

THE *South's Great* LAKES



This month we celebrate our favorite still waters, each with a distinct personality. Find the one that suits you best!

BY DAVID HANSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL HANSON

North Georgia's Lake Rabun celebrates the Fourth of July with a parade of classic wooden boats and more.





**NATURE LAKES
NEAR YOU**

Big enough to see from space, **Florida's** Lake Okeechobee is a critical habitat for migratory birds. Famous for fishing, **Georgia's** Lake Seminole balances primordial wetland and wide-open lake. The clear, blue waters of **Oklahoma's** Broken Bow Lake protect more than 250 species of birds.

Naturalist Numbers:
 Species of birds: **216**
 Species of trees and shrubs: **189**
 Species of fish: **86**
 Species of reptiles: **58**
 Species of amphibians: **27**
 Species of mammals: **47**
 Threatened or endangered species: **32**

Tunnels of cypress trees create an ideal habitat for a diverse range of species.

WHY WE LOVE IT: Few lakes envelop their visitors like Caddo. It feels ancient and primordial, like a scene depicted in a science book's prehistoric chapter. The pristine water spreads oil-black—an ebony marble-like slab that disappears beneath lush green water lilies and wraps around the trunks of bald cypress. Thick aquatic vegetation and corridors of cypress create a labyrinth for exploration. Outlaws and pirates have hidden out here, and some suspect it could still be refuge for a more innocent character, the possibly extinct ivory-billed woodpecker. One of only 29 internationally recognized wetlands in the U.S., Caddo harbors so many unique species you'd think it was a major port-of-call for Noah's Ark (see Naturalist Numbers).

THE SIGNATURE BOAT: The canoe is the best way to feel this lake's stillness, as the Caddo Indians did by dugout. (Go to oldportcaddo.com for details on canoe rentals.) If you prefer someone else to do the paddling, board the *Graceful Ghost* (gracefulghost.com). Caddo Lake's signature tour boat, it's an authentic re-creation of a paddle-wheel steamboat that harkens back to the glory days when steamboats chugged up and down Caddo's channels, transporting coal and cotton. Nowadays, the lone steamer adds some whimsy to the mysterious nature of Caddo Lake.

THE CADDO RITE OF PASSAGE: Paddling around the narrow finger peninsulas of Goat Island in the swamp part of Caddo. (See Insider Tip, below.) Maybe you'll be one of the lucky few to see the rare alligator snapping turtle, the largest freshwater turtle in the United States.

WHERE TO STAY: On the northwest side of the lake, in Uncertain, Texas, **Lafitte's Landing Guest Quarters'** private New Orleans-style shotgun cottages sit beneath the cypress trees (from \$120; caddolodging.com). Each cottage has its own Acadian and Creole touches.

INSIDER TIP: Pick up a swamp boat—and guide John Winn—at Caddo Outback Tours (caddolaketours.com). John will point into the canopy of moss-draped cypress limbs to the spindly legs of the wood stork or the bright yellow of the prothonotary warbler.