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SPECKS
SAVE THE DAY



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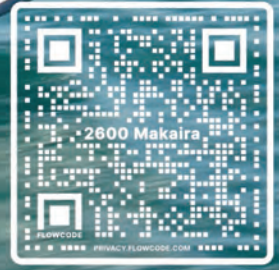
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This is the time of year that hunters get a shot at a deer of a lifetime like this one, specklebelly geese are flying and the speckled trout are still biting.

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DO NOT TAKE A SHOT IN THE DARK FOR THE PERFECT SPORTSMAN'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

And a very Merry C..., er, buying month, to you and yours. There's a wish to extend to all readers, and lovers of our Sportsman's Paradise, a bit of joy to be found in the upcoming "season" — I prefer Merry Christmas — but the "woke" folks believe it should be "Happy Holidays."

For lots of folks you and I know, it's weeks of agonizing over the just-right gift for your favorite outdoors person.

This examination of choosing a can't-miss gift comes amid frets over dwindling personal resources, supply chain problems, and inflation we haven't seen in a generation. Okay, enough already! No need to infect what should be the happiest time of any year with a dour outlook.

ONE CONSTANT

After writing about outdoor gifts for more than 30 years, there's one constant, that being you need to do your homework to pick just one top-drawer item for

your hunter or fisher.

For instance, buying a casting reel, a fishing rod, fishing line, tackle boxes and/or a handful of high-dollar lures comes with a risk of getting the wrong gift. Fishermen are fickle folks, very particular about these things. So, you have to keep your eyes and ears open to your angler's oohs and aahs when he or she is strolling through a tackle shop.

Or, seek out their favorite fishing companion and find out what he or she has mentioned that could send their angling heart into piscatorial heaven.

Same's true for hunters, a group much more diverse than fishing folks because there is so much more on their plate than freshwater or saltwater fishing options.

Deer, squirrel and rabbit, upland game like doves and quail, and the folks who occupy blinds for ducks and geese present a whole new set of problems and challenges.

AMMO UP

This year it's enough to know our country is in the first stages of coming through an ammunition shortage. Every hunter has their favorite rifle and/or primitive weapons cartridge, and shot-gunners almost always have a favorite shotgun shell to take their quarry.

Again, find their hunting buddy. It's 99% sure they'll know what ammo your hunter prefers. This get tricky because you have to know the caliber of their hunting rifle, the grains-weight of the bullet they prefer and the brand.

Yes, it's that specific, and with supplies short on some calibers, you'll need to



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.

start early to find that just-right bullet. You can start with local shops, or the big-box stores. If you strike out there, there's always the Internet. You'll need to contend with shipping and making sure you get delivery before you have to wrap and get it under the tree. And don't trust them with last-minute deliveries.

Years ago, bullets and shotshells would have been an inexpensive gift. Not now. Premium cartridges for my .308 rifle cost less than \$20 for 20 rounds. Today, you'll pay at least 50% more, maybe double. Know, too, that popular calibers, .308, .30-06, .270 and .243, will be easier to find than some heavier caliber rounds. That's because manufacturers identified the most popular calibers and set production to supply most hunters.

Shotshells are the same. Local shop like Hebert's in Prairieville, Simmons in Bastrop, Lafayette Shooters (where else but Lafayette), Bowie Outfitters in Baton Rouge and Lake Charles and Puglia's in Metairie said they were well stocked on shells for waterfowl hunters, and the consensus was to make sure to stock up early because suppliers might be unable to provide shells later in the season.

You can take the same steps for yours who like to head to sporting clays, skeet and trap fields. These folks were scrambling for shells during the last 18 months. Supplies are better today.

The good part about ammo is you can tailor your gift amount to the number of boxes you can afford.

NO, NOT THIS

Clothing, including camo hunting wear, vests, socks, etc. is something you shouldn't buy. There are more camo patterns than you can imagine and know each hunter has a preference. If there's one rule you should follow, it is to stay away from buying cotton clothing for winter wear. Wool and new synthetics provide more warmth in deer stands and

duck blinds, and for those wintertime excursions in search of speckled trout and redfish.

If you know your "fav" wants a new hunting coat, or needs any other apparel, then there's a gift card. Most local shops and all the big-box stores have gift certificates covering amounts you want to spend.

It's here where we need to talk about buying a youngster his or her first rifle or shotgun. You need to make sure the firearm "fits." There's no need to give a gift that will have to sit in a gun safe for a couple of years until the youngster grows into it. Know, too, there's a responsibility that goes with this gift. Firearms safety, proper handling and hunting ethics are

the main points of a hunter safety course. And, for the 10-and-older crowd of young hunters, a hunter safety certificate is needed to hunt deer and to get the new \$5 youth deer license.

There's always a gift card. Or maybe an extended subscription to some fine Louisiana hunting and fishing monthly magazine published in Boutte.

Or, you can take the time to pass along your knowledge of our outdoors to younger folks. It's inexpensive. And it lasts a long, long time. Maybe, this year, your time afield or on the water is more valuable.

So, Ho, Ho, Ho, and hope this Christmas is not a ho, ho, ho, OH NO! ■

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The advertisement features a collage of images: a green boat on a lake, a blue boat with a Yamaha outboard motor, a man in camouflage gear sitting on a boat, a close-up of several ducks, and a green boat docked at a pier with two people. The background is a textured, blue and white pattern.

OUTDOOR UPDATE

HERCULES FALLS

CRICKETT COLLINS USES BREAK
FROM WORK TO ARROW BIG
RACK MOREHOUSE BUCK

What do you do this time of year when you work daylight to dark as owner of a convenience store and you also are an avid deer hunter? Crickett Collins, who lives in Gilbert, is just such a person. She is serious about the nature of having a successful business but sometimes working at the store cramps her style, especially when she would rather be sitting on her deer stand.

"My husband Galen and I own a 40-acre tract in Morehouse Parish where we hunt every chance we get," Collins said. "After bow season opened, I was getting fidgety and really wanted to be sitting in my deer stand. So on Friday, Oct. 14, I left the store at 3:00 and drove the hour and 10 minutes to our land."

There was one particular buck that had shown up on her game cameras and it was impressive enough she named him "Hercules."

"I got to the property; my daughter and granddaughter joined me at the camp we have there and I got my feeders going and put out some corn and persimmon rice bran 50 yards from my box stand," Collins said. "That's the distance I feel comfortable with my Raven crossbow."

BUCK ACTS STRANGE

The weather that afternoon was quite warm when she climbed aboard at 5 p.m. She sat until 7 p.m. without seeing a thing.

"I was getting hot and sweaty and the mosquitoes had started bothering me and I had decided that I'd go back to the camp and wait until the next morning as a cool front was supposed to come in that night," Collins said. "I had started getting my gear together when I looked down my middle lane and saw something move. Hercules stepped out next to the feed I had on the ground. He was broadside at 50 yards and I got my pin on him and hit the trigger."

The buck did something that caused her to have immediate concern because at the shot, the buck turned and went back the exact same trail he had come in on.

"That worried me because I've shot a lot of deer and they



Crickett Collins took this 13-point buck on Oct. 14 in Morehouse Parish with her Raven crossbow.

always take off the opposite way they come in; I never had one do this," she said.

Stepping down from her stand, Collins walked down to where the deer was standing and didn't see any blood or evidence she had hit the deer.

"I walked back the 200 yards to the camp and told my daughter what I'd done," she said. "I decided since it was dark by now to just wait until morning to begin to search. We went and ate supper, came back to the camp and I sat up all night in my recliner with my hunting clothes still on; there was no way I could sleep."

RECOVERING THE DEER

The next morning, she went back to her stand to wait for her daughter, granddaughter and family friend, Colby, to come help her look for the deer.

"They got there around 8:00," Collins said. "The 40 acres is divided basically with 20 acres being big woods with the other 20 being CRP land. We spread out and began looking and finally found a drop of blood and then quite a bit of blood. Colby was looking in the big woods while we were following a trail through the CRP. Colby called out that he had found blood, I took a couple of steps and saw horns sticking up. The buck had only traveled about 50 yards from where I shot him."

The buck sported a rack of 13 points, had an inside spread of 19 inches, bases were over 5 inches each with main beams 22 inches. Estimated weight was 250 pounds and the deer was believed to be 5 ½ years old. The buck was taken to Simmons Sporting Goods in Bastrop to be entered in that store's Big Buck contest and was scored at 168 2/8 inches.

"When you own a convenience store and work 12 hours a day, you have to get away," Collins said, "and getting to sit on my stand is my getaway." ■



DEAD END DEER

BLAKE FINALLY WINS GAME OF CAT AND "MOUSE" WITH HUGE WINN BUCK

If By Glynn Harris

ever there was a buck that earned the name given him, it was a big 10-point Winn Parish buck that rightly earned the name of "Mouse". He had gotten good at playing cat and mouse games with 20-year-old hunter Everitt "Rett" Blake.

"For the last couple of years I had this buck on camera, and early on he had a 9-point rack," Blake said. "He disappeared for awhile and I figured another hunter had got him on another club. Then on opening day of bow season this year, things started to happen.

MOUSE REAPPEARS

Since the buck had disappeared, Blake started hunting another buck on the opposite side of the lease, a 1,500 acre plot leased by his family, a club they call Dead End Hunting Club. It was about then when the "cat and mouse" games kicked in.

"I was hunting the other buck when I checked my camera and there he stood, right next to my blind I usually hunt," Blake said. "Mouse who was sporting 10 points this year, won the first round."

The second weekend of bow season, Blake got on his stand that afternoon where he had seen the buck on camera and sure enough, he stepped out. However, it was late, there were three or four other deer around his stand and he knew if he tried to draw his bow, the deer would spot the movement and the game would be over.

"By the time the other deer finally moved off, it had gotten so late I couldn't see my pins on my bow well enough so I had to hold off," Blake said. "I sat in the stand watching him feed on acorns until he finally left. I didn't leave my stand until 8:30 that night."

MOUSE 2; BLAKE 0.

Not to worry, Blake knew that his stand sitting among a grove of acorn-producing white oaks would likely keep the buck in the area so he decided to sneak in long before daylight the next day.

"I got within 100 yards of my stand early that morning, decided to check my camera to be sure no other deer were there, but there Mouse stood eating acorns under my stand. I had a slight problem because when I got out of my stand the night before, I had left my bow hanging in the tree next to my saddle stand. Here I stood with the buck under my stand and my bow up in the tree. Mouse beat me again," Blake lamented.

MOUSE 3; BLAKE 0.

During the first week of primitive firearms season, Blake was on his stand when the buck showed up. However, it was late and there was another 8-point in the area he didn't want to shoot and he couldn't really tell which deer this was. so he held off.

"I went back to my truck at dark, checked his camera and sure enough, the buck I had passed on was Mouse," he said.

MOUSE 4; BLAKE 0.

Regular gun season opened Oct. 29, but Blake was not able to make it to his stand because of work conflicts; he works as an electrician. He was finally able to hunt on the afternoon of Nov. 2 and because of such bad luck with hunting out of his saddle stand, he decided to try his box stand.

"It was about 4:15 before I could get to my stand and decided to just put out feed and maybe try him the next day," Blake said. "I left my gun in the truck but halfway to the stand, I decided that may not be a smart move so I went back and got my 30.06 rifle and climbed in the stand at 5:35.

"An hour later, Mouse stepped out at around 100 yards. He was quartering to me so I took the shot and dropped him on the spot."

The buck was a fine specimen with 10 points along with two small kickers. Inside spread was 16 inches with bases 4 and 5 inches each. Main beams were 22 and 23 inches. The buck was estimated to be 4 ½ years old and weighed in at 205 pounds. The rack was measured at 151 inches.

Finally.....Mouse 4; Blake 1. ■



Everitt "Rett" Blake killed this trophy 10-point buck on Nov. 2 in Winn Parish.

CROSSBOW MONSTER

TINY PLOT YIELDS BIG
11-POINTER FOR RETIRED
OUACHITA FIREFIGHTER

T By Glynn Harris
erry Alvis retired as a fireman with the Ouachita Parish Fire Department and works part-time as a mechanic for a friend. His work in putting out fires and manhandling an engine block apparently gave him the strength and stamina to do what he had to do recently. He was faced with the task of dragging a 220-pound buck after dark through a thicket some 125 yards and loading it in his truck by himself.

"I'm 66 years old, but feel like I'm 40," Alvis laughed when relaying his story of the big 11-point buck he nailed with his Raven crossbow late on the afternoon of Oct. 7.

Alvis was hunting on a tiny eight acre plot of land behind his sister's home in Union Parish. Sitting in his ground blind, he can look down the hill and see his sister's mobile home at the end of the property.

"I had been seeing this buck on my trail camera for the past couple of months and I could tell he was a good one that I wanted a crack at," he said. "There was a cool front moving in and I felt it was a good time to be in my blind."

THE BIG BUCK ARRIVES

Crawling into his blind that afternoon around 5:00, he was soon seeing deer coming to feed on the corn he had spread out in a clearing.

"At first there were several does that came out followed by three small bucks, a 5-point, 4-point and spike. I was enjoying watching the young bucks spar and clash antlers when all of a sudden, they all threw their heads up and were looking toward my sister's house. I knew she was gone on vacation and there wouldn't have been anything to see there. About that time," Alvis continued, "the big buck stepped out."

The buck circled the other deer and came up to the corn on the ground at about 25 yards, Alvis explained.

"I had my crossbow on a shooting stick and as the buck was quartering away from me, I felt good enough to take a shot, so I hit the trigger," he said. "What happened next was chaos. The ground was so dry and all eight deer took off leaving a thick dust cloud. All I could do was guess what happened to my buck because all I could see was dust."

Alvis questioned himself as to why he didn't wait for a broad-side shot and he was feeling bad about possibly messing up on the biggest buck he ever shot.

"I just leaned back and had a sick feeling, afraid I had really



Terry Alvis killed this Union Parish 11-point buck with a Raven crossbow on Oct. 7.

messed up," Alvis said. "I looked at my watch and it was 6:40 when I pulled the trigger. I decided to give him 45 minutes to an hour before starting to look for him."

THE DIFFICULT WAITING PERIOD

In order to make the time he waited to pass faster, Alvis did something that helped him calm down.

"I got out my phone and started playing the Candy Crush game," he laughed.

After 45 minutes or so he decided he had to go look and found a single drop of blood 15 feet from where the deer was standing. He began to find more blood along a trail that led downhill through the thicket. It was dark by now and at 120 yards, his light shined on the beams of the buck's antlers where it had fallen.

"I called a friend and told him what I'd found and he offered to come help me," Alvis said. "I told him I thought I could handle it, but if I needed him, I'd call."

Alvis would drag the buck a few yards and have to stop and catch his breath. He finally got the deer into the clearing, backed his truck down and using a piece of plywood propped on the tail gate, he was able to drag the 220-pound buck into his truck. Quite the accomplishment for a 66-year-old guy who tips the scales at 180 pounds, smaller than his trophy.

The buck, which was estimated to be 5 ½ years old, was scored by Greg Hicks, Buck Master's official scorer, and measured out as an 11-point with bases over 4 inches, main beams 23 inches and an inside spread of 18 3/8 inches. The rack measured 147 6/8 inches. ■

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Justin Lyons of DeQuincy took this piebald 10-point buck on Oct. 30 in Calcasieu Parish.



THE GHOST

Lyons pulls off a good trick to take unique 10-point buck treat

When a big buck steps out of the weeds, a buck whose coloration is mostly white, one would tend to think of it as a “ghost” buck.

This is what happened to 35-year-old Justin Lyons of DeQuincy when the buck he had been after for five years stepped out within 10 yards of his box stand in Calcasieu Parish on Sunday morning, Oct. 30. This ghost was real.

The unusually-colored buck had been on Lyons’ radar for at least seven years; that’s when he first saw an image of the buck on his trail camera.

“I belong to a 4,000 acre hunting club in Calcasieu Parish and the buck displaying the piebald colorations first showed up as a 4-point in 2015. My dad, another friend on the club and I decided to keep an eye on him to see what he might eventually mature into,” said Lyons, a heavy equipment operator.

The buck steadily grew over the next five years, and three years ago developed an impressive rack of 10 points.

“A friend hunting on the other side of our lease had a trail cam photo of him after he had shed his antlers. I had been looking for him on my cameras this season but he seemed to have disappeared,” Lyons said. “I have been using my saddle stand so I could be mobile and move around the lease where I hoped I would find where he was hanging out, but he just vanished.”

THE RIGHT TIME ARRIVES

Early on Sunday morning, Oct. 30, Lyons had planned to hunt out of his saddle stand, but before heading out decided to check his trail cam photos.

“I had a photo of a small 10-point and a 4-point on the camera and had sent the pictures to my dad,” he said. “When I checked on the next picture, there he stood; he was next to my box stand at 4:09 that morning so I knew that’s where I would be hunting.

“I got there before daylight, parking my truck farther away than I usually do, sprayed myself with cover scent and attached a drag rag with attraction scent to my boot. I walked as quietly as I could to make my way to the box stand because I knew the buck would still be in the area, probably nearby.”

The box stand has a feeder out front and is bordered by a four-year-old pine plantation on the right and a patch of heavy weeds to the left. Lyons got quietly settled into his stand, opening windows on the front and rear of the stand but leaving a window to the left closed thinking if the buck showed up, he would come from a different direction.

“About 25 minutes after settling in, a doe came out within 10 yards of my blind and I noticed she seemed particularly nervous and on full alert,” he said. “I decided to ease my rifle, a Weatherby .308, to the shooting ledge. I looked to the left where the window was closed and saw nothing. I then saw that the doe was leaving and when I looked back to the left, there he stood, not 10 yards from me, and I was looking at him through a closed window.”

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

The buck stood there without moving for what seemed to Lyons to be nearly 10 minutes. He was having doubts about whether he’d have a chance at the buck so decided to at least ease his phone up and get a photo of the deer through the window.

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"The buck was on full alert, would look first this way and that and then stared at the blind," Lyons said. "After several minutes, he finally took one step and his body language indicated he was beginning to settle down. Finally, he switched his tail and I knew he was about to move. When the buck cleared the corner of the blind, I got on him and hit the trigger. He took off and ran about 20 yards when I saw him crash down."

What was his reaction after seeing the unusual buck he had been after for years piled up on the ground?

"I broke down and cried," he said.

Lyons' dad was hunting on another stand and after texting him, he soon joined Lyons to celebrate.

"Before dad got there, I walked down to the fallen buck and just laid down on him giving thanks for the opportunity of getting such an unusual buck I had been after so long," he said.

IMPRESSIVE GROWTH

The buck sported 10 points with an inside spread of 18 4/8 inches, had 4-inch bases and main beams 20 and 21 inches each. The buck, estimated to be 7 1/2 years old, was green scored at 140 inches.

"I just want to show folks what can happen if you let young deer walk," Lyons said. "To see this buck grow from a 4-point years ago to a fine 10-point today just proves the point." ■



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Melvin Brown Jr. of Patterson has his hands full of velvet antlers after he shot a 9-point, 215-pound buck Sept. 16 on a lease near Fayette, Mississippi.



BIG DEER COMMOTION

HARVEST OF BIG VELVET TROPHY
LEAVES HUNTER, WIFE CELEBRATING

T By Don Shoopman

he stillness in the western Mississippi woods was broken abruptly by high-fiving and celebrating during the late morning hours of Sept. 16 by a successful Louisiana hunter.

Patterson outdoorsman Melvin Brown, Jr. and his wife were the ones who caused the commotion after they tracked and located a wounded deer approximately 200 yards from where he put an arrow in it around 7:30 a.m. And not just any deer. One worthy of a commotion.

"I couldn't believe it, seeing a deer of that caliber. I've never killed a deer that big," Brown Jr. said about the 215-pound, 9-point buck with velvet antlers initially scored at 140 3/8 inches.

GOOD EXPERIENCE

Brown shared the special moments with his wife, Felicia Harris Brown, an equally ardent bowhunter who helped track the deer starting three hours after he shot it.

"Me and my wife high-fived and celebrated. We hugged each other. It was a good experience," Brown said about his first deer of the 2022-23 season and his personal best buck.

The 42-year-old subsea robotics supervisor for Oceaneering International Inc., where he has worked nine years, took the deer to a Mississippi taxidermist who tested it for Chronic Waste Disease. He was then picking up the deer to bring it home to a local taxidermist in Patterson. The Patterson taxidermist will officially score it for him and mount it.

Brown said he has hunted deer, rabbits and squirrels since he was five or six with his father, Melvin Brown Sr., and an uncle, Eddie "Jaja" Brown Sr. He picked up bowhunting and his wife hunts deer with a crossbow, he said.

He was hunting from a deer stand on a lease near Fayette, Mississippi. He and others have been leasing the property since 1990, when he was in high school, he said.

Brown was bowhunting with a Mathews Vertix compound bow and Carbon Express Maxima Red arrows. The deer stand he was in was 30 feet off the ground.

"I went in the woods around 6 o'clock," he said. "Around 7:12, I started seeing does. I was filming the does with my phone. That's when I noticed the big buck letting does go first to make sure everything was OK.

"Then he came behind them, came within 10 yards. I had drew back and held for what felt like an eternity, but it was 30 to 45 seconds. I was just waiting for a perfect shot. He was quartered to me. I shot him right behind the left shoulder."

THE KEY TO BROWN'S SUCCESS

As expected, the deer ran.

"So I got down. I didn't really see too much blood. So I backed down, waiting three hours. Me and my wife went tracking the blood. He ran about 200 yards," Brown said. "When I got to him, he was still alive. He was wounded bad, couldn't stand up. I was able to put another arrow in him."

Brown said he saw the deer on trail cam last season. It was a 7-pointer then. He believes setting his deer stand higher than others is a key to his success.

"Everybody says, 'Why do you climb so high?' I always climb high so the deer doesn't spook and doesn't see me," he said, reasoning he doesn't want deer to be startled by something they don't usually see.

The big deer was big news. After it was posted in Mississippi Whitetails, Brown received more than 1,000 congratulations.

It's a big year for the all-around outdoorsman who also fishes for catfish, redfish and, yes, yellowfin tuna. He recently landed a 105-pound yellowfin tuna off the drillship where he works (it has a charter boat permit) offshore in the Gulf of Mexico.

The big fish smashed a topwater popping bait.

"When you talk about explode, coming out of the water, ah, man, that's a nice feeling there," he said about his tuna, also a personal best.

However, for now the Louisiana outdoorsman will be happy just to bask in his most recent deer hunting accomplishment. And who wouldn't. ■

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BUZZ BAIT BLESSING

BIG 10.75-POUND OCTOBER BASS SUITS NEW IBERIA ANGLER JUST FINE

T By Don Shoopman

here's something about mid-October bass fishing at Toledo Bend that brings out good fortune, or luck, for Ben Suit.

For starters, let's look back to Oct. 11, 2020, Day 3 of the Sealy Outdoors Big Bass Splash, when the New Iberia native weighed a 4.00-pound bass. That bass was the first 4-pound even fish of the day and worth a \$5,000 special prize, plus \$350 for finishing 11th.

Now, fast-forward to Oct. 16, 2022, Day 2 of the two-day New Iberia-based Louisiana Bass Cats tournament at Toledo Bend. Suit, who recently moved to Texas to open his State Farm Agency, was trying to help his father, Kevin Suit of New Iberia, clinch the LBC's Angler of the Year.

But in doing so, he also helped himself to his personal best largemouth, a 10.75 pound lunger. The younger Suit's bass propelled him to a first place finish in the tournament, and his father won AOY.

They were trailing the first-day leaders by a few pounds and coping with another slow start on the second day while fishing grass beds in Housen Bay. With one keeper in the livewell at 9 a.m., the father-and-son team made a move to another point and picked up two keepers.

Another lull set in. Kevin suggested moving to a stretch that failed to produce a day earlier but had in practice. Ben was thinking of doing just that, too.

"I said, 'Let's go. What's the worst that can happen?'" Ben said.

A GOOD DECISION

Well, the best happened.

After Ben inexplicably had two buzz baits break off on braided line while casting, he tied on another buzz bait and cast it far. The retrieve was suddenly interrupted rudely by a big bass.

"It might have been my fifth cast when that big sucker bit that buzz bait," he said. "It just slurped it down. It was so big it sounded like a toilet flush. So I set the hook, looked at dad and said, 'It's a big fish!' Then it comes up and it couldn't get out of the water with its jump. So, I was like, 'This is a giant fish, dad. We've got to get this one,'" Ben said, noting they don't believe in using landing nets. "Dad got into position to use the 'Suit net' (his hands). She tried to make another run. Kevin got his hand in that big ol' mouth, put a death grip on her and wrassled her into the boat."

"Nobody panicked," his father said. "When the fish came by the boat I grabbed her by the jaw and put her in the 'well.'"

The size of the bass wowed them.



New Iberia native Ben Suit has a firm grip on a 10.75-pound bass he caught on a buzz bait Oct. 16 while fishing a two-day Louisiana Bass Cats tournament at Toledo Bend.

"We were pretty excited, obviously," Ben said. "So, we kind of whooped and hollered, celebrated a little bit. It took a while for the hair on my arms to lay back down ... I guess from all the adrenalin."

"We didn't know how big it was. We just threw it in the livewell. We knew it was a big one. That was pretty much our day. We might have culled once or twice but didn't get another bite after that."

STAR OF THE WEIGH-IN

At the weigh-in at Bridge Bay Resort, the bass club's digital scale read 10.75, which along with the other four bass gave them 19-plus pounds for a two-day total of 30.50 pounds to complete the comeback. They finished a few pounds ahead of first-day leaders Jacob Shoopman and Zach Suit, both of New Iberia. Zach is Ben's brother.

"Well, winning the tournament didn't feel as big a deal as having that fish," Ben said. "I think at the end of the day nobody remembers who won the tournament, but they'll remember the giant fish that got to the weigh-in."

"It was exciting, I tell you that," Kevin said. "It was a beautiful fish. It was a game-changer."

They then hurried to register the bass at Living the Dream near the lake on Louisiana 6 west of Many. The certified scale there also read 10.75, qualifying the fish for the Toledo Bend Lunger Bass Program. He'll get a free mount and the bass was able to swim free after its release in the creek behind Living the Dream.

"That's why you go to Toledo Bend, for an experience like that. It's not every day something like that happens in the Basin (Atchafalaya Basin). That's why we go ... literally one cast away from catching a giant at any point," Ben said. ■

COLORFUL CATCHES



You never know what you might catch when you drop a hook in Louisiana waters. But when Victor Moran caught this peacock bass from Bayou St. John, it was certainly a surprise. Unfortunately, he didn't get to keep the fish for further identification because he got the hook in his finger and had to make a trip to the emergency room. He did report it to the LDWF for further investigation. They plan to electrofish the area to see if there are more.



Jarrod Ransonet caught this blue shrimp while trolling in Vermilion Bay on Oct. 21.



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ASA SPORTFISHING SUMMIT

GRAVES TOUTS STATE CONTROL OF GULF FISHERIES, COASTAL RESTORATION AS PRIORITIES

R By Chris Macaluso
Representatives from the world's largest fishing tackle companies and fisheries advocacy and conservation groups gathered in New Orleans the last week of October for the American Sportfishing Association's annual Sportfishing Summit.

The event, which moves to different fishing hotspots across the country each fall, gives leaders in recreational fishing manufacturing, retail, marketing and policy the chance to analyze market trends, compare notes on advertising and public relations and talk about state, regional and federal fisheries management policy.

Federal legislation and policies were the focus of the discussion on the opening day of meetings as Louisiana Congressman Garret Graves and NOAA Assistant Administrator for



Allowing more state control over counting and managing red snapper was one of the hot topics at the recent ASA annual Sportfishing Summit. Here is Jodi Mallett with a red snapper caught in Fourchon with Capt. Kurt O'Brien.



The ASA annual Sportfishing Summit was held Oct. 25-28 in New Orleans.

Photo courtesy ASA

Fisheries Janet Coit addressed attendees, covering a range of management issues.

GRAVES GIVES THANKS

Graves thanked industry representatives for the ongoing support for several of his priorities and victories in Congress, including the passage of the Modern Fish Act in 2018 and the DESCEND Act in 2020, which requires the use of venting tools or descending devices when fishing for reef fish like snapper and grouper in the Gulf of Mexico.

"I want to thank all of you in the room for helping us pass important fisheries management bills and the funding for the Great Red Snapper Count and many other issues affecting recreational fishing," he said. "For too long the Magnuson Stevens Act, which manages all federal fisheries, focused entirely on commercial fishing. But we know that recreational fishing participation, especially in the Gulf, needs to be considered and managed as well. The Modern Fish Act makes sure the needs of recreational fishing are considered."

Graves, who serves on the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee was re-elected in Louisiana's 6th Congressional District with more than 80 percent of the vote Nov. 8. He illustrated the importance of consistent seasons in culturally and economically vital fisheries like red snapper and why he has continually advocated for more state control of coastal fishing throughout his eight years in Washington.

"Recreational fishing has a huge impact on Louisiana's economy of about \$1.6 billion each year," he said. "It's critical to our culture and economy that we manage using the best science and data available, and in Louisiana, that's LA CREEL, rather than data systems that aren't appropriate like the federal MRIP program."

A LOT WE CAN DO

Janet Coit, who was appointed as head of federal fisheries by President Joe Biden in June 2021, recognized the importance of fisheries conservation efforts in the Gulf, like passing the DESCEND Act and support from recreational fishing community to help managers adapt to changes in fisheries stock sizes and distribution.

"There's a lot we can do to bring in innovation like the DESCEND Act does, to limit dead discards in reef fish and to ensure the sustainability and survivability of species," Coit said. "We have to look at the tropicalization of the Gulf of Mexico and other issues brought by climate change and make sure management can adapt to those changes."

Graves noted that while there have been several advances and improvements

over the last eight years in working with NOAA on recreational fishing, he is concerned that state management of red snapper may be taking a step backwards as the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and NOAA contemplate calibrating state data to historic federal data.

That move could cut red snapper seasons in Mississippi and Alabama by as much as 60 percent in coming years.

"I and many of my Congressional colleagues oppose the calibration effort right now because it's attempting to take very accurate data that we're getting from the states and force it into the less accurate data from the federal system," he said. "We should use the more accurate state data and calibrate to it, not the other way around."

Graves also emphasized the need for the state to move forward aggressively with coastal restoration efforts, including diversions from the Mississippi River, to sustain and grow Louisiana's recreational fishing economy.

"When the levees were built on the river in 1927, we went from growing nearly a mile of wetlands each year to losing 16 square miles a year," he said. "That loss threatens one of the most productive ecosystems in the world. Nearly 90 percent of the fish species in the Gulf depend on Louisiana's wetland as a nursery ground and source of food. We need to grow the pie, increase production in the future and the only way to do that is to focus on habitat."

The 2023 Sportfishing Summit will be held in Destin, Fla., from Oct. 3-6.

"ASA's mission is to look out for the interests of the sportfishing industry and the entire sportfishing community," said ASA President Glenn Hughes. "To do this, we focus on clean water, abundant fisheries, access to those fish, favorable trade and commerce policies and increasing fishing participation." ■



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LOUISIANA ANGLERS CLAIM VICTORY IN BASSMASTER REDFISH CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

One-trick ponies seldom win races, but Sean O'Connell of Mandeville, La., and Edward Adams of Metairie, La., proved they were nothing of the sort by adapting to changing conditions and securing a wire-to-wire win at the Yamaha Bassmaster Redfish Cup Championship presented by Skeeter with a three-day total of 48 pounds, 3 ounces.

On Day 1, the 2022 Redfish World Series champions took the lead with a two-fish limit of 16-10. O'Connell and Adams held onto the top spot on Day 2 with 15-3, also the day's best. Not to blow their streak, the winners turned in the heaviest limit of Day 3 with two reds that weighed 16-6.

For their efforts, O'Connell and Adams took home \$75,000. "There's been a rumor that I can't win outside of (Louisiana), but I guess this crushes that rumor," Adams joked. "This is more than I could hope for. I've been doing this a long time and it's my first win out of state, so it's a really big deal."

O'Connell echoed that sentiment and noted the scale of this week's win did a lot to advance the sport.

"The stage that we were fishing and the platform that B.A.S.S. created is unparalleled by anything I've ever fished in redfishing," he said. "We've never been able to fish live and have the BassTrakk live standings.

"People now get to see what we do. This brought redfishing to a new stage and I can't thank B.A.S.S. enough."

O'Connell and Adams increased their margin each day. In

the first round, they established a 13-ounce lead over the all-star team of Bassmaster Elite Series veteran Chris Zaldain of Fort Worth, Texas, and IFA Redfish Tour standout Ryan Rickard of Brandon, Fla., who won last year's event. Day 2 saw the leaders widen the gap with a 2-3 lead, again with Zaldain and Rickard in second.

Day 3 saw O'Connell and Adams surge across the finish line by a margin of 3-14 over the defending champs.

For two days, the winners had diligently worked a pattern of long drifts across shallow grass flats in Laguna Madre, south of Port Aransas. With dim skies draping the Texas coast, Day 1 brought southeast winds of 15 to 20 mph, with Day 2 blowing at least as hard out of the northeast.

Both days, O'Connell and Adams had to use a drift sock to control their

speed for efficient coverage with their swimbaits on 3/8-ounce jigheads. Day 3, however, brought much less wind and that eliminated their ability to drift.

"We made two adjustments," Adams said. "First, Sean tied on a Yo-Zuri topwater so he could make longer casts and I added a Seaguar fluorocarbon leader to my PowerPro braid (because of the clarity)."

At 7:45 a.m., the topwater broke the ice with a high-slot red that went 7-10. The leaders endured a couple of hours with a lone keeper in the boat before adding one around 3 pounds.

Mid-morning, they had a shot to blow the doors off with a tank of a redfish that crushed O'Connell's topwater, but the fish measured just over the 28-inch maximum. Fortunately, they'd boat another giant just before 11 a.m. and this one went 8 3/4 pounds and measured just under 28.

"That's as close as it gets," Adams said during the Bassmaster Redfish LIVE coverage. "That could be \$75,000 right there."

The 2022 Yamaha Bassmaster Redfish Cup Championship presented by Skeeter was hosted by the Port Aransas Tourism Bureau & Chamber of Commerce. You can read more about the event on Bassmaster.com. ■

Edward Adams of Metairie and Sean O'Connell of Mandeville landing redfish on their way to winning the 2022 Yamaha Bassmaster Redfish Cup Championship.



Photo by Andy Crawford/B.A.S.S.

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DECEMBER'S RUT CALENDARS

Deer season is close to its halfway point, and while rutting activity has already wrapped up in some parts of Louisiana, it's slated to kick into high gear in other areas.

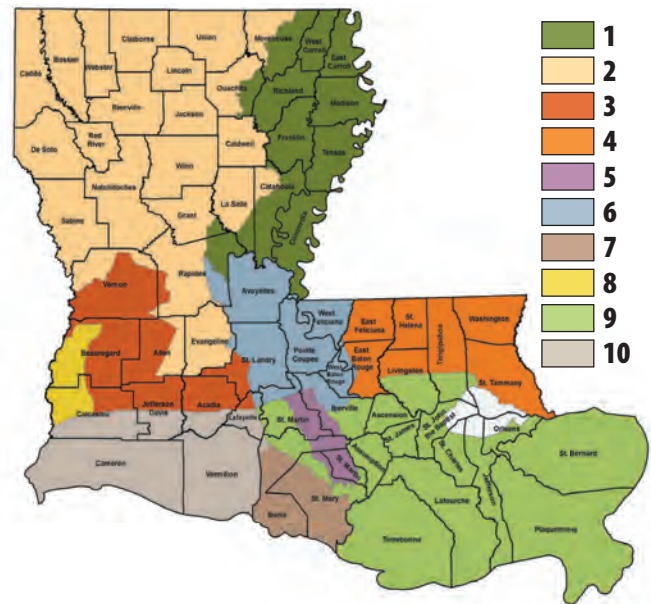
In Area 2, northwest Louisiana, the second breeding period, which started Nov. 23, is forecast to end about Dec. 6.

After that, hunters will have to concentrate on food sources for any shot at bucks.

Deer in Areas 4 and 9 will be wrapping up the first rut on or about Dec. 6, with the second scraping period estimated to run from Dec. 7 through Dec. 22. The second breeding period is forecast for Dec. 23 through Jan. 5.

In the Mississippi Delta and upper and lower Atchafalaya Basin, the pre-rut is slated to wrap up on Dec. 6, with the first scraping period running Dec. 7 through Dec. 22, immediately followed by the first rut, Dec. 23 through Jan. 5. ■

2022 - 2023 Deer Hunting Areas



DECEMBER 2022 Area 2

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

DECEMBER 2022 Area 4 & 9

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6 Major Rut Breeding Ends	7 Minor Rut Scraping Starts	8	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	31

DECEMBER 2022 Areas 1, 5 & 6

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6 Pre-Rut Ends	7 Major Rut Scraping Starts	8	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	31

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■ By Dusty McGehee

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THE CALL TO BRING IN THE HOUNDS.

If you hunt in North Louisiana, there is a very good chance that the call will be answered by Gary Cobb of Union Parish. He is well known in the northern section of the state. Some may call him famous, but Cobb, being a humble man, is the first to admit that he doesn't deserve the credit. It all goes to his dogs.

Cobb's start in tracking deer began by accident 28 years ago. Growing up, his dad had Black Mouth curs for hog hunting. One evening, Cobb's father-in-law shot a deer on their club, and he could not find it. He called his dad who suggested taking Queen, one of his curs, as she might be able to find it. Cobb went to his dad's house and loaded Queen into his truck. A short while later, she found the deer and that's where the obsession began.

Knowing he had a special dog who had the "want" to find a deer, he began training her with mock trails using deer hide and deer legs. Each and every time, Queen was at the end of the trail with her nose on the hide. Soon, word began to spread that Cobb had a deer tracking dog and that's when his phone began to light up. That first season, Queen found 20 or so deer.

Fast forward to present day, and thousands of deer recoveries later, Cobb has a team of black mouth curs. None are more famous than his best friend, Scout. Scout is his superstar cur that comes from the same bloodline as his original dog, Queen. Scout has found hundreds of deer and she isn't stopping anytime soon.

THE QUEST FOR 100 >

This buck won't make Boone & Crockett, but it made a once-in-a-lifetime memory for this young hunter, thanks to Gary and Scout's trailing skills.



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THE QUEST FOR 100

Cobb will be the first to admit he isn't concerned with accolades or numbers; he just enjoys helping people. There is no greater joy to him than successfully recovering someone's deer, especially if it's a child or someone's first. Last year, with one week of the season remaining, he had 97 recoveries. It was then that it struck him that reaching the century mark could be an attainable goal. He and Scout tried their hardest, but at the end of season they were sitting at 99. This year, Cobb and Scout have their sights set on achieving their goal.

WHAT BREEDS MAKE THE BEST TRACKING DOGS?

Of course, the Black Mouth Cur is Cobb's favorite breed, but there are many other dogs that make great deer trackers. Some of the other proven breeds he listed are Labradors, Blue Heelers, Australian Shepherds, Bavarian Mountain Hound, Wired Hair dachshunds, and Feists. He also believes rescue dogs make some of the best dogs/trackers. Whether you rescue a dog from a shelter or a dumpster.

"Dogs are a lot smarter than we give them credit for," he said. "These dogs are extra appreciative of getting to join a family and will do everything in their power to satisfy their owners."

DANGERS OF TRACKING

Over his 28-year span, Cobb has pretty much seen it all. His dogs have been kicked and hooked by deer. Wounded deer have charged at him. He has even had wild hogs attack them, but one event really sticks out in his mind.

Cobb and his former cur, Sage, went out to Spearsville to track a nice buck for a fellow hunter. Sage quickly took to the trail and found the buck. Unfortunately, the buck was still alive and turned on Sage. Using his antlers for defense, the buck swiped at the dog and Cobb saw one of the tines bury into his dog's neck. Once Cobb was able to get to his pup, he realized she had blood on her neck. He thought for sure she was a goner. Cobb was sick and got down on his knees and asked God to please let her survive. His prayers were answered because upon further inspection, the blood was from the deer and the tine had gotten caught between her collar and her neck.

Happy young hunters who Gary and Scout find deer for make all the work and expense worth it, especially when it is a hunter's first deer. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Deer shot late in the afternoon are especially tough to trail, even with good blood sign, so Cobb and Scout often work well into the night finding them for grateful hunters.





MOST MEMORABLE STORY

Cobb got a call one night to go track a six-year-old kid's first deer at Sadie Hunting Club. He had already committed to two other tracks that night, so he did not arrive until midnight. The little boy was wide awake.

"You could not wipe the smile off his face!" Cobb said. The boy began telling the story of shooting his first deer, but his father began getting antsy, saying they needed to go track the deer. Cobb assured him it was fine, and he wanted to hear every word of that excited boy's story. After the tale concluded, Cobb whispered to Scout, "If we never find another deer, we have to find this one."

Scout took to the trail in one of the thickest cutovers they have ever been in. Three hundred yards later, Scout found the little boy's trophy — a nice 6-point. You would have thought it was a world record buck with the way the boy and his family were celebrating... but that's not the end of it.

A couple of years later, Cobb was in town doing some shopping. As he walked into the store, a man stopped him and said, "Are you Gary Cobb?"

Cobb looked down and there was this little boy grinning ear to ear, and he immediately recognized him. The father said his son spotted him walking across the parking lot and exclaimed, "we can't leave until I shake Mr. Gary's hand and thank him for finding my deer!"

It's stories like this that give Cobb the motivation to keep helping others. That little boy will never forget him or Scout, or his first deer.

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ADVICE FOR HUNTERS

As the old cliché says, “When in doubt, back out.”

If you have any reservations about your shot placement, do not go in after the deer, Cobb said. You will be spreading scent and that will hurt the chances of the dog finding the deer. It isn't just human scent that may confuse a dog, as a deer emits a scent from its interdigital scent gland when it's wounded. Even if there is no blood, when you walk through and across the trail, you are unintentionally spreading all of that deer's scent with your footsteps.

Also, if you go in after a wounded deer, you run the risk of jumping it from its bed. A mortally wounded deer typically does not go far from the initial shot. Cobb knows better than most and said, “If you jump a wounded deer, it might run 200 yards or two miles. Just be patient and wait for the tracker to come to you.”



Wounded deer that head into thickets like the one behind Scout and Gary are often impossible for hunters to find without trailing help.

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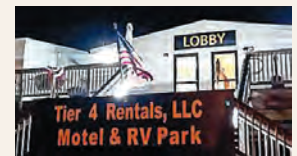
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WHERE TO FIND A TRACKING DOG?

If you do not personally know someone with a tracking dog, the most convenient way is to go to the Louisiana Blood Trailing Network on Facebook. There you will see a list of handlers/dogs broken down in each parish. There are upwards of 200 people listed, with multiple people available in each parish. You can contact them directly with the phone number listed, or make a post on the page giving the parish you are in and include as many details regarding the post shot signs you found.

In your preparations for deer hunting, it would be wise to already know a name and number or two just in case you need them.

WHY DOES COBB DO IT?

"I'm a Christian man and like to touch people in a positive way," Cobb said. "I get the same thrill from tracking another hunter's deer as I would if I killed a big buck myself. I get to re-live that excitement with every recovery that we make. Hunters are blessed to be able to hunt these animals, and we are lucky to live in a country where we can do this. God gave us these animals, so we need to do everything possible to find them if we are going to take their lives."

Cobb has gotten to meet hundreds, if not thousands, of people throughout his journey and that's one of the best parts of the job. He loves going to new hunting camps, meeting new people, and seeing the smiles on their face when his dog successfully recovers their deer. He has become lifelong friends with strangers he has met at the end of a blood trail.

In closing, Cobb said, "You have to have a passion to do this. I burn a lot of gas and have put countless miles on my truck, but I love it. Enjoy



Dusty McGehee is a native of Downsville and a 2006 graduate of Louisiana Tech University with a bachelor's in wildlife conservation. He and his wife Rachel have three kids.

“

I get the same thrill from tracking another hunter's deer as I would if I killed a big buck myself. I get to re-live that excitement with every recovery that we make.

each track job like it's your last because tomorrow is not promised. I have that mindset each time I drop the tailgate and let my dogs go to work."

And hundreds of hunters are glad he does. ■

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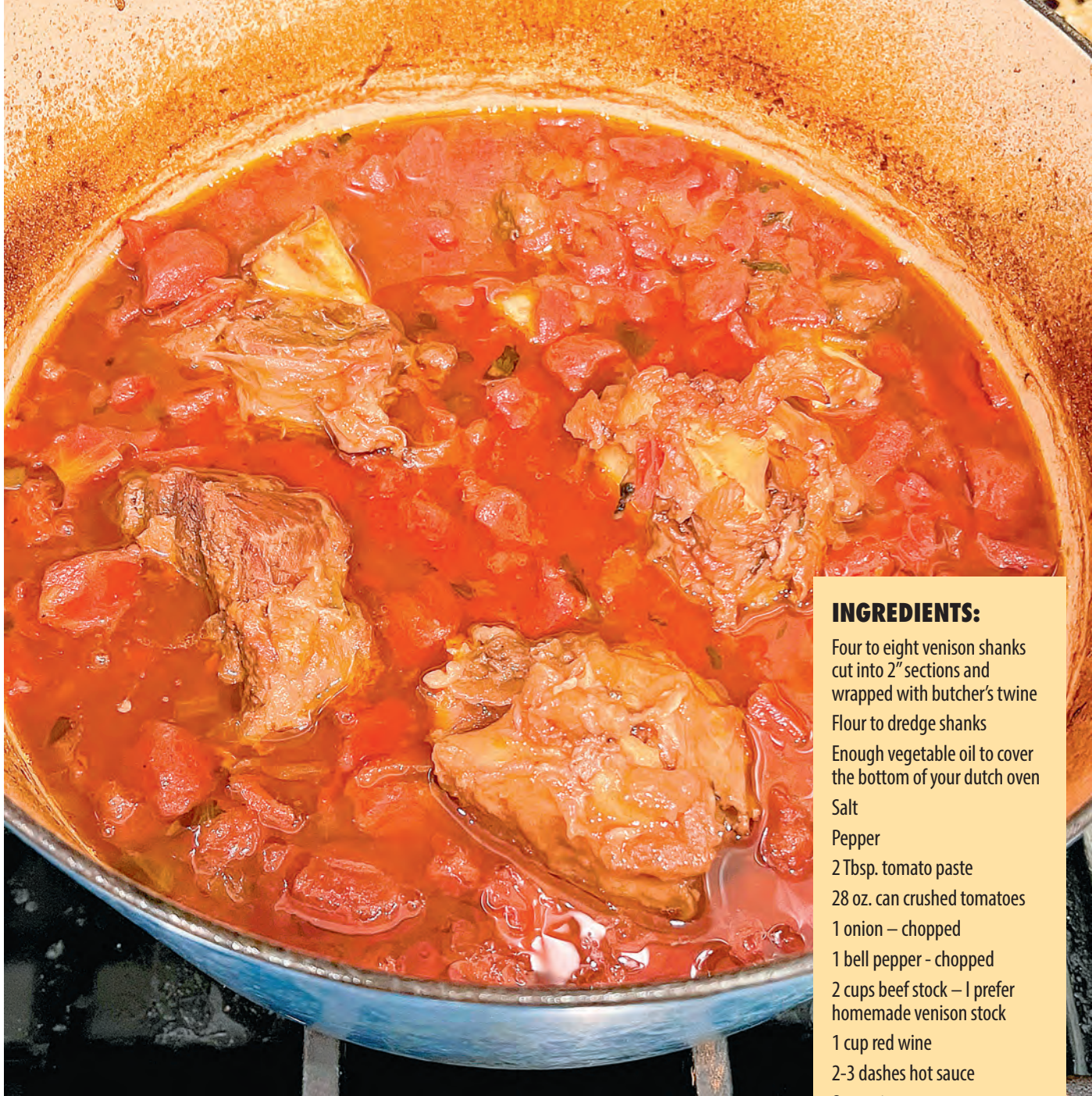
While the traditional Osso Buco uses veal, this recipe incorporates the most under used part of any deer... the shank. Time and time again, I have seen this part of the deer discarded in skinning sheds across the whitetail landscape or placed in the "grind" pile.

Once you try this recipe, I am confident that it will change your thought process and you can impress all of your friends at hunt camp. The shank is the part that exists below the knee of each leg of the deer.

I typically freeze my shanks whole. When I am ready to cook them, I cut them into 2 inch sections while partially frozen. This makes the cutting process much easier. I then wrap each section with butcher's twine to keep the meat from falling off of the bone during the cooking process. It can be served over mashed potatoes, polenta, egg noodles or rice.

Pork shanks can be substituted for the venison shank.





PREPARATION: Serves 4

1. Preheat your oven to 300 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Season your shanks with salt and pepper, then lightly coat your shanks in flour.
3. Using the vegetable oil, brown all sides of your shanks in cast iron dutch oven over medium heat.
4. Once browned, transfer the meat onto a plate.
5. Sauté your onions and bell peppers in the dutch oven until translucent. Add the remaining ingredients to the dutch oven.
6. Return the browned shanks to the dutch oven. There should be just enough liquid to cover the shanks (if not, you can add water to cover).

7. Cover and place in oven for 3-4 hours, depending on the size of the shanks, stirring occasionally.
8. Remove from heat.
9. Carefully snip the butcher's twine with a pair of scissors.
10. Serve over your desired starch.

TIP!

.....
 This makes an amazing "next day" breakfast served with scrambled eggs.

INGREDIENTS:

- Four to eight venison shanks cut into 2" sections and wrapped with butcher's twine
- Flour to dredge shanks
- Enough vegetable oil to cover the bottom of your dutch oven
- Salt
- Pepper
- 2 Tbsp. tomato paste
- 28 oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 1 onion – chopped
- 1 bell pepper - chopped
- 2 cups beef stock – I prefer homemade venison stock
- 1 cup red wine
- 2-3 dashes hot sauce
- Seasoning to taste
- Prepared starch of choice

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

- Dutch oven
- Butcher's twine

STICKS & STRINGS ➤



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

Crossbows can shoot faster and farther than ever before, but is that necessarily a good thing?



CROSSBOWS: FASTER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

In recent years, crossbow design technology has exploded. They are faster and more accurate than ever. For the most part, this is a good thing, with some exceptions.

The wider legalization of crossbows, even during the general archery season, means an aging population continues to enjoy archery hunting. The ease of transition from rifle to crossbow also brings firearms hunters into the woods earlier.

For the most part, this has been successful and a good thing, but it has caused some new challenges.

A crossbow doesn't require the hunter to draw it in the presence of game, but uses an arrow as a projectile. This requires archery shot placement, which can be confusing for first time archery hunters because they are holding and aiming what feels like a rifle.

Many of these firearms hunting converts are not familiar with archery shot placement or how arrows kill game. This leads to improper shot placement and often, to wounded animals. The key to preventing this is education about proper archery shot placement. Avoiding large bones and only taking shots that guarantee

double-lung or heart/lung hits are keys to consistently recovering game animals.

Another issue of late is crossbow hunters taking shots at longer distances than what is ethical. It is up to each hunter to decide what is an ethical shot for them.

Several years ago, a newcomer to the crossbow industry advertised their crossbow as "your next rifle," bragging of 3-inch groups at 100 yards. In my opinion, this was the worst thing to happen to our sport in a very long time.

Although the bow was more than capable of these tight groups, they didn't factor in the fact that animals rarely hold still. Also, wind drift impacts arrows severely and can lead to horizontal errors of several inches to more than a foot. This led to hunters pushing the limits of shot distances and many lost or wounded animals.

It also began an "arms race" among crossbow manufacturers that led to drastically increased speeds and extremely compact crossbows. Both of these come with a heavy price (both literally and figuratively).

As crossbows become more compact in width, this narrower profile causes several problems. Reverse limb crossbows

have extremely acute string angles which dramatically increases the chance for a dry-fire due to the arrow not being fully seated against the string.

Extremely narrow crossbows also cause extreme cable stretch that can lead to total failure and hefty repair bills.

As a general rule, the more compact the crossbow, the more frequently it requires string and cable replacement. With prices often at or above \$200 for this maintenance, this can add up to a lot of money.

And as speeds have increased to well in excess of 400 and even 500 fps, damage from dry-fires or failures is often catastrophic. Many of these spend more time in the repair shop than they do in the woods each year. For this reason, I don't recommend buying any crossbow that shoots in excess of 425 fps.

One manufacturer who has stayed above the fray is Mission Crossbows.



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.

CROSSBOW COST:

Crossbows have come a long way, especially since they've been legalized during archery season in many states. But the advancements in crossbow technology have come at a heavy price in more ways than just dollars.

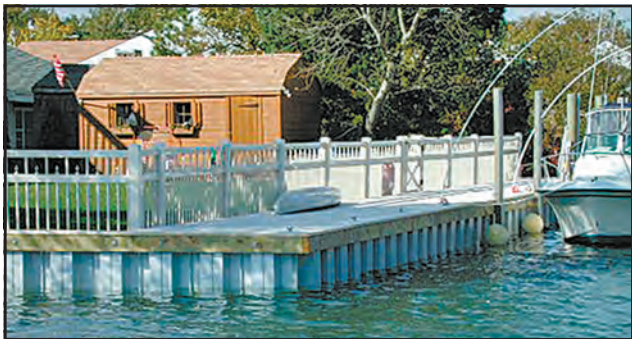
They have continued building high quality crossbows that are the most durable and maintenance-free on the market. Their bows come with a lifetime warranty on both ends of the bow, something offered by no other manufacturer to the best of my knowledge. Their bows will group under 1 inch at 100 yards, but they don't flaunt this fact. We see less of these for repair than any other brand, and they require less frequent maintenance. For these reasons, they are my recommendation when shopping for a crossbow. ■



Broken strings and cables are becoming more commonplace among extremely narrow crossbows.

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Jacob Robertson, a junior at Tioga High School, has emerged as a national contender in Archery Shooters Association competition.

BULLSEYE

TIOGA JUNIOR CONSISTENTLY HITTING THE MARK IN HIGH SCHOOL ARCHERY

A By Don Shoopman
Louisiana archer who finished in the Top 10 at a prestigious national tournament this year has his sights set on something even bigger — winning a national title.

Jacob Robertson, a 16-year-old junior at Tioga High School, lived up to some prophetic words this spring from his father when he finished 6th by shooting a 294 at a national tournament in Kentucky. Robertson, the son of Byron and Stephanie Robertson, had a sophomore year to remember.

"I told him once he gets past 290, he'll do it all the time," Byron Robertson said. "It was a mental block."

His son took those words to heart. The prediction boosted the high school student athlete's concentration and confidence.

The teen archer consistently shot in the upper 270s and 280s before the big breakthrough came in November, 2021, at the GCS Warriors Tournament in Alexandria. He broke 290 that weekend with a 291 to win the High School Division.

His father, a retired administrator for regional nursing homes, was right. More 290s and higher scores followed before and after the Archery in Louisiana Schools State 3D Tournament on Jan. 21 of this year in Alexandria, where his son shot 291.

ICING ON THE CAKE

The icing on the cake came during an eastern swing to Kentucky for Archery Shooters Association archery tournaments May 12-14. He was 6th out of 940 high school boys at the 2022 NASP Eastern National IBO 3D Challenge in Louisville with a



294, tying his personal best from a local tournament in January.

"He was the 6th highest shooter at nationals last year (season)," his father said. "I was just hoping he'd be in the Top 100. For a while there he was in first."

The younger Robertson said, "That was really crazy. That was like the peak. I mean, 6th in the country! That's crazy. It was great. It was quite an experience."

His goal is to join the "300 Club" — a perfect score — before he graduates from high school.

Robertson, who has earned approximately

Jacob Robertson, shown here in March 2022 after finishing second in the ALAS State Bullseye Tournament, has collected beaucoup trophies and other honors.

\$3,000 in scholarship money halfway through his junior year in high school, and THS have risen to the top in ALAS.

He went into 2022 ranked as the No. 1 ranked Louisiana high school archer based on max scores and was ranked 9th nationally. This spring he won an individual state championship while leading the high school to a state team title.

Robertson is proud of his accomplishments, as are his parents.

"I had a really great year, especially at the end of the year ... got up to 294," he said about his sophomore season of 2021-22.

LIGHTING IT UP

Robertson's parents gave him a bow when he was a fifth-grade student. His father said he thought his son would shoot targets around the house.

Now, five years later, Byron Robertson said, "He's lighting it up. This kid is a really, really good, good shooter. It's just a natural, God-given talent."

"Oh, yeah, I've come a long way," Jacob said, crediting three coaches.

He shoots ALAS events with a Genesis compound bow and ASA competitions with an Elite compound bow with large, long stabilizers.

Robertson learned the sport at each level, first under the tutelage of Richard "Coach T" Toepfer at Ball Elementary School, then Mary Mattox at Tioga Middle School, then Holly Pace at Tioga High School.

About Toepfer, he said, "He's a great archery coach there. He taught me how to shoot a bow."

Mattox, who also was his math teacher, helped him grow into the sport even more.

"I think my junior high coach got me up there. I really started seeing the jump in junior high school. That's when I really started getting everything down," he said, noting the sport has mushroomed in popularity the past few years at TJH, adding his freshman year about 50 students tried out while last year there were approximately 200.

A STRONG TEAM

He is gung-ho about THS, the defending state champs.

"I think this is the strongest Tioga's been in a while," he said about 2022-23. "I think Tioga will be even stronger this year."

He devoted all of his attention and extracurricular activities to archery his sophomore year in high school. That meant giving up his days and nights on the gridiron.

"I used to play football my freshman year," he said. "I just wanted to focus on archery."

With scholarship money in hand, Robertson is considering pursuing higher education and continuing his love for archery at the collegiate level.

"I'll definitely look for colleges," he said. "I'll definitely look at putting the money somewhere." ■



Robertson has earned approximately \$3,000 in scholarship money with his well-placed arrows in Archery in Louisiana Schools tournaments.



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SPECKS SAVE THE DAY

**WHEN DUCK NUMBERS THIN,
SPECKLEBELLIES PUT HUNTERS
BACK IN THE ACTION.** ■ By Darren Digby



The cries of airborne lulu chickens were barely audible above the howling wind as the few minutes to shooting time crept by one agonizing second at a time. Silhouettes of cupped wings went this way and that, in and out of our periphery as northerly gusts shifted their flights in almost kamikaze fashion. It looked to be one of those days where right place intersects right time, bringing hunters bliss only true fowl weather can deliver.

Indeed, ducks made their appearance as we'd hoped, though the action with them seemed to fizzle within the hour. Once our surroundings and beyond were well lit, it was apparent that there just didn't seem to be much for ducks using the complex of farms surrounding us.

On this particular morning, though, the geese were active with raucous barks and growls filling the air. Snows and blues did what they do, seeming to know full well the effective range of modern shotguns and minding that distance without fail.

However, the white-fronted geese or "specklebellies" continue to show far more propensity for the caller, skilled and even less so, and were giving our modest spread a long look. And thankfully so, as hunters setting up shop at the last stop of the Mississippi Flyway have come to rely on these birds more and more for bulking straps when duck activity is scarce. And with tremendous value on the dinner table, coupled with the reward of picturesque approaches when the hunter is on his game, specklebelly goose popularity with hunters is higher than ever.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Haiden Richard with Southern Parish Outdoors has tried plenty of different approaches to ducks and geese over the years spent chasing these birds across the greater Gueydan area, as well as Arkansas. Though his calling prowess speaks for itself as the reigning world duck and speck calling champion, not to mention Louisiana's current speck calling champion, Richard credits a key change in decoy philosophy to putting more geese on the strap lately.

"For years we hunted a lot of duck decoys with relatively few full body goose decoys, but we've changed over to mostly floater goose decoys lately," Richard said. "With so much more crawfish water all around these days compared to the past, we've had to adapt to be successful."

Indeed, as consumer demand for our native crustacean continues to grow, so does the acreage of managed water and rice stubble.

While at a glance this practice might seem friendly to visiting waterfowl, it's really of minimal value to them, especially ducks, given it's usually deeper than their preferred water depth and is under constant disturbance. Nonetheless, with the right decoy approach and effective calling, it can still be a productive habitat to hunt.

According to Richard, the decision to ditch most of the duck decoys in favor of more goose floater decoys has a number of advantages and has proven to produce geese while still being



attractive to ducks.

“When the wind blows, we’re getting a lot more motion on those goose decoys floating rather than on stakes,” he said. “Most ducks will gladly work a spread of goose decoys, there’s really no reason to even have many duck decoys at all.”

To the contrary, it can often be difficult to get a goose to work a spread of mostly, if not solely, duck decoys.

“Those larger floaters really stand out from a distance, and we’re seeing great results with the specks,” Richard said, noting that wind is critical to getting motion in the floating spread. Without ample wind, floaters can really suffer with a lack of realism given no rippling in the water. As a result, hunters should prioritize any means possible of getting motion into the water when the wind won’t do it for you, be it jerk rigs or motorized decoys.



Darren Digby, an environmental engineer and USCG licensed captain, has been hunting in Louisiana since childhood. He lives in Baton Rouge with his wife Ella and their two kids.

FLOATERS ADAPT >

Geese save the day when the ducks aren’t flying and are a great bonus even when ducks are flying. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The better concealed hunters are, the better the specks come in. Keep your blind freshly brushed for every hunt.



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FLOATERS ADAPT

The author is also a recent convert to emphasizing floating goose decoy spreads after years of fighting overnight water level changes from a big rain when chasing ag land ducks and specks in Avoyelles Parish. This conversion came from a strategic change after observing a good wad of feeding specks in a crawfish pond late one morning driving in the area, as well as a matter of convenience.

Since properly anchored floating decoys will readily adapt to changes in water levels on their own, it makes for far less work on each hunt compared to tending full bodies. Too many mornings we'd show up at the blind only to waste precious pre-dawn time chasing down full body decoys that had blown off their stake from a big storm's wind, or floated off their stake from a spike in water level.

Changing over to a mostly floating spread of geese gives our setup a new look for working geese while also being attractive to ducks, with unmatched visibility from a distance.

Beyond the decoy strategy, Richard notes how critical properly brushed blinds are to hunters looking to capitalize on specks if the duck flight is slow. His operation is constantly refreshing cover at their pit blinds to leave nothing to chance when specks come low and looking.

"You've got to double down on your cover, even add panels over the top," Richard said, noting that ducks will often let hunters get away with poor cover, but specks leave much less room for error. That can't be over-emphasized.

In general, hunters accustomed to chasing ducks that are interested in upping their specklebelly game need to mind the details. Scrutinizing decoy placement and quality, blind brushing, and calling combine with greater importance when it comes to getting geese in close. ■

There's nothing better than shooting waterfowl, unless it's having a good retriever bring them in to you.



Where did those geese earn their stripes? There's some debate about that among hunters.

SPECKLEBELLY STRIPE DEBATE



Speck hunters are often quick to show off their call prowess in stacking what they claim to be mature birds sporting "barred up" chests, perceived to be the mark of old and wise birds.

Today's social media hashtags that include derivatives of "tar-belly" account for thousands of posts, seemingly all in an attempt to depict one's hunting expertise having fooled the old birds that earned their stripes from many a trip down the flyway.

But those who closely study the bird, though, might beg to differ with such an assertion. Research seems to indicate that a heavily blotched specklebelly is hardly a sure sign of maturity.

"We know they're not like growth rings on a tree. It's not incremental with age," said Paul Link, LDWF's Research Program Manager at the Rockefeller Refuge. "Picture comparison one year to the next on our collared birds can even reveal fewer bars appearing on the bird's chest from the prior year."

As part of his exhaustive research efforts involving banding, collars and transmitter systems, Link has handled thousands of specks and notes there really isn't an easy way for most hunters to discern maturity on a harvested bird in hand.

"An older bird can just as easily be without bars entirely, though a young of the year speck will certainly be without any bars or patching on its first trip southward," he said, noting that it's not until its first molt on return to the breeding grounds that bars will begin to show.

Though the bars tend to get all the hunter attention, it's in fact the bird's mandible strap that is visible where the beak meets the head that gives the namesake "white-front" to the bird's appearance. Link notes that sometimes that band of white can bleed further up on to the bird's face in older birds, but even then is still not a definitive indicator of maturity. ■

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The advertisement features a bright yellow background with a red and green border decorated with poinsettias. At the top, the brand name "BLACKWELL'S" is written in large, white, outlined letters. Below it, the slogan "Work, Play HUNT" is displayed in green and white. The main product is a 2022 L3 Landmaster utility vehicle, shown in a camouflage pattern. A price tag of "\$7500" is prominently displayed in a green oval. Logos for American Landmaster and Kohler Engines are included, along with the text "Made in the U.S.A.". The website "www.blackwellsoutdoor.com" and contact information "106 Market Street | Hammond, LA 70401 | 985-542-7702" are provided at the bottom. A smaller image of the vehicle is shown in the bottom left corner with a "SEVERAL AVAILABLE" starburst graphic.



NET IMPACT

PINTAIL STUDY DESIGNED TO SHOW HOW SPRING MIGRATION IMPACTS REPRODUCTION.

■ By John Flores



Paul Link sat quietly in his blind overlooking a strip of shoreline along one of the wetland impoundments on the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge.

HE'D BEEN BAITING THE LOCATION WITH A HALF-TON OF RICE A NIGHT FOR SEVERAL WEEKS.

Meanwhile, over 30 volunteers and waterfowl biologists were assembled a mile and a half away waiting along a levee as the sun was setting.

A text message from Link came to the vehicle where myself and two of the biologists sat with the windows down, in spite of a squadron of marsh mosquitos on the attack. The short, redacted version of his message was essentially we made too

much noise deploying and our vehicles and trailers loaded with empty crates spooked the ducks he'd been watching off the bait.

The late afternoon in mid-January was quiet with no wind. The kind of quiet where the sound of voices and activities carry in the distance. Particularly the sound of clanking trailers pulled by pickup trucks on a limestone and gravel levee road. So just like that, the whole event went up in feathers in all directions.





Pintails in flight. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Wintering pintails are found in abundance in southwest Louisiana. One of the geographic locations of the TAMU-Kingsville study.

SHOOT IT!

Link waited to see if the ducks would come back and rush the bait in the twilight. His next message was, “I’m looking at a big black blob, slowly approaching the bait. Don’t know if I should fire the net. What do you think?”

The two biologists I was with both agreed, saying to one of the lead volunteers who was texting Link back and forth, “Just tell him to shoot it.”

The effort it takes to scout a site and bait it for days, inconspicuously set up a rocket net, organize volunteers, plus schedule other biologists to assist with banding is a huge undertaking. Link knew it would be days if not weeks before he could assemble such a platoon for another attempt. And then, it might be too late in the winter.

He fired the net!

A dust cloud rose off the levee road as we sped to the bait site, where upon arrival the crew of volunteers went to work. Much of the big blob Link saw was now captured in the net.

The initial moments seemed both frantic and chaotic, but soon settled into a rhythm. The shot hit its mark. The net was full of ducks. You can’t hide experience when it’s placed in positive motion. And then, soon the net was cleared and void of

ducks as the crew worked effectively.

The next phase consisted of segregating the ducks by species and then separating them one step further into crates containing just males and others holding just females for banding purposes. In the crates were blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, northern shovelers, and pintails.

It was the pintails that were of most importance to the massive effort. According to Link, pintails are one of a handful of species that didn’t rebound following the wet cycle on the prairie, where their populations have been on a slow decline for a number of years.

As a result, pintails became the impetus for a Texas A&M University-Kingsville study by Doctoral Candidate Georgina Eccles, titled, “Comparing spring migration strategies of northern pintails originating from different wintering grounds.”

The research is a large, five state three-year collaborative effort, where biologists from participating states place light-weight solar powered GPS/GSM transmitters onto pintails in order to closely track their northerly spring migration. The five states taking part in the study include Arkansas, California, Louisiana, New Mexico and Texas. The goal of the pintail transmitter study is to learn how spring migration impacts reproduction in pintails.



John Flores was enticed in 1984 to move to the Sportsman’s Paradise. The author spends much of his free time writing about and photographing the state’s natural resources.

LARGE PLAYER >

LARGE PLAYER

Because of Link's skill at catching waterfowl using a rocket net and extensive experience deploying transmitters, Louisiana has become a large player when it comes to participation in the important study. For each of the past three years, he and his team have attached 35 units annually. What's more, the information biologists hope to gain from the study is crucial.

Link, Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge's Research Program Manager, said, "They're very early nesters and we've lost a lot of CRP and a lot of native prairie, along with wetland drainage. The Federal wetlands, the first ones that thaw in the spring, are the easiest to drain."

"So, pintails are fighting the ice line getting up north really early and not finding the quality wetlands they once did," Link continued. "And of course, grasslands are becoming increasingly sparse. A lot of pintails are nesting in croplands just because there's not a lot of grass left or a lot of native prairie."

A major result biologists are seeing from the poor habitat conditions is low reproductive effort by pintails. A lot of them, Link said, aren't even attempting to nest. Moreover, pintails don't

have a lot of re-nesting propensity like mallards do. He refers to it as a "one and done" type thing. Essentially, when pintails get to the prairies and the wetland conditions aren't perfect, a lot of them forego reproduction and migrate further north. That's a major reason numbers are down.

By conducting the study on such a large geographic scale, what researchers hope to learn is if certain groups of pintails are doing better than others. Link points out that Arkansas's habitat is doing a lot better than Louisiana and Texas habitats. Therefore, one of the questions is, are certain wintering areas sending birds north in poor condition versus others that might be doing better?

From her TAMU-Kingsville Doctoral Candidate bio, Eccles's research focuses on comparing spring migration strategies in northern pintails that originate from different wintering regions across North America to identify key stopover sites during migration and therefore connect decision making to reproductive success.

Link hopes the answers will help biologists target conservation activities and enable them to figure out what's broken and what they can do to fix it. The long-term populations of pintails

LDWF Biologist Paul Link bands a blue-winged teal. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** LDWF Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge Research Program Manager secures a GPS/GSM Transmitter harness to a pintail hen.



has a lot to gain if this study's results can help.

Over the years, most of the transmitters Link has deployed on waterfowl have utilized a traditional neck and body loop strap harness, which have pros and cons. Ducks go through periods of rapid weight loss, particularly during incubation and molt, and a subsequent period of fattening up. These physiological changes require straps to have a reasonable amount of flexibility.

Though harness straps have come a long way over the years, four years ago Link worked directly with an automotive elastic company specifically for the pintail project. Since then, other biologists have picked up on the harness.

"It's really narrow," Link said. "It's elastic and therefore affords some flexibility throughout the annual cycle the birds go through. We're getting a lot of hunter recoveries and they're not having the issues we typically get with a solid piece of material that has no stretch, so we're seeing these are doing a lot better."

Link has also been working with LDWF State Wildlife Veterinarian Jim LaCour on developing semi-surgical methods of attaching transmitters to waterfowl. The semi-surgical process shows great promise especially as micro-technology advancements continue to improve.

Eccles's pintail study completed its final year this past spring. Hopefully the results will give waterfowl experts the insight to help give a boost to future pintail populations. ■



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FLYING UNDER THE RADAR

WOODCOCK ATTRACT MORE HUNTER ATTENTION THAN ONE MIGHT THINK

A By Kinny Haddox
mid the midst of the action in Louisiana's woods this time of year, a group of hunters fly under the radar chasing a bird that usually flies under the radar.

Based on annual LDWF hunter surveys, there are about 5,000 Louisiana hunters who go after a different kind of migratory bird each year — woodcock. The 2022-2023 Louisiana woodcock season runs from Dec. 18 - Jan. 31. The daily bag limit is three with a possession limit of nine. Shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

One of those avid woodcock hunters is Oscar Long of Baton Rouge. Long started "shooting" woodcock when he was just a youngster. He and his father scared up woodcock when they were hunting rabbits and, since they both use the same type of habitat, that's the way many other hunters got started too.

Today, Long hunts with dogs and has perfected his techniques in taking woodcock as the main target. He got his own dog and got serious about the sport 20 years ago.

"To really get serious about the sport, you need a good dog," Long said. "But you can just walk the woods and kill woodcock, too. It's not as easy, but if you get in the right areas and keep your eyes open, you can still do pretty good."

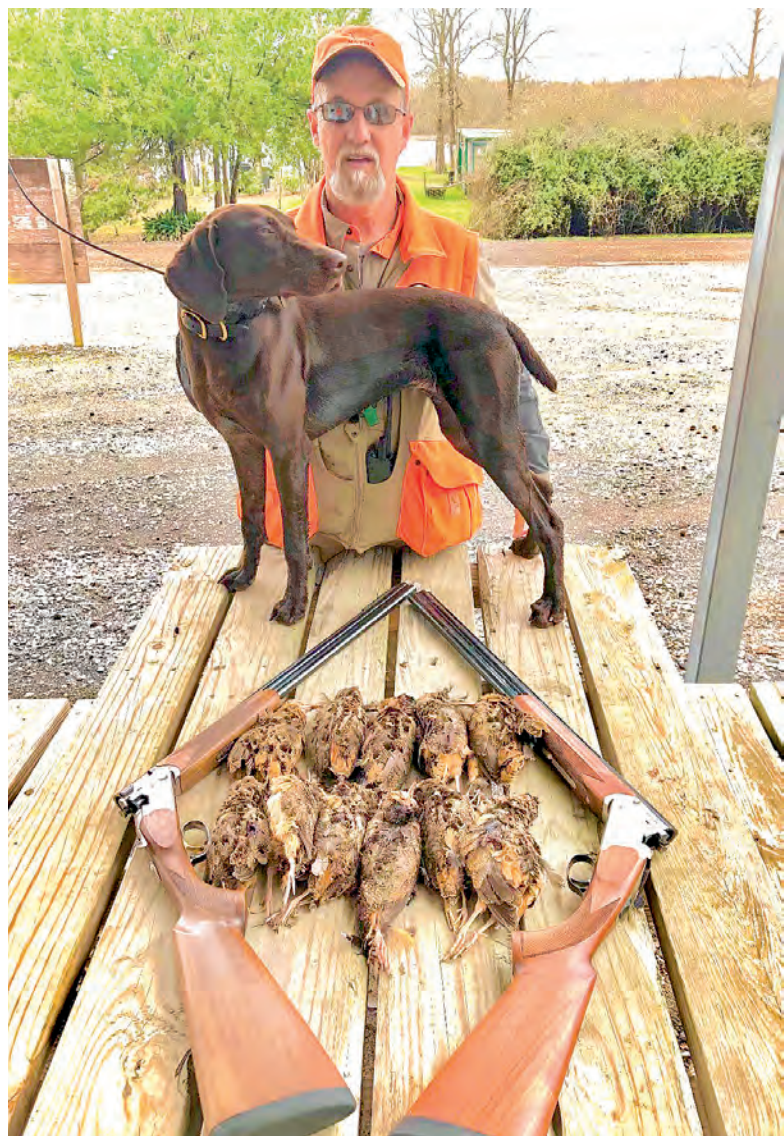
PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Long lives near two of what he calls "the best overwintering spots in the country" for woodcock, Sherburne WMA and Indian Bayou National Wildlife Refuge. He says if hunters spend a little time scouting and find areas the birds are using by watching the edges of openings at first light and last light, they can narrow down the search a whole lot. And be aware they like to stay in really moist areas with the thickest edge cover they can find.

"You can walk the woods and jump shoot them, but you are at the mercy of being lucky and just walking up on them," he said. "Scouting is a big help and paying close attention is, too. They hold really tight to cover and they are really camouflaged well. You can walk right by one five feet away. That's where a good dog comes in; either a dog to flush them or point them. That's a big help."

One thing that can help woodcock walkers is the fact that normally when they flush, they only fly 30 or 40 yards before they land again. Watch them closely and you can be better prepared the second time you encounter the bird.

Long recommends shooting the same type of setup you use for doves. He shoots a 28 gauge with 7 ½ or 8 size shot.



Oscar Long and Remi with the results of a successful hunt for Long and some friends.

BANDING PROGRAM

Louisiana has an extensive banding program for migratory waterfowl and it helps immensely with data about woodcock. Long has killed several banded woodcock that have made the trip north and back south several times. Last season, he actually killed a banded bird that had been banded right there on Sherburne just a month before. That one didn't get to make the trip back north, he said.

Louisiana has some of the highest numbers of wintering woodcock in the United States. Several WMAs, national forests and wildlife refuges, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' lands, as well as private lands, are managed to enhance woodcock habitat and hunting opportunities. According to the LDWF, Louisiana consistently has more hunters who spend more days afield hunting woodcock than any other southern state. Based on annual LDWF hunter surveys, that average of about 5,000 hunters harvest more than 22,400 woodcock each season. ■

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT >



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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: FOX SQUIRREL

The fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*), is the largest species of North American tree squirrels.

Throughout the American south, fox squirrels live in relative harmony with other squirrel species like the gray and red squirrel, but they are physically quite different.

Fox squirrels are considerably larger than those other squirrels. And while they sometimes have the same color patterns as the smaller squirrels, fox squirrels can vary widely in color. They have the most varying color patterns of any mammal native to North America.

Even fox squirrels born in the same litter can be vastly different than their siblings. Some are pure white, others pure black — except for having white noses and ears. Others are a combination of gray, red, silver, yellow and brown.

Gray and red squirrels are often seen in pairs or groups of three or four, but it's rare to see a fox squirrel that isn't alone. Somewhat anti-social except during breeding season, they rarely mingle or fight with other squirrels. They don't seem to mind when they're approached

by other squirrels. However, they tend to carry on their way alone after a short visit.

They eat a wide variety of foods including acorns, pecans, peanuts, corn, wheat, bulbs, roots, pine seeds, insects, bird eggs, berries and fruit. They bury a good deal of food in large caches — mainly acorns and other nuts, all still in the shell where they'll keep fresh for extended time periods.

THEY LIKE BEING GROUNDED

For a tree dwelling animal, fox squirrels spend a surprising amount of time on the ground and are often observed hundreds of yards away from the nearest timber during their daily routines. They do prefer to nest in trees, building their nests quite a bit higher than other squirrels. Some nest in the hollowed out cavities of trees, while others build nests out of leaves, twigs or pine straw in the crooks of mature trees.

Unlike other squirrels, fox squirrels avoid thick wooded areas with lots of underbrush. They prefer mature pine trees, or a mixture of hardwoods

and pine trees with lots of open space between them.

They are highly coveted by hunters, and are known as the trophy of all small game animals. Due partly to their solitary nature, they are much harder to hunt than gray or red squirrels. Those specifically targeting fox squirrels can sometimes go for days without spotting a fox squirrel, all the while feeling covered up with gray squirrels.

In the wild, fox squirrels generally live between 8 and 12 years, and those in captivity have lived as long as 18 years. Their mating season runs from mid-December through early January. This is often called "the other rut" by hunters, because it generally happens slightly later than the whitetail deer rut. Fox squirrels have a second mating season each year, mostly in June or early July. ■



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

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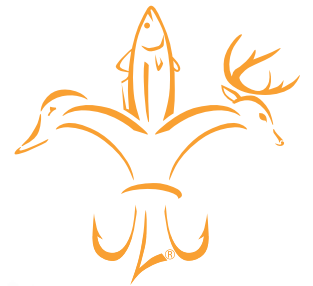
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Hunter Rivers

After a solid week of scouting, Hunter Rivers killed this buck on Clear Creek Wildlife Management Area on Nov. 6. The 4 ½-year-old deer scored 124 7/8.

ANGLER OF THE MONTH

Khanh KB Huynh

On Oct. 9, 2022, Khanh KB Huynh was fishing out of Myrtle Grove on a windy day when he landed some beautiful flounder on a solo trip.





**SPECKLED TROUT ANGLERS
RECALL THIS YEAR; DISCUSS
HOPES FOR 2023.**

**LOOKING
BOTH
WAYS**

■ By Jon Miller

It is helpful to look back at where we have been as a clue to *WHERE WE ARE GOING.*

For instance, this is very practical advice when traveling through the marsh, because if there is a lot of mud in our wake, then we may be calling Sea Tow if we do not turn around quickly.

It is also useful advice for fishery managers and anglers who are regular observers of the environment and the fishery resources.

I fished less frequently in 2022 than in past years due to personal and work obligations, and so I averaged around two trips per month instead of four. Less fishing trips in 2022 was a commonly mentioned occurrence for others across social media with high gas prices often stated as a cause. The times I did fish, I caught numbers of legal speckled trout around my average or below average as compared to 2020 and 2021. That is not a scientific analysis of trout numbers because the infrequency of my trips would have impacted my ability to find them quickly on a given day. However, I can remember a time when schools of legal sized trout were easy to find, whether or not I had fished that area a week before.

I know how the year was for me, but I wanted to know what other anglers experienced in 2022 and how they feel looking ahead to 2023, so I asked four top speckled trout anglers to get their opinions. Following are their thoughts.

JOHN PUCHEU

One of the most successful anglers I know is John Pucheu, and I asked him for his observations about 2022. Pucheu has his boat hanging in Delacroix and that is his base of operations. Unlike me, Pucheu's trips did not diminish in 2022 and so he can make a better judgement of how fishing was in 2022 compared to previous years.

For the last 15 years, Pucheu has kept a running record of the number of trout harvested from his boat. In the first nine months of 2022, he and his friends harvested 1,750 trout. His boat's average annual harvest is around 2,100. He expects a better than average fall season, and believes his harvest for 2022 could reach as much as 2,500.

Pucheu releases trout over 20 inches and while his overall trout numbers are as high as ever, he has released fewer 20-inch and over trout in 2022 than in the previous year. He released around 20 trout over 20 inches in the first nine months of 2022. However, Pucheu caught many trout in the 18- to 19-inch range over this period of time, he said.





CHAD GONZALAS

I also talked with a rising star in inshore fishing, Chad Gonzalas. Gonzalas got his own boat in 2020 and with that purchase he began fishing regularly. He has become well known on social media for his catch numbers and the size of his speckled trout. Gonzalas attributes his rapid growth in fishing knowledge and expertise in part to the courses on LAFB Elite, which is a local business created by Devin Denman.

Gonzalas has his boat at the Hopedale Marina in St. Bernard

In 2022, Chad Gonzalas taught his mother Victoria how to catch big speckled trout on topwater baits. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Cliff Hall, on left, had a great spring of 2022 catching nice speckled trout in shallow lakes.

Parish and fishes about three days per week, mostly around Hopedale, Shell Beach, and further south. For Gonzalas, 2022 has been his best year so far. He thinks this is partly due to his increasing growth curve in knowledge and skills. For one, he has become proficient with hard baits such as jerk baits and topwater baits, which he believes led to catching even more large trout.

CLIFF HALL

I then talked with Cliff Hall, who has fished most of his life in South Louisiana, including years of experience fishing inshore waters. Hall had the joy of getting a new boat in 2022, but like me he was not able to fish as much as he would have liked. He mainly fishes around Bienvenue, the MRGO (Mississippi River Gulf Outlet) and out from Hopedale Marina. For him, the trout fishing in 2022 did not feel as productive as previous years. That stems in part from lackluster winter and early spring fishing around Bienvenue and the MRGO rocks, where the trout did not show up in the same numbers as the last two years.

In the spring, his success improved with trips from Hopedale Marina, but he was not able to fish the summer season.



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

DON BALIUS >

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DON BALIUS

I talked with Don Balius whose home port is Biloxi, Miss., and he primarily fishes the Mississippi Gulf Coast Islands and the Biloxi Marsh in Louisiana. While Balius has not seen any tagging or tracking data supporting this, he believes that some of the trout on the nearby Mississippi Islands of Cat and Ship Island originated in Louisiana because of the islands' proximity to the Biloxi Marsh. Similarly, I also believe that trout growing up in the Biloxi Marsh find that the closest high salinity habitat is at Cat Island and Ship Island, and as they mature, they will gravitate toward high salinity habitats. Therefore, what happens on those islands can tell us something about what is happening in Louisiana. Balius had an average year at Cat and Ship Islands and in the Biloxi Marsh. He reports that 2021 was a better year for numbers of legal trout.

To better analyze 2022, I also asked the anglers to break down their experiences by season, their observations of bait fish, numbers of fish other than speckled trout, and observations of water quality and habitat changes. It is worth mentioning that these anglers almost exclusively use artificial baits.

WINTER

With the exception of Chad Gonzalas, the others said they experienced a below average start to 2022. I also found myself falling into that group. Gonzalas was more enthusiastic about the start of the year, but he is possibly also the most enthusiastic person in the group, so any day on the water is a good day. Hall and I found the numbers of trout around Bienvenue and in the MRGO to be quite depressed compared to the previous few years. Balius and Pucheu said they struggled to find concentrated trout in January and February in Mississippi and Delacroix. Pucheu suggested that Delacroix fishing suffered from unusually cold water temperatures that dropped into the mid 40's.

SPRING

Once March and April came, we all saw the trout fishing ramp up. Pucheu was slaying trout on oyster beds in Delacroix and Balius was finding success every trip at Ship Island. Hall, Gonzalas, and myself were fishing from Hopedale with good catches across a wide area from Lake Robin to Lake Borgne.

Like many other islands, Martin Island in the Chandeleur Sound is badly eroded and only a small portion of the island is above the waterline. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** James Helmer and his daughter, Allie, 10, with a nice trout caught out of Sweetwater Marina in Delacroix.



SUMMER

Balius had an incredible start to the summer, catching big spawning females in early June on Ship Island. For example, on June 4 he caught 21 trout, of which the smallest was 19.75 inches, and two were over 6 pounds. The largest trout was 6.5 pounds. Likewise, Pucheu found good numbers of trout in Breton Sound, and Gonzalas had his best summer for larger fish using jerk baits and fishing around rigs in the large lakes. I was most successful catching trout over oyster beds south of Hopedale or in the Biloxi Marsh. I also found more legal sized trout under flocks of birds this year than I have for several years. My biggest problem were dolphins, who would rush to me whenever I found a school of trout, which of course scared away the school.

FALL

Everyone I talked with had a slow September and found the trout to be quite scattered, allowing us only a few catches, if any, at each spot. That is so typical of September that I would worry if it was different. Gonzalas did limit out one day in mid-September, so even that was possible if you worked hard enough. In October, the fishing was beginning to improve and everyone was convinced that the signs pointed toward an excellent rest of the 2022.



A LITTLE LAGNIAPPE >

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Many anglers have noted that the numbers of redfish seem much lower in 2022.

A LITTLE LAGNIAPPE

Bait fish — By everyone's observations, 2022 was a banner year for the bait. We were all amazed by the vast numbers of shrimp, pogies, mullets and other species. I think the high numbers of white shrimp in the summer was the cause of my increased catches of legal sized trout under flocks of seagulls. I also attended a spectacular event in the MRGO put on by bull redfish, large jack crevalle, and dolphins. They were crushing large pogies across an area 200 feet in diameter while I floated on top of them. The large numbers of bait is one of the reasons this group is enthusiastic that winter of 2022 will be better than average for trout fishing.

Other species — Many anglers have noted a lack of redfish in 2022, and that was mentioned by Pucheu and Hall.

I also believe that the numbers of redfish are significantly reduced, especially the slot size. I rarely caught a redfish this year while trout fishing and that was affirmed by Pucheu and Hall.

Strangely, I found 2022 to be an unusual year for large numbers of bull black drum. I could catch several drum per day in the 30-35 inch range along the MRGO rocks while fishing jigs for trout. Those are massive fish to land with medium action

gear, but I was glad to see their abundance. However, like the redfish, I did not catch many smaller sized drum.

We all noted that we caught many more flounder this year as well. Hall said he caught more flounder in 2022 than he caught in total from the last five years.

Similarly, but with less celebration, the Louisiana anglers observed a spike in gafftopsail catfish, aka gaff top. These slimy rascals were roaming the marsh and lakes in large schools and often in the three to four pound size range. There were so many times when for the first 10 seconds of a hookup I was hopeful that I had found a 5-pound trout, only to get the slimed line treatment instead.

Environmental changes — All the interviewees noted that the water quality in the later half of 2022 was better than normal, most likely due to the low Mississippi River flow. The river condition is also allowing the salinity to increase, which will make the upper estuary more comfortable for trout this winter. Conversely, I hope that it doesn't kill off too many marsh bass or the salinity sensitive grasses.

A number of us noted that some of the named inshore islands appear badly eroded this year. We observed that Brush Island, Martin Island, and Deadman's Island all appear to be half the size they were in 2021. This destruction may have been another

result of Hurricane Ida. Pucheu mentioned that he is seeing the most marsh loss in Delacroix around the Lake Batola area.

PREDICTIONS FOR 2023

As a group, we are feeling enthusiastic about a great start to speckled trout fishing in 2023 because of the low Mississippi River and the abundance of bait species. For myself, I am looking forward to starting 2023 by throwing jerk baits and corkies along the MRGO and floating the shallow lakes with topwater baits. ■

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Capt. Adam Jaynes taking a photo with a trophy trout that was landed while fishing during a bluebird sky day.

BIG OR A BUNCH?

That's the question for Big Lake speckled trout fishermen

Oh By Capt. Adam Jaynes
sweet wintertime is finally here! I know that really does not even sound right, but this truly is the best time of the year and that is not just because of Christmas! Our drought conditions in 2022 have us poised to have the best wintertime fishing that we have had in years.

I think one of the biggest decisions an angler has to make when launching the boat in December, or any of the winter months for that matter, is whether or not to try and target big fish or to try and catch as many fish as possible. It is not impossible to do both, although if desiring to catch a trophy you will typically have to put your time in.

The definition of "trophy trout" is highly subjective and varies tremendously from one angler to the next. To me a trophy trout is an eight pound or better fish. I have also taken people fishing that to them a trophy was a four pounder and there is nothing wrong with that. It is all in the eye of the beholder.

NO, SLOWER

In regards to the "how to" most have heard to slow down and then to fish even slower.

Slowing down or fishing slower is often times effective and necessary starting in December and extending through February, however that is not always the case. Paying close attention to the water temperature, bait activity and how you get bit will be the greatest indicators as to what speed you should be working your lure.

A quick generalization is if the water temperature is 60 degrees or more, then you will likely be able to get the trout to bite a top-water or lures worked at a quicker, more aggressive tempo. If the water temperatures are between 50 to 60 degrees then it is most

likely time to start slowing down the retrieve and/or fall rate of the lure you are fishing. Using your favorite soft plastic rigged on a lighter jighead, a Corky Fatboy or a MirrOdine are some key players that come to mind. I would recommend that you still vary the retrieve speed until you start getting bit.

Fishing with water temperatures less than 50 degrees I would recommend preparing mentally for a tough day of trout fishing although there are some banner days mixed in with those cold temperatures.

TROPHY POINTERS

There are a few key points to consider when looking for the spot that you are going to catch your "trophy."

First, there really has got to be deep-water access close by. Trout will retreat to warmer, deeper water when they are not feeding, so this point is rather critical.

Secondly, bait activity needs to be present. A Cajun is not very likely to stick around a crawfish boil that has run out of crawfish and beer. Well a trophy trout is not very likely to stick around on a flat that has nothing on it to eat, either. A couple of well known, and for good reason, locations on Big Lake are both Joe's Cove and Turner's Bay.

They both have quality deep-water access and are typically rather abundant in the food source department. Both offer opportunities for wade or boat fishermen, although I have a strong preference for wading. During the winter I also pay more attention to the solunar calendar than any other time of the year. Make sure you are where you want to be when the major is on and not running around from spot to spot.

Have confidence in where you are and what you are doing and be patient, the fish will show. ■

DULAC DANDIES

December is a good month to bring home the specks and reds

A By Don Shoopman
New Iberia angler eventually found his heaven on earth for catching speckled trout and redfish 35 years ago. And he's still finding happiness there.

Kevin Suit still goes to the Dulac area on weekends and days off every November and December. His hotspot is 2 ½ to 3 hours away, depending on if he stops along U.S. 90 East to stock up on fresh shrimp and breakfast biscuits at Dago's Mobil and Grocery in Lydia.

PRIME AREAS

It took Suit and his close friend Tim Markle of New Iberia six or seven hours to find the prime areas the first time they went in 1987.

They relied on a *Louisiana Sportsman* article that year, but unlike today, had no GPS or cell phone instructions for the trip south-east of Iberia Parish. After making their way to Four Point Landing along the Houma Navigation Canal at Dulac it took them a few hours by boat to get to what have become Suit's go-to "honey holes" around Bay Antoine, Bayou Sale and Marrone Bay.

"We've been on countless, countless trips down there and caught countless numbers of speckled trout and redfish," Suit said, warming up to his favorite subject besides bass fishing.

"There are bad days, but even the bad days are good," Suit said in late October, a few weeks after clinching Angler of the Year in the Louisiana Bass Cats.

When Suit's two sons, Ben and Zach, were old enough, they joined him on the many trips to the honey holes. They know the area as well as he does now.

He has taken many anglers as guests, including a local outdoors writer and his son.

"I do enjoy going down there," he said. "It a relaxing-type fishing trip. We catch a lot of fish and it's fun."

While the best time to fish it is the week before or the week after Thanksgiving, he said, December "is a good month."

"December's usually harder on the fishermen with cold mornings and nice days," he said. "It gets cold. But fishing's still good."

AFTER THE FRONT

The 63-year-old said speckled trout bite best after the first hard cold front and until the water temperature drops into the 50s. Redfish, he said, seem to bite all the time.

After this year, if new speckled trout regulations become law, it may take a little longer to get a limit of 13 ½-inch-plus speckled trout but they can be had. He knows from experience. To be safe, he said, they'll probably just keep speckled trout over 14 inches. Most of the speckled trout are in the 11- to 13-inch range, he said.

His top speckled trout bait is a VuDu Shrimp fished 1 ½- to 3-feet under a popping cork over oyster beds. Speckled trout



Kevin Suit of New Iberia holds a nice speckled trout he caught while fishing in the Dulac area.

seem to favor the natural colored VuDu Shrimp.

If they aren't biting under the popping cork, his sons favor fishing a Lemonhead, Shrimp Creole or Green Hornet colored Matrix Shad on a jighead. Avocado/red flake also works well.

Speckled trout will be under the birds, in front of drains or in the middle of the canal.

The Suits catch beaucoup redfish on VuDu Shrimp, too. Mostly, though, the main meal ticket is a fresh shrimp on a leadhead, which the boys use. But Suit prefers a Matrix Shad on a 3/8- or ¼-ounce jighead tipped with shrimp.

They've enjoyed hooking up with and landing triples — three at a time — many times.

And they'll keep going back for more this November and December. It's a good time for you to give it a try, too. ■

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.

CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

DEAR SANTA: DON'T SKIMP ON QUALITY AND DURABILITY OF KAYAK GEAR GIFTS

Whether shopping for yourself or dropping hints for your favorite Kris Kringle, these 12 ideas are something that can benefit all kayak anglers. I highly recommend shopping by utility, quality and durability rather than price. Quality gear is not always the most expensive.

Likewise, cheap gear is not always the best choice. Kayak fishing exposes your gear to harsh conditions where it is always subject to getting wet — either by design, or accident. If you fish saltwater, conditions are even less forgiving. Ask Santa for some of these items to make your kayak angling experience safer, more comfortable and successful.

1. PFD

You wouldn't buy a bargain parachute, so why scrimp on a PFD? Get a high quality, comfortable PFD that you will wear while fishing, foam vest, auto/manual inflatable, or a hybrid of both. Foam vests never fail, but can be hot and/or uncomfortable. Choose one specifically designed for kayak anglers. Inflatables are less bulky and therefore cooler and more comfortable. Quality inflatables are extremely reliable. Some companies offer hybrid foam vests that are less bulky and provide minimal floatation. In a true emergency, the vest can be manually inflated with the CO2 cartridge to add additional floatation.

2. SPORTS/POV CAMERA

Kayakers mostly fish single kayaks. There's not always someone close by to document your catch and if it is catch

and release, they'll never believe you. Whether full length videos or just a couple of good grip and grin shots, these tiny cameras are what you need. Most are waterproof and have interchangeable batteries. Models with remotes, or better yet, voice control, make them easy to use in a kayak.

3. VHF RADIO

Cell phones don't always have coverage in many fishing areas. Compact, hand-held VHF radios are great for convenience and safety. Waterproof as well as floating models are recommended. Those with an emergency light and GPS signal sending capability can be literal life savers. Maritime traffic uses VHF and Channel 16 is monitored by the Coast Guard. Several VHF weather channels keep you current on changing local conditions that can be critical for kayakers.

4. KNIFE ➤



When it comes to kayak fishing accessories, anglers should consider gear made to withstand the harsh elements encountered by being in an open vessel, close to the water. Any gear exposed to salt water should be thoroughly washed and dried after each trip.

4. KNIFE

A good knife can be used for cutting bait, rope, and in various emergency conditions. Look for one with a protective sheath that can be clipped to your PFD. Knives made from corrosion resistant stainless steel, or better yet, titanium coated, are a good choice. A blunt tip with only the edges sharpened makes them safer to handle.

5. LINE CUTTERS/SCISSORS

Most kayakers make several lure changes during the course of a fishing trip. Today's super lines demand a sharp edge to cut and trim. Specialty nippers and scissors are made just for that purpose. Some come with built-in retractors to keep them out of the way and from falling in.

Kayak fishing demands quality gear. Having your kayak rigged with components to make it more comfortable allows you to fish longer and more efficiently, thereby leading to more success.

6. DRY BAGS AND BOXES

These come in a variety of shapes and sizes and are great for keeping gear dry either on deck or stored in the hull. Make sure they are waterproof and not simply water resistant. Keys, wallets, phones and spare clothes all remain safe.

7. KAYAK LIGHT

Most states and common sense call for use of a white light when kayaking at night. Some brands also combine these lights with a safety flag for better daytime visibility. The waterproof LED lights last for several trips. Be seen, be safe.

8. PLIERS

A quality pair of pliers is useful for every trip. From removing hooks to clipping lines, keep a pair handy. Select an aluminum or stainless pair with good cutters and a stout jaw. Spring actions that keep the jaws open are a plus. Add a leash or retractor to keep them from heading to the deep.



9. HEADLIGHT

Fishing kayaks necessarily require lots of rigging and unrigging. Having both hands free makes this task much easier for those pre-dawn or nighttime hours. LED headights are compact and some models are USB rechargeable.

10. WATERPROOF TACKLE TRAYS

Lures are expensive and a wet tackle box can ruin them in a hurry. Several companies offer trays of various sizes that have O-ring seals to keep the contents dry. Look for boxes that offer configurable compartments to better organize lures of various shapes and sizes. Clear/translucent tops let you find specific lures easier.

11. EVA FOAM DECK

While not a necessity, these custom foam pads are popular with many kayak anglers. Precision cut kits are available to fit a variety of popular kayak brands and models. The foam deadens noises and makes the deck cooler in hot weather. From basic coverage to all-out custom patterns and colors, this deck foam makes your kayak stand out from the rest.

12. KAYAK SEAT CUSHION

Modern kayak seats are comfortable, but can still cause aches and pains on long trips. A good butt cushion makes all the difference in the world. Whether paddling or pedaling, the padding adds comfort and

in some cases, an inch or two of extra height. Also consider a companion lumbar support. The slight change in angle can alleviate back or leg pain, especially for pedal 'yakers.

All of the items listed above are available from several different manufacturers. Prices and quality may vary widely. Read reviews, ask questions on social media and shop the items in person if at all possible. You may not use all items on any one particular trip, but each can come in handy and help make you a better, more comfortable and successful kayak angler. ■

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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>.



THE ROAD ENDS HERE

THESE TWO PARKS EPITOMIZE LOUISIANA'S UNIQUE FISHING WORLD

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED STOPS: GRAND ISLE AND BAYOU SEGNETTE

GRAND ISLE STATE PARK

On Sept. 21, 2021, this sad message appeared on the Grand Isle State Park Facebook page: “Grand Isle State Park is currently closed to the public due to ongoing cleanup & repair efforts following Hurricane Ida. At this time, there is no estimated reopening date. If you have questions about existing reservations, please call Reserve America. Park staff cannot assist you with this information via telephone or email. We appreciate your understanding and hope to see you in the future. We’ll be back!”

Fortunately, they are almost fully back and while there is much to do, this state park should be totally back up and running bigger and better than before shortly.

“As far as we know, we should be pretty close to ready to open right after the first of the year or sometime within that period. As it stood through the summer, most useable housing was leased out to FEMA workers and others working on repair, but we are getting close to returning to normal operations,” said Clifford Melius, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Louisiana State Parks. “The good news is that what was destroyed is being made new again. Out of the rubble comes something better.”

There’s an old saying, “Since there is six times as much water as dry land on earth, any fool can plainly see that the Good Lord meant for man to fish six times as much as we works.”

No fisherman would argue with that. But if you apply that principle to the areas around Bayou Segnette and Grand Isle state parks in the lower reaches of south Louisiana, it would be “hundreds” of times more water than land, not just six. Such is the nature of this unique area of the coastal area of the state. This is the essence of fishing, Louisiana style.

Mother Nature’s marvels are on display here. But sometimes, so is her wrath. The barrier island of Grand Isle was ravaged by Hurricane Ida in 2021 when the hurricane made landfall near Port Fourchon on Aug. 29 with winds of up to 150 mph. Every single one of the Isle’s roughly 2,500 structures was damaged. More than 700 were totally destroyed and it was months before power was even restored. The Bayou Segnette area was blasted as well, although not as directly as the Grand Isle area. Damage was significant there, too.

All this left both of these state parks in dire need of repair. Fortunately those repairs have been, or continue to be made. If you visit, check on the latest status of things beforehand.

Here’s what visitors to these fantastic areas have to look forward to.

No boat? No problem. Adventurous fishermen wade right out in the Gulf and catch several species of fish, plus have a relaxing time on the water — or should that be “in” the water. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Janie Murphey shows off the variety of fish you can catch in Grand Isle.





BAYOU SEGNETTE STATE PARK

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 Email: bayousegnette@crt.la.gov

GRAND ISLE STATE PARK

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of guides are available for nearby inshore fishing or trips off-shore. It's a year round fishing paradise.

Birding enthusiasts will also delight in the beauty of the lagoons and the Gulf shore. This unique environment attracts numerous species of birds and other wildlife, so bring your binoculars or a camera to enjoy the opportunity to view nature unspoiled.

Unlike most parks, what you see is what you get. If you want to make a little side trip to an amusement park or museum, you are out of luck. It's Grand Isle and the Gulf. That's it. And that's what makes it special.

A couple of recent events like the Ride the Bull kayak tournament and the Island Strong Beach Fest "celebrates the resilience of our community and helps raise awareness for the work that still needs to be done for us to fully recover," said Grand Isle Mayor David Camardelle. "We also encourage you to come down to stay a weekend, book a fishing trip or patronize a local business. Everyone has a role to play in this recovery."



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.

BAYOU SEGNETTE >

Melius said that includes a new higher, more stable fishing pier that will be extended out even further, new bath houses and a new crabbing pier plus completely rebuilt structures. He said he appreciates people's patience as do the Grand Isle businesses and residents. People are already coming back and that's a great thing. Put this area back on your bucket list.

Fishermen can stay next to some of the best fishing in the world and have access to dozens of top charter trips or just go enjoy boating. With more than 280 species of fish and four seasons of fishing, Grand Isle invites anglers of all ages and skill levels to cast their line in the abundant, surrounding waters.

People who stay at the park are also located right down historic Hwy. 1 just past legendary fishing spots like Galliano, Golden Meadow and Port Fourchon. Launches for private boats and dozens

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BAYOU SEGNETTE STATE PARK

Fortunately, even though this park had hurricane damage, it got back up and running much quicker than its sister park. The park was closed with no electricity, minor flooding within the park grounds, minor damage to the group camps and cabins, and multiple trees down that had to be removed from the park.

Today, everything is operational and going strong and offering the best of everything. Just a fifteen-minute drive across the Mississippi River from New Orleans, a multitude of recreational opportunities awaits visitors of all ages — boating, fishing, camping, canoeing, hiking, picnicking, playgrounds and, of course, swimming in the wave pool, as well as an ecosystem that offers you the chance to spot plants, trees and wildlife from both swamps and marshland.

Both salt and freshwater fishing are available because of the park's unique location. From the boat launch, you may explore many areas not readily accessible by overland routes. Catches of bass, catfish, bream, perch, redfish and trout are common in the area.

On land, picnic areas are available for the whole family, and the playgrounds will delight the children. Group shelters are also a perfect spot for large groups to gather.

While it is a little late in the year to splash the day away in Bayou Segnette's popular wave pool, it is open during the warmer months of the year. Bayou Segnette also opened 16

One of the most unique overnight stays in the state park system is in one of the floating cabins at Bayou Segnette. **BELOW:** Just about everywhere you go at Grand Isle or Bayou Segnette you are on the water, including canals, cuts, bayous and the Gulf of Mexico.



new floating cabins in late 2016 that are a unique place to stay. The floating cabins, situated on the canal adjacent to Bayou Segnette, include two bedrooms, a full kitchen, living/dining area, and a screened-in porch overlooking the canal. Aluminum walkways surrounding each cabin provide opportunity for casual fishing, complete with an attached cleaning station. ■



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Louisiana
SPORTSMAN



CHRISTMAS TREE!

By Keith Lusher

HOW LOVELY A PLACE TO UNWRAP THE GIFT OF DECEMBER EAST PEARL CRAPPIE.

December and Christmas trees go hand in hand.

For John Guillot of Kiln, Mississippi, Christmas trees invoke an excitement that rivals times spent as a child anticipating unwrapping presents.

However, it's not a Christmas tree in the living room that excites Guillot; it's the one on his fishfinder.

Guillot fishes the East Pearl River and Lock One on the Pearl River Navigational Canal and said he's starting to see the Christmas tree pattern on his electronics with the cooler water temperatures. Guillot has been sac-a-lait fishing for 20 years and has developed a manipulative way to catch these fish by using a top-down approach.

"When I spot a school of crappie I always lower my jig down and stop about two feet above the first fish on top of the group, Guillot said. "This allows that fish to leave the school, which in turn, results in the group remaining undisturbed."

SEEING THE TREE

As the colder temperatures set in, Guillot said he's seeing a more pronounced "Christmas tree" arrangement of sac-a-lait, which fits his style perfectly. "It seems the fish that are more

active and ready to feed are higher up in the column leaving the inactive, smaller fish on the bottom where they are closer to cover," he said.

On a recent trip, Guillot was fishing with his friend Wayne Ulrich. The two were fishing the East Pearl River near Honey Island Swamp when his screen lit up with a distinct tree shaped school of fish.

"It was a very large eddy that formed in 30 feet of water," he said. "Two oak trees were sunk in the middle of the eddy and had a 12 to 15-foot gap between them."

SMOKED IT

Both John and Wayne were using Bobby Garland jigs in the Lights Out color. Guillot lowered his jig slowly down and when it was nine feet above the first fish on top of the school, the fish darted straight up and inhaled the lure.

"He smoked that jig," Guillot said.

As he was unhooking his fish, Ulrich dropped his tube jig down and the same thing happened; the top fish on the "tree" swam vertically and swallowed the jig.

John Guillot hoists a hefty Pearl River crappie out of an underwater top and into the boat. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** This underwater brushtop shown on the electronics is also stacked with crappie, making it look like a Christmas tree.



“Since they were swimming straight up, almost at ballistic pace, we would just boom them up, keeping their heads from turning until on the surface,” the sac-a-lait veteran said. With the fish ranging from 1 pound to 1.5 pounds, the ice chest filled up quickly. Now that’s a tree loaded with Christmas presents for a crappie fisherman!

The team loaded a 48-quart ice chest with sac-a-lait and continued to catch as the ensuing fish flopped on the carpet of his boat.

“It was a freaking awesome experience,” Guillot said.

THE SET-UP

While Guillot has an assortment of rods, line, and jigs in his arsenal, his preferred set-up when targeting stacked crappie is a 10-foot rod with a Tennessee handle.

“The Tony Edgar Signature Ozark Rods are my absolute favorite,” he said. For line, Guillot likes 10-pound Camo mono-filament by Mr. Crappie. He said the line is heavier pound test than needed but thinks it makes a difference when it sinks.

“The 10-pound test is not needed, but the extra water it displaces slows the bait’s sink rate,” Guillot said. “Also, the tubes are much less likely to spin on the way down.”

The tube Guillot speaks of is a 1.5-inch Southern Pro tube threaded on 1/32-ounce jig head. A BPS 1/20 Clam Shot is attached 4-5 feet above the hook. He adds superglue to the tube in case he runs into a frenzied bite; he won’t have to waste time re-adjusting his tube on the hook. To add flavor to the tube, Guillot uses a syringe to pump Slab Sauce into the tube body.

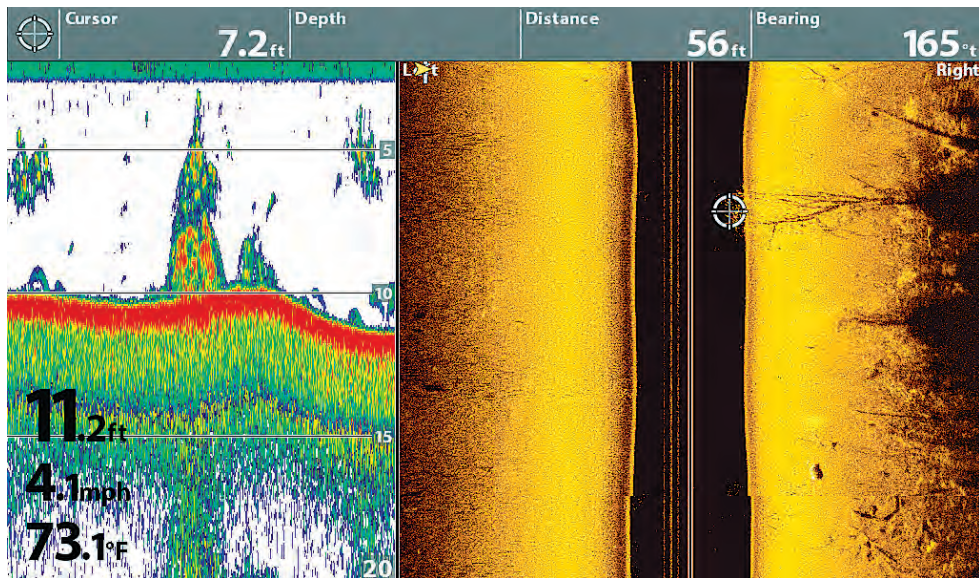
For electronics, Guillot operates Panoptix and turns the transducer to “LiveView Down” to watch the fish rise out of the pack.

“A fishfinder set to the Ice Fishing or Jigging mode will do the same thing,” Guillot said.

DISSECTING THE HOLDING PATTERN ➤



Keith Lusher Jr. owns and operates Northshore-FishingReport.com. He is the outdoor writer for the Slidell Independent Newspaper and host of the Northshore Fishing Report on WWL Radio.



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DISSECTING THE HOLDING PATTERN

When locating sac-a-lait in a Christmas tree holding pattern, water temperature is crucial. Guillot said he typically sees the phenomenon when the water column temperatures are fairly even at 60 degrees or lower. The larger fish will typically be located at the top of the “tree” — like the bright star topping off a holiday living room Christmas tree.

As far as why the larger fish are on top?

“I can’t say but I usually catch the bigger fish at the top and smaller at the bottom, so security comes to mind,” he said. “Maybe the smaller fish feel the need to stay close to the bottom where the structure is.”

While Guillot usually fishes the East Pearl River and Lock One in southeast Louisiana, he advises those looking for vertically stacked fish in December to target the deeper lakes like Toledo Bend and Lake D’Arbonne as well.

“If your presentation is good and you are quiet when landing your catch, to me, it’s the ultimate crappie fishing condition to find yourself in,” Guillot said.

Merry Christmas, crappie fishermen. ■



A hungry crappie races to hit a tube jig in the murky waters of Pearl River. **BELOW:** Keith Lusher, left, and John Guillot plucked these crappie “ornaments” right off the Crappie Christmas Tree.

LAKE CLAIBORNE CRAPPIE >



Get him in the boat! A happy angler lands another chunky Claiborne crappie.



FOLLOW THE MOVE

Crappie head for deeper water and things are getting right at Claiborne

D By Kinny Haddox
 on't look now, but the crappie are starting to head out to deeper water in Lake Claiborne near Homer. They aren't as frantic as Black Friday shoppers, but you know where they are headed. And things will only get better the next couple of months.

Lake Claiborne isn't one of Louisiana's waters that gets a lot of attention. But for the fishermen who know it, there's no better time than now and no better fish than crappie. You won't catch slabs like a lot of lakes, but there are plenty of pound and pound-and-a-half fish out there for the taking.

And one good thing about the Claiborne fish is that when they bite, they bite. Crappie on some lakes with high fishing pressure have started showing a disturbing trend. Fish there are spooky and often, even when you see them on the electronics, they'll just look at your bait and swim away.

Not so when things are right at Claiborne.

North Louisiana crappie guide Wesley Miller, known better as "Sasquatch", likes Claiborne this time of year for several reasons, including smaller crowds and good numbers of fish. But the fact

that they bite when you find them is high on that list, too.

"One good thing about Claiborne is they don't just get pounded like on some lakes, so they are not as soft of a bite or as spooky under good conditions," he said. "When crappie get stacked in the tops and the fallen timber this time of year, you can still rack up and catch an ice chest full of crappie in the deep water. There's a large area out here that has a lot of structure and the crappie tend to stay bunched up on that structure until they head to shallow water to spawn. You can catch them from 20-30 feet deep.

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

For that reason, using electronics to find tops isn't the only way

FISHING HOTSPOTS

to catch fish here this month. It's a great time to spider rig with several poles and several different baits. When you find the right depth and bait, put all the poles the same depth and use the same bait to increase your catches.

Claiborne crappie like small baits. Miller's favorite is a hair jig, but small plastics work also. Shad colors are always good. And live shiners are always a good bet.

If the fish aren't in the very deepest water yet because of warmer water late in the year, the same patterns still work, only in different areas. Shallower tops and sunken trees in the 15-20 foot water near deep water will hold fish and bait until they make the final move deeper. These spots are good to remember in the spring, too, because the fish move back to them before going shallow to spawn.

One thing Miller reminds people, especially in the deeper water, is to keep the bait above the fish. Crappie feed up and if it goes below them even six inches, they'll never see the bait. That holds true for crappie everywhere.

Claiborne is a great place to visit and spend a couple of days fishing. There is an excellent state park there and several good marinas. The state park offers a good ramp and parking area that is just a few hundred yards from where the fishing starts getting good this time of year. The lake covers 6,400 acres just south of Homer in Claiborne Parish. Additional ramps on the lake can be found at Port-Au-Prince area off Hwy. 146 and on the far north end off Hwy. 2 between Homer and Lisbon. You can find out more from Miller at Big Sasquatch Outdoors on Facebook. ■

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FOCUS ON DEEP DROPS FOR
BASS IN BUNCHES DURING
COLD WEATHER.

■ By John Felsher

LIFE ON
THE

LEDGE

John N. Felsher

When people began damming streams to generate hydroelectric power, control flooding or provide reliable water sources, the structures changed fishing forever. Anglers accustomed to fishing along shallow riverbanks needed to learn new techniques for catching bass in deep, open reservoirs.

Fortunately, advances in electronic technology helped anglers by giving them ways to examine bottom contours even in the deepest lakes. Today, sonar units can do so much more than simply determine the depth. Many high-tech units can display incredibly detailed information so anglers can find and target specific fish.

"I don't go anywhere without the Garmin Panoptix LiveScope (www.garmin.com) system," said Tyler Rivet, a Bassmaster Elite Series pro from Raceland. "It tremendously changed the way people fish. I grew up fishing in South Louisiana, where we don't have any deep reservoirs, so we fish shallow water along the banks. Now, we just pass over the brush pile and see it on LiveScope. We turn around and look at the screen to count all the fish we want to catch. It's insane."

FIRST, GET SONAR

In many ways, winter bass fishing resembles hunting. To catch fish, anglers need to find fish. Using quality electronics helps. Bass always congregate where they can find the best combination of comfortable temperatures, oxygen, food and cover. LiveScope and similar technologies opened entire res-

ervoir bottoms to anglers. Old shorelines became submerged ledges and shelves that provide bass with cover to ambush bait and easy access to deep or shallow water.

"Anyone who wants to fish ledges first needs to get a good sonar unit and a good map," said Gene Bishop, a Bassmaster Classic veteran and guide (601-941-9493, www.fish5work2.com) from Jackson, Miss. "The most active fish will be on top of the ledge. I look for any little underwater point or irregularity on the ledge. An irregularity combined with a hard bottom of clay, gravel or mussel shells makes a good place to fish."

Loggers clearcut many reservoirs before the water rises, but stumps remain. In other lakes, like Toledo Bend, abundant timber stands in deep water. In addition, people place thousands of brush piles in almost every lake across the South, mainly to attract crappie. Bass also hang around brush piles to eat crappie, bream and other fish. All those bottom contours and secondary structures make excellent places for bass to ambush prey.

"An old tree that was laying down on the shoreline years ago, but is now underwater could be a good place to fish," said Kevin Lasyone, the American Bass Anglers Top 150 Solo Series 2022 Southwest Division Angler of the Year from Dry Prong. "We can find that old tree with electronics. I also look for stumps on the ledges. Some very small stumps hold big fish, but I like to find the biggest stumps I can."

With good technology, anybody can find bass. However, even the best electronic units cannot make fish bite. In general, fish slower, deeper and with smaller, more subtle lures during the winter. A cold, lethargic bass won't chase baits far or fast, but might slurp an easy-to-grab temptation dangling right in front of its face.



Trent Hill shows off a bass he caught on a crankbait. A deep-running crankbait can be effective for tempting bass along ledges. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Chrome jigging spoons make an excellent way to catch bass in deep water. With high-end electronics, anglers can watch bass hit the spoons as they fall.

LEDGE LURES

For bagging bass in deep water, few techniques work more effectively than vertically jigging half to ¾-ounce chrome spoons. For deeper water, go up to a 1 or even a 1.25-ounce spoon. Heavy and compact, jigging spoons sink quickly and flutter down like a dying shad. Even the most lethargic bass can't resist a dying shad falling past its nose. Use a controlled descent as the spoon sinks to the proper depth. With good electronics, anglers can watch a spoon descend and see bass strike it as it falls. If the spoon hits bottom, jig it up and down a few times.

"My favorite lures for fishing around ledges in the winter are big worms or jigs," Rivet said. "Fish deep ledges slowly because the fish are sluggish. When it's really cold, my main lure is a jigging spoon. With good electronics, people can see fish in deep holes or determine where bass want to suspend. With LiveScope, people can spot bass in deep water and drop a spoon right on it. Bass might not want to chase a bait, but they'll hit an easy target of opportunity."

Most anglers simply drop spoons to the bottom, but bass don't always go that deep. They frequently suspend well above the bottom, particularly around vertical cover like standing trees, stumps or drop-off walls. For tempting suspended fish, cast spoons and work them almost like jerkbaits. Let them sink a few feet and then vigorously jerk them. Add a split ring on the nose and tie a swivel to the line to keep the lure from twisting the line.

A flutter spoon also makes a good bait for enticing suspended bass. It consists of a long thin, oblong sheet of concave metal. Few people use flutter spoons in fresh water, so bass rarely see this lure type. Fan-cast flutter spoons around drop-off edges and let them flutter to the bottom. Jerk a spoon up off the bottom and let it flutter down again.

LET IT SINK ➤



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



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LET IT SINK

A jerkbait mimics a shad and can work very well for tempting aggressive largemouth and spotted bass prowling the ledge tops. Toss a suspending jerkbait to a good area and let it sink. Estimate the sink rate by counting down by “one one-thousand, two one-thousand” for each second. To best fish a jerkbait, use a “pop, pop, stop, pop, pop, stop” cadence with a couple seconds between the fall and the start back. That causes the bait to shimmy from side to side, almost like a walk-the-dog topwater bait, but under the water.

“A suspending jerkbait is another good lure choice around ledges, particularly when fishing clear water,” Bishop said. “In clear water, bass can see a jerkbait several feet above them and come up to hit it. If bass are hanging right off the drop-off lip, a crankbait would be another good choice. When throwing a crankbait, I like the lip to dig into the bottom. That way, when it comes off the edge, the bait goes down a little. Bass sit right over the edge waiting to smash it.”

Big swimbaits also simulate baitfish, such as shad or bream, and usually attract larger than average bass. Many realistic swimbaits almost look like something an angler would rather fry than fling. Run swimbaits parallel to drop-off edges or work them slowly down the ledges. Periodically pause the retrieve to let the lure sink like a dying shad.

“I like to fish V&M swimbaits around ledges,” Lasyone said. “I fish it with a Lazyman Hook belly weight on the hook. I fish it way slower than most people. With the belly weight, the bait falls parallel to the bottom instead of nose-diving. It wobbles back and forth as it sinks.”

For lethargic fish in deep water, try a drop-shot rig. Tip it with a small grub, worm or other soft-plastic temptation hooked about 12 to 48 inches above a weight. On a spinning rod outfit loaded with 6- to 8-pound-test fluorocarbon line, drop the bait to the bottom around secondary structures or drop-off walls. When it hits bottom, shake the rod to give it a little subtle action.

ON THE BOTTOM >

Keith Poche, a professional bass angler born and raised in Natchitoches, La., admires a bass he caught on a jig. A jig can move easily through thick cover that would entangle other baits.



John N. Felsher



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A weedless jig makes a great temptation for largemouth bass. It can get into thick cover where other lures cannot go. Anglers can tip a jig with many different kinds of trailers.



John N. Felsher

ON THE BOTTOM

When bass stay near the bottom, drag a heavy jig, big Texas-rigged worm or a Carolina rig over the contours. Tip a jig or Carolina rig with a lizard or other creature bait. In cold water, downsize the offering. Move such baits extremely slowly around cover like stumps or brush piles. Pause occasionally. Just the slightest water movements could cause tentacles, tails or other plastic appendages on the lure to quiver just enough to tempt lethargic bass.

“Probably 85 to 90 percent of the time, I’ll stay in 25 to 40 feet of water throwing a ¾-ounce V&M Baits football jig or a big

Texas-rigged worm up shallow and dragging the bottom until I drag it off the ledge,” Lasyone said. “I like to find what I call a ‘spider stump.’ It’s an old stump that has been there a long time with roots coming off of it in all directions. Big bass get down in those roots. I drag a jig or a worm through those roots. Brush piles on ledges are another prime spot.”

Larger, deeper reservoirs like Toledo Bend offer anglers uncountable ledges to fish. Anglers can also fish ledges in Caney Lake, Kincaid Lake, Indian Creek and many other reservoirs. Even small lakes with creek channels, like John K. Kelly Grand Bayou Reservoir, can offer excellent ledge fishing.


In Mississippi, Pickwick Lake probably offers the best ledge fishing, but anglers could fish ledges in lakes as shallow as Ross Barnett Reservoir.

The “Big Four” lakes in northern Mississippi — Grenada, Sardis, Enid and Arkabutla — also provide good ledge fishing opportunities. Practically anywhere that people can find a sloping shoreline and a drop-off into a deeper channel might hold bass living on the edge and waiting to bite something too tempting to ignore.

You just have to go find them. ■

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SCOPE STIK

NEW JERKBAIT CATCHES CHUNKS AND IS EASY TO SPOT ON ELECTRONICS

A well-known Louisiana bass angler appreciates the exciting features of a new artificial lure introduced in July by a nationwide brand with its home in the Sportsman's Paradise.

Cliff Crochet of Pierre Part proudly touts the Bill Lewis Lures' Scope Stik, a jerkbait he'll fish with extensively this winter and early spring wherever his bass fishing trips take him as a pro bass angler. He's partial to jerkbaits with a lot of movement that work in 4- to 6-foot depths.

"Yeah, that jerkbait gets a lot of bites. I notice the jerkbait catches chunks. I love it. You go to twitch it and he's on it. That's the fun bite," Crochet said after his sponsor's introduction of the Scope Stik, which features pronounced, flattened sides and a lip design that makes it turn hard and flash sideways for easy detection on forward-facing sonar.

In early October, Crochet discussed how he'll catch bass on it in winter and early spring. The Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour veteran and four-time qualifier for the Bassmaster Classic was relaxing during the offseason, a period that included coaching a youth football team.

SEEK DEEP WATER

With water temps in the lower 30s to 50s, he'll seek out deeper water where more fish suspend in the winter. A vertical, steep break in a reservoir is ideal,

whether its 20-feet deep on a channel swing bank or 12- to 20-feet on a point.

"Anything that leads to deeper water in an area," he said.

As for using it around home while fishing the Atchafalaya Basin or Lake Verret, according to the personable pro, the deepest water in a canal or bayou might be around 4-feet deep, so that's where he'll chunk the Scope Stik. Also, he said, it's effective around deadfalls, boat ramps and isolated rocks.

In the spring, the prespawn months, Crochet plans to use it as part of a "one-two" punch with a Bill Lewis Lures Rat-L-Trap. For example, if he catches three bass on a Trap while rounding a point, he'll come back over it with the Scope Stik.

TREBLE TROUBLE

Armed with three treble hooks, Scope Stiks are available in two sizes — 3.9 inches and 4.7 inches — and six models to fit a wide range of depths. The Scope Stik 100 has a floating model and a suspending model. The Scope Stik 120 offers a deeper suspending model — 7- to 10-foot depths — and a sinking model — 7- to 10-foot plus depths.

Crochet's favorite colors are translucent for clear water, orange/gold and "Clown." A big fan of red Bill Lewis Lures Rat-L-Traps, he can't wait to try a new color Bill Lewis Lures offers that resembles

Rayburn red.

Crochet casts the Scope Stik with a KastKing Speed Bassinator Elite loaded with KastKing Cover Flourcocarbon 12-pound line. The reel is a 7-foot-3 KastKing Spirale Moderate Casting Rod.

Crochet welcomed the Scope Stik's arrival as did Alabama MLF BPT pro Mark Daniels Jr, who is also on the Lewis Pro Team.

"The new Scope Stik is a bait that we've needed in the lineup for years," Daniels said. "We've finally developed it and it's flat-out amazing."

"The action on this bait is second to none as it jumps left to right, as well as up and down. It's truly unlike any other jerkbait I've ever seen. With its pronounced, flattened sides it shows up so well on my LiveScope. This is going to be a huge player for me on tour."

For more information on the Bill Lewis Lures Scope Stik and other company fishing products, go to <https://rat-l-trap.com/> or call 877-269-8490. ■

TOLEDO BEND BASS ➤



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.

GRASS AND BASS

New aquatic growth has Toledo Bend anglers all smiles this month

By John Dean

For the first time in a couple years, I'm really looking forward to bassin' in late November and December at Toledo Bend.

Yep, I've had a smile on my face ever since I saw the acres upon acres of hydrilla in late summer inside Housen Creek. What a sight for sore eyes.

The green stuff there and in other areas, including Six Mile and some showing at Indian Mounds and up north, certainly will help with the low-water conditions facing us into November, when the pool level has been around 167 feet.

I believe everything grass-wise is starting to catch up after a few years with little or no hydrilla. It could become widespread again. I hope that's the case. More grass means more bass.

Again, I'm optimistic we'll regain the old-style bass fishing like we did in the past. I'm talkin' consistently catching on suspending Rogues, Rat-L-Traps, Thunder Jigs and Stanley Swim Jigs.

With pre-spawn a month or two away, bass could be caught like before on the inside grass line if the water rises. Every year in the past, that was the deal.

HEAVY RAINS

Low water (in this case possibly five feet below full pool) can be beneficial as it exposes the bottom. Shore grass is taking hold in many of those exposed grounds.

All we need are some heavy rains to bring the lake up about 4 feet. Those type weather events are common this time of year as systems head our way from the West and North.

Realistically, though, the region will need a three to four-day soaker to bring the lake up significantly.

The latter part of December, we'll see how much water we have. If it is low, chances are great we'll see more grass grow. If it goes up, we can fish the inside grasslines until the water temp drops below 55, if it does get that low this winter. Our winters aren't what they used to be.

GRAB A ROGUE

I'm so pumped this grass showed up. We can play like we used to play before.

That means picking up a gold/orange suspending Smithwick Rogue and staying with it. The technique that works best is almost deadsticking it — you don't want it on top. Put it down there where they're at. They're going to be kind of lethargic.

My favorite memory using that Rogue was a recent December or January while guiding a man and his two sons, ages 15 and 7. It was cold. Bass hammered the Rogue all day long as we fished ridges, ditches and main lake points outside Indian Mounds, where I was trying to stay out of the wind. We had to work it right. We had to park it and work it slow. It's the hardest thing to teach somebody to work it slow. The technique works better the closer you get to pre-spawn.



The water temp was 53 on a cold and nasty day at Toledo Bend but that didn't bother Jake Cudihy of Lafayette, who fished with his brother and dad and caught more than 20 bass by dead-sticking a gold/orange Smithwick Suspending Rogue.

This month you can't go wrong with ½-ounce Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap. Best colors are gold or, for sure, anything red.

With grass back in play, I'll rely more on a tried and true bass catcher, a 3/8-ounce Stanley Swim Max Swim Jig 38180. That'll definitely be part of the equation. That 180 is a silver belly bluegill color. I thread a watermelon candy/red Zoom Speed Craw on as a soft plastic trailer. The combination's dynamite.

Also try a 3/8- or 1/4-ounce Delta Lures Thunder Jig in Golden Bream, chartreuse white or white.

Good luck. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! ■

If you want to catch bass in December, I've been guiding on this lake most of my life and you're welcome in my boat. Give me a call at (936) 404-2688.

SECOND STATION ➤



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Having a second station on a fishing boat offers many advantages when fishing for all species.



Chris Burrows

I WANT TO SEE

A SECOND STATION OFFERS MANY ADVANTAGES

S By Chris Burrows
altwater options are typically limited this month. Trout and redfish are usually in play for inshore anglers. And offshore anglers may find a bluefin here and there. A good weather forecast can mean decent wahoo fishing off the beach, and black sea bass may be an option under the right conditions.

Let's be honest though. Many days in December don't translate into great fishing. Often the boat is on the trailer, with the outboard already winterized. Many anglers are already dreaming of spring and starting to maintain their tackle. This is a big project month.

December also means Christmas. And no matter how old you are, you can still write a list for Santa Claus. Whether I'm deemed naughty or nice, I have one thing on my list this year, and it's a major item.

And it's not cheap. But it's something that would pay dividends in just about any fishery. I want a second station. That's all I want.

Granted, I have asked Santa for this for about the last dozen years, and I still don't have one. Maybe I've been naughty, who knows? In the end, I just want to be able to see.

GET VERTICAL

Just 6 to 8 feet (or more) of heightened perspective makes a world of difference in the saltwater world. All the high-functioning charter boats at Oregon Inlet, Hatteras, Harbor Marina and the Morehead City waterfront are all fly-bridge boats for a reason.

Getting that additional height changes everything. Navigation is much safer when you can see what's in front of you. Seeing, from up high, that rip in the water

where the sandbar is offers precious time to change course and stay in the channel. Ditto for barely submerged objects.

Often, what you can see up high from a second station is completely invisible when you are at water level.

Several years ago, a fishing buddy rescued three guys whose hull had split, causing their boat to submerge in a matter of minutes. The trio had lost all electrical systems almost immediately when their boat took on water. They didn't have time to make a distress call. Luckily, my friend saw their vessel from the second station of his 2690 Triton



Chris Burrows began his charter fishing career out of Charleston and Georgetown, SC, but moved to Brunswick County, NC in 2005. He currently runs Wing & Fish Company in Shallotte and is involved with fisheries management at the federal level, but still fishes recreationally whenever he gets a free second.

ADD IT UP:

Almost all the major bay boat manufacturerers are now offering second stations on their builds. They add a bit more cost to the boat, but they increase the resale value as well. And you will catch more fish with a second station.

Express from 2 miles away. He realized quickly that something wasn't right. He said he would have never seen them from his boat's main helm.

Nothing beats vertical relief when it comes to fishability, for both inshore and offshore. When trolling, adding rod holders to the second station gives that few extra feet up, which drastically changes the angle of the line on your shotgun baits. This allows you to pull baits much farther back than before, without worry of tangling your long rigger baits. It makes a tremendous difference with spooky fish on slower days.

SEE MORE, CATCH MORE

You can also see debris that you would have previously trolled right past, the type of flotsam that dolphinfish adore. Ditto that for color changes, hard edges or schools of bait. Often, you'll see that dolphin or sailfish charge to the bait from well behind it. You can sometimes even beat the fish to the rod, skyrocketing your hookup ratio. With more baits in the water, you'll see more, you'll catch more. What's not to love?

Even when closer to shore, running up and down the beach in spring looking for cobia is so much easier when you can get a bird's eye view. Height gives you an opportunity to cast farther and more accurately. You'll find pogies much more quickly from up top as well.

Obviously, sight casting is going to be more effective when you can see.

You can get really elaborate with a second station, adding thousands of dollars in electronics, an additional top for shade, or even a hailer system to make sure your crew hears you. All of that is nice, but not always completely necessary. What's most important is having somewhere solid to stand, reliable steering and throttle control, and something to hang on to when things get a bit rough.

You don't even necessarily need an existing hard top. I have seen many a functional second station made with a simple plate welded to the frame of an existing T-Top, with another frame fixed farther up the frame to accommodate steering and controls.

Admittedly, the expense of a second station isn't for everyone. It's kind of a niche thing. And they have drawbacks. The boat will be a bit tougher to trailer. And whoever is running it from up there loses shade and a good bit of comfort, especially when it's rough. But if they know how to use it effectively, they will ultimately have more tricks in their bag to put more fish in the box.

I like those tradeoffs, so go ahead and sign me up. Santa, are you listening? ■

Jack Adams hooked this bull red on a trip to Grand Isle with Capt. Mike Guidry and family.



PAUL MEEKS

DEER HUNTERS CLIMBED TO NEW HEIGHTS WITH TALLULAH NATIVE'S HELP.

The way things are in today's society, what Paul Meeks did a few decades ago to try and help sell new fangled deer stands probably wouldn't even be noticed. But back in the day, his sales tactics got people's attention, changed the direction of deer hunting and even led to people calling the police.

Meeks, the founder and developer of API Outdoors, which became the country's largest producer of tree stands, vividly recalls a sales trip to a big New Orleans sporting goods store when he was first getting his start.

"I was trying to explain exactly what the concept of a climbing stand was to the people in the store and tell them how it worked," he said. "I couldn't really get them to understand, so I gathered everybody up and we all went outside. I put the climber on a telephone pole and climbed it up about 15 feet off the ground. It wasn't long until a crowd of people gathered around and the police got there to see the crazy man, too."

Fortunately for Meeks, they understood, the crowd dispersed and he even sold some climbing stands.

Today, Meeks helps run Great Day, Inc., a manufacturer of ATV accessories and other equipment, with his son, Paul IIar. They still live and maintain their headquarters in Tallulah, even though the products are sold worldwide. He previously sold his API business to a large sporting goods distributor.

"I've been blessed in everything I've ever done," he said. "It is literally the American Dream come true. I love the outdoors and to be able to make a living off what I love to do... I mean, it can't get any better. I couldn't have done it without my family and friends and I'm extremely honored by the attention that we have gotten."

That attention and those accomplishments included being a member of the first class of the Louisiana Legends of the Outdoors Hall of Fame and the National Legends of the Outdoors Hall of Fame.

One of our nation's most innovative outdoors industry leaders, Paul Meeks has remained on the cutting-edge of technology for over 40 years. It was back in 1978 when he first introduced the first climbing tree stand to the world of hunting. It literally revolutionized the hunting industry. It allowed hunters to climb trees anywhere they wanted and not be confined to one tree or one area like they were in box stands or regular ladder stands.

The new concept was hard to explain at first, but when it caught on, it caught on like wildfire. Through continuous design and construction improvements such as the transition to aluminum versus steel, API became the country's largest



producer of tree stands and the largest private employer in North Louisiana with over 350 employees. In 2003, Bass Pro Shops acquired the API Outdoors brand and immediately made API Outdoors a Bass Pro company brand. Meeks remains as a consultant with Bass Pro concerning tree stands and other outdoor gear.

Following the sale of API, in July of 2003, Meeks rolled out his new business producing specialty accessories for all-terrain vehicles of all kinds — ATV's, UTV's, Jeeps and trucks. The new venture once again distinguished Meeks and his team in developing outdoors products to meet the rising demand for better and more efficient methods for bringing sportsmen and their families together in the great outdoors.

Over the 12 year life of Great Day, Inc., Meeks has successfully patented several of the most unique products ever for use in the Outdoors.

Meeks has often been referred to as a marketing guru, a man who is relentless in his desire to solve problems even before most of the outdoors market even realizes that a problem exists. Beyond technological innovation, Meeks' team is con-

“*I love the outdoors and to be able to make a living off what I love to do. . . I mean, it can't get any better.*”

sidered "out of the box" in its design strategies and ability to prove a product's value in meeting the needs of today's outdoorsman.

Meeks was born in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and has served on numerous outdoor boards such as the Board of Directors of the Christian Bowhunters of America and the Christian Sportsman's Fellowship. He is a deacon at First Baptist Church in Tallulah, a Gideon and actively serves his church. His faith is one of the things he values most in his life.

He is a member of the Treestand Manufacturers Hall of Fame and a national sponsor of the National Wild Turkey Foundation. He was awarded the Louisiana Economic Development Businessman of the Year award.

While his activities supporting his community and the outdoors take up much of his time, he is still an active deer and turkey hunter. He has always emphasized safety when using climbing stands, but in 2020, his hunting days almost came to an end while climbing into a box stand.

He was hunting in Kansas like he had done for 20 years. One day it was snowing and the weather was rough, but they went hunting anyway and saw a good many deer. He and his son decided to make it an all-day sit the next day until they got a good buck. When he reached his stand, he climbed the ladder with no problems. But without thinking, he leaned on the handrail to open the door and it gave way. He slipped and in a second, he ended up hanging upside down over the edge of the platform, supported by only a one-handed grip. He couldn't hold on and finally fell. Fortunately, even though he was writhing in pain, he reached his cell phone and called for help.

After a long recovery, he is back at it again, but not without a lesson he doesn't ever want anyone else to have to learn the hard way.

"I share this story to make one point," he said. "It can happen to anybody, anytime. Always be careful and know your surroundings. I'm blessed that my hunting and my life didn't come to an end that day. Don't ever be lured into thinking that just because it's a box stand, something can't happen. Practice good safety precautions every time you get your feet off the ground." ■

You can learn more about the Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame, founded by Garry Mason in Tennessee and led in Louisiana by Peyton McKinnie of Marion, on Facebook.



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.



HUNTING REGS >

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	(North Zone) Sept. 3 - 25	45
	Oct. 15 - Nov. 27 Dec. 17 - Jan. 15	Oct. 8 - Nov. 13 Dec. 24 - Jan. 22	
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	Nov. 12 - Jan. 4	45
	Sept. 10 - 25	Nov. 12 - Jan. 4	75
GALLINULES*	Sept. 10 - 25	Nov. 12 - Jan. 4	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	8	24
	May 6 - 28**	3	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

DUCKS*, COOTS & MERGANSERS

EAST ZONE
Nov. 19 - Dec. 4
Dec. 17 - Jan. 29

WEST ZONE
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.



GEESE (snow, blue, Ross & white-fronted [specklebelly]) CANADA GOOSE SEASON

EAST ZONE
Nov. 5 - Dec. 4
Dec. 17 - Jan. 29

WEST ZONE
Nov. 5 - Dec. 4
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.

CONSERVATION ORDER FOR LIGHT GEESE

EAST ZONE
Dec. 5-16
Jan. 30 - March 5

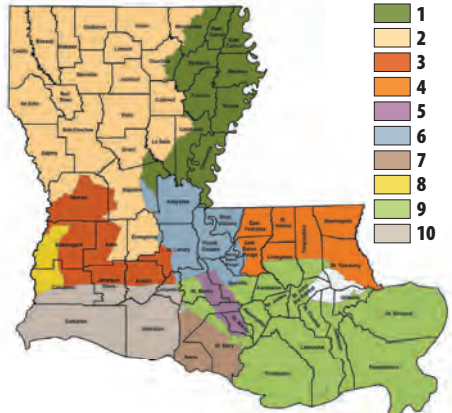
WEST ZONE
Dec. 5-16
Jan. 2-8
Feb. 6 - March 5

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	

A RARE BREED

"NEVER SAY DIE" ATTITUDE IS KEEPING OLD ATCS AND ATVs IN USE. ■ By Kinny Haddox



SOMEWHERE AROUND LOUISIANA,

hiding in the shadows of old barns, garages and deer camp sheds, are dozens of vintage Honda 90 or Big Red three-wheelers and Suzuki Quadrunner, Yamaha Timberwolf and Honda TRX200 four-wheelers.

Most of those early All Terrain Cycles (ATCs) and All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) lived rough lives, taking hunters through rugged swamps and terrain that they had only been able to walk to before. They either got worn out or replaced by newer, tougher, faster models.

But regardless of their earlier fate, West Monroe's Tyler Breed says they still have a place in the outdoor society. It's time to bring them back, especially as the cost of newer models skyrockets. He's a rare breed, indeed, and that's the name he chose for his business: Rare Breed Customs. He brings the old back to life.

"I grew up riding with my dad (former LDWF Education Specialist Bill Breed) on our hunting lease on an old three wheeler and as I got older, I got into older vehicles and customizing them," Breed said. "Then I started fixing up old three

wheelers and four wheelers and for some reason, I just fell in love with the older stuff. I like older cars and even live in a 120-year-old house in Choudrant. Even my appliances are from the 60's and 70's."

Combine that passion with his degree in Wildlife Management and Forestry and you understand why he is driven.

Breed actually got into the business during Covid, when he found himself without work and he joined with a family member to work on ATVs. That grew into him trying it on a bigger scale, and focusing on older models, and he opened Rare Breed Customs in West Monroe.

Believe it or not, the growth of the old school ATV restoration business actually expanded because of new school technology — Facebook.

"We built a following on vintage ATVs through Facebook," Breed said. "My interest was peaked and a friendship formed with D and A Restorations owned and operated by Travis Gisclair in Cutoff, on Facebook as well. He does an amazing job. I focus mainly on working class restoration, but he even does





This is one of the finished products made good as new and ready to hit the woods again. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** This Honda FourTrax shown by Tyler Breed has been rebuilt and is ready for another long run in the woods.

enjoy reviving the old three- and four-wheelers because that is important to me. Every time something new comes in the shop, my mechanic, Casey, and I are like kids at Christmas. We just say, 'Oh, what do we get to play with today' and we can't wait to get working on it.

"All most people want is something dependable to get them out in the woods and back home safely. That's what we are giving them, plus a little history to go along with it. We love bringing memories back. We love bringing Dad's or Pawpaw's four-wheeler back to life to make more memories. That's what it's all about."

And that's a rare breed, for sure.

You can learn more about Rare Breed and D and A Restorations on Facebook. ■



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.

museum quality jobs for people that are more interested in collector's items. One day I would like to do more of that and even have some sort of museum right here to show off what we've done and preserve the past."

Many people that have old, unusable ATVs are donating them to Breed and if they aren't in too bad a shape, he is even buying some to restore. Others are bringing them in to make new just so they can have them operational again. He has several "graveyards" of old original parts and tries to rebuild them as often as he can.

While many of the old pre 2000 models have been junked, many are just sitting. Breed thinks outdoorsmen who have room to keep them hang on to them because of sentimental value. Many don't know they can be brought back to life for a reasonable cost, but he is hoping to change that.

"My customer base is fixing them up because they want to ride them, hunt with them and use them for work around their property," Breed said. "We have done a few high-end restorations, but the dedication of money it takes for that is substantial."



Current market conditions are also playing a part in the development of this business. While a new medium level four-wheeler might sell for \$6-7,000, Breed said he can repair seats, fenders, gas tanks and do basic carburetor, fuel line and engine mechanic work (as long as it isn't major damage) and get an outdoorsman back on their unit fixed up right with quality OEM parts for less than \$2,000 in most cases.

The most rare units he's seen are the old Honcho four-wheelers and the original US90, which became the Honda 90 ATC. The most popular model that he sees are Honda Big Red four-wheelers.

So, what's in it for him? Obviously, he is striving to make a living, but it's more than that, he said.


"I know it sounds cliché, but it's not about the money," he said. "As long as I can make enough to pay my bills and my employees, I just enjoy the hunt for older ATVs and parts. I

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THE UNHAPPY FATE OF THE THREE-WHEELER

Are three wheelers dangerous? Of course. So are matches, guns, tree stands, etc. But the thing that makes them dangerous is operator error.

In 1970, Honda brought the world its first three-wheeled ATC. The first ones cost \$595. They were a big hit with people who loved the outdoors and the Honda marketers made it well known by even having it featured in scenes of a James Bond movie (*Diamonds are Forever*) and TV shows like *Magnum PI*. But the main market was hunters. Honda became the most popular ATV brand.

Unfortunately, the three-wheeler wasn't stable enough to handle much misuse. With its widespread growth, there also came accidents and injuries. Even though stats showed most accidents were caused by rider behavior, the newly social conscious Consumer Product Safety Commission put an end to three-wheeler sales in 1988.

But while it became illegal to manufacture and sell the units commercially, owners can still ride them off road.

Considering that these products are made in America, it makes sense when you consider the fact that the North American market sells more four-wheelers and side-by-sides than anywhere else on earth. It's no surprise that Polaris is the most popular ATV and UTV brand in the world.

The first ATV came about in 1985 when the Trail Boss hit the market. ■

— Kinny Haddox

An early Honda 90 ATC awaits its turn for a new life at Rare Breed Customs.





A MATTER OF FACTS ABOUT "WHEELERS"

This 2022 six-wheel Argo 850 Huntmaster and other amphibious vehicles got a lot of looks and interested buyers at the recent Louisiana Sportsman Show.

Hunters and outdoorsmen have one main concern about ATVs, from four-wheelers to side-by-sides. That is it can get them into the woods, through the mud and back home again. But there is history behind these valuable assets that is quite interesting.

It's a good bet that most folks don't even know where the first ATV came from. There is some debate, but most say it was actually developed in Canada back in 1961. It was called the Jiger and the Toronto-based business only made Jigers built to order. The machines were powered by 5.5 horsepower motors and were six-wheel amphibious vehicles.

And while Honda became the leader in ATV products early in the game with the three-wheeler, it was Suzuki's QuadRunner LT125 that was the first four-wheeler on the market in 1982. The machine not only added an extra wheel that made it more stable, it had amazing technological advances like an odometer and forward and reverse gears. Two years later, Yamaha became a big player in the market with their first quad unit. Honda is still near the top in sales today.

There were even small manufacturers like Adventure Vehicles in Monroe that made Avenger ATVs in the late 70's and early 80's. Their shop in Monroe burned down sometime in the mid 80's

and they relocated but never caught up in the fast-growing ATV market race.

Today, there are more than a dozen manufacturers of ATVs besides those previously mentioned. Polaris is the most popular on the market, largely due to side-by-side options that have grown in demand. These units have also become work and play vehicles with hundreds of available options, which have added a new UTV (Utility Vehicle) category to the mix. Can-Am, Kawasaki and Arctic Cat, John Deere, Kubota and KTM also compete in the UTV category. So today's outdoorsmen have plenty of makes and models to choose from.

And the idea behind that original Jiger? It is still here today with a large six-wheeler market. Argo ATVs are the most popular for outdoor enthusiasts who like to take on land, mud and water all at the same time.

North America dealers (U.S., Canada and Mexico) sell more units than anywhere else in the world. Sales peaked in 2020 at nearly a million units before pandemic and supply chain issues hit. ■



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

- The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).
- The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

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

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

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2022 DEC	BEST DAYS					LUNAR PERIODS				MOON PHASE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCEL	VALUE	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
						MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Thu 1					29	1:33 pm	6:29 pm - 8:27 pm	12:26 am	6:17 am - 7:55 am	☀
Fri 2					26	2:00 pm	7:04 pm - 9:22 pm	1:31 am	6:54 am - 8:52 am	☀
Sat 3					29	2:27 pm	7:36 pm - 10:18 pm	2:34 am	7:29 am - 9:47 am	☀
Sun 4					39	2:54 pm	8:11 pm - 11:11 pm	3:36 am	8:01 am - 10:43 am	☀
Mon 5					51	3:24 pm	8:50 pm - 12:06 am	4:38 am	8:36 am - 11:36 am	☀
Tue 6					62	3:57 pm	9:31 pm - 1:01 am	5:41 am	9:15 am - 12:31 pm	☀
Wed 7					67	4:36 pm	10:16 pm - 1:56 am	6:43 am	9:56 am - 1:26 pm	☀ Full
Thu 8					57	5:20 pm	11:05 pm - 2:51 am	7:43 am	10:41 am - 2:21 pm	☀
Fri 9					48	6:09 pm	11:57 pm - Midnight	8:39 am	11:30 am - 3:16 pm	☀
Sat 10					38	7:04 pm	Midnight - 3:43 am	9:29 am	12:22 pm - 4:08 pm	☀ High
Sun 11					31	8:01 pm	12:50 am - 4:32 am	10:13 am	1:15 pm - 4:57 pm	☀ Apogee
Mon 12					31	9:00 pm	1:43 am - 5:15 am	10:51 am	2:08 pm - 5:40 pm	☀
Tue 13					30	9:58 pm	2:34 am - 5:56 am	11:23 am	2:59 pm - 6:21 pm	☀
Wed 14					29	10:57 pm	3:26 am - 6:32 am	11:52 am	3:51 pm - 6:57 pm	☀
Thu 15					32	11:55 pm	4:16 pm - 7:07 am	12:18 pm	4:42 pm - 7:32 pm	☀
Fri 16					40		5:08 am - 7:38 am	12:43 pm	5:33 pm - 8:03 pm	☀ Half
Sat 17					28	12:54 am	6:01 am - 8:09 am	1:08 pm	6:26 pm - 8:34 pm	☀
Sun 18					21	1:55 am	6:55 am - 8:43 am	1:35 pm	7:20 pm - 9:08 pm	☀
Mon 19					19	2:59 am	7:52 am - 9:20 am	2:05 pm	8:17 pm - 9:45 pm	☀
Tue 20					27	4:07 am	8:53 am - 10:01 am	2:40 pm	9:18 pm - 10:26 pm	☀
Wed 21					36	5:20 am	9:56 am - 10:52 am	3:23 pm	10:21 pm - 11:17 pm	☀ Winter
Thu 22					45	6:35 am	11:06 am - 11:48 am	4:16 pm	11:31 pm - Midnight	☀ Low
Fri 23					50	7:47 am	12:14 pm - 12:52 pm	5:20 pm	Midnight - 12:13 am	☀ New
Sat 24					42	8:51 am	1:17 pm - 2:03 pm	6:33 pm	12:39 am - 1:17 am	☀ Perigee
Sun 25					33	9:45 am	2:16 pm - 3:12 pm	7:49 pm	1:42 am - 2:28 am	☀
Mon 26					24	10:29 am	3:07 pm - 4:19 pm	9:04 pm	2:41 am - 3:37 am	☀
Tue 27					21	11:05 am	3:50 pm - 5:22 pm	10:15 pm	3:32 am - 4:44 am	☀
Wed 28					28	11:36 am	4:29 pm - 6:21 pm	11:23 pm	4:15 am - 5:47 am	☀
Thu 29					42	12:04 pm	5:03 pm - 7:19 pm		4:54 am - 6:46 am	☀ Half
Fri 30					34	12:30 pm	5:38 pm - 8:14 pm	12:27 am	5:28 am - 7:44 am	☀
Sat 31					31	12:58 pm	6:12 pm - 9:08 pm	1:30 am	6:03 am - 8:39 am	☀

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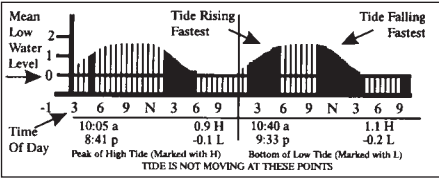
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Fish feed most actively when the tide is falling moving. Louisiana Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most-active feeding periods each day in the Tide Guide. Just fish those times indicated in black. To find the best time to fish your favorite 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 Gardens	+2:51	+2:44
Bayou BonFouca	+9:59	+10:11
Breton Islands	+0:54	+0:48
Caillou Boca	+0:40	+0:48
Caminada Pass	+0:20	+0:12
Chandeleur Light	+0:37	+0:34
Chef Pass	+5:17	+5:07
Cocodrie	+1:22	+1:33
Comfort Island	+1:34	+0:54
Delacroix Island	+3:42	+3:31
Empire Jetty	-1:03	-1:45
Four Bayou Pass	+2:18	+0:17
Gardner Island	+0:40	+0:47
Grand Pass	+1:48	+1:16
Head of Passes	-0:48	+0:00
Hopedale	+4:17	+4:56
Independence Island	+2:29	+1:59
Jack Bay	+1:59	+1:28
Joseph Bayou	-0:36	-1:37
Lafitte	+1:45	+2:51
Long Point, Lake Borgne	+2:28	+2:11
Manila Village	+2:32	+3:13
Michoud Substation	+5:24	+5:02
New Canal (Bucktown)	+10:34	+10:49
North Pass	-0:31	-0:37
Paris Road Bridge	+5:53	+5:58
Pelican Islands	+2:26	+2:26
Pointe a la Hache	+3:12	+3:01
Port Eads	-0:17	-1:37
Raccoon Point	-0:03	-0:20
Shell Beach	+4:32	+4:25
Ship Shoal Light	-1:54	-1:50
South Pass, Miss. R.	-1:13	-1:20
Southwest Pass, Miss. R.	-0:38	-1:33
Tchefuncte River	+10:23	+11:01
Timbalier Island	+0:19	+0:23
Wine Island	+1:08	+1:02

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

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HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK

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Ethan Defelice

Ethan Defelice with an 8-point buck taken on Oct. 1 in St. Mary Parish.



Dax Boudreaux

Dax Boudreaux with a 323-pound boar caught on Sept. 17 in the Henry marsh with help from their dogs.



Tarvarious Haywood

Tarvarious Haywood, an anchor with WGMB Fox 44 in Baton Rouge, went on his first sac-a-lait fishing trip on June 11 in south Louisiana with YouTuber Kendall Frederick.



Lane Maxwell

Lane Maxwell, 8, from Bastrop killed his first deer on Nov. 24, 2021. He made a perfect shot at 50 yards with his 7mm-08.



Drew Arabie

Drew Arabie, 12, with a trout caught on an evening fishing trip out of Sweetwater Marina in Delacroix.



Chris Murphey

Chris Murphey was fishing in Grand Isle on April 3 when he caught this beautiful trout.



Layla Campbell

Layla Campbell, 11, with an 8-point killed on Oct. 10, 2022 in Claiborne Parish. She was hunting on private land with her dad, Philip Campbell.



Rylee LeBleu

Rylee LeBleu, 11, did not get to spend any time in the woods last season due to her mother being on chemo. On Sept. 28, she made up for that time lost and killed her first deer. She dropped this 6-point at 75 yards with her mom's .243 on a private lease in Evans.



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



Maurice Smith

Maurice Smith caught these sac-a-lait at a local lake near his home in Ward, Ark. He caught them at Lake Barnett jiggling shallow trees along the creek channel for a couple of hours.



Bryce Donaldson



Jax Donaldson

Bryce Donaldson, 13, and Jax Donaldson, 7, were fishing in Shell Beach when they caught these redfish. It was Jax's first fishing trip.



Billy Cancienne

Billy Cancienne hauled in a big cobia about 30 miles south of Grand Isle on June 24.



Tony Crader

Tony Crader was hunting on the Alexander State Forest when he took this buck on Oct. 9, 2022.



Shae Stevens

Shae Stevens with some nice speckled trout caught in Lake Borgne.



Ashley Weems

Ashley Weems poses with her first bull red. It was caught and released.



Jayna Ganze

Jayna Ganze with a big sac-a-lait caught under Pendleton Bridge at Toledo Bend. Jayna lives at Toledo Bend with her grandparents, Mike and Cindy Chataignier.



Colston Savoie

Colston Savoie of Iowa with a 3 1/2-pound bass caught at Lacassine Refuge while fishing with his Paw-Paw, Keith Bergeron, and his dad, Jason Savoie.



Brody LeBlanc

Brody LeBlanc was hunting with his dad on public land when he got this young buck with a .243 semi-auto at 25 yards.



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK

Marilynn Tew



Marilynn Tew got her first red drum fishing the Intracoastal Waterway using shrimp.

Charles Williams



Charles Williams with a monster drum caught in Delacroix on live shrimp.

Thomas Sarrat



This black drum was caught on a live shrimp in Bayou St. Malo by Thomas Sarrat. It weighed over 25 pounds, since it exceeded the scale.

The "Chaos" crew



The "Chaos" crew for the Golden Meadow Fourchon Tarpon Rodeo with a mess of red snapper, cobia, jack creville and bonita. These kids took home 5 trophies and memories that will last a lifetime.

Braxton Brown



Braxton Brown with his first fish caught in St. Amant.

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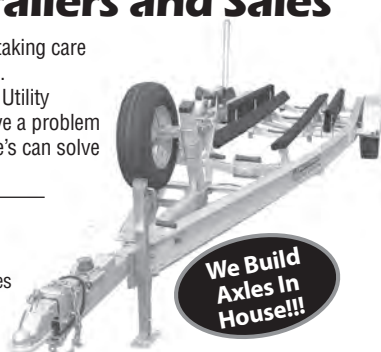
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GREAT OUTDOOR GIFTS FOR KIDS

LOVE, KNOWLEDGE, RESPECT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Hunters, the greatest gifts you can give kids this Christmas are not new rifles, bows, four-wheelers or lab puppies.

The gifts of love and respect for the outdoors, wrapped in knowledge and accountability, lasts a lifetime.

If you don't take time to teach these intangible skills, young hunters are handicapped in their ability to ever truly grow and enjoy their outdoor pursuits. A pretty smart dude, Albert Einstein, once said, "Look deep into nature, then you will understand everything better."

Gut check: As an adult, if you don't already have this approach, it is never too late. Making outdoor pursuits meaningful is more than a trophy buck or "oohs

and aahs" on a Facebook post. Seriously.

There is a rush about today's world that is very hard to overcome. A me-too, need-it-now, let's-take-the-easy-way-out approach. Frankly, I worry about today's younger hunters. We've got these big fancy ATVs, heated deer stands, automatic deer feeders...and on and on. Bigger and better and faster can rob you of why people hunt and go outdoors to start with. Think about it, if you aren't in too big of a hurry.

Most always, this column is meant to be entertaining or informative, but today's a good day to preach. My chronograph hit 70 o'clock this past summer, so I feel qualified after being granted that time in God's great outdoors.

OLD FASHIONED LEARNING

Too few young hunters start out the way most of us did — squirrel hunting or just tagging along on hunts. My first several years hunting in the woods were going after squirrels. We learned where they liked to go, why they were there, how to be quiet in stalking them and how to find them in the mass of branches and leaves in the trees. If they wouldn't move, we learned to shake a vine on the side of the



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.



probably about seven years old. I had an old wooden lean-to stand with the seat perched against an oak tree about 10 feet off the ground. There wasn't enough room for us to both safely get in it. I built him a little ground blind under the stand, where he could sit on a camp stool, hide and still see what was going on. He brought his toy gun so he could feel the part. We could still whisper and talk. It was a perfect setup for fun. I could hunt. He could learn.

He didn't grow restless. He watched everything that happened. About an hour after daylight, a nice young buck walked out about 70 yards away on the side of the clearing. In those days, any buck that wasn't a nubber was one good shot away from the freezer. In fact, it was rare for the average hunter to even see one 30+ years ago.

I watched intently and when the deer looked away, I raised my gun. I was about to take the safety off and fire, when...

Rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

My son had stood up and unloaded that toy gun on the deer. I'm not sure where that young buck finally stopped, probably somewhere in Arkansas. Fortunately, it caught me so much by surprise that I lost my breath for a second and didn't even holler at him. By the time I got my breath back, I just used it to break into a roaring laugh.

We could always eat chicken.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

We still laugh over that story. Not taking the deer didn't make us miss any meals. No trophy was lost. It did give us a story for life. And, of course, a good learning experience. I get to still laugh over it with him and my grandchildren. That's what the outdoors is about.

I'm blessed that all five of the grandkids get to spend time in the outdoors, too. Doing it right pays off. As it says in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Lord knows, we need a generation of respectful, knowledgeable and accountable outdoors lovers in the woods. Too many have departed from that.

Take the kids to the woods and water as young as you'd like, but keep it simple. Poking at a campfire with a stick is still one of life's great satisfactions. Trust me. They want a place to get away from this crazy world they live in every day just as much as we do. Don't underestimate that. And "winning" that becomes overbearing in every aspect of today's life needs NOT be a word in the vocabulary of an outdoorsman.

There is much more that must be taught. Always put safety first. No deer, turkey or duck, no ride on a four wheeler or in a boat, is worth hurting yourself or someone else. Be glad for every outdoor experience. Learn every time you go. Leave small footprints. Listen to your elders. They have been here before. Nobody is born an outdoor expert. Learn to shoot. Practice. Practice some more. Aim small, miss small. If you aren't going to eat it, don't shoot it. Ask questions.

Follow the rules. They are well-intentioned, and yes, they mean you, too. Merry Christmas. ■

tree and make them go mobile. And we learned that every shot counted.

The first few times I ever got to go hunting and carry a gun, it was Barney Fife style. I carried my bullet in my pocket.

My dad watched me to make sure I was making the right decisions and handled the weapon carefully. When he was sure — and I had proven I could shoot straight in numerous practice sessions — then I got a live load.

There's no need to be completely old fashioned, but listen up.

Think about the long-term with young hunters you are influencing. If they've done everything by the time they are 10 and haven't developed patience and knowledge, what do they have to look forward to in later years?

If youngsters aren't learning love and respect for the outdoors along the way, they're probably doomed to default to some city sport like golf or tennis.

YES, THIS HAPPENED

My son spent two years in the woods with me before he even touched a loaded gun, even to target practice.

I'll never forget one of our first deer hunting trips. He was

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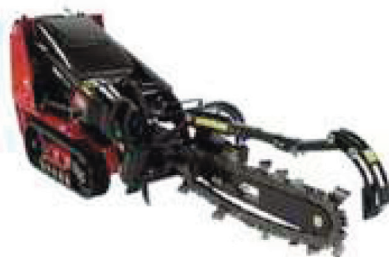


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