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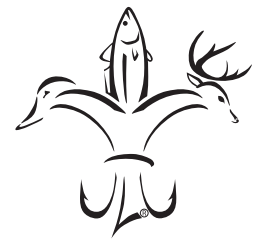
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Bream fishing, a summer-long heritage across Mississippi, peaks in June with bluegills spawning in waters all over the Magnolia State. Photo by Jeff Burleson.



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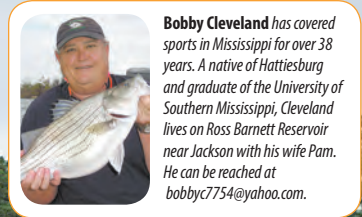
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Outdoor UPDATE with Bobby Cleveland



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

NO HUNTING? NO PROBLEM

FISHING IN MISSISSIPPI IS SO GOOD IN JUNE, WE CAN PUT GUNS AWAY AND MISS NOTHING

Dan Kibler

T'is June, the first month of the year without an open hunting season on any legal gamebird or animal — or actually since the last week of August 2020, when alligator season opened.

What's a Mississippi sportsman to do?

Plenty, that's what.

Fishing steals the headlines this month, and for good reason. Bass fishermen relish the topwater bite at sunrise, and rightfully so, as buzzbaits, plastic frogs and Pop-Rs elicit the most-powerful strikes found in our abundant fresh waters.

Panfish lovers get another great shot at bedding bream, especially around the new and full moons — June 10 and 24, respectively — and crappie enter their summer patterns of using structure or cover in deep water, all the while waiting for the annual thermocline to establish.

Catfish hit the peak of the hand-grabbing — or noodling — season, as the spawn brings more of the flatheads, blues and channels to the shallows.

Offshore, in the Gulf of Mexico, red snapper will be legal all month after Mississippi's season opens on May 28. Mangrove snapper, aka gray snapper, are also legal and plentiful. Redfish and specks are transitioning but still ready to bite a nicely offered bait or lure. Tripletails arrive in abundance, too, offering a refreshingly cool chance — you sight-fish them on the run — to add some delicious fish to the fish box.

Nights are for grabbing or gigging bullfrogs. Mississippi's frog season began in late April, and by mid-May, reports of great action on freshwater shorelines were circulating throughout the state.

Time out for a writer's note: Imagine a skillet full of grease on the stove, with the popping sound of cornmeal on frog legs and bluegill,

next to a pot of mixed greens and a pone of cornbread ... that's hall-of-fame eating, right there.

Time out for a writer's apology: Sorry, but when I start imagining such a wonderful thing, I also take time to imagine the sizzling sound and the awesome aroma ... and I need a moment to back away from the keyboard to digress.

Being it's Mississippi and it's still spring for two-thirds of the month, we will have a lot of rainy days. Those are perfect for spending time indoors enjoying this edition of *Mississippi Sportsman*. I believe you will find it both entertaining and educational.

Topping the list of features are timely offerings from our stable of contributors.

- Phillip Gentry talks to a noted crappie guide about how, when faced with a shortage of his preferred jigheads, he went into the do-it-yourself mode, or in this case the mold-it-yourself-and-fill-the-cooler mode. Read about make-it and take-it crappie fishing.

- John E. Phillips takes us out into the Gulf of Mexico with tips for catching red snapper so we can get that limit of two big 'uns on every trip.

- I talk to an expert at catching bedding bream in June, sharing his tackle tips and tricks for finding bluegill and even some late-spawning redear.

- And Andy Douglas tells us that June is the perfect time to "jump the gun" on the next hunting season. He explains why working on your deer rifle now and finding the ammo you need before the run starts this fall, just makes sense.

There's all of that and more inside this issue. Enjoy! ■

NOODLING: IT'S NOT FOR EVERYONE

Like a lot of people, I have several life rules, one of which involves sticking my hand anywhere I can't see what is in said place. Basically, my rule of thumb — since I want to keep my thumb and other digits — is that I don't even stick my hand in a closet without first turning on the light.

That is the No. 1 reason why I, retiring after more than 40 years in the business of outdoor writing, have never participated in the sport of noodling. Noodling is fishing for catfish by hand, and it involves sticking your arm into a likely spawning den, wiggling your fingers and hoping the big fish inside **BITES** you. The idea is that when it does you can lock on to the fish and pull it out and wrestle it to the surface.

Uh, no thanks.

I'm chicken; I was when I was 25 and am even more so now as a lot older and wiser human.

Mississippi is one of 16 states where noodling is legal, and its season is May 1 to July 15. June is the peak month as spring rains slow and water temperatures rise to suitable spawning conditions: 70 to 84 degrees for blues and 70 to 75 degrees for flatheads.

The season is set to coincide with the catfish spawning season, since the art of grabbing big catfish alive by hand depends on the fish's natural spawning instinct and spawning process.

"The whole idea is to catch the big male guarding the nest of eggs prior to hatching," said Gary Barnes, a noodling fanatic from Brandon. "You might get lucky and catch both the male and female in the same spot if you hit the brief window during which mama comes in to lay her eggs. That happens more often in early June, like the first two weeks. She doesn't stay around long."

Biologists say the male prepares the nest in a cavity, like a hollow log, stump, hole in the riverbank, under a boat ramp, old treetop, culvert or a man-made "fish house." Then, he sets out to entice a female into the cavity.

Once they are together, the female lays her eggs and the male fertilizes them and immediately drives the female away. The male takes sole custody of the eggs and stays to protect them, and he will do anything to protect them, including biting an intruding hand.

Flathead catfish are the most-targeted species, but big blues are also available since both species look for dark, hollow spots that protect their offspring against current and predators.

"The flatheads are the best eating, but the blues put up the biggest ruckus," Barnes said. "My team is in it more for fun than for food, so we let most of the flatheads we catch go, keeping only the smaller ones, and by smaller, I mean under 25 pounds. We keep more blues because they are more plentiful in the lakes where we noodle,

Barnett Reservoir and Eagle Lake, but we usually let anything over 40 or 50 pounds go either way.

"We used to keep everything, but I was at a business function one night in another state where noodling is illegal. The guest speaker was a fisheries biologist. He was asked why noodling had never been legalized there, and he said it was because his agency thought it was detrimental to the catfish population, flatheads in particular. Removing the male and/or female could cause the loss of that couple's entire spawn, as well as removing a breeder from the lake. Over years of noodling, it was felt that it would have a domino effect."

Barnes said his group became more particular about what they killed after that.

Fear of the unknown is the biggest limiting factor on noodling participants in Mississippi, but the possible impacts on the catfish population is the limiting factor nationally. ■



Flathead catfish are the primary targets of noodlers, but in lakes where blue catfish are established, they can be caught by hand in good numbers and sizes, like this one.

Phillip Gentry

MISSISSIPPI SEASON FOR RED SNAPPER OPENS

Mississippi's recreational red snapper season will open at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, May 28, and the length of the season will be determined by how quickly recreational fishermen catch the state's allotment of red snapper.

According to the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, there is an anticipated, mid-season closure date of July 5 to create downtime during which the agency will be able to compile catch data. However, that closure date is not set in stone and could move up or back, depending on catch trends.

After determining the catch, the state could then establish a reopening date or end the season.

It is hopeful that the quota will have enough to maintain the season through all three major summer holidays: Memorial Day, July 4 and Labor Day.

The season will be open seven days a week in both state and federal waters. The season will close if the annual catch target (ACT) for recreational fishermen is projected to be reached at any point after the season opens. It will also close if the Gulf-wide quota is reached.

Private, recreational anglers can fish out to 200 nautical miles. Vessels with state for-hire permits can fish in state territorial waters, which is 9 nautical miles south of the barrier islands. The daily creel limit is two fish per angler, with a 16-inch size minimum.



Mississippi anglers can keep two red snapper per day as long as the season remains open.

One angler per vessel, per trip is required to report through the MDMR Tails n' Scales system. As a reminder, Marine Patrol officers encountering anglers fishing for or possessing red snapper without a trip-authorization number will result in fish confiscation and fines.

Anglers may register their account through a smartphone app available in the Apple App Store and Google Play Store or online at tailsnscales.org. Returning Tails n' Scales users must download the most recent update of the app for the 2021 season. Tails n' Scales administrators can be contacted for assistance by email at snapper@dmr.ms.gov or by phone at 228-325-1585. ■

GATOR PERMIT PROCESS STARTS

The application process for Mississippi's 2021 public-waters alligator season begins at 10 a.m. June 1 and ends at 10 a.m. on June 8. Before entering the draw for one of the 960 permits available across seven zones, here are some tips provided by Ricky Flynt, alligator program director for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks.

- Make sure your hunting license is current. There is nothing more frustrating than starting the process online, in person or by phone, than being rejected due to an invalid license.
- Locate on your license your assigned MDWFP customer service number and have it available. It is required.
- Have a credit/debit card handy and be sure that your account is in good standing.
- Have a valid email address.
- Choose your preferred zone in advance.

You may only enter the alligator application process one time and choose just one zone.

- Check your schedule. Alligator season opens at noon on Aug. 28 and closes at noon on Sept. 7 (Labor Day). If you can't hunt during that time period, then do not enter. No permit can be transferred, nor can they be used without your being present during hunt.

Once you have everything in order and the application period is open, there are three ways to apply:

- Online: Visit MDWFP.com
- In person: Pay at MDWFP or any location that sells MS hunting licenses
- By phone: 1-800-5-GO-HUNT.

For more information on the process or zone, visit mdwfp.com/alligator.

MISSISSIPPI ADDS 28 MORE CWD DEER

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks has reported that it has tested a total of 7,188 deer since July 1, 2020, with 28 confirmed cases of Chronic Wasting Disease. There is one suspect case awaiting confirmation.

Two new counties — Alcorn and Tippah — were added to the list with confirmed cases since the first CWD deer was found in Issaquena County in February 2018. Alcorn and Tippah were already within the North Mississippi CWD Management Zone.

Mississippi has a total number of positive cases to 82 since 2018.

Of the 28 confirmed since last July, 22 came from Benton County on the Tennessee border. Benton County had 26 the previous year and has 55 cases since 2019. That represents 67% of all confirmed Mississippi cases.

Neighboring Marshall County follows with 20 cases, or 24% of the total. Marshall had four cases confirmed since July, compared to nine the previous year and seven the year before.

Alcorn and Tippah County were the only other counties with a positive result since July, with one case each. Like Benton and Marshall, Alcorn and Tippah share a northern border with Tennessee, directly across the line from that state's CWD hot zone of Fayette and Hardeman counties. The Alcorn case is a little more alarming, because it was located east of those two Tennessee counties, albeit less than 20 miles, but due south of what is considered a high-risk county, or one that is within 10 miles of a county with a positive case. ■

HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORK IS PROPOSED

Most of Mississippi's 2021-22 hunting seasons, including migratory bird seasons, were proposed at the April meeting of the Mississippi Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, with final approval expected at a meeting in late May.

The proposals include no major changes for deer season.

Archery: Open on Oct. 1 in all but the Southeast Zone, where it will open on Oct. 15, and will end on Nov. 19. Archery equipment is allowed during all open deer seasons.

Youth: Opens Nov. 6 statewide and ends Jan. 31 in all zones except the Southeast Zone, where it ends Feb. 15. Youth aged 15 and under are allowed to take antlerless deer up to the season limit, and there is no antler restrictions on legal bucks.

Early primitive weapon (antlerless deer only): In all but the Southeast Zone, this season opens on Nov. 8 and ends Nov. 19.

Gun, with dog: Nov. 20-Dec. 1 statewide.

Primitive weapon: Dec. 2-Dec. 15 statewide, but weapon of choice permitted on private land.

Gun, without dog: Dec. 16-Dec. 23 statewide.

Gun, with dog: Dec. 24-Jan. 19 statewide.

Archery/primitive weapon: Dec. 20-Jan. 31, statewide, weapon of choice permitted on private land. In Southeast Zone, the extended season continues Feb. 1-Feb. 15 for antlered bucks only during this period; weapon of choice permitted on private land.

Small game seasons are statutory and remain unchanged except by calendar dates.

Migratory bird seasons include:

Dove, North Zone: Noon, Sept. 4-Oct. 17; Oct. 30-Nov. 30; and Dec. 25-Jan. 9.

Dove, South Zone: Noon, Sept. 4-Sept. 19; Oct. 9-Nov. 7; and Dec. 19-Jan. 31.

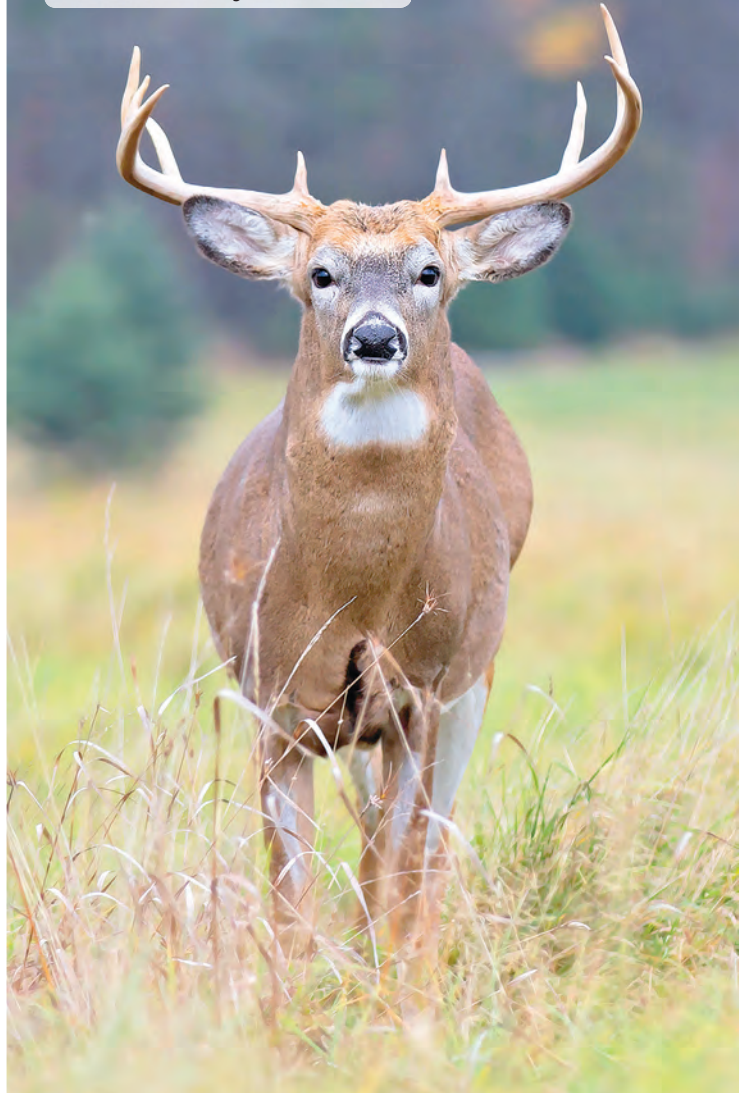
Duck: Nov. 26-28; Dec. 3-5; and Dec. 9-Jan. 31.

Duck, for youth, veterans and active military: Feb. 5-6.

Early teal: Sept. 11-26.

Early Canada goose: Sept. 1-Sept. 30.

Mississippi wildlife officials have created a proposed framework for 2021-22 deer seasons across the Magnolia State.



Regular goose: Nov. 12-28; Dec. 3-5; and Dec. 9-Jan. 31.

Gallinule and rail: Sept. 1-Oct. 3; and Nov. 26-Jan. 1.

Snipe: Nov. 14-Feb. 28.

Woodcock: Dec. 18-Jan. 31. ■

BARNETT GETS MORE FLORIDA-STRAIN BASS

After missing a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, bass fishermen on the state's busiest fishery helped the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks stock about 150,000 Florida bass in Barnett Reservoir in mid-May.

Fishermen used their bass boats to ferry the young bass from the drop-off points at the Goshen North Boat Ramp and in Pelahatchie Bay to be stocked into dense cover in backwater areas, helping raise the survival rate of the fish.

Fishermen were given a few thousand fingerlings per load to be released at any spot on the 33,000-acre lake of the boater's choice.

"All we asked was that they stay within 10 minutes of the ramp

unless they could put aerators in their coolers," said Ryan Jones of the MDWFP. "It's hard to determine exactly the impact this method has on survival rates, but it's easy to say that it has a positive impact. It beats us pulling up in a truck and releasing the fish at the ramp. By releasing them into desired cover, they have a place to hide."

Over the past seven years, this program has led to the stocking of over a million Florida fingerlings.

"The goal is not only to hopefully see these fish grow to preferred size for catch, but also to insure that the Florida bass gene remains in the population at Barnett," Jones said. ■



Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Slaydon Wise

Slaydon Wise, 9, limited out an early Youth Weekend duck hunt in 2020. An accomplished caller already, Slaydon is an avid waterfowler.



Linda Boleware

Linda Boleware took this Covington County buck on Dec. 29, 2020, with a Ruger Hawkeye in .243.



Brandon Laird



Aiden Laird

Twins Brandon (left) and Aiden Laird took these two Smith County does taken during the first week of the 2020 youth season while hunting with their father.



Jennifer Davis

Jennifer Davis shows off a 57-pound blue catfish that was caught and later released in the Mississippi River near Port Gibson.

GOT PICS? We want 'em

Email images to: images@ms-sportsman.com

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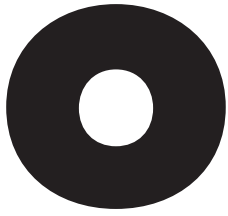


**BEDDING BREAM IN JUNE?
YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT!
IT'S THE MOST-CONSISTENT
SPAWNING BITE
IN MISSISSIPPI.**

■ By Bobby Cleveland



BREAM BUSTERS



One second, the bright orange Styrofoam float was sitting there, bobbing on the surface of the lake, having just been placed there by the first cast of the day by my oldest fishing partner and dear friend, Li'l Joe.

The next, it was gone, disappearing in a nanosecond without any forewarning.

Not even a "bloop" was heard.

Not even a wiggle was seen.

It just shot under the water with the speed of a bullet.


"Oh yeah, they're here," said Joe Watts of Canton as he lifted his 11-foot B'n'M jig pole into a high arc to set the hook. "Ooh, and it's a good 'un too. Look at him go."

The fish, still unseen under 3 feet of water, was darting hard to the right, then back to the left, but Watts was quick to pull it closer to the shoreline where we were standing.

"Get out of the bed before you spook them all," Watts muttered to the fish, which apparently wasn't satisfied with that proposition.

Then, my pal changed subjects: "Hey Bob, where's your bobber?"

Hypnotized by Watts' battle, I had lost track of my own gear. Indeed, my lime green cork was no longer visible, and my aging eyes couldn't pick up the tiny strand of the micro-thin, 4-pound line. So I did what any self-respecting asleep-at-the-wheel bream fisherman would do and raised my pole high into the air until I felt the tug of something heavy.

 The author admires a couple of chunky bream that were obviously mistaken in their choice of buffet items on a Mississippi lake.

Minutes later, Watts and I were comparing the two slab bluegills that completely covered our hands, starting from our wrists, past the meat at the base of our thumbs and hanging over our extended fingers.

They were the first two of 72 we put on ice that warm June morning on a 50-acre lake just north of Canton, almost in Watts' backyard. We tossed back that many more that were smaller. The combined weight of the 72 we kept was an amazing 69 pounds.

Monster bream they were.

And we never stopped giggling every time our tiny corks shot under the water.

Understand this: Watts and I have caught double-digit sized bass on topwater lures, we've sight-fished and hooked 50-pound cobia and 30-pound reds, and we've both battled tuna and blue marlin in the Gulf, all standing side by side.

As exciting as all those moments were, we get the same thrill every single time our little bream floats get jerked under the water.

If it doesn't do the same for you, then pity, pity, pity.

From the casting of the line, to the sinking of the cork, to the sizzling of the frying pan, to the crispy bite of the finished product at the table — nothing beats a hot, bream-fishing trip.

While most people think bream bedding activity is limited to April and May, that is simply not true. Watts and I have caught them all the way through to August and once in September — still on the beds. June has always been the most-consistent month.

IT'S ALL IN THE GEAR >



IT'S ALL IN THE GEAR

While eating bluegill is the most-popular reason fishermen chase the little panfish — and Watts is a master at catching, cleaning and cooking — he's in it for the pure joy of watching that cork disappear.

"It never gets old," he said. "We do, but it doesn't."

To get the most out of the sport, Watts gears down to match the fight of the fish. His main weapon is an old, 11-foot version of the B'n'M Buck's Jig Pole designed for crappie. His has the reel seat on the very end of the handle; he uses an ultra-light spinning reel made by Pflueger, spooled with line ranging from 4- to 8-pound test.

"I used to use only 4-pound, but as I have gotten older, I've had to go up in weight to see it," he joked. "But it's really all about the pole and the reel. The B'n'M gives me great flexibility and sensitivity. The sensitivity isn't necessary for detecting a bite since we use bobbers, but it gives me more feel of the fight."

"The base-seated reel, with the length of the pole, allows for easy casting, even in a bit of wind. I bank-fish now more than I boat, especially for bream on the beds. Most of the people who live on our lake have gravel beds out to attract beds, and they have them where they can easily be reached from either the shoreline or a pier. This rig gives me the reach to hit all those beds without getting too close, and it's light enough action to emphasize the fun. But there are some ol' natural beds that are my favorites."

Watts is a cricket man when it comes to bait.

"I only use worms in the fall and winter when the fish are deep," he said. "Then, I change everything from the rod and reel to the bait."

While I usually use a 11-foot outfit similar to Watts, I often opt for one that employs an 8-foot B'n'M spinning pole designed for crappie with a Browning ultra-light reel. It offers the same ease in casting while providing a lighter feel to increase the excitement. You just can't cast quite as far as with the 11-foot rig.

PROTECT THE BED

Watts is emphatic that a bream's bedding area be disturbed as little as possible during the fishing.

"I'm fortunate in that I know the layout of all of the bream beds in my lake, whether they are man-made or natural," he said. "That allows me to fish them from the outside edges to the inside, as well as knowing how far out to position my boat or how far away I should stay on the bank. That is very important on a lake like ours, because the water is a lot more clear than you'll find at a reservoir, river, most farm ponds and any other kind of lake. You have to stay off at a distance, even to the point of keeping your shadow from reaching the bed."

Watts is always careful to not spook the fish.

"I fish beds outside-in so that I can pick off the hungry fish on the edges before I start fishing the heart of the bed," he said. "It's important to get the fish out of the bed as soon as the fight starts. A little activity can excite the other fish, but too much can scare them. My first thought is to pull that fish out away from the bed, then relax and let him do what he's got to do. Those first few seconds are the only time I put pressure on a fish."

"This is especially true in June and later months during the summer, because I've always found that the longer the males stay on the bed, the more picky and the more agitated they get. They've already been spawning in April and May, and if there are redear mixed with the bluegill, then some started in March."

You can easily tell a difference in the male's appearance beginning in June.

"You catch them on the bed in April or May and those males look big and pretty, unblemished all over," Watts said. "By June, they begin to show the wear and tear of fanning beds, wooing females and fighting. They stress, and it shows. Their tails will start to look beat up, the back halves of their body will start to thin out and they may have little red sore splotches all over."

"But by June, they are also hungry as all get-out, so if you can get on a bed and put a bait in front of their face, you better believe they will eat. That's why in June you start seeing those corks disappear rapidly. They usually go under as soon as it hits the water."

SNIFFING OUT THE FISH ➤



Joe Watts is a serious bream fisherman who revels in landing hand-sized bluegills from a lake close to his home in Canton.





SNIFF OUT THE FISH

While Watts has the home-field advantage of his private, subdivision lake — and knows where most, if not all the beds are — guys like James Thomas of Jackson, who fish public waters, have become experts at sniffing out the beds.

Literally.

“My Daddy was the best bird dog there ever was for bream fish,” Thomas said. “That man could simply point his nose up in the air and point to the fish. I’d be driving the boat, and he’d be up front with his head bent back, going right to left, and eventually he’d wave his arms and start pointing in a direction for me to go.

“I’d get the smell a few moments later. I learned over the years to catch that natural organic smell, sort of sweet like watermelon rind and sour like decaying matter, all mixed together. When you get that aroma, you turn into the wind because that’s where it’s coming from.”


Biologists suggest that the smell is created by the release of pheromones by both males and females that act as a call to all other bream in the area. Bream spawn in mass, kind of like crappie and not at all like bass. The more the fish in one area, the higher the percentages are that all eggs will be in contact with milt.


“Well, that may be true, but you have to know that a dead fish can give off a similar smell,” Thomas said. “The smell of bedding bream is just sweeter, with more of the watermelon smell.”



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



 Big, male bream caught in June will be as beautifully colored and healthy as they are all year.

 A big stringer of bluegill is the start of a great summer dinner of fried fish.



IF WATER, THEN BREAM

The great thing about bluegill and redear is that they swim in just about every fishable pond, lake, stream or river in Mississippi, no matter which part of the state you might fish. Stocked farm ponds offer some of the best action, and finding access to those waters is best accomplished through networking your social circles.

Said Thomas: "My favorite three places are all ponds I found through members of my church. I asked around and was able to gain access to four or five lakes around the central Mississippi area and found these three to be the best."

Some of Mississippi's best panfish opportunities are lakes within the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks' State Lakes system.

In south Mississippi, try Lake Perry at Beaumont, Lake Mike Connor near Collins and Prentiss Walker Lake near Mize.

In central Mississippi, try Lake Calling Panther near Crystal Springs, Claude Bennett Lake near Bay Springs and Tom Bailey Lake near Toomsuba.

In east Mississippi, don't miss Neshoba County Lake near Philadelphia and Kemper County Lake near Dekalb.

In north Mississippi, there are two jewels: Lake Lamar Bruce near Tupelo and Tippah County Lake near Ripley.

Mississippi's state parks also offer some outstanding fishing, namely Trace Lake State Park near Pontotoc, Lake Lincoln State Park near Wesson, Roosevelt State Park near Morton and Johnson State Park near Brooklyn.

In west Mississippi, a lot of panfish focus falls on oxbow lakes along the Mississippi River counties. The most popular are Eagle Lake and Chotard Lake, north of Vicksburg, and Lake Washington, south of Greenville. ■

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

This bluegill was caught in a swampy area off of a major river, a common place to find these fish throughout the south.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: BLUEGILL

Brian Cope

A FAVORITE AMONG ALMOST EVERY ANGLER, THESE SUNFISH ARE FOUND EVERYWHERE AND REVERED WHEREVER THEY'RE FOUND

Bluegills, *Lepomis macrochirus*, are one of the most-popular and populous fish in North America. For many anglers, they are the very first fish ever caught. They are known among fisheries experts as “laterally compressed, or flattened sunfish.”

Depending on the water color and quality where they are found, bluegills can range from almost solid black to olive in color with orange or yellow breasts. Their fins are clear, except for a distinguishing black smudge on the bottom of the rear of the dorsal fin. Along with its black earflap, that black smudge is the surest way to identify it from some other members of the sunfish family.

As the name implies, these fish often — but not always — have blue to violet coloring on their gills and throughout the top portion of their bodies. This is most evident among males that are breeding.

The bluegill is native to the eastern United States, but it exists nationwide

thanks to stocking programs. They are one of the most-commonly stocked fish in ponds and lakes. They are a favorite among anglers, especially those who like to fish the old-fashioned way, with live bait under a cork.

HOME? ANYWHERE

These fish are highly tolerant of a wide range of habitat. Small ponds, creeks, rivers, swamps, oxbow lakes, retention basins and drainage ditches are all suitable waters. They are usually found close to some type of structure, including flooded vegetation, tree stumps, downed timber, rock walls and sunken debris.

Anglers find their share of bluegills in mostly shallow water during the warm months; few anglers fish for them during winter. Those that do often find them as deep as 60 feet in lakes.

Bluegills aren't too picky about what they eat. Insects of all sizes, small invertebrates, crawdads, freshwater mussels,

grass shrimp and tiny fish make up their diets. Their mouths are fairly small, which limits their choice of potential meals.

Live crickets are among the most-popular baits for bluegill anglers. Live red worms, night crawlers, wax worms, and catalpa worms will also draw strikes. Small crawdads are excellent baits but not widely available at bait shops. Small spinners, tiny crankbaits and artificial flies also work great.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Bluegill colonies are often made up of as many as 100 circular nests. Safety in numbers seems to be their motto, as their huge colonies help protect their



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

Even on dark-bodied bluegills, the black smudge on the rear, lower part of the dorsal fin is evident and helps to distinguish these fish from other members of the sunfish family.

eggs and fry from predator fish. They spawn throughout many months, as long as the water temperature is at least 75 degrees. In the South, this usually lasts from May through August, sometimes into September.

PROLIFIC SPAWNERS

Females can lay up to 80,000 eggs in a year, and they often deposit them in several different nests. Males, likewise, spray their sperm in multiple nests. The bluegill is the only species of sunfish that does this. The males guard the colonies until the fry disperse.

Bluegills are often called bream, sunfish, sunny, blue sunfish, coppernose and blue perch. They are often confused with redear sunfish, aka shellcrackers, and with green sunfish and redbreast sunfish.

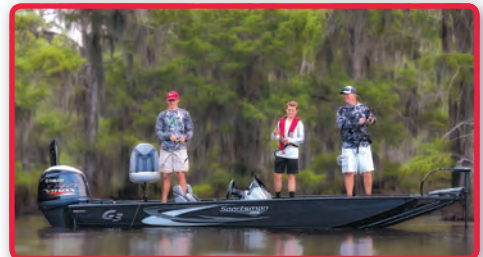
Louisiana's state-record bluegill weighed 1.83 pounds and was caught by Timothy Delaney in Iatt Lake in May 2016. The Mississippi state record weighed 3.45 pounds. Gerald Thurmond caught the fish in a farm pond in February 1995. The world-record bluegill weighed 4 pounds, 12 ounces and was caught by T. Hudson in Ketona Lake, Ala., on April 9, 1950. That fish is not only the world record, but is also the oldest bluegill on record from any state. ■



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MSRP: \$229.99

For more info, visit: irishsetterboots.com.

AVIAN-X G-BLIND

The folks at Avian-X, who brought you some of the most life-like decoys ever made, have gone the extra step to making hiding from the ducks that are checking out those decoys even easier with their new G-Blind.

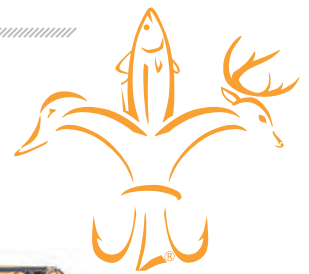
A portable, take-down blind that can seat four hunters and be set up in just minutes, the G-Blind is of the size and shape of traditional permanent blinds, providing overhead cover from ducks and weather, but in a sturdy aluminum frame and a skin of Mossy Oak's all-new Shadow Grass Habitats camo.

The G-Blind is 90 inches long by 60 inches wide, plus 53 inches tall, so hunters can shoot sitting or standing. The exterior has pockets and straps for adding natural vegetation. The G-Blind's real niche may be when you need a quick set up for hunting brush lines, fence rows or pond banks. An

adjustable cam buckle in a newly designed door system makes opening and closing much easier.

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■ By John E. Phillips

TIME TO SEE RED

WHEN SNAPPER SEASON FINALLY OPENS IN THE GULF, HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO PUT THOSE TWO BIG REDS IN THE COOLER EVERY TIME OUT.

DON'T GO OUT AND BUY ANOTHER FREEZER FOR THE RED SNAPPER YOU EXPECT TO CATCH THIS SEASON.

When the news was released at the end of March that three times as many red snapper were living in the Gulf of Mexico as had been previously reported, anglers thought that the season would be lengthened and bag limits increased this summer.

It doesn't look like that's going to happen, however.

Mississippi's red snapper season has been announced as May 28 through July 5, with the possibility of an extension if recreational quotas have not been met at that time. In 2020, Mississippi anglers got a May 28-July 12 season. The daily creel limit remains two fish per angler with a 16-inch size minimum.

Due to the many storms in the Gulf since the past snapper season, some artificial reefs and wrecks may have moved or been covered up. You may not be able to find some of your favorite structures to fish. However, when you do locate snapper, here are some ways to catch them.

LIGHT LINE, SMALLER HOOKS

After the first two weeks, snapper will have wised-up to heavy sinkers and line and dead bait. Fish with smaller-diameter line, hooks and sinkers and live bait like pinfish, shrimp and whatever is in a shrimper's by-catch that you can purchase.

Catches like this of red snapper may not be a thing of the past, but maybe more common in the near future.

CAROLINA- OR SOW-RIGGING

On your main line, place a slip sinker from 1-ounce (light current) or as heavy as 3 to 5 ounces (strong current). Below the slip sinker, tie a No. 5 or 10 barrel swivel with 4 to 6 feet of monofilament. Tie on a No. 4/0, 5/0 or 6/0 hook. Bait with either large dead bait or live bait like whole pogeys, whole blue runners or whole vermilion snapper. While falling to the bottom, the slip sinker will slide down the line and arrive at the bottom first. Then, your bait will be far enough off the bottom to stay above the smaller snapper but within easy eating distance of bigger fish.

DOWNRIGGING

An angler friend of mine has two downriggers mounted on the back of his boat. Once he spots schools of red snapper holding above or near a reef, he would bait up with live pinfish, croakers or cigar minnows. His baits would be 6 to 10 feet behind the downrigger ball when he lowered the ball to the depth where the fish were feeding and started trolling. This strategy works when a strong current in an area makes fishing on or near the bottom almost impossible.

COOKING MACARONI >



COOKING MACARONI

For bait, you can choose live croakers, live pinfish or dead cigar minnows, but also make sure to chum using macaroni that's been boiled. Add a can of tuna and allow it to sit all night to create a strong smell to chum up snapper.

You also can throw out the tuna-scented macaroni into the water to chum.

JIGGING

Anglers can fish 30-pound main line, an 8-ounce lead sinker, a black barrel swivel, 50-pound leader and either a No. 4/0 or a No. 6/0 hook. To the end of the leader, tie a 1- to 2-ounce jighead with a dead shrimp tail, and lower the rig and jig this setup to various depths.

The by-catch from shrimp boats makes great bait for red snapper: live croaker, menhaden, pinfish or shrimp, or fresh-caught, dead versions of same. Fish them on a Carolina rig, a jighead or troll behind a downrigger ball.

REEF FISHING

In reefs in 60 to 80 feet of water, fish menhaden, bonito strips packed in rock salt and frozen, live pinfish, live croakers and dead cigar minnows. A favorite reef bait is golden croakers.

USING WD-40 OIL

I saw an angler fish a ½-ounce jighead with a dead menhaden he had sprayed with WD-40 oil. He let the jig head fall halfway to the bottom, jugged it up and down and was the only fisherman to catch snapper.





Big red snapper are likely to become a little shy of heavy line and weights after a couple of weeks of the season.

DOWNRIGGING A CHUMSICLE

Some anglers call this “popsicle on a downrigger.” First, freeze a chum bag filled with crawfish and chum. When it’s time to fish, he takes the chum out of the bag and put it in a 5-gallon bucket, which is attached to a downrigger or a rope. As the chum melts, it filters down through the water, creates a feeding frenzy. One fisherman said he’s seen 100 yards of snapper come up when he’s brought the chumsicle up to the surface.

DRIFTING

Hook a cigar minnow through the head and let it drift behind the boat with no weight.

FISHING TUBE BAITS

You can a saltwater tube jig infused with menhaden oil and a small slip sinker up the line. After being cast, the sinker reaches the bottom before the tube jig that’s falling more slowly. By using a circle hook with the tube jig, the snapper’s bite sets the hook itself. ■



For more than 45 years, John E. Phillips has been a fulltime outdoor writer who travels throughout the South, gathering information on hunting and fishing and other outdoor pursuits.

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MAKE-IT, TAKE-IT CRAPPIE FISHING

By Phillip Gentry

MISSISSIPPI GUIDE NEEDED JIGHEADS HE COULDN'T FIND, SO HE CAME TO A CONCLUSION: HE HAD TO MAKE THEM HIMSELF. HERE'S THE HAPPY RESULT OF D-I-Y CRAPPIE TACKLE.

TORCH TINDLE HAS AN ENVIABLE PROBLEM:

the crappie he regularly catches on the lakes where he guides are too big for standard-sized jigheads.

Searching the retail market and not finding what he wanted, Tindle, from Cleveland, decided that making his own was the best way to correct this problem.

"I fish a lot on Grenada and Sardis, Enid and a few other Mississippi lakes, and our crappie are just huge," said Tindle, who runs Torch's Guide Service. "The problem is that most manufacturers use hooks in their jigheads that are too small for our fish."

Tindle discovered long ago that a standard 1/16-ounce jighead, a size he uses when long-line trolling, comes equipped with a No. 2 hook. He said he needed something bigger, like a 2/0 Aberdeen jig hook.

"With the smaller hooks you lose a lot of fish," said Tindle (662-515-0175). "I do a lot of long-line trolling during the spring

and summer, and the fish come off before you can get them to the boat. Since I started using the bigger hooks, I hardly ever have one get off."

After doing some research, Tindle ordered jighead molds offered by Do-It Molds and added a little homemade ingenuity to fine tune the result.

"The standard mold wouldn't accept a 2/0 hook, so I took the mold over to my wife's office," he said. "She's a dentist, and with one of her dental tools, we made some adjustments, enlarging the opening so it would accept the bigger hook and the crane swivel that I'll attach a spinner blade later on in the process."



Tackle molds and accessories come in all varieties and can easily be purchased from a number of tackle making retail outlets.

Courtesy Do-It Molds.com

Making his own fishing tackle opened up another facet of fishing for Tindle that has become an enjoyable pastime. “For me, it’s therapeutic,” he said. “I’ve built a whole tackle-making workshop, and I’ll think about what colors or sizes I need for an upcoming trip and go spend a few hours making what I need.”

The first step in making any bait involving a leadhead or body is to obtain a good, reliable mold and a lead pot for melting and pouring lead into the mold. Custom molds can be made by a quality tool-and-die shop, but the price for custom work can be expensive compared to a pre-made mold that will cost around \$50, even if you have to do a little tinkering with it.

A good melting pot will ensure even lead heating and pouring and can be obtained for less than \$100. Some good advice about obtaining lead: purchase pure lead from a plumbing supply store rather than use scrap lead, such as old tire weights, that contain a lot of alloys and don’t pour well. It’s best to pre-melt the lead into smaller, easier to handle bricks. During the meltdown process, any by-products will separate during the melting and can be skimmed off before placing in your lead pot. The lead is then heated and poured into the cavity in the

top of the mold.

The jigs harden within seconds of pouring. The excess lead, called the “sprue,” is clipped off, and the jighead can be shaped up before it’s ready to paint.

Tindle paints his jigheads using powder-coat paints. He’s found the best way to get the powder to stick evenly is to heat the head with an electric heat gun and then dip the heated head into the paint.

“One tip I learned is to use 3/32 heat-shrink tubing to cover the hook eye and the end of the swivel,” he said. “If not, you have to chip the paint out, and that slows the process down. The (tubing) shrinks onto the eye of the jig, and then you can pull it off easily after it comes out of the powder coat.”

Rather than stick the heated head into a jar of powder paint, he uses a fluid bed, a device that aerates the powder so it doesn’t clump on the head. This helps coat the jighead evenly.

Tindle will collect a handful of freshly painted jigheads and heat them in a small toaster oven to bake on the finish.

“None of this stuff costs a whole lot of money,” he said. “I made the fluid beds out of PVC pipe fittings and a coffee filter. I use a cheap aquarium air

After the powder coating is applied to the baits, baking them in a small oven helps to cure the paint and evens out the coating to create a smooth finish.



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.



Courtesy Torch’s Guide Service

Making your own tackle is fun, affordable, and helps you tailor your baits to the way you fish.



Courtesy Torch's Guide Service

pump to aerate the powder paint. I think the toaster oven cost me about 25 bucks at the Wal-Mart.”

Tindle said you don't have to add spinner blades to the jig-heads, but he wouldn't fish without them because the water in the lakes he fishes is generally muddy. He orders spinner blades online and clips these onto the crane swivel that was molded into the bait.

“I prefer willow blades,” he said. “I use sizes 2, 3 and 4 and use some with smooth blades and some with hammered blades. I also use a variety of gold and silver blades. On occasion, I'll use the round Colorado blades because they put off more vibration.”

Tindle admits that there are many tackle makers more skilled than he is, and that the internet is loaded with YouTube videos from some real pros showing how to create spectacular paint jobs on tackle, tie hair jigs and trailers and make different kinds of tackle — and not just for crappie.

He said that for crappie anglers who long-line troll as he does, it would be close to impossible to describe what depth a handmade bait will run at without trying it on your own.

“You can throw the trolling chart away, because there are just too many variables,” he said. “The spinner blades make the jig weigh more, but when it's trolled, it creates more turbulence that causes the jig to ride higher than you'd think.”

He described additional variables as boat trolling speed, line diameter, the amount of line out, the weight of the jighead and the style and size of spinner blade attached to the jig.

His suggestion was to find a sandy flat in 10 feet of water and troll the baits using your normal presentation, adjusting boat speed and line out, the two easiest variables to adjust, and write down what combinations put the bait at the depths you want it to run. ■

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ALL IN FAVOR, SAY 'EYE'

Guide Torch Tindle said he would be the first to admit that putting eyes on jigheads is much more aesthetic to the angler than to the fish. He said in the generally muddy Mississippi waters he guides, crappie hone in on the size, vibration and color of the bait and have committed before they have the chance to look the bait in the eye.

Nonetheless, adding eyes to jigheads is possible and does make for more-attractive baits.

Adding eyes to molded lead jigheads can be accomplished in a couple of different ways. The first and easiest is to take the finished jighead, dip a small model brush or the end of a small dowel rod into epoxy paint and dab the eyes on.



Courtesy Torch's Guide Service

Adding eyes to jigheads is more pleasing to the angler than the fish.

"Some folks use epoxy paint; others prefer model-car paint, which is pretty close to the same thing. Another option is oil-based enamel paint," he said. "You can just make a one-dot eye or you can let the outer eye dry then add a inner dot, like a pupil."

The second method — the way Tindle does it — is to buy commercially made stick-on eyes. Jig molds that are created to accept stick-on eyes will list the size eye, measured in millimeters, needed for that size jig.

"Another tip is the glue on these eyes is not good," said Tindle. "I use a dab of Loctite glue or Gorilla glue on the back of the eye before I stick it on."

Tindle explained that in most situations, he adds a clear-coat finish to the jighead to help seal the eye in place and make the bait more streamlined.

"You can dip the bait in a clear coat and then hang it; you can dip it and then bake it again," he said. "One problem to look out for is if the clear is too thick, it will create a small cone like a nose on the bait if you dry it upside down."

Tindle settled on using an automotive clear-coat that comes in a spray can. A couple of shots on either side of the jig, hang the bait for a few hours and it's good to go. ■

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A man with a grey beard and a baseball cap is kneeling in a wooded area. He is wearing a bright yellow and orange safety vest over a patterned shirt. He is holding the antlers of a deer that is lying on the ground next to him. The background is filled with tall grasses and trees.

START WORKING ON GETTING YOUR DEER RIFLE IN SHAPE EARLY THIS YEAR; AMMO, GUN SHORTAGES MAY MAKE IT NECESSARY. HERE ARE SOME STEPS TO TAKE.

■ By Andy Douglas

JUMP THE GUN? NOT THIS YEAR

Summer is in full swing, and June is a month when sportsmen and women are chasing big bass on the ledges, snagging monster bluegills off the beds and noodling for killer cats.

It's hot, alright, and it's not the rising temperatures we're talking about, as outdoor opportunities abound. It's also the perfect time to be thinking about deer hunting, specifically,

YOUR DEER RIFLE. **WHAT TO DO**

Deer season is roughly 5 months out, and that's usually that's plenty of time, but this year we should all wake up and smell the roses: the ammo or the gun you want may not be available thanks to extreme ammo shortages and new guns of choice being hard to find.

Use what you own. If you're a deer hunter, you should already have in possession or access to a deer-killing rifle. It's time to plan, prepare and make your gun more effective.

Here are several ideas, tips and some "outside-the-box thinking" that may help you get past the ammo shortage and improve the capabilities of your favorite rifle this fall.

ACQUIRE YOUR AMMO >

Get your rifle zero'd in with the ammunition you intend to use when deer season arrives.



ACQUIRE YOUR AMMO

How can it be done with empty shelves at big box stores and sporting goods suppliers? It's not going to be easy, so start while other sportsmen are occupied doing other things; you will be ahead of the game.

"Hunters are having to re-sight their rifles based on what ammunition they can find. Precision ammo like Barnes VOR-TX, Hornady Precision, Federal Premium or Nosler is hard to come by, and I don't see it getting better anytime soon," said Tracey Smith of Brookhaven, who runs the gun counter sales at 601 Sports.

Don't be picky; buy whatever ammo is available for the rifle you plan to use. Pick up any bullets that can be found for any

deer rifle you own.

Check out small gun shops, sporting goods suppliers, pawn shops and gun shows. Check any small town you may travel through; sometimes, local hardware stores will have a small sporting goods section, and it may have ammo. You never know where or when you may strike gold — or in our case, lead and brass.

Be willing to trade. Advertise on social media what you are looking for and what you have for trade. Be ready to give up quality ammo of another caliber for something that will work for you. There are many good folks associated with the hunting community, and after they have what they need they are usually willing "to help a brother (or sister) out."

GET GOOD GLASS

Improve your favorite rifle by upgrading its optics.

"We have sold twice as many scopes this year as opposed to the same time last year," Smith said. "Hunters are spending money on optics since new rifles are hard to get."

Abandon any older scopes and opt for something with better light-gathering ability; most modern optics are designed with this feature. You don't have to spend all your hard-earned money to possess quality optics anymore.

"We still sell some Leupold and other high-end optics, but we are selling a lot of Hawke and a record number of Vortex scopes, in which you get a lot of bang for the buck and excellent light-gathering ability," Smith said.

Acquiring good glass should be No. 1 on the list to make your rifle more effective. It will extend your ability to make longer shots at dusk with confidence and a positive ID of your target when the moment of truth arrives.



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.

If you count two or three deer rifles among the weapons in your cabinet or safe, try to get as much ammo as you can for each one so you have options when the season opens.



A trigger adjustment or new trigger might enable you to shoot extremely tight groups with your hunting rifle.

THINK ABOUT TRIGGER WORK

Getting a trigger job done is another idea for a superior improvement to your rifle. A professional gunsmith can give you good advice. Sometimes they will “work their magic” and adjust for a light, crisp trigger break. He may suggest a replacement trigger such as a Timney that would be better and more cost-effective.

“Trigger jobs have become extremely popular lately. We don’t do them but will point a hunter to a reputable gunsmith who can take care of their needs,” Smith said. “This will definitely help tighten shot groups.”

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Dry fire practice. If you shoot, save the brass, it’s possible to find someone who reloads. Save ammo by purchasing the same scope as on your hunting rifle and installing it on an alternate rifle, such as a .22, for practice.

If you are already prepared and don’t have to worry about ammo, a backup rifle should be considered. Better yet, help a friend who isn’t prepared. Don’t wait until 2 weeks before the season opener; it will be too late this year. ■

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Mounting a new scope on your rifle or your scope on a new rifle isn't a task you need to take lightly. Your rifle's accuracy, to a large extent, depends on how the scope, rifle and mounts fit. **BELOW:** Lapping jigs allow you to perfectly align the rings once you have your bases in place.

Photos by Pete Rogers

MOUNTING YOUR SCOPE: HOW TO DO IT RIGHT

YOUR RIFLE'S ACCURACY DEPENDS ON IT SOLID MOUNTING JOB

When it comes to mounting optics on our rifles, a saying from my mother rings as true now as ever, "There is doing it, and there is doing it correctly. Those are two different things."

Proper scope mounting is not difficult, but there is doing it and doing it correctly. You'll need these tools: a torque wrench for inch pounds, reticle level, lapping tools and removable thread locker. Below are the correct steps to follow when mounting a scope to your new rifle.

BASES

It's all in the base. The foundation is critical for accuracy. The best accuracy is achieved with a single Picatinny rail base. Although this not an option for some rifles, a one-piece base is always best. Many hunters and shooters prefer a two-piece base approach, which is fine so long as they are correct for your rifle and mounted correctly. The Picatinny rail offers a more solid platform for the rings to be secured and a stronger, more stable anchor. The most important part of a base, regardless if it is a one-piece or two-piece, is that you have the proper base for your rifle and scope. Check to verify that you have the proper bases for your make and model of rifle. They are not all the same.

RINGS

When choosing rings, there are three major considerations: size of the scope tube, height and fit to your bases. If you have a 50mm objective scope, your rings will need to be made for that scope. If you have a 44mm objective, then the rings need to be made for that size. The height of the scope affects accuracy, because if it is too high, you have to lift your cheek off of the





Tighten the rings only as much as the owner's manual suggests, and alternate tightening front and rear screws.

stock to see clearly. Most scopes have tube sizes of 30mm. A few are a true 1-inch, but make certain your rings are designed for the one you have. Last, make sure your rings will fit your base. If you go with a Picatinny rail, your rings will need to be made for that base type and so forth.

OPTICS

Lastly is the scope itself. Suffice it to say, get the best you can afford. The most-important criteria here is getting these three components to fit together perfectly.

MOUNT THE SCOPE

By far, the most-common mistake made when mounting a scope to a rifle is improper torque on the screws. I am still surprised to learn that many people don't know there are torque specifications for mounting a scope. "I just turn it as tight as I can" is the typical response.

Improper torque specs are the No. 1 reason for inconsistent accuracy. Every manufacturer of bases and rings has an owner's manual that specifies proper torque for their product. For example, Warne recommends that their bases are torqued to 25-inch pounds. If you have an aluminum receiver on your rifle, check your gun manufacturer's specifications before torquing. Torque each screw to 25 inch pounds and alternating tightening screws; one front screw, then one back screw, and another front screw and the last back screw. When done, check them all for proper torque settings.

Once the base is mounted and secured to the proper torque settings, it is time to mount the rings to the base. Set the rings in the base and tighten loosely. With the top of the rings removed, set the scope in the rings and check for eye relief. Make sure the scope is set at the proper distance. Remove the scope and tighten the rings to the base to the proper torque settings.

Warne recommends setting their rings screws to 25-inch pounds. Do not confuse this with foot pounds. Check your manufacturer recommendations before using any thread locker.

Next, it is time to check for perfect alignment between the rings. Setting the lapping jigs into the rings, the points of the jigs should align perfectly. If they do not, you will need to lap the rings to smooth and align the rings perfectly. Using a lapping tool (a round hand-grinding tool), gently run the lapping tool through the rings and level out any imperfections, periodically checking the jigs for alignment. Once you achieve perfect alignment, you are ready to set the scope in the rings.

After setting the scope in the rings, loosely tighten the cap screws. Place a level on top of the scope and align. Once aligned, tighten the cap screws to the proper torque setting.

Your scope is now mounted and ready to take to the range. ■



A torque wrench can measure how much you're tightening the rings' screws.

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GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

The best thing an angler can do to ensure survival of a caught bass, whether bleeding or not, is to release it or put it in a well-aerated live well as quickly as possible.

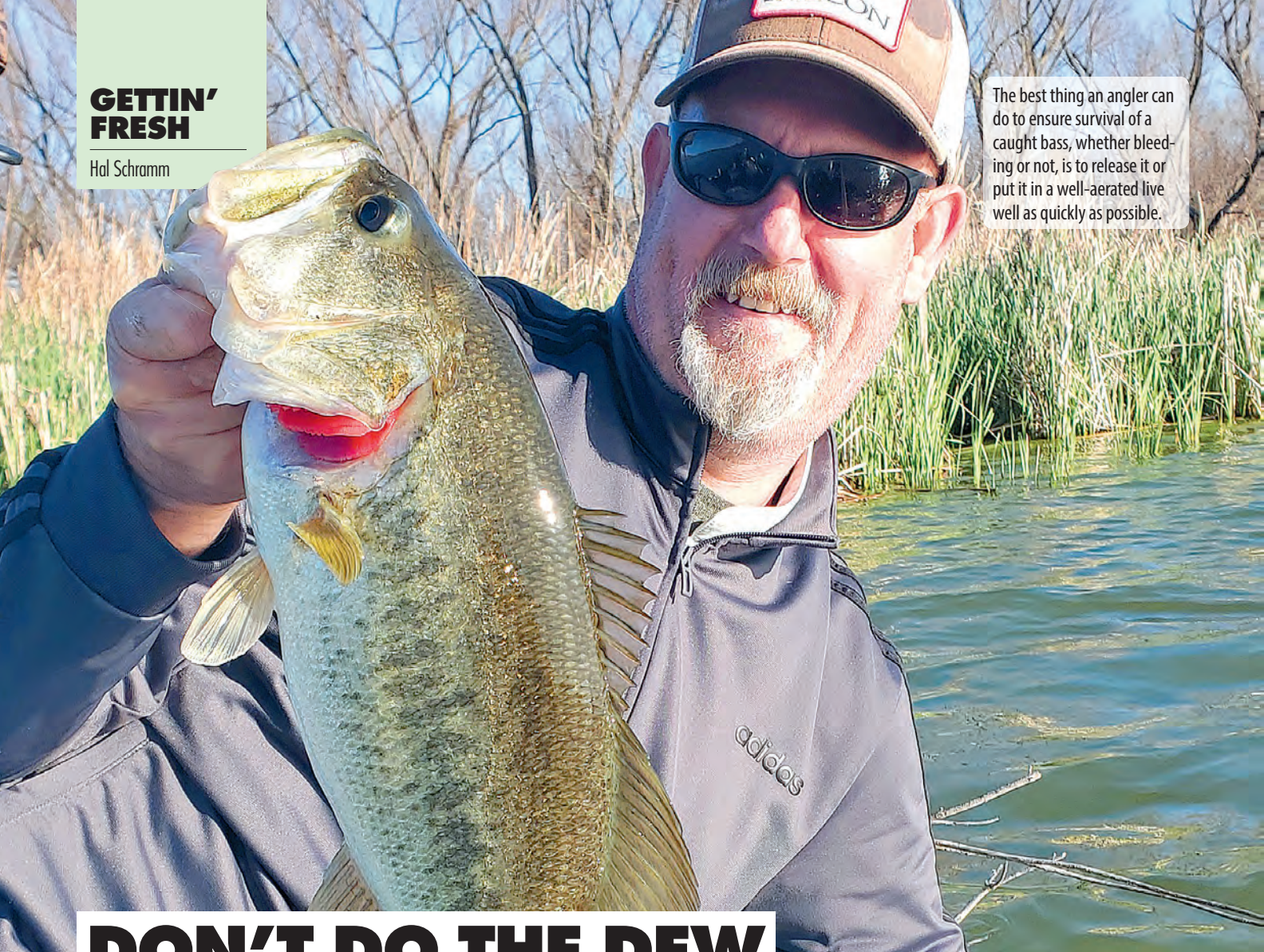


Photo courtesy Gene Gilliland

DON'T DO THE DEW

USE OF CARBONATED BEVERAGES TO STOP GILL BLEEDING HAS NO EFFECT

I first heard of tournament anglers pouring Mountain Dew over the gills of bass to stop bleeding about 30 years ago. The trick of pouring carbonated beverages into the mouths or over the gills has also been adopted by pike and muskie anglers — maybe by other angler groups, too. Like all dock talk, some you can believe, some you can't.

John Anderson, an accomplished muskie guide, had adopted and championed the use of carbonated beverages to stop gill bleeding. Always inquisitive, he enlisted Dr. Steven Cooke at Carleton University in Ottawa and facilitated funding to test the potential benefits.

The study by fishery scientists in Cooke's lab, at the University of Manitoba and the University of Massachusetts, was published this year in the *North American Journal of Fisheries*

Management. It concluded there was no benefit to the use of carbonated beverages to stop bleeding.

POP AND PIKE

The experiment was simple. Northern pike were captured by angling when water temperatures were 52° to 64° F. Those not injured nor bleeding were retained for the experiment. A small, 3/8-inch-long piece of one gill arch and attached gill filaments was removed. The now-injured and bleeding fish were then subjected to one of four treatments: held in lake water (control) or either carbonated lake water, or had Coca Cola, or Mountain Dew poured over the wound. The time to stop bleeding did not differ among the treatments; indeed, the average time to stop bleeding — 193 seconds — was almost identical among the treatments. The study tested 118 pike, a suf-

ficient number to achieve reliable results.

"DEWING" BASS

The ultimate judgement of any fish-handling procedure is whether the fish survives to reproduce and be caught again. The well-done pike study, like most other fish-handling studies, did not monitor long-term survival. Thus, the mortality due to injured and bleeding gills remains unknown.

However, a study by Steven Bardin, owner of Texas Pro Lake Management, a private lake-management service in



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

Texas, tested carbonated beverages on largemouth bass and provided insights about long-term survival.

Bardin used 30 largemouth bass collected by electrofishing. All fish were sedated before treatment. For 10 of these fish, Bardin made a cut in the gills with a fish hook and released the fish into a small, hatchery pond. Ten other bass had the gills similarly cut and soda poured over the gills until the bleeding appeared to stop before release into the pond. The last group of 10 fish — the control — was released into the pond uninjured. Water temperature was in the mid-60s. All fish were marked so the groups could be distinguished when recaptured.

The pond was fished daily. After 14 days, all fish were caught. Or more to the point of the experiment, all fish survived.

Conclusion: bass with a minor injury to the gills with or without carbonated beverage treatment survived as well as uninjured bass.

DEW IT OR NOT

So, carbonated lake water or beverages don't help stop bleeding. But they don't hurt either, right? Well maybe or maybe not; the contemporary knowledge of how fish gills work is still insufficient to draw a solid conclusion.

But here's what is known. The elevated carbon dioxide (the source of carbonation), which can be detected by the gills, can cause constriction of blood vessels and bradycardia (slowing of heart rate, not a good condition) that would transiently reduce bleeding.

Holding the fish out of water to pour the beverage over the gills, which reduces oxygen uptake (not a good condition), also triggers bradycardia. But tissue damage also stimulates blood coagulation, and the acidity of the carbonated water or beverage



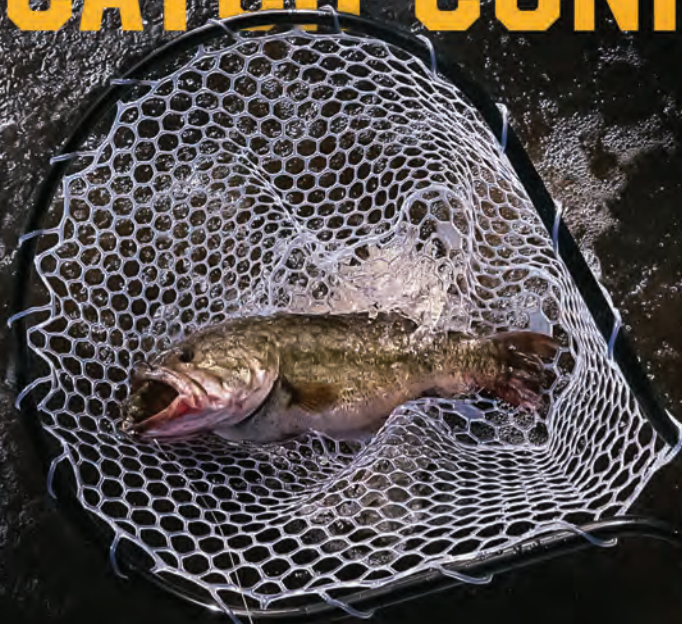
Helping anglers achieve high survival of caught-and-released bass is important to pond manager Steve Bardin's success and the pond owners' satisfaction. Bardin found no benefit of using carbonated beverages to stop gill bleeding.

Photo courtesy Steve Bardin

can cause gill tissue damage. Bardin observed his bass, although sedated, had a muscular response when the soda was poured over the gills, suggesting a noxious stimulus and possible adverse effect on the fish. The high carbon dioxide in the soda also can infuse into the blood and cause cascading physiological adjustments.

Bottom line: immersion of northern pike, largemouth bass and probably other gamefish in lake water stops bleeding just as effectively as those doused with soda, and it eliminates additional and potentially harmful handling and treatments. ■

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LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

Underwater ledges along creek channels will hold plenty of Pickwick Lake bass in June.

PICKWICK LAKE BUSTS OUT IN JUNE

FISH LEDGES WITH A VARIETY OF LURES FOR 25- TO 50-FISH OUTINGS

If you have quality electronics, catching 25 to 50 bass a day isn't uncommon this month at Pickwick Lake. They will be holding on underwater river ledges.

But to load up on those bass, you need to find them holding on points of underwater creeks and ditches running into the main-river channel. I'll locate these places with my Garmin electronics, using LiveScope. Bass also may be holding on mussel shell banks.

Your chances of catching bass will be best when the current's running. However, with no current, either drag a black/blue jig along the bottom or fish a drop-shot rig with a worm hooked wacky style.

FISHING THE LEDGES

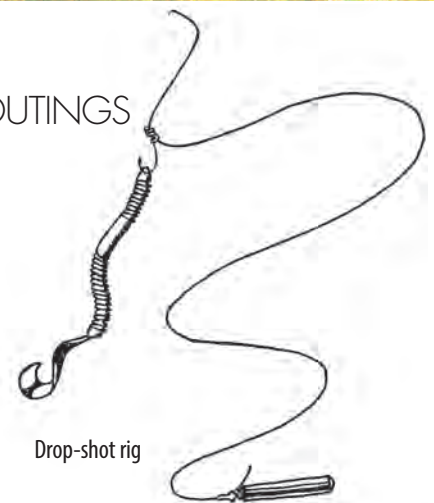
I'll start off deep cranking with Mann's 20+ and 30+ crankbaits. I prefer the gray ghost color with pearl sides and a gray back. My line will be 20-pound White Peacock fluorocarbon on a 7-foot-6 cranking-action FX Custom rod with a Bruin ELS 6.2:1 reel.



Mann's 20+

I'll begin at the mouths of the underwater creeks or ditches and fish about 100 yards down the left side and then down the point's right side. If I pinpoint a school of bass on my LiveScope, I'll concentrate there. Once I find a school, a crankbait will fire them up. But after catching several bass from that school, I'll change tactics. I realize that bass in a school often follow the bass that's hooked back toward the boat, eventually causing the school to scatter or move.

I won't leave that spot until I've fished up and down that ledge with a drop-shot rig. I'll use a 10-pound fluorocarbon leader tied to 15-pound bass braid on a 7-foot-4, medium-action spinning rod and reel. I'll attach a ¼-ounce weight on the end of a drop-shot rig with a watermelon seed 5-inch SpringR worm, rigged



Drop-shot rig

wacky style, up the line. I'll work that drop shot rig slowly. Once the bass takes the worm, I don't use a hard hookset but instead will pull the hook into the bass as it swims off. That drop shot hook allows the bass to almost hook itself.



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.

VERTICAL DROPS

With my LiveScope, I usually can see where the scattered bass have begun to hold on a ledge. I often can get right on top of them and fish the drop-shot rig vertically to catch more bass. My boat usually will be sitting in 25 to 30 feet of water. I'll be casting to the top of the ledge, perhaps in 15 to 20 foot of water where the creek channel meets the river channel. Bass may be sitting on top of the ledge, suspended off the ledge or holding at the ledge's bottom. My depth finder will pinpoint where the bass are.

I'll also fish a Stone Jig on 25-pound fluorocarbon with a 7-foot-7, heavy action FX Custom rod and a Bruin 7.3:1 reel. I'll drag the Stone Jig over the shell beds and off the ledges slowly.

MORE LEDGE SECRETS

By finding three to six underwater creek-channel openings to the main river before I start fishing, I can rotate the spots I'll fish. Then, I won't have to try to milk all the bass off my hot spots in that area before moving to the next place.

Two other lures I keep tied on my casting deck rods are topwaters: a popper like the Pop-R and a walking bait like a Zara Spook. Even if bass are holding on the bottom or suspended off the bottom, when they spot a school of shad on the surface, they'll come to the top and start feeding. That's when I'll cast one of these two surface lures into those bass schooling on the water's surface for some fun bass catching.

Don't get me wrong. You may not catch 25 to 50 bass in a day of June fishing at Pickwick. However, those days aren't uncommon. Don't be surprised if it happens to you. ■



Go to Pickwick Lake in June, and you're likely to catch a bass like this as well as 25-50 more.

POP AND KNOCKIN'

E Pop 80 provides anglers the perfect bait for aggressive topwater bites. The E Pop 80 has an extremely loud popping action with a loud knocking sound – calling in fish from a distance. The bait is designed to cast easily and can be walked back to the boat, creating life-like action that bass can't resist. Paired with Gamakatsu's #4 treble hook on the front and a #4 Gamakatsu feather treble hook on the back.

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JOINTED JITTERBUG 2.0

ARBOGAST GOES BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD TO REVAMP A REVERED TOPWATER BAIT THAT'S FOOLED THOUSANDS OF BASS

The Butler did it — with an assist from his friends.

Ethan Butler, who grew up fishing ponds in Iowa, was fresh out of college in July 2019 when he joined an all-star team charged with reintroducing the Arbogast Jointed Jitterbug, a legendary topwater that dates to 1937. Butler, Frank Scalish, Bill Jarboe and Chad Warner modernized it while keeping the same attributes that made the gurgling, wobbling topwater famous for so long.

Butler was working for PRADCO Outdoor Brands, based in Fort Smith, Ark., when he got the word to launch the Arbogast Jointed Jitterbug 2.0. PRADCO had introduced the Hula Popper 2.0 a few months earlier, even arranging to get them into monthly Mystery Tackle Boxes. “That was a great idea to get Arbogast in the hands of some young anglers, essentially make it cool again in the eyes

of younger kids,” Butler said.

The Jointed Jitterbug 2.0 was a tweak like no other, apparently.

Butler is proud of the upgrades, including ultra-sharp, black nickel hooks, a tantalizing multi-feather tail, a black, anodized aluminum headplate (the famous double-cupped lip), new hook hangars and special “crackle” colors.

“It works as good, if not better, than the original Jitterbug,” he said. “It might look drastically different, but deep down, under the hood, it has got the same action.”

REVISIT EXCELLENCE

The Jitterbug’s reputation as a go-to artificial lure from generation to generation hardly intimidated Butler as he shaped the new model for the 2020s.

“I don’t know if intimidation is the right word, but it was scary,” Butler said.

Warner, PRADCO product manager as

well as an avid bass tournament angler, coordinated the project, Butler said, helping with the sourcing after sitting down with the others and bouncing ideas back and forth.

Scalish, a well-known former pro bass angler, topwater expert and lure designer, built the tail feathers, Butler said.

Jarboe, the company’s award-winning product development engineer, came up with perhaps the most-integral part of the new design, according to Butler. He lowered the “pull point” to maximize the sound and action that made its predecessor so popular.



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.

A LONG PROCESS

It took an estimated four prototypes, a couple different types of feathers and 5 months to get what they wanted. Jarboe knew it looked good, but he emphasized making the action top priority.

PRADCO teased the fishing public before its arrival, so some people knew it was coming when the 2½-inch, ¾-ounce Jointed Jitterbug 2.0 armed with No. 6 treble hooks hit the market last summer. The feedback after its release was rewarding and overwhelming.

“There’s some big differences in the Jitterbug from the new one to the old one,” Butler said. “Obviously, it’s got a black-nickel anodized lip. I like that. I think adding the black lip was a piece of the puzzle to make the new generation of Jitterbugs great.

“And there are no ‘hook hangars.’ It’s got free-swinging hooks that ought to increase the ratio of hookups and minimize the chance of losing a hooked fish as well.”

Unlike the original, it also has a rattle inside.

NEW PAINT PROCESS

Butler, 25, believes anglers will be daz-

zled by the “awesome” color scheme, the intricate paint job PRADCO calls special “crackle” colors on the Jointed Jitterbug 2.0. The “crackle” look is created by a paint-drying process, he said. The new version comes in the same colors as the new Hula Popper 2.0 — coach dog, black death, blue kill and white zombie.

Butler said the crowning moment for him was during a photo shoot to film a promo on the water.

“After five minutes, there was a ‘toilet flush’ (a bass engulfing the Jointed Jitterbug 2.0). It hit me that we had something special,” he said.

“I was fortunate to have an input in the design of the Jitterbug. It’s kind of crazy. Talk about a cool project, just getting out of college and working on a project with Arbogast, launching such an iconic product, first the Hula Popper and then the Jitterbug.” ■

For more information about the Arbogast Jitterbug 2.0 and other PRADCO products, visit www.pradcooutdoorbrands.com or call 800-531-1202.



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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

PECAN ENCRUSTED WHITING

FRIED OR BAKED, THESE TASTY FISH ARE A DINNER TREAT



A cast-iron frying pan is great for frying whiting fillets, because the heat is spread evenly. **BELOW:** The finished product is a great tasting fish fillet with plenty of trimmings in the breader.

Jerry Dilsaver

Along the coast, we have already enjoyed some summer-like weather, and it's about to ramp up another notch or two — or three. This is a special recipe to enjoy one of the spring fish that fishermen have been catching in good numbers this year. With the warmer weather comes warmer water, and the whiting catches that have been excellent will soon begin to taper off until the water cools again in the fall.



In addition to being whiting, they are also called sea mullet and/or Virginia mullet. These names are colloquial monikers as they actually belong to a family known as kingfish, which are cousins in the drum family. Whatever you call them, whiting are one of the most understated fish of the spring. They

typically don't get a lot of lip service or print in fishing reports, but everyone who has ever eaten them holds their fine fillets in high regard.

Whiting don't have the elusiveness of trout or the bulldog fighting abilities of their drum cousins, and they are probably one of the last fish that will be mentioned by piscatorial gourmards, but they are the preferred dinner of generations of coastal fishermen. They have slightly sweet, mild and firm white-meat fillets and are excellent table fare prepared in a variety of ways.

For most fishermen, a meal of whiting is pretty simple. They are good simply dredged through your favorite seafood breader and introduced to a pan of hot grease. The meat isn't as delicate as trout nor as firm as red drum, but few folks who enjoy eating fish consider it a second choice to either. And they freeze well, too.

This recipe is simply a way to dress up and celebrate a whiting dinner. Instead of just adding breader and frying them, it mixes crushed pecans and orange zest into a homemade breader that also includes seasoned Panko crumbs. This recipe is excellent fried or baked in the oven, but my family prefers it cooked on the grill. I had intended to cook this batch on the grill, but a thunderstorm interrupted those plans. I was upset at first but realized this created the opportunity to show the versatility of this recipe, so most was baked, with a few pieces fried to show it works well that way. ■

PECAN-ENCRUSTED WHITING

I like to eat fish. I grew up in a commercial-fishing family, and there was a time we ate stronger-flavored fish because they didn't sell, and I learned to like them. I liked milder-tasting fish too, but there had to be an abundance of them to get to keep any — that is, except for whiting. They have always been special to us, and we kept a mess or two when we caught them.

As youngsters, we ate our whiting fried. They didn't get fancy breaders but were covered with a mixture of flour and corn meal, with salt and pepper added. The breadier didn't disguise the flavor of the whiting; they tasted great. They still do.

One of my best memories of eating whiting is having them for breakfast one morning while camping on the beach. My parents had begun to prepare breakfast, and I was putting out a pair of surf rods to watch while we ate. The whiting started biting, and I was catching them as quickly as I could rebait and cast back out. My parents laughed as I didn't stop catching fish and my eggs got cold. When the action slowed a little, my dad cleaned a few of the whiting and fried them for me. A storm was brewing, and the growing wind blew sand in my fish, but those whiting were the best fish ever.

I think of that trip and those whiting every time I eat them; this is why I wanted to do a special recipe for whiting. My doctors tell me not to eat fried fish, so I worked on this recipe with pecans and orange peel to cook on the grill. Neither of these ingredients is overbearing, but you can taste them in the mix. It's not the same as fried fish, but it's pretty dang good, and I'll take a mess of whiting any time I can.

This recipe was intended to be cooked on the grill, but a late afternoon thunderstorm forced moving to Plan B. They're almost as good baked in the oven and I even fried a few pieces — just for old times' sake.

The cup of chopped pecans looks like a lot, but if you load up the pieces of fish and press on them to be sure the pecan pieces stick, it's a good measurement. I used seasoned Panko

bread crumbs, which reduced the need for salt to just a very light sprinkle. I went pretty heavy on the pepper, and if you like it spicy, you might try adding a few shakes of cayenne pepper too.

Whiting fillets are pretty thin, so you need to be careful not to overcook them. It only takes a few minutes, and I don't turn them when cooking on the grill or baking in the oven. They will be ready as soon as you notice the pecan breadier getting darker. They're ready to eat when the fish flakes easily.

If you're going to fry them, be especially careful. It cooks very quickly over the medium setting, but I'm concerned that cooking it on a lower setting might make it taste greasy. A cast iron or heavy aluminum pan is optimum for frying as they spread the heat evenly and you don't have hot or cold spots.

Only enough oil to cover the bottom is needed. This will be about 1/8-inch deep, and the pan should be preheated so you see and hear a sizzle immediately upon putting the fish in the pan. Peanut or safflower oil works well and resists scorching if it gets too hot.

I like to turn the fish once when frying. This takes some care to prevent breaking up the fish or raking off the pecan breadier. I like to cook smaller pieces of fish and turn them with cupped tongs.

This recipe works well however you would prefer to cook it. We enjoyed the fish in these pictures and I believe you'll appreciate dressing up whiting with some pecans and orange zest too. It makes one of nature's treats extra special. ■

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound whiting fillets

1 can chopped pecans (fine, not crushed)

1/4 cup seasoned Panko bread crumbs

1 egg

1 tbsp milk

1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Zest of one orange

Lemon, lime or orange wedges

Tarter sauce (regular or spicy)

Peanut or safflower oil (if frying)

PREPARATION:

Cut fillets into serving-size pieces. Season with salt and pepper (to taste). Mix pecans, Panko, orange zest and parmesan. Mix egg and milk in a shallow bowl. Dip the fish pieces in the egg and milk mixture. Coat them with the pecan/Panko/parmesan/orange zest mixture and press to ensure it sticks to the fillets.

If cooking on grill, preheat the grill to medium heat. If cooking in oven, preheat the oven to 375 degrees, if frying, use just enough peanut or safflower oil to cover the bottom of the pan and preheat to medium heat.

Cook the fish until the pecan/Panko/parmesan coating is just beginning to brown. Only turn the fillets if you are frying and do



it carefully at about 3 to 4 minutes. Continue cooking until the pecan/Panko/parmesan coating is medium brown; be careful not to overcook. The fish is done when it flakes with a fork.

Serve while hot with lemon and/or lime and/or orange wedges, tartar sauce or spicy tartar sauce.

My intention with this was to cook it on a vegetable tray on the grill, but a thunderstorm dampened those plans. As noted above, it can also be baked in the oven or fried and we cooked some both ways for this meal. A tip for baking this is to cover a cookie sheet or shallow pan with parchment paper and cook the fish on it.

This combines well with a variety of vegetables. Potatoes are a standard with fish and they can be baked or fried. Slaw is also a standard with fish, but a fresh green salad or lettuce wedge works well, too. ■



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

BILOXI MARSH REDS WILL BE ON THE FEED

June is great month, with consistent water conditions, good weather

C By Joel Masson
apt. Justin Bowles of JB Fishing Charters spends many days in June targeting redfish in the Biloxi Marsh, and for good reason: it's loaded with hungry fish that seem to be in almost every crease.

"You can fish them on the shoreline of the open bays," Bowles said. "You can fish the shoreline of Lake Borgne, and you can also catch them up in the skinny bayous and in the ponds. You can kind of pick whatever you want to do in June."

Capt. Justin Bowles said redfish can be caught along the shorelines of marsh ponds this month.



Photo courtesy Justin Bowles

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Bowles finds conditions, which have been inconsistent since the winter, to be a lot more stable.

"Normally speaking, I find in June you get a bunch of south or southeast wind, and it pushes that good water in," he said. "You don't have to worry about any of those low-water issues."

When entering the vast Biloxi Marsh, Bowles keeps an eye out for a few key factors.

"I look for a good grass line along the edge of the pond, and I also look for bait and clean water," he said. "If you're fishing strictly artificial, I think water clarity is a lot more important than if you're fishing shrimp under a cork."

Bowles' strategy is also heavily influenced by which direction the tide is moving.

"I find with a rising tide, the reds push back as far as they can go, so you may catch them in the back ends of ponds or pockets,"

he said. "With a falling tide, it seems like they get more in the current or out off of points where they can let the bait be pulled out the marsh to them."

The redfish certainly are not picky, and Bowles has a variety of baits at the ready to chunk at the reds.

"You definitely don't need the (live) bait," he said. "It really depends on the skill level of who's fishing, but you can catch them on really anything in June: spinnerbaits, spoons, Texas-rigged craws and swimbaits."

Bowles (985-969-2036) said redfish in Biloxi Marsh generally range anywhere from 16 to 26 inches this month.

"Those are the kind you want to catch and cook anyway," he said.

The great part about June is it isn't extremely hot, so the fish are more prone to feed later in the day.

"In June, they'll bite throughout the day unless you have abnormally warm temperatures," Bowles said. "When it gets into July, you need to leave earlier and do your damage in the morning." ■

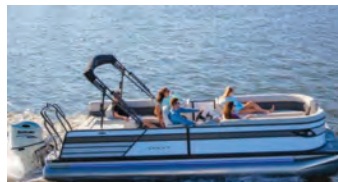
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I look for a good grass line along the edge of the pond, and I also look for bait and clean water. If you're fishing strictly artificial, I think water clarity is a lot more important than if you're fishing shrimp under a cork.



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Don't forget to look at ladder stands; they are not immune to damages from recent storms.

HUNT CLUB HONEY-DO'S

By Andy Douglas

It's that time of the year. Hunting leases are being paid for and clubs are scraping to fill memberships. Hunt club members are showing prospects around leased properties. What's being seen this year is a little "out of the norm" across many states along the Gulf Coast.

Areas have had a lot of rain, severe storms with wind and hail, and an unseasonable ice storm accompanied by extreme cold weather in the past few months. It's wreaked havoc on large portions of hunting land.

Work days are typically in September before archery season. If clubs wait until the traditional time to take care of their leases, it could be overwhelming this fall.

There is no time like the present to get started. Consider these tips and get your hunting land in order.

ACCESS AND RIGHT-OF-WAYS

ATV trails, logging roads and any accesses on hunting clubs are sure to have trees across them. In some areas, there are more than plenty. High winds and storms have caused a lot of timber damage, and it's not only pines. Monster oak trees are being found blown down, blocking rights-of-way. It could take a crew of men a day to clear out one big oak.

Water runoff has taken its toll on travel routes, too. If you've had trouble with certain spots in the past, they're likely going to be washed out again. Scout your land and drive down your trails; make notes of problem areas you find.

FOOD PLOT TLC

Check food plots for blown-down trees and fallen limbs. In pine country where there was ice; hunters are finding big piles

of limbs under larger pine trees. Many food-plot edges have bunches of limbs on the ground 15 to 20 yards out into the plot. A tractor with a bucket will make easy work of it.

Bush-hogging plots is a good idea but should be put off until turkeys have hatched their broods in early June. Spraying is a better choice now, and it will make clipping grass easier in a month.

KILLER FALL FOOD PLOTS

Spray stands of clover now. Use a spray like Hi-Yield Grass Killer, a post-emergent grass herbicide. It's safe to use on clover and kills grasses and weeds; your fall clover field will flourish. If you have used a fall food-plot mix, inspect it. Some have reasonable amounts of clover. If you notice some growth of clover, spray it like a clover field. Give it a try; nothing attracts whitetails to fall food plots like clover.

Lime, lime and lime. It's time to do it. To get the full effect of lime, especially pelletized lime, it takes six months. If you keep plots mowed, pelletized lime can be broadcast on untilled ground or can be broadcast and disked. Lime now, and your fall plots will be more attractive than your neighbor's.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Get the jump on work days and hunting club tasks. Check box blinds and tripods; some may have been toppled over by high winds. Inspect ladder stands in secret honey holes, too; they are not immune from the same kinds of damages. Do anything you can think of, and spread out the work. This will keep the traditional hunting club experience fun and not like a second job. ■

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Photos by Andy Douglas

BAIT SHOP BONANZA

You've seen the sign in a window or fastened to a building.

Live Bait.

Have you ever taken time to stop? What is it, and what's inside? We're talking about bait shops.

There is usually one in every small town and likely one at your favorite lake near the entrance or boat launch. Go inside; there's a variety of things for sale, but some things there cannot be bought.

HOT COMMODITIES

You guessed it: the No. 1 seller at a bait shop is live bait. It can't be beat when it comes to catching fish, and it won't break the bank.

"My best sellers are red worms for bream and minnows for crappie, and we are

selling a lot of crickets too," said Wayne Ashmore, owner of Blue Bayou Bait Shop in Brookhaven.

In similar shops, you will see big tanks with aerators holding minnows, shiners or goldfish. You will likely hear crickets chirping when you enter. There will be small containers full of black dirt and worms on shelves.

IT'S IN THE FREEZER

The refrigerators and freezers are full of bait, too, the kind you won't find in a typical sporting goods store.

"People come in looking for the best catfish bait they can get," said Ashmore, "Skipjack (herring) and rooster livers are what anglers are looking for the most. I have a good supplier for both and keep them on hand."

Frozen catalpa worms, refrigerated chicken livers, shrimp and shad are a few more things that can be purchased. What's found usually depends on the time of year and what fish in the area are biting.

OTHER THINGS

At bait shops, there's usually a variety of things you may need. Many sell gas and ice. Some sell food, drinks and short-order meals. If you need fishing line, you can find it there. If you are at the lake and forgot something — go to the bait shop; they are likely to have something to get you by.

Hooks, weights, leaders, yo-yo's, corks, stringers, fishing poles, reels, frog gigs, nets, paddles, and artificial lures are a few more things found here. The list could go on and on.

OPPOSITE: Hooks, weights, leaders, yo-yo's, corks, stringers, fishing rods, reels, frog gigs, nets, paddles and artificial lures are a few things found at bait shops. The list could go on. **RIGHT:** Crickets are a hot commodity for anglers seeking big bluegills. Wayne Ashmore, owner of Blue Bayou Bait Shop of Brookhaven, loads up a cricket cage.



"I keep a good stock of classic lures like Slater's jigs, Betts Spins, jig spinners, and H&H spinnerbaits; the white H&H is my favorite," Ashmore said.

NOT FOR SALE

The best thing you can find at a local bait shop cannot be bought; it's absolutely free: information and conversation. Often, the one person you see working at bait shops will be the owner — usually a seasoned fisherman or woman. They've been selling bait and can let you know what other anglers have been buying and catching fish with.

"I get people coming in and asking questions like: 'What's the bream biting? What's the best catfish bait? What's the bass doing now? Where can I go to get on some crappie?' I get a few phone calls too, and I will tell them what I know," Ashmore said.

Always be courteous when shopping; this will help you get the info you need.

WHY NOT STOP?

The next time you're riding by and see the **Live Bait** sign, stop in and check it out. It's guaranteed that they could use your business, and it will be appreciated. Whether it's the live bait or the information, either or both will help you catch your creel. ■

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MODERN FISHING LINES 101: MONO, FLUORO

W By Will Martin
With many types of fishing line available, filling a reel is a lot more complicated than it used to be. Maybe you're new to fishing, or perhaps you're a fishing veteran who wants to try something new. Here's what you need to know about nylon monofilament and fluorocarbon fishing lines. Braided lines will get their own treatment later.

THE BIG THREE

Fishing lines are divided into three major types: nylon monofilament, fluorocarbon

monofilament, and braid. Nylon monofilament is commonly shortened to "mono" in everyday speech; fluorocarbon monofilament is often shortened to "fluorocarbon" or "fluoro", and braided lines are called all sorts of things, from Spiderwire to superline.

Nylon monofilament is the least-expensive option. You can expect to pay between \$2 and \$10 for a spool, depending on the brand. Fluorocarbon lines can cost \$10 and up but are generally less expensive than top-end braids.

MONO VS. FLUORO

If you were to unspool a little of each line, nylon monofilament and fluorocarbon, the first thing you would notice is that the fluorocarbon line is clearer than mono; fluorocarbon was developed in the 1970s as a leader material. Clarity was the point; fishermen think it's more difficult to see.

Unlike monofilament, which begins to stretch the moment a load is applied, fluorocarbon stretches only after a specific load is reached, which makes it more

sensitive than mono; the angler is more aware of what is happening to the bait. Fluorocarbon's hardness also makes it more reactive than mono; adjustments to the bait made by the angler are immediate and more forceful.

Nylon monofilament lines absorb a small amount of water. Despite this characteristic, they generally float under normal circumstances. By contrast, fluorocarbon lines sink. Neither characteristic is innately good or bad, of course, but they make each line best suited for certain types of fishing.

Whether a line sinks or floats is important. A sinking line gives the fisherman more control over depth, and since there is no bow in the line, it allows a direct connection to the fish.

Sometimes, fishermen may not want their line to sink. Because it floats, Nylon monofilament is great for topwater fishing. Many guides swear by mono when fishing for redfish. Some anglers use mono when fishing crankbaits as well.

An unintended benefit of the stretchiness of monofilament is that it slows an angler's hookset, which may assist those prone to jerking the lure out of the mouth of fish. The stretch slows the action enough to give a trigger-happy angler a margin of error when setting the hook.

LIKE A PRO

"Like to have your cake and eat it, too?" Use a common trick employed by walleye fishermen. Tie a monofilament leader on the end of your fluorocarbon line. The redfish won't know what hit them. ■



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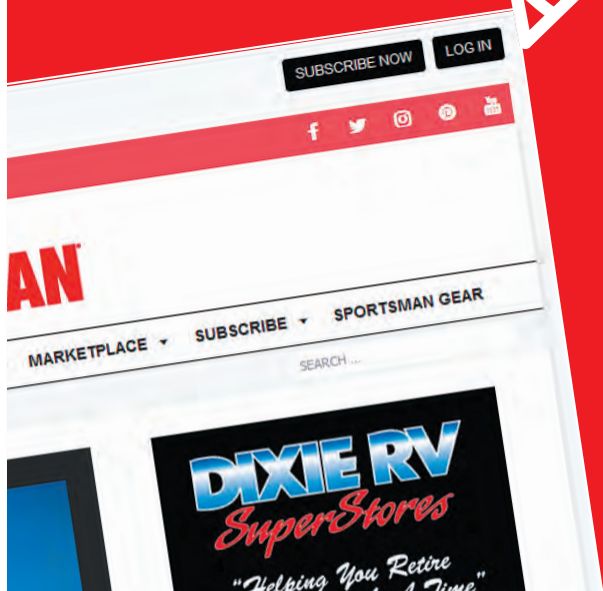
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SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

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

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

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.



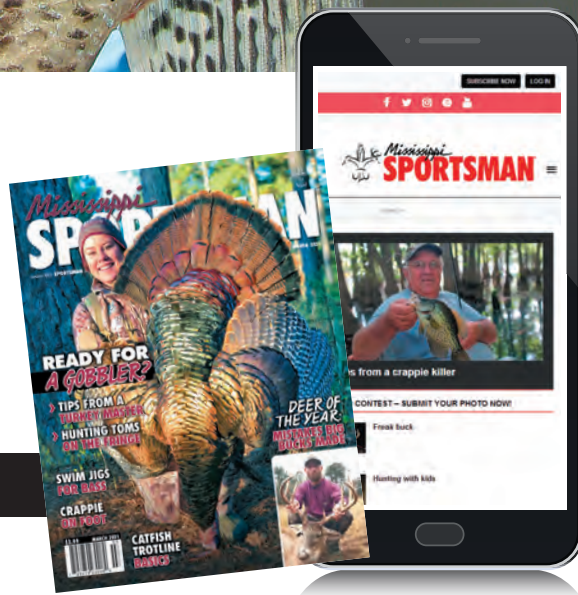
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