

A person wearing camouflage clothing is crouching in a swampy, wooded area. They are holding a shotgun. The background is a dense forest with water visible in the distance. The lighting is dim, suggesting dusk or dawn.

Looking ahead to duck season
with an ethereal trek through
the swamps, forests and marshes

La Chasse au Canard

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY DENNY CULBERT

**It's pitch black
and I'm hunkered down
in a wooden box
suspended
a few feet above water
that I know to be filled
with alligators.**

There is young man with a loaded shotgun to my left and another to my right. I'm definitely a little nervous. I'm unarmed, and I'm sleepy, but their vibrant anticipatory energy is becoming contagious as we keep our eyes and ears to the sky. The tree line begins to glow and the hunter to my left lets out a few shrill quacks from the call he keeps around his neck. In the distance, there comes a faint response followed by another round of honks next to me. A few winged shadows circle above and then lightly splash down among the spread of decoys. POW! goes the gun to my right and again POW! POW! (Here is when I realized my first of many rookie mistakes — no earplugs). The hunter, who is now shaking with excitement from discharging his weapon for the first time in a long while, zips off in a small motorboat to retrieve his first duck of the season.



HUNTERS AND WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR
(this is the gear I typically have in my kayak): Digital SLR / 200 to 500 millimeter zoom lens / 35 millimeter lens / Extra camera battery (especially if it's cold out, because batteries drain faster) / Monopod / Camouflage rain cover for a long lens and camera / Pelican case (water tight and indestructible) / Kayak (big enough to hold you and some gear) / Chest waders / Camouflage netting (to hide under or to cover my kayak while wading) / Towels (to dry equipment and your hands)

That morning and a dozen or so others out in the wilds of Louisiana with friends with last names like Autin, Fontenot, Nehrbass, Miller, Mouton, Trant and Vidrine helped me understand why Louisianans hunt. When I moved from northeastern Ohio to Lafayette in 2009, I couldn't understand why anyone would choose to get up way before the sun and subject themselves to the coldest weather of the year just to shoot at a bird that would then require a significant amount of work to pluck and clean before you could cook it. Plus this was all sometimes done early enough to make it back to civilization in time to go to work for

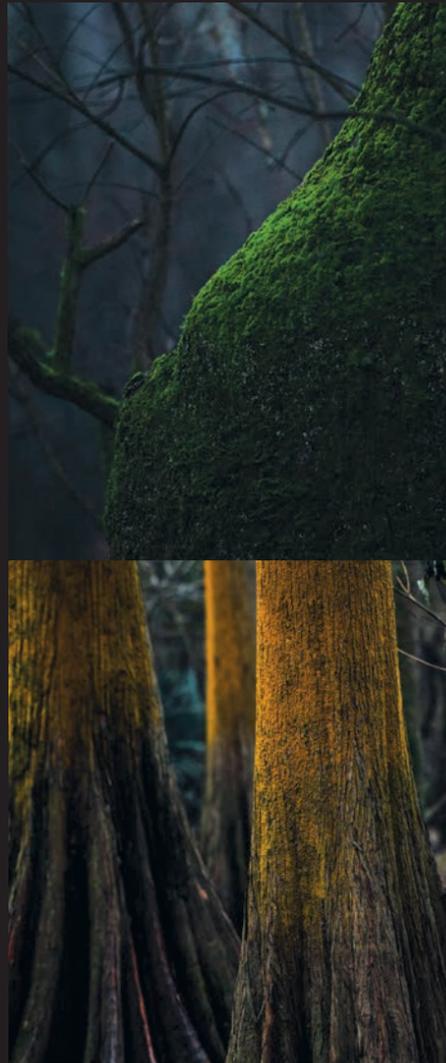




WHERE TO HUNT ON PUBLIC LANDS IN ACADIANA: (check the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries website for current Wildlife Management Area rules and regulations at wlf.louisiana.gov/wma)
Attakapas Island - St. Mary, St. Martin and Iberia Parishes / Atchafalaya Delta - St. Mary Parish / Grassy Lake - Avoyelles Parish / Lake Boeuf - Lafourche Parish / Marsh Bayou - Evangeline Parish / Maurepas Swamp - Ascension, Livingston, St. James, St. John the Baptist, Tangipahoa Parishes / Point-aux-Chenes - Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes / Pomme de Terre - Avoyelles Parish / Sabine Island - Calcasieu Parish / Sherburne - Iberville, Pointe Coupee, and St. Martin Parishes / Spring Bayou - Avoyelles Parish / Thistlewaite - St. Landry Parish

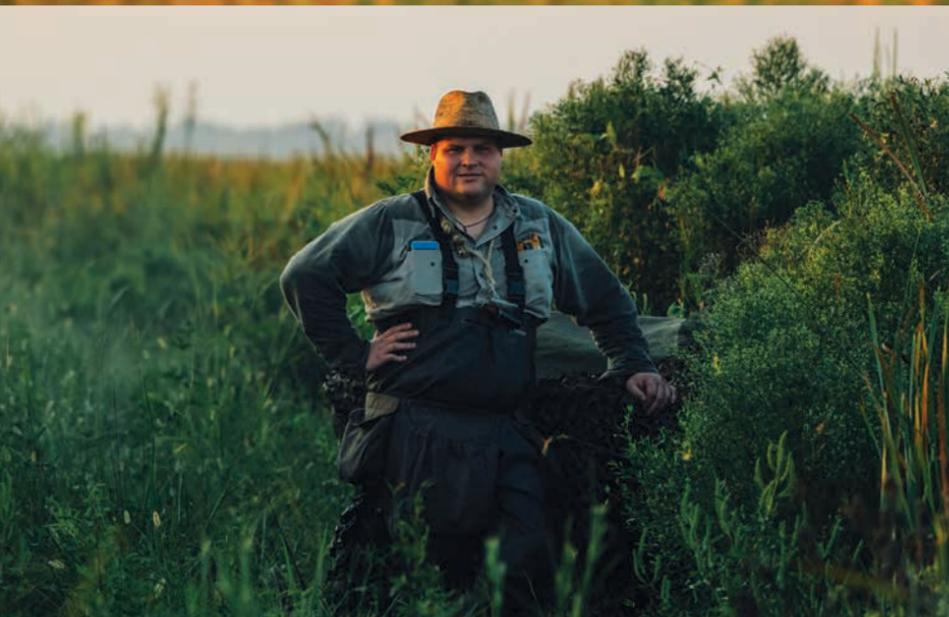
an eight-hour day and hit repeat the next morning. Duck hunting, like so many other things in life is as much, if not more, about the journey than the payoff. At the beginning of the season out looking for teal in Vermilion Parish, the mosquitoes were so thick they actually became a second skin, but the beauty and color palette of the marsh as the sun rose over the pond and birds began to sing almost made me forget that every inch of my body was crawling with tiny biting creatures. In St. Landry Parish I witnessed a hunter's heart fill with pride when the dog he was just beginning to train retrieved her first bird. The sweetest little golden retriever named Maple was a proud pup when she swam back to her master





with that duck. In Acadia Parish I struggled to paddle my kayak fast enough in the misty darkness following the voices of two guys in a canoe leading me to their favorite spot to hunt since they were in high school. It was so dark that there could have been a waterfall and I would have paddled right over it. But, as always, putting myself in the hands of Cajuns to lead the way to somewhere magical paid off. We spent the morning hunting a flooded forest, hiding in stumps, and wondering at the neon orange and green lichens climbing the trees on a gray morning.





These hunts that I tagged along on with my camera in hand were not guided hunts leaving from fancy lodges that you pay thousands of dollars to attend like you see in magazines or on TV. These were mornings with young men and women in Acadiana who grew up in these swamps, forests and marshes, and will eventually instill in their children the same wonder and respect for the natural world that they learned from their parents. These mornings were what I liked to call “adventure hunts.” From the piney woods in the north down to the coast, Louisiana has almost two million acres of public land managed by Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries that, with proper equipment and licenses, any of us can access. If you want it, the adventure is waiting.

WILD DUCK GUMBO

by Jo Vidrine (a.k.a. The Freelance Cajun)

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups flour
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- 3 ducks, cleaned
- 1 pound smoked pork sausage, cut into ¼ inch medallions
- 2 large yellow onions, chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 head of garlic
- 8 cups water, chicken broth or stock
- ½ cup Bruneaux's Bon Cajun Seasoning

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix flour and oil in a cast iron skillet and continuously stir on medium heat until you reach the desired color of roux (depending on your preference of darkness the roux will take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour and a half). Remove the cast iron skillet from heat, continuing to stir until the skillet cools. Set aside.

2. Preheat the oven to 350 F. Break garlic head into cloves, drizzle with olive oil and wrap in tinfoil. Place garlic in the oven for 30 minutes. Unwrap and roast for another 15 minutes or until brown. Remove from oven. Once cool, squish garlic from skins and set aside.

3. Season the ducks with Bruneaux's Bon Cajun Seasoning. Brown on all sides in a cast iron pot on medium heat. Add onions and peppers to the pot and cook for three to five minutes.

4. Add water, chicken broth or stock to the pot. Once water has come to a boil add roux until it reaches your desired color and thickness.

5. Add garlic and smoked sausage to the pot 45 minutes to an hour before serving so sausage is plump and moist when served.

6. Gumbo should continue to cook until the duck meat is nearly falling off the bone. Add salt and Bruneaux's Bon Cajun Seasoning to taste. Other seasonings to add if desired would be Herbes de Provence, garlic powder or onion powder. At this point if the dish needs to be thickened add more roux to the cast iron pot and dissolve. Serve over rice.

