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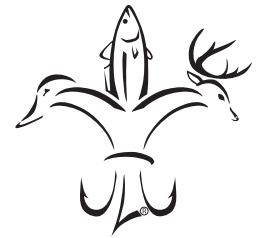


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Volume 21 | Number 4 | April 2019



Mississippi CONTENTS

FEATURES:

21 April's Bass Bonanza *cover story*

Across Mississippi, anglers target fish in all stages of the spawn, in lakes large and small. There's just one constant: don't miss it.

>>>By Bobby Cleveland

31 Pickwick's smallmouth equation

Don't pass up a chance to try out Mississippi's best smallmouth bass fishery. April is a perfect time to catch a big one.

>>>By David Hawkins

42 Be my Valentine

Brenda Valentine, one of the nation's leading female hunters, loves the wild turkey and shares her passion and tactics.

>>>By Mike Giles

52 April's saltwater kickoff

Trout are No. 1 target for fishermen along Mississippi's Gulf Coast this month, but reds and flounder are also options.

>>>By John Phillips

62 Bar-hopping for catfish

When the big river rises this spring, dragging across a good, submerged sandbar could land you some trophy cats.

>>>By Phillip Gentry

FIELD NOTES:

- 36 The sunrise bite
- 56 Rigging shrimp
- 70 Vacuum seal extras
- 71 Tricks for tube baits

OUTDOOR UPDATE:

- 6 April is breakout time
- 10 Artificial reefs coming

COLUMNS:

- 40 Lunker Lines By Paul Elias
- 50 Cooking on the Wild Side By Jerry Dilsaver
- 60 Speckled Truth By Chris Bush
- 66 Gettin' Fresh By Hal Schramm
- 68 Lure Review By Don Shoopman

DEPARTMENTS:

- 14 Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook
- 72 Astro Tables
- 73 Hunting/Fishing regs
- 74 Advertiser Index

ON THE COVER:



There may not be a better month for bass fishing across Mississippi than April, in part because of the wide spectrum of reservoirs and rivers and the fish they hold. Photo by Dan Kibler.

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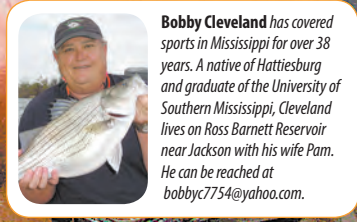
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Bobby Cleveland has covered sports in Mississippi for over 38 years. A native of Hattiesburg and graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Cleveland lives on Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson with his wife Pam. He can be reached at bobbyc7754@yahoo.com.

APRIL: A BUSY MONTH OUTDOORS

CRAPPIE ARE SPAWNING AND GOBBLERS ARE GOBBLING — IT'S ON!

Forget about May's flowers, the proverbial and somewhat pleasing product of April and its showers. What the fourth month gives a Mississippi sportsman is the opportunity to enjoy nature's spring bounty.

For starters, there's the crappie spawn — the peak time for fishing for the gamefish that the Magnolia State can boast about more than any other. Get this: when the popular fishing website Wired2fish ranked its Top 10 Crappie Lakes in the world, the top three were in Mississippi. Or was it the top five?

Actually it was both. Grenada Lake was No. 1 and Lake Washington No. 2, but the writers bunched together three more north Mississippi reservoirs — Enid, Sardis and Arkabutla — and ranked them No. 3.

Another website, Monstercrappie.com, put seven Mississippi lakes of its Top 20 crappie hot spots, including the top three (Grenada, Washington and Sardis).

It doesn't really matter the criteria, be it quality or quantity, Mississippi consistently rates as the world's top crappie destinations.

But you can also find world-class action in the woods, too. April is the heart of the state's spring turkey season, when the hens start leaving the gobblers to nest. That makes the big ol' toms lovesick and vulnerable.

This issue of *Mississippi Sportsman* helps set the table for a

great month of action, including a look at how women have made strides in the sport of turkey hunting. Mike Giles profiles Brenda Valentine, and this expert hunter shares her secrets to success.

We recognize that while crappie fishing is great, Mississippi has other great fishing opportunities. Writer Phillip Gentry takes us sandbar hopping in the Mississippi River in search of great catfish action, and David Hawkins looks to the northeast corner of the state and Pickwick Lake, the one spot where Mississippi anglers can catch trophy smallmouth bass on their resident license.

So in between your perch jerking, turkey hunting and other outdoor pursuits, take us along for some entertaining and educational reading when April's showers give you idle hours. ■



Dan Kibler

Gobblers looking for unbred hens this month will be under plenty of pressure from Mississippi hunters.

PRESSURE'S ON I-55 CRAPPIE CORRIDOR

Interstate 55 through north Mississippi is the one highway in the nation that lives up to the decades-old nickname given the interstate highways — Super Slabs.

The I-55 corridor of lakes, starting with Arkabutla just south of Memphis and continuing south to Sardis, Enid, Grenada and eventually Barnett Reservoir near Jackson, is what put — and keeps — Mississippi on top of the crappie world. Those lakes are famous for the slabs they produce.

This year, with the exception of Arkabutla, those lakes will be hit hard and heavy. Arkabutla is lower in the flood plain of the Mississippi River and was heavily inundated with flooding backwaters, causing most of its facilities to be temporarily closed.

"If we can't go to Eagle or to Washington and all the other Delta oxbows, that means everybody will be going to Barnett, Grenada and Sardis; they better get ready for a lot of pressure," said crappie fisherman George Hemphill of Vicksburg. "I'd love to have the parking concession at those lakes this spring."

Barnett Reservoir was an early front-runner for spring action. Fishermen there had an incredible March.

"I don't think the fishing was any better; I just think the conditions were perfect," said James Thomas of Brandon. "When you get that much consistent current, both into and out of the lake, you're going to find a lot of fish in predictable and vulnerable positions. There were tons of crappie taken out of the spillway and the Highway 43 area of the main lake."

"Other than reducing the number of fish there will be spawning in April, those conditions won't impact fishing during the spawn. When the fish move shallow to spawn, they are removed from the impact of current. Barnett doesn't

have a lot of feeder creeks steadily supplying inflow in its backwaters, at least not like at Grenada and Sardis."

The stable water of Barnett is what makes it such a consistent performer, if not a trophy producer.

"I've always said that if you want a trophy crappie, a lot of 3-pounders, then Grenada and Sardis and even Lake Washington is where you need to go," Thomas said. "But, if you just want to go catch a box of quality fish, year-round, there's no place better than Barnett Reservoir. Other lakes can be cyclic with regards to crappie, with populations yo-yoing depending on the lake levels. Not Barnett. It doesn't rise and fall 15 to 20 feet like the flood-control lakes

like Sardis and Grenada. You won't see it lose a spawning class because of it.

"As far as I can tell, Barnett has only one crappie cycle and it's good." ■



Crappie fishing at Barnett Reservoir is likely to be less affected by flooding this spring as are other bodies of water across the Magnolia State.



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PELAHATCHIE BAY'S FUTURE UNKNOWN

Pelahatchie Bay on Ross Barnett Reservoir remains off-limits as the lake's oversight agency, the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District, battles a 2018 outbreak of the invasive plant giant salvinia.

The bay was closed to all boating Nov. 1. All boat ramps were closed, and boat traffic stopped between the bay and the main lake at the Northshore Parkway Bridge. It remains closed.

Lake officials are waiting until the spring green-up to determine when it can safely reopen the bay. PRWWSA was hoping to have at least a partial reopening on April 1, but that seems doubtful it would be that early.

"The key is what we find during the spring green-up," said John Sigman, PRWWSA's general manager. "The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has done an exceptional job this winter, and in February it was reported that they had reduced the salvinia and its range by 90 percent since October. It could be even more than that, but until everything starts to turn green, we can't be sure how much, if any, of the salvinia survived."

The reservoir's level was lowered 2 feet this winter to expose as much of the salvinia as possible. Removing it from water and exposing it to cold weather was a key part of the eradication effort, combined with intensive spraying and containment work by the MDWFP.

"Our goal is to open the bay as soon as possible to our users," Sigman said. "We know how important that is to our leaseholders, area businesses and the general public, but we can't risk another outbreak. We're not sure what or when the reopening plan will be, but it is likely that it will just be a partial reopening. I know that the north-shore area where the salvinia was contained is likely to stay closed, and I doubt we'll open access at the bridge to the main lake right away."

"We simply can't take a chance of this weed escaping the bay and entering the main lake or other areas of Barnett Reservoir. We also don't want to see it leave our lake headed elsewhere on someone's boat trailer. We will be asking our boaters to be extremely vigilant when putting in and taking out their boats to guard against spreading vegetation."

PRWWSA will begin raising the pool back toward the operational range of 297.0 to 297.5 at some point this spring, as rainfall allows.

"We'd like to keep the water low as long as the vegetation experts tell us it's helping in the fight against salvinia," Sigman said. "But at some point, we have to raise it back up before it becomes a risk of a summer drought." ■



Ross Barnett's Pelahatchie Bay was closed to all boating last Nov. 1 because of an invasion of giant salvinia; it has since been found in other lakes.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

MDWFP FINDS MORE SALVINIA-IMPACTED WATERWAYS

Officials at the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks in March announced that the invasive plant giant salvinia has been positively identified in several lakes in addition to Barnett Reservoir.

The MDWFP said it found the plant at the Aliceville, Aberdeen, Columbus and Bay Springs lakes of the Tenn-Tom Waterway, Pickwick Lake and the Pascagoula River marsh. In addition, the U.S. Forest Service reported that it found an outbreak on the upper end of Lake Okhissa in the Homochitto National Forest near Bude.

"Since this plant has been found in several lakes at boat ramp sites, we believe that boaters are accidentally introducing it as it washes off their boat trailers," said Dennis Riecke, a fisheries biologist with MDWFP. "This is a very serious situation, because once aquatic invasive species are released into our natural waters, they are very difficult and expensive to control."

"Anglers and boaters can help stop the spread of all aquatic plants by inspecting their boats and trailers for aquatic plants after each use. Boaters and anglers should always clean, drain and dry their boating equipment after each use and certainly before traveling to fish or boat at a different location to limit the spread of aquatic invasive species." ■

DELTA LAKES' FLOODING LIKELY TO IMPACT CRAPPIE FISHING

A lot of Mississippi crappie fishermen could have some anxious moments this spring due to flooding in the Delta from the Mississippi River and its backwaters caused by heavy rainfall north of the state.

Mississippi's Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks had to close the river, its many tributaries and oxbow lakes to recreational boating in March, with the crest of rising water still weeks away.

Lake Washington at Glen Alan, a popular destination for crappie fishermen across the country, was among those impacted, as were Eagle, Chotard and Albermarle lakes near Vicksburg, and Wolf and Bee lakes near Yazoo City.

"I know you're concerned about fishing," said Phil Barnes of Vicksburg, whose family has a camp and second home at Eagle Lake, "but there's a lot of people over here

who are worried about everything they own. It's that dire. It's really hard to tell lakes from farmland now."

Flooding will deliver another blow to the inland oxbows and streams, with another "restocking" of leaping Asian silver carp migrates in from the Mississippi River. Those that don't return to the Big Muddy when the water falls will become permanent residents of the oxbows.

"After the 2011 flood, we needed hard hats and face masks to fish at Wolf Lake," Barnes said. "My partner took a 10-pounder to the noggin' at Albermarle Lake that nearly took his head off. This isn't good at all."

Water levels at Mississippi's four major Mississippi flood-control reservoirs — Grenada, Enid, Sardis and Arkabutla — are higher than normal, lots higher, which will undoubtedly impact crappie fishing this



Flooding in the Delta and northern Mississippi might cause fishermen to change tactics and locations for spawning slabs this spring.

spring. Grenada Lake, for example, the consensus No. 1-rated lake in the world for trophy crappie, was 10½ feet above normal on March 10. That will surely mean the traditional spawning grounds will be too deep for fish to use this year.

"What it means is we'll be doing a lot of wading in a lot of different areas," said Ronnie Thomas of Grenada. "When the water goes up, you just have to go with it, and in a lot of areas it will be in brush that you can't get a boat into, and if you can get a boat in it, you certainly can't get around in it. The alternative is to park the boat, put on your waders and get in the water. The fish are going to spawn, come hell or high water. You just have to go and find them." ■

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FOUR NEW GULF REEFS BEING BUILT

CONSTRUCTION COULD BEGIN IN SPRING, PENDING APPROVAL

Anglers will soon have four new prime areas to target speckled trout and redfish — if a permit filed by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in January is ultimately approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Construction of four new artificial reefs in and around Lake Borgne and the Biloxi Marsh — the Shell Pad Reef, Grand Banks Reef, Cabbage Reef and West Karako Bay Reef — could start as early as this spring depending on permit approval, weather and contractor availability, according to Ashley Ferguson, inshore artificial reef biologist with the LDWF.

"I'm excited," Ferguson said. "I think they're going to be really great fishing spots, and we also plan to have these reefs off-limits to oyster harvests, so that's going to have them serve as a sort of brood stock for the surrounding oyster population, an added benefit."

The project, a partnership between the LDWF and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, allows for each site to expand up to about 10 acres in size. But Ferguson said initially, each reef will be about 1 acre, made up of large limestone chunks, shells and reefballs.

"That leaves a lot of room for us to go in and put more material in the future," she said. "Adding hard substrate to areas with that soft bottom is going to be very beneficial for those settling organisms, and will establish a location for that food chain to set up and enhance fishing opportunities, which is the whole mission of the Artificial Reef Program."

The total construction cost for the project is expected to be about \$300,000, which will be split between the foundation and the LDWF, she said.

"We're paying for half, and they're paying for half," Ferguson said. "Our half comes from the Artificial Reef Trust Fund."

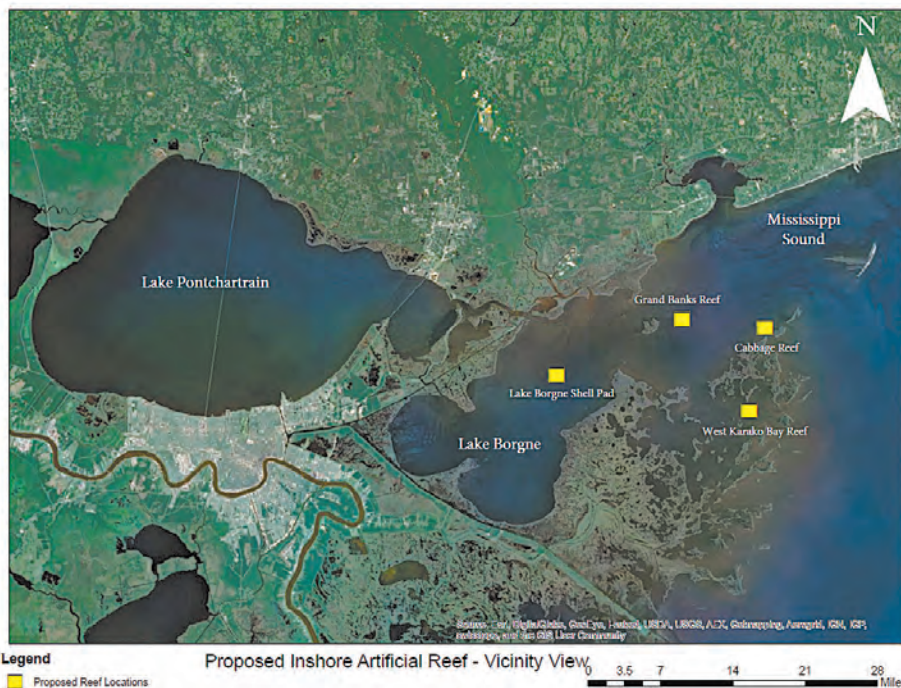
Several factors, including water temperature, rainfall and larval availability in the system, help determine how quickly fish are attracted to a reef, but Ferguson said it can happen relatively quickly.

"Settlement usually happens pretty fast with organisms like mussels and barnacles and things like that," she said. "Then that draws the cryptic species of fish and crabs that look for crevices in those rocks — they'll typically start hiding in there pretty soon after the material is deployed, like within a month. Food will start

to develop in the spring and throughout the summer, which then draws in predatory fish that anglers are seeking."

Plans call for 50 reef balls to be used at the Lake Borgne site, which is being constructed over an existing shell pad. The other three sites will feature 30 reef balls each, which Ferguson described as perforated concrete domes, almost like a cement whiffle ball. The Grand Banks, Cabbage and West Karako Bay sites will be composed of three rows of 2- to 3-foot high limestone in depths ranging from 8 to 10 feet, according to the permit.

With the addition of these four sites, Ferguson said that brings



the total number of inshore artificial reefs statewide to 33, and additional projects are slated for 2019. The permit for these four has already been approved by the state's Department of Natural Resources, so all that remains now is the Corps' blessing.

"We've been planning these for quite a while, so very soon after we have the permit in hand I expect we'll start deployment," she said. "And these four are really accessible, too. That's one thing we always try to make sure of — that the reefs are in areas where people can get out there and reasonably fish them."

The U.S. Coast Guard will ultimately determine if the reefs will be marked with permanent buoys, Ferguson said, or if anglers will have to rely on updated NOAA charts or GPS coordinates to locate the sites. ■

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CWD NOW CONFIRMED IN 16 DEER

NORTH MISSISSIPPI HAS HAD MOST CASES SO FAR

As more and more hunters voluntarily had their deer tested during the 2018-19 hunting season, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks was able to confirm many more cases of chronic wasting disease, as well as identify a new hot spot for the deadly disease.

The MDWFP on March 10 said it had a total of 16 confirmed cases, with a concentration developing in north Mississippi along the Tennessee border. Six

CWD-positive deer were found in Marshall County near Holly Springs and five in rural areas of north Benton County.

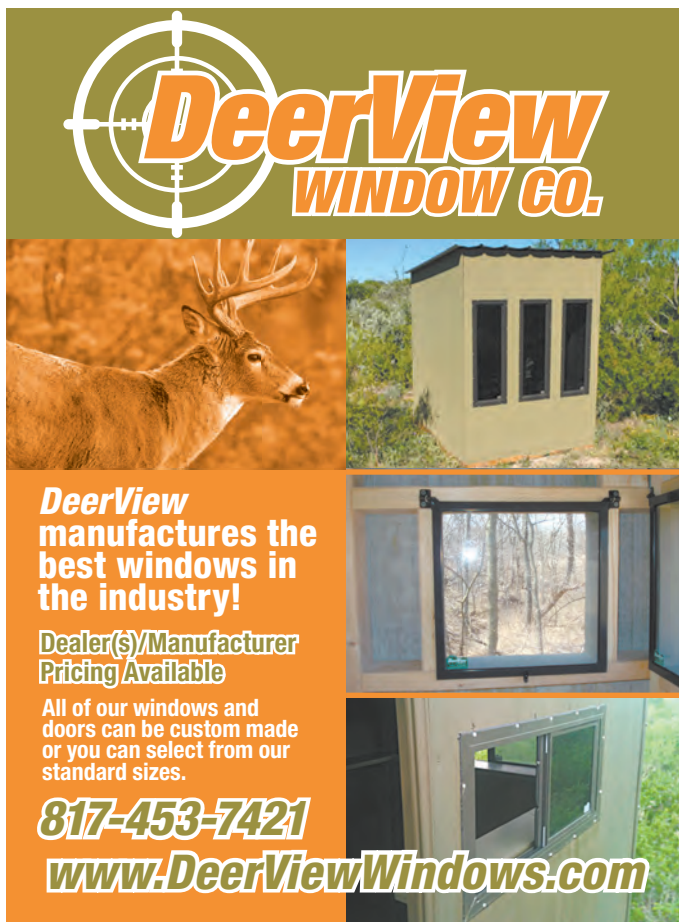
Both Marshall and Benton border the Tennessee counties of Fayette and Hardeman, which is where the bulk of that state's 185 confirmed cases of CWD has been found. Its first confirmation was Dec. 14, 2018.

Both states have enacted CWD Response Plans in their respective impacted areas. Mississippi also has an Issaquena CWD

Zone in the south Delta where the first case of CWD was confirmed in February 2018.

According to CWD-info.org, CWD is a contagious neurological disease affecting deer, elk and moose. It causes a characteristic spongy degeneration of the brains of infected animals resulting in emaciation, abnormal behavior, loss of bodily functions and death.

CWD belongs to a group of diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. There are several other variants that affect domestic animals like scrapie, which has been identified in domestic sheep and goats for more than 200 years, and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle (also known as "mad cow disease"). Several rare human diseases are also TSEs. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) occurs naturally in about one out of every one million people worldwide. ■



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RED SNAPPER SEASONS ARE SET FOR 2019

Mississippi's Department of Marine Resources has announced that the 2019 red snapper season will open for private recreational anglers and state for-hire vessels on Friday, May 24.

Private recreational anglers can fish out to 200 nautical miles; however, vessels with state for-hire permits are restricted to state territorial waters extending 9 nautical miles from the barrier islands.

The season will be open seven days a week and is scheduled to begin at 12:01 a.m. on May 24. It will run through Sept. 2 at 11:59 p.m. with a mid-season closure from July 8-28. This closure will help ensure the state's annual quota is not met before Labor Day. The season will close if the assigned quotas, including the Gulf-wide quota, are reached.

Anglers will be allowed to keep two red snapper per day, with a 16-inch size minimum.

Due to an increase in the Gulf annual catch limit, Mississippi's quota for 2019 is 151,584 pounds, with the quota for private recreational fishermen set at 148,507 pounds and the state for-hire quota set at 3,077 pounds. However, to account for the overage by for-hire vessels in 2018, the state for-hire allocation is 2,642 pounds.

All anglers are required to register their trips through MDMR's Tails n' Scales program, which is available through a smartphone app, a website and a call



center. Anglers must create a profile and start a trip before going fishing for Red Snapper. They must have a trip number when they are out on the water and close out that trip before creating a new one. The Tails n' Scales app is available in iTunes and Google Play, and the website is tailsnscales.org. Fishermen can call 228-697-5762 if they need to report any issues with the app. ■

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Cooper Thornton, 10, killed this 131-inch 11-point on family land in Kemper County on Nov. 26, 2018.



Aubrey Dale, 11, with the giant buck she took down on Jan. 28 in Holmes County.



Eleven-year-old Gracie Reynolds was hunting in Jackson County when she took her first buck.



Emerie Baecher, 7, poses with her first buck ever, a 6-point killed on Nov. 21, 2018 while hunting with her dad in Calhoun County.



Caleb Thompson killed this 4-point in Copiah County with a bow at 86 yards on the last day of the season.

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GRENADA GIRL, 5, GETS 2 GOBBLERS ON FIRST WEEKEND OF YOUTH SEASON

As a dad who loves turkey hunting, Dustin Kendall of Grenada wanted his 5-year-old daughter Paizley's first gobbler to be memorable, both for him and for his new hunting and fishing partner.

They got much more than that on the opening weekend of the youth turkey season in Mississippi.

On March 9, opening day of the youth season, Paizley Kendall closed the deal and got her first longbeard, adding it to a growing list of accomplishments for this neophyte hunter. The 9½-inch bearded bird was the first entered in the youth turkey contest at Lakeway Sporting Goods in Grenada.

Two days later, a Sunday, she added a gobbler with an 8½-inch beard.

"Man, she came within five steps on Saturday of limiting out," Dustin Kendall said. "If that bird had taken just five more steps, she'd have gotten him, and the one on Sunday would have been her limit."

"She does a lot of hunting, and she enjoys it all. She was able to harvest three deer in deer season, and she also enjoys going duck hunting, coon hunting, hog hunting and hand-grabbling for catfish."

The pursuit of her first turkey began last spring at age 4.

"We hunted several times last year with no luck," he said. "Thing is, the place we hunt in Tallahatchie County hasn't had a lot of turkeys in recent years. Last year, I told my wife I was going to set up my cameras down there and just see. I was so excited when we started getting pictures of this group of eight or nine jakes that kept coming through the area last year."

That created a lot of anticipation as the 2019 youth season approached. The Kendalls were so excited that with the season opening on a Friday, special allowances had to be made.

"After letting her play hooky from

(school), I played hooky at work, and we went to one of our favorite spots," Kendall said. "We slept in because there wasn't any use getting out there before sunrise. I haven't heard any gobbles, I just have a lot of pictures of gobblers passing through this area between 10 and 10:30 most mornings.

"It's just a small field near a ridge where I have a blind set up just for her to turkey hunt. We got there around 9 and got set up. After sitting in the blind for a little over an hour, I looked to our left and saw two longbeards standing there only 40 yards away. They had snuck in without gobbling."

Perhaps, he added, the silent approach was a good thing for the hunters.

"If they had come in gobbling, I'm not sure we could have controlled our excitement," Kendall said. "Paizley still got pretty excited. She was breathing so hard. It was more like panting or gasping, and it was so loud that I think they heard her. They didn't really spook as much as they did concentrate on our jake decoy."

The two gobblers, with the biggest one strutting, marched the 25 yards from where they were first spotted to reach the jake decoy just 15 yards from the hunters.

"She sits in my lap so she can see," Kendall said. "They walked right up to our decoy. As soon as the strutter cleared the decoy, Paizley was bearing down on him with Winchester SXP 20 gauge. I kept telling her to wait for the two gobblers to separate because I didn't want her to shoot them both and maybe injure the second one.

"They were about to attack that jake decoy, but I think they heard her breathing and the strutter broke down completely out of strut and took four steps away from the decoy. He stopped and stuck his head up, and I said 'Shoot him.' Boom! She made a perfect shot and we



Paizley Kendall's first gobbler, with a 9½-inch beard, was killed on opening day of Mississippi's youth turkey season. She killed another bird two days later.

both ran out of the blind as fast as we could to recover her first longbeard."

Back in the same spot on Saturday's second day, they again had a gobbler come in to the field. This one was alone and a little hesitant.

"I'm not sure if it was the same bird that had come in with the one she killed on Friday or if it's the one she killed on Sunday, but he hung up about 5 yards too far for her to shoot," Kendall said.

"But on Sunday, again, we had one come in without making a noise. I just looked up and there he was. This one was smaller than the first bird, and obviously one of the jakes we'd see last year. The first one Friday was a bigger bird, heavier and with 7/8-inch spurs. I'm not sure about his age."

This time the shot was a little tougher, a little longer.

"When she shot him, he jumped up almost in flight and came back down," Kendall said. "She shot him again, this time at 40 yards, and rolled him, but he got back up at about 50 yards. She shot him again, and it was over.

"The time change (to daylight saving time) certainly helped us get the Sunday bird, because we'd been getting pictures of these birds coming back through the field every afternoon around 3:30. We had time to go to church, have lunch and get to the field. She shot him at 4:30, which the day before would have been 3:30. Man, these cameras really helped us on these turkeys. She's still got plenty of time to get her limit gobbler." ■



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Flow from the Bonnet Carré Spillway on the Mississippi River could be heavy enough to push more speckled trout eastward into Mississippi waters this spring.

Speckled trout anglers have a lot to look forward to this spring, especially in the western areas of Mississippi's Gulf Coast, in part because the Bonnet Carré Spillway on the Mississippi River continues to pour out the remnants of a long, wet winter.

That freshwater runoff from Bonnet Carré pushes so much freshwater and silt into the Gulf that after wet winters, plenty of speckled trout have been pushed east

into Mississippi waters.

"Last time, it pushed all the speckled trout around in the western Mississippi Sound and everybody was catching speckled trout," said Richard Gollott, a member of Mississippi's Commission on Marine Resources, which was recently granted authority to close down fishing for trout based on how many specks were caught the last time Bonnet Carré's gates were open during March. "We really want

to protect the species."

That doesn't sit well with Mississippi anglers like Jerod Doucet of Diamond-head.

"As long as we're not keeping more than our limit, what difference does it make? It's like saying the limit is XYZ, unless you're catching that many, and then we'll just close the fishing down if that happens," he said. ■

— Brian Cope



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APRIL'S

BASS BONANZA

ACROSS MISSISSIPPI, ANGLERS TARGET FISH IN ALL STAGES OF THE SPAWN, IN LAKES LARGE AND SMALL. THERE'S JUST ONE CONSTANT: DON'T MISS IT.

By Bobby Cleveland

APRIL IS A STRANGE MONTH FOR BASS FISHING IN MISSISSIPPI.

Depending on where you fish, you can run into fish that are on postspawn, spawning and even prespawn patterns.

In some rare cases, fishermen can find all three at one time on the same water, for instance, Pickwick Lake and Bay Springs Lake in northeast Mississippi.

The cool, clear waters of these two Tennessee and Tenn-Tom Waterway lakes can put the fish in different phases of their procreation process.

“You have to be prepared for all three up here; kind of makes it interesting, doesn’t it?” Roger Stegall of Iuka, a longtime Pickwick guide once told me, adding with a wink, “Kind of makes it where you need to hire a guide.”

Stegall was joking around, of course, but he proved it one April day when he and a fishing buddy did this:

- Caught smallmouth bass holding on a dropoff after spawning, quite willing and ready to take a grub bounced along the shallow top of the drop until it fell off into deep water, where the smallies were waiting, suspending along the wall to feed after finishing their spawning.
- Sight-fished for big largemouths on the beds in the back end of coves.
- Found smallmouth, largemouth and even spotted bass, mostly females loaded with eggs, feeding together on the rocks around an offshore island in front of a cove known for spawning.

It is possible that other lakes around Mississippi can have fish in all three stages of the spawn at the same time in April, lakes like Barnett Reservoir, which is such a diverse fishery — upper river area with current, backwater areas shallow and warm, the diversity of the main lake with docks, piers, miles of riprap.

“With that much diversity, it’s a safe bet

that at sometime in April, you will find prespawn, spawning and postspawn fish on the same day,” said bass pro Pete Ponds of Madison. “Granted, you will have to cover a lot of water to find all three at the same time. In that case, go with whatever you feel most confident challenging.”

For the majority of Mississippi anglers, who fish much-smaller public and private waters, there is no such problem. The predominant pattern will probably be the

only pattern, with very little to no overlap.

“I just hope it’s the postspawn,” said angler Daniel Smith of Ridgeland, who loves to find bass settling down after the spawn, hungry to rebuild their bodies after the rigors of procreating. “Give me a 50- to 200-acre lake with bass coming off the spawn, and I’ll show you a fun trip. That’s why April is my favorite month for bass fishing, well, that and the fact that it is the perfect weather for comfortable fishing.

continued >>>



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“On a good day, I can catch bass on a frog or other topwater bait, a worm in heavy cover and even crankbaits when they are really hungry. I’ll throw everything in the boat until I find what produces the best fish, and then I’ll stick with that lure or that lure type until they get tired of either seeing it or eating it, and then I’ll switch to the next lure that worked. Now, that’s fun.”

PONDS: FIND BREAM BEDS

Ponds lives on a lake in central Mississippi, and fishes it regularly when he isn’t chasing bass for pay. One of his favorite April patterns is fishing bream beds — not for bream, but for bass.

“Think about it; bass spawn shallow,” he said. “When they leave the beds, especially the big females who leave the males to protect the bed and the newly hatched, they are hungry. Bream bed shallow, and by April, we’ve got redear already bedding, and some bluegill will move up, especially when we’ve had a

Daniel Smith of Ridgeland loves fishing smaller lakes during the spring for hungry bass.

mild winter and an early spring. So it makes sense that if a bass has a food source that close to her bed, why would she go any further.”

Ponds also noted that in most small to mid-sized lakes, access to deeper water is just a quick swim away for most fish, so they are comfortable holding in the shallows.

All this proved true on an April trip two years ago on his home lake, where he was working the shallows along a seawall when he suddenly lifted his head and started sniffing with a purpose.

“Smell that? Gotta be a bream bed,” he said, quickly retrieving his lure so he could pick up a rod with a Devil’s Horse tied on.

Using the wind, he pinpointed the location of the bed, launched a cast as far as he could throw it and then waited for the splash circles to disperse. Then he put the Devil’s Horse to work, giving it a couple of quick jerks, with the front and rear propellers producing audible splash- ing noises.



“The propellers are what makes me like the Horse,” Ponds said. “I don’t know exactly why, but it has always been deadly for fishing around bream beds. This is a big-fish pattern. You won’t be getting a lot of bites, but what ones you get will be quality bites.”

Ponds worked the lure with a few more twitches, pausing to ...

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Pickwick Lake guide Roger Stegall can target smallmouths, largemouths and spotted bass spawning at different times, in different areas.



“A lot of people think this is something you can only do around the full moon in April or May, but it’s not. Bream cycle on and off the beds, up into the summer, usually relating to the full- and new-moon phases. I promise you, the bass know that. The bass fishing is better in the early months because the bass are already shallow, coming off their spawn. Later, in the heat, I try to find beds extremely close to a deep drop. Those are good on into June and even July.”

continued >>>

... Splooosh!

The explosion of water was massive. “Oh it’s a big one,” Ponds said. “Half her body came out of the water and crashed on that lure. Got to be at least a 6, maybe bigger.”

The same scene was repeated over and over that day, on a variety of surface or near-surface lures.

“You want to fish on top, but I don’t want to use a walking-type bait like a Spook,” he said. “The props on a Horse give you a good splash without a lot of movement. A chugging bait like a Pop-R will work, but I like a bigger bait. The thing to remember is that

when you target bream beds for bass, it will be big bass you are targeting, and the bigger baits catch bigger fish.

“Bass are attracted to bream beds because they are a hive of activity, and obviously, they know they can pick off a nice meal. When we’re talking about bream that are in there bedding, then we’re talking about a pretty good-sized forage fish so any bass there actively feeding is capable of snaring a really big bait. The bream will run off smaller bass, too.”

Ponds let the water settle from the previous skirmish, fishing a nearby boat dock before returning to the bream bed. This time, he tossed a Floating Bull Shad swimbait and brought it back over what he assumed was the outer, deeper edge of the bed, where a big bass might be staging for a quick run in to grab a meal.

Splooosh!

The plan worked. Ponds set the hook on another good fish, and this time, he put it in the boat.

“Love me some bream-bed action,” he said. “Can’t blame them for eating bream. I love them, too. I’ll come back over here this week with my grandson, and we’ll catch a mess.

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Postspawn bass will hit a variety of baits when they come off the beds looking to feed up and recover.

SMITH: GIVE THEM THE FULL MENU

Smith, who also has access to the same lake as Ponds, usually opts for smaller, private lakes to target.

“Give me a 15- to 50-acre lake, and I’m happy,” he said. “The reason is that in such an impoundment, it’s likely that all the fish are on the same page at the same time. And being that they are smaller lakes, I don’t have to arrive with much information about what the fish are doing. It’s small enough that I can make a quick pass around enough water to figure it out. In April, I start right on the banks.”

Smith has many rods at the ready, each with different lure types tied on.

“I give them the full menu,” he said. “A frog, swimbait, spinner bait, buzzbait, square-bill crankbait, shallow crankbait, soft plastics — all of it. Chances are pretty good that I am going to get some action on just about all of it, at least on an overcast morning when the topwaters will work. Sooner or later, I’m going to hit on one that seems to get the biggest fish most often.”

“I know I can keep working right on the banks where the bass spawned and catch the smaller buck bass, 12 to 15 inches, using nothing more than a worm or a spinnerbait. But I’m looking for the big sows, so I’m ready for anything from a foot to 5 or 6 feet deep.”

Smith catches most of big April females in a postspawn pattern on the smaller lakes, targeting the first good cover away from a bank. He proved that pattern on an April 2018. After launching, we fished the shallow banks along the windward shore and caught a lot of the smaller buck bass, but only two 2- to 3-pound females. Topwaters caught the females, but the bucks were happiest with shaky-head worms. Unsatisfied, Smith turned up the speed on the trolling motor and rounded a bend in the shoreline that led to the lake’s biggest cove.

“This is where most of the bream bed, where the deep water is closest to bass spawning areas and, most important, where there’s a row of stumps in 5 feet of water,” Smith said. “Take that Bandit 200 and start banging those stumps.”

We did, and in the first 20 minutes, we boated 14 long, skinny females, obviously



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just finished laying their eggs on the bed. Four of the fish would have been 8 pounds or better had they still had their eggs. The other 10 were would-be 6s that were more like 4s.

Smith chose to leave them while they were still biting to let the area calm down and said he had an idea, if we wanted to try some topwater.

Across the dam, on the north end of the lake, was a small cove still hidden from the sun, in the shad of standing timber, featuring more stumps, plus a lot of old laydowns that had Smith drooling at the prospect of throwing a frog over the cover.

Using two variations of the Scum Frog produced by the Mississippi-based Southern Lure Company, we went to work.

I threw the Scum Dog, the plastic frog that can be worked with the “walking-the-dog” action of a big surface plug like a Zara Spook. Smith chose the Big Foot, which has legs that churn the water like a small buzzbait.

Both worked. We only caught one each in that cove on our frogs, but they were our biggest of the day — would-be 10s that were skinned-down to 8 pounds or so.

“A lot of people think that you can only throw frogs around vegetation, and they’re right that they work good in that situation,” Smith said. “What a lot of people don’t realize is how good a frog — especially ones with a unique action like the splashing feet and the dog-walking pattern — will work over underwater wooden structure.”

For the last hour that morning, we worked the entire shoreline on the shady, east side with the frogs, backed by a whacky-rigged Senko worm. If a fish swiped at the frog and missed, the Senko would finish the deal. We ended up catch another 10 each, all thin females in water ranging from 1 to 5 feet. ■

SKIP THE DOCKS up next >



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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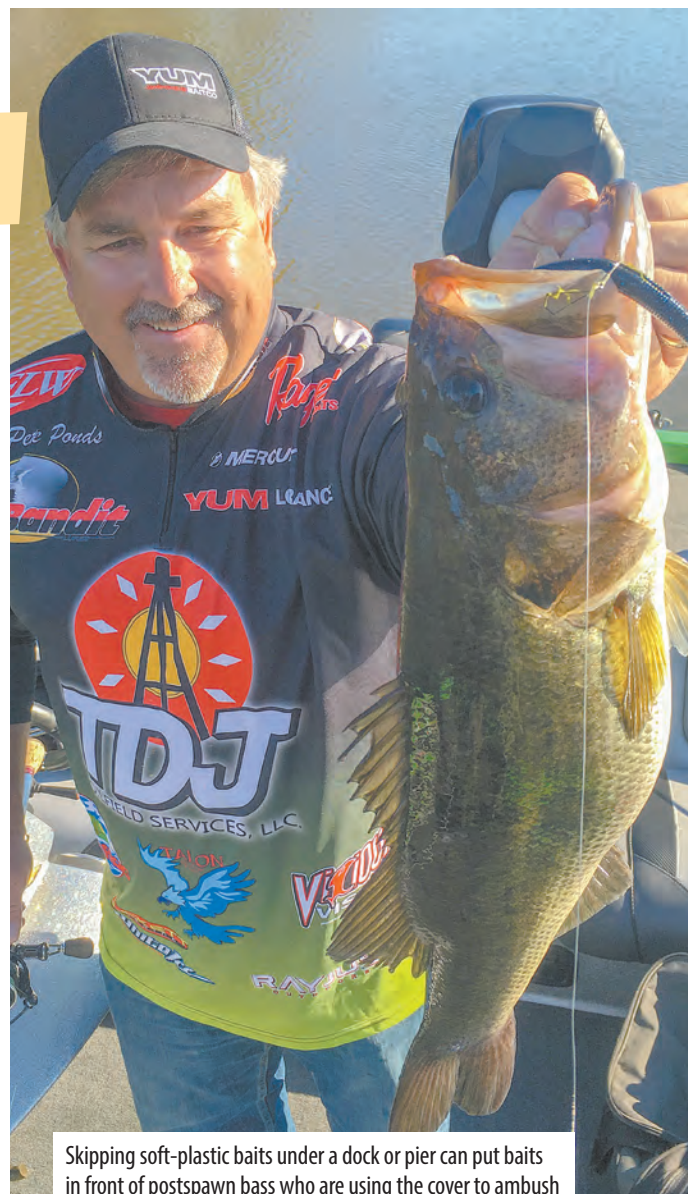
Pete Ponds, like most bass pros, seek out docks, piers and other horizontal cover on the lakes he fishes. According to Ponds, April is one of the best times to put those structures to good use.

"That's one of the first places I look in April to find big females after the spawn," he said. "They are always good places to look, all year, but postspawn makes them even more attractive, because when the fish leave the beds, the first cover they can usually find is a dock or a pier on the bank in the spawning area. It offers cover, and it offers baitfish, too."

Ponds has become proficient in skipping lures, like Senko-type worms rigged weightless and wacky-style on a light finesse hook, as far up under a dock as it can go. Seeing it in practice is a marvel to behold.

"I can't tell stress enough how efficient that is," he said. "Anybody can fish the outer edges of cover, but only those who are proficient at skipping baits, whether it's a worm or a spinnerbait or anything, to the very back of the cover can reach where the fish like to get.

"It's such a strong pattern that I recommend all bass fishermen who have access to waters with lots of piers, marinas, docks and boathouses try it. It just takes commitment and



Skipping soft-plastic baits under a dock or pier can put baits in front of postspawn bass who are using the cover to ambush forage as they recover from their reproductive actions.

Bobby Cleveland

practice, lots of practice."

Ponds uses a 6-foot or 6½-foot medium-heavy or heavy spinning rod, with a quality spinning reel spooled with fluorocarbon, as light as he thinks he can get away with. Stay away from baitcast reels or be prepared to spend most of the day picking backlashes.

Using a sidearm, down-angle cast, Ponds aims to hit the water about halfway between the boat and the pier, letting the lure skip three or four times before reaching the cover and then two or three more after that.

"Practice, practice, practice," he said. "That's the key. I've seen guys who aim closer to the boat than I do and guys who aim closer to the pier than I do. Halfway works for me because I like the bait to skip a few times before it gets there, and I want the loudest skips to be closer to the pier than to the boat. The skipping is important because it mimics the fleeing action of a shad running from a predator fish. It will get the attention of a bass and have it looking for where that baitfish is.

"When it comes bouncing under the pier and settles down ... BAM! She's all over it!" ■

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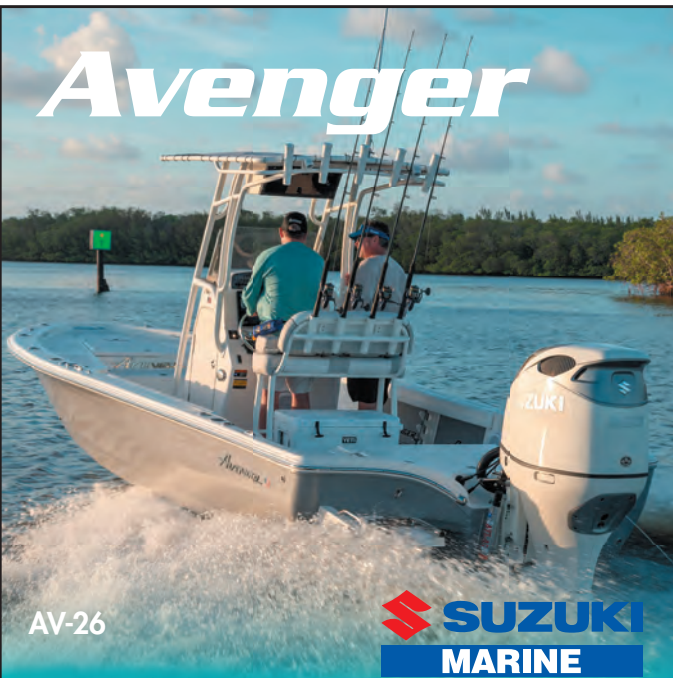
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Mississippi has thousands of places where largemouth bass can be caught on any given day. That makes it an excellent bass-fishing destination. In contrast, smallmouth bass can be caught in only one, small corner of the state, which includes Pickwick Lake, but it is so good it is also a destination of choice for visiting anglers.

Roger Stegall of Iuka has probably forgotten more about smallmouth bass than the average fisherman learns in a lifetime. Pickwick is his home lake, and for the past 30 years, he has made a business of guiding anglers to places where smallmouths can be caught.

Smallmouth bass, aka smallies, wear that moniker as if they have a chip on their shoulder, something to prove. What they lack in size, they make up for in brute strength and feisty attitude.

Mississippi shares Pickwick with Tennessee and Alabama in its northeastern corner. In parts of the lake, licenses reciprocity is practiced, but anglers need to know where the boundaries are to avoid a possible ticket.



PICKWICK'S SMALLMOUTH EQUATION

By David Hawkins

**DON'T PASS UP A CHANCE TO
TRY OUT MISSISSIPPI'S BEST
SMALLMOUTH BASS FISHERY.
APRIL IS A PERFECT TIME TO
CATCH A BIG ONE.**



“Pickwick is not the only place in Mississippi to catch a smallmouth bass,” Stegall said,

“but the size of the lake and the smallmouths’ population concentration make it the best Mississippi water to consider.”

Pickwick is a big lake, 43,100 acres, with a wide variety of structure and habitat, Stegall said, and just like their cousins, largemouth bass, smallmouths have their own patterns and preferences. The key to catching these fish is to decode those patterns.

Stegall, has fished Pickwick for 40 years, and over the past 25, he has caught between 40 and 50 smallmouths in the 7- to 8-pound range. The lake has yielded a five-fish tournament limit of 27 pounds, 6 ounces, and another 10-fish catch that weighed 52 pounds.

“I believe the next world-record smallmouth will come from Pickwick,” said Stegall. “Two 10-pound smallmouths have been caught from Pickwick.”

The Mississippi state record, caught in 1987, is a 7-pound, 15-ounce fish caught in Yellow Creek. The world-record smallmouth, caught in 1955 from Tennessee’s Dale Hollow Lake, weighed 11 pounds, 15 ounces.



David Hawkins

“In April, the secret to catching smallmouths is to work the ledge. That’s what I recommend at this time of year,” Stegall said. “Under normal circumstances, the fish are transitioning from spawn and postspawn in April. Bear Creek and Yellow Creek are excellent places to start looking. It is also a time when the young shad are starting to become the bass’s main diet. It’s like the bass are going to gorge themselves as they recover from the stress of spawning.”

Stegall keys on secondary ledges: anywhere there is a drop of a foot or more from the primary ledge to the secondary ledge. The drop may be as little as a foot or as much as 5 to 6 feet or more.

He provided a great example on an April trip for another fishermen, pointing on his depth finder to sheer drop where the water fell from 5 to 12 feet deep. A tube bait, rigged Carolina-

Hefty smallmouth bass like this one are nothing out of the ordinary for veteran Pickwick guide Roger Stegall. **BELOW, LEFT:** Largemouth and smallmouth bass are commonly caught in the same areas on the same baits.



Photo courtesy Roger Stegall

style on a half-ounce football-head jig, made the leap from the first ledge, but never reached the second. A fat smallmouth came to the boat for a moment of admiration and instant release.

A Strike King structure jig with a watermelon-red tube is another of Stegall’s go-to baits.

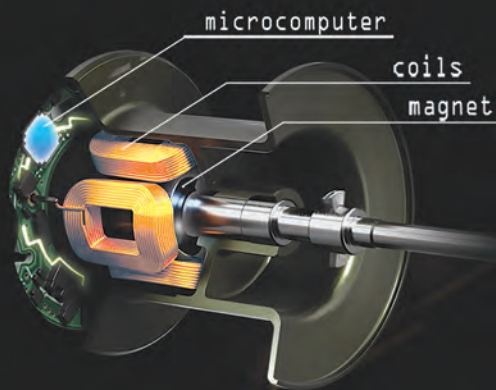
“If I can’t get the bass to bite the Carolina rig, I’ll use the Strike King Series 5 or Series 6 crankbaits,” Stegall said. “My favorite color for big smallmouth is shad. My No. 2 color is chartreuse with a black back. Recently, I’ve found very good success with the red-eye shad. I use the Series 6 if the water is 10 feet deep or more, and I fish with the Series 5 crankbait in water that is 6 to 10 feet deep. I use a slow-retrieve reel to crank the bait down to the bottom. Then, I vary my retrieve and let the bass tell me how they want the bait. Once I’ve determined the retrieve the big smallmouth wants, I’ll use that same retrieve on other humps and ledges.”

“Don’t overlook the smaller drops,” Stegall said. “Even transitions of as little as a few inches can hold bass. The ledges are a common occurrence at Pickwick, and where some structure exists in addition to the dropoff, the bass will gang up.”



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Stegall said smallmouths like smaller baits. Crankbaits, such as the Strike King Spittin' King or Sexy Daddy are great for locating schooling smallmouths along the ledges. Any of Strike King's Series 5 crankbaits come highly recommended.

"Where the ledges play out onto a gravel bottom, there are often mussel beds," said Stegall. "They show up as a very solid, bright, yellow line here on the (depth finder). Smallmouths like the beds because they can find a lot to eat there. I keep a rod baited with a Pro-Tour tungsten jig for places such as this. I can feel the bottom really well, and a bite on a braided line is like a hammer falling on the bait."

Past the ledges, Stegall moves to open water. Pickwick is full of underwater humps and mounds, many actually ancient Indian mounds that were on the landscape before the lake was impounded. To excavate these mounds, archaeologists dug trenches through the center of the mounds; you can locate them with your depth finder. Often, there will be a dropoff on the top of the mound, then the mound will reappear and drop off again. Hills that drop off sharply into the lake are also present, and the smallmouths usually relate to hills and dropoffs closest to the main-river channel, especially when current is pulled through the lake. The best current is when water is being pulled through the hydroelectric plant at Pickwick Dam; the current isn't as strong when the dam is simply releasing minimum flow.



David Hawkins

Grassbeds are another place to find Pickwick smallmouths. "The baitfish finds cover in the weeds or grass," Stegall said. "The bass patrol the edges picking off the careless baitfish. If it is a bright, sunny day, the bass simply slide under the grass to escape the sun. When this happens, switch to a punch-bait and braided line to get to the bass."

Stegall said largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass are often found in the same areas. It is not uncommon for him to catch different fish on consecutive casts.

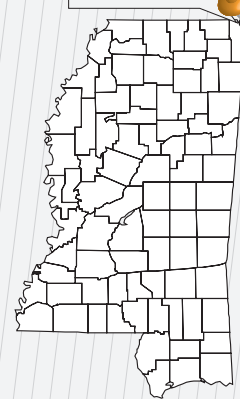
"They may also be a little competitive," he said. "Several times, I've caught a largemouth and smallmouth on the same lure, on the same cast — like one is trying to take it away from the other. That really adds spice to a trip."

Stegall said a quality depth finder with side-imaging like the Humminbird unit on his boat is a critical piece of equipment for every bass fisherman.

"The first time I looked at the images, I was blown away," he said. "In one location, I knew there was some structure holding fish, I knew the depth and could see the structure with a conventional depth finder. The side-imaging allowed me a much-clearer picture; the structure was a couple of sunken sailboats, and you could see the masts and everything. I was ecstatic. The world beneath the surface is no longer a big question mark."

Stegall said smallmouth bass appear to be a cyclic species, with peak cycles coming every 10 years. He is convinced Pickwick is on

Pickwick Lake



THE LICENSE EQUATION

Mississippi shares Pickwick Lake's 43,100 acres with Tennessee and Alabama, and fishing licenses from all three states are recognized and accepted in a large portion of the reservoir — but not everywhere.

Licenses from all three states are accepted in that portion of the lake from the downstream corner of the mouth of Bear Creek all the way downstream to Pickwick Dam.

Licenses from Alabama and Mississippi are accepted in Bear Creek as far upstream as the Southern Railway bridge, and upstream from the mouth of Bear Creek to the Old Riverton Lock at mile marker 226.6.

Only Alabama licenses are accepted in the extreme upper section of Bear Creek, upstream from the Southern Railway bridge. ■

Where weeds and grass exist near deep cover, both largemouth and smallmouth bass hang out ambushing shad. **ABOVE LEFT:** This smallie hammered a surface popper fished along the edge of a Pickwick grass bed.



David Hawkins



an upward swing of this cycle.

“In the 1990s and early 2000s, we witnessed more large fish than any time in the decades that followed,” Stegall said. “Now, we are starting to see bigger fish once again. The past several years are enough to make me believe we are again on a strong upward trend. Pickwick has a tremendous number of small-mouths. I have to consider it one of the top-five smallmouth lakes in the United States.”

Tom Holman, a biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, praised the dynamics of Pickwick Lake, saying it is the most diverse freshwater habitat in Mississippi. The most northern of Mississippi’s waters, it is the southern edge of the smallmouth’s range.

“Pickwick has every kind of bass, catfish and sunfish found anywhere,” Holman said. “In addition, there are populations of southern walleye, sauger and some yellow perch. There is little done in fisheries management on a pro-active scale. Our agency works with fisheries officials from Tennessee and Alabama; the three agencies often share data about the lake. The size of the waterway makes it a self-sustaining environment.” ■

To fish with Roger Stegall, call 662-423-3869, or visit www.fishpickwick.com, or email rogstegall@fishpickwick.com.



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

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How to **MAXIMIZE THE SUNRISE BITE**

By David A. Brown

Why bigger bass bite best at sunrise and how to make the most of it

Why do bass anglers get up early? Is it to beat the morning rush hour? To avoid the boat ramp chaos? To make sure we get a good parking space? Sure, all of this matters, but the bottom-line objective is to capitalize on the “magic hour” that follows the sun’s emergence.

>





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SURFACTANT TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

DIRT & GRIME

THE STAIN

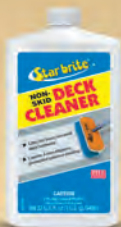
Dirt, grime, gunk, muck. Fish blood, food, drinks. These are your surface stains.

THE SCIENCE

Most surface dirt will wash right off with boat soap and water. However, some gets ground in, especially on non-skid surfaces. That's where surfactants come in. Surfactant molecules fully surround the dirt molecules and lift them from the surface that you're cleaning. This allows them to be washed away with water. Chelating Agents are supercharged surfactants for specialized cleaning.

THE SOLUTION

Star brite Boat Wash will definitely remove most surface dirt. For tough grime and gunk, use a cleaner/degreaser, such as Star brite Xtreme Clean or choose a surfactant based on the surface: Non-Skid Deck Cleaner for non-skid, Vinyl Cleaner for vinyl, etc...



ACID TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

RUST & TANNIC STAINS

THE STAIN

Tree leaves, hull stains, rust stains, waterline stains, hard water stains, orange stains.

THE SCIENCE

Tannins are naturally produced in the decomposition of plant-based matter, and their signature orange-hued stains are dyeing your hull and fiberglass. Rust stains occur on the fiberglass around metal, where water leaches color from underneath the metal and deposits it on the surface. Removing these stains requires a chemical reaction with an acid.

THE SOLUTION

Star brite Instant Hull Cleaner contains a modified oxalic acid that safely neutralizes tannins and rust. There's much more science behind it but trust us on this one, simply spray or wipe on and watch the stain disappear.



BLEACHING TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

MOLD & MILDEW STAINS

THE STAIN

Black, brown, green, and even pink mold and mildew stains.

THE SCIENCE

Similar to grass stains, these stains are caused by organic material, and need something stronger than a surfactant alone to remove them. The oxygen in a bleaching agent attacks and breaks up these types of stains, and removes any discoloration.

THE SOLUTION

While most people believe that regular chlorine bleach is the answer, it also causes a lot of problems, such as breaking down fabrics and stitching and destroying gelcoats. Instead use Star brite Mildew Stain Remover—a buffered bleach formula—that attacks the stain without harming the surface.



ABRASION TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

SCUFF MARKS

THE STAIN

Black shoe marks, rub rail and bumper scuffs, marks left from dragging hoses and equipment.

THE SCIENCE

Scuff marks—or “transfer stains”—happen when material is transferred onto a surface and is mechanically bonded. Chemicals are rarely strong enough to remove these marks, since many times the material that has transferred is chemical-resistant (think of a rubber shoe). These abrasive marks require the same to remove them: abrasion.

THE SOLUTION

Star brite Ultimate Magic Sponge uses nano-sized scrubbers to grab hold and erase most marks easily. For your hull, use Premium Cleaner Wax to buff the stain away.



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SUNRISE BASS



Photo courtesy of Strike King

Indeed, barring atmospheric calamity, the sunrise bite is often the period of highest opportunity the day will see. Even if tidal waters find the day dawning at a lackluster stage, the likelihood of encountering a flurry of activity are best at sunrise.

Topwaters like the Strike King Mega Dawg create a tempting image for big fish looking to grab a big meal at sunrise.

HERE'S WHY

CONCENTRATED FORAGE

Baitfish huddled tightly near their overnight spots are easy targets for sunrise bass. Once the day gets going and predators fracture these bait schools, the fish have to work harder for their meals.

OPPORTUNISTS AT WORK

Bass do their best work in low light. That includes cloudy days and nighttime, but that transition from dark to light gives them a best-of-both worlds scenario, as sunrise tends to stimulate forage. This new activity coupled with the waning minutes of low-visibility puts the bass in full-throttle feeding mode.

What you'll find is a heightened aggression level that makes the fish more willing to run after an enticing lure. The strike zone increases, so casting accuracy becomes less important.

FRESH FACES

Let's face it, bass see a lot of baits during daylight hours and, even if they have long memories, nights allow them

sufficient time to shake off the annoyances and refocus their feeding interests. In other words, sunrise finds bass rested and ready to go.

BAITFISH BOOGALOO

After the bass spawn, nature provides hungry post-spawners a handy feeding option via the shad spawns that occur along docks, sea walls, grass edges and any solid surface. These reproductive flurries happen mostly at night, with the activity spilling into the first hour of daylight. With thousands of baitfish distracted by their seasonal priority, they become easy targets for lurking bass. Targeting shad spawns at sunrise holds slam dunk potential.



Photos by David A. Brown

Covering water is the name of the game because fish are often out roaming at sunrise. INSET: With fish feeding aggressively in the low light conditions, topwaters can be incredibly effective at sunrise.

To maximize your sunrise potential, keep a few key points in mind.

GO BIG OR GO HOME

Capitalizing on the sunrise aggression means throwing baits that appeal to a big fish with a big appetite. Topwaters, sizable jerkbaits, big profile spinner-baits and hefty squarebills like the Strike King 8.0 fit the bill; but keep a pitch bait handy, just in case a fish misses a bite attempt. Often a quick shot with a more subtle follow-up bait can close the deal.

KEEP IT MOVING

No one's saying you won't catch 'em flipping a Texas-rigged creature bait, dragging a Carolina rig or jigging a drop-shot, but if you've ever watched a bunch of puppies during play time, they focus their attention on the one toy you're throwing, not those piled in the corner. Same with bass; when you know they're likely to chase, make 'em chase — you'll quickly dial in to the biggest, most-aggressive fish that know they need to grab breakfast quickly before the rising sun closes the door.

MAKE IT LAST

Fish don't wear watches, so no matter what time you're reading on yours, they will respond to the actual light conditions. You can't stop the sun's ascension, but you delay its impact by "chasing shade." That means avoiding west banks where a rising sun first reaches. Rather, fish the east sides where you can work the shadow angles of tree lines, docks, etc., to stay in shaded areas the longest.

DON'T WASTE ANY TIME:

Given your short window of

daybreak activity, you'll want to carefully plan your starting lineup and have several back-up baits rigged and ready. Moreover, keep a spare rod rigged with what you believe will be your top producer in case

any of fishing's mishaps claims your first one.

The sunrise bait can be the most amazing period of fishing you'll ever experience, so make the most of it. ■

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Paul Elias



BUZZING, CRANKING, PITCHING TO APRIL BASS AT BAY SPRINGS

Before the sun gets up and the fog leaves the water, Paul Elias will be fishing a buzzbait and a Baby 1-Minus on the spawning flats at Bay Springs Lake, since I can't see the beds or the bass at that time of day.

The bass will be very shallow at 9-mile long Bay Springs Lake in April — and probably be spawning or preparing to spawn. This lake, south of Iuka on the Tennessee/Tombigbee Waterway, is fairly clear. You should be able to see the bass on their beds.

WHERE, HOW?

I'll fish fast and cover a lot of water in as many main-lake pockets and creek pockets as possible. I'll start off fishing main-lake pockets near the dam, because they hold bigger bass. The size of the pocket determines the pattern I fish. In a small pocket, I'll start off fishing the point at the entrance to the pocket and fish all the way around it. In a large pocket off the main river, I'll begin fishing about halfway back into the pocket on its north side and fish all the way around its back. If I don't catch any bass in the backs of or on the north sides of large pockets, I'll leave them and go downriver to the next pocket. Although you also may catch some nice-sized largemouths in these

large pockets, I've found more spawning April bass in the creek pockets.

FISHING BUZZBAITS

I'll start off fishing with 3/8-ounce buzzbaits — a black one on one rod and a white one on the other. I'll have 30-pound braid on both medium-heavy 7-foot-10 rods with 8:1 gear-ratio reels. I always fish the black buzzbait first in April and fish it about 75 percent of the time in fairly clear or slightly stained water. But after the sun comes up and the day's bright and sunny, I'll switch to fishing the white buzzbait. In April, the bass may bite a buzzbait all day.

FISH A BABY 1-MINUS

I'll also have a Baby 1-Minus in a shad pattern tied to 20-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon on a 7:1 reel and a 6-foot-6 rod on my casting deck. You'll see holes in the submerged grass that rocks, submerged stumps or something else on the bottom has kept the grass from growing.

I'll be keying in on those targets; cast past those openings in the grass and reel the Baby 1-Minus over the tops of those holes, since the grass won't have topped out yet.

CRAW WORM, LIZARD, TUBE

Unless Bay Springs has received a lot of rain, once the sun comes up, you should be able to see the beds. Smallmouth and spotted bass will bed somewhat deeper, often spawning in 4 to 5 feet of water. Generally, you can watch them react to a lure. I fish these beds by making long pitches, because I don't want the bass to spot me before I can see them.

I'll leave my trolling motor on high, go down a bank and mark the beds on my Garmin GPS depth finder. Then, I'll move down the other side of the pocket fairly quickly and mark as many beds as possible in that pocket. Next, I'll go along the side of the pocket where I've marked beds and fish slowly by pitching.

My fourth rod will be medium-heavy

Spotted bass will bed a little deeper than largemouths, but you can still get hold of a feisty, spawning female.

with an 8:1 reel and a Mann's black/blue Craw Worm with a 5/16-ounce weight on 23-pound fluorocarbon. I'll be pitching that Craw Worm to the holes in the grass, underwater stumps and rocks and any kind of cover I spot that a bass will use for spawning.

A white lizard and a white flipping tube will be tied on the fifth and sixth rods. I like these two white baits that enable me to see the lure in the bed and watch how the bass react. A bass often will suck a bait into its mouth and blow it out quickly. If that's what's happening, I know I must set the hook more quickly than usual. If I can't get the bass to take the lure when I'm pitching, then after two or three pitches, I'll leave that bed and go fish another one, looking for a bass that will take my bait.

WHAT TO EXPECT

On an April day at Bay Springs, I expect to catch and release 20 or more bass, and most of them — two-thirds of my catch — will be male bass either creating or guarding the beds. I'll also expect to catch five to seven female bass, which should be the big spawners. The majority of my April catch will be spotted bass. ■



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.



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BE MY VALENTINE

By Mike Giles

Brenda Valentine, one of the nation's leading female hunters, loves the wild turkey and shares her passion and tactics.

Brenda Valentine has hunted and taken almost every big-game species in North America, along with many African species, and she has appeared on many television shows and conducted seminars as a spokesperson for Bass Pro Shops, Mossy Oak and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

She knows a thing or two about turkey hunting, even though there weren't enough turkeys to have a season when she first started hunting. When that changed, she wanted to get in on that action, too. >

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“I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO HUNT TURKEYS

but figured that I could learn, so I went out and bought a box call,” Valentine said. “It had a little piece of paper that said, ‘Yelp three times and wait 20 minutes,’ so that’s just what I did. I sat down and yelped and waited 20 minutes, and it got to be like taking medicine. It didn’t work too well for me at first.”

Valentine knew the ways of the woods and where to find turkeys, so she devised a plan.

“I knew I was deadly with a bow, so I found some dustbowls where the turkeys were dusting on an old logging road, and I climbed up high in a tree and waited for them,” she said. “I hunted with a whitetail hunter’s mentality, and when they came walking underneath my stand, I just shot straight down, and it went through the turkey and pinned it to the ground. It might have been unconventional, but it worked for me.”

Later on, Valentine got a shotgun and became proficient with it, and she quickly mastered the art of calling turkeys.

“When I first started turkey hunting, nobody around knew how to turkey hunt or what to do,” she said. “There probably weren’t two turkey hunters in the entire county.

“I didn’t know the basics at first, but I just grew into it. As the turkey population increased, so did my experience.

“I learned on my own through trial and error. We didn’t have any teaching books on the subject and certainly no television shows or internet. We had to get it on our own.”

KEY POINTS

Valentine learned very quickly that there was more to hunting turkeys than just being a good caller.

“We thought only really good callers could call a turkey, but we found out that you don’t have to be an expert caller to call a turkey in,” Valentine said. “Every

time I went out, I learned something new. You’re going to need woodsmanship skills, knowledge and determination, if you want to be a successful turkey hunter.”

Scouting an area is first on her list.

“For 20 years, I was filming turkey shows and going into areas cold; we had to get there early, be quiet and hope something opened its mouth,” Valentine said.

“Knowing the terrain, landmarks and lay of the land is first and foremost. If I’m hunting an area I’m familiar with, then I want to know where they roost. I’ll owl hoot a time or two if I don’t hear one gobble early, but if they’re there, you’ll usually hear one in a few minutes at dawn. If not, there’s probably not one there, so I’ll move on to another spot.”

If she hears a gobbler, she’ll set up quickly and begin calling.

continued on page 46

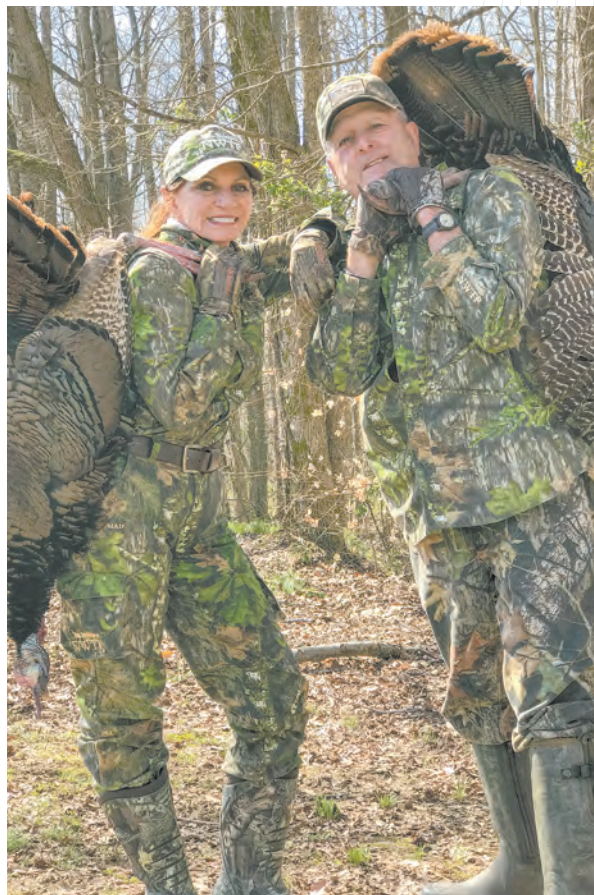
BRENDA VALENTINE

FACT SHEET:

- Bass Pro Shops television host and pro staff team member for 23 years;
- National spokesperson for the National Wild Turkey Federation for 11 years;
- National pro-staff member for Mossy Oak for 16 years;
- First woman inducted into the Legends of the Outdoors Hall of Fame;
- Inducted into the Tennessee Turkey Hunter’s Hall of Fame;
- Ran and produced Whitetail Adventure television show and hosted many others for more than 25 years.
- Won Golden Moose Award.

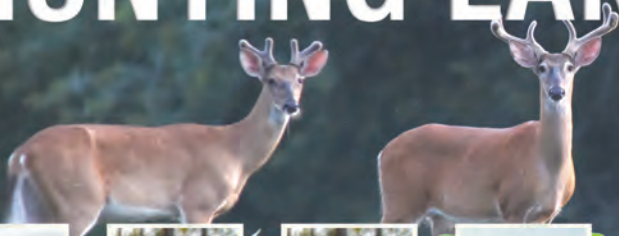
TURKEY HUNTING STATISTICS:

- Longest beard: Several in excess of 12 inches;
- Heaviest gobbler: 32 pounds, Tennessee;
- Grand slams: Too many to count, including two in one year;
- Favorite hunting area: Her farm in Tennessee;
- Favorite bird to hunt: Merriams because they are breathtakingly beautiful;
- Toughest to harvest: Osceola, because they are in a limited location and hard to access. They’re also challenging to hunt like the eastern.
- Favorite shotgun: Browning or Winchester 12-gauge;
- Favorite shells: Winchester;
- Recommended shotgun for ladies or youngsters: 20 gauge.



Brenda Valentine and her husband, Barney, show off two gobblers.

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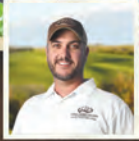
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BE MY VALENTINE

Known as “The First Lady of Hunting” Brenda Valentine has been a national spokesperson for the NWTF, Bass Pro Shops and Mossy Oak for many years. She’s also an accomplished hunter, speaker and television host.



FAVORITE CALLS

“I like to carry two box calls: a short, single-sided box and a two-sided box as a backup,” Valentine said. “I always carry some mouth calls, but they’re not my favorite calls.

“I use a wing bone a lot, and it comes fairly easy to me, although it is hard for some people,” she said. “It sounds different than most other calls, and most of the time I’ll get a response. When I go different places, I’ll also carry a few coffee stirs with me and teach kids how to use them too.”

BASIC NECESSITIES

“Permethrin spray is a must to keep ticks and the diseases they can carry away from me,” Valentine said. “I’ll spray a perimeter around where I’m set up and going to hunt to keep them at bay and spray all my clothes as well.”

Valentine carries a black, plastic garbage bag to carry any turkey she kills, she makes sure she has

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extra shells, and small, compact binoculars help her tell turkeys apart and determine which one has the long beard she wants to harvest.

Valentine’s favorite gun is a 12-gauge shotgun with an Indian Creek choke. While Valentine likes a 12-gauge, she said that most women are more comfortable shooting a 20-gauge, and that’s all the gun they’ll need.

“They need to know how to handle a gun,” she said. “Let them shoot light loads — not turkey loads — to begin with, and when they’re comfortable shooting the gun, you can move them up with the turkey loads. I like No. 5 and No. 6 shot sizes.”

FIND A MENTOR

Valentine recommends women and other aspiring hunters find a mentor if they can

“Nothing beats a patient mentor,” Valentine said. “Getting a dad or grandad to take kids or ladies is really what they need.”

But if you can't find one and still want to hunt, then by all means, go and start learning on your own.

“Sometimes, I can go in the afternoon and see a flock of turkeys, and it's been a success to me,” Valentine said. “I'll get an old decoy and sit by a tree and set that decoy out and just start calling.

“I believe you've gotta be motivated and want to go, and if you really want it, you'll figure out a way to do it. The state has a lot of hunting lands and Wildlife Management Areas available to hunt, and there are hunting groups you can join.”

Valentine also pointed to the many instructional calling and



Brenda Valentine calls to the turkeys while set up in a “safe location.”

hunting videos that are available. She said they have helped equalize hunting opportunities between men and women.

“Not a lot separates us in the woods between men and women,” Valentine said. “Women have just as much a chance at calling up a gobbler as a man.”

CONCEALMENT COUNTS

“Ground blinds have changed the complexion of new hunters,” Valentine said. “Blinds can help them be concealed, because they don't know how to be quiet and still. The blinds can help anybody stay concealed and learn turkey habits just by watching them from the blind.”


“It's just easier to put them in a ground blind to start out. The more restrictions you put on a young hunter, the more they're not going to like it, and they may quit before they really get started.”

Valentine also takes a lot of handicapped people hunting and said they do much better in ground blinds. It gives them an opportunity to experience what other hunters see and do while helping make up for their limitations.

“After I get my limit, I'll spend the rest of the season taking photos of wildlife from a ground blind,” Valentine said. “It gives me an opportunity to stay with the wildlife and observe their behavior and shoot more with my camera.”

continues

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AFTERNOON HUNTING

Valentine prefers hunting in the morning when gobblers are coming off the roost, but she has had plenty of successful hunts during the afternoon.

Her father, David Johnson, was her biggest mentor and influence on her outdoors life, and what he taught her during her formative years shaped her and led to a career that few women, or men could have imagined.

“My dad died during turkey season one year, and I had several stressful days,” Valentine said. “On the eve of the burial,



Brenda Valentine loves hunting in the afternoon to pick off cruising toms.

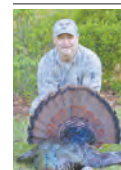
you just feel worn out. Too many people, flowers and other details to deal with will leave you washed out.”

After the funeral, Valentine’s husband, Barney, asked a question that set the stage for her recovery.

“What are you going to do now?” he asked.

“I’m going to the woods,” she said. “I just walked over the woods reflecting and thinking about my life with dad. After a while, a turkey gobbled way off. Then, it kept getting closer. I called, and he gobbled, and it went back and forth for a while.

“I kept calling and it wasn’t long before he marched right up to me, and I shot him,” she said. “It was like a revelation — a gift. It was kind of like my dad was saying to me, ‘Everything is going to be all right.’ That turkey was bound and determined to come up to me, and it really made my day.” ■



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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Jerry Dilsaver



TURKEY CORDON BLEU (ALMOST)

Flatten the turkey breast with a mallet to render it thin enough to roll it into a ball.

Jerry Dilsaver

PUT THAT WILD GOBBLER'S BREAST TO WORK IN A BIG, DELICIOUS WAY

April is a special time in the Carolinas. Winter is over, and the few cool mornings are pushed away pretty quickly by warming sunshine.

The warm days bring out a lot of sportsmen. Fishing opportunities abound from the tallest mountains to the deep drops of the Continental Shelf. A few hunters may be enjoying chasing varmints, but April is turkey time.

Turkey restoration is a huge success story in both Carolinas. Wild turkeys live in every county in both states. Hunters who look forward to matching wits with a wise, old gobbler now have opportunities everywhere. The right yelps and clucks will

invite Tom Turkey home to be the guest of honor at dinner.

Turkeys are one game bird most family members will try. Maybe it's because their first exposures were to beautifully browned turkeys at Thanksgiving, but many folks unwilling to try other game will sample turkey. Because of this, we need to be at the top of our game when preparing a wild turkey for the table.

Many hunters only breast out their turkeys, and they're missing some good eating. I like to keep the legs and wings for a variety of things, but this is a recipe for those folks who only keep the breasts. It sounds enough like something they've enjoyed with chicken to get most folks to

try it. Hopefully, they like the differences a little better than the original.

If you still have a turkey breast in your freezer from last year, you need to get it out and fix this recipe soon. It's time to be adding fresh meat for the coming year. If you enjoy wild turkey as much as we do, the cupboard is bare, and you'll need to slip into the woods and use your best sweet purrs and come-hither yelps to convince one to walk within range of a magnum load of shotgun pellets. A fresh young gobbler will almost always be better table fare, but this recipe can soften up an old bird and have him tasting primo. ■

TURKEY CORDON BLEU (ALMOST)

In addition to being tasty, this recipe is also pretty simple. There are numerous steps, and it takes a little time because of marinating the breast, but it's definitely not difficult. It's simple and it's good — that's about all you can ask for. The most-difficult thing is not overcooking it. That's a cardinal sin and will dry it out and make it tough. The marinade tenderizes it some and helps keep it moist, but it's not infallible.

The turkey I used for this recipe had two things going against him. He was an old bird, with longer spurs that were beginning to hook. He was also heavy at 23½ pounds, and sometimes this combination means the bird can be tough and stringy.

The other thing was, he came charging in to a jake decoy and jumped to the side as I dropped the decoy and shot. It wasn't torn up badly, but this side of his breast caught the edge of the pattern at a strange angle when he jumped. I trimmed some and pulled feathers from several holes and even pulled one No. 6 pellet from him.

My hope was the pellet holes and judicious use of the rough side of the mallet would allow the marinade to penetrate into the inner muscle and keep it moist and help with tenderness.

The "almost" in the recipe name gives away that this is not simply cordon bleu made with turkey. It uses the marinade, prosciutto instead of ham, different cheeses and spinach leaves. It's

almost cordon bleu, but just a little different to suit personal tastes.

This breast was so large, I cut it into two pieces and made two rolls. The one for my wife was stuffed with jarlsberg cheese, and mine was stuffed with pepper jack. Feel free to experiment. I would have added a few cracked nuts if I had them.

One reminder is in order to avoid over cooking. Some cheese will run and it will crust, but you must get the turkey cooked. However, if the turkey is overcooked, it will be dry and tough, and this won't be good. Take your time, enjoy an adult beverage around the grill as the sun begins to set and enjoy this. ■

INGREDIENTS:

1 side of a turkey breast

1 package thin-sliced prosciutto

3 slices jarlsberg cheese (for one piece)

3 slices pepper jack cheese (for one piece)

Spinach leaves

Zesty Italian salad dressing

Salt and pepper to taste

Non stick cooking spray

Toothpicks



Jerry Dilsaver

PREPARATION:

Use the flat side of a meat mallet to flatten one side of a turkey breast to approximately ¼- to ⅜-inch thick. Put the turkey breast in a ZipLock bag and add enough zesty Italian salad dressing to cover it. Press all the air out and seal the bag. Put the bag in the refrigerator and marinate for at least 2 hours. Add a couple of shots of rum and marinate longer for an older turkey.

Remove the breast from the bag and flatten again, this time by pushing down rather than swinging the mallet. Cut the breast into two manageable sections. Sprinkle the breast pieces with salt and pepper to personal taste.

Cover the breast pieces double or triple layers with prosciutto. Cover the prosciutto with cheese, leaving a few small gaps between slices. Use jarlsberg on one piece and pepper jack on the other. Cover

the cheese with spinach leaves.

Roll the breasts up and peg closed with toothpicks. Put some plain bread crumbs in a container and roll the breasts in the bread crumbs until they are well covered. Spray a cast-iron frying pan (or pans) with non-stick cooking spray. Place turkey breast(s) in frying pan.

Preheat grill to medium. Cook approximately 35 to 45 minutes. This will vary with each grill and turkey. Once the middle of the rolled turkey breast reaches 165 degrees, cut off the heat and let it set for about 10 minutes. Serve while warm.

A lettuce wedge or green salad is a nice start to this meal. Mashed potatoes or a baked potato accompanies it well on the plate and hot bread pudding is the ultimate dessert. ■

Turkey cordon bleu (almost) should be cooked for 35 to 45 minutes on a medium grill, then sit for 10 minutes. **BELOW:** flattened twice, the turkey is ready to be layered with prosciutto and cheeses.



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 at captainjerry@captainjerry.com.

A man wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt, a white baseball cap, and sunglasses around his neck is smiling and holding a large speckled trout vertically. The fish is held by its mouth, which is open, showing a lure. The background shows a body of water and trees under a clear sky.

By John Phillips

APRIL'S SALTWATER KICKOFF

TROUT ARE NO. 1 TARGET FOR FISHERMEN ALONG MISSISSIPPI'S GULF COAST THIS MONTH, BUT REDS AND FLOUNDER ARE ALSO OPTIONS.

April offers speckled trout, redfish and flounder options for Mississippi fishermen.

"When the wind doesn't blow, we've gotta go," said Tom Marzoni of Gotta Geaux Charters in Bay St. Louis.

Marzoni is a proponent of knowing where speckled trout go every day, which is tricky during March and early April — a transition period for the fish. They're leaving their deep-water haunts and the brackish river water feeding the marshes and heading for the Gulf of Mexico.

>

Brian Cope

APRIL'S SALTWATER KICKOFF

Productive artificial baits for spring trout include soft-plastic baits like this imitation shrimp (top) and suspending hardbaits like MirrOlures (bottom).

To find these tricky trout, keep an eye on temperature and water salinity. Trout, much like freshwater bass, won't move to the areas where they'll spawn until conditions are perfect.

Marzoni, who has been fishing the Mississippi Gulf Coast for 40 years and has guided since 2008, explains the annual migration.

"All winter long, the speckled trout hold in low-salinity waters," he said. "As the spawn approaches, they move out of the marshes and rivers to salty water, following the shrimp."

Speckled trout make their first stop on the outer edges of the marshes and passes. Marzoni names Nine Mile Pass, Three Mile Pass, Elephant Pass, Creole Gap, Brown Pass and all the major passes in the Biloxi Marsh as favorites to fish in April.

Marzoni said trout will be holding on islands and any shoreline with a hard bottom, underwater bars, points and oyster-shell bottoms, which warm up quicker than mud bottoms and thereby appeal to the spawn-ready trout.

A MirrOdine and a Zara Spook are Marzoni's baits of choice when he's searching for schooling trout.

"I like a bone-colored Zara Spook and a black-backed, green-sided MirrOdine to locate a school of trout early in the morning," Marzoni said.

Once he's found a school, he switches over to soft-plastics and fishes very shallow under a popping cork.

Marzoni fishes every windless day in March to try to keep up with the trout. Then, when April rolls around, he'll know exactly where to fish.

"In early March, the trout will be holding on what I call the intermediary marsh — the little grass islands and banks just outside the thick marsh," Marzoni said. "They're more likely to hang up there for a few weeks after a real cold winter to let the water temperature in the passes and on the oyster reefs heat up."

If specks hang up for a couple of weeks due to cold water, he'll stay in the marsh with them for about two weeks. The trout migration to the Gulf of Mexico usually starts in March and finishes the second or third week of April, depending on the weather.

"I've caught some of the biggest trout of my life during April," Marzoni said. "Those big sow trout have been holding and feeding in the rivers and marshes all winter long, fattening up for the spawn, which will occur as soon as the water temperature reaches 60 degrees.

"Twenty years ago, I caught a 7-pound trout in 3 feet of water in April on an island in the intermediary area of the marsh."

Combine 60-degree water and salinity of 12 to 15 parts per thousand, and you're looking at great trout conditions that will produce a limit with three to four trout that will weigh 3 to 4 pounds. The rest of the trout will weigh from 1 to 2 pounds.

The closer you get to the spawn, the more likely you'll be to catch a limit of 2- to 3-pound trout. The best time to fish for trout is five days before and after a full moon.

Once Marzoni locates a school of trout, he fishes with a jig and grub.

While plenty of bigger trout will be available during the spring migration along the Gulf Coast, most will weigh in at between 1 and 2 pounds.



“I like the Matrix grubs with a paddltail in opening night and avocado,” he said. “After a dark night, I’ll use the avocado with a red-flake jig. If I’m fishing on a clear day with no clouds, I’ll fish an opening night grub.”

Marzoni’s line of choice is 30-pound PowerPro weighted line, with 30-pound-test Berkley Big Game monofilament leader. If he’s using a popping cork, he prefers a 2-foot leader. When he’s throwing surface lures, he attaches 4 feet of monofilament line to his braided main line with an Albright knot so he can reel the knots through the guides of his rod.

REDFISH

Along with trout, Marzoni and his customers also will catch plenty of redfish.

“I have a few customers who just want to catch redfish, so I take them into the ponds and marshes, where there’ll be thousands of slot reds,” Marzoni said. “We catch our redfish on the same lures on which we catch our trout.”

FLOUNDER

“Fish the mouth of the Rigolets, the main passes feeding Lake Pontchartrain,” Marzoni said.

He puts in at Bayou Caddy and fishes both Mississippi and Louisiana waters. From there, Rigolets Pass is only about a 20-minute drive. This distance makes for an easy fishing day.

And if you catch your limit of specks and reds in the morning, you still have time to run to the Rigolets and take flounder.

“We’ve caught some huge, 5- to 8-pound flounder at the Rigolets,” Marzoni said. “When I’m fishing for flounder, I swim a Gulp shrimp on a jighead just off the bottom.”

When he’s fishing for flounder, he’s still using 30-pound PowerPro line with a 30-pound monofilament leader. ■

You can call Marzoni at 601-270-2187 or follow him at www.facebook.com/gottageauxcharters.



Dan Kibler

While speckled trout are the primary targets of Mississippi saltwater fishermen in April, plenty of flounder are available in the marshes and passes.



Brian Coy

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THE MANY BENEFITS OF USING **ARTIFICIAL SHRIMP**

By David A. Brown

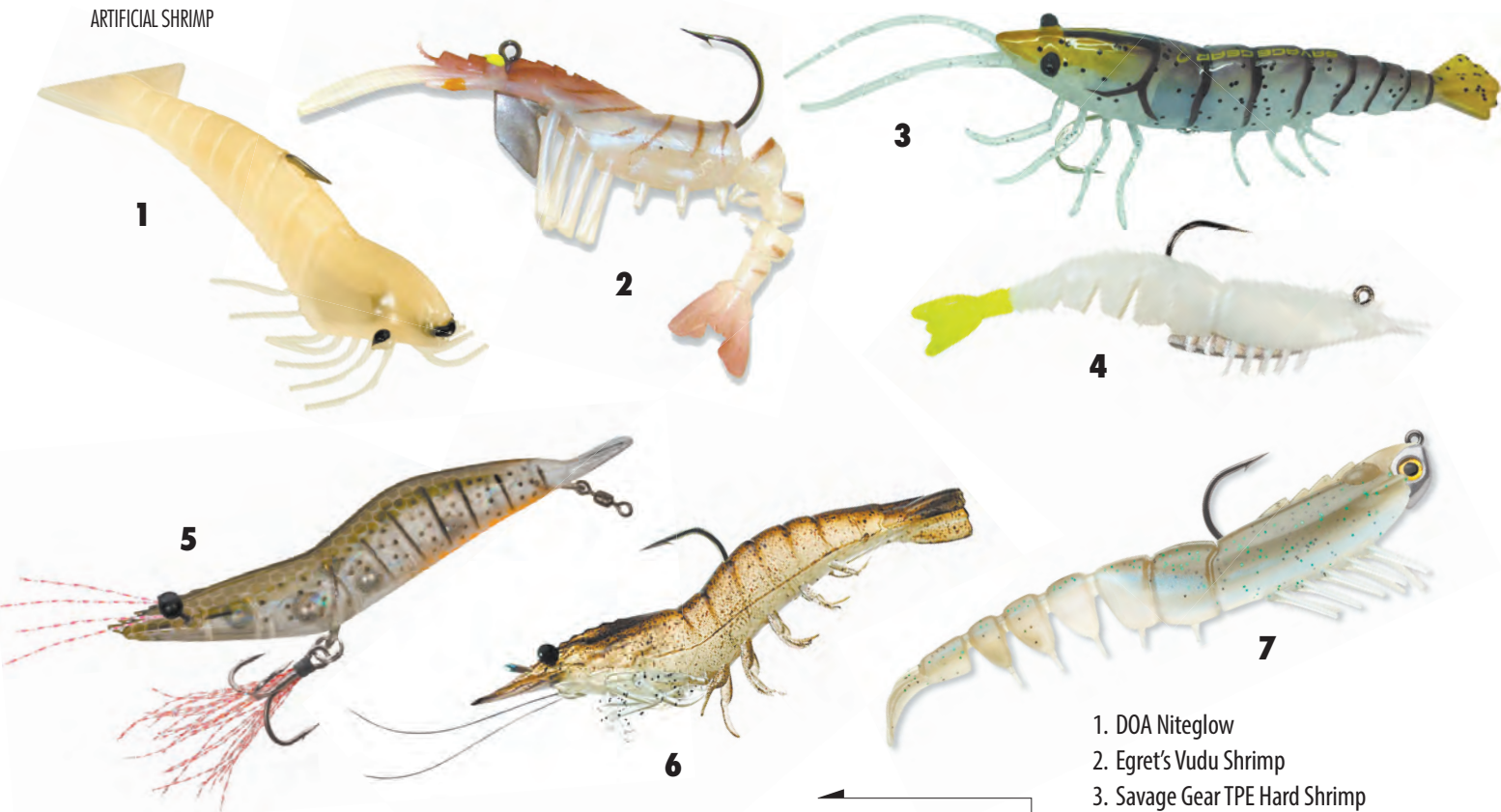
The artificial version of this popular coastal crustacean offers a wider array of performance than the real deal.

In 1968, Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell told us: “Ain’t nothing like the real thing, baby.”

Well, that’s kind of like the adage: “All that glitters is not gold.” I get the point, but factually speaking, gold glitters; so the syntax is incorrect. A more accurate statement would be: “All that glitters is not, necessarily, gold” or “Not all that glitters is gold.”

And to quickly connect this to fishing, Gaye and Terrell probably weren’t including shrimp in their message. Reason being, the artificial version of this popular coastal crustacean offers a wider array of performance than the real deal.

ARTIFICIAL SHRIMP



1. DOA Niteglow
2. Egret's Vudu Shrimp
3. Savage Gear TPE Hard Shrimp
4. Z-Man Shrimp
5. Unfair Lure Rattlin' Shrimp
6. Livetarget's Rigged Shrimp
7. Storm 360GT Shrimp

Now, hold the hate mail; no one's dissing live shrimp. It catches fish — no question. But there is a daily cost and time investment for obtaining live shrimp; you have to have a livewell or, at least, a flow-through bucket; and, at some point, your bait supply will end.

Some find these considerations well worth the desired outcome and, to those, we say: "Live like you want to live."

However, some find that foregoing baits with heartbeats and working with the impostors has its benefits as well. No muss and fuss of handling natural bait, one-time investment, rarely run out of bait — the argument for artificials stands on solid legs.

Models vary from the original DOA Shrimp, to Unfair Lures Rattlin' Shrimp, Egret's Vudu Shrimp, Livetarget's Rigged Shrimp, ZMan EZ ShrimpZ, Savage Gear TPE Hard Shrimp and Storm 360GT Shrimp Jig. Some are made with their own jigheads or weighted hooks, or you can opt to fit your preferred bait on the rigging of your choice.

Whatever your preference, you'll find artificial shrimp comprise a highly ver-

satile lure family well deserving of prime space in your tackle tray. Here's a handful of ideas for their use.

COVERING WATER

Let's be honest, the very thing that makes live shrimp so appealing to just about everything with a mouth is exactly what limits its performance. Despite its shell, a shrimp is a relatively soft forage species that is easily caught and easily gobbled. That means short shelf lives, especially when casting and retrieving.

Not so with synthetic shrimp. Sling 'em as long and hard as you wish, and barring any toothy encounters, the bait will last all day.

Adjust jig or weighted hook sizes for water depth and wind conditions.

SIGHT FISHING

This one's as simple as it gets. If you spot redfish finning, tailing or obviously foraging (When are they not?), cast your shrimp ahead of their course and snap it into the water column like fleeing prey when the fish approach. If they pass, they're vegans.

POPPING CORKS

Predation attracts predation; that's the key principle behind suspending a synthetic shrimp below a popping cork. Of course, depth control is a valuable tool when fishing over oyster reefs, grass or any other ensnaring risk; but noise is key.

Specifically, the gurgling, blooping disturbance a popping or clacking cork rig produces grabs the attention of nearby fish and calls in others from a distance. When fish come to inspect what sounds like another fish feeding, the image of a shrimp twitching vulnerably below is an easy sell.

Paul van Reenen, president of Unfair Lures, suggests popping the cork a few times for his backwards-swimming shrimp.

"Then keep slowly retrieving the cork. Do not stop the cork and your hook-up rate will drastically improve," he adds.

When free-line fishing, van Reenen suggests keeping the rod tip high when casting and retrieving.

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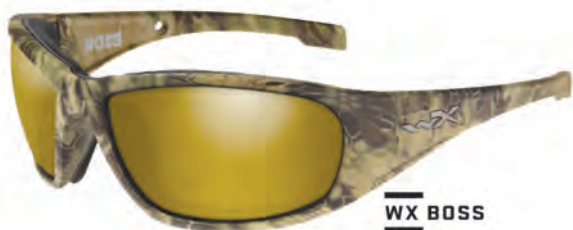


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ARTIFICIAL SHRIMP

“You will see the shrimp skip just like a live shrimp,” he said. “Try suspending it ever so often. Fish your shrimp like an escaping shrimp. Create the panic to attract your fish.”

ROCKING THE RIGS

Use heavier jigs or weighted hooks to sink your shrimp along the legs and any adjacent structure like crew boat piers. Cork rigs may work better once you dial in the target depth. With either presentation, a lone shrimp won't last long once the speckled trout spot it.

BASS BLAST

Largemouths in tidal fisheries have come to appreciate the taste of traditionally saltwater forage. Blue crabs delight these gluttons, but shrimp are much easier to catch and they don't fight back.

Casting synthetic shrimp toward laydown trees, wellheads and pumping stations or Roseau cane points is a good bet. Falling tides will find bass rubbing elbows with redfish and flounder at the mouths of marsh run-outs, so toss your shrimp (free lined, or corked) into the outfall and work it past those corner ambush spots.

For a full day of diverse fishing, keep an assortment of artificial shrimp lures on standby. Change up your body styles and colors and if the bite's slow, enhance your baits with chartreuse tail dyes. ■



ABOVE: Not many lure styles are as universally appealing as a shrimp. RIGHT: Suspending an artificial shrimp beneath a popping cork is one of the most effective presentations for big redfish.



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WX IGNITE

Like his fishing, Edwin Evers is serious about his gear. With sight and safety being top priorities, Edwin partners with Wiley X to assure his eyewear meets the ultimate standards in both. ANSI safety-rated and EN 166-certified, Wiley X polarized lenses and high-wrap frames block out blinding glare and harmful UV rays while improving optical clarity and contrast for a crystal clear read on the water.

SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

Don't overlook bright colors in over-cast, clear water conditions. This 27½-inch fish fell for a Double Bubble DD.



JUST BELOW THE SURFACE

THREE TWITCH BAITS THAT LURE UNCOMMITTED TROUT

In case you are following along, and for those new to the column, I mentioned in my opening article that I'll be discussing lures and techniques in an ascending manner.

Remaining true to form, we explored the middle part of the water column with various jerkbaits and as we progress to the surface, I would be remiss if I didn't discuss the zone just below the top.

Year after year at about this time,

anglers start to unveil a seemingly neglected box of topwater plugs. Split ring pliers and fresh hooks often accompany a cold beverage of choice to the serenade of a Spotify playlist on workbenches or boats across the Gulf Coast.

Along those same lines, experience on the water during this time of year, proves to us that fish may not be as eager to reward our spirited intent. To help bridge that gap, insert this month's article.

The 6-8 inches of water just below the

surface can be extremely productive if fished effectively and with specific purpose. Short strikes and swirls often confirm lack of fish commitment to surface baits, but providing the right lure targeting those mere inches remain invaluable.

Three lures I want to discuss to help you fish that part of the water column efficiently is the Borboleta Lelé, the Texas Custom Lures MirrOlure Double D and the tried and true MirrOlure 7M. Let's first talk about the Borboleta Lelé.

BORBOLETA LELÉ

Produced by a company in the Southeast region of Brazil, Borboleta's self-proclaimed most famous lure is the Lelé. Smaller in stature (3 inches) compared to the other two lures, this bait not only produces plenty of bites but big ones as well.

Outfitted with No. 4 treble hooks and weighing $\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce, its unique shape provides not only great profile but excellent action. Designed to be twitched down on a steady 2-count cadence, the bait darts downward approximately 8 to 10 inches and floats back to the top.

It can be fished on an accelerated walk the dog cadence, but most bites come on the pause as the bait retreats back to the surface. Speaking of floating back to the surface, the Lelé is slower than a 7M but faster than the Double D. In other words, if you wanted a smaller profile offering with an exaggerated ascent profile, this bait gives you that capability.

MIRROLURE 7M

The angling world is fortunate that the 7M exists. Decades ago, experienced anglers wouldn't be caught without the "topwater" capability of this ever so consistent bait, but somewhere along the way we lost our appreciation for this lure's fishability.

On a recent trip with 3-time IGFA World Record Holder for Speckled Trout on fly in various line classes, including the most recent, a 9-pound 2-ounce fish on 2-pound tippet, I asked Doc Jay Wright, "What is your favorite artificial lure to throw when looking for big fish?" Without hesitation, he says "a 7M" then reaches under the gunwale of his Hells Bay flats boat and pulls out a Spinning rod outfitted with a Mullet Color pattern 7M.

For those that haven't fished this bait or know its capability, it's very similar to the Borboleta Lelé, but its ascent rate is very fast.

In other words, from the time you stop your twitch cadence, the bait retreats to the surface in less than a half second. Having said that, this bait provides an exceptional offering and perfect solution to connecting with those fish that remain uncommitted to eating a surface plug.



Borboleta Lelé



Texas Custom Lures MirrOlure Double D



MirrOlure 7M

Unlike the other two baits, it has three sets of treble hooks, which can be cumbersome, but can be adjusted. As stated, the 7M is the subsurface extension of a topwater since it ascends so quickly, and a great "stand by" option on less committed topwater fish.

MIRROLURE DOUBLE D

Newer in terms of packaging and sales, this lure is the most recent to hit the market. Actually, many anglers outside of Texas have yet to see the Double D, let alone fish it exclusively.

Fortunately, Speckled Truth spans the angling reaches of Virginia to Texas and when I saw and understood this lure's capability, it was a no brainer before it started producing some large fish.

At first glance, people confuse the MirrOlure Double D with a MirrOlure MirrOdine XL (27MR) since its profile is the exact same. Fortunately, the internal mechanism is different and instead of sinking like the 27MR, the Double D floats back to the top after an angler's twitch cadence.

Of the three lures discussed, this lure has the slowest ascent rate as well as dive depth (9 to 12 inches). The majority of the bites come on the exaggerated pause, which can be upwards of 3 sec-

onds before surfacing.

In other words, this bait is a great cold water offering or when a more pronounced below the surface profile is to be achieved.

Having said that, do not be fooled by its slow fishability. Big fish in water temps as cold as 53 degrees have completely engulfed these baits at or near the surface after an exaggerated pause, and they do so with authority. Bottom line, add this lure to compliment your topwater arsenal when fish won't commit — it's the easiest decision you'll ever have to make.

So, in a nutshell, below the surface twitch baits provide the perfect hybrid capability for those finicky spring topwater trout. If you haven't explored these types of baits or their capabilities, I encourage you to do so and don't forget about those critical inches just below the top — it can pay huge dividends.

Until next month — Tight lines, God bless, take what you need and release the rest! ■



Chris Bush is an Air Force officer and a licensed charter captain, husband and father. He spends his time targeting big speckled trout and sharing knowledge on his website, Speckled Truth.



Rising spring waters on the Mississippi River make for some great catfish action if you know where to look.

BAR-HOPPING FOR CATFISH

When the big river rises this spring, dragging across a good, submerged sandbar could land you some trophy cats.

BY PHILLIP GENTRY

Photo courtesy Rusty Jackson

Rusty Jackson of Olive Branch has a difficult time concentrating when he's navigating the Mississippi River during times of low water. It's not that Jackson, owner of BigRiverCatfishing.com, is afraid of the hazards of low water, it's that he's afraid he might miss

something on one of the numerous sandbars that line the river. He is busy making mental notes so that when the water rises in the spring, he'll know where to drag for catfish. "Some people might call this style of catfishing trolling, but it's much more intense than that," said

Jackson, a B'n'M pro staffer. "Those bars have all kinds of small timber that grow up when the river is down, and that timber collects a lot of floating debris when the water rises. It's perfect catfish habitat, but to fish it, you have to drag baits through it rather than troll it."

Another benefit of dragging baits across the tops of structure-studded, submerged sandbars is that the relatively shallow water provides a current break. The speed of the water is not fast enough to bump for catfish, but the swirling currents typical of a good submerged sandbar also make it difficult to anchor in.

“I always go with the current,” Jackson said. “I usually run four rods: two on each corner of the stern, pointing back, and two on each gunwale at a 45-degree angle.”

Jackson’s dragging speed is just fast enough to go with the flow, somewhere between .3 and .5 mph as measured on his electronics. He said the average current speed on a good sandbar is about .5 mph.

Dragging heavy tackle through submerged trees, rocks and debris piles is not for the faint of heart. Jackson uses specialized tackle, at the heart of which is a specially designed trolling weight he manufactures called a Structure Snake.

Jackson named the weight because of the flexible way it bends and crawls around heavy cover. The Structure Snake is a long slinky weight, coated in high-density polypropylene thermal plastic that allows it to drag across and through obstacles without hanging up.

He drags the weight on 80-pound braid attached to a Hawaiian swivel that slips to another 3-way swivel. The Structure Snake is attached to one end of the 3-way, while a 36-inch leader is attached to the other. The leader, which terminates in an 8/0 Daiichi hook, is comprised of two lengths connected by a 40-pound barrel swivel. The first 4 inches is a break link of 40-pound mono; in case the hook becomes wedged, the break link protects against loss of the entire

rig. The remaining leader is 100-pound mono that is crimped to the swivel and snelled to the hook. About midway down the leader is an oval float that allows the baited hook to ride just above the structure to prevent snagging.

“It might sound complicated, but it’s a good system, and it absolutely allows you to fish in places others won’t go,” Jackson said.

Jackson’s rod choice is an 8-foot B’n’M Silver Cat Magnum paired with a heavy duty, line-counter baitcasting reel. The line counter allows Jackson to space the baits closer on the stern and further on the gunwales so that they lines don’t cross and tangle if he makes a tight turn.

continues >

Submerged sandbars offer areas of slower current where active catfish go to feed.



Photo courtesy Rusty Jackson

“I usually start out with the inside lines out to 150 feet and the outside lines at 200 feet,” he said. The water depth on a good sandbar is 12 to 20 feet, so that allows for a pretty flat line to slide over.”

Jackson likes skipjack herring for bait. Skipjack may or may not be readily available in the spring, which is why he buys fresh-frozen herring by the freezer-full during the fall runs, but skipjack isn't the only choice, he said.

“These fish on the sandbars are up and cruising, actively looking for food,” he said. “One of my favorite baits is fresh-cut Asian carp or buffalo; any of those can be caught right off the end of a concrete boat ramp with a cast net.”

Jackson's rig may vary, depending on the size and section of bait he's using. A big head section will require a two-hook rig, with one hook through the jaw and another — run off the snell of the other one — hooked through the skin on the back.

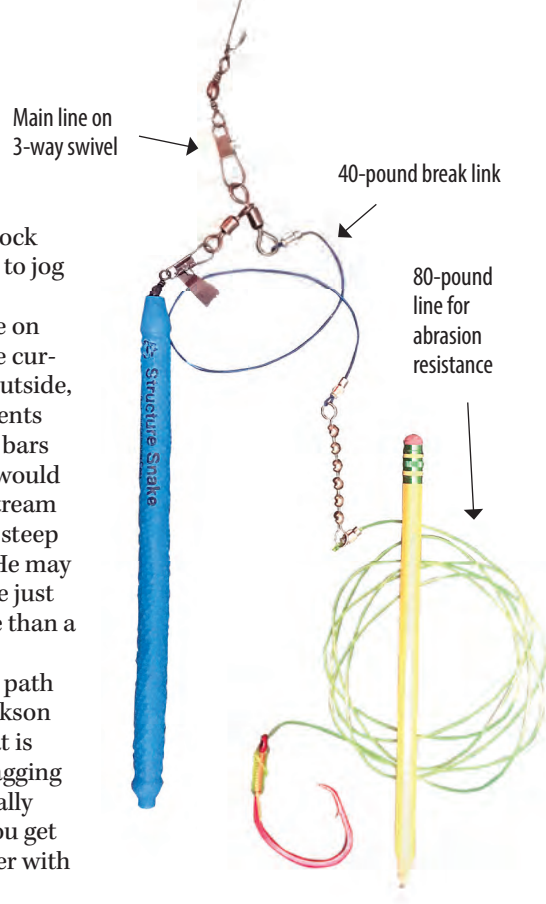
Jackson mostly fishes the section of the Mississippi near his home, from around Memphis, Tenn., downstream to about Greenville. He said finding a good sandbar isn't difficult if you've done your homework during low-water periods to make notes of what's available.

“I'll place waypoints on my chart alongside a sandbar that's out of the water, and I might make one- or two-word notes about

what's adjacent to that mark, like 'rock pile' or 'tall trees' — just something to jog my memory,” he said.

Most of the better sandbars will be on the inside of a bend in the river. The current will be much stronger on the outside, creating softer or even reverse currents on the inside bend. Jackson prefers bars adjacent to deeper water; a bonus would be a deep scour hole on the downstream end of the bar. To the fish, it's like a steep cliff dropping off into a deep hole. He may work several bars in a day, or maybe just one, as some sandbars can be more than a mile long.

“With technology, you can chart a path and hit your marks and just go,” Jackson said. “It's really fun fishing. The boat is easing along, and your baits are dragging through good structure, which usually hold hungry fish. About the time you get settled in, one of the rods bends over with a big catfish.” ■



A double hook rig is often required for head pieces or whole baits when dragging for catfish.

Photo courtesy Rusty Jackson

BACKGROUND: Making notes of potential dragging areas during low water will pay big dividends when the water comes up.

THE POWER TO PULL

While Kent Driscoll of Franklin, Tenn., doesn't do a lot of trolling for catfish, as a tournament crappie pro, he does know a thing or two about spending a day on the water trolling. He said finding a power source to supply electricity to his Minn Kota Ultrex trolling motor for a full day of fishing was a big challenge.

Having worked through several popular brands of marine batteries, Driscoll looked into a heavier-duty, deep-cycle battery and found what he was looking for in a US Battery 12-V golf cart battery package. U.S. Battery's flooded lead acid batteries are engineered and proven to provide the fastest cycle-up to full-rated capacity and have the highest total energy delivered over the life of the battery.

"I can get a full day of trolling at 1.5 to 2.5 mph from my 21-foot aluminum (boat); I'm talking 8 hours of solid fishing," he said. "If I'm moving slower, I can get 8 to 12 hours pulling at speeds of .7 to 1.2 mph."



Photo courtesy Kent Driscoll

Taking care of your equipment goes a long way toward being able to stay on the water trolling all day.

Driscoll said several other factors help him get the most out of his batteries. Always trolling with the wind, good battery and terminal maintenance and keeping the batteries fully charged all help.

"Trolling into the wind will kill your batteries; I don't care how good they are," said Driscoll, who advocates regular checking of the battery terminals, wiring and water levels in his trolling motor batteries.

"I keep all of my batteries connected and plugged in to a Minn Kota 4-bank charger when I'm not on the water fishing," he said. "This maintains the charge, and by keeping the terminals clean and the connections tight, it prevents you from losing power on the water." ■

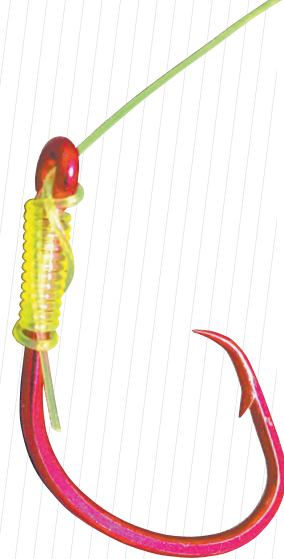
Traditional knots don't often fare as well on heavy diameter lines, often requiring the heavy tackle angler to use some alternatives, including snelling.

KNOT ALTERNATIVES

Working with heavy fishing line often means figuring out alternative ways to attach one piece of a rig to another without tying knots to every piece. Monofilament and lightweight braided lines may be much simpler to tie into a variety of useful fishing knots, but when using 80- to 100-pound test line, getting a good knot that will tie in a short space of line and hold up to the power it's rated for is a chore.

Accordingly, many anglers who use heavy tackle opt for alternatives to tying knots in their line.

- **CRIMPING** Most anglers think crimping, with the use of single or double metal sleeves, is only used for wire. Not true. In fact, crimping may be one of the best ways to secure thick monofilament, as the crimp grips the mono without causing damage to the line.
- **SWIVELS** Swivels may be used as a tie point between lines of different sizes or compositions where the two are not compatible due to differences in line size or material. Snaps or snap swivels provide a tie point for one line that attaches to a loop, eyelet or other connection.
- **SNELLING** Most commonly used to attach large-diameter line to heavy gauge hooks, snelling is similar to tying a knot except that the line wraps around itself and secures the tag end to the shank of the hook rather than just the eye.
- **LOOPING** Even heavy lines are simpler to tie when using a loop knot with a large opening. Loops are most commonly tied using Figure 8 knots. They can also be intertwined, bringing the leader through the loop to make a strong connection.
- **BRAID KNOTS** Opinions vary, but one of the most-popular, and highest strength-rated knots used for tying heavy braid to other tackle such as hooks swivels or other eyelets is the Palomar knot. It is tied by looping the line, inserting the loop through the eyelet, then bringing the hook or swivel back through the loop and tightening the knot down. ■



Phillip Gentry is a veteran outdoorsman who hunts or fishes for just about anything that swim, flies, runs or climbs. He loves fishing from his kayak.



EFFECTS OF TURBIDITY ON YOUNG CRAPPIE

WILL MUDDY WATER THIS YEAR AFFECT YOUR FISHING NEXT YEAR?

Photo courtesy Joe Balog, Millennial Promotions

Successful anglers are continually aware of how environmental conditions affect fish, but their focus usually is on the adults of the species they are targeting.

Environmental conditions affect the young fish, too. Understanding the effects of environmental conditions on young crappie is especially important because abundance of crappie year-classes varies widely over time.

In many lakes, turbidity fluctuates widely within and between years. Might turbidity affect recruitment of one of the Magnolia State's most popular sportfish? A study by Illinois Natural History Survey researchers provides insights.

Young black and white crappie were collected with seines from hatchery ponds and transferred to laboratory tanks. Young crappie were collected at several times after spawning to allow testing for the effects of turbidity on different life stages.

In the laboratory, fish were held in clear water at 72° F and fed *Daphnia*, *Chaoborus* and *Chironomus* larvae to acclimate to laboratory conditions. *Daphnia* are relatively large zooplankton that live in the water column. *Chaoborus*, also known as phantom midge larvae, have clear bodies; they spend much of their time living on the bottom but make frequent migrations into the water column. *Chironomus* are dark-bodied midge larvae that live in the bottom sediments. All are foods commonly eaten by young crappie.

Fish were transferred to tanks and offered known amounts of each forage type at three levels of turbidity that corresponded to visibility of 14 inches (clear water, no turbidity), 12 inches (moderate turbidity), and 9 inches (high turbidity).

The amount, measured as weight, of *Daphnia* consumed by white crappie did not differ among turbidity levels. Black crappie ate the least in clear water and

greater and similar amounts in moderate and high turbidity.

Young fish that feed on plankton are known to be size selective, generally tending to select the larger zooplankton that contain more energy. White crappie selected the largest *Daphnia* in clear water and smaller *Daphnia* in moderate and high-turbidity water. Black crappie had the opposite trend, selecting the smallest *Daphnia* in clear water and larger *Daphnia* in moderate- and high-turbidity water. Although trends were different, size selection for *Daphnia* was similar for black and white crappies in waters with moderate and high turbidity.

When provided with all three prey species, both black and white crappies selected *Chaoborus* at all turbidity levels. *Daphnia* and *Chironomus* were either avoided or neutrally selected; that is, they were neither selected for nor avoided.

Most important, turbidity did not affect the mass of food or energy consumed by

OPPOSITE PAGE: Every slab crappie was small at one point. Effects of environmental conditions on growth and survival of young fish determines future fishing success.

A CHANGING MENU:

Anglers know that environmental conditions like turbidity affect fish, but their knowledge usually is limited to the adult fish they seek. Environmental conditions affect young fish, too, sometimes differently from adult fish.

either species. However, black crappie consistently consumed more food and energy than white crappie at all turbidity levels.

Some of the results of this experiment are hard to reconcile with field observations. Black crappie tend to be more abundant in clear-water systems, and white crappie appear more tolerant of turbid water. Yet, black crappie consumed more food and energy at all levels of turbidity than white crappie. The only difference between black and white crappie feeding was the lesser amount and selection of smaller of *Daphnia* in clear water by black crappie, a result unlikely to account for black crappie tending to be more abundant in clear-water and less abundant in turbid-water lakes and reservoirs.

One important variable that can affect foraging of young crappie is predation. For young crappie, feeding is a continual trade-off between feeding where food is abundant and avoiding areas where predation risks are high. The outcome of these experiments may have been different if predators were present, but the experiments are informative in that turbidity, alone, has little effect on crappie food intake.

What factor or factors determine the dominance of black crappie or white crappie in a lake or reservoir are yet to be determined; but for anglers who fish in systems with widely varying turbidity, it is good to know that turbidity does not suppress food intake of young crappies and is unlikely, therefore, to affect recruitment after spawning. ■



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.



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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



LIVETARGET SKIP SHAD

A NEW INJECTION OF TECHNOLOGY

Four years in the making, LiveTarget Lures' Skip Shad with Injected Core Technology debuts this spring and will start hooking up with bass and many other species, freshwater and saltwater, time and time again.

The versatile, flat-sided soft plastic jerkbait's unique three-dimensional textures are realistic anatomically as well as intricately balanced to give anglers a deadly artificial lure that matches the hatch — ever-present shad, alewives, young sunfish and crappie, threadfin herring, pinfish and herring. The common denominator is each of those flat-sided forage species are favorite and fair game for hungry fish.

The Skip Shad is the latest in ultra-natural, lifelike products from Grant Koppers, the president and founder of Koppers Fishing and Tackle Corp. and the LiveTarget brand.

A small number of anglers and industry partners had access to sample Skip Shads before the finished models hit the market, Koppers said the second week of February, which is when Skip Shads were being shipped to retail locations across Canada and the U.S.

PATENT PENDING

Koppers is impressed with the soft plastic's newest injection of technology, LiveTarget's exclusive, patent-pending ICT. "Soft-plastic lures all suffer from pre-

cisely the same shortcomings: stated simply, most soft baits don't look anything like the natural forage base that predator fish eat and few behave like a vulnerable prey item that is about to play its part in nature's food web.

"Lures manufactured with our Injected Core Technology are effectively a bait-within-a-bait, featuring a vibrant, biomimetic, forage-profile interior that is fully encapsulated and intimately linked to a clear, soft polymer exo-skin," Koppers said Feb. 13.

After fishing 10 years as a guide, starting in his late 20s, analyzing baitfish patterns all the while, his vision for the artificial lure manufacturing company he started 11 years ago continues to grow.

The first “serious progress toward the development” of Skip Shad began in late 2015, he said, noting the idea expanded over time, and the designers went full steam ahead on product development leading up to its planned release in 2018.

LiveTarget’s Research and Development team went to work with the direction and input of pro staff anglers.

The Skip Shad was unveiled at ICAST 2018 in three lengths and weights — 3½-inch, ½-ounce, 4¼-inch, ⅝-ounce and 5¼-inch, ¾-ounce. It also was introduced in six colors — silver/pearl, silver/smoke, silver/brown, silver/green, silver/blue and silver/purple.

Koppers said the new soft-plastic jerkbait features vibrant color patterns on an interior core, which is fully encased in and protected by a clear, soft polymer shell. ICT, he said, also makes the Skip Shad extremely versatile to rig and present in freshwater and saltwater environments. It can be fished weightless or weighted on a Texas Rig, or along the bottom on a Carolina Rig, he said, or rigged to crawl nose down along the bottom on a stand-up jig, or used as a trailer on a conventional jig-and-plastic combo.

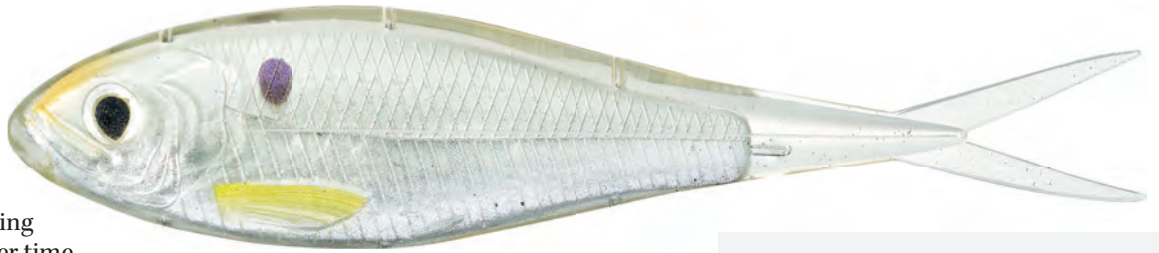
SKIP THIS BAIT

As its name implies, Koppers said, the Skip Shad can be skipped easily under docks and overhangs because of its flat sides.

And the smaller models are perfect to use as a drop shot bait, he said.

It’s the balance that appeals to anglers, he said, adding that it has a remarkably slow descent horizontally as it falls and it doesn’t spiral or tumble.

“The technology allows for the most precise balance of interior core and outer shell. The process creates a weight



distribution and balance that can’t be replicated with existing soft plastics, especially when you have the challenge of producing a lifelike appearance with the lure,” he said.

For more information about the Skip Shad and other LiveTarget Lures products, call (888) 231-4449 or go to www.livetargetlures.com.

SKIP SHAD:

Is the latest in ultra-natural, lifelike products from LiveTarget Lures.



Don Shoopman fishes for freshwater and saltwater species mostly in and around the Atchafalaya Basin and Vermilion Bay. He moved to Louisiana in 1976; he and his wife, June, live in New Iberia. They have two grown sons.

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DON'T RESTRICT YOUR VACUUM SEAL

By Allen Tarvid

THE TOOL THAT SAVES YOUR FOOD PRODUCTS CAN HELP YOU WITH OUTDOOR TASKS

At dinner a friend's house almost 20 years ago, I mentioned how good fresh fish tastes compared to fish that was frozen. He told me with a grin that the fish we were eating had been cooling in his freezer for two years.

At first I didn't believe him. I knew the trick about freezing fish in water to minimize freezer burn, but they still only last a few months. He introduced me to the first vacuum-packing/heat-sealing unit I'd ever seen, and I have had a happy relationship with one ever since.

And I discovered that food isn't the only thing that can benefit being vacuum-sealed.

A BACKUP BATTERY PACK

There is hardly a better way to store backup batteries for your flashlights, hand-held GPS or portable two-way radios. I reload ammunition for several rifles and handguns, and I store my cleaned and polished brass in pre-counted quantities in vacuum-sealed bags.

KEEP REPAIR PARTS DRY AND AT HAND

I once lost an outboard motor's prop, along with all the hardware I needed to install the spare. Just lay out an extra thrust washer, prop nut and any other components your engine's prop shaft calls for, vacuum seal them, and you have a homemade blister pack that keeps everything together, clean and shiny until you need it.



Vacuum-sealing important repair parts, fire-starting materials or first-aid components is a great idea for storage.

A FIRST-AID KIT AT HAND

You can put together a compact first-aid kit (including prescriptions) the same way, and vacuum-sealing a first-aid manual or survival guide protects them until they're needed.

ALWAYS BE ABLE TO START A FIRE

Vacuum seal a few fire-starter squares, along with a small lighter or some strike-anywhere matches, and you're ready to get a fire going in an emergency.

A soft-plastic tube is among the best baits to toss in front of bass during the spring, especially when they're spawning.



David A. Brown

TUBE TRICKS

GET THE MOST OUT OF A GREAT CLASS OF BASS BAITS

By David A. Brown

Designed to imitate a range of forage, soft-plastic tube baits are among the most-versatile and most-productive baits in a bass fisherman's arsenal. A simple drop-and-hop approach will certainly earn you a few bites here and there, but paying closer attention to how you rig the tube, how you change the tube, how you enhance the tube and, of course, how you present the tube, can improve your productivity.

RIGGING OPTIONS

Solid-body tubes are most often Texas-rigged for flipping and pitching to docks, laydowns, grass and bedding fish. Elsewhere, tubes with hollow or mostly hollow forms can be used in these presentations, as well as bottom-oriented tactics.

For basic Texas-rigging, wide-gaps worm hooks will accommodate a tube's body while allowing ample room for clean hooksets. Some hooks designed for tubes have screws that twist into the tube's head for a secure hold, or a wire hanging from the hook's eye that holds the tube. For deeper fish, a leadhead gets the call. You shove the jighead into the tube and push the eye through the body so you can tie your line to it.

If you're going to drag the tube across the bottom, tie your line to the eye at a 60-degree angle. If you want to hop or jig the tube, tie your line to the eye at a 90-degree angle.

ENHANCE TUBE'S APPEAL

High salt content makes a tube tastier to a bass; the longer a fish holds onto the bait, the greater your opportunity for a solid hookset. Various manufacturers impregnate and/or lather their baits with proprietary liquids formulated to tempt a bass' natural tendencies toward smell and taste. Spray scents can instantly increase or maintain a bait's attraction. Also helpful are scented gels and sauces. The hollow cavity of most tubes makes an ideal scent chamber. Squeezing a glob of gel inside is one option. Another involves dousing a small piece of sponge with your favorite liquid scent and placing it inside a hollow tube for gradual dispersion.

In addition to smell and taste, sound plays a big role in fish attraction. Jigheads made with rattles are one way; rattling inserts are another.

IN CONCLUSION

With the countless combinations of size, color, rigging and attractants, dialing in the right tube set up may seem overwhelming. Not to worry; just start with a single scenario — shallow or deep — and work with a couple of darker colors for low-light conditions and a couple of lighter baits for sunny days. Focus on making good presentations to your target area and take heart in knowing that those little tentacles will do most of the work for you.

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.

2019 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. \$29.95 (plus \$3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

SPECIAL PACKAGE OFFERS:

- #1: Wall Calendar, Astro Tables and "How to Know..." book... \$19.95 (plus \$5 s&h).
- #2: Same as #1, plus Software... \$47.95 (plus \$6 s&h).
- #3: Same as #2, minus book... \$38.95 (plus \$5 s&h).

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2019 APR	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Mon 1	██	██	██	██	24
Tue 2	██	██	██	██	36
Wed 3	██	██	██	██	48
Thu 4	██	██	██	██	62
Fri 5	██	██	██	██	70
Sat 6	██	██	██	██	63
Sun 7	██	██	██	██	58
Mon 8	██	██	██	██	51
Tue 9	██	██	██	██	49
Wed 10	██	██	██	██	51
Thu 11	██	██	██	██	57
Fri 12	██	██	██	██	68
Sat 13	██	██	██	██	58
Sun 14	██	██	██	██	52
Mon 15	██	██	██	██	51
Tue 16	██	██	██	██	59
Wed 17	██	██	██	██	67
Thu 18	██	██	██	██	74
Fri 19	██	██	██	██	76
Sat 20	██	██	██	██	62
Sun 21	██	██	██	██	49
Mon 22	██	██	██	██	36
Tue 23	██	██	██	██	30
Wed 24	██	██	██	██	28
Thu 25	██	██	██	██	32
Fri 26	██	██	██	██	42
Sat 27	██	██	██	██	32
Sun 28	██	██	██	██	27
Mon 29	██	██	██	██	28
Tue 30	██	██	██	██	30
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				
5:21 am	10:05 am - 11:31 am	4:19 pm	10:30 pm - 11:56 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
5:54 am	10:42 am - 12:20 pm	5:14 pm	11:07 pm - 12:45 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
6:24 am	11:18 am - 1:10 pm	6:10 pm	11:43 pm - Midnight	☾	☽	☽	☽
6:54 am	11:53 am - 2:01 pm	7:06 pm	Midnight - 1:35 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
7:23 am	12:27 pm - 2:53 pm	8:03 pm	12:18 am - 2:26 am	☾	☽	☽	☽ NEW
7:54 am	1:04 pm - 3:44 pm	9:02 pm	12:52 am - 3:18 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
8:26 am	1:42 pm - 4:38 pm	10:01 pm	1:29 am - 4:09 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
9:02 am	2:24 pm - 5:34 pm	11:03 pm	2:07 am - 5:03 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
9:42 am	3:11 pm - 6:31 pm		2:49 am - 5:59 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
10:28 am	4:02 pm - 7:28 pm	12:04 am	3:36 am - 6:56 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
11:20 am	4:57 pm - 8:27 pm	1:05 am	4:27 am - 7:53 am	☾	☽	☽	☽ HIGH
12:19 pm	5:57 pm - 9:23 pm	2:04 am	5:22 am - 8:52 am	☾	☽	☽	☽ HALF
1:23 pm	6:58 pm - 10:18 pm	2:58 am	6:22 am - 9:48 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
2:31 pm	8:02 pm - 11:08 pm	3:47 am	7:23 am - 10:43 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
3:40 pm	9:05 pm - 11:55 pm	4:31 am	8:27 am - 11:33 am	☾	☽	☽	☽
4:50 pm	10:07 pm - 12:39 am	5:11 am	9:30 am - 12:20 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽ Perigee
5:59 pm	11:10 pm - Midnight	5:49 am	10:32 am - 1:04 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
7:07 pm	Midnight - 1:22 am	6:25 am	11:35 am - 1:47 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
8:15 pm	12:10 am - 2:06 am	7:00 am	12:35 pm - 2:31 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽ FULL
9:22 pm	1:12 am - 2:48 am	7:37 am	1:37 pm - 3:13 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
10:26 pm	2:11 am - 3:33 am	8:16 am	2:36 pm - 3:58 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
11:28 pm	3:11 am - 4:19 am	8:59 am	3:36 pm - 4:44 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
	4:06 am - 5:08 am	9:44 am	4:31 pm - 5:33 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
12:25 am	5:01 am - 5:59 am	10:34 am	5:26 pm - 6:24 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
1:17 am	5:52 am - 6:50 am	11:26 am	6:17 pm - 7:15 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽ LOW
2:04 am	6:39 am - 7:41 am	12:20 pm	7:04 pm - 8:06 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽ HALF
2:45 am	7:24 am - 8:32 am	1:15 pm	7:49 pm - 8:57 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
3:22 am	8:04 am - 9:22 am	2:10 pm	8:29 pm - 9:47 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽ Apogee
3:55 am	8:41 am - 10:13 am	3:05 pm	9:06 pm - 10:38 pm	☾	☽	☽	☽
4:26 am	9:17 am - 11:03 am	4:01 pm	9:42 pm - 11:28 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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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.

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	Sept. 1-30	5
(Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Nov. 9-25, Nov. 30-Dec. 2, Dec. 5-Jan. 27	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)

ADVERTISERS INDEX

ANGLER QWEST PONTOONS	39	ENVIRON METAL, INC	17	ROCKY BRANDS.....	15
BARNETT'S BODY SHOP	35	FIRST SOUTH FARM CREDIT	76	SEVEN C'S MARINE.....	74
BATTERY WORLD.....	28	GATOR TRAX	9	SHIMANO AMERICAN CORP.....	33
BAYOU LAFOURCHE AREA CVB	26	GEICO - SPECIAL MARKETING	5	SOUTHERN CAMPER SALES LLC	69
BEN NELSON GOLF AND OUTDOORS.....	3	GIBSON REALTY/UNITED COUNTRY	12	STAR BRITE, INC	37
BOND ARMS	46	HIGH CALIBER	45	STIHL SOUTHWEST	24, 43
BRYAN'S MARINE	24	HOBIE CAT	19	VAN'S OUTDOORS	75
CAROLINA COMPOSITES, LLC.....	29	K2 MARINE	41	WHITETAIL PROPERTIES	45
CLENZOIL.....	48	MOSSY OAK PROPERTIES LAND INVESTMENTS.....	47	WILCO MANUFACTURING, LLC	39
CRAIN TRACTOR	67	NAUTIC STAR BOATS.....	23	WILEY X.....	58, 59
CUSTOM MAPPING SERVICE	27	OKUMA FISHING TACKLE.....	7	YO-ZURI.....	13
DEER VIEW WINDOWS CO.	12	PARISH TRACTOR.....	11		
DIXIE RV	20	REED'S METALS, INC.....	2		
EMMETT'S MARINE.....	27	RJ'S OUTBOARD SALES & SERVICE.....	25		

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