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Peregrine falcon

The peregrine falcon epitomizes the boldness and dash usually associated with the birds of prey. Probably never overly abundant in the state, the species is now a regular but rare winter resident. Primarily a hunter of birds, it has the size and spirit to attack sizable prey. The stoop, or diving attack, by striking with closed fist of its talons as do some avian hunters.

Pesticide ingestion appears to be the major cause of the decline of the peregrine. Much progress has been made, under the leadership of Cornell University, in artificial propagation of this rare and spectacular species. There is optimism that this technique, plus the growing awareness of the beauty and value of the birds of prey in general, will restore the “duck hawk” to something closer to its early day population.

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The Cover

Bucketmouth he’s been called by imaginative sports writers, and the reason is readily apparent in the cover photo of a trophy largemouth on the losing end of an encounter with a Florida “hawg-hunter.”

Photo by Florida Department of Commerce

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Americans favorite freshwater sports fish, the largemouth, black bass has a voracious appetite. There's probably no aquatic creature he won't eat. But of all the items on a bronzeback's dinner menu, undoubtedly the most unusual is saltwater shrimp.

Not many anglers realize this, unless they fish brackish waters. Nevertheless, a few expert table fishermen know that in the numerous tidal streams, especially in Florida, where saltwater shrimp regularly invade the brackish and fresh water areas nearest the sea, black bass love to dine on live shrimp. The bronzebacks adore a fresh shrimp cocktail, minus the sauce, of course. If you talk to cagey Florida table anglers who fish the St. Johns, Homosassa, Chassahowitzka, Withlacoochee, Choctawhatchee, Suwannee or Apalachicola rivers, or most any stream with a viable shrimp population nearby, you learn shrimp can be a very productive natural bait for bass. This type of fishing never rates the headlines.

During the winter run of speckled sea trout and channel bass (redfish) in the coastal rivers, anglers often regard black bass as a nuisance, when bucketmouths grab live shrimp intended for the saltwater fish. Then, believe it or not, the bronzebacks rate mule skinner adjectives usually reserved for trash fish.

The delta of the Apalachicola River in the Florida Panhandle is a particularly productive area for bass fishing with live shrimp.

Shrimp are a natural food during the fall and winter, and the nearby Gulf of Mexico supports a huge population of these crustaceans. It's possible to boat (or at least fight) bass in the 5- to 8-pound class, if you know (or learn) some of the tricks of this unusual fishing. In the Apalach Delta area, the guides specialize in using live shrimp and cane poles for bronzebacks.

Despite my extensive bass fishing experience, my introduction to this angling was a surprise. Jimmy Mosconis' statement was startling. Standing calmly on the docks of the Bay City Lodge in Apalachicola, he told me in a matter of fact manner that his guides specialized in taking parties black bass fishing using live shrimp as bait AND WITH BREAM POLES! I wondered why every guide boat I saw carried two or three rigged cane poles.

The idea of fishing with shrimp was surprising enough, but it became astounding when coupled with the idea of using 10- or 12-foot, limber cane poles, a far cry from the lunker sticks most dedicated bass anglers use.

For brute strength, a cane pole and a lunker stick are no more comparable than a willow switch and a telephone pole. Bream poles are fine for the panfish brigade, but as bass busters, they lack the backbone that landing a scrappy bronzeback requires.

Um, I thought, this sounds slightly fishy (no pun intended). I'd never heard of deliberately using live shrimp as bait for black bass, although, like other saltwater anglers, I'd had the bronzebacks interrupt trout-redfish trips in the coastal rivers at times. However, I'd always considered these merely odd-ball incidents.

The situation became more perplexing when Ralph Richards, our guide, arrived, and after studying the tide, quickly remarked: "We ought to be able to catch our limits in a couple of hours."

Now catching bass with shrimp and bream poles seemed possible, but claiming two limits—20

(continued on next page)
O.K., so they said you could catch bass. I had to be shown. Ralph wasted no time. Quickly, he landed a bass weighing a little more than a pound. I was convinced.

It took me a little time to get adjusted to dropping the shrimp in the proper places. The bass were among the weeds and in open water, which made proper placement more difficult. Also the weeds didn’t make landing a fish easy.

With no reel to retrieve line, all you can do is hold your pole high, hoping the pressure will prevent your jumping bass from throwing the hook. And jump they do, often successfully getting free.

Finally in control, you bring in your pole hand over hand, extending the butt over the opposite side of the boat until you can reach down and lip-land your bronzeback. It’s far different than retrieving with a rod and reel, and it’s a tricky landing.

After missing several bass, I got the touch and landed one weighing about a pound and a half. However, my landing technique was different. I yo-axed in typical bream fashion, and swung the fish close enough to the stern where Ralph made a dexterous catch.

The bream-rove system works, but you need a good catcher. Most Bay City guides have become adept, probably partly out of self-protection. Getting slapped in the face by a struggling, airborne bass isn’t particularly desirable.

As Ralph scalped the shore among the grass and weeds, we caught bass up to two pounds regularly, as long as we had live shrimp on our hooks. But once the bait was dead, the bass wasn’t wanted no part of the offering. By keeping lively shrimp on our hooks, we had the bronzebacks hitting eagerly until the tide changed. Then they abruptly quit.

The bronzebacks zone in on the last hours of a falling tide and the first hour of the rise. After that, apparently they follow the bait back into the grass where it’s impossible to hold them until the tide falls again, and bait and bass have to retreat from the grassy shallows.

The tide changed about noon. Our bag totaled 21 bronzebacks in less than two hours. That is excellent fishing. Had we started earlier, undoubtly we could have caught more fish.

Although the claim may not be true, Ralph and Jimmy proved to be fast, I still had some lingering doubts about this odd-ball, shrimp-bass fishing. It could have been a freak, one-day occurrence. The final proof came the following morning.

Again we sallied forth with our bream poles. Again in less than two hours on another falling tide, we landed 20 black bass up to two pounds.

The fishing technique was the same, as was the area. Definitely, the Apalachicola delta bass like a shrimp cocktail.

There was an added twist to this trip. I dropped a lively shrimp into a likely hole, and immediately got a savage hit. The slender cane bent like a willow in a storm. This fish was obviously bigger and a harder fighter than any I’d previously hooked.

Visions of a 5-pound or bigger bronzeback flashed through my mind as I fought to keep the unseen fish from fouling on the motor. I grimly hung on, keeping the pole as high as possible. There was nothing else I could do.

Eventually the pole’s spring tension tired the fish, and I drew it alongside the boat near the stern. Ralph grabbed the line and hoisted my prize aboard. It was a bass! No! It was a 3-pound jack crevalle, and fighting one of those bulldogs of the sea on a bream pole is an experience you never forget. If I had my choice, I’d prefer to encounter jacks and other saltwater fish with a rod and reel. It’s a lot less work landing them.

Since learning about this shrimp bass fishing, I’ve caught them several times, even later in the fall. I also learned you don’t have to restrict your fishing to the edge of the marsh grass near the Apalach causeway. You also can succeed way inland.

In Montgomery Slough one day, my guide and I landed 18 bass, again with bream poles and live shrimp, and we were much farther inland. It was a blustery December day with an east wind, which is never very favorable, yet the bass were larger. The biggest was a 3-pounder, and a bronzeback that size will give you a battle royal on a bream pole.

There was no doubt that the Apalachicola bass like saltwater shrimp. Logically, black bass elsewhere in tidal waters should do likewise. I started checking.

On a sheepshead fishing trip with Gene Lechler, a good friend who guides from the Yardarm Docks at Riverside Villas in Homosassa, I brought up the question of shrimp as bait for black bass.

Gene’s a swing guide, operating in both fresh and saltwater. He confirmed my theory. He’s had black bass hit fresh shrimp many times, particularly in the river when the reds move in after the first cold spell in the fall. At times, he finds the bronzebacks a nuisance when after reds.

I’ve made queries elsewhere, and learned that catching black bass with saltwater shrimp is a common technique in the St. Johns River near Welaka and Lake George approximately 80 miles from the sea, in the Ochlockonee River in the Florida Panhandle, in the Withlacoochee River near Yankeetown, and in the Suwannee River. But to find the specific holes you have to ask questions locally. This type of bass fishing is little publicized. Maybe the table fishermen don’t want too many people knowing about the technique.

Obviously, black bass enjoy saltwater shrimp when they can find them. Now that I’ve discovered this little known fact, I’m going to use shrimp again and again with something besides bream tackle.

I’d prefer a little stronger equipment when playing with those bronzebacks, particularly if I encounter some of the 5- to 8-pounders they say are frequently caught. They’d be almost too much on a bream pole.
Rigging the “Texas Rig”
keeping the weeds off while getting the fish on Lone Star State style

The subject of plastic worm rigging is approximately as sensitive as politics or religion and is made especially tender by use of the word “Texas.”

Now I don’t know whether the Texas rig was really invented by a Texan (no reason why it shouldn’t have been) but the history of worm fishing really got going 20 years ago, quite a bit has been forgotten about the beginnings.

Anyway, the Texas rig is most popular of all and when A.D. Livingston was less than enthusiastic (if casts are short, very light tackle is used) or with a slip sinker on course, can be fitted to the situation—water depth, casting distance and tackle. And it can be a specialized form such as the rattling worm heads sold by Jim Strader.

The conventional “Texas rig” with small sinker, as compared to Nymph-O weedless rigging with worm.

The special advantages of the rig are that the hook is unobtrusive and is probably not noticed by the bass when he slurps it and that when it’s on the bottom the fish can worry the worm a bit without noticing the slip sinker. The disadvantages are that the hook must be set hard because the barb must be forced through part of the worm before it gets to the fish and that the worm won’t last long thus hooked.

The ideal rod for use with the Texas rig has lots of backbone and comes on as a specialized “worming rod” with which you can set a hook very hard indeed, usually with both hands, and still stay in a small skiff. It is a bit stiff for casting the weights commonly used with it. At risk of receiving Texas mail, I suggest that quite a few strikes are missed.

From what I experience and hear, it is very difficult to keep this rigging if the worm is fished very slowly on the bottom because there is no unnatural weight in the worm itself. In cases where the worm is moved more rapidly and is likely to be struck the way a bass will strike a plug, there are arrangements that may hook better for most of us.

Of course the best weedguard is the lightest one that will fend off the weeds. Too heavy a guard becomes fishless as well as weedless but if the weedguard is just right it requires less energetic hook setting than does a hook imbedded in a worm.

Livingston, who started all the ruckus with criticism of the Texas rig, recommends a worm rig which involves a keel-type hook, a weight coated with soft material and fitted to the hook and a plastic weed guard. This is his Nymph-O rig and can be used with all sorts of spinners. The regular size is 3/16 ounce.

I have never been too happy with keel-type hooks in some kinds of fishing but the way a bass takes a worm it should hook satisfactorily. It contributes greatly to weedlessness, of course.

There are numerous lashups that involve weighted hooks in conjunction with a variety of attractors. However, since I mentioned Livingston’s specifically, you can get details on it from Bass Fishing News, Box 326, 9 Grove St., Headland, Alabama 36345. Livingston is editor of the paper.

Theories about fish eyesight, especially regarding black bass, eventually get around to night fishing and the best colors for night lures.

Black’s the traditional color, the theory being that it will show against the sky or against less-than-black underwater obstructions. The argument is especially strong where surface baits are concerned. Most regular night fishermen tend to discount color entirely, believing that the bass is primarily attracted by sound and/or vibrations. For that matter, we think sound and vibration are so closely related in fish senses that you may as well classify them together.

Now there’s no secret that the most popular and time-honored night plug for bass is the Jitterbug, usually worked steadily so that it leaves a surface trail of bubbles and wavelets and presents a constant gurgle. There’s a popular theory as to why you move it steadily instead of intermittently as most daytime lures are manipulated. The idea is that the bass is making his approach and strike solely on the basis of sound (vibration) and that if you stop the bait he may not be able to find it. Might overshoot or give up and go back to wherever he was loaﬁng.

A proven night bass getter is the Jitterbug.

While that’s practical theory, most fishermen believe that both sound and sight are involved to some extent—sight much less than in the daytime.

Anyway, it doesn’t hurt to keep it gurgling.

I’m pretty well sold on Lew Childre’s Spool Spool baitcasting reel, which puts a number of important features in one package and has now been around for a while. Ever since free-spool reels began to claw baitcasting popularity back alongside spin-fishing, the improvements have come steadily.

Everything that comes along in this line must be compared with the Ambassadeur, the Swedish reels that really started free-spool plugging. Oh, there had been light free-spool reels before that: they just didn’t get well started in fishing. Tournament casters had used them for a long time.

Briefly, the Childre reel has these characteristics: It is free-spool but the handles can be left engaged while you play a fish, making it possible for you to use your thumb as a drag. When you do, the mechanical drag does not work. You can also cast without throwing the reel into free-spool, a feature shared by some other reels.

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Few fishermen will make use of this casting method but it is handy in some situations, such as drifting fast along a close-in mangrove shoreline and casting heavy plugs from a boat. It saves time and the casts are very short.

The level wind does not move while the reel is in free-spool for casting, a system that reduces resistance to the cast. The centrifugal drag system, similar to that on the Ambassadeur, is an adjustable aid to drag control when the braid is going out. The handles are large and convenient.

Line capacity on the standard spool is very small because the spool is quite narrow (that's where you get your easy casting) and quite large in diameter (that's where you get fast takeup with a gear ratio of around 1 to 4, and it also adds to casting ease). Filling the spool to a red mark there for the purpose, I got on 65 yards of 15-pound-test Web braided monofilament line. That's aplenty for bass fishing. Saltwater anglers might want a deeper spool with larger capacity, also available. In the parts list the spool shows at $18.

The Speed Spool is compact and easily palmed for retrieving. No sharp edges. It seems very heavy, but that's because it's small. I find it weighs only an ounce more than an Ambassadeur 5000. I've used one considerably and it's worked beautifully. They're expensive. 'Suggested' prices don't mean much these days. You'll probably pay around $60.

Handlining comes with all sorts of cREDENTIALS. It is considered the crude method of aboriginals but sometimes turns out to require unusual skills. You may have caught bream or catfish with handlines while peering through a bridge crack and dismissed it as kid stuff.

I have gone bug-eyed at the skills of some Argentine natives who use gallon cans and nonfilament line, coiling the line on the cans as they retrieved and letting it unravel a la spinning reel style when they threw spoons by hand after whirling them a time or two to gain speed. Accuracy and distance too.

On a trip to Cucumel, Yucatan, Mexico I had an especially entertaining exhibition when a native called by the Spanish word for "Snapper" caught sharks, triggerfish, snappers and barracuda on a shallow flat—less than two feet of water.

He sightfished, seemingly firing a chunk of cut bait from the hip, and giving a cruising 'cuda just the right lead. The same went for sharks, even the ones that had obviously sighted the boat and were trying to avoid it. One end of his line was tied to the mast and he worked his coils like a rodeo cowboy.

On the mangrove snappers he was not above sliding up alongside the bushes, parting them carefully and then handing his bait to an individual fish leaping among the roots.

He wasn't carrying a spear but if a mangrove snapper refused to bite and didn't leave he'd attempt to knock it out with the end of his pushpole. Maybe it ain't sporting, but it ain't easy either.

"Speed Spool" reel, right, compared to Ambassadeur. Its spool is barely wide enough for a big thumb.

Most sportsmen enjoy hunting with congenial companions who speak the same language. However, they live in dread of getting stuck with some thoughtless or careless character who either doesn't know or ignores the basic rules of good manners and how to behave in the field. They make that sort of mistake with the individual only once.

Yet unfortunately, such thoughtless or careless hunters do exist and, though their numbers are few, their actions are all too often viewed as typical by critics of the sport.

The hallmarks of a responsible hunter and a good companion afford go way beyond just obeying the formal laws relative to trespass, bag limits and seasons. In essence, they involve a basic respect for the bird or animal being hunted. For example, it might not be against the law to shoot a pheasant on the ground, but a true sportsman wouldn't do it. Such a person tries to learn as much as possible about the game he or she hunts. Waterfowl identification is especially important to assure that only species that are legal are taken and that the hunter stays within the point system where it applies. Knowledge of wildlife management is also helpful. The responsible hunter takes an interest in programs to improve habitat through planting of food and cover crops in the areas he or she hunts.

Equally important is skill with firearms to insure quick, clean kills. In addition, such people regard game as a delicacy for the table and never waste it. Good dog work and ignore the animal's shortcomings. Praise them yourself only if absolutely necessary.

A cardinal rule is never to hunt in your friend's favorite spot which he has shown you unless he is along or has given his consent. Violation of this courtesy should lead to the end of a friendship.

There is an old saying to the effect that, if you want to find out about a man, get him in a poker game or take him hunting. Remember that when you accept an invitation, and see that you conduct yourself so that you will warrant a return engagement.

Above all, emphasize the basics of hunting ethics to all of your associates and to youngsters who may just be starting the sport. Responsible hunter behavior may not change the vitriolic sportsmen's point of view, but it will certainly go a long way toward persuading the general public that hunters are decent people who do care about wildlife. The irresponsible few, on the other hand, do us all great harm.

Provided as a public service by The National Shooting Sports Foundation
For 30 of my past 42 years, I have been hunting deer in the flatwoods and swamps of Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. My initial years were basically unproductive as far as killing deer. During this period I tried, without much success, most of the tips that I heard, read or dreamed up.

Only in the past six years have I consistently been successful at deer hunting. I'd like to share some of my experiences along the rocky pathway to deer hunting success. Hopefully these comments will help someone else who's still struggling for the key to putting some venison in the pot.

GUN SELECTION—All firearms have their strong and weak points, but for all around hunting (deer hunting included) if only one gun is purchased, I would suggest an automatic 12 gauge shotgun with 2%-inch chamber and a 28-inch barrel with modified choke. This type of firearm is most satisfactory for ducks, rabbits, squirrels, quail, or deer. It is not the very best deer gun, but it does serve the purpose and that should be the first consideration for a beginning hunter.

The second firearm that I would acquire would be a .30-06 or a .308 automatic rifle with a scope. Buy a full size rifle, not a carbine. The old story about needing a .30-30 carbine for brush country is a bunch of trash. If the brush is that thick, carry your shotgun. The short rifle was intended originally for the convenience of a horseman, not necessarily as a general hunting arm, and certainly not for long range shooting.

Many times bucks are allowed to get away without being shot at because the horns on a young whitetail deer are hard to see. A rifle without a scope has limited value in hunting the whitetail because you can usually shoot a shotgun as far as you can see the horns with the bare eye. This is especially true with a young buck. A 3-9x variable power scope is the best if money is no object but if money is tight, buy a cheap scope and spend the extra money saved in buying a .22 rifle with a scope and a few thousand rounds of ammunition for practice purposes.

Within reason, it is the quality of the marksman, not the cost of the equipment that gets the results. A rifle is useless to you unless you have the ability to shoot quickly and accurately at a standing or moving target. Year before last, in 43 days of hunting, I saw only one buck, an eight point, and he was running at 125 yards. I got off one shot but that was enough. Without being ready for that single opportunity—without the marksmanship resulting from much practice—the season would not have produced a deer. With a shotgun, I could not have even fired because of the distance.

I favor a raised "sight-through" mount for the scope. This enables the hunter to have available an open or peep sight for the fast close shots where this type of sighting equipment is preferable. If the game is moving fast, it may be difficult to find him in the scope. In my opinion, this is far superior to the snap-over or swing mount. Many times you don’t have time for the snap over!

If automatic weapons are to be used, it is essential that they be kept clean or they will likely hang up at the most inopportune time. The moving parts and all shells should be wiped clean and then regularly lubricated with something like WD40 to prevent hang-ups.

AMMUNITION SELECTION—With a shotgun, my choice of shot size is No. 1 buck, with a first alternate being Single 0 buck, and the third choice No. 2 buck. Double 0 buck does not have enough pellets to the load, thereby reducing the probability of hitting a vital spot. No. 3 and No. 4 buck shot are too light to get the velocity and distance necessary for deer hunting.

With a rifle, I would select the 180-grain bullet over a lighter one. The 190-grain is much less likely to be deflected by branch or twig.

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Cigarette smoking while on a stand is a severe handicap to your effort, if for no other reason than the fact that you move your hand and arm lifting the cigarette to your mouth for a puff and moving it away again. Motion at the wrong time can sink your best laid plans. Even the swirling motion of the smoke can spook a deer.

Test this for yourself. Sit in the woods and look about you. The first thing you notice are the things that move. You can sit absolutely still on a cold stand for hours and then move just a bit to get the circulation going and shy off a deer you didn't even know was anywhere in the vicinity.

Oh, sure, you've had an old Nelly or her fawn walk right up to you, even though you'd been moving around. But how about a good buck? If it's happened, I'll bet it's no more often than Miami has had a July snow storm.

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BUCK WHITETAIL FORAGING AT EDGE OF CYPRUS POND

Even when dogs are running a deer, it is essential to remain motionless. After the first few minutes, the deer can be so far in front of the dogs that he can pick and choose his way. He's watching where he's going, too, and a moving hunter is like a warning signal.

Two things are extremely important in not being detected by the deer. First, you must remain still. Secondly, if you are still hunting brush country, get as high up in a tree as you can. For some reason, deer almost never look up.

GENERAL TIPS—If you would bag a deer, be prepared to hunt long and hard. Most of the deer that I have taken have been downed after 2:00 p.m. At that time of day most hunters have gone back to camp so they obviously have no chance at all. If you go hunting at 7:00 a.m. and quit at 10:00 a.m., then I have four times better chance of killing one than you do because I am not going to quit until dark.

If you see a deer that has already seen you, and you do not get to shoot, that is the time to throw caution to the wind. Run, do not walk, to the nearest open area that he might have to cross. The odds are good that you will get a second chance. I have shot at running deer with a rifle and missed, only to have them run a couple of hundred yards and stop. Perhaps in an effort to determine if they've been followed. This will often allow for a second shot if you move quickly enough.

Know your hunting area thoroughly. When jumping, deer will head for an open trail. They do not like to crash through brush any more then you do.

After shooting, do not assume that you missed simply because you didn't see an animal stumble or fall. Deer are possessed of amazing vitality and not infrequently travel a considerable distance after taking a lethal hit.

Once you're sure you will not get a second shot, go back to the place from which you fired and look for sign that the animal was hit. There are two sure signs. The first is blood which may be on ground, bushes, leaves, or trees the deer ran past. A second sure sign of a critical hit is an irregular track pattern. A heavily wounded deer's feet will make jagged holes in the dirt where he occasionally stumbles, rather than the clear tracks he normally leaves. You may not see a stumble for the first 40 or 50 yards, even though you scored a vital hit. In any case, carefully track the animal as far as possible. Changes are he is already down for keeps and you'll find him if you persist in your tracking.

Another time you need to carefully check out the results of your shooting is when two or three deer are running in front of dogs. Most of the time, if you shoot down one of the deer, the dogs will not stop but continue to push after the one still running. Get to the spot and search carefully for signs of a hit and you may find your buck racked up.

A wounded deer, hard pressed by dogs, will frequently go down in water. The dogs will lose the track and will smell around in the vicinity trying to pick up the trail again. If they do not start the deer again, get to the dogs and look carefully in the water for a wounded or dead deer. But be ready to shoot! He may well get up running when you get within a few yards of him.

In summary, hunt hard, practice shooting, remain still at appropriate times, and be persistent. Remember, several thousand hunters do bag Florida white-tails every season. This could well be your year to score.

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WHAT IS A BASS FISHERMAN?

By CHARLES DICKEY

Between a boy's first cane pole and a tottering old man we find a strange creature called a bass fisherman. They come in assorted sizes but all of them have the same creed: To hurry to the water right now and enjoy every second of every fishing trip—and when it's past time to go home to make just one more cast.

Bass anglers are found nearly everywhere—floating silent rivers, lost in a swamp, kicking a motor at a boat ramp, sneaking into secret ponds, turning off alarm clocks at four in the morning and telling fishing stories at business meetings. Mothers love them, young girls can't understand them, brothers and sisters tolerate them, the boss envies them and Heaven helps them. A bass fisherman is Truth with dirty fingernails, Beauty stranded in a driving rain, Optimism against all odds, Wisdom with a love of Nature, and the Hope of the future with good-will toward mankind.

When you are busy, a bass fisherman is thinking of crank baits, lonely lakes and country roads. When you want him to make a good impression on someone, all he can talk about is plastic worms, bass beds, the lunker he lost last week, the pH factor, chartreuse skirts and bassin' rigs.

A bass fisherman is a composite—he likes Vienna sausage and rat cheese at a country store but at home he's on a special diet; he eats moon pies with one hand and casts with the other; he has the energy of a hurricane when he starts fishing but hires the neighbor's kid to mow the lawn; he has the lungs of a top sergeant when he gets a strike but goes deaf when you get one; he has the imagination of a scientist as he tears through his tackle box for a secret weapon; he has the courage of a lion as he sits quietly shivering in a cold front; he has the enthusiasm of a firecracker as he pounds each brush pile, and when a lunker finally hits, he's forgotten to set his drag.

He likes sloppy britches with plenty of seat room, dirty tennis shoes, long weekends, CAT caps, frequent holidays, private ponds, vacations and questionable companions who are also bass fishermen. He's not much for social gatherings, water skiers, kin folks who visit on weekends, neckties, litterers, double time on Saturdays and Sundays or neighbors who don't fish. Without thought of race, creed or color, he likes people who bass fish year-round and talk about it in between.

Nobody else is so early to rise, or so late straggling in to supper. Nobody else gets so much fun out of chasing minnow schools, searching for structure or getting his line busted. Nobody else suffers so patiently with aching hind end, chapped lips and blistered cheeks. Nobody else can cram so much into one tackle box—42 plugs he hasn't used in ten years, a compass that doesn't work, a flashlight without batteries, a hunk of fruit cake from three Christmases ago, a rainsuit which won't fit back into the plastic bag it came in, a change of drawers, a punctured can of oil and a copy of Robert's Rules of Order.

A bass fisherman is a magical creature—you might get sore at his constant chatter about solunar tables but you can't lock him out of your heart. When the bass are bedding, don't expect him to show up at birthdays, Sunday School, anniversaries or picnics. He'll do more than his share of work on the job but just don't count on him when the weather gets warm on weekends. There's only one remedy for bass addiction.

You might as well give up—the bass angler is a child of Nature with a hopeless one-track mind. He's always going to be late cleaning the garage when the bass are hitting. And you may as well quit trying to understand why he needs another rod when every closet in the house is loaded with them. Just forget about hot dinners and leave his in the oven.

And though you get sore at him at times, you know you'll always like him. There's something about him that rings true, that you can really count on. He's a simple and kindly man who only asks of life that the water stays clean, the bass grow big and he's there when they're hungry.
Beaches, lake shores, mud flats or wet uplands . . . . .

Look For The SHOREBIRDS

I'd gone about as far as I could. Drought had exposed an acre or so of mud flat, separating me from the upper reaches of the lake. Stepping into the shallow water, I surveyed the bar preparatory to dragging the canoe across.

The object of my immediate concern was a long, narrow spit, carpeted at one end by emerald-green spikerush. A movement caught my eye, and I turned in time to see a greater yellowlegs skitter across the spikerush an instant before bursting into flight.

It was one of those moments that leave you mildly astonished with their beauty. I still carry a mental image of colors and lines; the yellow legs, vibrant gold thread against the soft green background. And the bird itself, erect, poised for flight, the lines of its body and plumage pure and clean as the October sky.

The next day, I loaded the canoe and headed back up to the same spot. This time I packed a camera and telephoto lens.

A recent cold front had pushed good numbers of shorebirds into the area and there was reason to expect them to hang around for awhile. The weather was clear and bright as the day before. Maybe the yellowlegs would be feeding on the mud flat.

The only cover was a stand of maidencane just offshore. Feeling as conspicuous as a cow in a cabbage patch, I set up the tripod and hoped for the best.

Killdeer came and sanderlings. A snipe poked around the edge of the maidencane. The sanderlings busily fed, then settled down; some to bathe, others to doze in little groups, each balanced on a single leg.

Once I felt a surge of excitement as a pair of yellowlegs took wing farther up the lake. Although I couldn't see them, their clear, three-note calls were unmistakable. As they turned, the sun caught their white undersides and I could see them flying down the shoreline toward me.

Every hunter and wildlife photographer sometimes wishes to be invisible. Unable to disappear, I crouched low, seeking to be an unobtrusive lump in the maidencane.

No dice. The yellowlegs ignored the mud flat and its spikerush, the sanderlings, the snipe and plover, and maybe even me and my optical contraptions. They were bound elsewhere. Passing, their sandbar-gray backs and even the bright yellow legs were soon lost to sight.

Such is the way of shorebirds; often wary, highly mobile and difficult to second guess. As a group, they are the most widely traveled of birds, outdistancing even the globe-trotting waterfowl. Only the Arctic tern travels farther in its seasonal migrations.

Most shorebirds breed in the far north, many above the Arctic Circle. Of the 39 shorebird species reported in Florida, only six breed here. As winter approaches, they head south. Some winter in the Gulf states, others continue as far as Tierra del Fuego.

Shorebird flights are often incredibly long. Golden plover fly non-stop from the Aleutians to Hawaii, covering more than 2,000 miles in 35 hours at the rate of two wingbeats per second.

But they are remarkably well adapted for this. Their internal organs store and conserve energy to sustain long, rapid flights and most have the tapered wings and short tails of birds who go places in a hurry. Fast afoot, they are among the few birds swift on the ground as well as in the air.

Their colors are usually dun or gray, colors of rock and sand from the Arctic to the Argentine. Their beauty lies in movement and line, rather than color, and in the mystique of the traveler. —Michael Miller

The black-necked stilt. One of the most graceful of shorebirds, the distinct black and white plumage, long red legs, straight slim bill and large size (approx. 13 in. tall) are good field marks. Breeds in Florida.
Shorebirds are often difficult to identify. These dunlin (below) are in spring plumage. In winter rusty back plumage is replaced by gray and dark belly spot by white. Short-billed dowitchers (bottom), also in spring plumage, can be told from long-billed by lighter belly plumage and their bill length.

The pectoral sandpiper (above), an uncommon shorebird usually found in freshwater marshes or wet meadows. Abrupt transition of buffy upper breast and white underbelly along with extended carriage of neck are good field marks. Both the pectoral sandpiper and the common snipe (right) fly in rapid, zig-zag patterns when flushed. The snipe is also commonly found in freshwater marshes and wet pastures, often probing for worms with its long, sensitive bill. Along with woodcock, they are the only shorebirds legally hunted in North America.
American oystercatchers (top), an uncommon shorebird considered to be "threatened" by the Game Commission. Distinct markings make it easy to identify. Greater yellowlegs (above) are hard to distinguish from lesser yellowlegs in the field. Can be identified by size and call. Willet (right), a common shorebird year-round in Florida. Willets are tall (approx. 13 in.), often found singly or with flocks of smaller shorebirds and show strongly marked black and white wings when flying.

Killdeer (above left), the most commonly seen plover in Florida, is easily identifiable by double neck band. Ruddy turnstones (above right) get name from color and feeding habit of turning small stones to search for food. Red knot (below) in gray winter plumage. In the spring migration, this shorebird will have changed to russet and is sometimes called "robin snipe."
An enjoyable outdoor winter experience is . . .

Panhandle Paddling

Although hundreds of canoeists paddle the lakes and streams of Florida, surprisingly few know the rivers and creeks which lace the panhandle of the state. "Surprising" because these are some of the most enjoyable canoeing streams to be found anywhere. Of the 35 streams listed in the Department of Natural Resources' Florida Canoe Trail Guide, 15 lie west of Madison County.

Whether falling through limestone ravines, winding past sandy bluffs or trickling from deep cypress swamps, each stream has its own distinct character. The Indian names roll off your tongue with an easy resonance: Aucilla, Wacissa, Ochlockonee, Econfina, Chipola and many others. One of my goals is to know them all, to explore each by canoe.

Econfina Creek, narrow and swift, cuts a high-walled passage through limestone formations while the St. Marks River flows placidly through piney woods and coastal hammock. Canoeists can spend several days paddling more than a hundred miles along the powerful Apalachicola or leisurely cover the entire Wakulla (at least, all that's open to the public) in an afternoon.

Canoe trips in winter can be a chilly experience—even in Florida.

After hearing several good reports about the Blackwater River, several friends and I decided to see that river first-hand over the New Year's holidays.

To me, Florida camping is best in cold weather and I usually plan overnight trips during the winter. Insects are never a problem, you have the option of hunting if you wish, and the chilly evenings somehow make the food taste better and the campfire more enjoyable.

You might disagree and decide that warm weather camping is more to your liking; in fact, most people do. And in many ways it is better. You can enjoy the water more and you need less gear. But one item which you'll find most valuable is some good insect repellent. Those "skaters" can sure raise a ruckus during an otherwise peaceful summer night.

We began making plans for our trip. Chris and Don Simon were visiting from out of town and were enthusiastic about the prospect. Doug Bailey was anxious to try his new boat on a long river tour, and I made a more-than-willing fourth member of the party. But first we needed river information.

We called Bob's Canoe Rental in Milton, an outfit specializing in fully equipped float trips on the lower Blackwater. They obligingly told us the water level was good and suggested some points to start and end our trip along the river.

The next step should have been a check with the weather forecaster but, perhaps anticipating bad news, we ducked that option and went ahead with our plans. Using maps for Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties, we decided on a stretch of river which would give us a good two-day trip.

We packed cold weather sleeping bags, tents, tarps and cooking equipment and loaded our boats onto the cars. Doug had recently built his kayak

By Michael Miller

(continued on next page)
Stopping along the river to admire the scenery, we found the great piney woods of that region extending almost down to the water's edge. Most of the soil in that part of the country is sandy and well drained, ideal for the growth of longleaf pine and wiregrass. The hardwood belt along the river provides food and cover unlike that which is found in most of the surrounding countryside, attracting a number of wildlife species. Deer, wild turkey and squirrels are likely to be seen as they come to the river to feed on acorns, tupelo berries or plant buds. Many smaller birds such as warblers and woodpeckers can be seen along the river corridor as well as in the surrounding pinelands. At one point, we stopped to climb a high sandy bluff which extends along the eastern bank of the river, providing a good view of the river and surrounding forest. The bluff also is used as a nest site by belted kingfishers with tunnel several feet into the bank to lay their eggs.

After leaving the bluff, we decided to begin looking for a campsite. The short winter day was ending and we wanted to set up camp before dark.

Leaving Tallahassee late Thursday afternoon, we drove the 180 miles to the river and camped in a small county-maintained park at a crossing near Holt. Setting up camp in the dark, everyone did their best to ignore the steady rain which had begun to fall.

The next morning dawned cold and grey but the wind was steady and we were able to paddle in a straight line. Almost.

Paddling a kayak for the first time can be described as an aquatic balancing act, a "rope trick," as Doug would say. However, Don quickly passed the wobbly stage and before long was able to paddle in a straight line. Almost.

But it didn't matter because you don't really need to paddle in a straight line on the Blackwater. With the exception of one 300 yard straightaway, the entire trip was "around a bend." The river hardly straightens except to go in a new direction.

Piles of logs jam the inside of the bends, calling for some fancy maneuvering in the fast current and, occasionally, the jams extend across the river, requiring a short portage.

As the jams tax, they also reward. Beautiful pieces of weathered cypress and cedar driftwood can be found in the piles of logs. The best fishing, too, is in the deep holes on the downstream side of the log jams.

Finding a suitable site along the river is no problem, there are plenty of dry, level spots within a few feet of the water's edge. The river flows through the Blackwater State Forest and camping is allowed on state land. Anyone planning to have a campfire should contact the Forest Supervisor's office in Milton to determine the fire hazard conditions and to let the Forest Service know that someone will be in the area using a campfire.

We found a fine campsite, specking three deer off a nearby hillside as we set up our tents. With a good supply of well-seasoned dead wood lying around, there is no need to cut trees. Besides being frowned upon by the Forest Service, it's hard, unnecessary work to cut trees. We used a chainsaw to reduce large fallen branches to useful size and to chip "lighter" splinters from a pitch filled stump. You won't need an axo.

If you cook over a campfire, as we did, you'll need a metal grill in that near-rockless country. We were lucky and found one which Chris put to good use. Digging a small fire pit in the sand, she placed the grill over the hole, pots on the grill and proceeded to cook the best chicken and dumplings known to man. We scraped the pot for "seconds" till it hardly needed to be washed.

The next morning we awoke to clear skies and frost on the wiregrass. We had breakfast and broke camp, attempting to remove all traces of our campsite.

On the river again, we were faced with more than 40 miles to cover before day's end. Bending our backs to the paddle quickly warmed us despite a chilly tail wind and soon we were shedding layers of clothing.

"Wow," Chris commented somewhat dryly as she shed a sweater. "It's really warming up. Now you only need a T-shirt, a set of long underwear, a flannel shirt and a jacket to keep warm.

On the inside of the river bends are large sandbars of pure white sand, so fine that it squeaks when you walk on it. On that chilly New Year's Day afternoon, with the cold wind whipping the white sand through stands of spruce-like white cedar, it was easy to imagine the Blackwater as a northern river and the sandbars as snow banks.

Despite the cold weather, we only saw two people outside our party during the two-day trip; fellow canoeists. With the exception of that couple, the State Road 4 bridge and a nearby pasture, we noticed little evidence of mankind during the entire trip. We were living a fine but increasingly rare experience; an extensive river trip along a Florida stream that is neither polluted nor cluttered with shoreline development.

Backed by brushy uplands along the river bank, we paddled between wooded shores and white sandbars where turtles lay their eggs on warmer days. Rather than traffic sounds, we heard jrees and, once, late in the day, the whap-whap-whap wingbeats of a wild turkey spoofed from his riverside roost.

Although peace and quiet are sometimes hard to find, we found them aplenty along the Blackwater. Trip over and gear loaded, we headed east on Interstate 10, each with our own recollections of the past two days.

Like a mental liniment, thoughts of the wilderness river made us forget our sore arms and tired backs, we were already planning our next trip down a Florida panhandle river.
If your Florida stomping grounds are well down the peninsula, you know the onset of the fall season is a rather subtle thing. This is especially true if you're tuned in by up-north exposure to expect a riot of color in the woodlands. The drying up and dropping of the cypress needles doesn't really qualify as a burst of autumnal glory.

In the upper reaches of the state, however, fall does make something of a traditional showing. Here, the hot, sultry days at the tag end of summer have dragged on endlessly. The calendar says it is getting toward fall. The sweetgums, as though impatient to get on with it, are starting to show a first faint blush of color.

Then one day, usually toward the end of September, you wake to the sound of a mockingbird's singing. Bird song! That's what's been missing from the early mornings! Even before you go outdoors, you know the weather has changed. Dog days are over!

So although it still heats up during midday, the sweaty vice-grip of summer has been broken. Soon the woodlands will reflect the change of seasons. Depending on your location, it may not be quite as spectacular as the "shellburst of brilliant hue summoning the hunter to the field," as one enthusiast wrote, but it is highly attractive and pleasing to the eye nonetheless.

(continued on next page)
Earliest notice of autumn is posted along streams in the blackgum (a tupelo). By late October, its leaves are almost gone (above) and autumn’s red banner is carried by turkey oak (top, right) and shining or winged sumac (right) with Carolina chickadee.

(continued from preceding page)

What turns on the machinery that paints the autumn woods? In fantasy it’s Jack Frost touching the leaves with his paintbrush. The reality of the matter is somewhat more prosaic. It’s a straightforward biological-mechanical action that gives us the “beauteous harbinger of drear days ahead.”

The leaf is a factory, manufacturing, by the action of sunlight and chlorophyll contained in specialized cells, food for growth and maintenance of the tree. Conduits bring water and dissolved nutrients, as the raw materials, to the factory.

In late summer or early autumn, a block of cork cells grows across the base (petiole) of the leaf stem, blocking the conduits. Without a water supply, the leaf begins to dry out. The chlorophyll breaks down, and other colors that have been covered by the green mask are exposed to view.

The color the leaf “turns” depends on the pigment beneath the chlorophyll layer. A yellow leaf results from the pigment xanthophyll. Carotene gives orange yellow; anthocyanin, deep red and purple.

Soon the leaf breaks off at the cork layer and falls to the ground to be recycled in due time in nature’s never-ending chain.

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While autumn’s story might be written in red, it is punctuated with yellow. The water hickory is shown in top photo, the wild grape, above.
Cut and dried you could call it, this fate of summer's green. Some observers have had other things to say, for instance:

Wind a sighin' in the pine tops, 
Touch of frost, the musk of leaves, 
A drift of smoke from down the holler, 
Blaze of color, eye to please.

Hunting Time
Letters From 'Possum Hill
Art Willis 1841

Smaller shrubs and grasses also feel Jack's touch. The cinnamon fern (right) colors the upland while, in the tidal marsh, the yellow of giant reed turns to gold in the afternoon light.

The KESTREL
By Mike O'Shaughnessy

Most anyone who travels the Florida countryside is familiar with this diminutive falcon. Many call it "sparrow hawk." The names "kestrel" and sparrow hawk are said to be of European origin. The European kestrel is a small falcon, closely related to our own kestrel, while the European sparrow hawk is of a separate family and is similar to our sharp-shinned hawk. Generations of American farm kids have given our kestrel the name "killy-hawk" for its familiar "killy-killy-killy-killy" call. Yet, a more appropriate name might be "grasshopper falcon" because insects are the primary food item on the kestrel's menu.

Kestrels are a hole nesting species and often lay their eggs in abandoned woodpecker excavations or natural tree cavities. If they find these in short supply, they will often nest in spaces under the eaves of houses or in artificial nest structures such as martin houses or wood duck nest boxes. The eggs are deposited on the floor of the cavity, without benefit of nesting material, and usually number four or five.

Kestrels are year-round residents of Florida and when autumn gives way to winter, they become very common here as they move south to avoid the cold. They can often be seen perched on utility wires along the roadside where they search the grassy swales for prey, or hovering on quickly beating wings before diving for a grasshopper or field mouse. In flight, their tapered wings and relatively long tail give them a somewhat dove-like appearance and, while protected by state law, they are sometimes shot. However, a careful hunter can easily spot the differences in markings and flight patterns of kestrels and doves.
It was still dark as the inside of my camera—save for the bouncing lights of our swamp cat—when husky Ronnie "Mac" Green brought the pitching, grinding vehicle to a shivering halt on the Ozello marsh. We had come here to hunt ducks, near Crystal River, on Florida's upper Gulf coast.

Before us, bathed in the white glare of our little all-terrain vehicle's headlights, lay a small palm hammock in a ghostly setting. Wispy shafts of mist moved restlessly through the little island of trees, swaying among the otherwise motionless growths like specters dancing to music only they could hear. Close to one edge of the hammock lay a small pond with mirror-calm surface. There, barely visible through the clinging fog, floating in et hereal manner, my wife and I could see half a dozen decoys. "You two set up here," Mac announced, handing me a couple of folding camp stools. "Me and Will are gonna make our blind at the next pond. You'll be hearing us shoot shortly."

With that optimistic announcement the two brothers, each in his late 20's, clanked away into the foggy night.

We sat listening quietly to the predawn sounds. Eventually it was shooting time.

Too late, we saw the small, compact flock of ducks that materialized suddenly from the brightening mist—flying so fast that Lou hadn't time to bring up her Model 1100 autoloader. The dark blobs flashed in low, then disappeared again as quickly, leaving twittering calls behind them.

"Teal," I announced, grinning at my wife's frustration.

As Lou and I huddled there in our blind, waiting for shooting conditions to improve, I reflected upon (continued on next page)

By 11:00 a.m., it was all over but the pluckin'. We had filled our limits of pintail, baldpate and teal.

**Ducks On The Ozello Marsh**

By George X. Sand

Photo by George X. Sand
the unexpected phone call that had brought us here. The caller had been Crystal River realtor Ronnie Green. I hadn't heard from him in over 20 years. "You remember the last time we hunted ducks?" Ronnie asked. "Yep. We had a great shoot, for several days, on the Homosassa River—with Dazzy Vance, the famed National League pitcher."

"Right. We stayed aboard Dazzy's 32-foot houseboat. And Carson Mason was our guide."

"Yes. And I nearly flipped when a 10-foot porpoise surfaced suddenly—right among the decoys. Dazzy and I had put out. I in fact, I used that as the title for an article I subsequently had published in FIELD & STREAM. That was in the early 1950's."

"Things have gotten pretty much built-up in this area since those days. But we've still got a big piece of unspoiled marsh at Ozello that offers real good duck shooting."

"How good?" I asked.

"Well, when my three boys go there they seldom return without their limits. It's the kind of hunting you could write another story about."

"Is this marsh available for public use?"

"I guess is."

"You're not talking about the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, are you?", I asked. Good public shooting areas have become scarce.

"Nope. This is a 20,000 acre aquatic preserve on the St. Martins marshes, in Citrus County. It borders right against the back door of my trailer, here in Ozello. Anyone can walk right into it."

"We'll come," I had promised Ronnie. And we had set a date.

The 30 square mile marsh, I discovered, extends northward from the border of the Chassahowitzka Refuge to Fla. Hwy. 44, where this secondary road follows the south shore of the Crystal River to the Gulf of Mexico. Included in this vast and beautiful half-land, half-water labyrinth of oak and palm tree marsh islands, twisting creeks and majestic bays, are the St. Martins and the Bird Keys, and the Little Homosassa and St. Martins Rivers.

The quaint little commercial fishing village of Ozello, we discovered, is not shown on some road maps. Driving northward on U.S. 19, Lou and I turned west on Fla. Hwy. 494, which we picked up about midway between the towns of Homosassa Springs and Crystal River. We followed 494 for five miles, crossing a concrete bridge at the Salt River and two wooden trestles at Black Creek.

Ronnie Green was wearing a broad grin as he appeared at the door of his large waterfront trailer to greet us. The duck hunting, he assured us, had been good. He pointed to an all-terrain vehicle parked nearby. Two of his sons would use the ATV to take us into the marsh early the following morning. We could walk in from here, of course—the shooting waited less than 20 minutes away—but it would prove more convenient to use the little swamp cat.

The following morning my wife and I had boused out of bed expectantly—only to be greeted by the clinging fog.

Now, however, the heavy mist was beginning to break up at last, for a breeze had sprung up. Here and there, Lou and I caught glimpses of ducks trading back and forth across the big marsh, still searching for their breakfast.

A pair of widgeon appeared suddenly out of the thinning fog. The two birds came bounding straight toward us—low over the tall needle grass. There seemed to be no doubt these white-bellied ducks had seen our stool.

"Okay, we'll each dump one," I told Lou. "You take the drake—let's go!"

We came to our feet as one—and the birds immediately zoomed upward as one, pumping frantically to grab altitude.

I heard the drake's characteristic whistle stop abruptly as my wife's load of No.4's caught him in the dense cloud of lead that made the feathers fly.

My own bird remained unscathed.

"How come?" Lou asked.

"I guess I'm just too gallant to shoot hemos," I replied lamely.

Her glance fell suspiciously to my over-and-over.

"My guess is you forgot to take your safety off again?"

I sighed. It was true.

I waded out and picked up the white-crowned baldpate, which had been floating belly-up. I had barely returned when two more widgeon came toward us. They flew fast and nervously, in the usual baldpate manner, their white bellies and forewings conspicuous in flight.

Lou let me drop both of these, and I felt better.

"That's another $20 saved," she observed.

"Meaning what?" I asked.

"According to a survey by the Fish and Wildlife Service the average duck hunter pays about $10 for every bird bagged, all costs considered. If you live within driving distance of this marsh, however, all you need buy is your gas and shells."

We heard the twittering cry of teal. A pair of greenwings had bumbled in from behind us. Lou was ready and deftly dropped one of the Banking birds. It was a good shot. As I stood up to go after the teal—a pretty little male bird with cinnamon colored body—
iridescent green eye-mask—I could see one of our friends on the marsh in the distance, apparently likewise retrieving downed birds.

"Hold down!" There was a sudden urgency in Lou's hissed warning that made me dive back to cover. Dropping down from the now bright blue sky in a zigzagging, volplaning rush was a sizable flight of pintails! Why these wary ducks hadn't spotted me outside our blind I cannot guess.

My wife and I huddled motionless, barely following the sprig with our glances as they circled us. We could hear an occasional hoarse quack from the mottled brown hens; the repeated whistles from the dark-headed males.

Then they came straight in to us with down-cupped wings set stiffly and widespread webbed gray feet reaching for the water.

Whoom-whoom! Lou's first shot came almost at the same instant as my own. I saw my target—a plump drake with elongated white body and pointed black tail—throw back his head limply and start to fall.

Lou was shooting again as I swung on another drake. This one likewise stopped its climb...to go spinning down to the water below.

When the mist lifted and we could see to shoot, the action got hot as ducks dropped into our decoys.

When it was over four big birds lay on the pond: three males and a hen. Lou and I exchanged pleased grins.

By 11 o'clock that morning my wife and I had each filled our limits. So had Mac and Will. We rode back to the elder Green's trailer home, laughing and joking. It had been a good hunt.

Here are a few suggestions, should you intend to hunt ducks on the Ozello marsh this year: contact realtor Ronnie Green, at Crystal River, for information. (Ronnie has assured me there will be no charge for this assistance.)

Dress as lightly as the weather permits. Boots, or waders, should be light—and broken in for walking. The former is preferred.

A seat of some kind is almost a must. Legs become cramped from squatting. Sit on the earth, and you can't see much from a blind.

Decoys should be the kind that can be easily carried. A half dozen mixed pintails and mallards will do fine.

Weight will not be a problem, of course, if you have access to a 4-wheel drive vehicle. But it is easy to become bogged down in this marsh where some of the twisting creeks and ditches double-back again and again.

Take at least one other person with you. Allow yourselves time to walk—or drive—out before dark.

Photo by George X Sand

Photo by Farner & Montalbano

the lead shot problem

By Jim Farrior and Frank Montalbano

Duck Days—those weekday mornings of late December when the holiday season furnishes tomorrow's opportunity to learn from the school of hard knocks. To learn first hand about hard-headed Chesapeakes, cantankerous outboards, and squatting out at a widgeon brace because they didn't think about sunrise when they threw out the decoys. When the incentive to wait until they're in range comes from the hole sky-busting leaves in a sixteen year old's pocketbook, rather than from an uncle's wise-cracks. Leads are deceptive when ringnecks circle into a brisk north wind and boys throw a lot of No. 6's for every bird in the bag.

There's one thing they may never know. How many ringnecks those two boxes of No. 6's actually accounted for. Little do they know that all those misses will take their toll of next year's spring breeding population. They've heard about mallsards windrowed on some Illinois lake, their crops filled with grain but their breast muscles wasted away. To them it's just a far away problem that will never hurt the fun they have on those cold wintry mornings. After all, no one has ever seen ringnecks dying on Lake Iamonia or on the Merritt Island National Wildlife refuge.

Frank Bellrose, nationally renowned waterfowl biologist, looked into the problem in 1938 and by 1953 had examined over 39,000 duck gizzards from all over the country. The results proved conclusively that a substantial number of waterfowl die of...
(continued from preceding page)

lead poisoning from ingested pellets. Although roughly 2 million ducks are lost each year as a result of lead ingestion, Bellrose concluded that the problem wasn’t bad enough to warrant drastic corrective actions.

Unfortunately, the world’s become a less hospitable place for waterfowl since Bellrose voiced his conclusions in 1969. Habitat deterioration, increases in hunting pressure, and the proliferation of exotic diseases have combined to greatly increase the vulnerability of waterfowl to catastrophe. These factors together with an increased awareness of the quality of our environment, and a more critical approach to the harvest of wildlife resources, of the quality of our environment, and a more critical approach to the harvest of wildlife resources, have resulted in a re-evaluation of the lead ingestion issue. This despite calculations that the mortality rate due to lead ingestion has not changed substantially. The wasteful loss of 2 million ducks is far more significant today than 20 years ago. Concerned environmentalists agree that unless this needless waste of waterfowl is alleviated, the very future of waterfowl hunting is in jeopardy. Frank Bellrose saw the changes and is now among the most vocal advocates of measures to control the lead ingestion problem.

Recognizing the need for corrective action, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed a ban in 1974 that would have completely prohibited the use of lead shot while waterfowl hunting by 1978. The proposal was designed to take effect over a three year period by closing the flyways one at a time. The Atlantic flyway, which includes Florida, would have been first, closing in 1976, the Mississippi flyway in 1977, and portions of the Central and Pacific flyways in 1978.

Why didn’t the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service impose the ban and why can you still shoot lead shot in most parts of the state? State and other conservation organizations suggested a better way. The U.S.F.&W.S. agreed, and extended to the states the option of closing the entire state or conducting independent studies to determine the “hot spots.” These are areas where, because of heavy hunting pressure and other specific conditions, an unusually large number of lead pellets are concentrated.

The effort to document the scope and extent of the lead ingestion problem in Florida began during the 1974-75 hunting season with the collection and analysis of Florida duck gizzards. What better way to learn something than from the local residents. Division of Wildlife biologists working on the study felt that the Florida duck could answer questions that migratory birds could not. Being a non-migratory resident, any shot found in the gizzards could only be picked up here in Florida. This might not be the case with other ducks that migrate through several states, raising the possibility that shot was ingested elsewhere. The results surprised everyone including those working on the project. Over ten per cent contained ingested lead, almost four per cent higher than the national average for all species of ducks.

Two years later the study was extended to include all species of ducks taken in Florida. Using a new, more sensitive technique, 1908 gizzards were examined, their contents emptied into containers and x-rayed. The x-rays pinpointed the lead shot. The results closely paralleled those completed the previous year. Nearly 12 per cent of the gizzards contained one or more ingested lead pellets. All those misses may have taken their toll of ringnecks after all.

Next the gizzards were grouped according to the counties they came from. By knowing the percent of gizzards containing lead shot, the “hot spots” could be identified. To demonstrate, there were 31 counties where gizzards were collected. From Leon County there were 333 gizzards in the sample, one third contained ingested lead pellets. A ban on the use of lead shot was obviously needed.

In the revised federal proposal, a lead shot ban would have been implemented in Citrus, Seminole, Brevard, Leon and Glades counties, effective opening day of the 1977-78 season. However, because the Division of Wildlife’s study identified the “hot spots”, the F.W.S. agreed to close only those areas where an ingestion problem was evident. The ban will now be imposed only in Leon County (except Lake Talquin and the Ochlockonee River), Lake Miccosukee in Leon and Jefferson counties, that part of Brevard County east of I-95, and all National wildlife refuges. The study will be continued during the 1977-78 season to refine data and determine if other problem areas exist.

Despite the fact that lead ingestion in waterfowl has been identified as a serious problem in Florida, controversy still exists. This is partially due to the incorrect and incomplete information circulating about steel shot. It can also be attributed to those die-hard lead advocates who fail to see the benefits of steel.

Many questions are being raised that concern the use of steel as opposed to lead shot. Studies were conducted as early as 1954 in attempts to shed light on some of these questions and eliminate the controversy.

It is often argued that steel shot does not have the stopping power of lead, and will result in increased crippling losses, possibly enough to offset the positive effects of a ban. The Fish & Wildlife Service’s final environmental statement on steel shot cited nine studies conducted specifically to determine if the performance of steel is comparable to that of lead. The results all concluded that as long as the number and size of shot are increased to replace in mass what is lost in density, and shots are held to within 40 yards, the difference in performance is insignificant. When #4 steel is substituted for #6 lead and "moon shots" are avoided, the hunter should be able to fill out a limit without increasing the number of shots fired.

There have been many questions concerning the effects steel shot will have on a barrel of a gun. There are three types of damage that have been attributed to the use of steel shot. First of these is wear or erosion which appears as scratching inside the barrel. This problem also occurs when the lead is used, but the development of the plastic protective liner that enclosed the shot has eliminated this problem.

The construction at the end of the barrel is known as the choke. It is responsible for the shot pattern and the second type of damage, choke expansion. It is sometimes noticed as a ring-bulge near the end of the barrel. The concern is that the performance of the gun may be altered, resulting in a deterioration of the shot pattern. In a study conducted by Remington Arms, 23 guns of several different models were fired from 500 to 4500 times each with loads of steel shot. No choke expansion was found in 13 and the measurable expansion in the others was so small that gun performance was not affected. In one single barrel pump, 4500 rounds of steel shot were fired with no expansion. To satisfy your curiosity, that would take the average duck hunter over one hundred seasons, using only steel shot. Because noticeable expansion does occur in some makes of shotguns, it was recommended by this and other studies that to avoid northern and eastern American made, single barrel, good quality shotguns be used when firing steel shot.

Little information exists on steel shot’s relation to barrel bursts. Only four were reported in two seasons while steel shot was being used. These, however, have not been attributed to the steel shot. Winchester Group reports that 1000 bursts annually while lead shot is in use. It should be noted that barrel burst usually results from three causes; obstructions in the barrel, too strong a charge, and faulty barrels, often associated with low quality guns, and not the shot.

Perhaps the biggest concern to those who use steel shot is cost. Those who purchased a box last year know just how expensive it can be. Prices during the 1976-77 season were well above $7.00. Those who plan to purchase a box this year better count on prices of over $9.00. The answer lies in time. Manufacturers need time to develop steel shot production techniques.

It has been proven conclusively that a lead ingestion problem exists in portions of Florida. Steel shot has been found to be not only an effective substitute, but one that will appreciably reduce one type of damage to our population. With mounting habitat destruction and hunter pressure, it has become a problem sportsmen can no longer overlook. If future generations are to enjoy the thrill of early morning pintail decoying to a big water spread, a positive effort has got to be made to insure wise and proper management of this valuable resource.
Rabies! The very word strikes terror in the hearts of many people; principally, those who have little knowledge of this generally fatal disease.

Most dog owners realize they must have their pets innoculated annually. Some counties or municipalities require that cats be inoculated also. A few people take chances by ignoring the yearly shots because they are just too much to handle. Why should I bother? My dog won’t ever get rabies.”

From another aspect, many people do not realize that wild animals can have or carry the disease. This refers to warm-blooded mammals only. There are several methods of taking the pre-exposure immunizations. The U. S. Public Health Service’s Center for Disease Control recommends two 1.0 milliliter injections one month apart, with a third dose six to seven months after the second dose. Or, for more rapid immunization, three 1.0 mL injections at weekly intervals, with a fourth dose three months later.

The World Health Organization recommends three injections at 5-7 day intervals, followed by a booster one month after the last dose. And, makers of various vaccines have their own recommended methods.

In all instances, a blood test to check for rabies antibodies should be made 30 days after the fourth shot. Provided rabies antibody levels are proper, booster injections can then be administered every one to three years.

With our pre-exposure immunizations we would have to take a lengthy series of shots if bitten by a known rabid animal. If bitten seriously near the neck or throat, 21 doses are advised. If the bite is less serious and far from the head and neck areas, 14 shots might do the job. The area for these post-exposure shots is left to the physician’s discretion. They may be given in various locations, including the back or abdomen.

The only way to prove any animal is rabid is to destroy it and have the brain tested. And I’m told this is not always proof positive. Thus, anyone bitten or exposed should probably take the long series of injections unless he has had the pre-exposure immunizations.

Don’t panic at the sight of a wild animal. Be cautious and enjoy the moment quietly. It’s his earth too. Usually, if you leave him alone, he’ll leave you alone.

If the animal acts in an unusual fashion, i.e. is overly friendly when normally it should be shy and timid, or vice-versa, or if it just plain doesn’t look well, has a rough coat, appears unkempt, has a discharge from eyes, nose or mouth, or shows signs of uncoordination, leave it alone and contact the proper authorities.

Enjoy the wild ones where they were meant to be, in their own natural habitat. Most of them were there before you came along.

But, by all means, if you work closely with domestic or wild animals, seriously consider the pre-exposure immunizations. They are well worth it. If your physician isn’t aware of them, contact your local health department or even a veterinarian.

The life you save may be your own!
Will the Southeast become a region of rifle shoot­ers? With the expanding deer herd, there's no doubt that more and more hunters are turning from traditional shotguns with buckshot to rifles with telescopic sights.

With the dramatic increase of the deer herd in Florida the past 20 years, now between 500,000 and 600,000, there's a definite trend for hunters to replace their shotguns to wing shooting and convert to rifles for deer hunting.

There's a good reason! The word has gotten around that the riflemen are getting their bucks. They are successful at killing bucks at ranges the shotgun shooter can only dream of.

In any kind of hunting, the hunter is trying to overcome the distance factor between himself and the quarry. Rifles have more capacity for this than any other legal weapon.

Shotguns, loaded with buckshot or rifled slugs, will die slowly and hard but they are on the way out. It is true that many deer are killed in the deer under four types of rifles of Florida at ranges under 50 yards. There are times when the hunter would be happy to see clearly through the brush for 20 yards. Even the scoped rifle will handle short ranges better than a shotgun, provided low power sights are used.

The surest way to kill a deer is to place your shot when the deer is not aware of your presence. The closer you have to get to a deer, the more likely the deer will detect you and flee. With a scoped rifle, you can kill deer cleanly at distances of 200 to 300 yards, or even more.

The bowhunter accepts great odds. He wants to be within 30 yards or less of his quarry before firing. The muzzleloader wants to be within 75 yards or less. That's fine for them. They know they are giving away odds before they go hunting.

But if you really want to take a buck home, your best odds are to use a scoped rifle. Aside from the distance advantage, with a rifle you can place your bullet. This is extremely critical.

There are not many places where you can hit a buck and instantly knock him down with a clean killing shot, regardless of the weapon. The brain shot is sure but hunters do not want to damage the antlers or the head in case they wish to mount it. Any shot which shatters the vertebrae, the neck or spine, will instantly kill the animal.

The shoulder shot will drop a buck from shock and broken bones but quite a bit of meat may be damaged. A heart shot is fatal but the deer may run 50 yards or more. In fact, going by the hunters I've interviewed, it's more typical for the buck to run a ways than instantly drop.

A lung shot is fatal but the deer may cover quite a bit of distance before dying of shock and hemorrhage. As a general rule, the farther a deer travels after being hit, the harder he is to find.

Under field conditions, the hunter does not always have a choice of spots on a deer he'd like his bullet to hit. Obviously he must take the shot which is most open and likely to be fatal. Ideally he hopes to have a clear shot at neckbone, spine, heart or lungs. With a scoped rifle, properly sighted in, he has a good chance of placing his bullet exactly where he wants it to hit, or within an inch or two of it. He does not shoot at a whole deer. He shoots at a fatal spot. Because the riflemens places his shot, his chances of killing the deer are better than for any other weapon.

The hunter using a shotgun and buckshot does not know where his pellets are going after 20 or 30 yards. He sprays the deer. He may point at a fatal spot but if the deer is more than 20 or 30 yards away he has no assurance that even one pellet will go where he intended.

At 5 or 10 yards, the shotgun with buckshot may be the most potent of all guns. I have read that professional hunters often use it as a backup gun for a charging lion. As the closing lion makes his final spring for his enemy, the hunter fires both barrels straight into the face.

There is no question that hunters have killed deer at 60 yards or more with buckshot but no mat­ter how you figure it they were lucky shots. They had to be. At 60 yards or so, the hunter simply does not know where the pellets are going. He doesn't know after 30 yards.

Rifles may cripple deer but buckshot cripple more. The rifleman has the capability of placing his bullet in a fatal spot; the hunter using buckshot does not have that capability after 30 yards or so. He shoots and hopes one or more pellets hit a vital area, or that the accumulated shock of several pel­lets will stop the buck.

For most shots, the first one is the best—that is, you have more time to place it. You are more likely to kill the deer cleanly if you take your time on the first shot and make it count.

Of the four types of rifles—bolt, lever, pump and semi-automatic—the bolt is the most accurate. For most shooters, it is the slowest action to work for second and third shots.

A lot of hunters buying their first rifle go for the fire power. They want a rifle which will spew a lot of bullets in a short time. There is nothing wrong with this as long as rapid-fire capability does not detract from placing the first bullet, or any subse­quent shots fired.

Scoped lever, pump and semi-automatic rifles have the accuracy capability to handle most shots the hunter will get in Florida woods. However, I prefer the little edge I get with a bolt-action rifle. Besides its accuracy, I know I am not whiz at work­ing the bolt to get off a second or third shot and will work that much harder to make the first shot pay off.

My current caliber favorite for white-tailed deer is the .243 Winchester. It's a flat shooter for 200 yards and holds up pretty well to 250 yards. Al­though most deer in the state are killed at ranges under 75 yards, there is hunting in open woods, savannas and across pastures where you do get opportunities at 200 yards or even more.

One reason I like the .243 is that it has light recoil. In fact, it's hardly noticeable. I derive no pleasure from being belted around by the big bores such as the 30-06. Kicking guns make shooters flinch. If you flinch, you miss.

If you need a new deer rifle, but have to watch your dollars, I suggest you take a look at the Rem­ington Model 788 in 243 caliber. It has a fast locking system and excellent accuracy. It's a no­frills rifle which sells for about $160. For about $185, it comes with a fixed scope.

I prefer a variable scope and there's a wide and confusing number on the market. I think the ideal for Florida deer hunting is a variable from 2x to 5x. Most new shooters lean towards too high a magnification. They cannot hold a 10x still or field conditions do not allow a rest.

While walking when hunting, the variable scope should be kept on the low side, down about 2x. If

Which is the best bet for a buck in the brush—a rifle or a shotgun? It's a long standing subject of argument. Author favors the rifle and tells why.
you jump a deer from his bed, you have a wide enough field of view so that you can instantly pick him up through your scope.

Perhaps the main reason for missing deer with a scoped rifle, even above buck fever, is the failure to properly sight in the rifle. Most of the sighting done by a dealer or gunsmith is accurate enough only to get your bullet on the target. It's up to you to tune it down to where you can fire a satisfactory group. Scopes get knocked out of line in vehicles and in the field. They should be checked frequently by test firing.

You may only get one shot and you want it to count.

The most exciting gun announcement of the year is that Browning has finally come out with a pump shotgun. It's called a BPS, short for Browning pump shotgun.

John M. Browning, the eccentric genius who founded the company in Utah, invented the first successful pump shotgun. He granted rights to other companies and such famous pumps as the Winchester 97, Stevens 520, Remington 17 and 11 and 1877 were the forerunners of the BPS.

Just one of the unique new features is the magazine cutoff which lets you change the shell in the chamber without switching shells in the magazine. The BPS hunting model has a 3-inch chamber which gives the shooter a choice of 2½ or 3-inch shells.

The first production is in 12 gauge only, with a choice of 26, 28 or 30-inch barrels. It comes with a matted rib and double action bars for smooth pumping.

The thumb safety is conveniently located on top of the receiver, much like a Browning over/under. The serrated slide release is large enough to maneuver with gloves on and is located at the rear of the trigger guard. The suggested retail price is $209.95 for the hunting model and $244.95 for the trap model.

Browning has long been noted for its quality guns and the BPS is a welcome addition to their line.

Seeing a buck before he sees you is most of the key to successful deer hunting. You can't shoot him if you can't see him and lighting conditions are not always favorable to the hunter. Deer do much of their moving around dawn and dusk, gray shadows melting into cover.

It's easier to spot deer with binoculars than telescopic sights on your rifle. With binoculars you have the advantage of using both eyes, moving less total movement which the deer might catch. It's easier on your eyes to use binoculars and your arms don't get as tired.

Bushnell's Sportview binoculars are not expensive and there are four models in 7x to choose from. The bodies are made of lightweight aluminum in the traditional German style. The 7-power, 35mm 10-degree wide angle model weighs only 16½ ounces. The wide angle feature means you have 54 percent more viewing area than the standard 7x.

One of the most welcome features is the Insta-Focus, a lever action that works much faster and easier than the conventional center focus. It's one of those simple improvements that makes you wonder why someone didn't think of it years ago. For prolonged viewing, Insta-Focus is easier on the eyes than the old style of focusing.

Correct use of binoculars will improve most hunters' chances of bagging a buck. In fact, we probably don't see half of the deer that we come within easy rifle range of.

(continued from preceding page)

For complete information and application forms write to:

Bruce Miller
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Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission
620 S. Meridian St.
Tallahassee, FL 32304
CONSERVATION SCENE

LICENSES RECORD

A record 60 million Americans spent close to $318 million on state hunting and fishing licenses in 1975, according to figures released by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The figures are record highs and show that Americans continue to find hunting and fishing major pastimes.

One of every five Americans enjoy the outdoors this way. The figures represent an increase of $23 million in state sales and 500,000 in license holders over 1975.

Since some states do not require licenses for ocean fishing, children under 16 or senior citizens, these figures are conservative.

Florida with nearly 870,000 fishing licenses sold ranked 11th among the states. Hunting licenses sold ranked 11th among the states. Hunting licenses sold ranked 11th among the states.

martin house

Dr. W. B. Barton of Kingsport, Tennessee, took the basic martin house plan shown in the January-February FLORIDA WILDLIFE, added a few twists of his own and came up with a dandy martin condo. The house will accommodate 16 nests, weighs 74 lbs. and cost Dr. Barton 49 of his hard-earned dollars and his spare time for 10 days.

The new ARCHER’S DIGEST covers the history and basics of archery and the old controversy of long bows versus recurves, hunting and target shooting, crossbows, bowfishing and, for do-it-yourselfers, articles on making arrows.

The overall thrust, however, is to catch up on the recent developments in archery. Compound bows are featured and recovered snook ranging from one and a half to two and a half inches with indications that all the ponds have similar populations," he said.

The first snook have now been transported to the Boca Raton Exotic Fisheries Lab where they will be allowed to grow out prior to being placed in a yet unnamed research lake. Last year’s crop of snook, which were reared on a much smaller scale, found a home in Pioneer Park in Hardee County.

Chapman expressed pleasure with this result this year. If things proceed according to schedule, the research team will try to “double crop,” raising a second group of snook from the same ponds.

Work on the snook project continues at the Boca Raton Exotic Fisheries Bay near Naples at a site provided by the Collier County Conservancy. It is in this region that Commission personnel gather the broad stock necessary for artificial propagation.

When the final goal of the research project is reached, Chapman said the Commission must be able to produce large numbers of snook to meet the demands of stocking. Snook, although they can adapt to life in fresh water, are unable to reproduce in fresh water, and any stocking must be on a put, grow and take basis. Chapman pointed out that the tropical nature of the snook will restrict stocking locations to warm locations or bodies of water with some thermal effluent.

SNOOK SPAWN

More good news has been reported from a team of biologists and specialists from the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission working on a snook research program in South Florida.

For the past four years, the team has been involved in research on the artificial propagation of this very popular salt water fish. Plans call for a development of means to add the snook to the fresh water fisherman’s creel.

Phil Chapman, head of the Commission’s snook research project, reports the work is surging ahead with yet another first for his team, successful rearing of the young in earthen ponds.

“We drained the first pond and recovered snook ranging from one and a half to two and a half inches with indications that all the ponds have similar populations,” he said. These first snook have now been transported to the Boca Raton Exotic Fisheries Lab.

OUTDOOR ALMANAC

Where in this region that all the ponds have similar populations,” he said. These first snook have now been transported to the Boca Raton Exotic Fisheries Lab.

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The recipient has shown initiative by continuing his education and will receive his B.S. degree in biology in December.

Denson received a plaque recognizing him as the Outstanding Fish Management Specialist of the Year. He was also presented with a $25 cash award contributed by his co-workers.

OFFICERS HONORED

Sgt. David E. Melvin and Officer Alan L. Zell have been recognized by the Commission for service beyond the call of duty. The two wildlife officers were patrolling in a remote area of Dade County when they apprehended an individual who had abducted and tortured a young lady.

The officers rescued the victim possibly saving her life.

In citing the two, Commission Chairman Donald G. Rhodes stated, "There is no doubt that wildlife officers are a special breed. You have dedicated yourself, and the Commission is extremely proud of your good work."

Kenneth Denson has been recognized as the outstanding fish management specialist of the year, according to Division of Fisheries Director F.G. "Jerry" Banks.

Denson joined the Commission six and a half years ago, was stationed in the Northeast Region and later transferred to the Lake Kissimmee project working on the drawdown.

DENSEN GETS AWARD


(continued from preceding page)
By Wildlife Officer Henry Grimnes

I don’t care if you are headed north to prepare for Christmas, you can’t take deer across the state line.

By Wildife Officer Henry Grimnes

I don’t care if you are headed north to prepare for Christmas, you can’t take deer across the state line.
Wild Turkeys

From a painting by Russ Smiley

These proud old bearded boys and their girl friend have just flown down from their roost and got together for their daily rounds of feeding, dusting and more feeding. If turkeys are not disturbed or in quest of special food, they may follow the same trail at the same time each day. Turkeys range about two miles or less a day.

One of a series of limited edition 20"x30" prints by Russ Smiley, each signed and numbered by the artist. Send $3 for full color catalog.

Address Russ Smiley, 12000 N.W. 22nd Place, Miami, FL 33167.