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31

COLD-WEATHER CRAPPIE

21

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Mississippi CONTENTS

Volume 23 | Number 1 | January 2021

FEATURES:

21 BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

Adjust your tactics when hunting heavily pressured whitetails in January. A well-timed move or two might just put you in position to drop a winter wall-hanger.

> By Mike Giles

24 MISSISSIPPI'S 2021 FISHING CALENDAR

Here's a monthly look at the best opportunities Magnolia State anglers can take advantage of this year.

> By Bobby Cleveland

31 COLD-WEATHER CRAPPIE

Plenty of anglers know they need to save plenty of January days to target crappie. Here are some places to go and tactics to use.

> By David Hawkins

37 CALLING ALL HOGS

Don't leave vocalization out of your bag of tricks when it comes to hunting wild hogs.

> By Andy Douglas

OUTDOOR UPDATE:

- 6 2021: A NEW START
- 7 SLOW START FOR DUCKS
- 11 BIG MISSISSIPPI BUCKS

ON THE COVER:

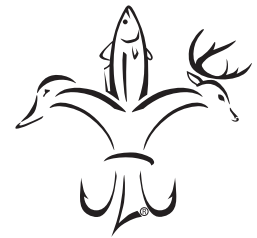
Hayden Juul of Prairieville, La., killed this 10-point, 150-inch buck on Dec. 4 on her family's hunting camp in Amite County.

COLUMNS:

- 46 GETTIN' FRESH By Hal Schramm
- 48 LUNKER LINES By Paul Elias
- 50 LURE REVIEW By Don Shoopman
- 52 SPECIES SPOTLIGHT By Brian Cope
- 54 COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE By Jerry Dilsaver

DEPARTMENTS:

- 10 Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook
- 40 Fiberglass Boat Review
- 56 Field Notes
- 58 Astro Tables
- 58 Advertiser Index



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SUBSCRIPTIONS OR SUBSCRIPTION ISSUES, CALL 1-855-371-1546

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

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

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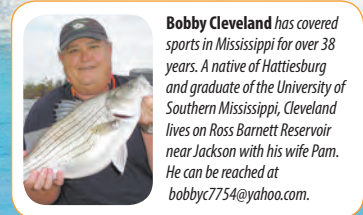
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Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland



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

A NEW START AFTER LESSONS LEARNED WELCOME, 2021; MISSISSIPPI OUTDOORSMEN HAVE PINED FOR YOUR ARRIVAL

So, just how bad was 2020? There are all kinds of COVID-19 coronavirus stats we can quote — tragic ones like infection rates, deaths and hospitalizations — but instead, there's this startling fact more related to an outdoor magazine:

Gov. Tate Reeves ordered the closure of all state waters to boating and fishing, including the 33,000-acre Barnett Reservoir on April 1, when, contrary to how fishermen reacted, the governor was not fooling.



Tristan Jenkins shot this 9-point buck on 3 acres in the Walker North area.

All of Mississippi's state-managed outdoor facilities related to water recreation were shuttered as the disease began spreading through the population and people started dying. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks closed all of the gates to its state lakes and state parks system.

Sadly, the short-lived closure was just the start of absurdity that followed the rest of the year. Bans on fishing tournaments continued for weeks, and when they restarted later in the spring,

STILL PLENTY OF TIME FOR DEER HUNTING

January begins in the middle of the final deer gun season with dogs statewide. It ends on Jan. 20, but there's more hunting time to enjoy.

In all deer zones, the late primitive weapon and archery seasons run Jan. 21-31 and on private lands, hunters can still use their weapon of choice, which makes regular rifles and shotguns legal.

In the Southeast Zone only, the season continues Feb. 1-15 for legal bucks only on private lands and open public lands. On private lands, hunters can use their weapon of choice.

certain rules had to be followed.

We learned new terms, like social distancing. Boaters who didn't know there was such a thing as a watercraft's capacity rating had to learn it because, when Reeves reopened boating, he restricted boats to half capacity.

We learned to deal with masks and with people who refused to wear them. There was the fear of running out of toilet paper, food and patience.

Sporting events were cancelled, seasons shortened and living within a bubble became part of sports nomenclature.

Zoom became known more as a method of holding remote classes, business meetings and family holiday gatherings, and not just a word for speed and one of the best plastic worms on the market.

There was no 2020 NCAA basketball championship or champion, and the college-football season experienced cancelled games and players allowed to opt out of playing.

NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball held games without fans in the stands, with some seats filled with laughable, life-sized cut-outs of people, pets and, well, whatever the seat owner wanted.

They played the Masters in November, for God's sake.

WHEW!

A NEW BEGINNING

Now comes January, and with it not just a new year but also a new decade. You won't find anyone reluctant to put 2020 in the rearview mirror, even though 2021 begins with many of the same COVID-related troubles.

One thing we learned in 2020 was that being outdoors greatly reduces one's likelihood of contracting the disease. You could say that hunting and fishing is preventative medicine. We may need to wear a mask around the fireplace at deer camp, at boat ramps or in weigh-in lines at fishing tournaments, but at least we can hit the woods and waters.

In that spirit, this issue of *Mississippi Sportsman* magazine can help you start another year of outdoor adventures. Inside, you will find a plethora of information and expert tips from our writers including a fishing calendar offering three terrific options for each month of the year.

David Hawkins talks to fishermen who feel winter is the perfect time to target crappie in Mississippi. He shares places to go and tactics to try.

Deer hunting enters its final weeks, and writer Mike Giles discusses adjustments that should be considered to beat a heavily pressured buck.

Andy Douglas offers an interesting take on how to find and kill more wild hogs, vocalizing to call them within gun range.

There's lots more inside *Mississippi Sportsman*, and before you start, we would like to wish our readers a very happy, successful, safe and healthy New Year and new decade.

And, please, eat plenty of black-eyed peas and cabbage. As a whole, we need a change in luck. ■

DUCKS START SLOW, BUT HUNTERS HOPEFUL

Several Mississippi duck hunters used the word "typical" to report a slow start to the 2020-21 season.

"It was typical of how most seasons start — poorly" said Ron Wilson of Greenville. "I know a lot of people had some decent opening day or opening weekend hunts after Thanksgiving, but those good reports were few and far between. I wasn't that fortunate this year, at least not on opening day. Me and my guys got four between the three of us."

"After that first day on Friday, we skipped Saturday and waited until Sunday, hoping our little brake would draw birds from other camps that hunted both Friday and Saturday. We did okay on Sunday. We killed eight between us."

Larry Thompson of Southaven fared a little better.

"We had those early migrators, (teal), gadwalls and a few others, but mallards were tough to come by," he said. "Pretty typical of how it usually goes. My brother and I hunted 3 hours that first morning and got eight between us. That afternoon, we went back to a different duck hole, and it was actually better. We got the four

we needed to fill our limit in an hour and were able to get in a deer stand for 2 hours after that.

"We hunted Saturday, too, at our third hole, on a levee between two converted catfish ponds and we got seven. We didn't even try on Sunday."

Lance Butler of Grenada had the worst report of all.

"Typical for me," he said. "I hunted over in the Delta on public land, and it was so crowded that I never got out of the truck. I hung around for about an hour, and from the few shots I heard, it sounded like poor hunting."

All three remain hopeful for prime duck hunting time in Mississippi: the month of January.

"Oh yeah, we'll get some decent hunting," Thompson said. "If they keep getting those hard freezes and snows in the Midwest, the ducks will start moving and get here in January. What's great this year is that the season runs right up to the last day of the month, Jan. 31, since it's a Sunday. This is the best scenario under the frameworks. Every year, our best hunting is the last week of the season. This year, it ought to be better than average." ■

SOUTH ZONE HUNTERS FINISH UP ON DOVES

January offers additional bird-hunting opportunities, including a full month of dove hunting in Mississippi's South Zone (south of U.S. Highway 84 and east of Mississippi Highway 35). The third and final split of the season there ends on Jan. 31.

Hunters in the rest of the state, the North Zone, aren't as lucky. The season ends on Jan. 8, which disappointed some hardcore dove hunters in the Mississippi Delta.

"I don't understand why we didn't get more days later in the month," said Gene Reynolds of Greenwood. "I'd gladly give up a week or two in October and November to hunt later in January. That gives us more time to shoot the migratory birds that come in from the corn belt in the Midwest. Those big birds get here late, and the food sources are scarce, which means those of us that planned and prepared some late crops can concentrate the birds and have some great hunts."

"It's hard to beat a weekend when you can hunt ducks in the morning and doves in the afternoon. That's what I love about being in the Delta,

and this year, we don't get that opportunity as much as we have in the past."

Other bird seasons open in January include woodcock and geese through Jan. 31, snipe and crows through Feb. 28, and quail through March 6.

"Two things we hunt a lot in February are crows in pecan groves and snipe in marshy bottoms near the Mississippi River," Reynolds said. "Crows are fun, and snipes are not only fun but taste and look just like a dove on the grill." ■

Dove hunters in Mississippi's South Zone have another four weeks to bang away at mourning doves this season.



PAST DECADE'S BIG NEWS: CWD

Without a doubt, the arrival of chronic wasting disease in Mississippi ranks as the No. 1 outdoors story over the past decade. Since the first case was verified in January 2018, the state has confirmed 60 CWD cases, with two more suspected cases awaiting final confirmation.

The numbers are not the big part of the story. Rather, it's the impact CWD has had on deer hunting in the Magnolia State. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has created two CWD management zones and established tight restrictions for them.

MDWFP instituted mandatory check-in days inside both those zones as well as in other areas.

Supplemental feeding was curtailed within the area, and the transportation of deer killed in CWD zones has been limited basically to deboned meat, and heads that have been completely cleaned to the bone.

The first zone, known as Issaquena, was created immediately after the 2018 discovery of a wild, native, mature buck in Issaquena County. It was reported from a hunting camp near Eagle Lake after a hunter watched the sick animal walking erratically, collapse and die.

A second deer was found in Issaquena County in 2019, and shortly thereafter, a new area of concern developed. Called the North CWD Management Zone, this large area encompasses much of north-central Mississippi, with CWD confirmed in five counties. With the cases widespread, a total of 19 counties are included in the zone.

Two northern tier counties on the Tennessee border have become the hot spot, Benton with 39 cases and Marshall with 16 — a total of 55 of Mississippi's 60 cases. CWD has also been certified in one deer each in Pontotoc, Panola and Tallahatchie counties.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

The second biggest story of the decade also relates to deer hunting. Big surprise, eh? This one is the spread of supplemental feeding to the point that it is an accepted management practice that is arguably used for the illegal practice of baiting deer.

While the law still prohibits "hunting deer over bait" per se, the relaxed rules for supplemental feeding that have evolved over the past 10 years make the baiting rule impossible to enforce. Laws changed from not being able to hunt within 500 yards or in line of sight of a feeder, to simply not in line of sight to no restriction on distance or line of sight. The only law regarding distance is that the feeding site must be at least 100 yards from a property boundary. Feeding is only allowed on private land and only permitted with the use of above ground, covered or spin-cast feeders. It can't be scattered on the ground.

SOUTH DELTA FLOODING

No. 3 is the impact of backwater flooding in Mississippi's South

6 MORE CWD CASES

Midway through the 2020-21 deer season, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has sampled almost 2,300 deer for CWD, either by voluntary submission from hunters, mandatory submission or road kills.

Only six new cases of CWD have been confirmed this season, with two suspected cases still in the testing process. All six confirmations have been from Benton County, which has 39 cases in 2 years.

Two more mandatory checks are scheduled for January:
SW Region: Jan. 2-3 in the counties of Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Lincoln Lawrence, Wilkinson, Amite, Pike and Walthall.

SE Region: Jan. 16-17 in the counties of Jeff Davis, Covington, Jones, Wayne, Marion, Lamar, Forrest, Perry, Greene, Pearl River, Stone, George, Hancock, Harrison and Jackson.

Hunters in these areas as well as statewide can submit voluntarily any deer harvested. MDWFP has 46 check stations established to accept deer. While not every county has a site, there is one within a short drive for all hunters.

For more information on mandatory and voluntary CWD testing, visit mdwfp.com.

Delta that occurred in 2018 (450,000 acres) and 2019 (550,000 acres). All species of game and non-game animals in the region were chased from their homes, as more than a quarter-million acres of farmland and thousands of forested acres were underwater for up to six months. Crops were lost. Houses were flooded. Animals both drowned and starved to death.

DEATH OF THE EXTRAVAGANZA

A flood-related boycott also led to the demise of one of Mississippi's top outdoor traditions — the Mississippi Wildlife Extravaganza in Jackson. That's the No. 4 story.

Its sponsor, the Mississippi Wildlife Federation, was a long-time opponent of the completion of pumps designed to prevent flooding inside the levees built around the South Delta by pumping out rainwater.

The Federation has backed off its opposition, and there is now widespread support for the installation of the pumps, but that was too late for the Extravaganza, which suffered miserably in 2019 when about half of its exhibitors were no-shows, and the gate was below half its normal 30,000 visitors over the three-day event.

Shortly after its conclusion, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture, which operates the Fairgrounds and Trade Mart, withdrew its lease agreement with the Federation and gave it to the Foundation for the MDWFP, a private support group for the state wildlife agency, which scheduled a 2020 wildlife show for the same time period — the first weekend in August. The Federation was forced to settle for a scaled-down show at a new location.

As fate would have it, neither show took place because of COVID-19 restrictions, but the Federation has filed a lawsuit over the matter that has yet to be settled. ■

JANUARY'S 'OTHER' FISHING HOT SPOTS

Elsewhere in this issue of *Mississippi Sportsman*, you'll find a feature listing the top-3 fishing choices for each of the 12 months. Not to ruin the surprise, we'll omit them from this list and give you our next five recommendations for January.

Barnett Reservoir crappie. This 33,000-acre lake near Jackson is dependable in January because there are four distinct patterns, and at least one will be red hot on any given day. In times of normal water flow, the river channel's edge on the upper lake in the pinch point just above and below the Mississippi Highway 43 bridge, and the bridge pilings too, will hold crappie suspended between 14 and 18 feet deep. The creek channel in Pelahatchie Bay is also dependable, but look from 12 to 15 feet. On days with a lot of current, hit the spillway recreation area below the dam or fish the "Welfare Hole," the common name of the big flat south and east of the Highway 43 bridge where all those fish that hold on the river's pinch point move to get out of the current.

Stick to deep water this month for Ross Barnett's slab crappie, either around the Highway 43 bridge, the Pelahatchie Bay creek channel or the Welfare Hole.

Biloxi Bay, Tchoutacabouffa River, mixed bag: Biloxi Bay, or Back Bay as the locals call it, along with its two feeder rivers, produces a variety of fish in January: saltwater species like speckled trout, redfish, flounder and black drum, and freshwater species like largemouth bass, striped bass and blue catfish. For bass and catfish, move further up the Biloxi and Tchoutacabouffa rivers and fish structure for largemouth and deep holes for stipes and catfish.

Tenn-Tom Waterway at Columbus catfish: If you can stand the cold, you can fill an ice chest with eating-sized catfish in deep holes along this section of the waterway. Cut bait or a big night crawler is all you need.

Calling Panther Lake bass: The creek channel on the upper end of this Homochitto National Forest Lake near Bude is a great place to practice your skills with the drop-shot and shaky head worms. On cold days, stick to the edge of the channel in 18 to 20 feet of water, and use the drop-shot to finesse a bite.



Dan Kibler

On warmer days, move up to the nearest bank and work the shallow cover with a shaky head.

Okatibbee Lake crappie: At Collinsville, just west of Meridian, this 1,500-acre U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lake can surprise you in the cold of January. The key is finding and sticking to the main creek channels. This shallow lake offers very little other deep water and cover that fish seek in the winter. This lake won't produce many giants, but nice catches up to the limit are available. Drifting with spider rigs along the edge of the creek is the best strategy. ■

Have you been in a wreck? You have a choice.
CHOOSE THE BEST!



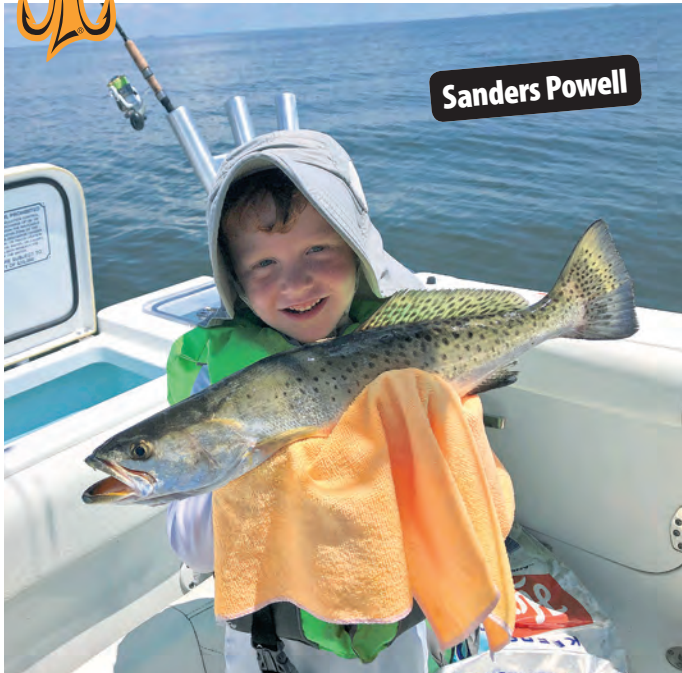
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Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Sanders Powell

Sanders Powell, 5, caught this big trout on the south side of Cat Island on a live croaker.



Russell Andrus

Russell Andrus of Hattiesburg and his daughter, Natalie, pose with a turkey he killed on public land. The gobbler had a 9½-inch beard and 1⅝-inch spurs.



Ken Carter

Ken Carter of Gulfport with his first black drum, a 24-pounder, caught on live shrimp in Gulfport Harbor.



Britton Martinolich

Britton Martinolich got his first deer during Mississippi's 2020 youth hunt.



Mack Kelly

Mack Kelly, 9, was fishing in Pass Christian when he caught these reds.

GOT PICS? We want 'em

Email images to: images@ms-sportsman.com

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

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

ANOTHER BIG BUCK IS DOWN

TEEN HUNTER DROPS BIG ASHBROOK ISLAND BUCK

By Glynn Harris

It all started for Zach Jones eight years ago, when the then 12-year-old youngster downed a trophy buck, a feat that found its way onto the pages of our sister magazine, *Louisiana Sportsman*. Since then, he has been featured twice more in the pages of that magazine. Now, at age 19, the youngster has struck again, laying claim to a big 11-point buck he shot with his bow.

Jones, along with his dad, is a member of a top-notch hunting club that lies along the Mississippi River. Bordering Arkansas and Louisiana, Ashbrook Island is physically located in Washington County. The 6,000-acre piece of prime real estate has produced plenty of trophy bucks over the years with Jones collecting his share. The club has restrictions on the taking of deer, with the minimum criteria for bucks being 8 points, 5½ years of age with 140 inches of antler. Mess up and you lose your buck privileges the rest of the current hunting season as well as next season.

THE GREEN LIGHT

Jones, a recent graduate of Sterlington High School, played football and baseball for his school and is currently working with his dad who is involved in oil and gas exploration with Delta Exploration. He plans to enroll in the University of Louisiana-Monroe for the spring quarter. In the meantime, he spends as much time as he can on Ashbrook.

"I was hunting a buck that ended up getting shot in October," Jones said. "I was hunting that morning and looked about 80 yards to my left and saw a big, wide-framed buck. I keep a camera with me, so I video'd the buck and sent it to my dad for his opinion. Dad agreed it was at least a 150-inch buck and told me if I wanted to go after him, I had his okay."

Sitting on his stand for more than a month, Jones saw the buck nearly every time he hunted, but since he was hunting with his bow, he almost never saw the buck closer than 100 yards, too far for a bow.

"I did have him at 28 yards one day, but a button willow bush blocked my shot," Jones said.

Zach Jones took this 11-point, 212-pound buck on Nov. 7 on Ashbrook Island.



MOMENT OF TRUTH

Getting into his stand before daylight the morning of Nov. 7, it didn't take long for the action to begin.

"Deer had been eating the leaves of cocklebur plants, but once they died off they started working on green briar and there was plenty of that near my stand," Jones said. "Just as it started getting light enough to make out movement, I looked up and recognized the buck I was after coming out of a button willow thicket, and he was traveling alone. I knew it was him because I had lots of pictures of him with his split G2 and drop tine.

"Some trees had fallen between my stand and the willows and I watched the buck hop over some logs and then start hooking his antlers on a bush making a rub. Then he popped out at 58 yards, and since I have a pin on my bow set for 60 yards, I considered making a shot."

However, the buck made a move in Jones' favor as it turned and started coming straight toward his stand to his right.

"When he got to 30 yards, I got a bead on him and released my arrow," said Jones, who shoots a Hoyt Defiant bow, Easton FMJ arrows with Rage Hypodermic broadheads.

"The buck jumped the arrow, but he wasn't quite quick enough; it clipped his spine and he dropped right there," Jones said.

The buck, estimated to be 5½ years old, weighed 212 pounds. It sported 11 points with the rack featuring a split G2 with a 3-inch drop tine. Inside spread was 19⅞ inches with heavy mass throughout. The rack was measured 152 inches. ■

CARRIERE HUNTER TAKES REFUGE MONSTER

PANTHER SWAMP BUCK SCORED 176 INCHES, WEIGHED 280 POUNDS

By Bobby Cleveland

Blake Herrin's dream, like that of most deer hunters, has always been to kill a big trophy buck. On Nov. 23, hunting at Panther Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in the Mississippi Delta, he did just that, bagging "the biggest buck I've ever seen."

Trophy? The buck's rack produced 176 inches of antler. Yep, that qualifies.

Big? Herrin's buck weighed 280 pounds. Yep, that qualifies, and then some.

"He dropped right where he was standing," said Herrin, of Carriere. "That's when I started shaking. You see those kids in all those videos shaking after killing a deer.... Well, let me tell you, I bet I looked just like them. I was shaking so hard that when I climbed down out of the tripod stand, I almost fell out of it."

The buck was 60 yards away, and Herrin, a 29-year-old lineman for the Coast Electric Power Association, was in for a shock.

"I knew he was a good buck, but I had no idea," Herrin said. "Every step I took, he just kept growing. The closer I got, the bigger he got. When I walked up on him, I said to myself, 'He's bigger than I thought it was.'"

"When I leaned down and picked up his head I almost threw up. Man, I was so excited. I can't tell you how shook up I was."

It was a team effort that involved a lot of helping hands both before the shot and certainly after it.

"I have some really good friends," Herrin said. "I needed them, too."

PANTHER SWAMP

Living in the southeast corner of Mississippi's boot-heel, Herrin had killed a lot of does and a few bucks, including a 125-inch

Panther Swamp NWR gave up this 280-pound trophy buck to Blake Herrin on Nov. 23.



8-point that is certainly respectable for that area. He figured his hopes of getting a trophy meant applying for a draw hunt at a public area in one of the state's big-buck regions.

"I put in at Panther Swamp for one of the 3-day gun hunts and got drawn for Nov. 21-23," Herrin said. "That was a Saturday through a Monday, but I had to skip the first day because we had a surprise birthday party for my mom on Saturday night. I left it a little early, went home, took a 3-hour nap and got up at midnight and started driving to the Delta."

He was going in blind, too, and that's where the team effort starts. Herrin had four friends who were drawn for that hunt, including two that were hunting with him. He also had a co-worker drawn for that hunt who was also at Panther Swamp.

DEER SIGN

"My two friends had gone up and hunted on Saturday and had scouted it pretty good," Herrin said. "They had found me an area with some sign, some hooking, and I hunted it Sunday morning. I didn't see anything, but one of my friends killed a nice, 17-inch, 8-point, and the other got a doe. We left at 9:30 and drove to a camp about 20 miles away where one of my friends knew a guy."

We used their cleaning shed to clean those deer and ate a sandwich and went back to hunt that afternoon.

"The guy who killed the buck let me hunt his area, because there was a lot more sign there. I saw one doe that afternoon. He went to where I had hunted that morning and didn't see a deer."

That night, the trio drove to Eagle Lake.

"One of them had a friend with a camp there, and we spent the night," Herrin said. "We got up the next morning at 3:15, and we got to Panther Swamp before daylight, and I went back to the same area where my friend had killed the 8-point and where I hunted the afternoon before.

"I got in the stand about 5:30, and it was a beautiful morning, clear and about 45 degrees, and the sunrise, I think, was 6:15. It wasn't long before three does came in feeding. I was in a tripod stand in a CRP area with an oak bottom. They were eating acorns and kept feeding off and coming back."

Herrin held off on taking a doe, even though he was allowed two. Turns out, it was a very smart move.

GIANT BUCK

"After they left, about 7:15, I heard a buck grunt, and that got my attention," he said. "He grunted again and then again, and I said to myself, 'I'm in the chips now.' I knew where it was coming from and got turned in that direction. He sounded about 70 to 75 yards away.

"I was looking in that direction, and the first thing I saw of him was when his antlers hit sunshine and I said, 'Ooh, that's a big buck!' When he reached the trail the does had used, he turned and started crossing broadside. I had one hole, one shooting lane, so I put the scope on that lane, and when he walked into it I made a doe bleat with my mouth to stop him. When he stopped, I put the scope on his front shoulder and knocked him down right where he was standing."

The 40-year-old Savage, 30-06 that Herrin's father, Vance, had given him did its job.

Not only did the rack shock Herrin, but the sheer size of the buck was beyond his belief, as well as his ability to move it. It would require five grown men.

"I took me, both of my friends, and my co-worker and his dad

to get the buck on our deer cart and wheel him out," Herrin said. "He was a horse."

The buck was a main-frame 8-point with a kicker sticking straight out of both 5½-inch bases. There were two other sticker points, or at least the remnants of two that had broken off the 24- and 25-inch main beams. The G2s were an amazing 13 and 14 inches and the G3s 8 and 10 inches. The inside spread was 19 inches. ■

“

*Every step I took, he just kept growing.
The closer I got, the bigger he got.*

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Hayden Juul of Prairieville, La., killed this 10-point, 150-inch buck on Dec. 4 on her family's hunting camp land in Amite County.

NURSING STUDENT DISCHARGES HUGE AMITE WHITETAIL

PREDAWN MEETING LEADS TO 150-INCH 10-POINT'S DEMISE

By Bobby Cleveland

Plan the fading light of dusk on Dec. 4, with only a few minutes of legal shooting time remaining, Hayden Juul saw a deer step out of the tree line on her family's hunting camp in Amite County in southwest Mississippi.

"It was right at 5:30, you know, prime time," she said. "I could barely see the silhouette."

But Juul, a 24-year-old nursing student from Prairieville, La., had no trouble distinguishing one main characteristic of the deer: a big rack. It was huge.

"Through my binoculars, all I could see was antlers," Juul said. "When he stepped out and I saw him, I didn't think too much longer on it. I knew he needed to go down."

There was one problem, however.

"The buck was in front of me, the way I was facing, and my gun was laying across my lap, across the stand," she said. "I had to pick it up and turn it, and when I did, I accidentally hit the stand with it."

Of course, with it being metal on metal, it made a "clink."

"He jumped and took a few steps," Juul said, admitting it probably scared her worse than it did the buck. "It scared me pretty bad. I thought I was going to screw this thing up. I don't even remember looking through the scope. I just picked up the gun and pointed it at him and shot."

After thinking about it a second, she remembered a little more.

"I vaguely remember that I picked up the binoculars and lined him up, then I picked up the gun and found his head in the scope," she said. "When he moved his head, I traced back down his body to his shoulder and pulled the trigger."

The .308 roared, and the buck fell in his tracks.

"I shot him right through his shoulder, and he dropped right where he was," Juul said. "I thought I saw him move, and I was worried he might be getting up, but now, thinking about it, he



ON THE COVER

was probably just (in the) last stages before dying. I shot him again just to make sure."

The buck never moved after the second shot, and Juul had a chance to catch her breath and realize what had just happened over a course of a few seconds in the descending darkness.

"I was stunned," she said. "I was stunned that I had shot something that big."

The buck carried a tall, symmetrical, main-frame 10-point with a sticker point off the left main beam. The inside spread was 18 inches, and the beams so thick Juul's hands couldn't reach around them and touch. Her father, Lance Juul, rough-scored the buck at 150 inches.

DESERVING HUNTER

"It's a really good buck and the one we were after, and I'm happy she got him," Lance Juul said. "She's a really good hunter, a good outdoorsman. Hayden has been hunting and fishing with me since she was about 4 or 5. She'll hunt anything: ducks, doves and even rabbits. She loves to fish, and we have a camp down at Grand Isle. She even had her photo in *Louisiana*

Sportsman magazine several years ago holding a big jack crevalle that she caught.

"Hayden has several deer on the wall already — nothing like this, one but some good ones. One thing though: she's never killed a single doe in her life. She's only killed bucks. That's all we kill on our places. That's what brings the bucks in during the rut. That's when we usually kill our best bucks. This one was different."

This one, the elder Juul said, was one of the rare trophies that was a permanent resident of this particular piece of property, 400 of the 900 acres the family owns and/or leases near Liberty in southwest Mississippi. He'd been watching the buck for about five years.

"We first noticed him and saw his potential three or four years ago, and last year was the first time I thought he was big enough to take," Lance Juul said. "We never got a lot of pictures; we just saw him hunting but just never got a shot. Over all those years, we had the opportunity to pattern him pretty good, and we established his core area. He was staying in this 200-acre area and wasn't leaving much. We got lots of pictures of him this year, almost all of them were at night. He wasn't leaving much, but we were able to figure out where he was staying and where he was going to eat, and that was a green field."

There was one occasion when the big buck did stray for a while, to a neighboring camp that the Juuls lease to another group.

MISSING IN ACTION, TWICE

"There was this girl hunting over there, and I guess she isn't that much into hunting as I am, because twice, she had left her stand early, probably because she was cold, and they got photos of the buck on the same trail she was (watching) within a few minutes after she left," Hayden Juul said. "Can you believe that happened twice? That's unreal!"

This year, the Juuls got even more serious about getting the big buck.

"My boyfriend started studying online and watching videos (about patterning bucks) and put up more cameras, and we knew where he was going," she said. "We had him figured out pretty good. We were getting a lot of pictures, at night, always in the same 200 acres."

The day the buck died, father, daughter and boyfriend surrounded that area.

"I told them that we were waiting until the wind was right to hunt it, and that day it was," Lance Juul said. "I hunted near the green field, put her in the middle, and the boyfriend hunted the dummy line in the bottom. The buck picked the middle route, and that was his mistake."

A REAL SURVIVOR

After recovering the buck, they were off to the skinning shed, where they made a discovery that told more of the story about the buck, one that answered the question about its stay-at-home behavior.

"It had been shot, probably two years ago, right in its back," Lance Juul said. "It had clipped one of its vertebrae, and there were some metal pieces in the meat around it. That told me why he had locked down so hard in that 200-acre core area and didn't

leave much. It was healed over, and he was healthy, but it had to be a reason he was so locked on that area."

As for his hunting protégé, the dad had every right to brag "I'm proud of her," he said. "She's a good hunter. She deserved this." ■

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BYHALIA HUNTER DROPS DESOTO MONSTER

HOLLIMAN GIVES BEST BUDDY
CREDIT FOR 187-INCH BUCK

By Bobby Cleveland

David Holliman was quick to give one of his best friends most of the credit for the monster, 20-point, 187½-inch buck Holliman killed on Dec. 6 on Nelson Bridgeforth's property in Desoto County.

But then — quickly and jokingly — he took it all back.

"I can't take all the credit for this awesome deer," said Holliman, 34, a truck driver from Byhalia. "Nelson lets me hunt with him on one of his places, so I never would've had the opportunity if it wasn't for him. We have been hunting a different deer all season, one he calls Henry that is a big massive 8-point that will probably make 135 or 140 inches."

Instead of an 8, Holliman took a 20.

"I left out the part about Nelson knowing this buck was there, but he hadn't seen him on camera since October," he said. "He was holding out on me. LOL."

The buck is a main-frame 10-point — although one G4 is broken at its base — with a lot of extra stickers. Each base had multiple stickers. There are two split tines on the right main beam and a sticker off a tine on the left beam, and, well, man, there are stickers everywhere, almost too hard to explain.

But that's not all.

Although the rack was just 17 inches wide, the buck carried an awful lot of mass. The bases were 6 and 5½ inches, and the beams carried that mass a long way, bordering on palmation on the right with a 5-inch measurement near the end.

So impressive a set of antlers that Holliman, whose previous best was a 163-inch, 11-point taken on Upper Sardis WMA in 2011, summed it up this way: "One of the best days of my life — one that hunters live a lifetime hoping to have."

SPECIAL OBSERVER

It didn't hurt that Holliman shared it with his girlfriend, Kari Harpole, and his explanation of why she was there is a good place to start the story of the hunt.

"Nelson and I have been hunting the 8-point hard for weeks,



David Holliman's 20-point, 187-inch Desoto County monster was taken on Dec. 6.

and I haven't been home much lately, so she wanted to go," Holliman said. "Kari wanted to sit with me, so I brought her along since we have a two-man stand on the property."

They arrived in the dark that morning, and right away, it seemed Harpole would be a lucky charm.

"Right at the break of daylight, we heard leaves rustling out in front of us," Holliman said. "I started looking through my binoculars, and I saw the biggest raccoon I've ever seen going through the woods."

So much for luck: a trophy raccoon.

"I kept looking through the binoculars, scanning the woods, and I noticed a big body with its head up like a buck hooking bushes," Holliman said. "I couldn't make out horns, so I looked away for a second, but when I came back to it, I couldn't find him anymore. He had disappeared."

Luck? Hang on, it gets better, lots better, a couple of hours later.

Holliman said he and Harpole spent a good bit of time catching up.

INTERRUPTED

"The morning went on, and we were whispering back and forth talking about deer, and about Christmas plans and whatever else

came up," he said. "Then, I heard a grunt. Then, I heard another one, and I looked at her and asked her if she had heard it. She said she did, just as he grunted again.

"A doe walked out at about 100 yards, and he was right on her heels. I was in shock, because I had never seen this deer, and he was clearly a shooter. I got on him as quick as I could, and then he stopped, about 75 or 80 yards away but he was behind some limbs."

PATIENCE PAYS OFF

Holliman stayed on the buck, patiently waiting for a shot. It came at 8:15.

"I stayed on him, and he took two steps, and boom," he said, describing the moment he took the 75-yard shot. "He bolted off and ran down into a bottom. I felt good about the shot but started getting scared that I had missed. He didn't look or act like he was hit.

"I kept watching him run through the bottom, and I could barely see him. Then I saw a white flicker. I told Keri, 'I think he fell. He's down.' I was shaking just like it was my first deer because I knew he was a giant."

Excitement settled in. Holliman climbed down and helped Harpole out of the stand. He told her to stay by the stand while he started toward the deer.

"I eased towards him, looking with my binoculars until I saw him piled up across the bottom," Holliman said. "I was super relieved and even more excited.

"I ran through the woods to him, and he grew and grew the closer I got. Man I was high-fiving the air and fist-pumping, and I'm sure I was hollering. I had a monster. I had a giant."

MISSING HIS MENTOR

He got to the buck and there was a somber moment when he thought about who he most wanted to share this exciting time with but couldn't.

"I had recently lost my grandfather, Leon Holliman, and he would've been my first call, because he would have been just as excited as I was," Holliman said. "I even shed a tear


thinking about it. Grandpa was the man who got me into hunting and fishing. He is the reason I love the outdoors so much."

Instead, Holliman called his gracious friend and No. 1 hunting and fishing partner, who was hunting a few hundred yards away.

"I called Nelson, and he was quickly out of his stand and on the way, because he was just as excited as I was," he said. "Then I called my cousin, who was fishing, and he left the lake to come see it."

The party was underway and wouldn't quickly end.

Two days after he killed the buck, Holliman said, "I'm still grinning ear to ear." ■



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HINDS COUNTY YOUTH HAVING A BANG-UP SEASON

THREE BUCKS ARE DOWN FOR 8-YEAR-OLD HUNTER

By Andy Douglas

Reed Courtney knew he was going to have a good deer season when he bagged an 8-point buck on the second evening of this year's archery opener with his crossbow.

Any deer with archery equipment is good, and when it has headgear—it's even better.

Courtney, 8, is an avid Hinds County sportsman with a few deer under his belt, but he had no idea how much success he would have and how soon it would come.

Reed and his father, Matt, hunt together as much as possible, but they spent the rest of archery season chasing crappie due to warmer weather, and they were anxiously awaiting the opening of youth gun season.

On the evening of Nov. 14, the Courtneys headed to a stand overlooking a food plot; they had been waiting on the right wind to hunt it. They settled in and watched a bachelor group of four bucks most of the evening. Reed Courtney opted to pass and



Reed Courtney bagged a trophy Hinds County 4-pointer on Nov. 15 for his second buck of the season.

wait on a bigger buck since he already had one under his belt.

The next evening, they returned to the same stand. This time, a different group of four bucks came out, and they could see another in the woods rubbing trees. They waited, hoping it would be a shooter.

During the wait, the four bucks came right to their box stand at 10 yards.

"When the deer in the woods stepped out, it looked like a mule deer," Matt Courtney said, "I told Reed that if he wanted to shoot, this was the one."

RESUME PADDING

The bigger buck joined the others and were so close, Reed Courtney had to wait for them to get away from the stand to get a shot. Then, he put a well-placed shot in the buck at 35 yards; the buck ran to the bottom of a hill, where they heard him crash to the ground. The buck was a huge 4-pointer with a 16½ inch spread and 20¾ inch main beams—a real trophy for 4-pointer.

Reed Courtney wasn't through however; on the evening of Nov. 29, a cool, rainy day, he and his father decided to make a short hunt before dark, hoping that the rain would subside.

They got to the box stand and were soaked at 4:15 p.m. It was raining hard, and they weren't seeing any deer. At 5 o'clock, a buck stepped out at 150 yards. He was obviously a good buck, and Reed didn't waste any time. He steadied his rifle on his tripod, the buck turned and offered a good angle, and the young hunter squeezed off.

"Reed has killed some deer at this distance before — he is a really good shot," Matt Courtney said.

The big buck didn't get 30 yards before piling up. It was a big 8-pointer with a lot of mass, an 18-inch spread and 23½-inch main beams. ■



Reed Courtney is having a great deer season, here he holds a Hinds County bruiser, and it is his best buck to date.

PETAL MAN KILLS BUCK HE WANTED WIFE TO TAG

HOLMES COUNTY BUCK SURPRISED HUNTER, MEASURED 176 INCHES

By Dan Kibler

Matt Langford of Petal might be the happiest deer hunter in Mississippi these days — if he can ever get his wife, Chelle, to speak to him again.

Langford dropped a 157-inch Holmes County buck on trail-cam photos on the tract of land a duck-hunting buddy had allowed him to hunt.

That second buck was pencilled in on Chelle Langford's hunting menu.

"When I killed that first big one, I was real proud of it, and with my wife still looking for her first buck, we put her on it. She hunted it two or three times," Matt Langford said.

When he slipped back onto the property for an afternoon deer hunt on Dec. 5, the bigger buck was the last thing on his mind.

"I just went that Saturday, never thinking I'd see him," he said.

But when a 176-inch buck walks within five yards of your tree stand and eventually gives you a 20-yard broadside shot, what can you do?

You shoot and hope that asking for forgiveness is as easy as asking for permission.

"She was a little displeased," Matt Langford joked. "One thing she said was, 'Fourteen years of marriage down the drain.'"

Langford's huge buck, which he had nicknamed "Tall Boy" after getting a few trail-camera photos of it, was a true Mississippi monster. Only 15¾ inches wide, the buck carried a 5x5 main-frame rack with one split brow tine and another sticker point. It had four tines longer than 10 inches and bases that were 6⅞ and 6¼ inches in circumference. It scored 176½ inches gross typical, and Langford expects it to net in the low- to mid-160s.

And his wife?

"I'm going to be her guide the rest of the season," he said. "There are still a couple of good bucks on the property."

Langford was hunting from a Summit climbing stand in a little patch of hardwoods close to some agricultural fields about a hundred yards from a "duck hole" surrounded by oak trees that the landowner duck hunts. He was several hundred yards away from the spot where he'd taken the 157-inch buck.

"They were just traveling through there," he said. "They were



Matt Langford's 176-inch Holmes County buck, taken Dec. 5, was his second trophy buck of the season.

headed for those agricultural fields, just coming through, eating a few acorns. They weren't staying long in my area."

But one of them stayed plenty long on Dec. 5. Langford had gotten away from his Little Caesar's pizza franchise early that afternoon and was in his tree stand by 3 p.m. He had four or five does slip through his area before he heard a deer behind him at 5:10.

"When I heard it, I didn't think anything about it being him, but when I turned around to my right, he was pretty much straight under me, at 4 o'clock (direction), walking away," he said.

Langford said the huge buck, which he watched for 15 or 20 seconds, had probably gotten out of sight, about 75 yards behind him, when he started grunting and turned it around.

"The first time I saw him, I was shaking. I've had some big bucks before where everything happened so fast I didn't have a chance to start shaking, but this one really got me pumped up. When he got up under me, I knew he was the one we had on camera that I'd called 'Tall Boy'.

"I've used a grunt call before, with maybe 10% success, so when I couldn't see him anymore, I hit my (Primos) grunt call four or five times. When I saw him, he was walking right to me."

"I was surprised when he came back in. When I grunted, I'd hoped for the best, but I had no guarantee. Then, he walked up 20 yards away, broadside."

Langford leveled his Browning A-Bolt at the buck and sent a .270 slug right behind the shoulder, through both lungs. The buck bolted away and got just out of Langford's vision before he heard it crash to the ground.

"I wondered why he didn't fall when I first shot him, but I heard him fall," said Langford, who said there was absolutely no "ground shrinkage" between the time he pulled the trigger and climbed down and got to his buck, which got 50 yards from where it was shot before falling.

"I watched him long enough the first time to know how big he was. I watched it all unfold," he said. ■

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Daniel Dilley was still-hunting along a creek, deep in the swamps of central Mississippi, when he heard something crashing and making a commotion in the thicket nearby. Instead of continuing on to his stand, he stopped and got serious. “I heard what I thought was a buck scraping a tree and making a rub,” said Dilley, who is from Forest. “I quickly pulled out my Primos grunt call, so I got to grunting, and directly, he pops out on the creek coming straight to me.”

“Tic-Boom!” Dilley’s .300 Magnum roared, and the buck collapsed in a heap, the victim of a seasoned hunter who read the signs and listened to the sounds and used it to his advantage almost immediately.

Dilley had used the buck’s natural mating urge against him by grunting, and the wise, old trophy buck, which weighed more than 200 pounds, sported long tines and 23-inch main beams, succumbed.

“Last January, I was hunting that swamp bottom when I came across a creek run along the edge of a swamp and a thicket,” Dilley said. “As I walked along the creekbed, I noticed the deer had been traveling up and down the creek, on both sides. As I hunted and scouted, I found a lot of fresh rubs along the creek, so I made plans to hunt the area later.”

As it turned out, Dilley didn’t have to wait long; the first time he hunted the area, he heard the buck and called him up the first time he hunted him. His kill was relatively quick, and the time of death was noted at 4:30 p.m. A word of caution to hunters is in order; if you come up on hot buck sign, don’t ignore the proof that he’s working the area, start hunting him right then.

**HUNTING THE
JANUARY RUT** ➤

**ADJUST YOUR TACTICS WHEN HUNTING
HEAVILY PRESSURED WHITETAILS IN JANUARY.
A WELL-TIMED MOVE OR TWO MIGHT JUST
PUT YOU IN POSITION TO DROP
A WINTER WALL-HANGER.**

**BETTER LATE
THAN NEVER**

■ By Mike Giles

HUNTING THE JANUARY RUT

“The rut is still going on in January where I hunt near Forest, and by then, the bucks have had a lot of hunting pressure, so they’re going to get away from most of the hunters if they can,” Dilley said. “I try to find food sources around thick areas where the deer are focusing and do my hunting right there. I find places like that along swamp bottoms bordering the edge of briar thickets, pine thickets and bedding areas.”

Since the deer have been hammered hard by January, Dilley tries to think outside the box when determining where the deer were when they vanished.

“I like to go as deep into a swamp as I can go to get away from the other hunters, and I like to pinpoint any food sources close to their bedding areas and get as close to that as I can without spooking the deer,” he said. “Depending on whether you’re hunting morning or afternoon, you can intercept bucks going to or from their bedding areas.”

Dilley likes to hunt all day if it’s possible, but he’ll hunt any time he can given the chance.

LOOK FOR SCRAPES, FRESH SIGN

Early in the fall, deer can be easily patterned, but those patterns change as the weather cools and food becomes scarce. Dilley knows deer are constantly on the move and changing patterns due to food availability, hunter pressure and their natural rutting activity.

“If I find active scrapes, I’ll hunt them no matter when I find them, but most of the time, I try to get as close to where they’ll be hiding,” Dilley said. “The last few years, I’ve hunted more off the ground with my bow and rifle so I can scout for deer and find sign, too. I’ll work my way through the woods while using my binoculars to spot deer as I’m moving forward really slow.”

Daniel Dilley killed this 225-pound, 8-point trophy buck in central Mississippi.

On some of his reconnaissance hunts, he’ll spot deer moving through the woods before they can spot him, a direct result of his stealth and keen eyes. While he’s hunting along the edges of thickets and transition areas, Dilley is always doing long-range scouting.

“I like to hunt a beaver run that the deer are crossing, and I might be able to see 100 to 125 yards in a place like that,” he said. “If the weather turns really cold and frigid, the deer will be on their feet more to find food and stay warm, and your chances are better at spotting a good buck, especially during the late season. There will still be some rutting activity, with some does coming into estrous late in the month.”

It’s not uncommon for hunters to see multiple bucks trailing a doe in January, as most does have already been bred and the ones coming into heat will put out a powerful scent bucks just can’t resist — no matter how many suitors they may have. It’s survival of the fittest, and if he makes one wrong move, a buck may pay for it with his life. The older ones are the hardest to find, but they are susceptible to making mistakes during the late rut as well. Hunters like Dilley will make them pay if they slip up and give them a glimpse.

A JANUARY AFTERNOON CRUISE >





DANIEL DILLEY'S LATE-SEASON TIPS

- Get as far away from the crowds as possible and hunt near the deer.
- Hunt creek crossings, beaver sloughs and flooded bottoms.
- Hunt near bedding areas and intercept bucks coming to and from their beds.
- Find late-season food sources and hunt near them.
- Hunt the edge of thickets.
- Make sure you're hunting a stand with the wind in your favor.
- Stay in the woods as often as possible and never give up.
- Learn to use a grunt tube properly.
- Scout throughout the year and look for fresh trails, rubs and buck activity.
- Hunt areas that have deer trails frequented by does. Find the does favorite haunts and you'll likely get a shot at a nice buck. ■

When scouting for late-season bucks, look for sign like fresh, new scrapes (left) and well-worn doe trails.



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Aidan Dilley, 14, killed this fine Mississippi buck while hunting with his father in January 2020.



A JANUARY AFTERNOON CRUISE

Although he prefers colder weather, Dilley’s going to be in the woods every chance he gets, because there will always be some deer on the move.

“Most of the bucks I kill during the late season are cruising and looking for does,” he said. “I’ve seen a few chasing does in late season, but they’re kind of hard to kill when they’re chasing and running does, but I have been successful sometimes.”

Dilley’s son, Aidan, was hunting with him last January when he took a stand in a travel corridor that had a deer trail crossing through it.

“Aidan watched some does come through, and a little while later, a nice 8-point buck came trailing the does through like a dog trailing a deer,” Dilley said. “Aidan put the crosshairs on him and made a killing shot on the 5½-year-old buck.”

If you see a doe or two come past your stand, be on full alert, because just when you least expect it, that old buck may come trailing behind, sniffing their scent trails. They don’t always chase wide open, but they sometimes follow does for miles until they tire or come into estrous and are ready for the buck.

WARREN COUNTY WATER BUCK

“Around the first week in January, a friend of mine called and said the time was right and to come on over to hunt,” Dilley said. “It was really hot, and I almost didn’t go, but I drove over there early one morning and got up in a stand. The property I was hunting was a 400-acre block that was surrounded by deer clubs and also had a beaver pond in the middle of it, so I took a stand right there. It didn’t take long before the deer started moving through the area, and I saw five or small bucks crossing in ankle-deep water. There were a couple of dry humps coming up out of the water, and they were crossing near them.”

Dilley hunted from daylight to noon, got down and went back to his truck to take a break and eat some lunch. Since the action was pretty hot, Dilley didn’t tarry long, getting back to his stand about 1 o’clock.

“I saw several bucks and does crossing the water, and things were really getting good,” Dilley said. “About 2, I heard the water splashing and some kind of commotion and looked up, and a couple of does were splashing through the slough. The sun was shining bright by then, and I could see a big rack shining bright as a buck was running the does. When he got to the big humps I hollered, and he stopped, and I shot him at 120 yards. He fell on one of the humps.”

The buck was the 13th Dilley saw that day; it was quite an impressive buck and a trophy anywhere in Mississippi. The massive 9-pointer weighed 240 pounds and sported long tines to go with an 18-inch spread and nearly 24-inch main beams.

If you’ve got a beaver slough or flooded bottom, you might want to put a stand where you can watch where the deer cross, because they don’t pay any attention to water. They’re not usu-



When he got to the big humps I hollered, and he stopped, and I shot him at 120 yards, and he fell on one of the humps.



ally bothered by hunters when they cross flooded bottoms, sloughs or creeks, so that’s in your favor if you have an area where they can cross undisturbed.

If you’re looking to fill that late-season tag then you might want to take a few tips from Dilley’s playbook and try them for yourself; you just might harvest the buck of your lifetime. ■



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

HERE'S A MONTHLY LOOK AT THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES MAGNOLIA STATE ANGLERS CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS YEAR. ■ By Bobby Cleveland

MISSISSIPPI'S 2021 FISHING CALENDAR

Against the backdrop of a rising sun, lifting over the horizon with its warming rays, the fisherman intently watches his fishing line from the tip of the rod to where it meets the water.

There's a twitch, then another, and then the thin thread goes tight.

It's on! Swinging hard with the rod, the angler drives the hook into the lip of the fish, and the battle is on. It could be a bass, a crappie, a bream, a catfish, a redfish, a speckled trout or a flounder. It could just be a trash fish looking to steal a meal.

It's Mississippi, so it could be any of those, or more, and it could be any day on the calendar that weather allows us to be on the water to fish for fun or sustenance. That's the splendor that is fishing in the Magnolia State — any day, any time and almost anywhere there is water. From Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, there are fish to be caught. So myriad are the opportunities that deciding is often the toughest part of fishing. This 2021 fishing calendar is designed to give you a place to begin planning. It is based on over 40 years of fishing in every part of the state and in the Gulf of Mexico.

We'll give you a No. 1 pick for the month, along with a No. 2 and a No. 3.

Let's go.

JANUARY >

March and April are months to find the state's best action on redear sunfish, aka shellcracker or chinquapin, plus bluegill.

JANUARY

Top choice: U.S. Highway 90 bridges

No. 2: Eagle Lake crappie

No. 3: Lake Bill Waller bass

Let's start the year with the easiest and arguably the most productive saltwater trip any time: fishing the pilings below the U.S. Highway 90 bridges at Bay St. Louis and Ocean Springs. This requires only a short run by boat from local landings and frozen shrimp for bait.

"The pilings offer predatory fish a place to hide and ambush bait fish pulled into or out of the bays by tides," said Capt. Sonny Schindler of Shore Thing Charters in Bay St. Louis. "Drop a bait next to a piling and hold on. You can load a fish box with good-eating fish like redfish, black (puppy) drum and sheepshead."

Eagle Lake, the old Mississippi River oxbow north of Vicksburg, is worth a trip to fish for black crappie under piers and boat houses on the outside bend.

Lake Bill Waller at Columbia will actually have bass on beds late in the month, but before then, fishing the edges of the spawning areas can produce good fish.

FEBRUARY

Top choice: Lake Washington crappie

No. 2: Barnett Reservoir bass

No. 3: Tenn-Tom catfish

Man, it can be so cold in February, but even then the fishing can be hot, especially in the little Delta town of Glen Allen, which sits on the banks of Lake Washington. Crappie is the target fish, and slabs are often the results, which is why this small oxbow lake ranks among the Top 5 crappie destinations in America. A shallow lake, fishermen troll or drift, offering jigs tipped with minnows at different depths. Once you hit the magic depth and start catching fish, you can adjust all your rigs and start filling a box.

Bass fishermen can cash in on warming trends on any body of water, but Barnett Reservoir is famous for turning on very quickly in the pad stems.

A third pick is the Tenn-Tom Waterway for catfish. Hitting the deep holes in winter can be extremely productive, but on warmer days look at nearby shoals.

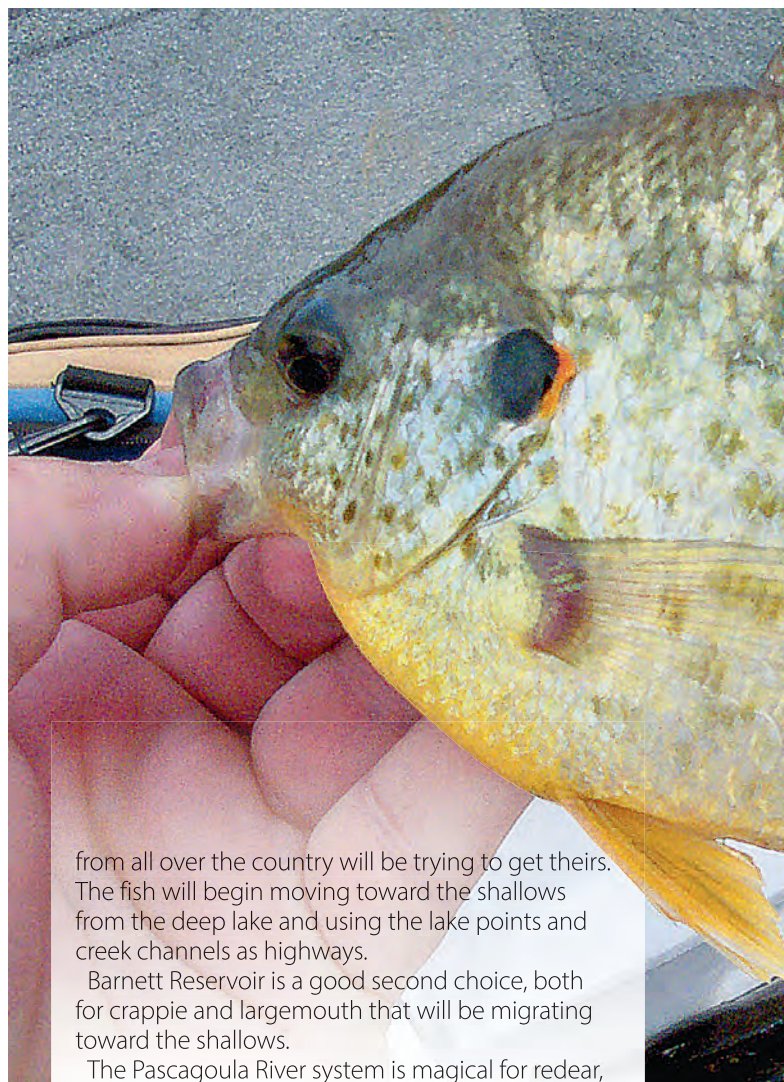
MARCH

Top choice: Grenada Lake crappie

No. 2: Barnett Reservoir bass and crappie

No. 3: Pascagoula River shellcracker

It's a tough month to pick three, since the choices are so plentiful, but it can't be argued that the world's No. 1-rated crappie destination, Grenada Lake, should top the list. By the middle of March, the search for Grenada's 3-pounders is on, and fishermen



from all over the country will be trying to get theirs. The fish will begin moving toward the shallows from the deep lake and using the lake points and creek channels as highways.

Barnett Reservoir is a good second choice, both for crappie and largemouth that will be migrating toward the shallows.

The Pascagoula River system is magical for redear, or what most Mississippians call chinquapin. Down near the coast, they are called shellcracker, and they will be as far south as freshwater will allow to feed up for the spawn.

APRIL

Top choice: I-55 lakes crappie

No. 2: Bay Springs Lake bass

No. 3: Lake Perry bream

The crappie spawn hits its peak all over Mississippi, so our No. 1 pick for the month are the big lakes that line Interstate 55 from Jackson north to Memphis. There's Barnett Reservoir near Jackson on the south end, Arkabutla Lake on the north end and Grenada, Enid and Sardis in the middle.

Bass fishermen should consider Bay Springs Lake on the Tenn-Tom north for Kentucky spotted bass; 4- or 5-pounders are not out of the question. A big largemouth is always possible, and there's a small chance for smallmouth.

Bream fishermen get their first shot at bedding bream in south Mississippi lakes like Lake Perry at Beaumont.



JUNE

Top choice: Mississippi Sound speckled trout

No. 2: Chotard Lake bluegill

No. 3: Lake Bill Waller bass

People mistakenly believe that the speckled trout bite on the coast is hottest in April or May, but more fish are caught in June. Start your day around Cat Island's south side, and if you have a Louisiana license, you can make the run to the east side of the Biloxi Marsh.

While the bedding is cycling down on most waters due to rapid warming, Chotard, a Mississippi River oxbow, hits its peak due to the cool waters coming downstream.

Near Columbia, at Lake Bill Waller, get your buzzbaits and frogs out and go lunker bass hunting at sunrise or sunset.

JULY ➤

This speckled trout was fooled around Cat Island, one of the Mississippi Sound's best fishing destinations.



MAY

Top choice: Pickwick Lake bass

No. 2: Pickwick Lake catfish

No. 3: Bedding bream in MDWFP state lakes

We're pointing north this month, starting with Pickwick Lake for bass. Whether you target largemouth or smallmouth, spots or stripers, Pickwick is red-hot in May.

"If you can't catch a bass up here in May on Pickwick, you need to give up," said veteran guide Roger Stegall. "Once the spawn is over, the big females start stacking up on points. Get you a crankbait and get after them."

If you can't catch bass and do give up, stay at Pickwick and shift gears and equipment and catch catfish, lots of catfish, on the bluff banks. Catfish move up on the base of the tall, rock banks to spawn on the rock flats. Cast out a nightcrawler and hold on.

Bedding bream is the third choice, and as a location, we give you the entire state lake system of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. The top five of those are Tip-pah (Ripley), Lamar Bruce (Saltillo), Claude Bennett (Rose Hill), Prentiss Walker (Mize) and Calling Panther (Crystal Springs). One of the historical best, Simpson County, is sadly closed for dam renovation.

JULY

Top choice: Gulf of Mexico tripletail and sharks

No. 2: Mississippi River catfish

No. 3: Barnett Reservoir crappie

One of the great things about fishing on Mississippi's Gulf Coast is there is always something biting, either something you target to eat or to battle. While many species are biting in July, the tripletail (blackfish) are the summer's hottest action. Just run crab trap buoy lines until you spot one on the surface around a buoy. Stop and offer it a shrimp. It will bite. Otherwise, get out some tough gear and go shark hunting. Cut bait is all you need. The edge of the Gulfport ship channel is one place to look. Chumming the water with anything bloody and smelly will help.

At Barnett Reservoir, get ready to turn on the live scope and go searching for big slab crappie holding on cover.



AUGUST

Top choice: Lake Ferguson white bass

No. 2: Biloxi Bay black drum

No. 3: Grenada Lake crappie

Probably Mississippi's most-overlooked fishing opportunity, white bass are native to all rivers connected to the Mississippi. At Greenville, you can launch on Lake Ferguson in downtown, then run to sandbars or simply spot them schooling and chasing shad on top. There is no limit, not on the fish nor the fun you can have on light tackle.

Biloxi Bay fills with black drum, and on the high tide, these fish can be caught from the bank on cut bait or dead shrimp.

Take your trolling gear to Grenada Lake and try to find the big crappie on their deep summer haunts near the river channel or the end of main lake points.



Bobby Cleveland has covered sports in Mississippi for over 40 years. A native of Hattiesburg and graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Cleveland lives on Ross Barnett Reservoir near Jackson with his wife Pam. He can be reached at bobbyc7754@yahoo.com.

Let the year begin with a trip to the Highway 90 bridges on the coast where sheepshead stack up on pilings.

SEPTEMBER

Top choice: Mississippi Sound redfish

No. 2: Sardis Lake crappie

No. 3: Mississippi river white bass

Redfish are plentiful in the Gulf in September, and a mix of bulls and keeper slot reds can be readily found fishing the barrier islands or the many man-made Katrina reefs built out of rubble from 2005's horrible storm cleanup.

Sardis Lake hits its summer peak for trolling in August. Pull crankbaits along the river channels or main lake points.

For sheer fun, it's hard to beat white bass fishing behind the jetty dikes on the Big Muddy. Drop to ultra-light gear and little white grubs and look for breaks in the dikes that have water running over.

OCTOBER

Top choice: Pickwick Lake bass

No. 2: Lake Washington crappie

No. 3: Eagle Lake white and yellow bass

In addition to the beauty of the fall foliage on its banks, Pickwick Lake offers fabulous bass fishing. Hit the deep, bluff banks with crankbaits for smallmouth, fish the boat houses and riprap for spotted bass, and look for largemouth in the mouths of the many coves.

An early fall run over to Lake Washington can produce a boat full of crappie by pulling jigs tipped with a minnow anywhere from 3 to 6 feet deep.

Eagle Lake's white and yellow bass are under-utilized and therefore plentiful. There is no limit and these fish taste great and travel in big schools.



NOVEMBER

Top choice: Lake Ferguson bass

No. 2: Tenn-Tom catfish

No. 3: Lake Chotard white bass

Lake Ferguson, the old oxbow off the Mississippi River at Greenville, is never a bad choice for bass fishing, but it's best in November. Two patterns usually produce: deep cranking and shaky heads on deep cover, like old sunken barges.

Both the Columbus and Aberdeen pools on the Tenn-Tom Waterway are prolific when it comes to fall catfishing for both blues (deep) and channels (shallow).

If the weather is too hot to sit in a deer stand, then put a boat in at Chotard and target the ends of boat ramps and gravel beds for white bass. Catching a few hundred is possible. We're not kidding. Try tailspinners.



Catching chunky, feisty white bass in the Mississippi River is a September treat. **LEFT:** Redfish get thick in the bays in December, and it's often warm enough to enjoy catching some sun, too.

DECEMBER

Top choice: Mississippi Sound redfish

No. 2: Pelahatchie Bay crappie

No. 3: Lakes Chotard/Albermarle bass

Redfish move close to the shore in winter, and when they arrive in December they are at their hungriest. The man-made reefs along the Gulf Coast will hold fish, as will bridge pilings. The shorelines of the bays like Bay St. Louis, Biloxi Bay and the Pascagoula River also hold reds, and a spinnerbait or a spoon will work.

On Barnett Reservoir, the Pelahatchie Bay area is outstanding in the winter for crappie. The water is mostly protected from winds, and the creek channel edges offer a good bit of natural cover for the fish.

Go back to Chotard and its connected oxbow, Albermarle, in December, when it's too hot for a deer stand and target largemouth (and white bass) on the ends of boat ramps and old road beds. You'll be shocked at how good it can be. ■

SHIMANO SARAGOSA REELS

Make no mistake about it. These are big-fish reels.

Shimano's Saragosa series of spinning reels has added two sizes and now offers anglers fishing for big fish with eight different reels.

The 14000XG and 18000HG reels, introduced at last summer's ICAST show, are great for casting or jigging up big fish, featuring Shimano's cold-forged HAGANE gears for lasting durability and smoothness, an ultra-durable, waterproof HAGANE body, the Infinity Drive feature and waterproof Cross Carbon drag.

The 14000XG is ideal for casting pencil baits and deep jigging. It pulls in 53 inches of line per turn of the handle. The spool capacity is 315 yards of 65-pound test PowerPro or 260 yards of 20-pound mono. The 18000HG, returns 51 inches of line per crank with its 5.7:1 gear ratio and it holds up to 440 yards of 65-pound test PowerPro or 340 yards of 25-pound mono.

MSPR: \$299 and \$349.

For more info, visit: fish.shimano.com



TENZING HANGTIME BACKPACK

Deer hunters nowadays take so much more stuff into the woods than even just a decade ago, and fanny packs often won't do the job; backpacks have become a regular sight, but they don't come without the problem of how to access all their nooks and crannies while sitting in a lock-on, ladder or climbing stand 15 to 20 feet above a well-travelled deer trail.

That's where Tenzing's new Hangtime Backpack comes into play. It's designed to be removed once you're in your stand and hung on a device like a bowhanger, so hunters can easily access the myriads of pockets to get out their scent products, rangefinders, cell phones, even an extra sweatshirt. The pack's rigid frame makes it

easy to search for your gear, and oversized zippers make opening pockets easy.

Weighing less than 2 pounds empty, the Hangtime Backpack has seven compartments and 15 pockets, including SD card pockets on the shoulder straps, a removable, ambidextrous bow carrier and a fold-out bow- and gun-carrying boot for the walk or ride in. There's even a base compartment that holds an included Plano® utility box so you can store smaller items for easy access.

MSPR: \$199.99.

For more info, visit: tenzingoutdoors.com



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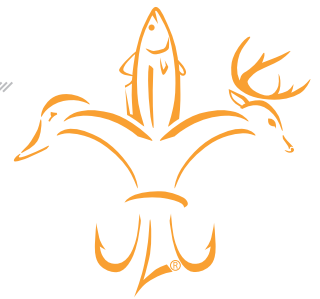
Rarely have sportsmen had so many great choices for gloves from the same manufacturer at the same time, but that's what's up with the four different offerings from Gorilla Gloves.

- Gorilla Grip VEIL gloves are light, featuring a quick-dry, breathable design available in three camo patterns in a light knit shell. They're even touchscreen compatible if you're negotiating your marine electronics.
- Gorilla Grip MAX Fingerless gloves give your hands protection while allowing your fingers to work, unfettered, while delivering a supreme grip while wet.
- Gorilla Grip + ANSI Level 5 Cut Protection gloves provide extreme flexibility and protection in wet and dry situations — perfect for

cleaning fish and throwing a cast net for baitfish or shrimp.

- Gorilla Grip + ANSI Level 5 Cut Protection + RhinoFlex have a tough, outer polymer skin for impact and abrasion protection that is flexible enough for natural movement.

MSPR: \$6.99-\$9.99 per pair, or in 3-packs.
For more info, visit: bigtimeproducts.net.





LOTS OF ANGLERS KNOW THEY NEED TO SAVE PLENTY OF JANUARY DAYS TO TARGET CRAPPIE. HERE ARE SOME PLACES TO GO AND TACTICS TO USE.

COLD-WEATHER CRAPPIE

■ By David Hawkins

The year 2020 is finally behind us, and all many of us can say is “Good riddance.” Here’s hoping 2021 will be everything 2020 wasn’t, and one way to get the year off to a proper start is to wet a line and catch crappie, aka sac-a-lait, milk-fish, white perch, slabs, papermouths, car-tags or just plain crappie. After a successful outing, just call them delicious.

The habits of these delightful fish remain the same as the seasons pass. There is a winter holding pattern, prespawn, spawn and post-spawn that anglers can follow like clockwork. In January, the winter holding pattern gets our attention.

Does it get too cold to fish for crappie? Somewhere far north of Louisiana and Mississippi, a man is sitting in a little shack on a frozen lake fishing through a hole in the ice. You know what he’s catching? Crappie.

Southern waters seldom freeze over, thank goodness, and in the colder months, crappie are easy to find. They will be deeper, in most cases, underneath shad balls. Shad are less tolerant of colder water and seek the warmest, most-oxygenated water they can find to survive. Crappie stack up right under them and pick off the dying shad as they fall from their schools.

Modern electronics will display these shad balls and often the larger crappie suspended close by. It then becomes a matter of finding which bait the fish want. They will take live offerings readily but will also inhale jigs and crankbaits. Fishermen should be prepared to experiment with colors and patterns to find just the right one.

I-55 RESERVOIRS >



I-55 RESERVOIRS

Mississippi's I-55 corridor lakes have long gotten nationwide attention from serious crappie fishermen. Grenada, Enid and Sardis are well known on professional crappie tournament circuits, and locals hold their perennial sweet spots. Lots of structure, including Christmas trees, crappie fences, pallets and the like has been added to the lake over the years. The fishing there is what some describe as intense. Every year, anglers from surrounding states come to Mississippi to fill their freezers. Every year, the fishery doesn't disappoint, and the crappie are there.

D'ARBONNE LAKE

D'Arbonne Lake in the north-central portion of Louisiana is getting a similar reputation. There is a wide variety of structure in the lake, and crappie are plentiful.

"D'Arbonne is getting a reputation among serious anglers as a go-to crappie lake," said Ryan Daniel, a fisheries biologist with Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. "Our crappie outlook statewide looks to be as good as it has ever been. Two-pound fish and the occasional 3-pound-plus slabs are common in our state lakes."

Poverty Point is another lake he points to as a popular crappie fishery. Toledo Bend, according to Daniel, can be a little intimidating; especially for the occasional visitor.

"There is just so much water to cover that it becomes a hit-

or-miss proposition unless you have an inside track," he said. "Those who fish the lake regularly learn the places to go and do well."

ROSS BARNETT SPILLWAY

It has long been a standing joke that a warming spell in January could be attributed to the Mississippi legislature starting a new session, what with all the "hot-air" being tossed about.

But the warmer days entice some of the first anglers to try their luck in the Pearl River just below the spillway. Consider first why the crappie are there, and second, what anglers can do to recharge their larders with fresh fillets.

"The discharge may be slightly warmer; it has a higher oxygen content than the water in the main lake," said Tom Holman, a fisheries biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "A good number of the fish there are as a result of being pulled through the gates into the river. Some others may have wintered in the river and are coming upstream to find improved water conditions."

Being somewhat lethargic during the colder months, the bite can seem slow, but these are the same crappie our northern buddies are pulling out of holes in the ice. A crappie just doesn't care how cold the water gets.

"There are eddy currents below the spillway where the (crappie) like to hold," said Vance Anding of Flowood, Miss., a regular



The spillway below Ross Barnett Reservoir fills up with crappie and fishermen, in boats and on the banks, once January arrives.

to the winter fishing scene. “Minnow-tipped jigs work fine here. Some of the more-popular colors include white/chartreuse, red/yellow and yellow with a silver thread. I like to use a small minnow, because I think the fish will hold it longer, allowing me to get a good hookset.”

Anding said there is no question where the currents are; on any given day, if the fish are there, boats and anglers will be there as well. The spillway has long held a Siren’s song for early crappie anglers. Shore-bound fishermen line the rocks at the water’s edge and cast into the current with every size and type of gear. The only boat ramp is on the west side of the river, and is accessible off the eastbound lane of Spillway Road.

“I’ve seen the time when there were five or six corks between two boats that were scarcely 10 feet apart,” Anding said, “but tempers seldom flare the few times lines get fouled. As long as everyone is catching a few fish along, everyone is happy. If the river starts a fast rise or fall, you may as well go home. I catch my best fish on a river that has a slow rise.”

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SOUTH LOUISIANA CANALS

Canals in south Louisiana are generally a little warmer than the lakes to the north and provide a different fishing experience, according to Milton Gaspard of Golden Meadow, La.

“The crappie I find are in the deepest holes they can find in January,” Gaspard said. “They pull out of the shallows and go deep in December, and that’s where they remain until they start moving up to prepare for the spawn. Keep in mind that deep water is a comparative thing. Sometimes only a few feet makes all the difference.”

Gaspard pointed out that hurricanes last year blew a lot of trash into the canals, and that may hinder some anglers who fish multi-pole spider rigs. He prefers a single pole when searching for fish and switches to two or three poles once he is on them. He also fishes primarily with shiners but admits his largest slab came to the boat on a Road Runner.

“Water clarity is important to me,” Gaspard said. “Clear or black water is the best for winter crappie. I tried to fish Sardis Lake one time to mark it off my bucket list, but it was so stained. We caught a few fish, but I can’t figure how they found the bait. I guess it’s what you get used to.”

Gaspard also points to Lake Buffet and Indian Creek as good places to catch crappie.

ROSS BARNETT RESERVOIR

On the main-lake side of the Ross Barnett Dam, the assault on schools of fish takes a slightly different approach. The spider-rigs and deep-running baits are brought into play.

“As simple as it may sound, finding the crappie is the easy part; getting them to take bait is a little more difficult,” said Larry Anderson of Grenada, Miss. “I find the fish with the aid of a Humminbird fish finder. They have been as deep as 18 feet and as shallow as 8, depending on the weather. Warmer days like we had last winter kept the shad up, and the fish were right there with them. I caught a lot of fish last January in 10 feet of



water or less.”

Anderson slow-trolls his jigs and crankbaits at various depths parallel to the rip-rap along the dam until he finds a depth/lure/presentation the crappie like.

“As I understand it, the rocks warm faster than soil and remain warmer longer than surface air,” he said. “That’s why the fish gather here along the dam. I’ve seen the same thing happen at Grenada and Enid. That’s closer to home, but I have folks here in the Madison area, and fishing new water is a good reason to make a visit.”

SARDIS LAKE SPILLWAY ➤

A minnow-tipped jig may just be the most-popular crappie offering in the Southeast, and for good reason; it catches fish. **ABOVE, RIGHT:** Lilly Hawkins, 13, of Pearl, displays a crappie she caught on live bait at Ross Barnett Reservoir.



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A good mess of winter crappie is every angler's dream: fun to catch, fine to eat.



SARDIS LAKE SPILLWAY

Anderson has also found cold-water crappie in the spillway at Sardis Lake, in an area called the "Lower Lake," which is part of the Tallahatchie River. Access is good there, and water flow is consistent, as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages the

LET'S GO CLUBBING

To become a better crappie angler is a simple matter of becoming social. Crappie-fishing clubs — the Magnolia Crappie Club being one such organization in Mississippi — hold monthly tournaments, and members are usually willing to share their secrets.

Many husband and wives fish as teams and enjoy the social aspect of competition and frequent fish fries.

In the absence of such a club or organization, local tackle shops often have a good handle on popular baits and techniques. Don't be too shy to ask questions. Other anglers putting in and taking out at boat ramps are also good sources of up-to-date information. ■



The two things wrong with retirement are: you never get a holiday, and you can't call in sick.



lake at winter pool level.

Being retired, Anderson can watch the weather and water conditions to choose the best days to fish.

"The two things wrong with retirement are: you never get a holiday, and you can't call in sick," he said. "Seriously, consider a day when the (Lower Lake) is steady or on a very slow fall or rise. Get as close to the rip-rap as you can or fish the points just downstream of the spillway. On more than one occasion, I've tied on a 3/8-ounce red/yellow Road Runner and worked the edges of the current with a spinning rod. If the crappie are in there, they will take the bait." ■

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



DON'T LEAVE VOCALIZATION OUT OF YOUR BAG OF TRICKS WHEN IT COMES TO HUNTING WILD HOGS.

CALLING **ALL HOGS**

■ By Andy Douglas

WILD HOGS.

The phrase makes the masses cringe. Hated and hunted by farmers, landowners, deer hunters and many others. Hunting hogs day and night has become extremely popular and necessary to keep the population in check.

They are smart, secretive, adaptive and, due to their rapid breeding, they have become probably the greatest emerging wildlife challenge the Southeast will face in the 21st century.

Can a hog be called? Some say yea; others say nay. It does work and creates another aspect to hunting wild hogs. Calling is one more tool hog hunters can add to their arsenal of tactics to help battle the increasing swine population.

“It’s absolutely true that you can call in hogs,” said Joel “Hans” Miller of the HansETX YouTube channel. “I have been doing it successfully for the last 10 years and do it most every night.”

WHEN TO TRY

Hog calling can be done during daylight or after-dark hours with success. It can be done throughout the year. Any time hogs can be hunted, hogs can be called.

Incorporate calling into your hog-hunting routines. Whether you check agricultural fields by day or are a night hunter equipped with thermal and night vision, give calling a try before ending the hunt or moving to other ground.

“It’s not going to replace traditional spot-and-stalk hunting, but rather complements it,” said Miller, from Ben Wheeler, Texas.

HOW IT WORKS

After a hog hunter has exhausted all other tactics, whether it is spotting and stalking or still-hunting over bait, calling should be given a chance. Calling hogs is similar to the way coyote hunters target their quarry.

A few hand calls like the Primos Hog Squealer or a grunter like Knight & Hale’s Wild Hog Call can get the job done. An electronic caller is more expensive but a better option, as many hog sounds are available to pair with the call for realistic sounds. Some of these sounds are actual recorded live hog sounds.

Place electronic calls no more than 30 or 40 yards away. Try some of the tactics below and start calling.



Joel “Hans” Miller said that calling has given him many more opportunities to take wild hogs than he would had without calls.

OPPOSITE: The hog that usually responds to calling is the more-dominant hog, like this alpha sow taken by the author using hand calls at close range with a pistol.





“I always commit to giving it least 15 minutes to work,” he said. “I start out with a low volume and a non-aggressive type call like Convergent Game Calls’ ‘sound the rally.’ If that doesn’t work, I will move to something more aggressive like sow in distress or aggressive boar and with more volume.”

Hogs are not naturally nocturnal animals, but they quickly turn nocturnal when pressured or close to human activity. This has made thermal and night-vision hog hunting very productive, and this includes calling them in.

WHAT TO EXPECT

There is no silver bullet when it comes to calling in and killing hogs. As a matter of fact, hunters are just as likely to scare away hogs as they are to attract them.

“You are more likely to call in a lone boar or an aggressive sow. It’s usually the alpha hog in a group that will respond to calling,” Miller said. “You can easily scare off a group of adolescents, but if there is an alpha in the group, the whole sounder will usually follow the dominant one.”

CONCLUDING

When targeting wild hogs give calling a try before leaving. You could call in a hog you never knew was there or you may call in a hog from other properties that you can’t hunt.

“Calling hogs has given me many shot opportunities that otherwise I would have never had,” Miller said.

Sometimes you will have success, and sometimes you will not. In one sense it’s a lot like calling predators or turkeys, it works best when strategically used in areas with lots of hogs.

However, the times when it does work, the results are incredible. ■



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

CONSIDERATIONS

Hogs have an exceptional sense of smell. When setting up to call, wind direction should be considered. Set up and call where you think the hogs will approach from either upwind or crosswind. Hunt the wind just as if you were hunting deer.

It’s a myth that hogs can’t see. Their eyesight is very similar to humans. Hide well to avoid being seen, especially during daytime, and tuck away in the shadows at night.

Wild hogs hear well, too. Be quiet while entering an area, as they will be less likely to respond if they have heard a loud truck, an ATV, or human voices.

TACTICS AND STRATEGIES

Target areas where you find hog sign or where you have seen hogs. Fields or food plots with wallows, open areas next to bedding thickets, logging trails near swamps and along waterways are good places to start.

Miller offers a little advice.



02-27-20/23:53



Calling not going to replace traditional spot-and-stalk hunting, but rather complement it.



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2021 BLACKJACK 256 BAY

The BlackJack 256 Bay is the flagship of the BlackJack line. With its larger size, you can take the 256 Bay into bigger, rougher water and still get the exceptionally smooth and dry ride that's come to be expected from the BlackJack brand.

The 256 Bay comes loaded with many standard features, such as LED lights, custom upholstery and gas shocks on all hatch lids. The console has a large door in the front, making it big enough to house multiple batteries and extra storage space. The large dash has plenty of real estate for aftermarket electronics. The

hull itself is a work of art, with a subtly more aggressive styling, while still maintaining BlackJack's beautifully unique look. When you drive a BlackJack, you drive a boat that makes everyone take notice.

Length 25'6"	Beam 8'6"	Capacity 10	Max HP 400
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www.blackjackboats.com/our-boats/blackjack-256

2021 BLACKJACK 224



The BlackJack 224 represents the ultimate blend of prowess and performance, all wrapped together in a sleek and striking design from legendary boat builders Bill and Gary Kenner.

From the smooth, dry ride of the “Carolina flare” bow to its classic “tumblehome” transom, the BlackJack 224 blends tradition and technology like no other boat on the market. Her hand-laid hull and deck are heavy-duty but lightweight. Reverse-angle, spray-reduction chines deflect the water with authority.

Length 23' 1"	Beam 8' 3"	Capacity 10	Max HP 300
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www.blackjackboats.com/our-boats/blackjack-224

2021 BLACKJACK 256 COASTAL

The BlackJack 256 Coastal is the newest addition to the BlackJack line that combines offshore and bay boat elements to give you a boat that lets you decide how you want to fish on any given day.

Its three-piece design, deeper casting deck and open aft deck give you the ability fish comfortably in bigger waters without sacrificing inshore fishability. Add the optional removable forward seating, and the Coastal quickly converts to a day cruiser perfect for family trips to your favorite sandbar or island.

The BlackJack 256 Coastal has the versatility you need with the style and performance you've come to expect from BlackJack Boats.



Length 26' 6"	Beam 8' 6"	Capacity 10	Max HP 400
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www.blackjackboats.com/news-events/blackjack-introduces-new-coastal-model

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AV26

The Avenger AV-26 has an overall length of 26-foot-2 and a beam of 8½ feet built with the serious fisherman in mind. This stable fishing platform is complimented with standard equipment like two live release and one baitwell, dual lockable rod storage boxes, and an anchor locker built to accommodate both bow and stern anchors. The Avenger AV-26 is rated for a single engine of up to 400 HP and features an 89-gallon capacity fuel tank, making your favorite fishing spot easily and quickly accessible.



Length 26' 0"	Beam 8' 6"	Capacity 8	Max HP 400
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www.avengerbayboats.com/av26.html

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AV24

The Avenger AV-24 has an overall length of 24-foot-8 and a beam of 8½ feet built with the serious fisherman in mind. This stable fishing platform is complimented with standard equipment like two live release and one baitwell, dual lockable rod storage boxes, and an anchor locker built to accommodate both bow and stern anchors. The Avenger AV-24 is rated for a single engine of up to 300 HP and features an 89-gallon capacity fuel tank, making your favorite fishing spot easily and quickly accessible.

Length 24' 8"	Beam 8' 6"	Capacity 8	Max HP 300
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<http://www.avengerbayboats.com/av24.html>



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2021 BLUE WAVE MAKAIRA

Can one boat really do it all? Maybe... meet Makaira.

Since 1992, Blue Wave Boats has ruled the bay... now the blue is in their sites. Makaira is an offshore hybrid. Built for offshore fishing with a shallow draft for those days when you want to stay nearshore.

Based on the wildly successful 2800 Pure Hybrid platform, Makaira provides the boat the marketplace has been begging for; offshore ability with nearshore capability.

NEW for 2021... Makaira is equipped with the standard features you need and has new options you want. Noteworthy standards for 2021 include: Garmin electronics, deluxe captains seats on a tackle station, compass, 3-sided tempered glass windshield, freshwater washdown, swim platform / ladder and a T-top with a finished edge. New optional equipment includes a second station and marine head.

Makaira has a spacious cockpit that seriously rivals that of traditional centers yet manages to keep a legit aft platform largely

thanks to the no-splashwell build utilized on all Blue Wave Boats that keep the aft decks huge on the entire line-up.

Forward features wrap around seating that quickly and easily transforms into a casting platform or u-shaped seating. And yes, the forward pitch-well of the 2800 Pure Hybrid is literally front and center on this model too. This smart design has an optional quick stow and easy access table and base unseen in larger boats.

Even more surprising features include lockable rod storage built into the gunwales, both port and starboard, that can accommodate up to ten 8' rods with reels. Additionally, these compartments do double duty as dry storage.

Length 27' 2"	Beam 9' 2"	Capacity 11	Max HP 600
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bluewaveboats.com/boats/2021-makaira--2800

2021 BLUE WAVE 2400 PURE BAY



Get to know 2400 Pure Bay, AGAIN. Totally reinvigorated for 2021, the Pure Bay Series has a redesigned helm station capable of accepting a 16-inch GPS, new helm seating and standard features that are sure to catch the eye of any angler. What hasn't changed? The legendary ride!

More casting space, more livewell, more dry storage on a hull built to perform as well in the shallows as open water. Generous, insulated fish boxes give you the room needed to earn bragging rights when you hit the docks. When it is time to give those fish a break, 2400 Pure Bay is equipped with plenty of amenities to keep the entire family happy for a day at the beach or sandbar. The rear casting platform quickly converts to comfortable seating while the forward platform is the perfect spot to work on a tan.

Length 24' 6"	Beam 8' 6"	Capacity 9	Max HP 350
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bluwaveboats.com/boats/2021-purebay--2400

2021 BLUE WAVE 2800 PURE HYBRID

Meet 2800 Pure Hybrid, it is just as comfortable fishing the shallows as fishing blue water. This is the evolution of a new species of boat from the Parks family, who have been leading the charge in innovation since 1992.

NEW for 2021... 2800 Pure Hybrid is equipped with the standard features you need and has new options you want. Noteworthy standards for 2021 include: Garmin electronics, deluxe captains seats on a tackle station, compass, 3-sided tempered glass windshield, freshwater washdown, swim platform / ladder and a t-top with a finished edge. New, optional equipment includes a second station and marine head.

The unique hull design of 2800 Pure Hybrid delivers a soft and comfortable ride with enough Carolina flare to stay dry in most conditions. The double-stepped hull gets on top of the waves immediately for peak fuel economy and nimble performance.

The boat's impressive size assures space for everything you need for a day of fishing or fun in the sun. Fishing is at the forefront of this boat's purpose-built design. One standard pressurized livewell aft holding 35 gallons of live bait and a 10-gallon pitchwell forward, are standard. An additional seventy-five gallons of livewell is optional. Spacious platforms with insulated fish boxes and lockable rod storage all drain overboard and keep the deck dry. The console is large enough for twin screens at the helm and a spacious step-down compartment has ample room for a marine head. A comfortable jump seat and optional seat cushions for the bow turn this fishing machine into a sandbar champ.



And to top it off you can easily fill 'er up thanks to fuel fills port and starboard. The transom is Kevlar reinforced to accommodate up to 600 HP in a single or twin set-up. Truly, no species is safe.

Length 27' 2"	Beam 9' 2"	Capacity 11	Max HP 600
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bluwaveboats.com/boats/2021-pure_hybrid--2800

GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

A small swimbait duped this 4-pounder on a windy day.



WIN THE BASS BATTLE

AS BASS CATCHABILITY DECLINES, ANGLER EFFICIENCY STILL INCREASES

Catching bass nowadays seems like a battle between the knowledge and skills of the anglers and the too-often unpredictable behavior of the bass.

Scientific evidence points to bass becoming harder to catch. Studies in the 1980s attributed declining catch rates of bass in ponds to lure avoidance. A more-recent study found rapidly declining catch rates in weekly fishing trips on small impoundments in Mississippi and suggested the decline in catchability may be simply due to the presence of anglers or some component of the act of fishing. A 30-year Illinois study demonstrated that vulnerability to capture was a heritable, genetic trait that resulted in harder-to-catch fish. All this points to declining bass catch rates, but a recently published study has found anglers may be evolving faster than the bass.

TESTING EFFICIENCY

Illinois Natural History Survey fishery scientists used bass-tournament catch data to ask a simple question: are anglers getting better at catching bass? They compared tournament-angler catch rates (bass weighed in per angler in each tournament) to electrofishing catch per hour, the standard way biologists estimate relative abundance of largemouth bass.

Electrofishing and tournament data were available for 969 tournaments on seven Illinois reservoirs for time periods spanning 2002 to 2016. The number of years of data for individual reservoirs ranged from five to 14.

All tournaments were single-angler events with a 5-bass limit. Using tournament weigh-in data to estimate catch rate has a potential flaw: it may not fully account for the total number of

tournament-legal fish caught by anglers that weigh in a 5-fish limit. For example, an angler may have caught 10 legal fish but only weighed in the five largest.

While this possible data glitch cannot be ruled out, the average number of fish weighed in was only 1.15 bass per angler per tournament in events surveyed. Less than 1% of all anglers in all tournaments caught four or five bass. Thus, underestimating angler catch was considered a minor issue.

On six of the lakes, angler catch rates increased over time, while bass rela-



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

tive abundance remained the same or decreased. On the seventh lake, angler catch rates decreased slightly, while bass relative abundance had a bigger decrease. Conclusion: bass tournament anglers are getting better at catching bass.

IMPLICATIONS

Bass might be getting smarter or evolving to be less vulnerable to capture, but bass anglers, at least in Illinois, seem to be winning the catch-me-if-you-can angler vs bass contest.

Several years ago, I analyzed trends in catch rates for anglers fishing in 311 large, top-tier, professional B.A.S.S.-sponsored tournaments. From 1972 to 2015, average catch rate in these tournaments increased at a rate of 0.06 bass per angler per day each year. The increase was statistically significant, but this is a tiny effect; at that rate of change, it will take almost 20 years for the average catch rate to increase by one bass per angler.

But in agreement with the Illinois results, it supports the conclusion that anglers armed with more knowledge of bass behavior and tremendous advances in boats, tackle and electronics are becoming more effective and efficient.

A DOWNSIDE?

I'm all about catching more bass, but there may be a dark side to increased angler efficiency that can affect management of black bass resources.

Fisheries managers have long debated the value of angler-generated data. In the vast oceans, thorough, scientifically valid fisheries surveys are limited. Marine fisheries managers, instead, have long relied on the catch of commercial fishermen and operated on the assumption that greater catches mean more abundant fish, declining catches warn of depleted stocks.

Scientifically valid fisheries assessments, like catch rates measured by electrofishing or nets, are more easily achieved in lakes and streams and, indeed, comprise a large portion of the work fisheries biologists do. Angler catch rate data is readily and relatively cheaply available and potentially useful, but to be useful for estimating fish abundance requires a very important assumption: catchability of the fish does

not change.

If catchability declines with increased fishing, as has been found in several studies, declines in angler catch rates would be expected in a stable population. But a biologist assuming no change in catchability would interpret the declining angler catch rate as a depletion of the fish, a false conclusion.

But the opposite is true if anglers are becoming more efficient. In a stable population, increasing catch efficiency would result in greater angler catch in a stable population. Thus, the biologist assuming equal catchability would inter-

pret the greater catch rate as an indication of an increasing fish population. Again, a false conclusion.

The worst-case scenario is a sufficient increase in angler efficiency to maintain high catch rates and mask a declining fish population.

These misinterpretations of angler catch rates are not worries as long as biologists continue to rely on on-the-water biological assessments, but they are concerns. Decisions on the status of a fish population based solely on angler catch data can lead to wrong conclusions. ■



New presentations like umbrella rigs can improve angler efficiency.

Ross Barnett bass don't have a lot of deep water to escape cold, January weather, but on warmer, more temperate days, they'll feed readily in the shallows.



RETURNING TO ROSS BARNETT

JANUARY: A BOOM OR BUST MONTH FOR BASSING OF THE REZ

Bass don't have much deep water where they can hide in the winter at Ross Barnett, but the only thing that makes Ross Barnett a bad January fishing day is a hard, blowing north, northeast or northwest wind.

Bass are in their winter pattern in early January. Generally, if you put a lure in front of them, they'll attack. I'll concentrate my fishing on the riprap near the dam and in Pelahatchie Bay and on the riprap and pilings on either end of the Pelahatchie Bridge and the Highway 43 bridge.

• **Riprap.** First I'll fish the riprap by the dam. The bass will be in the shallow water on the rocks or holding on the first drop-off in about 8 to 10 feet of water. The rocks will draw heat from the sun, and the shallow water around them will

concentrate baitfish. I'll start casting a gray ghost Mann's Baby 1-Minus on a 7-foot-1, medium-action FX Custom rod with a 7.3:1 Bruin reel and 20-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon. I'll cast parallel to the riprap and crash the lure into the rocks in foot-deep water. On any warming January day, the shad, the bluegills and other baitfish will hold as close to the rocks as possible, as will bass.

I'll also have on my casting deck a 3/8-ounce Classic spinnerbait with a white skirt, gold Indiana blades and a trailer hook. I'll crash that spinner bait at a 45% angle into the rocks from the shallow water, slow-rolling the spinnerbait to turn the blades out to about 4 feet deep. I'll use a 6-foot-10, heavy action FX Custom rod with 23-pound fluorocarbon on a 6.2:1 reel.

• **Bridges.** I'll expect the bass to hold on the downcurrent side of the bridge pilings and around the points of land on either side of the bridges. I'll fish those areas with a shad-patterned jerkbait on a 6-foot-9, medium-

Strike King KVD jerkbait



action FX Custom rod and a Bruin 8:1 reel with 15-pound fluorocarbon. I'll have two jerkbaits tied on: a jerkbait with a short lip that will run 1 to 6 feet deep, and a deep-diving jerkbait with a longer lip that will get down 6 to 10 feet.

Besides fishing the jerkbaits around the pilings, I'll also fish them around the riprap on the two points on either side of the bridges. The bass will come up out of the deeper water to attack them. I've caught some good-sized spotted



Mann's Baby 1-Minus



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.

Paul Elias emphasizes that you won't catch large numbers of bass in January at Ross Barnett, but the ones you do catch will be chunky prespawners.

bass around the Highway 43 bridge before. Usually in January, a current will come through the lake. I'll cast upcurrent and retrieve the jerkbait with the current.

Ross Barnett is really muddy during January; that's a negative effect on jerkbaits. However, if you'll change the color when you encounter muddy water, you still can catch bass. Under stained water conditions, I'll choose a purple back/chartreuse sides/orange belly and keep the jerkbait moving fairly fast.

If the water is clearer near Pelahatchie Bay, I'll let the jerkbait sit briefly before I jerk it again. I won't let the bait suspend nearly as long as when I'm fishing clear water. I'll also fish a jerkbait on the riprap, if I can't catch bass with my Baby 1-Minus and my spinnerbait there.

• **Upriver tactics.** If the river's not too muddy, I'll move upriver of the Highway 43 bridge and fish the cuts and the ditches in the sandbars you can see in clearer water. I'll fish a ½-ounce gray back/pearl sides/orange belly Little George tailspinner. I'll tie 23-pound fluorocarbon on the 7-foot-1, medium-action FX Custom rod, cast the lure, let it fall to the bottom, taking up slack in the line, and then pump it back to the boat like I'll fish a jig. Generally, bass will attack it on the fall.

END OF JANUARY

Once the water warms up, I'll concentrate my fishing on the lily pad stems behind the No. 7 river marker and the islands. I'll mainly use a ¾-ounce black/blue bladed jig with a black/blue crawfish trailer. I'll fish this lure on 30-pound bass braid with a 12- to 14-inch piece of 20-pound fluorocarbon leader. I'll cast the jig with a 6-foot-10, heavy action FX Custom rod and a 6.2:1 Bruin reel.

I'll retrieve the bladed jig slowly to let it tick those lily pad stems. Although the bass will be moving up into the stems, they're not very aggressive. So the slower you move the bait and still have the blade making noise, the better your odds will be for catching bass.

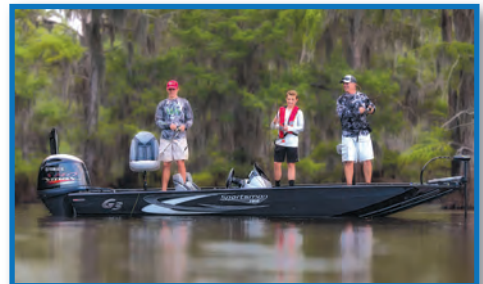
January's not a month where you'll catch numbers of bass, but you should catch some fairly large, prespawn bass. ■



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YAMAHA

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Zach Dubois with his new Bayou Bug 2.0 attached to a bass.

BAYOU BUG 2.0

CAJUN LURES GIVES ONE OF ITS MOST-POPULAR LURES AN UPDATE

One of the soft-plastic lures that launched Cajun Lures six years ago has a new look for 2021.

Founder and artificial lure designer Zachary Dubois of Nunez, a rural community near Kaplan in Vermilion Parish, wanted more action from the body of the lure, and he got it with improvements made to the original

Bayou Bug. Bayou Bug 2.0 has arrived, and it is catching bass like the 8-pounder Dubois boated last March at Toledo Bend.

Dubois, 28, got the bug, so to speak, for tweaking the bait at the beginning of last year, liked the direction the physical changes were headed and refined them from there to create the newest version. He eliminated the bulbous “arms” and

replaced them with flat arms featuring a flair, added ribs to the lower portion of the body to aid in “skin hooking” and, most important, in his opinion, added an



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.

extension to the upper of the body to give it more “meat at the top” where the hook is inserted.

“I wanted some improvements on it. Getting a big mold for my machine gave me the opportunity, and now we have a new one,” Dubois said.

As for the improvement, mission accomplished, he believes. “Guys I’ve given it to test it out and review all like it,” said Dubois, a 28-year-old Louisiana-Lafayette graduate. “I have a feeling once more people get it in their hands and start using it, it’ll be the favorite flipping bait for a lot of guys.”

Lucas Ragusa of Gonzales, who fished the Bassmaster Opens from 2013 to 2018, is one of the growing number of believers in the Bayou Bug 2.0. He fished with Dubois when the lure designer took it for a test drive at Henderson Lake.

Dubois, who has been manufacturing lures full-time in a small shed next to his house since 2016, said they caught some good-sized bass on the baits, fresh out of the new mold. He found out what he was hoping to learn.

“What I really wanted to see was how the fish reacted to it,” he said. “When I’d flip, a lot of fish bit on the fall or when I popped the bait. That tells me the arms generated the bite. I was happy about that.”

Ragusa later nailed a 5-pounder on the Bayou Bug 2.0 at Henderson Lake.

The changes made the soft-plastic creature bait even more appealing, according to Dubois.

The extension at the top gives it a little more tip to use when a fisherman runs the hook into it, plus helps “nudge it up there and keep it up there so it lasts longer,” he said.

The small appendage on each side at the lower end of the body gives the lure a little more vibration as it falls, he said.

The new ribs over the small cavity in the middle allows an angler to tuck the barb of the hook in to keep it weedless, he said, but won’t interfere with the hooksetting capability of the Bayou Bug 2.0.

The revised bait is about 4 inches long and available in 14 colors, with the most popular being black/blue, junebug, Okeechobee craw and boudin, a color Dubois cooked up that is brown pumpkin on top, light tan on the bottom with black/blue flake. ■

For more information about the Bayou Bug and other Cajun Lures LLC products, go to cajunlures.com.



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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Unbroken horizontal lines along their sides distinguish striped bass from other bass species.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: STRIPED BASS

Photos by Brian Cope

Striped bass, *Morone saxatilis*, have two distinct, naturally occurring populations. One strain is native to the Atlantic coast, from Canada down to the St. John's River in Florida. The second is scattered along the Gulf of Mexico's northern coast from Florida's Suwannee River to Louisiana's Lake Pontchartrain.

These fish began their existence as true anadromous fish, meaning they live the bulk of their lives in saltwater but migrate to freshwater to spawn. A huge population still lives that way. However, striped bass have also been successfully introduced into freshwater lakes and reservoirs across the United States, even in landlocked states with no access to saltwater. Fisheries biologists have also stocked them along the Pacific Coast with great success.

Striped bass have long bodies and range

in color from green to steel gray to dark gray and almost black on their backs, with silver to dark gray sides. Between seven and eight distinct horizontal lines run from their gill plates to their tails. One always follows the fish's lateral line.

They have two parallel tooth patches on their tongues and two sharp spines on the back edges of their gill plates. One big difference between the Atlantic and Gulf populations is in the number of dorsal fin rays. They also have a different configuration of lateral line scales, but fisheries biologists still consider both strains to be the same species.

ON THE MOVE

Atlantic striped bass also travel the open ocean much more so than the Gulf strain. Atlantic stripers migrate as far as from the Carolinas to Nova Scotia, and from Florida to at least Virginia. Gulf

stripers rarely migrate out of saltwater river systems.

On some occasions, Atlantic strains of striped bass have been caught in the Gulf, but this is probably from striped bass stocked in freshwater impoundments with access to the Gulf.

Striped bass go by many nicknames, among them: stripes, stripers, linesiders, rockfish, rock bass, rocks, silversides and squidheads. In some areas of the country, males are called bucks or jacks, while females are referred to as cows.

Despite their name, striped bass are not in the same family as largemouth or



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.

Striped bass are targeted by thousands and thousands of anglers, either in saltwater from the Gulf to New England, or in landlocked reservoirs where they have been stocked by state agencies.



smallmouth bass. Those fish are in the black bass family, while striped bass are members of the temperate bass family.

These fish have huge appetites and will eat just about anything. Smaller fish make up the bulk of their diets, but they also eat squid and eels, and those in saltwater eat shrimp and crabs. They feed throughout the entire water column, and anglers can draw strikes from them 60 feet or deeper and on topwater lures — and anywhere in between — on the same day.

Male striped bass reach sexual maturity at the age of two, when they are about 6.8 inches long. Females reach it by age four when are typically 17 inches long. All spawning occurs in freshwater, upstream of nursery areas near river mouths. The females release thousand of eggs that the males fertilize, then the eggs must float freely, hatching within a few days.

Louisiana's state-record striped bass weighed 47.50 pounds. James L. Taylor caught the fish at Toledo Bend in August 1991. Mississippi's state-record striper weighed 39.6 pounds and was caught by Rocky Rawls in the Pascagoula River in February 2016.

The world-record striped bass came from Long Island Sound off of Westbrook, Ct. Gregory Myers caught the 81-pound, 14-ounce fish in August 2011.

The world-record landlocked striped bass came from the Black Warrior River in Alabama and weighed 69 pounds, 9 ounces. James Bramlett caught the fish in February 2013. ■

A large, modern Crest Classic Platinum pontoon boat is shown on the water. The boat is white with black accents and has a Suzuki outboard motor. The text 'Come see the Crest Classic Platinum Pontoons at our new location.' is overlaid on the image in a large, white, outlined font. The Crest logo is visible on the side of the boat.

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

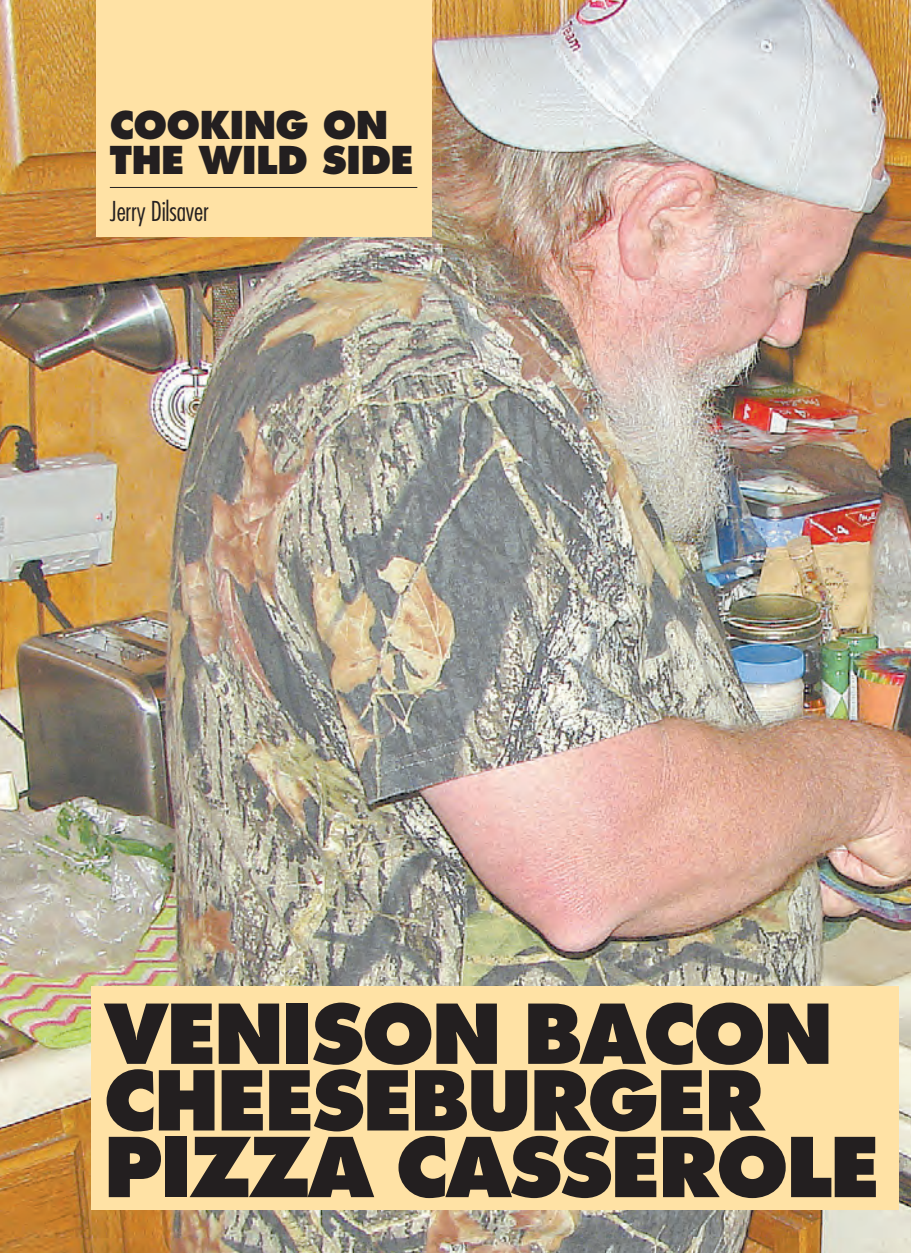
The Crest logo, featuring a stylized 'C' above the word 'CREST' in a bold, sans-serif font.

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver



VENISON BACON CHEESEBURGER PIZZA CASSEROLE

If two things taste good by themselves, surely they would go great combined in a casserole, right?
INSET: A cast-iron skillet does a great job of cooking a variety of dishes, including casseroles.

Jerry Dilsaver

Most of us are looking forward to the new year, not necessarily for 2021, but for 2020 to be over. This is a fun meal that tastes really good and I think you should try it the day after eating collards, black-eyed peas and the traditional good luck New Year's meal. This is a feel-good, taste-good meal that will be a great way to begin the new year.

This recipe is a gift, in many ways. Robert Cardwell, who has shared several excellent wild turkey recipes, provided it. It has quickly become a favorite.

January is often the coldest month in the Southeast, when we have potential to see the most winter weather. Still, sportsmen are out doing what they enjoy. Fishing hasn't gone away, but it has slowed, and much of the crowd is gone from boat ramps and marinas. Deer season has a ways to go, and duck hunters are still plying the sounds, rivers, lakes and impoundments, while quail hunters follow braces of pointing dogs over the rivers and through the woods.

This recipe works well for this time. There are multiple ingredients, but most can come from your fridge, freezer and pantry. In fact, that's what Cardwell credits for this recipe. It was his turn to cook dinner, and he hadn't prepared, so he went through the freezer, fridge and pantry and found all of the ingredients. Since that first time, it has become a staple, and he has added

or changed a few things from the original. And I changed and added more when he shared it with me.

Plain and simple, this is comfort food. It takes a little while to prepare, but it isn't difficult. Even better, it includes several things we all like. This proves my philosophy that if two ingredients are good, the odds are in your favor they'll be good together. This doesn't always work, but when you begin with venison, add sausage and bacon, then mix in cheese, the odds get really high it has to be good.

Sure, my arteries quake and quiver every time I fix this, so I do so sparingly, but there are times the ingredients come together and begin calling my name. I believe if you'll try this, you'll fix it again. It tastes good, is filling, is warming and brings a smile to your face. Heck, I smile just speaking the name, and that's about all you can ask from a venison bacon cheeseburger pizza made as a casserole.

Most readers will receive this issue a few days before Christmas. I'd like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and hope it brings you happiness. The New Year begins a week later, and I believe we're all looking forward to 2021. I'd like to wish you the best in health, wealth, wisdom, happiness and spending a lot of fun and successful time fishing and hunting during 2021. ■

VENISON BACON CHEESEBURGER PIZZA CASSEROLE

When I was younger, I would have called a pizza with these ingredients a “garbage” pizza. That isn’t actually a bad name, but an endearing name for using everything in the fridge that is about to expire. Robert Cardwell has put that idea together in a casserole. Who would have thought it? That’s why I appreciate so many of his endeavors. The man is creative!

This version is very close to Robert’s original recipe, but regular readers know I had to tweak it a little. You should feel free to do this also. This is excellent as it is, but some folks will prefer more or less spice. I rarely use salt and only use a little Himalayan pink salt with the egg noodles. Your tastes may be different; that’s OK.

Speaking of the egg noodles; here are two tips that aren’t on the package. First, use a little olive oil in the water when you boil them to help prevent them from sticking together. Second, before stirring them into the mixture, run hot water over them for a minute or two to loosen them back up and make them easier to blend into the mixture.

One of the things Cardwell likes about this is that except for needing a pot to boil the egg noodles, it could be cooked in a single, cast-iron skillet. This shouldn’t be changed. Cast iron heats well for both the stove top and oven segments of cooking. Also, don’t clean the skillet between cooking the bacon, browning the meats and sautéing the veggies. Pour out any excess drippings, but realize that with venison and one of the game sausages, there won’t be much except for the bacon. Use those juices to help season the veggies.

The first ingredient to consider is the meat. Bacon

PREPARATION:

Boil the egg noodles using the instructions on the package until al dente. Drain the noodles and set them aside. Chop the jalapeno and chop or slice any of the other ingredients that weren’t purchased already cut. Cook the bacon until crispy and drain the grease from the skillet. Season the venison with the garlic powder, oregano and salt and pepper (to taste) and brown it, then remove it from the skillet and drain any grease from the skillet. Brown the sausage and remove it from the skillet and also remove all but a light skim of the grease.

Sauté the onion and about one-third of the jalapeno in the sausage drippings. When the onion begins to turn opaque, add the banana peppers, onions, mushrooms and Rotel to the skillet and sauté lightly for another minute or two. Preheat the oven to 350. Cut the bacon into small pieces, but not as fine as crumbs.

Remove the skillet from the heat and mix in the venison, sausage, bacon, noodles, pizza sauce and 6 ounces of the cheese. Be sure to blend this well. Put this mixture in the oven and bake for about 15 minutes. Be careful not to singe any exposed egg noodles. Remove from the oven

is bacon, and it’s good, and that’s all that matters. Venison is the burger, but if you don’t have any, this is still surprisingly good using hamburger. I know that’s a sacrilege, but sometimes you’re out of venison burger.

The recipe call for sausage, and this generally means purchased pork sausage. That works fine, but it is excellent with feral pig sausage and venison sausage. I expect it would also be good with bear sausage, but I haven’t had any to try. Mild sausage is fine and hot or spicy is better.

Cardwell’s recipe called for mixed green and banana peppers. This was another opportunity for me to fine tune the mixture. I use a jalapeno pepper instead of the green pepper and sauté about a third of it with the onions to be mixed into the casserole and keep the rest to be sprinkled on top by those who like more jalapeno.

Cardwell’s recipe called for chopped tomatoes; I changed that to Rotel, which is available from mild to spicy and includes chopped green chilies. Even the mild is better than plain tomatoes.

This is a mix that begins with good ingredients and the blend of them is even better. Once you put the cheese on top, it’s almost ready. Finely shredded cheese will only require another minute or two in the oven to melt, while coarsely shredded cheese will take a few more minutes.

I think this is ready to eat when it comes out of the oven, but I’m experimenting with letting it sit for a few minutes before scooping some for the first plate. There definitely is some flavorful steam that escapes when it is cut immediately. ■

and stir the mixture well. Sprinkle the remaining cheese on top of the mixture.

Return to the oven and bake until the cheese melts. The time will vary from around 2 to 5 minutes according to how thick or thin the cheese was grated. Serve with the remaining jalapeno pieces sprinkled on top.

I like salads and serve this with a green salad or lettuce wedge. A piece of hearty bread helps get the last bit off the plate, and a slice of your favorite pie or some warm bread pudding caps this off just right. Of course, you could eat a second helping and forego dessert. ■

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ pound venison
- ½ pound sausage
- 4 pieces bacon
- 8 ounces shredded 4 Cheese Mexican blend
- 8 ounces egg noodles
- 14-ounce jar pizza sauce
- 4 ounces sliced mushrooms (drained)
- ¼ cup Banana peppers
- 1 Jalapeno pepper
- ¼ cup sliced black olives
- ¼ cup chopped sweet onion
- ¼ cup Rotel diced tomatoes
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp oregano
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste
- 10- to 12-inch deep cast iron skillet



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@captainjerry.com.

The author used this late-season rub to identify where a mature buck was still cruising around.

LATE-SEASON SCRAPES, RUBS

READ THE SIGN, KNOW WHY IT'S WHERE IT IS

By Bill Garbo

As we transition from the Christmas holidays into the New Year, deer hunters find ourselves entering the fourth quarter, so to speak, of the season.

According to where you are geographically, the rut is either full on or is just beginning to wind down.

This can be a puzzling time if you are not keenly aware of what makes your local deer population tick during January.

In my neck of the woods, the first week of January is what I would call the "immediate post-rut" period, where most of the breeding is over but mature bucks are still moving around as they search and compete for the last receptive does from the main rut cycle.

It is now the toughest time of year for your deer herd, as it competes for the waning supply of natural food.

Cold weather will have deer seeking out and hammering food plots, especially ones that have been properly fertilized and cared for.

Your does will reappear at these food sources, and bucks will once again be freshening rubs and scrapes.

So this is a great time to have some of your trail cameras trained on communal rut scrapes to see what bucks are actively moving around.

SCRAPE UP SOME INTEREST

Once the peak of the rut arrives and full-blown breeding begins, most scrapes are abandoned. But you might still see scraping activity in areas near doe hang-outs and bedding areas.

During the "immediate post-rut" time period, one strategy that might work under the prevailing conditions is to hunt scrapes on the downwind side of doe-heavy areas, and to use estrous scent and doe bleats to help reel in a mature buck.

Some deer hunters would call the next phase, often referred to as the "post-rut," the doldrums phase or maybe the "What happened to the bucks?" phase.

Breeding is, for all intents and purposes, over. As a result, tired, run-down and hungry, bucks retreat into familiar core areas and feed on prime food sources.

Under these conditions, you just might catch a mature buck out feeding in a food plot during daylight hours, especially in really cold weather.

DOE TO BUCK: IT'S ME AGAIN

Again, depending on where your hunting property is, the secondary rut can continue into late January.

Unbred does come back into estrous approximately 28 days after their initial cycle during the primary rut.

Also, doe fawns and yearlings born early come into estrous for the first time.

Suddenly, mature bucks are back on their feet and might



Photo by Bill Garbo

re-open scrapes. These active post-rut scrapes are somewhat isolated but are well worth your trouble to locate.

When you find a good one, set yourself up within shooting distance and try using doe bleats, tending grunts and snort-wheezes to pull a buck into range.

Bucks under these conditions can often be aggressive, since they are actively competing for the few remaining estrous does. Mature bucks will also be seen chasing does and fawns near winter food sources.

CHECKING WITHOUT SCRAPING

Before we move on to rubs, let's spend a moment going over what constitutes and qualifies as an active late-season scrape.

We have all seen scrapes that were just being hammered constantly by buck activity but then seemingly go cold all of a sudden.

Well, this is exactly why I harp off-and-on about keeping trail cameras trained on major communal scrapes all season.

Lack of apparent soil disturbance in a scrape is not always a reliable indicator of whether or not a particular scrape is being used regularly. The camera won't lie.

I have documented with cameras on numerous occasions, multiple bucks continuing to check a scrape that had been previously been "hot as a firecracker" on a regular basis, and yet not one of the bucks pawed the dirt.

Instead, they only used the "licking branch" or just scent-checked the scrape from downwind.

If a buck is in a hurry or is skittish during daylight hours, he might just do a drive-by downwind from nearby cover.

So, don't give a scrape up for dead until you are absolutely certain.

HERE'S THE RUB

Now, regarding buck rub lines, let's take a quick look at deciphering late-season rubs and rub lines.

Buck rub lines are both a means of finding increased-odds hunting locations and a learning tool for understanding buck travel patterns.

It has been my experience that buck rub lines most frequently occur along or near habitat edges, woods roads and trails.

Look for rubs in areas that contain young sappy trees with aromatic bark, such as pine and cedar.

Yes, bucks do most of their rubbing during the early pre-rut and seeking phase, but keep your eyes peeled for fresh rubs during the late season when some testosterone is still flowing and unbred does are cycling back into estrous.

If you do find some, it just might be the key you need to home in on and bag a late-season whopper. ■

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.

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 5-Oct. 18 (n), Sept. 5-20 (s) Oct. 24-Nov. 21 (n), Oct. 10-Nov. 8 (s) Dec. 23-Jan. 8 (n), Dec. 19-Jan. 31 (s)	15	45
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) Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	5/day, 8/party 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 Nov. 27-29, Dec. 4-6 Dec. 9-Jan. 31	6 6
Geese	Sept. 1-30 Nov. 13-29, Dec. 4-6, Dec. 9-Jan. 31	5 Canada 3, Brant 1 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 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery/primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 7-20 (youth)
East Central	Oct. 1-Nov. 20 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 7-20 (youth)
Southwest	Oct. 1-Nov. 20 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan.20(dogs) Nov. 7-Jan. 20 (youth)
Southeast	Oct. 15-Nov. 20 Jan. 21-31 (either-sex arch-primitive) Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 21-Feb. 15 (yth)
Delta/South Delta	Oct. 1-Nov. 20 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 21-31 (archery primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 21-Jan. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 22(dogs) Nov. 7-Jan. 20 (youth)



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

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

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

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

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2021 JAN		BEST DAYS				
		POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
Fri 1						50
Sat 2						39
Sun 3						33
Mon 4						31
Tue 5						35
Wed 6						43
Thu 7						31
Fri 8						24
Sat 9						33
Sun 10						40
Mon 11						48
Tue 12						53
Wed 13						43
Thu 14						33
Fri 15						24
Sat 16						20
Sun 17						22
Mon 18						24
Tue 19						31
Wed 20						43
Thu 21						34
Fri 22						32
Sat 23						34
Sun 24						37
Mon 25						48
Tue 26						60
Wed 27						71
Thu 28						77
Fri 29						66
Sat 30						55
Sun 31						43

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
7:49 PM	12:25 am - 3:55 am	9:28 AM	12:50 pm - 4:20 pm		
8:55 PM	1:25 am - 4:41 am	10:08 AM	1:50 pm - 5:06 pm		
10:00 PM	2:23 am - 5:25 am	10:44 AM	2:48 pm - 5:50 pm		
11:06 PM	3:22 am - 6:04 am	11:17 AM	3:47 pm - 6:29 pm		
	4:18 am - 6:44 am	11:48 AM	4:43 pm - 7:09 pm		
12:12 AM	5:19 am - 7:21 am	12:19 PM	5:44 pm - 7:46 pm		Half
1:19 AM	6:18 am - 8:00 am	12:52 PM	6:43 pm - 8:25 pm		
2:28 AM	7:18 am - 8:44 am	1:28 PM	7:43 pm - 9:09 pm		
3:38 AM	8:22 am - 9:30 am	2:09 PM	8:47 pm - 9:55 pm		Perigee
4:49 AM	9:27 am - 10:23 am	2:56 PM	9:52 pm - 10:48 pm		
5:58 AM	10:31 am - 11:19 am	3:51 PM	10:56 pm - 11:44 pm		Low
7:01 AM	11:32 am - 12:20 pm	4:53 PM	11:57 pm - Midnight		New
7:56 AM	12:27 pm - 1:23 pm	5:58 PM	Midnight - 12:45 am		
8:43 AM	1:18 pm - 2:24 pm	7:04 PM	12:52 am - 1:48 am		
9:22 AM	2:03 pm - 3:21 pm	8:08 PM	1:43 am - 2:49 am		
9:56 AM	2:43 pm - 4:15 pm	9:09 PM	2:28 am - 3:46 am		
10:26 AM	3:17 pm - 5:09 pm	10:08 PM	3:08 am - 4:40 am		
10:53 AM	3:51 pm - 5:59 pm	11:05 PM	3:42 am - 5:34 am		
11:19 AM	4:23 pm - 6:49 pm		4:16 am - 6:24 am		
11:45 AM	4:56 pm - 7:38 pm	12:01 AM	4:48 am - 7:14 am		Half
12:12 PM	5:28 pm - 8:28 pm	12:56 AM	5:21 am - 8:03 am		Apoogee
12:42 PM	6:06 pm - 9:18 pm	1:52 AM	5:53 am - 8:53 am		
1:16 PM	6:48 pm - 10:10 pm	2:50 AM	6:31 am - 9:43 am		
1:55 PM	7:32 pm - 11:04 pm	3:48 AM	7:13 am - 10:35 am		
2:41 PM	8:23 pm - 11:59 pm	4:46 AM	7:57 am - 11:29 am		
3:34 PM	9:17 pm - 12:53 am	5:42 AM	8:48 am - 12:24 pm		High
4:33 PM	10:14 pm - 1:46 am	6:35 AM	9:42 am - 1:18 pm		
5:37 PM	11:14 pm - Midnight	7:23 AM	10:39 am - 2:11 pm		Full
6:43 PM	Midnight - 2:36 am	8:06 AM	11:39 am - 3:01 pm		
7:51 PM	12:15 am - 3:21 am	8:44 AM	12:40 pm - 3:46 pm		
8:58 PM	1:14 am - 4:04 am	9:18 AM	1:39 pm - 4:29 pm		

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

ADVERTISERS INDEX

BARNETT'S BODY SHOP	9	EMMETT'S MARINE	51	RJ'S OUTBOARD SALES & SERVICE	49
BLUE WAVE BOATS	35	FIRST SOUTH FARM CREDIT	60	SEVEN C'S MARINE	33
CAROLINA COMPOSITES, LLC	2	FROST WATERFOWL TRUST, LLC	23	SMITH MARINE	53
COASTAL MARINE SALES	20	GATOR TRAX	36	UNITED COUNTRY-SOUTHERN STATES REALTY	13
CRAIN TRACTOR	17	KOOLA EZE	15	VAN'S OUTDOORS	59
CWP PROSERIES	15	REED'S METALS, INC.	3	WHITETAIL PROPERTIES	5

ODDS OF WINNING THE LOTTERY

1 IN 303 MILLION



ODDS OF VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION

1 IN 50



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