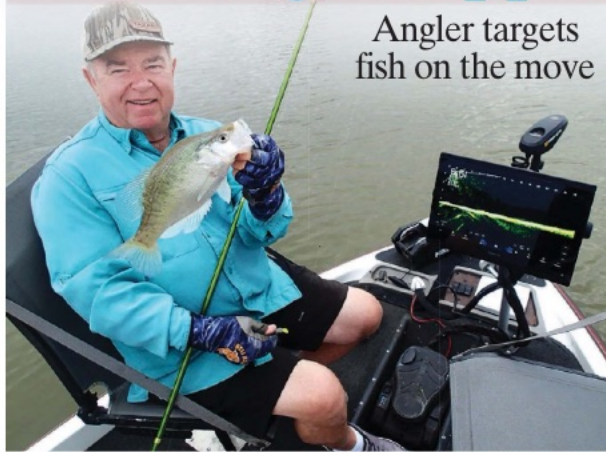


Free range crappie

Angler targets fish on the move



Mackey Harvin shows a fine Millwood Lake crappie he caught in early March at the 30,000-acre reservoir. The lake is known for big crappie and Harvin used minnows to catch several. Visit nwaonline.com/photo for today's photo gallery. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/Flip Putthoff)

FLIP PUTTHOFF
NWA DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

ASHDOWN — Sticks, bushes and brush are all hot spots for catching a mess of crappie. Mackey Harvin, a guide at famed Millwood Lake, leaves this cover behind and heads for open water.

"The shallow 30,000-acre reservoir is revered among crappie anglers for jumbo sized fish and lots of them. Millwood is 9 miles east of Ashdown or 25 miles northeast of Texarkana."

Harvin, who's fished at Millwood for years, launched his boat at Millwood Lake State Park and passed up acres of grass and brush that'd make other crappie chasers giddy. Open water near the dam was the destination for Harvin and his fishing buddy for the day.

"What we're looking for are roamers," Harvin, a guide with Millwood Lake Guide Service, said. "They're crappie that are by themselves, roaming and feeding out in open water."

Harvin is old school and new when he goes fishing. He uses old-school minnows for bait. Yet when it comes to technology, Harvin is an expert at using forward-facing sonar, the latest in fish finding electronics. There are different brands of this high-tech sonar. Harvin prefers Garmin LiveScope and has it on his boat for finding these open-water

Crappie in black and white

White crappie and black crappie swim in Arkansas waterways. White crappie have stripes on their sides while black crappie have dots. At Beaver Lake, white crappie are more plentiful on the south end of the reservoir. Black crappie show up in better numbers on the north end. At Millwood Lake, most crappie are white crappie.

Source: Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

roamers. They'd be hard to catch without it.

Harvin started this early March trip at Millwood Lake State Park. Bushes and grass stood in shallow water while Harvin idled his boat past the marina and out toward open water, passing up all this fish-holding habitat.

"This cover along the shore is all fine for catching crappie, but they tend to be smaller compared to the ones in open water," Harvin said.

He didn't travel far. The state park and Millwood Lake dam were close by at his first fishing spot. The dam is 3.3 miles long and is Arkansas' longest earthen dam. Harvin turned on the sonar and grabbed one of his 12-foot crappie rods designed for LiveScope fishing. A lively minnow was threaded on the hook and Harvin was ready to catch



Harvin ties a jig to his line. Jigs and minnows both work to catch crappie at Millwood Lake. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/Flip Putthoff)

See **CRAPPIE**, Page 6E

Camper cabins cozy, easy on the budget

No frills lodging an option at Devil's Den

Some say camping isn't really camping unless you're snug as a bug in a tent being lulled to sleep by a gentle rain on the nylon roof. Cabin camping may be more pleasing to others, in the sturdy shelter of a full service cabin with all the comforts of home.

There's middle ground between tent camping and cabin camping. That's the camper cabins at Devil's Den State Park. These cozy cabins may be perfect for folks who enjoy tent camping but might want to take a step up from nylon walls and a rain fly. They're more economical than the park's all-inclusive cabins built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. They've been refurbished and upgraded over the decades to 21st century standards.

Camper cabins, on the other hand, are fairly new at Devil's Den. The rate is \$79 per night for a camper cabin compared to twice that or more for a full service cabin.

A camper cabin is like a tent with walls, windows and a roof. Each has a double bed and a bunk bed with upper and lower bunks. Beds have comfy mattresses, but guests bring their own bedding such as sheets, pillows, blankets or sleeping bags. There's a dining table with bench seats in each cabin and that's it. There's no refrigerator, bathroom, stove or television.

OPINION THE FLIP SIDE



FLIP PUTTHOFF

Cabins have electricity, heat and air conditioning. For visitors who absolutely can't live without internet, it's available.

A large screened-in porch graces the entrance of each cabin and porches have two wooden chairs and a table. Outside there's a patio with a picnic table, water spout, campfire ring with adjustable cooking grate and also a smaller charcoal grill. There's a pole for hanging a camp lantern or two.

For a big family, I'm thinking these cool cabins can sleep even more if a couple of the kiddos want to bunk on the front porch in sleeping bags. Most would jump at the chance.

These cozy abodes are in a little cabin camper community at the park. In the center is a common restroom and shower building with four units and doors that lock. There's a shower, commode and sink in each unit.

See **PUTTHOFF**, Page 6E



Camper cabins at Devil's Den State Park are a middle-of-the-road option between tent camping and full-service cabins. Visit nwaonline.com/photo for today's photo gallery. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/Flip Putthoff)



The cabins have comfortable beds, indoor and outdoor dining tables and screened porches. Visitors share a common shower and restroom building and bring their own sheets, pillows and blankets. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/Flip Putthoff)

BASS FROM THE PAST



Morning bird walks

Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society hosts free drop-in bird walks each Wednesday, Friday and Sunday through May 17 at Lake Fayetteville to see spring migrating birds. The first walk is Wednesday. Meet at the north shore disc golf parking area at 6:30 a.m. Local birders lead the walks that are 1- to 2-mile slow rambles. Walks usually end by 8:30 a.m. but people may come and go as they please. No registration or experience is necessary. Binoculars are recommended.

Take hunter ed online

Virtual 10-hour online Arkansas Game and Fish Commission hunter education classes will be offered at 6:30 a.m. May 11-15. The classes are for youths age 10-18. Anyone born or after Jan. 1 1969 is required to have

Outdoor Events

to 3 p.m. May 13. Location is to be determined. Volunteers should bring their own boats but a limited number will be available to the first people who register. Bring lunch, drinks and whatever tools may be needed. Trash bags, gloves and snacks will be provided. Go to bnrpartners.org/sign-ups to register.

Learn trapping basics

Fur Takers of Arkansas will host a free class on basic trapping at noon May 16 at the Hunt Family Nature Center, 3400 N. 40th St. in Springdale. The class is for beginner and experienced trappers. Students will learn basic trapping techniques and how trapping is an essential part of conservation. Call the center at (833) 356-0847 for more information.

Apply for summer camp

Applications are open for the

oak-hickory forests and glades to the free-flowing Kings River.

Students track wildlife using radio telemetry, monitor bats, study aquatic ecosystems, learn bird banding techniques and take a canoe trip and overnight camping experience. Visit onsc.us/agis to apply.

Volunteer online

The new Ozark Natural Science Center online volunteer orientation is now live. A wide range of volunteer opportunities are available, from trail work and campus projects to program support and special events. Volunteers complete the online orientation, fill out the volunteer agreement form and list where your passions and skills shine. Visit onsc.us/volunteer to begin.

Fill required hours

Arkansas Game and Fish Com-

Warmer weather has black bears on the move across the state

RANDY ZELLERS
ARKANSAS GAME AND FISH
Arkansas bears are on the move.

Each spring, young black bears emerge from their dens and strike out to find new territories. While sightings of these misguided youths certainly grab the attention of people living in neighborhoods bordering bear country, they often move on as long as people don't give them a reason to stay.

Bears are part of Arkansas and have been since before the state was settled. Arkansas once was so rich with black bears that its unofficial nickname was "The Bear State." Unrestricted hunting for their fur and fat led to the bear's rapid decline by the early 1900s. Thanks to the efforts of conservationists and biologists with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas again has bears throughout the state in the areas they once roamed. Understanding how to coexist with these animals starts with a quick look at bear biology.

Unlike deer, which reproduce each year they are mature, female bears have cubs only every other year, spending two winters with their cubs. The cubs are newborn during their first den cycle,



Bears see wildlife corn feeders as an easy meal. (Courtesy Photo/Arkansas Game and Fish)

then they spend the whole year learning how to be a bear and overwinter once more as yearlings. At the end of this denning cycle, young females are allowed to stay in a portion of their mother's territory, but the young males are forced away to find a new home.

"This is how nature enables bear populations to expand and protects against inbreeding," said Spencer Daniels, Game and Fish bear

program coordinator. "Young males look for new suitable habitat, and the top priority is finding ample food resources."

Open trash cans, wildlife feeders and cooking grease are just as tempting to a young black bear as the native berries and soft mast they typically seek this time of year. This can put these young bachelor bears in some bad situations, especially if humans don't remedy the

situation quickly. "To that bear, it's just free food," Daniels said. "So locking those things away this time of the year is important to prevent nuisance encounters. You may still have a bear wander across your yard in bear country this time of the year, but if they don't find food, they won't stick around."

Black bears, the kind native to Arkansas, are not normally aggressive, but they are

still wild animals. If people allow the bear to become comfortable near their homes or land, they may set up shop. At that point, you become the intruder and the obstacle between them and "their" food.

"The first step to any nuisance bear phone call we receive is for the landowner to put away any of these possible attractants," Daniels said. "That includes deer feeders. Deer don't need corn or other feed this time of the year with

spring vegetation greening up. That's usually all it takes for the bear to move on."

The last thing you should do is let the bear get comfortable. Bears are naturally afraid of humans and the ruckus we create. It's important to maintain that relationship. Most bears that have to be removed by wildlife managers start as a welcome guest for photo opportunities and conversation to a landowner. Once the novelty wears off or the bear decides to damage property to get to more food, things get serious.

"Making noise, yelling and throwing a rock or stick can be enough to give the message that the bear is not welcome," Daniels said. "Make yourself look as large and obnoxious as possible. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the bear won't stick around. If it does, back away slowly while continuing to create noise until you are in a safe spot and report it to the nuisance wildlife hotline immediately. We can respond from there."

More information about bear awareness and bear safety can be found at www.Bearwise.org. This site was developed by bear biologists throughout the Southeast and includes information specific to Arkansas.

Turkey harvest points to upward trend

RANDY ZELLERS
ARKANSAS GAME AND FISH
Hunters from 6 to 15 years old checked 1,494 turkeys April 11-12 during this year's special youth turkey hunt, roughly 30 birds more than last year's hunt and more than 300 turkeys than the hunt numbers in 2024.

David Moscicki, Game and Fish turkey program coordinator, said the increase was likely due to a combination of factors including excellent weather during the hunt, a few strong years of reproduction and an increase in the number of adult gobblers on the landscape.

"We saw good reproduction two and three years ago, and last year saw decent reproduction as well. So there are more birds out there,"

Moscicki said. "We also have seen low jake harvest in the last few years by the youths, who are the only hunters allowed to harvest one. That means more mature gobblers are carrying over from each year and more of those birds out there are mature compared to years past. Combined with good weather that let youth hunters take good advantage of being the first ones out in their area to hunt, and you have all the ingredients for a great hunting experience."

Moscicki said the youth hunt harvest being nearly identical to last year's is good, and that the harvest is actually 14 percent higher than the average of the last two years. Factors such as weather can play a large role in a hunt as short as two days, but Moscicki works

with long-term trend data to help shed light on the population. In fact, Arkansas's youth hunt harvest has seen a slow but steady increase each year since 2018, when only 630 birds were checked during the two-day hunt.

"We've really had five years of stable season structures with a more conservative season in place since 2020, and we've seen five years of slow steady growth," Moscicki said. "That gives us confidence that we're doing the right thing. If you see too rapid of a harvest increase, it could actually be bad, meaning that you might be overshooting the capacity of the population. If that happens, you will probably see a decrease soon. Seeing a slow increase is better, and I expect it to level off eventually."



Mackey Harvin unhooks one of several crappie he caught in March at Millwood Lake. Crappie were eager to bite minnows at the shallow 30,000-acre reservoir. Visit nwaonline.com/photo for today's photo gallery. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/Flip Puthoff)



Harvin (left) and a friend discuss the day's fishing. (NWA Democrat-Gazette/Flip Puthoff)

NWA Fishing Report

BEAVER LAKE
Hook, Line and Sink in Rogers said black bass fishing is good. Try top-water lures in the morning. Go with plastic worms, spinner baits, swim baits or soft plastic crawdads later in the day. Banks with a mix of gravel and rock are good areas to fish. Bass are 1 to 15 feet deep. It's possible to catch a mixed bag of largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass.

Fish for crappie around bushes and wood cover 5 to 10 feet deep. Minnows or jigs should both work. A good jig color is a black or red body with a chartreuse tail. Striped bass are roaming open water of the Prairie Creek area south into the White and War Eagle tributaries. Go for catfish with stink bait, liver, nightcrawlers or hot dog chunks soaked in strawberry Kool-Aid powder. Average surface water temperature is in the mid 60s.

BEAVER TAILWATER
Austin Kennedy, fishing guide, said walleye are in post-spawn mode. Large female walleye are migrating back downstream to avoid Table Rock Lake. Most walleye in the tailwater are smaller male fish. A hair jig and minnow combination is good to use. Work it slowly along the bottom. Fish slow and cover lots of water. Trout are biting far on prepared trout baits fished on the bottom

with light tackle. Small hair jigs or small spoons are good lures to use. Water temperature is in the low 60s which is high for the tailwater. Little or no power generation at Beaver Dam has caused the temperature to rise. Some hydropower generation will lower it.

LAKE SEQUOYAH
Angler Mike McBride said crappie are in deep and shallow water. Fish for them with minnows or jigs and experiment with depth. Black bass fishing is good with any lure in an angler likes to use. Liver is the best catfish bait.

BELLA VISTA
Hook, Line and Sink in Bella Vista recommends fishing for black bass with soft plastic lures around docks at any Bella Vista lake. Go with crickets or worms for bluegill. Try worms, nightcrawlers or stink bait for catfish.

Please note that all fishing in Bella Vista is open only to POA members and their guests.

SWEEPED LAKE
Kenny Stroud in Siloam Springs said black bass fishing is good using top-water lures at dawn, dusk and cloudy days. Any soft plastic lure is good to use. Try minnows or jigs for crappie.

ELK RIVER
Kelsey Mitchell at Big Elk Flats and Camping said black bass fishing is good with swim baits,

Whopper Plopper top-water lures, white Zoom Flukes and square-bill crank baits.

EASTERN OKLAHOMA
Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation reports good fishing at Grand Lake for largemouth bass with crank baits or spinner baits worked around brush and rock. White bass fishing is good with Alabama rigs, crank baits or spinner baits worked around brush and structure. Catfish are biting well on cut bait, stink bait or hot dog chunks.

At Lake Eucla, largemouth bass fishing is fair with crank baits and spinner baits around brush and points. Channel catfish are biting well on liver or cut bait. Crappie are biting well on minnows or jigs.

TABLE ROCK LAKE
Table Rock Lake Chamber of Commerce reports good black bass fishing with top-water lures, square-billed crank baits, plastic worms and Ned rigs. Work them in spawning pockets and along gravel points and rock points. The Long Creek, Kings River and James River arms are best for crappie. Fish with minnows or jig around wood cover and bushes two to 15 feet deep.

— Compiled by Flip Puthoff

Events

• Continued from Page 1E

Game and Fish will organize and execute large-scale volunteer events based on need, with preference to districts that have registered. Game and Fish staff will be on site at volunteer projects to sign off on volunteer hours.

Live, work at Lake

Army Corps of Engineers, Beaver Lake office, seeks motivated and friendly campground park

unteers are the primary point of contact for park visitors. Volunteers greet visitors, provide park information to guests, direct visitors to fee collection kiosks and to the recreation.gov campsite reservation system.

Contact the Beaver Lake office at (479) 636-1210, extension 1704 or email kiran@bowlv.us for more information.

Hawksbill reroute set

Ozark National Forest seeks volunteers to work on a reroute of the trail that leads to Hawksbill Crag, also called Whitaker Point,

to address erosion, reduce trail short-cutting and relocate the trail farther from a nearby private property boundary to prevent public incursions.

In addition, 800 feet of user-created shortcuts will need to be naturalized. Sections of the designated trail tread will be hardened to discourage switchback short-cutting. Ongoing drainage issues throughout the trail corridor will also be addressed through the installation of side ditches and the cleaning and maintenance of existing drainage features.

Putthoff

• Continued from Page 1E

I've booked a Devil's Den camper cabin every April for

I like my morning coffee so I bring the coffee maker from home. A lawn chair is comfy for sitting by the campfire. My mountain bike and hiking stick get packed for

"It's a dandy 15-inch crappie," the guide said, tossing it into the boat's livewell. "When he saw that minnow came up to eat."

Harvin moved the boat along slowly searching for more free-range crappie. He never had to look long. Crappie from a foot long to 16 inches crowded his livewell. His fishing buddy sat in a seat next to Harvin in the bow of the boat for his first try at LiveScope fishing. He too welcomed some crappie aboard after a short learning curve.

Later in the morning, Harvin opted to sample the fishing close to some wood cover and leave the roamers behind. A line of man-made fish attractors have been placed in 10 feet of water on the other end of the dam near Saratoga Park operated by the Army

Corps of Engineers. They're made of tubs with boards sticking up toward the surface. "Stake farms," Harvin calls them.

Each attractor is marked with a pole sticking up out of the water. These "stake farms" showed up big time on the sonar with crappie hovering around the wood. Again Harvin targeted a crappie, lowered a minnow toward the fish and, whammo — another crappie for the livewell.

All the crappie caught this trip were big except one. It's no wonder Millwood is known far and wide as a crappie destination. The daily limit is 30 crappie per angler and there's no length limit. When you're catching crappie this big, there's no need to keep small fish.

Flip Puthoff can be reached at putthoff@nwaonline.com.

the 17-mile scenic drive on twisting and hilly Arkansas 220 between the park and U.S. 59. We'll feature that scenic drive down the road here in NWA Outdoors.