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This small beachcomber, with its alabaster-colored feathers, often appears as a mere shadow against the seashore’s sandy backdrop. Look for it along the ocean front or on the tidal mud flats of the Gulf Coast. A small depression in the sand lined with bits of broken shell serves as a nest. Its tiny eggs, usually three in number, are creamy-white, dusted with black specks. Downy young of the plover are able to leave the nest and run about soon after hatching. An active feeder, it dashes busily to and fro across the beach in search of tiny insects and other tasty marine life.

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St. Johns River, swinging into shoreline of Doc Bennett's island. They spread the cut where the canal joins the that secured it, chafing and squalling against the low river, pushed a heavy wake of straining against the fragile lines swells across the dark water.

It plunging like a spooked nag,

A yacht churning south on the cleaning ending nets and endlessly at the task, a fisherman. He chose from four of them for disciples. And then the waves' energy was dissipated and the creek was quiet. Doc reflected. He is mild and deliberate in his speech, his soft words falling easily into the drawl of North Florida and its scrub country.

Doc has spent his life in the country near the St. Johns, drawing his living from the water and the land. He lives in the Peniel community, in a comfortable old farm house with a long open gallery for taking the evening air. He and his first wife, Orilla Squires raised 11 children in the house. On the same rolling bluff land, in a dense, overgrown grove of cedar and magnolia and dooryard plum trees smothered by moss, is the house—now abandoned—where Doc and his nine brothers and sisters were raised.

"I don't know—seems like the Lord just loves an old fisherman. He chose four of them for disciples."

The fisherman's endless job—mending nets and cleaning catfish.

Doc Bennett was a grown man when he taught himself to read by spelling out the Gospels, word by word.

"I'll tell you, that Bible has every truth. I have very often thought when I'm catching the fish, what the Lord told Peter—"Come with me and I'll make you fishers of men." I don't know—seems like the Lord just loves an old fisherman. He chose four of them for disciples. And they were commercial fishermen," Doc reflected. He is mild and deliberate in his speech, his soft words falling easily into the drawl of North Florida and its scrub country.

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"It just breaks your heart to see the old house sitting there and nobody living in it and it just gradually drooping away. You know, just to look at it, you can see a big family being reared in it. It just makes your heart kind of hurt just to look at it. Least it does mine. He moved there when he was three years old and he's 79," Janie Gaskin Bennett had said on the way to Stokes Landing to cross over to Doc's camp. She is 72. She and Doc, both widowed, were married two years ago in the Peniel Baptist Church where Doc has been a deacon since 1940. He was made a deacon at about the same time that a young man named Billy Graham was baptized and ordained to preach at the Peniel Baptist Church.

Now, Janie stopped to open, unscreened door of the two-room cabin—slapped together 30 years ago of unfinished yellow pine and cypress boards and battens at the camp on Doc's island.

"Well, I do hate to tell you, but I believe we're out of gas. I can't get no light at all, even with the matches. If we're going to have us some catfish for dinner, we got to cook it," she told her husband. Bottled gas. It is the camp's single nicety, it's a small compromise with progress. All else is essentially as it was when Doc's grandfather had a fishing camp for a while on the same island. Doc's camp, three-quarters of an acre of one of the Seven Sisters Islands nudged a few feet higher than the ten acres of swamp that surrounded it, is an archetype, a frontier Florida Brigadoon.

There was a time—fifty years ago, a hundred years ago—when camps like this abandoned along the St. Johns River. Doc's camp is the way it was. Doc got the gas hooked up and the pilot light in the oven lit and returned to his net. He talked about the past.

"My father was a fisherman and my grandfather, too. They come from over in Marion County. Way back yonder, when they first started seining in Lake George, about a hundred years ago, Grandpa and his daddy, way
They'd catch boatloads of garfish, boatloads of stingarees, boatloads back, fished on Lake George.

They'd catch just enough of scalefish and catfish and all to Johns River for to eat, to keep buy groceries, a little something to get in there and get had to have some air and it tore more, still contends with gators. Doc, who has fished the St. Johns River for 60 years and more, still contends with gators. "I caught one the other day and it tore the back of the net out. It just had to have some air and it tore itself out. Once in a while they'll get in there and get drowned," he said. The net he was working on was stretched taut.

The nets that Doc and his youngest son set out along a four mile stretch of the river are intricately shaped around a series of large hoops. The hoop traps require constant maintenance and repair, including being hauled out of the river for cleaning every three weeks or so. Perhaps a dozen traps were now tethered among the few citrus trees that Doc had planted on his island. His grove, still young as groves are reckoned, replaced a grove originally planted on the island by Doc's grandfather. Beyond the grove, there's a thriving vegetable patch that Doc tends.

"You goin' to get us some catfish, Doc? I'm about ready to cook," Janie Bennett poked her head from the cabin door again. Inside, better for hushpuppies, dough for hobo bread, platters of fresh sliced vegetables, jars of homemade pickles surrounded her. The grease was heating on the front burner of the gas stove. On the back burner, a pot of grits steamed.

"There's a trap right around the point of the island. I reckon there'll be a few there," Doc agreed. Heaving the heavy traps alongside a fishing boat and dumping its load of catfish—often 75 pounds, sometimes more—is a two-man job. Since Doc's son wouldn't be along until evening, Doc made do by laying a heavy pole along the center of the boat to take the load of net and fish when he rolled it out of the water.

He swung his boat out into the channel and kicked the throttle of the powerful outboard wide open. The flat-bottomed, scarred gray workhorse of a boat took off like a thoroughbred on Derby Day. As he swung out of the creek and rounded the point of the island, Doc throttled back and the boat wallowed gently on the broad river, edging, nuzzling toward the stake that marked Doc's trap. The old fishermen probed the deep river bottom with a long boat hook until he caught the trap. He set his rubber-booted feet against the edge of the boat and hauled it up out of the water, every muscle stretched taut, marking his progress inch by inch with another precious turn of rope around the stake. The trap, as long as the boat, held a respectable assortment of flagging catfish. Doc unlaced the opening and shook his catch into the bottom of the boat, handling the fish, when necessary, with the respect due a catfish.

"You know, a lot of folks think the commercial fishermen take the game fish out of the river. They think we catch the bass and brim and so on in these traps. It ain't so," he said. His booted toe brushed a single speckled perch among them proved his point. He picked up the perch and tossed it back into the river. It wriggled across the surface for a second before it dove out of sight.

Back at the camp, Doc tossed a handful of fat, grunting catfish into a washbowl and slid the balance of the load into a wire holding trap which would keep them alive until he and his son worked the rest of the run and carried the catch to market near Palatka.

He took the lot destined to be the midday meal to a skimming table under a tall shade tree and changes in the weather. Weather has a lot to do with fish," said Doc.

"There's a big feed every 24 hours and they'll feed a full feed, a big feed. But their biggest feed is generally on south moon under. Then they'll really feed. Times, I'd go up the river and I'd bait my trap up and back off. I'd set back about an hour. Then I'd go raise the trap. I'd hear the fish feedin'. All charcoal in the water, stompin' and makin' a fuss. And generally at that time you'd hear birds and nightbirds hollerin' and goin' on. They feel too, and so do the deer. All at one time. Mostly at South moon under," Doc said.

"It's funny thing how fish and wildlife moves and works. It's amazing how the Lord God made everything and put it in rotation and in a cycle until it works and just keeps on working. I've seen a lot of it. It takes a long time to learn it," Doc reflected.

The last catfish dropped into the dishpan and Doc began the chore of scrubbing his work table. He brushed it, splashed dark water over it, brushed again until he was satisfied that the bleached wood was bone dry.

In the cabin, a feast was set, at Janie ready to prepare the evening meal.
Nutcracker Sweet

don't downgrade the nimble bushytail—he's popular with hunters for good reason

T he way Florida's deer herd is expanding, I wonder how many youngsters are interested in squirrel hunting? It's easy to understand why a lad would prefer to hunt a 150-pound buck rather than a one-pound squirrel.

Most of the over-40 hunters learned to hunt on squirrels and rabbits and it seems that most of the squirrel hunters I run across in the woods today are in that age group. Any kid who bypasses squirrels for larger game is missing a lot of fun.

Gray squirrels are in such good supply that a daily limit of ten is allowed. It takes good woodmanship and marksmanship to bag a limit, especially if the hunter uses a .22 rifle with open or metallic sights.

The surest way to get enough squirrels for a stew is to use a full-choked shotgun with number 5 or 6 shot. But bagging them with a .22 rifle is a lot more sporting. One thing for sure, you won't do much shooting unless you practice good woodmanship.

Apparently squirrels don't depend on a great deal on their sense of smell as a protective device. They depend more on their sight and hearing. Squirrels, the same as deer, have sharp vision for picking up movement but they have trouble identifying a motionless hunter, especially if he's dressed in camouflage. The slightest movement, particularly a sudden one, may alert a squirrel to danger. He may pause for a closer look, duck behind a limb or scramble away through the tree tops.

When spooked, squirrels can move rapidly along the ground and they don't waste any time scrabbling through tree tops. A running squirrel is a tough target with a .22 rifle.

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Nutcracker Sweet

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blessing before the first sweet morsel was tasted and approved. Janie ladled home-grown peas onto her plate. The tomatoes and cucumbers had also come from their garden. There had been but with the grits, fried potatoes

Janie loves the island camp—its beauty and its peace.

trigued that mallet will sometime take a hook, but not often, baffled that, in a catfish camp, she's never caught a catfish off the dock.

"Now, I don't want to live here, but I do like to come here in the daytime. The mosquitoes would carry me off in the night," she glanced at the unscreened windows.

After dinner, she wrapped the leftovers and packed them away to be re-heated for supper. Doc went back to his net.

He talked again about the river. "You know, it seems like you ain't ever by yourself on the river—there's so much nature gain on all around you. Lots of times, it just seems like there's something along with you. They say there ain't no place like home. I know there ain't no place like the St. Johns River. I love it."

There are not many men who can say that of their life's work. Doc Bennett can say it; in Doc's work is preserved an old way of life that still has not passed completely from the river that he loves.

It will be gone someday. But not yet. Not today.

FLORIDA WILDLIFE

JULY-AUGUST 1978
Before going squirrel hunting, it pays to shoot your .22 rifle on the range and sight it in. Long rifle cartridges are faster and shoot flatter than shorts or longs. Naturally you sight in your rifle with the same type of cartridge you intend to hunt with. Hollow point bullets are not recommended for squirrels because too much meat is destroyed on a body shot.

I sight in my pump .22 rifles with long rifle cartridges at 40 yards. That's a happy medium for me with iron sights. With the thick tree canopy in much squirrel hunting, it's hard to get a shot at one over 50 yards unless he's on the ground. The average shot is probably from 25 to 30 yards, with not many under 20 yards.

By sighting in at 40 yards, the bullet shoots flat enough that I don't try to make corrections for distance when firing with open sights. I can't shoot steady enough offhand to try and make that kind of correction. Even resting against a tree, it's hard to make fine adjustments with open sights.

When sighting in my .22 with open sights, I fire three or four rounds to get the barrel warmed up. Then I fire five shots for a group from a rest at a distance of 40 yards. If I group them in the bullseye in a space about the size of a half dollar, I'm ready to go hunting.

Sometimes I try a five-group offhand at 40 yards. The holes are considerably spaced out, maybe the size of a softball. Yet I can often hit a squirrel in the head when firing offhand. Maybe I concentrate harder on game than when punching holes in a paper target. I know a lot of excellent quail gunners who won't break over 10 x 25 clay targets on a skeet field.

The squirrel hunter who uses a sporter .22 with 2x or 4x telescopic sights has a deadly combination for squirrels. For a target group from a rest at 50 yards, he can space them no larger than a quarter. Some of the hotshots can bring it down to a dime. I prefer the open sights simply because it's a sporty way to shoot. To bag a limit of squirrels with open sights means you've not only done some good shooting but some good hunting. It's excellent training for deer hunting.

Mourning doves nest in all 48 of the original states. Depending on latitude, they nest one to five or six times a year. The life span of the average dove is about nine or ten months. Based on annual harvest, the dove is the most popular of all game. About 50 million are bagged each season from a total flock of roughly 500 million.

Despite the popularity of doves for gunning, they receive little affection or admiration from hunters. Sitting around a campfire, I've seen calloused hunters become so sentimental about a magnificent back that tears came to their eyes. Mention ring-necked ducks whistling down to a blind and a duck hunter will go misty eyed on you.

Turkey hunters have such admiration for their quarry that they come close to committing idolatry. When the hunting takes turn to bobwhite quail, I go all limp and will join in and sentimentally weep with the best of them.

I've never seen anyone get dewey eyed about doves. It's a migratory bird mostly, here today and gone tomorrow. Hunters are glad to see lots of them during the gemming season, but the attraction does not carry over into the rest of the year. I respect the mourning dove as a difficult target but cannot warm up any warmth for it. It's very strange and I don't know why.

About 25 years ago, educators across the nation began to get interested in lifetime sports. While football, basketball and baseball are great sports, not many people participate in them once they leave high school or college. But with the lifetime sports—hunting, shooting, fishing, bowling, golf etc.—a person can enjoy participating in them through middle age and well into senior citizenry.

One of my favorite stories is about the rich English country gentleman advanced in years who felt a heart attack coming on. Fearing it was the end of him, he had his butler take him to a nearby trout stream and hold him up for one final cast. A lot of hunters and fishermen I know would like to make a similar gesture for their final departure.

Some educators have long felt that a person gains more by participating in a sport rather than being a spectator. They also know that when a young person learns a lifetime skill he is apt to enjoy it for many years.

It has not always been easy for high schools and colleges to put in shooting courses, cost being one problem. But a surprising number of colleges today offer a variety of shooting programs, some including credit. Colleges in Florida offering shooting include Florida State University, Florida Southern College, University of Miami, Embry Riddle Aero-nautical University, Hillsborough Community College and others.

As a guide for planning a school, park department or industry shooting program, Remington Arms Company has just published an excellent booklet called "How to Start A Shooting Sports Program." It covers such topics as kinds of shooting programs, how to get started, how to convince administrators, costs, where to get help, basic shooting instruction, aids and many other topics.

Single copies are free by writing Shooting Promotion, Remington Arms Company, Bridgeport, Connecticut 06602.
Want variety? For bass, bream, shad, drum, stripers, to name a few - try

Fishing the St. Johns

The St. Johns River, one of the few northward-flowing streams in the nation, is famed for its largemouth bass. Meandering nearly 300 miles from the marshes of Brevard County, to its mouth at Jacksonville, it offers every conceivable bass fishing situation.

Although the fighting bucketmouth has made the reputation of the St. Johns, the river is also a panfisherman's delight, offering the whole array of other spiny-rayed fishes for those who are so inclined. Add a bonus of shad, drum, striped bass and others and you have a real duke's mixture to please other spiny-rayed fishes for those who are so inclined.

If you had to pick one section of the river as the most popular, undoubtedly it would be the area from Astor on the south to Welaka on the north. This reach includes both Big Lake George, Little Lake George, and a goodly length of the twisting main stream.

The middle St. Johns is a highly-favored fishing area. With favorable weather conditions, a knowledge of locations and some unusual techniques, you can go forth with full expectations of putting fish in the boat. By the end of the day, you may well be wailing over lines parted by lunker bass, exclaiming over the aggressive antics of the speckled perch, or grinning with satisfaction over a heavy stringer of other fish.

But it's not super easy fishing. If you don't know where to fish, and what its quirks are, the middle St. Johns can be frustrating. It's a case of decisions, decisions, decisions.

First of all you have to make a major decision at the dock. Even with high-speed bass boats, you don't want to spend too much time riding and there's so much water to pick from.

Do you want to fish Lake George's 46,000 acres, or Little Lake George with 1,400 acres, or the miles of relatively narrow winding river? Each area produces when conditions are right.

But knowing when conditions are right isn't as simple as it might seem. This fact was re-emphasized recently when three of us got to talking about the year around productivity of the St. Johns. Having fished it, I've a cursory knowledge, but nothing like that of the Morgans, who are the real experts on the quirks and foibles of fishing this part of the river.

Justin Morgan, manager of Silver Glen Springs, the campground on the beautiful springs whose run empties into Lake George, and his son, Rocky, now a professional guide, really know the waters. They should. Justin's been fishing the area for a quarter of a century, and Rocky has learned the basics from his dad and spends hours most every day expanding his knowledge.

Both know how to catch the big ones and have the evidence to prove it—real wall-mount lunkers. Justin's best so far is a 17-pounder. Rocky has a 15-pounder to his credit, but isn't too happy about it because he's low man on the totem pole in the family. His mother, Barbette, holds second place with a 16-pound 3 ounce lunker.

Of course, with no wind the situation is different. Then the fish may be anywhere, assuming the proper water temperature is available. Usually, they're found all along the lake shores with the spring side having a preponderance of fish. The pilings marking the channel across the Volusia bar at the south end of Lake George, too, are a good place for warm fishing for bass.

Basically, you're fishing a shallow water lake. There are no real deep holes, the greatest depth being the 12-foot maintained channel. You fish waters from inches to 12 feet, a normal but not a deep water range.

You get an excellent idea of the water depths by studying NOAA Chart No. 11495 (St. Johns River—Dunn's Creek to Lake Dexter). It's a good idea to carry this chart with you. You may be surprised at the water depths. They're sometimes very deceptive.

Knowing the general locations for fish, and the wind quirks on Lake George, the next questions are just where do you fish and at what time of year? Also what lures produce best?

According to the Morgans, the calendar run-down answers to these questions go like this. During the January-March period, prior to and during spawning, you fish the edge and middle of the abundant grass beds. The beds north and south of Silver Glen run are particularly productive. But to pinpoint the best daily locations you have to know the wind direction for the previous 48 to 72 hours.

The eastern shore of the lake, too, is good at

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times, depending upon weather conditions. This shore does not have any springs emptying into it. There's one particularly good grass bed to the left of the jetties at the south end. This is an area only the veteran anglers fish. Just before reaching the jetties, you turn left to pole across a shallow bar to the grass beds in slightly deeper water.

Beginning in January, the bass are moving into the grass beds either preparing to or actually spawning. From then until April, is the big trophy time for the bass. Bullhead minnows are the number one bait. The black bass hate these predators. The bass will kill any bullhead in the area, probably knowing it's a threat to their eggs.

Veteran anglers fish. Just before reaching the jetty, they're suspicious. They've been cured of time in the grass beds by wind direction. Bass naturally shift their locations with a temperature change. They concentrate on the west side of Lake George near the mouths of Silver Glen run, Juniper Creek and Salt Springs run. The water from the springs normally is a consistent 72 degrees, and that's a lot more appealing to bass than the water temperature favored by bass will be blown south.

The bass are attracted by the concentration of the bass are. Bass naturally shift their locations with a temperature change. They concentrate on the west side of Lake George near the mouths of Silver Glen run, Juniper Creek and Salt Springs run. The water from the springs normally is a consistent 72 degrees, and that's a lot more appealing to ol' bucketmouth than the middle and low 60s, or the high 80s.

As a result of the springs' outpourings, the west side of Lake George is always a favored hole. When the water's too cold elsewhere, the bass like the 72 degree range at the runs' outlets, and when it gets too hot, again they favor the 72 degree range. Thus, any time of the year can produce fish along the west side.

While the wind can play havoc with their exact location, George is a shallow lake and the water responds to the wind. Given three or four days of high winds from the north, and the water with the temperature favored by bass will be blown south.

The Morgans also use Sonic lures, and Reflecto Barrelheads No. 2 spoons fished slow and allowed to sink. There's little surface action. Late in this period, many anglers begin to use spinner baits, with crawdad-colored skirts. Double bladed spinners are generally preferred. The spinners are particularly effective bounced off stumps in Juniper Cove, and around the south end of Lake George.

With the fish moving during the October-December period, you fish the passes. Among the producing areas are Drayton Island, the mouths of Silver Glen and Salt Springs, Jones Cove and the Nine-Mile Point area.

This is also a good time to fish the middle of the lake along the maintained channel. Here deep diving plugs sometimes work, such as the Rebel Deep R series.

Of course, this is the period when sudden cold fronts begin to swing down from the north. If one does, then the place to fish is where the warmer spring water mingles with the suddenly cooled lake. Of course, the prime spots are the mouths of Juniper, Silver Glen and Salt Springs.

Not only do you encounter largemouth bass in the St. Johns, but also the famous American shad run in the spring. Too, there's a good population of crappie, and these fish are pugnacious when protecting their beds. They don't hesitate to attack a lure meant for a bass.

One trip, Charlie Keefer and I found the bass with lockjaw, but he caught three big crappie—all on a balance, shallow runner, a bass lure.

The river is full of surprises, like the stripers (rockfish) Rocky Morgan and I encountered one day at the mouth of Silver Glen run. These rocks had an affinity for plastic, shallow running Rebel lures, and when they hit them they meant business.

The middle St. Johns really can be a fishing smorgasbord. Don't be surprised at any encounter. And don't forget to check the wind direction for the previous two to three days.

On Lake George, wind can be a big factor, and a dangerous one. A 15-knot wind precludes successful fishing and it can hamper your efforts on Little Lake George.

Obviously, you have to fish protected water when the wind is blowing the length of the river. Obviously, you have to fish protected water when the wind is not blowing the length of the river. It's mandatory when the wind is out of either the north or south blowing the length of Lake George. Then the lake is just too rough. But with either an east wind (fish hike least, as the old saw says) or one from the west, you can fish the lee shore, if you don't have to run across the lake. For those conditions, you have to launch on the lee side.

You also find lee shores on the north end of the lake around Drayton and Hog Islands, depending upon the wind direction. The grass flats on the east side of Drayton Island usually are productive.

However, if you have to go into the narrow parts of the river, you fish the lee shore if you can, not necessarily where you prefer. The twisting St. Johns can be a problem sometimes. Mainly high wind angling is a case of finding calm water first, and then worrying about how big the bass are.

There's a factor to the wind problem that many first time anglers overlook. Current direction is not only important, but also the direction for the previous two to three days. Many never consider this, but the sustained direction over a period of time can radically change the profile on Lake George, especially when linked with a temperature change.

As a result of the springs' outpourings, the west side of Lake George is always a favored hole. When the water's too cold elsewhere, the bass like the 72 degree range at the runs' outlets, and when it gets too hot, again they favor the 72 degree range. Thus, any time of the year can produce fish along the west side.

The same thing in reverse happens with a strong, direct south wind. Only this time, instead of the fish being around the south end of the lake—the Juniper-Silver Glen area—they're at the north end in the vicinity of Salt Springs.

Obviously, knowing the wind direction prior to a fishing trip is more important here than on deep water impoundments where the wind is much less a factor.

While the Sally is the Morgan's No. 1 lure, they use other types. They also recommend plastic worms, usually without weights, or at most with a tiny split shot for grass bed fishing. Third choices are topwater and shallow running plugs such as Smithwick's Devil's Toothpick, Rebels and Rapalas. These score if worked slowly and carefully across the weed beds that are only inches under the surface.

The Morgans recommend looking for schools of spawning threadfin shad during the April through June period. These fish spawn along the edge of the eel grass around points and in coves but, according to local lore, they spawn only on a still morning.

The bass are attracted by the concentration of the small shad and gather to enjoy the easy pickings around the spawning areas. This is not bankers' hours fishing. You have to be on the lake at daylight, and the action generally is over by 9 a.m. You cast near the shallow grounds with Cordell Spots, Reflecto No. 2 spoons, or with a Yellow Sally and retrieve fast. The bass apparently mistake the lure for a feeding shad, and pounce on it. The action can be fantastically fast.

Plastic worms can be used between the grass beds and the shore. Also plastic worms fished without weights are very effective in Silver Glen run. The bass usually aren't takers, but they're scrapers.

During the July-September quarter, you fish the deep water. The south end of the lake around the jetties is a very productive area, as is the portion of the river between the south end of the lake to south of Aster. Worm colors are a matter of personal preference.

The river is full of surprises, like the stripers (rockfish) Rocky Morgan and I encountered one day at the mouth of Silver Glen run. These rocks had an affinity for plastic, shallow running Rebel lures, and when they hit them they meant business.

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Nuisance Alligator Control

Whatever you do, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission asks that you please not take an alligator to lunch.

"One of the easiest ways to create a nuisance alligator is by feeding it," said Fred Stanberry, Commission wildlife division director. "Once an alligator loses its fear of man it can pose a potentially serious problem."

Conflicts between humans and alligators are something happening more and more often in Florida. During 1976, over 10,000 persons contacted the Commission offices to request that alligators be removed from areas near them," Stanberry said. "That's why the Commission has created the Nuisance Alligator Control Program."

For the first time in more than a decade and a half, a few of the ancient reptiles, which were classified as an endangered species in 1967, may be harvested under the new nuisance control program.

The Florida alligator is a modern-day wildlife management success story. Protected by the Commission from unrestrained hunting since 1961, its population had once faced catastrophe. But with passage of other strong state and federal conservation-oriented laws, such as the amending of the Lacey Act in 1969 which effectively ended interstate shipments of illegal hides, the traffic in alligators was crushed.

This amendment, along with the 1973 Endangered Species Act and the new Florida laws protecting the alligator, destroyed the hide market," Stanberry said.

So the alligator has staged a spectacular comeback across the state. "For example," he explained, "Our research biologists working at Lake Griffin near Leesburg in 1974 estimated that there were approximately 26.8 alligators per mile of shoreline. When we resurveyed the same area last year, the number had shot up to some 70.3 reptiles per mile."

In fact, the powerful dragon-like creatures have become commonplace sights snoozing in the sun on lake and river banks, climbing out of marshy golf course ponds, and resting under private boat docks.

"We are permitting the harvesting of those alligators which could be a threat to human life," he explained. "No animals will ever be taken from wilderness areas such as the Everglades or Big Cypress National Preserve, where there's little or no conflict with man."

The Florida alligator is a threat-free reptile to human life, the Commission says. For the first time in more than a decade and a half, a few of the ancient reptiles, which were classified as an endangered species in 1967, may be harvested under the new nuisance control program.

"During the pilot study, the Commission tested the use of both private trapper-agents and wildlife officers to determine the most effective management method. During January 1977, two control teams were assigned to north and central Florida where there were significant nuisance alligator populations."

Six private trappers contracted to harvest the reptiles in Alachua, Bradford, Clay, Duval, Putnam and St. Johns counties. They were to take and skin complaint alligators assigned to them. Each hunter received 70 percent of his hides' sale price, while 30 percent was set aside for the program's administration costs.

The second area included Lake, Marion, Citrus and Sumter counties. Here Commission wildlife officers handled alligator complaints and, where valid, killed and skinned nuisance reptiles. These sales were retained by the Commission.

In both areas, each complaint was evaluated by an alligator coordinator before any action was taken. Private trapper-hunters handled 299 alligators based on 357 citizen complaints while Commission wildlife officers took 335 reptiles after 352 requests.

The hide sales were handled exclusively by the Commission through auctions to federally licensed hide dealers. The first sale brought $18.50 per foot in June, 1977, and a second one yielded $9.50 per foot that November.

A program analysis indicated that private trapper-agents proved to be the most cost-efficient wildlife enforcement resource, since wildlife officers, serving in the trapping areas, are called on to pursue a wide range of other wildlife law enforcement duties.

Research results also showed that the project allowed Florida citizens to utilize a valuable, renewable, natural resource, as well as provide assistance in gathering important biological data.

"There's been no upsurge in poaching, and no change in the overall population because of the number of alligators harvested in the program," Stanberry stated.

The statewide nuisance control program is organized and administered by the Bureau of Wildlife Research at the Wildlife Research Laboratory in Gainesville. They handled the pilot program also.

"It's considered a research project for one more year, so we can determine if it will be practical on a long-term, statewide basis," he concluded.

By W. L. Adams
An option in land use . . .

A BACKYARD WILDERNESS

By Lon E. Ellis

You get used to it—the verdant jungle just on the other side of the picture window. It wasn’t long ago the area was nothing more than a trash-strewn lot.

Now garlands of huge tropical vines and splashes of vivid color cloak the bent and silvered maples which have grown lush with age.

How did this change take place? Well, it was the result of an option to manicured lawns. The choice presented itself when I was to build a new home in my adopted state of Florida—a state which had an environment that could tickle your imagination to no end.

Before a shovel of soil was turned for the house, a general landscape plan was formulated to fit the available space. An outline for a pond was cut. The pond was to be the focal point for both plant and animal life. A bonus was the fill dirt dug from the pond. This was used to build contours on the normally flat surface, and outcrops of native rock were added to provide crevices for plant and animal life.

Enthusiasm became the fuel for work, and the excavation grew into a pit 30 by 90 feet at an average depth of three feet. A small island was left near the center for wildlife and an artesian well supplied a flow of water.

As the pond was filled, plants collected from the wild were planted to take advantage of the rising water. Arrowhead, pickerel weed, waterlilies, cypress trees, and pond grasses were followed by several species of fish for mosquito control and a food base for other animals.

The first spring season plants exploded into luxuriant growth and flowers bejeweled the rich new green foliage. Animal life moved into habitat niches as they became available.

May is the month for snakes. Black racers chase each other selecting mates. Corn, scarlet and ring-necked snakes slip through ferns and rocks while rat snakes search the maples above much to the consternation of blue jays.

Large-headed skinks and the diminutive brown-backed skink are the first lizards to move into rock ledges and lurk through the gaily colored bromeliads. Changeable

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anoles sport their throat pouches, flashing pink for females and warning other males away.

Yellow-bellied turtles are the first turtles to appear in the new pond. Otters visit the extension of their water world hunting frogs breeding in warm spring rains. Marsh rabbits find the hollows in rocks and raccoons behind the waterfall.

Huge green eels find their way overland in the rains, churning the water brown in their nuptial conflicts. Spade-foot toads try to drown out the leopard frogs, filling the air with trills and bawls while treefrogs honk from banana leaves above.

With changing weather patterns, the pond rises and falls, attracting egrets and herons. Kingfishers bomb through the trees rattling their challenges at one another. Thin whistles in the morning tell you a finely emblazoned wood duck is checking nesting holes.

A plicated woodpecker whacks away soft parts of a storm-damaged snag, its chuckling call rapping through the tree tops. Nature's jewels, indigo and painted buntings share the feeders with raucous red-wings and resplendent cardinals.

Redstarts, blackpoll and Cape May warblers search the canopy above in the company of tanagers and flycatchers. Late spring is a time of squealing young birds branching from nests, their parents defending territories. Carolina wrens build for the second time and a cuckoo gargles in a rank fern tree.

Summer is a hot and quiet time. Turtles crawl onto banks for the early sun. The happy racket of spring is smothered by a monotony of cicadas and katydids rasping their love songs. Only the blue and pink dragonflies enjoy the shimmering heat, laying eggs in the still pools.

Martins gather in noisy flocks to leave before July has ended. Then comes the fall season, our second spring. Exotic plants bloom with blazing colors of red, yellow, blue and pink. Air plants with splashes of red, yellow and many shades of brown. House wrens pick through the fallen blanket seeking hidden morsels. Catbirds and kinglets rasp agitated sounds of alarm, a venturesome rat snake has been found.

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A passing winter front drops the temperature to the chilly 40s—a red-tailed hawk pecks at the suet balls hung in a cedar tree for smaller birds. Berries on swamp hollies burn in brightest red, ripe for the clouds of cedar waxwings swarming the heavily laden branches. A phoebe repeats its plaintive note from a low oak twig, watching for the soft-bodied insect which would become lunch.

January brings sullen days. Days which overlay the green panoply of the jungle with a still drabness. The depressing grip of the weather drives all but the very hardy to cover. Cardinals and kaleidoscopic buntings skin seeds as fast as they can—fortifying against the cold. The bright blossoms of summertime orchids are now only vague memories.

Finally, the sun unclesaked by clear northern air, washes the gray-damp from the surrounding out-of-doors and woodpeckers, cardinals, blackbirds and doves compete with blustering blue jays and inventive squirrels for seed in the feeders. Below, marsh rabbits discover the spillage.

A rare and beautiful peregrine falcon stays a day or two, perched on the snag of an old dead pine—then stooping—tears the air with hard primaried wings as he dives at mourning doves leaving the pond.

There is a feeling of warmth and well being about the end of winter—the knowledge another spring is coming keenens the senses. You find yourself listening for the whistle of returning woodies—the episode of robins drunk on fermented oranges during the winter is already a hazy memory. A new time is coming.

Many dramas, some small, some large, will unfold every day in the leafy world just beyond my window. They will delight—they will bring solace to a beleaguered mind which at times needs diversion from outside turmoil. Also, one gets a deep satisfaction creating a small living portion of natural beauty.

The thought of intriguing and inviting pools, hiding another total world beneath their surfaces—old-friend lizards emerging to sun on favorite rocks, a possible new type of bird in the tree tops, gives you an anticipation, an eagerness to welcome the coming of new days, another year.
The hounds, the horses and hunters are afield, the fox is sighted... TALLYHO!

It was one of those beautiful winter Sundays. A wind had picked up to rustle the dried grass which bordered both sides of the quiet north Florida road. Overhead the sun bore down from the flawlessly blue sky.

This day found the two of us standing alongside the blacktop not far from the Georgia line. The breeze was just enough to keep us from hearing what we had traveled for—the sound of a pack of English/American foxhounds somewhere in the tall pines.

We were here because I had promised to show Morrie Naggiar the traditional sport of hunting foxes from horseback behind an organized pack of hounds. Our hosts were the Live Oak Hounds, and, for the moment, the hounds and field were lost to sight and sound and we could only speculate on what was happening.

Not two hours earlier, under bare pecan trees at Merrill Farm Headquarters near Monticello, the Hunt had assembled, looking suspiciously like a page from the colonial history books (if you ignored the pickups parked along the road).

This was the fourth season for the Hunt. Members had arrived from Old Town, Florida to Albany, Georgia for the meet, one of many held each weekend during the hunting season.

As the sun sets and shadows lengthen through the pines, Marty and Daphne Wood count noses of tired hounds as they head back after a satisfying day in the field.

The hounds, the horses and hunters are afield, the fox is sighted... TALLYHO!

By Trisha Spillan

9 and 10. Several husband and wife teams were also mounted.

All eyes and ears were on Marty and Daphne Wood, joint masters of the Hunt and the prime movers behind the sport in this area of north Florida and south Georgia. The Live Oak Hounds is one of 141 hunt clubs registered with the Masters of Foxhounds of America, and is the only group serving this part of the country.

Marty had taken us to the kennel that morning to show off the true reason for the sport—the pack. Live Oak hunts with a private pack, owned by the Woods and carefully built up over the last few years.

Standing among the milling hounds, the business executive pointed proudly to those that formed the nucleus of the pack and described the characteristics of each.

"We cross the American and English to get the best of both," Marty explained, trying to ignore the hounds jumping on his white kennel coat.

"The American for its deeper cry or tongue, speed and stamina and the English for its bigger bone, intelligence and tractability."

The hounds ("never call them dogs") are counted in couples or twos and the pack currently numbers 24½ couple. This day, 15 couple would participate and eagerly crowded into the pen on the back of the pickup.

Driving to the meet, Marty, looking a little out of place in his formal riding attire, kept in touch with the others on his CB. Naturally, he’s "Foxhound" and his wife "Lady Foxhound."

A brief history of the sport shows it originated in England with the American colonies taking up pursuit of Reynard in the 1700s. Our first president kept a pack at Mount Vernon and hunted whenever war or politics permitted.

Being able to sit a horse and hunt was con-

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considered a prerequisite for the landed gentry both here and in the Mother Country. It has always been a pastime for the wealthy, but now everyone is getting involved.

Foxhunting has spread throughout the country with organized clubs now in the west and midwestern states. Two clubs are registered in Florida and five in Georgia.

"Part of the enjoyment is adhering to tradition," Marty explained. From the functions of the staff members to the attire, everything about foxhunting is traditional but based on practicality.

While the field awaited a late arrival, the hounds took the opportunity to work off some of their pent-up excitement. They scampered, chased each other and, with nose to ground, searched for a fox. Some who strayed from the open area were checked by a scarlet-coated rider, either by voice or the crack of a whip.

Many bunched around the feet of Compone, Marty's horse, who seemed oblivious to the Lance now but could carry his master over any obstacle and through the covert for the four or more hours with eagerness and stamina.

Daphne had tried to unravel the etiquette of what was happening at the meet for the two of us. The scarlets-jacketed riders were either members of the staff or members of the Hunt who had "earned their colors," an honor conferred for longtime participation in all hunt activities. Ladies evidence their "colors" by wearing a dark green collar on their black or navy hunting jacket.

Everyone was watching Marty, for, in addition to being a joint Master of Foxhounds, he's the Huntsman, a personage whose word is final in the field and kennel. He controls the hounds, sending them into covert using a variety of signals, most notably the copper horn tucked in the front of his coat. The rest of the staff look to him for guidance and direction.

Assisting him are the Whippers-In, who serve as scouts for the fox's movement or assist in turning back or encouraging hounds forward. They are also responsible for keeping the hounds from running anything except a fox or bobcat.

Deer are the main temptation.

An onlooker might think the whole thing is uncomplicated and simple, but in reality and practicality, it's confusing. The Huntsman controls the hounds through traditional calls on the horn or by voice commands with the whippers-in helping. The riders or field are under the wing of the fieldmaster. Riders are expected to stay back and out of the way, their purpose being primarily to watch the hounds work and enjoy a fast run when a fox is found.

Through the clear afternoon air, the almost unearthly sound of the horn rose and, in a unison, the Hunt set forth. Once under way it would be almost impossible for spectators to follow so Marty planned to take the pack first to an area accessible by foot.

Waiting by the wooden panels which straddled the wire fence, Morrie and I strained to hear the hounds. Faintly the horn first, then the sight of the pack. Faintly the horn first, then the sight of the hounds and at last, thundering hoofbeats. Through the tall pines, a spot of hunting pink flashed and they were closing in.

With almost limitless energy, the hounds streamed over the panel headed towards the first covert. Marty followed, then the whippers-in. The fieldmaster held the riders back, then one by one, each horse sailed over the jump. The pack and Marty were already vanishing into the thickly wooded area at the far side of the pasture as the "whips" positioned themselves around it to try and view what might come out.

Lady Luck did not smile on spectators this day. Despite dogged attempts to keep up with the hounds and horses wherever feet or a car could take us, we spent most of the day on the fringes of the excitement, losing the sound to the breeze and just hoping to spot a glimpse of pink coats through the trees.

As the sun started to sink and the breeze turned chilly, Morrie and I were back at the starting point to view the field in. We heard the hoofbeats first then spotted the riders through the pecan tree. Walking now, even the hounds seemed satisfied with the day's work. Around the campfire that night, stories would be swapped of the grey fox they had jumped and the bobcat who outdistanced the hounds.

It is a time of comradeship and warmth known by those who love good working hounds. And a scene repeated throughout the country no matter how the hounds are followed.

"You know," Marty observed as he glanced around the flickering fire, "There are two kinds of people who take up foxhunting—those who do it to jump and those who do it to watch the hounds. It usually isn't long before the first become the second."

Photo by Morrie Naggar
Certainly neither of our native vultures could be considered a contender for an avian beauty prize. Nonetheless, they serve a vital function in the natural scheme of things. Members of the scientific family Cathartidae ("cleanser"), the vultures skillfully ride the thermals, soaring with effortless grace in search of carrion that is the mainstay of their diet.

Once accused, because of their feeding habits, of carrying various livestock diseases, it is now recognized that many disease organisms are destroyed by passing through the vulture's digestive system. Turkey vultures literally smell their way to the feast misfortune sets for them. Black vultures depend on keen eyesight to find food, or they bully the larger turkey vultures into sharing their finds.

Both species are commonly called buzzards, which technically they are not. That Old World name properly belongs to a group of broad-winged hawks, represented here by the red-tailed hawk and some others.

Unlovely to look at on the ground, poetry in the air, and vital in their role as nature's sanitarians—that about sums it up for the vultures.
RAIL HUNTERS ARE ALL WET

By Michael Miller

To me, the idea of hunting in September was never quite right; at least, not in Florida. Hunting was connotative of the cold wind of November or December's frosty mornings, not the leftover dog days of early September. That was before I knew about rail hunting.

Several years ago, I had the good fortune of spending a great deal of time with friends at their cabin on Crescent Beach, about 10 miles south of St. Augustine. Outside their door lay the great Spartina marsh that is found along the eastern seaboard from central Florida to Newfoundland.

My friends hunted and fished for fun and for a living. The marsh provided well—oysters, clams, redfish and, in the fall, "marsh hens." Further inland, "marsh hens" are gallinules, but in the salt marsh, they are clapper rails, members of the same family as limpkins and cranes. At low tide, I'd seen them skulking in the cord-grass where they feed on Littorina snails and fiddler crabs. Once or twice, I had flushed a rail and watched its weak, less-than-graceful flight to the nearest patch of cover. Rails didn't seem much like game birds to me and going after them with a shotgun, like hunting in September, just wasn't in my blood.

But one day in the week of September's full moon, my friend felt the strong northeast wind and said, "We're going to have a good rail tide. Want to try to find a few marsh hens?"

"Hunt?" I said. "Man, it's too hot."

He just grinned and started pulling on an old pair of boots that looked like they'd washed out of a creek bank. When it was obvious that he was really going hunting, I reconsidered, borrowed a shotgun and followed him into the marsh without the foggiest idea of what I was supposed to be doing.

It soon became apparent what a "rail tide" should be. Marsh hens are hunted best at high tide; the higher, the better. At extreme high tide, only the tops of the cord-grass are above the water throughout most of the marsh. The tallest grass stands along the edges of the creeks and, south of St. Augustine, clumps of black mangroves are found there, too. This is where you'll flush the birds.

Marsh hens fly only as the last resort. They move through the grass ahead of you, usually unseen, until reaching the open water of a creek. If you're lucky, the bird will flush and you'll get a wing shot.

But this is supposed to be a story about marsh hens. I soon learned that there's a method to hunting rails. Tidal creeks divide the marsh into irregular blocks. At flood tide, only the tops of the cord-grass are above the water throughout most of the marsh. The tallest grass stands along the edges of the creeks and, south of St. Augustine, clumps of black mangroves are found there, too. This is where you'll flush the birds.

Marsh hens fly only as the last resort. They move through the grass ahead of you, usually unseen, until reaching the open water of a creek. If you're lucky, the bird will flush and you'll get a wing shot. If you're not, you'll have to stalk the crafty rail or marsh hen.

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a shot. But often as not, you'll never know it was there.

Rails know something about camouflage. They will stand motionless, bills tilted toward the sky, looking for all the world like an extension of a cord-grass clump. They don't mind letting you walk right past.

Jacques Cousteau. They've been right out of Mike Nelson or face and swim past the hunter known to slip beneath the surface underwater. While you're beating the creek, the marsh hen is apt to be sneaking off in the other direction. When you've given up, he'd been slogging through a mile or so of marsh, trying to make some unkind comparisons relative to the sporting merits of rails and ring-necks. Just as I was beginning to feel apologetic, my companion caught sight of a marsh hen hiding a few yards away.

No doubt, an Illinois pheasant would've flushed with more style, but this was a clapper rail in a Florida salt marsh. He had his own way of doing things.

When he decided to flush, the rail flew straight up, flapped in a lazy half-circle and settled in the top of a mangrove right between the two of us. Shotguns at ready, we waited for him to fly again. Surely he wouldn't stay in the tree.

The rail ignored us. Maybe he understood the security of his position. Only the most crass of hunters would shoot a bird sitting in a tree. We hollered and splashed to no avail, but finally induced his departure by a hard-thrown piece of driftwood.

Oh man, that was what we were waiting for—the two of us—one a seasoned rail hunter of several seasons experience, the other a veteran of high-class upland bird shooting. Yessir, armed with repeating shotguns loaded with three rounds each of No. 8's, we defoliated a mangrove but, as near as I could tell, didn't touch a feather on that marsh hen. It was humiliating.

But that's rail hunting; creeks that'll drown you, birds that'll fool you and water that'll rust your shotgun. You've got to be all wet to hunt marsh hens.
Bald Eagle

Despite man's continued assault on their domain, Florida's bald eagles are doing fairly well these days. "There are approximately 1,200 of the birds residing in the state. Many of our eagles live in or near the Ocala National Forest," says Commission biologist Steve Fickett of Brooksville. "Nesting sites also are located on central and south Florida farms and ranches where, fortunately, there is still excellent, protected habitat." "We believe the population is fairly stable now," Fickett states. "From 170 known productive nests last year, we estimated 265 eaglets were hatched." The species is currently listed as endangered in the U.S. and considered as threatened in Florida.

Eagles are early nesters, starting this activity in November or December over much of the state but sometimes considerably later in the northern parts. Two unmarked white eggs comprise the usual clutch. The nest is a large collection of sticks, Spanish moss, bark and other plant material. The accumulation, after several successive seasons of use, may be as much as nine feet high and four or five feet wide. A bit over a month of incubation is required to hatch the brood. The male shares in the care of the young.

Regal in its bearing in the air or at rest, the southern bald eagle is a stirring sight. Larger than any of the hawks and vultures, the adult bird is readily identified by its flashing white head and tail, contrasting with the blackish-brown body. Immature eagles—birds less than four years old—are overall dark brownish in color.

Some will say that the bowhunters, the Robin Hoods of the deer hunting set, are a breed unto themselves. They never really stop hunting. In season or out, they continue to hone their skill toward a razor sharpness likened to their arrow heads. Most of the year their aluminum shafts quiver toward inanimate targets; but when October rolls around, their arrows dart their separate ways, preferably into the vital areas of big, many-pronged bucks. During the last couple years bowhunting organizations have been stressing education as a source of better, more accurate shooting. For instance, a few years ago, the National Field Archery Association (NFAA, Rt. 2, Box 514, Redlands, Calif. 92373) published a 64-page manual entitled "Bowhunting Deer." It is fast becoming the bible among bowhunters because of its thoroughness. Also, bowhunting clubs in the South have been holding seminars.

Attending some of these seminars has been NFAA's vice president, Perry Haymes of Simpsonville, S.C. Haymes, 55, began bowhunting only eight years ago, but his skill afield exemplifies the maxim that it's never too late to learn a new sport. In fact, he gave up hunting with guns because bowhunting "turned him on." He regularly harvests a half dozen deer or more each year. In the following interview, Haymes talks about the skill and satisfactions accompanying bowhunting.

QUESTION: What's the most significant thing in shooting accurately with a bow and arrow?

HAYMES: If you don't hold the bow steady, you're not going to hit anything; that's it in a nutshell. Of course, there's a lot that goes with shooting accurately—correct bow and arrow selection; proper setting up of the bow; taking care of your equipment; and the employment of tricks to fool the deer. All this takes a lot of effort, but it's what makes a productive hunter.

QUESTION: Let's start with the bow. There are three kinds of bows—the long, recurve, and compound, but most bowhunters use the compound, isn't this so?

HAYMES: Yes, about 90 percent of the pros use the compound bow, which has revolutionized archery. The advantage of the compound is in its ec

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 centric wheels which roll over, relieving the pound age on the string to a comfortable weight that can be held steadily on a game animal or target for a length of time.

And the stored energy of the compound has come from the compound is the "sight window." It's cut off-center, deep enough into the bow so that the string can deliver an arrow straight through.

**QUESTION:** What other advantages are there to the compound bow?

HAYMES: Tuning mechanisms are used with the compound bow. The manufactured size of the wheels determines the draw length of the bowman. And the stored energy of the compound has flattened the arrow's trajectory to a great advantage. Arrows coming out of earlier bows flew a higher trajectory before coming down onto the target. As a result, accuracy was not as great. But the compound directs the arrow more along a straight line, and delivers the arrow to the target faster. You don't have to ante-over (aim higher) to get the arrow to hit at greater distances.

**QUESTION:** What about the arrow itself, what part does it play in the accuracy of a shot?

HAYMES: It's very important in setting up your bow. In picking the right spine arrow, you should make sure it's of a proper bulk and strength for the strength bow you're using. A bowman must remember that when an arrow comes off the string, it bows or wobbles. So a bowman needs to have a strong enough arrow to reduce this wobbling and permit the arrow to come out of the bow straighter.

**QUESTION:** How does a beginner choose the correct bow and know the best size arrows to use?

HAYMES: Well, you should select a bow that suits your arm length and arm strength. Never pick a heavy bow to start with. Find someone who excels in archery and get his advice. A beginner may also obtain guidance from a knowledgeable dealer. He can furnish you charts which show the proper size and length arrow that goes with your bow. You just don't go into a store and buy any old bow and a handful of arrows. It's also a good idea for a beginner to join his local bowhunting club. He can get lots of good tips as well as enjoy the fellowship of good hunters.

**QUESTION:** What kind of bow do you use?

HAYMES: Personally, I look for simplicity in a bow, one without a lot of gadgets. I don't want to have to make a lot of adjustments to get back in tune. I prefer two wheels in the compound. After all, a man doesn't have a lot of time to do adjusting when he's out in the field looking for deer. I'm in my third year on my present bow and have it strung at 70 pounds with a 30 percent reduction (actually holding 49 pounds). I draw my string back 3½ inches. When I started eight years ago, I strung at 45 pounds with 40 percent reduction and was holding only 27 pounds. So you see, you start out with a light setup and work yourself up with experience.

**QUESTION:** Is there any minimum that a man bowhunting for deer should start out with as far as the strength of his bow setup?

HAYMES: I don't like to see anyone go into the woods with less than 45 pounds. The penetration will not be very good below this. The advantage of not having the string set too light is that with a light string, the mistakes you make in releasing the arrow tend to multiply, but a taut string gives the arrow a truer flight.

**QUESTION:** What about the draw length, the distance you pull the string back? How influential is this to accuracy?

HAYMES: You should neither underdraw nor overdraw. The average arrow used is 29 inches, but lengths vary from 24 to 34 inches. What length arrow you use is determined by arm length and overall personal comfort. It's much like the length of a gun stock. And people also have various anchor points—where their shooting hand stops on the pull back. Some pull back to their cheek, or put their fingers in their mouth, or back to their chest, and so forth.

**QUESTION:** I'm sure that even with the proper equipment, a bowhunter can run into problems which might affect his skill. What are some of those?

HAYMES: One is freezing, or having a psychological block so that you can't turn loose of the string. Freezing is coming to a critical point and not being able to perform. But there are mechanical releases a bowhunter can get. Some releases have a button you can mash in your hand. Or there's the trigger type of release.

**QUESTION:** When you do release the string, how should it be done?

HAYMES: This is another problem with some bowhunters—jerking the bow before releasing. Personally, I try to make every shot an individual shot. I observe and size up the distance first so I can select the correct sight pin for the proper yardage. I keep my primary vision on the forward sight and keep the secondary vision for the target. This permits the shooter to steady himself whether with a bow or gun. I tell some hunters that to keep from jerking at the release they should put a quarter on the hand they're holding the bow with, and release in such a way that the quarter won't fall off. Many instinct hunters (those who don't use a sight) jerk their release because they change their mind at the last moment and drop the arrow down to get a better aim.

**QUESTION:** Well, isn't making an accurate shot just like performing any skill. That is, it needs full concentration?

HAYMES: Definitely. And this concentration means being able to turn off the outside world—such as noises or the conversation of hunters with you. I try to carry my concentration to my fingers, being sure I have equal pressure above and below the arrow (although there are some who shoot all three fingers below the arrow). Then, with a fluid motion, I try to let the string leave my fingers. You don't jerk your hand away. You relax (continued on next page)
your muscles, letting go as you extend your fingers, and then just letting yourself hang loose.

**QUESTION:** What you've said so far can pretty well apply also to target shooting, but what are some of the special considerations in bowhunting for deer? Just how effective is an arrow in killing a deer and what additional equipment might you need in hunting live targets?

**HAYMES:** One thing is that you use steel heads on the ends of your arrows when you hunt. These are called broad heads and they screw in at the ends of your arrows. The main thing to remember here is that you pick a head that will give you good penetration. The arrow head must be razor sharp. If you have a rough saw edge, the blade will not cut the arteries. Hemorrhaging is needed to secure an end to the hunting. You should pad the arrow shelf so there will be no sounds of arrows scraping.

**QUESTION:** But, of course, it's important to know where to hit the deer as well.

**HAYMES:** Any archer who practices and knows his equipment should be able to place the arrow in the old "boiler room," that's in the diaphragm (the lungs, heart, and kidneys).

**QUESTION:** How do you go after a deer? Is there much difference between hunting them with a bow rather than with a gun?

**HAYMES:** I use a tree stand, or I stalk, but I believe a bowhunter has a better chance of seeing a deer because he knows to hunt where the deer are—that is, he learns to hunt in the thickly grown-up areas where deer lurk. A bowhunter will pick a thick area where one, two, or three trails are located. During the day, deer will move into the thickets. Most gun hunters with scopes, on the other hand, like long-range open areas where the deer just will not move most of the day. The bow-hunter is a close-in hunter, and, I think, takes more time in planning his tactics. I used to hunt with a gun, but for the last eight years, I've hunted only with the bow. I find deer much easier to harvest with a bow and arrow. I find it a greater challenge, and, because of this, I hunt more often and I'm more enthusiastic.

**QUESTION:** What about camouflage, is it very important?

**HAYMES:** Yes it is, although I've hunted with-out it. Actually, being still in the stand is the best camouflage. When I kill a deer that a deer might come up to meet me face to face in a place, I'll wear face netting. Your tree stand should be at least 12 to 15 feet from the ground and I sometimes raise it to 20 feet.

**QUESTION:** What other methods do you use to hide your presence from a deer, other than getting above him and camouflaging yourself?

**HAYMES:** Well, the odor of the human body should be hidden. This is all part of the tactics that fascinate me in trying to outwit a deer. Whatever hunting clothes I plan to wear the next day, I'll place them in a polyethylene bag and sprinkle with spirits of turpentine. I guess this might make the deer think I'm a pine tree or something. I also take chlorophyll tablets for about three days before I hunt. This rinses the body of any human odor. I also odor out the tree stand and make sure I place it so it will be downwind of any area where I expect deer will be staying.

**QUESTION:** Keeping quiet is also important, is it not?

**HAYMES:** Silencers are put on the strings. You could tie a couple rubber bands on the bow string. Knitting yarn will also snub the noise of the string. You should pad the arrow shelf so there will be no sounds of arrows scraping.

**QUESTION:** To sum up, then, what are the fundamental things to remember when you're bow-hunting?

**HAYMES:** First: you should know your game and their habits. Then, know how an arrow works, how it comes off the string—so you'll know how to adjust your bow. A third fundamental is to practice the unwritten law of the bowhunter: be a sportsman. If you're hunting on private land, ask the farmer or landowner first for permission, and respect that man's property by not littering it. A fourth point—and I've mentioned this before—I believe the best way a man becomes a good bowhunter is by joining a club. In this way he can get a lot of worthwhile tips first hand.

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**A hunter's face shines like a warning beacon to wary wildlife. Camouflaged face mask eliminates this problem.**

*Photo by Bill West*

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**If you wish to achieve maximum casting and fishing success, you need . . .**

**BALANCED TACKLE**

If there is one term that the beginning angler encounters more than any other, it seems, it is the expression "balanced tackle." The new fisherman is cautioned that without a correctly balanced rod, reel, line, he will not be able to properly cast out his bait or artificial lure. He can expect neither distance nor accuracy. Further, he is warned that, even should he manage to hook a fish with such unbalanced tackle, he likely will be unable to land his catch.

Balanced? Balanced against what? The pull of the fish? The force of the wind? Something else? These are typical of the questions many confused novice fishermen end up asking themselves.

**HAYMES:** The fisherman: You can throw a baseball farther than you can a ping-pong ball. Reason: the baseball has more weight, hence is better able to overcome the resistance offered by the air through which it must move.

In similar manner, when a fishermen uses his rod to cast out a piece of bait, or an artificial lure, this object also must overcome the resistance of the air. Carrying this truth a step farther, it would seem that the heavier the angler makes his bait, or his lure, the farther he can cast it. But this is not true. A point will be reached where the weight-handling ability of the rod is exceeded by the amount of work it is being called upon to do.
This can be best demonstrated by going back to the ping-pong ball and the baseball. Admitted, you can throw the second farther than the first. But how far could you throw an even heavier object—a bowling ball? The throwing ability of your arm (which corresponds to the casting ability of the fishing rod) is not barely exceeded by the weight of the bowling ball.

That, in a small box, explains why it is necessary to use "balanced tackle" if you wish to insure maximum casting distance.

Four things must be taken into consideration before you can assemble a balanced fishing outfit: (1) the weight of the rod; (2) the length and sturdiness (stiffness) of the rod; (3) the reel, and (4) the weight of the line; (3) the length and strength-and their relationship to the weight of the line (i.e., the amount of weight the stick must cast) you will not become easily confused.

The confused angler can be quickly recognized as he has the tackle spool too large or heavy. He intends to use a fly rod, or other light stick, to cast out a heavy fish head. Such big baits are best suited for use with heavy trolling outfits.

Lures (artificial baits) will vary in weight from about 4 ounce to 2 or 3 ounces, sometimes even more. They are not going to enjoy much success should you try to use a fly rod, or other light tackle, to cast out a heavy fish head. This same customer would not think of entering a sporting reel—perhaps even the head—out from a larger fish. Obviously, you are not going to be successful if you try to use a fly rod, or other light tackle, to cast out a heavy fish head. Such big baits are best suited for use with heavy trolling outfits.

Line, rod, and reel must be of a size to work well with the specific bait or lure you intend to use.

Your first consideration, therefore, involves the nature of the thing fastened to the end of your line. For, should the other items of your tackle not work well with it, you will not enjoy much success should you try to use a stiff and heavy boat rod to cast out a light lure. The line will be too heavy for the fishing rod, or too light for the lure.

There must be, of course, a compromise somewhere between these two extremes: a rod of a particular power (casting ability) that will best handle the bait or lure you intend to use, and the remaining factors in the balanced tackled equation. In other words, line, rod, and reel must be of a size to work well with the specific bait or lure you intend to use.

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A fat mallard sails downward toward a watery resting place as you wait silently in the chilled damp of the early morning mist. As your target drops, it crosses a patch of high reeds, wreathed in early morning mist. As you approach, the duck is seen taking off, but your rifle is aimed at the reeds. The deer hunter is about to bag two other duck hunters sitting in a blind among the high reeds, and the deer hunter is about to bag a doe. The rack the hunter sees is actually bare oak limbs framing the doe’s legs. Are these uncommon, once in a lifetime occurrences? Tragically, they aren’t. “Cases like these happen all too often,” Tyer said. “Mistakes are made, and people are sometimes killed.”

“We want to prevent these kinds of things from happening and that’s where Florida’s Hunter and Firearms Safety Training Program is playing an ever-increasing vital role,” he said.

“The program isn’t designed to turn out sharpshooters, but to instill the respect and responsibility that using a firearm commands. It offers the chance for a youngster or an adult to become familiar with the correct fundamentals of firearms handling and safety, along with the possibility of opening up an interesting and challenging hobby,” Tyer added.

“It’s likely that some people who take part in the program may never go hunting, but the knowledge gained from the course can help them understand firearms and can foster an interest in conservation practices and wildlife management,” he said.

Since its birth in 1958, Florida’s Hunter and Firearms Safety Program has become a pace-setting model for other states which have developed similar programs.

“More than 30,000 Floridians have taken advantage of the program in the past 20 years and with our states’ citizens becoming more conservation oriented today, we expect even more interest,” Tyer said. “From July 1, 1976 to June 30, 1977, we conducted 275 classes around the state, in which 3,980 students completed the course and were certified as Florida Safe Hunters.”

The comprehensive course includes a minimum of 12 hours of classroom instruction and 12 hours home study, an examination and actual firing of a rifle. The course also includes the proper handling of primitive weapons and bows.

“Each student who becomes certified is presented a shoulder patch, certificate of training and Florida Safe Hunter identification card which now is required for hunting in some states, especially in the west,” Tyer explained.

The pupils go to evening classes in their local schools, community centers, summer camps, and sportsmen clubs, where they are taught by more than 500 certified instructors who volunteer their time and talents at no cost to the state or students.

“It’s these dedicated volunteer instructors who make the program work and we owe them a real vote of thanks,” he said. “They’re the backbone of the program and without them, it couldn’t function.”

In the classroom setting, the instructors will explain such topics as firearm laws, Florida’s wildlife code, landowner-sportsmen relationships, firearm accident causes, proper gun handling, first aid and survival.

“Home study assignments are given after each session equaling the number of hours of classroom training,” he said. “A review is given at the beginning of each class period covering all the previous material before the new topics are examined.

After all the classroom training, an exacting 100-question exam tests the students, who must achieve a minimum passing score of 80 percent.

“During the field course exercises, the trainees also must pass a 30 problem field test,” he said. “These exercises are designed to give them a feel for some of the basic fundamentals to good shooting and woodsmanship.”

“Here the students participate in the firing of a rifle and shotgun along with the use of archery equipment under controlled conditions,” Tyer said.

The new hunters also must show their proficiency in such outdoor skills as map and compass reading in simulated hunt situations, game identification and firing zone safety.

“But our primary purpose in all this is safety,” Tyer said. “Our job is to provide the basic information about ammunition and guns which will help form accident-preventing habits.”

Citizens who are interested in enrolling in the Hunter Safety and Firearms Program course nearest them can call their nearest Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission office for additional information, or write to Captain Ed Tyer, Hunter Safety Coordinator, Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Bryant Building, Tallahassee, Florida 32304.

Captain Ed Tyer, Commission Hunter Safety Coordinator, instructs Barbara Burton on art of muzzleloader shooting.

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**Florida’s Record Fresh Water Fish Update**

As of June 22, 1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
<th>WHERE CAUGHT</th>
<th>FISHERMAN</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LARGEMOUTH BASS</td>
<td>19 lbs</td>
<td>Lake Tarpon, Pinellas County</td>
<td>W. A. Witt</td>
<td>June 26, 1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLUEGILL</td>
<td>2 lbs 12 oz</td>
<td>Private pond, Hillsborough County</td>
<td>Dev V. Flanery</td>
<td>April 7, 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOWFIN (Mudfish)</td>
<td>17 lbs 3 oz</td>
<td>Lake Tohopekaliga, Osceola County</td>
<td>Wilbur Glower</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARP</td>
<td>28 lbs 14 oz</td>
<td>Apalachicola River below Woodruff</td>
<td>Dick Andreason</td>
<td>June 21, 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAIN PICKEREL</td>
<td>8 lbs</td>
<td>Lake Talquin, Gadsden County</td>
<td>Jimmy James</td>
<td>July 5, 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHANNEL CATFISH</td>
<td>42 lbs 3 oz</td>
<td>Rodman Reservoir, Marion County</td>
<td>Atim Witting</td>
<td>Dec. 12, 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRAPPIE (Speckled Perch)</td>
<td>3 lbs 12 oz</td>
<td>Newmans Lake, Alachua County</td>
<td>John McGlyr</td>
<td>Dec. 29, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REDBREAM</td>
<td>1 lb 75 oz</td>
<td>Suwannee River, Gilchrist County</td>
<td>Tommy D. Cason, Jr.</td>
<td>April 30, 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHELLCRACKER (Red ear)</td>
<td>3 lbs 4 oz</td>
<td>Santa Fe River</td>
<td>Eugene C. Carmichael</td>
<td>May 7, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRIPED BASS</td>
<td>35 lbs</td>
<td>Apalachicola River</td>
<td>Oliver Howard</td>
<td>Dec. 1, 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNSHINE BASS</td>
<td>8 lbs 15 oz</td>
<td>Apalachicola River, Gadsden County</td>
<td>Larry Edwards</td>
<td>May 13, 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUWANEE BASS</td>
<td>3 lbs 8 oz</td>
<td>Ochlockonee River, Gadsden County</td>
<td>J. G. Cannon</td>
<td>May 10, 1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WARMOUTH</td>
<td>1 lb 7 oz</td>
<td>East River, Bay County</td>
<td>J. D. West</td>
<td>June 8, 1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE BASS</td>
<td>4 lbs 8 oz</td>
<td>Apalachicola River, Gadsden County</td>
<td>John W. Palmat</td>
<td>March 22, 1976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the best equipped wildlife research facilities in the southeast is the Game Commission's... 

Nestled in a nine-acre grove of majestic live oaks overlooking Payne's Prairie near Gainesville, stands one of the newest and best equipped wildlife research facilities in the southeastern United States. The lab is headquarters for statewide wildlife research within the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission's Division of Wildlife. The facility is headed by Wildlife Research Bureau Chief Lorette E. Williams, Jr. and is currently staffed by seven other full-time research biologists, two wildlife management specialists and two secretaries. An additional research biologist is stationed in Avon Park.

The building is tastefully constructed of rough-hewn red cedar and is separated into two main sections connected by covered walkways. The main building houses office spaces for each staff member and contains a combination library-conference room, covered pavilion, duplicating room, large combination wet and dry laboratory, and restrooms complete with lockers and showers. The covered walkway leads to a well-equipped shop and storage area where lab personnel can manufacture and maintain the traps, blinds, cages, and other pieces of equipment needed in the field. Adjoining the shop is another large general storeroom which also houses additional office space. There is a large walk-in freezer for specimens awaiting laboratory analysis. Alligator hides taken by wildlife officers and licensed Commission agents are stored at optimum temperature and humidity in a large cooler room adjoining the building. These skins are sold by sealed bid to licensed hide dealers several times during the year. The hides come from nuisance alligators which present a real or potential threat to either humans or livestock. A large open garage provides protection from the weather for the lab's airboats and outboard boats. Adjacent to the lab building are holding pens used at various times for sandhill cranes, pelicans, geese, or large mammals.

Division of Wildlife biologists in the Gainesville Lab are currently researching the ecology and management of many species of game and non-game wildlife. Study areas range from the lower Keys to the western "paradise." The following lists but a few of the species being investigated within the state at this writing:

- Eastern Brown Pelican
- Sandhill Crane
- Southern Bald Eagle
- Florida Duck
- Wood Duck
- Canada Goose
- Bobwhite Quail
- Florida Wild Turkey
- White-winged Dove
- Mourning Dove
- American Alligator
- American Crocodile
- Black Bear
- Florida Panther
- Wild Hog
- White-tailed Deer

In addition, programs concerning the ingestion of lead shot by feeding waterfowl, and the status of rare and endangered reptiles and amphibians such as the Pine Barrens Tree Frog, Atlantic Salt Marsh Snake, Key Mud Turtle, and Eastern Indigo Snake are currently under way. Possible research on commercially utilized species such as bullfrogs and various freshwater turtles may be implemented in the near future. A closer look at Florida's fur-bearing mammals is also under way at the research lab.

Several staff biologists are on U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service recovery teams for endangered species including the Dusky Seaside Sparrow, Eastern Brown Pelican, Everglade Kite, Florida Panther, American Crocodile, and American Alligator.

Numerous articles, both technical and non-technical, are published by the lab's biologists each year concerning their field research findings. The staff areas of expertise are broken down as follows:

- Lorette E. Williams, Jr. (Research Bureau Chief): Wild Turkey, Sandhill Crane, Eastern Brown Pelican, and general ornithology.
- Steve Neshbitt (Biologist): Southern Bald Eagle, Sandhill Crane, Osprey, and general ornithology including waterfowl.
- Tommy Hines (Biologist): American Alligator, waterfowl, also on American Crocodile Recovery Team.
- Jim Powell (Biologist): Endangered Species (general) and Wild Turkey.
- Chris Belden (Biologist): White-tailed deer, Florida panther, wild hog, and general mammals.
- Jim Brady (Biologist): Black Bear, Fur-bearers and general mammals.
- Tom Goodwin (Biologist): American Alligator, Waterfowl (Canada Goose, Bobwhite Quail, and general herpetology.
- Paul Moler (Biologist): Rare and Endangered reptiles and amphibians within Florida and general herpetology.
- David Austin (Biologist—Avon Park): Wild Turkey and general game/wildlife management.
- Bill Frankenberger (Wildlife Management Specialist): Wild hogs, white-tailed deer, and general game/wildlife management.
- Tommie Peoples (Wildlife Management Specialist): Wild Turkey and general game/wildlife management.

The research lab also enjoys a close working relationship with:
The Bureau of Wildlife Research also maintains two field stations. The field labs are located at Fisheating Creek near Lake Okeechobee and in Dixie County near the mouth of the Suwannee River. The Fisheating Creek facility is base for the majority of the ongoing wild turkey research, while the Suwannee camp serves as headquarters for a current wild hog study.

Although giving tours of the facility is not a normal function of the staff, the interested public is cordially invited to visit and see this fine facility whenever they might be in Gainesville.

For those persons with a sincere interest in the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission's wildlife research programs, the lab maintains an extensive reprint file of published research finding. To obtain a reprint list, simply write a request to the lab at the following address:

Wildlife Research Laboratory
Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission
4005 South Main Street
Gainesville, Florida 32601

BIG SNAKE

By the time we got him in the sack, we knew he was a big one—maybe even close to the record.” Bob Cross, Orlando Fire Department, was describing the king-sized cottonmouth he and fellow firefighters Steve Cross and Steve Patton captured near East Lake Tohopekaliga recently.

It wasn't until they got the snake stretched out on a measuring board—with some additional assistance—that they learned the snake measured an impressive 6 feet, 5 inches. Its girth went 11½ inches and it tipped the beam at 8⅜ pounds.

It isn't a record, but it is right up there with the leaders. In a FLORIDA WILDLIFE article some years back, Wilfred T. Neill reported taking a 69-inch long cottonmouth. In one cottonmouth, Ross Allen captured went a full 6 feet. Naturalist Roger Conant, in his “Field Guide to Reptiles,” lists Allen’s specimen as the largest he knew.

“One of the most characteristic things about the cottonmouth is its behavior,” Neill pointed out in his FW article. “When approached, it raises its head and appears to gaze about rather boldly.

“No harmless water snake has quite this habit of elevating the head and neck. If closely approached, the cottonmouth opens its mouth widely, exposing the white inner lining that occasions the common name.”

Orlando Fire Department Lt. Bob Cross displays the cottonmouth he and his friends caught on State Highway 530 in Osceola County.

The bass fishermen of today generally use more efficient methods and some of them catch more fish off the bottom at schooling spots than we used to get on top, even when the fish were tearing up the whole river.

“School bass,” “jump bass,” or “bar bass” are simply fish that gang up to strike bait on the surface. In lakes they chase the bait all over the map. In rivers they tend to lie in wait for it and strike at the same spots for years. I found fish this spring in places I fished 25 years ago and old timers tell me the same spots were active 25 years before that.

A schooling location is created by a vagary of current or a bottom feature (generally a bar) that either confines traveling schools of bait or herds it into a limited space where the fish can work on it.

I have seen some dejected fishermen watching schools in frustration. Some just don't get the idea of topwater fishing for them, their main problem being that they don't realize the necessity for speed. There is a saying that you should cast in front of a bass "just before he comes up." That's a gag, of course, but not far-fetched at all when there is bait showering. When a minnow jumps clear of the water the chances are there's an open mouth behind him and the perfect spot for your lure is between...
CONSERVATION SCENE

ROSCOE HAMILTON 1916-1976

The untimely death of Lt. Roscoe Hamilton last spring marked the passing of a man who weathered the changing tide of conservation, and held fast to a personal belief of supervision according to the standards of honesty, morality, dedication and hard work. He was 62.

Lt. Hamilton started his career with the Commission as a wildlife officer on Lake Okeechobee July 1, 1949. He later transferred to Bushnell in Sumter County which was his birthplace and home. Among many conservationists who began their careers under Roscoe's guidance is Colonel Robert M. Brantly, executive director of the Commission.

Hamilton retired on February 17, 1978, due to health reasons after more than 28 years with the Commission.

JAGUARONDI SIGHTED

WINNEPASO, MINNESOTA

Minneapolis, Minnesota, which now features the new St. Mary's IDS Center, boasts the world's tallest building.

Address

Central Business District, Minneapolois, Minnesotaz.

FLORIDA WILDLIFE

JULY-AUGUST 1978

46
(continued from preceding page)
covered by U.S. Forest Service employees, Hoyle Crowder and Milton Oralls on the Osceola Forest last November, however, came out on the short end of their encounter.

The pair, antlers locked tightly, were found dead. G&FWFC biologist Steve Stafford photographed the evidence.

SCHATZ HONORED

The Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission recently honored James F. Schatz of Starke Fish Commission for his outstanding service. He has been with the Commission for six years.

BLACK POWDER HUNTERS

During the 1978-79 season, for the first time, hunters using muzzleloading guns during special primitive weapons or muzzleloader-only hunts are required to have a muzzleloading gun hunting permit in addition to regular hunting license, and where appropriate, a management area permit. Muzzleloader permits are $5 from offices of tax collectors and their subagents. Schatz, who lives on the Camp Blanding Wildlife Management Area, was cited for his outstanding service. He has been with the Commission for six years.

The Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission recently honored James F. Schatz as Wildlife Management Specialist of the Year.
The pair, covered by employees, Milton OraJ Forest last came out of their encou.

The pair, ly, were for biologist St. graphed the

FLORIDA WILDLIFE Magazine
620 S. Meridian St.
Tallahassee, Florida 32304

FLORIDANA
O'LENO STILL 1923

Photo courtesy of Florida Division of Forestry Archives

Turpentine Stills

Today most of them remain only spots on Florida maps. But in their heyday, places with names like Flowers Still, Purvis Still, and Pope Still were thriving little communities where scores of workers produced not bootlegged whiskey but liquid gold from the state's vast pine forests. Retired State Forester C. Huxley Coulter, who came to Florida in 1928, remembered turpentine created a way of life. In a Bicen­tennial interview for the Florida Division of Forestry, he explained, "A turpentine still was really a whole community, complete with a jook, a commissary, and a frame church."

Before the rise of America's modern petrochemical industry, turpentine stills were a common sight throughout the heavily timbered central and panhan­dle regions. Here the gum from thousands of pines was converted into turpentine and resin for Florida's important naval stores industry.
Ah, summer is here, and the fishing is good, especially if you’re going after Florida’s famous largemouth bass. An emerald raft of waterlilies, bursting with sugar white blossoms, frames two north Florida fishermen landing one of the fighting lunkers in this picture postcard pond scene. The Florida largemouth or black bass is the state’s premier fresh water game fish. They are equally at home in small tranquil ponds such as this one, large deep lakes or flowing river systems. When hooked, the largemouth can battle with the energy of a chained demon. The Florida state record, a 19 pounder, was landed by W.A. Witt in Lake Tarpon on June 26, 1961. Attracted to a seemingly endless variety of artificial lures and baits, the perpetually hungry fish will eat almost anything. Given a chance, its diet can include salamanders, waterbirds, mice, tadpoles, hellgrammites in addition to the usual fare of fingerling bluegills and other small fish.