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21

Reelin' in the rut

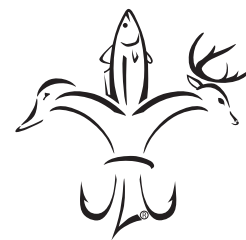
Mississippi
CONTENTS



38

Embrace the change

Volume 20 | Number 12 | December 2018



Mississippi
SPORTSMAN

www.MS-SPORTSMAN.com

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

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

P.O. Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039-1199
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Volume 20 | No 12

FEATURES:

21 Reelin' in the rut *cover story*

Whitetail bucks drop some of their innate caution when the peak of breeding season, aka the rut, arrives, which in Mississippi begins in December. Here's how to take advantage and add a trophy to your wall.

>>>> By Mike Giles

27 Backyard ducks

Wood ducks are wild and free, living in their own paradise, yet closer than most duck hunters in Mississippi realize. Here are some tips to help add them to your bag.

>>>> By Andy Douglas

31 Float up a duck

Paddling Mississippi rivers and streams and jump-shooting ducks can be a very effective technique, especially when the weather gets cold.

>>>> By Phillip Gentry

38 Embrace the change

December marks transition time from fall to winter areas for saltwater gamefish. Learn how to get in their way, and you'll have some of the best fishing of the year.

>>>> By Bobby Cleveland

45 We're in a poke — with pigs

Annual harvest of 'feral' porkers in Mississippi now exceeds the deer harvest. What can hunters, landowners do to stem the rising tide of pork?

>>>> By David Hawkins

53 Grounded in success

You don't have to climb a tree to kill a whitetail. Many Mississippi hunters ignore the opportunity to take deer from terra firma. Here are few tips for folks with a fear or heights.

>>>> By John J. Woods

FIELD NOTES:

66 How not to lose that blood trail

COLUMNS:

56 Gettin' Fresh By Hal Schramm

58 Lunker Lines By Paul Elias

60 Happy Trails By Bill Garbo

62 Lure Review

By Don Shoopman

64 Sticks and Strings

By Sammy Romano

DEPARTMENTS:

6 Outdoor Update

74 Sportsman Showcase

76 Hunting/Fishing regs

78 Astro Tables

79 Tide Guides

82 Advertiser Index

ON THE COVER:



December contains the peak of the whitetail rut across much of Mississippi, a time when the biggest, wariest of bucks let their guard down, even just a little bit. Photo by Brian Carroll.

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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.

Phillip Gentry

DECEMBER: SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST

LAST PAGE OF CALENDAR FILLED WITH OUTDOOR OPPORTUNITIES

“’TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY” is a fitting line for December, the month that brings us Christmas and the peak of the deer season.

In 2018, the joy that usually accompanies deer season is tempered by an air of uncertainty, especially in two areas of Mississippi where chronic wasting disease (CWD) has been found in single animals in our herd.

But we'll get to that. Let's start instead with the best part of the 12th month. All of us at *Mississippi Sportsman* wish you a wonderful holiday season, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

In this issue, we look at some of the gifts that Mother Nature gives us in Mississippi — outstanding hunting and great fishing during December.

Writer Mike Giles explains hunting the rut, when bucks get doe fever and make

mistakes that can put them in the wrong place at the wrong time — if the hunter is in the right place at the right time. For deer hunters who are looking to be more mobile — and are perhaps a little gravity challenged — we take a look at hunting from ground blinds.

Hopefully, we'll get a repeat of the early winter Mississippi had in 2017, with at least one or two arctic blasts in December. That will help duck hunters by pushing the migration south quickly. Writers Andy Douglas and Phillip Gentry describe two totally different means to take ducks, with Douglas discussing tactics for backyard woodies, while Gentry looks into jump-shooting ducks while floating rivers and streams.

Deer season puts more hunters in the habitat of wild hogs, and writer David Hawkins discusses ways to take more

pigs this winter.

We also go to the Gulf Coast to look at how the approach of winter brings many popular species of saltwater game fish within easy reach of more anglers.

Ho! Ho! Ho! Let's go. ■

December is a joyful month, especially for Mississippi deer hunters, but this year, CWD is tempering that good feeling.



Bobby Cleveland

PONTOTOC COUNTY BUCK IS STATE'S 2ND CWD CASE

Mississippi's chronic wasting disease (CWD) story added a second chapter in October, one that actually makes the first case last January hundreds of miles west a good thing — sort of. Say what? How can a confirmed case of CWD ever be labeled a blessing?

Consider this. What if the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks had not dealt with its first case of CWD before it found the second one, just a week into the 2018-19 deer season, with definitive CWD confirmation coming less than a month before gun season?

Imagine the turmoil the agency and hunters in the region would have faced with a discovery just before the heart of deer season.

On Oct. 8, a landowner in Ecu community in northern Pontotoc County, in extreme northeast Mississippi, heard his dog barking relentlessly and investigated. He found a young buck in his yard, seemingly fighting the barking dog. The landowner retrieved a gun and fired warning shots. The buck flinched but did not run away. The landowner then fired another shot, put the deer down, and called the MDWFP.

Testing began at the Mississippi Veterinary and Diagnostic Lab in Pearl, where tissue samples were tested twice and returned positive for CWD both times. The tissue were then sent to a national diagnostic lab in Iowa where a more definitive CWD test was run. The results were positive.

Russ Welsh, executive director of MDWFP's wildlife bureau, announced the results of both tests and did so without the worried tone that had accompanied findings in Issaquena County about nine months earlier. This time, the agency was prepared.

In late January, in the final days of the 2017-18 deer season, a mature buck was seen by hunters roaming aimlessly at a camp in Issaquena County near Eagle Lake in the south Delta. One hunter actually saw it take some of its final steps and then heard it fall dead in a food plot.

In an area with the highest concentration of deer testing since 2002, Mississippi had its first confirmed case of CWD.

The agency took immediate action and established an Issaquena CWD Management Zone that originally included parts of six counties. Over the next six months, the agency was able to refine its emergency action plan well ahead of the next deer season and shrink the management zone.

Walsh said the agency would use the same CWD regulations and protocols from Issaquena in the newly formed Pontotoc CWD Management Zone that includes all of Pontotoc and Union counties, plus that part of Lee County that is west of US 45. Those rules include a ban on all supplemental feeding of

UPDATE: THIRD CWD CASE REPORTED

The Mississippi Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks announced late on Nov. 9 that a third deer, collected Nov. 1, is suspected as having chronic wasting disease.

This deer, a free-ranging, 2½-year-old doe, was found in or immediately adjacent to the Issaquena County CWD Management Zone. Tests done in Mississippi came back positive, and tissue samples will be sent to an Iowa lab for further confirmation.



One symptom of chronic wasting disease in deer is heavy salivation, as exemplified by this doe in Arkansas.

Courtesy Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

wildlife (including mineral sites), require permits for the trapping of wild hogs and restrictions of what parts of a dead deer can be removed from the zones.

Walsh said that the agency will continue checking deer from the two zones, as well as the rest of the state, but it is taking a different approach on sampling deer in the Pontotoc CWD Management Zone, since deer season is underway.

"We, the agency, will not be harvesting deer for sampling," Walsh said. "We will be relying on samples from deer harvested by hunters."

The MDWFP has announced a statewide system in which hunters can drop off deer heads to be tested for CWD, but it is providing more access in the two CWD zones. Hunters are urged to participate without cost.

In Pontotoc County, in addition to regular drop-off sites, the MDWFP has identified peak harvest days from historical data and will provide extra service Nov. 17, 23-24, Dec. 29 and Jan. 5 with locations at the Ecu Volunteer Fire Department and the Pontotoc County Compound in Pontotoc.

In the Issaquena CWD Management Zone, the MDWFP will provide special collections on Nov. 17 and 23, Dec. 29-30, and Jan. 5-6 at the Onward Store on US 61 and at the boat ramp at the junction of US 61 and Mississippi Highway 465.

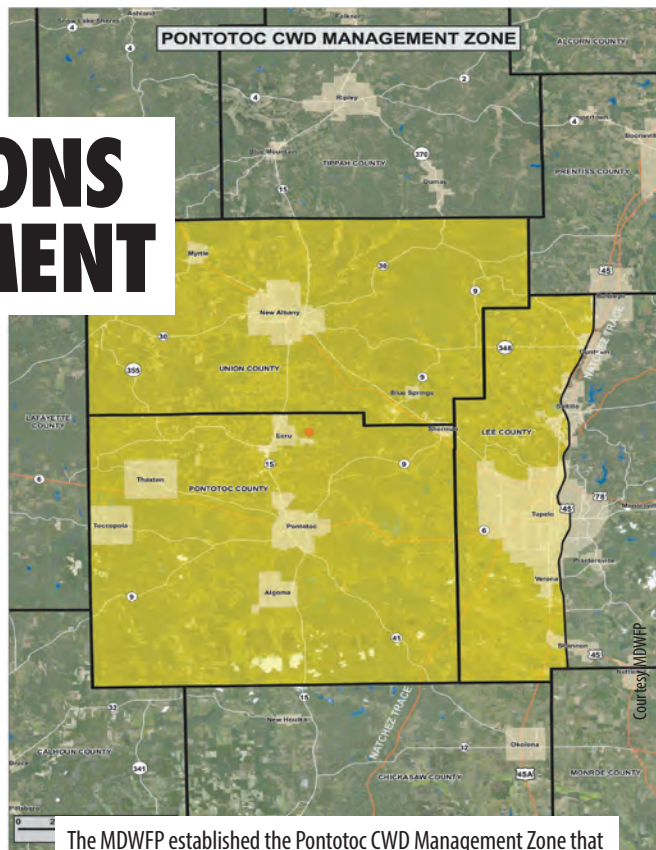
[more updates...](#) >

HUNTING REGULATIONS FOR CWD MANAGEMENT ZONES

The MDWFP has established two CWD Management Zones, the Issaquena CWD Management Zone and the Pontotoc CWD Management Zone. In those two areas, the following special regulations apply for the 2018-19 deer season.

IT WILL BE ILLEGAL TO:

1. Provide any supplemental feed for wildlife.
2. Establish new mineral sites or add supplements to existing sites.
3. Trap wild hogs without a permit from MDWFP.
4. Remove certain portions of deer carcasses from the zones. Only the parts listed below are legal:
 - Cut/wrapped meat (commercially or privately).
 - Deboned meat.
 - Hides with no head attached.
 - Finished taxidermy.
 - Antlers with no tissue attached.
 - Cleaned skull plates (no brain tissue).
 - Cleaned skulls (no lymphoid or brain tissue).



The MDWFP established the Pontotoc CWD Management Zone that includes all of Pontotoc (bottom left) and Union (top left) counties, and that part of Lee County (right) west of US 45.

MDWFP establishes free CWD check system

Now that Mississippi has a lab capable of testing deer for CWD through the quicker and less reliable of two standard tests, the MDWFP has established a statewide system through which hunters anywhere in the state can have deer checked for CWD without paying a fee.

It requires that the head of the animal, with at least 6 inches of the neck attached, be taken to a drop-off point where it will be held in a freezer until delivered to the Mississippi Veterinary and Diagnostic Lab in Pearl for testing. A positive test at that lab will lead to the sample being sent to an Iowa lab for confirmation.

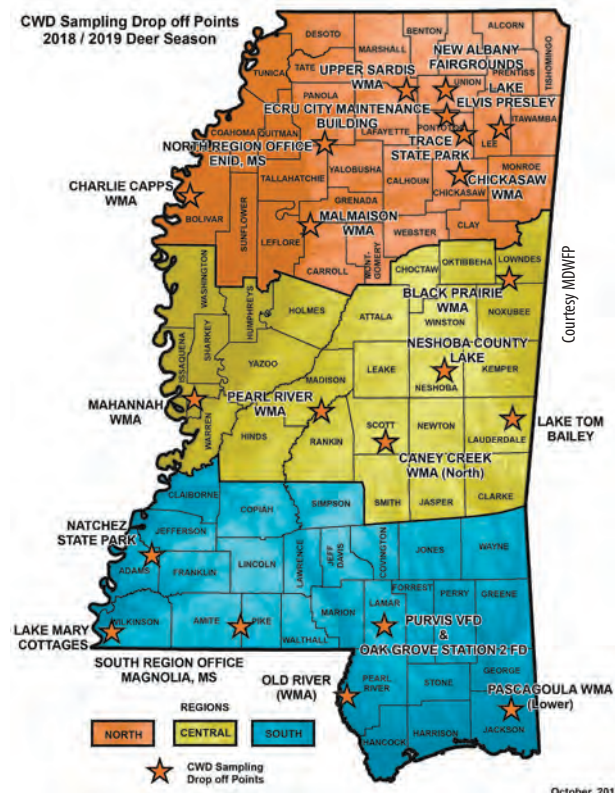
Hunters are advised not to dress deer exhibiting signs of illness or disease. Instead, contact the MDWFP at 800-BE-SMART (800-237-6278). Drop off points include:

North Region: North Region Office, Enid; Elvis Presley Lake, Tupelo;

Charlie Capps WMA, Rosedale; Malmaison WMA, Holcomb; Chickasaw WMA, Houston; Upper Sardis WMA, Etta; Trace State Park, Belden; New Albany Fairgrounds, New Albany; Ecu City Maintenance Building, Ecu.

Central Region: Black Prairie WMA, Crawford; Mahannah WMA, Redwood; Caney Creek WMA, Forest; Pearl River WMA, Canton; Lake Tom Bailey, Toomsuba; Neshoba County Lake, Philadelphia.

South Region: South Region Office, Magnolia; Purvis Volunteer Fire Department, Purvis; Oak Grove Fire Department Station 2, Purvis; Old River WMA, Poplarville; Natchez State Park, Natchez; Lower Pascagoula WMA, Moss Point; Lake Mary Cottages, Woodville.



This map shows the check stations available for CWD testing on a statewide basis.

SECOND CASE OF CWD ADDS TO MYSTERY

Mississippi wildlife officials went from having an odd case of a single deer with CWD in one of the most-heavily tested areas of the state to having two unrelated cases of CWD about 200 miles apart.

It is weird, to say the least, a mystery that defies explanation — or at least eludes it.

Mississippi has been alerted to the threat of CWD for decades and began testing for CWD in 2002 as part of annual herd checks. More than 12,000 deer have been tested, and until this past February, all tests were negative. The most-heavily tested area was the south Delta, in the immediate vicinity of Issaquena County. One former MDWFP biologist called it “the least likeliest place for CWD to be found in Mississippi.”

Yet that’s where hunters at a camp reported seeing a mature buck showing signs of disease, and on Jan. 26, a hunter saw it struggling and heard it fall and die in a nearby field. That mature buck, 4½ years old, became the state’s first confirmed case of CWD. Hundreds more deer were collected — yes, that means killed — in the months that followed. None tested positive for CWD. It didn’t help that Mississippi River flooding impacted the area, scattering what might have been a core cell of infected animals.

The MDWFP suspended its collection and limited testing in the area to road kills or other deer brought in by the public. There were no definitive answers as to how, where, when and why CWD showed up as it did.

Then, months later, the second case pops up in a 1½-year-old buck in the northeast corner of the state, in Pontotoc County about 40 miles west of Tupelo and nearly 200 miles from Issaquena.

Still with no answers as to the spread and prevalence of the disease in the Issaquena area, the MDWFP is dealing

with two seemingly unrelated cases hundreds of miles apart.

There is one aspect of the Pontotoc case that is different, and it involves the age of the second buck. At 18 months old, the buck’s illness adds to the mystery.

Studies in other CWD states show that it takes 15 to 18 months for a deer to exhibit clinical signs after initial infection. With this buck’s age, it appears likely it had CWD since birth.

Russ Walsh, executive director of the MDWFP’s wildlife bureau, said that because of the incubation period, the disease is more commonly associated with mature deer. He said its appearance in a younger

deer isn’t particularly rare, just surprising.

“It’s not necessarily unusual,” Walsh told *The Clarion-Ledger*. “Once it’s entrenched in an area, you have deer of all ages with it. It wouldn’t be unusual to see deer (with CWD) in all age-classes in a CWD-endemic area.

“It’s possible, if not likely, he contracted it as a fawn.”

Walsh didn’t say it, but it appears logical that more deer in the Pontotoc area — hey, at least one mama doe for sure — are infected, and the chances that they will be found are higher there than in the flood plain of the Mississippi River in Issaquena County.

We’ll see. ■

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<p>MONTGOMERY COUNTY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 104.4 Acres \$1,800/AC 	<p>PEARL RIVER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 61.7 Acres \$2,299/AC • 64 Acres \$3,487/AC • 67 Acres \$3,450/AC 	<p>LOUISIANA</p> <p><i>Livingston Parish</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7.5 Acres \$90,000 • 12 Acres \$144,000 • 38 Acres \$10,000/AC <p><i>Red River</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 Acres \$153,000 <p><i>Sabine</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 Acres \$3,095/AC <p><i>Tangipahoa Parish</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 Acres & Home \$359,000 <p><i>Webster</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55 Acres \$3,400/AC • 113 Acres \$3,250/AC • 160 Acres \$3,300/AC • 176 Acres \$2,500/AC • 958 Acres \$1,252/AC
<p>PIKE COUNTY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 Acres \$45,000 • 10 Acres & Home \$168,000 • 10 Acres \$37,500/AC • 12 Acres \$54,000/AC • 16.29 Acres \$90,000/AC • 20 Acres \$4,500/AC • 21.33 Acres \$4,195/AC 	<p>MONTGOMERY COUNTY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 104.4 Acres \$1,800/AC 	<p>LOUISIANA</p> <p><i>Livingston Parish</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7.5 Acres \$90,000 • 12 Acres \$144,000 • 38 Acres \$10,000/AC <p><i>Red River</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 Acres \$153,000 <p><i>Sabine</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 Acres \$3,095/AC <p><i>Tangipahoa Parish</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 Acres & Home \$359,000 <p><i>Webster</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55 Acres \$3,400/AC • 113 Acres \$3,250/AC • 160 Acres \$3,300/AC • 176 Acres \$2,500/AC • 958 Acres \$1,252/AC



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WET SOME PLACES, DRY IN OTHERS

A wet November has Mississippi duck hunters hoping for another good season in the Delta.

Bobby Cleveland

Awet start to November put a lot of rain on the Delta, providing good early habitat for ducks. Hunters just need it to keep raining and for the temperatures to start falling quickly to hasten waterfowl migration.

Deer hunters, especially in the northeast area, aren't so lucky.

"I've got more water now than I had last year, and we had a great December duck

season a year ago," said Carl Young of Grenada. "Our duck lease in the Delta was ready for ducks Nov. 1. What's funny is that my deer club over along the Tenn-Tom (in northeast Mississippi), we had a hard time getting food plots started because it was so dry. I mean, bone dry.

"Heck, my boys and I tried to squirrel hunt over there at deer camp a couple of times, and it was so dry that we sounded like elephants — we crunched so loud in

the leaves and sticks. It was frustrating. We could see squirrels but couldn't get close enough to them."

That was Young's only complaint.

"Between the two, I'd rather have the rain on the duck hole," he said. "You can't hunt ducks without it, and we'll be OK on the deer. We've had a good acorn crop, and we supplemented the feeding."

Young said a repeat of last December would be ideal.

"We were on the cusp of deciding whether to keep the duck lease because we'd had a couple of tough years," he said. "My two friends and I who have the duck lease together, we had about given up. Our 40 acres there cost me more to lease than my quarter-share in the deer camp lease, and my sons (10 and 14) prefer deer hunting to ducks. I was putting in more workdays for ducks than for deer and not getting much to show for it.

"Last year, though, it was crazy. We had a great hunt Thanksgiving weekend and figured we'd be done until January. We weren't; ducks came back by the next weekend, and then those two hard (arctic) blasts we had in December kept them coming. My sons even enjoyed it. It was the best duck season we've had over there in the last 10 to 15 years."

Drought this past summer in most of eastern Mississippi put many hunters behind schedule, but hunting was good.

"Fortunately, where I hunt in Monroe County, we had great acorns and good browse," said Riley Sims of Starkville. "We're right on the (Tenn-Tom) river, and I hunted the hardwoods. I saw plenty of deer every trip during the first two weeks of archery season and got two does. I was hunting a big 10-point but never got a decent look at his vitals in range.

"They disappeared after mid-October, just like they usually do. Trail cams were still getting pictures, but they quit moving in the afternoon. We finally got some decent rain, and our plots were up the last week in October and the cams there started loading up. I know where the 10 is."

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The crappie were biting good in Monroe County for Louis Burroughs.



Daylon Collins, 13, of Pass Christian, caught this monster black drum on May 5, 2018, at Pass Christian harbor while fishing with his parents.



Capt. Joey Davis with Relentless Sportfishing enjoyed a day with the Marsh Madness crew chumming up yellowfin behind shrimp boats. These two 100-pounders bit on live pogies in early October.



John Laird was 12 when he took his first deer while hunting in Smith County.

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DAD HELPS PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED SON GET FIRST DEER WITH A BOW

Special relationship is mutually beneficial for the Sanders

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

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

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

Here's the deal. Jason was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at 14 months. His body is severely weakened by the horrible affliction.

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

A longtime hunter with two older sons already in college, Sanders now concentrates on sharing his love of the outdoors with Jason. It is a story with several successful chapters already written.

It is one that has reached out and touched others.

"My Jason has hunted with us for several years now," Sanders said, with us referring to his wife Adrian and sons Nathan, 24, and David, 20. "Two years ago, we took him to a Hope Outdoors Disabled Hunt, where he killed his first buck, a small spike. The recovery of that first buck exceeded 2.5 million views on Facebook.

"Last year, I had someone reach out to me that wanted to take him to south Texas, where he took a 135-inch, 9-point buck. The recovery of that buck exceeded 8.5 million views on the Trinity Outdoors Adventures Facebook page."

With each success, the young hunter's

eagerness grew.

"This year, my Jason told me that he wanted to kill a deer with a crossbow," Sanders said. "Not wanting to spend a fortune on a new crossbow, I posted on Facebook if anyone might have a used crossbow they would be willing to sell me for Jason."

His request was quickly answered.

"A lady by the name of Jan Nolan sent me a Facebook message telling me of her husband's recent passing, and that she would love to give her late husband's crossbow to my Jason," Sanders said. "It just so happens that she attended the same church that we had been visiting and had recently joined.

"So on a Sunday morning, Mrs. Jan brought her husband's crossbow and presented it to Jason. Tears were shed and many hugs were shared. I knew that I had to put some effort into making this happen and get it done."

Sanders is a native of Vicksburg, but his father's business opportunities took him to the Mississippi Gulf Coast where he eventually joined his dad in a wetlands consulting business. With the two oldest sons in college, Dana and Adrian decided to move back to the family farm in Claiborne County, where they could home-school Jason, not to mention be very close to some outstanding deer hunting.

Over the past few years, as Jason began hunting, Dana studied up on hunting techniques and equipment for the physically challenged and got creative. He also got help from friends, like gunsmith Jimmy Bagby from Firearms Outfitters in Vicksburg, who built and gave a custom .257 Roberts rifle with a 2.5-pound trigger to the youngster.

"Sitting in the blind, we utilize a handicap



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

activity chair that has straps that hold Jason up and has hydraulic cylinders that can raise him up and down," Sanders said. "My Jason sits to my left, and I shoot off my left shoulder. Jason is able to look down the crossbow (or gun) at the deer as I look through the scope. Then he reaches his hand under the trigger guard and pulls the trigger when I give him the signal to do so.

"It's how we've taken most of his deer with a gun. I want Jason to be as much in control of the hunting event as possible. Pulling the trigger is all him."

On Oct. 8, Dana and Jason took the crossbow to the stand.

"We got in the stand around 4:30 to beat the heat," Dana said. "I had already taken his chair and Caldwell Field pod to the stand the day before. Hunting with my Jason requires some planning ahead."

"It was a warm sit, but the electric fan kept us from getting hot and helped keep the mosquitoes off of him. We had not seen anything, and it was getting late, and I was pondering going ahead and getting everything packed up when I heard footsteps to our right."

The hunt was on.

"I said 'Jason, there's a deer coming up the road right next to the blind; be still and very quiet,'" Sanders recalled. "Jason's breathing and posture changed and he said, 'Papa, my heart, can you hear it?'"

"The deer came out in front of the blind at only 17 steps, and we went into our routine. I got behind the crossbow and settled the crosshairs on the deer. Jason was grabbing for the trigger and I helped him get his finger on the trigger. Then I gave him the go ahead. He jerked back on the trigger very hard causing the

crossbow to fire."

The deer jumped and ran off. It looked like a solid hit.

"Jason was squalling and so happy," Sanders said. "We got out after a bit but found no arrow or blood. I called a friend of mine with the Mississippi Blood Trailing Network and he brought a dog. They found the deer."

"My Jason has now taken a deer with his archery gear. It was a really awesome time and we owe it all to Mrs. Jan, who gave my Jason her husband's crossbow."

The dad's dedication to his son is obvious, but it's a mutual beneficial relationship, giving the elder Sanders a solid reminder of what the outdoors should be about.

"I've had the privilege to have hunted some great places in Mississippi and Louisiana over my 35 years of deer hunting," he said. "I've taken a lot of deer. I still enjoy hunting but really like the preparation, and holding out for a nice buck. Hunting with Jason, however, brings back those



Photo courtesy Dana Sanders

emotions that I used to get when I'd see a deer or kill one.

"His joy and excitement is contagious and takes me back to what hunting should really be about. In a day and time where big antlered bucks get all the spotlights, there's my Jason, showing me what it's really all about." ■

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POPULAR PELAHATCHIE BAY CLOSED TO BOATING

Pelahatchie Bay produces some of the best winter and spring fishing on Barnett Reservoir, but not this year. Due to an outbreak of the plant giant salvinia, the Bay is off-limits to all boating for at least six months.

Bobby Cleveland

Fishermen or boaters planning a winter or spring trip to Barnett Reservoir need to plan around not visiting and using the popular Pelahatchie Bay area of the 33,000-acre lake near Jackson. It is closed to boating until further notice.

The reason: giant salvinia, an invasive aquatic fern that was found in June on the Bay's north shore. To battle the plant, the Pearl River Valley Water Supply declared an emergency and enacted an integrated action plan to prevent its spread, and to hopefully eradicate it.

All public and private boat ramps in the area have been closed and blocked, and temporary floating barriers block passage beneath a bridge that provides the only access from the reservoir to the bay.

"Because of the topography, with only

one narrow opening from the lake to the bay, we were advised by aquatic vegetation specialists that we could contain the giant salvinia to the bay," said John Sigman, general manager for PRVWSD, a state agency that oversees the operation of Barnett Reservoir. "They were adamant in their advice to close the bay off from the rest of the lake and just as adamant at closing the boat ramps.

"For the same reason, the unique topography, the experts told us we have a one-time shot at killing giant salvinia, which most lakes that have been hit with the plant didn't have. To do that, we had to design an emergency action plan that included the ban on boating access, continued prescribed applications of herbicides, and then lowering the lake level two feet during the winter months. With a

cold winter, like we had last year, it could kill the exposed salvinia."

Biologist John Skains of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks said giant salvinia is intolerant of freezing weather.

"It is a tropical plant, from Brazil, that simply cannot survive freezing temperatures," he said. "If we can contain it to the north shore of the bay and keep spraying it, the drawdown and a sustained, hard freeze could finish off any salvinia that survived spraying but was weakened by the herbicides."

The drawdown began in November, and, weather permitting, the lake will drop from its normal pool elevation of 297.5 feet above sea level to 296.5 by Dec. 1, and eventually to 295.5 by Dec. 15. Sigman said other factors, like weather and

downstream impact, could influence the drawdown process.

"We struggled hard with this decision; we never wanted to take the unprecedented step of closing the lake or a part of it to the public," Sigman said. "It was a painful decision to make, but it was the right one to make."

Most fishermen were disappointed but understood.

"I am one of the bass guys who frequents the bay, every tournament," said Kenny Churchill of Brandon. "That's where I fish, especially in the fall, winter and spring. Heck, everybody fishes it then, because it's one of the few places where you can find protected water in windy conditions.

"But I will get by. I would much rather lose the bay for half a year than to see us lose it forever to this plant. I've read up on it and heard about it and I know it's nothing to fool around with. I hope they kill it all this winter."

Louisiana and Texas have both had sad experiences with giant salvinia, including fishing destinations like Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn reservoir on the states' borders. Caney Creek and Caddo Lakes in Louisiana have been hit hard.

"Those lakes and those states, they are no longer trying to eradicate giant salvinia," Skains said. "They are now simply trying to control it. That's the stage we are hoping we can avoid. We can either kill it this year or likely spend the next decade or decades just trying to control it."

At a PRVWSD board meeting, state fisheries director Larry Pugh called giant salvinia "the greatest threat we face as fisheries and lake managers. I would really hate to see it spread from Pelahatchie Bay to other parts of Barnett Reservoir, or see it carried by boat or boat trailer to other lakes around Mississippi. That is a scary thought."

In a related note, PRVWSD

and the MDWFP became more aggressive in its battle with vegetation in Barnett Reservoir's upriver backwaters. A helicopter was used to reach areas no longer accessible due to hyacinth, alligator weed and other invasive plants.

"This was angler driven; a group of bass fishermen approached us and asked us if we would consider aerial spraying to reach some of those clogged areas that are historically some of the best fishing areas in the system," Sigman said. "They provided maps with coordinates, and a lot of it was to areas with 6 to 8 feet of water that were matted over. We got with

MDWFP and took some bids and found out that it was feasible."

If good results are found in the approximately 400 acres sprayed, it is possible that future aerial spraying would be employed in other areas.

"That's the only way we'll ever get those areas back," said fisherman Jimmy Carruth of Brandon. "A helicopter can get to 400 acres in a few hours that a boat just can't reach at all. We appreciate that the reservoir and wildlife folks listened to us; we're all in it together and want what's best." ■



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WINTER FISHING HOT SPOTS

Mississippi is blessed with great fishing opportunities on every page of the calendar, and some of it is saved for the last page: December.

Whether you fish in saltwater, prefer bass over crappie or vice versa, you can get a hook into some lips throughout the month. Here's a look at some of the best action.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Fishermen mistakenly think the best winter fishing is limited to south Mississippi, and that's based on some excellent action on lakes like Calling Panther near Crystal Springs, Okhissa near Bude, Jeff Davis near Prentiss, Bill Waller near Columbia and Perry at Beaumont. All are proven hot spots. But don't overlook some good opportunities north of I-20. Even Pickwick Lake on the Tennessee border can produce in December. Another big lake to hit is Barnett Reservoir, which can produce fish throughout the winter. For lovers of smaller lakes, there's Neshoba County Lake near Philadelphia, Monroe near Aberdeen, and Lamar Bruce at Saltillo. Unfortunately, two of north Mississippi's best lakes are off limits this December — the ramp is temporarily closed at Tippah County Lake near Ripley and the lake at Trace State Park near Pontotoc is closed for renovation.

CRAPPIE

Some of the best crappie action all year happens in the oxbow lakes along the Mississippi River in December and the rest of winter. Eagle, Chotard, Albermarle, Washington and Whittington lakes are all excellent waters for trolling for suspended,

cold-water crappie. Inland, Sardis and Grenada lakes were producing some good fish in November, and if the water remains at decent, stable levels, it should continue through to the New Year. Barnett Reservoir is perhaps the most-consistent producer in the state.

CATFISH

Winter months are outstanding for trophy blue catfish on the Mississippi River and the Tenn-Tom Waterway. Time spent learning how to find the cats in the deep holes and then putting the boat in the proper position to get a bait in their strike zones — and keep it there — is worth it.

COASTAL WATERS

Several of the most-popular saltwater gamefish species migrate to nearshore or inshore waters along the Mississippi

Gulf Coast during the late fall season. By December, redfish, speckled trout, puppy drum and sheepshead are all plentiful in the bays and on the man-made reefs along the beaches. Residents lucky enough to have homes on the back bays or attached bayous can catch all the trout they want at night under lights on their piers or docks. Redfish can be seen in packs roaming shorelines in search of food. Bridge pilings and other structure hold fish that use the cover to ambush baitfish pushed by the incoming or outgoing tides. The Biloxi Bay, Bay of St. Louis and the Pascagoula River are the three best places to be in December.

The exception: On Dec. 25, the place to be is with family and friends, perhaps enjoying a meal of fresh fish or perhaps venison backstraps.

Merry Christmas. ■



The Mississippi Gulf Coast gets red hot every winter with great fishing for, among others, redfish.

Bobby Cleveland

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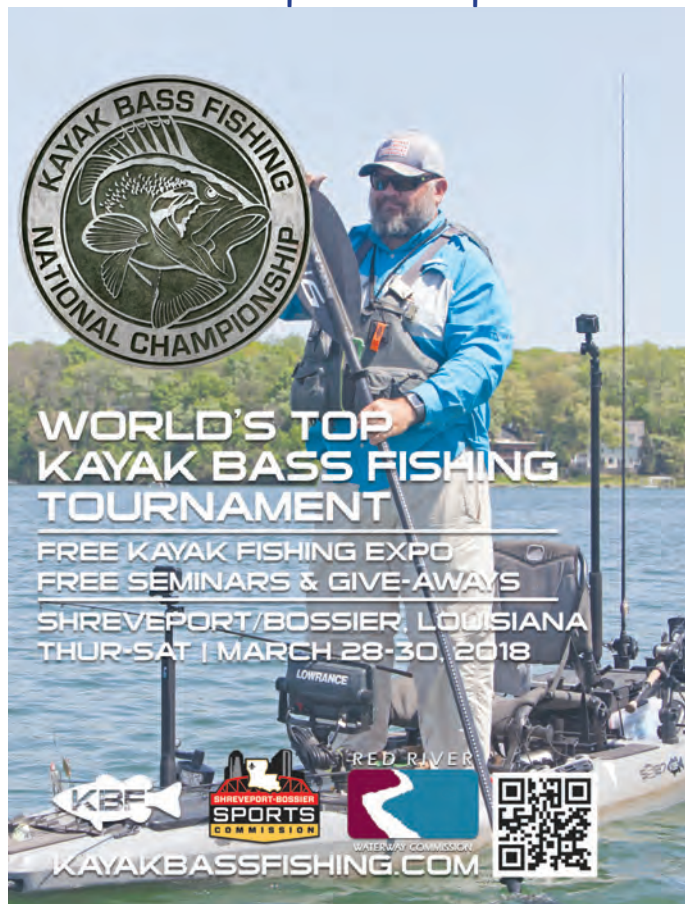
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REELIN' IN THE RUT

Whitetail bucks drop some of their innate caution when the peak of breeding season, aka the rut, arrives, which in Mississippi is in December. Here's how to take advantage and add a trophy to your wall.

By Mike Giles

Linda Burdine Pollard sat in her favorite deer stand in north Choctaw County last year, searching for sign of a hot doe. What she heard and saw were something very different, but exactly what she was looking for: a red-hot buck.

"I heard something running through the woods, and then I heard a buck grunting, and he was running wide open," Pollard said. "I guess I missed the doe come by, but I saw the buck, put my crosshairs on him and touched the trigger." "*Ka-boom.*"

The .280 Remington roared, and the buck collapsed in a heap, another nice 10-pointer, one of many that this talented hunter has harvested over the past 30 years.

"I first started hunting with a shotgun, but my husband, Russell, and son, Jeff, wanted me to try a rifle," Pollard said. "So Russell ... got a rifle and told the man (at the store) he wanted to let me try it out first. The man told him that a .280 wasn't a woman's gun. Russell just told him, 'You don't know my wife!'"

"Well, I shot the rifle with my son Jeff and then went to the woods the next morning. I heard a deer running flat-out, saw he had horns and dropped him. I really don't know how I hit that deer running like that the first time, but I called Russell and told him to call that man at the store back and tell him we're keeping the rifle!"

HUNT THE FUNNELS UP NEXT >



HUNT THE FUNNELS

Over the past 20 years, Pollard has taken many big bucks by hunting funnels in her area; she usually kills a good buck in the same stand every year.

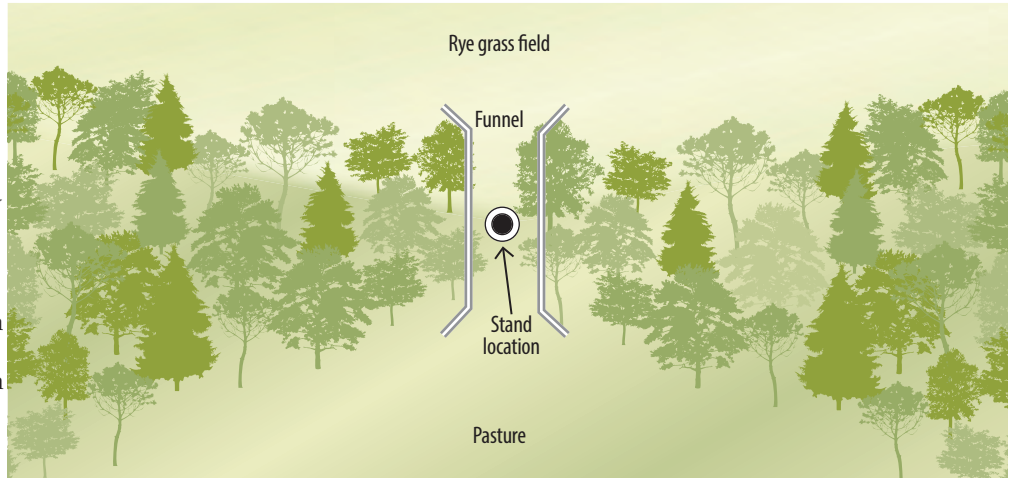
“I have one stand in a funnel that gets really narrow in the middle,” Pollard said. “The woods have acorn trees in the strip, and when it gets to my stand it’s really narrow. On one side of the funnel is a pasture, and on the other there’s a rye grass field. I’ve killed quite a few feeding in the rye grass, but when the bucks are chasing does, I’ll usually kill one traveling through the funnel.”

If you have food nearby, the does will be in the area sometime during the day, and you can bet there will be a buck or two trailing any hot does that pass by.

LEAVE THE DOES, SMALL BUCKS

“I love to go hunting and don’t have to kill something every time I go to enjoy it,” Pollard said. “I never shoot does, because I want my does there on my place. If does are there, then you’re going to have bucks coming in looking for them during the rut, too.”

Creek crossings such as this one are good places to intercept rutting bucks that are searching for does.



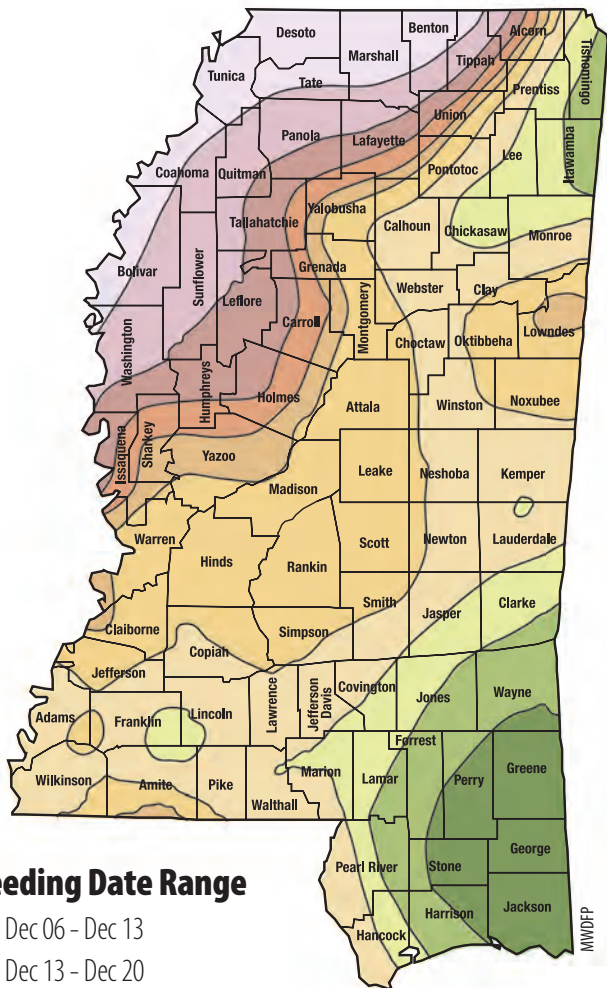
If you’re looking to attract trophy bucks to your area, then you’ve got to have the does, because when they put out that estrous scent, they’ll attract those mature bucks.

“I don’t shoot little bucks, either,” Pollard said. “If I shoot a smaller buck, then the older, wiser bucks might not come in, so I just don’t want to take a chance. I’m okay with going to the woods and not shooting or bringing a deer out. It’s the big bucks I’m after.”

Letting smaller bucks walk is a good way to make sure you have mature bucks in the area in the future, because dead deer don’t grow antlers. If you want to kill better bucks, you must let them live to maturity, so they can reach their full potential.

PUBLIC LAND DURING THE RUT UP NEXT >





Breeding Date Range

- Dec 06 - Dec 13
- Dec 13 - Dec 20
- Dec 20 - Dec 25
- Dec 25 - Dec 29
- Dec 29 - Dec 31
- Dec 31 - Jan 04
- Jan 04 - Jan 09
- Jan 09 - Jan 16
- Jan 16 - Jan 24
- Jan 24 - Feb 06

This map shows the peak breeding dates for whitetails in different areas of Mississippi.

BEST TIPS FOR HUNTING THE RUT

- Know the lay of the land you're going to hunt.
- Determine the available food sources during that time.
- Determine the bedding areas and travel corridors.
- Scout constantly through the season.
- Find scrape lines, fresh trails and crossings.
- Get into the woods and in a stand every day, every minute you can, while the rut is going on.



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PUBLIC LAND DURING THE RUT

Easing up to a knoll, overlooking a deep ravine, I was stopped dead in my tracks by a whiff of scent from a rutting buck. The distinctive odor was pungent, and I focused my attention on the unseen buck. Slowly turning my head, I spotted, not 10 feet to my right, a 3- to 4-foot-wide scrape in plain sight; a buck had obviously just worked it, as the coal-black earth had not even crusted over. It still bore the wet markings of his musty scent.

I'd just still-hunted a half-mile and run across a scrape line and rub line that ended at the precipice overlooking a ravine in front of me. The odor was unmistakable, but where to go and how to hunt him was another matter. Should I stay, or should I keep easing along, looking for more sign and antlers?

It was 9:45 on the last morning of a three-day draw hunt at Canemount WMA near Port Gibson, and time was running out. The choice was easy this time, as I'd done some scouting before the hunt and knew deer like to frequent the deep, cane-filled ravine. I'd only been there a couple of times, but I had spotted deer both times during daylight hours.

I picked a good-looking spot on the knoll, sat down and started watching. For 30 minutes, I didn't see a thing or hear a peep. I was relaxed and comfortable, though, so I grunted, and within 2 minutes, I heard a crack from somewhere in the jungle below.

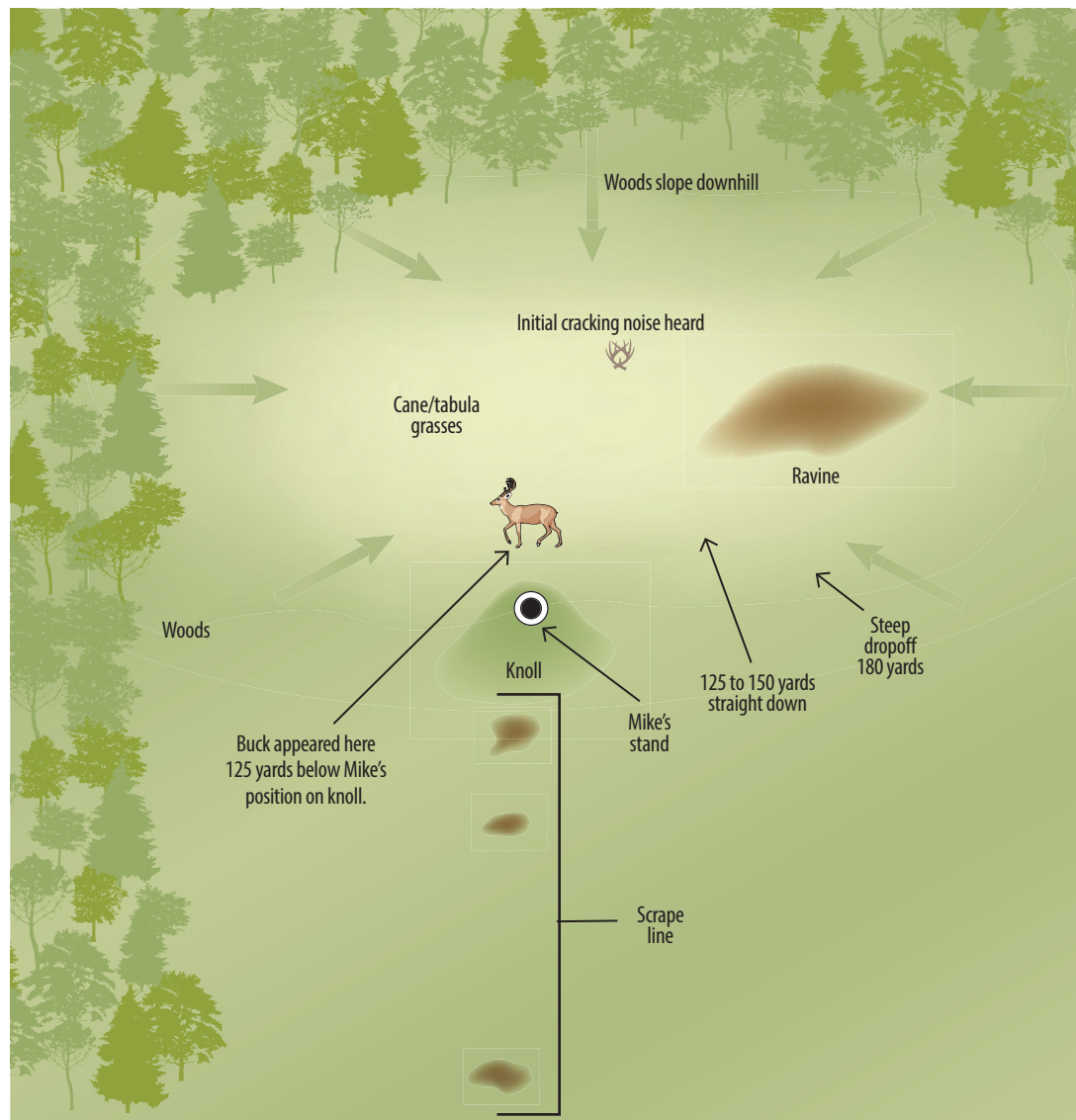
A few minutes later, I heard another pop and crack, sounds that only a big buck makes in woods like these. And then there was silence.

For the next 15 minutes, I stared intently into the deep tangle of cane and vegetation with nary a sight nor sign of anything including a deer.

I followed up with a low, guttural, drawn-out buck grunt to see if he was still coming.

"Crack!" It was on now.

Suddenly, a buck appeared like an appa-



rition directly in front of me, at the base of the hill about 125 yards below. He'd obviously pegged my location and was looking for a hot doe. With a side view, I couldn't make out the width of his antlers, but I knew that they were thick and a trophy for me.

Turning his head, I could see the antlers rising straight up and curving out wide. They extended well beyond his ears, so I knew he was a legal buck in this trophy unit.

Wasting no time, I centered the crosshairs on him.

"Tic-Boom!"

My .270 roared, and the buck collapsed instantly. He never twitched as one well-placed bullet pierced his backbone between his shoulders and went into his engine room. He never knew what hit him.

The 5½-year-old buck had lived a life of

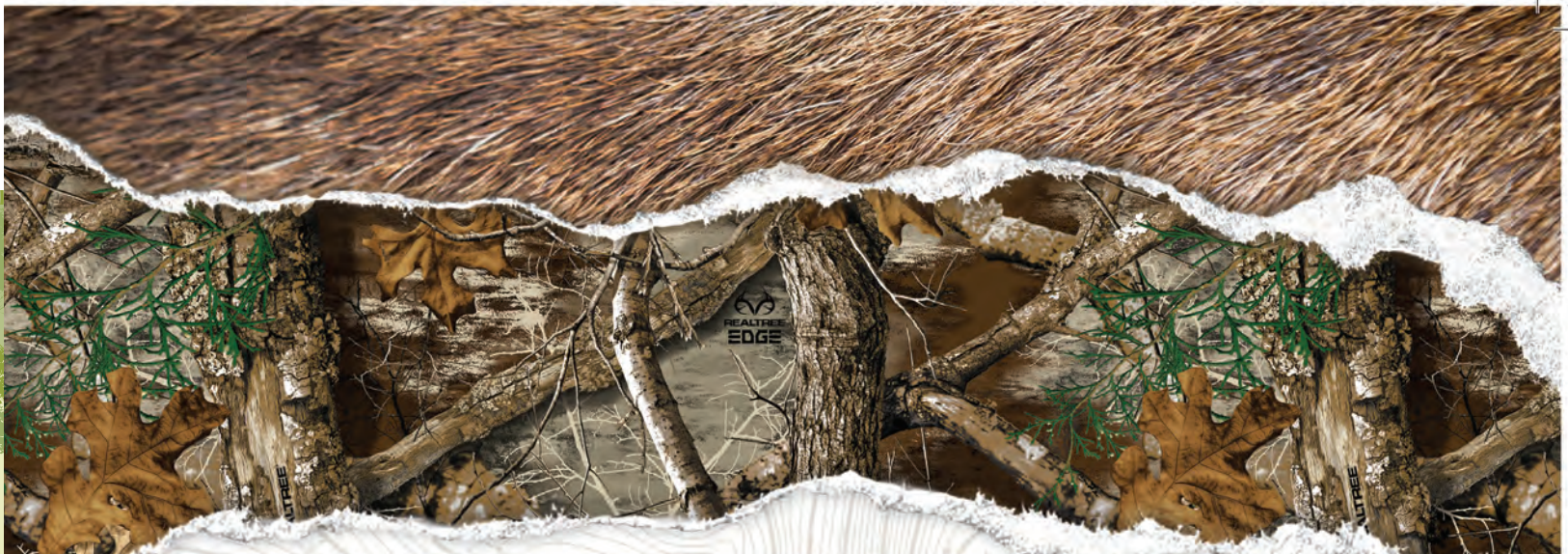
seclusion; he never had to leave his sanctuary during daylight hours.

His rutting behavior was ultimately his demise; he just couldn't ignore my sweet love grunts. He weighed 210 pounds, sported a tall, 20-inch wide rack to go with 5½-inch bases. He was surely a public-land trophy and made my season complete.

If you're looking for a quality buck, then you'd do well to head to the woods every chance you get during the rut. There will never be a better time to catch an old buck with his guard down. When does are coming into estrous, bucks throw caution to the wind and run wild, regardless of time of day or where they are. It will be the one time when hunters get a look at some trophies during daylight hours.

HUNTING RIGHT-OF-WAYS

UP NEXT >



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A 3-day WMA hunt near Port Gibson resulted in the author (left) and buddy Brad Madden taking these nice bucks.

HUNTING RIGHT-OF-WAYS

Though young by most standards, 15-year-old Camden Lott of Sebastopol has been hunting nearly all of his life, and he's learned a few things from his grandfather.

"I like to hunt pipelines because I can see a long distance and spot bucks running does during the rut," Camden said. "When the does come out, the bucks will follow them right across the open pipeline, and that's the best time to shoot a good one."

Last December, Lott was hunting a pipeline on his grandfather's when the rut erupted right in front of him.

"I looked up, and does were piling into the field," said Lott. "It wasn't long before a nice buck came out, and I was getting ready to take the shot."

But fate intervened before Lott could squeeze the trigger.

"I took a moment to settle down as I was trying to get on the buck, but then a monster buck with a much bigger rack busted out behind him," he said. "When they separated, I put the crosshairs on him and squeezed the trigger."

"Ka-Boom!" roared Lott's .270, and the buck of a lifetime was in his grasp.

The trophy was indeed the buck of his lifetime, sporting a rocking-chair rack with 11 points, a wide spread and weighed



in at 238 pounds.

If you have a pipeline or powerline to hunt, that could be your ticket to the buck of a lifetime like it was for Lott. Find out where deer like to cross and take a stand somewhere within shooting distance — but not too close — and you just might harvest a trophy buck this year as well. ■



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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Andy Douglas

BACKYARD DUCKS

By Andy Douglas

Wood ducks are wild and free, living in their own paradise, yet closer than most duck hunters in Mississippi realize. Here are some tips to help add them to your bag.

Duck hunting is becoming a favorite sport for many sportsmen and sportswomen. Considering all the gear needed, it can become expensive very quickly — especially if you have to pay to access places near flyways with good numbers of mallards and pintails.

There's an exception, however, to expensive waterfowl hunting: wood ducks, aka woodies, squealers, acorn ducks, swamp ducks.

You won't break the bank if you decide to go after woodies. They're found just

about anywhere that holds a little water. If you already have hunting land or fishing spots, chances are good that you have a place to hunt wood ducks. It doesn't take a whole lot of equipment, either. All you really need is a shotgun, shells and some camo, plus maybe a call or two and a half-dozen decoys.

WHERE TO FIND THEM

"Wood ducks prefer annually flooded areas that provide dense vegetative cover, such as bottomland hardwood forests and scrub-shrub wetland areas that

contain willow, buttonbush, and privet," said Houston Havens, the waterfowl project coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "This type of habitat provides everything that wood ducks need to thrive throughout the year, including nesting structure, cover for brood rearing and plenty of acorns, seeds and insects to feed upon."

Magnolia State hunters don't have to look far; we are fortunate to have a healthy population of woodies.

>

“IN MISSISSIPPI, WE HAVE A LOT OF RESIDENT WOOD DUCKS.

We also have a large number of them that annually migrate from the north,” said Phillip Cagle, owner of White Oak Hunting Service near Tunica.

Good places to hunt are the shallow ends of ponds, a bend of a slow-moving stream or river, in flooded timber or cypress swamps or on the edges of beaver sloughs.

“Scouting is the key to being successful bagging woodies,” Cagle said. “Scout for them, and don’t rule out lakes that can be hunted, especially near the creeks feeding them or narrow fingers.”

Scout places before you plan to hunt, both early mornings and at sunset. Look for roosting areas and the directions ducks fly at dusk and dawn. It’s not recommended to hunt in or on the edge of roosting areas — ducks are smart, and it could ruin a good roost for the entire season.

MYTHS ABOUT WOOD DUCKS

A lot of hunters have fallen for the fallacy that wood ducks can’t be called or decoyed. In the right situation, they will come to a call, and when combined with decoys, hunters can get them within shotgun range.

“They will come in to a decoy,” said Mike “Catfish” Flautt, a guide for Tallahatchie Hunts in Swan Lake. “I will do a wood duck whistle to turn them.”

The high-pitched hen call — “teeew-wwit” — or the really high-pitched drake whistle — “to-wwiit” — works well getting them in gun range as they’re trying to land. The same calls work if they land out of range — call to them, and they’ll sometimes swim over in range, then flush them and shoot. The loud “wheat-wheat” sound the squealers make when they’re spooked is a good call to use when they’ve flown over you and you’ve missed a shot opportunity. Many times, they’ll turn for another pass-by.

Decoys work, but keep the spread small. The number of drake and hen decoys should be the same, as they naturally travel in pairs. A good tip that

will stack the odds in your favor is to rig one decoy with a weighted jerk-line. Wood ducks rarely sit still in the water, and pulling the jerk-line creates action on the water, causing the other decoys to bob around.

While it’s possible to turn them and get them to come to decoys, Cagle makes a good point.

Bends in slow moving creeks or streams are ideal for ambushing and jump shooting woodies.



Andy Douglas

A typical day of hunting wood ducks with the author starts out a blind he’s constructed at a favorite, abandoned farm pond in the middle of some big timber. It has a beaver dam across the spillway and cypress trees growing on the shallow end.

Arriving very early, he hunts the shallow end with a spread of four decoys, one rigged on a jerk-line. If the squealers land before shooting

light, he waits until legal hunting time arrives, then call and work the jerk-line, hoping to get them to swim over for a flush and shoot. He does a lot of wood duck talk until mid-morning.

When the action has ceased, he will head to a section of hardwoods that has a big creek running through it. He will try his hand at ambushing and jump-shooting until he’s tired or lunch time arrives. He may stay and

make an evening hunt, pass-shooting, sitting beside a group of oak trees on a field woodland between a roosting area and some beaver soughs. It’s then time to do some intermittent calling and stay ready for fast-flying action on the fringes.

Be aware of the limit, it’s three daily. The author tries to harvest only drakes, feeling like he’s conserving hens for future seasons. ■

Calling and utilizing decoys will stack the odds in a hunter's favor for harvesting more wood ducks.

"They're not like a working duck that will circle two or three times before they commit," he said. "They're woodies, and they're coming in fast and furious."

SETUPS AND METHODS

You can jump-shoot, hunt from a blind or take woodies by pass-shooting. They're basically hunted like any other duck, only these ducks live in more wooded habitats than other ducks. And they are fast. They have no problem maneuvering — weaving, darting, diving — through timber.

"Woodies can be flying a hundred miles an hour through the woods and land in a hole of water as big as a bucket. You have to be ready for them," Flautt said.

Hunting from a blind can be very productive. It doesn't take anything fancy; just build one out of whatever nature has nearby. Set up near the water's edge. Sometimes a blind isn't even necessary if you find large enough trees to sit by and you can rely on your camo. Throw out a small spread of decoys and keep your call ready to react when they fly in or fly over. Be in the blind and set up well before daybreak. Woodies are notorious for landing on the water before legal shooting hours.

Pass hunting is where scouting pays off, where hunters lie in wait for a shot as they fly over.

Havens offers a good strategy for pass hunting.

"Wood ducks sometimes follow somewhat of a daily pattern during the winter," he said. "They typically roost in large numbers during the late evening and will often leave the roost early the next morning, heading the same direction before dispersing further. When this pattern is observed, hunters can take advantage by setting up in the flight path of wood ducks for morning hunts."

Set up on the flight path, no closer than a couple hundred yards from the roost —



Brian Carroll

remember, never hunt too close to their roost. Woodies are predictable and will keep the same patterns until shot into a couple times.

"The only kind of wood duck hunting we knew how to do back in the day was pass shooting on the way to a roost or jump-shooting," Flautt said.

Ambushing and jump-shooting are a traditional way a lot of hunters target wood ducks. The key is to know your hunting territory and know where the woodies will be. You can hunt them all day if you choose to. Ducks will be on the water or on the bank feeding on acorns, vegetation or insects. The strategy is to slip in undetected, and once you spot ducks, get in a position to make a good shot, then flush and shoot. Creeks and streams are ideal ambush places, especially in the bends. It can be difficult to put the slip on woodies in sloughs or flooded timber because of the flat terrain usually in those areas. Wherever you decide to ambush, sneak in slowly — wood ducks have a keen sense of sight and hearing, and they blend in well with their surroundings. Listen closely as you approach; they are very vocal ducks.

WRAPPING IT UP

Hunters don't have to be duck-hunting experts to chase woodies. It's not the kill that keeps sportsmen coming back for more, it's the whole package.

continues >



Andy Douglas

WOOD DUCKS

Wood ducks are fascinating. The hens are so well camouflaged — on the water, they'll spot you long before you see them. In full breeding plumage, the drake is the most beautiful of all ducks. They're forever wild, free and independently at large, living in their own paradise. These squealers have a splendid vocabulary of their own that is distinguished only as wood duck talk.

It's not just the allure of the wood duck that draws hunters, just as much; it's the territory where they live; some of the most beautiful scenery in Mississippi. These places can be found just beyond your own backyard. ■



Andy Douglas is an outdoor writer and photographer from Brookhaven. A native of Lincoln County, he's chased deer, turkeys, bass and most anything else the past 35 years. He lives the outdoor lifestyle and is passionate about sharing that with others through stories and photos.

CREATING A BETTER WOOD DUCK HOLE

If you have a place that holds a few wood ducks and you want to make it better and attract more, think about building some wood duck boxes and placing them over or near the water.

"It's just basic conservation," said Phillip Cable of White Oak Hunting Service. "I am here to tell you that putting out wood duck boxes will help hunters create a good hole and nesting areas for woodies."

It's all about creating the atmosphere for them. They're smart ducks, and they want to nest where predators can't get them; setting the boxes over the water helps with this.

Placing them on land near water requires a little more work. The boxes will need to be on some type of pole; 4-inch PVC is slick and difficult for predators to climb. A predator guard — a cone-shaped piece of sheet metal at least 2 feet in diameter, should be installed on

Duck boxes provide great nesting opportunities, especially for wood ducks.

any pole a predator could climb.

"We put out new boxes every year," Cagle said. "I try to put one box to every two to three acres. If I have a 60-acre slough, that's close to 30 boxes."

Woods ducks nest in cavities in trees that occur naturally. With the loss of habitat due to timber harvest and competition with squirrels, owls and other animals, pickings can be slim for nesting places. Fortunately, hunters and landowners woodies will utilize these artificial nest boxes.

For instructions on building a wood duck nesting box, visit www.ducks.org/conservation/waterfowl-research-science/wood-duck-boxes. ■



Andy Douglas

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NEW LOCATION OPENING UP SOON IN GLUCKSTADT.

Two things you'll find in abundance across Mississippi this month are ducks and flowing waterways. Throw in a stable, low-profile kayak, a 12-gauge shotgun and a box of non-toxic shot, and you've got the makings of a fine December outing: jump-shooting ducks while floating a river or stream.

Setting up a good float trip for ducks is a matter of doing a little homework, negotiating some arrangements with a buddy and making adequate preparation.

Float-hunting between setups offers the best of both worlds. Floating or slowly paddling down a medium-sized creek or small river in search of ducks is effective. If a hunter previously has identified a section of water that has been holding waterfowl, paddling into that area before daylight and setting up can be effective.

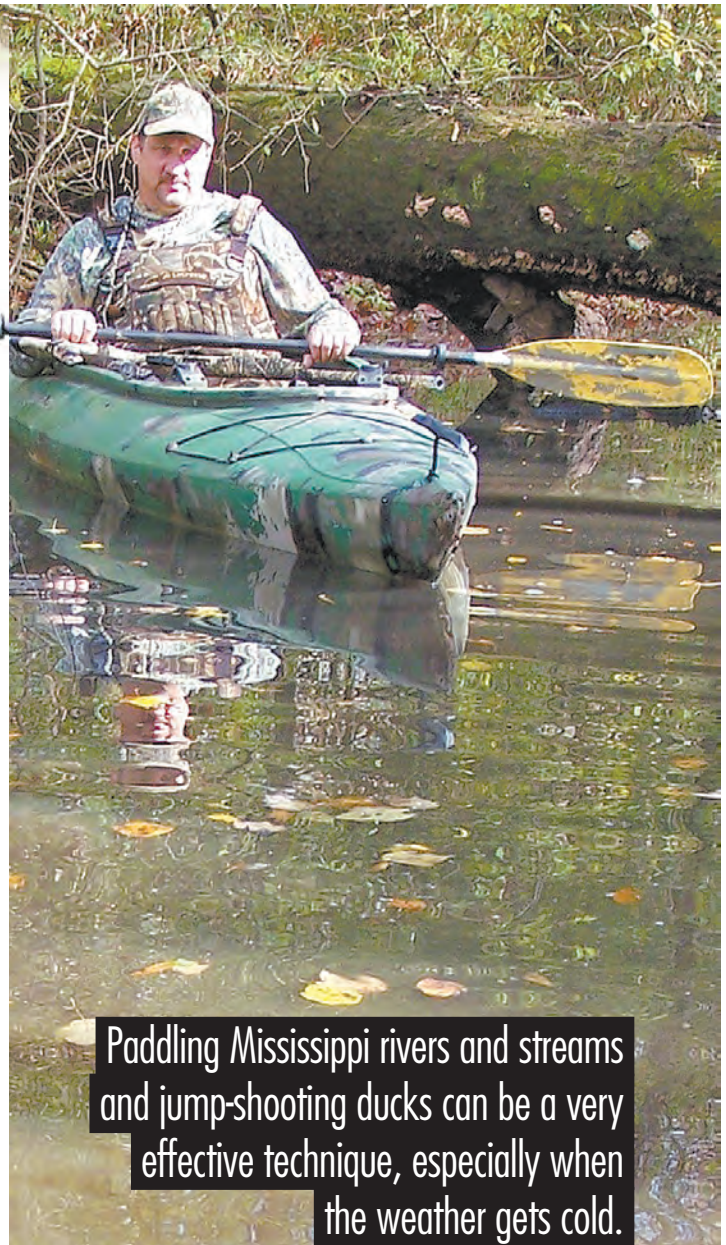
Both scenarios require a vessel. A small, flat-bottom, stable boat is recommended. They can vary from small john boats to kayaks to specialized "sneak" boats. The common factor is they have to be capable of floating in shallow water.

Richard Price of Greenwood has been floating for ducks in the creeks near his home since he caught the kayak bug 15 years ago.

"Sometimes drought will cause rivers or smaller creeks to have areas that are only a few inches deep," said Price. "These camo-colored kayaks you find in the department stores work great for this."

Price said shallow areas often lie upstream of deeper, quiet pools that hold ducks.

"Few things will spook a flock of ducks quicker than having a boat grind to a halt on a shoal before the hunter can get into range," he said. "I'd also recommend wearing a set of chest waders, because there are times when you'll have to get out of the boat to clear an obstruction or pull the boat over a logjam." >



Paddling Mississippi rivers and streams and jump-shooting ducks can be a very effective technique, especially when the weather gets cold.

Float up
By Phillip Gentry

A DUCK



Not only must the craft be able to navigate shallow water,

but it also will need a low-enough profile that one or two hunters can crouch behind camouflage without arousing suspicion.

Another option when ducks are spooked too far in advance of the boat is to deploy decoys and wait for the flock to regroup.

“Pull the boat up behind a point, sand bar or blowdown that will afford some camouflage and hold tight,” Price said. “Give the ducks at least 15 or 20 minutes to return to the area. Spend that time listening intently for the sound of ducks landing up or downstream of the location or a hen calling out to the flock.”

Float-hunting or setting up on moving water are effective techniques throughout the season, but they really shine when cold weather causes local ponds and holes, even impoundments, to freeze. In years past, the timing of cold weather has often coincided with migrations of ducks arriving in an area.

“With no still water to land in, these ducks will key on quiet pools in river stretches that don’t freeze,” said Price. “It may even be worthwhile to set up at likely looking spots and plan to extend the float to an all-day outing, giving each hole a good 20 to 30 minutes and even throwing in some hail calls after setting up if a spot looks good.”

Buck Williams of McComb has float-hunted for ducks since he was a teenager. He leans toward a smaller john boat.

“With all the stumps and log jams we have down here, a lesser boat won’t hold up to the abuse,” he said.

Floating a stream to get near ducks requires only the bow of the boat be used to conceal hunters.

Mississippi’s best float-hunting waters will be small enough that ducks winging up or down the waterway will be within range of a floating hunter. Wider rivers and creeks may not have enough water flow to keep the floater progressively moving downstream.

Streams also should have easily accessible put-in and take-out locations. A stretch of curvy water between bridges makes for an ideal float trip. Float-hunting means launching upstream and taking out downstream. Doing this most effectively requires two hunters and two vehicles.

Hunters should allow plenty of time to complete a float. Two points on a map may only be a mile or so apart by road, but it may require more time to navigate their twists and turns, not to mention obstructions that must be portaged.

Another potential spot is the upstream stretch of a tributary emptying into a lake or reservoir. Delta areas of larger bodies of water offer some good “ducky” water, and floating into these areas later in the day can help a water wing-shooter fill his daily limit.

“The further up a river you can start, the better,” said Williams, who favors floating through flooded hardwood flats.





Philip Gentry

Mississippi Flyway forecast

According to Ducks Unlimited, this season's forecast along the Mississippi Flyway is mixed. The breeding grounds that mainly feed the flyway — southern and central Ontario, southern Manitoba, and the Great Lakes regions of the U.S. — suffered from below-average rainfall resulting in fewer pothole nesting areas.

The forecast is a 5-percent decrease in summer recruitment, but recruitment that's still above the long-term average by 7 percent.

The extended cold winter in the northern United States also led to later breeding activity for areas supplying the Mississippi Flyway. Areas of Minnesota are forecasted at a 9-percent increase and a long-term average at 9 percent above normal, while Michigan's breeding grounds by 34-percent with a long-term decline of 28 percent below average. ■

Mississippi hunters can expect fewer birds this fall, thanks to a decrease in the number of breeding and hatching ducks this past summer.



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Williams said acorns dropping into shallow water will draw plenty of ducks, including mallards. Variations in stream flow may spell the difference some years whether a hunter should float or set up.

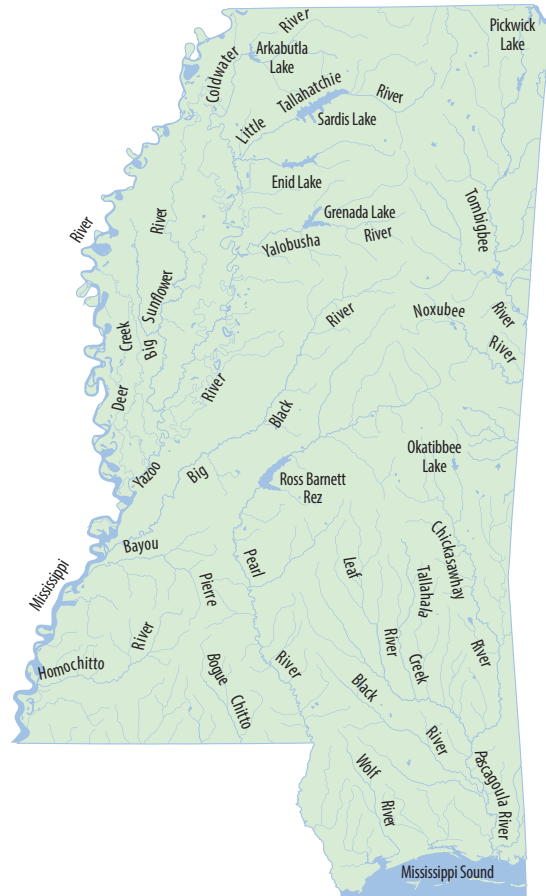
Waters that are navigable by boat are generally considered to be public waters. Adjacent landowners may have ownership of the shoreline and possibly the stream bed, so hunters who stay in a boat can avoid trespassing. Check with local authorities before hunting a stretch of water to make sure passages are permitted.

With the growing use of kayaks or sneak boats for duck hunting, two hunters can also hunt from separate boats in tandem. With two boats, a leap-frog approach can be used with boats alternating “taking the point.”

Hunters interested in float-hunting need to concentrate on winding stretches of rivers or streams. Ducks rest and raft in slack waters created behind points and bars. The curvature of a stream often allows hunters to float within gun range before coming within sight of the birds.

“Hunters need to remain as quiet as possible and learn to scull a boat quietly to get into position,” Williams said. “Hunters who make noise will see a lot of ducks but will have trouble getting close enough for a shot.”

Another tactic is to have the lead boat “run-and-gun” with the trailing boat lagging back 80 to 100 yards. Many times, jumped ducks will swing back around and offer a passing shot for a hunter in a trailing boat. ■



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.

CREEK HUNTING STRATEGIES
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BELOW: Chokes and loads should accommodate short and quick shots. Many times, ducks will be right in front of the boat. **RIGHT:** Chest waders are recommended when float hunting in case you need to pull the boat over an obstacle or retrieve a downed bird out of reach of the boat.



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Creek hunting strategies

Mississippi is blessed with an abundance of smaller rivers and creeks that wind their way across the state. These waterways provide plenty of waterfowl resting and feeding grounds to both resident populations and those making more southerly migrations.

The types of waterfowl likely to be encountered by hunters include a mixed bag of mallards, wood ducks, mergansers and a host of other puddlers and divers, depending upon the time of season and size of the streams.

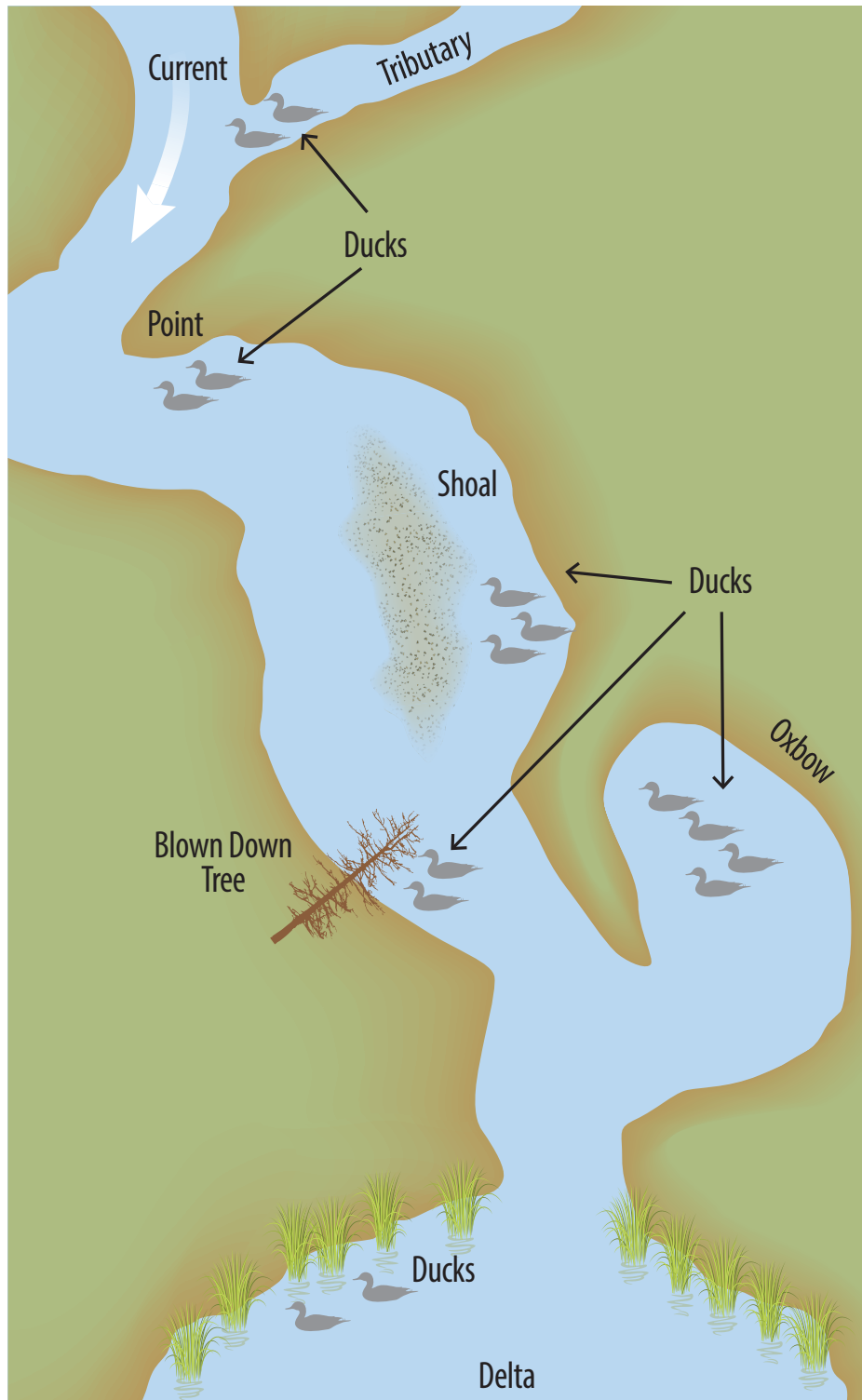
In the northern portions of the state, don't rule out the possibility of coming across a few resident Canada geese while hunting creeks. Equipment, locations and strategies differ greatly from the standard duck hunting setup, but the results, especially as the weather gets cooler, can be exceptional.

One drawback, which is also a plus, to hunting smaller rivers is a lack of traditional boat ramp access to launch a trailered boat. In these cases, a small john boat, canoe, or kayak that can fit in the bed of a pickup might be your best means of transportation.

The benefit of using decoys varies when hunting moving water. If accessing the area by a car-top boat, limited storage space is a consideration. A half-dozen decoys will be all that's necessary if decoys are used. It's best to equip decoys with short anchor lines and heavier than average weights.

Duck calls, like decoys, should be used sparingly in small streams. Ducks seek out smaller rivers and creeks to rest. Calling can help persuade ducks passing high overhead to swing down for a closer look but calling too much, especially with no decoys for the ducks to identify, is unnatural and can cause birds to spook.

Shot loads and choke patterns should accommodate quick and relatively close passing shots. ■



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EMBRACE THE CHANGE

December marks transition time from fall to winter areas for saltwater gamefish. Learn how to get in their way, and you'll have some of the best fishing of the year.

■ BY BOBBY CLEVELAND



Bobby Cleveland

December's cool weather finds speckled trout and redfish transitioning to the coastal shallows, and both can be caught on the many manmade reefs along the Mississippi shore. INSET: Speckled trout move in for the winter, and December sees them hitting the bays and bayous on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.



O.T. Sutton was grinning as he took the helm of his boat in Pass Harbor, a smile bigger than a child overlooking his trick-or-treat booty the morning after Halloween.

There was a pronounced glee in his voice, too, unlike what you normally get from a grizzled, old fisherman at sunrise on a cool morning, so one had to ask what was up on this early December day.

"So many fish, so many choices," Sutton said, gushing a cloud of vapor with the words, "and we ain't got to go far to find them."

With that, the captain spun his boat away from the dock and pointed it toward the exit to the Mississippi Sound and the Gulf of Mexico.

"So, what you want? Trout, reds, sheepsheads, flounder?" he asked, then answered. "You want redfish, always redfish. Stupid question."

Fifteen minutes later, the first red thumped to the floor of the deck, a 22-inch victim of a Strike King Trout Magic spinnerbait bounced off a manmade reef about 100 yards off the front beach somewhere near Pass Christian. Or, was it Long Beach?

It was a perfect start to a fun day of chasing fish on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, one that would end with a box full of assorted fish and a fuel tank down only 10 gallons. I don't know which of the two made Sutton happiest.

"That's the great thing about December down here on the coast," he said. "These fish are transitioning from where they summer to where they winter. They are in shallow water, and when you can catch a calm day with a decent tide, you can catch a bunch of them without a lot of work.

"You do have to clean them, but that's the kind of work we don't usually complain about, isn't it?" >

Five hours on the water put 14 specks, 10 sheepshead, six reds, two ground mullet and, saving the best for last, 12 flounder in the box.

“That little flurry on the flounder at that last stop was the icing on the cake,” Sutton said. “Been a few years since I’ve found that many in a wad at one spot, but they were wadded up in there good. If we’d have had more bait shrimp, I bet we’d still be catching them.”

THE END OF THE SEASON

Diehard fishermen along the Gulf Coast love December — and even winter — on the water for several reasons, the primary being that fish are usually willing to eat.

“It’s also not hot,” said Capt. Sonny Schindler of Ocean Springs. “And after struggling through 90- and 100-degree days and bright sun all summer, I love a break.”

“We don’t have to burn a lot of gas,” said Capt. Ronnie Daniels of Pass Christian.

“The beaches and coastal rivers fill with trout and reds.”

“Flounder,” said Capt. Robert Earl McDaniel of D’Iberville, kind of matter-of-factly. “I love the flatfish.”

Sutton still loves to run out to the Biloxi Marsh, which requires a Louisiana license to fish.

“This time of year, even on the calmest days, you can pretty much have hundreds — if not thousands — of acres to yourself,” he said. “I don’t have to worry about running all the way out to get to a spot and have a boat sitting right where I want to be. Everybody goes deer hunting, I guess, either that or they don’t want to fish in a little cold weather.

“You do have to deal with duck hunters, and there’s a lot of them, but the places I fish aren’t exactly what they are looking for. I’m fishing the main bayous more in December, especially during a cool snap. If I can find a good drain feeding a deep spot on a falling tide, I can usually catch both specks and reds in the same spot and get all I want without moving.”

BAIT ISSUE

One problem coastal fishermen can find in December and other cold months is

a shortage of live bait, including shrimp. They can get few and far between.

“We have to make do,” Sutton said.

“Redfish, heck, they’ll hit anything, and frozen bait shrimp works good enough on them. Specks are far more particular about what they want. I’m not saying they won’t eat bait shrimp, I just know they aren’t aggressive. We have to switch to plastics, even if we’re fishing under corks. These days, companies are making better looking shrimp than nature, and they even smell like shrimp.”

Sutton will drive a main bayou in the marsh, like Grand or Biloxi, and look for smaller streams, aka drains, running into the bayou. He’ll pole down at the side of the mouth and then fish the entire drainage area looking for the fish.

With two people in the boat, he likes to have two lines with bait shrimp working the shallow edges of the pass targeting redfish. They sit on the bottom waiting for a red to swim past. At the same time, the two anglers will work the deeper area in the bayou looking for trout with plastics.

“If we do happen to have some live bait, either shrimp or minnows, then we put them on Carolina rigs and work the bottom of the bayou for trout,” Sutton said. “You might have to wait them out, but sooner or later, a school of trout will come through and find the drain and check it out. They know the tide is bringing bait out of the back of the ponds, and they will look.”

continues >

One of the best-tasting and easiest fish to catch this month in the Gulf of Mexico is a sheepshead, worthy of a big smile from a young angler.

Bobby Cleveland



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BRIDGES OR REEFS?

In last month's issue of *Mississippi Sportsman*, we took a look at how fishermen use the bridges of US 90 (the coast highway) that cross the bays to produce fish that are transitioning. The pilings of those bridges — and we'll use the one connecting Bay St. Louis to Pass Christian in Hancock County as an example — will hold an assortment of fish.

"Quick and easy, and that's good on a cold, blustery day," Schindler said. "We can get there in a matter of minutes, anchor down and go to work on reds, sheepies and puppy drum. For a family trip, it doesn't get much better, especially if there isn't a lot of fishing experience

Redfish are everywhere in the shallow Gulf, even on the coldest blustery days, but watch out, some of them could be giants.

involved. It's easy, once you learn to put the bait against the piling."

But other captains, like Daniels, look elsewhere.

"I'm not a fan of the bridges," he said. "I mean, I know they are good, and I will fish them, but I like to fish the reefs and the bays and look more for speckled trout. The reefs that were built out of (Hurricane Katrina) rubble are fantastic opportunities. They concentrate fish just like the bridge pilings, except the reefs can hold trout. The bridges, not so much."

Weather plays into the decision.

"On a brutally cold day, there's no doubt that the bridges are the way to go," Schindler said.

"The fish hit those pilings as they transition



Bobby Cleveland

from outside to inside the bays, find the cover and stop to see if the current will bring them a meal. They will eventually move up into the bay, but (they) will hang around the pilings as long as they have something to eat.

"When we find a hot piling, we can anchor down and fish the current. We aren't as blasted by winds as we'd be in open water."

On a north wind, proper positioning on the south side of a piling can serve as a wave break, providing a more stable fishing platform. That's good for a person not used to the rocking action.

Daniels counters the mainland forms a pretty good wave break for the many reefs that dot the front beaches.

"The water is not that rough, but the winds can make it hard," he said. "You are exposed to the wind, and that can create some difficulties, like cold conditions, boat positioning and tough casting. But when the wind is calm, man, you can't beat it at all. Those reefs provide perfect holding places, the kind of habitat that game fish are looking for."

THE BAYS

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Some black drum hooked on a bridge piling require chasing them down, but it is worth the effort for a smile.

river systems that dump into the Gulf — the Pascagoula, Biloxi and Jordan. The Pearl River is shared with Louisiana, serving as the border, and it provides more of a marsh estuary than it does an actual bay.

“We don’t have to leave Biloxi Bay to catch fish in the winter, starting with December,” said McDaniel, whose WhipaSnapa Guide Service is headquartered about a block north of the bay. “Trout move up in the bays in the winter, and I’ve got friends who catch them right off their back yards. Black drum, what we call puppy drum, are also real thick in the cold months.

“Sheepshead stay more in the deep in current, but you can catch a few of them shallow, too. Redfish are everywhere.”

Fishing the bay is a lot like fishing the marsh; fishermen must find the cuts, points, drains and other structure/cover that will attract fish. Reading the water is critical.

“The key to fishing anywhere down here is reading the water and knowing what the tide is doing,” Daniels said. “If you can find where water is mixing, like where water is pulling out of a drain into a bayou or from a bayou into a bay, hang on, and check that place hard. That is current pulling bait out of the backwater on a falling tide, and the fish will gang up.”

Sutton said his best day in Bay St. Louis was one when the tide was ripping hard, falling as fast as he’d ever seen it.

“The water was pulling out of a bayou or drain, and when it hit the bay, it was running hard over a point about 3 feet deep,” he said. “The bottom had a good, hard, shell bottom for the most part, and we parked against the bank within easy downwind casting distance and hammered them. First time I’d ever limited on both trout and reds in one spot, and we had three people. Bud, that’s a lot of fish.” ■

For information on Robert Earl McDaniel’s WhipaSnapa Guide Service, call 228-229-6978.



Bobby Cleveland

For information on Sonny Schindler’s Shore Thing Guide Service, call 228-342-2295.

For information on Ronnie Daniels’ Fisher-Man Guide Service, call 228-295-0511.



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

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BY BOBBY CLEVELAND

FLOUNDER: CATCH 'EM WHILE THEY'RE HERE

Flounder leave Mississippi's inshore waters when it gets cold and move out to reefs in the Gulf. You can catch them in bunches in December.

Bobby Cleveland

Flounder are a year-round fish on the northern side of the Gulf of Mexico, but with opposite migration patterns than most shallow-water gamefish like speckled trout, redfish and sheepshead.

Those fish move shallow for the winter, heading inshore toward the beaches and bays, where they stay in for the cold months.

Flounder are just the opposite. They move offshore for the winter after being in the bays and backwaters during the hottest months. They leave in the winter and return in the summer.

I once even got into a school of them with Capt. Robert Earl McDaniel on the WhipaSnapa charter boat, in 100 feet of water fishing on the bottom for red snapper in April.

Weird, eh?

Until the first seriously cold blast of weather pushes them out, or in a warm December, the last month of the year can be a great time to catch a bunch before the flounder are gone and out of reach.

Knowing where to look is helpful.

"We catch them pretty good along the rocks behind Casino Row in Biloxi," McDaniel said. "They built those rock jetties behind the casinos for breakers, I reckon, and if you can find a little break in there with current flowing through, then finding a flounder is pretty much a sure thing."

O. T. Sutton, likewise, starts looking at places flounder might stage before moving on offshore.

"I like a big point on the edge of the marsh or a bay," he said. "I like one that has a lot of current, a mix of hard and muddy bottom, and, of course, one with a lot of bait working."

Sutton's rig for flounder is one learned

from an old timer in Slidell, La., who caught the fish consistently in the Rigolets area when the fish were leaving Lake Pontchartrain.

"He taught me his trick, and it involves a little crappie float to hold the shrimp right off the bottom," he said. "It's basically a Carolina rig, with either a 3/8- to 5/8-ounce barrel weight on braided line, then a swivel and two feet of fluorocarbon leader with a circle hook. I put a shrimp on it and it floats just above the bottom, right where a flounder will be looking with both eyes facing up."

The same kind of rig works in bayous that form the highways that lead from the marsh to the Gulf.

"They will lie on the bottom in those bayous, sometimes in the middle and sometimes on the edges," Sutton said. "It's hit and miss but if you hit one, look for another, and then another and..." ■



WE'RE IN A POKE — WITH PIGS

Annual harvest of 'feral' porkers in Mississippi now exceeds the deer harvest. What can hunters, landowners do to stem the rising tide of pork?

■ BY DAVID HAWKINS

Unless you have lived under a rock for the past decade you know feral hogs are a problem in Mississippi. They have the highest reproduction rate of any mammal that weighs 100 pounds or more, and trying to control them is like nailing Jell-O to a creosote post.

Trapping is the only effective means of dealing with the pests, but they are smart, and efforts to capture them may require the invention of new methods of entrapment. Shooting them is an option, but not a very good one. Dropping the hammer on an individual pig is a little like swatting a mosquito in your carport: you may kill one, but who will notice one fewer. >

FOUND IN ALL 82 MISSISSIPPI COUNTIES,

feral hogs fall loosely into two categories: domestic swine that have been released to forage, with plans for recapture and sale at markets or slaughtered for consumption; and the Russian strain that were released by those wanting to have another hunting option. Both are non-native wildlife species with origins in Europe.

From the 1900s up until at least 1960, farmers would release their hogs in the hardwood bottoms along rivers and allow them to get fat off the bounty of acorns, fungi, roots and plants; an adult wild hog will consume five pounds of mast per day. Recaptured in the winter, the hogs were sent to market or used by the farm family as food. Farmers would notch the ears of adult hogs released, thereby identifying those hogs as their property when community wide round-ups took place. Not all the hogs released were re-captured, so the wild, feral hog came into existence.

More recently, high-fenced hunting preserves have imported the Russian boar strain to add to the offerings for hunters. Windstorms and poor fencing have allowed some hogs to escape and become a part of the growing problem. The color phases of these wild swine have produced some interesting creatures; some solid black, others spotted with shades of red and white — whatever the gene pool happens to deliver. “(Wild pigs) destroy our crops and cause a myriad of problems for farmers across the state,” said Jeff Terry, a soybean and corn farmer from Issaquena County. “Mississippi farmers are working hard on a narrow profit margin to bring consumers a quality product at a fair price. Seeing thousands of dollars in sweet potatoes, peanuts, sorghum, corn and other crops go to waste is heart-breaking.

“We try to kill every hog we see and trap them on a regular basis. Just when we think we’re making progress, they hit us hard again. I have seen numbers as high as \$1.5 billion assigned to agricultural damage caused by wild hogs.”

Given the reproduction rate of pigs in general, there is no way to shoot or even

trap our way out of this hog problem. Unless every landowner does his or her part to rid the environment of these beasts, the “pig bomb” will continue to explode.

“Feral hogs compete with native wildlife for food and habitat,” said Anthony Ballard, a wildlife biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. “Unlike other critters, when the acorns are gone in the winter, deer, turkey and small game have limited sources of food, but hogs can start eating roots, fungi and even scavenge on carrion.”

continued >

This group of pigs came to a pile of corn placed for the purpose of killing them. Much of the sounder was shot before the pigs dispersed.



Becky Brewer was deer hunting in Kemper County when this bruiser came too close to her stand.



Photo courtesy Steve McFarland

David Hawkins

This damage to a food plot is indicative of the damages hogs will do to cropland, pastures and lawns.



David Hawkins

Ballard said harvest data indicates the total reported hog harvest for the 2017-18 hunting season exceeded the reported deer harvest — 206,148 to 194,975 — which indicates an upward trend in feral swine population. Louisiana passed this milestone several years ago.

So who owns this problem? Who should be the driving force behind wild hog eradication? Some will say the Mississippi Department of Agriculture because of the severe crop losses; others maintain the MDWFP because the pigs are wild animals. The Levee Board fights hogs as well as the state department of transportation for the damage they do to highway and levee rights-of-way. In the grand scheme of things, who should we point the collective finger at to say “You started this, so you fix it.”?

The bottom line is, we all have a stake in the issue and need to make a concerted effort to fix the problem. If each entity does all that is to be done, the rapid expansion may not be stopped, but it could be held in check, then an eradication plan could be executed.

A breeding sow can deliver a litter of piglets twice a year, and the piglets can start breeding at six months. By the time the third litter is born, females from the first litter are preparing to breed or have been bred. Some unofficial numbers place the number of wild hogs in Mississippi at around 1.1 million, with half of those being females. Do the math; it does not paint a pretty picture.

Shooting hogs with firearms is an option for every hunter, but it will not take care of the overall problem. There are not enough hunters to make a dent in escalating numbers. Some clubs weigh heavily on hunters who pass up pigs.

“We have given our mem-

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HONDA

WE'RE IN A POKE — WITH PIGS

This pen operated by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks at Mahannah WMA relies on a pig inside the trap to trip the wire that closes the entry.

bers strict instructions to shoot every pig they see, period,” said Steve McFarland, president of Curve Mountain Hunting Club in Kemper County. “Even if the (situation) compromises a deer hunt, kill the pig. It has been our experience deer will leave a green patch if hogs come in, so your hunt is trashed already.”

State law allows hunters to shoot hogs with the aid of bait, at night, any time of year. Thermal-imaging scopes and silenced rifles do a fine job of killing pigs



David Hawkins

DON'T MOVE THAT PIG!

It is illegal to transport live, feral hogs within Mississippi without a permit. Permits must be obtained by calling 601-432-2170, manned 24 hours a day, before transporting any live wild hog.

More information about wild hogs in Mississippi can be found at www.mdwfp.com under Hunting and Wildlife.

at night, but the cost of equipment borders on prohibitive for the average hunter. Some modern sporting rifles with suppressors and night scopes can easily approach or exceed \$8,000. Trapping remains the best option for eliminating large numbers of pigs.

Pigs are easily baited, but they are as smart as they are ugly, and they become trap-shy unless an entire sounder is captured. A sow will figure out the trap and teach her offspring to avoid it. Heavy hunting and trapping will cause a sounder to leave an area for another property. Not a bad thing for the property owner, but when his neighbor pushes back, the pigs return.

Several types of traps can be used, each with varying success. All involve attractive bait and fencing low enough that non-targeted animals such as deer may escape. So far, pigs have not developed the talent




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of leaping high enough to clear the fence.

One trap involves a trap door that is hinged to allow entry in only one direction. A pig enters and the gate closes, another pig repeats the entry, and now two are in the trap. Unfortunately, pigs have been able to learn how the trap works and simply wait for one to enter, then escape while the gate is in the raised position. These traps work, but they aren't as efficient as others.

Another trap uses a single-action gate that, once closed, remains closed until human interaction opens it. This trap uses a trip wire deep in the trap with the intention that a good number of pigs will be in the trap before it is triggered. Again, that could happen with one or a trap full of pigs.

The latest trap designs are far more complicated but extremely effective. This generation of traps utilize trail cameras that transmit a live/current-time image to a hunter's cell phone. When the pen



These hogs were shot at Curve Mountain Hunting Club in Kemper County. Shooting, trapping and hunting with dogs are on-going parts of the club's hog eradication plan.

Photo courtesy Steve McFarland

is full of pigs, the operator enters a code on the cell phone, and the trap doors quickly close. Some of these traps are very large and may have multiple entry points. ■



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

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GROUNDING IN SUCCESS

You don't have to climb a tree to kill a whitetail. Many Mississippi hunters ignore the opportunity to take deer from terra firma. Here are few tips for folks with a fear or heights.

By John J. Woods



Quite often, tactics used for deer hunting come around full circle over time. Thirty years ago, virtually no deer hunters had heard of factory-manufactured, lock-on tree stands, ladder stands or climbers, much less seen or used one.

A few hunters built elevated tree houses to hunt from, some fabricated pallet platforms up in a tree. Others more likely just wedged a 2x6 board into the Y-juncture of a split tree trunk. Still others with a little ingenuity built wooden ladder stands and posted them all over deer-hunting areas. Some of these old, rotted, abandoned stands can still be found in whitetail country as a visual reminder of what were early advancements in hunting tactics many seasons ago.

Before the advent of homemade stands, and well before assembly-line tree stands crafted of welded metal and padded fabric seats came on the scene, everyone basically hunted deer from the ground. In those days, a tree stand meant standing by one, not climbing up into it.

Now we have come full circle again, but with a significant twist. Many hunters are either abandoning their lofty perches altogether or at least splitting their time between tree stands and ground blinds. But today's ground blinds can be a much different affair.

BLIND BENEFITS

When deer hunting, being as unseen as possible is best. Being able to conceal or block careful movements to avoid detection is paramount. Having a position close to the deer

A "ghost" blind is one of the latest manufactured stands that hunters can use when hunting on the ground, years after tree stands of all kinds were coming off assembly lines all over the country.

continues >



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**GROUNDED
 IN SUCCESS**

action, yet well hidden, is important.

It is ideal to have placement where either a wide view of a whitetail haunt or a clear shot at a narrow travel lane or funnel, and either can be achieved with a well-planned setup on the ground.

A ground blind positioned where the hunter can slip into or out of with little notice, disturbance or contamination makes for a perfect situation. With some judicious planning, preparation and an assessment of the surrounds, a ground blind can be set up to maximize nearly all the potential angles of vision.

Ground blinds offer not only an added measure of concealment but a great deal

A portable, pop-up blind gives hunters the opportunity to quickly set up and take down the hidey hole and move to a better spot.

of flexibility as well. Portable ground blinds can be collapsed in a matter of minutes and slipped into a backpack to be moved anywhere else to create a whole new set-up.

Containment-type blinds offer an extra degree of scent control, reducing the need to use extra scent-killer sprays, except for coming and going from the blind. They also offer some protection from the elements.

OPTIONS TO HIDE

Ground blinds come in two configurations. They are man-made, put together in the field or naturally formed by



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Mother Nature, to which may be added extra supplemental natural or synthetic materials.

The store-bought types come in a wide variety of designs, from simple shielding screens to self-contained, tent-type blinds to hard-shell fiberglass, molded plastic or wooden hunting condos with roofs, floors, windows and a whole host of custom features.

A screen-type blind often used by turkey hunters can be improved for a long, deer-hunting sit by adding a few limbs or greener to break the outline. Hunters can sit on a comfortable cushion or low-profile seat. Gear can be laid out behind the barrier, and shooting sticks or a bipod are options. Hunters can leave such a blind in the woods for several weeks, or it can be packed up and moved whenever the wind changes.

Every deer hunter can locate a number of decent ground blinds created by nature. Just add a seat, maybe some camouflage fabric or cover up any exposed holes with fresh cedar or pine cuttings. Create a triangle shape or so you can see in all directions. Ideally, the terrain behind a setup like this would be the least-likely direction deer would come.

Pop-up blinds are in vogue

Deer-hunting “condos” have become more popular among hunters for their comfort and resistance to weather.

these days. Basically, they are a small version of a camping tent, with fabric walls and supports. Some are created for one hunter, but others can easily accommodate two or more. Some are even designed for bowhunters with shoot-through, screened windows. Some quick ground-clearing might be needed before setting one up.

Fabric blinds add an extra dimension of concealment as well as protection from the weather. The greater the hunter-comfort quotient, the longer the hunter is likely to stay engaged while waiting for a big buck to appear.

An extension of sewn-fabric, tent-type blinds are more permanent structures often referred to as “condos.” These are heavy-duty molded or assembled-panel blinds, and are the ultimate when it comes to terra-firma hunting stands. They offer 360-degree visibility with total protection from the elements. See-through windows can be opened for air flow or locked closed to keep the wind and rain out. Some models can be towed by ATVs or attachable wheels for ease of movement, and they are large or small enough to accommodate one to four hunters.

SETUP TACTICS

Location, location, location. There are subtle differences in setup tactics between hunters in trees and on the ground. After a prime area has been identified and scouted, the next step is to locate an ideal place to position a ground blind. Foremost is a spot that allows open vision of the area. Better also is a spot that permits easy access with minimal exposure to the hunting area. Avoid setups that require crossing a huge open area or even traversing a long way around edge habitat.

Factory blinds should be blended into the surroundings using brush or other natural cover. Placing limbs around the blind in irregular patterns will help further break up the outline of the blind, but make certain vision is not blocked. Once set up, get things organized inside. Make sure weapons can be easily maneuvered and mounted for a shot. ■




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GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Bass are visual predators. Fishing shallow is usually the best approach in muddy water, but bass located in deep, muddy water can still be caught.



TURBIDITY AND BASS FEEDING

STUDY MAY HELP YOU DO BETTER IN MUDDY WATER

Muddy water seriously shakes my confidence when it comes to catching fish. A few years back, I asked a couple of bass pros and a successful fishing guide to keep fishing logs of water clarity and catch.

The significant finding was that bass were caught shallower in turbid water. That makes sense; bass are primarily sight feeders, so you might expect them to feed (and strike baits) higher in the water column, where presumably, they can see better.

A recent study on smallmouth bass adds some support to a shallower bite in turbid water. Canadian researchers found smallmouth bass foraged more on prey in the shallow-water zone where rooted aquatic plants grow and ate a wider diversity of prey as turbidity increased.

But an experience on Pickwick early this spring made me rethink this simple reasoning. The water temperature was in the 50s, and in an effort to learn some new ways to catch bass, I decided to give a tube bait a try. The water was also muddy — about six inches of visibility

— and flowing from more than a week of heavy rain. I marked some fish on the bottom in 20 feet of water on a bluff point with my electronics. The only thing I had on deck that would reach those fish was a rod rigged with small tube, so I tossed it to the marked fish. Six casts produced four fish. Tubes are a silent bait. How did the bass find such a small bait in a presumably dark environment?

THE SCIENTISTS SAY

Searching fish-biology literature led me to a recent study by Oklahoma State

University fisheries scientists that coupled controlled laboratory and field studies to better understand how turbidity affects bass foraging.

Laboratory trials measured the consumption of bluegills and gizzard shad by 9- to 14-inch largemouth bass in 6-foot diameter tanks at turbidities varying from 3 inches to 13 inches of visibility. Consumption rates of both bluegill and shad declined rapidly with increasing turbidity. Conclusion: increasing turbidity reduces feeding — or at least feeding success. Interestingly, over half the bass did not eat during the 24-hour test period when visibility was less than 6 inches. The bass were held in clear water until 24 hours before the trial began. Possibly, a sudden decrease in water clarity simply shut down feeding for a brief period for some fish.

The field study measured the diets of largemouth bass collected from three lakes under varied water clarity (6 to 34 inches). Their predominant diet items were crayfish, sunfish and gizzard shad. Diets varied widely between lakes, but the overall trend was increased sunfish consumption or, in one lake, sunfish and shad consumption and decreased crayfish consumption as turbidity increased. The bass also tended to eat a wider variety of forage fish as turbidity increased. Total weight of forage consumed was not significantly related to turbidity.

The field study results indicate forage consumption changes little with declining water clarity, but prey selection does. Explanation of the field study results is complicated, because what bass eat is a function of the habitats they select — which may change with turbidity — and the habitats the prey uses, which also may change with turbidity. Dissimilarity of habitat types could explain the lake-to-lake variation observed. But the take-home message for me from the field studies is fish where a bass would eat sunfish when the water gets muddy. Depending on what lake you are fishing, that may be near shallow vegetation, brush piles or docks. ■



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.



Catching bass when the water turns muddy can be challenging. To up your odds, fish around cover where you're likely to find bluegill.

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LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

FISH PICKWICK FOR ROD-BENDING DECEMBER BASS

ALABAMA RIG, TOPWATER, JERKBAITS ARE CHOICES

A photograph of Paul Elias, a man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a dark hoodie with 'GARMIN' on it and blue pants. He is standing on a boat, holding a fishing rod that is bent significantly, indicating a catch. The boat has a 'HONDA 250' outboard motor and 'MARINE.HONDA.COM' and 'GARMIN' branding. The boat's registration number 'NC-6800-EE' is visible. The background shows a misty lake at dawn.

Paul Elias likes to fish on Pickwick Lake when fog is rising off the water just at daylight because he knows he'll have a busy day catching numbers of a wide variety of fish.

I love to go to Pickwick Lake in December. My rod stays bent and I catch nice-sized largemouths, big smallmouths, white bass, stripers and hybrids all in the same day.

I like to fish an Alabama rig there for actively feeding bass. You never know what you'll catch with it: those fish already named, as well as sometimes big drum when fishing near the dam.

WHERE TO GO

Here are places to fish:

• **The Lock, the Lock walls, the barge tie-up and riprap.** I'll start by fishing the lower end of the lake, along the riprap, down near Wilson Dam, with 65-pound bass braid and an Alabama rig on a 7-foot-6, heavy action Shimano rod with a Curado 200K reel. The Alabama rig, featuring several ¼-ounce jigheads with a Mann's white Reel 'N Shad on each, resembles a school of shad. The bass will come up from 20 to 30 feet to strike an Alabama rig.

I'll fish the rig around the lock and

down its walls, the barge tie-up and the riprap. In December, I'll usually catch some suspended bass around the corners of the lock wall where the riprap touches the dam's concrete wall. I'll cast this rig out at a 45-degree angle, count it down to a five-count to let the rig run 10 to 15 feet deep, and slow-reel the rig back to my boat.

As I fish down the riprap, I'll locate several schools of bass on about 25 to 30 yards of that bank. As soon as I catch a fish, I'll mark that spot as a waypoint on my Garmin fish finder to return later and usually catch several more bass. When bass in one school quits biting, I'll fish until I pinpoint another school, catch some bass out of it and mark that location as a waypoint.

• **The Florence Harbor Marina.** When I leave the riprap, I'll head to the Florence Harbor Marina, still casting an Alabama Rig around docks. Generally, bass will be holding on the outside ends of boat docks and not schooled up as they've been on the riprap and at the

lock. I'll catch single, 3- to 5-pound bass in this area.

• **Downstream from the marina on main-river points and points of islands.** Once I come out of the marina, I'll head downriver and begin fishing main-river points, often the ends of underwater bluffs in 25 to 30 feet of water. I like to start fishing about 75 yards below a point and fish down and around the rock bluffs for suspended bass. I'll also target fishing points of islands as I move downriver, especially where the river channel swings close to the end of an island.

CATCH SCHOOLIES

Bass at Pickwick will school tightly in December. If you catch bass on one of the bluff points or the deeper points around the islands, you should catch good numbers of bass.

Schooling surface bass. Bass will also be schooling on the surface the first couple of weeks in December, depending on the water's temperature. However, if the last

two weeks of December are fairly cold, you won't see any surface bass busting shad.

SECONDARY BAITS

At each of the places where I fish an Alabama rig, I also will fish a hard Megabass jerkbait in chrome/purple back/chartreuse belly on 15-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon with a 6-foot-10 Expride rod and a Curado 7.5:1 reel. December smallmouths particularly like this jerkbait.

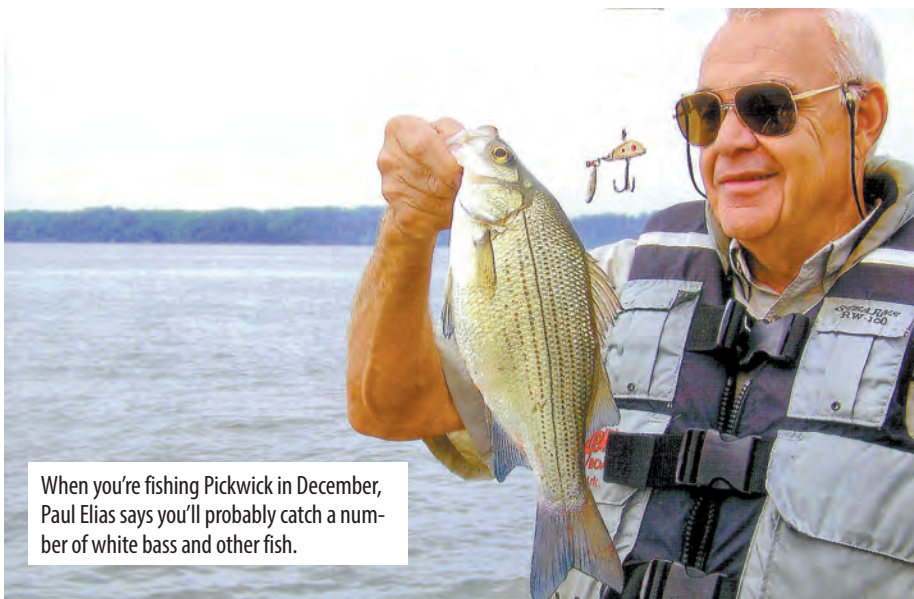
I'll also fish topwater lures, especially in early December, on the ends of islands and grass beds and over the tops of submerged grass beds. I'll fish a Zara Spook on 30-pound braid with a 6-foot-10 Expride rod and a 7.2:1 Curado reel, and a bone-colored Whopper Plopper fished on same line and Curado reel with a 7-foot-2, medium-heavy Expride rod.

THE VALUE OF ELECTRONICS

Electronics will tell you where the bass are holding. Look for balls of baitfish in 15 to 25 feet of water; bass generally will be schooled up under or off the sides of the balls of bait.

A piece of equipment that's been very useful for me is Panoptix Live Scope, which gives me the ability to see all around my boat in real time and in three dimensions. By rotating the transducer on my trolling motor, I can see the fish I'm trying to catch, although I can't tell what kind of fish are in the school I'm seeing. I like a 12-inch and/or 8-inch Garmin chartplotter/sonar combo model on the front of my boat.

Generally, you can catch bass at Pickwick all-day long during the first two weeks of December. ■



When you're fishing Pickwick in December, Paul Elias says you'll probably catch a number of white bass and other fish.

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



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YAMAHA

HAPPY TRAILS

Bill Garbo

The author with a nice mature buck, the age class that seems to be most often affected by CWD.

HERE WE GO AGAIN

DISCOVERY OF SECOND CWD DEER DRAWS MORE ATTENTION TO MISSISSIPPI REGS

Well, here we are once again, past Thanksgiving and rushing headlong into December, which is the core period for white-tailed deer hunting here in Mississippi.

Normally, at this point in the season, I would be busily engaged discussing the pre-rut, the rut, trail-camera setups, and everything in between, but this particular December I see us stepping off into uncharted territory.

What makes this December so different from those of the past is that chronic wasting disease (CWD) has raised its ugly head in Mississippi, and quite frankly, deer hunting will probably never be exactly the same again.

CWD was discovered last January in a buck in Issaquena County. Since that discovery, a multi-county "Issaquena CWD Management Zone" has been established, within which strict guidelines have been put in place that include outlawing supplemental feeding and the use or establishment of mineral or attractant stations. This is in addition to regulations governing the cleaning and processing of a harvested deer within

the zone, and carcass transportation out of the zone. The Issaquena CWD Management Zone includes portions of Issaquena, Sharkey and Warren counties.

A SECOND CWD DEER

Unfortunately, on Oct. 8, 2018, a second CWD-positive deer was found in Pontotoc County in the northeastern part of the state. This discovery, of course, resulted in the establishment of a Pontotoc CWD Management Zone, which includes Union and Pontotoc counties and a portion of Lee County. The same restrictions and regulations from the Issaquena Zone are in effect in this newly established area. With two CWD positive bucks being found in a span of 10 months in different areas of Mississippi, and the resulting establishment of the two CWD Management Zones, I see this going in only one direction in the future. In a state the size of Mississippi, with a huge resident deer herd, the chances of finding additional infected deer over time are pretty good — some might even say high. All of us had better get used to this new reality and become as informed as possible.

The best way to become informed is

to visit the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' website: www.mdwfp.com/wildlife-hunting/chronic-wasting-disease. If you are a hunter who moves through one of the two CWD management zones during the season, you may be surprised at what is being required and/or recommended regarding hunting, carcass transportation, field dressing, meat processing, disposal and equipment cleaning.

CARCASS DISPOSAL

One topic that is covered in MDWFP's "Best Management Practices" document addresses recommendations for minimizing potential environmental and human exposure to CWD while handling carcasses and processing meat from deer taken within one of the CWD management zones. Under the sub-topic "Disposal," the recommendation states the following:

Recommended disposal methods for unwanted portions of carcasses (bones, organs, etc.) are:

- Leave at the harvest site
- Double-bag and send to an approved, lined landfill; or
- Deep burial (8 feet or deeper)



WHAT CAN LEAVE A CWD MANAGEMENT ZONE:

- Commercially or privately cut/wrapped meat
- Deboned meat
- Hides with no head attached
- Finished taxidermy
- Antlers with no tissue attached
- Cleaned skull plates (no brain tissue)
- Cleaned skulls (lymphoid or brain tissue)

Getting people to responsibly dispose of deer carcasses in CWD zones is going to really difficult to accomplish.

Those options leave me with a slightly cocked head and a furrowed brow. I absolutely see the wisdom of what is recommended, but after almost 50 years targeting deer and observing my fellow man, I see a defect in the recommendations. There is no doubt that the MDWFP sees the same defect, but reality and practicality give the agency little room to maneuver while still allowing hunters to hunt and take deer in the CWD zones. Since lymphatic and nervous tissue have the highest concentration of CWD prions in an infected deer, the second and third options hold the greatest chance of keeping CWD prions released through carcass disposal from infecting other healthy deer. The highest CWD prion concentrations include tissues in the brain, tonsils, spinal cord, spleen and lymph nodes.

FALLIBLE HUMANS

In several decades of experience and observation, one immutable fact has been a constant: fallible humans do all of the hunting. That means that the three

recommendations for proper disposal will never be implemented as intended. I have seen far too many de-boned deer carcasses were dumped in creeks beneath bridges, thrown out in roadside washes and ditches and tossed into old stagnant ponds — plus everything in between. As I point this out, I personally have no better idea about what to do. In a way, I see the CWD carcass-disposal recommendations as a bunker fortified with bars and locks and alarms, but with an unlocked back door.

Very few hunters have quick ready access to a track hoe, a back hoe or a dozer, so that mostly eliminates deep burial as a practical option. Regarding the second option, who exactly is going to invest the time and expense of “sending” their carcass remains to an “approved, lined landfill” — if one is even located anywhere nearby? Maybe a few hunters, but not many I know would go to that amount of trouble.

By default, we are left with the first option, which is by far the easiest of the three. The problem is that some gut piles

will be left at kill sites, but with today’s prolific use of ATVs, I dare say most deer are hauled straight to the camp or truck. As a result, most gut piles wind up in a gut bucket back at the skinning shed, along with heads, hides and everything else left after deboning. Buzzards and coyotes are usually the cleanup crew. This begs this question: since the culprit prion molecules are so resilient and long-lasting in the environment, what about the scattered coyote scat and buzzard poop that results? Hmmm, the devil always seems to be in the details. ■



Bill Garbo is a petroleum engineer and avid whitetail hunter from Madison. He has lived and hunted out west and taken numerous big game species, but hunting big old mature southern whitetail bucks is his favorite pursuit by a country mile.

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

CODE-RED VIBRAWEDGE SPINNERBAIT

TAPERED-WIRE SHAFT LETS BLADES RUN TRUE

Give Texas angler William Flournoy a spinnerbait with a red head — and he'll catch bass.

Give Flournoy a spinnerbait with a red head *and* a tapered wire shaft that goes from .041 to .018, and he'll put even more bass in the boat — which he does with Stanley Wedge's new "Code-Red" VibraWedge spinnerbait manufactured by his great-uncle, Lonnie Stanley of Huntington, Texas.

Stanley has reintroduced the tapered-wire shaft spinnerbait that was such a force in the 1980s for Tommy Martin, John Torian, Larry Nixon and even Rick Clunn, who won a U.S. Open with it in 1983 at Lake Mead, Nevada.

And the legendary artificial lure manufacturer has added a red head, which, as far as his great-nephew is concerned, is

the coup de grace.

"I've been made fun of for years by people. I just like to throw red-headed spinnerbaits. It seems it doesn't matter what skirt I put it on," Flournoy said. "I've got my different (skirt) colors, different head sizes and different blade combinations."

The accomplished bass pro said some bass anglers like to match a spinnerbait head to a skirt color.

"Well," he said, "I learned a long time ago if you try to get the head to match the skirt for every color, you'll never get (the boat) on plane. The red head, to me, seems like a very versatile head, seems like it has caught more fish. A lot might be personal preference or confidence."

Flournoy, 35, who lives in Diboll, Texas, said he was using the red-headed, tapered-wire shaft spinnerbaits with their hand-tied skirts to catch quality

bass around cypress trees and edges of hydrilla beds at Lake Sam Rayburn.

Soon, the Code-Reds will be in stores in many southern states. Bass anglers in the region should start having as much success with them as their counterparts at Lake Sam Rayburn and nearby Toledo Bend.

"Once you throw the red spinnerbait with the tapered wire, it feels so much better than any spinnerbait made," Stanley said, noting it's the only artificial lure he knows about that had three patents (since expired) for the tapered wire, wedge-tapered blade and hand-tied skirt.

"We did all that (acquire the patents) back in the 80s. It's still something we're proud of," he said.

Martin and Clunn, he said, still throw the spinnerbait they first started casting in the early 80s. Now everyone else has a chance.

Lonnie Stanley grabs a big bass that bit his new, reintroduced "Code-Red" VibraWedge spinnerbait.

"That's our old-time spinnerbait we've reintroduced," he said.

According to Flournoy, the tapered wire (shaft) is the key to the spinnerbait's success.

"Well, the tapered wire actually serves many purposes. No. 1, it allows the blades to pull back a little bit and run truly. With the blades running with less resistance from a tapered wire they get more vibration. The biggest thing to me is it (tapered wire shaft) lets the blades run true and you can slow-roll them better," he said.

Also, the tapered wire is more flexible, and collapses easier.

That's important, he said, because when a large bass inhales the spinnerbait, blades and all, the flexibility allows the fish to get hold of the hook — and the hook set is rock solid. Also, if a bass doesn't get the whole spinnerbait, the tapered wire shaft allows it to get the hook easier, he said.

"In my opinion, it's the way a spinnerbait's supposed to be made," he said.

He also favors the "R" bend as opposed to the twist wire to tie the "Code-Red" VibraWedge to the business end of his fishing line.

"It's a personal preference. Everybody's opinion is different," he said, adding that he has caught as many as 70 to 80 bass on one of the new spinnerbaits.

On the rare occasion one broke, he said, it was because he was hauling hawks out of thick brush this past spring at Toledo Bend.

If one broke, it would break just above the head, where it was bent often from the weight of bass being pulled out of heavy cover, and not at the "R."

For more information on the "Code-Red" VibraWedge spinnerbait and other Stanley Lures products, go to www.fishstanley.com or call (936) 876-5713. ■



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.



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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano



Check wheel alignment with an arrow shaft (left). A bow press is necessary to determine whether you have mechanical wheel lean and to effect correction.

DON'T LET WHEEL LEAN HURT YOUR SHOOTING

MECHANICAL OR SHOOTER-INDUCED, IT CAN AFFECT YOUR ACCURACY, CAUSE DAMAGE TO BOW

The advent of the compound bow changed archery for the better. The addition of wheels allows more people to participate in our sport by making it easier to draw and hold heavier draw weights.

Higher let-off at the back end of the draw cycle makes it easier to aim and hold on target longer. Wheels also provide a lot more arrow speed than traditional bows are capable of at the same draw weight.

So it's ironic the very thing that gives compound bows all of their advantages can also rob you of perfect arrow flight and accuracy. With the addition of wheels, cams or pulleys comes the additional costs of wheel timing and wheel lean.

Many archers are now familiar with wheel-timing issues. If your bow's wheels are not synchronized perfectly, they fire out of sync, causing the arrow to whip at release and fly horribly. Not many people are familiar with wheel lean, however.

This can be as big — or an even bigger problem — as wheel lean not only drastically affects arrow flight, but it can also cause excessive wear to many parts of your bow.

There are two types of wheel lean: Mechanical wheel lean and shooter-induced wheel lean. Inherent wheel lean is caused by one or more of several mechanical issues that can occur. Shooter-induced wheel lean is caused by improper sight alignment and/or

improper shooting form. Either way, accuracy is drastically affected, and not for the better.

STRING-STRETCHING

In cases of mechanical wheel lean, severe damage to both the string set and bearings (both wheel and cable roller) can occur. In the case of shooter-induced wheel lean, the arrow impacts the target horizontally out of line with the bull's-eye. The groupings of arrows will drift progressively in the direction of lean of the bow's top wheel, becoming more severe as distance increases.

A common cause of mechanical wheel lean is unaddressed string and cable stretch. All modern compound bows use either a cable rod with a slide or rollers to pull the cables out of line and provide clearance for the arrow's fletching as it passes them. This creates uneven pressure on the limb tips, which causes severe wheel lean.

In order to correct this, one side of the yoke or harness is often twisted more than the other to compensate. As the bow is shot repeatedly, this stretches, along with the rest of the string set, allowing the cam or wheel to lean again. This is corrected by adding additional twists as necessary to bring the wheel back in line. Sometimes, the limb itself becomes warped, and the yoke is not able to be twisted enough to level the wheel. This requires a new limb to fix the issue.

On split limb bows, the four limbs have to be synchronized to the same strength or deflection. A good analogy for this is that of fishing rod actions: If the left limb is medium-fast action, and the right limb is medium-heavy action, the left limb will bend more than the right limb, causing the wheel on that end of the bow to lean.

MAKE IT RIGHT

There are several ways to correct this issue, depending on the cam system. They include twisting the yoke, swapping limb position and changing wheel spacing to affect wheel alignment. Twisting the yoke works the same as with a solid-limb bow. In rare cases, swapping limb position will help, but the best system is a top-hat limb bushing system such as that

used by Mathews on the Halon, Triax and several other models. By changing the top-hat bushings, wheel lean is easily and perfectly corrected.

In instances of severe mechanical wheel lean, it is not hard to diagnose, but in many cases, a well-trained eye is required. In nearly every case, a bow press is required to correct the problem. For these reasons, it is best to have your bow examined by a professional. Further complicating diagnosis in some of the newer models, it is necessary to have some pre-shot wheel lean in order for the cams or wheels to be straight in-line at full draw.

On most single cam models, the idle wheel (top wheel) must be aligned straight when the bow is at rest. This is easily checked by placing a straight edge — an arrow shaft works best — on the shelf (outboard) side of the wheel. The gap between the arrow's shaft and the bow's string should be even for the entire length of the arrow. Dual cam and cam-a-half systems are harder to judge.

SIGHT, FORM PROBLEMS

Shooter-induced wheel lean is often caused by improper leveling of the bow sight's second and third axis adjustments. Many archers are not even aware of these features, but if improperly adjusted, will cause the shooter to lean the bow at full draw. Also, poor shooting form can cause this problem. Have your bow sight's second and third axis checked by a pro-shop to prevent this issue. If your issue is form, working with an instructor for an hour or two should correct it.

Although wheel lean causes many issues for the archer, it can be corrected fairly easily. A quick trip to your local pro shop can diagnose and fix this issue, often without breaking the bank. So don't let wheel lean rob your accuracy and cost you a buck this season. ■



Sammy Romano is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 24 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.

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DON'T LOSE THAT TRAIL

TAKE THESE 5 TIPS AND FIND THAT DEER

By Cliff Covington

Your heart is still pounding uncontrollably as the overdose of adrenaline rushes through your veins. Only seconds have passed since you squeezed the trigger on the biggest buck you've ever seen. Everything happened so fast that it almost seemed like a dream.

But what you do now may determine whether you recover your trophy.

The initial impulse of most hunters is to bail out of their stand and immediately look for the deer they just shot. Depending upon where the animal is hit, this could be a terrible mistake. Attempting to blood trail a deer prematurely will more often than not result in a spooked deer and make recovery of the animal much more difficult, if not impossible.

Finding a deer you've shot can be a simple walk in the woods or a real chore, depending not only on how well-placed your shot was, but on how you approach the task of focusing on specks and splatters of blood on leaves, grass and brush. Taking this job seriously can mean the difference in finding that buck of a lifetime and going home frustrated and empty-handed.

Here are steps to finding and tagging that whitetail.

BE SPOT ON.

Stay in your stand and immediately pinpoint exactly where the deer was standing when you shot, and exactly where he was when he passed out of sight. After making these mental notes, get down and mark those spots with flagging ribbon, toilet paper — anything that will

mark a trail. Also, take time to remember how the deer reacted to the shot. Did it hump up in the back, kick out its hind legs, leap into the air or drop down on all fours before taking off?

TAKE YOUR TIME

You're not going to catch up to the deer if you jump down out of your stand and head off into the woods. Patience is critical in recovering a deer you've shot that's run out of sight. Wait a certain period of time to allow the animal to bed down, stiffen up and die. Don't get down early and bump a wounded deer from its hiding place. An hour is not too long to wait, unless the shot was poorly placed; a longer wait may be justified.

THREE'S A CROWD

A two-man blood-trailing team works best; one make tracks, the other spots. The tracker does the blood-trailing, while the spotter marks the last spot of blood found by the tracker. If the tracker loses the trail, he can return to the spotter's location and start searching again for new sign. A third person helps only when the blood

Blood-trailing a deer after the shot is often a two-man game. Do things correctly, and you'll have a better chance of finding that big buck.



trail plays out completely. In that case, the tracker and the third person can begin searching a zig-zagging pattern from the last spot of blood in the general direction the deer was headed.

LIGHT UP THE WORLD

Since the vast majority of blood-trailing is done at night, a good light is a necessity. However, more factors than brightness should be taken into account. A dim light has obvious limitations, while an overly bright light tends to bleach everything out, making it hard to see small specks of blood. A soft, white light is best, something like the light given off by a Coleman lantern.

HIT YOUR KNEES

You're already praying the deer is dead, somewhere in front of you. That's one reason to hit your knees. A better one is getting down on the level the deer was traveling. From a lower angle, you can shine your light in the direction the deer is headed and often see blood spots that don't show up as easily when you're standing. ■

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TARGET TRAVEL ROUTES FOR

By Brian Cope

LATE-SEASON DEER

SKIP THE FOOD PLOTS, WHERE DEER ARE ARRIVING AFTER DARK

We've spent all season perched in stands overlooking food plots and other well-known deer grazing areas, waiting for deer to get their feed on.

With the end of hunting season just around the corner, it's time to try a new approach.

While hunting from those stands has many advantages, it's common for late-season deer to wait until just after dark to slip into those feeding areas. That's a fact of hunting that we often ignore, with the hope that on some days, deer will slip in just a little earlier than they should.

Modern optics gather so much more light that we can often see far better and later than a buck would believe. Still, it's a game of chance that we should abandon at this point.

Throughout the year, we strive not to break a buck's habits when it comes to travel routes. We find where the deer are going, and we don't want to disturb how they get there. But this late in the season, we have fewer opportunities to hunt — so if we push the deer away from their normal travel paths, we aren't messing things up for very long. Deer season will be over soon anyway.

Those travel routes should now be where hunters focus their attention. Deer will be on those paths before last light, and with so little new growth in the

woods that it's easier to identify the most well-worn paths.

Roy Windham has been using this tactic for years.

"I usually kill three big bucks a year: one early in the season, one during the rut or pre-rut and one in the last week or so of

explained. "By the end of the year, I know which paths are best to hunt."

Once a hot trail has been identified, it's a matter of timing your hunts.

"You want to be on those travel routes before dark," Windham said. "These animals have their timing down to reach the



Move from food plots to watching travel routes to catch wily late-season bucks.

the year," Windham said. "Those first two are always from stands overlooking food plots, and the last one is always from the ground while hunting travel routes."

Trail cams help Windham identify the best travel routes and the deer that utilize them.

"I have trail cams at all my grazing areas, but I put some on animal trails, too," he

clearings just past dark, so they'll be on these trails with plenty of light."

And this is a ground-hunting deal.

"Don't put up a new stand — just scent-proof yourself really well, find a good spot with natural cover and pay attention," Windham said. "They slip up and down these routes quiet as a mouse, but they will be there." ■

3 TIPS FOR BUCKS UNDER PRESSURE

DON'T CHANGE SPOTS, JUST CHANGE TACTICS

By Cliff Covington

The remarkable white-tailed deer has adapted to increased hunting pressure with great ease, but that makes harvesting today's "pressurized" buck a thorough test of any hunter's skill. Those willing to hunt smart and utilize other hunters to their advantage can still be consistently successful in harvesting pressured bucks.

Tactics that are productive where deer are undisturbed, however, are rarely effective where hunting pressure is heavy. But contrary to what many hunters seem to believe, deer don't just up and leave the country when hunting pressure intensifies. Instead, they hunker down in the thickest cover they can find, and they limit their movements to nighttime and very brief day-time excursions.

A 1988 study at Mississippi State determined that most of 10 radio-collared bucks in Claiborne County moved very little when hunting pressure intensified, hunkering down in small areas with ample food, water and cover, and rarely leaving.

Knowing that bucks don't leave an area they like — just because it's got hunters moving through it on a regular basis — should change your hunting tactics.

Here are three tips for getting close to bucks in areas with plenty of hunting pressure.

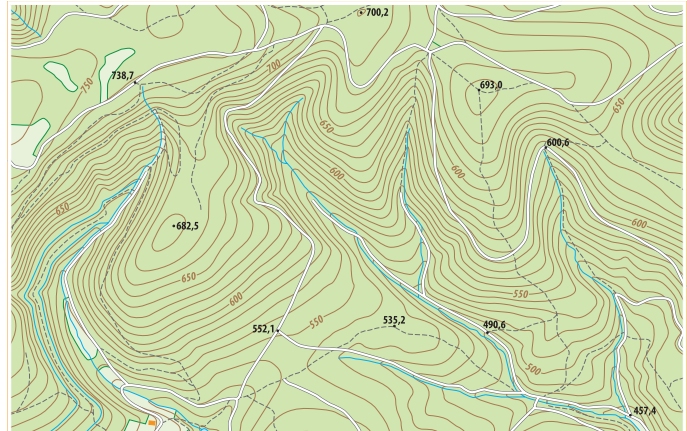
1 GET PLENTY OF INFO

Ask farmers and foresters — anyone who lives or works in a rural area — where they've seen big bucks. Knowing the time of day of a sighting will help. A buck on the move at dawn is usually heading to its bedding area; a buck moving at dusk is probably leaving his bedding area to feed.

Bucks that feel hunting pressure don't often head for the next township. They're more likely to hunker down in heavy cover in their home ranges.

2 LEARN THE LAY OF THE LAND

Obtain aerial photos and/or topo maps of the spots you plan to hunt. Aerial photos are helpful in locating thick cover; topo maps help in identifying distinct changes in elevation. Mature bucks often like to bed just over a ridge with the wind at their backs, so they can see approaching danger in front of them and smell it coming from behind.



3 SCOUT, SCOUT, SCOUT, BUT JUST ONE TIME

Scouting is the final piece of the puzzle. With boots on the ground, find well-used trails, fresh scrapes, rub lines, mast trees, escape lanes and bedding cover. Try to do everything in one trip. The less time you spend in your hunting area, the better.

Most important, always believe that a buck hasn't taken off for the next county. Even if you haven't seen him, he's likely still right under your nose.



SCREEN PLAY

PROTECT YOUR ELECTRONICS WITH CARE

By Allan Tarvid

Your depthfinder screen is liable to get plenty dirty with regular use, as it's exposed to the elements for hours on every fishing trip. You can protect, clean and repair any problems with the LCD screen with a little instruction.

Electronics have become important parts of our fishing experiences, but the units can become dirty or cluttered over time.

Who hasn't mistaken the shadow of a water spot on an LCD screen for a fish, waypoint or radar target? Or was it a smear of sunscreen lotion or insect repellent left by a fingertip? Hopefully it wasn't a permanent scratch, crack, craze or other scar.

And the growing popularity of touch screens in marine electronics is increasing the hand-screen contact problem.

Protecting screens from temporary and permanent blemishes is easier and less expensive than removing them after the fact.

PROTECTION FIRST

Trailing an open boat with the electronics installed exposes their screens to road grime, dirt, grit, tree branches, gravel and other flying objects. Snapping on their screen covers before hitting the road helps, but removing the units and transporting them in protective hard cases or padded bags works even better.

Wearing a small towel on your belt or hanging one near your seat gives you a place to wipe the excess sunscreen lotion, bug repellent, liquid fish attractant or residue from live or dead bait off your hands before touching your electronics.

Screens that have attracted a fine layer of sand, grit or other abrasive crud must be cleaned carefully to prevent permanent damage.

Wiping a dry rag over the grit turns the cloth into sandpaper, and you know what happens next.

Instead, pour or squirt clean water over the screen to flush away as much of the crud as possible, and then soak a clean rag until water runs out of it before touching it to a screen and gently mopping off the rest of the debris. Use a light, even pressure on the cloth as you clean, and repeat as necessary. Never press down hard on a small area of the display with fingers or the edge of your hand; concentrated pressure can flex the protective lens against the screen and might even damage pixels on the LCD.

Be extremely careful in choosing a

cleaner when water isn't enough to handle the cleanup. The protective lenses covering most LCD screens are made of plastic, not glass, and strong glass cleaners can permanently damage them. Stay away from cleaners that include ammonia or other harsh chemicals not recommended for plastics, and avoid anything abrasive.

I like Wilson Frazier's Krystal Vision (www.itaintv.com) for use on my screens (and my sunglasses), but there are many kinds of liquid cleaners and wipes designed to safely do the job. Once again, make sure the product you choose is safe for use on plastics.

LOSE SCRATCHES

Small scratches that remain after a thorough cleaning can be removed with Meguiar's Mirro Glaze Plastic Polish No. 17, available at auto parts stores and some marine dealers. I keep a clean, soft cloth wet with the polish and move it under light pressure in a circular motion with each circle covering about half the screen. This takes a while, and screen polishing is perhaps best done while watching the game or a movie on TV. Every 30 minutes

or so I switch to a clean, dry cloth and gently wipe the screen dry so I can check on my scratch-removing progress.

Small scratches can be completely removed, and the edges of deep scratches become rounded enough to make them all but disappear. Adding a coat of another Meguiar's product, Plastic Polish No. 10, to the screen forms a smooth, transparent layer that prevents most dirt and grit from sticking and lessens any abrasive damage when it does stick. ■

SLOW IS THE WAY TO GO FOR DECEMBER SPECKS

MATCHING THE HATCH IS ALWAYS KEY

By Patrick Bonin

With less and less daylight and cooler water temperatures settling in, slowing down your presentation is often key to catching December speckled trout.

"I'm always telling my customers, 'Slow is the way to go,'" said Capt. Mike Gallo of Angling Adventures of Louisiana. "And if you're not catching anything, go even slower."

Trout move deeper as the water cools, so Gallo likes to target shorelines with easy deepwater access that also feature flats with clear, moving water and signs of baitfish activity.

"If the water temperature is 55 and above, they like shallow water close to deep water," he said. "That way, if we get a cold front, they'll just drop down into that deep water without having to go very far."

But this time of year, especially, he takes his fishing cues from clues provided by the first trout he catches each day.

"If he comes straight to the surface and shakes his head, he's not cold," Gallo said. "But if you hook a fish and he's fighting

but it's a lethargic fight and he never comes to the surface and never shakes his head, he's cold.

"So if I change my technique, I need to change in a slower direction, not in a faster direction. Lots of things can be determined by catching one fish."

To that end, Gallo's first speck of the day doesn't end up on ice. Instead, it goes into the livewell to see if it will provide more clues that might turn an average day of fishing into a really good one.

"Every 10 or 15 minutes, I go and check the livewell, and I'm hoping he pukes something up: a crab, a shrimp or a baby fish," Gallo said. "Then I get a clue on what he's feeding on, and I can mimic that."

If the guide is fishing with a 3-inch Sparkle Beetle but sees the trout in his livewell just spit up a 2-inch minnow, Gallo typically downsizes his lures.

"I'm going to go more in that 2-inch range because that may be what's down there on the bottom," he said. "I happened to catch one, but if my lure really mimics what's down there I have a better chance

of catching more.

"That's just matching the hatch. And if you can actually make out what it is they spit up — let's say it's a pogie — then salt-and-pepper is a great imitation for matching a pogie."

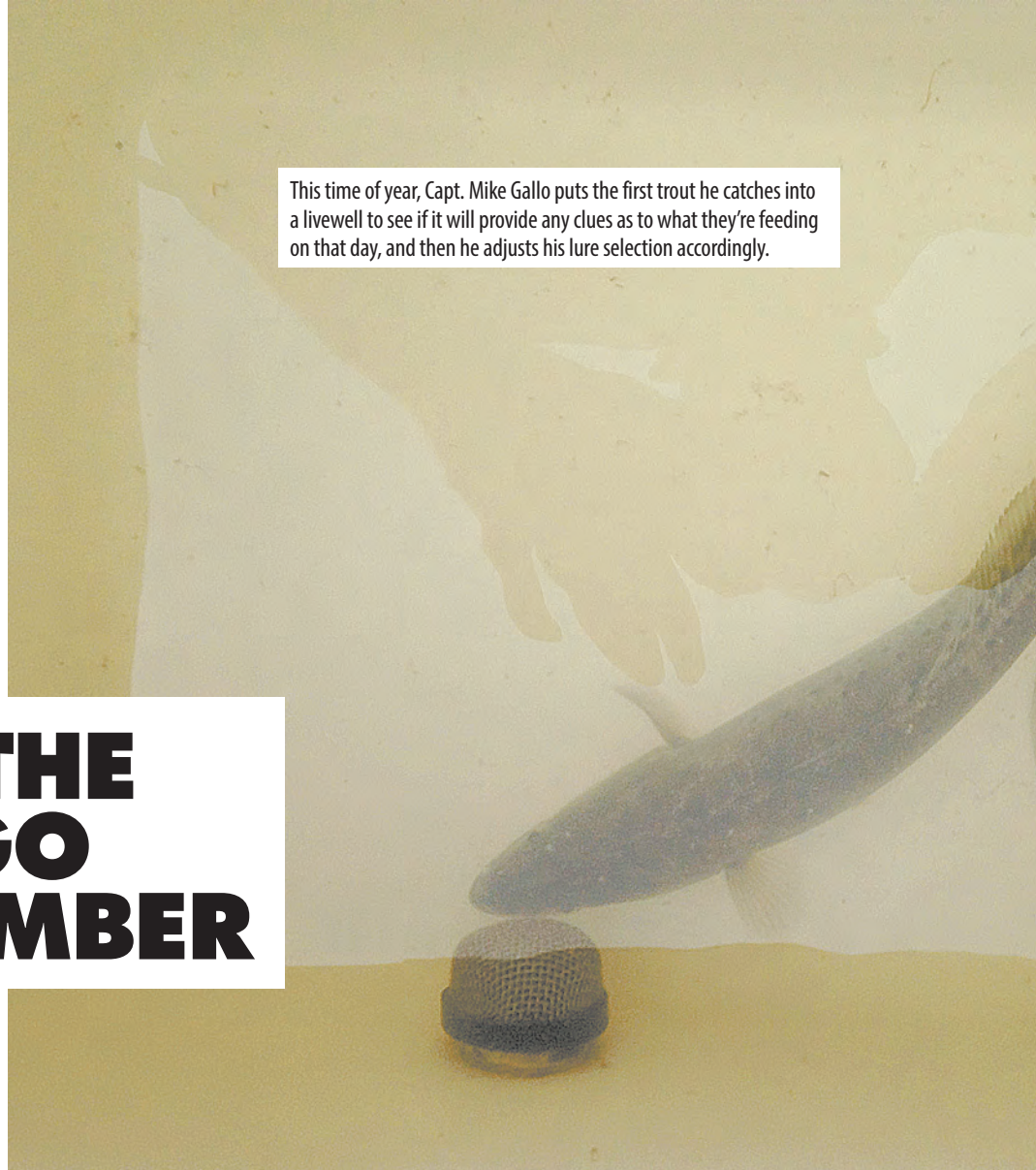
He also pays particular attention to his electronics this time of year to identify the good, hardbottom trout prefer. Being able to differentiate the bottom types is a matter of learning how the images display on the screen.

"Let's say you have one line showing the bottom that's an 1/8-inch thick," Gallo said. "What that's telling you is the signal going down from your transducer and bouncing back up is bouncing back up quickly because that bottom is firm."

"But when it draws a bottom that's 1 1/2 inches thick and real fuzzy, it's telling you that's a soft, mushy bottom, and it takes a while for the signal to bounce back.

"So there are clues that you can see on your depth finder. Areas with a hard bottom and a gradual slope are gold mines for trout to hang out in." ■

This time of year, Capt. Mike Gallo puts the first trout he catches into a livewell to see if it will provide any clues as to what they're feeding on that day, and then he adjusts his lure selection accordingly.



Fishing a small crankbait around cover along channel bends in rivers is a great late-fall bass tactic.

LATE-FALL TACTICS WORK ON DECEMBER BASS

By Dustin Wilks

No pleasure boats, no tournaments, not much of anything but you busting bass. That's the way fishing should be.

December bass fishing is late-fall transition fishing, with water temperatures not extremely cold but falling. As the water cools from the mid to lower 50s on lakes, shad begin to move out of the backs of the creeks toward the main body of water.

For river fishermen, it's just the opposite. As the grass dies out on the main river, baitfish and bass migrate to the protected waters of creeks. These creeks will be good all winter as long as they're protected from heavy winds, cold fronts and saltwater.

Bouncing crankbaits off isolated logs along creek-channel bends is tough to beat on rivers. On warmer days, bass will chase spinnerbaits and even buzzbaits up on the flats and near drainage ditches.

December is prime time to fish crankbaits and spinnerbaits on lakes and rivers close to the coast. On lakes, algae grows on shoreline rocks — with help from the fall turnover — and shad feed nose down on those rocks. A crankbait or slow-rolled spinnerbait perfectly imitates this feeding behavior and can be the ticket to success.

This is the time of the year, anglers can really have some fun with big schools of

bass. Crankbaits and spinnerbaits are great for covering water and finding schools. If you locate a big school, and they don't want to bite a hard bait, try a swimbait, such as a Culprit Riptide Shad or a hair jig before moving on to try another place.

If the water is stained and still warmer than 50 degrees, try fishing small, square-billed lures. For stained water, I like to use the pale-chartreuse color with a purple back.

Anglers should concentrate at main and secondary points, but don't rule out fishing banks with wind blowing directly toward them.

Spinnerbaits are excellent choices with increased instability of an approaching front or if clouds and wind are present. I like to slow roll a spinnerbait with double Colorado blades in shad or sunfish patterns when the water is stained.

Another tip for winter bass fishing — always be on the lookout for birds. They can tip you off to the location of baitfish and bass. ■

TIPS FOR TAKING WINTER CRAPPIE

GOOD FISHING REALLY ARRIVES WITH DECEMBER WEATHER

By Paul Johnson

As winter approaches, crappie fishermen need to make a few changes to their fishing strategies. Slabs bite in December, and on some lakes, they bite better this time of year than any other.

I've found the best time of the year to crappie fish on the state's oxbows is now through the end of February — the



Crappie fishermen who put away their tackle after Thanksgiving are missing some of the best fishing of the year in Mississippi waters. **INSET:** Downsize your soft-plastic crappie baits or your live minnows as winter approaches; smaller baits generally perform better in cold weather.

Dan Kibler

absolute coldest months of our season. How do you catch winter crappie?

• **Dress for the conditions.** I am partial to the new, space-age underwear and also fleece outerwear with a wind-shear membrane sewn in. Forget cotton. A duck-hunting guide told me years ago, "Cotton kills." Stay warm by dressing in layers, wearing good, thermal socks and warm neck and head gear. The warmest piece of clothing I have — the best thing I've come up with for keeping warm on the lake — is an inexpensive fleece neck gaiter. Get one.

• **Fish deeper.** I've had some of my best winter days on Chotard Lake fishing more

than 40 feet deep. You warm up real quick once you start landing 2-pound slabs.

• If you fish soft plastics, **use some odor attractant.** One of the neatest gizmos I've seen is the Bait Pump injector. You pour into it a few Crappie Nibbles and screw it down until they are mashed and forced through the injection point and into the hollow core of your jig skirt.

Colder water produces slower metabolism in most fish species. Often, a little extra enticement is required to make a crappie bite. Most spray-on attractants, dips or any of the large variety of nibble-like "candies" work. My advice is to stay with the ones

that are as natural as possible.

• **Try downsizing your bait,** soft plastics or live minnows. I know there are exceptions to the downsize rule. When we fish Lake Washington in cold weather, the largest minnows you can find often yield the best results. But for the most part, in most places, a smaller offering seems to work a little better in cold water.

My favorite winter crappie spots are: Chotard, Chotard and Chotard, followed by Lake Washington and then Ross Barnett Reservoir. Give any of these a shot this winter, and I promise you'll catch crappie as big as they grow. ■

STEVE GERMAN'S TAXIDERMY ART

If you're a Mississippi hunter headed to Texas, and you're wondering how to get your trophy mounted back home with all the chronic wasting disease import regulations, Steve German's Taxidermy Art in Westlake, La., has you covered.

They've partnered with Ty's Taxidermy, conveniently located just off I-10 in Vidor, Texas (409-504-5818), to care for your trophy whitetail or exotic and prepare it to legally enter the Magnolia sdtate.

"It's going to be a very efficient for hunters and clients heading back if they want to use our services," Josh German said. "We want people to know that we're working with Ty's Taxidermy in Vidor — and you can just drop off your animal there.

"They just need to make Ty's aware their deer is coming to Steve German's Taxidermy Art — that way they can properly tag it, put it on our invoices and notify us. But they'll make it legal to cross the state lines."

No money will change hands in Vidor — those transactions will take place at Steve German's facility once the animal is across the state line and specifics of the mount are determined.

If possible, German suggested hunters call his office at 337-436-0210 before their hunt so Ty's can be notified in advance. Regardless, the key is to make sure that the staff at Ty's knows your animal is ultimately headed for Steve German's in Westlake for taxidermy services.

For more info and a map specifying Ty's Vidor location, visit: stevegerman.com



VERSAMAXX BOLT POPPING CORK

If you get frustrated by constantly having to stop fishing to adjust the length of the leader under your popping cork, the VersaMaxx Bolt is exactly what you're looking for. Changing/experimenting with different depths as you fish has been proven to produce better results, but wired cork fishermen have hesitated to do this in the past because of the time it takes away from fishing. Not any longer — the VersaMaxx Bolt solves this problem.

The key to the cork's effectiveness is its patented Leader Line Lengthening system — which allows you to load several feet of mono, braid or fluorocarbon on a small spool featuring a locking eyelet on the leader side of the cork.

Once it's loaded, the length of your leader can be adjusted literally in seconds and you'll be back to fishing in no time

— without fumbling with spools of line, retying hooks or searching for snips.

The Bolt — which features a no-kink titanium wire, a stainless steel swivel and brass beads — comes in three colors which are solid to the core, so it won't ever get discolored, chipped or cracked. And the foam material used in the cork (unique to any other cork on the market) aids in producing the perfect sound of popping shrimp with deadly accuracy. It's not just about making noise — it's about making the right noise.

The VersaMaxx Bolt sells for \$6.99.

For more information or to purchase any cork in the VersaMaxx lineup, visit www.versamaxx.com.

New product submissions can be emailed to
Mark Boyd at markb@lasmag.com or call 601-829-8080.

MAHINDRA'S ROXOR

ROXOR is a new side-by-side off-road vehicle from Mahindra Automotive North America, headquartered in Auburn Hills, Mich.

Unlike its plastic-bodied, tubular-framed, belt-driven competitors, ROXOR features a steel body on a boxed steel frame and comes with a turbo diesel 4-cylinder engine and a 5-speed manual transmission. And its wheels, tires and brakes are far larger than conventional side x sides.

It also features a 9-inch ground clearance, has a towing capacity of 3,490 pounds and holds 12 gallons of fuel. And the wheelbase is 96 inches, with ROXOR coming in at 62 inches wide and 75 inches high.

The ROXOR is not street legal on any street or highway, but



it's absolutely perfect for the camp. The MSRP is \$15,499 for the base unit — you can check one out in person at Outdoor Powerhouse, located at 2323 Florida Blvd. SW in Denham Springs, La., or go to www.outdoorpowerhouse.com for details.

For more info, call 225-791-2277, or visit www.roxoroffroad.com.



ABU GARCIA'S REVO ROCKET BAITCASTING REEL

Talk about a fast baitcasting reel. ABU Garcia's Revo Rocket takes retrieve ratio to an unheard of level at 10:1. You get 41 inches of line back in for every turn of the reel handle, which will result in dozens of extra casts over the course of a day on the water.

And speed isn't all you get. The low-profile reel comes with 10 stainless-steel ball bearings and one roller bearing, an alloy frame and sideplate, ABU Garcia's Carbon Matrix Drag System, an Infini break system and D2 gear system.

The reel weighs slightly more than 7 ounces and has a line capacity of 190 yards of 20-pound braid, and 175 yards of 10-pound mono. MSRP is \$299.

For more info: www.abugarcia.com

PATRIOT BOATS' DUCK BLINDS

Tired of fighting the mud and the muck to rebuild your duck blind every couple years? Patriot Boats in Chauvin, La., has exactly what you need.

Their floating blinds, built on Patriot's boat platform, not only offer a great place to hunt, but the blinds are mobile — allowing you to move with the birds all season long.

Custom options are available, but Patriot offers both 8-foot and 12-foot models. All blinds come with two spud poles and a camo canvas cover, plus shelves inside for hunting gear and cup holders for that early-morning coffee.

Basic models come with olive paint. The 8-foot model can hold three hunters comfortably, and costs \$4,500. The 12-foot model seats four to five people, and costs \$6,500.

Camo paint and hydro turf flooring are available at an additional cost.

For more information on blind options, call Brooks Pellegrin at 985-594-5832, or visit www.jandbmanufacturing.com.



HUNTING SEASONS

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

WATERFOWL SEASONS

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

DEER SEASON

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

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

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

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

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

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ASTRO TABLES

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

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

• **Astro Tables** is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).

• **PrimeTimes'** forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

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

-and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2019, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2020, and more. Comes with FREE 2019 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, plus \$3 s&h.

Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor. \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

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

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 #2: **Same as #1, plus Software....** \$47.95 (plus \$6 s&h).
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For credit/debit card orders, call **515-964-5516**, or go online to **primetimes2.com** and click **Catalog**.

2018 DEC	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Sat 1	█	█	█	█	30
Sun 2	█	█	█	█	26
Mon 3	█	█	█	█	22
Tue 4	█	█	█	█	28
Wed 5	█	█	█	█	35
Thu 6	█	█	█	█	42
Fri 7	█	█	█	█	45
Sat 8	█	█	█	█	34

Sun 9	█	█	█	█	22
Mon 10	█	█	█	█	13
Tue 11	█	█	█	█	8
Wed 12	█	█	█	█	10
Thu 13	█	█	█	█	13
Fri 14	█	█	█	█	21
Sat 15	█	█	█	█	34

Sun 16	█	█	█	█	28
Mon 17	█	█	█	█	26
Tue 18	█	█	█	█	29
Wed 19	█	█	█	█	43
Thu 20	█	█	█	█	56
Fri 21	█	█	█	█	68
Sat 22	█	█	█	█	74

Sun 23	█	█	█	█	66
Mon 24	█	█	█	█	56
Tue 25	█	█	█	█	44
Wed 26	█	█	█	█	37
Thu 27	█	█	█	█	33
Fri 28	█	█	█	█	34
Sat 29	█	█	█	█	42
Sun 30	█	█	█	█	28
Mon 31	█	█	█	█	20

25 50 75
AVERAGE

MOON RISE	LUNAR PERIODS		MOON SET	MOON UNDERFOOT	
	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT			
1:07 am	6:20 am - 8:50 am ☀		1:56 pm	6:45 pm - 9:15 pm	☾
2:11 am	7:20 am - 9:28 am		2:29 pm	7:45 pm - 9:53 pm	☾
3:13 am	8:15 am - 10:07 am		3:03 pm	8:40 pm - 10:32 pm	☾
4:15 am	9:10 am - 10:48 am		3:37 pm	9:35 pm - 11:13 pm	☾
5:17 am	10:05 am - 11:31 am		4:14 pm	10:30 pm - 11:56 pm	☾
6:17 am	11:01 am - 12:13 pm ☀		4:54 pm	11:26 pm - Midnight	☾
7:15 am	11:55 am - 1:01 pm ☀		5:37 pm	Midnight - 12:38 am	☾ NEW
8:11 am	12:47 pm - 1:49 pm		6:24 pm	12:20 am - 1:26 am	☾
9:03 am	1:39 pm - 2:37 pm		7:14 pm	1:12 am - 2:14 am	☾ LOW
9:49 am	2:26 pm - 3:28 pm		8:07 pm	2:04 am - 3:02 am	☾
10:32 am	3:11 pm - 4:19 pm		9:01 pm	2:51 am - 3:53 am	☾
11:09 am	3:51 pm - 5:09 pm ☀		9:56 pm	3:36 am - 4:44 am	☾ Apogee
11:44 am	4:31 pm - 5:59 pm ☀		10:51 pm	4:16 am - 5:34 am	☾
12:16 pm	5:07 pm - 6:49 pm		11:46 pm	4:56 am - 6:24 am	☾
12:46 pm	5:42 pm - 7:40 pm			5:32 am - 7:14 am	☾ HALF
1:16 pm	6:16 pm - 8:32 pm		12:42 am	6:07 am - 8:05 am ☀	☾
1:47 pm	6:54 pm - 9:24 pm		1:39 am	6:41 am - 8:57 am ☀	☾
2:20 pm	7:34 pm - 10:20 pm		2:39 am	7:19 am - 9:49 am	☾
2:56 pm	8:16 pm - 11:18 pm		3:41 am	7:59 am - 10:45 am	☾
3:38 pm	9:06 pm - 12:18 am		4:46 am	8:41 am - 11:43 am	☾
4:26 pm	10:00 pm - 1:22 am		5:53 am	9:31 am - 12:43 pm	☾ Winter
5:22 pm	11:00 pm - Midnight		7:00 am	10:25 am - 1:47 pm ☀	☾ FULL
6:24 pm	Midnight - 2:26 am		8:04 am	11:25 am - 2:51 pm	☾ HIGH
7:32 pm	12:04 am - 3:26 am		9:04 am	12:29 pm - 3:51 pm	☾ Perigee
8:42 pm	1:09 am - 4:25 am		9:56 am	1:34 pm - 4:50 pm	☾
9:51 pm	2:13 am - 5:19 am		10:42 am	2:38 pm - 5:44 pm	☾
10:59 pm	3:16 am - 6:06 am		11:22 am	3:41 pm - 6:31 pm ☀	☾
	4:17 am - 6:49 am		11:58 am	4:42 pm - 7:14 pm	☾
12:04 am	5:14 am - 7:30 am		12:33 pm	5:39 pm - 7:55 pm	☾ HALF
1:07 am	6:11 am - 8:09 am		1:06 pm	6:36 pm - 8:34 pm	☾
2:09 am	7:06 am - 8:48 am		1:39 pm	7:31 pm - 9:13 pm	☾

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

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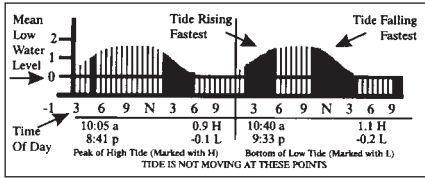
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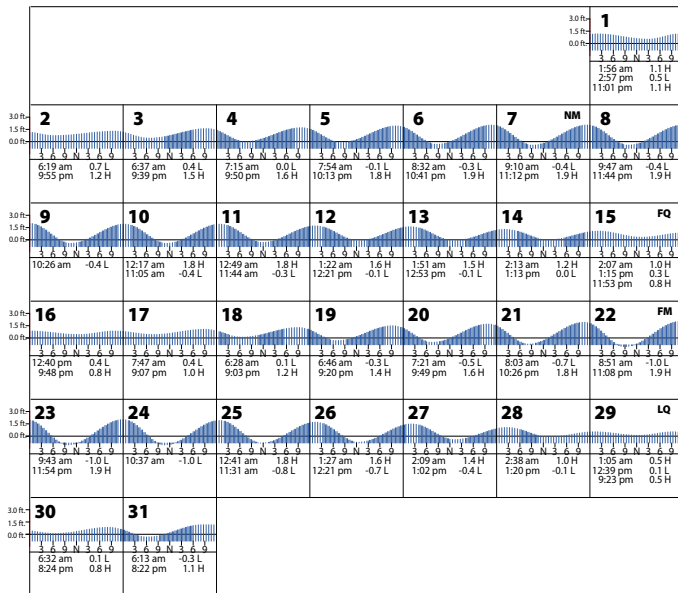
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Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. The Mississippi Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most active feeding periods each day in the TIDE GUIDE. Just fish those times indicated in black.

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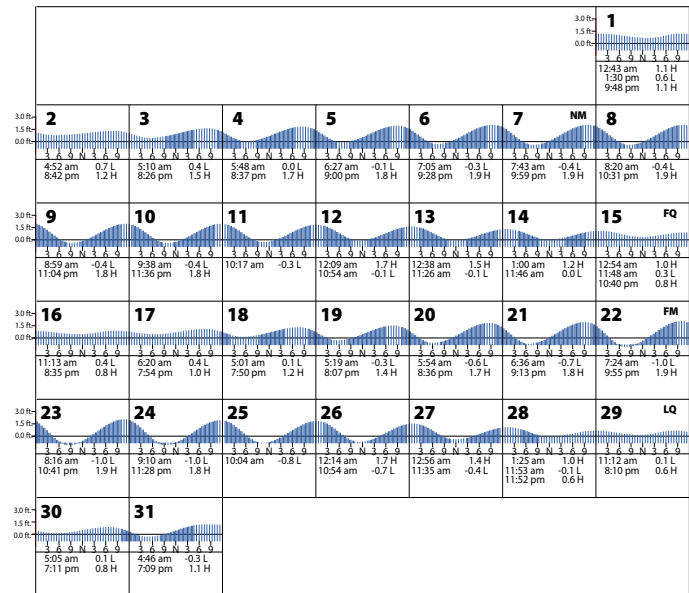
Bay St. Louis Entrance

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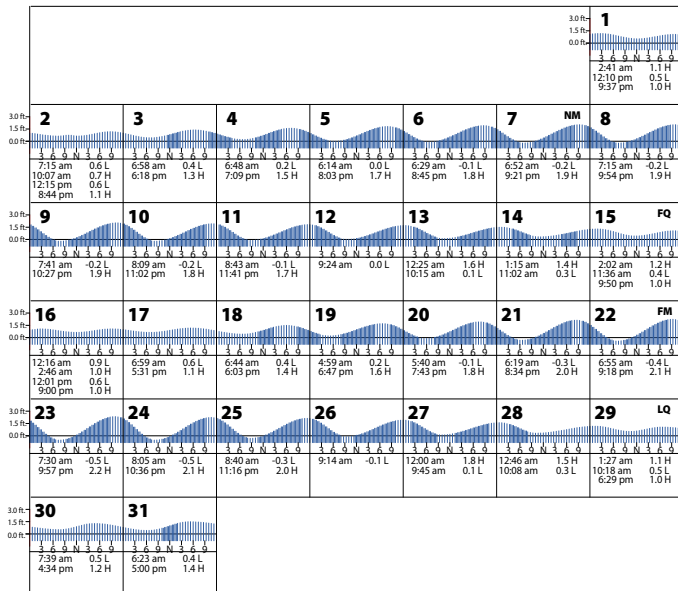
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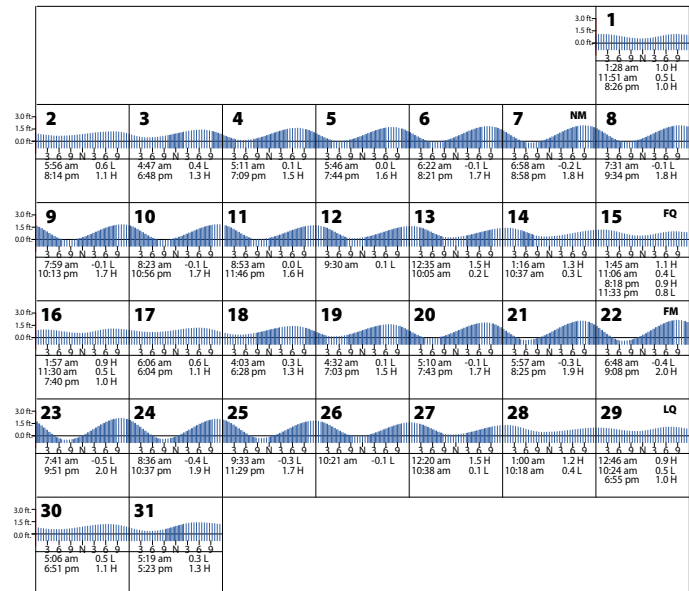
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BATTERY WORLD.....	33	FREDERICK'S SALES AND SERVICE.....	47	SHREVEPORT -BOSSIER SPORTS COMMISSION	19
BEN NELSON GOLF AND OUTDOORS.....	3	GAMEROOM GALLERY.....	54	SMITH MARINE	33
BROOKHAVEN HONDA	50	GATOR TRAX	55	SOUTHERN CAMPER SALES LLC.....	42
BRYAN'S MARINE	11	GEORGIA BOOTS.....	5	SPORTS CENTER	65
CAROLINA COMPOSITES, LLC.....	35	GIBSON REALTY/UNITED COUNTRY	9	STIHL SOUTHWEST	25, 41
CRAIN TRACTOR	48	H&R AGRI-POWER	11	TIRE DEPOT.....	13
CUSTOM MAPPING SERVICE	63	MISSISSIPPI AG.....	37	VAN'S OUTDOORS	83
DEER VIEW WINDOWS CO.	26	MOSSY OAK PROPERTIES LAND INVESTMENTS.....	23	WHITETAIL PROPERTIES	15
DELTA OUTDOORS	11	PARISH TRACTOR.....	67		
DEVINEY RENTAL & SUPPLY.....	43	REALTREE OUTDOOR PRODUCTS	25		
DIXIE RV	20	REED'S METALS, INC.....	2		
EMMETT'S MARINE.....	17	RJ'S OUTBOARD SALES & SERVICE.....	59		
FIRST SOUTH FARM CREDIT	84	ROAD AND TRACK POWERSPORTS.....	53		

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