

BOWFISHING 101: GEAR & TIPS

ADVENTURE

WOMEN

HUNT FISH. EXPLORE

SUMMER 2018 | ISSUE 14



Brooke
Benham
Wright

Recipe!
ULTIMATE
GATOR
BITES

+ UNLOCK
THE NIGHT
SKY

GATOR HUNT

EYE TO EYE WITH AN ALLIGATOR



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Virginia Kickle

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Story by Brooke Benham Wright



editor's note

MY TOP FAVORITES TO FOLLOW!

I recently had the pleasure of doing the Women's Hunting Seminar for the Altoona, Iowa, Bass Pro Shops during their Fall Hunting Classic! But before I got into more about hunting, I first mentioned the importance of having good role models. While



there can be social media negatives, there's also a lot of positives if you use it right. When I was growing up, I really didn't have a single other woman hunter to look up to or be friends with - now, I have many thanks to social media! So I thought I'd share my 'Top 10' favorites (no particular order) to follow on Instagram!

1. Tessa Shetter - @tessashetter
2. Amanda Caldwell - @amanda_caldwell
3. Jana Waller - @skullboundtv
4. Deanna Lucas - @deannalucas
5. Tiffany Lakosky - @thecrushtv
6. Tara Huff - @tara_huff_ and @tara.huff
7. Nicole Stone - @nicolestoneoutdoors
8. Karla Miller - @karlamae
9. Ashley Rae - @shelovestofish
10. Brooke Benham Wright - @outdoorsbrooke

You can tell I get inspiration from these women as they've all either been on the cover, written an article or at least had something to do with ADVENTURESS! Nowadays on social media, there's quite a few people that seem to be desperately posting to get famous or looking for any excuse to show off their body, but what I love about these women is they're just doing their thing. And if social media crashed for good, they'd still be out there doing their thing. But they also give support back - to other women, women's groups and this magazine, which sure means a lot!

Jennifer Pudenz

ADVENTURESS

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The only magazine specifically for women hunters and anglers!

ISSUE 14
SUMMER 2018

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JENNIFER PUDENZ

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on the cover



Cover featuring
Brooke Benham Wright -
her bio on page 8!

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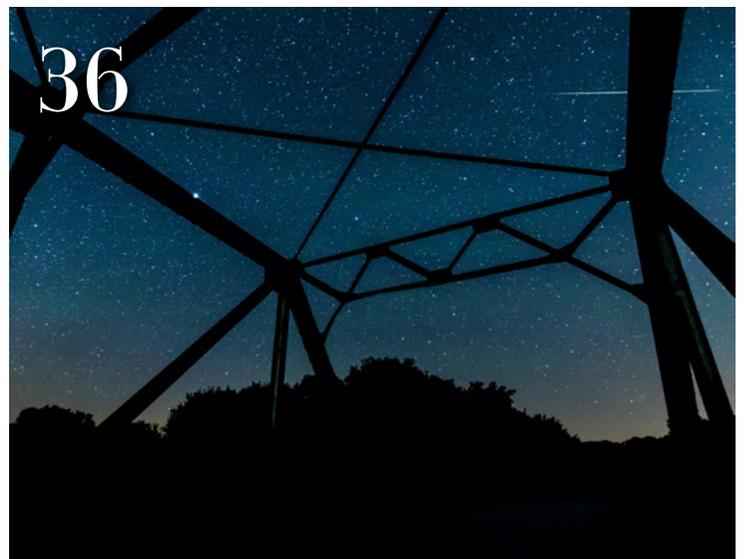
Learning about the night sky by Jules Norcross

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Featured photographer: Virginia Kickle



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BROOKE BENHAM WRIGHT

Raised on a small ranch, *Brooke Benham Wright* of Colorado, has naturally always had an appetite for adventure. A love for training horses and endurance running fueled her desire for the outdoors early on and then led her to the unique sport of pack burro racing with her burro, Farnsworth. Pack burro racing is Colorado's summer heritage sport where competitors run next to their burro from distances of nine to 29 miles in the mountains.

Brooke's love of animals has driven her to become an avid hunter and conservationist. You will often find her silently stalking through the woods in pursuit of big game or bowfishing the back waters. This passion for bowfishing drove Brooke to hunt alligators. After bowhunting her first alligator in 2012 with her husband, Matt, she was instantly hooked for life.

Brooke and Matt are founders of *Extreme Instinct*, makers of handmade knives, and offering survival classes and custom bowfishing/fishing adventure trips in Florida.



+Past Issues



<< Lots of great information in last year's fall issue, including waterfowling tips, fall fishing, protecting your rings as an outdoor woman and more!

Did you miss the last issue of ADVENTURESS magazine?! Check it out! >>



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RUSSELL

SUMMER





Virginia Kickle

Mt. Zion, Illinois

Featured
photographer

SEEING SPOTS

The large eye spots on the wings of the Common Buckeye butterfly are not only striking to see but they also help deter predators.

Follow Virginia on **Facebook** and check out **virginiakickle photography .com**.

Women's ADVENTURESS ^{4th Annual} TRAIL CAMERA CONTEST

RESULTS!

Each winner received:

- ~ Browning Trail Camera
- ~ Stic-N-Pic Mini Ground Mount & Mini Tree Mount
- ~ Trophy Rock package
- ~ Common Hunter Reader & Case

Deer
WINNER:
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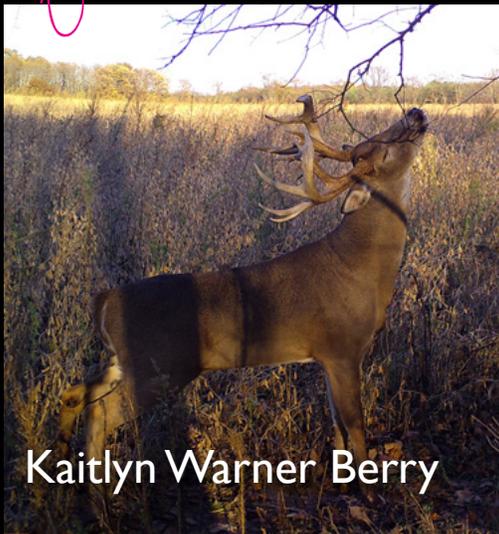
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Non-Deer WINNER: **KIM PRAVDA!**

Find more photos highlighted on the **ADVENTURESS** Facebook page!

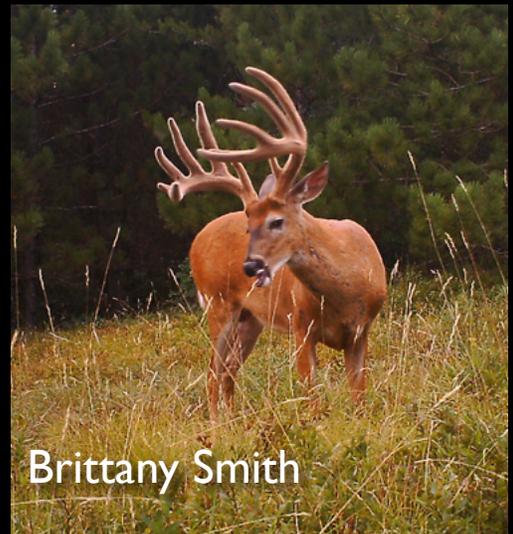
Finalists:



Kaitlyn Warner Berry



Julianne Hickok



Brittany Smith



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Brooke Benham Wright with a gator from yet another exciting hunt - be sure to read her story that follows.

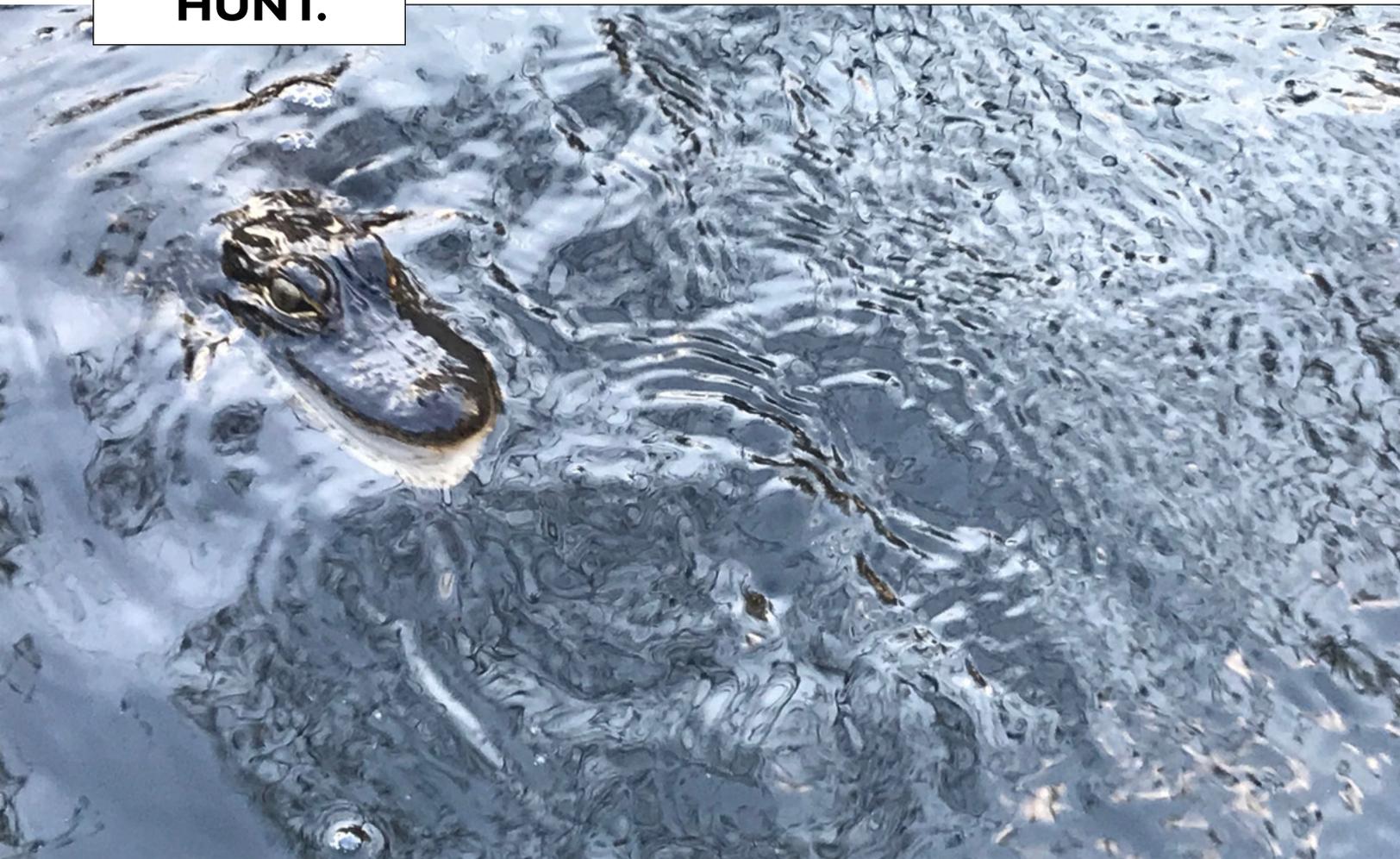
EYE TO EYE
WITH A

gator

By Brooke Benham Wright
of Extreme Instinct



HUNT.



The American Alligator is an incredible display of evolution with fossil documentation dating them to have survived in North America for more than 8 million years. With an average life span of 35 to 50 years, they grow big reaching more than 15 feet long and weighing as much as 1,000 pounds. And with each year, they also grow smarter, making them an incredibly tough predator to hunt.

When hunting a predator of this stature, you need to know your potential dangers. With alligators having 78 to 80 teeth and one of the strongest bite forces on the planet, if not treated with respect and the utmost attention to detail, you can lose your life or, at the very least, your ability to give two thumbs up.

Let's not forget the "alligator twitch" where a reptilian nerve response can cause a bite down or tail slap even hours after death.

Between the large size and incredible fight alligators can exhibit, plus handling a boat through swampy territory and often using numerous tools to bring them in, alligator hunting really is a team effort. If you're completely new to alligator hunting and interested in trying it, I recommend finding an outfitter so you are with people who know what they are doing so you can be safe while you learn and have a major head start with finding success.

LOCATION

With the appropriate licenses and tags, alligators can be legally hunted in the



THESE PUBLIC LAND SEASONS ARE USUALLY BY APPLICATION ONLY. HOWEVER, PRIVATE LAND HUNTING CAN OFTEN BE OVER-THE-COUNTER AND YEAR-ROUND.

southeastern United State in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina and Texas. North Carolina is the only state in the alligator's range that prohibits hunting. Alligator hunting seasons vary by state, but often start around August leading into September and sometimes even

October. These public land seasons are usually by application only. However, private land hunting can often be over-the-counter and year-round.

Understanding the hunting location is often your best tool for success. Gators can be found in any body of water in these areas, but some gators prefer specific environments. For example, females tend to prefer the thick backwoods and swamps, while the larger males prefer open water with steep drops in depth. Knowing where and how to land a big gator takes time. Before every hunt, we scout potential areas in our unit for signs of gators. They will leave slides in the grass or mud indicating the relative size and frequency. Through the years, we have found they are very territorial and will occupy a large territory.

HUNT.

Jennifer Dums on a March Florida gator hunt through an outfitter on private land using a .270 Winchester rifle. This hunt didn't start until the alligators came out to warm themselves in the afternoon.



5 Best Places to Hunt Alligators in America

According to LiveOutdoors

St. Johns River – Florida

Atchafalaya River – Louisiana

Bayou Pierre River – Mississippi

Lake Eufaula – Alabama

Victoria County – Texas

Alligator populations in the south have been growing exponentially over the past few decades making gator hunts more popular than ever with tags becoming more and more available.

METHODS

There is no single method of alligator hunting. Depending on the circumstances, hunters commonly use a combination of hook and line, bow and arrow, gig and snare, or firearm. The use of a hook and line is the most common method, which involves securing a sturdy hook and line to a tree or pole in the ground. The hook is commonly baited with fish or chicken. After the bait is taken, the hunter returns to draw in and dispatch the gator. Allowed methods of hunting often have restrictions varying by state, so make sure to look into all regulations.



We hunt public land in Florida, which can be tricky. For safety, you are not allowed to use any type of firearm to hunt them like you can on private ground or as a commercial trapper. The only firearm allowed to use on Florida's public grounds to take a gator is a bang stick, and it can only be used when an alligator is attached to a restraining line. This why you have to be very stealthy to get close enough, but these gators are often very spooky.

Our gear consists of simple, yet effective, equipment for the hunt typically consisting of a snatch hook on a strong non-stretch rope, a long harpoon spear with detachable tip and a 1-ounce snagging hook tied to the line of a fishing pole. Most importantly, I use my trusty bow equipped with a spool of line attached to a special arrow and large detachable float for

the anticipation of landing a big gator. And we have a bang stick - the legal equipment method of take used to finish off a gator. It is a live 357 magnum round attached on a fixed impact released firing pin.

While we hunt for alligators at night, they can be hunted at any time of the day. However, you again want to check all regulations in the area you're planning to hunt as there can be time restrictions, such as in Louisiana, alligators can only be harvested between official sunrise and sunset – no nighttime harvest is allowed.

MY HUNT

With our gator tags in hand and areas scouted, we get ready for the season to begin. I am like a kid on Christmas day waiting for the gator hunt to start. I spend months practicing with various gear for the hunt as well as often bowfishing common carp to further perfect my shot placement.

Once season has started and it's time to head out on the hunt, our boat is prepared for long nights down to every detail. As darkness falls, we head out with headlamps and spotlights into the endless waterways. When the night's sky is a colorless shade of black, this becomes the best time to hunt these nocturnal predators. Just like any hunt, it starts off with an eager excitement, followed by the hours of work that constantly try to wear down that anticipation. I stay diligent, scanning the shoreline and open water for the unmistakable red eye of a gator.

As the night wears on, I have to focus on every detail. Often a gator hidden in the reeds will only have an eye shine back for half a second before you lose sight. That second can make or break the hunt.

Watching smaller gators by the dozen, the

HUNT.



larger ones have gone into hiding. Over the years, older gators have adapted well to avoid capture. I would often see a large eye in the distance only to have it slip into the water and submerge. They are capable of holding their breath for well over an hour. Let's just say patience becomes more than a virtue!

After navigating through what feels like endless river bends for more than six hours, my heart skips a beat and my body becomes surged with adrenaline. It's a very large eye in the distance! We turn off the motor and begin to assess the stalk. To move in stealthily, we pull up the engine and begin to use a push-pole. Silently, we approach closer. To our surprise, we began to lift up and, in just a moment, we are now stuck in shallow water too skinny for a boat.

The gator still lays just 100 yards away, but this is as far as we can get in the boat. Now, if I want to continue the hunt, I have to step away from the protection of our vessel into the 'danger zone.' My husband, Matt, stepped off the boat asking if I would follow. Matt is a

three-time expert survivalist on the TV show 'Naked and Afraid' and was coined the "Savage and Jungle Warrior" for his ability to conquer what has never been done. Taking his lead to jump in the water is not for the faint of heart.

The drive for the hunt has now overpowered my fear of the unknown. I stepped into the 6-inch tannic water with caution. Equipped with a headlight and 8-foot harpoon in my right hand, I head out into the darkness. I made it about 50 yards and find the water deepens. It is now thigh-deep. It's too shallow for the boat, but deep enough to become very dangerous. As if black water in the dark isn't enough, the gator looks at me and sinks beneath the surface. I would love to tell you I held my ground like a Spartan warrior waiting for my moment, but the truth is the risk versus the reward got the best of me. I made a hasty retreat to the boat and found Matt right alongside me!

I looked back and noticed the gator resurface in the same place it went down. I felt defeated, but my determination was not yet broken. Matt made way through the water to see if the shallow bar had a deeper channel. I knew I could not get close enough with a spear or have a shot with the bow.

With alligator hunting, you can never have just one way to hunt, you must improvise and adapt. So I pulled out the heavy-duty spinning rod setup for a gator. It has a 150-pound test braided line affixed to an almost unbreakable rod. The 1-ounce weighted treble hook should give me enough distance to cast and snag my opponent.

I head back out with confidence and quietly make my way through the water with stealth. Any splashing could trigger an unwanted predatory response of attack. I casted the razor-sharp weighted treble hook from 40 yards away.



THE GATOR SWITCHED DIRECTIONS, AND I REALIZED THE PREHISTORIC PREDATOR WAS COMING STRAIGHT AT ME!

The splash of the treble hook 10 feet behind and little to the left of him caused the gator to sink beneath the surface. Figuring the gator will pop up further away, I began to reel in quickly to get ready for the next cast when BAM! I felt a snag followed by a tug on the line.

I set the hook hard as if hooking into a tarpon, and that's when I woke the beast! The water erupted with a huge splash as the gator fought back. I was in for a rodeo - then suddenly, my

line went slack. The gator switched directions, and I realized the prehistoric predator was coming straight at me!

I am still about 40 yards from the boat when I glanced back at a toothy torpedo. At this point, I retreated so fast I just about walked on water. No matter how fast I went, the line still felt weightless. This could only mean that he was still coming and coming fast. Yelling at Matt to get out of the water, we both jumped into the boat like a penguin on an iceberg!

That's when I finally looked back again. The water had slowed me down and it felt like a dream until I looked back again at just 20 feet behind me the gator surfaced. With the weighted treble hook still stuck in his leathery hide, he just stopped and starred at the boat. With no delay, I handed the rod to Matt and reached for my bow. In a moment, I pulled



back and let my arrow fly. It found its mark perfectly in the neck of the beast.

Instantly, it started thrashing, and Matt threw the harpoon to secure it with another line. With two lines attached, we began to secure the gator. As it approached the boat, I grabbed the finisher bang stick. With the gator just a few inches under the water, the bang stick delivered an immediate end to the fight with one swift thrust to its head.

I immediately took a moment to catch my breath and try to control the pounding in my chest.

Using tape to secure the gator's mouth, we pulled him into the boat. As this 9-foot gator came in, I knelt down to pay thanks and gaze at the amazement of this incredible animal. It touches at your heart being part of

special moment with a remarkable animal. It triggers a primal gratitude.

As dawn approached and pure exhaustion set in, the hard work of many hours to process the animal began once home again. From harvesting every ounce of meat to scraping and tanning the hide, and preserving the head as a lasting memory, it's always worth the long swampy nights and wildly unpredictable encounters of the unknown.

Words do not fully express the monumental moments and memories that accompany gator hunting. These moments will last the rest of your life and mold the path for your next adventure.

~~~

*See Brooke Benham Wright of Extreme Instinct's bio on page 8.*

+Recipe

# U L T I M A T E GATOR BITES

*Recipe from Brooke Benham Wright*

## DIRECTIONS:

- Cut the alligator (the tender tail portions are preferred) into 1-inch cubes and soak in milk in the refrigerator for a few hours.

- Drain milk, then lightly season meat with a Creole seasoning (similar to Cajun seasoning, but a little sweeter and less spicy, plus containing a fair amount of paprika).

- In a separate bowl, add seasoned crispy fish fry breading mix (Louisiana and Everglades fish fry mixes are my favorites). Dip the cubes, coating well with the mixture and then shake off.

- Heat cooking oil in a skillet, add cubes (don't overcrowd) and fry for a few minutes on each side until golden brown.

- Serve up your bites in the jaws of your alligator's head for the ultimate presentation, and enjoy!





Beka Garris with a common carp while bowfishing.

# HOW BOWFISHING

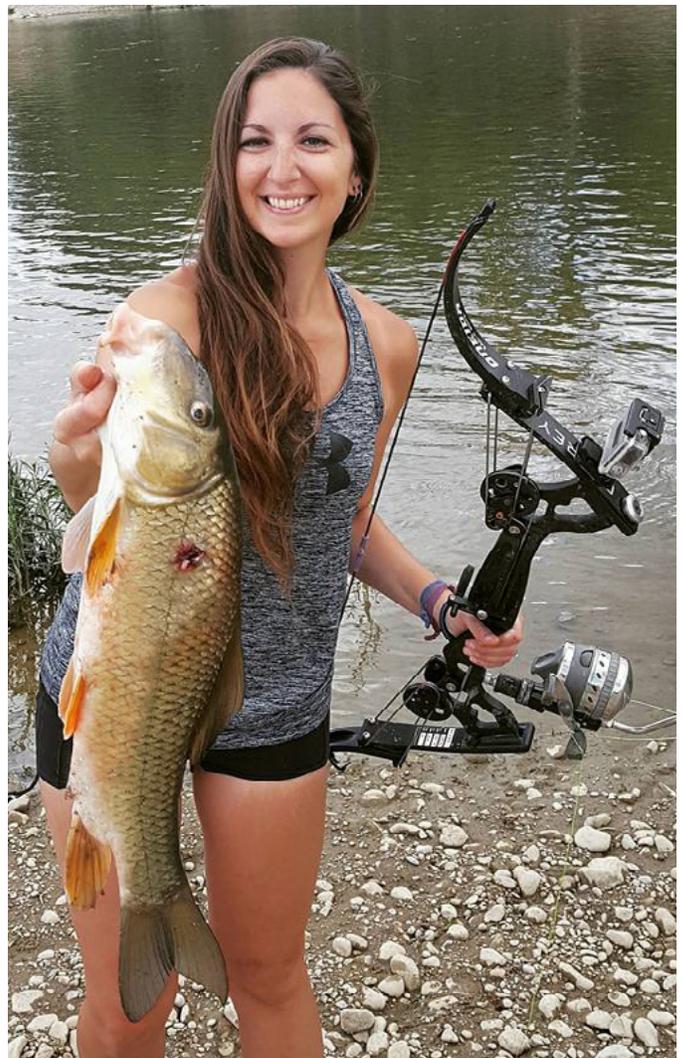
By Beka Garris

**B**owfishing is one of the fastest growing activities in the outdoor industry. Just in the past few years it's popularity has exploded. When I first decided I wanted to get into bowfishing six years ago, the only people I personally knew that bowfished were old enough to be my grandfather, and none of them were female.

Nowadays, many of my friends and family are interested in bowfishing and tournaments have become popular all over the United States. Bowfishing is a fairly easy sport to get into, and it doesn't have to cost much either. I spend most of the summer months on the river or at local lakes shooting fish until hunting season starts back up again.

## GEAR

**BOW** - If you have the money, there are several great bowfishing companies out there that manufacture bows and gear specifically for bowfishing. *Cajun Bowfishing* has a great



# FISH.



*Brooke Benham Wright with a common carp.*



Above: Polarized sunglasses are extremely important for daytime bowfishing. How do you tell if sunglasses are polarized? First, when buying them in store, they will specifically say polarized, but you can check this by crossing two pairs - if both are polarized, they will 'black out' when perpendicular to each other.

Below: If bowfishing from a boat, an inflatable life vest is a great way to stay safe without the bulk of a traditional life jacket in the way of your shooting.

selection, both online and in any Bass Pro Shops or Cabela's store. If you are on a budget, you have a few options as well. If you have an old hunting bow or just an extra bow lying around, it will work just fine. If not, check out local pawnshops, yard sales and Craigslist to find a cheap, used bow with a draw weight of 35 to 55 pounds. This draw weight is perfect for bowfishing, any less than 35 can be hard to get good penetration and any heavier than 55 is just overkill.

**REEL** - While there are simple hand reels available with a spool that screws into your bow and line wraps around, these can quickly become bothersome and frustrating. Bottle reels are most popular for bowfishing as they are easy to use and generally very sturdy.

The reel is made up of a plastic bottle that encloses your bowfishing line with a winch-style handle to reel in the line. However, most bottle reels aren't strong enough to withstand



*Bighead carp can be especially large and really put up a fight.*

reeling a fish in solely by the winch, so you will want to bring your fish in by hand and then reel in your line.

The third type of reel is a spinning reel. This looks like a standard push button fishing reel, only larger. The bowfishing line is fully enclosed, and these reels will use a thinner braided line than the other types of bowfishing reels. Spinning reels are my favorite simply because they tend to operate faster and smoother, but they do require more maintenance.

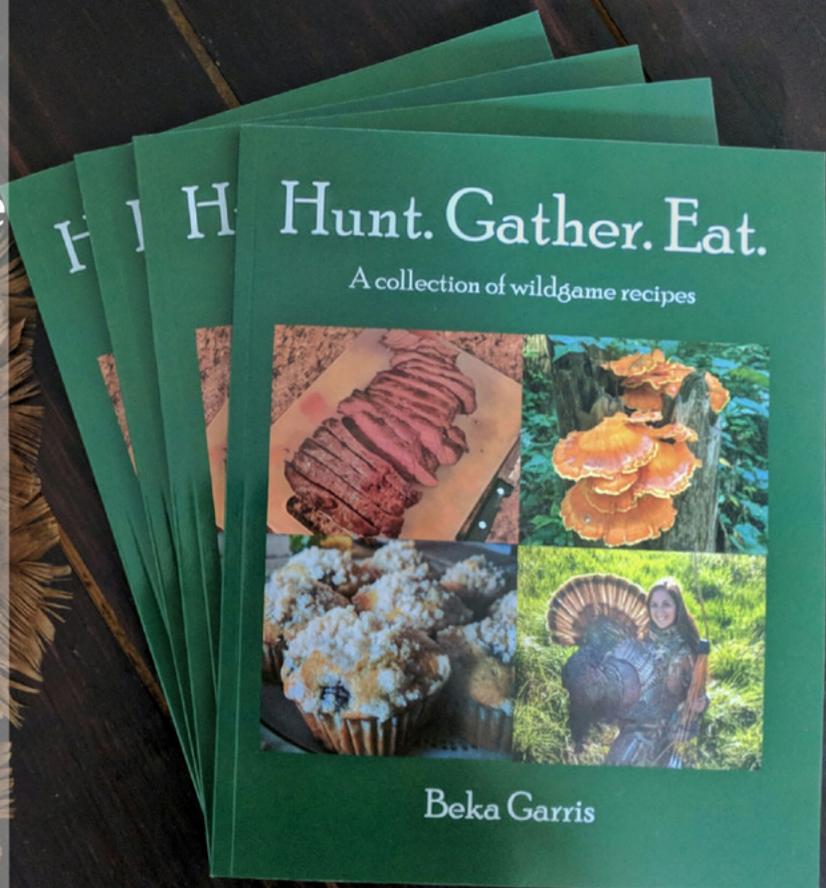
REST - Simple is always best. The last thing you want is to release your arrow and have your line wrap around your arrow rest. This can be dangerous, so don't take it lightly. You can use a simple whisker biscuit rest or a shelf rest. Keep in mind some whisker biscuits aren't sturdy enough for the extra weight of

bowfishing arrows, so if using one of these rests, you'll want to test this early on. I prefer a fully enclosed rest that completely encompasses the arrow, but either way, you will want a rest that is sturdy with no moving parts.

ARROWS - The arrows you will use are much different than the standard hunting arrow. Bowfishing arrows are made of fiberglass, and are long and heavy to be able to penetrate deep water and still go through a fish. The type of bowfishing tips on the arrow can be crucial depending on the type of fish you are shooting. Especially with soft-bodied fish such as carp, large flat prongs work best.

POLARIZED SUNGLASSES - Comparing no sunglasses, sunglasses and polarized sunglasses when looking for things under the water, the differences are simply

A collection of 50 wild game recipes, ranging from game such as venison and rabbit, to wild mushrooms and berries. This book also features tips on caring for wild game and how to preserve what you hunt and gather.



BEKAGARRIS.COM

## FISH.



amazing. Polarized sunglasses are definitely a necessary if you are planning to bowfish during the day. Even a cheap pair will make all the difference when it comes to spotting fish in the water. If you can't see the fish, you can't shoot the fish!

With how fast-paced and instinctive shooting bowfishing is, most bowfishing bows do not have a bow sight and are used without a release. However, I do recommend plastic *Finger Savers* on your bowstring to keep from hurting your hands, or wear a pair of gloves.

### TARGET FISH

The type of fish you shoot will vary depending on where you live. Always make sure to check your local fish and game laws, as most states prohibit shooting any fish that

aren't considered invasive. You will also most likely need a fishing and/or hunting license.

Here in Ohio, I shoot a variety of fish including carp, suckers, gar and freshwater drum. These

## THESE FISH ARE ON THE INVASIVE SPECIES OR 'TRASH FISH' LIST, MEANING THEY ARE DETRIMENTAL TO THE WATERS THEY RESIDE IN.

fish are on the invasive species or 'trash fish' list, meaning they are detrimental to the waters they reside in. Removing them from the waters is helpful to the ecosystem, as well as helpful to other fish populations. Carp in particular can take over

large bodies of water in short periods of time and obliterate species such as bass, sunfish, and even make the waters difficult for ducks to live in.

There are also different species of carp, such as common carp, buffalo carp and bighead carp, as well as different gar, such as longnose gar, shortnose gar and the huge alligator gar. Many states also have a frog season, which is



# FISH.



adventures from shore. I spend most of my time wading creeks and walking the banks, and I still shoot plenty of fish. I also bought a paddleboard last year to use at one of our local lakes, and it was a blast.

## IN THE DARK

Bowfishing can also be very successful, and is often most popular, at night. However, having a proper setup with mounted lights is key, except bugs can be extremely difficult. You want to be near the lights to see well, but you can also have massive swarms of bugs at all of your lights as well as be fighting mosquitos. Make sure to prepare for this with

proper clothing and strong bug spray.

While bowfishing at night is easiest in a boat, it can be done just as well from shore. I recommend getting a stream light to mount on your bow or a strong headlamp with a long battery life. However, again bugs will likely be an issue. With the lighting being so close to your face using a headlamp, you will also need to wear a face mask to cover your mouth and nose during the summer months, or you will be inhaling dozens of the hundreds gnats and mosquitoes.

At night, the fish tend to sit right along the bank in the shallows, so if you are quiet, you can get right up on top of them. You have to be quick though, as they'll swim off as soon as they see your shadow or hear your footsteps.

It took me a few times out before I finally got the hang of shooting fish... it can be tricky due to the refraction of the light on the water, and everything will appear closer than it is. You will need to aim low in order to hit the fish, and the deeper the fish, the lower you will need to aim. At first it may seem like you'll never get the hang of it, but after you hit a few, you won't even think about it. If you are feeling discouraged, fill a few plastic bottles with sand and toss them into a clear, shallow creek to practice.

Give bowfishing a shot — you won't be disappointed. And one of the added bonuses of bowfishing all summer is you will be keeping your bow muscles in shape for when hunting season rolls around again in the fall.

~~~

Beka Garris grew up hunting and fishing with her dad, brothers and sisters. Currently living in Ohio, she strives to live the outdoor lifestyle through hunting, fishing, bowfishing, gathering and farming.

HOW TO FILET A GAR



FRYING GAR



stargazing

gazing

Key tips to unlocking the night sky

By Jules Norcross - Photos by Bree Spradling

rowing up in the suburbs of Boston, I thought the stars off of Cape Cod were absolutely brilliant. When I first arrived at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) Rocky Mountain program in the small town of Boulder, Wyoming, my definition of brilliant changed. It felt like you could count every last star in the entire universe. For most of us outdoor women, we've looked up at the night sky somewhere, felt that and wondered what exactly is up there. Stargazing is not only a fun hobby, but also a useful tool when you're out in the wilderness.

EXPLORE.

Navigators, like Christopher Columbus, used the stars to navigate the Atlantic. In fact, the U.S. Navy still teaches a course in Celestial Navigation for its officers. How many times has your GPS failed? Or Google Maps sent you to the wrong place? We hope our tools never fail when out in the wilderness, but some basic knowledge of the night skies is a great way to insure you can find your way if they do. Not to mention, you can impress your friends around the campfire when you point out Cassiopeia or tell them the story behind Ursa Major.

This is the perfect time to start enhancing your knowledge of the night sky as numerous meteor showers are coming up this fall. While binoculars and a telescope can take your stargazing to the next level, the human eye is capable of seeing 2.5 million light-years away. That means with no extra tools to pack, we can start learning about stars, constellations, planets and even some deep space objects in the Andromeda Galaxy, the Milky Way and beyond. If you have a little extra space, consider bringing a pair of binoculars (or wear them with a binocular harness), a circular star map or plan ahead by downloading an app to your phone. Constellations

are pretty straight forward to identify and a great way to start orienting yourself to the night sky.

WHAT CONSTELLATIONS SHOULD YOU BE LOOKING FOR?

There are 88 constellations, and some of these are called circumpolar constellations. Circumpolar means the stars in the constellation are circling either the north or the south celestial pole. What does this mean for you? These constellations will almost always be viewable in their respective hemisphere so they are a great starting point for stargazing. Seeing them consistently will make them easier to identify and give you a point to orient yourself to as you look for new objects. Additional constellations can be viewed in the northern or southern hemisphere, which ones you can see depends on the season. Circular star maps, stargazing apps and websites run by NASA or major observatories will help you determine what you should expect to see in the sky on any given day of the year.

The United States is entirely in the northern hemisphere, so we are going to focus on what you'll be able to see in the U.S. There are five major circumpolar constellations in the northern hemisphere: Cassiopeia, Cepheus, Draco, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. Ursa Major is Latin for 'the great bear' or 'the larger bear.' I bet you already figured out, its smaller counterpart is Ursa Minor. Ursa Major is the largest constellation in the northern hemisphere. It's brightest stars form the famous Big Dipper, which is one of the most recognizable shapes in the sky. When I have a new stargazer out with me, I'll have them

find the Big Dipper, then try to connect the rest of the Ursa Major constellation to orient themselves in the sky. In Greek mythology, Ursa Major was created after Zeus had





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an affair, cheating on his wife Hera with a beautiful nymph named Callisto. Hera turned Callisto into a bear, but only after she had bore Zeus a son. Wandering in the forest one day, Callisto and her son came face to face. Her son drew his spear on the bear. Zeus stepped in and sent them both to the heavens, and thus, Ursa Major ‘the larger bear’ and Ursa Minor ‘the smaller bear’ were created in the stars.

Once you’ve found the Ursa Major and the Big Dipper, you can use the constellation and the stars it contains to find more objects in the sky. At the edge of the ladle in the Big Dipper is two stars called Dubhe and Merak. These stars point to Polaris, the North Star. Polaris is the tip of the handle on the Little Dipper, found inside Ursa Minor. Now, look between the two dippers. You’ll see a trail of

stars that run between them and arch around Ursa Minor making a backwards ‘S’ in the sky. This trail of nine stars is Draco, the dragon constellation. Draco represents the dragon responsible for guarding the gardens of the Hesperides in mythology. This garden bore the famous golden apples. Draco holds deep space objects, including the Spindle and Tadpole galaxies, and the Cat’s Eye Nebula. You’ll need a telescope to see these. If you don’t have one, but are interested in checking out more than just constellations and planets, local observatories often hold events and let you take advantage of their telescopes! It’s a great way to get to check out deep space objects without making an investment in a telescope.

From the head of the dragon, follow the stars straight back and you’ll find yourself viewing



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EXPLORE.

Cepheus. Cepheus somewhat resembles a child rudimentary drawing of a house. Cepheus is home to the Garnet Star, one of the largest in our galaxy. Additionally, with a telescope you can view the Fireworks Galaxy, the Iris Nebula and Wizard Nebula. The Cepheus constellation was named after King Cepheus of Aethiopia, who was the husband of neighboring constellation Cassiopeia.

Cassiopeia is easily identifiable by its 'W' shape. In Greek mythology, Cassiopeia is said to have bragged that she was more beautiful than the sea nymphs, which angered the god Poseidon. Poseidon demanded Cassiopeia and Cepheus sacrifice their daughter Andromeda to avoid the god ravaging their lands. Luckily, Perseus (best known for slaying Medusa) rescued Andromeda. According to the legend, Poseidon condemned Cassiopeia to the celestial pole forever. She spends half the year upside down as punishment for her vanity.

WHERE TO FIND THE MOST BRILLIANT NIGHT SKIES

While any remote area will have less light pollution and thus more brilliant night skies, the Smithsonian published the best places for stargazing in the world. In the U.S., you can find Cherry Springs State Park in Pennsylvania, which is known for being able to view the Northern Lights as well as their annual amateur stargazing event, Black Forest Star Party, in September. In Hawaii, Maunna Kea's 13,796-foot summit is home to the world's largest optical telescope. For you hunters heading north for some of Canada's big game, take the time to check out Alberta's Jasper National Park or the remote areas of western Nova Scotia, home to the first certified starlight hotel, Trout Point Lodge.

USING STARS AS A GUIDE

Modern technology has spoiled us - GPS doesn't just give us driving directions anymore. Hiking apps put trail maps in the palm of our hands, GPS locators make it easy to find tree stands or blinds in unknown territory, compasses are now on our phones. But we all know technology can fail. After incidents of naval ships running aground due to electronics failing, the U.S. Navy brought back its Celestial Navigation course as an officer requirement. The Navy felt officers should be able to safely navigate their ships in the event technology failed. Likewise, some basic knowledge of celestial navigation is a great way to insure even when your GPS fails, you can determine where you are.

Polaris, the North Star, is the brightest star in the northern hemisphere. It doesn't move in the sky, so it will always help you find north. Once you've found Polaris, a quadrant or sextant can help determine the angle between Polaris and the horizon. This gives you your current latitude. If you're in a pickle, stack your fists hand over hand to get an approximate latitude. Your fist is approximately 10 degrees.

Orion, the constellation known for his three-star belt, can help you find south. From the middle star of the belt, look for two stars hanging down. These represent his sword and point south.

Lost at night? Find a bright star and drive a stick into the ground so the star is lined up with the top of the stick. Find a second stick and repeat the same process with the same star, approximately a yard apart. Wait for the star to move out of alignment with the sticks. Since the night sky rotates east to west, if the star rose you're facing east, if it sank you're facing west. If the star moved to the left of

UPCOMING CELESTIAL EVENTS

September 9 - New Moon: The Moon will not be visible in the night sky. This is the best time of the month to observe faint objects such as galaxies and star clusters because there is no moonlight to interfere.

September 25 - Full Moon: The Moon will be fully illuminated. This full moon was known by early Native American tribes as the Full Corn Moon because the corn is harvested around this time of year. This moon is also known as the Harvest Moon.

October 8 - Draconids Meteor Shower: Best viewing will be in the early evening from a dark location far away from city lights. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Draco, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

October 21, 22 - Orionids Meteor Shower: Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Orion, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

November 6 - Mercury at Greatest Eastern Elongation: This is the best time to view planet Mercury since it will be at its highest point above the horizon in the evening sky. Look for the planet low in the western sky just after sunset.

November 17, 18 - Leonids Meteor Shower: The Leonids produces up to 15 meteors per hour at its peak. Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Leo, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

December 13, 14 - Geminids Meteor Shower: The Geminids is the king of the meteor showers. It is considered by many to be the best shower in the heavens, producing up to 120 multicolored meteors per hour at its peak. It is produced by debris left behind by an asteroid known as 3200 Phaethon. The first quarter moon will set shortly after midnight leaving dark skies for what should be an excellent early morning show. Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Gemini, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

the sticks, you're facing north - likewise if it moved right, you're facing south.

APPS

With modern technology at our fingertips, apps allow us to bring a cheat sheet to help identify constellations, stars, planets and other objects in the night sky. Most apps offer an augmented reality view of what's in the sky.

My personal favorite is SkyView, which offers both a *free* and a *paid* version. Two of my favorite features of this app are the night infrared option and the time travel feature. The night vision uses red light instead of full color to help keep your eyes acclimated to the dark, so if you're actively trying to identify the constellations in the sky you don't need to wait for your eyes to adjust. The time travel feature allows you to change the date to the future and the past to view the night sky on that date and time. It's fun to look at birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, etc.

The Night Sky app is popular for its compatibility with the Apple Watch. For those interested in the history and mythology behind objects, SkySafari is the app for you. Cosmic-Watch is created with some of the best graphics and Star Walk 2 is similar to SkySafari for Android users. Of course, don't forget about NASA's app, which offers news, current missions and other happenings in the night sky.

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*Jules Norcross of Virginia grew up camping, hiking and horseback riding, which quickly turned into a passion for archery, hunting, fishing, and all things outdoors.*

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Photos by Bree Spradling of Faith & Fur Photography.

+Last shot

GOLDEN ONE

This American Goldfinch ate every bloom off the sprig of Chicory as the photographer watched.

VIRGINIA KICKLE

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TAILORED FOR THE OUTDOOR WOMAN

