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Issue 264

September/October 2017

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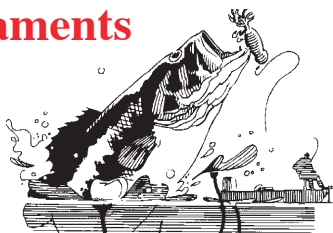
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Cover Photo

Wayne Potter caught this 42 pound, 5 oz. flathead on Burns-ville Lake. His 50 inch fish was landed while he was practicing for the Kings of the Lakes bass tournament.

Archery season is starting on September 30th. TEXT, mail or email your big bucks taken during the season. Look on page 38 for information.

The DNR is no longer charging \$5 for citation on fish. Look for information on **www.wvdnr.gov**

12 Crossbow Tips Fro Success

No mistake about it—modern crossbows are sophisticated hunting tools.

How do you load a crossbow? How do you pull its string back? What's the trigger like? Do they kick like a rifle? Are they noisy? Are they accurate, and at what distances? Do they have power to kill a deer?

When I first started shooting modern crossbows several years ago, I had no idea what to expect. Like many who had never played with them, these tools confused me. I had seen them on TV, but without ever handling one, I wasn't sure about many things. Was I surprised!

Instead of an unwieldy, slow, inaccurate Robin Hood-era weapon, modern crossbows are something. They're fast, accurate, and powerful enough to take the largest big-game animals in North America cleanly. Modern crossbows are a pleasure to shoot, too. But to get the most from your crossbow, you must understand the basics of how to set one up for hunting and how to shoot it. Here are 12 tips to make you a crossbow-shooting machine using a crossbow-and-arrow setup designed specifically for hunting big game.

Use high-quality broadheads when shooting your crossbow. Generally, you get what you pay for.

1. Buy the Best You Can Afford

There's a big difference between an el cheapo, bargain-basement crossbow and a top-of-the-line model. Sure, the bargain model costs less, but it won't be built as well, be as accurate or reliable, and it will fail when the moment of truth arrives. You can buy crossbow packages that include everything needed to shoot and hunt—a crossbow, a few arrows and arrow points, a scope sight, a cocking device and quiver—for between \$800 and \$1,500. A good crossbow alone costs \$300–\$1,000, depending on the make and model. You get what you pay for.

2. Use Enough Draw Weight

The principal specification that distinguishes a hunting crossbow from a target model is draw weight. Fortunately, most states have taken the guesswork out of determining what's sufficient by establishing a regulatory minimum. While those regulations vary considerably across states, the overall range runs from 75 to 125 pounds of draw weight. With little exception, any crossbow in that range should be adequate to kill a whitetail deer at moderate ranges. Most better-hunting crossbows are in the range of 150 to 175 pounds, a few exceeding 200 pounds. Generally, bigger is better—or, in this case, faster.

continue to the next page

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You can go too heavy, though. And at least one state (Ohio) has a maximum allowable draw weight of 200 pounds.

An accurate well-built rangefinder will improve shooting accuracy.

3. Shoot a Fast Enough Arrow

Crossbow and compound bow makers continually strive to push the speed envelope. You make a crossbow faster by increasing its draw weight. That's why point No. 2 is so important. How fast is

fast enough? I like my crossbows to shoot a hunting-weight arrow with an initial velocity of at least 300 fps. That will give your arrow enough kinetic energy to take any big-game animal cleanly and will reduce arrow trajectory at longer ranges, which makes accurate shooting easier. Some crossbows are beginning to push the 400-fps

envelope, so look for improvements in this number.

4. Use a Scope Sight

Some crossbows still come with open sights, but you'll be much better served using a scope sight. These optical sighting devices make accurate shooting much easier. For magnification, you can choose from

continue to the next page



Dave Post, from Mineralwells, went to Tennessee for a striper.



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just about anything 0X to 5X. Inside the scope is the reticle, defined as some configuration of horizontal and vertical crosshairs, though for crossbows, it also includes any object projected or suspended across the field of view. Choices begin with a simple, single red dot or crosshair. With them, you sight-in for a fixed distance, typically 20 yards, but must compensate for longer shots by holding higher. Multi-reticle scopes are the most popular, particularly those with three or four dots or horizontal crosshairs. The top one is sighted in for 20 yards, and the next two are fixed at intervals that will be dead-on at 30, 40 and 50 yards, respectively, on most bows.

5. Use Quality Arrows

Unless your arrows (or bolts) fly like laserbeams, you'll never precisely hit your targets. Cheap arrows manufactured to sloppy tolerances will fly like knuckleballs. That's why you should use only the best arrows you can afford that are designed specifically for crossbow shooting. Many crossbow companies sell arrows, but they're made by Gold Tip, Easton, and other



Brandon Richards went to North Bend Lake for a large bass.



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manufacturers. Ensure they have a nock designed for crossbows, not compound bows, are cut to the proper length, and have the proper fletches. Carbon and aluminum arrows work well, but by far, the most rugged and high-tech are made from carbon.

Scopes or open sights? You have a choice. The author generally recommends the use of scopes.

6. Use Quality Broadheads

The business end of a hunting arrow is the broadhead. Many makes, models and styles of hunting broadheads are available. Here again, the most expensive are generally those built to the tightest tolerances, have the sharpest blades, fly straight and true, and have a long track record

of success. Replaceable-blade and mechanical broadhead designs will work well for crossbow shooters. The mechanical design becomes more popular each year. The most common weight for a hunting broadhead is 100 grains, 125 grains a distant second.

7. Take a Rest

A crossbow is a bit heavy so a rest certainly helps steady it. That can include using standard rifle-shooting positions, such as kneeling and sitting, using a set of shooting sticks or monopod, and using a shooting rail in a treestand or shooting house. I never turn an arrow loose from my crossbows without taking a rest. When using one,

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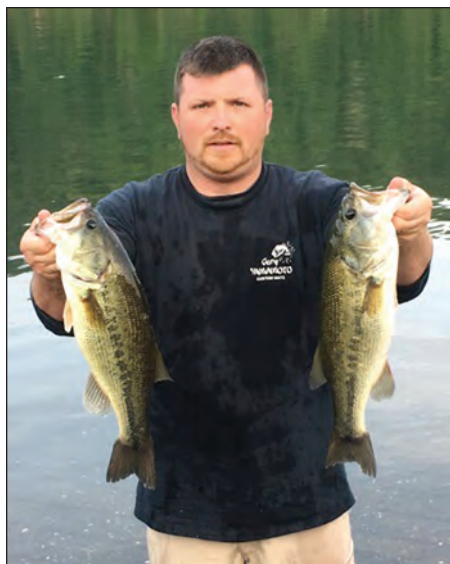



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pad the crossbow's forearm with something soft like your hand, a rolled-up jacket or a daypack. This will help absorb recoil and make precise sighting easier.

8. Learn Arrow Trajectory

All arrows fired from a crossbow travel downrange in a large parabolic arc. Your crosshairs are set to hit dead-on at specific distances, but you'll often be shooting at a deer or other animal between these distances. When practicing,



Johnny Crockett landed a couple of nice Sutton Lake largemouth bass.

you'll soon learn where you must place your crosshairs relative to the animal to hit at these "tweener" ranges. Also, when you understand how the arrow arcs, you can arc the arrow over tree limbs and other obstacles between you and the game.

9. Use a Rangefinder

With the click of a button, a modern laser rangefinder can give you

the exact distance from you to the target—critical information in accurate shooting when you're lobbing an arrow at the target. The best laser rangefinders are as reliable as the sunrise. My Nikon Archer's Choice even tells me exactly where to aim when shooting at steep uphill and downhill angles. Priced

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To most novices, crossbow cocking might appear a simple task. But for the pros, it's serious business.



Roy Woods got a nice gobbler this spring. Photo courtesy of Trappers Den in Cowen.

10. Get a Feel for the Trigger

Every crossbow has a unique trigger. You need to shoot your crossbow enough so you know exactly when the trigger will send the arrow on its way—not "maybe" when it will fire. Shoot with and without gloves so you know how both feel. (They will be different.)

11. Practice in the Field

The axiom "practice makes per-

fect" certainly applies to crossbow shooting. When setup and sighted, spend time shooting using a benchrest. Use these sessions to set your sights precisely and get a feel for the trigger. However, you then need to do "specificity training"—training specifically for the task at hand. Move away from the bench and practice shots that simulate

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Stonewall Classic

The third annual "Stonewall Classic" team bass tournament was held September 9 & 10 at Stonewall Jackson Lake. Forty-six bass fishermen competed for the \$1,000 1st place prize.

Local anglers and other teams from around the state came to this popular lake to compete. Stonewall Jackson Lake has been a very popular bass fishing location for many years.

The lake had a catch and release policy on bass for over thirty years. The DNR has allowed fishermen to keep bass for the past four years but only one over eighteen inches can be kept daily.

Other species of fish were allowed to be kept all along. The DNR has changed the musky rule. A musky now has to be at least fifty inches long to be kept.

The two day event consisted of teams trying to catch a six fish limit of bass each day. The fish had to be at least twelve inches long to count. Two bass over eighteen inches were allowed each day based on the lake rule. Teams brought in their best six fish to be weighed in.

continue to the next page



Gary Ross and Alan Fluharty won the Stonewall Classic with a two day weight of 33 pounds, eight oz.

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weighed in each day.

The four top teams were awarded cash prizes. Also, there were two big bass prizes each day. The winners of this years event were Gary Ross and Alan Fluharty with 33 pounds, eight ounces. 2nd place was Matt Summers and "Tater" Bennett with 29 pounds. 3rd place was Scott Settle and Tim Whaples with 28 pounds, 11 ounces. 4th place was Roger Balser and Josh Balser with 27 pounds, 7 ounces.

Saturdays big bass winners were Mark Garner with a 6 pounder and 2nd place was Gary Ross with a 5 pound, 8 ounce bass. Sundays big bass winners were Matt Summers with an impressive 6 pound, 14 ounce bass and the second big bass was Alan Fluharty with a 5 pound, 9 ounce largemouth bass.

Trophies were provided by the Lewis County Visitors Bureau.

Look for another "Stonewall Classic" next year. Stonewall Jackson Lake is noted for great bass fishing.



Matt Summers caught the biggest bass at the Stonewall Classic. His largemouth weighed an impressive 6 pounds, 14 oz. He and his partner had 20 pounds, 15 oz that day.

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Mark Garner landed a 6 pound bass for the Saturday luncheon at the Stonewall Classic.



Rick Sockman hooked a five pound, 6 oz. bass to help his team get 5th place at the Stonewall Classic.

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actual hunting conditions. Shoot from the kneeling and sitting positions. Climb into your treestand or ground blind and shoot at the same angles and distances you anticipate for your hunting season. Learn to use your shooting sticks or monopod quickly, quietly and efficiently.

Whatever the crossbow used and no matter what the target, watch out for your fingers.

12. Maintain String, Rail and Trigger

A crossbow is a machine, so it will need regular maintenance to keep on ticking like a fine Swiss watch. That means you should always check the string and cables for wear. This is very important because on a crossbow you have direct string-to-rail contact, which creates friction and abrasion during every shot. At the first sign of fraying or abnormal wear, replace

them. You can reduce the need for replacement with regular maintenance. Keep the string, cables and center serving clean and well maintained after each practice session and especially after every trip to the field. Lubricate the center serving. The rails should also be regu-

larly lubed with light machine oil after every 100 to 150 shots. The rest of the string should be waxed with bowstring wax.

There you have it—12 fantastic tips that will greatly improve your crossbow shooting. Have fun, shoot straight—and stay safe.



Scott Settle & Tim Whaples, from Fayetteville, caught 16 pounds, 5 oz. on day 2 of the Stonewall Classic. They finished 3rd with 28 pounds, 11 oz.

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Pre-Season Scouting

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — With small- and big-game hunting seasons set to begin, West Virginia hunters should start scouting, inspecting equipment and honing their skills before heading out to their favorite hunting spots.

Scout for mast production

“Most experienced hunters spend considerable time scouting for game before they step into the woods on opening day,” said Ethan Barton, Division of Natural Resources assistant wildlife biologist. “By early September, you should be able to gauge mast conditions thoroughly in the areas you hunt.”

According to Barton, mast crop quality and quantity are good indicators of the possible productivity of hunting areas. DNR wildlife biologists and wildlife managers conduct mast surveys statewide every year, and early indicators this year point toward an above-average mast crop. Abundant mast can

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make hunting a challenge because animals do not have to leave dense cover as often to meet their nutritional needs.

“Scouting areas where game animals are spending time feeding is just as important during abundant mast years as during poor mast years,” Barton said. “Look for producing white oaks or other desirable food close to dense bedding cover or transitional edges, and find a way to slip into position unobtrusively. Put in your time and chances are good your effort will pay off.”

Check hunting equipment

Archery hunters should be well into practice by this time of year.

“If you have any doubts about

your archery equipment, take it to an archery shop and have it checked
continue to the next page



Treston Martin got his first spring gobbler in Jackson County.

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by a qualified professional. Improper tuning of compound bows and crossbows can hamper accuracy, and frayed bow strings can be dangerous to hunters,” Barton said. “It’s also important to check arrows and broadheads, whether hunting with modern carbon arrows and expandable broadheads or traditional wooden arrows and glue-on heads.”

Tree-stand hunters should practice from various stand heights and angles. They also should check the safety harness for damage or wear before going hunting.

“Replacing a worn or damaged tree stand safety harness could save your life in the event of a slip or fall,” Barton said.

Rifle hunters should “zero” their firearms and practice shooting from various distances and positions before seasons open to ensure ethically proficient accuracy.

“When sighting in a rifle, shoot from a solid rest and be sure your rifle’s bore is clean before your shooting session,” Barton said. “It’s also important to check your ammunition for corrosion, uniformity and quality, particularly if you have old ammunition.

“If you’re trying a new load, remember that bullets of the same weight but different profiles — for example, a pointed bullet versus a



Doug Johnston went to Texas on a wild boar hunt..




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“Even if you’re confident your rifle is still ‘on’ after last season, take a few shots at a target to make sure,” Barton said. “You owe it to yourself and to the game animals you hunt to be as accurate as possible.”

For more information on hunting season dates and bag limits, consult the 2017-2018 West Virginia Hunting and Trapping Regulations, available at all license retailers, DNR district offices and from the DNR website, www.wvdnr.gov.

If you have additional questions about regulations or seasons, call your local DNR district office. Personnel are available from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, to answer questions and offer guidance.

Fall Bass Fishing

The two times of the year when bass fishing is at it’s best are 1. In the early spring of the year. 2. In the fall before the winter sets in.

In the early spring of the year, we call this period the “Pre-Spawn” or “Pre-Spawn Period”. The reason that this time of the year is one of



Journey Rose, from Meadow Creek, got her first smallmouth.

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the best times for bass fishing is because the bass are grouping together into areas called “Staging Areas”. These staging areas provide elements that the bass need before

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Now, the fall of the year is the other “best time” of the year for

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bass fishing because of the following conditions:

1. The water temperature is cooling down which means (in most cases) that you have a greater amount of oxygen.
2. This time of the year you will find that bass more often than not, school together.
3. The cooler temperature from the warm summer temperatures allows the bass to become more active.

4. This is one time of the year when the bass will strike just about anything that you throw at them, although there are certain patterns that work better than others. (which will be covered in this article) and there are more reasons, but these are the primary ones.

The things you need to know when setting out for fall fishing is:

Knowing the temperature of the water.

Knowing the natural forage of that certain body of water.

Knowing areas where deep water is close to shallow water.

Knowing where aquatic plant life is located. (If any)

The reasons for the above is that the cooler temperature will make the bass more active, which in turn will increase the digestive system making the bass feed more often.

continue to the next page



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Bass will eat natural forage in any given body of water, so color patterns and size of baits are to replicate the natural forage.

Bass will normally be in areas where shallow water areas are close to deep water areas for a "Comfort Zone".

For example, if you have a shallow water area that holds bass, and it is close to deeper water and a weather front (whether it be a cold or warm front) moves in, it will affect the shallow water. The temperature will change much faster in the shallows than in the deeper water. The deeper water will hold more of a constant temperature, thus making the bass move down in the more constant temperatures (or deeper waters).

As I said before, almost any artificial bait pattern will work during the fall period. However, the following are some of the more preferred baits to use for Fall Fishing: Lipless Crankbaits (Rattle Traps, Cordell Spots, etc)

Top Water Baits (Zara Spooks, Floating Minnows, and Chug Bugs)

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Crankbaits (Deep divers working on the downward slopes or drops)

DNR Seaks Comments

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) is asking for public comment on a series of state rules that may be more stringent than or equal to similar federal regulations. The rules relate to whitewater rafting, boating,

wildlife damage control agents, hunting, trapping, fishing, falconry, fertility control of free roaming wildlife, elk restoration and management and cooperation between state and federal agencies regarding federal lands within the state.

Public comments are being sought pursuant to West Virginia Code § 29A-3-20(a)(3). This information will be out for public comment until Monday, Oct. 16, 2017. Detailed descriptions are available at www.wvdnr.gov/rules.

WVDNR has reviewed and eval-



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uated its rules that have federal counterpart regulations. In accordance with West Virginia Code § 29A-3-20(a)(4), the agency must submit a report to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance and the Legislative Rule-Making Rule Committee on or before November 1, 2017, that includes both a description of the state rules that are more stringent than their federal counterparts and the comments received from this comment period. Comments can be emailed to DNRComments@wv.gov.



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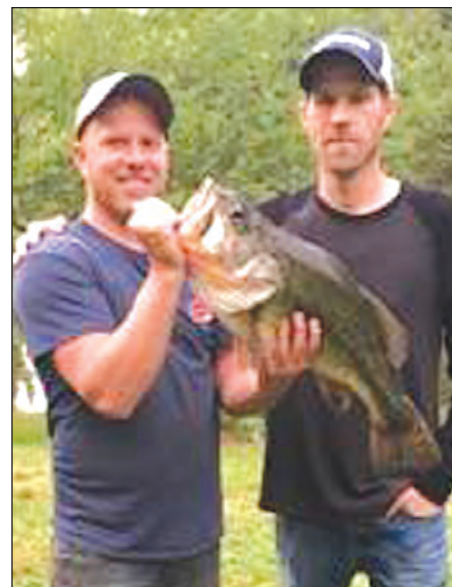


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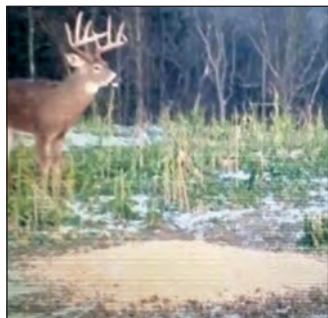
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Josh Tingler caught & released a 10 pound, 6 oz. Wood County large-mouth bass recently.



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Deer See Better Than Humans

White-tailed deer are a prey species. Their sight, hearing and sense of smell are especially adapted to evade predators, human hunters included.

While the whitetail's ability to hear and smell potential danger is probably most critical for survival purposes, I've been impressed by their ability to detect even the slightest bit of potentially dangerous movement.

As Leonard Lee Rue III notes: "A deer's eye is geared to detect motion, the slightest motion, and to move while the subject is in the deer's range of vision is to ensure detection."

Although the whitetail's ability to differentiate colors has been hotly debated, even among scientists, recently reported study findings may have finally answered this intriguing question: Can whitetails detect colors?

Vision Basics Like most prey species, a deer's eyes are set on the side of the head, providing a wide field of view. Their slightly bulging eyes also increase their field of vision. Hence, a deer's eye structure permits it to distinguish distant objects across 310 degrees field of view without moving its head.

Day or night, whitetails have excellent vision. Like other animals

adapted to being active at night, deer have a membrane in the back of the eye referred to as the tapetum lucidum, which allows light to pass through the receptor layer a second time, enhancing vision during dim light and producing eyeshine when exposed to bright light at night.

Unlike other mammals that are strictly crepuscular and nocturnal, deer can also see well in bright light. This ability is probably because of a ring of pigment surrounding the cornea in the eye that acts as an antiglare device.

Given the deer's ability to see in bright light, noted scientist Dietland Muller-Schwarze suggests the following: "Under strong light, the pupils of the eye close into a slit, focusing light onto a horizontal band across the eye's retina. In exactly this streak are clustered the nerve cells that function as signal conductors, carrying messages

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Dan Hendershot, from Bealsville, went to Tennessee for stripers.

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from the photo receptors to the brain. The arrangement and density of the nerve cells, called ganglion cells, in the visual streak account for the deer's ability to detect danger from afar."

Other researchers theorize that the visual streak corresponds to the horizon that dominates an animal's view in open-country. If so, then deer are especially adapted to detect danger in flat country.

"As another aid in their vision," notes Rue, "deer often use triangulation." This generally involves a

deer bobbing its head up or down or moving it from side to side, giving the animal two vantage points of vision and helping in depth perception.

Debating Color Vision Early reports concerning deer color vision were conflicting. Some suggested that whitetails had no ability to detect colors. However, other scientists reported the presence of cones (color receptors) on the deer's retina and their ability to distinguish different colors.

According to Muller-Schwarze, "Deer appear to have the anatomical apparatus for color vision, though again, not all studies agree. In vertebrate eyes there are two kinds of photo receptors: rods, which respond to single photons and enable vision in dim light, and cones, which account for color and daylight vision. The mix of rods and cones – or the absence of one

continue to the next page



Phillip Smalley shot a 400 pound bear last year. *Photo courtesy of Trappers Den in Cowen.*

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form altogether – determines what kind of vision an animal has.”

Until recently, speculation regarding deer color perception revolved mostly around an understanding of physiological and anatomical characteristics of the deer eye. One study measured the electrical activity of the tails. These investigators concluded that deer are less sensitive to light of long wavelengths (orange and red) and actually rely upon their perception of only two colors – yellow and blue.

At least one study found that deer had difficulty in picking out green. Considering that deer typically forage in a myriad of grassy and



Billy Isenhardt landed a 46” musky from the Tygart River.

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green vegetation this seems puzzling, leading the investigators to speculate that deer might not need to distinguish colors in their natural environments, even though they can do so in the laboratory.

Although the available data suggest that deer can differentiate colors, until recently there have been relatively few studies based on the behavioral response of deer to color.

Forced Choice Test One of the most recent published studies concerning white-tailed deer color vi-

sion was conducted by Bradley Cohen and others at the University of Georgia. They used seven semi-tame whitetail does in a so-called “forced choice test,” using a form of food reward when deer made the right choice.

Initially, deer were trained to associate a lighted trough with a food reward. That is, during a given trial deer were offered two similar troughs, but only the lighted trough held accessible food. Hence, deer were trained to feed from the light-

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After training, deer were tested to determine their sensitivity to light of various wavelengths, ranging from 360nm to 650nm (bright blue to orange-red). Then, the intensity of a given light was varied until deer no longer responded.

Implications The whitetail's crepuscular behavior is well-suited to its improved sensitivity to short-wavelength light, because when deer are most active the available light is in the short-wavelength part of the visible light spectrum.

White-tailed deer have outstanding vision at night.



Chuck Bickel caught catfish in Big Ditch Lake. Photo courtesy of Trapper's Den in Cowen.

According to the Georgia-based researchers, "The [whitetail's] sensitivity to blue wavelengths across a wide visual field likely facilitates movement through their environment during times humans would typically perceive as low-light conditions, and also aids in predator detection along a horizon."

Of practical importance to the deer hunter, Rue emphasizes the following: "While talking about wearing camouflage, it is important that you do not wash such clothing in any of the supermarket 'super' detergents, because they all contain ultraviolet (UV) brighteners that not only make your whites whiter than white, but makes your camo clothing brighter than bright. It has been discovered that deer can see the ultraviolet light emanating from clothing so washed."

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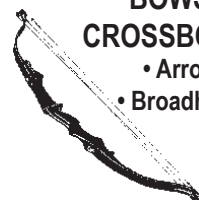
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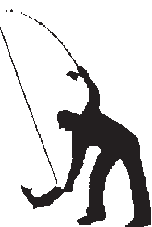


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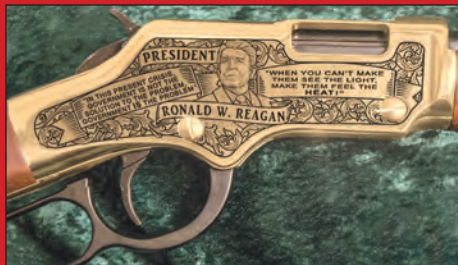
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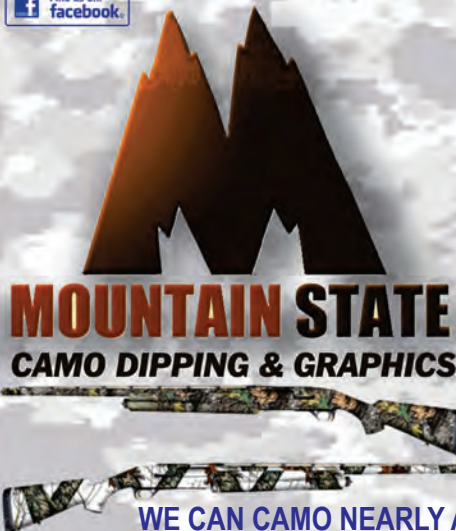
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Luke Long hooked a 4 pound, 10 oz. bass at the Kings of the Lakes.



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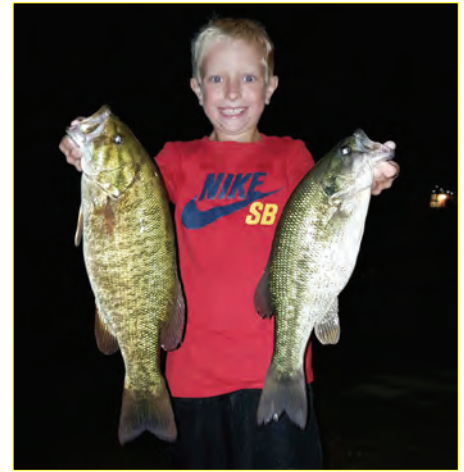
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Bruce Clarida caught a large 43 3/4" flathead on the Muskingum River.



Aiden Crockett knows big bass. He won the Federation Youth tournament earlier this year.

TEXT

**Your Big Game
Pictures
Details On Page 22**



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Dewey Smith & Chris White, from Charleston, brought in a couple of nice Stonewall Jackson bass.



Logan White got a big snapping turtle. Now what?



Isaiah Casto, from Ripley, has a huge crappie.



Louis Aspey, from Morgantown, caught a 22" smallmouth bass.

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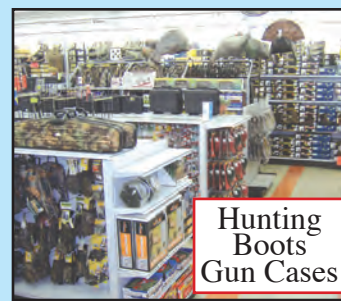
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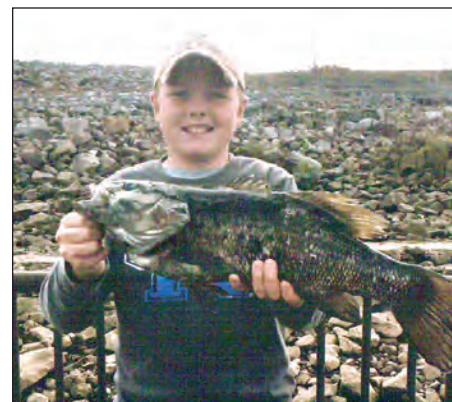
— West Virginia's waterfowl seasons are set for 2017-2018. These seasons are set within the guidelines established annually by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"The big news this year is that, after almost 30 years, the bag limit for black ducks has been increased to two," said Mike Peters, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (DNR) game bird biologist.

Federal regulations require all licensed migratory bird hunters, including lifetime and senior citizens, to register with the Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP) and carry proof of registration while hunting. HIP cards are free and available at all hunting license agents and online at www.wvhunt.com.

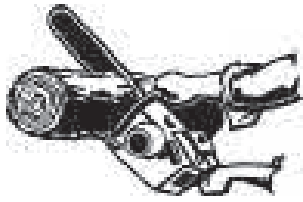
In addition, all waterfowl hunters 16 years and older must possess a federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp or "Duck Stamp." Duck Stamps can be purchased from local U.S. post offices or with a credit card by calling 1-800-782-6724. Hunters are reminded to report harvested banded birds online at www.reportband.gov.

Bird Hunting Regulations which are available on the DNR website www.wvdnr.gov.



Dylan Casto, from Given, hooked a 23 1/4" smallmouth bass.

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Hunting Season Changes

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— Several important changes in the state's fall hunting seasons for deer, black bear and wild turkey are included in the new 2017–2018 West Virginia Hunting and Trapping Regulations Summary.

The publication is now available at all West Virginia hunting and fishing license agents and Division of Natural Resources district offices, as well as the DNR Elkins and South Charleston offices. It also is available online at www.wvdnr.gov.

gov.

Hunters and trappers are encouraged to carefully review these regulations and the changes in hunting seasons. Important changes for 2017–2018 include:

Sunday hunting on private land is now legal in all 55 counties only with written permission from the landowner.

All deer harvested by hunters on November 20 and 21, 2017, in Hampshire, Mason and Upshur counties are required to be brought to a designated Biological Game Examination Station. Refer to the 2017–2018 West Virginia Hunting and Trapping Regulations Summary brochure for the Biological Game Examination Station locations in those counties.

Since the regulations were distributed, two corrections have been made and are now available online.

The first change is that Boone, Fayette, Kanawha and Raleigh counties are open for concurrent

buck deer and bear hunting during the buck firearms season Nov. 20 – Dec. 2. No prior application is required and hunters may participate with the appropriate hunting license and a bear damage stamp.

The other change deals with deer hunting on McClintic Wildlife Management Area in Mason County. The annual bag limit for antlered deer on the area is one deer, not three. The Antlerless Season bag limit is three, instead of one.



Mike Ayers, from Morgantown, caught a 7 1/4 pound hybrid bass.

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FLW Cup Champion

Justin Atkins weighed 21 pounds, 5 ounces on day one of the 2017 Forrest Wood Cup at Lake Murray to take the early lead. After a brief stumble of "only" 15-14 on day two bumped him back to second place, the young Alabama pro stormed back on Sunday with the largest bag of the tournament, a whopping 22 pounds, 1 ounce, to earn the first win of his career.

With a total of 59-4, Atkins earned \$300,000 and the title of Forrest Wood Cup Champion, handily making up for near misses in the T-H Marine BFL All-American, where he finished third, and the FLW Tour Rookie of the Year race in which he finished runner-up.

Starting the year at Lake Guntersville, near home in Florence, Ala., Atkins made a top 10 in his first-ever Tour event. From there,

he competed all year long for the Rookie of the Year title and capped a stellar season with one of the most superlative Forrest Wood Cup performances in recent memory. Atkins fished for Mississippi State in college, and has come up through the ranks with a herd of other young pros. All season, he said he was living his dream, doing what he was meant to do.

"When I say I feel like this is what I'm meant to do I don't mean that in any kind of arrogant way," says Atkins. "I just went out on a limb of faith this year. I didn't have the money to fish the full Tour when I started. I had enough money to fish about four events, and I was hoping I would make it. I felt like God had a plan, and that's what I was supposed to be doing. I just went out there and fished, and today signed off that I was supposed to be there."

All week long, Atkins targeted

cane piles and the fat blueback herring-eating largemouths that hung around them, but his success story actually started back in college, when he fished in consecutive College Bass National Championships

continue to the next page



Bill Butler hooked a 6 pound bass at Sleepy Creek Lake.

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on Lake Chatuge, a spotted bass fishery in north Georgia and North Carolina. There, Atkins learned some hard lessons, but in the post-game, he was able to pick up some herring skills from fellow competitors Brad Rutherford and Patrick Walters.

"They did really well, and they were catching them on top and calling them out of brush," says Atkins. "I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I was friends with them before the tournament ever started, but learning from them how they managed to succeed, that taught me a lot."

Because of that, Atkins was prepared to look for cane-dwelling largemouths in practice, but he was

the one to put it together, demonstrating just how quickly today's pros can master a bite.

Atkins had about 60 to 80 waypoints on cane piles he liked, and he accumulated most of them after some early struggles in pre-practice.

"It took me two days to get my graphs dialed in," says Atkins. "That cane is hard to see. It's real narrow. So I had to sit there and play with settings. I was here an



Richard Richardson landed a citation 18" sauger.



Carter Clegg caught a 43" musky at Burnsville Lake.

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afternoon and a full day before I finally found one pile. I went over it, and I saw it on the sonar and marked it, and I could barely see it on my down-view – just a little bit. I ended up graphing for a while and

continue to the next page



Jay Frye, from Meadow Bridge, hooked a 25" channel catfish.

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fishing some and never found any. The next morning I went to that spot and went around and around and around that pile. I turned my sensitivity up, my contrast and all that, until I finally got to where I could see it and knew what it was on my side-scan. After that I probably found 100 piles in my next six days of practice.”

Besides cranking up his sensitivity and contrast, Atkins also sped up his chart speed, which made the narrow cane piles appear larger and much more visible. Once he was dialed in, Atkins could mark cane piles up to 100 feet out to either side of his boat.

After some success in pre-practice, Atkins started on an innocuous pile on the first day of official practice and caught a 3-pounder on his first cast. Once he'd marked plenty of fish, he committed almost solely to the cane-pile pattern and continued to expand on it throughout practice.



Mike McLaughlin has his hands full with this 42” flathead catfish. He was fishing on the Elk River.



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