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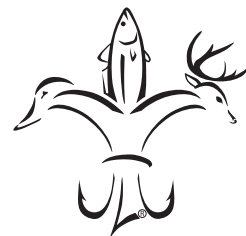
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GET IN THE SWIM OF THINGS



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WMA SMALL GAME PREVIEW



Mississippi SPORTSMAN

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PRESIDENT: Lisa Lottinger Cuccia

PUBLISHER: Jonathan Menard

EDITOR: Dan Kibler

MANAGING EDITOR: Alicia LaFont

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR: Jeff Caldwell

ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER: Desiree P. Lewis

ART DIRECTOR: Kevin Orgeron

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS: Jeff Cashio, Alissa Zeringue

CONTROLLER: Juanita Guidry

ADVERTISING SALES: Mark Hiltz (National Sales), Mark Boyd, Asa Faulkner, Burton Angelle, Peter Church and Bret Holten

CONTRIBUTORS: Bobby Cleveland, Brian Cope, Jerry Dilsaver, Andy Douglas, Paul Elias, John N. Felsher, Bill Garbo, Phillip Gentry, Michael O. Giles, David Hawkins, Dan Kibler, Sammy Romano, Hal Schramm and Don Shoopman

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES: advertising@MS-Sportsman.com 985.758.7217

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Deer season cranks up across Mississippi this month, and the early archery season is a great time to catch a big buck unaware, especially if you know what he's eating and where he's sleeping. Photo by Matt Hansen.

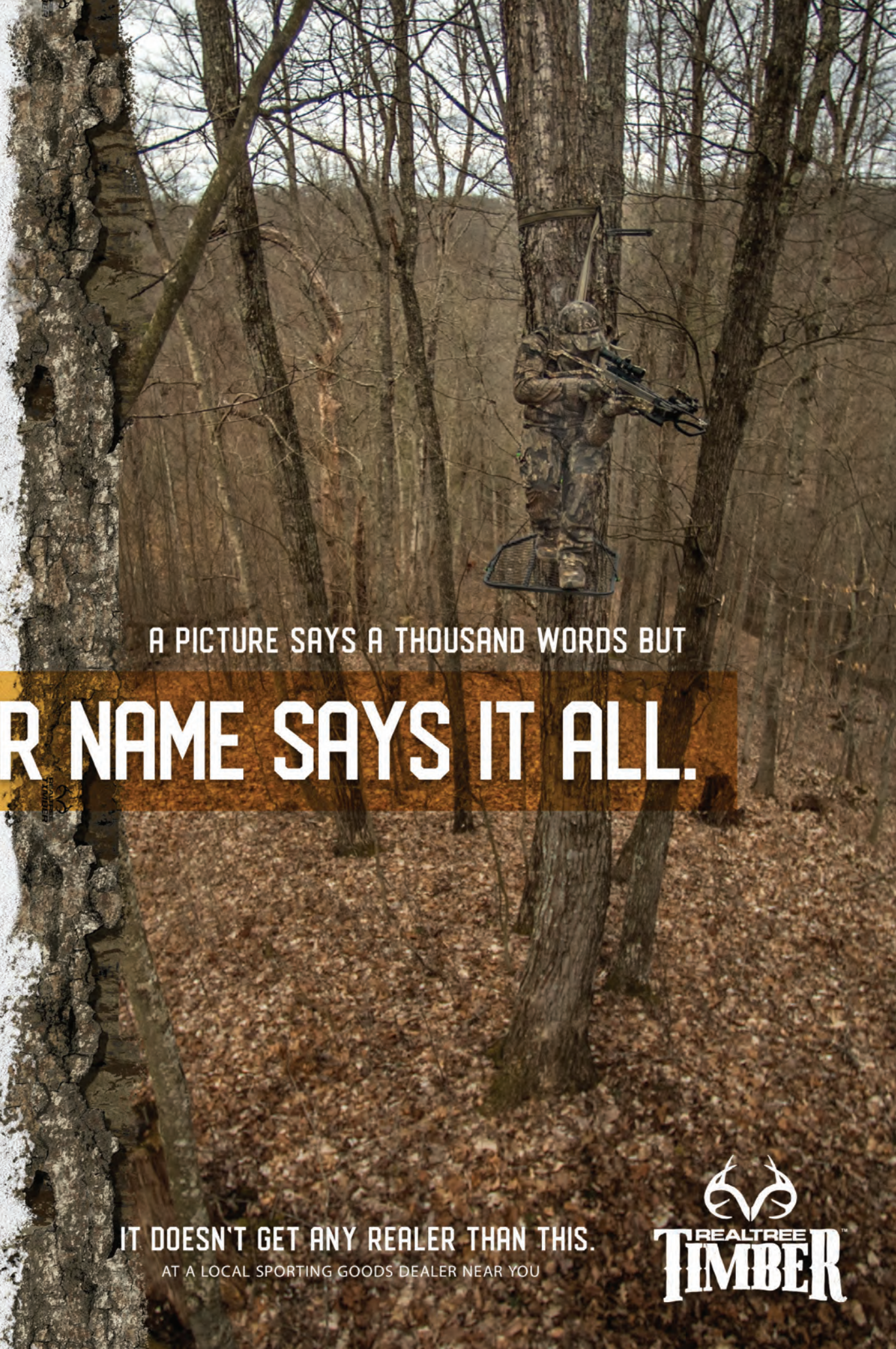


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**Mike Giles** of Meridian has been hunting and fishing Mississippi since 1965. He is an award-winning wildlife photographer, writer, seminar speaker and guide.

## PLENTY OF LOVE FOR OCTOBER

ANY MISSISSIPPI OUTDOORSMAN CAN EASILY FILL HIS/HER PLATE

**F**all is harvest time in the Mississippi woods and on the waters. Whether you're targeting small game or deer, or looking to catch more bass, reds and specks, there's sure to be something for you.

If you're looking for a place to hunt bushytails or other small game in Mississippi, then read about the state's

top WMAs for those species; find out where to go and how to harvest those red and black fox squirrels and grey squirrels. Jeffrey Wood's tried and proven hunting tactics also help.

Wood is a well-known dog trainer, squirrel hunter and call maker who has spent a lifetime hunting small game around Mississippi; he knows how to find and hunt squirrels, either still-hunting, calling or using treeing dogs. He discusses some of his early season techniques and explains how he still-hunts in areas with good food

sources and gets squirrels cranked up by using one of his custom-made squirrel calls.

Read about a most-unusual tracking dog in "Sophie's Choice" and learn how an unwanted little puppy became an endearing part of a hunting family and a legend in the deer-hunting community. This inspirational story about Sophie, born weighing a mere 5 ounces and struggling to survive, is truly a remarkable and fascinating one. Over the past few years, she has retrieved an untold number of deer that escaped hunters.

If you want to put an early season buck on the wall

and in the freezer, then check out Andy Douglas' story "Put a buck on a string". Douglas is a veteran bowhunter who will tell you how to tag a decent buck with your bow.

"A lot of people say they want to get some meat during bow season, but deep down, every bowhunter wants to harvest a big buck with a bow," Douglas writes. "If you'll hunt the right food source and know where the hunting pressure is, you can pattern and score on an early season trophy."

John Felsher tells us how to "Get in the swim of things" by using swimbaits during the fall cool-down. They're great big-bass baits and can be used effectively in a variety of water depths and conditions. Fish them around shallow grass and wood, or in deep water, and you're sure to get bit by a hungry bass if you cast to the right spot.

If you're hankering for some fast and furious saltwater action, then look no further than Felsher's "Put a spin on redfish" fishing article. Learn how to search for the hard-fighting redfish and how to catch them with some of his timely fishing advice. When October rolls around, the saltwater marsh and backwater brackish areas can get red hot, if you're there at the right time.

October signals the beginning of our fall hunting seasons, and many take advantage by hunting and fishing in some of the most fantastic spots in the country — bar none. Take a few of these experts' tips and techniques and try them for yourself but you've got to get outdoors get started.

Carpe Diem! ■



Mississippi hunters can take to the squirrel woods on Oct. 1 for five months in a long season for bushytails of all kinds: these greys, or the prized fox squirrels that roam the state's forests.

# CLARKSDALE WOMAN SUBDUES MONSTER GATOR

**K**alee Guin mustered every ounce of strength she could find as she battled the massive 12-foot alligator on Ross Barnett Reservoir on Sept. 3. Though the battle raged on for more than an hour, Guin and the River Reaper Alligator Team finally wore it down and got it to the boat. The tail girth was 36 inches and the belly girth was 54 inches.

Guin, who lives in the Clarkdale community near Meridian, first got a taste of alligator hunting a few years ago on a Southern Outdoors Unlimited hunt for disabled youths where she snagged two gators. This time, she was able to draw a tag and hunted with the River Reapers Team.

"We saw a few smaller gators that we didn't want to fool with," Guin said. "About 9:45 p.m., we spotted this gator and hooked up with him."

The alligator was hooked near the edge of the Pearl River about 14 feet deep, which made it difficult to wear it down.

"When I got him on the rod and reel, he was thrashing around and put up a heckuva fight," Guin said. "It was really exciting."

"It took three hooks and poles to subdue the alligator," said Sally Long, Kalee's mother. "He drug the boat all over that river and took about an hour to wear down."

According to Mississippi regulations, alligators must be hooked and brought to the boat before they can be dispatched and harvested. That's easier said than done, and wrestling an alligator that big took all of the strength that Guinn and the team had — just to wear him down and get him to the boat.

After an epic battle, Guinn and her team maneuvered the gator near the boat, and the young lady set her sights on the kill zone on the gator's head.

"Boom!" The shotgun roared and belched fire that lit up the night, delivering an instant kill to the massive predator.

Though Guin was born with cerebral palsy and has a few other physical problems, she has not let that stop her from doing things that many only dream about. Her opportunity to participate in the outdoors, harvesting big game and hunting around the country is a testimony to her desire and determination. Not too many young ladies even dream of tangling with man-eating alligators, but Guin has done it several times now.

"I just wanted to do it," said Guin. "It's so much fun and exciting, and it gives you a rush that is hard to get anywhere else. You just don't know what's going to happen when you go on a gator hunt after the sun goes down." ■



Kalee Guin harvested this massive, 12-foot alligator on Ross Barnett with the help of the River Reapers alligator hunting team.

# MISSISSIPPI'S TOP OCTOBER FISHING SPOTS

**W**hile many sportsmen have put up their rods and reels and taken out their rifles, bows and shotguns for hunting season, diehard Mississippi anglers are heading to the waters for some fantastic fall fishing. Here are a few of Mississippi's fall hotspots.

## PICKWICK LAKE BASS

Whether you are targeting largemouths or smallmouths, Pickwick Lake is the closest thing to a sure bet when it comes to catching bass in October. While the lake receives heavy fishing pressure during peak months, it remains one of the best fisheries in Mississippi and the Southeast. Many anglers, including Justin Giles, of Clinton, head to the lake in October, and the good fishing just keeps bringing them back.

Last October, Giles caught Pickwick smallmouth bass along rock walls and ledges adjacent to rock walls during a mid-October fishing trip.

"We caught smallmouths on topwater baits like Whopper Ploppers off shallow ledges adjacent to rock walls early, then caught some on swimbaits as they moved deeper on the ledges as the morning progressed," Giles said. "We also caught largemouth on shaky heads, crankbaits and worms in the Yellow Creek area."

If the weather is stable, look for fantastic fall fishing at Pickwick again.

## MISSISSIPPI RIVER CATFISH

As the water temperature falls, catfish will become active, and anglers can catch blue cats, channel cats and big flatheads in a variety of places. Anglers catch the big flatheads from the banks up and down the river, and some at night from select locations they've learned by trial and error over the years.



The author landed this nice blue catfish from the Mississippi River on a fall trip.



Pickwick Lake spits out a lot of nice smallmouth bass in October, most caught around rock walls and ledges.

Guide Bob Crosby, of Madison likes to fish the river from Port Gibson to north of Vicksburg; he targets monster blue cats and occasionally catches big flatheads as a bonus. Crosby catches them in a variety of spots in different ways.

"We'll catch them bumping bottom along the main river on ledges adjacent to drop-offs," Crosby said. "We also catch a lot along the wing dams up and down the river where the water rushes around the ends of the dams and creates large eddies. The big blue cats and flatheads will lay in the deep water just off the eddies and feed heavily when bait gets swept through."

On an average day, anglers can expect to catch 12 to 15 blue cats in the 15- to 20-pound range and occasionally a big blue in the 30- to 40-pound range. It's not uncommon for Crosby's clients to hook 50- to 70-pound catfish — and even catch a few.

## OKATIBBEE LAKE CRAPPIE

Okatibbee Lake usually has an annual water drawdown that pulls the crappie out of the shallows and concentrates them in the open water; they congregate along ditches and creek runs as the temperature falls. Many crappie are caught along stumps and brush tops adjacent to creeks, and anglers can load the boat by fishing jigs or minnows around structure.

Lure designer and angler Scott Vance likes to catch crappie by trolling along creek channels, concentrating on water in the 9- to 11-foot range. Vance uses jigs and double-minnow rigs, depending upon what the fish like that day. He also employs a spider-rig system with different rods trolling lures set at different depths so he can determine what depth the fish are holding or feeding. Many times, crappie will come up to feed, but if you're working below them, you won't get bit.

Many of the old-timers who fished the lake in bygone days sunk brush and treetops in a variety of areas off drops and ledges, and they fished those same spots in 9- to 11-foot depths with great consistency. They would pull up to a submerged top and catch several big crappie on jigs or minnows and move when the action slowed. Many times, you might limit out on one top or catch several big crappie on each brush pile and finish your limit by hitting multiple tops.





# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Scottie and  
Lincoln Stanford**

Scottie and Lincoln Stanford caught this bass from a Hinds County farm pond.



**Bradley Deaver**

Bradley Deaver was fishing in Leake County in July when he hooked this beautiful bass.



James Bennett helped two of his grandsons, Will Arnett and Henry Johnson, enjoy an evening of fishing in south Mississippi.



**Tom Pierce Sr.**

Tom Pierce Sr. holds up a bluegill he caught in a friend's pond in Leakesville last summer.

## GOT PICS? We want 'em

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

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

# MDMR CERTIFIES TWO MORE RECORDS

**T** From News Reports  
The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources has certified two new state fishing records. James Landers of Pascagoula set a record for vermilion snapper (*Rhomboplites aurorubens*) using conventional tackle with a fish weighing 5 pounds, 3.2 ounces. Riley Armes, 10, of Pass Christian, set the youth record for ladyfish (*Elops saurus*) using conventional tackle with a fish weighing 2 pounds, 9.6 ounces. ■



James Landers' state-record vermilion snapper weighed just under 5¼ pounds.

Photos courtesy MDMR



Riley Armes' state-record ladyfish weighed slightly more than 2½ pounds.

## MDMR ALLOWING LOUISIANA CHARTERS TO LAUNCH, LAND FROM MISSISSIPPI REST OF 2021

**D** From News Reports  
Due to the impacts of Hurricane Ida to Louisiana's coastal communities and infrastructure, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is allowing Louisiana charter captains possessing a Louisiana Charter Boat Fishing Guide License, Louisiana Mothership License or Louisiana Charter Skiff License and following all Louisiana regulations and requirements associated with above licenses to launch and land from Mississippi ports through Dec. 31. Any passengers fishing on these vessels must possess the appropriate Louisiana Charter Passenger or Louisiana Charter Skiff license. In order to fish in Mississippi territorial waters, a Mississippi Charter For-hire License must be purchased at the MDMR Licensing Office, located at 1141 Bayview Avenue in Biloxi. As a reminder to all individuals participating in these activities, no red snapper may be possessed or landed in Mississippi territorial waters while the Mississippi recreational red snapper season is closed regardless of any other state's red snapper season status. ■

A man wearing a camouflage hat and shirt is kneeling in a wooded area, holding the head of a large buck with impressive, velvet-covered antlers. The buck's head is the central focus, with its eyes looking towards the camera. The man's hands are visible, gripping the antlers. The background is filled with green foliage and trees, suggesting a natural hunting environment. The overall scene is brightly lit, likely by sunlight filtering through the trees.

# PUT A BUCK ON A STRING

**ARCHERY SEASON OFFERS MISSISSIPPI HUNTERS PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES GUN HUNTERS DON'T HAVE LATER IN THE SEASON. HERE'S HOW TO SET UP FOR OPENING DAY.**

■ By Andy Douglas

# READY OR NOT, deer season is upon us.

Whether hunters are sporting compounds, crossbows or traditional bows, it's archery season across Mississippi, and it's time to get after them.

Every hunter may have his or her reasons for deer hunting. Maybe it's to fill the freezer; maybe it's to thin the herd of does or maybe it's to spend time outdoors in the best time of the year. Regardless, all bowhunters dream of double-lunging a nice buck.

It has been done by many, and you can, too. Here are a few tips and strategies to consider when targeting mature bucks on your hunting grounds.

## HUNT EARLY SEASON

Pressure is the name of the game; it causes deer to change their patterns to avoid contact with humans, particularly for bucks that are 3½ years or older. The first few days of archery season is the best time to surprise a buck.

Early fall brings an invasion of people into deer territory. While pressure comes from the presence of hunters, it comes even more from other fall activities such as dove and squirrel hunting and deer-hunting clubs' workdays.

"The first week and into the second week of bow season is always the best time to take a nice buck," said Adam Lee of Florence, the owner of Tight Spot Charters, a hardcore bowhunter who has harvested many nice archery bucks from Rankin and Hinds counties over the years. "Otherwise, staying completely off a property until the weather and conditions are ideal is another good strategy."

Hunt any honey holes before small-game hunters make their way there. Seek areas on land where no one has been doing a lot of hunting-camp work.

### FIND THE FOOD >

Things deer are eating can give bowhunters an early season leg up on their quarry. So can the lack of hunting pressure as the season opens.



## FIND THE FOOD

Find the food sources, and you will find the bucks. The first few weeks of the season, bucks will be going after soft mast such as persimmon, crabapple, honey locust, domestic pear and apple. Greenbriar and kudzu are good, high-protein sources bucks flock to in early season.

“Early season where I hunt, food plots are dynamite when they first are coming up, and I will exclusively hunt them,” Lee said.

Hunters will have to sort of chase the food as the season progresses. When acorns start hitting the ground, soft mast will be almost gone, and bowhunters should follow the acorns for bucks. They are loaded with carbohydrates, and bucks will be feeding heavily on freshly fallen acorns, storing carbs for the high-energy demands of the rut to come.

Of all acorns, bucks prefer big, green, fresh, white oaks. The only thing better would be chestnuts, but they are extremely hard to find; if you have them, then you have a buck hotspot. Other hard-mast crops to look for are hickory, pecan, beech and walnuts.

## GAME CHANGERS

Many things have changed the world of bowhunting in the past few years. Advances in technology and changes in supplemental-feeding laws give archery hunters more opportunity at

trophy bucks.

“I believe cellular game cameras are the biggest game changer of my lifetime for bowhunting deer and being able to target a nice buck,” Lee said. “It’s not as much of a game of chance any more as opposed to the past. Hunters can set up a cellular cam and never have to go into the woods, plot or feeder to check it and leave their scent everywhere. You only have one good chance at a mature buck, and you don’t want to pressure him in any way and blow it.”


Cellular game cameras were expensive not long ago, but they have dropped in price and gone up in quality, such as the Tactacam Reveal X, priced around \$140, allowing many hunters to afford multiple cameras and the service.

Advances in scent control also equip hunters to get past the nose of an elusive buck. Electronic devices that generate ozone are very effective for scent control.

“Ozonics works; it’s the real deal. Other similar things work too, but Ozonics is the best,” Lee said.

Many hunters are skeptical of such products, and nothing is foolproof, but testimonies from many successful hunters attest to its genuineness. It helps beat the ever-changing wind directions and thermals that occur during archery season.

Mississippi archery hunters can legally hunt close to supplemental feeders since there is no longer a distance restriction. This will help hunters get better shot opportunities at nice bucks.



Food plots and their greenery will provide bucks with a solid food source that bowhunter can count on them visiting as the season opens.

## CONCLUDING

Practice your shooting and hunt with confidence. Harvesting a mature buck is possible. When you have done everything right, positioned yourself for success and a nice buck comes in close, slightly quartering away — you may have a quick decision to make. Is he nice enough; should I take him? Either way, you've found success. ■



**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.



Acorns, especially those produced by white oaks, are a magnet for deer as soon as they start hitting the ground.

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# SOPHIE'S CHOICE

By Mike Giles

**TINY, OUTCAST CHIHUAHUA HAS TURNED INTO ONE OF MISSISSIPPI'S TOP DOGS WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING DEER THAT HUNTERS CAN'T.**

# SOPHIE ENTERED THE WORLD UNDER EXTREME DURESS,

at a mere 5 ounces, and was immediately rejected. The poor, little chihuahua was quickly adopted by extended family.

Greg Tabb of Lauderdale already had a dog and wanted nothing to do with the puppy, and he let everybody know it. Little did he know the two would become intertwined by fate and their love of deer hunting.

After Tabb's wife and daughter nursed Sophie back to health, she didn't fare too well in their house, so the tiny chihuahua went in the yard with the other dogs.

"That's when Sophie became my dog," Tabb said. "Every time I came out of the house Sophie was there; (she) became my shadow. She wanted to go everywhere with me, and I couldn't

help but like the little chihuahua who had fought so valiantly to survive and now took up with me."

On her first trip to the woods with Tabb, Sophie found a deer that had gotten away from him.

"I shot a doe, and it went out into the cutover," Tabb said. "It was so thick I couldn't find a blood trail, but Sophie found that deer in no time."

Johnny Cumberland of Meridian, shot a buck this past Jan. 8 at 300 yards.

"I was so far from the deer that I heard the 'whap' when the bullet hit the deer in the cutover," he said. "We found blood and trailed the buck across a cutover, across a beaver slough and lost the trail after it crossed a hardwood bottom. We were just finding specks of blood, so we quit looking."

Greg Tabb's chihuahua Sophie has gone on the trail and found plenty of deer that Mississippi hunters couldn't or were having trouble finding.



**T**he next morning, Cumberland called Tabb, and they took Sophie to the last place they had found blood. Though it had been 16 hours since the shot, Sophie picked up the cold scent trail and started working. Evidently, the deer had been pushed further away by the hunters the previous night.

"We found a speck of blood about every 50 yards, and she tracked the buck across a stream and continued another 200 yards until she found him," Tabb said.

"I can assure you that I would never have gotten that buck if Sophie hadn't found him," Cumberland said.

That buck icing on the cake for Tabb and Sophie, whose legend grows with each deer recovery. Now 9, she's been recovering deer for the past 8 years and hasn't let up yet.

"I've got a little camo collar with a light on it, and when I get it down, Sophie gets ready because she knows she's going to get to work and have some fun," Tabb said. "She just loves it so much.

"She'll go through thick briars and rabbit holes like nothing else. I'll put her in the truck with me and leave an old jacket in there with her and go to the woods to hunt while she waits on me, and she'll be there when I return. We've found a many a deer by taking her with us on hunts, and we don't have to drive home to get her and bring her back."

Tabb has gone all over the eastern part of Mississippi recovering deer, and the more people who hear about Sophie, the more call for her services in times of need.

"My nephew, Robert, has shot quite a few deer, and she's found a good many for him, too," Tabb said. "He'll call me up when he needs us and says, 'Uncle Greg, we are going to need Sophie', and off we'll go on another adventure, which usually ends in a quick recovery."

It took a little while before Greg Tabb of Lauderdale claimed 9-year-old Sophie as his own after the family adopted her. That first deer recovery cemented things, however.



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

Sophie was the first dog Tabb used to track deer; it happened because she had a good nose for picking up scent, and she was a natural trailer.

"Sophie's found deer that were still alive, and she gives me signals to let me know that," Tabb said. "People can hardly believe she's just so good. She tracked one for a little boy from Houma, La., who was hunting up here, too.

"There's just nothing better than helping kids and finding the deer for them and seeing their excitement when they find



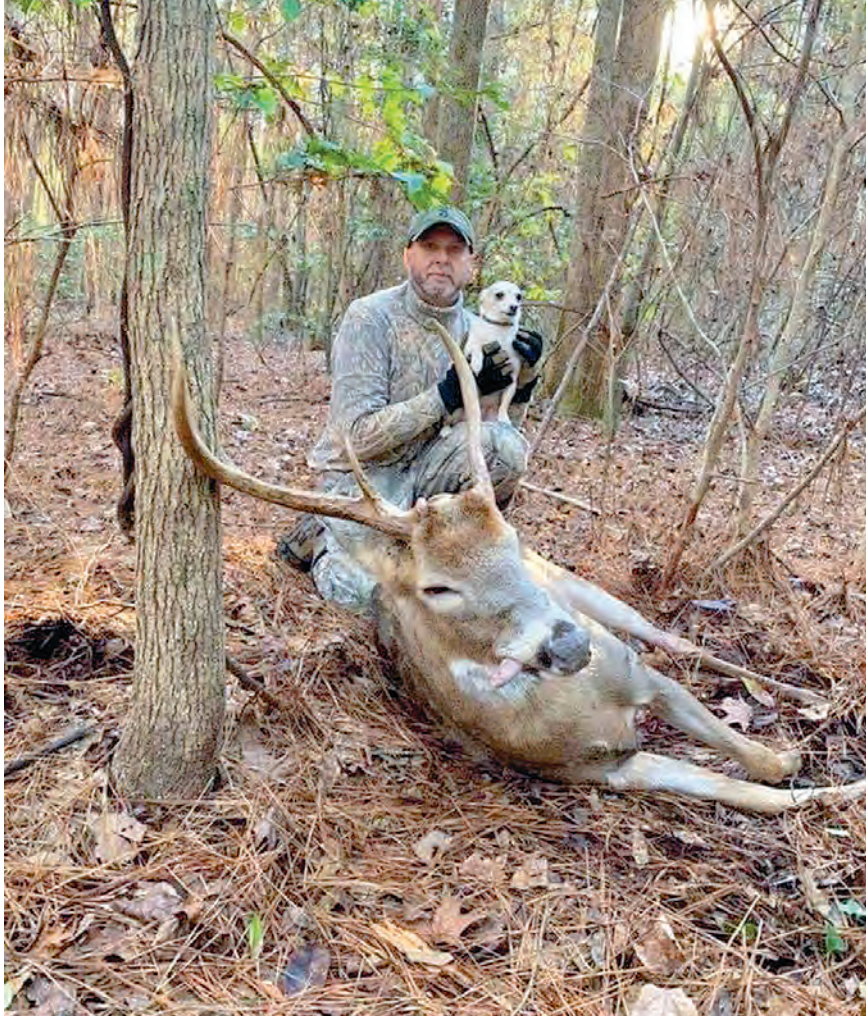
them. They'll high-five each other and are so excited.

A bad storm came through an area right after Tabb's son had shot a deer at last light, and it got away from them.

"That deer went into the swamp and went across Possum Creek," Tabb said. "I was kind of worried about Sophie getting across, but as soon as I put my foot on a log to cross the creek, I heard 'Ka-loop' and saw Sophie swimming across the creek. She went up the hill, across the swamp and found the deer.

"I knew then that she had the heart of a lion. The heart of a lion indeed, and in such a tiny but inspirational dog. ■

Sophie the chihuahua has been finding deer for hunters in Mississippi for the past eight years.



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# GO SOFT (MAST)

DEER WILL PUT SOFT MAST ON  
THEIR MENU EARLY IN THE FALL  
WHEN THE FRUIT BEGINS TO RIPEN.  
HUNTERS NEED TO BE ABLE TO  
RECOGNIZE IT, PAY ATTENTION TO IT  
AND SET UP CLOSE BY.

■ By Pete Rogers



October brings mixed emotions for deer hunters. We long to get afield, but at times, the sweltering heat makes it difficult to bear. For those of us who do not have large agriculture fields to hunt, we should be focused on one thing and one thing only: soft mast, the key to early season success.

That was the case for me once as I sat along the edge of a fallow field. Some earlier scouting had shown me loaded persimmon trees along one of the edges. Knowing that persimmons are a favorite wildlife food early in fall, I set up an ambush point. Just after daylight, a mature buck that had been feeding on the persimmons was making his way back to his bed. He didn't make it.

What really is soft mast, and how do you know what the best soft mast is for deer? How many different kinds of soft mast are there that deer key in on, and how can you manipulate them for your benefit?

Mast is a term used to describe a type of food or fruit that trees and bushes produce. Fruit trees produce soft mast, while oak trees, hickory, beech and others produce hard mast. Soft mast typically involves foods such as berries, plums, pears, persimmon, muscadines, scuppernongs, crabapples, apples, poke berries and others. Knowing how to identify these soft-mast species can help you maximize your early season success.

Let's look at some of these major foods individually and learn how you can identify them and use this deer candy to put a big buck on your wall.

## **AMERICAN PERSIMMON** ➤

## AMERICAN PERSIMMON

American persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana*, is without question the favorite soft mast to find in the deer woods. When ripe, it produces a light-orange fruit about the size of a golf ball. This delicious fruit will attract every animal in the forest when it is falling: fox, coyote, squirrels, rabbits and, of course, deer. But locating persimmon trees is not the only thing you have to worry about. Persimmon trees are dioecious trees, which means that the trees are separated into male and female. Only the female tree produces fruit. There is no way to tell the males from the females except during the flowering and fruit-bearing season.

The field with the persimmons I mentioned earlier had far more male than female trees. Scouting in the summer when fruit is growing is the best method of determining if a persimmon tree bears fruit or not. I can assure you one thing: every animal in the forest knows where the female persimmon trees are, and they will flock to them in early fall. If you don't learn anything else, learn to identify persimmons and hunt them.

If you are preparing a food plot for deer, always throw in several female and male persimmon trees to help you along. You have to have both for the female to produce fruit.

## GRAPES

Muscadines and scuppernongs are a variety of muscadine grapes that share the same biological name, *Vitis rotundifolia*. These two are next on the important list of soft mast to hunt. These wild grapes, as some call them, are plentiful, and wildlife



Persimmons are unmatched as a favorite food of deer and almost every other wild animal. Whitetails will flock to a tree filled with the fruit. **BELOW:** The scuppernong grape is another favorite food for deer in the fall.

will voraciously feed on them. Muscadines are dark, while scuppernongs are pale in color. Both are incredibly tasty, and when I find them, I gorge myself on them.

Healthy vines will climb to the furthest reaches of trees and can be difficult to spot since their leaves are usually well up in the trees' canopies. Locating the vines is one thing. Setting up at the one the deer will visit is another. With so many vines in the forest, it can be difficult to isolate which ones the deer will be attracted to, but knowing where they are can be the difference.

Growing up, very few homesteads in my home county were missing a muscadine arbor. Growing this favorite fruit was not only commonplace, but it also seemed to be a requirement. This tasty fruit was famous for making excel-



Muscadine grapes thrive in most areas of the Southeast; the fruit usually matures in September.



lent jelly and preserves. Muscadine and scuppernongs are also fine table fare for any industrious teenager looking for a snack.

Both muscadines and scuppernongs are able to thrive in deciduous and pine forests of the South, from the high mountains to the maritime forest. Florentine explorer Giovanni de Verrazzano documented the abundance of scuppernongs while exploring the North Carolina coast in 1524.

Typically maturing in September and October, the muscadine grape is a favorite of hunters and animals. Though these grapes tend to grow best in fertile, sandy loam and alluvial soils, they also grow wild in well-drained bottomlands and are not subject to extended drought or waterlogging. Both muscadines and scuppernongs are readily available afield.

One of the great things about muscadines and scuppernongs is their resistance to pests and diseases. This makes them a plant to consider when manipulating your land for better deer forage. With fruit being formed in just 3 to 5 years and lasting for decades, muscadines and scuppernongs are a delicious option for early season hunters.



**Pete Rogers**, who works for USDA Wildlife Services, has been an outdoors writer and photographer for more than a decade. He has a real passion for trapping and enjoys sharing these experiences with his wife and five children.

**CRABAPPLE** >



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## CRABAPPLE

Southern Crabapple (*Malus angustifolia*) is a shrub tree that will reach heights of 20 to 30 feet in some areas. It loves pine forests but can be found in mixed forests. It prefers edges where sunlight is not hindered. Crabapples produce crops in 3 to 4 years and reach full abundance in 6 to 7 years. This, too, is a great crop for soft-mast manipulation. The fruit is palatable to deer, and it will attract them, typically from late September to early October. I have seen deer feeding on crabapples as late as the end of October, but this is not common.

## HONEY LOCUST

Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), not to be confused with its cousin, black locust, is another favorite food source for white-tailed deer. Easily identifiable, the trunk will have large thorns, some reaching 3 to 4 inches long. The large seed pods resemble green bean pods but are 15 times larger. Measuring around 10 to 12 inches longer and 2 to 4 inches across, these large seed pods are a delicacy for wildlife and when producing, can be a ticket for killing big bucks.

In some cases, honey locust is considered an invasive species and has been known to spread rapidly. It is still a desirable food source for wildlife in general and deer in particular. Where it is found growing wild, the honey locust tree is one

Crabapples will typically mature in late September and early October and become a popular feeding site for deer. **BELOW:** The seed pods on honey locust trees can reach 10 to 12 inches long and 2 to 4 inches in diameter. Deer like them after they have dried and hardened.



of the favorites. Similar to the persimmon, the honey locust is a tree that every animal in the woods knows where to find. If you are able to locate one, set a stand immediately and get ready. Even though the pods will begin dropping in September, deer tend to focus on them after they have dried and hardened. If you are looking to plant honey locust, be certain that no livestock can access the plant. It can be toxic to humans and livestock.

Soft mast is a personal favorite for early season success. Locating these delicacies will put game in your sights and trophies on your wall. ■



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**A** solitary hunter stood silently, blending into the hardwood swamp bottom as he watched a fox squirrel soaring through the treetops, much like a trapeze artist as it swung from branch to branch. Jeffrey Wood barked to the squirrel with his custom squirrel call and got its attention.

The fox squirrel looked like a tiny dancer on the slender limbs, moving from tree to tree until it finally arrived at an old hickory near Wood. As the squirrel cut a hickory nut, the veteran hunter took a fine bead at the furry creature high atop a limb.

Crack-pow! Ka-Wap! Wood's aim was true, the bullet struck the squirrel's head, and the old, red squirrel was dead before it crashed into terra firma.

Scenes like this are rarer nowadays, but it is still possible to harvest a mess of fox squirrels in Mississippi's public-land swamps if you know where to hunt. There are still opportunities to slip through the vast, mast-producing swamps inhabited by red and black fox squirrels on many public Delta lands also.

MISSISSIPPI HUNTERS CAN EXPECT GOOD HUNTING FOR SQUIRRELS, RABBITS AND QUAIL ON PUBLIC-HUNTING GROUNDS ACROSS THE STATE. HERE'S A CLOSER LOOK.

■ By Mike Giles

# WMA SMALL GAME PREVIEW

## DELTA REGIONS

Wood, a noted dog trainer, hunter and call maker from Stringer, has spent a lifetime hunting around Mississippi, and he knows how to find and hunt squirrels either by still hunting, calling or using treeing dogs.

“The Delta region has a lot of good squirrel-hunting opportunities, and Sunflower, Phil Bryant and Mahannah WMAs, along with Panther Swamp NWR, are four of the best public-land areas to hunt squirrels,” Wood said. “Early in the year, hunters can sit by food trees, like beech, hickory and whatever they’re feeding on, and be successful. I like to ease along and bark on my squirrel call and listen for a response.”

If Wood hears a squirrel bark a sharp reply, he’ll slip in that direction until he spots the squirrel and then dispatch him after he’s in range.

“I like to be in total camouflage, including my face,” Wood said. “After the leaves come off the trees, the slip-and-stalk is not too good, so I’ll switch to hunting with dogs; that’s another great way to enjoy the hunt. You can find a good public-land squirrel hunting area almost anywhere you live in the state.”

While grey squirrels are the dominant species, fox squirrels can be found in pockets around the state where they have mature habitat and plenty of mast. Fox squirrels are still thriving in the Delta, and big, black fox squirrels are an anomaly and something desired by many a squirrel hunter. There’s just nothing like harvesting a big red or black fox squirrel, and the opportunity is still there if you have the time to scout them and pursue them.

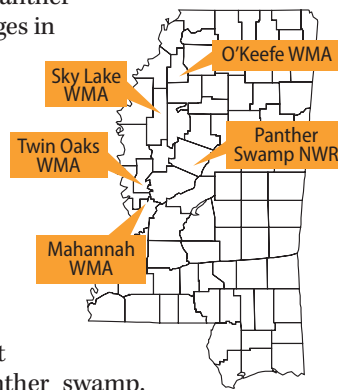
Here’s a statewide breakdown of public hunting areas and the prospects for squirrels, rabbits and quail for small-game hunters.

**Mahannah and Twin Oaks WMAs** in the South Delta region always offer outstanding excellent squirrel hunting and opportunities to kill a mixed bag of red and black fox squirrels and grey squirrels. These WMAs are also popular among still hunters and squirrel dog hunters. There are more than enough to go around if you know how to hunt them.

Though long known as a trophy buck paradise, **Panther Swamp National Wildlife Refuge** is also home to a prolific squirrel population, and squirrel hunting opportunities abound. Covering more than 40,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forests, Panther Swamp is one of the largest refuges in the state of Mississippi. Dogs are allowed for squirrel hunting and rabbit hunting during February.

Wood has had many successful hunts in Panther Swamp and recommends it to anybody who has not yet tried it.

Check out the refuge regulations for seasons dates on the different sections of the refuge at [https://www.fws.gov/refuge/panther\\_swamp](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/panther_swamp).



### NORTH DELTA >

O'Keefe and Sky Lake WMAs have good habitat for rabbits, offering opportunities to exercise beagles and take a few bunnies.



## NORTH DELTA

“O’Keefe has great squirrel hunting, and from what I’ve been hearing, it’s the best WMA to go squirrel hunting in the North Delta Region, and some of the best hunting in the state as far as WMAs go,” said Weston Thompson, North Delta regional biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. “We have a bunch of regenerated hardwoods in this area, and it’s great habitat for the rabbits and rabbit hunting. Sky Lake is another WMA that has great habitat for rabbit hunting, and there are some black squirrels there as well.”

## SOUTHWEST MISSISSIPPI

“Sandy Creek WMA in the Homochitto National Forest has a big area with a lot of hardwoods, so hunters can spread out over there. Someone with squirrel dogs can cover a lot of area, and there is plenty of squirrel hunting and rabbit opportunities,” said Josh Moree, MDWFP’s regional biologist. “Copiah County WMA is another good squirrel-hunting area, and we get a fair number of squirrel hunters coming there, but it’s a smaller area overall than Sandy Creek.”

Squirrels will typically be found in the hardwood slashes and strips of mast producing trees at Copiah County.

**Canemount WMA**, near Port Gibson on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, is chock full of squirrels, but there is a limited hunt system open to Mississippi residents only. Hunters must check the permit station for available hunting locations.

Squirrel hunting will be allowed from Fridays through

Wednesdays from Feb. 1-28 and May 15-June 1. If you are willing and able to hunt during the limited times, chances are excellent that you will be able to harvest a limit of squirrels as this WMA is managed primarily for trophy deer hunting.

Most of Unit 2 and Unit 3 is full of hardwood ridges and bottoms with an abundance of squirrels.

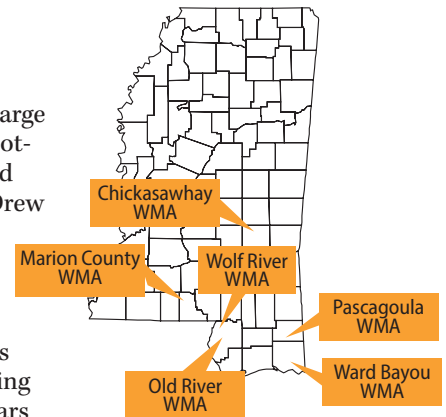
## SOUTHEAST MISSISSIPPI

“Squirrel hunting has traditionally been really good in the Pascagoula and Ward Bayou

WMAs, as they have a large amount of hardwood bottoms and plenty of good squirrel habitat,” said Drew Arnold, an MDWFP biologist. “Old River WMA is good as well but hard to access.”

“Wolf River WMA has seen good rabbit-hunting success the last few years due to cutting,” Arnold said.

“Chickasawhay and Marion County WMAs also have excellent rabbit habitat due to prescribed burning and management practices.”



## NORTHEAST REGION >

WMAs that offer mature hardwoods, especially along creek and river bottoms, will produce plenty of squirrels for hunters young and old alike.





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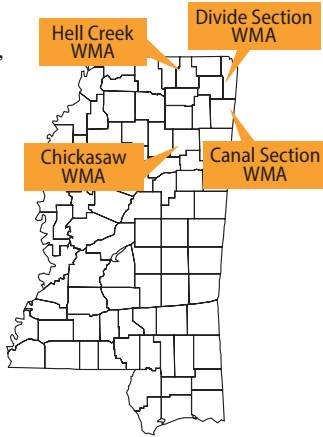
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# NORTHEAST REGION

“Our best squirrel-hunting opportunities in this region are along the (Tenn-Tom) Waterway,” said biologist Nathan Blount. “There’s a lot of access points along the waterway, and on the lower end of **Canal Section WMA**, you have your bottomlands. The farther north you go on the waterway, you get more into your upland habitat on the **Divide Section WMA**, which is usually really good. **Chickasaw WMA** is also a good spot for squirrel hunting; it has 27,000 acres of mixed pine and hardwood timber that is good squirrel habitat as well.”

“**Hell Creek WMA** has been a popular destination for rabbit hunters. We manage for early successional habitat there, and there are a lot of rabbits on the place.”

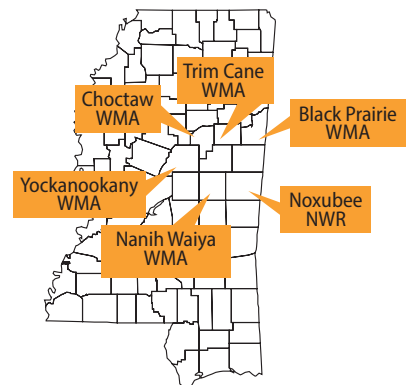


Using a call to locate squirrels, hunters can slip through the woods until they’re in range, then use a rifle or shotgun to get a start on squirrel stew.



# CENTRAL/EAST CENTRAL REGION

“**Trim Cane WMA** near Starkville has excellent rabbit habitat and offers rabbit hunting by draw only on Wednesdays and Saturdays during November and January,” said biologist Chad Masley. “The rabbit hunting has been really great there. **Black Prairie WMA** would be a second option for rabbit hunters, as it is covered up in thickets and early

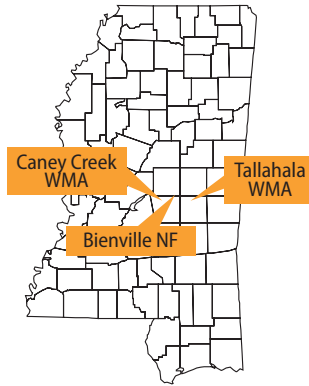


A good squirrel dog can help hunters cover plenty of ground in a day’s outing and bring some game to bag.



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

Divide Section and Hell Creek WMAs are Mississippi's top public-land hunting areas for bobwhite quail.



successional habitat.”

According to Masley, **Yockanookany and Nanih Waiya WMAs** have the best opportunity for squirrel hunting, as they have lots of bottomland hardwoods. **Choctaw WMA** also has bottomland hardwoods.

**Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge** in Noxubee, Oktibbeha and Winston counties has about 45,000 acres of bottomland and upland forest that is home to an abundance of deer, turkey and small game. Squirrels and rabbits abound on the refuge, which is primarily known for deer and duck hunting. Squirrel hunters have plenty of hardwood bottoms and mast producing trees to hunt and the squirrels can be found in all areas making it a good opportunity for hunters to spread out and not be pressured by other hunters.

“**Tallahala, Caney Creek** and the **Bienville National Forest** all have good squirrel hunting,” said Wood. “Tallahala and Caney Creek are your best bets. You just need to find a hardwood bottom or slash, and you’ll find squirrels to hunt.”

## QUAIL HUNTING

“Last year, **Divide Section** led the state in quail harvest for public-land hunting,” Blount said. “**Hell Creek** also has excellent harvest and bird-hunting opportunities at the very end of February.”

During February, there is a lot of field trials on Hell Creek, but after that’s over, it is open to quail hunting, too. ■

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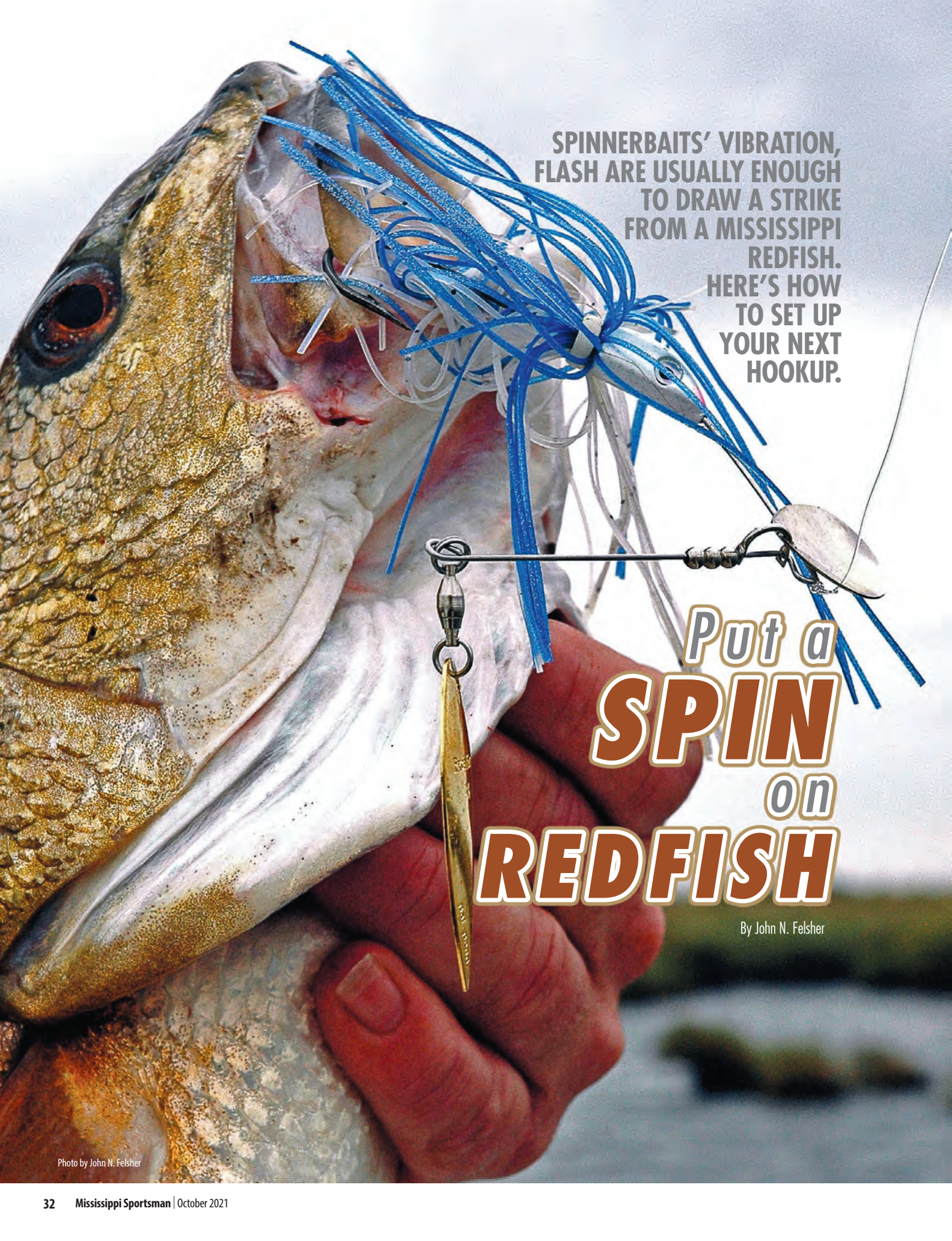


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Put a  
**SPIN**  
on  
**REDFISH**

By John N. Felsher

# Bass anglers fishing coastal waters discovered long ago that spinnerbaits not only attract largemouths,

# but **BIG REDFISH.**

In fact, they frequently catch bass and redfish in the same waters, at the same time, on the same spinnerbaits.

Redfish feed primarily by smell and feel, rather than by sight as do speckled trout. Spinnerbait blades give off significant vibrations that fish can detect even in the murkiest waters. On sunny days and in moderately clear waters, the whirling blades reflect sunlight, simulating the flash of baitfish scales. Even the least-aggressive redfish might slash out at an aggravating spinnerbait thumping past its nose.

“The fish feel that vibration of the blade thumping, and then they see the flash,” said Matt Tusa, a guide with Shore Thing Charters in Bay St. Louis. “Maybe the fish think that flash is a baitfish, a shrimp or a crab. The combination of flash and considerable vibration causes a reaction bite from the redfish, and they go for it.”

Most saltwater anglers prefer a “beetle-type” spinnerbait, consisting of a wire harness attached to a jighead tipped with a soft-plastic trailer resembling a minnow or shrimp. Also called a “harness” spinner, this lure of type allows anglers unlimited versatility. Since the components separate, anglers can quickly switch blades, jigheads or trailers to adapt to changing conditions. Many redfish anglers like rounded Colorado blades, which give off the most vibration and sink faster than more streamlined willow-leaf blades.

“For trailers, I’ve always had good luck with a pearl-colored plastic or an avocado with red flake,” Tusa said. “Black with a chartreuse tail or purple and chartreuse are also good colors. I use a spinnerbait with a gold Colorado blade. I think that flash of gold has a lot more to do with a fish hitting it than the color of the plastic.”

## WHERE TO TIE ON A BLADE >

Lisa Snuggs shows off a redfish she caught on a spinnerbait. Anglers can work spinnerbaits from top to bottom around practically any type of cover.



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Generally preferred by bass anglers, a safety-pin spinnerbait employs a bent “arm” that suspends one or more blades over a skirted head. Although traditionally used for bass, redfish like this one often hit them.

## WHERE TO TIE ON A BLADE

Most Mississippi sportsmen probably use spinnerbaits to fish weedy shorelines like those in the Pearl River and Pascagoula River deltas, particularly in the fall. Marshes between Bayou Caddy in Waveland and East Pearl create excellent redfish habitat. Anglers can also fish many other marshy areas, including those bordering the Back Bay of Biloxi, Old Fort Bayou and around Bay St. Louis. Wherever you find cover that might hold redfish, you can fish a spinnerbait.

“The barrier islands are excellent places to look for redfish in the fall,” said Mark Wright with Legends of the Lower Marsh Charters in Pass Christian. “The mouth of any bayous, rivers or creeks that feed into Biloxi Bay or Bay St. Louis should produce good fishing. The marshes at the upper end of Bay St. Louis where the Jourdan and the Wolf rivers hit the bay can produce a lot of good redfish action.”

Since they can cover so much territory at all levels in the water column, spinnerbaits make phenomenal search baits. Anglers can cast them long distances, and even if a fish doesn't strike the offering, the spinnerbait makes such a commotion that it will react to one passing close by. If a fish reveals its position and doesn't attack the spinnerbait, follow up with a more subtle, soft-plastic temptation.

“With a spinnerbait, the fish will know it's there pretty quickly,” Tusa said. “When a redfish feels that pulsating vibration and sees that flash, it might come from a long distance to hit a spinnerbait. Since a spinnerbait makes a lot of commotion, it's a great bait to use in murky water, and we have a lot of murky water on the Mississippi coast.”

Fish for reds almost like for largemouth bass. Like bass, redfish habitually hang around cover, waiting to ambush an easy meal. Move quietly along a marshy shoreline, casting lures into any pockets or other irregularities. Intentionally bump baits into any hard cover, such as dock or bridge pilings and stumps. Stop occasionally to let the bait sink a few feet like a stunned baitfish.

## MOVING WATER REQUIRED

“Any place with moving water, points or pockets could be a good spot to catch redfish,” Tusa said. “Even the smallest point might hold a lot of fish. I look for little shell patches that most people don't even know exist. When looking at the grass, mud on the top may not necessarily be at the bottom. There might be a shell bank there under the water. Anywhere we can find water moving around a point or in a little ditch, those fish are going to be there.”

During an outgoing tide, falling water dislodges shrimp, crabs, minnows, mullets and other prey from cover and forces them into deeper waters. Black-spotted predators gather at the mouths of little ditches that drain marshy ponds to feast on anything the tide brings to them. Cast baits far up those little drains and run spinnerbaits slightly faster than the tide can carry them downstream.

The same conditions apply to points. Pay attention to the water flow. Reds regularly lurk on the downstream side of wind-swept points. They look toward the tidal or wind current for bait. Cast upwind past a point, and work a spinnerbait across the tip.

Whenever possible, run baits parallel to shorelines. Keep the baits just over the edge of a drop-off, if one exists. In places with submerged vegetation, let the bait sink until it runs just across the grass tips. Pause periodically to let the bait sink into the grass.

## FISH SIGNPOSTS

While working a shoreline, watch for fish activity. Look for shrimp flicking on the surface or agitated baitfish jumping for their lives. Also watch for the distinctive large, V-shaped wakes redfish make when cruising. Sometimes, anglers can spot individual fish with their backs or tails breaking the surface as they root in the mud for crabs, shrimp, mussels or other morsels. Don't drop a bait on a fish's head. If possible, throw the bait in front of or beyond the fish and bring the bait to it.

“Sometimes, we sight-fish for reds in the fall,” Tusa said. “Because of that vibration, I don't want to throw a spinnerbait too close to them or the bait might spook them. If I see them waking some distance away from me, I throw well beyond them and pull the bait toward them.”

Anglers can fish versatile spinnerbaits countless ways



**John N. Felsher** is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. He worked as the outdoors editor for several Louisiana newspapers and currently co-hosts a weekly outdoors radio show on WNSP 105.5 FM in Mobile, Ala. You can contact him at [JohnNFelsher.com](mailto:JohnNFelsher.com).



An in-line spinnerbait uses a straight wire extending from the head with a blade rotating around it. The design dates back to the 1890s, but it still catches fish like this red.

Photo by John N. Felsher

YES ONLY

Sarah Rodrigue admires a redfish she caught on a spinnerbait. Spinnerbaits provide flash and vibration, making tempting targets for redfish.



Photo by John N. Felsher

from top to bottom. Few things in nature run in a straight line, so at any depth, don't just reel steadily. That works, but add a little zing when passing a likely ambush spot. Shake the rod tip to make the skirt flair or trailer tail wiggle or reel with an irregular cadence. Any varied movements could change the sound a bait makes underwater, which might get a fish's attention.

Around matted grass and extreme shallows, buzz spinnerbaits across the surface or wake them just beneath it to create a bulge in the water. If a redfish sits in a shallow pocket and refuses to hit a bait, repeatedly churn the lure past its nose until that action enrages the brute enough to strike out of pure hatred.

Myriad oyster reefs dot coastal Mississippi waters. Slow-roll spinners just above the shells. Pause occasionally so the blades plink against the shells, rocks or other objects; the sound reverberates through the water. Also, sporadically hit the bottom to make a mud trail that mimics a crab scurrying along the bottom. Redfish follow mud trails looking for the crabs that made the disturbance.



## DEEP-WATER TRICKS

Besides shallow shorelines and oyster reefs, anglers can look for redfish around abundant deeper structures all along the Mississippi coastline. Deeper river channels and cover such as bridge or dock pilings, jetties and reefs might hold big reds. The state also established numerous artificial reefs at various depths along the coastline. These structures can hold big redfish.


"People can catch redfish anywhere along the Mississippi coast," Tusa said. "People have many options on where to fish for redfish in October, from river channels to marshes to the beaches. The area from Bayou Caddy to East Pearl River is a good area to look for redfish in the fall. People could even wade the beaches to catch fish coming in and out of the sandbars."

When fishing slightly deeper water, try a "helicopter" or "yo-yo" retrieve. Let the bait sink a few feet. As it descends, the blades keep flickering like a struggling baitfish. Big redfish commonly hit lures as they fall. If nothing happens, pull it back to the surface, move it a few feet and try again.

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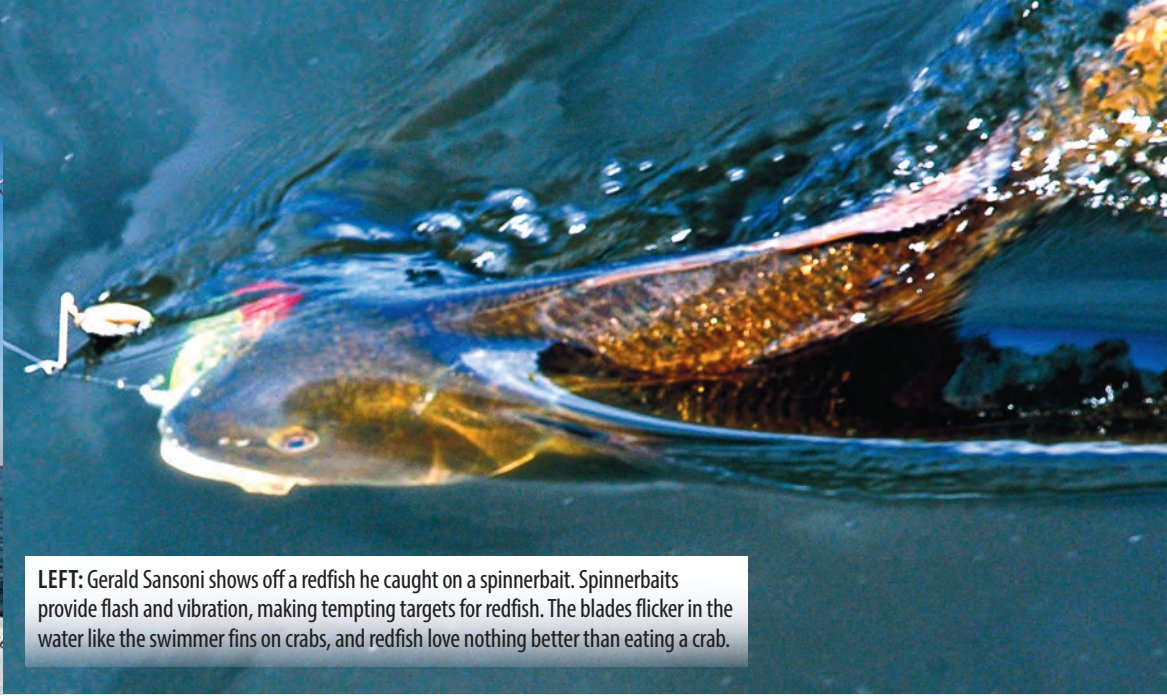
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PUT A SPIN ON REDFISH



LEFT: Gerald Sansoni shows off a redfish he caught on a spinnerbait. Spinnerbaits provide flash and vibration, making tempting targets for redfish. The blades flicker in the water like the swimmer fins on crabs, and redfish love nothing better than eating a crab.



Photos by John N. Felsher

ABOVE: A redfish comes to the boat after hitting a spinnerbait. Spinnerbaits provide flash and vibration. Redfish readily hit a variety of spinnerbaits from top to bottom around practically any type of cover.

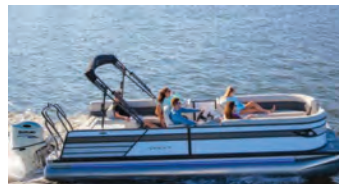
**W**hen fishing really deep, cold waters, try “worming” a spinnerbait. Let the lure sink to the bottom and crank it very slowly, with the blades barely turning. Then, yank it off the bottom by jerking the rod upward. Let it flutter back to the bottom like you work a Texas-rigged worm. Repeat that maneuver.

Mississippi sportsmen who use these techniques might put a few more spot-tails in the boat and experience incredibly thrilling action while doing it, and that’s not just spin! ■

To contact Matt Tusa of Bay St. Louis about a guided fishing trip, call 228-493-9743 or visit [www.shorethingcharters.com](http://www.shorethingcharters.com). To contact Mark Wright of Pass Christian, call 228-324-7612 or visit [legendsofthelowermarsh.com](http://legendsofthelowermarsh.com).

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**BIG SWIMBAITS ARE GREAT FALL BAITS FOR LUNKER BASS ACROSS MISSISSIPPI. HERE'S HOW, WHEN AND WHERE TO FISH THEM.**

# GET IN THE SWIM OF THINGS

By John N. Felsher

# BIG SWIMBAITS won't produce many bites, but any single strike could result in the **BASS OF A LIFETIME.**

Swimbait comes in many sizes and configurations, from the popular plastic-tipped jighead to lures that look so real someone might almost want to fillet and fry them. Some come with hollow bodies where anglers can insert a jighead and stick the hook into a special slot to make it weedless.

"Through the years, I've caught many big fish on swimbaits," said Paul Elias, a bass pro and past Bassmaster Classic champion from Laurel. "I like 7- to 9-inch, soft-plastic baits in a gizzard shad color. That's a great color to throw in October when bass feed heavily upon shad. Any of the clearer Mississippi lakes with vegetation would be good places to throw those baits."

Large swimbaits work best in lakes with robust populations of large baitfish and plentiful monster bass. Some large, jointed hard swimbaits closely resemble full-sized bluegills, tilapia, gizzard shad and other fish. Some float, and others sink slowly.

"When someone throws big swimbaits, they aren't fishing for a lot of bites, but looking for that one big bite," Elias said. "For big fish, I like the jointed baits that look like a bluegill or gizzard shad. Those baits work in any lakes across Mississippi with big bass."

## BIG, FAKE SHAD

Most Mississippi lakes contain abundant populations of threadfin or gizzard shad. A gizzard shad may grow to 12 inches or longer. A large bass can easily gulp down a big, fishy meal with its cavernous mouth. Even small bass regu-

larly attack lures almost as big as themselves.

"A big swimbait is a great bait for catching large bass," said Roger Stegall, a pro bass angler and guide from Iuka. "It also catches big smallmouth and spotted bass. One day, I caught a 4-pound bass that spit up a 13-inch largemouth. If a 4-pounder can eat a 13-inch bass, it can easily take in a 6- or 8-inch swimbait. Imagine what a 10-pounder could swallow."

Swimbait produces vibrations with their wagging tails, but they primarily attract fish by sight because they look like something a bass would naturally eat. In the fall, bass gorge themselves on baitfish before winter hits, and they regularly follow shad as they move up the creeks.

"In October, most Mississippi bass will be in shallow water or headed that way," Elias said. "Look for them around any logs, stumps or rocks; those are places where I would throw a big swimbait. That's where the shad are going to go, too. When the vegetation in lakes starts to break up in the fall, rig an 8-inch bait with a wide-gap hook on a 3/8-ounce weight and keep it 1 or 2 feet under the surface. Watch the bait as it works through the water."

## RIGGING OPTIONS >

A jointed, hard swimbait fooled this big largemouth bass. Big swimbaits won't load the boat with bass, but it will tempt big ones to make a big mistake.



## RIGGING OPTIONS

For fishing grass or shallow, wooden cover, try large, unweighted soft plastics. If necessary for casting heft, push a small finishing nail into its nose or attach a split-shot to the line. Insert the hook into the plastic to make it weedless. Skitter it across the top, pausing at openings so the bait sinks a little.

Over submerged grass beds, work a large, realistic hard bait very slowly. Occasionally jerk it so it slashes the water. Let sinking baits descend to the level of the grass tips so they hover in the strike zone just above the grass. A giant largemouth may not feed every day, but when it does, it usually wants one big meal without expending too much energy to grab it.

In the fall, also watch for schooling bass. Largemouth herd shad to the surface to cut off their escape. When chasing shad, bass might erupt anywhere without warning and suddenly vanish, only to reappear elsewhere moments later. Anglers can fling large baits long distances. Throw past the school and work the bait over it.

“If I can find a school of big fish, I think I’ve died and gone to heaven,” Stegall said. “That’s really the time for that swimbait. People can’t plan on that, but if they stumble on something like that, they can put a bunch of fish in the boat quickly.”

## PROBE DIFFERENT COVER

Some swimbaits come pre-rigged with shaped internal weights that create enticing wobbles. These baits sink fast, making them fantastic lures for probing depths, but they can tempt fish at any depth. Such baits work particularly well around bridge and dock pilings, flooded timber, bulkheads or other vertical cover where baitfish normally gather. Work baits as close to the objects as possible. Next to cover, pause the retrieve so the bait sinks a few feet.

“In standing timber, fish frequently suspend and orient toward



the trees,” said Jay Yelas, another pro and former Bassmaster Classic champion. “Throw baits past the trees and pull them through. When a bait hits a tree, slow it down considerably and try to finesse it through the limbs.”

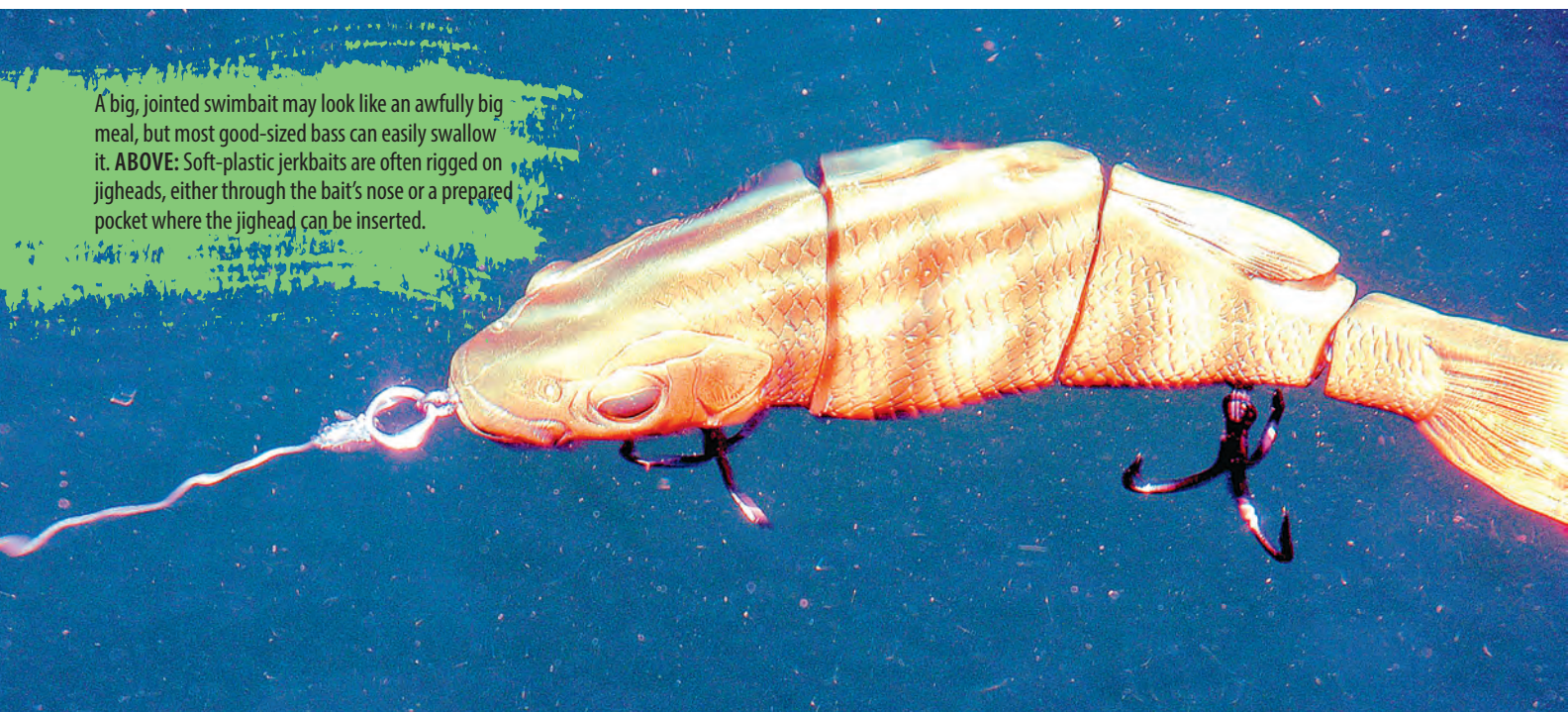
Swimbaits also work exceptionally well when fluttered next to riprap or along slowly tapering points, especially those with brush, rock piles or other cover just before the drop-off. Around deeper points and drops, let swimbaits sink to the bottom and slow-roll them back to the boat just off the bottom contour.

“I like to fish long, flat, slowly tapering points with swimbaits,” Yelas said. “These usually have a sharp drop-off at the end. Fish meander



**John N. Felsher** is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. He worked as the outdoors editor for several Louisiana newspapers and currently co-hosts a weekly outdoors radio show on WNSP 105.5 FM in Mobile, Ala. You can contact him at [JohnNFelsher.com](mailto:JohnNFelsher.com).

A big, jointed swimbait may look like an awfully big meal, but most good-sized bass can easily swallow it. **ABOVE:** Soft-plastic jerkbaits are often rigged on jigheads, either through the bait's nose or a prepared pocket where the jighead can be inserted.



back and forth across the flat, either deep or shallow. Often, bass suspend just over the drop-off. Around deeper points with no cover, let the swimbait sink to the bottom and then crawl it back to the boat extremely slowly, just off the bottom.”

In extremely deep water, try jigging or “worming” swimbaits. Fishing it like a heavy jig or spinnerbait, let the lure hit bottom, then, slowly hop it off the bottom and let it sink again. Keep working it to entice any finicky or lethargic fish resting in deep holes. Anglers could also vertically jig heavy swimbaits.

“When fish go deep, I like to fish a heavy swimbait with the weight built into the body and the hook exposed,” Elias said. “I let it go to the bottom and then bounce it off. I’ll make three of four cranks on the reel handle and let the bait swim back down to the bottom again.”

### FISH BIG-BASS LAKES >

Roger Stegall, a guide on Pickwick Lake, said a swimbait is the perfect weapon to throw into school bass, especially big fish.



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## FISH BIG-BASS LAKES

Since large swimbaits work best on giant bass, throw them in places that produce lunkers. Some of the best trophy bass fishing in Mississippi occurs at Pickwick Lake near Iuka. The Tennessee River impoundment holds many 4- to 8-pound largemouths and has produced at least one 14½-pounder. Pickwick also delivered the Mississippi state-record smallmouth, a 7-pound, 15-ounce bruiser.

“Pickwick is a great place to throw swimbaits,” Stegall said. “Bay Springs is another good lake for this type of fishing. Few people think about it, but Lake Ferguson, a Mississippi River oxbow near Greenville, holds a lot of 3- to 6-pound bass.”

Pickwick connects to Bay Springs Lake in Tishomingo and Prentiss counties through the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. Deep and clear, Bay Springs produces spotted bass exceeding 5 pounds and some topping 7, as well as double-digit largemouths. The only lake entirely within Mississippi with a smallmouth population, Bay Springs can yield some trophy brownies.

Another Mississippi River oxbow, Lake Washington in Washington County, dates back 700 years and still produces double-digit bass. Known more for slab crappie, the “Big Four” flood-control lakes — Arkabutla, Enid, Grenada and Sardis — also hold giant largemouth. Another favorite, Ross Barnett near Jackson, produces large numbers of fish, but can also give up some lunkers.

Many small Mississippi lakes contain the biggest bass. The

Mississippi state record, an 18.15-pound largemouth, came out of 230-acre Natchez State Park Lake. Other outstanding small waters include Lakes Bogue Homa, Lamar Bruce, Jeff Davis and Neshoba County lakes.

One of the hottest bass impoundments in Mississippi, Calling Panther Lake, covers 512 acres west of Crystal Springs. Heavily stocked with Florida-strain largemouths, it holds many bass in the 10- to 13-pound range and has produced some topping 15 pounds.

Targeting giant bass with big baits requires stout tackle. Many anglers use braided line tipped with either a monofilament or fluorocarbon leader. Fluorocarbon becomes almost invisible in water and sinks faster than monofilament; it stretches a little when fish hit, so anglers are less likely to yank the hook out of the fish’s mouth. Use a rod with enough backbone to work large baits and yank behemoth bass from entangling cover.

“It doesn’t matter whether fishing shallow or deep, a person needs to throw big swimbaits on a big, heavy rod,” Elias said. “I use a 7-foot-8 or a 7-foot-11, heavy action rod and a bait-casting reel with a 7.3:1 gear ratio. I use 50-pound braid. I’ll use a 10-inch leader of 20- to 25-pound monofilament. A person must be very patient to fish a big swimbait, but the rewards can be great. On any cast, a person could catch his or her personal best bass.” ■

*Guide Roger Stegall can be contacted for information on Pickwick Lake fishing trips at 662-423-3869 or [www.Fishpickwick.com](http://www.Fishpickwick.com).*



Bass pro Paul Elias of Laurel catches bass on big swimbaits all over Mississippi. He said they work well on lakes with big baitfish.

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## GETTIN' FRESH

Hal Schramm

Even though a high percentage of anglers practice catch-and-release, low mortality coupled with high capture rates year after year can reduce the abundance of big bass.



Photo courtesy Brian Dolski

# THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE

## THE FORCE OF FISHING ON BASS POPULATIONS CAN BE MEASURED

I've heard it again and again: fishing pressure is increasing. Based on what I see on the lakes I fish, I fully agree.

Whether the number of anglers is increasing or staying the same, a lot of guys and gals are on the water catching bass. A recent Auburn University study by researchers Jeff Buckingham and Dr. Matt Catalano assessed the capture rate: the proportion of the largemouth bass population greater than 15 inches — the legal minimum length — caught by anglers in Lake Guntersville.

### THE STUDY DESIGN

A variable-reward tagging study was used to estimate bass capture rates during 2014 and 2015. The concept is simple: the number of angler-recaptured tagged bass divided by the number of tagged bass at large equals the proportion of the population caught. Recaptures were totaled separately for harvested bass, caught-and-released (C&R) bass, and bass caught in tournaments.

While the math for calculating capture rate is straightforward, obtaining accurate numbers can be difficult.

First, tagging can cause mortality; this reduces the number of tagged bass at large and, without appropriate adjustment to calculations, leads to under-

estimation of capture rate. To estimate tagging mortality, the Auburn researchers monitored the survival of bass in small research ponds tagged with the same tag as applied to Guntersville bass. All but one of 68 tagged bass were recovered when the ponds were drained after one month, a mortality rate of 1.5%.

Second, bass can shed tags, and failure to account for tag loss can also lead to underestimation of capture rate. To estimate tag loss, the researchers monitored tag retention of bass stocked into research ponds tagged with the same tag applied to Guntersville bass. Tag loss was zero after one month and only 3.7 percent after one year.

One more variable — tag reporting rate — must also be known to accurately estimate capture rate. Numerous past studies to estimate bass capture rate have found that, unfortunately, many anglers failed to report tagged fish, even when cash rewards were offered.

### OFFER A REWARD

The standard approach to estimate tag reporting rate is to tag a few fish with high-reward tags and assume that all these tags are reported and the capture rate of bass tagged with high-reward tags is the same as bass tagged with low-reward tags. The ratio of high-reward

tags returned to high-reward tags in the population is compared to the same ratio for low-reward tags to estimate the reporting rate of the far-more-numerous low-reward tags.

Other studies have established that a \$100 reward per tag is sufficient to achieve 100% tag reporting. This study used \$150 high-reward tags and \$5 reward for the low-reward tags.

A total of 3,885 bass larger than 15 inches were captured by electrofishing and tagged in the spring and fall from November 2013 to February 2015; 280 of these fish were tagged with high-reward tags. Anglers caught and reported 890 bass during the two-year study.

Tag reports were tallied separately for harvest anglers, non-tournament catch-and-release anglers, and tournament anglers. The reporting rates were 49% for harvest anglers, 38% for catch-and-release anglers, and 15% for tournament anglers.

Although similar to reporting rates in some other studies, these low tag-



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

It might be hard to believe that anglers can catch more than half of the legal bass in 69,000-acre Lake Guntersville, but similar high bass catch rates have been measured in other popular bass lakes.



reporting rates hinder this and other studies conducted to improve fishing. The tags were 5 inches long, readily visible and had clearly printed instructions to report tags by phone or email. Posters at all lake access points and elsewhere alerted anglers to the study and the importance of reporting tags. Yet reporting rates were less than 50%. Please be a player in efforts to improve your fishing and, at the same time, put a few bucks in your pocket by reporting all tagged fish caught.

## STUDY RESULTS

When all the data were brought together, necessary adjustments made for tag loss, tagging mortality, and tag reporting, 56% and 50% of the legal-size bass were caught per year from 69,000-acre Lake Guntersville during the study. More than half of these fish were caught by non-tournament catch-and-release anglers, and less than 5% were caught by harvest anglers.

With such a high proportion of the population captured, mortality is a concern. For harvest anglers, mortality is 100%. Using mortality rates available from other studies, the Auburn researchers estimated catch-and-release mortality at 5% and tournament mortality at 5% to 14% depending on seasonal water temperature. Total annual fishing mortality was 10%. Of that mortality, about 55% was attributable to harvest anglers, 18% percent to catch-and-release anglers and 27% to tournament anglers.

Not surprising were the seasonal capture rates: far greater in the spring than winter. Summer capture rates were about half those of the spring, and fall capture rates about one-third of the spring rates.

Tucked away in the results was something I found interesting: based on tag returns, capture probability was not affected by age of bass. In other words, the numbers of bass may get fewer with age, but big bass are just as catchable as smaller bass. ■

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## LUNKER LINES

Paul Elias

Most of the bass you catch on an October trip to Maynor Creek will weigh between 1½ and 3 pounds, but there's potential to boat a much bigger fish.



# OCTOBER ON MAYNOR CREEK

FISH UPPER END OF LAKE WITH TOPWATER, CRANKBAIT, BUZZBAIT WITH FROG TRAILER

**In** October, I like to fish Maynor Creek, just west of Waynesboro, because it's a small lake. You can fish it in a day, it has plenty of lily pads and the bass there stay shallow almost all year-long. The bass will be in 1 to 3 feet of water, the lake's vegetation will have thinned out and the shad and the bluegills will move into the lily pads.

## EARLY MORNING

I'll start early morning fishing in the upper end of the lake, which is divided by a bridge and roadbed going across it. Around the bridge, I'll fish a shad-colored Zara Spook on 30-pound bass braid with a 20-pound White Peacock

fluorocarbon leader, on a 6-foot-10, medium action FX Custom rod and a 7.3:1 Bruin reel. I'll work both sides of the rocks around the points of the bridge and for about 50 yards below the bridge and around the bridge pilings with the Spook.

I'll start off fishing the Spook fairly fast but will let the bass dictate how they want the lure. This won't produce numbers of bass; however, you may catch 3- to 5-pounders, and possibly a 6- to 8-pounder.

I'll also fish a shad-colored Mann's C4 crankbait there on a 7-foot-1, medium-action FX Custom rod with a 6.2:1 ELS Bruin reel and 20-pound fluorocarbon. If I have some bass blow up on the Spook or the crankbait without a hookup, I'll follow up by casting a Mann's SpringR worm with no weight on 10-pound bass braid with a fluorocarbon leader on a 7-foot-4 FX Custom spinning rod. I'll rig the SpringR worm with a No. 1/0 wacky rig hook. I'll

spend 1 to 1½ hours at first light fishing around the bridge.

## LATER ON

After that, I'll crank up my big engine, go to the back end of the creek and begin fishing the edges of and the pockets in the lily pads with a ¾-ounce buzzbait with the skirt removed and replaced with a soft frog. I'll have two of these combinations on rods on my casting deck. Putting the frog on keeps the buzzbait riding higher in the water than with a skirt, and you can fish it more slowly. My line will be 40-pound bass braid spooled on an 8:1 ELS Bruin reel on a 7-foot-3 heavy action FX Custom rod. I'll tie the frog straight to the buzzbait with no leader. I prefer a clacker-type buzzbait that I can reel slowly and barely get it to clack. Watch your



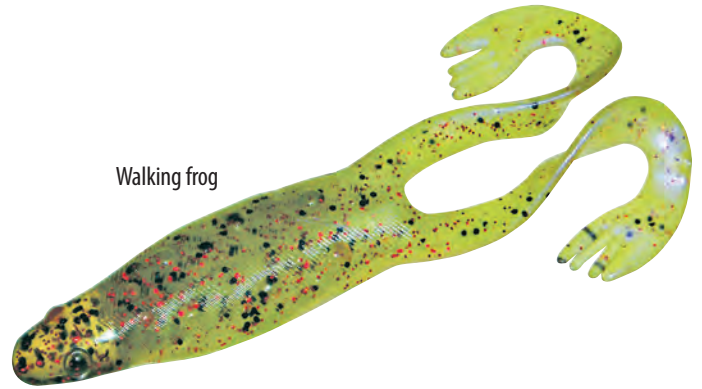
Zara Spook



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.



Popping frog



Walking frog

lure as it's coming to the boat, because often, bass will sneak up behind the frog and suck it underwater.

A good day of October fishing at Maynor Creek should produce about 15 bass, most weighing from 1½ to 3 pounds, but you'll probably have a chance to catch an 8- or 9-pound bass. ■

## GO FROGGING

Next, I'll fish that same area with two different types of frogs: a Mann's Super Frog, which is a walking frog, and a popping frog on 50-pound bass braid on a 7-foot-3, heavy action FX Custom rod with a 7.3:1 ELS Bruin reel.

I'll spend most of the rest of the day north of the bridge, and I'll fish it thoroughly. I'll pay close attention to the spots where I hear the most baitfish smacking under the lily pads, because the bass will concentrate in those places.

I'll retrieve the white walking frog fairly fast, bringing it across the tops of the lily pads and then slowing it down at openings in the pads. I'll cast a black popping frog in the thicker pads; I'll cast it onto the tops of the pads, pull it off into open water pockets and pop it. Once the frog reaches the edge of open water, I'll pop it, let it sit still for an instant or two, pull it out of that hole up on top of the pads, reel it to another open pocket and repeat the same action.

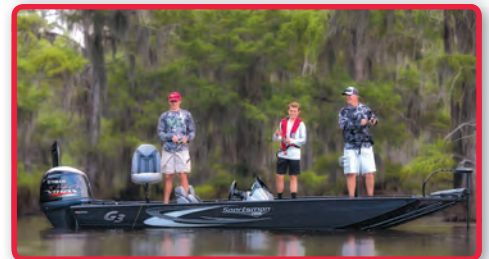
When you're fishing both frogs using both techniques, you'll miss about 50% of the bass that attack your baits. But you can return later and fish those same places, since bass may be holding in the same areas.



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## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Cotton Cordell's Boy Howdy has been reintroduced and is ready for action.

# COTTON CORDELL BOY HOWDY

A REVERED, OLD TOPWATER LURE GETS A NEW LOOK AND RETURNS TO THE MARKET

**B**ass fishermen in the know have hailed a 26-year-old Fort Smith, Ark., bass angler as a hero for his recent work with artificial lures.

Dustin Elder helps them put bass in the boat whenever they throw Cotton Cordell's tail-weighted Boy Howdy, a discontinued topwater that was dusted off at his urging, redesigned and reintroduced last year by PRADCO Outdoor Brands.

Elder, who began his association with PRADCO while he was in college, made it his business to get the ultra-popular lure from a few decades ago back on the clear waters of lakes in the region and across the U.S.

"I've been throwing it since I was 7 or 8 years old, nearly 20 years, since I was able to cast a spinning rod," Elder said.

It's deadly when bass are schooling, slurping up baitfish, because it mimics panfish, like bream, going to the surface to pick off a snack. It's also deadly over brush piles and other structures for the same reason because it "looks like bream popping," according to Elder.

"The biggest tip is just to try it. It gets

bit because it has action no other topwater bait has. It's really neat," he said. "Typically, when they hit the bait they just about choke on it."

## VERTICAL FLOATER

Elder said the Boy Howdy floats vertically, practically straight up and down in the water, when it's motionless.

The best situations for a Boy Howdy bite are when fish are suspended, perhaps around a point or a big flat. Cast and find a cadence that triggers bites, he advised.

Elder has plenty of opportunity to tie on the Boy Howdy and give it a workout on his favorite bodies of water in and around Arkansas.

"I'm fishing all the time. I spend about every bit of free time bass fishing, crappie fishing, guiding. I just love to fish," said Elder, who earned a bachelor's degree in advertising and public relations at the University of Arkansas in 2017, where he was on the bass-fishing team. While he was studying, he had his sights set joining PRADCO, where his father, Chris Elder, was a pro staff member and knew

Bruce Stanton, now vice president/general manager. The younger Elder talked to Stanton and shared his plans.

Elder began his career with PRADCO in January 2018 after starting as an intern in May 2016. He has been PRADCO's promotional staff manager since April.

Elder's knowledge and affinity for the Boy Howdy paved the way for its reintroduction in 2020.

"This tail-weighted model was around in the 1990s. It was a closely guarded secret for schooling fish. People were hoarding them," he said. "It was popular in clear-water lakes in Arkansas, Missouri and Texas. Lake Ouachita, where I grew up, is where it is probably known as the best (topwater)."

The Boy Howdy was discontinued, and hundreds of bass anglers were upset. Elder listened to them.



**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.

"I heard from enough people, 'You've got to bring it back!' Finally, we did," he said. "I mentioned it since I was pretty much an intern, as I grew into the company. I said, 'I want to bring back the tail-weighted Boy Howdy,' and they allowed me to."

That was during the summer of 2019.

## NO CHANGES

"The design was done exactly as the same ones that my grandpa used. It's actually a really simple, weighted topwater," Elder said, whose father made a video demonstrating how to work it in September 2020. View it at [https://youtu.be/sP\\_thFWEzOs](https://youtu.be/sP_thFWEzOs).

PRADCO reintroduced the bait at ICAST 2020. Of course, due to COVID-19, the splash was muted compared to normal times. The reintroduced Boy Howdy is 4½ inches long, weighs ¾-ounce and is armed with No. 4, short-shanked treble hooks.

Elder said Cotton Cordell increased the available colors on the Boy Howdy from the original four to 10. So far, the favorites are clear/blue nose, black/gold, chrome/blue and chrome/black.

Boy Howdys hit the market, to the joy of many, in the fall of 2020. "Sales have been very good," he said. "There were a lot of people lined up who wanted to buy several of them. It was very well received, especially around the Diamond Lakes around central Arkansas — Hot Springs and the Little Rock area."

At Trader Bill's Outdoor Sports in Hot Springs, he talked to "a lot of people."

"I'll see them at the store, and they say to me, 'My grandpa caught so many fish on it.' I've heard a lot of reviews like that," Elder said. ■

*For more information on the PRADCO Outdoor Brand products, including Cotton Cordell, go to [pradcooutdoorbrands.com](http://pradcooutdoorbrands.com).*



Dustin Elder, PRADCO's pro staff manager, has been fishing with Boy Howdys since he was a boy. He was instrumental in getting the topwater reintroduced for catches of bass like the "hawg" he is holding.

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## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope



Cobia are a favorite fish of nearshore anglers, who catch them on a variety of baits and lures across the Gulf Coast.

Brian Cope

# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: COBIA

**C**obia (*Rachycentron canadum*) are long, torpedo-shaped fish with dark brown backs, dark brown sides and white stomachs.

Most have two distinct, silvery stripes that run the length of their sides. Their lower jaw protrudes farther out than their upper jaw. These fish have deeply forked tails. They have broad heads, and seven to nine isolated spines along the forward section of their backs. A long dorsal fin with 27 to 33 rays is located behind these spines.

Their growth patterns are a bit of a mystery to fisheries biologists. A 2-year-old cobia can be longer and heavier than a 6-year-old fish. Their growth rates are based much more on their diets than their ages.

## A REAL BUFFET

And when it comes to diets, cobia are not picky eaters. They will eat just about anything they can fit in their mouths. Studies have found as many as 39 different species of fish in a single cobia's stomach. And while anglers most often

use fish as bait for cobia, the same studies have shown that crabs make up the majority of a cobia's diet.

When young, cobia look very much like remoras, except for the absence of the suction cup-shaped mouth. When older, they resemble sharks, except for the absence of a shark's iconic dorsal fin. They are the only members of the *Rachycentridae* family.

These fish are pelagic, living most of their lives offshore, but they enter estuaries occasionally. Fisheries biologists have found that some small groups of cobia do not migrate at all, but they aren't sure why. They are fairly solitary fish, traveling in very small pods only during spawning season, which lasts through the summer. Most spawn in the mouths of inshore bays and creeks, but some spawning occurs in the open ocean. Cobia often travel closely with sea turtles.

## CURIOUS FISH

They are curious fish, constantly investigating surface objects and noises that most other species of fish avoid. Anglers

often slap the sides of their boats, play loud music, and scatter potato chips and other food items on the surface. Any of these acts can draw cobia in to investigate. When one is spotted, anglers cast a lure or bait in front of the fish. They very often take the bait immediately.

Some common nicknames for cobia include Man in the Brown Suit, lemon-fish, ling, black salmon, black mackerel, prodigal son, cabio, and crab eater.

The Louisiana state-record cobia weighed 149.75 pounds and was caught by Garnett "Lucky" Caudell. He caught the fish in Grand Isle Block 69 in May 1965. Mississippi's state record weighed 106 pounds, 13 ounces. Randy McDaniel caught the fish in May 1996. ■



**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.

## GAMAKATSU DURASCENT BAITS

Gamakatsu has made some of the world's best fish hooks for years, and finally, the company has come out with sometime to put on those hooks.

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DuraScent baits are made from a

super-soft elastomer that is extremely durable and flexible, allowing baits to be stretched out to six times their original length, and they also float.

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## EINOVA ULTRA FAST POWER BANK

So, what does a hunter or fisherman need with a portable charging station for his electronic devices: laptops, tablets, even telephones?

Well, on a 3-day turkey hunt two seasons ago, I left my phone charger at home. By the time the hunt was over, my phone was running on fumes. Had I kept Einova's 63W Laptop Power Bank in my laptop case, as I do now, I'd have been in high cotton, able to charge my phone repeatedly instead of turning it off to save battery whenever possible.

This portable charging station provides

multiple charges for phones, laptops and tablets without having to be recharged itself. Two USB ports and USB-C and USB-A adaptors set you up to keep most any object charged that you might need in a remote deer, turkey or fishing camp.

The charging bank has three ports and can charge multiple devices at the same time. An LCD display showed the remaining battery life at a glance.

**MSRP: \$69.99**

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

## AVIAN X SPIN MALLARD

It had to happen. Avian-X, which has brought to the waterfowl hunting market some of the most-realistic decoys, has added a spinning-wing version, the PowerFlight Mallard, to its lineup.

The PowerFlight Mallard features Avian-X's spot-on, detailed painting and molding, plus heavy duty wings and a life-like head position to perfectly mimic a landing greenhead.

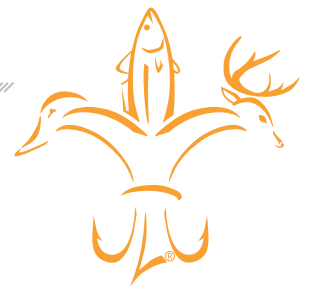
The patent-pending "Angel Wing" design spins 360 degrees at actual duck wing speed, and a remote that's good to 60 yards allows you to spin the decoys wings continually or in an intermittent mode: spinning for 5 seconds, off for 3 seconds, which gives the illusion of a duck landing.

The decoy's weather-resistant housing will

protect in winds up to 30 mph, and the lithium-ion battery is good for 16 consecutive hours of use. It's rechargeable, and a standard 6-volt lead battery can be substituted when recharging the original.

**MSRP: \$199.99**

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## TACO MACK STUFFED PEPPERS

HERE'S A DIFFERENT TAKE ON AN OFTEN-MALIGNED FISH

**W**e've made it into fall, a special time in the Southeast. It features the best weather of the year — except for those occasional hurricanes that can momentarily push the weather to the bad side. Still, it's the season most sportsmen find the best, nicest weather and most-pleasant temperatures of the year.

No other season offers more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors during the fall. Hunting seasons are going again, and fishing is as good as it gets. Mornings are cool enough to require a sweatshirt or light jacket, but days warm into shirt-sleeve weather. It's one of the best times for sportsmen, and there is little wonder so many sportsmen look forward to fall in these parts.

Fall fishing is excellent, and king mackerel are one of the most highly sought-after species. They are available for all fishermen, too. Kings sometimes get so involved in feeding on a school of baitfish they follow them inside larger inlets and can be caught in protected water. However, the better fishing begins at the ends of coastal fishing piers and heads offshore from there.

Menhaden schools are making their way down most beaches, and kings are rarely far from them. They feel the

water cooling and feed more ravenously than usual. In this push to feed, they lose some wariness and will hit a variety of baits and lures, making them easier to catch; most fishermen are successful.

Fall kings range from 10 pounds to some reel smokers that weigh 50 or more. There's a lot of meat on a king, and most folks eat them with a few tried-and-true, basic recipes. This recipe is a different way that I'm pretty sure only a small handful of folks have tried.

I'm going to recommend trying this. Kings are high in Omega 3 fatty acids that can help keep your heart healthy. They taste good, and that's another good thing. Some folks say mackerel has a strong taste, and that's okay — for them. However, I disagree. Kings I have eaten that were cleaned well and cooked properly were good. Give this a try. The pieces are small, cleaned of all red meat and cooked properly. Besides, it's such an interesting recipe, you have to try it. I like it and I'm sure you will, too. It's unusually good. ■

Jerry Dilsaver



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Sauteeing onions and pepper tops is an early step in taco mack stuffed peppers. **INSET:** A dollop of chunky salsa tops off the mackerel-stuffed pepper.

# TACO MACK STUFFED PEPPER

I'll bet even long-time readers are scratching their heads, wondering about this recipe. I don't shy from the unusual, and this definitely fits unusual. However, get ready for a pleasant surprise. This odd mixture of ingredients, which I still find difficult to believe can combine this well, works. It isn't fish tacos, but it tastes like fish and like tacos and is served in a roasted bell pepper. You know you've gotta try it.

At least once a year, I remind readers that I like king mackerel. Thinking back to things my dad said about food, I don't think it will put hair on your chest, but it tastes good and is good for you in measured amounts.

I suggest using fresh king mackerel that was buried in ice as soon as it was caught. Many folks believe a smaller one will have a milder taste. Be sure to clean the mackerel well, removing all traces of the skin and any red or dark meat. It doesn't matter if the meat is from a fillet or a steak. A fillet will yield a slab of meat, while a steak will yield the four loins. The steak I had, I used a sharp fillet knife to remove the skin and trimmed each loin away from the backbone.

I cut the meat into pieces and season it with the taco seasoning immediately. It helps for the seasoning to sit a while. I usually use a salt-free taco seasoning, and several will come up if you Google salt-free taco seasoning. To keep this simple, I used a package of Old El Paso taco seasoning with 25% less sodium. If you would like a strong taco flavor, use about two-thirds of the package to season the fish. For a lighter taco taste, use less. About half the package is a good starting point.

The bell peppers really affect the taste. I like the milder and slightly sweeter taste of colored bell peppers, if they are available. If you make this using green bell peppers, take the time to get a pot of lightly salted water boiling and boil the peppers for 5 minutes. This will tenderize the peppers and take the edge off their taste.

## PREPARATION:

Cook the rice according to the manufacturer's directions and set aside. Remove all skin and bones from mackerel. Cut the mackerel into bite-sized pieces. Sprinkle the mackerel with the taco seasoning.

Remove tops, cores and seeds from peppers. Remove stems and seeds from pepper tops. Dice pepper tops and onion. Using some non-stick cooking spray, sauté the garlic, diced pepper tops and diced onions until the onions are opaque. Very quickly (approximately 1 to 2 minutes) sear the pieces of fish.

Mix the rice, pepper tops, onion, chili peppers and fish in a large bowl. Use a pepper rack or form aluminum foil to place the peppers in a baking pan so they won't fall over. Fill the peppers to rounded with the fish and rice mixture.

Preheat the oven to 350. Add ½ cup of water to the baking pan. Bake for 30 to 45 minutes, being careful not to scorch the peppers. Sprinkle approximately 1 cup of cheese over the rice and fish mixture in the peppers. Return to the oven for 1 to 2 minutes to lightly melt cheese.

Serve each pepper with another light sprinkling of cheese

Some folks don't believe it, but cooking rice is an art. I like the rice fluffier and cook it a couple of minutes less than the package suggests. I let it sit a few more minutes than the directions before fluffing it. This helps the rice bond with the fish and veggies. If you like drier rice, cook it the full time suggested on the package.

If you like a different cheese, feel free to use it. This recipe is the simple version for anyone. When making this just for myself and friends who like spicier food, I use pepper jack. I also have some friends who add a spoonful of sour cream on the top. I encourage experimenting with a recipe.

Hot sauce is a personal choice; some like it, and some don't. Texas Pete Sabor Mexican hot sauce is a good one if you haven't tried these or don't recognize the difference. The Mexican hot sauces aren't vinegar-based like regular Texas Pete, Louisiana brand and many other hot sauces, and that is important when mixing with this. To me, the vinegar-based hot sauces just don't taste right. Give this a try; it adds flavor and isn't fiery hot.

This recipe will fill six peppers, but I only had four. I filled the four and used the excess with a plate of tortilla chips. That was good, too. I often eat it with tortilla chips on the side, and they really do add to the taco feel and flavor. Enjoy! ■

Filletted mackerel loins are trimmed of all red meat before being chopped into pieces.

and a healthy dollop or two of chunky salsa. An option for serving is to split the pepper, then sprinkle more cheese and add the chunky salsa. Tortilla chips go very well with this and add to the taco taste. I prefer low-salt blue corn chips. I'm a salad guy and would begin this meal with a green salad or lettuce wedge. A slice of key lime pie, with a big spoonful of whipped cream, is an excellent way to finish this meal. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1½-pound wahoo fillet
- 1 medium sweet onion
- 1 pound king mackerel steak or fillet
- 6 colored bell peppers
- 1 parge pkg yellow rice
- ½ sweet onion
- 2 tbsp green chili peppers
- 2 tsp granulated garlic
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 pkg taco seasoning
- 1 jar chunky salsa
- Buttery flavored non-stick cooking spray.
- Options:** Tortilla chips, taco sauce, hot sauce or Mexican hot sauce and different cheeses.



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



# REVERSE SEARED VENISON

## INGREDIENTS:

### Venison:

- 8- to 10-inch venison backstrap or 2 tenderloins
- 2 TBSP high-temp oil (vegetable, avocado, etc.)
- 1 TSP coarse sea salt
- 1 TSP fresh ground black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 sprig Rosemary
- 2 TBSP butter

## INGREDIENTS:

### Chanterelle Cream Sauce:

- 1 cup chanterelle mushrooms (store-bought mushrooms will work great, too)
- 1 shallot
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 TBSP butter
- ¼ cup of white wine
- 1 cup heavy cream
- Coarse sea salt and fresh ground black pepper to taste

**P**ass the backstrap...but hold the bacon. The backstrap, or loin, is the king of cuts when it comes to venison. Some prefer it smeared with cream cheese, stuffed with jalapeños and wrapped in bacon, while others like it sliced and fried. Whatever your preference, this king of cuts should be treated

### PREPARATION: Serves 2

Rub your backstrap with 1 tablespoon of olive oil, then salt and pepper generously. Set the seasoned backstrap out to warm up to room temperature (~30 minutes).

While the backstrap is coming to room temperature, preheat your oven to 215°F.

Place the seasoned backstrap on top of a baking sheet with a rack and place in the heated oven until it reaches an internal temp of 120°F (~45 to 60 minutes depending on the thickness).

While the venison is coming to temperature in the oven, roughly chop the chanterelle mushrooms and mince the shallots and garlic.

Heat a medium pan to medium-high heat and add the butter. When it melts and starts to bubble/brown, add the chanterelle mushrooms and shallots. Once the shallots turn translucent and the mushrooms release their moisture (~3 to 5 minutes), pour in the wine and minced garlic.

When the liquid in the pan is reduced by half, lower the heat to medium-low and pour in the cream. Season to taste. Stir thoroughly until reduced to the desired consistency or until it coats the back of a spoon.

While the chanterelle mushroom cream sauce is reducing, heat a cast-iron pan to high heat and add a tablespoon or two of high-temp oil to the pan. Sear the venison on all sides. Once seared, lower the heat to medium and add butter, whole garlic cloves and rosemary to the pan. Baste the venison on all sides with the butter until it reaches your desired internal temperature.

Once your venison reaches the desired doneness, remove from pan and let rest for 5 minutes. This will allow the juices to

like the prize it is. I prefer to cook backstrap like filet mignon: salt, pepper, a hard sear and basted with butter.

Nothing pairs with backstrap better than the chanterelle mushrooms that are growing in the Louisiana woods where the deer in your freezer was once grazing.

re-absorbed into the meat.

Plate the venison, top it with the chanterelle cream sauce, and serve with your favorite sides. ■

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



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Plan out the shot and get an image you can proudly hang on your wall. Andrew Pruitt of Homer killed this 8-point buck the morning of Oct. 2 in Claiborne Parish, La. It was his second and biggest buck with a bow and scored 117 inches.



# 10 TIPS FOR BETTER WHITETAIL TROPHY PHOTOS

TAKE PICTURES THAT  
REALLY CAPTURE THAT  
SPECIAL MEMORY

**S**o you've killed a monster buck. Now what? You could just field-dress the deer and move on with your life — but how will you remember that special moment?

Or, even better, how will you get your image run in your favorite outdoor magazine?

That's where a good photo comes into play.

But all it takes is a bit of planning to have an image you can proudly hang on the wall — and at least have a shot at the cover of *Mississippi Sportsman*.

Here are some tips to take better photos.

• **Plan ahead.** Make sure your battery is charged up and you have enough room on your memory card.

• **Know what the subject is.** I can't tell you how disappointing it is to receive a photo of a great deer only to discover that whoever took the shot apparently thought capturing the cleaning shed, the camp, the forest behind the camp and everyone's ATVs was important. The result is that the deer head is so small that we can't use it.

So get up close and frame the shot so all that clutter doesn't show.

• **Pick your background.** It's related to the previous tip, but it only takes a minute or two to move a deer to clean up the background.

I like to drag the deer over to the woods next to the camp and use that as a background.

• **Clean up a little.** Deer hunting is a bloody sport, but you don't have to take a photo with red stuff streaming from a deer's nose and gore pooled under the head.

You can use a rag, a paper towel or just use some leaves to clean off all that blood.

• **Don't just point and shoot.** There's secret to making that deer look impressive, and it's really simple.

What you want to do is get as close to the subject as your camera/lens will allow. The closer you get, the bigger the subject looks.

Of course, you have to balance a few things to ensure the image isn't just of deer head.

Make sure you can see the hunter's face. That might mean

backing up a bit or repositioning the subject a little.

And for the love of all that's holy, don't have the hunter stiff-arm the camera. Instead, ensure the hunter keeps his elbows bent.

You want the image to look natural.

• **Get the right angle.** This is vitally important with deer. I never stand up when taking a photo of a proud hunter and his kill.

Instead, I usually lay down so I'm eye level with the deer. This makes the deer the center of attention.

• **Smile.** You enjoyed killing that deer, right? You smiled after you saw the beautiful sight of that deer piled up, I'm sure.

But for some reason, many people think they need to look serious in photos. That makes it look like their mad.

So smile and let everyone know how much you enjoy the sport. ■

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

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

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2021 OCT		BEST DAYS			
		POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL. VALUE
Fri 1					46
Sat 2					45
Sun 3					53
Mon 4					61
Tue 5					69
Wed 6					71
Thu 7					59
Fri 8					47
Sat 9					33

Sun 10					25
Mon 11					28
Tue 12					37
Wed 13					37
Thu 14					23
Fri 15					24
Sat 16					25
Sun 17					37
Mon 18					47
Tue 19					57
Wed 20					64
Thu 21					66
Fri 22					49
Sat 23					40

Sun 24					38
Mon 25					40
Tue 26					41
Wed 27					47
Thu 28					57
Fri 29					47
Sat 30					40
Sun 31					31

25 50 75  
AVERAGE

		LUNAR PERIODS			
		TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED			
		PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD		PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
MOON RISE				MOON SET	
1:46 AM		7:27 am - 10:57 am		4:33 PM	7:52 pm - 11:22 pm
2:48 AM		8:23 am - 11:43 am		5:10 PM	8:48 pm - 12:08 am
3:53 AM		9:22 am - 12:24 pm		5:44 PM	9:47 pm - 12:49 am
4:59 AM		10:21 am - 1:03 pm		6:16 PM	10:46 pm - 1:28 am
6:06 AM		11:20 am - 1:42 pm	☀	6:46 PM	11:45 pm - Midnight
7:15 AM		12:22 pm - 2:20 pm	☀	7:17 PM	Midnight - 2:07 am
8:25 AM		1:23 pm - 3:01 pm		7:50 PM	12:47 am - 2:45 am
9:37 AM		2:27 pm - 3:45 pm		8:27 PM	1:48 am - 3:26 am
10:51 AM		3:32 pm - 4:34 pm		9:09 PM	2:52 am - 4:10 am
12:03 PM		4:39 pm - 5:27 pm		9:58 PM	3:57 am - 4:59 am
1:13 PM		5:41 pm - 6:27 pm	☀	10:55 PM	5:04 am - 5:52 am
2:15 PM		6:42 pm - 7:28 pm		11:58 PM	6:06 am - 6:52 am
3:08 PM		7:38 pm - 8:30 pm			7:07 am - 7:53 am
3:52 PM		8:28 pm - 9:30 pm		1:04 AM	8:03 am - 8:55 am
4:30 PM		9:11 pm - 10:29 pm		2:11 AM	8:53 am - 9:55 am
5:02 PM		9:49 pm - 11:25 pm		3:16 AM	9:36 am - 10:54 am
5:30 PM		10:23 pm - 12:19 am		4:19 AM	10:14 am - 11:50 am
5:57 PM		10:57 pm - 1:09 am		5:19 AM	10:48 am - 12:44 pm
6:23 PM		11:29 pm - Midnight		6:18 AM	11:22 am - 1:34 pm
6:49 PM		Midnight - 2:01 am		7:16 AM	11:54 am - 2:26 pm
7:17 PM		12:03 am - 2:53 am		8:14 AM	12:28 pm - 3:18 pm
7:48 PM		12:38 am - 3:44 am		9:13 AM	1:03 pm - 4:09 pm
8:22 PM		1:16 am - 4:36 am		10:11 AM	1:41 pm - 5:01 pm
9:01 PM		1:56 am - 5:28 am		11:09 AM	2:21 pm - 5:53 pm
9:46 PM		2:41 am - 6:21 am		12:05 PM	3:06 pm - 6:46 pm
10:37 PM		3:30 am - 7:12 am		12:57 PM	3:55 pm - 7:37 pm
11:33 PM		4:22 am - 8:02 am		1:45 PM	4:47 pm - 8:27 pm
		5:15 am - 8:51 am	☀	2:28 PM	5:40 pm - 9:16 pm
12:32 AM		6:10 am - 9:36 am	☀	3:07 PM	6:35 pm - 10:01 pm
1:35 AM		7:06 am - 10:18 am	☀	3:41 PM	7:31 pm - 10:43 pm
2:39 AM		8:04 am - 10:56 am		4:13 PM	8:29 pm - 11:21 pm

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