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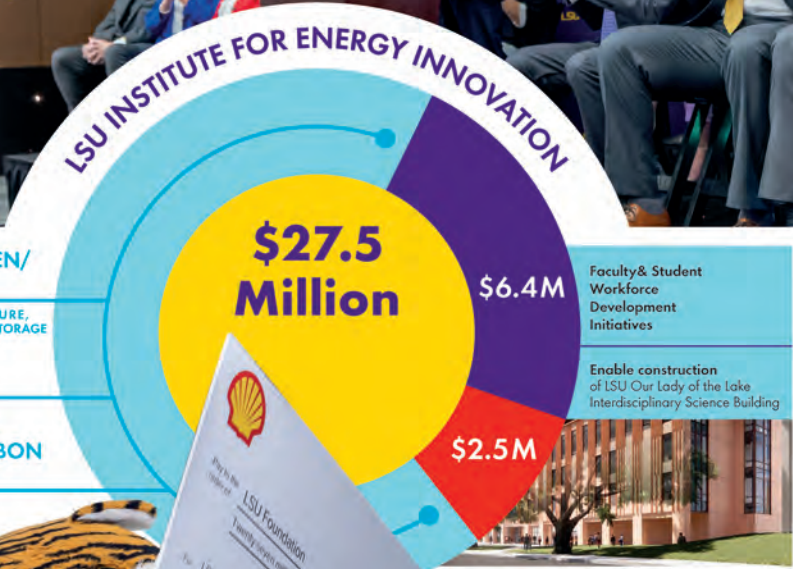
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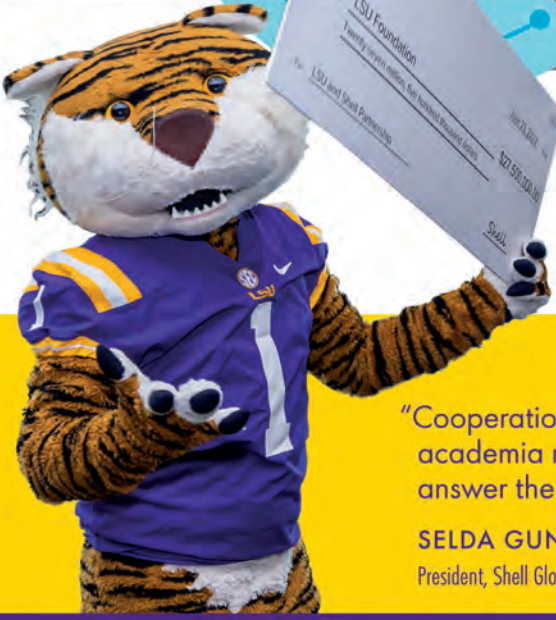
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Big buck down! The 2022 deer season is underway and Jason Lamm got the show on the road with a big 167-inch East Carroll Parish trophy.

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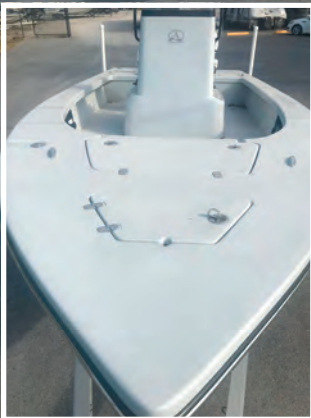
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I am thoroughly convinced that if you are a duck hunter, you have probably broken the law. Maybe just a little bit. Maybe not on purpose, but you did.

Justin Wilson, the grand old Louisiana Cajun comedian and chef, felt that way, too. He used to “tole” the story of a duck hunter who went to the local sheriff down in Terrebonne Parish as a “delegate of many delegates” and asked if he couldn’t get them one more month to choot ’dem duck.

“What you gonna name it, eh?” the sheriff replied. “You already choot ’dem duck 12 month a year. You get another month, you gonna have to get a new name for it.”

Over the years duck hunting, I have tried my very best to follow the letter and most of the time, the spirit of the law. I am not worried about discussing it because I know that even a conceived written confession from a veteran outdoor writer and teller-of-tall-tales would not hold up in court.

REGULATIONS

Duck hunting rules and regulations are flustering, almost to the point of amusing. It takes a mathematician just to interpret legal shooting hours. The time rules change every single day.

The limits seem to change as often as the opinions of politicians. In my lifetime the legal limit has gone as high as 15 ducks to as low as two. In 1962, that two-duck legal limit included only one mallard and a 23-day season. Can you imagine setting out your decoys, firing one shot, then retrieving your one mallard, picking up your decoys and going home? I still follow the one-duck limit some days, because many times I only see one duck.

You have to be an ornithologist, too. The limit last year was: “6 ducks which may include no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 of which may be female), 3 wood ducks, 2 canvasback, 2 redheads, 1 mottled duck, 1 black duck, and 1 pintail. Only 1 scaup may be taken for the first

15 days of the season, with 2 per day allowed for the remainder.”

Most days, the rules far outnumber the ducks.

I had an old duck hunting buddy who didn’t have time to keep up with the details of the annual changes in rules and regulations. He came up with his own interpretation. He figured if the limit was six ducks a day, that must mean 42 ducks a week per hunter, however you got them. Oh, my. On advice of legal counsel, I must channel my inner Bill Clinton here and go on record as saying “I have no recollection” of whether he practiced that or not.

Irvine didn’t let anything stop him when it came to the pursuit of ducks. After hunting with him, I think I know what it



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.

was like to trudge a swamp with Ben Lilly or cross a mountain with Daniel Boone.

One day we were speeding down Deadpecker Slough Road past the Hilo Missionary Baptist Church an hour before shooting hours and Irvine suggested we should consider moving our memberships there during duck season. He was serious.

It was freezing that cloudy morning and we just got plain old lost in the flooded treetops of the Ouachita River backwaters. It was so cold before daylight, the dripping water on my waders froze to the bottom of the little aluminum boat. We finally pried them lose, but could find no ducks. Or our way home we were freezing. We came upon an old abandoned floating duck blind. We crawled up in it and actually built a small fire in an empty gallon can we found floating nearby.

I know that wasn't the smartest thing to do, but the fact that we were in this predicament lets you know we didn't have much smart with us that day.

The sun finally peeped out, we found our direction and made it out through the flooded timber.

SOAKED TO THE BONE

One time our preacher went with Irvine and actually fell in the icy water. He had to strip down and build a fire on a giant old fallen cypress log to keep from freezing to death. Oh, there were more.

One day we were motoring down a small canal in Overflow Swamp when the boat ran up on a beaver dam in the dark. I was running the motor and Irvine hopped out up front on the dam and tried to free us. He couldn't. He told me I'd have to hop out and help, too. So I did. Only thing, I wasn't on top of the dam. I was in six feet of water and got soaked. It was cold. The

boat came loose and we both got back in. I turned it around and headed the boat back toward the truck.

"Where are you going?" he yelled.

"I'm going home. I'm soaked. I'm freezing. If we go hunting, I'm going to freeze and die. If you try to stop me, I'm going to shoot you and you are going to die. The only way we both make it home alive is if we go back to the truck," I replied. He left me there and went back hunting. I built a fire and warmed up. As you've gathered by now, you never went hunting with Irvine without waterproof matches.

Irvine used to have a lot of tricks up his sleeve, like carrying an old dead squirrel with him duck hunting. One day I made the mistake of asking why.

"Well, if we happen to shoot early and the game warden is out there, hears us and tries to give us a ticket, I'll just tell him I wasn't shooting at ducks. I shot this squirrel." Oh my, again.

Irvine did finally change his ways. He had come to know Jesus as a youngster. But he came to know Joe, as an adult. Joe was a federal game warden who put fear into the hearts of duck hunters all around, even those who tried to obey the law. He was known to spend the night in prime duck hunting spots so he would be there before duck hunters the next morning and he could catch them if they did anything wrong. Once, he swam a cold canal just to get to a group of hunters who had shot too many, too early, to give them each a ticket. Irvine never got a ticket, but he got the message.

In case there is a game warden who might question anything written here, I just want to note that I clearly made all this up. No duck hunter would ever do that. Really. Or Maybe.

There, that should be enough to establish reasonable doubt. Oh, my. ■

KENT
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OUTDOOR UPDATE

SPECKLED TROUT CHANGES

LDWF TAKES OFFICIAL ACTION TO FURTHER HELP MANAGE POPULAR GAME FISH

T By Joe Curtis
The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) adopted a Notice of Intent (NOI) to increase the minimum size limit of spotted seatrout (speckled trout) to 13.5 inches total length from the current 12 inches minimum total length. The NOI also decreases the current 25 fish daily bag limit to 15 fish daily bag limit. The action was taken at LWFC's monthly meeting held Thursday morning, Oct. 6.

The previous 12-inch size limit allowed 50 percent of female seatrout to spawn, but the new 13.5-inch size limit allows 100 percent of female seatrout to spawn, according to Jason Adriance, Marine Fisheries Biologist.

"What you get out of that is another spawning season," Adriance said. "You'll get them spawning through age two."

According to Adriance, other Gulf state's limits range from 15 inches to 17 inches and "have not seen disproportionate impacts to the female portion of the stock."

Additionally, modifications in the rule create one statewide size and bag limit, removing the separate regulations in coastal western Louisiana. The biologist said his team took into account LA Creel data to determine the new bag limit.

"When you look at the bag limit, it does show some more trends," Adriance said. "The average is actually closer to five fish with 85 percent of successful angler trips harvesting nine fish per angler trip. However, when you adjust a bag limit, all of that successful effort from above that new bag limit shifts down. By adjusting to 15 fish, it doesn't matter because most people only catch two."

POINT OF CONTENTION

Commercial harvest of spotted seatrout comprises less than one percent of total direct landing, Adriance said to the LWFC in his report. And, elimination of guide limits would result in less than one percent reduction of overall harvest. Opinions on the issue vary widely.

"We have strong consensus of captains in the eastern part of the state who want the strongest regulations possible," said Richard Fischer, executive director of Louisiana Charter Boat Association. "We have a strong consensus of captains in the central part of the state that say an increase in the size limit would put them out of business."

There was "very little" opposition from charter boat captains of the reduction of bag limits, but the size limit is a "major point of contention," Fischer said.

One major argument, according to Fischer, was the discard mortality rate. Discard and release mortality occurs when fish or other animals are caught alive and then die after release. Captains suspect the discard mortality rate to be higher than 10 percent.

"We've had some conversations with some highly esteemed scientists," Fischer said. "They are not too sure the discard mortality rate is 10 percent and therefore question whether increasing the size limit at all would create more harm than good."

Fischer recommended to drop the bag limit to 15 fish and "for a short period of time" table the size limit discussion to make additional time to focus specifically on the actual discard

mortality rate. Fischer also recommended the NOI be given a sunset time.

After Fischer spoke to the LWFC, the group said they previously presented options at a higher discard mortality rate but there was “no traction” and was not pursued.

LOSS OF HABITAT

Nicholas Francois, a 20-year Louisiana boat captain and guide, has seen the decline of the fish population and coastlines and “strongly” supported lowering limits and size of the fish.

Chris Macaluso, the Center for Marine Fisheries Director for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, advocated a reduction of the bag limit.

“I do believe the reduction in creel limit is warranted,” Macaluso said. “Not just because we don’t have the productivity we have in our estuaries that we once had. The expectation of production outpaces the reality of production at this point. We have simply lost too much habitat to produce the kind of fisheries we had 30, 40 years ago, even 20 years ago.”

Macaluso remarked the loss of habitat is a major deterrent to fish population.

“The term overfished is a management term,” Macaluso said. “It can be a little bit misleading. I think the more accurate term is depleted. These fish have been depleted for a number of reasons. The same issues affecting the speckled trout is affecting the redfish and affecting ducks. It is a profound loss of habitat. The habitat loss is too great to support the fisheries we expect. The primary focus here should be habitat restoration.”

During the last 2.5 years, the LDWF has held eight public meetings across the state, issued multiple surveys to the public, and collected hundreds of public comments on this topic via email.

NEXT STEPS

The Commission’s adoption of a Notice of Intent (NOI) is the first of many steps in promulgating a final Rule, which can take between 90 days and one year. Once adopted, the NOI will be published in the State Register and begin the public comment period. The Commission will consider all public comments received and may make any changes they deem necessary or appropriate. Absent any amendments to the NOI by the Commission, the proposed Rule will be sent to the Legislative Oversight Committee for their review. Upon expiration of the 30-day oversight period, or upon a favorable review by the Oversight Committee, the Rule can be published as final in the State Register. ■

Read more about this:

You can find more about these speckled trout actions in Joe Macaluso’s Down on the Dock column.

POGIE NOI

ABANDONED NET WITH HALF A MILLION POUNDS OF FISH SPARKS LWFC ACTION

From Staff Reports

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) has reacted to a controversial abandoned commercial pogie net found floating in the Gulf of Mexico off Holly Beach in Cameron Parish in mid-September. The net was loaded with an estimated half a million pounds or more of dead fish, including numerous redfish, drum and other species. Dead fish were reported floating up on the beach for days following the wanton waste of resources.

At the LDWF’s September Finfish Task Force Meeting, a representative of Omega Protein admitted that the net was owned by Omega.

The LDWF did not react publicly or issue comment following the incident. However, at its regular October meeting, the LWFC did adopt a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prohibit the waste of fishery resources and abandonment of menhaden purse seine gear during fishing operations. The proposed rule would:

- Prohibit abandoning menhaden purse seine gear during the course of fishing operations or while on the water and establish a 48-hour window to remove all gear before it is considered abandoned.
- Establishes marking requirements for gear that is released to facilitate retrieval and warn of navigational hazards by the released gear.
- Would require notification to LDWF within 2 hours of any release of menhaden.
- Requires that all reasonable attempts be made to retrieve menhaden and bycatch from the environment in the event of a release.
- Defines that a violation of these rules shall be considered a waste of a fishery resource subject to civil fine and restitution and abandonment of gear shall constitute a commercial littering violation.



This NOI does not address anything else involving the controversial liberal regulations concerning the pogie industry off Louisiana’s coast, including the unintentional waste of dwindling game fish resources.

“Please continue sending us your photos and videos when you see these activities near Louisiana’s shorelines and beaches, or when you encounter fish kills,” David Cresson with the Coastal Conservaton Assciaton urged Gulf anglers.

Interested persons may submit comments relative to the proposed rule to Jason Adriance, Fisheries Division, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, P.O. Box 98000, Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000 or via email to jadriance@wlf.la.gov before noon on Jan. 5, 2023. ■

BIG RIVER BUCK

LAMM GETS MONSTER BUCK, BUT IT DOESN'T COME EASY

O By Kinny Haddox
pening day of the 2022 archery season will be one that Jason Lamm of Crowley remembers for a long time. He experienced the highs and lows of deer hunting, all in a 12 hour period. But persistence paid off with a trophy of a lifetime.

A huge buck showed up on camera early morning about 4 a.m. on Oct. 1 on his family's hunting club near Lake Providence on the Mississippi River, but nobody saw him after daylight. Lamm and his brother headed back out to the area for an afternoon hunt, hoping to encounter the huge deer or another one like it.

THE RIGHT CHOICE

Jason's brother picked one stand and Jason went to the other. It was the right choice. He got a shot at a monster 167 2/8 trophy buck at 41 yards, hit him broadside and later found the big deer in the edge of the water on a chute that separates two clubs along the big river.

But it wasn't that easy.

"When I shot, I knew I made a good shot and I had high hopes," Lamm, a crawfish and rice farmer, said. "I began tracking him and found a good trail. I watched him down in the bottom and saw him lay down for about two minutes after I shot him and I thought he was dying. But he just gets up and walks off."

He shot the deer in a hardwood river bottom where they had just harvested some timber. Long story short, he tracked the deer to the edge of a chute that separates two clubs. He couldn't find him and thought he had either backtracked or gone in the water. After looking up and down the area, he backed off until morning when he was joined by his family. Again they looked everywhere, finally calling for a boat and going to the other side



Jason Lamm with his big 167 East Carroll Parish trophy buck.

ON THE COVER

of the 80-yard wide chute to see if the deer swam back to his regular bedding grounds.

"The bank is real steep and we just couldn't find him," he said. "I had been so high, but I about made up my mind I'd have to keep coming back every day until I found a big old floating deer."

GREAT MANAGEMENT

Then it happened. His neighbor spotted the deer in shallow water by the bank where he had swam across the chute, but couldn't make it up the steep bank. They were exhausted and Lamm had gone from the high of shooting the buck to the low of thinking he might never find him, then to the extreme high of posing for photos with the monster.

"We all got back to the little landing where we launched the boat and had a little celebration," he said. "Managing the deer like we do, it pays off. We've got some great deer hunting in Louisiana and this proves it."

The stand where Lamm shot the big buck has been great the past two years, he said. They killed a 153 and a 154 there last year and now the 167.

"We manage the area real hard and our neighbors do, too," he said. "We hadn't seen the deer but a couple of times, but our neighbor had seen him for a couple of years and let him pass. Last year he was in the upper 140's, but they let him pass and he just kept growing. He just blossomed this year and added weight and antlers. We estimated he was 6 1/2 years old. My neighbor was happy for me, but he was also bummed that he didn't get to hunt him again. That's understandable."

Finding the deer not only took persistence, but a little bit of luck. Lamm said they had seen several big alligators in the chute and one of them could have easily claimed his trophy before he found it.

DON'T GIVE UP

One thing Lamm reinforced with this kill was that when you shoot a big buck, you never give up until you exhaust all possibilities. And they learned something else, too.

"Now, nobody wants to go first picking the stands, because it seems like it never goes right," he said. "Everybody wants to let somebody else pick and then go to the woods so they won't pick wrong."

Lamm shot the deer with a Mathews Halon and an Easton Axis 250 Arrow 250 with a Rage Trypan, no collar, broadhead. ■

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SHORT-TRIP, SECOND CHANCE

PERRITT DIDN'T HAVE TO TRAVEL FAR TO HARVEST
158-INCH WEST FELICIANA BUCK

It By Glynn Harris
was about this time a year ago when a buck that 33-year-old Tyler Perritt had targeted gave him a chance with his bow. He got the shot he wanted. Unfortunately, his aim was off just a bit. The broadhead struck the shoulder blade without doing damage. The big buck was documented back on camera a week or so later.

"This is a buck that I had targeted and had on camera for a couple of years," Perritt said. "He was hanging out on a 15-acre plot

behind my house just outside St. Francisville in West Feliciana Parish, land owned by my wife's parents. I found one of his sheds last year and was hopeful for another chance at him this season."

Perritt didn't hunt on the morning of Oct. 1, opening day for archery season, because he felt he would have a better chance at the big buck late in the afternoon. He has placed climbing sticks on several trees in the area so he could choose where to hunt depending on wind direction. He was comfortable in his tree saddle on a tree that favored the wind.

Tyler Perritt with the 9-point buck he killed in West Feliciana Parish on the opening day of archery season.

LOTS OF ACTIVITY

The area he was hunting is an area formerly covered in a thicket he had cleared to create an opening beneath the scattered stand of oaks growing there. He had placed a corn feeder and had a pile of rice bran out from his stand.

"I got in the stand around 3:30 that afternoon and began seeing deer shortly thereafter," Perritt said. "Eventually I had four does, three fawns and a spike in front of me at the feeder. As the afternoon got later, around 6:35, I saw more deer moving in the thicket and could tell that one was a big-bodied deer. The deer stepped out and it was a nice 10-point that I had noticed had been traveling with the big buck. Ten seconds after the 10-point stepped out, here came the buck I was after."

The pair circled downwind from the feeder and it put them squarely in front of where Perritt sat 31 yards away. He shoots a Matthews Halon 32 bow, a Victory V-Force arrow tipped with a Grim Reaper broadhead.

"I came to full draw and as I did, the big one turned straight away from me and started eating from the rice bran pile," Perritt said. "I watched him, hoping he'd turn to give me a view of his vitals, but after a full minute I had to let off on my bow. Then the 10-point looped around the feed, the big one jumped at him and when he did I drew my bow. He gave me a quartering away angle and I released my arrow."

FINDING THE BUCK

The arrow came close to where Perritt had aimed but was a bit too far back, entering a ham and then the stomach area.

"When he ran, I could see where the arrow entered and knew it was too far back," he said. "I got down, found a few spots of blood, but I also knew I didn't need to press him so I went home, returning the next morning with a friend and his blood trailing dog. We found the buck that had only traveled some 250 yards but sadly, coyotes had gotten to him overnight and had consumed most of him."

The buck was a heavy-antlered 9-point with a 17

7/8-inch inside spread, impressive bases that measured over 6 inches each with 22-inch main beams. Perritt put a tape on the rack and came up with a green score of 158 inches. The buck was at least 5 1/2 years old and before the coyotes reduced his muscle mass, likely weighed in the neighborhood of 220 pounds. ■

“*We found the buck that had only traveled some 250 yards but sadly, coyotes had gotten to him overnight and had consumed most of him.***”**



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MAXIMUS GOES DOWN

MASTERS HUNTS DOWN
AMAZING 156 2/8
SABINE PARISH BUCK

In 2000, there was an epic film produced starring Russell Crowe. The film, *Gladiator*, portrayed Crowe as Maximus, who set out to avenge the murders of his family. Maximus became a gladiator and rose through the ranks.

Thirty-three-year-old Joel Masters watched a buck grow in stature over the past few years, rising through the ranks in a manner of speaking, to become the bull of the woods. In honor of the leading character in the film, he gave the impressive buck a special name, Maximus.

Masters and his family lease some 3,800 acres of land from a timber company and have held the lease for more than 20 years. The family has done a commendable job of turning the acreage in rural Sabine Parish into a top notch area improving the quality of deer the land is producing. Feeding high protein feed plus



Joel Masters took this impressive 10-point buck in rural Sabine Parish on Oct. 2.

maintaining food plots are keys to their success.

Two years ago, Masters put the crosshairs of his scope on one of the trophy bucks on the property. Masters named that buck "Bullwinkle", but he said that Maximus was the more impressive buck of the two.

"A year ago, we had this buck on camera, but he was an 8-point probably in the 120-inch class," Masters said. "This year, he really blew up and he was the buck I wanted to take this season. We have a rule on our club where each member can only take one buck per season and it has to be at least five years old. Maximus was the one I knew I'd be looking for."

PATIENCE PAID OFF

Born with spina bifida, Masters is basically wheelchair bound and is licensed to take advantage of the special season for physically challenged hunters on Oct. 1-2.

"I was sitting in a ground blind with my dad on Saturday, Oct. 1, when Maximus appeared," Masters said. "However, the only shot I could have had was straight on at 100 yards and he was too special to risk a questionable shot, so I held off."

The following afternoon, Masters and his dad were back in the stand and were looking at several does, yearlings and a couple of small bucks.

"While we're watching the deer, I couldn't see out of the window to the left so my dad kept an eye out that window," Masters said, "Suddenly, dad told me to get ready because here he comes."

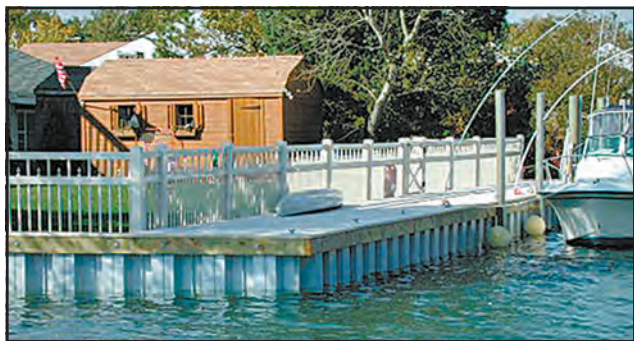
"It took me a second to find him in my scope and I followed him for 20-30 yards or so as he cleared some trees in the way. When he stopped at the edge of the shooting lane, he was standing broadside, so I shot. When I did, all the other deer took off creating dust and I didn't know if he fell or ran. Then we could see a leg sticking up and it was then I realized I had dropped him on the spot."

Masters was shooting a Browning 30.06 and once he knew the deer was down, the celebrating started, he said.

THE MEASUREMENTS

The buck sported a symmetrical rack of 10 points with an impressive inside spread of 20 ¼ inches. Bases were over 5 inches each with main beams 26 and 24 inches. The buck was estimated to be 6 ½ years old and was green scored at 156 2/8 inches of mass. ■

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Dustin Brister killed this Franklin Parish 10-point buck on Oct. 2.



CREEK CROSSER

SHOOTING BIG FRANKLIN BUCK WAS EASY FOR BRISTER; RETRIEVING IT WAS NOT

D By Glynn Harris

ustín Brister arrowed a fine buck in Franklin Parish on Oct. 2. However, he met serious challenges when attempting to retrieve his 10-pointer. The explanation follows.

Brister, 46, lives in Ruston and works in medical sales. He and his brother Chris purchased 450 acres of land near Fort Necessity 12 years ago and this plot of land has become their go-to spot for deer hunting.

"We had this buck on camera for the past few years and Chris' 9-year-old son, Mayes, looked at the photos and named the deer 'Bucky,'" Brister said.

ON THE HUNT

On the afternoon of Oct. 2, Brister decided this would be a good time to see if Bucky might make a showing. The wind was just right for where he had hung his saddle stand. An uncut soybean field bordered the property and Brister had found a deer trail he described as almost like a cow trail leading to the soybean field. It was obvious that deer were taking advantage of the buffet the soybeans provided.

"Before getting into my stand with my bow — I shoot a Matthews Halon bow, Full Metal Jacket arrow tipped with Rage 2

broadhead — I scattered some soybeans on the ground along the trail,” Brister said. “I got on the stand around 4:45 and got ready.

“I was starting to get discouraged because from the time I crawled into the stand until 7:00, I had not seen a thing. Then, just before giving up, I caught movement along the trail and here came a 7-point buck that Bucky had been traveling with. Right behind the 7-point came Bucky.”

The two bucks headed for the soybeans he had placed on the ground and the smaller buck stood broadside and Brister ranged him at 27 yards. Bucky stood facing him, not offering the shot he wanted.

“Bucky bumped the 7-point and as he did, he turned broadside to me and I drew my bow,” Brister said. “Before I could shoot, he gave me an angling shot and I took it at about 29 yards. I heard a solid ‘thump’ and felt I had made a good shot as the deer took off running.”

Climbing down from his stand, Brister went to the spot where the deer was standing and found a great deal of bubbly blood, indicating a lung shot. He felt confident he’d find the buck piled up not far away. That, however, was not the case.

ACROSS THE CREEK

Since it was getting late and he could see the blood trail leading through a thicket and straight to a creek, he decided to back out and call a friend to help in the search.

“We followed the blood trail to the creek and it was obvious the deer had crossed the creek,” Brister said. “I took a GPS reading and

since the creek was too wide and deep, we drove around to the other side and found where he had crossed. The buck ran about 50 yards, turned and crossed the creek again, which meant we had to drive back around to the other side.”


Brister called his friend John Brown, who manages the property for the Bristers, and Brown suggested they call Brian Reiger who had a blood trailing dog. Reiger didn’t get there until around 11 that night, but his dog picked up the trail that, once again, led to the creek.

Incredibly, the deer had crossed the creek for a third time.

“When the dog stopped, Reiger told me he bet the deer was dead and lying in the creek,” Brister said. “We shined a light and sure enough, the buck had crossed to the other side but had died in the shallows along the far bank.”

By midnight, the buck was finally transported to camp where measurements were made. The rack sported 10 points with heavy bases of five and six inches. Inside spread was 18 inches, main beams were 21 and 22 inches and the buck was determined to be 5 ½ years old. His estimated weight was 235 pounds. The rack was scored at 148 4/8 inches.

Shooting the deer was easy. Retrieving him was anything but. ■



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BOWHUNTER BAGS TROPHY MISSISSIPPI VELVET BUCK



Avid bowhunter Holt Martin of Lake Providence, La., took this big buck during Mississippi's first special velvet season.

H By Mike Giles
olt Martin, a recent Mississippi State University graduate, was intrigued by Mississippi's first velvet buck season and decided to give it a try. This avid bowhunter from Lake Providence, La., spotted a nice buck a couple of years ago on property he hunts in Issaquena County, but passed on him in favor of older more mature bucks.

Mississippi's first special velvet season was a three-day hunt and after the second day Martin had two strikes against him and it wasn't looking good on the final afternoon, with hot weather and everything seemingly going against him.

"Everything started in the worst possible way as I'd left my release at the truck, so I had to go back and get it," Martin said. "I bumped a deer on the way in and got back to the stand at 4:45 p.m. and the wind direction was wrong and not what was predicted."

Martin didn't see a deer in the food plot until 6:30 and it didn't seem to get better. His hunting buddy texted him at 7 p.m. and asked if he'd seen much.

"Nope, it's not happening today," Martin said. "Then I looked up a few minutes later and he was looking directly at me. I'd killed his running buddy last year, a 9-point that scored 157 Pope and Young and he'd really put on some mass this year."

WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT

The velvet buck continued to feed in the food plot facing directly at Martin and the veteran bowhunter was feeling the tension mount as he waited for a better broadside shot. Time stood still as the buck stayed put.

Suddenly another buck came in behind the velvet buck and Martin was ready for the moment of truth.

"The velvet buck turned to look at the other buck that had come in behind him and when he showed me his shoulder I drew, put the pin on him and released the arrow," Martin said.

Thwack!

The Rage Broadhead smacked the buck and he jumped at impact and stopped about 10 yards away and just looked around.

"He stood there a short time and I saw he was bleeding pretty bad and then he just collapsed," Martin said. "Everything seemed to go against me that afternoon, but it changed suddenly as he showed up and offered me a killing shot at 7:09."

The 10-point buck weighed 215 pounds and was aged at 5 1/2-years-old and scored an impressive 163 3/8.

"We hunt 3000 acres of land that is split by Louisiana and Mississippi so I decided to hunt the Mississippi portion and see if I could get a velvet buck," Martin said. "I told my dad that I was really excited to kill him, but I wished I could've hunted him more too."

DEAD DEER DON'T GROW ANTLERS

Most trophy bucks are hard to come by and hunters are elated to finally harvest them if they are fortunate enough to get the opportunity. Though he'd spotted the buck a couple years ago and passed on him numerous times, even once last year, he'd actually been targeting other bucks.

This year the velvet buck rose to the top of Martin's hit list just before the special velvet season but his quest didn't last long. The triumph of harvesting a trophy buck hadn't subsided yet before Martin had a bit of remorse that the chase had ended so soon.

Though his velvet buck quest lasted only one weekend, the work actually started much earlier, as he put in the time in the stand and in the woods for several years in preparation for this harvest. He's prepared food plots, put up game cameras and let the buck live to reach maturity.

"We planted wheat around the first or second week of August and he had been eating there since the food plot came up," Martin said. "He came to the plot the same time every morning and afternoon just like clockwork. I followed him on my Tactacam Reveal XB game camera.

"I actually shot the buck with my new Mathews V3X bow, the first deer I'd ever shot with it. It was just a special hunt and to kill him with my new bow was just icing on the cake!" ■

NOVEMBER RUT CALENDARS

The arrival of November means primitive firearms and rifle season gets underway in most areas of the state.

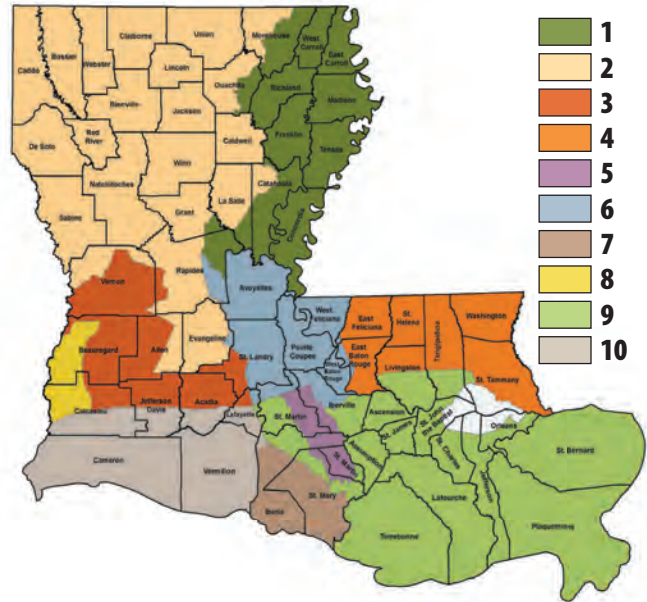
In Southwest Louisiana (Areas 3, 7, 8 and 10), bucks will have finished up their second scraping period in late October, with the second breeding period forecasted to take place from about Oct. 25 through Nov. 7.

Area 2 bucks will be wrapping up their first scraping period around Oct. 24, with the first breeding period running from about Oct. 25 through Nov. 7. The second scraping period will begin immediately thereafter, running through about Nov. 22.

Deer in Areas 4 and 9 will be in pre-rut through about Nov. 7, with the first scraping period lasting from Nov. 8 through Nov. 22, with the first rut starting immediately thereafter and lasting through Dec. 6.

In Areas 1, 5 and 6, deer will be in pre-rut beginning Nov. 8 all the way through about Dec. 6. ■

2022 - 2023 Deer Hunting Areas



NOVEMBER 2022 Areas 3, 7, 8 & 10

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

NOVEMBER 2022 Area 2

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

NOVEMBER 2022 Area 4 & 9

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

NOVEMBER 2022 Areas 1, 5 & 6

| SUN | MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI | SAT |
|-----|-----|---------------------|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 Pre-Rut Starts | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | | | |

DIFFERENT KIND OF TROPHY

KAYAKER LANDS WHOPPER
TRIPLETAIL DURING POPULAR
GRAND ISLE TOURNEY

V By Chris Holmes
eteran kayak angler Brendan Bayard is no stranger to the winners' circle when fishing kayak tournaments. He has won a lion's share of trophies, cash and kayaks over the years. On Saturday, Oct. 1, he was in his usual tournament mode hunting down trout, reds and flounder in search of the Cajun Slam for the Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club's 17th Annual Fall N Tide tournament in Grand Isle. He's won the tournament twice before. Did he win it again? Nope, but his catch had everyone jealous.

"I was just drifting across a shallow pond in the Fourchon area and noticed something in the water," he said. "I could see the outline and thought it was trash or something."

As he got a bit closer, he was shocked at what he saw.

"There was a small stick up out of the water and there was a tripletail lounging in that tiny shadow," he said. "Then I saw another. Oh my God! The second fish was lower in the water and in the shadow of the other."

SHALLOW WATER TRIPLETAIL

Without much time to react, Bayard positioned the kayak so he could approach the fish from the tail. Armed with a popping cork and a two-inch Ba-by Vudu shrimp, he made a light cast next to the fish.

"They were only six-feet from the kayak," he said. "I actually had to lift the rod and pull the cork above the water. I saw the fish dive and it was on."

He successfully netted the 19-inch beast and still could not believe the fish was where it was.

"I'm not sure what is going on, but one other kayak angler reported seeing a nice one and another saw a couple small ones" he said. "Additionally, a small tarpon was also caught by one of the anglers."



On Oct. 1, Brendan Bayard was fishing in the Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club's Fall N Tide tournament in Grand Isle when he caught this 19-inch tripletail.

Tripletail are not uncommon to coastal Louisiana waters and more and more powerboat anglers report catching them offshore, in the passes and lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne. However, this is the first I've heard of one caught by a Louisiana kayak angler and certainly in shallow, inshore waters.

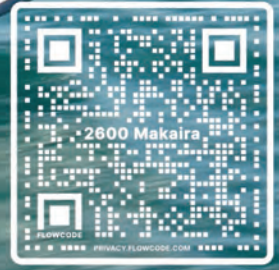
However, long-time Grand Isle guide Keith "Herk" Bergeron with Pair-A-Dice Charters advised that it is not as uncommon as you would think. Although not in the marsh, Bergeron has been slaying some nice "saltwater sac-a-lait" as he calls them, in the waters around Grand Isle.

Bayard caught his Cajun Slam, but it didn't make the cut for the seven top winning places. However, by the reaction from the crowd, you would have thought he won it all. He ended the day with a unique catch and some delicious table fare. ■

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GATOR GETTERS

LOUISIANA'S TAG-ONLY ALLIGATOR SEASON REACHES EVERY CORNER OF THE STATE

F By Kinny Haddox
 From the swamps, marshes and bayous of south Louisiana to the sloughs and bar pits of north Louisiana, hunting season is on! But it isn't a season that attracts just anybody. Only those with the skills, knowledge and courage — and of course, a permit — can tackle the state's tag-only alligator season.

Alligators are hunted on both public and private lands on a harvest-tag basis overseen by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Tags are issued for private lands containing sufficient wetland habitat capable of sustaining an alligator harvest. Licensed alligator hunters apply for alligator tags prior to the start of the season each year. Alligator tags are only issued to licensed alligator hunters and are nontransferable. More information is available on the LDWF website.

Residents who do not have access to alligators on private lands may be able to harvest alligators on public lands or lakes. These public lands/lakes are managed by many different entities ranging from local parish governments to federal government agencies. Alligator hunters are selected to hunt these areas through bidding and lotteries.

PUBLIC GATOR HUNTING

The annual program provides more than 400 resident alligator hunters the opportunity to harvest approximately 1,245 alligators on over 40 wildlife management areas and public lakes throughout the state. By all reports, weather, water and other conditions have been ideal for a quick start to an outstanding 2022 Louisiana gator season.

Louisiana is divided into east and west alligator hunting zones. The east zone opened the last Wednesday of August; the west zone opened the first Wednesday in September. Each zone remains open for 60 days from the opening date.

For many people, alligator hunting is a way to make part of their living while controlling the bayou beasts numbers. That industry spawned the famous Louisiana reality television series, *Swamp People*, which was first broadcast on The History Channel Aug. 22, 2010. The show follows the day-to-day activities of alligator hunters living in the swamps who hunt American alligators for a living.

Alligators bring in an estimated \$250 million to the state annually, according to the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Department.

Nine-year-old Caleb Hardwick killed this 9-foot, 9-inch gator hunting with his dad, Mead, and grandma, Mary, on Somerset Plantation in Tensas Parish guided by Dr. Bubba Bonneval.



For sportsmen, it's a way to have fun, get tasty wild groceries and also help control populations on a smaller scale. Make no mistake about it, alligator hunting is dangerous. It's one of the only things in Louisiana where the hunted can actually kill the hunter. Safety is of the utmost importance for both commercial and sporting alligator hunters.

TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

One of those sports hunters is Dr. Bubba Bonneval, who manages alligator hunting at Somerset Plantation lands in Tensas Parish.

"We mostly hang hooks in sloughs and barpits that are deep and some in Grassy Lake," he said. "We bait with chicken quarters and put most of our lines around the banks where we can run them in side-by-sides. We get 43 tags and we use them all. We also like to take some of the younger hunters and teach them about this. We start with gun safety and then safety concerning the alligators. And we teach them to respect the resource. Nothing goes to waste on the gators from the meat to the hide."

Robert Coats, manager of the Somerset Hunting Club, was the original alligator hunter there, but Bonneval now does it.

"I learned everything I know about gator hunting from Robert Coats," he said.

For more information on gators or to find out about applying for permits next season, email laalligatorprogram@wlf.la.gov. ■

SPORTSMAN'S ALLIGATOR GALLERY



Jack Lyons Bonneval shot this 8-foot, 2-inch alligator on Somerset Plantation with his dad, Rene, and grandpa, Dr. Bubba Bonneval.



Nicholas Merz (with gun) harvested this 11-foot, 6-inch alligator on Somerset Plantation, shown here with his mom, Telly, his dad, Peter, and his brother Henry.



Bryan Beatty, Jim Beatty and Justin Van Hout with the 10-foot 9-inch gator they got on Sept. 11 in Concordia Parish.



Danny Cooksey and Ronny Lyle with a 12-foot 6-inch and an 11-foot 8-inch alligator caught opening day in Pointe Coupee Parish with Travis Jewell of Louisiana Gator Hunts.

SPORTSMAN'S ALLIGATOR GALLERY



This 11-foot 7-inch gator was caught Sept. 17 at Richard K. Yancey WMA by Seth Doiron, along with his uncle, Jody Caze. This was Seth's first alligator and it was taken on his 17th birthday.



Juniper Stewart, 8, got her first alligator, a 5 1/2 footer, in the Grande River in Bayou Pigeon back in mid-September.



Maddox Knuckols, 7, killed a 6 1/2-foot alligator at Dewey Wills WMA.



Delphine Stewart holds a 7 1/2 footer caught from the Grande River in Bayou Pigeon.

Hadley Grace, 8, after a St. Tammany Parish alligator hunt at the Pearl River WMA on Sept. 2.



Drake Duet with a 10-foot 3-inch alligator caught with Rodney Leblanc.



Kywan Housely, 24, who is 6'5 himself, and his helper Glenn Young Jr. with the alligator Kywan killed the opening day of the season on Cross Lake with hook and line. The big gator measured 12 feet 5 inches.

DEER DISPOSAL

PRECAUTIONS WITH HARVESTED DEER, ESPECIALLY IN CWD CONTROL AREA

H By Joe Curtis
opefully, hunters and good wildlife management practices can help keep Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) contained in Louisiana. Unfortunately, the Louisiana Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory (LADDL) confirmed the state's first, and so far — only — CWD case last year.

According to Johnathan Bordelon, Louisiana Department Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) deer program manager, officials have caught the disease in its early stages. A hunter reported the suspicious deer.

"Obviously, early in the disease when there are very few positives in the landscape, there is not very much environmental contamination happening, so at that point for another deer to become positive, it would have to come in contact with another positive animal," he said.

But, with each CWD-infected deer, the environment is potentially contaminated more.

"With each additional positive, there are that many more positive animals walking around," Bordelon said. "The environment contamination grows with the increased number of positive animals and eventually reaches a point where there could be so much environmental contamination that the environment itself could become almost a likely source to infect a deer."

CONTROL AREA

As stated before, there has only been one case confirmed in the state. CWD has been detected in 30 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces in free-ranging cervids and/or commercial captive cervid facilities. To try to keep infected-deer numbers low, LDWF established a control area in Tensas and Madison parishes and 10 miles of Franklin Parish. In the control area, supplemented feeding is prohibited along with carcass transportation.

The export of any carcass or part of a carcass originating within a control area 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 teeth.

"It could certainly buy us some time and keep us from moving the disease unintentionally into new areas," Bordelon said.

Bordelon recommends those hunting in the control area take extra precautions with the harvested deer.

CWD-infected deer may exhibit signs of weight loss and emaciation, salivation, frequent drinking and urination, incoordination, circling and lack of fear of people.



"Good practice in the field is not to move or dispose of carcasses in areas outside of where you hunt," he said. "This is just a good rule of thumb regardless of the disease in this case, but it is just more important simply because of the ability of this disease to persist in that carcass."

When the carcass eventually breaks down and decomposes, it has the potential to be infected or contaminated by CWD if left and not properly disposed. With that, simply cleaning and skinning and field dressing the deer in close proximity to where that deer is taken is a good practice.

"In the event that the deer would be positive to CWD, you at least haven't redistributed the disease to a new area," Bordelon said.

SCAVENGERS LIKE BEARS

Scavengers could also play a part in spreading CWD. If a scavenger, like a bear, ingests an infected deer, it could contaminate its tissue. Those prions would be in that animal, but according to current information, CWD only affects deer. But the fast-growing population of bears could spread CWD through their scat. The CWD "control area" also has large populations of black bears.

When taking a deer for processing, Bordelon recommends labeling the harvested deer with a unique identifier.

"Hunters could have harvested three or four deer that year but maybe only one is positive," he said. "Being able to discern which deer is which, they could retain the venison of the deer the disease is not detected in and probably dispose of the venison in the positive animal."

"That will keep the disease from spreading into new areas," Bordelon said. "That should be the focus."

PROPER CARCASS DISPOSAL

The carcass of an infected deer can expose other deer to the disease, directly or indirectly. Long after an infected carcass




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decomposes, the soil will remain infectious for years, possibly exposing other deer to the prions that cause CWD.

To avoid this exposure risk, the following disposal methods are recommended:

1. Whenever possible, deer carcasses should be buried on the property where the animal was harvested, deep enough to prevent scavengers from displacing the remains.
2. Infectious prions are highly unlikely to migrate out of an approved sanitary landfill and infect other deer. Carcasses and parts can be disposed of in household garbage that is hauled to a landfill via regular trash collection.
3. If burial is not possible where the deer was harvested, the carcass may be left on-site. While this will not prevent scavengers from scattering potentially infectious parts, those parts will remain on the landscape where the deer was taken.

IMPROPER CARCASS DISPOSAL

1. Do not dispose of carcasses in ponds, lakes or waterways. This has the potential to spread infectious prions to new areas.

2. Only commercial incinerators are capable of generating enough heat for a long enough duration to destroy the prions.

3. Remains of harvested deer which are transported to a different property for processing should not be dumped on the landscape where it could infect the environment.

According to Bordelon, LDWF and others are performing more CWD research with the goal of obtaining more helpful information.

“With so many states having positive deer, there is much more research going on than 20 years ago,” he said. “Some of the things that are difficult now to answer, we may have a clearer answer to in the future. Some of what we are talking about now may change. What we know about the disease is terrible. It is 100% fatal. It’s transmissible. It can be persistent in the environment for decades.” ■

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PRE-CHARGED PNEUMATIC DEVICES MAY BE USED TO HUNT DEER DURING MODERN FIREARM SEASON

Pre-charged pneumatic devices, air guns that fires projectiles such as arrows or bolts, may be used by hunters only during the modern firearm season beginning with the 2022-23 season, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) said.

The Louisiana Legislature approved the use of these devices during the 2022 session.

Pre-charged pneumatic devices include air guns with unignited compressed air or other gases that are mechanically

pressurized without involving any chemical reactions.

The device must fire a projectile of at least thirty caliber in diameter and at least one hundred fifty grains in weight with a minimum muzzle velocity of eight hundred feet per second or any combination of bullet weight and muzzle velocity that produces muzzle energy of at least two hundred fifteen foot pounds of energy. Arrows or bolts must have well-sharpened broad head points.



For questions concerning the use of these devices, please contact your local LDWF regional office at <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/contact-us>. ■



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Good outdoor articles are usually a combination of information from an experienced source plus personal experiences of the writer, leaning heavily toward the experienced source, a.k.a. the “expert.”

In some cases, they can both be the same person. In this case, that’s me. A story about a few common mistakes made while deer hunting needs no outside contributions, because I have spent a lifetime becoming the expert! If it can go wrong, I probably have personal experience at it.

But just to stay professional, I’ve talked to about a dozen other hunters to help come up with a bona fide list of things NOT TO DO when deer hunting. These are especially true for trophy deer, but apply to most mature deer.

DON’T: GET OUT OF THE STAND TOO QUICKLY >

MISTAKES THAT CAN LEAVE DEER HUNTERS EATING VIENNA SAUSAGES INSTEAD OF VENISON STEAK.

■ By Kinny Haddox

SO THAT’S WHAT HAPPENED!

DON'T: **GET OUT OF THE STAND TOO QUICKLY**

One of the biggest deer I've ever seen walked out of a scrub brush thicket on the edge of Wham Brake the opening morning of deer season. It was broadside, looking away just 30 yards from my stand. Unfortunately, I wasn't in the stand, I was leaning up against it, looking at my Blackberry (an old timey iPhone type device). I grew impatient and got out of the stand, wanting to get home to watch an early football game. I had probably been looking down at the Blackberry motionless for 10 minutes. When I looked up, there he was, staring at me, trying to figure out if I was stupid or something. I was. The next second, I was reminded why they are called whitetail. His was flying high in the air as he headed the other way, showing me all the glory of his white tail. Another 10 minutes in the stand, and I would have had the deer of a lifetime.

DON'T: **MAKE TOO MUCH NOISE**

It's hard to believe the number of people who drive their ATVs up within 20-30 feet of their deer stands and walk in the rest of the way, or walk through the woods talking on their cell phone. Deer aren't deaf. If they hear an ATV coming through

the woods, or a human voice, they know it isn't a natural thing. And if they hear you making noise of any kind, they aren't going near where you are, no matter how many acorns or how much deer corn is there. Too much noise going to the stand is a deal breaker. And, if you make too much noise leaving, you can even spook deer off for the next day's hunt. They've got no where else to go, so if things aren't right, they will just bide their time.

Don't just know where the deer are coming to, either. Know where they lay up. Avoid getting too close to those areas traveling to and from your stand.

DON'T: **FORGET TO MASK YOUR SCENT**

Think about all these folks you read about who use scent killers and don't wash their deer hunting clothes in scented detergents, things like that. Think about the ones that focus on the wind direction before they even go to the stand. Think about those that hunt with the wind in their face so deer won't scent them. You know why you read about those folks? They are the ones killing big, trophy deer and usually, several of them. People that don't watch the wind and mask their scent? You don't read about them.

If you don't take that advice, you are wasting your time deer hunting, again, especially for the big ones. Sometimes you can get lucky, but most of the time not.





DON'T: MOVE TOO MUCH

If you are hyperactive, maybe you should go to Surge and jump on the trampolines instead of deer hunting. Being still is second only to masking your scent. It may even be a tie. When a deer walks a trail or steps out into an opening, don't kid yourself. They've usually been hanging back from the edge, looking and listening and sniffing for more time than we can imagine. Sometimes it is hours, just to make sure nothing ahead is posing a danger. The bigger the bucks, the smarter and more cautious they are. That's how they got to be big bucks.

Move around too much and odds are they will see you. The old myth about "deer never look up" is a real myth. If you hunt a box stand or stand that has been there for a while, the good ones will study it for a long time to make sure nothing is moving in there before they get close. Even if you are in the stand, if you are not totally blacked out, they can see the slightest movement and you'll send them back to the thicket until tomorrow ... or next week.



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.

DON'T: SPOOK THE DOES AND LITTLE ONES >

Killing a trophy deer isn't easy, but following a few simple rules puts the odds in your favor. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Products to keep a hunter's scent under control work, but playing the wind is also vital.



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DON'T: **SPOOK THE DOES AND LITTLE ONES**

Doe deer are the bodyguards of big bucks. They always go first and even when they look like they are not looking, they are. Do something to spook them, and you'll never see the ones behind them. Bucks often trail closely behind does, but sometimes they can be almost an hour behind. But they communicate through movements and sounds and body language more than you'll ever know. If a doe senses something is wrong, she may stomp or blow at you. If you move, she is gone. And any deer behind her will turn tail and ease away. You'll never know they were there. Usually if that happens, you are already busted.

If you hear a deer snort in the woods nearby and you can't see it, odds are it already saw you or smelled you and is making it known.

Deer have all the time in the world and are super cautious when they step out in the daylight like this one did.

DON'T: **FORGET TO SIGHT IN YOUR WEAPON...OR PRACTICE**

I went hunting with a good friend on his place not too many years ago and he wouldn't even let us go to the woods until he was sure our rifles were sighted in and we could hit a target 100 yards away. We actually went out behind his camp and practiced.

Fortunately, it all went well. But the point is, usually there is nobody to police you on sighting in your gun or bow and making sure you practice, except you. Seriously, why go to all the trouble to even go to the woods if you aren't sure of both your gun and your aim?

He told me he learned years before not to take any chances because he had trailed too many poorly hit deer through the thickets, or saw them jump and run when a bullet whizzed past them that didn't hit them. You can never practice enough and please don't commit the ultimate excuse here, "Well, my gun was sighted in when I put it up last year." No. No. No.

DON'T: IGNORE THE RUT ➤





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DON'T: **IGNORE THE RUT**

About the only time a big deer lets his guard down during daylight hours during the season is during the rut. That's when the boys chase the girls and throw caution to the wind. They lose their sense of sight and smell and hearing and ...well, you get it.

Stay ready because when they come by, they may be on the move.

If you see a doe walking through the woods and she looks nervous, or is steadily turning and looking behind her, nine times out of 10, there's a buck trailing her. Be patient.

Normally, you can pretty well predict the rut based on past seasons, but if you aren't sure, talk to other hunters and stay up with comments on hunting social media pages.

Big bucks will travel long distances — and in a hurry — when the rut is on. One hunter reported with photographic evidence that a big buck had been on his trail camera at 2:30 a.m. At daylight four hours later, he was shot by another hunter five miles away. It isn't even that rare for hunters to take trophy deer that nobody on their club or hunting area has ever seen before, even

on a game camera. The big ones will roam for miles when the rut is on.

NEVER SAY NEVER

One of the neatest things about deer hunting is that you can never know for sure what deer will do. None of the "do- and-don't do" lists in the world are perfect.

You can't be sure what a certain deer will do on any given day. You can play the odds, but never say never, or you'll find out that Mother Nature is in charge.

And above all, the more time you spend in the woods, the more you will learn and the more successful you will be. Nobody yet has killed a deer, big or small, while sitting on the couch by the fire watching *Gunsmoke* on TV. ■

Hunting stands dot the Louisiana outdoors, but they only produce harvests when hunters do their part.



DON'T GUESS; GET IT SCORED!

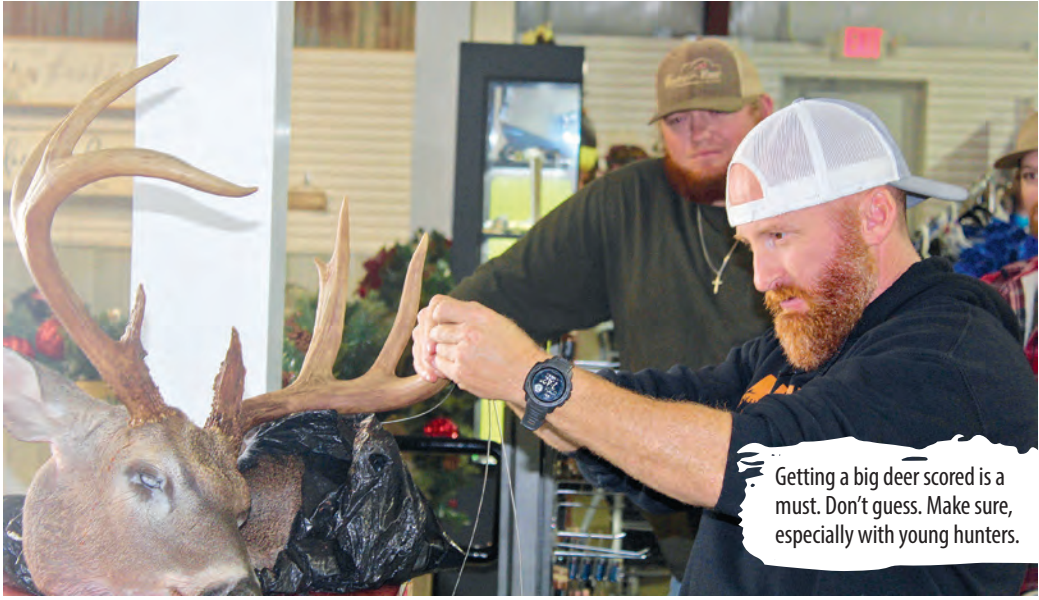
Some fortunate hunters are good enough and have great enough places to hunt that they kill big bucks on a fairly regular basis. Good for them. But if you are like most hunters, harvesting a deer in the 130 or 150 class may be a once in a lifetime experience.

If you have killed a good one, do yourself a favor. Get it scored by an official scorer. Don't be embarrassed if it comes out at 110 or 130. Think of the hundreds of hunters that would like to have taken that same deer.

Especially with younger hunters, get an official score if you

can. You might be surprised. And either way, be proud of your accomplishment.

There are also several big buck contests around the state that offer great prizes. Some have prize drawings that can be won by anyone entering the contest. Don't hesitate to join one of them, again, especially with a young hunter involved. ■



Getting a big deer scored is a must. Don't guess. Make sure, especially with young hunters.



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CROSSBOW MAGIC

**THIS WEAPON OF CHOICE IS
A GREAT OPTION FOR
MANY DEER HUNTERS.**

■ By Mike Giles

Several does passed through the hardwood bottom as the hunter waited patiently for his opportunity. Does were not on the agenda for Allen Shortridge on this day, so he scanned the hollow in front of him for any sign of **A BUCK TRAILING THE DOES.**

“Crack, tick, tick, tick,” sounded the footfalls of an unseen deer walking slowly down the same trail the does had passed through.

“Grunt, grunt.”

Suddenly the deer gave itself away by belching a guttural grunt followed up by several short grunts as a warning to any other buck and a come-hither message to the does he was trailing.

Shortridge stared intently into the hollow from where the buck was walking. He finally spotted the tips of antlers as the buck burst out of the thicket and passed within range. The 78-year-old hunter put the crosshairs of the crossbow on the bucks’ vitals and squeezed off a shot.

“Thwack!”

The crossbow bolt whacked the buck right behind the shoulder. It jumped high, spun around and disappeared into the hollow from whence he had come. Shortridge knew he’d

made a good shot, but couldn’t be sure until he found the blood trail, which was indicative of a good shot and easy to follow.

The veteran hunter of many deer seasons found the buck dead a short distance away. It was the culmination of a dream to harvest a buck with his crossbow in his later years. The avid hunter had accomplished that at an age when many hunters have already put down their bows.

“I shot the 9-point buck with my Ravin Crossbow,” said Allen Shortridge. “I’m a life-long bowhunter but the Ravin gave me an opportunity to hunt deer during bow season in my older years and still have the knowledge that I could make swift, clean, killing shots. I still want a 25 to 35 yard shot, but if I misjudge my distance the speed and power of this bow gives me a little extra room for error.”

BLENDING IN WITH THE BLIND >

A hunter has his crossbow resting on a limb looking over a hollow, waiting for a big buck to come by. **LEAD PAGE:** You never get too old to be excited by a big buck like this in crossbow range.



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BLENDING IN WITH THE BLIND

Shortridge has hunted with a recurve and killed deer and shot competitively. He's routinely shot disks out of the air and performed other tricks with his recurve at many exhibitions. During his younger years, he also hunted from tree stands with great success. Due to his age these days, he's no longer climbing trees but prefers to take the safe and effective way with the help of ground blinds.

"The new style crossbows allow me and other older hunters the opportunity to keep hunting from blinds or shoot houses," Shortridge said. "The new style bow is really blazing fast and easy to use in portable blinds or shoot houses. It's unbelievable what it will do, it's one of the most devastating weapons I've ever had besides a rifle."

Shortridge likes to put his blind up in a place well before the season starts and he likes to blend it in with natural cover and live trees so that it doesn't stick out like a sore thumb. Delta

bucks are pretty wild and they're not like those bucks from out west or in the Midwest. If you can get within bow range of a buck in this region, then you've really done something.

Though Shortridge is not a trophy hunter per se, he still likes to shoot the biggest deer around his house and that means harvesting what's available. He still processes the whole deer and utilizes the venison for sausage, burger, steaks and he prepares it just about any way you would use regular meat.

EARLY SEASON PATTERN

During the early season Shortridge likes to find trails between bedding and feeding areas. In fact, his best spot is a hollow that has a stream running through the bottom, right in the middle of the hardwood strip, making it a funnel for deer, both does and bucks. As the does come through from their bedding area, they travel through the funnel and right by Shortridge's blind on their way to their feeding grounds. Occasionally they browse on acorns near his stand briefly on their way to the main feed-

New models of crossbows make it easier for hunters to get a good shot at deer, both bucks and does.



ing area.

Once the does and bucks get on this early season pattern, they are very easy to predict and they will travel the same routes with little variation unless they are spooked during the trip or until the food source dries up. By that time, you'll need to change hunting locations and see what pattern, if any, that they may be on.

However, the best pattern for big bucks is during that late summer, early fall feed pattern that many of the bucks utilize. Sometimes Shortridge has bachelor groups of bucks come through during the early fall. If that is the case, they are usually thinking about the food and not females, so they do the same things every day. They rarely change their habits.

"I like to get my meat during the early season before the rut starts," said Shortridge. "That's a good time to get some does out of the way and into my freezer. After the rut begins, I don't want to shoot any does, as

I liked to leave them for bait. Find the does and you'll find the bucks during the late season run. But this time of year it's meat first and horns later."

While Shortridge does have some areas that are good for harvesting does for meat, he has other places where he only shoots horns. If you are after legal bucks, then it's okay to harvest does and young bucks, or any buck that may come by your stand during the early season.



Mike Giles of Meridian has been hunting and fishing Mississippi since 1965. He is an award-winning wildlife photographer, writer, seminar speaker and guide.

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WEEKLY CAMERA SCOUTING

One caveat to the early season doe harvest is the exception to the rule. If the rack bucks start moving toward the feed and Shortridge gets them on camera walking by his blind, then he's going to let the does go and wait on the Sad Daddy to come strolling by.

The key to harvesting the best bucks on your hunting lease during the early season is to keep human intrusion down to a bare minimum. Don't expect to go into the woods every few days to check your game camera or you'll put those older mature bucks on notice that you've been there. Just like you know when someone has been in your bedroom and moved things around, the mature bucks are all the wiser and many will vacate the premises when they even get a whiff of human scent. They are that wary and that's how they live to be old.

By utilizing those cameras and monitoring the buck activity, hunters can pick their prime times to go hunting and time is a valuable commodity since most of us don't have much time off outside work.

Parker Temple, of Meridian, Miss., has solved the human intrusion and scent problem by utilizing game cameras that send photos to an app on his phone. By using the cell phone cams and staying out of the woods he leaves the area free of human scent and just as importantly, he can tell when the bucks start coming by his stand during the daylight hours.

During one early bow season he was getting pictures of some good bucks at night. Then one day his phone dinged, and he saw the bucks moving and feeding during the daylight hours, so he changed his mind on where he was going to go and moved that stand site to the top of the list.

"When I saw the bucks moving during the day, I made plans to be off the next day and went to the woods," said Temple. "I didn't have to wait long before that trophy buck came in to feed with plenty of daylight available and he gave me a good shot."

Temple sealed the deal and harvested a really good deer, but he wouldn't have done it without his trail camera taking the picture and sending it to his phone. While Temple enjoyed harvesting several bucks with the crossbow, he still likes to harvest them with a compound bow and that's what he's using today. It's just personal preference to him now and he just likes a little more challenge.

IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES

Instead of hanging up his recurve bow and quitting bow season a few years ago, Shortridge bought the crossbow. It allowed him to expand his time in the woods and he's made a trip to Canada and harvested two bears with his crossbow as well as turkeys, raccoons and deer.

"If you can't move around a lot any more, then hunting with a crossbow is a deadly alternative that might just give you the edge you need to keep on harvesting bucks," Shortridge said. "All you need to go with the Ravin is a few bolts and Rage broadheads and you'll be in business!"

Spend a little time with your crossbow and you'll be ready when the moment of truth comes, and you just might harvest the buck of your lifetime during the early bow season. Carpe Diem! ■

STICKS & STRINGS >

Allen Shortridge harvested his first bear in Canada with his Ravin Crossbow. It is currently illegal to hunt bears in Louisiana. ABOVE: Allen Shortridge harvested this buck with his crossbow recently.





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It's nothing short of irresponsible to hunt from an elevated stand without using the proper safety gear.



TREE STAND SAFETY

A LITTLE PREVENTION GOES A LONG WAY

I have focused on the journey and the process of bow hunting in this column this year. Part of that journey for me has been the realization that hunting from elevated tree stands is inherently dangerous, if proper safety precautions aren't followed.

After more than 30 years in the hunting industry, I've had many friends and acquaintances who have fallen and become severely injured. And even more who have had close calls. I've even had a few close calls myself.

With age comes wisdom (hopefully). And there's nothing like getting older to make you feel less invincible. Fortunately, today's technology has led to both much safer tree stands, as well as better fall-restraint systems. We no longer have a valid reason not to have

these safeguards in place when leaving the ground to bow hunt.

Most of the folks I know who have fallen from their stands have had slow and painful recovery periods. A few have resulted in paralysis or even death.

I'd like to focus on one particular incident that happened last year however, to someone very close to me. It was mid-October, and Ray was bow hunting for deer just north of Natchez, MS. He had finished his morning hunt around 10 a.m. and was frustrated for most of the hunt by a muscadine vine that was growing across his main shooting lane. It was just out of reach of his stand.

Ray unclipped his safety harness and climbed down from the stand's 12-foot height. Realizing he left his pack in the stand, he figured he would deal with

the vine once back in it. Before climbing back up, he cut off a long piece of the tag end of one of the straps on the ladder.

THE FALL

"Once I got up there (just below the stand), I tied the strap around the vine so I could pull it closer and cut it," he said. "I was holding onto the ladder and pulling on the strap with one hand, and holding the cutters in my other hand.

"The only problem was I still couldn't cut it. So I leaned out and let the strap



Sammy Romano is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 25 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.



Hunter Safety System

hold my weight instead of the ladder. I even said to myself that if the strap breaks, I'm screwed. Well, it broke and I fell."

Surprised at how quickly he fell, Ray was lying on the ground in an instant. Luckily, he had his cell phone in the top pocket of his vest. He could not have climbed back up the stand where the rest of his gear was. So it can't be overstated just how lucky he was.

He called other members of his hunting club. They quickly rushed to his aid. After a nearly hour-long ordeal that included an agonizing, bumpy ATV ride, Ray reached the Natchez Trace. A helicopter airlifted him to UMC Hospital in Jackson, MS. He was diagnosed with a broken humerus, five broken ribs, and a \$52,000 bill — just for the helicopter ride.

He didn't require surgery, but he had a painful 4-month recovery period. His bow season was over almost before it began.

COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE

"This easily could have been way worse. I'm lucky I wasn't any higher up, and that I wasn't paralyzed or killed instantly. A lifeline safety system and lineman's belt could have easily prevented this from happening," he said.

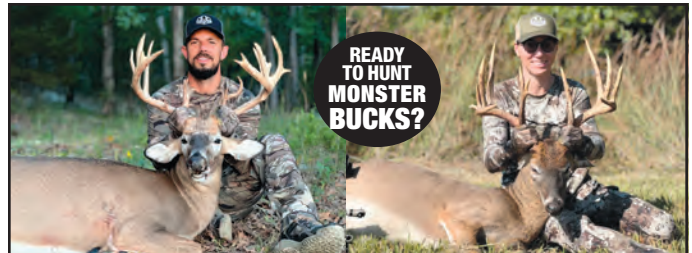
As we take to the woods, extra safety measures can avoid a season-ending injury or worse. The new "Life-line" systems allow a hunter to clip in their safety harness on the ground and stay attached the entire time they are elevated.

A linesman's belt or rope allows the safe use of both hands while hanging tree stands and trimming branches. We have no excuse for not taking advantage of these safety measures. If you don't do it for yourself, think of your loved ones and how much they care about you. Be safe out there and good luck. ■

**WOODS-TO-TABLE
DEER >**

COMMON SENSE:

If you're climbing a tree, or any elevated platform, it's common sense to clip yourself in as safely as possible. And that's true, not just while you're in the stand, but also on your way up.



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MORE THAN "MEATS" THE EYE

DEER HUNTERS HAVE LONG LIST OF OPTIONS FOR WOODS-TO-TABLE VENISON

Some people hunt deer to bag a big trophy buck, get it mounted and hang it on the wall of their home, office or camp.

Others go hunting just for the experience, but most all of them are also looking for something good to eat — a freezer shelf full of venison. Those folks traditionally have relied on the staples of deer meat — hamburger, steaks and sausage. A lot of hunters used to gut, skin and process their harvest themselves, but that number is dwindling. That was the old days.

By Kinny Haddox

Today, deer processors are located in popular deer hunting areas and there are usually more than one. And the selections of cuts for the freezer are almost unlimited.

"Things have definitely changed," said lifetime outdoor enthusiast and deer processor Kyle Green, owner of the Dubach Deer Factory and Smokehouse north of Ruston. "We make all kinds of products for hunters and that includes about 20 different options just for sausage. We even make deer bacon and that is a very popular item. People want different flavors, not just ground meat to put in

spaghetti or tacos."

Green said one thing people today like is venison that is already prepared to the point they don't have to spend a lot of time cooking it. That's why the "Smokehouse" part of his business has grown so much. One of his specialty products is cream cheese & jalapeño stuffed deer backstrap wrapped in bacon and smoked for hours that customers can just throw on the grill a few minutes and it's ready to eat. He also smokes all his sausage products so they are fully cooked and can be prepared the same way.

Having burger patties already made up

OPPOSITE PAGE: Getting everything right from the seasoning to the casing to the right smoking time is key for the best venison sausage.

and quick frozen where customers can just pop off a few from the pack and then throw them on the grill is a growing trend as well, he said.

The most popular sausages seem to be regular smoked sausage, jalapeño cheese sausages and even green onion sausages, Green said.

Various processors offer a world of options besides steak, regular hamburger and sausage. Those include bacon burger and burger patties, smoked sausage, deer bacon, cheese and jalapeño sausage, cheese and pineapple sausage, pan sausage of all types, summer sausage and even bratwursts. Brown sugar and maple smoked patties is popular for breakfast. And more.

At many processors, you can order your deer cut into stew meat, roasts and even get venison snack sticks, deer jerky, hot tamales and meat pies.

If you have a specialty item you want, make sure and check with your processor before delivering the deer to ensure your satisfaction. Not all processors provide the same services.

With the out-of-control wild hog epidemic in Louisiana, many

more people are also shooting and trapping hogs. You won't get as many options, but some processors stay open longer months to take care of the feral porkers as well.

Most processors didn't just stumble into the business. They have a history with deer and making the most of it in the kitchen. "When I was a kid, I would go to Texas and hunt," he recalls. "There was a place in Del Rio with a little Mexican meat market and the guy that managed the ranch had a son about my age. We would take deer to the plant and I was always fascinated with it. They even had a little grill where you could walk up and make your own breakfast burrito. I just kind of fell in love with it. The plans for me to do it were years in the making and we finally got it worked out like we wanted."

Green said he has a simple philosophy. He wants to send the venison home with the hunter with the same quality he would expect if it were headed to his table.

Processing deer isn't as easy as some people think, he said. Especially when it comes to making products like sausage. Everything you do has an impact, from the length and temperature it is cooked to the type of wood and casing used. It's also important that deer hunters make sure their processor has a clean, stable work environment to handle their meat. ■

Kyle Green and his wife, Amy, with a nice Louisiana buck that is about to become some nice Louisiana groceries.

HUNTING REGULATIONS ➤



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2022-2023 LOUISIANA HUNTING REGULATIONS

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

HUNTING SEASONS

| SPECIES | SEASON DATES | BAG LIMIT | POSSESSION LIMIT |
|--|--|---|------------------|
| DOVES+ | (South Zone) Sept. 3 - 18 Oct. 15 - Nov. 27 Dec. 17 - Jan. 15 | (North Zone) Sept. 3 - 25 Oct. 8 - Nov. 13 Dec. 24 - Jan. 22 | 15 45 |
| | | | |
| WOODCOCK^ | Dec. 18 - Jan. 31 | 3 | 9 |
| TEAL (blue-winged, green-winged, cinnamon) | Sept. 10 - Sept. 25 | 6 | 18 |
| RAILS* King & Clapper Sora & Virginia | Sept. 10 - 25 Sept. 10 - 25 | Nov. 12 - Jan. 4 Nov. 12 - Jan. 4 | 15 25 |
| | | | 45 75 |
| GALLINULES* | Sept. 10 - 25 | Nov. 12 - Jan. 4 | 15 45 |
| SNIPE | Nov. 2 - Dec. 4 Dec. 17 - Feb. 28 | 8 | 24 |
| QUAIL | Nov. 19 - Feb. 28 | 10 | 30 |
| RABBIT | Oct. 1 - Feb. 28 | 8 | 24 |
| SQUIRREL | Oct. 1 - Feb. 28 May 6 - 28** | 8 3 | 24 9 |
| | | | |

*An extended falconry season for ducks, rails and gallinules will take place from Nov. 3 - Jan. 31. ^An extended falconry season for woodcock will be Nov. 3 - Jan. 31. +An extended falconry season for mourning doves will be Sept. 15 - Oct. 1. **Spring squirrel season is CLOSED on the Kisatchie National Forest, some National Wildlife Refuges, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property and some Wildlife Management Areas. (Check WMA season schedule)

WATERFOWL SEASONS

| | EAST ZONE | WEST ZONE |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| DUCKS*, COOTS & MERGANSERS | Nov. 19 - Dec. 4 Dec. 17 - Jan. 29 | Nov. 12 - Dec. 4 Dec. 17 - Jan. 1, Jan. 9-29 |
| The daily bag limit for ducks is 6 and may include no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 females), 3 wood ducks, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 1 mottled duck, 1 black duck and 1 pintail. Only 1 scaup may be taken for the first 15 days of the season with 2 per day allowed for the remainder. Daily bag limit for coots is 15. Daily bag limit for mergansers is 5, only 2 of which may be a hooded mergansers. The merganser limits are in addition to the daily bag limit for ducks. The possession limit on ducks, coots and mergansers is three times the daily bag limit. Youth and Veterans only: EAST - Nov. 12 & Feb. 4. WEST - Nov. 5-6. | | |



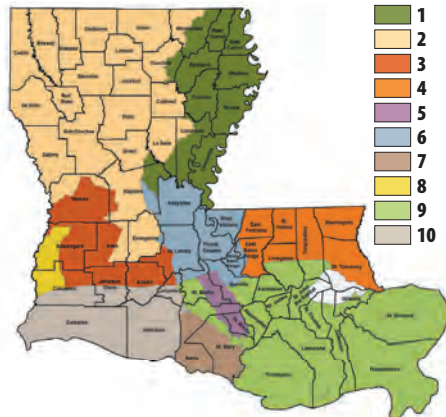
| | EAST ZONE | WEST ZONE |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| GEESE (snow, blue, Ross & white-fronted [specklebelly]) | Nov. 5 - Dec. 4 | Nov. 5 - Dec. 4 |
| CANADA GOOSE SEASON | Dec. 17 - Jan. 29 | Dec. 17 - Jan. 1 Jan. 9 - Feb. 5 |
| Daily bag limit for light geese (snow, blue, Ross) is 20, with no possession limit. The daily bag limit for white-fronted geese is three, with a possession limit of nine. The daily limit for Canada geese is one per day, with a possession limit of three. | | |

| | EAST ZONE | WEST ZONE |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| CONSERVATION ORDER FOR LIGHT GEESE | Dec. 5-16 Jan. 30 - March 5 | Dec. 5-16 Jan. 2-8 Feb. 6 - March 5 |
| No bag or possession limit. See pamphlet for more detail. | | |

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

DEER SEASONS

2022 - 2023 Deer Hunting Areas



| AREA | ARCHERY (Either-sex) | PRIMITIVE FIREARMS (All either-sex, except as noted) | STILL HUNT (No dogs allowed) (All either-sex, except as noted) | WITH/WITHOUT DOGS (All either-sex, except as noted) |
|------|--|---|--|--|
| 1 | Oct. 1 - Jan. 31 | Nov. 12 - 18 Jan. 23 - 31 | Nov. 19 - Dec. 9 Jan. 9 - 22 | Dec. 10 - Jan. 8 |
| 2 | Oct. 1 - Jan. 31 | Oct. 22 - 28 Jan. 16 - 22 | Oct. 29 - Dec. 7 | Dec. 8 - Jan. 15 |
| 3 | Sept. 17 - Jan. 15 | Oct. 8 - 14, Jan. 2 - 8 | Oct. 15 - Nov. 27 | Nov. 28 - Jan. 1 (certain areas) |
| 4 | Oct. 1 - Jan. 31 | Nov. 12 - 18 Jan. 23 - 31 | Nov. 19 - Dec. 9 Jan. 9 - 22 | Dec. 10 - Jan. 8 |
| 5 | Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex) | Nov. 12 - 18 (either-sex) Jan. 23 - 31 (bucks only) | Nov. 19-20, Nov. 25-27 (either-sex) Nov. 21-24, Nov. 28 - Dec. 9 (bucks only) | Dec. 10-11, Dec. 17-18 (either-sex) Dec. 12-16 (bucks only) Dec. 19 - Jan. 22 (bucks only) |
| 6 | Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex) | Nov. 12 - 18 Jan. 23 - 31 | Nov. 19 - Dec. 9 | Dec. 10 - Jan. 22 |
| 7 | Sept. 17 - Jan. 15 | Oct. 8 - 14 Jan. 2 - 8 | Oct. 15 - Nov. 27 | Nov. 28 - Jan. 1 |
| 8 | Sept. 17 - Jan. 15 | Oct. 8 - 14, Jan. 2 - 8 | Oct. 15 - Nov. 27 | Nov. 28 - Jan. 1 |
| 9 | Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex) | Nov. 12-18 (either-sex) Jan. 23 - 31 (bucks only) | Nov. 19-20, Nov. 25-27 (either-sex) Nov. 21-24, Nov. 28 - Dec. 9 (bucks only) | Dec. 10-11, Dec. 17-18 (either-sex) Dec. 12-16 (bucks only) Dec. 19 - Jan. 22 (bucks only) |
| 10 | Sept. 17 - Jan. 15 | Oct. 8 - 14, Jan. 2 - 8 | Oct. 15 - Jan. 1 | |



■ By Don Shoopman

LOUISIANA HAS THE HABITAT; NOW IT JUST DEPENDS ON THE DUCKS.

PUBLIC LAND WATERFOWL

Louisiana's Wildlife Management Areas in seven regions across the state offer first-rate duck hunting success based on favorable conditions and, as biologists on each area agree, if the ducks actually funnel down the Mississippi Flyway.

Duck hunters, naturally, hope for both when the season gets underway Nov. 12 in the West Zone and Nov. 19 in the East Zone. Providing a good number of ducks make their way this far south, the prime public areas to hunt are Atchafalaya Delta WMA in the Coastal Lafayette region, Boueuf WMA in the Monroe Region and Dewey W. Wills WMA in the Pineville Region.

Those three WMAs turned in some eye-opening duck harvest numbers last season: Atchafalaya Delta WMA reported 4,879; Boueuf WMA reported 2,930; and Dewey W. Wills WMA reported 2,714.

The big question: How many ducks are available to migrate?

The pre-season waterfowl population numbers report released Aug. 20 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicated there are fewer mallards, gadwall, widgeon, green-winged teal, shovelers, pintails and canvasbacks for the upcoming fall flight than at the same time in 2019.

Because of coronavirus restrictions, that was the last year the Waterfowl Population and Habitat Survey was conducted from

Alaska's Seward Peninsula to Newfoundland and south to near the Nebraska-South Dakota border.

The USF&WS reported the spring breeding population index at 34.2 million ducks, 12 percent lower than the 2019 estimate of 38.9 million ducks and 4 percent under the long-term average since 1955.

Hopefully, many of the ducks counted earlier this year fly this way and are fair game for duck hunters who enjoy hunting public land. Following is an update on WMAs in the Sportsman's Paradise.

HAMMOND REGION

TOP WMA WATERFOWL HARVEST NUMBERS FOR 2021-22

- **Pearl River WMA:** 2,353 ducks reported, 0.9 ducks per hunter effort
- **Maurepas Swamp WMA:** 2,598 ducks reported, 1.4 ducks per hunter effort
- **Biloxi WMA:** 719 ducks reported, 2.5 ducks per hunter effort
- **Manchac WMA:** 468 ducks reported, 1.1 ducks per hunter effort



One of the traditional three top Wildlife Management Areas for duck hunting harvest each year in the Hammond Region hardly came into play for waterfowlers in 2021-22.

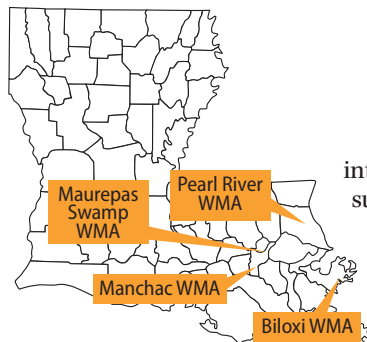
According to Bradley Breland, biologist supervisor for the Hammond Region since 2018, duck hunters faced extremely limited access to Manchac WMA during most of the early season because Galva Canal was plugged with debris from Hurricane Ida that smashed into southeast Louisiana on Aug. 29.

However, Breland noted in his report, there was a silver lining for Manchac WMA. And that bodes well for 2022-23.

“One positive result of the hurricane was the flushing of the giant salvinia and water hyacinths that tend to shade out the desirable submerged aquatic vegetation that provides forage for waterfowl species,” he noted in his report the first week of August.

Duck hunters downed 468 ducks, or 1.1 ducks per hunter effort last season at Manchac WMA compared to 1,046/0.8 in 2020-21.

Pearl River WMA’s duck harvest of 2,353 ducks led the way in the region in 2021-22. The area has beaucoup waterfowl habitat that translates



into fair to good duck hunting success every season, barring tropical storm activity. The brackish marsh is full of SAV, such as widgeon grass, that serves as a major forage source.

Pearl River WMA is split into zones, Breland wrote. South of U.S. 90 is in the western zone and is predominantly where the bulk of successful waterfowl hunting occurs on the WMA, he pointed out.

Gadwall and green-winged teal are the most common species harvested on Pearl River WMA, Maurepas Swamp WMA, Manchac WMA and Biloxi WMA.

LAFAYETTE REGION >




Louisiana has plenty of good spots for migrating ducks like this one, but the big question is “will they come?” in the annual migration.

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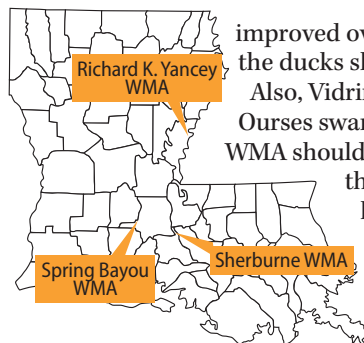
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LAFAYETTE REGION

TOP WMA WATERFOWL HARVEST NUMBERS FOR 2021-22

- **Spring Bayou WMA:** 2,323 ducks reported (1.6 ducks per hunter effort)
- **Richard K. Yancey WMA:** 1,212 ducks reported (1.0 ducks per hunter effort)
- **Sherburne WMA:** 779 ducks reported (0.72 ducks per hunter effort)



improved over the past few seasons, if the ducks show up.

Also, Vidrine pointed out, the des Ourses swamp area inside Sherburne WMA should have fair water conditions that appeal to ducks and duck hunters.

Sherburne WMA's duck harvest last season was 779 with an 0.72 duck per effort.

Consistently high duck harvests over the years make Spring Bayou WMA the seasonal go-to place for waterfowlers in the Lafayette Region.

Based on preseason conditions, don't rule out any of the other top duck-hunting WMAs in the region — Richard K. Yancey WMA and Sherburne WMA. As of late August, persistent drought conditions were a thing of the past.

"After a very dry spring (and early summer), we have gotten plenty of rainfall during the growing season," Tony Vidrine reported. "So waterfowl food production has been very good. If the ducks show up, the hunters should have a good season."

"Those WMAs that did good last year and normally do good every year should have a good waterfowl season again this year. Food production is good on all of the region WMAs."

Lack of rain had its upside, though, the veteran biologist manager noted, because it allowed him and his staff to get a head start this summer to manage those areas for desirable vegetation/conditions for 2022-23.

Duck hunters who frequented Spring Bayou WMA in 2021-22 killed 2,323 ducks with 1.6 ducks per hunter effort. The lake area usually gives up most of the ducks, predominantly blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, wood ducks and gadwall.

Richard K. Yancey WMA's 2021-22 harvest of ducks totaled 1,212 with 1.0 ducks per hunter effort. Duck hunters who hunt along the river often had the most success.

The South Farm on Sherburne WMA has prime vegetative growth (duck foods) due to biologists' efforts on the units during the growing season. Waterfowl hunting there should be

LAKE CHARLES REGION ➤



Heidi Crawford went on her very first duck hunt on Jan. 29, 2022 in Sandy Lake. She killed a mallard for her first kill.

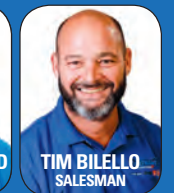
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LAKE CHARLES REGION

TOP WMA WATERFOWL HARVEST NUMBERS FOR 2021-22

- **Sabine Island WMA:** 18 ducks reported, 41 hunter efforts (1 duck per 2 hunter efforts)
- **Peason Ridge WMA:** 17 ducks reported, 5 hunter efforts (3 duck per hunter effort)
- **West Bay WMA:** 8 ducks reported, 16 hunter efforts (1 duck per 2 hunter efforts)
- **Clear Creek WMA:** 6 ducks reported, 8 hunter efforts (1 duck per hunter effort)

The Lake Charles Region is what it is and what it is mostly an upland big game public hunting area with fewer waterfowl opportunities.

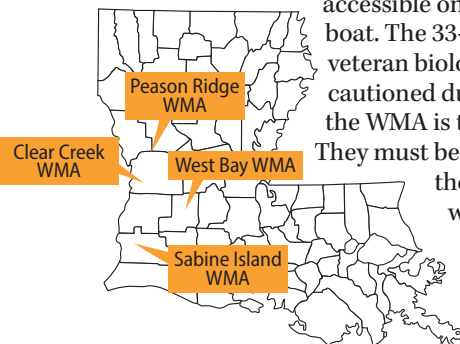
“We have more deer, turkey and small game opportunities than we have for waterfowl opportunities,” Wendell Smith, the region’s biologist manager 15 years with LDWF, reported.

Last season’s duck harvest numbers on the top WMAs reflect that statement. Sabine Island’s 18 ducks in 41 hunter efforts were the most downed in the region, followed by 17 in five hunter efforts on Peason Ridge WMA; 8 in 16 hunter efforts on West Bay WMA, and six in eight hunter efforts on Clear Creek WMA.

However, Smith has noted in the past, the wood duck hunting is a plus on Sabine Island WMA. Ridges with sloughs surrounding them offer feeding places for wood ducks.

“Occasionally another species of waterfowl will be taken but for the most part it’s wood ducks. Wood ducks feed in the sloughs and sometimes can be taken when they take flight,” Smith said.

Sabine Island WMA, actually two islands, is accessible only by boat. The 33-year veteran biologist cautioned duck hunters that the WMA is tidal-influenced. They must be cognizant of that if they travel up a bayou when the water’s high because their boat could be high and dry when they return at low tide.



Colt Leger and Patrick Benoit of Lake Charles with a nice limit of teal.



- **Loggy Bayou WMA:** 236 ducks reported, 175 hunter efforts (0.74 ducks per hunter effort)
- **Soda Lake WMA*:** 120 ducks reported, 43 hunter efforts (2.8 ducks per hunter effort)
* Portion east of Twelve Mile Bayou only

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries opened the portion of Soda Lake WMA east of Twelve Mile Bayou to waterfowl hunting in 2021-22.

Jeff Johnson, Minden Region biologist supervisor since 2007, was pleased with the results, as were waterfowlers who took the time and trouble to hunt it.

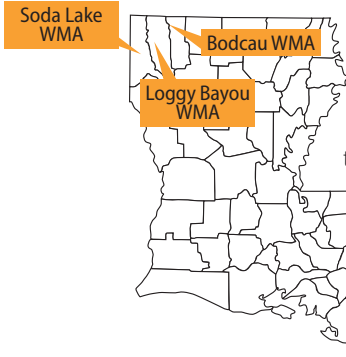
“I can’t speak on it historically because last year was the first season it was open but it was pretty good hunting for those that gave it a try,” Johnson wrote in his report.

How good? That portion of the area gave up 120 ducks in 43 hunter efforts, or 2.8 ducks per effort.

MINDEN REGION

TOP WMA WATERFOWL HARVEST NUMBERS FOR 2021-22

- **Bodcau WMA:** 961 ducks reported, 949 hunter efforts (1 duck per hunter effort)



Johnson pointed out the area to duck hunt is hard to access, so the long walk probably kept the duck hunter efforts and duck hunting pressure down somewhat.

Duck hunters who want to meet the challenge could do as well or better this season with a visit to that portion east of Twelve Mile Bayou.

Otherwise, Bodcau WMA and Loggy Bayou WMA are the top two areas for successful duck hunting year-in and year-out. Wood ducks, mallards, teal and gadwall are the main species that frequent all three WMAs.

Johnson noted that wood duck hunting is best early in the morning on each of the WMAs, which close to hunting at 2 p.m. When the other ducks are down in decent numbers, there's often more action later in the morning.

Some of the best waterfowl hunting is any time following a cold front that brings new ducks into the areas.



Don Shoopman fishes 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.

MONROE REGION >

“ *I can't speak on it historically because last year was the first season it was open but it was pretty good hunting for those that gave it a try.*



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Dawson Latiolais, 11, got these wood ducks while hunting on Bodcau WMA on Jan. 13.



MONROE REGION

TOP WMA WATERFOWL HARVEST NUMBERS FOR 2021-22

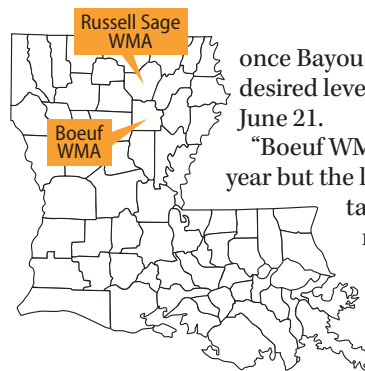
- **Boeuf WMA:** 2,930 ducks reported, (1.44 ducks per hunter effort)
- **Russell Sage WMA:** 1,562 ducks reported, (1.43 ducks per hunter effort)

Monroe Region biologist supervisor Mitch McGee knows prime duck habitat on two of the region's most productive WMAs makes all the difference in the world for waterfowl hunting success in the Sportsman's Paradise.

Boeuf WMA and Russell Sage WMA, which combined feature more than 13,000 acres of diverse waterfowl habitat, have what waterfowlers — and ducks — are looking for with natural sloughs, swamps, moist soil management units as well as a greentree reservoir on the former and the same features, plus flooded agricultural fields, on the latter. Those WMAs gave up nearly 3,000 and 1,500-plus ducks, respectively, in 2021-22.

Duck hunting success could be even better this season when one considers Russell Sage WMA's habitat depends on the water level in the Bayou Lafourche Canal. The LDWF staff was unable to pump most of the areas, which shifted management to make last year a "dry" year.

"This year we will be back on schedule to pump those areas



once Bayou Lafourche has reached the desired level," McGee wrote in his report June 21.

"Boeuf WMA was able to pump last year but the lack of rainfall did make the task take much longer than normal. Areas that normally have water for the first split did not have the water most hunters are accustomed to," he said.

Expect to see nearly all of the species that travel the Mississippi Flyway, but a majority of the birds shot in the region are wood ducks, green-winged teal, gadwalls and mallards, according to McGee. On Russell Sage WMA, Wham Brake's 4,000 acres historically have given up half of the area's waterfowl harvest.

The biologist supervisor noted that the first hour of the legal shooting period historically is the best time to hunt those areas. But that can change when hunting pressure and activity levels on surrounding areas ratchet up notch by notch, he said.

Naturally, early season hunts are rewarding but the second and third splits can be as good or better depending on conditions in the northern Mississippi Flyway.

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PINEVILLE REGION

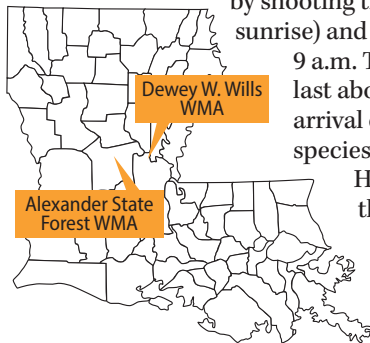
TOP WMA WATERFOWL HARVEST NUMBERS FOR 2021-22

- **Dewey W. Wills WMA:** 2,714 ducks reported (1.3 ducks per hunter effort)
- **Alexander State Forest WMA:** 63 ducks reported (0.7 ducks per hunter effort)

This 63,984-acre WMA in LaSalle, Catahoula and Rapides parishes is the go-to public area to kill ducks in the Pineville Region.

No one knows that better than Cliff Dailey, a 13-year veteran biologist who reported the sprawling Dewey W. Wills WMA gave up 2,714 ducks in 2021-22. It's no surprise it's his top pick for waterfowl hunting for the upcoming season as it's typically loaded with wood ducks, gadwalls, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal and mallards, especially during late winter in the second split.

"Temperatures and availability of floodwater is usually more favorable later in the season. Hunters should be set up by shooting time (30 minutes before sunrise) and try to hunt until at least 9 a.m. The wood duck flight will last about 20 minutes followed by arrival of the remaining dabbling species," Dailey said.



He reminded duck hunters they must be off the area before 2 p.m.

Mother Nature may have helped with a growing threat to quality habitat — giant salvinia, he

noted. Drought conditions in May-June dried out many intermittent sloughs, thus killing some of the giant salvinia.

"I anticipate fall rains refilling these areas and providing quality open water habitat for waterfowl when they arrive," he said.

Dailey pointed out that Alexander State Forest, where 63 ducks were killed last year, offers prime duck hunting opportunities in the Indian Creek Reservoir. Wood ducks, green- and blue-winged teal, mallards and hooded mergansers frequent the area if they're down.

He recommended using a kayak or pirogue to put out decoys because of deep water and advised the use of a retrieving dog.

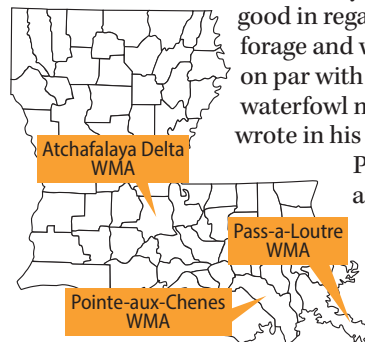


As challenging as post-Hurricane Ida conditions were in 2021-22 on some Wildlife Management Areas in the Coastal Lafayette Region, Atchafalaya Delta WMA and Pass-a-Loutre WMA still delivered.

The number of ducks bagged on those two WMAs was impressive despite fewer hunter efforts in the wake of Ida. The Atchafalaya Delta WMA's 4,879 ducks were the most harvested in the region last season compared to 7,134 in 2020-21. Pass-a-Loutre WMA's 2,144 ducks were the second-most bagged in the Lafayette Region compared to 2020-21's 4,195.

Vaughan McDonald, the region's biologist manager and an 18-year veteran with LDWF, expects as many or more ducks to be killed this season on those two WMAs, particularly the Atchafalaya Delta WMA.

"Atchafalaya Delta WMA is looking really good in regards to waterfowl habitat and forage and we expect to have a season on par with last year's season, provided waterfowl migrate to the area," McDonald wrote in his report.



Pass-a-Loutre WMA was among the three most hurricane-ravaged WMAs in the region in August 2021.

"Hurricane Ida negatively impacted Pointe-aux-Chenes, Salvador/Timken

COASTAL LAFAYETTE REGION

TOP WMA WATERFOWL HARVEST NUMBERS FOR 2021-22

- **Atchafalaya Delta WMA:** 4,879 ducks reported, 1,771 hunter efforts (2.75 ducks per hunter effort)
- **Pass-a-Loutre WMA:** 2,144 ducks reported, 463 hunter efforts (4.63 ducks per hunter effort)
- **Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA:** 662 ducks reported 467 hunter efforts (1.42 ducks per hunter effort)

and Pass-a-Loutre WMAs in 2021,” McDonald said. “All three of those had significantly lower participation during the 2021-22 hunting season and, with the exception of Pass-a-Loutre, success also was down likely due to habitat impacts with Hurricane Ida. We are expecting to see somewhat of a rebound in success on those areas this year barring any storm events.”

Blue-winged teal, green-winged teal and gadwall are the most common ducks in the region. Based on past experience, Pass-a-Loutre WMA’s best hunting typically is better toward the end of the first split and early in the second split. Atchafalaya Delta WMA and Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA duck hunting can be good throughout the season, but typically the first split is best. ■

Ricky Martin, Nick Lovell and Charlie Martin had a great second split opener in Venice on Dec. 19. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Dylan Raffray holds his first duck taken on the fly in Theriot.



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A close-up photograph of a mottled duck swimming in a pond. The duck's body is the central focus, showing its brown and white mottled feathers. The water is calm, reflecting the duck and the surrounding green lily pads. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue sky and water.

**MOTTLED DUCKS LIVE A TOUGH LIFE
AND DECLINING NUMBERS SHOW IT.**

LOUISIANA'S

■ By Chris Macaluso

DUCK

MOTTLED DUCKS ARE LOUISIANANS.

Unlike, teal, gray ducks, mallards, pintails and other common waterfowl that get a break from the heat by returning north every spring, mottled ducks make their homes in the coastal fresh and brackish marshes of the Gulf.

They live a tough life, having to fend off alligators most of the year. When hurricanes come, they hunker down like their fellow Bayou Staters or retreat north temporarily to agricultural fields in North Louisiana. Then, as soon as they start making new friends when the teal arrive in September, the shooting begins for two weeks. A month or so later, it starts again and doesn't end until the end of January.

Once widespread and abundant across the Gulf, mottled ducks have been in steady decline over the last 50 years with hunting limits reduced to just one bird per day in Louisiana and Texas and the possibility of further restrictions to come. Studies conducted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and state agencies have shown populations falling by as much as 70 percent.

Hunting is an unlikely culprit.

HABITAT INDICATOR

A combination of the loss of freshwater and brackish coastal marshes, an increase in predation from alligators, raccoons and other animals and changes in agriculture

practices that have altered grazing practices and turned rice fields into crawfish farms and row crops like sugar cane are the more likely causes.

"The mottled duck is a good indicator of wetland habitat quality," said biologist and avid waterfowl hunter Chad Courville. "Poor habitat quality for mottled ducks usually translates to poor habitat quality for all other ducks when they arrive here in the early fall and winter."

Courville, who was a Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commissioner for nearly six years, said figuring out exactly what habitats mottled ducks need is fundamental to recovery.



Without knowing what habitats mottled ducks prefer for breeding, nesting, foraging and roosting, it's difficult to implement adequate restoration strategies or projects.

He's been working closely with other avid waterfowlers, landowners, policy makers and waterfowl biologists to improve management and identify optimal habitat types. However, mottled ducks have proven one of the most difficult species to track and understand. The birds are harder to count than most migrating ducks because their plumage makes perfect camouflage and finding suitable

methods for capture and marking has been very challenging.

"We've had a lot of success in tracking other ducks with the latest versions of telemetry units that can follow where the birds go, but for some reason, mottled ducks don't seem to carry traditional devices very well and don't seem to behave normally after the devices are attached," he said. "Add to that, the landscape and the habitat has changed so much over the last 30 or 40 years since the benchmark studies, we just don't have a lot of good, updated data on these birds to guide decisions. For mottled ducks we need to find better telemetry units and better attachment methods, otherwise we will still be guessing at what they need."

A SPECIAL BIRD >

Mottled ducks fly over an open water area seeking a protected spot in the marsh.



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.



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A SPECIAL BIRD

The news on mottled ducks isn't all bad everywhere in Louisiana. In the few areas like the east side of the Mississippi River from Point a la Hache to Pass a Loutre, the Wax Lake and Atchafalaya Deltas and parts of Southwest Louisiana's freshwater marshes, mottled duck populations seem to be faring well.

"They're a very special bird and a lot of times I'll pass on killing them, especially late in the season, because I know they are struggling across a lot of our coast," said Capt Ryan Lambert, who guides waterfowl hunts in emergent freshwater and brackish marshes east of the Mississippi River

Lambert, working with Ducks Unlimited and funds from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, has used around \$2 million in the last decade to build approximately 5,000 acres of marsh near Ostrica, replacing large expanses of open water with vegetated mud flats and willow trees.

Terraces designed to slow water flowing from bayous and crevasses connected to the Mississippi River have helped suspended sediments deposit faster aiding the natural wetland building processes.

"It's like a mottled duck paradise where those projects have been built," Lambert said. "We saw thousands of them during the teal season this September."

Unfortunately, one of the sources of the land-building water and sediment near Ostrica, Neptune Pass, is set to be severely restricted by the Army Corps of Engineers due to concerns the



Photo courtesy Dr Ruth Elsey

widening pass will inhibit shipping. Lambert said the move by the Corps is "short-sighted and a huge mistake."

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and conservation groups like Ducks Unlimited are working with the Corps to find a solution to allow Neptune Pass to continue to flow and build new marsh while keeping the river safe for navigation.

TAKING STEPS >



A pair of Louisiana mottled ducks stand on a clump of marsh grass and mud. ABOVE: Mottled ducks lead a tough life and it's hard for a brood like this one to survive the many challenges of life along Louisiana's coast.



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Most hunters are aware of dwindling numbers of mottled ducks and are beginning to let them pass. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The 1995 Louisiana Duck Stamp featuring mottled ducks.



TAKING STEPS

While Lambert and others see positives east of the Mississippi, the story couldn't be worse for the Barataria and Timbalier Basins decimated by saltwater intrusion and marsh loss.

"There's a huge effort to try and rebuild as much habitat as we can for all ducks, especially mottled ducks, but you look at an event like Hurricane Ida wiping out 40,000 acres of marsh and it's difficult to overcome," said Aaron Pierce, a Louisiana-based regional biologist with Ducks Unlimited. "The aerial surveys conducted for this year's teal season showed an 89

percent reduction in teal and mottled ducks compared to past years in the eastern parts of Louisiana, likely because of impacts from Ida."

Pierce said Ducks Unlimited is working with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, farmers and landowners to leave more water covering native grasses rather than draining and turning every field for rice, crawfish or sugar cane.

"The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries deserves a ton of credit for leading the way to fix the issues



that have hurt mottled ducks,” he said. “These are very complex issues that deal with drastic habitat changes, changes in land use by farmers, predators, saltwater intrusion and other difficult things to resolve. But, we are optimistic. We are making progress.”

Additional progress is expected in early 2023 when construction could begin on the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion,

which is expected to build similar habitat west of the Mississippi River as the terrace projects near Ostrica. Recently passed federal infrastructure bills could provide hundreds of millions for habitat restoration and work with private landowners to turn marginal agricultural lands back into wetlands as well.


“We have to get serious about investing in our waterfowl habitat in Louisiana, managing what we have better and we need targeted research to help guide our decisions,” Courville said. “A lot of Louisiana hunters spend most of their time focused on what’s happening in other states. I say, we can start worrying about what other states are doing once we have our habitat house in order here in Louisiana.

“Outside of what is happening on the breeding grounds of Canada and prairie U.S., the habitat quality and quantity here in Louisiana is critical to our future waterfowling tradition. And for the mottled duck, just like on the breeding grounds to the north, nesting habitat and brood survival are likely limiting


factors, but at this point, I am not sure anyone knows with certainty, exactly which habitats we should be focused on. We better figure that out.

“Quickly.” ■

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 **YAMAHA**



Setting up for a blind retrieve, the handler has the dog looking out and set up correctly with an imaginary line from the bird through the dog's nose, spine and tail. Learning blind retrieves is a must for a great hunting dog.

DOGS MASTERING "BLIND RETRIEVE" IS AN IMPRESSIVE SIGHT FOR HUNTERS

I've been very fortunate to hunt with some amazing dogs. Some of my fondest memories were hunting with my uncle, Sid Lacoste. He had jam up dogs and started me on my retriever training journey. He helped me train my first dog some 25+ years ago and hunted with her often, so we both shared in her success. Hopefully you're on your way with yours and are progressing toward the finish line with a well-trained partner for seasons to come.

One of the metrics of a great dog is the "blind retrieve." There will be times when a dog won't see a bird fall. Could be its view was obstructed, fell in heavy cover,

or "sailed" after being shot, hence the term "blind retrieve." You want the blind retrieve in your arsenal. Not only will it put more birds in the bag, but it's a very impressive sight. It'll make your buddies jealous, too. All part of the fun!

How to train for it? Like all training, it takes lots of repetition. One plus is that it is something you can teach solo.

At heel, position the dog with an imaginary line from the bird passing through the dog's nose, spine and tail. The command used is "Back" differing from when the dog is sent on a mark by its name. To teach that it's a blind, "dead bird" is given before "back." The dog learns that a bird

is out there it can't see, but that you'll get it there. To get the dog lined up, use "heel" to pull the dog to you and "here" to have it move away slightly to get the straight line mentioned above.

"DEAD BIRD"

With a pile of bumpers a short distance away, line the dog up, and say "dead bird."



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.

The dog should lock onto the bumpers. Once locked, give the “back” command. The dog might be confused at first having not heard it, but after some repetition, it’ll get it. As you progress, increase the distance and cover to where the bumpers are out of sight. At this point, introduce a white pole for the dog to focus on and learn to run a straight line. When the dog has this down, switch to a black pole. The dog won’t see it from a distance, but will as it gets closer. This is a confidence as well as trust builder. The bird is the reward and the dog learns you’ll get them to it.

Factors such as cover, distance and terrain affect the dog’s line to the bird.

Hand and whistle signals get them back on it. The dog should know whistle signals, covered in an earlier column. One blast is blown, and the dog sits, squared up facing you. If not squared up, blow the “come in” whistle which is several blasts (beep, beep, beep) so the dog comes in a little ways and squares up on another “sit” whistle. The dog will take the hand signals from there.

THINK “CLOCK”

Thinking of a clock, there are six hand signals needed. Left and right back are 12 o’clock with your right or left hand straight up. Right over is 3 o’clock, left over is 9 o’clock. Right angle back is 1:30; left angle back is 10:30.

Start with the left and right backs (12 o’clock) with the dog out in front of you. Give the command sending it to a bumper pile. You want the dog turning in the direction of the signal you give, so stop it if it turns the other way. When you think you’ve done this enough, do it more! Then move to the other clock positions. Keep in mind that it’s a lot easier to keep the dog as close to that initial line as possible, so stop them quickly if they get off it.

Now that the dog has learned lining and signals, combine both on land and water. My dogs take signals better when swimming since they are treading water. Yours may be the same. Once adept, the dog won’t need a pole as a reference, will take a good line and take hand and whistle signals. Work on it often and increase the distance.

This is a lot to cover in one column on critical aspect of having a great dog. These methods work for me, but there are other paths to get to the same destination. Plenty of videos are available online to give you a better visual aspect. Seeking help from a pro or accomplished trainer is never a bad idea. I utilize both all the time.

I hope by now you have all the tools to build that great dog. We’ll cover the first hunts in the next column. Best of luck! ■

**HOW SPORTSMEN
COOK >**



This photo shows the left back hand signal given by the handler to make the turn back that way to the blind pole.

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WILD GAME LETTUCE WRAPS

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OF WILD GAME

Wild game equals flavor! Don't get me wrong, I love a good fatty steak now and then, but the versatility and distinct taste of the wild game and fish that Louisiana has to offer is something special.

That being said, not everyone likes the flavors of wild game that I've come to love and highlight in my recipes. Some even say that dreaded word—"gamey"—when they discuss wild game. Well, this dish was created for those that might normally shy away from what I refer to as "natural" taste! There is nothing gamey or wild about these delicious lettuce wraps.

Fall and winter are my favorite times of year; the weather is tolerable, hunting season is in full swing, and the local produce is diverse. Satsumas, grapefruit, and navels are all grown throughout the south and are typically canned, preserved, or turned into tasty marmalade due to their bountiful production. Louisiana citrus is my favorite local produce and is plentiful throughout the winter, so I frequently pair it with my favorite wild game protein.

With most wild game seasons open in the winter months, this recipe is a great way to help clear out the freezer and pantry of last year's wild game and citrus marmalade. And it is delicious.

Happy Hunting,
Recreational Chef





INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ½ Pounds of Duck, Venison, or Wild Hog Protein
- 1 Tablespoon Butter
- 1 Tablespoon of Sesame Oil
- 1 Cup of Diced Red Onion
- ½ Cup of Diced Leeks
- ½ Cup of Diced Fennel
- ¼ Cup of Diced Celery
- ¼ Cup of Diced Green Onion
- ¾ Cup of Shredded Carrots
- 1 ½ Teaspoons of Chinese Five Spice
- 2 Tablespoons of Grated Ginger
- 1 Tablespoon of Grated Garlic
- ¾ Cup of Soy Sauce
- 1 Tablespoon of Fish Sauce
- 1/3 Cup of Orange Marmalade
- 1 Container of Butter Lettuce Leaves

PREPARATION: Serves 4

1. Heat a cast iron pan or sauté pan to medium-high heat. Toss in the butter and the sesame oil.
2. While the pan is heating, mince the red onion, leeks, fennel, celery, and green onion.
3. When the butter melts and incorporates with the sesame oil, place the minced red onion, leeks, and fennel in the pan. Season with ½ teaspoon of the Chinese five spice then cook for 3-5 minutes.
4. While the vegetables are cooking, cut your choice of wild game protein into small ¼-inch pieces. If you prefer, you can substitute ground game meat of your liking.
5. Once the vegetables start to brown and caramelize, add the meat and remaining teaspoon of Chinese five spice, and brown for about 8-10 minutes.
6. Add the carrots and green onions in the pan and sauté for 1-2 minutes.

7. After the carrots and green onions are incorporated into the meat mixture, add the soy sauce, fish sauce, and orange marmalade to the pan. Cook the sauces until reduced by half and incorporated with the meat and vegetable mixture.
8. While the sauces are reducing, rinse the lettuce leaves and pat them dry, being careful not to tear them.
9. Once the sauces are reduced, remove from heat, place in a serving bowl, and let cool for 3-5 minutes. The lettuce wrap filling should be warm but not warm enough to wilt the lettuce leaves.
10. Serve the filling on the leaves and top with your favorite fixings. Some of my favorites are pickled red onions, chow mein noodles, cilantro, and crispy jalapenos or anything to give additional crunch!



Nathan Justice 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.

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HUNTER OF THE MONTH

Lyndsey Menard Morgan

Lyndsey Menard Morgan harvested a 16-point buck on Oct. 9, 2022 in Jefferson Davis Parish.

ANGLER OF THE MONTH

Slade Dowden

Slade Dowden was with his Paw Paw Andy Martarona when he won first place in the Gar division at the Salty Catch Fishing Rodeo on July 24, 2022. His alligator gar weighed 56 pounds.



FISH TRAFFIC PICKS UP
THIS TIME OF YEAR UNDER
LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN'S
BRIDGES. ■ By John N. Felsher

WHOPPER ROAD

John N. Felsher

When it comes to some of the best fishing in Louisiana, “A BRIDGE RUNS OVER IT.”

Several bridges spanning Lake Pontchartrain create miles of artificial reefs that hold various fish species all year long, but action really heats up as temperatures drop and you can take advantage of these fish

“TRAFFIC JAMS.”

“November on Lake Pontchartrain is an excellent time to fish,” said Mike Gallo of Angling Adventures of Louisiana (877-4AAOFLA, www.aaofla.com) in Slidell. “Heading into the wintertime, fish instinctively know that food is about to be scarce so they eat like pigs.”

Almost 25 miles long, the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway spans the widest part of the lake. With nearly 10,000 pilings supporting the longest bridge in the world running continuously over water, it resembles a concrete forest of fish-holding structures.

“The Causeway is a 25-mile reef,” quipped Andy Jones of Wicked Fishing Charters (985-750-0670, www.mandevillefishingcharters.com) in Mandeville. “Fishing in 2022 was incredible. We were catching many trout in the 16 to 20-inch range and quite a few over 20 inches.”

FISHING THE BRIDGES

Interstate 10, Highway 11 and a railroad trestle dating to 1884 cross the “Middle Grounds” from Slidell to New Orleans East. The Rigolets and Chef Menteur passes connect Lake Pontchartrain to Lake Borgne and ultimately the Gulf of Mexico. They bring good salty water to the eastern half of Lake Pontchartrain. Rail and vehicle bridges also cross the Rigolets and Chef. Any of these structures can produce outstanding action for speckled trout, redfish, sheepshead and many other species.

“I’ve been fishing those bridges since I was five years old,” said the 69-year-old Kenny Kreeger of Lake Pontchartrain Charters (985-960-3068, www.lakepontchartraincharters.com) in Slidell. “I’ve seen that train trestle change from creosote wooden pilings to concrete. I like to fish under I-10 in the summer to stay in the shade.”

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina severely damaged the original I-10 “Twin Bridges.” The new spans run parallel to the old bridge, but substantial structure from concrete slabs and other debris still attract fish where the old spans once stood. A portion of the old I-10 remains jutting out from the northern shoreline near Slidell.

Thousands of barnacle-encrusted pilings on each of these bridges provide excellent cover throughout the entire water column. Bottom debris accumulated over the centuries also hold fish. Tides washing around the pilings scour small doughnut-shaped depressions in the bottom that make great places for predators to ambush prey.

“I do a lot of fishing under the bridges,” Gallo said. “I circle the pilings with a depth finder to find structure on the bottom. Many huge concrete chunks have been on the lake bottom for years.”

SPECKLED TROUT >



An angler fishes along the old railroad trestle crossing Lake Pontchartrain between Slidell and New Orleans.



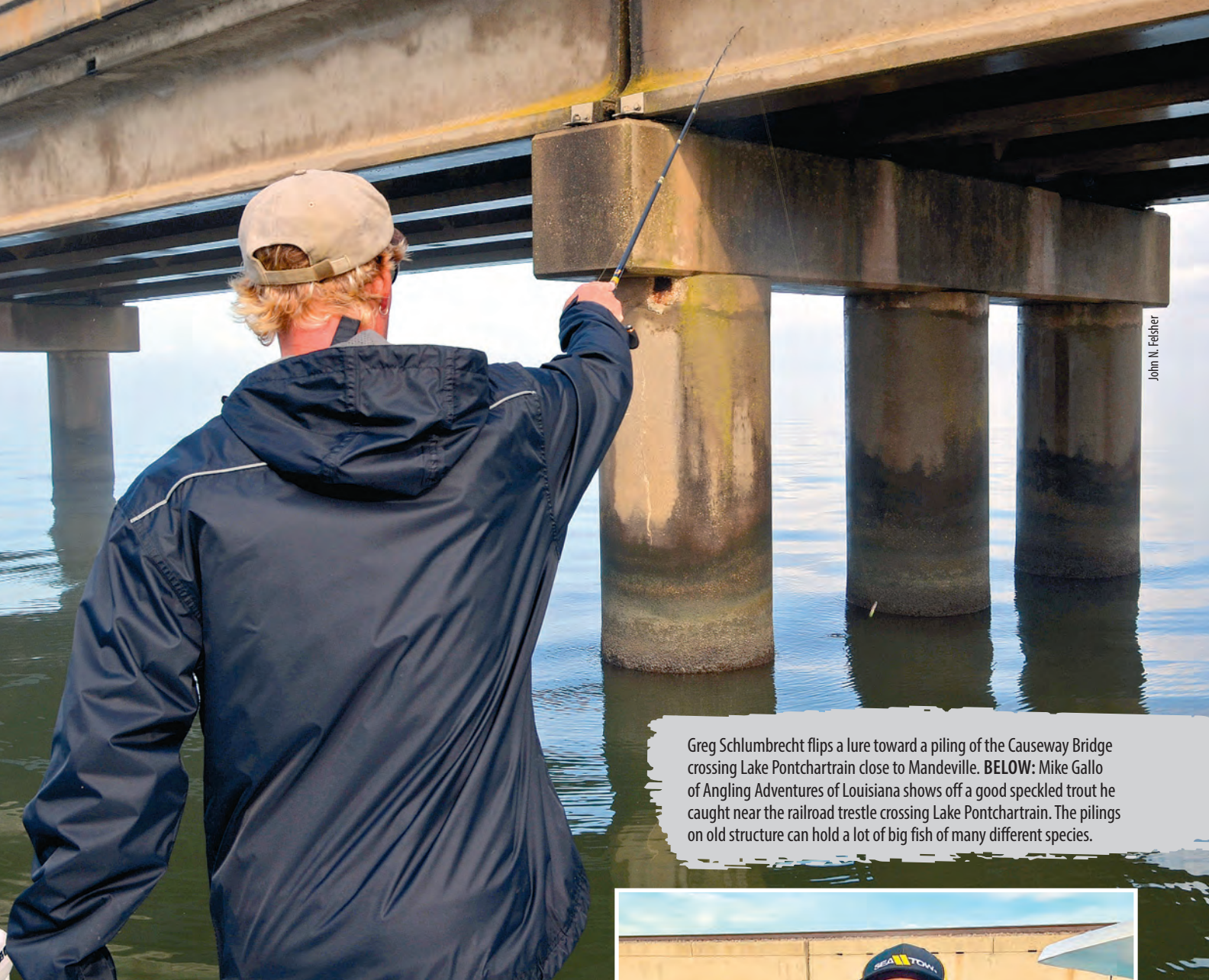
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John N. Felsher

Greg Schlumbrecht flips a lure toward a piling of the Causeway Bridge crossing Lake Pontchartrain close to Mandeville. **BELOW:** Mike Gallo of Angling Adventures of Louisiana shows off a good speckled trout he caught near the railroad trestle crossing Lake Pontchartrain. The pilings on old structure can hold a lot of big fish of many different species.

SPECKLED TROUT

In January 1999, Kreeger kicked off a run of giant speckled trout coming from the lake and associated waters. Kreeger's fish and two others made the Louisiana record books.

On Super Bowl Sunday, Kreeger headed into the lake, despite temperatures hovering around 28 degrees with howling winds. Fishing next to Highway 11, Kreeger flipped a 3/8-ounce jighead sweetened with a queen-sized soft-plastic sparkle beetle toward the pilings and pulled up a speck weighing 11.99 pounds, the largest caught in Louisiana since 1950.

"Besides the big one, I caught five trout over six pounds, eight over five pounds and the rest over four pounds," Kreeger said. "It's been years since we've seen big ones like that, but the lake still holds a lot of good trout. Since they started blocking the waterways for hurricane protection, the water doesn't get as salty."

Nine months later, Jason Troullier yanked an 11.24-pounder from the Rigolets to take the No. 3 position in the record book. In April 2002, Dudley Vandendorre added a 10.50-pounder to the roster.



Photo courtesy Mike Gallo

“All my big fish came off Highway 11,” said Vandenborre, (1985-1924), a guide from Slidell. “Over the years, I’ve had my best success fishing the railroad trestle along the south shore. The trestle has way more fish than any other bridge, but most are smaller. Highway 11 has the biggest trout, but not as many.”

Many trout fishermen work the pilings like bass anglers fishing flooded timber. They cruise along slowly with their trolling motors, hitting every piling from multiple angles with various baits. Drop temptations as close to the pilings as possible.

“We use a technique that Chas Champagne calls ‘the Pontchartrain Pop,’” Jones said. “We cast a jig as close to the pilings as possible and let it hit bottom. Then, we pop it up and down two or three times in that same spot. Sometimes, the bite will be very subtle so we watch the line for movement. Often, a fish will just suck in a bait. An inexperienced angler might never feel the bite.”

WORK SLOWER, DEEPER

As water cools, work baits slower and deeper. Pause occasionally to let it sink. Fish normally strike as a bait falls, resembling dying prey. When the bite gets tough, switch to lighter fluorocarbon lines that virtually disappear in the water.

“When I’m looking for trout in November, I look for deep water,” Gallo said. “When the temperature drops to about 57 to 54 degrees, fish hang a bit deeper, usually in the 6 to 10-foot range.”

Jones frequently trolls along the bridges. He’ll run baits along either side of the spans and sometimes between twin spans. Trolling makes a great way to search for fish and allow children to catch big ones. When trolling, youngsters don’t need to worry about casting or hooking fish.

“I troll with MirrOlure MirrOlip or a ½ to ¾-ounce Rat-L-Trap,” Jones said. “The farther back we fish those lures, the deeper they dive. I run two rods at different lengths off the T-top. I also run two lead lines on shorter rods straight off the back. I run one just barely off the bottom and one a couple feet higher. Once we determine where fish want to stay, we set everything to that and

“” *All my big fish came off Highway 11. Over the years, I’ve had my best success fishing the railroad trestle along the south shore. The trestle has way more fish than any other bridge, but most are smaller. Highway 11 has the biggest trout, but not as many.*

have a great time.”

Fishing success along the Causeway largely depends upon the Bonnet Carré Spillway near Norco. When the Mississippi River threatens to flood New Orleans, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers opens the gates to divert water into Lake Pontchartrain. The opening on the lake side points directly at Mandeville, but affects the entire estuary. Since 2011, the spillway opened six times, most recently in 2020. The massive influx of fresh water displaces salty species, but fishing improves once the lake returns to normal.

“A few months after the last spillway opening, fishing was absolutely dynamite,” Jones said. “We started seeing shrimp again. A spillway opening brings in a lot of nutrients. That’s good for the lake in the long run. In 2022, we caught some of the biggest striped bass off the Causeway that I’ve ever seen.”

BLUE CATFISH ➤

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

BLUE CATFISH

All that fresh water flowing into the estuary probably contributed to a freshwater catfish population boom. The western end of the lake remains the freshest. Highly tolerant of salinity, blue catfish might appear anywhere in the lake. Most blues average about two to eight pounds, but some exceed 30 pounds.

“We see a lot more catfish every year,” Kreeger said. “We always catch one or two in the summer. In the winter, when the water temperature drops below 50, we see many blue cats in the lake. In the winter of 2021-22, we had a pretty good cat run. Catfish act just like redfish. I’ll throw out a couple handfuls of shrimp heads or fish pieces for chum and put out four rods baited with shrimp.”

REDFISH

Anglers might catch redfish by the bridges all year long, but marshes nearly surrounding Lake Pontchartrain hold great populations of redfish and flounder. Between the Rigolets and the Mississippi state line, Pearl River feeds a fertile delta marsh loaded with redfish.

In late summer and fall, giant bull reds migrate in from the Gulf of Mexico through Lake Borgne and the passes. Anglers regularly see huge schools terrorizing baitfish in the Middle Grounds.

“In November, we watch for birds diving on huge white

shrimp,” Gallo said. “Bull reds chase the shrimp. I always try to talk to shrimpers because where shrimp go, fish go. It’s always fun to catch a bull red, snap a few pictures and release it. The passes bringing water to and from Lake Pontchartrain can be highly productive. The old railroad bridge over the Rigolets is always productive.”

OTHER SPECIES

Sheepshead love to nibble barnacles off hard structures. Besides the bridges, the state established several artificial reefs throughout the lake, some made with old bridge spans knocked down by hurricanes. With so many structures, Lake Pontchartrain offers some of the best sheepshead fishing in the world. In fact, the world record, a 21.25-pounder came from where Bayou St. John in New Orleans flows into Lake Pontchartrain.

The lake can also provide good action on many other species like black drum, white trout and croakers. At times, big sharks, tripletail and jack crevalle move into the estuary. While heading elsewhere, many anglers drive over giant fish just below them lurking around bridge pilings.

For help planning a trip, contact the St. Tammany Parish Tourist and Convention Commission at 800-634-9443. On line, see www.LouisianaNorthshore.com. ■



Steven Felsher shows off a sheepshead he caught in the Rigolets near the U.S. 90 bridge close to Slidell. The Rigolets connects Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne, which connects to the Gulf of Mexico. Sheepshead commonly hang around bridges and other hard structures where they eat barnacles.

Capt. Kenny Kreeger of Lake Pontchartrain Charters shows off a redfish, blue catfish, sheepshead and black drum he caught while fishing by the Interstate 10 Twin Spans crossing Lake Pontchartrain.



John N. Felsher

BRIDGES:

FISH COVER THAT NEITHER YOU NOR THE FISH CAN MISS

Most people fish the bridges spanning Lake Pontchartrain because these concrete structures provide abundant cover for many species. Keep these bridges in mind when you need a place to go:

- **Causeway** — The parallel Causeway spans stretch 24 miles across the widest part of Lake Pontchartrain. The first span opened in 1956, followed by the second span in 1969.

- **Interstate-10** — In 2005, Hurricane Katrina severely damaged the original “Twin Bridges” crossing eastern Lake Pontchartrain. One new 5.5-mile-long span opened in 2009 parallel to the old bridge. A second span opened in 2010. The remains of the old 1965 bridges were demolished and removed with some bridge rubble used to create artificial reefs. Part of the original twin spans remains as a fishing pier on the Slidell side of the lake.

- **U.S Highway 11** — Officially 4.78 miles long, the “Five-Mile” Bridge opened in 1928 as the Maestri Bridge, named for a former New Orleans mayor. Now it’s formally called the Watson-Williams Pontchartrain Bridge.

- **Others** — The original wooden railroad trestle dated to 1884. More recently, a concrete bridge replaced the old wooden structure near Highway 11. Another railroad crosses both the Chef Menteur and the Rigolets passes near Lake Borgne. In 2008, a new U.S. Highway 90 bridge opened to replace a 1930 bridge that once crossed the Rigolets near Lake Pontchartrain. A 1930 car bridge still crosses the Chef. ■

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THIS IS IT!

The best month of the year for Pontchartrain speckled trout

C By Joel Masson
 apt. Justin Bowles fishes 12 months a year, but this month, he ranks as his absolute favorite.

The Lake Pontchartrain fishing guide ranks it in this manner of several reasons.

“That’s when I catch my biggest specks of the year,” he said. “I like the weather; it’s not too hot, and there aren’t a lot of bad weather days. The fish are close.”

Bowles like to focus on structures, like bridges and anything that breaks the current.

One of the most popular Lake Pontchartrain areas to fish is the Train Trestle — and for good reason: it holds piles of fish every November.

When Bowles approaches the bridge, he likes to go in with an open mind as to how to fish it, even though he fishes it almost every day this time of year.

“I like to let the fish tell me what they’re going to do that day instead of going out thinking I know,” he said. “I’ll start off casting close to the pilings and you may get a hit when you’re retrieving your lure back to the boat — so I’ll back the boat off and fish further off.”

BRIDGE OR NOT?

One thing that will dictate how far the fish are off the bridge is tidal movement, according to Bowles.

“Depending on how hard the current is moving, the fish aren’t related exactly onto the bridge,” he said.

“I’ve also had days where we were out away from the bridge casting as far from the bridge as we could.”

Bowles certainly has color preferences too when fishing the specks.

“When I’m fishing bigger trout, I like colors that mimic a finfish rather than a shrimp,” he said. “Any of the Matrix Shads that the top and bottom are different colors, Tiger Bait, Limbo Slice; I just feel like those two-tone colors — I catch better fish on them.”

Jighead size for fishing the bridges and structures around Lake Pontchartrain is very important, and Bowles recommends bringing jigheads from ¼-ounce all the way to a ½-ounce jighead.

“There are days when the current is strong or it’s windy and you may need to use a ½-ounce jighead,” he said. “On a slack tide or a no wind day, you can get away with fishing a ¼ and it may be

more effective because the fall rate is slower.”

The Trestle is extremely popular with fishermen, and some days, you can almost walk from boat to boat.

However, Bowles has a method to combat the boat pressure.

“I’ve had several times where if it’s really busy, and especially if we’re fishing live bait, if I catch a fish, I’ll stay stationary and wait for those fish to pass me by again and they usually do,” he said. ■



Capt. Justin Bowles puts clients on specks like these all month in Lake Pontchartrain.

NOVEMBER SPECKS, REDS IN THE BILOXI MARSH

A By Rusty Tardo
According to fishing guide Sal Fontana (Gotcha Hooked Charters 504-812-7773), anglers only need to know two words to make a successful trip this month:

“Biloxi Marsh.”

“November is shaping up to be an outstanding month,” he said. “The conditions are right; we didn’t get a hurricane this year to mess things up; the bait is plentiful and the fish are definitely cooperating.”

“I’ve been fishing all over the Biloxi Marsh since October, and finding good numbers of both speckled trout and redfish.”

DEAD GIVEAWAY

Fontana said the fish are scattered all over the marsh in the usual places you’d expect to find them in the typical fall patterns.

“Stump Lagoon, Muscle Bay, Pete’s Lagoon, Cutoff Lagoon, Goose Flat, Brick and over to the Lakes of Bayou Marron; all are holding fish,” he said.

Fontana said the lakes and bays are full of shrimp and you’ll likely see birds diving on them all over.

“Naturally the birds are a dead giveaway, the bait is there and the fish are going to be there gorging themselves on them,” he said. “Try to sneak into them as quietly as possible and put some trout in the boat. Naturally you’ll have throwbacks, but you’ll have keepers too, and plastic is all you’ll need to catch them.”

DEAD TIDE, DEAD ACTION

Fontana said his usual procedure is to fish moving water around points, drains from the marsh into bays and lakes, and oyster reefs. He said it doesn’t really matter whether the tide is rising or falling, just as long as it’s moving.

“For bait, I’ve been using a combination of live shrimp under a cork, and soft plastics in the chartreuse color,” he said. “I’ve been doing good with Captain Lane’s Ghost Minnows, fished 2½ to 3 inches under a cork, and when I don’t have those, the good old H&H cocahoes or beetles in chartreuse will get the bite.”

“Redfish action has been holding steady in the marsh ponds with thicker vegetation, and just working along points and cuts and shorelines with the same chartreuse plastic or live or dead shrimp under a cork should put some spot-tails on your line.” ■



Capt. Sal Fontana caught this 6-pound redfish on a chartreuse Ghost Minnow in the Lakes of Bayou Marron.

MARSH MAN MASSON >



Photos of live fish in their natural environment are much more appealing and attractive.

MARSH MAN MASSON

Todd Masson

SOCIAL MEDIA OVERLOAD: DOCK SHOTS SHOULD GO THE WAY OF MYSPACE

Once tried to calculate the number of trips with fishing guides I've taken over the course of my career. As many of you know, I spent 18 years on staff at *Louisiana Sportsman*, and part of my duties was to produce two feature stories every month.

Although not every single one of those was with a guide, the vast majority were, so assuming 20 feature stories per year with a guide over 18 years, that's 360 guided fishing trips.

That pace certainly didn't slow down during the six years I spent at *The Times-Picayune*, so let's add in another 120 for a grand total of 480.

That's a lot of time spent on a boat with fishing guides, and I have a tremendous amount of respect for those guys. For the most part, they're incredibly hard working, many are excellent fishermen and almost to a man, they get super ticked when they're unable to produce for their clients. Viewers of my Marsh Man Masson

YouTube channel often ask if they can hire me to take them fishing, and I politely decline because 1) I'm not a licensed charter captain, and 2) at my age, I just don't want to work that hard. I've seen enough to know guides earn every penny they make.

But no profession is full of perfect people, and that's true of the guide industry as well. There's one habit among many guides I'd love to see go away forever: Posting pictures on social media of tables loaded with dead fish.

COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

Aside from the fact it's seen by many viewers as offensive, it's really just counterproductive.

I still speak regularly with a wide circle of guides, and many complain to me regularly about customers who call and ask when the best time is to go catch a limit. They'll give them a timeframe, the customers will book and then, when the

trip occurs, if all the stars don't align and they fall short of 25 speckled trout or five redfish per person, the customers get annoyed and feel cheated.

You could simply blame that on over-demanding, unrealistic customers, but every time these guys fish, they return to the dock, dump the fish on a table, take a picture and post it on social media. What kind of clients do they expect to get?

It's an action that's common among guides. I've discovered, though, that they don't do this to attract the attention of customers; they do it to impress fellow guides.

It's a highly competitive industry, and everyone wants to be seen, especially among their peers, as the best guide in a



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



particular area. Thus the daily pictures of copious amounts of dead fish on a table.

One North Carolina viewer contacted me on Instagram to let me know he had just returned home after a trip to Louisiana. He and his buddies told the guide they wanted only enough fish to cook that night, since they'd be returning home the next day and didn't want to transport the fillets.

They got on a hot bite, and when they said they wanted to release the rest of the fish, the guide looked at them incredulously, shook his head and said he'd take them. So they stuffed an ice chest with redfish and speckled trout. At the end of the day, sure enough, the guide dumped the fish onto a table to take a social-media picture.

MORE APPEALING

If guides are truly posting to Facebook and Instagram to attract customers, a better strategy is to post pictures of grinning customers holding live fish, still dripping with water, in their natural settings. It's just far more attractive and appealing.

Guides should be selling an

experience rather than a meat haul, even if their customers want to take a few fish home for dinner.

There's a small but growing number of guides who share this philosophy, and not surprisingly, they have all the business they can handle. Best of all, they attract clients who are satisfied with fewer fish and feel gratitude simply for seeing a coast as magnificent as Louisiana's.

Hopefully, as Louisiana's resources struggle to regain their foothold, even more will abandon the "mine's bigger than yours" daily mindset. ■



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The red LED also reduces eye strain, so even long walks are no match. Using night vision technology? That's not a problem either, as this light does not interfere with it.

This compact light is 4.8 inches long, weighs a scant 3.7 ounces, fits easily in a pocket, bag or glove box and puts out 114 lumens, with a peak beam intensity of

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Powered by three AAA batteries, the XL50 runs at full power for 6½ hours, so long tracking jobs or lengthy walks to the truck after the sun sets are no big deal. The low-powered setting keeps it going for a whopping 24 hours.

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For more info, visit: maglite.com



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This unique mounting system keeps your gun, binoculars, knife, flashlight – you name it, and it's got a secure place to fit on this panel that attaches easily to the rear of any vehicle's front seat.

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and secure while driving, but ready to quickly deploy once at your desired location.

This rack will serve you throughout the year whether you're deer hunting, waterfowling, small-game hunting, shooting sporting clays or going to the rifle range.

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For more info, visit: greymantactical.com

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Here's a powerful big bore PCP airgun combo that includes everything a hunter needs to humanely kill coyotes, raccoons, deer, wild hogs and more.

The Seneca Dragon Claw shoots .50-caliber projectiles and gets 230 pounds of muzzle energy. Fire the included Air Venturi Air Bolts at an even higher muzzle energy level, with deadly accuracy thanks to the gun's rifled barrel.

Aside from the rifle, which has a classic look and just the right amount of weight in hand, the combo includes six .50-caliber Air Bolts, three SenX Double Whammy broadheads, 100 Seneca .50-caliber round balls, a Mantis 4-12x40 scope, a UTG Tactical bipod, an arrow/bolt quiver,

a broadhead wrench, and a premium Air Venturi Nomad II portable compressor, allowing you to keep the airgun filled at home or in the field.

Two large air reservoirs allow you to

spend more time hunting or shooting and less time airing up.

For more info, visit: pyramydair.com



■ By John N. Felsher

**THINK THIN TO CREATE
ROD-BENDING BASS
ACTION ON COLD DAYS.**

FLAT BAIT FURY



John N. Felsher

EVERY ANGLER KNOWS THAT BASS PREY HEAVILY UPON SHAD, a dominant forage species for bass and other predators in many Louisiana and Mississippi waters. Look at a shad from the side. It's flat, not rounded like many baits.

Look at it head-on and it practically disappears. Bluegills and other bream also give off a very flat appearance. With flat sides and thin profiles, flat-sided crankbaits closely mimic the shape and movement of threadfin shad and bluegills.

"In the fall, shad is the predominant forage for bass," said Caleb Sumrall, a professional bass angler from New Iberia who fishes the B.A.S.S. Elite Series. "Shad come out of the main river and go shallow into the backs of creeks, pockets and oxbows. I've done very well fishing the Red River with flat-sided crankbaits. Toledo Bend is another obvious place for fishing these baits. I've also done well in the Atchafalaya Basin when it's right."

In the fall and winter, frigid bass turn lethargic and don't want to chase fast baits far or expend too much energy. They would more likely hit a slow, subtle bait that presents a tempting morsel that a bass can easily slurp without much effort.

"Flat-sided crankbaits are most effective late fall or early in the winter," said Pete Ponds, a Bassmaster Classic veteran from Madison, Miss. "As the water temperature drops, flat-sided crankbaits become increasingly more effective. November is a great time to throw it. They are great baits to throw when bass are chasing shad because it looks more like a shad than a rounded crankbait."

TIGHT WIGGLES >



A largemouth bass comes to the boat after hitting a lipless crankbait. A lipless crankbait makes a tight wobble and resembles a threadfin shad.



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TIGHT WIGGLES

Flat-sided crankbaits vibrate through the water with subtle tight wiggles instead of pulsating with wildly erratic movement. The subtle baits give off vibrations similar to those created by live shad, good for tempting bass in cold water.

“Shad don’t swim with massive tail movements,” Sumrall said. “They move with very subtle actions. Flat-sided crankbaits have the same subtle action. When water temperatures reach the low 50s to about 45 degrees, I throw a flat-sided crankbait. When fishing cold water, I don’t want a crankbait with a wide wobble because fish are not as aggressive.”

Flat-sided crankbaits could work in many situations. A traditional rounded crankbait more resembles a crawfish and works best when bass key on crawfish. Bass might smack shad at any opportunities, but they especially go after the thin baitfish in the fall.

When shad head up the creeks, bass follow. In the fall, bass want to feed up with rich protein and oils that shad provide to prepare for winter. As shad migrate, bass often gather in schools. Attacking from below, bass herd baitfish into balls and force them to the surface where the terrified shad run out of escape room. Then, bass move in to gorge themselves on anything they can catch.

Largemouth bass in a school chasing shad become frenzied. They attack anything that moves, hitting the hapless shad from all sides. Birds also dive to get their share of the protein. Anglers can often find schooling fish by watching birds dive or hover over the surface. Anglers lucky enough to find a school and react quickly might catch several good fish in minutes.

“Bass swim around like wolfpacks and bunch up the shad, like they are corralling them,” Ponds said. “I’ve seen bass push shad up on the edge of the bank and even knock them out of the water onto the bank. They devour them when the shad flip back into the water.”

In a frenzied school, make extremely long casts. If possible, throw crankbaits beyond the schooling activity and run them through the

area. Over the spot where the bass struck, pause to let buoyant baits float up a few moments like a stunned fish. Then resume the retrieve. For fooling schoolies, use 10- to 12-pound test fluorocarbon.

“With a different wiggle and a tight wobble, a flat-sided crankbait makes a great bait to throw at schooling bass,” Ponds said. “When bass chase shad on the surface, make an erratic retrieve, the more erratic the better. Don’t just throw it out and reel it in. Make the bait look like something is chasing it and it’s fleeing for its life.”

SHALLOW WATER SPECIAL ➤

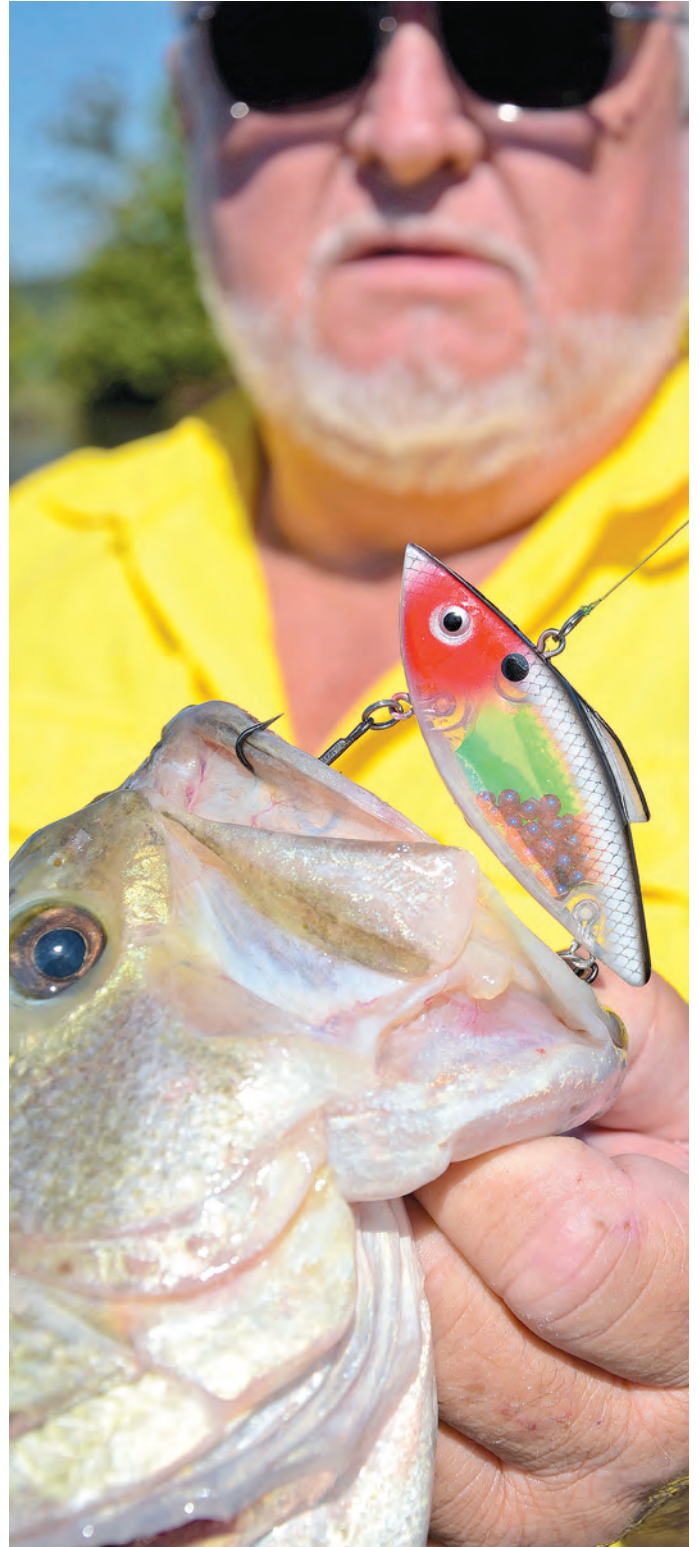


John N. Felsher is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. You can contact him at JohnNFelsher.com.



John N. Felsher

Flat-sided crankbaits give off a tight wiggle that attracts bass. They work best during colder months. **RIGHT:** A lipless crankbait makes a tight wobble and resembles a threadfin shad. With a thin profile and flat sides, it mimics a shad.

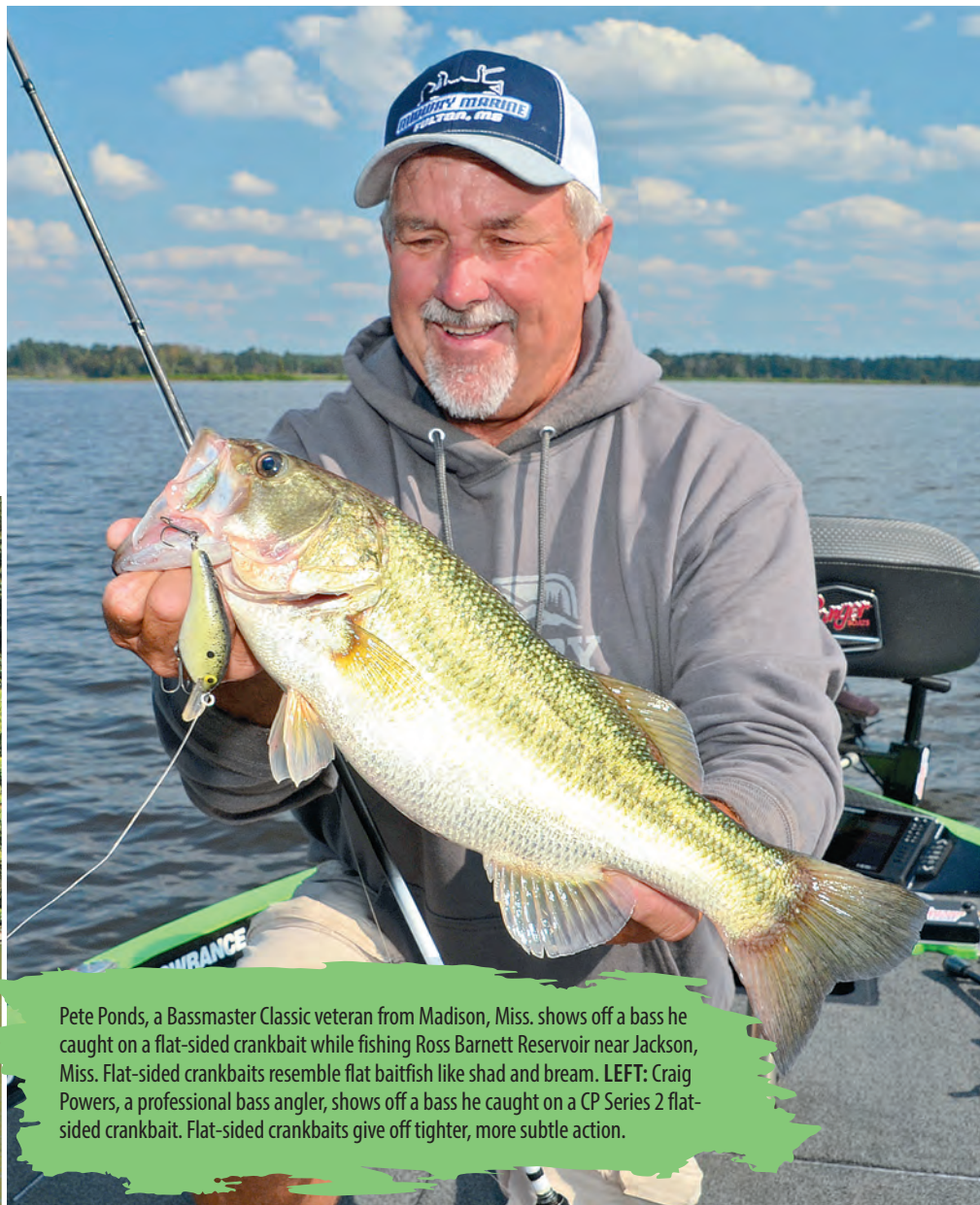


John N. Felsher

SHALLOW WATER SPECIAL

Flat-sided crankbaits also work especially well when bass feed upon shad or bluegills in shallow water. Fish them along rock or concrete riprap shorelines. Rocks and sunken logs grow with algae that can provide food for small fish. That attracts bigger fish.

"I really like to throw flat-sided crankbaits around riprap and grass that's not topped out," Ponds said. "Pull it along the edge of the grass. Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson, Miss., is a very good lake for fishing flat-sided crank-



Pete Ponds, a Bassmaster Classic veteran from Madison, Miss. shows off a bass he caught on a flat-sided crankbait while fishing Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson, Miss. Flat-sided crankbaits resemble flat baitfish like shad and bream. LEFT: Craig Powers, a professional bass angler, shows off a bass he caught on a CP Series 2 flat-sided crankbait. Flat-sided crankbaits give off tighter, more subtle action.

John N. Felsner

baits. I fish flat-sided crankbaits often at Toledo Bend because it has abundant ledges, riprap and rocks. People can get in many pockets with grass growing in the back of them. Some have little ditches leading into those pockets. Fishing a flat-sided crankbait in the little ditches and the grassy edges in the fall is very effective."

Shallow flats and tiny drains also make great places to throw flat-sided crankbaits. A long sloping shoreline or point also makes a superb place for working flat-sided crankbaits because anglers can find fish at various depths. Along a sloping point, bass can move up shallow or drop into the depths easily.

"Most often, I fish flat-sided crankbaits in shallow

water,” Sumrall said. “I’ll look for any drains with sandy, hard bottoms, laydowns, rock, old boat ramps and stuff like that. Most flat-sided crankbaits don’t go very deep. Some baits made by SPRO dive to six to nine feet deep. Some of my favorites are a SPRO Little John 50 or a SPRO Little John MD 50.”

Any type of isolated cover, like a brush pile or fallen tree sitting in the right area, can attract cold-water bass like a magnet. A long shoreline with one or two fallen trees, a stump sitting in the sun by itself away from shore or a lone rock frequently holds bass waiting to ambush a shad or other morsel that passes through the right spot.

“When it’s really cold, bass are not as aggressive,” Sumrall said. “They might not hit the bait on the first cast. That doesn’t mean they’re not there. They are not going to be chasing bait. If I see a good piece of cover, I’ll make multiple casts back to that piece of cover and hit it from all different angles. We might need to hit them in the nose.”

BANG IT OFF COVER

Flooded timber, dock pilings and bridge pilings provide bass with cover from the surface to the bottom. Sometimes, bass hang near the surface, suspend in the middle or hover just over the bottom. Run lures at varied depths and into any cover.

“The most important thing when throwing a crankbait is to make bottom contact,” Sumrall said. “Bang it off the bottom or off cover as much as possible. Nine times out of 10, the better bites are going to come when a crankbait bangs into the bottom or deflects off cover. I always try to make the bait dig into the bottom.”

Thin lipless crankbaits, like a Rat-L-Trap, could count in the flat category, but work differently than traditional flat-sided lipped crankbaits. Both produce extremely tight wobbles and excellent vibration, irresistible when targeting largemouth feeding upon shad. However, anglers typically must run lipless crankbaits very fast. When paused, they sink rapidly. Anglers can fish flat-sided crankbaits much slower and shallower than they can lipless crankbaits.

“A lipless crankbait also has flat sides and a tight wobble,” Ponds said. “With a lipless crankbait, pump it so it sinks. Most often, bass hit a bait on the fall. Anglers can also fish a lipless crankbait with a slow-rolling retrieve. The key to fishing a flat-sided crankbait, crank down four or five

“The most important thing when throwing a crankbait is to make bottom contact. Bang it off the bottom or off cover as much as possible.**”**

times really fast and stop. Then, jerk it one time. That’s usually when the bass hit.”

For colors, stick with anything natural that mimics a shad, such as whites, pearl or gray shades, perhaps with some blue mixed in or a black back when bass target threadfin shad. When bass chase bluegills, try firetiger, gold and red or chartreuse and blue. As water warms in the spring, crawfish emerge from the mud. Therefore, colors such as red, brown or black, often with a twinge of orange, yellow or blue work very well at that time of year.

“In the fall, I mostly throw anything shad colored, like chartreuse with white sides,” Sumrall said. “At that time, crawfish will be buried in the mud. People might catch a bass anytime on any color, but I always like to ‘match the hatch.’ I use a bait that looks like the prey bass want to eat at that time.”

Hungry bass can’t resist a delicious shad swimming seductively past its nose, so offer them something that resembles a delicious threadfin for hot action on frosty days when lethargic bass want a more subtle meal. ■

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The advertisement features a festive holiday theme with a red and white striped banner, a large red bow, and silver and red ornaments. It displays two stainless steel 5min Boilers on wheels and several pit blinds. The Hughes Manufacturing logo is prominently displayed at the bottom.

FISH ARE READY TO FATTEN UP

Bass get aggressive this month at Toledo Bend

T By John Dean
here's no doubt November's going to be a fish-catching month for bass at Toledo Bend.

As the water cools, starting at the end of September through October and even more through November, it is becoming prime time for moving baits like spinnerbaits, lipless crankbaits, bladed jigs and topwaters.

Hopefully, water temperatures will be in the 60s by November. It'll require consistent nighttime temps in the 40s-50s and 60-degree temps daytime.

It'll help if cold fronts between now and then bring some rain to the region, too.

Toledo Bend's pool stage has been around 168, about four feet below full pool. The water temperature was still in the 80's going into October, but has been dropping. A 2- to 3-foot rise would be perfect because, for one thing, it would cover the grass that's grown on the shoreline. And then the bass would be in there.

MORE GRASS

Speaking of grass, it seems more and more vegetation is trying to gain a foothold and that's a sight for sore eyes. Mostly, the green stuff is hydrilla and milfoil, but unfortunately, there still are no signs of peppergrass. Grass is important because bass will get around grass if they can find it, so if you find grass, fish it and you should run into bass.

Much of the bassin' action will happen in and along the drains leading to flats and the flats themselves. Stay close to the drains and target 5- to 7-foot depths, sometimes even shallower. As a general rule of thumb, the back end of creeks and coves usually cool first.

It's a time for bass to fatten up as they gorge on baitfish, chiefly shad. They're going to be in a feeding mode for sure, any time of the day, and they won't have to go far to get something to eat. By the end of November, many of them will resemble butterballs and weigh accordingly.

Bass are going to be aggressive in November, so it's a fun time to throw whatever you like best. The more water you cover, the more bass you catch.

However, this generally is the time to store away the drop-shot soft plastics, Carolina-rigged soft plastics and deep-diving crankbaits, to basically forget about fishing deep until any Arctic cold front freezes the region.

Toledo Bend guide John Dean with a chunky bass he caught on a cold, high-pressure, bluebird, no wind day with a C Rig Ribbit Frog.



FAVORITE COLORS

Some of my favorites for this time of year over the years include ½-ounce Golden Bream, chartreuse/white or chartreuse/blue/white Stanley Wedge spinnerbaits with gold blades, ½-ounce chrome/blue or gold Rat-L-Traps, ½-ounce Golden Bream or black/blue, gold blade Delta Lures Thunder Jigs, and your favorite topwaters. That would include watermelon/red/pearl Stanley Ribbits and Stanley Top Toads, black and bone Whopper Ploppers and Zara Spooks.

The latter is known for enticing the lake's bigger bass to bite.

You might want to try my old technique of putting a Stanley Ribbit on the business end of a C-rig. I've got great memories of getting consistently bigger bass (4-plus pounds) to bite for many years on the C-rigged Stanley Ribbit.

Some of the best topwater action, unlike the summer months, often is during midday hours during November.

My priority for the rest of the year is to get my hands on a double-digit bass. My personal goal is to catch a lake record bass.

If you want to catch bass in November at Toledo Bend, give me a call at (936) 404-2688. ■

Tioga High School's Noah Roberts, left, a senior, and Jacob LaCroix, a junior, grip the lips of bass they caught March 17.



TIOGA BASS TAMERS

LACROIX AND ROBERTS GOT THE BITES THAT COUNT TO WIN TOURNAMENT

D By Don Shoopman
 Despite two balmy afternoons in late spring just about six months ago, Jacob LaCroix had chills on the boat ride to the weigh-in both days of the Louisiana High School Bass Nation State Championship.

LaCroix and Noah Roberts, both 17, had a limit on Day 1, so it was a good trip on the Ouachita River and the moment caught up to LaCroix, a sophomore at the time at Tioga High School. Roberts was a junior in his third year with the fishing team.

The two-man team fished the second day following an overnight rain that muddied their hotspot. They ground it out to catch five bass by punching a watermelon/orange Zoom soft plastic under a tungsten weight.

"We just had to get a limit. That's when it really hit me, on the way back," LaCroix said.

He got chills again and for good reason. They had five nice-sized bass in the livewell.

Roberts and LaCroix, both of Ball, got the bites that counted and finished with a two-day total of 19.81 pounds to win the LHSBN state title. They also earned a berth in the Bassmaster High School National Championship against teams from 39 states and Canada held this past August at Lake Hartwell in South Carolina.

IT WASN'T EASY

Roberts, now a senior, said about that state tournament, "It wasn't easy finding fish. That was a tough, tough tournament."

After pre-fishing and finding bass in three areas, he said, they had to start from scratch when those areas were declared off-limits.

"We managed to find them in another area ... better than all three of the other areas. As we were idling in there, the first thing that struck me was we could get to the bank the whole place," he said, confiding that area was near Sterlington.

They got four bites and left immediately. Three or four boats were in there both tournament days, he said.

"It (state championship) was an awesome experience; our first year fishing together, learning together," LaCroix, a junior this season, said. "It took a while to sink in. It's a dream come true.

"We pre-fished for, like, three days. We had to come up with a whole new game plan. We didn't really think about what it'd take to win. We were just fishing."

Team chemistry apparently is one of the keys to their success, which included winning seven of eight high school club tournaments and finishing in the Top 20 twice on the LHSBN circuit in 2021-22.

A BOOST FROM GRANDPA

Their captain has been Mike Roberts, Noah's grandfather who introduced him to bass fishing as a freshman.

"My grandpa really enjoys it," Roberts said. "Whenever I told him I was interested in the high school deal, and wanted to get in on it, he jumped on it."

Roberts, the son of Brad and Beki Roberts, is a four-sport athlete who starts at outside linebacker for the Indians. He also plays soccer and throws the javelin in track and field.

His favorite place to fish near his hometown in November is Cane River.

"That is a fantastic place to go. That river's beautiful and it's where I learned to frog and flip," Roberts said, noting he usually launches at Cane River Shell Beach Landing near Natchitoches.

From there, he said, some of the best bassin' is in the first three or four miles north of the ramp. It helps, he said, that hydrilla is reappearing in the river.

In November, weather and water conditions permitting, shad get active and bunch up. Roberts offers a plastic frog early, then a Bandit 200 and/or a Jackhammer Chatterbait. His backup is flippin' a Strike King Rage Bug, which has produced a near 10 pounder and a 7 pounder for him and an 8 for his younger brother, Ethan, a 13-year-old who also fishes for Tioga High School.

Roberts and LaCroix had different tournament partners their sophomore and freshman years, respectively. Those partners realized they weren't into it, Roberts said, "We got to talking to each other. It worked out pretty dang well."

WHAT'S AHEAD?

Roberts, whose personal best was a 9.97-pounder caught on a Sweet Beaver in a Wednesday evening tournament in July, plans to study chemical engineering at Louisiana Tech and, hopefully, fish for the Bulldogs and with Louisiana B.A.S.S. Nation. After that?

"I might fish Opens or whatever," he said. "I've got to make sure I have a good backup plan."

LaCroix, who grew up hunting and fishing, moved from Lafayette to Ball three years ago with his parents, Eric and Melissa LaCroix. He has fished tournaments with his father for years. He has fished 18 evening, bass club (Holloway Hookers) or LHSBN tournaments as of early September.

He also wants to fish the next level.

"I'll try college, too, something like that," he said. "I'm going to try fishing and see how far it takes me." ■

LURE REVIEW ➤

Tioga High School's Jacob LaCroix, left, and Noah Roberts, right, hold the 2022 LHSBN State Championship plaques they won March 17 as they flank their boat captain, Mike Roberts.





SWAMPER AND THUMPER

THESE PLASTIC FROGS MAKE STUBBORN BASS SING A DIFFERENT TUNE

The boy who grew up fishing for bass and catfish with his dad, grandfather and/or great-grandfather stayed awake nights more often than not thinking of creating artificial lures.

Cody Cannon never lost his desire to design something that catches bass, even when his chosen career took him on the road as musical front man for Whiskey Myers. When coronavirus-related restrictions shut down the popular country music band's travels in Spring 2020, the Neches, Texas, native took advantage of the unexpected break and did something about his dreams.

Two years later, bass anglers who enjoy catching bass on quality plastic frogs rely on Cannon's Toad Thumper Lure Co.'s Thumper, a popping frog, and Swamper, a walking frog. Both hit the market in April thanks to Cannon, his friend and business partner, Cody Tedford of Bentonville, Arkansas, and another friend, company COO Jaron Tipton of Dierks, Arkansas.

"When you make anything, a song or a fishing lure, you might like it but other people might think it stinks," Cannon

said with a chuckle.

OVERWHELMING

To date, Thumpers and Swampers are smelling like roses based on the response since being introduced at the 2022 Bassmaster Classic Expo at Lake Hartwell during April in South Carolina.

"It's been overwhelming. It's been great," Cannon said.

And it's been a labor of love, a love for bass fishing and froggin', his favorite type of lure.

That Texas boy who fished so many years with his dad, Russell Cannon, his grandfather, the late Billy Cannon, and his great-grandfather, O.J. Mack, said those trips remain his most cherished memories. Today he lives near Palestine, Texas, a well-traveled musician, and he's oh-so proud of his company's initial success with an artificial lure he designed.

After 14 years touring with the band, 2020's abrupt stoppage gave him a chance to clear his mind. He embraced the calm period and the natural, creative juices flowed. He started drawing pictures of artificial lures, thinking, "Hey, I can do better."

His goal was to correct what he called three basic flaws in most plastic frogs: Hookup ratio, action and taking on water.

"If we had simply focused on putting a new lure on the market, we could have done it in a matter of weeks," Tedford said. "But Cody wasn't having it. We went through so many molds and made so many changes. He was adamant that we wouldn't call it done until it was perfect."

"He's the brains behind this," Tipton added.

HELPING PEOPLE CATCH FISH

"We're trying to help people land more fish. There's just a lot of little things that make a difference," Cannon, an all-around outdoorsman who hunts and fishes, said. It's a simple goal. Catching fish.

The guitarist who has played with his band across the country, plus London



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.



This largemouth thumped Cannon's plastic frog, proving it can fool big bass.

and Paris, noted he and his artificial lure manufacturing buddies asked veteran as well as inexperienced anglers what they wanted in plastic frogs.

The end result is a plastic frog with both the right amount of softness, sans hard ridges, precise hook placement on top the artificial lure, and ideal location for the silicone legs. The makeup provides "superior collapsibility and hookup ratio" and a custom made leak stop design that helps keep water out of the plastic frog. All three problems he attacked? Handled.

The Swamper and Thumper are available in seven colors for each.

For more information on the Toad Thumper Lure Co. plastic frogs, go to www.Toadthumper.com or call (870) 584-6325. ■

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**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>.



CITY AND COUNTRY

THESE TWO STATE PARK GEMS OFFER THEIR OWN SPECIAL REWARDS

**THIS MONTH'S
FEATURED STOPS:
BOGUE CHITTO AND
ST. BERNARD**

Not many people end up at Bogue Chitto State Park at Franklinton by mistake. It's way out there from the normal byways of the state. The St. Bernard State Park is a more readily accessible park because it is a short drive from the largest population area of the state — New Orleans. You get your choice — city or country.

One of the gems of the Louisiana State Park system, Bogue Chitto State Park is a haven for anglers, families, campers and disc golfers. Fourteen miles of designated horse trails crisscross the park, meaning that visitors on horseback are never far from good views of the park's namesake river. The topography of rolling hills and cypress forests make Bogue Chitto State Park a truly special place to spend time while visiting Washington Parish.

Load up the coolers, pack some sunscreen and get ready to chill out — literally. The cool waters of the Bogue Chitto offer Northshore visitors an awesome opportunity to beat the heat while floating through some of the wildest terrain in south Louisiana.

BOGUE CHITTO

Say “Bogue Chitto” to those in the know, and you're likely to hear recommendations of where to go tubing. The slow moving river is perfect for a day of floating with the family, coursing through unexpected canyons past pebble-strewn natural beaches. The Bogue Chitto is well known for tubing, and numerous outfitters offer drop-off and pick-up, along with tubes, kayaks, canoes and life jackets. Two local businesses to check out are Louisiana River Adventures in Franklinton and Bogue Chitto Tubing Center in Bogalusa.

Many children and adults from nearby Folsom and Franklinton grew up spending summers on the river. Visitors have as well. Today, you can get a taste of the country life, with plenty of outdoor adventures to find at Bogue Chitto State Park.

Highlights include horseback riding through the cypress and tupelo swamps (dedicated horse trails exist throughout the park) and four miles of mountain biking trails. Freshwater fishing is just one way to have fun on the water as well as a water playground.

When the weather is right, floating down the Bogue Chitto through the state park is a popular pastime.



Overnight visitors are in for a treat. Because of Bogue Chitto State Park's remote location on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, stargazing is spectacular. Fully appointed deluxe cabins (sleeping up to eight people) deluxe lodges (sleeping up to 14) and group camps (sleeping up to 52) make this park well-suited for family reunions and group getaways. Intrepid travelers will find dozens of campsites, and RV campers have their pick of parking spots. Water and electrical hook-ups are available.

In Franklinton, you can pick heaps of fresh blueberries at 3D Blueberry Farm. In Folsom, see thousands of exotic animals at Global Wildlife Center. And in Abita Springs, check out the Abita Mystery House, a quirky roadside attraction.

At Bogue Chitto State Park, a diversity of natural habitats makes up the 1,786-acre site including small streams, cypress-tupelo swamps, a hardwood forest, upland forests and a rolling landscape.

Fricke's Cave, which — despite its name — resembles more of a gorge, possesses delicate sandstone spires created when water erodes the surface underneath pebbles. The pebbles remain perched atop the spires, while over time water splashes on the sandstone surface, forming the two-foot-tall fingers of sandstone that shoot up from the now-lowered surface. Boardwalks have been built so that visitors can admire the sandstone creations from afar, as the formations are too delicate to allow visitors to walk among them.



BOGUE CHITTO STATE PARK

17049 State Park Blvd.
Franklinton, LA 70438
985-839-5707
boguechitto@crt.la.gov

ST. BERNARD STATE PARK

501 St. Bernard Parkway
Braithwaite, LA 70040
504-682-2101
stbernard@crt.la.gov

If the river doesn't offer enough fishing, there are also 11 lakes stocked with a variety of freshwater fish for anglers and an outdoor classroom for those that want a learning experience.



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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WHEN THEY'RE GONE,
THEY'RE GONE!





The facilities and serenity of St. Bernard State Park are a dramatic switch from the big city life not far away. **INSET:** Picnicking never gets old at the individual tables or group sites like this one at St. Bernard State Park.

ST. BERNARD

The drive here takes visitors just a few miles southeast of New Orleans, through oak-lined expanses of St. Bernard Highway that hug the Mississippi River. In the park, you'll find yourself in the swamps, forest and lagoons of St. Bernard State Park. But most of all, you will find yourself away from the hustle and bustle over everyday life in the Big Easy.

This is the perfect day trip or overnight excursion. There are great places to pick a picnic table and barbecue grill at spots overlooking the forest, and enjoy getting together with friends or family. If the weather doesn't cooperate, you can find a covered pavilion near the center of the park. While the water sports facilities are closed at the end of summer, remember they are there during the peak summer months in case you want to make a return trip.

Short hiking trails run between the roads leading into the park. One takes visitors across a lagoon onto an island overlooking wetlands typical of New Orleans' surrounding natural areas. For overnighters, RV campsites are conveniently located throughout St. Bernard State Park.

If you are a visitor to the area and want to experience something new, nearby attractions await visitors just beyond the park's boundaries. The charms of New Orleans' French Quarter, Garden District, music and architecture are a short drive. Closer to St. Bernard State Park, you'll find Chalmette Battlefield, part of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve where the deciding battle in the War of 1812 was fought. For some fun on the water, catch a charter boat out



from nearby Venice and into the Gulf.

St. Bernard State Park is the ideal spot for visitors who are seeking a family atmosphere and natural experience, as well as for campers who don't want to or cannot stray far from civilization. Many campers consider combining a camping vacation with a touring vacation of the New Orleans area. The Chalmette National Historic Park, Jackson Barracks, and other historic sites and plantation homes are also nearby.

A local family business donated the land for St. Bernard State Park to Louisiana in 1971. Today, St. Bernard State Park provides a much-needed recreation area, as well as relaxing and enjoyable surroundings for anyone wishing to experience a portion of Louisiana's natural beauty.

Located right along the Mississippi River, the park contains a network of man-made lagoons which provides a peaceful, natural setting for relaxation. Woodlands meet wetlands in St. Bernard and the park's nature trail is the perfect way to introduce children to the joy of discovery in nature. ■



LOUISIANA
State Parks



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– Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser

KINNY HADDOX

CONSERVATION EFFORTS, PROLIFIC WRITING SPOTLIGHT WRITER'S CAREER.

Most people who read about hunting and fishing in Louisiana are familiar with the writings of Kinny Haddox. He's been writing features, hard-hitting news and informative and entertaining columns about the outdoors for 50 years. He has completed an outdoor bucket list that most people only dream of.

He has written countless newspaper columns, magazine features and internet pieces, plus published a highly successful internet blog, lakedarbonnelife.com. Today, he serves as the Editor of the *Louisiana Sportsman Magazine*. He wrote the first national story on Duck Commander Phil Robertson in *Outdoor Life* and has fished with several dozen of the top pro bass fishermen, including riding along as a press angler in 14 Bassmaster Classics around the country.

But his writing isn't what made the biggest long-term impact. It's what he did behind the scenes in conservation that has altered the state of the outdoors in northeast Louisiana in a positive way.

I should know. He's my dad. And I'm proud to share his story.

Trophy fish are being caught on a near-weekly basis in Bussey Brake just outside of Bastrop. The lake even drew the attention of Major League Fishing for the finals of an \$800,000 tournament earlier this year. Had it not been for his love of the lake, willingness to work against the odds and coordination of efforts, it wouldn't be happening.

My dad grew up on Bussey and I was fortunate enough to fish there, too. Thousands of others have as well. But as International Paper's paper mills closed there, several private groups made offers to purchase the lake. As he neared retirement with the company, he worked with others in International Paper and state and local officials to make sure the lake was protected and remained open for the public. Working with former Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Secretary Robert Barham and corporate officials, the lake was donated to the state for present and future generations to enjoy. Popular duck hunting area Wham Brake was also included in the deal.

He worked with employees of the District 2 office of the LDWF to start the first local celebration activities of National Hunting and Fishing Day in Monroe with duck calling demonstrations, shooting skills classes, outdoor cooking, etc. more than 40 years ago. The local approach to NHF Day is still carried out with crowds of people, especially kids, in attendance each year. It has also spread to other locations in the state.

Most people today don't even know about this one: As a reporter for the Monroe newspaper, he helped stop the



destruction of the Ouachita River. The U.S. Corps of Engineers developed a plan to straighten more than 100 curves and bendways in the Ouachita River and shut off access to many river lakes and bayous. The Corps basically kept the plan a secret. Working on information from concerned sportsmen within the Corps, he led a group of reporters who uncovered the plan, publicized it and helped turn public and political sentiments against the plan, stopping it and helping to save the pristine condition of the winding river.

When a group of conservationists in Monroe began trying to secure the Black Bayou Recreation Area, he helped arrange a land swap allowing the USFWS to control all the lands in the future refuge. He also submitted and received grants to support building the first phase of the observation walkway and the Black Bayou Education Center.

For these reasons and more, he was selected as the first outdoor communicator inducted into the Louisiana Legends of the Outdoors Hall of Fame.

"I have been blessed to hunt and fish all my life and enjoy the

“*If you can't leave it like you found it, or a little bit better, then you really aren't doing your job as a hunter or fisherman no matter what you catch or shoot. It's that simple.*”

bountiful outdoors that God has provided,” he said. “I’ve been blessed to travel to other areas and enjoy the outdoors there, too. I have always enjoyed writing about others who were great at what they do and deserve recognition for their accomplishments in the outdoors. I was blessed to be in the right place at the right time with Bussey, the Ouachita River and other conservation projects.”

“I thank God for the blessings he has given me in the outdoors, with my family and with others,” he said. “One thing I always say when I am speaking with people is that God calls us to be Fishers of Men. He doesn’t count the number of fish we put in our livewell, but he counts the souls we help him put in His.”

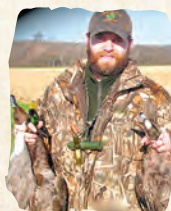
If there is one thing he would like to see passed on to future generations, he quickly responds, “We have to instill respect and accountability in every single person who enjoys the outdoors, starting with our young people. If you can’t leave it like you found it, or a little bit better, then you really aren’t doing your job as a hunter or fisherman no matter what you catch or shoot. It’s that simple.”

In addition to editor’s duties at *Louisiana Sportsman Magazine*, he is also a monthly columnist and regular feature contributor. His popular lakedarbonnelife.com outdoor website and Facebook page has gone well past a million total views.

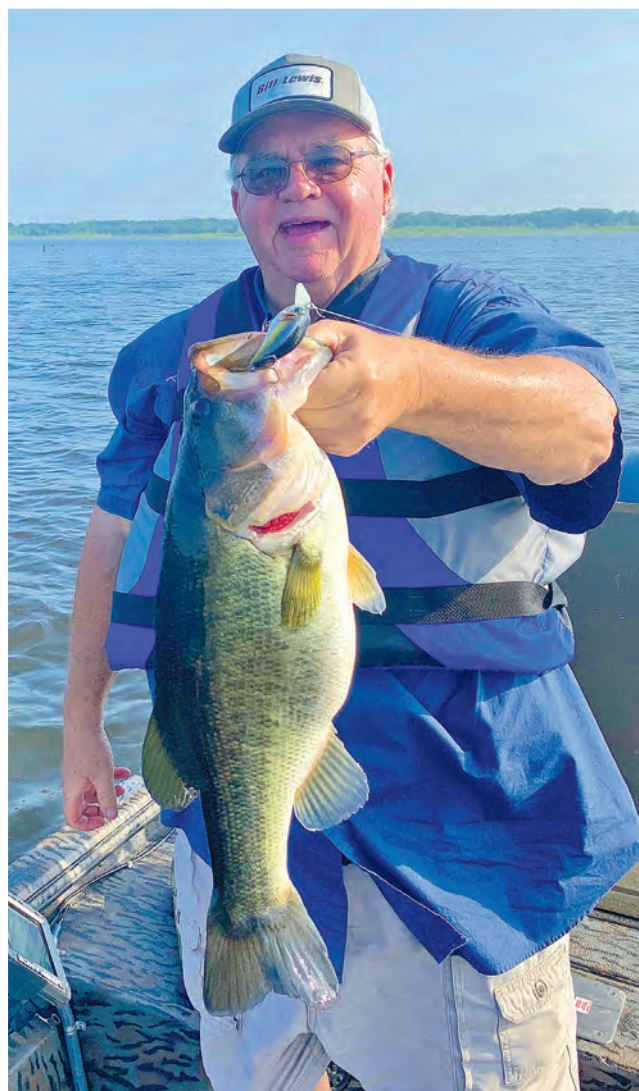
He helped bring the first Crappie University classes to Louisiana and served as emcee of those events. He manages Simmons Sporting Goods’ daily online Duck Report, started the first-ever high school bass tournament on Lake D’Arbonne in 1978 (that ran for 20 years) and is past outdoor editor of the *Monroe News Star*. He has contributed articles and photos to most of the major magazines in the South, including *Game & Fish* publications (Louisiana and Mississippi), *BASSMaster*, *Outdoor Life*, *Louisiana Conservationist* and more. And he is a gourmet cook who specializes in fish and game recipes. He even makes his own seasoning blend!

He is a member of the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association, including past service as President, a former competitor in local and regional bass tournament circuits and a frequent speaker at area civic club and wild game/fish dinners. ■

**LAKE D’ARBONNE
CRAPPIE** ➤



Adam Haddox graduated from LSU and works between a wide range of industries and elected officials to continue improving our state. He lives in Baton Rouge with his wife, three sons and their dog.



FISHING ON THE EDGE

That's where you'll find the hungry crappie on Lake D'Arbonne

O By Kinny Haddox
 ne thing John Harrison of Weston likes about Lake D'Arbonne is that you can catch crappie pretty much any time of the year on the 16,000 acre Union Parish Lake.

But this month and the next couple, it is one of his favorite times of the year because the fish even the odds by gathering up and making them easier to find. Just make sure you have a good topo map.

"D'Arbonne is on fire this time of the year," said the pro fisherman who travels all over the south fishing competitively and guiding. "The lake has plenty of shad and the shad start gathering up on the edges of the main channels this time of year. And it doesn't take long for the crappie to gather up there and feed right through the winter."

Sometimes factors like sudden weather changes or big rains in the lake's watershed can change the bite and slow things down, but for the most part, there's no better time to fish than now.

"The edges of the main creek channel, especially where it makes big bends or places where the big creeks come into the channel, like Stowe Creek or Forks Ferry, are the best spots," Harrison said. "When the bite is on, you can usually figure out some of the good spots because there will be anywhere from two to 20 boats already in the area."

Harrison mainly livescopes for fish these days, but he often still uses a spider rig. In fact, it's his favorite way to fish and this is a good month to try that. But you won't normally find him in with those other boats. There are fish all over the lake and he takes a different approach.

"I try to stay away from the crowds and find something different," he said. "D'Arbonne is mostly white crappie and whites are more of a roaming fish, a nomadic fish. They will roam around near the schools of shad and up and down the edges of the structure changes. You might even find them suspended 10 feet deep in 20 feet of water. Sometimes the really big ones just hang out by themselves there. D'Arbonne has some good black crappie, too, but they relate more to structure."

D'Arbonne is a lake with shallow water, deep water and flats within literal casting distance of each other and that's perfect for keeping crappie in a certain area. They don't just wander all the way up and down the lake, but in a specific area of the lake that becomes their home. The only time that usually changes is if there's no bait there or a high amount of current.

Harrison has every bait on the market available to him, but he sticks with some of his favorites. Those include EyeHole and Crappie Magnet jigs about 95 percent of the time. He makes no bones about it — he's sponsored by those companies, but it's because he uses and believes in them. He'd fish them even if they weren't sponsors.

John Harrison catches D'Arbonne slabs moving up to the edge of the channel this time of the year.



"You can fish live bait and catch fish now, but I stay true to my sponsors and my favorite lures," he said. "I'm not that big on color, but I concentrate on matching the profile of the bait to what the fish are eating. One of the best developments in a long time has been the EyeHole jig where you can put a Crappie Magnet Slab bite right in the lure's head. That way they don't short strike it. They take the whole bait when they bite."

Harrison does remind anglers that fish don't bite 24/7 every day. You have to be patient. Nothing is more frustrating than seeing a school of fish on your electronics and not getting a bite.

"When I give them a good shot and they won't bite, I move," he said. "I may come back to that spot, but I don't sit and wait on them. I'll go find another school that is aggressive."

Harrison is sponsored by B'n'M poles, Crappie Magnet, EyeHole jigs, Corn Field gear, K-9 fishing line, Hook & Bullet, Black Speck fishing and Ludwig Marine. ■

NORTHSHORE SAC-A-LAIT ➤



JOHN DEERE



LET US HELP YOU
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YOUR FIELD GOALS



Matt Schwierjohn shows off a couple of whopper Northshore river crappie.



LOOK DEEPER

Northshore sac-a-lait transition to deeper waters in area rivers

N By Keith Lusher Jr.
 November marks the start of what sac-a-lait anglers across the state refer to as the “deep jigging season.” The colder temperatures are sending sac-a-lait into the main rivers and with the transition comes an exciting time for those using electronics. Matt Schwierjohn of Raceland fishes the rivers on the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain and said November is one of his favorite months to catch sac-a-lait.

“I find the sac-a-lait school up tighter and are easier to locate in the deeper section of the rivers,” he said. In addition to the fish

being grouped tighter, Schwierjohn said he finds that they are less hesitant to bite.

“They seem to feed more aggressively as the water temperatures cool down,” he said.

Schwierjohn uses Garmin electronics with the ECHOMAP 93SV for GPS, side scan and down scan. On his bow, he operates a Garmin GPSMAP 1022. The 28-year-old said that his setup has become invaluable when targeting sac-a-lait in deeper water.

“It has been an absolute game changer for me when fishing deep water,” he said.

FIRED UP

On his latest trip, Schwierjohn was fishing the Tickfaw River. He was on the main river using his side scan in 20 feet of water when he spotted something on his screen.

"It was a brush pile with what looked like large fish suspended over it," he said. "Every time I come across sac-a-lait suspended over structure, it gets me fired up because those fish are usually feeding pretty heavy."

The excited angler lowered his jig down and when it was five feet above the school, four sac-a-lait shot up and tried to bite the jig.

"Then I knew it was on," he said.

Schwierjohn pulled nine sac-a-lait out of the school with all of them being over 10 inches.

In November, Schwierjohn stays in the main rivers and targets brush piles and tree tops that are in 15-20 feet of water.

He uses an 8-foot ACC Crappie Stix rod paired with a Lew's American Hero reel. For line, he uses Seaguar Fluorocarbon and ties on his favorite bait — a Bobby Garland Baby Shad in the Bone White color. With fishing deeper, comes the need for a heavier jig head than what he normally uses during the summer months. Schwierjohn uses a 1/16-ounce jig head but also adds more weight with a 1/8-ounce split-shot clamped on the line about one foot above the jig.

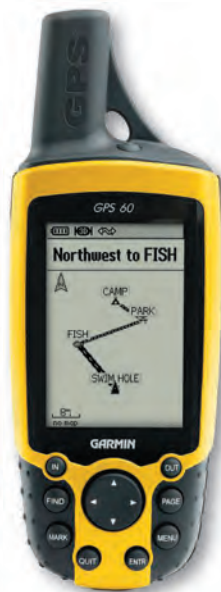
The split-shot serves as a marker when dropping his line down into a school of crappie.

"It's easier to locate my jig on the screen when I use the split-shot because it's easier to spot two falling objects on the screen rather than just the jig," he said.

As November passes by and the colder weather starts to set in, the main rivers that pepper the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain will hold large schools of quality sac-a-lait. The colder water temperatures will group baitfish tighter which also helps in keeping the sac-a-lait segregated to isolated areas in the rivers.

Schwierjohn recommends targeting the deeper rivers like the East Pearl, Tchefuncte, and Tickfaw Rivers on the Northshore. ■

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

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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes



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

KAYAK NOODLES

THE "OTHER" NOODLING LETS ANGLERS STAY IN THE BOAT AND ON THE CATFISH!

Starting Aug. 1, 2022, noodling became legal in Louisiana. This is the practice of getting in the water and grabbing catfish out of holes, logs, barrels, etc., with nothing but your hands. The sport is not for the faint-of-heart, or of sound mind.

Luckily, there is another form of noodling to catch bunches of catfish without risking life or limb. Using your kayak to set out a dozen or more baited pool noodles (or jugs), is a fun and exciting way to catch catfish. It is akin to a rodeo where you end up chasing down the floats as the catfish drag them around after being hooked.

THE NOODLES

They can be as simple as a piece of pool noodle, an empty plastic jug, or a crafted pool noodle/PVC pipe combination. For the simple noodles, a length of tarred/dipped nylon twine is tied around the center of a 10-inch piece of large diameter noodle and a 4/0-8/0 circle hook is tied to the other end. Although not necessary, a 3/16 to 1/4-ounce bank or split-shot sinker can be added about a foot above the hook. Line length varies depending on the depth you're fishing. I prefer four to six feet on average. The large float provides resistance to set the circle hook as the fish tries to swim away with the bait. Pool noodles are inexpensive, come in high visibility colors and the foam makes a convenient place to insert the hooks for storage and transport. If using plastic jugs, spray paint any clear jugs to make them easier to see.

For a more sophisticated set up, a 20-inch length of 3/4-inch PVC slid inside a

12-inch piece of small pool noodle works great. The noodle fits pretty snug around the pipe which is placed at the end of the pipe away from where your line is tied. Again, not necessary, but placing a 6-inch length of rebar inside the PVC before gluing on the end caps acts an indicator that you have a fish or that one may have taken your bait. Tip the noodle up and let the rebar slide to the end away from your line and lay the noodle flat on the water. When the fish hits, the rebar slides down the pipe and causes the noodle to stand in the water. The line can be tied directly to the PVC or you can add a small eye bolt and nut to the cap and seal the inside before gluing it on.

TAGGING

Newly enacted regulations require the tagging of noodles and jugs as well as any other passive fishing gear. Each device must contain your name, phone number and fishing license number. This can be an attached waterproof tag or simply writing the information in permanent marker directly on the device.

THE BAIT

Many types of commercial catfish baits are available. However, natural baits seem to work best. Shrimp and cut baitfish really can't be beat, but large earthworms also work well in many areas. Don't fill the circle hook with bait. Go sideways through a shrimp or edge of the baitfish chunk so that the barb is exposed and has room to rotate into the fish's mouth as it pulls on the jug.

THE LOCATION ➤





This big cat pulled the noodle all over the canal with it going underwater several times. Chasing down the noodles in a kayak is exciting and a whole lot of fun.

THE LOCATION

That's the good part. I don't believe that there is a parish in Louisiana that doesn't have somewhere to catfish. Of course, all of the freshwater lakes, ponds and bayous have catfish. However, many areas near the coast have also seen an explosion in the number of freshwater cats as these areas have become fresher due to diversions and other coastal restoration and protection projects. The lower salinities in these areas have brought an influx of various freshwater species. Many anglers fishing trout and reds are stumbling into some nice freshwater cats.

Free-floating the noodles is best in an area where they are somewhat confined. They can move around quite a bit simply due to the wind and current, and when hooked onto a fish, they can get out-of-sight quickly. Select a canal, bayou, cove or shoreline where you can keep them somewhat corralled.

NOW THE FUN

I recently tagged along as "Catfish Queen" Robyn Bordelon and Vicki Holmes set out for a morning of the "other" noodling. Armed with a combination of PVC and plain noodles, they set the lines using shrimp, worms and cut mullet. Before the third or fourth noodle was out, one was already being pulled under. After a short chase in the kayak, Vicki hauled in a nice 6-pound blue cat.


LOUISIANA FRESHWATER CATFISH REGULATIONS:

Minimum Length*:
Channel Catfish: 11"
Blue Catfish: 12"
Flathead Catfish: 14"

100 daily in the aggregate. A fisherman may possess up to 25 undersized catfish of the three species combined.*

* Check special creel and length regulations for Caddo Lake, Sabine River and Toledo Bend Reservoir





These PVC/pool noodle catfish jugs work great. A short length of rebar inside slides down when a fish is hooked or takes the bait. This causes the noodle to stand upright in the water signaling that it is time to go check it. They are inexpensive and a great DIY project.



The morning continued with chase after chase. While trying to work the noodles in a line as they were put out, it's always best to chase down any jugs that you spot with fish on them. This keeps them from getting out-of-sight and also that initial grabbing of the jug helps set the hook if they were simply swimming away with the bait.

The cats were mixed from undersized, great eating size, to 10-pound brutes that really put up a fight on the end of a four foot string — with no drag. Then of course there was the usual variety of unknowns. One rogue noodle was spotted about a quarter mile down the canal and moving at a good clip. A quick pedal in the kayaks caught up with it, but as Bordelon got close, the noodle took off and disappeared under the water a-la Jaws. This went on for a couple minutes with the noodle disappearing and popping up several yards away each time.

Vicki Holmes and Robyn Bordelon celebrate a successful morning of noodle fishing for freshwater catfish in a southeast Louisiana canal. Shrimp, cut mullet and earthworms did the trick on this nice bunch of cats.

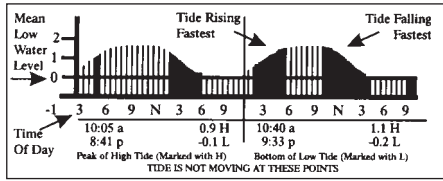
Finally, Bordelon got hold of the noodle and was treated to a water shower while straining to get control of the unknown beast. Giant cat? Nope. A bruiser-size black drum. She wrestled it into the kayak as it wouldn't fit in her net. A quick photo-op and it was released to fight another day. Other catches included small garfish, gafftopsail catfish and an eel.

Catfish can be caught year-round and provide great eating. Kayak noodling is an inexpensive, fun activity that can be done all across the state. No real fishing skills are needed and chasing them down as they swim away from you is a blast. A dozen basic catfish pool noodles can be made for about \$25.

If someone asks you to go noodling catfish, make sure which method they mean. If they are going to be blindly grabbing fish from a hole, assess how much you really like your fingers. However, if it is in a kayak with baited, floating noodles, then don't turn down the offer. ■



How to use the **SPORTSMAN** Tide Guide



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

Tide Corrections

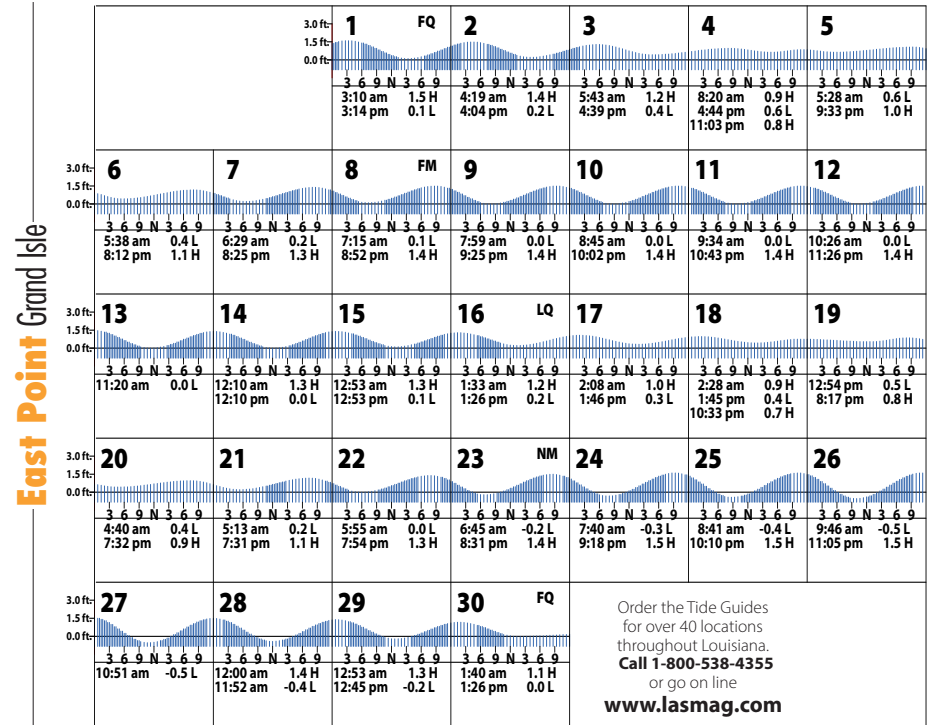
East Point, Grand Isle HIGH LOW

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|
| Barataria Pass | +1:00 | -0:10 |
| Bastian Island | +0:41 | +0:12 |
| Bay Gardene | +2:51 | +2:44 |
| Bayou BonFouca | +9:59 | +10:11 |
| Breton Islands | +0:54 | +0:48 |
| Caillou Boca | +0:40 | +0:48 |
| Caminada Pass | +0:20 | +0:12 |
| Chandeleur Light | +0:37 | +0:34 |
| Chef Pass | +5:17 | +5:07 |
| Cocodrie | +1:22 | +1:33 |
| Comfort Island | +1:34 | +0:54 |
| Delacroix Island | +3:42 | +3:31 |
| Empire Jetty | -1:03 | -1:45 |
| Four Bayou Pass | +2:18 | +0:17 |
| Gardner Island | +0:40 | +0:47 |
| Grand Pass | +1:48 | +1:16 |
| Head of Passes | -0:48 | +0:00 |
| Hopedale | +4:17 | +4:56 |
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| 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

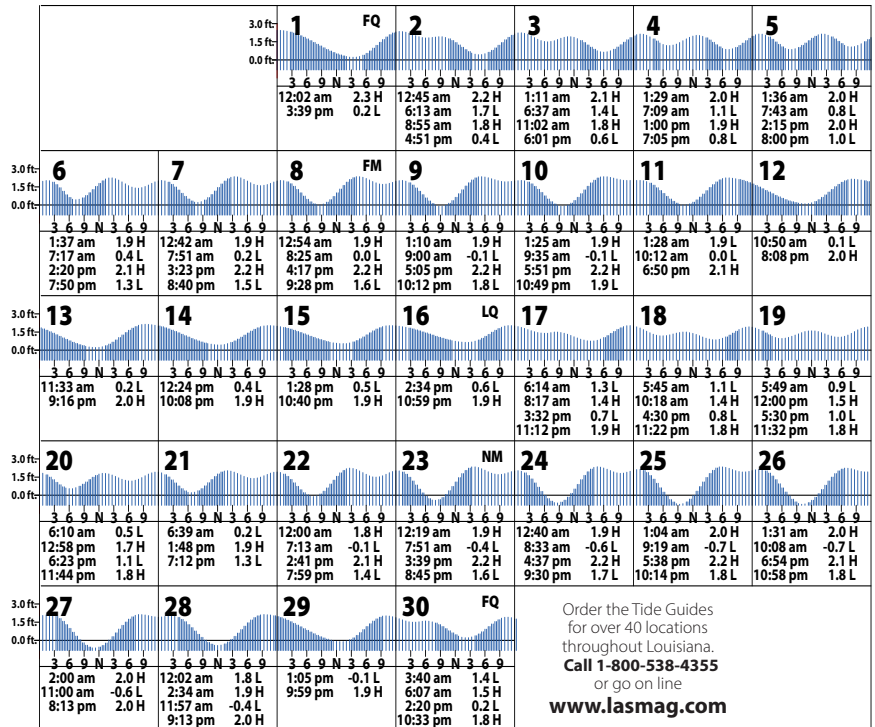
| | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Cote Blanche Island | +4:33 | +3:40 |
| Eugene Island | +1:49 | -0:39 |
| Lighthouse Point | +0:58 | -0:53 |
| Mermentau River ent. | +0:20 | +0:25 |
| Point Au Fer | +1:53 | -1:02 |
| Point Chevreul | +3:16 | +0:30 |
| Rabbit Island | +2:01 | -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 |

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Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf



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A combination of ram feeding and suction feeding allows bass to capture large and fast-swimming prey.



Photo courtesy Tim Bonvechio

A MOST CAPABLE PREDATOR

UNDERSTAND HOW BASS CAPTURE FOOD TO IMPROVE YOUR FISHING

L By Hal Schramm
 argemouth bass are sight feeders. True. You have probably heard that they also can locate prey in the dark by using their lateral line system. Also true. But locating prey is only the start of the feeding process. Next, the bass has to capture the prey.

HOW BASS CAPTURE PREY

Largemouth bass capture, meaning ingest or get into their mouth, prey two ways: ram feeding and suction feeding. Ram feeding is overtaking prey with

mouth open. Suction feeding is quickly opening the jaws and enlarging the mouth cavity by lowering the tissues on the bottom of the mouth to create negative pressure that sucks water and the prey into the mouth cavity. Indeed, a single feeding event is rarely all ram or all suction. Even with ram feeding, some amount of suction occurs in the last few milliseconds before the bass overtakes its prey.

Ram feeding will be predominate when bass are feeding on forage like shad in open water, or maybe when they crush a crankbait, swimbait, or jerkbait.

Capture of crayfish or a bottom-hugging fish will be mostly suction feeding. The light tap or the twitch in the line when they suck up a soft plastic from the bottom is probably suction feeding.

A bass blows up on a topwater. That's mostly ram feeding. But sometimes they just sip it from the surface: suction feeding. But how a bass detects prey also determines how they capture it.

HOW BASS DETECT PREY

While the sense of smell may play a minor role, vision and the lateral line

system are the bass' dominant senses for detecting prey. Both senses are used simultaneously to maximize feeding success by a healthy bass in moderately clear water and in the daylight, but bass can feed successfully relying only on vision or only the lateral line.

Proving this is simple. Bass in a tank in a completely dark room can feed using only the lateral line system. Chemically block the receptors of the lateral line system (non-toxic cobalt chloride blocks neural transmission from the lateral line sensory cells without blocking any other neural transmission) and a bass in a lighted tank will feed. Bass in a dark tank with chemically blocked lateral line system will not feed.

A little bit on fish anatomy may help you understand how the lateral line system is involved in feeding. Most anglers have observed the lateral line as a slightly arched line on each side of the bass from behind the gill covers to near the tail. What you are seeing is a line of scales with pores (small holes) that allows water to flow into the lateral line canal; the sensory cells that detect the water movement are in the canal.

Not visible without magnification and careful searching is an elaborate system of lateral line canals on the head and jaws of the bass. A bass may get some information about nearby prey, and especially potential predators, from the sensory cells on its side; but it is the lateral line system on the head of the fish that provides fine-tuned information about the position of the prey. The system is sensitive enough for a bass to track a prey fish by the turbulence trail it produces as it swims.

MAXIMIZING PREY CAPTURE

University of South Florida researchers Drs. Jayne Gardiner and Philip Motta discovered that the mechanics of how bass actually capture prey can differ depending on which sensory modality — vision or water movement (lateral line) — is in operation. The study measured the capture of mosquitofish by four-to-five inch largemouth bass.

Strike distance was shorter and strike velocity was slower when bass could not see. Using infrared light, which bass cannot see, and high-speed videography, the researchers measured numerous variables associated with approach to the prey and when the mouth opened to create suction.

The simple summary is that bass without vision relied more on suction feeding, whereas bass without lateral line sensory information relied more on ram feeding. Ram feeding was even more prevalent for bass that received both vision and lateral line information.

Bass are extremely well adapted for feeding in a range of light conditions, including total darkness. What I, as a biologist, find fascinating is that bass use a range of options to best achieve successful prey capture depending on the sensory input.

What I, as an angler, find fascinating — but also a bit intimidating — is that the final act of capturing the prey occurs in only 30 to 40 milliseconds, roughly one thirtieth of a second. If you think you have a fast hook set, think again. ■

HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK >

Efficient feeding is essential to fast growth of largemouth bass.



Photo courtesy Gene Gilliland



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**James Gornor
& Jeff Burlett**

James Gornor and Jeff Burlett with a 12-foot 4-inch gator killed Oct. 9, 2022 on the West Pearl River. It weighed 560 pounds.



Chad Lee

Chad Lee with a buck taken Sept. 13, 2022 in Fairchild, Wis. It scored 197 1/8.



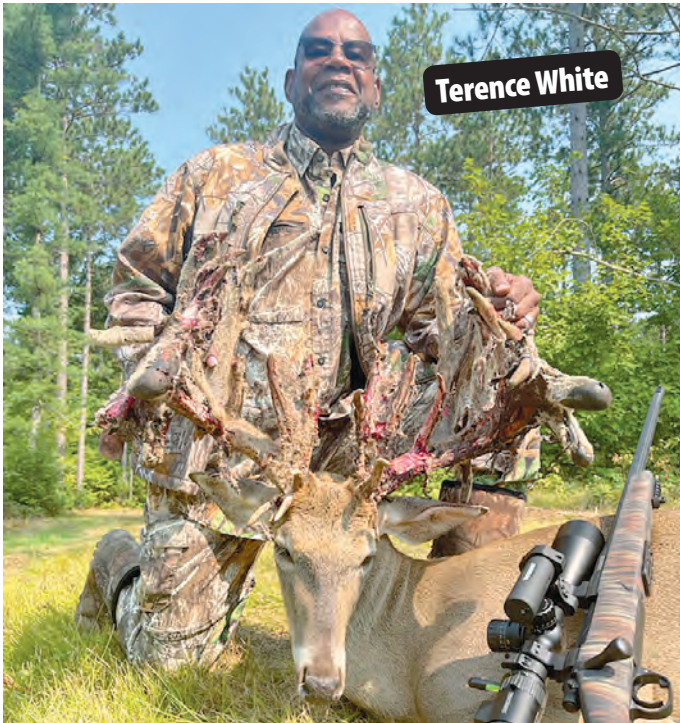
Laura Kate Felder

Laura Kate Felder used a Ruger 7mm-08 to take this 265-pound boar hog harvested in East Feliciana Parish on Jan. 4, 2021.



Nancy Roy

Nancy Roy caught her first redfish near the Cameron jetties. It was 39 inches long.



Terence White with the 280 ½-inch buck he killed in Fairchild, Wis., on Sept. 14, 2022.



This big bull red with 181 spots on one side and 151 on the other was caught by Capt. Tim Ortego with Louisiana Livin Adventures LLC.



Elliott Granger of Rayne went teal hunting for his birthday with his dad, Justin Granger, and their dog, Ace, in Acadia Parish on Sept. 17, 2022.



Luke Cruze caught this redfish at Grand Isle State Park on July 24, 2021.



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



Kyler Ray

Kyler Ray, 14, of Minden caught this 2-pound 7-ounce crappie on Lake Claiborne.



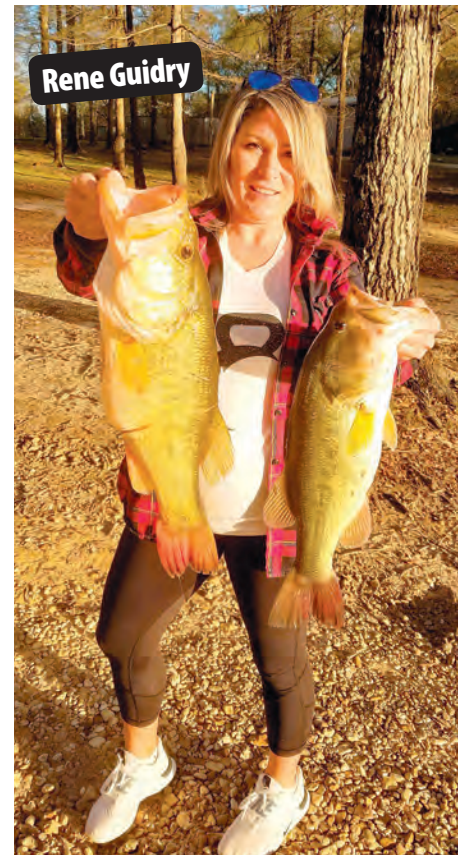
Mason Schittone

Eleven-year-old Mason Schittone from Central killed his first buck in West Feliciana Parish.



Lauren & Lucas Mcgee

Lauren and Lucas Mcgee after a successful North Mississippi hunt in November.



Rene Guidry

Rene Guidry with the 9-pound 6-ounce bass and 5-pound bass she caught in March 2022.



Felix Boone with the 200-pound, 11-point buck he killed in Toledo Bend. His brother shot at the buck from his stand 400 yards away and missed. Luckily, 10 seconds later the buck came running to Felix, who made a shot through a pile of downed branches and got him.



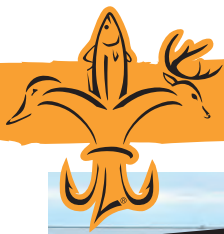
Jack Johnson after a December hunt in Beaver, La.



Dre Richard took this 164-pound, 9-point nicknamed "No Brows" with his Savage .243 on Nov. 27, 2021 in Terrebonne Parish.



Christian Macias shot his first deer in Mount Hermon unassisted with a .308 the day after Thanksgiving.

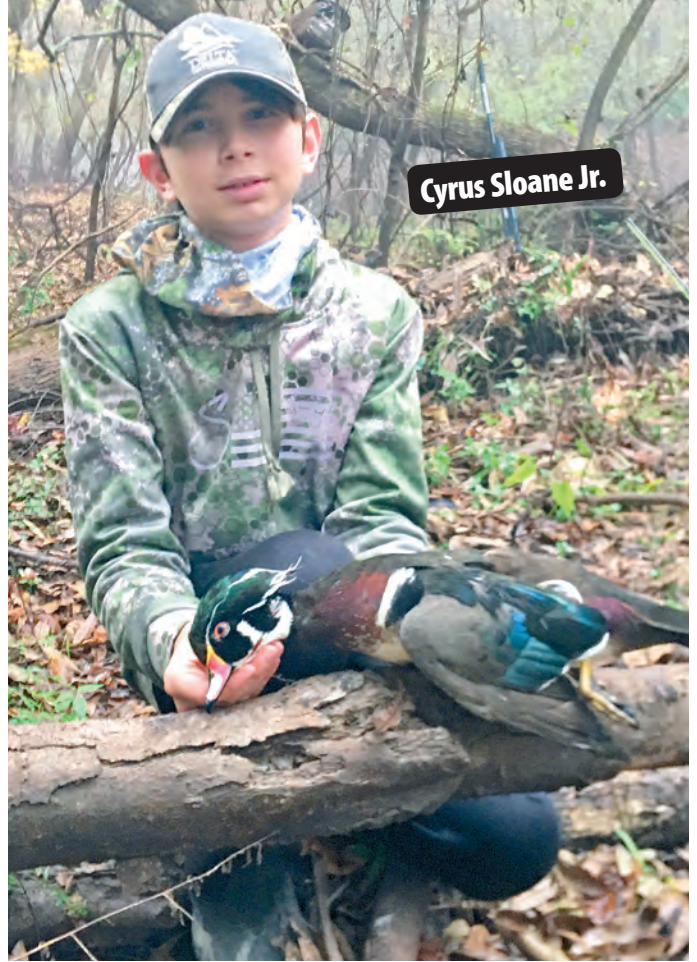


HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



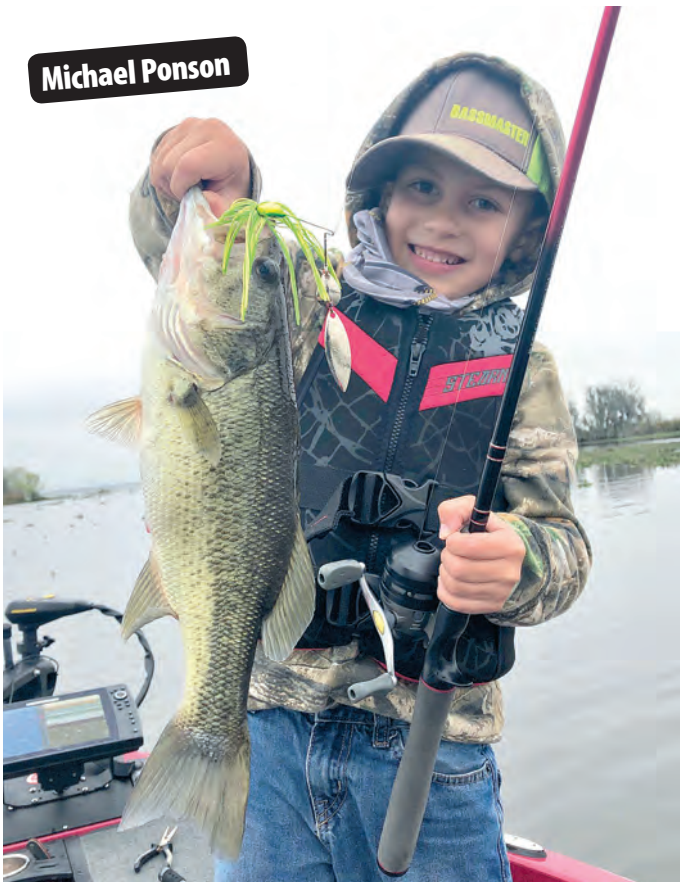
**Drake Burchfield
& Dennis Roussel**

Drake Burchfield and Dennis Roussel pose with a big Sulphur Mine redfish.



Cyrus Sloane Jr.

Cyrus Sloane Jr. shot his first woodie north of Opelousas on private land in December.



Michael Ponson

Michael Ponson caught this bass while fishing Lake Cataouatche with his dad and grandpa.



Ericka Whitmore

Ericka Whitmore of Shreveport holds up her two personal best fish, a 26-inch redfish and a 22-inch flounder, caught in Hackberry, La.

SPECKLED TROUT “TING” IS REALLY A “WHOLE BUNCHA TINGS” FACING LOUISIANA

This speckled trout thing had to come sometime.

You know the thing — the proposed decrease in daily limits and the increase in minimum size limits for Louisiana.

Like my dearly departed swampateer buddy Alcide once said, “An lemme tole you one ting ma fren, dis ting ain jus one ting, it’s a whole buncha tings.”

The funny ting — ok, we’ll get off that — the peculiar thing is that all this hurrah about lowering the daily limit to 15 — it’s now 25 — and pushing the minimum “keeper” size to 13.5 inches — it’s 12 now — comes during maybe the best speckled trout catching seasons in at least five years. Go figure.

Dats not, oops, that’s not to say our trout population isn’t in trouble.

It is, and because lots more fishermen are having trouble catching speckled trout, it’s spurred our Wildlife and Fisheries biologists into a more aggres-

sive population study.

So, three years and some months ago, the survey said “overfished and undergoing overfishing.”

And, like my Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership son, Chris, said, those are “...(fishery) management terms. A more accurate description is “depleted.” And there are lots more factors involved in this problem than fishermen taking fish from the water.”

LOOKING BACK 30 YEARS

It’s at this point in this discussion I need to take you back more than 30 years ago when our state’s redfish stock was in peril. The culinary craze for blackened redfish put lots of pressure on a fish some among us considered to be inferior table fare. Trout Almondine was the premier offering at high-end restaurants.

So, the first limit, albeit a very liberal one — a daily limit was 50 trout and

redfish in the aggregate — redfish became a “*cause celebre*,” and it didn’t take long after that for the daily limit to be reduced to today’s five with minimum size limit and an additional limit of only one measuring more than 27 inches.

During all those redfish discussions in our State Legislature, marine biologist Dr. Richard Condry offered a cautionary note to his testimony about restoring our redfish population.

Condry said it might not matter what we do with limits, and recruitment of young fish into the population, and escapement of larger fish into the breeding stock, but we should be concerned about the deterioration of our marshes.



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

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In essence, Condry said our disappearing marshes will not be able to support the marine life we knew then, because our marshes were losing “its edge effect,” and it’s in those “edges” where our abundant marine life grows from larvae to juveniles to adults both for predators and their forage.

What Condry said was the interplay between freshwater and saltwater — the brackish marshes — is what more than validates Louisiana’s claim of The Sportsman’s Paradise.”

And when those redfish numbers rebounded, fishing folks far and wide put Louisiana on their bucket list when it came to catching redfish. We had them and lots of other places didn’t. Plain and simple.

Same’s true for speckled trout. When the other four Gulf States were dropping their trout limits to a point where it’s almost not worth the expense to target specks, Louisiana fishermen continued to enjoy the bounty of our coastal marshes — year round.

Until now.

TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT

Now our marine biologists tell us we don’t have enough large egg-producing female speckled trout to keep our trout population from being self-sustaining, that most 13.5-inch female speckled trout go through two spawning cycles (unlike sun-fishes, trout spawn more than once in the spring and summer), while a 12-inch female trout “might” have gone through one spawning cycle.

That written, there are a number of folks who told our Wildlife and Fisheries Commission that moving to that minimum size will 1) put more pressure to remove larger trout from the water, and 2) increase the mortality on the number of smaller fish caught and having to be returned to the water, especially if those fish were taken on live bait and released during summer’s heat.

Both opinions have science to back up those objections.

One thing’s for sure, overall, our trout numbers are in decline, and, from here, the daily creel limit probably didn’t go far enough to hit any target number in the near future.

And, is the 13.5-inch number something that was settled for after the outcry of the prospect of going to a 14-inch minimum? Sure looks that way.

What I know is when Wildlife and Fisheries put a 14-inch minimum size on black bass in the Atchafalaya Basin (after the devastating loss of fish from Hurricane Andrew) the long-term plan didn’t produce the desired effect and that rule went away.

Public comment on this proposal will be taken through Dec. 30. State marine biologist Jason Adriance is the contact. Send written comments to: Jason Adriance, Fisheries Division, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, P.O. Box 98000, Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000. His email address: jadriance@wlf.la.gov. Additional information on speckled trout can be found on the LDWF’s website: wlf.louisiana.gov/page/spotted-seatROUT. ■

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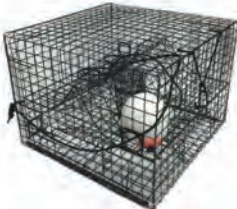
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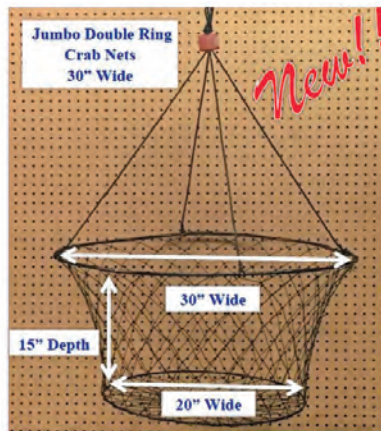
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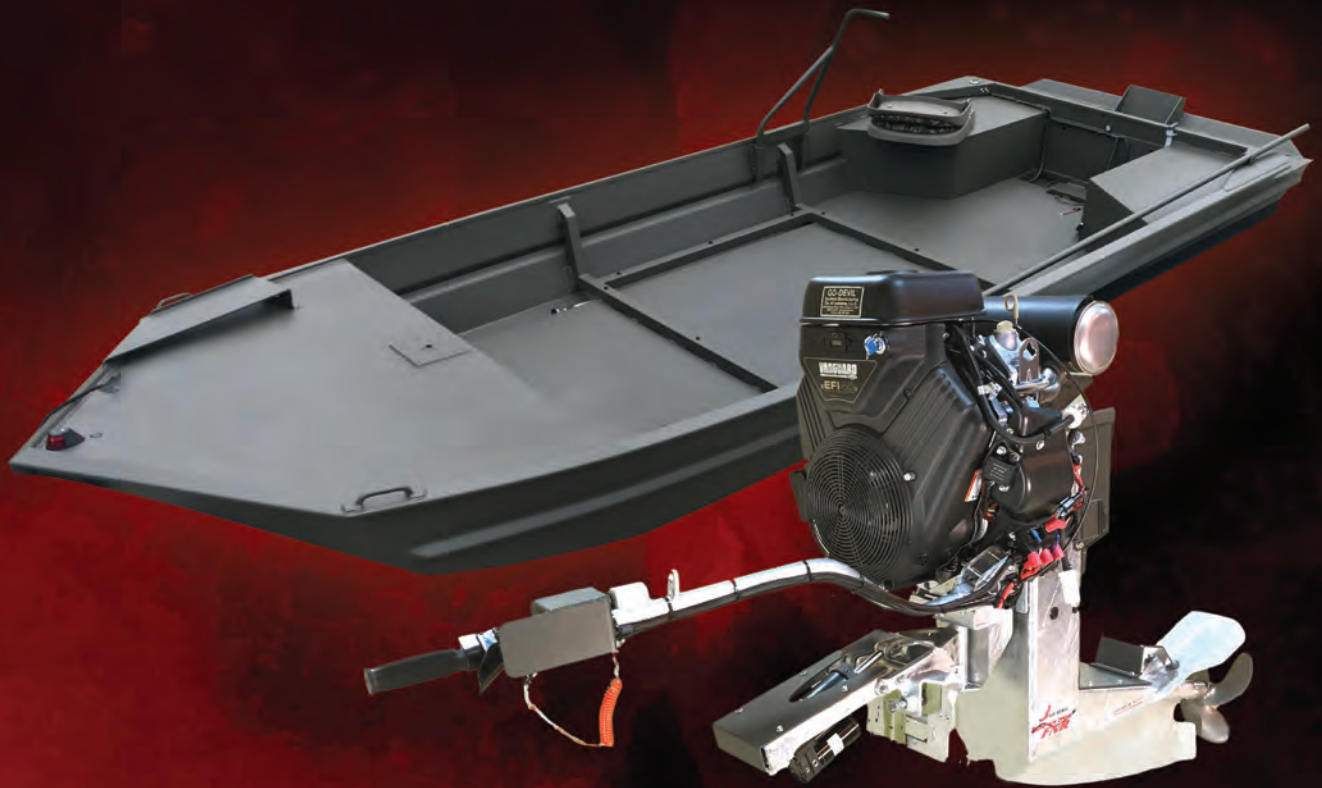
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