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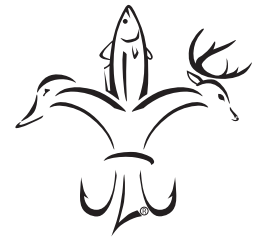
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June kicks off great fishing for bream and other freshwater panfish across Mississippi, and you don't need a boat to catch a mess of tasty fish. Photo by Terry Madewell.



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# JUNE FISHING OPTIONS ARE MANY



**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](mailto:bobbyc7754@yahoo.com).

## BREAM ARE JUST THE HEADLINERS AS SUMMER APPROACHES

**W**hen this Mississippi sportsman thinks about outdoors in June, the mind immediately envisions a shady bank on a nice lake, a light-but-cooling breeze, a box of crickets, birds chirping and hours spent staring at brightly colored bobbers floating on the surface.

Yep, I'm thinking bream fishing, perhaps the most basic of consumptive sports: so little effort required to reap such great rewards.

Hey, it's even good when the fish bite, because there are more tangible benefits than simply gaining peace of mind and a soothed soul. There's also a big platter of crispy, fried fish, and bream, filleted or whole, are as good as it gets.

Bluegill and many other species, including the delightful, red-bellied variety, may have started bedding in April or May, but they keep it up for several months. The full moon in June is one of the best periods of the year, and fortunately for the next generation of Mississippi sportsmen, school

is out, and parents and grandparents can easily introduce youngsters to fishing. Kids and bream fishing are a perfect match.

While hunters have only one real option in June — wild hogs, I'm sorry, but I can't wrap my head around accepting hunting-camp workdays as an option — fishermen have many.

In addition to bream, we've got many other freshwater and saltwater opportunities. Our team of writers offers you a look at most of the best.

David Hawkins introduces us to the joy of a float trip on the Jourdan River in Hancock County, where bass fishing is better than you think.

Mike Giles concentrates on the thrill of catching lunker largemouths on topwater plastic frogs.

Phillip Gentry gives us tips on getting the most out of fishing from the bank.

Jerald Horst and Terry Madewell share

expert tips for catching more bream, and Sam Davis takes us flounder fishing in the Gulf of Mexico.

Sit back, relax and read on. ■



**Buddy Ballard** and his granddaughter, **Clara Ballard**, with a hog taken in Marion County.

Small lakes across Mississippi offer great fishing for bluegill and other members of the bream family.

# TRY SMALLER MISSISSIPPI WATERS FOR GREAT BREAM

**G**ary Turner of Hattiesburg considers himself lucky that he is surrounded by at least a dozen public hotspots for bream, none of which are the slightest bit intimidating for him, his son and a canoe. It's a mix of MDWFP state lakes and Pat Harrison Waterway District lakes.

"We catch a lot of fish, not always bream, and we have so many choices within an hour of home," Turner said. "I'd put three or four of those lakes up against any in the state — Little Black Creek Water Park (Purvis), Prentiss Walker Lake (Mize) and Simpson Legion Lake (Magee/Mendenhall) — but that doesn't mean I limit our options to those three.

"Shoot, there's Flint Creek Water Park (Wiggins), Lake Mike Conner (Collins), Lake Bill Waller (Columbia) and Lake Perry (Beaumont). I like Paul B. Johnson State Park (Brooklyn), too, but it's so big there's a lot of ski boats and bigger craft, so I don't go there as often as I'd like."

Those eight choices are all top-notch bream lakes, but if Turner and other south Mississippi anglers don't really have anything that most areas of Mississippi don't.

Ray Robinson of Tupelo has just as an impressive list, where he takes his kayak for some solo trips.

"Man, where do I start?" he said. "Now that Lamar Bruce (Saltillo) has reopened, I'd probably start there. Once Trace Lake State Park's lake is back online, I'd rate it No. 2."

Robinson paused before continuing.

"Wait, you know what? I can't rank either one of those above Tippah County Lake (Ripley), which is just as productive for bream and is probably about as pretty a lake as we have," he said. "You'd think that would be enough but for sheer numbers, I go to Elvis Presley Lake (Tupelo), and I also don't have to leave my hometown to go to Tombigbee State Park (Tupelo). I don't catch as many fish at Tombigbee, but it's such a pretty, pleasant trip that I don't care.

"I've also got Davis Lake (Houston) just off the Natchez Trace, Monroe Lake (Aberdeen) just reopened, and I can hit the smaller pools of the Tenn-Tom Waterway beginning below Bay Springs Lake all the way to Aberdeen."

Both Turner and Robinson have a lot of secret honey holes, too, that their smaller watercraft allows easy access.

Turner likes creeks, including Black Creek, Red Creek and Okatoma Creek.

"If you've never gotten into a hive of red-bellied bream on a creek, then you wouldn't understand," he said. "Catching about 50 or 60 of those in one spot in a cool-water creek is what my son and I enjoy most on your trips. They aren't as big as bluegill or redear, but man, they are the best-tasting fried fish you'll ever



eat. We scale 'em, gut 'em and cut off the heads and fry them whole like that. Then we eat them until there's not one left on the platter."

Robinson enjoys hitting the many small — mostly 60 acres or less — watershed lakes on national forest land.

"Do the research and find some near you," he said. "The fishing is great. They don't get much pressure. And they are some of the prettiest lakes you will ever find."

Asked to name a few examples, Robinson declined.

"C'mon dude, you crazy or something," he said. "Find your own . . . seriously it's not that hard. Contact your local national forest service office and ask." ■

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# NEW BRYANT WMA RULES PROPOSED

**T**he state's newly acquired Wildlife Management Area has undergone a name change, and rules and regulations have been proposed for the 18,000-acre area in the South Delta.

Originally called Steele Bayou WMA, it is now named for the current governor: the Phil Bryant WMA. Because of how it will be managed, it will immediately become the most interesting WMA in Mississippi.

Russ Walsh, executive director of MDW-FP's wildlife bureau, said Bryant WMA will be broken into four units named after some of the hunting camps that once existed on the land: Backwoods, Buck Bayou, Ten Point and Goose Lake. Each unit will offer a unique hunting experience, and hunters will be permitted to hunt through drawings.

• **BACKWOODS:** This unit includes 4,400 acres and is designed to simulate the experience of the hunting camps long

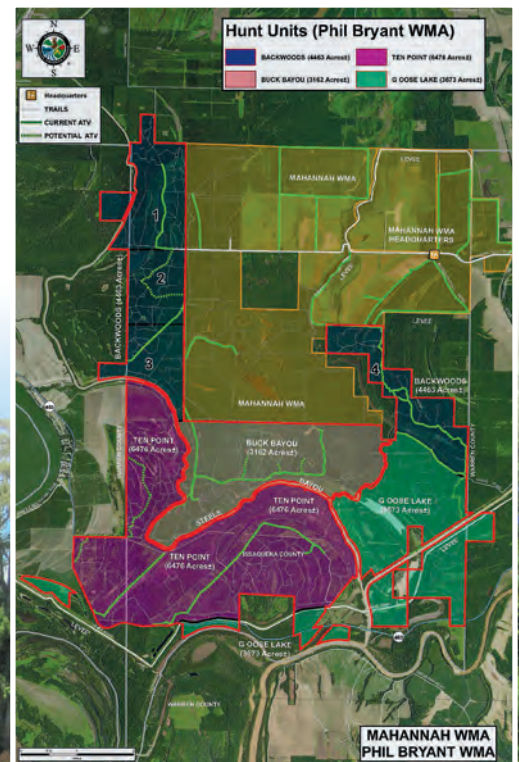
associated with the area. Hunters and up to three guests will be assigned roughly 1,000-acre sub-units for 5-day hunts. The parties can hunt any game in season and camp for the duration of the hunts. Walsh said it will offer drawn hunters the experience of hunting "your own camp" for the week."

• **BUCK BAYOU:** This unit will basically be an extension of neighboring Mahannah WMA. It will offer deer, small-game and duck opportunities according to Mahannah WMA regulations.

• **TEN POINT:** This unit will have its own personality. October and November will be archery-only. Hunting with a gun will be allowed in December. Dec. 26-Jan. 12 will be reserved for handicapped and youth hunters only, allowing them a chance to hunt during the rut. Small-game and duck hunting will

be allowed Mondays through Wednesdays.

• **GOOSE LAKE:** This unit will be managed for more hardcore hunters. Access will be by foot or boat only, and only archery equipment will be allowed for deer. Small-game and duck hunting will be allowed Mondays through Wednesdays. ■



Duck hunting will be allowed on all four of the hunt units on Mississippi's new Phil Bryant WMA.

# CWD LEADS TO DEER-LIMIT CHANGES

**W**ith CWD positives now at 19 and impacted areas on the increase, the whitetail disease is beginning to affect Mississippi's deer-hunting regulations and limits, at least under changes proposed recently by the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks for the 2019-20 season.

The changes include increased harvest opportunities for deer in all zones except for the Southeast Zone.

A key change is in buck limits on private lands in all but the Southeast Zone. The seasonal bag limit remains at three, but one of the three will not be required to meet any antler requirements.

Russ Walsh, executive director of the MDWFP's Wildlife Bureau, tied the change directly to CWD.

"There's multiple reasons," he told *The Clarion-Ledger*. "We know young bucks are dispersers. That's what they do. We know from our data and Tennessee's that yearling bucks can be CWD-positive."

According to Walsh, yearling bucks are largely protected by current restrictions and are underrepresented in the agency's CWD testing.

"In order to get samples from yearling bucks and allow that opportunity, we would need to relax the antler criteria in the bag limit," Walsh said.

Doe limits are also changing, both on private and some public lands, in most of the state. Regulations in the Southeast Zone will remain unchanged.

On private lands in all but the Southeast Zone, the antlerless limit will rise from three to five. Walsh said allowing more antlerless harvest should slow the spread of CWD.

Walsh said a proposal would reverse a regulation change made two years ago on public lands that prohibited antlerless (doe) harvest by any means other than archery. The proposal for the 2019-20 deer season would allow antlerless harvest in primitive weapons season on open public land and some WMAs. He said the proposed increase is the result of surveys during which the agency used spotlights to count deer at night, and that data indicated the populations can sustain a limited increase in doe harvest.

Two public land tracts in the heart of the Northern CWD Zone, Upper Sardis WMA and Holly Springs National Forest, will offer even more opportunity. There, it is proposed that antlerless deer can be taken during any open season, and that hunters be given the same one buck-of-choice proposed for public lands.

"That is in the wheelhouse of CWD, so we're opening the opportunity fairly wide there," Walsh told *The Clarion-Ledger*.

He said one final proposal would be to provide a bonus tag to hunters who harvest a CWD-positive deer and choose to relinquish the meat. The proposed changes were expected to receive final approval at the Commission's May meeting after this magazine's deadline. ■



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Mississippi's record for alligator gar by archery has been broken for the second time in two years.

# STATE GATOR GAR RECORD IS BROKEN

**T**he Mississippi River is famous for producing wild stories about alligator hunting. It seems it can produce some off-beat tales about alligator gar, too.

On April 22, Hughes Skinner of Madison and Hayden Speed of Flora broke the Mississippi state record for alligator gar, as recognized by the Bowfishing Association of America, with an 8-foot, 223-pound entry.

It was quite a catch, and a better story, which was first reported by *The Clarion-Ledger* newspaper.

"I'd gone out there and put three fish in the boat over 100 pounds the weekend before," Skinner said. "We hoped to put another in the boat!"

Skinner and Speed first encountered only smaller gar, so Skinner said they went in search of a new area with bigger critters.

Speed was on the deck looking for fish while Skinner was driving the boat when Speed saw something he couldn't believe about 150 yards away.

"This fish was so big I could see it from 150 yards," he said.

Speed alerted Skinner about the "giant

fish", and both got on the front deck and dropped the trolling motor in to silently approach within 5 yards of the gar.

They both had their bows at draw and released arrows toward the gar.

"It didn't move," Speed said. "I thought we missed. I literally looked at Hughes and thought we missed."

Said Skinner: "The fish took a gulp of air and slowly went down. He didn't even know he was hit."

But when the two tightened their lines, the fish apparently figured out something was wrong.

Then, it took the two men and the boat for a ride.

Skinner said the fish took off, and there was no stopping it. It dragged the men and boat for about a half-mile down a chute at trolling-motor speed.

The battle that ensued took almost an hour before the men got the tiring fish under control and got a rope around him. It took everything they had, Skinner said, to get the monster into the boat.

Knowing it was extremely large, Skinner and Speed immediately left and took the fish to be weighed on certified scales.



Lightning was about to strike twice for Skinner.

"He was cranking it, and I saw the numbers go up," he told *The Clarion-Ledger*. "When it hit 225 (pounds) I was like, 'Oh, my gosh.' When it settled down to 223, I couldn't believe it."

Making the story even better is that the 182-pound record recognized by the Bowfishing Association of America that Skinner and Speed broke belonged to Skinner and another friend, Kevin Meacham, taken in 2018.

"I beat the record twice in two years," Skinner said. "To do it once is crazy. To do it again is unreal. It was incredible." ■

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The Archery in Mississippi Schools championship drew around 6,600 students out of 70,000 involved in the program statewide.

# AIMS' STATE CHAMPIONSHIP DRAWS 6,600

**W**ith an increase in participation, that included more than 6,000 in the 2019 state championships, it appears the Archery in Mississippi Schools is growing in popularity.

According to AIMS director Waldo Cleland, "about 5,000 students competed in the state championship last year, and this year, it was closer to 6,600."

Cleland said statewide participation in the program stands at more than 70,000 students, although not all of them compete. He also believes the growth will continue.

"It's not going to shut down any time soon," Cleland told news outlets. "It looks like it's becoming more and more popular."

Two schools are becoming dominant. Both Columbia Academy and Simpson

Academy swept elementary, middle and high school competition in their respective divisions.

"It's two (years) in a row, now," said Mike Barber, coach of Columbia Academy's archery group. "This is my fourth year, and we have eight state championships."

Simpson Academy also swept its division, and it wasn't the school's first time to do so. Coach Chris Jones said his teams swept their MAIS 4A division in 2017, and he said the school's strength comes from numbers and allowing all students to participate at some level.

"I think a lot of it has to do with we leave no kid behind," Jones said.

Simpson Academy's high school team



set a record for the highest score ever posted by an MAIS team — 3,379 points out of a possible 3,600.

Simpson Academy also produced one of the top archers in the championship. Claire Polk, a 10th-grader, was the top female shooter in the state championship, and shared the overall honor by matching the score of 294 (out of 300) posted by Mendenhall's Kyle Dement, the event's male champion. ■

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2018 BEST BROKERAGES

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Margaret Eckert, 21, killed this big buck, which scored 165 points, while she was hunting with her dad and family on private land in southern Illinois.



Halle Huffman, 16, poses with her personal-best buck. The whitetail was taken in Rankin County while hunting with her father, Scot Huffman.



Leah Patterson, 10, holds up a 23-inch redfish caught using squid at her family's camp in Bay St. Louis.



Conner Dale was very excited after getting his first buck in Rankin County. He put a lot of time in the stand but finally did it.



Caleb Patterson, 10, holds a 19-inch gafftopsail catfish that was caught with dead shrimp under a popping cork while fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, a couple miles south of Bay St. Louis.

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# RAWLINGS' RARE TURKEY TRIFECTA

By Bobby Cleveland

3 GOBBLERS,  
3 STRAIGHT DAYS,  
3 DIFFERENT  
NATIONAL FORESTS

**W**hat Revel Rawlings of Richlands accomplished in a three-day period late in Mississippi's spring turkey season is legendary.

Heck, it is way, way, way beyond that.

Rawlings, 58, who has hunted gobblers for 47 years, turned a miserable spring into a phenomenal accomplishment with a rare turkey trifecta — three mature toms in three days, all on public land.

Oh, and did I mention, each came from different public lands — three national forests located miles apart.

- On Monday, April 22, Rawlings ended his 2019 drought by killing a bird at Bienville National Forest in east-central Mississippi near Forest.

- On Tuesday, April 23, Rawlings got No. 2 at Copiah County Wildlife Management Area, a state-run WMA in Homochitto National Forest.

- On Wednesday, April 24, Rawlings completed the hat trick at Choctaw WMA in Tombigbee National Forest near Ackerman.

Mission accomplished.

"I might have killed three birds in three days before, but I can't remember it," said Rawlings, a former president of the Mississippi chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. "But I can promise if I did it, I certainly didn't do it on three different public areas."



Revel Rawlings killed three gobblers in three days on three different national forests in Mississippi. This was the first tom, from the Bienville National Forest.

-0:23

## PEDDLING PUBLIC LAND

Rawlings hunts primarily public land, not because he's averse to private land, but because he's dedicated to the task. He knows it's hard work, and he knows there are going to be a lot of days when he heads to the office at 9 or 10 a.m., straight from the woods, without a bird in his bag, often without even hearing one.

"I was in a great club for years, but it got to where I couldn't justify the cost," said Rawlings, a financial advisor. "I own 200 acres in west Hinds County, but I don't hunt turkey there. I'm sure we've got some gobblers that pass through, but I don't even go listen there."

The challenge of public land is Rawlings' way, and how he hunts it is rather unique.

He rides a bicycle—a Trek mountain bike, to be exact.

"While I was state NWTF president, we worked to have gates put on roads on public lands and getting them locked during turkey season," Rawlings said. "That cuts hunting pressure and makes you

The second of Revel Rawlings' three public-land turkeys was taken on Homochitto National Forest.

work hard for it. The bike works for me. I carry a .20-gauge Model 870 Remington because it's light, and I carry it unloaded over my shoulders. My Primos game vest is big enough to carry my accessories and, if I'm lucky enough, a gobbler.

"It's a great way to get around on those roads. I'll ride about 200 yards, stop, straddle the bike and make a few yelps or cutting calls. If I hear one, I hunt him. If not, I just go another 200 yards and stop again."

## KEYS TO THE HUNT

Rawlings keeps a diary of his hunts every spring. After the first six weeks of the season, the 2019 book seemed destined for the back of the cabinet, perhaps never to be pulled out.

"I bet if we looked at my diary, we'd see I had hunted all but two days this year," he said. "Before April 22, I had heard some gobblers but didn't get many to play. I finally called one in, but, I hate to admit it, I completely missed the shot."

"It hurts because on private land, on



productive land, you can hear maybe eight or 10 birds gobbling on a good day. On public land, if you work hard and cover a lot of ground, a good day is hearing one or two birds. You have to make them count."

continues >

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The last of Revel Rawlings' three public-land turkeys was taken on Tombigbee National Forest.

**T**hat's what Rawlings did, too, when his luck changed on his trip to Bienville and he ran into four hot gobblers, strangely, in a wad. "I had ridden about 6 or 8 miles and was almost back to my truck, maybe a half-mile, when I stopped and did some yelping on my Primos Heartbreaker box call," he said. "The gobbling almost knocked me down. They were close. I literally threw my bike over in the grass, ran and got down by the closest tree. By the time I got my knees up and the gun ready, they were there on a string."

A shot at 22 yards rolled one of the gobblers.

"From first gobble to shot was 10 minutes at the most," Rawlings said.

On Tuesday, killing the second bird at Homochitto National Forest called for skill and improvisation.

"I had ridden 3 or 4 miles when I heard him at 6:55," he said. "I killed him at 8:13. The key to killing him was my kee-kee calls. He was answering my kee-kees the whole time.

"Turns out other hunters were calling to him from the opposite side, but he was answering my every call. He'd come so far and then stop. At 7:15, he went quiet, so I decided to stop calling."

After a nervous 15 silent minutes, Rawlings switched to his box yelper.

"I got nothing back from him," he said. "So I kee-kee'd again, and

he gobbled, but I could tell that he had gone away quite a bit. I have an App on my phone where I can look at topography, and I saw there was a creek that was hanging him up. He was gobbling his butt off but wouldn't budge. I jumped up and crossed the creek."

Crossing the 40-yard creek-bed and 5 yards of water was easy; the 6-foot bank was tough.

"When I got up the far bank, I kee-kee'd again, and he came straight in," Rawlings said. "I killed him at 35 yards.

"That night, when I was talking to my wife, Liz, and friend Barry Biggers, they were both adamant that I had to try to make it three in a row on three different national forests. So I decided I'd give it a try and started looking at the other national forests."

He chose Tombigbee National Forest and the Choctaw WMA.

"I had hunted it before, and it's 97 miles from my driveway to the gate on what we call Three Mile Road," he said. "I rode the bike up all 3 miles to the end of the road, and I hadn't heard a gobble and was pretty depressed. I was texting Liz and Barry that I had struck out when I heard a bunch of crows calling, and it was on."

At 7:56, Rawlings heard a gobble from a tom reacting to the crows.

"I set up and started kee-keeing, and at 8:03, I was standing with my foot on the gobbler's neck," he said. "It happened that quick. Everybody thinks of the kee-kee as a fall tool, but it's deadly in the spring, too, because by late April, those gobblers have heard every other call in the book. Once those crows got him to gobble, I thought, 'Hey this is going to happen. I might can pull this off.' It was sort of surreal. Where I was it was beautiful, almost too beautiful because it was open. I worried that he wouldn't like being that open, but he couldn't resist the kee-kee."

"I hear a lot of people say they don't turkey hunt because they don't have a place. They're wrong. We've got millions of acres. You have to work for it, but it's worth the effort. I love eating wild turkey, and I've always said that public land gobblers just taste better. They really do." ■



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Hunter Waltman of Kiln killed this solid white gobbler on March 17, 2019.



# KILN HUNTER KILLS SOLID WHITE TURKEY

By Brian Cope

**H**unter Waltman of Kiln killed a solid white gobbler on March 17. By then, he was intimately familiar with the animal.

Waltman's first indication of a rare bird on the property came before he purchased the land. He was walking through the tract with his fiancée when they found a white feather. Waltman recognized it as a turkey feather.

"I picked it up and told her, 'I know what this is.' And then, when I met the neighbor, he said he'd seen a white turkey on the property for about three years. Once I purchased the land, I put up trail cameras and started getting photos of it," said Waltman.

On March 17, Waltman and his friend, Toby Cagle of Saucier, got into the woods early.

"We knew where he was roosting and had a good plan for where he would come out. I knew his morning routine thanks to the trail cameras," he said.

They heard the bird gobble before it left the roost. Then the two hunters patiently waited throughout an hour-and-a-half of silence. They decided it was a lost cause and got up to leave. And that's when they saw the gobbler.

"When we got up to leave, we saw him with three hens. He was all fanned out about 80 yards away from us.

That was too far for Waltman to attempt a shot, so they hunkered down and watched the gobbler work the hens for about two hours.

"When he was done with the hens, he headed straight to us," he said.

Waltman was using a Remington 870 12-gauge with an extra-full extended choke. He knew the gun was on target out to 60 yards. So when the bird was at that distance, he pulled the trigger and sent a load of Winchester XR pellets downrange. The turkey dropped.

"That was definitely one of the hardest turkeys I've ever killed. It was really awesome. I was just shaking I was so worked up," he said.

The bird weighed 17 pounds, had a 9¼-inch beard, and spurs that measured slightly longer than an inch.

The turkey had solid white plumage, and its spurs and nails were also white. It had a black beard, and normal-colored eyes. It wasn't an albino, but had a condition

known as leucism, a partial loss of pigmentation which results in white, pale or patchy skin or feather coloration.

A few people on social media questioned whether the gobbler was a domestic turkey, but Waltman's taxidermist confirmed it was a wild turkey. Wildlife biologist Bob Eriksen with the Natural Resources Conservation Service agreed that the turkey was definitely a wild one. And a very rare one at that. ■

Hunter Waltman (left) and Toby Cagle pose with the rare white gobbler that Waltman killed on March 17, 2019.



At first glance, Ricky Case thought this might have been a dummy decoy turkey set out by game wardens, only missing its head.

# A SLEEPER TOM AT CANEMOUNT

## HUNTER HARVESTS SLUMBERING GOBBLER

By Andy Douglas

**B**rookhaven area resident Ricky Case was excited when he was chosen for one of the limited-draw turkey hunts at Canemount WMA in Claiborne County. His chances were good being that he would be one of two hunters allowed on a three-day hunt at the 3,500 acre WMA.

Case was plagued with bad weather on the first morning of his hunt and didn't hear or see any turkeys. That afternoon, he called in a tom and a hen but ended up spooking them. The next morning, he had a gobbler coming in "like he was on a string" only to be spooked by three deer. The hunt wasn't going as planned.

Later on in the morning Case called his wife, Celeste, poor-mouthing about his luck.

"I've messed up every way that I can mess up. It just ain't meant for me to kill a turkey," said Case, who drove to another spot and parked at a logging road on the southern end of the property. The wind had picked up a little, and Case walked 100 yards down the trail on top of a hill and called loudly with his mouth caller. He didn't hear anything and kept going downhill toward a creek bottom.

Suddenly, Case walked up on a big gobbler standing in the logging road. His first thought was that the tom was coming up the trail silently to his calling. He raised his gun to shoot him — but there wasn't a head to shoot at.

He lowered his gun and called a few more times but the gobbler didn't move. That got Case to thinking that wildlife officers on the WMA were playing a trick on him and had set out a dummy decoy but left off its head.

Case walked down to the turkey, got to within three steps and could see the gobbler breathing, with its head tucked underneath his wing.

"Well I guess this son-of-a-gun is asleep," thought Case, stunned.

After snapping a few photos with his cell phone, Case walked back about 15 yards to get a good shot and called loudly, intending to wake the sleeping tom. The gobbler brought his head out from under his wing — looked back and forth, and then stuck his head back under his wing.

"You've got to be kidding me," Case thought.

Baffled, he sat down in the middle of the logging road, propped up ready to take a shot. Close to 30 minutes passed.

While Case was trying to find one of the WMA wardens' phone number to report this occurrence, the gobbler woke up. It pulled his head out, stood straight up, realized the hunter was sitting there, and decided it was time to leave. Case was ready and connected with a killing shot to the head.

The big tom sported a 10-inch beard,  $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch spurs and

weighed 18 pounds.

Case tried to make sense of the sleeping gobbler. He wasn't sure if the turkey was exhausted from fighting or breeding. The previous night was a bright and moonlit; maybe the tom didn't sleep.

While cleaning the turkey, Case discovered two shotgun pellet wounds in its breast area. He had shot the gobbler in the head; the other pellets could have been strays from his shell, or the turkey could have been wounded by another hunter; Case thinks that most likely caused the gobbler's strange behavior.

"I wasn't going to shoot him like that (sleeping), I just couldn't do it," Case said. "But when he woke up and realized I was sitting there, he figured it was time for him to go — I didn't let him walk." ■



Hunter Ricky Case, a Lincoln County resident, harvested the "Canemount Sleeper" — an 18-pound tom with a 10-inch beard,  $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch spurs.



By Sam Davis

# FLAT-OUT GREAT

Some basic fishing knowledge and ability is all you need to be able to catch flounder along Mississippi's Gulf Coast — plus putting in your time. >

Dan Kibler

# KYLE PERRY'S CREATURE BAIT LANDED IN THE SHORELINE GRASS WITHOUT A SPLASH OR A RIPPLE, BUT IT NEVER REACHED THE BOTTOM.

Instead, his line started moving to the left, away from the grass. One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three.... On five Mississippi, Perry set the hook with force enough to drive it into the jaw of a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Thirty seconds later, a flat-but-meaty flounder came over the gunwale of his skiff and was soon sitting in an icy bath, sure to be turned into a tasty treat.

Flounder are wall-to-wall in the bays and estuaries of Mississippi's Gulf Coast in June and July, ready to be caught by any angler who can sling a Gulp! shrimp against a pier piling or current-breaking structure near a channel.

An officer in the U.S. Air Force, Perry spent three years at Keesler A.F.B. in Biloxi. He used that time to perfect predictable summer patterns that kept his icebox filled with the flatfish. A native of Augusta Ga., Perry said he is proof that freshwater anglers with the skills to catch bass can learn to master flounder.

His No. 1 tip? All of his best spots, whether a grass point, a marsh line or a dock, share one important characteristic: deep water nearby.

"You can find flounder pretty much anywhere," Perry said, "but the better concentrations of flounder, the better numbers and bigger fish I've found, are near marsh points, grass lines or docks near deep water. When I say deep, I'm talking at least 5 to 10 feet — like a good channel. Not only is that a highway for them traveling up and down the back bay, but like trout, flounder are migratory.

"They're always in their migration throughout the summer. They're heading further up (the bay), then they'll come back out in the late fall and winter to head back out into the gulf. Channels are their highways, so that's naturally where they're going to post up at."

According to Perry, flounder spawn

Shrimp — live or soft plastic — are a favorite offering of fishermen targeting flounder along Mississippi's Gulf Coast.

offshore in the winter. Starting in late spring and into the summer, they make the transition back inshore, working their way onto the beaches and into bays and bayous.

"By July, August and September, the majority of them are in the bays, up in the bayous and even up in some of the rivers," Perry said. "That's where all the bait's at, so that's where they're feeding. They'll move back out in the December time-frame. They'll start transitioning out to the front beach then out into the Gulf."

Like any saltwater fish, the best time to catch flounder is when the tide is moving. Flounder find a location on the bottom to camouflage themselves so they can ambush bait. They position themselves where the current will bring bait past them, because they typically do not chase anything down. With that in mind, some strategy is involved when fishing various structure.

continued >

Flounder use the natural camouflage of their coloration to settle down to the bottom and ambush anything edible that swims or floats past.



Dan Kibler

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Docks hold a lot of flounder, and a lot of big ones, especially if they are close to deep water and over a hard bottom.

**I**f you're looking at a dock," Perry said, "the first way I'm going to fish a dock is the downcurrent side,

because they want to use the pilings to break that current. I pull up to the end of the dock, perpendicular to the dock, and cast so the lure is retrieved parallel to the pilings, so you're bringing your lure past each piling. There could be a flounder behind each of those pilings, so it just increases your odds that you're going to bring that lure in front of a flounder. You can work it from different angles, but that's the ideal one. I catch the most fish doing that.

"As far as grass points, you want to fish a point that has the current coming down past it, whether its incoming or outgoing. The reason points are great is because you have current coming down either side. I like to bring my lure right across the front of the point or down the sides within 10 yards of the point."

Perry fishes grass lines similar to the way he fishes docks. He casts parallels to the grass line, hitting every minor point or pocket along the grass line with his bait.

One thing he has noticed about fishing tidal waters is that some areas are better on one tide or the other. Time on the water is a key factor to unlocking specific sites. Some docks are better on one tide or the other, but, for the most part, docks are more forgiving, according to Perry. Simply fish the downcurrent side of a dock, if a flounder is there, she'll hit your bait.

Most of our bay system and marshes consist of soft, black mud with scattered areas of sand and shell. Perry doesn't put a lot of focus on bottom composition as much as he does access to deep water.

"When you're fishing docks, I've found it doesn't really matter what the bottom composition is," he said. "Most of the docks that are really good are right on the channel. Sometimes, the banks around those docks are built up with shell and stuff the owners have put in there; that may be an attracting factor.



Brian Cope

"On grass lines and marsh points, if there is shell on those, they're always better for flounder. If you can find shell



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along a bank or shoreline, that makes a difference — docks not so much, because I think flounder are there for that dock structure. If it's just a small layer of shells, flounder will get on the shells. You can tell they're on the shells when you pull them up, you'll see their pattern is a lot lighter, a lot more splotchy. The camouflage is designed to the shells as opposed to if they came right off the mud, when they're very dark just like the mud."

Perry said flounder relate differently to varying bottoms.

"If it's just a light layer (of shells), and it's not protruding up, they will lay on top of those shells," he said. "If it's a lot of gravel or rock, they'll be on the outside of that, right on the edges of it, typically."

For some freshwater anglers, there seems to be an air of mystery about fishing saltwater because of the migratory nature of most estuary fish. From late spring through fall, a bass fisherman could bring his or her tools of the trade to the coast and have success using the tools already in their tacklebox.

"If you have any background with bass fishing, you would immediately realize that this very similar to bass fishing," Perry said. "Everything from the technique of the way you're dragging the bait on the bottom to the areas you look for, it's very similar to that.

"You should feel more confident coming down here and giving this a shot and trying to get yourself a mess of flounder in these bays and estuaries. If you have a bass fishing background, you should feel very confident you could come down here and figure this out."

It might take time, but it's worth the effort.

"There's a little trial-and-error trying to figure out exactly where they are, but technique-wise, you're probably already there on what it takes to catch these fish: a lot of pitching, casting to

structure, that type of thing," Perry said. "It's almost like fishing a plastic worm on the bottom; you're just slow-dragging a creature bait or a plastic worm or a jig. You're just bouncing it on the bottom. You want to keep contact with the bottom, because that's where the flounder are." ■



Sam Davis is a freelance writer living in Ocean Springs with his wife Carmen and two sons, Joey and Thomas.



Dan Kibler

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**T**raditional thinking is that a float trip goes with the flow. On most Mississippi streams, that means putting your canoe, kayak or paddleboard in upstream of a take-out point and being at mercy of the current in between.

The Jourdan River in Hancock County is perfect for a bit of a twist on that traditional thinking. The Jourdan is not a long river, but in its 18.2 miles, it twists and turns and changes from freshwater to saltwater and is one of the few Mississippi short rivers affected by an ocean tide.

McLeod Water Park southwest of Kiln, is operated by Hancock County. It offers a host of opportunities for campers and day-use vacationers. It features no cabins, but there are 120 RV spaces with hook-ups, and tent camping is allowed for the adventurous. Canoe rentals are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and kayaks are in future plans; kayaks are already popular among paddlers enjoying the Jourdan River Blueway.

“The park is growing by leaps and bounds,” said Kevin Ladner of Hancock County’s Recreation and Parks, who has fished the river for most of his life and praises the opportunities it provides.

“Bass fishing has always been good, but we can see it improving all the time,” Ladner said. “The Mississippi Department of Wildlife and Fisheries released both native black bass and Florida-strain largemouth. Our bait shop recently sold out of (more than 2,000) minnows to crappie anglers, but the word reached us that bass were also very active on the river.”



# ROLL, JOURDAN ROLL

By David Hawkins

This south Mississippi river doesn't cover much territory, but it's full of great bass fishing for anglers who'd enjoy a nice float trip from freshwater to brackish water and even saltwater.



# The Jourdan offers plenty of fishing for all of the popular species.

Largemouth bass, bream of all kinds and crappie are frequently sought by local anglers, as are catfish. But before the river dumps into the Bay of Saint Louis, spotted seatrout, red drum, white trout and flounder sweeten the mix. Even sharks and striped bass may be found in the river, which is part of the Jourdan River Blueway.

Public launch sites are a problem upstream of McLeod, but a few places offer take-out closer to the Bay of Saint Louis. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks is the principle enforcement on that part of the Jourdan north of I-10; the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources serves the remainder of the river.

## CHOOSE THE POWER

Using McLeod Water Park as a central location, anglers have two choices: motor upstream and float back to the put-in and call it a trip or paddle against the current and float back. We have taken a powerboat up the river, towing a canoe, and floated both vessels back down to McLeod. More people get to fish that way, and the creeks and oxbows are easily explored with the canoe, using the other boat as a base of operations.

For bass anglers, there is no shortage of targets along the river. Points, humps, submerged structure and cuts offer hiding

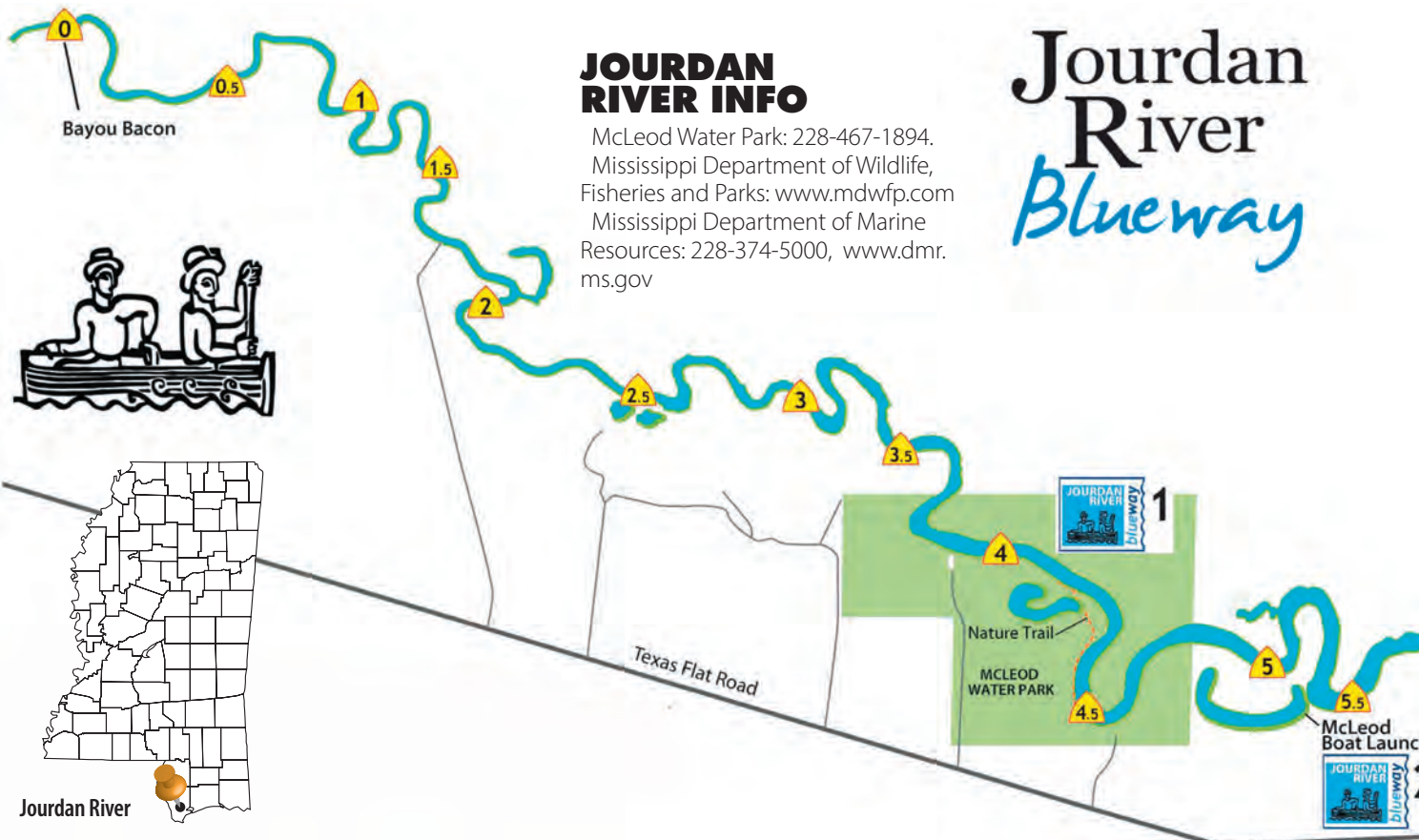
places for both largemouth and spotted bass. The same baits that have proved worthy on other float trips proved their mettle on the Jourdan.

For much of its length, the Jourdan is little different from other central and south Mississippi rivers. Most banks are low, with vegetation growing to the water's edge. Upstream of McLeod, cattails and grass are plentiful, and spotted bass seem to hold around them. Weedless baits worked close to the bank produced frequent bites.

On a recent trip, Robert Hayes of Brandon and I had good luck using a variety of crankbaits and plastics. When worked close to the cattails, the venerable Rapala produced good results. A square-billed crankbait handled the deeper cuts and points, also with good results. A new bait for us was an Oden with an attractant reservoir in the nose and slits where the gills are cut. A few squirts of mullet juice and the bait leaves a scent trail in the water. Mullet, also known as Biloxi bacon, are common in the Jourdan and the targets of many anglers.

"It has been my experience that small river bass will strike a

Spotted bass are caught around marsh grass and cattails in the upper Jourdan River.





Beetle Spin on a consistent basis,” Hayes said. “Yellow and black are my favorite colors, with black and white running a close second. Depending on my rod and reel, I like to use a 3/8-ounce for skinny water and a 1/4-ounce for faster current. Beetle Spins are often found at big-box stores for under a dollar each. That takes some of the sting out of losing one to a brush pile or submerged log.”

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## ROLL, JOURDAN ROLL



**F**urther down the river, the Oden also serves to prompt redfish and speckled trout to bite. Far and away, the most-popular summer bait for saltwater fish is live shrimp, but specks and reds are often caught with a D.O.A. shrimp fished under a popping cork. MirrOlures are a popular bait in the lower Jourdan. The floating series in pink/silver and a dark green/silver sinker proved to be the best on our recent trip.

“Redfish will often follow bait before they commit to a bite,” Hayes said. “The attractant in the Oden bait will sometimes make the difference in a bite and a miss. Most of the people I see fishing for reds are using bull minnows or shrimp and fishing on the bottom with some sort of Carolina rig.”

At McLeod, Jimmie Lake is connected to the Jourdan River by a man-made channel. The narrow connection allows fish to come and go as the water and tidal patterns change. As the summer progresses the salinity of the water increases, and salt-water species venture upstream.



Spinning tackle and topwater plugs are a great combination on most of the Jourdan River.

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The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has stocked Florida-strain largemouth bass in the Jourdan River.

## DIAMONDHEAD AND BEYOND

Downstream from McLeod Park, the river gets more developed and noticeably wider. Residential development has flourished on either side of the I-10 bridge since Hurricane Katrina.

Diamondhead continues to rebuild and grow, and much of the river winds adjacent to the city. The development consists of a maze of canals, seawalls and boathouses that hold those fish that tolerate brackish water. Most of Diamondhead is north of the I-10 bridge, in the area patrolled by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. Once you pass under I-10, you are in the jurisdiction of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. Regulation guides are available at most tackle shops and online.

The Jourdan empties into the Bay of Saint Louis. According to Ladner, the restaurants and shopping areas of Old Bay St. Louis are only a 30-minute ride by boat from McLeod, and a public pier is on the gulf side of the area. ■



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



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# GO FROG

Fishing frog baits can be an exciting way to target bass in Mississippi waters through the summer. Whenever they're shallow, tie one on.

# WILD

By Mike Giles



**T**yler Russell spotted movement in the vegetation and quickly sailed a Snag Proof Phat Frog to the spot. A big bass exploded on it a split second later. He snapped his rod back and set the hook, quickly prying the bass from the salad patch.

Russell, a former Mississippi State quarterback, knows a few things about throwing footballs and casting lures, and he's better than average at both.

Though it may surprise many to learn that he's an avid angler, Russell has been fishing since he could walk. His earliest recollections of fishing precede his football career, and fishing has always played a prominent role in his life.

"I can remember going to the lake and spending all day with my dad and enjoying every minute of it," he said. "In fact, I believe the constant casting, sometimes up to 8 hours a day, helped me build arm strength and develop my passing motion that later came in handy on the football field."

These days, Russell is an up-and-coming angler who has set his sights on competing against the best bass fishermen in the world. In the meantime, he's fishing regularly and catching bass almost everywhere he goes. Fishing frogs is a favorite technique he employs when bass are in shallow water around vegetation and wood structure.

"I've been fortunate to live in Brandon the last year-and-a-half and have really enjoyed catching bass on Ross Barnett Reservoir," Russell said. "Barnett is my No. 1 favorite lake to fish frogs due to the vast amount of vegetation on the lake. There's plenty of lily pads and assorted grasses and vegetation growing almost everywhere in shallow water, and that makes for some outstanding shallow-water fishing almost year-round." >

## SHALLOW WATER FROG BITE

Late May and June are perfect months to target bass in shallow water, as they've recovered from the spawn and are gorging on any baitfish they can find.

"I like to fish any type of vegetation, but particularly where you have a couple types of vegetation, such as lily pads and grass," Russell said. "When you have different types of vegetation meeting in

one area, that transition zone is usually a good area to target."

Russell like to fish in the 2- to 5-foot range.

"I'll key on vegetation, but you can't overlook stumps and docks, either," he said. "I've had success fishing frogs around docks and shaded areas in the shallow water, too. I'll use that Phat Frog ... like a topwater bait, searching for bass and drawing strikes. The action is like a Boy Howdy topwater bait; you can twitch

it once or twice, and it will stay in the strike zone a little longer, too."

## RUSSELL'S PREFERRED COLORS

"My go-to color really doesn't depend on the time of day or conditions, but I'll always start out with a white frog," Russell said. "I'll fish that color all day if they hit it, and I'm not afraid to use it at any time."

As a general rule, Russell will use white on bright, sunny days and black on darker, cloudy days.

"If the bream are shallow and bedding in May or June, I'll use a brown frog as well," Russell said. "The brown mimics the bream, and they really key on that color under certain conditions. But overall, I like to stay with those three colors as my main frog colors, and I'll usually catch bass on one of them."

## QUALITY BITES

In addition to the weedless aspect of fishing a frog in shallow-water vegetation, frogs tend to attract more quality bites, the way jigs have produced big fish.

"You're going to catch a lot of quality bass in the 3- to 5-pound range when you're fishing frogs, and that's the size you've got to have when your competing in tournaments these days," Russell said. "On Barnett, you're fishing for five bites in a tournament, and they have to be quality fish if you want to get a check or win."

## BEST TIME TO FISH FROGS

"A lot of people think frogs are only good to fish early and late, but I like to fish them all day if they're biting them," Russell said. "Cloudy, overcast days or days when you have a little drizzle or rain are very good days to catch bass on frogs all day-long. If you're looking for a big-fish bite, you might even catch

After they recover from the spawn, bass will feed heavily to get back to full strength, and big baits like frogs are meals they love.



## MISSISSIPPI'S HOT FROG-FISHING DESTINATIONS

1. Ross Barnett Reservoir
2. Kemper Lake
3. Lake Columbia
4. Turkey Fork Lake
5. Okatibbee Lake

them on sunny days right up during the middle of the day between 11 and 2. You might not get as many bites, but the ones you catch will usually be quality bass too.”

### BEST TECHNIQUE

“Most of the time, I prefer to fish the frogs fast and cover a lot of water,” Russell said. “If you find an aggressive bass, they will strike it, and if they’re not actively feeding, they may just swirl or swat at it, so you’ll know that bass are in the area. Although they might not want the frog retrieved fast, they may bite it if you slow it down and walk the dog, or they might hit a follow-up bait.”

Soft plastics like floating lizards, Senkos or trick worms are follow-up baits that are deadly on bass when they’re striking short. If you know where they are and can put that trick worm or Senko on them, they’ll usually eat it, and you’re back in the game.

continues >

Bass will readily eat frog baits, but if they only swirl at them and miss them, they’re often caught on follow-up baits.



Tony Garitta

## Go frog wild ➤

Tyler Russell caught this lunker Ross Barnett bass recently on a white Snagproof frog.

Whether using the frog as a search bait or as your primary fish catcher, they are the ticket when the topwater bite is on.

## KEN COVINGTON'S PROWESS

Ken Covington of Daleville scoured the mirror-smooth water looking for any sign of a bass and quickly spotted one slashing the surface near a stump on the edge of a shallow drop. Covington cast a popping frog a few feet past the area and worked it back near the stump, but it never made it past.

Ka-Whoosh! A bass smashed the black frog and bore down into the roots trying its best to escape. Covington, an avid bass fisherman, snapped the rod back and drove the hooks deep into the jaw of the bass a split second before it burst through the surface, wallowing wildly again and again as it tried to free itself.

Covington set the hook to jerk the bass up and out of the stumps and hidden dangers on the bottom. He's one of the top frog fishermen in Mississippi, and he rarely loses a bass that strikes his frog baits. You can be sure one of his rods will have a frog tied on no matter the



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time of year and conditions.

"I like to throw a frog any time bass are in shallow water, and that's most of the year here in the Magnolia State," Covington said.

"There's just something about catching a bass on a frog. When they strike, it sends a rush through you that you just won't get fishing any other lure."

## FAST RETRIEVE = RED HOT ACTION

Covington doesn't mess around when he fishes a frog. He's looking for active bass, and his sizzling-fast retrieve makes for some red-hot strikes and plenty of action.

"I like to use the longest rod I can find and make the cast just as far as I can," Covington said. "I can cover a of water and put that frog in front of a





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## Go frog wild ➤

Keith Covington displays a lunker bass he caught on a frog on Okatibbee Lake last summer.

lot of bass, and the strikes I get and fish I catch are usually quality fish; they're the bigger ones looking for a quick meal."

Even when most bass are not active, Covington will get a few quality bites, and that translates into quality bass.

"I like to fish the Booyah popping frog most of the time, because I think it entices the active bass into biting," he said. "I use it most of the time, but there are some instances where the regular frog will draw more strikes; sometimes, that's when most of the fish are not actively feeding.

"I don't care if it's on a small lake or big impoundment, there are always a few shallow-water bass looking for an easy meal, and they're always ready to smash that frog. I can't tell you why they prefer one over another, but I do know that they will bite when a frog swims by overhead."

Covington usually uses a dark-colored frog, either black or brown.

"Most of the time, I fish a dark frog almost exclusively, because I have confidence that they'll hit the black frog," said Covington. "I know some people say



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use dark colors early and late, but I actually catch bass on them at any time. Now, when they hit the frog, you've got to set the hook as hard as you can, let them know you mean business and get them out of there or you'll wind up empty handed." ■



**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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## LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

You'll find a number of stumps and bushes on the edge of the Maynor Creek channel.

# LITTLE BUT MIGHTY MAYNOR CREEK

**D**uring June, bass will be schooling, and once you find them, you may catch more than one from the same spot. Maynor Creek, a 500-acre lake in Wayne County, has one channel running through it.

## TOPWATERS ARE KEY

Topwater lures can be very effective in June, early and late, around and on both sides of the bridge that goes across the lake at Maynor Creek. I'll expect to catch four or five bass early, especially in the riprap.

I'll primarily fish two lures — the Pop-R and the Zara Spook — for 30 to 45 minutes at first light on a Bruin ELS 8:1 gear ratio reel with 20-pound test bass braid and a 6-foot-10, medium-action rod. I'll work the Spook fairly fast, darting it back and forth and side to side quickly. If the bass start hitting the Spook, I'll know they're actively feeding and willing to chase a bait.

I'll give the Pop-R two or three quick pops and allow it to sit still for a short time. If a bass doesn't take the Pop-R when I pop it, but instead waits for the bait to be

sitting still and an easy target, I'll realize the bass aren't very aggressive. Then, I'll know whether the bass want a moving bait or prefer to strike more slowly.

If the bass miss the topwater lure, I'll follow up with a green pumpkin HardNose Freefall worm rigged wacky style with an O-ring slid to the worm's middle, and the hook put through the O-ring. The bass probably will believe it's killed or injured that bait it's struck, and now the bait's falling to the bottom. So, often the bass will circle around and attack the wacky worm I'm fishing on a 7-foot, medium-action spinning rod with 16-pound bass braid and a 6-foot leader of White Peacock fluorocarbon.

## USE PYGMY FROG, WACKY WORM

After I fish the bridge patterns, I'll go to the lake's upper end, searching for vegetation and bushes in the water where I can fish a white Pygmy Frog on 50-pound bass braid with a 7.5:1 Bruin reel and a 7-foot, heavy-action rod. You can catch some good-sized bass in this fairly shallow water, if you can get a bass to bite.

I like the Pygmy Frog, a popping-type frog

with a cupped mouth, to work through the lily pads. I'll pop it a few times and then allow it to sit still in any holes in those pads and just outside the vegetation.

I'll also pick up my wacky rigged worm any time a bass attacks the frog and misses it. I'll cast that wacky worm right back to the spot and let it free fall. I'll spend the first two hours of the day fishing around the bridge and the upper end, attempting to catch shallow bass.

## CRANKING THE CHANNEL

The channel that runs the length of the lake starts at its upper end, flows under the bridge and passes in front of the mouth of the lake's biggest bay on the left-hand side as you motor toward the dam.

I'll fish below the bridge along the edge of that channel, probably only a 3- to 4-foot drop-off, with a gray ghost Mann's 15+ crankbait on a Bruin ELS 5.1 reel with a 7½-foot, medium-action rod and 20-pound fluorocarbon. I'll start casting at a 30- to 45-degree angle just above the big bay, to the lip of the break. I want to land my lure past the top edge

of that creek channel with its numerous stumps and brush and bounce it off those.

## FOLLOW UP BAIT

While fishing a 1/8-ounce shaky head jig with a black/blue flake Jelly Bug like I've fished the crankbait, I'll concentrate on dropping the Jelly Bug off the ledge down to the bottom of the channel. The crankbait should get the active bass to bite, and the Jelly Bug will appeal to the inactive bass. Often, when I've caught two or three bass on the crankbait at Maynor Creek, I can cast back to that same place with the Jelly Bug and catch a couple of bass that haven't bitten the crankbait. I'll fish this channel all the way to the dam with these two lures.

## WHAT YOU'LL CATCH

You'll mostly catch largemouths — perhaps 10 or 25 in a day. Maynor Creek homes numbers of 2- to 3-pound bass, but don't be surprised if you catch a 7- to 9-pound 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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## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

A long, fat and sassy bass that made the mistake of biting a Zoom Super Fluke offered by Louisiana Sportsman publisher Tony Taylor was one of the larger bass he caught during the six-day trip for an early April bass club tournament at Toledo Bend.

# THESE FLUKES REMAIN SUPER

TRY THESE DIFFERENT METHODS OF RIGGING ZOOM'S PREMIER SOFT-PLASTIC JERKBAIT

Zoom Super Fluke

**A**s serious as Tony Taylor is when it comes to fishing the Zoom Super Fluke on Toledo Bend, there's always a light moment after that venerable, time-proven soft-plastic jerkbait nets him a victory in a bass club's tournament each spring.

How light? Taylor has won twice in the past five years, and he does have fun when he defends his victory the next year. Taylor, a 57-year-old, all-around outdoorsman, stops at the Burger King in Natchitoches, the turning point from I-49 west to Louisiana, and makes sure to get one of those gold cardboard crowns, which he wears for about a half-day around other club members.

It's all in fun and well-received. At least one of the other guys confided they want to win just to wear a crown.

For sure, Taylor, publisher of *Mississippi Sportsman* magazine, is the king, or one of many kings, of fishing with a Zoom Super Fluke.

Entering this year's Road Runner Bass Club tournament the first week of April,

Taylor and Greg Veron of Gramercy, La., had finished first in two of the previous four contests at Toledo Bend. While they didn't have the weight to win a third time, they had heavy limits, once again relying on the Super Fluke.

During that latest annual tournament at Toledo Bend, Taylor and Veron cast Super Flukes to the water's edge and worked them out to deeper water. The bassin' buddies had the perfect answer to bass on the verge of moving shallower to spawn. The bass they caught were in the 6-foot depth range.

"I caught a 5½ and a 6½ that week. Me and my partner, we fish exclusively with a Fluke," Taylor said. "Our fish were staged a little farther out. We'd throw it on the bank and work it out. When it got to the dropoff, they'd bite."

The Super Fluke is billed as a realistic, super-soft, salt-impregnated soft plastic with seductive action to sucker the most reluctant bass. The deep belly of the Super Fluke is responsible for its action as it darts or glides through the water, tempting bass big and small, particularly those

that aren't super aggressive.

With the shad spawn in its early stages at the time of his last annual six-day trip to Toledo Bend, Taylor touted the soft plastic's shad-like shape.

"It's very indicative of a shad, a minnow or a bream. (Bass) likes to eat a small fish. This is a lot smaller profile," he said.

Taylor loves any color as long as it is watermelon/red. He tips the tail end with a dab of chartreuse garlic scent/dye.

His love for the Super Fluke and other Fluke-style soft plastics began almost 10 years ago when he visited John Dean at Toledo Bend. Dean, who writes about Toledo Bend for *Louisiana Sportsman*, designed and created the U99 Twitch Bait and convinced Taylor to fish it on that trip to the border lake shared by Louisiana and Texas. The U99 looks like a Fluke but has a longer split in the tail.

Taylor said he was hooked from the start. Soon, he added Super Flukes to his arsenal, thanks to Dean, a fishing guide and member of the old, notorious group of pro bass anglers known as the Hemphill Gang.



Wade Bourgeois proudly hefts two lunker bass, both caught on Zoom Super Flukes, he caught while fishing the Road Runners Bass Club tournament the first week of April on Toledo Bend. His biggest weighed 8 pounds 7 ounces.

Successful anglers pay attention to details when they fish the Super Fluke. For nearly a decade, Taylor has paid attention and added to the details he has perfected all those years.

For example, he fishes Super Flukes with a 2/0 Gamakatsu Offset Shank Worm Hook. Some bass anglers may think that's small, but has done the job on bass up to 8¼ pounds, the weight of a "hawg" Taylor caught four years ago, his personal best, while fishing at Indian Mounds. When it is Texas-rigged, the 2/0 hook is hidden inside the pronounced split belly.

Taylor usually fishes a Super Fluke without any weight and often is rewarded with bites from finicky fish.

Taylor changes out the hook at least once a day because he realizes a dull point, which can develop from the rigors of bass fishing, is bad news on a hookset and the aftermath.

The coup de grace to his setup is when he clamps a ½-ounce weight 10 to 12 inches above the hook, the same way legendary bass pro Peter Thliveros of Jacksonville, Fla., fishes it. Thliveros, however, pegs the weight the same dis-

tance from the Texas-rigged bait in what became known as the "Petey Rig."

There's more to Taylor's method of putting keeper-sized bass in the boat consistently with a Super Fluke.

Taylor fishes the Super Fluke on 12-pound fluorocarbon. If he doesn't have a rod-and-reel combo handy that's spooled with fluorocarbon, he'll add a fluorocarbon leader to the monofilament line using a tiny Spro barrel swivel — which is small enough to pass through the guides of a fishing rod — to tie the two lines.

He believes with fluorocarbon, he can detect the subtlest of bites, which is often the case when fishing heavily pressured bass on Toledo Bend or anywhere else.

When Taylor adds the barrel swivel, he doesn't use or need a ½-ounce weight because the barrel swivel provides enough weight.

Wade Bourgeois, another Road Runner Bass Club member, caught an 8-pound, 7-ounce lunker on a Super Fluke that was the big bass in the recent club tournament at Toledo Bend. However, Bourgeois has his own method, one that he kept to himself but agreed to share with Taylor.

"(Bourgeois) was reluctant to have me

**TOP:** Wade Bourgeois likes to throw Super Flukes on these Owner TwistLock ¼-ounce, 3/0 hook.

**ABOVE:** Tony Taylor, uses these Gamakatsu 2/0 Offset Shank Worm hooks to rig the soft-plastic jerkbait.

talk about this," said Taylor.

But Bourgeois opened up, revealing that he uses a black chrome 3/0 Owner TwistLock ¼-ounce weighted hook, which makes its free-fall descent more nose first. His go-to color is watermelon/blue/candy, Taylor said.

The Super Fluke is versatile. Dean religiously uses one effectively on a Carolina rig. ■



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

Whether by choice or necessity, nearly half of all anglers fish from shore. Choosing a good location and knowing how to approach it puts you a leg up on successful trips.



All photos by Phillip Gentry except as indicated

# ONE IF BY LAND

By Phillip Gentry

By choice or necessity, a lot of Mississippi anglers will be fishing from dry ground this summer. Here's how to make the best of fishing from the bank.

**E**ach year, nearly a half-million Mississippi residents take to the state's waters to fish. Of that number, it's estimated that almost half fish from land at some point, and 20 percent fish from the shoreline full-time.

Overwhelmingly, spring and summer are the seasons when most land-based anglers head for the water, often lining up side-by-side in pursuit of fish.

One trend that works against anglers who fish from with their feet on solid ground involves private development around public waterways. To combat this, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, the U.S. Forest Service and a host of other federal, county and local municipalities have created and maintained public access to waterways. Many of these public accesses are mandated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which seeks to advance shoreline management on public waterways.

Where space is available, many public-access areas — boat ramps and public parks, for example — also provide some type of fishing structure, usually a pier, dock or other fishing friendly area. In addition to areas provided for public access, a host of other public waters can be fished without trespassing on private property. Most scenarios involve a public roadway that intersects a public right-of-way along a shoreline that may or may not be developed.

## LOCATIONS

To find the best bank-fishing/public-fishing areas, you'll need access to the internet. The MDWFP maintains a listing of public fishing areas across the state at [www.mdwfp.com/fishing-boating/public-waters-program/](http://www.mdwfp.com/fishing-boating/public-waters-program/).

For areas other than those listed by MDWFP, industrious anglers can view the state's waterways on Google Earth, paying particular attention to public right-of-ways accessible by roadway.

While fish may be shallow in the warmer months, the one thing that all good bank-fishing locations have in common is proximity to deep water. It can be associated with the gradual slope away from land accessed by a pier, a creek or river channel accessed by bridge or shoreline, or a naturally occurring drop-off adjacent to accessible land.

YouTube channels, magazines and websites are filled with how-to tips for anglers fishing from boats, kayaks or canoes, but few give instruction on

continues >>>



In moving water conditions where fish must move to find food, flashy artificial lures can create a reaction bite.

## ONE IF BY LAND >>>

how to make the best of a bank-fishing situation. Lack of mobility is your greatest weakness, but if you're in the right spot, it's not an issue. Many anglers imagine that fish migrate to their location during the time they're fishing, but that is rarely the case. The fish you want to catch and are going to catch are mostly nearby.

### BAITS

The choice between live and artificial baits when fishing from the bank tips heavily in favor of live or natural baits, which have the capacity to attract fish from long distances, while artificial baits typically rely on a reaction strike when the lure comes close to the fish.

The type of live or natural bait may vary depending on location, time of year and the species being targeted.

Shore-based angler O'dell Livingston from Rankin County

fishes for crappie from the banks of Ross Barnett Reservoir in the spring, changes over to bream in May and then fishes for catfish throughout the summer.

"I almost always use minnows when I'm fishing in the reservoir," Livingston said. "I use jigs if I'm going to go behind the dam, but it's minnows when I'm on the pier. Then, I move on over to another location to catch bream, but I'm using crickets then, and when that's over, I'll use worms and sometimes liver for catfish."

One noted exception is when fishing in current or moving water, where fish are migrating past a specific location. That's when drawing a reaction bite is the ticket.

Duang Hun, an angler from Panola County, prefers flashy artificial lures whenever he fishes the rivers behind Sardis, Enid or Grenada lakes.

"I cast mostly spinner blades and small spoons up the river, and then reel them back across the current," said Hun. "I get most of my bites as the lure moves from straight across to moving downstream; that's when the blades start moving."

### TACKLE AND GEAR

Shore-based tackle tends to be heavier and longer than typical tackle used by anglers in boats. The primary reason is that the lack of mobility on the angler's part relegates him or her to muscling the fish to shore.

Longer rods offer greater casting distance when it's important to reach deeper water. Spinning tackle is also favored for the same reason.

Shore-based fishing using live or natural baits is typically a "bait-and-wait" situation, with anglers employing multiple rods — where allowed — to cover more water. Some ingenious rod-holder set-ups have been developed by shore-based anglers to accommodate using multiple rods.

Reginald "Reg" Fuller from Courtland said he normally fishes from the bank near riprap around bridges, and he carries homemade rod holders with him.

continues >>>



Land-based fishing does not have to be complicated, but being prepared with proper gear helps to insure success.



Fishing from a dock or pier is a great place to find unpressured fish.

## ONE IF BY LAND >>>

### THE BANK FISHERMAN'S RIG

Anglers fishing from boats don't have a monopoly on incredible crappie fishing behind the Ross Barnett Spillway. Guide Don Terry said some of the best fishing is along the bank, especially when waters in the spillway are falling.

"Bank fisherman kill the crappie when the water is falling," he said. "The fish tend to pull away from the stickups and blowdowns and concentrate more along the edges of the river channel.

"The spillway is full of shad that get sucked out of the lake and migrate up the river. When you get to within 150 yards of the spillway, closer than you are supposed to get with a boat, you can see baitfish working their way up along the shallows. Throw a jig on a slip cork up over there and pop it a few times."

The version of slip-cork rig that has become famous with the bank-fishing set is a two-hook rig tied below a sliding slip cork. To tie the rig, first, place a slip knot or rubber stop on the line at the approximate depth of the channel edge. Next, thread a cork on the main line, using a small bead, if applicable, to stop the cork at the knot. Thread a 1/6-ounce jighead on the line and secure it using an overhand or Figure 8 knot. At the terminal end of the line, tie a second 1/6-ounce jighead, again using an overhand, Figure 8 or loop knot.


Some consideration should be given to spacing between the jigheads. Allowing 18 to 24 inches between the two is standard, but in some cases where current is involved, some fish may be holding near the bottom while others are suspended just below the surface of the water. If the water depth at the edge of the channel is 5


feet, this may suggest putting as much as 4 feet of spacing between the two lures.

Long-distance casting with a slip cork from a riprap bank is best accomplished with a longer rod, something in the 7- to 10-foot range, since allowing room for the back cast typically isn't a problem and spacing of the jigs often is.



A slip cork allows land based anglers to adjust the depth of presentation to keep their lures at a particular water depth.

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## ONE IF BY LAND >>>

"I have a couple of set-ups I use," he said. "I might put one rod in the rod holder and cast a little bit until I get tired, then I usually put both rods in a holder. It keeps from losing it if a good fish comes along or breaking the tip off when he runs."

## BANK ON TIPS

Approaching quietly, walking softly, not wearing bright colors, and not making noise are all important to avoid spooking fish living close to the bank. While a good distance of water may separate you from the fish, keep in mind, they are always just a good cast away.

Start with finesse tactics, causing as little intrusion as possible. Live baits frequently see the most use in bank-fishing situations. Until you've

determined there is a need for a float to suspend your bait at a particular depth or current that requires heavy weight to anchor your bait in one spot, go lighter or avoid using these at all. Nothing is more natural or less invasive than a live bait placed in the water on nothing but a hook, tethered with just enough line to get the job done.

Some anglers mistakenly believe the best fishing spot will be straight out, as far out into the water as possible, and they subsequently come armed with tackle that is too heavy. Look for environmental clues, cover along the bank or a channel break or ledge that goes from shallow to deep. If fish attractors have been placed at the site — common in many managed areas — try to figure out where fish will

hold on the structure.

Shade is also very important. In the absence of cover, look for any available shady spots. They offer cooler water, as well as a place for predator fish to hide while stalking prey.

Finally, the best shore-based anglers are those who apply some strategy to location, bait, tackle and presentation. In order to consistently catch more and larger fish than the average shore-based angler,

you'll need to find areas that aren't fished as much as other popular public areas.

It's also advisable to pack your tackle and gear, which will allow you to hike further from public access areas to get to those under-fished locations. ■



Phillip Gentry is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer who says that if it swims, walks, hops, flies or crawls he's usually not too far behind.

## CASTABLE SONAR: MEET THE IBOBBER

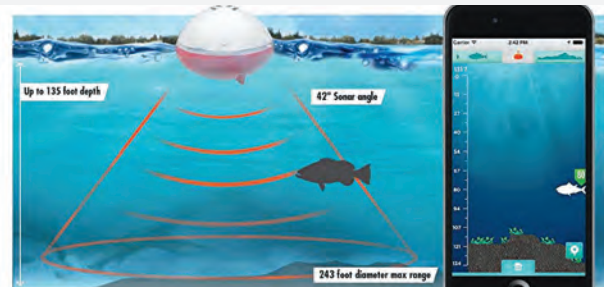


Photo courtesy reelsonar.com

The iBobber is a castable sonar device that sends sonar reading to your smart device via Bluetooth connection.

Catching more fish from the bank requires some preparation. Using a castable fish finder is a great way to figure out what the bottom looks like and whether you should keep fishing an area. iBobber is the lightest portable fish finder on the market and can be cast long distances. Map the bottom contours, locate fish or structure, ledges and holes where the lunkers lurk. You can GPS mark spots, laydowns, weed beds, drop-offs and other underwater structure where fish might be waiting to ambush baitfish.

"We developed this product to be easy to use and give anglers fishing from shore the same advantage that boating anglers have with the use of sophisticated sonar in a small, lightweight castable product," said Jim Cardillo, marketing manager for Reel Sonar, the makers of the iBobber. "Just cast the iBobber to the area you want to scan and watch the return on your smart phone, tablet or other bluetooth device. It's that simple."

iBobber is great addition to your tackle box for pier fishing. Whether in freshwater or saltwater, cast it and map the waterbed down to 135 feet, mark fish and save GPS locations. Use iBobber's fish-finder feature to locate fish and alert you when schools of fish gather under docks and piers.

iBobber is a castable, portable and wireless fish finder that syncs with the free app on your smartphone or tablet up to 100 feet away. The device syncs with iOS (Apple) 10.0 and later operating systems and Android 4.3 or later that use Bluetooth Smart (4.0). iBobber comes complete with USB charger, carrying pouch, and product guide.

MSRP is \$89.99. For more information, visit [reelsonar.com](http://reelsonar.com)

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# BEDDING DOWN FOR BREAM

By Terry Madewell

**SPAWNING BLUEGILLS, SHELLCRACKERS TAKE OVER THE SHALLOWS AS SUMMER APPROACHES. HERE'S HOW TO CATCH A MESS OF THEM.**

**F**ishing beds is an extremely productive way to catch huge bluegills or shellcrackers, as it enables anglers to target the males guarding the beds.

One angler who has figured out how to maximize his efforts is Brad Taylor, a guide who has several tips for consistently catching bedding fish.

"There are tried-and-true techniques for finding bream beds, as well as a high-tech method," Taylor said.

But it all begins with actually finding beds. >

## BEDDING DOWN FOR BREAM

**"F**irst, locate the right bottom substrate," Taylor said. "Bream prefer sandy or pea gravel bottoms so they can build a bed. A bed is simply a fanned depression on the bottom for females to deposit eggs that is guarded by the big males. If the bottom is mucky, pass it by.

"To locate the actual bed, focus on water depths from shallow down to 5 feet deep. When I locate a bream bed in that depth, I will check deeper adjacent water because, typically, the largest fish will be in the deepest water of a bed."

Taylor employs two strategies for locating beds.

"Fishing dingy water, I'll power-fish," he said. "I'll have two fishermen working the front of the boat — one fishing crickets at a fixed depth with a float, the other with a slip float using worms.

"The fixed-float depth is changed according to the depth fished to keep it just off the bottom. The slip float allows the worm to sink to the bottom. Both baits catch both species, but crickets will target bluegills and worms are preferred by shellcrackers."

Taylor doesn't camp out until he's sure there are fish in the area.

"I move fast, and the anglers keep casting and working until we catch a big male bream, and then we work that area with the appropriate bait for the species caught," he said.

The approach changes a bit when fishing water with plenty of visibility.

"In clear water, I look for beds with polarized glasses and use the electric motor to quickly run through the shallow water looking for beds," Taylor said. "I slip back, making long casts to the target, working the edge of the bed and move in as needed."

But there's also another way to locate concentrations of spawning bream.

"I find many beds by smell," Taylor said. "The smell is a fishy smell, distinct but consistent, and once a fisherman scents it, it's an easy scent to remember."

But Taylor said the high-tech era for bream-bed fishing also has arrived.

"The Humminbird side-scan unit is changing bream-bed fishing for me," he said. "I'll idle down a sandy shoreline, tune my unit to side-scan one side for a distance of 60 feet and look for multiple



When fishermen find an active bream bed, it's not unusual to be able to quickly fill a stringer with nice fish.

small craters on the screen.

"I cast crickets and worms to the location, and then target the species I find.

"Not all bream spawn at the same time, so that extends the productive bed fishing, he said. "Shellcrackers often bed earlier than bluegills. After fishing a shellcracker bed, return the next month, and it's almost guaranteed to have either bluegill or more shellcrackers bedding in the same spot."

Taylor said the week of the full moon — about three days on either side — is prime time for bream bedding, although bream might bed at any moon phase. ■

Live bait may be hard to beat, but big, bull bream will readily hit small artificial lures like this spinner.



Brian Cope

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## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Ethan Cox shows off a chunky warmouth caught on ultralight gear in a millpond. Warmouth are often overlooked or misidentified by fishermen.



## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: WARMOUTH SUNFISH

DON'T MISTAKE THIS SPORTING SUNFISH FOR ONE OF ITS CLOSE RELATIVES; IT'S SPECIAL

**T**he warmouth is one of the more interesting and often misunderstood — and just as often, misidentified — species of the sunfish family.

This fish (*Lepomis gulosus*) is native to the southeastern United States, and while many people believe it is a cross between a crappie and a bass, a crappie and a bream, or a bream and a bass, it's actually not the product of any crossbreeding, but is its own species of sunfish. It is closely related to bluegill and redbreast.

The very name “warmouth” has some mystery behind it. Some believe the name comes from the markings that extend from the mouth to the eyes,

which resemble the war paint used by Native Americans. Others think the sheer size of its mouth, which is similar to the mouth of a bass, gives the fish its name: “Mouth so big you could have a war in it!” Still others believe it's the mispronunciation of “more mouth,” which this fish has over its sunfish relatives.

Proportionately longer than most other sunfish, warmouths typically have red eyes, a mottled or splotchy body of olive brown with a purple sheen and prominent lines that run down the body, as well as away from the mouth. The dark ear flaps are short, stiff and sometimes sport a small, reddish spot. And previously mentioned, their mouths extend to

about the midway point of their pupils, allowing the lips to flare like that of a bass or crappie.

When spawning, male warmouths often display a bright red or orange spot at the base of the dorsal fin.

These fish are usually found in slower-moving water, like swamps, small streams or brown- and blackwater tributaries of rivers, but it's not unheard of to find them in ponds and some lakes. They have a high tolerance for dirty, muddy water. Warmouth do most of their feeding on smaller fish, insects, crayfish and shrimp.

Like most sunfish, the males build nests mainly by fanning out areas with their tails, and big groups of nests are often

built together, sometimes among dozens of other warmouth nests. In tight quarters, warmouth will also construct nests among the nests of other sunfish species. They spawn throughout late spring and summer as long as water temperature is warmer than 70 degrees.

Females lay between 2,000 and 20,000 eggs and divide them up between multiple nests. Warmouth guard their eggs and stay with hatchlings for a short time period.

Anglers can catch them with live worms, crickets, small crayfish, minnows and small artificial lures like Beetle Spins, Roostertails, and ultralight crankbaits such as the Rebel Wee Craw and Crickhopper lures. Fishing tight to cover like stumps, logs, vegetation and river banks is a good bet for anglers. Incoming waterways like smaller creeks or even rainwater runoff are always promising spots, too.

Using ultralight rods and reels will ensure anglers a fun and good battle and will make these spunky fighters feel much bigger than they are.

They are often caught among bluegill, redbreast shellcracker, and other sunfish.

These fish are often misidentified as bluegill, redbreast, smallmouth bass, crappie and green sunfish.

Warmouth are known by several other names across the south, including stump-knocker, limb bream, mom-mouth, molly, goggle-eye, red eye, red-eyed perch, and red-eyed bream.

The average warmouth ranges from 6 to 8 inches long and has a life expectancy in the wild of about 8 years.

The Louisiana state record is a 2.13-pound warmouth caught by Frank Dean, Jr. in the Atchafalaya River in July 1987.

The Mississippi state record was caught by Lilliam Morris in Black Creek in June 1979. The fish weighed 1 pound, 8 ounces.

The world record warmouth was caught from the Yellow River in Holt, Fla., in 1985. It weighed 2 pounds, 7 ounces. ■



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



A short ear flap, a long mouth, red eyes and dark, vertical bars are markers of warmouth sunfish.

Image courtesy of SCDNR

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Try out this veteran angler's ideas and fill that cooler with slab-sized sunfish

By Jerald Horst

**B**ass fishermen might be happy with a few bites in a day, but fishing for bream is about numbers. Filling the box.

And veteran angler Freddie McMullen has learned how to up his odds of success.

### **HERE ARE EIGHT OF HIS TIPS:**

**#1** Catching bull bream is largely a matter of finding their spawning beds in the shallows near the lake edge. This is best done early in the spawning season before aquatic plant growth obscures the outlines of the nests. Once the beds are located, male bluegill will use them all season; almost as quickly as some males are removed, others occupy the spots.

Early in the season, the beds are more densely populated, and it is easier to “git on ‘em.” Bed fishing later in the season demands more movement because the fish are more scattered.

**#2** Be stealthy. Approach bream beds with a trolling motor or paddle rather than a big motor. Don’t bang around in the boat and make noise.

**#3** Don’t fish too close to the boat. McMullen said he sees people all the time with cane poles or big reels and heavy line. The fish don’t bite as well because the boat’s proximity scares the fish. You can also cover more water with ultralight rods and reels than with cane poles or heavier reels.

**#4** Keep needle nose pliers handy. Even big, bull bluegills have small mouths, and a swallowed hook is difficult to get out.

**#5** Near the end of spawning season, some male bream get what McMullen calls “poor.” They are skinny and run down from fighting with other males for nesting space instead of feeding. Others develop sores on their skin.

McMullen keeps them all. He knows the lesions on scuffed-up fish are only skin deep, and that skinny bream taste as good as fat ones.

**#6** Add some kind of moist vegetable, such as potatoes, celery or carrots, to cricket cages. The crickets get both food and water from them that will keep them alive and alert.

**#7** McMullen is a big fan of wax worms, partly because they stay on the hook longer. Leftover wax worms can be stored for several months in a refrigerator.

**#8** Bream fishing doesn’t have to be an all-day job. Some of the best fishing can take place after 3 p.m., when the heat of the day has passed. Two guys who know what they are doing, McMullen said, can easily catch 60 to 100 bream in an afternoon. ■



Brian Cope

Brian Cope

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# The ledge stalker

By Mike Giles

Meridian bass pro relies on deep-water ledges for summer's best fishing action. Here's why...

**K**en Murphy studied his graph, pinpointed one area of a submerged ledge and quickly started dissecting it with his Rapala DT14, looking for the sweet spot and hoping to find a new honey hole as he bounced the crankbait off the bottom and banged it into structure.

Wham!

A bass smashed his offering just as it ricocheted off a stump, and the game was on.

Murphy leaned back, letting the rod and razor-sharp treble hooks do the rest. In a few minutes, he put a 5-pound spotted bass in the livewell, and his day was really heating up.

"Once the bass go on their summer patterns, ledge-fishing gets really good," Murphy said. "Most of the offshore fish will relate to certain ledges, and you can spend most of your time fishing for the bass instead of looking for them."

And the good thing about that, according to Murphy, is that bass will target the same ledges and keep coming back year after year unless major changes occur.

With drastic improvements in the electronics on bass boats, fishing underwater humps, ledges and submerged creek channels has become much easier. You still have to put in the time on the water, but finding the hot spots is easier than ever before.



>>>

Dan Kibler

## The ledge stalker

**“W**ith a quality graph and (mapping), anglers are now able to ‘see’ the fish swimming across the ledges and tell not only if they are there, but if they’re active,” Murphy said. “If you only see isolated fish on a ledge, then there’s usually not much going on there, and you can move on and find more-productive ledges with active bass.”

Murphy, from Meridian, has learned quite a bit about fishing underwater structure, thanks in part to tournament success around the country. He has proven he can adapt to a wide range of water and conditions.

### SCHOOLS ON LEDGES

“To be successful on any water, you’ve got to learn how to fish ledges,” Murphy said. “In June and July, offshore ledges are the place to fish for schools of bass, and you can really mop up with crankbaits once you find them.”

What’s not to like about catching lunker bass and numbers of bass? That’s just the opportunity anglers have when ledge-fishing this month. Once you master the nuances of finding the right ledges that hold fish, and then begin catching them, your productivity should increase dramatically.

“Cranking offshore ledges is one of the most-productive means of locating and catching fish that I know of,” Murphy said. “You can cover a lot of water fast and pick up reaction bites and locate the bass much faster.

“Different bodies of water have different types of bot-

toms and ledges, and that can cause the fish to relate to the ledges differently. River ledges may have rock or hard clay bottoms, and dredging will create even more varied types of ledges that provide fish with unique holding areas. Pickwick Lake also has a lot of natural rock ledges and humps that are very productive.

“Tennessee River lakes are some of the best in the world when it comes to ledge fishing, and Pickwick is right at the top. They’re usually full of clear water and loaded with baitfish and bass.”

That makes Pickwick an ideal lake to learn ledge fishing — and largemouths aren’t the only species on the menu.

### DIFFERENT TARGETS, SAME LURES

“When you get a little current on the river pushing bait over the ledges, there’s no telling what you might catch,” Murphy said. “I’ve caught a lot of largemouths and even lunker smallmouths on the same ledge. And sometimes we’ve caught largemouths, spotted bass and smallmouths from the same ledge.”

Murphy has also fished many ledges that are loaded with spotted bass and striped bass.

“June is a great month for deep-cranking spotted bass and catching fish on ledges at Pickwick,” he said. “We’ll even catch big stripers on the ledges, but they usually run off the largemouths. The spots will stay with them and keep right on feeding, however.” >>>





Dan Kibler

**SALTWATER**

**STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)**

<b>FISH SPECIES</b>	<b>Minimum Lengths</b>	<b>Creel Limit (per person)</b>
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
Grouper (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](http://gulfcouncil.org).

**FRESHWATER**

<b>FISH Species (Inland waters)</b>	<b>Minimum Size Limit</b>	<b>Creel Limit (per day)</b>
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/](http://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.



Fishing well off the bank is common for summer bass anglers (left), especially if they know how to use their electronics (above) to find fish-holding structure and can make long casts with a crankbait (top).

## The ledge stalker

White bass also prowl the ledges, although they can mess up an angler's tournament day.

"I've been fishing ledges on Okatibbee Lake and catching largemouth bass when the hybrids move up and start feeding, and the largemouths just leave," Murphy said. "If you're fishing for pleasure, it's fun and a great way for kids to really have a ball and catch a lot of fish. It's the kiss of death for a tournament angler, however."

### SHALLOW ENDS EARLY

Early in the day, Murphy may start out on the shallow end of some of the ledges, as bass will roam these areas during periods of low light.

"Sometimes bass will run shad up on main-lake points or on

top of the ledges where it's shallower, so I'll work those areas first," Murphy said. "Early in the morning, they'll be roaming and feeding and spread out more."

The strategy is pretty straightforward.

"I'm going to stay in the deep water and pull my crankbaits back toward the deep water," he said. "If I happen to find a main-lake point that is really long and runs way out into the deep water, I'll cast parallel to each side of the point before fan-casting across it."

Once the sun gets up in the sky, Murphy concentrates on the deeper ledges. In fact, he actually prefers more sun.

"I prefer a sunny and clear day because it will position fish like you like them to be: tight to the ledges and concentrated," he said. "You'll catch more bass up during the day, but you'll have a smaller zone to catch them in. So you have to be more precise when targeting and casting to small spots."

"When I find them schooled up tight on the ledges, it can really be good, in both numbers and size."

### SCOUTING MATTERS

Murphy's ledge-fishing forays begin even before he hits the water.

"Before I start fishing a body of water I'll look at a contour map and pick out key areas and water depths where I think the bass will be during June," he said. "Then, I can make my strategy and, once I start catching fish and pattern them, I can translate that information to other similar ledges and different areas of the lake and not have as much wasted time looking for similar locations."

After pinpointing likely ledges, Murphy will take time to use his electronics to further focus his fishing effort.

"I'll try to graph a ledge or key area and see what depth the fish are holding," Murphy said. "That works much better in clear lakes than muddy, but it can be good in both clear and semi stained water."

After he determines the depth and location in which most of the bass are, Murphy tries to fish those areas and keep his bait in that zone.

### TACKLE COUNTS

"I want to use a 7- to 8-foot-long rod in medium-heavy to heavy action with a reel full of fresh line," Murphy said. "It takes a long rod with plenty of backbone so you can load that rod up and fling that bait way out."

That distance is essential to success, he said.

"You need to make real long casts so that you can get that lure down on the bottom as soon as possible, and it's important to keep it down there in the strike zone," Murphy said. "I want to stay in contact with structure or bottom as long as I can."

By doing so, Murphy will be more apt to draw reaction strikes from bass that aren't actively feeding.

"Almost any reel is good for cranking, but you just have to pay attention to your retrieval speed when you use high-speed reels," he said. "You've just got to be sure and slow down or you'll reel it too fast and miss out on strikes."

Murphy turns to fluorocarbon when spooling his reels because fluorocarbon line sinks, allowing his crankbaits to dig a little deeper than monofilament. He likes to use 10-pound line



Dan Kibler

Even during the summer, some bass will be available in relatively shallow water during low-light conditions.

in open water deeper than 15 feet. In less than 15 feet, he'll use 12- to 15-pound line, depending on the depth and amount of cover he's fishing.

"It's important to get down to the fish, but you need abrasion-resistant line," he said. "Sometimes, I'll get that crankbait down there in the brush and just pull my rod slowly, working the lure through there like a worm, and just use the reel to take up the slack."

Murphy also doesn't really set the hook when cranking.

"When a fish strikes, I'll just lean back and keep pressure on the bass while reeling in the line real slow," he said. "Anytime I use a bait that has treble hooks, I'll just lean back and keep a steady pull on the rod when they strike and let the treble hooks do their job. If you try to horse the fish he'll tear the hooks out of his mouth or spit the lure out more often than not."

It's a fact that learning to seine the ledges on your favorite lake could mean more success when summer heat settles in.

"If you want to experience some of the finest fishing of the year and catch both numbers of bass and quality, then deep-water ledge-fishing is the technique for you," Murphy said. "Just get the proper gear, equipment and spend a little time on the water, and you just might experience the trip of a lifetime." ■

Big smallmouth bass are often caught on the same offshore ledges as largemouths on lakes that have both species.



Dan Kibler



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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## GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Studies in Mississippi and elsewhere have found flathead catfish move very little, but a telemetry study found annual movement from the Missouri and Mississippi rivers into tributaries for spawning. Chemical analyses of spines or otoliths could help resolve this apparent discrepancy.

# WHERE YOU FROM?

CHEMICAL ANALYSIS CAN BE USED TO TELL SPATIAL HISTORY

**K**nowledge of fish movement can be important — in some cases essential — for their management. Differences in water chemistry can offer conclusive evidence of where young stages of fish were reared.

## HISTORY OF FISH MOVEMENT STUDIES

For decades, fish were marked with some type of visible mark or a tag. Recapture at a later time provided information about fish movement. This approach provided a lot of information that is still useful today, but it also provided some “misinformation” because it does not tell you where a fish was

between the time it was marked and the time it was recaptured. Recaptures may occur years later, and fish are only recaptured where the biologist is actively sampling.

Telemetry — detecting the location of a fish from signals emitted from sonic (sound) or radio (radio-frequency) tags attached to or implanted into a fish — has been used to monitor fish movement and habitat use since the 1970s. Telemetry allows a fish to be tracked continuously and in real time. Sample sizes are usually small, because tags are expensive and implantation and tracking is time consuming; however, technological advances allow detection of tagged fish passing fixed-location receivers.

## NATURAL CHEMICAL SIGNATURES

Telemetry is restricted to larger fish, so the size and weight of the tag does not interfere with movement. Although advances in electronic and battery technology are allowing production of smaller tags, it still is not possible to tag very young fish.

Solution: use a natural tag. The chemi-



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

cal make up of a calcified (bony) structure that is present and grows throughout the life of the fish reflects the chemistry of the water in which they lived at the time that part of the bony structure was deposited. The otoliths — ear bones — are most commonly used, but fin spines also have been used. These structures contain annual growth marks called annuli and are also used to age fish.

Tools are available that can obtain a microscopic sample at a specific location on a spine or otolith. Chemical analysis of the sample reveals the chemical environment at that point in the fish's life. For example, analysis of a sample collected near the center of an otolith would describe the chemical environment of the fish during its first few months of life; a sample collected just beyond the fourth annual mark would reveal the chemical environment during the fish's fourth year of life.

## EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Walleye in the Missouri River. The middle reaches of the Missouri River in North and South Dakota are impounded by a series of hydroelectric dams to create four large mainstem reservoirs. Walleye are the principal sportfish, and walleye migrate up tributary creeks to spawn. Chemical analysis of otoliths collected from adult walleye revealed most young walleye were produced in only a few tributaries. The same chemical analyses also revealed whether walleye moved upstream or downstream within reservoirs and that substantial movement of walleye occurred through the dams to add to the walleye

population in the downstream reservoir. This entrainment increased during a record flood in 2011. This information can be used to identify tributary habitats to conserve, tributary habitats to improve to increase spawning, and to account for changes in walleye abundance among the four reservoirs.

Spotted bass in the Ohio River. Otolith chemistry revealed that most spotted bass spawned in the tributary streams remained in them and most spotted bass spawned in Ohio River embayments remained in the Ohio River. Spotted bass in the Ohio River grew faster and attained larger size than those in tributaries. These results suggest spotted bass in tributaries should be managed differently from those in the Ohio River.

Sturgeon in the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Shovelnose and pallid sturgeon are native to the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Declining numbers have made these species a significant conservation concern. Fin ray chemistry demonstrated that about one-third of sturgeon collected in the middle Mississippi River and all fish collected in the lower Missouri River were spawned in the Missouri River. A substantial portion of sturgeon in both rivers was spawned in an upstream reach of the Missouri River suggesting the importance of this reach for sturgeon recruitment.

## LIMITATIONS

Obviously, movement of fish and the origin of fish can only be detected if different habitats have different chemical signatures. While this probably would not be the case in small, confined waters,

continues on page 64

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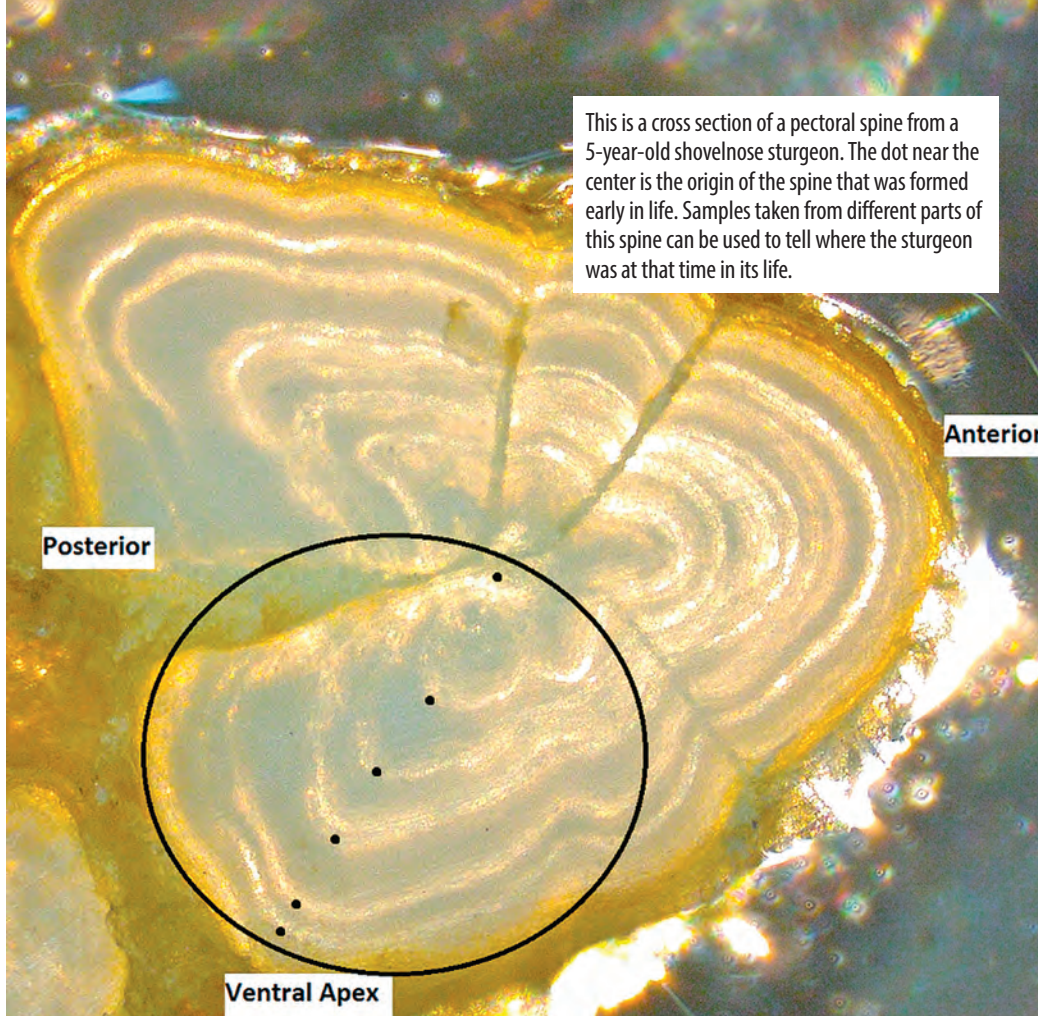
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## GETTIN' FRESH

continued

chemical differences are common in larger systems and where geology and soil types are variable. Anthropogenic chemicals, such as mercury, can also be useful to detect habitats used by fish.

Nevertheless, the ability to assess the environmental history of a fish is a tool that can provide important information used to better manage fisheries, such as resolving the debate about whether flathead catfish remain in relatively small sections of a river or make extensive movements into tributary streams to spawn. ■



This is a cross section of a pectoral spine from a 5-year-old shovelnose sturgeon. The dot near the center is the origin of the spine that was formed early in life. Samples taken from different parts of this spine can be used to tell where the sturgeon was at that time in its life.

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**HUNTING SEASONS**

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
<b>Doves</b>	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
<b>Quail</b>	Nov. 22-March 2	8	
<b>Rabbit</b>	Oct. 1-Feb. 28	8	
<b>Squirrel (fall)</b>	Sept. 30-Feb. 28	8	
<b>Squirrel (spr)</b>	May 15-June 1	4	
<b>Raccoon</b>	July 1-Sept. 30	1 raccoons per party	
<b>Rac/Opp/Bobct</b>	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport) Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	5/day, 8/party No limit	
<b>Rails</b>			
King & Clapper	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	25	75
Sora & Virginia,	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	15	45
<b>Gallinules</b>	Sept. 2-Nov. 10	15	45
<b>Snipe</b>	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28	8	24
<b>Crow</b>	Nov. 4 - Feb. 28	No limit	No limit
<b>Woodcock</b>	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9
<b>Wild Turkey</b>			
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
<b>Duck</b>	Teal only: Sept. 15-30 Nov. 23-25, Nov. 30-Dec. 2 Dec. 5-Jan. 27	6 6
<b>Geese (Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)</b>	Sept. 1-30 Nov. 9-25, Nov. 30-Dec. 2, Dec. 5-Jan. 27	5 Canada 3, Brant 1 Snow/blue/Ross 20 White-fronted 3
<b>Light Geese conservation</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 8, Jan. 28-Feb. 1, Feb. 3-March 31	No limit

**DEER SEASON**

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

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## SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

How do moon phases affect the feeding behavior of speckled trout? Not as much as you'd think.

# DOES THE MOON AFFECT THE TROPHY TROUT BITE?

WHAT DOES THE CATCH DATA TELL US ABOUT THESE FACTORS?

**S**olunar. Despite being a simple keyword search, neither Google nor “Alexa” cannot describe its impact to the inshore angling world. Perhaps, it’s because it deals with the sun, space, planets, gravity and a majority of other “nerdy” things I tuned out of while in my high-school science classes. As it turns out, it’s pretty important. Actually it’s really important when it comes to trophy trout, and here’s why.

## MOON PHASE, TROPHY SPECKS

As the son of a fanatical trout fisherman, one thing we were quick to discard was the Solunar rating. Instead, I learned that productivity directly centered around moon phases and was a great precursor to success on the water. Often, Solunar ratings leading up to a full or a new moon would be abysmal, yet we would still launch the boat and have great success on numbers of fish. Additionally, we would fish days rated as stellar, not associated with an optimal moon phase, and we would struggle to

catch a handful of fish.

So why does this matter? The longer I’ve pursued and studied trophy class trout, the less I’ve seen a correlation with certain moon phases. Don’t get me wrong, it’s important, and moon phase is a direct contributor, but the more I study trophy trout catch data, the broader that scope becomes.

Here’s what I mean. Speckled Truth runs Dirty 30 and Trophy Trout citation programs and captures catch data for trout 27 inches or longer across nine states.

In Texas alone, there have been 71 Trophy Trout citations registered since Oct. 1, 2018, and part of registering is divulging the day a huge speck was caught. In this particular instance, I grouped Dates of Catch (DOC) in one of four quarters. For example, the first quarter was the 1st through the 7th, the second was the 8th through the 15th, the third quarter the 16th through the 22nd and fourth quarter is the 23rd through the End of the Month (EOM).

I divided months in four pieces to give

me a good indication of a higher periods of production. For example, Pre New Moon would accurately be reflected by catches happening during the first quarter. Post New Moon/Pre Full Moon would coincide with second quarter, Pre Full Moon with the third and Post Full/Pre New with the fourth quarter.

As the Trophy Trout Citation data revealed, 19 fish were registered in Quarter 1, 15 in Quarter 2, 13 in Quarter 3 and 24 in Quarter 4. To try and validate my initial notion, I did the same with the Dirty 30 list, which has 47 entries, and honestly, I was shocked; it was almost the exact opposite. Quarter 1 had 11, Quarter 2 had 13, Quarter 3 had 12 and Quarter 4 had 11.

What does that tell me? First, we have a very small but maturing data set. However, what it suggests, which we hope to validate over the course of time, is that big fish aren’t as predictable to moon phase as I initially thought.

Far too often I hear, “The week before the full moon is your best chance at catching a trophy.” While I won’t dispute that

theory based on my own successes, my aperture is far wider now than it once was. There in lies the importance of Solunar.

## SOLUNAR AND FISH-OF-A-LIFETIME

The Solunar theory is actually a pretty old concept. Hypothesized by John Alden Knight back in 1926, the theory centered on “fish and animal movement based on the location of the moon and their bodies.” Starting with more than 30 factors, Mr. Knight kept only three to provide ground truth to his concept: the sun, moon and the tide, the latter for tidal waters. After years of study and refinement, Solunar charts accompany most, if not all, outdoor journals.

The idea is that moon overhead and moon underfoot can attribute to feeding behavior just as much as sunrise and sunset. Of course, these gravitational effects have impact on tide, but not all inshore estuaries have tidally influenced water. For example, the infamous Baffin Bay in Texas has almost no tidal influence. Additionally, East Matagorda Bay as well as the Lower Laguna Madre near Port Mansfield also have very little tidal influence. However, if you examine both lists, 87 of the 118 total entries, 74 percent, came from estuaries with extremely limited water movement.

What does that tell me as an angler? Big fish feeding behavior is more closely related to Solunar times, the major and minor feeding periods, rather than moon phase. In other words, if your lifelong goal is to catch a giant trout, statistically, your odds are better fishing higher-rated days based on the Solunar versus a certain moon phase, but that’s under the presumption you’re fishing high-potential water, a different conversation for another time.

Anyway, let’s hope this information is helpful and at least gets the wheels turning to maybe explore the subtle nuances of targeting these big bites. ■



**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*.

## WHERE'S THAT MOON?

Solunar tables predict fish and wildlife feeding behavior based on the location of the moon. When it's overhead and underfoot, you're more likely to run into a big speckled trout, so keep an eye on those major and minor feeding periods.



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## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

Grilling king mackerel filets that have been soaked in a 7 Up hot sauce marinade makes for a great fish dinner on a warm June evening.



## 7 UP HOT SAUCE KING MACK FILLETS

DON'T BE AFRAID OF OILY FISH;  
THIS RECIPE WILL TURN ON YOUR TASTE BUDS

**W**hile we've had some warm weather already, summer will arrive June 21, and you can expect temperatures to rise. The good thing is that fishing has been heating up, too.

Spanish mackerel, bluefish and king mackerel are three fish typically available along Gulf beaches without requiring a long run on a late spring or summer day. However, folks have contrasting opinions on their quality as table fare. Opinions range from "I love them," to "There's no way I'm eating that."

These are fish with gray meat, and many folks consider them to be oily, with a strong flavor. This recipe is designed to counteract the stronger flavor, and for lack of a better description, it bleaches the meat and turns it much lighter, often to white, with the combination of marinating and cooking. Don't let the hot sauce scare you, either. At this amount, even the most sensitive palate doesn't taste it. However, those who like it's flavor and the spice can easily add more to kick it up a notch — or three.

These fish are good for you, too, so if you make them taste good, you could be doing yourself a favor by eating them more often. They contain Omega 3 fatty acids that

lower triglyceride levels, decrease the potential for cardiac issues, help alleviate arthritis and have other health benefits. And I promise they'll taste better than you are thinking. This has been an introductory recipe for years, and folks who previously didn't care for them, now enjoy them prepared this way.

It seems like there are numerous steps in the preparation, but they flow together, and this is really a simple recipe. Once marinated, the fish can be fried or baked, but it best grilled and eaten on the deck or patio enjoying the cool-down at the end of the day.

To insure top table quality, begin by putting mackerel and blues in the fish box and covering them with ice as soon as they hit the deck. This is the right thing to do with any fish, and especially so with oily fish. When cleaning them, take the time to remove all the red meat, skin and gristle so the fillets are just prime meat. It takes a few more minutes, but it's time well spent. If you take the time to do this once, I am certain it will become one of the ways you prefer mackerel and blues and it helps people who won't eat them to enjoy them. ■

Jerry Dilsaver

# 7 UP HOT SAUCE KING MACK FILLETS

Not everyone appreciates the taste of mackerel and bluefish. They have grayish meat that has more flavor, and some folks consider them to taste strong. Some say it's an acquired taste, and maybe it is, but I like it.

I grew up in a commercial fishing family, and we often ate what wouldn't sell. The flounder, trout and drum were usually sold, and we were left with the fish with a stronger flavor. That wasn't an issue with me, however. These fish actually have some taste and aren't easily overpowered by the marinade, spices or breader used when cooking them.

Besides, even though I had already developed my tastes, I was an adult and had been eating them for years when health researchers determined the Omega 3 fatty acids they contained are beneficial to our health. I guess I was just a couple of steps ahead on the healthy eating front. Enjoying game and fish will do that for you.

This recipe is an easy way to prepare these fish, and it just happens to turn their meat from gray to white while they are cooking. The quality and flavor of fish can be seriously impacted by how they are handled on the boat and how they are cleaned. Getting them covered in ice immediately is important anytime, especially when the temperatures are in the 90s and the sun is bearing down. Don't just throw fish in the fish box or cooler, but be sure they are down in the ice and fully covered.

The next step is cleaning them thoroughly. Mackerel and bluefish have bloodlines running down their sides, and they are removed easily with a sharp knife. I split the fillets at the middle of each side and make sure to remove any bloodlines, red meat

## PREPARATION

Clean the fillets so there is no red meat, any bits of skin, gristle or anything that could influence its taste remaining. Wash the fillets, pat them dry and place them in a Ziploc bag.

Mix one cup of 7 Up and 2 teaspoons of hot sauce. Pour the 7 Up/hot sauce mix over the fillets and work the bag so the mixture penetrates all around the fillets. Work all the air out of the bag and seal it. Marinate in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to 2 hours.

Preheat grill to medium. Spray a vegetable tray with non-stick cooking spray. Remove fillets from bag, allow to drip, and place on a plate or platter. Sprinkle seafood breader on the top side of the fillets. Place fillets on grill, with the breaded side down. Cook 4 to 6 minutes, turn the fillets and cook 4 to 6 more minutes. Remove and serve hot.

This can also be fried or baked in the oven. If frying, liberally coat both sides of the fillets with breader and fry. At 350 degrees, the fillets will cook in just a few minutes. If baking in the oven, cover a cookie sheet with aluminum foil, spray the foil with non-stick cooking spray, and cook at 350, turning once at 4 to 6 minutes, then another 4 to 6 minutes.

Serve this with whatever sauces you prefer with seafood.

or bones that run from the backbone. Remove the rib cages to make it a true fillet. Try not to rupture any of the internals, and rinse the fish often while cleaning.

The citrus juices in 7 Up help break down the meat and neutralize the flavor. It's not as strong as squeezed citrus used in ceviche. Other drinks with citrus juices exist, but the ones I have tried are too sweet.

I don't know exactly how the hot sauce acts with the citrus, but it does. Even though you don't taste any spice or heat, the flavor of the fish isn't the same without it.

The kind of hot sauce is important. This works best with a Texas Pete, Louisiana, or similar hot sauce. For this meal, I used Trader Joe's Chili Pepper Sauce. It doesn't have any salt and is about two-thirds up the hotness scale. You don't notice this in the cooked fish, but you will if you add more at the table.

I don't fry fish very often, but if you want to, roll the fish in the breader rather than just sprinkling some on. Be cautious not to overcook it. If you wait until the breader is browning, you will overcook it. It will cook a little once removed from the hot oil.

One thing to always remember is that all fish dishes are best with fresh fish you caught earlier the same day. Enjoy! ■

## INGREDIENTS

**2 pounds of king mackerel fillets**

**1 cup of 7 Up**

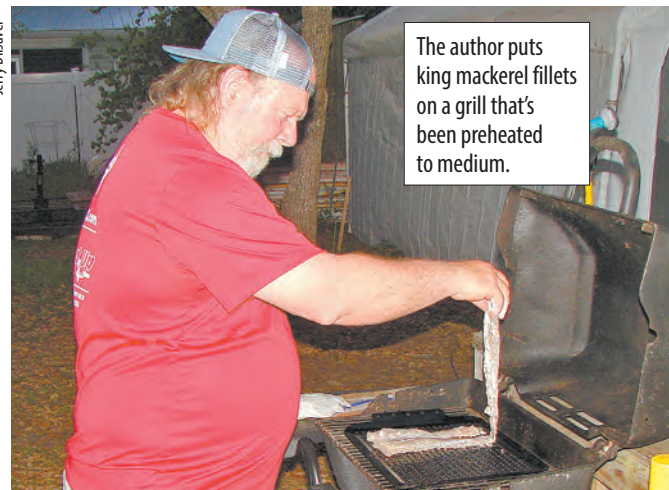
**2 tsp of hot sauce (Trader Joe's Chili Pepper Sauce)**

**1 cup spicy seafood breader**

**Salt and pepper to taste**

**Non-stick cooking spray**

Jerry Dilsaver



Some folks like this with tartar sauce, and I like to mix a little of the hot sauce used for the marinade with some tartar sauce.

This combines well with a variety of vegetables. Potatoes are a favorite side, and they can be baked or fried. I have served it with baked shredded sweet potatoes and green beans. That's a little unusual, but it works.

A fresh green salad or lettuce wedge is a great way to begin. Just add your favorite beverage, and all will be well. ■



**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](mailto:captainjerry@captainjerry.com).

Liming is important to get the pH of soil in a food plot into an acceptable range to produce the best forage for wildlife.

# TIME TO LIME?

## FIND YOUR PH

### USE WORKDAY FOR SOIL TESTS

By Bobby Cleveland

**A** deer camp workday or a root canal? It's too close to call. Seriously, I don't know which I hate more, but I do know this: at least in the dentist's chair, he can give me gas or a shot, followed by a wonderful prescription that makes the whole experience tolerable.

I have found nothing yet that alleviates the misery of spending a summer day, in Mississippi's brutal blend of heat and

humidity, working on food plots, paths and deer stands. All that considered, I question the sanity of my friends who actually enjoy and relish their summer workdays at deer camp.

I wish them well, and I felt it was the least I could do to give them some direction so they can get the best out of their efforts. For that, I turned to deer biologist William McKinley of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

Collect soil from a potential food plot area and get a pH test done as soon as possible.



Exactly what should sportsmen be doing on workdays to get the most bang at their bucks?

“The most-important thing they can do, especially if they haven’t done it in a few years, is pull a pH sample of their soil where they plan to put in food plots,” McKinley said. “That is the first thing I tell everybody, and the time to be doing it is right now, especially if lime is needed to raise the pH.

“What you want is a pH of between 6.0 and 7.0,” he said. “Anything less, and the food plot will not produce the kind of nutrition deer need and will seek out. What happens is that if you have a pH of like 5.5, most of the fertilizer you put out with your planting will be tied up in ionization, which renders it unusable for the plants. The fertilizer will be wasted and you just wasted a lot of money and time.”

McKinley said deer are very picky eaters.

“They’re not like me; I like to eat a lot of stuff that isn’t very nutritious but tastes so good, like chocolate ice cream,” he said. “Deer are just the opposite. They will seek out food sources they know are nutritious. They can taste it, and if your food plots are not producing good nutrition, they will go elsewhere to get it.”

Timing is critical, since winter food-plot plantings will be coming in a few months.

“Lime needs to be incorporated into the ground by disking it in soon after it is applied, and it takes 90 days to activate,” he said. “You need to get the ground tested as soon as possible.

It costs about \$6 for a kit; you just take it to the Soil Conservation office in your district and they will test it.

“If you know the pH is good because of liming in a recent year, then summer food plots can be very beneficial.” ■

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# DROP-SHOT WHITES

## WHITE BASS TOO DEEP? NOT FOR THIS OLD RIG

By Chris Ginn

**W**hite bass don't require specialized techniques to catch them when they are actively feeding. However, they can become a little tougher to catch when they retreat back to deeper water.

That's why guide Terry Bates of Greenville started experimenting with the drop-shot technique on Lake Ferguson a few years ago: He was looking for something that might entice the whites when they weren't as active, and he thought this popular large-mouth bass-fishing technique might fit the bill.

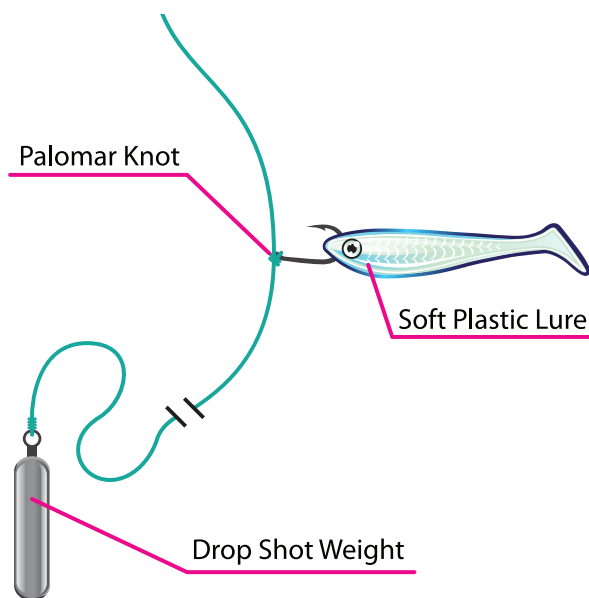
"I drop shot a 2-inch Gulp! minnow on it and can absolutely catch the stew out of them on it," Bates said. "Once I know I'm in the general area, I just throw it out in front of the boat, maybe 20 feet, and let it sink to the bottom.

"With this rig, my weight is on bottom, while that minnow swims above it about 2 feet off the bottom."

When his rig hits bottom, Bates just kind of crawls it along by reeling it really slowly while trying to keep his weight on the bottom. He admits he doesn't normally feel the bite this way; his bait just gets heavy all of a sudden.

"It's easy to tell when a fish is on it after you catch a few and get the hang of it," Bates said. "But sometimes there's no doubt they've got it because they'll grab it and run off with it.

"It's definitely more technique-oriented than a spoon or a Little George, because they basically hook themselves on those two baits." ■



A drop-shot rig and soft-plastic bait is a great way to knock out white bass when they're on the bottom in deep water.

# GRASS MEANS BASS

UNDERSTAND HOW, WHY  
AQUATIC VEGETATION  
WORKS

By David A. Brown



Aquatic vegetation in a lake, pond or river is like a magnet for largemouth bass, which rely on grass for a number of its features.

**G**rass equals bass. Now that's an angling axiom you can take to the bank.

However, fishing grass does not necessarily ensure catching bass. Plain and simple: fish utilize grassy cover for purely selfish reasons. However, anglers who show these fish the right looks can find a gold mine of opportunity hiding beneath the salad.

First, a quick look at why bass utilize grass environments:

## 1. SHADE

Lacking eyelids, bass instinctively seek shelter from sunlight, and the shadowy realm of aquatic grasses fits the bill nicely. The fish will adjust their positioning based on the day's conditions, so look for them to tuck deeper into the cover when skies are mostly to fully sunny. Cloudy and overcast days or the low light

of dawn and dusk often finds the fish venturing out from the grass to roam the edges in search of food.

## 2. SHELTER

Gators, otters, herons, eagles and ospreys have a harder time spotting and catching bass when their green-and-black markings keep them well hidden amid the grass.

## 3. AMBUSH

On the other side of the predator-prey equation, bass know that remaining hidden greatly improves their chances of nabbing a careless bluegill, shad or crawfish.

## 4. OXYGEN

Plants take in carbon dioxide and exude oxygen. Hanging out in the grass is like sitting under the AC vent.

## 5. WATER CLARITY

Plants inherently filter water by nature of their stalk and root density. This is especially relevant on tidal waters, as outgoing water is always cleanest around grass edges. Also, after heavy rains, look for the water to clear up the quickest in areas dense with hydrilla and other grasses.

Armed with the knowledge of why bass inhabit these environments, gear up with a strategic arsenal of baits and you'll put yourself in position to leverage the bounty of aquatic vegetation. ■

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POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
					MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
Sat 1				72	4:58 am	<b>10:15 am - 1:15 pm</b>	6:40 pm	<b>10:40 pm - 1:40 am</b>		
Sun 2				87	5:35 am	<b>11:00 am - 2:12 pm</b>	7:44 pm	<b>11:25 pm - Midnight</b>		
Mon 3				94	6:18 am	<b>11:50 am - 3:12 pm</b>	8:48 pm	<b>Midnight - 2:37 am</b>		NEW
Tue 4				86	7:07 am	<b>12:45 pm - 4:11 pm</b>	9:51 pm	<b>12:15 am - 3:37 am</b>		
Wed 5				77	8:04 am	<b>1:43 pm - 5:13 pm</b>	10:51 pm	<b>1:10 am - 4:36 am</b>		HIGH
Thu 6				68	9:06 am	<b>2:44 pm - 6:10 pm</b>	11:44 pm	<b>2:08 am - 5:38 am</b>		Perigee
Fri 7				62	10:13 am	<b>3:47 pm - 7:03 pm</b>		<b>3:09 am - 6:35 am</b>		
Sat 8				59	11:21 am	<b>4:50 pm - 7:52 pm</b>	12:31 am	<b>4:12 am - 7:28 am</b>		
Sun 9				60	12:29 pm	<b>5:51 pm - 8:37 pm</b>	1:13 am	<b>5:15 am - 8:17 am</b>		
Mon 10				68	1:36 pm	<b>6:50 pm - 9:20 pm</b>	1:51 am	<b>6:16 am - 9:02 am</b>		HALF
Tue 11				54	2:42 pm	<b>7:50 pm - 9:58 pm</b>	2:25 am	<b>7:15 am - 9:45 am</b>		
Wed 12				45	3:47 pm	<b>8:48 pm - 10:40 pm</b>	2:59 am	<b>8:15 am - 10:23 am</b>		
Thu 13				42	4:52 pm	<b>9:45 pm - 11:21 pm</b>	3:33 am	<b>9:13 am - 11:05 am</b>		
Fri 14				48	5:56 pm	<b>10:45 pm - 12:03 am</b>	4:08 am	<b>10:10 am - 11:46 am</b>		
Sat 15				57	6:59 pm	<b>11:41 pm - Midnight</b>	4:46 am	<b>11:10 am - 12:28 pm</b>		
Sun 16				65	8:00 pm	<b>Midnight - 12:49 am</b>	5:28 am	<b>12:06 pm - 1:14 pm</b>		
Mon 17				69	8:57 pm	<b>12:37 am - 1:39 am</b>	6:14 am	<b>1:02 pm - 2:04 pm</b>		FULL
Tue 18				57	9:50 pm	<b>1:32 am - 2:30 am</b>	7:04 am	<b>1:57 pm - 2:55 pm</b>		
Wed 19				46	10:36 pm	<b>2:24 am - 3:22 am</b>	7:57 am	<b>2:49 pm - 3:47 pm</b>		LOW
Thu 20				36	11:18 pm	<b>3:12 am - 4:14 am</b>	8:53 am	<b>3:37 pm - 4:39 pm</b>		
Fri 21				32	11:54 pm	<b>3:55 am - 5:07 am</b>	9:49 am	<b>4:20 pm - 5:32 pm</b>		Summer
Sat 22				35		<b>4:36 am - 5:58 am</b>	10:44 am	<b>5:01 pm - 6:23 pm</b>		
Sun 23				37	12:27 am	<b>5:15 am - 6:47 am</b>	11:40 am	<b>5:40 pm - 7:12 pm</b>		Apogee
Mon 24				46	12:57 am	<b>5:49 am - 7:37 am</b>	12:35 pm	<b>6:14 pm - 8:02 pm</b>		
Tue 25				58	1:26 am	<b>6:24 am - 8:26 am</b>	1:30 pm	<b>6:49 pm - 8:51 pm</b>		HALF
Wed 26				51	1:54 am	<b>6:58 am - 9:16 am</b>	2:26 pm	<b>7:23 pm - 9:41 pm</b>		
Thu 27				50	2:24 am	<b>7:32 am - 10:08 am</b>	3:24 pm	<b>7:57 pm - 10:33 pm</b>		
Fri 28				53	2:55 am	<b>8:10 am - 11:02 am</b>	4:24 pm	<b>8:35 pm - 11:27 pm</b>		
Sat 29				67	3:30 am	<b>8:51 am - 11:57 am</b>	5:26 pm	<b>9:16 pm - 12:22 am</b>		
Sun 30				79	4:09 am	<b>9:39 am - 12:55 pm</b>	6:30 pm	<b>10:04 pm - 1:20 am</b>		

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