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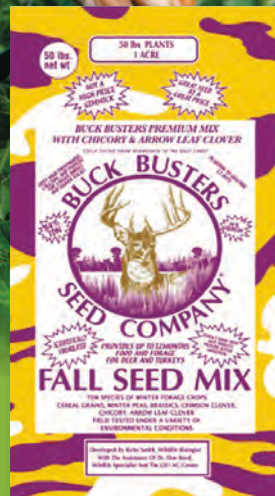
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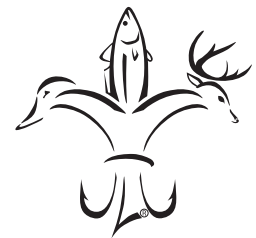
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**PUBLISHER:** Lisa Lottinger Cuccia  
**EDITOR:** Dan Kibler  
**MANAGING EDITOR:** Alicia LaFont  
**CONTRIBUTING EDITOR:** Bobby Cleveland  
 bobbyc7754@yahoo.com, 601.506.0739  
**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR:** Jeff Caldwell  
**ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER:**  
 Desiree P. Lewis  
**ART DIRECTOR:** Kevin Orgeron  
**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:**  
 Jeff Cashio, Alissa Zeringue  
**CONTROLLER:** Juanita Guidry  
**SALES DIRECTOR:** Jay Forrest  
 225.278.0258/jayf@lasmag.com  
**ADVERTISING SALES:**  
 Mark Hilzim (National Sales), Mark Boyd, Asa  
 Faulkner, Burton Angelle, John Cain and Bret  
 Holten  
**CONTRIBUTORS:**  
 David A. Brown, Chris Bush, Bobby Cleveland,  
 Brian Cope, Jerry Dilsaver, Paul Elias, David  
 Hawkins, Bill Garbo, Phillip Gentry, Michael  
 O. Giles, Dan Kibler, Sammy Romano, Hal  
 Schramm and Don Shoopman  
**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR:**  
 Ricky Naquin 985.859.7744/rickyn@lasmag.com

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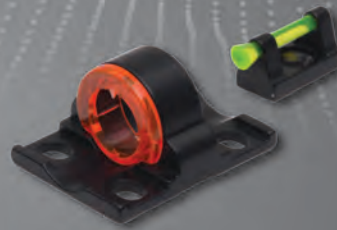
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# Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland



Teal will invade Mississippi waters this month, with hunters getting a 15-day season to throw shot at the speedy ducks.



# SEPTEMBER: WE CAN FINALLY SHOOT! PUT ASIDE PANDEMIC FOR A WHILE; HUNTING SEASONS HAVE ARRIVED



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

**T**he wacky world that has been 2020, thank heavens it's September. It's the month that will bring us an official



Dan Kibler

Dove season begins in Mississippi on Saturday, Sept. 5, running for 11 days in the South Zone and a month in the North Zone.

end to summer, if not its oppressive heat, which is always a good thing, no matter how screwed up the first eight months have been — thanks COVID-19.

And for about 200,000 Mississippians, it brings the hunting season. Yea! Two bits, four bits, six bits a dollar, if you're ready to shoot something, stand up and holler!

We may not have football to cheer, and we may not even be able to send our young 'uns off to school, but by golly, there's no better way to socially isolate than hitting the woods, waters and fields to chase:

• **Alligators.** If you applied and were lucky enough to get drawn, the season that started Aug. 28 ends on Sept. 7.

• **Canada goose.** The early season that gives hunters a shot at the growing numbers of these nuisance waterfowl opens Sept. 1 and ends Sept. 30.

• **Dove.** One of the most-popular seasons, this one starts Sept. 5 in both zones and ends Sept. 15 in the South Zone and runs through Oct. 6 in the North Zone.

- **Gallinules and rails.** Two of the least-popular hunting seasons in Mississippi, hunting is allowed for these migratory shorebirds Sept. 1 through Sept. 30.
- **Teal.** Duck hunters love this 16-day shot at the early-migrating blue-winged teal. It opens Sept. 14 and ends Sept. 29.

Of course, if none of those opportunities cater to your liking, September is also a great month for fishing, both in the Gulf of Mexico and in our inland waters. Who doesn't like catching redfish, speckled trout or tripletail in the marshes of the Gulf, or chasing schools of bass and crappie that are following the shad toward the shallows on major lakes and rivers?

The September issue of *Mississippi Sportsman* helps set the tone for your outdoor adventures with several regular features and stories that include expert tips that can help produce maximum results.

- Writer Phillip Gentry looks at the single-pole, vertical-jigging method of targeting big crappie in the fall transition period.
  - Bryan Hendricks takes us to the Gulf for a look at the exciting sport of searching for and catching tripletail — aka black fish — all while cranked up and running nearly wide open.
  - Mike Giles provides his annual assessment of the hunting opportunities on the state's Wildlife Management Areas.
  - Andy Douglas takes a look at fall turkey hunting, which just a decade or so ago was limited to a few Delta counties. Now, some other areas give hunters a chance to bag a bird for Thanksgiving. It's a sport where wearing a mask is universally accepted.
- Stay safe. Stay healthy. Be happy and read on. ■

Putting a little effort into preseason scouting can result in some great dove shooting come opening day.



Bobby Cleveland

“Each field will have several routes, and birds will use them all, but the key is finding the ones that the most birds are using every day. And you don’t ever quit learning about that, especially after the shooting starts. Seeing how birds react to shots being fired, where they immediately turn and speed toward, that’s something you need to be watching for, so the next time you hunt that field, you can be in that place or have a friend standing there to shoot and turn the birds.”

Townsend is not beyond using other hunters’ behavior to dictate where he might hunt, or even move, during an afternoon. “A lot of times, when a field is full of hunters, there will be one or two yokels out there who have no clue what to do,” he said. “They won’t be hidden, or they won’t be still. Those guys will flare birds, and if I see them doing it often enough, that it is turning birds in one direction to avoid danger, I’ll move to cut off their escape route.”

Townsend’s other tip is simple. “Make sure you get every pellet out of a breast,” he said, grinning. “These things are too good to mess up by chomping down a piece of lead.” ■

# UPCOMING SEASON HAS ‘DOVEAHOLICS’ EXCITED

## VISIT FIELDS BEFORE THE SEASON, DETERMINE A PLAN OF ATTACK

**B**acon-wrapped dove anyone? Mention dove season to Clyde Townsend of Madison, and his thoughts turn to lighting the coals, wrapping tender, red-meated dove breasts in bacon with a slice of jalapeno in between, cooking until the bacon is crisp and the dove medium rare and taking a big ol’ bite.

“Ain’t nothing better,” said Townsend, who is, as he calls it, “a bonafide, certified, doveaholic.” If the season is open, Townsend, a retired market analyst, is usually somewhere in the middle of a grain field, gun in hand, waiting on the next dove to fly past.

“This year, I’m excited about the first season,” he said. “It’s open from Labor Day weekend until Oct. 6, and buddy, that’s a lot of hunting time for me. The opportunity is so great that I kept my usual dove-club membership going and joined two more, just to have enough places to hunt. I may not hunt every day, but I bet I average at least five or maybe six days each week.”



Tasty and timely! Bacon-wrapped dove breasts on the grill, great with or without a slice of jalapeno in the middle.

Bobby Cleveland

The way Townsend figures it, he’ll hunt at least 25 days out of 31 in the first North Zone season. Now, if he averages 10 birds a day — “I bet I get the limit (15) near-about every day” — he’ll have 250 breasts put up by Oct. 6, minus the ones he’ll have already eaten.

Townsend’s secret to success is simple: “If you’re waiting until opening day or the day of any hunt to choose a place to sit, you are way too late,” he said. “Scouting each field and learning the approach and exit routes that the most birds are using is something you need to do from mid-August to the end of the season.

“I think doves are creatures of habit, in that what they do and get away with one day is what they will continue to do. If there’s a ditch or a tree line or even a point that sticks into the field, that’s the likely corridor they will relate to coming and going.

### DON'T FORGET TAX-FREE HOLIDAY

Mississippi hunters have a great opportunity for savings for the entire 2020-21 hunting season during the Magnolia State’s annual Second Amendment Tax-Free Holiday, set for Sept. 4-6.

For three days, firearms and ammunition, as well as archery equipment, can be purchased without additional sales tax added. Most locally owned sporting good shops that cater to hunters offer special deals to further savings. Most accessories, like clothing, are not included.

# COMMISSION NIXES CWD MANAGEMENT CHANGES

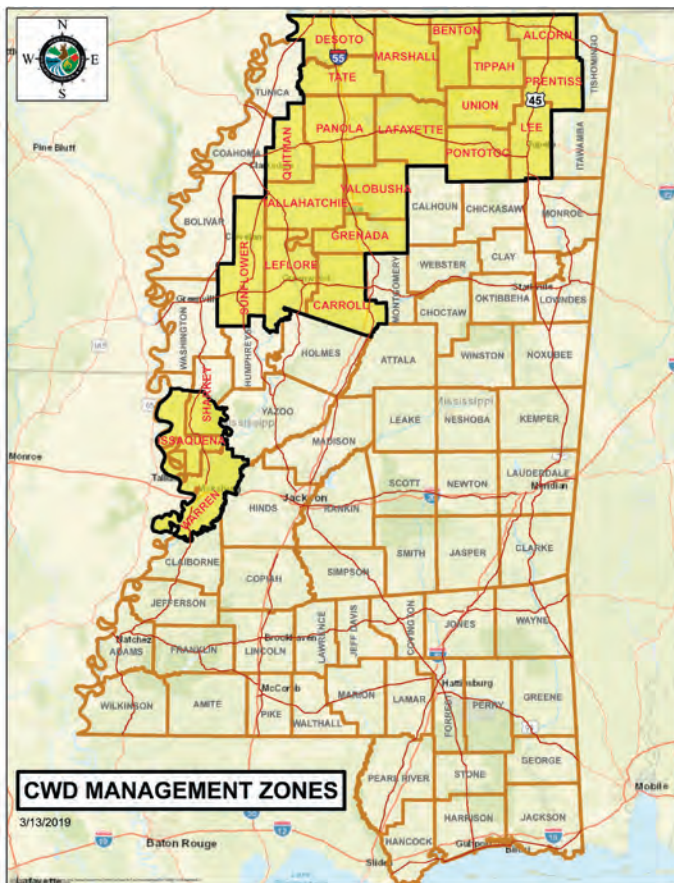
**A**t its monthly meeting in July, the Mississippi Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, reversed its decision on changes it made in May and confirmed in June to the agency's CWD Management Plan.

Gone is the controversial creation of CWD surveillance zones.

The key reason for massive opposition was a reduction in the size of CWD Management Zones where supplemental feeding is not allowed.

Quoting a lack of support from hunter and objections from biologists and conservation groups, including the Quality Deer Management Association and Mississippi State University Deer Lab, the Commission reversed its decision and returned the CWD Management Zones to the same boundaries and regulations used during the 2019-20 season.

That means 19 counties in the North Mississippi CWD Management Zone and three in the Issaquena CWD Management Zone will remain under last year's regulations for the 2020-2021 deer season. The proposal would have shrunk those zones and created



## CWD MANAGEMENT ZONES

### Boundaries and 2020-21 regulations

#### North MS Management Zone:

- Includes Alcorn, Benton, Carroll, Desoto, Grenada, Lafayette, Leflore, Lee, Marshall, Panola, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Quitman, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tate, Tippah, Union, and Yalobusha counties

#### Issaquena Management Zone:

- All portions of Warren County
- All portions of Issaquena and Sharkey counties defined as:
  - All areas east of the Mississippi River
  - All areas south of Highways 14 and 16
  - Areas west of the Yazoo River

### Regulations

Carcasses may not be transported outside of any CWD Management Zone. Research has shown that decomposed carcasses of infected animals can also contribute to transmission when prions bind to soil and plant material. Thus, movement of carcasses may introduce CWD into previously uninfected areas. Any harvested deer may be taken directly to a taxidermist or meat processor within the CWD Management Zone. Only the below products may leave the zone:

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

Supplemental feeding — salt licks, mineral licks, and feeders — is banned in all CWD Management Zones. Direct contact with prions is the most effective means of transmitting CWD. Research indicates saliva may have the highest concentration of prions. Thus, to minimize concentration of deer and potential spread of CWD, supplemental feeding is banned within all CWD Management Zones.

CWD surveillance zones for the other parts of the existing zones. The proposed change would have allowed supplemental feeding within 10 miles of a verified CWD case instead of 25, which is the problem most deer professionals had with the surveillance zones.

That drew red flags immediately.

According to Russ Walsh, chief of staff for the wildlife side of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, the opposition was very broad. He said it included a good mix of individuals and organizations, and the number of comments was well beyond what the agency receives for regulation changes. He said the response was overwhelming in a desire "to leave the zones as is."

Creating the surveillance zones would have allowed supplemental feeding — as most people correctly call it, baiting — from those areas, which would have started 10 miles from a confirmed CWD deer discovery and ended 25 miles from that spot. CWD Management Zones would have included only those areas that are 10 miles from a confirmed CWD case, and feeding would have been banned in that area only. ■

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# TEAL HUNTERS ARE READY!

## NUMBERS MAY BE DOWN, BUT THERE ARE STILL PLENTY OF BLUE-WINGS

**F**or the first time in its 65-year history, the annual Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey was cancelled in 2020, a victim of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey's partners, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Canada Wildlife Service and the many state wildlife agencies are forced to rely on long-term data for their 2020-21 forecasts.

There's good and bad news in those numbers for September teal hunters.

The 2019 survey, for the third-straight year, showed reduced numbers of blue-winged teal. Last year's survey produced an estimated 5.4 million blue-winged teal, a 16% decrease from the 2018 count. It's significantly lower than the peak count in 2010 of nearly 10 million blue wings.

But, the 2019 estimate was still 6% above the long-term, 65-year average for blue-wings.

"The last few years' trend is not great news, but last year, even with the decreased count, we still had a good season because the population is still above average," said Gabe Evans of Southaven. "I can only speak for myself and my hunting partners who hunt the North Delta, but we had limit hunts on blue wings every day we went. Some days, it was quick, like we were done and back at

camp by 8:30. Other days, we'd be closer to noon, but still we had lots of birds."

Evans said his group had to travel further south than normal to find the birds late in September.

"Early on, we seemed to have the peak of the migration come through DeSoto County right at the start of the season," he said. "We noticed toward the end of the first week that the concentration of birds was dwindling on our holes. Instead of being in there and out in an hour or two, we were staying until 11 or noon.

"We made some calls, and some friends of ours down around Grenada said the teal had shown up at Grenada Lake and on some converted catfish ponds to the west over by Greenwood. Sure enough, when we got down there, they were as thick as they had been around DeSoto County the first week of the season."

Evans said this year, if the pattern holds true, his group has invited the Grenada group to hunt the North Delta early and then follow the birds south again.

"I hope it works out as well as it did last year, but I know that it may have been a freak thing," he said. "But it makes sense that the birds are migrating, so they will move south. The key is when the peak of their southern flight pushes them into Mississippi. There have been seasons when the peak actually occurred before our season even opened, just like there's been some when the peak came after.

"All we can do is prepare some good habitat for them, shallow mud flats where they can rest and feed, and hope their schedule puts them here during our 16-day season. I hate they missed out on the 2020 survey, because I'd like to know if they downward trend is continuing. The more birds there are, the longer the migration will last, and the better our hunting will be. That's just common sense."

The limit will again be six per hunter per day, with a possession limit of 18. ■



Bobby Cleveland



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# SEPTEMBER'S TOP SPOTS

FROM CATS TO SLABS, BREAM, BASS AND REDS; PLENTY TO OFFER

**L**ooking for a place to fish this month in Mississippi? Try one of these:

**Catfish, Barnett Reservoir:** The long, hot summer has pushed the blues and channels to the edge of deep flats. Dead-sticking cut bait, prepared baits or night crawlers on rods and reels will work in 8 to 12 feet of water as long as you are in casting range of a drop to deeper water. In legal areas, free-floating devices, aka jugs, will be productive between 2 and 10 feet deep, 24 hours a day. Trot-liners do best upriver or in the deeper timber of the upper main lake.

**Crappie, Lake Washington:** Still among the worst-kept fishing secrets in Mississippi are the big crappie in this old oxbow lake near Glen Allen in southern Washington County. Once a virtual-unknown resource, this lake has made about every Top 20 list of the country's best crappie spots over the past decade. The best September pattern is probably the only remaining secret about this place: trolling shallow in deep water. It's true. Some of the best and biggest fish are caught within the top 4 feet of water in the heat of the day. Tip your jigs with a minnow. The fish may be plentiful, but they are picky.

**Bream, Tippah County Lake:** Of course, this MDWFP lake near Ripley is famous for its spring fishing, when the bluegill and redear are on the beds, but the bite doesn't end when the fish quit spawning. Think deep, and then think deeper. Some of the biggest bream caught from this lake are caught late in the summer and into the fall, with long casts from boats or the banks to the bottom in 10 to 12 feet of water. Use big worms and fish with tight lines.



Big reds will highlight fishing along Mississippi's Gulf Coast this month.

Bobby Cleveland

**Bass, Pickwick Lake:** This big lake is absolutely no secret, and it remains the No. 1 destination for late-summer bass action that includes all three black bass species: largemouth, smallmouth and Kentucky spotted bass — in quality and quantity. As soon as the shad begin migrating out of the river toward the banks, the action increases. Rock or grass points will both produce, but

one secret to big September smallmouths is moving to a rock bluff bank with a quick vertical fall and paralleling it with a mid-range.

**Redfish, Mississippi**

**Sound:** No secret here, and it comes with options. Fishermen can target the big bull redfish to stretch their lines or the gap reds — 18 to 30 inches — for the grill. September's dog days offer some of the best action in the Mississippi Sound, from the Pascagoula River to the Pearl River. Big schools of bulls will be around the barrier islands while the smaller reds will be tearing it up in inshore waters and the Biloxi Marsh. ■

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The lake at Trace State Park reopened to fishing Aug. 5 and showed signs it would quickly reclaim its place among Mississippi hot spots.



Photo courtesy MDWFP

## TRACE STATE PARK'S LAKE REOPENS AFTER RENOVATION

**F**ishermen in Northeast Mississippi are rejoicing over the reopening of one of its best fishing holes after the lake at Trace State Park near Pontotoc, just west of Tupelo off Highway 6, reopened on Aug. 5.

The lake, which is actually two big bodies of water connected by a channel at the dam, has been closed more than three years for renovation and repairs to the water-control structure.

Trace Lake has long been a favorite of area bass fishermen. Both the big "ski" lake and the smaller "fishing only" lake are capable of producing big, fat, sassy largemouths, as well as big stringers of bream.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks was able to retain most of the water in the fishing lake, which meant a lot of the original fish remained there untouched for three years. When the lake was returned to normal level, it was restocked, which the agency said is great news for fishermen.

Biologists there have placed a 16- to 22-inch slot limit on bass. All bass between 16 and 22 inches must be immediately released, without exception. To promote harvest of younger fish with some protection of bigger fish, the daily limit is 10; only one of those can exceed 22 inches.

On opening day, about 60 boats hit the water.

"They caught fish, both bass and bream," said Larry Pugh, fisheries director for MDWFP. "The bass fishing was great for numbers, with a lot of boats catching between 40 and 50 fish. Most fish were under the slot limit, which follows what we expected, with about 85% of the bass between 11 and 14½ inches. The biggest I saw was a 6-pound, 9-ounce fish."

Truth be told, the lake was always just as good for its bream fishing and has always produced both redear and bluegill varieties, and that held true on opening day.

"The bream fishing was outstanding," Pugh said. "They not only caught numbers, they also caught quality fish. I mean big mature bream, and the bluegills were on the bed. It was a full moon, and they were on the beds. They also caught a lot of quality redear out a little deeper, just off where the bluegills were bedding." ■

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# CMR CERTIFIES SIX STATE RECORDS

From News Reports

The Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources certified six state fishing records at its August meeting. Samuel Grayson, 13, of Mobile, Ala., set the youth state record using conventional tackle for spotted seatrout with a fish weighing 5 pounds, 11.78 ounces.

Rodie Armes, 10, of Pass Christian set the youth state record for spot with a fish weighing 4.16 ounces.

Sean Cook of D'Iberville set two state records using a spear for permits with a fish weighing 11 pounds, 0.76 ounces and Spanish hogfish with a fish weighing 2 pounds, 10.72 ounces.

The new state record for red grouper was set by Tim Shivers of Ocean Springs with a fish weighing 22 pounds, 2.05 ounces.

Donnie Armes of Pass Christian set a state record using conventional tackle for spot with a fish weighing 4.42 ounces.

"This month's fish records span a variety of species, methods of take and ages of fishermen," said Joe Spraggins, executive director of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. "Our agency enjoys seeing the variety of recreational fishermen enjoying our Mississippi waters. Congratulations to all of our new state-record holders."

Samuel Grayson with spotted seatrout.



Sean Cook with permit.



Sean Cook with Spanish hogfish.

Donnie Armes with spot.



Rodie Armes with spot.



Tim Shivers with red grouper.



Photos courtesy MDMR

# FAMILY FINDS SILVER LINING IN PANDEMIC

Brian Cope

**F**or Noah Brown of Winnsboro, La., COVID-19 has a huge silver lining. A single dad with a grown son and a 7-year-old daughter, he's struggled to find a balance between work and family life since losing his wife four years ago.

Once an avid fisherman, Brown had never taken his daughter fishing until he was furloughed from his job due to the pandemic back in the spring.

"She's grown up looking at pictures all around the house of her brother and me with big stringers of crappie, bass, catfish. She's always asked about going fishing. Her school let out about the same time I got furloughed, and on that first day, we went fishing in a friend's pond. She loved it," said Brown.

Brown had a fishing boat in the backyard covered with vines. He cut the weeds away and tried to get it running. His 22-year-old son stopped by and immediately got his hands dirty on the neglected outboard.

"My son's helped me out a lot with his sister over the years, but we haven't spent much time together due to work and all. He loves to tinker with things. Before long, he had the motor purring like a kitten. All three of us headed to Bruin Lake the next day," he said. "We had an outstanding day. We caught about everything you can catch."

Brown has been called back to work and furloughed again several times. So the three have continued to fish regularly throughout the summer, with Brown and his son constantly working on

the old boat. He gets choked up talking about it.

"You know, that part — me and him working together on that boat — I can't hardly explain it. I swear I'd have given up on that boat if it weren't for him. Just seeing that part of him and working with him on something to help us all spend more time together, it's been a bonding experience," he said.

The time with his daughter has been just as special.

"Before COVID, I knew she was getting the short end of the stick since her mom died. I figured I was doing the right thing, working as much overtime as possible to pay bills and keep food on the table," he said.

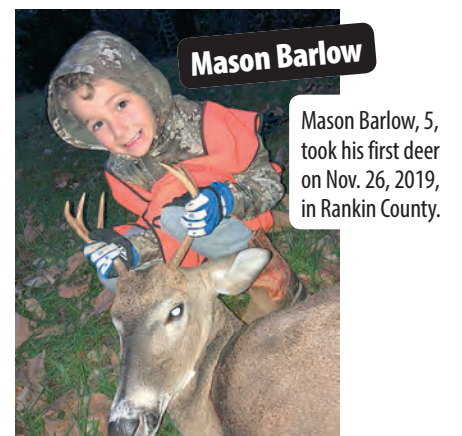
Between catching fish and their garden vegetables, Brown said their freezer and cupboards have remained fully stocked. He wishes his family's togetherness could have happened for a better reason.

"I feel bad for all the hurt that COVID has caused. But for the past several months, since it all started, life has been so good for me and my family. The time spent reconnecting with my son and finally connecting with my daughter like I wasn't sure I ever would, while doing something we all love. What more a man can ask for? The whole thing has blessed me beyond measure," he said.

Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way you enjoy the outdoors? Do you have a story to share? Please e-mail it to [images@ms-sportsman.com](mailto:images@ms-sportsman.com). ■



## Hunting/Fishing **SCRAPBOOK**





# MISSISSIPPI'S

By Mike Giles

# 2020-21 HUNTING FORECAST

OUTLOOK IS GOOD ON MOST PRIVATE LANDS; MANY WMAS OFFER EXCELLENT HUNTING FOR DEER, DUCKS AND SMALL GAME.

**D**riving over the levee, my headlights shone brightly into the dark, murky water that had flooded a portion of the Mahannah Wildlife Management Area. I'd spent a lot of time scouting the WMA and had located several hot spots with buck rubs and scrapes when the flooding started.

I backed my truck down, slid my boat into the water and quickly loaded up provisions. I wasn't going to let water stop me from harvesting a buck on public land after I'd put in so much time and effort. At least I wasn't going down without a fight.

After a two-hour trek over flooded fields and woods, I finally hit dry ground, took a short break and gathered my bearings while planning my options. After a quick snack, I started hunting in a westerly direction then came to the end of the dry ground.

Suddenly, I detected movement about 75 yards distant. A doe got my attention, but movement a few yards behind her caught my eye, and I saw antlers moving through the brush. As the doe fed slowly, the buck followed her on a string, never look-

ing up but browsing along behind her. As she went through an opening, I picked out that spot and waited on the buck. As soon as he went behind an oak tree, I raised my rifle and looked through my scope.

When the buck walked into the opening, I squeezed the trigger slowly.

"Ka-Boom!" roared my Browning BAR, and the buck collapsed in a heap. The public-land buck was my biggest at that time, sporting a wide rack with tall tines and weighing 210 pounds.

Each year, many hunters drive across Mississippi to various WMAs in search of the buck of a lifetime, and each year, many achieve their goal. If you're looking to harvest a deer, kill some ducks, squirrels or rabbits, Mississippi has an opportunity waiting for you — if you're willing to put in the time and effort to scout and hunt. Whether you're hunting private or public land, there's sure to be a world-class opportunity just waiting for you.

**STATEWIDE DEER FORECAST** ➤

## STATEWIDE DEER FORECAST

“Mississippi hunters harvest the oldest buck age-structure (of any ... state,” said William McKinley, deer program coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

“Our hunters do a great job of harvesting mature deer and passing on the younger bucks to give them time to mature.

“We had an overly wet spring this year; at my house, we reached the average annual rainfall on July 4, but it was almost double that amount last year with the flooding, and too much dilutes the nutrients and local flooding along rivers prevents vegetation growth.”

“Nutrient quality has been average to poor this year,” he said. “But overall, deer have had plenty to eat. Reports are coming in with pictures, and the deer are looking good.

“The South Delta region has seen flooding again, for the third-straight year, and that has affected the deer harvest in that area. We have serious issues with the deer herd in that area.

“We lost a lot of deer last year, as they were pushed out into other areas,” said McKinley. “The harvest was down because of

the half-million-acre flood, and we don’t know if all those deer will return to the area. And we don’t know the extent that (chronic wasting disease) may have spread into other counties as a result. We won’t know the outcome of that for a few years.”

## STATEWIDE HABITAT

“(What makes) the most difference for the fall harvest this year will depend upon several things,” said John Gruchy, MDWFP’s private lands program coordinator. “How good of a fawn crop you’ve had in the area the past couple of years, along with the mast crop and rainfall amount we receive in the fall are determining factors. If we get a good mast crop and late-summer and fall rains to grow good food plots, then deer hunting conditions should be good.

“We’ve had good browse condition through most of the state, and, so far, it looks like the mast crop is going to be very good for white oak. We’ve also had good conditions for soft-mast production like persimmons and muscadine, so they should do well this year.”

## QUAIL, RABBITS

“Bobwhite and rabbits are somewhat dependent upon rain, and we’ve had a good year for that,” Gruchy said. “We’ve probably had a good quail and rabbit hatch this year also.”

Where conditions are good, and people are managing for early successional habitat, we should have good quail and rabbit crops.

“I’ve spent a good bit of time in southwest Mississippi and heard tons of quail,” Gruchy said. “We’ve had two good hatches in a row, and if people have the right habitat conditions in their area, they should have a good year on quail. Rabbits are also contingent on the local habitat conditions as well.”

Nathan Blount, a wildlife biologist who works on WMAs, said **Divide Section WMA** in Tishomingo and Prentiss counties near Iuka led the state last year in quail harvest. “We’ve been seeing a lot of broods this summer, and that’s something that’s a unique opportunity,” he said. “We have hunters coming from surrounding states to hunt quail here, too.”

## WATERFOWL

“Waterfowl conditions have been great,” said Gruchy. “The people who are growing summer food like corn, browntop millet and some of the moist-soil food have been



doing great and got the right amount of rain at the right time.”

If you have the food and water, then all you need is cold weather to send the ducks to Mississippi. The Mississippi flyway annually brings thousands of ducks to the rivers, streams and sloughs along the Mississippi River, and this year should be even better since the 2-year flood has subsided.

## DELTA REGION WMAS

The Delta is, without a doubt, the crown jewel of the state’s WMA regions due to the rich soil composition and bountiful wildlife, with the best deer, duck and squirrel hunting in the world.

“The productivity of the Delta soil is unmatched anywhere,” said Roger Tankesly, a wildlife biologist with MDWFP. “The South Delta took a hit last year, and we saw some bad things happen, but the water receded in June ... and things are looking up.”

### DEER

“We are documenting fawn drops on all of the WMAs and private land, so we’re back in the deer making business. The browse is there now, and it’s in good shape,” Tankesly said. “I expect all those deer that suffered last year to rebound, and we expect deer hunting to be good, too. While the numbers may be down in the South Delta, it may take another year or two, but I believe people might not even know there was a problem.”

The bag limit in the South Delta has been reduced to two legal bucks and one doe, and on draw hunts at **Phil Bryant**, **Mahannah** and **Twin Oaks** WMAs, it is one legal buck and two does.

“Last year, we had a limited amount of people hunting and harvesting deer on the South Delta, but we saw deer all year, and those deer came back through the WMAs when the river flooded again,” Tankesly said, “so we’re pretty excited about our deer hunts this year and ready to go.

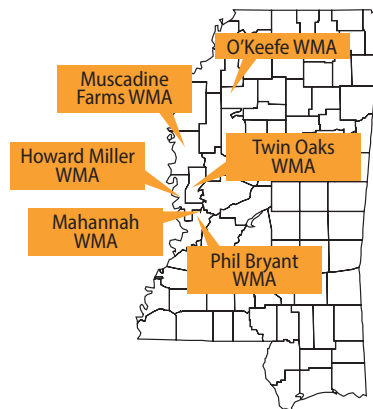
“It’s business as usual on the north end of the Delta.”

“**O’Keefe WMA** is wide open for hunting. We’ve been managing the habitat by harvesting timber, and there’s a lot of browse,” he said. “During the week, hunting pressure usually is pretty slow, with limited access, but if you put in the time and are willing to walk in, the opportunity will be there to harvest a good deer.”

### DUCKS

“Duck hunting should be good this year on **O’Keefe**, **Muscadine Farms** and **Howard Miller** WMAs, as we were able to get a lot of feed planted,” Tankesly said.

“The habitat is excellent at **O’Keefe**; we planted a lot of soybeans (and) corn and completed moist-soil management with native grasses. Muscadine Farms is one of the draw hunts, and we put in a lot of work there and planted soybeans and moist-soil management. Last year, we didn’t get to plant anything at **Howard Miller**, but this year, we planted soybeans and there should be a lot of native grasses producing seeds. **Howard Miller** should be back again.”



“**Mahannah** will be good again, even though we lost a few levees and weren’t able to get them repaired quick enough to plant. But we had our best year ever there, and it should be good again as we’ve got our planting in this year on most areas.”


### SQUIRRELS

The Delta is full of bottomland hardwoods, with a variety of mast-producing trees, both hard and soft mast, and as a result, both fox squirrels and grey squirrels are plentiful in many areas. In fact, people come from all over the country to hunt the big black and red fox squirrels and the harvest should be plentiful in most areas.

## SOUTHWEST WMA REGION ➤

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**OPPOSITE:** Deer bag limits have been lowered in many areas of Mississippi because of the effects of last year’s flooding.

## SOUTHWEST WMA REGION

### DEER

“The best opportunity for a quality mature buck in this region would be at **Canemount**,” said biologist Josh Moree. “We have a 16-inch inside spread or 20-inch main beam antler requirement, which allows the bucks to mature and produce quality antlers.”

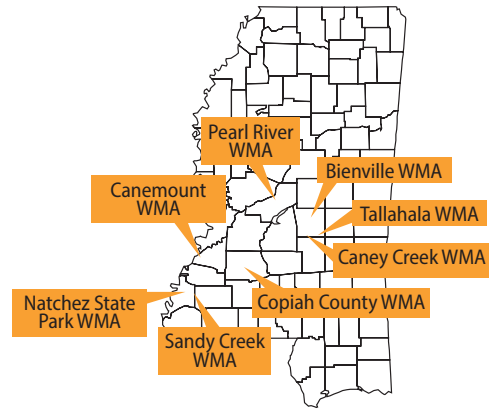
Last year, the average 4½-year-old buck was typically an 8- or 10-pointer weighing from 200 to 220 pounds, with some up to 230. Occasionally a 3½-year-old buck will meet those criteria, and if they live to be 4½ years old, they’ll be trophies.

For hunters who are more interested in the chance at taking a deer, **Copiah County** and **Sandy Creek WMAs** are in the forefront.

“(Copiah County) offers possibly the best opportunity to harvest a deer in this region, and it’s a short drive from Jackson,” Moree said. “Hunters will be able to harvest either sex from Oct. 1 through mid-December. We also have a 12- to 15-inch antler regulation on bucks.”

**Sandy Creek** may get overlooked some, but with 16,000 acres of good woods, it offers a great opportunity to harvest a buck. This WMA is in the Homochitto National Forest, with a lot of hardwood bottoms and mixed pine and hardwood areas.

**Natchez State Park** has some very good bowhunting, and it is all draw, split between archery and primitive weapons. It’s a very popular spot for bowhunters and is utilized as a way to control the deer population in the park. Natchez State Park has a 12- to 15-inch antler criteria regulation.



### SQUIRRELS

“**Sandy Creek** is probably the top squirrel-hunting destination as it has plenty of mast producing hardwoods,” said Moree.

**Bienville, Tallahala** and **Caney Creek** have some good squirrel-hunting habitat with hardwood bottoms. These areas are located in central Mississippi and are easily accessible.

### DUCKS

**Pearl River WMA** is the top spot for duck hunting in the region, and it’s reserved for youth waterfowl draw hunts in the waterfowl impoundments. However, there are lots of flooded acorns and bottomland and sloughs.

### NORTHEAST WMA REGION ➤

WMAs with abundant hardwood bottoms are likely to have the best squirrel populations and the best hunting opportunities.

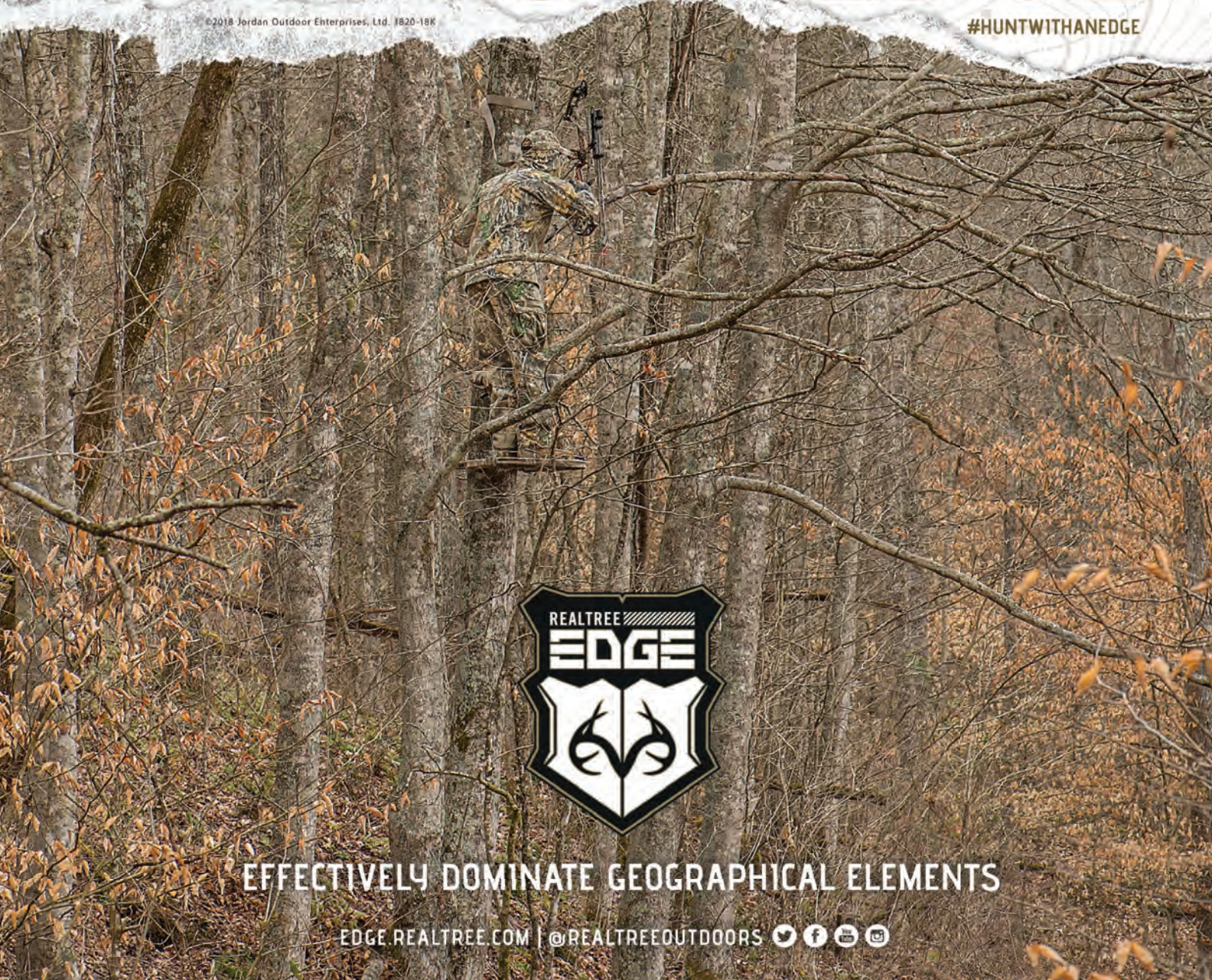




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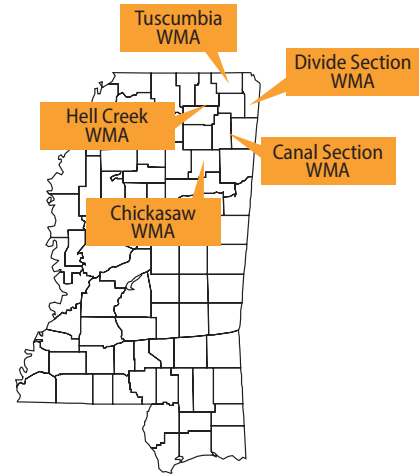
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## NORTHEAST WMA REGION



### DEER

“We’re looking for another good season in this region,” said biologist Blount. “If you’re looking for quality bucks, then you might want to try either **Canal Section** on the Tenn-Tom or **Divide Section** in Tishomingo County, as they always have some good bucks there.

“If you just want to see a deer or harvest a deer, then **Chickasaw** may be the WMA for you. We’re seeing a lot of deer there and having great reports, and there’s a lot of new cover after a pine beetle outbreak a few years ago. Last year, this WMA had the best man-day harvest rate it’s had in the past decade.”

### DUCKS

**Tuscumbia** is the premier waterfowl destination in this region, with nine impoundments for ducks. Unit 2 is a draw hunt only, but there is also an opportunity for non-draw hunts in Unit 1.

“Tuscumbia has an assortment of ducks, but **Canal Section** also has some wood ducks and mallard to hunt,” Blount said.”

### SMALL GAME

If you’re looking for squirrel hunting, then practically all of the WMAs in this area have good squirrel hunting, including **Canal Section**, **Divide Section** and **Chickasaw**.

**Hell Creek** has good rabbit hunting, and it’s by an early draw as well.

Many Mississippi WMAs are managed for waterfowl, with impoundments, greentree reservoirs and habitat-improvement.



# NORTHWEST WMA REGION

## DEER

**Charles Ray Nix** and **Malmaison** offer the best bets in this region to harvest a quality buck due to regulations and habitat management,” said regional biologist Brad Holder. “Charles Ray Nix is draw-hunt only, and Malmaison is a first-come, first-serve hunt.”

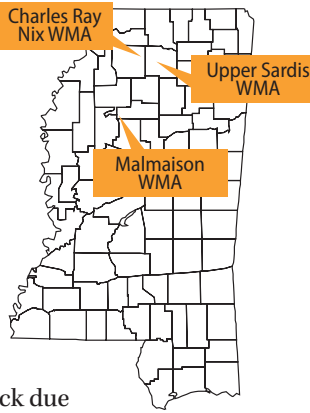
“Last year, there were a couple of bucks harvested in the 120 to 125 B&C range on C.R. Nix, and a couple 8- and 10-pointers that scored in the 130 to 140 class on Malmaison.”

## WATERFOWL

“Waterfowl hunting is pretty big on **Malmaison**. We’ve got greentree reservoirs that get flooded as well as the McIntyre Scatters and sloughs along the Yalobusha River,” Holder said. “Normally, we’ll see a lot of greenheads, teal, gadwall, wood ducks and a few ring necks, widgeon and scaup.

## SMALL GAME

“**Charles Ray Nix** has a pretty strong population of rabbits, and it’s always pretty good rabbit-hunting here,” Holder said.



Rabbit populations on Mississippi WMAs are largely dependant on habitat manipulation; young cutovers offer perfect food and cover.

“**Upper Sardis** is a good area to hunt squirrels. The upper end of the WMA along the Tallahatchie River has a greater composition of hardwoods and plenty of grey squirrels and a few fox squirrels.”

## EAST CENTRAL WMA REGION ➤

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## EAST CENTRAL WMA REGION

### DEER

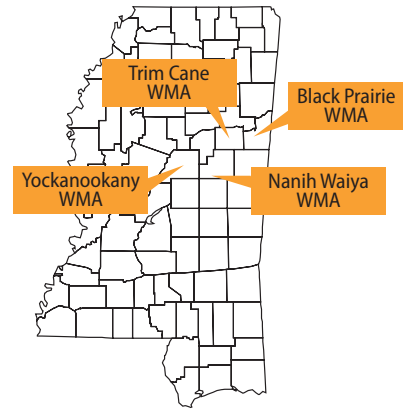
“If you’re looking to harvest a quality buck in the East Central Region, then it would definitely be at **Black Prairie**,” said Chad Masley, regional biologist. “We are trying to get the bucks up to at least 3½ years of age, and we’re starting to see results as our 2-year-old harvest was a lot fewer last year.”

A typical 3-year-old buck will average 130 to 200 pounds and score between 120 to 130 points on Black Prairie.

**Trim Cane**, near Starkville, is another WMA with good potential for harvesting exceptional bucks; it is open for deer hunting through limited draw hunts for only youths and handicapped hunters.

“We see extremely high-quality deer on our game cameras on Trim Cane,” Masley said. “Hunters will draw for assigned stands, and this year, we’ve been putting new stands up to give hunters more opportunities at some of the really impressive bucks we have.”

**Yockanookany**, just outside Kosciusko, has a 12- to 15-inch antler criteria and could be a sleeper. It has quality habitat and will produce quality bucks if there is no significant flood waters this year.



### DUCKS

“**Trim Cane** is managed for waterfowl, and we have seven waterfowl impoundments on it and our vegetative management is completed and planted. We’ve planted milo, millet and completed moist-soil management,” said Masley.

“**Yockanookany** and **Nanih Waiya** have sloughs along the river that hold wood ducks and offer good duck hunting if there’s not any flooding. Access is limited but if you put in the time and find the sloughs that hold ducks you can have success.”

### SOUTHEAST REGION >

Hunters have opportunities to harvest mature bucks on several WMAs in Mississippi’s East Central WMA region.



The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks plants and manages plenty of dove fields.



## DOVE HUNTING

Special youth dove hunts will be held at several WMAs this season: **Black Prairie WMA, Hell Creek WMA, Leroy Percy WMA and Muscadine Farms WMA.** For youth hunt registration and other specific regulations check out [www.mdwfp.com](http://www.mdwfp.com) and go to the Dove Hunting tab under Wildlife and Hunting.

**Black Prairie:** Black Prairie has a 50-acre field and will hold a Youth Hunt on Labor Day, Sept. 7. The hunt is open to youth 15 years of age and younger. Hunters must apply online at [www.mdwfp.com](http://www.mdwfp.com). Participants will be selected by a random, online drawing. A parent or guardian over 21 years of age must accompany each youth during the entire hunt. Hunters should be at Black Prairie to check in by 11 a.m.

"The past few years, we've had a great dove shoot," said biologist Chad Masley.

**Hell Creek WMA:** A Youth Hunt will be held on a designated field on Sept. 5 from 2 p.m. to sunset.

**Leroy Percy WMA:** Leroy Percy has a 30-acre field and will have a Youth Hunt on Sept. 5. Hunting hours are 2 p.m. until sunset. Guardians accompanying youth may hunt. One guardian is allowed per youth and is defined as a person over 21 years of age with a valid hunting license. The youth hunter and the guardian must hunt together in one of the 25 designated hunting locations.

**Muscadine Farms WMA:** A Youth Hunt is scheduled on a designated field on Sept. 7 from 2 p.m. to sunset. Youth hunters must apply online and register at the WMA headquarters on Sept. 7 between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Participants will be selected by a random, online drawing.

**Trim Cane:** Trim Cane has a 35-acre dove field; hunts are held on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons.

**Okatibbee WMA:** Okatibbee has 20 acres of sunflowers, as well as milo and millet, and is open every day of the season.

**Charles Ray Nix** has a 30-acre dove field planted in winter wheat and milo along with some browntop millet and natural vegetation that provides excellent food sources and dove hunting.

Other WMA's hosting dove hunts are **Tuscumbia, Divide Section, William C (Billy) Devine** and **Yockanookany.** ■

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## SOUTHEAST REGION

### DEER

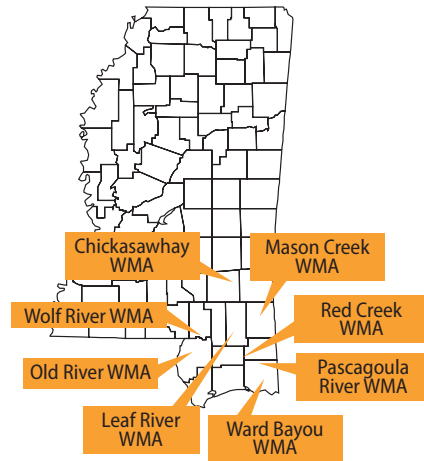
Although the overall deer forecast is not looking as good as normal on some areas, others provide excellent opportunities at harvesting a deer.

“**Leaf River** is the best bet to kill a buck and decent deer as well,” said area manager Drew Arnold. “This is the only region in the Southeast region with a 12- to 15-inch antler regulation; we have good hunter compliance there, and hunters are letting the smaller deer walk.”

**Old River** is also a good place to kill a buck if you’ll put in the time to scout and find the sign and deer, but access is limited.

**Ward Bayou** is another area that should be good, with decent deer located on the WMA, but you need to hunt before the dog season opens.

“Most of the WMAs in this region offer opportunities to harvest bucks, but you have to scout and get away from the crowd to be successful,” Arnold said. “The deer numbers are down at **Red Creek**, but there’s low hunting pressure, so you may have success there. I’d say **Mason Creek** is a sleeper choice down here, as it has some good deer on it if you will just spend the time to scout and put in the legwork to locate the deer.”



### DUCKS

“There’s not a lot of duck hunting in this region like there is in the Delta region, but **Ward Bayou**, **Pascagoula River** and **Old River** traditionally have a lot of wood ducks,” Arnold said. “A lot of people hunt the sloughs and get after the wood ducks. If there’s a good acorn crop with some water on it, then duck hunting can be good, but you’ve got to have cold weather to push some ducks down here. If they come down and we’ve got acorns, water and food, then the action should be good.”

### SMALL GAME

“The top squirrel hunting area is the **Pascagoula WMA**, hands down, due to the hardwood bottoms,” Arnold said. “We have mostly grey squirrels, but you may occasionally find a fox squirrel.”

**Chickasawhay WMA** is the destination for quail hunters, and the future looks bright at the U.S. Forest Service had done a lot of habitat improvement and work. They’ve been working quail on smaller focal points and burn units, including thinning of timber and prescribed burning. The future looks bright indeed as officials look for a good response to the habitat improvement over the coming years.

“Woodcock hunts can be good in the upland areas if you have a good bird dog and small thickets,” he said. “**Chickasawhay**, **Wolf River** and **Mason Creek** all have some potential for fast and furious woodcock hunting as a by-product of the quail management.” ■



**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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Adding weight toward the broadhead end of your arrow, maybe with a weighted insert, doesn't necessarily make for more accurate shooting or better arrow penetration on game.



## WHAT F.O.C. IS, WHY IT MATTERS

'FRONT OF CENTER' MEASURES HOW MUCH OF YOUR ARROW'S WEIGHT IS IN THE BROADHEAD END. IT MATTERS A GREAT DEAL

Sammy Romano

**E**very sport has its trends, and the sport of bowhunting is no exception. The latest craze is shooting extreme "F.O.C." arrows.

Log onto to any online archery forum, and you won't have to scroll far to see a thread about it. Like most subjects on most forums, a lot of strongly opinionated people post, many of whom are not completely knowledgeable and a few who actually understand the topic well. It is important to be educated about the topic so you can read between the lines to glean helpful information without getting lost in opinions and pointless discussion.

You might wonder "What is F.O.C., and why is it important?" F.O.C. is an abbreviation for "Front of Center," which refers to the percentage of total arrow weight that is on the broadhead end of an arrow.

Having sufficient F.O.C. balance to any arrow is crucial to accuracy, but even more so when it comes to a broadhead-tipped hunting arrow. The best analogy for this is a badminton "birdie," where the heavy tip pulls the lighter rear through the air. By having a higher F.O.C., your arrow becomes more accurate, especially at longer distances, and it also gains momentum, helping to increase penetration on game animals.

During the bow-speed craze of the 1990s and early 2000s, many hunters mistakenly switched to lightweight broadheads in an effort to reduce the total weight of their arrows. The result was often a loss of accuracy due to the "tail wagging the dog" effect and also poor penetration. In my opinion, the pendulum is starting to swing too far the other way, as people are being led to shoot arrows that are excessively heavy in an effort to achieve extreme F.O.C. weights that are much higher than necessary.

Heavy F.O.C. is nothing new, having been around since the dawn of archery. Native Americans and other early archers used broadheads made of stone that were extremely heavy, on wooden shafts fletched with extremely light feathers. It is only recently with modern materials that archers have had the ability to shoot lighter tips, causing their F.O.C. to be too low.

### MATERIAL CHANGES

With the addition of plastic vanes and heavier, lighted arrow nocks — which add weight to the nock end of the arrow — thus reducing F.O.C., the problem was exacerbated. Only recently have many archers started to worry about proper F.O.C. due to better education on the subject. The longer shots that today's equipment allows for has also increased the need for higher F.O.C. weights. This might lead you to think, "If a higher F.O.C. is good, a much higher F.O.C. should be even better!" Not necessarily; that thought process is a slippery slope that can lead to other issues.

Our society is always looking for the magic bullet or super pill that will instantly fix all of our problems. Extremely high F.O.C. has occupied that niche recently in the archery world. There are even people selling test kits with super-high F.O.C. online. Although

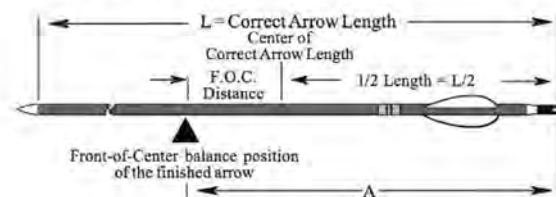
### Determining F.O.C. %



AMO-Standard F.O.C. balance formula

$$\text{F.O.C. \%} = \frac{100 \times (A - L/2)}{L}$$

L = Correct Arrow Length—Distance from bottom of nock groove to end of shaft  
 A = Distance from bottom of nock groove to finished arrow balance position (includes weight of point [+ insert], nock system and fletching)



it often helps correct poor arrow flight due to improper form or tuning, this correction comes at a cost. Extremely high F.O.C. weight leads to extremely heavy arrows, which drastically affect trajectory. Unless the archer has a range compensating sight, such as a Garmin Xero, Burris Oracle, or E-Z-V, this can result in missing shots due to a range misjudgment of only one or two yards.

### ACCURACY OVER PENETRATION

I often hear people say, "I want to be able to penetrate both shoulders." According to the Ashby Foundation, which has done extensive scientific



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



research on the subject, arrow weights of at least 650 grains are required for consistent penetration when encountering large bone. But this will have the trajectory of a lead balloon out of most whitetail setups. One absolute is that you must hit the animal to penetrate it at all. Think about it this way: if you hit the dirt with a very heavy arrow, all you do is to penetrate deeper into the ground. Shot placement and proper target angle helps eliminate the shoulder as an obstacle on whitetails. Like most things in life, it is important to find a literal balance when it comes to F.O.C.

Easton Archery recommends an F.O.C. of 10% to 15% for hunting arrows. Anything over 15% is extreme, with 10% to 12% being ideal. F.O.C. for your arrow can easily be calculated using a thin edge — such as a butter-knife blade, a pencil, a tape measure, and a calculator. Simply find the balance point of your arrow by laying it across the knife edge. Mark it with the pencil, and measure to it from the bottom of your arrow's nock groove (where the string attaches). Next, measure the total length of your arrow from the bottom of the nock groove to the end of the shaft itself. Then, plug these numbers into the formula to calculate your arrow's F.O.C.

## MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

If your F.O.C. is too low, you can easily increase it by using heavier broadheads or weighted arrow inserts to add weight to the front of your arrow. F.O.C. can also be increased by removing lighted nocks and fletching your arrows with either smaller vanes or feathers to decrease the weight at the rear. My personal whitetail arrow weighs 475 grains — which is fairly heavy — with an 11% F.O.C. This will kill any whitetail in the world with proper shot placement. My Garmin Xero sight eliminates worry about trajectory costing me an animal.

Hopefully, this has helped explain F.O.C. and why it is important. Check your arrow's F.O.C. and adjust it to get the most out of your setup this year. Do some research; keep an open mind, but be skeptical enough to verify the info in many forums. As always, if you have questions or need help, consult your local pro shop. Consider the source; when it comes to the subject of arrows, I would believe Easton Archery, the world's oldest and largest arrow manufacturer, before a keyboard warrior in most cases. Increase your F.O.C. — but not too much — and watch your shooting improve. ■

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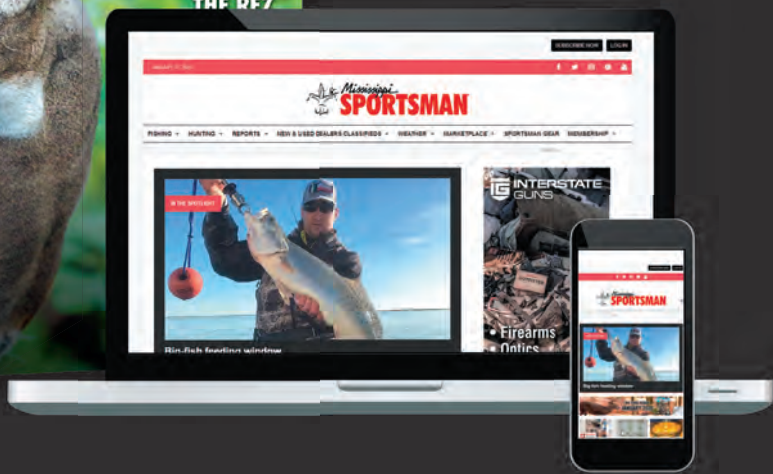
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**A CRAPPIE'S FALL HABITS AND LOCATIONS MAKE VERTICAL JIGGING WITH A SINGLE POLE A GREAT TECHNIQUE. THESE EXPERTS CERTAINLY THINK SO.**

# When one is enough

■ By Phillip Gentry

**O**ver the years, crappie fishermen have become spoiled, catching slabs in big numbers while trolling with multiple rods.

Even with the trolling revolution, a lot of anglers still prefer to fish with just one pole. Call it single-pole, jig-fishing, jiggig — whatever suits your taste — fishing for crappie with one pole in hand is a lot of fun and, especially during the fall, it can also produce a lot of quality fish.

It's important to understand some key elements when single-poling in the fall that will greatly increase your crappie fishing success.

**FISH TIGHTER >**

## FISH TIGHTER

John Harrison of JH Guide Service on Grenada Lake, a long-time B'n'M pro staffer, said the differences between trolling and single-pole or jigging for crappie goes way beyond just the fishing rod.

Harrison said the key to catching crappie in cooling, and in many cases, falling water from fall through winter is to keep that jig in the water next to vertical structure at all times. That's something that's much easier to do with a single pole than using the shotgun approach of multiple poles, which tends not to concentrate on tight-quarters fishing.

"Any lake that holds crappie will hold crappie on vertical structure, whether that's boat docks, brush piles, stake beds or just natural stuff sticking up out of the water," he said. "I have found that the clearer the lake, generally the deeper the water the fish will hold in, but on muddy water lakes, it's not unusual to catch crappie in 8 to 10 feet of water all through the winter."

Tools? Harrison opts for a 1/16-ounce jighead on 6-pound monofilament. He uses an 11-foot, ultralight jig pole.

In water that gets deeper than the length of the jig pole, or in windy conditions, he'll upsize the jighead to a 1/8-ounce version. He pairs the jighead with a minnow-imitating plastic bait and will switch colors until he finds one the crappie prefer. It seems each lake has its favorite "go-to" color and he may ask around at a local bait shop if he isn't familiar with a starting color.

"Don't overlook anything," he said. "You may not see that little stick that no bigger around than your thumb and only sticks up 5 or 6 inches, but it's usually the tip of the iceberg, especially if it's in 8 to 15 feet of water and off by itself."

One advantage for single-pole anglers over trolling multiple rods is the ability to put baits into tight places that hold crappie.



## CHANGING THE GAME:

# Garmin LiveScope

Anglers in general and crappie anglers in particular are always on the lookout for that one thing, that one bait, rod, tactic or piece of gear that will help them catch fish better than anyone else.

According to Kent Driscoll, a B'n'M pro staffer, that one thing is the Garmin Panoptix Live Scope sonar system.

"This thing is a game changer," Driscoll said. "The tournaments I've been fishing are all being won by boats equipped with these units. Single-pole anglers are winning tournaments with them."

Panoptix gives anglers the ability to see all around the boat in real time and in three dimensions. Whether idling around, graphing or fishing, Panoptix transducers are available in Forward and Down configurations, with mounting styles to suit the anglers needs.

"I've been a big fan of side-scan sonar for years, and it's still hard to beat for scouting new areas and finding structure that holds crappie, but once you have located something you want to check out — a brush pile or a stump field or just open water — there's nothing like this," Driscoll said.

According to the Garmin website, it's easy to adjust the transducer mode to fit the angler's desired fishing techniques. Forward allows you to see remarkably clear images of structure and swimming fish around your boat, and the Down allows you to see directly below your boat. The view automatically updates on a compatible Garmin chart plotter.

"One of the things that really stood out to me when these Garmin units started showing up on tournament anglers' boats is that single-pole anglers started winning tournaments," said Driscoll, who said it took him a little bit of fine-tuning to figure out the best way to approach crappie he was marking on his unit.

The sonar distance on the Garmin can be adjusted further out or closer in. Driscoll said when he's scanning an area, he sets the

distance at 40 to 50 feet, what he considers search mode. Once he marks fish, he will pull in to 22 to 26 feet for fishing.

"I can see the structure on the scope, and I can see the fish; I can even see which way he's facing, so I pitch my jig out on a single pole past the fish and slowly bring it into view," he said. "With this unit, you can watch a crappie in real time come up to your bait off a piece of structure or even just suspended out in open water, and you're catching that fish." ■

The introduction of live-time, forward-scanning sonar has changed the tide in crappie tournaments, with many anglers opting to fish with just one pole.



## LOOK FOR BAIT

Veteran angler Tim Blackley, from just across the state line in Union City, Tenn., said he rarely leaves home this time of year with more than one rod in the boat.

"This time of year, crappie get on a real predictable and dependable pattern," he said. "Fish are moving out of deep water into the shallows. It's very similar to the spring spawning run, except they are not moving in to spawn; they're following baitfish in to feed."

Blackley said that on some Mississippi lakes, anglers can expect crappie to be scattered up and down a tributary arm. On other lakes, the fish will be moving but in more of a leap-frog fashion, staging on brush piles, stake beds and natural wooden cover along the route.

"Right now, single-poling is the best way to go," he said. "I'm using a B'n'M Sam's Super Sensitive rod and a 1/8-ounce Strike King jighead in pink with a tube jig. I am literally picking the bigger fish up on my sonar and moving the bait out in front of the boat to that fish and catching him right off the tops of whatever structure I'm finding."

While Blackley has a pretty extensive list of brush piles and stakebeds located in different lakes across the state, he said first-time anglers to most any Mississippi reservoir can also locate fish with a decent set of electronics.

"Find the bait, find the fish," he said. "Then start looking for structure where crappie will be holding and waiting on those baitfish to swim past."

**FIND THE CURRENT** ➤

## FIND THE CURRENT

In many lakes, fall means lakes that have stratified will start turning over. The turnover can last from two to several weeks, depending on the location, and the turning water often scatters crappie or puts them in an ill mood. Pro angler Brad Taylor from Greenville suggests finding some current, either from water entering lake or areas where water is moved by natural or man-made forces.

“Current can be a good thing, because it congregates crappie around structure; they will often use planted brush piles or other woody debris as a current break,” Taylor said. “You can get too much current at times when the water is moving too fast, which happens a lot in oxbow lakes tied to the Mississippi or flood-control lakes letting water out. The current really pushes and often washes brush piles away or moves them for you.”

In areas of modest or temporary current, crappie will often use available structure to break the flow and provide them with both rest and



“When I’m single-pole fishing, I’m actively using my sonar in forward scan, so I want to see my line and my bait.”

an ambush point. One noticeable advantage of areas that provide current versus more stagnant areas is the level of dissolved oxygen. Moving water may tend to fall on the cooler side, and cooler or “fresher” water, as in runoff, may hold more oxygen. Both baitfish and gamefish are drawn to areas holding more dissolved oxygen.

Guide John Harrison suggests not overlooking any visible structure when jig fishing, especially structure standing out away from the shoreline.



## CHANGE YOUR LINE

One aspect of crappie fishing that has remained relatively unchanged through the years is the use of monofilament line for single-pole fishing. Mike Morgan, tournament director for the American Crappie Trail, said with the changing of times, it's time to change your line.

"When I'm single-pole fishing, I'm actively using my sonar in forward scan, so I want to see my line and my bait," he said. "I use 15-pound braid for my main line and then attach a section of 10-pound flouro-carbon to that. Just past the knot between the main line and the leader, I thread a 1/8-ounce egg sinker and use a small bobber stop on either end of the weight to hold it in place. Below the weight, at a distance of a foot, I will attach a 1/32-ounce jig in a natural color."

Morgan said the sinker is not for additional weight; both the weight and the jig will show up on the sonar as he's fishing. That allows him to distinguish the jig from a lot of other small particles in the water that he might mistake for his bait. By knowing exactly where the weight and the jig are, he can lower that bait slowly and put it right above the fish. ■

Current will often attract schools of crappie into run-off areas to find more oxygenated water.



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MISSISSIPPI'S FALL TURKEY SEASON IS A BIG BONUS FOR HUNTERS WILLING TO TAKE TIME AWAY FROM BUCKS AND DUCKS. ■ By Andy Douglas

# FALL INTO A TOM

**A**s autumn's cooler days quickly approach, Mississippi hunters look forward to the chance to get afield. Most are focused on what's sooner than later, like dove and early season teal. Others anxiously await Oct. 1, which kicks off fall squirrel hunting statewide and archery for deer in all zones except the Southeast Zone, where it opens Oct. 15.

More opportunities abound for Magnolia State sportsman to chase wild game, including rabbit, quail, raccoon, bobcat, duck and geese — not to mention great bass fishing. Then there's turkey, that's right, turkey. Mississippi offers a limited opportunity for turkey enthusiasts with its fall season, which runs from Oct. 15 to Nov. 15 in two-dozen select counties or part of counties.

Most turkey hunters spend little time worrying about the bird that causes many to fret and lose sleep until spring approaches. "Fall turkey hunting season for Mississippi is a very under-utilized opportunity," said Adam Butler, the wild turkey program coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "Historically, there are usually 100 to 150 tags issued each year."

Fall turkey season is not open statewide, only in specific counties and areas. Care must be taken to follow the laws and guidelines for legal harvesting. It's already time to make application and preparations to be ready for opening day.

**WHERE TO HUNT FALL TURKEY >**

## WHERE TO HUNT FALL TURKEY

Open areas are in those counties or portion of counties, on private lands and only where the landowner/leaseholder completes a fall turkey hunting application and fall turkey tags are issued by the MDWFP:

**Delta Zone:** Bolivar County west of the main Mississippi River levee and those lands east of the main Mississippi River levee known as 27 Beak Hunting Club. Also portions of the counties of Coahoma, Desoto, Issaquena, Tunica and Washington that are west of the Mississippi River Levee.

**North Central Zone:** Benton, Lafayette, Marshall, Panola, Tippah and Union counties.

**Southwestern Zone:** Adams, Amite, Claiborne, Copiah, Hinds, Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, Madison, Warren, Wilkinson and Yazoo counties.

## APPLY FOR FALL HUNTING

Hunters must apply for tags to be able to fall turkey hunt in open areas. This is done by completing a fall turkey hunting application, which can be found and printed out from [www.mdwfp.com/media/4008/fall\\_turkey\\_hunting\\_application.pdf](http://www.mdwfp.com/media/4008/fall_turkey_hunting_application.pdf).

Complete the entire application, except for the bottom, which will be filled in by MDWFP personnel. Then, gather the other required documentation listed on the application.

Landowner hunters must provide documents from their county's tax assessor's office verifying the number of acres that they own. This can be a land roll or taxpayer statement, tax receipt, etc.

Applicants who hunt properties they do not own must provide a copy of the lease agreement, signed by the landowner and leaseholder or a signed statement from the landowner giving them permission to hunt on the property. The lease agreement should designate the number of acres the applicant has permission to hunt. Additionally, documentation (land roll or taxpayer statement, tax receipt, etc.) from the county's tax assessor's office verifying the number of acres owned by the landowner should be provided. Tax receipts are not required when providing official lease agreements with timber companies.

The application and documentation should be mailed to the address shown on the application document. After review, tags are sent by mail for the property size.

If fall turkey permits were received for a property in the past, no tax or lease documentation for subsequent re-application is necessary — only an application should be completed and mailed.

"We will take applications on into October," Butler said.

---

Turkeys will gang up by gender in the fall, often by age, with jakes gathering and old gobblers sticking together.





## RULES AND REGULATIONS

Tags are issued for specific properties. If you have applied for one property in a county, the tag is only good for that specific property/acreage that you have applied for. Tags cannot be taken for use on any other places.

The tags are issued at a rate of one per 500 acres. If you have anywhere from one to 500 acres, then you will receive one fall turkey tag. It will take a thousand acres to get two fall turkey tags, 1,500 acres to get three, 2,000 to get four, and so forth.

The bag limit for fall turkeys is two. Keep in mind that if you have only one tag on a property that is less than 1,000 acres, then one is your limit. Two tags are needed to be able to limit out.

If you are an applicant applying for a large parcel of land, like a hunting club, you will get the tags. You can divide the tags among fellow hunters for that specific property. Let's say you hold the lease to 2,800 acres; you will receive five fall turkey tags and can pass them out to fellow club members, keeping the two-bird limit in mind.

The two turkeys tagged can be either sex. This is the only time when a Mississippi turkey hunter can legally harvest a hen. There are no beard-length restrictions, so any gobbler is legal, including jakes. Both tags can be on the same day; if a hunter has two tags in hand for the property, and two big toms walk

Mississippi hunters can take up to two turkeys of either sex during the fall season, provided they have two tags. **BELOW:** Fall turkey tags are issued by MDWFP based on the amount of land the applicant is hunting.



up — both are fair game.

Legal weapons for fall turkey hunting includes archery equipment and shotguns with no shot larger than No. 2s.

“As long as a hunter has the fall tag, they can shoot a turkey of either sex while bowhunting for deer, or they can set out with shotgun in hand, specifically targeting turkeys,” Butler said.

After a turkey is harvested, the tag must be attached before moving the turkey. The date should be notched to validate the tag and must remain attached to the turkey until it is processed.

## REPORTING THE HARVEST ➤

## REPORTING THE HARVEST

It's mandatory for spring hunters to report all turkey harvests through the MDWFP Game Check system. This is *not* used for reporting the harvest of fall turkeys. Instead a Fall Turkey Season Harvest Data Sheet is mailed to applicants, along with their fall tags. This must be completed and mailed to the agency no later than Jan. 1 and must be submitted even if no turkeys were harvested.

"Historically there's only two- to three-dozen turkeys harvested each fall," Butler said. "This is based on past fall surveys."

## LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

Resident hunters who are not exempt from purchasing a hunting license are required to have in possession a valid All Game Hunting License along with a Fall Turkey Hunting Permit



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(\$5) or an annual Sportsman or Lifetime Sportsman license. Non-residents are required to have in their possession any valid All Game Hunting License and a Fall Turkey Permit (\$20) or a Native Son Lifetime Sportsman License.

## FALL TURKEY BEHAVIOR

Turkeys behave differently in the fall compared to spring. Hunters will find hens gathering in groups. Usually, female broods stay with their mothers and join other hens as fall progresses forming larger flocks. Gobblers tend to separate from hens. Gobblers will also segregate by age groups: young of the year, upcoming 2-year-olds, and 3-year-olds and older.

Fall turkey movement and sightings will be directly related to what they are feeding on. Any type of wild berry or fruit can be found in their diet, but the predominant food source is hard mast. Acorns of all species of oaks are consumed, along with sweet pecans, beech tree mast and pine seeds.



## 2020 MISSISSIPPI FALL TURKEY HUNTING SEASONS

**Dates**  
Oct. 15–Nov. 15

**Bag Limit**  
Two (2) turkeys,  
which may be  
either sex.

One fall tactic to fill a tag: set up a blind near a food source that turkeys are using regularly and wait them out.

killing a turkey. The other half are opportunists — usually bow-hunters who will shoot one when they have the chance,” Butler said, based on past surveys.

There will not be a lot of competition or pressure on turkeys during the fall. Hunters will find them more relaxed. If you hunt or have access to land where fall turkey hunting is available, do the prep work and give it a try. The reward could be great. ■



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

## HUNTING TACTICS

Hunters will find turkeys near the places they feed, and these are the areas to target. Think back and remember how many times a group of turkeys came by while you were sitting on a deer stand. Was it in the woods, on a field's edge or a food plot? Target the areas where you have seen them in the past.

Still-hunting is a good method, and calling can work as well. If you hear other turkeys calling, try to mimic what you hear. This is the time of year when you will hear the younger turkeys making the “kee-kee-run” calls. It's not unheard of to hear mature toms blowing it out on the early morning roost; sometimes they will come to an old hen or a gobbler yelp. Busting up a group of turkeys and setting up to call them back in is a time-proven fall tactic and will work but will take a lot of patience, especially for older toms.

## CONCLUDING

“About half the hunters with fall tags are actually going hunting with the intent of

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**HUNTING SEASONS**

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
<b>Doves</b>	Sept. 5-Oct. 18 (n), Sept. 5-20 (s) Oct. 24-Nov. 21 (n), Oct. 10-Nov. 8 (s) Dec. 23-Jan. 8 (n), Dec. 19-Jan. 31 (s)	15	45
<b>Quail</b>	Nov. 26-March 6	8	
<b>Rabbit</b>	Oct. 17-Feb. 28	8	
<b>Squirrel (fall)</b>	Oct. 1-Feb. 28	8	
<b>Squirrel (spr)</b>	May 15-June 1	4	
<b>Raccoon</b>	July 1-Sept. 30	1 raccoon per party	
<b>Rac/Opp/Bobct</b>	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport) Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	5/day, 8/party No limit	
<b>Rails</b>			
King & Clapper	Sept. 1-Oct. 4, Nov. 26-Dec. 31	15	45
Sora & Virginia	Sept. 1-Oct. 4, Nov. 26-Dec. 31	25	75
Gallinules	Sept. 1-Oct. 4, Nov. 26-Dec. 31	15	45
<b>Snipe</b>	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28	8	24
<b>Crow</b>	Nov. 7 - Feb. 28	No limit	No limit
<b>Woodcock</b>	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9
<b>Wild Turkey</b>			
Fall season	Oct. 15-Nov. 15 (permit, selected counties)	2 per season (may be either sex)	
Spring season	March 15-May 1	1/day, 3/season, longbeards only	
Youth season	March 8-14	1/day, 3/season, bearded birds only	

**WATERFOWL SEASONS**

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
<b>Duck</b>	Teal only: Sept. 12-27 Nov. 27-29, Dec. 4-6 Dec. 9-Jan. 31	6 6
<b>Geese</b>	Sept. 1-30	5
<b>(Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)</b>	Nov. 13-29, Dec. 4-6, Dec. 9-Jan. 31	Canada 3, Brant 1 Snow/blue/Ross 20 White-fronted 3
<b>Light Geese conservation</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 12, Feb. 1-5, Feb. 8-March 31	No limit

**DEER SEASON**

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
<b>Northeast</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 20 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery/primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 7-20 (youth)
<b>East Central</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 20 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 7-20 (youth)
<b>Southwest</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 20 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan.20(dogs) Nov. 7-Jan. 20 (youth)
<b>Southeast</b>	Oct. 15-Nov. 20 Jan. 21-31 (either-sex arch-primitive) Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 21-Feb. 15 (yth)
<b>Delta/South Delta</b>	Oct. 1-Nov. 20 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Jan. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 7-Jan. 20 (youth)

**SALTWATER**

**STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)**

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	34" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	no limit
White marlin	66" LJFL	no limit
Sailfish	63" LJFL	no limit
Sharks (large coastal/pelagic)@	37" TL*	1/day or 3/boat
Sharks@	37" TL*	1/day, 3/vessel
Cobia	36" 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@	5/day aggregate
Mutton snapper	18" TL@	10/day
Queen/blackfin/silk/winchman snapper	none@	5/day aggregate
Vermillion/lane snapper	10"/8" TL@	20/day aggregate
Gray triggerfish	15" FL@	1/day
Golden/blueline/anchor/blackline tilefish	none@	20/day
King mackerel	24" FL@	2/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL@	15/day
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL@	3/day
Bigeye tuna	27" CFL@	no limit
Tripletail	18" TL	3/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	15"	15/day

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

**FRESHWATER**

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

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

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

% For lake-specific regs, see MDWFP's Regulations Digest or [www.mdwfp.com/](http://www.mdwfp.com/)

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

\* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

# Triple Play

## TRIPLETAIL

■ By Bryan Hendricks

**WHEN THE REDS  
AND TROUT QUIT  
BITING, CRANK UP  
THE OUTBOARD AND  
START LOOKING  
FOR A FAT, TASTY  
TRIPLETAIL.**



When mid-day settles upon the Gulf of Mexico near Bay St. Louis, slack winds and mirror-calm seas shut down the speckled trout fishing.

The only relief from the heat and humidity is artificial wind created by a swift boat, and that's when Sonny Schindler of Shore Thing Charters goes hunting for a different kind of quarry. Having released a couple of big redfish and filled the cooler with trout, the only thing left to fill the

# MISSISSIPPI TRIPLE PLAY

is to put a tripletail or two into the box.

The Atlantic tripletail is an unusual-looking fish that inhabits inshore waters in the Gulf of Mexico. Shimmering, mottled brown bestows understated elegance that rival the coppery glow of the redfish and the pink aura of the trout. Its signature features are its soft, round dorsal and anal fins that gives it the appearance of having three tails, hence its name.

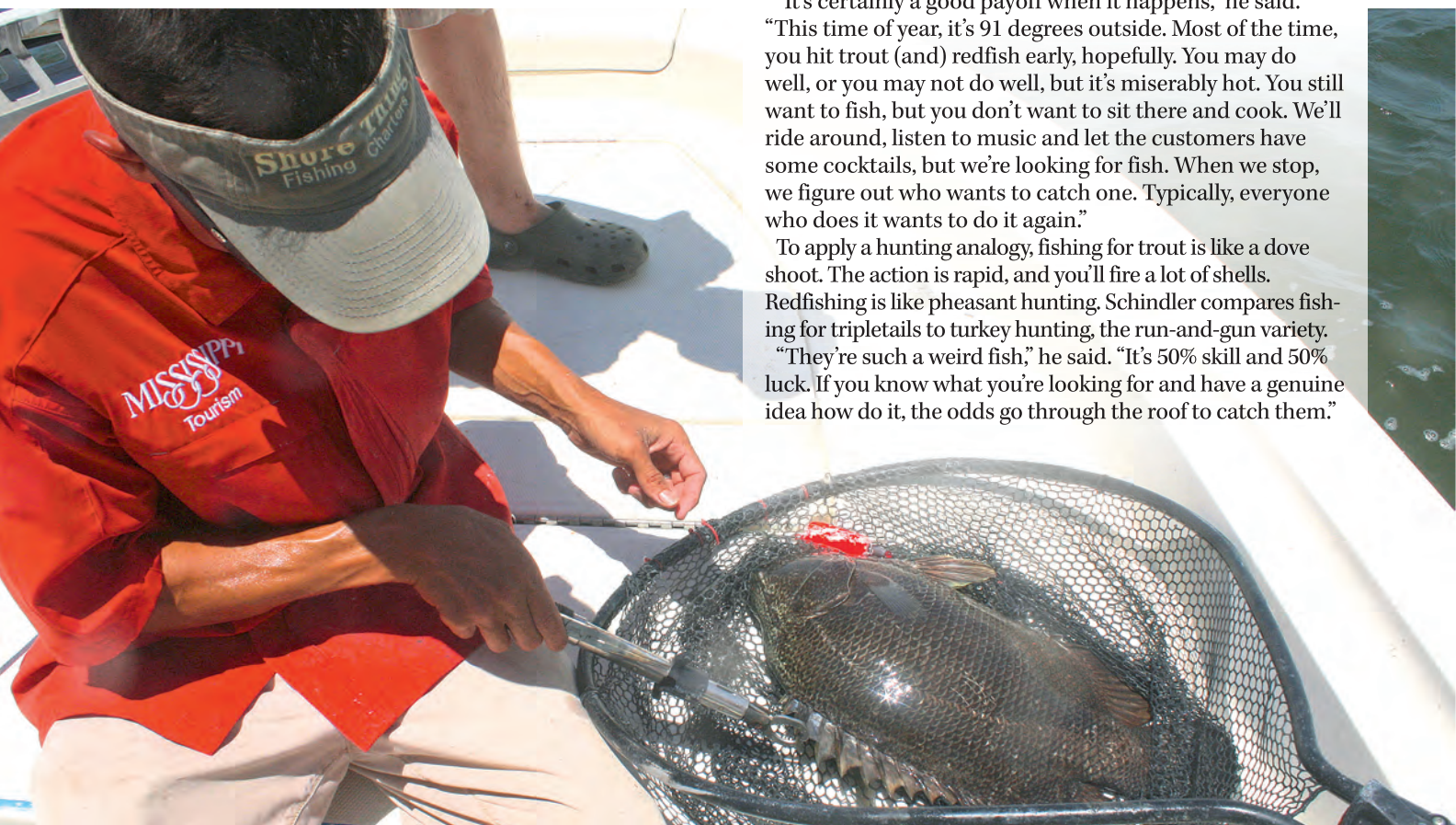
Unlike trout and redfish, tripletails do not prowl flats, feeding in large schools. They prefer to hover around floating structure and daintily snack on the food chain that sets up around them.

For Schindler, ending a trip with a tripletail is the cherry atop the sundae.

"It's certainly a good payoff when it happens," he said. "This time of year, it's 91 degrees outside. Most of the time, you hit trout (and) redfish early, hopefully. You may do well, or you may not do well, but it's miserably hot. You still want to fish, but you don't want to sit there and cook. We'll ride around, listen to music and let the customers have some cocktails, but we're looking for fish. When we stop, we figure out who wants to catch one. Typically, everyone who does it wants to do it again."

To apply a hunting analogy, fishing for trout is like a dove shoot. The action is rapid, and you'll fire a lot of shells. Redfishing is like pheasant hunting, Schindler compares fishing for tripletails to turkey hunting, the run-and-gun variety.

"They're such a weird fish," he said. "It's 50% skill and 50% luck. If you know what you're looking for and have a genuine idea how to do it, the odds go through the roof to catch them."





A typical tripletail rig will include a popping cork, a short section of leader and a hook, all of which can be cast to a fish suspended just under the surface.

**OPPOSITE:** Sonny Schindler prepares to unhook a nice tripletail caught near Bay St. Louis.

## THE GEAR

For tripletails, Schindler uses a 7-foot Okuma Reflection rod with a medium-heavy action mated to an Okuma Trio Baitfeeder spinning reel.

“If I’m fishing heavy structure like well heads or pilings, I’ll spool one with 50-pound braid,” he said. “It’s not so much for the fish, but for the structure. Tripletails are notorious for running you around and dragging you through stuff, so that’s mainly to stop them from breaking you off.”

If you prefer a good fight, Schindler uses a 7-foot Okuma Reflection medium-action rod with 20-pound braid on an Okuma Epixor 30 spinning reel.

“That’s my favorite trout rig,” Schindler said. “You definitely get more fight out of the fish with the lighter stuff. I use that if he’s under a (floating) log where’s he’s not going to drag you under anything.”

## SCOUTING REPORT ➤

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Tripletail will hang around just about any kind of floating structure, but crab-pot buoys and marker buoys are favorites.



## SCOUTING REPORT

After the trout bite dies, Schindler runs a large circuit checking navigation buoys, crab-pot buoys and any other prominent surface structure. A keen eye often spots a tripletail's silhouette hugging the structure near the surface.

"I'm checking under anything and everything," Schindler said. "If I'm seeing minnows and little crabs floating around or pogeys flickering, I'm going to slow down.

"I usually go 25 to 30 miles per hour, but when I get in area with structure and debris and things just look right, I'll come down to an idle and give that stuff a once-over."

Not all structure is productive; Schindler looks for specific clues.

"I want clean water. I want to see baitfish and crabs," he said. "The ideal conditions for me are hot, still, calm, clean water with little to no current. The luckiest is when you find a debris line with grass and driftwood and stuff that's been out in the water for a while. Not stuff that has floated out of the river, but stuff that's come from offshore."

Catching tripletail is a numbers game, Schindler acknowledged. Most spots won't hold fish, so he keys on the spots that have the requisite combination of triggers.

"If you've run three buoys, and there's fish on two of the three buoys, start scanning the area and making wide

circles around it looking for other structure or debris," he said. "You might stumble on an old crab trap or a log floating around. If you work in a grid or in circles and find more habitat, those fish seem to stage themselves in the same area."

Schindler said he's just checking, looking, observing. Only when all the puzzle pieces mesh does he cast.

"Some of my friends make a lap around a channel marker see if anything in there, but if it's hot, still and calm at mid-day, you don't want to stop at everything and do a loop around it," Schindler said. "You can, but you might burn yourself and the crew out. If you're running and looking, the more stuff you run under the right conditions, typically, the more fish you're going to see."

Over time, Schindler said he's noticed that he encounters tripletails in clusters. They don't school like trout, but Schindler said he believes tripletails travel in dispersed groups.

"I firmly believe that they travel in a pack or a herd," Schindler said. "You may run 10 miles and not really see anything, but then you'll find a buoy or a piling, and there's one. A couple things later there's another one. That's when you need to start making wide circles, because I'm convinced those fish travel in a school."

## THE WINDUP

Carelessly approaching a promising bit of tripletail cover guarantees failure. You must get close, but you must approach quietly, keep a low profile and cast quietly with a soft splashdown.

“Get as close as you can to it,” Schindler said. “That’s why I like little to no current. You can work up and down whatever the structure is. They’re almost 100 out of 100 times on the downcurrent side, right against the structure, but you know it is with floating debris. Anything goes. I got one recently that was making laps around a big, old log. We waited for him to come around, and when he did, we got him.”

## THE PITCH

A tripletail is an aggressive predator stimulated by lively prey. Schindler said that a big, fresh shrimp is irresistible.

“You can’t get a big-enough shrimp,” Schindler said. “When we buy live bait in the morning, I tell my customers to leave the monsters alone in case we see tripletail.”

Again, the cast must be subtle so that the splashdown doesn’t spook the fish. When the cast is complete, the shrimp will do



**VIDEO:** Go to [ms-sportsman.com/triple-play-tripletail](http://ms-sportsman.com/triple-play-tripletail) to see the author hook a tripletail while fishing with guide Sonny Schindler.

the dirty work.

“We typically catch them at or near the surface,” Schindler said. “You can free-line and keep them high, or you put them a couple of inches under a cork and leave shrimp to freak out next to structure.”

Unlike trout or redfish, which slam a bait, a tripletail is a delicate nosher. He slurps a bait and savors it.

“Tripletails typically eat and stay put or swim up to the cork,” Schindler said. “You have got to pay close attention. Braided line helps you feel the ‘pluck.’ More often than not, he’s going to eat it and stay there or swim upwards. Of course, if the cork goes under, that’s awesome. Just make sure you don’t snag whatever structure you’re fishing.”

## THE SWING >

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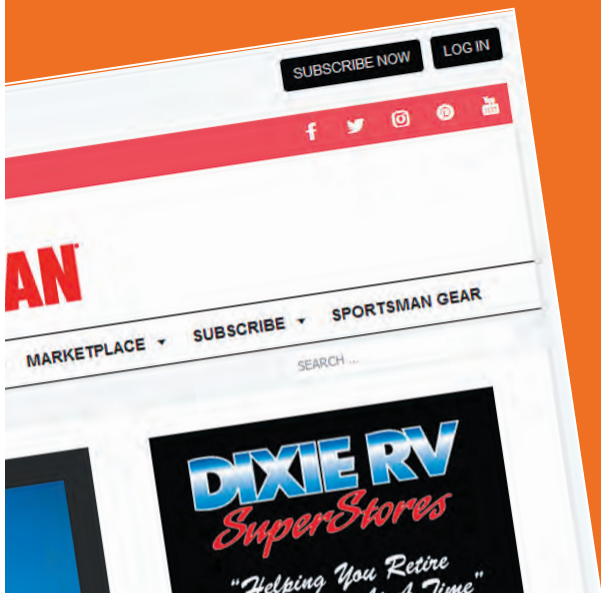
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TRIPLE PLAY, TRIPLETAIL

The author boated his first tripletail on a huge, live shrimp around a piece of floating cover.



## THE SWING

My first tripletail was a delicate take, just like Schindler described. After passing several vacant structures, Schindler stopped at one bit of cover that had all the proper trigger elements. A close look through polarized sunglasses confirmed that a tripletail was home.

"It's not like casting to a redfish," Schindler said. "You want to cast away from the fish and slowly ease it to them. If they spook, and it's a fixed structure, leave them alone. Go do something else. Mark it and come back in 20 minutes or an hour. The longer you let him sit, the better your odds of getting him if someone doesn't come in behind you and scoop him up."

Schindler recruited a magnum-sized shrimp for the mission and handed me the rod. I landed a soft cast beyond the structure and gently reeled the shrimp into the strike zone. The cork did not plunge. The line twitched almost imperceptibly, as if it bumped a bit of grass. Schindler dropped his arm softly, signaling me to drop the hammer. I reeled in the slack and swept the rod gently backward. The reward was two-fold. A big tripletail put up a magnificent fight on light tackle, and it checked another box off my wish list.

The trout we caught were delicious, of course, but as table fare, the tripletail was in a higher league. ■



**Bryan Hendricks** is Outdoors Editor for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, book author and radio personality. He is an avid saltwater kayak angler and stream angler.



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## GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Recent studies have shown that the catchability of largemouth bass is not affected by hybridization with Florida bass.



# FLORIDA BASS STOCKING

SUPER STRAIN DOESN'T AFFECT NATIVE BASS CATCHABILITY

**S**olid scientific evidence supports the growth of Florida-strain bass to larger sizes than largemouth bass.

Rumor has it that they are harder to catch than largemouth bass. More on that later, but if correct, could Florida bass stocking efforts create populations of bass that are more difficult to catch?

An average of 15 million Florida bass are stocked annually in southern states. The state of Florida stocks about 1.9 million per year to maintain genetic purity in its waters, but in other states, Florida bass are stocked to provide anglers greater opportunities to catch trophy bass. Texas annually stocks 7.7 million Florida bass fingerlings. Mississippi stocked 500,000 this year to increase trophy bass potential in selected waters.

A natural consequence of stocking Florida bass is that they hybridize with native largemouth bass. The first-generation hybrids of Florida bass and large-

mouth bass also have greater growth potential than largemouth bass. Twenty years ago, conservation geneticists forewarned of disastrous effects of mixing genes between introduced Florida bass and native largemouth bass. No negative effects have yet occurred.

Solid science has demonstrated that catchability is a genetic trait and is heritable. Several early studies, but not all, found that Florida bass were harder to catch than largemouths. If this is the case, and catchability is heritable, stocking Florida bass into a largemouth population could reduce catchability. The early catchability studies were conducted in small research ponds. Recent studies in Texas and Tennessee evaluated the effect of Florida bass stocking on black bass catchability in large reservoirs.

## TEXAS STUDY

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists compared the catchability of

Florida bass and largemouth bass in five reservoirs. The genetics of bass captured by anglers were compared with those captured reservoir-wide by electrofishing and assumed to be a random sample of bass in each population.

In two reservoirs, the proportions of angler catch of bass with 95% or greater Florida bass genes were lower than the proportion of bass with 95% or greater Florida bass genes in the populations. In other words, bass with a very high influence of Florida bass genes were less catchable. The proportions of bass with less than 95% Florida bass genes was the same or greater in the angler catch than



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

the electrofishing catch. Florida bass genes had little effect on the catchability of bass with less than 95% Florida bass influence.

Catchability of bass in the other three reservoirs, which had very few bass with 95% or greater Florida bass genes, did not differ across a range of percentages of Florida bass genes.

## TENNESSEE STUDY

Fishery researchers at the Tennessee Cooperative Fishery Research Unit at Tennessee Tech used a similar approach — comparison of the genetics of angler-caught and electrofishing-collected bass — to assess the effect of Florida bass genes on catchability of bass in Chickamauga Lake. They found no significant differences in the proportions of angler catch and electrofishing catch across genealogical classes of first- and second-generation Florida bass X largemouth bass hybrids or back crosses of hybrids with either their Florida or largemouth bass parents. Too few pure Florida bass were captured by anglers or electrofishing to allow meaningful assessment of the catchability of pure Florida bass.

## MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Several early studies comparing the catchability of Florida bass and largemouth bass found Florida bass more difficult to catch, but a couple studies found no difference in catchability. Techniques to assess the genetic purity of Florida bass and largemouth bass have advanced greatly in the last 20 years, and it is possible that the discrepant results of these early studies were a consequence of comparing bass of unknown genetic purity.

Rigorous genetic testing with advanced techniques allowed the Texas and Tennessee researchers to accurately describe the genetics of the fish captured by anglers and electrofishing. The results from the reservoir studies support the conclusion that pure Florida bass have lower catchability than native largemouths.

The more-important finding, in my opinion, is that the catchability of bass with less than 95% Florida bass genes is little affected. This is significant, because every stocked Florida bass that survives has the potential to hybridize with largemouth bass. Stocking Florida bass has disrupted the genetic integrity of native bass populations. This may have some yet-to-be-determined adverse effects on bass populations, but the results to date demonstrate that stocking Florida bass will produce a few bigger bass without altering the catchability of the native bass populations. ■

Pure-strain Florida bass like this fish caught in Orange Lake, Fla., are more difficult to catch than largemouth bass.



Photo courtesy Brian Dolski

## LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

The author likes to fish Ross Barnett in September, because there's no deep water in which to hide.



# SEPTEMBER'S HEMMED UP BASS AT ROSS BARNETT

SHALLOW RESERVOIR REMOVES ONE VARIABLE; BASS MUST BE IN SKINNY WATER

**S**eptember and October are my two least-favorite months to bass fish anywhere in the nation. The bass don't know whether they want to be deep or shallow, and they're harder to catch — at least in the South.

So, instead of letting the bass decide where they want to go, I hem them up in Ross Barnett. This lake is relatively shallow and has an abundance of vegetation that will start breaking up some, especially toward the end of September. Another factor that makes Ross Barnett a good choice this month is that it has numerous docks, providing shade, food and structure where bass can hold.

## GETTING STARTED

Just a little before first light, I like to fish the riprap at the dam, since the bass pull up really shallow there, making catching them easier. Also, by fishing at first light, you can cover a lot of water and identify the areas on the riprap where most of

the bass are holding. If you fish all the way down the riprap, you'll find several little stretches that you can travel back and forth to catch bass. Once you locate those honey holes, you'll have some good action for the first two hours of daylight.

I start off fishing fairly fast with top-water lures such as a Rebel Pop-R or a Zara Spook on a 7-foot-1, medium-action FX custom rod with an 8:1 gear-ratio ELS Bruin reel. I'll be using 20-pound braid with about 15 inches of 14-pound mono leader. I don't choose fluorocarbon for my leader while fishing topwater lures because I get less action out of my bait, and it's heavier than monofilament, causing the nose of the lure to sink down.

Next, I use a Uni-Knot to connect the mono to the braid and tie on a shad-colored Mann's Baby 1-Minus. I'll fish the same rod, but instead use a 6.2:1 ELS Bruin reel spooled with 20-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon. I'll fish these lures close to the rocks for about an hour, crashing the Baby 1-Minus into

the rocks, creating a lot of action as I retrieve. Although these tactics generally catch largemouths, you may take a few spotted bass, too.

## FOLLOW-UP WORM

After about 1½ hours, I'll start using watermelon-colored 4¾-inch and 6-inch SpringR worms rigged wacky style with no lead. I'll fish the larger worm on a 6-foot-8, medium-heavy FX custom rod with a 7.3:1 ELS Bruin reel and 15-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon. For the smaller worm, I'll use a spinning reel with 15-pound bass braid and a 6- to 8-foot leader of 8-pound fluorocarbon. I'll cast the worm right up against the



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.

Just before the sun comes up, the author will fish topwater baits like the Zara Spook and the Pop-R.



rocks and sometimes even on top of the rocks, pull it off and let it fall in the water, since the bass will hold shallow on the rocks. I'll let the worm flutter to the bottom, pull it a couple of times and allow it to flutter to the bottom. Once the worm is in 3 to 4 feet of water, I'll reel in and make another cast.


## AS THE SUN RISES


After spending about 2 hours fishing the riprap at the dam, I'll go to the residential area of the lake and look for docks. I'll pitch and flip every dock thoroughly with a black/blue-ounce Stone Jig and a black/blue craw-worm trailer on a 7-foot-10, heavy action FX custom rod with a 7.3:1 ELS Bruin reel and 30-pound braid. This jig is easy to skip under docks and falls fast enough to trigger a reaction strike. You won't catch a lot of bass using this technique, but you'll catch bigger bass than you've caught at the dam — possibly a 5- to 7-pounder.

## FROM 2 P.M. UNTIL DARK

During this part of the day, I'll be fishing a Super Frog through the lily pads on a 7-foot-3, heavy action FX custom rod with a 7.3:1 gear ratio reel with 65-pound braid. This technique is usually the most-productive around the end of September when the vegetation starts breaking up. Then, you can fish in areas that you haven't been able to fish all summer. But remember, you won't hook every bass that hits the Super Frog. If you get seven bites, then you'll probably catch at least three or four bass.

Since the bass don't have deep water to go to in Ross Barnett, they've got to be shallow. These water tactics will produce nice bass this month. ■

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## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

# GRILLED DRUM STICKS

SEPTEMBER'S SEASON  
CHANGE IS PERFECT  
FOR THIS NEAT MEAL

**D**rum, both red and black, are some of my favorite fish to catch in September. They're pretty obliging, too, as they attack the mullet minnows gathering in the marshes then heading through the inlets and along the beaches before heading south. It's only natural to invite a few home to be the guests of honor at dinner.

Yep, September is quite a month for sportsmen in Mississippi. Fishing is improving, and some hunting seasons are opening. Life in the outdoors is good. The best time for those who enjoy nature's bounty is beginning; we should get out and enjoy it any way we can.

I usually try to have a dove recipe for September, but I don't have any in the freezer, and dove isn't something you run out to the grocery store and buy. You've got to earn them, putting up with the sweltering heat and being at least a reasonably good shot.

Fishing? It's still hot, but at least you're on the water and in the marsh where any breeze will be cooler; you're almost guaranteed a sea breeze every afternoon. It's a heat that's easier to handle, and exercising your casting finger is easier than

exercising your trigger finger; it doesn't come with recoil.

Sometime in late August, things change in the marsh. There will be a few cool mornings, and everything will notice. The finger mullet that had been lazily milling about begin gathering in schools and edging towards the mouths of creeks and maybe even into open water. They're moving faster now, almost as if they have a purpose. It may be survival; to get to the Gulf and head out, they must run a gauntlet of hungry predators.

Red and black drum are two predators that mullet minnows must avoid to reach the Gulf. They both like mullet minnows almost as much as they like shrimp. Many mullet minnows will be eaten on their journey to the sea, and the tendency for drum to stay in the migration routes and gorge themselves makes them easy for fishermen to locate. When they're feeding that ravenously, they're pretty easy to catch too.

This recipe works well with red drum and black drum. There are some differences, but many folks can't differentiate after they're cooked. The main thing to remember is they both taste good. ■

# GRILLED DRUM STICKS

September will only be a little cooler than most summer months, but the difference is noticeable, especially in the evenings. Whatever the reason, enjoy it. This is obviously a meal to cook on the grill, and enjoying it outside is a plus, too. Just be sure to have the insect repellent fired up and working. Those blood-thirsty buggers don't respect the seasons.

This is a recipe that came about while trying to find a different, but simple, way to cook drum. Truly, this is about as simple as it gets, and you can visit with family or friends while it's cooking. Be sure to choose or make a variety of dipping sauces, ranging from mild and creamy to pretty spicy. You might even make a cheese sauce for anyone who likes fondue.

My current favorite dipping sauce is a combination of Ranch dressing and sriracha sauce. I am a bit of a sauce snob and make this exclusively with Hidden Valley Ranch, which is creamier, and Texas Pete Cha Sauce, which has a great smoky and sweet flavor. If you like creamy and spicy, be prepared for this to become your favorite for this and many other foods. The ratio of the mix is up to you and is easy to vary from mild to wild. The more Cha sauce you add, the spicier it will be.

I think this is just a little better with red drum, however, the limits are low, and without several people fishing, there might not be enough red drum to go around. Don't fret, this is still good with black drum.

The wooden skewers still sometimes burn, even after soaking them, but I like them better than metal ones. Metal skewers get very hot and are difficult to hold to turn the fish, and they stay

hot longer after removing them from the heat. I have threatened several times to do this with coat hangers, like roasting marshmallows, and leaving the end long enough it's easy to handle, but I won't remember to do this until I grab a hot skewer again.

I only use salt and pepper for seasonings with this, so the flavors of the dipping sauces stand out. My preference is for pepper; I use very little salt. There is plenty in the dipping sauces.

There will be pieces of fish that are thicker and thinner. Try to match these together on skewers. My grill has a hot side, and I put the thicker pieces there so all will be ready at the same time.

This is a fun time around the grill, and the fish cooks quickly. Many of my friends say the best part is trying the many dipping sauces, and I agree. I made this just for us, and it has my Ranch and Cha mixed sauce, Tai sweet chili sauce and teriyaki sauce. Try a bunch. I'm sure there's a dipping sauce just right for everyone. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

**1½ pounds** of drum fillets — red and/or black drum

**Olive oil** or buttery flavored, non-stick cooking spray

**Coarse ground black pepper**

**Pink Himalayan salt**

**Dipping sauces:** teriyaki, sweet mustard, hot sauce, cocktail sauce, homemade sauces, etc.

**Wooden skewers**

## PREPARATION:

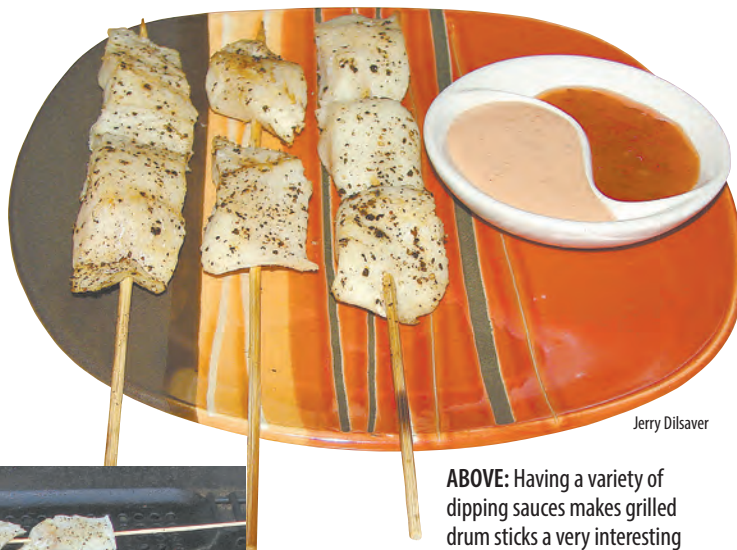
Soak skewers in cool water as instructed, usually a minimum of 30 minutes. Trim any dark or red meat from the fillets, then cut them into pieces approximately 1 to 1½ inches wide. They will be different lengths.

Slide the fish pieces on the skewers. Lightly rub the fish pieces with the olive oil or spray them with the cooking spray. Sprinkle the fish pieces with salt and pepper to personal preferences. Place the fish pieces and skewers in a Zip Lock bag and seal if possible. Put the bag of fish in the refrigerator to season for at least 30 minutes — longer allows the salt and pepper to season better.

Make any homemade dipping sauces while the fish pieces are seasoning.

Preheat the grill to medium heat. Cook the fish, being careful not to overcook them. The time will vary according to the thickness of the fish, but it should only be 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Serve the fish hot off the grill with an assortment of dipping sauces. ■



Jerry Dilsaver

**ABOVE:** Having a variety of dipping sauces makes grilled drum sticks a very interesting late-summer meal. **LEFT:** Wooden skewers should be matched to the size of the fish chunks you're grilling.



Jerry Dilsaver



**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](mailto:captainjerry@captainjerry.com).

## SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

A 28-inch speckled trout and a Corky Fat Boy have a story to which the author listens.



# THE FAT BOY'S LESSON

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM A FAVORITE BAIT? IT HELPS YOUR MEMORY; THAT'S FOR SURE

Christopher Bush

**T**he teeth marks tell the story. Hopefully, the bourbon helps communicate that story.

Under a glowing lamp in my home, I'm surrounded by stories. Personified in various shapes, colors and profiles, these artificial lures bear the brunt of a deep, fishing underbelly located just below the surface. Through epoxied eyes, we've exposed them with good intent to some of the most savage and violent things. They wear the scars.

One bait in particular stands out: a very colorful Floating Corky Fat Boy, aptly named Texas Turnip. From the faint pink presence on its upper half to a glowing yellow chin, this bait looks fishy. However, its most notable feature is the distinct violet stripe running down its

dorsal. To a big-trout angler, profile and capability generally wins over color — at least from what I've seen — but this one is a little different. The Corky's famous exaggerated eye glares emotionless, and the blend of colors command a presence, so off she goes to the business end of a loop knot.

We often hear that fishing transcends time; I wouldn't argue otherwise. I still remember my dehydrated fingers configuring that knot and the gentle easterly breeze kissing my cheeks. Although nautical twilight was well under way, the cloudless sky made you question whether it was Texas or some flat located on the west side of heaven — jaw-dropping being the understatement.

## FAT BOY FINDINGS

For years, I've fished Floating Fat Boys and, more often than not, I've considered them a complimentary bait to wary fish uncommitted to topwater baits. That day, however, I learned their distinct and precise capability: big profile, skinny water and super-aggressive fish.

In the days leading up to this trip, life's questions started to mount. A pandemic environment with social unrest loom-



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

ing, it was only fitting that a distant hurricane located in the northern Gulf brought water levels up, well beyond their mean. Bugged down by my own personal thoughts, I yearned for clarity, so off I went.

As I slid into my waders, I debated whether I should target deeper structure or focus my efforts up shallow. Remaining indecisive, a small slick out deep was the apparition I needed. The searing smell of watermelon quickened the pace of my pursuit, and my lure choice of a small soft plastic was the investigator for hire. Admittedly, I'm no stranger to this area, but given the fact it was early summer, my decisions went fully uncommitted. After almost an hour, with a few dink trout and an eager, young redfish, I quickly thought that the previous apparition was some sort of twisted joke crafted by the devil himself. Unlike him though, I remained true to my convictions to a higher power and believed that some big fish were up skinny — I had faith.

For years, I've always wade-fished with two rods. I keep telling myself that it's easier and more efficient to wade with just one, but year after year, I feel that subjecting myself to such clumsiness is worth the effort. In short, today was that day. As I abandoned the deep stuff, I swapped my finesse gear for something with a little more power. Now, soundly wedged between me and my wade belt, I unsheathed the Texas Turnip.

Corky Fat Boys are so unique. Their pliability, density and hardware are unmatched in the saltwater fishing world. Nose and tail bends applied by anglers up and down the coast from Virginia to Texas match not only their persona but the fish's as well. On this day, I chose a slight downward tail bend with a perfectly straight nose so I could keep the bait just above the grass in the water column. As I gave her one more quality check, her eyes and bright, shiny red hooks screamed, "Put me in, Coach!"

## TAKE STOCK OF SURROUNDINGS

With the wind at my back, I methodically threw onto a shelf lined with lush sea grass. Mulletts skipped happily nearby, but as the sun sank, carefree quickly turned to a matter of survival. Dinner-plate sized slicks earmarked those less fortunate, their oily residue a target for my lure to explore.

With more and more falling victim to a roaming wolf pack, the thump that followed made me question my bait's willingness to subject itself to such a savage world. Although it came back empty, the back hook neatly placed above the loop knot certainly remains one of the angling world's great mysteries.

Now realigned and my slack reeled in, I made another cast, 10 feet to the left of the previous one. A two-twitch cadence and a slightly elevated rod tip, I hear her trash-talking on the descent. This time not so lucky, a healthy 28-inch trout finds extreme offense to her communication style. With remarkable dissent, she hits the bait so hard that the braided line jumps, sending a shock wave all the way to your spine.

For more than 30 years, I've targeted trout, getting more serious with every passing day.

I can assure you that the "thump" is the apex of a trophy trout fishing world. A myriad of lures in my fishing kingdom try to emulate, with some getting close, but my Corkys, both active and retired, stare down their counterparts with undeniable bravado. After all, they've been exposed to the meanest of the mean without backing down.

## FACE THE TURBULENCE

With sunlight completely gone and multiple fish over 25 inches to include that 28, mosquitos encourage my retreat to fully functioning air conditioning. No doubt I found my clarity that evening. Even in the waves of the smallest bay, turbulence both in life and in fishing is always overcome by standing tall, being honest and always trusting that something larger than yourself is in control — trust being the key word.

As for the bourbon? It's a smooth Texas single barrel that has a great finish, but sadly, the ice has melted, and it's all but gone, minus one sip. As I look around, peering through the downward light, the lures hanging on my wall all have stories to tell. This one in particular, though, was not just about big trout pulled up on a shallow flat, or a Floating Corky Fat Boy, but about courage and how we navigate this unsettled world. The parallel here is that we share many of the same scars from our earthly life: ours being above and theirs below. It's when we go fishing that our worlds collide, and we gain greater perspective as to our purpose in life. Even though I don't envy my lures and the situations I put them in, they may argue the same — it's all about understanding. This day was all about clarity and the teeth marks communicate that. Hopefully, the bourbon found the words. ■



Christopher Bush

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope



# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: ATLANTIC TRIPLETAIL

THIS UNIQUE FISH APPEARS TO HAVE THREE TAILS; IT'S FOUND FROM OCEAN TO OCEAN

**T**he Atlantic tripletail, *Lobotes surinamensis*, is a warm-water fish that, despite its name, lives in many parts of the globe other than the Atlantic Ocean, including the Pacific Ocean. They are plentiful from Chesapeake Bay south, around Florida, and into the Gulf of Mexico.

Tripletails have rounded dorsal and anal fins that extend back almost to their tails, giving them the appearance of three tails, hence their name. They vary in color from silver to yellow to mottled black, and they can change their shade of color based on their surroundings.

These fish have disproportionately small eyes and large mouths, and as they grow, the fish's head becomes concave. Commonly referred to as simply

“tripletail” or “blackfish,” these fish are somewhat migrational and are found in big numbers along the Gulf Coast from summer through late fall. Fisheries biologists believe almost all tripletail head offshore during the winter and stay there until late spring/early summer.

While scientists know little about how tripletails spend their winters offshore, the behavior of these fish along inshore waters is highly documented and witnessed by biologists and anglers alike. Anglers find them floating sideways under structure, which they use as shade and to ambush prey. From a distance, they look like leaves or submerged weed mats. Up close, they appear very lazy, but anglers see otherwise once a tripletail takes their hook.

Tripletails are easy to spook, but they quickly take a well-placed hook, especially one baited with shrimp.

## STRUCTURE SPECIES

Crab-pot markers, buoys, surface weeds or any floating structure are good places to look for tripletail. One Mississippi angler reports catching a tripletail he spotted under a floating tennis ball with one eye in the shade of the ball.



**Brian Cope** of Rembert, S.C., is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He has been writing about the outdoors since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.

As the fish grows, its head stays the same relative size but the body grows, giving it a concave appearance. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Tripletails are commonly found floating just under the surface around buoys of all kinds or junk.



Photos courtesy Fisher-Man Guide Service

Tripletails have hearty appetites. They eat a wide range of foods, including small fish, crabs, shrimp, and other crustaceans. They are very quick to take a baited hook, but anglers find these fish spook easily if their cast lands too close to the fish.

## SUMMER SPAWN

Throughout the summer and into the early fall, tripletails spawn along the inshore and nearshore waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. Little is known about their spawning habits, other than it is the only time these fish gather in large numbers. When not spawning, tripletails are mostly solitary, but they sometimes travel in groups of three or four fish.

Due to their unique body shape, tripletails are rarely confused with other fish species. However, some inexperienced anglers have misidentified them as black sea bass and black drum. They have numerous nicknames throughout their range, but are most frequently known as tripletails or blackfish along the Gulf Coast.

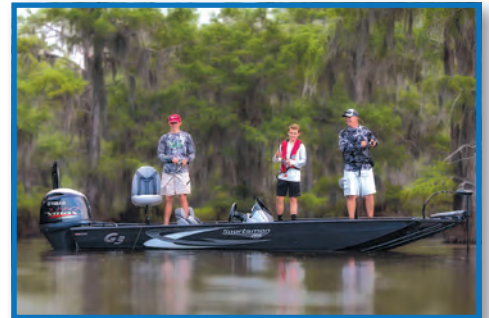
Louisiana's tripletail state record is a long-standing one. Caught by Mrs. Jimmy Toups in July 1959, the record fish weighed 39½ pounds.

B.G. Gibson caught Mississippi's state record, a 37¾-pound tripletail, in 1972.

Steve Hand caught the world record for the species in Zululand, South Africa, in June 1989. That fish weighed 42 pounds, 5 ounces. ■

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# YAMAHA

## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



Egret's Vudu Shad are made in 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-inch sizes, pre-rigged with a hook.

# EGRET BAITS' VUDU SHAD

**F**or about a year, saltwater fishermen have been using Egret Baits' Vudu Shad to put fish after fish after fish in the boat.

The 3-inch, ¼-ounce and 4-inch, ⅜-ounce models are tapping the triple crown of speckled trout, redfish and flounder consistently, primarily in shallow flats and bays in inshore waters, as well as over reefs and in the surf. The 5-inch, ¾-ounce and 6-inch, 1-ounce baits are sticking fish in near-offshore and offshore waters.

What's more, bass fishermen are using the two larger sizes to catch striped bass, and the biggest Vudu Shads have been effective in the Northeast around New Jersey.

Ken Chaumont of Lake Charles, CEO of Egret Baits and a veteran in the artificial lure manufacturing industry, said he and

others who contributed to the design were counting on the soft plastic to "really go after a much broader saltwater market."

Mission accomplished.

With its "Tough As Hell" TPE (thermo-plastic elastomers) body, it's following in the ultra-successful, fish-catching footsteps of the Original Vudu Shrimp.

## BEACH BITE BAIT

In mid-July, Chaumont was well aware just how well the 4-inch Vudu Shad was triggering a speckled trout bite along the beach at Johnson Bayou in southwest Louisiana.

"We're getting some good beach activity on the 4-inch because you can throw it a mile," he said. "When the tide's way up and they're in the first gut, I think it'll be a good surf bait, probably the best surf bait we've built. It has done very well in the surf."

Plus, he said, the 4-inch bait is expected to get larger speckled trout to bite when the water's a little bit cooler this fall.

What each of the four Vudu Shads have going for them — in addition to the TPE — is the serrated rear portion of the body with a nylon mesh weave and a boot tail that adds lift and thump to the soft plastic. Chaumont said that lift is a key to keeping the 3-inch model up in the target zone in the shallows, 2 feet

of water or less.

Vudu Shad are well-armed. The 3-inch model has a 1/0 2X strong saltwater-grade hook. The 4-inch model has the same hook in 3/0 2X; the 5-inch a 5/0 and the 6-inch a 6/0.

## JERSEY SHORE?

The call to build a big, soft-plastic shad originated a few years ago in New Jersey, Chaumont said. His biggest distributor there and fishing guides worked with him on the design. "Up there, they throw bigger baits," he said.

Several prototypes followed the first; pre-rigged soft plastics must be precise, and this was no exception. Once Egret had the desired look, natural action and appeal, Vudu Shads hit the market six months later, in 2019. The bait was an instant hit in the Sportsman's Paradise.

"Ninety percent of the 3- and 4-inch sales are in the South — the Gulf Coast from Tampa to Corpus Christi," Chaumont said. "What comes out of Louisiana sweeps across to Texas and Mississippi, all the way over to Florida, real quick," he said. "We (Louisiana anglers) have so many miles of marsh and estuaries. We have so much developing ground to prove a bait."

For more information on the Egret Baits Vudu Shad and other Egret Baits products go to [www.egretbaits.com](http://www.egretbaits.com). ■

The huge, 6-inch Vudu Shad is liable to food big fish like this bull red; in the Northeast, it's a killer bait for big striped bass.



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.

## MILLENNIUM R500 ROD HOLDER

Pontoon boats are increasingly being used and recognized as great fishing platforms, with anglers targeting a variety of species from their relative comfort.

Millennium Marine has taken a big step to try and help them out, debuting this year its R500 rod holder, specifically designed for pontoon boats or other boats that have existing rails. The rod holders mount seamlessly to round or

square-tube rails from 3/4- to 1 1/2 inches.

Constructed of anodized aluminum, the R500 has the company's patented Spyderlock technology that allows 360° rotation and incremental locking angles., allowing for drifting, trolling or still-fishing on anchor.

The R500 weighs 2.2 pounds and has rubber-coated contact points to protect your rods from damage. **MRSP: \$44.99**

**For more info, visit [millenniummarine.com](http://millenniummarine.com)**



## SHIMANO'S VANFORD SPINNING REELS

Shimano has taken another big step toward providing fishermen with some of the best tackle on the market, this time with a spinning reel, the Vanford series, that combine light weight, strength and many of the brand's top-drawer features.

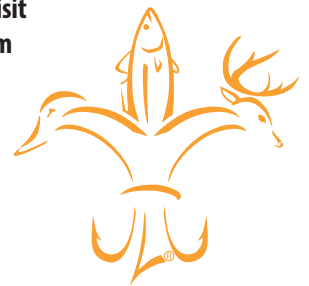
The Vanford series includes seven reels of different sizes, from the tiny VF500F, which weighs less than 5 ounces and handles 2-, 4- and 6-pound test, to the VFC500XGF, which weighs almost 8 ounces and handles up to 14-pound test mono or 40-pound braid.

The Vanford has a Ci4+ body that's light,

but with carbon-fiber strength, plus a MagnumLight rotor that provides almost 50% less rotational inertia, plus the HAGANE gear, Silent Drive and Micro-Module Gear il for smooth performance. The Long Stroke Spool allows for greater casting distance. Its X-protect technology insures that it will repel the potential problems that the toughest saltwater environment can provide.

**MSRP: \$229.99**

**For more info, visit [fishshimano.com](http://fishshimano.com)**



## WILDGAME INNOVATIONS RIVAL 20

Trail cameras have revolutionized the scouting aspect of deer hunting, and Wildgame Innovations' Rival 20 Lightsout camera is a great example of the hows and whys.

This camera will carry a 32GB card, allowing hunters to log thousands of photos, and it runs on 8 AA batteries. It comes with an adjustable strap and alligator clips to make it easier to attach to a tree, a stake — however you mount your trail cams.

The Rival 20 carries two lens, for daylight and nighttime images, it's a quiet camera with an infrared LED flash that won't alarm animals

when the shutter opens and closes. Images are of high quality, and the camera can be set to take photos at intervals of 5, 15 or 30 seconds, plus videos.

A bright, LCD screen allows for quick and easy selection of settings; it takes only a minute to set up once it's mounted.

**RSPV: \$159.99**

**For more info, visit: [wildgameinnovations.com](http://wildgameinnovations.com)**





Photo by Dora Lambert

# SCRAPING FOR SHEEPSHEAD

By Dora Lambert

## ON-SITE CHUMMING WORKS

**J**oshua Bourg of Larose, La., suggests that “scraping” for sheephead is the way to catch them.

“I started scraping for them around 20 years ago,” he said. “I noticed that it worked really well, so I started sharing my technique with other people who target sheephead regularly.”

The process involves scraping barnacles and other crustaceans off pier posts or sea walls, in effect, chumming.

“Before you start, you will need a garden

hoe or a shovel for this to work,” he said. “Either one will do the trick, as long as the handle can reach where the barnacles and/or oysters are. You don’t need any specialized equipment other than what can be found in your shed.

“The next thing you want to do is to look for a piling or bulkhead that has barnacles and/or oysters. The deeper the water is, the better, and the more pilings in a small area, the more sheephead that will gather,” he said. “The sheephead will

Sheepshead feed mostly on crustaceans, so shrimp or fiddler crabs are great baits.

already be hanging around the area scanning for food, such as small crabs. Once scraping begins, they will all gather in the cloud of debris coming from the pilings or bulkhead. It’s basically like chumming them with the existing food source.

“Once you locate a good spot, you should start to scrape a couple of pilings in an area. I prefer to put out a couple of baits at different depths. Once you figure out the depth they are, then you can adjust the other lines. Sheephead will

Fishing vertically around pier and dock pilings or seawalls after scraping off barnacles and oysters is a great tactic.

usually come to the spot you scraped, so you need a rod rigged to pitch. The more you scrape, the more sheepshead that will show up and the better bites you will get.

"I prefer to use fresh shrimp with a long-shank hook, when I target sheepshead when scraping," Bourg said. "Other places swear by fiddler crabs. Fiddler crabs are a little difficult to get around here, unless you catch them yourself."

Bourg said if you want to use them, fiddler crabs can be found along the beaches and saltwater islands where there is a good bank and marsh grass. But shrimp is king along the Gulf, and it's the easiest local bait to get.

## OTHER SPOTS TO TRY

"Not everyone is going to want to put in the time to scrape for sheepshead, and that's fine," Bourg said. "These fish are found everywhere in the marshes, channels, and offshore."

"The platforms in the bay really produce! I've seen giant schools of them on some days. Several hundred will be podded up in the summer months. You would have to try not to catch one, if you come across these schools."

"I've also seen sheepshead tailing a lot in the marshes when fishing in really shallow water. They can sometimes be mistaken for redfish."

"Oyster reefs are a great place to fish for them, as well. Look for bank lines with oysters and a little current running through. This will be like a highway for them. Again, shrimp and a long-shank hook will work. I prefer using long-shank hooks, because of their teeth. It's easier to unhook them." ■



Photo courtesy Joshua Bourg

# Come see the Crest Classic Platinum Pontoons at our new location.

A large, sleek pontoon boat with a black and silver finish is shown on clear blue water. The boat has a Suzuki outboard motor at the stern and a canopy over the seating area. The word "CREST" is visible on the side of the boat.The Crest logo, featuring a stylized wave above the word "CREST" in a bold, sans-serif font.

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# FRESH TUNA SALAD, CAJUN STYLE

By Nathan L. Judice

**T**una salad. Words that every school-aged child dreads to hear. Well, this isn't your cafeteria tuna salad. This version is made with fresh or frozen yellowfin tuna.

The Gulf Coast has some of the best tuna-fishing opportunities, with a relatively short run offshore. There's nothing that I love more than

fresh tuna straight off the fish with a splash of soy sauce, but sometimes you just want a quick lunch or an elevated dip.

Don't count out other saltwater fish for this recipe, I have made it plenty of times with mahi mahi, amberjack and redfish with the result being just as tasty.

## INGREDIENTS:

½ pound tuna (mahi mahi, amberjack, cobia, redfish, etc.)

¼ cup bell pepper

¼ cup shallots

¼ cup jalapeno or ½ large jalapeno

¼ cup celery

¼ cup cucumbers

¾ cup mayonnaise

¼ cup sour cream

1½ tablespoons blackening seasoning

1 tablespoon fresh dill, minced

1 tablespoon Louisiana Hot Sauce



## PREPARATION: Serves 4

- Season the tuna with a tablespoon of the blackening seasoning and cook until cooked through and let cool.
- While the fish is cooling, dice all of the veggies to a uniform size (pea size). If the jalapenos are hot or if you prefer, remove the seeds. I love the texture that cucumber peels add to this dish so I leave the skin on.
- Once your fish is cool or at room temperature, add the diced veggies, the remaining blackening seasoning, and the remaining ingredients.
- Serve immediately with crackers, on sandwiches, with a salad or place in the fridge for future tuna salad sandwiches that are sure to knock your Crocs off.



You'll find more great dishes from the Recreational Chef on Instagram at [instagram.com/recreationalchef/](https://www.instagram.com/recreationalchef/)



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

• The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).

• The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

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

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

**AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:**  
**The 2020 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar.** \$13.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2020 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2020, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2021, and more. Comes with FREE 2020 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, plus \$3 s&h.

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

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	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
Tue 1	██	██	██	██	56
Wed 2	██	██	██	██	62
Thu 3	██	██	██	██	53
Fri 4	██	██	██	██	45
Sat 5	██	██	██	██	38

Sun 6	██	██	██	██	36
Mon 7	██	██	██	██	40
Tue 8	██	██	██	██	43
Wed 9	██	██	██	██	51
Thu 10	██	██	██	██	62
Fri 11	██	██	██	██	54
Sat 12	██	██	██	██	50

Sun 13	██	██	██	██	51
Mon 14	██	██	██	██	60
Tue 15	██	██	██	██	69
Wed 16	██	██	██	██	77
Thu 17	██	██	██	██	79
Fri 18	██	██	██	██	66
Sat 19	██	██	██	██	52

Sun 20	██	██	██	██	38
Mon 21	██	██	██	██	30
Tue 22	██	██	██	██	32
Wed 23	██	██	██	██	40
Thu 24	██	██	██	██	28
Fri 25	██	██	██	██	23
Sat 26	██	██	██	██	23

Sun 27	██	██	██	██	23
Mon 28	██	██	██	██	34
Tue 29	██	██	██	██	45
Wed 30	██	██	██	██	55

25 50 75  
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS				
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
7:49 pm	Midnight - 1:14 am	6:00 am	12:21 pm - 1:39 pm ☀	◯
8:18 pm	12:35 am - 2:07 am	6:59 am	1:00 pm - 2:32 pm ☀	◯ FULL
8:46 pm	1:10 am - 2:58 am	7:56 am	1:35 pm - 3:23 pm	◯
9:12 pm	1:42 am - 3:48 am	8:52 am	2:07 pm - 4:13 pm	◯
9:38 pm	2:15 am - 4:37 am	9:47 am	2:40 pm - 5:02 pm	◯
10:06 pm	2:47 am - 5:27 am	10:42 am	3:12 pm - 5:52 pm	◯ Apogee
10:36 pm	3:20 am - 6:16 am	11:38 am	3:45 pm - 6:41 pm	◯
11:09 pm	3:57 am - 7:07 am	12:35 pm	4:22 pm - 7:32 pm	◯
11:47 pm	4:38 am - 7:58 am ☀	1:33 pm	5:03 pm - 8:23 pm ☀	◯
	5:22 am - 8:52 am ☀	2:31 pm	5:47 pm - 9:17 pm ☀	◯ HALF
12:32 am	6:11 am - 9:47 am ☀	3:28 pm	6:36 pm - 10:12 pm	◯
1:23 am	7:05 am - 10:41 am	4:22 pm	7:30 pm - 11:06 pm	◯ HIGH
2:22 am	8:03 am - 11:35 am	5:12 pm	8:28 pm - 12:00 am	◯
3:27 am	9:05 am - 12:27 pm	5:58 pm	9:30 pm - 12:52 am	◯
4:36 am	10:09 am - 1:15 pm	6:39 pm	10:34 pm - 1:40 am	◯
5:48 am	11:12 am - 2:02 pm ☀	7:16 pm	11:37 pm - Midnight	◯
6:59 am	12:15 pm - 2:45 pm ☀	7:52 pm	Midnight - 2:27 am	◯ NEW
8:12 am	1:20 pm - 3:26 pm	8:26 pm	12:40 am - 3:10 am	◯ Perigee
9:24 am	2:24 pm - 4:10 pm	9:01 pm	1:45 am - 3:51 am	◯
10:35 am	3:28 pm - 4:54 pm	9:39 pm	2:49 am - 4:35 am	◯
11:47 am	4:32 pm - 5:40 pm	10:20 pm	3:53 am - 5:19 am	◯
12:56 pm	5:34 pm - 6:32 pm	11:06 pm	4:57 am - 6:05 am	◯ Fall
2:02 pm	6:35 pm - 7:27 pm ☀	11:58 pm	5:59 am - 6:57 am ☀	◯ HALF
3:01 pm	7:33 pm - 8:21 pm		7:00 am - 7:52 am ☀	◯ LOW
3:54 pm	8:24 pm - 9:20 pm	12:54 am	7:58 am - 8:46 am	◯
4:39 pm	9:13 pm - 10:15 pm	1:53 am	8:49 am - 9:45 am	◯
5:18 pm	9:57 pm - 11:09 pm	2:54 am	9:38 am - 10:40 am	◯
5:51 pm	10:36 pm - 12:02 am	3:54 am	10:22 am - 11:34 am	◯
6:21 pm	11:11 pm - 12:53 am	4:52 am	11:01 am - 12:27 pm	◯
6:49 pm	11:45 pm - Midnight	5:50 am	11:36 am - 1:18 pm ☀	◯

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

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