



Blue-winged teal are most common in south Louisiana during the late-summer, autumn, and spring migratory seasons.

SUNRISE ON A TROUBLED PARADISE

On a cool winter morning at the Section 14 Hunting Club on south Louisiana's Pecan Island, hunters set out before dawn for their duck blinds. Slowly, the morning glow fills a dark sky that gradually gives way to first light. A deep russet line cuts across the horizon like a broad stroke from a painter's brush. Mist rises from the marsh, softening the hazy morning light. A distant owl calls and traffic along a nearby highway picks up as residents of Pecan Island head to their jobs. As the sun rises, the morning glow intensifies and feathered wisps of coral-colored clouds brush across the burning horizon. Stars gradually lose their intensity. Leafless willows form a backdrop to a misty lake warmed by golden light. Ducks, marsh hens, and other early risers begin their overture to the rising sun. Hunters chatter their duck calls. Off in every direction, shotguns fire with repeated echoes rolling across the marshes. The morning sky brightens in layered colors of cobalt, crimson, and white. Morning turns into full glow until the only star left is the morning star on the horizon. A half-dozen ducks rise from a nearby pond. Then to the east, the sun breaks above the horizon in full radiance. The distant sky turns pink and purple behind the dark tree line of a far-off chenier. The rising sun brightens the sky; birds intensify their songs. Distant willows turn misty umber against the pink sky. Wispy reeds along the edge of the pond glow a yellowish green in the morning light. Ducks in search of a landing spot glide with extended wings as they slowly descend to the pond's surface. The warm, ethereal haze of foggy mornings in south Louisiana's swamps and marshes has enchanted poets and artists for centuries. To waterfowl hunters, south Louisiana's coastal marshes are indeed a paradise.

In *Vanishing Paradise*, nature photographer Julia Sims explores the geography, natural beauty, and wildlife of Louisiana's endangered coastal marshes. This amazing gulf coast region, which stretches from Texas and the Sabine River in the west to Mississippi and the Pearl River in the east, ranks among the most important and productive ecosystems in the world. From an economic standpoint, Louisiana's coastal wetlands produce almost a third of the nation's commercial seafood and a substantial percentage of the nation's oil

and natural gas. To thousands of waterfowl hunters, Louisiana's wetlands, located at the southern end of the Mississippi Flyway, are indeed a "Sportsman's Paradise."

But something is wrong in Louisiana's Eden. *Vanishing Paradise* is a glimpse at the state's disappearing coastal marshes and the scores of private and commercial hunting clubs where generations of prominent Louisianians, their families, and friends have met to play, entertain, hunt, fish, and continue long traditions passed from fathers to sons and, sometimes, daughters. Sims gives us a rare glimpse at an inner world open only to members and selected guests. Here, readers will visit a few of the most prominent of these clubs—the Avoca Duck Club, Bayou Club, Cajun Way Hunting Lodge, Cherry Ridge Hunting Camp, Coastal Club, Dupont Cutoff Fishing and Hunting Club, Florence Club, 4 Square Duck Club, Goose Lake Camp, Grosse Savanne Lodge, Hackberry Hunting Lodge, Hackberry Rod & Gun, K&J Hunting and Fishing Lodge, Lacassane Lodge, Lake Arthur Club, Le Camp Canard, Little Lake Hunting Club, Little Pecan Island Preserve, Lulu's Hunting Club, McGowan Brake Club, Oak Grove Club, Pecan Brake Lodge, Savanne Nuvelle, Section 14 Club, Whitehall Plantation, and White Lake Hunting Club. Equally important is the story of the rapid loss of Louisiana's coastal marshlands and, perhaps, a way of life as old as the land and the people who inhabit it.

“DANGER, MEN AT PLAY”—THE CLUBS

“Danger, Men at Play” and “Martha Stewart doesn't live here” are two signs that greet members and visitors to 4 Square Duck Club, located on the marshes at the end of old Highway 90 southwest of Sulphur, Louisiana. These playful signs actually mean what they say. The 4 Square Duck Club and many other hunting clubs are domains where men gather to hunt but, most importantly, to enjoy the company of other men. Fastidious decors and immaculate housekeeping are not priorities. In other words, the interiors of these male retreats are not torn from the pages of *Architectural Digest*. Though wives are

North American Migration Flyway



Courtesy of Ducks Unlimited



The fleet of 1950s wooden marsh boats is still used at White Lake Hunting Club.



4 Square Duck Club is a special place.

invited on annual spouse days or other special occasions, most camps are places where guys leave their muddy boots at the door, kick back on worn furniture, put their feet up anyplace they like, have a cigar, watch a football game, tell jokes, down a beer, and eat some of the best food available on the planet. Propriety, however, is always present. Camaraderie with one's friends and family is most important, but gentlemanly behavior is expected in the blinds and clubhouse. Some lodges or clubs, especially commercial ones, are open to both men and women hunters throughout the season.

Why join a hunting club? To Dick Crowell, president of the Coastal Club, belonging to a club is about hunting and friendships. "It's almost becoming the only way to hunt and fish. So much private land is now leased to clubs. If you don't belong to a club, you have limited opportunities to participate in it. But to me hunting is almost incidental to the trip down, the fellowship, the fun the night before, the good food, and the good conversation with the guys. This club has a lot of traditions about it." Avoca president Hardy Fowler simply loves the outdoors. "The older you get, how many times you shoot is less important than just swinging the bat." To Cressend Schonberg, past president of Little Lake Hunting Club south of Lafitte in southeast Louisiana, being a member is about loving "to see a sunrise, enjoying good fellowship, and sharing the environment with good friends."

Before getting into the organizational structure of these male sanctuaries, visitors might notice the occasional woman's touch, especially when the housekeeper or cook comes in to restore some non-intrusive domestic order to the "boys only" playground. At the Section 14 Club on Pecan Island, for example, Rhonda Miller and another young woman do all the cooking and cleaning for club members. In addition, she is an award-winning artist and her paintings of ducks on the wing decorate the clubhouse walls. Her husband, Wayne, is the club's head guide. Before the hunters go out in the morning, she fixes them a light breakfast of coffee, juice, and cinnamon rolls. When they return, they sit down to a full meal. The menu differs each day, but on one February morning the men and their wives (this was spouse day) feasted on shrimp piquant, white beans, and pineapple cake. "Our hunters are funny," says Miller. "As soon as they cross Forked Island Bridge, their lifestyles change."

The scene is similar a little further west at Savanne Nuvelle, a modest-looking

camp located on the Creole Nature Trail south of Lake Charles and the Intracoastal Waterway. Meals here are the specialty of longtime cook Darlene, whose mother and father worked at the Coastal Club for many years. A before-hunt breakfast at Savanne Nuvelle might consist of eggs, bacon, and toast. Lunch might include shrimp Creole, dirty rice made from ground duck gizzards, baked duck, and bread pudding made from her own special secret recipe. For the evening meal, hunters are treated to baked duck, duck gumbo filled with gizzards, and white rice. At Oran Richard's Goose Lake Camp southwest of Sulphur, Edith Miller and her daughter, Anna, do the cooking and keep the place tidy. The hired cook and housekeeper arrangement is typical at most clubs, except at Oak Grove Club on Grand Chenier, where promptly at 5 P.M. the staff appears from the kitchen dressed in tuxedos to serve hors d'oeuvres to members and their guests.

Each club has a personality that reflects its location and membership. Some, such as Lulu's Hunting Club near Lake Arthur, have colorful histories. Lulu's, formed in 1928 by Wilfred ("Lulu") Broussard, has hosted hunters from all over the world, including silver-screen heroes Clark Gable, John Wayne, and Ward Bond, automobile industrialist Henry Ford, and famed test

pilot Chuck Yeager. The organizational structures of these hunting clubs differ greatly. Many are corporations, with their members holding individual shares. The Little Lake Hunting Club south of Lafitte in southeast Louisiana, for example, is a private club, a corporation with forty shareholding members. New members are nominated by existing members and voted on by the entire club. Others such as the Vincent family's Cajun Way Hunting Lodge near Lake Arthur, Jim Bel's Hackberry Hunting Lodge, Terry Shaughnessy's Hackberry Rod & Gun, and Grosse Savanne Lodge are commercial business ventures. Cherry Ridge Hunting Camp near Lake Arthur is a family-owned operation that sells hunting days not used by family members. Others, including Whitehall Plantation, McGowan Brake Club, and Le Camp Canard, are privately owned and used solely to entertain business clients, friends, and families. One, White Lake Hunting Club, once the private hunting reserve of Amoco Oil Company and then British Petroleum executives and guests, is now owned by the State of Louisiana. In some cases, membership lists are long; others have fewer than a dozen names. Some clubs have no members at all, just invited guests. Most clubs are located in the coastal wetlands from the Sabine River in the west to the mouth of the Mississippi River



Savanne Nuvelle.



Located on a manmade island, White Lake Hunting Club is now owned by the State of Louisiana.

in the east. Northeastern Louisiana also has several prominent clubs including Kent Anderson's McGowan Brake near Bastrop and Frank Harris's Pecan Brake Lodge and Whitehall Plantation, both on Catahoula Lake.

Whitehall is a private hunting club owned by the Justiss Oil Company. The hunting lodge, located on 4,000 acres owned by the company, was built in 1983 not as a membership club but as a place for the Justiss family and company managers to entertain clients and friends. Whitehall Plantation built its own habitat. Working with the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and several other federal and state conservation agencies, the company constructed a six-and-a-half-mile-long levee along Old River to control flooding. The land became ideal for soybean farming, cattle, timber, and hunting. In the 1990s, Justiss Oil got out of the cattle business and dedicated additional land for duck hunting. The plantation now has five duck-hunting areas. As it is a company-owned club, women often hunt there, including the Justiss women. Jenna Fae Justiss, wife of company chief executive officer and president James Justiss, enjoys duck and quail hunting, while daughter Jennifer Justiss Loe prefers hunting deer.

McGowan Brake Club is located in Morehouse Parish just west of Bastrop,



James Justiss works his retriever at Whitehall Plantation.



These ducks create quite a splash.



Hundreds of ducks swim, soar, and land against the winter tree line.

Louisiana. Founded in the early 1930s by the United Gas Company for its employees, the club is now a corporation with Kent Anderson as the sole stockholder. He serves as president and his wife, Yvonne, as vice-president. The club, which is used primarily by family and friends, runs along the Ouachita River. The oldest building on the property dates back to the 1930s and the most recent, the 1980s. McGowan Brake also is home to several endangered and threatened species, including bald eagles, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and the occasional Louisiana black bear. The land seems ideal for hunting. The 4,600-plus acres include an 800-acre, manmade cypress-tupelo brake with an additional 60 acres of managed impoundments and a 28-acre beaver pond. During extremely wet seasons, the Ouachita River floods the club's hardwood bottomlands, creating an ideal habitat for mallards and wood ducks.

Pecan Brake Lodge, formed in 1975 by Frank G. Harris III, is located on French Fork of the Little River northeast of Alexandria in La Salle Parish. It was originally a private club for family and friends, but Harris opened it in 1995 to a limited number of commercial guests. As to hunting, the club owns 200 acres and has access to 20,000 acres of state-owned water bottoms of nearby Catahoula Lake. Pecan Brake has been an important part of the Harris family. Since establishing the club in 1975, Harris says, "I have had the satisfaction of seeing [his son, Frank G. Harris IV] and his two younger sisters, Virginia and Helen, and many of my friends' children grow into adulthood as hunters. All have developed a strong conservation ethic."

In the southern part of the state, Hackberry Rod & Gun, located in southwest Cameron Parish, is a privately owned commercial hunting and fishing outfitter. Founded in 1975 by Capt. Terry Shaughnessy, the business leases 10,000 acres from the Westland Corporation. Like most other clubs and hunting organizations in this region, Hackberry has noticed erosion problems due to saltwater intrusion and a declining number of ducks and geese. Regardless, the people at Hackberry are dedicated to this way of life. "We feel the club and organization affords us the opportunity to promote Louisiana's wonderful outdoor resources," says manager and guide Buddy Oakes. "Sportsmen from all over the world come here annually to fish and hunt ducks."

At the nearby Cajun Way Hunting Lodge near Lake Arthur, Steve Vincent, who owns the club with his mother and brothers, touts the family history and



Most hunters agree that the male wood duck is Louisiana's most beautiful bird, having a color pattern of rich chestnut, splashes of black and white, golden flanks, and red eyelids amid iridescent greens, purples, and bronzes.



Mervis Saltzman from Gueydan instructs Joe Arthur Sims on how to use his Chien duck and goose calls.

its connection to duck hunting. “Cajun Way has a combined hunting experience of over a hundred years,” he says. “Our dad was a guide for many hunting lodges in southwest Louisiana. He taught us how to guide and read the birds’ movements in flight. Our mother, Theresa, learned from our dad, who also taught us how to call. We decided to go into the family business in 1998 with eight homemade, twelve-foot blinds. We still enjoy eating and hunting the wild waterfowl of south Louisiana.”

K&J Hunting and Fishing Lodge, located near Johnson Bayou in southwest Louisiana, has gone by many names since its 1989 founding. First known as The Marsh Club and later as Point Pleasant Hunting and Fishing, K&J is a commercial lodge owned by Kent and Julie Carlson. The club, which features a 5,200-square-foot lodge, sells seasonal hunting and fishing memberships. Non-members may hunt and fish there if they reserve in advance. The Carlsons also have noticed erosion problems and declining duck populations in the region. “I see the gulf getting closer inward to Highway 82 each year,” Julie says. They have pumped sand from offshore to the coastal areas to build up the land. It looks as though it’s working. Kent has a special appreciation for the area. “Kent was raised here in Johnson Bayou, where he was surrounded by hunting and fishing,” Julie says. “He has always worked

and been around hunting clubs growing up. Kent loves the outdoors and loves to watch the sun rise in the marsh and hear the marsh hens, the shore birds, and other waterfowl at their wakeup call.”

The Bayou Club, dating back to 1923, is a private club with more than fifty members who lease several thousand acres of marshland in southwest Louisiana near Vermilion Bay. An early-morning hunt begins with the hunters standing in a half-circle, singing “God Bless America” with gusto, then downing a shot of bourbon and a slice of orange, followed by a large breakfast.

The Little Pecan Island Preserve, located in southwest Louisiana on Grand Lake between the Rockefeller and Lacassine wildlife refuges, is privately held by a corporation owned by Jim and Cherie Flores of Houston, Texas. The preserve is surrounded by 14,000 acres of marshland and lakes either owned by the Floreses’ corporation or leased from the Miami Corporation, a major landholding company based in Chicago. The marsh is protected by levees and maintained by water-control structures. Jim Flores describes the club as a “private wildlife management area that is completely dedicated to the preservation of wetlands.” The Little Pecan Island area has a long history of duck



The Bayou Club, a stately lodge.



The traditional toast and the singing of “God Bless America” start each morning hunt at the Bayou Club.

hunting in Louisiana. The hunting acreage that comprises the preserve today once belonged to three separate organizations—Herman Taylor’s Little Pecan Hunting Club, Carl Jones’ Bismarck Hunting Club, and Cletis Cribs’ Lake Charles Dredging and Towing Lease. All three men, as well as the Floreses, were active in Ducks Unlimited. Little Pecan Island has had a rich history of hunting and entertainment for all of its guests, and features a private runway that ends at the front door of the lodge.

In southeast Louisiana, the Dupont Cutoff Fishing and Hunting Club is one of the newer clubs to join the long list of established membership organizations. It was formed in 1991 when a drilling fluids division of Halliburton & Dresser decided not to renew its lease on 2,300 acres of prime marshland. Located near Lafitte, the club has eighteen members. Like most clubs, Dupont is accessible only by boat. Today, the club has two twenty-six-foot inboard ferryboats, a number of mud boats and pirogues, a wood-burning fireplace, a pool table, and an open bar for members. The club’s staff also serves three meals daily. “The marsh not only has a great abundance of ducks,” says club member John Koerner, “but also provides a nice harvest of redfish from the shallow ponds and speckled trout from the canals.”



Little Pecan Island Preserve is only accessible by air or water.



Portable blinds are often used at Little Pecan Island Preserve.

The Avoca Duck Club, founded in 1937 in south-central Louisiana on Avoca Island near Morgan City, is a corporation with fifty members. It leases 16,000 acres, two-thirds of which is under water. According to club rules, the first weekend of each duck season is open only to members. After that, members may bring guests, including spouses. The clubhouse, rebuilt in 1995 after a devastating fire, sleeps twenty, but because of the informal living space, women spend the night at hotels in Morgan City. When a membership position becomes available, the club's board of directors and membership must approve all nominees. Adding to the club's allure is the colorful history of Avoca Island itself. Jim Bowie, of the knife and Alamo fame, grazed cattle here in the early nineteenth century, and the first Tarzan movie was filmed here in 1917.

The equally prestigious Coastal Club, founded in 1928 by lumber executives from the Alexandria area in central Louisiana, owns 6,000 acres of marshland. During hunting season, the club leases an additional 6,000 from the Miami Corporation. Located along a narrow coastal canal south of Iowa,



Larry Saltzman, guide and dog trainer, gets a little loving reward from one of his dogs at the Coastal Club.

Louisiana, the club has eighty-seven members who own stock in the club. Most reside in south and central Louisiana but a larger number, former Louisianians, live all over the United States. Membership is passed from generation to generation. Club president Dick Crowell, a lawyer from Alexandria, has been a member since he was twenty-one years old. He inherited his membership from his father. "It's been a family tradition to hunt down here for generations," Crowell says. "My grandfather was one of the charter members in 1928. My son is a member and he loves to hunt here. He and his wife live in San Francisco, so they don't get to come down too often." Securing new members when an occasional space opens is not a problem. "If a share of stock comes up for sale, there's never a lack of people who would like to have one," says Crowell. "Some people have waited fifteen or twenty years." Crowell also says the Coastal Club has become more family oriented over the years and not just a men-only sanctuary. "We have family reunions down here. Some come from all over the world. Also, Thursdays and Fridays are ladies' day. They can come down here and hunt on those two days. More and more women are coming down here to hunt. They're bringing small children and spending the night. Even when the small children and women are down here, they learn how to shoot dice and play *bouré*," a French card game popular in south Louisiana.

Oak Grove Club on Louisiana Highway 82 in Cameron Parish, founded in the early 1930s by Lafayette oilman Win Hawkins as the Grand Chenier Hunting Club and later Oak Grove, has only nine members with a full-time household staff of eight and eighteen hunting guides. The club hunts on 9,600 acres of freshwater marsh leased from the Miami Corporation, which holds one of the club's nine membership slots. According to club president Richard Lipsey of Baton Rouge, the club can hunt sixteen to nineteen people at the same time. Becoming a member is not easy. "A lot of people have shown interest in Oak Grove over the years and we bring their names up at each meeting, whether or not there's an opening," Lipsey says. "The membership decides on who they want as the next member. If a member wants to sell his share of stock, they can't sell it to someone on the outside. The corporation buys it back and the remaining members vote on who they want."

William W. ("Billy") Rucks IV is a grandnephew of Oak Grove founder Win Hawkins and a former member of Oak Grove Club. He and his wife now

own the Florence Club, established in 1912 in southwest Louisiana below the town of Gueydan. The club, which owns approximately 5,100 acres of freshwater marsh, has no members, just Rucks' family and guests. "My passion for duck hunting began when I was a child, hunting in the Gueydan area with my father," Rucks says. "I was introduced to the premium hunting-club environment when I was about twelve years old through my great-uncle Win Hawkins, who was the founder of the famous Oak Grove Hunting Club. My hunting experiences at Oak Grove demonstrated to me at a very young age that fellowship and fine dining fit hand in glove with duck hunting."

The Section 14 Hunting Club on Pecan Island, established mostly by Baton Rouge people in 1957, has twelve members and is a limited liability corporation. The club leases 1,350 acres from the Vermilion Corporation. Longtime member Charles ("Chuck") Schwing of Baton Rouge describes the club's governance and administrative policies as "loosely organized." He says the club began in order to give fathers and sons an opportunity to spend time together. "We have a group of people who have really gotten along. We only make rules when they become necessary. We have no board; everybody's vote is the same." The club has six bedrooms that sleep twelve. The staff includes a head guide, Wayne Miller, and an assistant. Wayne's wife, Rhonda, is the cook and another woman comes in to tidy the place up each morning. The only time women visitors can stay overnight is during the annual "wife weekends."

Once a year, members bring their wives, daughters, and granddaughters. Schwing's wife, Jerry, enjoys the hunt. "It's a wholesome thing for a wife and husband," she says. "We've been hunting together for thirty some odd years. We've gone to Mexico, White Lake in Africa. We've been grouse hunting in England and Scotland. Before we married, I hunted squirrels and deer, but I don't like hunting deer. It's like shooting a cow." In the early 1970s, Jerry broke the spouse barrier. "I stimulated the old group to have a ladies' night. At that time, I was the only woman who went out in the marsh and hunted. The others stayed in the house and cooked, did needlepoint, played cards, and had a good time." As with most hunting clubs, getting new members is not a problem, says club president John Noland of Baton Rouge. "We have a number of guests who come regularly," he says, describing the informal process. "When we have a membership opening, we look around and if we have a guest that has come often and is liked, we tend to choose people who are known to our

members and are compatible to our group." Noland says the Section 14 Club is like most social organizations. "It's good because the members are compatible and get along. We're just a bunch of guys that come down here to have a good time. If you have that in mind, then by cracky, you have a good time."

Savanne Nuvelle, located just north of Creole in Cameron Parish on a small gravel island connected to the Creole Nature Trail by a narrow creosote bridge, hunts 3,200 acres of marsh leased from the Miami Corporation. Club members have hunted this same property since 1928 when it was established as a corporation by a group of businessmen from the Lake Charles area. Ironically, the club no longer has members from Lake Charles. Most are from Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Ruston, and Shreveport. Although the club's charter provides for up to thirty members, the current roll stands at about twenty. "We have a waiting list," says club president Gus Voltz, Jr., a lawyer from Alexandria who has been a member since the mid-1950s. "A name has to be put on the list by a present member, subject to approval by the board and membership. There is no transfer of membership. It's not inheritable. But there is a regulation that states if a member dies, leaving a son who desires to be a member, unless there is serious objection, they approve his membership. That's the way it is passed on. The stock is not for sale." Club members constructed the current clubhouse after Hurricane Audrey destroyed the original camp, a houseboat in the Intracoastal Waterway, in 1957. The current camp consists of three long and narrow metal buildings that look like boxcars lined up on a sidetrack. Inside, the bunkroom has ten cots lined up against the outer walls. "You think this bedroom is close—it was very cozy in the houseboat," Voltz laughs. The next building is a living room with old duck-hunting photographs hanging on the wall. The final building is the kitchen, where Darlene conjures her culinary specialties. To the rear of the compound sits a small shed with a large metal drum filled with wax. Here they remove the ducks' feathers by dipping the birds in hot wax, which when peeled away removes the feathers.

The Lacassane Lodge was formed in 1948 by Albert Bel, Charles Nobel, David L. Garrison, Sr., and Albert and Ernest Fay. After returning from World War II, Bel and Nobel went on several duck-hunting trips to Johnson Bayou on the coast south of Lake Charles. Bel enjoyed it so much he established a hunting club on the Lowry Plantation, west of Lake Arthur. The club started

off with a kitchen and living area all in one room with a small room attached. Furnishings then consisted of fourteen army cots, a dining table, a poker table, and a potbellied stove in the middle of the room. It had no running water, no electricity, and lanterns provided the only light. Over the years, members added a well, indoor bathroom, additional rooms, porches, and a separate guide shack. According to a brief history of the club written by its members, the Lacassane Lodge “has become less of a men’s club and more family oriented.”

James B. (“Jim”) Bel’s Hackberry Hunting Lodge, located west of Hackberry, Louisiana, on the northern border of the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, is a year-round commercial hunting lodge that enjoys 8,000 acres and twenty-five blinds. Bel purchased the property from Amoco Oil Company in 1998. The lodge’s main section was constructed in 1957 by hunting guide Allen Hinton and former leaseholder J. A. Lowery. The expanded building now offers hunters private rooms, including several with private baths. Women are always welcome, Bel says. “Wives and female friends are always welcome to accompany their hunters, even if they don’t hunt. . . . We have a truly family atmosphere and love to have young hunters come in with adults. My four grandsons, who are seven and eight years old, are regulars here. I think it’s extremely important to teach young people not only the sport, but gun safety, wildlife conservation, marsh conservation, and to foster a general love of hunting and the marshland.” When it is not duck season, Bel offers clients fishing and deer and alligator hunting trips.

The well-known Lake Arthur Club has been a commercial club, a private-membership corporation, and a family-owned camp. It began prior to the 1920s as a commercial camp to hunt waterfowl for restaurants and markets in south Louisiana towns and cities. Then in the early 1920s, two prominent Louisiana businessmen and sportsmen acquired Lake Arthur and transformed it into a private club and corporation with a membership list that was a who’s who of business and social leaders throughout the United States. According to a history of the club published in 1922, membership was limited to 160 members of “unquestioned standing as men and sportsmen.” In 1931, during the Great Depression, two Shreveport friends, Alfred Glassell and Ray O’Brien, bought the club for \$1,000, or ten cents an acre. The men’s descendants now own the club and its only members are the two families. According to Patsy O’Brien of Shreveport, the granddaughter of Ray O’Brien, the club

originally owned 10,000 acres. “Now we own 9,000 acres. We’ve lost a lot to erosion,” she says.

Patsy first began hunting at Lake Arthur at the age of seven. She has hunted there every year since. Her daughter Mary Frances and granddaughter Kate also have been avid hunters since childhood. Stafford Comegys, a grandson of Alfred Glassell, also has hunted here all his life. But he, like his cousins, has noticed considerable changes in the marsh. “It’s now a freshwater marsh because of the gates in the Intracoastal Waterway,” he says, looking out over the marsh. “We used to fish redfish and speckled trout here and catch blue crabs.” Over the years the original clubhouse and subsequent clubhouses were destroyed by fires, but each time the families rebuilt. The tradition has continued here for three generations. Comegys says his family, the O’Briens, and members of other clubs across south Louisiana are dedicated to waterfowl conservation. Like other hunters, all agree that simply being out on the marsh is more important than the hunt. “It’s just beautiful to be down here,” Comegys says. “You can shoot your hunt or go home with a goose egg.” Mary Frances agrees—“It’s so beautiful. There’s a certain smell and a certain awe in the air the minute you get down here.”

Clubhouses or lodges can be elaborate or deceptively simple structures. The prestigious Oak Grove Club and Savanne Nouvelle are as plain looking as Grosse Savanne Lodge, White Lake Hunting Club, McGowan Brake Club, Little Pecan Island Preserve, and Florence Club are imposing. Some have stories to tell; others would rather keep their memories private. Those memories can be as exotic as the origins of the 4 Square Duck Club or as businesslike as the beginnings of Le Camp Canard on Grand Chenier adjacent to the Rockefeller refuge.

The 4 Square Duck Club, with its red carpet and walls lined with mirrors and stuffed nutria and ducks, once was—according to club president Pat Beard of Shreveport—a brothel next door to The Grove, a popular nightclub from the early 1920s through the 1940s on the Old Orange, Texas, Highway. “It dates back to Spindle Top oil days in the early twentieth century when whoring and gambling were going wild in Texas,” Beard says. “Texas cracked down on it during the depression and it moved to Louisiana. From our location to Vinton on old [Highway] 90, there were thirteen nightclubs in the thirties, forties, and during World War II.” The old supper club could hold over a thousand

patrons who enjoyed the club's gaming tables and the famous big bands that toured the country before World War II. The house that now accommodates the 4 Square Duck Club was once two stories—the brothel upstairs and a cockfighting ring downstairs. According to a newspaper clipping on the wall, Gov. Sam Jones sent in a raiding party in the early 1950s to shut down the club's backroom gambling hall. Then in 1953 the new Highway 90 opened and left the once popular roadhouse isolated. The Grove burned a few years later, leaving a pile of rubble and the old brothel next door. The Deupree family later bought the house, lowered it to one level, and resided in it for many years. Then in 1979, they sold it to the 4 Square Duck Club. The vinyl-sided house, with three bunkrooms, an enclosed porch, and living room and kitchen, sits quietly at the end of the narrow road, overlooking a marsh and the eerily silent remains of The Grove next door. The club has seven members and spouses are welcome anytime.

Le Camp Canard is the private domain of the Acadian Ambulance and Air Med Services of Lafayette, founded in 1971 by Richard Zuschlag, Richard Sturlese, and Roland Dugas. Today, the hunting club's expansive and impressive buildings are a favorite fund-raising retreat for many of south Louisiana's most influential politicians. For generations, the camp was a family compound for the Sturlese family, whose Italian ancestors homesteaded the land in the late nineteenth century. Acadian later leased the land from the family and built more than 1,400 square feet of living space with twelve bedrooms that can sleep twenty-four people. Unlike many hunting clubs, Le Camp Canard is not a membership club. Zuschlag and Sturlese use the camp exclusively for family gatherings and to entertain their business clients and politicians. The camp leases more than 5,000 acres of marsh and operates thirteen blinds. The founding of Acadian Ambulance and Le Camp Canard is an enticing story of three young roommates in their early to late twenties who created a multimillion-dollar-a-year enterprise with nothing but a plan and youthful enthusiasm. Sturlese and Dugas, who later sold their interests in Acadian to its employees, are native Louisianians. Zuschlag, originally from Greenville, Pennsylvania, came to Louisiana in 1970 on a job with Westinghouse. When the company wanted him to return north a year later, he decided to stay in Louisiana. With an idea from a successful ambulance company he saw in Pennsylvania, Zuschlag teamed up with Sturlese and



Le Camp Canard is located on the edge of a chenier in southwest Louisiana.

Dugas to form the subscription-driven Acadian Ambulance service. For the first few years, Zuschlag and Sturlese drove the emergency vehicles with Vietnam-veteran medics in the back tending to patients. To seal his fate in Louisiana, Zuschlag married a local Cajun girl.

Grosse Savanne Lodge, located on the Creole Nature Trail in Cameron Parish, is a venture by Mr. and Mrs. Buddy Leach and the Sweetlake Land and Oil Company. Located on 5,000 acres of marsh, with access to an additional 50,000 acres, Grosse Savanne is a plush commercial club with five guest rooms, a large living room with a large fireplace, flower arrangements, paintings of wildlife and waterfowl, five hunting guides, and forty blinds. The popular hunting and fishing supply company Orvis has given its prestigious "Wing Shooting Lodge" endorsement to Grosse Savanne, making it one of only twenty-five in the world to receive this distinction. The year-round hunting and fishing club attracts sportsmen from throughout the United States, Europe, Mexico, and

Japan. Plans are on the drawing board to make Grosse Savanne a year-round corporate and family retreat center where people can fish, hunt, bird watch, or hike nature trails cut into the marsh and nearby woodlands.

Not far to the west from Grosse Savanne, as the goose flies, is Oran Richard's Goose Lake Camp. Richard, who owns Industrial Helicopters in Lafayette, leases more than 5,000 acres of marshland from the Matilda Gray Stream family, who have maintained a hunting camp here for several generations. The lodge, which sleeps eight comfortably, is a spacious wooden house with a covered gallery across the front. Inside is a large living area that leaves little doubt as to what this place is. Walls are decorated with stuffed waterfowl and paintings of ducks in flight. Like Le Camp Canard, Richard, the son of a south Louisiana sharecropper, uses the place for himself and to entertain family and business clients. "I'm just blessed that Matilda and her family entrust the care of this place to me," Richard says, his eyes scanning the nearby marsh. "It's a beautiful piece of God's creation. It's just a beautiful marsh. The egrets, the ibis, the herons, bull frogs, the alligators, the songbirds, it's just a thrill to go out there and sit in a duck blind or sit on an island someplace out there and listen to that marsh wake up in the morning. It's just a magnificent experience."



Speckled-bellied geese decorate a cloudless Louisiana sky.

PARADISE IN TROUBLE

Ducks have always been part of south Louisiana's culture and cuisine. In the early 1700s, one settler in the Louisiana colony was impressed by their taste and quantity. They are "fatter, more delicate and of better taste than those of France." As to their abundance, he noted that for "every one you see in France you may here count a thousand."

Until early in the twentieth century, waterfowl darkened the skies and hunting limits were something for the next generation. Walls in the old hunting clubs are decorated with faded photographs of old-timers dressed in tweed jackets, stiff collars, and ties, standing proudly before hundreds of dead ducks and geese strung from tree to tree. After all, this was Louisiana, with an endless bounty of wildlife and waterfowl for the taking. Times are different and conservation laws now protect wildlife from overkill. According to state wildlife officials, Louisiana in the early 1990s had approximately 60,000 licensed waterfowl hunters. With more liberal hunting regulations initiated in the mid-1990s, the number of hunters rose to almost 100,000 by 1999. "Duck hunting is almost mystical and magical to some people, and it can be a very addictive behavior," says Robert Helm, waterfowl program manager for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. "That passion is high and people go to all measures to hunt. It's an exciting time."

The state and federal governments also maintain wildlife management areas and refuges that offer an abundance of quality habitations and sanctuaries for migrating and wintering waterfowl. The State of Louisiana alone owns or oversees at least forty-nine wildlife management areas throughout the state, many of which are important for waterfowl. Approximately a dozen of those are scattered in the state's coastal region, from the Sabine Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in the west to Pass-A-Loutre WMA at the mouth of the Mississippi in the east. Major ones in between include the Attakapas Island, Atchafalaya Delta, and Pointe-aux-Chenes WMAs. All wildlife management areas are open for hunting.

Pass-A-Loutre WMA, a vast marshland of 66,000 acres located south of the Delta National Wildlife Refuge, is an active delta region, but it also is suffering serious erosion and saltwater intrusion problems. Since the 1980s, the state has diverted sediment-heavy water from the Mississippi River into open



Mike Hollier assists Robert Helm, waterfowl program manager for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, in checking water levels for waterfowl control at Sherburne Wildlife Management Area.

bays to rebuild the marshes. Apparently the effort is working. As to hunting, Helm says the area has “some of the best waterfowl hunting in the state.” All of Pass-A-Loutre WMA is open to hunters, but only part of the federal Delta refuge is available for that purpose.

In addition to wildlife management areas, the state owns and operates several wildlife refuges in the coastal region, including the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge, located west of Pecan Island in eastern Cameron Parish and western Vermilion Parish, and Marsh Island, with more than 70,000 acres south of New Iberia. Both are off limits to hunters. The Rockefeller refuge is a magnificent and extensive marshland that stretches more than twenty-six miles along the gulf coast and six miles inland to Grand Chenier ridge. When the Rockefeller Foundation donated the land to the state in the early 1920s, the refuge consisted of approximately 86,000 acres of land. Today, coastal erosion has reduced its size to about 76,000 acres. The deed of donation insisted that the land be kept as a wildlife refuge and prohibited hunting and fishing. In

1983, however, the U.S. Department of Interior and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries amended the agreement to permit sport fishing and commercial trapping to maintain an ecological balance in the marshland. Though the property is owned and managed by the state, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service inspects the refuge regularly to make sure the terms of the donation are followed. The Rockefeller staff is also involved in various wildlife research and management projects.

Another important state management area is the Sherburne Wildlife Management Area, located in the Atchafalaya Basin. Actually, the region consists of three major connected parcels of managed lands—the state-owned Sherburne WMA, the federal Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property. Together, they create almost 43,000 acres of protected wetlands and forests managed by the state. The management area is open for public use, except for 800 acres set aside as a waterfowl sanctuary.

In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with its southern regional office in Atlanta, maintains twenty-three national wildlife refuges in Louisiana. Among the oldest and largest are Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), with almost 35,000 acres in Cameron Parish; the Sabine NWR, spanning more than 124,000 acres also in Cameron Parish; and the Delta NWR, containing approximately 49,000 acres at the mouth of the Mississippi River. All three were established in the mid-1930s and all three are available for public recreation, including hunting. The department also is actively engaged in wetlands and waterfowl management at all its sites.

The state and federal governments also have created more than a score of wildlife management areas in central and north Louisiana, such as Grassy Lake WMA in Avoyelles Parish and the Russell Sage and Ouachita WMAs in Ouachita and Richland parishes in the far northeast corner of the state. All are open to hunters. Russell Sage, for example, boasts 2,400 acres of waterfowl habitat. According to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries’ publications, these impoundments are excellent places to hunt mallards, wood ducks, and other species of waterfowl. Other state management areas favored by waterfowl hunters are the Red River and Three Rivers WMAs, located near the confluence of the Red and Mississippi rivers south of Vidalia in Concordia Parish. The two management areas include some 62,000 acres, 20 percent of which is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Here the state has



The wood duck is a somewhat common permanent resident throughout Louisiana's wooded swamps.

constructed a reservoir and wetland habitat for waterfowl. Another popular waterfowl hunting area is on Catahoula Lake, twenty miles northeast of Alexandria. The lake, which is the largest natural freshwater lake in the state and borders the state's Dewey W. Wills WMA, is "the key to waterfowl abundance in central Louisiana," according to Helm. "It's a very important site in Louisiana for ducks and geese." Each summer, the state and federal governments draw down the lake to permit various grasses and other vegetation eaten by ducks to grow on the lake's bottom. Lowering the water level, says Helm, is nothing more than replicating its natural summer fall.

Wildlife management officials agree that overhunting is not, however, a problem facing hunters these days. Warmer winters up north in the upper Mississippi and Missouri river valleys and Canada have kept a great number

of waterfowl from their ageless winter journey south through the great Mississippi and Central flyways. They find ample food in ponds and fields that in previous years had been covered by snow. In fall 2002 and winter 2003, Louisiana wildlife scientists estimated that only half as many waterfowl found their way to Louisiana when compared to the three previous years. They estimated that 3.1 million ducks came to Louisiana during the 2002-2003 hunting season. That was a sizable drop from the more than 5 million in the 2000-2001 season. Federal officials also estimated that duck breeding had dropped from 40 million in 1999 to 32.3 million in 2003. Since Louisiana is sometimes the winter destination for half the ducks in the Mississippi Flyway, with 75 percent ending up in the coastal marshes, milder winters in the north also have made for some very disappointed waterfowlers.



A Canada goose shows aggressive behavior.

Banding studies have shown that more than half the waterfowl that arrive in Louisiana travel the Central Flyway to the west. According to Helm, the first half of the 2003-2004 season also was poor but better than the same time a year earlier. But Helm remains optimistic: “Hunting in 2002-2003 was the worst in a long time and this year is shaping up not to be one of the best. Hunters, however, have a short memory. The five or six seasons prior to 2002-2003 were pretty good. Beginning in 1995 and continuing up to [2002], Louisiana was one of the top harvest states in the country.”¹

The nation’s 1.5 million duck hunters and \$1 billion industry (\$150 million annually in Louisiana) are facing more serious problems—the draining of wetlands in the nation’s northern prairie states and the rapid loss of Louisiana’s coastal marshes. The loss of breeding ponds in the Dakotas and other prairie states to farming has troubled conservationists for years. Until lately, conservation officials depended upon their interpretation of federal legislation to help preserve hundreds of thousands of ponds and wetlands, especially in the Dakotas, essential to waterfowl breeding. The most important weapon in their arsenal of regulations was the federal 1972 Clean Water Act, which prevented landowners from draining certain wetlands. Then in 1985, Congress passed the Farm Bill, with a new provision called the Conservation Reserve Program. The program paid farmers to retire marginal farmland for ten years. Between 1986 and 1990, farmers in north-central states enrolled 8.2 million acres in the program. As a result, millions of acres became prime waterfowl nesting areas. Congress renewed the program in 1996—farmers signed up an additional 4.2 million acres in 1997—and again in 2002. However, conservation efforts received a blow in January 2001 when the U.S. Supreme Court threw out the migratory-bird protection rule in the Clean Water Act. Cong. John Dingell of Michigan’s Clean Water Authority bill of 2002 made another effort to protect migratory-bird breeding grounds, but it died in committee.

Waterfowl managers claim that other federal protections of wetlands also are under attack. These attacks and changes in federal laws threaten habitats that produce more than a quarter of the ducks in North America. In a February 2003 interview with *New Orleans Times-Picayune* outdoor editor Bob Marshall, Ron Reynolds, a waterfowl specialist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in North Dakota, painted a bleak picture for the future of

waterfowl hunting in the United States. "What they experienced this year could seem like a picnic compared to what might be coming," Reynolds said, referring to attacks on federal wetlands protection. "We're not talking about slow seasons. We're talking about no seasons. I'm not sure hunters appreciate the seriousness of what's happening."² Then in December 2003, Pres. George W. Bush's administration declared that it would continue to protect the wetlands under the Clean Water Act and issue no new rules or regulations as a result of the Supreme Court's 2001 decision.³

Hunting-club members also have noticed declining waterfowl populations in south Louisiana, and everyone has explanations and theories. "It's not what it used to be," said Section 14 Club member Chuck Schwing in describing hunting conditions in the split season of fall 2002 and winter 2003. "We've been fortunate. Our lease has been very productive, though we have had a sparse time like others have had. My wife and I shot only once today. In the past, we shot twice a day for about ten years. Then we started noticing the hunts were beginning to suffer somewhat from the pressure we were putting on it, so we [came up with] a rule that we could hunt Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, but you couldn't hunt Thursday or Friday afternoon."

Hardy Fowler, president of the Avoca Duck Club, agrees. "Hunting the last three years has not been good. This year is worse than last year. It's really bad." He attributes the declining number of waterfowl in his area to both mild weather and the loss of duck-feeding habitat caused by saltwater intrusion and water turbidity. "They need aquatic vegetation to eat," he says. "The turbidity of the water has had a negative impact on our aquatic vegetation."

Gregory Mark ("Coco") Gaspard, a guide at the Coastal Club since the 1970s, has his theories: "A lot of these places further up north are keeping these reserves from freezin' over. Like in Arkansas. A duck moves down as they get ice. It pushes them down further and further. If it freezes up there, they go further south. As soon as it thaws out, they start to come back. About three years ago, we had that big freeze. We had all kinds of ducks because Arkansas froze up. When those big reserves are thawed up, they just stay there. There's no use [for] them to come any further." Gaspard also believes that local wildlife refuges contributed to poor hunting in recent years. The Coastal Club is located between the Lacassine and Cameron Prairie wildlife

refuges. "The ducks get used to goin' in there and they don't get shot. They just stay in there. I guess they bring their younguns and they go in there and they know right away that they're safe." Club president Dick Crowell also looks to changing weather patterns: "Hunting has gotten slower in the last few years. The first half of the season has been pretty good. The second half gets slower and slower as the season winds down. There are a lot of theories as to what's happening. You get these Ducks Unlimited reports stating there are going to be more ducks this year than in the history of mankind. Yet, [the ducks] are not down here in the Mississippi Flyway, which is the largest flyway in the country. They're just not down here in the second part of the season . . . they're stopping in the Midwest, [where] there's food for them and the winters are not as harsh." Crowell goes on to say that, until recently, hunters came in with their limits each day. "In the second half of the season [winter 2003], some blinds came in with nothing. They didn't even fire a shot."

Oran Richard at Goose Lake Camp agrees. "Winters have been mild," he said about the 2002 and 2003 split season. "Ducks have feed all up and down the flyway from Canada all the way down into Mexico and South America. As long as it doesn't freeze in the Midwest, they've got feed and a lot of those birds just don't come down here. I have a friend up in Montana and he said they had about twenty thousand mallards that never left where he lives. We've had reports that Oklahoma, North Texas, Kansas, Missouri had some of the best duck hunting they've ever had last year [the 2001-2002 season] because it was so mild and the lakes never froze. The two things that have affected duck hunting down here are the drought and the mild winters that haven't pushed the ducks down."

Doug Miller, land manager at Grosse Savanne, has another theory for the declining number of ducks and game waterfowl, one in which the weather is only partly to blame. "People are saying the bird-count numbers up north are still high. My personal opinion is that the interest in duck hunting has gotten so big that there're more commercial operations popping up all the way up the flyway into Canada. When you have twice the interest and twice the hunters and they're provided twice the habitat that attracts ducks, they're spread out more and you put more gun pressure on them. I just think they're scattered over a larger area. With these milder winters we're having, there's not the need for them to migrate south anymore. They stop up north and feed.



“Bottoms up” is a familiar sight among feeding mallards.

My biggest concern is you get a generation or two of ducks that don't make it down here. They are not used to coming to south Louisiana. I think over the long haul, Louisiana will have a few ducks but I think duck hunting like we knew it is a thing of the past around here.”

Mike Baccigalopi, who has been a guide at Oak Grove since 1972, attributes the decreasing number of ducks to the loss of feeding grounds. “Every year, it's closing in,” he says, describing rising water levels in the marsh. “We've seen fewer ducks. Back in the seventies, we'd have forty ducks on our boat every day. Now, sometimes people get their limits and some don't. That high water we had down here after those two hurricanes [in 2002] set us back. When the ducks got down here, they had no place to feed. So, they didn't stay in the marsh. They went somewhere else.”

John Hebert, a longtime guide at the Lake Arthur Club who was actually born at the club in 1934, attributes the poor hunting to too many hunting clubs. “When I came down here, they had only one other camp around here. Now they have thirteen. Every hole in the marsh has a camp or blind. There're too many hunters. All the rice fields are covered with blinds.”

Wesley LeMaire, foreman at White Lake Hunting Club since 1971, has a slightly different take on the situation. “Between now and [the mid-1980s], there's been no difference in the numbers of waterfowl. As far as the species, we've seen some changes. The number of pintails has dropped. Mallards and drakes depend upon the cold up north. Arkansas and Missouri have started growing crops—corn, rice, soybeans—and they've started flooding their farms, short-stopping a lot of birds. That changed the number of birds coming down at a certain time of the year in the fall. In November, we'd see thousands and thousands of pintails come in with the blue wings. Now they don't come in nearly as early. That started [in about the mid-1990s]. If they can't feed, then they come down.”

However, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials are a bit more optimistic. Their May 2003 survey of the duck population in the northern prairie states and Canada counted 36.2 million ducks, up from 31.2 million in spring 2002. The number of breeding ponds there also increased, from 2.7 million in 2002 to 5.2 million in 2003, or a 91 percent increase. Officials attributed the increases to higher rainfalls on the northern prairies.⁴



Northern pintails, distinguished by their elongated tail feathers, fly gracefully over a Louisiana marsh.

Jim Bel at Hackberry Hunting Lodge in southwest Louisiana said the first half of the 2003-2004 hunting season was quite good. “We have noticed a decrease in the number of waterfowl in southwest Louisiana,” he said, “but overall, due to our management policies and work, we have seen an increase on our property. The first split [fall 2003] was the best hunting I’ve ever seen in my life, and I’ve been hunting since I was six. The first season [first split], I killed as many as all last year.”

Many club hunters, called “sports,” are actively engaged in conservation efforts and organizations such as Ducks Unlimited to preserve and restore the wetlands for hunting. Members of Savanne Nouvelle are involved in projects to plant new vegetation to rebuild the marshes. They also have self-imposed a limit on the number of ducks they shoot. “We’re trying to conserve,” says club president Gus Voltz, Jr. “Our limit is less than the federal limit. In a blind, we have three hunters—two sports and one guide. We’re entitled to six ducks each [eighteen total for the three hunters]. Our self-imposed limit is fifteen.”

With all these efforts, Louisiana is facing an even greater threat—the state’s rapidly disappearing coastal marshes.



Snow and blue geese make their winter home in the south Louisiana marshes and rice fields.

THE VANISHING COASTLINE

Ducks Unlimited, a popular advocacy group among all waterfowl hunters, paints a disturbing picture of Louisiana’s coastal problems: “Louisiana contains the largest expanse of coastal wetlands in North America, and has for centuries provided critical wintering habitat for up to two-thirds of the ducks and a third of the geese that use the Mississippi Flyway. These critical habitats have been deteriorating since man-made navigation channels changed the natural water-flow patterns of the landscape, allowing the intrusion of salt-water to negatively impact natural vegetation communities. Twenty-five to thirty square miles of the coast’s emergent wetland are converted from productive marsh to open-water habitats devoid of marsh vegetation each year.”⁵

Louisiana’s vast coastal wetlands are not only the largest in North America but also the seventh largest wetlands delta in the world. It is home to more than 2 million people and one of the most productive ecosystems on the globe. The state’s coastal region accounts for almost 30 percent of the nation’s total commercial seafood industry, 18 percent of its oil production, and 24 percent



Geese at a grit site fill their craws to aid in their digestion.

of its natural gas, totaling almost \$17 billion annually. This, of course, does not include the state's internationally celebrated recreational fishing and hunting, which also contribute millions of dollars to the state's economy.

By most accounts, however, that sportsman's paradise is slowly vanishing. According to government reports, Louisiana has lost more than 1,900 square miles of coastal marshland, roughly the size of Delaware, since 1932. Louisiana has approximately 40 percent of the coastal wetlands of the lower forty-eight states. Tragically, scientists say this multibillion-dollar economic and ecological resource is disappearing at an astonishing rate of 25 to 35 square miles a year. This represents about 80 percent of the nation's loss of coastal wetlands. The state currently has 3,800 square miles of marsh and approximately 800 square miles of swampland. At the current rate, by the year 2050 an additional 630,000 acres of wetlands and islands will disappear, and the Louisiana shoreline will advance inland as much as 33 miles in some areas. In 2003, the National Geodetic Survey reported that Plaquemines Parish lost 34 square miles, or 5.5 percent of its wetlands, between 1990 and 2000. Another study revealed that long stretches of Louisiana Highway 1, the major hurricane escape route for Lafourche Parish, are sinking rapidly. The same study said Louisiana is losing its coastal marshes "at a rate equivalent to a half-mile-wide corridor stretching the 60 miles from Baton Rouge to Lafayette." State and federal conservation officials also estimate that the state by 2050 will lose 600 to 700 square miles of marsh and almost 400 square miles of swamp. "Nearly 1,000 square miles of Louisiana's wetlands will become open water," one state and federal study reported in the late 1990s. "The Nation will lose an area of coastal wetlands that is nearly the size of Rhode Island." The study went on to say the "loss could be greater, especially if worst-case scenario projections of sea-level rise are realized, but in some places there is nothing left to save." Even New Orleans "will be closer to and more exposed to the Gulf of Mexico" by the year 2050.⁶

Scientists believe that the impending catastrophe is linked to rising world sea levels, global warming, saltwater intrusion, nutria that eat and destroy coastal vegetation, natural subsidence, new canals across marshlands to expand navigation and petroleum exploration, and the construction of levees across marshes and along main rivers and bayous, which block necessary river sediments that initially formed, then nourished and maintained coastal marshes

for millions of years. Hurricanes also contribute to the problem. Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and Hurricane Georges in 1998 as well as Tropical Storm Isidore and Hurricane Lili in 2002 devastated barrier islands and coastal parishes, often washing away years of restoration work. Coastal communities, such as Cocodrie in Terrebonne Parish, are under heavy threat. Following Tropical Storm Bill in 2003, a *New Orleans Times-Picayune* reporter described Cocodrie as a metaphor for all of south Louisiana's coastal region: "Like many fishing villages along Louisiana's coast, Cocodrie is slipping into the Gulf of Mexico, inch by inch, storm by passing storm. Land is becoming marsh. Marshes are becoming water. Water is lapping at the side of the road, and the road is washing away like the barrier islands and pasture land did before it."⁷

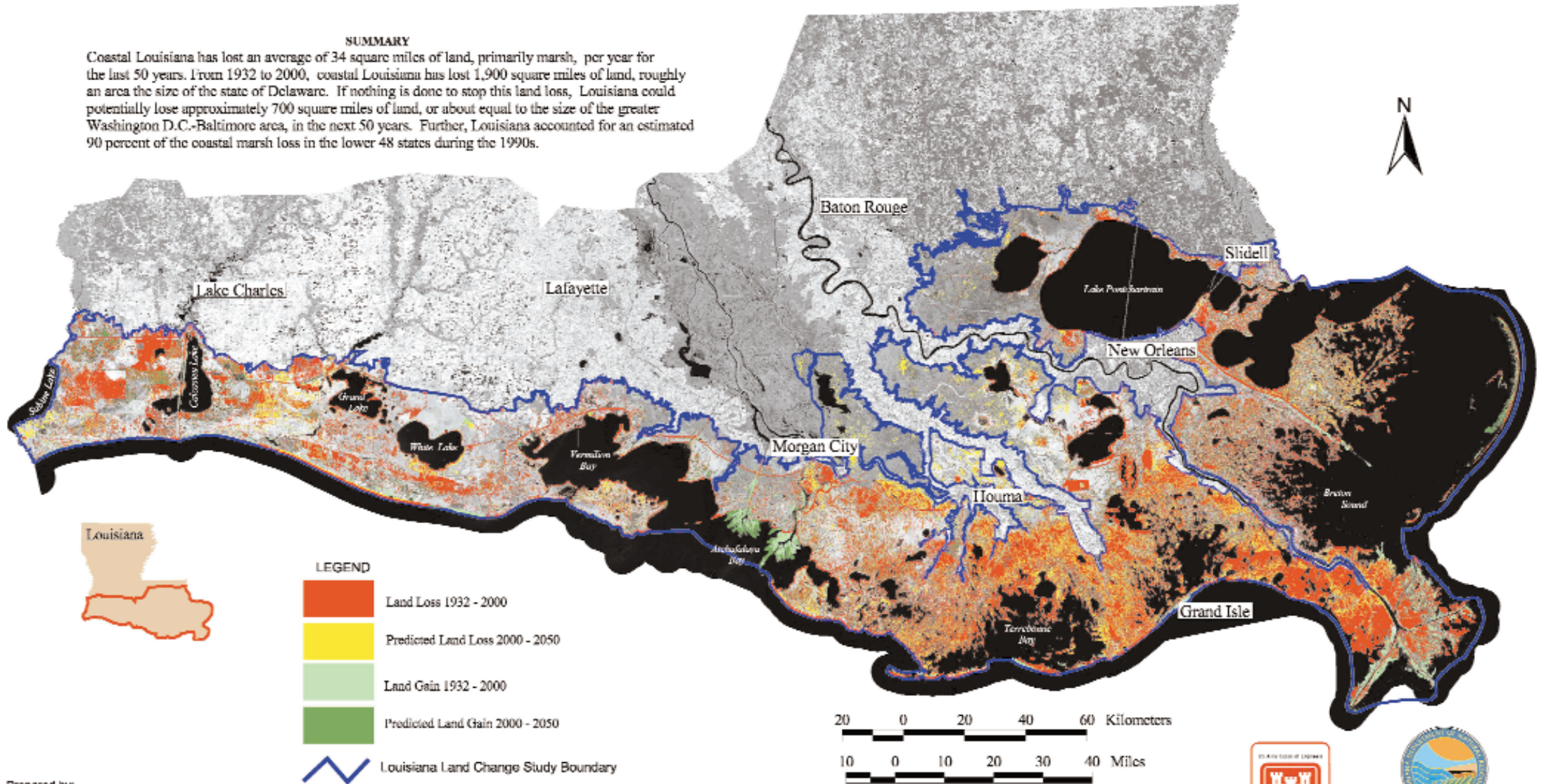
To help avert an impending disaster, since the 1960s various conservation groups and governmental agencies have come up with plans and initiatives to save the wetlands, such as the successful Cameron-Creole Watershed Project in southwest Louisiana. In 2001, Gov. Murphy J. ("Mike") Foster called for a "holy war" to restore Louisiana's wetlands. Since the 1990s, state environmental officials have lined miles of coastline with recycled Christmas trees. By 2003, more than a million trees had found a new home and use in the wetlands. U.S. senator John Breaux of Louisiana sponsored the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act of 1990, or the "Breaux Act," which has provided \$33 to \$53 million a year for coastal restoration projects and called for a comprehensive plan to save and restore Louisiana's coastal wetlands. The first of several plans was drawn up in 1993.⁸

Later in the decade, federal, state, parish, and conservation groups realized that one comprehensive plan to save the coastal wetlands was needed. They formed the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force and the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Authority. In December 1998, the task force issued *Coast 2050: Toward a Sustainable Coastal Louisiana*, a strategic plan to restore and maintain south Louisiana's wetlands. Essentially, the plan called for closing the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, diverting river water to swamps and marshes in the Pontchartrain Basin and Barataria-Terrebonne area, diverting sediment-heavy fresh water from the Atchafalaya River to marshes east and south of the river, and constructing seasonal locks in the Calcasieu-Sabine area of southwest Louisiana to stop saltwater intrusion in the local marshes. The task force estimated that

100+ Years of Land Change for Coastal Louisiana

SUMMARY

Coastal Louisiana has lost an average of 34 square miles of land, primarily marsh, per year for the last 50 years. From 1932 to 2000, coastal Louisiana has lost 1,900 square miles of land, roughly an area the size of the state of Delaware. If nothing is done to stop this land loss, Louisiana could potentially lose approximately 700 square miles of land, or about equal to the size of the greater Washington D.C.-Baltimore area, in the next 50 years. Further, Louisiana accounted for an estimated 90 percent of the coastal marsh loss in the lower 48 states during the 1990s.



LEGEND

- Land Loss 1932 - 2000
- Predicted Land Loss 2000 - 2050
- Land Gain 1932 - 2000
- Predicted Land Gain 2000 - 2050
- Louisiana Land Change Study Boundary

Background is 2000 Thematic Mapper panchromatic band.

Prepared by:
U.S. Geological Survey
National Wetlands Research Center
Lafayette, LA



the price tag for implementing its recommendations would be about \$14 billion. The cost for ignoring its strategies, the task force said, would be more than \$37 billion over the next fifty years. If these projects are fully implemented, however, scientists believe that up to 25 percent of the land projected to be lost over the next fifty years could be saved.

The task force completed its report with an appeal to reason and the nation's well-being:

Why should the Nation and the State of Louisiana invest billions of dollars to restore coastal Louisiana? Because it is a wintering area for migratory waterfowl? Because the barrier islands provide nesting areas for seabirds and wading birds? Because the coastal wetlands are beautiful and mysterious? Because the culture is rich, the gumbo good, and the music exhilarating? These alone may be ample reasons, but there are others that are even more compelling. The entire Nation depends on these wetlands for much of its fisheries catch, oil and gas production, navigation, and so much more. Coastal communities large and small, from New Orleans to Golden Meadow, from Houma to Grand Chenier, depend on Louisiana's coastal wetlands for hurricane protection and ultimate survival.⁹

In October 2003, Louisiana voters approved several amendments to the state constitution important to the *Coast 2050* plan. The first amendment increased the cap from \$40 million to \$500 million on a state fund dedicated to coastal projects such as freshwater diversion projects and barrier-island restoration. The second amendment dedicated a percentage of the money the state received from its settlement with the tobacco industry to coastal restoration projects. The third limited the state's liability for damage to private property caused by coastal restoration initiatives. State officials believed that all three were necessary to help the state come up with the estimated \$200 million a year it will need to match federal coastal restoration grants.

Two months later, a committee that was formed to advise federal and state agencies administering the Breaux Act fund recommended that work begin on three major projects, costing more than \$100 million. One was the Barataria Barrier Islands project, designed to create hundreds of acres of sand

dunes, beaches, and saltwater marshes to protect and extend headlands in the far tip of southeast Louisiana. Another would strengthen the Barataria Basin land bridge, and the third project would continue additional phases of a plan to pump sediment from the Calcasieu River into the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in Cameron Parish.¹⁰

Perhaps the most visible private-membership organization dedicated to the conservation and restoration of wetlands and waterfowl habitats on private and government-owned lands internationally is Ducks Unlimited. According to club reports, it has completed more than 1,100 habitat conservation projects on more than 558,000 acres of national wildlife refuge lands nationwide. It also has been a major lobbying force in the nation's capital for waterfowl hunting and funding for wetlands conservation projects nationwide, especially in the "Prairie Pothole" regions of the United States, central Canada, and Louisiana. In November 2003, Congress approved \$38 million to fund the 1989 North American Wetlands Conservation Act's 2004 budget. Ducks Unlimited hailed the appropriation as "a victory for wetland conservation" that will "greatly benefit waterfowl and hundreds of other wildlife and plant species." In thanking Congress, the Bush administration, and the wildlife conservation community, Ducks Unlimited praised the act for providing funding to more than 1,100 wetland conservation projects in all fifty states, Canada, and Mexico; for conserving more than 8 million acres of waterfowl habitat; for stimulating new public-private partnerships to "protect, restore, enhance, and manage wetland habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife"; and for enabling federal dollars to be "matched by three or more dollars of non-federal investment to leverage project funds."

In recent years, Ducks Unlimited has participated in three major wetlands restoration projects in Louisiana. Since 1995, Ducks Unlimited has received federal funds through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) to restore almost 50,000 acres of Louisiana wetlands. In the Sherburne Wildlife Management Area in south-central Louisiana, the organization teamed up with Exxon, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to "restore and enhance" almost 2,100 acres of wetlands. According to Ducks Unlimited reports, water management here has "increased habitat diversity for the Atchafalaya River basin and improved [the] quality of the existing bottomland hardwood habitat."

In southwest Louisiana's Cameron-Creole Watershed, including parts of

Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Ducks Unlimited, working with federal, state, parish, corporate, and private partners, constructed twenty-seven miles of terraces in open-water habitats that once had been marshland. These terraces are embankments that rise about two feet above the water level. They provide protection for aquatic vegetation and nesting sites for alligators and waterfowl. By reducing wave action in open bays and ponds, these terraces also reduce further erosion and actually help marsh vegetation grow and spread.

In addition, Ducks Unlimited, working with a \$50,000 grant from ExxonMobil Foundation, planted more than a thousand acres of bottomland

hardwood trees in eight other state wildlife management areas. These forests provide food and shelter for many waterfowl species, especially mallards and wood ducks. Ducks Unlimited, again working with NAWCA grants and private and public partnerships, has undertaken hydrologic restoration projects in various coastal areas to control freshwater habitats. In 2003, the organization announced two major coastal initiatives—the Avoca Island Restoration Project and the Oyster Bayou Restoration Project. Both are partnerships with private and governmental agencies. The Avoca Island project will restore 2,222 acres of estuarine inter-tidal marsh in south-central Louisiana, while



These mallard companions tread through duckweed common to Louisiana swamps.

the Oyster Bayou initiative will restore more than 7,300 acres of coastal marsh in southwest Louisiana's Cameron Parish.

Duck-club members have read newspaper accounts of the vanishing coastal marshes but over the years they also have observed the problem firsthand. Savanne Nuvelle president Gus Voltz, Jr., says he has noticed dramatic changes in the marsh from the time he first started hunting there with his father in the late 1930s. "The marsh grass used to be head high, seven or eight feet," he says. "To get to your blinds, you had trails and very little open water. The ducks would be in small ponds." Voltz's son, Gus ("Dutch") Voltz III, believes that the changes started in the 1970s. "The saltwater intrusion began coming in and killing the grass. I didn't start coming here until 1967 and it was still tall sawgrass. We went out in pirogues and you couldn't see fifteen feet out."

Lake Arthur Club guide John Hebert also has noticed changes. The marshes around Lake Arthur were once filled with cut-grass, he says. They are now filled with bull tongue. When the winter frost comes and kills off the bull tongue, nothing is left but open water.

Oran Richard, who flies over the region regularly in his helicopter business, also has seen dramatic changes. "I see erosion not only along the coastline but where the salt water has intruded. It kills vegetation along the banks of the bayous and lakes. As the vegetation dies, the wave action from the wind will erode the banks." Richard also remembers the fate of his uncle's camp at Holly Beach on the gulf coast in southwest Cameron Parish. Little by little the beach slipped into the gulf. "If his camp was still there," he says, "it would be at least two to three hundred yards out into the gulf. As the storms have come through, they take more and more beach than just normal erosion. Finally, his camp was just washed into the gulf along with many others. I've seen that happen [since the 1980s]. He had at least seventy-five to eighty yards of beach in front of his camp. I saw the beach slowly washing away and then the camp went. You see it all up and down the coast."

Avoca president Hardy Fowler says erosion and saltwater intrusion have been problems for Avoca Island. Since 1989, the club has rebuilt some levees and plugged holes in others. In addition, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will construct a freshwater-diversion project to reclaim dry land on the island, and Ducks Unlimited has provided a large grant to build levees that will help restore land and prevent future loss.

Cressend Schonberg, past president of Little Lake Hunting Club near Lafitte, also has noticed severe erosion problems in his club's 10,000-acre lease. "We're having erosion problems with land on our perimeter," he says. "The ponds are getting wider and deeper. We've lost several miles of marshland. We've rebuilt levees but hurricanes continue to wash them away." Little Lake is now working on a project to build permanent levees to protect their marshland.

Coastal erosion also has been a problem at the nearby Dupont Cutoff Fishing and Hunting Club. "The entire Barataria Basin has been faced with this erosion problem," says club member John Koerner. "Small waterways become wider until their banks disappear underwater, resulting in a lake and eventually a large bay. Without resources, this marshland will surely be lost forever and our children will not have the opportunity to enjoy waterfowling at this location." Hurricanes take their toll on the marshland, but they only contribute to the problem. "Even when there is not a severe hurricane, the open-water ponds continually enlarge themselves at the expense of their own shorelines. Many of the duck blinds, which were originally placed on the edge of a pond, soon find the shore has retreated and left that blind uselessly twenty or thirty feet out into the pond. What was just [in the 1990s] a series of potholes is now an area of broken marsh and large ponds. Each time the wind blows or the tide flows, the natural organic soil of the marsh is mixed with the water and goes out forever with the next tide." Club members have noticed some improvement, however. Recent rock levees placed along the Barataria Seaway and the new Davis Pond Siphon from the Mississippi River have increased the amount of fresh water entering the club's leased marshland. The fresh water has produced "healthier grasses, which hold the organic soil together."

Clark Cormier, manager and guide at Cherry Ridge Hunting Camp fifteen miles south of Lake Arthur, also has noticed wetlands loss in his area. "We have an erosion problem where we have lost about eighteen inches of depth in the marsh [since the 1970s]," he says. "We are currently trying to approach government departments to attend to this problem."

Jim Bel at Hackberry Hunting Lodge works at protecting his 8,000 acres. He keeps water salinity balanced and has rebuilt levees. He also constantly adjusts water levels in the marsh to attract waterfowl, fish, deer, alligators, and

other wildlife. On the drawing board is a project with Ducks Unlimited to re-terrace the marshes. Keeping salinity levels balanced is important, Bel says, for this permits varieties of grass to grow that attract ducks. “I have always felt that God has allowed me to own this land,” he says, “and I realize that I am simply a steward of this beautiful marshland. . . . You can help Mother Nature along but you can’t control it. Marsh management is water control. You don’t want it too salty but you don’t want it too fresh.”

Several club members have noticed some improvement in the marshlands in recent years, especially in efforts to control the intrusion of salt water into freshwater marshes. Doug Miller, land manager at Grosse Savanne, agrees that Louisiana has lost much of its valuable coastal and inland marshes to erosion. Part of that loss has been attributed to the widening and deepening of the Calcasieu ship channel in the mid-1900s. Lake Charles greatly improved its port, but it also introduced destructive salt water in the upper end of the watershed. Marshes and grasslands became open lakes. In recent years, however, considerable effort has been made in the region to control saltwater intrusion and restore the wetlands. Through grants from the Breaux Act, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and other federal grants, several projects were completed to restore the marshes, including a nineteen-mile hurricane protection levee with gates managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to control salinity levels in freshwater marshes. The terraces constructed by Ducks Unlimited are providing platforms to grow grass and are breaking high winds. “We’re seeing definite improvements,” says Miller. “We’ll never regain the historic marsh that was here. That took thousands of years to form. But we’re taking what was starting to be a bad thing and swinging it back around and making it productive again.”

When one talks with members of duck-hunting clubs, common interests appear—love of the outdoors, hunting, camaraderie, and the importance of conservation. Almost all belong to Ducks Unlimited and most clubs have programs or contribute to the restoration and conservation of the wetlands. Two members of the Bayou Club, which has fifty members nationwide, belong to the Governor’s Commission on Coastal Restoration and Conservation. In February 2003, Louisiana governor Mike Foster recognized the Coastal Club’s efforts in a special proclamation marking the club’s seventy-fifth anniversary. He congratulated the club for being “the oldest land-based and

continually-operating duck hunting club in the state of Louisiana that owns its own property and exists under its original organizational structure.” But more important, the proclamation praised the club’s “exemplary wildlife management, fish restocking and conservation practices” and “proven private conservation efforts [that] can successfully protect our precious coastal areas by managing water levels to enhance our fish population, control grass and maintain areas conducive for duck hunting.” The document concluded by proclaiming that the Coastal Club’s “accomplishments provide a model of preservation behavior for other Louisiana citizens who love the coastal marshland and enjoy the wonderful opportunities it affords for hunting and sport fishing.” In November of the same year, Ducks Unlimited presented the club with a similar proclamation that praised the club’s conservation efforts.

After all the talk of coastal erosion and declining waterfowl numbers, Oran Richard gets to the true reason why he and so many hunters rise on cold, dark mornings to sit in damp blinds worlds away from busy jobs, warm kitchens, and the morning news: “I love watching that sunrise and that sunset. If you enjoy nature, this is a beautiful spot. The roseate spoonbill, egrets, the black and white ibises are out there by the thousands in the spring and summer. They have huge rookeries out there. There’s five or six spots out there where they nest; it’s like snow in those trees.” As to camp life, “[I] like to sit on this porch, smoke a cigar, and watch the sun set and have some good cookin’ from Miss Edith’s stove in her kitchen.”

JULIA SIMS

In recent years, Julia Sims has traveled extensively throughout Louisiana, visiting generations-old private and commercial duck-hunting clubs located along swampy bayous, grassy rivers, and lakes and in remote coastal marshes and prairies. Along the way, she has met remarkable people who are as much in love with the beauty and glories of nature as she. Each club has stories to tell. They are about the sport of hunting, wetlands conservation, good food, and traditions. But most important, they are about family and friendships.

Sims reflects upon the thousands of miles traveled, scores of clubs visited, and long hours spent in damp, cold blinds waiting for the right moment. “At

first I thought they were interested only in hunting,” she says of the club members. “That was certainly a big part of why they were there, but they are also greatly concerned about the disappearing wetlands in Louisiana and the declining number of waterfowl. They are fun-loving but disciplined and they pay close attention to shooting limits.”

Sims, a Baton Rouge native and longtime Ponchatoula resident, is an exceptional nature photographer who captures ethereal images that touch something deep within us all. Since the 1970s, photography and nature have become major forces in her life. The beauty, the artistic expression, the Louisiana swamp, and the journey into that other world have helped Sims deal with difficult times in her own life. Simply observing natural beauty was not enough for her. Through photography she could participate in the natural drama. After taking a beginner’s “this is your camera” course at Newcomb College in New Orleans, she signed up for wildlife photography workshops around the country taught by some of the best shooters in the business. Her work gradually improved so much that by the mid-1980s she had a contract with the Peter Arnold Agency in New York, one of the most prestigious stock photo houses in the nation. In addition, her work has appeared in *National Geographic* as well as in an impressive list of other publications and books, including the 1996 landmark book on Louisiana’s Manchac Swamp.

Sims’ fascination with Louisiana’s wetlands began when she was growing up in Baton Rouge. During frequent family automobile trips to New Orleans along Airline Highway, she loved to let her imagination wander into the seemingly impenetrable dark swamps that came up to the highway’s edge. These were the days before interstate highways and air-conditioned cars. Catching a cooling breeze meant opening the window. “I remember hanging out the car window as we drove through Lutchter and seeing the southern edge of the beautiful Manchac Swamp. I can remember thinking, ‘What’s back there?’ There was just that wall. To think, now I’m back there. Maybe even then there was something there that drew me.”

Nature photography requires immense patience. Photographers must submit themselves to nature’s schedule and rhythms, not the clock. “In photographing sunsets and sunrises, I look for color,” Sims says. “The prettiest light is forty minutes before sunrise and forty minutes after sunset. You see this magnificent glow. The red glow starts with washed-out pinks and then gets

deeper and deeper. You could take a picture every minute until the sky darkens.” Getting good images of ducks and geese in the marsh requires similar patience. “Many of these shots were taken in refuges, marshes, and at duck clubs before and after hunting season,” she says. “I often sat by myself in water nineteen degrees, waiting for the perfect shot after carrying forty pounds of camera equipment through cold, muddy marsh to a hiding place. At times, thin sheets of ice surrounded me. [Since 2001], the duck population has decreased drastically, which means I would sit in these conditions for hours and not see a duck. I’d often ask myself why I was doing this, but I knew I loved just being there in nature where I feel peace.” She also tries to capture wildlife undisturbed. “When I photograph wildlife, I don’t like to startle them. I hide so they don’t know I’m even there. I want them seen in nature.” There were times when she got calls from club members and others, urging her to be there the next morning so she would find thousands of ducks “you can get right up on” to photograph. The next morning, she would rise at 3:30 and drive for hours to the club, only to find no ducks. “You should have been here yesterday” became a familiar refrain. Sims recalls other occasions when she and a friend, Dwain David, crawled on their bellies, carrying a thirteen-pound camera lens, to get just the right photographs of geese. Other times, she shared stands in the marsh with the hunters’ retrievers. “After fetching the duck, the retriever would give the bird to the hunter and then return to his stand where I was sitting and shake off the icy water all over me.”

And then there was the predicament dreaded by all photographers. Sims, who serves on the state pardon board, was scheduled to photograph Billy Rucks’ Florence Club near Gueydan during dinnertime. Unfortunately, she was running late after a long day of hearings at Angola State Penitentiary. “I was on the phone with Billy, telling him to go ahead and eat with his guests, but he insisted on waiting for me. I arrived in a pea-soup fog about 8:30, an hour and a half late. I ran in with my camera, still dressed in my suit from the hearings. There, waiting for me, were all these smiling, eager faces. When I went to shoot, I realized my camera had no film. I ran back out to my car to get my ice chest where I keep my film cooled. No ice chest. No film. I had left it home two hundred miles away. Those eager faces turned to shock when I broke the news to them. They called around to stores in Lafayette trying to

find film, but I explained to them that I use only professional film. Billy was forgiving and invited me back the next weekend. The following week, I did return to get my photos. While eating, Billy stood up, toasted me and this book, stating he believed that with all the problems of having no film the previous week that this book should be titled *The Florence Club and Other Duck-Hunting Clubs of Louisiana*.”

As Sims traveled from club to club, she also was impressed by the number of women duck hunters, including Louisiana governor Kathleen Blanco, the Coastal Club’s Beck Crowell, Cindy Harris of Pecan Brake, Cajun Way’s Theresa Vincent, Section 14 Club’s Susan Holloway and Jerry Schwing, Jenna Fae Justiss of Whitehall Plantation, Little Pecan Island Preserve’s Cherie Flores, and three generations of Lake Arthur Club women—Patsy O’Brien, her daughter Mary Frances, and granddaughter Kate. “These and others are remarkable women who are hunters who simply enjoy being out in nature.”

When Sims talks about her experiences in the swamps and marshes, her thoughts drift inward to a private and beautiful world that she permits others to enter only through her photographs. “I have enjoyed the beautiful marshes, the sunsets and sunrises. The marsh is wide open and you can see forever. You see the sun come up and hear those geese flying,” she whispers. “Something just comes over me. It’s an inner peace that I get out there.” She especially enjoys being in the marsh on foggy mornings, when the cool, damp air enshrouds the landscape. “Many times, I’d be back there when the fog rolls in off the lake and you couldn’t see. I would stay two or three hours. Sounds in the fog are even more intense. You just lie down in the boat and listen and then watch the fog lift. It’s like being above the tree line in another world. Every minute is a new picture.”

NOTES

1. Gary Koehler, “View from the Gulf,” Ducks Unlimited Web site, August 2002; Bob Marshall, “Troubled Waters,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 12, 2003; Robert Helm, telephone conversation with author, January 2004.

2. Marshall, “Troubled Waters.”

3. “Administration Decision Supports Wetlands Protection,” Ducks Unlimited Web site, December 18, 2003.

4. “Duck Numbers Up,” Ducks Unlimited Web site, July 3, 2003.

5. “Louisiana Coastal Wetlands—Cameron Prairie WMA,” Ducks Unlimited Web site, 2002.

6. *Coast 2050: Toward a Sustainable Coastal Louisiana*, Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force and the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Authority, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, 1998; Janet McConnaughey, “New Survey of Plaquemines Parish to Be Released Thursday,” Associated Press, September 25, 2003; “Washing Away—The Sinking of Louisiana,” Louisiana State University Web site, August-December 2003; “100+ Years of Land Change for Coastal Louisiana,” U.S. Geological Survey, National Wetlands Research Center, Lafayette, La., 2003.

7. Keith O’Brien, “At Home in Harm’s Way,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 13, 2003.

8. Mike Dunne, “Governor Calls for ‘Holy War’ to Restore State’s Wetlands,” *Baton Rouge Advocate*, August 16, 2001; “Restoring Coastal Louisiana: A Resource for the Nation,” U.S. Geological Survey, National Wetlands Research Center, Lafayette, La., Winter 2002.

9. *Coast 2050, an Executive Summary*, p. 9.

10. Mark Schleichstein, “Wetlands-Saving Projects Could Start by Spring,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 11, 2003.

DUCK CLUB FAVORITE RECIPES

AVOCA DUCK CLUB

Captain Larry's BBQ Baby Back Ribs

4 tbsp. lemon pepper
2 tbsp. Creole seasoning
1 tsp. garlic powder
2 racks baby back ribs
2 bottles Kraft Honey BBQ Sauce

Mix dry ingredients in a small bowl. Rub this seasoning on both sides of ribs. Place ribs on BBQ pit or butane grill for 15 minutes on both sides. Baste ribs with some of the BBQ sauce when taken off grill. Stack ribs on top of each other in a foil-lined Dutch oven or baking pan with lid. Pour remaining BBQ sauce over ribs. Cover and bake at 375 degrees for 2½ hours. Serves 5-6.

CAJUN WAY HUNTING LODGE

Pot Roasted Duck

Duck
Mustard
Tony Chachere's Seasoning
1 lb. smoked sausage, sliced (optional)
Water
½ cup chopped parsley
1 tbsp. minced garlic
1 oz. chopped jalapeno peppers
½ cup chopped onions
½ cup chopped green onions

Remove skin from duck. Cut up duck in pieces like a chicken. Smear mustard over the bird and add Tony Chachere's Seasoning to taste. Put the bird and sausage in black cast-iron pot and turn heat on high with the lid on. Let it cook until moisture is gone and you can start to hear it sizzle or fry. Then take the lid off and add ½ cup water. Stir the meat around to unstick from bottom. Fry meat until golden brown. Do not let burn. Add ¼ cup water. Cook until the water is almost gone. Repeat this process three times, then drain grease. Cover meat with water and add the parsley, garlic, jalapeno peppers, onions, green onions, and Tony Chachere's Seasoning to taste. Replace lid. Cook on high heat for 1 hour. Reduce heat to low and cook for ½ hour. Serve over rice.



Water provides a mirror while these birds enjoy a morning swim.

CHERRY RIDGE HUNTING CAMP

Pop Ice Cream

- 14 oz. Borden condensed milk
- 12 oz. Pet milk
- 12 oz. whole milk
- 20 oz. Barq's Red Creme Soda

Mix all the ingredients together. Place the container in the freezer and stir every 30 minutes until the dessert is frozen. Then enjoy.



COASTAL CLUB

Coastal Club Seafood Gumbo

- 2½ gal. water
- ¾ pt. Savoie's Roux
- ¼ lb. smoked pork sausage cut in ¼"-¾"-in. pieces
- 1 lb. smothered okra
- 1 tsp. shrimp base
- 2 tbsp. dried bell pepper
- 2 tbsp. dried parsley
- 2 tbsp. dried onion
- 1 cup diced white onion
- 1 lb. crabmeat
- 2 lb. shrimp
- Cayenne pepper
- Black pepper
- Garlic powder
- Salt

Boil water and roux together until foaming stops. Add sausage, okra, shrimp base, dried herbs, and onion. Simmer on low heat for 45 minutes. Add crabmeat and shrimp and simmer an additional 30 minutes. Season to taste with cayenne pepper, black pepper, garlic powder, and salt.



DUPONT CUTOFF FISHING AND HUNTING CLUB

Crab Soup by Chef Joe Arabi

- 1 stick margarine or butter
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- Chopped parsley
- 3 green onions, chopped
- 3 cans cream of celery soup
- 1 cup water
- 1 lb. lump crabmeat
- 1 pt. half and half
- ½ tsp. liquid crab boil
- Salt

In the margarine or butter, sauté celery, parsley, and onions. Add soup and water and bring to a boil. Then add crabmeat and half and half. Bring back to a boil, shut off heat, and add crab boil and salt to taste.

FLORENCE CLUB

Chicken 'n' Dumplings

- 1 5-6-lb. hen, cut in serving pieces and seasoned
- ¼ cup olive or cooking oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 medium bell pepper, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 5 cloves fresh garlic, chopped
- Water
- 1 cup sliced green onion tops
- ½ cup chopped parsley

Brown chicken in oil on medium heat. Remove chicken. Add onions, bell pepper, celery, and garlic. Sauté until caramelized. Return chicken and add water to make gravy. Water should barely cover chicken. Cook on medium heat for 1 to 1½ hours or until chicken is tender. Add more water to level of chicken. Turn heat to low. Add dumplings by dropping tablespoonsful of batter into pot. Do not overlap. Cook on low for ½ to 1 hour. Add green onions, parsley, and more seasoning if needed.

DUMPLINGS

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. sugar
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- 1 tsp. cayenne pepper
- ¼ cup minced green onions
- ¼ cup minced parsley
- 1 egg
- Water

Combine all ingredients except water in bowl. Add water until batter is somewhat thicker than pancake batter.

4 SQUARE DUCK CLUB

Pâté

- 1 lb. Jimmy Dean Hot Sausage
- 2 8-oz. pkg. Oscar Mayer Braunschweiger
- 8 oz. cream cheese
- 1 bunch green onions, minced
- 1 4¼-oz. can chopped black olives
- 3 tbsp. water

Cook sausage until crumbled and done. Drain. Cube Braunschweiger and cheese. Using a potato masher, or a dough hook in a mixer, mix all ingredients to make a smooth, well-mixed pâté. Spread on crackers. Can freeze in small portions.

4 SQUARE DUCK CLUB

Carrots and Grapes

2 tbsp. butter
6 tbsp. brown sugar
6 tbsp. Grand Marnier
Dash cinnamon, nutmeg, and allspice
3 tsp. cornstarch
6 tsp. water
1 lb. baby carrots
1½ lb. seedless green grapes

Melt butter in saucepan. Add brown sugar and Grand Marnier. Whisk to mix. Let mixture come to a slight boil. Light with match to burn off alcohol. Make sure vent hood over stove is off. Add spices. Mix cornstarch and water. Stir into mixture and whisk until slightly thickened. Set aside. Boil or steam carrots until soft but not mushy. Use a toothpick to test while cooking. When cooked, set aside. Slice grapes in half lengthwise. Add grapes to pot of carrots. When ready to serve, add brown-sugar mixture, tossing carrots and grapes to coat. If necessary, warm entire dish.

GOOSE LAKE CAMP

Fig Cake and Glaze

2 cups flour
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. cinnamon
1 tsp. nutmeg
¼ tsp. ground cloves
1½ cups sugar
1 cup oil
3 eggs
1 cup buttermilk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 cup fig preserves
1 cup chopped pecans

Sift flour with salt, baking soda, and spices. Stir in sugar. In mixer, beat in oil and eggs, then buttermilk and vanilla. Stir in figs and pecans. Pour into greased and floured tube pan. Bake for 1 hour at 325 degrees (may need 15 more minutes).

GLAZE

1 cup sugar
1 tbsp. white Karo syrup
½ cup buttermilk
1 stick margarine
1 tsp. vanilla extract
½ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. cinnamon
¼ tsp. nutmeg
¼ tsp. ground cloves

Mix all ingredients and cook 10 minutes. Pour hot glaze over baked cake while still in tube pan and let cool. It will absorb the glaze slowly. After about 2 hours, turn out onto a plate.

GROSSE SAVANNE LODGE

Gayle Fontenot's Crabmeat Appetizers

1 onion, minced
3-4 stalks celery, chopped
1 stick butter
Salt
Black pepper
Cayenne pepper
2 tbsp. all-purpose flour
1 cup half and half
1 lb. crabmeat
15-20 slices bread
Melted butter
Finely shredded cheese

Sauté onion and celery in 1 stick butter until translucent. Season to taste with salt and peppers. Add flour and stir until it disappears. Add half and half and stir over low heat until thickened. Remove from heat and add crabmeat. With a small cutter, cut 4 rounds from each bread slice. Butter them well with melted butter. Toast in 350-degree oven until light brown. Cool slightly and top each round with 1 tsp. crab mixture and then cheese. Return to oven and bake until cheese is melted and lightly browned. Makes 60-80.

HACKBERRY HUNTING LODGE

Mrs. Margaret Anne's Coca-Cola Ducks

4-6 full-sized ducks
1 tsp. garlic salt
1 tsp. chili powder
2 tsp. Cajun seasoning
1 tsp. cayenne pepper
1 tsp. white pepper
2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
2 tbsp. Louisiana hot sauce
2 tbsp. cooking oil
1 (12 oz.) can Coca-Cola
1 cup catsup
2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
2 tbsp. Louisiana hot sauce
1½ tbsp. prepared mustard
1 cup light brown sugar

Rub ducks with garlic salt, chili powder, Cajun seasoning, peppers, and 2 tbsp. each Worcestershire and hot sauce. Heat oil in a large Dutch oven and brown ducks on all sides. Drain off excess oil when done. While ducks are browning, in a large bowl mix together Coca-Cola, catsup, 2 tbsp. Worcestershire, 2 tbsp. hot sauce, mustard, and brown sugar. Pour over browned ducks. Bring mixture to a boil, then lower heat and place lid on pot. Cook on medium to low heat, stirring occasionally, until ducks are tender, about 1½ hours. Serves 4-5.



A local entrepreneur advertises his trade.



Two greenheads are unfazed by the splashing arrival of a visitor.

HACKBERRY ROD & GUN

Martha's Stuffed Duck "Pot Roasted"

Ducks or geese, cleaned
Pan sausage (half mild and half hot mixed together)
Hackberry Rod & Gun Secret Seasoning Spice
4 tbsp. olive oil
Water
Fresh mushrooms, cut up
2-3 tbsp. Kitchen Bouquet
Cornstarch dissolved in cold water

Stuff birds with cooked sausage and sprinkle seasoning on outside. Brown in olive oil on top of stove in a heavy iron pot (very important), turning often, until very dark. Add water to almost cover birds. Add mushrooms and Kitchen Bouquet. Bring to gentle boil and cover with tight lid. Simmer until falling from bone (3-5 hours). Remove birds and thicken gravy with cornstarch. (This is the only way I have found to completely tenderize ducks or geese and remove all wild flavor.) Serve over wild or regular rice with gravy from ducks. Also serve with sweet potatoes, rolls, and iced tea.

K&J HUNTING AND FISHING LODGE

Redfish Courtbouillon by Julie Carlson

10-20 fish filets
Tony Chachere's Seasoning
1 onion, chopped
1 bell pepper, chopped
Oil
1 10-oz. can Ro-tel tomatoes
1 15-oz. can tomato sauce
2-3 tbsp. roux
1 15-oz. can water

Cut up fish, season, and set aside. Sauté onions and bell pepper in a little oil. Add tomatoes, tomato sauce, roux, and water. Let sauce simmer on very low heat for about 30 minutes. Turn up to medium high and add fish to sauce. Cook for about 10-15 minutes. Serve over rice. Serves 4-6.



LACASSANE LODGE

Deluxe Spoonbill Recipe

Ducks
Cream cheese
Jalapeno peppers, chopped
Bacon

Remove breast from ducks. Slit breast and stuff with cream cheese and jalapeno peppers. Wrap with bacon and secure with toothpick. Place on hot grill. Sear each side until bacon is cooked. Eat immediately.

LAKE ARTHUR CLUB

Lake Arthur Ducks

Canola oil
6-8 ducks
Garlic powder
Onion powder
Tony Chachere's Seasoning
Salt and pepper
1 large onion, minced
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 stalks celery, minced
Water
1/2 onion, minced
2 tbsp. minced garlic

Cover bottom of pot with oil. Season ducks well with garlic powder, onion powder, Tony Chachere's Seasoning, salt, and pepper. Put the 1 minced onion, 4 minced cloves garlic, and celery under skin of each duck breast. Brown on all sides in oil, being careful not to burn seasoning in bottom of pot. (This will be the base for the gravy.) When ducks are golden brown, add enough water to the pot to reach halfway up the sides of ducks. Cover and cook until water has cooked out. Turn ducks over and add water. Continue this process until ducks are tender. When ducks have become tender, add the 1/2 onion and 2 tbsp. garlic to pot. Continue to cook until reaches consistency of gravy. Remove ducks and put on a platter, leaving onions and duck residue in pot. Add enough water to make gravy. Bring to boil until consistency is right. Serve over ducks and rice. This dish is a must on the second night of the hunt.



A male mallard flutters its wings.

LAKE ARTHUR CLUB

Apricot Casserole

- 6 cans apricots, drained
- 1 small box light brown sugar
- 1-1½ sleeves Ritz crackers
- 1 stick butter

Put apricots in bottom of an 11x13 glass dish and cover with brown sugar. Crumble Ritz crackers on top. Slice butter and evenly place on top of crackers. Bake at 350 degrees for 30-45 minutes. This melts in your mouth and goes great with ducks.



LAKE ARTHUR CLUB

Best Queso Ever

- 1 lb. Velveeta cheese
- 1 can Ro-tel tomatoes, half-drained of juice
- 3 tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 fresh jalapeno, minced (less if you don't like it too hot)
- ¼ lb. ground beef, browned
- ¼ lb. chorizo sausage, browned
- 2 avocados, chopped

Melt Velveeta with Ro-tel tomatoes. Add cilantro and jalapenos. Add meats. Stir all together. Reheat if necessary. Add chopped avocados and serve with tortilla chips.

LE CAMP CANARD

Grilled Duck

Duck breasts
Water
Italian salad dressing
Tony Chachere's Seasoning
Lemon pepper
Cajun Power garlic sauce
Bacon
Jalapeno peppers

Cut breast of a large duck into 4 pieces or breast of a small duck into 2-3 pieces. Soak in water for 30 minutes and then drain. Marinate for 20 hours in Italian salad dressing, along with Tony Chachere's Seasoning, lemon pepper, and garlic sauce. Cut each strip bacon into 2 pieces. After marinating the duck pieces, wrap each with 1 piece bacon and 3 pieces jalapeno pepper. Cook on barbecue pit for 35-45 minutes until golden brown.

LITTLE LAKE HUNTING CLUB

Miss Bettie's "Little Lake Duck"

Ducks
Salt
Cayenne pepper
White pepper
Garlic powder
Melted butter
White onions
Bell peppers
Celery
Parsley
Water
Flour

To thoroughly clean ducks, split open lengthwise and remove "debris" from inside. Lay ducks open in a clean sink or large pan and liberally sprinkle on salt, cayenne pepper, white pepper, and garlic powder. Knead, by hand, all ingredients and spread all over ducks. Spread a little melted butter in the bottom of a metal roasting pan with 4-6-in. sides. Chop white onions, bell peppers, celery, and parsley into medium chunks and mix together in separate bowl. Spread some of these veggies in the bottom of the buttered pan. Put ducks in pan 2 abreast, breast side up. Put more veggies on top of ducks. Pour some melted butter on top of ducks and add water to about $\frac{3}{4}$ in. from the top of the ducks. Cover metal pan very tightly with aluminum foil (doubled over at edges). Cook in oven at high temperature for approximately 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours (varies with sizes of ducks). Remove aluminum foil cover, baste ducks with liquid in pan, and continue to cook uncovered for approximately 15-20 minutes (this is to brown ducks). Remove ducks from oven and remove ducks from pan. Put pan on stove over medium-low heat and let cook for approximately 20 minutes (do not boil rapidly; just allow a light bubbling, if any). In a separate pan add melted butter and stir in flour. This forms a pastelike mixture. Slowly add this into the liquid cooking on the stove and stir. This thickens gravy. Place ducks in a serving pan, add liquid gravy, and serve.

LULU'S HUNTING CLUB

Lulu's Dirty Rice Recipe

1½ lb. ground duck gizzards
2 tbsp. roux
½ cup chopped onions
Salt and pepper
1½ cups water
1 cup cooked duck gravy
6 cups cooked rice
¼-⅓ cup chopped green onions

Brown gizzards, roux, and onions for about 10 minutes. Season to taste. Add water and duck gravy. Cook for about 45 minutes. Stir in rice and green onions.



MCGOWAN BRAKE CLUB

Beef Tenderloin by Mark Anderson

Start with a whole, trimmed beef tenderloin. Rub with extra virgin olive oil, then with the following spices: McCormick's Broiled Steak Seasoning, salt, lemon pepper, and McCormick's Grill Mates Montreal Steak Seasoning. Sear over very hot coals on all sides, turning it with fingers or tongs (do not use a fork or knife to turn or cut into during the cooking process; puncturing the loin allows the juices to escape). This takes about 10 minutes to sear all sides. Then place loin on side of grill away from direct heat and allow to cook for approximately 30 minutes. Baste during cooking with a mixture of butter, lemon juice, and Worcestershire sauce. Remove from grill and let sit 10 minutes before carving to serve.

OAK GROVE CLUB

Anna's Wild Ducks

10 wild ducks, thoroughly washed
Salt and pepper
Large pieces onion
Large pieces celery

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Season the ducks inside and out with salt and pepper and stuff cavities with onion and celery. Place ducks breast up in a roasting pan and brown in oven 30-40 minutes. Remove from oven and discard all drippings from the pan. Place ducks breast down in roasting pan. Turn oven down to 350 degrees.

SAUCE

3 8-oz. cans tomato sauce
2 6-oz. cans frozen orange juice concentrate (thawed)
¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
1 cup burgundy (or your favorite red) wine
¼ cup brandy
3 whole bay leaves
3 cloves garlic, minced

Mix the sauce ingredients in a saucepan, bring to a simmer, and pour over ducks. Cover the pan and place in the oven. Cook approximately 2½-3 hours or until tender. Baste ducks several times while cooking (the cooking time will vary depending on the size of the ducks). When the ducks are tender, remove bay leaves, then plate ducks. Reserve and defat sauce while ducks rest. Pour reheated sauce over ducks before serving. Serves 10.

OAK GROVE CLUB

Oak Grove Oyster Pie

6 cloves garlic, chopped
2 onions, chopped
2 bell peppers, chopped and seasoned to taste
4 stalks celery, chopped
1 stick butter
2 tbsp. roux
2 qt. oysters (well drained)
Salt-free Tony Chachere's Seasoning
Lemon pepper
Garlic salt
Cracker crumbs
2 boxes 2-layer Pillsbury Piecrusts
Half and half

Sauté vegetables in butter until done (onions are clear and tender). Add roux and stir until melted and well mixed. Add oysters and cook about 15 minutes. Season with Tony Chachere's Seasoning, lemon pepper, and garlic salt. Put a layer of cracker crumbs on the bottom of the piecrusts. Pour in oyster filling. Sprinkle some cracker crumbs on the top and cover with piecrusts. Spread a little half and half on top of slit crusts and bake at 350 degrees until crusts are brown, about 40 minutes. Makes 2 9-in. pies.



After his morning guide, Red shucks oysters for Oak Grove Club's oyster pie that evening.

PECAN BRAKE LODGE

Braised Speckled-belly (White-Fronted Goose)

Plucked goose, either speckled-belly or Canada
Tony Chachere's Seasoning
Garlic powder
1 qt. jar sauerkraut
½ bottle dry red wine
14 oz. can chicken broth
1 tbsp. cornstarch
1 shot dry sherry
Tabasco Sauce

Season goose liberally with Tony Chachere's Seasoning and garlic powder. In a heavy covered roaster, brown goose well in its own fat and reserve. Rinse sauerkraut under cold water and drain. Stuff the goose well with the rinsed kraut and tie legs. Place goose in roaster and pour wine over goose. Cover and braise at 325 degrees for approximately 3 hours until legs are loose in their sockets. Remove goose to platter, immediately cover with foil, and let rest while making sauce. Degrease drippings in a gravy separator. In a saucepan, combine half of the chicken broth with the cornstarch. Add drippings and heat until sauce thickens, stirring with a whisk. Adjust thickness of sauce with remaining broth. Adjust seasoning with sherry and Tabasco. Serve goose with sauce.

PECAN BRAKE LODGE

Snipe with Grapes

8 dressed and picked snipe
Tony Chachere's More Spice Seasoning
½ cup all-purpose flour
¼ cup butter
½ cup chicken broth
1 tsp. chopped garlic
Tabasco sauce
1 cup seedless grapes
2 tbsp. chopped pecans
1 tsp. lemon juice
4 slices toast, buttered

Season snipe with Tony Chachere's seasoning and dust with flour. Melt butter in skillet on medium heat. Brown snipe on all sides. Add broth with garlic and Tabasco. Cover and cook on low heat 10 minutes (no longer). Add grapes and cook 10 minutes (no longer). Do not overcook snipe. They should be pink and tender. Stir in nuts and lemon juice until heated. Serve 2 snipe per slice of toast and top with pan juices and grapes. Serve with a good, crisp Chardonnay and fruit salad for lunch or light supper.

SAVANNE NUVELLE

Baked Duck by Darlene Taylor

Cleaned ducks
Chopped onion
Chopped garlic
Salt
Cayenne pepper
Yellow mustard
Wine
Cooking spray
4 cups water

Cut slit in each side of duck breast. Stuff with mixture of onion and garlic. Sprinkle salt and cayenne pepper all over ducks. Cover ducks with mustard. Put in bowl or plastic bag and pour any kind of wine over ducks. Let marinate at least 24 hours before cooking. Spray a heavy roaster with cooking spray. Place ducks in pan, pouring the marinade over ducks and adding a little more wine over ducks if desired. Bake covered in oven at 375 degrees for about 2 hours. The bottom of ducks should be very brown. Add water. Cover again and bake for approximately 1 hour.

SAVANNE NUVELLE

Bread Pudding by Darlene Taylor

1 loaf bread
6 eggs
1 cup sugar
6 cups milk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
½ cup raisins (optional)
½ stick margarine

Put all ingredients except margarine in a bowl and let sit about 30-45 minutes for bread to absorb milk. Mash with hands and pour into a greased 9x13-in. baking dish. Top with pieces of margarine. Bake at 350 degrees for about 1 hour. Texture will be a little soft but that is what makes it pudding and not cake.

SAUCE

3 sticks margarine
½ cup powdered sugar
¾ cup brown sugar
2 tsp. rum extract

Melt margarine. Add sugars and rum extract. Stir, pour hot over hot bread pudding, and serve. Hunters at Savanne Nuvelle expect this dessert every night.

SECTION 14 HUNTING CLUB

Fried Chicken by Rhonda Miller

2 cutup fryers
Tony Chachere's Seasoning
Garlic powder
5 eggs
1 can Pet milk
Flour
2 tbsp. baking powder
Cooking oil

Rinse fryers in running water and season with Tony Chachere's Seasoning and garlic powder. Place in large bowl or pan. Beat eggs with Pet milk and pour over chicken. Let fryers sit for about 2 hours in egg mixture. Season flour in a large bowl with Tony Chachere's Seasoning, garlic powder, and baking powder. Sprinkle a little of the seasoned flour over chicken, then roll fryer pieces in seasoned flour, shaking off excess. In a large magnalite pot, pour enough oil to cover chicken pieces. Heat oil on high to medium-high heat. Add chicken, cover pot, and let cook for 10-15 minutes. Check fryers frequently to make sure they are not burning. Then turn pieces and continue cooking until fryers are done, making sure there is no blood remaining in chicken. Remove chicken and drain on paper towels. To make gravy if desired, pour oil out of pot, keeping flour remains in bottom. Add a little more flour and brown. Add water to make gravy. Serve on mashed potatoes with biscuits and mustard greens.

SECTION 14 HUNTING CLUB

Road Kill by Rhonda Miller

1 lb. Jimmy Dean Sausage
1 12-oz. can Ro-tel tomatoes (regular or extra hot,
depending upon your taste)
8 oz. cream cheese
Corn chips

Brown sausage in skillet and drain off grease. Return sausage to skillet. Purée tomatoes and add. Add cream cheese. Heat until combined. Serve hot with corn chips.

WHITEHALL PLANTATION

Roast Duck

3-5 frozen ducks
Salt
1-2 onions
2 bay leaves per duck
1 pt. cooking sherry
¼ cup cooking oil
1 cup water
¼ stick butter
2 2-oz. bottles onion juice
1 tbsp. chopped parsley
1 tbsp. sage
½ tsp. cayenne pepper
1 tsp. white pepper
1 pkg. Uncle Ben's Wild Rice (or more if needed)

Thaw ducks in cold water. Salt inside and out. Put ¼ onion and 2 bay leaves inside each duck. Place ducks, breast down, in a large roaster. Heat sherry, oil, butter, water, onion juice, parsley, sage, and both peppers to a boil and pour all of mixture over the ducks. Put the top on the roaster and cook at 350 degrees for 4-5 hours until ducks fall apart. Cut ducks in half and place back in juice to prevent drying. Serve ½ duck to each person with rice. May use juice over rice.

WHITE LAKE HUNTING CLUB

Cajun Oyster Pie

3 celery hearts
1 bell pepper
1 cup chopped parsley
2 cups sliced green onions
1 stick butter
Cracker crumbs
1 gal. fresh oysters
Salt and pepper
2-4 tbsp. Pet or Carnation milk

Mince celery hearts, bell pepper, parsley, and green onions and cook in butter until wilted. In greased casserole dish or bowl, put one layer of cracker crumbs, one layer of oysters with salt and pepper, and one layer of cooked ingredients. Continue layers ending with cracker crumbs. Add milk before last layer of cracker crumbs. Bake in oven at 350 degrees for 1 hour or until top layer of crumbs is browned.