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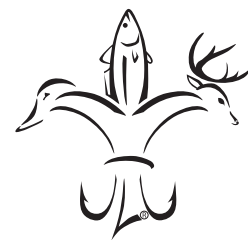
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Big bass start to stir in Mississippi waters this month. Take these tips from top anglers and put more chunky largemouth in your boat. Photo by Brian Cope.

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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](mailto:bobbyc7754@yahoo.com).

John Phillips

# FEBRUARY: JUST THINK SMALL

## DEER SEASON IS BEHIND US, BUT THERE'S ACTION TO BE HAD

**F**or several hundred thousand Mississippi sportsmen, the day the calendar flips over to February begins a long period of mourning. Deer hunting has ended for another season. Only those in the coastal corner, who hunt in the Southeast Deer Zone, can continue the pursuit. It's legal bucks only in the Southeast's final Feb. 1-15 season.



Crappie start to stir in February in lakes and rivers across Mississippi, beginning the move toward spawning areas.

Duck hunters won't be happy either; for them it might even be worse. Their season is over, too, save for a youth, military and veterans day on Feb. 8.

"At least deer hunters got to hunt during the peak of buck activity," said avid waterfowler Gene Woods of Madison. "We have to quit right when most of the ducks are arriving in Mississippi. Migration makes it tough on us, especially when we get a mild winter like this one."

OK. OK. OK. Enough with the belly aching. It's not like February is short on outdoor opportunities. Not by a long shot. There's small-game hunting, and without having to keep one's head on a swivel on the lookout for somebody in a tree stand. Rabbit and squirrel hunters have

the woods and fields to themselves. And, fishing . . .

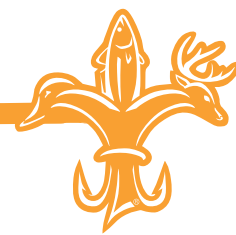
Let's just say the action is as hot as the weather is cold. Coastal fishing remains a nearshore activity, with specks and reds, sheepsheads and drum all within an easy reach of any port.

In freshwater, bass are moving into the prespawn period, and on a warm day can be found feeding heavily to prepare for their coming labors. Crappie, bless their tasty souls, are willing dance partners, and they hold in schools suspended in deep water ready to take a jig or a minnow when offered.

"It's actually one of the best months of the year for crappie," said veteran angler Billy Jenkins of Jackson. "If you know what you're doing and where to look, you can use the conditions Mother Nature provides to pinpoint more fish than you can during the spawn. It's not as easy, not always comfortable and sometimes can be downright unpleasant, but if it was easy, comfy and pleasant, everybody would be out there doing it. That's why it's my favorite month. I don't have to share the water with a lot of other fishermen."

As always, *Mississippi Sportsman* can serve as your guide for February's offerings. Inside this issue, you can find expert tips on getting more out of your small-game trips and putting more fish on the wintertime dinner table.

So, step inside the magazine, even if you're rocking a recliner in front of the fire and enjoy. Maybe it will inspire you to get up, get out and get in on the action. Let's go. ■



## FEBRUARY IS FOR RABBITS...

**F**ebruary is Fred Mitchell's favorite month, for a very special reason. Mitchell is a beagle man with a kennel full of dogs.

"It's not like I don't hunt them in October, November, December and January, it's just that I turn them loose every day in February and we run rabbits until those dogs run out of want to," said Mitchell, who is from Florence. "Basically, I use those first four months of the season to get these pups ready and in top shape for February.

"It puts me in shape, too. I lose about 20 pounds every year during hunting season from walking so many miles behind those dogs. It's what my daddy did and what his daddy did, and I'm so proud they passed that passion on to me. I don't think there is any more of a pure form of hunting than a man, his beagles and rabbits."

His passion makes Mitchell a popular man in February; he and his dogs were booked by Dec. 1 for 26 of the first 28 days this month.

"About half of next year is already on the books," Mitchell said. "Everybody becomes a rabbit hunter when deer season or duck season ends, and that's when a guy with good beagles is in high demand. I can cherry pick the places I hunt and the people I hunt with, and that's what makes it so great."

Mitchell, who retired at 52 from a lucrative career in commercial real estate, has no sprawling properties of his own to hunt, but he has the means to hunt as often as he wants, and he wants to hunt every day the weather allows.

"Half of the places we hunt every February are the same lands we've been hunting for the past decade," he said. "We've got all the weekends booked with the same people we've had them booked with for 10 to 15 years. They turn their deer camps into rabbit camps for the weekend, and they turn it into a party. We'll hunt Friday through Sunday, daylight to dark."

Mitchell has two friends who help handle the dogs. They have three trucks, two with big, custom-built dog pens in the beds and the third pulling a 30-foot bunkhouse travel trailer.

It's a nomadic lifestyle, so to speak. In the Delta one week, in the hills the next. Canecutters, aka swamp rabbits, on one hunt, cottontails, aka hillbillies or bunny rabbits, the next.

"I don't really have a preference, but when we get on the bunnies, we usually get into more rabbits," Mitchell said. "We've got this one place we go every year for a weekend that is about 2,000 acres of grain fields in the black belt prairie where we can run 200 or 300 hillbillies over two days. There was a time last year when we turned the dogs loose in this one block, and within five minutes, we had 10 different rabbits running in 10 different directions. I have never laughed so hard in my life. People were yelling 'There he goes,' constantly for about a minute. Shots were ringing out in every direction. We took eight in the first 10 minutes of

Rabbit hunting is a southern tradition that really takes off once deer seasons end and land becomes available.



hunting, and the dogs were still running two different races."

Mississippi's two species can be found statewide. Swampers tend to inhabit land around creek and river bottoms. Hillbillies inhabit everywhere else.

"I love lands with young pines or is in the second or third or fourth year after a total cutover," Mitchell said. "The more dense the cover, the more rabbits will be around, especially the hillbillies. It's tough hunting but it's worth it."

Mitchell is disappointed that no allowance has ever been made for leap years.

"You know, 2020 is a leap year, which means there's a February 29th on the calendar," he said. "That could be another day of rabbit hunting, if they'd change the law. I'm a glutton for punishment." ■

# ...AND FOR SQUIRRELS, TOO

**By** Feb. 1, Jeff Thompson and his feist dogs, Fred and Ethel, will have led well over 100 squirrels to their demise since the season opened in October.

"We'll double that number by the end of the month, I promise you," said Thompson, of Vicksburg. "Fred and I will be out there every day we can, even if it's only for an hour or two."

Thompson is a squirrel hunter; he doesn't hunt anything else, not ever.

"I grew up in a family of deer and duck hunters but just never found either to be what I enjoyed," he said. "Then, I met this man who had a treeing feist dog named Highball. I was a senior in high school, and football season had just ended. I played ball with his son, and all he ever talked about was squirrel hunting with his dad and his dogs. I finally got him to invite me on a hunt, and buddy, let me tell you, I was hooked on it. That was 40 years ago, and I have never wanted to hunt anything else since."

Thompson is a health nut and a nature freak.

"That's probably why I like squirrel hunting so much," he said. "For one thing, I get a heck of a lot of exercise behind my dogs, and I get it in some of the prettiest places in Mississippi. And, I eat a lot of squirrel, and I think it's as healthy a protein as there is, and the tastiest. Obviously, most of the best recipes for it aren't that healthy — fried or smothered in dumplings, but I walk that off the next day I go hunting."

February is a busy month for Thompson. It's when his days are full of invitations to some of the best hunting lands in the state.

"I have a lot of contacts, business contacts, with a lot of people throughout Mississippi and Alabama, too, and many of them are members of some of the best hunting camps around," he said. "Once deer season ends, my phone rings constantly. It actually starts about Jan. 1, and I start lining up hunts with friends who enjoy a good squirrel hunt behind a good dog. If there's a promise of a kid or two going along, then I get real excited. Ain't nothing better than watching a kid's excitement when Fred and Ethel tree a squirrel and we get to the tree."

Mississippi's season runs through Feb. 28. The limit is eight per day, per hunter. Thompson said he's enjoying a great season with the best yet to come.



A great acorn crop this past fall has Mississippi squirrel hunters excited about the tail end of this seasons.

"We seem to have had a long run on good acorn crops in most of the state," he said. "The squirrel population this year is the product of the acorn production last year, and so on. That's what biologists have told me, and my experiences back that up. Me and Fred, and me and Ethel, we had a lot of limit hunts in October, November and December, and on Jan. 1, we had four hunters, and we all got limits before lunch.

"I expect February will be bang-up. That's when we get to hunt some of those great hunting-camp lands that haven't been squirrel hunted all year. And with all the leaves gone and the acorns all down, we should be treeing squirrels all day every day. I can't wait!" ■

# LEGISLATIVE SESSION STARTS QUIETLY

**A**s is often the case after an election year and a turnover in many statewide offices and legislative districts, the 2020 session in Jackson probably won't see many high-profile outdoor issues addressed.

As of mid-January, not a single bill had been assigned to either the House or Senate Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Committees.

In the House, Rep. Scott Bounds (R-Philadelphia) returns as the chairman, beginning his 17th year in the House. In the Senate, Delbert Hosemann, the new lieutenant governor, turned the chairmanship over to Neil Whaley (R-Potts Camp), who is entering the third year of his first term in the Senate.

One issue that could come up is a mandatory harvest reporting system for deer. The legislature approved mandatory reporting for turkey hunting before the 2019 spring season, but it left deer reporting on a voluntary basis. Called Game Check, the system allows hunters to do online reporting, including by cell phone app, as well as a toll-free phone call.

"This is not so much a law-enforcement tool, although it could be used as such, I guess, as it is a game-management tool," said Bill Johnson of Brandon. "I'm all in favor of better game management, especially in this era of (chronic wasting disease), and the need for a more regionalized approach to managing our wildlife instead of a statewide approach based totally on non-scientific surveys.

"I do wish that we could make it more about enforcement though, because we all know there are game hogs out there among us who exceed the limit without any fear of repercussion. But I doubt seriously we'll ever see a mandatory tagging system that makes you put a physical tag on the animal before it is ever moved. I do that with turkeys I hunt in Texas, and I've done it when deer and elk hunting out West. I don't see it as a big deal!"

Bills can be tracked easily online during the legislative session. Just visit bill status page of the legislative website at <http://www.legislature.ms.gov/legislation>. ■

## CWD CASES ON THE RISE

**T**he number of CWD-positive deer from Mississippi had nearly doubled with part of the 2019-2020 season remaining.

Mississippi had 19 confirmed cases since 2018 when the season opened last fall. That number had increased to 37 by early January, according to Russ Walsh, chief of staff of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' wildlife bureau chief of staff. Two more cases had been confirmed, and 16 others that have tested positive are awaiting confirmation by a more-thorough testing.

All new cases were reported from counties with previous confirmed CWD deer. Walsh said 15 of the new positives came from Benton County and three from Marshall County, which are both in the North Mississippi CWD Management Zone.

Benton and Marshall counties sit on the border of a heavily infected area of southwest Tennessee, where hundreds of confirmed positives have been found since an initial confirmation in 2018.

Walsh said his agency is hoping to conduct tests on 10,000 deer during the 2019-2020 season but said the MDWFP had only tested about a quarter of that number entering January. He was hoping that more hunters would bring deer to be sampled, especially in the North Mississippi CWD Zone counties.

The good news is that no further positive tests has been found in the South Delta CWD Zone, where Mississippi's first case was confirmed two years ago. Despite thousands of deer tested in the region, only one other positive CWD test was confirmed: during the 2018-19 season. ■



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## DRAWDOWN WILL BRING HAZARDS TO SURFACE OF BUSY, POPULAR LAKE

MDWFP

**F**ebruary is a popular month for fishermen on the state's busiest lake, 33,000-acre Barnett Reservoir near Jackson. Officials at Pearl River Valley Water Supply District, the state agency that oversees operations of the lake, urged boaters to use extreme caution on the water.

"The lake will be drawn down about 2½ feet below normal all February, which will increase the number of obstacles near or at the water line," said John Sigman, PRVWSD's general manager. "It will also mean that only a few of our boat ramps will be open. Be careful launching and be extremely careful while running."

Sigman said The Rez was lowered as part of the emergency action plan related to the outbreak of a sinister invasive plant species, giant salvinia. The plant was first discovered in the Pelahatchie Bay area in 2018, and PRVWSD and its partners have been battling it ever since.

Officials felt that it had eliminated most if not all of the plant in 2019 by using herbicides, burning and dropping the lake level to 296 from January to October. No Salvinia had been spotted for four months. Then, in October, the decision was made to raise the lake back to its normal elevation of 297.5, which could help expose any colonies that had survived. It was thought it would require several weeks if not months to achieve that rise.

"Unfortunately, it happened much quicker," Sigman said. "We had an unseasonable heavy (4- to 6-inch) rain over a two-day

period in October that pushed the lake all the way up basically overnight. We did not need that."

Biologists found one surviving colony in an area where none had ever been spotted. By the time it was located, it had broken free from its base area and was being pushed by wind.

Workers succeeded in using oil booms to surround the location and contain the plant within 36 hours of its finding. The water had shot up so fast, however, that it is unknown if any of the highly mobile plant had escaped.

Sigman said actions were immediately taken to establish a new plan to fight that one area. Because the water around the island location is deeper, it was necessary to lower the lake another foot lower than in 2019 to 295.0.

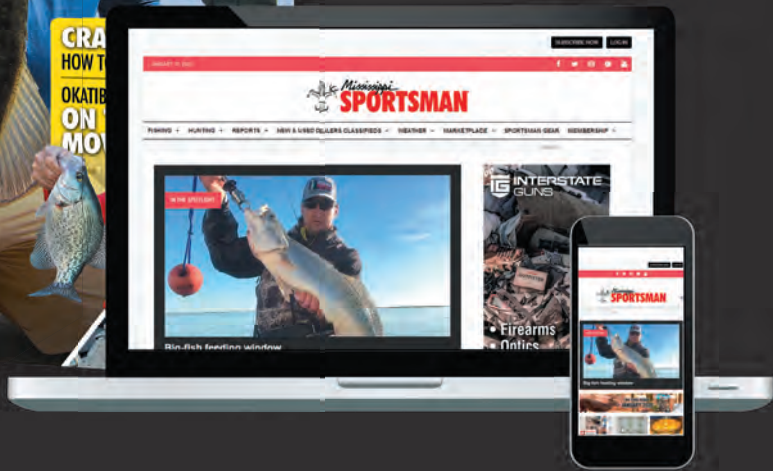
"Our partners will use February at low water to fight this plant with fire and herbicide to eradicate what we can, and at the same time survey the entire Pelahatchie Bay area to see if any spread," he said.

By deadline for this issue, no new areas of Salvinia had been discovered and the existing colony has been treated several times with herbicide. ■

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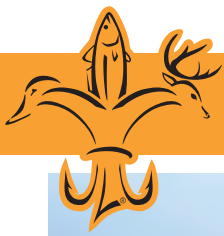
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**Jasmine Robertson**



Jasmine Robertson of Brookhaven caught this 2.85-pound crappie at Eagle Lake on Dec 26, 2019, fishing with her papa.

**Emily Laird**



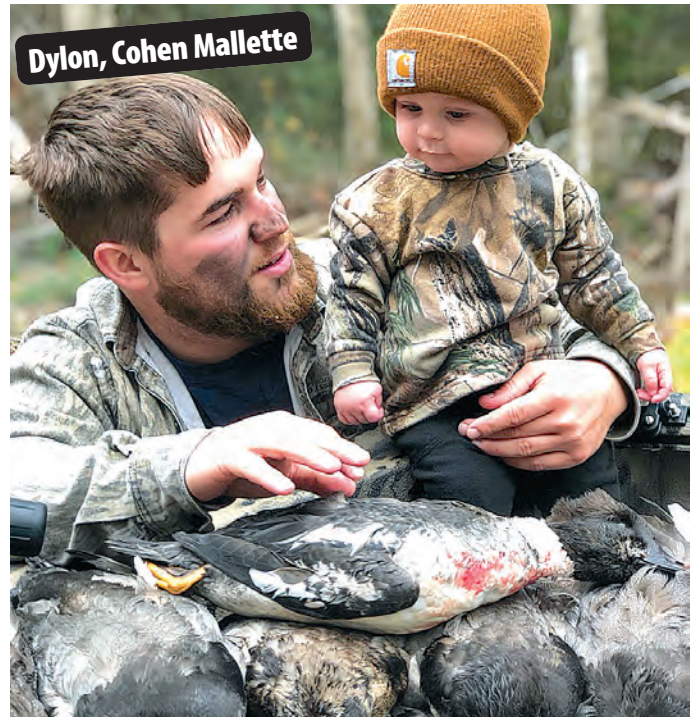
Emily Laird of Saucier with a fine Smith County doe taken opening weekend while hunting with family.

**Layla Rain Hopkins**



Layla Rain Hopkins was hunting in Alcorn County when she killed this deer on Christmas Eve.

**Dylon, Cohen Mallette**



Dylon Mallette and his son, Cohen, pose with a goldeneye taken in Pascagoula.

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**Madelynn Stelly**

Madelynn Stelly, 11, poses with her first deer. It was taken on her grandpa's property in Copiah County on Nov. 23, 2019.



**Graham Gilmore**

Graham Gilmore, 12, of Brandon, with five gadwall and four wood ducks he and Bubba Gilmore killed on Jan. 4.



**Brandon Laird**

Brandon Laird, 10, took his first deer, this Smith County doe, with a .243 while hunting with his dad.



**Alan Grant**

Alan Grant harvested this 205-pound, 9-point, 3-year-old buck on Oct. 29 south of Lexington.

Cody Armstrong's big Montgomery County non-typical was old enough that its teeth were worn down to almost nothing.

# DOUBLE PURPLE HEART RECIPIENT GETS 17-POINTER

## AGING MONTGOMERY COUNTY MONSTER HAD THREE DROP TINES

By Bobby Cleveland



**C**ody Armstrong's monster buck story is atypical, and that doesn't just refer to the hardware atop the old deer's head, which, with 17 points — including three drop tines — on a main-frame 6-point rack, is extremely impressive.

But just describing the Dec. 20 hunt in Montgomery County wouldn't do justice to Armstrong. His story is so much better.

For starters, Armstrong, 27, received two Purple Hearts during his service with the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, both in August 2012.

"I was a sweeper for my unit both times, looking for IEDs (improvised explosive devices)," he said. "The first time I was in a vehicle; the second I was on foot walking through a village. After the second one, I was sent to Texas. To look at me now, you wouldn't notice anything, but I have to wear hearing aids, and I had very bad burns on my legs."

### HUNTERS FOR HEROES

During his time rehabilitating in Texas, Armstrong hooked up with a few guys who had started a new group called Texas Hunters for Heroes.

"They kind of took me into their group and took me hunting at their lease in Texas," Armstrong said. "I was the second guy they chose to take, and I tell you, it was pretty special to get that opportunity."

What that did was stoke a fire that burned deep inside Armstrong, a Brandon native whose family has a history of deer hunting.

"My dad got me started when I was little, and I killed my first deer at 8," he said. "But then dad got cancer and lost a leg and had to quit hunting. He introduced me to the sport, but after that I guess I was sort of self-taught. My sister and I both hunt, and dad bought this 27-acre block of land about 20 or 21 years ago in Montgomery County for us to always have a place to hunt.

"Don't think 27 acres is too small."

Armstrong admits that his family doesn't kill that many trophy bucks on the property, but there's enough to make it interesting. Before Dec. 20, the best to come off the land was his sister's non-typical 14-pointer, taken in 2000.

"Oddly enough, most of what bucks we have are non-typical in some way or other," Armstrong said. "My sister's 14-point had one side that was a perfect five points, but the other had 9 points and looked like somebody put in a vice and squashed it. We noticed he had a hurt leg, and we've been told that could have been what led to the deformed rack."

### BACK IN THE WOODS

Completing his service and treatments in Texas, Armstrong returned to Mississippi and joined the Flowood Police Department. Now, he's entered nursing school, has a girlfriend and started deer hunting again in Montgomery County. Perhaps, maybe hunting a little too much?

"My girlfriend was arguing with me about how much time I was

spending hunting with the holidays coming on," he said. "She wasn't that happy."

It didn't help matters that one buck that Armstrong had been interested in for three years, was starting to show up regularly on trail cameras.

"The first picture I got was Dec. 28, 2016," he said. "But I didn't know about it until after the season ended because I never checked the camera. I checked the camera card after it ended and saw this big deer with drop tines and big brow tines. He was huge."

The big buck returned, briefly, in 2017.

"In 2017, I had pictures of him on Nov. 25 and Dec. 17, never in daylight," Armstrong said. "He was a big main-frame 8 with a big drop and a couple of kickers, but all the photos I had were when he was passing through, like one shot, and it was like he noticed the camera and never came back.

"In 2018, he came one time, at 3 a.m. to Dec. 6. That was it"

## THIS SEASON

Then came 2019, and the buck, now old, increased his visitations.

"I got the first photo Nov. 11, and in the second picture, Dec. 7, he was checking scrapes. I got one photo of him at 6:30 p.m., and the second you could see him sprinting away. It was like he

saw the camera again.

"But then on Dec. 18, I got a photo of a doe coming by the camera at 9 a.m., and he came by two seconds later. The rut apparently brought him out behind this doe in daylight. That night, he came back at 7 p.m., checking his scrape."

Then it got real interesting.

"On Dec. 19, he came in three times — 12:40 p.m., 3:50 p.m. and 6 p.m. — checking scrapes in the small hardwood bottom, like 50 yards by 50 yards, where I had a camera," Armstrong said.

One of those cameras was connected to his cell phone, and he got excited.

"I decided right then I was going to sit in my stand Friday, Saturday and Sunday, daylight to dark. I told my girlfriend I was going and explained the situation about how long I had been chasing this deer."

Armstrong told her it was a once-in-a-lifetime deal, and she agreed.

"I promised that no matter what, I'd be back for all the holiday stuff," he said. "She wasn't thrilled, but she agreed."

He explained to her what it meant to have only a few pictures over three years, and then getting photos regularly. It was basically now or never for Armstrong and the aging buck.

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## ON STAND PLENTY EARLY

On Dec. 20, Armstrong made the hour-and-a-half drive and was in his stand by 5:15 a.m. He was done by noon.

"I got into my Millenium Lock-On stand; I used to hunt from shooting houses and ground blinds, but I switched and learned you needed a tree stand if you were going to kill bucks and not just watch bucks," Armstrong said. "The bottom is all in front of me, and the property line is not far. I had permission on that property, but I had never used it. There was a cutover thicket with tall grass on the neighbor's land, and this bottom was on our property.

"At about 10:45, I noticed grass moving in the cutover. He had been laid up in the grass just off the line, and I saw him stand up. I couldn't see him; all I could see was the grass moving. I watched the grass moving toward the bottom. He had stood up about 75 yards from me and had to walk 20 yards through the grass, and that whole time I had no idea which deer it was. It was coming from the east, and the wind was from him to me. A doe had come through about 7 a.m. and her and her baby had fed for two hours without getting my scent. I felt good about it."

## THE MOMENT ARRIVES

Armstrong waited to see which buck was coming. He had three shooters on camera: a big 7-pointer, a non-typical 9 and this old buck, all behind this one doe.

"Then he stepped out, and I knew it was him," he said. "He was at 75 yards to my 3 o'clock. In the bottom, there are a lot of blown-over trees for cover, and he was on the backside of one of them. I knew I was going to have to shoot through brush, so I chose a friend's 7mm magnum over my 7mm-08 for the bigger bullet. When I told him about the situation, he insisted I take his gun.

"When he gave me what I thought to be broadside shot, I pulled the trigger. He was actually slightly quartering away. My shot was a double lung shot with a bit of the liver. He went 40

yards and fell. If I had glassed over quick enough, I'd have seen him fall!"

Once a giant, the buck weighed only 150 pounds.

"He was old, so old that the taxidermist said he couldn't age him for sure," Armstrong said. "It was the oldest he had ever seen. He put it up against a jawbone from a 7-year-old pen-raised deer, and it wasn't even close. He was at least 8 or 9."

## NON-TYPICAL CHANGES

The buck's antlers weren't as massive as in previous years, but they still had the unique, non-typical characteristics.

"He's like 22½ or 23 inches wide, depending on the angle you measure, and just a main-frame 6 or maybe even a 5," Armstrong said. "The right side is crazy. It has two drop tines among the 11 points, and stickers and a hook on the base. The left side has six points, and one is a drop tine.

"He's had the drop tine his whole life. He was a better buck in 2018 with a bunch of stickers and a drop tine. It was obvious this was the buck that I'd been seeing all these years."

The biggest difference was body mass, and that's a good thing.

"This buck had been easily over 200 pounds in previous years, but was 150 this year," Armstrong said. "I don't think it was from running does or anything, just how old he was. The taxidermist said he'd probably never live another year with those teeth. Heck, he didn't have any teeth.

"I was alone and I had to drag that deer out of the woods. It was 250 yards back to the truck, over logs and stuff. It's so thick you can't get a 4-wheeler in there. I'd drag 50 yards and take a break; drag 50 yards and take a break. Thank God he didn't weigh 200 pounds. I'd have never made it."

## MISSISSIPPI HEROES

The story doesn't end there. Armstrong is starting another chapter by organizing a Mississippi chapter of Hunters for

Heroes, which will be affiliated with the National Hunters for Heroes, matching hunters with injured veterans and first responders. He wants to pass on to others what was passed on to him in Texas.

"We're working on the paperwork now, and I hope we get it going by next hunting season," Armstrong said. "It's a non-profit, and we've got to get our certification in Mississippi. Once we get it set up and added to the national program, we'll be ready to take heroes hunting."

In Armstrong's case, it will be more like a hero taking other heroes. ■

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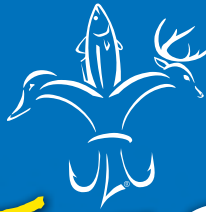
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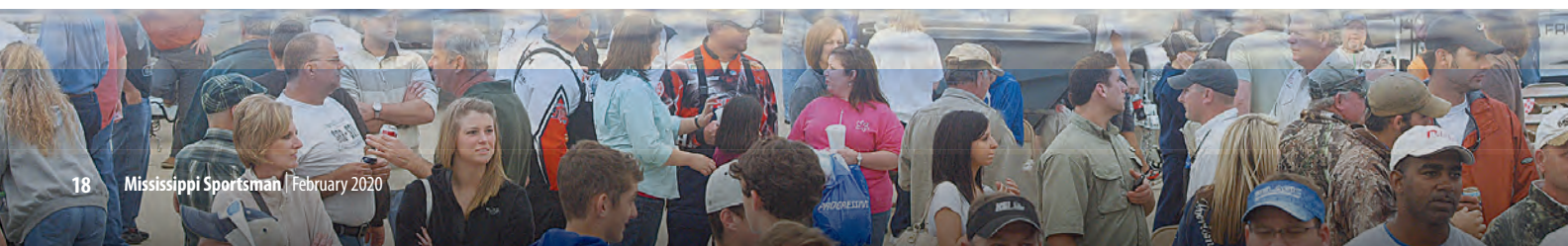
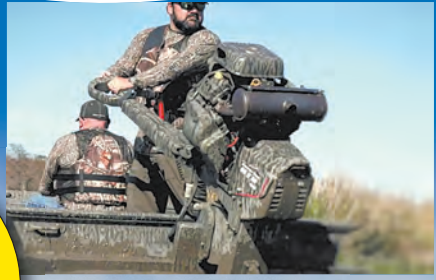


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# HUNTER DOWNS 332 INCHES OF ANTLER IN 2 DAYS

NATCHEZ HUNTER GETS  
1 3-Pointer WITH DROP  
TINE, THEN A 170-INCH  
12-Pointer

By Bobby Cleveland

**C**hris Gann's deer season started getting interesting in mid-December, and then it got extremely exciting very quickly on Dec. 23.

By Christmas Day, Gann, 32, from Natchez, had gifted himself with more than 332 inches of antlers, killing two trophy bucks in two days.

"It was crazy," Gann said. "Prior to this season, the biggest buck I'd ever taken was a 125-inch 10-point. Then, I killed a 162-inch 13 point with a drop tine on Dec. 23, and the next day I took a 170-inch 12-point, within 200 to 300 yards of each other.

Like Gann said, it was crazy.

## SIGHTS SET DOUBLE

Hunting private land in Adams County, Gann knew he had two trophy bucks on the property and was hoping to eventually be in the right place at the right time. He had trail-cam pictures of

Chris Gann with the 162-inch 13 point with a drop tine he killed on Dec. 23.



both, originally from the same general vicinity.

"I got my first picture of the big 12-point on Oct. 20, and I'd been hunting him ever since," Gann said. "Funny thing, that buck disappeared right after that, but I was getting hundreds of pictures of the drop-tine buck. He had moved slightly to a new area. I wasn't having any luck hunting the big 12, so I moved and started hunting the other.

"I had so many pictures of the drop-tine buck, which was the smaller of the two deer, so I pretty much had him patterned. I knew where he was bedding, where he was feeding, which trails he was traveling in the morning and those in the evening, which scrapes he was tending and which rubs he was visiting. I thought I had a better chance to get him than I did the big 12. I figure he moved into the nearby area after getting run out by the bigger buck."

Gann moved over to the new location, and on Dec. 23, at 5:15

p.m., in the final minutes of legal shooting hours, he saw a big deer with "a lot of antlers" follow a doe into a field.

Gann knew exactly what he was looking at and put the buck down, then devised a plan to use the dead animal's remains to help fool the other buck.

## THE LURE

"I cut out his tarsal glands and his bladder, and used the bladder to squirt urine on the glands," Gann said. "I hung them in two trees about 50 yards and 80 yards from my stand in his area. I was hoping he'd sense the presence of an old rival, and that would bring him out."

Good logic, knowing the deer were entering the final stages of the pre-rut, and establishing and maintaining dominance would work.

Gann added calls from a bleat can and a grunt tube to entice the buck, and on Dec. 24, he put his plan into action.

"I was at work at my car lot in Woodville when I got a picture of him at 3 p.m.

"He came out at 5:20 in between the two trees where I'd hung the glands," Gann said. "He came through all puffed up, like he was looking to kick somebody's butt. He wasn't chasing a doe, but he looked like he meant business."

Instead of finding the rival buck, the 12-pointer instead found something much worse, a bullet from Gann's .308 Remington Model 7 rifle.

The drop-tine buck carried 13 points on an 11-point main frame that had a 17½-inch inside spread and 5½-inch bases. It weighed 185 pounds and was aged at 4½ years.

The 12-point was just that, a main-frame 12, that produced 170 inches on the dot. It is extremely symmetrical except for 5¾- and 6¾-inch bases. The longest tines, the two G2s, were both 11¾ inches. It was 16½ inches wide and was aged at 5½ years.

"I still can't believe it, 332 inches in two days," Gann said. "I was like 'Merry Christmas to me.'" ■



Chris Gann killed this 170-inch 12-point on Dec. 24 on private land in Adams County.

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# CRAPPIE 101:

USING MULTIPLE RODS

■ By Phillip Gentry



**IF TWO RODS ARE BETTER THAN ONE, HOW 'BOUT 12? LEARN THE TWO MOST-POPULAR TECHNIQUES FOR TROLLING USING MULTIPLE RODS.**

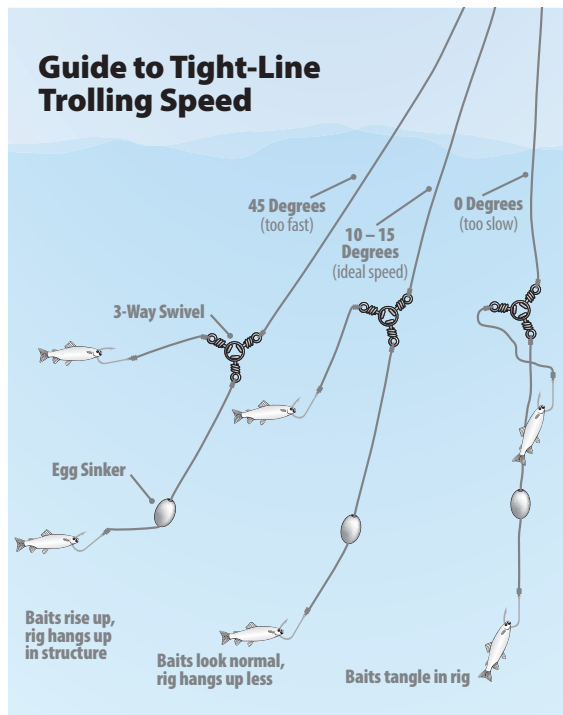
# With the promise of the coming spring, both crappie and fishermen are preparing.

It's fairly easy for slabs: wait until the water temperature is right, then move to the bank. Anglers have choices, the biggest one being whether to fish with a single pole or involve multiple-pole strategies.

Tight-lining is a multiple-rod, vertical technique in which the rods are positioned around the bow of a boat.

Multiple-pole strategies involved two main techniques: tight-lining and long-lining, also referred to as pushing or pulling. Both involve multiple rods and rod holders, and from above, they give a boat a water bug-like appearance. The boat positions the baits or lures; you watch the rod tips to detect bites, then lift the rod to set the hook.

Anglers tight-lining normally have their rods around the bow of the boat, and they use relatively



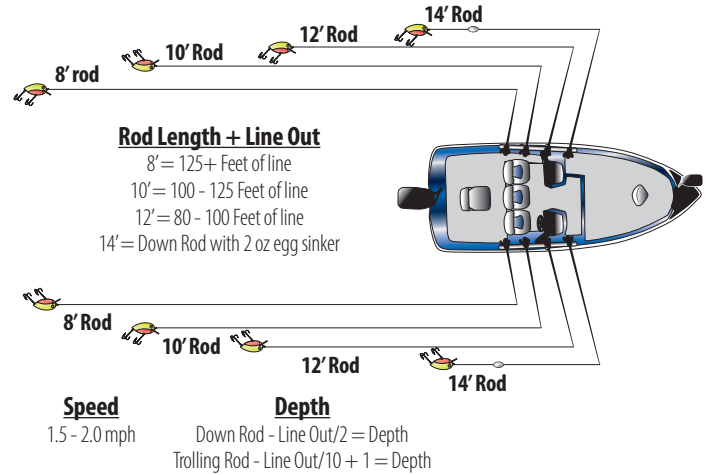
heavy weights to keep lines vertical. Long-lining has rods near the stern, pulling baits behind the boat.

It could be argued that the originators of modern, tight-line trolling are Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman, who are 7-time national champions. They have made tight-line trolling the most-popular crappie fishing tactic.



Philip Gentry

## Crankbait trolling at a glance



“It’s actually pretty simple,” Capps said. “From the fish’s perspective, he’s down there hanging out on a brush pile or a stake bed or hanging on the edge of a creek channel, and suddenly, here comes 16 baits right in his face.”

The benefit of tight-lining is absolute depth control. Because the line is vertical in the water column — thanks to the weight — anglers can dial in the depth of baits.

Tight-line trollers typically don’t move their boats much faster than about .5 mph. Some will use heavier weights and bump up their trolling speeds in order to cover more water in less time, but the basic idea is the same.

According to Coleman, tight-line trolling works best when the boat is following a known line, such as the edge of a creek channel or river channel, and the angler is targeting the drop-off and structure related to it. Crappie use contour changes when traveling from place to place, so tight-lining along a contour line is a great way to intercept fish.

“When we first started using GPS, Ronnie and I would place a waypoint on the GPS whenever we would catch a big crappie,” Coleman said. “At the end of the day, whether we were trying to follow the creek channel or not, most of the biggest fish came off the drop. That changed a lot about the way we trolled. Now we almost always follow the contour line.”

It’s hard to argue when long-lining first became popular. Fishermen have been trolling hooks behind their boats for ages. The advent of long rods to space out offerings and give crappie a variety of baits to choose from helped long-line trolling become a staple tactic for many.

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**R**od Wall of Ninety Six, S.C., fell in love with long-line trolling and said it's his go-to tactic anytime crappie move from one pattern to the next. "Long-lining works best when fish are in transition," said Wall, a successful tournament crappie pro. "Long-lining also works better when crappie are relating to roving schools of baitfish than when specifically relating to structure."

Like anglers who tight-line troll, long-liners may follow a contour line, but they most likely will be trolling the expanse of a flat. This allows the angler to cover more water as the boat speed of long-liners is twice that of tight-lining.

"Crappie will follow a contour line like a creek channel, and that's a great place to look for them, but active, feeding fish are often be all over a flat chasing baitfish. That's the best situation to find crappie when you're long lining," he said.

The depth of presentation when long-line trolling is a function of boat speed, the amount of line out, the weight of the jig and line diameter. Each plays a part in how deep jigs swim and whether you reach the level the crappie are suspended at. Wall referenced trolling a 1/16-ounce jighead pulled on 6-pound line the distance of an average cast — 40 to 50 feet — behind the boat, where the variable is boat speed. At .7 to 1.2 mph, baits will reach depths of 6 to 10 feet.

"To be good at depth control means you spend a lot of time pulling jigs," said Wall. "Find a 10-foot flat with a level bottom,

Long-line trolling allows a crappie fisherman to cover a great deal of water and different depths, or troll across a featureless flat when fish may be scattered.



then experiment with different variables to find what combination would put you occasionally skimming bottom, then work from there on works best in your boat, your baits, and your setup." ■



**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.

## LONG-LINING CRANKBAITS

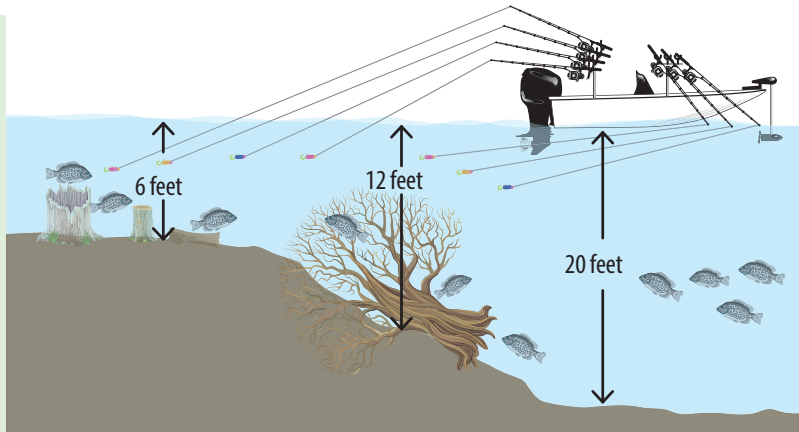
Jigs are not the only baits that can be trolled for crappie. Many anglers have found success replacing jigs with shallow- to medium-running crankbaits when trolling, one of them being Kent Driscoll, a pro-staff member for B'n'M.

Driscoll pulls crankbaits on eight rods — four on each side of his boat. He uses super-stiff rods that keeps crankbaits from putting too much bend in the rod while trolled. He graduates the rods in length, starting with an 8-foot rod nearest the transom, then a 10-footer, a 12-footer and finally, a 14-foot rod nearest the bow.

"That's your basic setup," he said. "You're going to want to vary your speed from 1.5 to 1.7 to 1.8 — sometimes faster if you can get away with it; sometimes slower if the fish are in a negative mood. You just have to vary speeds to figure out what they want."

The depth a crankbait runs is a coordination of variables including the amount of line out, the working depth of the crankbait and boat speed. Driscoll usually trolls at 1.5 mph and 2.0 mph, using his variable-speed trolling motor. Such precise graduations in speed require the use of a GPS-enabled electronics system that will measure speed to the tenth of an mph.

Driscoll said that anglers trolling crankbaits will catch the lion's share of crappie by targeting suspended fish. In order to target



crappie suspended at a certain depth, he uses a line-out formula. As an example, If he wants to target fish that are holding 12 feet deep, he lets out 110 feet of line. His formula is:

Amount of line out divided by 10, plus 1 foot. So to get to 12 feet he lets out 110 feet of line. One-hundred-ten divided by 10 is 11, plus 1, is 12 feet.

Anglers often add weight to trolled crankbaits. Using a 2-ounce weight in front of the bait, Driscoll doubles the line out for the depth he wants to fish. To reach 12 feet, he lets out 24 feet of line.

"Some days, the crappie want the bait slower, and some days, they want it a little faster" he said. "Covering as much water as possible in order to find willing fish is another secret to the formula. When you get those variables figured out, you can really wear some big crappie out." ■

**W**ith frigid temperatures and brisk winds, Okatibbee Lake was ripe for the picking last February, so we planned a quick trip after work to test the water. Overcast skies and a chill in the air kept most folks off the water, but Ken Murphy joined me for a little rest and relaxation. That was the plan, of course, but the rest and relaxation was something that we didn't get to experience after a bone-chilling ride across the water.

We pulled up to a shallow stump field flat along a shallow creek run and started fishing.

Wham! A crappie slammed into Murphy's jig-and-cork rig, and he quickly boated his first sac-a-lait of the day. I pitched out a marker buoy so we could stay on the spot and cast near the spot he'd caught the fish. Wham! Another scrumptious crappie inhaled my jig, and it was on.

Cast after cast went to the spot near a submerged stump, and we caught them as fast as we could get

to the spot. We were fishing with lightweight spinning tackle and fishing a jig-and-cork rig very slowly. Jerk, reel, jerk, reel — in a rhythmic fashion. After we found the stump, we'd cast to it and let the jig-and-cork stay there for a bit, and the crappie couldn't stand it.

"I prefer using a hot pink and chartreuse jig and grub under a special crappie cork," said Murphy. "You just can't beat the jig-and-cork rig in cold weather, as the fish are lethargic and won't chase after anything moving fast."

Back in the 1970s, J. P. Nolen taught me how to use the jig-and-cork rig to catch lethargic crappie in cold weather. While the slabs won't chase a fast-moving jig or spinner rig, they will inhale a jig when presented properly.

We located the crappie staging around stumps in 3 to 5 feet of water on the edge of a ditch. They were getting ready to spawn on the old stumps, and they were ready to be plucked. Due to the annual fall draw-down and below-average rain during the winter, the lake was still really low, which makes it great for people who know the off-shore ditches, flats and stump fields.

**FEBRUARY MAY BE FRIGID, BUT SLAB CRAPPIE ARE GETTING READY FOR THEIR BIG MOVE AND ARE THERE FOR THE TAKING — IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK.** ■ By Mike Giles



Lake Okatibbee



**Okatibbee?  
OH BOY!**

**LOW WATER SPOTS >**

## LOW WATER SPOTS

If you're fishing the flats, you're looking for stumps, submerged structure, stick-ups or anything that will provide cover for staging fish.

After you locate a stump or stump field, pitch the jig-and-cork rig near a stump and let it sit for a few seconds before twitching it. You can work the cork very slowly and entice strikes after you find their location.

In our case, we found an area that had several stumps on the edge of a ditch, so we anchored the boat and cast to them. Sometimes, we caught two at a time and several around one stump. When the action slowed a bit, we'd work the other stumps and keep going back and working the ones we'd started with.

The crappie were obviously moving in and staging by the stumps, as they kept biting until dark when we couldn't see to cast.

## FISH THE JIG-AND-CORK RIG

A jig-and-cork rig is very versatile, and it keeps anglers from losing too many jigs on the stumps as you can adjust the depth so the jig sits right above the stump, out of harm's way.

The jig-and-cork rig can be enhanced with the addition of a minnow or Crappie Nibble during cold weather. Sometimes it takes a little something extra, like a minnow to make slabs bite. Some people also use Crappie Nibbles, which may entice them to bite, but more important, makes them hold onto the jig long enough for you to feel the strike and set the hook.

Although some fishermen prefer fishing minnows on a cork-and-hook rig, the jig-and-cork rig is even more versatile, as the jig is more compact and will not get hung up as easily, and the minnow adds to the enticement.

After a lot of culling, we wound up with our two-man Okatibbee limit of 60 crappie, which we promptly took home and cleaned for the frying pan.

## HIGH-WATER CRAPPIE

Okatibbee is one of the most-prolific crappie lakes in Mississippi, but anglers must be versatile and ready to change techniques at a moment's notice. Due to the nature

of the flood-control lake, drastic water-level changes can take place on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis, and you must adjust your fishing if you want to catch fish.

If the water is low, you fish the ditches and stump fields. If you have plenty of rainfall, you're going to have high water, and fish will move to shallow coves and stage in the



grass and lily pad fields, which are actually just stems in February but still hold fish.

Think crappie won't be in less than 3 feet of water in February? Think again. As the water warms, crappie know it and will move to those shallow water areas and get ready to spawn. They may not chase jigs, minnows or baitfish,

but they will gobble up your offerings if presented in the proper presentation.

Bruce Roberts is a master of finding crappie, and he's equally adept at finding them on offshore flats or in the grass and bushes in shallow water.

"I like to catch them any way I can," Roberts said. "But I really like to feel them thump that crappie jig, too. If they move up shallow into the grass and pad stems, I'll take a jig pole and a single jig and work the cover really good, hitting every piece of grass or structure, and usually catch a pile of them."

On one occasion, I fished with Roberts when he looked like he was dressed for Colorado snow, but he was actually dressed to catch Okatibbee Lake crappie, and catch them he did.



Bruce Roberts works grass and catches crappie on jigs during a February crappie outing on Okatibbee Lake. **OPPOSITE:** Mike Giles displays a prespawn crappie caught out of the grass beds during high water caught on a jig.

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**R**oberts pulled up to a shallow grass field and put down both of his Power Poles and promptly started catching the succulent fish.

“It never gets too windy to fish the shallow grass when you have Power Poles,” Roberts said. “I’ll put down the poles and then work every clump of grass or pad stems around the boat with a black jighead and a red and chartreuse grub. Crappie have always like that color combo on Okatibbee, and I’ve caught thousands on it there.”

Roberts has caught a limit of crappie in one spot without ever having to move the boat, quite an accomplishment but, routine for an angler who has a lifetime of experience and wealth of knowledge on Okatibbee.

Roberts uses a light, 10- to 11-foot crappie pole with a single jig with a red/chartreuse, white, or black/chartreuse tail grub when probing the grass. He simply drops the jig slowly into the grass or next to a bush or stick-up and jigs it up and down a time or two, then waits for the thump of the crappie biting.

If he doesn’t get a bite, he’ll pick the jig up and drop it by the next piece of cover. Watching him dissect a grass patch is akin to watching a skilled surgeon at work. He knows what to do and where to drop the jig. He rarely gets hung up, and if he does, he grabs his line and runs the rod tip down to the jig and pops it off the structure.

Nathan Hodgins caught this crappie on a jig and cork rig while fishing Okatibbee Lake.



Drop your bait vertically next to each piece of cover you find; some of them will hold nice slabs like this one.

## LIGHT TACKLE FOR PRESPAWN

If you’re targeting crappie during cold weather, you need some light, sensitive equipment. If the water is high and crappie are in the grass or brush, use a 10- or 11-foot B’n’M crappie pole teamed with 6/20 braid, which gives you thin sensitive line with the strength to pull the slabs from the brush.

When crappie are on shallow flats and along submerged ditches, use a 6½-foot B’n’M TCB spinning combo. The rod is light as a feather and stout enough for catching slab crappie, but sensitive enough to feel that twang when the crappie strikes. Use this combo when fishing a jig-and-spinner combo or a jig-and-cork rig.

If you’re looking for some hot crappie action then head to the lake as soon as possible because if you don’t you’ll miss out on some of the best fishing of the year. ■



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

**B**ROCK MOSLEY worked a football-head jig slowly over a gravel bar on Pickwick Lake until he felt an almost imperceptible strike. Mosley whipped his rod back and set the hook on a lunker smallmouth. He fought the bass, finally wore him down and brought him into the boat, pausing only for a few seconds before releasing him and getting back to the business of finding another bad-to-the-bone-bass.

Mosley, of Collinsville, recently qualified for his first Bassmaster Classic, which will be held this spring on Alabama's Lake Guntersville. It will be the culmination of a lifelong dream. If there's one thing Mosley knows more than any other thing required of a professional bass angler, he needs to be versatile and open-minded when fishing a tournament, or any lake, for that matter.

"Depending upon the type of winter we are having, the fish could still be in their winter pattern during February," Mosley said. "February is a great time to catch trophies, and the fish still have to eat, no matter how cold the water."

But Mosley said it is critical to take note of the weather conditions to confirm what pattern you need to fish.

**WINTER WEATHER HANGING ON >**

**SLOW DOWN AND FISH THE RIGHT BAITS, AND FEBRUARY CAN BE LUNKER CITY FOR BASS FISHERMEN ON A HANDFUL OF MISSISSIPPI LAKES — AS LONG AS YOU TAKE THIS PRO'S ADVICE.**

■ By Mike Giles

# FEBRUARY'S BASS FROLICS



## WINTER WEATHER HANGING ON

“If the water temperature is below 50 degrees, you’ve got to slow it down,” Mosley said. “I’ll fish a football jig if the water is really cold — and fish really slow. My two favorite lures this time of year are football jigs and suspending jerkbaits.”

Mosley lets the bass dictate how fast he fishes, but it will usually be slow until he determines otherwise.

“I’ll really slow down, slower than most could imagine this time of year,” he said. “The bass are lethargic, but you’ll have an opportunity to catch a 7- or 8-poundunker in February if you hit the right spots and give them what they’re looking for.”

Mosley said it’s really hard to fish a suspending jerkbait unless you have confidence in it — and if you know what to do and how to fish it.

“I’ll make a long cast and crank it down to the depth I want it and just work it really slow, jerking it and pausing for long periods,” he said. “We have some of the best anglers in the world out here on the tour, and you’ve got to learn how to catch bass in all conditions. The suspending jerkbait is one of the top cold-weather lures used on the tour.”

Mosley likes to keep it simple when fishing jerkbaits. He prefers a shad- or clown-colored jerkbait during the winter. And if he finds an area with bass, he can really pick them apart with a Mega Bass jerkbait, which suspends right out of the box.

## MILD-WINTER TACTICS

“If we’ve had a mild winter, it only takes a few days to warm the water, and if we get several warm, sunny days in a row in February, the bass will start thinking about spawning, and the action can be good really fast,” Mosley said.

“If the water gets to 52 or 53 degrees on Ross Barnett, they’ll get ready to spawn,” he said. “If it gets above 50 degrees on Pickwick they’ll head to their staging areas and be ready to spawn in a hurry.”

“The last few years, the Alabama rig has really been tough on Pickwick in the fall and winter,” Mosley said. “It’s not as popular as it once was, but for those who know how and where to use it, they’re still killing them on it this time of year.”

According to Mosley, it’s the time of year when anglers can expect to catch 5-fish, 25- to 27-pound bags on the famed Tennessee-Tombigbee lake.

## PICKWICK GRAVEL BARS

One thing you hear a lot about on Pickwick Lake is gravel bars. “The bass will stage on those gravel bars along the river, and crankbaits are really good this time of year,” Mosley said. “If you want to catch 5-pound smallmouth, then this is the time and place to do it.”

Mosley targets ledges and gravel bars in the 8- to 12-foot range and the 10- to 16-foot range.

“I’ll have crankbaits rigged for both depths; that way, I can cover some ground and find out where they’re located on that particular day without having to spend a lot of time switching lures back and forth,” he said.

“During the winter, when the winter bite is on, I like to throw anything that has a craw color,” said Mosley. “They just like that crawfish-colored crankbaits during the winter. After the water warms up to 58 degrees, I’ll switch back to the shad color. “You just have to go fishing and find out what depths they’re located in on the day you’re fishing,” he said.

A big swimbait is a really productive tool in a fisherman’s hands on Ross Barnett Reservoir in the winter. **INSET:** Brock Mosley shows off a big smallmouth bass he caught in a tournament last year.



Dan Kihler

Bass will hit a variety of baits late in the winter, but all have one thing in common; they have to perform when retrieved slowly.



Dan Kibler

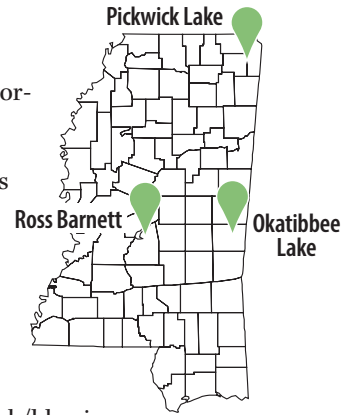
## ROSS BARNETT

“Ross Barnett is one of my favorite lakes to fish,” Mosley said. “As the water warms up into the low 50s on the warmer days when the air temperatures are in the mid- to upper-60s, you’ll have a wave of fish go shallow,” Mosley said. “That’s when I like to use a Net Bait Big Spanky (swimbait) in black/blue and throw it as far and as shallow as I can. Black/blue is my favorite color in that lure.”

“That’s a good way to locate fish this time of year and they really love that swimbait,” he said.

Mosley has caught many lunker bass on the Big Spanky by swimming it through pad stems during the prespawn period as well. There’s nothing quite like a bass smashing a swimbait when it is bumping off of pad stems, brush and shallow objects.

“Black buzzbaits are also good once the water temperature reaches 52 degrees. You won’t get many bites, but when you do, it’s going to be the right one,” Mosley said. “And be sure to pay attention to the ditches and creek channels when you’re fishing shallow. Local tournament anglers have used the black buzzbaits to catch a lot of lunker bass on Barnett during the prespawn in February and March.”



### OKATIBBEE LAKE >

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Brock Mosley displays a couple of bass that helped him qualify for next month's Bassmaster Classic on Alabama's Guntersville Lake.



## OKATIBBEE LAKE

Usually in February, Okatibbee will be at winter pool, part of the annual drawdown that helps the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prevent flooding downstream. That's the key to locating and finding bass during the prespaw.

"After the water is pulled down to winter pool, the bass will pull back to the ditches," Mosley said. "Follow the ditches until you find a point in the creek and fish that thoroughly. It's also a good idea to work the ditches that lead to spawning flats, because you'll find lunkers staging, and they're ready to strike at a moment's notice."

Mosley has caught some huge limits fishing the ditches during the winter — prespaw months on Okatibbee — by working creeks and ditches. Some of his past catches included five-fish limits of bass averaging 4 to 5 pounds.

Just imagine catching a limit of 5-pound bass. It can happen, and Mosley has caught his share as well. While that may be the exception rather than the rule, it can happen during the prespaw in February if you find the right staging area and get onto a school of big fish.

"If you're looking to catch a 5- to 7-pound bass on Okatibbee Lake, then February is definitely the time to do it," Mosley said. "But you've got to get out there and work those prime areas and slow down."

When you find the right spots, it can seem magical, and it doesn't take a magic lure to catch them. You've just got to get on the water and fish those stumps, structure, points and creek bends along the ditches and stay alert, because you might just find the mother lode staging area chock full of 5- to 7-pound bass.

Whether you want to target smallmouths at Pickwick or largemouths on Ross Barnett or Okatibbee, Mosley's patterns will work. In fact, they'll work just about anywhere in Mississippi on similar waters. ■

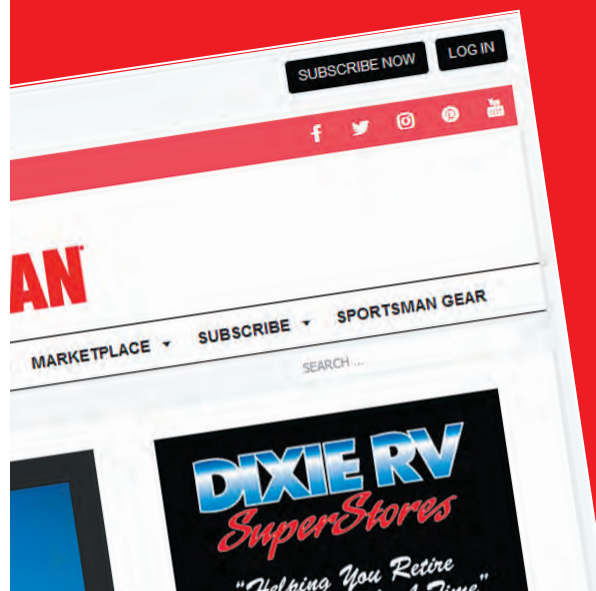


Mike Giles of Meridian has been hunting and fishing Mississippi since 1965. He is an award-winning wildlife photographer, writer, seminar speaker and guide.

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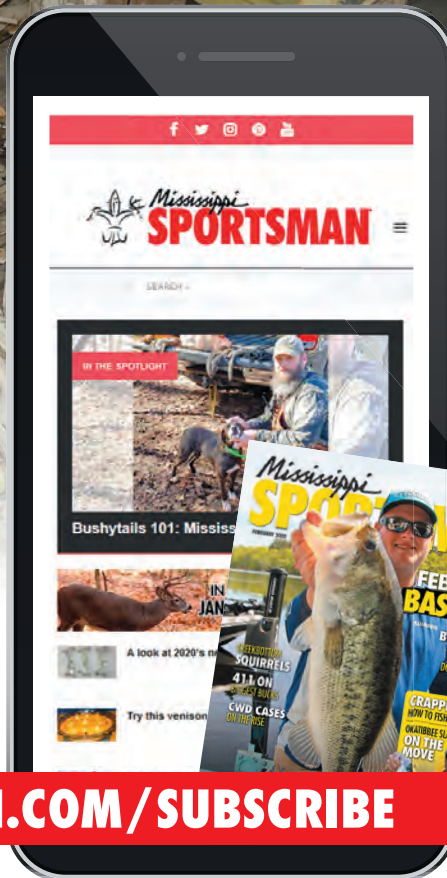
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## LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias



"You may have to fight the structure in Bogue Homa to land a bass there," Paul Elias said. "If you use a follow-up lure like the Spring-R worm on 10-pound test line, you may get your line broken. But the fight is worth it to catch a bass that size."

# WEATHER IS KEY FOR FEBRUARY BOGUE HOMA LUNKERS

**H**istorically, February is one of the craziest months for bass fishing, with 50- to 70-degree weather one day and 20- to 30-degree weather the next.

February is a spawning month for the bass at Bogue Homa. We'll have some early spawners that move up when the weather's warm and some late spawners that will hold near the dam when the weather's cold. So, the weather will determine how and where I'll fish.

At this time of year, you can catch a very big bass at Bogue Homa. Most fish there will spawn from the first to the middle of February, weather permitting. On warm days, I'll concentrate primarily on small clumps of lily pad stems where the early spawners will show up first. I'll start fishing with a 3/8-ounce, black/blue bladed jig on a 6.4:1 Bruin reel with 23-pound test White Peacock fluorocarbon on a 7-foot-4 heavy action FX Custom Rod.

I'll cast to either side of the lily pad stems, use a relatively slow retrieve,

pause the bait once it reaches the clump and then restart the retrieve. These clumps will be in very shallow water — only 2 to 3 feet deep. You don't want the bladed jig to fall all the way to the bottom. By pausing the bait, the lure will stop and drop a few inches and may cause a reaction strike.

## BIG, CYPRESS BASS

However, the lake is full of old cypress stumps, logs and trees. Your boat may be sitting in only 2 feet of water, and you'll have a tough fight with those stumps and standing cypress trees, but that's where the bigger bass will hold. You'll have to fight the cover to get into position to make a cast. Once you get hooked up, you'll have to fight hard to get a nice bass out of that thick cover.

Most bass anglers won't go to war with this environment and risk losing as many bass as they hook. However, I believe the effort is well worth the price you pay. An area in the northeastern part of the lake

has lanes in it, and the very back end of the middle lane is home to a place that has proven for me to be the most productive for February bass.

## FOLLOW-UP BAIT

Because the water at Bogue Homa is so shallow, generally you'll see the bass move when you cast and the lure hits the water, or when the bass misses the bladed jig. When that happens, I'll fish with a 7-foot-4 FX Custom spinning rod with 10-pound bass braid tied to an 8- to 10-foot leader of 8-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon that I tie together with a J-knot.

I'll cast a green pumpkin Spring-R



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.

You should catch some nice sized bass at Bogue Homa this month, and you won't have much competition for them.

worm back to the spot where I've seen the bass. It may take the worm when it's falling, but if it doesn't, I'll let the worm sit motionless on the bottom for some time. The bass still may be looking at the worm, move closer to it and then inhale it. You'll probably feel a peck on your line and see the line moving off to the side. That's when you set the hook. I don't put a weight in front of the worm, and I don't cast it more than 30 to 40 feet to the spot where I've seen the bass move.

When you're fishing 10-pound leader and hook a big bass, getting it out of that cover requires all the fishing and landing skills an angler has. However, I prefer to get the bite and then worry about how I'll get the bass out of the cover instead of not getting the bite at all.



Mann's Baby 1-Minus

## FISH DITCH TURNS

Once a cold front comes through an area, the female bass will pull out of the shallow water and hold on ditch turns lined with big cypress stumps. I'll usually fish a red Baby 1-Minus crankbait there. The top banks of the ditches will be 1½ to 3 feet deep, and the bottoms 4 to 5 feet deep. You want the crankbait to hit the top of the ditch. A big female will usually attack the lure when it bounces off the stump. I'll be fishing with a 7-foot-1, medium-action/light-tip FX Custom rod with a 6.4:1 Bruin reel and 20-pound fluorocarbon, using a medium retrieve. ■



## GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Stocking may supplement a bass population, but the fish must survive and grow for three or four years to achieve a size interesting to anglers.



# IS BASS STOCKING NEEDED?

LARGEMOUTHS CAN RECOVER FROM CATASTROPHIC EVENTS, AND WILD FISH DO BETTER THAN THEIR EXPENSIVE, HATCHERY REARED BROTHERS

**In** September 2004, Hurricane Ivan struck Alabama's Gulf coast. Heavy rains caused a massive runoff of decomposing loads of organic matter flushed out of the watershed, resulting in a lot of oxygen-depleted water. Extensive fish kills took place throughout much of the Tensas-Mobile River Delta. Most of the dead fish were shad, but the oxygen depletion also killed largemouth bass.

Assessments by biologists with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries documented a record-low 2004 year-class of largemouth bass. Assessments in 2007, the year the 2004 year-class would have recruited to the fishery, also documented a record-low abundance of catchable-size bass. Anglers campaigned for ADWFF to stock bass to restore the fishery.

## STOCK BAYOU BASS

In 2009, ADWFF biologists initiated efforts to stock two bayous, one 30 acres and the other 170 acres, in the Delta to evaluate whether stocking would speed the recovery of the fishery.

Adult largemouth bass were collected from the study areas from 2009 to 2011 and spawned at the Marion State Fish Hatchery. The progeny were reared on live forage to 5 to 6 inches and stocked at densities of 20 to 32 fish per acre in the springs of 2010, 2011 and 2012. The bass populations were intensively monitored to assess the effects of stocking.

Survival of age-1 fish — in their second year of growth — that were stocked was similar to wild bass in the first year of evaluation but much lower during the second and third years of evaluation. The proportion of stocked fish in a year-class was highest shortly after stocking but

steadily declined two and three years after stocking. The average wild fish was bigger than the average stocked fish.

Overall, the contribution of the stocked fish to the established, wild populations was low.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The stocked fish made a minor contribution to the bass population after the fish kill, but the contribution decreased with time. The study, although designed to assess the effect of stocking on population recovery, also demonstrated the



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

resilience of bass populations in the wild to drastic, short-term population reductions.

Apparently, sufficient healthy largemouth found refuges from the widespread oxygen depletions that caused the massive fish kill. With adequate habitat available, the surviving bass were able to repopulate the fishery; in this case, it required about six years.

Hurricanes are devastating events in many ways, and six years for recovery of a fishery is a long time. Could stocking have shortened this time period? Maybe a little, but not much.

A weak or missing year-class cannot be determined until the next spring. And documenting a weak or failed year-class rarely triggers immediate stocking. Every year, hatchery production is limited, and fish are produced for specific stocking needs. Stocking to fulfill an unexpected need means other, predetermined stocking needs must go unfilled.

Large fish have better post-stocking survival than small fish. Stocking large fish, therefore, is more likely to accomplish the intent of stocking: increasing the population size. Producing larger bass for stocking takes time. It also is expensive and requires a lot of hatchery ponds to rear both the bass and the forage they need to grow. Hatchery managers have minimized the need for hatchery space by rearing young bass on prepared feeds similar to the way catfish are raised, but the survival of these pellet-fed fish in the wild may not be as good as fish reared on live forage.

Fish for stocking could have been available as soon as one year after the catastrophic event. With good survival, these fish would grow to catchable size in about three years. Yes, stocking may have accelerated the return of the fishery by one or two years. But the question remains: is stocking a good management strategy?

## **COST EFFECTIVE?**

The Mobile-Tensas Delta covers approximately 20,000 acres of aquatic habitat. Stocking this large an area, even at the lowest stocking rate used in the ADWFF study, would have required about 400,000 fish. Based on a survey of state fisheries agencies I compiled last year, the cost of production of large fingerling largemouth bass ranges from \$0.50 to \$2.80 per fish. Assuming hatchery production capacity is available, accelerating the return of the fishery by a few years would be very expensive. Stocking smaller fingerlings could be done sooner and at lower cost, but the survival of these fish is much less predictable.

Natural reproduction can restore a bass fishery at no cost after an environmental catastrophe if the habitat remains intact. However, a little patience is required. ■



Quality bass will be scarce for several years after an environmental catastrophe but the population will rebound.

**HUNTING SEASONS**

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

**WATERFOWL SEASONS**

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

**DEER SEASON**

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
<b>Northeast</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 22 Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 17-31 (archery/primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 9-22 (youth)
<b>East Central</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 22 Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 9-22 (youth)
<b>Southwest</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 22 Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 17-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan.16(dogs) Nov. 9-Jan. 22 (youth)
<b>Southeast</b>	Oct. 15-Nov. 22 Jan. 23-31 (either-sex arch-primitive) Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 16(dogs) Nov. 3-Feb. 15(youth)
<b>Delta*</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 22 (See www.mdwfp.com for details on special Oct. 15-Jan. 5 South Delta Season)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 23-Jan. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 9-22 (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/ mahoghany/yellowtail/dog snapper	12" TL@	10/day aggregate
Mutton snapper	16" TL@	10/day
Queen/blackfin/silk/winchman snapper	none@	10/day aggregate
Vermillion/lane snapper	10"/8" TL@	20/day aggregate
Gray triggerfish	14" FL@	20/day
Golden/blueline/anchor/blackline tilefish	none@	20/day
King mackerel	24" FL@	2/day
Spanish mackerel	no minimum size@	15/day
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL@	3/day
Bigeye tuna	27" CFL@	no limit
Tripletail	18" TL	3/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	15"	15/day

@ For openings and closings of federally regulated fish and updated size limits, visit [gulfcouncil.org](http://gulfcouncil.org).

**FRESHWATER**

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/](http://www.mdwfp.com/)

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

\* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

# CREEKBOTTOM SQUIRRELS



WITH DEER HUNTERS LARGELY OUT OF THE WOODS, IT'S TIME FOR MISSISSIPPI HUNTERS TO GET IN ON SOME GREAT SMALL-GAME HUNTING.

■ By David Hawkins

**Is** there anything new about squirrel hunting? It was the most-popular hunting sport at a time not too long ago. It requires simple equipment and is an inexpensive means of outdoor entertainment. If you wish it to be, it's a great way to introduce a new hunter to the sport, especially children.

Squirrels are easy to clean and can be very good table fare. At a time when woodsmanship is a dying art, the lowly squirrel hunt opens a beautiful classroom for several months a year. All these are good reasons to hunt squirrels, but there is one more good reason: it's fun!

With most deer seasons closed, it is commonly said that February belongs to small-game hunters and trappers. That may be true in a sense, but squirrel season opens in October for a five-month run, then reopens again in May for a season finale.

**WHERE TO HUNT >**

Squirrel nests and vines are most often found together. Pulling or shaking a vine will send a resident bushy-tail scurrying.

## WHERE TO HUNT

Squirrels are where you find them, but they flourish in hardwood forests and creek bottoms, where ample moisture allows mast-producing trees to thrive. Stream set-asides, as a part of timber and land management, have led to mast-producing trees being abundant, and Mississippi has an abundance of public land in the form of wildlife management areas, national forests, and land found along the Pearl River and Tenn-Tom Waterway. To mention every location would be challenging.

Both fox and grey squirrels can be found in these areas. Along the Mississippi River, a color-phase of the fox squirrel that is almost black is also found. Some of the state and federal lands in the Mississippi Delta, including Twin Oaks WMA, Hillside NWR and Leroy Percy State Park, may have all three. This leads to a challenging hunt if the hunter wishes to complete a trifecta of tree dwellers. All squirrels, no matter the color, are counted in the daily bag limit of eight.

"Mississippi is fortunate to have many good public-land squirrel hunting options available around the state," said Rick Hamrick, a biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "These include lands managed by the (MDWPF), U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others. However, hunters should become familiar with the regulations and any permits that may be required. For example, in addition to basic hunting licenses, WMAs require a WMA user permit, and national wildlife refuges require different federal permits.

"If you are unfamiliar with hunting public lands, definitely spend some time learning about the areas before you go. Practically all agencies that manage public hunting lands provide information online, or hunters can call agency offices during business hours for information."

The Caney Creek WMA comprises 28,000 acres of the Bienville National Forest. Big Caney Creek and the Strong River can offer the creek bottom hunter many hours of fun and quality hunting. Carry a compass or GPS with you as these woods are easy to become lost in.

"(WMA) users are required to check in and out each time they use a WMA," Hamrick said. "This used to be done with daily use permit cards, but users can now check in and out of WMAs with a mobile application or from a home computer by an online application. More information on these new features can be found at ([www.mdwfp.com/license/wma-check-in-app/](http://www.mdwfp.com/license/wma-check-in-app/))."

Methods of hunting depend on a lot of factors: the number of hunters in the party, whether a dog is being used and/or how the land is laid out. One hunter will find his time is better spent stalking. This method works well in the fall when leaves are still on the trees. The same leaves that prevent hunters from seeing squirrels also prevent the bushytails from seeing hunters.

Armed with excellent vision and equally good hearing, a squirrel's only weakness is having the attention span of a ninth-grade boy in English class. The patient hunter will always win.

"When I see a squirrel run, I just lean against a tree and wait," said hunter Daniel Golden. "Eventually, its curiosity will take over. The squirrel thinks it has the advantage by being in the tree, which works with most predators, most of the time. It has run from the hunter to the far side of the tree, where it listens for the hunter to move. Hearing nothing for a couple of min-





utes, it feels the coast is clear and makes his move. That is a fatal mistake.”

For two hunters working together, the pace can be a little faster. Spread out by a few yards, one hunter moves while the other stands still. Then, roles are reversed. Squirrels will run from the most-recent movement. This tandem method of stalking will work every time, especially when a small ditch is involved with one hunter on either side. Wear orange and beware of low squirrels to avoid accidents.

“Squirrel nests and vines go together like peas and carrots,” Golden said. “The nest is a place for squirrels to sleep in the absence of a hollow tree. Vines help hold the cluster of sticks and leaves together, allowing it to have some resilience in the wind. My daddy once whipped me good for shooting a nest when I could have pulled a vine. He said there was no need in killing a squirrel you may not recover.”

Raccoons and possums will spend the day in a squirrel nest; shaking a vine will generally dislodge them from their beds, making them a larger target. On rare occasions, a flying squirrel will settle in such a nest. These cute little critters are more fun to watch than shoot.

One word of caution: allow one hunter to pull the vine while the other shooter is in ready mode. That way, the vine puller can turn his or her head aside quickly to

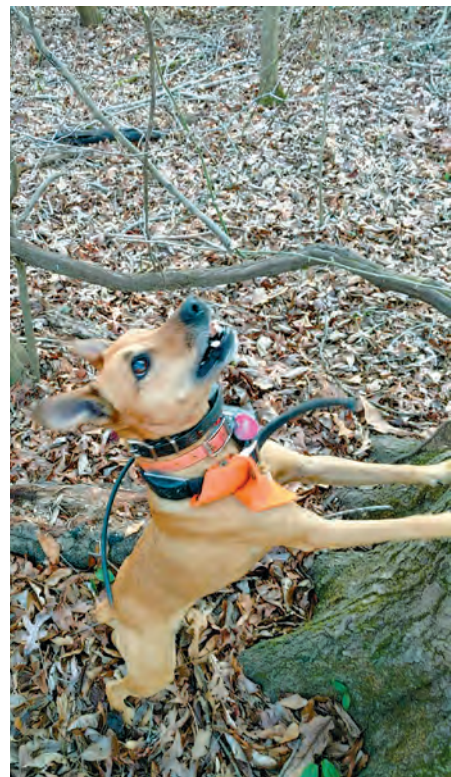
avoid a face full of trash that may fall.

Hunting with a good squirrel dog is a pure delight, so much so that squirrel dog field trials have endured for decades. While most any dog can show some promise, a trained squirrel dog is like any other sporting canine: a pleasure to watch and a delight to behold. A field trial-level dog may easily sell for \$3,000 or more. A started puppy — one that has been in the woods but is not fully trained — will fetch \$500.

“For me, it’s all about the dog,” said hunter Kenny Latham of Ludlow. “A well-trained dog hunts with all its senses. Squirrels feed on the ground in winter months. Believe it or not, squirrels can remember where they have hidden nuts for future use. A good dog can discern how fresh the scent is, and which tree the squirrel escaped to. They may also see the prey on the ground and in the tree. They alert the hunter by barking, or treeing.”

Once the dog has treed, hunters surround the tree and try to spot the squirrel. Often, the hunter who sees the squirrel first gets the first shot. Children and ladies often get the first shot as well. One point of dog-hunting etiquette; never try to command the dog or otherwise interfere with its work; that should be left strictly to the handler.

Fox or red squirrels are larger than their grey cousins but often share the same habitat. **BELOW:** Hunting with a dog is just fun. A good squirrel dog is just as excited to find squirrels as is their master.



**WEAPONRY** ➤

## WEAPONRY

Any non-centerfire rifle capable of hitting a golf ball at 33 yards is good for squirrel hunting. Far and away the .22 Long Rifle is the go-to choice for rifle shooters, but it is far from an exclusive choice. The .22 WRM is typically just called the .22 Magnum. It adds another 20 yards to the range of the common .22 and packs a bigger punch.

Other rimfires include the diminutive .17s which are the whiz-bangs of the rifle world. The .17 Hornady is a necked-down .22 WRM, and the Winchester .17 is a struggler trying to get a hold in the hyper-speed rimfire market. The Winchester version has just never caught on, and few rifles are



# Top It Off!



**SPORTSMAN**Gear.com

made in that chambering. The .17 HMR is going to be around for at least a few more years, and the .22 rimfires are definitely here to stay.

But going a step further, rifles are not the only game in town. Handguns, both semi-auto and revolvers, have a following with creek bottom bushytail hunters. Smith & Wesson has introduced a new Model 628 K-frame revolver in .22 WRM. By all accounts, this is as good a small-game handgun as can be had. Bill Ruger's original .22 auto pistol has seen many modifications since its introduction, with scope-mounted versions often found in the squirrel woods.

For the traditionalist, muzzle-loading rifles in .31 and .36 caliber can still be bought and add a whole new element to the hunting sport. Thompson Center made the System One for several years, and one stock and action would accept a .50-caliber or .36-caliber barrel or a 12-gauge shotgun.

Shotguns can't be beat for taking a tree-hopping bushytail right out of action. Modified chokes are good, but some hunters prefer full chokes in the smaller .410

A mess of squirrels for supper was an easy task for this super-accurate Volquartsen .22 WRM semi-auto. This rifle shoots dime-sized groups consistently at 50-yards and beyond. **OPPOSITE:** Involving young people in the hunting sports often begins with a simple squirrels hunt.



bore. No. 6 shot is probably the top choice, but No. 7½ runs a close second.

For times when noise or recoil is a factor, modern air-rifles in .22 caliber are accurate and can produce fatal head shots. With hunting pellets being launched at in excess of 900 feet per second, clean kills are possible, making the quiet rifles perfect for urban or suburban areas where squirrel hunting is allowed.

Squirrel hunting is great fun and a bowl of squirrel stew served with hot biscuits is a perfect meal for a cold February night. Good luck and be safe. ■




David Hawkins is a freelance writer living in Forest, Miss. He can be reached at [hawkins2209@att.net](mailto:hawkins2209@att.net).

## 7 STEPS TO CLEAN A SQUIRREL ➤

### Properties for Sale in AL, MS, LA, & AR

<p><b>ALABAMA</b></p> <p><b>FRANKLIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 263 Acres ..... \$1,615/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>MISSISSIPPI</b></p> <p><b>ADAMS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 32.81 Acres ..... \$7,500/Ac.</li> <li>• 100 Acres ..... \$2,750/Ac.</li> <li>• 402 Acres ..... \$3,109/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>AMITE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home &amp; 28 Acres ..... \$399,999</li> <li>• 28 Acres ..... \$3,892/Ac.</li> <li>• Home &amp; 37 Acres ..... \$300,000</li> <li>• 37 Acres ..... \$2,675/Ac.</li> <li>• 41.71 Acres ..... \$3,649/Ac.</li> <li>• 51.85 Acres ..... \$4,725/Ac.</li> <li>• 53 Acres ..... \$2,650/Ac.</li> <li>• 116.91 Acres ..... \$3,500/Ac.</li> <li>• 125 Acres ..... \$3,175/Ac.</li> <li>• 191 Acres ..... \$3,481/Ac.</li> <li>• 414 Acres ..... \$2,500/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>ATTALA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lodge &amp; 96.5 Acres... \$370,000</li> <li>• 148 Acres ..... \$1,182/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>CLAIBORNE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 360 Acres ..... \$2,950/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>CLARKE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 216.5 Acres ..... \$1,500/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>COPIAH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 339 Acres ..... \$2,389/Ac.</li> <li>• Cabin &amp; 63.5 Acres... \$289,000</li> </ul> <p><b>COVINGTON</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 182 Acres ..... \$3,850/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>FOREST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 95 Acres ..... \$5,000/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>FRANKLIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40 Acres ..... \$3,300/Ac.</li> <li>• 44 Acres ..... \$3,409/Ac.</li> <li>• 105 Acres ..... \$3,000/Ac.</li> <li>• 145 Acres ..... \$2,744/Ac.</li> <li>• 170 Acres ..... \$3,235/Ac.</li> <li>• 230 Acres ..... \$3,004/Ac.</li> <li>• 250 Acres ..... \$2,796/Ac.</li> <li>• 420 Acres ..... \$2,850/Ac.</li> </ul>	<p><b>GRENADA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 127.5 Acres ..... \$1,550/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>HARRISON</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 47 Acres ..... \$4,100/Ac.</li> <li>• 82 Acres ..... \$3,950/Ac.</li> <li>• 129 Acres ..... \$3,900/Ac.</li> <li>• 243 Acres ..... \$3,497/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>JASPER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24.5 Acres ..... \$2,244/Ac.</li> <li>• Lodge &amp; 255 Acres... \$765,000</li> <li>• Lodge &amp; 900 Acres... \$2,200,000</li> </ul> <p><b>JEFFERSON</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home &amp; 70 Acres .... \$799,000</li> <li>• 347 Acres ..... \$2,850/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>JEFFERSON DAVIS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 106 Acres ..... \$1,700/Ac.</li> <li>• 280 Acres ..... \$1,821/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>JONES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 Acres ..... \$2,100/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>KEMPER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 37 Acres ..... \$1,643/Ac.</li> <li>• 220 Acres ..... \$1,422/Ac.</li> <li>• 247 Acres ..... \$1,750/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>LAMAR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 23 Acres ..... \$5,445/Ac.</li> <li>• 24.7 Acres ..... \$9,777/Ac.</li> <li>• 26 Acres ..... \$9,250/Ac.</li> <li>• 215 Acres ..... \$3,450/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>LAUDERDALE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30.5 Acres ..... \$1,500/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>LAWRENCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36 Acres ..... \$3,500/Ac.</li> <li>• 765 Acres ..... \$2,875/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>LOWNDES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 150 Acres ..... \$1,395/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>MARION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 98 Acres ..... \$2,450/Ac.</li> <li>• 113 Acres ..... \$2,650/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>NESHOBA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26.8 Acres ..... \$2,250/Ac.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOXUBEE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 328 Acres ..... \$2,437/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>PEARL RIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 67 Acres ..... \$2,238/Ac.</li> <li>• 255 Acres ..... \$3,243/Ac.</li> <li>• Home &amp; 283 Acres ... \$895,000</li> </ul> <p><b>PIKE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 Acres ..... \$4,500/Ac.</li> <li>• 20 Acres ..... \$2,500/Ac.</li> <li>• 20 Acres ..... \$3,250/Ac.</li> <li>• 24.11 Acres ..... \$4,769/Ac.</li> <li>• 24.34 Acres ..... \$2,259/Ac.</li> <li>• 28.52 Acres ..... \$3,488/Ac.</li> <li>• 32.23 Acres ..... \$2,249/Ac.</li> <li>• 33.78 Acres ..... \$2,735/Ac.</li> <li>• 34.6 Acres ..... \$8,500/Ac.</li> <li>• 36.7 Acres ..... \$2,500/Ac.</li> <li>• 40 Acres ..... \$2,800/Ac.</li> <li>• 40 Acres ..... \$2,200/Ac.</li> <li>• Home &amp; 58.4 Acres... \$420,000</li> <li>• 77 Acres ..... \$5,181/Ac.</li> <li>• 109 Acres ..... \$3,623/Ac.</li> <li>• 196 Acres ..... \$3,250/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>PRENTISS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 31 Acres ..... \$1,850/Ac.</li> <li>• 44 Acres ..... \$2,000/Ac.</li> <li>• 75 Acres ..... \$1,750/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>WAYNE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 54 Acres ..... \$3,000/Ac.</li> <li>• 67.96 Acres ..... \$1,798/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>WILKINSON</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 Acres ..... \$4,166/Ac.</li> <li>• 143 Acres &amp; Lodge ... \$799,000</li> <li>• 156 Acres ..... \$3,365/Ac.</li> <li>• 309 Acres ..... \$3,883/Ac.</li> <li>• 350 Acres ..... \$3,971/Ac.</li> <li>• 496 Acres ..... \$3,649/Ac.</li> <li>• Home &amp; 485 Acres... \$1,499,999</li> <li>• 662 Acres ..... \$3,761/Ac.</li> <li>• Home &amp; 680 Acres... \$2,950,000</li> <li>• 961 Acres &amp; Home... \$5,500,000</li> <li>• 1278 Acres &amp; Lodge... \$9,500,000</li> </ul> <p><b>YALOBUSHA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 75 Acres ..... \$3,399/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>YAZOO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 515 Acres ..... \$1,850/Ac.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ARKANSAS</b></p> <p><b>LITTLE RIVER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 170 Acres ..... \$2,100/Ac.</li> <li>• 183 Acres ..... \$2,322/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>LOUISIANA</b></p> <p><b>BATON ROUGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 238 Acres ..... \$9,624/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>BIENVILLE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 127 Acres ..... \$2,975/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>BOSSIER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home &amp; 51 Acres .... \$668,000</li> <li>• 102 Acres ..... \$2,936/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>CADDO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19.6 Acres ..... \$3,562/Ac.</li> <li>• 32.4 Acres ..... \$2,880/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>CONCORDIA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lodge &amp; 1,536 Acres... \$6,000,000</li> </ul> <p><b>DE SOTO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home &amp; 160 Acres... \$1,375,000</li> <li>• 255.5 Acres ..... \$3,326/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>EAST FELICIANA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 479 Acres ..... \$4,173/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>LAFAYETTE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100 Acres ..... \$1,950/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>ST. HELENA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 116.46 Acres ..... \$3,600/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>TANGIPAHOA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 95 Acres ..... \$3,500/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>WASHINGTON</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27.14 Acres ..... \$2,943/Ac.</li> <li>• 150 Acres ..... \$3,200/Ac.</li> </ul> <p><b>WEST FELICIANA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lodge &amp; 113 Acres... \$1,250,000</li> </ul>
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# 7 STEPS TO CLEAN A SQUIRREL

## THE TAIL-STEP METHOD PROVIDES EASY, HAIR-FREE MEAT

I grew up squirrel hunting, but one thing I didn't learn was a way to clean squirrels that didn't end with picking hair off the carcasses.

I was first taught to cut a hole in the back of a squirrel's hide, stick my fingers in the hole and pull in opposite directions — the same way rabbits skin out. The problem is, squirrel hides are much tougher than that of rabbits, so it's almost impossible to follow that method without hair tearing off and getting all over the meat.

Another squirrel-hunting fanatic, laughed at me when he watched me tugging at a squirrel. Instead, he uses a method that's much quicker and results in not a hair on the carcass.

I haven't squirrel hunted much in years, but I was reminded of of that technique on a recent hunt.

Here are the steps to easily, quickly and cleaning snatching the hide off of a squirrel.

You've killed a few squirrels, and now it's time to prep them for cooking. Here are the steps to make quick work of the process.



**1** Place the rear legs in a squirrel skinner (see sidebar for more information), with back facing outward.



**2** Pull some hair off the skin at the base of the tail, and then make a cut at the base of the tail. Cut between joints of the tail bone, twisting to break the tail bone.



**3** Carefully skin down the back of the squirrel a few inches.



**4** Step on the tail of the squirrel, hold the back legs and pull upward. The front portion of the hide should pull down past the front legs.



**5** With the tail still beneath your foot, grasp the tag of skin still attached to the belly and pull upward to pull the rear portion of hide past the squirrel's rear legs.



**6** Pull hide as far down the front and rear legs as possible. This will also expose most of the head (if you want to keep it).



**7** Place squirrel back in squirrel skinner or hang on a nail, and gut the carcass. Then clip the legs with a pair of pruning shears.

## SQUIRREL SKINNER MAKES LIFE EASY

Most hunters have loops hanging off a tree or post to use to hold a squirrel while skinning and cleaning, but I had never seen what Keith LaCaze and his buddies at The Bird Camp Hunting Club use.

It's a simple square of metal with three tapering slots, and it really makes getting the job of cleaning a squirrel under way a breeze.

Just slip the squirrel's back legs into the outside slots, with the back facing out. Pull the legs as far into the slots as they will go, and you're ready to make the cut at the base of the tail, which is the first step in skinning the squirrel.

You also can put the squirrels hind



legs back in the slots before you cut the rear feet off to hold the carcass while gutting it.

The squirrel skinner can be made by anyone who knows how to work with metal, or you can go online and purchase one at [www.huntershelper.com/tools.shtml](http://www.huntershelper.com/tools.shtml).

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## BOATING ACCIDENTS ARE NO LAUGHING MATTER FOR ANGLERS. TAKE A FEW PRECAUTIONS AND MAKE YOUR FISHING TRIPS ACCIDENT-FREE.

■ By Kinny Haddox



# SAFETY FIRST

**WE** don't want to talk about it, but it happens far too often. A fisherman is having the time of his life one second, and the next, he's seriously injured or fighting for his life. Hunting safety is a popular subject, but the truth of the matter is, there are more serious boating- and fishing-related injuries and deaths than hunting accidents.

Hunters are constantly reminded of safety in the woods. You have to pass a hunter-safety course to be able to buy your hunting license and get in the woods. But fishermen? What can happen to you out fishing? Here's your license. Just go have fun.

Sometimes, it's a little thing, like getting a crappie jig in your finger or a treble hook from a topwater bait in your forearm. Those can get serious, however, because complicated infections abound after

on-the-water injuries, but the range of accidents while fishing is just as broad as any other activity: cutting off a finger in a trolling motor prop, falling in the lake and hitting your head on the side of the boat, get a slipped disk pushing on a boat trailer — all kinds of things happen on a more-regular basis than anyone wants to talk about.

Most accidents can be avoided by putting safety first, but when people go fishing and boating, they tend to get excited. And that's when it happens.

"You want to get out there and get to your spot in a tournament, or just get out there and catch some fish for fun, but you can't get caught up in the moment and forget about taking care of yourself and others in your boat," said BASS Elite pro Brett Preuett of Monroe, who knows from personal experience and watching others.

**A "NOT-SO-SPECIAL" BONUS >**

## A “NOT-SO-SPECIAL” BONUS

It's a special bonus for young bass pros to get their photo in a fishing magazine or to be shown catching fish in a few clips on an outdoor TV show. Preuett has had those luxuries many times, but there was one brief moment of publicity he wishes he would not have gotten. In fact, he wishes the moment would never have happened. It's what he calls one of his “Not Top 10” moments.

“The deal was, I was fishing like crazy trying to make it to the (Bassmaster) Classic, and the big spotted bass were schooling, but you had to be on them within a second or two, or they were gone,” he said. “I saw a big one and reeled in my bait fast as I could. I didn't get it in far enough and when I whipped the rod back and threw hard as I could, the big topwater caught me square in the back of the neck. It almost knocked me out. Two of the big treble hooks buried up to the base of the bait. It was bad.”

And it was caught on camera.

Preuett kept on fishing, BASS sent medical help and fixed him up in the boat, and he made the Classic.

“Getting a hook in you isn't fatal, but it does hurt,” he said, “and it can sure mess up your day. I'll tell you another thing; when you get your bait hooked in a tree, go get it. Don't jerk and pull hard as you can because you are very likely to hook yourself or your partner. It's not worth the risk for a \$5 bait.”

## A MOST-SERIOUS CONCERN ➤

# HYPOTHERMIA

The highest number of fishing and boating accidents involving someone falling in the water occur in the summer, when drowning is the usual cause of any fatalities.

But while some fishermen who fall in swim back to the boat in the summer, falling in during January and February is serious business.

The reason? Hypothermia.

Hypothermia is a condition that occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it, dangerously and quickly reducing core body temperature. When your body temperature drops, your heart, nervous system and other organs can't work normally. Left untreated, hypothermia can eventually lead to complete failure of your heart and respiratory system and eventually to death.

Shivering is the first symptom, followed by slurred speech, shallow breathing, a weak pulse, confusion and loss of consciousness.

If you are in water that is below 40 degrees and don't get help, death can occur in 30 to 90 minutes. ■

Boating accidents are showing a downward trend, but fast boats and crowded boat lanes are dangerous if everybody doesn't pay attention and slow down when needed.





Kinny Haddox

A kill-switch is an essential safety item on a boat.

## LIFE JACKETS, KILL SWITCHES ARE ESSENTIAL

The two most-important fishing safety devices are no brainers for Preuett.

"Never turn on the key on the big motor until you've got your life vest on and fastened and your kill switch securely fastened," he said. "I don't care how many times you have made a run or how well you know where you are going, you never know when a log might float out in the boat run, or you might have to dodge another boat. Or your steering could fail. All those things have happened. You don't want to go into the water with that big motor still running. We've all seen and heard what that can lead to." ■



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## A MOST-SERIOUS CONCERN

Obviously the most serious concern for fishermen is a boating accident, either someone being ejected from the boat or two watercraft colliding. As a pro fisherman, Preuett said that is always on anglers' minds.

"Fishing tournaments, it's going to be crowded, especially at take-off and weigh-in," he says. "And lots of times, there are hundreds of spectators on the water. When it is crowded in a tournament or just a Saturday morning when you are out for fun, just slow down a little bit. Be aware of your surroundings, drive safely and watch out for the other boats. You are just talking about a few minutes. It's not worth rushing, pushing your luck and getting hurt."

## THE LIST GOES ON

Spend some time looking around your fishing rig and ask yourself, "What if?" That's what Preuett does. Even little things matter, like turning off your trolling motor every time you aren't going to use it for a while. Leaving it on exposes anglers and others to the possibility of breaking or seriously cutting a finger or hand. Preuett also carries a spare set of clothes and jacket in one of his compartments. Again, he learned about that the hard way.

"I was up on Table Rock, 40 miles from the landing, and I tried to reach out and get a bait unhung," he said. "I fell in, and it was 40 degrees. Thankfully, I had a towel and a chance of clothes, or it would have been bad. Hypothermia is nothing to fool around with."

Today's anglers also have no excuse for getting caught out in dangerous weather. Preuett uses his cell phone to get the latest weather reports, and if something bad is coming, he gets out of there. It's also a good idea to have a spare charger if your boat doesn't have a charging port.

"Be prepared for emergencies before they happen," he said. "Keep the stuff in your boat you need, and then pay attention to what you are doing, so you hopefully won't need it." ■

## PUT OUT THAT FIRE

The law requires fire extinguishers in boats, but Preuett didn't have to get one just to stay legal. He learned as a young fisherman how valuable they are.

"My dad and I were out fishing when somehow, the batteries in the back of the boat shorted something out and caught fire," he said. "Thank goodness we had a fire extinguisher, because we were able to put it out quickly. You know what is always sitting right next to the batteries? The gas tank. Never

go without a good fire extinguisher."

Preuett also reminds fishermen to keep the fire extinguisher where you get can get to it in a hurry, not in a compartment or too close to the back of the boat where it could be close to a fire. Boat fires usually only have two outcomes: one, you put it out quickly; two, the boat is gone. ■

Most boats lack smoke detectors, but having at least one fire extinguisher is not only the law, it can save your boat and your life.



Kimmy Haddox

Capt. Rachel Zechenelly of LDWF's boating-safety program has some sound advice for fishermen and boaters: wear your life jacket.

## BOATING SAFETY CHIEF SEES PROGRESS

Capt. Rachel Zechenelly of Baton Rouge is in charge of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' boating safety program; she sees her state heading in the right direction.

"We've made a lot of progress in making boating a safer experience, and we will continue to look at ways to make it even safer in the future," she said. "Actually, I think most people are becoming more safety minded when it comes to boating, not less. Since 2003, Louisiana has required mandatory education for anyone born after Jan. 1, 1984. Mandatory boating education is creating a generation of boaters that have been informed about best boating practices."

Other states are headed in the same direction. Increased mandatory education, outreach to growing numbers who take part in paddle sports and canoeing, tougher enforcement and better information sharing through social media all contribute to more safety awareness on the water.

Wherever you fish and boat, Zechenelly has some good advice.

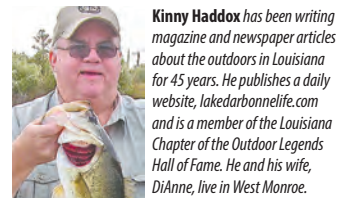
"Wear a life jacket. Take a boating education course. Don't drink or take impairing medication while operating a boat," she said. "It is also important to file a float plan. Even if you are on a short, freshwater fishing trip, let someone know where you are going



Kinny Haddox

and when you plan to be back. It's basically just common sense, but commonly, people often don't do it.

Good emergency communication plans, monitoring the weather and just knowing the rules of the road on the water are important to preventing accidents and also to keeping them from becoming more serious in the final outcome. As with any outdoor pursuit, it's simple. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. ■



**Kinny Haddox** has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, [lakedarbonnelife.com](http://lakedarbonnelife.com) and is a member of the Louisiana Chapter of the Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.

Boating education efforts are being increased to reach the fast-growing number of people who are new to paddle sports and canoes both for recreation and fishing.

## FACTS TELL THE STORY: SAFE BOATING ISN'T HARD TO FIGURE OUT

If you go fishing or boating, don't be in denial. Accidents can happen, and it is important to know the facts and take precautions so you won't end up a statistic.

In 2018, the U.S. Coast Guard compiled reports of 4,145 accidents that involved 633 deaths, 2,511 injuries and approximately \$46 million dollars of damage to property.

Here's a quick glance at the facts:

- The fatality rate was 5.3 deaths per 100,000 registered recreational vessels. This rate represents a 3.6% decrease from the 2017 fatality rate of 5.5.
- Compared to 2017, the number of accidents decreased 3.4%, the number of deaths decreased 3.8%, and the number of injuries decreased 4.5%.
- Where cause of death was known, 77% of fatal boating accident victims drowned. Of those drowning victims, 84% were not wearing a life jacket.
- Where length was known, eight out of every 10 boaters who drowned were using vessels less than 21 feet in length.



Kinny Haddox

- Alcohol use was the leading known contributing factor in fatal boating accidents; it was listed as the leading factor in 19% of deaths.
- Where instruction was known, 74% of deaths occurred where the operator had not received boating safety instruction.
- At least one person was struck by a propeller in 177 accidents. Those accidents resulted in 25 deaths and 177 injuries.
- Operator inattention, improper lookout, operator inexperience, machinery failure, and excessive speed rank as the top five primary contributing factors in accidents.
- Where data was known, the most common vessel types involved in reported accidents were open motorboats (46%) and personal watercraft (19%).
- When data was known, the vessel types with the highest percentage of deaths in accidents were: open motorboats (50%), kayaks (13.5%), and canoes (7%). ■

## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

## A DISH OF CAJUN SPICE

THIS SEAFOOD/SAUSAGE CHOWDER WILL KEEP YOU WARM ALL OVER



Jerry Dilsaver

**S**outhern winters feature some cold days, but mostly, there are only a few at a time, with more moderate and occasionally downright warm days separating them. Still, it's nice to come inside for lunch or dinner and have a meal that is tasty, filling and warms you to the soles of your feet.

This is one of those meals, and putting it together with seafood makes it even better. After trying it once, many folks prepare this often. It tastes good, is filling and warms you to the core, so why not?

This is excellent anytime, but it is guaranteed to hit the spot on those days when you break for lunch after a morning of hunting small game. While the savory taste of the shrimp and fish still lingers in your mouth, the warmth is already on its way to chilly toes and fingers. It does the same for fishermen too; it tastes good when you return.

You'll have to pull shrimp out of your freezer or visit your favorite fishmonger, but you can add the fish from a fresh catch. This particular version uses king mackerel, as a friend dropped off

some fresh fillets only a day earlier. However, striper, wahoo or any fish with firm meat will work well.

The consummate sportsman will also have some smoked venison or feral pig sausage to use, but I didn't have that — or friends willing to contribute a link for this batch. This recipe uses Bright Leaf smoked sausage from Carolina Packers in Smithfield, N.C., and it does the job well, with a good smoke flavor without being too spicy. This is an iconic brand and isn't available everywhere. Folks in locations where it's not on the shelves can substitute their favorite brands.

While not a Cajun by birth, I really enjoy many of the spices and combinations used by Louisiana cooks. The best salute to this was a few years back when a waitress in Des Allemands, La., told me I talked funny but ate like a local. With February being Mardi Gras time, I thought this would be a good time to offer a salute to the many Cajun cooks whose wonderful food I've had the opportunity to enjoy. I really think you'll like this. It has a little spice, but isn't hot and combines several good tastes. ■

Shrimp, fish and sausage makes for a great chowder, especially when you add some Cajun spices.

# CAJUN SEAFOOD/SAUSAGE CHOWDER

Fat Tuesday is Feb. 25 this year. I wanted to cook something that was a warm, filling dish, but with a salute to Mardi Gras and my favorite Cajun cooking. You can find gumbo, jambalaya, red beans and rice and étouffée on February specials at many restaurants, so I decided to go a little deeper. This is a seafood chowder that uses Cajun seasoning to get it going but isn't too spicy for those with milder palates.

Many sportsmen will be able to find all the meat ingredients in their freezers, but if you can't, your favorite local fishmonger will be able to supply the shrimp and fish. The best preparation is with homemade venison or feral pig smoked sausage, but that may be the most difficult ingredient to find in your freezer. Any smoked sausage should work, but as the television commercial likes to point out, "Sometimes OK isn't OK."

There are a couple of tips for keeping this in the excellent category, not just very good. First is cutting the sausage into bite-size pieces before cooking it. The Bright Leaf sausage I suggest is already fully cooked, so you're really just warming it to get some drippings to sauté the shrimp, fish and onions. However, by cutting the sausage first, you can get slightly crunchy edges on the pieces. I like this and you may also, but it isn't required. Because it is already fully cooked,

## PREPARATION:

Clean and devein shrimp, cut into 2 or 3 pieces depending on size. Cut fish into roughly thumb-size pieces. Cut smoked sausage into bite-size pieces. Chop onions into medium-size pieces. Cut potatoes into halves. Slice green onions.

Season shrimp and fish lightly all over with Cajun seasoning, and add salt and pepper to taste. Heat a large, deep, cast-iron pot to medium and lightly brown sausage. Remove sausage and leave enough drippings to cover the bottom of the pot. If your sausage doesn't leave enough drippings, add a little butter or buttery non-stick cooking spray. Sauté fish, then shrimp, just to the point of turning opaque and remove.

Melt butter in pot and sauté onions until they turn opaque. Stir in the garlic and flour, being very careful not to scorch the flour. This should only take about 30 seconds to a minute at most. Add the broth, potatoes, a couple of chopped green onions, thyme and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer until the potatoes are tender — approximately 8 minutes.

Stir in the corn and cream and simmer another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the shrimp, fish, sausage and paprika and simmer another 4 minutes, stirring often. Turn off heat and allow to sit off burner for another 2 minutes,

the sausage doesn't have a lot of drippings, so you'll have to augment it with a spoon of grease, butter or non-stick cooking spray.

Don't overly season the shrimp and fish unless you like it spicy. You want to be able to see the Cajun seasoning on the pieces, but don't coat them heavily if this will be eaten by anyone with a mild palate. I sprinkle in a little more Cajun seasoning when I add the onions and garlic. If you want more kick, use more seasoning or make this using blackened seasoning instead of Cajun and coat the shrimp and fish well.

Be careful when adding the flour and don't overcook it. This isn't quite a roux, but if it gets scorched, the only thing to do is make it over.

Golden potatoes are creamier than white potatoes and add to this chowder. If you can't find mini golden potatoes, use the larger ones and cube them down to about thumb-size or slightly larger. They really do taste better than other potatoes in this.

This cooks best in a well-seasoned, cast-iron pot. My largest isn't quite large enough, so I use it for the browning and sautéing, then switch to a stock pot.

Laissez les bons temps rouler, and enjoy a bowl or three of Cajun seafood and sausage chowder! ■

## INGREDIENTS:

**6 ounces smoked sausage**  
**½ pound medium shrimp (26 to 30 count)**  
**½ pound firm fish**  
**1 medium sweet onion**  
**1 pound baby yellow potatoes**  
**4 cups chicken broth**  
**3 cups frozen corn kernels**  
**1 bundle green onions**  
**1 cup heavy whipping cream**  
**2 tbsp all-purpose flour**  
**1 tbsp minced garlic**  
**3 tbsp Cajun seasoning**  
**1 tbsp butter**  
**1 tsp ground thyme,**  
**1 tsp smoked paprika**  
**Freshly ground black pepper and pink salt to taste**  
**Optional: Bacon bits, cheese, cayenne pepper and blackened seasoning.**



Jerry Dilsaver

stirring once or twice. Garnish each serving with a sprinkle of paprika and green onions.

Some of my friends like to also garnish with a sprinkling of bacon bits and/or cheese. For a spicier chowder, add more Cajun seasoning, a little cayenne pepper or use blackened seasoning instead of Cajun seasoning. Serve this with several hot sauces on the table.

This almost begs for a slice of warm hearty bread to sop up the bowl. I like to begin with a lettuce wedge or green salad and warm bread pudding is the perfect dessert for those wanting to add something sweet. ■



Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., is a freelance writer, as well as a former national king mackerel champion fisherman.

## SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush



Chris Bush

# GO WITH YOUR GUT? FISHING IN THE INFO AGE

Let's face it, social media has made the fishing world a smaller place. Locations and techniques that were once guarded by a secret handshake and a personal voucher are now available to all anglers like samples at a Costco.

It's all part of living in the information age. Anglers scour media outlets seeking a mountain of information in hopes that their next trip will be more successful. Fortunately or unfortunately — depending on how you look at it — trophy speckled trout always seem to be one step ahead. Their evasiveness across all estuaries seems to adapt to our thirst for knowledge, leaving us sometimes scratching our heads and inspiring me to write about one key component that is often overlooked: intuition.

## MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

I continue to educate myself on the latest equipment and techniques through the myriad of resources available online. I immerse myself in conversation of what I think is working in an area and where I should focus my efforts, and like many anglers, this doesn't always lead me to success. What I've found to be most successful during many of my trips is my ability to make adjustments.

If you're fishing an area that has been producing fish on topwaters and suspending baits and the bite has seemingly shut down, you need to peel back the onion of why it's not producing and consider adjusting your technique. Maybe it's because there has been an environmental shift in conditions? Maybe the bait is staged differently on the flat? It

could be a host of things, but figuring out and adjusting your technique could be the difference in your angling success.

As a result, a simple switch to a soft plastic with a varied retrieve might produce a bite, and when it does, strive for consistency. Another example may involve the fish moving all together, but having that intuition and confidence to make adjustments and find high-potential water comes with experience only achieved on the water.



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

Fishing information gleaned from a number of sources can put you on the right track, but it's more likely your own knowledge and intuition that will lead you in the right direction.

## INTUITION VS. INFO

You should always trust your fishing intuition. I grew up under the fishing instruction of my dad, who would always tell me, "Son, don't read about the news, get out there and make the news." For years I heard that phrase, and as I continued to grow as an angler, the more it made sense.

What he was saying was, don't fish an area just because you've heard it has fish; instead, fish the conditions and find the fish. Too many times, I've watched him stop the boat and fish a spot we've never fished before and be successful. I've also been back to those spots on occasion and have had limited success simply because the "conditions just weren't right."

## USEFUL INFO

Angling information, on the other hand, is what we find online. This could be tutorials on how to use your electronics to better storing your soft plastics. It can also contain spot information from local forums about where fish are being caught, but it won't necessarily put fish over the gunwales — your fishing intuition will.

I'll leave you with this. My dad and I, on our first trip down to South Texas, fished with Capt. Mike McBride, a mentor and now a good friend. As you would expect, my dad and Mike got to talking about the centuries worth of trout fishing knowledge they both possessed. As a fly on the wall, on a flat in the lower Laguna Madre, I heard my dad utter his coined phrase to McBride: "Son, don't read about the news, get out there and make the news."

McBride, perpetuating his agreement, decided to move the boat one more time to adjust to a water-color change driven by the strong wind. Immediately, McBride and I went back-to-back on big trout, and without hesitation he looked at my dad and says, "Don't read about the news, read the water, then make the news!"

I can't encourage you enough to store what you've read online in your memory bank. Draw from that knowledge when required, but never second guess your intuition, this and only this will make you consistently successful. ■

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## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



# THE 4.5-INCH XL TINY IKA

YAMAMOTO'S LATEST CREATION CAN BE RIGGED IN ALMOST EVERY FASHION

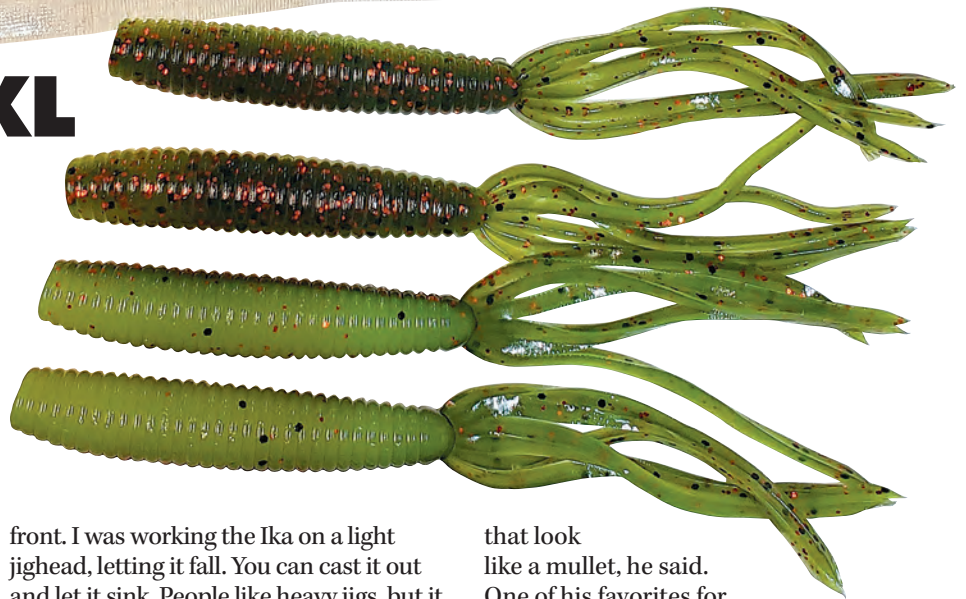
**W**hen Gary Yamamoto wanted a superior, solid tube with a skirt, he went to work and came up with the 4.5-inch XL Tiny Ika.

Yamamoto, a 77-year-old lure designer from Palestine, Texas, loves to fish as much or more than he loves to design and manufacture soft plastics. His latest design may be the perfect artificial for finesse fishing, as well as power fishing.

Yamamoto, who started Gary Yamamoto Custom Baits in 1983, has been catching plenty of fish on the XL Tiny Ika all winter around his camp near the coast at Fourchon, west of Grand Isle. The fish aren't green, either.

"I primarily use the Ika for speckled trout," Yamamoto said. "I've had tremendous luck with Ikas.

"There are several ways of working it. Yesterday was a prime example," he said. "There was a real good bite after a cold



front. I was working the Ika on a light jighead, letting it fall. You can cast it out and let it sink. People like heavy jigs, but it seems like on the lighter jighead, it flutters better when you let it fall to the bottom."

Yamamoto caught trout after trout on a mid-December day when other anglers came in with few, if any, specks.

Naturally, the XL Tiny Ika's prowess in Yamamoto's favorite canal at his camp is catching on with the neighbors. Its popularity grows as the word spreads.

"This community is learning about it," he said. "I play with it in the canals. As years go by, I'm learning more about fishing around here. This year has been a banner year. I guess after 20 years, I've figured how to catch them."

The top color combinations are any

that look like a mullet, he said.

One of his favorites for specks is a two-toned model with clear and black/silver speckles on the top and a dark color on the bottom, Yamamoto said.

A special plastic formula that makes the soft plastic glow in the dark enhances the appeal of the 3.5-inch Saltwater Ika, Yamamoto said, adding, "We've done that quite a lot."

The XL Tiny Ika has a slightly big-



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



Yamamoto 4.5" XL Tiny Ika  
in black/blue flake.

ger, solid, grub-style body and a longer tail than Yamamoto's original Tiny Ika, which has been the scourge of crappie populations everywhere. The tail is comprised of six skirted, flat tentacles. Hence the name. Ika in Japanese means "squid."

"It's a subtle bait" that doesn't have a big tail that swashes around, Yamamoto said. The bait was originally designed as a flipping bait for bass in large bodies of water. Its applications have grown by leaps and bounds.

For those who target bass, Yamamoto and so many others know the most-recent XL Tiny Ika stands out as a drop-shot plastic and when rigged on a finesse jighead, like a Ned Rig. It's at its best as it comes through the water with a very subtle, swimming action on a steady retrieve and quivers side-to-side when it falls on a slack line.

Also, Yamamoto pointed out, it has been effective on a shaky head, as well as a Carolina-rigged soft plastic and on a light Texas rig. The bait's affinity for a Texas rig is the worst-kept secret among many bass pros and other aficionados.

The XL Tiny Ika rigged backwards and weedless on an EWG hook suckers both largemouth and small-mouth bass. Rigged skirt up and weedless, it has a unique, backward falling action. Many anglers fish it in place of a Senko when bass are aggressive and want a faster fall, particularly around ridges, humps and other distinctive bottom features.

Yamamoto also shared a secret on how to Texas-rig it. He uses a short piece of solder and pushes it into the lure's body to fish it Texas-rigged around boat docks and piers.

Some of the top colors for bass fishing presentations include goby, black/blue flake, watermelon/black/red, baby bass, green pumpkin and smoke/black/purple. ■

*For more information about the 4.5-inch XL Tiny Ika and other GYCB products, call 800-645-22481 or go to [www.baits.com](http://www.baits.com).*

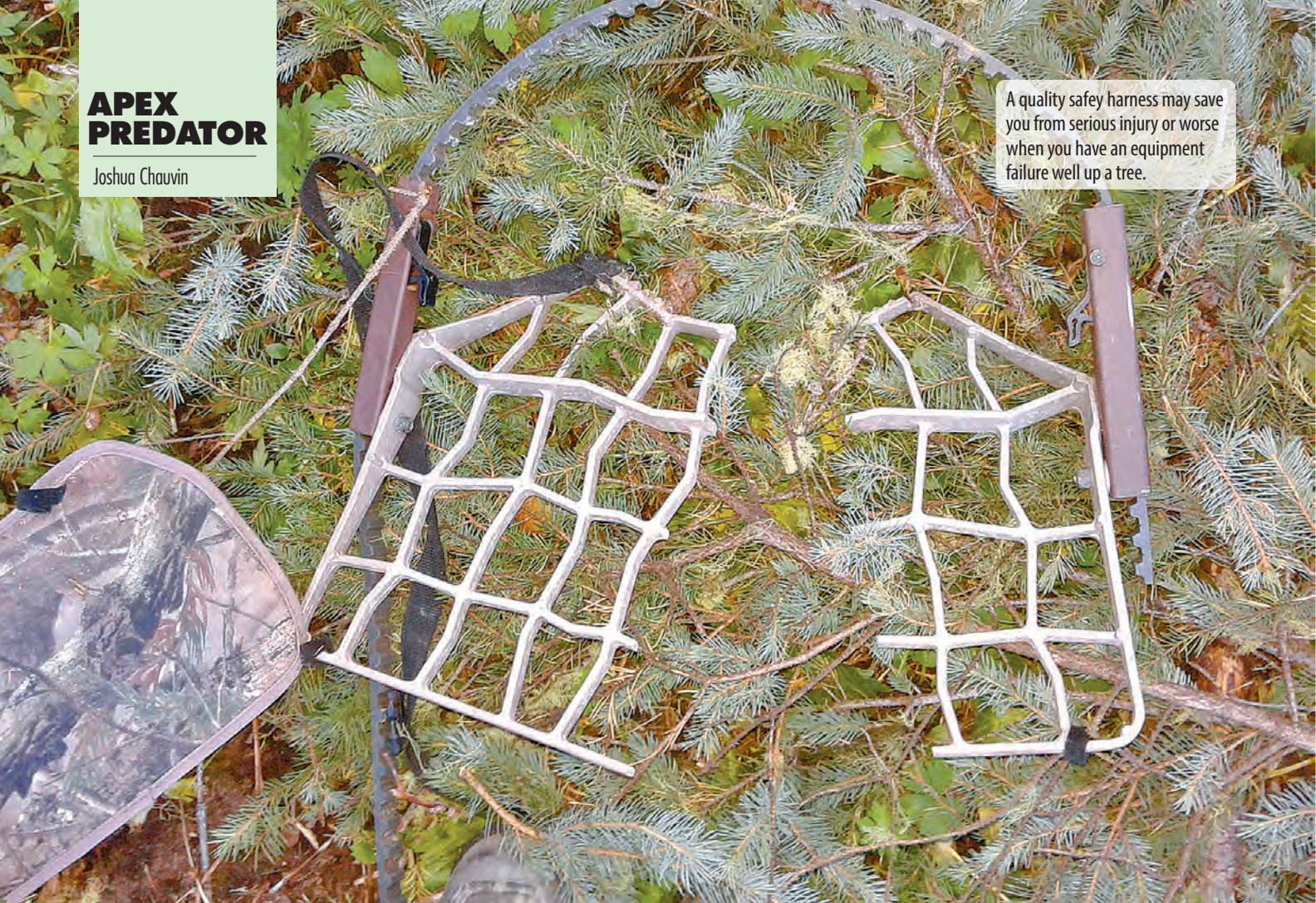


Frank Roberts with a nice  
Reggio speckled trout.

## APEX PREDATOR

Joshua Chauvin

A quality safety harness may save you from serious injury or worse when you have an equipment failure well up a tree.



# TREE STAND MALFUNCTIONS

THINGS YOU'D NEVER EXPECT CAN BREAK, AND HAVING PROPER SAFETY EQUIPMENT CAN PREVENT FALLS AND SERIOUS INJURIES

**W**earing a safety harness has saved me from tree-stand accidents several times. These incidents are rare, but when making hunts every weekend during a long archery season, unforeseen events are eventually bound to happen.

This year, on my week-long hunting vacation, I had to slide down a tree like a bear not once, but twice, from scary situations where my climbers failed.

## STARTING OUT

Growing up, I was fortunate not to find out the hard way about harnesses. I had to learn how to deer hunt on my own, without guidance. I was given an old climber from someone's attic and set off into the woods alone to down a deer.

I soon found out that climbing stands could be very dangerous. On one of the first times I used that decades-old, smooth, V-style metal climber, it nearly

slid all the way down a tree with me in it. Not having a clue what a safety harness was, I remember lassoing my boat's anchor rope around my torso and bungee strapping that climber to the tree for the next hunt, hoping to avoid another roller-coaster ride experience.

Soon after, I bought my first tree climber and learned how to use the harness that came with the purchase.

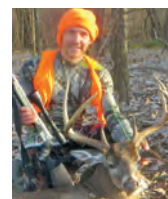
## STRAPS VS. ROPES

I'm constantly on the move every week on various tracts of land, so I use a basic, full-body, lightweight strap harness. I attach a wide strap to the tree that I slide up and down as I climb. However, this is a slower process to keep lifting and adjusting the strap, and I've been busted by several deer that came through while making these lengthy ascents.

For a faster solution, when I have trees that I climb often or when setting up a lock-on where allowed on public lands,

I set a safety rope high in the tree. I use my regular tree strap with the harness to get up for the initial setting of the static line above my stand. Then, I use the loop from a Prusik knot to attach my harness to a carabiner for fast climbing on future hunts. This knot slides up and down the static rope, but it clinches tight when pressure is pulled from the loop. I tape the carabiner to avoid any metal clanking noises.

With a static rope, I can safely climb a tree in a handful of seconds. Searching the internet for "tree stand safety line" will bring up many pre-made options from which to choose. They can also be homemade for a cheaper solution.



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

## METAL STANDS CAN SPLIT

The scariest moment I experienced happened when I was hunting in Colorado years ago. I climbed a tree more than 6 miles deep from the trail head where I was dropped off, alone, by my wife. As I got to the desired height in the dark, more than 20 feet up for a morning elk hunt, I put all my weight on the tiny Lone Wolf Hand Climber top piece to get it securely dug into the tree's bark. I never expected what happened next.

The metal top piece cracked completely in half. The startling jerk left me dangling from my harness. I got all banged up against some of the sharp stubs on this dead fir tree, but I was able to crawl safely down the tree. It was one scary morning, but at least I didn't get injured way up in the mountains.

The Lone Wolf customer support sent me a brand new Hand Climber top piece as a replacement, which I've still been using to this day. Those micro-tops are the lightest, quietest and smallest profile, which makes a great solution to accompany any climber bottom for the standing position I need to use my recurve bows.

## CLIMBING WITH ONE HALF

I didn't have any more tree stand issues until this winter. One morning before daylight, I set up in a hard-barked tree that I had climbed many times before, 12 yards from a commonly used community scrape. This tree had a big branch about 17 feet high, so I rehooked my climber top and safety harness strap over the branch. When trying to get ultra-close, within 15 yards of deer for close-range weapons, finding the easiest climbable tree isn't always an option, and cutting branches isn't legal.

After setting up my bag and action cameras, I realized I needed to reposition the bottom piece of the Summit stand to a better angle, just under the branch. When I shifted my feet back from resetting it, the stationary platform slipped loose. I tied the pieces together a bit too far, but I thought, "No big deal," since my paracord was holding the bottom a few feet down. However, as I got on my fin-



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gertips stretching down from the hand climber in the pull-up position to reach with my boots, the knot I tied in the dark with cold fingers suddenly sprung loose. The bottom piece tumbled down to the base.

I had to remove the harness's strap with one arm while bear-hugging the tree, since it couldn't slide down with the branch. Lowering myself down with arms and legs wrapped around this smaller tree wasn't difficult; it was the climbing back up to my gear with only the bottom piece to use. It took all my energy to hug the tree and lift the bottom with such a small angle for each tiny 3-inch lift.

Fully exhausted, I was able to get safely set up in the tree for the hunt. A nice buck had passed in front my camera 30 minutes before legal hunting hours. If he had stayed nearby, all the metal clanking definitely scared him off.

## THE SNAPPED CABLE

Later in the week, I took one of my older climber bottoms from an API stand with my Lone Wolf top to hunt a new spot. I got set up 20 feet up and was upset that the bottom was squeaking when I moved. Still, I thought "At least I'll be above the deer." Well, I wasn't high for long.

As soon as I leaned over to pull up my bag and recurve, the squeak turned into a snap. The stand flattened against the tree, sending me falling.

Luckily, I was facing the tree and was able to grab the top piece, but that micro hand climber didn't have any bars to grab, and it cut my wrist until my fingertips found an area to clinch tightly. I was bleeding, with banged-up obliques, but I was holding onto the tree with my other arm while allowing my harness to take some of the weight load as I caught my breath.

The bottom piece was stuck against the tree with its flexible snapped cable cord strung out but not fully detached. I had to keep kicking the stand and cable dozens of times to get it to slide down while using one hand to slide down the harness strap and top piece above me as I hugged my way to the ground. I hiked a mile deeper for another location to keep hunting until dark.

On my 7-day vacation, my Garmin watch logged 141.4 miles while running six half-marathons mid-day between hunts on the nearby high-school track in one of my biggest training weeks for the 2020 Boston Marathon and ultra-marathon season build-up. I focused on hiking around 5 miles each morning and each evening for stalks and quick sits in the treetops at my furthest locations. I had no luck with the deer, though I saw some on several hunts, but I was able to harvest a hog, rabbit and a big choupique with my 1960s vintage recurve. It was one grueling week of quality adventure with a few tree-climber scares that makes my traditional archery pursuits enjoyable, even when the does continuously blew from downwind and the bucks I had rattled and grunted-in ducked under my slow flying feathers — twice.

## DOUBLE-CHECK EQUIPMENT

Be sure to regularly inspect your equipment. On one hunt, I was taking my lightweight X-stand climber in the woods when I heard rattling and stopped to fix the noise. One of the four fiberglass rods on the climber had cracked in half. After inspecting the stand, I noticed another fiberglass rod had a small crack down the midline.

On some other stands, I've had the foot paneling and bolts holding the stand rust and corrode. Even the main steel beams on a couple of climbers have hollowed out with corrosion. I made sure to upgrade to new equipment and trashed those danger traps.

Through the years, I've had two T-straps pop, nearly throwing me from a tree each time. Each year, I buy new straps to connect my stands and tree steps.

Years ago, I read that some people were using lower-profiled, rock-climbing harnesses, so I tested one out. I practiced falling from a climber in the yard at eye level. Sure, it saved me from hitting the ground, but it spun me nearly upside down, and wearing running clothes, it left me all bloodied from the impact against the tree. After that experiment, I stuck to using the typical harness that is now required to be worn in some of the national wild-life refuges I hunt. To me, that's the best rule in the pamphlet.

## PREPARATION

Practicing bear hugging to climb or descend from a tree — or hanging just above the ground in a harness — can prepare you for what it may be like if that happens during a hunt.

In the gym, some of my favorite functional exercises are: muscle ups (pull-ups where you thrust your entire upper body above the bar), one-arm grab pull-ups (using one arm on a bar and grabbing that arm's wrist with your other hand) and jumping pull-ups (letting go after a thrust up to grab different bars). Also, weighted pull-ups are great as well, since you're often wearing heavy boots and cold weather gear afield. I usually just get my wife or clients to jump on my back for my sets of these, since stacking plates with a weight belt is a tedious, time-consuming task.

For grip strength, doing pull-ups with one or two fingers and alternating digits, or holding onto a towel laid over the bar will help strengthen one's grip for when extreme situations occur. Many of these exercises can be done with a pull-up assistance machine or from a lower bar using some leg assistance until full hanging versions can be mastered. Trips to rock-climbing walls are amazing workouts as well.

By always wearing a safety harness in elevated stands, checking equipment and exercising many accidents can be prevented and a lifetime of hunting can be enjoyed! ■

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

The author shows off a nice channel catfish that will make somebody a great meal.

# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT CHANNEL CATFISH



STOCKED ALL OVER NORTH AMERICA, IT'S A FAVORITE OF FISHERMEN EVERYWHERE

**C**hannel catfish are known as the smallest of the “big three” species of catfish. The average size is about 16 inches, or 1½ pounds. But they can grow much larger.

Like its two bigger cousins, the blue catfish and flathead catfish, channels have spiny dorsal and pectoral fins. They also have whiskers, known as barbels, around their mouths. They have long, slender, bodies that are typically pale blue to olive on their backs and sides, with white bellies.

Channel catfish have deeply forked tails and small dark spots scattered on their bodies, especially when young. These spots usually fade as the fish ages. Exceptionally big channel cats are often mistaken for blue cats, which also have forked tails. Trophy-sized channels can also appear more blue or gray than olive, further confusing anglers.

The best way to tell the difference between a channel catfish and a blue is to count the rays on the fish's anal fin. Channel cats have 25 to 29 rays; blue cats

have 30 to 36.

The favored diet of channel catfish includes other fish, crawdads, mollusks and insects. They often eat aquatic vegetation, but fisheries biologists believe this may occur as the fish eat small prey hiding in vegetation, which the channel cats ingest inadvertently. However, during extreme conditions when little food is present, channel cats are known to eat large amounts of vegetation, suggesting the fish will adapt as situations dictate.

Channel cats spawn from May to July in waters that range from 70 to 80 degrees. The males construct nests along undercuts river banks, in logs and in other sunken debris. Females deposit a mass of gelatinous eggs into the nests, which are guarded by the males. Males stay with the fry for an extended period after they hatch.



## POND STOCK

When ponds are constructed throughout the United States or when established ponds are lacking fish for sport, biologists suggest stocking channel



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



Clear water gives up bass more readily during winter than dirty or muddy water. Water clarity is even more important than water temperature.



# BE CLEAR ABOUT WINTER BASS

By Dan Kibler

## FIND CLEAR WATER OR DON'T FISH, VETERAN PRO ADVISES

**W**hen it comes to catching bass in February, things are pretty clear to bass pro David Fritts — clear, as in clear water.

"When it's cold, if you want to catch bass, the water had better be clear. I can't stress how important it is. If it's been consistently cold, you need to find the clearest water and fish it," said Fritts, a Lexington, N.C., native who is one of only two professional bass fishermen to win the FLW Tour Championship, the Bassmaster Classic and BASS Angler of the Year.

"Down here, as long as the water temperature is around 49 or 50 degrees, you can catch 'em," he said. "If it gets much below 49, the fishing gets extremely tough. For some reason, 49 is a big number; I've never done well with the water temperature around 45. It needs to be

around 48 or 49, at least, before you can catch 'em good."

Fritts said that when you find clear water, start looking for warmer water — and it doesn't have to be much warmer.

"A difference of a degree or two can mean good fishing in one spot and poor fishing in another," he said. "If you've had a warming trend, you might look in the backs of creeks, where the shallow water will warm up quickly. If not, you're looking for places that are protected from the north wind, like short, deep pockets on the main lake.

"If you're not fishing the back of a creek, you want to be fishing a place where you can sit in 20 feet of water and cast up near the bank. Real sharp drops are good, and rocky banks are not bad. Fish are probably not gonna move all the way up

on a flat in February."

Fritts said because cold water makes bass act and feed sluggishly during the winter, you have to fish baits that will stay in front of them for a while — no zooming a bait past their noses, looking for a reaction bite.

Fritts likes a medium-diving crankbait, a jigging spoon, a jig or a suspending jerkbait like a Rapala Husky Jerk.

"Whatever bait you choose, you have to retrieve it as slowly as you can. The colder it is, the slower you go — and I'm terrible at that kind of fishing. I've fished with guys who were fishing suspended jerkbaits, and they'd make a cast and maybe wind it down a little bit, and just let it sit and sit and sit. I'd make two casts while they were just letting it sit there." ■

The Bobby Garland/Road Runner Slab Runner combo produces big crappie like these.



# SLAB RUNNER A WINNER FOR CRAPPIE

By Kinny Haddox

**S**ome baits are catch fish, and some catch fishermen. A first-of-its-kind collaboration between two giants in the crappie lure business — TTI-Blakemore and Bobby Garland — has moved to the top of the list in the “Both” category.

It’s a dream match for anglers and a nightmare for crappie. It’s called the “Slab Runner” and it comes in 20 of Garland’s top colors, including the most popular: Blue Grass, Cajun Cricket, Monkey Milk, Electric Chicken and Lights Out. The lure has a color-flow design with the jighead and plastic body sporting the same color combos.

“Any time you introduce a new lure like this, it gets a lot of attention,” said Ron Stallings of TTI-Blakemore, manufacturer of the Road Runner head and spinner. “But early orders are showing it’s already catching fish, and it’s going to be a popular one

with fishermen.”

The combination features the Road Runner, a leading jighead, with Garland’s Baby Shad plastic tail, a favorite soft-plastic tail for crappie.

“How can you go wrong with that?” Stallings asked.

The lure was revealed at last year’s ICAST sportfishing show and has started showing up on store shelves the past couple of months.

## VERSATILITY

“One of the attractions of the Slab Runner is that it can be fished so many ways,” Stallings said. “For most of your fishermen in Louisiana, it’s best for casting and retrieving in shallow-water applications like along the banks and beside cypress trees. The lure can be fished super-slow or at a pretty good clip, based on what you

find the fish want. The color combinations also work in just about any type of water.”

The Slab Runner comes in regular and weedless models, the latter having a small hook guard that keeps it from tangling. Slab Runners are available in a 1/6-ounce size with a No. 2 hook or a 1/8-ounce with a No. 1 hook. One pre-rigged bait and an extra Baby Shad come in each package, which sells for around \$3.25 a pack.

The larger model is also good for vertical jigging or fishing with a slow retrieve over drop-offs, ledges and points, often good spots for crappie this time of the year. It also works for spider rigging and long-lining techniques.

The Road Runner is one of the oldest crappie lures that’s still at the top of anglers list. When it was first made in 1958, designer Bert Hall has been quoted as saying, “We just wanted a lure that

would catch fish."

Time has proven that he got what he wanted.

## CAST PAST COVER

When fishing a Slab Runner in shallow water, Stallings said the best method is to cast the bait past trees, pilings or edges of grassbeds and then reel the lure slowly past the cover. The flash of the spinner and the action of the tail gives crappie two different "live shad" looks.

In deeper water, you can count the lure down to the depth fish are suspended in and then begin the slow retrieve. Often, if weather or water changes have made fish a little finicky, they might hit the lure but miss it. Veteran fishermen know that you should turn the reel a couple more times, then pause. Fish will often hit it again if you can keep it in their strike zone for a few seconds.

There's really no wrong way to fish the Slab Runner. Just keep it close to the fish and they'll do the rest. ■



Early reports show the new Slab Runner catching fishermen and fish.




# WINTER SALES EVENT




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FIELD NOTES



Bill Lewis' new SB-57 comes in several colors, including crawfish shades for springtime lunkers. INSET: Nick LeBrun depends on lures like the SB-57 to keep him ahead of the game on the pro bass tour.

# BILL LEWIS SB-57 FITS THE BILL PUTTING BASS IN THE BOAT

By Kinny Haddox

**I**t took Nick LeBrun only a few casts to decide that Bill Lewis's new SB-57 crankbait was going to be a fixture in his tackle box this year. A touring pro from Bossier City, LeBrun committed to a whole day of fishing the new lure recently, and it didn't take him long to start convincing the largemouths to play along. "It's a great bait, and it didn't take me long to figure that out because I didn't have to cast it very many times before I started catching fish," he said. "The thing that excites me about it is that

honeycomb pattern makes it rattle a little bit different, and it also makes the lure strong — even though it's more thin than most crank baits. "The lip is another thing. It's a hybrid bill — not a typical square bill or a coffin lip. It's a unique blend that helps the bait deflect well off cover. That's really important when the fish are being a little bit finicky, especially early in the year." LeBrun, a member of the pro staff for Louisiana-based Bill Lewis Lures, said while this bait will catch fish anywhere, it's also special for home-state bass.



"The first thing I think about for fishing it in cypress tree lakes is that during the spawn and the early post-spawn, it's

going to be great to deflect off the trees," he said. "It'll work just cranking it by the trees, or any structure, but when the big ones get finicky, bouncing it off the tree seems to be something they can't resist. This new lip design should minimize hangups. You can't catch fish when you are hung up. That's for sure."

## TICKLE THE GRASS

LeBrun said the lure will be great for shallow bass on big lakes like Toledo Bend. It is designed to work in 3 to 6 feet of water, and not just around hard structure, but grass, too.

"This bait is going to give anglers fishing the shallow grass, like on Toledo Bend, an option to get right on the grass but fish slower," he says. "It's typical in our lakes to rip a red Rat-L-Trap over the grass and barely nick the cover. But when the water is cold, a slower presentation sometimes works. This lure maintains its action at very slow retrieve speeds, and it comes in strawberry craw or glitter crawdad colors, two excellent choices. I also think my overall favorite will be the sneaky shad, a shad color with a little chartreuse in it. Another good feature of it is that it has a very slow rise when you pause it."

The SB-57 is named from its construction — a square bill that is 57 millimeters long. The honeycomb wall construction allows the bait to be 25% thinner than normal crankbaits.

LeBrun recently finished his rookie season on the FLW Tour after winning the BFL All America in 2018. ■

The small, squarish bill of a SB-57 crankbait helps it deflect off stumps or other submerged, wooden cover.



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# 6 HUGE MISTAKES TO AVOID IN COYOTE TRAPPING

By Brian Cope

**T**rapping coyotes is an effective way to help other wildlife species on your hunting land. These predators wreak havoc on deer fawns, quail, squirrels and many other species.

When you're trapping this season, avoid these common mistakes when using foothold traps, and you'll catch more coyotes than ever.

## SETTING TRAPS IN THE OPEN

Coyotes take the path of least resistance, so you're better off placing traps in areas like field edges, roadbeds, ditch banks and fence lines. You'll increase your chances even more by setting traps where two or more of these locations intersect. Coyotes will rarely venture into open fields to look for food, so if you're setting traps there, you're wasting your time.

## USING TOO MUCH BAIT OR LURE

Coyotes are attracted to bait sites because they look like a place they'll find an easy meal. The scent of lure may help seal the deal on a wary animal, but that isn't what initially attracts them. It can, however, alarm them if the amount of scent present is unnatural. This will scare them off and quickly educate them. They'll be much more skittish in the future, especially in that area.

## NOT SETTING ENOUGH TRAPS

In some cases, having more traps out can help you catch multiple coyotes. In other cases, having more traps out can help you catch one coyote that is smart enough to avoid one or two traps.

It's tough enough to trap a coyote when everything is set up correctly; make one of a half-dozen beginner mistakes and the task becomes almost impossible.

## NOT "BACKING" THE TRAP

This is one of the most crucial mistakes, and will frustrate trappers quickly. When you bury a trap and bait the hole, you need to give coyotes a reason to approach the hole from the proper direction. Otherwise, they can walk right in from behind the trap, dig up the bait, and never touch the trap. A well-placed tree branch or other natural debris will guide the animal right into your trap.

## GIVING YOUR SET AN UNNATURAL LOOK

It's easy and quick to just bury the set, smooth out the dirt, and walk away. But a coyote looking at that — even though it's curious about the hole and the scent coming from it — will not approach if it doesn't look natural. Use pine straw, peat moss, grass or whatever was on the ground before you dug the hole to bury your trap. Make it look natural or coyotes will walk right on by.

## SET YOUR TRAP FRAME ON SHAKY GROUND

When inspecting a site, a coyote may step directly on the frame of your trap before it sets foot on the trigger. If the trap shifts or wobbles, that dog is gone.

Coyotes quickly learn from trapping mistakes. The more educated they are, the harder they are to catch. Attention to detail will help you avoid the mistakes that allow them to roam free on your land. ■

All-white clothing is an option for hunters targeting late-season snow geese.

# FOOL A SNOW

## CONCEALMENT IS KEY TO TAKING SNOW GEESE

By Jeff Burleson

**As** soon as duck season ends, a choice few waterfowlers will pack away their duck decoys and layout boats and unload masses of white decoy shells for the snow goose conservation season.

Along with the masses of decoys, hunters will need to figure out a way to conceal themselves in the middle of 1,000 decoys without being noticed. If one goose out of a group of 500 sees trouble, the rest of the flock will respond and leave hunters empty handed.

Two basic ways to stay hidden are full concealment or plain sight. Full camouflage is the most-common method hunters use to break up their cover and hide from the incoming geese. With most fields that attract geese being planted in wheat, camo that includes browns, grays, and patches of dark green are tough to beat. Hunters can also fully conceal themselves in a layout blind that allows hunters to lay back and relax under two

spring-loaded doors; in times of brutally cold weather, they can offer some degree of wind protection and warmth.

Another way to hide from geese is out in the open, in the flock, wearing all-white apparel. White jackets, face masks and pants provide hunters full concealment while adding additional eye-catching white to the decoy spread.

Regardless of which type of concealment hunters end up using, the most-important aspect is beyond the type of camouflage chosen. Hunters need to hide their faces, and the best way is by wearing a face mask, because a shiny face will stick out like sore thumb in the middle of a drab field. ■

### MISSISSIPPI'S SNOW GOOSE SEASONS

**Conservation Order Season (special permit required):** Feb. 1-7, Feb. 9-March 31..

**Bag limits:** No limit.



# POND TIME

## START FIXING POND PROBLEMS THIS MONTH

By Jeff Burleson

**G**rowing big fish begins with creating the right environment on the molecular level. The food chain in ponds begins with the microorganisms and ends with the top predators, such as largemouth bass and catfish.

In order to get the preferred micro-organism to grow, proper pH and later fertilization must be a part of every pond management plan. Pond productivity starts with balancing the pH to allow the expected phytoplankton to be able to utilize the added nutrients.

During February, pond microorganism growth remains dormant and will continue to lack activity until the waters warm in spring. Since ponds require at least four weeks for water chemistry parameters to change, pH-altering compounds should be added in February.

Many ponds suffer from acidic conditions and limestone will be prescribed to raise the pH to desired levels between 6.5 and 7.5. The nearly balanced pH will allow phytoplankton to utilize the fertilizer to be added in the coming months when primary productivity begins its warm season blooms and provides the food resources for the users the next rung up on the food chain.

Take results from water testing and determine the appropriate amounts of limestone the ponds will to alter the pH. If water tests were not performed, the water's pH can be tested using a pH test kit purchased from a pool-supply retailer. As a rule of thumb, one ton of limestone per acre will raise the pH by one point. Limestone supplements should be scattered evenly throughout the pond and allowed to settle four weeks before the first fertilizer treatment in March. ■



**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.

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2020 FEB	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Sat 1	██	██	██	██	47
Sun 2	██	██	██	██	42
Mon 3	██	██	██	██	39
Tue 4	██	██	██	██	42
Wed 5	██	██	██	██	44
Thu 6	██	██	██	██	55
Fri 7	██	██	██	██	65
Sat 8	██	██	██	██	75
Sun 9	██	██	██	██	81
Mon 10	██	██	██	██	69
Tue 11	██	██	██	██	56
Wed 12	██	██	██	██	42
Thu 13	██	██	██	██	32
Fri 14	██	██	██	██	34
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