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MARCH 2020

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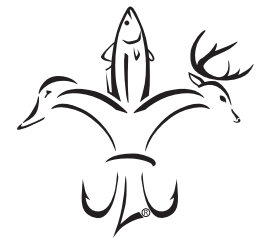
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CALLING ALL
GOBBLERS

47
BASS FISHING IN THE
SINGULAR



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If you're a Mississippi hunter, that big gobbler is out there, waiting for you somewhere, and you can put the hurt on him beginning this month. Photo by Rick Small.

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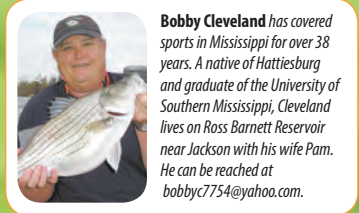
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Bobby Cleveland has covered sports in Mississippi for over 38 years. A native of Hattiesburg and graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Cleveland lives on Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson with his wife Pam. He can be reached at bobbyc754@yahoo.com.

Outdoor **UPDATE** with **Bobby Cleveland**

Rick Small

MARCH MARCHING ORDERS: GET IN THE WOODS OR ON THE WATER AND ENJOY MISSISSIPPI'S TREASURES

As a Mississippi sportsman, you have your choice of March marching orders:

- To the forests and fields to chase the monarchs of Mississippi, wild turkeys;
- To the water for the myriad freshwater and saltwater opportunities that abound;
- Or, of course, both of the above.

We recommend the third option, and our March edition is the perfect mood-setter for the month. We've got the features that include the best advice of the state's expert hunters and anglers, plus a few suggestions of where your pursuits should begin, all designed to help you take the biggest bite possible of all the treats March has to offer. Mike Giles writes about the magic of turkey hunting; Phillip Gentry discusses single-rod crappie fishing techniques, Kinny Haddox talks with bass pros about how to target big fish, David Hawkins provides a primer on hunting wild hogs, and we review the biggest bucks taken during the 2019-20 deer season.

Before we hit the road, and you turn the pages, we have an important reminder for 2020, a leap year when February has that one extra day: Feb. 29.

Since this issue actually comes off the press before March 1, and you could be reading this in February, we feel it necessary to remind sportsmen that all of the hunting seasons that usually end on the final day of February, the 28th in most years, still end on Feb. 28.

That means no hunting for squirrel, rabbit, snipe, crow, raccoon, opossum and bobcat on Feb. 29. Trapping is still open through March 15 and quail through March 7. The conservation order on light geese is still open, too, through March 31.

Now, let's go. ■



March is a big month for bass fishermen in Mississippi, as fish really get cranked up for the spring spawn.



GOBBLE, GOBBLE! GOBBLE! IT'S FINALLY TURKEY TIME

For many devoted turkey hunters, like Earl Thompson of Southaven, deer season is simply a “glorified, extended scouting season for gobblers.”

Mississippi’s spring season has two opening days: March 7 for youngsters ages 15 and under, and March 14 for all other hunters. The season will end on May 1.

Thompson enjoys hunting deer, sort of . . .

“Let me put it like this: I like to go to camp and be with the gang and to take my grandsons and granddaughters to the stand to help out my sons, but honestly, I don’t care anything about shooting them anymore,” he said. “They kill all we need for the processor and the freezer. I go out there to assess the turkey. They are looking for antlers; I am looking for longbeards.”

“I learn the core areas of the biggest, toughest, meanest gobblers around. I guess that’s so I can have the areas chosen to have my heart and spirit broken during the season. Those old birds, as much as I love them, I hate them even more.”

That’s a love-hate sentiment shared by most experienced and dedicated turkey hunters.

“There’s an old joke about turkey hunting involving these two old hunters walking back to the truck after an unsuccessful morning of chasing a boss gobbler,” Thompson said. “One of them sees the other suddenly stop and then stomping on the ground. He walks over and sees the guy had walked up on a hen’s nest with about eight eggs, which are now obliterated. ‘What the heck you doing?’ he asks his partner, who turns to him, shows a wry smile and answers, ‘I’m getting them before they can beat me.’”

“I’m not that bad, but I can understand how he felt. Many times I’ve gone home feeling like a whipped puppy, frustrated, with my tail between my legs. They shut me out last year. I didn’t fire a shot during Mississippi’s spring season, for the first time in . . . in so many years, I can’t remember when. I did kill two in Texas and another one in Kansas.”

Thompson hunts near Oxford in Lafayette and Marshall counties, so he was surprised to hear the results compiled from the 2019 season during the first mandatory harvest report or “Game Check” for turkey.

Lafayette County ranked No. 1 for reported harvest with 407 gobblers. Marshall was No. 2 with 388. Ranked No. 4 was Panola, which neighbors Lafayette to the west, with 357. Attala was No. 3 at 358, Carroll No. 5 at 342 and Copiah No. 6 at 304. No other counties reported more than 300 birds.

“Wow, I knew our population numbers were good, but I didn’t expect that,” Thompson said. “We were told that the North Central Zone was going to have a good season last year, but I had no idea we rated that highly in the state.”

As expected, due to the vast flooding, Mississippi’s South Delta had the worst season. Hardest hit was Sunflower County, the only county that didn’t have a single gobbler reported. Humphreys and Washington each had two reported, and Issaquena and Sharkey had three each.

Data collected for the 2019 Turkey Game Check showed that 61 percent of all Mississippi gobblers taken were mature longbeards.



Dan Kibler

THE SURVEY SAYS....

Here are some of the interesting statistics found in the 2019 Turkey Game Check results, as published by the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks:

- Opening day of the season (March 15, 2019) had the highest reported harvest at 773 birds.
- Over half of all turkeys were killed by the end of March.
- Only 3 percent of birds reported had less than a 6-inch beard; meaning 97 percent taken were mature gobblers.
- With 61 percent of gobblers reporting having spurs measuring between ½- and 1 inch, it appears 2-year-old birds dominated the harvest.
- Older gobblers — or birds with spurs exceeding one inch — accounted for 34 percent of those harvested.
- Only 9.7 percent of hunters reported taking a season limit of three gobblers.
- A total of 8,780 unique users reported 12,627 gobblers harvested.

Slightly more than half of Mississippi’s 82 counties reported at least 150 gobblers taken. Twelve percent of reported gobblers harvest were taken on public land. ■

The first segment of Mississippi's red snapper season will open May 22.



RED SNAPPER WILL OPEN ON MAY 22

Mississippi's 2020 red snapper season will open at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, May 22, for recreational and state-permitted for-hire vessels, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources has announced.

Recreational fishermen will be able to fish out to 200 nautical miles, while charterboats with state permits are limited to fishing in state territorial waters, which is 9 nautical miles south of the barrier islands.

The season for federally permitted for-hire vessels will be announced by federal officials.

Considered the first of two segments of the season, the first one will continue through 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, July 12. The red snapper season will then close for an undetermined period to allow MDMR officials to assess the harvest to determine how to manage the remaining catch quota during a second segment.

The season will close if the assigned quota for recreational fishermen or state for-hire fishermen is reached at any point after the season opens. It will also close if the Gulf-wide quota is reached. ■

CWD CASES NOW NUMBER 49

MDWFP COUNTS ON SPECIAL SEASON FOR MORE DATA

According to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, the number of confirmed cases of chronic wasting disease in deer has risen to 21, with 28 more suspected CWD cases awaiting confirmation from a national laboratory in Iowa.

All 30 cases discovered through testing during the 2019-20 deer season came from the North Mississippi CWD Management Zone, with six found in Marshall County and 24 in Benton County. Both counties are on the Tennessee line, just across the border from that state's hot CWD Zone, where more than 400 confirmed cases have been found in two years.

The MDWFP took steps in January to help expand its testing opportunities in the North Mississippi CWD Zone. It created a special two-day deer season Feb. 8-9, with regulations mirroring

the regular deer season except that each hunter was granted two more bucks and five does over and above the regular season limit.

It was mandatory that all deer taken during this two-day hunt be submitted on the day of harvest for CWD testing. The season drew mixed reactions from hunters, with some happy for the additional opportunity and others worried about the impact on the herd.

"One way or another, we'll be up here anxiously awaiting the results," said Pete Jones, a native of Marshall County who lives in Oxford. "I had to work but would have hunted otherwise. I know a lot of my friends were planning to hunt, and I know one who killed three the first morning: two does and a pretty decent buck." ■

5 HOTSPOTS FOR MARCH FISH

The late winter/early spring is prime time for fishing in Mississippi, mostly thanks to the phase of fish activity known as the prespawn. Fishing feed heavily in early and mid-March as they prepare for the rigors and the fasting period that comes with the peak of reproduction activity. With that in mind, here is *Mississippi Sportsman's* Top 5 March fishing trips:

GRENADA LAKE

For the pure, trophy crappie angler, not just from Mississippi but from all over the country, there is no destination that ranks higher on any list than this U.S. Corps of Engineers flood-control project near Grenada. As many 3-pound or better fish are caught in March as in the rest of the year combined. When the big females begin migrating from the deep winter to the shallow spawning areas, it leads them into precarious positions where they can be found. They will follow all the typical routes; main lake points, creek channels, ditches. If fishermen can locate structure on those routes, it's on.

LAKE WASHINGTON

If, and that's a mighty big if, the South Delta can escape the backwater flooding that was so catastrophic in 2019, then this old oxbow lake near Glen Allen in south Washington County is a must visit, especially for trolling aficionados.

It is unique in that the fish have very little structure with which to relate, so they simply stack up in shallow flats just off the shallower spawning grounds. You have to find the shad, but they are plentiful. Most trolling success is found in 5 to 7 feet of water, and the west side of the lake right across from downtown Glen Allen, is a great place to start. Use either jigs or a jig-minnow combination and cover all levels of the water column from 3 feet down to the bottom.

LAKE OKHISSA

Bass fishermen looking for the bite of a lifetime would be wise to visit this U.S. National Forest Service lake near Bude. It is deep and clear, but it is also full of big bass that start moving up on the points and banks nearest creek channels on the upper end of the lake. In early March, the big females will be on the move from deep water to shallow water, but by late March fishermen with trained eyes can start spotting females on the beds.

BARNETT RESERVOIR

This is the one lake we can include for both bass and crappie, all on the prespawn pattern. This year could be a challenge, because the lake has been lowered by 2½ feet, which is a lot for The Rez, through the winter as lake officials continue fighting



against an outbreak of giant salvinia in the Pelahatchie Bay area. But it could also be a blessing. The shallow water should concentrate the fish in smaller areas. Bass fishermen may have to switch from vegetation like pad stems to ditches and ledges, but that shouldn't be a problem. Crappie fishermen can look to the old standing timber areas.

BAY SPRINGS LAKE

For spotted bass and black bass lovers, this lake produces some entertaining action, and an old pattern is making a comeback on this Tenn-Tom Waterway pool. The prespawn period brings the big fish up from the deep points and places them in the mouths of the coves they will eventually use for spawning. Throwing a suspending jerkbait, reeling it quickly to a depth of about 7 or 8 feet, and then retrieving it slowly with a sweeping action of a rod, can get your shoulder hurt with the way these aggressive spots and largemouths hit these lures. ■

HOUSE WILDLIFE COMMITTEE GETS NEW CHAIRMAN

Two weeks after the February edition of *Mississippi Sportsman* hit the newsstands detailing that no changes were expected regarding the House Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks Committee in the state legislature, a change took place.

Long-time chair Scott Bounds was replaced by Bill Kinkade, R-Byhalla, who is entering his seventh year in the House. Kinkade was handed the chair by Phillip Gunn, speaker of the house. Kinkade's vice chairman is Shane Barnett, R-Waynesboro. Bounds remains a member of the committee. Other members are: Chris Brown; Lester Carpenter; Bob Evans; Abe Hudson; Robert Johnson; Trey Lamar; Johnathan Lancaster; Vince Mangold; Carl Mickens; Tom Miles; Ken Morgan; and Karl Oliver.

As we reported in February, the Senate chairman is Neal Whaley, R-Potts Camp.

Both chairmen are from Marshall County, representing districts in the North Mississippi Chronic Wasting Disease Management Zone. Of the 21 confirmed CWD cases and 28 suspected CWD cases (awaiting confirmation results), all but two come from the North Zone.

It is natural then that both chairmen have a keen interest in legislation that could help curtail the spread of CWD, which is considered an affliction with a 100-percent fatality rate for deer.

So far, 10 bills have been assigned to the Senate committee and three to the House, and the majority involve CWD is one way or another. Those that could directly impact sportsmen or wildlife

management include these:

SB 2152 (Senate bill): Would establish a four-year term for the executive director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "The term of office of executive director shall be four (4) years, and the executive director may be removed for cause by majority vote of the members of the commission or by recall by the Governor."

SB 2275: Would clarify that a conservation officer must have "probable cause to conduct a search without a warrant;"

SB 2276: Revise and require deer taken under depredation permits be tested for chronic wasting disease;

SB 2313: Would prohibit use of certain scents and the supplemental feeding of deer outside registered enclosures;

HB 450 (House Bill): Would authorize the MDWFP to require annual CWD testing of white-tailed deer taken inside any enclosure;

HB 622: Would require the MDWFP and its commission to provide public notice any hunting and fishing regulation changes in affected areas, and also to notify legislators that represent the affected area.

The legislature had a Feb. 17 deadline for introducing new bills. The deadline for floor action on bills originating in each house is March 3.

Neither chairman sounds supportive of a bill to authorize the MDWFP to create a mandatory harvest reporting system for deer, similar to the authorization granted for turkey hunting before the 2019 turkey season. While both like the idea, Kincaid and Whaley say they prefer more study this year. ■

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Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Brett Wristen

Brett Wristen, 15, of Richland, with the 12-point buck he killed at 60 yards in Leflore County on Dec. 21, 2019. The buck had a 20½-inch spread, weighed 165 pounds and was roughly scored at 145.



Lillian Naquin

Lillian Naquin took her first deer with a Ruger .300 Blackout on Nov. 10, 2019, at her pop's camp in Tylertown.



Lien, Andriy, Aliena, Andrew and Audrina Chebanu

Lien and Andriy Chebanu and their children, Aliena, Andrew and Audrina, pose with the family's first-ever buck on Christmas Eve 2019. It weighed 205 pounds and was taken on private land in Smithdale.



**Addison Finch
Hayden Jordan**

Addison Finch and Hayden Jordan showing off bluetick deer dogs in north Mississippi on Jan. 18, 2020.



**Jeff Coker
Bryan Sanders**

Jeff Coker and Bryan Sanders took these two bucks sitting in a stand together in Monroe County.

GOT PICS? We want 'em

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All images will be considered, but those taken on the water or in the woods will have the best chance of being featured.

*Digital images must be sent in jpeg format. High-resolution images (taken on your camera's highest setting) will work the best. All images (physical and digital) become property of Mississippi Sportsman and cannot be returned.



CALLING ALL GOBBLERS

PATIENCE, AND KNOWING WHERE TURKEYS WANT TO BE, CAN GO A LONG WAY TO HELPING YOU FILL A TAG THIS SEASON. THESE TWO EXPERTS HELP YOU UNDERSTAND.

■ By Mike Giles

Sometimes, it only takes a few well-timed purrs and clucks to get them coming his way.

But there are times when he can't call them off the roost in your direction, especially when there are a lot of hens in the area.

Andy Duvall of Carrollton understands. A veteran turkey hunter and call-maker, he killed his first gobbler at age 10. He knows how to turn the heads of gobblers and tempt them into making fatal mistakes.

"If he's got hens, then I try to call the hens in," Duvall said. "I like to let them know I'm there and keep close to them and let them dictate how much they want to communicate. As long as I'm close to them, I'll purr and cluck, just enough to let them know where I am.

"But the easiest way to call in an old gobbler is to call him to where he wants to be. The only way to know that is to know their habits and the lay of the land. If you scout year-round and become familiar with an area, you'll know their strutting grounds and where they like to spend their time from mid-day to mid-afternoon. If you know where they're roosting and where they like to be mid-day, then you can set up and call them in the direction they're already going."

LATE AFTERNOON OR EVENING

While many people prefer calling to gobblers off the roost, the reality is that many people have to work in the morning, but they can hunt afternoons. And some, like Duvall, have great success.

"I've killed more turkeys in the evening because I can go more after work," Duvall said. "And they can be much easier to call and kill if you can locate an old gobbler."

During the afternoon, gobblers usually don't gobble a lot, but they will respond to calling, especially when they find that the hens have left them and they're alone.

"I'm going to walk the ridgetops along hardwood bottoms as well as along pasture edges," Duvall said. "I've located more turkeys by using the terrain to my advantage and spotting (them) by sight or with my



MISSISSIPPI TURKEY SEASONS

Youth season: March 7-13, ages 15 and under. Bag limit: one bearded bird per day, three per season.

Spring season: March 14-May 1. Bag limit: one bird per day, 6-inch beard or longer, three per season.

Andy Duvall dropped the hammer on this Carroll County gobbler.

ears. I've located more turkeys in the afternoon by hearing their scratching while I'm slipping around and listening."

If he locates some turkeys or if he knows an area, he'll often set up on a ridge above the bottoms and purr and yelp softly while scratching the leaves.

"When I'm walking to my hunting spot, I'll also use a crow call to try to entice a shock gobbler," Duvall said. "But if you move too much, you might spook more than if you just set up and call. I like to set up and call every 15 to 20 minutes, and I'll spend two to three hours there."

BE PATIENT AT MID-DAY

Award-winning author and veteran turkey hunter Otha Barham has spent a lifetime calling to wary gobblers around the country, and his Mississippi turkey education prepared him well. The wise old birds around these parts were such a challenge that they made other birds seem easy. At 83, he's still successful at getting his birds. Barham can't run-and-gun like he used to, but he can still be effective by hunting the mid-day hours and utilizing his patience and calling skills.

Get a big gobbler started your way, and make sure you call just enough to keep him interested.



Barham prefers hunting mid-day from high spot on a ridge where his enticing calls can be heard from long distances, in any direction. He proved that last year during a mid-day hunt in Lauderdale County.

"I didn't hear a gobbler at daylight, so I called sparingly, like the old-time hunters recommended," Barham said. "I didn't want to spook the turkeys by calling too much and making them call-shy. I'd call about every 30 minutes, trying to attract any bird I could."

Barham stroked the lid of his box call, producing a series of yelps, and put the call down.

"Gobble, gobble, gobble." An old tom sounded off in response from the hollow to his north.

"At 10:30, that old gobbler belted out a thunderous gobble, so I called back to him," Barham said. "I sent out a few sweet love yelps just to let him know where I was and shut it down for a while. I wanted to entice him to come looking for me."

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The author (right) accompanied 83-year-old Otha Barham on a successful hunt last season.



PATIENCE PAYS OFF

After a little game of cat and mouse, the gobbler couldn't stand it any longer and belted out a few more thunderous gobbles, pleading with the hen to answer him.

"I answered him again about 15 minutes later, and he gobbled right back at me," Barham said. "Then, he went silent, and I knew he was coming."

Ten minutes later, Barham heard a limb crack, turned to look, and out walked the coal-black gobbler.

"That gobbler popped out there and stopped dead in his tracks," said Barham. "He didn't move for what seemed like an eternity and just stood there and looked around the field. He

was afraid that another gobbler was going to come in and spoil his party, and he was on full alert.

"He finally started easing towards the woods, so I decided to try and find out if I had enough for him," Barham said. "I told myself that it was now or never as I pulled the trigger."

"Ka-boom!" roared his 12-gauge Berretta. The love-sick tom collapsed in a heap, flopped a few times and died.

Barham had put another notch on his turkey call. Later that season, he duplicated the feat with another fine bird he killed at 1:45 p.m.

"If you have the patience and know how to call, then you can find a ridgetop or pasture where turkeys are and still be successful harvesting turkeys no matter your age," he said. "It was hard for me at first, but I finally had to modify my hunting, and I've been very successful as a result."

If you want to harvest a gobbler this spring, you might want to utilize some of Duvall's and Barham's tips and techniques. Head to the woods and be patient. ■

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MEET ANDY DUVALL

Andy Duvall of Carrollton has been an avid turkey hunter since he was 8 years old. He is an expert turkey hunter, call-maker and competition caller. He has harvested birds around the country and has been making calls for several years.

Duvall won the first calling contest he entered, taking first place in friction call in the state championship. He's had top-3 finishes or better in calling competitions in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Florida, and he's also had several top-3 finishes in call-making competitions.

Here are some facts about Duvall:

- Hunted turkeys for 25 years.
- **Best Mississippi gobbler:** 11½-inch beard, 1¼-inch spurs.
- **First turkey:** Harvested at 10 years old with his father.
- **Favorite call:** 3-reed combo cut mouth call he makes. "Mouth calls are more convenient and have less movement," he said.
- **Calls he makes:** mouth calls, scratch box, pot calls and box calls.
- **Favorite shotguns:** 12-gauge Remington 870; 12-gauge Benelli SBE III.
- **Favorite turkey load:** TSS No. 9. "I shoot this because it allows for cleaner kills," he said.
- **Andy Duvall quote:** "I don't care about shooting a turkey at 60 to 70 yards. It's more fun to call them up in your lap and shoot them in the face at close range." It also takes more patience and is much more exciting." ■



Andy Duvall has been hunting turkeys for 25 of his 33 years.



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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DEER OF THE YEAR

WHERE AND WHEN WERE MISSISSIPPI'S BEST WHITETAIL BUCKS TAKEN DURING THE 2019-20 SEASON? YOU'LL GET SOME IDEA HERE.

Yes, it was an interesting deer season in Mississippi, a period of four months or so after the flood waters receded enough for hunters to get into most of the deer woods in the Magnolia State.

Mississippi Sportsman chronicled the taking and tagging of a double-handful of the best bucks that fell since archery season opened last Oct. 1. The following are summaries of previously published stories written by Bobby Cleveland, Bill Garbo, Andy Douglas, Dan Kibler and Brian Cope.

We hope you enjoy reliving the way these great animals met their matches.

MACK DADDY MEETS HIS MAKER >





Chip Henderson's 'Mack Daddy' of a buck fell on Oct. 7 in Hinds County.

MACK DADDY MEETS HIS MAKER

Chip Henderson, lead pastor of Pinelake Church, was scrolling through trail-camera photos this past August, when one caused his heart to skip a beat. With his head and wheels spinning, he sat, staring at a photo of one of the most eye-popping and beautiful bucks he had ever seen, a huge, main-frame 10-pointer.

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

That worked out perfectly, when, on Oct. 7, Henderson arrowed the huge buck, which carried a rack with a gross Boone & Crockett Club score of 153 inches, including a 19-inch inside spread, 22-inch main beams and tines as long as 12 inches.

Henderson's only access to Mack's likely bedding cover was from the south, so he had to wait for a northerly wind to leave

his lock-on stand, high up on a pine tree, in a perfect spot. When the first cold front of the season finally arrived, he realized he'd have his coveted north wind on Monday, Oct. 7.

Henderson got to his hunting grounds the next afternoon around 2:45, spooking one deer on the way to his stand. He saw a doe almost immediately, and at 3:30, he caught a glimpse of movement and he could see antlers, but the deer stopped and disappeared. After 15 nerve-wracking minutes, he saw the buck move again at 50 yards, and Henderson realized it was Mack, headed straight toward him.

The buck tested the wind and kept coming, slowly and cautiously. When it got to 30 yards, the buck stopped with his head behind a tree, and Henderson picked up his bow and shifted his body slightly to the right to get the best shot angle. At 20 yards, Mack turned broadside and stepped out into an open shooting lane and stopped. Henderson went to full draw with his Matthews bow, put his 20-yard sight pin behind the buck's front shoulder, and squeezed his release at 3:45 p.m., sending the Rage broadband home.

After waiting an hour, Henderson took up the blood trail, and 100 yards away, he found the huge buck piled up. ■

— Bill Garbo

SECOND TIME THE CHARM

The second time was the charm for Troyce Luck Whittington of Byram.

A 25-year-old deer hunter, Whittington made good on his second chance at a great Hinds County buck on Oct. 22 after missing the trophy the first time on Oct. 10, at the outset of Mississippi's archery season.

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

Whittington didn't return to his stand until the afternoon Oct. 22, after he saw a few bucks in trail-camera photos. He climbed into his stand just before 4 o'clock, and it wasn't long before he had a nice 8-point buck in range. He was ready to draw when he saw the huge buck walk in, all 12 points and 136½ inches of him.

"I couldn't believe it. I waited until he came walking in, but he wouldn't turn broadside," he said.

Whittington never got the broadside shot, and with the 8-pointer and another 6-point buck watching, he took an unusual shot at the big buck, head on, from above.

"I drew my bow and took the shot as he was standing, still facing me," he said. "When he started running, I could see about 5 inches of arrow sticking out. I knew I had smoked him, and the other bucks ran about 50 yards out and stopped. I'm pretty sure they saw me do my happy dance."

Whittington got help in the form of trailing dogs, which found the buck about 75 yards away.

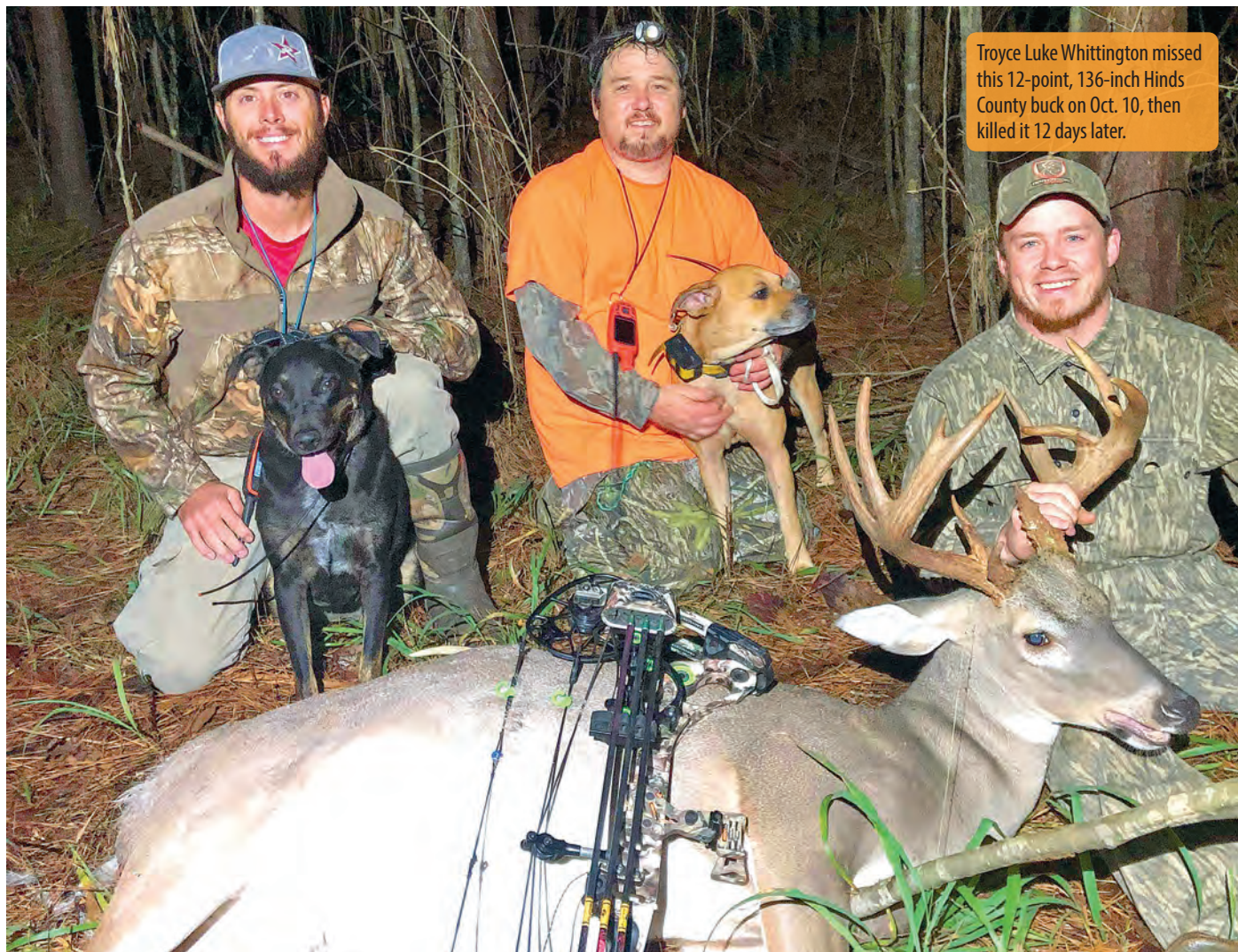
"Once we found this one, I had to back off and cry, I was so relieved," he said.

Considered a main-frame 10-point, the buck had 12 countable points, and is pushing the definition of typical to the limit. It had some character, to say the least.

"He has this one point, almost like a third main beam, growing right out of his right base," Whittington said. "He has a nice sticker point off his right G2, which turns in across his head, which is similar to his left G2 that turns right and points back across his head." ■

— Bobby Cleveland

OLD-STYLE HUNTING ➤



Troyce Luke Whittington missed this 12-point, 136-inch Hinds County buck on Oct. 10, then killed it 12 days later.

OLD-STYLE HUNTING

Kyle Carter killed his big public-land buck the old-fashioned way. He earned it.

Carter, from Pascagoula, killed a 133-inch, 10-point buck on public land in the Desoto National Forest in Stone County by finding the buck's food source, its bedding area and the trails that connected the two. The two connected on Oct. 23.

"I have been hunting Desoto National Forest for about 10 years, and it is 100% open to the public," said Carter. "There's not a lot of foliage out there for the deer to eat, being as how it's mostly pine and briars with a few scrub oaks. I always look for muscadine and persimmon trees producing during bow season.

"This year, I found a good food source and set up multiple cameras on different trails leading to that food source. I got a picture of the big deer, and I believed it to be the same big 8-point I have been trying to kill for a couple of years. He turned into a 10-point (with four stickers) this year."

After finding the muscadine vines and persimmon trees, Carter moved in, only to find he had more work to do.

"I set up on the food sources, but he wasn't moving and feeding in daylight," he said. "So, I pinpointed his main trail and was able to identify his bedding area.

"I found which trail he was using, and that started the domino effect that allowed me to find his bedding area," he said. "I was hoping to get as close as I could to his bedding area without disturbing him so I could get a shot at him in good shooting light."

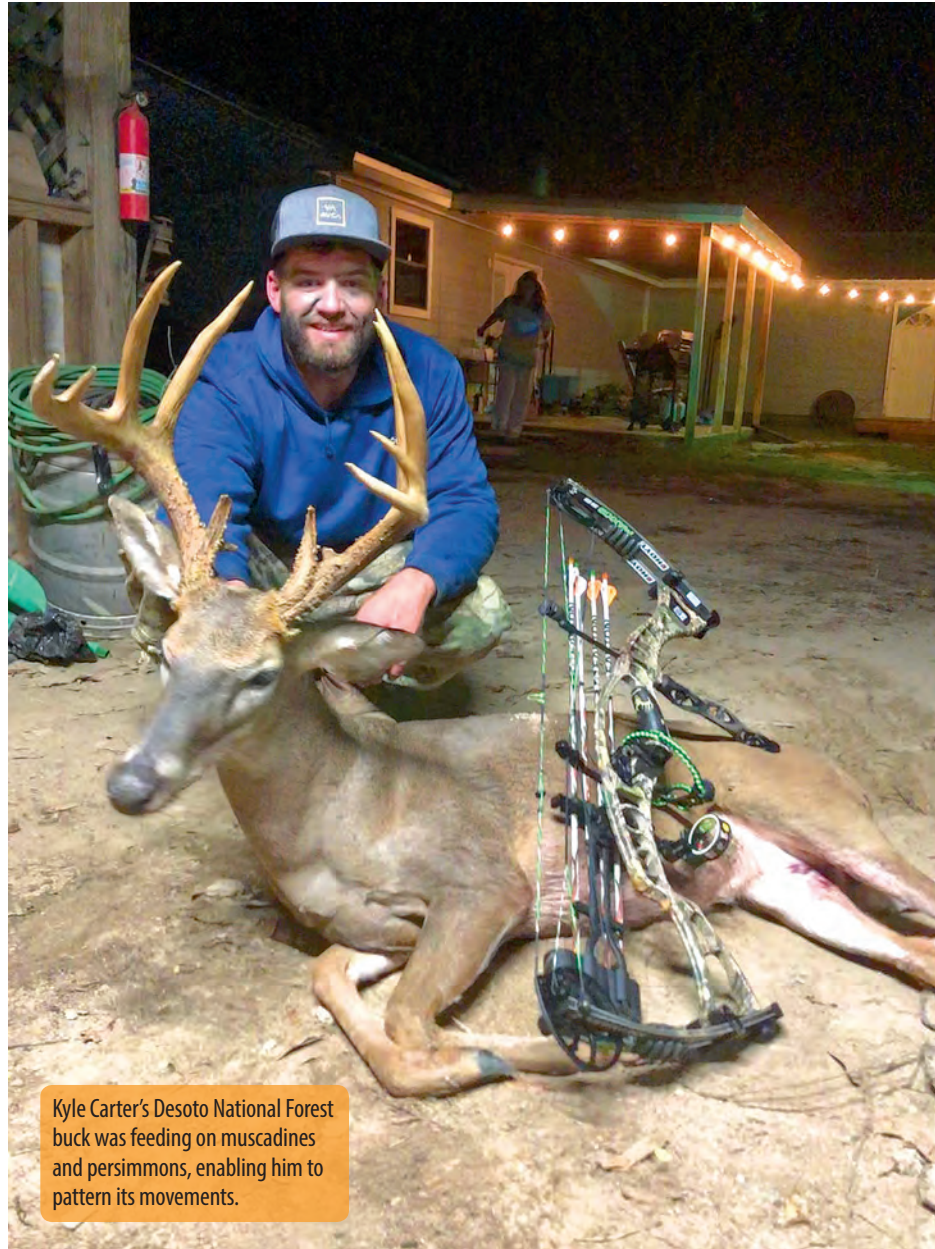
On the afternoon of Oct. 23, Carter spotted the buck on its main trail, which ran through a bay bottom between two pine ridges. He heard the buck long before he saw it.

"I got in the stand at 2:30 and shot it at 5:35," he said. "I could hear it coming from my left, loud footsteps coming down the ridge. When I was finally able to put motion to the sound, all I could see was antlers over the top of gallberry bushes. It looked like a rocking chair upside down going over the bushes.

"That bottom is so thick, you can't see through the gallberries. It took a long time before I could ever see hair. All I could see for a long time was antlers."

Carter liked what he saw — big tall tines rising above the brush — but he was able to control his emotions.

"When he came in, he moved so cautiously and nervously that it took him 30 to 40 minutes to go about 50 yards," he said. "On



Kyle Carter's Desoto National Forest buck was feeding on muscadines and persimmons, enabling him to pattern its movements.

the first good shooting lane, I drew back on my bow, but he staged up behind a tree. All I could see was his head. I had to hold full draw for six or seven minutes until he turned his head so I could collapse.

"I took some deep breaths and recollected my thoughts. There's a small creek ditch running through the bottom, and when he cleared that, he wasn't as nervous and came on up toward the ridge where the food sources were. I drew the bow the first chance I got, lined him up in my peep (sight) and let it fly. It was a 42-yard shot."

And, it was perfect. ■

— Bobby Cleveland

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DEER OF THE YEAR



A 17-yard crossbow show gave Kenneth Wallace this great trophy on the Natchez State Park WMA.

Kenneth Wallace's four-day draw hunt on Natchez State Park WMA turned out to be twice as nice. Wallace had killed a doe with his crossbow on Nov. 3, and he had decided to sit a while and let his son, Garrett, finish his afternoon hunt before dealing with the dead deer. He reloaded and recocked his crossbow, and 30 minutes later, he was squeezing the trigger again, on a 13-point, 220-pound monster that scores in the high 140s.

The Wallaces, from Lincoln County, were able to hang their stands the first day of an Oct. 31-Nov. 3 draw hunt on the WMA. They hunted the next morning, then couldn't come back until the final afternoon of the hunt.

Kenneth Wallace took the doe after getting into his stand on a ridge, taking her at 12 yards with his crossbow. Another 30 minutes passed, and he heard more deer behind him. He turned and could see legs and tips of antlers at 25 yards, a buck eating acorns; he thought it might have been an 8-pointer he'd seen earlier in the hunt but couldn't get a shot at.

"The buck took another step or two, got where I could see him better, and raised his head," Wallace said. "I realized, 'Oh my gosh, this isn't that 8-point.'"

The buck didn't give Wallace an immediate shot. He had to let the buck skirt a downed tree, but the buck, apparently startled, ran off but stopped 17 yards away. The angle of the shot wasn't

what Wallace wanted, but when the buck took three more steps, Wallace leaned as far out as he could to keep the bow from making contact with the tree and fired at 17 yards.

Wallace waited 40 minutes until it was dark, texted his son, and the two took up a good blood trail, finding the buck 70 yards away.

The big buck had a 19¼-inch inside spread, main beams that were 22¼ and 23¾ inches long, 13 scorable points and three more sticks not quite but close to an inch long. ■

— Andy Douglas



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ALMOST TOO EASY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Dan Kibler



William Dearman of Flowood took this 152-inch buck after grunting it into rifle range.

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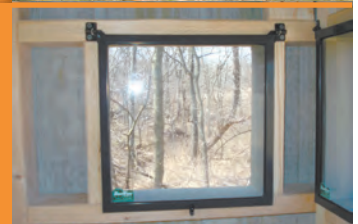
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BETTER LATE THAN NEVER >

**BETTER LATE
THAN NEVER**

Cody Armstrong of Brandon killed a great, 17-point non-typical buck on Dec. 20, but he had one regret: that he didn't kill it a year or two earlier.

Armstrong, 27, a decorated U.S. Army veteran — the recipient of two Purple Hearts — had the big non-typical buck in trail-camera photos from the 2016, 2017 and 2018 seasons. In all three seasons, he was a big, main-frame 8-pointer with a series of drop tines and sticker points.

By the time Armstrong killed him in 2019, his rack, while still impressive, wasn't nearly what it had been previously.

Hunting on a 27-acre block of land in Montgomery County belonging to his family, Armstrong had a trail-camera photo of the buck on Dec. 28, 2016, that he didn't discover until after the season. He had photos of him in 2017 on Nov. 25 and Dec. 17. He had a 2018 photo at 3 a.m. on Dec. 6. But in 2019, the buck showed up more often. Armstrong had a photo on Nov. 11 and one on Dec. 7, the latter checking a scrape. He had a daylight photo of him on Dec. 18, behind a doe, and he had another the same day at 7 p.m., checking a scrape.

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

Armstrong was in his lock-on tree stand on Dec. 20 by 5:15 a.m. He saw a doe and yearling at 7 o'clock, and at 10:45, he noticed grass moving in a thick cutover in front of him.

"I saw him stand up," he said. "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



Cody Armstrong had trail-camera photos of this big non-typical dating back to 2016. He finally killed him on Dec. 20, 2019.

wind was from him to me."

The buck finally stepped out at 75 yards, to Armstrong's right. It was behind a blowdown tree, and when it presented him with a broadside shot, he took it, punching it through the tree and through both of the buck's lungs and the liver. The buck fell 40 yards away.

Armstrong said the buck's inside spread was between 22½ and 23 inches wide. The rack was a main-frame 6-pointer. On the right antler, it has two drop tines among 11 points, including stickers and a hook-shaped point on the base. The left side has six points, one a drop tine.

"He's had the drop tine his whole life," Armstrong said. "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.

"He was old, so old that the taxidermist said he couldn't age him for sure. 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."

"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." ■

— Bobby Cleveland

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'THE GERMAN' MEETS ITS END

Ashley Eichwurtzle of Florence killed the second deer of her life Dec. 21 on a hunt in Madison County.

To say the buck was big would be an understatement. The 11-point non-typical has been green-scored at more than 180 inches. It's a bigger buck than most hunters will ever lay eyes on, much less harvest.

Eichwurtzle was sitting in a tree stand overlooking a food plot in a wooded area when she shot the buck at 10 yards with a Ruger .30-06.

She had a bit of a history with the deer, first spotting it in a field three years earlier while in the car with her husband — about the same time she started hunting.

"It was just a huge deer. And last season, my husband found out who owns that land, and we got permission to hunt it. We put up some cameras and we got a photo of the deer — which we named 'The German' — on the last day of the season," she said.

The couple put its cameras back up this season and started getting photos of the special buck on Nov. 14. He continued showing up on one particular camera, but all the photos were at night.

"He had a scrape that he was coming to check," she said. "We had a camera monitoring that scrape, and The German showed up almost every night. The only daytime photo we had of him was from last season, on Jan. 30."

Bad weather and her husband's work schedule almost kept her out of the woods. On Dec. 21, Eichwurtzle's husband was working, and the weather forecast was calling for rain. She decided she wasn't going to hunt, but her husband and father-in-law talked her into it.

"I didn't really want to go because of him working, and rain was supposed to come in," she said. "But he told me it was the peak rutting season. Then, my father-in-law called saying he wanted to go. So I went."

After settling into her tree stand around 3:30 p.m., Eichwurtzle saw a spike buck walking into the food plot. Even though she had no intentions of shooting this deer, she said it got her adrenaline flowing.



Ashley Eichwurtzle's huge Madison County non-typical, killed Dec. 21, tapes out at more than 180 inches.

"I always get excited when I see deer," she said. "The spike walked on through the food plot, then into the woods. But I kept hearing noises and thought it was the spike."

But when she finally saw the source of the noise, it was The German.

"I just couldn't believe it was him," she said. "He wasn't checking that scrape. I think he was just looking into the field to see if any does were there. He eased just his nose out of the woods. He was so close to me, I thought for sure he was going to hear me."

Eichwurtzle is right-handed, and the buck was on the right side of her stand. To get a clean shot, she had to turn her whole body, along with her rifle. The deer did not appear bothered by her movement, but it began slowly making its way back into the woods.

"I got my rifle on him and pulled the trigger. He took off running, but I heard him crash almost immediately," she said. "He ran about 15 or 20 yards, and his horns got stuck in a tree."

Surprised that she'd even seen the big buck, she was astonished when she saw it up close.

"My heart was just pounding. I just couldn't believe it. He was something to see on trail cameras, but up close, it was really just unbelievable. It's a great buck," she said. ■

— Brian Cope

DOUBLING HIS FUN

Chris 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 admitted after killing a 162-inch, 13-point buck with a drop tine on Dec. 23, then killing a 170-inch, 12-point buck he next day. The deer fell less than 300 yards apart.

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 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, 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., he saw a big deer with "a lot of antlers" follow a doe into a field. He 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.

"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."

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.," said Gann, who rushed to his hunting land.

"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



Chris Gann of Natchez took this 162-inch non-typical (above) on Dec. 23, then killed a 170-inch, 12-point buck the next day.

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. ■

— Brian Cope

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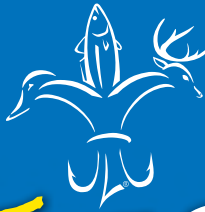




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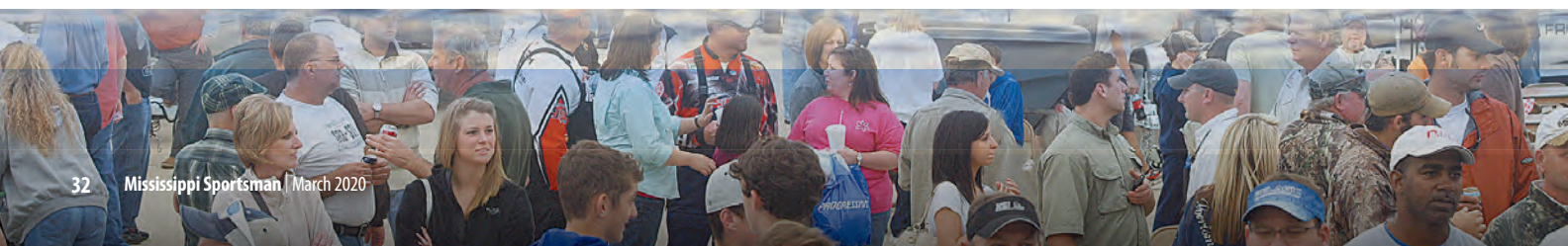
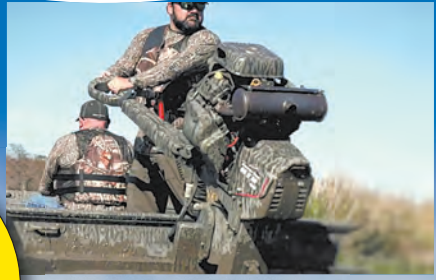


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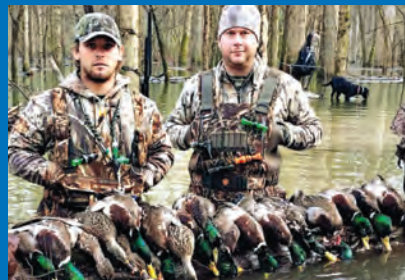


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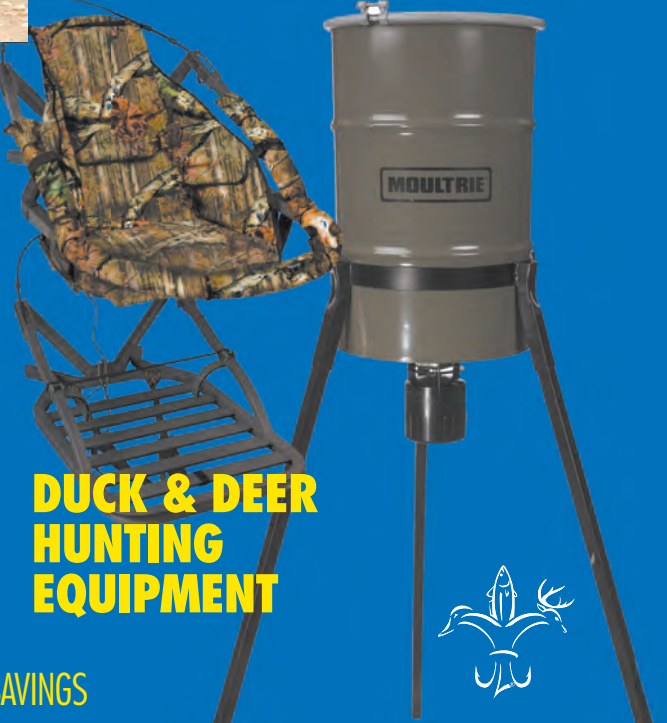
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■ By Phillip Gentry

CRAPPIE 102: SINGLE-POLE TECHNIQUES

SINGLE-POLE TECHNIQUES CAN PUT PLENTY OF SLABS IN YOUR COOLER IF YOU UNDERSTAND HOW TO GET YOUR BAITS IN THE RIGHT PLACES OR TO THE RIGHT DEPTHS.

In the world of crappie fishing, tactics for catching these tasty panfish probably outnumber those for almost any other fish species. Last month, “Crappie 101” covered things you need to know about fishing with multiple rods, all set in rod holders, with the boat providing locomotion to the baits.

This month, “Crappie 102” discusses strategies where you hold a single pole in your hand, where you have to provide all the motion yourself.

CASTING >

CASTING

Most anglers learning to fish started out by casting a rod. Casting works great for crappie as well, but moreso if you are able to control how long your bait stays in the depth zone where the fish are holding.

Two methods for controlling a bait's depth while casting are using a slip cork to suspend the bait at a prescribed depth or counting a bait down.

Slip corks work great with either live minnows fished on a light-wire, No. 2 Aberdeen hook or with a crappie jig in the 1/32- to 1/16-ounce range. Set a bobber stop at the desired depth and cast the bait or lure. Pulling and stopping will cause the bait to swing and not only adds more action to the bait, but covers more water.

Crappie jigs can be fished at a prescribed depth by counting down the jig as soon as it hits the water. Leaving the bail on the reel disengaged, count seconds until the bait reaches the desired depth. Typically, a bait will free-fall an average of one foot per second on 6-pound line. At that point, engage the reel and slowly and steadily reel the line in to keep the bait at the desired depth. Bear in mind, crappie tend to feed in an upward direction, so stop the bait a foot or two above the level at which you have marked fish on your sonar.

JIGGING

Jigging for crappie entails a traditionally long, limber rod to reach out to place the bait, usually a 1/32- to 1/8-ounce crappie jig, alongside visible, fish-holding structure like standing timber, stumps or a pier.

Jigging implies an up-and-down movement of the bait, but in essence, most strikes are elicited by simply placing the bait in the vicinity of the fish. As with any presentation, the bait should be at or slightly above the level of the fish, since crappie are generally inclined to look up and feed up.

For this reason, the most-effective jigs for using a jig pole have static action, meaning that the rubber, plastic, hair or other material comprising the bait tends to "shimmer" in place, giving the bait a lifelike action while sitting still.

Another effective presentation for jigging involves swinging the jig forward above the surface and allowing it to swing back toward the angler under the surface, like a pendulum. If the jig swims past structure on its circular fall, all the better.

Depth of presentation is key to jig fishing, as mentioned crappie feed and face up. Jig fishermen frequently measure the depth of presentation by the amount of line out. Some pole manufacturers even assist in this endeavor by placing marks at one-foot intervals down the length of the rod.

DOCK SHOOTING ➤



Docks are natural hiding places for crappie, so learning to get your bait or lure under the structure is important.



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DOCK SHOOTING

Dock shooting refers to holding the bait, typically a small crappie jig, in one hand, while using the other to hold the line tight to the spool of a spinning reel with the bail open.

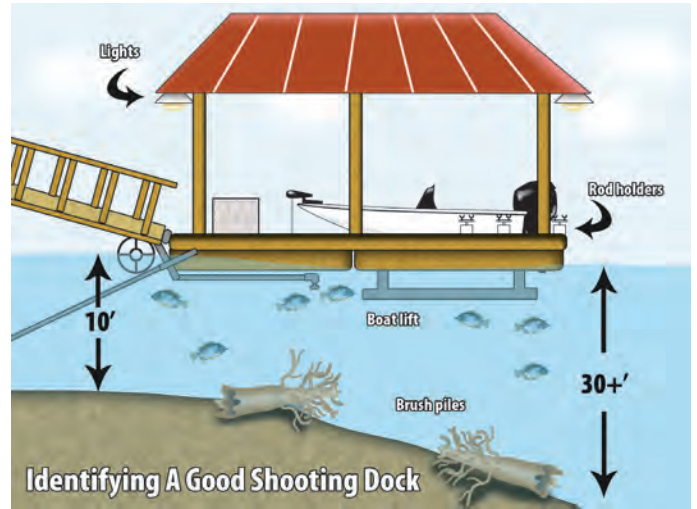
To execute the shot, bend the rod over and hold the jig between your thumb and forefinger, under the reel. Release the jig and simultaneously release the line, which sling-shots the bait forward, parallel to the water, causing it to skip up under the boat or dock or other overhead structure.

Boat docks come in two basic styles: floating docks and piers or pier docks. The big difference is a floating dock has little or no support structure attached to the bottom. A pier dock has vertical, and more often than not, supplemental diagonal and horizontal supports, for stability. The two styles of docks fish differently.

Some dock shooters prefer floating docks because there's no support structure underneath to get hung up on. If the fish are under there, and you feel any kind of catch or tension on your line after you shoot the jig, you'll know pretty well it's a fish.

Piers can be more aggravating to shoot because of support pier and cross members, which may snag the jig on the fall or retrieve. However, more structure often means more fish.

Making a good shot is important, but what happens after the shot is just as important to detect bites. By using a 1/32-ounce rubber bodied jig, the bait sinks slowly and gives the fish a long time to look at it falling under the protected area. Any movement of the line — a pause, twitch or shudder — signals a crap-



pie has inhaled the bait and the angler should set the hook.

The next few seconds are important to get the fish's head turned around and begin guiding the fish out of the heavy structure. ■



Phillip Gentry of Simpsonville, S.C., is host of "Upstate Outdoors," a weekly radio show that can be heard on Saturdays at noon on WORD 106.3 FM.

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WINTER FINESSE TACTICS

According to Tom Mundy, owner of Fish Stalker Lures in Laurens, S.C., the science behind finesse fishing for crappie in cold water is understanding that the colder the water gets, the tighter crappie will school on structure such as rocks, bridge pilings, submerged timber and brush piles.

Crappie won't move very far to take a bait, but some years ago, Mundy discovered that if you put that bait right in the fish's face, again and again, the action can be non-stop. Along with designing a whippy, lightweight rod for crappie rod manufacturer B'n'M, Mundy also began producing tiny, shrimp-like slabtail finesse baits that could be fished on tiny 1/64-ounce jigheads.

Mundy uses the finesse tactic any time crappie are found in deep water, both spring and summer, but he has better success, in terms of the size of crappie caught during the winter.

"Boat positioning is real important," Mundy said, "You want to be right over the top of the brush. Some people frown on fishing under the trolling motor, but I'm fishing in 20 to 25 feet of water, and the trolling motor only goes down about 3 feet, so I don't view that as a potential disturbance to the fish below."

Mundy pays close attention to the line and his pole's sensitive tip as the jig sinks. Once it settles, he retrieves it using a slow, continuous turn of the reel handle.

"It took me a long time to distinguish between a bite and the jig bouncing off a limb," Mundy said. "The secret is watching the rod tip. When a crappie sucks the jig in, the rod will go from a limber bounce to a stiff look; that's when it's time to set the hook."

"You can also watch the line," he said. "The line will twitch long before you feel it with the rod, or it will start piling up in the water, which says the crappie sucked it in and is holding still while the line's still sinking." ■

Philip Gentry

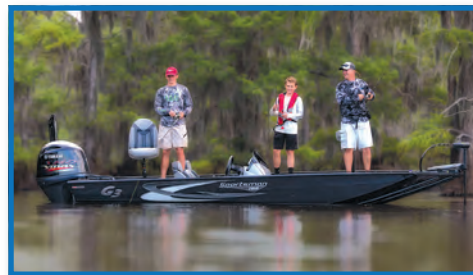


Slow and subtle is not just a bass fishing tactic when it come to winter or deep-water fishing; it works on crappie, too.

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YAMAHA

GETTIN' FRESH >

GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm



This 4-pound female largemouth has probably produced more than 100,000 eggs in her lifetime. **INSET:** This large female bluegill is capable of producing more than 20,000 eggs per year.

SPAWN SPECIFICS

THE REPRODUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF COMMON FISH

It's the start of spawning season, the time of year when a pulse of new fish are added to the population.

But how many are added?

That depends on many things, but it's a lot. Here are the results of some simple calculations with available data — sometimes robust, sometimes scant — on fish fecundity, age at maturity, reproductive life span, and growth rate.

A LITTLE BIOLOGY

Fish achieve sexual maturity and spawn when they reach a certain size. Commonly, the age of sexual maturity is reported, but age has little to do with it. Rather, sexual maturity occurs when fish reach a certain size. This is biologically important, because it takes a lot of energy to develop eggs and sperm, and to complete the spawn, energy that is not available in the body of a small fish.

Fecundity is the number of eggs produced by a mature female fish for a

single spawning cycle. Fish grow throughout their life, and larger fish produce more eggs. To accommodate this, biologists measure relative fecundity: the number of eggs per pound of female.

All fish have a life span. Although only occasionally measured, biologists and hatchery workers commonly report that older fish are less reliable spawners; the fecundity may decline, and the eggs and sperm may not be as viable.

IN A LIFETIME

In the early days of fisheries management, minimum-length limits were established based on size at maturity. The reasoning was to forego harvest until the fish had a chance to spawn. This makes sense in a fishery in which most of the population is harvested annually. This may occur in some commercial and



subsistence fisheries, but it is rarely the case in recreational fisheries.

A more meaningful estimation of a population's spawning potential is to estimate the reproductive contribution



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

of a fish throughout its reproductive life. Fishery managers use a similar approach — the spawning potential ratio — to establish harvest guidelines to prevent recruitment overfishing.

SPORT VS. FORAGE

Estimates of the reproductive contribution for common sportfish and a key-stone forage fish — gizzard shad — are summarized in the table. The calculations are based on the assumption that the average of the limited number of relative fecundity estimates are reasonably accurate for fish in Mississippi waters, and that all eggs are spawned.

The relative fecundity estimates are multiplied by fish weights during each year of approximately the first half of their reproductive life span. Summing the calculated numbers of eggs produced provides an estimate of lifetime reproductive contribution.


Clearly, an individual fish can produce a lot of progeny during its active, reproductive years. Remember, these numbers are estimates of potential progeny. Fecundity is measured by counting mature eggs in the ovary. I doubt that all of the eggs are spawned during each annual cycle. Furthermore, not all eggs are fertilized, develop and hatch. Therefore, the estimates of total reproductive output may not accurately predict the number of offspring. On the other hand, I have used low estimates for reproductive life span, partially offsetting high estimates of the possible number of progeny produced.

What should be obvious is that if good habitat is available for spawning, Mississippi's native sportfishes can produce more than enough young to sustain their populations. ■


LURE REVIEW >

ESTIMATED LIFETIME REPRODUCTIVE OUTPUT OF COMMON MISSISSIPPI FISHES

Fish	Eggs/pounds	Length at maturity/inches	Reproductive life (years spawning)	Lifetime reproductive output, eggs
Channel catfish	2,495	13	10	202,400
Blue catfish	2,495	13	15	628,650
Flathead catfish	1,679	15	10	171,680
Smallmouth bass	4,174	10	5	42,320
Largemouth bass	12,326	12	5	173,869
White crappie	126,145	7	3	212,966
Black crappie	77,936	7	3	137,416
Bluegill	82,510	4	3	43,644
Redear sunfish	47,057	5	3	24,891
Gizzard shad	169,297	5	2	253,729



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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



THE CRAPPIE WEAPON

CRAPPIE PSYCHIC'S LATEST LURE OFFERING WILL DEBUT AT LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN'S SHOW



Awidely known Raceland sac-a-lait fisherman and artificial lure manufacturer kept talking over the winter about a secret weapon coming out in the spring of 2020.

Capt. Clyde Folsie's unbridled enthusiasm stayed revved up between 5,000 and 6,000 rpm, mostly on the high end, as he anticipated introducing the lure to the public at the annual Louisiana Sportsman Show and Festival at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center March 12-15 in Gonzales. He's had the prototypes in his hands since September, and they haven't disappointed him.

Meet the Crappie Weapon. By now, the word probably has spread like wildfire among those who love to fish for crappie, aka sac-a-lait and white perch in many

areas of Louisiana.

"I've caught a lot of fish, a massive amount of fish, with it already," Folsie said in late January. "I've had the prototype since September. I've been keeping it hush-hush.

"It's about to be released in eight different colors. We will have a ton of them at the Louisiana Sportsman Show," said Folsie, who gave a sneak preview of the soft-plastic bait around the first of the year to friend Otis Taylor of Grand Point. At first, Taylor wasn't happy as the outing got underway on Hackberry Lake. Folsie, meanwhile, was on Cloud Nine.

"I was using the Crappie Weapon.... He was using a black and white Crappie Psychic Crappie Ringer. I had six before he had one. I was having goose bumps.

I was thanking God. It was way above expectations," Folsie said after seeing his new bait perform against a tried-and-true lure.

Taylor, naturally, was miffed.

"Well, I'm excited, and I'm mad. I'm sitting in the back of the boat and catching one fish and he's catching seven," said Taylor, 81, who asked for and received one of the prototype Crappie Weapons.



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.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Capt. Clyde Folsie holds two slabs caught on Crappie Weapons at Hackberry Lake while fishing with Otis Taylor of Grand Point.



VIDEO: Go to louisianasportsman.com/sac-a-lait-at-bayou-des-allemands to see Capt. Clyde Folsie talk more about The Crappie Weapon.



Taylor tied it on and, suddenly, twice as many big sac-a-lait were going into the ice chest.

What took the cake, Taylor said, was as he was about to put away his fishing rod after the spectacular trip, Folsie asked to see it and snipped the new lure off his line, guarding the secret.

Sac-a-lait fishermen everywhere will get to see the Crappie Weapon, part of a strategically planned line for Crappie Psychic, a line that's still missing one part for reasons beyond his control, according to Folsie. He introduced the Crappie Trailer, then Crappie Ammo, and developed a Crappie Mag(azine) to attach to a fishing rod and make it easier to attach Crappie Ammos to the Crappie Weapons. The Crappie Mag, which experienced unforeseen delays in its production, fits in a tiny holster, but it isn't available yet.

Folsie designed the Crappie Weapon to make a disturbance in the water. Its body has ringed segments and bulbous eyes that add to the wobble as it falls under a cork or is tight-lined. It also has a split or fork tail, with two tails that are diamond-shaped. Where that forked tail meets the hook, add a Crappie Ammo bead and a similarly diamond-shaped Crappie Trailer and, bingo, there's more action and color, more for the fish to see.

How long is the Crappie Weapon? Folsie measured it at 2¼ inches long.

The eight color combinations that will be available immediately are: black/white, blue/white, chartreuse/glow, black/chartreuse, pink sparkle/chartreuse, pumpkinseed/chartreuse, junebug/pink and Christmas tree/pink.

For more information about The Crappie Weapon and other Crappie Psychic products, visit thecrappiepsychic.com or call 985-790-0862. ■

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Plural nouns are words used to indicate that there is more than one person, place or thing. Bass fishermen used to go “bass fishing” in the plural — targeting areas that held numerous bass and trying to catch one of many that might be there, including an occasional “hawg”.

But today’s new electronics have allowed anglers to change that approach and fish effectively for one big bass at a time. Bass fishing in the singular. One fish targeting, so to speak.

It’s a foreign concept to most anglers, but fishermen like Todd Risinger of West Monroe and Sontus Mitchell of Ruston have fine-tuned their skills to become big-bass stalkers with amazing success.

Two great fishermen. Two different approaches. One goal: catching the biggest bass possible. They often fish together, and when they do, it’s double trouble for the bass.

Mitchell is a Louisiana state trooper, and he knows speed kills, both on the highway and in fishing for big bass. Risinger has his own construction business and he knows you complete big projects one step at a time. He uses the same approach in fishing. Here’s more on how they do it.

MITCHELL: SLOW IS BETTER >

HOW TO SINGLE OUT AND TARGET THAT ONE BIG BASS? THESE TWO LUNKER HUNTERS SHARE THEIR SECRETS.

■ By Kinny Haddox

BASS FISHING

IN THE SINGULAR

MITCHELL: SLOW IS BETTER

“Every time I hit the water, I am trying to catch that big one,” Mitchell said. “I don’t care much about numbers. It’s quality that I’m looking for, not quantity. It’s the same whether I’m in a tournament or on a trip just for fun. I think the biggest key to being successful is to just slow down.”

Mitchell slows down in his approach to planning out his strategy, finding fish and presenting a bait to try and fool them.

“I would honestly say that I’ve found the best days to catch really big bass are the bad-weather days, right before a front comes in or during the first part of the weather change,” he said. “I like to plan my trips where I can fish those conditions, and I fish slow. The bigger fish are just lethargic by nature, and they don’t want to have to chase after their dinner. I also like to use big baits to target big bass. I don’t hesitate at all to fish with a large crankbait, large creature bait or a large worm. I have caught a lot of big fish on 10- to 12-inch worms in all kinds of conditions. It’s just a mindset. You have to convince yourself that the bait isn’t too big for them.”

Mitchell uses his electronics to help him find big fish, but it wasn’t always that way. He learned where big bass hang out the hard way.

“When I started fishing, I couldn’t afford the kind of electronics that a lot of fishermen had,” he said. “I had to use land resources to pinpoint where big bass were, places like secondary points, old road beds, creek channels — things you can see on a map and visualize on the water. I studied everything

I could to help me learn more about the habits of big bass and applied it on the water.”

Today, he uses his graphs like everyone else, but he also combines what he sees with what he knows.

“Take for instance today, when I see a big brushtop with some big fish on it on the graph,” he said. “I may fish it for 30 minutes and not get a bite, but I know they are there. It can get confusing, but here’s what you do when you know they are there. Basically, fish a complete circle around that top — or whatever type of structure it is. There are times when those big fish won’t hit a bait unless it is coming in the direction or at the angle they are feeding. You’ve got to figure that out and present the bait just like they want it. Be patient. Slow down. Give them, and yourself, every opportunity to get that fish to bite.”

“My mental approach is simply figure out how long I’ve got to fish and do what I can to get five big bites. I’m either going to win big or lose big,” he said.

RISINGER: TAKING A DIFFERENT APPROACH >

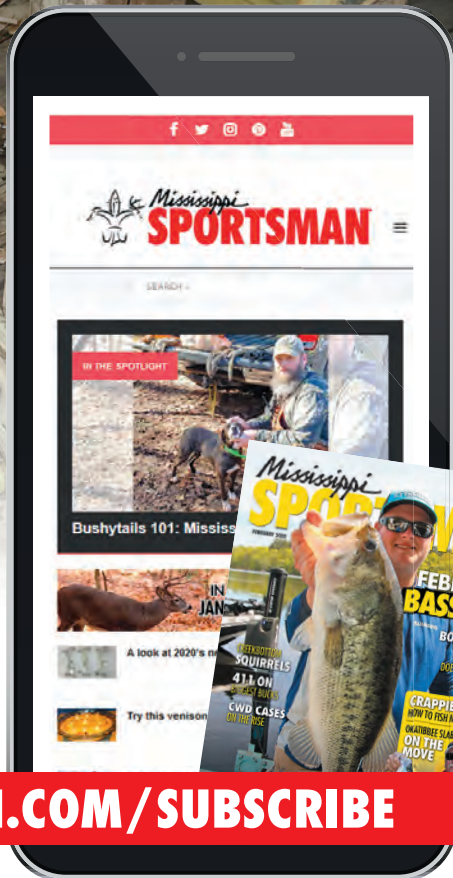


Many anglers are scared to fish a 12-inch plastic worm, but this bass that Sontus Mitchell caught on one thought it was a good snack.



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RISINGER: TAKING A DIFFERENT APPROACH

“One reason Sontus and I do so well fishing together is that I take a different approach sometimes than he does,” Risinger said. “While he’s mostly about big baits, I’ll often go smaller, especially until the water warms up and gets stable in the summer. And I’ll spend a lot more time on the graph to find that one fish, or several areas that have a big fish or two. I’ll mark them and then come back to them over and over again until I can get one to bite.”

Risinger pointed out that, especially on bigger lakes and reservoirs, you often see a lot of fishermen just idling around. What they are doing, he said, is finding fish, marking them on their electronics and trying to pick out the spots that have the biggest fish.



“You can definitely tell the big bass from the smaller ones on today’s units, especially with a little practice,” he said. “Frankly, a lot of people after big bass today spend more time idling around the lake than they do fishing. You spend your time marking fish, then when you do actually fish, you are in the prime spots, not just casting and hoping.”

Risinger has the same approach as Mitchell, however, when it comes to the target.

“I’m all about catching the big one,” he said. “The biggest bass I’ve caught is 11 pounds, 2 ounces. I’ve caught three of them that weighed that, so naturally, I want to catch one that is just a little bit bigger. It’s like deer hunting. You kill an 8-point, you want a 12. Then you kill a 12, you want a bigger 12. The same thing with bass. I’m not knocking an 8-pounder, but I want to catch one bigger than that. And in a tournament, if you don’t catch 5-, 6- or 7-pounders, you probably aren’t going to win.”

Risinger said the best time to catch the very biggest bass is in the spring, right when they are about to spawn. They are full of eggs and gorging themselves on shad to have the energy to

Todd Risinger patiently works a drop shot over a big bass **INSET:** Risinger points out a big bass shown here as a big inverted “V” suspended near the bottom and with several other smaller fish.



survive the spawn. But you can catch big bass all year-long if you target them.

“Remember this,” he said. “The big bass are going to move in along the points, creek beds and humps to the shallows to spawn in the spring. Then they are going to move back out to deeper water to the same type spots after the spawn. Bigger fish usually like deeper water. That’s a key. But there are really big bass that will stay in the grass most of the year, as long as it provides them cover and an abundance of baitfish.”

Both skilled anglers agree on another point. You can’t catch a big fish if you don’t go. You can never overlook the fact that sometimes, catching a big bass is just a matter of being in the right spot at the right time and getting a little bit lucky. To do that, you’ve got to have your bait in the water.

CATCH-AND-RELEASE

LETS BASS GROW BIG

One thing that Sontus Mitchell and Todd Risinger agree on is that managing big-bass populations is critical to anglers catching more big bass.

"We owe it to the sport and to other anglers to protect the bigger bass that we catch," Mitchell said. "It's okay for people to catch bass to eat if that's what they want, but when they start getting 5 to 8 pounds, it's best for the sport to put them back. You can't have big fish unless you give them a chance to grow up. All the tournaments we fish in are catch-and-release, and we do that with all our fish. It's especially important in lakes that have heavy pressure."

Risinger agrees.

"Bass can't grow to be 8, 10, 12 pounds overnight," he says. "They have to have some age on them, no matter how much food they are getting or how great the lake is. Again, it goes back to deer hunting. Hunters that expect to kill massive 10- and 12-pointers don't also shoot their young 6- and 8-pointers. That just won't work." ■

Sontus Mitchell said that releasing big bass is the only way fishermen can help develop any truly huge fish.



BIG-BASS BAITS

If you spend a few hours in the boat with Mitchell, his front deck will probably look a little bit like a bait store, with lots of options laid out and tried at one time or another. But you can bet most of those baits will be big. Everything from 8- to 12-inch worms, big crankbaits and big swimbaits.

Colors will vary from purple to watermelon to brown to green flake. He doesn't let old preferences affect his decision about what today's bass want; he lets them decide. If he's on a big fish and it doesn't hit after a cast or two, he'll offer something else until the fish gives in.



Risinger, on the other hand, will try a larger variety of different types of baits, from lipless crankbaits to Chatterbaits to football jigs. If he's locked in on a big bass out in fairly open water, he won't hesitate to throw a whole school of baits at the big bass. He likes to add a Rage Craw trailer to his Chatterbaits and jigs.

"There are times when a big fish is out deep, and I just know I can catch him on an Alabama rig," he says. "An Alabama rig is a setup with five wires angled like spokes of an umbrella, with plastic grubs attached to each end. It mimics a school of bait-fish. It is a big rig, but it is actually a group of five smaller baits. Instead of just being one bite, though, it's like a whole buffet coming through the water."

If big bass are finicky, Risinger won't leave until he tries a small drop-shot rig or a Carolina rig. And he can be patient, too.

"I've seen a situation where you have to actually bump the big bass five to 10 times with your lure and just finally aggravate it into hitting the lure," he said. "But you've got to be keenly aware, because when it hits, it won't be a monster strike. It will usually just be the fish grabbing it just enough to move it out of her way. It's similar to bed fishing, only in deeper water." ■



Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, lakedarbannelife.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.

Go big or go home is the best way to describe Sontus Mitchell's worm selection.

LUNKER LINES ➤

LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias



"If a cool front moves in, you'll still catch some chunky bass, but you may find them deeper on the rocks or in the lily pad stems or the bladed grass," Paul Elias said.

BASS MOVING UP AT OKATIBBEE

EARLY SPAWNERS PROVIDE PLENTY OF ACTION

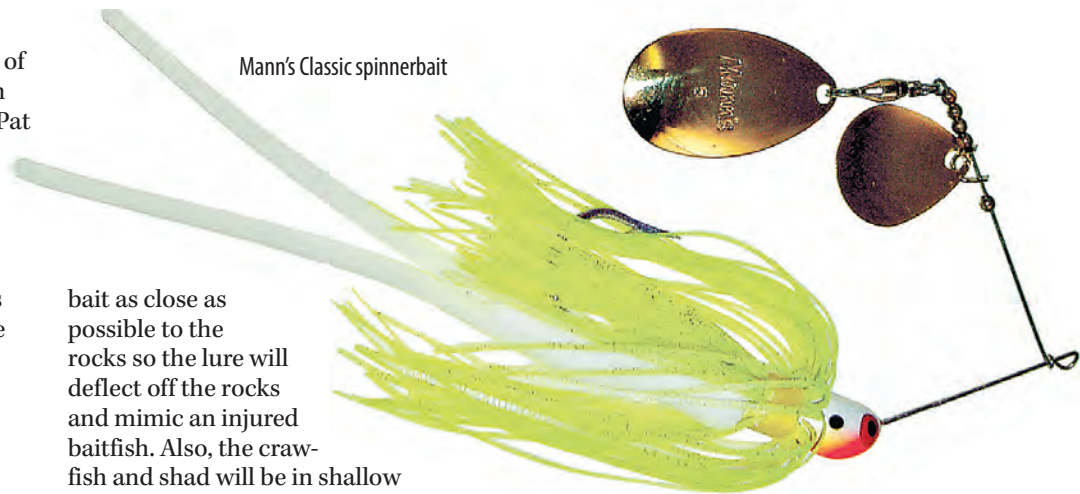
This month, I'm picking Lake Okatibbee, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reservoir just north of Meridian that's part of the Pat Harrison Waterway, to fish for bass.

Although Okatibbee wasn't producing good bass for a while, in recent years, the lake has bounced back. I'll fish a typical spring pattern at Okatibbee. Remember, Mississippi's mild winter may mean the bass will be spawning early.

EARLY MORNINGS

In the early spring, with warmer weather and brighter skies, bass will move to the shallow rocks along the dam and get ready to spawn. I'll fish parallel with a crawfish-colored Mann's Baby 1-Minus, because in March, the baitfish and the shad seek the most heat in the shallowest water — up against the rocks. I like to cast a shallow-running crank-

Mann's Classic spinnerbait



bait as close as possible to the rocks so the lure will deflect off the rocks and mimic an injured baitfish. Also, the crawfish and shad will be in shallow water. I'll use 20-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon on an Elias Legend Series 6.2:1 Bruin reel mated to a 7-foot-1 medium-action FX Custom rod and fish fairly fast down the rocks to cover lots of water. I want that lure to lightly bump off those rocks.



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.

I'll also slow-roll a 3/8-ounce, chartreuse/white skirted Mann's Classic spinnerbait with gold Indiana blades on a 7.3:1 Elias Legend Series Bruin reel with a medium-heavy, 7-foot-1 FX Custom rod down the rocks out to about 4 to 5 feet of water.

My boat will be about a boat-length from the rocks, in 8- to 10-foot deep water, so I can make short casts with the spinnerbait. Somewhere between 2 inches below the surface where I'm fishing the Baby 1-Minus and from the surface to 5 feet where I'm fishing the spinnerbait, I should locate where the bass are and learn which lure they want.

LATER IN THE DAY

As the sun climbs and the day warms, I'll go above the bridge and fish the lily pads and the bladed grass along the shoreline on the east and the west sides of the lake. I'll be pitching a watermelon red Mann's SpringR worm rigged wacky style with a weedless, wacky hook and no weight close to the lily pads and the bladed grass. I'll allow the worm to wiggle slowly to the bottom of the lake.

SHORT-STRIKES FROM BUCKS

When the worm's high in the water, you may get a number of short strikes from male bass protecting the nests of the female bass holding on or near the bottom. I'll fish a spinning reel when I'm pitching with 15-pound bass braid on the reel and a 6-foot, 10-pound fluorocarbon leader. I'll attach the bass braid to the fluorocarbon with a Uni knot. I'll fish very slowly, wait for the SpringR Worm to reach the bottom, and then be patient for some time while that worm's motionless on the bottom. Next, I'll jerk the worm up off the bottom a couple of times and let it wiggle and fall back. If I don't get a bite after two jumps off the bottom, I'll reel in and pitch it to another target.

While I'm pitching and letting the worm fall, I'll be looking for bass moving in the grass and the lily pads. The bass will be running bluegills and other fish out of their beds to keep them from eating the bass eggs. This movement will alert you to where the bed is.

BUZZ 'EM UP

Another tactic I'll use around the rocks, lily pads

and bladed grass is to fish a black buzzbait and a white buzzbait, one tuned to run to the left and the other tuned to run to the right. Bigger bass generally key in on a buzzbait during late winter and early spring. I'm not fishing buzzbaits the way most people do. My black buzzbait will feature a black-painted blade and the white buzzbait a white-painted blade. Besides casting to the lily pad stems and the bladed grass, I'll also run it through those types of cover.

I'll fish a buzzbait on an Elias Legend baitcasting reel with an 8:1 retrieve ratio spooled with 30-pound braid on a 7-foot-4 FX Custom rod. The secret to catching these early bedding bass in March is to reel a buzzbait slowly, just fast enough to keep it up on the surface.

While fishing Okatibbee in March, you'll have a good time catching 10 to 12 buck bass that will weigh up to 2 pounds each, and three to five females for up to a 20-fish day. Of those female bass, several will weigh 4 to 6 pounds or better. ■

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SPRO RK CRAWLER SERIES

With spring bass fishing right around the corner, SPRO has added four colors to its line of RK Crawler crankbaits, all of them carrying different shades of red — just as anglers get ready to try and fool bass with crawfish-colored lures.

The RK Crawler 55, the RK Crawler MD 55 and the RK Crawler 50 will add electric red craw, melon craw, burnt orange craw and red river craw to their offerings.

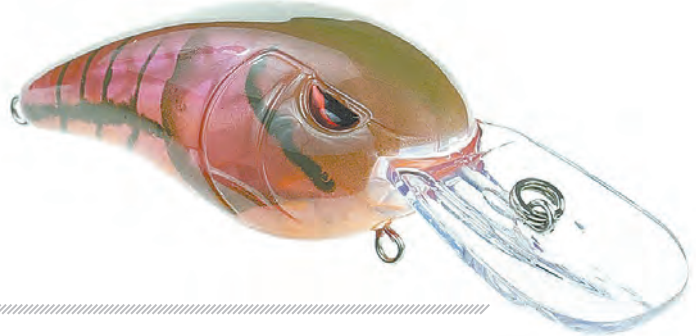
The RK Crawler 55 is the deep-diver, a 3-inch, ½-ounce bait that runs from 9 to 14 feet deep. The RK Crawler MD 55 is the same size but runs 4 to 8 feet deep. The RK Crawler 50 is a slightly smaller version, 2¾ inches and ⅝-ounce bait that runs 4 to 8 feet deep with a tighter wobble.

The coffin-bill style helps bait in the RK Crawler line to deflect off submerged, wooden cover like stumps and limbs,

as well as rocks, without hanging up, attracting the attention of bass that are often keying on crawdads.

MSRP: \$11.11.

For more info, visit: spro.com.



SWAGGER STALKER QD42 BIPOD

Need a solid rest in the field for your rifle, muzzleloader, shotgun or crossbow? Swagger's new Stalker QD42 may be just the ticket.

The QD42 features spring bases in each leg that allows for easy movement, pivoting and tracking of targets. The legs adjust from 14 to 42 inches, with one-hand adjustments possible, making it easy to shoot from plenty of positions in the field. Adjustments are quick and easy.

The QD42 weighs only 15 ounces, so it's not going to cause any hernias when attached to your weapon. It mounts to a Picatinny rail or Quick Detach.

MSRP: \$129.99

For more info, visit: swaggerbipods.com

CZ 1012 SHOTGUN

If you're tired of having to spend too much time after hunts cleaning your shotgun, making sure it's spotless so the gas-operated recoil system works, then the CZ 1012 shotgun is for you.

A moderately priced semi-automatic, the CZ 1012 comes in five models, all in 12-gauge with a 28-inch barrel, with the company's new gas-less, spring bolt operating system, which uses recoil from the shot to rotate and unlock the twin-lug bolt head from the barrel extension to withdraw the spent shell. Maintenance requirements are minimal compared to gas-operated guns.

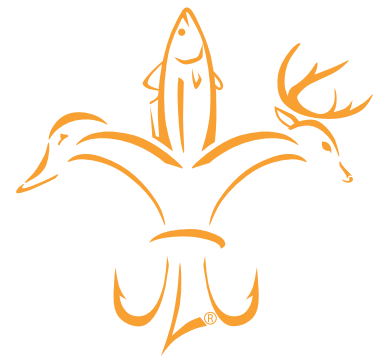
Unlike many semi-automatic guns, the inertia-operated recoil system in the CZ 1012 will shoot anything

from light dove loads to magnum waterfowl loads without any adjustments. The gun handles 2¾- and 3-inch shells.

The CZ 1012 weighs in at 6½ pounds and comes in Mossy Oak camo and four other stock/receiver combos, including Turkish walnut and polymer, each with five interchangeable chokes. It also comes with an adjustable stock to ensure a perfect fit for every shooter.

MSRP: \$659-\$749.

For more info, visit: www.cz-usa.com





It has been said that there are two types of hunting property in Mississippi; those that have wild hogs, and those that don't have hogs yet. Those on the "have" side of the issue, in most cases, wish they didn't.

Yes, feral hogs are another target for hunters. Yes, wild hogs, when properly cooked, are deemed by most as good table fare. But having hogs to shoot is not a desirable end result of any game management plan, anywhere. Emphasis should be placed on eradication, plain and simple. Shoot them on site, trap them and shoot them, shoot them at night: boars, sows, shoats, barrows, even piglets. Kill the whole sounder if possible.

Anthony Ballard, a biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks who oversees nuisance species, offers a perfect perspective on the removal of feral swine: "You don't manage the cockroach or mouse populations in your house, so why would you want to manage a hog problem on your land?"

Ballard said he gets requests from people wanting to hunt feral swine on WMAs during the time when other seasons are not open.

"We discourage the sport hunting during the offseason, because that is the time when the agency personnel

are placing emphasis on eradication," Ballard said. "There are many opportunities within the existing season framework to shoot hogs on public land."

Eat what you will from the slaughter, but feel no guilt for leaving the remains of the others for the buzzards and other carrion-loving critters. This may go against what sportsman have been taught for generations, but it is the right thing to do. If your property is like most of Mississippi, you'll have a new sounder moving in within a matter of months.

"Although recreational hunting is one tool often used to help manage wildlife populations, taking feral swine opportunistically while deer hunting has little impact on reducing feral swine populations to stop damage," said Aaliya Essex, public affairs specialist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "Feral swine damage management and eradication operations, such as those used by USDA and its partners, are a methodical process targeting the removal of feral swine from specific areas in order to reduce or eliminate associated damage. Entire sounders must be targeted — often trapped and removed — otherwise, feral swine will quickly repopulate an area."

**MISSISSIPPI HUNTERS,
LANDOWNERS CONFRONT
THE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY
FERAL HOGS, AND HOW TO
TAKE ACTION AGAINST THEM.**

By David Hawkins

Hog-tied

Conservationists and biologists, along with responsible land owners, have been pounding away at the feral pig problem for years.

Stopping interstate and intrastate transportation has made some progress, and hefty fines have been handed down to lawbreakers. Baiting, trapping and night-hunting have accounted for scores of hogs being removed. We can't allow the effort to slow. It's doubtful the complete eradication of the species will ever be complete, but we must try.

The effort to champion the cause of annihilation is not helped by those who chose to glorify hog hunting. But as one Texas wildlife biologist said, "You can't shoot your way out of this problem." As long as someone is profiting from feral swine shooting opportunities, they will be difficult to completely eradicate.

Hunters have reported more hogs than deer harvested in the past two seasons. This should serve as a wake-up call that efforts thus far have done little to curb the rapid spread of the feral hog menace. Deer hunters alone cannot stop the epidemic; it requires a concerted effort by landowners and hunters working together.

"We have pigs on our hunting lease in Kemper County," Steve McFarland said. "They have ruined food plots, rooted hardwood bottoms to the point deer and turkey can't possibly find acorns. The hogs have even destroyed young pine plantings. We pressure them with hunting and trapping, but when pressured, they move to our neighbor's property. When the neighbor puts pressure on the pigs, they just move again, eventually returning to our property."

McFarland said deer and hogs don't like to mix. When deer are in a food plot and hogs appear, the deer leave. A hog or two will be killed, but the deer hunt is ruined. Members of his hunting camp have never passed on an opportunity to kill a hog.

"At my Rankin County home, deer and hogs are pushed out of the Pearl River swamp and sometimes find their way into my back yard," Becky Hemphill said. "We put in food plots for deer, and the hogs root them up, so we try to kill all we encounter. I'd much rather hunt deer and



Becky Hemphill of Rankin County killed this bruiser while deer hunting on her land bordering the Pearl River.

Becky Hemphill

MISSISSIPPI HOG particulars

The transporting of live hogs into Mississippi is prohibited by state law. The intrastate transport of wild swine is allowed by permit only. Special permits are required for this transport, such as from a trap location to a holding pen.

Hogs are considered nuisance animals. All regulations governing wild hogs can be found at www.mdwfp.com. Follow the hunting header and navigate to nuisance animals. ■

never see another hog.”

Questions of other of state wildlife agencies brought the same comments: hogs are an environmental menace; they have the ability to alter an entire ecosystem, and there is no better hog-control method than trapping and killing.

Traps run the gamut from simple to very advanced. Early traps were simple pens with a bait source inside and a trip wire that an animal would trigger to close the gate. The problem is that often, only a few pigs were caught, and the others were educated. Pigs may be ugly, but they are among the more-intelligent mammals. Mature pigs will become trap-shy and refuse to enter an enclosure, a learned behavior not soon forgotten. More recent trap designs involve closures that will drop a large pen all at once. Using the technology, found in modern trail cameras, the operator is alerted via cell phone when hogs are around the bait source. When the time is right,



Wild hogs trapped in another state cannot be brought into Mississippi, and transport inside state boundaries is allowed by permit only.

the operator can activate the trigger via cell phone and drop the trap, capturing the greatest number of hogs possible. All traps should have an open top to allow non-targeted animals such as deer to escape.

A DANGER TO PEOPLE

All too many motorists know the cost and aggravation of a deer-auto collision. Some cars can be repaired, others are totaled. Hog collisions have been compared by some body shops as far worse. When struck, deer may go over the hood and maybe the roof of the vehicle; hogs have a lower center mass and cause more damage.

While feral hogs choose flight to avoid human interaction, the muscular beasts are well equipped to defend themselves. Strong jaws and razor-sharp incisors have the ability to inflict serious injury on a person. Sows will become aggressive if their litter of piglets is threatened, and boars will attack anything they perceive as a threat. In 2019, a woman in Texas was killed when feral swine attacked her.



A hunter stops to check out a wallow and rooting done by feral pigs in Kemper County.

WEAPONRY UPDATES ➤

WEAPONRY UPDATES

Any good deer rifle is fine for shooting hogs, but one shot may be all you get if you use a bolt-action. Repeaters such as pumps and lever guns allow for quick second shots but still lag behind the modern sporting rifle for the firepower to destroy a sounder. The .223 Remington and 5.56 NATO are the most-common modern sporting rifle calibers. Full-metal jacketed ammo weighing around 55 grains will stop a hog with the right head shot, but shoulder and torso shots with non-expanding bullets are iffy at best.

The 6.8 Remington is gaining a following as both a home-defense and hunting round. Federal offers a round in its excellent Fusion line of ammunition that fires a 115-grain, soft-point projectile at 2,470 fps. This gives a pig sticker a little more confidence of a clean kill.

Using soft-pointed ammo will cure some of the deficiencies of the .223/5.56, but to get the most out of the weapon, hunters would be wise to invest in one the stronger thumpers. Heavier bullets at even modest velocities are deadly on feral

swine, perhaps the newest being the .350 Winchester Legend, which will launch a 180-grain soft-point pill at 2,100 fps, with ample energy to get good expansion. In a modern sporting platform, you can deliver a magazine full of carnage on pigs in short order. The same can be said of the .450 Bushmaster and other short-action bruisers. What the .450 Bush Master loses in velocity, it makes up for in bullet energy delivered to the target.

Mississippi has taken the gloves off when it comes to feral pig control. Night optics and silencers are legal for those who can afford them. Such weapons cost upwards of \$2,500, and special licensing is required for silencers.

The feral hog problem did not manifest itself overnight, and it will not have a quick fix. Hogs have the uncanny ability to adapt. Their diet is so varied they can find nourishment where other species cannot. ■



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



This pen in the lower Delta is designed to lure several pigs in until one trips a wire releasing the gate.. Note the open top to allow deer, bear and other non-target species to escape.

David Hawkins

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

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

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

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

HUNTING SEASONS

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

WATERFOWL SEASONS

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

DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
Northeast	Oct. 1-Nov. 22 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)
East Central	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)
Southwest	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)
Southeast	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)
Delta*	Oct. 1-Nov. 22 Nov. 11-22 (antlerless primitive weapon) for details on special Jan. 22-31 (archery primitive weapon) 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)

SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

Persistence and patience both had a role in the author landing this huge Texas trout on a terrible weather day.



Terry Madewell

NEVER GIVE UP! THAT BIG SPECK WON'T

TROPHY TROUT SOMETIME TAKE A VERY SPECIAL EFFORT ON THE PART OF A PERSISTENT ANGLER

Whether young or old, freshwater or saltwater, if you're a fisherman, chances are you remember Mike Iaconelli's 2003 Bassmaster Classic victory.

Screaming "Never give up!" at the top of his lungs, little did Iaconelli know those words would not only permeate the marsh around Venice, La., but would ripple their way into present day.

I bring this up to introduce this month's topic: common traits among big trout anglers. Michael Salinas, a big-trout specialist from Corpus Christi, Texas, beautifully described the process of targeting trophy fish as "ugly" in a Speckled Truth podcast. Going even further, notable big-trout legends like Jay Watkins, Mike

McBride and Doc Bob Weiss unanimously agree that the three qualities a big-trout angler should have are persistence, patience and a heavy dose of mental toughness. In other words, it's not easy, and the pursuit for a giant will test the nerves of any angler — sometimes even for a lifetime.

PERSISTENCE

Persistence is a noun that means a firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. A friend who was once asked about one of her most-valued qualities, without hesitation, responded, "A person who keeps showing up." For fisherman, that equates to, "There is no substitute for time on the water."

On that same podcast recording with Salinas, I had every intent of fishing the next day despite a hard northwest wind accompanying a mid-winter front. Cold, misty, windy conditions greeted my 4 a.m. wake-up time, and the palm trees outside his apartment complex tried to talk me into going back to bed. Fortunately, I don't understand their language, and with Salinas' help, I got my gear in the truck and off I went, even if that meant "just showing up."



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*.

PATIENCE

If you Googled “Top 10 Traits of highly successful people,” patience is perpetually atop most lists. I would argue that as anglers, it’s probably one of our most-undervalued qualities, but most important. More often than not, patience in letting a bite develop or changing techniques to target certain parts of the water column, has directly led to success. On this particular day it was the latter.

After getting set up, I realized that wind and water conditions refined my lure selection to slow-rising jerkbaits. With capping waves the norm, I knew a free-floating Fat Boy or Slow Sink would not reach my targeted depth. Also, a jighead and soft-plastic would be a little heavy and not afford the castability I was looking to achieve, so I stayed patient with a jerkbait.

Starting with a Rapala Shadow Rap Shad, I worked hard to no avail. Wanting to change ascent profile and speed, I switched to a Megabass Vision 110 to get a little deeper, and not long after that, I caught my first fish. The bite was picking up, but unfortunately, it was short-lived. To try to keep the bite alive, I switched to an IMA Flit 100, a Jackal Rerange 110, then ultimately a Rapala Shadow Rap.

After three cold hours, I only had four fish for my efforts, but I decided to press on and be patient, fishing the lower half of the water column. So, I stuck with a Rapala Shadow Rap.

MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Time after time, we hear elite-level athletes talk about their level of performance in times of adversity. Paraphrasing slightly, you will often hear, “We had to put mistakes behind us, be mentally tough and execute better.” Mental toughness is about blocking out adversity and zoning in on the task.

With rain pelting the hood on my jacket, thoughts of calling it a day started to evolve, especially with the air temperature hovering around 50. Knowing that I’m on the front side of a mid-day major, a day before the full moon, if a giant were to eat, it would be the time. Encouraged by that thought, I blocked out the environmental noise and my own inner voice and instead focused on my cadence and my movement. Being as precise as I could, despite shivering, I made a long cast like so many other failed attempts that day, except this one didn’t come back empty.

Instead, with savage simplicity, my bait rushed to the roof of a willing predator. Anchored by the two remaining trebles on the back of the bait, an enormous trout emerged from the water with polarizing headshakes. Discontent with her decision, she decided to continue her violent, on-the-water display. Unsuccessful in her previous attempts, she decided that making long runs would present a suitable alternative.

On the other end of the line, I hung on for dear life. Whispered offerings to the Man Upstairs turned to audi-

ble coaching of the situation at hand. Understanding that I was alone, I decided to work the fish to shallower water to help with the landing process. After a 10-minute fight, my second double-digit trout lay comfortably in the net, and I gawked at her.

Realizing I did not have my seamstress tape, I took some spare line from my pocket and measured her length and girth. After a few quick pictures and the Boga grip bouncing on 10 pounds, I figured it would be a good time to watch her swim away. After

Notable big-trout legends like Jay Watkins, Mike McBride and Doc Bob Weiss unanimously agree that the three qualities a big-trout angler should have are persistence, patience and a heavy dose of mental toughness.

a tense drive home with a wondering mind, I measured the leader lines and she taped out at 31½ inches long, with close to a 16¾-girth — a true Texas giant.

NEVER GIVE UP

For years, I’ve compared the similarities of trout fishing to the lives we live. Whether that’s being persistent in a job, patient in a relationship or mentally tough through financial struggles, the parallel between man and fish extend way beyond the banks.

As I stood there on a cold, windy flat after watching her swim away, I couldn’t help but be inspired — not only by her existence, but inspired by her willingness to validate my persistence, patience and mental toughness.

So I encourage you, regardless if its your life or angling journey, to never give up. Never, ever give up. Thanks Ike ... we owe you one. ■

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APEX PREDATOR

Joshua Chauvin

The author closed out a long, frustrating deer season by taking this buck in a spot where another buck had gotten away.



SOMETIMES IT TAKES ALL SEASON

MONTHS OF FRUSTRATION TURN TO EXCITEMENT AS DEER SEASON WANES

Some deer seasons, everything seems to go right, but others are a test of persistence. Luckily, archery hunters are blessed with a very long season, giving ample time to score a deer.

This season started out amazingly, when I downed a record-book elk on the 13th day on my annual Colorado public-land trip using my vintage recurve bow. I hit the Louisiana woods feeling on top of the world but was quickly reminded that whitetails are much harder targets to hit with these slow-flying arrows.

TOUGH HUNTS

October and November were filled with many close calls chasing does. On one hunt, my arrow drilled the one, tiny sapling in front of a doe after a near-perfect stalk. Another stalk on a windy morning resulted in a big doe inside of 20 yards ducking my arrow. On one hunt, I forgot my shooting glove and drew short, send-

ing the arrow under the doe. And those were just a few of the does that got away.

I saw several bucks from my stand early in the season. I switched to my heavy-powered Black Widow recurve for some hunts. After many weeks of hard hunting, I was able to down a buck when one finally walked close enough.

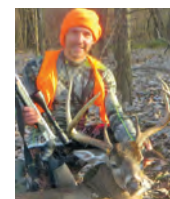
The next deer encounter was the most frustrating; I lost a buck while bow-hunting. The video clearly showed the unalerted buck, 20 yards away, lunging forward around 18 inches in the split second the arrow was in flight. I gave the deer nearly 24 hours before tracking, but I still bumped him in a high, briar-filled cutover 70 yards from the spot of the shot. I never saw him again in multiple days of searching.

ARROW SPEEDS

I've had several deer duck my 330-foot-per-second compound bow arrows in the past, but my traditional arrows flying

less than 160 feet per second gives the deer more than twice the time to dodge. One article I read that crunched deer reaction-time numbers using bowhunting videos to avoid a deer vertically ducking a 230-fps arrow, you'd have to aim 6 inches low at 20 yards and 17 inches low at 30 yards. Sadly, these are estimates using an arrow flying nearly 50-percent faster than the ones I shoot.

What's worse is, one cannot accurately predict the horizontal direction the deer may react; sometimes it's forward, sometimes it's reverse. Then comes the unpredictable shifting and rotating of the deer's torso. No matter how accurate one is in practice sessions, these jumpy



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.

deer can leave the most accurate shots landing far from the mark.

ARROW NOISE

Having a quiet rig will help dampen the thud from the arrow's release, but the noise of the flying arrow is still something deer often react to within milliseconds. A hunter cannot hear how loud an approaching arrow really is. Sound testing videos taken of arrows flying from the target's point of view demonstrate this whirling noise that the deer hears throughout the arrow's flight.

Sometimes a deer doesn't begin to react until hearing an approaching arrow in the final several yards. This still gives deer enough time to potentially move its vitals from the point of impact. Watching archery hunts in slow motion will really demonstrate the amazing reaction ability of a whitetail.

Heavier arrows fly slower and drop more quickly, but they are much quieter in flight. Larger feathers help stabilize arrows, but they decrease speed and increase noise. In archery, everything is a trade-off.

WOES CONTINUE

In December, I had more bad luck. Several times, I had nice, racked bucks on camera just after or before shooting hours or in daylight before arriving or leaving the location. Other times, while hunting one tree, my other spot nearby, had deer show up on camera. These cameras are great tools to use on WMAs, but they can really tease a hunter.

On one hunt, I was about to shoot a buck, and just before he got to the perfect spot, two other bucks ran in from another direction. I twisted around in hopes of shooting the bigger one. He was standing at 15 yards, looking at the first buck, presenting a quality shot. I was caught in between their vision and unable to draw. Soon, the closer buck glanced up and busted me. All three skipped out of range and fed together for a while.

This wasn't shaping up to be one of my hotter seasons, when I saw plenty of deer and let smaller ones walk. I was going to have to work harder than ever to fill another tag. My hunting buddy had missed several deer, including three trophy bucks, and he had wounded a nice buck with his traditional bow, so at least I had a friend with whom to commiserate. When you're using a recurve bow,

the deer will win most of the time, and that's part of the ultimate challenge one must accept.

TRIPLE DUEL

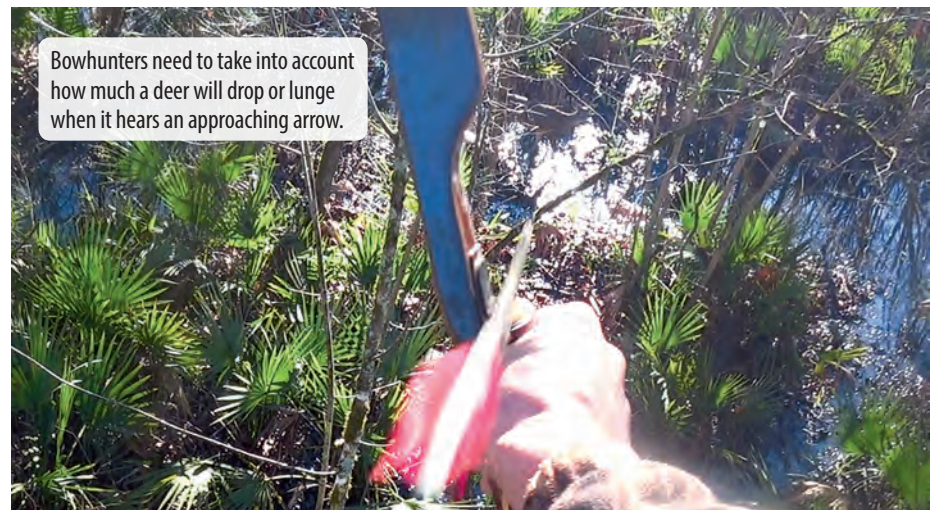
Then came my late-season face-offs with an elusive 6-point buck. He ducked and twisted away from my arrow not once, not twice, but three times. The first time, I waited too long to draw, worrying about getting busted when he was in the open and broadside at 15 yards. Instead, I drew undetected, but the 23-yard quartering away shot where I forgot to aim low enough gave the buck more time to drop and twist so much that the arrow hit his antlers.

The next time, one evening after having my range finder break in the morning. I thought I knew most of my gaps at this spot, but apparently I didn't know the one gap the rattled-in buck passed

utterly defeated every Sunday was taking its toll. On the last weekend, I thought it was finally going to come together. I was set up at my bad-memory spot; a location I shot an 8-point with my recurve the previous season, one had ducked hard, resulting in a non-lethal hit above the spine.

The area was still hot this season as a racked buck approached late in the morning along my doe-in-heat scent drag line. However, I couldn't shoot with a recurve from where he was standing, with the tree and my stand being in the way of the bow's limbs. I was using my short, 52-inch Kodiak Magnum bow, but even that isn't like a compound that can be drawn easily in advance and shot from most angles from a climber.

Finally, the buck came around to my side and into a shootable gap in the thick brush 15 yards away. My bow was



through, and I misjudged it by 5 yards. Not aiming low enough, the arrow passed just over his back as he dipped down.

The third time, I watched this buck feed for several minutes around a nuttall oak 22 yards away. I passed all the shots, hoping he would come to a closer nuttall, but he finally began to head in another direction. I had a good look, aimed low, but I lost focus of a branch in the shot path and hit it instead of the deer.

My cousin told me he had one buck dodge his recurve arrows three times this season as well. We agreed: at least they'll be bigger next year.

THE FINAL WEEKEND

Driving to north Louisiana every weekend to hunt a different public land with newfound excitement, but coming home

pointed at him, but I couldn't draw with the deer looking around for a hot doe and up into the treetops for the human he also smelled. The deer eventually turned his head, but as soon as I started to draw, he picked me up in his peripheral vision and bolted. That evening, at another spot, I saw does out of range.

FINISHING FOCUSED

A friend shared a great quote from a legendary hunter that kept me focused. "You can't get a deer by giving up or being worried about the past failures. It isn't about all the unsuccessful days and hours spent hunted; it's all about being there and ready in the next minute of the next hunt."

continued >

APEX PREDATOR

continued

I woke up the next morning at 4 a.m., went for a 10-mile run and decided to hike back to the previous morning's tree one last time. Once again, late into the morning, after all the duck and squirrel blasting stopped, a buck approached from upwind. He walked right into the same gap where the previous day's buck had stood. When my Steel Force 2-bladed broadhead struck just above his heart, my bad-memory spot turned into a great-memory spot.

I was barely able to see the 4-pointer sprint about 70 yards and crash. The water and leaves quit shaking quickly, but I continued to shake for quite some time. I hiked out of the woods and went to review my head-camera footage. Exact shot placement is something that's hard to tell during the rush of the moment, and checking video gives extra time that an animal may need to expire.

The video showed the 650-grain arrow appearing to fly way too low for a lethal hit,



just under the buck. However, that's where I aimed, and in the final few yards of the 15-yard shot, the deer dipped down more than one-half foot for a flawless center-height pass-through behind the shoulder. I went right back in find my 2½-year-old deer, which was easily located, but the 2-mile drag was far from easy.

After having more missed deer opportunities in this one testing season than I had in the past decade, I persevered to harvest

my first whitetail using my 72-pound, vintage 1960s bow I call "The Wolverine." Sure, bucks are scored by inches, but this measurement is just a fun number to quibble with. What really matters to me is the unique, unquantifiable meaning that lies within each set of horns. ■

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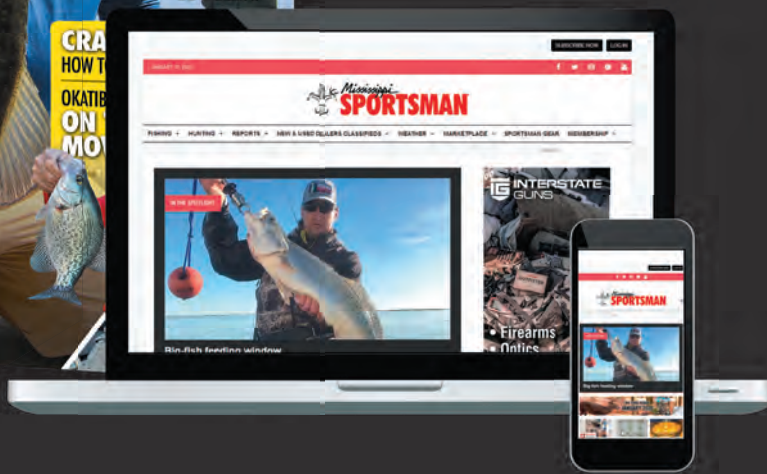
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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	3		

Winter typically departs the Southeast in March, but this one has been so unusual that all bets are off. There are usually long stretches of mild weather leading into spring during March, and I sure hope there are again this year.

However, with winter not really coming, just popping in and out for a week or so at a time, I thought a recipe to cook inside might be a good idea. This is one I haven't prepared in a while and probably wouldn't if I hadn't stumbled across a piece of backstrap in



the freezer while looking for something else.

There's never a bad time for serving venison, and this is an easy way to prepare the main course for dinner while doing something else, like getting ready for spring fishing or the rapidly approaching turkey season. It even works as a good surprise on a work day at your hunting lodge. Once you get it going, it's amazingly like a Ronco appliance. Just set it and forget it and return later to the main course of your meal cooked tender, juicy and ready to serve.

This recipe is special. Everyone loves backstrap, and this recipe makes it as tasty as possible with minimal effort. Go search your freezer and find a piece of backstrap to try this. You'll be glad you did. ■

CROCKPOT VENISON BACKSTRAP

TRY THIS RECIPE FOR ONE OF THE BEST PIECES OF VENISON

Spices like cinnamon and nutmeg aren't typically used with venison, but they play big roles in this recipe. **INSET:** Make sure the backstrap can sit completely on the bottom of the crockpot.

CROCKPOT BACKSTRAP

This isn't your typical crockpot recipe. Most of them are stews or soups and those types of things, but this slow-cooks a piece of backstrap in a dry crockpot. That's right, this recipe begins with a dry crockpot and piece of venison wrapped snugly in aluminum foil. I know it's difficult to fathom this could taste the way it does, but it's delicious and tender. The only way you'll know for sure is to try it yourself.

Like many recipes you find here, this is a combination of several things known to be good by themselves. Most outdoorsmen like backstrap and prepare it a variety of ways. This infuses the flavors of the onions, onion soup and spices into the backstrap while cooking it slowly to be sure it stays tender. Wrapping it in foil keeps the juices and steam contained and saturates the meat with the flavor. This is especially important with a lean piece of meat like a backstrap.

Cinnamon and nutmeg aren't spices often used with meat in this manner, but they combine with the peppers to create a sweet and

subtle flavor. Some of my friends say they taste this a bit more in the onions and try to have a piece or two of onion in every bite.

There is a bit of judgment call when cooking. The heat produced by crockpots and slow cookers varies. The one I have now is hotter than my last one, and I reduce cooking times. The size of the backstrap will also affect cooking time. This was a medium-size backstrap that I cooked for 5 hours and 15 minutes, and it was done all the way through.

Once this has cooked a while, some of the natural juices will find their way out of the foil and steam in the crockpot to keep the heat as even as possible. However, this doesn't make a bunch of juice, and most of it stays in the foil. These drippings make an excellent au jus to serve with the meal. Don't try to sneak a taste. Maybe more than with other recipes that fill the crock pot more than half full, the steam is important, and it is imperative not to remove the lid until you think the backstrap is done. Enjoy! ■

INGREDIENTS:

Half to whole piece of venison backstrap, 1 to 3 pounds. The backstrap must be able to lay flat on the bottom of the crock pot.

1 medium sweet onion

1 pkg dry onion soup mix

1 tsp cinnamon

1 tsp nutmeg

1 tsp white pepper

½ tsp black pepper

Aluminum foil

Optional: 1 Jalapeno pepper.

PREPARATION:

Mix the cinnamon, nutmeg, white pepper and black pepper. Slice the onion and cut slices into quarters or halves to match the width of the backstrap. Tear off a piece of aluminum foil large enough to totally wrap the backstrap. Lay the backstrap on the foil and sprinkle the pepper, nutmeg and cinnamon mixture on both sides. Sprinkle the onion soup mix on both sides of the backstrap. Score the backstrap two-thirds deep every couple of inches. Insert an onion slice in each score. Break up the remaining onion and lay pieces around and on top of the backstrap. Sprinkle any remaining spices and soup mix on the top of the backstrap, even covering the onion.

Wrap the backstrap tightly in the foil. Use a second piece, if necessary; it must be sealed well. Place the wrapped backstrap in the bottom of the crock pot and put the lid on. Do not add any liquid. Turn the crock pot to low and cook approximately 5 to 6 hours until the backstrap is tender. The time will vary depending on the size of the backstrap and how hot your particular crockpot cooks. A smaller backstrap will cook quicker and a larger one may require a little more time. The backstrap should make some juice while cooking. Most will stay in the foil, but some may run out into the crockpot. Don't worry about it. Serve immediately after opening the foil.



Jerry Dilsaver

Option: If you like the flavor of jalapeno peppers, slice a pepper and add pepper slices in the scores with the onion and spread the remaining pieces around and on the backstrap before sealing it in the foil.

This serves well with a variety of vegetables. I like to begin with a green salad and serve it with steamed or stir-fried vegetables and a baked potato or sweet potato. Whole wheat dinner rolls or a slice of hearty bread accompanies it well. This is a great meal that welcomes a bowl of apple or peach cobbler topped with a scoop of ice cream as the finishing touch. ■



Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., is a freelance writer, as well as a former national king mackerel champion fisherman. Readers are encouraged to send their favorite recipes and a photo of the completed dish to possibly be used in a future issue of the magazine. E-mail the recipes and photos to Jerry Dilsaver at captainjerry@captainjerry.com.

In Mississippi, youth aged 15 and under get a week of hunting before the regular spring season opens. **INSET:** Kids can unintentionally make mistakes that would doom a turkey hunt, but a blind, decoys and shooting sticks can help even the odds.



YOUTH WILL BE SERVED

SHOOTING STICKS, DECOYS, POP-UP BLINDS COVER MISTAKES

By Bobby Cleveland

While many die-hard turkey hunters might turn their noses up at decoys and folding, pop-up blinds when hunting alone, they consider them absolutely necessary accessories when guiding a youngster.

"The younger the hunters are, and the less experienced they are, the more necessary some assistance is," said Gerald Harper of Jackson, a long-time turkey chaser. "I don't care who you are ... when you are taking a 9- or 10- or 11-year-old boy or girl, you need a blind and a decoy to keep the gobbler's attention away from you.

"A youngster on his first hunt is going to make some mistakes, including moving when a bird is close," Harper said. "A blind covers that. A decoy might draw the gobbler's attention away.

"And a third tool, and one too many overlook, is a good set of shooting sticks or some kind of gun rest. We all know times when we struggled to hold a shotgun at aim waiting for a long-bearded tom to

provide a shot. Think about a youngster and his or her arms. Even with a .410 or a light 20-gauge, they will need help."

Harper gets no argument from Revel Rawlings of Ridgeland, the former president of the Mississippi Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation who raised two sons that share his passion.

"A blind, decoys and shooting sticks, and I'd rate them in importance in that order," Rawlings said. "Little ones have a tendency to move a lot, and I'm not talking about the mistakes that adults make like turning a head or something like that. They get restless and will move. Inside a blind, it's like a tent. Kids can even crawl around or play with a video game and be concealed. And a great thing about the modern pop-ups is that they are quick and easy to deploy and take down, and light enough to pack in and out and to move from area to area during a day."

Mississippi's youth season this spring — for hunters ages 15 and under — runs



Dan Kibler

from March 7 to 13. The regular spring season opens March 14 and ends May 1.

The daily limit for youths under 15 is one gobbler of any age per day, three per spring (includes youth and regular season). The limit for hunters 16 and over is one mature gobbler, or a gobbler with a minimum 6-inch beard per day, three per spring season. ■

HEY, LET'S GET SMALL

DOWNSIZE BASS BAITS WHEN COLD FRONTS HIT

By David Brown

When spring cold fronts put prespawn bass in a foul mood, just remember that, despite the interruptive nature of a temperature drop and the dreaded bluebird post-front day, the fish still want to eat.

They might not feel like it, but there's no question that they need to feed.

And stalling periods delivered by cold fronts are rarely more than annoying delays for the bass; they've already sensed the days growing warmer with longer periods of sunlight, so they'll simply lay low and wait out the front.

But rather than lament the lapse in raging prespawn action, adjust your tactics

and show the fish something that's easy for them to catch.

This is a great time to throw a jerkbait — a lure design to twitch and pause for an effective blending of interest and accessibility.

In most prespawn habitat, you'll want to stick with shallow-diving models. And on sunny afternoons, you might want to work in some floating jerkbait action for the fish that don't mind heading topside.

Carolina rigs baited with small lizards or curlytail worms can also deliver attractive options that don't require much chasing.

Downsizing is also an effective strategy Florida bass pro Cliff Prince often implements.

Downsizing to a smaller jig, crankbait or jerkbait can make a difference drawing strikes from bass during cold-front conditions.



Dan Kibler

In fact, Prince said he can still get bit on a lipless rattle bait during frontal conditions by simply dropping from an Xcalibur XR 50 lipless bait to the XR 25.

"I catch them on that bigger bait, too, but it seems they eat that small bait better in post-frontal conditions," he said. ■

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SLAB SPAWN? ONE POLE

THE BEST WAY TO PRESENT A BAIT TO A SHALLOW CRAPPIE IS JIGGING UP CLOSE WITH A SINGLE POLE

By Dan Kibler

Melvin Cummings was an expert crappie fishermen 20 years before the words “spider-rigging” ever became popular among the crowd that targets slabs. And even though he understands that the concept of multiple-pole trolling is tremendously effective, there’s at least one time of year when he isn’t going to put his single rod down for any reason.

That period is when crappie go to the bank to spawn.

In March and April you’re going to find Cummings fishing only one rod and one lure at a time.

Period.

“It is the best way to catch crappie when they go to the bank to spawn,” he said.

Cummings said fishermen need to watch their temperature gauges as winter gives way to spring.

“(The fish) should go to the bank when the water temperature gets to 56 or 57 degrees, and they’ll go to any kind of cover on the bank — no two ways about

it,” he said. “They’ll stay up there until it’s 62 to 64 degrees. They’ll go in in waves, because there’s no way they can all go in at one time; there’s no room, because there are too many of them.”

If you’re fishing a lake that has populations of both white and black crappie, Cummings said one species or the other will be first to head to the bank, and when they’re finished, the other will get started.

This guarantees fishermen have slabs to catch in shallow water for the better part of six weeks — at least.

And Cummings catches them the old-fashioned way, easing down the bank in his boat, holding in one hand a 13-foot, telescopic fiberglass crappie rod with an equal length of 17-pound monofilament tied to the end, with a 1/6-ounce jighead on the business end, and likely, a curlytail grub threaded onto the jig.

“You can dip it right down in the middle of the brush or the tree you’re fishing and just fish that jig straight up and down,” Cummings said. “I may put a float on to



Big spawning crappie can be caught one-by-one if an angler can probe shallow cover with a long pole, a length of line and a crappie jig. **BELOW, OPPOSITE:** Jigged vertically, a mini-jig can turn a hungry crappie into a guest at a fish fry in a matter of seconds.



Dan Kibler




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judge the depth — if I want to go down 3 or 4 feet — but I'll hold the cork up out of the water. You don't need it; you can feel that fish hit it and knock the fire out of it."

Cummings might dab his jig around a shallow stump, and then move 15 feet down the bank and jig vertically around a laydown tree or a brush pile. He doesn't put much action in his jig, and he doesn't expect to have to because crappie in water as shallow as 18 inches don't need to be coaxed into striking.

"I'm just jigging straight up and down, maybe moving it from side to side. Or I'll bump the end of the rod with my hand, and that will be enough to make that little jig move," he said. "You have to fish heavy line when you're fishing down in a tree or you'll keep breaking off. And usually, the water is stained enough that the size of the line doesn't matter." ■



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To find groups of bass late in the prespawn, start in the back of a creek or pocket and work your way out — not the other way around.

START IN, WORK OUT

LATE IN PRESPAWN, IT'S HOW BASS PRO FINDS MORE BASS

By Bobby Cleveland

When bass pro angler Pete Ponds of Madison is asked about the best way to approach the final stages of the prespawn, his answer usually gets funny reactions.

"I like to start in and work out, which means I get on in to the shallow spawning area, and I fish my way out," said Ponds. "I know that's the opposite of how most fishermen do it, but that is how you need to approach it, especially in the final stages of the prespawn."

"I'll go in and look in spawning areas for the clearest shallow water I can find, and that's relative to each lake," he said. "I will look for fish and signs of fish, and what I expect to find is male buck bass. Everyone knows they go in first, and even if we get a freak cold front, they won't go far."

Ponds knows that if the males are in there without females, they will be aggressive and will hit things like a swimming lizard.

"I say the lizard because that's something we all did for years

and still do on Barnett Reservoir, which is where I grew up fishing," he said. "If I start catching the buck bass and I want bigger fish — and I usually do — then I start moving out to deeper water and it's extremely important that I fish my way out. Female bass will move up in stages.

"You may find some in 3 feet, 4 feet, 5 feet or even 6 feet, and maybe some in all of those depths. Take the time to fish it all, and fish it thoroughly, and I bet that eventually you are going to hit a depth that is holding the most numbers of quality fish."

Ponds switches to different lures as he moves out, and his No. 1 choice is always a swimming jig.

"The last few years, I have found that the swimming jig just attracts bigger bites," he said. "But in the right conditions, warming water and overcast skies, a small ¼-ounce black or white buzzbait is killer. And there are times in murky water that you can't beat a spinnerbait with a single, large, gold Colorado blade, about the size of a half dollar ... you know, what some people call 'thumper blades.'"

Vegetation plays a big factor in Ponds' search for the bigger females.

"You have to look at the area, the whole area as a single picture," he said. "You look for things like lily pads and then identify areas in the pads where they are sparse, which would indicate either a change in the bottom or a change in depth. Those are key areas bass will use."

"I also look for other vegetation, like primrose and alligator weed, but anything really, because anywhere you see a change in vegetation is usually a spot where the bottom changes, like from sandy to muddy. Fish really relate to those changes. It is a good junction point for fish." ■

Dan Kibler

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Sun 1	██	██	██	46
Mon 2	██	██	██	58
Tue 3	██	██	██	50
Wed 4	██	██	██	47
Thu 5	██	██	██	47
Fri 6	██	██	██	57
Sat 7	██	██	██	66

Sun 8	██	██	██	78
Mon 9	██	██	██	81
Tue 10	██	██	██	69
Wed 11	██	██	██	55
Thu 12	██	██	██	41
Fri 13	██	██	██	32
Sat 14	██	██	██	29

Sun 15	██	██	██	31
Mon 16	██	██	██	40
Tue 17	██	██	██	28
Wed 18	██	██	██	23
Thu 19	██	██	██	23
Fri 20	██	██	██	23
Sat 21	██	██	██	34

Sun 22	██	██	██	45
Mon 23	██	██	██	57
Tue 24	██	██	██	65
Wed 25	██	██	██	57
Thu 26	██	██	██	51
Fri 27	██	██	██	44
Sat 28	██	██	██	42

Sun 29	██	██	██	45
Mon 30	██	██	██	48
Tue 31	██	██	██	55

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TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD		MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
10:32 am	3:58 pm - 7:10 pm	☀		3:43 am - 6:43 am	☾
11:10 am	4:42 pm - 8:04 pm	☀	12:42 am	4:23 am - 7:35 am	☾ HALF
11:53 am	5:31 pm - 9:01 pm		1:41 am	5:07 am - 8:29 am	☾
12:45 pm	6:25 pm - 9:57 pm		2:41 am	5:56 am - 9:26 am	☾ HIGH
1:44 pm	7:24 pm - 10:54 pm		3:38 am	6:50 am - 10:22 am	☾
2:49 pm	8:27 pm - 11:49 pm		4:32 am	7:49 am - 11:19 am	☾
4:00 pm	9:32 pm - 1:42 am		5:21 am	8:52 am - 12:14 pm	☾
6:13 pm	11:38 pm - Midnight		7:05 am	10:57 am - 2:07 pm	☾ Begin DST
7:26 pm	Midnight-2:30 am		7:46 am	12:03 pm - 2:55 pm	☾ FULL
8:39 pm	12:43 am - 3:15 am		8:23 am	1:08 pm - 3:40 pm	☾ Perigee
9:51 pm	1:49 am - 3:57 am		8:59 am	2:14 pm - 4:22 pm	☾
11:01 pm	2:53 am - 4:41 am		9:35 am	3:18 pm - 5:06 pm	☾
	3:56 am - 5:24 am		10:12 am	4:21 pm - 5:49 pm	☾
12:11 am	4:56 am - 6:12 am		10:52 am	5:21 pm - 6:37 pm	☾
1:18 am	5:58 am - 7:00 am		11:37 am	6:23 pm - 7:25 pm	☾
2:21 am	6:56 am - 7:52 am	☀	12:25 pm	7:21 pm - 8:17 pm	☾ HALF
3:19 am	7:53 am - 8:45 am	☀	1:18 pm	8:18 pm - 9:10 pm	☾ LOW
4:11 am	8:44 am - 9:40 am		2:14 pm	9:09 pm - 10:05 pm	☾
4:57 am	9:31 am - 10:33 am		3:11 pm	9:56 pm - 10:58 pm	☾ Spring
5:37 am	10:14 am - 11:26 am		4:08 pm	10:39 pm - 11:51 pm	☾
6:11 am	10:55 am - 12:17 pm		5:05 pm	11:20 pm - 12:42 am	☾
6:42 am	11:30 am - 1:08 pm	☀	6:01 pm	11:55 pm - Midnight	☾
7:11 am	12:05 pm - 1:57 pm	☀	6:57 pm	Midnight - 1:33 am	☾
7:38 am	12:37 pm - 2:45 pm	☀	7:51 pm	12:30 am - 2:22 am	☾ NEW & APOGEE
8:05 am	1:09 pm - 3:35 pm		8:46 pm	1:02 am - 3:10 am	☾
8:32 am	1:42 pm - 4:24 pm		9:41 pm	1:34 am - 4:00 am	☾
9:01 am	2:18 pm - 5:14 pm		10:38 pm	2:07 am - 4:49 am	☾
9:32 am	2:55 pm - 6:05 pm		11:35 pm	2:43 am - 5:39 am	☾
10:08 am	3:37 pm - 6:59 pm			3:20 am - 6:30 am	☾
10:48 am	4:23 pm - 7:53 pm		12:34 am	4:02 am - 7:24 am	☾
11:35 am	5:15 pm - 8:47 pm	☀	1:32 am	4:48 am - 8:18 am	☾ HIGH

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS:
☀ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ☀ = DUSK
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