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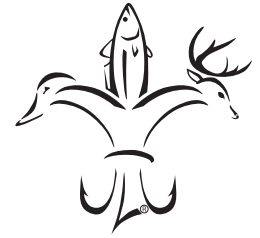
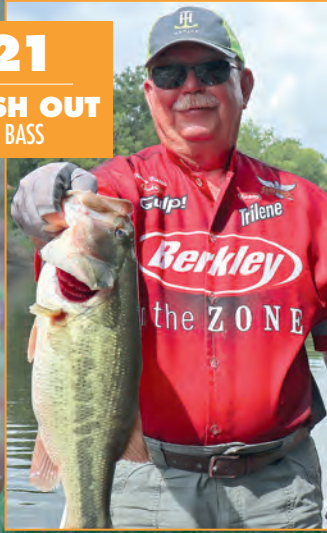
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SMILE, TOM,  
YOU'RE ON CANDID CAMERA

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FLUSH OUT  
OXBOW BASS



Mississippi  
**SPORTSMAN**

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Robin Prince of Labadieville, La., killed this 24-point, 215-inch non-typical buck on Dec. 11, 2020, in Humphries County. Photo courtesy Robin Prince.



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# Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland



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

Isaac Buckner killed this 9-point, 125-inch buck on Dec. 16 in Oktibbeha County.

## DON'T SIT OUT FEBRUARY. GET OUT! DEER, DUCK ARE DONE, BUT MISSISSIPPI OFFERS PLENTY OF HUNTING, FISHING

**W**ith deer season over for most Mississippians — yeah, you guys down in the southeast boot heel can keep chasing whitetails through the middle of the month — and duck season done, too many hunters begin packing up their gear for the long off season.

But, whoa Nellie, wait a minute. It's not quite time to put it all away, and that includes even the long guns.

Not even close.

"My camp is overrun with pigs, so I just keep on hunting every chance I get," said Gary Rainer of Vicksburg. "We've got some work to do thinning those dang things out. I think we whacked about 20 or 25 during deer season, but honestly, we need to get three times that before we quit, maybe more."

Ollie Thomas of Brandon has another animal on his mind.

"I'm still putting up squirrels for the year, filling my freezer with enough to get me through the summer," said Thomas, an avid squirrel hunter who looks the part. He admits to being 6-foot-4, and to weighing all of 150 pounds — the man is thin.

"You walk as much as I do hunting the tree rats, and you don't have to worry about being overweight," he said. "I bet I started the season in October weighing 160. But now, I can get serious about it. With the deer hunters gone, there's a lot more ground I can cover, a lot of ground I can get access to now those folks have call it quits."

And, then there's Paul Rivers of Meridian, who eagerly enters February with a pack of beagles in prime shape to run rabbits "three or four days a week."

"We've been rabbit hunting about once, maybe twice a week since October, just enough to give the dogs a chance to get in

tip-top shape," he said. "Now that deer season is over, we'll be turning them loose almost every day. Between me and my pals, we've got 25 good dogs we can alternate day-in and day-out, so we can go. We are completely booked up by hunting clubs who have invited us to come to their land and hunt. Yes sir, a team of rabbit men with good dogs get pretty popular come February."

Wing shooters aren't left out of the monthly equation either, with quail, snipe, and crow seasons hitting their peaks, and the conservation order season on light geese opening again.

That covers hunting, but let's not overlook fishing. February can be a great month to put a variety of species in the boat, frying pan or freezer. The water may be cold, but the fish know what's ahead — the spawn — and will take advantage of any opportunity to grab an easy meal.

As always, *Mississippi Sportsman* and its staff of writers fulfill a role of entertaining and educating readers with an edition that includes:

- Mike Giles gives expert tips on flushing out bass in the state's scores of oxbow lakes.
  - Phillip Gentry helps build the perfect catfish boat, rigging it for all seasons and all waters.
  - David Hawkins gives expert tips on chasing squirrels on both public and private lands in February.
  - Andy Douglas advises against removing trail cameras just because deer season is over. His tips can help you turn the lenses into a great scouting edge for the coming spring turkey season.
- Enjoy the reads when you can't go afield or on the water, but don't overlook the many opportunities the winter provides all Mississippi sportsmen.

Get after it! ■

# MISSISSIPPI BUSHYTAILS HAD BETTER BEWARE

**M**ississippi's No. 1 small-game animal remains the squirrel, although hunting pressure continues to plummet. Only half the number of squirrel hunters exist in the state compared with just 50 years ago.

"That makes no sense to me," said John Weathersby, 67, a lifelong squirrel hunter from Jackson, who hunts primarily in Hinds and Warren counties. "When I was growing up, we hunted squirrels all fall

and winter. It was so much fun, and it still is. I know why it's falling off so bad, and I don't understand it. There's a big rush to take kids to a deer stand when they are 4, 5 or 6 years old instead of taking them for a hike in the woods where they can learn so much about the outdoors.

"Whether you hunt with a treeing dog or just stalk, it's so much fun for kids. I get it that sitting in a shooting house is fun, but not so much as being active and covering ground. It's like real-life learning about the woods compared to virtual learning, like COVID has done to school rooms."

Jimmy Harris, another veteran squirrel hunter, put it another way.

"It's just an entire generation gone from the woods, one that won't learn the importance of habitat conservation, and that won't develop a concern about or form a relationship with nature," Harris said, adding, with a big ol' grin, "and they may never know the joy of a pot of squirrel stew or squirrel and dumplings. That would be a shame." ■

## MISSISSIPPI'S SQUIRREL TRIPLE

Mississippi has two game species of squirrel, the eastern gray squirrel (aka cat squirrel) and the fox squirrel (aka red squirrel). There are two sub-species of fox squirrel, the bigger bachmani or hill country fox squirrel and the Delta fox squirrel, the latter of which is limited to the western border along the Mississippi River alluvial valley.

The Delta fox also has a black color phase, which many hunters cherish. The hill country fox and the gray squirrel can produce extremely rare black and albino phases.

It is possible to score a Mississippi triple, getting a red, black and gray squirrel on the same hunt. The best bet is either on private lands or on WMAs in the Delta. ■



Gray squirrel



Red squirrel



Fox squirrel (black phase)

Mississippi's season on bobwhite quail remains open through March 6, with a daily bag limit of eight birds.



## FEBRUARY'S HUNTING SEASONS

**Deer:** Limited to the Southeast Zone (south of U.S. Highway 84 and east of Mississippi Highway 35), archery and primitive weapon season open through Feb. 15 for legal bucks only. Weapon of choice allowed on private land.

**Squirrel:** Open statewide through Feb. 28 (daily limit 8).

**Rabbit:** Open statewide through Feb. 28 (daily limit 8).

**Raccoon, bobcat, and opossum:** Open statewide through Feb. 28 (no limit).

**Bobwhite quail:** Open statewide through March 6 (daily limit 8).

**Snipe:** Open statewide through Feb. 28 (daily limit 8)

**Crow:** Open statewide through Feb. 28 (no limit).

**Special duck:** limited to youth (15 and under), veterans and active military only; Feb. 6-7 (regular season daily limits apply).

**Light goose conservation order:** Feb. 1-5 statewide and Feb. 8-March 31 statewide (no limit; visit MDWFP.com for regulations).

# FEBRUARY: IT'S RABBIT TIME

**W**ee doggies: It's rabbit time. James Green's favorite month is February — he's a beagle man who loves to set his kennel loose on rabbits.

"I hunt them some in October, November, December and January, but I turn them loose every day in February that the weather allows, and we run rabbits until those dogs run out of can-do," said Green, who lives in Madison County. "Basically, I use those months to get these pups ready and in top shape for February.

"Gets me ready for February, too. I always drop about 20 or 30 pounds in February. My doctor always laughs about it. I used to go get my annual physical in January every year, and he used to tell me I could stand to lose some weight. One year, I told him about how I always lose weight in February and why, and he invited me to his deer club to rabbit hunt. Now, I get my physical



Mississippi's rabbit hunters really get serious in February, with deer and duck seasons finally in the rear-view mirror.

## MISSISSIPPI'S CWD COUNT RISES TO 72

**S**purred by increased hunter submissions for CWD testing of white-tailed deer — including mandatory testing in some areas — Mississippi saw its number of confirmed cases rise to 72. Six more suspected cases awaiting confirmation could raise that number to 78.

Benton County on the Tennessee border remains the epicenter with 49 confirmed cases, including 16 since Jan. 1. That includes deer submitted during the region's mandatory check dates of Nov. 21-22. The vast majority of Benton cases came from the narrow strip north of U.S. Highway 72 and south of the Tennessee line.

Neighboring Marshall County was the only other county to have CWD tests return positive in January. Marshall County added two more for a total of 18 confirmations.

Out of 82 total counties in the state, only six have returned positive results since the first case was found in 2018 in Issaquena County, which initiated more statewide testing. Issaquena County added a second case in 2019. Panola, Pontotoc and Tallahatchie counties all reported one case in 2019.

Benton and Marshall sit directly across the line from the Tennessee counties of Hardeman and Fayette, which are the epicenter of that state's hardest-hit and rapidly growing CWD zone. According to the Tennessee wildlife agency's website, the total number of confirmed positive cases in Hardeman (244) and Fayette (409) was 653 before the 2020-21 season.

Tennessee confirmed its first case in 2018, and the total number is approaching 700.

Hardeman sits just north of Marshall County; Fayette just north of Benton. ■

in March."

Like all rabbit hunters, Green and his two hunting partners are a popular breed in February.

"Everybody becomes a rabbit hunter when deer season ends, or in the Delta when duck season ends," he said. "That's when a guy with good beagles is in high demand. I can cherry pick the places I hunt and the people I hunt with, and that's what makes it so great."

A semi-retired real estate salesman, Green has the means to hunt as often as he wants. And he wants to hunt every day the weather allows.

"Most of the places we hunt in February are the same lands we've been hunting for five or 10 years," he said. "It would be longer, but CRP affects that. We concentrate on CRP lands with very young pines that create perfect 'rabbitat,' which is what we call rabbit habitat. Those places stay good about five years before the trees are big enough to thin and the briars and thick stuff are gone. Then, we look for more."

Green and partners have what they call "the rabbit hauler" that they take on weekend trips. It's a self-contained camper that sleeps four that they take to the different locations each weekend. It's a nomadic lifestyle.

They may be in the Delta one week, in the hills the next.

They'll target canecutters, aka swamp rabbits, on one hunt, and then cottontails, aka hillbillies or bunny rabbits, the next.

"I don't really have a preference, but when we get on the bunnies, we usually get into more rabbits," Green said. "The hillbillies are really great in the Delta and in the Black Belt Prairie (north-east). There was a time last year when we turned the dogs loose in this one turnrow ditch bank in the Delta; within 10 minutes we had 10 different rabbits running in 10 different directions."

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

# MISSISSIPPI'S TOP FEBRUARY FISHING TRIPS

Ross Barnett Reservoir and Columbus Lake on the Tenn-Tom Waterway are great February destinations for anglers targeting catfish.

- **Barnett Reservoir.** Whether you like catfish, crappie or bass, Barnett Reservoir is a February hot spot. Seriously cold days offer catfishermen the best opportunity of the year to fish from the bank. Catfish move shallow to feast on shad that die in the cold water. Just cast as far as you can with night crawlers or cut shad and set multiple poles. Tight-lining on the bottom is the ticket. For crappie, watch the river current. A regular, slow river puts the attention on the natural bottleneck created at the Mississippi Highway 43 bridge. Fishermen concentrate on the river channel edges both above and below the bridge. After heavy seasonal rains, a fast river usually follows, and that puts fish in the "Welfare Hole," a popular fishing area just southeast of the bridge. The current forms a big eddy that offers fish safe haven. Of course, if the river is running, so is the spillway, and the crappie will be thick in the tailrace. Bass fishermen play the warm fronts. The third or fourth day of a warming trend will lure the big fish out of the deep water to nearby shallows. Pad stems along the river channel is an ideal target. Throw a small-bladed spinnerbait.

- **Eagle Lake.** No doubt about it, visit this old Mississippi River oxbow north of Vicksburg and fish for suspended black crappie under the piers on the Mississippi bank. The Louisiana side is too shallow. Most of the fish are caught fishing jigs 3 to 4 feet deep in deeper water.

- **Okhissa Lake.** Bass fishermen enjoy hitting this lake early in the year. The upper end, which has the best-defined creek channel, is a good place to start. There are many spots where the deep creek nears a point or a steep bank. Suspending jerkbaits are good on warm days on those steep banks. On cold days, stick to a drop-shot or shaky head along the creek channel edge.

- **Coastal rivers.** The Pascagoula, Biloxi and Jordan river systems on Mississippi's Gulf Coast are excellent in February, especially if it's a dry month without a lot of freshwater running in the rivers. The Pascagoula is a great late-winter trout producer, with deep holes holding the big specks. The Biloxi and its partner, the Tchoutacabouffa, produce great largemouth action in their upper ends, but any cast is also subject to bring a bite from a speck, redfish or puppy drum. A personal favorite is the U.S. Highway 90 bridge pilings at the mouth of the Jordan River in Bay St. Louis. Big sheepshead, puppy drum and redfish all use those pilings to ambush baitfish. Bridges on the other rivers work, too, but Bay St. Louis is the best.

- **Tenn-Tom Waterway.** Whether you're trying to catch a monster flathead or blue cat, or just fill an icebox with keeper-sized and fun-to-eat channel catfish, Columbus Lake on the Tenn-Tom



Waterway is the place to be. According to local knowledge, unless the water is 50 degrees or higher, forget the big ones and go for the smaller ones. Look for stumpy areas off the main channel with water between 7 and 20 feet and use cut bait on a 5/0 hook to catch blues and channels from 1 to 15 pounds. ■

## LEGISLATIVE WATCH

**T**he Mississippi Legislature convened in early January, and in the first week, only five bills involving hunting and/or fishing had been filed, all in the Senate.

Those include:

- **S.B. 2035:** to allow air guns, air bows and pre-charged pneumatic weapons and authorize special seasons for CWD sample collection.
- **S.B. 2036:** to allow the use of electronically amplified sound devices in deer hunting.
- **S.B. 2073:** to require metallic tags to be affixed to the ear of a wild hog being transported.
- **S.B. 2074:** require additional regulation of freshwater fishing guides by the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.
- **S.B. 2095:** to include the manager or member of LLC owning land within the exemption from hunting/fishing licenses (while hunting on those lands).

Jan. 18 was the deadline for original introduction of general bills. The deadline for committee action on those bills will be Feb. 2, and the deadline for floor action on original bills by the full House or Senate is Feb. 11. ■



# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Grace Munro**

Grace Munro with a beautiful redfish caught at Ship Island.



**Manning Moody**

Manning Moody was bass fishing in Leakesville when hogs walked up on him and made for a land and sea package deal.



**Kynlee Reese Goff**

Kynlee Reese Goff with a bass she caught on a private lake near Movella in October.



**Dillon Murphy**

Dillon Murphy, pictured here with his wife, Taylor, didn't have much luck deer hunting on Nov. 28 near Ackerman, but he was able to get rid of this huge beaver for Renee Murphy.



**Knox Morgan**

Knox Morgan hooked his first fish at a private lake in Agricola on May 15, 2020.

## GOT PICS? We want 'em

Email images to: [images@ms-sportsman.com](mailto: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.



**Jody Juneau**

Jody Juneau with a 40-inch redfish hooked out of the Pascagoula River on Nov. 16.



**Harper Owens**

Harper Owens killed her first deer on Dec. 16 in Tippah County. The 6½-year-old buck, nicknamed "Rip" for a cowboy in the TV show "Yellowstone," gave a perfect broadside shot at 85 yards, and she dropped him with her Howa 7mm-08 with a 120-grain Hornaday reduced-recoil load.

**HUNTING SEASONS**

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

**WATERFOWL SEASONS**

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

**DEER SEASON**

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

# LOUISIANA HUNTER DROPS MONSTER 24-POINT WHITETAIL

AFTER PASSING ON DOE, ROBIN PRINCE TAKES HUMPHREYS COUNTY TROPHY

By Bobby Cleveland

**O**n Dec. 11, Robin Prince of Labadieville, La., went to his deer stand in Humphreys County in the Delta with the intent of killing a doe.

"That was the plan; I was going to take a doe," said Prince, 69. "And after a couple of hours of seeing nothing, a doe finally walked out into the far corner of the food plot about 125 yards away.

"But I looked around and thought I had a good bit of sunshine left, and I said, 'No, I'm not going to shoot her just yet. This looks too right, too good.' I decided I was going to wait and see what happened."

## GREAT DECISION

In the history of deer hunting, few people have ever made a more fortunate decision. Moments later, Prince was squeezing the trigger on one of the biggest and oddest bucks ever taken in Mississippi — a 24-point trophy that gross scored 215 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches. If it holds that score for 60 days, it will be the 13th biggest non-typical listed in Magnolia Records.

"It wasn't but a minute or two later, a buck walked out on the same trail and was following that doe," Prince said. "I had never seen this buck before, but one look in the corner of the field, I could tell he was a shooter, and we don't shoot anything less than 140 inches up there. We're

on a good management plan.

"I could see his left side and could tell through the scope he had five points and was impressive. Then, he turned, and when I saw what was going on (the right side), I didn't need to see anything else. I didn't pick up the binoculars. I didn't need them. I said to myself, 'You just need to get him in the scope and shoot.'"

Which he did, with his new 6.5 PRC Begara rifle and Swarovski Z8i scope.

"I put it right on the base of his neck and squeezed the trigger, and he went right down, I mean, right down," he said. "He didn't even turn his head. When he went down it was like he was still looking straight ahead. The wind was blowing pretty good, and it was blowing his tail, and I thought he might get up. I tried to chamber another round, but honestly, I was shaking too bad and was so nervous I couldn't have made another shot."

## A REAL BEAST

Instead of going to the buck, Prince climbed down and walked the quarter-mile back to his side-by-side buggy and went to get his wife, Arlene, from her stand a few hundred yards away.

"I didn't want to take any chances," he said. "I thought he was done, but I wanted to be sure. I didn't want to go walking over there and him jump up and start running."

Robin Prince of Labadieville, La., killed this Humphreys County giant on Dec. 11.



**ON THE COVER**

Upon returning, the Princes discovered this remarkable beast.

"I fell to my knees and started thanking Jesus for sending me this buck," Prince said. "I'd have never thought I'd see or a chance to kill a deer like that. It was a remarkable day that I will never forget. I couldn't thank Jesus enough."

Prince, whose previous best buck was a 120-inch, 10-pointer from the Louisiana marsh — said the decision to not shoot the doe was based on what he'd seen in the previous few hunts.

"We'd been seeing a lot of smaller bucks, younger bucks pushing does, but none of the big ones we had been getting on camera were involved," he said. "We had several cameras out and have a lot of deer pictures, but not a single one of this buck. We never knew he was there.

"Me and some friends lease the 250 acres from the family of one of the friends, and we've been there three years and are managing it. We're trying to do it right. But we had no idea this guy was around. Turns out, one of our neighbors told one of our guys that he had one photo of the deer. That's it."

## PRIME HABITAT

Prince said his lease is mostly in CRP hardwoods, and lots younger than the

Prince's impressive 24-point gross scored 215 7/8 inches.

surrounding landowners who are also mostly CRP.

"Ours is so much younger and thicker, I mean, so thick you can't walk through it unless you're on a trail," he said. "We are their bedding area. That's why he was there."

And, probably why nobody had ever seen him.

"The area I was hunting, there weren't any kind of rubs or scrapes that would make you think there was a big buck around," Prince said. "But I knew does would be hitting that food plot, and I was hunting a doe. This doe was the only one that came out, and she brought this buck to me. He wasn't really pushing her hard, just following her from behind. She just fed across the field and had covered about half of it before he stepped out a couple of minutes or later.

"In recent weeks, we had seen a lot of the younger, smaller bucks following and even pushing the does. That's one of the reasons I hesitated on shooting the doe. I knew there was a chance."

## NON-TYPICAL RACK

The buck's antlers are incredible and dang near indescribable. He is half of a main-frame 5 on the left side, but a wonderfully disfigured 19 on the right side, with what can best be described as a double main beam that comes out of the base.

"One antler, the one scored as the main beam by the scorer at the Simmons Sporting Goods Big Buck Contest, goes straight up and branches out," Prince said. "The other goes straight out to the right and has three drop tines, and one of those drop tines has two more drop tines. The beam that goes up has a lot of other stuff happening, too."

Prince said the inside spread was about 19 inches but wasn't sure where it was measured.

His buck is as non-typical as non-typical gets, and one that likely will require a good deal of thought when officially scored by a Boone & Crockett judge. Which is the main beam on the right? Where would the massive right base measurement be taken?

"It's a weird rack for sure," he said. "I'd have never thought I'd ever get a chance at a deer like that. I still can't believe it." ■



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# LYONS KILLS 'KING OF THE FOREST'

BILOXI MAN TAKES  
187-INCH TROPHY  
IN LOWNDES COUNTY

By Bobby Cleveland

**A** lot of deer hunters in one area of Lowndes County were hunting a legendary buck, so big that one group nicknamed it “King of the Forest.” Most of the clubs around the family land that Thomas Lyons hunts had pictures of the buck and were hot on its trail.

Seems the only ones unaware were members of Lyons’ family.

“We didn’t know anything about it really; we had a single picture of a big buck, but we’d never seen it and weren’t hunting it at all,” said Lyons, 37, a former high school football coach who is a real-estate agent in Biloxi.

Lyons first saw the buck on a warm Dec. 11 afternoon hunt.

“My wife, Claire, and I had driven up to Starkville for a Mississippi State football game the next day, and she was working remotely on the internet,” Lyons said. “I was sitting around bored. It was like 70 degrees outside, but I told her I was going to drive over to Columbus and go sit it in a stand to kill some time.”

He killed a lot more than that. He dropped the royal buck, its head crowned by a 20-point, 187-inch rack, leaving him with one of the oddest hunting photos you’ll ever see and best stories you’ll ever hear.

## HE WORE WHAT?

“I went hunting in short pants with boots and a Dallas Cowboys pullover; I wasn’t expecting much,” Lyons said. “I got in this

Thomas Lyons killed this beast of a buck near Columbus on Dec. 11.



shooting house in a corner of a big field with my back up against the back of the house, with one tree line running straight out from my left and another over my shoulder to the right.

“I got in there about 2:30, and at about 5:05, I just happened to turn and look back over my right shoulder. Right when I did, this buck came walking out of the woods about 70 yards away. I had to really turn my head and shoulder to see him, and I was in about as bad a position as I could be in the shooting house to shoot in that direction.”

Yet, there was the buck.

“He walked a few yards out of the woods into the field and stopped and looked back at a doe standing right in the edge of the field,” Lyons said. “The doe was closer to me, about 20 yards closer, and all I could see was her head. She was feeding, and she was looking at the buck and turned to go back to the woods.”

“I grabbed my binoculars to get a look, and all I could see was a lot of antlers, a huge rack and a bunch of points. I decided I wasn’t going to waste a lot of time, because when the doe walked back into the trees, he turned to follow her.”

## A DILEMMA

Lyons was in a pickle, one that almost makes you laugh; he did as he told it.

“I’m in a bad situation, facing straight down the field and he’s over my right

shoulder,” he said. “My gun is in front of me on the floor leaning against the house. I was going to have to get up, turn the chair, get the gun, get the buck in the scope and shoot.”

“Here’s the deal; I’m no small guy. I’m 6-foot-4 and weigh 350. How was I going to pull this off? I put the binoculars down and started to move, but as soon as I did, the buck stopped and started looking right at me. I couldn’t move. I didn’t dare move, but I was going to have to.”

The buck might have been spooked, but instead of bolting, the buck just stopped, broadside, turned and looked straight at the hunter.

## GOING FOR IT

Lyons weighed the situation and realized that at any second, the buck could either bolt to the trees or just walk into obscurity — it was only about 15 feet away.

“I had to go for it,” he said. “I sort of half-stood, grabbed the chair to turn it and grabbed the gun at the same time. I did all that, got settled into the chair, threw the gun up and found him in the scope. He was still broadside, staring right at me. As soon as I had the crosshairs on him, I shot. That’s when it got strange. He didn’t really react to the shot. He didn’t jump, buck, kick or anything. All he did was trot off into the trees. I looked at the doe, and she was just sort of standing there with a blank look.”

"I was thinking, 'Did the gun not shoot?' and 'Did I just miss a trophy buck?' I sat there looking and saw the doe eventually just walk off. I waited 10 minutes and decided to go look for blood. I found where he had kicked up some dirt, but no blood. Then, I walked over to the trail in the trees and found blood."

## TRACKING THE BUCK

Lyons stopped and called his stepfather, who was down on the coast. The land is part of his stepfather's family holdings.

"I told him I just shot a huge buck, and he asked me if I was sure it was big, and if it was the big 10-point we had on camera," Lyons said. "I told him I didn't know for sure, because I didn't have time to look him over good. I said 'I just know it's huge!'"

"I also told him that if I did find him, I was going to need help and asked if he could call his brother, Charles, who hunts nearly every day, if he could come help. Turns out he was hunting in the next field over, which I didn't know. He was on his way."

## IN SHOCK

Lyons started following the trail and was relieved when the blood began getting heavier.

"About 15 yards in, it was a lot, and some of it was nearly two feet up on the brush and trees," he said. "That's when I knew he was likely down. I kept tracking and lost the trail twice, but picked it back up both times. It was dark by then, and I couldn't see him, but I started smelling him. He was rutting, and I could smell him. I walked right to him about 20 yards away. When I

put the light on him, he was facing head away. I couldn't see his white belly or his face, which is why my light never picked him up. When I got to him and saw the antlers, I was in shock.

"About then, I heard Charles walking up, and I said, 'I found him!' He came over and couldn't believe it either. We took a couple of pictures, which is where we got the now infamous Facebook picture of me in short pants, rolled down boots with this giant buck."

In addition to some funny comments about his attire, Lyons started getting information about the buck and the different clubs that had been hoping to kill it.

"The most interesting one was when I called (a Columbus TV station) to enter their big buck contest, and I got switched to the woman in charge of it," Lyons said. "I filled out the forms and sent her photos and she said 'OH MY GOD! That's the King of the Forest. We've been hunting that buck so many years.' Turns out, she hunts a club about 2 miles away."

## KING OF THE FOREST

The buck is worthy of the royal name. It's a main-frame 7x7 with incredible mass — 7½-inch bases. The right brow tine has three additional points and the left one splits and has another point, too. The right G-2 has two stickers.

"It's not that wide, maybe 16.5 or 17 inches, I can't remember," Lyons said.

One thing is for sure, the buck and the hunt will live forever in his memories. ■

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# HUNTER USES LATE FATHER'S RIFLE TO DROP MONSTER

WARREN COUNTY TROPHY:  
164 INCHES, 255 POUNDS

By Bobby Cleveland

**M**ost stories about the harvest of trophy bucks take many hundreds, if not thousands of words, to describe the mechanics of how the hunter made the shot that killed it, from locating the deer to patterning its movements and choosing the right stand.

Then there's the story of Eric Pell and his 11-year-old sidekick, Owen Grissen, who on Dec. 11, overslept, arrived late, discovered they had chosen a stand built for one instead of two hunters, made the best of the situation, and 10 minutes later were standing over a 164 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch, 255-pound Warren County monster.



Eric Pell, along with 11-year-old Owen Grissen, took this 164 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch Warren County trophy on Dec. 11.

"Didn't take long; wasn't much to it," said Pell, who made the 50-yard shot that put the buck down with his late father's gun, a Remington Model 700 BDL, a .270 that is named "Lucille."

## IN MEMORIAM

But there's another story, a deeper and emotional one, that deserves being told and that makes this buck so special for Pell, 37, who killed the deer on the

birthday of his father, his hunting mentor, who died in March 2017.

It's why Pell and Grissen had gotten the late start.

"It was a tough night for me; I didn't sleep good," Pell said. "I was very emotional about it being the eve of Dad's birthday. I wanted to hunt with his gun, so I took Lucille down and I broke it down to its parts, cleaned it thoroughly and then put it back together. I took a bullet and marked it with dad's nickname, Alpo."

"I actually overslept, and it was my wife Holly who woke me up about 5:30 a.m. Owen had called me the night before and asked if he could hunt with me the next day, and I told him to come on over and spend the night and we'd get up and go. We still had an hour-and-a-half drive to deep camp. We didn't get there until nearly 8 a.m."

## MAKING IT WORK

The late arrival gave Pell an opportunity to pick a stand, and he chose one that was not being used. It was in a hardwood bottom between two big blocks of woods, with a trail that crosses a beaver dam on a



Eric Pell added the "ALPO 2020" hull to his collection of spent rounds that have taken big bucks. That one is extra special, since it was fired by his late father's favorite rifle and it harvested a main-frame 8-point buck with stickers that measured 164 inches.

slough that is the preferred deer path from one block to the other.

"It's a stand that isn't very popular, probably because it is such a long walk in there," he said. "Owen and I walked back in there, but when we got there, we discovered it had a one-man ladder and there were the two of us. I had forgotten that. I looked around and found a dead tree about 20 yards away, and I told Owen to sit there behind it, which he had never done before. We always sit together. He got down behind it, and I climbed the stand.

"A few minutes after I got situated, I told Owen to flip the Primos Big Can one time. It makes what is called a long doe bleat. Owen flipped it one time. A couple of minutes later, I had heard a deer walking but couldn't pinpoint it. Then I turned my head to the right, and there was a buck 50 yards away, walking toward a beaver dam. I didn't have a lot of time to react, but one look at it, and I knew it was a big buck. It looked like it was carrying a chair on his head. I had to move the gun because it was pointing the opposite way, and when I did, it spooked the buck and he started trotting."

## THE CELEBRATION

Realizing that the buck was rapidly moving toward a thicket so dense it would disappear, Pell got the gun in position and pointed at the only opening the deer would pass through.

"I was hoping Owen wouldn't see the buck and do something that would change the deer's path, but it happened too fast for that," he said. "The buck was to my right 50 yards, and Owen was to my left 20 yards. When the deer got to the opening I whistled, and he stopped broadside, right in the opening, I put the crosshairs on him and squeezed the trigger. The buck fell straight down.

"I looked down, and Owen had heard me whistle and had turned and saw the buck fall. He looked up at me and said, 'Mr. Eric, you done shot a stud.'"

Pell climbed down, joined the youngster and walked over to the buck and then broke down.

"I was so emotional about it, my Dad and Lucille, Owen and all," Pell said. "I was bawling."

He called his wife, Holly, sent her a picture, and she immediately left the house, making the long drive to deer camp. Her help would be needed, not only for pictures but also to help load the big-bodied deer on the 4-wheeler. While waiting for her to arrive, Grissen was busy on his cell phone reaching out to his friends.

"He was Facetiming everybody he knew to show them what we had killed," Pell said. "It was fun having him there."

## A SPECIAL MOMENT

Grissen is important in Pell's life, filling the void of not having a child of his own. Albert Pell, aka Alpo, was Eric Pell's father and mentor, who taught him hunting and fishing before bone cancer had ended his life.

"When Dad was dying, right after deer season, we sat on his bed one day, and he asked me that if he was to give me the pick of his guns, which would I want," Pell said. "I told him Lucille, and he said that if I promised to take that rifle and use it to kill a big, trophy buck, I could have it. I had killed my previously biggest deer, a 126-inch 8-point, the first season after Dad died. Dad had killed a lot of good bucks with it, but neither of us had ever killed one like this.

"After Dad died, we moved down to his house, and that's when



Eric Pell's big Warren County whitetail, didn't take a step after being hit by his .270 slug.

I met Owen. His parents lived about a mile down the road and were Dad's friends, and they had Owen. We got to know them, and I sort of took Owen under my wing because he loves to hunt and fish. He just loves the outdoors, and he really helps me out. I have some medical issues, and he helps me a lot when we hunt and fish.

"He's a great kid and a good little outdoorsman. He has killed some deer, including a nice 8-point with this (grandfather) last year. He's killed a 6-point with me and a bunch of does. He loves running trot lines, squirrel hunting, building forts, all that. He isn't as much into video games like most kids; he'd rather be outside doing something."

## CHERRY ON TOP

That the two were able to take this big buck together tightens their bond, and adds another chapter to this story.

"Having him there was special to me, and that he helped by calling that buck with the Primos can," Pell said. "That had to be what got the buck up. The way I figure it, the buck had been laying up in one of the many oak tree tops that had fallen down in that bottom, probably near the stand, and the strong winds that had been blowing kept him from hearing us coming in. Plus, the wind was blowing from him to us, so he couldn't wind us. Then, when Owen hit the can, I think he got up and came looking for that doe. He was tiptoeing and had his head up looking as he approached that beaver dam."

The buck is a very tall, symmetrical main-frame 8-pointer with a sticker off one main beam and another off a point. Its best characteristics are giant tines, measuring 13, 12%, 10 and 9% inches. The main beams were 25 inches.

"I took the hull with Alpo on it out of Lucille and will add it to the others I carry on a chair," Pell said. "It's a good luck thing, I reckon. It's got the hull from the last bullet Dad used to kill his last buck, and it's got two that I used, including the big 8-point.

"This will make No. 4." ■

# MERIDIAN HUNTER DOWNS STUCKEY BRIDGE TROPHY

EARLY CHRISTMAS PRESENT WORE BIG, 12-POINT RACK

By Mike Giles

**D**eep in the woods of south Lauderdale County stands the Stuckey Bridge, so named because of a legendary outlaw who reportedly operated an inn and robbed patrons and others who dared cross his bridge.

The bridge still spans the Chunky River, but these days, the river is home to spotted bass and trophy bucks.

Lamar Arrington has been hunting those deer for as long as he can remember. A Meridian native, he followed in the footsteps of his father, Dr. George Lamar Arrington II, and grandfather, George Lamar Arrington, both avid hunters and fishermen. While Arrington has harvested trophy deer from Nebraska and other states, the ever-elusive trophy bucks have escaped him in Mississippi and, more specifically, near Meridian. That could be a result of his goodwill towards others, especially including friends, and children.



Lamar Arrington harvested the Stuckey Bridge Buck on Christmas Eve near the Chunky River in south Lauderdale County.

Arrington hunted one of his favorite stands the week before Christmas and saw about 10 deer, with three bucks among the bunch — but no shooters. The next week, he texted a friend to see if he wanted to go hunting the Wednesday before Christmas, but rain was predicted, so they decided to make a Christmas Eve hunt instead. On the morning of the hunt, Arrington learned that his friend was bringing his daughter since she was off work that day and might not have another chance to hunt.

## COLD CHANGE OF PLANS

Arrington met his friends the next day in south Lauderdale County and told them to hunt the two fields in the river bottom, about a mile back in the woods.

"I wanted the young lady to get a shot, so I told her dad to put her in my field," Arrington said. "I'd seen so many deer the week before, I thought she'd get a shot, and I wanted her to get a deer."

"I went back to check out another field not too far from my friends, but I'd left my coveralls at the truck, so I went back to get them since it was bitter cold and very windy that day."

When he got back to his camp, Arrington decided to hunt close to it and not go back and disturb the woods near the other hunters.



Hunters on adjacent properties had trail camera photos of the Stuckey Bridge Road buck.

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## A SURPRISE BUCK

"We had a field on an 80-acre tract that was close to the main road, where we have never killed anything or hardly ever seen anything, but it was close to the camp, so I decided to hunt there and wait on the others to get out," Arrington said. "The field was in a bottom, with hardwoods to the right and a pine plantation to the left. It was about 125 yards long and about 20 yards wide."

It was a decision that some might not make, but Arrington was more concerned with the young lady harvesting a deer than he was about taking one himself.

"I got into the field about 3 p.m. and got into the stand and napped for a while," Arrington said. "A single doe walked into the field about 4:30, and she kept looking back as she nipped at the grass. I wasn't too excited about it until he walked into the field 5 minutes later."

Arrington knew instantly it was a special buck and quickly got ready to shoot.

"The buck's rack was so wide and massive that I didn't have to look at him through the binoculars, so I just pulled up my rifle in the shoot house window and tried to get the crosshairs on him as quickly as possible," he said. "I knew I might not have long to shoot since the field was so narrow. The buck crossed the food plot at 75 yards, and I took the shot as soon as I lined him up."

## PERSONAL BEST

"Tic-Boom!" roared Arrington's Remington .270, and the buck collapsed in a heap.

Not only was this the biggest buck he'd ever seen in Mississippi but this buck beat all of his Nebraska trophies — and he never had a clue it lived anywhere nearby.

"After I killed it, I found out that several neighbors had seen the buck on camera, and they told me that they were hunting him," Arrington said. "People had seen him around the Stuckey Bridge Road and on several game cameras the past two or three years in the properties surrounding the bridge."

The 210-pound buck sported 12 points — including a double brow tine — on a rocking chair rack with a 20-inch spread. Its Buckmasters score was 160.

Ironically, Arrington had never considered hunting there before, and he took the stand on Christmas Eve because he wanted the young lady to get her chance. It seems appropriate that Arrington harvested the Stuckey Bridge Buck, which was unknown to him, but on the radar screen of several other hunters, after years of helping others and trying yet again to help someone else. ■

**“**The buck's rack was so wide and massive that I didn't have to look at him through the binoculars.**”**

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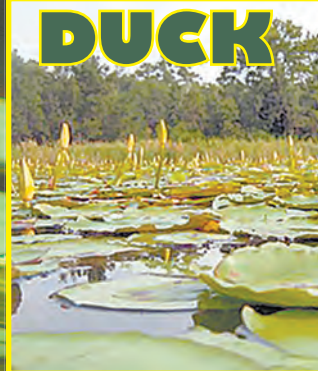
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MAX HP: 500

DEADRISE/ENTRY: 55

DEADRISE TRANSOM: 22

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By Mike Giles

WHEN THE WATER'S UP IN RIVER-FED LAKES AND BASS ARE STIRRING AT THE APPROACH OF THE SPAWN, IT TAKES SPECIAL TECHNIQUES TO CATCH BIG FISH CONSISTENTLY.

# FLUSH OUT OXBOW BASS

**F**rigid weather and cold water had put a damper on catching winter bass, but as the water started to warm, fish began to move up and head towards the flooded trees.

Terry Bates of Greenville knew the time was about right for his spinnerbait, so he tied one on and went fishing on Lake Ferguson. Bates slung a 1-ounce spinnerbait out and began to slow-roll it back, but he didn't get too far.

Wham!  
A lunker bass slammed the spinnerbait as it passed a partially submerged log, then bore down for the timber. Bates was ready, quickly snapped the rod back and turned the bass on a dime, much like a rodeo cowboy would turn a calf. The bass fought wildly, but Bates slowly wore him down and brought him into the boat.

"In February, when it starts warming up — when the water temperature gets above 50 degrees — you'll get a migration towards the trees," Bates said. "If you can get in on the first prespawn wave, it can be an unbelievable spinnerbait bite. You may not catch a ton of fish, but the ones you catch are going to be huge."

Bates' best five bass caught on one prespawn trip weighed 30 pounds — all on the spinnerbait. If conditions stay the same, then the first wave of prespawn bass moving up typically lasts about two weeks.

**PRESPAWN ON RIVER LAKES >**

## PRESPAWN ON RIVER LAKES

Bates, a retired fisheries biologist, has used his enhanced technical knowledge about fish behavior and spawning tendencies to his benefit over a lifetime of tournament angling and guiding.

“A lot of people think bass all spawn on the ground, or on the bottom,” Bates said, “but that’s not true with bass on river lakes. If it were, then we’d not have many good spawns or many fish, as a result of all of the springtime flooding.”

If you know anything about river-fed oxbow lakes, you know that the action can be fast and furious, and that the river lakes get replenished with fertile nutrients and quality bass almost every year.

“After the water gets into the timber or keeps rising, the bass are forced to look for good prespawn sites to prepare to spawn, so they’ll key on floating logs or floating log piles, anything that floats up and down,” Bates said. “If you find a big log in the middle of an opening it’s a good place to get bit. The key on the floating logs is that there needs to be some water on top of a

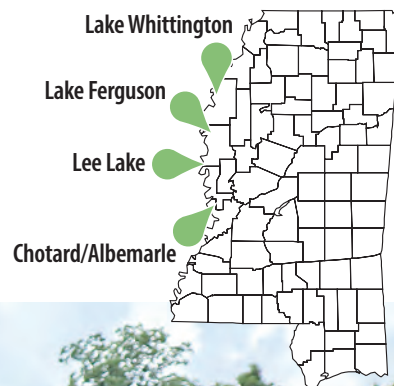
portion of the wood structure so that the bass can lay their eggs when they’re ready.”

Bass will relate to laydown logs and tree limbs that are in the water as well.

## JERKBAITS

“Sometimes, jerkbaits are deadly during the prespawn,” Bates said. “I prefer a hard-body jerkbait this time of year, and I like treble hooks that will help with a secure hookup. When it’s cloudy I’ll use a jerkbait with a gold and black back; if it’s clear, I’ll use chrome with a black back. There’s just something about the jerkbait that the bass like when they’re in the prespawn mode.”

The prespawn bite on river-connected oxbow lakes can



Oxbow lakes get plenty of fish, nutrients and water — a great combination that provides for great bass fishing.

occur any time between mid-February and the first of May depending upon the water temperature, stability and a number of other things according to Bates.

Jerkbait



“The fish will relate to the logs and floating structure about 6 weeks, and then they’ll be gone,” he said. “The water is usually really clear and will stay that way through March. You can see a jerkbait 4 feet deep, and the bass are keying on that flash.”

“I’m going to position my boat so that I can throw past the end of the log and twitch it and just ease it up to the log. More often than not, he’ll hit it on the first pass through.”

Bates likes to work jerkbaits with a twitch-twitch-pause retrieve and let them float up slowly; those suspended bass can’t stand it. Most of the time, you’ll only catch one fish per log, but it will usually be a big one.

“Normally, when you’re on that pattern, just go to an area where you have lots of structure in the water, with logs and brush, and you’ll find the fish,” he said. “You might be in 25 feet of water and catching them 2 foot deep, but I usually like to try them 5 to 6 feet deep and just try to get a feel about what depth the fish are in. Then, it’s simply a matter of presentation and execution.”

## SUSPENDED FISH >



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



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## SUSPENDED FISH

Another thing Bates encounters during periods of high water during the prespawn is suspended bass.

“The fish will sometimes suspend in the top of willows in about 8 feet of water, and they’re not active,” Bates said. “Normally, there will be some fish under the willows, suspended, so we’ll use a ½-ounce jig or ¼-ounce tube or Brush Hog. Anything with tentacles will get hung up easier.”

Bates likes to pitch a jig or Texas-rigged plastic bait into the area where the fish are suspended and let it fall about 8 feet, then reel it in and pitch it in somewhere else. If bass are suspended and they bite, it will happen on the fall, not on the bottom, so there is no reason to let it fall 20 feet.

On one trip when the water was about 20 feet higher in the willows than normal, Bates found bass suspended under brush tops or along the trunks of the willow trees. He was using magnum tubes rigged Texas-style, and they were nailing the lure as it fell in the 6- to 8-foot range. If they suspend, they can’t resist a plastic bait falling on their heads.

“I like a green pumpkin, watermelon or candy colored bait on a clear day,” Bates said. “They may not be chasing and feeding



Tube jig

actively, but when you drop it on their head, they’ll eat.”

In one Lake Ferguson tournament during the prespawn, Bates won with a 5-fish limit that weighed 26.99 pounds. Almost every angler fishing had success with catching quality bass, as a 24-pound sack didn’t even make the money. Now that’s great fishing anywhere.

As the water fills an oxbow and floods standing timber, bass will head for that cover and look for a place to spawn a few weeks down the road.



## PRESPAWN, POST-SPAWN BITES

"You need to remember that the bass will spawn in waves on most lakes, and that means there may be some bass on a pre-spawn bite and some on a post-spawn bite after the first batch are done spawning," Bates said. "After that first group actually spawns out, they'll suspend in the trees and around brush, lay-down trees and thick brush."

Bass that have spawned want to stay where they can rest easily and attack any prey that may swim past unawares as they build up their strength and energy. As a result, you may find an area that has the potential to have bass in both stages of the spawn. Bates likes to cast into the middle of the brush when bass get in there, and the bite can be amazing as well.

"Lake Ferguson, Whittington, Lake Lee, Chotard and Albemarle are all similar and good places to catch prespawn bass on (these) patterns," he said. "River-fed oxbows are different than most lakes, but the bass in these lakes will spawn in a similar manner, and the prespawn is often fantastic for catching quality bass."

## SPINNERBAITS

"Spinnerbaits are a universal lure for the prespawn and a great technique almost everywhere you find prespawn bass," Bates said. "I like to fish a 1-ounce chartreuse/white spinnerbait with two No. 4 willow-leaf blades, which keeps the bait down near the bass. Those small blades allow me to slow-roll the lure."

"There's nothing fancy about fishing one of these spinnerbaits, but I always use a trailer, and I never fish a tournament without a trailer hook."

Bates is targeting bass in the 3- to 5-pound range during the prespawn; therefore, he's going to use a big lure, and there's nothing much better at enticing bites from bass in brush and logs than a slow-rolled spinnerbait.

If you're looking for some fantastic fishing, spool on some stout line, grab a few of your favorite spinnerbaits and jerkbaits and head to the nearest river-fed oxbow. The action may be fast and furious if you use some of Bates' favorite prespawn tactics. ■



Spinnerbait

# GIKA RIG

Gika Rig combines the natural presentation of finesse fishing with the speed of power fishing. The Gika Rig uses an off-set shank worm hook with an elongated drop shot style weight attached directly to the eye via a solid ring. The position of the weight allows anglers to 'feel' the bottom, detecting transitions in composition and helping find fish-holding structures. It slips through vegetation with ease and grabs the attention of bass.



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GETTIN' FRESH >

## GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm



Although a visionary who foresaw a strong bass-fishing industry, one wonders if James Henshall's vision included tournaments and professional anglers 140 years ago.

# THE GAMEST FISH THAT SWIMS

A FULL 140 YEARS LATER, THE FIRST GREAT BASS-FISHING BOOK IS STILL A GOOD READ

It's February. Hunting seasons are pretty much over. Fishing opportunities are out there for dedicated anglers patiently awaiting the next nice day.

For most anglers, however, it's a time to rest the rods and try to remember if you put fuel stabilizer in your outboard's gas tank the last time you filled

up. So let me try to entice you to read a good book written by a member of the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame. If you don't like to read books, consider this the CliffsNotes version.

James A. Henshall was a medical doctor by training and an addicted angler. He was also a self-taught and deep-thinking biologist with a penchant for details, as evidenced by his meticulous treatment of black bass taxonomy — the process and practice of the classification and naming of plants and animals that fills the first 132 pages of his book. I recommend skipping them.

In his 1881 *Book of the Black Bass*, Henshall described the black bass as "Inch for inch and pound for pound, the gamest fish that swims." At the time, only largemouth bass and smallmouth bass were recognized by science and anglers, and anglers today still debate which species he was referring to.

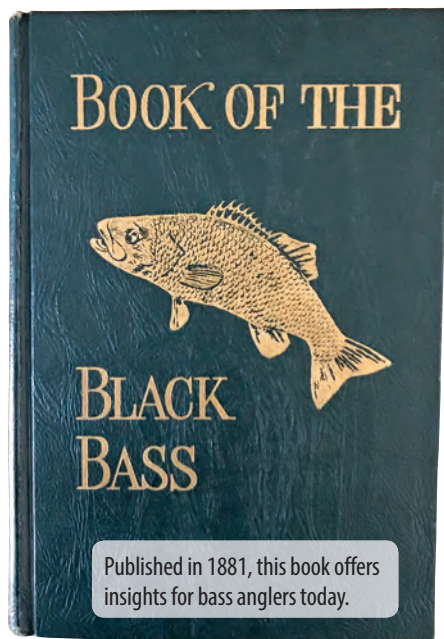
In several places in the book, he implies the smallmouth bass as the gamest; in other passages the largemouth is awarded the title. At the end of my read, I wondered if he was cagily leaving the decision to the angler and simply promoting fishing for whatever member of the black bass clan was most available.

## BASS BIOLOGY

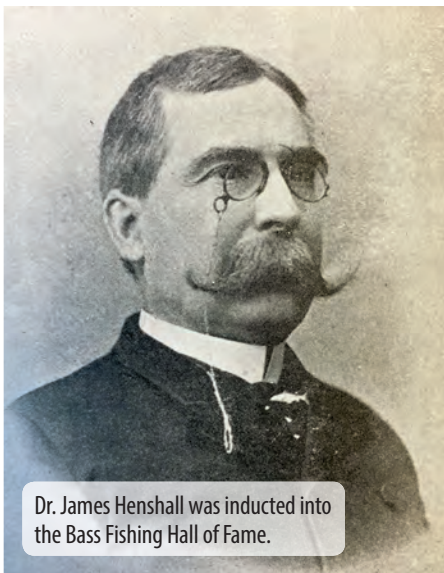
The book is a rigorous compilation of black bass biology, even when compared to the volumes of information about black bass that have been obtained and published in the last 50 years. Much of the biological information about black bass was original thinking on Henshall's part, based on his own observations and picking the brains of the few ichthyologists (scientists who study fish) and zoologists of his day. Most of what he wrote is still true.

Henshall was also a pioneer and proponent of the aquaculture of black bass. He provides guidance for spawning, rearing and transporting black bass and waters suitable for their stocking.

Much of the book expounds on tackle selection, care and use. He was a promoter of fine fishing tackle and sources for its purchase, even to the point of



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.



Dr. James Henshall was inducted into the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame.

Photo courtesy Bass Fishing Hall of Fame

a consumptive sport in the 1800s, and a bass caught was a bass killed. Even on 100-fish-plus days.

### FISHING PROPHET

Henshall was a promoter and a teacher, encouraging anglers to adopt black bass as their favorite species and telling them how to catch them. Henshall writes: “(Black bass) will eventually become the leading game fish of America is my oft-expressed opinion and belief.”

Prophetic.

Important to his prophesy is that much of the information in his book was published in *Forest and Stream* magazine (which later merged with and was replaced by *Field and Stream*) and

probably had a much larger reach than the book.

But Henshall was also a visionary. He foresaw the day of overcrowded and overharvested trout fisheries. He foresaw the adverse effects of deteriorating water quality. And he foresaw the growth of bass fishing, the industries that would support it, and the economic benefits generated by a widely distributed and readily available game fish.

Although *Book of the Black Bass* is a book collector’s treasure, you don’t have to be rich to own a copy. Reprinted books are available at amazon.com for \$35.

Enjoy. ■

**LUNKER LINES** ➤

marketing his signature bass rod. He was possibly the first angler — almost certainly the first bass angler — to do what is now referred to as product mention.

Whether you are a bass angler or pursue other noble quarry, Henshall’s book will instill in you an appreciation for the tackle you use today and how effective methods of presenting a bait, lure or fly to a fish evolved. It made me go out to my shop, pull my old Pflueger Supreme baitcaster (circa 1962) out of it’s suede bag and reminisce about fishing before free-spool reels and drag mechanisms hit the market. Trust me — those revolving-spool reels were tough on your thumb and a knuckle buster if you didn’t have your head in the game when you got a strike.

And, of course, he provided “How to catch ‘em” information.

Henshall was an elitist angler, touting the fine arts of fly fishing and casting plugs and live minnows. He encouraged high ethics, philosophized on the merits of catching a few fish, and disdained “pot fishing” — which he did not define, but I presume is fishing with the intent of capturing fish for food. Yet, he was also a product of his times; fishing was

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## LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

When cold fronts hit at Bogue Homa in February, the female bass will pull out of the lily pad stems and move out to the thick cover on the creek channel bends.



# BOGUE HOMA'S YO-YO BASS

SHALLOW OR DEEP, FEBRUARY WILL PROVIDE SOME HEFTY, HUNGRY FISH

**Y**ou must pay attention to the weather report in February to catch a wall-hanger at relatively shallow Bogue Homa.

These bass spawn early, with warm and cold fronts impacting where they will be and on what type of cover. A day or two of warm weather means female bass and baitfish will move shallow. Bogue Homa has cold fronts, too, and mama bass will pull out of the shallow-water then — yo-yoing back and forth. These fronts moving onto the lake will alert you as to whether the bass are in shallow or deep water, on lily pad stems, the bends of the main channel and/or standing cypress trees' roots.

I like to start off fishing in the very back of the middle boat lane at Bogue Homa, in the lily pad stems. No matter what lake you fish, you'll generally locate the warmest water in February on the northeast side of the lake because it receives the most sunshine.

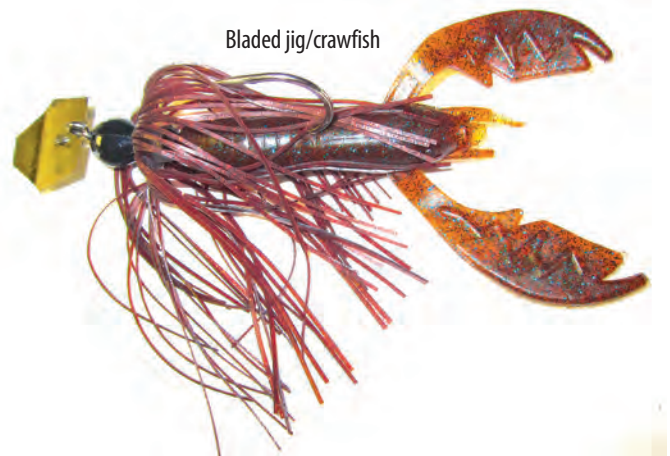
## A LIZARD STARTER

First, a 6-inch Texas-rigged plastic lizard

in junebug color with a 1/8-ounce slip sinker can be cast and allowed to fall to the bottom. I'll let the lizard sit still for a few seconds. If the female bass have started fanning their beds, you can't see the beds, because the water will have some color. I'm searching for movement in the stems and fan-casting to patches of stems after putting down my Power Poles.

I'll fish the lizard on a No. 5/0, wide-gap hook with a HitchHiker or screw-in device on the eye to screw into the head of the lizard. I'll Texas rig the lizard and tie it to 23-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon that's spooled on a Bruin 7.3:1 baitcasting reel on a 7-foot-7, heavy action FX Custom Rod to get a strong hookset. You can tell when a bass takes the lizard, because you'll get slack in your line, and the line will move away.

Bladed jig/crawfish



## A BLADED JIG

A black/blue 3/8-ounce bladed jig like a Chatterbait is my second choice, with



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.

a crawfish trailer of the same color, particularly later in February. I'll swim the jig slowly, so it kicks off the lily pad stems. I'll fish braided line with a 23-pound fluorocarbon leader on a 6.3:1 Bruin reel and a 7-foot-6, medium-heavy FX Custom Rod. When fishing braid, you'll have the tendency to strike the bass just as it sucks the jig into its mouth and possibly pull the bait out. If the bass aren't taking the bladed jig, they may prefer a slower-moving bait like a worm.

## SPIN OUT A WORM

The third lure I'll fish around the pad stems is a SpringR Worm in junebug color with no weight on the line, rigged wacky style with a No. 1/0 Eagle Claw drop-shot hook. I'll use 10-pound fluorocarbon leader with 15-pound bass braid as my main line. I'll cast a worm on a spinning reel with a 7-foot-4, medium-action FX Custom Rod to small holes in the stems. Because I fish the SpringR Worm with an open hook, I'll often get caught up on the stems, which makes fishing tedious.

## JIG AROUND CREEK BENDS

If the shallows haven't warmed up or a cold front hits, I'll target the main creek-channel bends that usually feature underwater brush, stumps and cypress knees. You'll get hung up a lot, but if you can put up with the aggravation, you may catch some big bass.

I'll fish a ½-ounce black/blue Stone Jig with a



Stone Jig

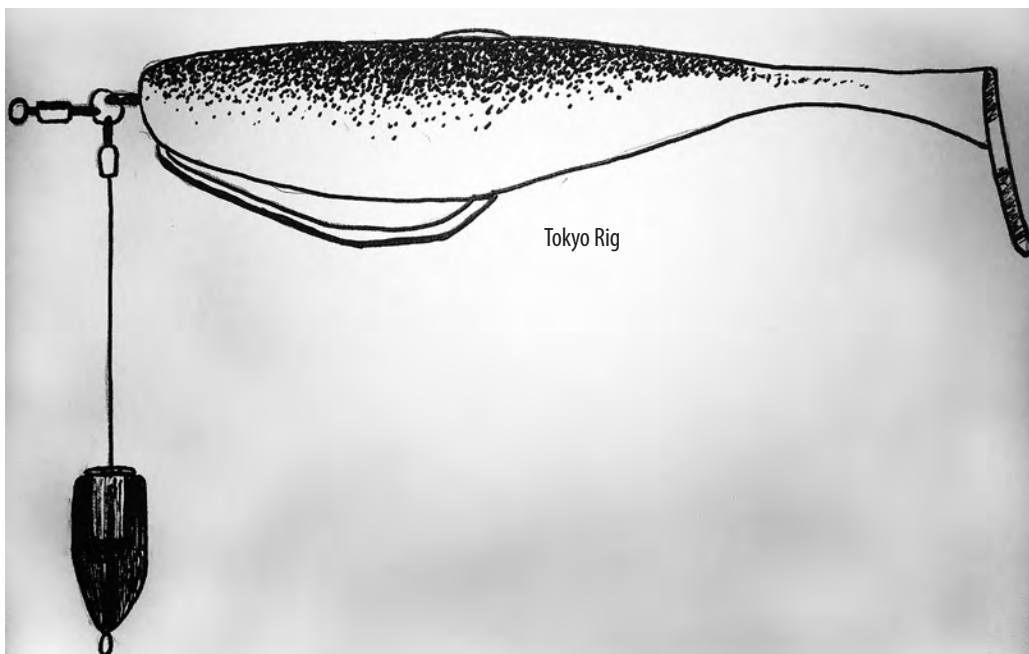
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black/blue crawfish trailer slowly on 26-pound fluorocarbon and a 7-foot-7, heavy action FX Custom Rod. I'll bump this jig off every piece of structure and the cypress trees' root systems.

Before I throw the Stone Jig, I'll often fish a Tokyo Rig, a modification of a drop-shot rig that won't hang up in the brush. I've had good luck with fishing the Tokyo Rig in gnarly, brushy places.

I'll Texas rig a 4-inch, black/blue crawfish on a 4/0 wide-gap hook with a 90 degree bend. The Tokyo Rig comes with a hard wire that's 3 inches long. I'll put a ⅜-ounce weight on the bottom of the wire and bend it up to 90 degrees to hold the weight on. The wire and the lead will be under the artificial crawfish. The lead will slide up and over stumps and brush without getting hung.

When fishing Bogie Homa in February, you may not catch 20 bass in a day, but if you catch 8 or 10, you should have one or two very nice bass. ■



Tokyo Rig





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## 2021 XPRESS X23B LOUNGE

The X-Bay Series from Xpress Boats has been enhanced for 2021 with the addition of the new X23Bay Lounge. This addition to our padded hull X-Bay line up takes the already popular bay boat to a whole new level with features designed for the angler and whole family. Key standard features include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, gulfsand paint with xtreme coat liner, large bay lounge console with fish box, fold down grabrail, removable windshield, seat cushion, back-rest cushion, Humminbird Piranha Max 4 graph, Minn Kota Riptide 46 trolling motor, 300 HP rating, and appearance package options.



<b>Length</b> 23'	<b>Beam</b> 102"	<b>Capacity</b> 9	<b>Max HP</b> 300
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## 2021 XPRESS X23B DUAL

The addition of the X23B Dual to our padded hull X-Bay line up takes the already popular bay boat to a whole new level with features designed for the angler and whole family. Key standard features include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, gulfsand paint with xtreme coat liner, large bay lounge console with fish box, fold down grabrail, removable windshield, seat cushion, back-rest cushion, Humminbird Piranha Max 4 graph, Minn Kota Riptide 46 trolling motor, 300 HP rating w/two Yamaha F150XB's (the first of its kind for our company), and appearance package



<b>Length</b> 23'	<b>Beam</b> 102"	<b>Capacity</b> 9	<b>Max HP</b> 300
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## 2021 XPRESS XT16

The newly redesigned Xpress Tactical Series has laser-like construction, engineered precision to provide the hunter and outdoorsman the finest outboard hull "HD:3" capable of handling most conditions seen by timber hunters to backwater fisherman. Open floor plan, narrower beam, wider bottom, deeper v for optimum outboard excitement. Redesigned transom, center keel and a SeeLite LED lighting system to illuminate even the darkest of destinations. Key standard features include a Hydro-Dynamic hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, camo paint, xtreme coat liner, duck boat accessory rail, and step pod transom.



<b>Length</b> 16'	<b>Beam</b> 68.5"	<b>Capacity</b> 3	<b>Max HP</b> 50
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## 2021 XPRESS H17

Built on the foundation of the famed Hyper-Lift Hull, this sleek, superbly appointed, open floor plan H17 is your solution to getting you to and from your destination safely and most certainly, quickly! Key standard features on this bass boat include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, choice of five hull colors, xtreme coat liner, SeaDek liner on decks, 7.5' capable rod storage, aerated livewell in rear deck, Humminbird Helix 5 graph, Minn Kota 45 Edge trolling motor, and appearance package options.



<b>Length</b> 17'	<b>Beam</b> 93"	<b>Capacity</b> 4	<b>Max HP</b> 90
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## 2021 XPRESS H18

The new H18 is built to go head to head with Mod-V style boats, which offer a rough, uncomfortable ride, however the introduction into this category with a padded hull design is truly a game changer. Built on the foundation of the famed Hyper-Lift Hull, this sleek, superbly appointed, open floor plan boat will provide you with years of excitement. Fast, dry, pad hull design is your solution to getting you to and from your destination safely and most certainly, quickly. Key standard features on this bass boat include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, choice of five hull colors, xtreme coat liner, SeaDek liner on decks, 8' capable rod storage, aerated livewell in rear deck, Humminbird Helix 5 graph, Minn Kota 45 Edge trolling motor, and appearance package options.



<b>Length</b> 17' 10"	<b>Beam</b> 93"	<b>Capacity</b> 4	<b>Max HP</b> 115
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## 2021 XPRESS H190B

The H190 Bay is the ideal option for anyone who is looking for a high-performance, beautifully styled, economically priced 19' bay boat. Built on the foundation of our Hyper-Lift Hull, this dream craft packs performance, fishability, and comfort into one amazing cost effective boat. Thin water or rough seas, you will not find a better solution. Key standard features include a Hyper-Lift hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, choice of four hull colors, xtreme coat liner, Humminbird Piranha Max 4 graph, Minn Kota Riptide 46 trolling motor, and appearance package options.



<b>Length</b> 18' 10"	<b>Beam</b> 93"	<b>Capacity</b> 4	<b>Max HP</b> 115
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# EXCEL BOATS

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## 2021 EXCEL STALKER

One boat that does it all.

There is no such thing as the perfect boat for every outdoor situation; but the Stalker™ comes pretty darn close. The Stalker™ is geared and ready for all season fishing and hunting. The Viper™ hull handles choppy waters of the gulf coast and large reservoirs yet can access shallow coves after crappie or your favorite duck marsh. Large front and rear casting decks provide ample elbow-room and comfort on all day excursions as well as piles of hunting gear. Options such as a low front deck, floor gate drain, seatbox livewell, leaning post backrest with rod holders and interior LED lighting allows you to customize the Stalker to your dreams.

Model	1860	1960	2072	2172
Length	18'	19'	20'	21'
Beam	60"	60"	72"	72"
Capacity	5	5	5	6
Max HP	115	115	150	175

[excelboats.com/stalker-console.html](http://excelboats.com/stalker-console.html)



## 2021 EXCEL BAY PRO

Excel has bragging rights to this smooth running and fast Bay Pro 230. This boat is an elite bay boat platform with features and options professional multi-species fisherman have been asking for. The Bay Pro 230 is big, 23'x102" (8.5') to be exact, and the widest beam you can legally tow on the highway. Fit and finish is our specialty, and the Bay Pro 230 is so well built that many think it is fiberglass when they look down the sides of the hull. To top it off, we built this hull from 0.160 aluminum, unheard of for bay boats that normally have 0.125 hulls. To move this large boat, we built it on a 14 degree pad hull that lifts the boat, provides a dry ride and allows the boat to reach higher than normal speeds for a 23 foot boat varying from 200 to 250 HP.

Model	BP230	BP220	BP203	BP183
Length	23'	22'3"	20'3"	18'3"
Beam	102"	94"	94"	94"
Capacity	10	8	7	5
Max HP	250	200	150	115

[excelboats.com/stalker-console.html](http://excelboats.com/stalker-console.html)

**DON'T PUT AWAY YOUR TRAIL CAMERAS AFTER DEER SEASON ENDS; THEY CAN BE GREAT TOOLS FOR PRESEASON TURKEY SCOUTING.**

By Andy Douglas

# SMILE, TOM, you're on Candid Camera



# TURKEY SEASON IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER,

and it's time to scout and find out where the big gobblers are on your turf.

Any hunter worth his or her salt will know before the season opens what they've got and where they're hanging out.

Early morning sits within hearing distance of roosting areas are traditional ways of preseason scouting that work well. A hunter hears some gobbling, makes notes and is on the way — but what about the rest of the day?

"I leave my cameras up after deer season," said Matt Courtney, a veteran turkey hunter from Hinds County. "They are already in key locations where I hunt. I will just change out the cards, replace the batteries and let them set."

Undisturbed birds are easier to bag than educated ones, and there's no better way to see what's on your hunting property, with minimal disturbance, than by utilizing trail cameras. Here are a few tips and ideas to help get started.

## WHERE TO PLACE THEM

It's really a no-brainer that food plots are the No. 1 location to place cameras. This time of year, gobblers will still be in small, bachelor groups and will frequent plots planted in wheat, oats, clover and deer-plot mixes. A tom may even be caught on camera displaying if the day is nice and a hen is nearby.

Logging roads or trails in the middle of your hunting area are another idea. Turkeys use trails, especially trails in open hardwoods. Long straight-of-ways are places toms love to strut. In

thicker areas, turkeys will use trails, especially when it rains.

Long ridges are another excellent place to set a cam. Hens and gobblers naturally travel ridges, using them as a vantage point to look out for danger. Ridges can become strut zones for big toms; they fancy places where hens can see them display from distances.

Look for areas with fresh scratching, droppings, feathers or tracks as go-to locations when setting up cameras. As the old saying goes, "Where there's smoke, there's fire" — if you find the sign, you will find birds.

"I set up a camera every year on a place I hunt that's an old road with gravel and sand," Courtney said. "The birds come to the sand; when I see several tracks, I set my camera. I've located a lot of gobblers over the years using this method."

Woodlots between fields can be hangouts that bring birds into close quarters. Winding creeks and stream management zones (SMZs), pinch points, natural funnels and field edges are places for camera setups. Open, grazing pastures and fresh-plowed fields or row crops will attract turkeys. Set cameras on fence rows or timber edges overlooking fields where there's sign present or if you have seen turkeys there before.

A well-placed trail camera can give turkey hunters a big head-start on the upcoming spring season.

**SET IT UP** ➤



## SET IT UP

Turkeys are not as wary of trail cameras as deer tend to be, so hunters don't have to worry about hiding them or making them inconspicuous. They can be set in wide-open places with little worry of spooking any birds. Actually, the wider open, the better shots you'll get.

The height you set your cameras will be a little different; they need to be lower than where you set them up for deer; 2 feet above the ground is perfect. Cameras need to be aimed as parallel to the ground as possible, maximizing the effectiveness of their range. If it's in tight quarters, dropping the height to 1 foot and angling the camera slightly upwards will produce fantastic photos.

## WHEN TO CHECK

There's really no right or wrong time to check a game camera, and every hunter has to utilize his or her spare time when doing so. Just check them when there's no risk of alerting turkeys of your presence. The absolute best time is at dusk — right after fly-up time. Some die-hard hunters will only check them at night.

Cellular cameras, such as ones made by Moultrie, Covert or Spy Point, are even better for locating gobblers. The only time a hunter needs to visit the camera is when batteries run low.

Trail cameras can help hunters scout without requiring them to be in the woods, where the chances of spooking turkeys are greater. An old gobbler with long, sharp spurs won't stand for a lot of intrusion. **BOTTOM:** Turkeys frequent openings or clearings in the woods; those are great places to set up a trail camera.



SHNELL

3.10.2016 9:08:06

Trail cameras are a great tool to use when scouting turkeys. If done right, it will show hunters what they've got without pressuring the birds.

"It keeps me from having to go out too many mornings prior to the season opening," Courtney said. "It saves me a lot of leg work."

Making the most of game-cams will help you stay on top of what is happening, and when, on your turkey hunting grounds. You may be surprised at what you find and it is sure to change the way you hunt. ■



**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.



Nothing beats finding an old gobbler's roosting area before the season, but trail cameras can help hunters pattern a tom's movements throughout the day.

**SPORTSMAN SHOWCASE >**

**SALTWATER**

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

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	34" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	no limit
White marlin	66" LJFL	no limit
Sailfish	63" LJFL	no limit
Sharks (large coastal/pelagic)@	37" TL*	1/day or 3/boat
Sharks@	37" TL*	1/day, 3/vessel
Cobia	36" FL	2 per day
Redfish (red drum)	18" minimum 30" maximum TL	3/day (1 over 30")
Flounder (state waters)	12" TL	15/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL@	4/day aggregate
Hogfish	12" FL@	5/day
Red, yellowfin grouper	20" TL@	4/day
Scamp grouper	16" TL@	4/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	no minimum@	1/day each
Gray/schoolmaster/cubera/ mahogany/yellowtail/dog snapper	12" TL@	5/day aggregate
Mutton snapper	18" TL@	10/day
Queen/blackfin/silk/winchman snapper	none@	5/day aggregate
Vermillion/lane snapper	10"/8" TL@	20/day aggregate
Gray triggerfish	15" FL@	1/day
Golden/blueline/anchor/blackline tilefish	none@	20/day
King mackerel	24" FL@	2/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL@	15/day
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL@	3/day
Bigeye tuna	27" CFL@	no limit
Tripletail	18" TL	3/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	15"	15/day

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

**FRESHWATER**

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

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

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

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

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

\* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

## GAMAKATSU G-BOXES

Gamakatsu is best known for the fishing hooks it makes; they're among the best on the market. Now, they're bringing you places to store them, their G-Box line.

Four different sizes and configurations of the G-Box are available, giving fishermen the ability to make boxes with the size of the lures and terminal tackle that need a home. The 3700D Deep Utility Case is built with deep compartments for storing bulky lures; the 3200D is a smaller

case with deep compartments

The 388DD and 318SD models are smaller, pocket utility cases that are perfect for storing terminal tackle or just taking a dozen or so lures for an afternoon trip to a local pond.

All G-Box models can be kept in a G-Case 7000, which has an optional rod stand and jig compartment.

**MSRP: starts at \$9.70.**

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



## SPRO GOUKEN FLUOROCARBON LINE

The folks who have brought you great SPRO fishing lures for years now bring you something to spool on your reel and tie on those fat, little crankbaits.

SPRO has introduced Gouken Fluorocarbon in 150-meter spools in five different sizes: 10-, 12-, 14-, 16- and 20-pound test.

A small-diameter line, Gouken is exceptionally sensitive, enabling you to make contact and feel your baits and everything they hit. Despite the small diameter, Gouken is a tough,

abrasion-resistant fluorocarbon that's great for power fishing and big hook-sets.

Like all fluorocarbons, Gouken is invisible in the water; light passes through it, rather than refracting off the material, making it perfect for targeting high-pressed, spooky fish.

**MSRP: \$18.99**

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

## AVIAN-X HDR TURKEY DECOYS

If there's one thing you can say about all of the decoys that are sold under the Avian-X brand — mallards, pintails, teal — it's that they look incredibly realistic. Add wild turkeys to that list.

Avian-X has debuted their HDR (Heavy Duty Realism) turkey decoys, the HRD Hen and HDR Jake, beautiful, rubber-molded bodies that look like they're ready to gobble, yelp and cluck on their own.

The HDR jake comes in a size slightly smaller than a wild turkey, to make sure it's not big enough to intimidate a gobbler that walks in for a closer look. It's in a half-strut pose, and it comes with two, interchangeable head/neck units, one in an aggressive posture and one more submissive.

The decoys come with a synthetic, lifelike paint scheme, including detailed feathers and lifelike legs, and a mounting stake

that allows for natural, realistic movement without uncontrolled spinning.

The jake is ultra-durable, allowing it to take and survive repeated beatings from gobblers.

**MSRP: Hen, \$89.99, Gobbler \$149.99**

**For more info, visit: [www.avian-x.com](http://www.avian-x.com)**





# THE BUSHYTAIL REVIVAL

**MISSISSIPPI IS A HOTBED FOR SQUIRREL HUNTING ON PRIVATE OR PUBLIC LANDS. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT FEBRUARY PROVIDES WHEN THE WOODS ARE FULL OF SQUIRRELS, BUT NOT DEER HUNTERS.**

■ By David Hawkins

**A** wide variety of options are associated with squirrel hunting.

One hunter may pick up a box of high-brass No. 6 shot and have fun all weekend shooting squirrels, maybe a rabbit and a quail. Another may have saved his money to invest in a top-rated canine hunting buddy that will enhance the hunting experience. A third may cherish the days in the squirrel woods with family members of all ages, observing and discussing the art of woodcraft and hunting lore.

No matter the level of participation, squirrel hunting is just fun.

Public land where squirrels abound is not in short supply. The floods of the lower Mississippi Delta took a toll on some areas, including the Mahannah WMA, but don't be discouraged; there are thousands of other hills, hollers, creek bottoms and cane breaks to explore, and the entire month of February to try for an 8-squirrel limit before the season closes.

"Mississippi has a good crop of squirrels and such a wide variety of places to hunt them," said Rick Hammerick, small-game coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "February has become a favorite month for hunting squirrels. The trees are bare, dogs can take advantage of the scent trails, hunters have clear views, the insects are few and the snakes are hibernating."

**RIFLE OR A SHOTGUN >**

## RIFLE OR A SHOTGUN

When I was old enough to be trusted with a weapon, my father took me to the hardware store, and along with the money I had saved doing chores, he helped me buy an Iver Johnson .410. He reasoned I could shoot small game as well as quail with that little gun. I wanted a .22 repeater, but in the end, I was happy to have that little single-shot shotgun. The .22 would come later, as well as a safe full of fine firearms, but none quite holds the place in my heart of that little .410.

The gun need only be able to safely deliver a sufficient load of shot to the target. I've always been partial to No. 6 shot, but some folks like No. 5 or even No. 7½. The smaller shot is a fine idea when the chances are good a quail or woodcock may be flushed while hunting. Otherwise, the larger shot is all that is needed for bushytails and cottontails.

Mississippi regulations allow hunters a lot of options when it comes to weaponry. Rimfire rifles remain the most popular of small rifles. As far as calibers, the .22 stands out, but the .17 has made headway in the race. Wildlife Management Areas, National Wildlife Refuges and other public land can and do have specific restrictions on weapons used. Read and understand the specific regulations for the area before hunting.

On private lands, weapon usage is somewhat more relaxed.

Air-rifle technology has advanced in recent years to the point that pneumatic weapons are becoming more common, especially in suburban areas where noise is a primary concern and squirrel populations flourish.

A handloading enthusiast might find a less-powerful load that would allow his or her centerfire rifle to do double duty as a squirrel rifle. Just be mindful of where the bullet will return to earth once it has been launched. As an example, a .223 or .22 Hornet case might be loading with a cast bullet and fired at a sub-sonic velocity. Such loads are deadly on squirrels and provide an added layer of fun for the handloader.

In recent years, the advances in air-rifle technology have elevated those weapons to go-to choices for shooting squirrels where the noise of the report is a problem. Both .22 and .177 hunting pellets are capable of clean kills on tree rats at close ranges. The lack of noticeable recoil makes such weapons a perfect choice for introducing a child to the sport, and they offer hours of safe, backyard plinking for a budding hunter or shooter.

## STILL-HUNT OR DOG

Squirrels are rodents, thus, they are low on the food chain. Nature has adjusted their reproductive cycle to insure that, under normal circumstances, they are a plentiful species. They are hunted from above by hawks and owls and from below by bobcats, foxes and humans. Luckily, they have the attention span of a ninth-grade boy, and once disturbed, they don't wait too long before moving again.

To their credit, they have excellent eyesight and keen hearing. It's a balance of predator and prey that works pretty well both ways.

In the fall, leaves provide them with cover, but that cover gives away their location as they move along limb by-ways. Still-hunting is the best choice when leaves are on the trees. By resting motionless, a hunter may blend into the forest until a squirrel moves again; thus offering the hunter a shot.

Two still-hunters moving through the woods a few yards apart, alternately starting and stopping, will make squirrels move around tree trunks or limbs, allowing one of the hunters a shot. Additional hunters can shake vines, especially where a nest is involved, and increase chances



Hunting with a dog is a joy for all involved, except perhaps the squirrels. Here, King poses with his morning's finds.



of success. As leaves fall and the trees become bare, visibility increases for hunter and hunted. When spooked, squirrels will make a run for the nearest den tree or the top of the tallest tree that's close by.

Dogs are a popular, but not inexpensive option. Some yard dogs will do as squirrel dogs, but most top dogs are kennel-kept, well trained and may easily cost five figures. Add on food, vet bills and the like, and the price per squirrel climbs pretty fast. However, there is very little hunting more fun than a bright day in the woods with a top-notch dog and a group of friends or family members.

"Dogs enjoy being a part of the hunt as well as their human counterparts," said hunter Kenneth Latham of Ludlow. "It's important that those people who hunt with a dog and its master not forget that special bond. Only the master should give the dog commands. Trying to command another man's dog only perplexes the man and confuses the dog. Just enjoy being in the company of fellow hunters."

Publications such as the Mississippi Market Bulletin list squirrel dogs for sale. Some are touted as finished, while others are referred to as started, meaning more training is necessary. If seriously shopping for a dog, consider a few visits to a kennel that specializes in squirrel dogs. Ask a lot of questions, Look into the Mississippi Hunting Dog Association. Many people think they are just deer and coon dog owners. Not so; there are many squirrel and rabbit dog enthusiasts in the group.

"We have members from every aspect of the hunting community: coon and deer hunters, rabbit and squirrel hunters, waterfowl and upland game," said David Smith, president of the Mississippi Hunting Dog Association. "We welcome new members or perspective members to visit our website or follow us on Facebook. Within our membership is a wealth of knowledge. Members will be eager to share that wisdom with those new to the hunting dog world."

**ALONE OR IN A SMALL GROUP** ➤

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## ALONE OR IN A SMALL GROUP

Social interaction can be a wonderful part of squirrel hunting. Making challenges and taking turns increases the interest in the hunt, especially when the hunt involves family members. You miss, you go to the end of the line before you get another chance to shoot. In the end, the hunter who drops the most squirrels is the winner. Perhaps the first shot goes to the one who first spotted a treed squirrel, maybe flattened against a limb or in the crook of the tree. Then, there is heaviest squirrel, the longest shot or a running shot. There is no end to the games hunters can concoct.

There is also the matter of taking all three types of squirrels in Mississippi; the squirrel trifecta. The grey squirrel is easily the most common. Fox or red squirrels are not as common but fairly numerous. A black squirrel is actually a color phase of the fox variety, and a squirrel's colors can take some interesting shades. In some areas, all three co-exist colors, but the black and red varieties are found mostly in the Delta close to the Mississippi River.

## FRIED, STEW, WITH DUMPLINGS

My mother dredged squirrel parts in flour seasoned with salt and pepper, cooked it in grease until brown, then moved them to a pressure cooker that jiggled and whistled while she made home-made creamed potatoes. By the time the potatoes were done, so was the squirrel and gravy. Served with hot biscuits, it was a fine meal for anyone. My father would pop the heads open with a spoon and eat the brains. My wife still does and admonishes me for head-shooting all the ones I kill. She has a 20-gauge now and can kill hers and leave the head intact.

A common dish in the South is squirrel stew, which is often a deer-camp item made in a large pot. Mixed vegetables and chicken broth, along with canned tomatoes make it feast fit for a king.

Follow any chicken and dumpling recipe with squirrel substituted for the chicken and you'll never go wrong.

Bon Appetite! ■



Mepps buys squirrel tails from hunters to use in their classic fishing lures like these Aglia spinners.

## MEPPS WILL BUY THE TAILS

For years, Mepps has advertised in outdoor periodicals that they buy squirrel tails with which to trim their fishing lures.

It's not a proposition that will make a person wealthy, but it will add a little jingle to a hunter's pocket. It's a great activity for children. For greater value, the tails may be exchanged for Mepps' fine quality, handmade fishing lures.

For complete details about the squirrel tail program, visit [stinfo@mepps.com](mailto:stinfo@mepps.com). ■



# MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A SQUIRREL

The two-hunter method of skinning a squirrel starts with an incision across the back large enough for each hunter to insert a finger before pulling in opposite directions.

Several popular methods for skinning squirrels exist.

A very popular one is referred to as the two-hunter method. One hunter holds the head or front legs, while the other takes the other end. An incision is made across the back large enough for each hunter to insert a finger, then pulling against one another, the skin will begin to strip from the carcass.

A sharp pocket knife is all that is needed to make the necessary snips in the hide until removed completely. Use the same knife to remove the feet and gut the animal.

Thorough washing throughout the process will aide in keeping the meat free of hair.

A quick search on your favorite browser will yield multiple methods. Hangers and accessories sold commercially to make the task easier. ■



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

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# Watercraft **FOR** whiskers

**WHAT FEATURES DO YOU NEED ON YOUR ULTIMATE CATFISH BOAT? HOW YOU OUTFIT AND RIG THE HULL CAN MAKE FISHING A BREEZE OR A BATTLE.**

■ By Phillip Gentry



# Anglers have been lining the banks of the Mississippi River for eons to *catch catfish.*

As targeting them evolved into a solid pastime, anglers began leaving the shoreline, using dinghies, barges and other more commercial vessels to chase their prey.

Not long ago, someone regarded as exclusively a catfish angler still used the most basic, unsophisticated craft to anchor up and drop lines with pieces of cut bait over the side.

But today, heads are more likely to turn to look at one of today's modern catfishing machines as another run-of-the mill bass boat.

Boats intended to target catfish now come with every amenity, from heated seats to temperature-controlled, oxygenated livewells and every bell and whistle in between. Choosing your catfishing boat is no longer a mundane job.

According to Roy Harkness, a veteran tournament catfish angler from Ripley, Tenn., acquiring a boat is the easy part. The hard part, he said, is figuring out how to rig it exactly the way you want it.

While some anglers may argue the first part of this statement, few can argue with the second part. Rigging a new boat requires time and patience in order to get all of the catfishing components — rod holders, bait tanks, livewells, seating, trolling motor and sonar units — situated on the first try without have to re-drill holes and re-clamp bases on a new boat.

"I don't start drilling holes and permanently attaching things until I've made several dry runs with the boat," Harkness said. "I can run and pick up a new boat the same day, but it takes me weeks — and maybe as many as a dozen trips — before I get everything installed where I want it."

Whether you're outfitting a brand-new boat or just a new-to-you boat, rigging it to provide optimal performance for a tournament or just a day of fun fishing is no easy task.

Harkness has some pointers from his years of experience rigging catfish boats.

## ROD HOLDERS >

)} Rod holder placement is a big deal and hinges on what tactic of catfishing you expect to do the most.



Phillip Gentry

## ROD HOLDERS

A firm believer in and user of Driftmaster rod holders, Harkness said his preference is to clamp some of the rod bases on the rails that go around the rear gunwales of his Sea Ark Dynasty catfish boat, as well as to screw some of the rod-holder bases directly to the deck of the boat.

“The first few trips are without any rod holders; I just lay the rods where I want them to go,” he said. “You can do mock-ups sitting on the trailer in the driveway, but until you get out there and fish and see what potentially works, you’ll never really know.”

## SONAR PLACEMENT

The No. 1 priority to where Harkness mounts his 12-inch Garmin sonar units is allowing himself line of sight, a safety consideration, especially when running in the dark.

“I use several different RAM mounts to place my units out of my way but still easy to see,” he said. “A good example is my chart plotter. I want it out of my direct line of sight but in my peripheral area so I can glance at it and keep track of where the boat is.”

Like the rod holders, he’s not afraid to connect his sonar units and lay them on the dash in an effort to see what works best before attaching the mounts to the boat.

## LIVEWELL

Harkness said his boat has a 100-gallon livewell built into the rear deck, but other boats may not have one or one that size. He suggests keeping the livewell in the back, closer to the motor, so the boat will get on plane more easily.

“Check out the pumps and the wiring and make sure to check it all out before you’re relying on that livewell to keep your fish alive,” he said.

As for bait wells, he rarely has a need for live bait, but he does store his bait cooler on the front deck, strapped down and out of the way.

“I keep the bait up front on the other side of the windshield,” he said. “That keeps the bugs and the smell out of the back where we’re fishing.”



**Phillip Gentry** is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer who says that if it swims, walks, hops, flies or crawls he’s usually not too far behind.



Harkness said watching his graphs is important to finding the right spot, but not at the expense of being able to steer the boat in adverse conditions.

Phillip Gentry



Roy Harkness

When thinking about the best layout for you, consider the little things, like where to store the net so you can reach it quickly.

## TROLLING MOTOR

Harkness' final advice on rigging is to make sure the trolling motor will clear other gear when deployed and stowed. He said he's also learned the hard way to mount the motor so the head is inside the edge of the boat. This prevents the head of the motor from getting damaged if he's trying to dock in or against strong currents.

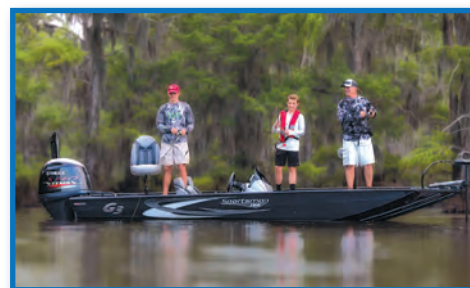
"I use my trolling motor in a lot of heavy current situations, whether I'm bumping or drifting or just trying to put the boat in position," said Harkness. "You want a reliable model with enough power to move a pretty heavy boat in strong current, but you also need to have it set so you can deploy it and stow it pretty easily when it's time to move." ■

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Consider such options as hull design, floor plan, motor size and layout before picking out your boat for catfishing.

# THE perfect catboat?

A highly debated topic in catfishing circles is what makes the best catfish boat? But instead of arguing over who, look at the specs and features that are best suited for the task.

Starting at the front, the first decision is Deep-V or open front deck. Both have advantages and disadvantages. The argument is often that most catfishing is done from the rear of the boat, so a stout V-hull becomes a necessity when plying big waters like the Mississippi River on a high-water day. Open front decks allow more walk-around room and more gear-storage capacity.

The next consideration is layout and floor design. Arguments can be made for center consoles, wrap-around windshields or open design. While center-console models frequently come with T-tops that provide shelter from the sun, heat, wind and rain,



Roy Harkness

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others voice support for wrap-around windshields that allow for clear views when underway and support retractable Bimini tops to protect anglers from the elements.

Seating arrangement is another concern with floor plan. Will anglers primarily be fishing standing up or sitting down? What tactics do you plan to use the most? It's tough to stand for hours on end, waiting on a rod fished at anchor to go down.

Bumping anglers don't have much time for sitting and frequently range all over the boat, but primarily on the rear deck.

Because modern catfishing boats tend to run on the rather large, heavy and metal side, you'll want enough motor to push the boat. Four-stroke outboards dominate the catfish market these days. The question is, how big of a 4-stroke outboard do you need? Can you get by with 115 or 150 horsepower or do you have a boat that won't get on plane without a bigger outboard?

Storage is another concern. Most catfishermen don't need much room to store baits, but a considerable amount of space is needed to accommodate rod lockers and huge livewells. ■



■ By Kinny Haddox

HERE'S AN OVERLOOKED LIVE  
BAIT THAT A BIG SLAB  
WON'T BACK DOWN FROM AS  
THE SPAWN APPROACHES.

# CRAWDADS FOR SLAB CRAPPIE?

## HERE'S A QUESTION:

# Why would fishermen spend money and time buying and fishing with dozens of lures that imitate live creatures but not fish with the real thing?

Consider the crawfish. Crappie fishermen use all sizes and shapes and varieties of crawfish-colored jigs, small crankbaits, plastic tails and spinners, but you rarely hear of a fisherman using a live crawfish. Along the Gulf Coast, what could be more natural? And it's a bait that crappie, especially slab crappie, won't back down from.

"Crappie tear crawfish up, but you won't see many folks fishing with them," said pro crappie angler Jason Thomas of Monroe, La. "These things are full of nutrients, and they are all

over the place where the crappie are trying to spawn, especially around shallow cypress trees and the grass mats. It's the same principle as fishing grass shrimp, but with a little bigger profile."

Thomas said crawfish and crawfish-colored lures start working best in February when the water starts warming up a little bit. There's no doubt that artificial baits and minnows are the top lures for crappie, day-in and day-out, but things like worms, grubs, grass shrimp and even meal worms will also become meals for a hungry crappie.

## MATCH THE HATCH

And then there is the crawfish. The key to using crawfish for crappie is matching the time of the year with the crappie's lifestyle.

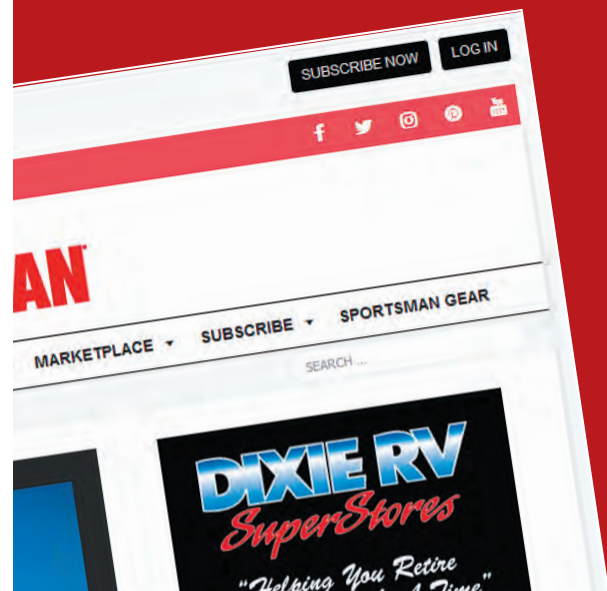
The season for crawfish that people consider eating-size can last from November to July, especially during an exceptionally warm, wet winter. But the most reliable months — and the time you'll find the best crawfish — are in the



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Try lures that imitate crawfish or lures in crawfish colors: Bobby Garland Baby Shad, Bill Lewis Tiny Trap and Rebel Tiny Wee in crawfish colors, and Uncle Buck's panfish creature. **OPPOSITE:** Fishermen aren't the only ones that eat big crawfish this time of year.

winter and spring, from late February through May. Smaller crawfish are around all the time; The key is having water warm enough for them to be active.

"In late winter and early spring, when we are starting to fish shallow, we often catch fish to eat, and it is amazing when we clean the fish, how many of the bigger crappie have crawfish in their bellies," Thomas said.

The majority of crawfish in most bodies of water are small this time of year, and it's important to match that with the bait you fish. Usually, the bigger fish will go for bigger crawfish, though. Thomas said that if you want to try fishing with a live crawfish, rig one up under a slip cork with a small weight and fish it close to structure, like boat docks and cypress trees, where fish will be looking to spawn.

The ideal size crawfish for crappie is around 2 inches, but in a pinch you can use 3-inchers.

**THINK SHALLOW >**



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

Big slabs like this can be caught on a variety of baits this time of year, including live crawfish

## THINK SHALLOW

Fish are going to attack anything that gets in their spawning zone, and while they may just push some baits out of the bed, with a crawfish, you've got a good chance of getting the fish to take the bait in its mouth. Most of the best water for fishing this technique is 2 to 4 feet deep.

Thomas says that even though crappie feed up — they are most-often looking up toward the surface for what they eat — spawning time turns on a more-aggressive bite. You can stick a hook through a crawfish and fish it weightless, allowing it to settle to the bottom, where it looks more natural. Try to put the hook through the bait where it won't stop the bait from moving its tail and having plenty of action. You might think that crawfish would die pretty quickly on the hook, but in cold water, you might be surprised.

"Crawfish are tough creatures," Thomas said; they'll stay alive longer than you might think.

Fishing a live crawfish for shallow crappie is similar to fishing grass shrimp around the grass beds or live shrimp for speckled trout.

Thomas said areas in certain lakes always warm up earlier and more quickly than others, and the fish move in shallow earlier in those places than on the main part of a lake, especially big reservoirs. Try crawfish in those spots for the best results.

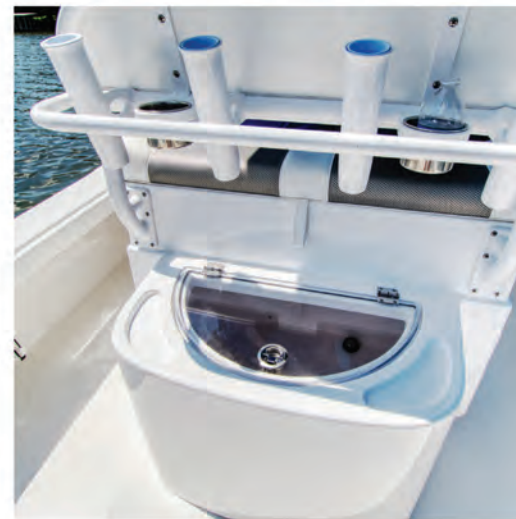
There is the question of finding bait. You can't walk into the local bait stand and buy two dozen crawfish, and if you try to get them from your local crawfish boiler, they'll likely be too big — unless you make a deal with him to save you small ones. But you can get your own bait by putting out crawfish nets or dredging a net in shallow, grassy ditches. They will often be just the right size in those places. You can keep them alive for several days in wet moss or wet newspaper. Here's a trick, too. If you



want to add more color to your crawdads, put them in a small styrofoam ice chest with a layer of wet, colored paper. Within a day, they'll soak up the pigments from that paper and turn more that color.

One other thing about catching big crappie on crawfish. Don't tell anybody you are doing it, okay? Fishermen just can't keep a secret. ■

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## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Clyde Folse has added to his line of crappie-fishing products a jighead he's been using for 25 years.



# HAMMA HEADS

CRAPPIE PSYCHIC DEBUTS FLAT JIGHEADS HE'S BEEN USING FOR DECADES

**T**he Crappie Weapon, Crappie Trailers and Crappie Ammo all became even more dangerous to the crappie population about three months ago when The Crappie Psychic introduced Hamma Heads.

Clyde Folse, the lure manufacturer's founder, is letting everyone in on something that has given him a decided edge for putting fish in the boat for the past 20 to 25 years. It's been all about the lead jighead he has been making for himself, hammering them out at his home in Raceland.

It's easy to see the difference between the Hamma Head and other leadheads on the market. The Hamma Head's head is about as flat as can be.

That wasn't the case when he started experimenting with them years ago, Folse said.

"Nobody made flat jigheads," he said, noting there have been triangle-shaped jigheads on the shelves, just not flat ones.

"I would take a triangular (or round), go in the shop and hammer" it flat, he said, noting that the big difference is the jighead's action in the water column. Drop a marble in an aquarium, and it will fall straight to the bottom. Drop a quarter in the aquarium, and it will slide or wobble to the bottom.

"I haven't used a round jighead in 25 years," he said, whose family business got Hamma Heads on the market in late fall 2020.

Folse said that as he was getting ready to launch his line of new jigheads, he was going to call them "Flatheads," or something similar to that. However, his wife, Janelle put her foot down.

"My wife said, 'I've been watching you for 15 years with a hammer in the shed, hammering round jigheads. You're not going to call them Flatheads,'" he said.

Thus, the name Hamma Heads were born.

The flat jigheads come in  $\frac{1}{32}$ - and  $\frac{1}{16}$ -



**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.

Misha Mann and his father, David, slammed the slabs with Clyde Folse, The Crappie Psychic, in the Bayou Black area.

ounce sizes, both with bronze Mustad hooks: a No. 4 for the 1/32-ounce and a No. 2 for the 1/16-ounce.

People at seminars conducted by Folse, a working guide, repeatedly ask him why he puts a No. 2 hook on a 1/16-ounce jig-head. And they wonder why he prefers a 1/16-ounce jighead with a larger hook — many 1/16-ounce heads feature a No. 1 — when they rely on a 1/32-ounce model that has a slower fall.

“I don’t want to catch (bream),” he said. “That’s why I use a 1/16, why all the 1/16s have a No. 2 Mustad hook, which is a high-quality hook.”

The Hamma Heads also feature a bait holder to help keep a soft-plastic bait snug against the head.

Folse doesn’t paint the jigheads, because often, paint cakes the line tie, plus, it would add to the cost. But he shared a valuable tip. Get a bottle of Salon Perfect Neon Pop Professional Nail Lacquer, which literally shines underwater. There is only one color, as far as the lure manufacturer is concerned: orange.

“It has to be Neon Pop, because it’s like traffic-cone orange, almost a fluorescent orange, my favorite color. I put one little dot on each side,” he said.

Folse’s second color preference is pink. ■

For more information about the Hamma Heads, visit [thecrappie-psychic.com](http://thecrappie-psychic.com) or call 985-790-0862.



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## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Capt. Ronnie Daniels shows off a bull red caught while fishing the Biloxi Marsh.



# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: REDFISH

Brian Cope

## THE RED DRUM IS FOUND ALMOST EVERYWHERE AND REVERED IN MOST PLACES

**R**ed drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*), commonly referred to as redfish, are one of the most-popular species of saltwater fish throughout the Southeast. Their range extends from Maine down the east coast and around the Gulf of Mexico.

Redfish are strong fighters when hooked, and anglers catch them in a variety of ways. Live and cut shrimp and baitfish options are popular. Artificial lures like soft-plastic shrimp, grubs and swimbaits are good choices. Redfish will even bite topwater lures on occasion. And crabs — either live or cut up — entice numerous bites. Spoons and spinners are great options as well.

Redfish have elongated bodies with coppery red overtones on their otherwise silver bodies, with white bellies. Depending on water quality, redfish can appear bright orange or almost white with slight tints of red. They almost always have a characteristic black spot on their tails. Some have more than one spot, and some even have spots along the

sides of their bodies as well. On very rare occasions, a redfish will have no spots.

### VERY ADAPTABLE

These are schooling fish, and during winter, redfish up to between three and five years old gang up in very tight schools in inshore waters, while older redfish — often referred to as bull redfish — head offshore to deeper waters. From spring through fall, the bulls come back inshore, and the tight schools of younger fish become much more loosely concentrated.

While naturally a saltwater species, redfish tolerate brackish water very well and can even live in freshwater as long as certain other water-quality conditions are met. Redfish have been successfully stocked in freshwater lakes in Texas, and other states have taken steps to do the same. They are among the most adaptable saltwater gamefish, tolerating extreme weather and water conditions.

Across their range, redfish are known by several different names: red drum, channel bass, spot-tail bass, spot-tails, reds

and redfish. Along the Gulf Coast, some anglers call them poisson rouge. Small ones are often called puppy drum or rat reds, and very large ones are known as bull redfish, bull drum or old drum.

### BIG SPAWNERS

Most female redfish reach sexual maturity by age six, but some reach that stage in three years. Males usually mature around two years old. After reaching sexual maturity, redfish spawn for the rest of their lives, usually beginning in the summer and lasting through fall.

During a spawning season, a single female redfish can produce as many as 40 million eggs. Their spawning period is about half that of spotted seatrout, but



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



Laura Burch, 14, caught a nice 28-pound redfish out of Dulac.

they outproduce that species by a long shot.

The “drum” part of the red drum name comes from the fish’s ability to make a drumming sound by manipulating their air bladders, a common way of calling to other redfish during the spawn.

Redfish have a distinct enough look that they are rarely mistaken for other species. However, when very small, they are sometimes misidentified as whiting, aka kingfish or sea mullet, which do not have spots but otherwise resemble small reds.

### LONG-LIVED

These fish can live very long lives. A redfish in Texas was known to be 37 years old, and in recent years, an angler in the Carolinas caught a redfish that had been tagged 21 years earlier.

The Louisiana state-record redfish weighed 61 pounds. David Weber caught the fish in June 1992. Mississippi’s state record weighed 52 pounds, 2 ounces, and was caught by Antonio Rubio on May 26, 2016.

The world record redfish, caught in the surf at Avon on North Carolina’s Outer Banks, weighed 94 pounds, 2 ounces, and was caught by David Deuel in November 1984.

It is no long possible to break the state record for redfish in most states because these fish are managed with slot limits. The maximum sizes anglers are allowed to keep are too small to challenge for a state or world record. ■



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### 2021 FEB

POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
Mon 1	██	██	██	36
Tue 2	██	██	██	35
Wed 3	██	██	██	38
Thu 4	██	██	██	44
Fri 5	██	██	██	30
Sat 6	██	██	██	22
Sun 7	██	██	██	20
Mon 8	██	██	██	29
Tue 9	██	██	██	39
Wed 10	██	██	██	49
Thu 11	██	██	██	55
Fri 12	██	██	██	46
Sat 13	██	██	██	38
Sun 14	██	██	██	30
Mon 15	██	██	██	26
Tue 16	██	██	██	29
Wed 17	██	██	██	32
Thu 18	██	██	██	41
Fri 19	██	██	██	54
Sat 20	██	██	██	46
Sun 21	██	██	██	43
Mon 22	██	██	██	45
Tue 23	██	██	██	46
Wed 24	██	██	██	56
Thu 25	██	██	██	65
Fri 26	██	██	██	75
Sat 27	██	██	██	79
Sun 28	██	██	██	67

25 50 75  
AVERAGE

### LUNAR PERIODS

TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED

MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
10:05 PM	2:14 am - 4:44 am	9:50 AM	2:39 pm - 5:09 pm	☾
11:12 PM	3:14 am - 5:22 am	10:22 AM	3:39 pm - 5:47 pm	☾ Perigee
	4:13 am - 6:01 am	10:54 AM	4:38 pm - 6:26 pm	☾ Half
12:20 AM	5:14 am - 6:42 am	11:28 AM	5:39 pm - 7:07 pm	☾
1:29 AM	6:15 am - 7:27 am	12:07 PM	6:40 pm - 7:52 pm	☾
2:38 AM	7:18 am - 8:16 am	12:51 PM	7:43 pm - 8:41 pm	☾
3:46 AM	8:19 am - 9:11 am	1:42 PM	8:44 pm - 9:36 pm	☾
4:49 AM	9:20 am - 10:08 am	2:39 PM	9:45 pm - 10:33 pm	☾ Low
5:46 AM	10:17 am - 11:09 am	3:42 PM	10:42 pm - 11:34 pm	☾
6:35 AM	11:10 am - 12:08 pm	4:47 PM	11:35 pm - Midnight	☾
7:17 AM	11:55 am - 1:07 pm	5:51 PM	Midnight - 12:33 am	☾ New
7:53 AM	12:37 pm - 2:03 pm	6:54 PM	12:20 am - 1:32 am	☾
8:24 AM	1:15 pm - 2:57 pm	7:54 PM	1:02 am - 2:28 am	☾
8:52 AM	1:48 pm - 3:50 pm	8:53 PM	1:40 am - 3:22 am	☾
9:19 AM	2:21 pm - 4:39 pm	9:49 PM	2:13 am - 4:15 am	☾
9:45 AM	2:53 pm - 5:29 pm	10:45 PM	2:46 am - 5:04 am	☾
10:12 AM	3:27 pm - 6:19 pm	11:41 PM	3:18 am - 5:54 am	☾
10:41 AM	4:01 pm - 7:11 pm		3:52 am - 6:44 am	☾ Apogee
11:12 AM	4:41 pm - 8:01 pm	12:38 AM	4:26 am - 7:36 am	☾ Half
11:49 AM	5:23 pm - 8:53 pm	1:36 AM	5:06 am - 8:26 am	☾
12:31 PM	6:11 pm - 9:47 pm	2:33 AM	5:48 am - 9:18 am	☾
1:20 PM	7:02 pm - 10:42 pm	3:30 AM	6:36 am - 10:12 am	☾ High
2:16 PM	7:59 pm - 11:35 pm	4:24 AM	7:27 am - 11:07 am	☾
3:18 PM	8:58 pm - 12:24 am	5:14 AM	8:24 am - 12:00 pm	☾
4:24 PM	9:58 pm - 1:14 am	5:59 AM	9:23 am - 12:49 pm	☾
5:32 PM	10:59 pm - Midnight	6:39 AM	10:23 am - 1:39 pm	☾
6:42 PM	Midnight - 1:59 am	7:15 AM	11:24 am - 2:24 pm	☾ Full
7:51 PM	12:01 am - 2:40 am	7:49 AM	12:25 pm - 3:05 pm	☾

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

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