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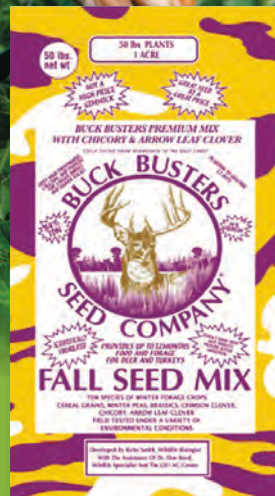
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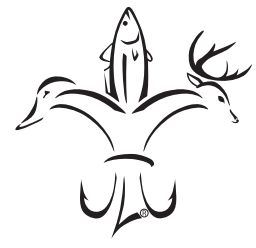
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Besides the rut, there's no better time to make a connection with a trophy buck than the beginning of Mississippi's archery season. Photo courtesy Dusty Wilson.



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Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland



Bobby Cleveland has covered sports in *Mississippi Sportsman* 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.

OCTOBER IS FULL OF PROMISE ARCHERY SEASON, SMALL-GAME SEASONS BRING ON EXCITEMENT

If you looked around any sporting goods store in Mississippi in late September, you likely saw a lot of smiling faces and felt an unmistakable air of optimism in the entire place.

The happiest folks were likely archers — and the store owners selling them all the equipment and accessories — looking forward to the Oct. 1 opening of bow season for deer in all but the Southeast Zone.

“Danged right, we’re happy, and if you aren’t optimistic, then you aren’t taking the right approach to bowhunting,” said Phillip Ray of Brandon. “I’ve been a bowhunter for

25 years and a deer hunter for 30 years, and I still get just as excited about opening day as I did those 25 and 30 years ago. I’m also just as optimistic about how great a season it will be. The day or year that I lose that giddiness and optimism will be the time I

quit hunting. I’m 40 now, and I don’t see that happening in the next 25 or 30 years. Not anytime sooner.”

You’ll also notice other smiles from scores of small-game hunters, since squirrel season opens Oct. 1 and rabbit season follows on Oct. 12.

Yessirree! October is a great month to be a Mississippi sportsman.

It’s also a good month to read *Mississippi Sportsman*, the magazine. If you like hunting and fishing in the Magnolia State this month’s issue is loaded with entertaining information from our writing staff about October’s outdoor opportunities.

- Bowhunters will enjoy Sammy Romano’s story on how to properly choose effective archery stands during the early deer season.
- Mike Giles will help hunters find more deer in the opening weeks of the season.
- A story that no hunter should miss is Kinny Haddox’s piece on hunting safety, in which he speaks with a duck hunter whose unfortunate accident involved a loaded gun, an ATV and a very active retriever.
- For fishermen — no let’s not forget the outstanding angling action available in the fall — long-time contributor Phillip Gentry offers expert tips on finding crappie in the changing seasons.
- We’ve even got a recipe from Jerry Dilsaver’s *Cooking on the Wild Side* column that all deer hunters will want to cook: bacon- and cheese-stuffed venison burgers. I can almost taste it — and smell it — as I type the words.

I’m optimistic it would be good and that I will have the opportunity to cook it several times, as well as squirrel and dumplings, rabbit sauce picante and grilled venison steaks. Bring it on!

Stay safe. Stay healthy.

And, have a great month. ■

SOUTH DELTA BOW SEASON OPENS OCT. 1

Some confusion exists over the opening date of the archery season for deer in the 2-year-old South Delta Zone, which includes parts of Issaquena, Sharkey, Warren and Yazoo counties. In the 2019-20 season, archery hunting opened Oct. 15, the same as in the Southeast Zone. For the 2020-21 season, it has been returned to Oct. 1 in all zones except the Southeast.

GATOR HUNTERS HAVE PRODUCTIVE SEASON

Since Mississippi's first alligator season in 2005, just weeks after Hurricane Katrina rolled through, the state's reptile hunters have honed their skills. Even rookies — and there's a lucky few drawn every year — seem to have a good knowledge of the sport's techniques or the good sense to reach out to veterans who weren't lucky in the drawing.

The vets rarely turn down a seat in a boat, usually offering their own watercraft and specialized equipment for a chance to enjoy a few nights on the water.

Talent is evident in the statistics from the recently completed 2020 public water season, which ran from Aug. 28 to Sept. 7. We learned:

- Of the 960 permits awarded, only 799 hunters drawn went hunting — the one disappointing statistic because that means 161 permits weren't used, and there were hundreds of disappointed applicants who weren't drawn.

- Of the 799 who hunted, 579 registered at least one harvest.

- A total of 3,064 people participated, for an average of 3.8 hunters per permit. There is no limit to the number of assistants or team members each permit holder can have.

- The harvest was 854 alligators, 448 under 7 feet and 406 over 7 feet. Only one gator exceeding 7 feet was allowed per permit.

- Eight of the dispatched gators measured at least 13 feet; 43 measured between 12 and 13 feet; 86 measured between 11 and 12 feet, and 76 measured between 10 and 11 feet. That's 213 alligators in the double-figure club.

- Another 2,000 gators were captured and released.

- Of the 854 harvested, 796 were taken by rod-and-reel, 34 by bow-fishing equipment, 14 by snare pole and 10 by direct harpoon.

- Hunters spent 15,288 hours chasing alligators.

- It took an average of 7.6 hours per alligator captured.

- Of the 799 hunters, 596 rated the experience very enjoyable, 191 rated it enjoyable, and only 12 said it was not enjoyable. The odds are extremely high those 12 were not among the 596 to harvest an alligator. What do you bet?

The longest alligator captured came, rather surprisingly, from the Barnett Reservoir/Pearl River Zone, an area known for having one of the densest gator populations in

the country, which is not good for producing size. The 13-foot-8 gator was the longest ever reported from the reservoir, but it weighed only 595 pounds. By contrast, the heaviest gator ever recorded in the public-waters hunt was 822 pounds — a lizard 2 inches shorter, caught from the Mississippi River near Natchez in 2015.

No alligators caught this year pushed an established weight record, according to Ricky Flynt, the alligator program leader for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, so no official weights were registered. Flynt indicated he saw several reports of alligators between 700 and 750 pounds.

The weight records of 822 pounds for males and 319 for females remain on the books. ■

GATOR TAGGING ➤



This 13-foot-1 gator was killed in Bluff Creek off the Pascagoula River on Sept. 4 by (l-r): Thomas Brooks, Justin Miner and Colby Jones.

GATOR TAGGING INFO

One aspect of alligator season that biologist Ricky Flynt enjoys is the capture of gators that have previously been caught, measured, tagged and released.

That was true this year, when Flynt found evidence that ties growth rates directly to habitat and available food sources.

One alligator captured Sept. 3 in the Forest Home Chute of the Mississippi River south of Eagle Lake measured 12-foot-1. It had been captured and tagged in 2011 at nearby Halpino Lake (less than a mile away) measuring 76.38 inches (6-foot-4.38). Adding an average of 8.6 inches every year, it had nearly doubled in size.

Rarely, Flynt said, will you see that kind of growth. It is rare, he said, to document alligators of that size with that size of average annual growth rates. When one is close, it usually comes from a place with perfect habitat and food sources.

By contrast, an alligator captured and tagged on June 14 2007, was harvested at 11-foot-1 by hunter Cory Stewart on Aug. 29, 2020. That gator grew only 24.75 inches over 13 years, an average of 1.9 inches per year. It was harvested only .72 miles from its original capture location, in the middle of the densest population of gators in the state.

The difference is obvious: the vastness of the Mississippi River backwaters offers plenty of room per gator. Less pressure on a food source produces more food for each alligator.

Flynt feels there's a strong likelihood it proves alligators are feasting on the abundant and rapidly growing number of Asian silver



Ricky Flynt, MDWFP

(flying) carp in the river system. In the past 15 years, the number of these nuisance fish have exploded. The MDWFP has documented alligators feeding on carp, and people have reported seeing gators feeding on the carcasses of carp after a die-off, as well as feeding on live carp.

That neither the Forest Home Chute gator nor the Barnett Reservoir gator had traveled very far between tagging and recapture was offset by one of the other 12 tagged gators taken this season. A group of hunters along the Mississippi River took a gator with a Louisiana tag, meaning it had crossed Big Muddy. Flynt wants to get the tag info to find out where it was tagged. ■

An advertisement for 411 Land Management. The central logo features the number '411' in a stylized font with antlers, above the words 'LAND MANAGEMENT'. The ad is surrounded by four images: a lake with green trees, a yellow CAT dozer, a green tractor with a yellow implement, and a wooden hunting stand. Below the logo, a list of services is provided, followed by contact information for Buster and a phone number.

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Anna Raines, 11, shows off her first squirrel. It was taken with a .22 rifle on Feb. 16, 2020, in Hinds County.



SMALL GAME, PLENTY OF FUN

While they may be considered small game, squirrels and rabbits take a backseat to no other animals when it comes to the fun they provide.

"Which would I rather do, sit in a shooting house or up in a tree scared I'm going to fall out, waiting on a deer to walk out, or follow around a pack of beagles chasing rabbits or a feist dog treeing squirrels? It ain't even close," said Terry Joe Roberts of Brandon. "My first choice would be rabbits. My second would be squirrels. A distant third would be deer, and I don't care if every deer I saw was a 150-inch, 8-, 9-, 10- or 14-point buck.

"To me, a day with kids and a dog or five, enjoying the sounds of the hounds and the thrill of the hunt, the walk through the woods or fields with all the majesty of Mississippi around us, well, it's just too much to beat. There's a lot of us like that, but deer hunting and, to a degree, duck and turkey hunting, get more attention."

Asked to sum up his love of small game in a word, Roberts thought a second before asking if he could invent a word.

"Soul-soothing," he said.

Mississippi's 2020-21 squirrel season opens Oct. 1 statewide, and rabbit season begins Oct. 17, also statewide. They both end on Feb. 28, 2021. The limit for both is eight per hunter per day.

"I've already started working my beagles to get them ready," Roberts said. "I've got 12 back from last year — some I've had for five or six seasons — and I added four more from two litters from the pack. By season's end, they'll be worn out from chasing a mix

of swamp rabbits and hillbillies.

"Two of the guys who hunt with me pretty regular have treeing feist dogs, and we trade out hunts all the time. One thing's for sure; from the start of October to the end of February, we will be out there every weekend day, some weekdays and just about every holiday, chasing one or the other. Our freezers will be filled, because we can't eat them as fast as we can kill them."

If you're wondering how Roberts likes his small game cooked, it's pretty simple: fry the squirrels and use the rabbits to make dumplings or in Cajun dishes like jambalaya or sauce picante. ■

WHAT ELSE IS OPEN IN OCTOBER?

Hunting in October isn't limited to deer, squirrel and rabbits. Several other seasons are open this month, including wild turkey in all or parts of 24 counties.

Here's the list:

- **Wild turkey.** The season opens Oct. 15 and ends Nov. 15, by permit only, in three zones. The limit is two per hunter, and turkeys can be either-sex — hens and/or gobblers, or a mix of the two. Landowners and leaseholders must apply for tags by completing a fall turkey hunting application and submit with the required documentation of land ownership/leasehold to the Jackson office of the MDWFP. Applications can be downloaded from the MDWFP website.

The three zones are below.

- **Delta:** Bolivar County (west of the main Mississippi River levee and those lands east of the main Mississippi River levee known as 27 Break Hunting Club); and west of the main Mississippi River levee in the counties of Coahoma, Desoto, Issaquena, Tunica, and Washington.

- **North-central:** Benton, Lafayette, Marshall, Panola, Tippah, and Union counties.

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

- **Raccoon, opossum and bobcat:** Food and sport season is open Oct. 1-Oct. 31 statewide. The limit is 5 per person per day, but there is an 8 per party limit that supersedes the individual limit. Starting Nov. 1, however, there's no limit.

- **Gallinules and rails.** These underutilized seasons on these tasty migratory birds began in September but will end on Oct. 4.

- **Doves.** There's lots of opportunities to shoot these speedy, little, and oh-so-challenging migratory birds, no matter where you live in Mississippi. The North Zone's long first season, which opened on Sept. 5, ends on Oct. 18. After a brief break, the second season opens on Oct. 24 and will run through Nov. 21. The South Zone's long second season begins on Oct. 10 and will run through Nov. 8.

- **Light goose conservation order.** On the outside chance any snow, blue or Ross' geese should migrate into Mississippi early, this special "no-limit" season opens for its initial run on Oct. 1 and will end Nov. 12. Two more segments will come in February and March. ■

HUNTER-ED MOVES TO ONLINE-ONLY, FOR NOW

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks to make many changes in the way it serves its constituents, including how it will conduct its hunter-education classes.

Until further notice, the class will be only available online through <https://www.mdwfp.com/education-outreach/hunter-education/>.

The online course, which became active July 31, can fulfill any resident's hunter-education requirement. The internet course, Today's Hunter in Mississippi, is video-narrated and interactive. The card from the online course can be presented as a digital or paper copy to license vendors to purchase a hunting license.

This certification will be retroactive from July 1, 2019, for Mississippi residents ages 12 and above. Students who are currently "in progress" on the course will receive their full certification upon completion. Students who have finished the course since July 1, 2019, will need to log back into the course to receive full certification (log back into the course, update and complete the personal information page, and download your certificate). ■

CWD: NOW 55 CASES

Mississippi will start its 2020-21 deer season with 55 confirmed cases of chronic wasting disease divided among six counties. A total of 8,487 deer have been sampled since the first case was identified in January 2018 and confirmed a month later.

Most cases are concentrated in two counties in north Mississippi — Benton and Marshall — that border Tennessee in areas where the neighboring state has had an explosion of cases. Benton County has confirmed 33 cases, including seven in 2019 and 26 in 2020. Marshall County has confirmed 16 cases, including nine in 2020.

Issaquena County is a distant third with two cases, one each in 2018 and 2019. Panola, Pontotoc and Tallahatchie counties each had one confirmed case in 2019.

By comparison, Tennessee has confirmed 409 cases in Fayette County just north of Benton County and 144 cases in Hardeman County, just north of Marshall County, over the past two years. Tennessee has confirmed 576 cases in seven different counties.

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OCTOBER'S TOP FISHING SPOTS

Think this month is all about hunting in Mississippi? No way. Try any of these five suggested fishing trips to start your fall fishing excursions.

- **Largemouth bass, Trace State Park.** The lake at this state park outside Pontotoc — a short drive west from Tupelo — recently reopened to fishing after a three-year renovation. Already, the popular fishing hole has shown a return to its status as one of the state's best spots. Larry Pugh, fisheries director for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, said the lake's unique layout allowed it to remain partially filled, keeping a large percentage of its original bass population, which was left alone for 3 years. Once the lake was refilled and restocked, it started producing outstanding fishing right off the bat, especially bass. It's mostly a catch-and-release spot right now, since 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.

- **Catfish, Tenn-Tom Waterway.** When water and — thankfully — air temperatures begin falling, catfish on the Tenn-Tom become extremely active. From the north end of the Tenn-Tom to the Alabama border and beyond, this river system is the place to be. The deeper holes on outside bends are the best places to find trophy blues and flatheads, but you can fish just about anywhere to find keeper channels and blues — 1 to 5 pounds — to fill an ice chest or two. Fish around until you get a bite, then soak that area with baits.

Chances are good you'll stay busy. If you don't, move until you get another bite and sooner or later, you'll hit a sweet spot.

- **Bass on topwater, Barnett Reservoir.** The shad spent all of September beginning their annual migration to shallow water, and on Barnett Reservoir, that means vegetation. Even though the flood in February pushed a lot of vegetation out, and the managing agency has aggressively attacked a rash of the invasive alligator grass, enough lily pads exist that the shad can locate. The bass will follow, and it's a great time to throw plastic frogs and buzzbaits.

- **Bass, Delta oxbows.** Mississippi is blessed with outstanding natural oxbow lakes on its entire western border along the Mississippi River. Some are far inland from the river, like Wolf, Bee and Atchafalaya lakes, but many more are close to the river, like Eagle, Chotard and Albermarle north of Vicksburg and Washington, Lee, Ferguson and Whittington around Greenville. As the water cools, grab some crankbaits and hit the steeper banks, or grab some

Redfish and plenty of other inshore saltwater fish are tearing up along Mississippi's Gulf Coast in October.



Dan Kibler

spinnerbaits or swimbaits and move up around the shallow timber. Find a spring along a bank on a cool October morning, and small plastics can produce a lot of action.

- **Mixed bag, Gulf Coast.** If you're extremely lucky, it might be a flounder. It's more likely to be a redfish or its first cousin, a black drum. It's just as likely to be a speckled trout, or its first cousin, a white trout. There's even a good chance it will be one of those odd-looking but very tasty sheepshead. One thing's for sure: if you put a bait in the water along the Gulf Coast or in the coastal rivers, there's a pretty good bet you're going to get a bite. If you can find live shrimp, use them. If you can't get live bait but know where the bottom-feeders like redfish and black drum, flounder and sheepshead are holding, get frozen (dead) shrimp. Use plastics if you find trout. The key to all of them is moving water. Watch your tide charts. ■

FATHER-SON TEAM BAG RECORD TOM BAILEY BASS

CAROLINA-RIGGED WORM PRODUCES 10.1-POUND LUNKER LARGEMOUTH

By Mike Giles

Everybody knows it is too hot to fish during August's dog days, but Trey and Rhett Tanner a father and son from Meridian, don't believe it. The Tanners fish Lake Tom Bailey near their home several days a week, and they're very successful — never moreso than Aug. 16.

"We got out on the lake just after sunrise," Trey Tanner said. "We started fishing and then decided to pull over to the bank and fish in the shade a while since it was getting hot."

Rhett Tanner, 7, loves to fish about as much as his dad. He was the reason his dad moved to the shade instead of stopping altogether.

"Things were really slow due to the heat, but we didn't want to quit, so we kept fishing," Trey Tanner said. "I've caught several lunker bass at the lake, so we knew there were some big bass in there if we could just coax one into biting."

Tanner practices catch-and-release, so he can feel that thrill that only a trophy sized bass can give you.

"About 9:15, I cast a Carolina-rigged worm out and let it sink on the bottom," he said. "I picked up on it, and it felt like it was hung, so I gave it a tug and felt it move. I set the hook and knew it was a big fish and thought it might be a big cat."

THE BIG REVEAL

As soon as the fish felt the sting of the hook, it exploded through the surface, soaring towards the sky. The bass tailwalked and thrashed back and forth on the surface as Tanner fought the fish. It was nip and tuck for a while, and Rhett Tanner was afraid they were about to lose the monster bass when they finally wore him down.

"I laid down across the boat and grabbed him with both my hands when he got close," Trey Tanner said. "Rhett was speechless for a few minutes, and we were both excited."

When they learned that it was a lake record, they were overjoyed.

Conservation officer Bud Loper said the bass was biggest ever caught from Lake Tom Bailey, weighing in at 10.1 pounds. It was 24 inches long and had a 17-inch girth. ■



Trey Tanner and his son, Rhett, caught a 10.1-pound, lake-record bass on Aug. 16 at Lake Tom Bailey.

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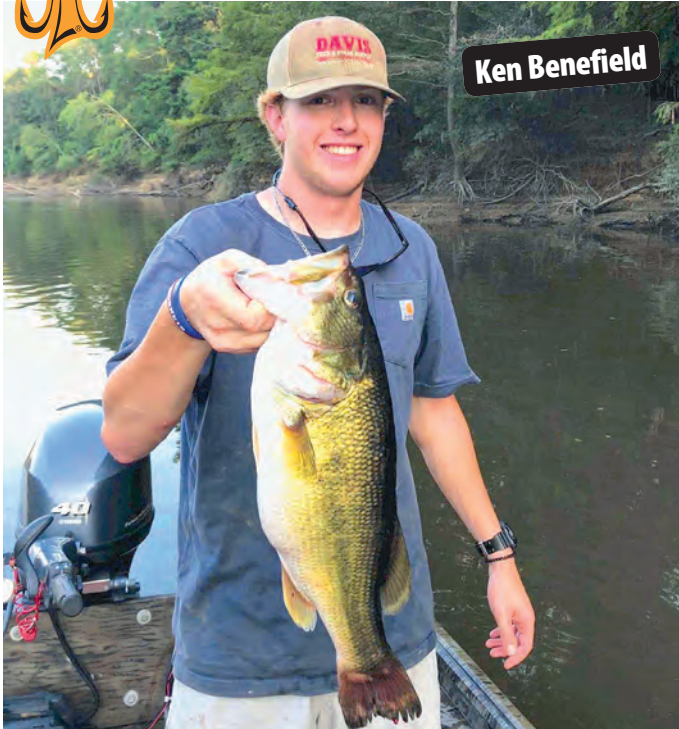
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Ken Benefield

Ken Benefield hooked this 6.7-pound lunker on Aug. 9 in the Pascagoula River.



Stone Kelly

Stone Kelly, 11, of Pass Christian with a nick speck from Cat Island.



Caitlin Kelly

Caitlin Kelly caught and released two nice bull reds on a recent Pass Christian fishing trip.



Kelly Welsh

Katie Welsh of Bay St. Louis took this photo of her father, Kelly Welsh, with some beautiful Mississippi blue crabs.

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

Steve Brown anxiously awaited the day he could hunt one of his choice stands and target a big buck. He knew the intricacies of the buck's whereabouts, including its bedding and feeding areas, as well as the best location to intercept it. He just needed an easterly to northeasterly wind to hunt the stand.

Then, the opportunity arrived, almost without warning, with little time to get to the stand — but time or weather conditions wait for no man. One day, around 2 p.m., the wind shifted and started blowing from the direction he needed to hunt the stand properly.

"As soon as I saw that the wind direction had changed in my favor, I called my godson, Jake Beck, and told him to meet me so that he could film the hunt," said Brown, president of the Mississippi Bowhunters Association. "I was hunting an area that was a working cattle ranch with small thickets, hayfields and grass, surrounded by houses, without much hunting pressure."

Brown, who hails from Starkville, knew where the buck was bedding and spending its time during the day, and he'd patterned him coming through a hole in the neighbor's fence as he made his way to an oak ridge.

"I climbed up the tree, and Jake climbed up and got below me to film the hunt," Brown said. "Just before dark, a small buck fed towards my stand, and then the big buck came in behind him and fed right down the ridge to me."

"The buck fed within range about 30 minutes before dark, and I pulled a fine bead on him and let the arrow fly."

"Thwack!" The arrow smacked the buck right behind the shoulder, and the deer disappeared in an instant. After the shot, it started raining, so Brown got down and found blood and took a compass reading and marked the deer's direction. The shot was true and fatal, but he backed out to return in the morning so he wouldn't push the deer too hard.

"We returned the next morning and found the buck about 80 yards from where we spotted the blood trail," Brown said. "I didn't want to lose a good buck, so we just did the smart thing and came back the next day."

The 10-point buck scored 157 points and was the best Mississippi bowkill for the veteran hunter and guide.

SCOUTING TROPHY BUCKS >



EARLY SEASON BOWHUNTING IS A TIME TO HARVEST DOES FOR THE FREEZER, BUT ALSO A TIME TO TARGET TROPHY BUCKS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN PRESSURED. HERE'S HOW ONE MISSISSIPPI HUNTER FIGURES OUT WHERE THEY ARE, WHERE THEY'RE GOING, HOW THEY'RE GOING TO GET THERE — AND WHERE HE CAN AMBUSH THEM.

GET THE JUMP ON A BIG BUCK

By Mike Giles

SCOUTING TROPHY BUCKS

“Hunting deer with a bow is year-round for me,” said Brown. “I choose to bowhunt all season, and I start scouting in late June, using game cameras in travel corridors. We also do supplemental feeding and use mineral licks to help keep track of the deer. We get a lot of pictures of young bucks and does, and sometimes, I follow those bucks for 5 to 6 years and target the good bucks when they reach maturity.”

Brown wants to know where they're sleeping, eating and going to water. He puts cameras in and around water sources, creeks, streamside management zones and anywhere they travel frequently.

“I love the early bow season patterns,” Brown said. “The secret for me is to figure out where they are bedding. You can use Google Earth to view timber, landscape and focus on one, two or three bucks. Before the acorns start falling, the bucks will be on a late-summer, early fall pattern. They'll bed in the same vicinity every day and have a routine we can exploit.”

Brown goes a step farther than most people, using 20 to 25 trail cameras across his hunting areas and learning nearly

every move the bucks make.

“I'll use the trail cameras to find out the times and direction he's going to travel,” he said. “I have several persimmon trees marked, as well as white oaks and other food sources. I'll employ the cameras along break lines that deer and bucks use to get water or food.”

STAND SETUPS, PLACEMENT

“I love to hunt transition areas and pinch points and set up ambush points to intercept them on their way to where the acorns or fruit are falling,” Brown said. “I make my living guiding and taking hunters, and I've learned a few things in hunting deer, especially mature bucks, all around the country. One of the most-important things I've learned is to minimize your presence in the woods where the bucks live.”

During summer and into fall, Brown visits his camera sites sparingly to keep human scent and intrusion to a minimum.

“When I do check my cameras, I'll usually go in during the hottest part of the day when the deer are bedded down and not moving,” he said. “I'll check those cameras between noon and 2 p.m., so I won't spook any deer.”

Early season bucks are more easily patterned because their only concerns are food, water and cover. You intercept them on their way to and from.





Get your stand well off the ground to keep deer from easily seeing you. Add some concealment whenever it's possible.

With the advent of modern game cameras with cell-phone capability, hunters can see when the deer

come through an area by the time the pictures were taken and sent to a computer or cell phone. This allows Brown to further pattern the deer's travel routes and timing, though nothing is ever certain. The biggest thing about the cameras is that it helps keep human intrusion to a minimum. After you complete the initial work, you might not have to disturb the deer until you actual go in to hunt them.

"Although stand placement is a key part of the equation in harvesting mature bucks, concealment of the stand is just as important," Brown said. "Here in Mississippi, you can't just put up a ground blind and hunt from it like you might in other states; you've got to cover it up and blend it in. I'm still active and in good shape, so I prefer hunting from an elevated tree stand.

"I climb pretty high in the trees and hide my stands in cover. I don't want the stand to be obvious to the deer — or other hunters. I'll primarily use a lock-on stand with stick ladders or a portable stand if I have to move around an area due to a change in deer movement."

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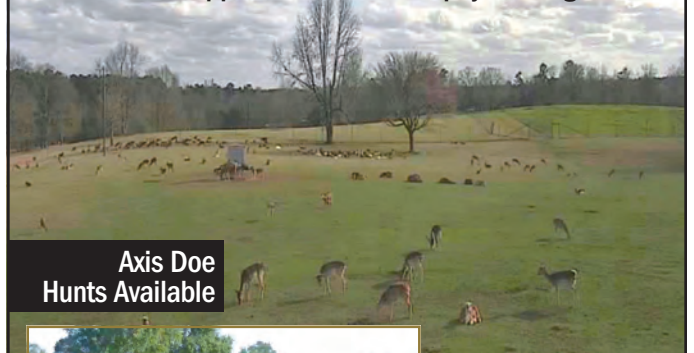
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Steve Brown won't set up a big buck in the early season unless the wind direction is perfect for the stand he wants to sit.

SAFETY FIRST

"I have lost some friends due to tree-stand accidents and know some others who have sustained permanent damage from falls, so I'm going to practice safety first when hanging stands or hunting from stands," Brown said. "I'll put on a safety harness and climb the tree and hang a tether above the stand so that I can climb with a Lifeline tether on the entire time I'm climbing the tree or hunting from the stand until I get back to the ground."

RIDING THE WIND

Brown is meticulous about every aspect of hunting trophy bucks, from locating them, learning their movements and travel routine to the available bedding areas and current food sources, but there's one thing that is most important after everything else has been done.

"No matter what buck I'm after, or how bad I want to hunt

that buck from a particular stand, wind direction is the most-important factor in my plans to hunt a certain buck or stand," Brown said. "I'm not going to spend all summer and fall finding and patterning a buck just to hunt that stand and have him smell me if the wind is wrong. It only takes one mistake to miss out on an opportunity at a mature, trophy buck."

Brown doesn't use any special clothes, scent attractants or scent control when bowhunting, though he does like to keep his scent to a minimum. There's just no way you can guarantee that a buck that comes in downwind will not smell you. He's just not going to take the risk.

"I do wash my clothes in scent-free soap, but there's only one sure way to fool a deer's nose, and that's to be downwind of him," Brown said.

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TAKING DOES

“During October I’m going to concentrate on hunting mature bucks, and if I’m locked down on a good buck, I’m not going to hunt does or shoot them in that area,” Brown said. “Now, my family loves to eat venison, and I’ll shoot does for meat, but I typically don’t harvest them during the early season.”

Brown does advocate that hunters harvest does for population control and will even do some of that himself in October in areas where he has a high deer population where but no bucks in his sights, or in an area where there’s just not any good bucks.

“Sometimes, if the wind is wrong on a certain stand, or if it changes after I’ve planned to hunt one of the stands that I have targeted for trophy bucks, I’ll hunt one of my ‘doe stands’ in another area,

to harvest some meat for the table,” Brown said. ■



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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TAKING AN IMPORTANT STAND

SEVERAL FACTORS ARE BIG KEYS IN FINDING AND SELECTING THAT PERFECT TREE FOR AN ARCHERY STAND FOR DEER. HERE ARE SOME EASY-TO-FOLLOW TIPS.

By Sammy Romano

Deer hunting, especially with archery gear, requires lots of preseason preparation for a successful outcome. Assuming you have your bow dialed in and have taken proper scent-control measures, stand placement is the main factor that will determine your success — or lack thereof.

With today's equipment, a majority of bow hunters are confident in their shooting ability out to at least 30 yards. Keeping that 30-yard maximum range in mind, think about the following:

You have to choose a tree-stand or ground-blind location that deer will pass within a 30-yard radius of, during shooting hours, offering a broadside or quartering away shot, all while totally unaware of your presence. Let's take this one step further and target trophy bucks, or even more specifically, one particular buck. Sound like a tough choice? It most definitely is.

The following are some guidelines for bow-stand placement and strategies I have adopted after 30 years of bowhunting white-tailed deer. By no means do I consider myself an expert; more often than not, the deer win, but I learn something every time I'm in the woods with archery gear, and I'm hoping this will help some of you become more successful.

**IT'S ALL ABOUT
THE GROCERIES >**

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GROCERIES

During early archery season, deer are focused almost entirely on food. They are coming off the late-summer stress period, and they need to consume huge amounts of food to build their bodies up for the upcoming rut and winter. This concentrates deer around food sources such as food plots, agriculture fields and mast trees.

Warmer temperatures cause deer to bed down early in the morning and get up to feed late in the evenings. Due to an abundance of food and cover, deer — especially bucks — rarely travel very far from their beds. This makes morning hunting a losing proposition in most places. It is nearly impossible to get ahead of or around deer that are headed back to bed in the predawn hours without spooking them, which will quickly educate them to the fact they are being hunted. For these reasons, a majority of my early season hunts are in the evening over or near a food source close to a cutover or other thick area. I use mornings to practice shooting or to scout new areas.

FOOD PLOTS

Food plots are great spots to hang a stand for early season bowhunting. Their tender, green growth concentrates deer while offering great visibility and open shots. When hanging a tree stand on a food plot, I try to choose a tree that offers the best opportunity to cover the majority of a small plot or where a larger plot narrows down to funnel deer closer to me. Inside corners are great places for a close shot at a big buck, because they love to slip in and stand just inside of the wood line where they can watch the field on either side of the corner. I look for a tree situated downwind of the plot with easy access. Ideally, I also try to pick a tree where the sun will be behind me as it sets in the evening; it's no fun squinting into the sun all afternoon, and it makes it more difficult for deer to spot you. Try to choose a tree with sufficient cover.

A major problem with sitting on a food plot is leaving your stand undetected at dark when the field is often filled with deer. One good solution is to have a buddy pick you up in a

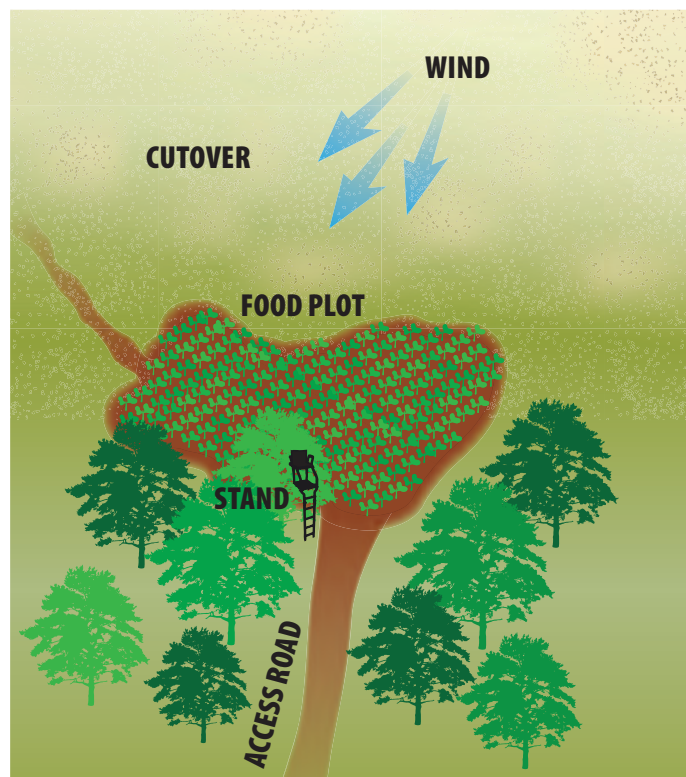




CUTOVERS

Although they are a food source, in that they contain lots of browse, cutovers primarily serve as a bedding area for deer. Many properties have so many food sources, it can be difficult to single one out to hang a stand over. In these cases, hunting the edge of cutovers can be a great strategy.

I try not to penetrate into the cutover very far so I don't spook bedded deer. You want to set up on the downwind side of the cutover. There is often a heavily used deer trail within 20 yards of the inside edge of a cutover, running parallel to the edge.



vehicle so that the vehicle spooks the deer and they don't notice you climbing down. Another trick I have used in recent years is to play a coyote howl on my smart phone. Although this runs the deer off, I believe they think it is random and won't avoid the area in the near future.

MAST TREES

Mast trees, especially oaks, are a big draw for whitetails in the early fall. Acorns contain huge amounts of fat that help deer gain weight rapidly. Because acorns are seasonal in their availability, deer will forsake almost every other food source to feed under a hot oak tree. The problem is, several trees are often dropping at the same time, and choosing the "right" tree on any particular evening can be a matter of luck. Trees that are closer to thickets or cutovers are more likely to see daytime use, so I focus on them. If there are multiple oaks in an area dropping acorns, I try to find a stand tree that offers the opportunity to shoot to as many of them as possible within 30 yards. I always try to put my stand near the tree with the most feeding sign and fresh droppings, but this can change daily, so it can be frustrating.

Soft mast such as persimmons and crab apples can be even better, especially the first week or two that they begin to drop. Resist the temptation to set up right on top of food trees, and try to find a tree 20 yards or farther away to remain unnoticed.

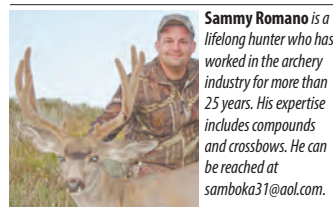
OPPOSITE: Food plots are great places to run into big bucks during the early archery season, because they'll be feeding heavily.

Deer often walk this trail, peering out into the more open woods while remaining in the thicker cover of the cutover. Positioning your stand so that you can shoot to this trail is a great strategy that will greatly increase your shot opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The perfect stand tree is situated 22 yards downwind from the trail or food source, with ample cover, the sun at your back, and easy undetectable access. These trees exist but are the exception rather than the rule. Hanging stands often requires some degree of compromise on one or more of these criteria, but I always try to compromise as little as possible. Put some thought into your stand locations this season, and your success should increase. ■

WHAT MAKES A GREAT STAND TREE? ➤

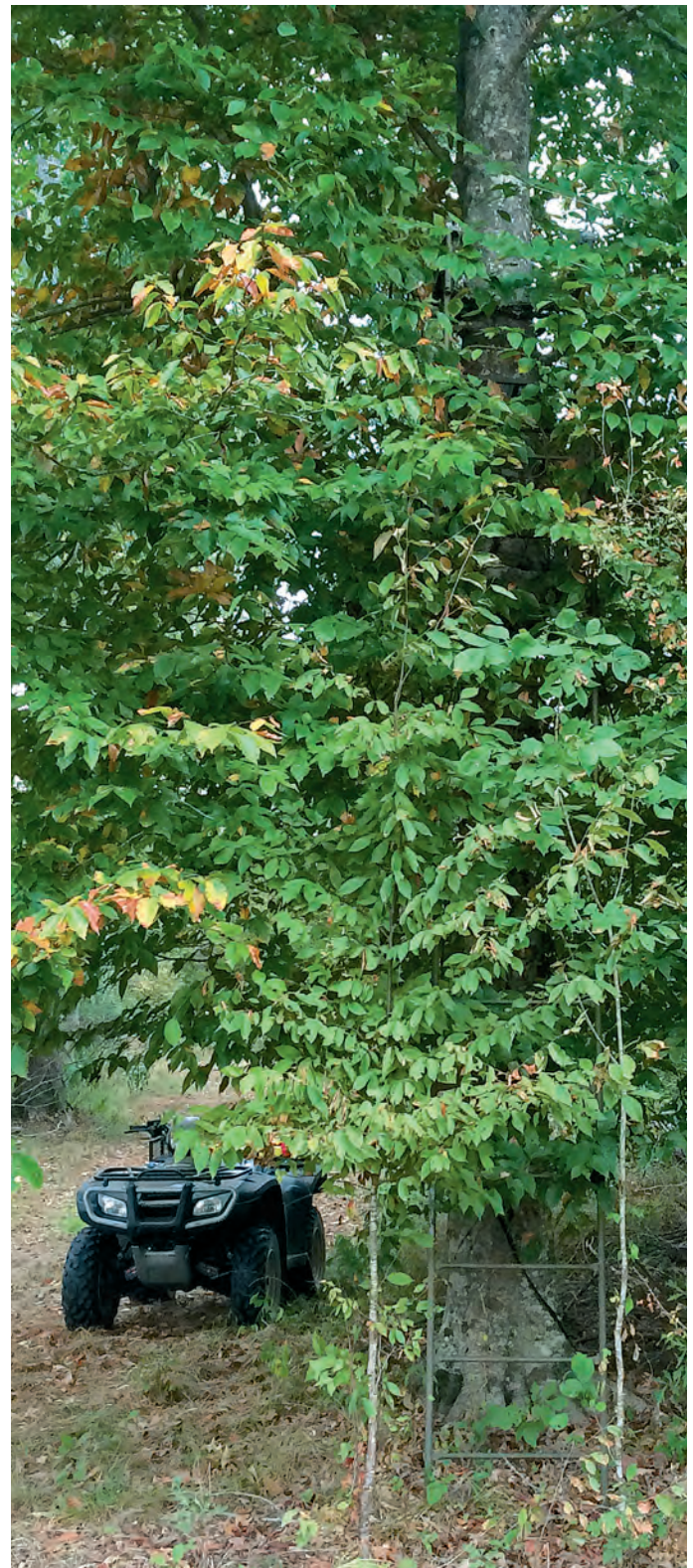


Sammy Romano is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 25 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT **STAND TREE?**

When hanging a tree stand, I primarily focus on four considerations.

- Can I set up with the wind in my favor? There's no sense hanging a stand where the predominant wind is blowing towards the deer; you just can't beat their noses most of the time.
- Can I access AND leave my stand without spooking the deer I'm hunting? It only takes a few encounters on the way to or from your stand for deer to realize they're being hunted, making them avoid your stand area, or even worse become nocturnal.
- Consider the shot angle and distance. I try to pick a tree that will give me the maximum opportunity for a shot at a properly angled deer within 30 yards. This may seem obvious, but I've seen a lot of people compromise on this one, stretching it beyond their comfortable shooting range.
- Does the tree offer sufficient cover to conceal me well enough to draw my bow undetected? Drawing the bow requires a fair amount of motion, and an open tree will result in missed opportunities at the moment of truth. ■



Sammy Romano

Is there enough cover around your tree stand that you can draw your bow undetected?

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SAILING BROADHEADS: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

WHEN YOUR FIELD POINTS SHOOT STRAIGHT, BUT YOUR BROADHEADS WON'T GROUP, EXAMINE YOUR BOW'S SETUP

Even though it was more than 30 years ago, I still remember the first arrow I ever shot at a deer like it was yesterday.

Deer were scarce where I hunted, and my mouth hung open as I watched my arrow shave the white hair from her belly at only 15 yards away. Other than her new haircut, that doe was no worse for the experience, but I was devastated and confused, having just blown a golden opportunity.

My mistake was not shooting my broadheads before hunting. Had I done so, it would have revealed that they were flying poorly and hitting the target 12 to 18 inches low at 20 yards. I learned a hard lesson that day, which is that fixed-blade broadheads always tell the truth, quickly revealing any flaws in the setup of your bow. I vowed to never let it happen again, and it instilled a desire to settle for nothing less than perfect arrow flight.

Fast forward to a recent Tuesday, just after 8 a.m. I had already been at work for several hours, tuning customers' bows, when I received a text message from an unknown phone number asking if I would be at the shop that morning. Since I'm famous for losing/destroying cell phones, I figured it was someone I knew who was no longer programmed in my contacts, so I answered the text.

When the customer arrived just as we opened, I realized I had never met him. He explained that he got my number from a mutual acquaintance, and he had just driven 3 hours seeking my help with a bow-tuning issue. He took a chance that I would be at work, texting me at the halfway point and planning to turn around if I wasn't going to be available.

TAKE NO CHANCES

You might wonder what would make someone so desperate. He had drawn a coveted elk tag in a unit of Wyoming after a 12-year wait. Once he drew the tag, he left nothing to chance; he purchased a new, flagship bow from an archery shop in his hometown, and it shot awesome — with field tips. But when he switched to fixed-blade broadheads, his arrows wouldn't even group at 20 yards and were flying spastically. He returned to the shop where he purchased the bow, but the answer there was "It left here paper-tuned."

Although I was way behind and already had a full schedule, since he was desperate and had driven 3 hours, I agreed to help. I adjusted his bow back to specs, resetting the wheel tim-



ing and arrow rest to the proper alignment and paper-tuning it, but his broadheads still flew wildly. After some thought, I decided his arrows were improperly spined and slightly too stiff. He told me that he had called the manufacturer, and they told him which arrow to shoot, which, according to their charts, was correct. But as I said earlier, broadheads will ultimately tell the truth, often hurting your feelings in the process, and this case was no exception.

I cut him six new arrows, and they immediately solved the problem, with tight groupings of both field points and broadheads to the same point of impact. After some quick sight adjustments, he left satisfied and headed home to shoot at longer ranges. I received a text from him several days later; he was shooting tight groups all the way out to 60 yards.



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.

COMMON PROBLEM

Although it inspired this month's topic, his story is by no means unique. Almost daily this time of year, I have a customer come in distraught because their broadheads do not shoot like their field tips. Although they may weigh the same amount, leading to identical ballistics, the fixed-blade broadhead differs a great deal aerodynamically, because its exposed blades act as a planing surface, magnifying any arrow flight deviations.

Poor broadhead flight is often a symptom of a larger problem in the setup of your bow, your form or both. In a pinch, mechanical broadheads can be a Band-Aid on a bullet wound, but given time, it is always best to fix the underlying issues with your setup.

SYMPTOM, SOLUTION

Other than the obvious problems of improper center shot, nock height, wheel timing and rest timing, arrow spine is probably the No. 1 gremlin when it comes to achieving field point-like accuracy shooting fixed-blade broadheads. Whenever I set up my personal bows, I start with the arrow first, only cutting a couple of shafts. After achieving a good paper tune, I sight the bow in with field tips. Once these are sighted in, I switch to a broadhead target and shoot a fixed-blade head. Assuming it hits close to center, I then "chase it" with a field-point arrow.

If both the broadhead and the field point tipped arrows don't group tightly together, I go back to the drawing board, adjusting and trying different spines until they do. This is the best method I have found. If the two arrows are impacting the target close to each other — within a few inches — but not quite the same, you can make small adjustments by moving your bow's nocking point or center shot slightly towards the broadhead-tipped arrow's point of impact, as compared to the field point arrow. Make sure this doesn't cause the arrow to be drastically out of level or center shot, however, as these can lead to other issues.

Once you have your bow shooting fixed-blade broadheads accurately, then and only then are you truly ready to hunt. A bow that will do this will be more forgiving and shoot any tip you choose to point of impact. Although this often requires a lot of work, the results are more than worth the effort. Archery is a mental game, first and foremost, and knowing that your broadheads will shoot exactly where you point them is key to confidently taking a shot at a trophy animal. ■

COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE >

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

STUFFED VENISON BURGERS

BACON, CHEESE MAKE FALL COOKOUTS A TREAT

Jerry Dilsaver

Welcome to fall. Whether you prefer hunting or fishing, this is absolutely the best season for sportsmen in Mississippi. If you enjoy both, you may miss some days at work, because both are so good it's difficult to choose which one to enjoy on only a day or two off each week.

Other seasons are good, but fall is when the outdoors calls the loudest and strongest. Deer season is one of the most-anticipated hunting seasons, and by October, it is open across the state. Fishing is also top-notch from small streams to the depths of the bluewater.

Fall weather is excellent for having a cookout. If you cook for lunch, you'll probably be more comfortable in shirtsleeves, but as the sun begins to set, the air usually cools enough for an overshirt or light jacket. This is prime time to cook outside. You might even want a small fire in an adjacent fire pit.

Venison is an excellent choice for firing up the grill. It may be fresh venison, or it could be time to prepare the last from the previous season before filling the freezer again. We like burgers, but sometimes we like to fancy them up a bit. This is

especially true when it is burgers made from game.

We are fortunate to be able to enjoy a variety of game and fish, but it's still special. This recipe is for bacon- and cheese-stuffed venison burgers. It is a bit different than laying a slice of cheese and a couple of strips of bacon on top of a burger. We like that, too, but this puts the bacon and cheese inside the burger, and it's different. I believe you'll see.

If you want, you can also melt a slice of cheese on top and even add more bacon. You don't need to, but you can if you like. Bacon and cheese are two things that only your doctor thinks you can enjoy too much.

This is a meal to enjoy outside, especially during the fall. Whether in your back yard or on a deck or patio, there is something special about eating outside, and these venison burgers add to that. Have them on buns if you like, but be prepared to lick your fingers and use a lot of napkins. I like them served hot off the grill on a plate like a hamburger steak with the melted cheese oozing out. It's good both ways, so have it your way. ■

OPPOSITE: Why just put bacon and cheese on top of a burger after it's cooked? Try stuffing your favorite extras and cook them inside the meat.

STUFFED VENISON BURGERS

Most folks like burgers, and this is a way to enjoy them with your favorite fixins — on the inside. They're big, a half-pound or more, but they're good. This is a simple version, as most folks like bacon and cheese, but the list of ingredients you can add is very long. If there is something you like, give it a try. One of my favorites is taco burgers stuffed with salsa and cheese. Maybe we'll give that a shot later, but I wanted to show something simple that appealed to a lot of people.

I started stuffing burgers when my mother-in-law gave me a burger press for Christmas. It helps when making super burgers like this, but they can be formed by hand. There are multiple videos on using a burger press. I've watched plenty, and this draws a little from several of them.

Most instructions say to oil the surfaces of the press that will be touching the burger; it will come out easier; that's good. I line the press with the press-and-seal version of plastic wrap. It isn't as foldy and clingy as regular plastic wrap and holds its shape a little better. I turn the sticky side up towards the burger and push the smooth side down into the press, leaving some hanging out all around. It allows the burger to form to the shape of the press, and when the burger is finished, you lift the wrap and it comes right out. Use the same piece of wrap for all your burgers.

Some versions of the recipe don't use onions or mixes them in the cavity with the bacon and cheese. I wanted to spread the taste throughout, especially since I was sautéing them in the bacon grease. That's why I chop the onions

PREPARATION:

Chop the onion pretty fine. Fry the bacon softly done, remove it from the pan and crumble. Drain the bacon grease until it's barely covering the bottom of the pan. Lightly sauté the onion to break its glaze. Beat the eggs. Mix the venison, egg, bread crumbs, onion, Liquid Smoke, salt and pepper.

Form the bottom half of the burger using a burger press with a stuffed burger adapter. If you do not have a burger press, make an approximate ½-pound burger with an approximate ½-inch deep cavity that runs to within a half-inch of the outer wall. Fill the cavity with bacon crumbles and shredded cheese.

Form another thin burger the same diameter using the burger press or by hand. Place the second burger over the burger with the filled cavity and press the burgers together into a single burger.

Spray the grill grate or a grill tray liberally with non-stick cooking spray. Preheat the grill to medium. Place the burgers on the grill and lay a sheet of aluminum foil over them. Cook the burgers until the bottoms are almost done and the tops is beginning to show it is cooking. This is 10 to 12 minutes on my grill for a medium doneness. Turn the burgers and cook the second sides, again with the sheet of aluminum foil laying over them. This should not take as long as the first sides. This is 8 to 10 minutes on my grill for a medium doneness. Less cooking time will make the burger more rare, and more cooking time will take it to well done. Remove the burgers and serve them hot.

You can make these burgers a bit thinner so they can be served

finer and mix them in.

Speaking of fine chopping, I use an Ulu to chop them. An Ulu is a curved-blade knife used by the Inuit, Yupik and Aleut peoples of the Alaskan and arctic regions. I saw one used in Alaska years ago, and I picked one up. It's amazing, and I'm learning more about it every time I use it.

I rarely suggest adding salt, but this recipe can use a little. I am heavy on the pepper; I think it sets off the bacon taste. As with any recipe offered, use ingredients to your personal taste. This is simply a good basic recipe to get you to try this.

The ingredients list includes a half-cup of shredded cheese and doesn't specify which. Use your favorite. I used cheddar cheese on two burgers and pepper jack on a third. It isn't on the ingredients list, but the one with pepper jack got a shot of Texas Pete Cha Sauce before being closed up.

Make these burgers to your personal preference. It easy to tailor them to individual tastes. Experiment, have fun and enjoy! ■

TIP!

Try covering a burger with a sheet of aluminum foil on the grill, not wrapped, but laid over it. It will cook throughout without charring the ends.

INGREDIENTS:

2 pounds ground venison

2 eggs

4 to 6 pieces of bacon

½ sweet onion

½ cup shredded cheese (your choice of flavor or multiple flavors)

½ cup plain bread crumbs

½ tsp Liquid Smoke

Salt and pepper (to taste)

Aluminum foil

The finished product is a tasty, fall treat.



Jerry Dilsaver

on buns, but if you eat them while they're good and hot, they may be a little runny from the melted cheese. They are fun to eat but can be messy. They are easier served on a plate as a hamburger steak, and you can add your favorite steak sauce or a dollop of ketchup. A salad or lettuce wedge is a good way to begin and corn on the cob, a baked potato or mashed potatoes are good choices for a side. ■

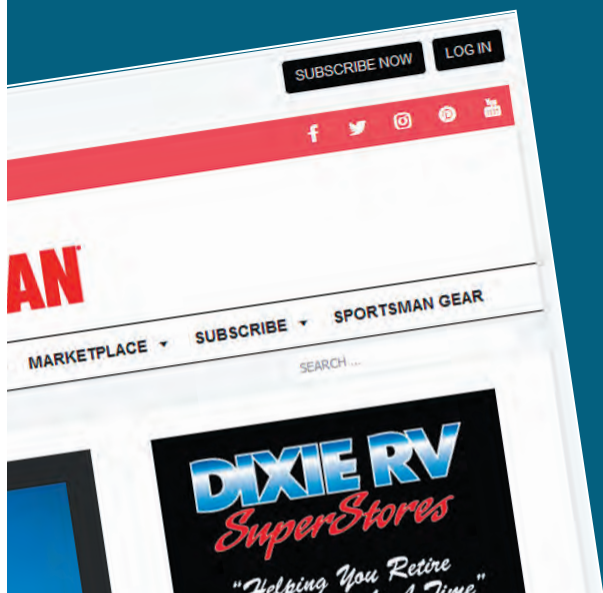


Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., is a freelance writer, as well as a former national king mackerel champion fisherman. Readers are encouraged to send their favorite recipes and a photo of the completed dish to possibly be used in a future issue of the magazine. E-mail the recipes and photos to Jerry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

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HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 5-Oct. 18 (n), Sept. 5-20 (s)	15	45
	Oct. 24-Nov. 21 (n), Oct. 10-Nov. 8 (s)		
	Dec. 23-Jan. 8 (n), Dec. 19-Jan. 31 (s)		
Quail	Nov. 26-March 6	8	
Rabbit	Oct. 17-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (fall)	Oct. 1-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (spr)	May 15-June 1	4	
Raccoon	July 1-Sept. 30	1 raccoon per party	
Rac/Opp/Bobct	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport)	5/day, 8/party	
	Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	No limit	
Rails			
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
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28	8	24
Crow	Nov. 7 - Feb. 28	No limit	No limit
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9
Wild Turkey			
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
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 12-27	6
	Nov. 27-29, Dec. 4-6	6
	Dec. 9-Jan. 31	
Geese	Sept. 1-30	5
(Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Nov. 13-29, Dec. 4-6,	Canada 3, Brant 1
	Dec. 9-Jan. 31	Snow/blue/Ross 20 White-fronted 3
Light Geese conservation	Oct. 1-Nov. 12, Feb. 1-5, Feb. 8-March 31	No limit

DEER SEASON

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



Hunters must think about many things before heading back to the deer woods or the duck blind. None are more important than a simple reminder from Matt Branch of Monroe, a former LSU football player who almost lost his life in a tragic hunting accident two years ago: “This could happen to you.”

It was 10 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 28, 2018, when Branch and a few friends had picked up their duck decoys to move to another spot on a family farm near Mississippi’s Eagle Lake. As he stood on a levee, a group of ducks came his way. He slipped a single shell into his shotgun, but the ducks never made it into range.

One member of his hunting party pulled up in a Ranger ATV, and Branch put his gun down in the cargo box and walked around to the side of the vehicle. The group’s Labrador retriever, Tito, finished retrieving a couple of ducks from the field and jumped in the back of the ATV. When he did, he stepped on the gun’s safety, disabling it. In another instant, the dog’s paw accidentally pulled the shotgun’s trigger, sending a load of No. 2 steel shot through the side of the ATV and into the inside of Branch’s left leg from 6 inches away.

A HARD LESSON

■ By Kinny Haddox

**FORMER LSU FOOTBALL
PLAYER IS PREACHING HUNTER
SAFETY LESS THAN TWO
YEARS AFTER ACCIDENT THAT
ALMOST TOOK HIS LIFE.**

“That’s something we all know: never leave your gun loaded,” Branch said.

“I don’t know of another time I ever left a shell in my gun. Any time I go to the deer stand or into the duck blind, 999 times out of a thousand, my gun is even going to be in the case. One time. That one time got me. I forgot that shell was in the gun, and it was just crazy what happened next.”

Being inside the back of the Ranger, the sound of the gun was muffled. It just sounded like a loud pop. Matt remembered someone yelling, “*What was that?*” and he looked down and saw a coffee can-sized hole in the side of the ATV, right by his leg.

“It’s so strange. I never felt a thing at first,” he said. “Obviously, when I saw the hole in the Ranger right by my leg, I figured I might be hit. When I tried to step back, my left leg didn’t move. I stumbled and fell. Then the adrenalin rush hit me. I knew I had been shot. Next came the pain, then the sudden drop in blood pressure. I don’t remember much else.”

Thanks to the quick thinking of his hunting companions, who called 911 and got him to the nearest highway to be picked up, quick actions by local first responders and medical teams at the hospital, Branch survived. He has only brief memories of the next 12 days as he struggled to stay alive from the tremendous

loss of blood and tissue damage.

Branch has had to make a lot of decisions since then, but none are more important than the decision to use his experience in a positive way, every chance he can, to reinforce hunting safety to others. He does every interview requested. He stops and talks about it with anyone who asks. He has made numerous talks to groups and, although he was interrupted by the pandemic, he plans to resume those talks as soon as it is safe for people to gather.

“I just want everyone to know that you can handle a gun correctly hundreds and hundreds of times, but one slip-up can change your life forever,” he said. “Know that once your gun fires a bullet, it can’t be called back. If there is a shell in the gun, anything can happen. Never be complacent.”

His other lessons for hunters? Always treat a gun like it is loaded. That’s just another basic hunter-safety item. And when a gun is loaded, never leave it unattended. Never take chances and never lose focus long enough to even leave one shell in the gun even one time. Never be shy to be the guy or gal that reminds everybody to take extra safety precautions. Never take it for granted. It’s simply not worth it.

Matt Branch sits in a Ranger similar to the one he laid his gun in and was accidentally shot two years ago.



Within a year of his near-fatal accident, Matt Branch was back in the woods and killed this big buck.



LESSONS LEARNED NOT GOING TO WASTE

We learn many lessons and grow in ways we often don't even understand from trips outdoors and hunting adventures. Matt Branch of Monroe has hunted his whole life and has learned those kind of lessons as well.

But he also learned a couple that he hopes nobody ever has to learn the way he did.

When he was shot in a freak accident on a duck hunt almost two years ago, he was embarrassed by what happened. He knew better, and he had practiced better his whole life, but that one time was all it took to change his life.

"When I woke up and came to, I was embarrassed by what happened," he said. "It was my fault it happened, but I had a choice right there. I could have gone and hidden and told people I didn't want to talk about it again, or I could find ways to help benefit others so maybe it would not happen to them. I couldn't change what happened to me, but I couldn't help others if I didn't tell my story. I hope the impact is going to help somebody else down the road."

The second lesson was already one that he knew, but the accident renewed his beliefs and gave him strength.

"I just decided to trust God in this process and fall in line without question to what I feel like He is leading me to do. I can't tell you how many doctors and others told me I probably would never walk again. But I did. And it was my faith in Him and belief that I could do anything that helped me through this." ■

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As Branch shared his story, he has heard from other hunters who have had similar experiences but were fortunate because no one was hit by an accidental shot. He wasn't so lucky. His injuries almost took his life and have left him with a prosthetic leg. That followed an amputation called a hip disarticulation; a majority of people who have that surgery never walk again, but Branch was determined, and today, uses that leg like he was born with it. He has conquered it, not the other way around.

There were days in the hospital bed when he wondered if he would walk again, hearing from many doctors that the prognosis was not good. But he fell back on the days when he was at

that into a disabled hunter event," Branch said. "They did a fantastic job. I plan on going back this year. They work with anybody with a disability: kids, adults, veterans. It takes these folks' minds off the everyday challenges of life. To see the smile come across their face when they really need it, that's something I feel drawn to now. I feel like I need to return the favor to them, because so many have done that for me. I'd encourage other hunters to try and help in this cause."

Branch is motivated because of his family: wife Liana, 3-year-old son Barrett and a new daughter, Charlotte Ann, born in August, his other family and friends and what he sees that he can do to help others.

"I won't lie. It's been tough. It is tough," he said. "There were many, many mornings early on that I didn't want to get out of bed, but then I'd snap out of it. I realized I have a lot of things to do."

Nobody has watched and marveled at Branch's journey to his "new normal" more than his father, Mark Branch, who sat by his hospital bed and had to tell the strapping, former football star that doctors had to take his leg to save his life.

"Of course, we are all proud of all of our kids, but Matt's done something pretty special. I see a man who has worked hard, prayed hard and tried to do the very best he can under some very adverse circumstances," Mark Branch said. "The picture that was painted for us was bleak. Most people that have this surgery never walk again. They are bound to a wheelchair. Matt wasn't going to allow that to happen."

"Having a prosthetic leg is hard on anybody, but because of his size, it was an added challenge. He's done so well. He's had so many people praying for him and encouraging him. The bottom line through this is that I have seen what God can do.

What He has done is truly a miracle."

No chapter could document Branch's undying spirit more than a deer hunt last year, the year after his accident. He went out on his own and shot a full-sized buck. When his younger brother, Connor, rode up, he offered to help Matt get the deer and put it in the back of the truck, he was too late. Matt had already done it.

"I still don't know how he did that," Mark Branch said. ■

DISABLED HUNTERS GAINING ATTENTION ▶

Matt Branch and Westin Jenkins, founder of Disabled Outdoorsman USA with a limit of ducks from last season.



LSU as a 6-foot-6, 290-pound offensive lineman. Tommy Moffitt the conditioning coach, put them through rigorous drills, and as they lined up to do one more, he would yell, "Nobody's going to die out here today." So Branch kept working in rehab as he had football. And he focused on his family.

His story went viral, mainly because he was an LSU football player. Prosthetist David Rotter in Joliet, Ill., reached out and offered to help, building Branch a custom prosthetic leg that got him on his way to recovery.

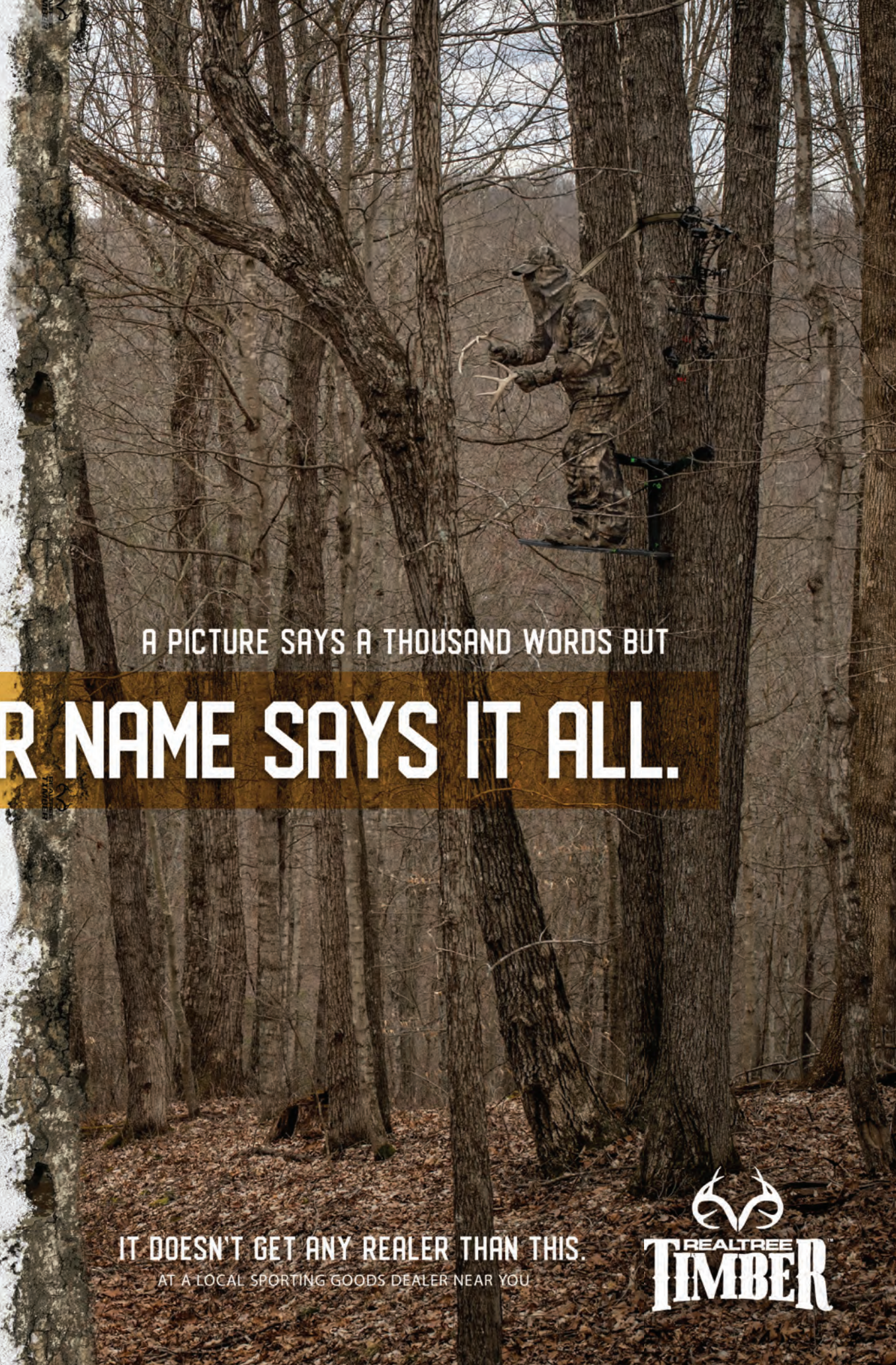
Branch is committed not only to sharing his story, but also to working with groups that promote outdoor experiences for disabled hunters. One of those is Disabled Outdoorsmen USA.

"I got invited up to make a duck hunt with guide Jim Stafford and Central Kansas Outfitters last November, and we turned



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

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DISABLED HUNTERS GAINING ATTENTION

Numerous groups are dedicated to helping disabled individuals learn to hunt or fish, or to be able to continue to enjoy the outdoors after a terrible accident. Here are just a few:

Disabled Outdoorsmen USA: A non-profit organization created for the people who refuse to give up their dreams of living in the outdoors and use the outdoors as therapy to help cope with their disability. Learn more at <https://shop.disabledoutdoorsmen.com/>

Louisiana Hunters for Heroes: A non-profit organization that assists our veterans by taking them on guided hunting and fishing trips and offering fellowship and assistance to those in need. Learn more at <https://www.louisianahuntersforheroes.org/>

Wheelin' Sportsmen: Wheelin' Sportsmen is part of the National Wild Turkey Federation, which recognizes the need to help people



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with disabilities enjoy the outdoors by participating in hunting and shooting sports. Learn more at <https://www.nwtf.org/about/hunting-heritage/wheelin-sportsmen>

Kidz Outdoors: This group's mission is forming bonds by linking family and friends to pass on our passion for the outdoors to a new generation. and raising funds for hospitals and research centers in hope to find cures for cancer and other childhood diseases. Learn more at <https://www.kidzoutdoors.org/>

Outdoors Without Limits: Outdoors Without Limits promotes awareness and teamwork between disabled and non-disabled individuals through education and outdoor recreational activities. Learn more at <https://outdoor-swithoutlimits.net/>

Buckmasters American Deer Foundation: Buckmasters is dedicated to aiding members of our outdoor community who are in need of assistance, whether it's putting food on the table, making the sport of hunting accessible to a disabled hunter or thanking our American military heroes for their service to our country. Learn more at <http://www.buckmasters.com/Resources/BADF> ■

Now that the hottest part of the year is behind us, it's time to consider options for outdoors pursuits. Many sportsmen will be opting to spend the fall glassing the woods and fields in search of a trophy whitetail buck, while others may be making plans for the fall waterfowl migration.

On Mississippi's lakes and waterways, the crowd is decidedly thin, and that's a good thing, no, a great thing for crappie anglers. It's hard to put fall crappie in a particular pattern like we tend to do in the spring, when all things point toward the spawn. In fall, it's a variety of both biological and environmental factors that determine where and how crappie will behave.

These factors include available cover and structure, water currents, clarity and levels, and finally, what tactics are best suited to target crappie in the fall.

Let's take a look at some more in-depth discussions of the factors that will help you catch more slabs this fall.

HEAD FOR COVER >

LEARN WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE THE MOVEMENT OF CRAPPIE ONCE SUMMER IS A MEMORY. IT WILL HELP YOU PUT MORE SLABS IN THE COOLER WHEN YOU STEP OUT OF THE DEER STAND OR DUCK BLIND AND INTO THE BOAT.

■ By Phillip Gentry

FALL SLAB FACE-OFF



HEAD FOR COVER

During much of the year, anglers can rest assured that crappie — in many cases, both black and white crappie — will be oriented to man-made brush piles and planted cover in mid-water depths, especially in a clear-water impoundment. Joel Harris, a Tenn-Tom area crappie guide, said it's the most reliable place to find crappie.

"Here on Bay Springs and on a lot of clear-water lakes around the country, crappie are going to be oriented to brush piles all-year long," Harris said. "On cloudy days, they may range 10 to 15 feet out on either side of the cover, and on sunny days, they may be buried down in it, but they'll always be somewhere close."

When Harris said the brush piles he's referring to are stands of sunken trees or tree tops and limbs he has strategically planted in areas that will be suitable to crappie.

When fishing these locations, Harris employs a variation of the side-pulling technique made famous on nearby Pickwick Lake.

"I fish from a War Eagle boat designed for side-pulling," he said. "I instruct my clients to lay their rods flat on the side deck of the boat, not in a rod holder. Then, it's just watching that tip for any movement. If it moves at all, set the hook."

Fishing vertically in clear water necessitates some stealth in terms of fishing line. Harris picks 4-pound Gamma fluorocarbon, which is matched with a tiny, 1/64-ounce Trout Magnet jighead and a Trout Magnet body. To hold the bait deep, he crimps a No. 5 split-shot about 18 inches above the bait.

"The boat is not moving," said Harris. "I hold it in place using the Spot Lock feature on my trolling motor. The baits are just down there hanging."

The combination of light line, tiny baits and placement right in their living room is typically too much for crappie to pass up. It's a pattern that Harris said will last through the summer and fall, even through the winter as fish take up residence on these sites.

FIND THE CURRENT

In many lakes, fall means lakes that have stratified and will start turning over. The turnover can last several weeks, depending on the location, and the water that's turning often scatters crappie or puts them in an ill mood. Angler Brad Taylor of Greenville suggests finding some current, either water coming into the lake or areas where water is moving because of 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," he 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."

Oxbows in the fall may or may not have current in them, and that's a factor that will determine how good the crappie fishing is.



Guide Joel Harris said the most-consistent location to find crappie in the fall is around strategically located brush piles and man-made cover.

Courtesy Joel Harris



In areas of modest or temporary current, crappie will often use available structure to break the flow of the current and provide them with both rest and ambush points. One noticeable advantage in areas that provide current compared to 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.

TRY SOME FAST-TROLLING >

2019-20 MISSISSIPPI FISHING REGULATIONS

Not an official document. Refer to MDWFP's official regs guide, www.dmr.ms.gov, or www.mdwfp.com.

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.

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

Guide Brad Whitehead prefers a single jig pole to haul Lake Pickwick crappie out of brush tops during the fall.



Courtesy Brad Whitehead

WATCH THE WATER

Fall fishing for crappie can be a time of feast or famine as water temperatures begin to descend, as well as additional climatic factors such as lake levels, water flows and baitfish migration. One factor that many crappie anglers may overlook is the color of the water, or more specifically, the clarity of the water.

Water clarity can and does vary from lake to lake, based on geographic factors. Grenada, a water-control lake, comes to mind; it may remain murky, turbid or even muddy the majority of the year, while a lake with a sandy or rocky bottom, like Pickwick, may remain clear most of the year.

Pro angler Rod Wall spends much of his time long-line trolling jigs behind the boat. His success depends greatly upon where crappie are holding in the water column.




“In the fall, after the lake turnover, fishing can be tough, especially if we get dry spells with little freshwater coming through the system,” Wall said. “In clear water, crappie will tend to hold tight to cover, and that’s not a best-case scenario for me to catch them long-lining. I’d much prefer to see them up in the water column chasing baitfish.”

Like deer hunters begging for rain to water food plots, Wall does rain dances in October and November, hoping that a late-season tropical depression brings several days of soaking rains to an area he wants to fish.

“It’s kind of the reverse of the spring,” said Wall, “when crappie are anxious for warmer water to flow in. In the fall, the main body water is practically dead; it’s hot, there’s no oxygen, and water washing in from a creek is like a fresh breeze on a hot day.” ■



Phillip Gentry, who hunts for everything that moves and fishes for everything that swims, is host of “The Outdoor Show,” a weekly radio podcast that can be seen at www.pgandboatgirl.com.

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GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Fishery biologist Aaron Gray holds a bass that grew to 11 pounds in only four years after stocking only female bass into Georgia's newly flooded Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area.



LET THE GIRLS PLAY

GEORGIA'S EXPERIMENT STOCKING ONLY FEMALE BASS IS AN EXPENSIVE BUT TREMENDOUS SUCCESS

Photos courtesy Tim Bonvechio, Georgia DNR

A common goal in contemporary fishery management is providing anglers the opportunity to catch trophy largemouth bass.

A common problem in small-impoundment management in southern states is bass crowding: an overabundance of small, slow-growing largemouth bass. Stocking only female bass sounds like a strategy to provide both trophy bass and reduce bass crowding. But does it work?

THE PILOT PROJECT

Tim Bonvechio and Joseph Rydell, fisheries biologists with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, tested all-female bass stocking in the Ocmulgee Public Fishing Area. Ocmulgee, like other PFAs in Georgia, is intensively managed to provide high fish production, but in this case, the biologists wanted to try to produce trophy largemouth bass sought by area anglers.

The new, 106-acre reservoir was stocked with five female first-generation hybrid

northern X Florida largemouth bass per acre in 2005 and 2006. Bluegill, redear sunfish, channel catfish, golden shiners, threadfin shad and lake chubsuckers were stocked as sport and forage fish.

Bass were sampled by volunteer anglers and electrofishing. Growth of the bass was fast; almost all had grown to 18 inches by age 3 and 20 inches by age 4.

Male largemouth bass were first collected in electrofishing samples in 2009, and there was evidence of bass reproduction when the lake was drained in 2012. Some of the male bass may have originated from a small pond within the Ocmulgee PFA drainage, but at least a few of the male bass were individuals that were mistakenly identified as females at the time of stocking.

The experiment produced the trophy bass anglers desired. It took anglers 3.76 hours to catch a bass weighing more than 5 pounds, 7.35 hours to catch a bass heavier than 8 pounds, and 53.25 hours to catch a bass of 10 pounds or better.

One 13.25-pound bass was captured by electrofishing.

EXPENSIVE SUCCESS

Success didn't come cheap. The purchase of hybrid bass fingerlings from a private hatchery was a relatively small cost. The bass then had to be reared to 10 inches so they could be reliably sexed and have high survival after stocking. This required almost a year of personnel time and the use of hatchery ponds to rear the bass and the forage fish needed by the bass to grow to 10 inches. Then, only about half the fish were females usable for stocking into Ocmulgee — the males were stocked elsewhere.



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

Bonvechio and GDNR must think so, because they are repeating the effort. The lake basin remained dry from 2012 until it was refilled in 2016. Forage fish were stocked, followed by bass, but this time, the lake was stocked with all-female progeny of native Georgia largemouth bass that have 70% to 100% Florida bass genetics.

So far, the results have been outstanding. Recaptured bass have grown to more than 8 pounds in 3 years, 11 pounds in 4 or 5 years, and one 4-year-old fish pulled the scale to 13 pounds. Bonvechio has detected a small amount of bass reproduction.

The almost-unbelievable results are a consequence of stocking all-female bass with a high level of Florida bass genetics. Biologists know that only the female Florida bass grows larger than 20 inches and 5 pounds, but Bonvechio suggested other factors also are likely in play. For starters, the bass were stocked into a newly filled lake, and a lot of terrestrial and lowland vegetation was flooded when the lake refilled. This vegetation provided fish habitat, nutrients and a lot of food for invertebrates that, in turn, are food of fishes that feed bass.

The stocked forage fish were rapidly expanding their populations into their new and empty home, so the female bass had plenty to eat. As in 2004, the forage stocked included lake chubsuckers, a native fish found to be a preferred forage of trophy Florida bass in Florida lakes and a fish that should benefit from the flooded terrestrial vegetation.

LOOKING AHEAD

Management challenges lie ahead. If the limited bass reproduction persists, which is the desired outcome, additional female bass with Florida bass genetics will need to be stocked. Considering the cost of these fish and that only the female bass have trophy potential, catch-and-release is essential to sustain the trophy fishery.

This finite bass population also offers a perfect chance to evaluate changes in catchability of trophy bass over time and with continued fishing effort. ■



FRUITS OF HIS LABOR:

Tim Bonvechio, a fisheries biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, collected this 13-pound female "mostly Florida" bass from Ocmulgee Public Fishing area.

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The advertisement features a large central image of a blue Gator Trax boat with a thatched roof, floating on a lake. The text is overlaid on the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below the main image, there are two smaller inset images: one showing a boat on a trailer and another showing a boat with people on it. The background of the bottom half of the ad has a green, textured pattern.

LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

Bogue Homa bass are shallow in October, beginning to chase baitfish. Paul Elias catches them on a variety of baits around cypress trees and submerged vegetation.

BOGUE HOMA'S OCTOBER BASS

SPEND SOME TIME ON THIS EXCELLENT BASS FISHERY, ENJOY THE AUTUMN ACTION

Bogue Homa is a productive lake to fish during a transition month like October. It's relatively shallow, the vegetation is dying and the baitfish are moving into shallow water.

By this time, you can access more water that you can't reach during the warmer months. One boat lane in the center of the lake allows you to drive to the lake's better fishing areas. I'll turn off that main boat lane and go to the grass lines on the north side of the lake.

THE BLADED JIG

I like to fish with a 7-foot-4, heavy plus FX custom rod with a moderate tip that prevents you from setting the hook too fast when the bass takes the bait but has the power to keep the bass from getting deep in the grass and hanging up. With this rod, I use a Bruin ELS baitcasting reel with 30-pound bass braid for the main line and a 14- to 18-inch leader of 40-pound mono. Since Bogue Homa is fairly clear in October, I feel like I get more bites when I have a monofilament leader tied to my braid instead of tying the jig straight to the braid.



My main bait is a bladed jig that I cast around the sparse grass and open lanes in the grass to take numbers of bass. I like two different colors of bladed jigs tied on two rods a ¼-ounce white-on-white jig and a ¾-ounce black-blue jig. I'll use the same rod, reel and line with both lures.

Bogue Homa has plenty of targets to fish, including cypress trees, lily pads, coontail moss, eelgrass and other vegeta-

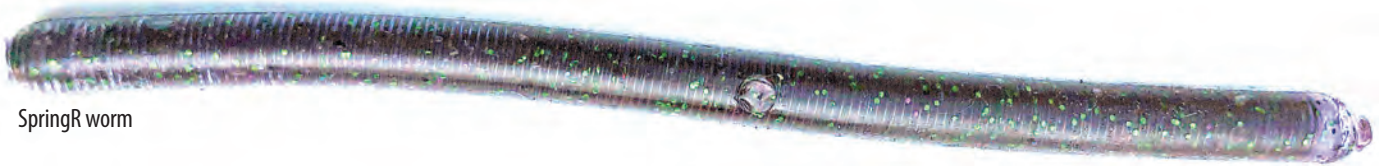
tion, as well as stumps. I'll start off fishing the grass-line edges with and then fish it around the cypress trees.

Although I'll cast straight to the trunks of these trees, I'll keep my boat well away so I don't spook bass holding there. Then, I'll continue my retrieve through the cypress knees that may be 5 to 6 feet away from the trunks. My first few casts will be with both colors of the bladed jig, but then I'll know exactly what color will produce the most bass.

Once the bass quit hitting the bladed jig, I'll fish a green pumpkin Mann's SpringR worm rigged wacky style with a weedless hook on a 6-foot-8, medium action FX custom rod with a spinning reel and 15-pound bass braid and 10-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon leader in the same places I've fished the bladed jig.



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.



SpringR worm

SPOOKY OCTOBER

October is a month when bass like to school. I'll have a Zara Spook and a Pop-R tied onto two rods — both 6-foot-8 medium-action FX custom rods — on my casting deck. I'll fish with an ELS Bruin 8:1 spinning reel, 20-pound bass braid and a 20-pound mono leader. I'm fishing this lighter line with bigger topwater lures to make long casts to the schooling bass chasing baitfish. Once again, if the topwater lures quit producing, I'll follow up with a SpringR Worm in the same color as before, rigged wacky style.

I'll also fish the Baby 1-Minus in the shad color on the same rod and reel with which I fish the topwater lures. Any place I see 6 inches to a foot of open water above the grass, I'll fish the Baby 1-Minus there.



Baby 1-Minus

FALL TACTICS

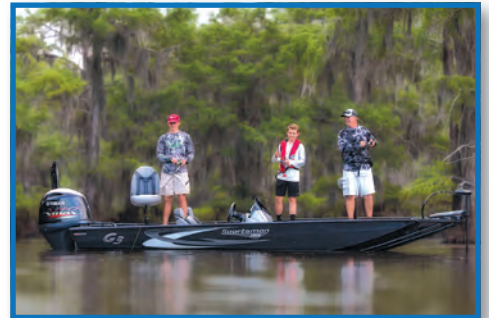
While I'm fishing, I'll continue to change baits until I find the one bait that the bass like best. After fishing down the grass lines and around the trees, I'll make notes of where I've caught the most bass. Next, I'll pick three or four locations with actively feeding bass. Then, I'll turn around and go back down the grass line, only stopping to fish at the spots that I've fished earlier and have had success.

At these places where you've gotten bites, you may notice more baitfish seem to be holding there than on other sections of the bank. Because Bogue Homa is an 882-acre lake, you can fish the entire northern shore in a day — or perhaps a fraction of a day — and set up a milk run on the spots that have produced the most bass that day.

Sometimes you'll catch and release 15 bass in a day, although most of them may not be keepers. Bogue Homa has a 15-inch size limit on the five bass per day you can keep. Still, several of those bass may be 3- to 8-pounders. Catching that many bass of that size in a day is why I like to fish Bogue Homa in October. ■

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YAMAHA

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



GORILLA BUZZ

ARKANSAS LURE DESIGNER HITS A HOMER WITH THIS LURE

Photos courtesy Derward Mauldin

Buzzbait aficionados and bass have been going ape over the Gorilla Buzz since it was introduced four years ago by Prototype Lures after being designed by Derward Mauldin, an Arkansas lure designer.

Mauldin, a hairstylist by trade and an angler his whole life, is oh-so proud of the Gorilla Buzz, which he put all of his bassing know-how into around 2016.

Prototype Lures has a fitting slogan for the Gorilla Buzz: “Don’t be monkeying around when you have time to catch a gorilla.”

Mauldin repeated another slogan and said, “The Gorilla Buzz is designed to catch gorilla bass. Now get out and get you some.”

LET’S GET SMALL

Don’t think lightly of the smallest of the four Gorilla Buzz baits, the 1/8-ounce model.

“It’s probably the biggest hidden secret of this line,” he said. “I had a pro, who’s sponsored by other people, who called it ‘power fishing with a finesse touch.’”

Mauldin lives and breathes topwater fishing.

“I have been a topwater man my whole life. There’s nothing more exciting than a fish blowing up on topwater,” he said.

Mauldin began throwing buzzbaits during his early teens with his father and brother. They gave him a buzzbait tied to line strong enough to pull in a mule, well, a tree limb or two.

He loved fishing and catching bass with a buzzbait. He learned their ins and outs and how to fish them. Soon, he had a good idea of what it takes to make a productive sputtering topwater like a buzzbait.

“There’s quite a few different buzzbaits out there,” he said.

The Gorilla Buzz was designed to have a metallic squeaking sound with an audible knock if the angler prefers to bend the wire so the blade touches the flat head. The elongated, flat head is the key to getting the buzzbait up with one to three cranks of the reel.

It features a long, stainless steel hook, either 4/0 or 5/0, and a barbed keeper to keep a soft-plastic trailer in place.

It’s all according to plan, one developed through many years of experience.

BLADE TRIALS

“As a fisherman, I’m always thinking how I can adopt each lure to your type of fishing,” Mauldin said. “I’ve played with buzzbaits and blades probably 10, 15 years. I’ve got the blade the way I want it, the bend, pitch, size and thickness. On a buzzbait, I wanted a bait to come up quick, I wanted it to move a lot of water (minus a lot of splash) and I wanted it to create a lot of noise.”

Gorilla Buzzes are available in 1/8-, 1/4-, 3/8- and 1/2-ounce models. The 1/4-, 3/8- and 1/2-ounce buzzbaits are 4 inches long; the 1/8-ounce model is 3 inches.

Width and thickness of the blades were designed for each of those sizes, Mauldin said. The intent was to get as many revolutions of the blades as possible.



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.

Derward Mauldin put all his experience into making a buzzbait that catches big bass.



Extra attention was paid to the blades in an effort to create different sounds through thickness, added paint and/or added coating.

"Every blade's going to make a different sound," he said about the nickel, white, gold, black and chartreuse.

One has a "mat finish, almost a primer color that turned out to be probably the best sounding of any of them, more of a click than a ding," he said.

QUICK RISER

When Mauldin said the buzzbait was designed for a quick climb to the surface, he wasn't kidding. If an angler wants to get the artificial lure up and buzzing in a 3- to 5-inch open pocket in a lily pad field, he or she can do in two or three turns of the reel handle, he said. The buzzbait also tracks back straight with no pull to the right or left, also one of his prerequisites.

"You know, when I went into designing it, I wanted the buzzbait to run straight. When you parallel the grass or rocks, you don't want to fight the buzzbait," he said.

Fishermen can add a small, soft-plastic swimbait, plastic frog or any kind of soft-plastic creature that mimics shad or any type of baitfish.

For more information, go to www.facebook.com/PrototypeLures-1975010389411732/.



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.

2020 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. \$29.95 (plus \$3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

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2020 BEST DAYS					LUNAR PERIODS				
OCT					TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL. VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Thu 1	██	██	██	60	7:15 pm	Midnight - 1:43 am	6:46 am	12:10 pm - 2:08 pm	☉ FULL
Fri 2	██	██	██	53	7:41 pm	12:16 am - 2:32 am	7:41 am	12:41 pm - 2:57 pm	☾
Sat 3	██	██	██	45	8:08 pm	12:49 am - 3:21 am	8:36 am	1:14 pm - 3:46 pm	☾ Apogee
Sun 4	██	██	██	39	8:37 pm	1:21 am - 4:11 am	9:32 am	1:46 pm - 4:36 pm	☾
Mon 5	██	██	██	38	9:08 pm	1:56 am - 5:02 am	10:28 am	2:21 pm - 5:27 pm	☾
Tue 6	██	██	██	40	9:44 pm	2:35 am - 5:51 am	11:25 am	3:00 pm - 6:16 pm	☾
Wed 7	██	██	██	43	10:26 pm	3:18 am - 6:44 am	12:23 pm	3:43 pm - 7:09 pm	☾
Thu 8	██	██	██	49	11:13 pm	4:05 am - 7:37 am	1:19 pm	4:30 pm - 8:02 pm	☾
Fri 9	██	██	██	60		4:55 am - 8:31 am	2:14 pm	5:20 pm - 8:56 pm	☾ HALF
Sat 10	██	██	██	51	12:08 am	5:49 am - 9:25 am	3:04 pm	6:14 pm - 9:50 pm	☾ HIGH
Sun 11	██	██	██	46	1:09 am	6:49 am - 10:15 am	3:50 pm	7:14 pm - 10:40 pm	☾
Mon 12	██	██	██	45	2:14 am	7:49 am - 11:05 am	4:32 pm	8:14 pm - 11:30 pm	☾
Tue 13	██	██	██	53	3:23 am	8:51 am - 11:51 am	5:10 pm	9:16 pm - 12:16 pm	☾
Wed 14	██	██	██	61	4:33 am	9:54 am - 12:34 pm	5:45 pm	10:19 pm - 12:59 pm	☾
Thu 15	██	██	██	68	5:45 am	10:58 am - 1:16 pm	6:20 pm	11:23 pm - 12:59 am	☾
Fri 16	██	██	██	71	6:57 am	12:02 pm - 1:58 pm	6:54 pm	Midnight - 1:41 am	☾ NEW & PERIGEE
Sat 17	██	██	██	57	8:11 am	1:07 pm - 2:43 pm	7:31 pm	12:27 am - 2:23 am	☾
Sun 18	██	██	██	43	9:25 am	2:14 pm - 3:30 pm	8:12 pm	1:32 am - 3:08 am	☾
Mon 19	██	██	██	30	10:39 am	3:19 pm - 4:21 pm	8:57 pm	2:39 am - 3:55 am	☾
Tue 20	██	██	██	22	11:49 am	4:24 pm - 5:16 pm	9:49 pm	3:44 am - 4:46 am	☾
Wed 21	██	██	██	21	12:53 pm	5:25 pm - 6:13 pm	10:45 pm	4:49 am - 5:41 am	☾ LOW
Thu 22	██	██	██	24	1:50 pm	6:21 pm - 7:13 pm	11:45 pm	5:50 am - 6:38 am	☾
Fri 23	██	██	██	34	2:39 pm	7:12 pm - 8:10 pm		6:46 am - 7:38 am	☾ HALF
Sat 24	██	██	██	25	3:20 pm	7:57 pm - 9:05 pm	12:46 am	7:37 am - 8:35 am	☾
Sun 25	██	██	██	21	3:55 pm	8:37 pm - 9:59 pm	1:47 am	8:22 am - 9:30 am	☾
Mon 26	██	██	██	23	4:25 pm	9:13 pm - 10:49 pm	2:46 am	9:02 am - 10:24 am	☾
Tue 27	██	██	██	22	4:53 pm	9:47 pm - 11:39 pm	3:44 am	9:38 am - 11:14 am	☾
Wed 28	██	██	██	35	5:19 pm	10:18 pm - 12:30 am	4:40 am	10:12 am - 12:04 pm	☾
Thu 29	██	██	██	45	5:45 pm	10:49 pm - 1:19 am	5:35 am	10:43 am - 12:55 pm	☾
Fri 30	██	██	██	56	6:11 pm	11:22 pm - Midnight	6:30 am	11:14 am - 1:44 pm	☾ Apogee
Sat 31	██	██	██	63	6:39 pm	Midnight - 2:08 am	7:26 am	11:47 am - 2:33 pm	☾ FULL

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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.

MARSH MAN MASSON

Todd Masson

Topwater-crushing speckled trout were already established in inside waters in August.



Photo by Todd Masson

IT'S GOING TO BE A GOOD FALL, Y'ALL

Speckled trout follow a predictable, annual pattern. In spring, lengthening days and rising water temperatures trigger something in their pea-sized brains, and they get the signal it's time to move to saltier water to create future generations of speckled trout.

That's what they do throughout the summer, meeting nightly in deepwater passes to partake in massive fish orgies, producing fertilized eggs that move inland with the tides.

You would think the males, at least, would never grow weary of such a lifestyle, but apparently they do. By the end of summer, speckled trout have had enough of gettin' busy and are really gettin' hungry, so the bulk of them begin to move back inshore, not coincidentally at a time when white shrimp are leaving the skinny backwaters they've called home since their birth just a few months earlier.

Contained in those thin, shrimp shells is all the fuel the exhausted speckled trout need to recover from the rigors of the spawn and actually add fat layers in preparation for lean times in the winter.

Exactly when that move inland begins depends on the year. Sometimes, the only specks in interior waters in August are juveniles that weren't ready to spawn. But then, there are years like this one, when those fish are joined by early migrators who get off the spawning grounds and commence to filling their bellies.

EARLY THIS YEAR

I got a clue this might be an early-migration year during a mid-July trip out of Hopedale, La., with Capt. Charlie Thomason. We were targeting redfish that day in skinny water ponds and coves, and it seemed like everywhere we went, the trolling motor kicked up schools of tail-snapping white shrimp

that went airborne in protest of our intrusion.

Before that trip, the earliest I had ever seen THAT many shrimp in interior waters was mid-August.

We didn't catch any specks that day, but a couple of weeks later, Chas Champagne, who owns Matrix Shad, boated a 3-pound speckled trout, as well as a handful of smaller fish, while fishing an inside lake.

Not too many days later, I was deep inside the marsh on a hunt for bass and redfish when I came across a bayou loaded to the gills with shad and white shrimp. The bass were there, too, and I caught a bunch of them, but I kept seeing



A former editor of *Louisiana Sportsman*, **Todd Masson** has published the *Marsh Man Masson* YouTube channel since 2017.

Ian Lovell, 9, caught this nice speckled trout in Hopedale.



something explode on the bait in the middle of the bayou.

So even though it was August and the sun was well above the horizon, I reached for a rod that had a topwater Matrix Mullet tied on and made a long cast down the middle of the bayou. I don't think I twitched the bait three times before something exploded on it.

I set the hook, reeled in a keeper speckled trout and repeated the process several times that morning. I was giddy to see the seasons change before my eyes — and at the prospects for excellent fishing this fall.

FANTASY OCTOBERS

October can be a tricky month for inshore speckled trout fishing. Sometimes, like last year, the transition is late, and the fish are incredibly scattered this month. But when the migration is early, like it appears to have been this year, the fish are entrenched in their autumn patterns by October, and easy to find.

My favorite pattern this month is to watch the buoys for falling-tide trends and schedule my trips accordingly. I'll set up at the mouths of major bayous, where they dump into big lakes and bays, and keep my eyes peeled for popping shrimp.

Once you find them, limits are almost a foregone conclusion. It's usually not a great month for trophy-sized fish, but if you're looking to host a weekend fish fry, it's hard to beat October during an early-migration year. ■

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: TARPON

THE ACROBATIC SILVER KING MAKES ANGLERS HAPPY UP AND DOWN THE GULF AND SOUTH ATLANTIC COASTS

Tarpon, *Megalops atlanticus*, is a highly-prized gamefish for recreational anglers throughout its range. A combination of reasons contributes to tarpon's status among anglers.

These fish are highly acrobatic, usually jumping numerous times once they are hooked. During these fights, they attempt to throw the hook, which more often than not, they do. A battle with a tarpon — even a losing one — often sticks in an angler's mind as one of their greatest angling feats.

Most anglers have far fewer chances at tarpon than other fish. Other than along the coast of Florida, tarpon do not spend the entire year in range of most anglers. Along the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts, they usually appear in late spring or early summer, and most leave near the end of summer. Smaller numbers stick

around through the end of September, and even fewer remain into late October.

Another reason for anglers' fondness of these fish is that they grow to enormous sizes. Every single tarpon in Louisiana's Top-10 list weighed at least 220 pounds. The Louisiana state record tarpon weighed 246.63 pounds. David Prevost caught the fish in the West Delta Block in October 2015. The Mississippi state record, caught by Don Ruiz on Aug. 2, 2019, weighed 185 pounds, 8.80 ounces. The world record tarpon tipped the scales at 286 pounds, 9 ounces. Max Domecq caught the fish in March 2003 out of Rubane, Guinea-Bissau.

NO CLOSE RELATIVES

Belonging to the family *Megalopidae*, tarpon are the only member of this family to occur regularly along the eastern and southern U.S. coastlines. They are

silvery in appearance, looking very much like super-sized herring with very large scales and a long body. When young, they are often confused with eels.

Tarpon have flat sides; sides and belly are silvery. Their backs are often dark blue to greenish-black, but this color changes depending on the waters they visit or in which they reside. The dorsal fin's last ray is greatly elongated.

Female tarpon reach sexual maturity at about 70 inches long, usually in their 10th year. Males reach sexual maturity at about 50 inches long. Females in the wild can live as long as 55 years. Males



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

Capt. Dave Marino with a 180-pound tarpon caught while fishing out of Venice with Mike Stromeyer on the M/V "Pass a Good Time."



normally don't live longer than 43 years.

Tarpon mostly travel in small schools of 10 to 12 fish. They sometimes gang up in large schools of more than 100, especially when making long runs as seasons change.

APEX PREDATORS

These fish are apex predators. They eat pretty much whatever they want, and their presence — even for short periods of time — means the water quality and presence of other fish is excellent. They are unusually tolerant of freshwater.

Most tarpon that are caught along the eastern seaboard and Gulf of Mexico come from Florida, where they spend their winters. They travel in good numbers up to the North Carolina/Virginia state line, with smaller numbers of fish traveling farther north, even as far as Nova Scotia. Others move along the Gulf Coast states, to Texas and farther south.

The tarpon fishery in Louisiana has a long history, with Lake Charles forming its own tarpon club in the 1930s. The oldest fishing tournament in the United States is the International Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo, which has been held yearly since 1928. Anglers catch tarpon on numerous lures and with numer-

ous strategies. Sight-fishing is popular, and when an angler spots one, he usually casts topwater lures or big jigs with long streamers. Fly anglers catch their share with giant flies. Live croakers or other small fish are also great baits. ■

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When a serious fisherman finds a pair of pliers that he likes and trusts, he'll guard them almost as much as he guards his favorite crankbait.

Gamakatsu, the fish-hook people, have given anglers one more item to like and trust with their 6- and 7-inch stainless steel fishing pliers, which debuted this past summer.

Featuring non-slip grips, the pliers come with a sheath that allows you to keep them on your belt, close at hand while fishing. There's no

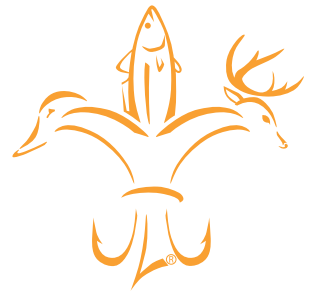
worry about them heading overboard because of a lanyard attached to the handle.

The pliers can do a lot of things. They have a split-ring feature for quick hook changes, crimping jaws and a cutting feature that will easily clip monofilament, braid and fluorocarbon.

Gamakatsu has added a PTFE coating to aid against corrosion and rust.

MSRP: Starting at \$25.24.

For more info, visit: www.gamakatsu.com



SPRO POWER BUCKTAIL HD

SPRO has long produced excellent baits for fishermen of all backgrounds, and its recent offering of a beefed-up bucktail jig, the SPRO Power Bucktail HD, brings even more great features to the fishing world.

Previous models were designed to be trolled for big striped bass or jigged for flounder, but a bigger, stronger hook gives anglers another weapon to drop down on a deep rock pile to try and fool a grouper, or to cast at a curious cobia.

Made in sizes from ¼ to 8 ounces, the Power Bucktail HD features a 4X-strong Gamakatsu O'Shaughnessy hook that will penetrate even the toughest mouths. It comes in two colors: white and crazy chartreuse.

The semi-flat face of the jig allows it to work equally well being trolled or jigged vertically. A prominent eye is a focal point for predators. In addition, more bucktail has been added to the jig to give it a bigger profile to attract bites from bigger fish.

MSRP: \$11.12.

For more info, visit: www.spro.com



STYRKA S3 RED DOT

Styrka's top-drawer optics have been updated by a pair of new red-dot offerings, the S3 Open Style and S3 Tube Style scopes.

Perfect for mounting on shotguns for turkey or deer hunting, or on pistols for hunting or target shooting, these are reflex sights with 1 MOA adjustments, good eye relief and 1X magnification, and 10 brightness settings.

The S3 Red Dot includes a riser mount for mounting on most AR platforms and most types of firearms with a Picatinny style rail/base. The body is constructed of aircraft-grade aluminum alloy for durability and

strength.

The S3 Tube Style Red Dot sight features a unique double-lens optical system which, coupled with dot color indexed coatings, virtually eliminates parallax and point-of-aim errors.

The red dots are available in a 2.5 MOA red dot model, a 5 MOA red dot and a 5 MOA green dot. All three models have a 21 mm objective lens and weighs less than 6 ounces

MSRP: \$289.95, \$329.95.

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Rattling during the pre-rut should be understated; you're just trying to get a traveling buck's attention, not bring him in snorting, looking for a fight.

BIG RACKETS ARE FOR TENNIS

PRE-RUT RATTLING, GRUNTING SHOULDN'T BE LOUD

Jeff Burleson

By Dan Kibler

Few people in the hunting industry would ever describe Marshall Collette as “understated.”

The big, garrulous hunter, a long-time pro-staff member for companies like Mossy Oak and Quaker Boy, is rarely at a loss for words or opinions.

But on the subject of attracting deer during the pre-rut period in October and November, Collette is more likely to go with “understated” as a description for his calling and rattling tactics.

“October is a little early, I think, for real aggressive calling,” he said. “All I’m trying to do is get their attention and get them moving my way.”

Collette said he’s more apt to do a little doe-calling with a Quaker Boy Bleat-in-Heat can call or grunting on a Swash-buckler grunt call, but he’s not going to be doing any calling that might be taken as a challenge to bring in a dominant buck for a fight.

ATTENTION GETTER

“I’m just grunting to get their attention; I won’t take it to the next level until ... when you start to see some chasing,” Collette said. “I want to watch them and watch their body language: That will tell me how aggressive I should be.”

He’ll take a set of rattling horns with him every time he climbs into a tree stand, but this month he’s not rattling hard to try to draw bucks in to watch a fight over a doe — he’s just wanting to crank up a little curiosity on their part.

“I will do some light rattling, just tickling the antlers,” Collette said. “If I get a good, cool morning or afternoon, I might try to get a little more aggressive.”

“Again, I’m just trying to get a buck’s attention, to get him interested and coming my way.”

MAKING SCENTS

As far as scents are concerned, Collette

keeps it simple. He doesn’t make any mock scrapes or drip glandular scents around rubbed trees. Instead, he soaks a drag rag in Tink’s 69 scent so he leaves a scent trail going into his stand, and he uses scent to cover his own aroma.

“I wear a pair of L.L. Bean 16-inch hunting shoes — the ones with rubber bottoms — and I’ll cut a strip of T-shirt and tie it to the laces, let it hang down 4 or 5 inches. I’ll soak it in Tink’s 69 and walk in,” Collette said. “When I get to my stand, I’ll walk around it. I’ll loop to the left and loop to the right around the tree. If I walk straight in, they’ll walk straight in. I want them to go around the sides of my tree and show themselves.”

“Once I get in my stand, I’ll spray Tink’s aerosol to get the aroma in the air and help cover up my own scent. I don’t mess with any rubs or scrapes or hanging stuff. I’ll get some wicks out once the rut gets here, but October is too early.” ■

PHOTOS FROM THE EDGE

USE TRAIL CAMS TO SCOUT EARLY ON

By Bill Garbo

When it comes to early season scouting for bucks with trail cameras, monitoring rubs and rub lines can be very effective to better understand just what bucks are using your property and how they travel around and through your property.

Deer hunters have always considered rubs to be common fixtures of the fall woods, but by using buck signposts as indicators to aid in the early season placement of trail cameras, we can greatly magnify our buck movement knowledge — and increase harvest success.

Before you roll your eyes, let's set the record straight: rub locations and rub lines are great early season indicators of just where bucks live and travel. That's all.

There are definite preferences when it comes to where bucks tend to rub and where their travel corridors are located.

Unravelling this puzzle and taking advantage of what is learned can have a profound effect upon hunting success and enjoyment.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Let's take a look at the role that habitat edges have in defining where rub locations tend to be concentrated.

A habitat edge is the defining line between two types of habitat. Deer research has clearly shown the majority of buck rubs occur in the linear parallel corridor that is roughly 60 feet of either side

of an edge.

Some call this the "edge affect," and you need to take full advantage of it.

Deer are classic edge creatures. A habitat edge can either be an abrupt hard edge, such as the transition from dense woods to open habitat like a field or food plot. It can also be a soft edge, where the transition zone is more gradual as with a change in timber type and/or timber age.

Early in the season, spend time scouting edge areas, looking specifically for rubs and rub lines. Place trail cameras in good vantage spots to catch the bucks that are moving through edge habitat.

WHERE DID HE GO?

As the rut approaches, bucks produce rub lines along their preferred travel corridors. What you should find is, within the roughly 60-foot band on either side of a given edge, the highest concentration of rubs will fall within the first 15 to 20 feet from the actual edge, in both directions.

This gives hunters a rough 30- to 40-foot-wide area to closely investigate.

Since the term edge defines a line of habitat transition, we can also refer to it as a "linear feature." Linear features can be further expanded to include things like roads, log skidder trails and creeks, in addition to habitat edges. While roads and creeks display some edge effect, it is not as pronounced or strong as habitat edges.

One exception involves abandoned

Deer often travel along edges, places where two different kinds of cover or habitat meet. **INSET:** Lines of rubbed trees and other signs of buck activity are often found in edge areas.



Dan Kibler

logging skidder roads and trails, which do produce a noticeably strong edge effect.

COVER, FOOD

All habitat types are not the same when it comes to buck preference. In order for a habitat type to be prime for buck utility, it had to contain and provide both security cover and quality browse. That combination produced the highest rub densities.

The most-productive habitat types, from the standpoint of buck utility, included young pines, young hardwoods, sapling thickets and mixed tall grass/saplings.

Place your trail cameras in favorable locations during the early season time frame to better pin down buck movement patterns on your hunting property. ■

TOP 3 TROUT TOPWATERS

TRY 'EM, YOU'LL LIKE 'EM

By Brian Cope

It's tough to beat the speckled trout bite in the fall along Mississippi's Gulf Coast. And for most anglers, nothing tops catching them on topwater lures. It's the perfect combination of sight, sound, and feel that you can only get from using surface lures, and trout are very cooperative at this game, especially in low-light conditions like early morning.

Plenty of topwater lures are on the market, and most of them do a decent job at catching trout. Here are three that can help you boat your share of specks this fall.



1

MIRROLURE TOP DOG

This lure comes in two sizes – a 4-inch model and a 4 $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch model.

A typical walk-the-dog action is the way to work these lures. This is done by twitching the rod tip, reeling in the slack and repeating this until the lure is all the way back to the boat. Twitch, reel, twitch, reel, twitch, reel. It's an easy lure to work, and you can change the speed you work it if the fish aren't responding.



Speckled trout are easy pickings in the fall when they are aggressive enough to hit topwater plugs regularly.

Dan Kibler

2 LIVETARGET MULLET POPPER

This lure looks so life-like that you'll be tempted to break out the knife and turn it into cut bait.



The Mullet Popper is available in two sizes (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ and 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches) and several colors. A clear cupped face makes a gurgling or popping sound when retrieved, but the angler can cause a louder noise with more commotion simply by pulling harder

when working the lure.

A quick pop, followed by a quick pause, is the best way to use this bait. Anglers should take care in not pausing for too long. Trout are accustomed to chasing baitfish that are trying to get away from them and will turn away from a lure that sits still too long.



3 NEMIRE LURES SPOON BUZZER

Spoons have been catching fish literally for centuries, but this spoon is definitely an advanced model. Aside from having a buzzing blade in front of it, it also has a sound chamber against the metal body of the spoon. So not only does this lure give anglers the buzzing sound that comes from the blade, another noisemaker calls the fish in at the same time.

This lure is best worked with a steady retrieve with no pausing. Pausing will allow this lure to sink, so anglers should crank the reel the entire time to keep the lure on the surface and making noise.

TIPS FOR EARLY SQUIRRELS

DIE-HARD SMALL-GAME HUNTER SHARES SECRETS TO OCTOBER SUCCESS

There are squirrel hunters who hit the woods a couple times each season and knock down a handful of tree rats. And then, there are those who are just eaten up with the sport.

Jeffrey Wood falls into the latter category: The man just can't get enough of it.

"I find it a challenge to sneak up on and call up squirrels with a squirrel call early season," Wood said. "When I was a kid, my dad would take us squirrel hunting. That was the main thing — we hunted still and with dogs."

Wood owns Etehoma Creek Kennels and produces his own line of calls, Swamp Boys Custom Calls, and he spends upward of 100 days every season in the woods — and trains squirrel dogs almost every day of the year.

Here are his tips for getting the most out of the early season:

KEEP INSECT FREE

Wood never goes into the woods without spraying down with Sawyer permethrin tick and mosquito repellent, but it's heavy-duty stuff that shouldn't be sprayed on your skin.

"I spray my clothes with this a few days prior to going hunting," he said. "Never spray your skin — only your clothes."

WATCH FOR NO-SHOULDERS

October can be nice and brisk, but it also can be fairly warm. And that means snakes can still be out.

So Wood said he wears a pair of good snake boots.

"The first of squirrel season, snakes are out in full force looking for squirrels and other small rodents," he said.

You don't want to take a step and get a nasty surprise.

GET COMFORTABLE

While stalking can be productive, sometimes the best strategy is to find a den or feed tree and wait for squirrels to come to you. A dove stool helps ensure you can endure the down time.

"I use a dove stool for sitting long periods of time while watching and waiting on squirrels feeding on acorns and hickory trees," Wood said.

SQUIRREL CALL OR BARKER

Stalking is easier if you actually have an idea where a squirrel might be in the dense cover of early season.

"I use these calls while sitting still, watching acorn flats or hickory ridges," Wood said. "When I have a squirrel answer my call, I start slipping closer to get a shot."

THE RIGHT GUN

Because trees have yet to lose their leaves this month, Wood uses a shotgun instead of a .22.

"I use a 20-gauge or 12-gauge loaded with No. 4 or 6 shot, high-brass (shells)," he said. "These loads will penetrate the leaves and get your squirrel."

"When the leaves come off later in season, I will use a .22 loaded with 40-grain solid-tip bullets like CCI mini mags." ■

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