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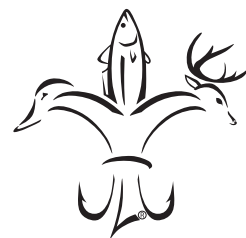
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Red snapper season is quickly approaching for Mississippi anglers, one of several excellent saltwater fisheries to be sampled this month. Photo by Ann Taylor.



Mississippi SPORTSMAN

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

Monday thru Friday, 6 am to 11 pm
Saturday & Sunday, 8 am - 5 pm CST

MISSISSIPPI SPORTSMAN is published monthly by Louisiana Publishing, Inc., Allen J. Lottinger, President, 14236 Highway 90, P.O. Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039. Periodicals postage paid at Boutte, La., and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Mississippi Sportsman, P.O. Box 433294, Palm Coast, FL 32143. All rights reserved. Reproduction of contents is strictly prohibited without permission of Mississippi Sportsman. **EDITORIAL:** Mississippi Sportsman uses free-lance writers throughout the state. Call (985) 758-7217 for information on submitting articles and photos. Mississippi Sportsman is not responsible for the loss of queries, manuscripts or other materials.

P.O. Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039-1199
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Volume 21 | No 7

GO GIANT OR GO HOME



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Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland

Cal Cossich of Ocean Springs with a 28½-inch speckled trout weighing more than 8 pounds that he caught on a Paul Brown artificial lure.

MAKE TIME TO WORK AND PLAY



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.

FISHING CAN BE HOT AS THE WEATHER; TIME TO GET DEER CAMPS READY

Hard to believe that half of 2019 is in the rear-view mirror, but that is good news for hundreds of thousands of Mississippi sportsmen whose eyes are focused on the calendar and hunting season.

Yes, opening days are still two months away but close enough that hunters can sense them and, gulp, actually start working hard toward them.

It's part of the game, at least for many Mississippians. The work done in the summer ensures a better hunting season later on.

In the meantime, between the deer-camp chores, there are other forms of outdoor pursuit over the summer that offer great enjoyment. There's even the oldest fishing contest in the state — the 72nd annual Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo July 4-7 — to celebrate a coastal tradition.

The July edition *Mississippi Sportsman* and its writers have that covered.

Mike Giles discusses the many opportunities available for fly fishermen in the summer, and he provides tips to get the most out of the long casts.

Phillip Gentry focuses his attention on south Mississippi in a discussion of three great summer bass fishing hot spots.

David Brown covers crappie fishing, and how spider-rigging is a good bet for find summer slabs.

We've also got a piece about five great summer saltwater targets to enjoy on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, with tips from experts on how to make them work by putting fish in the box and smiles on faces.



Spider-rigging with an array of tiny jigs is a proven method for catching summer crappie.

Dan Kibler

Regular columnists also contribute to the fun. Hal Schramm has a very timely piece about caring for bass caught during the summer to increase their survival rates after release. Paul Elias writes about how to catch more bass on Pickwick Lake, and archery specialist Sammy Romano's column returns with a look at bowstrings.

Find a cool spot under a fan or air conditioner vent, kick back and enjoy this edition of *Mississippi Sportsman*. Stay cool. ■

MISSISSIPPI DEEP SEA FISHING RODEO TURNS 72

One of Mississippi's longest-running outdoor traditions, the Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo in Gulfport, will be held for the 72nd consecutive year July 4-7 at the Gulfport Small Craft Harbor.

The Rodeo will feature plenty of fireworks, fishing and fun.

"It may not be the biggest tournament down here, with the biggest payout, but clearly it remains the biggest celebration of the wonderful tradition of Mississippi Gulf Coast fishing," said Riley Edwards of Gulfport, a longtime fan of the event. "It's the one event where anyone can enter for free, fish from land or boat, in salt or freshwater, perhaps win a prize but always have fun seeing all the fish brought in and displayed at the bins.

"That's why I've been coming since I was just a kid in the 70s. My dad brought me and my brothers and sisters every year. He wasn't a sport fisherman; he was a shrimper, but he wanted us to know what fishing was all about and what the fish we were always eating looked like before they were cooked."

The event has always been scheduled on and around Independence Day. This year, the calendar is perfect for a July 4 opening day, meaning the Rodeo's large fireworks display will help open the event instead of close it.

Daily and overall competition will be held in 20 divisions: barracuda, black drum, blackfish (triple-tail), bonito, flounder, gar, gray (mangrove) snapper, grouper, jack crevalle, king mackerel, cobia, redfish, shark, Spanish mackerel, speckled trout, stingray, dolphin, red snapper, tuna and wahoo.

The five freshwater divisions are bream, catfish, crappie, bass and striped bass. All freshwater fish must be caught in accordance with Mississippi state law.

In addition to the regular Rodeo competition, special rewards are offered for state records in southern stingray and tiger shark. The anglers catching the largest record-breaking ray or shark will earn \$25,000 bonus. Anglers must follow special guidelines and register in advance to be eligible for the bonus.

A kid's rodeo will be held Friday, July 5, for children ages 4 to 12. No preregistration is required, and it is open to both boys and girls, with 55 winners in 11 divisions. The saltwater divisions include speckled trout, redfish, white trout, croaker, ground



Tiger shark is a special category in the Deep Sea Rodeo. A state-record will be worth \$25,000.

mullet, flounder, sheephead and drum. The freshwater divisions are bass, bream and catfish.

The event also includes live music, rides, games and food. The big attraction is always the fresh fish in the huge ice bins where entries are on display for all to see. Scales open daily at noon, and close at 6 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and at 4 p.m. on Sunday's final day.

For more information, visit mississippideepseafishingrodeo.com. ■

HUNT CLUB WORK IS TO BE DONE

Hunters who do the work on hunt-club lands during the summer are a leg up on great hunting success in the fall and winter.

James Gentry of Meridian has a philosophy about the deer-hunter psyche. “You can tell the true hunters from the average ones by what they do in July and August,” Gentry said. “The folks who really put the time in the summer, working for the winter, those are the hard-core hunters. The ones that sweat clearing and preparing food plots, cutting lanes, moving old stands or building new stands, and enjoy doing it in the miserable conditions ... that’s who I’m talking about.”

Count Gentry among them. He manages around 6,000 acres in three different hunting camps, trading his hard labor for a discounted membership price in all three clubs. With a degree in forest management, he’s perfect for the role. Gentry works one area each weekend beginning in July, rotating them over the next few months to have them ready for the weekend warriors who’d rather pay him than do the work themselves. “There’s a few members in each that will come out and help,



but mostly the rest just pay the no-show fees, and that’s okay, too,” he said. “The fee money goes right back into the ground, the stands and the other preparations. I guess you could say we need those guys, too. Without them, the membership fees would be higher for all of us.”

With two sons rapidly growing into the footsteps of their father’s hunting boots, Gentry has several good reasons to put in the hard work. Plus, he loves being in the woods.

“My twin sons are 8 years old and are ready to stop being observers and start being shooters,” he said. “Affording memberships in enough quality clubs where the four of us, my wife included, can have a chance to harvest quality bucks, isn’t easy for a working man.

“The work I put in heading up the management of these clubs was the way I came up with to help make those ends meet. My dad was a forester, too, so I learned early the way of the woods from him. Now, I’m hoping to pass that respect for the habitat and nature on to my boys.”

In July, Gentry does more planning than actual physical labor, though there’s plenty of the latter, too.

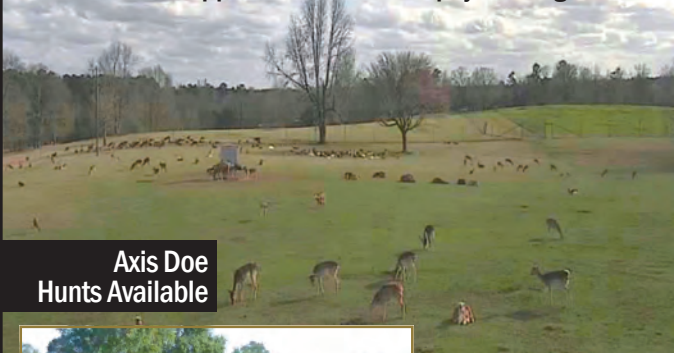
“For example, I study the records from the year before as to what areas were successful at each club and why, and, if I can decipher an answer, I try to copy what worked in other areas, or at least enhance that condition in the successful areas to make them even better,” he said. “Maybe it’s what we planted. Maybe it’s the amount of cover. Maybe it was stand-site selection. Maybe it was how traffic was routed.

“I can do that at night. During the day, I’m out bush-hogging the plots and the lanes and inspecting stands. But it’s not all work and no play. There’s a side benefit at two of my three clubs — hogs.”

Gentry calls pig patrol the fun part of the summer routine. “While I’m working or cruising the properties, I look for hog sign,” he said. “When I find a hot area, I figure out how to thin the herd. This year, I’m hoping my boys each get a chance to put a pig or two down. If we get some piggies — or maybe a good sow or two — we’ll eat well and save one or two for the big cookout on the opening day of the season.” ■

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Manning Moody IV, 13, of Wiggins with a doe he killed last season. It was taken in Leakesville.



MISSISSIPPI 2019-2020 DEER SEASONS

DELTA, NORTHEAST, EAST CENTRAL, SOUTHWEST ZONES

Archery: Oct. 1-Nov. 22 (archery equipment allowed during any open firearm season); either sex on private land open public land and Holly Springs National Forest.

Youth: Nov. 9-Nov. 22, either sex on private lands and authorized state and federal lands.

Early primitive weapon: Nov. 11-Nov. 22; antlerless deer only, private lands only.

Gun, with dogs: Nov. 23-Dec. 1; either sex on private land and Holly Springs National Forest, legal bucks only on open public land.

Primitive weapon: Dec. 2-Dec. 15 (weapon of choice allowed on private lands only); either sex on private land, open public land and Holly Springs National Forest; legal bucks only on open public land.

Gun, no dogs (still season): Dec. 16-Dec. 23; either sex on private land, open public land and Holly Springs National Forest, legal bucks only on open public land.

Gun, with dogs: Dec. 24-Jan. 22; either sex on private land, open public land and Holly Springs National Forest, legal bucks only on open public land.

Archery/primitive weapon: Jan. 23-Jan. 31 (weapon of choice allowed on private land); either sex on private land, open public land and Holly Springs National Forest, legal bucks only on open public land.

SOUTHEAST ZONE

Archery: Oct. 15-Nov. 22 (archery equipment allowed during any open firearm season); either sex on private and open public land.

Youth: Nov. 9-Nov. 22; either sex on private lands; and authorized state and federal lands.

Gun, with dogs: Nov. 23-Dec. 1; either sex on private land, legal bucks only on open public land.

Primitive weapon: Dec. 2-Dec. 15 (weapon of choice allowed on private lands only); either sex on private land and open public land.

Gun, no dogs (still season): Dec. 16-Dec. 23; either sex on private land, legal bucks only on open public land.

Gun, with dogs: Dec. 24-Jan. 22; either sex on private land, legal bucks only on open public land.

Archery/primitive weapon: Jan. 23-Jan. 31 (weapon of choice allowed on private land); either sex on private land, legal bucks only on open public land.

Archery/primitive weapon: Feb. 1-Feb. 15 (weapon of choice allowed on private land); legal bucks only.

Notes: Youth aged 15 and under can use weapon of choice during any open gun season on deer for the specific area being hunted, and all three of their buck deer allowed during the season may be of any antler size.

Buck limit: One per day and three per season. Of the three in the seasonal limit, one may be of any antler length on private land and Holly Springs National Forest.

Antlerless deer limit private land: In all zones but the Southeast, the seasonal limit is five and there is no daily limit. In the Southeast Zone, the limit is one per day and two per season.

Antlerless deer National Forest Service lands: The limit is one per day, five per season in all zones except the Southeast Zone, where the limit is one per day and two per season.

Legal buck descriptions: In the Delta Zone, to be legal, a buck must have either an inside spread of 12 inches OR a main beam length of at least 15 inches. In all other zones, a buck must have either an inside spread of 10 inches OR a main beam length of at least 13 inches. ■

JULY IS PEAK OF FAWN DROP

The peak of the fawn drop in Mississippi arrives this month — when most deer are born and when they are the cutest they're ever going to be.

Nearly irresistible, they are.

But wildlife officials say it is very important that humans resist the urge to interact with fawns. It is also against the law to do so. "If someone finds a fawn in the woods, they should not touch it," said Amy Blaylock, the wildlife bureau director for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "I know it can be difficult, but people should keep their distance from the fawn. The fawn has a much better chance at survival if it is left alone."

Blaylock said that does bred in December will begin dropping fawns in late June, but because does in most areas of Mississippi are bred in late December or early January, the peak of the fawn drop is usually the first two weeks in July. Because some does, particularly in southeast Mississippi, aren't bred until late January and into February, the fawn drop can continue into August and even September.



The majority of whitetail fawns in Mississippi will be born in early July, thanks to late December and early January breeding.

few weeks the fawn will be up on its feet and able to follow its mother. It will be fast enough to outrun most predators.

Deer aren't the only wildlife that birth in the summer months. Humans, according to Blaylock, also mistakenly handle baby birds and squirrel. In some cases, they may be blown out of nests during a summer storm but the adults will find them and continue to care for them.

Mississippi law prohibits the capture, possession, or caging of any wild animal, including white-tailed deer fawns, squirrels, and birds. Leave them alone. ■

NO NEW CWD CASES REPORTED

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks has sampled nearly 8,000 deer for chronic wasting disease since Oct. 1 and has confirmed 19 cases of the deadly disease.

No new cases of CWD have been confirmed since April, but because of the confirmations found since January 2018, changes have been made in hunting limits and regulations impacting hunters not only in the containment areas but also statewide.

As reported in the June issue of *Mississippi Sportsman*, antlerless limits have been increased to a season limit of five in all but the Southeast Zone. The Southeast Zone has not had a confirmed case of CWD; however, deer numbers there are lower than the statewide average and antlerless limits there were unchanged.

One change that did affect all hunting zones involves buck limits. The statewide limit remains three; however, one of those three can now be a buck with any size antlers.

"The doe takes great care to purposefully hide the fawn during its first few weeks of life," Blaylock said. "As a natural defense, the fawn lays still in a fashion that makes people think it is sick or injured."

In addition, she said, the fawn is born nearly completely void of scent, which is why the doe will often bed the fawn down in heavy cover and leave the immediate area to remove her natural scent. It is at this time that when encountered by humans, many people mistake the lack of adult presence as a sign the fawn has been abandoned.

Blaylock said that is not the case; instead the doe will return and check on her fawn and feed it frequently.

"Leave the fawn alone," Blaylock said, adding that within a

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BOATERS URGED TO 'CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY'

Bass pro Pete Ponds of Gluckstadt knows that fishermen are facing a big change in the future. "Those days when we used to load up the boat and go fishing, then put it back on the trailer and go home are over," Ponds said, discussing the spread of invasive grass species in waters across the country. "Obviously, it's not just fishermen, but all boaters, but there is understandably an emphasis on fishermen, particularly bass fishermen, since we are the ones that take our boats into the waters where grasses exist."

The spread of invasive species has moved to the forefront on fishing issues in Mississippi now that one of the worst — giant salvinia — has been found in several of the state's most popular fishing holes, including Barnett Reservoir, where officials closed one whole area of the lake — the very popular Pelahatchie Bay — after an outbreak occurred in the summer of 2018.

Ponds said the recommended "Clean. Drain. Dry" method of clearing boats of unwanted vegetation is nothing new on the national boating scene.

"A lot of lakes that pro bass circuits visit in the Great Lakes region and places like upstate New York, the awareness campaign has

been strong for years," he said. "Many make it mandatory for boaters to inspect their boats prior to leaving the lake. At a lot of our tournaments, they have teams of volunteers who inspect each boat, inside and out, as they leave the water."

At Barnett, officials there began pushing "Clean. Drain. Dry" as soon as they began systematically reopening parts of Pelahatchie Bay. Mandatory cleanings were required during the first few weeks to help instill the correct thought process in boaters.

"We are hopeful that the public will not only buy into the program but understand why this is becoming important," said John Sigman, general manager of Barnett Reservoir. "Giant salvinia and some of the other invasive vegetation threatens the future of our waters. We've seen the damage they can cause at lakes in Texas and Louisiana. We do not want — nobody wants that to happen here or anywhere."

Barnett's battle became quite expensive. Through six months, the agency has spent more than its annual vegetation budget just on the Pelahatchie Bay alone.

"If it were to spread to the rest of the lake, I do not know how we'd be able to fight it," Sigman said. "That's why we urge boaters

to practice 'Clean. Drain. Dry.' Clean your boat and trailer. Drain all your holding tanks and bilges. Dry all surfaces, and do all that before you leave the ramp."

Barnett Reservoir has installed three cleaning stations around the lake to assist in the high-traffic areas. Organizations that plan to hold fishing tournaments on Barnett Reservoir in 2020 must submit and have approved a boat inspection plan before being issued a permit. That created a lot of apprehension with tournament fishermen, which Ponds tried to quell.

"It's not that difficult, really and it doesn't take that long to protect a lake or lakes from which we derive so much pleasure and recreation," he said. "It's not just something we need to do but should want to do." ■

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THE REZ GETS 175K FLORIDA BASS

Working with volunteer bass and crappie fishermen, fisheries officials with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks have stocked more than 175,000 Florida-strain bass fingerlings in 33,000-acre Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson.

Fish raised at the MDWFP's nearby Turcotte Hatchery were delivered to the Goshen Springs Boat Launch, where they were loaded into coolers in fishermen's boats. They were then taken and released into preferred bass habitat on the upper end of the reservoir where fishing pressure is greatest.

"Instead of our hatchery trucks just pouring them at different locations around the lake, these fish have a lot better chance of survival because fishermen are taking them and placing them right into thick cover," said biologist Ryan Jones. "I can't say what the survival rate is, but it's better than it would be just releasing them in the water in places where we can reach the bank by truck. Far better than that."



A fisherman loads fingerlings of Florida-strain largemouth bass into a cooler for release in Ross Barnett Reservoir.

Fishermen weren't told where to put the fish.

"That's a perk for some," said Gene Bishop, who delivered more than five loads himself. "We can put them where we like to fish, but I took them to as many areas as I could in the safe amount of time to have them in the cooler without aeration. I made sure to pour them right into the thick cover. It's kind of fun watching their reaction when they hit the water. It's the first time any of them have seen any kind of cover, but as soon as they get oriented, they race to get in the thick of it. I guess it's instinct."

The idea of the Florida bass stocking, Jones said, is to add the sub-species' fast-growing characteristic to the gene pool. ■



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Amanda Gray of Ocean Springs was fishing with her dad, Roger Gray, when she caught and released this big black drum off the east end of Ship Island on May 26. She used a large piece of cut mullet for bait, in about 10 feet of water, a quarter-mile off the tip of the island.



Wheelchair-bound Mark Brown killed this turkey on April 15 in Lowndes County with Aubrey Grace Caldwell, Steve Thomas and Bryan Montgomery. The gobbler had a 10-inch beard, 1-inch spurs and weighed 20.8 pounds.



Louis Burroughs hooked some flatheads back in March on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway in Aberdeen.



Bradley Fitts of Saucier with his first turkey, taken on public land in Smith County.



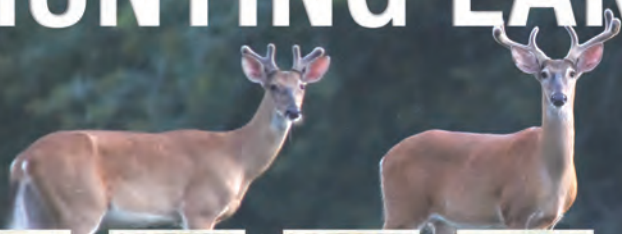
Landry Barton, 5, of Oxford with a catfish from Sardis Lake.

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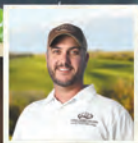
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Tripletails are a great summer target around crab-pot buoys and marker buoys in Mississippi Sound.

5 HOT SPOTS FOR JULY FISHING

Too hot to fish? Oh, we beg to differ, except in cases when the fish aren't biting or when you forget the water and the sunscreen.

When the fish are biting, you aren't turning bright red, and there's a cool drink at hand, anglers don't feel the heat. These five hot spots usually provide great action in July so give them a try.

BARNETT RESERVOIR: STRIPED BASS/CRAPPIE

Since trolling with crankbaits is a popular method for catching both striped bass and crappie relating to contour changes, this is a great way to beat the heat and catch fish. Add a Bimini top like those common on pontoon boats, and it's hard to beat what will likely be a mixed bag of fish in the cooler.

Bandit 200 and 300 series crankbaits will work, using the 300s on the deep side of the drops and the 200s on the break line. Once a school of stripers is found, it's easy to mark it with a buoy and stop and work it over with crankbaits. When fish 7 pounds and up are biting on every cast, you will forget the heat. Target a little deeper on similar ledges and you'll likely find crappie.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER: JUGGING FOR CATFISH

When — and if — the river falls to its normal summer level, that's when the legion of juggers hit the river in search of catfish. Two men can legally fish 50 jugs between them, and in the Mississippi River they will stay busy chasing down hooked fish.

The pattern of choice is setting up drifts that will carry the array of jugs across the shallow flats with cover on the inside bends of the river. Fish can range from the perfect eating catfish that are between 1 and 2 pounds, all the way up to 100 pounds. No bait beats cut skipjack shad, which can be caught in running water in big numbers on ultralight spinning gear and small jigs.

MISSISSIPPI SOUND: TRIPLETAIL

Catching tripletails in the Gulf of Mexico is just plain ol' cool. Since it's done on the fly, at the fastest speed that allows for spotting these fish around floating debris or markers, there's always a cooling breeze. After spotting one, captains usually pull a few hundred yards away before idling back toward the fish. Tripletails



migrate into the shallows in the summer and like to use any surface cover, like crab-pot buoys, to hide and ambush shrimp and other forage fish. Pitching a live shrimp fished about a foot under a popping cork without a weight usually gets a strike.

PICKWICK LAKE: BLACK BASS

The hotter the weather, the better the fishing on this TVA lake, as water pulled through the dam to produce electricity for air conditioning sets up a current that sets up bass to feed.

All three types of black bass native to the Tennessee River system can be caught in big numbers on the Mississippi waters of Pickwick Lake. Largemouth bass will relate to any vegetation you can find, and the hydrilla and other grasses vary in their concentrations year to year. Smallmouth bass begin to stack up on the deep ends of gravel shoals and, will join largemouths and spotted bass on shallow humps — 15 feet surrounded by 25 feet or more — in the open lake near the river channel. Spotted bass also school under boat docks in bigger marinas with deep water.

SARDIS, GRENADA: CRAPPIE

The summer pattern will be in place by July 4, which means all the crappie in these two large, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood-control reservoirs in north Mississippi will move out on the deep ends of the main-lake points where they are in perfect position for trolling with crankbaits. A 3-pounder is possible, especially at Grenada. ■



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Five great summer trips to the Gulf

By Bobby Cleveland

Get beyond specks, reds, and open up a new world of fish that can be tasty, hard-fighting, or both.

Summer on Mississippi's Gulf Coast offers a lot of action for fishermen, a variety that far exceeds the listings on most seafood restaurants' menus.

That statement covers just the fish you'd consider edible: speckled trout and reds, snapper and grouper, cobia and triggerfish, mackerel and tripletail.

Plus, there are my favorites: mullet and flounder.

There's so much more, if you're open to catch-and-release.

Boy, there's so much more.

"Until you have spent a day parked behind a moored, working shrimp boats, picking through the night's catch, you don't know just how much fun you can have fishing," said Michael Ray of Biloxi. "You might catch one or two fish you'd want to eat, but you'll catch so many other fish in between that you won't have time to fret about it.

"Or even care."

Sounds like your kind of action? Does to me, and that makes it a perfect way to start our look at five fishing trips the summer offers. Let's get going.

continues >>>



TAKE LOTS OF LINE

Ray starts his search for his shrimp boats at the break of day, and his boat is full of bass-type gear, cut bait and spools, spools and spools of line.

"Thousands of yards," he said. "You'll need it."

He often launches in the dark, before 5 a.m., to be across Mississippi Sound, to the barrier islands, well before daylight.

"Shrimpers most often will stop, anchor and start picking through their catch at daylight," Ray said. "They trawl all night while it's cool and then sort the catch as soon as the sun is up before it gets hot. They're not stupid. When the heat arrives, they want to be inside the air-conditioned cabins sleeping so they can be ready to run nets again at night."

The by-catch of shrimping — stuff tossed over by the shrimpers — starts a chain-reaction feeding frenzy that attracts sportfish,

especially bonito, aka false albacore, and jack crevalle.

"Oddly enough, that's the two species we target," Ray said. "We release every one of them, unless we need one or two for cutting bait — maybe to take home and prepare for our next trip. Bonito average between 8 and 14 pounds but can get to 20 or 25, and (they) are like tiny rockets. Jack crevalle are bigger, upwards to 35 and 40 pounds. They're just brutes and are the reason why you need a lot of line. A big one will spool you on his first run and never look back."

"I had an old friend who's no longer with us, who had his boat rigged just for this type of fishing. He was an old-timer who introduced me to this kind of fishing. At the front of his cockpit, right behind his small cuddy cabin, he had this homemade rack that worked like a vertical paper-towel dispenser. It held two 3,000-yard bulk spools of 12- or 14-pound



Dan Kibler

mono, and when he'd get spooled, he was ready again in a couple of minutes. He taught me to use a different color backing line, of heavier poundage, and to tie a very weak knot about 30 yards off the spool. When he saw the backing start going out the rod, he'd tighten up and force a break at the weak knot. That way, he would be able to tie quickly to the backing, reel on a new spool of line and be back casting in two minutes."

That was decades ago, long before the advent of modern braided line available in lighter classes.

"A lot of people switched to braid, but it's tough on light equipment when you have a 30- or 40-pound fish," Ray said. "We still use mono and take the bulk spools, and we've switched from baitcasting reels to high-volume spinning reels.

continues >>>

LEFT: Cobia can be found hanging out below channel markers and cast to by anglers. ABOVE: King mackerel will hit lures and spoons trolled around oil rigs and deeper wrecks.



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The lighter the tackle you can use, the more fun you will have.”

In recent years, a few guides have started offering shrimp-boat trips, including some catering to fly-fishing. A feeding frenzy on the surface creates a perfect fly-fishing opportunity.

Ray said on a normal weekday morning, he can find three to five working shrimp boats anchored either inside the barrier islands or on the south side.

“You move around until you find the right one holding the most fish and hit it until the action slows,” he said. “Then, you move to the next one. Some of the shrimpers don’t like you being close, but we offer them some cold sodas or beer or maybe a sandwich, and that generally works. Some of them will also trade you for chum for bait, and if you want, you can buy shrimp from them, which helps offset the fact that 90 to 95 percent of what you catch you can’t eat.”

Besides jacks, bonitos and sharks, you might hook a stray red, a cobia (if deep water, like a channel, is nearby) or a tripletail, which are very rare.

“That’s just a bonus to the fun you’ll have with the trash fish,” Ray said. “And trust me, you’ll be having a ball.”

FLOUNDER: FLAT-OUT TASTY

Of course, there’s a lot to be said for edible fish, too, and for a lot of folks, that means flounder.

“Best there is,” said Mollie Jenkins, 80, of Gulfport, who goes to the Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo over every July 4 holiday to see all the fish in the viewing bins. “You can keep the tuna, the trout and the reds, but I’d fight you over a flounder. I’d probably fight you over red snapper, too, but I don’t like the water enough to go out that far.”

Jenkins does all her fishing from piers and bridges and off the beaches from her nephew’s small fishing boat. She catches a lot of delectable species, including a few flatfish, puppy (black) drum, reds and ground mullet. But when the moon goes full, she gets wet.

“We like to go gigging for flounder,” Jenkins said. “The full moons in the summer, July through September, that’s when we go two or three nights in a row from about 10 (p.m.) until 2 (a.m.).”

Robert Earl McDaniel, who runs the *Whip-a-Snapa* offshore charterboat, is another flounder fanatic. He makes a living chasing snapper and cobia, but he keeps peace at home catching flounder.

“Wife’s favorite, no doubt,” he said. “If she hears me passing up a flounder bite, I’m in the doghouse. Whenever I get the chance, I will check a few of my flounder holes around my charters, like when I’m needing bait and go fishing for white trout or croakers for snapper or cobia bait. I’ve got a few places that are pretty dependable for flounder, and they are very close by and easy to get to.”

Casinos and the many riprap banks that have been built on the Gulf side as breakwaters for marinas have created some of McDaniel’s hottest spots.

“Shrimp, fished about 2 feet below a cork, is all you need,” he said. “I like to look for any little breaks in the rocks where current comes through. That’s where flounder will lay, waiting for the current to bring them a meal. I make a stop or two and usually get what I need to make Mama happy.”



Flounder will hang around riprap banks, around places where they can lay on the bottom, waiting for current to bring a meal past their noses.

The first segment of Mississippi's red snapper season closes July 8, then the second segment runs July 28-Sept. 2.

THE SNAPPER TRADITION

Historically, Mississippi's Gulf Coast charterboat industry was based on red snapper, but those days — quite controversially — are gone and are likely never to return. Only a few captains are still devoted to them, McDaniel being one of them.

"They have cut our seasons and cut our limits, but there's still a mystique about catching red snapper that keeps customers coming back year after year, even if it's only for two fish per person," he said. "With that limit, you want to catch the biggest you can find, and that's what I try to do. If I find the right oil rig or wreck holding fish, we can limit out pretty quickly.

"That's why I keep track of where the mangrove (gray) snapper are holding. They are just as good to eat, they just aren't as big as the reds. They are generally caught higher in the water column, too, and on less bulky rods and reels. The limit is 10 per person, so that can help fill a box after we've hit the red snapper."

Mangrove snapper also offers more days of opportunity for anglers. Mississippi's 2019 red snapper season is in two parts, with a break in July. The season opened in May and will close on July 8, reopen on July 28, and continue through Labor Day or until the gulf-wide quota is reached.

"We can still catch gray snapper during that time," McDaniel said. "There is no season on them."



continues >>>

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COBIA, TRIPLETAIL: SEEK COVER

We can combine these two species, since both are related to structure and/or cover, and either can often be found while actually searching for the other — especially if the structure being searched is a channel marker

“If your path across the Mississippi Sound takes you past the Gulfport shipping channel, I highly suggest you make a pass close to all the red and green markers,” said Capt. Sonny Schindler of Shore Thing Charters. “The water in the channel is deep enough to hold cobia, and the water adjacent to it is shallower and can hold tripletail.

“Either way, on a hot, summer day, you can check those channel markers on the fly, which keeps you cooler. It’s something we often do on our way in from speck and red trips. Just a bonus opportunity.”

When it pays off, either in a cobia or a tripletail, it means fun action and delicious eating.

Fishermen need to be ready for both, which means a heavy rod for cobia and something a little smaller for tripletail. The cobia rod usually has a live baitfish (white trout, clipped hard-head catfish, etc.) while the tripletail rod has a live shrimp — the bigger the better.

“But I’ve got a buddy who uses a fly rod and has caught both on the same day on the same rod and fly,” Schindler said.

A key is having a fine eye for spotting fish, since you are often doing it on the run. Look for shadows on the shady side of the marker poles. A cobia’s brown back and a tripletail’s black body appear as shadows.

“Turn around and approach from downcurrent, and get the bait to them,” Schindler said. “Cobia are curious and aren’t easily spooked. If they think they can get a meal, they won’t leave. On a tripletail, be more stealthy.”

Both can also be spotted swimming under a sea turtle, so, as Schindler says, “always check them out. Same with any kind of floating debris.”

Shore Thing and other coastal charter services have incorporated tripletail chasing into their normal daily speckled trout and red charters.

“What makes them so attractive is that in the summer, on those really hot still days, that’s when they are easiest to catch around crab-trap buoys,” Schindler said. “Crabbers set their traps in long, straight lines so they are easier to run. That gives us a course to run and look for tripletail on our way in from trout and red trips in the marsh. It’s a great bonus to pick up a tripletail or two on the way in.”

Cobia fishermen, by the same token, never pass up an oil rig or old wreck to check for a cruising brownback.

“You’d be foolish not to check,” McDaniel said. “I still think the best way to catch a summer cobia is to chum next to an oil rig, but playing hit and run on the way by any structure is a great idea.”



Bonita, aka false albacore, are sleek but inedible members of the tuna family that can put up quite a reel-screaming fight on light- to medium-action tackle.

HOLY MACKEREL

King mackerel are a fun fish to catch, with reel-screaming action that can challenge any angler.

“I still love catching kings, and I try it as often as I can in the summer,” said John Travis of Ocean Springs. “When I go snapper fishing in the summer, I always keep a couple of trolling rigs on the deck and make a few laps around a rig trying to hook a king.

“As for sheer excitement, I don’t know if there’s a fish out there that can match it on light to medium-light tackle. I know a lot of people don’t like eating kings, but they don’t realize that smoked king mackerel makes better smoked fish dip than more expensive tuna. We use it for that, and we use it for fish cakes, too.”

Kings are often caught trolling in the same waters south of the barrier islands that produce reds and Spanish mackerel, but most of them are caught on oil rigs and deeper wrecks.

“We troll live baits and we troll big spoons and other lures,” Travis said. “On a good day, we’ll have 10 to 12 hookups and catch maybe one or two. On a great day, we’ll catch more than we want to clean, so we let them go.

“Kings are just a great way to add to any Gulf fishing trip in the summer. It’s getting tough now with tighter limits and tighter seasons, so anything we can do, like adding a king to a day of snapper or cobia fishing, is gravy.”

Obviously, Mississippi will always be a state where speckled trout and redfish will rule the coastal action, and they also get the lion’s share of attention in the media.

Just don’t forget about all the other action; you’ll be glad you didn’t. ■



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

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Sheepshead like this one are often caught around docks, where the fish search for food among the barnacles that grow on the wooden structures.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: SHEEPSHEAD

'CONVICT FISH' ARE SOME OF THE TASTIEST FISH IN THE GULF

Brian Cope

Sheepshead, *Archosargus probatocephalus*, are a strangely named fish. Along with that, they have teeth that look strangely out-of-place. The teeth are much larger and more mammal-like than those of most other fish.

Nevertheless, these fish are sought after by many anglers for their sporty fight as well as their tasty table fare. They are difficult to catch, and most successful sheepshead anglers devote a lot of time to specifically targeting them, rather than just fishing for whatever is biting.

Sheepshead are somewhat oval-shaped, much like a freshwater bluegill, but sheepshead grow much larger and are more elusive. They have a silverish-green to gray body with five or six dark vertical bars that run all the way from the dorsal fins to the bottom of the fish's body. They have a well-defined lateral line that runs horizontally from the rear

of the gill plate down the center of the body toward the tail.

A sheepshead's dorsal fin has 12 spines and 11 soft rays. The spines are very sharp and should be avoided by anglers. They have slightly forked tails. Inside their mouths are four wide teeth on both sides of the jaw that resemble incisors. They also have numerous molar-like teeth, depending on the fish's age and health.

These fish use their teeth to crush and grind invertebrates that commonly live around concrete, metal, and wooden structures. Their diet is made up of mussels, clams, oysters, barnacles, crabs, shrimp, and occasionally, small fish. They consume a good deal of algae as well, but fisheries biologists aren't sure if that is by choice, or if they just happen to eat the material while foraging for their favored foods.

Observant anglers often spot sheeps-

head swimming around pier pilings, bridge supports and other debris. They are looking for, and eating, whatever they can find among the barnacles.

Some sheepshead stay inshore year-round, and many move between offshore, nearshore, and inshore structures, usually in the fall and early spring. Anglers catch them throughout the year on sunken trees, bridge and pier pilings, rock jetties, reefs, wrecks and livebottom. Some anglers report catching them in shallow, open water around oyster mounds.

Fiddler crabs serve as one of the top baits for sheepshead anglers. Mussels, clams, and shrimp are also good bets. A small number of anglers fish for sheepshead with artificial lures like Cranka Crabs, Coco the Crab, Savage Gear's 3D Crab and Gulp! crab lures.

Rather than casting and reeling in, sheepshead anglers typically fish directly

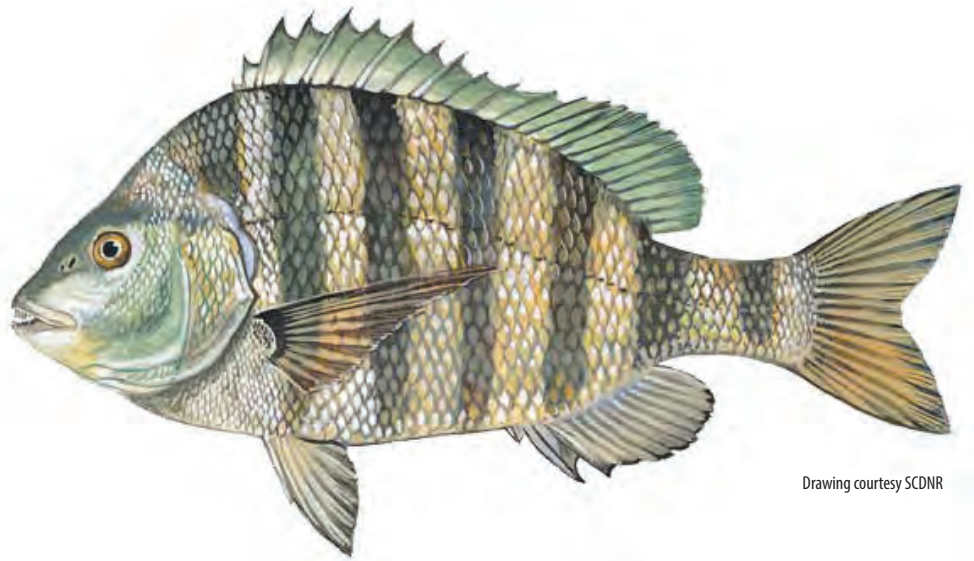
below their position. The fish has a very quick bite that is difficult to detect. Many beginning sheepshead anglers hear the term “set the hook before the fish bites” when talking to more experienced sheepshead specialists.

Sheepshead are often confused with spadefish and black drum. They are most commonly misidentified as black drum, which also have dark vertical bars and are often caught in close proximity to known sheepshead hotspots.

Some nicknames for sheepshead include convict, convict fish, bait thief, toothy bream, sheep bream, sea bream, and saltwater bream.

Mississippi’s state record is 19 pounds, 10 ounces and was caught in 1966 by Roy Groupe, Jr.

Louisiana’s state record sheepshead has stood since 1982 when Wayne J. Desselle caught a 21.25-pound fish in waters near New Orleans. Desselle’s catch is also the



Drawing courtesy SCDNR

current world record sheepshead.

The fish’s name is interesting for more than just its uniqueness. It can be pronounced and spelled as either sheepshead or sheephead. Both are acceptable according to American English dictionaries and fisheries manuals. ■



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

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SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

The author landed this nice speckled trout on a Megabass Darksleeper, a Goby-type soft-plastic bait. **BELOW:** Ned rigs are mushroom-shaped jigheads that allow soft plastics to stand upright when in contact with the bottom.



THREE NEW TRICKS FOR MORE BIG TROUT

NED RIG, DARKSLEEPER, S-WAVER 120 HAVE POTENTIAL TO FOOL TROPHY SPECKS

Chris Bush

I think it's safe to say our fishing world is changing, and since it's summer, ICAST, the world's largest sportfishing trade show, looms in the future, scheduled for July 9-12 in Orlando, Fla.

Designers, manufacturers and anglers gather to view, reveal and introduce technological advances before they can be purchased in the mainstream market.

I bring this up because I'm going to discuss three lures that meet the definition of ICAST's intent: view, reveal and introduce. Having fished these on plenty of trips, I can confidently write they all have high production value, as well as big-fish potential.

THE NED RIG

Year after year, this simple setup produces tremendous results on heavily pressured fish when downsizing is appropriate. A mainstay in almost every

freshwater angler's arsenal, its transition to inshore saltwater fishing is virtually flawless.

The rig is remarkably simple and includes a jighead and soft-plastic lure. Unlike traditional jighead styles — round, aspirin or arrow — it features a "mushroom" profile. Simple as it may seem, this jighead allows the bait to stand straight up when in contact with the bottom. Additionally, pairing it with smaller soft plastics gives great fishability and heavily pressured fish a less-invasive offering.

I prefer the Owner Blockhead in the 1/16- and 1/8-ounce sizes, but Z-Man also makes a NED Lockz HD jighead, and I prefer those in the 1/8- and 1/4-ounce sizes for heavier-tide and windier situations. Soft-plastic selections being endless, I prefer ZMan's Finesse TRD and Trick Shotz, mainly because they are buoyant and compact. For fishing purposes, this

is a jig, and I fish it as such — making one or two twitches, then letting the bait sink to the bottom while maintaining contact with the lure. Bites can be very subtle,



but they can also be very big since many large summer trout are looking for smaller, quick offerings.

MEGABASS DARK SLEEPER

Newest of the three to market, this Goby profile soft plastic made by Megabass has unlimited inshore potential. Unlike many all-in-one swimbaits, it has an exaggerated set of dorsal fins that act as weed guards and allow an angler to fish grassy or rocky substrate virtually unscathed. Although they are made in three different sizes, the 3-inch is the



Megabass Dark Sleeper

most versatile. Production weights vary depending on the length of the bait, but the $\frac{3}{8}$ - and $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce are perfect for most, if not all, inshore situations. If you're like me and initially thought the offered weights are too heavy, I can tell you, the fishability of the $\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce is comparable to a traditional $\frac{1}{8}$ -ounce jig and soft plastic, while the $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce fishes more like a $\frac{3}{16}$ -ounce bait. In terms of technique, fish this lure as you would any soft plastic/jighead combination. Keep your rod tip elevated and give the bait two or three twitches, letting the bait sink while maintaining contact with your lure. Most

hits, if not all, come on the fall, and since it's a compact offering, a majority of the hooksets occur on the inside of the mouth, particularly the cheek. This bait was designed to target smallmouth bass in clear, northern lakes, so the reduced visibility of most inshore estuaries renders this bait the perfect croaker silhouette.

RIVER2SEA S-WAVER 120

I dare you to walk into any tackle shop on the California coast and mention the word "glide bait". What I would imagine taking place is a store clerk offering a myriad of samples and customers producing copious numbers of pictures of large bass with jointed baits longer than most human forearms. With that said, I took it upon myself to test the West Coast success and apply it to the Gulf Coast, particularly for large trout. After overcoming a large learning curve, I found these baits to be very effective and very versatile.

I chose the River2Sea S-Waver 120 mainly because of the price point and size. Most glide baits are produced in small batches. In other words, they are expensive. The S-Waver is one of the cheaper alternatives, yet it is still \$15.99, but if you are serious about targeting big fish, these baits provide that option. The 120 is $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches long and weighs $1\frac{1}{16}$ ounces. Since, I wade the majority of the time I'm fishing, use lighter rod and reel combos, the 120 still falls in that option window and won't give me shoulder



River2Sea S-Waver 120

fatigue. Heck, Corky Fat Boys weigh almost a full ounce.

The options for fishing this bait are endless, but know that I found a long, exaggerated walk-the-dog cadence to be most effective. What makes this lure so effective is the long, sweeping side-to-side motion. It's great for shallow flats or a topwater alternative on lighter tide/calm days. I find the only downside to these baits is the clumsy/loud entry into the water. Additionally, almost exclusively fish these lures on braid or 100-percent, pure fluorocarbon, with nothing less than a medium-power/extra-fast action rod. Not only will the bait run true, but hookup-to-land ratio goes up exponentially with slightly heavier tackle. Don't ask me how I know!

Technology is giving some very creative lure producers endless possibilities, and as the angling world continues to change, it doesn't hurt to keep an eye out for those crossover lures that may give you the edge on big fish in your estuary. So keep plugging and remember, take what you need and release the rest. ■



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

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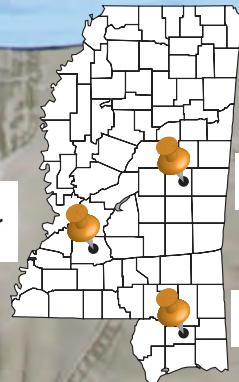


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Small lakes, **BIG BASS**

Looking to do some summer bass fishing in the lower half of the Magnolia State? Try these three small lakes that offer plenty of big bass.

By Phillip Gentry



Calling Panther Lake

Neshoba County Lake

Flint Creek Water Park

Phillip Gentry

Bass fishermen looking for some summer options in the southern half of Mississippi might be some-

what limited in the number of places they can fish, but not for good fishing.

Several smaller bodies of water are capable of producing as good or even better bags of feisty large-mouth bass as some venues farther north, without having to cover all the miles in-between.

The thought behind providing good fishing opportunities closer to home is what drove Mississippi officials to create several state-park and state-owned bodies of water that many Magnolia State anglers have come to enjoy.



As much as fisheries managers may try, not all state lakes are created equal when it comes to num-

bers and sizes of bass. A closer look at which state lakes in the southern half of Mississippi leaves a list of three lakes that you don't want to miss.

FLINT CREEK

Though technically not a state lake, Flint Creek Water Park on Highway 29 in Wiggins is owned and operated by the Pat Harrison Waterway District but is still managed by Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

Flint Creek provides some great fishing for freshwater anglers inland from the Gulf Coast. The park features a 650-acre lake stocked with bass, with 13 miles of shoreline, the unofficial home of the Petal Bass Club.

Rocky Rowell, a former club president, said the key to consistent success at Flint Creek is to concentrate on main-lake points. During the spring, bass tend to move shallow and are susceptible to topwater and subsurface baits, but after the spawn, they will move off the points and can be caught nearly year-round using a Carolina rigs, jigs, and deep-diving crankbaits.

"A lot of bass school in this lake because of all the shad," Rowell said. "I like to throw a crankbait when they're schooling, something in either a clown color or natural, like a crawfish or chrome pattern. It's best to use light line or at least a fluorocarbon leader because the water is so clear."

"In the summer, you'll get a lot of recreational boat traffic," he said.

continued >

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE

Flint Creek Water Park is off Highway 29 in Wiggins, 35 miles north of the Gulf. The street address is 1216 Parkway Drive, Wiggins, MS.

Neshoba County Lake is a 138-acre lake in Neshoba County, 7 miles southeast of Philadelphia off Highway 486. The street address is 10360 County Road 1711, Philadelphia, MS 39350

Calling Panther Lake is in Copiah County, 5 miles west of Crystal Springs off New Zion Rd. The nearest street address is 1000 Gaddy Ln, Crystal Springs, MS 39059

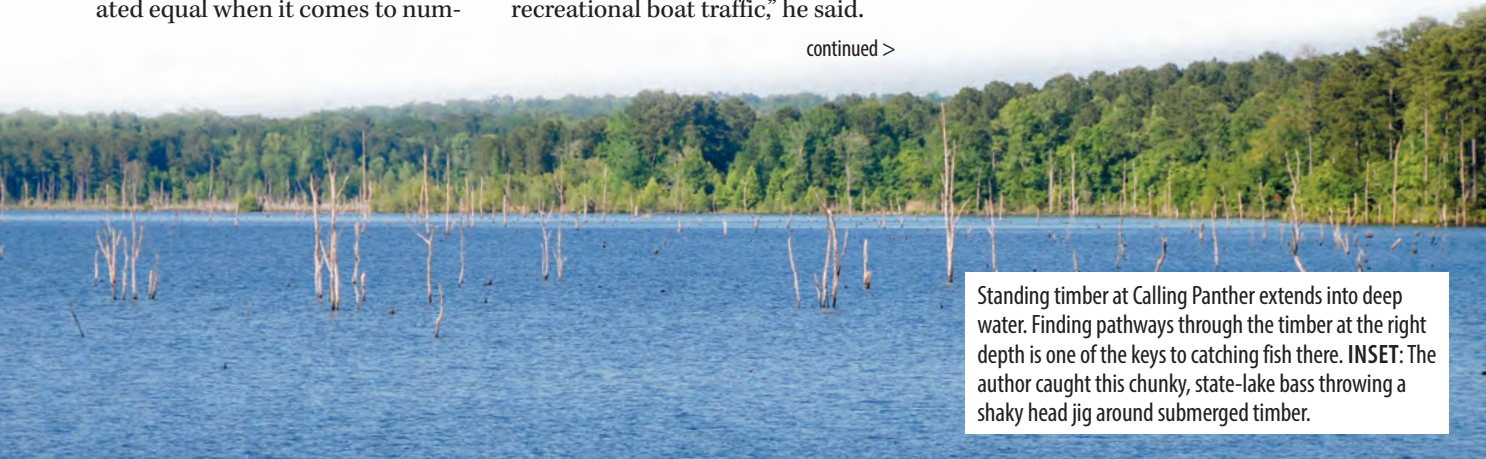
BEST TACTICS — At **Flint Creek**, bass will hold deep on main-lake points in the lake's main basin. Texas- or Carolina-rigged plastics, jigs or deep-diving crankbaits are a good bet.

Most anglers at **Neshoba** are throwing frogs and buzzbaits. Avoid anything weighted because of the grass and shallow water. Other favorite baits include swim worms, Senkos and Flukes in watermelon/red, baby bass and Colorado shad.

Look for bass to hold 20 to 25 feet deep along the main-creek channel in **Calling Panther's** standing timber. Best bets are big plastic baits fished down in the wood. Early and late and at sporadic intervals during the day, bass will chase bait on the surface. Casting crankbaits to these fish will produce.

ACCOMMODATIONS — **Flint Creek** offers 152 camping spurs, including 34 vacation cabins that are located adjacent to the lake and 11 camp-houses. **Neshoba Lake** offers 22 RV hookups with power, water, and sewer. Primitive camping is also available. **Calling Panther Lake** offers 23 camping pads with electrical/water/sewer hookups. Primitive camping is also available.

MORE INFORMATION/MAPS — Lake and Campsite Maps, www.phwd.net/flint/flintc; www.mdwfp.com/fishing-boating/state-fishing-lakes



Standing timber at Calling Panther extends into deep water. Finding pathways through the timber at the right depth is one of the keys to catching fish there. **INSET:** The author caught this chunky, state-lake bass throwing a shaky head jig around submerged timber.



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As schooling is likely to take place at any time during daylight hours, it's always good to have a medium- or deep-diving crankbait ready to go.

"If you can fight the waves, you can still catch fish. I think all the wave wash pulls the shad to the surface. You can have a boat go by and cast right in the wake and catch a bass. Maybe it aerates the water or something, but it really doesn't hurt the fishing."

Rowell also said the topography makes Flint Creek a better-than-average summer fishing spot.

"Out in the middle, it will be 30 to 40 foot (deep) in places, and then it shallows up as you come in," said Rowell. "There is good depth. If you'll watch as you're fishing around the edge, you'll see points going out in the water. You'll see little ridges. If you follow those points out and fish at different depths, you'll find a bass out there."

NESHOBA COUNTY LAKE

No mention of big-bass lakes in Mississippi is complete without discuss-

ing Neshoba County's shining gem.

According to Chuck Hazelwood, the lake manager, Neshoba County Lake was built in the 1930s using laborers who were paid 35 cents per day to toil with scoops pulled by mules to dig out the impoundment. The original lake covered 226 acres, but it had to be rebuilt in the late 1990s, and the long spillway that was added reduced it to 138 acres.

When Neshoba was re-opened for business after the rebuild, the fishing, particularly for bass, responded. Some huge fish were caught that seemed to outpace regular growth rates for stocked fish. Hazelwood said the lake is very fertile, which helps the fishery tremendously, but it was an old, 35-acre beaver pond that got the newly remodeled lake off to



Philip Gentry

such a good start.

"They restocked the lake after it was rebuilt, but in the back, we had about 35 acres that were behind a beaver dam," Hazelwood said, "so when we drained the lake, they left the beaver dam alone, and then we blew the dam when the lake came back up. A lot of my big fish were back in that 35 acres, and (they) came

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BIG FISH FROM SMALL WATERS

Micah Johnson of Hattiesburg is a diehard bass fisherman who loves to travel and camp for several days at a time when he heads out fishing. Over the years, Johnson has learned a few tricks about fishing state lakes and smaller bodies of water.

"We have a lot of big large-mouth bass in our state lakes," he said. "We've found that because our bass can only travel so far, they behave a lot different than if they were in a big body of water."

"The smallest piece of cover — a single stump, tree limb or even a bush hanging over the water — is a big deal to a pond bass because they don't have the same amount of room here," he said. "Our fish

use the shoreline a lot more than a big-lake fish would."

Being quiet is important anywhere you fish, but especially in a small lake. Your best chance to catch that big bass off a small piece of cover is to make a long, accurate cast that lands in the edge of the grass and then slides into the water.

"Soft plastics are probably your best bet, something with very little weight that is hooked weedless," Johnson said. "Even a big bass will spook if something slaps the water right over his head. I like to land my cast on the bank and just slide it in. Being weedless helps you pull the bait off the bank, over cover and through shallow weeds where big bass like to hide." ■



Bass in small lakes don't act the way their brethren in big reservoirs do. Learn the differences, and you're a step closer to sampling some great fishing in a handful of lakes in south Mississippi.

Phillip Gentry

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continued from page XXX >

back in after the lake was filled.”

Through the summer, daytime temperatures can get more than a little uncomfortable. Hazelwood said many local anglers bring their campers and fish early and late, using the middle of the day to rest up and take it easy until time to get back to fishing.

“Some folks prefer to come stay a few days and camp on the property. It’s kind of like their home base,” Hazelwood said. “They fish early in the morning and late afternoon and even into the night, and they sleep during the day.”

CALLING PANTHER

Calling Panther is a 404-acre impoundment of Finley Branch and Hurricane Creek in Copiah County. The two streams form one channel that winds through the length of the lake. The bottom is littered with stumps, timber and lay down trees. The lake is a mecca for summer bass fishing.

“The lake has a ton of structure,” said Jake Guess, a former lake warden. “Before it was flooded, the timber was select-cut, but a lot of standing trees were left, so there’s an abundance of structure. There are some shallow spots in the back that stay around 2 foot, a foot-and-a-half, but then fall off into the creek channel; it could be anywhere from 15- to 20-foot deep. Then, along the dam, the channel drops into spots that are 30- to 40-foot deep.”

Guess said the best summer patterns on Calling Panther are finesse fishing with big plastic baits and cranking in the timber with shallow- to medium-diving crankbaits. Largemouth bass will hold in the treetops, and these two patterns represent the best methods for getting them out. He said the lake also sees its share of live-baiters, mostly in the late winter

and early spring, but the bigger fish fall to artificials.

“Our anglers do best by finesse fishing using big worms and big lizards on a slow fall,” he said. “Fish tend to hit on the fall. They are targeting fish in 20 to 25 foot of water, and you need to have patience to allow the bait to get down there to them.”

“We also we have a good base of thread-fin shad in the lake,” he said. “We get bass schooling early and late in the day during the summer, but almost any time

you can be fishing in the deep water and shad will roll up to the top. You can take a crankbait and throw in among them and pull some nice fish out of there when they pull up on the shad.” ■



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.



Look for bass to utilize long points, moving shallow early and late and holding on the deep end through the day.

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GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Although survival research has focused on largemouth bass, cool, well-aerated livewells and short fight times probably increase smallmouth bass survival, too.

SUMMER BASS CARE EXPLAINED

GIVE BASS A BETTER CHANCE TO SURVIVE IN A LIVEWELL

It's the middle of summer, when it's tough to be on the water all day and when bass retained in a livewell for later release — such as in a tournament — commonly suffer increased mortality. Following are some guidelines for keeping survival of bass held in livewells high and some results from a recent Mississippi State University study that addresses the survival of bass held in livewells and those released immediately.

SIMPLE GUIDELINES FOR BASS SURVIVAL

For many years, I have worked with Gene Gilliland, my colleague, friend, frequent fishing buddy and B.A.S.S. conservation director, to develop and test simple procedures for maximizing survival of livewell-held bass in summer tournaments. Details are available at https://www.bassmaster.com/sites/default/files/keepingbassalive_guide-

[book_comp.pdf](#).

Here's the short version for summer bass care:

- Fill the livewell early in the day when the surface water is coolest. Set your livewell water-control system to recirculate.
- Use blocks of ice to keep your livewell at 80°F. Half-gallon milk jugs filled with water, capped and frozen, work well.
- Run your aerator continuously if you have more than a few pounds of bass.
- If you have more than 5 pounds of bass in the livewell, pump out half of the livewell water every three hours, then refill with fresh water from areas with good water quality. Add block ice to lower the livewell water temperature to 80°F.
- As always, handle bass quickly and gently; don't let them flop on the carpet; use a coated or rubber landing net, and minimize air exposure.

Research at Mississippi State has

proven that following these recommendations in summer tournaments will reduce mortality by 50 percent compared to no temperature control. You will also find that bass from livewells where the temperature is controlled are more vigorous and have a heavy slime coat, while bass from the warm livewells are lethargic and feel dry and rough.

NEW INFORMATION

Research recently completed at Mississippi State University measured the survival of bass released immediately and bass retained in livewells for eight hours and subjected to a typical tournament weigh-in at water temperatures



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

Whether held in livewells for weigh-in at a tournament or released immediately by an angler practicing catch-and-release, bass get larger by surviving to feed and fight again.



ranging from 63°F to 91°F. The findings:

- Bass subjected to one minute of simulated angling and immediate release had 100-percent survival at all temperatures.
- Bass subjected to one minute of simulated angling and eight hours retention in live wells with five parts per million (ppm) dissolved oxygen had high survival up to 84°F. Mortality was 30 to 40 percent when the water temperature was 91°F and livewell temperature was 91°F or lowered 7°F but was 100 percent if livewell temperature increased 7°F during the livewell retention period.
- Survival of bass subjected to one minute of simulated angling and eight hours retention in livewells was 15- to 20-percent lower in livewells with 2 ppm dissolved oxygen than in livewells with 5 ppm dissolved oxygen at 77°F and 84°F, and only 15 percent of the bass held at 91°F survived when dissolved oxygen was 2 ppm.
- Survival declined significantly when simulated angling was increased from one to three minutes at 84°F for both bass released immediately and those held in livewells and subjected to tournament weigh in procedures.
- Lowering livewell water temperature 7°F improved survival at water temperatures at or above 84°F.

Summer temperatures stress anglers and bass, but survival of fish immediately released or held in livewells can be 100 percent in water temperatures up to 91°F when fish are landed quickly, handled gently, and held in well-aerated, cool-water livewells. Admittedly, the recent Mississippi State study used very controlled conditions, but they demonstrate that high survival is possible for bass caught from the warmest water anglers face in Mississippi. ■

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Bass will set up at the ends of rock bluffs, mussel shell beds, ledges and drop-offs, ready to ambush Pickwick Lake baitfish. Once located, you may catch plenty from one school.

FISH PICKWICK FOR NUMBERS OF JULY BASS

SCHOOL FISH OFFER OPPORTUNITY TO CATCH PLENTY OF BASS OFFSHORE



Mann's 20+

During the hot, summer months, I love to fish ledges, especially on Pickwick Lake. Most people are running their air conditioners day and night, creating a heavy demand for electricity, and the constant pulling of water through Pickwick Dam makes bass bite.

Largemouth, spotted and smallmouth bass hold on Pickwick's ledges and shell beds. I'll concentrate my July fishing between the Natchez Trace and Pickwick Dam with the bigger creeks, bluff endings and first and secondary bars there. Here's how I'll fish:

DEEP-DIVING PLUGS

On my casting deck, I'll have Mann's 20+ and a 30+ crankbaits tied on, both

on 7-foot-6, medium-action rods with Bruin 5:1 ratio reels spooled with 20-pound fluorocarbon. I'll start with a 20+ in grey ghost color, casting upcurrent at a 45-degree angle to the ledge, dropoff or mussel bar and reel with the current. I'll cast first to the key areas where I expect to get a bite, or I'll use my side-scanning depth finder to locate where bait and bass are, searching for a transition area with a stump, rock or any type of obstruction a bass can hide behind.

Once you get your first bite in the morning, that bass will trigger a feeding frenzy in the school. You may catch seven to 10 bass out of that same school quickly, mostly largemouths and spots, but sometimes a big smallmouth.

I'll fish a 20+ crankbait in up to 17 feet of water. I always want to overpower the depth I'm fishing by using a crankbait that dives deeper than the bottom. I want to dig the bottom and get my lure to the bottom quickly. I'll fish a Mann's 30+ in 18 to 24 feet of water.

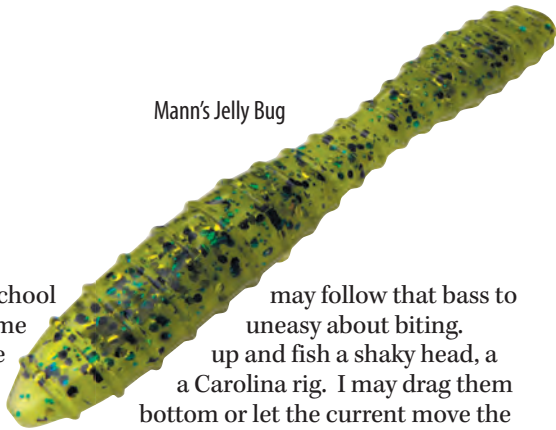
CHANGE UP LURES

After you've caught several bass out of the same school, they may quit biting, since you're releasing numbers of fish back into the water that spook the rest of



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.

Mann's Jelly Bug



them. Or, the entire school may follow that bass to the boat and become uneasy about biting. I like to change up and fish a shaky head, a drop-shot and/or a Carolina rig. I may drag them slowly across the bottom or let the current move the weight, the jig and the bait to drop back to the bottom. With these slow-moving bottom baits, I'll often be using a 7-foot-6 spinning rod with 15-pound bass braid on the reel and 10-pound fluorocarbon tied directly to the braid. On the Carolina rig, I'll fish a 7:1 casting reel with 30-pound braid, a 1-ounce slip sinker up the line with a bead and a swivel under it and 2 feet of 26-pound fluorocarbon. If I'm competing, I'll fish these rigs on a baitcasting outfit, but if I'm fishing for fun, I'll catch the bass on spinning tackle.

I'll have a ½-ounce Stone jig with a green-pumpkin skirt and trailer that I'll cast, drag across the bottom and maybe catch one or two more bass. Next, I'll cast the shaky head worm back to that same spot and perhaps catch another bass, and then I'll throw the drop-shot there.

Last, I'll fish a Jelly Bug — a soft-plastic bait that's compact and has a lot of action — on a Carolina rig and the drop-shot rigs and the shaky head, changing colors of the Jelly Bug — junebug, green pumpkin and watermelon red — when I switch rigs. I like the Jelly Bug because it's a big bait, and I can use a No. 4/0 hook. Depending on how big a school is holding on the spot I'm fishing, by using the jig and the Jelly Bug, I may catch another seven to 10 bass.

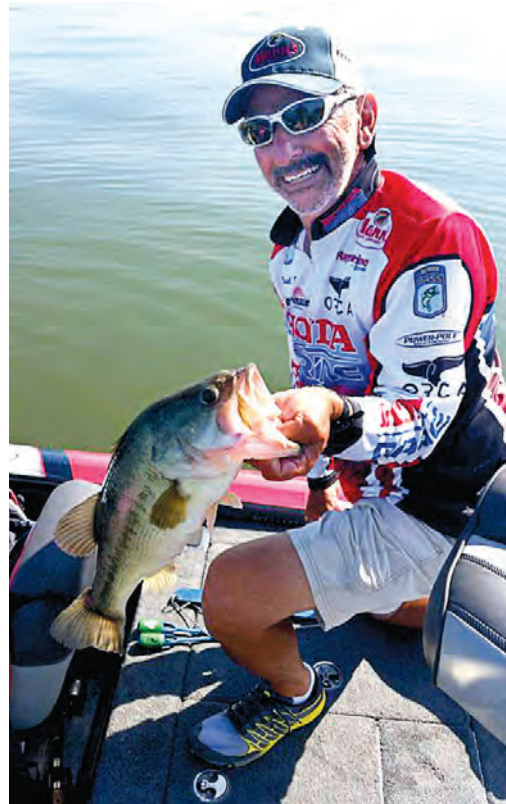
CRANKBAITS AGAIN

After I fish soft plastics through that area, before I leave, I'll once more fish the grey ghost 20+ or the 30+, and I often catch two or three more bass. When I'm finally convinced I've caught all the fish off that spot, I'll move to another mussel bed on the edge of a dropoff and fish it the same way, sometimes fishing 10 ledges or mussel bars and then starting over again on the first ledge. Pickwick hot spots regularly replenish themselves with bass in July.

TOPWATERS

When bass come to the top and school, I'll also have two rods rigged — one with a Zara Spook and the other with a Pop-R. I may catch 25 to 30 or possibly 40 to 100 bass a day.

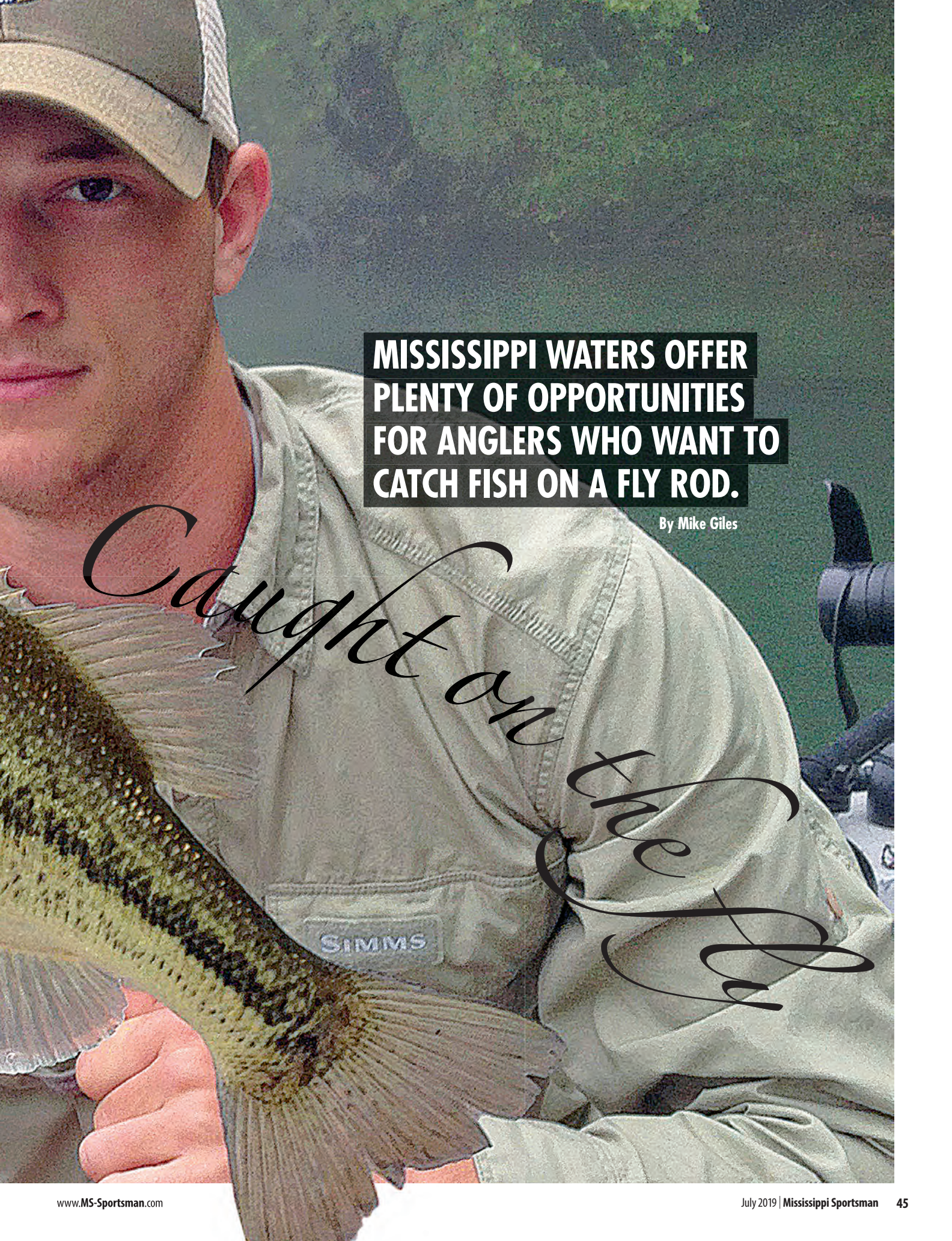
If I pinpoint three good schools of bass, I may alternate between those three schools all day — often catching 50 to 100 bass a day. Many bass will be small, however, you'll also pick up some 4½-pounders and some 5- to 7-pounders. ■



Paul Elias counts on current running through Pickwick Lake in July to keep bass feeding almost constantly.





A man wearing a tan baseball cap and a tan Simms fishing shirt is holding a large, dark-colored fish. The background is a blurred green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**MISSISSIPPI WATERS OFFER
PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES
FOR ANGLERS WHO WANT TO
CATCH FISH ON A FLY ROD.**

By Mike Giles

Caught on the Fly

John David Santi worked his fly rod in smooth, rhythmic motions

and gently laid a fly on the water's mirror-smooth surface above a bream bed teaming with bull bream.

Cast after cast, he effortlessly and steadily picked off one bream after another. One more perfect cast resulted in another strike and hookup, but something was amiss.

"Ka-whoosh!" The water exploded as a bass crushed the bream that had just smacked his fly. Santi used all the skills he'd learned from a lifetime of fly-fishing to fight the monster bass, which wallowed before diving again, then slashing up through the surface like a hooked alligator.

Fly rods are tools, and Santi's was made for catching bream, panfish or small trout, not lunker bass.

The enraged bass fought like a bull in a china shop, but Santi finally wore it down and brought it to the boat. The feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment made his day, and he quickly released the 6½-pound lunker.

While many forms of fishing center on how many fish you can catch, fly-fishing is also about the experience and the ambiance with nature. For many, it's a chance to experience something few are able to enjoy in the hustle and bustle of the modern world.

FLY-FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

While many people think fly-fishing is limited to trout, it is much more than that. Mississippi is chock full of fly-fishing opportunities, both public and private, to catch bass, bream and crappie on fly tackle. Once learned, it's not a big step to head to trout country and catch rainbows, browns and brookies. Many of the same techniques apply, and you will find trout in the same areas of a cooler stream or river where you'll find and catch bass.

"There's a full moon every month during the summer, and the bream bed during that time," said Santi, a native of the

Big, bedding bream are prime targets for anglers looking for some action on fly-fishing tackle.



Memphis, Tenn., area and an Ole Miss graduate. "If you're looking for some fine fly-rod action, then fishing for bream is the best way to get started in Mississippi. Bream and bass are abundant, and there's plenty of places to fish for them."

Learning to cast proficiently is a matter of getting a fly rod in hand and practicing. And one of the easiest ways to learn how to cast is by fishing.

"If you're learning to cast, you can go to your local golf course or public lake," Santi said. "(Many) golf courses are closed on Mondays, and many allow you to fish in the lakes on the course during that time. Those water hazards usually have a lot of fish that haven't seen a lot of lures, and

You don't need a box full of flies and popping bugs to get started fly-fishing. A rod, reel, line and a handful of flies will work just fine.

Equipment AND LURES TO GET STARTED

Fly-fishing expert John David Santi has some recommendations for fishermen who want to add a fly rod to their arsenals.

"If you're looking for a fly rod to do-all, to catch bass and bream, I'd recommend a 9-foot, 5-weight rod with floating line with a 4- to 5-foot sink-tip, weighted line," he said.

"I'll use a tiny, foam popper with a Bream Killer or sinking fly — like a small nymph or bug — behind it when targeting bream."

Anglers can get into fly-fishing without spending a lot of money on equipment: rods, reels and flies. A basic outfit will save you time and money when getting started and give novices the opportunity to catch fish and see if they enjoy it before buying more-specialized equipment. ■



Mike Giles

the grounds around them are clean, with few trees and brush on the shorelines. That makes it easy to learn to cast. You just need to spend time doing it, and you'll have fun catching a few fish, too."

Municipal parks often have well-manicured ponds or lakes available that you can fish from the bank, and if you have access to a canoe, kayak or small boat, you can fly-fish almost anywhere.

**FLY FISHING
FOR BASS**
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FLY FISHING FOR BASS

“When you’re looking to catch bass with a fly rod, you have to look at it in two different perspectives,” Santi said. “You’re either going to fish in lakes or ponds with no current, or in a river, stream or creek that has current. They can be attacked in similar ways, but each have their differences, and you have to account for that when planning your strategy.”

“Creeks like Bear Creek in north Mississippi and the Chunky River near Meridian have good current and offer scenic flows and spectacular fishing for both bass and bream. They both offer good topwater floats as well.”

Current is important; everything is related to the flow, including the way fish position.

“When you’re fishing creeks with moving water, it’s all about the current,” Santi said.

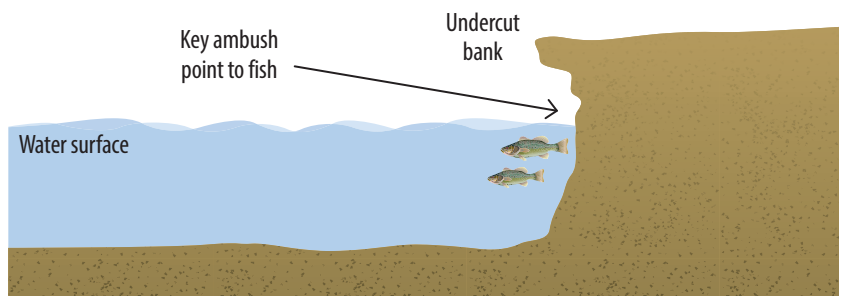
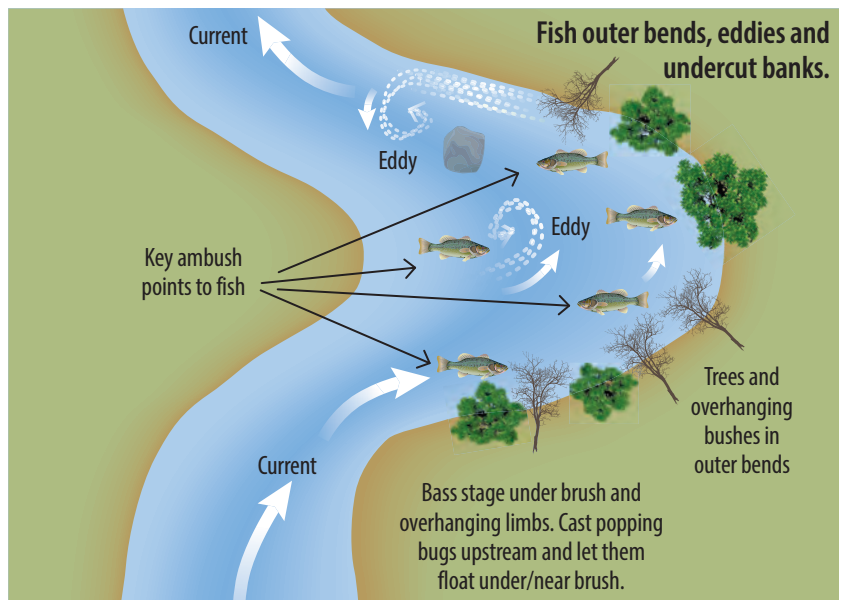
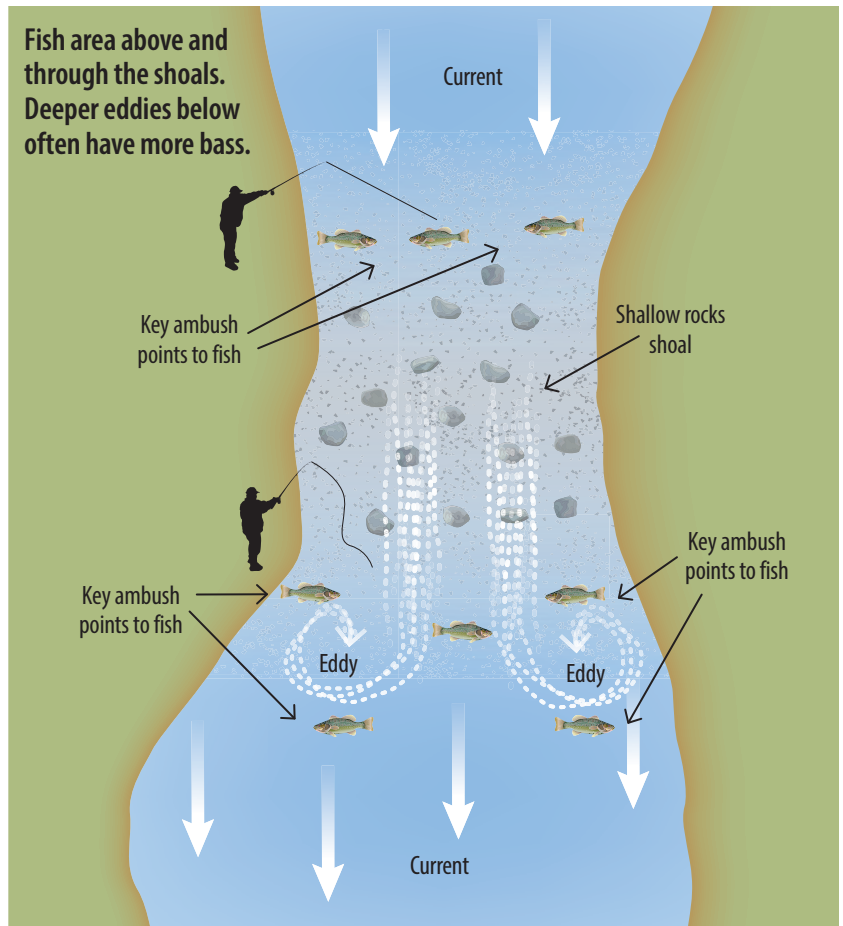
“When I work the creeks, I’m going to concentrate on fishing the overhanging limbs and trees in the outside bends as well as the swirling eddies in the creek — no matter where they’re found. Streams that have shallow shoals, like the Chunky River, offer good ambush points for bass both above and below the shoals.”

Santi, a co-owner of Team Renegade Outdoors, a digital marketing and outdoor production company, also concentrates on areas below shoals around which eddies curl. Bass sit in the slack water and attack any bait-fish or lures that happen to float past.

If you already fish creeks, streams and shallow rivers, you know where bass position when feeding; just use a fly rod in the same places and tailor your presentations accordingly.

“You can fish for trout in streams and rivers around the country and employ the same techniques that you do for bass right here in Mississippi,” Santi said. “The trout will stage in the same places, and you can find them in those outer bends, around brush and cover as well as in the eddies. Typically, they utilize the same ambush points.”

“If I’m fishing lakes and ponds, I’ll employ the same tactics that I do when bass fishing, but in shallower water. I’ll work the banks and also concentrate on depth changes, as well as weed lines, stumps, logs and laydowns. A lot of the flies we use are weedless, and you can use them in and around the weeds too.”



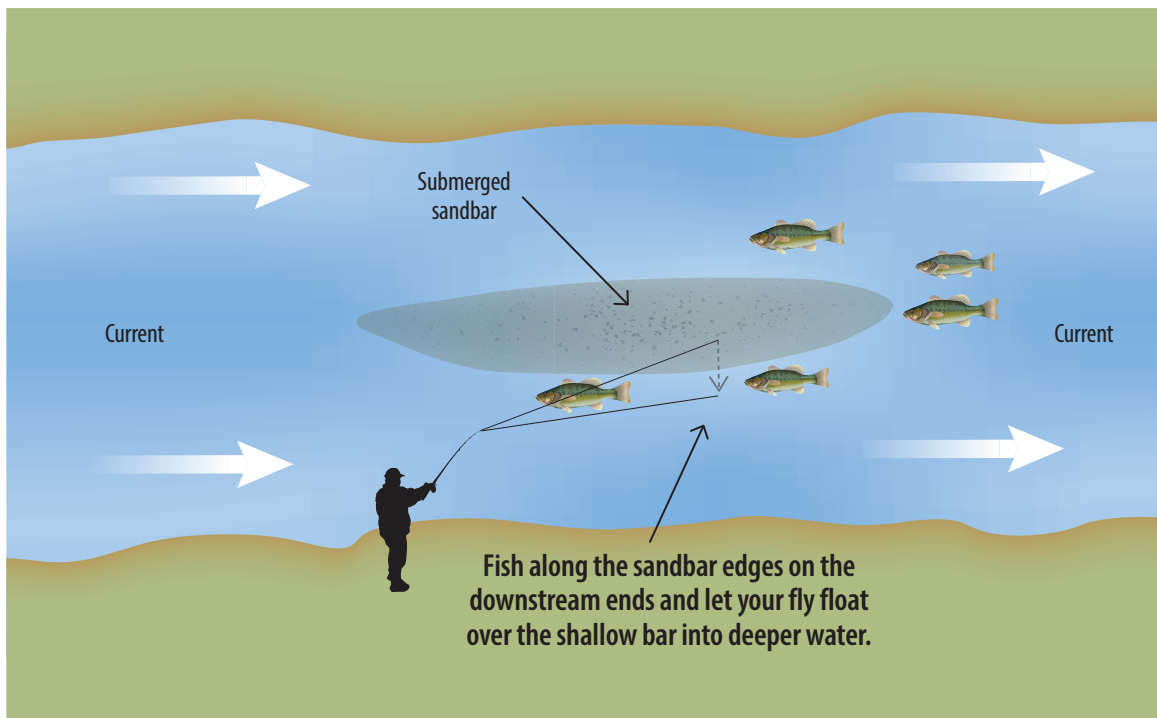
FLY-ROD ADVANTAGES

“The good thing about a fly rod is that you have the ability to make another cast and get right back into the spot where you want to be without spooking them or reeling it back in and casting again,” Santi said. “You can move the popper around and find the beds pretty quickly and make a quick, silent entry without ever spooking the fish, and it’s easy to cover a lot of water too.”

There’s also a huge advantage when utilizing a popping bug on a fly rod in current.

“Fishing with a fly is a different way to go about it, and you’ll be exposed to a different experience and see things you wouldn’t ordinarily encounter,” said Santi, who spends the summer guiding fly fishermen at Teton Valley Lodge in Driggs, Idaho. “You can actually use a popping bug and cast upstream of your target and let the fly float to where you expect the fish to be, so the lure has time to get into position and look as natural as possible before it goes by the ambush spot.

“If you miss the mark, you can do a roll cast and try it again, or you can mend your line and keep it in the strike zone a little longer as well.”



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WHERE TO WADE

UP NEXT ➤



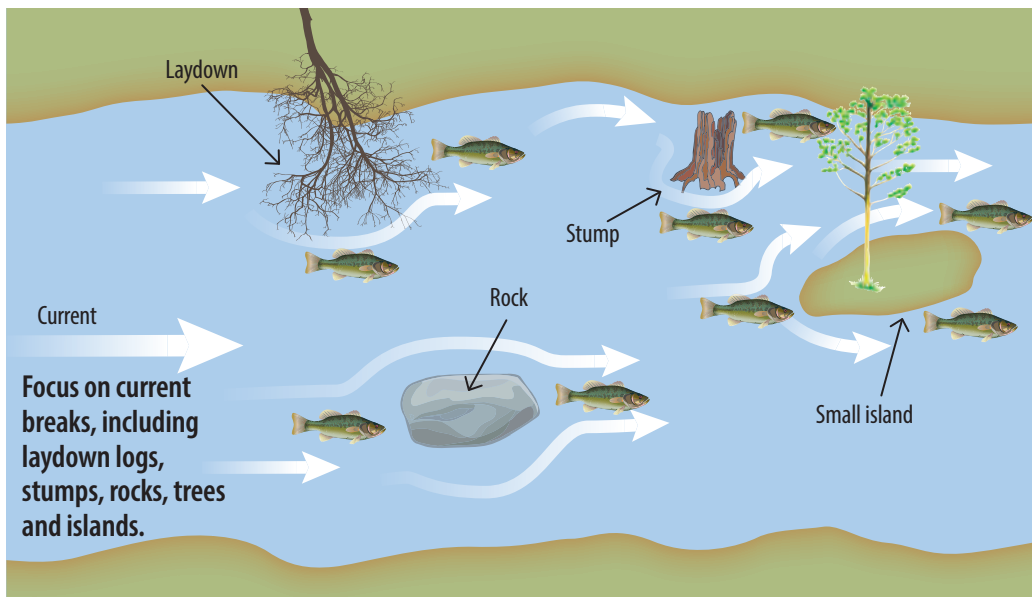
WHERE TO WADE


While boats are involved in most fly-fishing on lakes and rivers, strategic locations can be a boon to wade-fishing in areas where it is allowed.

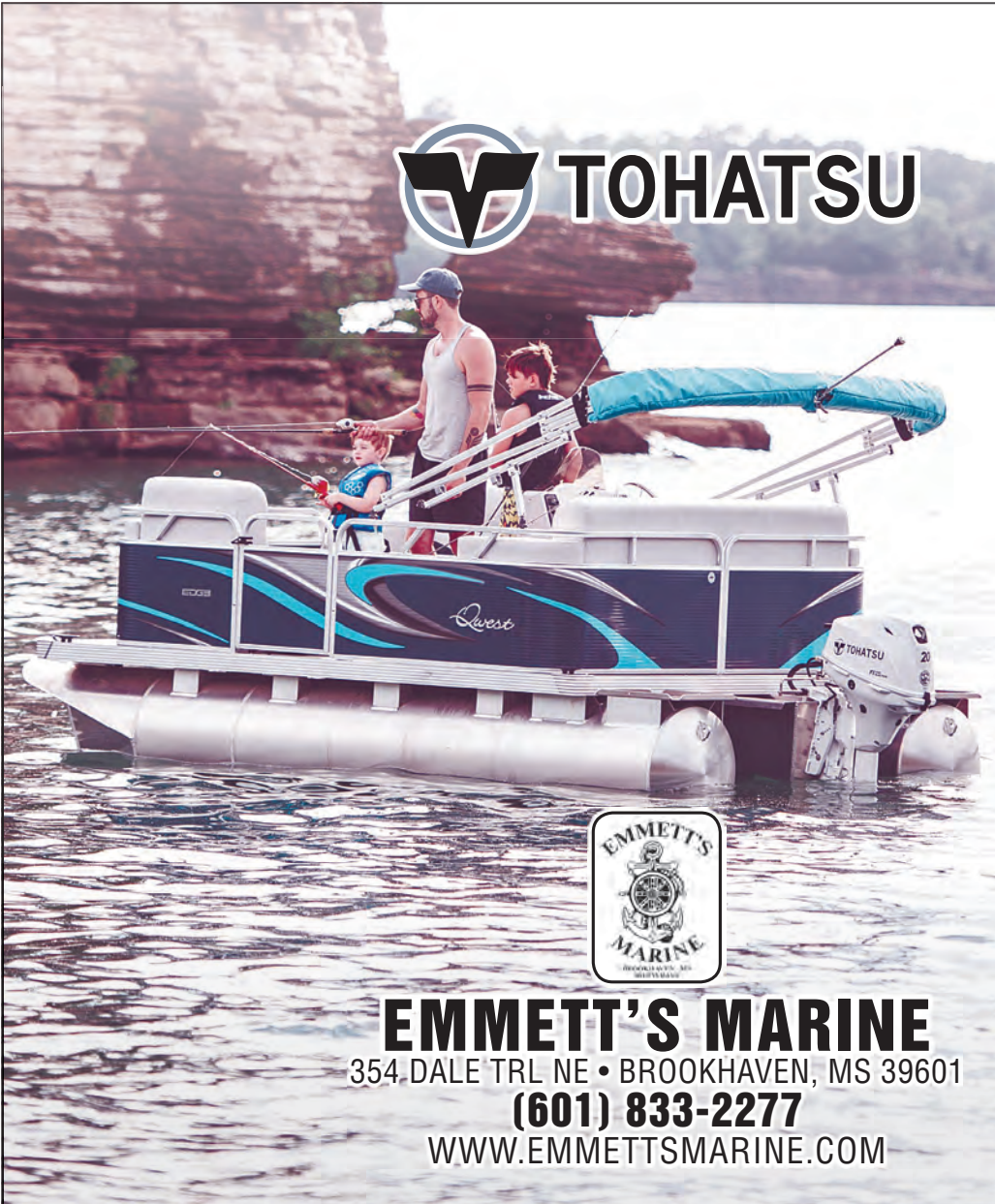
“When I get to some key ambush points or areas that usually hold bass, I’ll anchor the boat and wade” Santi said. “When you’re fishing shoals areas, you can wade-fish above and below the shoals and cover the area thoroughly. If you just hit the high spots, you’re bound to miss out on some great fishing.”


In addition to shoals, other wade-fishing areas are also productive when there is ample room for casting to the key spots such as the outside bends in streams.

“By getting out of the boat, we’re able to make multiple casts to different locations and cover the whole spectrum,” Santi said. “When you get a chance to work the outer bends, you can work the whole area much faster and key on the prime spots. After you find where they are holding, you’ll be able to work that area and concentrate on fishing rather than hunting for their locations.” ■









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

SPINNING THEIR WEB



Spider-rigging is a great technique for catching summer crappie. Here's how to make it work for you.

By David Brown



SPINNING THEIR WEB >

Lethargic in the summer heat, fish need time to choose a meal. Spider-rigging is the perfect answer. Crappie fishermen who troll with spider rigs base their success on the same theory of snack hawkers at a baseball game, girl scouts pushing those diet-busting cookies outside the local grocery store and the ice cream man blasting the Music Box Dancer throughout your neighborhood.

They succeed by making tasty treats clearly visible and easily accessible.

Spider-rigging — also known as pushing or tight-lining — means having a boat bristling with multiple rods around the bow. Baits hang vertically from the poles, ideally in front of some crappie-friendly haunts. Slow and steady is the name of the game, as success relies on keeping the food in front of fish that just aren't gonna run very far for anything.

"In the summer when it's real hot, you find the fish with multiple poles," said crappie pro Whitey Outlaw. "If they are holding to structures and ledges, you can work them really well with a slow presentation because the water is hot and the fish aren't real active."

"You can get your limit, get out of the heat and back into the air conditioning pretty quickly."

Here's how it's done.

WHERE ARE THEY?

Matt Morgan, another crappie pro, finds summer crappie relating to areas that satisfy their trio of needs: comfortable



Spider-rigging, aka tight-lining, is a great tactic for finding scattered summer crappie.

Phillip Gentry

water temperature, oxygen and forage.

"Those three things are what (summer) crappie call home," Morgan said. "For me, that's probably going to be a ledge where the fish can move up and down in the water column to find cover to ambush their food, while staying in a place where they feel safe."

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Crappie fishermen will troll a variety of tiny, soft-plastic lures in a rainbow of colors when they're searching for summer slabs.

Dan Kibler

RATE OF RETURN

So, how slow is slow? Some might peg it at around .2 or .3 mph for search mode, but Outlaw finds he does best when he pays more attention to fish response than the speed reading on his GPS.

continues >

A common depth range for summer ledges is 10 to 18 feet, but Morgan won't hesitate to fish as deep as 25 feet. Outlaw is also a fan of ledges, but he knows spider-rigging can tempt fish in front of standing timber, deeper docks and flats dotted with scattered stumps and brush.

"Throughout the summer months in Mississippi, I like to target open waters in the middle of the lakes anywhere from 8 to 14 feet of water," Outlaw said. "Once we locate the crappie, they're easy to catch. In 15 minutes, you will know what's there. If it's suspended fish on a flat, we may fish the area all day."

Morgan also values persistence, along with mobility. You won't find him sitting over one set of stumps very long; rather, it's all about staying active and finding the fish.

"You've got to keep moving, you have to stay on the move. You have to be the predator," Morgan said. "I might do circles around a (key spot) or some left-and-right patterns, but I'm always moving."

That's a point worth clarifying. When you're spider-rigging in front of a dock or a particular brush pile, a static approach may serve the objective. However, for working large areas such as a ledges and flats, you'll want to maintain forward progress, sometimes at a glacially slow pace.

"Speed determines how many bites you get," Outlaw said. "You want to slow down and give the fish time to bite. If you are going too fast, the sluggish fish won't bite due to the hot weather."



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The spawn is long passed, but summer still produces some real slab crappie across Mississippi.

“I don’t usually use a GPS to mark my speed; I let the fish tell me what to do,” Outlaw said. “If I’m fishing open flats, I adjust my speed until I start catching fish. If I’m fishing structure such as ledges, stake beds or brush piles, I usually let the bait sit still in the structure until I can catch fish.”

For Morgan, the unhurried rate of movement is essential for dialing in the right areas.

“Fishing as deep as we do in the summer, you have to slow down because you can’t cover the water in an effective way,” Morgan said. “To find those fish and get them to bite, you have to move slowly enough to present your baits from 10 to 18 feet deep along the ledge.”



Rodholders allow anglers to spread a half-dozen or more light-action spinning rods of various lengths around the bow of a boat.

“You’ll find out pretty quickly where those fish are relating next to the ledge. Are you catching some at 12 to 14 feet, but not at 18 feet on the bottom of that ledge? And are they not up at 10 feet on the top?”

As Morgan notes, time of day influences crappie positioning. Morning finds them higher in the water column, but intensifying sunlight will push them lower by late morning. The key driver, though, is bait school positioning.

“You have to be able to adapt,” Morgan said. “Those fish are like us, they have to eat every day. They can move up and down hour to hour, and being able to find them and change throughout the day is a key point.”

JIGS OR MINNOWS?

Morgan said he and his tournament partner, Kent Watson, primarily fish minnows on No. 2 Eagle Claw hooks during summer, as the sluggish crappie generally need a lot of coaxing. It’s not uncommon for them to dress their hooks with colorful tubes and swapping hooks for light jigs is another option spider-riggers may entertain.

Whatever the offering, double rigs are the norm, as they offer crappie twice the targets. Pre-made setups offer a convenient option, but meticulous tournament types typically build their own.

Morgan’s double-rig starts with his main line tied to a cross-line, 3-way swivel. The side ring holds a 6- to 8-inch tag line of 15-pound fluorocarbon leader tied to a No. 2, light-wire Eagle Claw hook. The bottom ring of the 3-way swivel holds an 18- to 24-inch leader that wraps three times through a ½- to ¾-ounce egg sinker, with an 8-inch tag end holding another No. 2 hook.

“This rig gives the minnow enough line to present a natural look, but not so much that you frequently get hung in the bottom,” Morgan said. “The reason we use the heavier (main) line is that we get hung up, we can grab our main line and pull our hooks straight without breaking them off and having to retie. We can rebend our hooks, rebait them and get them back in the water without losing so much time.”

Outlaw uses a similar double-rig design, only instead of an egg sinker and a bottom hook, he uses an Outlaw Max Game Changer, a specialized jighead he helped design for Rockport Rattler. Essentially a rattling, round-head jig with two additional light wire hooks flanking the main hook, this specialty jig increases the grabbing ability and prevents short strikes.

“This jig will hook that crappie no matter what angle he hits it from,” Outlaw said.

Outlaw and Morgan both use eight-rod spreads, except where local regulations limit anglers to fewer. They’re spread out at an angle around the bow. One person manning multiple rods can be a bit of a scramble, but it’s doable. With a second man in the boat, you watch fewer rods, and when one dips, you reach only for the ones of your side of the spread. ■



A full-time freelance writer specializing in sport fishing, **David A. Brown** splits his time between journalism and marketing communications (www.tightwords.com).



PIG KILLER DROPS 47

BY 1:00 A.M.

By Josh Chauvin

His mission is to eradicate hogs, and he's pretty good at it

After working all day, most people enjoy sleeping at night, but not Trey Dupre, aka atchafalaya_assassin on Instagram. Most nights from March through September, nighttime hog hunting season, he is out there doing his best to help thin out the destructive and invasive wild pig problem that plagues Louisiana.

Dupre just doesn't go to take out a pig or two and call it a night; he goes to complete the mission of hog eradication. On average, he puts down around 20 pigs per night. One night this year, he took out 47 hogs by

1 a.m. The photo of his truck bed loaded didn't even show five of the larger pigs he had already donated before heading to his final spot of the night. On that night, at the second spot, he put down 19 out of a sounder of 29 pigs.

Looking for an exciting hunt?

Dupre loves hunting and fishing and has been a diehard deer hunter. Now, his passion is nighttime hog hunting; he said there is no type of hunting as exciting.

He enjoys eating the pig meat himself but likes to donate as much as he can to members of his community.

continues >

This nighttime pig hunting endeavor started slightly more than two years ago, when Dupre was instantly hooked when he looked through a thermal-imaging scope and saw all those hogs that were invisible to

the naked eye.

Want a place to hunt?

Talk to farmers. Dupre said to try talking to farmers to see if they have a hog problem that needs fixing.

“Be prepared and check aerial maps and drive the area in the daytime to see where it’s safe to shoot. Also search for hog sign,” he said.

However, not much scouting is needed with Dupre’s method. The farmers tell him where the fields have been getting destroyed and when fresh farming has been completed in a particular field. Dupre knows the hogs will show; all he needs is to apply his drive-around method to find them.

The pig problem hits home hard for these farmers. Sure, hogs destroy roads and forests, and they spread disease, but it’s the crops and cropland that incur the most financial damage.

Hogs damaged one farmer’s 5,500-acre tract to the tune of \$20,000 to \$30,000 in one year. And that farm isn’t even one of the major hog locations where Dupre sees the most pigs. At another farm not much larger, the estimates exceeded \$40,000 a year.

Hogs begin their destruction as soon as tractors till up the ground. The sound of a tractor and smell of dirt calls them in. Dupre often has success hunting freshly chopped fields without any crops yet planted.

HOGS WILL EAT ANYTHING

Hogs are not picky and will destroy every type of cropland, including rice, sugarcane, soybeans and corn.

But once the crops are nearly ready to har-

vest is when the hogs really attack, eating the crops before the farmers get a chance to harvest.

BEST TIMES TO HUNT

Dupre calls both the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and local sheriff’s office before he goes hunting.

On full moon-lit nights, Dupre said pigs come out best in the middle hours, but on dark nights, hunting as soon as it gets dark is most successful.

He wears whatever clothes he wore at work. Colors don’t really matter, but wearing lighter-colored clothes on brighter moon nights can keep a hunter from sticking out.



He likes to take out bigger boars and keeps some trophy skull mounts. He has taken down a few of these smart, elusive boars exceeding 300 pounds.

HOW TO SNEAK IN WITHOUT SPOOKING THE HOGS

Dupre usually takes one or two friends or kids to experience the action. They drive around the well-known roads through the fields using Pulsar thermal-imaging scopes that detach with quick-release mounts to spot hogs from the truck.

“The trick to seeing the most hogs is to keep moving,” he said. “Waiting around will only waste time, so I drive around until I spot a sounder. Then, I park my

BEST EQUIPMENT AND AMMO

Travis Dupre sees all the action through his XQ38 Trail Pulsar scope with a traditional reticle; it’s the most-expensive part of his setup, costing \$3,400. He can see cows at 2 miles with the scope, and he can see defined leaves on trees at 400 yards in any night-time condition.

There’s never any question with thermal imaging whether the animal is the intended target. He suggests spending at least \$1,800 on a decent thermal scope to night hunt. Cheaper night-vision scopes can work, but they have a much smaller range of effective use, said Dupre, who shoots an AR-15 chambered in 7.62 x39mm with 20-round clips.

Since he typically fires around 100 rounds a night, he opts for less-expensive, 122-grain hollow-tip ammo by Tulammo that cost only 20 cents a round when bought in bulk. These rounds will usually take down any pig within 200 yards, with a 6-inch drop at 200.

The longest shot Dupre ever made on a hog was nearly a quarter-mile, but he doesn’t often take long-distance shots, most being within 100 yards. The pigs expire quickly from the hollow-tip bullets, seldom making it more than 30 yards after being shot. ■

ABOVE LEFT: Travis Dupre said a typical night’s hunt will result in the elimination of dozens of wild pigs from farmers’ fields.

truck about 200 to 300 yards from the pigs and take to the field by sock. Sometimes I wear boots, but being quiet in the dark is important, so I'd rather the shoeless approach."

He sneaks up to 60 to 70 yards from the sounder before setting up.

The most important part in getting close is using the wind and constantly looking at the hogs in the scope as the group walks closer in a single-file line.

One pig usually stands on guard outside the sounder. That guard hog's body language is what Dupre focuses on, because the other pigs are busy feeding. Also, seeing which direction the hogs are moving is important to getting set up at the correct distance.

WIND IS YOUR FRIEND

Since noise is a big concern, Dupre has greater success on nights with 10 to 15 mph winds. When downwind on a breezy night, the hogs simply can't hear or smell the hunters' approach.

The hunters set up in a tight pack, kneeling a foot or two apart using Primos trigger-stick tripods for their gun rests and over-the-ear style Walker headphones for hearing protection. The group goes for an initial neck shot on the first shot with a 3-2-1 countdown.

That's when the real action begins. After the first shot, pigs explode in all directions, and quick shooting is how Dupre takes down so many. "Aim around 5 to 6 feet in front of a pig's head on a hog at full sprint. A hog trotting slowly or in soft mud only needs about a 1-foot lead. It's similar to duck hunting, and the pigs are fairly easy to hit on the move," he said.

Dupre doesn't use a noise suppressor, but some of his friends do. The suppressors can definitely keep from scaring nearby hogs. However, nearby tree lines

muffle the sound, and Dupre often finds the next sounder of hogs feeding just a mile or so away. Sometimes, hogs come right back out into the open fields soon after he shoots.

COYOTE BYCATCH

Another problem animal is also sought on these nights — the coyote. Dupre has a dump site where the non-edible hog parts are hauled to, and he makes a pass with his truck to that area periodically. He usually shoots a coyote or two every night, once taking seven in one outing.

Additionally, the lack of hogs and coyotes seems to be helping the nearby hunters. One long-time rabbit hunter now sees five-fold the amount of rabbits he has ever seen. The nearby deer hunters are seeing and shooting far fewer pigs in the surrounding woods.

ARE HIS EFFORTS HELPING THE FARMER?

But are the hog numbers decreasing? Dupre is not so sure.

Last year, his group removed 1,187 pigs

continues >

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from these fields, yet on the first night of hunting the same fields this year, they found 105 hogs in one sounder, he said. In one 500-acre field, he counted more than 200. Dupre and his crew have already taken out 167 hogs this year, and he will continue to try his best to eradicate these destructive pests.

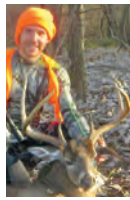
If any farmers near St. Landry Parish have a hog problem, or if anyone wishes to learn more about Dupre's hog-hunting adventures, they can find him on Facebook.

SHOULD WE HAVE A PIG BOUNTY?

Dupre wishes there was a bounty on pigs and thinks that's a potential solution to help with the huge pig problem experienced by many southern states.

But in the meantime, the Atchafalaya Assassin will be out there putting down pigs most nights for the rest of this summer. Well, except for taking Sunday nights off since he says he actually needs some time to get some sleep.

"The gratification knowing how much we are helping our farmers by saving their crops, mixed with the thrill of hunting hogs with a thermal, is unexplainable with words," he said. ■



Joshua Chauvin is a health-focused ultra-marathon runner who goes on solo manual-powered public land adventures focusing on hunting big game and large fish by using challenging methods and weapons. He enjoys self-filming and sharing the tactics and details from his expeditions to help others learn from his unique techniques.



HARD WORK STARTS AFTER THE HUNT

Most of the hard work starts after the shooting takes place. With flashlights, Travis Dupre carefully tracks any shot hogs that ran off. He drags all of the hogs out of the field and loads them up in his pickup truck, making sure he doesn't leave any mess for the farmers. Then, it's on to driving around some more until he sees more pigs.

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APEX PREDATOR

Joshua Chauvin

The author untangled this big choupique under the water at a running cut into the Mississippi River.



MISSISSIPPI MOTHER LODE

FALLING RIVER WATERS CAN BRING UNEXPECTED TREASURES WHEN LIMB-LINING THE TRENASSES.

The Mississippi River may be experiencing record flooding this year, but it's bound to come down. As the water leaves the swamps and river ponds, the fast-moving, bubbly outflow from the temporary streams creates perfect locations to hunt one of my favorite fish, the choupique.

High water can really spread out the fish, but these drain-offs are what concentrates the fish. Right when the natural banks begin to expose themselves is when the rest of the trapped waters flow through the tiny gaps connecting to the river.

RIVER MONSTERS

I grew up catching choupique, aka bowfin, in the swamp to make patties, but it wasn't until I started setting limb

lines in the big waters of the Mississippi River and its oxbows that I started catching really big choupique that commonly exceed 10 pounds. I now stick to setting my lines in the river because it's where all types of fish grow extra-large.

I most enjoy going on foot-only missions or using my 8-foot kayak unless my wife or some kids want to join; then, we take a larger boat.

Still, with the bay boat, I'm getting out to set and retrieve most of the lines in the water. A kayak doesn't flip as easily as a pirogue when battling large fish in the deep-water currents.

The 100-percent bank mission just takes this task up to an extreme challenge. These river banks are usually lined with huge rocks or steep, nearly straight-up muddy banks. Climbing up those tall,

soft mud banks is a challenge, but doing it while bringing a big fish to the truck is extra tough.

I only keep enough fish to eat, so with the size of these river fish, that usually doesn't take very many. The rest I just catch and release for the sport of seeing what's lurking out there.

I'm often targeting flathead catfish on these missions at other types of locations, but I always find a few running cuts to seek out the bowfin.

FAVORITE BAIT

My favorite bait is live bream hooked through the back or huge, live crawfish hooked through the tail. The live bait will often result in a few flathead catfish every trip, even in my choupique spots.

Getting live bait by land or kayak can

This big catfish was tangled and too large to get in the author's kayak, so he went diving and swam the monster to the bank.

be a challenge during the summer heat. I use a large ice chest with iced water and an aerator in the back of my truck. Then, I transport the fish in a small floating minnow cage by hand or tied to the kayak.

When that isn't an option, fresh-cut bream chunks work very well. Choupique don't seem to be too picky about what they eat. Just be sure to pick a tough bait that stays on the hook well.

DENIZENS OF THE DEEP

Big blue and channel cats and tasty gaspergou often come up from the depths to these shallow-running cuts at night to feed in the trenasses. The biggest soft-shells and snapping turtles visit looking to feed as well.

I set my limb lines on limber roots and limbs that are strong and have some flexibility. I try to set my lines late in the evening or at night. Gar will steal most of the baits if left during the daylight hours. Also, on nighttime sets, I'm on the lookout for big river bullfrogs to jump on. Alone at night, setting the lines in the river and the slop mud, is what I consider a peaceful evening of relaxation.

ADRENALINE RUSH

It's the next morning that the real adrenaline takes place. There's nothing like seeing that limb or root tugging. Still, be prepared on slack lines that look untouched; often, they go berserk when you pull, awakening the creature below.

Sometimes, the fish can be pulled up without any issue, but usually, they are tangled underneath. That's when I dive down to feel around and see what's hooked.

I start by using my foot to see if it's a big alligator gar or turtle before sticking my hand down the leader into awaiting jaws. Alligator gar may have the biggest teeth, but the choupique have super-sharp teeth and gill plates to watch out for. Luckily, the bigger catfish's stickers are dulled down, so I bear hug those to the surface.

Even though I'm a great swimmer, since I'm often alone and near the deep, strong



current, I always wear my fanny pack inflatable life vest, a dive knife on my calf and a backup tiny, folded knife on a lanyard for when I get in the water.

RIVER GEAR

Having a long push pole rigged with a gaff hook helps bring up the tangled debris and fish all together. However, getting in the water and untangling the fish by hand makes the trip the most fun and ensures a landed fish once my hands get hold down below.

I use heavy duty 8/0 to 10/0 circle hooks with heavy, braided nylon twine of at least 250-pound test or more. I rig most of my heavy duty lines Carolina-style by using about an 12- to 18-inch leader tied to a large, strong swivel. Above the swivel, I use 8 to 12 ounces of weight from old, broken cast-net weights threaded on with a knot above the weight to keep them in place.

The strong river current means a lot of weight is needed to keep the bait down and keep it from washing up against the bank or staying at the surface. The circle hook and swivel is very important to keep the fish from twisting off.

I try to set lines about 3- to 6-feet deep, directly under a limb. Since that's not always possible at certain spots, I keep some longer, suspension-rigged lines

with me, too.

These longer lines have a heavy railroad spike or nearly 16 ounces of weight tied to the end. I use them with the same leader, hook and swivel combo, but tied halfway up. When using live bait, having the bait suspended away from brambles is very important.

Most of my spots are in rarely visited locations, so instead of wasting time tying complex knots and having to remember each branch my lines are on, I use pool noodles on the ends. They only require a few wraps and quick single overhand knot to stay on the limb. This makes setting and untying to the limb a quick 5-second task, which allows me to save time and set many more lines.

A couple years back, I did an article and video on swim noodling to get the big flathead and blue cats from under the water which can be found here: <https://www.louisianasportsman.com/fishing/freshwater-fishing/apex-predators-extreme-noodling-swim-fishing-for-big-cats/>

FINDING THE FISH

When driving in the truck or boat or jogging, I'm always looking for birds. Just like speckled trout fishing by spotting diving seagulls, where they have flocks of

continues on page 62

APEX PREDATOR

continued



Getting muddy is all part of the fun when catching choupique without a boat using limb lines. **BELOW:** When taking kids with you, or if the water is too cold, the same action can be had from the boat but landing deep tangled fish is not easy.



any long-legged birds standing in the drain-offs, they have big fish feeding there as well.

To find these running trenasses online, carefully search Google Earth during the lowest river level dates and seek the dried out light colored run-offs. Once found, use GPS imagery of higher river levels to dates on rivergages.com to see how that location correlates to various river levels. This way no time is wasted checking spots when on the water.

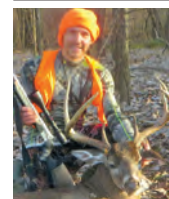
The deeper cuts have the longest fishable time as the river drops. The more narrow the cut the better odds I have since my few lines are concentrated within the run off. Fishing right next to the deep drop off into the river is where I try to set lines.

BRING YOUR BASS POLE

Also bring a bass pole. The bass tend to stack up at many of these cuts, and a limit can be had in no time if the bass are there. The river may be muddy, but when the clean, swamp water is rushing out, there's a perfect mixture for feeding bass that school up during the summer. I pack a telescopic travel rod-and-reel that fits into my backpack on these long hikes.

One time, I was fishing a running trenasse where I had set some limb lines. After catching a nice bass, suddenly my 6/0 hook set into one of the biggest alligator gar I've ever seen. The monster, which was more than 6 feet long, swam straight just under the surface, acting as if the tight drag it was spooling didn't even phase this submarine of a fish, swimming out into the river. Needless to say, the 65-pound braid suddenly popped.

When targeting the rushing river cuts in the summer, catching fish is nearly a guarantee; the question is just what type and how big of a monster will you have hooked. If looking for a way to stay cool in the heat of summer try giving this ultimate wading-style limb lining mission a go. ■



Joshua Chauvin is a health-focused ultramarathon runner who goes on solo manual-powered public land adventures focusing on hunting big game and large fish by using challenging methods and weapons. He enjoys self-filming and sharing the tactics and details from his expeditions to help others learn from his unique techniques.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

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

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

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

LET ROGUE STRING YOU ALONG

BOWSTRING MANUFACTURER ENTERS MARKET WITH QUALITY PRODUCT YOU'LL NEED

Rogue's bowstrings are single color only to avoid inconsistencies that often appear in the dyes in multi-colored strings. **BELOW:** Strings and cables are the first components on your bow you should examine when preseason practice approaches.

As summer sets in, many hunters' thoughts turn to the upcoming early archery seasons.

While a lot of them daydream of cooler fall days in the woods, very few begin to practice this early. Whether you start practicing or not, it's time to check your bow and bring it to your local pro shop for any needed maintenance, especially if you need to replace your string and cables.

Your bow's string set is the engine that propels your arrows toward the target. It is also often the weakest link; it fails first, and this causes untold numbers of hunting trips to be missed or cut short.

Most manufacturers recommend replacing your string set a minimum of every two years with average use, while people who shoot way more than average should replace theirs once a year. Obviously, if a string or cable shows extreme wear or nicks and frays, it should be replaced immediately regardless of its age.

Modern compound bows contain a massive amount of stored energy, even when at rest. Not only can a string or cable breaking cause damage to parts of your bow, but it can also cause severe injury to the archer. Don't push your luck riding a damaged string, replace it at once to avoid even costlier repairs or worse.

Your string and cable(s) serve a vital role in the performance and accuracy of



your bow setup; this is no place to cut corners. A little extra money spent up front will lead to fewer tuning issues and maintenance down the road. Higher-quality strings and cables have tighter servings that don't space, "creep" less and have fewer peep-rotation issues than bargain strings do. This better quality is due to better construction processes, as well as better materials. It's a lot like cooking, where you need both technique and quality ingredients to prepare an outstanding meal.

ROGUE STRINGS: A RISING STAR

For the past several years, we have been installing primarily string sets by Rogue Bowstrings in our pro shop. I have found their quality to be outstanding, as well as their customer service. Their exacting attention to detail and how quickly they fill orders sets them apart from other manufacturers. Rogue offers string sets in a rainbow of color options, and at different price levels to accommodate any archer's budget. They



are big enough to produce top-quality and innovative strings, yet small enough that they always treat you like family.

Joey Hershberger Rogue's chief operating officer, said Rogue got started in December 2016. Although it is a newer manufacturer, all of its employees came from within the string industry, forming an all-star lineup. String and cables are built to order and to exacting specifications, then quickly shipped to the customer. Rogue offers string sets from its R-15 — a great entry level string set — to its new R-21, its flagship.

R-21: THE NEXT LEVEL OF STRINGS

Earlier this year, Rogue introduced its R-21 string, a proprietary blend of materials resulting from collaboration between Rogue and BCY.

"We always wanted our own blend of materials, and through an extensive, multi-level testing process partnered with BCY, we feel we have found the perfect blend in R-21," Hershberger said. "Compared to 452X, for example, which tends to fuzz more, increases hand shock and often slows the bow down 5 to 8 feet per second from factory specs;

"R-21 is resistant to fuzzing, cushions the shot and maintains factory speeds. Not only that, it has a much-higher tensile strength in a thinner

material, allowing the use of more strands for added strength. Whereas 452X has a single strand tensile strength of 100 pounds, R-21 boasts a tensile strength of 120 pounds. This is further compounded by the fact the strings often have as many as 28 strands. When this is factored in, the R-21 string has a tensile strength that is 560 pounds stronger. That's a huge advantage whether hunting or target shooting."

R-21 is available in nine solid colors — black, red, blue, pink, white, fluorescent green, fluorescent orange, silver, and tan — and is offered as a single-color string only, to avoid inconsistencies caused by varying thicknesses of dyes that would lead to unbalanced strings, according to Hershberger.

If you are due to change your string set, I encourage you to give R-21 some serious consideration. String sets can be ordered from any pro shop that is a Rogue dealer, or by contacting Rogue Bowstrings at 866-9-STRINGS or www.roguebowstrings.com. ■



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

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

GRILLED DOLPHIN ON BLACKENED CORN RELISH

Serve fillets on top of the corn relish and try to get some of each on every forkful. **INSET:** Marinating dolphin fillets in spicy Italian dressing will help keep them moist while grilling.

If you didn't realize it or didn't get the memo, it's summer again in the South. After the mild winter, the spring was hot; the 90-degree days began before Memorial Day weekend. Folks living in states along the Gulf Coast don't need a calendar to know when summer has arrived. It's here for 2019, so let's try to enjoy it.

With the right clothing and a 5-gallon bucket of sunscreen, July is a good time for fishing off the Mississippi coast. Unless there is a tropical system in the mix, most days begin pretty calm, then develop a sea breeze as the temperatures rise. The breeze picks up in mid-morning, just when the heat is about to become unbearable, and it is at its strongest blowing toward land when fishing is over and anglers are heading in.

Dolphin are a favorite fish of all anglers who head offshore. Many call them Mahimahi to distinguish them from Flipper, but most enjoy them as the guest of honor at dinner.

Sometimes, the experience of catching fish adds to the flavor, and this is one of those times. All fresh fish are good, but eating ones you caught yourself earlier that day makes it really special. These fish are mild-flavored, and almost everyone likes them. Adding the grill and a little smoke from blackening the corn relish makes it even better. We may not be the tropics, but this is definitely tropical.

The proper care of fish begins as soon as they hit the deck, especially when it's hot and sunny.

Fish should be covered in ice, not just tossed in the fish box on ice, as soon as possible. If they come in green, flip them into the fish box until they quiet down, then remove the hooks and cover them with ice. When days are super hot and the sun is bearing down, even a few minutes on the deck can negatively affect the quality of fish. Ice is your friend; cover your fish in it immediately. ■



GRILLED DOLPHIN ON BLACKENED CORN RELISH

This is a unique way to eat dolphin. As much as we like dolphin, when you find them, you usually catch a lot, and eating them grilled, baked or blackened can get rather mundane. This recipe began while sitting with a group of fishermen and talking about different ways to prepare seafood, especially dolphin, when you come in with a big catch and have enough for a bunch of meals.

This recipe doesn't blacken the fish, but the corn relish. Actually, blackened might be a little overstatement, as the corn relish is really more caramelized with the seasoning, rather than being blackened. I believe you'll appreciate the juxtaposition.

Take care to remove all the liquid you can from the corn relish without squeezing it. It will stay moist with the olive oil and butter in the pan. The little bit of olive oil helps keep the butter from scorching.

This is another example of my food philosophy: if two things taste good separately, there's a good chance they will taste good together. Corn relish basically amounts to pickled corn, but with both sweet and sour tastes. It usually has onions and some peppers, and there are many different recipes. You can find options to make it yourself by Googling "corn relish," but in staying with the easy part of this recipe column, I used some Jardines Corn Relish from the shelf at a local grocery store, and it can also be found at most farmers' markets.

I use Chef Paul Prudhomme's Blackened Redfish Magic blackened seasoning, rather than making the salt-free blackened seasoning I usually make from scratch. There are many different combinations for making your own salt-free or regular blackened seasonings that can be found by Googling, and I'm still experimenting with them.

The zesty Italian dressing doesn't impart much flavor to the fillets, but the combination of vinegar and oil penetrates and keeps them moist while grilling. I use a lot of coarse ground black pepper and not much salt, but this can be tailored for

PREPARATION:

Trim away any larger, red areas of the fillet and cut it into approximate 8-ounce pieces. Place fillets in ziplock bag, barely cover with spicy Italian dressing, squeeze out all the air and seal. Marinate at least 30 minutes in refrigerator.

Strain the corn relish and shake to remove all liquid possible. Put corn relish in a bowl and sprinkle with blackened seasoning (to taste), then stir to mix.

Place fillets on grill tray and season to taste with salt and coarse ground pepper. Grill fillets over medium heat for a few minutes on each side and move them to a warming tray. Be careful not to overcook the fillets.

Turn grill to high. Put olive oil and butter in a

individual tastes.

Be sure not to overcook the dolphin fillets. As soon as a fork slides in easily and they flake, take them off the heat and move them to an upper warming rack or to a heated plate. It will only take a couple of minutes to cook the corn relish once the butter has melted. The pan will still be warming when you put it in. This is a caramelization, not a usual blackening, so as soon as you see any black in the relish, remove it from the heat and serve it.

Serve this with the corn relish on the plate and the dolphin fillet on top of it. They are good eaten separately, but try to get some corn relish with each bite of the fillet. The combination of flavors that aren't typically mixed is what makes this special.

Even though it's really easy, I don't use this recipe often and I don't expect anyone will. However, just about every time I use it, one of us makes a comment that we should fix dolphin this way more often and maybe even try it with other fish. ■

INGREDIENTS:

2 pounds dolphin fillets
1 16-ounce jar sweet and spicy corn relish
Spicy Italian salad dressing
Blackened seasoning
1 tbsp olive oil
¼ stick butter
Salt and coarse ground black pepper
Non-stick cooking spray.

The flavor of sweet and sour corn relish will turn a meal of dolphin into something special.



TIP!

A few drops of olive oil in a frying pan will keep butter from scorching



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.



FOR TROPHY SPECKS, CROAKERS!

By Sam Davis

Live croaker are a killer bait for fishermen targeting trophy speckled trout.

HOW TO RIG UP FOR HUGE TROUT USING FAVORITE LITTLE BAITFISH

When Capt. Joey Garriga goes fishing for trophy speckled trout, that means he's geared up for fishing with live croakers.

"Big trout like croakers," said Garriga, of

Poggey's Boat Charters in Pass Christian.

With that in mind, gearing up for big fish is important. Here's Garriga's checklist for croaker fishing:

CROAKER GEAR

- Hardware: 1/2- to 3/4-ounce egg sinkers and barrel swivels;
- Hooks: 3/0 or 4/0 Kahle;
- Corks: Boat Monkey popping cork;
- Leader: 20-pound monofilament or fluorocarbon;
- Main line: 30-pound braid;
- Reel: Lew's 300 or 400 spinning reel;
- Rod: 7-foot, medium-action Speedeaux Custom spinning rod;
- Bait: 3- to 4-inch croakers;

Garriga said a Carolina rig is his preferred tool.

"I like about 18 to 24 inches of mono leader, which is usually 15- to 30-pound test," he said. "I use 30-pound braid on my larger reels and 20-pound on my smaller reels. I use a barrel swivel and a 3/0 or 4/0 Kahle hook, according to the size of the croakers."

Garriga suggested using a quality leader such as Seaguar Senshi and being certain that the leader has a lesser pound-test rating than your main line. Following this simple rule will you allow to break off the short leader and hook if you get snagged or a bull red grabs your croaker and heads south.

He said when he's forced to go to fishing a cork, he has a reason to grab a Boat

Monkey model. Spinning gear on a long, medium-action rods are his choice.

"The Boat Monkey cork has heavy gauge wire," Garriga said. "It doesn't bend, and it throws well. I like to use the bigger cork when it's a little rougher conditions; it makes a little more noise. On calm days, I use the smaller one, the cigar type."

The washer between the cork and weight on a Boat Monkey keeps the weight from damaging the bottom of cork, and it adds extra sound.

"You want to have that clicking," he said. "It sounds like shrimp popping. A popping cork sounds like bait hitting the top of the water and fish hitting the bait." ■

All topwater lures are not created equal; learn when to use big ones, small ones, heavy ones, light ones and ones that wobble wide or not.



Dan Kibler

TOPWATER? YES! BUT WHICH ONE?

WEIGHT, RATTLE, LINE TIES KEYS TO LURES' ACTIONS By Jerry Dilsaver

Using topwater lures to catch fish is a favorite technique of many fishermen. The lure wobbles across the surface, imitating a thrashing, wounded baitfish, and the strikes come with knee-weakening violence.

But knowing which baits to choose under different circumstances is a key to success.

"Not everyone can work all topwater lures, and that's one of the reasons why there are so many sizes and options," said guide Allen Jernigan. "Some lures sit deeper in the water or have a split ring on the nose that requires more effort to get the lure to move, and some lures sit higher on the water and need to be finessed rather than jerked. There are other differences in size and body profile. Many folks think that topwater lures are made in different sizes, with different rattles, to attract different fish, but they also work better in different water conditions."

So what does he use?

"I use a lot of Top Dogs, Top Dog Jrs., She Dogs and She Pups," Jernigan said.

"I also use some Zara Spooks and have a Badonk-A-Donk or two in my tackle bag for situations that require them.

"By knowing how each lure works, you can use them to your best advantage, and with modifications as simple as changing the hooks, you can change the way a lure works. Differences between lures — even in the same brand and series — can be size, weight, rattles and materials."

Jernigan said size is an obvious difference, and that lures should match the baitfish in the area and the fish being targeted. After size, the most-noticeable differences are the rattles. Baits with higher-frequency rattles attract fish better in windy conditions with chop; baits with lower-frequency rattles generally perform better in calm conditions.

Bomber labels Badonk-A-Donks as either high- or low-frequency; Mirrolure offers Top Dogs and Top Dog Jrs. as their lower-frequency lures, while She Dogs and She Pups give off higher-frequency noise. And the frequency of the rattles often dictates another factor that can make a

big difference.

Lures with a higher-frequency rattle tend to sit higher on the water and will walk with less effort and more of a finesse action, Jernigan said. On the other hand, those with a lower-frequency rattles tend to sit deeper and take more effort and a pronounced pop with the rod tip to make them walk correctly, he said.

Jernigan said he occasionally has clients who are used to one version of lure and can't easily adjust to the difference, so he switches lures or modifies them to work for that day's fishermen. The easiest modifications are changing hooks and split rings or adding a split ring to a lure's line tie. When he replaces hooks, he switches to No. 2 Eagle Claw L774BK Series versions, which are black platinum in color and have a 4X strength rating. They are heavier, causing the lure to sink slightly and tighten up the action while requiring a little more effort to work.

Jernigan said the addition of a split ring to the line tie will loosen up a topwater's action and make the arc of the walk larger. ■



Food plots don't have to cover acres to be effective, if they're well-located and produce a good crop.

MINI PLOTS?

THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE BIG

By John J. Woods

Micro or mini wildlife food plots are in high cotton these days, working well on hunting properties that are not really large enough to justify full-scale farming practices, or where a hunter finds a unique little honey hole somewhere in the woods ideal for creating an impromptu plot.

"I have tried them both with success as well as failure," said long-time hunter Brad Carr, who has hunting land in Holmes County. "There are several tricks to getting these small plots started and productive. It takes just a bit of pre-planning and some sweat work to create a micro food plot, but the benefits can sometimes end up at the taxidermist."

If you want to go this route and try some smaller, isolated food plots on your land, here are some practical bullet point suggestions to follow to create one and how to hunt them.

- Create micro food plots no larger than a house-sized living or great room.

- Odd-shaped plots attract more deer than square ones.
- Even micro plots need sunlight for proper plant growth.
- Ideally, plots should have escape cover nearby for deer.
- Keep micro plots off main road hunter routes. The more hidden, the better.
- A mini-plot should have rub and scrape sites with overhanging limbs for licking and rubbing orbital glands.
- Disk or otherwise disturb the soil before planting.
- Heavily weeded spots might require a herbicide treatment.
- Choose easy to grow food-plot seeds like oats and wheat.
- Add suitable amounts of fertilizer to the seedbed.
- Lightly cover seed for decent germination success.
- Don't put a stand in the plot or on an edge, but back in cover.
- Have a sneak-in entry and exit so you can play the wind.
- Minimize human exposure to the plot.
- Control human smells with scent-killing sprays. ■

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE?

DITCHES CAN MOVE WATER ON AND OFF FOOD PLOTS

By Jeff Burleson

Water is one of the most-abundant chemical compounds on earth; it covers nearly two-thirds of the planet's surface. All living creatures and tissues — plants, animals or fungi — require water, but too much or too little can cause problems for some organisms.

Since plants lack mobility, water exposure in food plots must be regulated to produce a successful crop for wildlife.

Even though most plants have the majority of their structures above the ground, the roots of most must breathe and cannot tolerate extended flooding or anaerobic conditions. Too much water rots away the roots, starving the plant to death. Monitor the standing water across a food plot in low-lying areas and take action to drain off the excess with small hand-installed drains.

MOVE WATER OFF

Periods of inundation will drown almost any food-plot seed planted for the deer. While some water problems cannot be prevented on some sites, water ponding can be eliminated on others through shallow drainage ditches. Previous plantings from prior years generally will reveal the problem areas.

Ditches don't have to be deep to

effectively move surface water off a food plot; 12 inches is usually the key depth. Gravity will play a fundamental role in ditch construction. These ditches must be connected to an outfall or a lower drainage feature to carry excess water downhill and away from the plot.

Shallow ditches can be cut with an angled blade on a tractor or small backhoe, and these ditches can even result from a little elbow grease and a shovel.

While July seems to be the hottest month, rainfall seems to be more plentiful in July than any other month. But the sun and sweltering temperatures rarely allow showers to stick around for very long. Most summertime food plots and field crops are susceptible to heat damage and water stress.

MOVE WATER ON

Plants need water throughout their entire growth cycle, but the reproductive

period and a few weeks before is the most important stage and consequently, when water utilization is highest. Additionally, July is the time when most summer crops are in this reproductive stage and water usage is peaking. If soil moisture is low and plants are yellowing and expressing heat stress, these crops must be irrigated to produce high yields.

Irrigation should be routine to match normal rainfall amounts depending on soil type and porosity. In tight, clay soils, irrigation duration must be carefully monitored to make sure plants are not becoming flooded. In well-drained, sandy soils, practically unlimited irrigation can be utilized as long as ponding doesn't occur. Water should be applied just before daylight or during the early morning hours to allow plants to get the most use and to prevent any fungal growth at night. ■

Ditches cut through food plots can help carry off water when the plants are inundated, and they can help irrigate plots when rain is missing in the heat of the summer.

TRY YOUR LUCK...

AFTER DARK

By Phillip Gentry

WAITING UNTIL THE SUN GOES DOWN PROVIDES MORE SUMMER FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

As summer heat and recreational boat traffic make daylight hours less than hospitable to the serious angler, many turn nocturnal in pursuit of crappie, stripers, catfish and other fish that readily bite after hours. Many also view night-fishing as a traditional summer pastime, spending the night on the water with friends and family sharing time between bites.

How you go about night fishing can spell the difference between a successful outing and just losing sleep. Keep these five steps in mind to help insure your success.

LIGHTING

Whether or not you intend to use lights to attract fish to your bait, having proper lighting is critical to night-fishing success. Being able to see to navigate, prepare rigs, unhook fish and fix the inevitable mishap that arises will require the ability to see. If using batteries, make sure they are fresh and charged. Some anglers rely on portable generators, which may be noisy but insure you don't lack for lighting power.

When possible, rig rods during the daylight and carry spares.

TACKLE

In the event of a malfunction, it's easier to swap a rod than fix a problem. Rod holders make it much simpler to stay organized and keep lines spaced apart when fishing with multiple rods. Keep repeated-use items like hooks, weights, nets and pliers within easy reach so you can find them in the dark.

ORGANIZE

Most night-fishing occurs from a stationary position. Arrange anglers' things so each has space to move, be comfortable and tend to rods without having to step over or around obstructions. Clear pathways so each angler can freely move about the boat without tripping over items.

ANCHORING

Whether using an anchor or tying off to fixed objects like trees or bridge pilings, make sure your anchor points are secure. Keep anchor lines clear in the event that weather, conditions or simply moving to another spot makes it necessary to move.

LOCATION

Regardless of your quarry, fishing at night typically involves intercepting fish as they move from deep water to shallow in search of food. Target areas that provide a variety of depths in close proximity. Other considerations to keep in mind are structure, current, thermoclines and the presence of baitfish.

CHUM UP A SHEEPSHEAD

By Jeff Burleson

CRUSHED CRABS, BARNACLES WILL ATTRACT CONVICT FISH

Once located, it's not difficult to get sheepshead to bite, but finding them first is the key, and chumming can be a way to concentrate the hungry convict fish.

Sheepshead are suckers for free food, and they can smell things at great distances — almost like sharks. Many expert sheepshead fishermen believe that chumming is as important as tying on a hook.

Guides Tommy Scarborough and Jordan Pate chum heavily for sheepshead, whether fishing nearshore reefs during the winter or rock jetties during the summer.

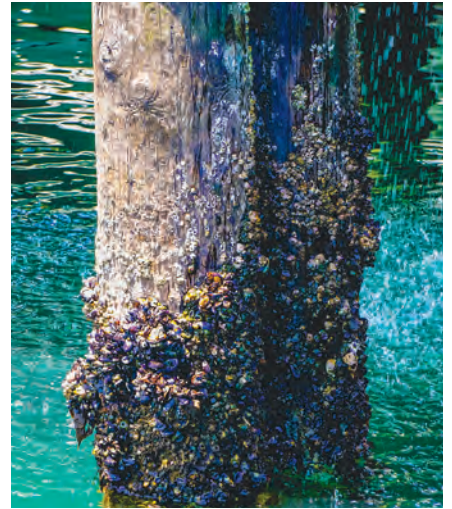
"I am not a biologist, but they have got to have one of the best senses of smell there is," Scarborough said. "You will be surprised the difference it makes."

The best chum for sheepshead can be barnacles or oysters scraped off pilings or rocks. They can be busted up into smaller pieces and tossed out bit by bit in small amounts.

"It creates a feeding frenzy and makes it easy to fill up the box in a hurry," said Pate.

Scarborough will also use busted up barnacles and oysters, but he prefers to pick up fresh-dead fiddlers from area tackle shops. He then smashes them up and puts them inside a tubular cricket basket that he'll tie off and hang down in the water.

"The thin wires of the cricket basket will not allow all of the chum to float out at the same time. The chum smell really gets them going," he said. ■



Sheepshead can be drawn to an area by anglers chumming with crushed fiddler crabs or with barnacles (inset) scraped off rocks or pilings.

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	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET		PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT
Mon 1	██	██	██	██	92	4:56 am	10:31 am - 1:57 pm	7:35 pm	10:56 pm - 2:22 am	NEW
Tue 2	██	██	██	██	97	5:50 am	11:28 am - 2:58 pm	8:38 pm	11:53 pm - Midnight	HIGH
Wed 3	██	██	██	██	88	6:51 am	12:32 pm - 3:58 pm	9:35 pm	Midnight - 3:23 am	Perigee
Thu 4	██	██	██	██	78	7:58 am	1:35 pm - 4:55 pm	10:26 pm	12:57 am - 4:23 am	
Fri 5	██	██	██	██	65	9:08 am	2:41 pm - 5:47 pm	11:12 pm	2:00 am - 5:20 am	
Sat 6	██	██	██	██	56	10:19 am	3:43 pm - 6:35 pm	11:51 pm	3:06 am - 6:12 am	
Sun 7	██	██	██	██	52	11:27 am	4:46 pm - 7:18 pm		4:08 am - 7:00 am	LOW
Mon 8	██	██	██	██	54	12:35 pm	5:44 pm - 8:00 pm	12:28 am	5:11 am - 7:43 am	HALF
Tue 9	██	██	██	██	60	1:40 pm	6:44 pm - 8:40 pm	1:02 am	6:09 am - 8:25 am	
Wed 10	██	██	██	██	45	2:45 pm	7:42 pm - 9:20 pm	1:36 am	7:09 am - 9:05 am	
Thu 11	██	██	██	██	37	3:48 pm	8:37 pm - 10:03 pm	2:10 am	8:07 am - 9:45 am	
Fri 12	██	██	██	██	34	4:51 pm	9:35 pm - 10:47 pm	2:47 am	9:02 am - 10:28 am	
Sat 13	██	██	██	██	42	5:51 pm	10:31 pm - 11:33 pm	3:26 am	10:00 am - 11:12 am	
Sun 14	██	██	██	██	50	6:49 pm	11:25 pm - 12:23 am	4:10 am	10:56 am - 11:58 am	LOW
Mon 15	██	██	██	██	59	7:43 pm	12:17 am - Midnight	4:58 am	11:50 am - 12:48 pm	FULL
Tue 16	██	██	██	██	63	8:32 pm	Midnight - 1:15 am	5:49 am	12:42 pm - 1:40 pm	
Wed 17	██	██	██	██	53	9:15 pm	1:06 am - 2:08 am	6:44 am	1:31 pm - 2:33 pm	
Thu 18	██	██	██	██	43	9:53 pm	1:52 am - 3:00 am	7:40 am	2:17 pm - 3:25 pm	
Fri 19	██	██	██	██	34	10:27 pm	2:34 am - 3:50 am	8:36 am	2:59 pm - 4:15 pm	
Sat 20	██	██	██	██	31	10:58 pm	3:13 am - 4:41 am	9:31 am	3:38 pm - 5:06 pm	Apogee
Sun 21	██	██	██	██	34	11:27 pm	3:48 am - 5:30 am	10:26 am	4:13 pm - 5:55 pm	
Mon 22	██	██	██	██	37	11:56 pm	4:22 am - 6:20 am	11:21 am	4:47 pm - 6:45 pm	
Tue 23	██	██	██	██	45		4:56 am - 7:08 am	12:16 pm	5:21 pm - 7:33 pm	
Wed 24	██	██	██	██	59	12:24 am	5:29 am - 7:59 am	1:12 pm	5:54 pm - 8:24 pm	HALF
Thu 25	██	██	██	██	52	12:54 am	6:05 am - 8:51 am	2:10 pm	6:30 pm - 9:16 pm	
Fri 26	██	██	██	██	49	1:26 am	6:44 am - 9:44 am	3:09 pm	7:09 pm - 10:09 pm	
Sat 27	██	██	██	██	53	2:02 am	7:28 am - 10:40 am	4:12 pm	7:53 pm - 11:05 pm	
Sun 28	██	██	██	██	65	2:44 am	8:16 am - 11:38 am	5:15 pm	8:41 pm - 12:03 am	
Mon 29	██	██	██	██	77	3:34 am	9:10 am - 12:40 pm	6:19 pm	9:35 pm - 1:05 am	
Tue 30	██	██	██	██	88	4:32 am	10:11 am - 1:41 pm	7:19 pm	10:36 pm - 2:06 am	HIGH
Wed 31	██	██	██	██	93	5:37 am	11:17 am - 2:39 pm	8:14 pm	11:42 pm - Midnight	NEW

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