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Issue 287

September/October 2020



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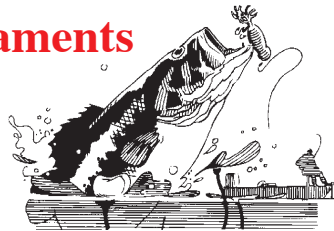
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Text or email your pics - Page 38

Don't Feed The Bears

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — West Virginia bears begin leaving their dens around mid-March. They emerge hungry and looking for food. People who feed them by accident or design put themselves, their property and especially the bears at risk.

Deliberately feeding black bears is illegal. More commonly, people attract and feed bears through carelessness or a lack of knowledge.

“Bear movements are tied to food sources,” said Colin Carpenter, black bear project leader for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR). “Bears that roam around residential areas in search of food are less likely to stay

if they do not find anything to eat. The key to avoiding human-bear conflicts is to remove or secure food attractants before a bear finds them.”

To remove the temptation:

Never intentionally feed bears. It is illegal. Feeding teaches bears to approach people or homes to search for more.

Secure food and garbage. Businesses can use bear-resistant dumpsters and residents use bear-resistant trash bins. The containers must be metal, as the powerful bruins can shred rubber or plastic bins. Locks or push-to-open systems keep containers securely closed. Some waste disposal services may offer bear-resistant containers. If not, before buying your own, confirm with your waste collection provider that they will service it.

Do not leave birdseed, pet food or livestock fodder outside. Bird-continue to the next page



Matt Watson got his 1st gobbler in Marion County.

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seed, pet food or livestock fodder outside. Birdseed and other commercial animal feed are high-energy food sources. Store the bird feeder until the bear's natural diet of nuts, berries, sedges and insects are more abundant. Store feed in bear-resistant structures.

Several conditions converge with the end of hibernation to make the bears' hunt for food more urgent.

"Natural food sources are at their lowest point when bears leave their dens in the spring," Carpenter said. "High-energy foods such as serviceberries, blackberries, raspberries, and blueberries do not become available until later in the summer."

Black bear breeding season peaks from mid-June through July. Male bears will cover large areas while searching for mates. At this same time, the adult female bears will chase off their yearlings so that

they may breed again.

"All bears, but especially yearlings that are on their own for the first time, will take advantage of easy food sources," said Carpenter. "If people do not present bears with easy-to-get food, the bears will continue on their way naturally."

The unintentional feeding of black bears is something that people can prevent with simple changes in behavior.

"Garbage should be secured in a bear-proof facility and placed out for collection on the morning of pick-up, not the night before," Carpenter said. "Bears are smart enough to notice the pattern if a banquet of food in plastic trash bins appear on the curb every Sunday night for Monday pickup."

Limit food odor by sealing scraps in plastic bags before placing them

in the trash. Avoid adding meat, fish, dairy products, oil, un-rinsed egg shells, cooked food, or large amounts of fruit to compost piles.

The "easy pickings" of unsecured foods entice bears to overcome their natural fear of humans and raid again. That is typically when WVDNR receives complaints about nuisance bears.

continue to the next page



Jake Brookover caught some nice trout in Tyler County.

The situation often proves fatal for the bear.

The state's Urban Black Bear study found that bears were living in and around major urban centers in West Virginia.

"We radio-collared black bears in and around the cities of Beckley, Charleston and Morgantown," Carpenter said, "and found that these bears are resident animals that spend most of their time within 3 miles of city limits."

The ready access to human garbage, pet and animal feeders puts the bears at risk. That makes it essential that people properly secure foodstuffs to avoid attracting bears. Failing to remove food attractants until the bear has become a nuisance will likely lead to the destruction of the bear.

"Capturing and moving bears that have become accustomed to humans is a costly and often ineffective way of addressing the problem, especially when faced with the possibility of merely moving a problem bear from one area to another," said Carpenter. "Bears are now found in areas where they have been absent for decades and have been reported in all 55 coun-

ties. That is why wildlife agencies around the country tell people that 'a fed bear is a dead bear.'"

WVDNR worked with other member states of the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to develop a website dedicated to

educating people about how to live with black bears. To learn more, visit www.bearwise.org. The secure food section includes a True/False quiz to test your knowledge of what is – and is not – bear-resistant.



Gracie Bowen harvested a nice 7 point in Roane County last year.



Bill Legg flashed the Peace Sign for this quality 2019 10 point buck.

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Urban Archery Deer Season

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — The start of West Virginia's archery and crossbow deer season is still a few weeks away, but hunters can get in the woods starting Sept. 5, when special deer archery hunts become available in municipalities around the state.


These urban deer archery hunts, coordinated by cities, towns, homeowner associations and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, provide additional hunting opportunities and help control deer populations. The season will run through Dec. 31 and include a split on January 11-31, 2021.

"The urban deer archery season is really popular because it starts three weeks before the regular archery season and gives hunters extra time to bag a deer," said

Chris Ryan, a WVDNR wildlife biologist. "And one of my favorite things is that you can set up a tree stand not far from your house so you can hunt in the morning and again in the evening when you get home from work."

In addition to providing more time to hunt, the urban archery deer season gives hunters an opportunity to harvest seven extra deer, which don't count against their regular archery and crossbow harvest limit. Hunters should note that no more than two antlered bucks can be taken during this special season and the first deer must be antlerless.

"Being able to take those extra deer means you can have a direct impact on your area by helping control the deer population," Ryan said. "It's also a great way to fill



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your freezer with meat and donate any leftovers to Hunters Helping the Hungry or a local charity that accepts wild game."

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Trevor Lynch had deer success last season in Calhoun County.



Trevor Lynch had deer success last season in Calhoun County.

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Harvesting antlerless deer with a firearm is one of the best ways hunters help control deer populations. But hunting with a firearm in an urban or suburban environment is usually not safe, which can result in the deer population getting out of control.

"As deer populations grew, we saw an increase in vehicle collisions and got complaints from homeowners," Ryan said. "By allowing hunters to come in and harvest deer in these areas, they can help alleviate the problem in their community."

To participate in the urban deer archery season, hunters must first purchase a hunting license. Deer hunting regulations set by the WVDNR still apply and hunters are encouraged to contact their local officials to see if their city, town or homeowners association has adopted special regulations or lottery requirements.

To learn more about West Virginia's hunting regulations, visit wvdnr.gov/hunting/hunting_regs.shtm. To purchase a hunting license, visit wvhunt.com.

Hunt Safely This Season
Send In Your Game PICS
From 2020
Info Is On Page 38

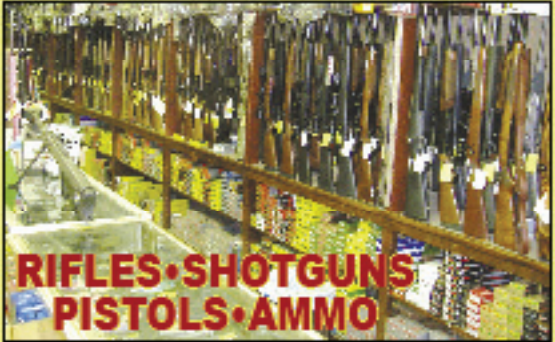
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Arianna White got a gobbler in Gilmer County this youth season.



CD Martin and Jimmy Watson both shot a gobbler in Marion County.



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Nuisance Bear Problems

BECKLEY, W.VA. — Due to an increase in nuisance bear activity being reported in West Virginia, the state Division of Natural Resources is asking residents to remove food and other attractants from around their homes to help reduce future incidents.

The WVDNR has received more than 1,600 bear complaints in 2020 and bears have been spotted looking for food in rural backyards, suburban neighborhoods and busy cities and around people.

“Once a bear gets a taste for human food, they can become more of a nuisance as they search it out,” said DNR wildlife biologist Colin Carpenter. “Trapping and relocating bears causing these problems is logistically impossible and biologically unsound. West Virginia has a statewide bear population, so there are no places to move large numbers of bears where they don’t currently exist.”

By taking extra precautions, res-
continue to the next page




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cautions, residents can help prevent bears from becoming a nuisance.

Here's how to avoid attracting bears to your neighborhood:

Remove all food attractants from around your home. Bears are attracted to and will eat anything that humans or other animals will eat. Take down all bird feeders, hummingbird feeders, squirrel feeders and deer feeders. Birds do not need to be fed during the summer.

Store livestock feed in bear-proof containers or inside a secure building.

If you have outside pets, only feed them a portion they will consume each time they are fed. Make sure food isn't left outside overnight.

Keep trash cans in a garage or storage building until the morning of trash pickup.

Properly installed electric fencing is the best way to keep bears out of

beehives and chicken houses.

Bears typically rely on the soft mast of summer (blackberries, raspberries, blueberries) until hard mast (acorns, hickory nuts, beech nuts) is available in the fall. However, because of the weak soft mast crop this year, bears are taking advantage of whatever human food is available. Bears prefer natural food when it is available, which is why nuisance activity usually subsides in the fall.

The WVDNR also would like to remind West Virginians that it is illegal to feed bears. Biologists recommend that people stay away from bears and not get between a bear and any kind of food.

“The simplest way to avoid attracting bears to your home is to remove all food attractants from around your home before a bear becomes a problem,” Carpenter

said. “All West Virginians play a role in keeping bears wild.”

To learn more about living with bears in your neighborhood, visit www.bearwise.org.



Ronnie Harper caught the lunker - 5 pounds, 2 oz. to help his team win a bass tournament at Burnsville.

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Interest In Archery

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — Families looking for an alternative to school-based sports or an outdoor activity their kids can enjoy have plenty of options in West Virginia thanks to archery and other bow-shooting programs. And with the COVID-19 pandemic creating uncertainty over participation in traditional team sports this school year, now is a great time to start, say West Virginia Division of Natural Resources officials.

"Archery is one of the safest sports your kids can get involved in and one of the good things about it is that you don't have to be part of a team or go to a gym to enjoy it," said Scott Warner, assistant chief for the DNR's Wildlife Diversity Section. "We're fortunate in West Virginia to have so many outdoor ranges at state parks, wildlife management areas and shooting clubs. It's a great time to take up archery."

Warner says archery is also an inclusive and approachable outdoor sport kids of any skill level can enjoy. It's perfect for adults, too.

"Participation in hunting is decreasing across the country, so the DNR wants to get kids and their families interested in the outdoors and maybe one day decide to take up hunting," said Warner. "One of
continue to the next page

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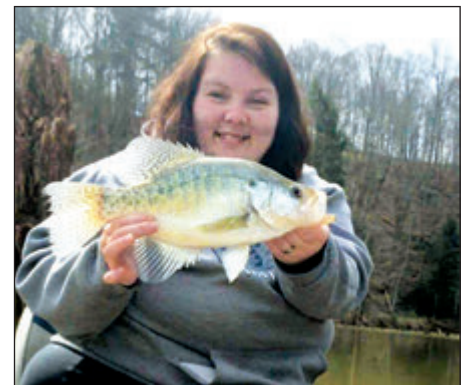
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the best ways we can do that is introducing them to a bow and arrow through programs like Archery in the Schools."

West Virginia started its Archery in the Schools program in 2004 with 18 schools. Since then, more than 200,000 kids have gone through the program, which is now available in more than 300 public and private schools around the state.

But not all kids have the chance to join a school-based archery program. Warner says that's OK because all a kid needs to get started is a bow and arrow, a supportive parent and a safe place to start shooting.

Archery is a sport you can enjoy almost anywhere.

Drive through the nearest town or up any hollow in West Virginia and you'll likely see more yards with a shooting target than yards without one.

"My whole family has been shooting bows and guns for years," said Grant Knapp, a 12-year-old Hurricane Middle School student. "It's just one of the things my family has always done and it's something I want to pass down to my kids one



Mike Long caught a 5 1/2 pound largemouth at a Sutton night event.



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day."

While hunting is a revered tradition in the Mountain State, there are still kids and adults who've never hunted. And when participation in hunting declines, fewer hunting licenses are sold and the

state's wildlife and conservation programs lose funding. That's why DNR officials want to make the outdoors, archery included, even more accessible.

"People are always asking me how

continue to the next page



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to get started and the good thing is that archery shooting can be done almost anywhere, provided you setup a backstop and practice safety measures," Warner said.

But you don't just want to put a bow and arrow in your kids hands, says Warner. Parents should first find out if their kids want to get



Zach Mynes landed a nice brown trout in the mountains.

into recreational or competitive shooting or hunting. Then they need to go to a local archery shop so their kid can get properly measured for a bow they'll be comfortable using.

"When your kid knows what they want to do and has the right tools, they're going to have a good time," Warner said.

Archery teaches kids a valuable lifelong skill.

Shooting bows and arrows isn't all fun and games. When used as an educational tool, archery can impart life lessons on a kid.

"I've learned a lot about how to maintain a routine and practicing so I can do my best," said Ashton Warner, a 12-year-old Hurricane Middle School student. "You can use these skills in your every day life and then you can go hunting if you want to be able to shoot and get your own food."

Learning life skills is one of the reasons why kids should consider getting into archery and why parents should help them pursue the sport. But like any other sport, kids need to be patient.

"You can't get frustrated if you don't hit the bullseye on your first shot," said Knapp. "You have to accept that you might not be good at first, but with enough practice you can be in the future."



Brian Mitchell hooked a nice large-mouth bass - large mouth.....



Roger Russell reeled in a big Stone-wall Jackson Lake largemouth.

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Bigger Bluegill In WV

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.VA. — There's always a bigger fish. At least that's what fisheries biologists are trying to determine as they research ways the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources can provide anglers with bigger bluegill when they go fishing in lakes around the state.

Over the last few years, DNR biologists have been focusing on how bluegill management in small lakes in District 1 can improve habitat,



Ayden Ashley landed a huge farm pond bass in Marion County.

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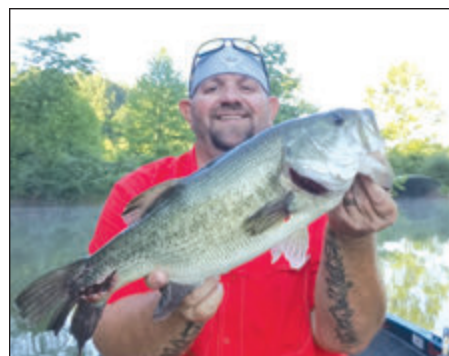


promote better fish growth and increase the number of large bluegill available to anglers.

“Our goal is to improve bluegill fishing in some of the lakes in northern West Virginia,” said David Wellman, a District 1 fisheries biologist. “We are trying to determine what lakes have the most potential for growing larger bluegill and if they need to special regulations and habitat enhancement.”

Is bigger better?

Bluegill are freshwater members



Josh Sommerville hooked a big largemouth at Stonewall Jackson.

of the sunfish family. While coloration varies, bluegill commonly feature deep blue and purple markings on the face and gill cover, dark bands down the sides and an orange or yellow belly. Bluegill eat aquatic insects and fish and are often eaten by other fish, such as bass, catfish, and musky.

Research indicates bluegill can grow larger in certain lakes if there is sufficient food, adequate habitat and harvesting larger bluegill is limited. It also helps if there is a dense population of predator fish to thin out mid-sized bluegill. DNR biologists take into consideration how these conditions may affect bluegill populations when determining how to best manage these fisheries.

“There’s this misconception that you can’t over-harvest bluegill, but we are seeing that overfishing can drastically alter the size of fish

continue to the next page



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available to anglers," said Dustin Smith, an assistant district fisheries biologist.

Improving bluegill fishing opportunities

Not every lake is set up for bluegill management. Some lakes are better suited for trophy bass or other species. That's why DNR biologists are taking time to look at data from the study to determine how to

provide improved fishing opportunities.

And having more large bluegill in lakes around the state is something all anglers can enjoy. Not only can the abundance of larger fish entice anglers to visit West Virginia, bluegill is a great fish for beginner anglers.

"We look at bluegill as a gateway fish species because they are abun-

dant in lakes and streams, like to bite and are easy to catch," Wellman said. "And you don't need elaborate equipment. A cane pole with a bobber and a small hook with a worm will do. Bluegill fishing is a great way to introduce people to the sport."



Riley Bell caught a huge flathead catfish at the Belleville Dam.

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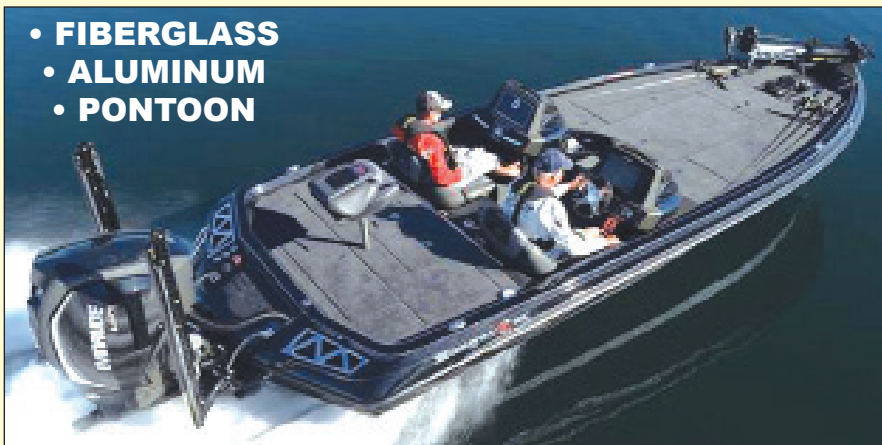
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Unlike most other fish, the ocean sunfish does not have a tail. A female sunfish can lay 300 million eggs each year. Each egg is smaller than the period at the end of this sentence. Interesting Lamprey Fact

Lampreys are jawless and have a round sucker-like mouth

Lampreys and hagfish are the most primitive form of fish still living today.

Most types of seahorses pair for life. Female seahorses lay their eggs inside a pouch on the male seahorse's belly. When the babies are ready to hatch, the male holds onto a piece of seaweed with his tail and rocks back and forth until the babies pop out of his pouch.

The freshwater Pygmy and Luzon gobies of the Philippines, the salt-water Marshal Islands goby, and the tiny rice fish from Thailand all reach a maximum length of 1/2", roughly the size of a grain of rice.

They are typically considered the world's smallest fishes. A baby seahorse is called a "fry."

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Early Season Archery Scouting

For years bowhunters have debated about bowhunting deer during the early season. When is the best time of day to hunt? Should I only hunt evenings? Does calling deer during early season work? Can you harvest a mature buck early season? Those are just a few of the many questions hunters ask before getting in the stand for the first time of the year.

Here are 5 early season deer hunting tips that shouldn't be overlooked when trying to harvest a mature buck in early fall.

HAVE AN ESCAPE ROUTE

One of the biggest arguments with early season bowhunting is what time of day to hunt. Some of the most successful hunters say to only hunt the evenings. Others say the exact opposite arguing that ear-

ly mornings are the only way to go. The one thing we can all agree on is the importance of trying to keep deer from getting spooked when entering or leaving the treestand. This is the main reason it is so important to have an escape route to and from your treestand.

Hunters that don't hunt mornings say it's because they don't want to spook deer that are feeding in crop fields or traveling back to bedding areas after feeding all night. However, the same can be said for hunting evenings, because it is nearly impossible to leave a treestand after dark without spooking a field full of deer. There is truly no magic rule for when to hunt early season deer. Morning or afternoon, have an escape route to and from the stand to keep from spooking deer, and keep them coming back.

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buck on game camera

One of the most important tools when scouting before deer season continue to the next page



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is a game camera. Using game cameras throughout the summer in multiple locations helps hunters to keep an inventory of which bucks made it through the winter,



Marvin Jeffrey, from Kenna, caught a Kanawha RIVER hybrid bass.

how much bigger bucks are from the previous year, and of course, how many total bucks are on the property.

As bow season begins, pay close attention to the date and time of target deer pictures. Seek to understand what has that particular deer in that spot at that time. Keeping game cameras going throughout the early part of season will help you learn when deer are going to

and leaving food sources and if bucks are still in bachelor groups. Use your cameras to hone in on where specific deer are entering fields. This will help to learn where they are most likely bedding, which in the early part of season, usually isn't far from their primary food source. All of these findings can be big factors in where to position your ambush point and how

conintue to page 24

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to strategically access and exit that spot to minimize hunting pressure.
CUT SHOOTING LANES

When hunting in a treestand, it can often be the small and forgotten things that make or break a hunt. Pre-season preparation is a good time to make sure that the small things aren't going to be a factor when an opportunity to shoot happens. Preparing the treestand area by cutting shooting lanes before a hunt is a good place to start. During the early part of the season, foliage on trees can be a huge factor in being able to harvest a mature buck. Making sure that all shooting lanes are clear is a must, not only in being able to see a buck coming but also in making a successful shot.

It's easy to forget about shooting lanes, especially when stands have been up a few months prior

to hunting. Make sure to clear out all possible shot opportunities with a good pruning saw a couple weeks before hunting. However, be aware that clearing lanes too early can give chance of regrowth resulting in a blocked shooting lane as well.
PREVENTING HUMAN ODOR

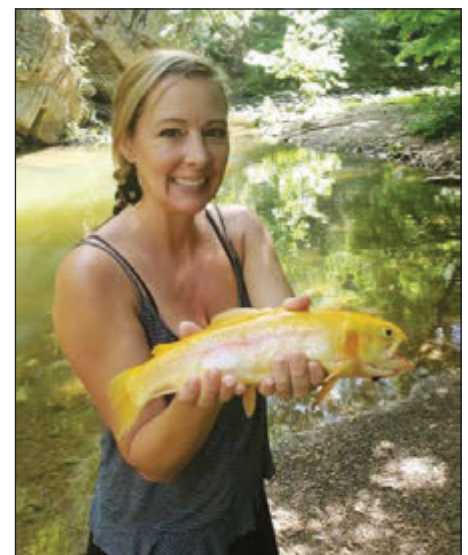
When hunting early season, temperatures are still fairly warm. Sweating causes human odor, which is why staying scent-free during early season can be a difficult task unless you follow a few tips along the way.

Dress Light - Wear moisture-wicking fabrics early season. This type of fabric dries quickly and helps keep the hunter cool and dry throughout the hunt.

Wait to Dress - Wait to put on items such as a light jacket, gloves and head net until settled into the stand.

Walking to the stand is when the body warms up the fastest, so don't rush the process by having too many accessories on until ready to hunt.

continue to next page



Jennifer Gracey caught her 1st golden trout.

Shower with Odor Killing Soaps - Taking a shower with odor eliminating soaps and shampoos is a step you do not want to leave out during the early season. Most of these soaps are designed to eliminate odor and more importantly, fight odor from coming back. This will help to keep scent-free longer throughout the hunt.

Spray Everything - Using scent eliminating sprays is an obvious tactic during early season bow-hunting. However, just spraying clothes will not cut it. Spray everything that will be exposed to the outdoors such as binoculars, rangefinders, grunt calls, release, etc. Also, do not forget high perspiration areas such as the inside of a hat where sweat is gathered, as well as the insides of boots.

Spray Often - Spray down with your favorite scent eliminating spray multiple times throughout the hunt. This keeps any human odor from developing while the body is exposed to warmer temperatures.

Scent Transfer - Don't forget about smells you leave behind. Be sure to spray down after the hunt. Leaving scent behind is one way to clue deer in to your whereabouts.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO USE A GRUNT CALL

A grunt call is primarily used as a call to lure in a buck during the rut. However, early season can be
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Kacey Ross is learning how to catch bass.



Bryan Maynard, from Huntington, caught a big Dale Hollow smallie.

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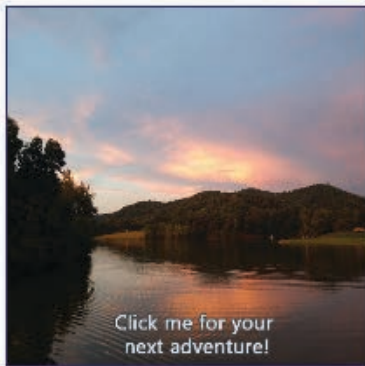
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ISSUE 286 July/August 2020

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SUMMER Catfish	B.A.S.S. News	DNR Updates
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great time to use this call as well. The difference between calling to deer early season compared to calling to rutting bucks in mid-November is the intensity of calling. Deer use multiple vocalizations all year. Early season is when does and fawns communicate with soft grunts, bleats, and bawls. Yet using a grunt call on a buck can work too as long as you stay soft and subtle. If a mature buck is feeding on the other side of a crop field, blowing a couple of soft grunts can ramp up his curiosity as to what competition he may have in the area. As the buck's curiosity builds, this could bring him into bow range to make the shot.

The key to early season deer calling is not to overdo it. Use calls sparingly and at a lesser volume than as used during the rut. Again, use a grunt call to build up curiosity, making a buck come to the soft sound. When doing this, remember not to call when a buck is looking at you or if he is already coming your way. In doing this, it allows the buck the chance to spot your location. Only call when the attention is drifting away such as when feeding or checking out other deer.

Putting these five tactics to use could be the advantage one needs to harvest that early season mature

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buck. In keeping with these recommendations, a successful early season bowhunt should be on the horizon as well as putting you a step ahead for the rest of the fall season.



Matt Cronin hooked a big flathead at North Bend Lake.

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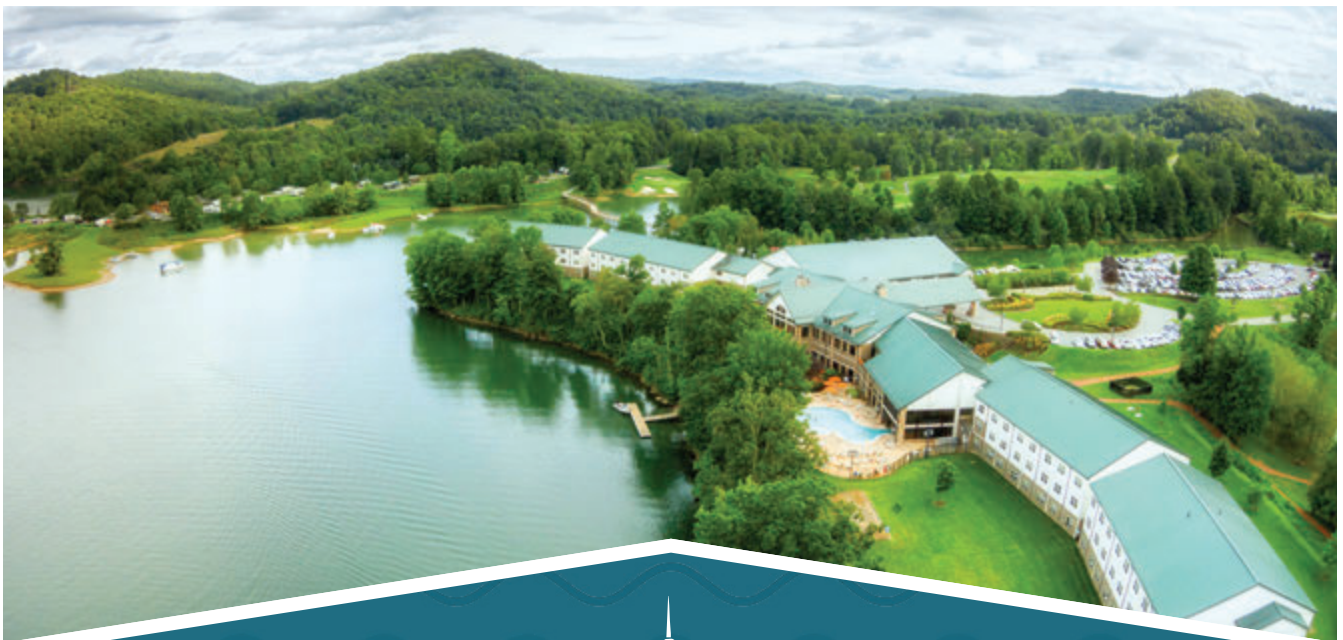
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Catching Fall Bluegill

In the fall, we all get a little break from the sun as the days get shorter, and series of cold fronts move in to cool us off. This not only gives us a break, but also the bluegill, making it a solid time for catching fish, as they can move close to shore where the waters are not as hot as they were in the summer.

As the waters cool, the big bluegills start to move back into the shallows for the fall season. Here, they can be found in their typical habitats – residential docks, grassy shorelines, fallen trees, lily pads, and any other structure in shallow water.

Catching Bluegill Using the Bait and Bobber Method

Again, using bait under a bobber is the easiest and probably most

effective method for catching bluegill in shallow water. Use a nice cricket, grub, worm, or simple doughball near the docks, vegetation, or banks and just wait for that bobber to go down. Use a splitshot about 12 inches from your bait to keep in down there.

Catching Bluegill Using Small Lures

Small jigs and spinnerbaits, such as beetlespins, are perfect for fall weather when the fish are close to shore. Cast these small lures adjacent to vegetation lines such as grasses, cattails, or lily pads, or next to residential docks or other structures. A good rule of thumb is to always pack a wide variety of colors for these lures, because some days the fish just seem to prefer one color pattern over another,

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for whatever reason. They are generally very cheap, and you can pick up a nice variety pack for less than a single expensive bass lure.

Catching Bluegill on Flies

Since fall is the other season be-
continue to the next page

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Jim Duckworth, from Waverly, bagged a huge Ohio buck last year.



Haiden Bollinger, from Cowen, got a piebald buck last season.



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sides spring where the big fish can be found in shallow water, it makes this another great time to target bluegill on flies. The fall season often brings lots of wind and rain, so you may want to prepare with

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Young Deagon Bomboy reeled in a nice flaehead catfish.



Young Aiden and Isaiah Crockett, from Sutton, are a couple of the best young bass fishermen in the state. Their dad, John, teaches them well.

a heavy casting line, and a sinking leader and fly. Good flies to try include insects, nymphs, and small streamers.

An Overview of Catching Bluegill in the Fall

As the weather cools off in the fall, the big bluegill once again come close to shore near the veg-

etative and manmade structures. Natural baits, small lures, and flies are all highly successful for catching bluegill in the fall. Sometimes the weather can cause winds and rain to make fishing small lures, especially flies difficult, so use heavier flies and lures to overcome the winds.

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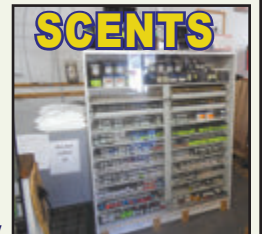
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Bass On Bridges

Shade, shelter, pinch points, bait aggregators — yeah, we know why bridges rank as top-shelf fish magnets, but what if the fish didn't get the memo? Or, maybe they just blew off the meeting? Well, you can keep on keepin' on, or you can dig into the bag of tricks to tease, tempt and taunt your targets into making a mistake.

Sometimes, this requires a position change — subtle or not so subtle — while other instances find a creative bait or presentation flips the switch. We asked a few Bassmaster Elite Series pros for their insight on bridge-fishing tactics that some may be overlooking. Here's what they shared.

Off the beaten path

David Fritts is no stranger to cranking bridges, but when the bite's tough, he knows he has to shift gears; but that doesn't mean decking his crankbait rod. Rather, it often means finding a different place to present that tried-and-true bait.

"When fishing is tough, the crankbait bite can be at its best because you can get a reaction strike out of it," Fritts says. "I'm going to figure out not only what color they want,

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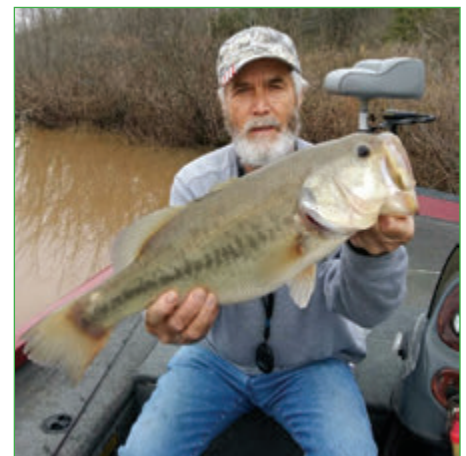
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but exactly how deep I need to be fishing.

"In tough conditions, you try to fish where not every crankbait has passed by. That may be underneath a low bridge; I can get on one side
continue to the next page



Bo Hollen, Ari Clark and Dustin Holley have the Junior State Champions trophies.



Terry Dunbar hooked a huge largemouth at Elk Fork Lake.

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and throw all the way underneath and out the other side. That kind of stuff doesn't get fished as much."

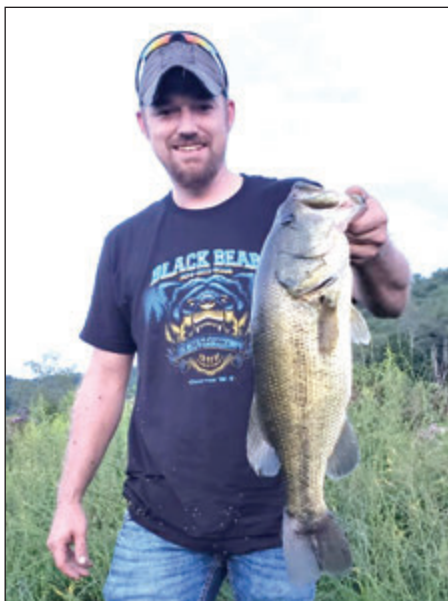
And what about those traditional ambush spots, like the corners of causeway riprap? Fritts often finds heavy fishing pressure pushing bass off the textbook stuff — but not entirely.

A lot of times, he said, the ambush spot is not on a corner, but around the corner. Dissatisfied with the obvious stuff, the fish might simply ease back from the heavily pressured areas, so don't completely bail on the idea; simply adjust your positioning — and remain open-minded.

"Where you least expect to get a bite, that's probably where you're going to get it," Fritts says.

"Sometimes, it's the angle at which you're throwing on the bridge. If I'm going down the bridge and I haven't had a bite, I'll turn around and come back the other direction and catch five."

Elite Series pro David Fritts knows that bridges can receive a lot of fishing pressure, so he aims his casts to targets other anglers might



Corey Ross reeled in a nice North Bend Lake largemouth.

have missed. He will also fish the structure in both directions, knowing that the angle of presentation is sometimes the key to getting bit.

Don't dis the trash pile

Noted bridge aficionado Keith Combs spends plenty of time between a bridge's causeway points and the pilings, but he encourages anglers to also visit the landward ends, where wind and waves pile up wood and debris. Drawdowns and seasonal water fluctuations

may vary how much structure remains fishable, but there's almost always something sitting in cast-worthy water.

Bridges create more casting targets than just the pilings and rocks that create them. Combs always looks for the debris piled up near bridges. Typically, this junk ends up where the current is slack, offering a prime target for pitching plastics.

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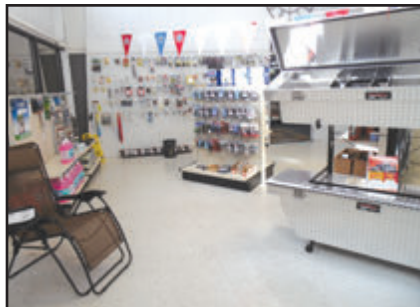
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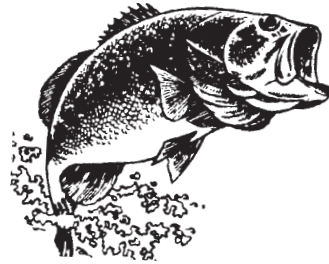
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Baitfish and bream may take refuge here, so you can bet the isolated buffet will not go unnoticed by opportunistic bass. Productive tactics include flipping, pitching and maybe a squarebill or spinner-



Grace Stalnaker and her grandpa have a nice catfish that she caught.

bait around the perimeter. If there are any blown-in weed mats, a frog might find a taker, as will a Texas-rigged beaver or creature bait.

This is rarely a winning pattern, but it can offer that limit-making safety valve that's so often the difference between bombing and making the check cut.

Spin to win

Elite angler Mark Menendez of Kentucky confronts tough bridge conditions by throwing a Strike King Tour Grade Spin Head with a Strike King Caffeine Shad and slow rolling it around the pillars and riprap corners. Fishing these

obvious current spots is key, but precision matters.

"Angles are very important when you're dealing with man-made structure, as is counting it down to where the baitfish are, and the rest is pretty easy," Menendez says. "I can control this bait well; it looks like a shad and it's a high-percent-age, high-hookup bait.

"And it appeals to all three species, so you might catch a brown one, you might catch a spotted one and you might catch a green one." Death circles

When Combs needs a big bridge bite, he often turns to a 7-inch Strike King Caffeine Shad — but probably not in the form or presentation most are accustomed to. Rather, the Texas pro rigs his big bait for a tantalizing downward spiral that mimics the easy pickings of a wounded gizzard shad.

Combs rigs a soft jerkbait with a nail weight in its head and a treble in its back for a spiral-down presentation fish find hard to resist.

Combs inserts a 1/16- to 1/8-ounce nail weight into the bait's nose for a downward tug that initiates the presentation. Next, he sticks one arm of a No. 2 treble hook into the shad's back.

This arrangement makes the bait fall faster and with a circling descent. It also ensures optimal hook-up success, as the treble's two free arms firmly grab whatever bites. Maintaining contact with the bait

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is key, and that sizable bait helps here.

Parting shots

Low And Slow: Hank Cherry's a big fan of spinnerbaits, but when the bridge game becomes challenging, he'll turn to a single Colorado blade spinnerbait. The logic, he said, is forgoing the flashy profile and lift of a twin willowleaf bait for something he can keep in front of the persnickety ones.

"With that single Colorado blade, you can pull it slower, keep it closer to the bottom and attract more lethargic fish," Cherry said. "You can do more things with it than you can a tandem spinnerbait."

A Different Drop: Drop shots and bridge pilings get plenty of face time, but if you're only doing the vertical deal, you're likely missing significant opportunities. For one thing, you may have suspended fish that may not feel like chasing your bait to the bottom. Here, a

long cast past the piling allows for a pendulum swing along the structure. Fiddling with the weight size and sink time will bring your bait through different zones until you figure out what makes 'em bite.

Another creative look for picky bridge bass: Wrap your drop shot around the face of a piling by casting across the upcurrent side right as you drift past. You're essentially

using the oncoming current to pin your rig against the structure, to resemble a baitfish feeding on piling algae. Definitely a timing deal,

continue to the next page



Doug Haskins caught an Ohio River 46 pound flathead catfish.



Eloise McLaughlin, from Spencer, got an antelope in Wyoming.

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Perimeter Plan: Sunshine plus solid object equals shade — and when we're talking bridges, that protruding shade line sets up an ambush-feeding scenario not unlike the edge of a weed mat, a grassline or a marina pier. Though lacking physical form, the shade line allows bass to lurk in lower visibility and use that dark-to-light transition to pick off unsuspecting prey.

Take your first shot with reaction baits — something to trigger the most aggressive fish with their noses on the shadow line. After that, pick off the ones holding a little deeper with a swimming worm, a drop shot or maybe a grub on a light jighead.

Keep in mind that shadow lines change with sun angles, so adjust as needed to maximize the opportunity to target fish that are largely overlooked.

Second fiddle

One of the biggest bridge mistakes you can make is overlooking one of these fish magnets entirely. It's hard to do with the major structures, like Toledo Bend's Pendleton Bridge, the Natchez Trace Parkway Bridge across Pickwick or the Potomac's Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge, but sometimes, the more modest crossings are irreverently ignored en route to sexier destinations.

Maybe it's that small, local road bridge spanning the mouth of a spawning bay/creek. You know
 continue to the next page



Justin Waggoner brought in a black bear last season..

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there'll be lots of staging spots for pre- and postspawners once you turn off the main lake, but don't overlook those bridge pilings for this role.

And what if a river fishery is so rich, you can successfully fill a day working that offshore structure? Well, Elite angler Brandon Lester said the occasional bridge may be an afterthought for most, but that's precisely why he saved some time for the one near Ogdensburg during his third-place finish in last year's St. Lawrence River event.



An impressive rack was on this last years Jefferson County buck.



Andrew D'Angelo bagged a bow-buck in Upshur County last year.



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