

There's nothing quite like the satisfaction and adrenaline of pulling that giant beast out of the water and into your boat after a thrilling fight! It's what keeps alligator hunters coming back night after night, year after year - the hope and anticipation of landing that once in a lifetime monster! I've been hunting alligators for years and have witnessed a substantial increase in interest in the sport over recent years. When I first started alligator hunting, you only had one day to fill your tag. There weren't as many people that

hunting, a friend and I volunteered to take a tag holder (whom neither of us knew) in my boat on opening night of the 2011 season. None of us had ever hunted alligators before, but we had done our homework and thought we were up for the task. We were eager to try out all our new equipment. We were armed with my Hydro Strike fishing bow fitted with the AMS Big Game reel and loaded with Fast Flight 400 pound test line. This was a rig designed with a buoy attached that completely detaches from the bow when deployed (much more suitable

To our surprise, this "runt" turned out to be an 8'1" male. My hopes of snagging a giant for the tag holder was over. Since a legal runt tag is for a gator between 4 and 7 feet in length - and catch and release is unethical and illegal when bow hunting alligators - this one had to fill his trophy tag instead of the runt tag. It was a rookie mistake on our part, but the tag holder wasn't totally disappointed. His only goal was to fill his two tags, and he was thrilled to complete that goal later in the night.

For me, this was a lesson learned. There is no catch and release with a



Scott Berry and son, Holston, with a 9' 1 1/2" female tagged by Scott Berry and a 12' 10" alligator tagged by Josh Thrash on his private land in 2011.

Photo: Josh Thrash

ADRENALINE & *the Driving Force*

BY SCOTT BERRY

did it, and the information about it was sparse. Now, the time you are given to fill your tag is 10 days, and there is more information about products, equipment and hunting techniques. The sport is growing and the interest is skyrocketing. I've definitely learned a lot since I first started. I've made adjustments to my equipment and techniques based on my successes and failures, but one thing that has remained consistent from the beginning is having a bow and arrow in my boat.

The very first time I went alligator

for alligator hunting than a regular bow fishing rig). The arrow was a solid fiberglass shaft equipped with a red glowing Luminock, and tipped with an Interlock 3 blade grappler fishing point.

It didn't take us long that night to find a gator that we all agreed would be a good runt to harvest. The tag holder decided he wanted to try shooting the gator with my bow, so I got the boat close to the gator. He made a great four yard shot in the back. After a short fight, we dispatched the gator, got him in the boat and measured his length.

gator that has been shot with archery tackle, so make sure you know the size of your target before you shoot! Since that first night, I have learned a lot about hunting alligators, mostly through trial and error. I now have had the experience of putting forty tagged gators in my boat. And still, estimating the size of a gator in the water is tough. For this reason, I hardly ever use a bow to harvest a runt because of that tough lesson I learned on night one.

Maybe surprising to some, using a bow and arrow to harvest large alligators can be very effective,

especially in certain habitats. Although a rod and reel is the most common method of hunting alligators, when hunting in high grass, sunken timber or heavy debris, it can become tricky to keep from breaking lines. This is the prime reason I like to have a bow when alligator hunting. Losing your trophy because of a broken line is heart breaking.

The extra strength of the 400 to 600 pound bow fishing line compared to the smaller line on a rod and reel can be the difference between harvesting a gator or never seeing him again after

grass or lily pads where throwing fishing rods can be difficult or even impossible. I have lost gators that broke 150-pound braided fishing line using a rod, but never had a gator break my archery tackle. I've had hooks bend, break, or just come out, but with a well-placed arrow I have never lost a gator.

I can remember taking a friend and his wife (who was the tag holder) hunting on a small river with lots of debris and logs. The gator we were after dove under the logs and would then come back up for air on the other

buoy was our saving grace. Each time the buoy would re-surface, we could grab the line and continue the fight. Eventually, he got tired and we were able to dispatch her 11-foot trophy. I'm confident this hunt would have turned out much differently had we been hunting only with a rod and reel.

Hunting alligators with a bow



Scott Berry on opening night of 2012 season with 11 foot gator.

Photo: Jessica Leggette

ANTICIPATION of Alligator Hunting



Photo: Jay Leggette

Ricky Flynt measuring the length of Robert Mahaffey's 2014 state record gator that measured 13' 1 1/2" long and 756 lbs.

that gator swims through debris or under logs and breaks your line. Bows also work great when hunting around



Brian Montgomery with his 2014 state record alligator that weighed 792 lbs and was 13'5" long. Also pictured are Scott Berry and Jesse Phillips. Photo: Ricky Flynt

side. He continued swimming down river, weaving below logs and other debris. I have lost many gators with this type of behavior when using rod and reels, but on this occasion we had a well-placed arrow fitted with a floating buoy attached to the end of the line. That heavy duty line and



Brian Montgomery's 2014 state record alligator being removed from trailer to be weighed. Photo: Scott Berry

has its advantages and disadvantages. For some hunts, a bow is absolutely essential – and for others its not needed at all. But as for me, I will never be on an alligator hunt without having my bow handy, and I encourage all alligator hunters to add a bow to their arsenal if they aren't using one already.