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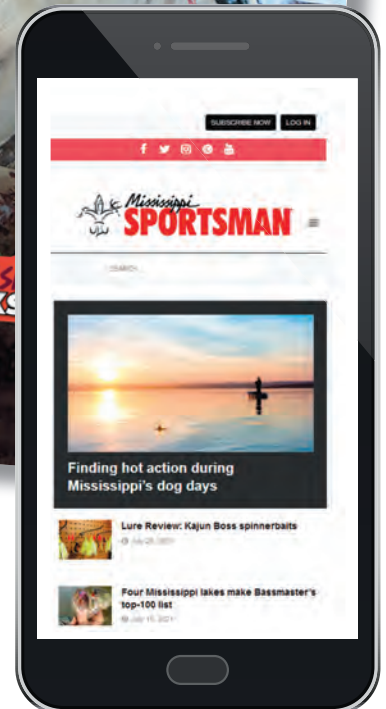
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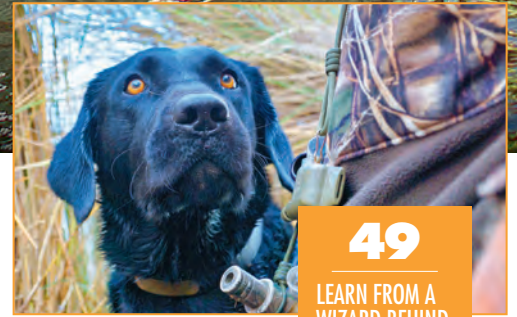
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Wyatt Powell shot this 10-point buck that weighed 230 pounds on Dec. 27, 2021. (Photo courtesy Jay Powell)

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OUTDOOR UPDATE

with Mike Giles

Jarred Barnett, Nathan Hodgins and Jack Allen display squirrels on a hunt with Patrick Allen in Neshoba County.



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

Photo by Mike Giles

LOTS TO LOVE ABOUT FEBRUARY

TIPS TO CATCH PRE-SPAWN CRAPPIE, TAKE THE PERFECT PICTURE AND CATCH LOADS OF FLOUNDER

Brad Chappell set the hook on an ice-cold Lake Washington crappie and promptly landed it, admired it a second and quickly released him to catch another day. Chappell has had many successful fishing trips on the famous lake and February is a perfect time to get back on the water to catch those papermouths that make succulent table-fare.

Patrick Allen watched as his beloved squirrel dogs treed yet another squirrel and his son Jack Allen quickly dispatched one also. Allen and many avid squirrel hunters relish the options that our February small game opportunities bring as the deer hunters have put up their weapons, in most of the state, which allows hunters to let the dogs out and have a ball.

February is a transition month for many outdoors people as most are putting up those guns, recovering from the deer season and preparing for spring fishing. There's still plenty of time left to chase squirrels and rabbits with the time-honored tradition of hunting with dogs. There's just something special about listening to the dog's strike a trail and tree a squirrel or beagles bawling and barking after jumping a rabbit and filling the hills and swamps with sweet beagle music.

Many die-hard crappie anglers have already hit the water in search of pre-spawn crappie. Mike Giles discusses ways to find and catch those succulent Lake Washington crappie with tips, tactics and techniques from crappie guide and guru Brad Chappell.

Chappell has years of experience in fishing the famous lake and gives the readers an inside look at the best technique to catch

those big white perch.

Chris Holmes brings us a timely photography feature, 'Learn from a wizard behind the lens.' By following Christopher LeCoq's tips, you can turn your outdoor triumphs and big catch or kill into a treasured memory that you can share for a lifetime.

Have you ever wondered what your best big buck scored? Kinny Haddox brings us a little different slant on scoring in his feature 'What's the score' and Greg Hicks brings some perspective on the uniqueness of every deer, no matter where they are living and harvested. Many hunters live in areas that have deer that will never grow as big as the Delta Bucks due to many factors. Hicks says every deer is special and hunters should enjoy their experience no matter the score.

John N. Felsher's 'Flat out for flounder' gives us an edge on fishing a variety of artificial lures to fool and catch the tasty flounders. Enjoy Felsher's article on catching the succulent flat sided fish and you just might learn a thing or two about finding and catching saltwater flounder.

There's just no limit to the possibilities of February in Mississippi. If you want to rest up from deer season, then that's okay. Just know that many avid anglers and hunters will be going full bore into some of the best hunting and fishing of the year. Take it from our expert writers, anglers, hunters and guides, the time is now to enjoy some fine fishing and hunting. ■



CWD DETECTED IN WARREN COUNTY

T From News Reports
The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) received test results indicating a mature buck collected in Warren County was positive for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). The buck was reported to MDWFP in mid-December as potentially diseased given its drastically emaciated and lethargic condition. It was found approximately 4 miles north of Vicksburg and 4.5 miles south of the first CWD-positive white-tailed deer detected in Mississippi. The sample is considered "suspect positive" through initial testing and will be sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa for final confirmation.

Since February 2018, 111 CWD-positive white-tailed deer have been detected across nine counties. MDWFP is still relying on hunter-harvested deer for the remainder of the 2021–22 hunting season. Hunters can submit deer for testing at established freezer



The suspect positive mature buck from Warren County.

Photo courtesy MDWFP

locations or participating taxidermists.

For more information about Chronic Wasting Disease visit www.mdwfp.com/cwd. ■



Blake Bosarge with his scamp.

Photo courtesy MDMR

MDMR CERTIFIES FOUR STATE RECORDS

T From News Reports
The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources certified four state fishing records in December.

Rodie Armes, 11, of Pass Christian set the youth record for Ladyfish (*Elops saurus*) using conventional tackle with a fish weighing 2 pounds, 11.04 ounces. Blake Bosarge, 13, of Gautier set the youth record for Scamp (*Myceteroperca phenax*) using conventional tackle with a fish weighing 20 pounds, 12 ounces.

Dustin Conway, of Ocean Springs, set a conventional tackle record for Golden Tilefish (*Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps*) with a fish weighing 20 pounds, 11.68 ounces. Jordan Matthews of Gulfport set a conventional tackle record for Inshore Lizardfish (*Synodus foeten*) with a fish weighing 9.1 ounces. ■

GOOD MANAGEMENT PLAN PAYS OFF WITH MONSTER SUNFLOWER COUNTY BUCK

Bryan Daugherty of Hernando was hunting family land in Sunflower County the afternoon of Dec. 2 when he was getting ready to take a doe for meat.

"At 4:50 I went to shoot a doe, but she trotted off before I could shoot and I got mad at myself for not taking the shot sooner," Daugherty said. "I turned around, looked the other way, and saw a big buck a long ways off, but he turned and disappeared into the woods before I could tell how big he was. He reappeared about 100 yards from me at about 5 p.m. and that time I could see he was a really good buck."

Daugherty was glad that he didn't shoot the doe first or he'd never have seen the buck. He had planned to go to another stand but his plans didn't work out.

"It was hot, and I was going to another stand, which was farther away, and I forgot my binoculars," he said. "So I went back to get them and decided to hunt this stand instead. I'd already told my wife that if I hadn't seen anything to shoot I'd shoot a doe at about 5 for meat, because we don't shoot many bucks."

The buck walked across the food plot, and he stopped just long enough for Daugherty to center the crosshairs on him and squeeze the trigger of his Winchester 7 MM Magnum Model 70 rifle.

"I knocked him down and he got up and circled and made it 15 yards out of the food plot," Daugherty said. "The stand where I shot him was dad's favorite hunting spot."

BIGGEST DEER YET ON PROPERTY

The typical 9-point buck had 15 scorable points with a 20 ½-inch spread and scored an astonishing 189 ¾ B&C. The mature Delta buck weighed 255 pounds.

"After I shot the buck, I called my brother and told him that I got Brutus," Daugherty said. "Are you serious?" he asked. "Yes, I got him!" I said. He drove straight from Morgan City and came to help me."

The excitement was hard to believe as Daugherty had harvested the best deer they'd ever killed on the property.

Daugherty was hunting a food plot about two acres in size in between two blocks of woods.

"Dad (Jerry Daugherty) bought the land after previous owners had set it up in the Wetlands Restoration Program (WRP) about 30 years ago and we were letting the deer get some age on them and harvesting them when they matured," Daugherty said. "Dad actually liked to video the deer with his phone and send to the whole family. He really got a kick out of filming them instead of shooting them. Our family still uses that approach to be involved with both the wildlife and each other throughout the season.

"If it was not something really big then we let them walk and



Bryan Daugherty, of Hernando, was hunting family land in Sunflower County the afternoon of Dec. 2 when he shot this mature Delta buck.

harvested does for meat instead. Dad passed away in 2014 so my brother has mostly been managing the place for deer, with some help from me, and really making it better for wildlife with sound habitat practices."

MANAGING THE HABITAT

Jerry Daugherty actually put five different kinds of oaks in his WRP section, which provided plenty of fall and winter food for the bucks.

"It was a long journey to get to this point," Daugherty said. "The land around here hasn't been known for producing trophy bucks, but we've worked hard at managing the habitat and deer. I haven't shot a buck in a couple decades, as I chose to harvest does for meat to let the deer mature. For me, it's been about spending time on the land with my family. That has always been the priority."

Daugherty said that they have a biologist from Mississippi State come out every year and give them recommendations and they take as many does as they need for meat. But there's so much lush habitat with plenty of food and cover that it's not really imperative to harvest a certain number each year.

"My brother, Barrett, actually spotted the buck for the first time this year back in September, and had been hunting him with a bow, even seeing him on one hunt," Daugherty said. "I never saw him in person until the day I killed him."

There's no doubt that you must have the habitat as well as deer with the genetics to grow big bucks. But thanks to Jerry Daugherty's love for the land and hunting, he left the property in good hands for his wife, daughter and his sons, Bryan and Barrett, who have taken it to the next level. The family is now reaping the benefits. After spending a lifetime chasing deer around the state they are now able to hunt trophy deer and get all the meat they need right at home. It just doesn't get much better than that. ■

FIRST TIME'S THE CHARM FOR COLLEGE STUDENT

Mikaela Mengarelli of Linn joined her boyfriend, Ruan Naude, and brother, Ridge Fullilove, on a hunt near the Sunflower River on Dec. 5 and experienced the hunt of a lifetime. Though she'd never been deer hunting before, Mengarelli harvested a monster 11-point buck that scored 169 7/8 B&C, with a 22-inch spread, 5-inch bases and weighed in at 220 pounds.

Though some may call it beginner's luck, Mengarelli spent the day before practicing shooting with a 6.5 PRC Browning rifle until she had the hang of it. She completed her hunter safety course and purchased a license the day before the big hunt.

Though this was the first time that she hunted as an adult and shot a weapon of her own, she did go hunting with her grandfather occasionally when she was younger.

Mengarelli and her companions arrived at her uncle's farm at 3:30 p.m. and took a stand in some tall grass overlooking a field adjacent to the Sunflower River.

"We were all playing on our phones when my boyfriend saw a deer in the tall grass across the field on the edge of the river," she said. "At first we thought it was a doe because it had its head down, and we couldn't tell."

THE BIG REVEAL

Mengarelli got her rifle ready and before she could shoot it the buck raised his head and they saw the massive rack sticking high in the air. The Mississippi Delta Community College student was up for the task and will have a big story to tell when she gets back to school.

"I shot at the buck, and it didn't move," Mengarelli said. "It didn't

move a muscle, so I shot again, and it collapsed in the tall grass and disappeared. We ran over to where he was standing and found him dead right on the spot. He didn't move an inch."

The buck was soaking wet so they surmised that he had just crossed the Sunflower River and was walking through the tall grass on his way to another location.

Ironically, Mengarelli's uncle, Rodney Walker, had been watching the buck on his game cameras for a couple of years. It seemed appropriate that the young lady had harvested the buck of a lifetime on her first hunt and first time to carry her own rifle. Walker was so proud of his niece that he's going to pay for her deer to be mounted.

CELEBRATING THE BUCK

Mengarelli had mixed feelings after shooting the buck at first, but 10 minutes after the kill she got excited that she had shot such a magnificent buck. Before she knew it the hunters had bloodied her face, in the longtime southern tradition bestowed on a hunter after they've harvested their first deer. It is a time honored celebration.

"I love deer meat and enjoyed some grilled backstrap steaks last night," she said. "I really felt the satisfaction of harvesting a buck and being able to eat the tasty meat and provide food for my family too."

Mikaela Mengarelli is not your typical community college medical technology student. She's a sharpshooter, deer slayer and a modern-day Annie Oakley as evidenced by her skilled marksmanship on the deer killed at 200 yards. It just doesn't get much better than harvesting the buck of a lifetime on your first hunt. ■

Mikaela Mengarelli, of Linn, was hunting near the Sunflower River on Dec. 5 when she shot this trophy buck.



NEWTON COUNTY GIVES UP TROPHY BUCK TO HOLLINGSWORTH

Cody Hollingsworth of Lawrence spotted a main frame 10-point on his game cameras last year at his deer club in Newton County. They had the buck on game cameras in September and October of 2020 before the buck vanished. Nobody knew exactly what happened to him or if he'd been killed. If he had died nobody owned up to the deed.

"He showed back up in September and I had him on camera through October," Hollingsworth said. "I decided to take the camera out so that I could stay out of the area and not alert the buck to my presence during this season."

Hollingsworth was going to go to another stand on Monday, Dec. 13, and planned to film another buck if he could, but plans changed and he went to the area where the big buck was, primarily due to the wind direction. As it turned out the buck came out at 4:45 and Hollingsworth promptly inserted a surgical precision strike with his Weatherby .270 short-magnum.

OLD STAND IS A WINNER

The 198-pound buck had grown a bit since last season and now sported 14 points. It was a mainframe 12-point with split brow tines to go with a 17 ½ -inch spread and a 23-inch neck. The rutting buck rough scored in the upper 150s and had one of his matching tines broken off from fighting. The tine was a perfect match with the one on the other antler as seen in the game camera photos.

"I'd been filming hunts every day and I laid my camera down and didn't get it, so I didn't go back to that stand," Hollingsworth said. "I went to a stand overlooking a lane near where we'd seen the buck on camera. The shoot house was one of the first ones that had been put up and it had small windows and wasn't as good as the newer ones we had so nobody had hunted it much as a result.

"I was talking to one of my buddies on the way in to the stand and he told me, 'You'll probably kill him because nobody has been hunting there!' There's a beaver slough to the west of the lane and a fire lane in the middle with pines to the right and another bean field. I think they've been traveling to the beans to feed during the late afternoon."

ACCIDENTAL SOUND TURNS OUT TO BE A GOOD THING

A wise old doe came out into the lane and saw something she didn't like and kept looking at the shoot house and stomping



Cody Hollingsworth, of Lawrence, killed this 14-point buck in Newton County on Dec. 13.

her feet, according to Hollingsworth. That's when things started heating up.

"I thought she was going to blow my hunt," Hollingsworth said. "Just then four more does came into the lane and started feeding, but they turned their heads and looked back towards where they'd just entered the lane and stared hard. Suddenly they took off across the lane and the buck charged out into the lane and started running toward the doe that had been eyeing me. I didn't know if I could get a shot or not because he was running so fast, but I tried to get my gun up. Then the doe broke and ran and he came down the lane towards me at full speed!"

Thump! Hollingsworth accidentally bumped the shoot house with his rifle barrel, and it made such a noise that the buck put the brakes on and skidded to a halt a mere 70 yards away. That's all it took for the excited hunter to get his sights on him.

Tic-Boom! The rifle roared and the buck collapsed in an instant.

Hollingsworth had pulled the trigger as soon as the crosshairs hit the spot and the buck was dead on his feet before he ever knew what happened.

DEER PROGRAM IS WORKING

The club Hollingsworth is hunting in went on a big buck program a few years ago and the deer have been getting better each year. Last year, Hollingsworth killed a 135-inch buck that was 6 ½ years old and this year he killed the buck of a lifetime.

Dead deer don't grow antlers so it's a good idea to let them reach maturity to realize their full potential. Since all of the local landowners are on the same program and there is plenty of AG rich crops in the area, all they need is time to mature. Take it from Hollingsworth, he's benefitted from letting them walk until they are ripe for the picking. ■

PUBLIC LAND BRUTE BITES THE DUST

Creek Baham of Loranger, La., and his family and friends were hunting in Winston County over Christmas week. They were all hoping to score with a buck, or at the very least harvest a doe for meat. Baham, a student at the University of Louisiana Monroe, was itching to get into the woods and harvest a buck, but things weren't going well for the group, as nobody had harvested a deer up to that point.

"We had not seen a deer yet," Baham said. "I went to a stand early that morning and did a little calling with my grunt call but really had not seen or heard a response."

Baham wasn't giving up, so he kept at it. Things made a drastic change on Dec. 21.

"I was looking out into the open bottomland hardwoods and saw two deer scatter," Baham said. "I lost sight of them and then I saw a doe dart into the bottom. Then I saw another big old doe on the ridge to my left and she got my attention as she was moving. I was looking at the does and they were eating, and I looked back down the ridge and there was horns coming down the side of the hill. I lost him for a second and then saw him walking and watching the does."

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

The big buck was trailing a doe 15-20 yards out in front of him and he stopped a minute to watch.

"I had to wait for them to clear the trees as the doe moved to the right of me," Baham said. "I picked out a tree and once he crossed by that tree I was going to shoot at about 40 yards. Just before he got to the tree, he stopped with his back end covered by the tree."

"I got really anxious and pulled the trigger. He jump-kicked and tore out running away from me, so I grunted loud twice, and he stopped. I bolted another bullet and shot again. The buck took off and ran over the ridge and out of sight. The does ran up onto the ridge and I waited for them to leave and get out of sight before checking him out. The time of the shot was 9 a.m."

Baham waited on his father, Ricky Baham, and they went down the hill and found blood.

"When I got there, I found some bone," Ricky Baham said. "I told him that I had bad news and thought he'd shot him in one of his legs because I found some bone. I really hated to tell him that I thought he made a high shot and hit the deer in the leg bone."

"We trailed the deer another 200 yards and saw a lot more blood," Creek Baham said. "We thought that the deer had laid down because we found a lot more blood in one spot, but he kept on moving."

CALLING IN SOME HELP

The Bahams thought that this may have been a good time to call Zack Crowley of

Maben. Crowley and his dog have found many deer for hunters when there was little or no blood trail.

"We waited a few hours and Crowley got there about 12:30," Baham said. "His dog picked up the trail and led us right to the deer and we found him dead in a creek about a mile from the shot sight. If I hadn't called them, I would never have gotten the deer, there's no doubt in my mind. I just really want to thank Zack and his dog."

"I told my dad that I'd never see another deer like this one after we thought he'd gotten away," Baham continued. "You just can't describe going from such a high of getting a shot on a trophy buck to such a low feeling after you've missed or wounded the deer and watched him run off."

As it turned out the first shot did hit the deer's leg and the second actually pierced the buck's liver, which ultimately caused his demise.

"I didn't think he looked that big until we found him laying there in the creek," Baham said.

The 180-pound buck green scored in the 150s and had tines that were 9 to 10 inches long. It had a 21-inch wide spread and 11 points with a kicker on one brow tine. Its main beams were over 23 inches long.

Baham shot the trophy buck with a .308 Savage axis rifle. After finding the deer, Baham was on cloud nine and he's still in shock today. To harvest such a buck on public land and then to experience such an ordeal to retrieve him is amazing and makes the victory that much sweeter. ■



Creek Baham, of Loranger, La., was hunting in Winston County on Dec. 21, 2021 when he downed this trophy buck on public land.

McKinna Powell took this Humphreys County trophy buck on Dec. 26.



BROTHER AND SISTER DEER SLAYERS HARVEST TROPHY BUCKS

a larger one heard them and came out," McKinna said. "We couldn't tell just how big he was because he was on the edge of the woods at first. I told Hunter I thought it was the 4-point coming back in. Then Hunter said, 'No, you're going to shoot him.'"

A massive buck with a rocking chair rack came running in the patch chasing and they tried to get him to stop a minute for a shot. Marlow yelled and the deer locked up.

Boom! McKinna's Remington .270 rifle roared as she pulled the trigger and the buck vanished.

FINDING THE BUCK

McKinna's father, Jay Powell, came out to help look for the deer and they started at the shot site and started in the direction the buck had disappeared.

"I found a little blood on a tree," Jay said. "She was shooting a .270 so it wasn't the amount of blood you'd expect. We went about 20 yards into the reeds and thick stuff, and he was laying there dead. He didn't make it far before he collapsed just out of sight."

"When we got to the buck, we were excited and amazed at just how big he was because we hadn't been able to get a good look at him and it all happened so fast," McKinna Powell said. "He was a main frame 9-point with a 20-inch spread and was huge, weighing 250 pounds."

"This is my third buck and the best yet, scoring in the mid 140s. I've always enjoyed coming to camp and being with my family and eating some good food."

Mckinna Powell, 21, experienced the hunt of a lifetime on the day after Christmas. Powell, a junior in Bio-Medical Engineering at Mississippi State University, enjoys deer hunting with her family and she can shoot pretty good, too. She was hunting in Humphreys County with her family and was on the stand with her boyfriend, Hunter Marlow.

Two does came running into the field from behind the stand and then a couple of young bucks came in and chased them around. After a few minutes of the running and chasing, the bucks turned on each other and started fighting. It was quite a remarkable sight, but nothing compared to what happened next. "We had been watching the small rack bucks when I guess

Harvesting this monster buck was icing on the cake for this talented young lady.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Whenever you have a family of athletes and hunters there's always some good-natured competition and camaraderie no matter who it is, and the heat was on for Wyatt Powell after his younger sister harvested her trophy buck. Wyatt was hunting another buck, maybe even a tad bigger, that had appeared on their radar screens a couple of weeks before.

Wyatt Powell went on to kill the trophy buck on Dec. 27, the day after McKinna killed hers.

"Wyatt was in a stand set up like a cross where the lanes are 350 yards long," Jay said. "It's a good morning spot and good place to hunt during the rut since you can see a long ways in several directions. We'd captured him on game cam pictures recently and my youngest son had seen him while hunting a few days before Wyatt finally saw him."

Jay told his son about the buck, so Wyatt went hunting on Dec. 26.

"I actually had a great hunt and saw some good bucks and an absolute cow; a huge buck that day," Wyatt said. "The next morning I was back at the same stand looking for the 10-point and saw a couple small bucks and a doe early.

"At 8:45 a.m. I looked up and saw the buck walk into the lane at 250 yards. I shot and the buck turned around and looked. I was shooting a .280 single shot that is really accurate, normally, so I was scrambling to get another shell in there."

SEALING THE DEAL

Wyatt put the crosshairs on the buck and the shot hit him in the neck, with the bullet coming out the shoulder. The buck dropped straight down in its tracks.

"Wyatt's buck weighed 230-pounds, sported 10 points with a lot of mass going all the way out to the ends of the main beams and it green scored 152," Jay said. "The inside diameter was about 20-inches-wide!"

Not too many hunters get to kill trophy bucks like McKinna and Wyatt Powell did, and it's even more rare for siblings to do it on back-to-back days. ■



ON THE COVER

Wyatt Powell killed this buck which green scored 152 on Dec. 27.

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HUNTER GETS PIEBALD DEER WITH SOLID WHITE HEAD

Gerry "CJ" Parker thought he was seeing a ghost on a hunt near his home in Lauderdale about 3 years ago when several deer came into view. One was noticeably lighter than the other deer, but her head almost glowed it was so white. Yes, you heard right - the doe had a solid white head the likes of which most people have never seen.

"I'd never seen anything like that," Parker said. "I didn't know what to think at first. I'd never seen a piebald deer.

"I talked to my dad about shooting the deer and he told me that since it was during the rut, I better not shoot the deer if I wanted to shoot a buck, so I didn't shoot her. We had her on game cameras for a while, along with her fawn, but then she disappeared, and we didn't see her last year."

They nicknamed the deer the "ghost" and it was back on their radar this fall when it reappeared on their game cameras. Parker had not killed a buck at the time of the first sighting three years ago but accomplished that milestone last year, so there was no holding back when she made a personal visit to his area during the Thanksgiving holidays. It was just too big a temptation to pass up this time.

"I was hunting a green field the Saturday after Thanksgiving," Parker said. "I got in the stand about 2 p.m. and the ghost came in with two other deer. I didn't waste much time as I raised my rifle and centered the crosshairs on her and squeezed the trigger."

A UNIQUE TROPHY

"Tic-Pow!" Parker's 30 06 rifle roared, and the doe collapsed before the echo of the shot had died down. That shot set off a frenzy of excitement for people around Meridian as many had never seen or heard of such a sight. The ghost deer with the solid white head was very unique and is a memory that will live forever with Parker.

"We're getting a shoulder mount from Luke Wimberly in Quitman," Parker said. "We're also getting the meat processed over at R & L Deer Processing. There's nothing much better than getting some backstrap cut up into steaks and frying and eating it with rice, or onions and gravy!

"When I made the shot and watched her drop, I was really



Gerry "CJ" Parker harvested this piebald deer near Lauderdale on Nov. 27.

happy and overcome with emotion. I just thanked God for the opportunity. Something like this doesn't happen often so I'm enjoying it now."

Parker is ready to go after that trophy buck now that he's dispatched the ghost doe.

"I like to hunt during the rut because you might see a buck any time of the day, but shooting a deer with a white head is really something," Parker said. "Whether I kill one or not, each trip I make to the woods is a success. Just being able to be out in nature and taking in the serenity of the woods makes it worthwhile to me."

NEXT UP: TROPHY BUCK

Parker has done something really special, something that few people do, and that's killing a piebald deer. He just finished his last class in the physical therapist assistant program and now only lacks his clinicals before starting his career. He'll have a little time to harvest that trophy buck soon.

Parker's first deer was taken with a .410 shotgun when he was only 10 years old, and he was hooked from that day on. Who knows what he'll find in the woods next? It might be that trophy buck. ■

OUTDOOR LESSONS WE LEARN FROM KIDS

C By Kinny Haddox
orey Harris has caught monster bass, killed trophy deer and done just about anything outdoors in Louisiana that one could do. But it was on a hunt with his two growing-up-too-fast kids, daughter Haven and son Harley, that he was reminded of what time in the outdoors and how it relates to life is all about. "I mean, this is as special as it gets," he said. "I just can't tell you how proud I was."



Haven Harris and a recent spike she harvested.



Harley Harris and his 8-point that Haven helped locate.


What was an everyday hunting adventure one afternoon in November is a lesson or reminder for us all.

"This little girl right here has huge heart," Harris said. "Yesterday while we were hunting her brother shot a deer. We hadn't been in the stand very long at that time. When I told her we needed to go help him find his deer she began to cry. I mean real tears running down her face. She just wanted to hunt but her brother needed help.

"So long story short, we lost the blood trail. I mean we couldn't find anything. That's when I look over and she has her hat in her hand and her head bowed. I asked what she was doing and she said, 'I was praying that we will find Harley's deer because I don't want him to be sad.'

"That made me smile the biggest smile," Harris said. "A few minutes later we had given up and we're walking back to the 4 wheeler, all of a sudden she said, 'Look there it is.' Low and behold the deer was laying within 20 yards of us. Her praying for us to find that deer and then her actually spotting it, that was more special than her brother killing it. Haven, I hope you never lose that good heart God has given you or the faith to stop and pray about things no matter how big or small."

And that's what it's all about. ■



SCORING TROPHY BUCKS PUTS EVERYBODY ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD, BUT SCORER GREG HICKS SAYS EVERY DEER IS SPECIAL AND HUNTERS SHOULD ENJOY THEIR EXPERIENCE NO MATTER THE FINAL NUMBERS.

WHAT'S THE SCORE?

By Kinny Haddox

Hundreds of “140 class bucks” have walked out of a thicket, been harvested by a great shot and taken to town by proud hunters. Then something interesting happens.

The hunter takes the trophy to an official scorer and, suddenly, the 140 is officially a 132, or worse yet, a 128 1/8.

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF OFFICIAL DEER SCORING.

It’s a world Greg Hicks lives in every week during deer season. Hicks quickly points out two important facts about scoring deer. Every deer is special to the person who killed it. And it’s not all about the score. There’s much more.

“Oh, there’s no doubt that every time I score a deer, there is high anticipation,” Hicks said. “When it comes down to the final and it’s a little bit less than what he or she wanted, I start pointing out the good characteristics of the deer. Every one is unique in tine length, color, shape — it’s all part of the hunt. No matter which way it goes, I always want people to leave my table feeling positive about their deer. The score is just part of

the experience that the hunter will remember for a lifetime.”

Sometimes there is even a surprise for a hunter scoring a deer. “Often somebody will bring one in and say what they expect, but they may have much more,” Hicks said. “I’ve been doing it long enough to have a good idea when I look at it what they’ve got. There’s not much more pleasing than to score a hunter’s deer and them be ecstatic over the results.”

Scoring deer has also taught Hicks a lot about the people who kill big deer. And the main thing he has learned after hundreds of big racks laying on the table in front of him?

JUST GO HUNTING >

Greg Hicks and the simple tools of the trade for scoring deer.



JUST GO HUNTING

"There are times when you can spot a big, healthy buck and watch it grow a few years, then harvest it," he said. "That's exciting. But the thing I've learned in my nearly 10 years of scoring deer is just go hunting. Just get out there. Find where deer are and hunt hard. And I know this will make some trophy hunters cringe, but when it is your time to kill a monster deer, sometimes it is just your time. I can't tell you how many people come up and tell me they didn't know that deer was in the world and 'Bam', it just walked right out in front of them. That's the most important thing I think I can tell people. Just to go out there and hunt. And if it is your time, it's your time. Always be ready and have hope."

There are highlights every season for Hicks, who was encouraged by Buckmasters Regional Director Cecil Reddick to get certified and begin scoring deer. Hicks followed up on that. The first local deer he ever scored and turned in was a bow kill by Dan Preaus that measured 150 inches.

Buckmasters scores based on inches of antler, Hicks said. The first thing tallied is the inside spread, then the main beams and the length of each tine. A tine has to be at least one inch to be considered a scoreable point. Lastly, you take the circumference measurements in four spots along the main beam. When you finish, double check the numbers and tally them up, you

have the gross score. It's a process that an official scorer has to make with confidence and concentration much like a major league baseball umpire. You have to do it enough to trust yourself to do it right and make the right call. It means a lot to people and it means a lot to Hicks, too.

Sometimes a hunter may come in with a huge 8-point and another hunter have a smaller 12-point. To the naked eye, the eight looks bigger, but when you go through the process, the 12 may have more inches of antler and score higher. It's a consistent process that evens the playing field for everybody. The result of scoring a deer is much like putting a big bass on the scales. The numbers don't lie.

Hicks also points out that not all the racks he scores are recent kills. Sometimes people bring in deer they killed years ago that were never scored just to see how they fare. Recently, two men brought a deer their father had killed 30 years ago that had been in storage most of that time.

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

Hicks was raised in the rural Salem community near Farmerville and spent his time with his three brothers and grandfather talking about hunting and the outdoors. It's where he learned to tell stories and to love the outdoors. Today, he's the Environmental, Health and Safety supervisor at nearby West Fraser and he's the father of two daughters, Addison and Peyton.

This young hunter was thrilled with her trophy deer and having it scored by Greg Hicks to add to the memory of a lifetime. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** This deer was brought to Hicks for scoring after being in storage for almost 30 years.



They have grown up hunting with him and have both killed deer. That family experience also motivates Hicks to give back to the sport. He has a growing social media presence with his Antlers and Hicks stories, which you can follow on Facebook.

“There is no doubt about it,” he said. “When a young boy or girl comes up to the table with a nice set of antlers, it’s exciting to me because you know it is exciting to them. I usually talk through what I’m doing with them and want them to know exactly how we do this. I also love to talk to them about their hunt and how they killed the deer.”

Recently Hicks was able to score a deer of a lifetime for local 9-year-old Abram Riser of Downsville. The buck was estimated at 4 ½ years old and scored a whopping 150 3/8”. While the process of scoring deer and tallying the results is complicated, the tools of the trade are simple. Hicks starts with a wooden Mason’s folding ruler to measure the inside spread. It goes straight across between the beams and is super accurate. He uses a regular soft measuring tape for the circumference of the beams and a regular retractable tape for the tines. Measuring the beams length can be done with a string from the lowest base of the antler, up the back side and right along the antler. Hicks puts an alligator clip at the end of the tallest point and then measures the cable with the Mason’s tape. He always does the main beams twice just to double check. He then records the numbers on an official scoring sheet, signs it and has the hunter put his or her information on the official sheet. ■

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME >



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FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

Greg Hicks is always prepared for the question and he never wavers on the answer: "How much do I owe you for scoring my deer?" The answer is nothing. He does it for the love of the game.

"I don't get paid a dime to do the scoring thing," he said. "That's 100% my contribution to hunting."

"People try to pay me all the time and I don't like taking it. Heck one man wanted to give me something so bad one time because I wouldn't take his money, so he reached in his truck

and gave me a big bag they put cotton in. I still have it today as a reminder of good people in the world. Too many people today are using hunting and fishing as a way to promote themselves. We need more people doing things strictly to promote hunting and fishing. That's my whole thing with scoring. It's why I do it. To promote the lifestyle I love." ■

Hicks carefully checks every measurement because it is important.



THE GREG HICKS SCRAPBOOK DEER

Hicks said he could spend all day talking about the bucks he's scored and not even get close to covering all the stories. But three deer stick out more than any others since he began scoring deer. Lets call them his non-typical scrapbook deer.

First of all, the "Broadhead Buck."

"Several years ago a guy brought in a big rack and said 'ya'll be careful with this one' and he pointed down to the main beam," Hicks said.

"There was an expandable broadhead from an arrow stuck in the main beam. A bowhunter had apparently been looking at the rack when he shot and the arrow hit dead center in the main beam on the inside part. It was still pretty sharp and a little bit tricky to handle."

Hicks also treasures the first buck he ever scored and posted to social media in 2014, a 194 class buck taken by a hunter in Mississippi. And the largest free-range deer he ever put a tape to was entered in the Big Buck contest at Simmons Sporting Goods. It was a 231 3/8 buck harvested from Kansas. In between, he's lost count of how many bucks he has scored. ■



Greg Hicks' first officially scored deer. A lot of things have changed since 2014, but not Hicks' love for scoring deer.

HOW SPORTSMEN COOK >



Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 47 years. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.

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HOW SPORTSMEN COOK

Jason Thornton

GRITS AND VENISON GRILLADES

THIS ORIGINAL NEW
ORLEANS RECIPE IS GREAT
AND STICKS TO YOUR RIBS!



TIP!

The grits can be prepared with cheese, roasted garlic, or corn for variety. In a pinch instant grits can be used.

This is one of those meals that sticks to your ribs, is easy to master, and gives you another way to use some of your prime cuts, including backstrap from that deer you harvested this past season. Grillades (*gree-yahds*) originated in New Orleans and are typically served for either lunch or brunch. Traditionally, they are medallions of meats, but can be served in cubes.

Pork is also traditionally used for this dish and served over grits but it wouldn't hurt my feelings if you served it over rice or even mashed potatoes. The same combinations work for venison. A piece of French bread should be handy to sop up the gravy. Bon Appetite!

PREPARATION: Serves 4

1. Cut the backstrap into one inch pieces.
2. Cover the meat with white vinegar, and place into the refrigerator preferably overnight. This will help tenderize the meat.
3. Drain the meat and pat dry with paper towels to remove as much moisture as possible. Season to taste.
4. Heat oil in a dutch oven over medium heat.
5. Brown venison cubes on all sides in oil.
6. Remove backstrap with slotted spoon and reserve in a bowl.
7. Add onion, celery, and bell pepper and sauté until soft.
8. Add the backstrap, stock, Rotel, and bay leaves.
9. Bring to a gentle simmer.
10. Cover and cook for 40 minutes stirring occasionally.
11. Stir in cornstarch slurry to thicken.
12. Remove and discard bay leaves.
13. Season to taste.
14. Serve over grits.
15. Garnish with parsley.



Jason Thornton was born and raised hunting, fishing, trapping, foraging and gardening in south Louisiana. His personal belief is that all of nature's ingredients are better if you have to work for them. He can be found at EdibleOutdoorsCook.com.

INGREDIENTS:

Grits prepared according to the package

2 lbs of prime venison cut into cubes (I prefer backstrap)

Vinegar (enough to cover your meat)

2 tbs vegetable oil

1 large onion (chopped)

1 bell pepper (chopped)

1 stalk celery (chopped)

3 cups game stock (beef stock can be substituted)

1 (10 ounce) can of Rotel tomatoes

2 bay leaves

1 tbs of cornstarch mixed into ½ cup warm water

Your preferred seasoning and parsley for garnish

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Dutch Oven





DEER HUNTING PRIZE

BACKSTRAP IS THE FILET MIGNON OF VENISON

Some hunters treasure trophy bucks with big racks. Some hunters just like spending time outdoors and enjoying nature. But if there's one thing almost every hunter can agree on, there's nothing more rewarding than enjoying a good meal of venison fixed up your favorite way. There's fried deer steak, deer chili, deer stew, grilled deer kabobs and a whole range of ways to fix it.

By Kinny Haddox

But the prize of the harvest is the select cut off a deer — the backstrap. Deer season is over, but the benefits of a successful season go on. It's time to consume your harvest and claim your prize.

Backstraps run along the length of the spine. The backstrap is one of the most tender cuts because the muscle itself isn't really used. The more a muscle is used, the tougher it becomes. For the record, backstrap refers to a length of loin on the back

of a deer like the ribeye in beef. Tenderloins, on the other hand, are the two strips of very tender meat under the loin. Those are like the filet mignon in beef.

In Louisiana, we use lots of ways to season and cook venison, but here's a way to grill venison backstrap like a "Hard Core Carnivore" that is appealing and has trophy taste.

MEAT PREP

Place the backstrap on a piece of foil and sprinkle all sides with meat tenderizer, Montreal Steak seasoning and then a good coating of Les Pryles Hard Core Carnivore Black seasoning. This seasoning contains sea salt, spices, sugar, dehydrated garlic and activated charcoal. Pat it in with your hand. Place the meat in a Ziploc or vacuum sealing bag and pour one-half cup of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce mixed with 10 drops of Tabasco sauce over it, seal the bag and place in the refrigerator overnight. When you are ready to cook it, let it sit out about 30 minutes before grilling, remove meat and discard the marinade.

GETTING FIRED UP

Heat your grill up to 400 - 450 degrees. Before you place it on the grill, drizzle the entire straps with olive oil and then another good coating of the Hard Core Carnivore until the meat is black. A big backstrap should cook about 5-7 minutes on each side. Because none are the same size, use a meat thermometer and cook to medium rare, about 120-125 degrees internal temperature.

When finished, let the meat sit for 8-10 minutes before slicing so the meat will retain its juices.

TIME TO EAT

Serve with french bread or rolls and a green salad. You can add sides like grilled asparagus or mashed potatoes for a meal if you like, but the more simple, the better. Slices can even be served alone on a tray as an hors d'oeuvre. ■

A hot grill that allows the flame to kiss the backstrap is best for sealing in the savory flavor of the meat.

OPPOSITE PAGE: When your backstrap is done and rested for about 10 minutes to keep the juices in the meat, slicing up the strap leaves you with morsels like this.



STICKS & STRINGS >



BE YOUR BEST WITH BOW IN HAND

PRACTICE, BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR BOW AND YOUR SHOOTING

Unless you are shooting competitively, archery is much like golf in that you are only competing with yourself.

This is one of the great things about our sport; it allows everyone to feel successful on some level, boosting self-esteem and providing an individual experience. The drawback, however, is that it leaves the results open to individual interpretation.

In today's world of participation and instant gratification, this has led to an epidemic of many archers uncon-

sciously skewing the results in their own favor. Not only does this lead to mediocrity in their shooting, but on some level, it also leads to a lack of confidence in their own ability to make the shot when it counts.

Shooting at a target at exactly 20 yards on an indoor range does not properly prepare someone to shoot a quartering animal from an elevated stand in heavy cover. Neither does "rationalizing" the fact that the arrow that flew 6 inches out of your group was a "fluke." This leads

to many missed opportunities or worse, wounded animals each fall.

PRACTICE MORE

Consistently successful bowhunters practice often. Read that last sentence again. Nothing else prepares you for the



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

OPPOSITE PAGE: Practice may not make perfect, but not practicing will put bowhunters behind the 8-ball when a buck steps into range. Regular practice can result in tight groups on the range (right) and accuracy afield.

moment of truth like proper practice. If you practice regularly, muscle memory takes over, allowing your subconscious mind to run the shot sequence. This frees up your conscious mind to aim and focus on proper shot placement.

Archers who practice often are more confident in their ability to make the shot when it counts. They know they can do it because they have done it hundreds of times in practice. Confidence breeds success and helps to eliminate any thoughts of missing, thereby keeping target panic at bay.

We all know a guy who says, "I'm not really good shooting at a target, but I shoot really well when there's fur in front of me."

I'm going to call BS on this statement 99% of the time. There are exceptions to every rule, but most people do NOT perform better under pressure. If they can't hit the bull's-eye when it doesn't matter, what would make them think it will happen at a crucial moment? A majority of people who say this are effectively kidding themselves, and deep down on some level, they know it. When the moment of truth arrives, they are often disappointed with the results.

A lot of people take their bow out the week before the season and fling a few arrows downrange, and they are satisfied with a 5-inch group at 20 yards. If your bow is shooting a 5-inch group at a stationary target in the wide open, you can just about double it in a hunting situation, which will put you right on the edge of the animal's vitals. That doesn't leave any margin for error or movement by the animal. This is a wounded animal waiting to happen. Sadly, this is easily avoidable, but it happens far too often.

BE HONEST, FOR A CHANGE

This lack of self-honesty can apply to both the tune of the bow and the shooter's form. There is no exception for a properly tuned bow. It will shoot field points and broadheads to the same point of impact and is fairly easy to sight in. Continuing to shoot arrow after arrow and telling yourself the next arrow will be better rarely solves any problems. If your bow is inconsistent or excessively difficult to sight in, take it to a pro shop immediately to have it checked out. Remember, Albert Einstein defined insanity as continuing to do the same thing and expecting different results.

Be honest with yourself about your equipment and your shooting ability. Always strive for perfection,



especially when it comes to hunting. Develop a scoring system and keep score, even when you are shooting at an animal target. This way, you can measure your own progress. Be accountable for your results; accountability leads to better performance in the future. After all, we owe it to ourselves and especially to the animals we hunt to shoot as well as we possibly can. ■

**TURKEY SEASON
REGS >**

Stay on top of the latest state regulations—spring turkey season is just around the corner. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Reporting turkey harvest is mandatory for all Magnolia state hunters. Using the app for reporting is as easy as it gets.



TURKEY SEASON REGULATIONS

CHANGES IN STORE FOR NON-RESIDENT HUNTERS

R By Andy Douglas
 eady or not the 2022 spring turkey season is upon us — and ready or not a few changes have been made to Mississippi's turkey hunting regulations. Most laws are the same as last season but new statutes regarding the hunting of public lands by out-of-state hunters will take effect.

SEASON AND LIMIT

The season framework remains the same with youth season being March 8 – 14, and the open Spring season is March 15 – May 1. The bag limit is one adult gobbler or one gobbler with a six-inch or longer beard per day, three per season. Hunters 15 years of age and younger may harvest one gobbler of choice that is any age per day and three for the season limit.

WHAT'S NEW

The latest regulation change is for public land hunting regarding non-residents. Between March 15 – 28, all non-resident turkey hunters must be drawn before they can hunt public lands. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) will limit the numbers allowed on public lands during this time. This regulation does not apply for private or leased lands, nor does it affect traditional WMA draw hunts.

Non-resident hunters must obtain a special, no-cost Public Land Endorsement in addition to regularly required licenses when hunting open public land during the first two weeks of the season (March 15 – 28). The endorsement will be allotted in limited quantities via a drawing

conducted in mid-February and winners will be notified by email.

Non-resident hunters should visit the MDWFP website for the application and more information. The period to apply for the drawing is anytime between Jan. 15 – Feb. 15 via a link on the website under the turkey hunting program page.

Mississippi maintains a reputation as a blue-chip turkey hunting state, which is part of the reasoning behind these new regulations. With an increase in popularity in recent years, non-resident license sales have doubled since 2019. The new license endorsement was established to maintain hunting quality on Mississippi's limited public lands. MDWFP's goal is to ensure hunter numbers on public land are realigned closer to historic normal.

REPORTING HARVESTS

Mandatory Game Check was initiated in 2019 and remains the law. It is required for all turkey hunters and is an easy process.

Before you go hunting, obtain a hunting license and the means to report your harvest. There are two types of harvest records that are acceptable — a digital record or a printed form. Digital records may be done through the Game Check feature within the MDWFP app; register in the app and it will be your official harvest record. If you prefer a printed form, it can be found and printed from the MDWFP website under Game Check instructions page.

Hunters are required to start the reporting process whether digital or print before the turkey is moved from its harvest location. Under the app, click Report Turkey button and complete then submit the entry. Don't worry if there is no cell service, the app will upload the harvest info when cell service resumes. The printed form must be started before moving the turkey and called in or reported online before 10 p.m. on the day of harvest.

Remember the three ways to report:

- MDWFP App
- Online at mdwp.com/gamecheck
- Call 1-800-BE-SMART

Once the harvest reporting is complete, hunters will receive a confirmation number that should be documented on the harvest report and the app will automatically give the confirmation number on the app report.

WRAPPING IT UP

Every Magnolia State hunter should know and review the latest regulations and pass the info to other hunters. Non-residents—it's time to apply for the Public Land Endorsement. ■

CONFIRMATION NUMBER
20-28719T

HARVEST DATE
04/10/2020

COUNTY
Jefferson

PRIVATE/PUBLIC LAND
PRIVATE PUBLIC

BEARD LENGTH
6" or less Greater than 6"

LONGEST SPUR LENGTH
Less than 1" 1" to 1 1/2" Greater than 1"

DISCLAIMER: MDWFP is NOT capturing, transmitting, or storing any GPS location information during the reporting of harvest records using this mobile application.

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GSi OUTDOORS PINNACLE PRO

Camp stoves are bulky, hard to clean, and never roomy enough for multiple pots and pans. Or at least they used to be. The GSi Outdoors Pinnacle Pro camp stove eliminates those negatives with its sleek design, stainless finish, and non-stick boil-over tray.

When not in use, it folds, and folds, and folds until it's out of the way. When it's time to cook, the design allows the full use of both burners, thanks in part to windscreens that do their job without getting in the way.

The dual starters are a nice touch, and the flexible braided propane hose allows the propane bottle to sit behind the stove, saving valuable food prep area.

The 11,000 BTU dual burners will have the whole camp fed pronto. The retracting legs and space-saving design mean you'll take it along everywhere.

MSRP: \$240

For more info, visit:
gsioutdoors.com



GAMAKATSU WACKY HEAD

Gamakatsu's Wacky Head jig is a uniquely-designed jig that will entice even the wariest of biters into striking. The side-to-side rolling action created by the flat-shaped head is too much for fish to resist.

The Wacky Head comes in a red epoxy head with short-shank, wide gap hooks. It's available in three sizes -- 1/32-ounce, 1/6-ounce, and 1/8-ounce.

Add this to your tackle bag and show the fish something a little bit different next time you're on the water.

MSRP: \$8.66

For more info, visit:
gamakatsu.com

GAMO SWARM MAGNUM .22 AIR RIFLE

This air rifle is a squirrel hunters dream. Shooting .22 caliber pellets at 1300 fps, and featuring its Whisper Fusion noise-dampening technology and Rapid Reload 10-shot pellet magazine, you'll be shooting your limit of bushytails quickly and quietly.

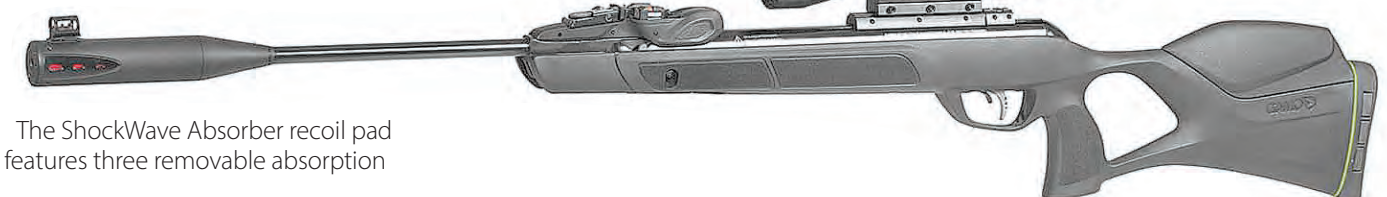
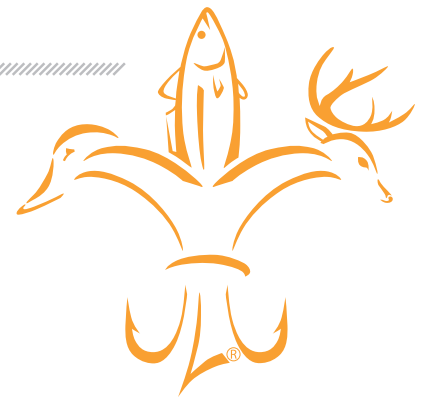
It's got high-visibility iron sights, but also comes with a fog-proof and shockproof 3-9x40 scope with mounting hardware.

cells, ensuring comfortable shooting. And the Recoil Reducing Rail absorbs shock waves, virtually eliminating recoil stress to the scope.

This gun weighs less than 7 pounds and is a dream to shoot.

MSRP: \$320

For more info, visit:
gamousa.com



The ShockWave Absorber recoil pad features three removable absorption



Few Gulf Coast anglers intentionally leave the dock hoping to stack a mess of flounder on ice, but nobody objects when they land a bonus “flattie” or two. Anglers who target flounder usually fish with live shrimp, minnows and other natural baits. However, artificial temptations can catch flounder and the finicky fish can’t strip them off the hooks as easily.

Since flounder obviously must spend most of their time on the bottom looking skyward, sinking lures traditionally make the best presentations. Many salt-water anglers fish jigheads sweetened with soft-plastic trailers.

“For flounder, some people like smoky curled-tail grubs, but I like brightly colored plastics,” recommended Mike Gallo of Angling Adventures of Louisiana, (985-781-7811, www.AAofLA.com) of Slidell, La. “I throw white, pearl or chartreuse grubs. I just drag it along the bottom. Flounder are very much scent oriented, so sometimes we tip jigs with a piece of shrimp. Gulp! baits and other scented lures also work very well.”

When specifically targeting flounder, use the least amount of weight possible, just enough to get the offering to the bottom. During a strong tide, upsize the weight, but not too big. Ambush predators, flounder commonly face into the flow to watch for prey drifting or tumbling naturally along the bottom, like an injured shrimp or baitfish caught in the tide.

LOOK FOR MOVING WATER >

FLAT OUT FOR FLOUNDER

FISHING AN ARRAY OF ARTIFICIAL LURES WORKS TO FOOL THE BIG ONES.

LOOK FOR MOVING WATER

"I definitely look for moving water," said Tom Adams with Fishing Tom Guide Service (318-675-9114, www.fishingtom.net) in Hackberry, La. "Normally, I use a 1/8-ounce jighead, but I go to a 1/4-ounce if necessary. I don't want anything too heavy. I throw a bait upstream so it bounces along the bottom with the current. That's when flounder pop it. I like a 3-inch Berkley Gulp! Swimming Mullet. My favorite flounder colors are pink or chartreuse."

During a falling tide, small marshy ditches draining ponds pull bait out to deeper water. When fishing a falling tide, toss a soft-plastic shrimp imitation or similar temptation as far upstream as possible. Hold the rod tip high to let the bait barely bounce over the bottom. As necessary, gently lift the rod tip to keep the bait off the bottom and in the flow. Use the reel only to take up slack.

"I've caught flounder on a plethora of lures," said Kyle Johnson with Coastal Waters Outfitters (228-669-3553, www.fishcoastalwaters.com) in Biloxi, Miss. "The great thing about artificial lures, flounder don't play with it like live bait. When they want

it, they hit it and swallow it."

"My favorite flounder lure is a Down South Lures soft-plastic shad on a 1/8- or 1/4-ounce jighead," Johnson revealed. "I like a jighead with a short-shanked hook in 2/0 or 1/0. The shorter shank gives a soft-plastic bait more action because the body can wiggle and move around more. A person can also get a better hook set with a shorter shank. I also like a 3.5-inch Egret Baits Mambo Mullet swimbait in Cajun Pepper color with some red and gold flakes. It has a 1/4-ounce internal weight. With the swimbait, I let it touch bottom occasionally, but try to keep it swimming just off the bottom. Flounder come off the bottom to smack it."

THEY SMASH BASS BAITS

Besides jigheads and swimbaits, flounder smash many other baits. Any bass angler who regularly fishes brackish marshes and river deltas probably caught flounder on practically every bait type in the tackle inventory.

"While targeting bass on the Sabine River system around Sabine Lake, we absolutely catch flounder on worms, jigs and many different kinds of baits," Adams said. "Flounder are a lot

Most people catch flounder on live minnows or shrimp, but flounder might strike a number of artificial baits, such as this jighead tipped with a soft-plastic trailer. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** An angler shows off a flounder he caught with a soft-plastic crab imitation. Flounder hit a variety of artificial baits.

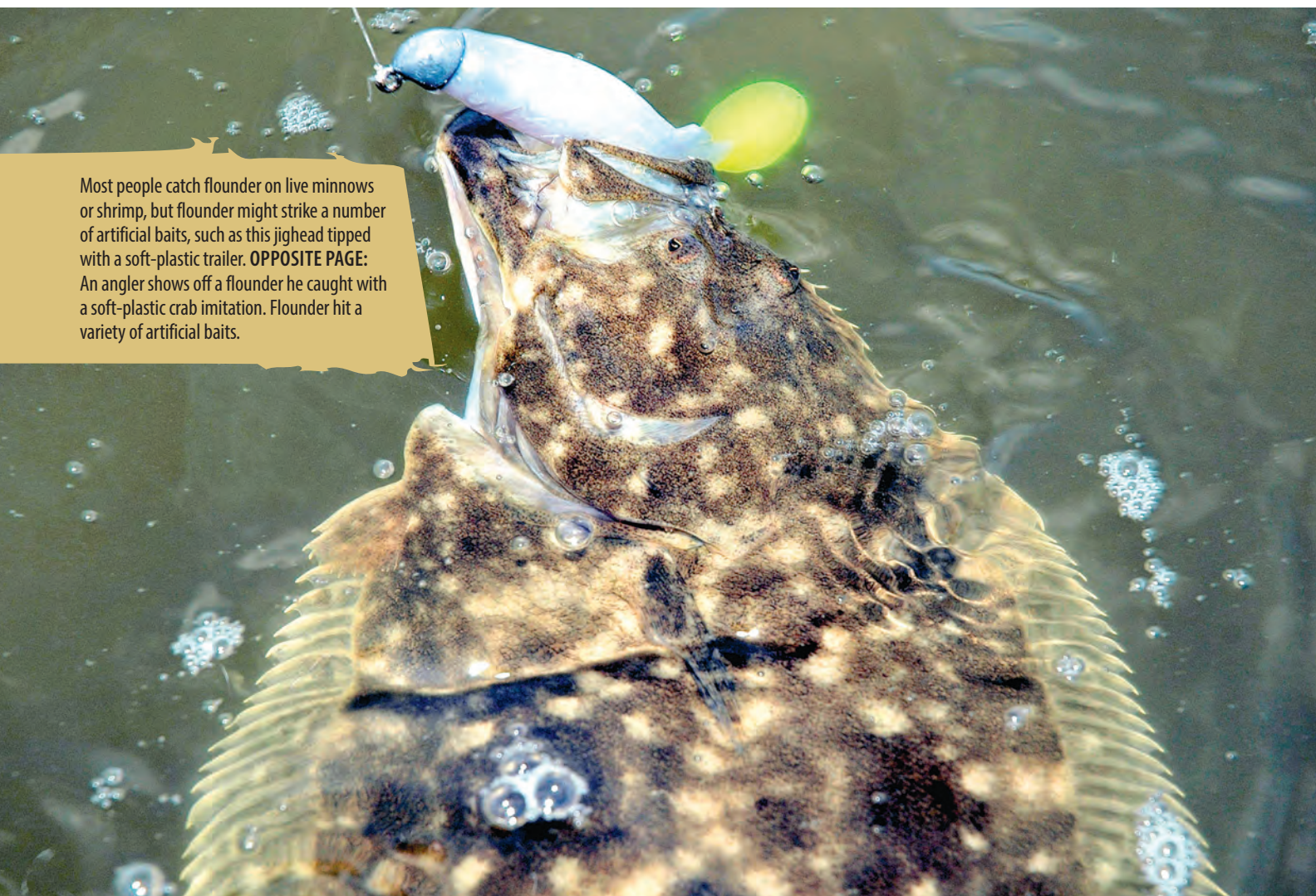


Photo by John N. Felsher

more aggressive predators than most people think. I've had flounder hit lures so hard it almost ripped the rod out of my hands. Once, I saw fish busting baitfish and thought it was redfish. I threw a topwater out and caught two flounder."

Favorite bass busters turned flounder finders, Texas-rigged worms, weedless jigs and similar attractants can put fish in the boat. A weedless bass jig tipped with soft-plastic craw imitates a crawfish or crab. Worms and weedless jigs can slip into thick cover where flounder often lurk. For fishing weedy shorelines, jetties, bridge pilings or similar places, flip weedless jigs as close to cover as possible and fish them vertically. The sudden invasion of its lair might trigger a reaction strike even from a flounder not feeding aggressively. If the bait hits bottom with no bite, jig it up and down a couple times. Then, drop it into another likely hiding spot.

Another bass technique, a wacky worm with a hook inserted into the middle rather than at the head slowly sinks like a dying shad or shrimp. Drop a wacky worm next to weeds or other cover and let it sink without additional action. A flounder sees a tantalizing silhouette slowly descending to its hiding spot with the tips quivering seductively. That prompts a predatory instinct. If nothing hits, drop it into another nearby pocket. This way, anglers can probe all along a shoreline, reef edge, jetty, bulkhead or other places that might hold flounder. Watch how the line moves for subtle bites.

TYPICAL BITE IS SOFT

"A typical flounder bite is a very soft, sensitive bite, just a nudge" Adams said. "Someone must have a feel for it."

Flounder frequently slurp soft plastics, but these toothy predators can attack prey more aggressively. Anything that might interest a speckled trout or redfish could entice a flounder. Many anglers throw spinnerbaits or shallow-diving crankbaits for redfish. These baits imitate shad or other baitfish and might tempt larger flounder looking for a bigger meal.

Toss a spinnerbait to a shoreline, jetty or other cover. Let it sink to the bottom. Barely turn the reel handle to keep the blade flickering just off the bottom. Anglers can also fish wobbling gold or silver spoons the same way. With either bait, anglers might add a sliver of shrimp or cut bait for flavor and scent.

"I catch a bunch of flounder by slow-rolling spinnerbaits," said Sonny Schindler with Shore Thing Fishing Charters (228-342-2206, www.shorethingcharters.com) in Bay St. Louis, Miss. "I'll just dig it across the bottom. When flounder want a spinnerbait, they crush it."

Use smaller crankbaits that generate good wobbling action and resemble pogies, mullets, croakers or other salty morsels. Run crankbaits parallel to shorelines, jetties or other structures. When fishing flats, use lures with bills that make the bait dive slightly deeper than the water. As the bill hits bottom, it digs up a silt trail. This commotion could attract fish.

Any brackish to salty system along the Gulf Coast should hold flounder. With low profiles and high tolerance for fresh water, flounder even enter coastal rivers. The marshes between Sabine and Calcasieu lakes near Lake Charles offer some of the best waters to catch big flatties in Louisiana.



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GOING DEEP ➤

GOING DEEP

“Flounder use some deep bayous off the Calcasieu Ship Channel when running to or from the marsh,” Adams said. “Some deep bayous at the south end of Calcasieu Lake, Kelso Bayou and the Salt Ditch areas around Black Lake are good places to look for flounder.”

People can also find flounder in the Terrebonne-Barataria Estuary, particularly around the Grand Isle area. Marshes, bayous and passes associated with eastern Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne out to the Gulf of Mexico and south to the mouth of the Mississippi River offer unlimited excellent places to catch flounder.

Mississippi anglers catch flounder in the Pearl and Pascagoula River deltas, around the barrier islands and in the marshes surrounding Back Bay or Biloxi Bay. The Old Fort Bayou area near Ocean Springs can produce good flounder action. Many people fish the Bayou Caddy area and the marshes bordering Mississippi Sound between Waveland and Pearl River.

“Back Bay is a good place to catch flounder,” Johnson said. “We often go out to the Chandeleur Islands. Running a 28-foot boat with twin 200-horsepower engines, it takes less than an hour to reach the islands from Biloxi. In late winter or spring, I fish from the main island to the north.”

Situated in Louisiana waters, but accessible by boat from



Photo by John N. Felsner



Photo by John N. Felsner

These flounder hit plastic worms in the marshes near Venice, La. In coastal waters, flounder often hit various lures intended for bass. INSET: Flounder, like this one caught by Jeff Bruhl in the marshes of the Pearl River delta near Slidell, La., often bite soft plastic baits, particularly Texas-rigged worms, intended for largemouth bass

Photo by John N. Felsher

Elizabeth Eustis shows off a flounder she caught while fishing with Capt. Tom Adams of Fishing Tom Guide Service in the Calcasieu Estuary near Lake Charles, La.



Mississippi, the Chandeleur Islands run in a giant crescent for about 50 miles off the southeastern Louisiana coast. The low, sandy uninhabited chain of barrier islands create excellent habitat for flounder and other species.

"We've caught some big flounder in the Chandeleurs while wade fishing," Johnson recalled.

"I am very conservation-minded. I say just take what you need and release the rest. If we really get into flounder, each person can take a good one home and we release the rest. We don't want to overdo it, especially considering the population has taken a real dip in recent years."

For the past decade or so, flounder populations plunged across the Gulf Coast due to various reasons, but they seem to be making a comeback. Larger females generally remain in inshore waters while smaller males prefer deeper waters offshore. Therefore, the overwhelming preponderance of fishing pressure greatly impacts reproducing females more than males.

Keep some flounder to make a few delicious meals, but release the rest, especially the biggest ones. ■

AMBERJACK SPOTLIGHT >



John N. Felsher is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. You can contact him at JohnNFelsher.com.

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Troy Helwig caught this 114.2-pound beast back on March 18, 2011 out of Ocean Springs.

Photo courtesy Troy Helwig



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: GREATER AMBERJACK

Greater amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*) are long, heavy-bodied fish. They are one of numerous members of the jack family. They are close cousins to lesser amberjacks and banded rudderfish. Greater amberjacks are commonly called simply “amberjacks.”

These fish vary widely in color depending on their surroundings. Their backs are usually bluish-brown to dark olive and their sides are often silvery white with a wide amber-colored stripe running down each side from head to tail.

Many members of the jack family look very similar. One feature that sets the amberjack apart is a dark band extending from the mouth, through the eye, and to the front of the dorsal fin. Their tails are more crescent-shaped than forked.

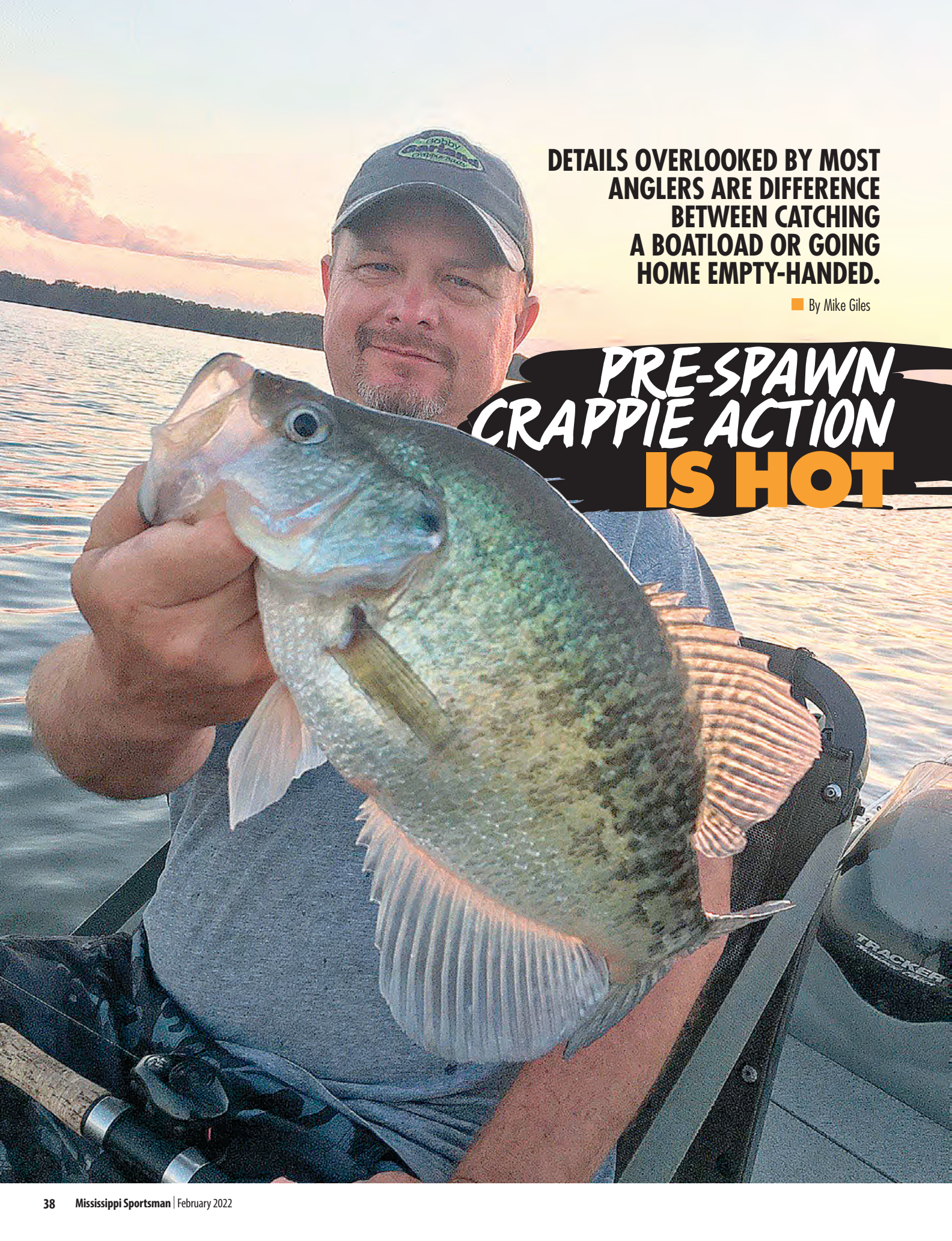
Amberjacks can grow to more than 150 pounds, but are more commonly caught by anglers in the 20- to 40-pound range. Most catches of amberjack are incidental catches by anglers targeting snapper and grouper while bottom fishing with cut bait.

These fish are found throughout the

world in subtropical and temperate waters. Those caught by American anglers range from off the coast of New England to the Gulf of Mexico. They are typically found around natural and artificial reefs and wrecks. Offshore oil platforms are also common areas to find them.



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



DETAILS OVERLOOKED BY MOST ANGLERS ARE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CATCHING A BOATLOAD OR GOING HOME EMPTY-HANDED.

■ By Mike Giles

PRE-SPAWN CRAPPIE ACTION IS HOT

Brad Chappell watched his graph and lines simultaneously as he slow trolled the bountiful waters of Lake Washington.

CHAPPELL'S RODS SUDDENLY BEGAN JERKING DOWN,

and as he reached for one of them, another started jerking towards the water. In short order Chappell had landed a couple of super-sized Lake Washington slabs. He continued his route picking up crappie with seemingly no rhyme or reason. It almost seemed like they were biting at random spots as the open water gave no clues of what it held deep below the surface.

"I've spent thousands of hours on the water of Lake Washington learning the lay of the lake and learned the tendencies of the fish," Chappell said. "I know that the fish are there, but you have to find out where they are and what they want on the day you are fishing. It's like a game that starts again each time you are on the water."

There's just no substitute for time on the water and Chappell pays attention to minute details that are often times overlooked by most anglers. It is precisely those details that mean the difference between catching a boatload or going home empty-handed.

"I've got a camp on Lake Washington, and I like to spend the winters up here catching fish and relaxing," Chappell said. "It may take me a little while but if I have a few hours, I'll find out where they are and what they want to eat on that particular day."

While he's relaxing from the rigors of his daily guided fishing trips throughout most of the year, he's also looking for new hot spots. He finds them the old-fashioned way by fishing under various circumstances in all weather conditions.

Chappell employs a variety of fishing techniques throughout the year when fishing for crappie and will try several until he finds what they want. He'll slow troll his long poles when he gets the chance, but he also likes to spider rig jigs from the front of the boat. When the weather and conditions allow, he really enjoys casting Bobby Garland jigs to the hidden slabs that he finds on some of his hot spots.

"If I can find a concentration of crappie around a submerged stump or top, I'll get about 25 to 30 feet from them and cast to them," Chappell said. "You can watch your jigs slowly falling on light line on my LiveScope screen and watch the crappie strike the jig. Sometimes you have to get them to bite by enticing that first bite by jerking the jig up and letting it fall as it descends upon them. If you can get them into a feeding frenzy it will set the school off, and you can load the boat."

I've seen Chappell's expertise firsthand and he's a pro at catching crappie from deep water brush piles and stumps.

FINDING SUSPENDED CRAPPIE ➤

In February and March, Brad Chappell is usually long line trolling out of the back of his boat.



FINDING SUSPENDED CRAPPIE

“From mid-February through mid-March, I’ll target suspended fish that are in the pre-spawn pattern,” Chappell said. “I still like fishing for them in deep water, but they’re just starting to get aggressive and they’re starting to feed up and get that little burst of energy before they go into the process of actually spawning. I’d call that a good pre-spawn pattern and it would be mid-February to late February.

“I’m usually pulling two 1/8-ounce jigs about 1.2 mph and the jigs are going to hit about 12- to 13-feet deep. Some days they may be a little bit shallower, so I’ll use a 1/6- and 1/8-ounce jig.”

After he finds the depth that they’re at, he’ll fish the areas of the lake that have that certain depth. Usually he’s keying on 13 to 16 feet deep water and will target that range and hit those contours as he works his way around the lake.

“After I find an area that has a concentration of the fish that are biting, I’ll work that area back and forth, say maybe a 500-yard area, until they quit biting or we limit out,” he said.

LONG LINE TROLLING OUT BACK

During February and March, Chappell is going to be long line trolling out of the back of the boat.

“I’ll use a 6-pound diameter Hi-Vis line and alternate between a clear line and Hi-Vis line on each pole,” Chappell said. “That way if we get the lines tangled up on a couple poles, we can separate them easier by telling the lines apart.”

Chappell uses rods of various lengths starting with a 9-foot pole straight out the back. Then he will use 12-foot poles on each side, then 15-foot, then 18-foot-long poles to cover more water with less tangles between the rods and lines. Chappell lets out about 70 to 80 feet of line out the back of the boat and the lures will sink to the preferred depth and stay there until they’re bit.

“I typically use a Brad Chappell Signature Series rod that I designed for them,” he said. “You can find them for sale at Grizzly Jigs. This pattern will work all spring.”

During February and March, when the crappie are deep, the sudden cold fronts and weather changes don’t affect them as bad, according to Chappell.

“Cold fronts don’t affect deeper fish as bad,” Chappell said. “If the fish are spread out you can pick them up all along no matter how many boats are out there. Wind doesn’t seem to make much difference to the deep fish either.”

An important thing to remember is that all of the fish in the lake don’t spawn at the same time. Even in March anglers can catch some fish deep. When the spawners have finished and are moving back into the deep water, others are moving shallow to spawn as well.

CHAPPELL’S PREFERRED BAIT

“I’m a Bobby Garland fan and use those jigs,” Chappell said. “I like the Bobby Garland Strollers for trolling, and I’ve caught tens of thousands of crappie on them. They are a curly style bait, and they create a lot of vibration and that attracts a lot of bites.”

Chappell likes to fish a variety of jig colors on Lake Washington. Some of his favorites are Vegas, Bluegill Fire, Keystone Candy, Glacier and Horse Fly.



After he finds the depth the crappie are at, Chappell will fish the areas of the lake that have that certain depth. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Lake Washington can provide some fantastic fishing action this month.

Photo by Brian Cope

LIVESCOPES

LiveScopes have changed the way top crappie anglers’ fish during tournaments, and it allows anglers to fish for the big crappie. It’s rare these days to see an angler win a tournament who doesn’t prefer fishing the LiveScope. They can target the lunker crappie and weigh in their best five or seven fish with strings that often rival bass tournament winning weights. The technique is just that good.

Some say that the LiveScopes should not be allowed, because they are just that good. But they are just a tool, and it allows knowledgeable anglers the ability to catch those lunkers and release the smaller ones to grow and catch another day. The veteran tournament anglers don’t keep everything they catch so there should be no problem with having plenty of fish left for everybody to catch.

CATCH AND RELEASE

“The limit on Lake Washington is 30 fish per person,” Chappell said. “But I catch and release when I’m just fishing and search-



ing for new spots, and I don't have to keep 60 fish a day when I go fishing to have some to eat. There's so many fish in this lake that you can keep a mess almost any time you want so I'll keep seven or eight fish to eat when I want some and eat them fresh."

Chappell prefers to catch and release because it allows him to look for bigger fish while releasing the smaller ones so that they can grow up, too. Thankfully, most crappie anglers aren't gluttons, and they keep a few to eat and throw the rest back to catch another day.

Whether you prefer fishing with a cane pole and minnow, long poling, bottom bumping, casting jigs or single poling, you can be successful at catching fish but you've got to spend the time on the water to learn the lay of your lake, what the fish are doing and where they will be located during the time you are on the water. There's just no substitute for time on the water. You can catch crappie on various techniques on the same lake at the same time.

Chappell's best crappie was pulled from the bountiful waters of Lake Washington and weighed nearly 4 pounds! If you are looking for some fantastic fishing action, then head to Lake Washington this year and you might just catch the largest crappie you have ever had on a line. ■

For more information on fishing the lake during February or March, contact Brad Chappell at 601-317-6681 or on Facebook at Brad Chappell Guide Service.



GETTIN' FRESH ➤



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

If you spend time on the water to learn the lay of your lake, you can be successful at catching fish.

Sustaining fishing for crappie like this remains a fisheries management challenge in small and mid-size lakes.



CRAPPIE STOCKING

Photo courtesy Bill Turner

POOR RETURN OF HATCHERY FINGERLINGS IN MISSISSIPPI STATE LAKES

Mississippi can rightfully boast some of the best crappie fishing in the country in its larger reservoirs and river oxbow lakes, but sustaining good crappie fisheries in small and mid-size impoundments is difficult. Some fisheries managers would say, “not possible.”

Crappie are notorious for wide fluctuations in year-class strength, the numbers of individuals spawned in a given year that remain in the population in the fall or the succeeding year. Crappie fishing can be excellent several years after a strong year class, as crappie grow to 8, 10 and 12 inches. But the good fishing commonly is punctuated by poor fishing following weak year classes.

An obvious solution seems to be stocking crappie to keep recruitment high. A recent study by Mississippi State fisher-

ies researchers Bryant Haley and Wesley Neal evaluated the success of crappie stocking in four of Mississippi’s 20 state fishing lakes.

THE STUDY

Hatchery-produced fingerling white crappie were stocked into the four lakes ranging in size from 70 to 180 acres at 50 fish per acre in 2015. Magnolia crappie — a hybrid between white crappie and black-stripe black crappie — were stocked at the same density in 2016. All fish were marked with dyes that allowed detection of stocked fish by microscopic examination of the otoliths (ear bones).

Fingerling white crappie were also stocked into newly renovated Lake Monroe, assumed to lack crappie, to serve as a reference lake and to monitor marking effectiveness.

Crappie populations were sampled immediately before stocking in 2015 and 2016 and in the summer of 2017.

The wild-spawned, age-0 crappie averaged 5.1- to 5.4-inches long when the hatchery-produced crappie were stocked. The hatchery crappie were 2.8- to 3.1-inches long when stocked.

Only 11 hatchery-produced crappie were collected among all lakes and all sampling years. Ten of those fish were collected in previously crappie-free Lake Monroe.



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some success has been achieved stocking crappie. Stocked crappie made an 18 to 74 percent contribution to crappie populations in large (3,000 to 30,300 acres) reservoirs in Tennessee. However, stocked crappie were less than five percent of the crappie population in Lake Chicot, Ark., a 21-mile-long oxbow lake now isolated from the Mississippi River, after several years of stocking. The low return observed in Mississippi's state lakes matches the consistently low returns from crappie stockings in small to mid-size (140 to 1,240 acres) lakes in Arkansas, Florida, and Tennessee.

Lake size may have something to do with the effect of stocking crappie. Haley and Neal found a positive relationship between lake size and percent contribution of stocked crappie when they analyzed the pooled results from their and other studies.

This relationship — better survival of stocked crappie in larger lakes — may be attributed to largemouth bass predation. Young crappie occupy the open-water zone of lakes; bass forage primarily in the shallow, shoreline zone. In smaller systems, where the shoreline zone is a larger proportion of the total habitat than in larger lakes, the crappie are exposed to greater predation by the bass.

Smaller lakes with high proportions of shoreline-zone habitat also have higher densities of largemouth bass, further increasing bass predation on the crappie.

The poor success may also be partly attributed to the smaller size of the stocked crappie compared to the wild-spawned crappie. The smaller size would make them more vulnerable to bass predation. It would also make them less able to successfully compete with their larger, wild-spawned siblings.

Stocking larger fingerlings and releasing the fish into the open-water zone rather than at boat ramps may improve the survival. Ongoing research at Mississippi State is exploring off-season crappie spawning, an approach that could be used to produce fingerlings earlier in the year, thus, equivalent to the size of the wild-spawned crappie at the time of stocking.

Studies on other fish species have found improved survival when naive hatchery-reared fish have been

exposed to natural habitats and predation prior to stocking. This approach, possibly achieved by first releasing the crappie into predator-free enclosures installed in the lake, may also benefit crappie survival.

While some questions await answers, the present knowledge indicates stocking crappie to supplement existing populations in smaller impoundments is a waste of limited fisheries resources. But even if post-stocking survival was increased, a significant dilemma remains: managers don't know the strength of a crappie year class until late summer or fall when it is far too late to initiate hatchery production of crappie fingerlings. ■

LUNKER LINES ➤



Mississippi anglers can expect to catch quality crappie two or three years after a strong year class.

Photo courtesy Tim Ciampoli

FISHING ROSS BARNETT'S FEBRUARY FRONTS

Depending on the fronts moving through in February, bass may be in 1-10 feet or more of water and be super aggressive or slow to bite. A cold front at the beginning of February may occur with a 32 degree air temperature; or 50-60 degrees in a warm front, which is when bass will be in the lily pad stems in water 1 foot or less.

EARLY FEBRUARY

I'll key in on the rocks and riprap near the dam and in Pelahatchie Bay. I'll fish three crankbaits to determine where the bass are — a Mann's Baby 1-Minus, a C4 crankbait and a T15+ crankbait — and a suspending jerkbait. In cold weather, I expect to catch the bass in water 8-10 feet deep on the rocks with a crawfish-colored T15+ crankbait on 12-pound test White Peacock fluorocarbon line with a 6.2:1 ELS Bruin reel and a 7'1" medium action FX custom cranking rod. I'll start by fishing at a 45 degree angle from the edge of the rocks to the boat, bumping the crankbait into the rocks. Then, I'll cast parallel to the rocks and crank the T15+ slowly. I want to be able to feel the bill of that crankbait kicking off the rocks as it swims.

Also in cold weather, I'll cast a suspending jerkbait in a Table Rock color with a purple back, chartreuse sides and a little bit of an orange belly. I'll use an 8:1 ELS reel with 10 pound fluorocarbon on a 6'6" medium action FSX custom rod, jerk the lure down to 8-10 foot deep, pause it for 10 seconds and jerk it again. I expect to get the bite when the jerkbait's sitting still. Watching your line to see the bite is very important to success.

On warmer days, bass will pull up to the edge of the rocks. I'll switch to slow retrieving a red Baby 1-Minus and a crawfish-colored Mann's C4 crankbait, if most of my strikes are in 1-4 foot deep

water. The sun heats up the rocks, the baitfish move up to that shallower water, and the bass will follow them. I want my crankbaits to kick off the rocks. I'm fishing for a reaction strike. The water temperature will dictate at what depth the bass are concentrating.

LATER IN FEBRUARY

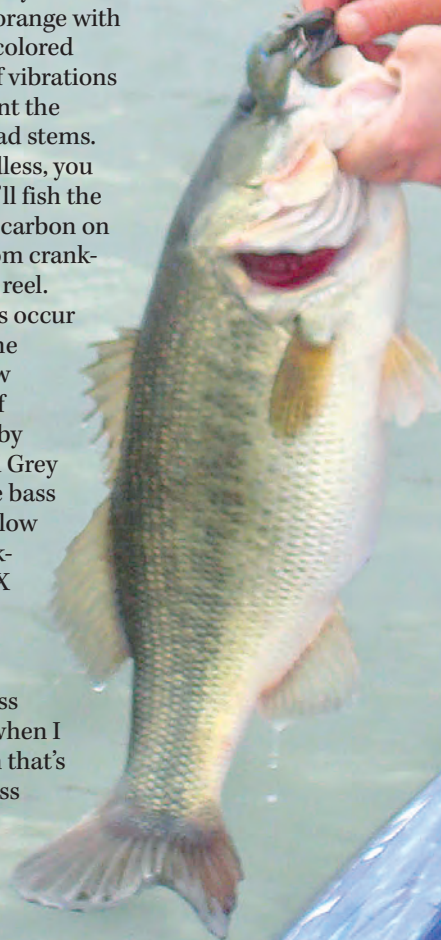
Once Ross Barnett has more warm fronts than cold fronts, the bass will move into the dead, shallow, lily pad stems on the eastern, shallow side of the lake. I'll fish the stems slowly with a 3/8-ounce bladed jig in a fire orange with a black blade and a crawfish-colored swimming trailer that puts off vibrations to cause a bass to attack. I want the bladed jig to kick off the lily pad stems. Since it's not completely weedless, you will get hung up sometimes. I'll fish the bladed jig on 20-pound fluorocarbon on a 7'6" medium heavy FX custom cranking rod with a 7.3:1 ELS Bruin reel.

Once two or three warm days occur toward the end of February, the bass will be holding so shallow you may see their backs out of the water. That's when the Baby 1-Minus in a shad color called Grey Ghost seems to produce more bass than the bladed jig in the shallow stems. I'll fish this small crankbait on a 7' medium heavy FSX custom rod and 20-pound fluorocarbon on a 7.3:1 Bruin reel. You'll have a chance of catching some fairly heavy bass when they're shallow. That's when I prefer 20-pound fluorocarbon that's strong enough to get those bass back to the boat.

The last bait I'll use in the lily pad stems will be a 3/8-ounce Classic Spinner Bait with gold blades and a



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.





Even in the colder part of February, you can catch some nice-sized keeper bass on crankbaits and jerkbaits.

chartreuse-and-white skirt. I get more bites with gold blades than I do with nickel or painted blades. I like to use this spinner bait in somewhat deeper water in the stems because I can reel it slower than the bladed jig and let it kick off the stems. I'll fish the spinner bait in 3-4 foot deep water where I've fished the bladed jig. I'll use an FX custom rod with heavy action with 20-pound fluorocarbon on a 6.2:1 Bruin ELS reel.

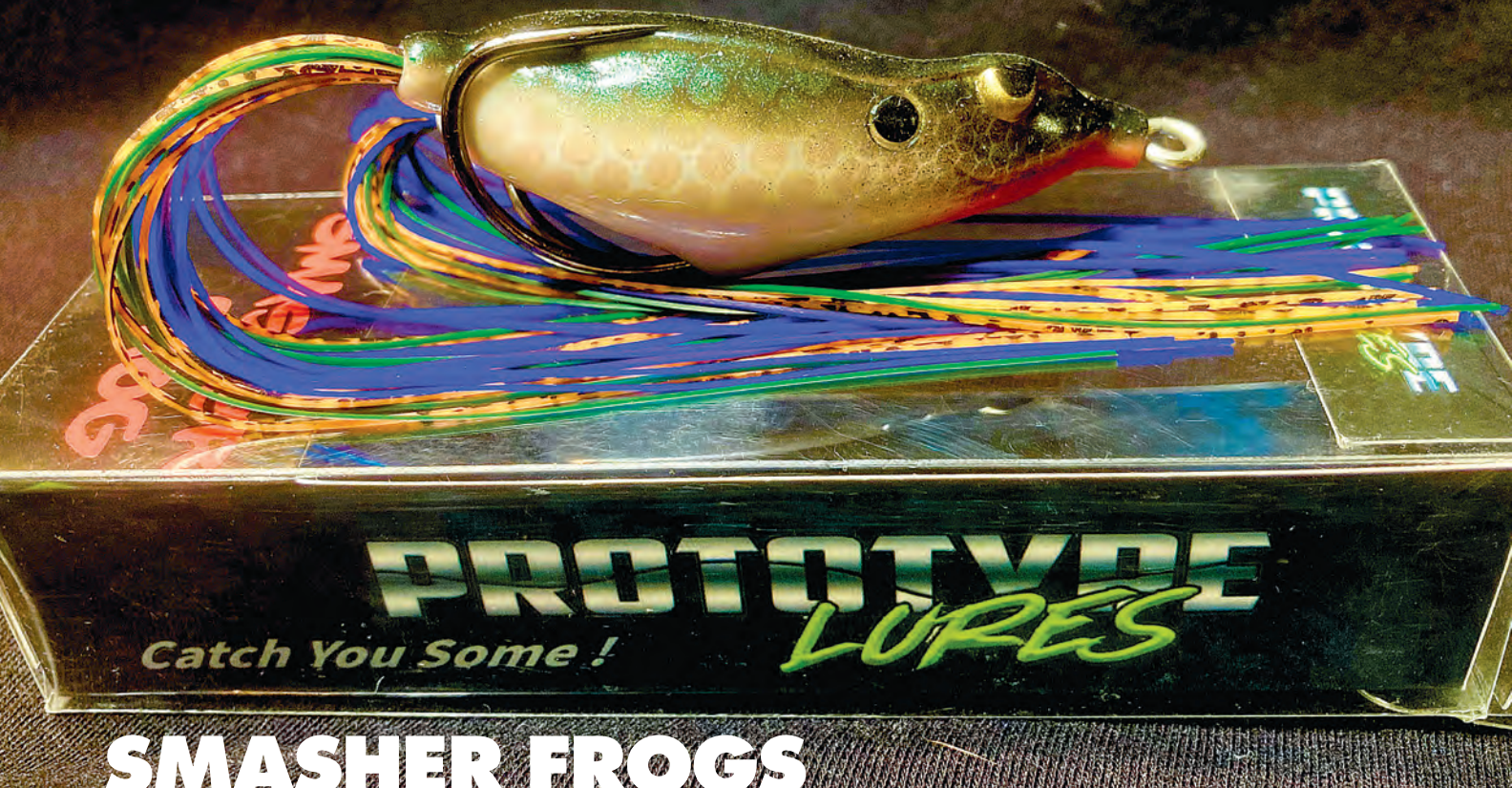
February weather dictates the water depth and the structure where the bass will be holding and also how many bass you may expect to catch. On cold days, catching five or six bass is a good day. On warmer days, I expect to catch 15-20 prespawn bass, 5 pounds or more. At Ross Barnett in February, you possibly may catch a 7-8 pound bass. If I can pick a February day to fish Ross Barnett, I prefer a south, southeast or northeast wind. A west wind will muddy up the west side of the lake, making catching bass much more difficult. ■

SMASHER FROGS ➤



The last lure Elias will fish before leaving the lily pad stems in February is a spinnerbait. He can swim it slower than any other lure and crash it into the stems.

Prototype Lures LLC's Smasher Frog has been making waves in the bass fishing market since it was introduced last spring.



SMASHER FROGS

BASS ARE BLOWING UP ON THIS LIFE-LIKE SOFT PLASTIC TOPWATER BAIT

A top notch soft plastic, hollow-body plastic frog twitched and walked across the surface of a bass angler's favorite fishin' hole usually winds up deep in the throat of a good-sized bass.

There are no two ways about it. When Prototype Lures LLC's Smasher Frogs get eaten, they often wind up far back in the mouth of self-respecting, hungry "hawgs". Derward Mauldin, creator of the Smasher Frog, is proud he has brought an angler-friendly soft plastic to bass anglers from his home state of Arkansas across the south, where the plastic frogs are romping across the thick mats and the bass are chomping.

Mauldin's first claim to fame as an artificial lure designer was the Prototype Lures LLC Guerilla Buzz, which was introduced in 2016. The buzz bait found its way into many tackle boxes over the past four years.

The West Helena, Arkansas, bass angler said he designed and oversaw construction of the plastic frog for the same

reason he made the buzz bait. He loves fishing with topwater lures, a passion ignited when he was young and fished with his father and brother.

"I have been a topwater man my whole life," Mauldin said. "There's nothing more exciting than a fish blowing up on topwater."

MAGIC NUMBER: 55

When water temperatures get to 55 degrees and up, that's his time to start casting the Guerilla Buzz and Smasher Frog. He'll rely on them from that magical mark in late winter and early spring.

"I'm an Arkansas man that loves Louisiana-type fishing, so I try to fish a lot of grass and a lot of mats," he said.

He welcomed input from pro bass anglers about three years ago when he began designing the frog. His goal was to make a properly weighted hollow-body soft plastic frog with a 5/0 double hook custom-built to fit the body for a more consistent hookset.

"I wanted a frog that was easier to

work," he said. "I wanted a frog to come through the grass ... not roll over on its side, not get hung up, not roll on its back. I wanted to make a frog to where it is more affordable for everyday fishermen to tournament fishermen. I wanted it to be more affordable for a college kid or a high school kid, so they could afford a good, quality bait."

The Smasher Frog hit the shelves, catalogs and online stores last spring. Tackle Warehouse took them on in April 2021. It became extremely popular in Virginia, where thick grass mats are targeted in slow pools of the Shenandoah River and Rural Retreat Lake. The ½-ounce Smasher Frog is 2 ½ inches long and weighs ½-ounce. Its has twin tails rubber strands, each 4 ½ inches long. Mauldin



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.

purposefully made the tails long so they can be cut to fit a bass angler's preference. The weight's placement and the special hook make the biggest difference, he said.

IT'S AN EASY WALKER

"By far it's the easiest walking frog on the market because of the way it's weighted," he said.

Mauldin weighted it so the body is half-submerged in the water. He pointed out some other plastic frogs float on top, which results in many of those models bouncing out of the bass' mouth on a strike. Also, he said, its position in the water moves more water.

The two-pronged hook doesn't have to be bent upward or out to improve the hookset as many bass anglers do to hooks on other plastic frogs. That technique does make for a better hookset, the artificial lure designer admitted, but also increases the likelihood of snagging the plastic frog more frequently.

"We use a 5/0 hook we designed for that because we couldn't get a manufactured hook" to do the job, Mauldin said.

"It's designed where the hook comes over his back, not out to the sides, so

when a bass mashes down on it the hooks are exposing themselves," he said. "We designed it so it collapses on the sides, too."

Mauldin believes the colors are first-rate. "We have a range of proven fish-catching colors," he said. "Fishermen can confidently select a color for every situation. They are good, life-like colors."

There are 10 colors available now and five more on the way for 2022. Some of the current favorites are Giller, Sun Perch, Pinkie, Flyswatter and Crawl Frog.

THE FAMILY GROWS

Smasher Frog will have a brother soon. Finishing touches were being made in December 2021 to the Smasher Popper, Prototype Lures LLC's newest lure. It should fit nicely in the plans of bass anglers who want to target bass with a popping frog.

The Smasher Popper features an "air evac escape" system bassers won't find anywhere else on any other plastic frog on the market. Air escapes faster than when a bass clamps down on it because of a pattern of air holes on the popping frog's back.

"Even with a Smasher Frog there's only one place on the frog when the bass

Derward Mauldin, owner of Prototype Lures LLC, says the Smasher Frog he designed usually gets inhaled deep in the mouth whenever bass try to eat it. That's what happened to this flyswatter-colored Smasher Frog.



hits and squeezes for the air to escape," Mauldin said, noting that model's vent is at the bottom and rear of the bait.

For more information on the Prototype Lures LLC Smasher Frog and other Prototype Lures products, go to prototypeluresllc.com. ■

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LEARN FROM A WIZARD BEHIND THE LENS

FOLLOWING CHRISTOPHER LECOQ'S TIPS CAN TURN YOUR OUTDOOR MOMENT OF A LIFETIME INTO A TREASURED MEMORY THAT YOU CAN SHARE FOR A LIFETIME.

■ By Chris Holmes

His answer and advice is, “Become familiar with the basics of image composition. Basic photography and videography lessons teach terms like headroom, rule of thirds, leading lines, negative space, diagonals, depth of field patterns and symmetry. This may all seem pretty technical, but are all simple concepts to understand. We have a psychological reaction to seeing an image. Knowing what makes it ‘pleasing to the eye’ greatly improves the quality of your work, no matter if you are using a cell phone, action cam, drone, consumer or professional camera. Strive to be creative and look at, and document things from unique perspectives and angles.”

TIPS FROM THE WIZARD ➤

Christopher LeCoq is a wizard behind the lens. While most of his work is videography and production, his still images are equally amazing. He’s shot and produced several hunting and fishing shows for many years. He’s also a regular in LSU sports productions. LeCoq has won numerous awards in broadcast media and even received a Suncoast Regional Emmy Nomination. He is regularly recognized by his peers from within the industry — even those not in tune with hunting and fishing.

He knows his stuff. We recently picked his brain to get tips for hunters and fisherman that want to take and produce high quality photos and videos to preserve and share their adventures in the outdoors.

“It is a lot easier these days,” he said. “Virtually everyone carries a smartphone so they always have a great tool to get high-resolution photos and videos right in their pocket. Gone are the days of needing a \$5,000.00 camera to get stunning content. GoPro’s and smartphones fill the need for most. Other specific video equipment is constantly getting better, easier and less expensive.”

LeCoq regularly gets compliments on his work and they usually go something like this: “Your images are always awesome, that camera is so good.”

TIPS FROM THE WIZARD

TIP 1: Don't set out to be Steven Spielberg. Stay creative. Are you documenting this for personal memories or the general public? Keep your audience in mind and give them something they want to see.

TIP 2: Practice with your equipment to get familiar with all functions. Before going on an actual trip, photograph the kids and dog in the yard. Outdoor activities aren't scripted and you need to prepare and be able to quickly adapt for when that special moment comes. Filming from a kayak or deer stand produces many more challenges that have to be met.

TIP 3: Before investing, you may want to rent a drone or GoPro to see if it is something you want to buy. Combining video from several different sources can make for a better production. If considering a drone, keep in mind there are strict restrictions on where they can legally be used.

TIP 4: Make sure to have several ways to attach your camera(s). This is especially important if self-filming. It is hard to hold a rod or gun and a camera all at the same time. You also do not want your video to all be from the same angle. Change

positions several times. If you have more than one camera, all-the-better. Different perspectives can be edited in production and give the viewer a better experience.

TIP 5: Editing is the most time consuming part of final production. Don't just turn the camera on and let it run all day. Know what you want and be specific in your filming. That provides much less footage to have to review for editing. YouTube is a great resource to learn the technical side of production. Watch and learn. It is also a good source to get equipment comparisons and help make informed choices before you purchase.

TIP 6: Managing data takes some planning. Today's cameras are much higher resolution and therefore the files are larger and require more storage space. Always save files from your memory cards to multiple locations to have back-ups in case one copy gets damaged or accidentally deleted. Cloud-based storage and external hard drives keep your data safe and also free up your computer's memory for editing purposes.

TIP 7: Keep in mind that not every outing will work out as planned. Don't frustrate yourself if things are not working out. You cannot control the weather, the fish, or the animals. Take



whatever footage you can to save and perhaps use at a later date.

TIP 8: If you can pre-scout an area, you will be much better prepared. Knowing where the sun rises and sets helps get in better position for camera angles. This is not a movie set so you need to control what you can and be prepared to adapt as needed.

TIP 9: B-Roll. This is video footage that is not the main subject of your film. Take B-Roll in 10 second increments. (Turn the camera on and literally count to 10) You may only use a few seconds of that clip, but it is there if you need it. This is footage that you edit into your final film to add tension, make it more interesting, and tie things together. It can also come in handy to cover any gaps and to even hide errors. Take B-Roll footage in a variety of perspectives of wide, medium and close-up. For instance, shoot a deer stand full wide, zoom in half way and then zoom as close as you can.

FOCUS ON LIGHT, SUN ➤

This great photo of a lab in the blind almost makes the viewer feel like they can see the ducks up in the sky that the dog is looking at.



HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION
Doves	Sept. 4-Oct. 17(n), Sept. 4-19 (s)	15	45
	Oct. 30-Nov. 28 (n), Oct. 9-Nov. 7 (s)		
	Dec. 25-Jan. 9 (n), Dec. 19-Jan. 31 (s)		
Quail	Nov. 25-March 5	8	
Rabbit	Oct. 16-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (fall)	Oct. 1-Feb. 28	8	
Squirrel (spr)	May 15-June 1	4	
Raccoon	July 1-Sept. 30	1 raccoon per party	
Rac/Opp/Bobct	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport)	5/day, 8/party	
	Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	No limit	
Rails			
King & Clapper	Sept. 1-Oct. 3, Nov. 26-Jan. 1	15	45
Sora & Virginia	Sept. 1-Oct. 3, Nov. 26-Jan. 1	25	75
Gallinules	Sept. 1-Oct. 3, Nov. 26-Jan. 1	15	45
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28	8	24
Crow	Nov. 6 - Feb. 28	No limit	No limit
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9
Wild Turkey			
Fall season	Oct. 15-Nov. 15 (permit, selected counties)	2 per season (may be either sex)	
Spring season	March 15-May 1	1/day, 3/season, longbeards only	
Youth season	March 8-14	1/day, 3/season, bearded birds only	

WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 11-26	6
	Nov. 26-28, Dec. 3-5	6
	Dec. 9-Jan. 31	
Geese (Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Sept. 1-30	5
	Nov. 12-28, Dec. 3-5,	Canada 3, Brant 1
	Dec. 9-Jan. 31	Snow/blue/Ross 20 White-fronted 3
Light Geese conservation	Oct. 1-Nov. 11, Nov. 29-Dec. 2 Dec. 6-8, Feb. 1-4, Feb. 7-March 31 Feb. 8-March 31	No limit

DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
Northeast	Oct. 1-Nov. 19	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 8-19 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 20-31 (archery/primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 19(dogs) Nov. 6-19 (youth)
East Central	Oct. 1-Nov. 19	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 8-19 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 20-31 (archery-primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 19(dogs) Nov. 6-19 (youth)
Southwest	Oct. 1-Nov. 19	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Nov. 8-19 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 20-31 (archery-primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 19(dogs) Nov. 6-Jan. 19 (youth)
Southeast	Oct. 15-Nov. 19	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs)
	Jan. 21-31 (either-sex arch-primitive)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)		Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 21-Feb. 15 (yth)
Delta/South Delta	Oct. 1-Nov. 19	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec.1 (dogs)
	Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon)		Dec. 16-23 (no dogs)
	Jan. 20-31 (archery primitive weapon)		Dec. 24-Jan. 19(dogs) Nov. 6-Jan. 19 (youth)

FOCUS ON LIGHT, SUN

TIP 10: When a subject is talking, the camera should always be on them. The sound will be much better. Always keep light and the sun in mind. Avoid heavy face shadows. Change shooting angles and subject position if possible. When shooting video on a cell phone, always turn the phone sideways to shoot in landscape mode. Think of how your eyes are oriented — they are aligned horizontally, not vertically.

TIP 11: Plan out what you want to document. What are your expectations for the beginning, middle and the end? Having the story laid out in your mind helps the flow and ensures you get all the video necessary to edit into a smooth flowing, interesting video.

TIP 12: Always have multiple batteries and memory cards. Even the best camera is useless if a battery dies or you run out of storage.

TIP 13: For devices that have voice control like newer GoPro's, use manual operation as it is more reliable and can be done silently if the situation requires. Once you capture a special moment — fish strike or landing, deer or duck shot, etc. Stop recording. It will be easier to locate that clip when editing as you know it will be located at the end of the clip.

TIP 14: Get a dry bag. The outdoors are hard on equipment and the weather can change at any moment. Electronics and water do not mix. A quality, dedicated dry bag is a great investment to keep your gear protected. If you don't have one, carry a large Ziploc or even a garbage bag for use in a pinch.



Getting the sun and lighting and a great background is the key to making this a good outdoor photo. **OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:** A closeup of the hog and happy hunter help illustrate the successful hunt very well. **OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM:** Whether it's an expensive camera or just a quality iPhone you take photos with, always have a waterproof bag to protect your equipment.



TIP 15: We as sportsman understand the harsh realities of taking fish and game. Yes, there is blood and death. We respect our quarry, but sometimes that is hard to explain to those that do not participate. The hard parts of what we do is sometimes best left out and the story told with images and words to best promote our heritage.

At the end of the day, this is supposed to be fun and help encourage others to participate or at least better understand what we do as sportsmen. The chance of becoming a YouTube star is remote. The most important result is the story. Producing quality, interesting and informative video, whether it is for your personal memories or sharing with the world is the best way to explain what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. It may even encourage others to give it a try and, importantly, helps keep the traditions alive. ■

Christopher LeCoq can be reached through his Facebook page, Full Frame Media Productions.

DEER PHOTO TIPS >



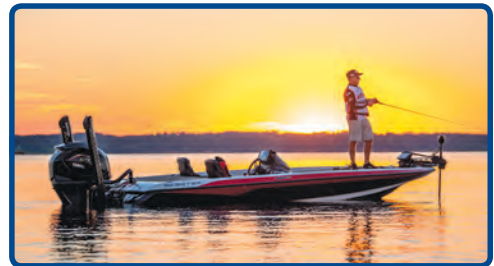
Chris Holmes has kayak fished in the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and many places in between.

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DEER PHOTO TIPS

With deer season in full swing, we've all seen terrible photos with blood everywhere, tongues hanging out, shadowed faces, etc. Taking a little time to think and prepare for your photos shows respect for the animal and produces a shot you will be proud to share and show off for years to come. You will be amazed at how much better your photos turn out using these simple tips:

- Carry a small pack of baby wipes or moist towelettes in your pack. Wipe away as much blood as possible. Use the used wipes to pack the hole to stop/limit more blood from coming out. Move the deer to a spot with less blood on the ground and/or use leaves and grass to cover ground blood.
- Select a site for the photo that is representative of your hunt. Natural settings are much better than the bed of a truck, on an ATV, or hanging from the skinning rack.

- Tuck the tongue back in or hide it — tongues hanging out look terrible.
- Position the deer with legs tucked or on a rock or stump to get some elevation if possible.
- Take the photo from a low angle looking up at the hunter and the deer.
- Take shots from many different angles and positions — digital photos are free and you can simply delete the ones you don't want.
- Talk to the hunter. Get them to smile, turn their head for different angles.
- Position the deer where the light will be to the photographer's back.
- Place the hunter seated behind the deer and have them hold with as few fingers as possible.



- Move the antlers up/down, left/right to see where they show off the best.
- Tip the hunters cap up high to lessen shadows on the face.
- Use fill flash, even in bright sun.
- Be aware of the background to avoid objects that take away from the photo — sticks/branches that appear to be coming out of the hunters head, trash, etc.
- If using the gun/crossbow in the photo make sure it is unloaded and pointed in a safe direction.
- To avoid that dead white or green eye look (flash), carry a pair of high-quality taxidermy glass eyes. Pop the eyes in over the natural eyes and align the pupils horizontally.
- You don't have to get the whole deer in the frame for a good photo.
- And finally, take photos of just the deer and perhaps with your gun or bow. ■

Both of these photos made sure that all blood was cleaned away, the tongue was tucked in and the natural-setting area was clean. While the first is not bad, the second one has the hunter smiling and the glass eye took away the dead-eye shine. It is these little things that greatly enhance the photo's appeal.



TOADFISH SHRIMP TOOL ➤

The shrimp peeling tool in action — it peels, deveins and butterflies in one motion.

TOADFISH SHRIMP TOOL

GRANDMA'S GADGET MAKES FAST WORK OF PEELING, DEVEINING

Photo courtesy Toadfish

T By Kinny Haddox
Thank goodness for Grandmas. If you love fresh shrimp, but wish there was an easier way to peel and devein a big pile of them, Casey Davidson's grandmother may have saved the day for you. Davidson is the CEO of Toadfish, a South Carolina business that manufactures the Frogmore Shrimp cleaner. "We grew up in the Lowcountry and wanted to solve a problem. Peeling shrimp is not a fun process and can be tedious," said Thor Scott, vice president of sales for the company. "One day our CEO, Casey Davidson, was with his grandmother and she was using a cheap, plastic shrimp tool that only peels the shrimp and she mentioned it would be great to have a blade in the tool. That was where the idea was born and Casey designed the only high quality shrimp tool that can peel, devein and butterfly the shrimp in one smooth, easy motion."

In a three-year period, the company has sold tens of thousands of the product and are working furiously to keep up with

demand. Here's how it works.

First, you insert the tool right below the top of the shrimp's shell. Then you push the tool forward, while at the same time sliding the shrimp upwards towards the handle. The entire shrimp peel will be left on the Frogmore cleaner. And the peeled, deveined, and butterflied shrimp will be left in your hand. A quick rinse and you're done.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

The company also has a video online that shows the process:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LWjoeuSZjE>

After watching Scott demonstrate the tool and then have others sample it, it was amazing to see how quickly people who had never peeled a shrimp picked up on it.

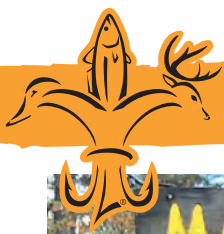
Toadfish also makes a whole range of kitchen products designed to be sturdy and effective for fishermen and cooks to make seafood prep easy. The shrimp tool is by far the most popular, but their oyster

knives, crab cutters and the "Ultimate Spatula" are also top sellers.

The company also has a strong commitment to coastal waters and the seafood that are an essential part of the ecosystem.

"Toadfish is committed to cleaning coastal water by replanting new oyster habitat across the country," Scott said. "Oysters are the centerpiece of healthy saltwater ecosystems. They filter toxins from the water and provide nursery grounds for hundreds of marine species. The more oysters we plant the cleaner and healthier our coasts become. The Toadfish 'Put 'Em Back' mantra comes from the goal of recycling all oyster shells so they can be reintroduced into the water, where more oysters will eventually grow. An acre of oysters can filter up to 24 million gallons of water per day. Toadfish has planted enough oysters to filter 82 million gallons of water daily. The more oysters we plant, the cleaner and healthier our coasts become."

To date, 210,643 square feet of oyster beds have been replanted by the company. ■



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



Justin Singley went hunting twice in early December with hopes of killing a nice buck, but they turned into hog hunts. On Dec. 4, he downed a nice sow weighing 110 pounds and on Dec. 5 he used his 45-70 to land a 250-pound boar.



Chance and DJ Mcknight got these bass fishing for the Vancleave High School bass fishing team at a Ross Barnett Reservoir tournament on Dec. 11.



Selby Oliver and his son, Rhett, had a great time fishing at Ross Barnett Reservoir on Nov. 15.



Josh Robertson caught this bass on Sept. 17 at Percy Quin State Park in Mccomb. The fish weighed 9.3 pounds and was released to be caught again. Robertson is having a replica made of it.

GOT PICS? We want 'em

Email images to: images@ms-sportsman.com

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

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

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