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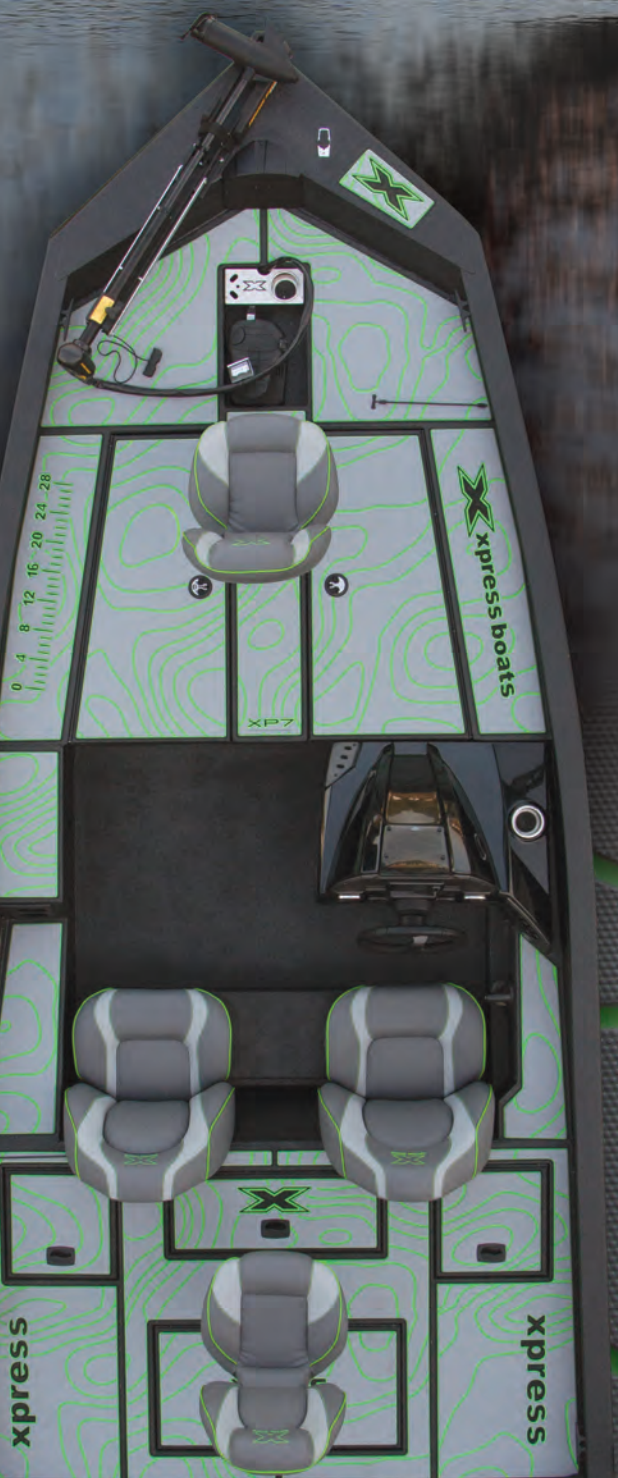
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Winter bass on the skinny

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Outdoor UPDATE with Dan Kibler

Dan Kibler *is managing editor of Carolina Sportsman magazine. If every fish were a redfish and every big-game animal a wild turkey, he wouldn't ever complain.*

Kevin Snead (center) and crew members Jody Gay (left) and Kimberly Snead won a record $127,755 at the King Cup championship held out of Ocracoke, N.C., on Nov. 4. Snead's 48.4-pound mackerel was the biggest caught in the event, and the crew also caught a 33-pound fish to win the aggregate prize.

SHOWS, HEARINGS: THAT'S JANUARY

TAKE A LOOK AT NEW BOATS AND TACKLE, HAVE A SAY IN NEW REGULATIONS

As far as months go for outdoor activities, January ranks pretty far down the list in the Carolinas. Deer season is over, and a lot of fishermen are sitting out the winter in front of the fireplace, watching the NFL playoffs.

First off, grab the calendar and get to work marking down some important dates. Boat and fishing shows will line up across both states this month, and they're worth attending, if only to see how the other half lives. Personally, I won't be writing a check for a 31-foot center console fishing bullet. But I might write a check for some fishing tackle.

The Grand Strand Boat and Sportsman Expo kicks show season off Jan. 4-6 at the Myrtle Beach Convention.

The Bass and Saltwater Fishing Expo follows the next weekend, Jan. 11-13, at the N.C. State Fairgrounds. The Carolina Outdoor Expo is Jan. 19-20 at the Greenville (N.C.) Convention Center. The same two days, Haddrell's Point Tackle, one of the top tackle shops in the Charleston, S.C., area, holds its annual Shallow Water Fishing Expo at the Shrine Temple in Mount Pleasant, S.C.

These four shows offer sportsmen at least a chance to listen to informative seminars and getting a look at the latest in boats and tackle. A fifth show, the Mid-Atlantic Boat Show at the Charlotte Convention Center, is Jan. 25-27. This show doesn't have as much of a fishing theme as the others, but plenty of boats should be on display.

NC REGS CHANGES

Sportsman in North Carolina get a say-so on proposed changes to hunting and fishing regulations at a series of public hearings scheduled by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission in January.

The schedule looks like this:

Jan. 8, Bladen C.C., Dublin, N.C.;
Jan. 9, Old Alamance County Courthouse, Graham;
Jan. 10, Stanley County Agri-Civic Center, Albemarle;
Jan. 15, Haywood C.C., Clyde;
Jan. 16, Western Piedmont C.C., Morganton;
Jan. 17, Elkin High School, Elkin;
Jan. 22, Chowan Co. Public Safety Center, Edenton;
Jan. 23, Craven C.C., New Bern;
Jan. 24, Nash C.C., Rocky Mount.

All hearings begin at 7 p.m.

Several proposals worth noting: lowering the minimum size for crappie on Jordan Lake from 10 to 8 inches; implementing a 25-fish creel limit and 9-inch size minimum on crappie at Kerr Lake; opening rabbit season the Monday on or nearest Oct. 15 instead of the Saturday before Thanksgiving; and opening a season for fox squirrels in all 100 counties, plus closing the season Jan. 31 instead of Dec. 31. ▪

SC TURKEY HARVEST OFF

Turkey hunters in South Carolina tagged 17,939 turkeys during the 2018 spring season, a 6.4-percent drop from 2017 levels.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources said that, according to its mail survey, hunters took 16,145 gobblers and 1,794 jakes during the March-April season, down from 19,171 turkeys in the 2017 season.

The decrease was the first since the state legislature changed turkey season dates in 2016, increasing dramatically the length of the season in 34 of the state's 46 counties.

Charles Ruth, SCDNR's wild turkey project leader, wrote in the annual turkey harvest report that reproductive success over the past five years has been estimated as the lowest five-year period on record, which would result in fewer birds in the forests and fields to hunt.

Top counties for overall harvest this past spring were: Williamsburg (935), Berkley (832), Orangeburg (746), Fairfield (742) and Colleton (718). Counties with top harvests per square mile were: Union (1.7), Spartanburg (1.4), Cherokee (1.3), Anderson (1.3) and Fairfield (1.2). ▪



South Carolina hunters didn't have a great spring turkey season in 2018, experiencing a decrease in the harvest of almost 1,800 birds.

Dan Kibler

SWORD DRAWN



Ryan Keany of Manteo, N.C., boated this 528-pound swordfish out of Oregon Inlet on Oct. 14. The fish was 87 pounds heavier than the existing state record, but the use of an electric reel disqualified the fish from possible record status.

SC OPENS THREE NEW DOG-TRAINING AREAS

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources recently announced the opening of three public bird dog-training areas on designated portions of certain Wildlife Management Areas.

The training areas now open in South Carolina are:

- The entirety of the Angelus WMA in Chesterfield County;
- A portion of the Cliff Pitts WMA in Laurens County;
- A portion of the Landsford Canal WMA in Chester County.

On these areas, anyone with a valid hunting license and Wildlife Management Area permit can train bird dogs between Sept. 15 and March 15, except for Sundays. Dog trainers may release and take pen-raised quail or pigeons for training purposes, only within the areas designated by posted signs reading: "Bird Dog Training Area."

"The average person that does not own a sizable tract of rural land has little opportunity for training a bird dog," said Michael Hook, SCDNR's small-game program leader. "We borrowed this idea from Georgia, where public dog-training areas have proven very popular, and we believe our constituents will appreciate the opportunity as well." ▪

SC MOUNTAIN BLACK BEAR HARVEST IS NO. 2 ALL-TIME

South Carolina's 2018 mountain bear harvest was the second highest on record, with 124 bears taken in the 13 days of hunting.

During the week-long still hunt, 55 bears were tagged, and 69 more were tagged during the week of dog hunting. The breakdown was 66 males and 58 females taken in three counties.

Oconee County had the highest harvest: 51 bears, which included 12 boars and three sows on the still hunt and 19 boars and 17 sows during the dog hunt.

Hunters in Pickens County took 47 bears: eight boars and 11 sows during the still-hunt season and 11 boars and 17 sows on the dog hunt.

Greenville County hunters took 26 bears: 15 boars and 6 sows on the still hunt, one boar and four sows on the dog hunt.

The biggest bear taken during the 2018 season was an Oconee County boar taken on a dog hunt that weighed 519 pounds.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources pointed to pockets where a heavy acorn crop was present as a reason that multiple bears could be found in small areas. ▪



South Carolina had a great mountain bear season this past October, with 124 bears taken in three counties.

BEAR FACTS

The coastal third of North Carolina continues to produce some of the world's biggest black bears, and the 2018 season has been no different. Matthew Griffin of Clayton, N.C., killed this 616-pound bear in Craven County on Nov. 17.



SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Zack Laws of Newland, N.C., took this non-typical Avery County trophy on Nov. 29. It scored 169 inches gross.



Travis Gaines tagged this huge, 11-point buck in Alamanace County, N.C., on Nov. 3, with a muzzleloader.



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SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Greg Robertson of King, N.C., dropped this 157-inch, 9-point Stokes County buck with a muzzleloader on Nov. 10.



Jeremy Howard of Lillington, N.C., killed this 225-pound, 10-point,149-inch buck on Nov. 8, at Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield, S.C. The buck was the biggest ever taken on Cherokee Run's properties.



Alec Kearns tagged this 145-inch, 10-point buck in Granville County, N.C., on Oct. 28.



Dale Morgan of Angier, N.C., killed this 11-point, 153-inch Harnett County giant on Nov. 10.



Mark Tinsley of Allendale, S.C., killed this 147-inch, 10-point buck on Nov. 4. He had earlier put a bullet in the buck on Sept. 11.



Thomas Cook dropped this 12-point, 144-inch buck in Moore County, N.C., on Nov. 24.



Phillip McBryde of Matthews, N.C., killed this huge 10-point, 170-inch buck on Nov. 11 in Anson County.

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SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Chase McLean of Boone, N.C., killed this 162-inch, 11-point Watauga County buck on Thanksgiving Day.



Jonathan Chermak took this 143-inch, 226-pound Mecklenburg County, N.C., buck on Nov. 17.



Travis Manuel of Winston-Salem, N.C., tagged this 147-inch Forsyth County buck on Nov. 16.



Joshua "Fatback" Sellars tagged this 145-inch buck in Chesterfield County, S.C., on Nov. 9.



Jason Dunn of Snow Camp, N.C., killed this 141-inch Alamance County buck on Nov. 21.



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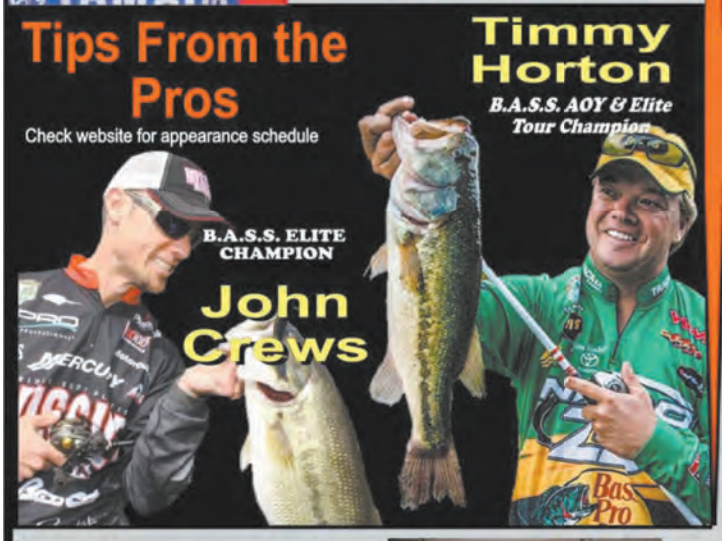


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SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Think Jim Belushi was a cool school administrator in "The Principal"? How about Stephanie Wray, principal at Western Rockingham Middle School in Madison, N.C., and this 8-point buck?



Karley Davidson of Carthage, N.C., took this 150-inch Moore County buck on Nov. 13.





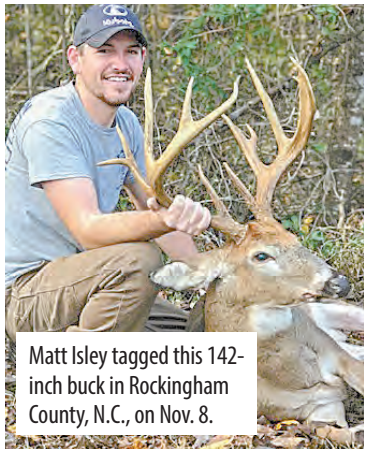
What a sister act! Lila League (left) 7, from Summerfield, N.C., killed this 10-point buck on Nov. 11, the day after 9-year-old sister Laurel took an 8-point trophy.



George Mattison of Trinity, N.C., killed this 18-point Forsyth County buck on Nov. 17.



Chase Watson of Oxford, N.C., killed this 150-inch Granville County buck on Nov. 10.



Matt Isley tagged this 142-inch buck in Rockingham County, N.C., on Nov. 8.

DUCKS on the CLOCK

Waterfowl hunting is one of the most-popular outdoor activities in the country, and January is the last month that duck hunters can sit in brush-covered blinds sending high-dollar shotgun loads skyward at winged bounty. But with only a few weeks of the season remaining, ducks aren't as easy to lure into a decoy spread as when they first arrived; hunters must pull out all the stops to return to the homestead with a limit in hand.

North Carolina and South Carolina are littered with high-quality wintering habitat for ducks and geese. Not only do farmers and landowners with waterfowl impoundments have groceries available for incoming flocks, the two states have thousands of acres of natural habitat teeming with energy rich forage for the large portion of the migrating flocks heading down the Eastern Flyway.

By Jeff Burleson

Waterfowl hunters need to adjust their calling, decoy spreads and locations as January arrives and the end of the season approaches. Here's how two guides face late-season challenges.



Jeff Burleson

While ducks won't think twice about picking up and flying to greener pastures 100 miles away when food reserves dry up,

the majority of the migration is over by the end of December. Ducks using local bays and swamps are going to stay around for the rest of the season unless something or someone gives them a reason to relocate.

Food is critical for ducks during the winter. Migration is a major drain since ducks burn 12 times more energy flying than anything else they do. A duck can burn more than a million calories between Canada and the Southeast, making local food availability in wintering areas extremely important for ducks and hunters. Ducks will gobble up as much food as they can to restore their fat reserves after they arrive, and after they have finished that task, they go into a maintenance mode, with less emphasis on feeding and more time spent resting away from danger zones.

Activity will increase or decrease with the change in the weather. A bluebird day in January when the mercury spikes into the 70s may keep duck flights at their lowest ebb, but when a front shows up with wind and frozen precipitation, ducks will be actively looking for food.

Matt Bellamy of Captain Matt's Guide Service in Pawleys Island, S.C., lives and breathes duck hunting. From the Santee Delta to the marshes around Georgetown's Winyah Bay, Bellamy spends more time on the water with a shotgun in hand than anywhere else. On those warm, bluebird days of January, it can be challenging.



Jeff Burleson

ABOVE: Late-season ducks will notice anything out of the ordinary around your hidey-hole, so re-grassing or re-brushing your blind or boat blind will help keep ducks from staying away. **BELOW:** Find a spot that has plenty of the food that ducks love and you can count on some late-season action.



A TIME TO REFRESH:

Spruce up your decoys and blinds

By January, ducks have earned masters–level educations from duck hunters scattered from Canada to the southern states. They have learned to pick out deficiencies in a duck hunter's setup to survive another day in the wild.

To get these little fliers into range, hunters' camouflage and decoy spreads must be immaculate.

Guide Matt Bellamy concentrates first on keeping ducks in the dark.

"My No. 1 rule is concealment, and movement can be a terrible problem," Bellamy said. "I have a teepee blind, and there is nothing exposed on my boat. It is completely camouflaged with natural grass and other stuff from the surroundings where I hunt."

"I re-grass my blind midway through the season to make sure I am completely concealed."

Bellamy hunts mostly in brackish waters and close to the saltwater/freshwater dividing line. In these areas, he makes sure he uses native cover to make his boat blend in. But if he is hunting in areas with abundant pine trees, he will change his blind setup with pine saplings.

In addition to blind rehab, Bellamy also invests time in his decoys. After dragging his decoys into and out of his boat 30 or 40 times, his decoys get beat to death, and the paint jobs will often take a real beating.

"Ducks are in full plumage this time of year, and decoys need to be immaculate. On bluebird days when ducks aren't flying, I use that time to re-paint or touch up decoys to make sure there is nothing ducks will reject on that final flight into shot gun range," he said. ■





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"Some days, I don't even bother going," said Bellamy (843-568-8203). "In flooded timber in Arkansas, you need sunshine to bring the birds in, but around here, we need wind and weather to push them out of impoundments."

The area around Georgetown is littered with acres of impoundments filled with native vegetation or crops from planted agriculture options. Luckily, the impoundments are hunted so frequently that ducks are flushed out onto the main bodies of water in the region.

Bigger waters are where hunters can take a limit quickly in January, whether ducks are being flushed out of impoundments or are just looking for the company of a big flock for protection.

Jennings Rose of North State Guide Service hunts out of Oriental, N.C., and spends his days chasing ducks from the sloughs off the Neuse River to the big water of the western Pamlico Sound. In 15 years of hunting the area, Rose knows where to go and what to do when ducks respond to pressure as the season wanes.

"We change tactics in the latter part of the season because ducks get educated," said Rose (910-231-7741). "We change up our decoy spread and slide off the bank. Birds start getting bank shy."

Especially during the early season, hunters are predominantly hunting along the shorelines where there is abundant food and cover. Pressure will send ducks into open water where they raft up and avoid danger, but they can also feed over clam and mussel beds in deeper waters.

"We have three boats, and at least one of us will be out scouting, looking to see where the birds are. They will move around to different areas, and we have to keep track of them to keep our people in the action," Rose said.

When he finds them, Rose will pull significantly off the banks and use larger decoy spreads to mimic the natural flocks found

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As the end of the season approaches, leaving the comfort of the marshes to move and hunt in big water can help you squeeze out a few more ducks.

on scouting trips.

"The divers on the sound really raft up into bigger groups, feeding on the clam beds out there, and we mimic these large groups with larger decoy spreads. We will use between 60 and 120 decoys. If you can come close to three figures on decoys, you are doing pretty good," he said.

North Carolina's Pamlico Sound is close to being the largest body of water on the east coast. In that massive expanse of water, a large decoy spread is critical to being seen by birds cruising around away from the marsh.

When moving off the bank, the water gets deeper, and that makes Rose switch to a deep-water setup. He starts using large strings of decoys on gang rigs, and he needs to be efficient deploying and recovering them. He uses a unique setup to get his decoys out in a hurry.

"We use gang rigs of decoys hooked on heavier line. We add loops to gang lines and cinch decoys to loops with zip ties so that they shoot right out of the barrel," Rose said.

Not only do ducks get accustomed to danger along the shorelines, hunter tactics can alert weary flocks.

Bellamy changes his tactics to keep the ducks at ease.

"I don't call as much," he said. "By this time of year, ducks have heard about every mallard call there is. I do more peeping on whistles than with a standard mallard call. You just want to get their attention with the call, and then I let the decoy spread do the rest."

In addition to less calling, Bellamy wants more motion in his decoy spread. Movement will give an incoming flight more confidence, but motion devices may not always produce good results.

"Mojo decoys with spinning wings can be wonderful, but most of these ducks learned about these in Canada before they came to South Carolina," Bellamy said. "If they aren't working and (are) flaring off birds, take them down. I do like movement on the water, though. I will still use a jerk string to keep the decoys moving around and looking as natural as possible."

Even though ducks have brains the size of a marble, they learn how to survive, and no matter how much food is available in a particular area, ducks will avoid the Vegas-style buffets when hunting pressure rises around them. For the best results, adopt a larger spread, call less, and make every shot count to prevent a college-level education for ducks. ▪

MAKE INFORMED DECOY CHOICES
UP NEXT

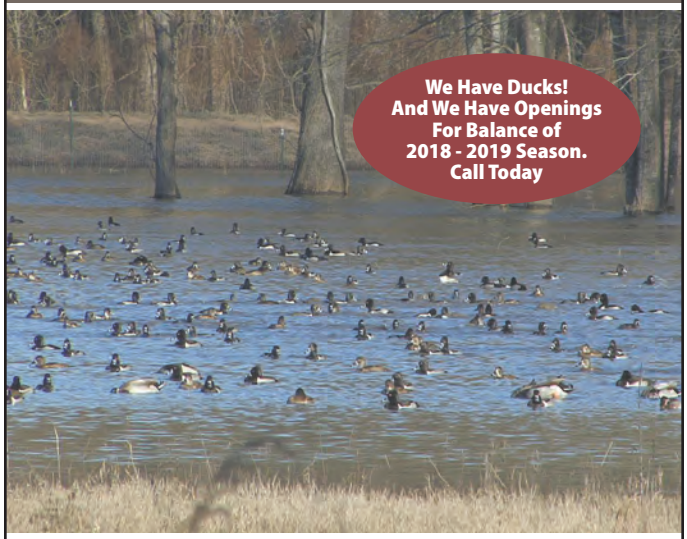


Jeff Burleson *is a native of Lumberton, N.C., who lives in Myrtle Beach, S.C. He graduated from N.C. State University with a degree in fisheries and wildlife sciences and is a certified biologist and professional forester for Southern Palmetto Environmental Consulting.*

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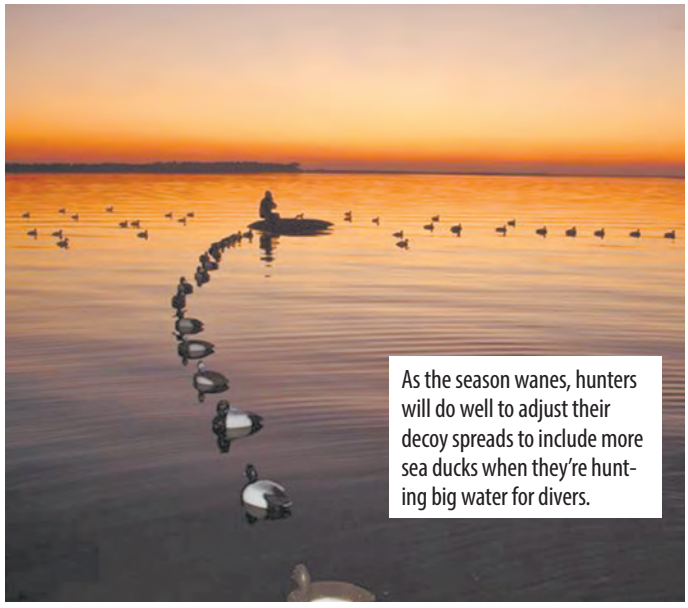
Watch What's Happening Now, Follow Us On

Make informed decoy CHOICES

It only takes the bare minimum of a shotgun, non-toxic shot, a license and a duck stamp — and some skilled shooting — to take a mess of ducks home to the dinner table.

But, the bare minimum can only suffice in a swamp or for hunters who know exactly where to stand on a passing flock. More likely, hunters will have lots of money invested in decoys, calls and other high-tech equipment. For some duck species, the color of decoys can make a huge difference between shooting and listening to crickets.

Decoy manufacturers make options to match every species that use the four North American flyways. While gadwalls, mallards and widgeon will have no problems decoying into a mixed spread of puddle ducks or even a set of white-backed bluebills, sea ducks are more keyed in on decoys that look similar to their own, God-given paint jobs.



As the season wanes, hunters will do well to adjust their decoy spreads to include more sea ducks when they're hunting big water for divers.

Jeff Burleson

Guide Jennings Rose predominantly hunts the big waters of the North Carolina's Pamlico Sound in his scissors blind. While he takes his fair share of black ducks, pintails and widgeon nearshore, he concentrates on the bigger rafts of divers and sea ducks in January.

"We shoot more puddle ducks early in November and December. In the late season, we concentrate on divers," Rose said. "When you get used to hunting that far offshore, you get a good showing of sea ducks, too."

Sea ducks can be found along the ocean front all the way to the larger sounds like the Pamlico and the Albemarle. When he finds a big raft of sea ducks, he changes his entire decoy spread.

"We use long strings of all-black decoys to mimic scoters. Sea ducks will not decoy into white or spreads of diver decoys," he said.

In the Carolinas, black scoters, white-winged scoters, and surf scoters are the most-common sea ducks. From above, they appear to have all-black blacks, and they like to sit on the water with their own kind. In addition, some goldeneyes and eiders will show up on rare occasions. ▪





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WORLD CHAMP'S CALLING RECIPE

By Todd Masson

KNOW WHAT CALLS TO MAKE AND WHEN TO MAKE THOSE DUCKS COME INTO VIEW

World-champion duck caller Mike Smith, who spends nearly every day of duck season hunkered in a marsh blind, is an aggressive caller, and he makes no apologies for it.

"I call from the moment I see them until I pull the trigger," he said.

But before he ever blows a call, Smith tries to gauge the mood of the birds he sees.

"First, you have to learn how to read the birds, whether they've just been shot at or are heading somewhere far away, or whether they're looking for somewhere to land," he said. "I've got customers who want me to call at every duck in the sky. You're really just wasting your time when you do that."

Once Smith determines that a far-off duck or flock is looking for a place to land or otherwise callable, he sets up a progression of calls.

SOUND 'RIDICULOUS'

Smith's first effort is a 20-note hail call, which he admits "sounds ridiculous."

But there's a method to his madness.

"If it's windy, those ducks are only picking up pieces of that long string of notes," he said. "It's like if you were on one side of the Superdome and I was on the other, and I screamed 20 words to you. You might only hear two or three words."

GREETER STATUS

If his first call elicits some interest, Smith will hit them with another hail call if the birds are far off, or if they're closer, blow five-note greeting calls.

"The closer they get, the more natural you have to sound," he said.

KEEP THEM INTERESTED

Once it's obvious the birds have seen the decoys and are showing strong interest, Smith will hit them with repeated three- to five-note greeting calls. These calls are short in duration, and are intended to make the ducks feel very welcome.

"I really get excited with the call," he said. "It's constant 'quack-quack-quack, quack-quack-quack, quack-quack-quack.' I used to stop calling when the birds got that close, but now I find it's better to keep them interested."

TWEET, WHISTLE

If the ducks pass the blind, Smith continues with the fast series of greeting calls, especially if the birds continue to look interested.

When they're just about ready to commit, Smith will mix in some tweets on his pintail/widgeon whistle, even if there are no pintails or widgeon in the flock.

"It gives the birds confidence that those are real ducks down there," he said. "Especially late in the season, that's important. Those birds have heard hard calling for months."

The only time Smith lays off the call is if the birds circle directly over the blind.

"If they're above us, I want everybody looking down, and I'm not going to call," he said. "I don't want to draw attention to the blind."

PLEASE, COME BACK!

If the birds at any point turn tail and begin heading away from the pond with a sense of purpose, Smith will blow a long, plaintive comeback call.

"Usually when that happens, they've seen something they didn't like," he said. "You can sometimes call them back, but they're usually heading somewhere else by that point."



Plan your calling series and run calls that match the mood of passing ducks

BY PHILLIP GENTRY

EXTENDING THE QUAIL TRADITION

Preserves give hunters in the Carolinas the opportunity to sample upland game birds the way their elders did decades ago.

Before whitetail deer and wild turkeys became the flagship species for hunters in the southeast, bobwhite quail was king. Back when boys rolled into the high-school parking lot with shotguns in gun racks in the back window of the truck — and no one minded — it was common to stop along the way to school and kick up a covey of quail before heading to class.

Back in those days, the "waste lands" that made areas much more rural consisted of cutover fields and farm lands. Those areas were perfect habitat for rearing quail, rabbits and other small-game species.

>

Brian Carroll

Unfortunately, changes in land use and urban sprawl have changed the landscape for hunters. The fields and farms that once held abundant quail and other small game are few and far between, and the small-game birds and animals have been unable to adapt to the changing landscape the way deer and turkey have.

But does that mean that upland game hunting is a thing of the past? The answer is a solid no.

What has replaced quail hunting on the lands of your relatives and neighbors is a more organized and more planned version of upland bird hunting. It's called a hunting preserve.

Hunting preserves began showing up in the Carolinas when it became clear that quail were fighting a losing battle. A typical preserve may encompass 500 to 10,000 acres and provides guided hunts for a fee or a paid membership.

According to Mike Johnson, general manager of The Clinton House Plantation in Clinton, S.C., one of the benefits of hunting upland birds is that quail, chukar and — to a lesser degree — pheasant, prefer to hide in cover rather than fly, remaining in the vicinity where they were planted when the hunting party arrives. Pointing and retrieving dogs are used, just as in the old days of plantation hunting, to point, flush and retrieve birds.

"Our wildlife habitat at the preserve is well maintained, but not to the point that it could sustain wild numbers of the birds hunted," Johnson said. "The solution is to use pen-raised birds, either purchased or reared on site."

Birds are released in different areas, either well before or the day of the hunt, and once the hunt is under way, the similarities between hunting planted birds on preserve land and wild birds in natural surroundings can be seen.

"I have a lot of customers who have hunted quail and other upland game birds in Texas, and (they) claim the hunting here is every bit as good and as challenging as what they get out West without having to walk 10 miles to get it," said Johnson.



Much of the delight of hunting quail and other upland game birds on hunting preserves is watching the world of quailty dogs.

Brian Carroll



Bobwhite quail, like this beautiful cock bird, were once the king of southeastern woods and fields before changes in habitat supressed their numbers.

The typical hunt is a combination of walking behind pointing dogs, working coveys of quail, or hunting in stands of thinned pines ferreting out single birds that have broken from field coveys. A common criticism that many preserve managers hear about hunting released birds is that they don't flush and fly as well or don't act like wild birds.

"I'd invite you to come see for yourself," Johnson said. "If a hunting party comes out here and kills 100 percent of the birds released on the day of the hunt, I will pay for their hunt."

One of the benefits of preserve hunting is that in addition to quail, hunters can hunt non-native game birds such as pheasant and chukar, a Eurasian partridge native to the western United States.

Johnson often mixes quail and chukar in areas, as these birds tend to stay put. Pheasant, on the other hand, need to be hunted shortly after they are planted.

"The chukar is a real popular bird," Johnson said, "maybe not as fast as a quail because they are bigger birds. You definitely get more meat for the money there."

Johnson said hunting preserves are the next generation of quail hunting. A lot of his hunters may remember days gone by or may have been out west where wild birds are still available, but to a larger degree, many of his hunters have only hunted released quail.

"The South has always been the stronghold for the traditions of hunting quail — watching the dogs work, the excitement of birds flushing, and the camaraderie of hunters who hunt together," he said. "Unlike deer or turkey hunting, which are pretty solitary, quail hunting has a lot of social aspects, and we do everything we can to preserve that." ▪



Phillip Gentry of Simpsonville, S.C., is host of "Upstate Outdoors," a weekly radio show that can be heard on Saturdays at noon on WORD 106.3 FM.

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NORTH CAROLINA'S TOP PUBLIC QUAIL HUNTS

VOICE OF AMERICA GAME LANDS

Voice of American Game Land in Beaufort County holds six permit hunts from November through January. David Turner, a biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, said it is a unique hunting opportunity.

"We do call counts and hear and see quail when we are working there," he said.

The 2,800-acre game land is kept in early successional habitat with prescribed burning. It has an entrance road, parking area and 22 miles of walking roads and trails. Turner said hunters can see their bird dogs for 100 yards in many places as compared to the surrounding terrain, which is in industrial timber production.

MURPHY-BROWN FARMS CORPORATE CURE AREA

Murphy-Brown Farms in Bladen County holds four permit hunts in December and January. Benjy Strope, a Commission biologist, said they can be amazing hunts, but a couple of bad-weather years have hurt quail numbers.

"It is a lot of great habitat, which usually means there are lots of birds there," Strope said. "Since 2006, my hunt results show 150 coveys flushed in 265 hours of hunting. Some hunters may only see a quail or two, while others will flush several coveys.

"At 4,300 acres, it's too large for anyone to hunt in a day. I give hunters a tour of the property and give them the option of showing them where the birds are, or they can pick their own spot."

Strope has a few quail outfitted with radio-transmitter harvests, so he can locate coveys on the property, which is a working farm with field borders and other early successional habitat areas.

SUGGS MILL POND GAME LAND

Suggs Mill Pond Game Land in Bladen and Cumberland counties holds five two-day permit hunts in November and December. Much of its 10,838 acres is early successional habitat. Longleaf pine restoration is the goal, with intensive use of prescribed fire and mechanical control of competitive trees and shrubs that benefits quail.

"It is not the type of hunt where anyone accompanies hunters," Strope said. "You just find a good spot, get out with your bird dog and start walking. Our call counts have been better at Suggs the past couple of years than at Murphy-Brown."

The Commission plants several fields for doves but converts most of the larger small grain food plots to deer forage before quail season. Some remaining strips and small food plots of with small grains remain to attract quail. ▪

— Mike Marsh

SHOOT THE OTHER PRESERVE BIRDS

Shooting preserves in the Southeast aren't limited to bobwhite quail; many offer hunts for several species of non-native but exciting gamebirds, including pheasant and chukkar and Hungarian partridges.

Marcus Heath, a guide at Primland, a huge preserve in southwestern Virginia, five minutes across the North Carolina border, said the best preserve hunting is in the colder months, when bird dogs are at their peak in form.

"The later you get, the warmer it gets, the harder it is on the dogs," he said. "The hunting is much better when it's cold, in November, December and January.."

Primland has more than 200 acres of habitat for game birds in 10- and 20-acre patches of corn, sorghum and other grains, giving hunters a real feel for a midwestern pheasant or chukkar hunt.

— Dan Kibler



Mike Marsh

Some quail on the Murphy-Brown CURE area are outfitted with radio transmitters so biologists can study their movements and habits.

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A GUIDE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

A guide at Contentnea Creek Shooting Preserve in Snow Hill, N.C., Walter Claybrook has some advice for hunters visiting a shooting preserve for the first time.

"Shooting sporting clays before you shoot (birds) is great practice," he said. "Make sure you're practicing with the same gun you'll be using to hunt quail, and make sure you're using the right gun and the right loads for the hunt."

Claybrook said a lot of hunters bring their long-barreled waterfowl guns to preserves. He suggests shotguns with 26-inch barrels rather than 28- or 30-inch barrels, with chokes at improved cylinder or modified.

"Most novice hunters shoot too quickly and don't give the bird time to get out there so the choke can do its job and let the shot pattern open up," he said. "If they do hit the bird, it's such a tight pattern it destroys the meat."

Claybrook recommends nothing bigger than No. 7½ shot, with No. 8 being the most common and, on occasion, No. 9. He also recommends hunting parties consist of two hunters per guide and never more than three, so each hunter gets ample but safe shooting opportunities.

"Another thing I suggest is hunt with a guide who will let you go back and hunt the birds you missed," he said. "Some clubs only allow one try at each bird. You want a guide who will remember what's left on the field and will work back through for a second try at the birds that didn't get killed the first time around." ■

SC TAKING STEPS TO RESTORE WILD QUAIL

In 2014, a group of local and federal agencies, private landowners, sportsmen and conservationists formed the South Carolina Quail Council, which became the driving force behind the South Carolina Bobwhite Initiative (SCBI).

Established in 2015 and based on a plan written by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources with the support of the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, the SCBI aims to restore northern bobwhite quail to their early 1980s levels.

The SCBI established four regions to focus restoration efforts, selected by wildlife biologists as having the most potential for growing coveys of quail. These regions contain an estimated 23,000 coveys, with projections that the number could improve to 74,000.

continues on page 34 >



Hunting released quail on a preserve can offer hunters a chance to relive a time 50 years ago when bobwhite was king in the Southeast.

Phillip Gentry

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In addition, SCBI and its 31 partners — organizations including the S.C. Forestry Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — offer services such as prescribed fire training, forest management assistance and an equipment rental program to help landowners by providing the tools necessary to develop and manage suitable upland habitat. Some partners also provide assistance in the form of subsidies for forestry management services and the purchase of seed for brooding fields and food plots.

According to Michael Hook, small-game program leader for SCDNR and a member of the South Carolina Quail Council, the SCBI has helped provide more than 200 landowners with management plans, and about 30 landowners have received funding specific to bobwhite habitat restoration.



Dan Kibler

Guide Marcus Heath of Primland, just across the North Carolina border in Virginia, does plenty of pheasant hunts during preserve season.



"Hopefully, by showing folks that, if they commit as little as 6 percent of their agricultural property for upland habitat, we can improve wild quail numbers and once again create excitement around one of our oldest sporting traditions here in South Carolina," he said.

It is still too early to accurately assess the SCBI's impact on wild quail populations. However, given their ability to rapidly reproduce, with hens capable of laying about 12 eggs per clutch and producing two to three clutches per brooding season, it is expected that they will begin to respond to the habitat restoration efforts quickly.

To find out more information about the South Carolina Bobwhite Initiative and how you can help, visit its website, www.dnr.sc.gov/quail. ▪

— Justin Goethe

WINTER ROCKS!

Striped bass, aka rockfish, keep North Carolina's coastal rivers alive during the colder months.

BY JERRY DILSAVER



Striper fishing in North Carolina's Pamlico River is a lot like an undiscovered jewel. There aren't any large towns along the river, and fishing there is primarily enjoyed by locals and a few who know about the good fishing and are willing to make it a day trip. The number of boat ramps is increasing, but there aren't an abundance of places to stay, and this makes it difficult to enjoy the excellent fishing for a week — or even a weekend.

Richard Andrews of Tar-Pam Guide Service knows the river and is an excellent advocate. Headquartered in Bath, N.C., he fishes the Pamlico from above Washington, at its junction with the Tar River where an inland fishing license is required, to the mouth of the Pamlico Sound below Swan Quarter. He catches flounder, speckled trout, red drum and more, but he specializes in striped bass. Andrews fishes striped bass, aka rockfish, year-round, but they really move to the top of the list as the water cools through the fall into the winter. >

"Weather seriously affects our fishing," Andrews said. "The river is wide, but an abundance of rain can make it dirty, and a deluge like the hurricanes this fall can keep it dirty for a while. When the river gets dirty, I concentrate on the creeks and smaller rivers that run into it and can usually find cleaner water and bait. Both are keys to catching rockfish."

On a trip last winter, Andrews tried to dodge dirty water in the main river and a wind that reached 20 knots by early afternoon. He fished the Pungo River from near its mouth back to Belhaven and ducked into several creeks to escape the wind. He had more luck dodging the wind than finding clean water, but he found several schools of baitfish and led anglers Josh Roberson and Jeff Butler to a handful of stripers.

"There isn't a lunar tide here, so we rely on the wind to move water, and that moves the bait," Andrews said. "We'll try a few close places this morning on our way out and probably check them again later. They're good spots, and I hate to ride by them when they're this close, but they'll probably be better once the wind picks up a little and begins moving the water. Hopefully, we'll catch a few fish early while it's calm."

One of the first places Andrews stopped was the NC 92 bridge, where there was deeper water; he had one of his fishermen casting a Rat-L-Trap and the other a Rippin' Rap, counting them down for a few seconds, then jigging them vertically and letting them settle again. Both baits had the factory treble hooks replaced with single hooks for easy in releasing fish.

One cast produced a quick hookup to a striper that hit hard, bent the rod deeply and tried to run back around a piling. Some skillful rod handling and a well-set drag stopped it short. A few minutes later, it was led to the landing net.

Andrews checked several places headed towards open water, but he never found the water clarity or bait he wanted to see. He stopped at the bridge again before heading into the Pungo, with the wind building and current trails tapering off the pilings. This stop produced four strikes and two fish in a half-hour.

A chop was building on the Pungo, so Andrews decided to check the Belhaven breakwater before heading farther out. He eased near the breakwater and set his Lowrance unit for downscan and sidescan, allowing him to look for bait and fish under the boat and beside it.

continued on page 38



Jerry Dilsaver

Fishermen in rivers along North Carolina's central coast are limited two two stripers a day, at least 26 inches long, between Oct. 1 and April 30.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The Pamlico River can be accessed from US 264 on the east side and NC 33 on the west side. Both cross US 17 near Washington. Bath, off US 264, is another prominent access between Washington and Belhaven on the eastern side of the river. Four public ramps are off US 264 between Washington and Swan Quarter.

WHEN TO GO — Stripers are in the Pamlico River all year, but big schools tend to be more common during the colder months. Red drum and speckled trout may be mixed with stripers and caught while fishing for stripers.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Medium-light to medium-action spinning rods and 2500 class reels spooled with 10- to 20-pound brade are common for stripers. Rat-L-Trap, Rippin' Raps and Z-Man soft plastics fished on ¼- to ⅜-ounce jigheads are productive.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Richard Andrews, Tar-Pam Guide Service, 252-945-9715, East Side Bait & Tackle, Washington, 252-946-2186, www.eastsidebaitandtackle.com; Radcliffe Marine, Belhaven, 252-943-3923, www.radcliffemarine.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Washington- Beaufort County Chamber of Commerce, 252-946-9168, awww.wbcchamber.com; Hyde County Chamber of Commerce, 888-493-3826, www.hydecountychamber.org.

MAPS — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainsegullcharts.com; Sealake Fishing Guides, 800-411-0185, www.thegoodspots.com; GMCO's Chartbook of North Carolina, 888-420-6277, www.gmcomaps.com.

STRIPER REGS FOR COASTAL RIVERS

On Oct. 1, 2018, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission announced a new size limit for striped bass in inland waters within the Central-Southern Striped Bass Management Area.

For the 2018-2019 striped bass harvest season, which runs from Oct. 1, 2018, to April 30, 2019, the minimum size is 26 inches, with a two-fish daily creel limit.

The waters covered by these regulations include:

- The Tar and Pamlico rivers and tributaries from Rocky Mount Mill Dam downstream to the Norfolk Southern Railroad Bridge at Washington;
- The Neuse River and its tributaries from Falls Lake Dam downstream to Pitchkettle Creek;
- The Pungo River upstream of the US 264 bridge at Leechville;
- All other unlisted inland waters of coastal rivers and tributaries except the Cape Fear River and tributaries. There is a moratorium on striped bass in the Cape Fear River system; no possession is allowed at any time. ▪

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He located a school of bait a little off the breakwater, with larger marks around the outside. Once again, a few minutes of casting produced several strikes, but only one got the hook well enough to be landed. Meanwhile, Andrews had been watching a flock of diving and wheeling birds a ways out in the river. He said the birds had to be on bait, but were moving pretty quickly. The fishfinder again showed a few larger marks around the bait, but nothing was hungry.

Andrews' anglers also fished soft plastics: 3-inch Z-Man Minnowz and 4-inch Swimming Trout TrickZ on 3/16-ounce Trout EyeZ and 1/4-ounce Redfish EyeZ jigheads to see if different sizes and sink rates would produce better.

Andrews' party caught more fish around stump beds and docks. ▪



Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., a full-time freelance writer, is a columnist for Carolina Sportsman. He is a former SKA National Champion and USAA Angler of the Year.

FLY-FISHING FOR STRIPERS

Guide Richard Andrews said fly-fishing for striped bass in the Pamlico River system is as good as he has seen anywhere. The options include targeting schooling fish in open water, working vertical structure like docks and bridges and subsurface structure like stumps, old broken pilings, a few small shipwrecks and rubble or oyster beds.

Fishing is usually pretty good and can be excellent at any time of the year, but Andrews considers late fall and winter as the best.

The ultimate action is schooled stripers feeding on herded bait in open water. Concentrations of wheeling, diving birds give away the locations of these schools and make carrying good binoculars a must. This action is usually hot and heavy and often produces 100 fish plus days.

Andrews cautions anglers not to overlooking structure for the spectacle of stripers under birds. The water is rarely clear enough to sight-cast, but it happens occasionally in calm, dry weather. However, there are plenty of points, groins, banks, docks, jetties and bridges that are known to hold rockfish — plus trout, drum and flounder.

Andrews likes to fish a little lighter, using 6-weight rods and line, but equipment from 6- to 8-weight will get the job done.

Andrews carries several Sage rods rigged with Rio sinking-tip fly line and several rigged with Rio streamer-tip line that sinks even faster. He fishes a lot of small, white Clousers and said they work great when fish are feeding on bay anchovies. However, sometimes they herd up schools of smaller menhaden, and a larger fly with a fuller profile, is needed.

Andrews also carries one rod rigged with floating line in case stripers are feeding on the surface. He likes to use poppers from Flyman Fishing Company in Brevard, N.C., that have a slight swimming motion. ▪



Guide Richard Andrews shows off a striper from a coastal river that fell for a fly.

Jerry Dilsaver

WILMINGTON TURNS
into striped bass hot spot in January

STRIPED BASS HOTSPOT

Striped bass have been the primary winter catch in the rivers around Wilmington, N.C., for several decades. Stripers live in the Cape Fear, Northeast Cape Fear and Brunswick rivers most of the year, but numbers that make fishing fun typically begin to show in December and are strong from January through March.

This year is expected to be similar, but a little slower than past years due to fish kills associated with Hurricane Florence toxic runoff associated with and tropical storm Michael. But the waters were returning to normal by Thanksgiving, and the fishing should be cranking up around Christmas.

Stripers often feed at the mouth of the many creeks and rice ditches and respond well to soft plastics in these spots. Some also hold along drop-offs into the channels and around structure, like the bridges, docks, old pilings and several sunken barges. Most fishermen find large lipped diving lures reach these stripers best.

There is a moratorium on possessing striped bass anywhere in the Cape Fear River System, so they are catch and release fishing only. Drum and trout often mix with stripers around Wilmington and they can be invited home for dinner. ▪

— Jerry Dilsaver



Guide Stu Calder shows off a Cape Fear River striped bass.

Jerry Dilsaver

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WINTER BASS ON THE SKINNY

You don't have to fish deep; bass at Shearon Harris Lake don't mind getting shallow in the winter, if conditions are just right. Here's how to catch them. **BY CRAIG HOLT**

By late December and January, water temperatures in many of North Carolina freshwater lakes usually drop to 50 degrees and lower, causing largemouth bass to become sluggish.

Conventional wisdom says anglers should fish for winter bass in deeper — and slightly warmer — water, but Jeff Thomas, a guide and former tournament pro, takes the opposite approach on Shearon Harris Lake, which is just 30 minutes from his home in Broadway, N.C.,

"The weather lightens fishing pressure at Harris, but I like that," Thomas said. "If you know where to fish and what to use, you sometimes can find bass stacked up. I've caught as many as 15 or 20 (bass) in a day at two or three spots. >

Craig Holt



Craig Holt

Cite et omnimolupta cus repeditat minto molut quis seque latiber uptasit emporem

"DECEMBER AND JANUARY OFTEN ARE MORE LIKE LATE FALL THAN WINTER. I'VE EVEN CAUGHT BASS WHEN THERE'S SKIM ICE AT THE BACKS OF COVES AND CREEKS."

Most serious chub chasers think of January as a time to drop lures 25- to 30-feet deep, using their depth finders to reveal bottom structure, bait schools and bass.

Not Thomas.

"I can get to Jordan, Falls (of the Neuse) or Harris pretty quick, but I'd rather go to Harris because it's got shoreline cover that's a little shallower. Also at Harris, you also don't have to worry about muddy water. In January, the water's clear."

Corey Oakley, a regional fisheries biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources commission, once described Shearon Harris this way: "Shearon Harris is more like a large farm pond."

Thomas fishes it that way. Instead of jigging a spoon or slow-rolling a spinnerbait through deep water, he heads "to the backs of coves where it's shallow and there's dormant vegetation. You almost could call it a spring pattern."

However, the lake's shoreline habitat has changed, he said.

"(Duke Energy) has gotten rid of most of the milfoil and hydrilla," he said. "About the only (aquatic vegetation) left is primrose. And that doesn't (green up) until spring."

But Thomas still targets shallow water with decaying vegetation because it provides almost all the lake's remaining cover.

"I like to throw little, flat-sided crankbaits, such as a No. 5 Shad Rap, near the edges," he said. "Best colors are ghost, white or natural-shad color. The only thing they have got to have is a chartreuse back.

"Typically, I look for water that's above 46 or 47 degrees in January. Any lower, and bass won't bite.

"The main thing is to fish those crankbaits really slow in the backs of pockets

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Shearon Harris lake is south of Raleigh, N.C., and north of Sanford, just off US 1. Along with US 64, US 1 is the primary access to the 4,100-acre lake, which has two public boat ramps: Crosspoint off Crosspoint Road and Holleman's Landing on Bartley-Holleman Road east of US 1.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Use medium-action baitcasting rods with 7:1 ratio reels spooled with 10-pound monofilament. Fish flat-sided crankbaits in light colors to match clear water, weightless Senkos of Zero Gravity jigs or Megabass 110 jerkbaits. Go to the backs of coves or creeks and pull lures off shallow banks with grass, then work them back slowly. The best surface water temperatures are 47 to 56 degrees. Best water temps 47 to 56 degrees.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Jeff Thomas, 919-770-4654.

and coves or around shorelines that are crusted over (with ice). I throw crankbaits up on the ice, bring them off and fish them slow."

The smaller the crankbait, the better.

"They're 2½ or 3 inches long," Thomas said. "Any little flat-sided crankbait (that) dives 5 feet max, with a subtle movement, is good. I don't use crankbaits with square bills.

"Most shad die off by January, so a bass will jump on any shad-type bait, especially a small one. I like them because they let you fish a lot of places and move until you find a bite."

However, when warm fronts produce two or three days of warmer weather in December and January, bass activity changes.

"You can be sure I'll be at Harris then," he said. "You don't have to go early; there's no point to get there at the crack of dawn. You can wait until it warms up, maybe 9 or 10 a.m."

With skim ice evaporated, he'll often throw jerkbaits using a 6½-foot, medium-heavy rod spooled with 10-pound monofilament.

"I like a (Megabass) 110 jerkbait without a deep-diving bill," Thomas said. That bait is 4 to 4⅓ inches long and tracks 4- to 10-feet deep.

"If we get two-straight warm, sunny days, sometimes I throw Senkos at dead shoreline grass, too," Thomas said. "I fish the sunny (northwest) side of the lake. If the sun's been out a couple days and the temperature is in the upper 50s, you may hit a pocket that's loaded with bass." ▪

Zero Gravity Jig next page >



Craig Holt of Snow Camp, N.C., has been an outdoor writer for almost 40 years, working for several newspapers, then serving as managing editor for North Carolina Sportsman and South Carolina Sportsman before becoming a full-time free-lancer in 2009.

Megabass 110 jerkbait



ACCOMMODATIONS — Comfort Inn, Sanford, 919-842-5600; Days Inn, Sanford, 919-776-3150; Hampton Inn, Sanford, 919-775-2000; Comfort Inn, Fuquay-Varina, 919-557-9000; Quality Inn, Fuquay-Varina, 919-557-2009.

MAPS — DeLorme North Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer, 207-846-7000, www.delorme.com. Fishing HopSpots Maps, 800-ALL-MAPS, www.fishinghotspots.com.

WINTER PATTERN

produces bass on Lake Monticello

Lake Monticello is South Carolina bass pro Andy Wicker's go-to lake for big bass in the winter.

"January is a really good time to catch some big fish on Lake Monticello," said Wicker, from Pomaria, S.C. "There are a couple of different ways I like to target big bass on Monticello in January. My first option is to throw an Alabama rig around points, humps and drops."

Wicker said he is targeting fish in 15 to 30 feet of water with the Alabama Rig, letting it sink to the bottom and then starting a slow retrieve.

"For my baits on the rig, I will use most any type of 3½-inch to 4½-inch swimbait rigged on an open True South Lures jighead — either ⅛- or ¼-ounce, depending on the depth. And I normally use shad-colored baits in the winter."

Another option, he said, is to jig a small spoon vertically in 30 to 40 feet of water.

"The presence of bait is key with this pattern," he said. "You will not always see the fish on the depth finder this time of year because they will be hunkered to the bottom, so seeing the bait is crucial.

"Locations are also important. I spend a lot of time idling around until I find an area with bait. I'll then troll around with the trolling motor until I start catching fish," he said.

"I like using a Berry's Flex-It spoon or War Eagle Spoon in ½- and ⅝-ounce weights. You will catch tons of white perch doing this, and that is a good sign that the big largemouth are not far away."



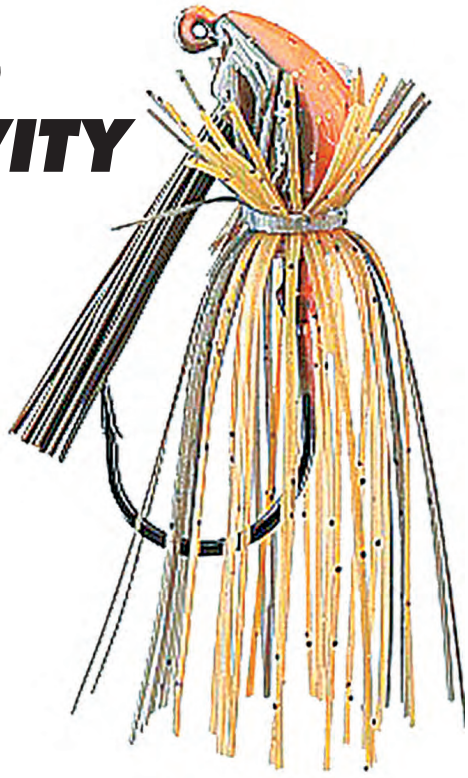
Bass pro Andy Wicker said winter bass may be deep on Lake Monticello, but they'll bite a spoon or Alabama rig.

While weather can be a small factor this time of year, Wicker said water temperature is not a concern because fish are in the middle of their normal winter pattern, so a slight variation in temperature does not change them very much.

"Cloudy, cold days are best with the Alabama rig. For the spoon bite, I like it sunny with a slight breeze. Dead slick conditions are normally the worst." ▪

— Pat Robertson

ZERO GRAVITY JIG IS SECRET WEAPON



Cite et omnimolupta cus repeditat minto molut quis seque latiber uptasit emporem

Although some anglers like to fish jigs, spoons or spinnerbaits in deep water during the winter, bass pro and guide Jeff Thomas prefers a springtime tactic at Shearon Harris Lake.

He often chooses flat-sided crankbaits, jerkbaits or Senkos in the backs of coves or cuts, even those with thin, ice-covered dead vegetation.

But when warm fronts sweep into central North Carolina, stay for a couple of days and raise the water temperature above 50, it often steps up the bite another notch.

"My philosophy is I'm fishing shallow because there's only one reason a bass is there in winter: he wants to eat," Thomas said. "If I find feeding bass in winter, they usually won't be large, even though Harris is known for hawgs. You might catch a quality 6- or 7-pounder, but rarely a huge one. That happens more in early spring through early summer, February through June.

"If it's winter though, with a nice warm snap, sometimes big bass will move up in shallow water with smaller bass. And big bass like big baits."

Thomas takes advantage with a little-known lure, the Zero Gravity jig, designed by a veteran North Carolina lure-maker, Kelly Barefoot of Raleigh's Catch Outdoors.

"It looks like a lead-weighted jig, maybe ½-ounce — but it weighs nothing (actually, .21 ounces)," Thomas said. "On a warm, winter day, I'll throw it on top of primrose at Harris and let it fall off the edge. Big bass can't resist it."

"It's so light, it takes 3 seconds to fall a foot. And that's what you need in winter: a slow-falling lure. It's bulky, has a big profile and looks like a jig. It's perfect for bass that aren't gonna chase a small meal in cold water."

Thomas said he likes to use a black/blue Zoom Super Chunk as a trailer, although some anglers use a Senko. ■

Bass tactics next page >

SPOTTED BASS KEEP

Lake Russell's winter action top-drawer

Although an occasional largemouth will show up in the bag, winter bass fishing on South Carolina's Lake Russell is mainly for spotted bass, according to guide Jerry Kotal of Elberton, Ga.

"By January, if we don't have a warm winter, the bass will probably be in the creeks or out on drops in the main river. We will be catching them from 30 to 60 feet deep," said Kotal.

Locating bait is the key to catching Russell bass this time of year, he said. A graph is a necessity to locate the baitfish, primarily threadfin shad — although there are also some blueback herring in the lake, too.

"You just have to get out there and look to see where the bait is," Kotal said. "That's a big range to cover, but that's the way those spots are. You might catch them shallow sometime, but the rest of they time, they will be out there 60 feet deep. Once you find the bait, you should be able to catch the fish on jigging spoons and drop-shots."



Lake Russell spits out plenty of nice spotted bass, even during the winter.

Pat Robertson

Kotal (706-988-0860) likes a ⅝-ounce jigging spoon, either chrome or white with reflective tape. Sometimes, he will go with a ¾-ounce spoon. The brand is not a difference maker, he said.

"I use various spoons. I like a Hopkins Spoon and one called a Carolina Special. Just cast it and let it hit the bottom, then jerk it up," he said. "Normally, the fish will hit it on the fall, but if you see them on the graph and they are suspended, just reel up to the depth they are in and start jigging."

For a drop-shot, Kotal rigs with a finesse worm in green, light brown, green pumpkin or watermelon.

"Just drop it down to the fish and shake it in front of them," he said. "Barely twitch the rod tip, just enough to make the worm move."

If his guide party is not adept at this type of fishing, Kotal will use a live minnow instead of the finesse worm on the drop-shot rig, he said.

"On Russell, I fish the drop-shot on 12-pound line, because the water is not real clear," Kotal said. "But on Keowee, which is much clearer, I will fish it on 8-pound line."

Whichever technique he uses, Kotal said a good day on the lake can produce upwards of 100 bass, anywhere from 1 to 4 pounds and occasionally one up to 5 pounds. Plus, there will be plenty of bonus species, he said.

"You'll catch just about everything in the lake, including perch, stripers and catfish along with the bass." ■

— Pat Robertson


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JANUARY CAN BE A GREAT TIME TO LOAD THE BOAT, IF YOU'RE WILLING TO BE THOROUGH, PATIENT

I have always said that, in the Carolinas, March is the best month to catch a really big fish, but really, January and February can be awfully good, and with deer season over in the Carolinas, you have people starting to get back on the water — some not as much as others because of the cold.

I like to target big fish, but in January, when you find fish, you usually find them ganged up, so you can have some really good days, as far as numbers are concerned. You're looking for fish and baitfish, and I can find them when my Humminbird electronics.

The key is, it's important to be fishing on the main-lake or main-river channel, or on deeper creek channels. Those are the places where bass are relating. They can be up the lake or down the lake, but they'll be on that channel. Down the lake, you might be two miles from the shoreline, but with our electronics, we can find the old river channel — a lot easier than we could 20 years ago.

I am looking for fish to be in deep water, and that can mean 20 to 30 feet of water, all the way down to 40 or 45 feet of water. You're looking for baitfish, and when you find them, you'll often find bass and all kinds of other predator fish: striped bass, white perch, spotted bass in lakes that have them. There will be a lot of species hanging around that old river channel.

When I find fish, I like to use bigger baits. I think those big bass like to eat a big meal all at once, and gizzard shad are at the top of the food chain for largemouth bass. So I'm going to fish a big spoon or a big swimbait. I'll fish a 4½- or 5½-inch Storm GT360 swimbait, or I'll fish the bigger Largo Shad, a swimbait that's in Storm's coastal line.

WEIGHTY MATTERS

Depending on the depth of the water and the wind, I will be adjusting the size of the jighead to get the bait down. The other thing is, I want to be able to fish this bait real close to the bottom, bumping it along, maintaining contact with the bottom. You have to reel it very slowly. You have a bait with a big profile, and you're slow-rolling it close to the bottom. But you'll need to adjust the size or your jighead depending on whether they're in 20 or 30 or 45 feet of water.

continues on page 50

WINTER BASS ACTION

remains hot on NC's Belews Lake

Joel Richardson of Kernersville, N.C., guides on a handful of reservoirs across North Carolina, but the one he knows most intimately is Belews Lake, the 3,863-acre fishing hole north of Winston-Salem and Greensboro, N.C.

"(A lot of) the land beneath the lake was once my family's farm before the lake was impounded in 1973," said Richardson. "I grew up fishing Belews."

Over the years, Richardson has seen the bass fishing at Belews peak, fall and rejuvenate, but it's still a great winter destination because of the hot-water discharge related to the Duke Energy power plant on the lake.

"The lake doesn't get as warm as it used to because of changes in the way the water is recirculated through the power plant," said Richardson (www.joelgrichardsons.com). "The water temperature stays in the 50s during the winter, but it doesn't approach the 70s like it used to."



A drop-shot rig is a great way to catch winter bass on North Carolina's Belews Lake.

Another change has been the influx of spotted bass.

"Spots were placed in the lake without the (N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's) knowledge, and their numbers have increased," said Richardson. "The fish population is about 60/40, with the larger percentage being spots."

Despite these changes, Richardson said Belews remains an excellent winter fishing hole.

"You can catch spots and largemouth shallow and deep," said Richardson, who defines shallow as 20 feet or less.

Spinnerbaits, crankbaits, floating worms and shaky head jigs take fish from laydowns, shallow cover and long points.

"Belews is a clear lake where the fish scare easily in shallow water, though it's somewhat dingier this year because of all of the rain we've had," said Richardson. "I use spinning tackle and 10-pound line or less."

Richardson said most fish favor deep, open-water.

"They're not structure-oriented, just roaming freely after an easy meal," said Richardson. "They can be caught as deep as 50 feet."

Anglers skilled with electronics "video-fish" for suspended bass by vertically dropping small jigs, spoons, tailspinners or drop-shot rigs in front of the fish after viewing them on their units.

Spots run from ¾ to 2 pounds; largemouth from 2½ to 3 pounds.

"Find the forage and you can catch 10 or more fish in a hurry; if you can't find the forage, you can go hours without a bite," said Richardson. ▪

— Tony Garitta

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A big swimbait, fished in deep water, is a great way to tempt a big bass to bite — if you fish it slowly, barely crawling it along the bottom.

Storm 360GT swimbait

Bass are not as likely to suspend in January as they are at other times of the year. It would be easy to use a 1-ounce jighead to get the bait deep, but to keep it close to the bottom, you have to reel that big jighead faster than I want to. I like to fish something between a ⅜- and ¾-ounce head. I like the ⅜-ounce, but if you're fishing a big 360GT in 40 feet of water, and it's windy, you might have to go up. You want to experiment with different weights until you get one that you can get to the bottom, then keep it close to the bottom on a slow retrieve.

I'll fish a big swimbait on a 7-foot, medium-action Bass Pro Shops Carbonlite baitcasting rod with a Johnny Morris Signature Series reel spooled with 12- to 14-pound XPS fluorocarbon. I want the reel to have a slow retrieve ratio so I can reel the bait back slowly. Lure colors depend on the water clarity. Herring colors are good, and I like to fish a straight pearl or white bait. I'll dip the tail chartreuse if there's a little stain in the water.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Now, put all of this together, and we still have one huge thing to discuss: patience. You might fish a half-day or three-quarters of a day without catching anything, even though you're marking bait and fish. So you have to be patient and just keep working. When you pull up on the right place and find them in the right mood, you can have a great day. It's a great way to catch a big fish, and I've had some of my biggest days in terms of total numbers on days like this: maybe 10 or 15 largemouth bass, 10 or 15 stripers, 30 or 40 white perch. You have a chance to have one of those days that you'll never forget.

Yes, it's nice to catch a warm day where you're fishing in 50- or 60-degree water, but the best fishing is when the water temperature is in the 40s. If you can catch a day like that, don't miss the chance to fish it. And remember, go slow, be patient, and use your electronics. ▪



Davy Hite *of Ninety Six, S.C. is a two-time BASS Angler of the Year who won the 1999 Bassmasters Classic and 1998 FLW Tour Championship. He is sponsored by Phoenix, Evinrude, Bass Pro Shops, Rapala, Buckeye, VMC, Humminbird, War Eagle and Yamamoto.*



WATEREE'S WINTER WONDERLAND

Cold weather brings out the best in this South Carolina lake's blue catfish population. Here's how to do some real catfish catching.

By Terry Madewell

SOUTH CAROLINA'S LAKE WATEREE is a prime, winter catfish destination that provides the best of both worlds in terms of consistent action on feisty, fat catfish, as well as a realistic option for hooking heavyweight toads. The lake is teeming with 10- to 20-pound blue catfish that feed heavily in January and February, but the potential to hook fish in the 30- to 50-pound class, and even larger, is realistic on any given day.

Experienced Wateree fishermen have developed multiple ways to figuratively skin the big cats. Two with an excellent handle on the process are tournament anglers Jeff Manning and Michael Paciocco from Gastonia, N.C.

"The catfish bite is very strong at Lake Wateree during mid-winter, and fishing a tournament at that time of the year, I expect three fish weighing somewhere between 80 to 100 pounds is needed for a chance to win," Manning said. "The tournament record at Lake Wateree was set a few years back: three fish just under 130 pounds. That's serious 'fat cats' anywhere you want to fish."

Manning said the key to fishing Lake Wateree during January is understanding that multiple patterns are potentially productive and how and when to fish each.

"Over the years, we've developed a solid, deep-water pattern near the main-river channel in the middle and lower end of the lake," Manning said. "An excellent opportunity often exists far up the lake after heavy rains (when) the water has had a chance to settle. The third option occurs typically on sunny afternoons in warming trends and is a shallow-water bite."

The primary winter strategy for Manning and Paciosso is finding forage and targeting those spots.

>

Terry Madewell

"A MAJOR REASON I LIKE WATEREE AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR IS FINDING WHERE THE FISH ARE CONGREGATED," *Manning said.*

"That plays right into the way I prefer to fish. When the water temperatures approaches the low point of the year in January, the forage will cluster into specific areas. After years of using graphs on Lake Wateree, I think 90 percent of the forage, specifically threadfin and gizzard shad, are in perhaps 10 percent of the water. During summer, the forage situation is reversed, with maybe 90 percent of the forage scattered throughout 90 percent of the water, and catfish are much more scattered. But now, the vast majority of forage is in very specific areas, relating to deep water."

Paciocco said forage concentrated in specific deep spots, generally near the main-river channel, creates a formula for success.

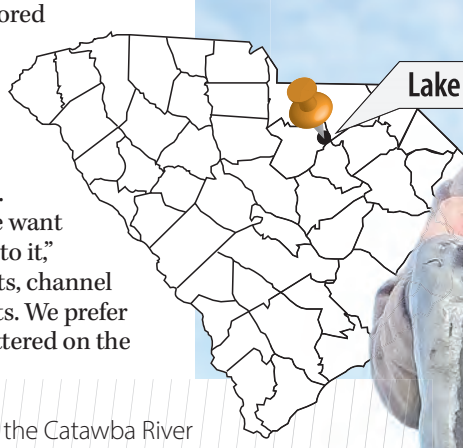
"We'll fish any technique to be successful, but our preferred method is to fish from an anchored position," he said. "January at Wateree is absolutely ideal most of the time for what we prefer to do."

Paciocco and Manning use electronics to hunt for concentrations of forage and then refine the search to a specific target.

"We like to pinpoint the target where we want to present bait and then anchor and cast to it," Paciocco said. "Underwater humps, points, channel bends and deep holes are potential targets. We prefer places with big rocks or even stumps scattered on the bottom. Patterning forage and fish is a dynamic situation, with weather, water temperature and current all playing a role. But the reliable factor is, these fat blue catfish are going to be eating wherever the forage is located."

Manning said that while they prefer to anchor fish, they'll drift-fish if that's the best option.

"At times, the best technique will be drifting, because fish and forage may be scattered a bit too much for anchor fishing," Manning said. "So we'll drift the typi-




Terry Madewell

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Lake Wateree is in Kershaw, Fairfield and Lancaster counties east of I-77. Access from the south is via SC 97 to the east side of the lake. From I-77, take SSR 41 at Exit 41 to SSR 101 (River Road). From Camden, take US 521 to SSR 97. For a list of public boat ramps, visit www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/BoatRamp/BoatRampSelected/1238232

WHEN TO GO — Mid-winter is prime for fat cats with much of the action in deep water. However on warm, sunny afternoons, a strong, shallow-water bite can often be found in depths as shallow as three feet of water.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Best techniques are to fish deep-water ledges near the Catawba River channel using white perch and gizzard or threadfin shad as bait.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Justin Whiteside, 803-417-0070; Scott Peavy, 803-569-7017; Colonels Creek Market, 803-337-2100. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Kershaw County Chamber of Commerce, Camden, 800-968-4037; Lake Wateree State Park (camping), 803-482-6401.

MAPS — Fishing Hotspots Maps, 800-338-5957; Kingfisher Maps 800-326-0257, www.kfmaps.com; DeLorme's South Carolina Atlas and Gazetteer, 207-846-7000, www.delorme.com.

cal Santee drift rig and target areas marked with forage and fish. They're the same type places where we like to anchor, but we simply need to present the bait by drift-fishing to cover adequate areas. At this time of year, we'll usually drift in the 0.4 to 0.6 miles per hour range."

Manning said another excellent pattern is to fish far uplake, especially if heavy rains have created a situation where there's a lot of current in the upper end.

"For years, this was my favored technique, and I've found that it's best after the rain has passed and the water has settled a bit," he said. "I still graph the areas, but in the upper end of the lake, it's obvious where some of the bluffs are located for fishing deep holes."

continues on page 54








Terry Madewell

Bait selection and presentation is crucial to success catching blue cats during the winter on Lake Wateree.

A final winter option may surprise some anglers, but a strong, shallow-water pattern will sometimes be present.

After two or three days of warmer temperatures, Paciocco said a bright, sunny afternoon can pull forage and big catfish back into shallow coves, with 3 to 6 feet of water being plenty deep enough.

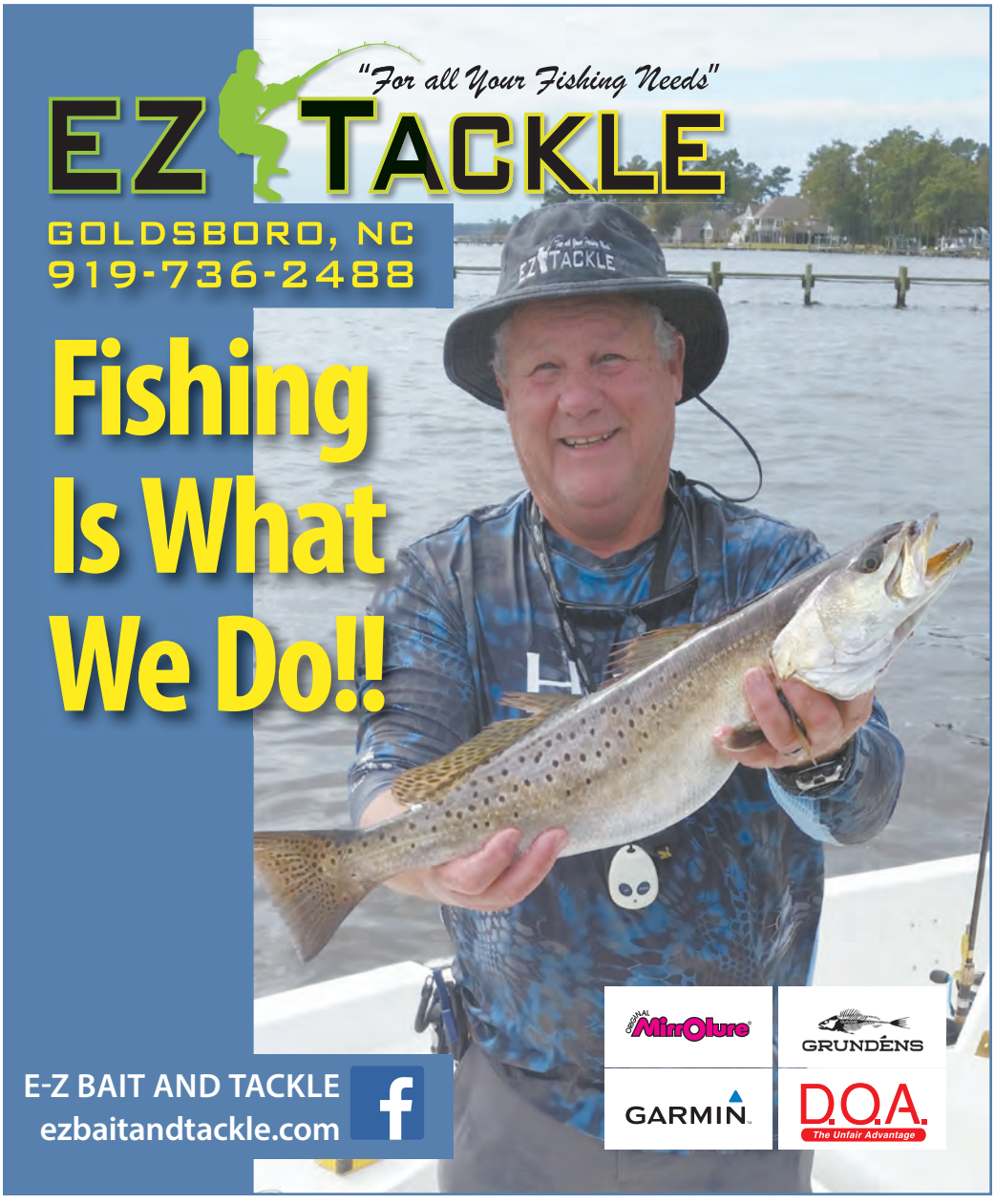
"And it's a great option for a big fish, too," he said. "If we're fishing a tournament and need an upgrade in size, when conditions are right, this is a very good option. It's not a last-ditch effort; it's a reasonable method to try to put a 30- to 40-pound fish or two in the boat."

Manning said the three main ingredients to a successful Lake Wateree catfish-catching recipe are patience, patience and patience.

"These catfish eat during cold weather, but not nonstop," he said. "Even if on a good spot, we have to be patient. I've got lots of examples of patience working, but during one tournament, we had 6 pounds at 12:30 p.m. , but shortly after 1 o'clock, we had three fish weighing 101 pounds. Another example is after fishing six hours, we had zero, then two hours later we weighed in nearly 90 pounds with three fish."

Manning said it's often a process of elimination.

"Most days in January and February are filled with catching lots of 'teener-sized' fish with larger fish sprinkled in, so the action is usually consistent," Manning said. "But when searching for those big toads, I've learned to fish forage-rich targets and just be patient." ▪





Terry Madewell *of Ridgeway, S.C., has been an outdoors writer for more than 30 years. He has a degree in wildlife and fisheries management and has a long career as a professional wildlife biologist/natural resources manager.*

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PLENTY OF FORAGE SPURS
WATEREE CATS



Lake Wateree is full of big blue catfish, but top-end size and numbers may actually be improving.

Terry Madewell

Robert Stroud, a fisheries biologist for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, said he believes the blue catfish population on Lake Wateree is healthy.

"Our most-recent studies show that the blue catfish are still in an expansion phase at Lake Wateree, and the lake has a good number of 30- to 50-pound fish, as well as plenty in smaller-size classes," Stroud said. "We'll likely see even more top-end fish but for a lake this size; the blue catfish presents a great opportunity for quality and quantity of fish."

Stroud said a prime forage base for Wateree catfish includes both gizzard and threadfin shad.

"In addition to shad, I know the blue catfish also forage on white perch, and I'm very hopeful they continue to utilize white perch as a forage source," he said. "Lake Wateree has a very high population of white perch, a non-native species."

Stroud said that white perch have created issues for some species, most notably white bass. Catfish utilizing white perch is good for the lake.

"At this point the blue catfish offer anglers an excellent fishing opportunity at Lake Wateree," Stroud said.

Veteran angler Michael Paciocco said utilizing these prime food sources for big blues during winter is a key to success.

"Without a doubt, our primary baits for wintertime blues at Wateree are shad and white perch," Paciocco said. "These natural baits are key, and we utilize all sizes, from small to huge, and species and size can make a difference in productivity.

"White perch presentations for bait include whole live perch, perch heads, chunks of cut bait, filleted strips of perch and perch cut from the bone on both side and hooked to present maximum scent. We'll use big gizzard shad in multiple ways as well."

Paciocco said most of the time, big baits will produce big fish at Wateree, but they always have some smaller baits out.

"We never know what they'll prefer on a given day, so we give them options, then refine the bait presentation based on results," he said. ▪



BLUES IN WINTER:

Lake Norman fishing produces cool cats



For years, Lake Norman has regularly produced nice blue catfish, especially during the winter.

Lake Norman's largemouth bass have often been compared to Peter Pan because they just don't want to grow up. The same can't be said of Norman's blue cats. Over the years, they've grown to trophy sizes.

In 1966, 4,000 8-inch blue catfish fingerlings were stocked in Norman. It wasn't until 1983 that an increasingly number of blues showed up in samples taken by N.C. Wildlife Commission biologists. The lake now regularly yields cats from 10 to 40 pounds, highlighted by an 85-pounder, a former state record.

Unlike other species that become inactive in cold weather, winter temperatures turn on blue cats.

"January can either be really good or really bad for blues," said guide Jerry Neeley of Jerry's Fishing Guide Service (www.carolinasfishing.com). "A strong wind often means a bad day."

Given reasonable conditions, Neeley's clients usually catch 10 to 15 blue cats weighing 10 to 40 pounds during a full-day trip.

Neeley slow-trolls at .5 mph, running six Santee rigs out of the back of his boat. The outfits consist of sturdy baitcasting rods paired with 6500 Ambassadeur reels spooled with 20-pound line. A 50-pound leader is attached to the main line to offset the twisting and turning blues employ to try to break free. An Eagle Claw 42 hook or an Octopus hook holds cut perch or bream as bait.

"If you find feeding white perch, blue cats will be nearby," said Neeley. "The cats feed on the bait scraps left behind by perch."

Neeley slow-trolls points and flats in water as deep as 40 feet, with the majority of his strikes coming in 25 to 30 feet of water.

He also slow-trolls the mouths of creeks starting in 40 feet of water and gradually moving into the creeks samplings depths to 15 feet. His favorite creeks include Burton, Little and Ramsey, all on the lower end of the lake.

"Ramsey is affected by the hot-water discharge from the McGuire Nuclear Station near Cowans Ford Dam where water temperatures range from 50 to 60 degrees even in the winter," said Neeley. "The warm water attracts forage; the forage attracts blues." ▪

— Tony Garitta



SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

KEEP YOUR COOL; BIG CATFISH WILL

COLD WEATHER SETS UP CATFISH ON SANTEE LAKES



A rod with a light or medium-light tip will help hook catfish when drifting live or cut baits over winter schools.

Terry Madewell

Catfish anglers know that blue catfish thrive in lower water temperatures, but on the Santee Cooper lakes, Marion an Moultrie, one of the most-productive times is when the water temperature dips to the lowest point of the year.

Understanding the process can make it happen for you.

WHY AND HOW

Tad Resser of Manning is a lifelong Santee Cooper fisherman, and finding and catching blue catfish during the winter has become his specialty and passion.

Reeser said the primary forage for the blue catfish in the winter is shad, and the fishing really gets hot when the water temperature dips below 50 degrees.

"As the water temperature drops low, shad bunch up and get into huge, tight schools," he said. "The process begins as early as December, but it's often January before the shad really tighten up for the best fishing. Cold rain, snow and sleet are on my Christmas wish list, because a rapid decline in water temperature sets up ideal conditions."

Reeser said as the shad schools grow ever larger and tighter, the falling water temperature slows their metabolic rate. They move more slowly, and blue catfish swarm them. When the water temperature drop is quick and dramatic, the best fishing follows.

"A perfect example was early January 2018, when we had a winter storm blow in, dropping snow on the lakes," he said. "The shad were already in reasonably tight schools, and fishing was good, but that snow and subsequent arctic air created a rapid drop in the temperature into the mid-40s. The shad bunched up very tight, in huge schools, and the blues made their move."

KEY BAITS, RIGGING

When targeting blue catfish on the shad schools, Reeser said the best bait is the natural one, fresh shad. He'll catch them before the trip, preferably the same morning or the evening before.

"I don't cast over schools of bait I intend to fish," he said. "When you put the net on a good school of shad, you can catch all you'll need in a single cast."

"I use a 7/0 circle hook and hook two

BIG POSSIBILITIES:
The Santee Cooper lakes probably have more blue catfish in the 10- to 15-pound class than anglers could ever hope to coatch, but the occastional 30-pound and up monsters are always a possibility.


Terry Madewell

shad through the eyes," he said. "I use a 30-inch leader of 60-pound Berkeley Big Game and attach the leader to the main line with a barrel swivel. I spool 120-pound braided line because I like strong line with no stretch in the stumpy territory of Lake Marion."

Reeser uses using a 1½-ounce sliding sinker above the swivel; any baitcasting reel will work, but he prefers a 7½-foot Shakespeare rod with a light to medium-light tip but with plenty of backbone.

"I want the fish to pull the rod down, and the less resistance of the light tip works better," he said. "But we need that backbone when hooked into a heavy fish."

SHAD PATTERNS

Reeser uses his boat's electronics to find the huge concentrations of shad that are his ground zero fishing target.

"I've learned that not all shad schools are equal," he said. "If catfish are actively feeding on a school of shad, the screen image will depict a broken or disrupted section of the shad. This is a high-percentage target.

"Shad marked along a drop are often more productive than when marked on large flats. But a channel ledge with shad piled on the ledge and forage extending onto the flat with fish marked on top of the ledge, that's the homerun shot."

With a target marked, Reeser gets upwind, drops a heavy anchor and allow the boat to drift back directly over his target. He fishes vertically and will usually fish 10 or more rods, depending on the number of fishermen in the boat.

"I drop the bait to the bottom, then reel in about two cranks, setting the rod in the Driftmaster rodholder," he said. "I want the bait a couple feet off the bottom, and when the fish bites, I let the fish pull the tip down then lift the rod in a steady motion. The steady pull sets the hook; don't snatch it. It's common to have several rods with fish hooked at any given time. It's chaos in the best possible way."

Reeser said fish of all sizes are caught with a lot of fish in the 5- to 15-pound class. When fishing the right places, it's very common to hook multiple large fish on any given day.

"When the conditions are right hooking fish in the 30- to 40-pound class can occur and the potential for much larger fish is always present," he said. ▪



Terry Madewell, *of Ridgeway, S.C., has been an outdoors writer for more than 30 years. He has a degree in wildlife and fisheries management and has a long career as a professional wildlife biologist/natural resources manager.*



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Brian Cope



Popular guide Rod Thomas will present seminars in January at a fishing show in Raleigh, N.C., that cover big catching huge red drum like this one.

Brian Cope

SHOW TIME!

EVEN IF YOU'VE PUT UP YOUR TACKLE, YOU CAN LEARN PLENTY AT SHOWS

It's January, and let's face it, even though plenty of fish are still willing to bite this time of year, it doesn't hurt to take a break when the weather is cold.

But that doesn't mean you have to quit thinking, preparing or planning to catch fish. January is the beginning of the boat and fishing show season.

The first is the Grand Strand Boat and Sportsman Expo, scheduled for Jan. 4-6 at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center. You'll have plenty of boats and fishing tackle vendors to choose from, but you can also take notes during a host of seminars, including kayak fishing from guide Mike Eady, inshore fishing with guide Mike McDonald, and using a cast net with guide Jason Burton, plus more.

Next up is the Bass and Saltwater Fishing Expo, which runs Jan. 11-13 at the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh; it's the largest fishing show in the Carolinas. No matter where you live, this show is worth the trip. You'll find the latest fishing tackle and accessories, the newest marine electronics and numerous seminars to get you ready for some great fishing in 2019.

SEMINAR TIME

Saltwater fishing seminar presenters include Jerry Dilsaver, the *Carolina Sportsman* columnist who will teach you all you need to know about rigging your kayak and tactics for catching trout, flounder and puppy drum inshore. You won't want to miss his presentation on kayak fishing nearshore waters for kings and other species.

Guide Rod "Ponytail" Thomas will be on hand to talk about catching giant red drum on the Pamlico Sound and stripers during the spring run up the Roanoke River. He specializes in helping anglers catch their fish-of-a-lifetime through his seminars as well as his guided trips.

Another speaker you don't want to miss is Dave Tilley, a bottom-fishing wizard who will teach anglers how to use satellite images and all the data that comes with them to catch more fish. His Weather Forecasting for Captains is another feature that anglers enjoy each year at this show.

John Knight is one of the top surf anglers on the east coast; he'll share his tips on fishing the southern Carolina coast. If you think surf fishing is simply walking up to the water, making a cast, then waiting on a bite, you really need to take notes at Knight's seminars.

Wrecks and artificial reefs dot the Carolinas coastlines, and guide Noah Lynk of Harker's Island will be around to show you what equipment and techniques are best for fishing these structures to catch a variety of species.

You definitely don't want to miss guide Bobby Brewer's presentations on catching false albacore and giant old drum. Brewer is a regular fish junky, and he catches them from kayaks and powerboats, so you can learn plenty from him.

FRESHWATER, TOO

A host of freshwater seminars including numerous pro bass anglers as well as crappie guide Freddie Sinclair, will teach you what you need to know for the coming spring bite, and we can all learn a lot from Wilson Frazier, the "Sonar Professor," about using electronics to catch more fish.

One weekend later, Jan. 19-20, the Greenville Convention Center in Greenville, N.C., will play host to the Carolina Outdoor Expo where guide Ricky Kellum will lecture on catching speckled trout on top, bottom and everywhere in between. Guide Joe Shute will share cobia fishing tips, guide Dave Stewart will hold a striper fishing seminar, guide Richard Andrews will provide his tips for catching flounder inshore, nearshore and offshore, freshwater guide

Greg Griffin will share his crappie fishing secrets, and Ollie Smith will help you get equipped for your next mountain trout adventure. You'll have plenty of tackle and accessory vendors to keep you busy as well.

FEBRUARY BOUNTY

If you want to see even more boats, it's back to Raleigh Feb. 8-10 for the Raleigh Convention Center Boat Show, and later in the month, Feb. 22-24, you'll have two shows to choose from. The Eastern North Carolina Boat Sale will be held in the Greenville (N.C.) Convention Center. This show will focus more on boats than fishing tackle or seminars.

That same weekend, the Central Carolina Boat and Fishing Expo will be held at the Greensboro Coliseum. This show is very similar to the Bass and Saltwater Fishing Expo, with fishing seminars and countless fishing tackle and accessory vendors, as well as outfitters to set you up on your next fishing outing.

Then, it's down to Columbia, S.C. for the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic March 22-24 at the South Carolina State Fairgrounds. This show has something for every outdoorsman, and features hunting as well as fishing seminars, displays, and vendors. The venue will also hold the weigh-in for the 2019 S.C. Youth Bass Fishing Championship.

It's show time! Don't miss it. ▪



Brian Cope *of Edisto Island, S.C., is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He has a B.A. in English Literature from the University of South Carolina and has been writing about the outdoors since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.*





Jeff Burleson



Post-season evaluation of the deer on your hunting property can give you a leg up on planning next season's harvest goals.

DO DEER DILIGENCE: EXAMINE THE HERD

WITH SEASON JUST FINISHED, BEGIN PLANS FOR '19

Jeff Burleson

The Carolinas offer two of the longest deer seasons in the nation, giving hunters more than a hundred days to get the job done.

Deer hunters aren't all created equal, either. Some hunters are purely after meat; any combination of does and bucks is sufficient to fill the freezer. For others, tasty venison is merely a bonus after their record-book buck makes it to the taxidermist. With deer season finally over as the new year arrives, hunters can compare their harvests with their pre-season goals.

Deer-management strategies have changed over the past three decades for hunters and regulators. For the greater part of the past century, management decisions were wholly depicted by state regulations, and hunters shot deer based on their daily or season limits. As tasked, state deer biologists make management decisions based on keeping the deer population healthy and self-sustaining.

In the Carolinas, wildlife agencies don't regulate buck or doe harvests by any age criteria. If any age-selected harvest goals are made on a personal or club level, customized by the property managers.

Deer hunters continue to evolve from shooting sheer numbers to unique selections for older, mature animals. Hunters aren't just looking to fill the freezer anymore. Many want to take a trophy deer they can hang over their fireplaces and admire each and every day.

HOMEGROWNS

In the past, many hunters in the Carolinas believed that trophy, world-class bucks were only possible in the midwestern states, Texas, and Canada. While the Carolinas may not produce the number of world-class whitetails as Ohio and Kansas, they have shown over the past decade that big bucks are possible here. The habitat and genetic lineages in the Carolinas have the potential to produce some real wall-hangers. The Big Buck Gallery in this and past issues of *Carolina Sportsman* sure show the results, with many bucks reaching 140 inches or more. Both Carolinas have produced some world-class bucks over time.

Since 1974, South Carolina has had its antler record book, which now has more than 7,200 entries scoring 125 or better, using the Boone & Crockett Club's scoring system. The biggest typical in South Carolina is still William Wyatt's 176-inch buck, but the S.C. Department of Natural Resources' antler scorers are staying busy, with 226 new entries last year, including 32 bucks better than 140 typical inches 14 in the non-typical category between 145 and 175 inches. The 50 biggest of all time are 165 typical inches or better.

A look at North Carolina's records shows hunters are even doing better, with double-digit records of bucks scoring over 170 typical inches and two in the 180s, with non-typical bucks busting the 200-inch mark.

Even though a record-class buck is certainly possible in all areas of the Carolinas, a few select counties are producing more high-scoring bucks than others. Bucks with trophy headgear come from advanced nutrition, maturity and a top-shelf genetic strain. While hunters have a limited reach for controlling the populations of deer on their farms, there are certainly strategies hunters can indoctrinate into their overall management plan to make a difference in their season outcome.

Basically, hunters can improve the ratio of quality animals on their properties by adhering to selective harvest guidelines and nutritional improvements.

TRAIL-CAMERA ADVANTAGES

For the modern hunter, the advances in technology have provided a true advantage over hunters in the past who relied totally on tracks, glassing summer agriculture fields, and other personal interactions with deer. Few hunters are left who don't use trail cameras throughout the year.

By Labor Day weekend on heavily managed tracts, there are few bucks who haven't been identified and classified on the shoot or not-shoot list. Of course, there is always a newcomer that shows up and surprises hunters when least expected.

Regardless, hunters can take analyze their trail-camera data at the end of January to see what bucks survived the season, and they can examine what their doe-to-buck ratio looks like.

Fortunately, there is little food available in the woods or fields this time of year, and a healthy food plot, or a pile of sweet potatoes or corn will bring in every deer to a trail camera.

Typically, when deer find plenty of food, water, and cover on properties in January, they will often remain residents throughout the winter and into spring/summer.

While a preseason evaluation is important, the post-season review of the effects of the previous season's harvest can be as important to understand what's left and how hunters can make improvements to harvesting guidelines for the next season. ▪



Jeff Burleson

POTASSIUM RULES!

Plants require a cocktail of nutrients to fulfill chemical reactions and fuel growth. Potassium is one of the top three macro-nutrients required for growth. All living cells in both animals and plants require potassium to properly function. Potassium is mined as potash from the Earth's crust to use as plant fertilizer.

Potassium is a major player in photosynthesis and is primarily responsible for nutrient transport, water transport and protein and carbohydrate synthesis. Without available potassium ions in the soil, the primary energy molecule, adenosine triphosphate (ATP), wouldn't be created, either. If potassium is deficient, plants will be stunted and crops will produce low yields.

Potassium is absorbed through the root system as potassium ions. It must be water soluble in order for plants to absorb it and receive benefits. For the best absorption, soils must be moist and well-aerated.

Fortunately, plants will exhibit clues when potassium deficiency is a problem. Each plant will express a slightly different variation, but yellowing around the leaf edges and exfoliation are tell-tale signs of a potassium deficiency.

Potassium is a critical component to any soil management program and must be applied at planting to make sure young plants get a good start.



Check the crops of any quail you harvest this season to determine what foods it prefers. It may help when it comes to improving habitat for the gamest of gamebids.



Jeff Burleson

EXAMINE CROP CONTENTS OF QUAIL

With deer season ending as the New Year arrives and duck season trailing off later this month, diehard hunters will start entertaining their small-game spirit. Quail habitat will certainly give their spaniels, setters and pointers some hours in the briars, and they can examine birds they harvest to see what foods are making them stick around.

Historically, bobwhite quail dominated the grasslands, woodlands and agriculture regions of the Carolinas. While there are populations available to keep a hunting season, the bobwhite quail is declining over much of its range. Landowners with a love for quail spend many hours and dollars manipulating habitat to benefit these 6-ounce birds, which have barely enough meat to feed a small child.

When some tracts of land seem to hold more birds than others, it's generally improved habitat conditions that produce higher numbers. While escape and nesting areas are critical parts of quail habitat, ultimately, food must be available to maintain life for these pint-sized game birds.

Landowners will manipulate their land by planting food plots, prescribed burning, mowing and discing to improve quail habitat. Knowing what birds are actually eating will help tell landowners where birds are making a living.

Every harvested bird should be examined to see what types of seeds are in the crop. Birds will typically eat preferred foods first, before less-desired foods. Also, it can be a good way to see if prescribed burning and mowing have helped provide a food source devoured by quail, or if unharvested grain left around a field edge was beneficial and used by quail. ▪



Jeff Burleson *is a native of Lumberton, N.C., who lives in Myrtle Beach, S.C. He graduated from N.C. State University and is a certified biologist and professional forester for Southern Palmetto Environmental Consulting.*





2017-18 NORTH CAROLINA HUNTING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.
Refer to NCWRC's official hunting regulations pamphlet or www.ncwildlife.org.

HUNTING SEASONS

DEER

Western	Bowhunting	Sept. 8-30 Oct. 14-Nov. 18 Dec. 9-Jan. 1, 2019 (bucks only)
	Muzzleloader	Oct. 1-13
	Gun	Nov. 19-Dec. 8
Northwestern	Bowhunting	Sept. 9-Nov. 2
	Muzzleloader	Nov. 3-16
	Gun	Nov. 19-Jan. 1, 2019
Central	Bowhunting	Sept. 8-Oct. 26
	Muzzleloader	Oct 27-Nov. 9
	Gun	Nov. 10-Jan. 1, 2019
Northeastern/ Southeastern	Bowhunting	Sept. 8-28
	Muzzleloader	Sept. 29-Oct.12
	Gun	Oct. 13-Jan. 1, 2019

BEAR

Oct. 15-Nov. 17 & Dec. 10-Jan. 1, 2019:	In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties
Nov. 10-Jan. 1, 2019:	Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly,Union counties
Oct. 13-Jan. 1, 2019:	Franklin, Harnett, Johnston, Hoke, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties
Nov. 17-Jan. 1, 2019:	Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties
Nov.12-Jan. 1, 2019:	Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Robeson, Sampson counties
Nov. 10-25, Dec. 8-23:	Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell counties
Nov. 10-18, Dec. 8-23:	Currituck, Gates, Perquimans counties
Nov. 9-18, Dec. 8-23:	Camden, Chowan, Pasquotank counties
Nov. 17-Dec. 16:	Beaufort, Bertie, Craven, Hertford, Jones, Martin, Washington counties
Nov. 17-Dec. 16:	Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Pitt, Wayne, Wilson counties

SQUIRREL	Oct. 16-Feb. 28, 2018 (gray & red squirrels) Oct. 16-Dec. 31 (fox squirrels) in Alleghany, Edgecombe, Moore, Scotland, Anson, Greene, New Hanover, Stokes, Ashe, Harnett, Onslow, Surry, Bladen, Hoke, Pender, Watauga, Brunswick, Johnston, Pitt, Wayne, Cumberland, Jones, Richmond, Wilkes, Duplin, Lenoir, Sampson
RABBIT & QUAIL	Nov. 18-Feb. 28, 2019
GROUSE	Oct. 16-Feb. 28, 2019
WILD TURKEY	April 13-May 11, 2019 (Youth Only: April 6-12, 2019)
RAILS **(KING, SORA, VIRGINIA, CLAPPER)**	Sept. 1-Oct. 13, Oct. 22-Nov. 28
(GALLINULES, MOORHENS)	Sept. 1-Oct. 13, Oct. 22-Nov. 28
CANADA GEESE Statewide: Sept. 1-30	Resident zone, Oct. 3-13, Nov. 10-Dec. 1, Dec. 15-Feb. 9. NE Zone, Jan. 11-26, permit only
SNOW, BLUE, ROSS GEESE	Oct. 9-Feb. 9, 2019, Feb. 11-March 30, 2019 (permit)
DUCKS	Oct. 3-6, Nov. 10-Dec. 1, Dec. 15-Jan. 26, 2019
EARLY TEAL	Sept. 12-29 (east of US 17 only)
SEA DUCKS	Nov. 19-Jan. 26, 2019
BRANT	Dec. 15-Jan. 26, 2019
DOVE	Sept. 1-Oct. 6, Nov. 17-Jan. 1, 2019; Dec. 10-Jan. 31, 2019
TUNDRA SWAN	Nov. 10-Jan. 29, 2019. Bag limit 1, by permit only.
RACCOON, OPOSSUM	Oct. 16 (at sunrise)-Feb. 28, 2018
WOODCOCK	Dec. 8-Jan. 29, 2019

2017-18 SOUTH CAROLINA HUNTING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.
Please refer to SCDNR's Rules & Regulations Digest.

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND)	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 1-Oct. 13, Nov. 10-24 Dec. 15-Jan. 15, 2019	15	45
Crow	Nov. 1-March 1, 2019	No limits	
Quail	Nov. 20-March 1, 2019	12	36
Rabbit	Nov. 23-March 1, 2019	5	15
Squirrel	Oct. 1-March 1, 2019	10	30
Fox	Nov. 23-March 1, 2019	No limits	
Grouse	Nov. 23-March 1, 2019 (Game Zone 1 only)	3	9
Raccoon/ Opossum	Sept. 15-March 15, 2019 (statewide)	3 raccoons per party	
	Sept. 15-March 15, 2019 (Game Zones 3, 6)	No limits	
Other furbearers	Nov. 26-March 1, 2019 (bobcat, otter, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk)	No limits	
Bear	Oct. 17-23 (still hunting only)	1	
	(Game Zone 1 only) Oct. 24-30 (dogs),	5 per party	
	(Game Zone 1 only) Oct. 17-30		
	(Horry, Georgetown, WIlliamsburg counties)	1	(permit only)
Rails	Oct. 6-10		
King & Clapper	Nov. 3-Jan. 6, 2018	15	45
Sora & Virginia		25	75
Gallinules (common/purple)	Nov. 3-Jan. 6, 2018	15	45
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28, 2019	8	24
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31, 2019	3	9
Wild Turkey	March 20-May 5, 2019 (statewide private land)	3	
	April 1-May 5, 2019 (statewide WMAs)	3	

DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
1		Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2019
2	Sept. 15-30	Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan.1, 2019
3			Aug. 15-Jan. 1, 2019
4	Aug 15-31		Sept. 1-Jan. 1, 2019
Youth Day			Jan. 6, 2019

WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 15-30	6
	Nov. 17-24, Dec. 8-Jan. 27, 2019	6
Canada geese	Sept. 1-30, Nov. 17-24, Dec. 8-Jan. 27, 2019 Feb. 13-28, 2019	15
Blue/snow (light) geese	Nov. 17-24, Dec. 8-Jan. 27, 2019, Feb. 13-28, 2019	25
Brant	Nov. 17-24, Dec. 8-Jan. 27, 2019	2
Sea ducks	Nov. 17-24, Dec. 8-Jan. 27, 2019	6
Mergansers	Nov. 17-24, Dec. 8-Jan. 27, 2019	5 (1 hooded)
Coots	Nov. 17-24, Dec. 8-Jan. 27, 2019	15

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry



Winter fishing can be more fun than most anglers realize, but in a kayak or other paddlecraft, precautions are necessary.

LAYER UP FOR WINTER KAYAK FISHING TRIPS

ACTION CAN BE TOP DRAWER, IF YOU'RE PREPARED FOR THE COLD

Phillip Gentry

One of the best-kept secrets in the angling community is fishing during the winter. It might not exactly be a secret, but a large contingent of anglers hits the water sometime in March just before the spring spawn, fishes through the spring and early summer, then starts to peter out once the weather gets hot. The same anglers may fish a time or two in the fall, but most never consider winter fishing.

While kayak anglers are but a subset of the fishing community, the same mindset often holds true, maybe even to a greater extent because kayak fishing almost always involves getting wet to some degree, simply due to paddle splash and the close proximity to the water.

The secret is that winter can provide some of the year's best fishing. Food is harder to come by, so some species bite more readily. Others may actually prefer cooler water and become more active.

The No. 1 and No. 2 considerations when kayak fishing in the winter are attire and safety, and the first has a lot to do with the second. Just like riding a motorcycle in cold weather, learning what to wear and how to dress negates much of the adversity, while reserving much of the enjoyment for yourself.

For kayak fishing in the Carolinas, where the temperature — for the most part — stays above freezing during the day, anglers who dress in layers can stay warm and dry during on the water.

Dressing for winter fishing is done in three layers. The first is the base layer next to the skin. Its purpose is to cover the skin for comfort, while allowing perspiration to wick through so moisture won't accumulate under your clothing. Base layers are mostly thin synthetics or wools. A word about cotton here. Cotton might be warm, but it absorbs water and should be avoided.

The second layer is the middle or insulating layer. These garments are made of denser, thicker synthetics, fleece, wool or down. This layer traps air that is warmed. During mid-day, this layer may actually be the outer layer if conditions permit.

The final layer is outerwear, which needs to be both windproof and waterproof. Outer garments will vary for fishing on a mid-50s day and a lower-30s day. Rain-shell materials works for average days while dry suits have become very popular for harsher days.

A final note about preparation for being on the water in the winter: safety practices deserve the same preparation as fishing and launching plans. PFDs are a must; there's no exception in the winter. Additional clothing stored in a dry box or bag is also necessary in the event of a winter spill.

Lastly, always file a float plan, or better, fish with a partner who can provide help if needed. ▪



Phillip Gentry *of Simpsonville, S.C., is host of "Upstate Outdoors," a weekly radio show that can be heard on Saturdays at noon on WORD 106.3 FM.*

A SERIOUS, NEAR MISS

Justin Carter of Mount Pleasant, S.C., a member of Hobie's pro staff, tells the story of a fishing trip that almost ended in tragedy.

It was early in Carter's kayak-fishing career; he was learning how to stand up in his Hobie Adventure, a much-narrower craft than his current Pro Angler. He and a buddy were sight-fishing the flats off the ICW and had paddled a couple of miles to find fish.

"It was 18 degrees that morning — so cold the edges of the marsh were actually freezing, and the water temps were in the low 40s," he said. "I was getting comfortable with standing up in the kayak and paddling, which was a tremendous help in sight-fishing for reds."

Carter said that all of the sudden, he got that left/right wobble going, a tell-tale sign he was about to go in the water.

"I just dropped and grabbed the bow of the boat in a bear hug," he said. "I'm not sure how I kept from flipping the boat and going in the water, but I didn't."

No one wants to go in the water during the winter, the cold air and water that day were more serious, even life-threatening, considering the other situation Carter had put himself in.

"I had left the phone in the truck, and I had no other clothes, no towel, nothing. My buddy was probably a half-mile away, out of shouting distance. If I had gone in the water, I can't say I would have made it back to the ramp before hypothermia set in."

Carter said the incident taught him a lesson. To this day, he always packs spare clothes and a towel in a dry bag that goes in the boat. In addition, he never goes out on the water without some type of communication. ▪

DECEMBER'S BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Yellow perch

WHERE — Nantahala Lake

HOW — Yellow perch spawn very early in the season, so mid- to late January is prime prespawn time on many western North Carolina lakes. Live minnows are hard to beat fished around rocky points, as well as small crawfish-colored crankbaits.

LAUNCH — Nantahala Lake has two public-access points, one on the east side of the lake at Rocky Branch and the other on the west side at Choga access. Both can be reached via Wayaha Road.

INSIDER TIP — Nantahala Lake is best known for its population of kokanee salmon. These fish often frequent the same spots as yellow perch.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Redfish

WHERE — Copahee Sound near Mount Pleasant

HOW — Redfish will be schooled up tight and holding in extremely shallow water to avoid predation by dolphin. Cast small-plastic baits out in front of the schools.

LAUNCH — Kayak access to Copahee Sound is from the public ramp located at off Gadsonville Road east of US 17.

INSIDER TIP — Most anglers think of winter fishing for reds as sight-fishing, which requires clear water. Winter weather frequently causes murky water conditions, so always fish with scented or scent-enhanced baits.

continues on page 70





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continued



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The case protects against water, moisture and damage from the elements. The watertight design boasts reliable protection and is ideal for camping, paddle and water sports.

The case is made from shatterproof materials and constructed using a heavy duty, long-lasting design. Its dimensions are 7.9" x 4.89" x 1.02".

MSRP is $11.99.

Available at Dick's Sporting Goods.

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Don't let weather, water levels or risk of immersion keep you from fishing. Made with kayak anglers in mind, the men's NRS Sidewinder Dry bibs let you wade without fear of soaking.

These waders, specially designed for fishermen, are made from 125 denier polyester and are completely waterproof, utilizing a 4-layer Eclipse fabric with a Nanosphere durable water repellent finish that locks out water while letting excess moisture escape.

The polyester, microfiber shell has superior abrasion-resistance and allows friction-free movement for paddling. The bib is designed for maximum comfort under a PFD.

The detachable wishbone suspender system uses nylon buckles, with two side adjustments for a snug fit. The patented TIZIP® MasterSeal relief zipper allows convenient pit stops without having to completely removed the bibs.

Kayak anglers can combine the bibs with a double-skirted dry top or the NRS High Tide Splash Paddling Jacket. The jacket has an articulated hood and a quick-venting neck.

MSRP for the NRS Sidewinder Dry Bibs Waders is $449.95. The High Tide Splash Paddling Jacket lists for $149.95.

Both available at REI.

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Jerry Dilsaver

HEARTY SOUP FOR A COLD DAY

CREAMY VENISON, MUSHROOM, RICE SOUP WARMS YOU UP



While last winter was an exception, winters in the Carolinas aren't typically harsh. Still, there are days we get cold hunting, fishing or working, and it's nice to have a nice bowl of soup or stew to warm up. This is a venison soup that includes a multi-rice blend, fresh mushrooms and cream of mushroom soup to give the kitchen a nice aroma. It also makes it filling and something that warms deeply.

This recipe is ideal for cold, January days. Whatever you did that made you cold, a bowl or three of this soup will have you up and wondering what to do that afternoon. It's also civilized enough to serve at home for the wife and kids.

I haven't made this soup in a crock pot yet, but I'm sure it will work. The venison is lightly browned in the pan, and surely, several hours on low heat in a crock pot will plump and tenderize the rice without destroying the nutty crunch of the wild rice in the blend.

I typically don't make things with a lot of cream, but this is good. Because of the cream, I don't eat this soup often, but you just might. It's simple and really tasty. It's a lot like spaghetti and chili, in that it seems to get better when reheated. That actually became a step in this recipe after it was discovered with an early pot. A plus is that wrapping your hands around a cup or bowl will bring them back to operating temperature quickly.

This versatile recipe should easily transition to substituting beef or chicken. I prefer the flavor and lower fat content of venison and sometimes use venison sausage to give it a little spice from the start. Whatever you use, just get a good sear on the meat before adding the other ingredients for the prolonged simmer that spreads the good flavor throughout.

Let me offer a little warning regarding cooking this. If you prepare it for a Saturday lunch at the hunting club, you may want to double or triple the recipe. This is a good amount, but I've seen hunters swabbing the pot with bread to get the last bit when I only made a single amount, and it's not good to leave a hunter hungry. He may be the one who provides the meat for the next batch. ■

Rice and cream of mushroom makes this venison-based soup a great winter meal. **INSET**: Onions and celery are the only ingredients that need to be chopped before becoming part of this soup.

Jerry Dilsaver

CREAMY VENISON, MUSROOM, RICE SOUP

This is a hearty soup that is very filling and warming. It's good anytime, but is just the ticket for a meal or snack on a cold, winter day. This version is mild, with just a little edge. It can be made more robust by adding a little more Cha Sauce or pepper, and it doesn't have to be added while cooking; they can be added at the table to suit those who prefer it spicier.

This soup has gone through several revisions over the years. The best one has been the rice. It began with wild rice, then shifted to long grain and wild rice, but I believe it will stay with the Rice Select Royal Blend (www.riceselect.com); it's worth the time it takes to find. It is a blend of Texmati white, brown, wild and Thai red rice that plumps well and soaks up the venison and creamy mushroom flavors in the soup. I like it so much I have begun using it with other recipes and as a side dish.

This soup is also much like chili and spaghetti in becoming more flavorful each time it is cooled and warmed. I included the cooling and warming steps in this recipe; this doesn't have to be done, but it enhances the flavor enough to be noticeable. It is even better when refrigerated several hours and warmed over. Cooling the soup thickens it, and you may want to add a little water when reheating, but don't use much.

When you warm it, bring the heat up slowly so it doesn't sear and stick on the bottom of the pan. Stirring a lot helps prevent this. If you are pushed for time and want to reheat it in a microwave, don't use full power; use half power and let it warm a little more slowly. This gets the juices flowing and locks in added flavor.

If you have an older package of ground venison in your freezer, this is just the recipe for it. Cooking it slowly and in the bouillon and cream of mushroom soup will keep it moist and restore its tenderness. If you like this and would like to try it with a little more kick, one of the easiest ways to do that is to begin with venison sausage rather than burger.

I prefer to cook in a cast-iron pot, which distributes the heat well, and there aren't hot spots right over the burner rings. I have a deep frying pan I sometimes use for frying fish and chicken that barely holds this recipe. In fact, this recipe was tailored to cook in this pan. If you have a cast-iron Dutch oven, that would be just the ticket and allow stirring without being extra careful not to spill.

This winter, when you're thinking that a soup or stew would be good to ward off the cold, give this a try. I promise it will warm you up, and it's filling too. Give it a try and you won't be disappointed. If you take it to the hunting club, you should at least make a double recipe. It disappears pretty quickly once hungry hunters get a taste. Enjoy! ▪

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound ground venison

1 cup Rice Select Royal Blend rice blend

2 cans cream of mushroom soup

⅔ small pack of fresh sliced mushrooms

1 large sweet onion

4 celery ribs

2 cups beef bouillon or broth. If using bouillon, I suggest Better Than Bouillon Roast Beef Base.

3 cups water

1 tsp Cavender's All Purpose Greek Seasoning

1 tsp coarse ground black pepper

1 tsp Texas Pete Cha Sauce

Non-stick cooking spray



Cooling thickens this soup, and rewarming it enhances the flavor plenty.

PREPARATION:

Chop the onion and celery. Use the non-stick cooking spray to lightly cover the bottom of the cast-iron pot, then break the glaze on the onions and very lightly brown the venison in the Cavender's seasoning. Drain any grease from the pan.

Add the two cups of bouillon or broth, two cups water, celery, Royal Blend Rice Blend, pepper and Cha Sauce and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium and stir in the mushroom soup, mushrooms and another cup of water. Return to high just long enough to boil again, stirring frequently.

Reduce heat to low and cover while cooking for 45 minutes to an hour, stirring occasionally. Cook just long enough the mushrooms and celery are tender.

An option is to allow it to cool at this point, then reheat to medium, stirring often. Reduce heat to warm and serve.

This serves well with a green salad or lettuce wedge to begin and accompanied by a warm roll or slice of hearty bread. Warm pecan or apple pie is a good choice for dessert, and ice cream with the pie makes it even better. ▪



Jerry Dilsaver *of Oak Island, N.C., is a freelance writer, as well as a former national king mackerel champion fisherman. Readers are encouraged to send their favorite recipes and a photo of the completed dish to possibly be used in a future issue of the magazine. E-mail the recipes and photos to Jerry Dilsaver at captjerry@captjerry.com.*

Robert Satterwhite



Yes, it's cold in the winter in places in the Carolinas where trout are commonly caught, but don't let that keep you off the stream.

DON'T GET STUCK IN A FISHING RUT

TROUT ANGLERS IN THE CAROLINAS HAVE TOO MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO GET STUCK ON JUST ONE STREAM

Welsey Satterwhite

Too often, trout fishers fall into a comfortable pattern of fishing the same streams over and over because they know where fish are likely to be. Western North Carolina, South Carolina's Upstate and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park have hundreds of miles of trout streams, more creeks and rivers than you could fish in a lifetime.

Additionally, the Cherokee Indian Reservation has more than 30 miles of streams open to public fishing on the Oconaluftee River, Raven Fork, Bunches and Soco creeks, plus three ponds in the Big Cove area. A two-mile section of the Oconaluftee River in Big Cove is designated as trophy trout waters and limited to catch-and-release fly fishing. Only a tribal permit ($10 per day) is required to fish Enterprise Waters, but a separate permit is required for the trophy waters. Fishing is open year-round on trophy waters. Enterprise Waters close on the last day in February and reopen the last Saturday in March.

CHOOSE WILD TROUT

Wild trout streams are open to fishing year-round in the Great Smoky Mountains Park, in western North Carolina, and South Carolina's Upstate. With a few exceptions, fishing is limited to artificial lures with a single hook. Creel limits are four per day in North Carolina, five per day in South Carolina, and five per day in the park.

Either a North Carolina or Tennessee state fishing license is required for fishing streams in the park.

The Blue Ridge Parkway's 100 miles of streams offer both wild and hatchery-supported trout fishing, the latter managed by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Only a state fishing license is required to fish parkway streams.

Stone Mountain State Park in Alleghany County has two streams designated as "just for fun" fishing streams: Bullhead and Rich Mountain creeks. Fishers buy a permit that gives them exclusive access to designated portions of the streams. Most of the fish in Bullhead are trophy size, some measuring more than 30 inches.

In South Carolina, most streams have a split season, with fishing limited to catch-and-release from Nov. 1 through May 14. On May 15, streams, with a few exceptions, open to catch-and-keep fishing, most with no bait or lure restrictions.

The majority of South Carolina's trout streams are in Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties. Tailwaters of Lakes Hartwell and Murray also are open to trout fishing.

SC FISHING GUIDE

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources has an excellent online trout-fishing guide (www.dnr.sc,gov/fish/pdf/TroutBook.pdf) with maps, stream listings and other useful information. Stream regulations are also available online at (www.dnr.sc.gov/regulations).

North Carolina trout-fishing information, maps, stocking schedules and regulations are available at www.ncwildlife.org. The site includes a downloadable map showing locations of trout waters.

EMBRACE THE COLD

January and February traditionally are the coldest months in the southern Appalachians, and if the forecasts are accurate, the mountains will have an abundance of snow. The good news is that January and February always have a few warm, sunny days suitable for trout fishing, and those warm, sunny days produce hatches. The bonus of winter fishing is that streams are less crowded. As for the trout, they must eat regardless of the weather. It just takes more work to catch them.

Brown, black, and gray nymphs get the best results in cold weather. Use bead-heads or lead to get nymphs to the bottom where trout are most likely to be holding. Trout will hit dry flies any time of year if conditions are favorable, but nymphs are much more effective and consistent.

Suggested patterns are: Blue-Winged olive (Nos. 18-20), black or white Trico (Nos. 18-20), and gray Midge (Nos. 18-20) for dry-fly fishing. Recommended nymph patterns are Zug Bug (Nos. 10-12), Hare's Ear (Nos. 10-12), Secret Weapon (No. 10), Brown Stone (Nos. 8-10), Prince (Nos. 10-12), and My Pet (No. 10). ▪



Bob Satterwhite *has been writing about the outdoors, particularly trout fishing, for more than 25 years. A native of Morganton, N.C., he lives in Cullowhee, N.C., close to the Tuckasegee River, Caney Fork, Moses Creek, and several other prime trout streams.*





By Rob Heflin

4 KEYS TO WINTER DOVES

Not many of us think of hunting small game, especially doves, during the dead of winter. It is true that while dove hunters come out en masse on Labor Day and a few weekends afterwards in September, only a few "professional" dove hunters take to the fields during the second and third segments of the season.

They miss out on the 100-degree weather, biting insects and large crowds. Couple those benefits with northern doves migrating south, and you have a recipe for success during the January portion of the season.

Here are a few things to consider:



The southern migration of mourning doves, together with limited food availability in January, can make for some great, late-season dove hunts if you can put everything together.

1 DOVE BIOLOGY

It is no secret that many of the doves shot during the early seasons are resident doves. A large portion of those birds are juveniles that were hatched only a few weeks or months before season began.

Doves typically have multiple broods per season. Often, one brood will be raised, and not long after they fledge, another batch of eggs is laid in the same nest.

The downside to this rapid reproduction cycle is a short lifespan. Studies have shown that as much as 70 percent of the juvenile population doesn't make it through its first year.

2 FOOD, FOOD, FOOD, FOOD

A mourning dove's diet consists almost entirely of seeds. Up to 99 percent of a typical dove's diet is composed of weed seeds and agricultural grains. Commonly eaten weed seeds are foxtails, pigweeds and wild millets such as barnyard grass. Commonly eaten agricultural grains are wheat, corn and soybeans.

In many agricultural fields, these natural dove foods have sprouted and produced seeds after the ag crop has been harvested. You can score a double-wammy in these areas with both natural and agricultural seeds. In many instances, a field prepared for the early dove seasons can also be a late-season dove magnet when natural grasses and weeds emerge and produce seed after September sunflowers are long gone.

Keying in on the food sources is probably the most important factor when targeting late-season doves. While early-season hunts usually focus on water holes, shade trees and high-oil crops like



sunflowers, late-season hunting tactics can be a bit different.

When those blustery cold fronts sweep down from the north, doves can't afford to sit still. They need high-energy food sources to provide the fuel to keep their bodies warm.

3 IT'S ALL ABOUT LOCATION

Finding a food source is one objective, but narrowing it down to which spot the doves prefer in a 300-acre cut cornfield is another. Dialing in on mini-flight paths in each area is crucial to your success, especially when covering a lot of ground with very few hunters.

Focus on gaps in treelines, dead snags, fencerows, wires and grit areas. No matter what season, doves must have grit in their crops for digestion. Find an area where they congregate to gather grit, and you can score big, but keep in mind that it is not legal to shoot from or across a public road.

4 GETTING IN GEAR

While one may not necessarily think of a lot of gear for hunting doves, a few changes in "accessories" can be beneficial to the lone dove hunter in the late-season.

While most dove hunters I've talked to say that their dove stool is their most useful gadget, I get an overwhelming vote of confidence for the use of decoys during the late season.

Most hunters agree that when hunting with a couple-dozen hunters in September, it is not difficult to keep the birds flying and to have multiple opportunities at passing birds. But switch gears to hunting a cold, windy, 200-acre field with a handful of hunters, and the guys agree that decoys really help

Clip-on decoys attached to stalks, limbs, fences or even placed on the ground seem to have a positive effect on bringing doves closer for a shot. Probably the most-popular dove decoy with the modern hunter is the spinning-wing decoy.

Another thing to consider when hunting late-season doves is that the birds are larger than early-season locals, and are generally passing by at greater distances than those birds on small, September fields. Many hunters agree that switching from low-brass No. 7½ and No. 8 shot to a heavier load of No. 6 shot will give that extra "umph" needed to take down late-season birds.

Don't overlook the minute details when hunting late-season birds. There is usually less cover for the hunter to hide in, and the green, leafy vegetation is gone. Good camo and concealment is paramount. ▪





Winter is a great time to work on your fly-casting technique, paying special attention to the relationship between the back cast and forward stroke.

WINTER FLY-ROD PRACTICE

GET YOUR STROKE DOWN, COLD

By Richard Bernabe

If you're not inclined to take advantage of some of the Carolinas' superb winter trout or coastal flats-fishing opportunities, this could be the time of year to practice, refine or improve your fly-casting stroke.

This can be done from the relative comfort of your own backyard. Warmth and hot coffee are only a few dozen steps from your practice area.

Here are some fly casting basics to remember when honing your casting stroke during the winter:

1. GET RID OF THAT SLACK, SLACKER

It's important to remember that in order to cast efficiently during forward and back casts, any slack must be removed from the line before the start of the cast.

Simply put, the line must be taut before the cast ever begins. This is true for the forward and the back cast. You'll not move the line or load the rod until the slack is gone. Power and efficiency will be wasted if the arm moves without the line.

2. START/STOP: A CASTING KEY

During the back and forward casts, the casting stroke must be accelerated to a hard stop. Your casting motion must continually gain speed until the rod is brought to a complete stop in the desired position.

By accelerating, the rod is kept loaded at all times. A constant speed either forward or back will not load the rod properly, and the cast will fail.

Do not decelerate at the end of the stroke. The hard stop at the end of both the back and front casts is often compared to flicking wet paint from a paint brush. This comparison helped me greatly when I was first learning to cast.

3. MEASURE THAT STROKE

A longer casting stroke will result in a longer cast. Conversely, a shorter stroke will lead to a shorter cast. This is simple to understand but still requires practice.

4. YOUR PROBLEM IS BEHIND YOU

How your rod tip travels during the casting stroke defines how your line will travel through the air. If the rod tip travels straight, then your line will be straight; if curved, then a curved or wavy line.

The direction of your cast is defined by the direction of your rod tip at the end of the end of the casting stroke. If your rod tip is curved by the way you stop your rod or hold your rod, then your line will curve on the cast as well.

It's during the back cast when most casting problems originate with beginning fly casters.

The old saying is: "When you're fly casting, 80 percent of your problems are behind you" — meaning, most casting problems relate to the back cast.

The perfect back cast is one that, when viewed from all angles, is 180 degrees away from the intended forward cast and has enough momentum to load the rod by bending back the rod tip. The line should be in a fairly tight loop and have no slack in it as you begin your forward cast. If your back cast is 180 degrees from your target, you will minimize tailing loops.

A tailing loop is caused by the end of the fly line running into the rest of the line on the cast (either forward or back). A back cast out of alignment or a rod tip not tracking straight can cause the problem.

Make a good back cast and keep the rod tip tracking straight on the forward cast. The tailing loop should disappear. ▪



Steve Sykes of Durham caught this 7-pound bass on March 18, 2018, fishing in a farm pond.



Steve Pearson caught this nice crappie in the Lynches River near Effingham, S.C., last spring.



Brian Johnson of Raleigh, N.C., boated this 22-inch striper fishing out of Belhaven on March 19, 2018.



Jared Beard of Wilmington, N.C., decked this red snapper on April 1, 2018, fishing 35 miles off of Wrightsville Beach.



Jeff Stewart killed this nice gobbler in Lancaster County, S.C., last spring.



Timmy Luck, a special-needs hunter from Randleman, N.C., took this Granville County Dec. 22, 2018, with help from hunter Jeff Ferguson.



Phil Bridgers caught these stripers on March 17, 2018, at Roanoke Rapids Lake.

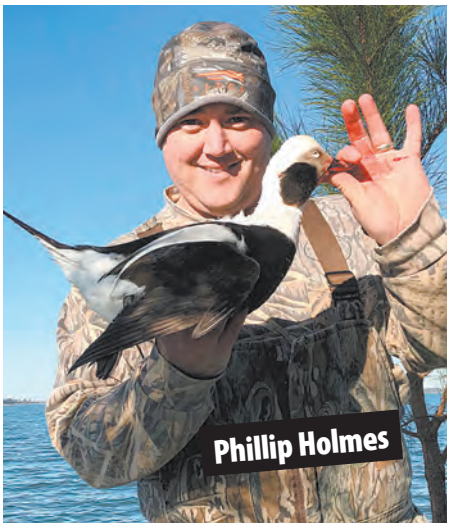
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But hang on to the negatives, because the photos cannot be returned.

Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Philip Holmes killed this beautiful old squaw sea duck in January 2018 on the Pamlico Sound in Hyde County, N.C.



Patrick McCann of Raleigh, N.C., caught this yellowfin tuna on April 1, 2018, off Los Suenos, Costa Rica.



Jessica Eva Braxton of Emerald Isle, N.C., caught this nice Atlantic bonito last May.



Dianne Meadows caught this huge brown trout, 7 pounds, 23 inches, in North Carolina's Catawba River.



Toby Burton caught this nice dolphin fishing off North Carolina's Cape Lookout.



John "Dawson" Williford, 7, of Oxford, N.C. killed his first buck, this 13-point trophy, on Nov. 14, 2017, in Granville County.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of Carolina Sportsman magazine. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your fish, deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, doves, etc. to

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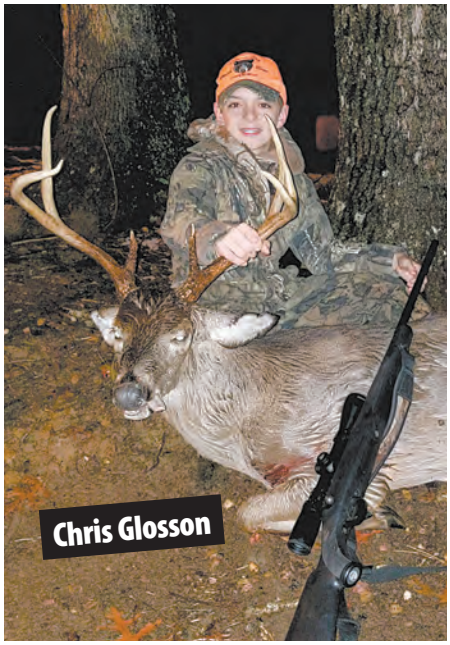
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Mazie Buckner, 9, from Saluda, N.C., caught her first smallmouth on South Carolina's Lake Jocassee on April 22, 2018.



Tommy Johnson of Knightdale, N.C., caught this big bluefish out of Rose Bay on a Zara Spook on April 12, 2018.



Chris Glosson, 13, of Rougemont, N.C., killed this nice buck on Dec. 9, 2018, with a .243.



Toby Burton caught this big false albacore on a Castmaster spoon fishing off North Carolina's Cape Lookout.



J.R. Passmore caught and released this 10-pound bass in a pond near Orangeburg, S.C., on a frog bait.



Laura Silverdahl caught this 27½-pound king mackerel in September 2017 off North Carolina's Shackleford Banks.



Angie Langston caught this 42-pound striper in the Tennessee River in April 2017 fishing with guide Bo Rice.



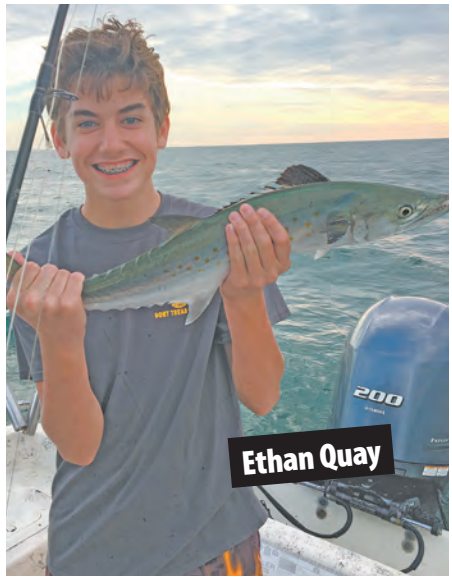
Owen Goins, 7, killed his first deer, this 24-inch 8-pointer, on Dec. 2, 2017, in Union County, N.C.



Jaymack Lloyd, 9, of Hartsville, S.C., caught these nice Santee Cooper bluegill.



Micah Edquist of Meisenheimer ,N.C., caught this beautiful rainbow trout on a mop fly in the Watauga River in April 2018.



Ethan Quay caught this Spanish mackerel on Aug. 9, 2018, out of Awendaw, S.C.



FISH MONKEY GUIDE GLOVES

If fishing is tough on any particular body part, it's likely your hands, which are in constant contact with the handle of your reel, line of various size and materials, not to mention the toothy mouths of fish and the hooks that catch them.

That's where Fish Monkey comes in. Based in Destin, Fla., this manufacturer has, in three years, come out with a line of gloves designed for comfort and protection of all kinds for anglers of all stripes, whether you're regularly grabbing the leader and lining in heavyweights like wahoo, tuna and billfish, or tying on lures and hooks for bass, redfish or mountain trout.

The company debuted its Half Finger Guide Glove and its Pro 365 Guide Glove this past spring, designed for fishermen who need to keep a good grip on things while getting protection for their hands.

The Guide Gloves come in a variety of colors and retail for $29.95.

For more info, visit: fishmonkeygloves.com



OTTOLOCK CINCH LOCK

My son and I faced a problem this fall when trying to make sure we could securely store an ATV in a barn on our hunting lease. A big chain and lock would be fine, but an Ottolock might be even better.

Made from a durable plastic with multiple layers of steel and Kevlars bands, the Ottolock works like an indistructable ratchet strap, but there's no ratchet — just a lock instead. A 3-dial combination lock holds the strap in place when it's cinched down to secure something; in this case, part of the ATV frame to a beam in the barn. Other uses include locking up bicycles, canoes and kayaks, and even locking boxes down onto the front or back rack of an ATV. We're already looking at it as a tool to secure a canoe while shuttling vehicles around after a float trip for ducks.

Ottolocks come in three sizes, 18, 30 and 60 inches, a handful of colors — including camouflage — and range in price from $60 to $85.

For more info, visit: ottodesignworks.com

LIVETARGET'S HOLLOW BODY CRAW



When it comes to realistic-looking lures, nobody beats LiveTarget — and this time they've turned their attention to anatomical precision to a staple food for bass, with the introduction of the new hollow body craw. I got the chance to see it in action last summer, shortly after it won Best of Show at ICAST 2018 for the Freshwater Soft Lure category. And let me tell you, this hollow body/jig combo is something to behold. The lure comes in three sizes (1½-inch, ⅜-ounce; 1¾-inch, ½-ounce and 2-inch, ⅜-ounce) and eight colors, but the beauty of this craw is that its skirt and pincers trap tiny air bubbles, which create tantalizingly realistic movement — even when the lure is still on the bottom. And to top it off, it moves in reverse, like a fleeing crawfish. (Just don't bring it to a boil, because it looks so real someone might get hooked.) MSRP is $9.99 - $11.49, and each lure comes with a pair of replacement pincers.

For more info, visit: livetargetlures.com

New product submissions can be emailed to **Mark Boyd** at **products@CarolinaSportsman.com** or call 601-829-8080.

ASTRO TABLES

Astro Tables is far more effective than "moon tables," because it takes into account critical solar energies as well as lunar.

• The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).

• The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each . . . 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

• **Astro Tables** is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).

• **PrimeTimes'** forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

The 2019 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. **$13.95** (plus $4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2019 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks-and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2019, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2020, and more. Comes with FREE 2019 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for $8.95, plus $3 s&h.

Book: *"How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor.* $14.95 (plus $4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

2019 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. $29.95 (plus $3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

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For more information and samples of PrimeTimes products, visit our web site: **www.primetimes2.com**

2019 JAN

	BEST DAYS					LUNAR PERIODS (TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED)				
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Tue 1					17	3:10 am	8:01 am - 9:29 am	2:15 pm	8:26 pm - 9:54 pm	
Wed 2					24	4:09 am	8:55 am - 10:11 am	2:53 pm	9:20 pm - 10:36 pm	
Thu 3					32	5:08 am	9:48 am - 10:56 am	3:34 pm	10:13 pm - 11:21 pm	
Fri 4					40	6:04 am	10:41 am - 11:43 am	4:19 pm	11:06 pm - 12:08 am	LOW
Sat 5					44	**6:57 am**	11:33 am - 12:31 pm ☀	**5:08 pm**	11:58 pm - Midnight	NEW
Sun 6					34	**7:45 am**	12:21 pm - 1:23 pm ☀	5:59 pm	Midnight - 12:56 am	
Mon 7					24	8:29 am	1:07 pm - 2:13 pm	6:53 pm	12:46 am - 1:48 am	
Tue 8					16	9:09 am	1:48 pm - 3:04 pm	7:48 pm	1:32 am - 2:38 am	Apogee
Wed 9					13	9:44 am	2:28 pm - 3:54 pm	8:43 pm	2:13 am - 3:29 am	
Thu 10					16	10:17 am	3:05 pm - 4:43 pm	9:37 pm	2:53 am - 4:19 am	
Fri 11					19	10:47 am	3:41 pm - 5:33 pm ◠	10:32 pm	3:30 am - 5:08 am	
Sat 12					24	11:17 am	4:15 pm - 6:23 pm ◠	11:28 pm	4:06 am - 5:58 am	
Sun 13					32	**11:46 am**	4:51 pm - 7:13 pm		4:40 am - 6:48 am	
Mon 14					45	**12:17 pm**	5:27 pm - 8:07 pm	12:25 am	5:16 am - 7:38 am	HALF
Tue 15					38	12:51 pm	6:08 pm - 9:00 pm	1:24 am	5:52 am - 8:32 am ◡	
Wed 16					37	1:28 pm	6:53 pm - 9:59 pm	2:25 am	6:33 am - 9:25 am ◡	
Thu 17					50	2:12 pm	7:41 pm - 11:01 pm	3:30 am	7:18 am - 10:24 am	
Fri 18					62	3:02 pm	8:38 pm - 12:04 am	4:36 am	8:06 am - 11:26 am	
Sat 19					74	4:01 pm	9:40 pm - 1:06 am	5:41 am	9:03 am - 12:29 pm	HIGH
Sun 20					79	**5:07 pm**	10:45 pm - 2:07 am	**6:44 am**	10:05 am - 1:31 pm ☀	FULL
Mon 21					70	**6:18 pm**	11:53 pm - Midnight	**7:41 am**	11:10 am - 2:32 pm ☀	Perigee
Tue 22					58	7:31 pm	Midnight - 3:05 am	8:32 am	12:18 pm - 3:30 pm	
Wed 23					44	8:42 pm	12:58 am - 3:58 am	9:16 am	1:23 pm - 4:23 pm	
Thu 24					36	9:51 pm	2:02 am - 4:44 am	9:56 am	2:27 pm - 5:09 pm	
Fri 25					32	10:57 pm	3:05 am - 5:27 am	10:32 am	3:30 pm - 5:52 pm ◠	
Sat 26					34		4:03 am - 6:09 am	11:07 am	4:28 pm - 6:34 pm ◠	
Sun 27					41	12:01 am	5:01 am - 6:49 am	**11:41 am**	5:26 pm - 7:14 pm	HALF
Mon 28					27	1:03 am	5:57 am - 7:29 am	**12:16 pm**	6:22 pm - 7:54 pm	
Tue 29					19	2:04 am	6:52 am - 8:10 am ◡	**12:53 pm**	7:17 pm - 8:35 pm	
Wed 30					17	3:03 am	7:46 am - 8:54 am ◡	1:33 pm	8:11 pm - 9:19 pm	
Thu 31					15	3:59 am	8:38 am - 9:40 am	2:17 pm	9:03 pm - 10:05 pm	

25 50 75 AVERAGE

For more, visit primetimes2.com

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS: ◡ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ◠ = DUSK

*WHILE THE LESSER **MOONRISE** AND -**SET** OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY **BOLD BLACK TYPE**.*

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Guide Shane Flannigan of Charleston, S.C., can usually catch several fish out of a winter school of reds before they spook.

Brian Cope

GO TO SCHOOL ON LOWCOUNTRY REDS

Sight-fishing to cruising redfish schools can make a January angler happy

Winter is a great time to catch schooling redfish in South Carolina's Lowcountry. Shane Flannigan of the Reel Deal Charters in Charleston said that if anglers don't mind bundling up, they'll find January to be one of the top-producing months for redfish.

The cold has run off the tourists and fair-weather fishermen, and it's also run bait-thieving trash fish out of the inshore waters. But it hasn't run off a large portion of redfish, which gang up in large schools and travel up and down the secondary creeks and inlets that dump into the Charleston Harbor.

"Pinfish and the other bait thieves have to move offshore this time of year because they can't take the cold temperatures January brings to the inshore waters," Flannigan said. "This means you don't have to fight them, and that makes a big difference."

Redfish gang up because they like safety in numbers, and with so many other species gone for the winter, porpoises turn to redfish as their main forage. These schools stay as shallow as possible to stay out of

Flipper's range.

"The water is clearer this time of year, and these schools are so big that anyone can spot them," he said. "And once you locate a school, you can pick up a few fish before moving on to another school, as long as you don't mess up and spook them. That is really the key here; you can't spook and break up a school. They will get really wary then," he said.

Flannigan (843-597-0690) likes to fish for schooling reds with either pieces of blue crab or soft-plastic grubs on jigheads. And to avoid spooking fish, once he sees a group of them, he casts well ahead of the lead fish. Then, he waits for the school to arrive before giving his bait or lure a twitch.

"Don't cast a foot in front of them or even 2 or 3 feet in front of them. I'll cast 10 feet or more ahead of the school and wait on them to get there," he said.

Hooking and battling a fish caught from the front of the school almost never results in the school breaking up, and Flannigan uses his trolling motor to run parallel to the fish as he gets ahead of them again, keeping his boat well away from them.

"You always want to stay a strong cast away from the schools," Flannigan said. "And after you catch two or three from one school — or if you've accidentally spooked the school — it's a good idea to look for another school to fish for a while. You can always come back to the first one after giving them some time to calm back down." ▪

— Brian Cope



Cold weather doesn't slow down the crappie bite at North Carolna's Jordan Lake; it just moves it to deeper water.

JORDAN'S CRAPPIE

head for deep water but keep right on biting

When water temperatures reach their lowest levels in January, crappie also reach their deepest depths at Jordan Lake. That doesn't bother guide Freddie Sinclair of Clayton, NC. He deepens his tight-lining spread and drags the deep channels to fill his boat with slabs that are hunkering down to feed on shad.

"January is a very predictable month," said Sinclair (919-219-2804), who runs Sinclair's Guide Service. "You know the fish are going to be stacked up in the deeper creek channels and deeper ledges on the main lake. Very seldom will they be scattered. If you find the baitfish, most of the time, the crappie will be bunched up with them in good numbers."

The majority of the channels and ledges Sinclair targets are in 30 to 35 feet of water, with schools of crappie ranging from near the bottom to 20 feet below the surface. This makes the main-river channel that winds through the lake and the ledges that drop into it a focal point for a lot of good crappie fishing. Sinclair said that main-lake points where the slope continues into the river channel are hot spots, and the S-turns on the Haw River side of the lake and the US 64 bridge will also get plenty of attention.

"I'll mostly be vertically tight-lining — spider-rigging — with 8 to 10 rods off the front of the boat," said Sinclair, "using 6-pound monofilament line and an egg sinker like a Carolina rig to keep the bait down. The wind will dictate the weight, but on an average day, I use a ½-ounce, dropping down to a ¼- or ⅜-ounce with lighter winds. If we do have more wind and choppy water, I'll put the rods on the back so they don't bounce as bad. I use 12-, 14- and 16-foot rods, but it's not as uncommon for people to use shorter rods. In the deep water, the fish aren't going to spook as bad."

Below the sinker, Sinclair ties either a 1/32- to 1/16-ounce jighead or a gold, No. 4 crappie hook and tips both with a minnow. Jig colors include black, pink, red, orange, and chartreuse — the brighter colors being favored in stained water. Sinclair notes that a trolling speed between 0.2 and 0.5 miles per hour is of particular importance, as well as staggering bait presentations to be above the crappie marked, but as close as possible because the colder water will not allow them to give much of a chase. ▪

— Dusty Wilson

Pawleys Island up next >

PAWLEYS ISLAND

specks stay active, biting in winter months



Speckled trout are a real target for winter anglers in the small estuary at Pawleys Island, S.C.

Jeff Burleson





Diehard speckled trout anglers will find a way to connect with a yellowmouthsyear-round in the Carolinas. While the fall run typically peaks around Thanksgiving, anglers in Pawleys Island, S.C., get to keep picking at specks all winter.

Matt Bellamy of Captain Matt's Saltwater Charters can smell Pawleys Island's salty air from his humble abode just west of US 17. January and February are two of his favorite months to target trout in his backyard playground.

"Trout fishing in Pawleys is usually on fire in January," said Bellamy (843-568-8203). "The creeks in here are usually a little warmer than in other estuaries to the south of us; that holds our fish in place when it gets cold."

In most estuaries with a significant freshwater flow, water temperatures can fall below a trout's comfort zone, and dissolved oxygen can plummet during an extended weather event. While speckled trout prefer cool water, they will often retreat into the ocean to find stable water temperatures and dissolved oxygen.

But small estuaries with minimum freshwater input lead to stable water, moderate temperatures and healthy levels of dissolved oxygen. The small, saltwater estuaries around Pawleys Island and Litchfield Beach are prime examples, and Bellamy can prove it with a stringer full of specks during the coldest months of the year when most anglers have packed it up.

"Most of the bait is gone, and you can catch them on both live bait and artificial lures. If we can get them, we will use mud minnows on a cork. They will hit anything looking frisky," he said.

When live bait isn't an option, Bellamy will use soft plastics.

"I like to use Gulp swimming mullet, Gulp shrimp, and D.O.A. shrimp ... in electric chicken and opening night, but my favorite is pearl white. Everything will hit it," he said.

Even though waters are typically a few degrees warmer in these small estuaries, the water can still be cold, and the trout will gang up in deeper holes. Bellamy will attack these holes on all tides, but he finds the best opportunity for steady action is around the lower end of the falling tide.

"They gang up in the pools, and you can crush them," he said. ▪

— Jeff Burleson

GOT PICS? Send 'em in!

Email images to: **dank@carolinasportsman.com**

All images will be considered, but those taken on the water or in the woods will have the best chance of being featured.

*Digital images must be sent in jpeg format. High-resolution images (taken on your camera's highest setting) will work the best. All images (physical and digital) become property of Carolina Sportsman and cannot be returned.

Little River up next >





Big black sea bass invade the reefs and hardbottoms off Little River Inlet once cold weather arrives along the Carolina coast.

Jeff Burleson

BLACK SEA BASS

give Little River a great bottomfish option

When January arrives, many anglers go into winterizing mode and put up their fishing gear, but it doesn't have to happen that way. Some of the best fishing arrives when it gets cold along the Carolinas' coast.

Cold weather will send some saltwater species on a migratory train to sunny Florida, but others will reposition and overwinter right here. Black sea bass are among those, and anglers with cold-weather gear can have triple-digit catches just a short run from Carolinas beaches, especially those around the state line.

Tom Cushman of Cush's Calmwater Charters in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., fishes hard year-round. He targets a variety of species during winter, but big, black sea bass out of Little River Inlet are tops on his list .

"Black sea bass congregate at our ledges, wrecks and other places off Little River that have lots of livebottom growth," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "We target them from nearshore places out to 100 foot."

Black sea bass evacuate nearshore and inshore structures when the water gets cold, congregating in offshore waters. For bigger, keeper-sized fish 13 inches and longer, Cushman heads to deeper structure. Often, nearshore reefs will be covered in massive schools of black sea bass with many more small fish than larger ones.

"Once the ocean water dips below 60 degrees, the bigger fish are in 50 to 80 feet, and usually, the deeper water, the bigger the fish. I usually catch the biggest ones as soon as we drop down, and I'll drift from rock to rock picking out the bigger fish," he said.

"I use 20- to 30-pound spinning combos with 2- to 4-ounce diamond jigs tipped with curlytail grubs, or I will use a little heavier 20- to 30-pound setup with chicken rigs, a 4/0 circle hook and one-inch chunks of cut bait. Any bait will work for black sea bass, because they are real hungry," he said.

Both natural bait and artificial lures will quickly get the attention from a school of black sea bass, but Cushman prefers artificials to avoid catching sharks.

"Any bait will work, but using artificials will reduce on chumming up sharks that will ruin a spot," he said. "Black sea bass are a lot of fun in the winter. They are hard fighting and very tasty." ▪

— Jeff Burleson



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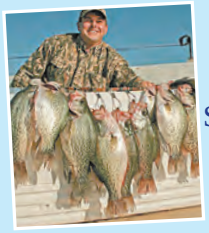
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