

# LOUISIANA Conservationist

Fall 2022



**GOBBLIN'THEM UP**

*Louisiana Turkey Hunters  
Had Abundant 2022 Season*



# LOUISIANA Conservationist

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Baton Rouge, LA 70808

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## LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY

Dear Reader,

One of the things Louisianans love to do is gather in celebration, whether it's for football games, birthdays, anniversaries or just about any other reason we can come up with. That, of course, was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Though we were still able to enjoy hunting and fishing, the pandemic forced us to cancel one of our favorite Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries events the last two years, National Hunting and Fishing Day (NHFD).

But, I'm pleased to say that, as of this writing, it will be back this year. In fact, it's almost here. The event, scheduled for the fourth Saturday in September each year, is set for Sept. 24. The free event, supported by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation, will be held at four locations in Louisiana, including Monroe, Woodworth, Baton Rouge and Minden.

The first NHFD in Louisiana was held in 1982 at the Monroe district office. In the following years, Baton Rouge, Minden and Woodworth were added.

The number and types of displays vary at each location, but all include exhibits on LDWF management programs, shooting and fishing demonstrations. Attendees will have the chance to try their skills at the shooting ranges, fishing ponds and boating activities as well as learn about wildlife.

One of the main goals of NHFD is to recruit new hunters and anglers by encouraging participation and increasing public awareness of the connection between hunting, angling and conservation. Now in its 50th year, NHFD is the largest, most effective grassroots movement ever undertaken to promote outdoor sports and conservation.

Created by Congress in 1971, NHFD was developed to commemorate the conservation contributions of the nation's hunters and anglers. More than 50 million Americans hunt and fish every year, creating over \$200 billion in economic activity and supporting over 1.5 million jobs.

The continuation of these time-honored traditions will ensure that our lands and waters receive the care and funding they need to stay accessible and magnificent for all Americans.

Hunting and fishing are important parts of Louisiana's rich heritage. We encourage all of the sportsmen and women of our state to take someone into the outdoors, especially someone who would not have the opportunity otherwise. We want to help build the tradition of hunting and fishing in our nation. NHFD is a perfect way to get started.

To learn more about National and Hunting Fishing Day, go to [www.wlf.la.gov/page/nhfd](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/nhfd).

Sincerely,

Jack Montoucet, LDWF Secretary

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Little angler, Bryce David, reels in his biggest black crappie on Murphy Lake.

Cover Photo: This leucistic turkey (see story on wildlife color mutations on page 14) was harvested by Brandon Stafford, with the help of his brother David. The bird was taken on the former Jackson-Bienville WMA. They are pictured with their father, Jimmy Stafford, a retired LDWF biologist. *Photo by Jasmine L. Stafford*

# SEASON OF CHANGE

*Public Should Be Aware Of License, WMA Access Changes During 2022-2023 Hunting Season*

story by **LDWF STAFF**

The 2022-23 Louisiana hunting season has opened and there are several changes to be noted in licensing and use of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Wildlife Management Areas and Refuges.

LDWF has implemented a new fee structure for licenses. The new fee structure streamlines the old process, reducing the number of licenses required for hunters and anglers. These changes were implemented to reduce confusion over the various types of licenses required for hunting and fishing in Louisiana. The changes may also provide the agency with a more stable source of revenue, which is crucial to our ability to provide programs and services to the people of Louisiana. Here are some of the licensing changes as well as how to access LDWF WMAs and shooting ranges.



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on LDWF's new licensing structure, go to [www.wlf.la.gov/page/understanding-our-license-fee-changes](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/understanding-our-license-fee-changes).

For more information on LDWF WMAs, go to [www.wlf.la.gov/page/wmas-refuges-and-conservation-areas](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/wmas-refuges-and-conservation-areas).

For more information on LDWF shooting ranges, go to [www.wlf.la.gov/page/shooting-ranges](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/shooting-ranges).

## YOUTH LICENSES

- Youth are considered age 17 and under (raised from age 15 and under) for all hunting and fishing activities that require a license.
- Youth (ages 17 and younger) who are actively hunting deer or turkey, participating in a lottery hunt or trapping are required to have a license.
- Youth (ages 17 and younger) who are hunting game animals besides deer or turkey are not required to have a license, except those participating in a WMA lottery hunt.
- Youth (ages 17 and younger) who are spectators of another person who is hunting, but who are not actively harvesting a game species, are not required to have a license or tags.
- For deer and turkey hunting ONLY, hunters age 17 and under will need to purchase a \$5 Youth Hunting License to obtain Deer and Turkey Tags. The purpose of this license is to allow LDWF to count each youth hunter and receive federal funding.
- Youth who hold Lifetime Hunting License or a Lifetime Combo License are not required to purchase the \$5 annual license mentioned above to obtain deer and turkey tags. They are, however, still required to use deer and turkey tags.
- Youth who hold Lifetime Hunting License or a Lifetime Combo License are not required to pay the fee associated with a Youth Lottery.

## SENIOR LICENSES

- For those born prior to June 1, 1940, a Resident No-charge Senior Hunt/Fish License is required. It is for residents only and is FREE, but is required have in possession when hunting or fishing.
- The annual license fee for anyone born between June 1, 1940 and May 31, 1962 is \$5.

## LIFETIME LICENSES

- The new lifetime licenses include recreational hunting, fishing and gear privileges. A lifetime license costs \$500 for any individual.
- If you held a Resident Lifetime Fishing License, on June 1, 2022 you keep your existing privileges and gain the gear privileges associated with the Recreational Freshwater License and the Recreational Saltwater License in the new structure. However, your license will not be converted into a Hunting/Fishing Combo License.
- If you held a Resident Lifetime Hunting License, on June 1, 2022 you keep your existing privileges. But your license will not be converted into a Hunting/Fishing Combo License.
- If you held a Resident Lifetime Hunting/Fishing Combo License, on June 1, 2022 you keep your existing privileges and gain the gear fees and privileges of legal harvest associated with the Recreational Freshwater License and the Recreational Saltwater License in the new structure.
- For individuals that held a Lifetime Fishing (only) License or a Lifetime Hunting (only) license, after June 1, 2022 those type of Lifetime licenses will no longer be available. You will only have the option of a Lifetime Combination License for \$500 in order to have both Hunting and Fishing.





### WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA ACCESS PERMIT

- You will need a Wildlife Management Area Access Permit to visit an LDWF WMA for any reason – boating, hiking, bird watching, berry picking, fishing or hunting.
- The fee for a WMA access permit, which grants access to the 1.5-million acres of land managed by LDWF, is \$20/annual (resident/non-resident) or \$5/day (resident/non-resident).
- All funds generated from the permit fees will be dedicated to managing the WMAs.
- Youths 17 and under are not required to have a WMA access permit.
- WMA Access Permits are included in the Sportsman's Paradise license, Senior Hunt/Fish License and all lifetime licenses.

### WMA SELF-CLEARING PERMIT

All WMA users, including LDWF shooting range and education facility visitors, are required to comply with self-clearing permit guidelines. There are three methods for checking in and out of LDWF administered lands and facilities. The most convenient methods are via the Self-Clearing app and Web Portal.

- **Self-Clearing Permit app via mobile device:** To download the app, go to [www.wlf.la.gov/page/wmas-refuges-and-conservation-areas](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/wmas-refuges-and-conservation-areas). The app is available on both Android and Apple platforms. This application features a conveniently organized drop-down interface for use when visiting the WMA or Refuge. To see a video demonstration of how to use the app, go to <https://youtu.be/D9W9xeW-G6jM>.
- **Web Portal via computer or mobile device:** To use the web portal, go to [wmacheckincheckout.wlf.la.gov](http://wmacheckincheckout.wlf.la.gov). If you don't have an account, click 'Need to Create an Account', complete the form, and login. Once logged in, click 'Create New Check-In.' When leaving the refuge, don't forget to revisit this page, click 'Check Out', and add any activities you engaged in during your visit.
- **Physical self-clearing permit station:** Physical self-clearing permits will be available at the entrances to all WMAs, Shooting Ranges and Education Facilities.

### WMA CAMPING PERMIT

- Staying overnight on a designated WMA campground will require a camping permit (in addition to the access permit).
- The camping permit is \$7/night for up to five adults who are camping together and must be displayed at the party's campsite.
- A campsite is defined as any tent, RV, camper, vehicle or site occupied within a campground or vessel/houseboat moored adjacent to a campground.
- All funds generated from the permit fees will be dedicated to managing the WMAs.
- Youths 17 and under are not required to have a camping permit.

### WMA SHOOTING RANGES

Visitors to LDWF shooting ranges and education facilities must possess one of the following and fill out a self-clearing permit:

- WMA access permit
- Sportsman's Paradise license
- Lifetime hunting or fishing license
- Senior License
- Any license that confers the equivalent of a WMA Access permit
- Youths 17 and under are exempt from this requirement.





# BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

*Louisiana Turkey Hunters Enjoyed The Best Season In Years In 2022*

story by **TREY ILES**, LDWF Public Information

Cody Cedotal loves to talk turkey. You'd expect that from someone who has devoted so much of his life to turkey hunting. And if you've ever visited for any length of time with an avid turkey hunter, you understand they have a passion for stalking the elusive bird like no other sportsman.

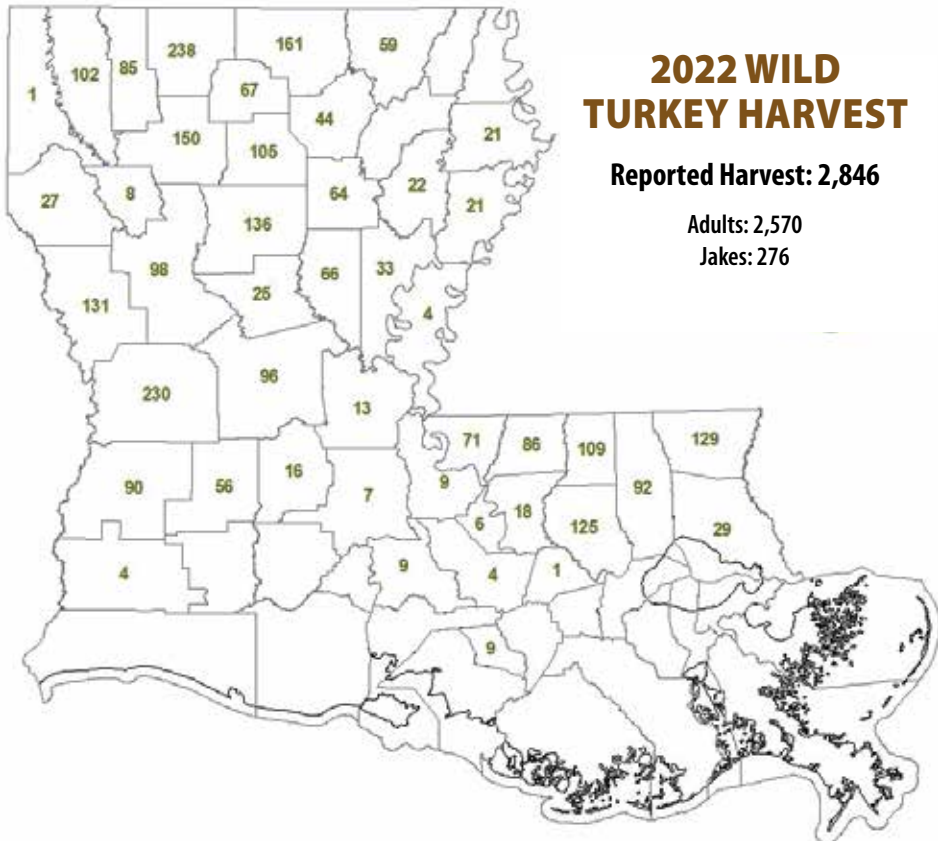
As a hunter, Cedotal has a niche of friends who would constantly compare and analyze notes. You think baseball metrics is complicated, just listen to these guys. But when Cedotal became the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Small Game Program/Wild Turkey Program Manager, it seemed he heard from just about every turkey hunter in Louisiana, he said.

"You hear many different opinions," Cedotal said. "People either loved the season, thought it was the best ever, or hated it. It's never just okay."

According to 2022 Louisiana turkey harvest data, the past season provided state hunters with one of its best in recent memory, certainly in the last 13 years. A confluence of factors contributed to it and it appears turkey populations may be ticking up.

Based on tag validation data alone, hunters bagged 2,846 birds in 2022 the most since the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries began harvest surveys in 2009. The previous high was 2,586 in 2009.

The combination of good weather during hunting season, which runs from April 2 - May 1, and more adult males in some areas of the state are likely the primary reasons Louisiana's turkey hunters had a bountiful season. In addition, according to the latest hunter survey, the number of turkey hunters in the state also increased by approximately 23.5% to an estimated 24,500 hunters. This increase likely had an impact on turkey harvest as well.





In 2018, the opening of Louisiana’s turkey season was moved later in an effort to potentially increase breeding and recruitment. This year is the first significant increase in reported harvest, according to the data, since then. Whether or not the move has directly impacted hunter harvest isn’t conclusive yet. Cedotal is optimistic but said it’s entirely too early to know and additional years of data are needed.

“Hopefully this increased level of harvest will be maintained or improved upon in future years,” Cedotal said. “This would indicate increasing populations in many areas of the state and may provide evidence that the season change is working.

“But we need a few years' monitoring to really be able to tell more definitively whether or not it’s 100 percent tied to that or not. There are just so many variables.

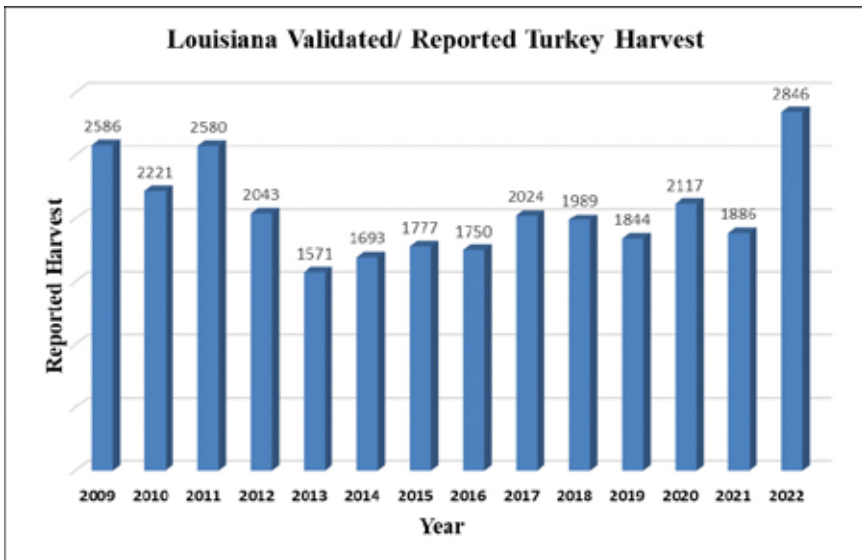
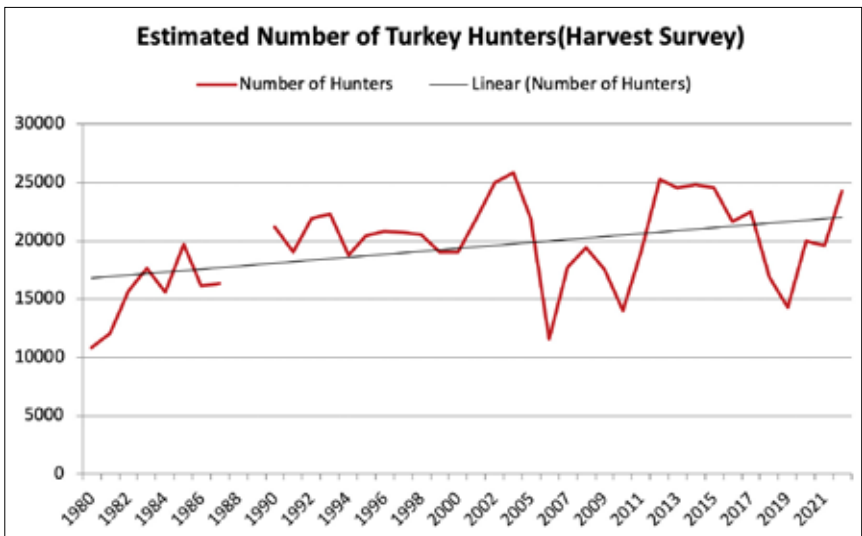
“Results indicated by the reported harvest are extremely encouraging,” Cedotal said. “Even more encouraging is the overall dry weather experienced throughout April, May and most of June potentially creating good nesting and brood rearing conditions.”

Cedotal said northwest Louisiana and southeast Louisiana, primarily the Florida Parishes, had the best results. That could be a result of better reproduction, he said.

“You can look back to our reproductive data back to 2020, it showed an increase in reproduction in the northwest part of the state and the southeast part of the state,” Cedotal said. “Slight increases. Nothing eye popping. These slight increases in reproduction could result in more adult males being in the population for this year (2022). It would be two-year-old adult males. Combine that with the good hunting weather for the first few weekends and I think that’s why the improvement was there.”

According to tag harvest data, Claiborne Parish, in northwest Louisiana, produced the most birds with 238. Vernon Parish, in west Louisiana and with good turkey habitat, was next with 230. In southeast Louisiana, Washington Parish (129), Livingston Parish (125), St. Helena Parish (109) and Tangipahoa Parish (92) had good numbers.

Not every area of the state had a bumper crop. And it speaks to how rainfall and flooding affect turkey reproduction. LDWF management regions along the Mississippi River continue to struggle and show signs of low



populations, Cedotal said, because of flooding and excessive rainfall. Drier springs are much better for turkey reproduction than wet, he said.

The other factor, as it is with nearly all wildlife populations, is habitat.

For decades, habitat quality for wild turkeys has decreased in many parts of the state, Cedotal said. But he said he thinks landowners seem to be more interested in improving habitat for turkey. As ground nesters, that means managing low growth and brush. And prescribed burning is an excellent tool for that.

"We seem to have increasingly more folks interested in improving (turkey) habitat," Cedotal said. "As timber markets have changed over the last few years, as the price of timber has gone down, it makes people start thinking about other objectives for their land. Wildlife, in some cases, have benefited from that. It seems more folks are purchasing property strictly for recreation now and interested in different objectives than managing the land just for timber revenue."

Signs are pointing to growing turkey populations as reproductive trends have gone higher the last couple of years and now reported harvest has increased for this year. But Cedotal wants to temper expectations.

"Absolutely we're going in the right direction," Cedotal said. "Harvest will fluctuate based on weather, reproduction and other conditions. Long term, you monitor the trends. Increasing trends are what everyone likes to see with regard to wild turkey reproduction, populations, and harvest." 🦃



Photo courtesy of USDA Forest Service

# TURKEY SURVEY

## LDWF's New Online Survey Allows Anyone To Report Turkey Sightings

story by **TREY ILES**, LDWF Public Information

**T**he Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is looking for more eyes as it works to monitor turkey populations throughout the state. In fact, anyone can help now thanks to a new public online component designed to expand LDWF's Wild Turkey Population Survey.

In addition to increasing participation in the survey, the online component can also incorporate and track wild turkey sightings throughout the year.

LDWF has tracked wild turkey reproduction since 1994 with a survey conducted by volunteer participants during the summer. It provides important trend data with regard to reproduction and recruitment in Louisiana turkey flocks. However, over the years, the number of volunteers and observations have declined, resulting in less reliable data. The new online reporting component will augment the summer surveys, which will continue.

"This web-based tracking component will allow us to greatly expand our survey," said LDWF Small Game/Wild Turkey Program Manager Cody Cedotal. "Now anyone can assist us in our effort to keep track of Louisiana's wild turkey populations. Whether you are sitting on your back porch in

October, in your deer stand in December, turkey hunting in April or making a round through your property in August and see wild turkeys, we would like to know about it."

The data obtained will allow managers to monitor population trends and help make regulatory recommendations as necessary to sustain populations.

The survey can be accessed on the LDWF website ([www.wlf.la.gov/subhome/turkey](http://www.wlf.la.gov/subhome/turkey)) or directly at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/81c20aa4e4524fbcbecc2c426d9d3e2a>.

Once you have opened the portal to the survey, simply click the "LA Turkey Survey Data Entry" to review the specific instructions and log each separate wild turkey observation. You will be asked to provide your name, date, location and the number of males (adults or juveniles), females, and/or poults seen.

If you are interested in keeping up with observations as they come in, check out the "Turkey Survey Dashboard" tab. Here you can view updates on how many observations have been reported so far during the year. You will be able to view reported observations by parish and track the number of birds seen by sex and age, to an extent; i.e. poult, juvenile male or jake, adult male or gobbler. 🦃

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

For more information contact Cody Cedotal at 225-765-2361 or [ccedotal@wlf.la.gov](mailto:ccedotal@wlf.la.gov).

*Scan Here*  
**TO TAKE THE SURVEY**







# RIGHT ON TARGET

*Savannah O'Donohue, Jewel Blakey Turn Their Passion For Archery Into National Championships*

story by **TREY ILES**, LDWF Public Information

**T**he draw was more curiosity than competition. Savannah O'Donohue and Jewel Blakey were introduced to their now favorite sport by the Archery in Louisiana Schools program, administered by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Neither grew up with anyone in their families or circle of friends taking part in archery.

"Nobody in my family shot," said O'Donohue, a 13-year-old eighth grader at Benton Middle School. "It was straight out of the blue. When I suggested archery to my mom (April) she looked at me and said 'What? You really want to do that?' I never knew that I would go to a big competition."

Blakey, a seventh grader at Calvary Baptist in Shreveport and 12, took up archery just a couple of years ago at the urging of her mother, Jen.

"I had never realized that archery was an actual sport," Blakey said. "I kind of thought it was something made up. Never thought about trying it."

But both did try and, in just a few short years, have reached national championship status.

O'Donohue won the girl's individual national bullseye championship and led her school to the national middle school title in the 2022 National Archery in Schools Program bullseye tournament in Louisville, Kentucky, in May.

Blakey of Calvary Baptist captured the individual girl's middle school 3D championship at the same tournament.

**ABOVE LEFT:** Savannah O'Donohue won the 2022 NASP girl's individual national bullseye championship.  
**ABOVE RIGHT:** Jewel Blakey captured the individual girl's middle school 3D title.



Both now share a passion for the sport they discovered on a whim. They're also teammates on the Hoot and Holler Junior Olympic Archery Development team. And though their roads to these championships differ, what they share is a strong work ethic and love for archery they couldn't imagine they'd have before they shot their first arrow.

### BE LIKE MIKE

O'Donohue's path was paved partially with disappointment. Most know the story of Michael Jordan's basketball journey, when he failed to make his high school's varsity team as a sophomore, used that as motivation and went on to become arguably the greatest basketball player ever.

Once she started in ALAS, as a third grader, O'Donohue immediately enjoyed archery and was pretty good at it. But she failed to make the tournament team as only a handful of third graders were picked to the team that season.

"It was a little bit of motivation to see if I could pull it off," O'Donohue said of making the team as a fourth grader. "My third grade year I really wanted to make the team. The fourth grade year I was a little more determined."

Indeed. Not only did she make the team, she finished fourth at nationals in the elementary school level. O'Donohue signed up for lessons at Hoot and Holler and she blossomed into an excellent archer. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, paralyzing the world. But O'Donohue improvised.

"The pandemic came during my fifth grade year," O'Donohue said. "I was really getting into archery and competing and doing well in it. The pandemic stopped everything.

So I began mainly practicing outside. A few arrows outside to make sure I stayed sharp."

Her hard work and perseverance culminated in May when she captured the overall individual national championship, which includes elementary, middle and high school competitors. She shot a 295 out of 300 and actually tied for first place with several other competitors, including teammate Charli Long. But O'Donohue and Molly Wolken, a high school senior from Missouri, emerged as the top two because they had scores of 295 and more perfect arrows, or 10s, than the other archers with 26 apiece.

That necessitated a shoot off of five arrows. However, both scored 48 in the five-arrow shoot off. That meant a one-arrow sudden death shoot off to determine the champion. O'Donohue had faced this before in JOAD competitions and won. O'Donohue hit the X mark on the target for a 10 score on the first arrow and Wolken got a nine, giving O'Donohue the title, the first national overall championship for an ALAS competitor.

O'Donohue said mental preparation was a key in the playoff. She said it's something she's taught working with her team and coaches at Hoot and Holler.

"One thing is Savannah noticed (Wolken) had a little bit longer prep time than she did," said Savannah's father, Scott O'Donohue. "Savannah ran through her process exactly how she was supposed to and stuck it in the X before (Wolken) got her shoot off. That put on more pressure."

Savannah said she didn't realize her accomplishment until the ride home from Louisville.



"That's when the real shock came," she said. "I was still kind of processing all that and in the car it was like, 'I'm a national champion.' "

O'Donohue said she's in the sport for the rest of her life. She devotes much of her time to it while still maintaining academic excellence. She also likes to serve as a mentor to younger archers at Benton Elementary.

"I would love to go to the Olympics and experience that," said O'Donohue, also honored as an NASP Academic Archer. "I don't want to ever give up archery."

## COMPETITIVE FIRE

Before archery, Blakey participated in several sports, including soccer, basketball and running. Jen and Clint Blakey, her mother and father, said she's pretty independent and driven in and out of the classroom. She's a straight A student and, like O'Donohue, was honored as a NASP Academic Archer.

So an individual sport like archery seemed a natural fit. But Blakey, who moved to Calvary Baptist from another school in fifth grade, was skeptical at first.

"I'm from south Louisiana and went to summer camp every year and I always did archery and enjoyed it," Jen said. "I thought it would be a great way for Jewel to maybe make some new friends. She started and she loved it."

In about two years, Blakey went from novice to national champion, winning the middle school girls' 3D title with a score of 292 that included 22 10s.

Blakey said she always expects to do well but was a bit surprised she captured the 3D title. Unlike bullseye, which is basically a standard archery target, there are different targets, represented by decoy game animals. The six targets are placed at six different distances and two different ways in which the target can face.

"So you have to focus hard on where you are aiming and which way the target is facing," Blakey said. "I didn't focus much on 3D (coming into the national tournament). But something came over me and I did really well."

Clint said that Jewel has enjoyed success despite only having taken part in the sport for two years. He said this is a sport with a very small margin of error and that can be difficult mentally. But Blakey has learned to navigate the mental process and that has added to her success. Plus, even though she's right-handed, she shoots left because she is left-eye dominant.

"Jewel shoots at a level now in which she has done well and is capable of placing high every time," Clint said. "The thing is one wrong move, one bad arrow, and you can find yourself down in 10th place. So the mental preparation for this is so important."

Blakey has also taken her skills out into the field. She harvested her first deer with a bow in November of 2021. The previous year she took a 6-point buck with a rifle.

"I didn't know that I'd end up enjoying (archery) as much as I do when I started," Blakey said. "It's something I can't see myself ever giving up." 🏹



**TOP PHOTO:** Savannah O'Donohue won the bullseye championship in what amounted to sudden death after she tied for the title. **BOTTOM PHOTO:** Jewel Blakey has taken her love of archery into the outdoors, where she harvested a deer last year during a bow hunt.

LDWF's Chad Moore (right), with LDWF Assistant Secretary for Wildlife Randy Myers, was honored as the IHEA U.S. Hunter Education Coordinator of the Year for 2021.



# AIMING FOR EXCELLENCE

*LDWF's ALAS Program Moves Ahead Despite Restrictions, Challenges From COVID-19 Pandemic* story by **TREY ILES**, LDWF Public Information

**B**efore COVID-19 shook up the world in the spring of 2020, the Archery in Louisiana Schools program, administered by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, was thriving. About 200 schools and 23,000 students took part in ALAS in all corners of the state from rural to metropolitan areas.

ALAS, part of the National Archery in Schools program, debuted in Louisiana in May of 2012 with 35 schools participating. It grew rapidly as its simple aim, to teach students basic archery techniques, resonated with school administrators and kids.

The regional and state tournaments were well attended and many Louisiana archers qualify for and participate in the NASP Tournament each year. In addition, ALAS was honored with the 2019 Louisiana Youth Conservation Organization award in the 56th annual state Conservation Achievement Awards, presented by the Louisiana Wildlife Federation and the National Wildlife Federation.

Then the pandemic hit, closing Louisiana schools from the middle of March 2020 until the following school year. Even then some schools elected to go virtual or place heavy restrictions on students when attending school in person.

"I remember we were at our (2020) 3D state tournament and thinking if things don't get any better we may have to cancel our state (bullseye) tournament," said LDWF Biologist Manager Chad Moore, who oversees ALAS for LDWF. "Sure enough, we did. And as time went along that spring (of 2020), I began to be extremely worried about the next school year (2020-21). If schools didn't get to participate that year, they may not want to do it anymore."

But instead of sitting around worrying and lamenting about it, Moore went to work contacting schools to see what LDWF could do to assist in making ALAS a part of the curriculum with adjustments.

"When the schools went back in August of 2020, we could gauge what we could do by calling coaches," said Moore, who has run ALAS for the last 4.5 years. "Some of them said, 'Look they're not going to let us do it this year.' And some told us hopefully by November they'll let us do more. I was getting a feel from the coaches before. Just going to the schools, we got to see what each school was working with. That was a huge deal. Then when I realized about half of them were going to be able to do something, that's when we started planning."



Moore and LDWF personnel adjusted the plans to accommodate COVID-19 regulations and requirements. Though not all schools and students participated during the 2020-21 school year, many did and ALAS was able to weather the pandemic storm.

"We were able to make some adjustments on the range so these kids could be six feet apart and wear their masks," Moore said. "They were able to practice. The principals were fine with it as long as we could make those adjustments. But what they weren't willing to do is they didn't want anyone from the outside coming in and they didn't want their kids going anywhere else. That kept us from having our regional tournaments (in the spring of 2021)."

Moore said he considered not having either of the regional tournaments. But the one thing he noticed was how hard the students were working, how much they wanted to shoot and compete and how they wanted normalcy.

So instead of students coming to the regionals, LDWF brought the regionals to the students. LDWF went to the schools and set up the tournament shooting format.

"There was a representative at each tournament to make it legitimate," Moore said. "We could come to your school, set it up, watch them shoot and record the score. We had to make adjustments. We had to widen our lanes, had to keep up with everybody that came in. And we scored the competitors ourselves so the kids weren't close together."

The state 3D tournament was held as a hybrid tournament. Schools that were not allowed to travel were able to shoot at their school with a LDWF staff member present to record scores. Schools that were allowed to travel participated in the 3D tournament held in Alexandria.

The state bullseye tournament went off in Shreveport in the spring of 2021 with significant restrictions. Only 200 people were allowed in the tournament venue at a time and only parents or guardians could accompany the student competitors. Social distancing and masks were required of the students and those attending.

"It was painstaking," Moore said. "I remember Karen Edwards (LDWF Biologist Supervisor) and other staff sat there and wiped down every single arrow that was shot after each flight. Where we normally have 1,300 competitors or so at state, we were around 900 (in 2021).

"It was a great team effort. Staff members worked long hours and spent many weekends traveling to schools and tournaments. I would also like to thank our administrators for allowing us the opportunity to make this work. My Regional Coordinator (Christina Speyrer) and I definitely had to think outside the box to navigate the pandemic. I'm extremely proud of what our section was able to pull off that tournament season."

The national NASP tournament, normally held in Louisville, Kentucky, was instead held virtually in 2021 with about 15,000 virtual participants.

"They had an app where you can walk down, put the kid's score in the app, and it would ask you to take a picture of the target," Moore said. "That's how they were able to keep everyone honest. It was the largest archery tournament in the world. Granted, it was virtual. But kids who may not have been able to attend in person were able to do it this time."

For his efforts, Moore was honored as the International Hunter Education Association of the United States Hunter Education Coordinator of the Year for 2021.

"Chad is an exemplary employee and ALAS has succeeded and continued to grow under his leadership," said LDWF Assistant Secretary for Wildlife Randy Myers. "He is deserving of recognition for these accomplishments alone, however, he is being given this award for his efforts to ensure ALAS was successful in 2021. When COVID-19 restrictions threatened to cause the cancellation of our regional and state ALAS tournaments last year, rather than taking the easy route, Chad rose to the challenge."

The 2021-22 school year provided more normalcy as the pandemic waned. All tournaments in Louisiana, regionals, 3D and bullseye, were held in person and at selected venues. The national tournament returned to Louisville with two Louisiana competitors - Savannah O'Donohue from Benton Middle School and Jewel Blakey of Calvary Baptist - winning individual national championships.

Moore said participation in the program went up though not quite back to pre-pandemic levels yet. He estimates about 18,000-19,000 students took part in the program. About 340 schools are listed in the program with about 160 active, he said.

"We love that our tournaments are back," Moore said. "But the great thing about ALAS and NASP is that their primary design is to teach students to learn something they know little or nothing about and then become proficient in it. Plus this is a great gateway for students to get involved in the outdoors. They begin to wonder, 'What else can I do out there?' Some may have never hunted before and after taking part in this they'll realize how enjoyable hunting and getting into the outdoors can be." 🏹



### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on the ALAS program, go to [www.wlf.la.gov/page/alas](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/alas) or contact Chad Moore at [cmoore@wlf.la.gov](mailto:cmoore@wlf.la.gov).

ALAS is hosted in conjunction with the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation. For more information, go to [www.lawff.org](http://www.lawff.org).

# SPOTLIGHT



LDWF's Scenic Rivers Program preserves, protects, develops, reclaims, and enhances the wilderness qualities, scenic beauties, and ecological regimes of designated free-flowing Louisiana rivers, streams, bayous, and segments thereof. Whiskey Chitto Creek is one of the original Louisiana streams first designated as part of the Natural and Scenic Rivers System through the "Louisiana Scenic Rivers Act" of 1970.



## WHISKEY (OUISKA) CHITTO CREEK

**LENGTH:** 86 miles total length (most of which is designated as a State Natural and Scenic River)

**YEAR DESIGNATED AS A SCENIC RIVER:** 1970

**LOCATION:** Vernon, Beauregard, and Allen Parishes. Only the uppermost reach of the creek that meanders through Fort Polk Military Reservation is not included in the Scenic Rivers System.

**PUBLIC ACCESS:** Tubing companies provide access near the town of Mittie and a boat launch is located off HWY 190 near Kinder. Access is also available via the Calcasieu River.

**COMMON FISHING SPECIES:** Largemouth bass, spotted bass, channel catfish, blue catfish, flathead catfish, bream and sunfish species.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Whiskey Chitto Creek remains largely undeveloped in primitive condition throughout much of its length. Archaeologists have confirmed at least 13 Native American sites along the river with some dating back as far as 1,500 years ago. This creek is known for canoeing, tubing and kayaking. The use of a canoe to float from one access point to another is a common practice used to fish this stream. This stream was highlighted as part of the Scenic Rivers 50th Anniversary video collection and may be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hsyTT2hWuw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hsyTT2hWuw).

### ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE:



FISHING



BOATING



SWIMMING



PHOTOGRAPHY



BIRDING



CAMPING



# IGHT

## WATERBODY & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



### GRASSY LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

**ACREAGE:** 12,983

**LOCATION:** Avoyelles Parish. Take Louisiana Highway 451 to Bordelonville, cross the levee at the Bayou des Glaives flood control structure and follow the gravel road for 6.5 miles.

**OWNER:** LDWF

**DESCRIPTION:** Grassy Lake WMA lies within the Red River alluvial floodplain and is subject to periodic backwater flooding. The terrain is flat and drainage is poor. Bayou Natchitoches transects the area and has several smaller tributaries. The WMA's forest cover is entirely bottomland hardwood species such as willow, cypress, bitter pecan, swamp privet, water elm, overcup oak, cottonwood, sycamore, honey locust and hackberry.

**POPULAR GAME & FISH SPECIES:** Swamp rabbit, white-tailed deer, squirrel, turkey, woodcock and waterfowl can be hunted on the WMA. There is a youth deer season. Recreational fishing is fair for largemouth bass, crappie, and bream.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** There are four major waterbodies on the WMA: Smith Bay, Grassy Lake, Lake Chenier and Red River Bay. There are two primitive camping areas on Grassy Lake WMA.

#### ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE:



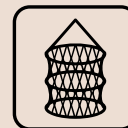
HUNTING



FISHING



BOATING



COMMERICAL FISHING



CAMPING



HIKING



BIRDING



PHOTOGRAPHY

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

#### WHISKEY (OUISKA) CHITTO CREEK

For more information contact:

Chris Davis: 225-765-2642

Lake Charles Inland Fisheries District Office: 337-491-2575

[www.wlf.la.gov/page/scenic-rivers](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/scenic-rivers)

#### GRASSY LAKE WMA

For more information contact:

337-262-2080

[tvidrine@wlf.la.gov](mailto:tvidrine@wlf.la.gov)

[www.wlf.la.gov/page/grassy-lake](http://www.wlf.la.gov/page/grassy-lake)





Photo by Nick Coplen, Shutterstock.com

Photo by Joy O'Keefe, Aiken County, South Carolina



Photo by Mark Vukovich, US Forest Service, Aiken County, South Carolina

**ABOVE LEFT:** Example of a piebald deer. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Leucistic chipping sparrow. **LEFT:** Melanistic eastern coyote

# EYE-CATCHING COLORS

*There Are Many Reasons Why Color Mutations In Wildlife Exist*

story by **KATE HASAPES**

Have you ever seen a piebald deer? Or perhaps an albino raccoon? What about a black bobcat? While most often wildlife come in typical colors and patterns, every once in a while we get a glimpse of something extraordinary. From speckled and spotted to all white and all black, some strange looking animals can be found in the wild. There are even social media groups specifically for sharing and discussing these oddly colored animals, such as Facebook's Understanding & Identifying Color Mutations In Wild Birds & Animals.

There are many reasons for changes or defects in coloration of wildlife, including the inability to produce pigments, inability to deposit pigment, lack of pigment making cells, lower concentrations of pigment, over production of pigment, pattern mutations, hybridization, disease and diet.

These color defects can cover an entire animal or show up as simple spots. Some of these conditions are easily confused as they can express identical external coat and feather colorations. The only way to know for sure in some instances is to test DNA and tissue samples, which is most often not an option. For simplicity's sake, we will not refer to the cause of the discoloration but instead refer to what people see in the outward expression of color or lack thereof and lump them into three categories: albinism, leucism/piebald, and melanism. Domestic animals have been selectively bred for certain traits such as behavior, conformation, and coat pattern. This article does not address these specifically bred animals and focuses on coloration abnormalities one might see in wildlife.



## ALBINISM

Albinism is a genetic condition in which no pigment or color is produced, resulting in the classic white hair and pink eyes and skin. This pink color observed is the blood and blood vessels that are usually hidden behind the normal colored irises and skin. Albinism is very rare in the wild. Possibly the most famous albino animal in Louisiana is Pinky, a bottlenose dolphin that has been seen around Calcasieu Lake and the Gulf of Mexico. While a DNA test would be needed to fully confirm that Pinky is albino and not another genetic condition, she shows the classic signs with her pink skin and eyes.

Animals with albinism are born at a great disadvantage. Prey species such as deer and songbirds are more easily seen by predators and picked off at an early age. Conversely, predator species are more easily seen by prey, making it more difficult to have a successful hunt. Also, the lack of melanin can cause multiple health problems, including abnormal eye development, hearing issues, and less protection from the sun's harmful rays.

## LEUCISM/PIEBALD

Currently, the definition of leucism is a condition in which there is a partial loss of pigmentation resulting in white, pale or patchy coloration of the skin, hair, feathers or scales, but not the eyes. There is debate on the different medical and genetic disorders that produce these color abnormalities and subsequently the proper terminology to use. While the genetic circumstance that results in leucism differs from that of piebald, pattern mutations and some diluted pigments, we will lump these animals together and refer to them as animals that express a loss of coloration, resulting in either entirely white, muted colors or patches of white.

Similar to albinism, some health conditions can be associated with leucistic or piebald animals. In deer, the recessive genes that cause piebald coat patterns are also associated with skeletal deformities in the spine, legs, and hooves. The health and survival of the animal depends on how mild or severe the piebald genes are expressed. These health conditions, along with a reduction in camouflage, can reduce the life span of leucistic and piebald animals.

## MELANISM

Melanism is the opposite of albinism. Animals with melanism have an over production of the pigment melanin causing them to become much darker or even black in color. Melanism is very rare in some species while abundant in others such as squirrels, wolves and some large cats. Melanistic leopards and jaguars are well-known. Bobcats have also been documented with melanism, but is extremely rare. However, melanistic cougars have never been documented. Their coat



Photo by Lindsay Klatzkin, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania



Photo by Jerry Newman, Caddo Parish, Louisiana

**LEFT:** Albino northern cardinal. **RIGHT:** Albino raccoon.



Photo by Sara Zimorski, Cameron Parish, Louisiana

Pinky the albino dolphin of Louisiana.



Photo by SilverEdge, Shutterstock.com

An albino squirrel in the wild eats a nut under cover of a tree. This rare mutation gives this rodent an interesting appearance, but also makes it highly visible to predators.

is generally tan in color with some shades appearing more reddish or grey. The so called 'black panther' is a misidentified animal such as a large house cat, dog, or otter. What about that black panther picture circulating social media that was taken by my uncle's neighbor's cousin? Do a little investigation. You'll see that these pictures are melanistic leopards or jaguars, taken off of the internet, and falsely stated as being taken locally. Unlike albinism or leucism, melanism may increase survival for some animals in the wild. For example, in predatory animals, their dark color may give them an advantage when hunting in low light or at night.

### FAMOUS COLOR MUTATIONS

Islands off of the coast of British Columbia host a special population of black bears. Isolated from the mainland, the genetic makeup of their subspecies results in about 10% of the bears being white in color, while bears outside of British Columbia have a one in a million chance of being white. These white bears are not albino but instead carry a specific recessive gene for white fur. The subspecies of black bear is fondly referred to as spirit bears. Due to their rarity and wonder among people, these spirit bears are illegal to hunt in British Columbia.

Similar to the spirit bear, there is an isolated herd of white-tailed deer in New York known as the Seneca white deer. Unlike the natural genetic separation of the island spirit bear to bears on the mainland, the Seneca deer became isolated when the Seneca Army Depot erected a fence around the property, greatly reducing genetic flow between the deer on the army depot and outside the fence. With limited predation and protection from hunting, the recessive genetic condition became more abundant in this now captive herd. When hunting was allowed on the depot, it was ordered by the commander to not kill the white deer, further selecting for that specific trait. 🦌

Photo by Cody Cedotal, Louisiana



Melanistic eastern fox squirrel.



Photo by Nathan VanWinterswyk, Bossier Parish, Louisiana

## THE WHITE BUCK OF BOSSIER PARISH

Biologists with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries often receive pictures of odd looking animals to be identified. Sometimes the person knows what the animal is and would like to see it protected due to its rarity and beauty. This is the case of the white buck in northwest Louisiana. Several deer clubs started seeing a beautiful mature white buck in early 2018. Like a ghost, people would see glimpses of him as he moved through the woods or foraged on the edges of openings. Only once was he ever captured on a game camera. Wanting to protect this deer from being harvested, the locals contacted LDWF to see if there was any way to protect the buck. First they asked if we could make a regulation against a hunter harvesting the deer. Unfortunately, a regulation for such a specific situation is not easy to create and would take over a year to pass if at all. However, specific hunting clubs and/or property owners can create any rules they would like for hunters to follow on their property. Neighboring clubs could also organize to help spread the word on protecting the deer. Then they asked if we could catch the deer and protect it in a pen. This was also not feasible. Native white-tailed deer are held in the public trust and cannot be owned by an individual. Deer pens found in Louisiana are regulated by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry and are populated with deer from other deer pens, not wild native deer. Further, to capture a wild deer and attempt to pen it would mean certain death for the animal. It will continuously try to escape the pen, either killing itself by running into the fence or by a condition called capture myopathy in which extremely over worked and stressed muscles build up too much lactic acid, resulting in severe muscle damage and ultimately death.

Eventually, the neighboring clubs got together and discussed what could be done amongst themselves. Most worried that if they restricted his harvest but another local club did not, they would essentially rob their hunters of harvesting a deer of a lifetime. Therefore, they put certain requirements on harvesting the white buck, one club even requiring that the deer be full-body mounted by a taxidermist and donated to a local nature park for all to enjoy. However, like the ghost he is, the white buck disappeared before the start of deer season.





# SUMMERTIME FISH KILL BLUES

*Factors Associated With Tropical Systems Can Exacerbate Fish Kills*

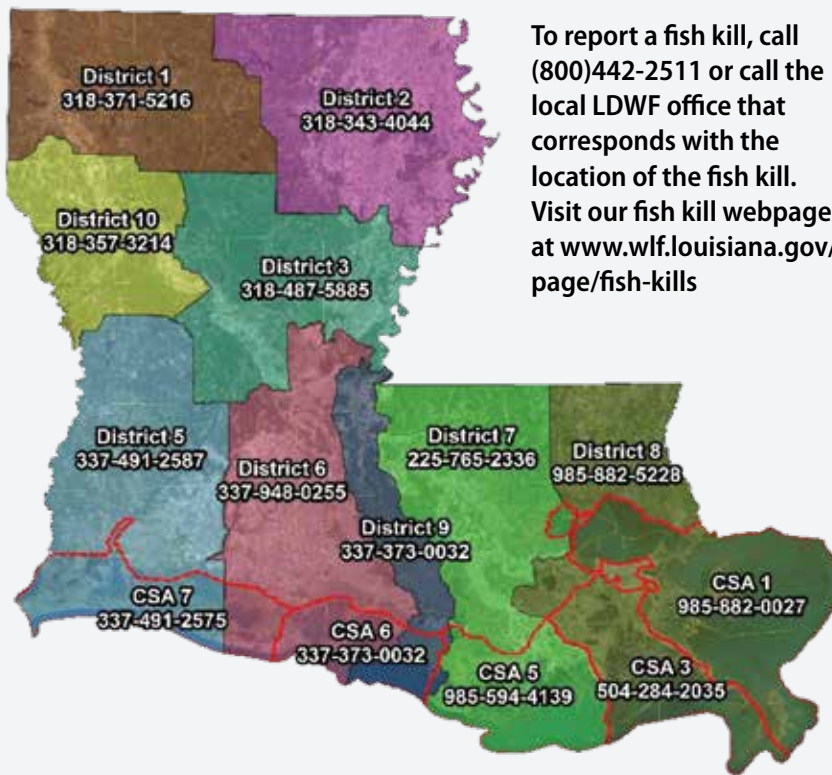
story by **ROBBY MAXWELL**, LDWF Inland Fisheries  
Technical Advisor

## W

With the landfall of hurricanes Laura and Ida in 2020 and 2021, Louisiana experienced two of the strongest hurricanes since the year 1856. Along with the widespread devastation and destruction, fish kills were scattered over nearly 10 million acres for the two storms, combined.

Tropical systems are intense, and usually a combination of factors contribute to hypoxic (low oxygen) conditions that lead to fish kills. The main tropical storm-related factors that lead to fish kills, alone or in combination, are storm surge, churning of sediments, and debris washing or blowing into waterways. Organic matter, when churned

## REGIONAL CONTACTS FOR REPORTING FISH KILLS



To report a fish kill, call (800)442-2511 or call the local LDWF office that corresponds with the location of the fish kill. Visit our fish kill webpage at [www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/fish-kills](http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/fish-kills)

carbon dioxide in and oxygen out, to respiration, where plants breathe oxygen in and carbon dioxide out.

The normal balance of oxygen-producers and oxygen-consumers is easily disrupted in the summer due to the low oxygen affinity of warm water. Factors that can cause summertime waters to dip into hypoxic conditions include stagnation, extended overcast weather leading to plants consuming and not producing oxygen, decaying organic matter, and rainfall that can wash organic matter and nutrients into waterways. Winds and flooding associated with rainstorms can also churn up hypoxic water and sediment on the bottom layer, lowering the oxygen content of the water column. Like tropical systems, these factors can work alone or in combination to cause fish kills.

Not all fish react to hypoxic conditions the same way; different species, sizes, and even populations of fish have varying levels of

up or introduced into a waterway, begins to break down by microbial decomposition. These microbes consume oxygen and deplete it from the water.

Warm water cannot hold as much oxygen as cooler water, so by the time hurricane season hits, oxygen capacity in Louisiana waters is already diminished without the added demand from the breakdown of extreme amounts of organic matter. To compound the issue, tropical systems are usually followed by extreme heat, still weather, and cloudy conditions, all of which exacerbate oxygen depletion. Fish kills usually begin to appear within a few days following landfall of a tropical system, and as fish die, they also begin to rot, leading to a further increased demand on the limited available oxygen. Hypoxic conditions have been observed in Louisiana more than a month after a major storm.

Summertime also ushers in conditions that are conducive to fish kills in Louisiana, especially in bayous, marshes, and ponds in the southern part of the state. These events can be either localized or scattered, but are generally not as widespread as tropical storm-related events. Oxygen content of water changes throughout the year, with the highest oxygen levels occurring during the winter, and the lowest in the summer. In the course of a day, oxygen levels fluctuate, too. On sunny days when plants are photosynthesizing, the oxygen content of the water will rise, and at night, it will drop as plants switch from photosynthesis, breathing

tolerance to hypoxia. Some of the most sensitive species are shad and menhaden (pogies), and they are often the only species present in fish kills only experiencing mild hypoxia. On the other end of the spectrum, gar are virtually immune to hypoxia-related fish kills since they can gulp air. Many coastal populations of fish in Louisiana seem to have a higher resistance to hypoxia than members of the same species found further inland. This is due to millennia of selective pressures from tropical and summertime hypoxic events where fish that were more prone to hypoxia died, leaving fish that were more resistant to those conditions to reproduce and pass on those traits.

LDWF biologists investigate fish kills in a variety of ways as deemed appropriate for any given situation. This can range from a simple phone or email exchange to an in-depth investigation identifying, counting, and measuring dead fish. Water quality readings and general observations are taken, and if the suspected cause of the fish kill is not natural, the Department of Environmental Quality will be brought in to complete the investigation.

The immediate aftermath of fish kills can be shocking and pretty disgusting to experience, and the heat of summer just makes them even harder on the nose. Fortunately, the heat will cause the fish to dry up or decompose quickly. Decomposers and scavengers including microbes, crawfish, crabs, fish, alligators, turtles, raccoons, and birds will all do



their part to help clean up fish carcasses. Within a few days, the smell and visual reminders of fish kills are typically gone.

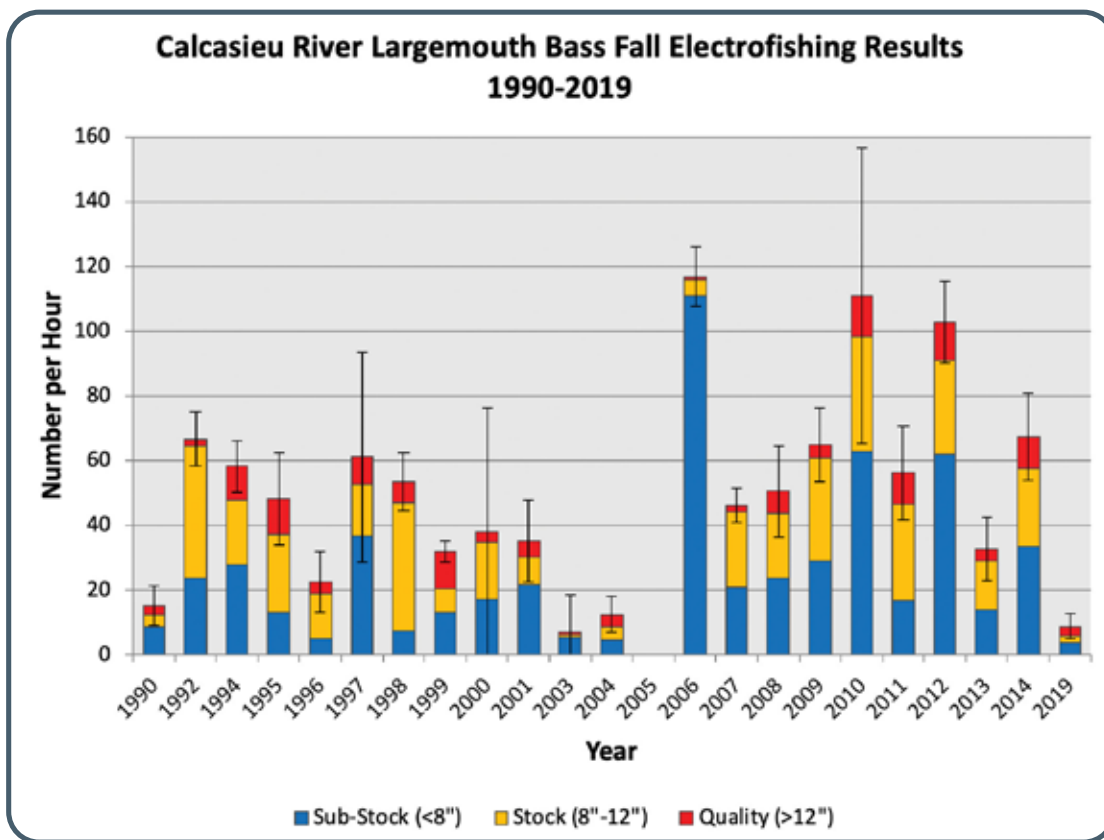
Recovery from fish kills varies based on a number of factors, including severity of the kill, total area of the kill, connectivity to other waters, productivity of the affected area, and favorable conditions in the years following the kill. In waters other than isolated ponds, fish and other aquatic life will begin to repopulate the area quickly as hypoxic conditions subside. Even in large, concentrated kills like those experienced following Hurricane Ida, fish and aquatic life will find refuge in areas with sufficient oxygen while kills are occurring, and repopulate the recently depopulated waters taking advantage of an area freed of predators and flush with nutrients.

Aquatic communities in Louisiana are adapted to bounce back strongly from fish kills. Where fish usually produce many young just to have a miniscule percentage survive, in the spring following a fish kill we generally observe extremely high recruitment (survival of young) because of the reduction of predators. Aquatic systems also experience a spike in productivity as nutrients from rotting fish and other organic matter are utilized by plants and algae. What this leads to is a very large, in numbers and in size, year class (fish born in any given year) of fish in the year following the fish kill. Generally, the year class following a major fish kill can be tracked with LDWF sampling efforts for many years, as it will noticeably

stand out in size and catch-per-unit-effort analyses of fish populations.

Because of the natural tendency of fish and other aquatic communities to bounce back after fish kills, restocking is rarely necessary. Sport fish will likely rebound just as their prey species do. Some reservoirs may see a slight boost in fish numbers following a post-fish kill stocking effort, but large open systems like rivers and marshes will probably not experience a measurable boost due to stocking. The primary reason LDWF stocks Largemouth Bass (LMB) in Louisiana is to introduce the Florida Largemouth Bass (FLMB) genetics, and chances of growing larger fish that come along with those genetics. Stocking efforts in impoundments with the goal of introducing FLMB genetics are often more successful following fish kills; however, the intent of the stockings are not to increase numbers of catchable fish. Florida Largemouth Bass introductions in rivers and open marsh have proven to be largely unsuccessful in Louisiana, as measured by the percentage of FLMB genetics in the populations following stocking efforts.

Many fish kills due to weather conditions are unavoidable, but promoting healthy ecosystems will promote resistivity to fish kills and provide resilient environments leading to quick and thorough recovery. Adding aeration to ponds can also help mitigate some of the effects of hot weather and storms.



**FIGURE 1.** Fall Largemouth Bass catches showing the fish kill from Hurricane Rita in 2005 and the recovery with a spike in sub-stock fish in 2006.





Southern flounder captured in a fyke net.



Biologists setting a modified fyke net. The long lead net guides passing flounder through the throat, or box section, of the net.



# FINDING FLOUNDER

*LDWF Fishery Biologists Develop Standardized Survey to Better Understand Southern Flounder*

story by **KATHERINE ELLIS & ZACHARY ZUCKERMAN,**  
*LDWF Fisheries*

In recent years, southern flounder across the Gulf of Mexico and southern U.S Atlantic has earned the attention of anglers, researchers and fishery resource managers as an iconic flatfish with a declining population.

Louisiana's southern flounder is no exception to this trend. The most recent stock assessment of southern flounder conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries showed that the stock is currently in decline. To set and evaluate regulations aimed to recover Louisiana's southern flounder stock, fishery resource managers rely on biological data - information on size and age distribution of southern flounder harvested by anglers, commercial fishers, and LDWF biologists, alike - to develop these stock assessment models.

Southern flounder, however, have proven elusive to ongoing fisheries-independent surveys (biological sampling conducted by LDWF Biologists) as flounder are not commonly captured in standardized sampling gear. Since 2010, fishery-independent sampling conducted using trammel and trawl nets capture a relatively small number of flounder compared to other species in the same gear sets. As concern grows for Louisiana's southern flounder stocks, fisheries managers have identified a need for targeted fisheries-independent sampling of southern flounder to expand data collection on growth and reproductive rates, which governs population structure and informs management decisions.

At the LDWF Fisheries Research Lab in Grand Isle, fisheries biologists are exploiting southern flounder's seasonal reproductive behavior to develop a standardized survey to im-

prove the information used for stock assessments. Beginning in fall, southern flounder migrate from Louisiana's coastal estuaries into the Gulf of Mexico to spawn. Adult southern flounder encounter choke points between barrier islands on their way to deeper waters, providing the opportunity for biologists to target flounder when they are most concentrated and mobile.

To maximize sampling efficiency, biologists have adopted a commercial fishing gear used along the Atlantic Coast for targeted harvest of southern flounder. Modified fyke nets consist of a long, straight lead net that terminates at a trap. When set perpendicular to the shore in passes between barrier islands, migrating southern flounder encounter the lead net and are forced to swim along it, eventually ending up in the trap. From there, biologists can collect necessary data from each flounder such as size, age, relative abundance and reproductive status of individuals to characterize the spawning stock.

The combination of implementing a known effective sampling gear in areas where southern flounder are seasonally concentrated is anticipated to greatly supplement the number of individuals encountered in fisheries-independent surveys conducted by LDWF biologists. As Louisiana's southern flounder stock status continues to be monitored, this new survey, combined with data collected from commercial and recreational harvest, will assure for the best data available to inform future management decisions. 🐟

Photo taken from the Grand Isle Beach by a public witness as Sgt. Rhodes approached the capsized vessel with eight people on top of the vessel and the 7-year-old girl trapped underneath.



Sgt. Rhodes is a 15-year veteran with the LDWF Enforcement Division.

# RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

*Unusual Circumstances Put Sgt. Stephen Rhodes In A Position To Save A Young Life*

story by **ADAM EINCK**, LDWF Public Information

**B**eing the right person at the right time and in the right place to save a life is extremely rare and something most people will never experience. It is even rarer when the right person was not even supposed to be in the right place or at the right time to begin with to start the day.

Sgt. Stephen Rhodes, a 15-year veteran with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Enforcement Division, was supposed to be working out of Grand Meadow on a patrol boat for closed season shrimpers in inside waters on the morning of May 7, 2022. Before he could get to his original work location, he got the call to go to the beach in Grand Isle to check on recreational shrimpers that were catching shrimp over the limit.

“The shrimp were running that day near the beach and people with cast nets were getting their 50-pound limit in mere minutes,” said Sgt. Rhodes. “When I got there I had to

park my truck and walk the beach checking on shrimpers. I was there about 40 minutes and was actually in the middle of writing a few citations for over the limit of shrimp when I saw the vessel having trouble in front of me in the gulf.”

The vessel had nine people on board and it was having trouble navigating some large waves that were inundating the boat. Sgt. Rhodes was keeping an eye on the boat.

While writing the citations Sgt. Rhodes heard someone yell that the boat had just capsized. He immediately dropped what he was doing and started running for his truck that was about 1,000 yards away on the Hwy. 1 of the Bridgeside Marina.

“While I was running for my truck to launch my vessel a Good Samaritan on an ATV (all-terrain vehicle) pulled alongside of me and offered me a ride,” said Sgt. Rhodes. “I estimate this person saved me about 10 to 15 minutes of time by helping me get to my truck and also helping me launch my boat.”

After launching his boat, he made it to the capsized vessel in a few minutes. At the scene, he was able to get eight occupants of the upside down vessel onto his vessel. After getting the eight occupants onto his patrol vessel, Sgt. Rhodes was notified that there was still a person missing from the capsized vessel.

Sgt. Rhodes figured the missing boater was trapped under the vessel since he was told she was wearing a personal flotation device. Sgt. Rhodes then flagged down a nearby vessel for assistance in holding his vessel still while he prepared to jump in the water to search for the missing boater.



With the nearby boater holding Sgt. Rhodes' patrol vessel in place, he jumped into the water and started searching under the vessel.

"I held onto the side of the overturned vessel and started making my way down the side while also feeling underneath the boat with my legs in a sweeping motion," said Sgt. Rhodes. "After a short time I felt something that could be a person. I dove under the boat and found a little girl trapped underneath. I was able to get her to the surface and hand her to the Good Samaritan that was holding my boat."

Once back on his boat, Sgt. Rhodes noticed the little girl was not responsive and her eyes were unfocused. He immediately began cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in an attempt to revive her. Sgt. Rhodes estimated that she was trapped under the water for about 15 minutes.

"I started CPR and on my second try I could see her eyes come back into focus," said Sgt. Rhodes. "I then saw her breathing and immediately got back behind the wheel of the vessel to bring them to waiting EMS personnel at the marina."

Sgt. Rhodes brought nine people, including the little girl, to the Bridgeside Marina. The little girl, who was 7, was stabilized by the EMS crew and airlifted to Children's Hospital in New Orleans. She was released soon thereafter and has made a full recovery.

"We are extremely proud of the actions of Sgt. Rhodes," said Col. Chad Hebert, head of LDWF's Enforcement Division. "He did an exceptional job of using good judgement and his training to help save the life of this young girl and the other occupants in the capsized vessel. We would also like to thank all of the good Samaritans that assisted in this successful rescue. Sgt. Rhodes was on patrol by himself and these Good Samaritans helped him perform this rescue faster. That time saved probably made it possible to resuscitate the young girl."

Sgt. Rhodes estimated the time that the Good Samaritans saved him to make the rescue was more than 15 minutes.

"The guy that gave me the ride to the truck and helped me launch my boat easily saved me 10 to 15 minutes," said Sgt. Rhodes. "Also the Good Samaritan that held my boat was a big time saver and help. Without him, my boat would have

floated away while I was searching or I would have had to tie off to the engine since that was the only thing there for me to tie off to. Plus getting her from me and bringing her to my boat once I found her."

Sgt. Rhodes said that his experience and training helped prepare him for this moment. He also said this is something that will stick with him his entire career and life.

"We are trained in life saving and disaster response," he said. "Your career, personality, and experience play a part in it as well. Do I feel awe struck that I saved that young girl...sure. She is alive against some very serious odds and I played a big part in that. The memory of everything that happened that day will never leave me." 🐾



Sgt. Rhodes received a proclamation from Governor John Bel Edwards for his heroic efforts.



The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission honored the Good Samaritans that helped Sgt. Rhodes with the rescues at their June 2. Pictured here are LDWF Enforcement Col. Chad Hebert, Craig Hebert, Brock Pellerin, Grant Hebert and LDWF Enforcement Lt. Col. Rachel Zechenelly.

*A look back at the Conservationist's past with an eye on the present*

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## Where The Squirrels Are... In North Louisiana

By Kinny Haddox

The directions were so easy anyone could understand them.

"Just follow me, but if we get separated, all you have to do is follow Hwy. 165 south until you get to Grayson, turn left at the light and keep going until you come to the old church. Take another left just past the cemetery then the gravel road will fork and you head north. After that, take the second left by the old open field and keep going until it dead-ends on top of the hill."

I don't know what I had ever done to Byron Rogers to make him leave me halfway lost down a gravel road in Caldwell Parish but we were well on our way to one of the most memorable north Louisiana squirrel hunts that a fellow could want.

Squirrel hunting is one of those sports that gets started with a bang and just keeps getting better. While many hunters only go to the woods early in the season, those who really have chasing bushytails in their blood keep up a torrid pace.

The Louisiana season opens in October and keeps going well into January, offering ample time for hunters. Whether a hunter reaches his day's limit of eight doesn't really matter, unless there is a camp full of hungry hunters waiting on a squirrel mulligan or squirrel dumplings.

November and December are excellent months to hunt north Louisiana squirrels. Later season hunts make it easier to spot squirrels because the foliage isn't quite as thick as it is on opening day. And even though some of the best hunting spots have already been hunted heavily, there is less pressure on a day-to-day basis, which makes the squirrels a little less wary.

With a little scouting and planning of your trip, maybe you won't need excuses. By far the best hunting spots for squirrels in north Louisiana are in the hardwood flats and creek bottoms. These areas are the most likely spots for den trees and lots of squirrels in smaller areas. A good way to hunt these areas is to find den areas and get there quietly before sunrise. At the break of day, squirrels will check the area out, then come out for their morning exercise. If you are quiet and still, you can get some good shooting in.

Another proven technique is to locate several of these areas and slowly stalk through the woods until you cover all the prime spots. Usually you can get at least one or two shots at each spot.

On up in the day, mixed stands where pine and hardwood are combined can provide some activity. Squirrels will often race around the big pine trees or cut on big pine cones. These activities give squirrels away easily as you can hear them from quite a distance. Again, it's good to be able to stalk quietly through the woods because if they spot you first, you may never see them. For that reason, good camouflage clothing is a must. During late season hunts, make sure



that you wear orange if you are in an area that requires hunter orange. It may not help your hunting but it might save your life.

There are two basic types of squirrels in north Louisiana, fox squirrels and grey squirrels. While there are several biological races of each, they are two distinct groups. The grey squirrel is noticeably smaller, usually lighter in some shade of greyish color and is usually found in hardwood stands.

The fox squirrel is basically a reddish color, ranging from dark cinnamon to a bright red similar to the color of a red fox. The fox squirrels are also larger on average, and some have been killed that weigh in excess of two pounds. The squirrels make homes in most areas of the state but they are most common in the upland mixed timbers and the ridges along bottomlands throughout the state.

Seasons for hunting squirrels in Louisiana are set so as not to interfere with breeding season but biologists have noted that it is not uncommon to find a few newborn squirrels just about any time of year in the Bayou State. However, the main breeding seasons are in the spring and in the late summer.

The quest for squirrels is still the top-ranked hunting sport in the state. It is estimated that nearly three million squirrels are killed in the state annually but that varies with mast production and available habitat. Squirrels adapt easily to changing habitat but must have a solid food source to really thrive.



# THEN & NOW

## VANISHING SMALL GAME HUNTERS

Small Game Hunting The Perfect Way To Get Started In The Sport

by **ERIC SHANKS, LDWF Hunter Education Dual Career Ladder-A**

Squirrel hunting has a long, proud tradition here in Louisiana. Many of us cut our teeth chasing bushy tails in the swamps, bottoms, or mixed hardwood forests, depending on which part of the state we grew up in.

Hopefully, many of us still mix in a morning or afternoon squirrel hunt amongst our other hunting pursuits, even as adults. And what's not to enjoy? Squirrel hunts and small game hunts in general tend to be short, lower intensity affairs that often give us a chance to socialize with our friends and family during the hunt. In addition, squirrels are found in almost all forested habitats and are usually common enough that your chances of at least harvesting a few (if not a limit) are good.

Squirrel and other types of small game hunting make an ideal way to introduce new hunters to our way of life. The frequent action, mobility, and immediate rewards of squirrel hunting make it easy to see why many new hunters might prefer to start out that way.

Unfortunately, total hunting participation has been on a downward trend nationwide over the last 25 years. Small game hunting in particular has experienced the most drastic reduction in hunter participation, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife surveys. Even with our strong traditions Louisiana is no exception, it just may have taken us longer to see the same trends. The overall trend in small game hunters in Louisiana since the 2013 hunting season has been downward. Of particular concern are the last four years where our participants have now dropped well below the long-term average of 150,000 hunters.

So how can Louisiana landowners and managers help turn the tide on those declines? One way is to allow more squirrel hunting on their properties and encourage their hunters to bring new hunters squirrel hunting with them. Teaching novices the basics of hunting and woodcraft during the pursuit of one of the various sub-species of squirrels we have is both fun and rewarding.

While we all love to introduce children to the great outdoors by taking them hunting, don't overlook the opportunity to bring new adult hunters into the field with you. You might be surprised at the number of grown-ups that are interested in giving squirrel hunting a try. Many of them may not have grown up in a hunting family and so never had the opportunity to learn.

One of the challenges of taking a new hunter squirrel hunting, even on your own property or lease, is that many properties restrict small game hunting to days outside of the deer firearm season. Some properties may also not allow small game hunting before the deer season opens or during archery season, effectively cutting a five-month squirrel season down to less than two months. Hunters and landowners often invest significant amounts of time, money, and ef-

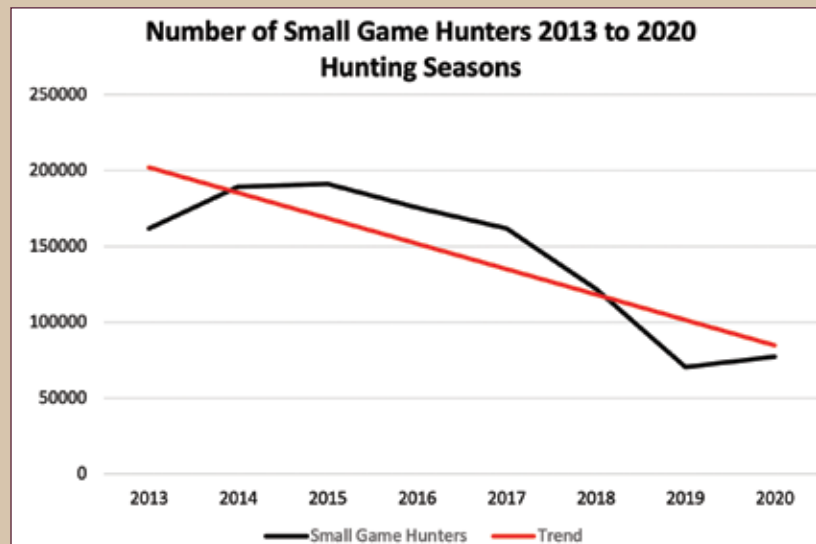
fort into managing or enhancing their property for deer, and understandably the idea that their deer hunting success may be negatively impacted by small game hunting doesn't necessarily sit well.

The good news is, according to multiple studies on the subject, the data indicates that low to moderate intensity small game hunting has little or no effect on deer movement and behavior.

For example, LDWF and LSU partnered to study the effects of small game hunting in Louisiana. This study found that moderate (once a week) rabbit hunting with dogs had no significant effect on deer movement or home range. It did have an effect on how much time they spent in their core range, which is a much smaller area of their home range where deer normally spend 50% of their of their time. In other words, the deer stayed home, they just spent more time in a different room of the house.

It is worth noting that this study looked at the effects of small game hunting with dogs. It is reasonable to assume if small game hunting with dogs has little or no impact on deer behavior then removing dogs from the equation to take a morning stroll and shoot a few squirrels would have the same or even less impact.

I truly believe that the tradition of hunting will never die in the Sportsman's Paradise. We can all help ensure that never happens by introducing new hunters, young and old, to the sport we love.



**FIGURE 1:** Number of small game hunters in Louisiana from fall 2013 to spring 2021. Source: LDWF hunter harvest annual surveys.

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