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**Issue 272**

**September/October 2018**



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TIPS**

**B.A.S.S.  
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- 1: Coyote Calling and Hunting - Tom Bechdel
- 2: Hunt Waterfowl Like a Pro - Joe Austin
- 3: West Virginia Snakes - Jim Fregonara
- 4: Raptors in Flight - Raptors up Close
- 5: How to Film Your Hunts - Brothers of the Woods Outdoors
- 6: WV University Archery Team Exhibition
- 7: Whitetail Deer Taxidermy Seminar - Jeremy Simon of Re-creations Taxidermy

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**Volume 1 Issue 272**

Publisher and Editor  
**Mark A. Goudy**

Contributing Editors  
West Virginia Division Of  
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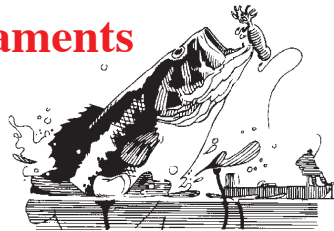
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## Cover Photo

Using a nine weight fly rod, Drew Kroll, from Sutton, was determined to catch a big musky. He finally had success at Burnsville Lake. He was doing a figure eight at the boat and the musky hit. It took him over ten minutes to land the 47" musky.

Archery deer season opens at the end of September. Good luck and hunt safely.

TEXT, mail or email your large fish or game pictures. Info is on page 38.

# 5 Archery Tips For Success

No archer achieves a state of absolute perfection. There are too many steps in a complicated process and too many details to juggle during each shot. Even the archer with perfect coaching and perfect shooting form must deal with the mental aspects of shooting a bow.

You can master the most basic fundamentals of shooting form and understand the mental aspects. But beyond that, the majority of bow-shooting difficulties stem from only five elements of the shot sequence. Take them seriously, and they'll provide a boost in bowhunting accuracy.

## 1. Anchor Twice

A rock-solid anchor is the foundation of a perfectly executed shot. Anchoring creates the bases of the rear of the sighting system. Without a solid anchor point, shots become unsteady and aiming is more challenging. This invites incon-

sistencies to your shooting. The anchor point you choose is based on personal preferences and individual comfort. The anchor point should also be rooted in something immovable. Cheek, jawbones or teeth are quality anchor bases. They're fixed and solid. Malleable anchor bases such as lips, jowls and sideburns are poor choices.

Choose multiple contact points to improve your anchor point.

To take it one step further, an anchor point shouldn't involve just one immovable point ... but two immovable points. This gives you a two-point anchor assuring your shooting hand is placed "just so" during each and every shot. For instance, I snug my index-finger knuckle tightly into the divot behind my ear, and my thumb wraps around the lowermost point of my jawbone. Choose a method that works best for you.

A kisser button is another trick that serves the same purpose. It provides an additional anchor and assures your anchor routine is consistent and repeatable. It assures your bow fits properly. A draw length that is too long can introduce a floating anchor. Get your drawing hand to the middle of your

continue to the next page



Alice Warden hooked an 8 pound hybrid bass at Kanawha Falls,

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releases will be more controlled.

## 2. Watch That Bubble

Most quality bow sights include an incorporated bubble level. Particularly for bowhunters, levels help eliminate left-right misses, especially from treestands or in broken topography. When shooting peep and sights, any deviations from vertical plumb cause the rest/arrow to swing left or right and send arrows off center. Canting a bow top-limb right — a common symptom for right-handed shooters — is instigated by loaded quivers. This causes arrows to miss the mark. The level acts as a reference, assuring each shot is launched consistently.

A quickly developing shot opportunity may leave no time for a bubble check. This is why it's important to instill these habits during practice. Consult the level

before every shot. After a while, the correct feel will become second nature.

That said, smart bowhunters at least glance at their bubble level — continue to page 7



Brothers Mark & Andy Godwin brought in 21 pounds, 6 oz. of bass over two days to win the Kings of the Lakes event held at Burnsville and Sutton Lakes. They had a 5 pounder and others on day two.



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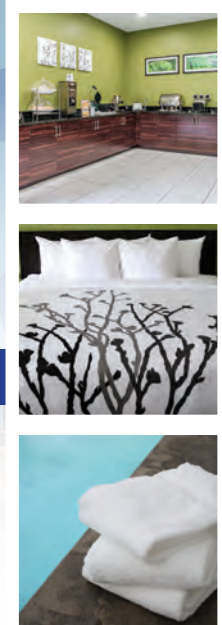
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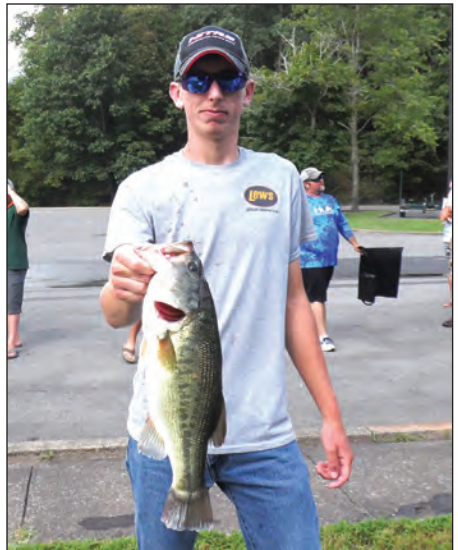
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els during challenging shots from treestands, in uneven terrain, or for ranges past 40 yards. Severely bending at the waist to address targets below you easily introduces a canted bow. Fast-falling terrain can create the optical illusion of a level bow, when you're actually tilting into the bow uphill. The longer the shot, the more deviations are compounded. It's always worth the extra second to check your bubble. You don't want to miss — or



Luke Long caught a 3 pound, 15 oz. bass at Burnsville Lake in the Kings of the Lakes event.

wound — a season-making animal due to a leaning bow.

3. Cradle It

A proper bow "grip" goes hand-in-hand with the bubble-level concept. Avoid the term "grip" in relation to holding the bow at full draw. The bow handle should never be gripped at all. Physically wrapping your hand around the handle to manipulate its attitude results in torque. Torque is the enemy of repeatable accuracy.

There's a better approach: Put all your fingers together and hold them vertically, as if offering your hand for a shake. Create a U with your thumb. Slide the bow handle into the U and allow it to cra-

dle atop your fingers and thumb. You're not holding the bow at all. Gravity does all the work. Come to full draw and turn your fingers continue to the next page



Frankie Pachutta & Wes Carr won the Water Festival bass event held at Bluestone Lake. They had 6 1/4 pounds from a muddy lake.



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slightly outward. This pushes the heel of your hand into the riser. The draw weight pushes down your solid skeletal structure so muscles remain relaxed. This allows a steadier sight picture and a more solid shooting platform.

Don't grasp the grip. Keep a loose handle on it with relaxed fingers.

Don't grasp the grip. Keep a loose handle on it with relaxed fingers.

There are two important caveats: Your bow should sit up straight at

rest and full draw without any manipulation on your part. This will require auditioning various stabilizers to discover the right feel. I find this is made easier by removing bow quivers and adopting a back quiver like Rancho Safari's Catquiver line. Use the bow as engineered to be shot.

Adopt a wrist sling and adjust it properly. The wrist sling eliminates the fear of dropping your bow on release or snatching at it during the shot in a subconscious attempt to prevent losing control of it. Many leave their wrist slings loose to slip

their hand in when hurried. But without actual support, the purpose of the wrist sling is largely defeated. Adjust it to support the bow.

#### 4. Surprise Release

Punching the release trigger is a common mistake. An example: The archer aims while the trigger finger is poised over the trigger, like a coiled snake. He then yanks the trigger when the proper pin sweeps into the bullseye. This leads to even bigger problems, such as shot anxiety and target panic.

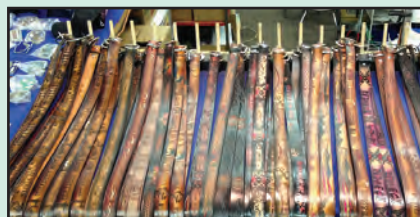
If using an index-finger release,

continue to page 10



Mark Foster, from St. Albans, landed a 24 1/2" hybrid bass.

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shorten the extension shank so the jaws hit the first joint of an open palm. At full draw, the trigger should hit the middle joint, instead of the sensitive tip. While triggering, use all fingers as a single unit. This gives you more control and allows you to squeeze more effectively. Aim and allow your sight pin to float over the bullseye. Deliberately create a figure-8 if necessary. Continue to aim. Concentrate on allowing the pin to float and slowly increase trigger pressure until the arrow releases.

If trigger-punching habits are bad, ditch the index finger release and use a thumb-activated T-handle release. The shot sequence is the same. It allows the pin to float on the bullseye while aiming. But this time, carefully wrap your thumb around the trigger barrel and pull into the draw to release the arrow. You're not physically squeezing the shot, but slowly pulling your shoulder blades together to increase the pressure on the limbs against the cam's draw stops. The draw pressure pulls the trigger barrel into your stationary thumb. This is a true, back-tension surprise release. This method eliminates anxiety and allows you to concentrate on aiming, and it will make you a

continue to the next page



Doug Frame, from Birch River hooked a 21 3/4" brook trout.

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### 5. Follow Through

Practice a smooth follow through. (John Hafner Outdoors, LLC photo)

The tendency is to jerk the bow down, watching arrows sail away, or simply allowing shooting form to fall apart once the release trigger is pulled. The problem is your timing can physically pull the shot off the mark. When my shooting suffers, I normally get back on track by reminding myself to focus on the follow-through. I continue to aim until the arrow sinks into the target. Follow-through involves intense concentration. It focuses on keeping everything static once the shot cuts. It attempts to hold the pin on the bullseye until impact. Lastly, it requires mentally willing your arrow to go where you want it.

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Tim Wade caught a six pound bass at Stonewall Jackson Lake.

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Wes Shearer, from Elizabeth, landed a nice largemouth bass.



Mike Long hooked a 5 pound largemouth at Sutton Lake..

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## Fishing Success For Fall Bass

It's funny, while a lot of people are cleaning out their boats to reorganize their tackle for next year. Fall is actually a time when you want to make sure you keep a good selection of baits handy.

That's because this can be a tough time of the year because the fish get scattered based on the progression of the seasonal change,



Dawson Morrison, from Gilbert, caught a four pound, 13 oz. bass.

particularly the water temperature. If you travel to different parts of the country, you never know what you're going to face. But even at home, you have to be prepared for a lot of fluctuation during the fall.

One thing that can complicate the seasonal progression is what some people call an Indian summer. That's when warm weather stretches well into fall — like it has this year.

What that does is extend the season because water temperature determines everything in the fall. Warm conditions don't actually stop the seasonal change; they just slow down the process. Overall, it's the amount of daylight that cools the water because the sun doesn't shine as long in the fall as it does in the summertime.

Because of how diverse the fall

season can be, I like to keep myself ready for whatever I might face. Here's what I'll have on my deck.

1. Topwater: Until the water gets below 55, I love to throw a buzz-bait to find those scattered fish. You can cover a lot of water with it, and it catches big fish.

2. Lipless bait: The fall fish like to school up on bait, and no matter where you go in the country, they

continue to the next page

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like to get on flats out in the middle on isolated cover like stumps, brush piles, grass clumps. Whatever the lake has, the fish will be on a flat with a ditch running through it.

That's where the bait goes because running water coming into the backs of the creeks brings oxygen and that's what the bait's looking for.

I like a shad pattern, white or chrome, and I like to match my bait size to the depth and the size of local baitfish. If it's bigger bait or if the bait is deep, I'll go with a Livingston Lures FlatSide 50, but if the bait is smaller and/or shallow, then the FlatSide 38 is my choice.

3. Spinnerbait: I use this in a similar application as the lipless bait but it's a different style. When the fish are schooling on a flat, a lipless bait will get under them, but I can keep that spinnerbait up in the water column.

Fish love to feed up in the fall, but they may not want a topwater. With a 3/8- to a 1/2-ounce, depending on the water depth, you can keep that spinnerbait high and you can even wake it when the situation calls for that.

continue to the next page



Chad Wallbrown, from Charleston, landed a big Kanawha River flat-head catfish.

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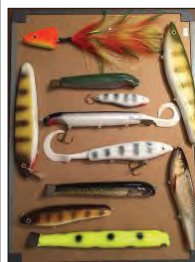
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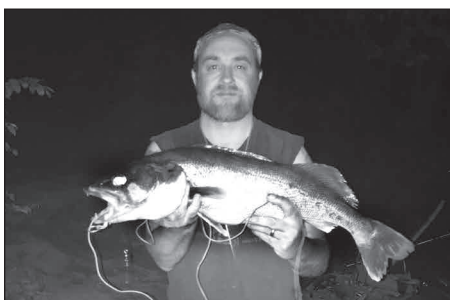
I love a double willow leaf spinner-bait, but in the fall I always seem to do best with a No. 3 Colorado blade on the front and a No. 4 1/2 willow leaf on the back. I call that combination "bread and butter."

Blade color depends on water clarity, but 90 percent of the time, I go with a silver Colorado blade and a gold willow leaf. If the water turns gin clear, I might go with two silver blades; but with this style of fishing, the water's almost always colored because you're in the backs of creeks where the water's coming in.

The lake is turning over and it gets what I call that "winter brown" look to it — that chalky, tannic color. That's why I chose the silver and gold combination.

4. Zoom Trick Worm: I'll Texas rig this bait with a 3/16-ounce pegged weight and flip it on isolated cover like stumps and blowdowns. I like to mix up my colors with green pumpkin, Junebug and red bug, but I'll also use a Merthiolate for an unweighted floating worm application to keep it higher in the water.

Either way, this is one of those scenarios when I absolutely depend on my Costa sunglasses to help me spot the smaller pieces of cover beneath the water. This technique works well later in the day when the fish hold tight to cover and want a smaller profile bait. They may not bite a jig, but you can go



Harry Nester caught a big walleye after dark on the Kanaha River.



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behind people and catch fish with that trick worm.

5. Flat-sided crankbait: This is actually what I'd call a wintertime

bait, something that will run 6-7 feet deep with a tight wobble. I'll use this in the late fall when the  
continue to the next page



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water temperature gets down into the 50s.

The fish are still keying on bait and they'll suspend a lot in 5-8 feet. So, a Livingston Flatmaster SQ is a good bait to wind over isolated cover and also to catch fish out of the middle of a creek when they're schooled up on bait, especially in the morning.

Overall, if I had to pick my favorite part of a fall day, it would have to be the first two hours after sunup. Whether it's early fall or late fall, that's when the fish get out there and roam around in the low light and you can really catch them fast.

What I throw depends on the time of the year. If it's still warm, I'll cover as much water as I can with the buzzbait or the spinnerbait. Once the water gets below 55, I'll throw the lipless bait on the flats and if the fish are farther along in

their seasonal pattern, that's when I'll throw that flat-sided crankbait.

When they have that bait bunched up early in the morning, you can catch them cast after cast.



Chad Eckhart, from Parkersburg, bagged a bobcat last season.

## Preseason Hunting Information

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va.

— September marks the beginning of many hunting seasons and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources would like to remind hunters to prepare by scouting, inspecting equipment and sharpening their skills.

"By late August, you should be able to gauge fall mast conditions in the areas you hunt," said Ethan Barton, a DNR wildlife biologist stationed in Romney. "Mast crop quantity is a good indicator of whether or not a hunting area will be productive."

DNR wildlife biologists and managers conduct mast surveys statewide every year, and early indicators this year point toward a mixed mast crop. Deer, bear, and boar

continue to the next page

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hunters should look for producing oaks or other desirable food close to bedding cover or habitat edges, and squirrel hunters should seek out producing oaks and hickories.

According to Barton, squirrels should be more abundant this year than during last hunting season. "Hard mast production has a time-lagged effect on squirrel populations. More mast during the previous autumn means higher overwinter survival and more reproduction for squirrels the following year," he said.

Preseason scouting will help hunt-

ers locate the food and cover which game animals require, and that effort should translate into better success and recreational experiences during hunting seasons.

Another important preseason activity for hunters is practicing their craft and inspecting their equipment well before seasons begin. Archery and crossbow hunters should practice from various ranges, heights, and angles they expect to encounter while hunting. Bows, arrows and bolts, broadheads, and safety equipment should also be inspected before being used.

Improper tuning of compound bows and crossbows can hamper accuracy, and frayed strings can be dangerous. Broadheads that have been previously used should be sharpened or the blades should be replaced to ensure a humane, ethical harvest.

Hunters who use tree stands should check their safety harnesses for damage or wear before they go hunting, and should follow manufacturer recommendations for time of replacement. Replacing a worn or damaged tree stand safety harness continue to the next page



Rosemary Cutwright landed an 8 pound bass at Stonewall Jackson.

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ess could save your life in the event of a slip or fall.

Rifle hunters should check their firearms for accuracy, and practice shooting from various distances and positions they expect to encounter while hunting before seasons open to ensure proficiency. When sighting-in a rifle, shoot from a solid rest and be sure the rifle's bore is clean before the shooting session.

It's also important to check ammunition for corrosion, uniformity and quality, particularly if you have old ammunition that has seen a few years at hunting camp. If you're trying a different load, remember that bullets of the same weight but different ballistic profiles (a pointed bullet versus a round-nosed bullet) often don't shoot to the same point of aim. Also, impact points of

similar loads from different manufacturers can differ substantially.

"Even if you're confident your rifle is dead-on, take a few shots at the range to make sure you're in the black," Barton said. "You owe it to yourself and to the game animals you hunt to be as accurate and ethical as possible."

Another preseason tip is to read through the 2018-19 West Virginia Hunting and Trapping Regulations summary, available for free

at license agents, DNR offices, and online at [www.wvdnr.gov](http://www.wvdnr.gov). If you have additional questions about regulations or seasons, call your local DNR district office between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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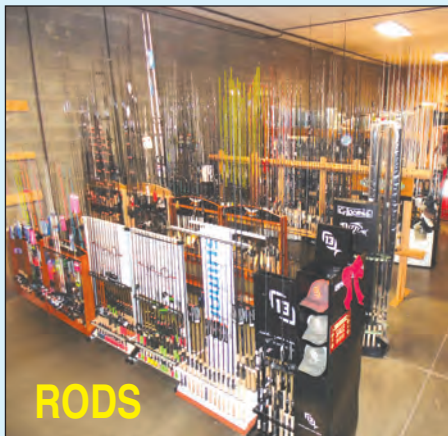


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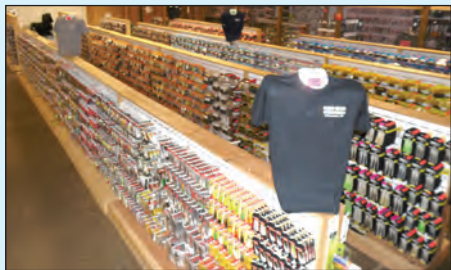
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## Crossbow Use And Safety

According to nearly every bow-hunting safety study conducted in recent times, most accidents involve the use of treestands. I have hunted from treestands longer than I care to remember, and can recall a couple of hairy instances when I saw my life flash before my eyes, reminding me to be extra cautious when hunting from high places. Knock on wood, nothing serious ever resulted, but when those mishaps occurred, the thoughts of what could have happened made me slow down, think things through and take every precaution to do things right.

The advantages of treestands are well founded, which is why so many hunters are found perched 15 feet or so above the ground each fall. And as states relaxed restrictive regulations and crossbows have become more widely accepted and popular, horizontal bowman have taken to the trees as well. In the process, they've adopted basic treestand safety practices such as wearing a full body safety harness while aloft and using a draw line to

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pull their bow up. This is all well and good, but crossbows are different from other hunting tools in several ways and additional safety rules apply.

Crossbows are fun to shoot and great for hunting, but just as with a bow, muzzleloader or firearm practice is needed for confidence and familiarity.

Treestand placement is always  
continue to the next page



Lindell Marker hooked an 18 1/2" crappie at Woodrum Lake.



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critical, but when hunting with a crossbow it's even more so. Because of their width, length and weight, crossbows limit how far the shooter can swing left or right to make a shot, a hindrance that can blow a shot opportunity unless addressed. In most cases, trails, tracks, rub lines and such indicate where deer are traveling and stands are placed accordingly. But whitetail movement is unpredictable at best, particularly during the rut when bucks might approach from any direction.

To counter the situation, it is often more advantageous to offset the stand a tad, either left or right, to a position that provides more

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freedom to swing the bow. Doing so opens a wider target area and creates more shot opportunities, rather than just covering the primary trails.

It's also safer. I still get excited when a big buck comes into view. I imagine other hunters do, too. A hunter might have a tendency to swing left or right more than anticipated or planned for, in some cases extending the body outward or over-reaching more than they should to get around branches, tree trunks and other obstacles.

Once you've positioned a stand, settle in and take a look around. Does it provide the optimum shooting options? If not get down and make some adjustments. Once the final position is set, remove any limbs that might interfere when the bow is fired, even if it means cutting shooting lanes and removing branches that provide cover. When

a crossbow is fired it generates blinding speed and enough energy to throw a shooter off balance in restrictive quarters. The last thing you want is the limbs striking an obstacle that will blow the shot but more importantly damage the bow or injure you. This also means making sure packs, binoculars, continue to the next page



Devon Primus, from St. Albans, landed a 9 1/2 pound rainbow.

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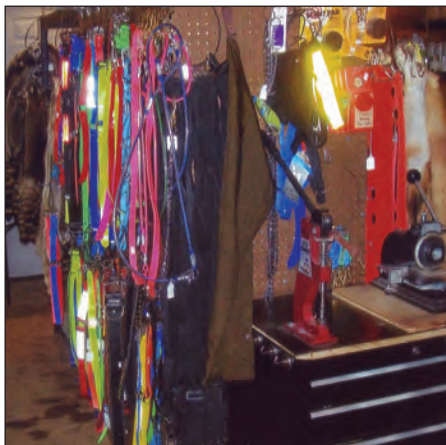
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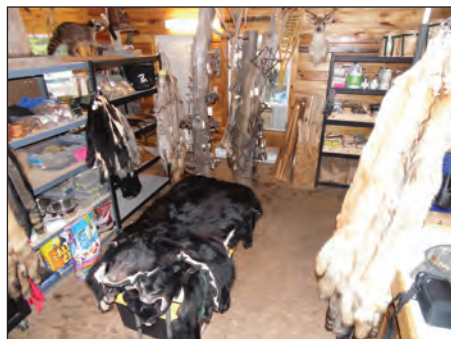


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range finders and other gear items are stowed out of the way.

The human body is capable of turning only so far, and side-to-side movement in a treestand can be limited. Stationary right-handed shooters can swing only so far to the right, left-handed shooters only so far to the left.

Fortunately, most crossbows are ambidextrous. One of the best ways to increase shot opportunities from a treestand and to limit over reach or swinging too far in either direction is to learn to shoot both left- and right- handed.

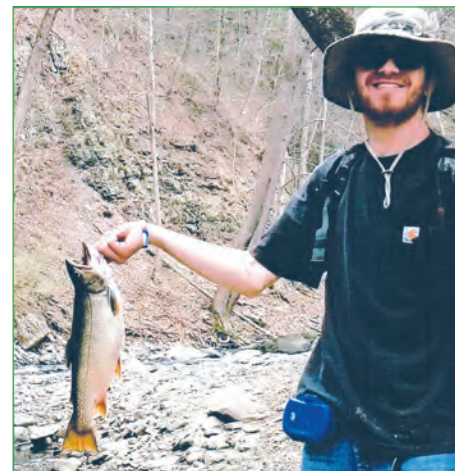
Take your unloaded crossbow and if you're right-handed swing left and then right. If left-handed swing right and then back left. It takes some getting accustomed to and considerable practice, but the ability to shoot left- or right-handed greatly increases the area you can cover and increases shot opportu-

continue to page 24

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**DETAILS ON PAGE 3**



Josh Castillo, from Hedgesville, hooked an 18" rainbow trout.

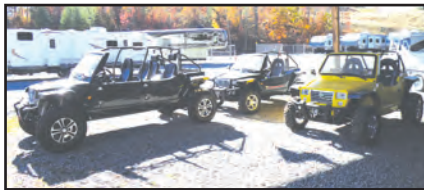
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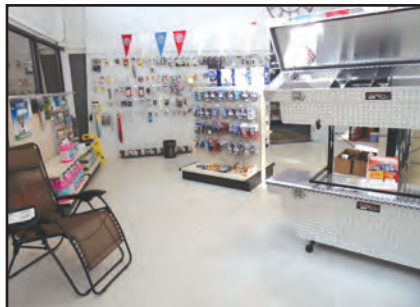
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ities.

Cocking devices are great tools to help hunters more easily get a crossbow ready. Cock it on the ground before climbing a stand and then use a haul rope to pull it up safely by the buttstock but never through the trigger guard.

**COCK IT ON THE GROUND**

The safest place to manually cock a crossbow with a cocking rope is on the ground — before ascending

to a treestand, period.

Crossbows can be cocked at home or at the truck before heading in to the stand to reduce noise but should never be cocked in a stand. Even



John Cecil hooked a nice rainbow trout.

double- wide ladder stands provide limited space and single stands and climbers even less. There is also a great deal of down pressure on the foot stirrup when cocking a bow. A slip with pressure applied is never a good thing when you're a dozen or more feet off the ground.

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 continue to the next page

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evated cocking a great deal safer. Crossbows from TenPoint and Wicked Ridge can be ordered equipped with the ACUdraw cocking system that is integrated into the bow. Other manufacturers offer optional cocking devices on bows such as such Excalibur's C2, Parker's Sidewinder and the Predator from Barnett. All are cranking systems built into or attached to the buttstock and use a crank to cock the bow. Each greatly reduces the human effort required to cock a crossbow, some by as much as 90 percent. And they require less room to operate, even from a sit-

ting position.

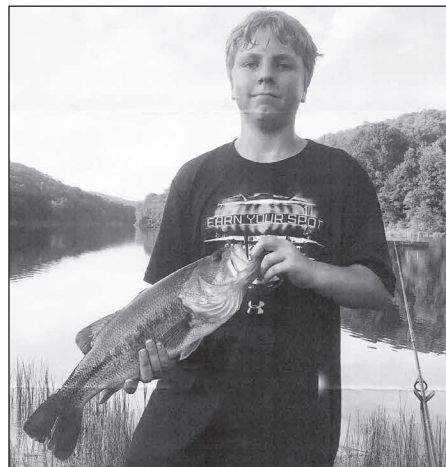
## MAKE THE FIRST SHOT COUNT

Of course, the best and safest way to prevent the need of cocking your bow from the treestand is by making the first shot count. This is best achieved by always ranging potential target areas after first climbing aloft, being patient for the best shot opportunity, putting the arrow into vitals and keeping shots within normal, accepted crossbow range, typically under 35 yards. In case of a miss, it is best to relax, calm down a few minutes, descend and re-cock the bow on the ground.

## USING A DRAW LINE

Using a draw line is the safest way to get a crossbow into an elevated stand. Hunters should consider it a cardinal rule, along with always having the safety ON and never loading an arrow until in the stand fully seated or otherwise secure.

Depending on who you talk to,



Hoyt Glover, from Morgantown, hooked a Dents Run largemouth.

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the best way to pull a bow aloft is by securing the draw rope to the  
continue to the next page



Jordan Hall, from Glenville, caught a 24" brown trout.

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foot stirrup or stock — and never through the trigger housing. Of the two, I prefer and feel it's safer lifting the bow by the stock, and here's why.

Knowing which arrows and broadheads work best is critical for success. Even more critical is wearing a safety harness anytime you're elevated.

I always cock my bow on the

ground. Even with the safety ON, if by chance the bow discharges on the way up the energy is directed away from me, not toward me. Doing so also keeps the arrows and broadheads pointed away or toward the ground, whether the quiver is attached parallel to the stock or front mounted parallel with the limbs. With the arrows pointed down, the chance of one dislodging from the quiver is also reduced. Another thing: When the bow reaches me I can grip it by the stock around the grip, keeping

the loaded limbs and broadheads pointed down or away. If pulled up by the stirrup, the opposite is true. I lower the bow the same way, by the stock, for the same reason. It keeps everything pointed away from me.

And speaking of broadheads, most crossbow quivers these days are equipped with a broadhead cover, typically made of sturdy plastic and a foam or plastic insert to help secure and protect the heads. Make sure your quiver has one. Exposed heads are a potential

continue to the next page



Dakota Cyrus landed a nice catfish. Photo courtesy of PC Outdoors in Hinton.

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hazard, whether you're in a stand or walking in to one.

Any limbs, twigs or brush the bow might strike against or that might impede its ascent or descent should be removed when setting up a treestand. I want a clear window all the way from the treestand to the ground, especially when I'm pulling my bow up in the dark.

I tie off my draw lines short, several feet off the ground. By doing so, when lowering the bow at the end of the day it stops above the ground rather than coming to rest on it, which might jar the scope or cause damage to the bow. I hunt mostly from ladder stands, so I tie off to the side of the stand rather than in front, keeping the draw rope well away from the ladder. When I hunt from a climber, I lean the bow against the tree, stirrup down, draw the rope up with me as I go and then secure it to a limb off to the side or to part of the stand below me. When the day is done, I lower the bow ever so gently to the ground, maneuvering it so the trigger guard settles first, and then drop the line, never taking the bow and line down with me. Attaching the line off to the side also places the bow out of the way as you descend and set foot on the ground.

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a monopod for better stability and accuracy. Practice with and without the rest, too.

### GET A GOOD REST

I don't care what anyone says, even with the strides manufacturers have made in reducing crossbow weight, after a few hours in a stand they get heavy and cumbersome. For that reason the best crossbow stands have a safety/shooting rail. Not only do they serve as a shooting platform to help stabilize the shot, but they provide a place to rest the bow. Every stand I own has one.

Lacking a safety rail, the next best thing is a shooting stick or monopod, such as those used by rifle hunters, and a bow hanger.

A shooting aide will allow you to keep the bow at the ready and help make a more accurate shot. The best bow hangers screw into  
continue to the page 29



Donavan New hooked a good catfish. Photo courtesy of PC Outdoors in Hinton.

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or strap to a tree and have a swivel arm, allowing the shooter to strategically place the bow within easy reach. Most also have accessory hooks for packs and other necessities to keep them out of the way. Again, safety is the key factor here. When a crossbow gets heavy mishaps are apt to occur and that can lead not only to safety issues but a misplaced shot.

**TAKE CARE OF THAT BOW**

All crossbows are mechanical, compound models more so than recurves, and to keep them in tip-top condition and safe whether you're on the ground or a dozen or more feet up a tree they must be properly maintained. Read and follow the manufacturer's recommended guidelines and make a point to routinely check strings, cables, cams and trigger and safety mechanisms. Wax and lube as instructed.

One of the first crossbows I ever owned was a recurve I purchased second-hand. I knew little about crossbows in general at the time, but after shooting it a few times prior to deer season with no problem I thought I was good to go. Come opening morning I had less than halfway cocked the bow when the string broke. No bodily harm or bow damage done, fortunately, but to say the least it was a jaw jarring experience I'll never forget.

Considering what could have resulted, I was grateful it happened at home, giving me time to restring the bow; and that it happened before the bow was close to full cock and I was on the ground.

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# Finding Fall Crappie

Fall days looking for crappie can feel more like a scavenger hunt than a day out on the water, but these tips are sure to help you find them

To catch big fall crappie like this, anglers may have to dig deep into their bag of autumn fishing tricks. (Photo courtesy of Keith Sutton)  
To catch big fall crappie like this, anglers may have to dig deep into their bag of autumn fishing tricks. (Photo courtesy of Keith Sutton)

Autumn fishing frustrates many crappie anglers. During fall, America's favorite panfish often are scattered and hard to find. Crappie may be deep one day, shallow the next and suspended at mid-depths the next. Fish may feed ravenously in the morning and get a bad case of lockjaw in the afternoon.

On the lakes and reservoirs usually targeted by crappie anglers, hot-weather crappie tend to stay in or near the thermocline. Shallow-water action might be good during cool, low-light periods, but crappie rarely venture to the "dead zone" below the thermocline. For this reason, pinpointing schools of summer fish is relatively simple; find the cool, oxygen-rich water that forms the thermocline and you'll find crappie.

This changes when fall begins. Cool weather begins lowering the surface water temperature. As the upper layer cools, it becomes heavier and sinks. This action forces warmer, lighter water below, back to the surface. This water subsequently is cooled, just as the previous surface layer was, and

descends as it cools. This mixing or "turnover" continues several weeks until the thermocline disappears and all water in the lake is roughly the same temperature. This mixing effect also replenishes oxygen in deep water.

continue to the next page



Jamie Mullins, from Ranger, hooked a black crappie.



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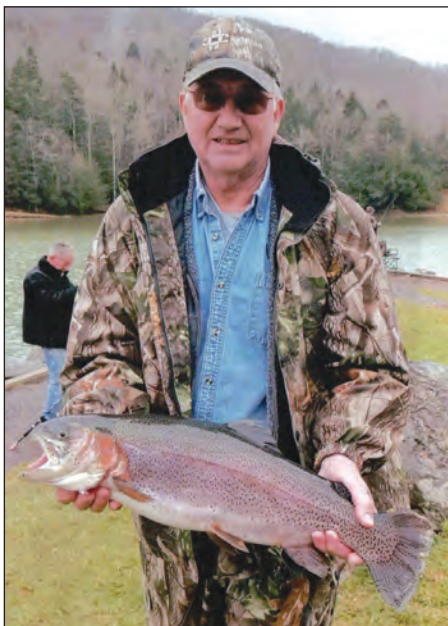
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The end result is that fish, formerly restricted to narrow bands of acceptable oxygen and temperature, are no longer limited in their movements. Crappie once barred from the coolest depths because of low oxygen levels now may roam freely to much deeper water. Likewise, where once fish could not spend extended periods in extreme shallows due to high temperatures and low oxygen levels, after turnover, even these areas are acceptable. Crappie may now be found deep, shallow or anywhere in between.

Some waters don't experience turnover because they don't stratify in summer. Rivers are a case in point. So are many large, shallow, wind-swept lakes and some reservoirs with lock-and-dam facilities or hydroelectric generators.

In waters where fall turnover does occur, however, the angler will need to dig deep into his or her bag of tricks to zero in on schools of crappie. And it never hurts to have a few new tricks in your bag. Here are some that could help.



Robert Dennison, from Clarksburg, hooked a 24 1/2' rainbow trout.

### Find the Crappies' Comfort Zones

The secret to crappie-fishing success, regardless of the season, is realizing that crappie always concentrate in areas providing the most comfortable living conditions and learning to identify those areas. In fall, conditions are theoretically such that crappie can live anywhere within a lake. In actuality, factors such as oxygen content, light penetration and food availability still

continue to the next page

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still greatly influence a crappie's choice of living quarters.

Consider, for example, that all the debris and poorly oxygenated water being pushed upward from the lake bed when turnover begins temporarily "trashes" the whole system. Crappie respond by seeking areas with good quality water. To find them, savvy anglers do likewise. An easy way is working

tributaries bringing fresh water into the lake. Another way is looking for areas where turnover has not begun. On some large reservoirs, different arms turn over at different times; anglers can concentrate their efforts in areas that aren't visibly affected.

When turnover causes excessive amounts of decaying debris to circulate in the water column, sudden

significant drops in oxygen can result. When this happens, crappie must find oxygenated water immediately. They frequently solve the problem by going directly to the nearest source, which is surface aeration from wind and waves. Consequently, windswept shorelines with shallow cover may be productive crappie fishing spots.

Your first order of business when fishing during the turnover period should be finding comfort zones such as those just described and working them systematically to pinpoint crappie.

#### Try Standing Timber

When turnover ends and the water starts to clear, crappie often concentrate around standing timber. Here the fish can move shallow or deep as water and weather conditions dictate. On cloudy or windy days when light doesn't penetrate very far into the water, crappie may be within a few feet of the surface. Bright, sunny, post-frontal days may find them hugging the bottom. Adjust your tactics accordingly.

"When fishing standing timber, fish each tree for only a couple of seconds," says Missouri crappie pro Kevin Rogers whose specialty is jigging vertical timber. "If you don't get a bite, move to the next  
continue to the next page



William Wlaters, from Augusta, caught a 25" rainbow trout.

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tree. Too many people make the mistake of sitting or tying up to a tree. You'll catch more fish by using your trolling motor and moving from tree to tree."

Rogers used such tactics to qualify for the Crappie USA Classic six consecutive years. The way you present your lure, he says, important.

"When vertical jigging around standing timber, after your lure reaches the bottom, grab the line with your free hand and gently raise the lure up the tree," he says. "Crappie will not go down to hit your bait so raising the lure puts the bait in their face. They can't stand it."


**Dealing With Cold Fronts**

Passing cold fronts are a common fall phenomenon. And when a front moves in, the fishing can quickly turn sour. Crappie still can be caught, however, if the angler knows how to deal with this situation.

"Anglers can't control the weather," says Kentucky crappie guide



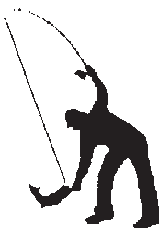
Hal Hutchinson caught a 35 1/2" flathead on the Ohio River.



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Steve McCadams (www.stevemccadams.com). "But they can adjust their presentation and be more effective in catching crappie when weather patterns turn nasty. I've seen crappie have a drastic mood swing literally overnight when cold fronts descend, lowering surface temperatures with bone-chilling winds. After the front passes, high skies with a high-pressure system alter the crappies' feeding habits, too."

Crappie relate close to structure in this scenario, says McCadams.

"To catch them, you must slow down your presentation to a vertical style, keeping the bait in front of the fish longer and in their specific depth range," he notes. "Don't expect the fish to be aggressive and chase down a moving bait because they're holding tight on structure. Light or small lure sizes will help too, as will using a bobber for slow, sinking presentations that assist

continue to the next page

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you in keeping the bait in the strike zone longer.”

**Pontoon Flipping**

Ohio crappie guide and tournament pro Russ Bailey often concentrates his fall fishing efforts around pontoons, or party barges.

"Pontoons provide excellent crappie fishing in early fall when the days are still hot and the nights are starting to cool off," says Bailey. "Pontoons provide one key thing for the crappie this time of year: shade. You don't have to have brush or other cover under them to catch fish. As the nights begin to cool, the fish start moving to shallower water. During the day, when the sun is hot and bright, the pontoons provide the cover they need."

Bailey uses a long pole to flip jigs into the shady reaches beneath the pontoons where crappie are likely to be holding.

“If you work at it, you can learn to use a 10-foot or 11-foot rod to

flip under the pontoons,” he says. “But ‘shooting’ with a 6- or 7-foot rod can be very effective as well. Using colored line such as Berkley Iron Silk or Stren Hi Vis Gold will help catch more fish because many times you will not feel the strike at all, but you can very easily see the colored line jump. Concentrate on getting your jig back as far as possible under the rear of the pontoon. This can make the difference between catching just one fish and catching 20 fish.”

**Additional Tips**

Spider trolling and drifting are excellent ways to pinpoint scattered schools of autumn crappie. Rig several poles with different lures/baits set at different depths, then move around in likely looking areas. When you catch a fish, change rigging so all your poles conform to the depth and bait preferences exhibited by that fish.

Fall crappie often follow secondary bottom channels when moving between deep water and shallow.

A sonar unit is invaluable for pinpointing this type of structure and the fish themselves.

Jigs and minnows are the best crappie baits year-round, but if one or the other doesn't produce, try a jig/

continue to the next page



Sam Ambrose hooked a 22” large-mouth bass at Sleepy Creek Lake.

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minnow combo. A marriage of live bait and artificial lure sometimes does the trick for finicky fall crappie.

Be patient and persistent. Fall conditions force fish to roam, thus fishermen must also be willing to move frequently, forsaking likely looking spots or those that produced yesterday. If the tactics covered here don't produce crappie, improvise another strategy and keep trying.

**In Conclusion**





The transition from summer to autumn is jolting for both fish and fishermen. Crappie find their once secure world literally turned over on them. Anglers who fish these waters find their quarry more unpredictable than ever. Overcoming this seasonal nemesis will require all the skill, knowledge and patience you can muster. But when you finally zero in on a big school of hefty autumn crappie, you're sure to agree that the rewards make the extra effort worthwhile.

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**SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va.**  
— In anticipation of fall hunting season coming up, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources is reminding outdoorsmen and women to prepare for a safe and enjoyable season and to refreshing themselves on hunting ethics.

“Hunting ethically and legally preserves our image as sportsmen and women and promotes good stewardship of our natural resources,” said Gary Foster, assistant chief in charge of Game Management for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

One of the first steps in planning a hunting trip is identifying a place you'd like to hunt and checking regulations for that area/county. Topography or proximity to

your home also may be a factor in  
continue to the next page



Tiffany Cassell landed a 33" flat-head catfish.

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Stonewall Jackson Lake

choosing a location.

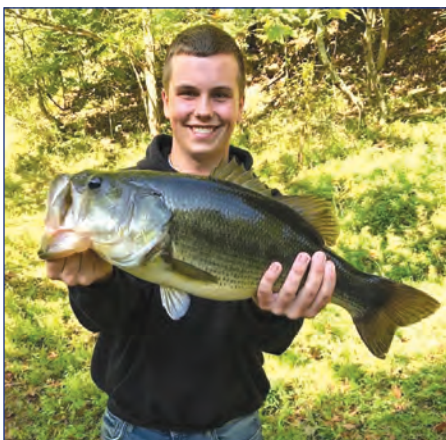
Should a hunter choose to hunt on private land, they should obtain written permission from the landowner and go over any ground rules for hunting in the area. While private land makes up 90 percent of West Virginia, there are still more than 1.4 million acres of public land open to hunting. This includes wildlife management areas, state forests and national forests.

“We encourage folks to check out the DNR Hunting Interactive Map online at [www.mapwv.gov/hunt-fish/](http://www.mapwv.gov/hunt-fish/) to explore areas open to hunting,” said Paul Johansen, Chief of the DNR Wildlife Resources Section.

Hunters also should practice shooting skills before the season. Other things to keep in mind include being courteous to other hunters and not crowding folks that got to the area before you. Successful hunters, should be mindful of how they dispose of a harvest. Dumping carcasses and hides on public land is illegal.

“Treat all land, whether public or private, as if it were your own,” Johansen said. “How we act in the field and treat others reflects on all of us as hunters.”

Good luck hunting in 2018.



Rance Gandee landed a 6 pound, 4 oz. largemouth bass in a pond.



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Josh Balsler hooked a huge Stone-wall Jackson Lake largemouth.

## LARGE FISH & GAME PICS WANTED

Clip Out

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fish \_\_\_\_\_ Pound \_\_\_\_\_ Oz \_\_\_\_\_  
 Deer \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_ #Points \_\_\_\_\_

We are looking for LARGE fish & game pictures from 2018.



**NO  
 DOES**

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**P.O. Box 5521**  
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**26105**

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