



SPREAD OAKS RANCH

Go Deeper Into the Heart of Texas



JULY 2019 NEWSLETTER



Book the October Bowhunting Adventure of a Lifetime

Prime habitat, lack of hunting pressure, and excellent range conditions coalesce at Spread Oaks Ranch to present outstanding bowhunting opportunities September 28-November 1

With a total of 5,500 acres of prime Texas mid-coast habitat, Spread Oaks Ranch is poised to become your next destination for a bowhunting trip of a lifetime.

"We're seeing 145-to-200 class bucks on the property," says Business Manager Tim Soderquist, "and not just in the 'inner heart' of the ranch, which is high-fenced, but along the Colorado riverbottoms as well, where we are seeing solid native deer. As we manage for trophy deer year-round, this is not surprising."

A total of four bowhunting packages will be offered in 2019, as follows:

- ★ FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4-SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6
- ★ FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11-SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13
- ★ FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18-SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20
- ★ FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25-SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27

Your custom-tailored bowhunting weekend will begin with a Friday afternoon arrival, followed by scouting with your guide. Upon your return to the lodge, Chef Ric Rosser will delight your palate with his signature farm-and-field cuisine.

You will hunt on Saturdays and Sundays, selecting your setup from a range of box and ground blinds, or by positioning yourself in one of our majestic live oaks.

Luxurious lodging, chef-prepared cuisine, libations, ranch activities (such as swimming, fishing, target shooting, and hog hunting), and field dressing/quartering/packing for transport are included in the all-inclusive fee. Cost for two hunters pursuing quality native white-tailed deer, with up to four non-hunting guests, is \$10,000.

For costs of hunts for 180 class and larger deer, please contact Soderquist.

To book your dream hunt, contact Business Manager Tim Soderquist at (281) 814-5442 or at tim@spreadoaksranch.com.



JOIN US FOR THE INAUGURAL BOWHUNTING SEASON AT SPREAD OAKS RANCH: ABOVE: Hunt from a box blind, a ground blind, or from one of our ancient live oaks; BELOW: Unhunted 145-to-200 class deer in excellent body condition abound on Spread Oaks Ranch, thanks to prime range conditions and year-round management.

Lodge's Decoy Collection Highlights Texas Master Carvers

A curated collection researched and selected by waterfowl historian R.K. Sawyer



Carved working decoys are a thoroughly American folk art that uniquely reflect the culture and the hunting styles of the people who crafted them. There are only a handful of Texas decoys both historically valuable and of collectible quality. Arguably the best workmanship came from carvers who hunted along the Trinity River in the upper reaches of Galveston Bay, and lived in the towns of Winfree and Baytown. Spread Oaks Ranch is pleased to have procured working decoys from this region, the product of local carvers dedicated to continuing a nearly hundred-year-old tradition.

The signature style of Trinity River decoys includes the flat-to-gently curved back of the body, or "block," and the graceful form of the head and neck. The painting is remarkably detailed for working decoys. One of the characteristics of Trinity River area decoys is their light weight, a result of using cypress root that carvers, still to this day, collect by hand using a bow saw, axe and wedge. After drying, the decoy that took life from a block of wood was crafted using nothing more sophisticated than a hatchet, knife, and a hand plane.

Texas' best-known area carver is **Rudolph 'Rudy' J. LeCompte**. Born in 1910, Rudy got his start from Louisiana's famous Mark Whipple, and carried the Whipple tradition with him after he moved to Baytown in 1936. In most years, Rudy carved an average of 80 to 100 decoys, a pace he maintained for nearly 40 years. Rudy first sold his decoys for a dollar apiece, but by the 1950s they commanded a \$4 price tag. Today, they

can sell for as much as \$1,500. The LeCompte carving style was synonymous with Baytown decoys for many decades through the work of other area carvers, notably H.B. Creekmore, Walter Brewer, and Deer Park's Oliver Townsend. Today the Rudy LeCompte and Baytown style lives on through Mark Byford and Walter Brewer's son Dennis and grandsons Travis and Nathan.

Mark Byford grew up in Baytown with an appreciation for the decoy carvers around him. He was in his 40s when he decided to honor their legacy by learning to carve their decoys. "I had a deep admiration for Rudy LeCompte's style and the way he painted," he says. "I wanted to learn to carve 'em the same way and paint the same way to honor the legacy." Hand carving with only a palm planer and a pocket knife was a challenge, but Mark recalls that painting was even harder. "I asked Baytown legacy carver Ollie Townsend what the trick was to painting the 'C-dot' feathers. Ollie told me they were done with a single brush stroke, and the best way to learn it was to 'get a 1" x 6" x 20' board and paint the C-dot pattern all up and down one side, turn it over, then do the same thing on the other side. After that, you might be ready to paint a decoy!" Mark laughs when he remembers how long it took him to create a good-looking decoy, and says, "I threw the first 80 away!"

Little did he know how much work lay ahead of him when, in 1971, Rudy LeCompte and **Walter Brewer** dragged a teenage **Dennis Brewer** to the Trinity River bottoms to cut cypress

(Continued on next page)

Texas' Master Decoy Carvers, continued



Decoys carved by Mark Byford, 2018

root. After selecting trees with the right shape at the base, they exposed the root by digging through the muck, then cut no more than one root from each tree with double-bladed axes. They collected enough on just a few trips for each of the older carvers to use the rest of their lives, with some still left over for Dennis and his sons to use nearly 50 years later.

Walter, one of Rudy's mentees, carved working mottled ducks, blue-winged and green-winged teal, pintails, and mallards. All of his working birds were drakes—he never carved any working hen decoys. Dennis taught his own sons, Travis



Decoys carved by Dennis Brewer, 2018

and Nathan, how to hunt using those carved decoys. "We didn't know how special they were," they say. "We thought everyone had carved blocks. We still hunt over them today."

Dennis and his sons first learned to carve Walter's working style and then began to develop their own variations. Like Walter, they make their decoys with cypress bodies and use tupelo gum for heads. All three remember that, wherever Walter went, he usually brought a block of cypress, a hand planar and pocket knife, and sat down to carve. Nathan and Travis recall "We'd leave for school in the morning and Paw-Paw would be

carving a new block when we left. When we'd come home, and he'd be working on the feather detail. He would sometimes carve all day."

Walter died in 1993, and didn't live to see his 2013 induction into the *Decoy Magazine* listing of America's Master Carvers, or his recognition as a Legacy Carver in 2017 by the Louisiana Antique Decoy Collectors. When they were notified of the Legacy Carver award, 14 Brewer family members attended the Baton Rouge Antique Decoy Show to celebrate the event. The plaque was received by Mrs. Walter Brewer.

Mike Tilton is the great-grandson of Amos Tilton, who was born in Winfree in 1899. Amos first began carving his elegant mallard decoys behind his house, and later in a caretaker shack next to the Champion Paper and Fiber Company lodge on the



Decoys carved by Mike Tilton, 2018

Trinity River where he worked as a guide. His style is very different from the Baytown carvers, but Mike notes: "the heads are similar to Rudy LeCompte's and H.B. Creekmore's. And you know, Rudy and the Baytown carvers all hunted at Pickett's Bayou Hunting Club, right now next door to Amos, so they likely had an influence on each other."

Mike watched Amos carve when he was a boy, and he taught the youngster to carve with just a pocket knife. Years later Mike started carving seriously, judiciously studying the details of Amos' decoys so that he could recreate the family tradition—right down to the leather loop for the decoy line. Mike says that "the first thing you notice about the Amos style is the high neck band. And if you see a decoy with painted or glass eyes, somebody else added those later, because Amos never gave his decoys eyes. Mike noticed how the head designs changed over the years, and discovered that on Amos' early decoys the heads kept coming off, so he worked on a pattern that was more durable. Today, Mike is teaching his son Grant Michael, 12, how to carve—bringing the art to five generations of Tiltons. Fittingly, Amos was carving a decoy in the shed behind his house when he died in 1984. Thirty-three years later, Mike was there to pick-up Amos' Legacy Carver award presented to him by the Louisiana Antique Decoy Collectors in 2017.

Leapin' Lizards: Book Your Trophy Alligator Hunt Now!

Limited number of tags still available for September 10-30 season

Alligator hunting at its best is a signature Spread Oaks Ranch experience, and we're delighted to offer a few choice dates in September for guests to enjoy this thrilling hunt.

For 2019, Spread Oaks Ranch is offering three mid-week alligator hunts in September, as follows:

★ TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 10-THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

★ TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17-THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

★ TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24-THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

Your Spread Oaks Ranch alligator hunting weekend will begin with a Tuesday afternoon arrival, followed by scouting with your guide. Upon your return to the lodge, Chef Ric Rosser will delight your palate with his signature farm-and-field cuisine.

All lodging, meals, libations, and ranch activities (such as swimming, fishing, target shooting, and hog hunting) are included in the all-inclusive fee. The package is for two hunters, with up to four non-hunting guests.

To book an alligator hunt, contact Business Manager Tim Soderquist at (281) 814-5442 or at tim@spreadoaksranch.com.



GREETINGS, GATORS: Two alligators, harvested from Spread Oaks Ranch, stand sentry at the lodge's main entrance and overlooking the grounds from the dining room.

In the Kitchen and Afield with Chef Ric Rosser

Canning, preserving, fermenting among ways Chef Rosser preserves summer's bounty

Summer's swelter isn't preventing Chef Ric Rosser from delving into the best the season has to offer in both cultivated and wild crops.

July's wild fruits include both mustang grapes and elderberries—the former lacing through the trees along the Colorado River and Blue Creek, and the latter clumping together in low-lying areas near the ranch headquarters.

Chef Rosser is stocking the lodge's pantry with wild jams and jellies—as well as crafting fermented sodas with wild fruit.

In addition, Chef Rosser is pickling cucumbers, carrots, okra, and other produce to accompany the charcuterie grazing boards that he will create for guests, centered by his house-cured heritage hams and house-made sausages.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: A peek inside the Spread Oaks lodge pantry reveals glistening rows of house-canned delicacies; Chef Rosser picking wild mustang grapes along the Colorado River; Chef Rosser prepares sausage for smoking; Chef Rosser making egg-rich dumplings for his signature chicken-and-dumplings.



Fowl Play

Barnyard chickens and ducks provide eggs, table fare, and amusement for Spread Oaks Ranch guests



COMING NEXT MONTH:

In the August newsletter, we'll highlight Spread Oaks Ranch's duck dogs, guides, and retriever training expertise as we gear up for September teal season.

Sign up for our newsletter at spreadoaksranch.com—don't miss a single issue!

*"Ninety minutes from Houston,
yet a world away."*

Visit Spread Oaks Ranch online at spreadoaksranch.com.

To arrange your adventure, contact Business Manager Tim Soderquist at tim@spreadoaksranch.com or (281) 814-5442.

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