

Mississippi

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MARCH 2022



SPRING TURKEY FORECAST

LOCATING
MARCH
CRAPPIE

BOGUE
HOMA
LUNKERS

BASS BED
FISHING
STUDY

BOWHUNTING
GOBBLERS

2021-2022
DEER OF
THE YEAR:

BEST BUCKS OF
THE SEASON

RABBIT
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> By Phillip Gentry



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Spring means it's time for Magnolia state turkey hunters to hit the woods. Photo by Tommy Kirkland.

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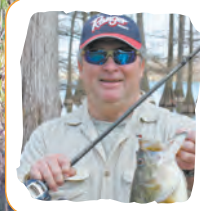
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OUTDOOR UPDATE

with Mike Giles



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

Andy Douglas

SPRING MEANS BLOOMING DOGWOODS, GOBBLING TURKEYS AND CRAPPIE SPAWNING

March is a favorite time of year for hunters and anglers alike as the woods are coming alive with buds and blooms and love is in the air.

From spawning bass and crappie to lovesick gobblers, there's sure to be something to seize your attention and draw you into the wild Mississippi outdoors.

Opening day of turkey season is always exciting and last year I spent the opening Saturday in the woods near Lauderdale and called up not one but two longbeards. The king of the flock came strutting up to 20 yards from me with his sidekick following close behind. I shot him in full strut, and he jumped straight up and started flipping and flopping in his dance of death. The second gobbler flew about 8-feet straight up, came down and started towards the gobbler I'd just shot.

I had to run the second gobbler off to tangle with another day. Had it been legal to kill two gobblers in one day I would have given him a free ride home also.

A few days later I was on the water at Okatibbee Lake catching my first limit of crappie with Ken Murphy. In fact, we each caught our limit of the papermouths and brought home 60 crappie after fishing about an hour!

Don't you just love spring?

So much to do and so little time to do it all. However, you can pick your passion and do some or all of it during the spring. Some hunt gobblers in the morning and then head to the lake in search of succulent crappie.

In this month's magazine, you can meet Becky Nicosia in "Turkey Slayer Extraordinaire" and read how she hunts and harvests gobblers with her Mathews bow. Hunting with a bow almost exclusively now, Nicosia is an expert at locating and harvesting wise old birds with only a stick and string. Read about her tips and techniques of harvesting the wary old gobblers with a bow.

The 2021-2022 Deer of the Year feature revisits some of the spectacular bucks harvested during the past season. Mississippi hunters, both male and female, brought down some impressive whitetails. Take a look back at a few of the best deer and the successful hunters who harvested them.

Phillip Gentry will give anglers a variety of ways to find and catch springtime crappie in his article "Locating spring crappie." When March rolls around anglers can catch crappie in a variety of ways and Gentry has a few tips to help anglers achieve their goals of catching the succulent perch.

If you want to know what's happening in the turkey woods, then Andy Douglas will have his "Spring Turkey Season Forecast." He'll tell you what to expect in the five different regions. Check out the best bets for harvesting turkeys around the state and you just might be able to harvest a "Thanksgiving gobbler" during the spring season.

Whether you choose to fish or hunt, or do both, there's surely some good fishing and hunting just a cast or shot away! ■



John Phillips

Crappie are busy feeding in March to build up their energy for the spawning season.

20-GAUGE SHOTGUNS CHANGE THE GAME WITH TUNGSTEN SHOT

I've been a 12-gauge man since I bought my first Remington 870 Wingmaster back in 1972. I've killed almost every game species with that gun in the Mississippi outdoors. After 40 years of hunting with the 12-gauge, a trip to the dove field or quail hunt left me pretty worn out and bruised. During turkey hunts I usually walk several miles during a hunt and experience long periods sitting with the gun on my shoulder and across my knee.

It had become much heavier than I remembered. After hearing about the fantastic ballistics turkey hunters were getting using the much lighter turkey gun at ranges from 40 to 70 yards, I had to try it myself. However it seemed like they were about as common as hen's teeth when I wanted to try one out last year. I finally got hold of a 20-gauge Mossberg SA-20 turkey gun one week before the end of last year's spring season. I was determined to take it to the woods and try it out and that's just what I did.

I conducted an unscientific ballistic test and after three shots with #7 Tungsten Federal shells it was obvious, I was ready. I shot a cola can at 10 yards and obliterated it. Followed that up with a second shot at a cola can at 20 yards and then took one shot at 40 yards. I didn't count the pellets as some diehards would but at 40 yards I had a 15-inch uniform pattern that didn't have any "holes" in it, which was just what I wanted. Any tighter than that and I might miss at distances up to 40 yards.

I went to the woods the next couple of days and couldn't believe the difference the lighter weight made in carrying the 20-gauge



Mike Giles

Mike Giles displays a gobbler taken on his final hunt last spring with one of the new-generation 20-gauge turkey guns. He shot the turkey at 40 yards with #7 Federal Tungsten shot.

BIRTHDAY BUCK



Mike Giles

Ralph Morgan, of the Harper & Morgan Rodeo Company, harvested this 13-point buck with a 19-inch spread in his hometown of Lauderdale on his 88th birthday, Jan. 19, 2022.

on my 3-to 4-mile morning jaunts in search of a gobbler.

On the final Thursday of the spring season I left my ATV key at home and had to walk a mile back through a pine cutover until arriving at the corner of my lease. I got there just as it was breaking day and sent out an owl hoot and was answered by a thunderous gobble.

I quickly set up on a ridge on a power line and locked horns with the old gobbler for over 2 hours before he showed up. I finally coaxed him across the hollow and as he walked into the clear I had the bead of my shotgun on his head. I let him strut about 10 yards closer and squeezed the trigger. As the shotgun roared, the gobbler collapsed instantly.

The Mossberg 20-gauge semi-auto was deadly accurate at 40 yards and the Ghost Ring sights were just the ticket for my aging eyes. After taking a few selfies, I made the mile and a half trip back to the truck with the gobbler in my vest and the shotgun slung on my shoulder. The lightweight shotgun was just the ticket for my trek through the steep terrain back to the truck.

I saved my third tag to try out the Mossberg 20-gauge and I wasn't disappointed as I had an exciting and successful hunt while trying out a new style of turkey hunting shotguns. The 20-gauge Mossberg had a 22-inch barrel, weighed 5.5 pounds and came with Ghost Ring Sights as well as a bar for mounting scopes or special sights.

If you're looking for a lighter turkey gun to take to the woods, then look no further than the new generation of 20-gauge turkey guns. They are lighter, shoot killing patterns further and don't knock you down with 3-inch magnum turkey shells. While I tested a Mossberg, there is a wide range of new 20-gauge turkey guns to be found on the market today. Try one and you just might find out that you like them. ■

WINGBONES AND TRUMPETS MAKE SWEET TURKEY TALK

When it comes to turkey calls there's nothing much new under the sun. Originally Native Americans used every part of a turkey and they made suction calls out of the wings of the turkeys. Later on a few old turkey hunters used wing bones and an occasional Turpin Trumpet but these types of turkey calls have never been that popular in the Deep South or Mississippi.

With turkeys receiving more hunting pressure each year, hunters are always on the lookout for new calls. More than a few turkey hunters are turning to wingbones and trumpets to give them a bit of an edge. While wingbones and trumpets are surely different, they are not the easiest calls to master. However, when you learn how to call on one of these suction type calls you can do things you never imagined.

Jeffrey Wood, owner of Swamp Boy's Custom Calls, learned how to make wingbones from an old timer up in Tennessee and his are different than most, but very unique and deadly. His wingbones are slightly longer than most wingbones and they're cut differently on the end, thus giving them a different sound.

If you are not familiar with how to call turkeys with a wingbone, it's unusual in the fact that you actually suck air in and through the wingbone to make the turkey calls. Traditional mouth calls and snuff box calls are blown out. Mastering the wingbone is not the easiest and it takes a lot of practice, but if you learn to master the call you can imitate multiple turkeys from young hens to jake gobblers, to mature gobblers and raspy hens on the same suction call.

It's amazing to watch pros like Jeffrey Wood make those wingbones sing. He can really make them talk and he makes a few for the public each year.

"I started making the wingbones a few years ago after meeting an old mountain man in Tennessee while we were squirrel hunting," Wood said. "I make my calls a little different as I cut the end in an angle which allows you to put your finger over the end and cup your other hand and make a two-note yelp like a turkey when you suck in. You actually make a sound chamber with your hands, and it gives you that turkey sound."

The Turpin Brothers made the first popular trumpets, a favorite of many trumpet lovers, back in the late 1800s and they're still in production today by Steve Turpin of Memphis.

While most trumpets are made of different types of wood, and they are beautiful and deadly too, a few are made of cane. Lee Steed, of Brandon, makes an excellent cane call if you can get your hands on one. Steed's cane calls are made in the trumpet



Mike Giles plays one of Jeffrey Woods' wingbones with a few instructions from the master call maker.

Mike Giles

style, and they are easy to blow.

Mark Prudhomme is a 17-time world champion turkey caller who had to learn to use a trumpet in his competitions, so he eventually made his own to fit his style of hunting. Prudhomme uses the call in the spring woods to imitate a flock of turkeys and he'll throw in a few young hen kee kees, raspy hen's purring and clucking and also use a gobbler yelp as well as a jake yelp to convince stubborn old toms to come on in. He's an expert at playing his style of trumpet, and if you have the opportunity to attend one of his seminars you will be ahead of the game.

If you'd like to learn a little more about the origin of the wingbones and how to play them, then reach out to Jeffrey Wood at swampboyscustomcalls.com or 601-479-3979 and he'll give you a few tips and information about his calling techniques. ■

MISSISSIPPI'S LONGEST SERVING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MDWFP RETIRES

“ I could have never imagined in 1992 that this opportunity would evolve into a life’s calling that would endure for nearly three decades.

Dr. From News Reports Sam Polles, the longest-serving Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP), is retiring after 29 years. He served from July 1992 to February, 2022.

During nearly three decades of his leadership, Polles has guided the agency toward many groundbreaking accomplishments that have affected citizens across the Magnolia State.

“I could have never imagined in 1992 that this opportunity would evolve into a life’s calling that would endure for nearly three decades,” Polles said. “During this time, I have been blessed to work with one of the most capable, committed, and talented team of professional public servants found anywhere, at any level of government. The men and women of this Department are often not appreciated for their tireless efforts, but they remain steadfast in their commitment to preserve Mississippi’s rich and historic conservation heritage for generations to come.”

Polles, originally appointed by Gov. Kirk Fordice, has served under five governors during his career. ■



Photo courtesy MDWFP

<p>MARCH</p> <p>WATER LILIES PLANTED</p>	<p>JULY</p> <p>ADULT LILIES FULLY GROWN</p>	<p>OCTOBER</p> <p>POND FULL OF DUCKS</p>	<p>“My son and I followed Mr. Hills’ instructions for planting the shipment of banana water lilies...And within 5 months, we had new ducks feeding in our pond” - Chris B.</p>
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MDMR ANNOUNCES FLOYD AS DIRECTOR OF OFFICE OF MARINE FISHERIES

T From News Reports
he Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) announces the appointment of Traci Floyd as Director of the Office of Marine Fisheries.

As Director of the Office of Marine Fisheries, Floyd will be responsible for regulating all commercial and recreational saltwater fisheries in the State of Mississippi and for providing protection, conservation and management over all marine aquatic life. She will oversee programs and direct activities for the Artificial Reef, Finfish, Hatchery, Seafood Technology, Shellfish and Shrimp and Crab Bureaus, as well as protected species coordination. Floyd will represent the agency at various local, state, regional

“ *Traci has the knowledge, experience and commitment to lead the MDMR Office of Marine Fisheries.*

and fisheries management forums, and serve as program coordinator, principal investigator or primary project review officer for federal grant projects.

“Traci has the knowledge, experience and commitment to lead the MDMR Office of Marine Fisheries,” said MDMR Executive Director Joe Spragins. “I look forward to seeing her continue our agency’s mission to enhance, protect and conserve the state of Mississippi’s marine resources.”

Floyd, who started at the MDMR in 1997, held positions as Deputy Director of the Office of Marine Fisheries, Director of the Shrimp and Crab Bureau and as a Marine Fisheries Scientist.

During her time at the MDMR, Floyd has served on the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Crab Subcommittee, grant coordinator and internship recipient for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sport Fish Restoration Program, lead MDMR representative at the Deepwater Horizon Incident Command Center and natural disaster recovery programs and proxy to the Executive Director on the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council, as well as Mississippi’s representative on the Council’s Special Shrimp Science and Statistical Committee. ■



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Chase Fowler

Chase Fowler, 11, with the buck he killed in Lambert, Miss., on Dec. 5, 2021.



Tucker Thompson

Tucker Thompson with a hog taken in February 2021 in Adams County.

Reese Robertson, 7, got his first deer, an 8-point, in Marion County on Nov. 6, 2021.



Sawyer Goodson

Sawyer Goodson, 6, got his first deer over the youth weekend in Jefferson County. He took the 16-point without any help.



Reese Robertson

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2022 SPRING TURKEY SEASON FORECAST

By Andy Douglas

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR MAGNOLIA STATE HUNTERS? THE FORECAST VARIES THROUGH THE FIVE REGIONS USED BY THE MDWFP. HERE IS A REGIONAL BREAKDOWN.

The spring turkey season is as good as here. Youth season opens on March 8 and the regular open season begins on March 15 and ends May 1. The forecast looks good for most and should be a far better season this year compared to last year.

Any predictions that can be made are thanks to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) and the information they capture from a combination of summer brood survey data and hunter observations collected as a part of the Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey (SGHS).

GOOD NEWS

“The good news is that this season should be better for many, if not most, hunters in the state,” said Adam Butler, MDWFP Turkey Program Coordinator, “When making predictions about the upcoming year, the 2-year-old gobbler cohort is crucial, which makes a look back to the hatch of 2020 a critical indicator, and this is where we find reason to be hopeful.”

The statewide poult per hen ratio from the 2020 hatch was above the 10-year average. More impressively, more than 50 percent of the hens observed in some regions were accompanied by poults, which is some of the better production Mississippi has seen in quite some time. Not surprisingly, statewide jake sightings were up 25 percent last year. In fact, despite the almost universally depressed gobbling activity, turkey observations were up in most places, which bodes well for 2022.

BAD NEWS

“The bad news is that the good news won’t be shared equally,” Butler said.

The delta, southeast, and east-central regions seem to be primed for a solid season, but numbers will be off in the historically turkey-rich southwestern and north regions. Both

southwest and north averaged 1.4 poults per hen in 2020, well below the level needed to sustain populations. Unsurprisingly jake sightings were under the 10-year average for both regions last year.

Here is a glance at the five wild turkey management regions of MDWFP.

NORTH

North Mississippi has had a poor run of hatches for the past five years. The region only averaged 1.3 poults per hen this past summer — well below what is needed to maintain population stability. Jake sightings were down about 20 percent last season, further indications to temper expectations in 2022.

“Properties with the right habitat will still have good numbers of birds,” Butler said. “All indications are that turkey numbers have been sliding downward in north Mississippi for the past several years. Nonetheless, I still consider a lot of this region to hold some of our state’s most abundant populations.”

Top counties for last season’s harvest are Lafayette and Marshall. Holly Springs National Forest is the region’s most visible public option, but some of the Corps of Engineers properties are strong, too. Chickasaw WMA will see heavy pressure but for good reason.

DELTA ➤



Hunters should try to remember where the most jake sightings in their hunting area was — there are sure to be a good crop of two-year-olds waiting. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** There should be more toms toted out of the woods this season compared to last year. The top counties last season for mature gobbler harvest were Lafayette, Marshall, Panola, Copiah and Attala.

DELTA

Data indicates that the lands along the Mississippi River had a huge hatch two years ago in 2020. This was corroborated by a seven-fold increase in the jake sightings last year, which is the best increase in the state.

“The population is all over the place in the delta,” Butler said. “Higher elevation properties behind the mainline levee system have likely seen dramatic jumps in numbers over the last two years, some are reporting their highest numbers in a long time. On the other hand, lower elevation properties and properties in the interior of the south delta have been decimated by recent flooding and are basically building back from near zero and haven’t climbed far enough yet to even be considered close to decent turkey hunting.”

Public land opportunities are very limited in the delta region and have almost been curtailed because of flooding. The region’s top county for gobbler harvest was Bolivar in 2021.

EAST-CENTRAL

This region has posted steadily increasing hatches the past four years. Both the 2020 and the 2021 hatches were more than adequate to result in population growth and expansion.

“Most hunters would likely agree that the population in east-central Mississippi is not what it was 15-20 years ago,” Butler said. “Nonetheless, numbers over the nearer term — say the last 2 to 3 years — have been back on the upswing. I will be very surprised if hunters in east-central Mississippi don’t come away well pleased by a noticeable uptick in turkey numbers during the 2022 season.”

East-central Mississippi is well blessed with several public turkey hunting options. The Bienville National Forest and its complex of three Wildlife Management Areas are always good, solid stand-by producers. The top county for harvest last year was Attala.



SOUTHWEST

Indications are that the population in southwest Mississippi has probably been sliding downward for the past several years. “Southwest Mississippi had good hatches in 2018 and 2019, but unfortunately hasn’t done so well since,” Butler said. “The 2020 hatch, which is where the bulk of this year’s longbeards will come from, was pretty meager. The 2021 hatch was even poorer — it only yielded 1.3 poults per hen, placing it in the bottom fifth of all hatches recorded in the region since the MDWFP began the annual brood survey in 1994.”

Homochitto National Forest is the region’s biggest public land option but reports from last year indicate that bird numbers were off from normal. Top counties for harvest last season were Adams and Copiah.



Andy Douglas is an outdoor writer and photographer from Brookhaven. A native of Lincoln County, he’s chased deer, turkeys, bass and most anything else the past 35 years.

SOUTHEAST ➤

Gobbling fever is predicted to infect the spring woods this year as the 2022 turkey season gets underway. **RIGHT:** Public land can be tough hunting at times, but success can be found. Here is a national forest Jefferson County tom taken by the author. Hunters can look forward to a little less pressure on the turkeys at public places during the first two weeks of the season.



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SOUTHEAST

The word is good hatches — three out of the last four hatches have been very good in southeast Mississippi. Both 2020 and 2021 were at or above 2.0 poults per hen, which should result in noticeable population increases.

Jake observations have been trending upwards since 2016. This past season, hunters observed 16.2 jakes per 100 hours hunted, which is the highest observation rate in the state outside of the properties along the Mississippi River.

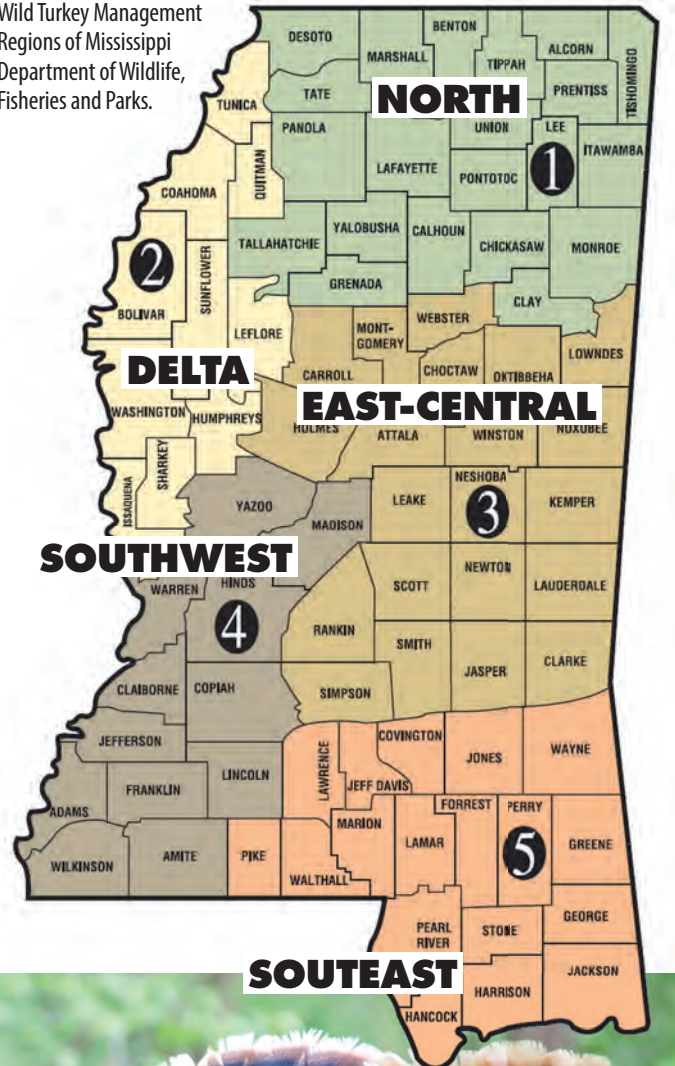
“Southeast Mississippi may be a real bright spot in the state,” Butler said. “The region has struggled for a long time, but over the last few years, all indicators point toward a steadily increasing turkey population. Harvest totals from Game Check indicate that overall populations are still lower than they are elsewhere, but 2022 may be the year that that narrative flips a bit due to a stellar 2020 hatch.”

There is an abundance of public land in this region. Hunters can look to Little Biloxi WMA, Marion County WMA, and Mason Creek WMA that have delayed season openers starting April 1. This may provide some go-to options when other areas have been heavily pressured. Marion County was top last year for gobbler harvests.

CONCLUSION

It’s a mixed bag of predictions for the Magnolia State this season, but overall, it looks good. Get out there and get after the spring monarchs. Any hunter that is persistent is sure to find success. ■

Wild Turkey Management
Regions of Mississippi
Department of Wildlife,
Fisheries and Parks.



The 2021 season will go down as one of the strangest in quite a while. The combination of a late February ice storm and a slow spring green-up suppressed even further what would have probably already been a lackluster season due to a below average hatch in 2019. This year is predicted to be a much better spring turkey season.



A WORD FROM THE TURKEY PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) is hard at work trying to make things better for our state's turkey population and the hunters who pursue them. Here are a couple things that Adam Butler, the Turkey Program Coordinator for MDWFP, points out.

"Mississippi hunters need to know that MDWFP is currently partnering with Mississippi State University to take a critical evaluation of our hunting season framework," he said. "The region-wide concern for turkeys that we've heard over the past several years, along with prominent season changes in other states, has brought a lot of public attention on our very long and liberal season. The research we have going will bring together several different datasets, including results of past studies, hunter observations from the Spring Gobbler Hunting Survey, and Game Check, to try and forecast how different season changes may impact the number of gobblers on the landscape in future years. Additionally, as part of this study, we changed the season framework on five WMAs to April 1 – May 1 for the past three seasons as a case study to see if it improves the hunting. Unfortunately, we do not have any results ready to release quite yet, but we're close."

At the time of this writing these case study results are not available, but there may be some initial findings ready to roll out to the public by the time spring turkey season begins.

"Along these same lines, MDWFP responded to public concerns last year by implementing restrictions on non-residents hunting public land during the opening two weeks of Mississippi's season," Butler said. "Essentially, we've created a special license endorsement which nonresidents will have to obtain in order to access public lands from March 15-28, and we are controlling the allotment of those licenses via a draw system similar to the system we use for alligators. We've seen nonresident license sales double in the last two years. Additionally, delayed openers in several other southern states created a situation

where Mississippi public lands were going to just about be the only game in town (besides Florida's south zone) for a couple weeks in March. The combination of these two things — already skyrocketing nonresident license sales coupled with loss of hunting opportunity in other southern states that once opened concurrently with Mississippi — left us with a potential public land trainwreck in 2022. We hope our new nonresident draw process will bleed off some of the pressure while still allowing for some limited nonresident opportunities." ■

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THE BEST DAYS TO TURKEY HUNT THE MAGNOLIA STATE

M By Andy Douglas
any turkey hunters ponder the question — when should I go? Should it be morning, evening, mid-day? Should I go on the weekend or the middle of the week? The correct answer would be all the above. Anyone who chases the wily old tom will tell the same tale — I'm going as soon as I can, as much as I can, and as often I can.

Most turkey hunters are people with commitments, jobs, and responsibilities, so going turkey hunting as much as a hunter would like isn't feasible for all.

Here is some good information that will help you plan days to go after gobblers and tag your limit of toms.

THANKS, MDWFP

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) turkey program gathers information from hunters through Spring Gobbler Surveys and collects data from the mandatory Game Check (since 2019) to produce the annual Spittin' & Drummin' Mississippi Wild Turkey Report. Information from this report can

be used to help hunters pick out the best days to hunt.

WHAT DAYS TO GO

Overwhelmingly opening day of the open season each year is the best day to bag a bird. According to the data from Game Check that's been available since 2019, more birds are harvested on opening day than any other. The first three days are tops for consecutive days for the most harvests.

The same is true for youth season — its opening day is best and closely followed by the next two days.

Interestingly, 50 percent of the state's total harvest occurs by March 30 historically.

This makes sense when it comes to the best chances of taking home a bird. The early days of the season offer hunters the opportunity at hunting turkeys when they have seen the least amount of hunting pressure.

OPENING DAY AD NAUSEAM

There is more than one opening day for

Mississippi hunters and the data backs up how good it can be. There is an interesting spike in turkey harvest each year around April 1. This is the delayed Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) opening day.

MDWFP allows spring turkey hunting on 37 WMAs. Some WMAs restrict early season hunting to draw hunts only, then follow with an opening day for all hunters. Check any WMA you may be interested in hunting and see when that day will be — it could be very productive and can be an opening day all over again.

PEAK GOBBLING

Another time that may interest hunters is the peak gobbling time in the state. This can vary with weather patterns, high pressure, and low-pressure systems moving through or becoming stationary. But if a day could be picked, that day would be around April 4 for a good solid statewide average date where there is historically good gobbling activity.

"I look to hunt on days following a cold snap when cooler temps and high pressure move in," said Chase Allen of Magee

Chase Allen and Aimon Chisholm both of Magee, go after the birds as often as possible. They prefer hunting a few weeks into the season when the gobblers seem to be primed up.

who hunts Smith and Simpson counties. "If I had to plan, I would hunt a few weeks into the season when the hens in my area are starting to sit on the nests more, leaving the gobblers by themselves."

Go online and check out the past few years' copies of the Spittin' & Drummin' Mississippi Wild Turkey Report. It breaks down each region of the state and will give a more accurate history to pinpoint the peak gobbling dates in your hunting region.

CONCLUDING

Most gobbler chasers will plan ahead of time when they hunt. Time off from a job causes hunters to burn valuable vacation, personal, or yes — sick time, too. Utilize the information at hand to make the most of your valuable time. ■



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BECKY NICOSIA SHARES HER TIPS FOR CALLING IN AND HARVESTING TURKEYS WITH A BOW.
■ By Mike Giles

TURKEY SLAYER

EXTRAORDINAIRE

Becky Nicosia slowly drew her bow back and placed her pin on a wise old gobbler and released the arrow.

KA-WHAP!

The broadhead smacked the longbeard in just the right spot and he never knew what hit him.

Calling wise old gobblers within shotgun range is difficult for even the most seasoned hunters, but calling up an old tom and shooting them with a bow and arrow takes it to another level. Becky Nicosia, of Baton Rouge, La., is a talented archer who loves to turkey hunt and call in the wary old birds, and she prefers shooting them with her bow.

Nicosia shoots a Matthews bow and she harvested her first gobbler with a bow in 2000. Nicosia was hunting near Sonora when she harvested that first gobbler in Texas. That first kill was an amazing accomplishment, and it ignited a flame that developed into a burning passion for calling up gobblers and shooting them with her bow.

"It's one thing to shoot deer from a tree stand but quite another calling and harvesting gobblers from a ground blind," Nicosia said. "In the beginning they would see me draw back and spook, so I had to practice sitting in a blind and shooting from ground level. I finally blacked out everything behind me and I usually wear all black too. I would draw my bow back from the side and then shoot through the window when they walked by."

HUNTING OUT OF BLINDS

Hunting out of a blind is about the only way you can draw back on them, but it really limits your ability to move around.

These days Nicosia usually sets up a Primos Double Bull blind on the edge of fields where the gobblers like to feed and strut and in areas where hens like to be.

"I'll get out and scout the gobblers and then set up in an area that they like to be," Nicosia said. "If I go early, I'll do an owl call with my natural voice to see if I can get a response from any gobblers in the area. I'll

try to locate one in that area and if I know that a bird is in there I'll slip in the blind and make some soft calls. I try to get the hens pulled on in near me and usually the gobblers will come in too.

"I used to run and gun with a shotgun, but I don't do that anymore. I'm more successful hunting this way by being patient and calling them in to where I am."

Nicosia loves to bow hunt so much that she knew she could extend her bow hunting into turkey season. Nicosia hunts on family land in Adams County and nobody else in her group turkey hunts with a bow. She likes the challenge it presents and there's nothing easy about it.

"I have several blinds near food plots and fields, and I'll use my game cameras to see where they're hanging out," she said. "I've got one or two permanent blinds and four Double Bull Blinds out in various locations."

CALL GOBBLERS, LISTEN TO HENS >



Becky Nicosia harvested this gobbler with her Matthews bow while hunting out of a portable blind. She turkey hunts almost exclusively with a bow and has harvested many gobblers in the process.

CALLING THE GOBBLERS AND LISTENING TO HENS

Nicosia uses several different box calls like a Primos box and several slates or glass, by Lynch and Woodhaven calls.

You can really get soft on those slates and glass calls too, Nicosia said.

"I'll use little soft calls and do what the hens are doing and mock them," she said. "I'll let them set the pace and go from there. I have stayed with some flocks from daylight until noon. I had one turkey that I hunted for several years and finally named him Booger because he always seemed to booger me and get away."

Old Booger set up in a field one afternoon and spent the day with the hens well out of range. As the afternoon wore on Nicosia knew it was time for a change of pace. Booger disappeared for about an hour giving Nicosia a chance to make a move.

"I slipped out of the blind and circled around and tried to get in front of where I thought they'd go," she said. "I set up on the edge of the field and called the hens up and Booger walked right in front of me, following them, and I shot him. Sometimes things don't work out like you plan so you have to make adjustments. Sometimes it works and in this case it did."

Old Booger had an 11-inch beard, 1 ¼ inch spurs and he eluded Nicosia for 3 years, but he finally met his match at the hands of an expert archer and turkey caller at 6:30 p.m.

"I use a fixed broadhead, a 3 blade 100 grain Wasp Boss," Nicosia said. "I'll shoot them where the wing touches the body, or through his lower fantail from the rear when looking directly at his back. That's a killing shot, too. But I like to get them as close to me as I can."

AFTERNOON DELIGHT!

"I like to hunt in the fields in the afternoon from 1 to 6 p. m.," Nicosia said. "I've had a lot of success hunting around those fields during mid to late afternoon and it's much easier to kill one where they like to hang out."

Fields are excellent spots for hens that like to feed during midday and late afternoon. If the hens are there you can



believe that the gobblers will be somewhere close by because they stay on ready during the mating season. They don't want to waste a minute or a chance at finding a lovesick hen.

Gobblers will follow the hens and keep them in sight even when the breeding is over. If the hens get away to go nest or lay eggs the gobbler might wake up and find themselves alone and it's a different game. If that old gobbler gets lonely and he's by himself late in the season, then he's a lot more vulnerable and is much easier to call up. If he's looking at hens, he's not apt to move on to some unseen turkeys, but let the hens disappear and they get desperate and let their guard down many times.

"Those gobblers don't even know what they're going to do from day to day," Nicosia said. "So it's almost impossible for us to know what he's going to do except for one thing. He's going to be in areas where the hens like to be and during the midday hours that's wherever their favorite feeding, nesting, or dusting areas are. Usually that's in fields but it can also be on sandbars on creeks, or on sandy roads running through a pine plantation. They will leave their sign including their dusting areas for gobblers and humans to see."

PERFECT PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Nicosia is used to hunting out of tree stands when she bow hunts for deer, so she had to practice regularly with a bow to get the hang of shooting off the ground.

"I started shooting from a chair on the ground first," Nicosia said. "Then I started shooting from a blind sitting down. Shooting from the ground is different than from a tree because you have a different anchor point and there is no substitute for regular practice. I started off shooting a couple times a week when I first got into hunting turkeys from a blind and then I put a pop-up blind in the camp yard to practice at camp."



Becky Nicosia battled this old gobbler she called "Booger" for several years before she harvested him with her bow in Adams County. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Nicosia's patience helped her take this tom with her bow at 16 yards back in 2018.

While she killed her first turkey with a bow back in 2000, she's still been at it and has killed eight with her bow to this point.

"I'll still hunt with a shotgun occasionally, but I prefer hunting with a bow if I have the opportunity," she said.

PATIENCE ➤



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

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION
Doves	Sept. 4-Oct. 17(n), Sept. 4-19 (s) Oct. 30-Nov. 28 (n), Oct. 9-Nov. 7 (s) Dec. 25-Jan. 9 (n), Dec. 19-Jan. 31 (s)	15	45
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/Bobcat	Oct. 1-Oct. 31 (food/sport) Nov. 1-Feb. 28 (food/sport/pelt)	5/day, 8/party No limit	
Rails			
King & Clapper	Sept. 1-Oct. 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 Nov. 26-28, Dec. 3-5 Dec. 9-Jan. 31	6 6 6
Geese (Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Sept. 1-30 Nov. 12-28, Dec. 3-5, Dec. 9-Jan. 31	5 Canada 3, Brant 1 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 Nov. 8-19 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 20-31 (archery/primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 19(dogs) Nov. 6-19 (youth)
East Central	Oct. 1-Nov. 19 Nov. 8-19 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 20-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 19(dogs) Nov. 6-19 (youth)
Southwest	Oct. 1-Nov. 19 Nov. 8-19 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 20-31 (archery-primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan.19(dogs) Nov.6-Jan. 19 (youth)
Southeast	Oct. 15-Nov. 19 Jan. 21-31 (either-sex arch-primitive) Feb. 1-15 (archery-primitive bucks only)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec. 1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 20(dogs) Nov. 21-Feb. 15 (yth)
Delta/South Delta	Oct. 1-Nov. 19 Nov. 9-20 (antlerless primitive weapon) Jan. 20-31 (archery primitive weapon)	Dec. 2-15	Nov. 20-Dec.1 (dogs) Dec. 16-23 (no dogs) Dec. 24-Jan. 19(dogs) Nov. 6-Jan. 19 (youth)



Becky Nicosia harvested this old gobbler with her Mathews Chill SDX bow and took a selfie with him in celebration.

PATIENCE

If turkey hunting is your game, then you need a ton of patience. If hunting turkeys with a bow is your preference, then you need patience and a ton of experience. Everything has to go right to be able to harvest a gobbler with your bow.

Calling a wise old gobbler to a specific spot is hard no doubt, but to call them to a blind that can't be moved at the spur of the moment makes it harder indeed. That's where Nicosia has an edge over many hunters. She has patience and is also confident in her ability to call a gobbler into range. She also knows that her hours of regular practice will enable her to make a clean kill when the opportunity arises.

CALLING GOBBLERS IN CLOSE

If you want to call the gobblers in close like Nicosia, then it is a good idea to learn how to master a pot call or box. Yelps, purrs and clucks are all you need to be able to do if you know how and when to use them. Nicosia doesn't use mouth calls, but she prefers these calls and that's all it takes to call in gobblers. Try a few of Nicosia's tips and techniques and you might just become an expert at calling in and harvesting turkeys with your bow. ■

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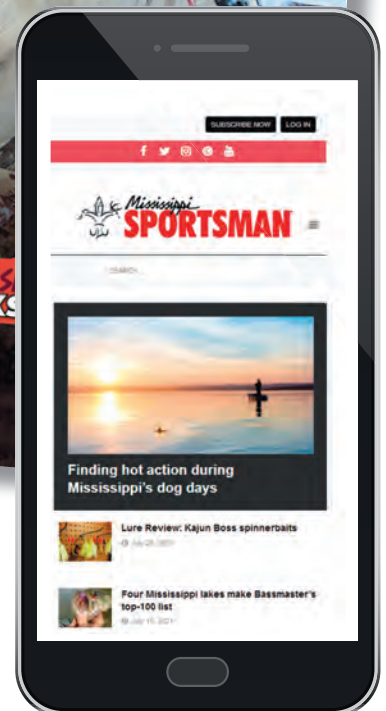
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2021-2022 DEER OF THE YEAR

MISSISSIPPI HUNTERS BROUGHT DOWN SOME IMPRESSIVE WHITETAILS THIS PAST SEASON. HERE'S A LOOK AT A FEW OF THEM.

During the 2021-22 season, hunters proved again and again that the Magnolia State can spit out some deer that would be impressive anywhere in North America.

Mississippi Sportsman writers have cataloged the hunts and hunters that were on the right end of the bows and rifles when Judgement Day arrived for big bucks across the state.

Carson Rinehart, 10, harvested his first buck on the opening day of primitive weapon season in Yazoo County. The 240-pound buck sported 12 points with a drop tine and scored 145 5/8.



BRANDON YOUNGSTER SCORES BIG

PATIENCE AND A DEER HERD
ON A COMEBACK YIELDS
TRUE TROPHY BUCK

N By Mike Giles

11-year-old Kanon Ott, of Brandon, was optimistic that he would kill his first deer this season. His father, Danny, did all he could to help and they both wanted to make sure his first deer was both a buck and a memorable experience.

Though that might sound easy to some people, it was not the case at their camp. Three consecutive years of flooding had about wiped out much of the deer population. They couldn't hunt at all one year and had been on a one-buck per family limit the last couple of years as the herd builds back up.

Ott's daughter, Kaylee, got the first chance last year. And she scored. She killed her biggest deer ever, a 140-inch-plus buck, at the Belle Island Hunting Club north of Vicksburg. Next it was Kanon's time, but they didn't want it to be a doe or young buck. So they were prepared to put in the work and be patient.

"Our numbers are still way down since the flood," Danny Ott said. "We only get one buck a year and no does right now, but the quality of the bucks has really gone up lately. Kanon set his sights on an 8-point that we had gotten on camera and we started hunting for him."

Sometimes things just don't work out and sometimes it is for the best.

Kaylee and her friends, Colt and Tate Dowd, went to a stand one afternoon just to spend time in the woods and actually filmed a gigantic 10-point buck at the same place she killed her trophy last year. It was enough to get everybody back at the camp excited.

ANOTHER DAYLIGHT VISIT

"I didn't think we'd actually see a buck like that walk out into a food plot in broad daylight again, but we decided to give him a try the next day," Ott said. "I took Kanon back in there and the buck came in at 100 yards between 4:30 and 5 p.m."

That's when things did work out for the best.

Kanon watched and waited until the deer turned broadside, kept his composure and made a great shot. The Big Buck Bounty contest out of Jackson scored the buck at 180 1/8. It was a trophy of a lifetime. The Ott's will get an official Boone and Crockett score after the mandatory drying time has been completed. The



Kanon Ott killed his first buck, a trophy 10-point, at Belle Island Hunting Club north of Vicksburg on Nov. 24.

buck was a main frame 10-point that had a 19-inch spread and weighed 250 pounds.

"Kanon shot the buck with a Winchester 25 Ultra Mag made for youths," Ott said. "The bullets are actually short and really fat, and it did some serious damage to the buck. It only ran about 120 yards from the site of the shot. The buck ran into a thicket, so we got a man to bring his Catahoula Cur dog and begin tracking. He found the buck in no time."

Needless to say, Kanon and the whole family were really excited to find he had taken such a monster buck.

"Kanon was ecstatic and he got a picture with all the kids," Ott said. "It was really quite an experience for everybody."

If you don't think you are capable of harvesting a trophy buck, then think again. With a lot of practice, patience and help from a mentor, you might just harvest the buck of a lifetime, too. Just ask Kanon Ott. ■



Drew Beith killed this monster buck, which was estimated to score close to 160 inches, in Yazoo County on Jan. 31.

THRILL OF VICTORY OVERCOMES AGONY OF DEFEAT FOR YAZOO HUNTER

D By Mike Giles
rew Beith's world changed about a month ago when a monster buck showed up on his Yazoo County game cameras. Beith had several trail cameras out and when this big bruiser showed up, another 8-point in the 140-class departed for parts unknown.

Beith turned his focus towards the new buck and he was almost tortured by the fact that he had to watch the buck day after day, night after night before he could get the wind direction needed so that he could hunt the buck.

"I finally got a south wind and hunted the stand on the final day," Beith said. "During my morning hunt almost everything that could go wrong did. Thankfully, I was in the right place at the right time despite a series of setbacks and was able to make a good shot when it presented itself."

The "new" buck ended up being a main frame 10-point with a kicker on his G-2 that had broken off and he had one more sticker. The buck had a tall rocking chair rack that was estimated to go near 160 inches!

SOUTH WIND NEEDED

Beith is from Benton, and he hunts about 10 minutes from home. He had been after this trophy buck since it came into his world a month ago. Due to his stand location, wind direction

agonizingly kept him off the deer.

"I had to have a south wind to hunt this buck," Beith said. "I had a Millennium lock on stand in the hills of Yazoo County."

All of the agony was about to change on the last day of the season Jan. 31, 2022. However, not without a lot more angst.

As Beith walked into his stand before daylight on the final morning he stopped for a minute to check his game camera app. He didn't want to run the buck out of the patch if he was there. As it turned out there was only a small deer in front of the camera, so he confidently went on to the stand hoping the deer wouldn't spook and warn all of the other deer in the area. But then...

"I got to within 30 yards of my stand, and the woods exploded with deer running in all directions," he said. "I eased up to the stand and sat there 45 minutes waiting for daybreak. Another deer came in and started blowing and left. Then about 8:30, my neighbor shot three times with a rifle, and I thought it was all over. I thought, 'that's just great!'"

Beith feared the worst and could only wonder if the neighbor had shot his target buck. Nothing else came into the field and no deer were showing up on his trail cameras, so he decided to head back to the house for lunch.

"I was going to go to another stand that afternoon, so I lowered my bow to the ground and got into my cart and drove back to

the truck," Beith said. "Before I got there, I realized that I had left my bow on the ground by the stand."

ONE MORE CHANCE

Instead of going back and getting the bow, Beith changed his mind and decided to hunt that stand again that afternoon. He was disgusted with how the morning hunt went, but didn't want to change things after leaving the bow at the stand.

"That afternoon my brother, Thay Montgomery, went back hunting with me, and I took him to a stand, then got back into my stand about 2:30. I was really hoping for a glimpse of the buck and a good shot too," Beith said. "I finally saw a couple of spikes walk out and start feeding and then something got their attention. I looked up and saw a buck's horns sticking up through the trees."

The buck walked into view at 5:45 with only minutes of legal shooting light left.

"I started pulling my bow back as the buck walked directly toward me, but the arrow came out of the cradle and I had to let it back down," Beith said. "All three deer spooked and ran a little ways and I thought I'd missed my chance."

The buck had run out to 40 yards, a long way for a last-minute shot, but he turned and started making a beeline towards Beith after he saw the spikes heading back.

THWACK!

"As soon as he offered me a shot I let the arrow fly," Beith said.

Thwack! The sound of the arrow striking the buck indicated a good hit.

"The buck ran about 100 yards making all kinds of noise and racket and then it got quiet," he said. "I was sure of a good hit then, but I got down and went to my arrow and found guts on it."

Beith's heart sank at the sight of the guts on the arrow, something that usually means a poor shot. He had mixed feelings, but immediately called Ben Ward, who recovered deer. Ward couldn't come, but he told Beith that whatever he did, not to go in there if the deer had been gut shot, just wait for the dogs. He recommended he call Chase Therrell.

Beith called Therrell at 6:30 and Therrell told him that he'd be there in a few hours and they'd get on him then. More agony — a long wait lay ahead.

"At 10:00, Chase Therrell, his Catahoula Cur dogs and I arrived at the scene of the kill, and he turned the dogs loose," Beith said. "We couldn't find any blood, but the dogs took off just the way the deer had gone. Therrell asked if there

was a creek in there as he studied his handheld GPS. I told him there was and then he said that the dogs were in the creek now.

"We got in there about 100 yards away and saw the dogs gnawing on the buck. That's when the celebrating started," he said. "The deer ended up dying right where I heard him fall and it was actually a great shot. I put it right behind his front shoulder and it went through everything. The Gold Tip arrow and Swacker broadhead cut through the heart and lungs and came out through the intestines."

It's always better to be safe than sorry and Beith was vindicated when they found the buck and learned he'd made a swift, clean, kill with his Mathews VXR bow. In the process a lifetime memory, including the full range of high and low emotions, was made! ■

BIG BUCK GALLERY >



Chase Therrell and his Catahoula Cur dogs pose for a photo with Beith after his trophy buck was located.

DEER OF THE YEAR **BIG BUCK GALLERY**



Hunter Dees of Kilmichael got his first crossbow buck, this 10-point, in Montgomery County on Oct. 1.



Matt Adcock, a student at Simpson County Academy in Mendenhall, drew his bow on Oct. 3 and was rewarded with this 13-point Smith County buck.



On Oct. 9, Michael O'Neal got some help from his son, Wesley, to take down this 12-point trophy buck on Ashbrook Island. The buck was green scored at 149 6/8 inches.



Matt Langford of Petal harvested this impressive 11-point buck at his hunting camp in Carroll County on Oct. 12.



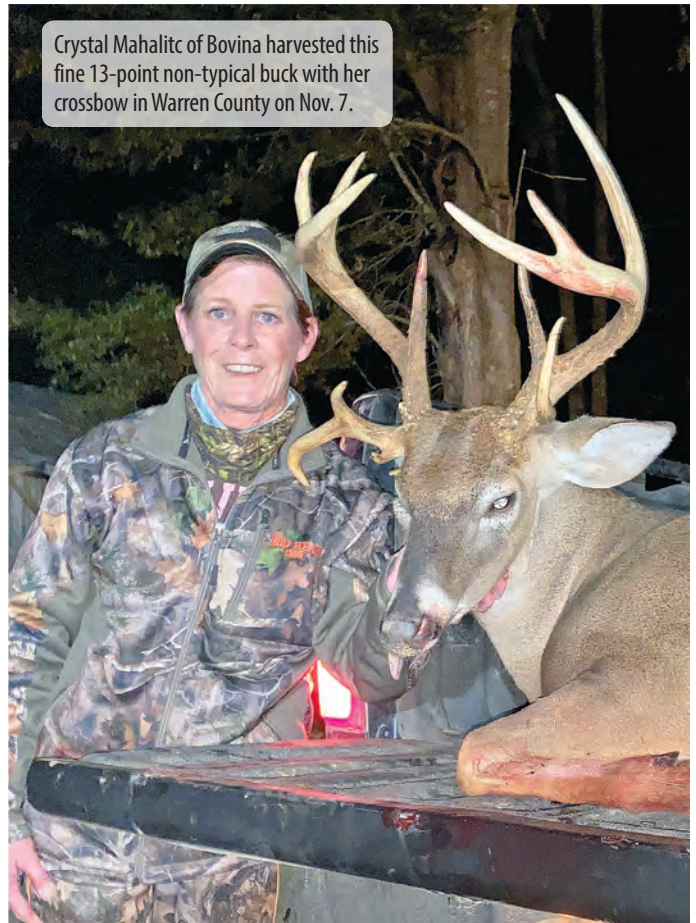
Becky Nicosia took a big 160-inch buck nicknamed "Megatron" on land she owns in Adams County on Oct. 16.



This monster 8-point buck nicknamed "Blinky" was harvested by Todd Irwin on Oct. 29 in Madison County. It rough scored 150.



Zach Jones harvested this 220 pound, 11-point buck at Ashbrook Island Hunting Club on Nov. 5. The rack green scored at 160 1/8 inches.



Crystal Mahalitic of Bovina harvested this fine 13-point non-typical buck with her crossbow in Warren County on Nov. 7.

DEER OF THE YEAR **BIG BUCK** GALLERY



Aaron Woodard of Gluckstadt was hunting at his family's Webster County deer camp on Nov. 26 when he took a trophy 8-point buck.



Stacy Welty Owens took this 9-point buck with a crossbow on family land near Natchez on Nov. 14. The buck, a main frame 9-point with a kicker, green scored 167 inches.



Bryan Daugherty of Hernando was hunting in Sunflower County on Dec. 2 when he shot this mature Delta buck. The 9-point had 15 scorable points with a 20 1/2-inch spread and scored 189 3/4 B&C.



Mikaela Mengarelli of Linn was hunting with her boyfriend and brother near the Sunflower River on Dec. 5 when she shot this trophy buck. The 11-point scored 169 7/8 B&C.



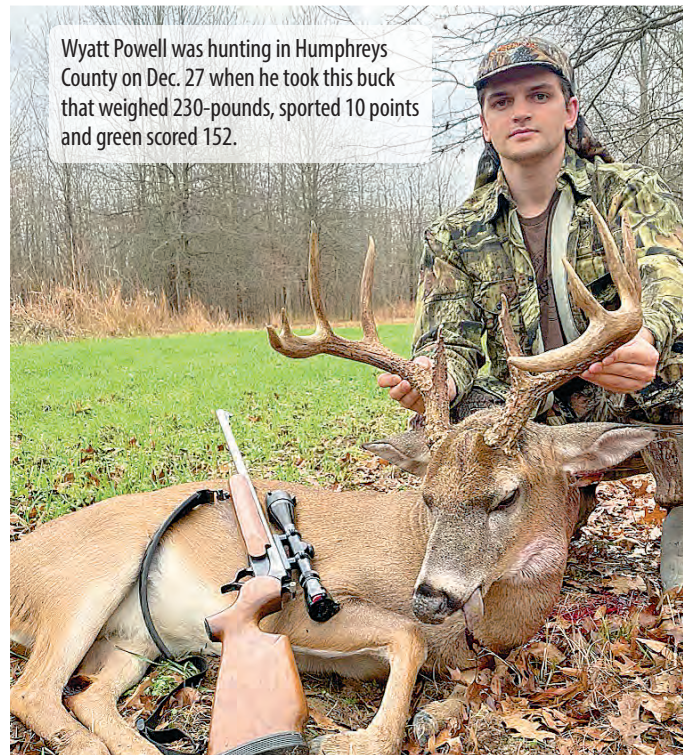
Cody Hollingsworth of Lawrence killed this trophy 198-pound, 14-point buck at his deer club in Newton County on Dec. 13.



Creek Baham of was hunting in Winston County on Dec. 21, 2021 when he downed this trophy buck on public land. The 180-pound buck green scored in the 150's.



McKinna Powell killed this trophy buck on Dec. 26 in Humphreys County. It was a main frame 9-point with a 20-inch spread and weighed 250 pounds.



Wyatt Powell was hunting in Humphreys County on Dec. 27 when he took this buck that weighed 230-pounds, sported 10 points and green scored 152.

To get all the details on every single deer Mississippi Sportsman has covered this season — and in past years — head to www.ms-sportsman.com/bigbucks.



Photos by Bryan Beatty

A GREAT HUNTING DOG IS THE ICING ON THE CAKE FOR WATERFOWLERS

You've recently been bitten by the duck hunting bug, or maybe you were bitten long ago, and thankfully never got over it. I've been "suffering" from it for over 40 years and luckily, the diagnosis is terminal.

Louisiana is known for its waterfowl hunting, and though some may argue it's gone downhill in recent years, there are still plenty of birds to be had. When you do put them on the water, what better way to have them delivered to the blind than by man's best friend — your own duck dog. I got really serious about duck hunting in my teens and early twenties. The next logical step after the decoys, guns, gear, and everything else was to get a dog to make the whole thing even better. It's the icing on the cake for waterfowlers.

It has gone from the dog being just part of the experience to being ever increasingly about the dog. I, along with a large group of others probably get more pleasure and enjoyment out of watching the dogs work than other aspects of the hunt. Don't get me wrong, watching a

bunch of greenheads helicopter down through the timber so close you could smack with the gun barrel is one of the greatest sights in the hunting world. Now this is just my opinion, but it's a close second to watching your best friend happily and efficiently fetch them then get ready for the next flight.

The intent of this column is to cover what it takes to develop an accomplished retriever from the point the little fur ball comes home to the payoff in the blind. I have trained two really good dogs and am now training my third with the help of some outstanding trainers I've gotten to know over the years in addition to what I've learned. In the future, I will share some of their best tips and ideas, too. Have I made mistakes? Yes. Will I make more in the future? Smart money says yes, but that's just part of it and how you get better.

If you are thinking of getting a duck dog, where do you start? The answer is with the puppy, of course. Before you start looking for your next "hunting partner,"

here are a couple of things to consider:

- Barring unforeseen accidents or illnesses, the average life expectancy of most duck hunting breeds is 12-14 years. That's a long term, major commitment that needs serious thought and consideration by you and your family.
- Duck season in Louisiana is 60 days. Say you get to hunt 20 of those days, that still leaves 345 days where you own a dog and have responsibilities to it.
- Dogs aren't cheap in terms of food, vaccinations, flea/tick/heartworm preventatives, check-ups and the unexpected bumps and bruises. Make sure you are prepared for the financial investment. Plan on \$1000.00 to \$1500.00 a year on food and routine medication alone.



Bryan Beatty is a native of New Roads and is an avid hunter and fisherman. He resides in Baton Rouge with his black lab, Molly Bee.

After you've considered the points above and decided to pull the trigger, what's next? You've got to settle on breed, color and sex of the puppy you want. Labs are the most common but Golden Retrievers, Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Pointers and Spaniel breeds are all very capable. Breeders you'll want to get a puppy from will have a social media presence so that's a good place to start as well as those in your own hunting circles. Well bred, capable dogs cost money, so don't skimp here. That extra \$500.00 to \$1,000.00 dollars for a top notch puppy is a pittance over that 12-14 year life expectancy. Another way to put it is a good semi-auto shotgun runs upwards of \$1,900.00, duck boats \$25,000; plus, leases: going up every year and we're not getting into the ammo, decoys and other gear. Bottom line is that dog, once trained and experienced, is going to be the MVP of the team. Go out and get a first round pick!

Now the fun starts: getting a puppy. Look for reputable breeders where the parents are health tested, the litter is registered, references are furnished and the breeder has a solid reputation. Top notch litters go quickly so putting down a deposit on a litter you're interested in is a good idea to reserve your pick. Titles from AKC or UKC events such as hunt tests or field trials are proof that the puppy comes from lines with the desire and trainability to do the work even though that may or may not be of interest to you and your pup. If possible, visit the litter before the pups are ready to go home to get an idea of your top picks "personality." Other considerations such as health guarantees, breeding rights, and initial vet visits/vaccinations should be spelled out in a contract. Good luck and happy hunting! ■

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Nathan Justice

RABBIT AND JALAPENO CORNBREAD DUMPLINGS

SMALL GAME HARVEST PROVIDES
BIG TASTE IN THE KITCHEN

Small game hunting is the best way to introduce kids or someone new to hunting and the great outdoors. It is faster paced than deer hunting and you don't have to sit still like you do for waterfowl hunting.

Putting miles on your boots, small game hunting will make you an overall better hunter because you are likely to find new game trails, bedding areas, scrapes, rubs, or new flooded areas to hunt wood ducks, to name a few. An added bonus of being in the woods during small game season is finding wild mushrooms. Oyster and lion's mane mushrooms can be found clinging to the same trees that are hiding the small game you're after.

Rabbit and squirrel meat have a clean mild flavor, can be used in a multitude of dishes, and are great game meat to introduce to the picky eater. So bust out your Dutch oven and take on this dumpling with cornbread twist recipe.



PREPARATION: Serves 4

1. Preheat oven to 325°F.
2. For the dumplings, place the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, sugar, and salt into a mixing bowl and whisk until combined.
3. Add the melted butter, milk, and diced jalapenos to the flour mixture and whisk until the dumpling batter is smooth.
4. Wrap the mixing bowl in plastic wrap and refrigerate until needed. The mixture will thicken as the flour becomes hydrated.
5. For the shredded rabbit meat, quarter the rabbits and season with salt, pepper, cayenne, dried thyme. Sprinkle with flour after it is seasoned.
6. Sear the quartered rabbits in the olive oil. Then, pour in the stock and roast in the oven at 325°F for 1 to 1.5 hours or until the rabbit is tender.
7. Remove the rabbit from the oven and let cool.
8. Reserve the stock for the rabbit and dumplings. Once cool, debone and shred the rabbit meat (2 rabbits or 6 squirrels should yield 2-3 cups of cooked meat).
9. For the Rabbit Soup, mince the red onions, bell peppers carrots, celery, fennel, and garlic into 1/8-inch or smaller size pieces. Add the butter and flour to a Dutch oven and stir

continuously to make a peanut butter colored roux (8-12 minutes). Add the minced veggies to the Dutch oven and cook until tender and translucent (5-10 minutes) at medium to high heat. (Adding the veggies to the roux will cool down the roux and prevent it from burning.)

10. Add the stock, roasted rabbit, parsley, thyme and heavy whipping cream to the Dutch oven. Simmer for 15 minutes until thickened. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

11. Use a large cookie scoop and drop the dumplings into the Dutch oven making sure they don't touch. Place the lid on the Dutch oven and place on low heat for 15-20 minutes until the dumplings rise and they're cooked through.

12. Serve piping hot and enjoy.



Nathan Judice is a wild game food blogger who lives in Baton Rouge. An environmental scientist by day, Nathan has a great appreciation of wildlife, conservation and sustainable harvesting. He can be found at Raisedonwild.com.



INGREDIENTS:

Jalapeno Cornbread Dumplings:

- 1 ¼ Cup Flour
- ¾ Cup Cornmeal
- 2 Teaspoons Baking Powder
- 1 Teaspoon Sugar
- ½ Teaspoon Salt
- 2 Tablespoons Melted Butter
- 1 Cup Milk
- 1/8 Cup Diced Pickled Jalapenos

Shredded Rabbit or Squirrel Meat:

- 2 Rabbits or 6 Squirrels
- 1/8 Cup Flour
- ½ Teaspoon Salt
- ½ Teaspoon Pepper
- ¼ Teaspoon Dried Thyme
- ¼ Teaspoon Cayenne Pepper
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil
- 1 Quart Stock (Chicken, Beef, or Vegetable)

Rabbit or Squirrel Soup:

- 2-3 Cups Shredded Rabbit or Squirrel Meat
- 1/8 Cup Flour
- 1/8 Cup Butter
- 1 Cup Red Onion
- 1 Cup Bell Pepper
- ½ Cup Carrot
- ½ Cup Celery
- ½ Cup Fennel
- 6 Cloves Roasted Garlic or 2 Tablespoons Minced Garlic
- 1 Quart Stock
- ½ Pint Heavy Whipping Cream
- 2 Tablespoons Parsley
- 1 Teaspoon Thyme
- Salt and Pepper to Taste

Say what you will about the month of March, but for crappie anglers, this month heralds the arrival of crappie season. Crappie anglers who've been fishing year-round may scoff at the notion, but you can still expect the boat ramp to be filled this month.

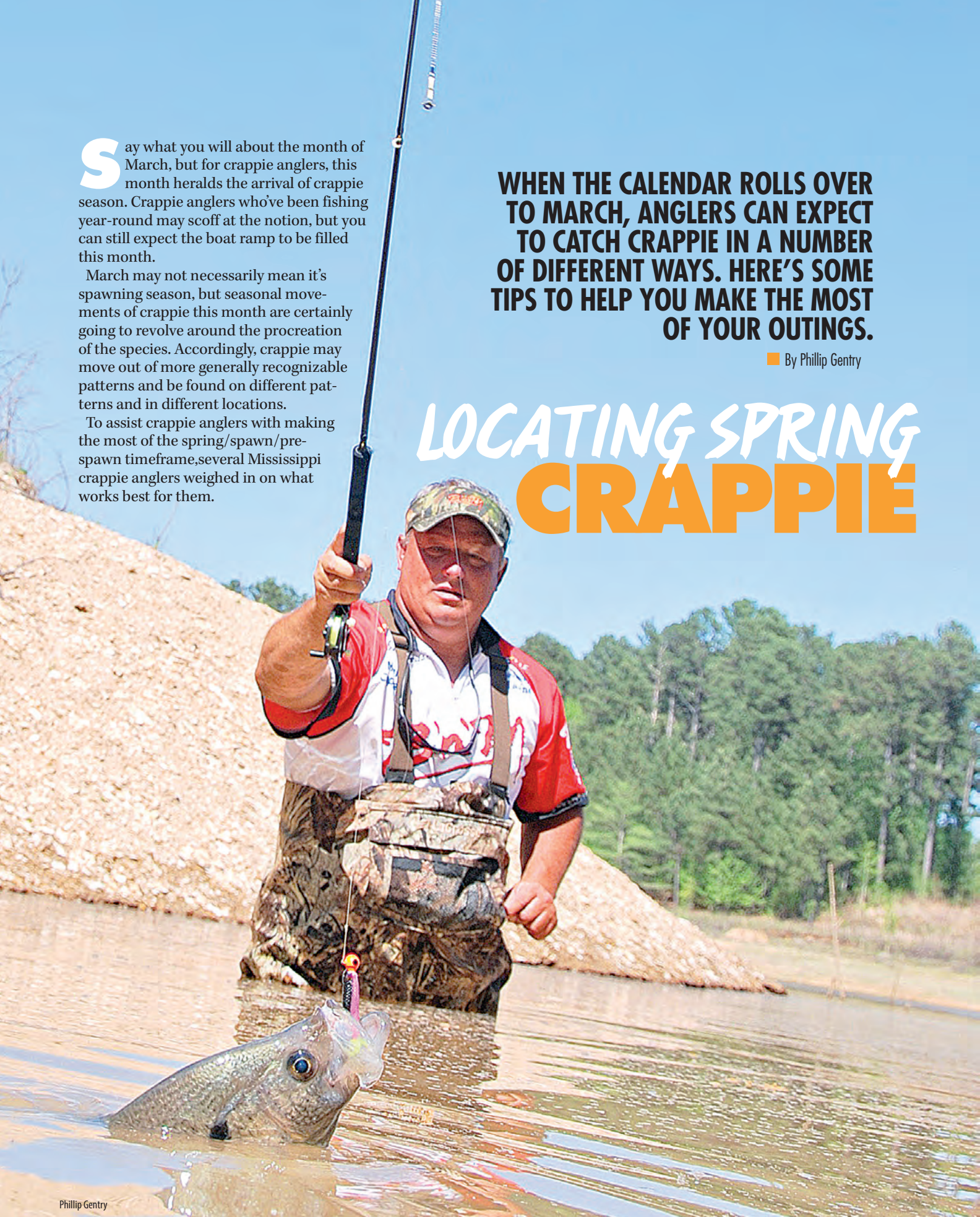
March may not necessarily mean it's spawning season, but seasonal movements of crappie this month are certainly going to revolve around the procreation of the species. Accordingly, crappie may move out of more generally recognizable patterns and be found on different patterns and in different locations.

To assist crappie anglers with making the most of the spring/spawn/pre-spawn timeframe, several Mississippi crappie anglers weighed in on what works best for them.

WHEN THE CALENDAR ROLLS OVER TO MARCH, ANGLERS CAN EXPECT TO CATCH CRAPPIE IN A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT WAYS. HERE'S SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OUTINGS.

■ By Phillip Gentry

LOCATING SPRING CRAPPIE



Phillip Gentry

FISHING ROCKS

Although crappie guide Brad Chappell gravitates to standing structure in the shallows when crappie spawn, they may not start the day out in those locations nor will they end the spawning season there. Chappell has found that the first hour or two of the day is better spent fishing along the rocks.

“It’s a timing thing,” Chappell said. “Some lakes, like Ross Barnett, have a lot more vegetation than hard structure and it seems to warm up faster than the southern part of the lake, down near the dam. The first hour of the day is the best along the rocks. In fact, if you can get on the water before daylight you can fish the rocks as long as you want till the sun comes up.

“There is very little cover to shade the crappie from the sun, so they’ll move up on the rocks at dark and stay till daylight. A lot of anglers do very well fishing around rip rap by only fishing at night.”

Chappell’s theory is not that crappie move from the rocks to the grass after the sun gets up, but that the rock-loving fish move off deeper and are harder to catch with a jig pole while the shallow structure fish are there all the time. He has also found that since the south end of the lake warms slower than the north end, the last of the spawning fish to be found will usually be on the south end along rip-rapped banks.

BOAT DOCKS

Veteran crappie angler Shelton Culpepper loves to jig fish around boat docks when crappie start moving shallow in the spring. While some boat docks may be floating docks with little

support underneath, Culpepper favors pier structures constructed on permanent driven pilings. Very often, cross braces are installed along these pilings during dock construction and that’s one of the key structures Culpepper looks for. He offers that most often he’ll find crappie suspending right along these cross braces in deeper water.

“You’re looking for the sweet spot,” he said. “That’s a little 3- or 4-foot diameter area that will hold a bunch of fish right in that same spot. You can put your jig all over that dock and not get a bite, then stick it down in that sweet spot and catch a mess of fish without having to move the boat.”

He offers that crappie may be drawn to these sweet spots due to the location of some sunken brush that was planted by the property owner or it might just be a natural corner with a broken cross brace or something sticking out that fish will get around. One quick way to locate such areas is to look at the dock itself. If there are rod holders and spotlights mounted all over the dock, it’s apparent the homeowners like to fish and very likely have sunken fish attracting structure under and around the pier. A quicker way is to scan the dock with forward facing sonar and see the fish in real time.

“Time of day can also be important,” Culpepper said. “Early in the morning and later in the evening, crappie may just be holding around the dock and mostly on the outside edges. Once the sun gets up, they’ll back up under the dock and will really congregate under the boat houses people have built on the ends of their docks. Those provide a lot of shade and cover. That’s when you have to get under there and jig them out.”

WADE FISHING >

Lakes and reservoirs that allow boat docks provide crappie with ready-made structure. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** A favorite method for targeting crappie in March is to wade for them, but several productive patterns can be found this month.



Phillip Gentry

WADE FISHING

Grenada Lake crappie guide John Harrison loves to wade at any of the Corps lakes that are lined up along I-55. When it comes to specific strategies for finding the best locations to fish these lakes, Harrison's advice was to do a little homework before you head to the water.

"Get a topo map of the lake and the area surrounding the lake," Harrison said. "Then just follow the ditches. Anywhere you see a ditch that breaks off a creek and peters out or a low spot that runs into the lake, both of those will be good spots. You need to know what the water level is first. Won't do you any good to try to fish a flat that's still out of water or that rising water has already covered up with water too deep to wade. Just be real careful. There are a lot of stumps and different water levels here."

For getting back to these locations, Harrison claims there are multiple ways to get to where you want to go.

"You got to look at the water's edge from both sides," he said. "My favorite way is to launch my boat, just like I was going fishing and motor in as far as I can get, then tie the boat up, get out and wade. Some people even tether the boat to their belt and pull the boat along as they wade, but if you're in the thick stuff where you need to be, just tie the boat and go."

Harrison was quick to point out that you don't always have to have a boat to catch crappie this month.

"The other way is look at a lake map that has roads marked on it," Harrison said. "Drive as close as you can get, then walk down through the woods and wade in. If there's enough shoreline available, a lot of people that fish these Corps lakes will unload a 4-wheeler at the ramp or someplace close by and go around the edge of the banks on 4-wheelers."

FISHING CURRENT

There is some debate among crappie anglers as to exactly what the effects of current, either wind or water driven, has on



Phillip Gentry



Whether pushed by run-off or wind, crappie will orient to moving water current and can be easily patterned. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Early in the month, rip-rap rocks will warm faster and attract pre-spawning crappie.

crappie fishing. Some anglers claim that crappie avoid current like the plague and will only fish in areas where there isn't a ripple to be found on the water. Other anglers swear that crappie don't mind current, and as evidence, recount the times when they caught fish in 30 mph winds or drastically rising or falling water.

Tournament angler Steve Coleman claims that in areas of modest or temporary current, crappie will often use available structure to break the flow of the current and provide them with both rest and an ambush point.

"One noticeable advantage of areas that provide current versus more stagnant areas is the levels of dissolved oxygen," Coleman said. "Moving water tends to fall on the cooler side and cooler or 'fresher' water, as in runoff, may hold more oxygen. Both baitfish and gamefish are drawn to areas holding more dissolved oxygen."

Another debate often ensues over which direction the angler should present his baits when dealing with current. Coleman said one school of thought indicates that crappie always face into the current in order to minimize their profile.

"By facing into current, crappie can detect any possible prey that is blown in by the current," he said. "You always want to go with the flow and not fish against it. It doesn't look natural."



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

TARGET BLACK CRAPPIE ➤

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TARGET BLACK CRAPPIE

“A black crappie is my favorite fish to target in the early spring because they are so much more consistent,” said Magnolia crappie angler Hugh Krutz. “They are not as apt to migrate and move as fast as white crappie will. White crappie will move in and out of shallow water overnight. The black crappie are more reliable. If you find a good school or group of black fish, they’re going to be there the next day.”

Several aspects of black crappie behavior make them a little easier to target than white crappie. He said even though clear water is at the top of the black crappie’s preference list, it’s finding areas of stained water in a clear water lake that he prefers to fish.

Krutz also notes another trait that black crappie exhibit during the pre-spawn phase. The fish will transition from tightly packed schools in the winter pattern to a more loosely associated migration of fish into major tributaries that eventually will lead them to their spawning grounds in the shallows.

“As the water temperature rises into the low 50s and toward the middle 50s, that’s when these fish are really going to get into their spawning group and they’re really going to start to search,” Krutz said. “They’re going to be feeding heavily.” ■

LUNKER LINES >

Black crappie move shallow to begin spawning a couple weeks before white crappie. This knowledge can help anglers pattern fish throughout the spring.



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Bogue Homa female bass will be chunky in March and weigh between 2-4 pounds but also possibly 5-10 pounds.



MARCH WALL HANGERS AT BOGUE HOMA

Plenty of 4-5 pound female bass are caught in March at Bogue Homa, and you may catch a 10-pound plus bass. The weather and the moon phase will dictate when Bogue Homa's big spawners will move into shallow water — generally at the end of February or the first of March.

BABY 1-MINUS

I'll start off fishing a red Mann's Baby 1-Minus on 12-pound test White Peacock fluorocarbon line on a 6.2:1 Bruin reel and a 7'1" medium action FX custom rod. Lily pad stems, dollar pads, coontail moss and other grasses will be emerging, coming up from the bottom just under the surface. I'll swim the Baby 1-Minus over the top of that emerging grass and through the lily pad stems, primarily on the northeastern and northwestern sides of the lake. These regions home the most lily pad stems and small feeder ditches coming into the lake. Also, because the sun rises in the east, that water will warm up first.

Bogue Homa is a stump infested lake. You'll need to fish a lot of water to pin-

point where the most spawning bass are. You'll find the lake loaded with 60-yard sections of bass beds. Concentrate your fishing there. In clear water, you can see the beds, but generally in March, the water will have some stain. These bedding bass may be in water only 1-2 feet deep. I'm searching for movement in the water around the lily pad stems or for wakes on the surface as bass try to catch and eat the bluegills that also bed in and around the grass. When fishing with 12-pound line, you'll lose some bass. If the water's fairly muddy, I'll fish the Baby 1-Minus on 30-pound bass braid.

BLADED JIG

If the water's very muddy, and the bass aren't aggressively trying to eat the Baby 1-Minus, I'll fish a 3/8-ounce bladed jig in a crawfish or a fire-orange color, a black blade and an orange trailer — perhaps a crawfish colored soft plastic or a swimming trailer. I'll kick that bladed jig off the lily pad stems. I'll swim it through new dollar pads closer to the surface to keep from getting hung up.

I'll use 19-pound fluorocarbon with

a 7' medium heavy action FX custom cranking rod. A bass either may attack the bait or hit it short, not be committed to it or not get it all the way in its mouth. A cranking rod will slow down the time from when I set the hook, until the bass gets the bladed jig in its mouth, which gives the bait to the bass longer than a stiffer rod will. I like this rod with both fiberglass and graphite in it. The rod's fiberglass allows the rod to bend and give the bait to the bass, while the graphite has the backbone to help jack the bass out of cover.

SPRINGR WORM AND SPRINGR II WORM

If the bass are finicky, not actively feeding, or the water's so clear I can see the



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.

The weather may be cold at the first of March, but the bass fishing at Bogue Homa will be hot at the end of the month.

bass sitting on the bed, I'll fish either a Mann's SpringR Worm or a SpringR II worm in a junebug color on a 7' medium heavy action FX custom rod with 30-pound braided line and a 6 foot leader of 14-pound test fluorocarbon with a uni-knot connecting the bass braid and the fluorocarbon.

I'll throw the worm past the bass on the bed and reel it back in front of these bass without any lead on the line. I'll kill the bait and let it fall in a slow, natural way once it hits the water. I'll be using a 1/0 Gamakatsu Weedless Wacky Worm Hook, and I'll aggravate the bass sitting on the bed, until I can get her to bite. If the water's clear enough, I'll use a white SpringR worm, so I can watch it as it's on the bottom of the bed and see as the bass inhales it. If the water's dingy, I'll use a junebug colored SpringR Worm.

BUZZBAIT

I'll also fish the buzzbait by tying 55-pound bass braid directly to the buzzbait and fishing it on a 6'10" heavy action FX custom rod with a 7. 3:1 Bruin reel. During the first two weeks of March, I'll reel that buzzbait as slowly as possible but still have that blade turning. As the water warms up in March, I'll retrieve it faster. My favorite color buzzbait in March is white with a gold blade, no matter the water's color.

WHAT YOU'LL CATCH

You'll catch numbers of male bass in March. Bogue Homa has a 15-inch size limit. Some male bass will be just under 15



inches but others will be 16 inches and weigh 2 - 2 ½ pounds. Although you'll catch some 3-4 pound female bass, you're likely to get a 5-pounder or possibly a 10 plus pounder. ■

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BASS BED FISHING

MULTIPLE STUDIES FIND NO EFFECT

It's that wonderful time on the bass-fishing calendar when bass move to predictable, shallow-water habitats to spawn. The egg-laden females are at their heaviest weight, and the nest-guarding males tend to be more aggressive.

Some anglers question the effects of bed fishing on bass populations. Studies in the 1990s demonstrated that bed fishing can adversely affect the production of fry for both largemouth and smallmouth bass. The longer a guarding male bass is kept away from a nest, the more predators like bream and shiners are likely to consume the eggs or fry. And the more eggs or fry removed by the nest-robbing predators, the more likely it is that the buck bass will abandon the nest completely, leaving the remaining eggs vulnerable to more predation, siltation, and fungus.

Fewer fry produced means fewer adult bass available in the future, right? Well, maybe yes, maybe not. Several studies indicate little effect of catching spawning fish on largemouth bass recruitment.

POND FISHING STUDIES

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission fisheries scientists evaluated the effect of controlled bed fishing on Florida bass in one-acre hatchery ponds. Ten male and 10 female bass were stocked into each of nine research ponds. Brush and cinder blocks were added for cover. The ponds were stocked with bluegill, Seminole killifish, and mosquitofish to provide forage for the adult bass and their offspring and to replicate the presence of potential nest predators.

Anglers attempted to catch the bedding bass in five ponds (fished ponds). Bass caught from the beds were held for one hour in a net enclosure and then released. Nests were monitored by snorkel divers and judged as successful if they produced swim up fry.

Across both years of the two-year study, bass were caught off 44 of the 91 nests fished in five ponds -- not all spawning bass are catchable. Of the 44 nests from

which bass were caught, 21 were successful (produced fry) and 23 were unsuccessful. Across both years, 41 percent of the nests produced bass fry in the fished ponds, and 54 percent of the nests produced fry in the unfished ponds.

The ponds were drained in the fall, and young bass counted. The difference in young bass per pond between fished and unfished ponds was not statistically significant.

DENSITY DEPENDENCE

University of Florida researchers stocked one-acre hatchery ponds with three to 20 male-female pairs of adult largemouth bass. Bluegill, redear sunfish, and golden shiners were stocked to pro-



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

vide forage for the adult bass and their offspring. Yearling largemouth bass were stocked as predators on the soon-to-be-produced bass fingerlings.

The bass nested in all ponds, and the numbers of successful nests — those that produced fry — was positively related to the number of adult bass. Yet, when the ponds were drained in the fall, there was no relationship between the numbers of adult spawners and recovered bass fingerlings. The ponds stocked with three pairs of adults produced as many offspring as those stocked with 20 pairs.

Density dependent population regulation, which is commonly observed in many animal populations, occurs when some feedback mechanism — like disease, competition for food and starvation, or predation — limits the number of individuals in the population to the number the environment can support. The similar density of young bass at high and low numbers of spawning bass suggested density-dependent population regulation.

The average size of the age-0 bass and the number of small forage fish declined as age-0 bass density increased. At high densities, the age-0 bass appeared food limited and their growth slowed, making them more vulnerable to predation by the yearling bass. Further, because predators satisfy their energy requirements by weight — not numbers — consumed, the predators would eat more slow-growing age-0 bass than larger, faster-growing fish. A lot more small, slow-growing bass would be eaten in the high-density ponds, reducing their density to levels similar to the low-density ponds.

A water body will only produce a certain maximum number of young bass, and spawning bass in a healthy population can produce more offspring than needed to sustain the population.

LARGE-WATER MODELING STUDIES

Pond studies provide useful information, but do they apply to larger fisheries? University of Florida fishery scientists used a robust population model to identify conditions where spawning-season protection may benefit largemouth bass populations. Like most population models, their model used established values of bass growth, natural mortality, catch and harvest, and recruitment rates to

predict changes in the bass population; but this model also incorporated new knowledge about the effects of fishing for spawning bass — namely, the loss of eggs and fry when females are harvested before they spawn or males are harvested while guarding nests — and functions for density-dependent mortality of young bass as summarized above.

For bass fisheries typical of those in most Mississippi reservoirs, catch-and-release-only fishing during the spawn increased the adult bass population eight percent compared to a year-round open fishery with a 14-inch minimum length limit. No fishing at all during the spawn increased the adult bass population 20 percent compared to the year-round open fishery. The greatest

increase in adult bass abundance — 42 percent compared to the year-round open fishery — resulted from the year-round catch-and-release fishery. Importantly, spawning was sufficient to sustain bass populations under all regulation scenarios.

Despite documented adverse effects on nest success of individual bass, these three population-level analyses indicate no adverse effects of fishing during the bass spawn at present levels of fishing if fish are handled carefully. If anglers really want more bass to catch — a predicted 42 percent more — they need to consider year-round catch and release. ■

LURE REVIEW >



The effect of bed fishing on smallmouth bass awaits study, but populations seem resilient to present levels of bed fishing.

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



Bass smash the Hula Popper 2.0, sometimes getting the topwater deep inside their mouth. **INSET:** Ethan Butler of Iowa loves to catch bass of all sizes, particularly brutes like this, on the Hula Popper 2.0.

HULA POPPER 2.0

A LITTLE OLD, A LITTLE NEW COMBINE TO MAKE THIS TOPWATER CATCH BASS

Same size. Same action. Almost the same look. Same rave review on the results.

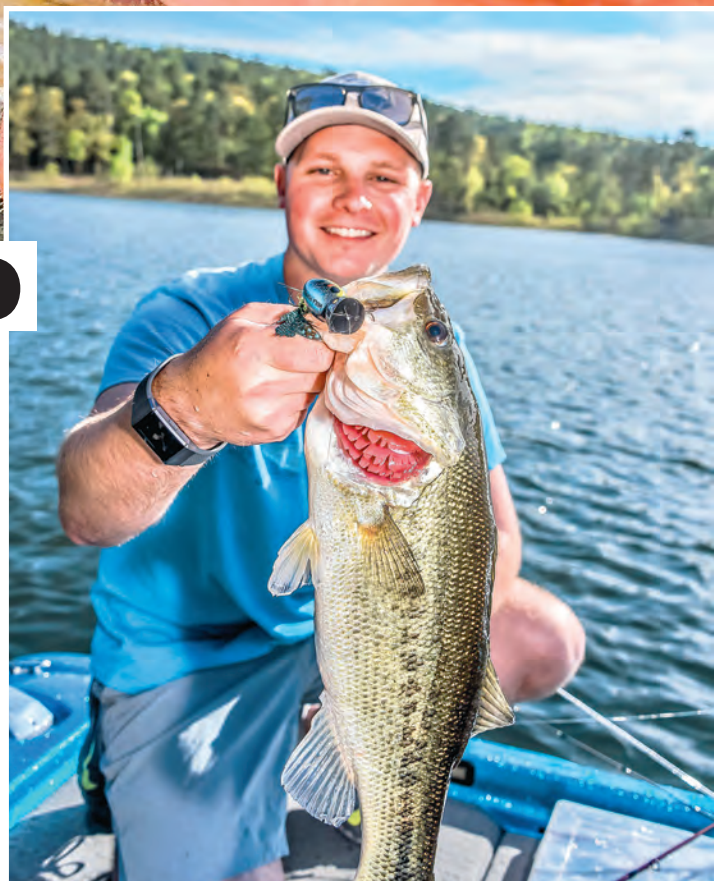
Arbogast hit a bass fishing home run last year when it marketed the Hula Popper 2.0, a spittin' image of the G760 model of the original Hula Popper introduced in 1948. The reintroduction was the start of something big, something exciting, and a college graduate from Iowa was in on it as the content specialist for PRADCO Outdoor Brands.

Ethan Butler of Knoxville, Iowa, graduated from the University of Northern Iowa (Class of 2018) and moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas, where the company is headquartered. He got in on the tail end of the Hula Popper 2.0 campaign, the first launch of a "next generation" artificial lure by Arbogast. It was followed by the new Arbogast Jointed Jitterbug 2.0.

"I started in 2018," Butler said. "The Hula Popper 2.0 project was already

in motion. I wasn't so much involved in the actual decision on what it looked like R&D, colors, components and feathers."

But they handed the finished version of the Hula Popper 2.0 to him and he put his college double major — marketing/advertising and digital media, and business administration — to work successfully to help the revered topwater lure take off. Butler, 26, was one of the bass fishing enthusiasts who worked with the next project start to finish. It was a thrill to join a team that created the Jointed Jitterbug 2.0 and he was proud of his contribution to one of his favorite topwaters, he said.



Photos courtesy Pradco Outdoor Brands



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.

Butler said the Hula Popper 2.0 “was the first one we really stepped out of the box with.”

The Hula Popper 2.0 is two inches long and weighs 3/8 ounce. It has all the characteristics of the original model save one — there are rear-treble hook feathers instead of the rubber skirt on the original Hula Popper. The feathers, a touch added by Scalish, accentuate the new model’s movement on the surface to create a tail-like look, according to Arbogast.

The designers kept the traditional shape of the bucketmouth that serves as a huge popper. The two No. 6 black nickel treble hooks are attached to new split rings rather than the old “hook hangers” for enhanced strength and full range of motion.

And it features the same popping action that the topwater was known for for seven decades. That’s what counts, according to Butler.

Hula Poppers are near and dear to the Iowan. The new one reminds him so much of the old one, the way it consistently triggers strikes, some that really get the blood pressure going.

“Yeah,” he said. “I love it. It really fits my style of fishing a lot. I grew up in Iowa. We don’t have a lot of big bodies of water. I grew up fishing small lakes and ponds. This bait ... that’s its sweet spot right there.”

Butler said he adjusts the cadence of the pops to water conditions and cover. He’ll pop it more frequently if there’s a ripple on the water or around cover and less frequently (longer pauses between pops) in the spring if the water temp is in the upper 50s, he said, “when they’re not quite committed to topwater.”

The new topwater’s colors are spectacularly irresistible and feature the ultra-modern “crackle” paint job patterns. His favorite when he fishes in his home state is Blue Kill.” Other popular colors are Black Death, Coach Hog and White Zombie.

“It’s kind of crazy. Talk about a cool project just getting out of college and working on a project with Arbogast, launching such iconic products, first the Hula Popper and then the Jitterbug,” he told this magazine in June 2020.

Butler worked for PRADCO two and a half years before he and his wife moved back to Iowa for another job, but he rejoined PRADCO as regional account manager in mid-summer 2021. Chad Warner, PRADCO product director; Bill Jarboe, product development director; Frank Scalish, former pro bass angler and lure designer, and Justin Johnson were responsible for the Hula Popper 2.0.

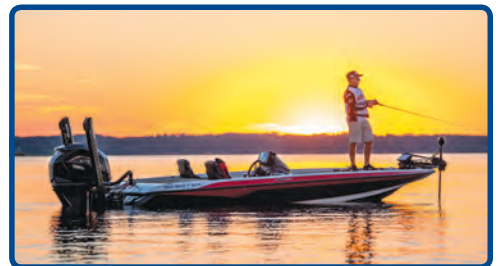
Butler said he had the fun job, marketing the great product. For more information about the Hula Popper 2.0 and other PRADCO Outdoor Brands products, go to pradcooutdoor-brands.com. ■

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YAMAHA



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: *LADYFISH*

Ladyfish (*Elops saurus*) are long, cylindrical shaped fish that live primarily in tropical and subtropical waters. In the U.S., they are found along inshore waters along the Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico. They are very tolerant of low salinity levels and sometimes travel up freshwater rivers.

These fish are usually silver in color, but may appear white or gray depending on the waters they inhabit. They have deeply forked tails and small scales that run the entire length of their bodies.

Ladyfish are related to tarpon and bonefish, and are often misidentified as either of those species, but most commonly as tarpon.

Their mouths are shaped much differently than both other species, however, and the lack of a long, filamentous dorsal ray sets them apart from tarpon. The scales of a ladyfish are also much smaller than those of a tarpon and tarpon get much bigger than ladyfish.

When young, ladyfish are translucent and can look like clear eels. They lose these features shortly after birth. They eat small fish and shrimp, with shrimp making up the majority of their diet when available. They have very fine, sharp teeth.

NOT ALL "LADIES"

Like tarpon, ladyfish spawn offshore,

hatching huge numbers of eggs which float with the currents, usually ending up in inshore waters before hatching.

Anglers catch ladyfish on a variety of baits, most often live or cut pieces of shrimp. They are acrobatic fish, and are known for leaping far above the surface when hooked. They are usually released or used as bait for sharks or tarpon. The food quality of ladyfish is quite poor, and



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.



very few anglers eat them.

Ladyfish are known in some areas as tenpounders. Other nicknames include poor man's tarpon, lady tarpon, little tarpon, she-tarpon and she-fish. Contrary to their name, all ladyfish are not females. Adult ladyfish average 2 to 3 pounds, or about 18 to 24 inches in length.

The Mississippi state record ladyfish weighed 5 pounds, 6.06 ounces and was caught by Doug Borries in May 2020. Louisiana's state record ladyfish was caught by Royden Lynch Jr. in Sept. 2015 and weighed 4.82 pounds. Lynch caught the fish in South Pass.

The world record ladyfish weighed 8 pounds and was caught out of Sepitiba Bay, Brazil in February, 2006. ■

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	34" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	no limit
White marlin	66" LJFL	no limit
Sailfish	63" LJFL	no limit
Sharks (large coastal/pelagic)@	37" TL*	1/day or 3/boat
Sharks (small coastals)@	25" TL*	4/day
Cobia	36" FL	2 per day
Redfish (red drum)	18" minimum / 30" maximum TL	3/day (1 over 30")
Flounder (state waters)	12" TL	10/day
Black Grouper	24" TL@	4/day ~
Gag Grouper	24" TL@	2/day ~
Hogfish	14" FL@	5/day
Red, yellowfin grouper	20" TL@	4/day ~
Scamp grouper	16" TL@	4/day ~
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	no minimum@	1/day each ~
Gray/schoolmaster/cubera/mahogany/yellowtail/dog snapper	12" TL@	10/day ~
Mutton snapper	18" TL@	5/day ~
Queen/blackfin/silk/winchman snapper	none@	10/day ~
Vermilion/Lane snapper	10"/8" TL@	20/day aggregate
Gray triggerfish	15" FL@	1/day ~
Golden/blueline/anchor/blackline tilefish	none@	20/day ~
King mackerel	24" FL@	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL@	15/day
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL@	3/day
Bigeye tuna	27" CFL@	no limit
Tripletail	18" TL	3/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	15" TL	15/day

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

~ Check Aggregate Total Bag/Possession Limit

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

* Possession of certain species of sharks is prohibited.

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



CHILL OUT FOR TASTIER FISH

KEEP YOUR CATCH COLD TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PISCATORIAL PLATTER

S By Kinny Haddox
ome fishermen catch fish for fun, enjoy admiring their catch, then release them back into the water to fight another day. Other fishermen catch fish for fun, but like to keep them and take them home to release them into hot grease at a fish fry.

Conservation is important, but so is proper nourishment. And there's nothing better to eat than

fresh fish, especially this time of year. When the fish are fat and healthy from the winter and the water's good and cold, it's the best time to catch fish to eat. If you do keep fish to eat, pay attention to three stages of the process that are important to making the most of your piscatorial platter. It applies to any species of fish you catch.

Many decades ago, a famous French chef said, "In the hands of an able cook,

fish can become an inexhaustible source of perpetual delight." I think that means it's hard to beat a good fish fry, especially if proper care has been taken with the prime ingredient.

COLD IS KEY

The first step to a good fish fry (or whatever preparation you choose) comes when you first catch the fish. Keep your fish alive in cool, fresh water or ice them



down. Keeping them cold is the key. Two dollars worth of ice is a good investment to preserve the flavor of your catch.

Second, take time to have a proper cleaning station and handle your fish with the same respect you give a \$30 cut of filet mignon. Keep it clean and keep it cold during and after cleaning. This isn't just an old wives' tale. Keeping fish cold keeps the blood inside their organs. In warmer conditions, the blood spreads throughout their body. The blood in the fish flesh gives them a strong, fishy taste.

Getting fish cold has an added benefit. A really cold fish is much easier to clean than one that is still flouncing.

If you are eating the fish in the next 24-48 hours, you can keep the cleaned fish in the refrigerator in a covered stainless steel bowl or a sealed plastic freezer bag. For later use, there

are several ways to freeze fish. Many people like to freeze them in water, but when you do that, make sure you dry the fish completely after thawing and before cooking.

VACUUM SEALING

Today, a popular way to keep fish tasting fresh is by using a vacuum sealer unit to secure them in an air-tight heavy duty plastic bag. Two tips here: make sure the fish is dry and also it doesn't hurt to double seal the bag, just to ensure you prevent frost burn.

For species with a more "fishy" flavor like catfish, it doesn't hurt to soak them overnight in a bowl of cold water with the juice of one fresh lemon stirred in. The lemon flavor isn't strong and helps cleanse the meat of some of the wild flavor.



Once you clean and fillet fish, it's important to still keep them cold and sealed waiting for the fryer, broiler or grill.

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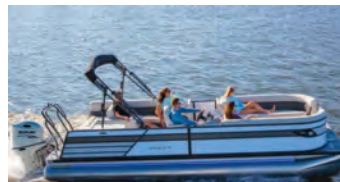
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There are just about as many favorite ways to fry fish as there are lures to catch them. The basic fish fry only requires that you season the fish, cover it well with cornmeal or a commercial fish fry mix and cook it in hot oil. Here in Louisiana, we have lots of great seasonings to choose from. Peanut oil is the prime choice for frying. Frying fish at 350 - 375 degrees for 3-4 minutes for quarter pound filets is a good baseline. Thicker fish require a bit longer, but it's easy to overcook fish, so timing is important.

For crispier fish or fish with a thicker coating, dip fish into an egg/milk mixture and then the coating. Some cooks repeat that process for a thick crispy batter. Another way to make fish extra crispy is to coat the fillets with plain mustard, then cover with meal or fish fry. The mustard holds the coating and only gives a faint taste of mustard to the finished fish.

Nothing beats fresh caught fish. Develop your own favorite method and stick with it for consistent results. And remember, the preparation for a good fish fry starts long before you fire up the cooker.

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A close-up look at the new Berkley Gilly in the large 130 mm size. **INSET:** Keith Poche targets big bass like this one with the Berkley Gilly and said more and more anglers will be, too.

GIVE 'EM A GILLY

LARGEMOUTH AND ANGLERS ARE GOBBLING UP THIS NEW SWIMBAIT

When you look at the new Berkley Gilly soft plastic swimbait in the package or in the water, it's hard to imagine anything looking or acting more like a real fish, other than a real fish itself.

The question is, do the bass feel the same way?

"The bait definitely passes the eye test and the fish catching test," said 40-year-old Alabama professional bass angler Keith Poche. "It's still new to most fishermen, but this year it's going to be a bait that a whole lot of fishermen are going to be throwing, especially when they are looking for a big bite."

The lure isn't just a chunk of soft plastic, the pro bass angler said. It has a hollow head that allows the bait to float in an upright posture when swimming and also helps with the hook set on crushing strikes. The lure can be rigged vertically without a weight, sideways as a Texas

rig or on a jig head. It can also be used with a weighted swimbait hook, a line-through Stinger hook or even on a drop shot setup. The lure is also packed with Berkley's patented PowerBait flavor. It comes in three sizes, 90mm, 110mm and 130mm.

"Besides the natural look and action that the bait has, that is the biggest thing about it," Poche said. "It's so versatile. You can rig it to match just about any type of fishing. And while most swimbaits are only good in shallow water, this one can be used for just about any depth of fish you want. You can fish it weightless around the cypress trees or spawning beds. You can fish it on a jig head in big reservoirs on deeper points and grass lines. It is great for staging fish in a situation like that."



"The thing just looks so realistic. It looks just like a real bream. Most swimbaits are more narrow, but the profile of this bait is big. It's a big bass bait for sure. You can catch all sizes on it, but when you want a big bite, it's something you want to try. In the South, we've got so many cypress trees, that's a great place to rig it Texas style and just fish it like a floating fluke. Flip it around the trees, in holes in the grass or around brush-tops and hang on."

He also says spawning bass are going to see this bait and immediately feel like it's a threat when you toss it on the



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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:
The 2022 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$13.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2022 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2022, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2023, and more. Comes with FREE 2022 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, plus \$3 s&h.

Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor. \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

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2022 MAR

POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCEL	VALUE
Tue 1	██	██	██	58
Wed 2	██	██	██	66
Thu 3	██	██	██	58
Fri 4	██	██	██	50
Sat 5	██	██	██	42

Sun 6	██	██	██	39
Mon 7	██	██	██	41
Tue 8	██	██	██	42
Wed 9	██	██	██	48
Thu 10	██	██	██	58
Fri 11	██	██	██	48
Sat 12	██	██	██	44

Sun 13	██	██	██	44
Mon 14	██	██	██	43
Tue 15	██	██	██	52
Wed 16	██	██	██	61
Thu 17	██	██	██	72
Fri 18	██	██	██	75
Sat 19	██	██	██	63

Sun 20	██	██	██	50
Mon 21	██	██	██	38
Tue 22	██	██	██	31
Wed 23	██	██	██	31
Thu 24	██	██	██	34
Fri 25	██	██	██	43
Sat 26	██	██	██	32

Sun 27	██	██	██	28
Mon 28	██	██	██	29
Tue 29	██	██	██	40
Wed 30	██	██	██	52
Thu 31	██	██	██	65

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED

MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
6:24 am	11:04 am - 12:20 pm ☀	5:08 pm	11:29 pm - Midnight	☾ New
6:59 am	11:45 am - 1:21 pm ☀	6:16 pm	Midnight - 12:45 am	☾
7:30 am	12:23 pm - 2:19 pm ☀	7:21 pm	12:10 am - 1:46 am	☾
7:58 am	12:59 pm - 3:15 pm	8:24 pm	12:48 am - 2:44 am	☾
8:25 am	1:33 pm - 4:09 pm	9:26 pm	1:24 am - 3:40 am	☾
8:52 am	2:07 pm - 5:03 pm	10:26 pm	1:58 am - 4:34 am	☾
9:21 am	2:43 pm - 5:55 pm	11:26 pm	2:32 am - 5:28 am	☾
9:53 am	3:22 pm - 6:48 pm		3:08 am - 6:20 am	☾
10:29 am	4:05 pm - 7:41 pm ☀	12:25 am	3:47 am - 7:13 am	☾
11:09 am	4:52 pm - 8:34 pm ☀	1:23 am	4:30 am - 8:06 am ☀	☾ HALF & APOGEE
11:56 am	5:42 pm - 9:24 pm	2:19 am	5:17 am - 8:59 am ☀	☾ High
12:48 pm	6:33 pm - 10:15 pm	3:11 am	6:07 am - 9:49 am	☾
2:46 pm	8:29 pm - 12:01 am	4:57 am	6:58 am - 10:40 am	☾ Begin DST
3:46 pm	9:23 pm - 12:45 am	5:39 am	8:54 am - 12:26 pm	☾
4:48 pm	10:17 pm - 1:27 am	6:15 am	9:48 am - 1:10 pm	☾
5:52 pm	11:14 pm - Midnight	6:48 am	10:42 am - 1:52 pm	☾
6:55 pm	Midnight - 2:04 am	7:18 am	11:39 am - 2:29 pm ☀	☾
8:00 pm	12:10 am - 2:40 am	7:46 am	12:35 pm - 3:05 pm ☀	☾ Full
9:05 pm	1:07 am - 3:15 am	8:14 am	1:32 pm - 3:40 pm	☾
10:13 pm	2:06 am - 3:52 am	8:44 am	2:31 pm - 4:17 pm	☾ Spring
11:23 pm	3:05 am - 4:31 am	9:16 am	3:30 pm - 4:56 pm	☾
12:34 am	4:07 am - 5:15 am	9:53 am	4:32 pm - 5:40 pm	☾
1:44 am	5:10 am - 6:06 am	10:36 am	5:35 pm - 6:31 pm	☾ Perigee
2:51 am	6:14 am - 7:00 am ☀	11:28 am	6:39 pm - 7:25 pm ☀	☾ Low
3:50 am	7:18 am - 8:00 am ☀	12:27 pm	7:43 pm - 8:25 pm ☀	☾ Half
4:40 am	8:17 am - 9:03 am	1:34 pm	8:42 pm - 9:28 pm	☾
5:23 am	9:11 am - 10:07 am	2:43 pm	9:36 pm - 10:32 pm	☾
6:29 am	10:00 am - 11:08 am	3:53 pm	10:25 pm - 11:33 pm	☾
7:30 am	10:43 am - 12:09 pm	5:01 pm	11:08 pm - 12:34 am	☾
8:29 am	11:21 am - 1:07 pm	6:06 pm	11:46 pm - Midnight	☾
9:28 am	12:00 pm - 1:56 pm	7:09 pm	Midnight - 1:32 am	☾

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

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