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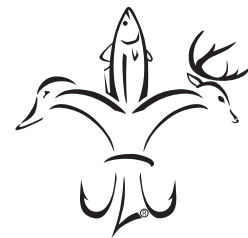
25
Never too late

Mississippi CONTENTS



46
Back in black

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PUBLISHER: Tony Taylor

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Bobby Cleveland
bobbyc7754@yahoo.com, 601.506.0739

MANAGING EDITOR: Dan Kibler

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Alicia LaFont

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR: Jeff Caldwell

ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER:
Desiree P. Lewis

ART DIRECTOR: Rodney Anouilh

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:
Jeff Cashio, Kevin Orgeron, Alissa Zeringue

CONTROLLER: Juanita Guidry

SALES DIRECTOR: Jay Forrest
225.278.0258/jayf@lasmag.com

ADVERTISING SALES:
Mark Hilzim (National Sales), Asa Faulkner, Brent Comardelle, Mark Boyd, Greg Webb, Peter Church, Ron Dorsey and Bret Holden

CONTRIBUTORS:
David A. Brown, Andy Crawford, Jerry Dilsaver, Paul Elias, David Hawkins, Bill Garbo, Phillip Gentry, Michael O. Giles, Chris Ginn, Dan Kibler, Tommy Kirkland, Sammy Romano, Hal Schramm and Don Shoopman

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR:
Ricky Naquin 985.859.7744/rickyn@lasmag.com

CIRCULATION FIELD MANAGER:
Tim Stiglets 601.434.1526/timstiglets@comcast.net

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:

Contact Jay Forrest
email: jayf@lasmag.com/225.278.0258

SUBSCRIPTIONS OR SUBSCRIPTION ISSUES, CALL 1-855-371-1546

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985.758.7217

Volume 21 | No 1

FEATURES:

25 Never too late *cover story*
January brings breeding activity to many parts of Mississippi, so hunters can literally find themselves in a rut as long as they'd like to be.

>>>By Mike Giles

32 Pressure points
Deer that have been hunted heavily appear basically to disappear as the end of the season approaches across Mississippi. Here's how to turn late into great.

>>>By David Hawkins

39 Licking their lips
Delta waterfowl hunters say the habitat is best it's been in years and hope the weather makes 2019 the equal to last season for ducks.

>>>By Bobby Cleveland

46 Back in black
Battles with big, black drum ward off winter's chill for Mississippi's saltwater fishermen.

>>>By Todd Masson

53 Pick off Pickwick crappie
Low fishing pressure, plenty of deep-water structure, good population of slabs leads to great winter action.

>>>By John E. Phillips

57 Mississippi's highlights
A handful of the best-read stories on MS-Sportsman.com shed some light on what drew attention from sportsmen in Mississippi last year.

FIELD NOTES:

45 A recipe for good duck calling

COLUMNS:

64 Gettin' Fresh By Hal Schramm

66 Lunker Lines By Paul Elias

68 Lure Review
By Don Shoopman

70 Cooking on the Wild Side
By Jerry Dilsaver

DEPARTMENTS:

6 Outdoor Update

52 Hunting/Fishing regs

56 Sportsman Showcase

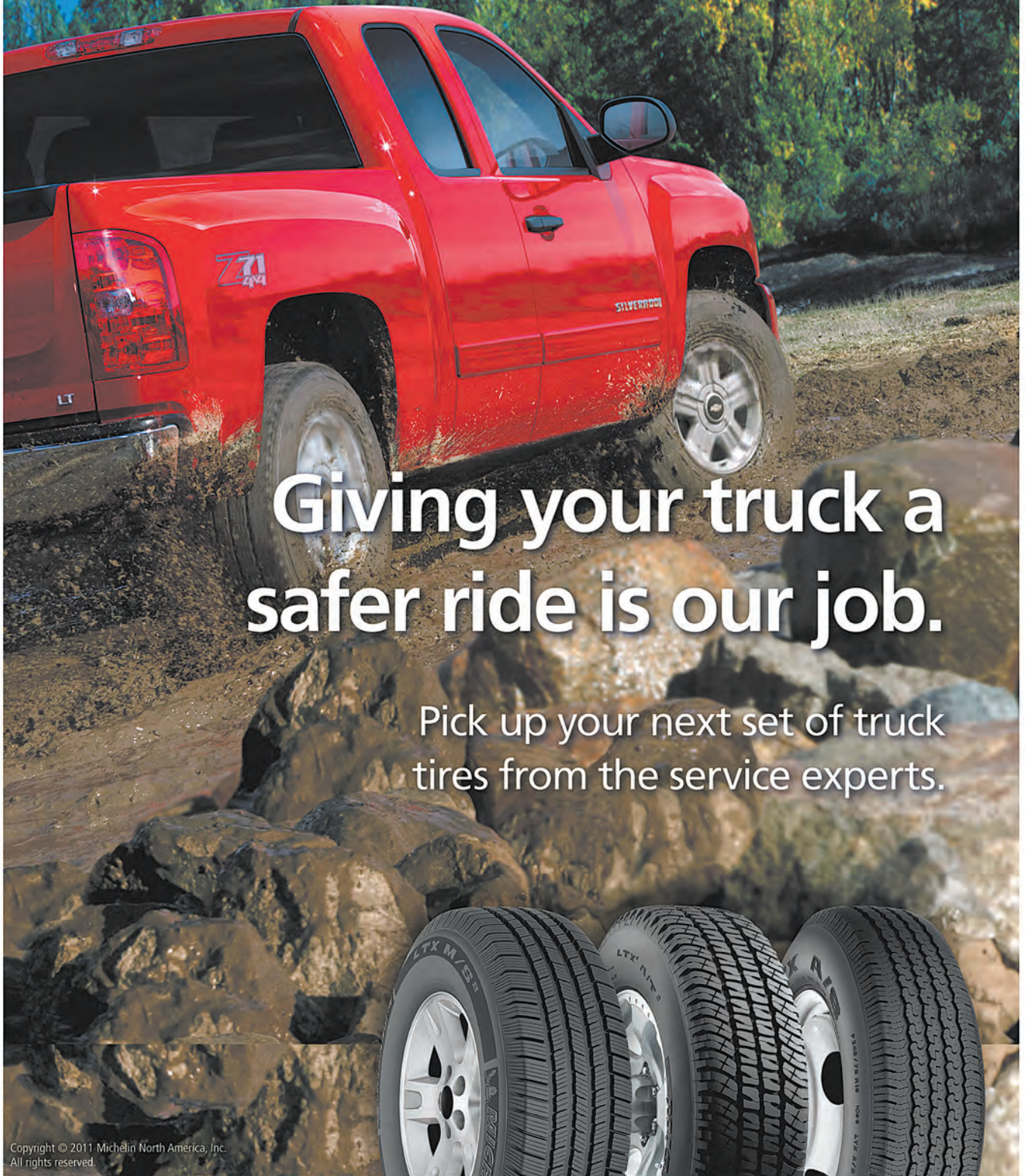
73 Astro Tables

74 Advertiser Index

ON THE COVER:



Keith Hodges of Itta Bena won the big-buck lottery when he dropped this 20-point, 217-inch non-typical giant on Dec. 3 in Leflore County.



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Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland



Bobby Cleveland has covered sports in Mississippi for over 38 years. A native of Hattiesburg and graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Cleveland lives on Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson with his wife Pam. He can be reached at bobbyc7754@yahoo.com.

Bobby Cleveland

NEW YEAR BRINGS OPPORTUNITIES

BUT 2019 ALSO BRINGS A FEW CHANGES IN MISSISSIPPI REGULATIONS

Happy New Year!

The staff and contributors of *Mississippi Sportsman* wish our readers the very best for 2019, including a fish on every cast and a trophy buck in every rifle scope — and a safe return from each wonderful trip made to our great outdoors.

January is a great time to be in Mississippi, with so many opportunities to enjoy the bounty that nature provides and to relish good times spent with friends and family in the pursuit of game and fish. This issue, the first of the year, can accomplish both.

January is the peak month for waterfowl hunting, and we have a feature that can help you make the most of trips to public waters or private duck clubs.

Deer season enters its final month, and we've got two stories to set the table. Mike Giles covers hunting the post and secondary rut periods, while David Hawkins shares experts' secrets to finding trophy bucks that have been under heavy hunting pressure for two months.

A great benefit of living in the South, and Mississippi

in particular, is that we have a 12-month fishing window that includes both saltwater and freshwater opportunities. One of the most overlooked is the black drum, aka puppy drum, in the Mississippi Sound; Todd Masson looks at one of the hottest areas. Meanwhile, we revisit one of the state's best fishing destinations, Pickwick Lake, where regardless of the temperature, anglers can find crappie for a winter fish fry.

We've got that and so much more.

Let's go! ■

GOT PICS? We want 'em

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January is the peak of waterfowl hunting in Mississippi, with cold weather up north putting more ducks in Magnolia State waters.

SECOND ISSAQUENA COUNTY CWD CASE IS CONFIRMED

Mississippi's third confirmed case of chronic wasting disease is the second from Issaquena County and the state's first to be harvested by a hunter. The 2½-year-old doe was killed Nov. 1 by a hunter on public land, according to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

"This deer was harvested by a hunter on Mahannah Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and voluntarily submitted to our drop-off station located on site," said Russ Walsh, MDWFP's executive wildlife director. "We have seen great participation so far this season, but we still need hunters to continue providing samples as part of our state wide monitoring effort."

Mississippi's first confirmed case of CWD, a protein-based (prion) disease that is thought to be 100-percent fatal to cervids like deer and elk, was a 4½-year-old buck, found in January in Issaquena County. The doe was killed about 6 miles north of the first deer, within the Issaquena CWD Management Area, so no immediate regulation changes were necessary, but the second case is still an important find.

"It tells us that buck wasn't the only one," Walsh told *The Clarion-Ledger*. "He had to contract it from another deer. What it tells us is we need to continue moving forward in this process to determine prevalence and geographic extent of the disease."

Mississippi also has established the Pontotoc CWD Management Area, about 200 miles northeast of Issaquena County. A landowner near the town of Ecru, about 10 miles north of Pontotoc, killed a 1½-year-old buck that had walked into his yard in October and was acting strangely around the family dog.

That such a young deer was confirmed to have CWD is important, since deer usually don't start showing symptoms of the disease until 14 to 18 months after contracting it. Walsh said that means the young buck either was infected at birth or immediately thereafter, meaning somewhere nearby in Pontotoc County there is another deer with CWD.

Walsh said that between Oct. 1 and Dec. 1, 1,202 deer have been tested, most of them killed by hunters. Only two tested have positive for CWD.

Walsh expects many more deer to be tested, and he said it is important to keep testing. The agency has a statewide system for hunters to have deer tested. Visit mdwfp.com for links to collection stations throughout the state. There is no fee charged, and the samples will be sent to the state's veterinary diagnostic lab in Pearl for preliminary testing. Any tissues testing positive will be sent to a national lab in Iowa for confirmation.

While CWD has never been proven to infect humans, consuming venison from a CWD-infected deer is not recommended, which is one reason why some hunters are having their kills checked.

"It only makes sense to me," said Jeff Terry, whose farm is located in the



A young buck found to have CWD has raised plenty of questions for Mississippi officials

Issaquena Zone. "This is venison I feed my whole family, including my grandkids, nephews and nieces, not to mention friends and their kids. I'm having all mine checked. Heck, it's free."

Terry plans to submit the heads to the MDWFP and store the deer for processing until the testing is complete. ■

NATURAL URINE-BASED PRODUCTS ARE OUT

Deer hunters in Mississippi, take note: it would be prudent to use any and all natural deer-urine attractant products before the current season ends.

After the 2018-19 season, it will be illegal for hunters to use all such materials. The regulation, passed in September by the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and later finalized, is a proactive measure in the wake of three confirmed cases of CWD cases in the state.

The regulation states:

"Beginning, July 1, 2019, it shall be unlawful to use scents or lures that contain natural cervid urine, biofluids or biological material for hunting purposes. Synthetic scents or lures may be used for hunting purposes."

For the purpose of this rule, cervids include any member of the Cervidae family, including white-tailed deer, elk, moose, red deer, sika deer, fallow deer, mule deer and caribou.

"I guess I have about five different 'Doe in Heat' bottles, some of them five or 10 years old, both at home and at the deer camp," said Rick House of Jackson. "I probably buy one every year, usually at the Wildlife Extravaganza, and then forget where I put it. It's only worked on a few bucks for me, but I keep trying."

"Guess what? I'm going to use it liberally during the rut and pre-rut in December and January; you can bet on that. I've told all my friends to come and get a bottle and use it whenever and wherever they can."

CWD scientific research indicates infection prions are found in bodily fluids of cervids. While the introduction of CWD through a urine-based product is a long shot, Mississippi is taking no chances. ■

more updates... >

'GAME CHECK' APPROVED FOR TURKEY

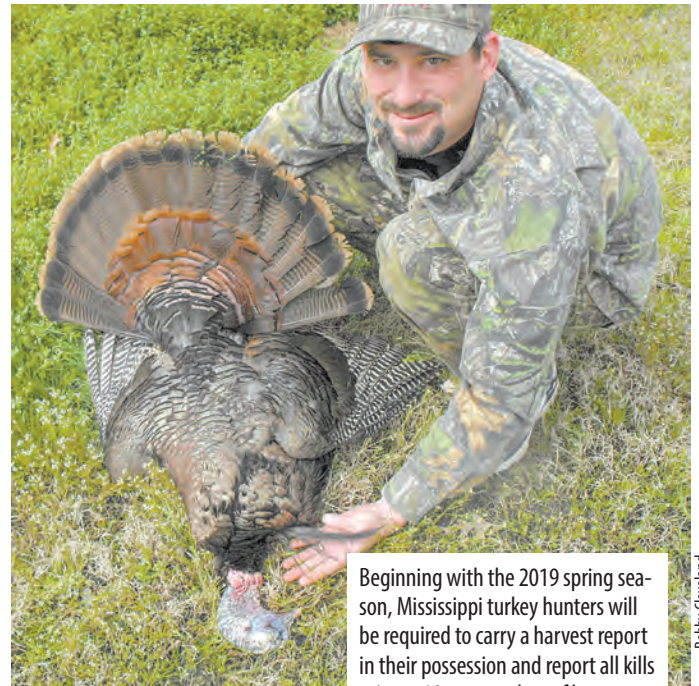
The Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has given final approval to Mississippi's first mandatory harvest system.

Beginning with the 2019 spring season, all turkey hunters in the state must report all kills by 10 p.m. on the date of harvest.

"It's about time," said Dwight Partridge of Terry. "We've needed a tagging system to help monitor the harvest of turkeys, and nobody really wanted to deal with tags. Now, with modern technology, this makes it a lot easier and a lot simpler. I'm happy about it, and anyone who isn't is probably a game hog and law-breaker."

Called "Game Check," the harvest reporting system will require turkey hunters to carry a current harvest-reporting record. That record can either be an MDWFP harvest-reporting application on a smartphone with the hunter's profile and harvest history, a paper copy of the MDWFP harvest-reporting record or a form improvised by the hunter with the required information.

The "Game Check" record shall be considered current when it contains the hunter's full name, harvest date for each turkey harvested and a harvest reporting confirmation number for each



Beginning with the 2019 spring season, Mississippi turkey hunters will be required to carry a harvest report in their possession and report all kills prior to 10 p.m. on date of harvest.

Bobby Cleveland

turkey harvested.

Before moving a turkey from the point of harvest, hunters must document their name and harvest date on their harvest reporting record. All hunters must then by 10 p.m. on the day of harvest report the kill to the MDWFP by either the MDWFP smartphone app, the MDWFP web portal or by telephone. They will receive a harvest report confirmation number.

Harvest reporting records for hunters under the age of 16 may be possessed and maintained by an adult aged 21 or over when hunting under their direct supervision. ■

DON'T FORGET DOVES

A major change in the federal migratory bird framework is giving Mississippi dove hunters additional opportunities to take the fast-flying birds this month. The season extends to Jan. 31, more than two weeks later than the previous required closure of Jan. 15.

"A lot of people may not understand the importance of the extension, but those of us who dove hunt religiously certainly do," said Herb Phillips of Greenville. "To us, it's not about quantity; instead it's about quality. Some of the best dove hunting is late, kind of like duck hunting. It gives us more days to hunt when the migration has pushed more doves down to the Delta from the corn-belt states in the upper Midwest.

"But it also gives us the opportunity to find birds in concentrations. Food sources get scarce in the Delta; that means that the few places that have abundant food for

doves will have a lot of doves. They aren't as scattered as they can be in September and then the October-November dates. It can be the best hunting days you can get, once you find where they are feeding."

Food sources can be anything from scheduled and manipulated plantings for doves, to natural or harvested seed or grain pushed by high waters following heavy rains.

"One of the best hunts we ever had in January was after a high-water event that pushed soybeans and Johnson grass seeds up on a ridge that ran through a soybean field," said Bobby Hayes of Brandon. "We were in the Delta, and there was a high spot that ran the length of this huge rectangular field. When the water receded, it left a lot of seed and beans on that ridge.

"We didn't have to hide or anything. It was food, and they had to eat, so they were coming whether or not we were shooting.



Cold-weather dove hunts can mean furious action, if hunters can find a food source that attracts both local and migrating birds.

Bobby Cleveland

They had no choice and this lasted for over two weeks right up until the last day of the season. It was a two-hour hunt, if that, and everybody got the limit."

Mississippi's daily limit is 15 doves per day, with a possession limit of 45. ■



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Kennan Briggs killed this big public-land buck near Natchez on Jan. 14, 2018.



Preston Briggs with the buck he killed on his youth draw hunt in Natchez on Nov. 18, 2017. The deer's weight was 205 pounds.



Parker Dodson, 7, took this nice 10-point in Madison County on opening day of the youth season.



This buck was taken on the opening weekend of youth season, Nov. 3, 2018, by Parks Brock, 9. He was hunting in Forrest County.



Brayson Briggs poses with the second buck he killed last season. He was hunting in Pearl River County on Dec. 26, 2017.



Tom Pierce of Leakesville with his first (and only to date) spotted gar caught on a horrible tornadic weather day at Lewis Smith Lake in Cullman County, Alabama. He's been an avid alligator gar fisherman since nabbing this spotted one.



Eleven-year-old Colton Grimes with a buck harvested in Ecu.



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ITTA BENA MAN TAGS HUGE BUCK

BIG NON-TYPICAL SPORTS
20 POINTS, MEASURES
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Heath Hodges of Itta Bena, a 38-year-old building contractor, won something akin to a big buck lottery when, on the afternoon of Dec. 3, a huge, 20-point brute chose his trail to walk down.

One shot with his .35 Whelan and the big buck was on the ground.

"At least five other hunters had been after this big buck for the past few seasons," Hodges said. "I guess it was like I won the lottery because the buck came walking right down the trail I was set up on, and I got him."

One of those five, a bowhunter, had the buck at 35 yards last season but held off on because he couldn't get the shot he wanted. Others have seen trail-camera photos and the big non-typical eluded them all until Hodges' luck took a turn for the better and he downed the big buck.

It's not like it was all pure luck on Hodges' part. He and a hunting buddy had been watching for the deer and had him patterned for four weeks. Hodges had seen the deer three times over but was never in the right situation for a shot.

"I actually saw the buck the day before I shot him, and (it) was the third time I'd seen him during daylight hours," Hodges said. "We had trail-cam photos of him for the past few years, and he just kept getting more impressive each year. After I saw the buck the day before, I moved my stand a little closer to where I'd seen him, hoping that it would pay off."

The area around Itta Bena in Leflore County is farmland, and Hodges' family owns about 1,000 acres and grows cotton, soybeans and corn. On Dec. 3, he was hunting an adjoining 80-acre plot a friend



Heath Hodges of Itta Bena killed this 217-inch, 20-point buck on Dec. 3 in Leflore County.

allows him to hunt.

"I got on my stand around 2:30 that afternoon, and after getting settled in, I picked up my grunt call and rattling horns and periodically called and rattled. Before long, two does came by me, walked past and actually bedded down 25 yards from me. They stayed there about 30 minutes," said Hodges, who continued to hit his grunt call and rattling horns when he looked down the trail he had been watching, and here came the big buck, straight to him.

"I guess he was responding to my rattling and grunting, because he was headed right to where he'd heard it, which put him right in front of me at 25 yards. I eased my gun up, squeezed the trigger, and he ran about 20 yards before piling up.

"I decided to shoot my .35 Whelan, because I knew if I had a shot it would be

fairly close, and that gun can do the trick on a buck that close."

After he shot and watched the buck fall, he sent a text message to his buddy, who was hunting on another site, to give him the news.

"All I texted to him was, 'He's down.' My buddy texted back, 'No way.' I answered 'Yes,'" he said.

The buck was a sight to behold, with 20 scoreable points and a long drop tine. The inside spread was 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches, main beams 26 and 27 inches and the buck had plenty of mass throughout the rack. Putting a tape to the impressive rack, the tally added up to 217 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches of antler. The buck, estimated to be 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ years old, was a heavyweight, tipping the scales between 250 and 260 pounds. ■

— Glynn Harris

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WE ARE MOWER THAN JUST A TRACTOR STORE

Kade Lott, 14, of Valley Park, killed this Sharkey County monster 10-point on Nov. 10 after his dad had spotted it the first weekend of the youth season.



Photo courtesy Brian Lott

LITTLE LOTT'S BIG SHARKEY COUNTY BUCK

DAD SPOTS GIANT 10-POINT ONE WEEKEND, PUTS SON ON IT THE NEXT IN YOUTH SEASON

The advantage of youth can extend way beyond the lack of fiscal responsibility, work deadlines, body pains and all that stuff us older folks deal with on a regular basis.

There's also deer hunting, and 14-year-old Kade Lott is a perfect example.

In early November, during the youth season, the St. Aloysius eighth-grader was able to hunt with a gun, while his father and hunting mentor, Brian Lott, could only carry a crossbow. Brian Lott put the youngster in a position to kill a

monster 10-pointer in Sharkey County.

"On opening weekend of youth season (Nov. 3), Kade and I went to our hunting camp in Sharkey County," said Brian Lott, who lives in Valley Park about halfway between Vicksburg and Rolling Fork.

"I dropped him off at a stand in the woods, and I drove to a stand on a pipeline that crosses our property. He saw a couple of does, but no bucks.

"Around dark, as I was fixing to climb down and go get Kade, I looked up and saw a large silhouette walk into the

ATTENTION Landowners and Still Hunters

Are you tired of deer dogs ruining your still hunts?

According to a 2017 deer-hunter survey done by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks, 88% of deer hunters use still hunting as their primary means to hunt deer in Mississippi. Only 2.2% of Mississippi deer hunters use dogs exclusively while 4.5% use a combination of dogs and still hunting. Why is it that dog-deer hunters

get 39 days to hunt deer with dogs while still hunters get only eight with modern gun on public and private land? Even with the primitive weapon season from Dec 2 to 15 allowing weapon of choice on private land (13 days with additional license) the total comes to 21 days for still hunters who make up 88% of the deer hunters. This is all before the second



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dog-deer season opens. There are additional days to still hunt with weapon of choice on private land after dog-deer season closes but

what deer are left are quite wary by then. Why do landowners and still hunters not have protection from trespassing deer dogs on our

land and in our seasons? What is the economic impact of this current situation? Learn more at www.ruralpropertyrights.org

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pipeline. I couldn't clearly make out the antlers, but I knew it was big — bigger than anything we usually see around there. It was too dark to see well, and I was hunting with a crossbow, so at 300-plus yards, I knew I was never going to get a shot. I waited for the deer to disappear into the woods before I got down."

When they returned the second weekend, on Nov. 10, Brian Lott knew exactly what needed to be done.

"I told Kade he needed to hunt the pipeline and wait this buck out," he said. "Kade's young, so waiting while a food plot is full of smaller deer isn't his strong point. We got to camp around 3 o'clock that afternoon, and we loaded up, and I dropped him off on the pipeline and got him settled in.

"I rode to another stand and sat down. At 4:30, I texted him to see if he was seeing anything."

The response text: "155 does :("

Brian Lott knew that the youngster, who has hunted since he was 6 years old and has harvested several bucks, needed encouragement. The frown in the text was telling.

"I texted back that was a good thing; it means the deer are moving," Lott said. "Around 5:15, I was tired of sitting, so I collected my things and started walking back to my Ranger."

That's when he heard the crack of a rifle.

"It was his 7mm-08 Encore echoing across the field," the dad said. "I texted him '???' and he replied with 'BIG BUCK!!!'"

Brian Lott raced to the pipeline to the foot of Kade's stand.

"I asked him how big it was, and he said 'I don't know; all I saw was horns,'" Brian Lott said. "He came down, and we grabbed the flashlights and walked down the pipeline about 120 yards and started looking for blood. Kade found the blood trail, and we took off.

"About 50 yards through a cane thicket, there laid the buck. I approached first, in case it was still alive. The brush was so thick, all I could see was the tip of one antler. I thought to myself, 'I've heard him say it was a big buck before and it not be.'"

Not to worry this time. When dad reached this buck, and grabbed the antlers, he hollered two words: "Oh, wow!"

Kade came running and added three more words: "Oh, my God!" The celebration began.

"After that it was just handshakes and hugs," Lott said. "This young man has hunted hard for many years, and it finally paid off. That day will be forever engraved in my mind."

The typical 10 had great features, including main beams measuring 24 and 23¼ inches. The inside spread was 18 inches and its longest tines were 11 and 10¾ inches. The deer grossed a total of 156 inches and with the few deductions should net about 150. It weighed 238 pounds and was aged at 5½ years.

"I don't think we'll ever forget that day, either one of us," Brian Lott said. ■

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SON PUTS FATHER ON BIG PUBLIC-LAND WHITETAIL

SOUTHAVEN HUNTER KILLS OLD, 16-POINT BUCK THEY HAD NICKNAMED 'SAMSON'

Rick and Nathanael Reeves had a rare kinship with a buck that covered several years, not far from their home in Southaven in DeSoto County, a deer so impressive they called it Samson.

They have photos of Samson from the past three seasons, watching the trophy grow to a massive 19-point buck pushing 300 pounds and then to a much-lighter 16-pointer this year.

That they've had a relationship is not rare; it has happened throughout Mississippi since the advent of trail-cam technology. Many hunters have photos of deer they've watched mature for several years.

What is rare is that this buck lived on public land and died there, too, when Rick Reeves shot him on Nov. 18, the opening weekend of the gun season. That hunters can track a deer that long on public land is, well, amazing.

"We believe him to be at least 6½ years old due to the fact he lost so much since last year," said Rick Reeves, referring to the reduced weight and smaller antlers. "Nathanael got a shot at him in 2016 when Samson was following some does. I think he got buck fever; I've had it before, too, so I understand it."

After the miss, Samson became a recluse. They never saw him again, at least not with the naked eye, and rarely on camera.

"It's like he knew where the cameras were," Reeves said. "But, Nathanael figured him out. He's the best hunter I know, and the best outdoorsman I know. He put me on this buck just like he put me on a big brown trout in Arkansas. He thinks like a deer and like a fish. He's just good outdoors."

According to his father, the outdoors have been good, and important, for Nathanael Reeves.

"He has some learning disabilities and other problems that he probably got from me," Rick Reeves said. "He's had a lot to overcome, not just the disabilities, and has really excelled as a sportsman. As a father, I tried to introduce my kids to the outdoors. Nathanael has told me many times if he had not had hunting and fishing to fall back on, things could have been different."

Rick Reeves was rewarded for his steering efforts on Nov. 18, when he was in a stand and Samson finally made another mistake. His son had put him in an area near where a camera had captured Samson the week before, tending a doe.

"He slipped in quick, and when I saw him through my scope, I knew immediately it was Samson," Reeves said. "I only had a second. He was quartering away, so I aimed a little back, hoping the



Rick Reeves of Southaven with Samson, the 16-point buck he killed Nov. 18 on public land somewhere in North Mississippi.

Photo courtesy Rick Reeves

bullet would cross through the vitals."

He pulled the trigger, then watched Samson take off.

"Last year, I purchased a new rifle, a Ruger American in 6.5 Creedmoor," Reeves said. "I shot two deer last year with ballistic points. They destroyed the vitals but left no blood trail. I like a blood trail, so this year, I switched to a bonded bullet."

But, alas, Samson had left no blood trail.

"When I walked up to look for blood, I saw that I had shot through a small branch," Reeves said. "I shot about 75 to 100 yards in thick brush. My heart dropped. I had thought about taking Nathanael's 300, but didn't. I looked for blood and hair ... nothing."

"I called Nathanael, and he came to help. He is a good tracker, and I am not."

It didn't matter; Nathanael Reeves found the buck, and fortunately he had a big UTV on hand.

"Neither of us could drag him any distance without assistance," Rick Reeves said. ■

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FATHER, SON DOUBLE UP IN JASPER COUNTY

SAME STAND, SAME GUN, SAME HUNT PRODUCES TWO TROPHY BUCKS FOR MISSISSIPPI HUNTERS

Billy McKee of Terry and his appropriately named son, Gunner, can make a claim that few other deer hunters can — they collected 262 inches of antler with two shots in five minutes.

From the same stand. And, with the same gun.

Two days after Thanksgiving, the McKees killed two bucks in a very short period of time. Gunner McKee, 12, killed a 121-inch, 8-point buck. Billy McKee took the same .30-06 Ruger and shot a 141-inch, 11-point trophy.

"I told Gunner, 'Son, we aren't likely ever going to do that again,'" Billy McKee said.

Nobody else likely will, either.

The story began on Thanksgiving Day, when the two hunters headed to their Jasper County hunting club on family land.

"We arrived at our camp on Thursday just in time to go check some trail cams," Billy McKee said. "When we checked a particular camera we had overlooking a scrape, we were excited to see that we had several different bucks visiting it, two of which were shooters and on our hit list. We had a general idea as to where we believed the deer were bedding, and the direction to which we could expect them to come from. So all we had to do was wait on the right wind, and go hunt."

Friday didn't work due to the wind, but Saturday ...

"Saturday evening, we checked the weather app, and it called for the wind we needed, so off we went," McKee said. "With the weather being rather warm and the moon being full, we did not have very high hopes. And on top of that, once we were in the stand, we realized the wind was actually terrible for where we expected the deer to come from."

They decided to ride it out in the two-man stand until dark.

"Gunner was going to be the trigger man that evening, so I did not bring my gun along," McKee said. "His is a Ruger .30-06 bolt-action. Honestly, I didn't feel very good about our chances."

But they made the most of it, even joking about what they might do if the two shooters showed up.

"We were even picking with one another about the possibility of seeing both of the bigger deer, what we were going to do should they both show up, and how we were going to get them both," Billy McKee said. "Not in a million years did we think it was a possibility."

Then, it happened.

"About a quarter to 5, we saw a nice buck walking in the pines, roughly 80 yards away, and realized it was a shooter," Billy McKee said. "We were able to see the buck had good tines and appeared to be the 8-point we were after. I gave Gunner the green light to take the shot, so he knocked the safety off and squeezed the trigger.

"We saw the famous 'mule kick' and knew that he had a good shot on him."

The pair were celebrating, trying to be quiet, until ...

"I noticed a figure that I didn't recall being there — I am constantly scanning the woods and knew that blob wasn't there earlier — so I picked up my binoculars for a better look," Billy McKee said. "Guess who it was? It was the other big shooter we had on camera. He was standing like a statue staring at us. I could not believe I was looking at him. It was less than five minutes.

"Gunner realized what was going on, that it was the other shooter, so he quietly chambered another round. He passed the gun to me, giving me the opportunity to take the shot."

At the shot, Billy McKee said the big buck lunged forward and took off in the same direction that his son's deer had gone.

"At this point, we were not even trying to be quiet anymore; we were in full celebration mode," he said. "We both could not believe what had just happened. We gained our composure, got out of the tree, and took off on the track."

Billy McKee said he wasn't expecting to find the deer without help; both had



Photo courtesy Billy McKee

Billy McKee and son Gunner, 12, of Terry killed these two Jasper County bucks on Nov. 24 five minutes apart from the same stand, with the same gun.

disappeared from sight.

"We had one little flashlight between us, but we got down and went and looked and were ready to go back to the camp and get my dad and others to help," he said. "But right before we did that, I told Gunner we should make one little lap through the pines and see what we could find. It was pretty thin in there.

"One of the coolest parts of the whole thing is that both deer had piled up and expired in the same, exact spot. They were laying only a couple feet apart where we found them. They both ran 60 yards and died just feet apart. It was crazy."

Jasper County in Southeast Mississippi is rich in deer quantity, but not so much in quality.

"I've hunted this camp since before I was Gunner's age; it's a deer camp, but it's on my family's land," McKee said. "These were the biggest deer either of us had taken at our family club. To have it all happen the way it did, with him, makes it that much more special." ■

Fishermen at Barnett Reservoir, including the popular Spillway Recreation Area, will all need a designated trash receptacle beginning Jan. 1.



Bobby Cleveland

BARNETT RESERVOIR TRASH RULE CHANGES

Beginning Jan. 1, all fishermen on Barnett Reservoir near Jackson will be required to have a designated and clearly marked trash receptacle in their possession while fishing waters managed by the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District.

"The rule includes both boaters and bank fishermen," said John Sigman, general manager of PRVWSD. "There was already a requirement that boats have a designated, covered trash container on board. The new rule simply adds bank fishermen to the regulation."

Sigman said the PRVWSD Board of Directors is growing weary of a trash-related problem in many of the most-popular bank-fishing areas, in particular, the Spillway Recreational Area below the dam along the tailrace to the 33,000-acre lake. A closure of the area, either short- or long-term, has been considered.

"We met with some of the concerned

fishermen from the spillway and worked with them on a solution; this was one of their suggestions," said Kenny Latham, the PRVWSD parks policy committee chairman. "This was what they wanted, and let's hope it works. It does give our law enforcement officers an enforceable regulation."

One problem with fish-related trash and standard litter law enforcement in an area like the spillway is that an officer must see the fisherman discard the trash, then sit and wait until the fisherman leaves to issue a litter citation.

"That could be six or eight hours, or even longer," said Perry Waggener, reservoir police chief. "Otherwise, if we approach about litter, the guy can say, 'Yes, it's mine, but I plan to pick it up before we leave.' There's not much we can do."

"The new law gives officers an immediate recourse," said fisherman Todd Macko, part of the group that worked with Latham's committee to combat litter. "If the officer

walks up to a fisherman with litter on the ground, and says, 'Let me see your designated receptacle,' and the fisherman can't produce one, he can be ticketed."

To be legal, the receptacle must have either "trash" or "litter" printed on it and cannot be used for any other purpose.

"I hate it came to this, but the litter problem isn't going away," Macko said. "I really think it's a very small percentage of fishermen and other visitors who are the problem. A lot of us have worked hard to pick up and clean the litter and attempted to use peer pressure to make a difference, and we've made a difference. It just wasn't enough."

The new regulation includes all areas of Barnett Reservoir where bank fishing takes place: the spillway, along the Natchez Trace, public fishing piers, parks, dikes and other places. ■

5 JANUARY FISHING HOT SPOTS

Don't think for a minute that fishing slows down just because January is the beginning of the heart of winter. Like crappie expert Paul Johnson always said, "Fish gotta eat, no matter what."

That's true of bass, crappie, catfish, speckled trout, redfish... You name it, "Fish gotta eat." That said, here are five hot spots fishermen should try this month:

• BARNETT RESERVOIR

Whether you chase catfish, bass or crappie, this central Mississippi lake near Jackson has plenty. That the lake is in a drawdown to fight an outbreak of the invasive plant giant salvinia won't impact fishing. Crappie were being caught in pretty good numbers in early December in depths of 7 to 8 feet and in deeper water: 10 or 12 feet down to 30 or more. That won't last, and cold temperatures will push fish deeper. Bass fishing is a bit tougher, but on warm days, the largemouth will be aggressive and can be found in schools blasting on the surface in the backwater areas upriver. Spotted bass can be readily caught in the river on deep sandbar points on drop-shot rigs in at least 10 feet of water. Oddly enough, the best catfish days on Barnett are on the coldest days, and the best fishing is from the bank. Shad get caught shallow and the cold temperatures kill them. Catfish move up and feast.

• TENN-TOM WATERWAY

Trophy catfish anglers love the Tenn-Tom pools of Columbus and Aberdeen in the heart of winter. According to local experts, December through February is the peak season for big blues and flatheads, mainly because the cold weather concentrates them in deep holes in the river. With little to no current, target flathead catfish with live bait in deep, standing timber. Target blue catfish in times of moderate to heavy current. Blues will relate to the channel, but they will move up on the nearby flats, often as shallow as 3 to 4 feet, and feed heavily. Another good spot for blues is the tailrace area, extending about 2 miles down from the locks and dams.

• OKHISSA LAKE

Bass fishermen have fallen in love with this big Homochitto National Forest Lake near Bude, especially in the winter when fish move to the upper end of the lake and coves. You find fish in other areas — like along the dam on suspending jerkbaits — but for numbers and size, find the deeper water in those coves. One excellent pattern is fishing the edges of the main creek-channel on the upper end of the lake with a drop-shot worm. That's a numbers game, with lots of fish in the 1½- to 3-pound range. For



Bobby Cleveland

For cold-weather crappie, Eagle Lake is tough to beat and can produce some jacked-up January action.

bigger fish, pick those warmer days and find points and banks where the creek channel comes closest. Then, try big shaky head worms, slow-moving swim baits and suspending jerkbaits.

• EAGLE LAKE

This one is strictly for crappie fishermen, especially those who know how to catch both white crappie and black crappie. Eagle has plenty of both, and in good size. Three-pounders are not rare there. For white crappie, hunt suspended schools in the deep outer curve of the lake, the Mississippi side. They will be suspended somewhere between 10 and 15 feet in at least 20 feet of water. Modern electronics have made it easier to pinpoint big schools. Trolling with minnows or jig-minnow combinations works. For black crappie, look under the fishing piers on the outside curve — and don't always think deep. Local experts know that a jig fished 2 to 3 feet deep often catches the biggest "specks" in the lake.

• BAY OF ST. LOUIS

Saltwater fishermen on Mississippi's Gulf Coast are probably tired of seeing this — especially those who have already mastered it and like keeping it to themselves — but some of the best fishing of the year is in January along the US 90 bridge pilings in the Bay of St. Louis, where the Jourdan River meets the Gulf. Those pilings concentrate several species, including some of the best-tasting fish on the coast — red and black drum and sheepshead. Fish downstream on a falling tide and upstream on a rising tide, or just fish right up against the piling on either side. The key is keeping the bait as close to the cement piling as possible. Dead bait shrimp is good enough, and maintain a good tight line so you can feel bites on the fall. ■

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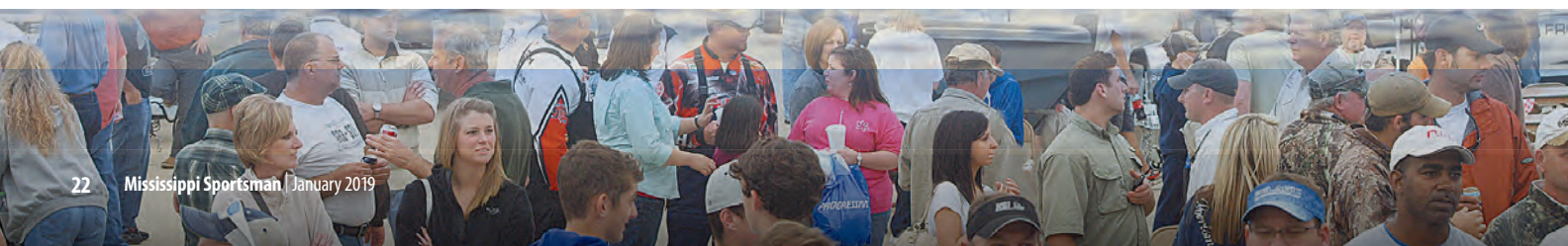


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NEVER TOO LATE



Mike Giles

January brings breeding activity to many parts of Mississippi, so hunters can literally find themselves in a rut as long as they'd like to be.

By Mike Giles

George Clark Burge settled the crosshairs of his .45/70 on a massive, swamp-bottom buck in Pearl River County and squeezed the trigger deliberately.

Ka-Boom!

The rifle roared, and the big buck collapsed in a heap. Burge's trophy harvest was not an accident, nor a one-time occurrence. If there was any luck, it was preparation meeting opportunity, which equals some hard-earned success. Anybody can be lucky once, but to consistently harvest trophy bucks, hunters must have a strategy and plan of action and carry that out to the nth degree.

Burge has consistently harvested trophies in a part of Mississippi that is not known to have big bucks, but he targets them, and when he locates the biggest bucks in an area, he buckles down and hunts him mano-a-mano: one-on-one. >

“OUR RUT IN PEARL RIVER COUNTY IS CRAZY,”

Burge said. “A few years ago, they did a study, and it seems that the rut occurred in parts of three months — starting in November — and it was vastly different, even in the same county.”

Now retired, Burge, who is from Poplarville, hunts with his brother almost every day of the season; where they hunt depends upon the time of the season and month.

SOUTHEAST REGION LATE RUT

“We hunt the WMAs up through December, and then I head to my camp in the northern part of Pearl River County after Jan. 1,” Burge said. “We still try the south end occasionally in January, but it’s like all of the bucks just left the southern part of the county and followed the does up to the north.”

With Pearl River County being in the Southeast Region, it’s obvious to knowledgeable hunters that the rut usually occurs there much later than the rest of the state. In fact, the Southeast Region season runs through mid-February to take advantage of the late rutting activity.

“We hunt 6,000 acres up there, and you can’t hardly kill a buck before Jan. 1. In fact, last year we killed 80 percent of our bucks after Jan. 1. Of the 24 bucks we killed, 17 of them were killed in January. And it’s not like there is no pressure on the deer before then. People hunt hard from Thanksgiving right through Christmas, but most bucks are nocturnal then.

“The area we hunt on the north end of the county is rolling hills with a lot of pine timber, almost the exact opposite of the swamp bottoms on the south end of the county,” Burge said. “But it’s pretty obvious when the rut occurs, because we start seeing buck movement and killing a bunch, too.”

“Every time we see the bucks running or chasing does, we mark the calendar,”

Burge said. “Some people think the weather affects it, but it’s all affected by the light.”

Find the does, and you’ll find the bucks during the primary and secondary rut, because the bucks will go where the does are coming into heat.

SECONDARY RUT

Mark McPhail scanned the cutover hillsides for any sign of a deer, but the action had slowed to a crawl in south Lauderdale County. The year-end rut had long since passed, and McPhail just hoped to catch a glimpse of antlers.

Suddenly, a doe burst over the crest of the ridge, running wide open across the cutover. Seconds later, a buck followed in hot pursuit. Amazingly, several small-racked bucks popped over the ridge until nine bucks were following in a helter-skelter line. McPhail simply picked out the one he wanted, and it was easy pickings.

A Collinsville resident, McPhail hunts to the very end of January and credits the secondary rut for some of his best buck kills in central Mississippi during a time when most hunters have hung it up.

Across much of Mississippi, the main rutting activity has already ceased by January, but for diehard hunters like McPhail who are willing to put in the time, the secondary rut may be even better.

continues on page 28

A deer crossing on a beaver dam in a swamp is a great pinch point to watch.
BOTTOM: George Burge displays a big south Mississippi swamp buck. The 8-point buck was a trophy for that area of the state.

GET BACK, JACK

When hunting late in the season and during the secondary rut George Clark Burge of Poplarville always hunts at least 100 yards off fields or food sources.

Burge has harvested many quality bucks by backing off about 100 yards downwind and intercepting them before they get to the field during daylight hours.

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NEVER TOO LATE

Cypress sloughs dry up during the winter in south Mississippi, but they do have moist soil that grows titi, a favorite deer food. Bucks run through the secluded sloughs for the security as the sides are usually thick and the moist soil grows some greens that the bucks love.

“I normally like to hunt areas where I can see a long distance, like cutovers, power lines or long lanes through the timber,” McPhail said. “The further I can see, the better, and I like to move in real quietly and ease up into my stand undetected. The less you disturb the environment, the more likely you are to see a buck and get a shot. I prefer being at least 200 to 300 yards from where the bucks normally cross the opening.”

McPhail is a sharpshooter with his Ruger 7mm Magnum, having harvested many bucks and even elk with the trusty rifle.

“That Ruger 7-Mag will reach out there and touch them,” McPhail said. “Last season, I watched a buck chase a doe back and forth across a lane, and I finally got on him when he came across hot on the doe’s trail. I squeezed off a shot at him, but he never checked up. I really thought I’d missed him, but when I got ready to head home, I checked and found him (dead) just outside the lane.”

If you have a rifle that is dead-on and you know how to shoot it, there’s a good probability that you might harvest a trophy buck chasing a doe during the secondary rut as well. But take a tip from McPhail and have your gun aimed in the direction that the doe crosses the lane, because you’ll only have a split second to decide, aim and fire when the buck comes into view.

DOES IN HEAT

If a doe doesn’t get bred the first time she comes into estrus, she will come in again, and sometimes, you’ll have several does come in a second time in the same area — and you have a secondary rut. As J. P. Nolen was prone to say, “I don’t care where it is, if a doe in heat ran down Capital Street in downtown

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Jackson during the rush hour, that buck would be hot on her tail; nothing would deter him from his natural mating urge.”

Normally, the secondary rut is more concentrated, and since most of the does have already been bred, there may be more bucks following one doe. Don't shoot the first one that pops out. Camden Lot passed on a smaller buck that followed a doe out last year in Quitman County and then shot the buck of a lifetime, an 11-point, 238-pounder that sported 12-inch tines and an 18-inch spread.

ReAnn Chatham of Meridian also passed on a decent 8-point on a hunt during the rut and then killed a 14-point buck that was also hot on the trail of a doe. That buck weighed 170 pounds and scored 149% Boone & Crockett points.

Hunters must be patient and stay in the woods, ready for a moment of truth that may not come. If it does present itself, however, you'll only have a split second to make the right choice. It helps to have nerves of steel, good optics and a steady, accurate rifle that is easy to handle. If you have those things, you need to stay in the woods as the season wanes.

MIDDAY HUNTING: CORRIDORS

There's one good thing about hunting during the rut; bucks will move night and day until a doe they've picked out is receptive. Even though they sometimes throw caution to the wind, does and bucks will try to avoid hunters, stay in the thickest cover available and move only when human activity is at a minimum.

“We like to hunt at the crack of dawn, but if you don't catch one moving by 7 a.m., it is usually a dead time until about 10:30,” Burge said.

One of the best spots Burge has is a mid-day crossing on a beaver dam. Bucks will move during the mid-day hours, and they'll slip through the swamps by traveling on top of a beaver dam situated between two sloughs. When the deer are on the move there's a good chance Burge will get a shot at one crossing that beaver dam.

“One year, we started getting pictures of bucks moving between 10:30 and 12:30,” Burge said, “so we decided to sleep late and do some things around the farm and then go to the woods. It seems that the woods wake up around 10:30 during the late season. We tried to be in the woods between 9:30 and 10.”

Turns out that was just the ticket for Burge.

“I went into the woods mid-morning, and was going to hunt a particular stand, but the wind shifted, so I changed plans and got to another stand about 11. I was tired, so I dozed off for about an hour and then decided to get up and leave,” Burge said. “I'd already turned around when I saw a nice 9-point coming my way, so I eased my rifle up and shot him,” said Burge.



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



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Jason Pugh of Dixon chose a well-used trail crossing under a power line in Neshoba County to bag this heavy-antlered buck.

PRESSURE POINTS

By David Hawkins

Deer that have been hunted heavily appear basically to disappear as the end of the season approaches across Mississippi. Here's how to make late into great.

There was a joke at King's Flat Hunting Club that the deer had the camp house bugged.

Should a hunter mention a stand he or she planned to hunt, the duty deer would enter that data for immediate display on the King's Flat Deer Facebook Page. Every buck and most does would get the message and avoid that stand at all costs. Club members would often think of one stand but talk about another just to throw the bucks off. It's suspected the deer caught on to this ploy early on and employed a witch doctor to cast a spell on the hunters by playing a drum set outside — very long and loud.

Jokes aside, it seems uncanny how bucks, especially mature, heavy antlered trophy class specimens, can avoid hunters in the days and weeks after the opening fusillades of November. They were caught in trail-camera images, their shed antlers will be found — to instill wanton disap-

pointment — by turkey hunters marching in the spring woods.

But where do the bucks go to disappear during hunting season? They become nocturnal; that is well established, but they still have to eat and move from one bedding area to another. Just how is a hunter supposed to solve the problem of hunting pressured bucks?

The sensory system of a whitetail is highly refined. Deer can smell, hear and see movement better than any human. It may however, be a pair of conditioned responses that gives them the edge over the modern human hunter/gatherer. Deer have a talent for concealment and an equally adept ability to pattern hunters. Most hunters easily address the physical senses the deer possess, with camo, scent killers and quiet stealth. It is the learned responses the deer have that hunters are lacking.

SLOW DOWN, LOOK AROUND UP NEXT ▶



SLOW DOWN, LOOK AROUND

“Deer are in their element 24/7/365,” said Dr. Steve Damaris of the Mississippi State University’s Deer Lab. “They know the land as well as most of us knows the floorplan of our bedroom. They know where the mast trees are; they know where the water is; they have the ability to see changes and adapt their memory and movement patterns based on those changes. When a human enters the picture, for whatever reason, they will fall back on life experiences to determine how to deal with that intrusion.”

One of those responses might be to do nothing. If a deer is bedded or feels confident it is undetected, it will allow hunters to pass at very close range. After all, since the time the deer entered the world, remaining motionless has been a defense. Not every encounter a deer has is a fight or flight scenario.

Melvin Tingle of Decatur, a member of the Mississippi Outdoors Hall of Fame, often shared stories about deer

holding their ground, unseen and undisturbed for long periods of time. Here are a couple, and how hunters may have succeeded in getting a successful shot on a trophy buck.

“We were filming a rabbit hunt in Claiborne County the first week of February,” Tingle said. “It was a private camp with a reputation for big deer and plenty of bunnies. We had as good a pack of beagles as could be found anywhere, and they were all over the place. After several hours of hunting and filming, we paused under a powerline to have some water and rest our legs.

“A good number of trees had been cut and felled away from the powerline, and three of us chose to use one of the logs as a seat. We chatted among ourselves, and a beagle kept busy snuffling around our feet. One of the other men walked perhaps 50 feet to where the top of the felled oak still held a good number of dead leaves, to relieve himself. He shouted, and we all turned to see a wide-racked 8-point, maybe a 10-point, bolt from the tree top with a great rustle of leaves and brush. The buck had been bedded there and had felt no reason to run



Finding a natural funnel and spending some quality time there is a good plan. Here, a ditch with a good assortment of hardwood adjoins an area where beetles killed over 100 acres of mature pine timber.

until it had been almost peed on.”

“In the 1960s, we hunted quail because there were so few deer and the season was very short,” said hunter Mark Golden of Taylorsville. “I can’t tell you how many times we jumped deer while walking behind the dogs. Sometimes, we were looking for well-known covey, and the dogs were all around the deer before they jumped. All the time, we were talking to each other and calling to the dogs, and the deer held tight. Now we have lots of deer and fewer quail, but I believe they still stay put unless they are threatened.”

Late in the season, preferred deer food starts to run low, and acorns and other mast begin to sour. Deer still need to eat, and they look to green patches and early green-up tree buds for much needed nutrition. But don’t sit on a food plot you’ve hunted all season and expect a trophy buck to come waltzing into the wide open. Trail-camera fans can attest to the fact that late-season bucks are late-night diners on food plots, or at least visit just at dusk and dawn.



Deer that feel secure in heavy cover will often stay put until hunters almost step on them.

HUNT TIME-TESTED TRAILS UP NEXT ▶

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HUNT TIME-TESTED TRAILS

Instead of hunting directly over a food plot, hunt trails leading to the plot, especially where several trails cross or converge. The thicker the cover, the better your chances of getting a shot at a good buck. If you regularly hunt a trail and see deer, continue to hunt that trail even after the rut has ended. First, there can always be a few straggler does who are just entering estrus and may have a buck in tow. Second, deer are creatures of habit. A well-used trail is likely to be used by generations of deer on an annual basis.

Randall Pugh of Neshoba County knows just such a trail and has erected a permanent stand where it goes under a powerline. There is a small green patch under the powerline, but bucks seldom use it.

"The deer have a trail just up from the edge of the patch," Pugh said. "Bucks will come out into the open and stop to look toward the line at the grass patch, like they are just checking it out, then they walk on or sometimes turn around and go back the way they came. Over the years, we have killed some good bucks there. It's sort of a go-to stand when the season is short and deer have been hunted hard."

Pressured deer will take the shortest route between two patches of thick cover when traveling during daylight hours. This cleared lane between two bedding areas sees much deer traffic, but a hunter best be ready; the deer isn't going to hang around for long.



Photo courtesy Josh Hawkins

SEARCH OUT FUNNELS

Pressured deer will avoid wide-open spaces as the season starts to wind toward a close. The travel corridors they choose are often natural funnels that affect normal movement patterns. The narrow places in these funnels are called pinch points, and finding one will allow a hunter to “tag out” well before Super Bowl Sunday.

A map of an area being hunted will go a long way toward locating natural funnels, but not all maps are up to date. Grabbing a Google Earth photo may not include all the information a hunter needs to make an informed decision. Hopefully, the hunter has a good, working knowledge of the area being hunted, and using wind and hunting history of the area, puts together a working plan.

Much of Mississippi was hit hard by an infestation of pine beetles over the past two years; more than 20,000 acres of pine forest was harvested or cut and left to decay as part of a management plan. The upside of this is deer will have a tremendous increase in great fawning habitat, and deer numbers over the next decade should respond positively. Also, pressured deer will avoid these dead tracts and stick to the edges, where less effort is required to move about unseen.

All that is to say if you are hunting in a National Forest such as Bienville in central Mississippi, on one of the WMAs in Scott, Smith or Jasper County, chances are good the deer have altered their movements in areas now littered with down and dead trees. Keep in mind that food sources are getting scarce, and a deer will only want to expend minimal energy. Finding a funnel with a ditch or stream running through it and a huge, fresh cutover beside it, and you've found the perfect pinch point. There may be some acorns under the leaves and few oaks may still be dropping.

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IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER

The last days of January are reserved for primitive-weapons hunters. There are fewer hunters in the woods, and dog season has closed. With primitive being a relative term for weapon definition in Mississippi, there is no reason not to spend some time doing spot-and-stalk. A great way to look at new territory, slipping through the woods can be rewarding in many ways. As a hunter, you may need another doe for the freezer or happen onto the trophy of a lifetime.



Using a map is a simple way to locate drains and ditches that will act as travel corridors for late season bucks.

David Hawkins




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Setting up informal man drives is another option; several people can cover a lot of ground that might harbor deer during daylight hours. Just be sure everyone is on the same page about safety and wears the required hunter orange and is sure of the target before pulling the trigger.

With enough people, some tree stands manned with hunters and a few walking the terrain may just pop a deer out of its day bed and into a hunter's sights. Several deer camps have done this late in the season. There are some rules about man drives and how they are conducted. Check with the MDWFP or a Conservation Officer before trying such a drive for the first time.

There is quality deer hunting during the last month of the season for those willing to change a few old habits. Don't quit hunting until the end has come. Good luck and be safe. ■



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



By Bobby Cleveland

LICKING THEIR LIPS

Delta waterfowl hunters say the habitat is the best it's been in years and hope the weather makes 2019 the equal to last season for ducks.

Magnolia State duck hunters are forecasting another great January in the Mississippi Delta, hoping it will match the 2017-18 season that many consider the best in decades.

"After last year, and with the habitat in the shape it's in, you better believe we're anticipating another great season," said Trip Burns of Southaven. "We had a lot of deer hunters quit deer hunting to go duck hunting; it was that good last year. I've never seen that many ducks in the Delta, not in the 20 years I've hunted.

"We got limits early and often, and it was quality ducks. Mallards were as plentiful as I've ever seen. Most days, we had to work hard for a limit of six because we had to stop at four mallards each. We had to work to find enough off-birds to fill the limit, but we did, mostly thanks to the green-winged teal and (gadwalls)."

The thing is, hunters say the Delta is in better condition entering into the 2019 than it was last year.

Public lands were good to Austin Partridge in 2017-18 in January. He got his first black duck hunting timber in the Delta at one of the many WMAs.

"That's the big thing right there," said Timmy Hearn of Greenwood, a farmer who prefers timber hunting on public lands. "We've had an extremely wet fall and summer, record-setting in some areas. The habitat is as good as I've ever seen it in the past 15 to 20 years. Not only does the entire Delta have plenty of water, there's plenty of food."

"I think the success that hunters had last year impacted their preparations this year. After seeing all the ducks we had last year, a lot more people who used to duck hunt came back to the sport. This year, I've seen more and more people manipulating land and crops just for duck season. That's the kind of impact one really good season can bring."

It would be tough to match last year, despite the splendid habitat.

"That's true, because we aren't guaranteed duck migration on a set schedule," Hearn said. "Last year, we had those two sub-freezing arctic blasts in December, one kind of early in the month and the other about the week or 10 days before Christmas. We

had frozen ponds here, so you know it was a total freeze out early in the upper Midwest.

"Ducks started pouring in early December and, at least where I hunted, they never left. Last year, we weren't in the same great habitat condition we are this year. If anything, this year we have too much water. That could make hunting tough early in the year, because the ducks won't be concentrated. There are so many places for them to be."

It can be so good that it becomes both good and bad, like the proverbial double-edged sword.

"The good news is that when the ducks start coming in, even the early arrivers, because the habitat is good, they'll stay," Hearn said. "But because there's so much water, they can scatter and not be concentrated, and if hunted hard, they can jump move out to a new area. Consistency is hurt."

"But all of that goes away in January, once the main flight of the migration brings in the ducks. They will fly in, see the abundant water, find the food sources, and they'll stay. They will not overfly the Delta."



Mike Giles

A black lab makes a mad splash back to the blind after a retrieve in the Delta. **BELOW:** Ag fields and converted catfish ponds produced ducks last season, as Jacob Sartain (right) can attest.



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A common sight in 2017-18 duck season: a happy retriever after a morning of chasing ducks for his owner.

BAD FORECAST? WHO CARES?

Despite a smaller flight forecast from federal surveys, most hunters are not discouraged.

“Even if it is down 10 percent, like they said, you give me 90 percent of the ducks we had last year, and I’ll take it,” said Phillip Cummings of Grenada. “We were limiting every weekend at our lease in January, and usually before 8 a.m. Ten percent won’t hurt that much.

“I’ve duck hunted in the Delta for nearly 40 years, since I was about 12 years old, and I have never seen it as good, consistently good, as it was last year. We’d get in the blind before sunrise, pour a cup of coffee and never get a chance to finish the cup. The shooting was that fast and furious.”

Cummings learned a valuable lesson. “I ran out of shells early, and when I went to get a few more cases, I had trouble finding what I shoot,” he said. “Not this year, no sir. I bought 10 cases of shells. I am not going to run out, I assure you.”

TIMBER OR FIELDS?

Cummings has the option of hunting timber or flooded agriculture fields, and last year said he was about 50/50.

“Both places had plenty of ducks; we just switched up to keep the pressure down on any one spot,” he said. “We did kill a higher percentage of mallards last year in the timber than we did in the fields, but we had more green-wings, pintails and gadwalls in the fields. We had to wait more for the mallards in the fields, but it was easier filling the limit because of the other birds. In the timber, once we had our four mallards, we struggled to get the other ducks needed to limit. We’d get them, though.”

Hearns prefers timber, so he leaves the farmlands behind and goes to the many public lands available in the Delta.

“I love to hunt the timber — shallow, flooded timber — and I don’t mind a good walk to get to it,” he said. “It’s work to do it the way I like to, but I stay mobile, and it’s just me and my dog, so we can cover a lot of water if we have to.

“Last year was the best season I’ve ever had, and without a doubt, January 2018



was the best month of duck hunting I’ve ever experienced. I hunted every day I could, and I don’t think I failed to get a limit a single time, whether I went to the timber or stayed close to home and went to a field. When you duck hunt like I do, there’s the luxury of being able to go where the ducks are.”

BRING ON THE COLD

The No. 1 factor in hunting success or failure in the Delta, at the far end of the Mississippi River Flyway, is the severity of the winter weather. In a mild winter, ducks won’t reach Mississippi, stopping instead in Arkansas and Missouri.

“All the work we do, all the water we



Mississippi duck hunters found a lot of mallards in the timber last January in the 2017-18 season, but then they found them all over the Delta. They are looking for a repeat this month.

get and all the food we supply ducks, none of that matters if we don't get the ducks," said Jacob Sartain of Madison, whose business — and pleasure — is selling and managing property for recreational purposes. "We need a repeat of last year's winter weather to get the ducks back in here. We'll get plenty in January — we always do — but a cold winter will put them here early and keep them here."

Sartain advises landowners for whom he manages duck holes to hunt them lightly early in the season, to keep from putting too much pressure on the waterfowl.

But not in January, at least not in mid- and late January.

"In January, I tell them that if they have ducks, hunt them," he said. "By then, it's time to reap the benefits of all the work we've done to provide food and habitat. Everything we did all year — and managing waterfowl habitat is a year-round job — is about having ducks in January, so when you got them, hunt them, then get up the next morning and hunt them some more."

After the long flight down from the prairies of the upper Midwest and Canada, ducks are looking for food and security.

"That's why I like the timber," Hearns said. "Once the shooting starts in earnest across the Delta, those ducks will be looking for the security of trees. They may go to the fields during the day to feed, but it's been my experience that they will not want to be

exposed for very long. They are going to look for brakes, sloughs, oxbows ... you know, water with timber so they can have cover.

"If you look hard enough, you will find hot spots in the timber where ducks keep coming back over and over, and usually because there's some kind of food source there. If I find them, I don't hesitate to walk in or let my dog Troy go in on them and jump them up out of a hole. There's a reason they like that spot on that day, and once it settles back down, they'll come back for that same reason."

Austin Partridge, a firefighter from Terry, is another hunter who loves to hunt the timber and doesn't mind a long drive or a tough walk to find a honey hole.

"I'll go standby at a draw hunt just for the opportunity that somebody may not show up and I can go," he said. "But if that fails, I still have time to get to public land somewhere nearby and get in some timber and shoot some ducks. If this year is anything like last year, I'll get my share." ■



Bobby Cleveland has covered sports in Mississippi for over 40 years. A native of Hattiesburg and graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Cleveland lives on Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson with his wife Pam.

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MINIMALIST HEARN AN 'OLD SCHOOL' DUCK HUNTER

TIMMY HEARNS of Greenwood, a son of the Delta, is an old-school duck hunter, one who carries a single call, totes a sack of 12 assorted plastic decoys, only wears hip waders, and takes a canteen of water and perhaps a PB&J sandwich on a hunt.

His dog Troy — pronounced T-Roy — usually lopes along beside him.

No ATV. No pirogue. It's just a man and his dog.

"He'd likely be carrying one already opened box of shells, too," said his friend, Johnny Thames of Jackson. "Truth is, he only needs six, and I've seen him limit with four."

In an age of technology and gadgetry, Hearns is a relic, a hunter who eschews fancy clothes, waders and "gizmo decoys"

and old Troy, we do okay."

Okay?

In the 2017-18 season, Hearns said he got 26 limits in 50 days of hunting, got at least a limit of mallards another 20 times and was never skunked.

In January, he hunted every day he could and said he limited every day.

"Best season ever, and January was the best month I've ever had," he said. "We were overloaded with ducks in the Delta, even on public lands, but I'm not saying it was easy. I had to work at it. I covered a lot of land almost every day. I love it, so I can do it, but it's not the kind of hunting anybody else wants to do. My man Johnny there, he's about the only one I ever let go with me, and he's only good for a day or two..."

Said Thames, a 34-year-old, pencil-thin, unmarried farm hand, "He's right; I can't keep up, and I'm a triathlete.

"He lives like he duck hunts, minimally," Thames said. "He has no cell phone, doesn't want one, and has never owned a computer. Don't ask him for duck pictures. He doesn't have a camera, either.

"He has girlfriends, from time to time, but never in the winter. He lives rent-free on one of the farms he works, in a two-room apartment built into a barn..."

Hearns interrupted: "Hey, one of them is a full bathroom; I'm not totally Neanderthal."

His is the perfect lifestyle for an old-school duck hunter, even one with an agriculture-related degree from Delta State University. As a farmer, Hearns has the winter off from work, and he can concentrate on duck hunting. His living expenses are minute, so he doesn't need an offseason job in the winter. Because he's in the farming network, he's made a lot of friends with farmers who own a lot of Delta land, and since he's quick to help

when needed, he gets a lot of invitations on land nobody else hunts.

"I hunt about 50/50 on private and public lands, but last year, I did most of it on public lands like Sunflower WMA and Yazoo (National Wildlife Refuge)," Hearns said. "I like to hunt timber, and the WMAs and refuges have the best.

"As often as I was going, I still had to be mobile. Ducks only have to move about 100 yards to be where you can't shoot them, and they will move on you. The key is being able to move quickly, and then go where the ducks are. People think that if you move on ducks during a hunt, they will jump and fly away and not come back. That ain't so. There's a reason ducks want to be where they are and, when, they think it's safe to go back, they will go back."

Hearns gave an example from a hunt at Sunflower WMA last year.

"I found a hot spot on a slough and limited out three mornings in a row on greenheads; then on the fourth day, they started landing on the far end of the slough, about 300 yards away," he said. "I gathered up my dozen decoys, and Troy and I walked over to the hole the ducks were using. Must have been 100 or 200 in there, and they all got up and flew away when Troy walked up. I was still 50 yards away, and it was a roar when they took off.

"I didn't bother to throw out my decoys. I called ol'Troy over and we huddled up at the base of this big tree and he looked at me and the decoys, like he was thinking, 'Hey boss, you gonna get them fake birds out there or what?' I told him, 'We don't need them, boy, they'll be back.' I was right. About 30 minutes later, those ducks started coming back. I shot two drakes out of the first group and two more out of the second, all greenheads. Took five minutes. We jumped up two wood ducks on the way out, and I had the limit. An added bonus from the ground I cover is learning where the little wood duck holes are so I can pick up what I need to fill a limit." ■



Timmy Hearns of Greenwood goes simple when it comes to duck hunting. Hunt where the ducks are. If they move, you move.

Mike Giles

and is never burdened by a half-dozen calls hanging around his neck on a lanyard filled with tags. He doesn't even have a duck club or lease.

"It's pretty simple really; I believe that to be a good duck hunter, the way I like to hunt, you have to be mobile," Hearns said. "If I'm not in the right place where the ducks want to be, or they are stubborn about coming where I want them to be, then I can pick up and move in a matter of seconds. It's how I like to hunt, and me

WORLD CHAMP'S CALLING RECIPE

By Todd Masson

KNOW WHAT CALLS TO MAKE AND WHEN TO MAKE THEM AS DUCKS SHOW UP

World-champion duck caller Mike Smith, who spends nearly every day of duck season hunkered in a marsh blind, is an aggressive caller — and he makes no apologies for it.

"I call from the moment I see them until I pull the trigger," he said.

But before he ever blows a call, Smith tries to gauge the mood of the birds he sees.

"First, you have to learn how to read the birds, whether they've just been shot at or are heading somewhere far away, or whether they're looking for somewhere to land," he said. "I've got customers who want me to call at every duck in the sky. You're really just wasting your time when you do that."

Once Smith determines that a far-off duck or flock is looking for a place to land or otherwise callable, he sets up a progression of calls.

SOUND 'RIDICULOUS'

Smith's first effort is a 20-note hail call, which he admits "sounds ridiculous."

But there's a method to his madness.

"If it's windy, those ducks are only picking up pieces of that long string of notes," he said. "It's like if you were on one side of the Superdome and I was on the other, and I screamed 20 words to you. You might only hear two or three words."

GREETER STATUS

If his first call elicits some interest, Smith will hit them with another hail call if the birds are far off, or if they're closer, blow five-note greeting calls.

"The closer they get, the more natural you have to sound," he said.

KEEP THEM INTERESTED

Once it's obvious the birds have seen the decoys and are showing strong interest, Smith will hit them with repeated three- to five-note greeting calls. These calls are short in duration and are intended to make the ducks feel very welcome.

"I really get excited with the call," he said. "It's a constant 'quack-quack-quack, quack-quack-quack, quack-quack-quack.' I used to stop calling when the birds got that close, but now I find it's better to keep them interested."

TWEET, WHISTLE

If the ducks pass the blind, Smith continues with the fast series of greeting calls, especially if the birds continue to look interested.

When they're just about ready to commit, Smith will mix in some tweets on his pintail/widgeon whistle, even if there are no pintails or widgeon in the flock.

"It gives the birds confidence that those are real ducks down there," he said. "Especially late in the season, that's important. Those birds have heard hard calling for months."

The only time Smith lays off the call is if the birds circle directly over the blind.

"If they're above us, I want everybody looking down, and I'm not going to call," he said. "I don't want to draw attention to the blind."

PLEASE, COME BACK!

If the birds at any point turn tail and begin heading away from the pond with a sense of purpose, Smith will blow a long, plaintive comeback call.

"Usually when that happens, they've seen something they didn't like," he said. "You can sometimes call them back, but they're usually heading somewhere else by that point."



Plan your calling series and run calls that match the mood of passing ducks.

BACKYARD





WINTER BLACK

BATTLES WITH BIG, BLACK DRUM WARD
OFF WINTER'S CHILL FOR MISSISSIPPI'S
SALTWATER FISHERMEN.

■ BY TODD MASSON

When you're a fishing guide and Jack Frost decides he's sick of the Canadian tundra and wants to spend some time on the beaches of the Gulf Coast, you're probably going to get a couple of days off.

That happened to Kyle Johnson and Jeremy McHugh a couple of years ago.

Not wanting to take his clients out in 20-knot winds, McHugh decided to reschedule them, but he still wanted to fish. Johnson suggested that they go hit some of the inshore artificial reefs scattered along the Mississippi coast.

McHugh had some shrimp he had bought for the guide trip, so they toted them along and tied on Carolina rigs.

"We sat at one of those reefs and banged out just as many black drum as we wanted," Johnson said.

The fish were brutes, ranging up to 40 pounds, and they bit every shrimp dropped to them. The weather was terrible, but the fishing was awesome.

That's a common story along the Mississippi coast during the winter, according to Johnson, who spends way too many hours attached by thin, braided line to big, ugly fish that weigh more than many children.

The black drum hold very closely to some of the area's most productive wintertime speckled trout holes.

>

“It’s something fun to do, just to break the monotony of chasing big trout,” *Johnson said.*

“That’s what I’m usually doing this time of year. Sometimes, I just want to get out and have a good time, and to me, catching anything big is a good time.

“I’m not really a trout snob. If I catch something big, it’s fun. It’s a pattern that’s productive all year, but especially in the winter.”

Black drum don’t really carry the clout of speckled trout, so many anglers ignore them, even though the best areas are often right under their noses, Johnson said.

“I’m actually catching them, usually, pretty close to where I like to catch trout,” he said. “I fish Gulfport Harbor a lot in the winter. In Gulfport Harbor, off the rocks and the rock jetties, they’ll be off just a little bit farther than the trout. The trout will be a lot closer to the rocks.

“It’s kind of like a win-win. If I’m targeting some big trout in the Harbor, and I’ve only got an hour or two to fish, I’ll give the trout 30 minutes or an hour, and if it’s not working out, it’s not a huge move to go catch a big black drum, just to have some fun.”

Making it even easier, Johnson doesn’t change his gear at all.

For trout, Johnson likes a medium- or medium-heavy rod threaded with 20-pound main line tied to a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader. The same outfit is perfect for black drum.

“A lot of people really go overboard with their setups for this,” Johnson said. “They’ll use 65-pound braid and 40-pound fluorocarbon, but you really don’t need it. These fish don’t have sharp teeth or anything like that.

“People will use that 65-pound braid, and they can’t cast it 5 feet. I’ve been spooled by big jacks, but never a big red or black drum.”

What Johnson does change when switching between trout and drum, however, is his bait.

The bay is full of structure that attracts black drum this time of year.



PLACES TO FIND BLACK DRUM

In addition to the black drum that regularly hang around Gulfport Harbor, its bridges and artificial reefs, there are also fish that inhabit the shallows, according to guide Kyle Johnson. He’s determined to catch one of those on a fly this year.

“There’s a couple spots over here like Fort Bayou and over in Bay St. Louis where I’ve seen them tailing, but I haven’t had my fly rod with me,” he said. “That’s something I’m going to do this year, just to knock it off the list. I’ve caught lots of fish on a fly, but not black drum.

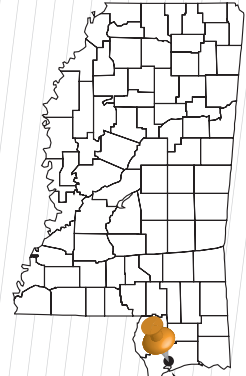
“If you go to the back around the Dupont Power Plant, there’s some really clear water back there during the winter. You’ll see big bull reds there. There’s a spot back there called Grassy Point. It’s a well-known spot. There’s a lot of oyster beds back there, and it just filters that water out. It gets really clear.”

Also, the state’s inshore waters are loaded with artificial reefs that hold black drum, Johnson said.

The black drum stack up on them during the winter,” he said. “They’re all publicized on the (Mississippi Department of Marine Resources) website, all the coordinates. It’s nothing secret.

“The fish will be there until early spring. They hunker down there because there’s a good bait supply for them.”

For more information, visit dmr.ms.gov. ■



Gulfport Harbor

BIG BLACK DRUM ARE FUN, BUT NOT TO EAT

The value of the black drum that guide Kyle Johnson catches this time of year is in the fight, not the food. Black drum longer than about 20 inches aren't very palatable, and the 30-pounders Johnson regularly catches are downright disgusting.

"A lot of people have been killing the bigger ones, and they get them home and discover they're full of worms, so they go to waste," Johnson said. "That's becoming a problem over here."

There is no recreational size or bag limit on black drum in Mississippi waters, but Johnson would like to see that change.

"I don't know exactly what the regulation should be, but maybe just one per angler over a certain size," he said. ■



The black drum that Capt. Kyle Johnson catches this time of year are all big bruisers that are much more enjoyable to fight than to eat.

Kyle Johnson

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“A chartreuse Gulp curlytail; I know it catches everything, but I’ll get a black drum every drop with that if I’m in the right spot,” he said. “It just drives them crazy.

“I’m usually in 10 to 15 feet of water across the board, whether I’m fishing Gulfport Harbor or the bridges, so I usually go with a 3/8-ounce jighead, and I just bump it off the bottom, really, really slowly,” he said. “If I’m in really heavy rocks, I’ll keep it up a foot or so, so I don’t get hung up.”

The best thing about the drum bite, particularly in January, is that it’s almost entirely impervious to the weather.

“Harsh January cold fronts slow just about everything down, but man, if you know where those things are, they’re going to bite,” he said. “I haven’t really had a black drum lockjaw deal. If you put something in front of their faces, they’re going to eat it. The ones I catch over here, not only are they long, they’re really fat. They eat all the time.”

That’s true even when the weather turns the water into mud-wrestling pits.

“Water clarity doesn’t matter,” Johnson said. “They don’t care about it at all. I’ve caught them in water with no visibility and hardly any salinity.”

That means black drum may be the perfect fish for what is otherwise one of the toughest fishing months of the year. ■



Todd Masson has covered the outdoors for a quarter century, and is host of the Marsh Man Masson channel on YouTube.



ABOVE: Black drum activity is not affected nearly as much by cold weather as the behavior of other species. BELOW: Black drum, big and small, are likely to be found around wooden or rocky structure in Gulfport Harbor.



Kyle Johnson



Fishermen who fish Gulfport Harbor — and the rest of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, for that matter — don’t have a lot of fishing competition during the winter.

Anglers who target black drum in January can have the fish almost to themselves, but the fish are gaining in popularity among professional fishermen, according to guide Kyle Johnson.

“There’s a couple of charter guides who will fish the bridges for them,” he said. “Black drum and sheepshead are getting more and more popular. Guides are realizing that they can still run trips in the winter. You’ve got those guys who just want to catch a big fish.”

Best of all, the hottest action is easy to reach, so guides don’t have to burn a tank of gas.

“It’s a short ride during the winter,” Johnson said. “You can launch right by a bridge, anchor as close to the bridge as you can, and drop dead shrimp, crab or curlytails. You’ll get one. There’s no doubt about it.”

Wise anglers will take any sure thing they can get in January. ■

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PICK OFF PICKWICK'S JANUARY CRAPPIE



Dan Kibler

Low fishing pressure, plenty of deep-water structure and a good population of slabs leads to great winter action.

By John E. Phillips

Don't expect to go to Pickwick Lake and see numbers of treetops, brush tops, standing timber and visible cover that you can fish around for crappie, because you won't.

To locate and catch slabs at Pickwick, which Mississippi shares with Tennessee and Alabama, you

need a good lake map that shows bottom contour, a quality depth finder that you can read and understand and a GPS receiver. You won't find most of the best crappie hot spots within rock-throwing distance of a bank. From some of Pickwick's better slab spots, you can't hit the bank — even with a slingshot and a rock.

>

PICKWICK CRAPPIE

If an angler can catch a number of crappie out of Pickwick all day, every day, you know the lake holds plenty of crappie. Perhaps many Mississippians haven't considered Pickwick as one of the state's best crappie lakes because few anglers know how to pinpoint the lake's slabs.

But if you doubt Pickwick's position as a premier crappie lake, just show up at the boat ramp every January afternoon when guide Roger Gant of Corinth comes in. He generally has 40 to 70 crappie in his livewell.

To understand why Gant consistently catches fish at Pickwick, you must realize he has fished the lake almost every day for more than 45 years and has guided there for more than 25.

"Most crappie fishermen don't think of Pickwick as a crappie lake because most of the structure crappie hold on lies in deep water, making it difficult to detect," Gant said. "We don't have much bank structure here at Pickwick, but one of the advantages is you can catch crappie there all year."

Although anglers use a wide variety of techniques to catch crappie at Pickwick

in January, Gant (662-650-5160) has developed a unique tactic that at first glance appears goofy. However, after understanding why Gant uses this tactic, anglers will wonder why more people don't fish this way.

GO SIDEWAYS

"I put the trolling motor in the middle of the boat so it pulls the boat sideways instead of pushing it from the bow or the stern," he said. "By mounting the trolling motor in the middle of the boat, I can move the entire side of the boat down the edge of a drop-off or a ledge. Then, both of my fishermen will have baits trolling just above that bottom break. With their lines in front of the boat instead of being pulled along the side, the fishermen can see their strikes better and have better chances of setting their hooks.

"I also can regulate the speed of my boat much easier. The wind doesn't blow the boat and move it nearly as fast when the boat's sideways to the wind as it does when the wind's at the back of the boat. If the lake has no wind, I can use the trolling motor to pull the boat slowly along the drop of the break. If the wind's

blowing too fast, I can slow our progress by using the trolling motor in the center of the boat to push against the wind."

To fish Pickwick successfully in January, anglers must understand how the current and wind affect the fish.

"On a day that's not very windy, use the current to move the boat, which allows you to troll deep structure," Gant advised. "On a windy day, when the side-pulling technique proves most beneficial, fish in bays like Yellow Creek, Indian Creek and Bear Creek. I prefer to side-pull creek edges or old flats with large numbers of stumps on them in deep water."

LOAD UP ON LEDGES

Gant also likes to fish on the tops of creek channels and ledges, 15- to 20-feet deep, with a sharp break down to 30 feet or more. Stumps, which crappie love, grow along the edges of those breaks and the flats in 15 to 20 feet or more.

"One of my favorite places to catch crappie is the edges of underwater creek bends," Gant said. "I slow-pull along the creek bends fishing with hair jigs. I set up my jigs so they'll swim as closely to the tops of those stumps as they can. I move the boat as slowly as I can so those jigs

>



Although not known as a crappie lake, Pickwick can sure produce some nice catches of slabs in winter.

Dan Kibler



Dan Kibler

In January, female crappie in Pickwick Lake are already putting on weight for the spring spawn.

pass within the strike zone of the crappie, slowly enough for the crappie to see them and move up in the water column to eat them.”

“Most crappie fishermen use 1/16- to 1/32-ounce jigs when fishing for winter crappie, but Gant fishes with a 1/4-ounce jig.

“We’re fishing deep water on Pickwick, and the heavier jigs are easier to get down quicker and hold in the strike zone of the crappie than the lighter jigs,” said Gant, who ties two jigs 14 to 16 inches apart, on his 10-pound line.

“Because we’re fishing deep, the bigger jigs are easier for the crappie to see,” said Gant, who prefers lime and chartreuse jigs. “I’ve found that crappie take the bigger jigs better than the smaller jigs at this time of year.”

MAKE A DEEP IMPACT

Because of Pickwick’s characteristics, Gant believes the lake holds a different type of crappie than the rest of Mississippi.

“The water fluctuates during the spawn at Pickwick, so the crappie have learned that the only way to a successful spawn is to spawn in deep water,” Gant said. “Pickwick’s waters also have cleared up a tremendous amount over the last 40 years, which also drives crappie deep.

“We have large numbers of crappie in this lake spawning in water 20 feet or deeper. In December and January, the eggs in the crappie at Pickwick are beginning to grow, and the crappie are in the prespawn mode, which is earlier in the year than other crappie. These crappie are much more comfortable at this time of year in really deep water than most crappie in Mississippi.”

Gant catches plenty of 2-pound crappie, and he sometimes catches 2½- and 3-pound fish in January and February.

“Now’s the best time to crappie fish on Pickwick Lake, because you can fish anywhere you want and any way you want, and not find a crowd of other anglers,” Gant said. “Anyone else you see fishing is a die-hard crappie fisherman, and won’t interfere with the way you fish like a novice will. However, if everyone learns how good the crappie fishing is and how big the crappie are at Pickwick Lake, there will be more people on the water.” ■



For more than 40 years, John E. Phillips has been a fulltime outdoor writer who travels throughout the South, gathering information on hunting and fishing and other outdoor pursuits.

KNOW YOUR STUMPS

Knowing Pickwick Lake gives Gant an advantage over most anglers.

“When Pickwick was backed up, the power saw hadn’t been invented,” he said. “All the trees that were cut down were cut with a crosscut saw. Anyone who’s ever pushed a crosscut saw knows that it’s not a device to be used on hands and knees like a chainsaw.

“When the trees at Pickwick were cut, the lumbermen cut the stumps about 2 feet high, because that was about as far as they could lean over and push the saw back and forth. Knowing that helps me understand that if the bottom’s at 30 feet, the tops of the stumps on that bottom must be at about 28 feet. So I want my jigs to run just above 28 feet deep to clear the stumps and attract the crappie.”

Gant also understands that because of the current in the lake, there’s no silt built up around the stumps, nor do the stumps rot.

“Maps will show these stump fields,” Gant said. “Slow-trolling the stump fields can reveal numbers of crappie holding on these underwater flats.”

In a mild winter, Gant primarily trolls in 20 to 30 feet of water. He generally side-pulls in water deeper than 30 feet during an extremely cold or harsh winter. ■



Crappie will flock to Pickwick Lake’s stump fields during the winter; they’re readily visible on a good fish finder.

Dan Kibler

FISH MONKEY GUIDE GLOVES

If fishing is tough on any particular body part, it's your hands, which are in constant contact with the handle of your reel and lines of various size and materials — not to mention the toothy mouths of fish and the hooks that catch them.

That's where Fish Monkey comes in. Based in Destin, Florida, this manufacturer has come out with a line of gloves designed for comfort and protection for anglers of all stripes, whether you're regularly grabbing the leader and lining in heavyweights like wahoo, tuna and billfish, or tying on lures and hooks for bass, redfish or speckled trout.

The company debuted its Half Finger Guide Glove and its Pro 365 Guide Glove this past spring, designed for fishermen who need to keep a good grip on things while protecting their hands.

The Guide Gloves come in a variety of colors and retail for \$29.95.

For more info, visit: fishmonkeygloves.com



OTTOLOCK CINCH LOCK

My son and I faced a problem this fall when trying to make sure we could securely store an ATV in a barn on our hunting lease. A big chain and lock would be fine, but an Ottolock might be even better.

Made from a durable plastic with multiple layers of steel and Kevlar bands, the Ottolock works like an indestructible ratchet strap, but there's no ratchet — just a lock instead. A three-dial combination lock holds the strap in place when it's cinched down to secure something; in our case, part of the ATV frame to a beam in the barn. Other uses include locking up bicycles, canoes and kayaks, and even locking boxes down onto the front or back rack of an ATV. We're already looking at it as a tool to secure a canoe while shuttling vehicles around after a float trip for ducks.

Ottolocks come in three sizes: 18, 30 and 60 inches and a handful of colors — including camouflage — with a price range from \$60 to \$85.

For more info, visit: ottodesignworks.com

LIVETARGET'S HOLLOW BODY CRAW

When it comes to realistic-looking lures, nobody beats LiveTarget — and this time they've turned their attention to anatomical precision to a staple food for bass, with the introduction of the new hollow body craw. I got the chance to see it in action last summer, shortly after it won Best of Show at ICAST 2018 for the Freshwater Soft Lure category. And let me tell you, this hollow body/jig combo is something to behold. The lure comes in three sizes (1½-inch, ¾-ounce; 1¾-inch, ½-ounce and 2-inch, ¾-ounce) and eight colors, but the beauty of this craw is that its skirt and pincers trap tiny air bubbles, which create tantalizingly realistic movement — even when



the lure is sitting still on the bottom. And to top it off, it moves in reverse, like a fleeing crawfish. (Just don't bring it to a boil, because it looks so real someone might get hooked.) MSRP is \$9.99 - \$11.49, and each lure comes with a pair of replacement pincers.

For more info, visit: livetargetlures.com

New product submissions can be emailed to
Mark Boyd at products@MS-Sportsman.com or call 601-829-8080.

Mississippi's outdoor scene was certainly not lacking in newsworthy stories throughout 2018. It seemed like a month didn't pass without something of great interest to hunters and fishermen taking place — some good, some not so good, some just interesting.

We looked at MS-Sportsman.com, the website that accompanies *Mississippi Sportsman*, and we came up with the 10 most-read stories of 2018.

Hope you enjoy looking back at them, reading them a second time, or maybe for the first time. The following are short versions of those stories. You can check out the full stories for all of our Top 10 at http://app.ms-sportsman.com/most_viewed/2018.php



Best-read stories on
MS-Sportsman.com
shed light on what drew
attention in Mississippi.

Mississippi's 2018 HIGHLIGHTS

1 DEER FEEDING BANNED IN 6 COUNTIES DUE TO CWD (FEB. 12)

Supplemental feeding of deer was suspended on Feb. 9 in six west-central Mississippi counties after a laboratory in Iowa confirmed the Magnolia State's first case of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in a free-range buck from Issaquena County.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks immediately implemented its CWD Response Plan under the auspices of the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, part of the plan banned supplemental feeding in Claiborne, Hinds, Issaquena, Sharkey, Warren, and Yazoo counties.

No feeding of deer, including through mechanized feeders, is allowed in any fashion. Baiting hogs will continue to be allowed, but with much tighter restrictions.

Amy Blaylock, assistant chief of wildlife, said on Feb. 12 that the ban on supplemental deer feeding was just the first step in a fluid MDWFP response plan for CWD. Mississippi is the 25th state with a confirmed case of CWD.

CWD is a prion-based disease. Prion is a term derived from proteinacious infectious particle and refers to the pathogen that causes transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs), rare neurodegenerative diseases. It is believed that prions released through bodily excretions from CWD-infected deer can remain infectious for at least 10 years.

2 BROOKHAVEN TEEN KILLS 200-INCH NON-TYPICAL BUCK (JAN. 9)

On his first hunt of the 2017-18 deer season, and his first alone in a deer stand, Joseph Blalock of Brookhaven took one of the most impressive bucks in Mississippi last season. The main-frame 12-point — with 17 scorable points and about five more that don't qualify for scoring but do hold a ring — grossed 205% inches as green-scored by a certified Boone & Crockett scorer, who estimates a final net of 191 to 192 inches after deductions.

All of it happened on a well-managed, small tract of family land in Franklin County, hunting with his father Tyler Blalock, an EMT, who carried his son from his Rural Rapid Response Thanksgiving Party to the deer stand for an afternoon hunt.

A single shot from the AR-15 chambered in 6.8 SPC did the job. The buck dropped where he stood, and Joseph Blalock reached for his phone and text his dad.

"He texted me, and I called him," Tyler Blalock said. "I could tell by the text he was excited because he wasn't making any sense. I called him, and he said, 'Daddy, I

Joseph Blalock, 13, of Brookhaven, took this giant in Franklin County on Nov. 22. The non-typical 17-point buck grossed over 200 inches.



don't know how big he is, but he's outside the ears and he is really tall!"

Tyler Blalock was wasting his time when he told the son to stay in the stand and wait for him to arrive. Joseph Blalock just had to go see the buck immediately.

"I walked across the field, and I counted 18 points at first," he said. "I sent my dad a picture, which sped him up. I was so excited when he got there and we counted 20 points. We both freaked out.

"Dad left to go get the truck, but I stayed because I thought it was all a dream and I would wake up if I rode to the cabin."

3 SECOND ROUND OF CWD TESTS **ALL NEGATIVE** (MARCH 13)

Mississippi wildlife officials have tested 128 deer — two sets of 64 each — since the state's first case of the deadly deer disease CWD was confirmed in a buck in Issaquena County on Feb. 9.

All have tested negative, including many that were road kills and others that were reported by the public as showing signs of illness.



Russ Walsh, executive director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' wildlife bureau, said that tests on the second 64 deer taken were returned negative March 9.

By coincidence, Walsh said, that is the exact number of deer tested two weeks ago from the immediate 5-mile containment zone, also all negative.

4 PROPOSAL ALLOWS DEER HUNTING **WITHIN 100 YARDS OF FEEDERS** (SEPT. 24)

Baiting deer is one step away from being officially legal, after action proposed last week by the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks would remove the one major regulation that hindered the practice.

The five-man panel voted at its September meeting to remove the restriction that prevented hunting within 100 yards of a feeder, as well a few other regulation changes.

It is a move, one MDWFP official said, that has been requested many times by sportsmen and mostly by archers, who have a very restricted kill range as compared to modern rifles.

"There had been requests before, some from bow hunters," Russ Walsh, the wildlife bureau's executive director told *The Clarion-Ledger*. "The commission looked at it, and it was their decision to do it."

Walsh said the change would still require a final adoption vote at the October meeting as required under Mississippi's regulatory process, but that the MDWFP would likely file a temporary order so that it would be allowed when the archery season opens in most of Mississippi on Oct. 1.

Another deer change adapted last week makes it illegal to transport a deer carcass into Mississippi from any other state, regardless of whether the state of origin has had a confirmed case of chronic wasting disease. Deer taken within the levees of the Mississippi River in either Arkansas or Louisiana would be excluded.

continues on page 60

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5 MDWFP DEAL WOULD OPEN MORE DELTA LAND TO PUBLIC (JULY 5)

Through the Nature Conservancy, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks bought 17,000-acres of land adjacent to one of its existing wildlife management areas, Mahannah WMA, mostly in Issaquena County with some in Warren County, from longtime owner, Anderson-Tully Lumber Company.

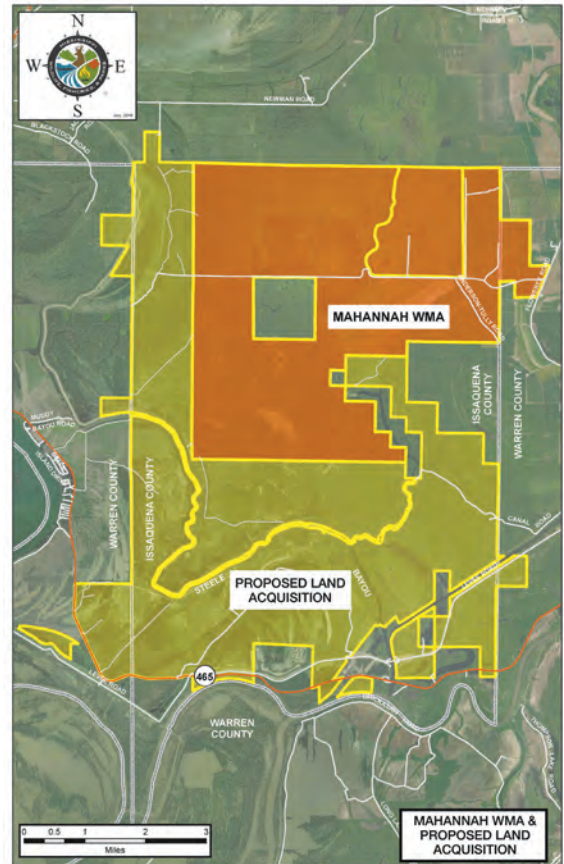
In May, Anderson-Tully began advising hunting clubs with leased lands within the area that their leases were terminating immediately and personal property must be removed.

With the MDWFP acquiring the property, agency officials said it would be unlawful for it to lease the land for private hunting clubs, and would be used only for public access hunting.

“What this acquisition would mean to the state is we will have in perpetuity 17,000 acres adjacent to an existing WMA (wildlife management area),” Larry Castle, director of technical programs for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, told *The Clarion-Ledger*. “We will be able to manage it and provide opportunity.

“This is probably the last opportunity to acquire a contiguous tract of land of this size in the south Delta. It will be a milestone of true conservation. This will be something people will look at in the future and say, ‘Wow.’”

For an update on the land purchase, visit: <https://www.mdwfp.com/media/news/administration/mdwfp-announces-steele-bayou-wma/>



6 DAD HELPS YOUNGSTER TO FIRST ARCHERY DEER (OCT. 12)

There is a relationship and a story that transcends most father and son hunting kinships, little 13-year-old Jason Sanders and his dad, Dana Sanders, who recently celebrated the youngster's first deer taken with a bow.

It takes just a few seconds of talking with the father to understand his dedication to the son. When he speaks of his boy, Dana doesn't just say Jason, he refers to him as “my Jason.”

And, it becomes quite obvious that they need each other, love each other dearly, and benefit from each other, especially when it comes to their hunting trips.

“His limitations are fine and gross-motor related, which means that he can't walk and has muscle tone that requires him to use a wheelchair for most of his getting around,” Dana Sanders said. “He can use a walker with some assistance.”

Dad Dana Sanders and son Jason with the youngster's spike buck taken with a crossbow on Oct. 8.

7 NINE-FOOT GATOR LANDED — FROM A KAYAK! (OCT. 12)

In the inshore kayak community, the Hobie Pro Angler 14 is a beast in the marsh, perfect for pursuing specks, reds, bass and more — and stable as a rock if standing up and sight-fishing is your thing.

But Daniel Wilson's plans for his PA 14 earlier this month were likely a little more aggressive than even the most confident Hobie design engineer.

The 37-year-old D'Iberville native who now lives in Mobile, Ala., decided the stealthy paddlecraft would be a perfect platform to target alligators — and that's just what he did on Saturday, Sept. 1 during the opening days of the Magnolia State's alligator season on Bayou Heron south of Pascagoula.

After an epic 40-minute battle via rod-and-reel that morning, Wilson finally finished off a 9-footer from the PA 14 that he estimated weighed about 225 pounds.

"It was something I had never seen anybody do, and I wanted to be the first to my knowledge that's ever done it in a kayak," said Wilson, who described himself as an avid inshore kayak angler all over the coast from Grand Isle, La., to East Alabama. "Over the course of the last year, I had been seeing the animals in that area, and it just struck me as an idea, like you know, 'I can do

this.'

"The kayak community has these stigmas about it, like you're limited on what you can do, and boaters say we get in their way and can't do what they do — I just wanted to be the one to say, 'Yes we can.'"



Daniel Wilson shows off the 9-foot alligator he battled and eventually harvested from his Hobie PA 14 in Bayou Heron south of Pascagoula on Sept. 1.

8 MISSISSIPPI OFFICIALS GET GOOD NEWS ON CWD TESTS IN SOUTH MISSISSIPPI (APRIL 3)

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks continues to find good news related to chronic wasting disease in an area of concern in south Mississippi.

Seventy deer tested during the 2017-18 hunting season were all found to be negative for CWD, a disease that is deadly in several species of cervids including white-tailed deer.

According to MDWFP, the agency discovered a "non-permitted, high-fenced enclosure" in 2013, southwest of Hattiesburg in Lamar County. MDWFP said an extensive investigation it undertook in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service revealed that animals in

the enclosure had been transported from Texas facilities that were linked to CWD-positive animals.

In January 2017, a tornado damaged 6,845 feet of the enclosure fence, releasing animals into the surrounding area.

MDWFP established a 5-mile radius surveillance zone around the enclosure in an effort to detect any CWD-positive animals. Hunters who harvested a deer in this zone were asked to voluntarily submit deer heads for testing. Seventy samples were submitted for testing, and all were returned "not detected for CWD".

continues on page 62

9 HUNTER TAKES **TROPHY WHITE GOBBLER** IN COPIAH COUNTY (MARCH 28)

Bo Brown had little choice, the way he had it figured, but to lift up his shotgun, aim and fire at the gobbler.

"This was not a shot I would normally take, I assure of you, but in that situation, I did," he said. "It's kind of like a 'speak-now-or-forever-hold-your-peace' type of thing. I didn't have time to think, I just did it."

What Brown did Sunday morning was send three 2-ounce rounds of No. 4 shot from his Remington 1100 through the woods at a tom turkey that his hunting party had run into in the woods of Copiah County.

"Probably 50 to 60 yards, maybe further," Brown said. "Like I said, not a shot I'd normally take, but this was not a normal situation."

This was no run-of-the-mill gobbler either. It was mostly white.

It was also big, about 20 pounds, and was sporting a big beard, and, as Brown would later learn, it had long, sharp, hooked spurs measuring $1\frac{1}{4}$ and $1\frac{3}{16}$ inches.

A trophy gobbler by any definition, the bird was simply beautiful.

"My buddy told me, 'Dude, you got a trophy bird there, and it's white to boot' and he's right," Brown said. "I am very lucky, very fortunate to have killed this bird, and it's only my second gobbler."



Bo Brown killed this unique gobbler in Copiah County. In addition to being white, the bird had long spurs, $1\frac{1}{4}$ and $1\frac{3}{16}$ inches, and a $10\frac{5}{8}$ -inch beard.

10 CAPITOL REPORT: **HARVEST REPORTING BILL MOVES STEP CLOSER** (MARCH 1)

Mississippi deer and turkey hunters are a step close to a mandatory harvest report system after the Senate wildlife committee amended a House bill that would establish the regulation beginning in 2019.

House Bill 1390, as amended, now goes to the full Senate for consideration. The deadline for action is Wednesday (March 7).

The two versions, passed by the House and by the Senate committee, are similar, which bodes well for the bill's chances.

But the interesting thing about H.B. 1390 is not what it includes but what it does not— no mention of using the program for enforcement of bag limits.

What it says: "The MDWFP shall develop, implement and regulate a mandatory harvest reporting program for white-tailed deer or wild turkey or both. The purpose of this program is to collect and compile harvest data of such quality and quantity as to be able to assist

the Legislature and the Commission in formulating the wildlife resource conservation policy for the State of Mississippi."

The original bill, as authored and introduced by House Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Committee chairman Scott Bounds and co-author Ken Morgan, did include the line "monitor bag limit compliance by any means," but it was stricken prior to committee vote in the House.

The bill requires that "the harvest reporting program shall be simple to use by sportsmen so as to promote compliance and accurate reporting. The program may include, but is not limited to, such means as a mobile smartphone application, online web-based reporting, or such other electronic or digital method(s) as will promote ease of use."

H.B. 1390 would require the public to report any and all kills within four days of the harvest. ■

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Schools of jumping silver carp are common on the Mississippi River. Silver carp are abundant in Kentucky Lake and have moved upstream into Pickwick Lake and down the Tenn-Tom Waterway to Bay Springs Lake.



Jason Jenkins

SILVER CARP UPDATE

ASIAN INVADER SWIMMING SOMEWHERE NEAR YOU

Asian carp have been expanding their territory throughout the Mississippi River and connected waters for several decades. While much of the notice has been directed at their threatened invasion of the Great Lakes via a man-made waterway connecting the Illinois River and Lake Michigan, Asian carp have achieved high densities in Mississippi River floodplain lakes and are spreading up the Ohio River, into the Tennessee River and into east Mississippi and west Alabama waters.

They are suspected of causing ecological damage to fisheries in systems they invade, but “hard science” about their effects is scarce. A recent study on the Illinois River provides substance to suspicion, but many questions remain.

CARP BIOLOGY

The group of fish known as Asian carp includes four species: black carp, grass

carp, bighead carp and silver carp. Although all are threats, the silver carp — the jumping carp — is the species that is most rapidly expanding in the lower Mississippi River basin.

Native to Asian rivers, silver carp grow quickly, reaching more than 40 pounds in five years. Silver carp eat phytoplankton — the microscopic plants that form the base of the aquatic food web — and zooplankton — small invertebrates that feed on phytoplankton and provide a vital food supply for juveniles of all sport fish and a variety of adult fish.

ILLINOIS RIVER INTEL

Silver carp were first detected in the Illinois River in 1993. The population remained low until 2001, then steadily increased from 2002 to 2015.

Phytoplankton increased from 1994 to 2002 — before the expansion of the silver carp population — and then varied widely but had a weakly decreasing

trend when silver carp were abundant. Zooplankton decreased markedly — by an average of 89 percent — after silver carp became established.

Age-0 native fish biomass decreased before 2002 but increased after the silver carp population expanded. Adult native fish biomass did not change over time.

Aquatic ecosystems are complex, with each feeding level affecting the next higher level, but also with feedback effects. For example, abundant phytoplankton are expected to fuel abundant zooplankton populations, but abundant zooplankton can also suppress the phytoplankton. Interpreting and predicting ecosystem effects is difficult at best.

The decline in phytoplankton can be attributed to grazing by silver carp but may also be a consequence of shifting nutrients from the water column to the bottom as silver carp consume the phytoplankton and nutrients in their feces sink to the bottom. That the decline in

phytoplankton was lower than in other studies may be due to high phytoplankton production in the fertile Illinois River or less grazing by a greatly reduced zooplankton assemblage.

The researchers attributed much of the decline in zooplankton to direct consumption by silver carp. Of great significance is that the 89-percent decline in zooplankton dropped the biomass of zooplankton to levels below those considered necessary for good sportfish recruitment.

But the predicted downturn in age-0 sportfish did not occur. Understanding this lack of response requires further inquiry, but one explanation is that the now-abundant silver carp fry absorbed much of the predation by adult fishes that usually depletes age-0 native fishes. The continued abundance of age-0 native fish may also explain part of the decline in zooplankton.

Contrary to expectation and findings of other studies, biomass of adult native fishes did not change with changes in silver carp biomass. This is good news, at least at this stage of the invasion. But one reason for lack of response by adult native fish is this study looked at the entire adult assemblage. Other studies have found clear adverse effects on fishes with diets more similar to silver carp, like gizzard shad and big-mouth buffalos.

TOO SOON TO TELL?

“Too soon to tell” is a common caveat offered by scientists when observations don’t perfectly match predictions. In this case, the failed prediction was the lack of decline in age-0 and adult native fishes with increasing biomass of silver carp.

Maybe it is too soon to tell, but what strikes me as most interesting about this study is the possibility of redirecting aquatic production and energy flow from the water column to the bottom. This could result in major restructuring of the fish assemblages in many Mississippi lakes where planktophagic thread-fin shad are the dominant forage fish. ■



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.



Joe Deters, USGS

ON THE FLY:

A 14-pound silver carp goes airborne. Noise or vibrations from outboard motors appears to trigger jumping. Angler reports of these fish jumping into boats are increasing.

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LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

Although the weather in January may be nippy, knowing how to fish the channels in Bogue Homa can produce some good bass.



HOW TO FISH BOGUE HOMA IN JANUARY

January and February can be tough months for finding and catching bass, but this time is my favorite for fishing shallow Bogue Homa Lake. There aren't many places for bass to hide, and they'll stay in water depths only a few feet deeper than the shallow water in the channels. That's why the bass tend to school up this time of the year, making them easy pickings. I mainly use three strategies and three lures.

BLACK/BLUE JIG

I'll fish a ½-ounce black/blue Mann's Stone Jig with a black/blue crawfish trailer on 23-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon with a Shimano Curado 6.5:1 reel and a 7-foot-6, medium-heavy Expride rod in the big, underwater cypress tree stumps scattered on the channel edges.

The water will be somewhat stained, and you may not be able to see the



Black/blue Mann's Stone Jig

stumps, but I can spot them with my Garmin SideVu optics and will make several casts to each stump. I'll hold my boat in the channel, keeping it at a 45-degree angle to the channel, cast over the stump, allow the jig to go to the bottom and ease it back toward the boat until it reaches the stump, pulling it slowly up to the top of and over the stump, before letting the jig fall straight down off the stump.

Below the stump will be the root system of the cypress tree that's been washed out

over the years where often 2- to 3-pound bass will be holding. When you feel a bite, you must set the hook hard to get the fish out of that root system and headed to the boat. You can possibly catch a 9-pounder or better in January. If you have a very good day at Bogue Homa, you may take a couple of bass that weigh 5 pounds or more with this system.

SHAKY HEAD BAIT

After I've worked a stump thoroughly with my jig, I'll repeat the same number of casts with a ½-ounce shaky head jig-



Mann's Jelly Bug



Bladed jig



Baby 1-Minus

head and a Mann's Jelly Bug in junebug or black/red flakes. Fish for bass on the channel swings, since generally four or five big underwater cypress stumps where bass tend to congregate will be within 30 yards of each bend. I'll change rods, reels and lines to fish for bass with this rig, including using a 7-foot-2, medium-heavy spinning rod and reel spooled with bass braid and 4-foot leader of 8-pound fluorocarbon.

If bass aren't very active, or if I catch two or three bass around a stump, I'll fish the Jelly Bug again to try and catch a bass that hasn't taken the jig. I'll fish this like a Texas-rigged worm, slowly dragging it over the bottom, up an underwater stump and over the top of the stump and allowing it to fall off the stump.

or when the bladed jig drops off the stump, depending on how aggressive the bass are. Fishing this bait can be aggravating, due to the bladed jig hanging up on the stumps, but this lure catches numbers of very big bass.

At the end of January, and if our area gets a break in the weather — even a slight warm front, bass (mostly females) will move out of the channels and into the lily pad stems and coontail moss. If you slow-roll a bladed jig through the stems and over the tops of the moss, you can catch big females preparing for the spawn.

Also, in the lily pad stems and the moss, the Baby 1-Minus in fire orange with a black back on a 6-foot-10 medium rod and 30-pound bass braid catches bass.

I'll need a 6:2.1 Curado K reel to retrieve this lure slowly. Since some of the underwater stumps will come close to the surface on the edges of the channels, be sure to fish this small crankbait right by those stumps you can see.

January is a big bass at Bogue Homa, so plan to be there and get you some. ■



Paul Elias, of Laurel, has fished 15 Bassmaster Classics with career winnings of over \$1 million, including one Bassmaster Classic Championship. Elias also holds the current record for a four-day BASS tournament weigh-in with 132 pounds, 8 ounces, on Falcon Lake in Texas.

BLADED JIG/ BABY 1-MINUS CRANKBAIT

I like a 3/8-ounce bladed jig in two colors — a black/blue with a black/blue trailer or a green pumpkin with a green pumpkin trailer — on 30-pound bass braid and a 7-foot-3, extra-heavy Expride rod. These 2- to 3-foot deep channels have drop-offs 4½ to 5 feet deep.

I'll throw the bladed jig at the stump, with the bass generally taking the bait as the line starts to come over the stump,

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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Vudu's new Weedless Shrimp is as tough as the original, with nylon mesh woven into the tail for superior durability.

VUDU'S NEW WEEDLESS SHRIMP

NEW MODEL — PERFECT FOR SHALLOW-WATER APPLICATIONS — HITS SHELVES THIS MONTH

Going weedless with arguably one of the most-popular soft plastic shrimp imitations on the market seemed to be the most logical next step for Egret Baits.

And owner Ken Chaumont has made it happen — and the rollout is underway to another successor of the Vudu Shrimp.

“We’re well known for our shrimp. And we now have a new weedless version of that shrimp. It has what we call a ‘belly hook’ that sits on top and gives you a weedless configuration,” Chaumont said.

“People have been asking for a weedless version. We’ve had a lot of requests from guys who throw it in the marshes. I know the redfish guys are going to go crazy,” he said. “With the hook in the body, you can pull it in grass and it won’t get hung up. It’s going to be deadly in shallow water. It’ll be extremely effective to shallow water fish.

“This looks very, very natural, so it’s not only going to work in the marshes but in the open because of its gliding action. It just glides in the water.”

Most importantly, the Vudu Weedless Shrimp, like the Vudu Shrimp, also is

made with TPE, a mix of rubber and plastic synthetic materials and thermo-plastic elastomers that stretch and return to their original shape. As every angler who’s tried it knows, the nylon netting fabric woven into the tail section like a mesh gives it unbelievable durability.

Chaumont, 64, a 35-year veteran in the lure manufacturing business, started tinkering with a weedless version late in 2017.

“We started playing with it. We had to pre-form the TPE. I said, ‘We need a different mold.’ It’s not like we took an ‘old’ shrimp,” he said. “We had to figure out how to put the hook in the mold (so that it did its job efficiently and was weedless).”

Mission accomplished.

“When the fish bites down on it, you have plenty of hook to stick him,” he said.

Three dozen of each color were made and a handful of anglers, including charter boat captains in Florida like Terry Shaughnessy, started to test it.

“I knew we had a hit on our hands,” Chaumont said. “I wanted to see if everybody else did.”

So far, response has been tremendous.

The Vudu Weedless Shrimp will be in stores in January, he said.

“It’s going to be a big hit. It’s being produced now and it will be ready to roll,” he said.

Take away the new hook position, and the Vudu Weedless Shrimp looks just like the most-popular version since Egret Baits came out with the original Vudu in 2013. Other versions followed, bigger and smaller.

The Vudu Weedless Shrimp, just like the original Vudu Shrimp, also is 3½ inches long, weighs ⅛-ounce and is armed with a wide gap, “super sharp coated black nickel” 3/0 hook.

There’s a reason the new weedless model is the same weight and length of the original Vudu.

“The 3½ is the No. 1 killer along the Louisiana coast, all along the Gulf Coast. Yes, there will be different sizes down the line. People weigh in on that,” he said.

The new weedless soft plastic glides in the water and falls through the water column naturally. It’s all in the tail.

“This tail, even though it has a wide foot on it, still has an up-and-down motion in



the water. It's very lifelike with the eyes on top. The redfish are going to love it," he said.


"You can add weight to it, but we don't recommend that so it'll glide. We extended the tail. We made the tail wider to give it a gliding feature. It's more flat than concave. It sinks very evenly in the water column," he said, noting some other soft plastic shrimp imitations sink head first.

The Vudu Weedless Shrimp, two to a pack, will be available in the most-popular colors and patterns of the Vudu Shrimp, including glow and brown shrimp.


For more information about Egret Baits Vudu Weedless Shrimp and some of their other products, go to egretbaits.com. ■




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.



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Jerry Dilsaver

HEARTY SOUP FOR A COLD DAY

CREAMY VENISON, MUSHROOM,
RICE SOUP WARMS YOU UP



While last winter was an exception, winters in the deep south aren't typically harsh. Still, there are days we get cold hunting, fishing or working, and it's nice to have a nice bowl of soup or stew to warm up. This is a venison soup that includes a multi-rice blend, fresh mushrooms and cream of mushroom

soup to give the kitchen a nice aroma. It also makes it filling and something that warms deeply.

This recipe is ideal for cold, January days. Whatever you did that made you cold, a bowl or three of this soup will have you up and wondering what to do that afternoon. It's also civilized enough to serve at home for the wife and kids.

I haven't made this soup in a crock pot yet, but I'm sure it will work. The venison is lightly browned in the pan, and surely, several hours on low heat in a crock pot will plump and tenderize the rice without destroying the nutty crunch of the wild rice in the blend.

I typically don't make things with a lot of cream, but this is good. Because of the cream, I don't eat this soup often, but you just might. It's simple and really tasty. It's a lot like spaghetti and chili, in that it seems to get better when reheated. That actually became a step in this recipe after it was discovered with an early pot. A plus is that wrapping your hands around a cup or bowl will bring them back to operating temperature quickly.

This versatile recipe should easily transition to substituting beef or chicken. I prefer the flavor and lower fat content of venison and sometimes use venison sausage to give it a little spice from the start. Whatever you use, just get a good sear on the meat before adding the other ingredients for the prolonged simmer that spreads the good flavor throughout.

Let me offer a little warning regarding cooking this. If you prepare it for a Saturday lunch at the hunting club, you may want to double or triple the recipe. This is a good amount, but I've seen hunters swabbing the pot with bread to get the last bit when I only made a single amount, and it's not good to leave a hunter hungry. He may be the one who provides the meat for the next batch. ■

Rice and cream of mushroom makes this venison-based soup a great winter meal. **INSET:** Onions and celery are the only ingredients that need to be chopped before becoming part of this soup.

CREAMY VENISON, MUSHROOM, RICE SOUP

This is a hearty soup that is very filling and warming. It's good anytime, but is just the ticket for a meal or snack on a cold, winter day. This version is mild, with just a little edge. It can be made more robust by adding a little more Cha Sauce or pepper, and it doesn't have to be added while cooking; they can be added at the table to suit those who prefer it spicier.

This soup has gone through several revisions over the years. The best one has been the rice. It began with wild rice, then shifted to long grain and wild rice, but I believe it will stay with the Rice Select Royal Blend (www.riceselect.com); it's worth the time it takes to find. It is a blend of Texmati white, brown, wild and Thai red rice that plumps well and soaks up the venison and creamy mushroom flavors in the soup. I like it so much I have begun using it with other recipes and as a side dish.

This soup is also much like chili and spaghetti in becoming more flavorful each time it is cooled and warmed. I included the cooling and warming steps in this recipe; this doesn't have to be done, but it enhances the flavor enough to be noticeable. It is even better when refrigerated several hours and warmed over. Cooling the soup thickens it, and you may want to add a little water when reheating, but don't use much.

When you warm it, bring the heat up slowly so it doesn't sear and stick on the bottom of the pan. Stirring a lot helps prevent this. If you are pushed for time and want to reheat it in a microwave, don't use full power; use half power and let it warm a little more slowly. This gets the juices flowing and locks in added flavor.

If you have an older package of ground venison in your freezer, this is just the recipe

for it. Cooking it slowly and in the bouillon and cream of mushroom soup will keep it moist and restore its tenderness. If you like this and would like to try it with a little more kick, one of the easiest ways to do that is to begin with venison sausage rather than burger.

I prefer to cook in a cast-iron pot, which distributes the heat well, and there aren't hot spots right over the burner rings. I have a deep frying pan I sometimes use for frying fish and chicken that barely holds this recipe. In fact, this recipe was tailored to cook in this pan. If you have a cast-iron Dutch oven, that would be just the ticket and allow stirring without being extra careful not to spill.

This winter, when you're thinking that a soup or stew would be good to ward off the cold, give this a try. I promise it will warm you up, and it's filling too. Give it a try and you won't be disappointed. If you take it to the hunting club, you should at least make a double recipe.

It disappears pretty quickly once hungry hunters get a taste. Enjoy! ■

PREPARATION:

Chop the onion and celery. Use the non-stick cooking spray to lightly cover the bottom of the cast-iron pot, then break the glaze on the onions and very lightly brown the venison in the Cavender's seasoning. Drain any grease from the pan.

Add the two cups of bouillon or broth, two cups water, celery, Royal Blend Rice Blend, pepper and Cha Sauce and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium and stir in the mushroom soup, mushrooms and another cup of water. Return to high just long enough to boil again, stirring frequently.

Reduce heat to low and cover while cooking for 45 minutes to an hour, stirring occasionally. Cook just long enough the mushrooms and celery are tender.

An option is to allow it to cool at this point, then reheat to



Cooling thickens this soup, and rearming it enhances the flavor plenty.

medium, stirring often. Reduce heat to warm and serve.

This serves well with a green salad or lettuce wedge to begin and accompanied by a warm roll or slice of hearty bread. Warm pecan or apple pie is a good choice for dessert, and ice cream with the pie makes it even better. ■



Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., is a freelance writer, as well as a former national king mackerel champion fisherman. Readers are encouraged to send their favorite recipes and a photo of the completed dish to possibly be used in a future issue of the magazine. E-mail the recipes and photos to Jerry.Dilsaver@captjerry.com.

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound ground venison

1 cup Rice Select Royal Blend rice blend

2 cans cream of mushroom soup

¾ small pack of fresh sliced mushrooms

1 large sweet onion

4 celery ribs

2 cups beef bouillon or broth. If using bouillon, I suggest Better Than Bouillon Roast Beef Base.

3 cups water

1 tsp Cavender's All Purpose Greek Seasoning

1 tsp coarse ground black pepper

1 tsp Texas Pete Cha Sauce
Non-stick cooking spray

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 1-Oct. 7 (n), Sept. 1-Sept. 9 (s) Oct. 27-Nov. 7 (n), Oct. 6-Nov. 7 (s) Dec. 22-Jan. 31 (n), Dec. 15-Jan. 31 (s)	15	45
Quail	Nov. 22-March 2	8	
Rabbit	Oct. 1-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (fall)	Sept. 30-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (spr)	May 15-June 1	4	
Raccoon	July 1-Sept. 30	1 raccoons per party	
Rac/Opp/Bobct	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport) Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	5/day, 8/party No limit	
Rails			
King & Clapper	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	25	75
Sora & Virginia,	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	15	45
Gallinules	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	15	45
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28	8	24
Crow	Nov. 4 - Feb. 28	No limit	No limit
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9
Wild Turkey			
Fall season	Oct. 15-Nov. 15 (selected counties)	2 per season (may be either sex)	
Spring season	March 15-May 1	1/day, 3/season, longbeards only	
Youth season	March 8-14	1/day, 3/season, bearded birds only	

WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 15-30 Nov. 23-25, Nov. 30-Dec. 2 Dec. 5-Jan. 27	6 6
Geese (Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Sept. 1-30 Nov. 9-25, Nov. 30-Dec. 2, Dec. 5-Jan. 27	5 Canada 3, Brant 1 Snow/blue/Ross 20 White-fronted 3
Light Geese conservation	Oct. 1-Nov. 8, Jan. 28-Feb. 1, Feb. 3-March 31	No limit

DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
Northeast	Oct. 1-Nov. 16 Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 17-31 (archery/primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)
East Central	Oct. 1-Nov. 16 Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)
Southwest	Oct. 1-Nov. 16 Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan.16(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)
Southeast	Oct. 15-Nov. 16 Jan. 17-31 (either-sex arch-primitive) Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Jan. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Feb. 15(youth)
Delta	Oct. 1-Nov. 16 Nov. 5-16 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 17-31(archery primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 17-Jan. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 17(dogs) Nov. 3-Jan. 31 (youth)

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)		
FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	34" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	no limit
White marlin	66" LJFL	no limit
Sailfish	63" LJFL	no limit
Sharks (large coastal/pelagic)@	37" TL*	1/day or 3/boat
Sharks@	25" TL*	4/day
Cobia	33" FL	2 per day
Redfish (red drum)	18" minimum 30" maximum TL	3/day (1 over 30")
Flounder (state waters)	12" TL	15/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL@	4/day aggregate
Hogfish	12" FL@	5/day
Red, yellowfin grouper	20" TL@	4/day
Scamp grouper	16" TL@	4/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	no minimum@	1/day each
Gray/schoolmaster/cubera/ mahogany/yellowtail/dog snapper	12" TL@	10/day aggregate
Mutton snapper	16" TL@	10/day
Queen/blackfin/silk/winchman snapper	none@	10/day aggregate
Vermillion/lane snapper	10"/8" TL@	20/day aggregate
Gray triggerfish	14" FL@	20/day
Golden/blueline/anchor/blackline tilefish	none@	20/day
King mackerel	24" FL@	2/day
Spanish mackerel	no minimum size@	15/day
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL@	3/day
Bigeye tuna	27" CFL@	no limit
Tripletail	18" TL	3/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	15"	15/day

@ For openings and closings of federally regulated fish and updated size limits, visit gulfcouncil.org.

FRESHWATER

FISH Species (Inland waters)	Minimum Size Limit	Creel Limit (per day)
Crappie/Panfish #	%	30 crappie, 100 bream
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted bass	%	10 in combination
Channel catfish	No more than 1 over 34"	None +
Blue catfish	No more than 1 over 34"	None +
Flathead catfish	No more than 1 over 34"	None +
Striped bass or hybrid bass	15"	6 in combination
Mountain Trout (Lake Lamar Bruce)	No restrictions	3
Sauger	%	10
Walleye	%	3
Alligator gar/paddlefish	No fish over 30" in creel	2

TL=Total Length; LJFL=Lower jaw to middle of fork in tail; FL=Fork Length (tip of snout to middle of fork in tail); CFL=Curved Fork Length (measure of a line tracing contour of body from tip of upper jaw to fork of the tail).

+ In Lake Okhissa, 5 per day, in ReCon Lake and all MDWFP lakes, 10 per day

% For lake-specific regs, see MDWFP's Regulations Digest or www.mdwfp.com/

In Lake Okhissa and Percy Quin State Park, the creel limit is 50 per day.

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

ASTRO TABLES

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.

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

The 2019 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$13.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2019 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2019, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2020, and more. Comes with FREE 2019 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, plus \$3 s&h. **Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor. \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h).** 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

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2019 JAN	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Tue 1	█	█	█	█	17
Wed 2	█	█	█	█	24
Thu 3	█	█	█	█	32
Fri 4	█	█	█	█	40
Sat 5	█	█	█	█	44
Sun 6	█	█	█	█	34
Mon 7	█	█	█	█	24
Tue 8	█	█	█	█	16
Wed 9	█	█	█	█	13
Thu 10	█	█	█	█	16
Fri 11	█	█	█	█	19
Sat 12	█	█	█	█	24
Sun 13	█	█	█	█	32
Mon 14	█	█	█	█	45
Tue 15	█	█	█	█	38
Wed 16	█	█	█	█	37
Thu 17	█	█	█	█	50
Fri 18	█	█	█	█	62
Sat 19	█	█	█	█	74
Sun 20	█	█	█	█	79
Mon 21	█	█	█	█	70
Tue 22	█	█	█	█	58
Wed 23	█	█	█	█	44
Thu 24	█	█	█	█	36
Fri 25	█	█	█	█	32
Sat 26	█	█	█	█	34
Sun 27	█	█	█	█	41
Mon 28	█	█	█	█	27
Tue 29	█	█	█	█	19
Wed 30	█	█	█	█	17
Thu 31	█	█	█	█	15

25 50 75
AVERAGE

For more, visit primetimes2.com

LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
3:10 am	8:01 am - 9:29 am	2:15 pm	8:26 pm - 9:54 pm	☉	☾
4:09 am	8:55 am - 10:11 am	2:53 pm	9:20 pm - 10:36 pm	☉	☾
5:08 am	9:48 am - 10:56 am	3:34 pm	10:13 pm - 11:21 pm	☉	☾
6:04 am	10:41 am - 11:43 am	4:19 pm	11:06 pm - 12:08 am	☉	☾ LOW
6:57 am	11:33 am - 12:31 pm	5:08 pm	11:58 pm - Midnight	☉	☾ NEW
7:45 am	12:21 pm - 1:23 pm	5:59 pm	Midnight - 12:56 am	☉	☾
8:29 am	1:07 pm - 2:13 pm	6:53 pm	12:46 am - 1:48 am	☉	☾
9:09 am	1:48 pm - 3:04 pm	7:48 pm	1:32 am - 2:38 am	☉	☾ Apogee
9:44 am	2:28 pm - 3:54 pm	8:43 pm	2:13 am - 3:29 am	☉	☾
10:17 am	3:05 pm - 4:43 pm	9:37 pm	2:53 am - 4:19 am	☉	☾
10:47 am	3:41 pm - 5:33 pm	10:32 pm	3:30 am - 5:08 am	☉	☾
11:17 am	4:15 pm - 6:23 pm	11:28 pm	4:06 am - 5:58 am	☉	☾
11:46 am	4:51 pm - 7:13 pm		4:40 am - 6:48 am	☉	☾
12:17 pm	5:27 pm - 8:07 pm	12:25 am	5:16 am - 7:38 am	☉	☾ HALF
12:51 pm	6:08 pm - 9:00 pm	1:24 am	5:52 am - 8:32 am	☉	☾
1:28 pm	6:53 pm - 9:59 pm	2:25 am	6:33 am - 9:25 am	☉	☾
2:12 pm	7:41 pm - 11:01 pm	3:30 am	7:18 am - 10:24 am	☉	☾
3:02 pm	8:38 pm - 12:04 am	4:36 am	8:06 am - 11:26 am	☉	☾
4:01 pm	9:40 pm - 1:06 am	5:41 am	9:03 am - 12:29 pm	☉	☾ HIGH
5:07 pm	10:45 pm - 2:07 am	6:44 am	10:05 am - 1:31 pm	☉	☾ FULL
6:18 pm	11:53 pm - Midnight	7:41 am	11:10 am - 2:32 pm	☉	☾ Perigee
7:31 pm	Midnight - 3:05 am	8:32 am	12:18 pm - 3:30 pm	☉	☾
8:42 pm	12:58 am - 3:58 am	9:16 am	1:23 pm - 4:23 pm	☉	☾
9:51 pm	2:02 am - 4:44 am	9:56 am	2:27 pm - 5:09 pm	☉	☾
10:57 pm	3:05 am - 5:27 am	10:32 am	3:30 pm - 5:52 pm	☉	☾
	4:03 am - 6:09 am	11:07 am	4:28 pm - 6:34 pm	☉	☾
12:01 am	5:01 am - 6:49 am	11:41 am	5:26 pm - 7:14 pm	☉	☾ HALF
1:03 am	5:57 am - 7:29 am	12:16 pm	6:22 pm - 7:54 pm	☉	☾
2:04 am	6:52 am - 8:10 am	12:53 pm	7:17 pm - 8:35 pm	☉	☾
3:03 am	7:46 am - 8:54 am	1:33 pm	8:11 pm - 9:19 pm	☉	☾
3:59 am	8:38 am - 9:40 am	2:17 pm	9:03 pm - 10:05 pm	☉	☾

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

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

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