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5 TIPS FOR WINTER SLABS



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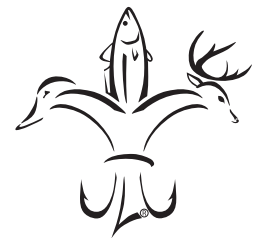
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January bucks across Mississippi are still very active, thanks in part to late-blooming does. Photo by Bryan DeHart.



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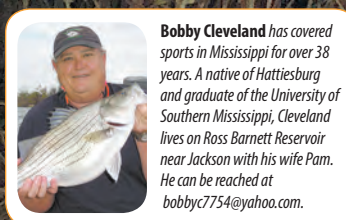
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Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland



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



J.D. Harvey recently harvested his biggest buck while hunting fresh sign with his dad, Jason. The buck is a 10-point Jefferson Davis County bruiser with a 14½-inch inside spread that weighed 180 pounds.

2020 VISION: JANUARY PROVIDES BLANK OUTDOORS CANVAS

GREET ANOTHER YEAR READY TO ENJOY MISSISSIPPI'S OUTDOORS

Happy New Year! Another year is here, and 365, oops, 366 days of opportunity for every Mississippi sportsman to expand his or her list of outdoor adventures.

- More waters to explore; more acres to roam.
- More fish to be caught; more game to be pursued.
- More sunrises to enjoy; more sunsets to toast.
- And, mostly, more time to spend with family and friends, making memories that can last a lifetime.

Whether you hunt and/or fish for pleasure or for food, 2020 lies ahead and, like all new years, it begins with a blank canvas in January upon which to paint your outdoor experiences. Use it wisely.

For this writer, after a year of battling some leg issues, it's an opportunity to make more fish jaws sore and give my own mandibles a chance to chew on some wonderful fish dishes.

Seriously, I set a goal each year to see just how many different fish species I can catch over a 12-month period. My average is 35 to 40, but one year, when I dedicated myself to the task and was young enough to pursue it, I had topped 60 when I quit counting.

Included were three different freshwater catfish, six different bream species, three crappie, seven different fish with the last name bass (largemouth, spotted, smallmouth, white, yellow, hybrid, and striped), a sauger and so many trash fish species, including four types of gar, three different carp — including the flying variety — two different buffalo and two different shad.

Oh yeah, bowfin, chain pickerel and an eel. Same year, I also

hooked, captured and released — carefully — two alligators, if you want to count those.

Saltwater is where I quickly built the list: redds, specks, flounder, mullet (2 types), black drum, sheepshead, sharks (10 types at least), snapper (4), grouper (4), amberjacks, jack crevalle, bonito, king and Spanish mackerel, cobia, wahoo, dolphin, tuna (2), rays (2) ... and those are just the ones we could identify. There were dozens of others, including what has to be the oddest creature I've ever encountered — an oysterfish.

More important is the list of fishing partners and friends with whom I shared those catches. So many good times and laughs to count, all to cherish.

What's your passion? Your plan or goal for 2020? Boy, there's just so many options in the Magnolia State, and January is loaded.

To give you a head start, this edition of *Mississippi Sportsman* offers several features to guide you in January including:

- Two looks at late-season deer tips, one centering on the second rut, when does that went unbred during their first cycle, cycle back around 28 days later.
- Small-game hunters will enjoy a piece on a squirrel hunter's best friend — a good treeing dog.
- And, finally, our writers share some of the best winter tactics for taking cold-water catfish and the highly prized crappie.

Enjoy this edition of *Mississippi Sportsman*, and from our entire staff, we wish you a safe, happy, and productive New Year. ■

LOTS TO DO THIS MONTH

With very few exceptions — such as turkey and a few shorebirds — every species of game animal and bird that is popular to hunt in Mississippi can be hunted in January. Many seasons, like deer and duck, are open in all areas all month, which delights a lot of people, especially Jimmy French of Madison.

“All I need to know is that every day I wake up, I can either duck hunt or deer hunt, so I am happy,” he said. “The problem is that I get four weeks of vacation every year, and every year I exit January with only one week left. I take most of it to go hunting.

“Where I deer hunt in southwest Mississippi, (January) usually includes the rut. Our bucks actually start chasing right after Jan. 1. At the places I duck hunt up in the Delta, the peak hunting is mid-to late January and this year I can hunt all the way to the 31st.”

Small-game hunters like Timmy Short of Brandon enjoy January, too. Squirrel and rabbit seasons are open throughout the month, setting up a great finale for each in February after the deer hunters have gone home.

“I’m a rabbit hunter first and a squirrel hunter second,” Short said. “Guess I never fell in love with hunting deer. I like to move, and most of the friends I grew up with were deer hunters who simply went and sat in shoot houses over big green fields. That was too bland for this country boy.

“My dad and my uncle both raised beagles, and my grandpa had a rat terrier squirrel dog. We covered many a mile behind those dogs, many, many, many miles. Everything I know about the outdoors, I learned behind a dog walking with Dad, his dad and his brothers.”



Dakoda Chisolm was hunting in Bolivar County on Dec. 5, 2019, when he killed this 3-point buck with 24-inch main beams and an 18-inch spread.

Short said his family always took a deer or two in November and December.

“Then, we started real hunting,” he said. “We’d hunt squirrels every afternoon after school, Grandpa and I, and on the weekends, we’d run the rabbits. We’d start at first light and quit when the beagles gave out, and in the winter, they could run all day.

MISSISSIPPI'S JANUARY HUNTING SEASONS

Deer, all zones but Southeast

Gun, with dogs: Open through Jan. 22.

Primitive weapon and archery: Jan. 23-Jan. 31. Hunters on private lands can use weapons of choice including modern guns.

Deer, Southeast Zone

Gun, with dogs: Open through Jan. 22.

Primitive weapon and archery: Opens Jan. 23 and closes Feb. 15. The season allows either-sex harvest through Jan. 31, but legal bucks only from Feb. 1-15.

Small game

Rabbit: Open through Feb. 28.

Squirrel: Open through Feb. 28.

Raccoon, bobcat and opossum: Open through Feb. 28

Trapping: Open through March 15.

Bobwhite quail: Open through March 7.

Migratory birds

Dove, North Zone: Open through Jan. 14.

Dove, South Zone: Open through Jan. 31.

Duck, coot and merganser: Open through Jan. 31. Youth, veterans and active military day is Feb. 8.

Goose: Open through Jan. 31. Light goose conservation order open Feb. 1-7 and Feb. 9-March 31.

Snipe: Open through Feb. 28.

Crow: Open through Feb. 28.

Woodcock: Open through Jan. 31.

“In early January, we’d hunt where we could get an invite to a lot of pine plantations and CRP. Back then, deer season ended in mid-January, and then we’d get invites to bring our dogs and hunt all over. Now it doesn’t end until February, but still it seems when deer season ends, everybody wants to be a rabbit hunter.”

Dove season has evolved over time, and in recent years, thanks to the loosening of federal regulations, it has increased opportunities in January. This year, the North Zone is open through Jan. 14 and the South Zone all month.

“I love that we now get so much time in January in the Delta, but I do wish they’d adjust (shorten) the other segments in September, October and November to let us hunt up here through Jan. 31 like they can this year in the South Zone,” said Glenn Overby of Greenville. “That would give us some great hunting with the migrating doves coming in from the Midwest.

“They arrive here in January and give us some great hunting. Since food supplies are so few and far between, the birds are concentrated in a few places. Where there’s a steady food source, there will be birds, and they will come back day after day no matter how often you shoot. They have to eat.”

Overby has a good argument, especially since he’s also an avid duck hunter.

“They (the feds) are letting us hunt ducks through the end of the month, and this year their frameworks for dove run through the end of the month,” he said. “Just about everybody I know who hunts ducks also dove hunts. We hunt ducks in the morning and doves in the afternoon. If both seasons ran through to the 31st, that would be ideal.” ■

PHIL BRYANT WMA DEDICATED

On Nov. 13, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks formally dedicated the Phil Bryant Wildlife Management Area, a highly prized 18,000-acre matrix of bayous, cypress sloughs and well-managed bottomland hardwoods in Warren and Issaquena Counties.

"I am humbled and honored with the naming of this amazing Wildlife Management Area," said outgoing Gov. Phil Bryant said. "I will continue to do all in my power to earn this distinction. It will be dedicated, if not in name, in spirit, to the Mississippi outdoorsmen and women who will forever enjoy its beauty and harvest."

The MDWFP will be maintaining an intact bottomland hardwood forest in perpetuity for the benefit of many wildlife species. The WMA will be vital in maintaining a long legacy of outdoor recreation for sportsmen and women, while offering a unique hunting experience.

"We are applying a new concept with the Phil Bryant WMA by allowing group hunts in a primitive setting," said Dr. Sam Polles, executive director of MDWFP. "It is divided into four tracts that offer a variety of hunting opportunities."

In 2018, the MDWFP, in partnership with The Nature

Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, purchased about 18,000 acres in Issaquena and Warren counties from Anderson-Tully Company. The horrific flooding of 2019, which inundated the entire 18,000 acres, delayed development of the WMA.

It has since been divided into four units based on accessibility and geographical features, all named after previous hunting clubs that were located on the property: Buck Bayou, Ten Point, Goose Lake and Backwoods.

The Bryan WMA will offer hunters unique opportunities not previously offered on other WMAs. From October to January, groups of hunters — such as fathers and sons — will be drawn for a specific hunting unit. For five days, they can camp and hunt any game species that is in season.

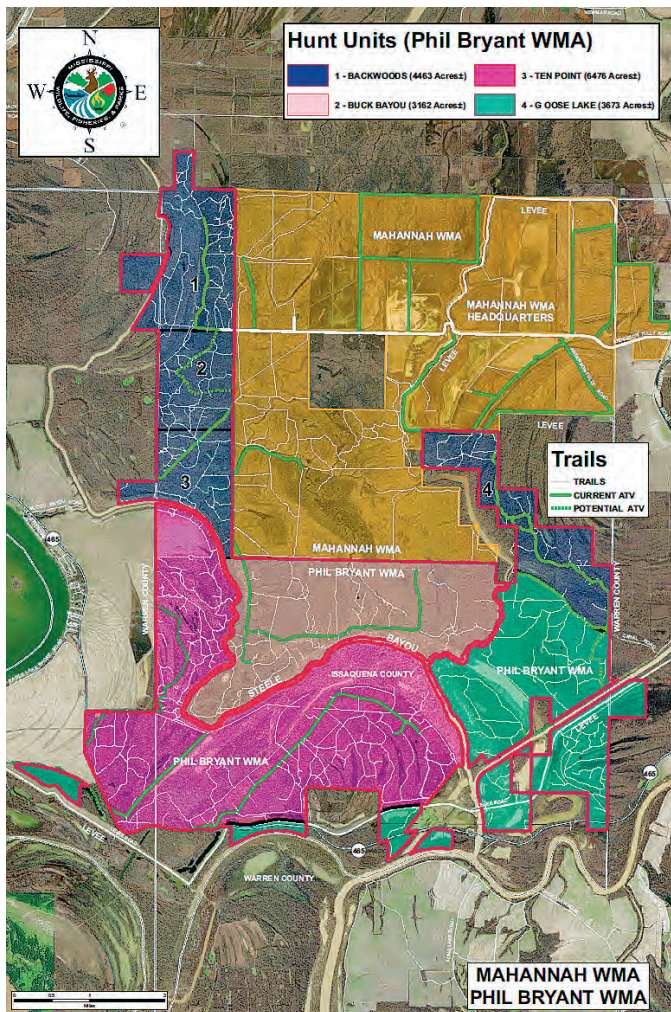
From Dec. 26-Jan. 12 on the Ten Point Unit, draw hunts will be conducted for youth and handicapped hunters. This hunt will be during the peak of the rut and provide an exciting hunting opportunity.

The Buck Bayou Unit will be included in the neighboring Mahannah WMA draw-hunt system. These areas are a combination of moist-soil impoundments and flooded timber, providing a quality waterfowl-hunting experience. Other WMA units will offer open waterfowl hunting on specific days.

The Goose Lake Unit, accessible only by boat or foot, will have archery-only draw hunts throughout the season. This unit offers a unique hunting experience for those wanting to get off the beaten path.

The Phil Bryant WMA is the 55th WMA managed by MDWFP, providing more than 700,000 acres of land to public access in all four corners of the state.

For more information about the new Phil Bryant WMA, and all other public lands managed by the agency, visit MDWFP.com. ■



BARNETT RESERVOIR WILL BE LOW

The Pearl River Valley Water Supply District, which oversees Barnett Reservoir near Jackson, has announced it is lowering the 33,000-acre lake about 2½ feet during January and February to continue its battle against giant salvinia.

The drawdown will create more hazards in both the upper river and main-lake areas, and boaters are advised to use caution at all times — even in the marked boat channels.

It will also necessitate the closing of some of the 39 boat ramps on the lake. Ramps will be closed case-by-case during the period. A list of closed ramps will be maintained on the Barnett Reservoir website at TheRez.ms. ■

SIMPSON LEGION LAKE CLOSED

One of Mississippi's most-popular public lakes, Simpson Legion Lake on Highway 49 between Mendenhall and Magee, is closing to allow the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks to repair and renovate the dam, the agency has announced.

The 76-acre lake is popular because of its easy access from Highway 49 and its ample bank-fishing opportunities.

According to Larry Pugh, fisheries director for MDWFP, the dam is in need of repair and is the next project in the agency's renovation project in its public lake system.

"The bad news is that the lake will be closed for about 2 to 2½ years," Pugh said. "The good news is that historically, once we renovate and repair a lake, it comes backs better than ever."

Typically, the MDWFP draws a lake down to renovate aging water-control structures, but it also uses the time to do renovations to the shoreline and lake bottom to improve fish habitat and increase bank access.

The lake was open in December during the drawdown; fishermen were allowed bank access only and all limits were removed.

Pugh said the agency was able to use its electrofishing boats, normally used to survey fish and return them safely to the water, to capture some of the fish and transfer them to other lakes in its system. Included were several of the trophy bass that had made Simpson Legion so popular. Pugh said fish were taken to both Lake Calling Panther near Crystal Springs and Lake Mike Connor at Collins. ■



MDWFP electrofishing boats removed some trophy bass from Simpson Legion Lake before it was drawn down and closed to transfer to other state lakes.

BRANDON TEEN CASHES IN ON BASS

NORSWORTHY GETS COLLEGE FISHING SCHOLARSHIP

One of Mississippi's most-accomplished high school bass fisherman, Lake Norsworthy of Brandon, has signed an athletic scholarship to compete in bass fishing at Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain.

Blue Mountain is the only college in Mississippi — one of about a dozen nationally — that offers scholarships for the sport, and the small school in the northeast corner of the state is among the top teams in the nation.

According to Coach Shane Cox, Blue Mountain finished fifth nationally in overall combined points on the three national college tours — Cabelas (now Bass Pro Shop), FLW and Bassmaster.

"Lake Norsworthy is one of the best high school fishermen I have ever seen or heard of," he said. "We are happy to have him competing for the Toppers."

Norsworthy is one of two Mississippi high school anglers to sign with Blue Mountain this year. Cox said Jake Kimbrough of Amory has also signed an agreement to fish for the Toppers.

The school's team will have 10 or 11 members when the 2020-21 season begins in September. Ten anglers were on the team this past season, including Cox's son, Ty, who is a senior.

Norsworthy, who often partners with his father, Mike Norsworthy, to compete against adults in tournaments on Barnett Reservoir, has an impressive resume as a member of the Brandon High School bass team. On it are 11 wins, 10 second-place finishes, five angler-of-the-year titles and four qualifications for the national championship.

Norsworthy plans to study business at Blue Mountain.

Cox, who owns Hammer Rods and lives in Guntown, has been with Blue Mountain since its bass program started three years ago.

"They called me about wanting to start a bass team, and (after) one attempt to get one going failed, they called back and said



it was pretty much a go," Cox said. "All of the schools that give scholarships through (their) fishing program are small, private schools like Blue Mountain. These are not full rides, but partial scholarships. There is no limit to team members, as long as I stay within the scholarship allowance."

"The key thing for us is that the school does cover all our team expenses for our tournaments. That's a big deal right there, and it allows us to fish all three of the major college circuits, which usually means somewhere between 12 and 13 events a year. There are a lot of big schools like Mississippi State and Auburn that have fishing teams, but they do not offer scholarship aid and do not cover all the expenses."

The level playing field is why you see school names like Adrian, Bethel, Kentucky Christian, Montevallo, Emmanuel and Blue Mountain atop leaderboards. ■

FIVE JANUARY FISHING HOT SPOTS

January may be one of the coldest months, but that doesn't mean there isn't some red-hot fishing action. These are our picks of five hot spots you should consider visiting.

INSHORE/NEARSHORE: MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

The action in the major coastal rivers and bays is incredible, and on days when the weather allows, the nearshore marshes can be just as productive. The bridges along US 90 in Bay St. Louis, Ocean Springs/Biloxi and Pascagoula are all outstanding. They offer a mixed bag of redfish, black drum and sheepshead that use the pilings as ambush points for bait moving in and out with the tides. Dead shrimp on a moving tide can fill an ice chest in a few hours.

BLACK CRAPPIE: EAGLE LAKE

Early indications are that the flood of 2019, which had this old oxbow out of its banks for about nine months, did not hurt the fishing, at least not for one of its best patterns: black crappie around piers on the Mississippi side of the lake. The "specks" — as locals call black crappie — began hitting in early December. The colder the day, the better, but don't think you have to fish deep to catch black crappie. While some fishermen prefer to troll deep for white crappie, many know that the specks will be suspended only 3 to 4 feet deep under the piers.

CATFISH: BARNETT RESERVOIR

The only time of the year when the 33,000-acre lake is productive for bank fishermen is when chilling, winter weather brings catfish into the shallows to feed of shad dying by the millions due to exposure. They die and fall to the bottom of the lake, and catfish move in to feed. Along the Natchez Trace, Red Dot Road and Highway 43 offer access to bank fisherman.

BASS: LAKE BILL WALLER

This MDWFP lake near Columbia remains one of Mississippi's premier bass lakes due to its winter production. The big bass are entering their prespawn stage in January, and they start staging off the first drop from the many shallow spawning areas. They can be targeted there all month. On cold days, fish a jig and trailer on the drop, and on warm days, move up on top of the drop and don't be afraid to use a quick bait like a lipless crankbait.



Shad stunned and dying in cold water bring catfish to the shallows and fishermen to Ross Barnett Reservoir in January.

BREAM: TIPPAAH COUNTY LAKE

Yes, you read that right. This small MDWFP lake near Ripley in extreme north-central Mississippi is one lake where anglers can whack some panfish in the winter, and they can do it from the bank. You will need casting equipment — long rods with spinning gear — to put worms on the bottom in 8 to 10 feet of water. The lake's big redear and big bluegill will not disappoint. Don't expect to load a cooler, but you can take home a big mess of fish to fry. ■

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Reed Alexander

Reed Alexander, 5, shot his first deer at around 100 yards with a .243.



Kendall Lee

Kendall Lee with a squirrel from a Nov. 23, 2018, hunt in Poplarville.



Grayson McCarter

Grayson McCarter, 7, was all smiles after taking his first deer at his Pawpaw's farm on opening weekend.



Sean Johnson

Sean Johnson hooked this 8-pound, 15-ounce lunker bass on Nov. 7 on a state lake in south Mississippi.

GOT PICS? We want 'em

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FLOWOOD HUNTER GRUNTS IN BIG RANKIN COUNTY WHITETAIL

By Dan Kibler

William Dearman admits it seemed way too easy. Sitting in a climbing stand 15 feet up in a sycamore tree the afternoon of Nov. 27, Dearman heard a buck grunt three times out in a cutover in front of him. He pulled out his grunt call, grunted back, and in a snap, a 150-inch trophy was standing broadside at 20 yards.

Almost as quickly, it was on the ground, a .308 bullet cleanly through both lungs.

Of course, it wasn't nearly that easy for Dearman, 33, of Flowood. Having had the buck in trail-camera photos since January, it was the first time he'd seen him, and only the third time he'd hunting this particular area of an 80-acre lease.

"We had this buck on camera since January, and I had been trying to set up to kill him," said Dearman, who works for Center Point Energy. "He pretty much stayed on camera throughout the year, about once a month.

"Then, I went to check a creek crossing and stuck a camera up there, and I started getting him about every other day, so I put a climber up and hunted it three times, and I killed him the third time."

Dearman's Old Man climber was about a third of a mile from his original stand, with a cutover and a big willow thicket — on the bed of a dry lake — close by. He climbed up in the stand about 1 p.m. and at 3, he heard the buck out in the cutover.

"I thought, 'Golly, listen to that,'" he said.

GRUNT CALL DOES THE TRICK

Using a Primos Buck Roar, Dearman grunted back at the buck three times and was astonished when the buck broke out the thicket running, apparently looking for his competition. Accompanying him were an 8-pointer and a 4-pointer.

"He just busted out of that thicket, ready to fight," he said. "I was grunting at him with my mouth, trying to get him to stop. I didn't think he was gonna stop. He finally stopped broadside about 20 yards away."

Dearman had his Ruger American rifle in .308 on his shoulder when the buck stopped, and he didn't waste any time squeezing the trigger. Shot through both lungs, it stumbled off about 40 yards before falling for good.

William Dearman killed this 152-inch Rankin County buck on Nov. 27 after making a series of grunts on his Primos Buck Roar call.



The buck carried a main-frame 5x5 rack with three sticker points. It was 18½ inches wide, had 10-inch back tines, main beams measuring 21 and 23 inches, and scored 152 inches green gross.

The buck is Dearman's biggest ever and his first of the season. "I didn't shoot one earlier in the season," he said. "I was waiting on this one." ■



A RIFLE FOR A PRESENT?

BREAK IN THE BARREL FOR OPTIMAL ACCURACY

By Andy Douglas

Many rifles are given as Christmas presents every year. It's one of the best gifts for a sportsman or woman who enjoys hunting, plinking or any of the shooting sports. If you're lucky enough to be the recipient of a special gift like this, consider breaking in the barrel.

Breaking in a barrel is simply polishing or burnishing the inside rifling using the ammo that fits the gun. The process should start before the first shot is ever fired.

There are lots of opinions, philosophies and different ways to break in a barrel. Look it up on-line and you'll see them. Here is a time-proven and simple method you can't go wrong with.

BEFORE THE FIRST SHOT

Any brand-new barrel can have imperfections such as filings or shavings, along with dust, dirt and grime. Taking a shot could foul the barrel and leave a permanent pit or blemish. Before shooting a new gun, the first step for break-in is to clean it well.

Take a quality bore cleaner and soak a one-inch square cotton patch and push it down the barrel from the receiver end with a non-abrasive cleaning rod and brass or nylon jag that's caliber specific to your rifle. The wet patch will exit the barrel at the crown. Let the bore cleaner work by letting it set or "soak" for a few minutes. Then follow by running three or four dry patches through until they're clean. It's not a bad idea to do this step twice. What you're looking for is a clean, dry patch.

TAKE THE FIRST SHOT

Shoot the first round in the gun, then run a wet patch down the barrel. Save the wet patch for a comparison later. Let the bore cleaner soak. Run dry patches through until you get a clean patch. This may take 15 or more patches.

MORE SHOTS

Shoot it again and repeat the cleaning process. Save the second wet patch. Do this for five shots total, cleaning after each round, saving the wet patches and looking for a dry, clean patch each time.

Compare the wet patches of the first five shots. You should notice that each wet patch should look a little cleaner than the



Take advantage of the shots and sight in the scope while breaking in the barrel.

Photos by Andy Douglas

one prior; the fifth wet patch should be cleaner than the first. It should start taking fewer dry patches to see the barrel clean.

SHOT GROUPS

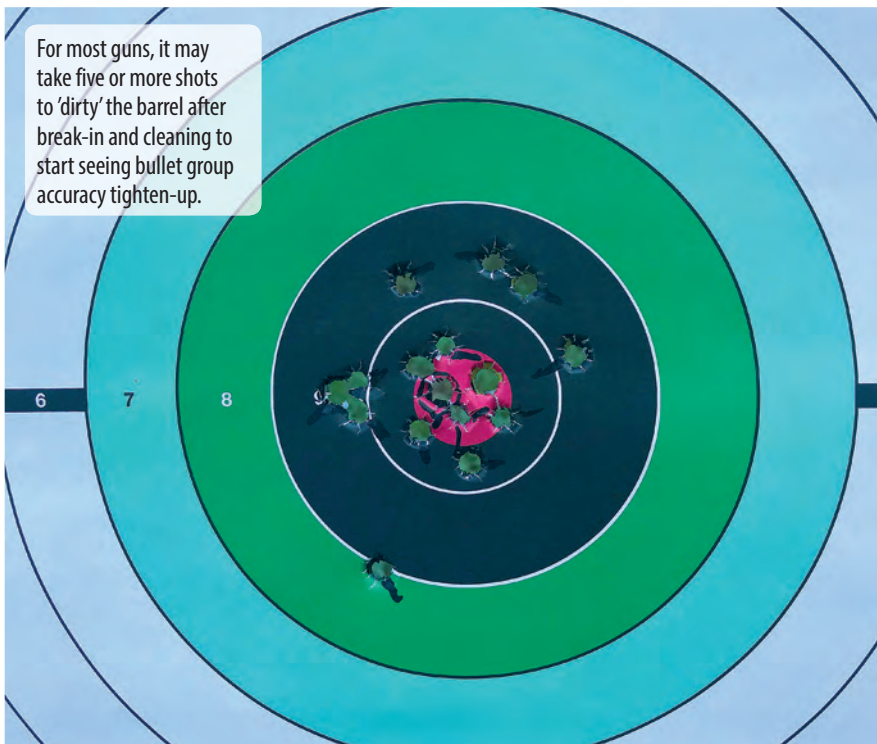
It's now time to shoot a three-shot group, and clean — wet patch followed by dry patches. Then, shoot another three-shot group and clean. Last, try a five-shot group and clean. You should be to the point where it takes five or six dry patches to come clean. It should also take a little less force to run the patches down the barrel compared to when you first started. If that's the case, you can feel good about the break-in. If you're not happy with it, you can continue shoot more groups.

Take advantage of the shots and sight in the scope while breaking in the barrel. Also note that for most guns, it may take five or more shots to "dirty" the barrel after break-in and cleaning to start seeing bullet group accuracy tighten-up.

It's your gun, you can tweak, adjust, or extend this method to your preference. Don't just throw a scope on your new rifle and sight it in. A proper break in of the barrel is necessary to obtain the best accuracy possible for the life of the gun. ■



There are a few cleaning supplies you'll need during the break in process to clean the barrel.



For most guns, it may take five or more shots to 'dirty' the barrel after break-in and cleaning to start seeing bullet group accuracy tighten-up.

SUPPLIES YOU MAY NEED:

- Quality Bore Cleaner.
- Nonabrasive cleaning rod.
- Cleaning jag caliber specific made of brass or nylon.
- Standard cotton cleaning patch, one-inch square or round.
- Optional: cleaning rod guide.

SIXTEEN SHOT BREAK-IN GUIDE:

- Clean before the first shot. Repeat if desired.
- First shot, then clean.
- Second shot, then clean. Repeat for five shots total.
- Three shot group and clean.
- Three shot group and clean.
- Five shot group and clean.

MISSISSIPPI'S 2019 highlights

Mississippi's outdoor scene was certainly not lacking in newsworthy stories throughout 2019. It seemed like a month never passed without something of great interest to hunters and fishermen taking place — some good, some not so good, some just interesting.

We looked at MS-Sportsman.com, the website that accompanies Mississippi Sportsman, and we came up with the 10 most-read stories of 2019.

Hope you enjoy looking back at them, reading them a second time, or maybe for the first time. The following are short versions of those stories. You can check out the full stories for all of our Top 10 at MS-Sportsman.com.

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

1 A 'MACK DADDY' OF A PRAYER IS ANSWERED OCT. 15

Chip Henderson, lead pastor of Pinelake Church, was scrolling through trail-camera photos this past August when one caused his heart to skip a beat. With his head and wheels spinning, he sat, staring at a photo of one of the most eye-popping, beautiful bucks he had ever seen.

Further examination revealed additional photos of the huge, main-frame 10-pointer, and surprisingly, most were taken during daylight hours.

Leading up to the Oct. 1 bow season opening, Henderson, who is from Flowood, accumulated a pile of additional photos of the Hinds County buck. He began to refer to the giant buck as "Mack" — short for "Mack-Daddy" — and as a serious and dedicated bowhunter, he realized that a wily, old buck of this caliber casually traipsing around during daylight hours would probably give him one good opportunity. If the buck realized it was being hunted, it would likely become nocturnal, and Henderson knew he needed to close the deal the first time in, if possible.

That worked out perfectly, when, on Oct. 7, Henderson arrowed the huge buck, which carried a rack with a gross Boone & Crockett Club score of 153 inches, including a 19-inch inside spread,



Chip Henderson of Flowood first saw his 'Mack Daddy' buck in a trail-camera photo in early August. He killed the big buck the first time he hunted him, on the afternoon of Oct. 7 — the first time he got a needed north wind.

22-inch main beams and tines as long as 12 inches.

— Bill Garbo

To read the complete story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/deer-of-the-year/a-mack-daddy-of-a-prayer-is-answered/>

2 STATE ALLIGATOR GAR RECORD IS BROKEN

MAY 16

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Bobby Cleveland



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

To read the complete story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/fishing/freshwater-fishing/state-gator-gar-record-is-broken/>

3 MISSISSIPPI 2019-2020 DEER SEASONS

JUNE 27

Delta, Northeast, East Central, Southwest Zones.

Mississippi hunters were eagerly looking forward to the upcoming seasons...

To read the complete story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/mississippi-2019-2020-deer-seasons/>

4 NATCHEZ WMA DRAW HUNT PRODUCES BIG BUCK NOV. 15

When Natchez State Park is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is big bass, and rightly so. The biggest largemouth in Mississippi history, weighing 18.15 pounds, was caught in Natchez Lake in 1992.

But there's also close to 3,000 acres of WMA land available as permit deer hunting for the few hunters lucky enough to be drawn.

Kenneth Wallace and his son, Garrett, from Lincoln County were fortunate enough to draw a four-day Natchez State Park WMA archery partner hunt, Oct. 31-Nov. 3. Everything came together, with a good high-pressure system, cool temperatures, red acorns falling and, most important, a 220-pound, 13-point buck falling.

— Andy Douglas

To read the complete story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/deer-of-the-year/natchez-wma-draw-hunt-produces-great-buck/>



Kenneth Wallace dropped this 220-pound buck, which scored close to 150 inches, on a four-day, permit-draw hunt on Natchez State Park WMA.

5 A SLEEPER AT CANEMOUNT WMA

APRIL 18



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

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

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

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

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

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

He lowered his gun and called a few more times but the gobbler didn't move. It was asleep with its head under its wing.

— Andy Douglas

To read the entire story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/turkey-hunting/a-sleeper-at-canemount-wma/>

6 NEW BRYANT WMA RULES PROPOSED

MAY 28

The state's newly acquired Wildlife Management Area has undergone a name change, and rules and regulations have been proposed for the 18,000-acre area in the South Delta.

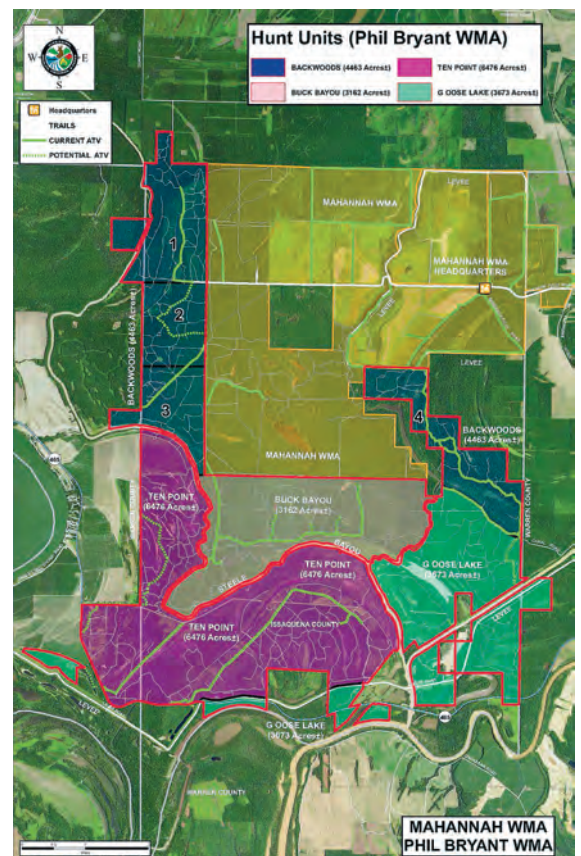
Originally called Steele Bayou WMA, it is now named for the current governor: the Phil Bryant WMA. Because of how it will be managed, it will immediately become the most-interesting WMA in Mississippi.

Russ Walsh, executive director of MDWFP's wildlife bureau, said Bryant WMA will be broken into four units

named after some of the hunting camps that once existed on the land: Backwoods, Buck Bayou, Ten Point and Goose Lake. Each unit will offer a unique hunting experience, and hunters will be permitted to hunt through drawings.

— Bobby Cleveland

To read the entire story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/new-bryant-wma-rules-proposed/>



7 CARTER GOES OLD SCHOOL ON STONE COUNTY TROPHY

NOV. 1

Kyle Carter is old school when it comes to deer hunting with a bow, and he deserves an "A" for both comprehension and application of the pure basics of the sport.

By finding the buck's food source, identifying its main trail, and following the path to its bedding area, Carter was able to take one of the best trophies ever killed in Stone County.

And he did all this on public land in Desoto National Forest.

The 10-pointer, which Carter had hunted the previous two seasons as an 8, had a very tall, thick rack that green scored at 133 inches. If it holds that measurement through the 60-day drying period, it would be the highest-ranked buck taken by a bow — and No. 5 by any method — in Stone County, according to Magnolia Records. Stone County is not known for producing big bucks, and that it came on public land makes it even more of a trophy.

— Bobby Cleveland

To read the entire story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/deer-of-the-year/carter-goes-old-school-on-stone-county-trophy/>



Kyle Carter took this tall, thick 133-inch trophy buck in Stone County on public land in the Desoto National Forest.

8 HUNTER'S SECOND CHANCE NETS HINDS COUNTY 12-POINT

OCT. 30

Troyce Luke Whittington of Byram couldn't believe what he was seeing from his Hinds County deer stand on Oct. 22, and he knew he didn't want to mess up the situation — again.

He was looking at the buck of his dreams, a 12-pointer that measured 136% inches, a buck he never thought he'd see again in a hunting situation, not after how he missed out on a chance to take the same trophy nearly two weeks earlier.

"Twelve days before, I had located the big buck I wanted to kill," said Whittington, 25. "He came in at 4 o'clock and was acting really spooky, because a 6-point had already busted me. I knew he was fixing to run off, and I was thinking I'd never see him again. So, I took a risky shot, and I shot right under his belly. I was sick. I felt like I was going to throw up."

— Bobby Cleveland

To read the entire story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/deer-of-the-year/hunters-second-chance-nets-hinds-county-12-point/>



Troyce Luke Whittington's 12-point buck, measuring 138 %inches, was killed Oct. 22 in Hinds County.

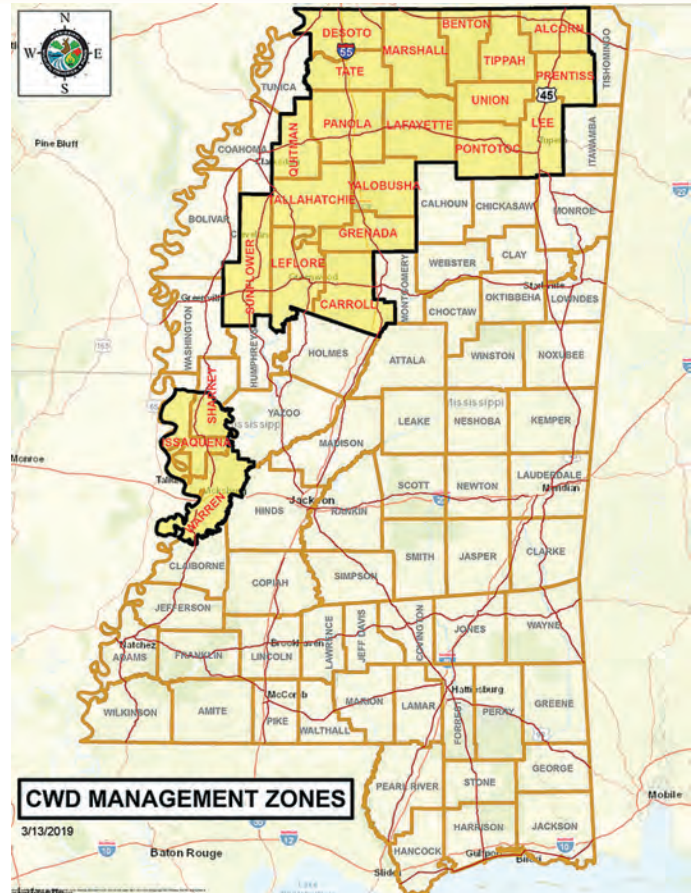
9 CWD COUNT NOW 19; ZONES GROW CLOSER

APRIL 25

The two latest confirmed cases of chronic wasting disease in Mississippi's free-ranging deer herd brings the total to 19, causing the North CWD Management Zone to expand south.

Two does, one each from Tallahatchie and Panola counties, were recently added to the list of confirmed cases. Because the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' CWD Response Plan impacts areas within 25 miles of a confirmed case, the North Zone grew, adding Sunflower, Leflore and Carroll to a list of 19 other counties affected. Added to three counties in the original Issaquena Zone, Mississippi now has parts or all of 22 counties in CWD Management Zones.

With the North Zone expanding to the south, only three counties — Humphreys, Holmes and Yazoo — keep the two zones separate.



Within the CWD zones, it is illegal to:

- Supplementally feed wildlife;
- Establish new mineral sites or add supplements to existing sites;
- Trap wild hogs without a permit from MDWFP;
- Remove certain portions of cervid carcasses from the zone. Only cut/wrapped meat; deboned meat; hides with no head attached; finished taxidermy; antlers with no tissue attached; cleaned skull plates with no brain tissue; and cleaned skulls with no lymphoid or brain tissue can be transported from inside to outside a CWD Management Zone.

— Bobby Cleveland

To view the entire story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunt-ing/deer-hunting/cwd-count-now-19-zones-grow-closer/>

For full details on these stories, as well as all the latest outdoor news — plus tips and tactics to make you more successful out in the field — visit

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10 SOUTH DELTA'S CATASTROPHIC FLOODING AFFECTS WILDLIFE

JULY 23

When you're worried about people's lives and well-being, both certainly being impacted in the catastrophic, backwater flooding that has plagued the South Delta for half of this year, it might seem tacky to discuss the flood's impact on outdoor sports.

But understanding and hunting and fishing is important to the very people hit hardest by the high water. Not only are hunting and fishing a big part of their lives, both have significant economic impact on their pocketbooks, as well as different communities.

"It has been terrible; it is terrible, and you can't help but worry about how terrible it's going to be in the long term," said Jeff Terry, an avid hunter, fisherman and land manager from Eagle Lake Community about 20 miles north of Vicksburg. "We're seeing wildlife stressed to the limits, from deer to turkey to alligators to ... look the list is long and getting longer."

— Bobby Cleveland

To read the entire story, visit <https://www.ms-sportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/south-deltas-catastrophic-flooding-affects-wildlife/>

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MISSISSIPPI	• 47 Acres \$4,100/Ac.	• 67 Acres \$2,238/Ac.	• 183 Acres \$2,322/Ac.
ADAMS	• 82 Acres \$3,950/Ac.	• 255 Acres \$3,243/Ac.	LOUISIANA
• 32.81 Acres \$7,500/Ac.	• 129 Acres \$3,900/Ac.	• Home & 283 Acres \$895,000	BATON ROUGE
• 100 Acres \$2,750/Ac.	• 243 Acres \$3,497/Ac.		• 238 Acres \$9,624/Ac.
• 402 Acres \$3,109/Ac.	JASPER	PIKE	BIENVILLE
AMITE	• 24.5 Acres \$2,244/Ac.	• 20 Acres \$4,500/Ac.	• 127 Acres \$2,975/Ac.
• Home & 28 Acres \$399,999	• Lodge & 255 Acres \$765,000	• 20 Acres \$2,500/Ac.	BOSSIER
• 28 Acres \$3,892/Ac.	• Lodge & 900 Acres \$2,200,000	• 20 Acres \$3,250/Ac.	• Home & 51 Acres \$668,000
• Home & 37 Acres \$300,000	JEFFERSON	• 24.11 Acres \$4,769/Ac.	• 102 Acres \$2,936/Ac.
• 37 Acres \$2,675/Ac.	• Home & 70 Acres \$799,000	• 24.34 Acres \$2,259/Ac.	CADDO
• 41.71 Acres \$3,649/Ac.	• 347 Acres \$2,850/Ac.	• 28.52 Acres \$3,488/Ac.	• 19.6 Acres \$3,562/Ac.
• 51.85 Acres \$4,725/Ac.	JEFFERSON DAVIS	• 32.23 Acres \$2,249/Ac.	• 32.4 Acres \$2,880/Ac.
• 53 Acres \$2,650/Ac.	• 106 Acres \$1,700/Ac.	• 33.78 Acres \$2,735/Ac.	CONCORDIA
• 116.91 Acres \$3,500/Ac.	• 280 Acres \$1,821/Ac.	• 34.6 Acres \$8,500/Ac.	Lodge & 1,536 Acres \$6,000,000
• 125 Acres \$3,175/Ac.	JONES	• 36.7 Acres \$2,500/Ac.	DE SOTO
• 191 Acres \$3,481/Ac.	• 20 Acres \$2,100/Ac.	• 40 Acres \$2,800/Ac.	• Home & 160 Acres \$1,375,000
• 414 Acres \$2,500/Ac.	KEMPER	• 40 Acres & 58.4 Acres \$420,000	• 255.5 Acres \$3,326/Ac.
ATTALA	• 37 Acres \$1,643/Ac.	• 77 Acres \$5,181/Ac.	EAST FELICIANA
• Lodge & 96.5 Acres \$370,000	• 220 Acres \$1,422/Ac.	• 109 Acres \$3,623/Ac.	• 479 Acres \$4,173/Ac.
• 148 Acres \$1,182/Ac.	• 247 Acres \$1,750/Ac.	• 196 Acres \$3,250/Ac.	LAFAYETTE
CLAIBORNE	LAMAR	PRENTISS	• 100 Acres \$1,950/Ac.
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CLARKE	• 24.7 Acres \$9,777/Ac.	• 44 Acres \$2,000/Ac.	• 116.46 Acres \$3,600/Ac.
• 216.5 Acres \$1,500/Ac.	• 26 Acres \$9,250/Ac.	• 75 Acres \$1,750/Ac.	TANGIPAHOA
COPIAH	• 215 Acres \$3,450/Ac.	WAYNE	• 95 Acres \$3,500/Ac.
• 339 Acres \$2,389/Ac.	LAUDERDALE	• 54 Acres \$3,000/Ac.	WASHINGTON
• Cabin & 63.5 Acres \$289,000	• 30.5 Acres \$1,500/Ac.	• 67.96 Acres \$1,798/Ac.	• 27.14 Acres \$2,943/Ac.
COVINGTON	LAWRENCE	WILKINSON	• 150 Acres \$3,200/Ac.
• 182 Acres \$3,850/Ac.	• 36 Acres \$3,500/Ac.	• 30 Acres \$4,166/Ac.	WEST FELICIANA
FOREST	• 765 Acres \$2,875/Ac.	• 143 Acres & Lodge \$799,000	• Lodge & 113 Acres \$1,250,000
• 95 Acres \$5,000/Ac.	LOWNDES	• 156 Acres \$3,365/Ac.	
FRANKLIN	• 150 Acres \$1,395/Ac.	• 309 Acres \$3,883/Ac.	
• 40 Acres \$3,300/Ac.	MARION	• 350 Acres \$3,971/Ac.	
• 44 Acres \$3,409/Ac.	• 98 Acres \$2,450/Ac.	• 496 Acres \$3,649/Ac.	
• 105 Acres \$3,000/Ac.	• 113 Acres \$2,650/Ac.	• Home & 485 Acres \$1,499,999	
• 145 Acres \$2,744/Ac.	NESHOMA	• 662 Acres \$3,761/Ac.	
• 170 Acres \$3,235/Ac.	• 26.8 Acres \$2,250/Ac.	• Home & 680 Acres \$2,950,000	
• 230 Acres \$3,004/Ac.		• 961 Acres & Home \$5,500,000	
• 250 Acres \$2,796/Ac.		• 1278 Acres & Lodge \$9,500,000	
• 420 Acres \$2,850/Ac.		YALOBUSHA	
		• 75 Acres \$3,399/Ac.	
		YAZOO	
		• 515 Acres \$1,850/Ac.	



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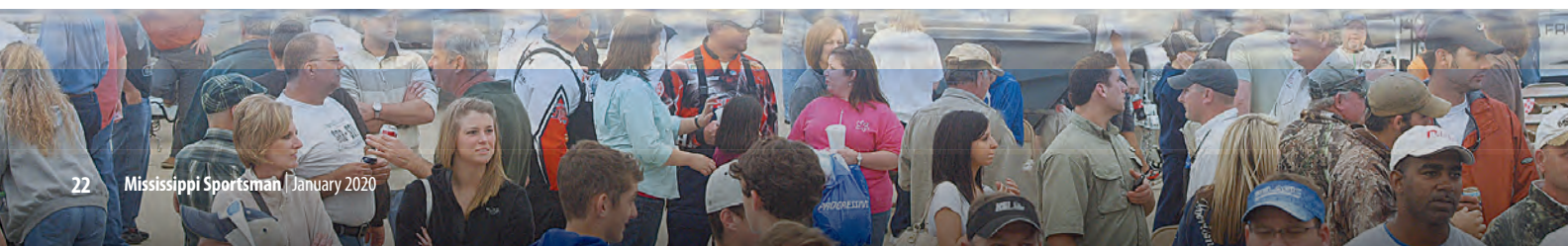


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JANUARY MAGIC:

LATE-SEASON DEER TIPS

MERIDIAN HUNTER HAS A ROUTINE FOR FINDING AND TAKING NICE BUCKS WHEN THE SEASON BEGINS TO WANE.

■ By Mike Giles

Parker Temple took his bride hunting on one of the coldest days of the year in search of a late-season trophy buck. “We were trying to get in there early, but we decided to hike to the stand since my wife likes to hike,” said Temple, from Meridian. “We carried two bags with clothes and iPads, and walked in to the stand. (We) put our warm clothes on when we got there.”

Temple’s stand overlooked a 3-acre food plot, that was only 250 yards long, short by his standards. It was bordered on the front and on back ends by a patch of broom sage.

It didn’t take long for the action to heat up; they had barely gotten settled into the stand.

“Rachel was looking at her iPad, and I had stuff in my lap when a deer came out into the sage about 3:30,” Temple said. “The sage was only about 15 yards wide, and I knew the buck was a shooter when it came out, even at that distance. I was throwing stuff out of the way and stuck my gun out the window just about the time the buck walked into the woods.”

Lucky for Temple, he had the crosshairs on him by then.

“Tic-Pow!” Temple’s rifle roared, and the buck, which was crossing 275 yards away, disappeared.

“That was a deer of a lifetime,” said Temple. “We stayed in the stand and saw 15 to 20 other deer and a couple more bucks the rest of the afternoon as we waited. I thought we’d missed our opportunity and wasn’t feeling really good about it as we got our stuff out of the house.”

With darkness setting in, Temple walked into the woods, then started up a trail and found a piece of bone. Dejected and fearing that he’d made a bad shot, he and his wife went back and cranked the truck to warm up before looking further.

“We went back to the spot I’d found the bone and found the deer about 20 yards away,” Temple said. “He had a pretty 9-point rack with a kicker on his G-2 and weighed 195 pounds. It wasn’t my biggest ever, but I loved the hunt and how it played out, along with ... having my wife there.”

Harvesting that buck was not luck or an accident; Temple is serious about his deer hunting, hunts several places, puts in a lot of time and preparation and lets the young bucks walk.

SWEET SPOTS FOR BIG BUCKS >

SWEET SPOTS FOR BIG BUCKS

“During January, I typically try to locate the low-pressured areas that haven’t been hunted, but you also have to get on or near a food source, so it’s a catch-22 situation,” Temple said.

“During the morning hunts through mid-day, I like to hunt cutovers or crossings in a draw. During the afternoon, I’ll concentrate on food plots where the does are coming in, especially during the rut.”

During January, there will be a secondary rut or bucks looking to breed does, so Temple really likes to hunt areas close food sources, as those tend to attract more bucks too.

While he hunts food plots, they’re not your typical food plots, and that’s part of the key to his success on late-season bucks.

“If we have an area cut over, I’ll get a dozer and clear a lane several hundred yards,” Temple said. “I have some stands where you can see 425 yards in both directions and some that might be 600 to 700 yards, but I want my stand at least 300 yards away from the crossings. That seems to be the optimum distance or sweet spot for my buck sightings.”

By positioning his stands well away from the crossings or food

sources, Temple keeps the area free of human traffic and scent, which is imperative when targeting quality bucks during late in the season.

FOOD PLOT PREPARATION

There’s more to disking fields and throwing out seeds, and Temple’s success validates that statement as well.

“We put ammonia nitrate on our fields, and I think it makes the grass softer and tastier to the deer,” said Temple. “On one of my Kemper County fields, I’ll put the ammonia on the fields right before the holidays, around Dec. 20, just before a rain if I can.”

“I also hunt in Alabama, where the season runs a little longer and the rut’s later, so I’ll put the ammonia out there right after Christmas.”

“The big thing is that you want to get in that sweet spot when the rut’s going on, and that means getting in an area that has a food source, but not too close to the deer,” Temple said. “I’m not big on hunting around grain, but properly fertilized green fields are the ticket to my late season success.”

SCENT, STEALTH, CROSSWINDS ➤



Rick Small



Established crossings where deer get through fences or go across utility rights-of-way are great places to set up late in the season. **INSET:** Parker Temple uses trail-cameras to track bucks' late-season movements and 'sweeters' up his food plots to draw more deer in January.



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SCENT, STEALTH, CROSSWINDS

While Temple prefers hunting long-distance stands, he also bowhunts trophy bucks in tight quarters and knows that scent control is paramount, so he wants to keep his scent dispersal to a minimum in case the buck of a lifetime comes downwind.

“I don’t use a lot of cover scents, but I do like to use scent control and prefer the scent control kits that have the scent-free deodorant, shower soap, detergent and some type of autumn cover scent,” he said. “I believe you have to use stealth and keep your hunting area free of scent, and that means doing everything in your power to keep your scent out of the area you’re going to hunt.”

The only way to keep your scent out of the area where the deer travel is to keep out of it yourself; that’s a reason that Temple believes in hunting the least-pressured areas on any land. While you can’t keep everyone out of some places, you can keep your own stands or hunting spots free of your own scent.

“I’ve killed more deer hunting a crosswind, and have found it better than just hunting downwind,” Temple said. “But I’m more a pick-your-time hunter and want to hunt when the time is right for certain stands and areas when it all comes together, instead of hunting every day regardless of the weather and conditions. I only have a limited amount of time to hunt, so I want to pick those times that are most favorable to me and give me optimum opportunities.”

GAME CAMERAS, SCOUTING

By employing a new generation of game cameras that can

send pictures directly to his cell phone, Temple is able to scout without getting close to his stands, limiting human intrusion.

Just imagine getting a text message from the buck of your dreams.

How can that happen, you might ask?

It can, and Temple recently got such a text.

Though his time to scout is limited by his job and other responsibilities, he utilizes game cameras to scout while he’s working and sleeping — and not just any camera, but the high-tech cameras that take pictures and send them to his cell phone. That’s where the difference comes in. In pre-camera days, hunters scouted and found buck sign and then hunted for a glimpse of a deer — or buck — without a clue as to how big or mature the animals were, let alone the antler size.

“I use the game camera to locate good bucks,” Temple said. “I had some deer on one of my cameras before the season, but all the pictures were at night.

“Then just before bow season this fall, I started seeing bucks in daylight. Opening day was exciting, and I had deer all around me as it was getting dark. I drew my bow but couldn’t see through the peep sight and spooked the deer when I let my bow down.”

By using trail cameras as scouting tools, hunters can eliminate the need to do a lot of walking through their hunting turf, except to access their stands.



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

"I didn't get any more pictures for a few days, and then, he came back at night," said Temple. "I had to plant over the weekend but didn't get the opportunity, so I planned my work week around hunting the buck. I'd planned to make a late-afternoon hunt one day, but before I got to the woods, my cell phone was blowing up with pictures of deer coming in, so I was worried that they were feeding earlier that day."

Though distracted by the volume of pictures, Temple made it through his workday and headed to the woods to his stand as soon as he could.

Before he arrived at his hunting lease the call, or text, came in from the big buck. Yes, he walked into the camera frame, and it sent a direct cellphone invitation to Temple.

"I went to the stand, and the deer started moving, with a few does and spikes coming in," Temple said. "Then a big-racked buck came into the end of the small field and turned facing me while feeding with his head down."

"Thwack!" Temple's arrow flew straight and true, and another trophy fell victim to Temple magic.

Temple's buck was a trophy, sporting a rocking-chair 8-point rack with an 18-inch spread that made its 180-pound frame look small. The buck was hard-earned, the result of utilizing all of the skills and tools at his disposal. Ultimately, the cellphone call from his Covert Game Cam photo spelled the buck's doom. That's one call that Temple doesn't regret taking. ■

A trail-camera photo of this buck, sent to Parker Temple's cell phone, led to the buck's harvest.



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

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DOES THAT DIDN'T GET BRED DURING THE FIRST ESTRUS CYCLE DRIVE LATE-SEASON HUNTING IN MISSISSIPPI. HERE'S HOW TO APPROACH THE LAST MONTH OF THE SEASON.

■ By David Hawkins

LATE BLOOMERS

Every hunter knows the rut is a magical time in the deer woods.

BELOW: Bucks will cruise the woods, trying to detect the scent of does that didn't breed during the first estrus cycle.

Bucks and does are carrying out the centuries-old ritual of procreation. The rut is predictable; within a few days, the rut will begin, peak and end at about the same time every year — not the same time everywhere, but the same for every unique locale.

So what happens to the wallflowers who miss the first go-round? Well, 28 days later, they will enter estrus again. Since it is the doe that completes the cycle, there is a good likelihood she will be bred.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Game division has crunched years of numbers and has a graphic on its website (www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/deer-program/deer-breeding-date-map/) that shows the date of the first rutting period for every area of the state. Based on some criteria, every doe has the potential of hitting this first rut, but there are factors that can cause the doe to be late or miss this first opportunity all together.

Hunters should use a list of factors to determine the best time to be in a stand before and during the rut. The pre-rut is only the deer activity that takes place in the days and weeks ahead of the rut.

The rut is initiated when does react to a specific photoperiod: the amount of daylight in a given day. This begins a hormonal reaction that causes the estrus cycle to begin. If the doe is in good health, she will soon be ready to breed. If she is malnourished, recovering from a disease or the victim of an injury, she may come in at a later date. Once the photoperiod starts the rut, there is no postponing it.

So why do deer in different counties appear to enter estrus at different times? One theory is that Mississippi deer are an amalgam of genetics from across the country. Photoperiod is credited with starting the rutting cycle, but maybe a descendent of a Michigan transplant (circa 1940s) has enough genetic difference from a Texas transplant or a Virginia to start at a slightly different time.

If a doe misses being bred once she is healthy enough, she will re-enter estrus every 28 days until she meets Mr. Right. Her

fawn will drop a month later than does who were successful breeders during the peak of the first rut.

“Does can miss breeding during the first rutting cycle for a number of reasons,” said Dr. Bronson Stricklin of Mississippi State University’s Deer Lab. “But when another fall comes along, and the photoperiod again triggers the rutting cycle, she will enter the rut, no worse for the wear of the previous season.”

Scrapes are deer message boards where they post all the scents other deer are looking for to make a connection. Once that connection happens, bucks will respond until that doe is receptive, and at some point, she will be willing. The doe squats and urinates in the scrape. Bucks will urinate down their legs, allowing the urine to flow across the tarsal glands on the inside of the back legs.

With does the focus of buck activity, it’s time for hunters to change gears; you want to hunt does. They have all the chips



in their favor. Bucks will be checking scrapes and cruising the woods, smelling and tasting the air for the intoxicating aroma that might lead to their demise.

“Bucks use their fantastic nose to zero in on an estrus doe, but scrapes are not the only option the bucks have,” Stricklin said. “They will visit doe groups and use their sense of smell, as well as the Jacobson’s organ (in the nasal cavity) to detect pheromones that indicate if a female is nearing estrus.”

Food plots are good places for hunters to find does in January; bedding areas are good, as are active game avenues. During the rut, if you don’t see deer moving, you’re in the wrong place.

Finding a line of scrapes is dynamite. Set a stand so the wind is blowing from the scrapes toward you, then sit and wait. Where deer activity is known to be happening, making a mock scrape might be the key to success. There are lots of products on the market for mock scrapes, the makers swear they work; I still like to find an active scrape and hunt what the deer have made for each other.

“Doe groups remain pretty much the same all year,” Stricklin said. “The matriarchal group is led by a dominant, adult doe, her female fawns and yearlings from the previous season and perhaps others. All things being normal, their routine is primarily concerned with the search for food.”

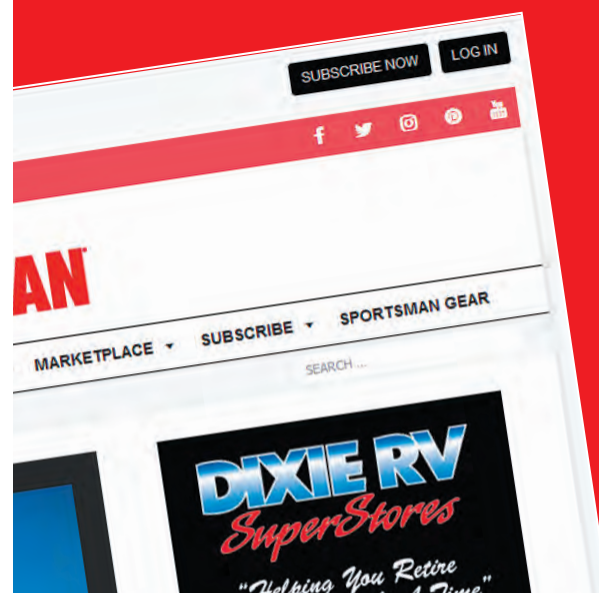
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LATE BLOOMERS

Bucks use signpost rubs not only to strengthen their neck muscles, but to leave information for other deer.

VOCALIZATIONS

Deer are vocal creatures, with grunts, bleats, wheezes and snorts all being part of the vocabulary. Put all the knowledge you can muster into analyzing deer sounds, and you will make another leap toward harvest success. First, leave a few calls at home. A fawn bleat will bring a doe running in early archery season, but this is winter, and the only thing a fawn bleat will call is a stupid coyote.

Probably the most-common buck call is a grunt, a deep, guttural sound that in reality sounds a lot like a pig, but a bit staccato and evenly spaced.

“Grunt calls have been used for decades,” said call-maker Paul Meek, who also deals in various scents and lures. “People may say I make the stuff, so of course I say it works, but it is 30-plus years of repeat business and return customers that say it works that have convinced me.”

There is a call made by a doe when she is ready to breed but no buck has followed her trail, heard often where the doe-to-buck ratio is skewed toward too many does and bucks get spaced out and tired. This is when a doe does a snort-wheeze. There are a lot of variations in the cadence of this call, but they all boil down to a sense of desperation on the part of the doe.

Primos produced a can call that makes this sound, and people who have had success with it swear it is magic. Some experts say it is overrated and overused. I watched a doe walking a trail perform a snort-wheeze, and within 15 minutes, a 4-point buck came in looking for her and a quickie before a bigger buck showed up for a challenge. He followed her down the trail, and I never knew if he got lucky, but the call she made worked. ■



David Hawkins

BUCKS AREN'T ALL STUDS; DOES AREN'T PARTICULAR

I'd be in big trouble with the politically correct crowd with this statement, but allow me to explain. First, bucks are not the virile, doe-breeding machines some hunters believe them to be. Yes, they are aggressive toward other suitors for a doe's attention, and knockdown, drag-outs are a common result. But after a successful breeding session, a lucky buck is not immediately

ringing the doorbell of another female. He has to have some time to recover.

On the other side of the coin, does will stand for several bucks within a single estrus cycle, a fact that has been confirmed by testing DNA from twin and even triplet fawns and determining they all have different sires.

All of this is to say, if you see a lesser buck than what you're after breed a doe, don't be discouraged, her next baby daddy may be on the way, and he might be the one you're after.

Another interesting point is that of the traveling man: a buck that decides he's ready for a road trip. Every season, hunters get trail-camera pictures of or see a mature buck with which the hunter has no history. This is because a mature buck will some times just pick up and travel. Perhaps this is a genetic imprinting reaction or possibly just a need to breed and not having or finding enough receptive females in his home range. The point is, a hunter in the woods has a better chance of seeing a transient buck than the hunter lamenting the season's end from his recliner. There will be a last deer of the season killed by a hunter somewhere this month. Why not let that hunter be you? ■

Doe deer drive the rutting activity. Those does that did not get bred in the first rut cycle may be ready again before the end of January.



David Hawkins

SYNTHETIC ALTERNATIVES TO DEER URINE EXIST

Making a mock scrape or scrapes is one way to bring late season deer activity to your area. Using a rake to disturb the ground and applying a doe in estrus scent will often do the trick.

Hunters have for years drank the Kool-Aid and forked over dollars for the "one-doe-one-bottle, bottled and bond, certified collected at the absolute peak of estrus doe-urine."

The fear in the professional community is that chronic wasting disease might be transmitted from infected, pen-raised deer in another state. There are those who profit from the sale of such products who insist there is no such threat. But the point is, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks believes there is enough credible evidence to ban genuine deer urine.

Synthetic doe urine compounds are considered to be safe and are legal to use. Don't even take genuine deer urine into the woods; if you have a bottle that says it is the real deal on your person, you are assumed to be using it.

Mock scrapes and tactics for hunting them have been well-documented. One method is to find a line of existing scrapes that may not be as fresh as they once were. Those with a licking branch overhead seem to be especially good choices. Select a quality, synthetic doe-in-heat liquid and add it to the scrapes, using a tool to rake back leaves and disturb the soil. Then sit and wait.

The late rut can be a good time for a buck or taking another doe for the freezer. ■



David Hawkins



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A LOOK AT 2020'S NEW HUNTING BOWS

MATHEWS, HOYT AND BOWTECH HAVE IMPRESSIVE NEW MODELS NOW AVAILABLE

New bows for 2020 from (left to right): Bowtech, Hoyt and Mathews.

November is one of my favorite months for several reasons, but perhaps none bigger than the launch by most manufacturers of the next year's new compound bows.

I eagerly await for them to reveal their newest technologies, much like a kid on Christmas Eve waits to open presents the next morning. Technology moves fast in this industry, with some years seeing far more advancement than others — 2020 is one of those years.

Although there are many quality bow manufacturers in today's marketplace, I am focusing on Mathews, Hoyt and Bowtech, what I call "The Big Three." These manufacturers are in it for the long haul and consistently produce quality bows that push the envelope when it comes to new technology. All have a solid offering for 2020, making it a tough decision when choosing a new bow.

For 2020, Mathews' flagship hunting bow is the VXR, which is offered in two axle-to-axle lengths: 28 and 31½ inches. This bow builds on Mathews' revolutionary Switchweight Technology by using the Crosscentric Cam with Switchweight Modules. This cam system allows the archer to adjust the peak draw weight of his/her bow from 60 to 75 pounds in

5-pound increments, all without losing any efficiency, by simply changing the cam modules. Draw length and let-off can be adjusted as well.

The VXR features Mathews' new Extended Bridged Riser, which contains six bridges for increased length, stability and rigidity in key areas, while reducing weight at the same time. The 3D damping has been extended forward to optimize its effects and provide better balance. The popular Engage Grip helps promote proper hand position and reduce torque. Once again, the riser includes the Integrate Rest mounting system, which is a dovetail machined on the back of the riser, allowing a QAD integrate rest to be mounted.

Mathews has always been known for quiet, smooth-shooting bows, and the VXR takes this to another level. There is **ZERO** movement or hand shock at the shot. This bow is crazy quiet and sounds like it is a black hole that actually absorbs noise. Its quietness is furthered by the new Enhanced Stabilizer Bushing, which is enlarged and has a concave face, increasing the stiffness of any forward stabilizer by 10%. The VXR 28 is available in draw lengths from 25½ to 30 inches, while the VXR 31½ is available in 26½- to 31-inch offerings, a fit for virtually any

archer. Perhaps the coolest feature of the VXR is the new, optional Silent Connect System (SCS) Kit, which allows for quick and silent attachment of the new Mathews Genuine bow rope and bow sling. These screw onto the back of the limb pockets and add very little weight, while providing a streamlined, neat attachment point for those accessories. The last new feature is actually a new color "Green Ambush," best described as a powder-coat, duck-boat green — really cool. This has been the best seller in our shop so far.

Not to be outdone, Hoyt has built on its REDWRX series with the new RX-4 carbon riser bow. The RX-4 is Hoyt's shortest hunting bow ever, and at only a 29½-inch axle-to-axle length will be extremely maneuverable in both the tree stand and ground blind.

Hoyt offers the same in an aluminum riser bow called the AXIUS. Both bows feature the new ZTR cam system, which has a more solid back wall and is the



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.

STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

quietest, smoothest cam Hoyt has ever produced. I was blown away by how much smoother these bows shoot than last year's bows.

Both models feature Hoyt's patented adjustable grip system, which allows the shooter to customize the grip location to aid in tuning. These bows feature Fuse strings and cables that are low stretch and minimize peep rotation. New for this year, Hoyt features the Integrate Rest Mounting System, this eliminates the rest bracket, making for a cleaner, lighter, lower-profile rest attachment. Hoyt also offers a new color for 2020, Under Armour Forest, which has been extremely popular in other brands.

For 2020, Bowtech offers the Revolt and Revolt-X. These bows feature the Deadlock Cam System, one of the most innovative cam systems I've ever seen. It allows the use of an Allen wrench to precisely adjust the cams left and right on the axles for perfect alignment. This focuses the energy directly in line with the arrow for perfect arrow flight. This adjustment can then be locked down securely for permanent repeatable accuracy.

These bows also feature the Deadlock limb pockets, which lock every component in the entire bow structure as one to ensure maximum accuracy. I love the grips which are comfortable and virtually eliminate torque.

The Revolt is 30 inches axle-to-axle with a 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch brace height, making it extremely forgiving. The Revolt-X is 33 inches axle-to-axle with a 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch brace height. Both bows are adjustable from 26- to 31-inch draw lengths.

Do yourself a favor and go test shoot this year's new class of bows, I can guarantee you'll be impressed with them all. ■

Mathews' EHS damping system has been changed to improve balance.



Sammy Romano

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

Every now and then, an idea comes to mind that won't go away. That's what happened with this recipe. The idea popped up one day in a conversation that about chicken pot pies and tater tots, and it wouldn't be denied. I think most sportsmen agree that venison is tasty, and many people enjoy tater tots, so it was natural to combine the two.

Winters in the South typically aren't harsh, but there are days when the weather gets raw, and it's nice to have some warm, comfort food. This is comfort food at its best. It's another way to use some of the venison harvested before deer season closed.

Most years, I feature a soup or stew in January. Those can be left in the hunting shack in a crock pot, set to serve when you return from a morning or afternoon afield. This takes a little more time to prepare but warms well, so leftovers can still be carried to the hunting or fishing camp. And it's just a little more fun to eat. Most hunters like venison, creamy soups and tater tots. This recipe combines those in a mixture that is good, good for you and tends to create humorous conversations regarding the combination.

Many hunters would eat venison at every meal, but children, wives and other significant others often require more variety. This is a nice option that often gets youngsters or squeamish adults to try venison because they like tater tots. It's a nice, full-flavored mixture, as it includes fresh mushrooms, tomatoes, peppers and cream of mushroom soup.

This recipe is good anytime, but especially so for those cold, winter days. It's a good substitute for chili while watching basketball on TV. I make this with ground venison, but expect it would also be tasty using the trimmings from cleaning and processing a deer that are usually saved as stew meat. As with any recipes, feel free to adjust the seasoning or any ingredient to suit personal tastes. This mixture makes two pies, and the reason you need to make two will become fully apparent once you taste it. ■

VENISON TOT PIE

WARM THINGS UP WITH SOME GREAT COMFORT FOOD

VENISON TOT PIE

Welcome to another fun installment of Captain Jerry's fun foods from game and fish. I guess it's possible to not enjoy this, but you would have to not like either venison or tater tots. They're pretty much the two ingredients that shouldn't change, while the others may be adjusted to better suit personal tastes.

My wife laughs whenever I mention using tater tots in a recipe, but she began slowly coming around to liking this when I showed her how the tots formed the pie crust. She still picks out all the jalapenos, which is one of the reasons I use brightly colored bell peppers instead of green. I also think the brightly colored bell peppers tend to be milder and sweeter than the green ones.

A friend said I was only making venison chili and pouring it into a tater tot crust. That's an interesting idea but isn't correct. This has more of a beef-stew flavor, but I think chili would be an excellent filler for the tater tot crust.

This is filling and warming, which makes it ideal for a meal or snack on a cold, January day. If you would prefer a more robust taste,

add another jalapeno, some cayenne pepper or maybe some hot sauce. I add the hot sauce on my plate; this goes well with Valentina and Trader Joe's Chili Pepper sauces. The Trader Joe's sauce has more of a vinegar base, while there is almost no vinegar taste in the Valentina sauce.

If everything isn't eaten at the first meal, this reheats well, but it seems to respond better to a slow warming at 250 degrees in the oven. The microwave tends to make the tater tots a bit soggy. I warm this slowly and let it take 30 minutes or so to get up to temperature in the oven.

I prefer to cook the stove-top part in a cast-iron pot; it works better for browning the meat, sautéing the vegetables and bringing the ingredients up to temperature while mixing the bouillon throughout. Cast iron distributes the heat; there aren't hot spots right over the burner rings at medium and medium high settings.

Keep this recipe in mind and give it a try sometime this winter when you would ordinarily cook a soup or stew. I guarantee it will warm you up and it's a good hearty and filling combination. ■

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound ground venison**
- 1 large bag of tater tots**
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup**
- 1 pack of fresh, sliced mushrooms**
- 1 can diced tomatoes**
- 1 large sweet onion**
- 1 bell pepper, red, orange or yellow**
- 2 jalapeno peppers**
- 4 slices mild cheddar cheese**
- 1 tsp minced garlic**
- 1 tsp Better Than Bouillon Roasted Beef Base**
- Cavender's All Purpose Greek Seasoning**
- Coarse ground black pepper**
- Non-stick cooking spray**
- 9-inch, deep-dish Pyrex pie plate, deep frying pan.**

PREPARATION:

Lightly defrost 5 cups of tater tots (until they are soft enough to compress). Preheat oven to temperature suggested in tater tots' instructions. Spray pie plate with non-stick coating, then cover bottom with tater tots and compress to approximately half thickness to form the bottom crust. Use partial tots to fill any holes. Stand tater tots on end around edge of pie plate and add 6 to 8 loose tots in the bottom of the plate. Cook tater tots two-thirds of the time suggested in the instructions.

Chop the onion, bell pepper, jalapenos and mushrooms. Mix garlic with venison and season with Cavender's and black pepper, then lightly brown venison in deep cast iron frying pan. Remove venison from pan and set aside. Pour off venison drippings except for enough to lightly cover the bottom of the frying pan. Season peppers and onions with Cavender's and black pepper (to taste) and sauté in venison drippings. Add mushrooms to peppers and onions and stir often for a minute or two.

Drain the tomatoes and add them, the cream of mushroom soup and the Better Than Bouillon to the vegetables in the frying pan. Stir the mixture well, then slowly stir in the venison until all is mixed well. Cook on medium, stirring often, until warm all the way through. Spoon the venison and vegetable mixture into the pie plate to the top of the tater tots ringing the pan and bake at 350 for 15 to 20 minutes. Be careful not to overcook the tater tots.

Cover the pie filling (but not tots) with cheese and place the extra tots saved from earlier on the cheese, then put the pie back in the oven for a few minutes to melt the



Jerry Dilsaver

cheese. Remove from the oven and allow the pie to set for 3 to 5 minutes before serving. Serve while warm.

This is actually a complete meal in itself. I like salads and usually begin with a green salad or lettuce wedge. A warm roll or slice of hearty bread is also a good addition.

I usually forgo the bread and save room for a slice of warm pecan or apple pie for dessert. Don't forget a scoop of ice cream on the pie. ■



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.

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What's the difference between targeting catfish in July and January? About six months; that's all. Mid-winter catfish are just a little less active than in summer, but they still cruise the waters, looking for a quick meal.

Well, sort of.

The ever-popular flathead, which prefers live bait and is known for a good fight and good taste, becomes lethargic during the winter. While they do not hibernate in holes and logjams as some insist, their metabolism slows dramatically, limiting their need to feed.

Blue cats and channel cats are not as active as in the summer, but they are feeding regularly enough to be laudable targets. Shad are the favored meals for these two species, and finding and fishing where shad are ganged up can prove worth the effort.

Like all fish, shad prefer the comfort of warmer and more-oxygenated water. This can be on riprap where the sun warms the rocks and water. In larger reservoirs, that will be along the dams, breakwaters and similar areas. Tailrace water, where and when it is accessible, is warmer and high in dissolved oxygen. Fishermen downstream from dams will find shad and catfish plentiful, along with a few crappie and bass feeding on shad.

CATFISH STAND OUT IN THE WINTER AS PREDATORS IN MISSISSIPPI WATERS; THEY'RE A LITTLE LESS ACTIVE BUT MORE THAN WILLING TO HIT A PROPERLY PLACED BAIT. HERE'S HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES.

■ By David Hawkins

COLD CATS ARE COOL



Terry Madewell

In the open water, using sonar to locate shad balls or dense schools of shad will pay off big-time.

Big cats will be close by as the shad go with the flow in the deeper water. Having a rig with two or three shad all hooked through the eyes and trolling just beneath the shad will almost guarantee a good bite. Often, there will be an area holding shad where an angler can catch a few in a cast net.

There is a successful bait most Mississippians associate with Sunday dinner rather than catfish: chicken, especially chicken breasts. Cats prefer theirs' skinless and raw, as opposed to crispy and fried. In big water, allow the speed of the river current to move the boat. It's a good technique to use on the Mississippi and Tennessee rivers, or with trolling-motor power in all of Mississippi's big lakes. Attach just enough weight to the line so that it sinks easily; catfish this time of year are not topwater feeders.

Make sure all netted bait is dead before using it above the dam to prevent the possible spread of the invasive Asian carp, whose young resemble shad.

TECHNIQUES

Free-floating fishing devices (FFFDs) remain a popular weapon when searching for Mr. Whiskers. Line can measure from 3 to 12 feet until a comfortable thermocline can be found; after that, all lines are adjusted to that depth. Most commercial fishing floats have a swivel incorporated to allow a specific depth to be fished. Homemade FFFDs can have a swivel attached just as easily.

Rod-and-reel anglers will find catfish in the deep bends of rivers such as the Pearl or Big Black. Banks that catch the sun will have warmer water, just a little warmer, making them good areas to try. The rush of water over the Low Head Dam in Scott County creates a good environment for catfish.

Borrow pits and old river channels are another place to place FFFDs with longer lines. These devices also work well around channel markers where deep water and shallow flats meet.

BAITS

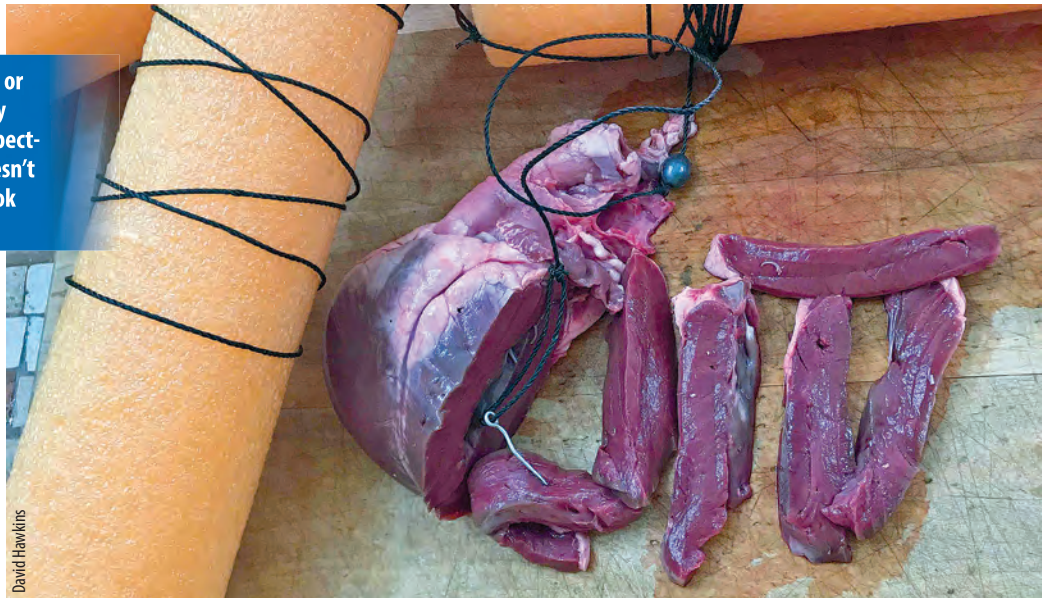
Blood baits have long been a popular choice for catfish anglers. Colder water remains a good situation for these scent-emitting morsels. At this time of year, many

Catching live shad in a cast net is the first step in catching winter catfish. Cut up the shad or hook them through the eyes and slow-troll them at the right depth.



David Hawkins

Strips of deer heart or liver can make tasty meals for an unsuspecting catfish who doesn't realize there's a hook involved.



David Hawkins

fishermen are choosing to use deer hearts and livers. A hunter will be wise to save those organs for this purpose. Cut the heart into 1-inch thick strips about 2 inches long. Soak them in a coffee can filled with deer blood for a few days if the weather allows, then place them in freezer bags. The liver can be prepared the same way.

"Some people cook and eat deer hearts," said angler Patrick Shannon of Jackson. "I'd rather have the fried catfish fillets the bait will catch. I have friends at deer camp who always save me the hearts from the deer they kill. I catch enough catfish to feed the camp at least one meal every season."

Hook the slices of deer heart so they resemble a bow-tie. The heart meat is dense and will release blood and scent slowly. To a lesser degree, deer livers can be sliced in chunks and used with good success.

Shannon also uses "juiced-up" hot dogs with good success. Those are red franks cut into 2-inch chunks and soaked in raspberry Kool-Aid. Fish oil is another good bait soak, according to Shannon, but finding liquid fish oil can be a challenge. Hooking a fish oil gel cap above the bait seems to work most of the time in spreading an underwater scent trail.

Old South Lures makes a fish attractant that has served this writer well when fishing in state lakes and ponds, where there is little current to carry the smell, but it works well in any water.

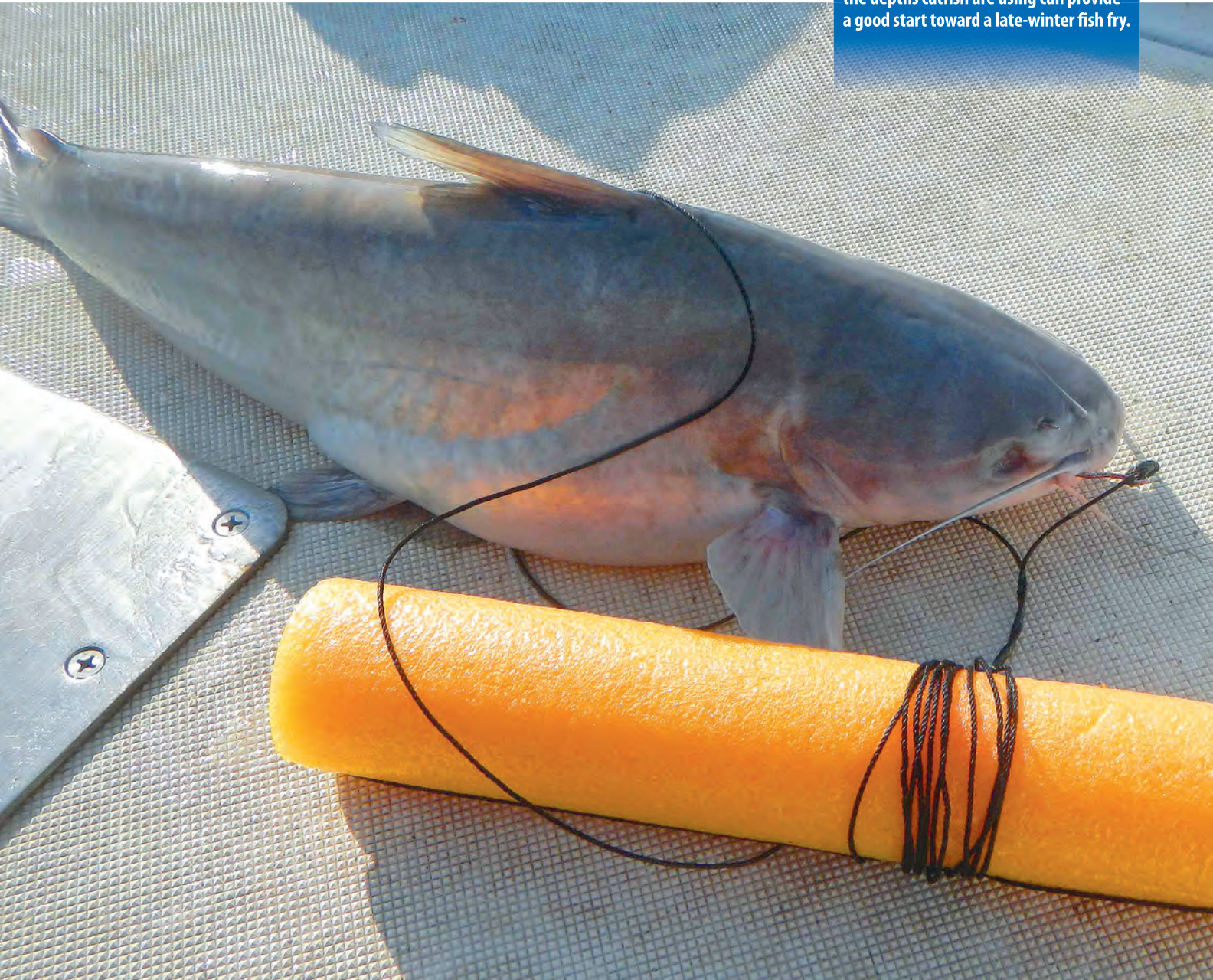


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Free-floating fishing devices (FFFD) set at the depths catfish are using can provide a good start toward a late-winter fish fry.



David Hawkins

Most bait shops are stocked with small shiners to satisfy the demands of anglers starting to test the winter crappie bite. Crappie heads with the guts attached are good catfish baits. A shad, when it can be found, can be broken so that its guts hang from the head. Angler Sid Montgomery of Jackson said shad guts remain his favorite bait for catfish in the backwaters of the Mississippi River during colder months.

Keith Sutton, an outdoor writer and angler from Arkansas, has authored two books about catfishing. So authoritative is Sutton that his nickname is “Catfish.” When asked about winter catfishing he had this to say.

“Follow the shad balls; the catfish will be just beneath them,” Sutton said. “Blues and channels are active in winter and position themselves beneath the bait balls to pick off the shad, especially during the shad kills.”

According to biologist Keith Meals of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, shad die-offs are usually threadfin shad since they are more cold-sensitive than gizzard shad. Threadfin die-offs are more common farther north, but they can happen anywhere if it gets cold enough fast enough. Literature says anywhere from 35° to 45°F is their lower lethal limit. If water temperature decreases slowly and steadily over several days, fish may acclimate to temperatures colder than normal. Most big die-offs happen when there is a sudden temperature drop from severe cold fronts where wind-blown cold air mixes the water top to bottom and the water temperature drops significantly in 12 to 24 hours. Water is most dense at 4°C or 39.2°F, which is why ice floats. If a lake or pond ices over, the warmest water available is 39.2°F unless there are underwater springs or inflowing streams that provide temperature refuges.

Dress warmly and in layers to stay warm and safe on winter fishing trips.

STAY SAFE

Special considerations must be given to angler safety with fishing in cold weather. Hypothermia can happen quickly, and unless treated properly, it can result in severe illness or death very quickly.

Dress in layers and always wear an approved personal flotation device. Never go out without leaving a plan with a friend or relative that tells where you intend to fish and your planned return time. ■



David Hawkins

Catfish and other predators gorge on dying shad, but predators are in cold water, too, so their metabolism is slower, and it takes longer to digest a meal. It will be a while before they are hungry again, but when the pickings are easy, just like people with a bag of chips on the couch, they'll eat until they are stuffed. The best time to fish shad for cats is when the kill first starts.

Threadfin shad have shown up in all the flood-control reservoirs in recent years, likely as escapees from private-pond stockings. Since these lakes are drawn down in winter, they are shallow, wind-swept bowls where threadfins often experience winter kill. I have seen dead shad under the ice, but ice cover is not necessary; shallow water and wind combine to drive temperatures too low for threadfins to survive during severe cold snaps.

Connected oxbow lakes off the Mississippi and other rivers that flow south towards the Gulf can have winter kills of threadfins, but they recolonize from the rivers. Downstream shad that survive in warmer temperatures move upstream as the water warms in spring to spawn. Below reservoirs, they aggregate below locks and dams in spring.

So there you have it. Deer season is winding down, and there are the few false spring days. Use these days to get the fishing tackle out and find a fishing hole near you. ■



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

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As the calendar flips over to 2020, the vast majority of crappie fishermen are content to wait a couple of months before heading for their favorite spots to load up on slabs. Those who don't mind braving a little cold weather will find there are plenty of fish to be caught today.

While these locations and tactics might not be the same as hitting every stickup in 3 feet of water with a minnow or crappie jig, a little advance planning, a little preparation and an eye to the weather can yield the same or even better results.

Check out one of these five tactics if you're not in the mood to wait until spring.

SUSPENDED OVER DEEP WATER >

By Phillip Gentry

TIPS FOR WINTER SLABS

GET THE JUMP ON THE SPRING CROWD BY CATCHING CRAPPIE NOW USING ONE OF THESE TACTICS.

SUSPENDED OVER DEEP WATER

Veteran fisherman Morris King said one of the most-obvious places to catch crappie in any lake — especially his home lake, Ross Barnett — is suspended over deep water in the main lake.

Finding slabs in deep, open water is best accomplished by using a multiple-rod, tight-line presentation while slowly trolling around breaklines and channel edges. The most-productive areas are channel edges and any submerged depressions not far from the main channel. Look for crappie to suspend up in the water column around these areas. Finding concentrations of baitfish in and around one of these holes is a big plus. Fish at the level that you mark bait on the graph.

“One thing I can say is that these fish will hang out over deeper water the colder the water gets,” King said. “In late November and early December, they may be at 13 to 14 feet (deep) over 20 feet of water, but by the end of December, you’ll find them around 15 to 18 feet over 30 feet of water; it seems like the bigger fish will suspend deeper than the others.”

According to King, the biggest challenge is often the wind. Winter mean frequent cold fronts, often followed by fair-weather days. If fishing must occur — such as in one of the frequent crappie tournaments he fishes — he looks for a wind break to provide calm water; otherwise, he watches the weather and plans his trips accordingly.

“For me, it’s never stopping,” said King. “I troll with a Minn Kota variable-speed trolling motor. I run it down pretty slow, about .4 mph, but I never stop. If I’m catching fish, I may circle around and hit that area again but I think they want to see those baits in motion.”

PIERS AND DOCKS

Shelton Culpepper of Bay Springs suggests concentrating on docks and piers to catch winter crappie, especially on the state’s oxbow lakes. Look for fish to hold in the 10- to 16-foot depths around the ends of the piers, docks and boat houses.

“Crappie spawn very early after the first of the year on some of our oxbow lakes,” said Culpepper, who owns a camp at Eagle Lake. “Because of that, these crappie will actually start gather-



ing up as early as November. They'll overwinter under and around piers in water that ranges from 10 to 16 feet, and you can catch them there all through the winter."

Culpepper prefers a long jig pole to either pitch or vertically jig a 1/32- or 1/16-ounce jig along pier structures. Fish will move back under the structures on sunny days, so a pitch-and-pendulum retrieve often works. Fish may concentrate around piers that have been sweetened with brush tops or Christmas trees, and a relatively small spot can hold a number of fish.

"You're looking for the sweet spot," he said. "That's a little 3- or 4-foot diameter area that will hold a bunch of fish right in that same spot. You can put your jig all over that dock and not get a bite, then stick it down in that sweet spot and catch a mess of fish without having to move the boat."

He said if fishing is tough, switching over to a small live minnow on a No. 6 bream hook or adding bait attractant to your jig will often produce. Also, don't overlook using a cork to suspend your jig and slow down the retrieve.

STUMP FLATS ➤

Some days crappie may hang out around the edges of boat docks, but when the sun comes out most will retreat back under the docks, and anglers may need to reach in after them.



Phillip Gentry

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STUMP FLATS

For winter fishing on Lake Pickwick, guide Brad Whitehead looks to find crappie holding on stump flats in medium depths.

Whitehead will side-pull double-jig rigs along stump flats to target crappie. Side-pulling is a specialized practice that employs a specially designed boat, allowing a controlled, sideways drift that puts baits near the bottom for an entire trolling or drifting run.

“They use depth as a type of structure,” Whitehead said. “This means the fish travel in and out a lot more than they do up and down. That’s why side-pulling works so well; it covers a lot of water while allowing you to fish right off the bottom in a controlled drift.”

Often, Whitehead will side-pull cork rigs, spacing the rods out across the side of the boat and easing across the flat sideways with the corks 50 to 60 feet behind the boat. Once the boat passes, the jigs may not get to that spot for several minutes, and that’s plenty of time to get a fish to bite.

“I’ll put a Thill slip cork and tie a bobber stop about 8 feet up the line,” he said. “The average depth of the good stump flats at winter pool is about 12 feet. That puts my jig right at the top of the stump, and the top jig a foot or so above that. I like two 1/16- or two 1/8-ounce jigs, so I have to have the right size cork to float them.”

SPILLWAYS

Many factors that influence where crappie hold in the spillway below some of Mississippi’s major reservoir dams will be dictated by water flow. Rising waters will send the fish to the river bank behind blowdowns and possibly even into the backs of feeder tributaries and sloughs. Falling water levels will pull fish back to the river ledge and cover located in the river itself.

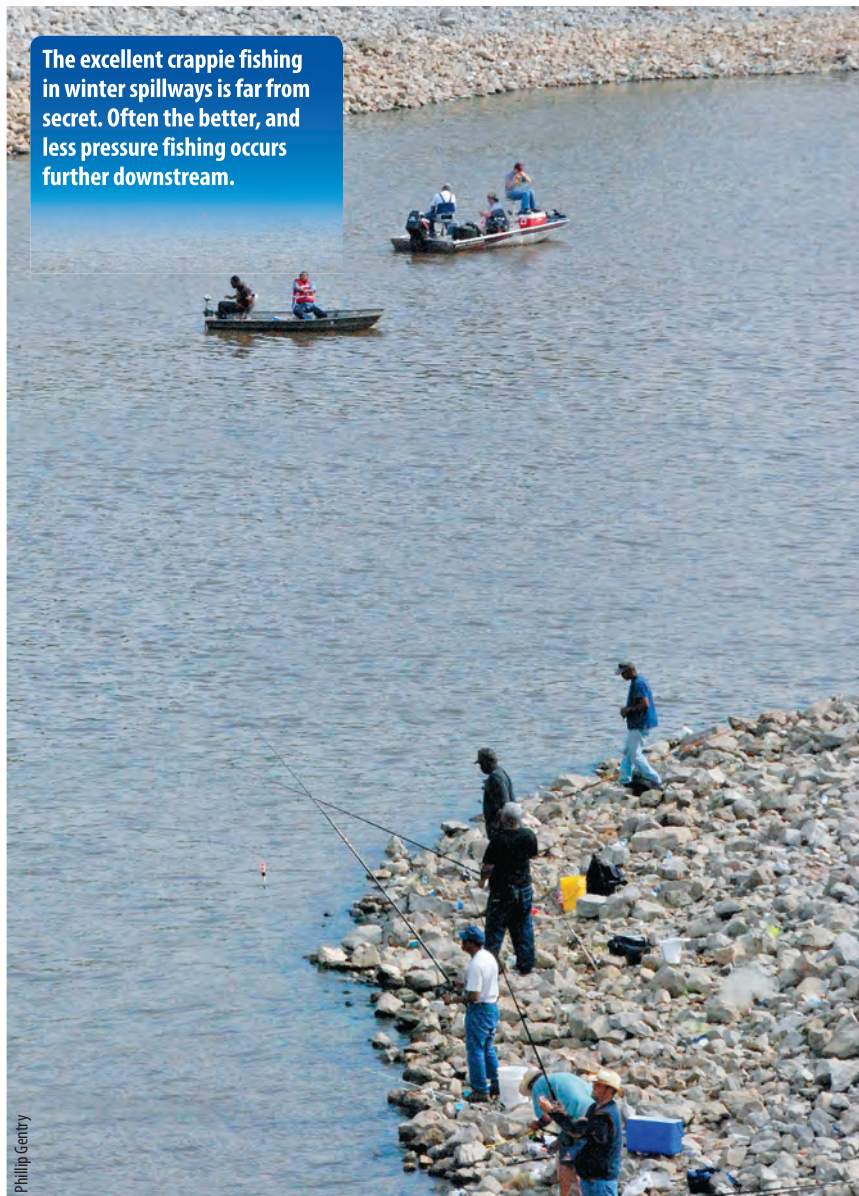
Bernard Williams is a veteran crappie angler who fishes all over the state with the Magnolia Crappie Club and across the country in national tournament trails. His perfect place, when it comes to winter fishing for crappie, is in a spillway.

“When they open those gates at the spillway, crappie get sucked out of the lake and washed into the spillway,” he said. “It’s just like fishing in a pond right after it’s been stocked. For the first mile or two of the river behind the spillway, crappie are behind every tree, every stickup, and every piece of cover on the bottom of the river.”

Boating anglers will find fewer crowds and bigger fish away from the riprapped banks of the spillway. Look for blowdowns, stumps, or any other cover that will provide a current break for crappie to hold behind to ambush passing baitfish.

“I much prefer to go a mile or a mile-and-a-half downstream to do my fishing,” said Williams. “That gets you away from the

The excellent crappie fishing in winter spillways is far from secret. Often the better, and less pressure fishing occurs further downstream.



crowds, and I find that I catch much better fish than I could if I was within sight of the spillway.”

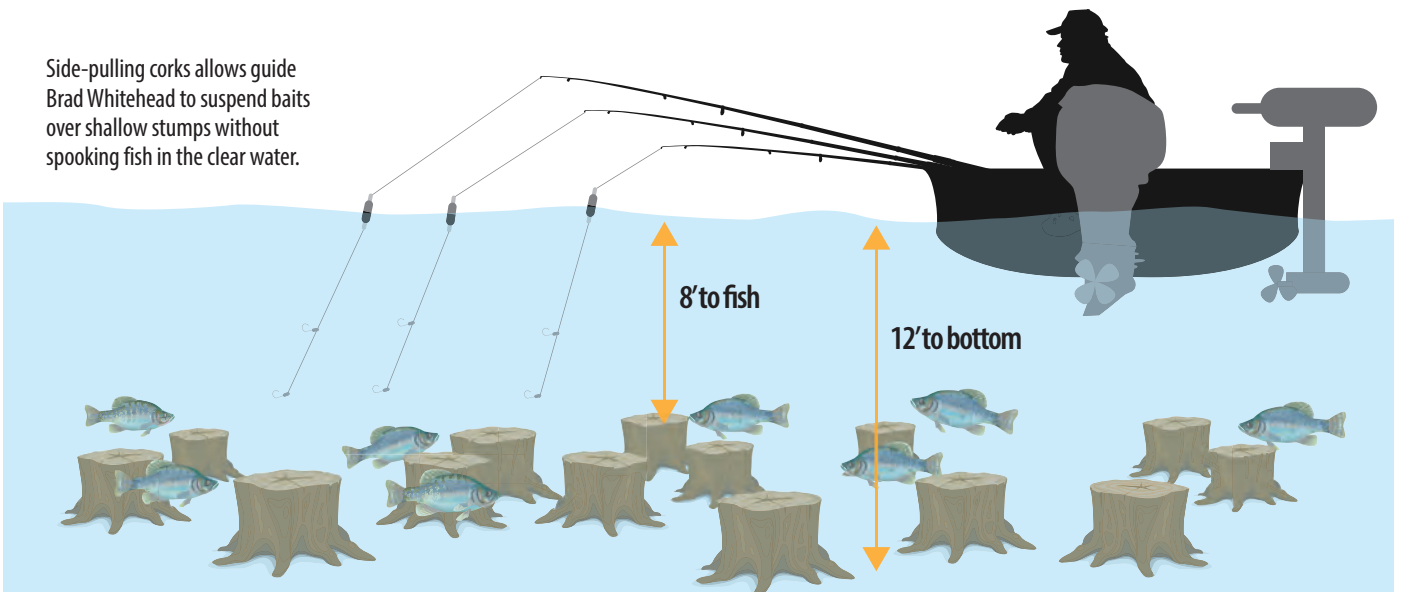
A vertical presentation of jigs, appropriately weighted to match the current, or jigs tipped with live bait works best to work underwater structure.

Shorebound anglers can simulate a vertical presentation by using a slip cork to present two jigs at different water depths. The slip cork is cast upstream and allowed to flow with the current. Occasionally “popping” the cork will attract attention to the bait. Live bait can be presented in a similar fashion.

CRANKBAIT OXBOWS

According to Brad Taylor, pro crappie angler and past president of the Magnolia Crappie Club, crankbaiting oxbows during the winter is a systematic approach. Use three to five rods of staggered lengths on each side of the boat. Depth-counter reels keep track of how far and how deep the crankbaits are running. Stagger the lines so that crankbaits don’t tangle during a turn. The ideal speed is 1.4 to 1.5 mph using an electric trolling motor for propulsion.

Side-pulling corks allows guide Brad Whitehead to suspend baits over shallow stumps without spooking fish in the clear water.



“The back-and-forth action of river water eats away the outside edges of an oxbow lake,” Taylor said. “Most of them are crescent-shaped, so that makes the outside, steep side deeper and leaves sharp ridges. From late fall through winter, crappie will sit on those steep ridges and ambush baitfish. It can be a lot of open water to fish, which makes it a perfect scenario to pull crankbaits.”

Since crappie tend to hold deeper, 8 to 17 feet as a general rule, during the cooler months, a deep-diving Bandit 300 crankbait is a favorite choice. If fish are found shallower, running a 100 or 200 series bait on a long pole from the bow of the boat may provide better depth control.

“Bandit is the only bait I use,” said Taylor. “Without a doubt, they run the truest out of the box and never have to be

adjusted. The 300 series is my favorite because it’s the perfect size bait, they dive deeper than most other baits and they have the right noise and wobble to elicit that reaction bite from a school of crappie.

Crappie will almost always relate to the deeper, outside bend in the oxbow channel. Troll the ledges on this side to locate feeding crappie. If fish remain aggressive, stay with the crank baits. ■



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.



Phillip Gentry

Crappie pro Brad Taylor takes a systematic approach to trolling crank baits during the cooler months of the year.

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Black crappie (left) and white crappie (right) are often caught in the same bodies of water. They're similar, but different.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: CRAPPIE

BLACK OR WHITE, THEY'RE SPREAD ALL OVER — AND AMONG THE MOST-POPULAR FISH AMONG ANGLERS IN THIS COUNTRY

Crappie are one of the most-popular gamefish among anglers in America. These fish are found in all 48 states on the continent, and they are found in many different types of water. They are members of the sunfish family, which also includes bass and bream.

Many anglers don't realize it, but crappie come in two varieties: black and white. Both species are similar in size and shape, and they both have similar diets. They spawn at pretty much the same times, mostly during early spring. Males of both varieties create nests during breeding season, then guard the eggs and fry. Females lay anywhere from 5,000 to 60,000 eggs that hatch in two to five days.

Crappie are abundant in most lakes and in some rivers. Pond managers are hesitant to stock them in farm ponds because they can overpopulate small bodies of water very quickly. These fish provide fun fishing, and also excellent

table fare. The meat is white and flaky. They are most often prepared fried.

Both varieties have similarities, but also some distinct differences

White crappie are generally lighter in color and have vertical, black stripes. Black crappie usually have darker bodies and have black splotches throughout. However, due to variations in water clarity and quality, their coloration can be much more subdued, so the distinguishing features can be difficult to see. The most-reliable way to determine which species is which, count the spiny dorsal fin rays. Black crappie have seven or eight; white crappie have five or six.

Smaller fish make up the majority of a crappie's diet. They also eat insects, crustaceans and zooplankton. Anglers targeting crappie often use live minnows. Artificial lures like small jigs and spinners are also good. Some anglers anchor their boats and fish vertically over brush piles. Others troll from one brush pile to

the next using multiple rods.

Crappie can live in a variety of depths, and they move up and down in the water column throughout the year. Many are caught in shallow water during the spring and early summer, then head to deeper water throughout the hottest and coldest months. Many anglers consider them as spring and fall fish and rarely pursue them in the heat of summer or the dead of winter. But recently, advances in electronics have spurred a growth in fishing for them during those times as well.

December is great for crappie; many anglers construct beds for them with



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.

discarded Christmas trees once the holiday passes.

Crappie are known by several other names, including: papermouth, speck, speckled bass, speckled perch, strawberry perch, strawberry bass, and across Louisiana, sac-a-lait.

In Louisiana, no size limit is enforced, except on Eagle Lake, which has an 11-inch minimum. In most of the state, the daily creel limit is 50. Exceptions include Poverty Point, Caddo Lake, the Sabine River, and Toledo Bend Reservoir, where the daily limit is 25.

Crappie are often misidentified as white bass or white perch. They are also sometimes confused with fliers, one of the lesser-known species of panfish.

The Louisiana state record for white crappie is 3.8 pounds., caught from Lake Verret in May 2010 by Tim Ricca. The state-record black crappie, caught by Randy Causey at Poverty Point Reservoir in April 2010, weighed 3.84 pounds.

The world-record white crappie weighed 5 pounds, 3 ounces and was caught at Enid Dam, Miss., in July 1957 by Fred Bright. The world-record black crappie, caught out of Tennessee's Richeison Pond in by Lionel Ferguson in May 2018., weighed 5 pounds, 7 ounces. ■

Black crappie



White crappie



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Compass 360 has introduced the DuraTek 5mm Bootfoot Chest Wader, made to keep hunters and fishermen warm in cold weather.

The waders are made with rugged, 5mm neoprene, 1,600-gram Thinsulate boots, and oversized and reinforced kneepads.

Features include plenty of storage — often a concern in waders — including front-waist storage pockets, a

flip-pound inside security pocket and a chest pocket for calls.

The waders come with a deep-chest hand-warmer pocket with neoprene shell loops.

Two camouflage patterns are offered: Mossy Oak's® classic Bottomland® or Realtree's® Max5®.

MSRP is \$249.95.

For more info, visit: www.compass-360gear.com



BARNETT HYPERGHOST 425

Barnett launched its HyperGhost line of crossbows this past fall, featuring the 405 and 425 models, which are full of the latest features and technology that hunters want in a crossbow.

The 405 comes with an upgraded stock and Barnett's step-through riser, plus the new Retractable Underarm County balance Support (RUCS) that hooks under a shooter's arm to counteract the weight of the riser for better balance when the bow is shouldered. The 405 features a monochromatic Mossy Oak® Treestand finish with skull detail delivers arrows at a blistering 405 feet-per-second speed. It comes with three HyperFlite arrows.

The 425 features a 1.5x5x32 illuminated scope, a the RUCS, a SoftLok floating bristle arrow retainer and anti-dry fire TriggerTech trigger. It also comes with HyperFlite arrows.

MSRP of the HyperGhost 405 is \$1,099 and \$1,299 for the HyperGhost 425.

For more info, visit: www.barnett-crossbows.com/



WILD GAME PROCESSING CLASS

Join Meat Science curator Dan Robert and the Southern Food & Beverage Museum in New Orleans on Jan. 19, 2020, from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. for a wild-game processing class. Dan Robert is a 25-year veteran of the USDA, where he served as a food-safety inspector and meat grader.

The class will cover post-harvest handling and food safety, lean meat to fat ratios, and finishing techniques. During the class, Robert will teach you to make your own venison bacon, snack sticks

and Andouille sausage. Whether you're an amateur or a seasoned game processor, there's something in this class for you.

For more info, call 504-569-0405 or email Dan@Southernfood.org





VETERAN SQUIRREL HUNTER CHARTS THE STEPS IT TAKES TO MAKE SQUIRREL HUNTING IN JANUARY AN ACTIVITY THAT CAN'T BE MISSED.

■ By Mike Giles

BUSHYTAILS 101

Jeffrey Wood turned his dogs loose, and they hit a hot trail almost instantly.

They opened up on a squirrel and treed him high in an oak. As the hunters surrounded the tree, shots rang out from rifles and shotguns as squirrels started running wild.

Pow! Thump! Tic-pow, thump! The hunters' aim was true as they harvested not one, but two fox squirrels treed by Wood's champion squirrel dogs.

The owner of Swamp Boy's Custom Calls, Wood was trained in the ways of the woods by his father at an early age, and he learned how to train squirrel dogs, specifically treeing dogs. Both his father and grandfather owned treeing dogs, so it was in his blood. By the time he got out on his own, he was a champion trainer, making hunts across the Southeast, many to the Mississippi Delta.

These days, Wood, who hails from Stringer, is still training champion dogs and hunting squirrels, while also making innovative game calls and products to enhance his hunting opportunities. But the bottom line is enhancing the hunting experience so hunters will be successful. There's nothing much better than taking kids and novice hunters on a successful squirrel hunt with dogs.

STILL HUNTING: SLIP AND BARK

During the early season, many hunters head to the woods alone; that's a good way to get started before the leaves fall, or if you just have a short time to hunt by yourself.

"I like to hunt by myself and shoot them with a .22," Wood said. "I'll shoot a round-head CCI bullet and shoot them in the head to save meat. You can also reach out and touch them pretty high in the tree, higher than some shotguns will effectively reach."

Wood's rifle of choice is a Browning Buck Mark .22 with a scope. An expert marksman, he has been known to kill two or three squirrels in one tree with that rifle.

"The prime time for still-hunting is from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, because that's when most of the squirrels are mov-



One of Jeffrey Wood's champion squirrel dogs barks at a treed squirrel during an early season hunt. **OPPOSITE:** When you get into the right area, a limit of squirrels is a real possibility with the help of good dogs.



ing,” Wood said. “I like to use a dove stool and slip through the woods, hunting quietly until I locate an area with squirrels, and then I’ll sit down and hit my barker and bring the squirrels right to me.”

When leaves are on trees you can’t really see well enough to spot the squirrels when you’re hunting with dogs, so Wood uses this technique then, and any time he’s by himself and wants to call up a few squirrels.

“If I hear a squirrel barking, I’ll slip up there and sit still for a little bit, and then bark at him and challenge him,” Wood said. “They’re inquisitive and will answer a challenge and come looking to see who’s barking at them. I made my own barker call just for this technique, and it works very well. When they bark, I bark right back and lure them in. I have killed my limit pretty quickly by locating an area with squirrels and barking them up.”

Early in the season, Wood also scouts for deer sign while he’s squirrel hunting, and he’s found some pretty good areas in WMAs and on national forest lands that led to successful deer hunts.

PRIME TIME FOR DOGS

“The prime time for hunting with dogs is (from) around the first of December through January,” Wood said. “When the squirrels get to rutting, you can find seven or eight squirrels in a tree, with one or two females and the rest males. It can be really fun”

Hunting squirrels is fun any time, but nothing beats hunting them with dogs after the leaves fall. That’s also the time to take children and novice hunters.

“The action is fast and furious at times, but in between the action, kids and new hunters can walk along and talk with the veteran hunters and enjoy time in the woods without having to be real still and quiet like when you’re deer hunting,” Wood said. “Then, when the dogs tree, you can get down to the business of shooting squirrels.”

Wood learned a lot about the outdoors, the woods and hunting while following his dad and granddad, watching dogs work.

“I learned the names of the trees and which ones produced acorns or fruit while we were walking behind the dogs and waiting on them to tree,” Wood said. “I also learned about buck scrapes and rubs and generally what to look for and how to find that particular animal. We also learned about the different tracks game made and where to find them a lot of the time.”

WHERE TO HUNT ➤

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 1-Oct. 6 (n), Sept. 1-15 (s) Oct. 19-Nov. 16 (n), Oct. 5-Nov. 6 (s) Dec. 21-Jan. 14 (n), Dec. 21-Jan. 31 (s)	15	45
Quail	Nov. 28-March 7	8	
Rabbit	Oct. 12-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (fall)	Oct. 1-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (spr)	May 15-June 1	4	
Raccoon	July 1-Sept. 30	1 raccoons per party	
Rac/Opp/Bobct	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport) Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	5/day, 8/party No limit	
Rails			
King & Clapper	Sept. 1-30, Nov. 22-Dec. 31	15	45
Sora & Virginia,	Sept. 1-30, Nov. 22-Dec. 31	25	75
Gallinules	Sept. 1-30, Nov. 22-Dec. 31	15	45
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28	8	24
Crow	Nov. 2 - Feb. 28	No limit	No limit
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9
Wild Turkey			
Fall season	Oct. 15-Nov. 15 (selected counties)	2 per season (may be either sex)	
Spring season	March 14-May 1	1/day, 3/season, longbeards only	
Youth season	March 7-13	1/day, 3/season, bearded birds only	

WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 14-30 Nov. 29-Dec. 1, Dec. 6-Jan. 31	6 6
Geese (Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Sept. 1-30 Nov. 11-24, Nov. 29-Jan. 1, Dec. 6-Jan. 31	5 Canada 3, Brant 1 Snow/blue/Ross 20 White-fronted 3
Light Geese conservation	Oct. 1-Nov. 10, Feb. 1-7, Feb. 9-March 31	No limit

DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
Northeast	Oct. 1-Nov. 22	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 17-31 (archery/primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 9-22 (youth)
East Central	Oct. 1-Nov. 22	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 9-22 (youth)
Southwest	Oct. 1-Nov. 22	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan.16(dogs) Nov. 9-Jan. 22 (youth)
Southeast	Oct. 15-Nov. 22	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Jan. 23-31 (either-sex arch-primitive)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)		Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Feb. 15(youth)
Delta*	Oct. 1-Nov. 22	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Jan. 1 (dogs)
(See www.mdwfp.com for details on special	Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 22-31 (archery primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 9-22 (youth)
Oct. 15-Jan. 5 South Delta Season)			

WHERE TO HUNT

Mississippi is blessed with some of the best hunting lands anywhere in the country, and most of the state's WMAs, national forests, and national wildlife refuges are chock full of squirrels and squirrel-hunting opportunities. Since deer are the focus for many hunters, squirrels are often overlooked on many of these public areas, which makes for some good hunting.

"The Mississippi Delta is home to a pretty good fox squirrel population; you can find both the red and black phases of fox squirrels on public land in many of those areas," Wood said. "If you have a couple days to hunt, you can go to the Delta and get in some good action and maybe kill a fox squirrel, too."

While going to the Delta is a treat for many hunters, look no further than your local WMA or other public land to enjoy some fast squirrel-hunting action in your own backyard. Every area of Mississippi has public land available for squirrel hunting, and squirrels live in those areas.

"These days, I stay right here at home in central Mississippi and hunt our WMAs locally," Wood said. "There's enough government land and WMA land to provide a lot of fine squirrel hunting action without having to make a long trip to the Delta if you don't live close to the Delta WMAs."

SQUIRREL DOG HUNTING 101

There's nothing really scientific when it comes to hunting squirrels with dogs, but first and foremost, you must have dogs capable of treeing squirrels. After that, it's simply a matter of knowing what to do when the dog trees. Usually the dog owners are the "hunt masters" who call the shots and tell the hunters what to do around the tree.

"I like to have at least one hunter with a .22 rifle and one or two with a shotgun," Wood said. "We'll surround the tree with hunters and then look for that squirrel until somebody picks it out. You can pick them off with the .22 rifle, but if they break and start running, you can shoot more effectively with shotguns."

"I'll get to the woods at the break of day, but on really cold days, we'll hunt from daylight until 11 or 12," Wood said. "After lunch, we'll hunt with another dog a couple hours, getting back out there from 2 to 2:30 and hunting until 3:30 until dark, which is the prime time they're moving in the afternoon."

"The best squirrel hunting action with dogs is in December and January. By February, a lot of the females are holed up in den trees."

TIPS TO FIND TREED SQUIRRELS

"Those squirrels will flatten out on those high limbs and hide in forks of the trees and on top of the limbs, so you really have to look hard to find them," Wood said. "The gray squirrels are just about camouflaged when they flatten out in those oak trees, too."

Jeffrey Wood said the Mississippi Delta is famous for its squirrel hunting, but most WMAs around Mississippi hold good populations of squirrels.



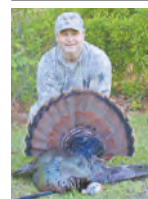
These days, Wood brings along binoculars so he can pick out squirrels hidden from view by eyes alone.

"The 8- to 10-power binoculars will help you pick out a gray squirrel on a gray tree," he said. "Amber safety glasses will also help you pick out those squirrels on a hazy or cloudy day."

"Another thing I'll do to help people find the squirrels is to use a green or red laser pointer to help point the squirrels out to the kids or older hunters."

Wood has also come up with a squirrel skinner that makes it easy to skin squirrels right by yourself. ■

For more information on hunting squirrels with dogs, or about Jeffrey Wood's squirrel barker or skinner, call 601-479-3979 or visit Swamp Boys Custom Calls on Facebook.



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



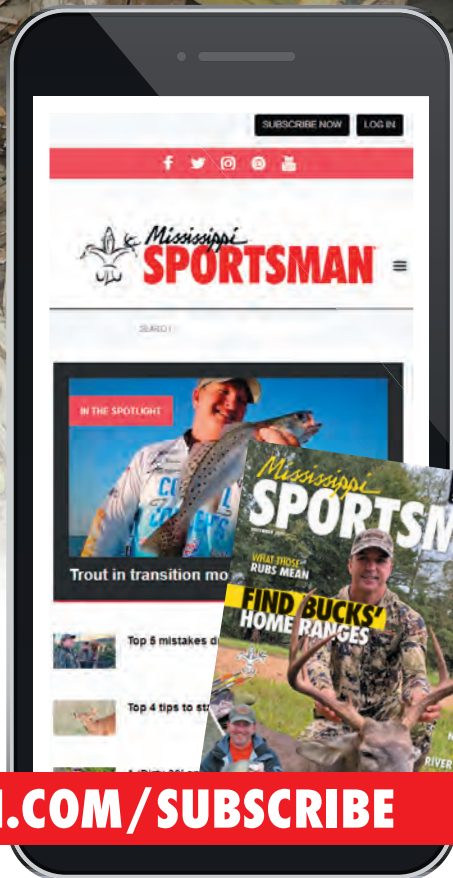
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GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

This may not be the biggest bass this young angler will catch, but it's one he will never forget.



Photo courtesy Ben Davis

FARM PONDS: FISHING'S FUTURE?

Anglers need fisheries — waters with fish — and access to them. But fisheries need anglers, too.

License sales provide most or all of the money that state agencies use to manage fisheries and provide access. Anglers spend a lot of money on boats, fishing tackle and fuel that cycles through the economy and also generates tax dollars for state and federal governments. Some of those federal tax dollars are returned to state fisheries agencies to augment license revenues. Although not as easily measured as license sales and tax revenues, anglers provide political and social support for healthy aquatic resources needed for productive fisheries.

For these and other reasons, a large and growing number of anglers is important to the sportfishing industry and fisheries managers. But the number of anglers is not growing, and the participation rate

in fishing — the proportion of the population that fishes — is dwindling rapidly.

Numbers of freshwater anglers ages 16 and older peaked at 38.4 million in 1985. Since 1990, freshwater angler numbers have fluctuated between 25 and 30 million. Some leaders in the sportfishing industry are encouraged by a slight upward trend in angler numbers in the past 10 years. I have always admire optimists, but the participation rate has declined from 26% in 1985 to 14% in 2016. The decline in participation is especially important, because it diminishes the political support for fisheries and healthy aquatic resources.

TRIED AND FAILED

These changes have stimulated efforts to recruit, retain and re-activate anglers, but despite focused efforts by agencies and the sportfishing industry — activities such as urban fishing or

fishing in neighborhood programs, fishing derbies and fishing education programs — angler numbers have changed little, and participation rates continue to decline.

No single action is going to increase angler recruitment, but research by Dr. Leslie Burger and Dr. Wes Neal at Mississippi State University and Bob Lusk, owner of Pond Boss, a pond management service in Texas, suggests that a resource in your backyard or down the road may help build new anglers.



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

TARGET: YOUTH

Recruitment of new anglers generally begins at an early age, as more than half of new anglers begin fishing by age 15. Concurrent with trends in declining angling participation, the fishing initiation rate for children has been declining nationally. In 1990, 53% of children ages 6 to 19 years old had participated in fishing, compared to 43% in 2010.

THE RESEARCH

The researchers administered surveys to pond owners who actively managed their ponds for quality recreational fishing. Pond owners from 36 states responded, with 50% of the responses coming from Illinois, Louisiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Texas.

About 90% of the respondents reported at least one child fished in their pond in the previous year, and 7% indicated that 20 or more children fished in their pond in the same year. Ninety-four percent of respondents personally took at least one child fishing, and respondents averaged 12 trips with children per year. Most of the fishing trips were with relatives (sons, daughters, nephews, etc.), but 55% of pond owners provided fishing opportunities to family friends. The pond owners' fishing mentorship also extended to trips to other private ponds and public waters.

The researchers provided a bunch of interesting statistics, but the one that really caught my attention was that 75% of children who were taken fishing by a survey participant continued to fish on their own, either as a youth or an adult. Other studies have concluded that repeated engagement of youth in angling activities may increase the likelihood of continued participation into adulthood. A family or neighbor's pond provides that opportunity.

DIFFERENCE MAKERS

Will the pond in your backyard or down the road change trends in angler recruitment? Probably not alone, but it certainly could help. The U.S. has an estimated 4.5 million ponds; if only 10% of those ponds help recruit just one new angler each year, almost a half-million new anglers would be added annually.

Take a kid fishing. It could be the best insurance you can get that you — and them — will have good fishing in the future. ■



Photo courtesy Leslie Burger

START 'EM YOUNG:

Statistics indicate that a youngster like this one is more likely to fish as any adult than a child that is not exposed to fishing at an early age.

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LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

Rigging the SpringR worm wacky style is slow, patient fishing for bass that can pay off big in January.



SLOW IT DOWN ON RIPRAP AT BARNETT

Generally, January is a tough month to catch bass. However, one of the advantages to fishing Ross Barnett this month is the abundance of riprap. Riprap holds heat, and I'll be fishing those rocks.

You'll find riprap, especially down by Ross Barnett Dam, near deep water. Once the sun warms the riprap, bass will move out of their deep-water homes onto the rocks to feed, although the feeding times will be short. This time of year, shad are searching for warmth, just like bass. You must be prepared to fish very

shallow water when the bass are moving up and fish 10 to 12 feet deep when the bass aren't as shallow.

EARLY MORNING

I'll fish parallel to the rocks and start with a ½-ounce, white, single-blade Mann's spinnerbait with a trailer hook. I prefer a No. 7 Colorado blade that I'll slow-roll out on the deeper section of the rocks where they meet the bottom. I don't use any type of trailer. I'll cast about 4 to 5 feet out away from the rocks and slow-roll the spinnerbait back about two-thirds of the way to my boat, which

will be sitting in 8 to 10 feet of water. I try to cover as much water as I can with this method early in the morning.

If I get two bites on a certain section of the rock, I'll mark that as a waypoint on my GPS and return and fish it three to four times during a day. I'll fish 20-pound



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.



Paul Elias likes the red Baby 1-Minus (bottom) in January at Ross Barnett.

“Although I fish the SpringR worm shallow, I’ll also fish it in 6 to 8 foot deep water for January bass.” — Paul Elias



test White Peacock fluorocarbon with a 6-foot-8 heavy action FX Custom Rod and a 5.2:1 Bruin reel. The reel allows me to wind slowly and still keep the blades on my spinnerbait turning. I want the blades to thump slowly; that’s why I use a No. 7 Colorado. Usually the water is stained in January, so I’ll need that thumping sound to attract bass.

SHALLOW TACTICS

As the sun comes up and warms the rocks, I’ll have a red Baby 1-Minus tied on 23-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon on a 7-foot-1, medium-action FX Custom Rod with a moderate-fast tip. I’ll cast this lure as close to the rocks as possible without hitting them, using a 7:1 Bruin reel. I’ll let the bait bump the underwater rocks while reeling slowly. The Baby 1-Minus runs in about 1½ feet of water, and I’m using it to catch the bass that are moving up to feed. I’ll be watching the rocks closely to see shad activity and possibly bass feeding on the shad. The color red seems to produce the best in cold, muddy water.

I’ll also have a Mann’s SpringR worm in junebug rigged wacky style, tied to an 8- to 10-foot piece of White Peacock fluorocarbon leader tied to 10-pound braid on a spinning rod. The line causes the SpringR worm to fall very slowly, while wiggling some. I can fish this very shallow water with this Spring-R worm and also fish out to the 6- to 8-foot deep water. If I don’t get a bite there, I’ll pump my rod two to three times to move the worm out to deeper water.

This strategy catches the lethargic bass holding from the shoreline out to about 8 feet of water. When that SpringR worm comes past these bass, very slowly and moving just a little, they can’t seem to resist eating it. The key to fishing this SpringR worm wacky style is to fish it extremely slowly, since you’re attempting to catch bass that don’t want to bite. I seem to get more bites on a junebug worm when fishing muddy water than I do on any other color. I’ll also spray some chartreuse dye on each end of the worm.

CHANGES TO MAKE

If I’m not getting any bites or catching any bass by the dam, I’ll make a run to the riprap at the Pelahatchie Bridge where Pelahatchie Creek flows through, especially if this area has had a good rain, and current is coming down that creek. I’ll start out fishing the points of the riprap with the same bait I use to fish at the dam, and then fish the riprap on both sides.

My next stop will be at the Highway 43 bridge; I’ll fish the corners of the riprap and the bridge pilings using the same baits and techniques. I’ll spend all my days this month fishing the rocks.

Something about January bassing that makes it different from other times is that warming days will often appear at the end of the month. So, if I’m fishing, and a warm front moves through, I’ll begin fishing the lily pad stems with a Baby 1-Minus and also a ¼-ounce rattling bait like a Rat-L-Trap. I’ll reel both these lures slowly through those stems. ■

SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

It took the author several years of catching big trout like this one before he was able to pinpoint when big trout most like to feed.

LOOK OUT THE 'WINDOW'

BIG SPECKLED TROUT HAVE PARTICULAR TIMES THEY FEED DURING THE MOON CYCLE. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR SUCCESS AND FRIENDS' SUCCESSES AND PINPOINT WHEN THAT BIG-FISH FEEDING WINDOW OPENS

With the holidays in our rear-view mirrors, it's only fitting that we deal this month with some sort of diet intervention, particularly a tryptophan detox. While catching up with my father over a cold beer, we started talking about one of my favorite sayings: "Feed the Machine."

The phrase, although not original, is used in an original sense. During my time on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I coined the phrase, with intent to describe big-trout feeding windows. In other words, it touches on getting in on the action while the getting's good.

Mike McBride, a legendary Texas trout angler, friend and fishing mentor, once said to me that his mission — while guiding all those years — became one of proving theories, right or wrong, but more or less searching for the science of it all. "Feeding the Machine" fit that narrative. It was indescribable, but the

meaning was never clearer. I believe that big-trout feeding windows are fairly scientific. Variables like moon phase and solunar, water levels and water temperature are just a few that play a part in opening the window. However, one observation I couldn't pinpoint, other than my stupid slogan, was when the big-fish feeding window was open, it was **OPEN**.

START TAKING NOTES

Here's my challenge to you. Let's face it; we're all pretty addicted to some form of social media, and chances are, if you're reading this, you like to fish. I encourage you to start paying close attention to your social-media feed and the fishing pictures many of your friends post. What you will find is that quantities of small fish in those pictures will be found throughout the month. However, start noticing that twice monthly in a 3- to 5-day span, larger fish will start popping

up on your news feed. Whether it's at the cleaning tables or on the water, these micro windows start to appear.

The benefit of having Speckled Truth is the volume of anglers I interact with from various states and fisheries. What I've found is that big fish feeding windows are immune to state lines. In other words, when the bite window is open, I'll see photos of big fish being caught in North Carolina, at the same time friends from Florida, Alabama or Texas are also on an epic big-fish run.

Personally, while on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I fished so often that I even narrowed down the window. Both big-fish feeding windows appeared



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 his knowledge on his website, *Speckled Truth*.



TIMING IS EVERYTHING FOR TROUT:

Several years of record-keeping on the author's part brought him to the belief that big speckled trout, real trophies, are more likely to bite during several distinct feeding windows: from two days before to four days after a full or new moon.

monthly on the two days preceding and four days after a full or a new moon. Almost 150 trips validated that trend while I winter-waded at night along the coast. Trip after trip, I'd come home empty handed in areas that would produce big fish consistently. Intellectually, which was always a struggle for me anyway, I couldn't put together why some nights were better than others.

NOTICE TRENDS

With sheer determination, I fished until I saw the trend. I'd go from catching one, maybe two, mid-teen fish to, all of the sudden, catching three 7-pound trout, as well as a handful over 5, in a week's time. Shockingly, I finally then did something smart: I started documenting trip's outcomes: failures and successes. Then, and only then, after stepping back and looking at it holistically, I saw these windows take shape. With my newfound knowledge, I joked with my wife about doing whatever was necessary to go "Feed the Machine."

Whether I had to bathe the dog twice or wash the car in a bikini top, I didn't care. My goal was to catch the biggest trout possible, and if weather was conducive during those times, I was out there giving myself the best chance at a big fish. Why? Because they were vulnerable to making a mistake.

Last, let me remind you that I lived in Biloxi from 2009 to 2013. Since that time, I've seen and fished similar trends not only here on the Texas coast, but in Florida as well. My point is they exist. Social media gives you those glimpses, and chances are there is a scientific explanation. However, if you're serious about catching big fish, start targeting them during these windows.

So in closing, be observant both at home and on the water to what is going on in your estuary. Challenge yourself to explore more and get in tune with these big-fish feeding windows. After all, once its open all that is left to do is...Feed the Machine! ■

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
Grouper (black and gag)	24" TL@	4/day aggregate
Hogfish	12" FL@	5/day
Red, yellowfin grouper	20" TL@	4/day
Scamp grouper	16" TL@	4/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	no minimum@	1/day each
Gray/schoolmaster/cubera/ mahogany/yellowtail/dog snapper	12" TL@	10/day aggregate
Mutton snapper	16" TL@	10/day
Queen/blackfin/silk/winchman snapper	none@	10/day aggregate
Vermillion/lane snapper	10"/8" TL@	20/day aggregate
Gray triggerfish	14" FL@	20/day
Golden/blueline/anchor/blackline tilefish	none@	20/day
King mackerel	24" FL@	2/day
Spanish mackerel	no minimum size@	15/day
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL@	3/day
Bigeye tuna	27" CFL@	no limit
Tripletail	18" TL	3/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	15"	15/day

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

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.

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

The Mega Matrix fills a size slot between the original Matrix Shad and the Matrix Monster.



THE MEGA MATRIX

WILL DOCKSIDE'S LATEST OFFERING FILL THE TROUT BILL

Many saltwater anglers rely on a 4-inch soft plastic while targeting big speckled trout and slot redfish.

Beginning a few weeks ago, they could get what they want to cast at those bigger fish after Dockside TV Bait & Tackle introduced the Mega Matrix. The 4-inch bait complements the line of Matrix Shad soft plastics and fills a void that will be welcome along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas.

"A lot of trout fishermen who focus on big speckled trout like larger lures like that," owner Chas Champagne said.

The Mega Matrix fits in between the 2-inch Matrix Mini, introduced in 2016, the original 3-inch Matrix Shad and the 5-inch Monster Matrix, introduced in October 2018.

When the largest model hit the market

a little more than a year ago, Champagne said, "We want to offer a product for every fisherman in the world, no matter what species they target."

The idea, he said, is to make many artificial lures in a few popular colors as opposed to a few baits in a plethora of colors. Champagne — who introduced the original Matrix Shad in 2013 — feels the same way now.

There was a need for the Mega Matrix. Chances are it will be ultra-popular in Texas, where speckled trout anglers traditionally favor 4-inch soft plastics.

"We have a big Texas following. Texans love big baits," he said.

Many of those anglers probably will fish the Mega Matrix on a 1/8-ounce jighead, particularly the wade fishermen.

"It has the potential to catch fish in Texas, and it probably will," he said,

adding the if it catches on there, he more than likely will have to add a few new color combinations to the list: cockroach (root beer), strawberry and strawberry/white.

Otherwise, he expects the top three color combinations to mirror those of the Matrix Shad: shrimp creole, lemon-head and green hornet. Opening night, which comes in four shades, is right up there, too, he said.

Champagne started working on the bait in March 2018.

"I tested them in Florida this past June. Like we discussed earlier, any time we



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

bring something else out, we test it in Florida,” he said, believing that if the finicky gamefish, which see so many artificial lures in those clean, salty waters, bite on a prototype there, they’ll bite on the new bait anywhere.

The Mega Matrix was designed to look and vibrate in the water like the Matrix Shad. The Mega Matrix’s action is the same as the original Matrix Shad, just as it is the same with the Matrix Mini and the Monster Matrix because they have the exact same dynamics nose to paddletail, he said, noting “the swimming motion is identical in all of them.”

“That Mega Matrix really puts out a lot of vibration,” Champagne said.

In October, sight-fishing for redfish in the marsh near his home in Slidell with a buddy, both using a Mega Matrix in tiger bait color on back-to-back trips, they both limited out on big, slot redfish using the same durable soft-plastic impaled on a 3/8-ounce jighead.

“Pay attention to some of the latest episode of Docksides TV, because we’ll be fishing The Trestles (a speckled trout hotspot in Lake Pontchartrain) with the Mega Matrix,” he said.

He recommends these hook sizes for jigheads: 3/0 hooks for 1/8-, 1/4-, 5/16- and 3/8-ounce jigheads and either 4/0 or 5/0 for 1/2-, 3/4- and 1-ounce jigheads.

For more information about the Mega Matrix and other Docksides Bait & Tackle products, go to matrixshad.com. ■



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APEX PREDATOR

Joshua Chauvin

Deer and other game species will move and feed more actively right after a weather front raises the barometer.

HIGH-PRESSURE DEER

A RISING BAROMETER IS THE TIME TO BE IN THE WOODS, AS WILDLIFE REACT TO A FRONT AND FEED

Barometric pressure can be the best weather indicator for increased deer-hunting success. Once the patterns of high-pressure systems are learned, seeing bucks up and feeding will become a common occurrence.

When high-pressure systems move through, they typically involve cold fronts; it means the temperature will be dropping and the wind will be increasing with the pressure change. I've read many studies showing a threefold increase in buck activity, and a 1:1 doe to buck movement ratio during higher pressures over 30 inHg. Through the years, my woods sightings and camera research have correlated the same amazing results.

This season has been a new challenge, using my recurve bows in very limited hunting time with a newborn baby boy. Still, I'm driving more than 7 hours every week, even if its just to spend a few hours in the woods on one day. Since I have such limited time, I try to choose days with the best weather, which I base upon high-pressure systems.

FIRST TAG FILLED

After seven close calls with does in bow range the first two months of this season, my luck changed on an eventful morning where a cold front was pushing through.

Unable to get up north as early as planned because of dad duty, I got to the woods after daybreak. Another hunter was in my planned spot, so I went to a deeper area I had only been to once

before. Just as I was nearing the tree I intended to climb, I came face to face with a mature buck making a rub 15 yards away in a slough, but he saw me first. The big fellow had created a bubble line, passing just 8 yards upwind from my climbed tree. I was just a few minutes too late.

While in my climber, another nice racked buck walked past at 34 yards, out of range on the thick, sapling ridge. Yet it all came together when the morning's third buck walked where the other big one had created his bubble trail. I was able to make a great shot using my 80-pound Black Widow recurve using a heavy 700-grain Piledriver arrow tipped with a wide, 1½-inch cut Steel Force 2-bladed broadhead. While waiting for my buck to expire from the lung and liver shot, I went for a jog in the wet leaves and stalked, then shot, a big spotted boar.

THE RECOVERY

Later, I went back to track my buck, which had only gone 35 yards. I was thrilled about finally getting to down some fresh, wild venison this season, just in time to serve smoked backstraps as the main dish for Thanksgiving. Also, my baby boy and I eat bone broth daily, and we were out of bones, so that was the main mission for taking the tasty buck. The cartilage, ligaments and tendons don't go to waste at my house and are now my favorite parts of the deer to consume in my homemade broth.

I shared the buck with my brother's family, who has quadruplets to feed. He

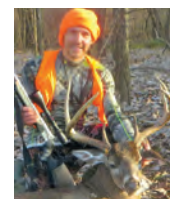
had joined me that morning on his first-ever compound bow hunt. He quickly learned just how challenging the archery pursuit can be, having deer within 10 yards but not having any makeable shots.

AFTER THE RAIN

In the same boat, trying to feed a family of four kids, is my best friend, Brian Cifreo. He has been focusing on hunting during times of rising pressure for many years and teaches me a lot on our weekend's together at my camp, where he leaves his camper. His brother taught him how to deer hunt after an autumn rainstorm had passed back when they were kids. After many years, he put the pieces together that it was the rising barometric pressure that correlates to all his deer sightings after rain and the next day.

His best small-game hunts and fishing trips have usually occurred under these conditions as well. He said that's when everything wants to feed, because the pressure change affects their stomachs.

This past October, he had the best deer hunting week of his life on Louisiana public land. It began on a rainy Monday when work got called off due to inclement weather. He had packed his Black Widow recurve in his truck, just in the



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.

hopes of getting free from his job as an electrician.

The rain creates the perfect, stealthy stalking conditions when it ends, and Cifreo loves to stalk as much as sit in a tree. He went to an area he had not hunted in many years and got wet crossing several deep sloughs to access areas other hunters don't often visit. As he was creeping along a cocklebur patch in a river bottom, two bucks stirred. Magically, an 8-pointer stopped in a gap at 18 yards. He made the perfect shot, slicing through the heart with his four-blade Muzzy broadhead.

BUCK DOUBLE

The success continued on his next day in the woods. He went back to a different area in a riverbottom filled with nuttall oak acorns. A tropical storm had passed the night before, and the windy conditions of the rising pressure that pushed the storm eastward through Mississippi had the animals feeding. During the morning sit, a nice boar moved through, and Brian downed the hog with his compound bow.

After moving his climber to a hot nuttall to get upwind of that location, the action picked up again. He had set up at a new nuttall tree much earlier than normal for an evening sit because he knew the conditions were perfect. And behold, a beautiful 100-inch buck with a 16¼-inch inside spread came



out just 15 yards away to feed only a little while into the hunt. An even bigger buck was with him, but out of archery range. The arrow sailed true and he had his largest archery buck after 28 years of bowhunting.

After the shot, the larger buck ran, confused, and stopped underneath Brian in the climber. It was a week my buddy will never forget, and the decades of learning the best weather conditions to hunt had paid off.

The next weekend, stalking in windy conditions, he stalked a nice 6-pointer to 8 yards in very windy conditions the day after the front arrived. He held out to fill his last tag for something with more bone.

HIGH PRESSURE TIPS

Stalking with our recurve bows is one of the hardest types of hunting, but it can be very productive in the right conditions. The wet leaves after a rain is when we do most of our stalking, since we can walk quietly. Cifreo's 8-pointer was taken in similar conditions as my best recurve buck two seasons ago. Getting in the woods with rain gear at a good location just as the rain stops is optimal.

Once the wind from a high-pressure front kicks in, it really

helps keep human movement hidden. With all the leaves and branches swaying, stalking conditions are even better. This season, I was able to stalk does a few times within 20 yards under windy, wet-leaf conditions. However, one doe ducked the shot, and I took out a 1-inch sapling instead of one deer. Cifreo missed a doe with his recurve as well from a ducked arrow.

I also shot several hogs this season, traditionally stalking in the wind.

We usually take to our climbing stands once the leaves dry up. The crunchy leaves puts a stationary hunter in the advantage, as approaching deer can be heard coming. The hard wind of a high-pressure system usually dies down early in the morning and late in the evening by the second day. This is when being elevated and stationary creates a better advantage.

STRONG WINDS

In late fall and winter, a front's strong winds are usually very consistent and different from the typically south to southeast winds Louisiana receives early in the season. Even though the weather forecast often says a northward wind, the wind often blows from the southwest to west-northwest during the day the front arrives. The next day, it will begin to switch to consistently north. Just before the pressure peaks, Cifreo has his most success seeing game.

By the third day, a northeast wind blows. The hunting usually remains action-packed until the pressure and wind begins to drop. That's when our sightings really plummet. Instead of hunting low-pressure conditions, we typically run full throttle through the woods and scout for new spots and await the next high-pressure front.

The best barometric pressure to hunt is when the barometer rises above 30, with 30.10 to 30.30 being the sweet spot for animals to get up and move in daylight. The few magical hours during a hard front when the pressure is rising fast is when I see the majority of my bucks.

Cifreo uses his Weather.com app to check current pressure. I like to use Weather Underground for my source on pressure conditions for the week ahead.

Of course, die-hard hunting dads like the two of us will be roaming the public woods every chance we get throughout the season, but when the pressure gauge is showing a 30 with the arrow pointed up is when we strike the most. ■



Not all docks are created equal, at least not to redfish. Find one that's in full sunlight, close to shallow and deep water, and with moving water, and you're in the right spot.



Jerry Diltsaver

REDS ON DOCKS

By Brian Cope

TIPS FOR GOING UNDER THEIR COVER

A Anglers know redfish love to hang around boat docks, especially so in the winter.

Guide Addison Rupert said if you can find a dock that has four key factors, you're likely to find redfish there.

Rupert looks for docks that are in full sunlight, with shallow water nearby, deep water nearby and running water nearby. If he checks a dock that has all those ingredients, but doesn't find reds, he will move to the nearest dock. It doesn't take long to find the reds, he said.

"If you find a good dock that's in the sunlight (that) has both shallow water and deeper water nearby, you'll find redfish this time of year," he said. "Once you find fish under a dock, you need to keep your distance. The water is crystal clear this time of year, and these fish are wary. They won't tolerate you getting too close."

Once you find a school around a dock, Rupert pays close attention to the direction the fish are facing; they want to see baits coming from that direction. If you make a cast that requires you

to bring a lure from behind them, it's going to spook them. And Rupert won't cast into the middle of these fish — he doesn't even like to cast under the dock.

"Getting that lure to land just on the outskirts of the dock is the best approach. They will come out and get it as long as it is close enough, but not too close," said Rupert.

Rupert lowers his Power Pole while he's still a good, long cast from the structure.

"You want it to take a good, strong cast to reach it. If it's too easy to cast there, you're too close," he said.

Rupert will use anywhere from a 1/16-ounce jighead on up to 1/4-ounce, depending on conditions. He will use a variety of Gulp lures, from shrimp to minnows and crabs.

"Some days, they are more particular than others, but usually this time of year, if they are biting, they aren't too picky about whether it's a shrimp or mullet," he said. ■

Rebrush your duck blind throughout the season; it needs to look great in January the way it did in November.

3 TIPS FOR LATE DUCKS

By Patrick Bonin

Although it seems like opening day just happened, the final weeks of duck season are already here.

All of the prep work from last fall — brushing the blind, putting out a perfect decoy spread, scouting birds and practicing with your gun — will culminate in the next few weeks as another season heads into the history books.

To make the most of your remaining time in the blind, duck guides Nick Poe and David Faul shared a few key tips to knock down wary birds that have heard every bad duck call from Canada all the way to the Gulf Coast.

Here are their top tips to down more ducks in January:

• **Camouflage is king.** This sounds simple, and it really shouldn't change from opening day, but as blinds get beaten up during the course of a season, it's important to spruce up your brush as things wind down.

"Being hidden is the end-all, be-all," Poe said. "If you're not hidden, they're not going to come."

To that end, he makes it a point to rebrush his marsh blinds every single week of the season.

"I'm rebrushing constantly," he said. "And I keep the old brush; I try to make the blind look as much like an island as I can. All of the old brush still gets used — even if I pull it off when I'm putting fresh brush on, I throw it on top of the boat hide."

• **Tweak your decoy spread.** "I hunt with a bunch of decoys early in the year," Poe said. "I think a big factor that not many people pay attention to — especially if they're hunting in the marsh — is the No. 1 thing you see when you see ducks sitting in the marsh — you see them somewhere in the vicinity of a big wad of coots. And I'm a firm believer in coot decoys. If you don't have your coot-to-duck decoy ratio correct, it's going to be harder for you to kill ducks as the season goes on."

"Right now, I've got 12 dozen coots to three dozen ducks, and I would actually like to be hunting about 15 dozen coots with three dozen ducks."

Faul, who favors teal and gadwall decoys, downsizes his spread late in the season.

"I reduce toward the end of the season," he said. "I'll also move two or three dozen out in the middle to open things up, and just leave a few nearer the blind."

• **Tone down your calling.** "Less is best," Faul said. "I'm a firm believer, especially ... when birds are working, to just do a little light feed call or a quack-quack."

"That big hail call is a last resort if they're leaving. Really and truly ... they're either coming in or they aren't. As long as they're working, shut up; that's how I've always thought about it."

One call Poe definitely uses more in the late season is a whistle.

"The whistle I think is a real big deal late in the year," he said. "But just because it's a whistle, it doesn't mean you blow it like a whistle. You have to actually call the ducks — you hear people all the time that see a group of pintail and it sounds like a team of football referees."

"When ducks are calling on the water and you watch them call at other ducks, they don't do all that. You've got 50 pintail and there's only one in the whole bunch that's making any noise." ■

Tony Taylor



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

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

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	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Wed 1	█	█	█	█	21
Thu 2	█	█	█	█	35
Fri 3	█	█	█	█	28
Sat 4	█	█	█	█	27

Sun 5	█	█	█	█	31
Mon 6	█	█	█	█	47
Tue 7	█	█	█	█	34
Wed 8	█	█	█	█	59
Thu 9	█	█	█	█	71
Fri 10	█	█	█	█	76
Sat 11	█	█	█	█	67

Sun 12	█	█	█	█	58
Mon 13	█	█	█	█	47
Tue 14	█	█	█	█	38
Wed 15	█	█	█	█	34
Thu 16	█	█	█	█	35
Fri 17	█	█	█	█	42
Sat 18	█	█	█	█	28

Sun 19	█	█	█	█	20
Mon 20	█	█	█	█	18
Tue 21	█	█	█	█	25
Wed 22	█	█	█	█	34
Thu 23	█	█	█	█	43
Fri 24	█	█	█	█	47
Sat 25	█	█	█	█	38

Sun 26	█	█	█	█	29
Mon 27	█	█	█	█	21
Tue 28	█	█	█	█	19
Wed 29	█	█	█	█	22
Thu 30	█	█	█	█	25
Fri 31	█	█	█	█	34

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
11:37 am	4:32 pm - 6:24 pm ☀	11:24 pm	4:22 am - 6:00 am	☾	Apogee
12:05 pm	5:05 pm - 7:13 pm		4:57 am - 6:49 am	☾	HALF
12:32 pm	5:37 pm - 8:03 pm	12:19 am	5:30 am - 7:38 am	☾	☾
1:00 pm	6:11 pm - 8:53 pm	1:14 am	6:02 am - 8:28 am ☀	☾	☾
1:30 pm	6:48 pm - 9:44 pm	2:11 am	6:36 am - 9:18 am ☀	☾	☾
2:04 pm	7:28 pm - 10:38 pm	3:09 am	7:13 am - 10:09 am	☾	☾
2:43 pm	8:14 pm - 11:36 pm	4:10 am	7:53 am - 11:03 am	☾	☾
3:28 pm	9:05 pm - 12:35 am	5:12 am	8:39 am - 12:01 pm	☾	☾
4:21 pm	10:02 pm - 1:34 am	6:14 am	9:30 am - 1:00 pm	☾	HIGH
5:22 pm	11:03 pm - Midnight	7:14 am	10:27 am - 1:59 pm ☀	☾	FULL
6:28 pm	Midnight - 2:33 am	8:10 am	11:28 am - 2:58 pm	☾	☾
7:38 pm	12:06 am - 3:28 am	8:59 am	12:31 pm - 3:53 pm	☾	☾
8:48 pm	1:09 am - 4:19 am	9:42 am	1:34 pm - 4:44 pm	☾	Perigee
9:57 pm	2:13 am - 5:05 am	10:21 am	2:38 pm - 5:30 pm	☾	☾
11:05 pm	3:15 am - 5:47 am	10:56 am	3:40 pm - 6:12 pm ☀	☾	☾
	4:16 am - 6:28 am	11:30 am	4:41 pm - 6:53 pm	☾	☾
12:12 am	5:14 am - 7:10 am	12:03 pm	5:39 pm - 7:35 pm	☾	HALF
1:18 am	6:14 am - 7:50 am ☀	12:38 pm	6:39 pm - 8:15 pm	☾	☾
2:24 am	7:14 am - 8:32 am ☀	1:16 pm	7:39 pm - 8:57 pm	☾	☾
3:29 am	8:11 am - 9:19 am	1:57 pm	8:36 pm - 9:44 pm	☾	☾
4:32 am	9:10 am - 10:08 am	2:43 pm	9:35 pm - 10:33 pm	☾	☾
5:32 am	10:05 am - 11:01 am	3:34 pm	10:30 pm - 11:26 pm	☾	LOW
6:27 am	10:59 am - 11:55 am	4:29 pm	11:24 pm - Midnight	☾	☾
7:15 am	11:50 am - 12:48 pm ☀	5:26 pm	Midnight - 12:20 am	☾	NEW
7:58 am	12:35 pm - 1:43 pm	6:25 pm	12:15 am - 1:13 am	☾	☾
8:35 am	1:17 pm - 2:35 pm	7:23 pm	1:00 am - 2:08 am	☾	☾
9:08 am	1:55 pm - 3:27 pm	8:19 pm	1:42 am - 3:00 am	☾	☾
9:38 am	2:29 pm - 4:17 pm	9:15 pm	2:20 am - 3:52 am	☾	☾
10:06 am	3:03 pm - 5:05 pm	10:09 pm	2:54 am - 4:42 am	☾	Apogee
10:33 am	3:36 pm - 5:54 pm ☀	11:04 pm	3:28 am - 5:30 am	☾	☾
11:00 am	4:08 pm - 6:44 pm ☀	11:59 pm	4:01 am - 6:19 am	☾	☾

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS:
 ☀ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ☀ = DUSK
 WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

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