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VOLUME XXXII NO. 1

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'It's Spring Again': Time to Enjoy Outdoors

BY PIERCE BROWN



Lou Rawls said it best when he sang, "Well, it's spring again, the grass is turning green again, the warm air feels so good, and summer's not too far away." Yes, it is spring again, and I love this time of year. My favorite things about spring are seeing all the new light green leaves on the trees and watching seeds sprout up in rows of a field planted in corn, soybeans, cotton or whatever crop is growing. While I'm on the subject of planting, do not forget to fill out the order forms for your habitat seed needs. If you don't have a form, call or email our office to get one sent to you right away. One of the benefits of being a member is getting significant discounts on soybeans, corn, rice and milo seeds for wildlife food plots.

When not farming, I'm trying to wet a hook for some crappie or largemouth bass. Spring is an excellent time to be outside and enjoy our Delta outdoors. Delta Wildlife's spring edition features stories and information on how to enjoy our Mississippi outdoors. If you're like me, you may be interested in Parker Frew's article about crappie and bass fishing or learning about fly-fishing for Arkansas trout or Mississippi warm-water fish with the help of Delta Outdoors' Jeffrey Jones. If you want to attend a festival that has a big aquarium full of fish, read about the inaugural Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Festival to be held in May.

This spring edition's partner highlight features the Executive Director Lynn Posey and the key role he plays in working with MDWFP. I genuinely appreciate his values to conserve and enhance wildlife for all future generations, which happens to align with ours at Delta Wildlife. In addition to the highlight sections, we recognize our very own Will Prevost. I am proud of the work he does for our organization at the field level. Will's work also includes writing various articles for our magazine on interesting subjects like the one in this issue titled "River Shrimp." I always learn something new when I read his work. There are also articles for turkey hunters, long-range shooters and practitioners of falconry! In this issue Mitt Wardlaw will focus on spring clover food management for turkeys, while Ron Selby will share a story about one of his turkey hunts on public land. So, turkey hunting is not on your radar? Explore the world of falconry with Steel Henderson or get into long-range shooting with the help of Jody Acosta.

Whatever excuse you may need, just find one, get outdoors and enjoy our Delta wildlife!

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Delta Wildlife Partner Highlight

Lynn Posey

Executive Director of Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks

BY KELLEY PINION

Lynn Posey's daily intention is to protect Mississippi's natural resources for future generations, including his own grandchildren.

Posey and his wife Kathy live in his hometown of Union Church, Mississippi, with their children and families in nearby Brookhaven. Their family grew quickly, welcoming six grandchildren in seven years. He introduced his two children to the outdoors, teaching them to hunt and fish at an early age. Today, he shares those same traditions with his grandchildren, recently hunting alongside two of his grandsons as they took their first bucks.

The rural community of Union Church shaped Posey's love of outdoor recreation, with hunting and fishing his primary source of entertainment as a child. Little did he know he would harness that passion into a lifelong career in public service that has focused on preserving and improving Mississippi's abundant resources.

Posey's education took him to Copiah-Lincoln Community College, Mississippi State University and banking school, which landed him back in Southwest Mississippi, working for a local bank. A run for state senator launched a 20-year career in the Mississippi legislature, where he chaired the committee on wildlife, fisheries and parks budget for 16 years. After an eight-year stint as the Mississippi Public Service Commissioner, he retired and returned to his roots in banking and the landscape of Jefferson County.

However, the state of Mississippi had other plans for Posey's expertise.

In 2019, Posey was asked to become a consultant for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP), eventually luring him back into a full-time position as deputy director and director in 2022. While considering these roles took some "soul searching," Posey graciously accepted the challenge to make a difference. His values align effortlessly with the mission of the MDWFP to conserve and enhance wildlife for all future generations.

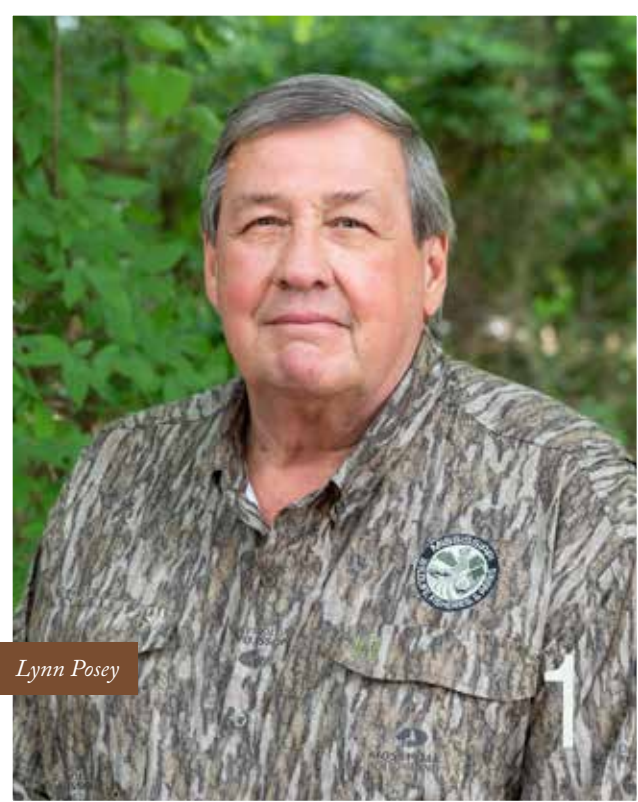
"Outdoor recreation is really important for the state of Mississippi, and we want all of our folks involved in it," Posey said.

Overseeing six bureaus and more than 700 employees at MDWFP, Posey credits his staff's competence with the strides they have been able to make.

"We're doing a lot of good things in the state of Mississippi," Posey said. "In particular, right now, we're in charge of rebuilding the parks system. We're well on our way to making the parks system in the state of Mississippi an enjoyable and first-class operation."

The project started with the improvement of five parks in South Mississippi and will soon continue with its second phase in North Mississippi, including upgrades to the Civilian Conservation Corps constructed cabins at Leroy Percy State Park.

Posey says the legislature has been supportive in providing fund-



Lynn Posey

ing for their efforts.

"I knew there were ways to make things better, and we've asked the legislature to help us with that," Posey said. "From the governor to the lieutenant governor, everyone has been kind about helping with our budget, and we're working on behalf of them and the people of the state of Mississippi to get things the way we think they want it."

While camping and parks might be the most visible work of the department, managing the state's Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and lakes is a top priority.

"Our WMAs and lakes are what's important to our sportsmen, hunters and fisherman," Posey said. "That's where we spend a lot of time, making sure they are ready for them when hunting season gets here."

MDWFP is on the heels of another successful deer season, but according to Posey, duck season left hunters with more to be desired.

"Duck season was not especially what we wanted, but we can't control the ducks," Posey said. "We [MDWFP] just control the habitat."



Lynn Posey celebrating the success of his grandchildren's hunt

Posey adds that monitoring wildlife populations across Mississippi's changing landscape is only one challenge MDWFP faces. Managing invasive species and the health and diseases of wildlife, in addition to societal factors like recruitment of anglers and hunters to loss of public land access, can impede progress. However, public support helps the department mitigate these issues.

"Simply buying a hunting and fishing license supports MDWFP's mission," Posey said. "These license sales help us leverage federal dollars from the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program (Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts). This 75:25 funding model directly puts dollars on the ground for conservation work throughout Mississippi."

With more than 50 WMAs and lakes stretching from North Mississippi to the coast, Posey says the projects are constant, with the department touching 82 counties every day of the year.

Posey adds that there is ongoing work throughout the Delta with forest and wetland management, infrastructure upgrades to multiple WMAs and providing technical guidance and cost-share opportunities with private landowners in the region.

"There's always something that you feel like you need to be doing," Posey said. "We never get through a day without thinking of something else that needs to be done tomorrow."

Still, Posey says the work is rewarding, and he's thankful for his position, a role that has fostered a long-term relationship with Delta Wildlife.

"I have a tremendous amount of respect for all the people that serve and work with Delta Wildlife," Posey said. "They are just a great bunch of people and put a lot of their time and effort into the resource like we try to do here. You can always go a long way if you put the resource first. Work toward that, and everything else will fall into place."



Reed McClurg, 14, son of Quinn and Emily McClurg of Vicksburg. 146 1/8" buck taken in Redwood, Miss.



Will Gates, 10, son of George and Amy Gates of Oxford. 10 pt. 262 lb. buck taken at Beulah Island



Lela Fratesi, 7, daughter of Will and Kendall Fratesi of Leland. Deer taken in Washington County



Maddox Harris, 8, son of Bryan and Cricket Harris of Holcomb. 10 pt. buck taken in Grenada County



Baker Henderson, 12, son of Taylor & Jennie Henderson of Greenville. 10 pt. buck taken in Bolivar County



Preston Henderson, 12, son of Taylor & Jennie Henderson of Greenville. 8 pt. buck taken in Bolivar County

Lexie Greenlee, HS Senior, daughter of John Murry and Amanda Greenlee of Bentonla. 12 pt. buck taken in Yazoo County



Will Duncan Fratesi 8, son of Will and Kendall Fratesi of Leland. 10 pt. buck taken in Washington County



Zeb, 11, and Haze, 8, sons of Dr. Zeb and Haley Whatley of Madison. Bucks taken in Madison County



Finn Manning, 11, Ollie Manning, 8, and little brother Hudson, 5, sons of Wes and Melissa Manning of Biloxi. Grand-sons of Rex and Tina Manning of Leland. Deer taken in Camden (Madison County)



Bentley Allen, 6, son of Jerry and Alicia Allen. Channel Catfish, October 2023. Youth Fishing Derby on Deer Creek, Leland, Miss.



Aubrey Ray, 9, daughter of Cliff and Taylor Ray. 9 pt. buck with Crossbow, Ashley County, Ark.



Collins Ray, 9, daughter of Cliff and Taylor Ray. Whitetail doe with Crossbow, Grenada County



Mariella Acosta, 8, daughter of Jody & Mary Kathryn Acosta of Carroll County. Her buck was taken in Leflore County



Elliot Jones, 9, son of Christy & Andy Jones. 9 point buck was taken while hunting with his grandfather "BigBig" in Leflore County



Ethan Jones, 7, son of Christy & Andy Jones. 8 point buck was taken in Leflore County



Miller Tollison, 6, son of Zac & Lauren Tollison of Ruleville. His 8 pt. buck taken while hunting with "Poppa" Rodney Walker in Sunflower County



Ollie Sheppard, 4, son of Landon & Terry Sheppard of Greenwood. Great-grandson of Buck Harris. First buck, taken in Holmes County



Jonathon Flowers, 12, son of Julie & Scott Flowers of Clarksdale. 9 pt. buck taken while hunting with his dad Scott in Coahoma County

**Jack Roberson, 11,
Bryan Prather, 10,
Charles Musgrove,
5, Easton Selby,
10, John Michael
Manning, 4, and
Robert Prather, 8.**

Proud parents include: Patrick Roberson of Oxford, Ron Selby & Laura Selby, Carey & Sarah Prather of Indianola, Jordan & Joely Musgrove of Madison, John & Kaitlyn Manning of Madison. February 2024 Youth Duck hunt in Washington County



JC Prevost, 13, son of Dan Prevost and Jessica Prevost of Raymond. 8 pt. buck taken in Hinds County



Gaines Flowers 14, son of Julie & Scott Flowers of Clarksdale. 9 pt. buck taken in Quitman County



Baker Henderson, George Stock, Preston Henderson, and Jon Martin Fountain, all 12 years old. Sons of Taylor & Jennie Henderson of Greenville, Gene & Jane Stock of Greenville, and Stephen & Cassie Fountain of Madison. These young hunters harvested their limit of ducks in Washington County.



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Staff Highlight:
Will Prevost

Will Prevost posing with a 3-man limit of mallards he and his buddies harvested hunting a local WMA

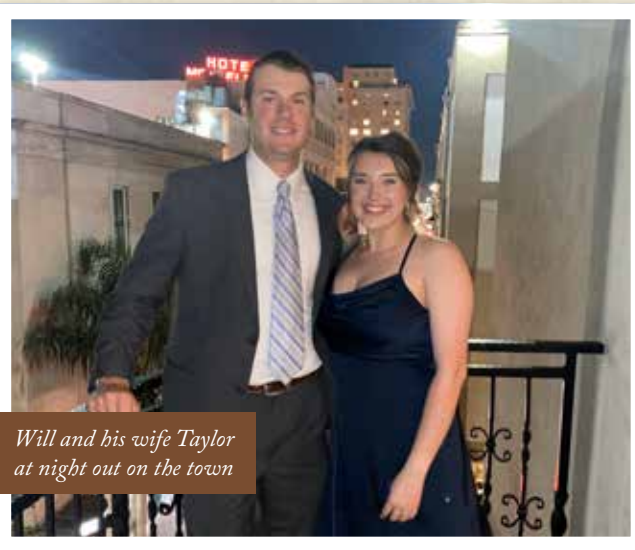
Will Prevost is a Wildlife Technician for Delta Wildlife's nuisance and invasive species division. He started working with Delta Wildlife in December 2020, and his primary responsibility is trapping feral swine in the Feral Swine Control Project Program in the South Delta. His duties involve scouting, moving traps, monitoring traps and trapping pigs. He occasionally assists with other Delta Wildlife projects, such as writing magazine articles (he is an excellent writer, we at Delta Wildlife might add).

Will graduated from Mississippi State University in 2017 with a Bachelor's degree in Precision Agriculture and from Louisiana State University in 2019 with a Master's in Agronomy. According to Will, "LSU had a very different culture than MSU, but I met my wife there and spent plenty of time fishing in south Louisiana, so it was a success overall."

While at Mississippi State, Will worked as a mechanic for an atv/motorcycle dealership in Starkville, and during the summers he worked for a couple of cattle farms in Hinds County. While at LSU, Will gained experience as a research assistant at the LSU AgCenter. Once graduated, Will went to work for the Corps of Engineers in Vicksburg, assisting with research projects. Unfortunately for him, the COVID-19 epidemic came shortly after he started his new position with the Corps of Engineers. The result was that it was a struggle to get anything done. After six months, Will stated, "I had enough of COVID regulations and applied for a job at Delta Wildlife."

Will claims his favorite part about the Delta Wildlife job is spending most of his time outdoors. Will also enjoys assisting landowners with improving their land by removing feral swine and preserving the resources for native species.

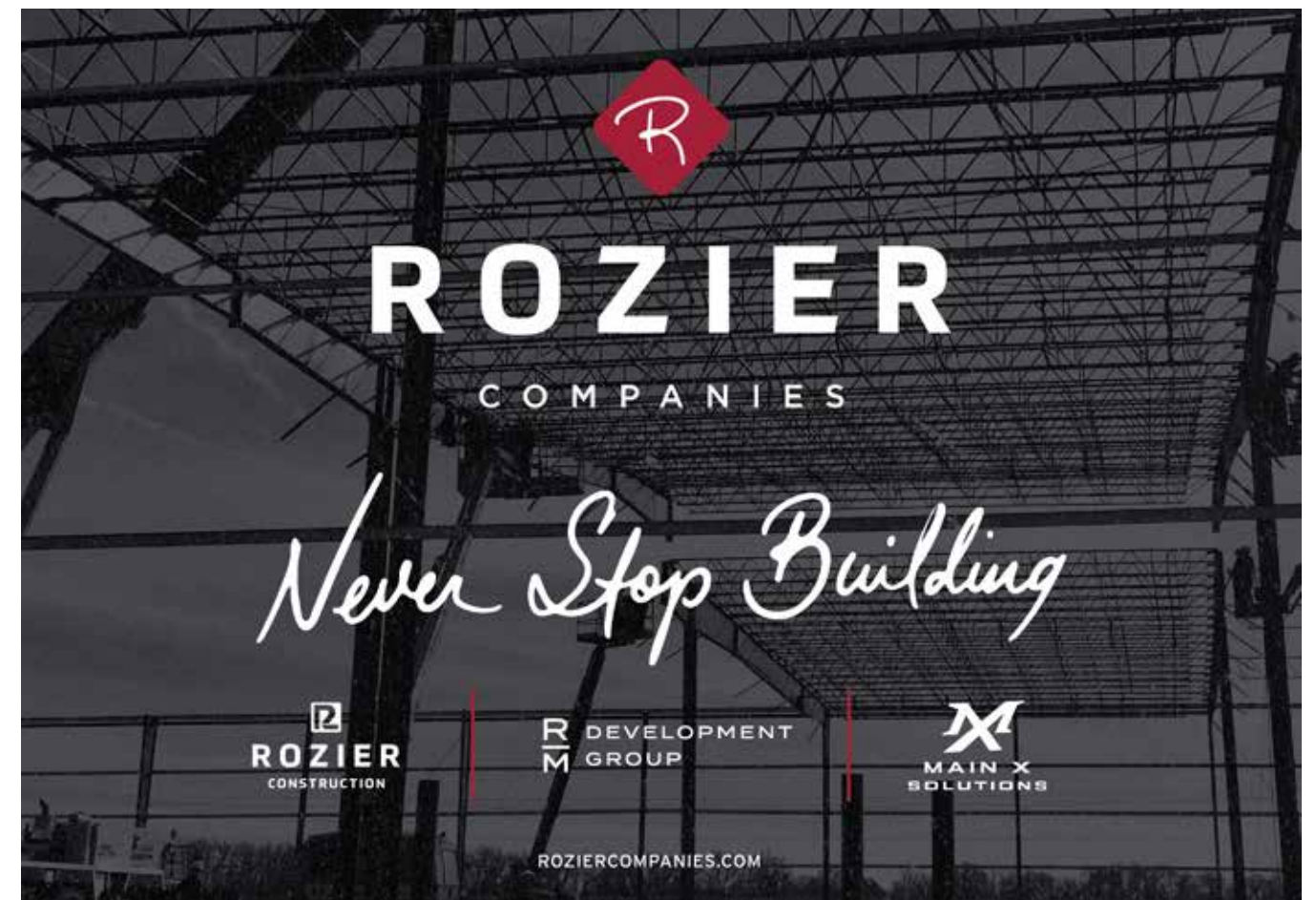
Will grew up in Raymond, Mississippi, and resides just a few miles from his childhood home. He lives with his wife, Taylor Gravois,



Will and his wife Taylor at night out on the town

who is from Vacherie, Louisiana, and their two black labs, Ellie and Maggie. The couple met while Will worked for the LSU AgCenter and married in April 2022. When asked about his hometown, Raymond, Will responded, "I love the area, and Raymond will always be home to me regardless of where I live."

Will started deer hunting at a young age, but since high school, his favorite pastimes have been duck hunting and fishing for redfish and speckled trout. Will is also quite the mechanic and enjoys working on anything with an engine. According to Will, "I have a couple of old trucks and boats that require a good portion of my time to keep running, but I enjoy the challenge, and it gives me something else to do."



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Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Festival

May is an excellent time of year to get outside and enjoy the outdoors, especially outdoor festivals. The Mississippi Delta has a new event for all eager festival enthusiasts to attend. The Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Festival brings together a couple of already great springtime festivals under the umbrella of a completely new event. According to the festival's chairman, Rob Baker, the Leland Crawfish Festival and The Mockingbird Songwriter's Music Festival have combined forces into one main event, thanks to the vision of both singer/songwriter Steve Azar, the crawfish festival's founder Billy Johnson and Leland Chamber of Commerce's Sherry Smythe.

Historically, the Mockingbird Songwriter's Music Festival occurred in early April in Dunleith, Mississippi, just a few miles east of Leland and featured different music artists from across the country. The Leland Crawfish Festival,

whose primary draw was crawfish cooking, also featured music but focused on blues music.

The Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Festival will also incorporate another annual Leland favorite, FrogFest. The festival takes its name in honor of Jim Henson, the creator of The Muppets and Kermit the Frog.

The Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Festival will be held in the historic downtown area of Leland. The festival will open at 3 p.m. May 3 and continue until 10 p.m. Saturday hours are 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Chairman Rob Baker stated that the festival aims to feature Mississippi's hunting, fishing and outdoor heritage, represented in the Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Museum in Leland. Festival proceeds will go to the museum and the Leland Chamber of Commerce.

If you are interested in participating or hosting a booth, reach out to the festival committee website at <https://www.lelandchamber.com/>.

Mississippi Wildlife Heritage Festival highlights

Mockingbird Songwriter Series Main Stage

The Mockingbird Music Series, hosted by founder Steve Azar, features intimate performances with some of Nashville's best and most prolific award-winning songwriters, telling the stories behind their hits and performing them as originally written.

Jason Reynolds Fetch N' Fish Exhibit

Jason Reynolds, a longtime favorite for outdoor expos throughout the United States, draws a crowd wherever he goes. Whether it's his dog's retrieving or a fishing exhibition in his tank, people love to watch the action. The show invites audience participation and is always a hit with kids who may get a little wet in the process.

Leland Crawfish Festival

Mississippi's Longest Running Crawfish Festival. Over the years thousands of people have come to Leland to enjoy good tunes and hundreds of pounds of crawfish. It's always a good time and a great end to crawfish season.

Frog Fest

Another long-standing Leland tradition, Frog Fest is an excellent morning event for the kids. It will include rides, face painting and all sorts of activities. Frog Fest gets its name from Jim Henson, who attributes Leland as the birthplace of Kermit the Frog.

Fishing Rodeo in Deer Creek

On May 4, from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., a section of Deer Creek will be blocked off and stocked with fish. Entrants will be allowed to fish for an hour and a half, and prizes will be awarded for different categories.

Much More

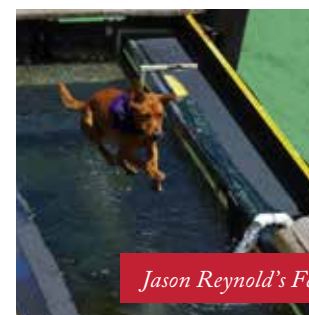
Don't miss the wildlife speakers, wildlife vendors, wildlife exhibits, food trucks and pop-up shops



Mockingbird Songwriter's Music Festival outdoor and indoor stages



The late Fred Ballard enjoying a meal with son Bo at the Leland Crawfish Festival.



Jason Reynolds's Fetch n Fish Exhibition





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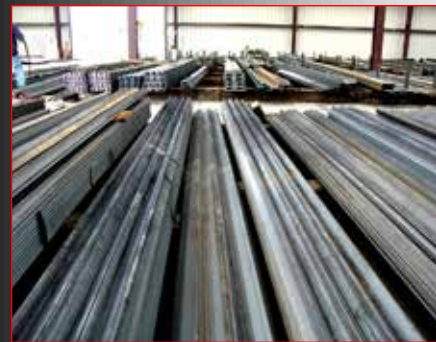
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Ron Selby with his spring gobbler

Serendipity

BY RON SELBY

Executive Director of Delta Wildlife/Delta F.A.R.M.

A few years back, I was invited to hunt with a buddy who had access to some family land with a good number of turkeys. We were not to meet until lunch the next day, so I decided to hunt the neighboring national forest that morning before the meeting. I'd never hunted this public hunting ground before, so I decided to pre-scout the afternoon before my hunt. All I had was a Delorme topo map of the area and a compass. The time was before smartphones, affordable GPS devices and all the technology that is available to us hunters today.

When I arrived at my destination, I began to travel the boundary roads to make sure I knew what legal side of the road to be on at daybreak. After determining the public land boundary, I started exploring the interior roads. I had left the Delta and was hunting in the hill country, so I was looking for good listening spots that I could access from the road. I wanted multiple options in case other hunters parked along the road or at trailheads.

When hunting public land, it is always good to have plans A, B, C and D as well. Out of respect for other hunters, I did not want to interfere with anyone's hunt, nor did I want them to interfere with mine. After about an hour and a half of driving, I had settled on multiple spots to listen from for the next day. I like high points where I can hear a long way, like hardwood bluffs overlooking deep hollows and draws that may have good roost areas. Gobbling birds



PHOTO COURTESY OF EDWARD WALL

can be heard a long way from these high vantage points. I stopped at each spot to call and listen for a response. Sometimes, you can hear a turkey gobble right before they fly up in the evenings. Unfortunately, this evening was cold, windy, overcast and drab, which is not ideal gobbling weather. So, I headed for a primitive camping area to build a fire, eat some service station food and sleep in my truck.

The next morning, I awoke a good hour before daylight and drove to the first spot I had chosen from the day before. It wasn't long before



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Ed Pentecost

Brad Phillips

a few other trucks passed by me, slowly making their way to their destinations. Once it started getting light enough for a turkey to gobble, I listened intently for one to sound off. After only a few minutes of hearing songbirds, I gave a barred owl call with my mouth.

Unfortunately, nothing responded, so I hopped in my truck and went to another spot. Another hunter had already taken Plan B, so it was off to Plan C.

I had to scratch Plan C and D, for they were already taken as well. I remembered seeing another area I thought was marginal the day before, but it might work. It was located at the bend of the road where a trail led into a scope of 10-15 year-old pine trees bordered by some hardwoods on the opposite ridge. As soon as I stepped out of the truck, I could hear a turkey gobble on the distant hardwood ridge. Not seeing anyone else parked nearby, I felt I had the bird all to myself, so off I went. As I approached the hardwoods, I realized I could see nearly 200 yards through the understory. I knew the bird would be able to see me at that distance as well. I changed my approach by using the short pine trees as cover to slip into the bottom below the ridge where I thought he was. As I walked slowly in his direction, I could tell there were two different birds. Staying beneath the lip of the ridge, I closed the distance to the one nearest me.

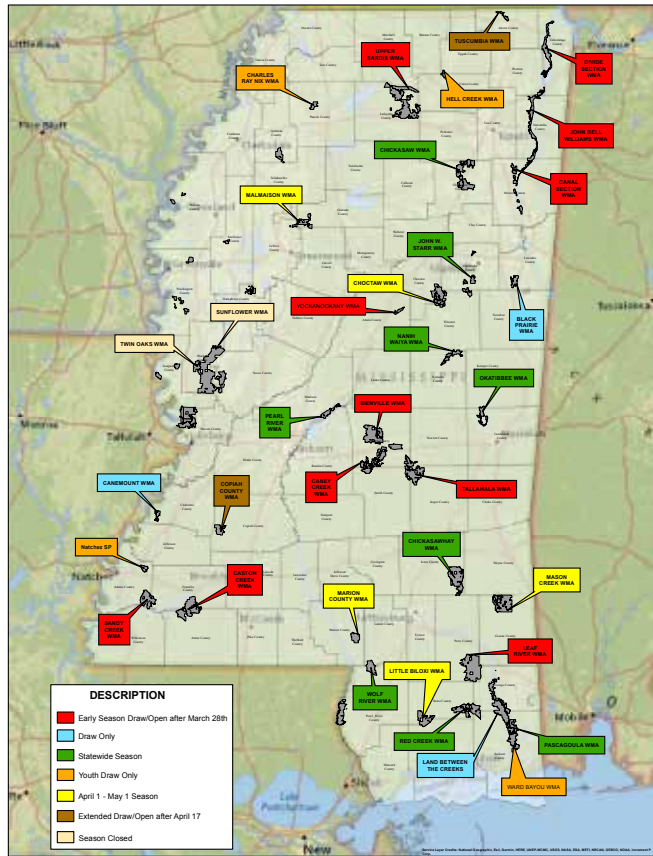
The hardwood leaves were loud and crunchy to the point that the closer I got, the turkey would gobble at each footstep!

He was very close, and I figured he thought I was another turkey walking in the leaves, so I sat down next to a big white oak. I realized I had left my diaphragm mouth calls in the truck, so I pulled my laminated striker and pot out of my shirt pocket and my turkey wing out of my vest.

The turkey wing was a dried wing taken from a turkey I had harvested earlier in the season. It was then I could hear a hen call. She was no ordinary hen. She was a loud and chatty hen to the point that didn't seem natural.

I realized there was another hunter above and up the ridge from me. At this point, I could not get up and move away without ruining the hunt for both of us. Positioned below the lip of the ridge, I felt safe from any birdshot that may travel in my direction, so I decided to sit tight and listen to him shoot one of the gobblers. He was an excellent caller; both birds answered everything he'd throw at them. His calling was so good I figured he'd won multiple calling contests. His cadence was perfect; his volume was loud, and he would cut followed by a series of yelps. He would cluck, cut, yelp, purr, fighting purr and even kee-kee. He was good, and I was in awe of his ability to sound like the real thing. I was wishing he was sitting by me and not 200 yards out.

Unfortunately for him, he was sitting in the wide-open hardwoods. With that, the old gobbler knew the difference between a real turkey and a jive turkey. I figured the old tom could not see a hen in the



direction of all the calling and decided to stay safely in his strutting zone. After some time, I could tell his gobbler was leaving and heading in my direction. In the meantime, I could hear another turkey drumming close by. I purred softly with my call, and with my left hand opposite the direction of the gobbler, I began to scratch in the leaves. I mimicked the reverse 3 step scratch rhythm I'd heard hens do when foraging for acorns in the leaves. One, two...one; quick, quick...slow was the movement of my fingers as I drug them in the loud leaves. The tom cut me off with a gobble so loud that nearly blew my hat off! I knew he was close, and I was afraid to move.

A Strut Fest

I could hear the other bird making loud clucks as he approached our space. Not just one clucking tom, but two clucking toms! They began answering each other and coming together for a strut fest!

There were multiple birds just out of sight but within gun range. I needed them to come just a little closer and within view. Using my leg and the downhill slope as cover, I reached for my wing with my left hand. I gently raked the leaves with it and then flapped it twice against my leg to mimic a hen stretching and flapping her wing to her body. Loud gobblers erupted, startling me as my body shook against the large White Oak. I slowly raised my gun in their direction. I could hear them walking in the leaves. I could then see the beard followed by the body of a strutting tom coming from behind the opposing White Oak 25 yards away. Suddenly, two more toms strutted before him, followed by a third. I had four strutters in front of me at 25 yards. My breathing was erratic, and I could barely contain my excitement. When they separated, I "putted" with my mouth to get them to extend their heads from their strutting stance. I shot the one on the far left to not hurt the other three. His head hit the ground, and he flopped wildly as I jumped up to put my boot on him.

The other three ran and flew toward the expert caller, and I could hear him empty his shotgun as turkeys fluttered away in all directions. I'm sure he was surprised by all that had just happened, and I waited to see if he'd walk in my direction. After waiting and admiring the old tom for 10-15 minutes, I headed for my truck without meeting the other hunter. I figured he was either disappointed, mad or admiring his bird that he may have gotten during that volley of shotgun blasts. Public land hunting and competition are inevitable even when hunters respect boundaries and spread themselves out over the landscape.

We in Mississippi are fortunate to have access to some of the nation's best public-land turkey hunting. We have National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lands and MDWFP Wildlife Management Areas (see attached WMA map) that hold numerous turkeys. I've hunted many of these properties and have had success over the years. Turkey numbers fluctuate in different parts of the state due in large part to various conditions that effect the hatch. Therefore, it pays to do your research before you drive long distances only to be disappointed. Go online at www.MDWFP.com and check out the turkey program under the wildlife and hunting link for more information.

The managers of these properties do great work and strive for quality in wildlife and wildlife habitat management. I commend them for their efforts, and you should too, if given the chance.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EDWARD WALL



RESEARCH EDUCATION AND PROMOTION OF THE MISSISSIPPI RICE INDUSTRY

P.O. BOX 257 STONEVILLE, MS 38776

Turkey Focused Food Plots

Conventional and Un-Conventional Strategy

BY MITT WARDLAW

In my life, the things I'm most passionate about are my faith, family, friendships and the blurred boundaries between my work and hobbies. Here, you'll discover the things that ignite my deepest enthusiasm. Ranking not far from the top is my passion for land management. The land, with its rich history and sentimental value, holds a special place with me. I acknowledge and appreciate the uniqueness of every tract of land, finding joy in strategically devising plans to optimize its assets while also addressing its liabilities with equal importance. The deliberate management of habitat and wildlife can significantly impact the yield from the land. Just as there is a blunt contrast between a farmer who simply sows seeds in the spring with no more attention until the fall harvest, compared to one who methodically tends to the crop throughout the growing season, the difference in yield can be substantial. Investing time and effort into the intentional and strategic management of the habitat and wildlife can lead to a significant increase in yield compared to passively accepting the unmanaged output of the land.

My hunting passion is the wild turkey. I began turkey hunting relatively late in my life. It wasn't until college that I first entered the turkey woods. In those days, I believed you either had turkeys or you didn't, assuming you are in an area that had turkeys. My answers for the years a tract had silent springs - you went somewhere else for the remainder of the season or waited until next year. Fast forward to today, I believe turkeys respond to management as good or better than any other game species. You can absolutely affect your turkey population through proper management. Intentional management of food plots for turkeys is a part of that management. Factors such as purpose, placement, size, forage variety and orientation relative to other land features are key considerations when tailoring food plots specifically with turkey in mind. This attention to details can make a big difference in the success we see with food plots as it relates to turkey.

Most food plots in the Southeast have deer top of mind, with only an afterthought of turkey. Whether intentional or unintentional, the way we manage our plots can make them turkey centric or deer centric



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EDWARD WALL

food plots. The purpose for each food plot needs to be thoughtful and purposeful. Food plots serve many purposes. These purposes can range from killin' plots, destination plots, transition fields, summer time plots, winter forage and all can be wildlife species specific. When you consider the growth habits and utilization curves of the different food plots species, it can make them more or less attractive for individual game species. For example, a clover variety that is slow to establish in the fall then begins to give heavy vegetative growth the end of January and February may not be the best food plot strategy for a deer hunting plot. Contrast that with a food plot that is nearly waist high by April is probably not going to be very conducive for a mid-morning strut zone. There are several ways that you can manage and manipulate these food plots to make them more attractive for the purpose of turkeys.

When I was growing up, in my hunting club, our food plot management strategy consisted of walking away from our food plots on the last day of deer season and not giving them another thought until Labor Day. At which point the club members would reconvene on the infamous "workday." The member with the 8N Ford would bushhog the 7-foot tall mix of broomsedge, ragweed and goldenrod. Thinking back, that was probably the best deer habitat that we had on the entire place. Nonetheless, we would bushhog it once or twice



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EDWARD WALL

depending on how sharp the blades, and then disk 17 times until we could finally get to the point where we could achieve seed soil contact, broadcast our five-way mix with the picture of a big buck on the bag and start the whole process over again. I have honed my food plot strategy a little since those days. The better strategy that I have since adopted is to actively manage these food plots for year-round success. As testimony, I have both annual and perennial clover plots that I have not reseeded in 5-7 years.

Mindful forage from a year-round perspective is a concept often overlooked, and even less thoughtful from a turkey's perspective. Year-round focus on turkey plots can have several benefits over and above a killing plot.

The areas of focus, the specificity of the forage and the way we manage them will be made based on where on your land the turkeys tend to travel and frequent. There will be very intentional food plots that are managed specifically for deer, and likewise, there will be some that are laser-focused for

turkey. Not that they can't pull double duty, but the attention to details in the management strategy can and will tip the scale toward a certain wildlife species during a specific time of year.

When prioritizing turkey-focused food plots, selecting the right plant variety is crucial. Each type of forage boasts a distinct production curve, indicating when it's most abundant and palatable for wildlife. Consider the production curve as a guide to when the forage is both available and most attractive to wildlife. This will help you strategically think through the food plot types, varieties and placement for a full year-round plan.

One of my favorites is a perennial white clover. There are several persistent, low-growing varieties that I key in on for deliberate turkey food plots. Among its varieties, persistent, low-growing types are particularly favored for intentional turkey food plots. These varieties feature shorter vegetative structures, allowing turkeys to feed without

hindering their visibility or getting their wings wet on dewy mornings, both factors they tend to avoid. The vertical height of food plot plants is directly correlated to the time a turkey spends in it at different times of the year. A three-foot-tall food plot in April is not going to be the ideal location for a gobbler's strut zone. As opposed to a 4-6 inch tall perennial white clover stand in April could be the spot he spends the majority of his day. Crimson clover, another favorite, is an

annual variety, blooms in mid- to late-April, making it an excellent option as an earlier maturing variety that will be in flower during part of the turkey season. Clovers are highly attractive to insects during their flowering stage, significantly enhancing their appeal to foraging turkeys. Insects are a crucial component of a turkey's diet, and to expand turkey bugging habitat, enhancing insect habitat is a necessary first step.

In areas with no wild hogs, and where larger, open fields and equipment availability aren't limiting factors,

one underutilized strategy is a corn and bean rotation. Simply put, it is magic! On a tract where there are enough field acres, I maintain an ongoing rotation, splitting it 50% corn and 50% beans, alternating annually. This approach not only provides high-quality summer soybean forage for deer but also delivers unmatched value through the yield in both the corn and soybean grain. The key lies in finding the right balance of acreage, grain yield and deer population to achieve an equilibrium where there's leftover grain through turkey season. This approach should be illegal!

As late winter transitions into early spring, you will see the cereal grains start to tiller and get big and rank. This generally comes at the cost of the forage quality of the cereal grains from a deer's perspective. As this happens, they get less palatable and you will see the preference for the cereal grains diminish. If the cereals are growing in companion to clovers, the cereals will begin to compete for space and



resources that can limit forage yield of the clovers. A strategic herbicide application of clethodim and 2,4-DB herbicide in February will release the clover to grow unchecked through spring. This will accomplish two things. First, it will eliminate any grass and broadleaf weeds from competing with the clover, and second, it keeps the unwanted competition from growing tall enough to deter turkeys from using it in late spring. As you do not like walking across a high food plot in heavy dew, neither does that turkey. Depending on the type of clover, the vertical height of the plot, in the absence of the cereal grains, will be very attractive for turkeys to spend a lot of time.

After clover matures into the summer months, one or two non-selective herbicide applications such as glyphosate will keep the summer annual and perennial weeds suppressed. This strategy makes planting in the fall much easier. Whether planting with a no-till drill or disking ahead of a broadcast planting of your fall food plot blend, starting in a clean field has big advantages. With little to no actively growing plants in late summer, moisture conservation is maximized. The additional soil moisture retained will have your food plots germinating while others are waiting on a rain. When managing annual food plots, this is a good approach.

Intentional turkey food plots are not just about ambushing a long beard. They can more importantly contribute to the longevity and sustainability of turkey populations in the areas that we hunt. In order to do this, the success of the hen, and more specifically the success of the nest and brood rearing, is very important to having sustained huntable populations of gobblers into the future. This is an area that I feel is given less consideration and arguably the most important. One such example is managing wheat through maturity along roadsides for great brood rearing food plots. Wheat is a great winter forage that is a common ingredient found in most white-tail deer food plots. However, wheat grain is rarely considered in food plot conversations. The seed head of wheat is highly attractive to deer, turkey, dove and quail, not to mention countless nongame species. In areas of high deer density, the seed rarely makes it to the ground. When growing wheat seed intentionally for turkeys this seems counterproductive. The answer may be in the variety that you grow. There are two different variety characteristics in a wheat seed head known as awned and awnless (bearded) wheat.

I routinely plant forage variety trials on my farm (Figure 1). One observation that I routinely see is the deer's preference for awnless wheat seed and likewise avoidance of the awned varieties. The intentional planting of awned wheat varieties can be a natural deterrent to protect the wheat seed from over browsing by the local deer population. There are many benefits to mature wheat that is strategically placed around your tract of land. The timing of wheat maturity aligns with the nesting and brood-rearing phases. This is important because the 3'-4' tall vertical structure of the mature wheat offers protection against overhead predators, such as hawks and owls. Moreover, its plentiful, high-energy seed source makes it an excellent choice for early summer food plots for turkeys and young poults. This timing corresponds with late nesting and brood-rearing seasons that maximizes the advantages of wheat as a crucial escape cover and food source during this pivotal period. Managing wheat for grain yield requires different management practices than managing wheat for forage production in a deer plot. In order to maximize yield, a supplemental application of nitrogen fertilizer will be necessary to maximize yield potential. This initial nitrogen application should be applied when wheat breaks winter dormancy and slowly resumes growth. This will normally occur sometime in February depending on seasonal temperatures. After wheat starts strong vertical growth and stem elongation begins, typically occurring in March, a second nitrogen application is often needed. These ap-



Figure 1: On-farm wheat variety trial. Side by side comparison between awned and awnless varieties.



Figure 2: Mature wheat on roadsides. Its clumping growth habit allows great access for young turkey poults to move around freely on the ground while at the same time providing great overhead security cover from flying predators.

lications are typically 50-60 lbs. of N/ac. (100 – 130 lbs. Urea/ac.) each. Weed control will be important to keep the wheat weed free after maturity. This can be accomplished with an application of a broadleaf herbicide such as 2,4-D or Clarity.

I am very intentional about the locations of these different food plot systems, keeping in mind when and where turkeys will get maximum benefit from each plot type. The area on my hunting tracts that I benefit from the mature wheat most are my “daylighted” road sides. These are access roads throughout my property that I have widened from a 20' road bed to a 60-100 foot wide corridor with the road in the center. These roads give continuity throughout the tract, close proximity to cover and abundant food if managed correctly; all important resources to an upcoming clutch of young turkeys (Figure 2).

We would be remiss if we didn't consider chufa in the conversation of turkey-focused food plots. When done correctly, chufa plots have little rival in attractiveness to a turkey. But, forget chufa if hogs are around. Chufa is typically grown on sandy soils for the purpose of a turkey food plot. Chufa can be grown on a wide variety of soil types; however, the attractiveness of chufa is the tuber that is located below the soil surface. The sandy soil makes it much easier for the turkeys

to scratch up the tubers. These tubers are highly sought after by wild turkeys, ducks and other wildlife. Turkeys scratch the tubers out of the ground throughout the fall, winter and spring. At first, turkeys may overlook chufa because it is an unfamiliar food source. If the turkeys have not found the tubers the first fall after planting, disk strips in the plot to expose them. Weed control is accomplished using selective preemergent herbicides, such as Treflan and Prowl. Incorporating these into the soil will help ensure chufa will be relatively weed free.

A more unconventional “food plot” strategy is strip disking. This is a land management technique that is used to disturb the soil in strategic areas to release the native seed bank, creating patches of bare ground scattered within areas of vegetation. These diverse vegetation strips provide different food sources, cover and nesting opportunities. Through several years of trial and error and keen observation, I have found the best results are when these strips are located along side food plots, mature timber and roadsides. Strip disking, or disking, adjacent to nesting cover is a good idea. That way hens and poults can move directly from nest cover to brood rearing areas with minimal exposure. The open spaces offer ideal conditions for turkey hens to lead their broods in and around the sparse vegetation that allows the young poults to move freely while foraging and reduces the risk of predation by providing better visibility and close proximity to escape cover. Overall, strip disking is a versatile land management tool that can be used to improve habitat quality and diversity.

Another way to add a next-level attractiveness to your turkey tract is by incorporating gravel into a portion of your road system. Grit is an essential ingredient and often time overlooked aspect to a wild turkey's diet. Turkeys are going to grit regularly, usually several times a day. They have to have it for their digestive process! Depending on

your land's proximity to a gravel source, good spots for turkey to “grit” may be harder to come by than other tracts. Assuming you don't have gravel on your internal road system already. Spread a dump truck width of gravel for 20-50 yards around your properties road system every ¼ mile can be magic. Where this is a limiting factor, it can be one of the most attractive places on your hunting tract.

As a land manager entrusted with taking care of a piece of land, I feel a deep sense of responsibility with every management decision I make. When it comes to managing wild turkeys, there's a lot to consider, like hunting regulations, keeping an eye on predator impact, figuring out how many turkeys we have and even making sure there's enough quality habitat. Food plots are just one part of the bigger plan.

The journey of a turkey hunter evolves from the pursuit of the kill to a deeper appreciation of the hunting experience, to ultimately culminating in a long-term commitment to sustainability. Every action in land management isn't just about attracting more turkeys; it's about conservation of their future populations. To truly maximize the success of wild turkey populations, we must identify and address the most limiting factors on each tract of land, purposefully and strategically. In doing so, we not only enhance our hunting opportunities but also ensure a legacy of thriving turkey populations for generations to come.

Mitt Wardlaw is a co-owner in both Southern Ag Consulting and Wildlife Investments, these two companies specialize in resource management. With a team of skilled professionals including agronomists, wildlife biologists, resource consultants, certified herbicide and prescribed fire applicators he helps lead the companies in assisting clients to achieve their long-term resource management objectives, whether in agriculture, wildlife, forestry or general land improvement.

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I am Catching Them, but I am not...

BY PARKER FREW
 Delta Wildlife Staff

Growing up and spending my entire life in the Mississippi Delta, I have always been fascinated and obsessed with bass fishing. The thrill of the "unknown" or the unpredictable ability of it has always kept me hooked on looking for that next fish and learning how to catch more. As with everything else in our world, things have developed and technology has advanced. Some might think that a hobby such as fishing outdoors all by yourself would be the last thing to be impacted by technology and development. But, my how things have changed. One such innovation that has been gaining popularity over the years is the use of forward-facing sonar. For those unfamiliar with forward-facing sonar, it is a type of fish finder that provides real-time imaging of the area in front of your boat. This technology lets you see underwater structures, schools of fish and individual fish in incredible detail. Returning to where I started with the "unknown," forward-facing sonar has opened another door leading to the "unknown."

Early on, I was fortunate enough to be able to start using forward-facing sonar products. Within a year of the invention, I had one on the front of my boat and began to spend as much time as possible learning how to use this technology and have it to my advantage. Being an avid tournament bass fisherman, we always look for an edge and push the envelope to obtain somewhat of a sneaky advantage over our competition. While so excited, I quickly realized it was not the easy button of bass fishing. The images and quality of the graphics were outstanding! I was seeing things I had never seen before. But at the end of the day, what in the world am I looking at? It was almost as if I had utterly reset everything, I thought I had learned and knew about bass fishing my entire life.

Testing The Waters

With all, over this past winter, I decided that even as confused as I was about how



Parker's bass success

everything works or what I am looking at, I was going to dedicate the winter to learning this technology and finding ways I can

implement it into my tournament system to avoid costly mistakes on the water. I started out by going bass fishing in some places



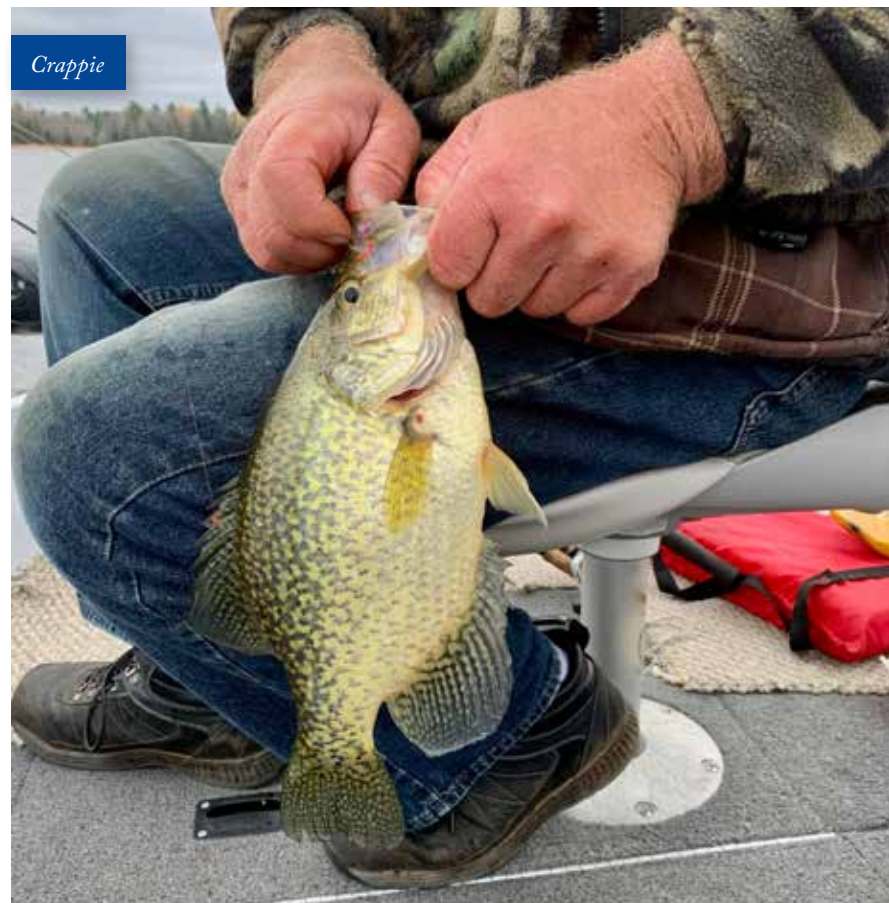
Forward Facing Sonar allows anglers to have a two-dimensional live view of everything going on under the water around their boat. Notice the fish being picked up by the Garmin Livescope.

I was very familiar with, areas where I had recently caught big bass, and places that I thought I would understand. As soon as the transducer reached the water, just like always, there was a handful of fish residing in a brush pile. They looked huge to me, but after repeated casts and a few hours, I faced the reality of zero luck. I can see them, but they aren't biting. My initial assumption when this happens is that maybe these aren't bass? Perhaps they are crappie or some other fish. With that in mind, I devised a plan to come back the next day with different tackle to try and catch them if they were crappie.

The next day, the process repeats itself. My forward-facing sonar shows fish and them actively moving in and out of the brush pile but with zero luck and catching them. Frustrated beyond belief, I decided to go somewhere else to do anything but stare at those same fish. I moved down the lake to an area I was familiar with but less knowledgeable than the others. Upon arrival, my screen lights up with fish, if not a hundred, a thousand. The water was nearly 25 feet deep and freezing. Using my thoughts and instincts, this struck me as almost obvious, this isn't crappie and this isn't bass. With that in mind, I aimlessly dropped my jig down to see how these fish would react and hoped to get lucky enough to snag one and see what they were. Carp? Catfish? Shad? I was completely confused about what this could be and how there could be so many.

To make a long story short, I finally stopped going to that spot about a week later. From that first drop to the last, I was able to catch nearly 500 crappie by myself. For days, I would go out, reel fish in and toss them back as fast as I could. Just one week before, I couldn't identify what a fish looked like or

how to catch them using forward-facing sonar. Five hundred crappie later, I truly felt like I could see their fins and now tell exactly what was always going on under my boat. This was mind-blowing to me. I grew up absolutely resenting the thought of crappie fishing. In one week, I learned that fish were almost all over the lake and that techniques we had practiced our entire lives may not be



the best way to catch them. In fact, the first brush pile in this story full of mystery fish ended up being a place where I would return and try something different and catch some of the biggest bass I caught in 2023.

So, the lessons I learned and take away from this experience are: Don't let forward-facing sonar drive you into doom and gloom on how to catch fish. Embrace technology with an open mind. In my case, it was crappie fishing with a single pole and a tiny jig. Let the fish tell you where and how they feed on the given day. Use this technology to eliminate areas or delineate species apart from each other. Sometimes, the spot you've been fishing for your entire life may be way better than you think or way worse. As humans, it is natural for us to make assumptions or build scenarios in our heads that we believe are concrete and cannot be changed. At the end of the day, fish do not have day jobs; they don't wear a wristwatch and can do whatever they want regardless of what that book or magazine you read says.

Parker Frew is a Delta Wildlife Biologist. Parker also fishes in many local bass tournaments and is a member of several bass fishing organizations.



Fly Fishing with Jeffrey Jones

Fly fishing is my passion. I jokingly tell anyone listening that it's what I want to do when I grow up. I'm also passionate about teaching folks how to fly fish. I started part-time guiding fly-fishing trips to spread the joy of the sport even more. I took on the challenge of guide fishing to teach clients how to tie a fly, cast a fly and catch fish. For the past few years, I've been taking clients on guided trips to the natural state of Arkansas to both the Little Red River near Heber Springs and the area of the White River close to the Trout Capital of the World, which is the town of Cotter in pursuit of rainbow, cutthroat, brook and brown trout species. The state record brown trout, formerly the all-tackle world record at 40 lbs., 4 oz, was caught on the Little Red River. These rivers are a 12-month fishery and the state stocks these rivers with rainbow trout throughout the year. Brown trout used to be stocked but are now wild, spawning in these rivers. Anglers can catch great-sized fish of various trout species in these waters year-round. I prefer October because it is a great time to fish the spawn, which provides plenty of action.

The river level is also an important determinant of where we'll be fishing. Since dams control both river levels, we must monitor the water level before traveling to a targeted area. Most of our trips are one day, but we also take longer trips. It's up to the fisherman's wallet. Plenty of lodges are available, and there are campsites to choose from in cooler weather. We always purchase our license online before leaving for our destination because we usually get to the river before the bait shops open. All fishermen can buy a license and trout stamp at the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission website, www.agfc.com. You can purchase a year's fishing license or a three-day pass. You also must buy a trout stamp. We go early in the morning because I like to be there at first light.

I can have you from the Mississippi Delta on the Little Red in three hours or the White River within five hours. Whichever we choose, we can be on crystal clear, 50-degree water catching trout. We either wade, boat or kayak, depending on what the clients want and what they are physically capable



Gar fly patterns tied by Jeffrey



Jeffrey with a Longnose Gar

of doing. That's some excellent fishing, and nothing beats it in my book. Whether fishing or guiding, I'm always up for a fly-fishing trip. I can set you up with a reputable local guide if I'm unavailable to guide you.

Warm Water Fly-fishing

Fly-fishing in the Mississippi Delta allows me to practice my technique while targeting even bigger fish.

One of my favorite fish to pursue in the spring is the longnose gar. They are strong fighters and can be found in numbers stacked in the eddy waters behind our rivers' rock dikes, feeding on skipjack. I catch 3' - 4' longnose gar regularly, which is always super fun. I cast an 8-wt. rod with a fly made of nylon rope with a 25 lb. monofilament line, pulling a trailer hook 2" from the bottom of the lure's skirt. I like to use a 0X tippet to connect the lure to my fly-line. Due to their sharp teeth, I usually attach four inches of 20 lb. monofilament end bite tippet to improve catch opportunities.

I also target largemouth bass and bream in the spring. For largemouth I throw a 6-wt. rod tipped with a topwater frog or an elk hair caddis.

For bream, I use a 3-wt. bamboo rod with an 8X tippet and tiny dry flies. Fishing with such a light setup helps me to prepare for the bigger, more robust fish like brown trout in river currents.

The sport is addictive, in a good way, and I've seen it grow exponentially over the past few years. It unites father and son, mother and daughter and gets folks off their phones and laptops, out of the cubicles and into God's creation. It doesn't take much in the way of fishing tackle. You can get out on the water with a fly rod, reel and a few flies for as little as \$50. At Delta Outdoors, we stock a lot of fly-fishing tackle. But understand, it's not the fishing tackle that makes the fisherman. Fly fishing takes skill, and that's why we at



Jeffrey sharing a foam cricket fly pattern with a warmouth's mouth

Delta Outdoors also teach fly-fishing lessons to anyone and everyone, whether you have some experience or no experience. Many people are interested in learning to cast a fly rod but don't want to go on a trip until they are more confident in fly-casting. I can teach them and help build their confidence. Anyone interested can call the store at (662)843-9109 or message us on Facebook to get the rates.

Jeffrey Jones is a passionate fly-fisherman/flyfishing guide from Greenville, Mississippi, and is part owner of Delta Outdoors located in Cleveland.

River Shrimp

BY WILL PREVOST
Delta Wildlife Staff

The Lower Mississippi River is home to a myriad of aquatic species, each contributing to the rich biodiversity of this iconic river system. Among the fascinating inhabitants is *Macrobrachium ohione*, commonly known as the Ohio River shrimp or simply "river shrimp." Shrimp are typically thought of as a marine species, and I personally had no idea there were edible freshwater shrimp in the Mississippi River until recently. This species has a relatively abundant presence in Mississippi along the river and its tributaries.

Historically, the Ohio River shrimp could be found from the Gulf of Mexico to the upper reaches of the Ohio River. Although named after the Ohio River, the species is now confined to areas below the southern tip of Missouri. There is also a smaller population along the Atlantic coast. The river shrimp is similar in appearance to marine shrimp species, but stands out by bearing a single oversized claw. These shrimp possess a slender body that is typically 2-4 inches long. Their coloration varies, often displaying shades of brown, green or olive, providing effective camouflage in the diverse habitats found in the lower Mississippi River. River shrimp are omnivores that typically feed on detritus, small invertebrates and organic matter. They typically inhabit side channels and borders of the main river channel, where plant and animal matter are available for foraging. While Ohio River shrimp are not the only freshwater shrimp species in the Mississippi River, they are the largest and most commonly utilized for food and bait.

Since brackish water is essential for the early development of the river shrimp larvae, females carry eggs on the underside of their abdomen all the way to the Gulf in the spring. If the female does not make it to brackish water by hatching time, the tiny hatchlings must finish the journey, floating downstream to the brackish estuaries. If they do not make it to salt water within five days, they will die. Hatchlings spend a few months in brackish water, then after developing to a certain stage, they migrate up to hundreds of miles upriver in the late summer and fall by swimming or walking in shallow water along the bank. They spend most of their life further upriver until it is time to spawn again.

In the pre-colonial times, river shrimp would migrate all the way to the upper reaches of the Ohio River and back again. This 2,000-mile round trip was a remarkable feat for the 2-4 inch long shrimp. For the better part of American history, we have been trying to tame the Mississippi River and optimize it for transportation. As a result of this, the river has been contained by levees and its meandering

bends have been cutoff in order to make the journey to the Gulf shorter. With the River leveed and straightened, the current now flows too fast for the river shrimp to complete its historic migration. The shrimp are still abundant enough to support a fishery in the Lower Mississippi River, but they are becoming increasingly rare in the northern reaches of their historic range. Interestingly, the population of river shrimp on the Atlantic coast has remained relatively healthy along most of its historic range. This fact adds confidence to the theory that channelization of the Mississippi River has affected the range of river shrimp.

When settlers first arrived, freshwater shrimp were a very important source of food and income. The species was once a market staple from Louisiana to as far inland as Illinois and Indiana. As recently as the late 1900s, there was a commercial market for river shrimp as food in Louisiana. Today the shrimp are primarily harvested for personal use as food or commercially harvested for bait. River shrimp are an often overlooked, but highly effective, bait for catfish.

While commercial operations often utilize nets, river shrimp are commonly trapped using wooden "shrimp boxes" or wire traps. Since river shrimp are omnivores, a wide variety of bait can be used. This can include vegetable scraps, decaying organic matter, meat or fish scraps, and commercially produced baits. Historically, cottonseed meal cakes were a favorite bait of commercial trappers. Traps are typically set among willow or cottonwood trees near the shoreline when water levels rise in the early spring. Spring is the best time to catch shrimp since females are migrating south to spawn at this time. Catch success is primarily affected by water level. Early spring typically produces the highest levels of success, while numbers taper off in late spring and into summer. River shrimp can be used in any recipe that involves shrimp, but are typically boiled in heavily seasoned water, in the same manner you would boil marine shrimp species. Their flavor and texture are unique and have been described as closer to a crawfish than a shrimp.

Many people in Louisiana still utilize the river shrimp for food and bait, but further north the species is mostly overlooked. I think that many people are not even aware there is a freshwater species of shrimp in the Mississippi River, much less one that is capable of a thousand-mile migration. Though its range has been shortened, it is still relatively abundant within a few hundred miles of the gulf. This fascinating little species of shrimp serves as another reminder of the diverse range of species that the Lower Mississippi River supports.



River shrimp



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The Art of Falconry

BY STEELE HENDERSON
Delta Wildlife Staff

Falconry, also known as hawking, is an ancient sport that involves training birds of prey to hunt small game. It has a rich and fascinating history that dates back thousands of years.

The origins of falconry can be traced back to ancient Mesopotamia, around 2,000 BC. The Babylonians practiced it and considered falcons symbols of power and royalty. The art of falconry then spread to other ancient civilizations, such as Egypt, Persia and China.

During the medieval period, falconry reached its peak in Europe. It was popular among the nobility and was considered a prestigious pastime. Kings and knights were often depicted with falcons in their artwork and heraldry. A strict code of conduct governed the sport, and falconers were highly respected.

Falconry continued to evolve over the centuries with advancements in breeding, training and equipment. The development of firearms in the 17th century led to a decline in popu-

larity as a hunting technique, but it continued to be practiced as a recreational sport.

In the modern era, falconry has gained recognition as a cultural heritage and is practiced in many countries worldwide. It is now regulated by organizations and associations that promote conservation and ethical practices. Falconry enthusiasts continue to train and fly birds of prey, fostering a deep connection between humans and these majestic creatures.

Today, falconry is a sport and a tool for conservation and education. It is used in various wildlife management programs to control pest populations and promote biodiversity. Falconry displays and demonstrations are also popular attractions in many zoos and wildlife centers, providing visitors with a glimpse into ancient art and its close relationship with nature.

Falconry has a long and storied history that spans different civilizations and cultures. From its ancient origins to its modern-day practice, falconry has captivated the human imagination



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Harvey Leslie with his falcon



Terms you need to know:

- **Pitch:** The falcon flies up or mounts up as we say to its desired pitch or altitude and circles overhead in anticipation of the quarry (ducks) being flushed from a pond.
- **Stoop:** Once a falcon reaches its pitch and locks onto its prey, it will begin its descent, known as a stoop.
- **Waiting on:** The falcon has mounted up by flying higher and higher, usually in large circles like a corkscrew to reach its pitch. After it reaches its pitch, it waits over the falconer to flush the quarry.
- **Rake:** A falcon may rake off as it mounts up because it sees something else in the distance and pursues it. It might be another raptor or a crow, cattle egret, pigeon or anything that catches its attention and pulls it away from mounting up and the falconer. It may return on its own, but if not, you must call it into the lure or retrieve it.
- **Make in:** When the falcon has captured its quarry, the falconer will slowly make way to the falcon to pick it up after it has eaten some of the quarry (duck), and you coax it up onto your glove with a portion of its meal to finish eating the remaining ration.
- **Lure:** An essential piece of equipment made with leather padded in the shape of a bird, with meat attached to call the falcon in when the falconer needs to get the bird back to him. For example, if the falcon doesn't catch its quarry, like a duck, the falcon must be called in using the lure. They are trained to do it initially, so the falcon understands it means food. The falconer allows the falcon to eat the most significant portion of its meal on the lure during training to reinforce its importance to come to it immediately when it is used.
- **Hood:** This is made of leather and fits over the falcon's head and eyes to keep it calm when transporting it to and from the field.
- **Anklets:** The part around the legs of the falcon with grommets. One on each leg.
- **Jesses:** A jess goes through each anklet grommet on the falcon's leg. It is attached to a Jess extender and a swivel, with a leash attached to the other end of the swivel, for controlling your falcon on the glove or tying it to a block perch.

and forged a unique bond between humans and birds of prey. As a testament to its enduring appeal, falconry continues to thrive as both a traditional sport and a means of conservation.

Harvey and Robert

Although falconry has been around for centuries, it wasn't until a couple of men started doing it in Mississippi that it gained some notoriety from the state. I was fortunate enough to tag along with these two men, Harvey Leslie and Robert McGuire.

Both very experienced falconers, Harvey stumbled upon falconry by happenstance while studying organic chemistry in the stacks of the library at Ole Miss. Harvey stated that he got bored and stopped studying for a minute to look at reference books that happened to be on falconry. The book Harvey opened up was from the 1920s. Inside was a picture of a peregrine falcon sitting on a block beside a bird dog. This being one of the coolest things Harvey had ever seen, he began to dig and do much more research into this. This lit a fire that eventually led him to a man in Memphis who practiced the art of falconry. This man became Harvey's mentor in the art. What hooked Harvey on the sport was his mentor's friend in Missouri, who used male peregrines to hunt doves. Harvey stated that seeing that in person hooked him for life.

Robert also stumbled upon falconry at the age of 12 while visiting his first cousin in Palos Verde, California, in 1970. Upon his arrival he learned that his cousin, Marty Ellis, who was 13 at the time, was a practicing falconer. While Marty himself did not have a bird, his neighbor did. Marty took Robert over to introduce them, and it was during this meeting, seeing his neighbor's Red-Tailed Hawk, that Robert became infatuated with falconry. He says he hasn't let up and is still learning about this ancient sport. That was 54 years ago!

My experience with them

Although many types of hawks or falcons are used in this sport to hunt various prey animals, Harvey and Robert have peregrine falcons that they use to harvest waterfowl. Peregrines have the fastest airspeed of any bird on this planet, reaching speeds upward of 200mph on the stoop, which is absolutely insane to see in person. After one hunt, I can see why these two have such a passion for it. Although our hunt wasn't successful, watching Harvey and Robert with their birds was still amazing. I didn't get to see one of them take a duck, but I watched them get very close, and that was beautiful in and of itself. With falconry, I can see how it isn't really about harvesting the animal, although that is a plus,



A falcon's hood custom made by Robert McGuire

especially for the hungry falcon. It's also about the bond they have between them and their birds. These wild-caught birds have gained the trust of over a couple of years of working with them constantly. It's something about taking something out of the wild and gaining its trust that makes it much more rewarding.

As an avid deer and duck hunter using a gun or bow, I went into this hunt as green as possible. I learned a lot through these two individuals. The way these men hunt isn't just sending a falcon into the air to get a duck. It's more thought out than that. Before they even go out into the field, they determine whether the bird is hungry by monitoring slight weight fluctuations. Once in the field, they hunt in a large-scale spot and stalk fashion with a falcon. Your actions must be tactical and thought out to successfully harvest waterfowl with a falcon.

First, you must be in an area with the correct terrain and topography. You can't just do this anywhere.

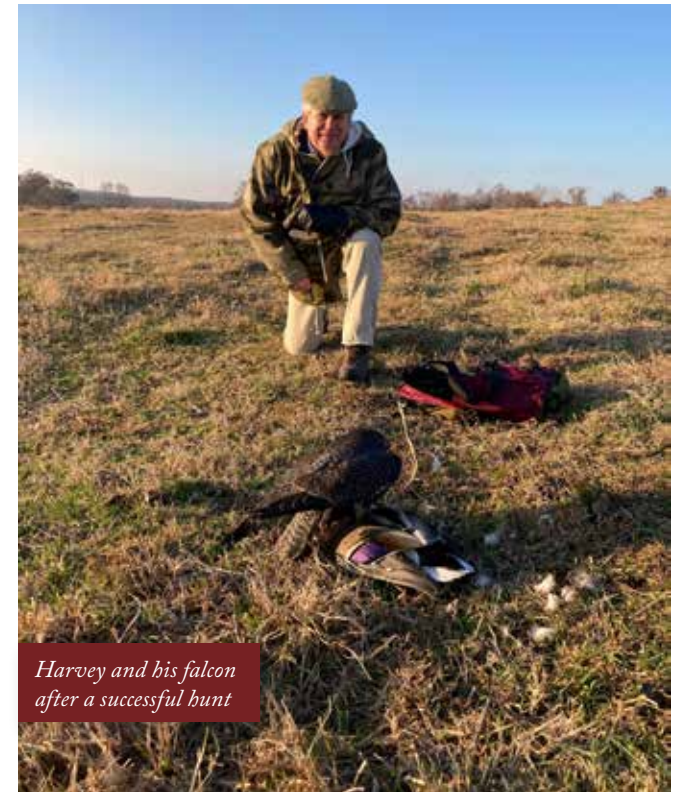
Fun Facts

You probably heard phrases stemming from falconry but didn't know where they came from.

- **"Hoodwinked"** stems from the use of the hood on the falcon that is used to blind them to make sure they are calm.
- **"Someone is under your thumb"** comes from holding a falcon on the fist. Their jesses or leather straps attached to the bird run between your index finger and under your thumb; that is where the phrase comes from.
- **"She's got me wrapped around her finger!"** The leash attached to the bird wrapped around your bottom two fingers is where this phrase originated.
- **"Old Hag"** is a term used to describe an old beat-up falcon that was haggard, which has since been shortened to hag, coining the term old hag.

pitch, Harvey and Robert run up to flush the waterfowl from the pond, flushing them overland where the falcon can stoop down and kill its prey. Watching this firsthand was a privilege. Although the falcon was unsuccessful at its attempt the particular day I was there, it was still amazing seeing the animal come down at speeds that great in an attempt to harvest a duck. Falcons usually strike the other bird with their feet, knocking it to the ground. They will then swoop back and land on top of their quarry.

Once a falcon has overtaken its quarry, whether a duck, a pigeon or a dove, it will use its Tomial tooth to break the neck of its quarry. The tomial teeth are notches on each side of the falcon's top mandible designed explicitly for this task. This is a characteristic of falcons, not hawks. Hawks will use their powerful, strong feet and talons to dispatch their quarry.



Harvey and his falcon after a successful hunt

Falconry classes

There are three classes of falconers. They are the apprentice, general and master levels. Both Harvey and Robert are master-level falconers. You can become an apprentice falconer at the age of 12, and you can upgrade to a general at the age of 16. Regardless of age, to become a falconer, you must start at the apprentice level. You may upgrade to a general permit if you are 16 or older and have held an apprentice-level permit. Once you have possessed a falconry permit for seven years, you can upgrade to a master falconer.

The apprentice-level falconer can only possess one wild juvenile trapped raptor. The first-year raptor can be a red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk or American kestrel. Under an apprentice permit, you cannot take a raptor from a nest.

The general and master class level permits allow you to possess more raptors and various raptors used in falconry.

Training process

Training a falcon requires patience, skill and a deep understanding of the bird's behavior. The process typically involves several key steps. First, the falconer must establish trust with the bird through regular handling and feeding. Creating a solid relationship between the falconer and the falcon is essential. Next, the falconer introduces the falcon to a training area, gradually increasing the distance between them and the bird's perch. This helps the falcon develop its flying skills and learn to return to the falconer. The falconer also uses a technique called "creance training," which involves attaching a light line to the bird's leg to prevent it from flying away while allowing it some freedom to fly and return. The falcon is then introduced to live prey to enhance its hunting instincts. Finally, the falconer reinforces the bird's training through regular exercise, flying sessions and positive reinforcement techniques. Over time, the falcon becomes a skilled hunting partner, responding to the falconer's commands and successfully catching prey.



RUSSELL REYNOLDS

Introduction to Long-Range Shooting

BY JODY ACOSTA
Delta Wildlife Staff

“Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance” is a quote that my grandfather introduced me to a long time ago that has stuck with me and echoed time and time again.

This article may appear to be at an odd time; usually, for this spring magazine, we are talking about turkey hunting or focusing on shotgunning of some sort. I’m not even remotely thinking about next year’s deer season when this year’s season is not far in the rearview mirror.

I admit I often have to find a subject that interests me to put together an article, and I have recently been bitten by the “long-range” bug, so that’s what we’re looking at today. Let me stop right here and say just because this article is about long-range shooting, in no way, shape or form is this me advocating taking unethical shots at live animals.

The main reason I am interested in long-range shooting is to become more proficient as a rifleman at normal hunting distances, as I obviously needed another expensive and time-consuming hobby. I

am already pretty confident going out to 350 yards with my deer rifles, something that someone from the Delta may not think is “long-range,” but someone from South Mississippi or the Hills may think is three times farther than they would even consider shooting. Admittedly, I only take shots at those distances when I check my zero before hunting season with my rifles. This is not an ethics discussion or an article to pit sportsmen against each other for the choice of shots they take or the hunting styles they enjoy, so we are focusing on long-distance paper punching for this article.

So, where does one start with long-range shooting?

“The internet, duh!” which I’m 99% sure would be the response given by one of my daughters if they were asked that question...but they’d be right since in this day and age, anything and everything you want to learn about is but a few clicks away.

I found a few important considerations when getting into long-range shooting during my research.

The first would be ensuring proper form by getting one-on-one

training or enrolling in a class catering to long-range shooting fundamentals. This will simply ensure your form is correct and you correct any bad habits before attempting to shoot at longer distances that will slow the learning process.

Whether you’re trying to shoot a deer at 200 yards or bang a steel target at a mile, good form and understanding the variables affecting long-range shots are critical. At longer ranges, previously unnoticed flaws in form or inaccuracies caused by equipment can become magnified tremendously, so ensuring good shooting fundamentals is vital. Getting the once-over by a qualified instructor can drastically reduce the learning curve.

After ensuring the fundamentals are covered comes the equipment component. You may think your rifle is the “most important” factor, but if you ask anyone who shoots long-distance, their answer may surprise you.

“You can’t shoot what you can’t see” is a quote I’ve heard answering that question.

Optics

The first piece of equipment required for long-range shooting is a quality optic/scope with adjustable Mil or MOA turrets and a reticle designed for targeting at a distance. Don’t skimp on the scope; it is a “buy once-cry once” investment and perhaps one of the most important purchases for long-range shooting. With a good scope, most hunting rifles these days are more than capable of shooting long distances; when shopping for a scope, a few critical areas to key in on are:

- **Turrets that track consistently with accurate adjustments:** There are factory options geared towards target shooting or universal long-range applications, or you can get custom turrets from some scope manufacturers or aftermarket options calibrated to the ballistics of your specific load/rifle combo. You send in the data needed for your gun and are returned a turret with the clicks or adjustments easily identified by distance. I have these on a couple of guns, but be mindful that if you make any drastic changes in elevation or temperature/shooting environment, they may be a little off. One of the cons I often see in regard to custom turrets is the “what if you have to or want to change ammo.” In that case, you must update your turret to ensure the load data and clicks/adjustments match up. With that in mind, many long-range shooters stick to MOA or Mil-style turrets and adjust their clicks based on ballistic calculations.

- **Good quality glass:** Along with adjustable turrets, good crisp and sharp glass is vital to hits at longer ranges. Again, you can’t shoot what you can’t see.

- **Magnification:** This is important but depends on personal choice and preference. Do you want to be able to count hairs on a coyote’s head at 300 yards or hit a large steel plate?

- **Focal Plane:** In the first focal plane scopes, the reticle will grow and shrink with the magnification level, and reticle measurement spacing will always be accurate. This is valuable when shooting at variable or unknown distances. The reticle image is fixed in the second focal plane scope (which most people are more familiar with). The measurements are only accurate at one magnification level, which is more suitable for fixed-distance shooting environments. One must be mindful of this when using etched reticles with hold-over marks built into the reticle, and it’s worth checking to see what magnification they are “calibrated” for or true and accurate.

Ballistic Calculating Help

The flight path of a bullet can be calculated to a high level of precision using a ballistics calculator, which incorporates the physics of external ballistics, using measured environmental data and accurate

information about the target, gun and projectile. These are available in many products these days, from Binoculars/Rangefinders to handheld weather meters with ballistic calculators built into apps for smartphones and other devices. I’m not getting too far off in the weeds on this topic because there are many options for calculating ballistics on the market. The quick and dirty summary is the more accurate your data collection is on your environment, and the more precise your rifle, ammo and target information is, the more accurate the ballistic calculations will be.



YAUHEN AKULICH

Rifle

The accuracy of a rifle is measured by how tight a grouping it can shoot, often expressed as the MOA it can hold. MOA (minute of angle) is an angle measurement that can be roughly simplified to one MOA = one inch for every 100 yards of distance (to “get technical,” an MOA is 1.047” at 100 yards). Still, for simplicity’s sake, a one MOA rifle can shoot a one-inch group at 100 yards, a 5-inch group at 500 yards and a 10-inch group at 1,000 yards. Most rifles on the market used as hunting rifles can shoot one MOA without modification with the proper ammunition. There are also a lot of “sub-moa” guarantees with different rifle manufacturers, and pretty much all of your custom rifle builders will guarantee the accuracy of their works of art.

Suppose you have tried different ammo without achieving the desired results or perhaps just gotten on a “modifications” kick. In that case, one can do a few things to tighten groups with relatively minimal investment usually.

- **Adjustable Triggers:** A good trigger is vital to accuracy. The weight the trigger pull is measured in can be personal preference, but for a long-range setup, somewhere in the 1-3lb range should work well.

- **Quality “Match Grade” Optic Mounts:** Great scope mounts keep a great scope from moving, ensuring repeatable accuracy. NEVER SKIMP on optics mounts or ensuring the optic is mounted correctly!

- **Stocks:** A properly fitting rifle will make life much easier. No one likes to shoot when they are not comfortable with the fit and feel of a gun. There are adjustment areas in the length of pull, cheek weld height, and many other areas you may want to fine-tune.

- **Barrels:** You can swap barrels if you need to squeeze the most accuracy possible out of an otherwise stock rifle, but most of the time, ensuring the free-floating barrel or a barrel that is not being touched by the stock or anything else is sufficient. If you want to take it further, add a bull or heavier barrel profile to increase weight and rigidity.

- **Bedded/Glassed Action:** This is a process that ensures perfect alignment and “fit” between the action and stock to increase rigidity, usually by adding a bedding compound or by going to a chassis-style stock that has a built-in insert that accomplishes the same end result.

Match Grade Ammunition

Shooting at long-distance targets requires consistently loaded ammunition to aid in repeatable results when you already have to compensate for environmental variables. In the not-so-distant past, most believed the only way to achieve that consistency was to reload your own ammunition. I believe that is probably still the thinking of “serious” long-range shooters. Still, the factory loadings have improved tremendously to the point you can shoot factory ammo now and do just fine for most scenarios. If your particular rifle doesn't like any ammo you try, you may want to explore reloading, but I prefer simplicity, and when I find a good shooting round, I try to stock up and buy enough to last a little while. If you can, I suggest buying a case or two at a time to stay with the same lot number of production. When there are issues with factory ammo, it is usually a “whole run of ammo,” and if you have ever noticed, recalls are done in lot numbers. Using the theory that if they recall a lot or run of ammunition, you're probably safe if you have a good consistent round from one lot to last a little while.

Extras

Other things to consider when trying to squeeze the most out of your rifle setup would be good shooting supports or rests, sandbags, bipods or some sort of mechanical rest. Also, if you have invested time and money into setting up a nice rifle, an often-overlooked item is a good quality protective case to ensure no hard bumps or bangs with your optic and rifle. These come in soft or hard varieties, and it really boils down to personal choice. At the end of the day, if your gun is protected, you should be fine. Lastly, invest in a quality cleaning kit to ensure your equipment is properly cared for. Some guns



TREASURE PHOTO

like to be squeaky clean, and others will shoot better after a fouling shot or two through them. That's something to experiment with and keep in mind when you get bitten by the grouping bug.


In closing, if you are interested in exploring long-range shooting as a new hobby or perhaps using it as a tool to practice your marksmanship for next hunting season or even just to shake off a painful miss from this past season, now is the time to start preparing and practicing thus preventing that dreaded poor performance in the future. Sure, it's an excellent time to get started. At the same time, there is a little break between hunting seasons, but mainly because in a few short months, it will be so hot outside that you will not want to bake in the sun on the range, nor will you want to have to fight the mosquitoes for your weapon or blood for that matter.

Remember your ear protection and eye protection, and have fun!

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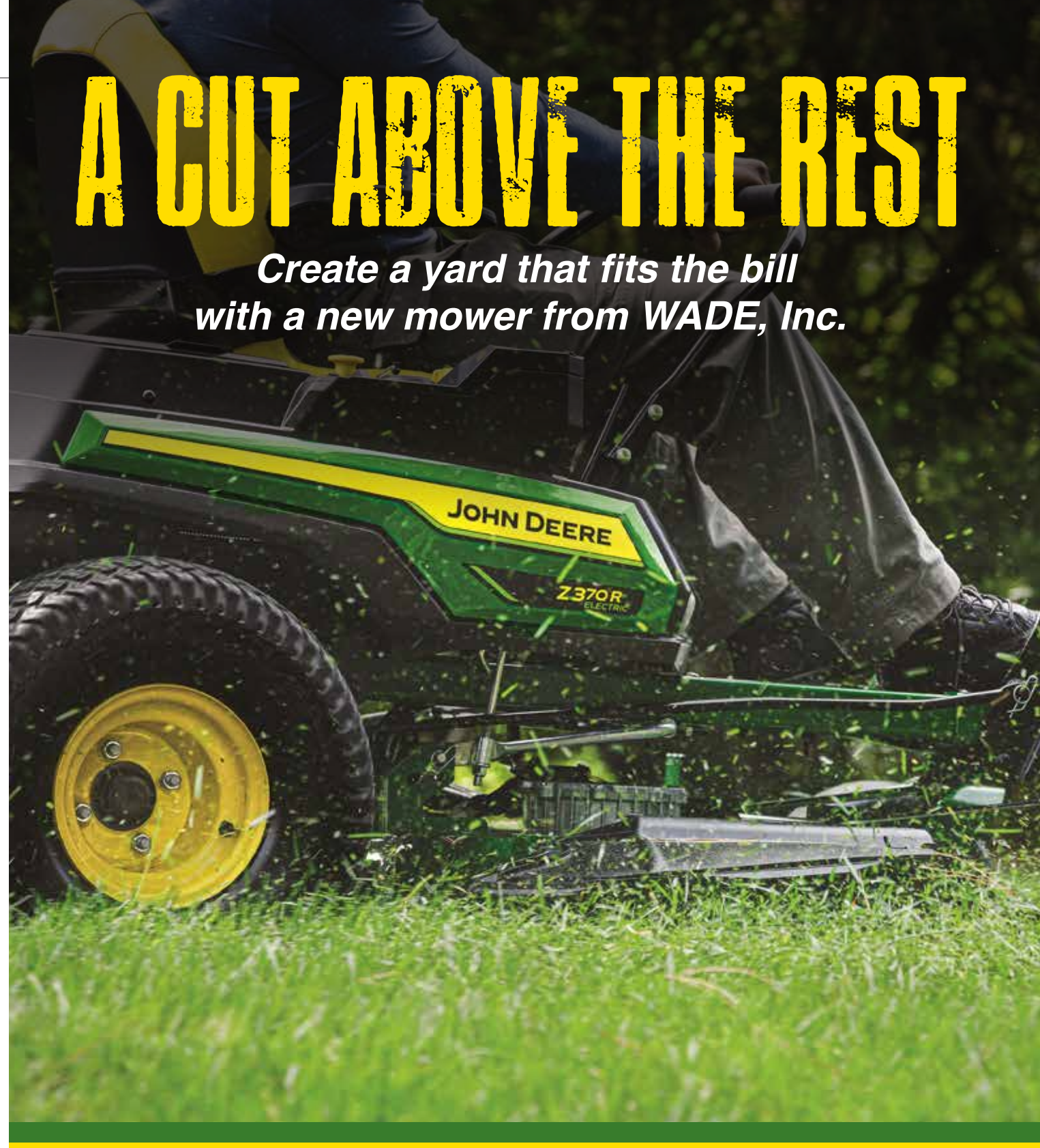
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