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Mississippi waters are known for giant spring slab crappie. Now's the time to hit one of the state's big crappie lakes. Photo courtesy of Carlee Jo Williams. INSET: Mike Giles harvested this gobbler near Lauderdale in 2021.

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# OUTDOOR UPDATE

with  
**Mike Giles**

The author and Billy Russell display the wet swamp gobbler they called up last April.



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

Photos by Mike Giles

## DOUBLE UP WITH A TRIP TO THE WOODS AND WATERS

**W**hen the dogwoods bloom the gobbler's boom, and the fish gobble up those lures and baits. Whether you are hunting gobblers, or fishing for freshwater or saltwater fish, the bite will be on during April as love fills the air and water.

down after 8:30 a.m. We called sparingly, and Russell made the final call that sealed the deal. The gobbler was heading to my side of the tree but turned on a dime when he heard Russell and closed fast!

Tic-Boom, roared Russell's shotgun and the gobbler collapsed and began his death flop. The bird was a celebration long overdue. In fact, it had been 40 years since we'd last hunted together and Russell had called that one for me.

After taking care of the bird we quickly made our way to a cypress-filled slough just teaming with crappie. I had rigged up a couple of B'n'M crappie poles with jigs and we commenced catching crappie, slab crappie and lots of them.

We continued jigging along the cypress trees and picking up crappie after crappie. Russell had never crappie fished much but he was getting the hang of it quickly. As he dipped his jig and cork rig near a bush something happened.

Wham! A large bass smashed his jig and tried to take it away. Russell used all of the muscle and backbone the rod had, and he was able to wear the bass down and bring him to the boat. But that was just the first of many on this fantastic spring day.

Over the next four hours we caught a pile of crappie and Russell caught at least six bass in the 4 to 6-pound range on that jig pole.

If you are looking to make a combo trip, then April is the time to do that. We experienced a great day in the

Billy Russell belted out an owl hoot with his natural voice deep in the Delta woods before dawn last turkey season. I heard a faint reply, or thought I did to the south of our location. Russell, of Lexington, couldn't hear the bird, but I told him to hoot again. This time the old pro hooted again, and the distant gobbler

answered with a lusty response, much stronger than the first time. I told him where the turkey was located, and we quickly made our way to the roost site.

I sent out a low tree yelp and the gobbler answered me quickly. Over the next couple of hours the gobbler belted out gobblers continuously before finally flying



Billy Russell displays a nice bass caught while fishing with the author last spring on a combo turkey hunt/fishing trip the same day.

turkey woods as well as catching bass and crappie on the water. The good news is that it can be just that good for you too if the timing is right.

In this month's issue, you'll read about how to fill your livewell with monster Grenada Lake crappie in John N. Felsher's "Spring slabbing" feature.

Bradley G. Williams' article "Grow your own baits" is helpful for those times when live bait is about the only thing the fish will bite. If you've got live bait, then you can be sure the fish will have the option and many times live bait is the only thing between not catching any fish or bringing home a livewell full of succulent crappie, bass or shellcrackers.

Andy Douglas has experienced more than his fair share of tough turkeys and his article on "Walkaway Gobblers" will be

informative if you encounter those tough old gobblers who start heading the other way. While they can be really tough to turn around, Douglas gives us a few tips on how it can be done.

If you're looking to catch some redfish then John N. Felsher has just the ticket in his article on "Spoon-fed spot tails" which has some simple yet tried and true lures and techniques for filling your limit of reds.

In "Guardians of the crappie waters," Kinny Haddox covers a successful crappie fishing family. Read about their keys to catching monster springtime crappie. Those crappie are fun to catch and tasty to eat no matter how you cook them. ■

## LAKE WASHINGTON BASS ON A CONSISTENT BITE

**T**erry Bates studied the row of cypress trees intently as he worked the cypress knees and shallow water brush in search of a hungry bass. He was dissecting the cover like a skilled surgeon, pitching the crawfish imitation into each piece of cover with barely a ripple.

Wham! Bates drove the steel hook home a split second after a bass sucked in the tempting offering. Bates wasted no time in jerking the bass from the safety of the gnarled cypress knees and structure under the water. After a quick picture he released the bass to catch another day.

Lake Washington warms up quicker than many lakes, and the crappie and bass can be found in shallow water earlier than almost any other public body of water in the state. Even more importantly for bass anglers who like to fish shallow, bass can be caught year-round in the shady shallow waters of the lake.

Bates is a retired fisheries biologist who has spent a lifetime fishing Lake Washington and the fertile delta oxbows, sloughs and rivers. He's also been a successful tournament angler since the 70s and he's still locating bass and winning tournaments to this day.

If you want to catch bass on Lake Washington or one of the Delta lakes, Bates can show you when, where and how. As a bass guide he's as good as any I've ever fished with. He'll even supply the rod and reels and show you how to fish a lure or technique that the fish are biting that time of year.

I joined Bates on Lake Washington recently and had a great day on the water. The water temperature was rising, in between the cold fronts, but the fish had already moved up into the shallow waters and they were biting, though not aggressively.

Since the bass were lethargic, Bates was pitching the small creature baits and getting bit regularly. I switched to a Bass Pro Stiko and promptly caught a bass after not getting bit for a while. Bates kept working the Texas rigged crawfish and I worked the soft jerkbaits and we both got bites.

About mid-morning, Bates found an area that had bass moving up and they were biting. He'd pitch that bait to trees and wood cover and get bit regularly, but you never knew just which cast would entice a bait.

Watching the master bass angler at work was amazing as he effortlessly pitched and retrieved the lure without a hitch. And occasionally he'd slam the door on a bass, set the hook and jerk them from their hidden lair. We'd take a picture every once in a while, but he releases every bass he catches to grow some more.

"I like to fish spinnerbaits, buzzbaits and Texas-rigged plastics

on Lake Washington," Bates said. "I'll let them tell me what they want and after we determine what that is, we'll offer that to them as long as they keep biting."

As the water warms up, he'll continue probing the shallow waters with spinnerbaits and other favorite lures and give them what they want. The good news is that you don't have to be an expert bass angler to catch bass at Lake Washington. Just get to the lake and keep your lure in the water and you'll probably catch a few 3 to 5 pounders, or at least have the opportunity to.

If you want to know more about current fishing conditions at the lake, contact Mike Jones, owner of Bait N' Thang's bait shop and boat launch, at 662-822-2087. Or you can reach Terry Bates for bass fishing information at 662-390-3886. ■



Terry Bates with a chunky Lake Washington river bass caught after a recent cold front moved through the area. Bates caught the fish on a Texas-rigged creature bait pitching to the base of cypress trees.

# OKATIBBEE LAKE ON FIRE

CRAPPIE ARE GOBBLING UP JIGS AND MINNOWS NOW

**A**rriving at a shallow flat on Okatibbee Lake, we started working jig and cork rigs and it didn't take long to see that the crappie were biting. Ken Murphy cast out near a submerged stump and promptly got bit.

Wham! Murphy drove the hook deep into the mouth of our first white perch of the day. I saw the spot, so I quickly followed up with a shot on the other side of the stump and another crappie nailed my jig as well. We were working a shallow stump filled flat in three to five feet of water with a ditch that wound through the flat.

Crappie have come to this pre-spawn flat for more than 40 years when the water is at winter pool level or below. It's like clockwork. They start moving in during February and depending on the current weather conditions may start spawning between mid-February through mid-March. This year it seems that they started biting about the third week in February and were only interrupted by brutal cold and stormy weather temporarily.

But now, in mid-March, they're on fire once again. Anglers only have to get in the 3 to 4 feet deep range and find wood cover and start fishing.

My grandfather J. P. Nolen taught me how to crappie fish with jigs and we caught fish from Ross Barnett Reservoir's main lake and spillway areas. An average day would include a limit of 1 ½-pound crappie and we relished cleaning and eating them as they were about as good as you can get around these parts.

The thing I like the best about crappie fishing this time of year is that you can catch crappie and lots of them on just the basic equipment. You can use a cane pole and cork, or a B'n'M Crappie pole with minnows or jigs, or a jig and minnow on it and catch fish.

"If the water is low like it has been at Okatibbee, then find any brush or stumps in the shallow flats along the ditches and creek channels," Murphy said. "I prefer a jig and cork rig so that I can find the depth they like it and also to keep from getting hung up on the stumps all the time. If you have the jig right about the stumps, then you can retrieve it over them, and the crappie will strike."

After catching about 25 crappie we moved to another shallow water area of the lake and caught a few crappie off of rocks. The fish were holding on top of the submerged rock pile and would strike when you popped a jig by them.

On this day they were hitting any color combination that had a chartreuse tail. We caught them on black and chartreuse, white and chartreuse, and on Pico grubs in orange and chartreuse. We cast in the exact same spot, and they hit all three. If you could find one, then you'd usually catch another if you could hit the spot.



This crappie was caught on a jig and cork combo using a B'n'M TCB rod and Bass Pro reel combo.

Photo by Mike Giles

Our final stop on the late afternoon fishing trip was to a drop off near a clay bank. We'd cast up onto the point and let it go to the bottom. With the jig on the clay bottom the cork laid flat, but as soon as we jerked it off the ledge the cork would stand up and that's where the hits usually came. Simply let it sit a minute and if they didn't hit it then, we'd twitch it and usually get a bite.

We finished our limit and called it a day.

If you're looking to catch a few crappie for fun or for eating, then head to Okatibbee Lake this month. You can catch perch in 9-11 feet depths along the ditches, as well as in 4-5 feet of water fishing over stumps, brush, shallow drops and on rip rap rocks. Start shallow and work deeper until you find wood structure and you'll likely catch a few and possibly load the boat. But if you catch one, be sure to drop a marker, or anchor and start fishing right there because you might just find the mother lode, but you'll never know it until you keep fishing the exact spot. ■

# D'IBERVILLE TEAM WINS AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

## HOKAMP AND REDDING NO. 1 RANKED FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL TEAM FOR 2021

**A**nna Hokamp and Leslie Redding were bestowed with the "Bait N'Things, Lake Washington Crappie Legends Youth of the Year" award at a recent banquet held in Greenville.

"It is our highest honor that we give to people who inspire others and work hard in God's creation or have served this great nation and share their passion with others about the outdoors," said Mike Jones, Mississippi fishing and tournament promoter. "These two young ladies are very inspirational, and they epitomize what we like to see in young people today. The fact that they fished against anglers from all around the world and came out ranked as the No. 1 female team after the season ending world championship was icing on the cake!"

This dynamic duo were a huge part of the D'Iberville High School fishing team which was the only team to win 3 division-1 state championships while fishing through the Bass Tactix tournament organization.

From 2019 through 2021 they won three major tournaments and finished in the top 10 in five others sponsored by the Bass Federation and Major League Fishing.

Hokamp and Redding finished 2020 ranked as the No. 4 female team, and in 2021 they became the No. 1 ranked female high school team at the World Championships.

The team's total earnings came to \$172,000 in cash, prizes and scholarships. Randy Kroll was the coach and team captain the first three years that they fished, and Billy Redding was the coach last year.

"Last year we won back-to-back tournaments at the Mobile Delta and at Ross Barnett," Hokamp said. "My favorite places to fish are Ross Barnett, Pickwick, Mobile Delta, the Pascagoula River and the Pearl River."

And that's when they knew special things were happening for the young ladies. Steven Ramsey is the school adviser for the team and Hokamp is the president of the team. During the World Championships the talented duo beat other young ladies from around the world, including some lady anglers from Zimbabwe. In true sporting fashion they traded jerseys with the Zimbabwe ladies also.

"Fishing is my life," Hokamp said. "To go from the bottom to the top in three years is great!"

Hokamp, a senior in high school this year, won scholarships to fish and go to school full time, but she's forgoing that at least for now to pursue a career in the Air Force. She was also in the ROTC and earned a Commander's Pin at Camp Shelby and was promoted to Captain her junior year and Liaison Officer this year.

"I made a promise to my grandfather that I'd keep Air Force in the family if I got the opportunity," Hokamp said. "And that's just what I'm going to do."

Redding has one more year to compete on the high school level, but she may take a scholarship to attend Simpson University in California after she graduates. Though she's been the younger member of the female team she is certainly a force to be reckoned with when she's on the water. She has also been battling an illness through her fishing tournament career but she's overcoming that while succeeding in a tough sport.

"A lot of kids are getting opportunities to go to college as a result of the fishing scholarships and that can mean changing a kid's, even a family's future for generations to come," said Richard Parker.

Parker was the first person to start a high school fishing team in Mississippi back in 2015. Parker also founded the Bass Tactics tournament trail. There are four divisions including the Junior and High School divisions as well as Fishers of Men Legacy, and TBF/MLF Adults tournament series. For more information on fishing the Bass Tactix trail or the related trails contact Parker at 601-307-8492 or online at <http://www.basstacticsmshs.com>. ■

Anna Hokamp and Leslie Redding of D'Iberville High School finished 2021 as the top ranked female team. They are pictured here with Bass Pro Staff Regional Team Member Mike Giles and Richard Parker, founder of the Bass Tactix Fishing organization.



Photo by Mike Giles

Azlynn Shed, a 5th Grade Lamar Elementary student, killed her first turkey while hunting with her grandfather, Randy Smith, in Kemper County.



# TEN-YEAR-OLD KILLS FIRST GOBBLER DURING YOUTH HUNT

**A**zlynn Shed, 10, hunted hard during this past deer season in search of a mounting size buck. She hunted quite a bit with her grandfather Randy Smith, but she never saw one that was big enough for her to mount, or so she thought. As a result, she told her grandfather that she wanted to kill a gobbler this season and set her sights on doing just that. Randy Smith is an avid turkey hunter, and he was game to try, so he set about getting her a shotgun that she could handle that would be adequate for a clean kill.

"I found her a Mossberg 500 .410 shotgun from the Rock House, and we practiced with her shooting a target a few times before we went," Smith said.

Smith, of Collinsville, had family land up in Kemper County so he made plans to take Azlyn hunting the opening week of youth season.

"She actually shot the gun a few times on Friday, so we planned to go Saturday morning," Smith said. "I went to our natural blind and got things ready that night and also put a jake and hen decoy up near the stand. However, when I got up the next morning the wind and cold was so bad, I decided to take her later when it warmed up."

Smith picked up his granddaughter and they went to the woods and got set up in their natural blind.

"When we got there the jake decoy was mashed on the ground and torn up by a gobbler," Smith said. "I called a few times and we settled into our blind and started watching for turkeys."

After watching the field with no action Smith decided to stir the pot some.

"I clucked a few times and two hens and a jake came out and stopped about 80 to 90 yards away," Smith said. "We were sitting side by side and I clucked with my Primos mouth call and purred with a Woodhaven slate call and suddenly a gobbler came charging out towards the Jake."

When he got to the jake and hens, Smith purred and clucked. Again, the gobbler made a beeline to the decoys and started fighting the jake. Things got so intense that Azlyn couldn't get a clear shot at first.

"That gobbler was wearing out that decoy and he finally got clear of it for a minute, and I told Azlyn to shoot," he said.

Boom! The shotgun roared and Azlyn's first gobbler was history! Needless to say the proud grandfather and granddaughter were thrilled that she got her first gobbler, something that is very hard to do.

Azlyn's gobbler was a mature bird with an 8 3/4-inch beard and 1-inch spurs and only took about 20 minutes for the whole hunt. Sometimes it's good to get a quick clean kill, especially when you are 10 years old and hunting with your grandfather.

She is the daughter of Chad and Danielle Shed and granddaughter of Randy and Debbie Smith. ■

**“** We were sitting side by side and I clucked with my Primos mouth call and purred with a Woodhaven slate call and suddenly a gobbler came charging out towards the Jake. **”**

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# HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



**Lane Woods**

Lane Woods, 13, killed this stud on Nov. 14, 2021 while hunting on family land in Yazoo County.



**Eloise Bourgeois**

Eloise Bourgeois harvested her first deer on Jan. 17, 2022 while hunting with her Pop, Ricky Naquin, in Walthall County. The 10-point buck had a 20-inch spread and weighed 175 pounds. Eloise placed a perfect shot on the deer at about 50 yards.



**Jay Huff**

Jay Huff harvested this big buck on Dec. 22, 2021. He was hunting on a green food plot during the beginning of the rut.



**Hadley Hayman**

Hadley Hayman, 9, of Raleigh harvested this Smith County 7-point buck on Dec. 17, 2021 with her rifle chambered in 6.8 Rem SPC. This was her first deer.

## GOT PICS? We want 'em

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

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

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

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# FOUR POUND SLABS!

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PRODUCES GIANT CRAPPIE  
AND RECORD STRINGERS

**M**atthew and Bruce Rogers, of El Dorado Springs, Missouri, battled freezing temperatures, high winds and a field of 170 boats to catch an astonishing 14-fish limit weighing 44.71 pounds — which was 2.71 pounds more than the 2nd place team of Brett and Robert Luther — to get the win in the Crappie Masters Grenada Lake National Qualifier on March 11 and 12.

Anglers took advantage of perfect conditions to start Day One of this two-day tournament and the weights reflected that as records were broken numerous times. The top 11 teams all broke 21 pounds with their seven fish weighed in, with the top five all bringing amazing catches over 22 pounds to the scales.

Additionally, Crappie Masters history was made when Joey Johnson weighed in a 4.03-pound Grenada toad! But the four-pounders didn't stop there as three others came to the scale, ending up with



Matthew, right, and Bruce Rogers with four of the 3-pound plus Grenada crappie that helped them to the Crappie Masters Championship.

Photos courtesy Blake Jackson

the biggest fish ever weighed in, a huge 4.26-pound Grenada monster by Day One leaders, Brett and Robert Luther.

"This tournament didn't just set records but it shattered records," said Weighmaster Brian Sowers. "The top 11 teams had limits averaging over three pounds per fish. And the second place team won \$5,000.00 for their record crappie from Car Zone USA who put up the money for the record fish."

## LAND OF GIANTS

"Grenada Lake showed what fishing her can be like," Sowers said. "They call it the

Land of the Giants and it is definitely the stuff of dreams!"

Matthew and Bruce Rogers started Championship Saturday in third place and were greeted with an unpleasant surprise, two inches of snow and temperatures in the 20s with 20 mph winds.

Although most teams struggled to match the Day One weights, Matthew and Bruce Rogers shocked the crowd with another 22-pound-plus stringer, walking away from the field and collecting the \$10,000 First Place prize along with a \$500 Beatdown Outdoor Products bonus.

The Rogers team was using a 15-foot Jenko Rod with a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce weight and baited with several different lures and minnows.

"We were live scoping and targeting the large crappie," said Matthew Rogers. "We pre-fished the tournament and the fish were in 4 feet of water, but the big ones came in 6 to 8 1/2 feet of water. We were using 14 and 15 foot rods with a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce weight above a purple and blue jig or minnow."

They were fishing a flat in open water, but they found a ditch where the bigger fish were holding just a little deeper. He noticed the fish were moving up the lake, so he adjusted by keeping the bait in front of them at all times and also kept track of water temperature closely.

The Luthers slipped into the runner-up



Brett, left, and Robert Luther with four Grenada slabs, including the 4.26 monster that was the big fish of the event. The Luthers finished in second place.

Joey Johnson with a 4.3-pound Grenada slab. Johnson finished fourth in the tournament.



spot. The wind kept them from effectively fishing the same way as Day One when they set a one-day, seven fish weight of 22.77 pounds.

## \$5,000 FOR ONE BIG FISH

Their second Crappie Masters record earned them the \$5,000 Big Fish award with a 4.26 pound fish of a lifetime! The team also took home \$7,000 for their 2nd-place finish weighing in 42.00 pounds

The big jump of the day came from the eventual third place team of Jeremy Aldridge and John Harrison, who started the Crappie Masters Championship Saturday in 17th place. They were the first team to take their place on the Millennium Marine Hot Seats with a two-day weight of 41.54 pounds. Harrison and Aldridge collected \$5,000 for their effort.

Fourth place honors went to Joey Johnson, who was the first to weigh a 4-pound fish on Friday with a 4.03 pounder, and a two-day total weight of 40.74 pounds, taking home a nice \$3,500 payday.

Rounding out the top five with 40.53 pounds was the team of Hayden and Dan Jeffries, who went into Championship Saturday in 18th place before moving all the way into the top 5 to take home a \$3,000 check.

The event was hosted by the Grenada Tourism Commission and sponsored by Grenada Lake Tackle Company. ■

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FILL YOUR BUCKET LIST AT THE HOME OF THE 3-POUND CRAPPIE. ■ By John N. Felsher

# SPRING SLABBING!

John N. Felsher

# Ask any group of crappie enthusiasts to name just one bucket-list lake where they could possibly catch a monster crappie, most would say,

## “GRENADA LAKE IN THE SPRING.”

“The nickname for Grenada Lake is ‘the home of the 3-pound crappie,’” remarked Jarad Roper, a professional crappie angler with his father, Tommie. “It does produce bigger than average fish every year. Anytime someone drops a bait into Grenada Lake, that person could possibly catch the biggest crappie of a lifetime.”

About three miles northeast of the town of Grenada, the largest lake entirely within Mississippi spreads across 35,000 acres at pool stage. Beginning in August each year, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers begins to draw down the flood-control reservoir. By December, the water level could drop more than 22 feet. The lake begins to refill in mid-January, depending upon the amount of rain at the time. It normally reaches full pool by early May.

“We’ve compiled data from various sources comparing Grenada Lake to other lakes and it was again No. 1 for big crappie in Mississippi in 2021,” reported Keith Meals, a Mississippi

Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks biologist in Oxford. “It produces many 2- to 2.5-pound fish with the biggest crappie in many tournaments often coming in around 3.5 pounds or better. A 3.83-pound crappie was weighed in a tournament in the spring of 2021. In 2020, we saw two fish that were both at 3.87 pounds.”

In some professional crappie tournaments on Grenada Lake, anglers might bring in 30 to 40 3-pounders each day. In one tournament, the winners landed seven fish weighing more than 27 pounds for nearly a 4-pound average.

“In 2021, I caught 18 crappie weighing more than three pounds and put every one of them back after weighing them,” recalled John Harrison with JH Guide Service (662-983-5999, Facebook) in Calhoun City. “The biggest weighed 3.29 pounds. The biggest I’ve ever caught and put on a scale weighed 3.59 pounds. I’ve heard of people catching some 4-pounders.”



Toni Collins, a professional crappie angler from Largo, Fla., shows off a crappie she caught while fishing at Grenada Lake. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Professional crappie angler Jarad Roper holds two crappie he caught while fishing on Grenada Lake.

mpounded on the Yalobusha River, the reservoir dates to 1954. The Skuna River flows into the northern end of the reservoir, creating the second main arm. Some holes in the old river channels drop to more than 30 feet deep at full pool, but much of the lake remains shallow and stumpy. Both arms can produce good fish. Although anglers can catch big crappie all year long at Grenada Lake, the best fishing for giants occurs in the spring when big females swollen with roe move up shallow to spawn in the coves off major creeks.

“Normally our historic peak time to catch big crappie on Grenada Lake is the last week of March,” Meals said. “Of course, that always depends upon temperature, water levels, the moon and other factors. The peak of the crappie spawn on Grenada historically occurs in the first or second week of April. Warming temperatures, rising water levels and a full moon would be ideal for spawning.”

A little larger than the Skuna, the Yalobusha side typically runs a little more stained to muddy. The Skuna side generally holds clearer water. Since the Skuna River runs a little clearer, many anglers fish this arm first during the spawning season. Look for little ditches or creek channels that lead into shallow sunny backwater areas that might warm quicker.

“Water warms up faster on the Skuna arm than it does on the Yalobusha arm,” Harrison said. “Crappie usually start spawning on the Skuna River side about a week to 10 days before they start on the Yalobusha River side. The Skuna has more sand in it so it clears up faster.”

“Once the water temperature starts getting in the high 50s or around 60 to 62 degrees, the males start hitting the banks. We’ll catch males in knee-deep water. I

start fishing the Skuna in early March and fish around to the Yalobusha side.”

Males move shallow first to look for spawning places. Crappie spawn around stumps, standing timber or other cover close to a cleared spot with a sand or gravel bottom. Males don’t make beds like bass or bream. Instead, they collectively clear out a place near cover to wait for the females, which tend to hang in slightly deeper water. Abundant standing timber and stumps dot the lake, providing good spawning cover.

For the past few years, high water levels during the spring flooded the woods surrounding the lake. High water in cover usually produces excellent spawning success, meaning more and bigger fish two or three years down the road. When water inundates the timber, crappie move in to spawn where people couldn’t reach them in boats. Therefore, many anglers wade through the shallows.

“We do a lot of wade fishing around the flooded trees in the spring once the lake fills with water,” Harrison said. “I like to target flooded pines, pin oaks and slick birch trees. I also like cypress trees with muscadine vines hanging on them. Those trees usually hold fish around them. Most of the trees are still green, alive and growing, because the water doesn’t stay high very long, but some of them die.”

To catch fish in shallow flooded timber, use long poles to stra-



Tommie Roper prepares to net a fish caught by his son, Jarad Roper, while fishing on Grenada Lake. The father-and-son professional crappie fishing team frequently fish tournaments together. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** John Harrison with JH Guide Service shows off some crappie he caught on Grenada Lake while wading around flooded timber. During years with high water, fish get in the trees to spawn in the spring.

tegitically place minnows or soft-plastic jigs as close to wood as possible. With a short line attached to a single long pole, quietly approach the trees and jig around the trunks, stumps, cypress knees or flooded bush. Whenever possible, fish completely around every object.

“For wading, I use an 11-foot B’n’M ultralight pole with about 2.5 feet of 10-pound-test Gamma line because those old males are sometimes pretty hard to get out of the cover,” Harrison said. “Those fish won’t be very deep. The surface of the water will be the warmest, so that’s where fish will be. I use a variety of jigs and colors. Most of the time, my go-to bait would be an 1/8-ounce orange and chartreuse jig. It’s a little heavier and I can feel it better. It makes a bit bigger presentation.”

Drop a jig next to a woody object and let it fall naturally. Don’t add much extra movement. If present, a crappie should snatch it quickly as the jig sinks. If it hits bottom and nothing happens, drop it in another spot, perhaps only a few inches away.

“I don’t jig it up and down a lot,” Harrison said. “I just move it in a slow motion around that tree and give it a little twitch occasionally. One time on Sardis Lake, I caught 19 crappie off one cypress tree and never moved.”

Not everyone wants to leave a perfectly good boat to wade in a swamp, or can physically do it. People can still catch big crappie and stay dry. Use the same single-pole technique, but around trees growing in slightly deeper water.

“In the first part of April, I look for the big females in about three to five feet of water,” Harrison said. “When the water is too low to wade fish, we’ll fish the creek edges or troll along the ledge edges. For trolling, I use single ¼-ounce jigs tipped with minnows on 16-foot trolling rods. When fishing deeper water, we also do spider rigging. That’s a good way to catch fish in April.”



Photo courtesy John Harrison

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John N. Felsher is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. He currently co-hosts a weekly outdoors radio show on WNSP 105.5 FM in Mobile, Ala. You can contact him at JohnNFelsher.com.



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**YAMAHA**



An angler shows off a white crappie he caught at Grenada Lake, one of the top trophy crappie lakes in Mississippi.

John N. Felsner

**BY** trolling or spider rigging, anglers can deploy multiple baits to fish different depths simultaneously. They can also experiment with various lure sizes, configurations and colors to pattern fish.

“Around the first of May, most fish will still be in shallow water,” Harrison explained. “On May 3, 2021, I caught a crappie that weighed a little over three pounds in 2.5 feet of water. If it starts getting hot, they’ll move away from the banks and start schooling.

They might be in 16 to 18 feet of water, but suspended seven to eight feet deep. That’s when we troll for them with live minnows. Sometimes, we use jigs.

“People miss out if they don’t fish the summer and fall. We catch a lot of fish from June through November. The fall fishing on Grenada Lake is phenomenal.”

Many people also fish the spillway below the dam. Some people without boats catch big fish there. People could fish the riprap at the spillway or a fishing pier on the south side near where the spillway channel and the old river merge.

“I’ve seen some big fish come out of the spillway, which means they were probably pulled out of the lake,” Meals acknowledged. “Not everybody has a boat, and the spillway is one of the places where bank anglers can catch good fish, but it’s not a place for the mobility challenged.”

Any day of the year and any drop of a bait could produce the crappie of a lifetime on Grenada Lake. Sportsmen from neighboring states and all over the country regularly visit “the home of the 3-pound crappie,” but Mississippi anglers don’t need to travel far to land a bucket-list fish. ■

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This 2-inch, 3/8-ounce lure is offered in numerous colors. It's a must-have for spring bass fishing trips when the topwater bite is just getting cranked up.

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■ By Kinny Haddox

**TEAM STEWART  
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KEYS TO CATCHING  
MONSTER CRAPPIE.**

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# WHEN IT COMES TO CATCHING CRAPPIE,

very few have a better command of the situation than Terry Stewart, an angler with “home” ties to Louisiana and Mississippi and both of the state’s famous big crappie waters.

Stewart, like most people, started out bass fishing and he loved it. But shortly after moving to Clinton, Miss., he found out about the monster crappie in Ross Barnett and other lakes in the region. After catching a bunch and frying them up, he changed teams. And he also loves to fish on Lake D’Arbonne near his former hometown, West Monroe, La.

Stewart has been crappie fishing for about 20 years. He has done it for fun (and supper). He has guided dozens of others on successful trips. And in recent years, he has teamed with rotating family members — wife Tonya, son Cole and daughter Terra — to take home more than his share of professional tournament trophies. In fact, you could say that Team Stewart has command of many events they fish.

That should be no surprise. “Stewart” is an old Scottish surname meaning “guardian” or “warden” and their fishing prowess keeps them locking up livewells full of crappie consistently. They not only catch crappie on a regular basis, but they catch monster slabs others only dream of.

Terry Stewart, left, and daughter Terra caught these slabs on Crappie G jigs.

## TWIN 3.83 SLABS

The best example of that was in a tournament on Lake Grenada where they weighed seven fish totaling 21.17 pounds, including twin 3.83 pound slabs. Yes, two of them.

If catching big crappie is on your bucket list, Terry has some good advice, especially if you are fishing big reservoirs in this region this time of year.

“The main thing about fishing this time of year is don’t get locked in thinking all the crappie are in one depth of water or one type of water,” he said. “D’Arbonne and other lakes in northeast Louisiana are a prime example of that. Fish will be out on the edge of the channel in 20 feet of water. They’ll be on the flats in 10 feet of water. And they’ll be up staging in five or six feet of water or even still in two feet of water around the cypress trees. And here’s the key. Some will be in all those spots on the lake on the same day. They don’t all do the same thing at the same time.”

Stewart is a firm believer that even in the best days of the spawn, fish move in and out from staging areas to the beds. And while some people think the spawn is over by now, he said that isn’t the case.

“Sure, most of the females have probably laid their eggs by now in most of the lakes, but it varies,” he said. “But the males will be up in there guarding the nests until the fingerlings hatch and get out of there. And it happens over a three-month period. After they lay their eggs, females may still hang out near the shallow water nests as well.”

## A UNIQUE LESSON >



**RIGHT:** Most people never catch a 3.83-pound crappie in their lives, but Terry Stewart caught two on the same day at Grenada Lake. **BELOW, RIGHT:** Stewart with the kind of slab crappie that should make anyone pay attention to his advice.



## A UNIQUE LESSON

One of the most unique things Stewart has learned from personal experience and from talking to other experts is the fact that sometimes the males will move in shallow and make the nests. Then they will go out and find the big females and escort them to the nest. That makes sense, he said, because how else would they find it? He said he and others have seen on their sonar units smaller males swimming toward the shallows with large females right behind them.

Learning more about crappie every year helps them stay consistent in their catching. And he suggests the same for others.

“Never think you know everything about it or it will keep you from catching a lot of fish,” Stewart said. “Keep learning. Do what you know how to do best. But also try new things.”

Stewart fishes with all kinds of baits. He used to rely mostly on shiners, but also used a lot of jigs with plastic tails. He still does. But his new favorite has become hair jigs. If he could only take one lure with him, it would be the Crappie G hair jigs made by Greg Davis in Tullos, La. He doesn't have one favorite color, but likes silver or dark gray jigs sometimes and darker jigs with green sometimes. He even has Davis make up some special order jigs from time to time when he thinks a certain color will work.

And Stewart said just like with the “where” in crappie fishing, you shouldn't get locked in on the “how” either.

“Seriously, when the bite is good, a kindergartener can drop a bait down there close to one and catch it,” he said. “But most of the time it isn't that way. There's usually something going on this time of year that can tend to slow the bite up. It can be a lot of rain, wind, a cold front...anything. Lure presentation has as much to do with it as anything else. Sometimes you can ease the jig slowly over a crappie's head and he'll nail it. Sometimes you have to bounce it around a little bit and then other times, you just have to hold it as still as possible while it makes up its mind to bite or not.”

## LISTEN TO THE FISH

More than once, Stewart said he has been schooled by other anglers in the boat because they were doing something different and he was slow to catch on. That also applies to the size of a bait. If you fish a certain lure or technique without a bite for 30 minutes or they are hitting short, switch up. Change colors. Change size. Or change the way you pres-



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

ent it. A good rule of thumb is that when fish are sluggish, go smaller and slower with the lure and presentation.

"It's like any kind of fishing," he said. "You can fish the way you want to and hope to catch some. Or you can present it to the fish the way they want it and catch them. Those who let the fish show them what they want usually are the ones with fish in the livewell."

## CHOOSING A ROD

There are now more crappie rods on the market than ever before in the history of the sport. And Stewart thinks that picking the right one for your fishing is ultra important.

"A lot of people are going to rods with stout backbones where they can just boat flip two pounders in the boat," he said. "That may work, but I've seen a lot of those same people lose fish on the way up because they are pulling them too hard. I love to fish B'n'M poles because they have enough backbone, but they also have good action throughout the rod and you aren't going to pull so hard you lose them. The limber part of the poles allows for a lot of feel. That's huge in crappie fishing."

The Stewarts are sponsored by B'n'M poles, Thump Crappieco, Crappie G jigs, Palmer Custom Baits, Elite Optical, Pro Built and Garmin Fish & Hunt. ■



Crappie G hair jigs like these are Stewart's go-to lure for big crappie this time of the year.

**SOME THINGS CHANGE;  
SOME DON'T >**

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## SOME THINGS CHANGE; SOME THINGS DON'T

Terry Stewart runs the lab for Elite Optical, so vision is part of his everyday life. And so is what he sees in the world of catching crappie: Some things change. Some things don't.

"There's no doubt that the new electronics has changed the crappie fishing game more than anything else," Stewart said. "Live sonar is an absolute necessity to compete in crappie tournaments unless something really odd is going on. I'm not saying you can't catch fish without it, but if you are just keying on seven big fish, it's the only way to go."

The live sonar also lets anglers see what fish are doing even when they won't bite. Another thing that has changed is the new anglers that are crappie fishing and really, the two are tied together.

"We used to consider it an old man's sport, but it is not anymore," he said. "There are a bunch of young guns out there who are so good with the electronics that it's just like they are playing a video game. They don't have the history of fishing like guys like me, but they have the knowledge to catch them with the new technology. And they are hard to beat."

The number of crappie fishermen has changed, too. Stewart said there's no way to even estimate what the percentage of increase is, but it's tremendous. And there are new folks taking up the sport every day.

So what hasn't changed?

"That's an easy one. Mother Nature," he said. "Just about when we think we are in charge, she proves different with all kinds of curve balls. If you just get to fish on the weekends this time of year, it's a matter of whether she's going to let you or not. Wind is the biggest problem along with late cold fronts."

Another thing that hasn't changed is the part that patience plays in catching crappie. Many say it's a lost virtue, but you better find it for crappie fishing.

"I've fished half a day and not caught enough to fry for supper, then found a spot the last hour and caught fish as fast as I could," he said. "The key is to have patience. Even if you are on fish and they won't bite, come back later and give them another try." ■

Terry Stewart, right, and Cole Stewart with a set of slab crappie caught at Louisiana's Lake D'Arbonne.



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## **FRIED FISH CAKES**

USE YOUR FAVORITE FRESH FISH FOR A TWIST ON THIS TRADITIONAL DISH

**T**hese cakes are similar to crab cakes. They make for either an excellent appetizer or even a main course meal. I typically serve these cakes over a bed of lettuce with a side of dipping sauce. Your normal crawfish dipping sauce will work or if you prefer, a remoulade or tartar sauce each work very well. On occasion, I will make sandwiches with these cakes. Just add mayonnaise and lettuce on the bun of your choice to finish it off. Since the fish is already cooked through poaching, you only need to fry to your perfect color. No need to worry about cooking it throughout.





## INGREDIENTS:

- 12 medium fish filets (sac-a-lait, redfish, or speckled trout)
- 3 cups of water
- 1 cap full liquid Zatarains crab boil
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons HuntChef seasoning
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon plain bread crumbs
- 1 cup panko bread crumbs
- 2 cups vegetable oil

## SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

- Cast iron skillet for frying
- Large mixing bowl
- Paper towels

### TIP!

Crab, shrimp, or crawfish can also be substituted for the fish.

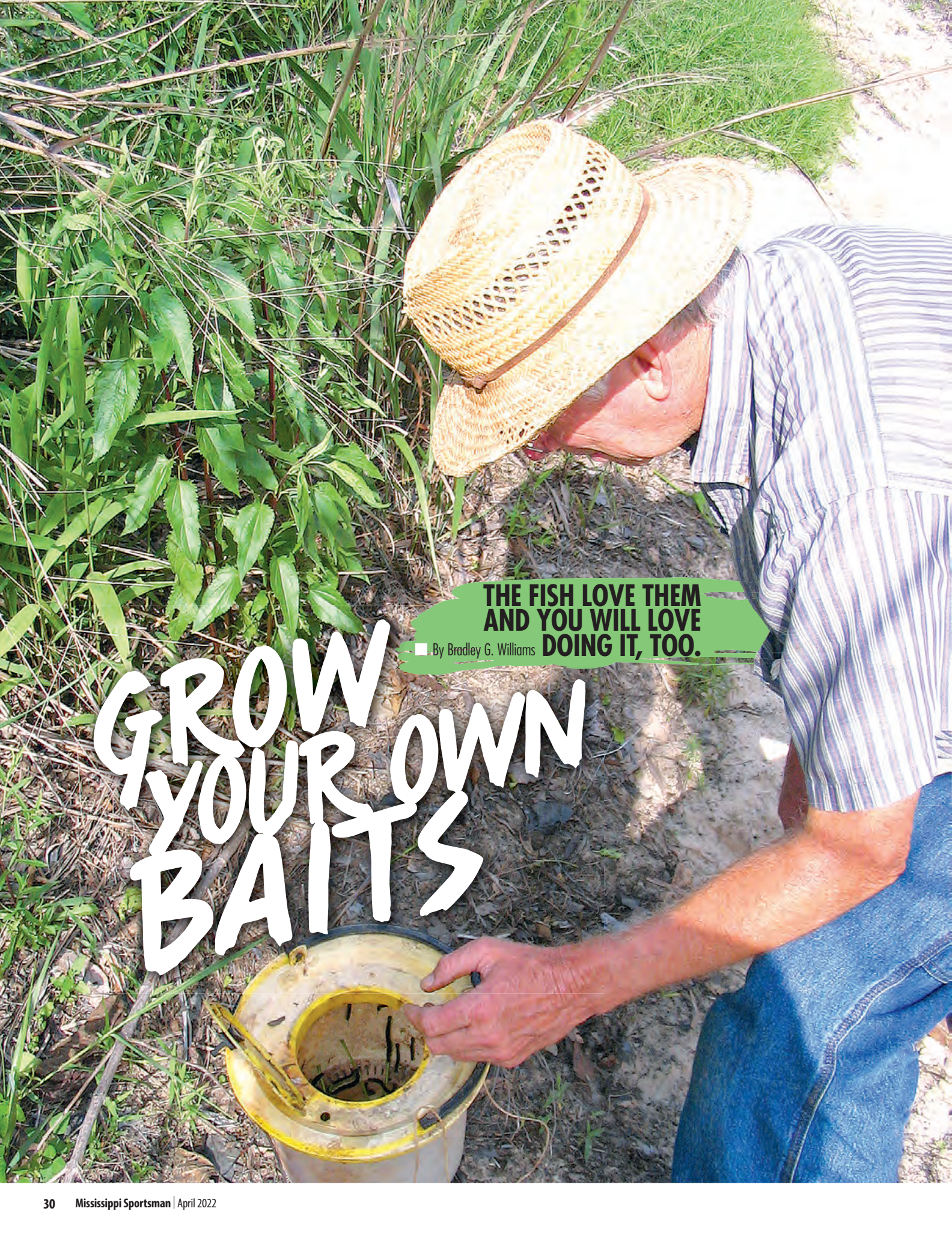
Just looking at these fish cakes cooking in the cast iron skillet is enough to make anybody hungry.

## PREPARATION: Serves 2

1. Poach fish filets in simmering water and crab boil for 4 minutes.
2. Remove the fish from the water, pat dry with paper towels, and allow to cool to room temperature.
3. Using two forks, shred the fish fillets into manageable lumps.
4. Combine fish, mayonnaise, mustard, egg, plain bread crumbs, and seasoning in a large bowl.
5. Form 4 patties using a handful of fish mixture.
6. Layer the panko bread crumbs in a shallow dish.
7. Coat each fish cake by gently patting them into the panko crumbs.
8. Refrigerate the cakes for 20 minutes so that they come together.
9. Heat vegetable oil to 350 degrees in cast iron skillet.
10. Cook each cake until golden brown.
11. Remove and place on paper towels to let drain.



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



**THE FISH LOVE THEM  
AND YOU WILL LOVE  
DOING IT, TOO.**

■ By Bradley G. Williams

# GROW YOUR OWN BAIT

## When it comes to catching fish, nothing works consistently quite as well as

# LIVE BAIT.

This comes as no surprise to most of us. Artificial baits are, in a word, “artificial.” If we know that, sometimes the fish do, too.


Everyone has been on those fishing trips when the fish could be caught on just about any bait thrown in the water. Those are good times. More often than not, however, fish are selective and kind of picky about what they put in their mouths. That brings us back to using live bait.

For those occasions when live bait is the only thing the fish are biting, you have a couple of options. Grab your wallet and

visit the local bait shop or plan ahead and grow your own bait! Growing your own bait is easy and really doesn't require much effort. Save yourself time and money on your next fishing trip.

First and foremost, every angler needs a worm bed. Let's be clear, I'm not suggesting that you build one to help the worms sleep better. This is in reference to a compost pile on the edge of your yard or in a shaded area where the ground stays moist. If done right, native earthworms will naturally take up residence in your compost pile.

**GIVE THEM A GOOD START >**



Catalpa worms are gold for fishing. Little ones are just right, but you just need to pinch off a piece of a big one for bream or crappie.

## GIVE THEM A GOOD START

With that said, you always have the option of giving them a head start by placing some good quality worms in the compost pile so that they will multiply. Either way you will have worms.

So what makes good compost material? Leaves, corn shucks and vegetable scraps from the garden all make excellent compost. Just keep in mind that worms like damp, moist places so locate your worm bed accordingly. Also, your compost material should be placed thick enough so that as the material begins to decompose, it creates a layer adjacent to the natural ground that is cool, moist, and rich in organics. This organic layer next to the natural ground is where you will find most of your worms.

Secondly, every serious angler needs a catalpa tree of his own, or at least one he has access to. The catalpa tree and its resident worms are a wonder of nature as far as I'm concerned.

As participants in an annual ritual, these hungry yellow and black worms emerge from the ground and appear on the tree leaves. These worms gorge themselves until all of the leaves are completely gone, becoming big, fat and juicy in the process. Remember, don't wait too long to collect your bait from the tree. When all the leaves are gone, these weary participants will return underground to begin the cycle again.



A well maintained, moist compost pile will produce lots of worms for your fishing trips. **INSET:** This wiggly nightcrawler is destined to go bream fishing and is one of the best baits you can find.



Bradley Williams checks a streamside catalpa tree to see if the worms are on the leaves yet.

## A PINCH WILL DO

Most knowledgeable bream or white perch (crappie) fisherman can tell you about this kind of bait. If you haven't tried fishing with catalpa worms, you have missed out. Because these worms grow to a fairly large size, all you may need is a pinch off of a worm to catch a fish. Although they are very messy and your hands will be green with the juice they will squirt on you, it will be well worth your while when you are pulling in fish after fish. The best way to obtain a catalpa tree is to find a young catalpa tree in the woods, perhaps on the creek bank, and dig it up. Don't forget to protect the root ball and keep it moist until you can set it out on your property.

Catalpa worms can be used for bream, crappie and catfish. Finally, if you have the time or the inclination, much bait can be found in the wake of a passing lawnmower.

Crickets, grasshoppers, and katydids are all excellent bait for bream, bass, and white perch. All you need to grow these insects is grass. If you live in the country or have a big yard, have someone follow the lawnmower or bush hog with the cricket cage. I normally do not discriminate as to what kind of

bait I collect when following the mower.

Crickets work well for bream. With regard to grasshoppers, be a little more selective. I only keep the tender green ones. Most fish don't care much for a tough brown grasshopper. For big bass, don't pass up the chance to catch a big green katydid. Putting a big green katydid on your hook almost certainly means hauling in another nice sized bass. They just can't stand it! The katydid will flutter its wings and struggle as it sinks below the water. Most bass will not pass this up, so be ready.

So when the fishing gets tough this summer don't forget about the opportunities that you have to collect bait right around your house. Having a variety of live bait at your disposal will certainly help you catch more fish especially when nothing else will work. ■



Bradley Williams is a lifelong Mississippi resident and freelance outdoor writer currently living in Brandon. His passion for the outdoors and his love for hunting and fishing in the Magnolia State began as a child and continues today.

**LUNKER LINES >**

Those old, big, female largemouths can be caught in all three locations at Bay Springs Lake this month.

## APRIL'S BEDDING BASS AT BAY SPRINGS

**T**he prespawn bass at Bay Springs Lake on the Tenn-Tom Waterway will be moving into shallow water to bed now. Throughout April, you can catch smallmouth, largemouth and spotted bass in three lake locations with four different lures: a Mann's Classic spinnerbait, a jerkbait, a bladed jig and a SpringR worm.

### MAIN LAKE POINTS AT THE FIRST OF APRIL

At the beginning of April, the first locations I'll fish are main lake points, since bass will be migrating from deep water to the points before moving shallower.

• **Jerkbait** - I'll start fishing the bank with a jerkbait that dives 6 feet deep and then suspends, generally in a color called Table Rock that features a purple back, bone colored sides and an orange belly.

I like a 6'6" medium action FX custom rod with a 7.3:1 ELS Bruin reel and 8 ½-pound test White Peacock fluorocarbon line. I'll fish 50 yards above a point, all the way around a point and 50 yards below a point.

Some of these points will have grass, stumps and/or gravel on them. On the gravel points, you're more likely to catch smallmouth rather than largemouth or spotted bass. The points with underwater grass that grows up to 3-4 feet from the surface or have stumps on them are where you'll find all three bass species.

When fishing the jerkbait, let the bass tell you what presentation they like best. I'll start off fishing a jerkbait fairly fast, pausing it occasionally. Because we're fishing in April with water not as cold as March's, the bass will be more aggressive.

• **Classic Spinnerbait** - I'll next slowly roll this spinnerbait with a white and chartreuse skirt and one gold and one

silver willowleaf blade on the shaft over the tops of the grass and around the stumps, using the same system I did with the jerkbait. I fish this spinnerbait with an ELS Bruin 6.2:1 reel, a 6'10" heavy action FX custom rod and 14 pound fluorocarbon line. I'll make my second pass with the Classic and then next fish that same point with a bladed jig.

• **Bladed Jig** - I like a ½-ounce green pumpkin colored bladed jig that I'll cast on 19 pound fluorocarbon with the same reel I use with a jerkbait and a 7'6" medium heavy action FX Custom Cranking rod.



**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.



Ike's Mini Flip Jig catches bass in cover and away from cover.



# IKE'S MINI FLIP JIG

Photos courtesy missilebaits.com

CREWS' MISSILE BAIT CAN BLOW INTO A BIG BASS'S COVER QUICKLY

**W**hen well-known pro bass fisherman Mike "Ike" Iaconelli wanted a jig with a smaller profile built for flipping, he got in touch with his good buddy and fellow Bassmaster Elite Series pro John Crews of Salem, Virginia. Crews had started Missile Baits in 2012, two years before Iaconelli, a Bassmaster Classic winner from Pittsgrove, New Jersey, talked with him about building a compact flippin' jig.

Crews obliged and Iaconelli used prototypes of the lure to win a Bassmaster Elite Series tournament on the Delaware River in 2014, speeding up the process of lure development. It took four to five months to design and tweak the lure, but today the Ike's Mini Flip Jig is a favorite among bass fishermen. You can count Iaconelli and Crews, plus many other touring bass pros and regular anglers, among those who have made it a go-to bait.

"I use it a lot. It's one of those baits I've always got tied on. I fish this bait pretty much all year," Crews said. "In your area (Louisiana-Mississippi-Texas) for sure. It's real good around cypress trees because it doesn't get hung up. You can drop it around those roots (cypress knees) because again, it doesn't get hung up."

"From its name, the Mini Flip, is good for flipping in bushes and around docks, but it also excels as a skipping bait. Plus, I'll cast it and fish points, and road beds because it comes across cover. I'll fish it out 15 to 18 feet deep, too. It's a real versatile jig."

## NO BRAID NECESSARY

A notable aspect of the Mini Flip Jig is that it doesn't have to be tied on braided line. Flourocarbon line or monofilament line in the 20-pound range is perfect for getting bass to bite.

"If you call 20-pound test 'light line,'" Crews said. "But a lot of flippers do call 20-pound test light line. I use Sunline Shooter Flourocarbon line, 18 or 20 pound test, most of the time and I have real good success with that."

Since its introduction approximately seven years ago, no changes have been made to the original design of the flippin' jig. It continues to do its job, which is to trigger bass bites.

However, Missile Baits is adding five colors to the original eight colors.

"We've got new skirt colors coming out this year," he said. "It's taking a while to get the skirts in," he said about the new



**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.

colors. “They are brown craw, black neon, Ike’s secret (smoke purple/green pumpkin/black blue), bluegill and larvae craw (red/orange/black). Ike’s secret, it’s a neat color. Bluegill, it definitely looks like a bream.”

## IT’S “FROG HAIR”

The skirts are special, too. The material is a silicon material called “frog hair,” or fine cut, as he described it, that helps the jig breathe a little easier and gives it more of a finesse look, he said.

Ike’s Mini Flips are available in ½, ¾ and 1¼ ounce sizes. Each is armed with a black 4/0 VMC hook.

“What’s unique for the Mini Flip is it has a weight forward design centered around the hook shank. It falls straight and it falls fast. It goes in and out of cover because of that,” Crews said. “The jig design is all about balance. That’s what we like about it, the balance of that jig.”

Crews uses a Missile Baits Baby D-Bomb for a soft plastic trailer on the Ike’s Mini Flip, which features a cone-shaped weedguard. He pinches a third off the 3.65-inch twin tail, ribbed creature bait, which is the baby brother of the Missile Baits D-Bomb.

The Ike’s Mini Flip’s weedguard is designed in such a way it enables it to get in and out of the heaviest cover 99 percent of the time, he said. Crews very rarely trims or otherwise modifies the weedguard. Neither does anybody else he knows that fishes it.



Ike's Mini Flip Jig has become a staple for Missile Baits Co.

“Not usually, because it’s the right weedguard at the right angle and not too thick,” he said. “It’s the perfect size for a good hookset.”

For more information about the Ike’s Mini Flip and other Missile Jigs products, go to [www.missilebaits.com](http://www.missilebaits.com) or call 855.HOOKSET. ■

**GETTIN’ FRESH ➤**

An advertisement for Okuma ITX Spinning Reels. The main image shows a close-up of a black and silver spinning reel with a hand on the handle. The background is a blue sky with a white torn-paper effect at the bottom. The text "ITX SPINNING REELS" is prominently displayed in white. Below the reel, the text "INSPIRED BY VERSATILITY" is written in large, bold letters. At the bottom, there is a paragraph of descriptive text and the Okuma logo with the tagline "INSPIRED FISHING" and the website "www.okumafishingusa.com".

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SPINNING REELS

**INSPIRED BY  
VERSATILITY**

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GETTIN'  
FRESH

Hal Schramm

Forward-looking sonar provide better images of what is under the boat and allows anglers to detect fish in front of the boat.



# JOINING THE FISHING ELECTRONICS CONVERSATION

A FISHERIES BIOLOGIST'S PERSPECTIVE

**F**our decades ago, I used to catch a lot of fish on a little offshore hump in a northern lake. The spot, about 50 feet in diameter, rose to 25 feet from much deeper water. It wasn't on the paper map for the lake. Despite my

efforts to triangulate the location from shore features, I often spent a lot of time searching, eyes glued to my flasher depth finder. When I finally located the hump, I'd toss a fishing marker off one side of it. Now, each morning when I start my



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

boat, three powerful computers (in addition to the one in the outboard motor) spring to life. The unit in the console monitors depth and provides a map showing one-foot depth contours, boat position, and waypoints marking desirable fishing spots. This unit will be used later in the day in side-scan and high-resolution down-scan modes to search for underwater cover and maybe fish. When I drop the trolling motor, one unit on the bow displays a map showing depth contours and objects above the bottom below the trolling motor; the other bow unit displays depth and objects on and above the bottom in a narrow field 80 feet directly in front of the trolling motor. I'm guessing some readers will think, "sounds like my boat." Many anglers insist this is too much, reduces the challenge of catching fish, or is unsportsmanlike. Other anglers tout the benefits of adding more electronics. Diversity is good. Debate is healthy.

## FISHING ELECTRONICS

While Garmin Panoptix LiveScope and other forward-looking, real-time sonars appear to be drawing the fire right now, this and other sonar technologies are only the tip of the iceberg of anglers' use, investment, and — maybe — addiction to a long list of electronic options.

We now take GPS and high-resolution bathymetric lake maps for granted. They certainly help keep me away from shallow-water hazards and identify potential fish-holding structure. When linked to my side-scan and forward-looking sonars, I can mark waypoints on fish or interesting habitat features without passing over them. And a SteadyCast sensor plus my GPS allows me to know the bearing and distance to that waypoint relative to the bow of my boat and make a pinpoint cast.

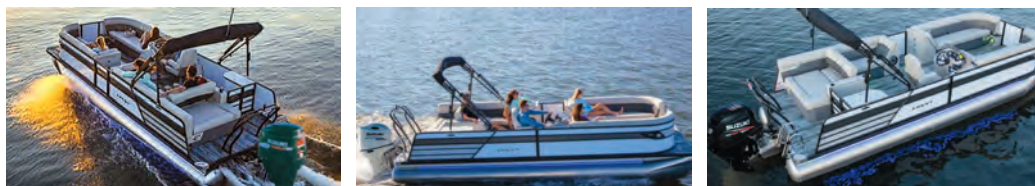
But there is a downside to the GPS and hi-res mapping: anybody that rides by can easily figure out what you are fishing. Even put a waypoint on it. That tiny hump in the northern lake that I often spent so much time locating? It's on the GPS map if you zoom in, and I've marked it with several waypoints. Unfortunately, the spot hasn't

produced fish the last four or five times I fished it. Maybe that's because a lot of anglers also have waypoints on my "secret" hump.

But the electronics revolution is more than LiveScope, sidescan, and GPS. Underwater cameras like AquaVu are hardly new technology; but they still get a lot of use, particularly in clear-water northern fisheries. Wait until they attach them to underwater drones.

Don't overlook the obvious. Computers and smartphones, although now common, can be used in many ways — from weather forecasts to fishing reports to how-to videos — to improve your fishing efficiency and increase your catch.

**BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS >**



## BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Recreational fishing is size selective mortality. In harvest fisheries, like crappies, successful anglers often cull to harvest the greatest weight of legal-length fish. Some bass anglers select lures or fishing locations to increase the size caught. Most bass anglers release most or all of the fish they catch, but a low rate of mortality accompanies catch-and-release fishing whether the fish are released immediately or retained for weigh in in a tournament. Catfish anglers are somewhere between crappie and bass anglers.

Electronic devices can greatly increase the size selectivity. With heavy fishing effort, this size selectivity could reduce the numbers of large fish in a fishery. The extent to which that occurs depends on what the angler does with fish after capture, and that is completely independent of electronic technology.

*Hyperstability* is a fisheries term that refers to a situation of continued high catches due to greater fishing efficiency that masks a decline in fish stocks. This term originated in marine commercial fisheries where the health of a fish stock is often judged by the commercial landings: good catches imply a healthy fishery, declining catches indicate a stock in trouble.

But hyperstability equally applies to recreational fishing. And more specifically, sustaining high catch — whether measured by fish size or fish per hour — by increasing fishing efficiency specifically zooms in on fishing electronics. The potential adverse effects are even greater when the technology increases the catch of larger fish that have a greater spawning potential.

Advanced fishing sonar and other fishing electronics are no more likely to be banned than the use of cell phones. However, avoiding the potential adverse effects of increased catch and size selectivity that can result from these technologies will require greater vigilance by fisheries management agencies to ensure the abundance and favorable size structures of our fisheries remain intact. ■



LiveScope allows anglers to see fish and know where they are in the water column.



# SPOON FED SPOT TAILS

**DON'T OVERLOOK THIS  
SIMPLE TRIED AND TRUE  
LURE FOR BIG REDFISH.**

■ By John N. Felsher

## AS EARLY AS THE LATE 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, Scandinavian fishermen hammered metal kitchen spoons into fishing lures.

In the early 19th century, young J.T. Buel dropped his spoon into the water while eating lunch. As he watched it flutter down, a big fish smacked it. Probably when his mother wasn't looking, the youngster swiped another spoon from the kitchen and fashioned it into a fishing lure.

Buel began making more spoon lures and sold them for years before he obtained a patent on the Buel Spoon in 1852, the first patent awarded for any fishing lure commercially sold in the United States. Spoons remain popular today for both fresh and saltwater fishing because they still work.

"A spoon is a tried-and-true classic that's still hard to beat," proclaimed Sonny Schindler with Shore Thing Fishing Charters (228-342-2206, [www.shorethingcharters.com](http://www.shorethingcharters.com)) in Bay St. Louis, Miss. "It's a very simple bait, so it's hard to improve upon it, but

it works so well. There's a sweet spot when a spoon gets moving just right with that constant vibrating. Even the most unskilled fisherman will know when a redfish grabs a spoon."

### THE SILVER MINNOW

One of the most popular spoons today, the Johnson Silver Minnow dates essentially unchanged to 1920 and remains a legendary redfish temptation. Despite the name, the spoon invented by Louis Johnson comes in varied colors, but for many saltwater anglers, only one color matters for catching bayou copper — gold! A metal arm helps deflect weeds and snags so people can fish it in places with thick grass or over oyster beds and other redfish-holding structures without snagging.

"I personally use nothing but weedless gold spoons," said Mike Frenette, a professional redfish angler and guide with The Redfish Lodge of Louisiana (504-782-0924, [Laredfish.com](http://Laredfish.com)) in Venice. "I've used spoons in many different states and different habitats. Some people swear by black in really clear water. Some people like the silver or chrome."

Anyone, even a child or beginner fisherman, can use a spoon to fish from the surface to the bottom and catch reds. With little effort on the part of the angler, spoons naturally create wobbling action and can work at any depth.



John N. Felsher

Capt. Mike Gallo of Angling Adventures of Louisiana and Kendra Maness show off a redfish she caught while fishing near the north shore of Lake Borgne near the Louisiana-Mississippi line. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Dustin Bounds shows off a redfish he caught on a Bomber Who Dat spoon.



John N. Felsher

Crank the reel faster or hold the rod tip higher to make a spoon run closer to the surface. Or barely turn the reel to slow roll the bait just off the bottom.

“The beauty of a spoon is it’s so easy to work,” said Ryan Lambert with Cajun Fishing Adventures (985-785-9833, www.cajunfishingadventures.com) in Buras. “Anybody can catch redfish with a spoon in so many ways. If I have a novice on board who can’t handle certain baits, I always put a spoon on the line for that person. Just throw it as far as possible and reel it in. I’ve seen people catch more than 100 redfish in a day on a spoon. It’s a great lure for anybody to use.”

Lots of anglers don’t need to jerk the rod or add more dynamic action, but some people pause reeling to let the spoon sink a few feet like a dying baitfish before resuming the retrieve.

People can even vertically jig spoons. Some people even cast tiny spoons with fly tackle. All of these ways catch fish.



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

**IT’S THE WOBBLE** ➤

# NO WHERE TO HIDE

Designed by Aaron Martens, Gamakatsu has developed the G-Power Flip and Punch Hook. A step up from the G-Finesse Heavy Cover Hook, for serious flipping and punching with heavy fluorocarbon and braid. The Tournament Grade Wire hook, paired with its welded eye, make this one of the strongest hooks in Gamakatsu’s G-Series lineup. Ideal for larger baits and weights, punching through grass mats and flipping into heavy timber. G-Power Flip and Punch ideally matches to all types of cover and able to withstand extreme conditions.



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**AARON MARTENS**

**Gamakatsu**

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## IT'S THE WOBBLE

The wobbling gives off considerable flash and vibrations that fish can see and feel, even while fluttering to the bottom. Many people think the wobbling reminds redfish of a crab swimming through the water with its rounded rear swimmer fins flashing back and forth. A redfish likes nothing better than to crunch a crab.

"I use spoons mainly when the grass is up and the crabs are out," Lambert said. "It's best from May through October when there's a lot of aquatic vegetation in the water and reds are feeding on crabs. When redfish hit a crab, they try to get it in the back of its mouth by their crushers. Look at a crab in a redfish's belly. It's crushed. When reds hit a spoon, they are rocking it!"

When a big redfish grabs a wobbling spoon, it almost hooks itself, especially if it struck a moving bait. For good measure, make a good hook set or two on that rugged fish. Anglers can accentuate the lure's wobbling action by adding a split ring and a swivel to the nose.

"If the bait doesn't already come with one, I recommend anglers put a small split ring on the eye and add a swivel," Frenette said. "That'll keep the line from twisting. If the line starts to twist, people won't be able to cast as far. The great thing about a spoon is it can cast like the dickens. A person can sling them out there and cover a lot of water wobbling the whole

time. If I'm coming up on a point or I know that there are oysters between the point and my boat, I don't want to get in there and disturb the fish so I'll throw a spoon through that area."

Since the heavy, compact baits can sail long distances, they make superb search baits. Generally, the farther from the boat one can cast, the more fish that person will catch. Even if the fish doesn't strike the spoon, it might cause it to move and give away its location. Sometimes, one red might even try to take a bait out of a hooked spot-tailed cousin's mouth.

"My favorite time to throw a spoon is when I'm scouting for fish," Schindler said. "If I'm in an area that I think has redfish, I'll throw a spoon to cover as much water as I can faster than most other baits."

## LET IT SINK

Frequently, big redfish follow baits for long distances before finally smashing them right at the boat. If a redfish follows, but doesn't strike, pause the retrieve to make the bait sink a few feet to imitate a wounded baitfish.

"When redfish just slap at a spoon, slow that retrieve down or stop it for a couple seconds," Frenette said. "Then start slowly retrieving it again because they're looking at it. I've had redfish slap at a spoon two or three times before grabbing it. I had times when I stopped the retrieve to let the spoon fall to the

John N. Felsher



A gold spoon makes an excellent search bait. Sonny Schindler likes to throw one when he's scouting for fish to cover water faster than other baits.



John N. Felsner

Gary Krause shows off a redfish he caught on a Bomber Who Dat Rattling Spinning Spoon. It combines the attributes of a spoon and a spinnerbait.

bottom. Fish pick it up right off the bottom. When they do grab a spoon, reds just about jerk the rod out of someone's hands."

For added enticement and color, sweeten a spoon with a soft-plastic trailer. A split trailer or one with claws mimics a crab works well. Fish a spoon with a trailer over the grass tops like a buzzbait for explosive topwater strikes or reel it steadily just off the bottom. Hopping one off the bottom could imitate a crab.

"I sometimes tip spoons with a chartreuse curly tail to make it vibrate more and cause more of a disturbance in the water," Schindler said. "Usually, I make a slow retrieve to keep it just off the bottom. Most of the stuff we fish has shells or grass on the bottom."

Many anglers work gold spoons through weedy areas like in the Mississippi River Delta. Like the original Johnson Silver Minnow, many spoons come equipped with weed guards so they can easily slip through thick vegetation or over oyster beds. Around oysters and other hard cover, slow roll spoons off the bottom so the metal lure clanks against the objects.

"My favorite way to fish is in the shallow marsh ponds looking for reds," Schindler said. "Most spoons have weedless features. If I'm in a new pond and don't know what's in it, there might be shells, grass or something else in it that can hang up other lures. With a spoon, I can get in and out of it without wasting time and losing tackle."

**FISH THE SHORELINES** ➤

# BOATING SPECIALS!









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## FISH THE SHORELINES

When fishing marshy shorelines, throw spoons into any pockets or irregularities in the grass and work them out toward the boat. Also run spoons parallel to marshy shorelines, jetties, reef edges or next to bridge or dock pilings and across points. Some spoons come with little plastic covers slipped over the swivel or eye to make them even more weedless and snagless.

If a spoon doesn't already come with a metal weed guard, place a length of monofilament line from the eye to the hook barb. Another way, loop a rubber band through the eye and stretch it back to the hook barb to make a spoon weedless.

Because anglers typically fish spoons around thick weeds or rough objects, throw it on tough 30-pound-test braided line. Tie on about four feet of a 20-pound-test monofilament or fluorocarbon leader to the braid. In murky water, use shorter leaders. For exceptionally clear water, use longer leader. To make the longest casts, throw spoons on a 7 to 7.5 foot medium action rod.

Anglers can catch redfish with spoons anywhere they can find the spot-tailed marauders. Almost overlooked among the plethora of colorful plastics and other baits, spoons look so simple, but they still catch fish and have been for centuries. ■

## MISSISSIPPI HAS PLENTY OF COASTAL SPOON SPOTS

Anglers can catch redfish throughout coastal Mississippi, but two areas really stand out — the Pascagoula River Delta and the marshes between Bayou Caddy near Waveland and East Pearl River. Some marshes and bayous feed into the Back Bay of Biloxi. The Tchoutacabouffa and Biloxi rivers plus other streams flow into the Back Bay.

Old Fort Bayou and its tributaries flow into the eastern side, creating a good place to look for redfish. Other marshes surround Bay St. Louis. People can also fish the barrier islands just offshore.

"The marshes around Back Bay and Bay St. Louis are good places to throw spoons," said Sonny Schindler. "The Bayou Caddy area by Lakeshore has some good places to throw

**SPOON FED SPOT TAILS**

**2022 MISSISSIPPI FISHING REGULATIONS**

Not an official document. Refer to MDWFP's official regs guide, [www.dmr.ms.gov](http://www.dmr.ms.gov), or [www.mdwfp.com](http://www.mdwfp.com).

**SALTWATER**

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

<b>FISH SPECIES</b>	<b>Minimum Lengths</b>	<b>Creel Limit (per person)</b>
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](http://gulfcouncil.org).

~ Check Aggregate Total Bag/Possession Limit

**FRESHWATER**

<b>FISH Species (Inland waters)</b>	<b>Minimum Size Limit</b>	<b>Creel Limit (per day)</b>
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/](http://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/](http://www.mdwfp.com/)



John N. Felsher

A redfish comes to the boat after hitting a gold spoon.

spoons. The Heron Bay and Ansley areas are also good. Cat Island has marshy bayous in it. We also use spoons a lot around Cat Island."

In southeastern Mississippi, the Pascagoula River creates one of the richest estuaries on the Gulf Coast. Numerous channels flow through a marsh dotted by small lakes.

Anglers can also fish similar marshes and islands near the Alabama line.

Many people also fish Graveline Bayou area southwest of Gautier. ■

**SAILFISH SPOTLIGHT >**

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: SAILFISH

**S**ailfish are members of the billfish family and are related to marlins and swordfish. Along with white marlin, sailfish are among the smallest members of the billfish family. But they are the most easily-recognized thanks to their dorsal fins.

While marlins and swordfish have relatively small and rigid dorsal fins that look very much alike, sailfish have much bigger and flexible dorsal fins, extending almost the entire length of their backs. These “sail” type dorsals give the fish its name.

Fisheries biologists believe sailfish are the fastest swimming fish in the world. They have been clocked at 68+ mph. Their large dorsal fins usually lay folded down limp to one side of their body. But they stand straight up and go rigid when the fish is excited, chasing prey or fleeing from predators.

These fish are long with blue backs and fins, silvery to white bellies, and long bills that are more streamlined than those of marlins and swordfish. They feed primarily in the middle of the water column, but often take prey at or near the surface as well.

Researchers have identified two subspecies of sailfish, Atlantic sailfish and Indo-Pacific sailfish. However, they have found no scientific differences between these two. Their DNA and all other means of identification are identical. Still, fisheries biologists recognize them depending on which ocean they inhabit.

### “LEFT-HANDED” BEHAVIOR

Sailfish grow quickly, reaching four to five feet in length in their first year. Their maximum size, however, is very small compared to blue marlin or swordfish. Very few sailfish have been known to reach 200 pounds or 10 feet in length.

Throughout their lives, sailfish are preyed upon by a variety of larger fish like dolphinfish, wahoo, king mackerel, orcas and sharks. Their primary source of food is squid, jellyfish and smaller fish, which they attack from behind, slashing at them with their bills to injure them. Studies have shown that a percentage of sailfish are “left-handed,” preferring to slash their bills to the left when chasing prey.

Sometimes when hunting, commu-

nicating with other fish or otherwise excited, sailfish change colors. They are dependent on coral reefs and often disappear from areas where reefs have suffered extensive damage.

Nicknames for sailfish include spindle-beak and bayonetfish. They are sometimes misidentified as swordfish, blue marlin or white marlin.

Louisiana’s state record sailfish weighed 96 pounds and was caught by John Lauricella in October 1953. Sailfish are mostly seen in cool weather months off the Louisiana coast. Mississippi’s state record tipped the scales at 62 pounds. Eddie Jones caught that fish in 1963. The world record stands at 142 pounds and was caught out of Lobito, Angola on March 12, 2014 by Marco Couto. ■



**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.

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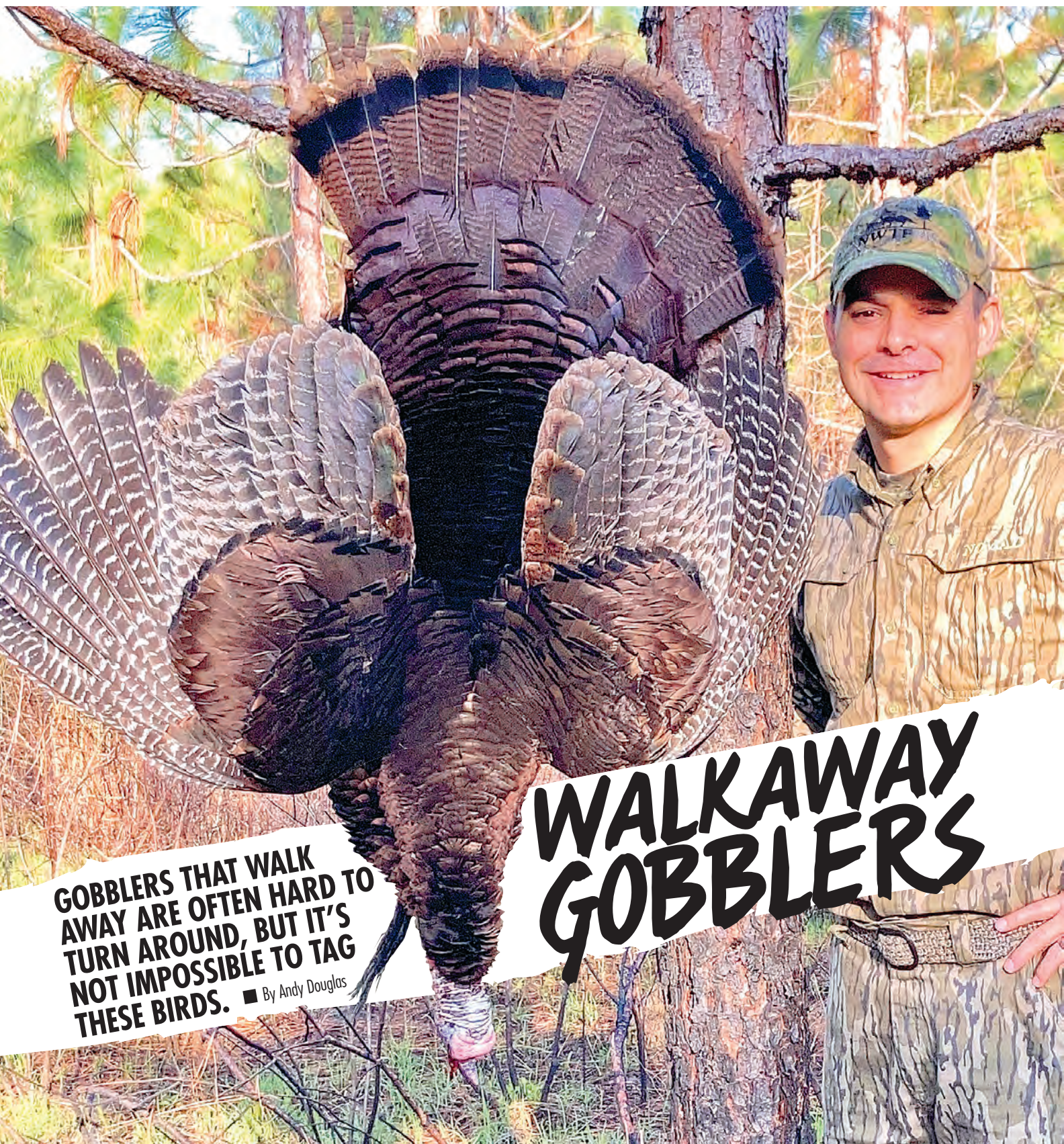
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**GOBBLERS THAT WALK AWAY ARE OFTEN HARD TO TURN AROUND, BUT IT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO TAG THESE BIRDS. ■ By Andy Douglas**

# WALKAWAY GOBBLERS

Photo courtesy Adam Butler

# YOU'VE PROBABLY BEEN HERE BEFORE.

## MOST LIKELY

a gobbler is blowing it out and you head his way; you make a few calls, and he goes silent — or he heads the opposite direction gobbling at your every call. You immediately question your calling abilities. You may wonder if he heard or saw you slipping in. What's going on?

One of the leading turkey authorities in the state is Adam Butler, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) Wild Turkey Program Coordinator. Butler, also a die-hard turkey hunter, offers insight on this spring woods scenario based on knowledge as a biologist combined with the skills of a veteran turkey hunter.

"These are really good questions! I'll be honest, I'm going to give you some answers — they will be a mix of thoughts as a biologist and hunter. Some of it will be based on fairly known things, but a lot just based on my opinion," said Butler establishing this point upfront.

It takes a lot of patience, persistence and understanding of what's happening to lure a walkaway gobbler into shotgun range. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Adam Butler, MDWFP Wild Turkey Program Coordinator, harvested this nice tom during the 2021 Spring season.

It's usually hens. Most of the time the tom has got with a hen or hens, and those hens are now leading the gobbler away. The gobbler may still be interested in the hunter's calls, but the hens in the tom's presence are actively trying to avoid the other unknown hen.

"Hunters often think about the dominance hierarchy amongst gobblers, but hens also have a similar hierarchy," Butler said. "A component hunters often don't appreciate is that the hierarchy doesn't just exist for turkeys within flocks, but also between flocks. Some flocks dominate other flocks. Therefore, if the gobbler has gotten with a hen who isn't dominant within her flock, or with a group of hens who may not be the dominant crew in their area, those females are probably going to want to avoid confrontation."

The gobbler in question is indiscriminating and will stick with the hens in hand, resulting in a walkaway gobbler. He will follow the hens and may be silent at times or answer every call a hunter throws his way.

## SECOND POSSIBLE SITUATION ➤





## SECOND POSSIBLE SITUATION

It may be a jake. You might encounter a gobbler who gobbles good, maybe comes a little way, and then ultimately moves off. “Everyone knows that some jakes are identifiable because their gobble sounds more like a goofy barnyard turkey,” Butler said. “That’s true for some, but not all. Some jakes do have full, roll gobbles, and they can be especially misleading if you have several jakes in a group gobbling at once. It’s not uncommon to strike a gobbler later in the morning that is fairly responsive but seems hesitant to commit, usually staying just outside your visual bubble. It can be a letdown to spend a couple of hours fooling with that turkey and then he shows up and it’s jake.”

## ANOTHER LIKELY SITUATION

Hunters may stumble upon a more dominant bird that has established a ‘lek’. Many turkeys’ taxonomic relatives have breeding strategies where males congregate in specific spots every morning to attract hens.

“Those specific spots are known as leks,” Butler said. “If you’re not familiar with this biological phenomenon, I’d suggest Googling ‘Sage Grouse lek’ or ‘Sharp-tailed grouse lek’ and

watching some of the videos.

“Turkeys are not generally regarded as a true lekking species, in which all the males in an area congregate at the same spot — but maybe more associated with a phenomenon called ‘exploded lekking’ which is sort of the same idea, but the males will not be able to visually see one another but can still hear each other. My opinion, which is not necessarily based on definitive science but rather my general observations of turkeys over the years, is that some males do establish a point-in-space that they utilize like a lek.”

In hunter terminology, this is a ‘strut zone.’

“It is their spot from which they intend to advertise, and they are likely to return to that spot every morning quickly off the roost,” Butler said. “Usually, this pattern of behavior begins to be noticeable later into Mississippi’s season. I very rarely see gobblers exhibiting this committed point-in-space routine in March, it usually becomes more evident in April after the hen flocks have broken up and a portion of them have begun nesting.”

These mature toms will post up and wait for hens to come to them instead of vice versa. When strutting back and forth, it will sound as if the tom is walking away.

## LEAST LIKELY BUT POSSIBLE

Hunters may encounter a call shy gobbler. He has been extremely pressured and is wary of anything sounding like a hen and will head the other way when hearing hen calling.

"My personal opinion is that this is probably not as common as we like to think, but it could happen," Butler said. "The reason I think that all the above are more likely explanations is that if it's springtime, especially if it's on over into April, it is hard for them to ignore their sex drive. They may be suspicious of calling, especially if it's too loud, but the urge to breed overpowers all."

## WRAPPING IT UP

Consider all the above as possible situations when you encounter a walkaway gobbler. Decipher the current situation and establish your strategy accordingly. These toms can be difficult to bag but not impossible. Persistence, patience, and understanding lead to a tagged tom. ■

## WALKAWAY GOBBLERS STRATEGIES ➤



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.

Hunters should break out their best calls when trying to turn a walkaway gobbler around to bring them into their sights. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Tough-to-kill toms are usually and most often in the company of hens.



### HUNTING SEASONS

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

### WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 11-26	6
	Nov. 26-28, Dec. 3-5	6
	Dec. 9-Jan. 31	
Geese (Canada, blue, Ross, white-fronted, brant)	Sept. 1-30	5
	Nov. 12-28, Dec. 3-5, Dec. 9-Jan. 31	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

### DEER SEASON

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

# STRATEGIES FOR WALKAWAY GOBBLERS

You've probably encountered every situation imaginable with gobblers. Whether it's a gobbler with hens, jakes, a stubborn gobbler posted up in a strut zone, or the call-shy gobbler — they can be had. Here are some strategies derived from conversations with MDWFP Turkey Program Coordinator Adam Butler that may help you develop your strategy when encountering walkaway gobblers.

## GOBBLERS WITH HENS

Make a move on the bird if terrain and foliage allow. Try to get around him and never approach him directly. Always swing wide and come in at an angle offset from his last known location. This is risky, so move slowly and make sure you go undetected.

Another option is to try and talk to the hens. You can't be too aggressive in calling, but you will have to 'read the hen' and mimic what you hear. If you encounter the boss hen, then turn up the aggressive calling to equal her calling. You may entice the subordinate hen out of curiosity or the boss hen out of anger to come in and the big tom is sure to follow.

Lastly on gobblers with hens, you may want to go find another gobbler. The reality is if the gobbler moved and you suspect it's because he is being pulled away by hens, your odds of killing him at that particular time are pretty slim. If you've got other options, go try those. You can always come back to the first gobbler later.

## JAKES

When the gobbler comes in you've been calling turns out to be a jake or a group of jakes, it can be disappointing as we said, but your hunt's not over. Don't get too discouraged and get up spooking the birds at hand. Quite often a group of jakes hammering the woods will call in a more mature tom and sometimes the dominant bird in the territory. Use the jakes to your advantage and stoke them up if you're able.

## STRUT ZONE GOBBLERS

What can a hunter do in this situation? To be successful you must figure out the gobbler's 'spot' and get there before he does. He will be going there very intently first thing in the morning, and it gets tough to make him veer off his course. Once he gets to his chosen spot he will stand there and gobble his brains out until hens come to him. He won't be leaving to come to your calling, his heels are dug in and his pride won't let him leave. It can be frustrating as a hunter, but often these birds will have the



The most common situation a hunter stumbles upon when encountering a stubborn tom that walks away or goes silent is the fact that he is with a group of hens.

same routine daily — if you are not successful on a particular day, come back the next day and beat him to his strut zone.

## CALL SHY GOBBLERS

What can hunters do with these birds? Avoid any kind of aggressive calling. Scratch in the leaves, flap a wing, stick with the subtle stuff. Truly call shy birds are the most frustrating turkeys of all to deal with because they do not want to commit. As soon as you put the least little pressure on them, they are going to shut down or leave. You must have extreme patience.

Crow, piliated woodpecker, or owl calls work well to locate these types of gobblers. If you get a locate on him, you may want to consider still hunting him and sitting within shotgun range of possible travel routes such as trails or ridge tops.

## FINAL WORD

Butler said, "Let me clarify that there are many hunters out there who are better than me at reducing gobblers to possession. These types of strategies are just my opinion as a hunter and biologist. At the end of the day, who knows why turkeys do what they do."

The unpredictability and chess-type situations are ultimately what keep hunters coming back each new day in pursuit of the monarch of the spring woods. ■

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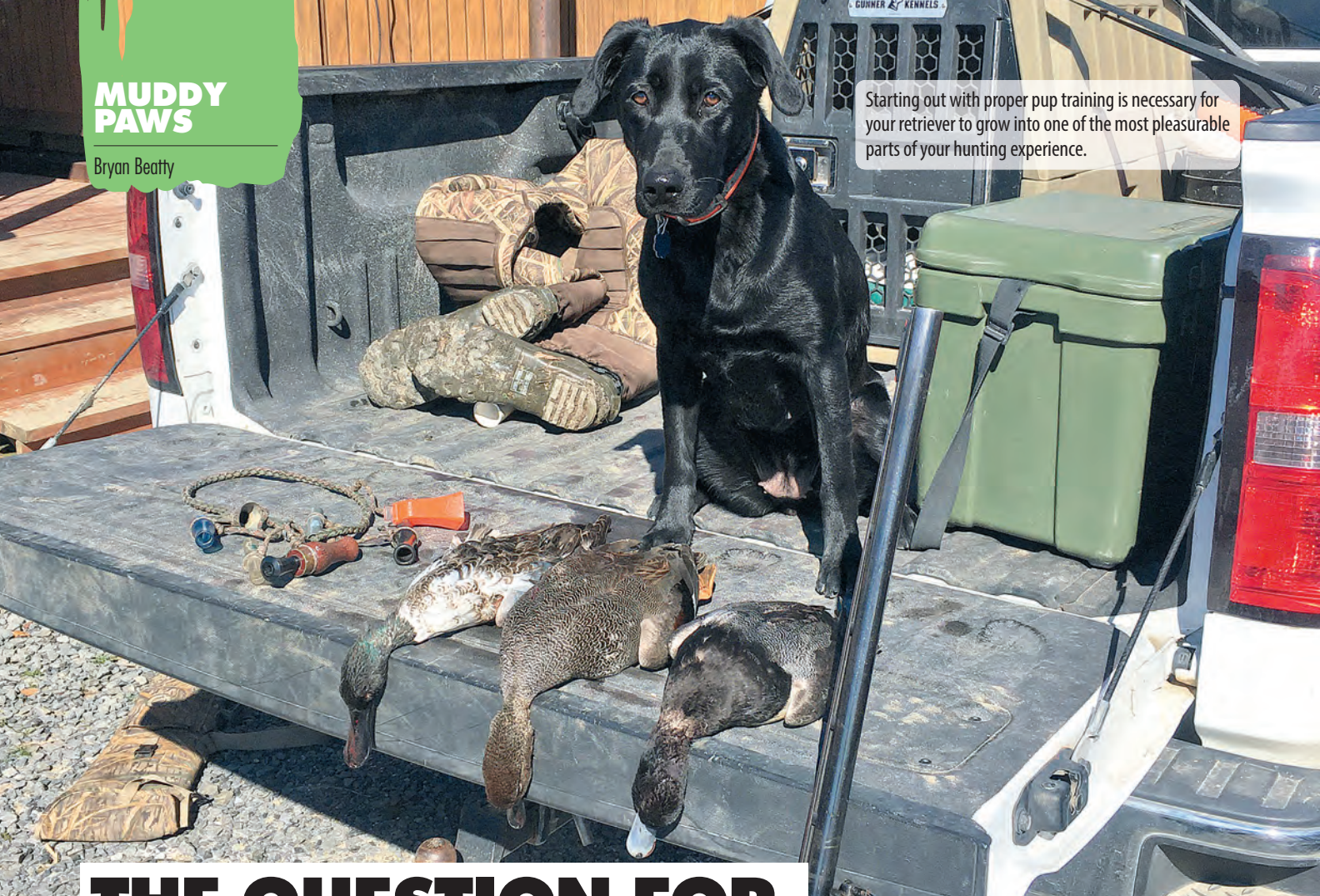
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# THE QUESTION FOR NEW PUP OWNERS:

SHOULD YOU TRAIN YOUR OWN DOG OR USE A PROFESSIONAL TRAINER?

**Y**ou did your homework and found the perfect pup. Now what? That's a really big "what" and I'll admit it can be a little overwhelming. You and your dog have a long journey ahead, from the little fur ball you have now to the experienced and capable dog you want as the end result. Now the work begins!

In terms of training your pup to reach that level, you really only have a couple of options: training the dog yourself or sending the dog to a professional trainer. We'll take a look at both. No matter which way you go, expect these results with your dog at a minimum:

- Steadiness, meaning it won't break at gunfire (it only goes when told).
- Marking multiple downed birds and remembering their locations to pick them up.
- Handling via voice, whistle and hand signals to a bird that the dog did not see fall (a "blind retrieve" where all that

training pays off).

- Honoring another dog who may be hunting with yours.
- Good temperament and disposition around other hunters and dogs; generally, a pleasure to hunt with.

If you're considering training your dog yourself, let me share a little of my experience. My first one was with a book, "Water Dog" by Richard Wolters 25 years ago. I go back to it today. It worked for me. That book is 60+ years old and technology has changed the landscape, but the basics are still the same. In today's digital age, there is a wealth of info such as videos, subscriptions and such online. Soak up all you can and if you pick a subscription, for example, stick with that one as methods may differ between the trainers publishing them.

Luckily, there are retriever clubs across the state that can be found on the American Kennel Club (AKC) and United Kennel Club (UKC) websites. Check into

them and trust me on this, you'll meet lots of great folks with tons of experience eager to help. I'm a member of the Amite River Hunting Retriever Club near Baton Rouge, La. I've gotten to know some incredible pro and amateur trainers who've helped me immensely. The clubs hold seminars and training days outside of duck season geared to all experience levels of dogs and handlers alike. You'll learn more than you imagined from some great people and have lots of fun. These clubs also train for, and hold tests.

If training your dog yourself sounds like a little too much, and believe me, I get it, the other option is to send your pup to a professional. There are many great



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.

trainers, so finding one will be easy. Start with your hunting circles and social media. From there, reach out to the trainers mentioned. Ask for references and ask questions such as how long they've been in business, how many dogs they are training at a time, who will be training your dog (assistants) and costs. Once you've narrowed down your choices, meet them at their facilities and have them work dogs currently in training.

Pay attention to the kennels and grounds. They should be clean, safe and in good condition. All dogs should be healthy and in good shape. Once satisfied, discuss what you want out of your dog, agree on price, duration of training as well as anything not covered, like vet bills and medications. If all goes to plan, you should have a good feeling about the trainer you choose. It's a serious decision with long lasting implications, so leave no doubt.

So what should a trainer expect from you? Steve Riggins is owner of Bear Creek On The Bayou Retrievers in Slaughter, La. He was kind enough to share his insights.

"Formal training starts at five to six months of age when the adult teeth are set," he said. "If the trainer offers a puppy program, seriously consider it. Puppies start it at 14-16 weeks and will be introduced to bumpers, live birds, gunfire, shallow water, socialization. It builds trust with the trainer and sets a solid foundation for starting formal training."

He also offered a few tips you and your pup can start on from 7-14 weeks before going to a trainer, or if you choose the DIY route:

- Acclimate the pup to its new home: housebreaking, kenneling, boundaries and learning that you're the boss.

- Teach basic obedience such as sit, here and holding eye contact.

- Introduce the pup to wings/feathers, and if you can find some, live clipped pigeons. This builds prey drive.

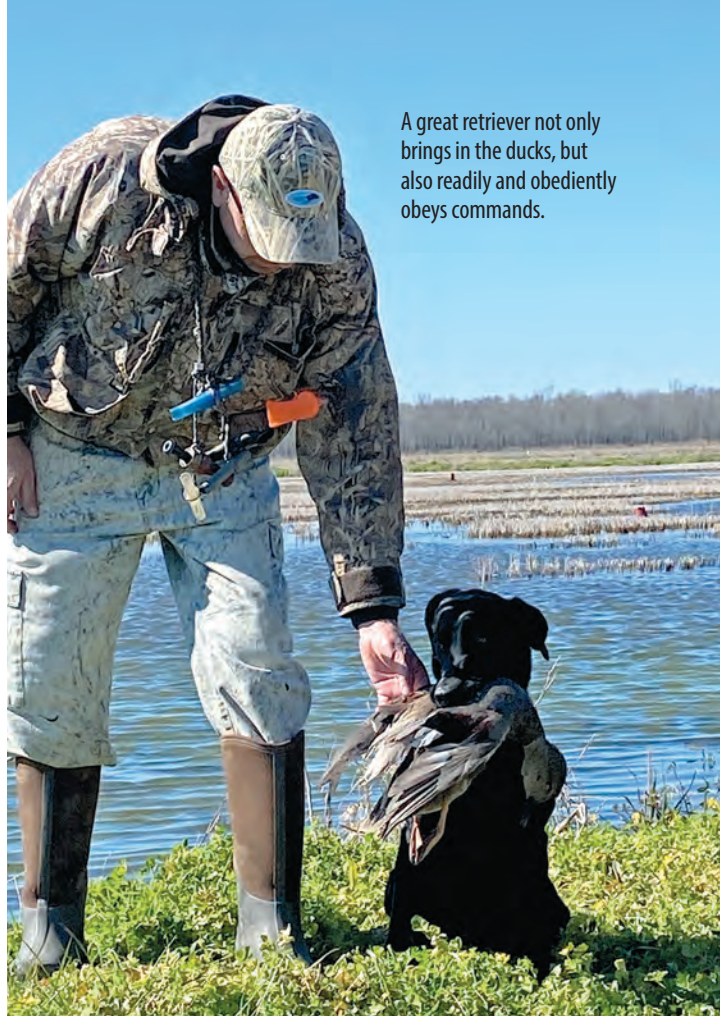
- Practice short, easy retrieves with a small bumper. Make it fun. Worry about "stay" later. Quit while the pup is still excited. They wear out quickly, so too much turns into work.

- Take the pup anywhere you can. It builds confidence and trust and gets them used to traveling and being in different environments.

This is a marathon, not a sprint, so at first, let the pup settle in and bond with you. Keep it fun in this early stage, and then they'll be ready to "go to work!" ■

*Steve Riggins can be reached at 225-324-6948 and on Facebook.*

A great retriever not only brings in the ducks, but also readily and obediently obeys commands.



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BEST DAYS				
2022	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	VALUE
APR				
Fri 1	██	██	██	73
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LUNAR PERIODS				
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
7:25 am	12:28 pm - 2:58 pm ☀	8:11 pm	12:21 am - 2:27 am	● New
7:51 am	1:04 pm - 3:50 pm ☀	9:12 pm	12:53 am - 3:23 am	●

Sun 3	██	██	██	57
Mon 4	██	██	██	48
Tue 5	██	██	██	44
Wed 6	██	██	██	45
Thu 7	██	██	██	47
Fri 8	██	██	██	53
Sat 9	██	██	██	64

8:20 am	1:39 pm - 4:45 pm	10:13 pm	1:29 am - 4:15 am	●
8:50 am	2:18 pm - 5:38 pm	11:13 pm	2:04 am - 5:10 am	●
9:24 am	2:59 pm - 6:31 pm		2:43 am - 6:03 am	●
10:03 am	3:44 pm - 7:24 pm	12:12 am	3:24 am - 6:56 am	●
10:48 am	4:34 pm - 8:16 pm	1:09 am	4:09 am - 7:49 am	○ Apogee
11:37 am	5:24 pm - 9:06 pm ☀	2:03 am	4:59 am - 8:41 am ☀	● High
12:32 pm	6:16 pm - 9:56 pm	2:51 am	5:49 am - 9:31 am ☀	● Half

Sun 10	██	██	██	53
Mon 11	██	██	██	47
Tue 12	██	██	██	45
Wed 13	██	██	██	53
Thu 14	██	██	██	63
Fri 15	██	██	██	73
Sat 16	██	██	██	76

1:31 pm	7:10 pm - 10:40 pm	3:34 am	6:41 am - 10:21 am	●
2:32 pm	8:05 pm - 11:21 pm	4:12 am	7:35 am - 11:05 am	●
3:34 pm	9:00 pm - 12:01 am	4:46 am	8:30 am - 11:46 am	●
4:37 pm	9:56 pm - 12:36 am	5:16 am	9:25 am - 12:25 pm	●
5:42 pm	10:53 pm - 1:11 am	5:45 am	10:21 am - 1:01 pm	●
6:47 pm	11:51 pm - Midnight	6:13 am	11:18 am - 1:36 pm ☀	●
7:55 pm	Midnight - 1:47 am	6:42 am	12:16 pm - 2:12 pm ☀	○ Full

Sun 17	██	██	██	64
Mon 18	██	██	██	52
Tue 19	██	██	██	40
Wed 20	██	██	██	33
Thu 21	██	██	██	31
Fri 22	██	██	██	35
Sat 23	██	██	██	46

9:06 pm	12:51 am - 2:27 am	7:14 am	1:16 pm - 2:52 pm ☀	●
10:20 pm	1:54 am - 3:10 am	7:49 am	2:19 pm - 3:35 pm	●
11:33 pm	2:59 am - 3:57 am	8:31 am	3:24 pm - 4:22 pm	○ Perigee
no period	4:05 am - 4:53 am	9:21 am	4:30 pm - 5:18 pm	●
12:43 am	5:11 am - 5:53 am	10:20 am	5:36 pm - 6:18 pm	● Low
1:46 am	6:14 am - 6:56 am ☀	11:25 am	6:39 pm - 7:21 pm	●
2:40 am	7:09 am - 8:01 am ☀	12:35 pm	7:34 pm - 8:26 pm ☀	● Half

Sun 24	██	██	██	37
Mon 25	██	██	██	33
Tue 26	██	██	██	35
Wed 27	██	██	██	47
Thu 28	██	██	██	59
Fri 29	██	██	██	71
Sat 30	██	██	██	78

3:24 am	7:58 am - 9:04 am	1:44 pm	8:23 pm - 9:29 pm	●
4:01 am	8:44 am - 10:02 am	2:52 pm	9:09 pm - 10:27 pm	●
4:32 am	9:22 am - 11:00 am	3:57 pm	9:47 pm - 11:25 pm	●
5:01 am	9:57 am - 11:55 am	4:59 pm	10:22 pm - 12:20 am	●
5:27 am	10:30 am - 12:48 pm	6:00 pm	10:55 pm - 1:13 am	●
5:54 am	11:03 am - 1:43 pm ☀	7:01 pm	11:28 pm - Midnight	●
6:21 am	11:36 am - 2:36 pm ☀	8:01 pm	Midnight - 2:08 am	● New

25 50 75 AVERAGE

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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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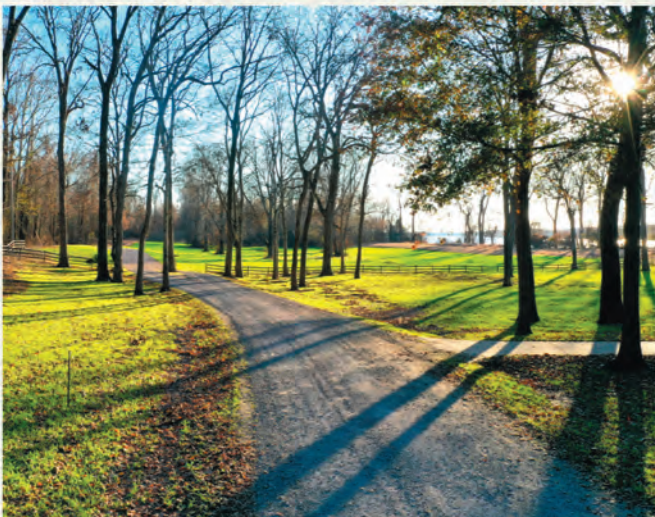
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Ben McDonald  
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