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Mid-Tenn

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OUTDOOR NEWS

APRIL 2020



INSIDE THIS EDITION: *Enjoy the Great Outdoors • It's Time to Seduce a Gobbler by Larry Woody • Area Fishing Reports • Bass Fishing on Kentucky Lake • Trying Different Tactics Will Help You Find the Crappie and more!*

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PICKWICK AREA FISHING REPORT

PICKWICK LAKE ELEVATION: 410 • WATER TEMP. 50

BASS: With the weather changing it has been hard to pattern bass over the last week. I have actually caught more fish during the colder days. I have also had more luck in the afternoons. Craw-fish colored Strike King Series 3,4&5 rankbaits have been my first choice of baits although jerkbaits have also caught a good number of quality bass. Craw-fish colored in the Series 3 have worked the best as far as numbers of fish and should continue to work good throughout the Spring. Strike King Jerkbaits with orange belly's have been a good bait over the past several weeks and will continue to be good for a few more weeks. This is a good time of year to catch a big bass in the Pickwick area. Remember to use the right equipment for the lures you're using, I use Lew's rods and Lews high speed reels for everything I fish because there is a Lews rod and reel for every situation and in my opinion it's better than any other option.

WHITE BASS: You should be able to catch white bass on smal white grubs right now. They are schooling in different areas between the Pickwick Dam and Savannah.

STRIPERS: The river conditions now are not my favorite for stripers but they will be starting to bite soon.

SAUGER: This has been a tough year for sauger. I usually fish with a jig throughout February and mid-March, but by April I like to troll small crankbaits along 12-15' of water. If you get in a good area you can catch a lot of fish fast.

Compliments of Clagett Talley • 731-607-5266 • or www.pickwickareaguide.com

FISHING REPORT DALE HOLLOW LAKE

Denton Hummel with kickinbassdhl.com fishing is good water 54 in the main part of the lake up the rivers 56 small mouth are being caught on swim baits and jerk baits in the middle to lower part of the lake largemouth being caught up the rivers with jig and shaky head and also on spinner baits and crank baits if the water has any color in it here's some that was caught the last two days.

Kickinbassdhl@outlook.com



ENJOY THE GREAT OUTDOORS!

Even as many schools, churches and offices are closing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we remind all Tennesseans that the great outdoors remains open as usual and more inviting than ever. March and April usually bring some excellent fishing opportunities. Also, turkey hunting will kick off March 28th with the statewide youth season, and April 4th for everyone else.

What better way is there to practice 'social distancing,' as health authorities recommend, than to seize the opportunity to get outside and enjoy Tennessee's natural resources. The recommendation is to stay 6 feet or more away from others as you head outside.

Places that are open for you to get outside and enjoy some sunshine:

- Boat ramps
- Family fishing lakes
- Statewide Bank Fishing
- Wildlife Management Areas
- Select Shooting ranges on WMAs (only unstaffed shooting ranges are open)



The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency offices statewide have very limited staff on location until further notice. This is in response to the Governor's emergency declaration and the need to halt the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The headquarters and field offices will remain open with limited staffing until further notice. In addition, scheduled public events through April are being canceled/postponed. These include any in-person hunter education classes, boating education classes, public staff shooting ranges, the National Archery in the Schools state tournament, and Commission meetings.

There are no plans to limit turkey season, which opens statewide April 4. Public land hunts and quota hunts will be opened. Many TWRA staff will continue serving the sportsmen and sportswomen of Tennessee by working remotely.

We encourage everyone to get online if they need us. You can make inquiries about anything through our website or email. Our licensing system is available 24/7/365 online so anyone can purchase licenses at anytime without going to a physical location. Or, go paperless and use the TWRA on the Go App for license purchase.

We will continue to respond to inquiries on TWRA's normal public communication outlets including:

Facebook • Email messages via the "Contact Us" link Ask.TWRA@tn.gov • TnWildlife.org

Game Wardens will be in service across the state as usual; to report a violation or accident visit <https://www.tn.gov/twra/law-enforcement#accident>



TRYING DIFFERENT TACTICS WILL HELP FIND THE CRAPPIE

Hey Y'all from the Excel Bay Pro 230 "Fishful Thinking". How our lives have suddenly turned upside down. Fishing seems to have become so much less important. My prayers go out to all the medical professionals who are putting in so many hours and those who are directly affected by the virus. With all the turmoil, the fish keep on doing what fish want to do. The water conditions are improving even though we still have a lot of current.

I was out earlier this week and got to see first-hand the water conditions on both sides of Kentucky Lake on the north end. Bays on the LBL side are reasonably clear while bays on the west side are stained to muddy. The mid-week rain is going to really muddy up things on the west side. West side bay surface temps were around 57 while LBL side bays were around 54 degrees.



Reports of catches are everywhere from bad to good, deep to shallow, sunrise to sunset. The virus concerns are keeping boat traffic lower than normal and many places fishermen would normally frequent like restaurants and resorts are either closed or running at very different schedules. Carry-out is the rule at most eating places that are normally eat-in. It would be a good idea to check with each business as to what their situation will be since things seem to be in constant flux.

For those who do brave out between bouts of rain and wind, your choices are many on tactics. Most fishermen are spider-rigging or vertical jigging. The best place to start looking would be in the mouths of coves or bays around structure in 15 or so feet of water. Minnow rigs and jigs with plastics are what are tied onto most lines.

As the day moves toward afternoon, it might be a good idea to work toward shallower areas with structure. One thing most fishermen are finding is this: it's taking eliminating a lot of structure to find that one piece of structure that seems to be holding every fish in the bay. When you do find that one spot, it's game on!

The female crappie are now laden down with eggs and should start to spawn in the next couple of weeks if we have some sunshine and the surface temps get into the low 60s. The black crappie will begin their spawn first and will be found around rocky areas and chunk rock banks, especially areas near cover. White crappie are more inclined to be found spawning in the backs of bays with sandy bottom.

I love to troll, as those of you who are regular readers know. I got my longline trolling gear loaded up and tried my best to put together a pattern in the short time I was out. As is often the case, the crappie had other ideas. I did catch enough to stink up a small skillet and one nice female white crappie who just couldn't resist a new bait for me, the Spinnie Minnie. It's a 1/10th ounce lure similar in appearance to a Little George.

Many of you old-timers will remember the Tom Mann's Little George tail-spinner from years back. Ed Duke of Southern Crappie Rods markets the Spinnie Minnie and features it in a recent video that can be seen on Crappie-gills-n-more Facebook page. Ed and I have never met but we have spent hours on the phone, and I consider him to be absolutely the nicest person in the fishing tackle industry. In my opinion, he also sells the best rods in the business. Check them out on southerncrappierods.com.

If this virus scare calms down, we will be seeing a huge increase in lake traffic from all those who have been cooped up all winter with the terrible rain, currents, and bad lake and fishing conditions.

The Kentucky Lake level is around 355' but will surely rise sharply with heavy rains south of us. Be mindful of gremlins both floating and just under the surface along shallow areas. Carry extra dry clothing and wear your PFD. So many of our first responders are tied up with other things these days and you don't want to be that person who didn't bring the proper safety gear or check out your boat before you got out on the water.

Be careful out there, have a good time, leave the alcohol on the bank for later, and welcome to our slice of Heaven!

Doug Wynn • Crappie Gills n' More • (270) 703-7600

TIM'S FORD

Met Billy and Braxton at Tim's yesterday-David Duval was there as well. Everyone caught Smallmouth but with very few keepers. I had 11 total with 2 keepers. For those of you that are from different states our Smallmouth length is 18 inches. Many of the other 9 that I caught was in the 15 to 17 inch range. VMC Weedless Finesse Jig and soft plastics www.vmchooks.com rigged on Sufix Braid and fluorocarbon leader . With the VIRUS going on I'm not sure how many more trips they will let us make here in Tennessee. I know that many states are shutting things down. Keep praying.



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Confinement and Quarantine Tugging On You? Go Fishing!

Even your doctor will agree that fishing is a great way to get some much needed physical and mental health benefits during this stressful time. If he doesn't agree: change doctors!

Got claustrophobia? Been cooped up too long listening to the redundancy of doom and gloom from the news media? Yes, they're providing a valuable service and educating us as we navigate uncharted waters. This pandemic from "ole' man chrono" is indeed scary. Not to be overlooked or underrated. Yet the inside gig for some bears a close resemblance to solitary confinement. Hard to smell the roses and see the sunrise from dark corners of the house. No way to see the blue sky but you can get the blues!

Try a fishing trip to perk up your spirits. You can still adhere to all health and safety recommendations while soaking up some sun and connecting with nature. Out on the lake or beneath a shady oak with your fishing pole you can dodge the crowds and still maintain social distancing. Don't let your fishing go to the dogs. Take him with you too!

Meanwhile, spring weather is taking over this week as a rapid warm up is in progress. Anglers have dodged, and in some cases endured, a lot of thunderstorms. With warmer days at hand surface temperatures will continue to rise, bringing active spawning phases closer for Kentucky Lake crappie. We're not there yet but drawing closer day by day.

Lake levels are rising slowly in the aftermath of rains this week. Elevation at midweek at Kentucky Dam was in the 355.7 range, which is up about a foot from last week at this time. Fishermen can expect the rise to continue through the weekend. Upstream in the New Johnsonville area the reservoir is already at 357.5. That shows significant water flowing through the system and headed north.

Surface temperatures are reflecting the warmer nights too. Readings were in the 55 to 56 degree range at midweek, which has climbed a couple of degrees from last week already. Watch for that to cross the 60-degree threshold soon!

Dingy water color is present in the backs of most bays as a lot of runoff is stirring up sediments. Stained water color is present in the upper half of several bays but still relatively clear in the main lake area of Big Sandy in the Paris Landing sector. The upper Big Sandy basin and West Sandy are starting to see more stained water enter that region.

Crappie anglers using long lining techniques and covering a lot of water are having the most success lately. The fish appear to be suspended and staging in midrange depths of 8 to 13 feet. Slow trolling Road Runners and curly tail grubs plus some tube skirted jigs have paid dividends. The prespawn crappie in this region are waiting for warmer surface temperatures before making a blitz to spawning structure. Anglers spider rigging are catching fish as well as they canvas the flats and move about. Some are tipping jigs with minnows as they slowly meander over open water areas where the fish are staging or roaming. Popular colored jigs have ranged from the white/chartreuse to pink/chartreuse or similar shades.

A few boats are vertical fishing manmade fish attractors with 1/16 to 1/8-ounce jigs and finding a few scattered fish in midrange depths such as 7 to 12 feet. Watch for that technique to improve quickly as more fish enter the shallow bays and flats as spawning time nears. Some boats have been seen vertical fishing the main lake ledges and stalking deep drop-offs. Reports indicate the bite has been sluggish there with low numbers being taken in the 18 to 20 foot depths.

Late March and early April always sees crappie on the move here. Rising lake levels and surface temperatures climbing trigger crappie to transition rapidly toward spawning spots. Normally they stair-step their way from main lake deep water venues to midrange depths where they park for a week or two.

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Once surface temps reach the upper 50's and low 60's hormonal changes kick in and male crappie start taking on a dark purple appearance as their pigment darkens. Female crappie have already been sporting a hefty egg sac and bulking up in preparation for spawning.

Watch for active phases to change gears the next two weeks. Weather is always a factor but a rapid warm can accelerate the biological clock. Most anglers associate the first two weeks of April as being prime spawning time here. Better sharpen your hooks as that time is almost here!

Bass fishermen are finding some hefty fish lately with several stringers sporting 4 to 5-pound fish. A few smallmouth are showing up too. March has held up to its reputation of giving up big bass. Rising lake levels and dingy water should put a lot of fish up shallow this week. No doubt the bass are moving up and following the rise as that's where the shad are headed. Loud colored crankbaits have been working well such as Rattle Traps, Bandit and Shad-Raps in fire-tiger, florescent orange and red/chartreuse variations. Rock points and gravel banks continue to produce but some bass will stage on mud flats and shallow sandbars or sloping mud banks too, especially in the backs of bays where fresh warm water is entering. Spinnerbaits and shallow running crankbaits tossed around stickups are beginning to produce as well. Jig and pig combos are also popular choices.

There's a lot of current in the main channel this week so working rip-rap banks or any areas where eddies are forming is worthy of consideration. TVA is pushing a lot of water through the system so expect current to linger for a spell.

Spring fishing patterns are rapidly changing. The fish are on the move and you need to be too!

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BASS FISHING PICKING UP AT KENTUCKY LAKE

The fishing remains good here at Kentucky and Barkley Lake. A lot of fish are still scattered and as far as crappie go you can catch them from 8 feet down to 30 feet.

Most fisherman do not fish 30 feet deep but I do know for sure that some anglers are catching them there where the water is clearer towards the east side of the lake.

As for bass you can catch them from drop offs or in a foot of water. Last Friday evening I caught about twenty bass in about an hour as a cold front was moving in. I caught all those fish in 1 to 2 feet of water with a terminator double bladed spinnerbait. Those bass were towards the back end of a creek arm and it was one of those deals where all the fish in the area were concentrated in a small area. They were all feeding in the shallow flat coverless water.

Bass are in the pre-spawn stage or what I like to call the second pre-spawn which occurs a couple weeks before the spawn. Fish in this second stage are in real shallow water basically holding where they would spawn in the water was warm enough and the timing was right.

There are still plenty of bass holding in the first pre-spawn stage that are using drop offs in deeper water or that are scattered along sloping banks. I like to use jigs while fishing drop offs but may use a jerkbait or spinnerbait on some ledges.

While fishing the sloping banks, jerkbaits and crankbaits are the most effective. While I was fishing the shallower flat water this year I have been using a spinnerbait and jerkbait primarily and have caught some fish on a buzzbait.

During the last couple of weeks I have spent more time working a shallow water pattern targeting shallow cover and eliminating a lot of water quickly. Primarily I have been using a spinnerbait and shallow running jerkbait. My Rapla jerkbait is supposed to suspend but it actually slowly rises when paused and that's what I want it to do in real shallow water.

Kentucky Lake fishing can change a little bit from year to year and I try to adjust and do whatever it takes to get a pattern going when the fish are shallow. I think I have a good one going now so I am confident in going to any new area of the lake - meaning where I haven't been this year - working my pattern, eliminating water and catching fish.

A lot of people are afraid to travel right now and others are taking advantage of the coronavirus situation and are taking trips. One thing that is for sure, this part of Kentucky has very few cases of the virus so it's a lot safer here than the densely populated urban areas. If you call me to book a trip I am offering a significant discount to anyone that wants to book a multi-day trip.

As a guide I specialize in taking people fishing to make sure they get to catch as many fish as possible. However, one of the best values to fishing with me is what you can learn in a day. I know for certain I am as good as anyone at teaching any aspect of bass fishing.

I have traveled to clients home lakes where I have never fished to teach them how to catch more fish and win tournaments on their favorite lakes/bodies of water. Please checkout and like my Shelldivers Guide Service Facebook Page and my updated Shelldiversguide.com website.

Scott McGlinchey • Shelldiver Guide Service • (317) 440-2934



LAKE GUNTERSVILLE FISHING REPORT

This past week was the best week overall I have had on the water in 2020; the bass are on the move and catching was better than fishing. Sure, there is always down time, but the feeding and number of bites were the best of the year. Good solid fish all week with the biggest near 7 lbs. and good numbers everyday we fished.

The bite has changes some as most of our fish are being caught fishing Missile Bait D-Bombs, 48 stick baits and Tight-Line football jigs. We still caught some fish on Picasso Shock blade chatter baits and SPRO rattle baits. We stayed in less than 8 ft. of water most the week working drops and structure.

Come fish with me no one will treat you better or work harder to see you have a great day on the water. Outside fishing is great social distancing, my boat is cleaned and disinfected with spray after every trip. We fish with great sponsor products, Lowrance Electronics, Ranger Boats, Mercury motors, Vicious fishing, Duckett fishing, Navionics mapping, Boat Logix mounts, Dawson Boat Center and more.

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Call: 256 759 2270
Capt. Mike Gerry

CRAPPIE FISHING PERCY PRIEST IN APRIL

When you see the pretty dogwoods in bloom in Tennessee, the spawning bite is on. The water temperature normally is between 64 and 72 degrees. We should have a good number of keeper sized crappie this year. I suggest that you start your fishing trips above Fate Sanders Marina, keying in on Spring Creek, Fall Creek and the East and West Forks. These areas warm up quicker and have great spawning structure. If you don't have your own crappie structure, focus on the "white pipe" stake beds put out by TWRA.

When you start out the day fishing and you seem to catch more throwbacks than keepers, you need to fish the cover in a little deeper water. The bigger females wait in deeper water before they decide to move shallower to spawn, especially if a cold front rolls in. My go-to technique is "power corking" with 8 rods off the nose of the boat using big floats and 1 ½ -ounce weights. It's hard for the fish to resist a minnow. Other techniques are casting a slip float around visible cover and casting tube jigs around stake beds and brush piles. Some favorite jig colors are red and chartreuse. Also, shad color jigs are useful in clear water. Don't forget!.... April is a great month to take your children fishing. The bite is on!

Mark Travis Guides for crappie on Percy Priest year around and Lake Normandy in the Fall.

Mark Travis Guide Service
WWW.crappieguideservice.com
Email_ mark@crappieguideservice.com
615-542-9800



SPRING IS HERE & MORE RAIN TO COME

Spring is officially here and the weather forecast is more rain. It seems over the last month, every other day is gloomy and rainy. I know myself for one is ready to see some sunshine for more than one day a week. A few days of sunshine would do wonders to the bass fishing on the lakes right now. Here's a rundown.

Lake Conditions and What's Happening on the Lake

Water Temps: Low to mid 50's

Lake Level: 355.31 and holding steady for next few days

Water Color: Main river is slightly stained and clearing daily, Easy Side is Clean to Clear, West Side Creeks are stained to muddy in backs of creeks

It's Springtime! Grass is starting to green, trees are blooming, bass are on the move. Over the last couple weeks we have had nothing but dark, nasty, rainy days with little sunshine. I have spent a good bit of time, weather permitting, on the water.

This is the time of year when the bass are on the move. When water temps get into the 50's, the fish usually make a big push shallow and start feeding up before the spawn. Even though we as fishermen think the spawn is a ways off, the fish still have the spawn on their minds when the water temps start climbing. The water temperatures are holding around 52-54 degrees and the very backs of the creeks I have even seen some 58 degree water. We have had a few cool nights keeping the fish from really making that big push in. I believe the biggest factor is lack of sunshine. If the sun would shine for about 2-3 days straight, the fishing could go crazy. Each day is still hit or miss, catch them one day decent and struggle the next. There are still a few different patterns that are working. The primary pattern and most consistent I would say would be half way back in the creeks, in the stained water, and throwing lipless, crankbaits, and spinnerbaits.

It's that typical spring time pattern that produces day in and day out. Some days numbers are good and some days quality is good. Keep in mind that there is a good number of just under keeper sized fish or just keeper sized fish in the lakes right now. This is also that time of year where the big girls will really show themselves. Chunk rock banks that have been close to deep water are good areas for those staging fish that are moving back. If you find yourself going back farther in the creeks you will find a little warmer water, and if you can find cover in the water that's a bonus.

Our lakes at winter pool doesn't have a lot of shallow cover in the water, but if you find some its worth tossing a blade or shallow crank around it. Another pattern that's working is the jerkbait and ARig on the main lake points and mouths of creeks. There are still a good number of quality fish being caught out closer to that deep water. If you prefer the deep, clear water then you can fish the east side of Kentucky Lake and find just that. The jerkbait is a bait that I have a lot of confidence in and will usually get you those better quality bites. Channel Swing banks that have that deep water right by the bank with chunk rock are a good starting place. Keep in mind that the TVA is still pulling a good bit of current to keep the lake levels down. That being said if you plan to try your luck on the main lake, you may be limited to moving baits instead of bottom baits unless you plan to throw something pretty heavy.

This time of year fish are constantly on the move and you have to always be thinking ahead and where they will be next. If we get a few days of sunshine, I think you will see a significant change in activity on the lakes. It's springtime and fish will be biting!!

***Brandon Hunter is a professional tournament angler and guide for Kentucky Lake.
He specializes in largemouth bass fishing.***

Brandon Hunter • (270) 703-7777

TECHNIQUES AND WHERE

JERKBAIT

A good number of fish are hanging out on the main lake points suspended with the cool nights. A jerkbait is always a good choice when water temperatures are colder.

Specifics - 6th Sense Provoke (Joint Juice, Table Rock Pro, Sensory Shad), Spro McStick, Lucky Craft Pointer

SHAKY HEADS OR NED RIG

Main lake points with gravel are always a good place to throw the finesse type baits.

Sometimes there is too much current on main lake but if this is your go to, you can find points out of the current that hold fish. A Ned Rig will get you bit when nothing will.

Specifics - 6th Sense Ned Fry on your favorite Ned Head, There are a lot of good baits to use but I have primarily been using the Ned Fry and the ZMan TRD Worm

SPINNERBAIT, CHATTERBAIT

Always a good choice in the spring months when fish are on the move. Fish around shallow

cover such as rock, laydowns, stumps. Specifics - Accent Spinnerbait 3/8 and 1/2 oz (Double Willow Chart White in stained water), Jackhammer 1/2 oz (Green Pumpkin, Red)

SQUAREBILL AND SHALLOW CRANKING

The squarebill and shallow crankbait is a great bait for covering water this time of year when fish are on crawdads and or baitfish. Points that have chunk rock and or shallow cover is where you will find most shallow cranking activity.

Specifics - 6th Sense Crush 50 (Boiled Crawfish, Wild Lava Craw, Chart Black), Crush Flat 75 (Chart Black), Lucky Craft 1.5, Spro Little John MD, Rapala DT6

LIPLESS

Fished on mainlake or flats in the creeks, the lipless is a great search bait when fish are chasing and feeding up in the spring months. Specifics-6th Sense Quake 70 and 6th Sense Quake Thud (Wild Lava Craw, Delta Craw, Tiger Treuse), Strike King Red Eye Shad, Bill Lewis Rattle Trap

ARIG

If they are biting it and your in a tournament, 9 times out of 10 you will get beat. Fish the Arig offshore or on main lake points that have deep water close to it. Specifics - ARig of your choice. I prefer the HogFarmer Rigs with the 6th Sense with the Divine Swimbaits 3.8 (Ghost Ice Minnow, Pro Shad)

For those of you who are not familiar with my service, I competed for 8 years on the FLW Tour. I am a full time Licensed and Insured Captain with First Aid and CPR certification. I offer one-on-one training for all times of the year, fun bass fishing trips, and electronics lessons on the ins and outs of the new technology. I would love the opportunity to share a day with you in my Ranger Z520L or in your own boat to get your electronics dialed in. I am here to help you and to help you become a better angler and to give you confidence in your equipment.

If you are in the area on the north end of Kentucky Lake, there are a couple businesses that I highly recommend you check out. Kentucky Lake Outdoors is fully stocked with anything you read in my reports and if they don't have it, they will get it for you. Hi-Tec Outdoors is one of the premier shops for anything electronics. They are very knowledgeable on the latest technology, can do the install, and have a great tackle selection as well. The guys at Jet-A-Marina in Calvert City are our local Ranger Boats dealer. These guys do a great job keeping us running throughout the year.

Follow me on Facebook and Instagram @brandonhunterfishing and @bhunterfishing for anything fishing. Make sure your following along and subscribe to my YouTube Channel BrandonHunterFishing. Please visit brandonhunterfishing.com and shoot me an email to book your next trip. See you on the water!



IT'S TIME TO SEDUCE A GOBBLER

By Larry Woody

It's springtime, and the Tennessee hills are alive with the sound of music. Turkey music.

Camo-clad hunters tune up their box call, slate calls, mouth calls and even a few old-time wingbone calls and take to fields and forests to try to seduce a love-sick gobbler by impersonating a come-hither hen. "It's amazing that a bird that's so smart and cautious most of the time, goes ga-ga during mating season," says Lebanon's Clarence Dies. Clarence is a turkey-calling maestro, with four Grand Slams and Two World Slams to his credit over decades of hunting, including two trips to the Yucatan to bag a brace of jungle turkeys. "I've seen old gobblers get so worked up that they come running in and start flogging a plastic decoy," he says, adding with a chuckle: "Now how smart is that?" Clarence, whose hand-crafted Three Tracks Turkey Calls are sold nationwide (check out the video on You Tube), is quick to add that springtime gobblers are not always pushovers, lovelorn or not. "They catch on fast, especially the old birds," he says. "You can fool a jake fairly easily, but those old Toms didn't grow old by being stupid. But the peak of mating season is when they're most vulnerable. "Of course every hunt is different," he says. "One day gobblers will respond to calling, and you can work one in. The next day they head in the other direction. They're unpredictable, which is what makes hunting them such a challenge."

Turkeys were non-existent in most parts of Tennessee until a TWRA restoration project was launched in the mid-1970s. Birds were trapped in some of the few areas they existed, such as the Cumberland Plateau, and stocked in other locations. The stockings were a huge success, and within a couple of decades wild turkeys became fairly common sights throughout Middle Tennessee. Eventually they became so abundant that a "bonus" fall season was added to the traditional spring season. There was a generous of bag limit of six birds in most Middle Tennessee counties during the fall season, and hens could be harvested.

In recent years, however, the turkey population plunged drastically in certain areas, prompting the TWRA to cut back – and in some counties cut out -- the fall harvest. The Agency is in the midst of a five-year partnership with the University of Tennessee to find and remedy the cause of the decline. Meanwhile, turkeys remain fairly abundant in many areas, and springtime romance is in the air. It's the perfect time to trick a Tom.

SAFETY FIRST:

With more and more turkey hunters flocking to the sport, and accessible land shrinking, the chance of an accident increases. Unlike deer hunters, who are required to wear blaze orange, turkey hunters drape themselves in camo from head to toe. Not only are they virtually invisible, but they use calls to imitate a turkey. It can be a risky combination. I once had an uneasy encounter when I "called in" another hunter. He came slipping down a fence row toward me, shotgun at the ready. If that happens, don't move. Don't wave or stand up. Sometimes an excited hunter, stalking what he thinks is a putting turkey, may shoot at sudden movement. Sit still and shout a warning. Better to spoil a hunt than to get shot. Don't wear "turkey colors" – red, white and blue. Those are the bright hues of a gobbler's head and wattles during spring mating season. Obviously, nobody should ever shoot at a flicker of movement or a flash of color. But not everybody observes ethics and common sense. Unfortunately, that's how hunters get shot.—Larry Woody

