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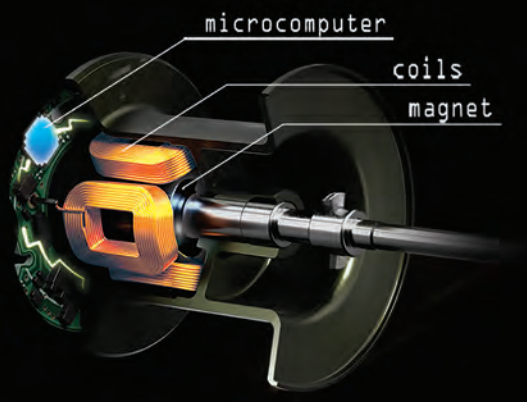

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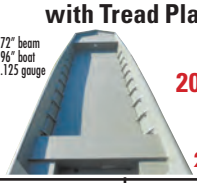
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March is crappie month across the Carolinas, and plenty of lakes and rivers are full of them. Discover six places you have to fish. Photo by Terry Madewell

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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.*

MARCH IS REALLY SHOW TIME!

Biologist Richard Morton of SCDNR measures a buck during an antler-scoring session at the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic in Columbia.

DIXIE DEER CLASSIC, PALMETTO SPORTSMEN'S CLASSIC FILL THE CALENDAR

Besides the opening of South Carolina's turkey season and great crappie fishing on just about every major lake and river in the Carolinas, the first things I mark down on my calendar for March are the two biggest outdoor shows of the year: the Dixie Deer Classic and the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic.

The Dixie Deer Classic is scheduled for March 1-3 at the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh. Hours are 11 a.m.-8 p.m. on Friday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. on Saturday and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Sunday.

Tickets are $12 for the entire show, $6 for youths ages 13-18, seniors, women and members of the military for Friday's session. Kids under 12 are free.

The Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic, is scheduled for March 22-24 at the S.C. State Fairgrounds in Columbia. Hours are noon-8 p.m. on Friday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. on Friday and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. on Sunday.

Tickets are $10 per day, with a weekend pass $18. Kids under 10 are free.

Close to 30,000 people will attend each of the huge shows, which feature hundreds of vendors hawking their outdoors wares, plus dozens of expert seminars on hunting and fishing topics, scoring of big deer antlers and, in each case, a few neat sideline activities.

The Dixie Deer Classic will have the annual big-buck contest that determines the biggest buck killed in North Carolina last season, the N.C. Open turkey calling championship, a kids' scavenger hunt, a Carolina Dock Dogs event and guest appearances by TV show hosts Jim Shockey, Eva Shockey and Larysa Switlyk, plus seminars on dog training, turkey hunting, coyote hunting and fishing.

The Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic will have plenty of seminars on hunting and fishing topics, and antler-scoring session for the S.C. Deer Antlers Record Book, a catch-and-release catfish pond for youths, plus the final-day weigh-in on March 23 for the S.C. Youth Bass Fishing Championship, which is being held on Lake Murray for fishermen from The Bass Federation Junior and Student Angler Federation clubs, plus B.A.S.S. Junior Bassmaster clubs.

I've attended 25 years of Dixie Deer Classics, and this year's Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic will be my 12th. I wouldn't think of missing either one, ever. ▪



GATORS ON ICE?

Where do alligators go their home waters ice over? In Ocean Isle, N.C., they go to the Shallotte River Swamp Park,. where park personnel noticed gators frozen in place with their noses above the surface ice. They first noticed them in 2018 during a cold spell, then saw them again in mid-January. All 18 of the park's alligators allowed themselves to be frozen in place, with their only their noses out of the water so they could breathe.

BAG-A-BUCK GRAND PRIZE GOES TO SC DEER HUNTER

C.J. Addison of Lancaster, S.C., flipped off the safety on a certain big buck at least twice during the 2017 deer season in his home county, but he could never get a safe shot.

So it was little surprise when the same buck stepped out into a pasture the morning of Oct. 16, 2018, that Addison found himself with the safety off, and no shot.

"I told my wife I was either gonna kill him that weekend, or somebody else would kill him, because he was making too many appearances," said Addison, 38. "I had him patterned, and I knew he would be at this place the next morning. I put out a Tink's Buck Bomb the night before, and when I got in the stand, I grunted once, and he walked out in the field and was munching grass with the cows."

At first, the cows were in the way and Addison couldn't shoot. When the buck finally cleared them, Addison dropped him with a single shot from his .30-06. The 10-point buck, which had a 21¾-inch inside spread and weighed 186 pounds, ran about 30 yards and crumpled.

The same day, he entered the buck in *Carolina Sportsman's* Bag-A-Buck contest, and in mid-January, his entry was drawn as the grand-prize winner from among 153 entries in the contest.



C.J. Addison of Lancaster, S.C., won the grand prize in Carolina Sportsman's Bag-A-Buck contest with this 10-point, Lancaster County buck.

Addison's grand-prize package includes a three-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman*, a $50 gift certificate to the online Outdoor Store at www.carolinasportsman.com, and a two-day, deer-hog combination hunt for two people at Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield, S.C

"I had been hunting this buck for two years," Addison said. "I hunt 300 acres, and I've had three game cameras out. I was getting a photo of him about every seven to 10 days; that's how big a circle he was running." ▪

EDDIE BRIDGES, LEADING CONSERVATIONIST, WILL JOIN N.C. SPORTS HALL OF FAME



EDDIE BRIDGES

Eddie Bridges of Greensboro, one of the nation's most-honored conservation voices, got another feather for his cap in late January when it was announced that he is among 12 sports figures to be inducted into the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame on May 3 in Raleigh.

Bridges, the executive director of the N.C. Habitat Foundation and a former member of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, joins 11 other inductees, including NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt Jr., pro golfer Davis Love III, former ACC commissioner Gene Corrigan, and long-time football coach Rod Broadway.

Bridges, who played football and ran track at Elon in the late 1950s, served on the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission from 1977-89, during which time he created the Wildlife Endowment Fund to control funds from the sale of lifetime hunting and fishing licenses. He was named the Budweiser Conservationist of the Year in 2004 and was named a Hero in Conservation by *Field & Stream* magazine in 2012.

"I feel very blessed, really," said Bridges. "I think it's a great compliment to the one million people in North Carolina who generate $2.3 billion a year for our economy through hunting and fishing. I'm blessed many have been supporters of mine."

Bridges' Wildlife Endowment Fund, which started in 1981, created lifetime hunting and fishing licenses, plus a designated fund for the license fees collected that would never been spent; only the accrued interest on the funds would be spent on programs and projects that benefit fish and wildlife. To date, the Commission has spent more than $50 million in interest.

The N.C. Wildlife Habitat Foundation was chartered in the early 1990s and has funded dozens of projects around the state to promote projects benefiting fish, wildlife and conservation.

"The achievements of this year's class of inductees enrich North Carolina's remarkable sports heritage, and the individuals have certainly earned the honor of joining the 351 men and women who have been previously enshrined," said Nora Lynn Finch, president of the Hall of Fame. "This is our 56th class, and we look forward to celebrating this special time in our state's sports history."

Bridges is only the second member of the hall with any connection to sports related to hunting and fishing. Jack King, a champion trap and skeet shooter, was inducted in 1979. ▪



BIGGEST BUCK EVER

Bowhunter Luke Brewster, a Virginia resident, arrowed the biggest non-typical buck every taken by a hunter on Nov. 2 in Edgar County, Illinois. The buck has 39 scoreable points and netted 320%. Only two bigger bucks are on record: both were found dead.

North American Whitetail

SCDNR SCHEDULES ANNUAL ANTLER-SCORING SESSIONS

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources has scheduled antler-scoring sessions across the state for March, culminating in three days of scoring at the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic in Columbia.

SCDNR measures deer antlers across the state each March to determine whether or not they're big enough to be included in South Carolina's all-time antler records list. Minimum scores for the record-book are 125 points for typical antlers and 145 points for non-typical antlers, scored according to the Boone & Crockett Club's system. The record book contains more than 7,000 sets of antlers. Last season's scoring sessions added 232 bucks to the record book.

Hunters wishing to have their deer scored need to provide documentation, including the date and county of the kill, and sign a fair chase statement. Antlers in velvet or those that are broken or repaired or separated from the skull plate cannot be measured for the record book.

HERE IS A LIST OF THE ANTLER-SCORING SESSIONS:

March 1, Wilson's Taxidermy
Bath, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., 803-593-3357;

March 2, Sportsman's Warehouse
Columbia, 1-7 p.m., 803-731-3000;

March 5, Cabela's Greenville, 2-8 p.m., 864-516-8100;

March 7, Sportsman's Warehouse
Anderson, 2-8 p.m., 864-540-7100;

March 8, Price's Country Store
Gilbert, 1-5 p.m., 803-892-2457;

March 12, Durham's Grocery
Pickens, 2-8 p.m., 864-868-2070;

March 13, Dennis Wildlife Center
Bonneau, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., 853-825-3387, please call ahead;

March 14, Hunter's Headquarters
Greenwood, 2-7 p.m., 864-223-1911;

March 19, Academy Sports
Easley, 2-8 p.m., 864-850-6130;

March 22-24, S.C. State Fairgrounds
Columbia, Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic, 803-734-3886.

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY THROUGHOUT MARCH:

SCDNR office, Camden, 843-309-5165
SCDNR office, Clemson, 864-986-6247
SCDNR office, Columbia, 803-734-8738
SCDNR office, Florence, 843-661-4768
SCDNR office, Garnett, 803-625-3569
SCDNR office, Georgetown, 843-546-8119
SCDNR office, Union, 864-427-5140

NEW GUN TAX FOR SC SROs?

Field reporter Brian Cope of Edisto, S.C., posted this story on www.CarolinaSportsman.com on Jan. 8.

Two lawmakers have proposed a state law that would add an additional 7-percent fee to every gun sold in South Carolina. The additional revenue would be used to fund SROs (School Resource Officers) throughout the state's schools. South Carolina currently has about 370 schools that do not have SROs, according to the S.C. Dept. of Education.

Rep. Wendy Brawley (D-Hopkins), and Rep. Ivory Thigpen (D-Columbia) introduced the proposal, which Thigpen stressed was not anti-gun.

"We live in a state where people buy guns and people own guns. We're not in any way saying people shouldn't do that," he said. "As a matter of fact, people have every right to. What we are saying is that we need recurring revenue and funds to provide the type of security and safety that our children need."

Brawley agreed but said she knows the proposal will have its detractors.

"We know that there'll be some push-back. We are prepared for that, but this is a people's bill. This is designed to help the most vulnerable population we have, and that's our children," she said.

Gov. Henry McMaster is not in favor of proposal. His office responded to a request for comment by WIS-TV in Columbia with this email:

"Governor McMaster was the first to start talking about the need for school resource officers last year in his state of the state address, and he secured more than $2 million in the final budget for a pilot program to begin the process of reaching his goal of having a certified law enforcement officer in every school, in every county, all day, every day. Reaching that goal is a matter of prioritizing existing funds — not simply taxing and spending."

If the law passes, it will raise $22 million in additional revenue annually. ▪

— Brian Cope

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EUTHANIZED SC SPIKE PROBABLY RAISED BY HUMANS, SCDNR SAYS

Field reporter Brian Cope of Edisto, S.C., posted this story on www.CarolinaSportsman.com on Jan. 29.

An police officer in Aiken, S.C., shot and killed an aggressive spike buck on Jan. 19 after it attacked a person.

According to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, it wasn't the first time the deer had attacked a person. The agency had been alerted to the deer's behavior by the S.C Dept. of Health and Environmental Control. The deer had previously acted overly aggressive toward two other persons..

On Jan. 16, the small buck attacked someone in an Aiken subdivision. It became aggressive with someone else the next day on Pony Trail in Aiken. Then, on Jan. 19, someone called for a dispatch on Anderson Pond Road. The deer was once again attacking a person. This time, officers arrived in time to locate the deer.

The victim of this attack had abrasions and bruises from the deer. She described the deer as a spike buck. She also told officers the deer had a ring of bunched up fur, as though it had been wearing a collar.

After a quick search, the officers spotted the deer less than 200 yards from where the attack had occurred. As soon as the deer noticed the officers, it charged toward them. One of the officers put the deer down with one shot.

The deer had no signs of previous injury or illness. It seemed to have been very healthy and well-fed.

Charles Ruth, SCDNR's deer biologist, said the deer was surely a pet that had either been released or gotten loose. He said that explains the health of the deer, its comfort level being around humans, and even its behavior.

"Since it was hand-raised, it associates people with good things, and although this looked like aggressive behavior, it was almost certainly the deer simply wanting to play because that's how it was raised. If someone puts their hands on the deer, that encourages it to play harder. I think that's what we saw in those incidences," Ruth said.

As a precautionary measure, DHEC is studying the deer's carcass.

It is illegal to keep deer in captivity in both North Carolina and South Carolina, but people often adopt "abandoned" fawns, even though they are almost never actually abandoned.

"Many people who come upon a solitary spotted fawn in the woods or along a roadway mistakenly assume the animal has been deserted by its mother and want to take the apparently helpless creature home to care for it. These fawns have not been abandoned but are still in the care of a doe," Ruth said.

Deer raised by humans, no matter how loving, eventually become a threat to people, he said.

"It is illegal to have a deer in captivity. They grow into semi-tame adult deer and can become quite dangerous.... And when deer are a threat to humans, they sometimes have to be killed." ■



A crew member leads a 15-foot, 2,600-pound great white shark toward the boat before it was tagged and released off Hilton Head Island, S.C. in mid-January.

HILTON HEAD BOAT STRIKES SHARK GOLD

Seven great whites, including huge male, caught on one trip

Field reporter Brian Cope of Edisto,Island, S.C., posted this story Jan. 22 on www.CarolinaSportsman.com.

Chip Michalove of Outcast Sport Fishing Charters in Hilton Head Island, S.C., and his crew caught seven great white sharks off the coast of Hilton Head on Jan. 18, the most he's caught in a single day. They tagged four of the sharks and released all seven.

One, a 15-foot, male estimated at 2,600 pounds, is the largest-known male great white ever tagged in the Atlantic Ocean.

Michalove has hooked more than 30 great white sharks since 2015; that's when he caught his first one off South Carolina's coast. But seven in one day was epic, even for him.

"I've never dreamed of seeing that many in one day. We found this spot where there was a plethora of great whites. Like barracuda swarming a reef," he told *The Island Packet*. "We were battling great whites for more time than we were waiting for them."

The tags they used will send data back to scientists — water depths, temperatures, how often and how far the sharks move, and which areas they spend most of their time — as the sharks continue their journey.

One of the crew's sharks last Friday was a 12½-foot, 1,500-pound female. The crew caught an 8-foot male toward the end of the trip. With his crew tired and ready to celebrate, Michalove (843-290-0371) convinced them to stay for one more try. That's when they hooked the 15-foot male.

"They were beat, but I talked them into setting up the chum once more with a 'We'll give it an hour.' Thirty minutes and three Advil later, we had a hog swim up and take it," he said.

"It was almost as wide as the boat. It's always shocking to not only see the length of these sharks, but their width and their power is just incredible," he said. ▪

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MALLARD LIMIT CUT IN HALF FOR 2019-20

Drop in population along Atlantic flyway causes changes

Duck hunters in the Carolinas who love to see mallards lock up as they approach the decoys will have to be satisfied with a daily bag limit that's 50-percent lower when the 2019-20 season arrives in the fall.

That's the word from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Atlantic Flyway Council, which has announced that hunters along the flyway are facing a two-bird daily limit on mallards — down from four — with one hen allowed in the daily bag.

A long-term decline in the population of eastern mallards has led to the bag-limit changes. Sally Yannuzzi, the waterfowl biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, said "The number of mallards on the Atlantic flyway has been dropping about one percent a year (for 20 years). We're not sure why yet, but that's behind the limited bag limit. We expect the issue is (breeding) productivity, but by dropping the bag limit, we make sure it's not related (to hunting).

"They have compared these numbers to the way black ducks dropped (in the 1990s). Those numbers were scary low."

Yannuzzi said the USFWS is looking at problems in mallards' breeding grounds in eastern Canada and the northeastern United States. She said mallard numbers on the Mississippi, Central and Pacific flyways remain high; the population, at around 10 million, is larger than any other North American duck species.

Although eastern mallards are declining, they occupy a smaller percentage of the Atlantic Flyway harvest than elsewhere, and the breeding habitat of eastern mallards is distinct from other major species important in the Atlantic Flyway.

"If you looked at the estimate of breeding mallards and breeding mallard habitat in the Central Flyway in a given year, it'd be pretty descriptive for all prairie-nesting ducks," said John Devney of Delta Waterfowl "But mallards are a less-appropriate surrogate for the habitat, and breeding biology of the important eastern ducks is considered in the multi-stock harvest strategy." ▪



NC SLATES TURKEY SEMINARS

Field reporter Brian Cope of Edisto Island, S.C., posted this story on www.CarolinaSportsman.com on Jan. 31.

With deer and duck seasons finished, North Carolina hunters are looking forward to bagging a gobbler beginning in April. The youth season runs April 6-12, followed by the statewide season April 13-May 11.

To help hunters prepare, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and National Wild Turkey Federation are offering 11 free turkey hunting seminars across the state in March. Speakers will cover a range of topics, including turkey biology, use calls and decoys, selecting the right firearms and ammo, and cooking techniques.

Hunters of all skill levels are welcome to attend,. While the seminars are free, attendees must pre-register by visiting https://www.ncwildlife.org/Learning/Skills-Based-Seminars. Each 3-hour seminar begins at 6 p.m.

THE DATES AND LOCATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

March 5: Craven County Extension Center, New Bern

March 6: Onslow County Extension Center, Jacksonville

March 7: Forsyth County Extension Center, Winston-Salem

March 12: N.C. State University, 3114 Engineering Building II, Room 1025, Raleigh

March 13: Brunswick County Extension Center Building N, Bolivia

March 14: Richmond County Extension Center, Rockingham

March 19: Caldwell County Extension Center, Suite 1, Lenoir.

March 20: Mountain Horticulture Crops Research and Extension Center, Mills River

March 21: Bass Pro Shops, Concord Mills, Concord

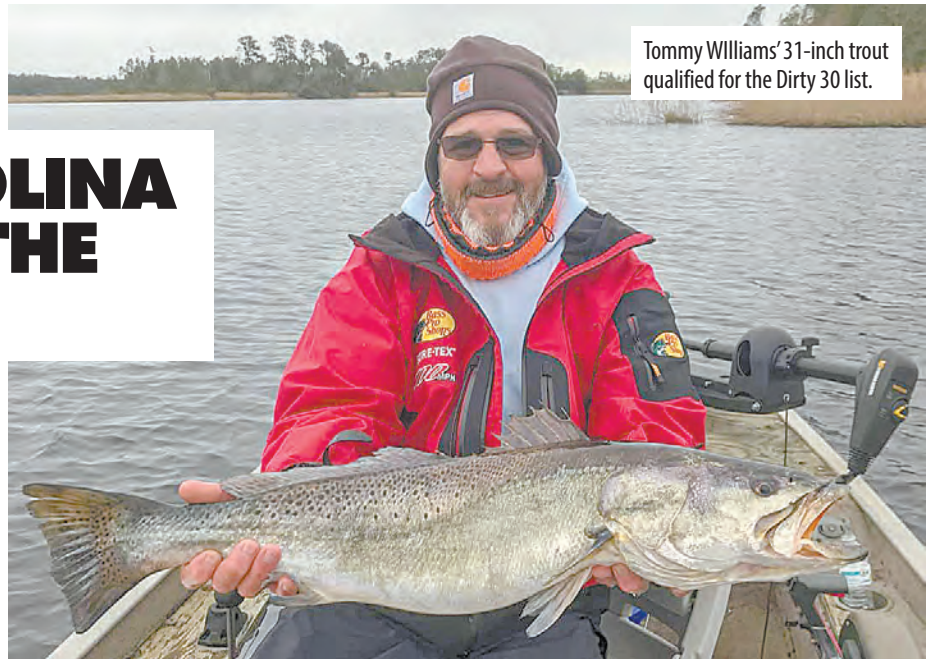
March 27: Guilford County Extension Center, Greensboro

March 28: Cumberland County Extension Center, Fayetteville.

LEFT: Josh Thomas, a Carolina Sportsman reader, killed this gobbler last May 9 near Beulaville, N.C. It had an 11-inch beard and 1¼-inch spurs.


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NORTH CAROLINA MAN JOINS THE 'DIRTY 30'



Tommy WIlliams' 31-inch trout qualified for the Dirty 30 list.

In most cases, having your name placed on a "Dirty 30" list might not seem like a positive development, but a citation program created by Chris Bush of The Speckled Truth honoring anglers who land a benchmark 30-inch speckled trout, is an exception.

The program, inspired by a Virginia angler-recognition program, began Oct. 1, 2017, covering coastal states from Virginia to Texas. In its first year, 59 entries were certified as meeting the benchmark. So far, the list for 2018-2019 comprises 17 entries, including Tommy Williams, who caught a 10.06-pound, 31-inch speck from North Carolina's Neuse River on Jan 12.

Sponsors are jumping in to increase the program's stature in its second year. Now, along with a "Dirty 30" sticker, anglers will receive a "box chock-full of tackle," according to Bush, who estimates the value at $70 to $80.

Anglers, however, aren't the only ones who stand to benefit from the program. Tangible data leads to better conservation, Bush said.

"You want to have a measurable baseline." Bush said. "The more information, the better you can preserve the fisheries."

The data already has provided some interesting insights, Bush said, such as the fact that 87 percent of 2018's trophy trout were caught on or around a new or full moon. And while catches were spread out somewhat evenly throughout the four seasons, anglers were more successful using artificials from March to October.

Bush said anglers can use the growing information from the program to their advantage. "You still have to find them, but you stack the odds in your favor."

The "Dirty 30" program is free to enter, but photos must include a measuring device. For more information on the program go to thespeckledtruth.com.

Williams caught his fish on a soft-plastic artificial lure; he kept the fish alive in a 120-quart, aerated cooler, then took it to Neuse River Bait & Tackle in Grantsboro, N.C. At the tackle shop, store owner Todd Willis put the trout in his bait tank before weighing it, and he worked with it for 30 minutes before the fish seemed to be revived, at which point, the fish was weighed and measured. ▪

— Allan Schilling

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6 HOT SPOTS FOR CAROLINA SLABS

By Terry Madewell



SPRING IS THE PEAK TIME OF YEAR FOR CRAPPIE FISHING, AND THE ACTION ON THE FATTEST CRAPPIE IS WIDE OPEN BY MARCH. WHEN ROE-LADEN SLABS MAKE THEIR MOVE TOWARD THE SHALLOWS, THEY'RE FOLLOWED BY A LEGION OF ANGLERS. >

Terry Madewell



1. High Rock Lake
2. Kerr Lake
3. Shearon Harris Lake
4. Lake Wateree
5. Clarks Hill Lake
6. Lake Moultrie/Marion



THE KEY TO SPRING SUCCESS IS TARGETING THE RIGHT LAKES WITH THE APPROPRIATE TACTICS.

The ability to adapt to changing weather patterns and tracking the always on-the-move crappie migration from prespawn through postspawn is crucial.

The Carolinas are full of lakes that are full of crappie. What follows are expert tips on how to fish six of them as March arrives.

LAKE WATEREE

T.C. Lloyd is a 33-year-old crappie pro who runs Southern Angling Guide Service. He is familiar with numerous lakes throughout the Carolinas, but among his favorites for spring fishing is South Carolina's Lake Wateree, the last lake on the Catawba River system.

"I've fished Wateree most of my life, and it's highly productive," he said. "The lake has a great population of crappies and produces plenty of slabs this time of the year. But Wateree can be finicky, requiring fishermen to change patterns from one day to the next."

Wateree is among the lakes on which Lloyd, from Hartsville, S.C., guides. He experiments daily with tactics and lures, often opting to begin by long-line trolling. If that doesn't work, he's prepared to switch tactics to vertical fishing with tight-lines.

Lloyd (843-307-6678) uses different-sized jigheads, with ⅛-ounce for checking water that's shallow in the water column, all the way to ⅛-ounce for deeper water, with 1/32- and 1/16-ounce sizes for mid-depths. He varies motor speed to raise and lower jig depths to refine presentation for the best bite.

"I also use different color combinations, because the amount of sunlight and water color makes a big difference in the best color daily," he said. "I like a grub with a chartreuse tail, and I will match that with blue, John Deere green, black and junebug color patterns. I've had great success with other color patterns, but it's a good starting point for Lake Wateree."

Lloyd said he typically targets large creeks from the upper end of the lake at Wateree Creek, all the way to the dam on the lower end. Creeks with dingy but not muddy, water are prime targets.

He'll vary his speed from 0.6 up to 1.2 mph based on how deep the crappie are holding. Line size is crucial; he typically uses 4-pound line, and his success has proven more slabs are caught with light line.

HIGH ROCK LAKE

Ed Duke of Concord, N.C., said High Rock Lake on the Yadkin River system is an ideal lake for spring crappie fishing, especially for novice fishermen.

"High Rock rewards fishermen with excellent numbers, with quality crappies mixed in the creel," Duke said. "Novice anglers can enjoy success, and advanced anglers certainly do well. High Rock is ideal for learning spring crappie-fishing skills while catching plenty of fish."

Duke (704-791-0108), who owns Southern Crappie Rods, said the length of days and water temperature are keys to spring crappie action. High Rock typically has good water color, so it warms quickly and produces well early in the season.

"As the days get longer, we'll often find fish staging at the mouths of the creeks, particularly in the upper end of the lake," he said. "This occurs in late-February if water temperature gets warm enough, and dingy water improves the crappie bite."

continued >



Most anglers look for dingy water, then long-line troll or tight-line vertically to catch early spring crappie.

Terry Madewell

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Tiny jigheads are the rule when fishing a multiple-rod setup in shallow water for crappie.

Terry Madewell

Duke's basic process is finding crappies staging around creek mouths, and from that point, they're basically on the way to the back of the creeks to spawn. But not all fish spawn at the same time, so the process of fish moving up the creeks and then back out in postspawn is an ongoing pattern from late-February until April.

"The early fish are usually bigger fish," he said. "Later on, when the bulk of the fish move in to spawn, more fish are present — but fewer slabs — so go early and often."

Duke said during prespawn, he'll long-line troll up to a dozen rods in lengths ranging from 7 to 16 feet. He primarily uses very small jigs, with ⅛-ounce a good starting size, but he will use smaller if the fish are really shallow.

"I rely on electronics to see where the fish are daily," he said. "They may be deep or in mid-depths and occasionally very shallow in the water column."

Duke said when crappie make their spawning move, he'll fish in the back of the creeks using a tight-line, spider rig setup. consisting of eight rods of different lengths to cover as much water as possible.

"Spider-rigging works best when fish get into shallow water, because I can fine-tune bait presentation and keep it at even more precise depths," he said. "I continue to search until I find where fish are congregated, then focus on that area."

SANTEE COOPER

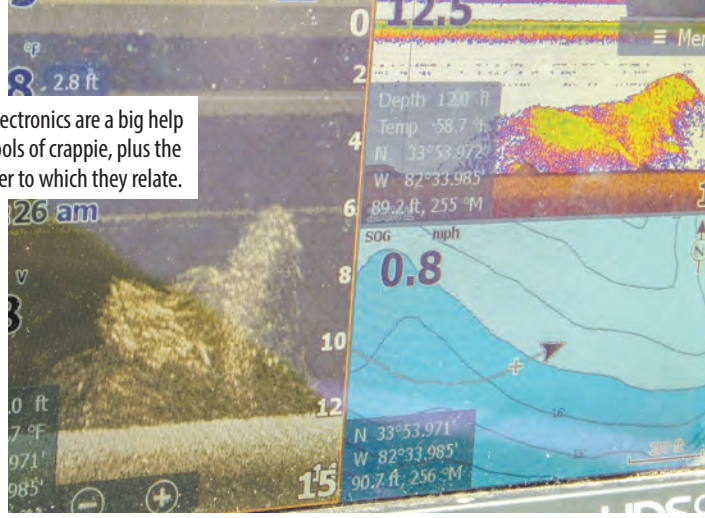
Crappie fishing on the Santee Cooper lakes, Marion and Moultrie, is typically good year-round, but March is a prime time for taking limits of slabs.

Kevin Davis, who guides out of Black's Camp, said one key to success is adapting to ever-changing water and weather conditions.

Davis (843-312-3080) said fishing can be good in shallow water this month; some fish will be found around shallow brush, logs weeds and trees.

"Not all crappies spawn at the same time, and many will be staging deeper, so I'll often target brush in the 10- to 20-foot depth range," he said. "With so much prime, shallow-water spawning cover available, it can be difficult to pinpoint hot spots. When guiding, I'll often target those fat, prespawn fish staging a bit





Good marine electronics are a big help in locating schools of crappie, plus the depths and cover to which they relate.

deeper because their locations are more predictable."

"For shallow-water action, I'll fish the cypress trees, as well as logs, stumps and other woody cover in about 3 to 5 feet of water in Lake Marion," he said. "In Lake Moultrie, my favored tactic is fishing the back of the coves where slightly deeper depressions exist; I'll work the woody cover associated with those. That's where the majority of the super slabs will be spawning on the lower lake. I use a 12-foot pole to poke around the cover and use either jigs, minnows, or a combination of jigs and minnows."

Davis said some anglers also score big catches by long-line trolling on both lakes. His favorite and most-consistent tactic on both lakes is tight-lining brush and cover in 10 to 20 feet of water.

"The fish in 10-foot and slightly deeper depths are usually prespawn slabs staging just before moving shallow," he said. "I use electronics to locate the target, then work the top and sides of the brush before fishing into the cover. I tight-line jigs with minnows or just minnows using split-shots or clip-on weights. Many huge crappie, some over 3 pounds, come from spots like this."

Davis said that after spawning, the fish return to the same type places.

"This pattern is productive all spring, because we catch them coming and going," he said.

KERR LAKE

Kerr Lake (Buggs Island) Lake straddles the North Carolina/Virginia border, with a reciprocal license agreement in place. That's a good option. because this 49,500-acre lake has lots of excellent crappie fishing water to explore.

Pete Jordan, a 59-year-old angler from Wake Forest, N.C., has fished the entire lake since he was 16, and his experience make this lake his "go-to" springtime crappie water.

Jordan, who owns Ultimate LED Solutions and loves nocturnal crappie fishing later in the year, said in March, it's more about covering water and finding patterns.

"I'm usually fishing in February, and when the water temperature reaches 57 degrees, the crappie action begins in earnest," he said. "I target the very large creeks, as well the feeder creeks further back in the major creeks."

Jordan (252-503-0627) said patterns

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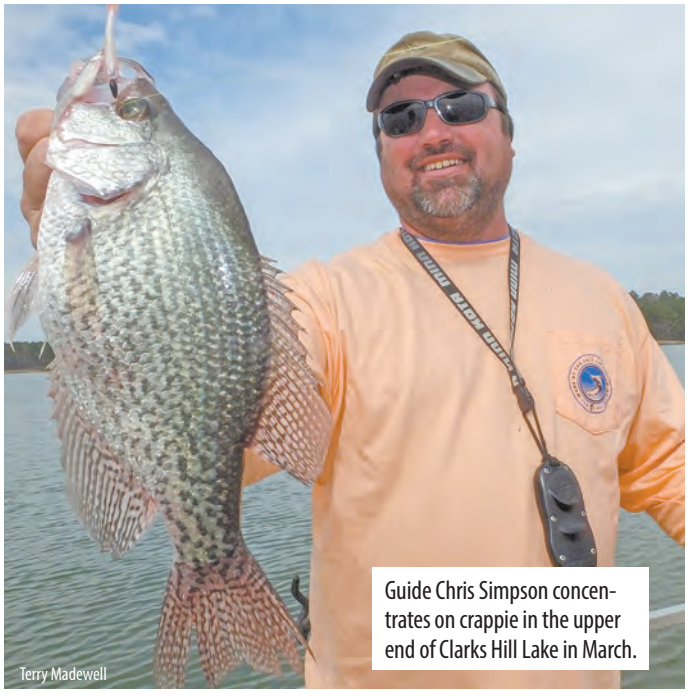


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change quickly in March as the water warms, so his first effort is to study his graph before he begins fishing. He searches for fish locations and identifies how deep they're holding.

"One pattern I hope to see is fish suspended over deeper water," he said. "These are prespawn fish staging before migrating shallow. My experience has been, the shallower the better, in terms of action. If crappies are in 15 to 20 feet of water, the fishing is usually good, but if fish are in the 7- to 15-foot range, it's usually much better. Knowing this before I start fishing enables me to place my rigs exactly how I want them from the beginning. I hunt before I actually fish."

Jordan long-line trolls with eight rods of different lengths up to 16 feet, allowing him to cover a 32-foot swath of water. He employs his electric motor to keep a 0.5 mph controlled speed.



Guide Chris Simpson concentrates on crappie in the upper end of Clarks Hill Lake in March.

Terry Madewell

LAKE SHEARON HARRIS

Freddie Sinclair of Clayton, N.C., guides on Shearon Harris, a 4,100-acre lake southwest of Raleigh. He said for the prespawn conditions of March, it's hard to top Shearon Harris in his part of the state.

"Harris is my 'go-to' spring lake because it sets up perfectly for March fishing," he said. "March is transition time, and warm weather can pull crappies toward the shallows, and then a cold front pushes them deeper again."

Sinclair, 62, said the key is searching for the right pattern and technique based on conditions. While some anglers employ either long-line trolling or vertical tight-lining, he employs both techniques to find the fish.

"Typically, long-line trolling is best when the crappies are moving into the creeks until they get near the back where they'll spawn," he said. "I prefer the tight-line method then, because I can fine-tune my rigging to essentially any depth the fish hold."

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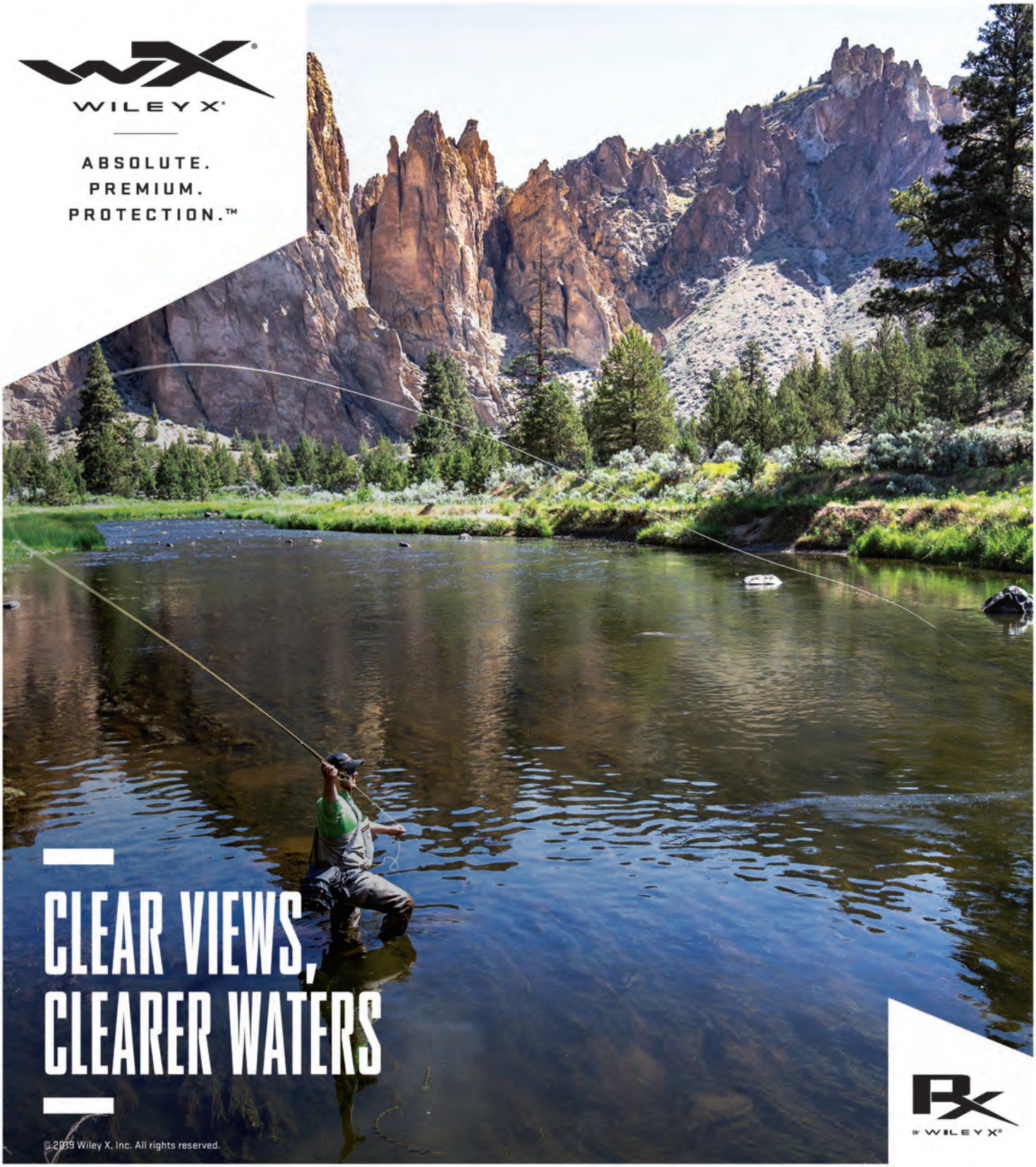
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Guide T.C. Lloyd expects to catch some real slabs when he heads to Lake Wateree this month.

Sinclair (919-553-4547) said for long-line trolling, he'll generally troll the ledges in the creek or cove pulling as many as 12 rods rigged with ⅛- and 1/32-ounce jigs. He'll use curly-tails on some rigs and tube or hair jigs tipped with minnows on others, looking for a daily preference.

When crappies get to the back of the creeks, Sinclair switches to tight-line rigs and usually pushes multiple rigs off the front of the boat.

"When spider-rigging, I'll use 14- and 16-foot rods to get the bait away from the boat, he said. "I'll use a heavier jig, either a 1/16- or ⅛-ounce, because if the water is calm, that's all the weight I need. If windy I'll use an egg sinker a foot above the jig, with a BB shot just below it.

Sinclair prefers black, red and blue jigs for clear water, with chartreuse grubs and a minnow trailer in clear water. When conditions are dingy to muddy, he'll opt for pink and orange jigs with chartreuse trailers and tipped with minnows.

Sinclair said 2-pound crappie are a reasonable expectation at Harris, but a lot of fish are caught in the 8- and 9-inch size classes.

"If this doesn't produce, I change techniques and begin tight-lining with rigs in the front of the boat and fish vertical; I'll slow my speed to about 0.2 mph," he said.

"WHEN SPIDER-RIGGING, I'LL USE 14- AND 16-FOOT RODS TO GET THE BAIT AWAY FROM THE BOAT ... "

CLARKS HILL

Guide Chris Simpson targets crappie in March at South Carolina's Clarks Hill Lake for a very good reason; they can be caught in limit numbers and huge sizes.

Simpson (864-922-2352) said his personal preference for spring is the upper half of the lake with abundant water in depths where long-line trolling is extremely effective. .

"From late February into April, the crappie action is excellent, but where I catch them can change dramatically." He said. "A great example was in 2018 when, after a week of unusually warm temperatures, the water temperature in the shallows in the back of creeks rose to 68 degrees. The crappies got into 3 to 5 feet of water and bit great. A week later, after normal February temperatures returned, the water temperature dropped to 58 degrees — about normal for that time of year — and fish had moved back much deeper. A totally different pattern was needed."

Simpson's system for March is primarily long-line trolling with a starting speed of about 1.0 mph, varying from 0.7 up to 1.3 mph. He targets ledges and humps in creeks, but he also has a lot of success working points where crappies often congregate.

"If I pick up a single crappie, I usually keep going, but if we hook a double or more in one spot, I'll work that specific area hard, usually catching a bunch of fish quickly,' he said. "When action slows, I'm back to searching, but it's surprising sometimes how quickly the numbers begin to add up."

Simpson trolls with 6-pound yellow monofilament that enables him to see his lines during tight turns when targeting a specific spot. Jig size will vary, but 1/16-ounce is a good mid-range for Simpson, who fishes jigs with and without minnow trailers.

The best color combinations vary, but Simpson, like many crappie fishermen, often prefers some chartreuse in jig patterns. His idea is to use a darker color body with a chartreuse tail in stained or dingy water. But a solid color, such as pink, red or blue, can be excellent so he mixes grub colors and styles with and without minnow trailers to find the daily preference. ▪



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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SPRING SLABS ARE PERFECT KAYAK TARGETS

SHALLOW WATER GIVES PADDLING ANGLERS A BIG ADVANTAGE

With spring in the air, crappie season can't be far behind.

Fishing from a kayak frequently gets less attention than casting artificial lures to fish such as bass, redfish and speckled trout. Perhaps the fact that targeting crappie by powerboat anglers using multiple rods in rod holders dissuades many paddlers from considering crappie as a worthy target for single pole fishing with artificial baits.

During spring, crappie offer a kayak angler with a fishing rod in one hand and a paddle in the other a smorgasbord of opportunities. Crappie can be cast to in the same manner as bass and redfish using much smaller offerings that consist mainly of 1- to 3-inch jigs.

Crappie can also be jigged, using a traditional long, slender pole to dip a plastic or hair jig vertically around structure. Even if the kayak angler prefers to use live bait, a small bucket or container of minnows is easily cared for and stored on a kayak. Live baits can be fished drop-shot fashion using a ⅜- to ½-ounce weight and a hook tied in-line to target fish holding on or near the bottom and tight to cover. Jigs and live bait can also be fished under a cork to position the bait at the appropriate depth using the rod to impart action to the bait.

TIGHT SPOTS

The versatility of the car-top kayak is that anglers can access backwaters where crappie congregate to spawn. These areas never see any amount of fishing pressure from anglers in powerboats too large to get into shallow, tight spaces or are out of reach from shore-bound anglers. One positive aspect of two years and counting of above-average rainfall in the Carolinas is that formerly dry pockets in the backs of creeks and coves and areas cut off from the main body by road crossings are chock full of perfect spawning cover and now flooded with fishable water.

Finally, multiple-rod tactics from a kayak are not out of the question. With developments in kayak rigging, gear tracks can be installed practically anywhere on the boat to attach multiple adjustable rod holders and the kayak angler can push or pull baits the same as power boating angler using pedal or paddle propulsion to move the boat forward. ▪



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.*

SHOOTING DOCKS

Many fish use man-made structure as prime habitat, especially crappie. Areas like docks and piers are top-notch, fish-holding structures but are difficult to fish using conventional techniques. Obstructions leave little room for casting. A kayak angler with proper 'shooting' skills can turn a row of docks into a day of action.

Shooting is a casting technique that utilizes the action of the rod to sling-shot a bait under overhead structure. It lends itself well to the kayak; a water-level perch is an advantage. Start with a 5½-foot, fast-action spinning outfit suitable for crappie. Shooters typically choose small, compact baits likely to skip across the water's surface to reach the far recesses of the target. Lead jigheads with soft-plastic trailers or hair bodies are top selections. Spoons, plastic worms and tough live baits also often produce.

To execute a shot, leave 2 feet of line dangling from the rod tip and grab the bait by the bend of the hook with the thumb and index finger of your free hand, making sure to keep other fingers out of the way. Open the reel's bail and grab the line between the index finger and thumb of the hand holding the rod. Pull the bait down and back toward your body and extend the rod forward, causing the rod to bow over in the middle.

Targeting is instinctual, similar to shooting a longbow. You can "aim" the rod by looking down the spine. Practice and experience quickly build muscle memory and hand/eye coordination. Release the bait, which snaps the rod tip forward, launching the bait toward the target. With proper timing, the line is released from the other hand, allowing line to peel off the reel without impeding travel. Any opening small enough to fit a bait into is fair game, so don't overlook gaps between pontoons in floating docks or a stationary platform that sits low to the water.

A skipping bait closely mimics fleeing prey, and many bites will come as soon as the bait starts to sink. Leave the bail open and allow the bait to free-fall through the structure, watching closely for any twitch in the line signaling a bite. ▪

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — White crappie

WHERE — B. Everett Jordan Lake

HOW — Vertical jigging bridge pilings. White crappie will be in prespawn during March and will be staging around structure in deeper water.

LAUNCH — Seaforth and Poplar Point are public ramps a short paddle from several good bridges.

INSIDER TIP — Jordan Lake has a 10-inch size minimum that differs from other North Carolina lakes.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Black crappie

WHERE — Clarks Hill Lake

HOW — Slip-cork fishing. Tie a slip cork about 3 feet above a 1/16-ounce jig and cast the rig around docks, laydowns and visible structure near the backs of creeks. Black crappie will be pre-spawn until about mid March, then look for them to move to the bank.

LAUNCH — The back end of SC Little River has several boat ramps and dump-in sites near SC 81 and SC 28.

INSIDER TIP — Clarks Hill recovered from a drought two years ago and has had nearly full pond. Look for crappie to spawn in small brush that grew up around the banks during the drought.

continues on page 30

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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

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Crappie fishing while wading requires the use of only a single pole, and the longer rods favored for typical vertical jigging situations are often cumbersome.



Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman, national champion crappie fishermen, wanted a great rod for casting or dipping, with a slightly stiffer action designed for wade fishermen. The pair laid out their specifications, and B'n'M Poles delivered. The result was an all-purpose rod in either 8- or 9-foot lengths that features a bottom-mounted cork reel seat and a blank made of IM6 graphite.

Although designed for wading, many kayak anglers have discovered the wading rod is plenty long enough to wrestle a crappie around the bow of a boat with plenty of backbone left to pull spawning crappie out of heavy cover where kayak anglers excel.

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Bobby Garland's Itty Bit Slab Slay'R is a little, soft-plastic crappie bait that catches big crappie by imitating a variety of preferred crappie meals ranging from insects to minnows.



The Itty Bit Slab Slay'R measures 1¼ inches from nose to tail. Its body is round and solid and makes up about a third of the overall length. The lure's thin, flexible tail is also diminutive, but its design serves up big performance. It is cupped coming off the body and narrows to a point. Rigging it on a jighead either cup up or cup down totally changes its action, even as small as it is.

When rigged cup down, the fall is more vertical and delivers greater vibration to the tail's tip section, because the cup is trapping water. This is a great rigging choice for when crappie are finicky and want minimal lure movement, or when heavy cover warrants more angler control of the bait to minimize hang ups.

When rigged with the tail's cup faces up, the fall is more of a darting action because the convex surface of the tail makes the lure glide. This rigging action is ideal for bouncing the jig along breaklines and when fishing around more open-cover areas.

Itty Bit Slab Slay'Rs, because they are little, work best on smaller jigheads. Garland's Itty Bits Jigheads are made specifically for these baits and feature No. 8 hooks on 1/48- and 1/64- ounce Itty Bits jigheads are unpainted.

MSRP for a 20-pack is $3.59.

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LONG-LINE OR BRUSH:

March tactics for slabs at Lake Hartwell vary



Guide Steve Pietrykowski catches Lake Hartwell crappie in March by being ready to change tactics and where he fishes.

Pat Robertson

Typically, in late winter and early spring, crappie in South Carolina's Lake Hartwell will be locked onto brush piles, making them easy to locate and catch. Just find a brush pile with a school of crappie around it and drop down a jig or live minnow, and pretty soon you will have a cooler full of slabs.

But unseasonable rising temperatures and excessive rain can put a damper on that kind of fishing. When the water gets too muddy, crappie will leave those brush piles in 15 to 25 feet of water and many will find refuge around brush under docks, according to Steve Pietrykowski, who operates Fishki Business Guide Service.

"Last year in February, it got really warm, and there was a lot of rain that muddied up the creeks, said Pietrykowski (864-353-3438). "You can use a side-scan to locate them under docks where people have put brush, but with a pontoon, it is hard to flip docks."

By the time March rolled around, Pietrykowski was going with a tried-and-true tactic for Hartwell crappie — pulling long lines. Long-lining can be one of the most-effective ways of catching crappie when they are moving from deep brush towards shallower water in preparation for the spawn.

"I had to cover water, catching the fish that were spread out," he said, "so I pulled long lines."

Pietrykowski likes to use 6- to 8-pound, high-visibility line, either green or chartreuse, to be able to see where the lines are running and avoid tangling them.

"I like curlytail grubs, 1/32- to 1/16-ounce, because they give a little more action when pulled on long lines," he said. "Colors can be crucial, depending on water color. Typically, pink and chartreuse are great for crappie on Hartwell. Last year, a blue body with a white tail was outperforming all the other colors."

Crappie seem to prefer a boat speed of .7 mph to 1.2 mph, he said, although one day last spring the crappie wanted the baits pulled faster at 1.7 mph.

"Don't be afraid to vary your speed until you find the speed that works best," said Pietrykowski, who starts deeper with a heavier grub and moves lighter and shallower as the water warms.

"They start pushing up when the water temperature gets close to 60 degrees and they will start dropping eggs at 65 degrees, Pietrykowski said. "I like to start out deeper and work shallower, from 25 feet up to 5 feet, until I locate a zone that holds more fish." ▪

— Pat Robertson

Kerr lake up next >




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Guide Keith Wray said Kerr Lake crappie will move to flats near the mouths of creeks in March, before the spawn gets rolling.

Keith Wray

WHO'LL STOP THE RAIN? WHO CARES?

Crappie fishing at Kerr Lake shouldn't be affectd by higher lake levels

Guide Keith Wray of Fish Docs Guide Service in Eden, N.C., said the incessant rains that have plagued fishermen since last summer shouldn't deter the March crappie bite at Kerr Lake on the North Carolina-Virginia border.

"Heavy rains may raise the lake more than 12 feet, but the (U.S. Army) Corps of Engineers draws it down in just a few days," Wray said." Unless a huge downpour comes our way in March, the fishing for prespawn crappie should be good. Three days after a rain, the fish usually start biting again. It's been that way for years."

In March, Wray (www.fishdocsguideservice.com) tight-lines for crappie on flats near creek mouths. His favorite places include Bluestone, Buffalo, Orange, Aarons, Peters and Sandy creeks on the 49,500-acre lake's upper end, west of Clarksville, Va.

Wray sets out eight 16-foot spinning rods in the bow of his boat, paired with



reels holding hi-vis yellow 10-pound line — which serves a specific purpose.

"I can see the yellow line twitch with the slightest bite, even when the rod tip doesn't move," said Wray, whose rig consists of a 15-foot clear leader with a ¼- to 1-ounce, double-swivel torpedo weight tied a few feet above a 1/16-ounce Betts marabou jig tipped with a minnow. One of his deadly color combinations is red/green/yellow; he likes jigs with three colors.

"The jighead is red, the body is green, and the tail feathers are yellow," said Wray, who fishes the jigs in 15 feet of water or less than halfway down in the water column.

"If the water is 10 feet deep, I'll place the baits in about 5 feet of water," Wray said. "As the water warms in late March, I do most of my fishing in water 5 feet deep or less."

This season, the water coming out of the backs of creeks has been muddy, but that doesn't bother Wray or the crappie.

"These are spawning creeks where the big females, weighing 1 to 2 pounds, move in first," he said. "By the end of March, the smaller males move in."

Wray may set 12 rods ranging from 10 to 16 feet long out of the stern of his boat when the fish move shallow. He uses corks with these outfits and employs side-scan depth-finding units to help him locate crappie and forage at the creek backs.

"The fish don't relate to stumps or brush that much this time of year," Wray said. "Instead, they relate to forage moving along the creeks. That's what I'm looking for with my units." ■

— Tony Garitta





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CRAPPIE 101:
USING MULTIPLE RODS

By Phillip Gentry



IF TWO RODS ARE BETTER THAN ONE, HOW 'BOUT 12? LEARN THE TWO MOST-POPULAR TECHNIQUES FOR TROLLLING USING MULTIPLE RODS.

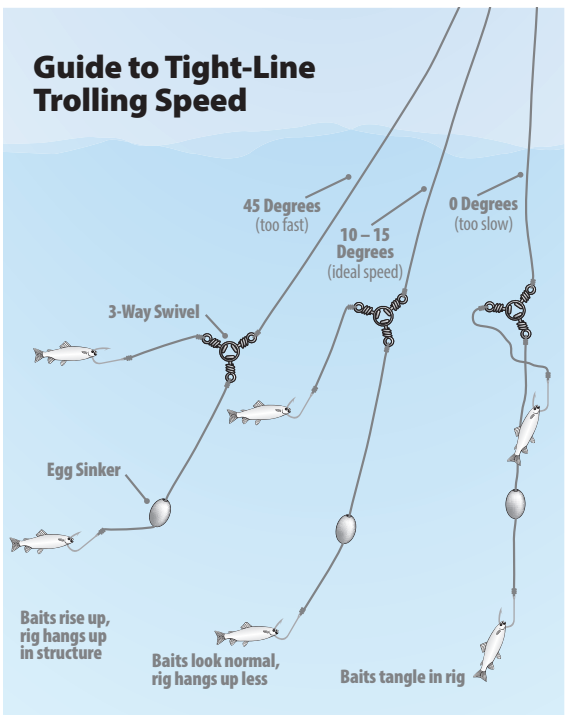
With the promise of the coming spring, both crappie and fishermen are preparing.

It's fairly easy for slabs: wait until the water temperature is right, then move to the bank. Anglers have choices, the biggest one being whether to fish with a single pole or involve multiple-pole strategies.

Tight-lining is a multiple-rod, vertical technique in which the rods are positioned around the bow of a boat.

Multiple-pole strategies involved two main techniques: tight-lining and long-lining, also referred to as pushing and pulling. Both involve multiple rods and rod holders, and from above, they give a boat a water bug-like appearance. The boat positions the baits or lures; you watch the rod tips to detect bites, then lift the rod to set the hook.

Anglers tight-lining normally have their rods around the bow of the boat, and they use relatively



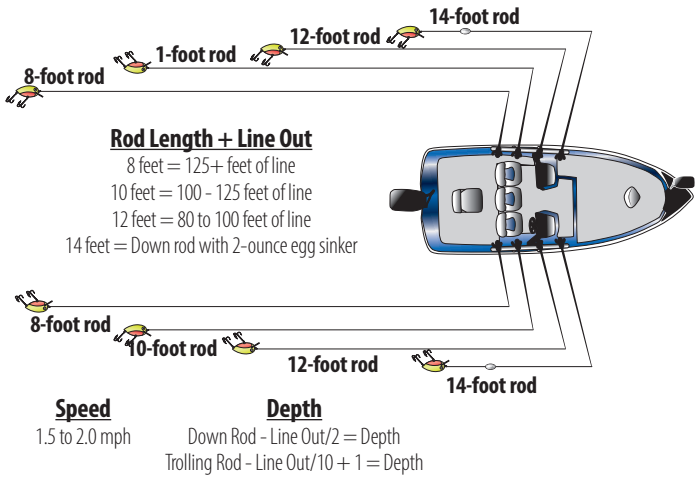
heavy weights to keep lines vertical. Long-lining has rods near the stern, pulling baits behind the boat.

It could be argued that the originators of modern, tight-line trolling are Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman, who are 7-time national champions. They have made tight-line trolling the most-popular crappie fishing tactic.



Phillip Gentry

Crankbait trolling at a glance



"It's actually pretty simple," Capps said. "From the fish's perspective, he's down there hanging out on a brush pile or a stake bed or hanging on the edge of a creek channel, and suddenly, here comes 16 baits right in his face."

The benefit of tight-lining is absolute depth control. Because the line is vertical in the water column — thanks to the weight — anglers can dial in the depth of baits.

Tight-line trollers typically don't move their boats much faster than about .5 mph. Some will use heavier weights and bump up their trolling speeds in order to cover more water in less time, but the basic idea is the same.

According to Coleman, tight-line trolling works best when the boat is following a known line, such as the edge of a creek channel or river channel, and the angler is targeting the drop-off and structure related to it. Crappie use contour changes when traveling from place to place, so tight-lining along a contour line is a great way to intercept fish.

"When we first started using GPS, Ronnie and I would place a waypoint on the GPS whenever we would catch a big crappie," Coleman said. "At the end of the day, whether we were trying to follow the creek channel or not, most of the biggest fish came off the drop. That changed a lot about the way we trolled. Now we almost always follow the contour line."

It's hard to argue when long-lining first became popular. Fishermen have been trolling hooks behind their boats for ages. The advent of long rods to space out offerings and give crappie a variety of baits to choose from helped long-line trolling become a staple tactic for many.



Long-line trolling allows a crappie fishermen to cover a great deal of water and different depths or troll across a featureless flat when fish may be scattered.



Rod Wall of Ninety Six, S.C., fell in love with long-line trolling and said it's his go-to tactic anytime crappie move from one pattern to the next.

"Long-lining works best when fish are in transition," said Wall, a successful tournament crappie pro. "Long-lining also works better when crappie are relating to roving schools of baitfish than when specifically relating to structure."

Like anglers who tight-line troll, long-liners may follow a contour line, but they most likely will be trolling the expanse of a flat. This allows the angler to cover more water as the boat speed of long-liners is twice that of tight-lining.

"Crappie will follow a contour line like a creek channel, and that's a great place to look for them, but active, feeding fish are often be all over a flat chasing baitfish. That's the best situation to find crappie when you're long lining," he said.

The depth of presentation when long-line trolling is a function of boat speed, the amount of line out, the weight of the jig and line diameter. Each plays a part in how deep jigs swim and whether you reach the level the crappie are suspended at. Wall referenced trolling a 1/16-ounce jighead pulled on 6-pound line the distance of an average cast — 40 to 50 feet — behind the boat, where the variable is boat speed. At .7 to 1.2 mph, baits will reach depths of 6 to 10 feet.

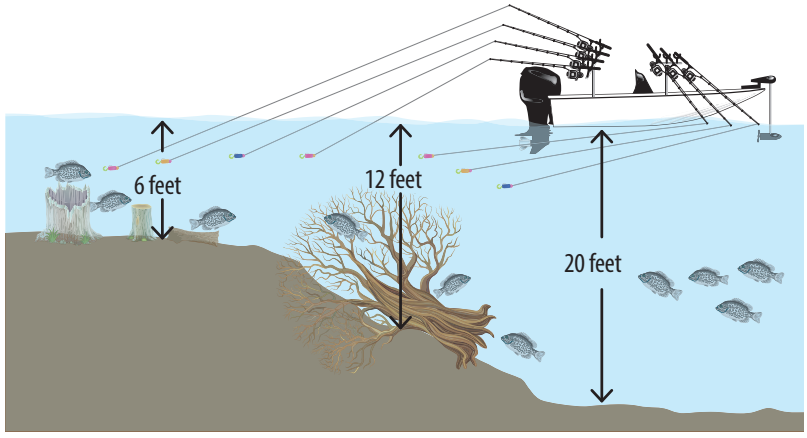
"To be good at depth control means you spend a lot of time pulling jigs," said Wall. "Find a 10-foot flat with a level bottom, then experiment with different variables to find what combination would put you occasionally skimming bottom, then work from there on works best in your boat, your baits, and your setup." ▪



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LONG-LINING CRANKBAITS



Jigs are not the only baits that can be trolled for crappie. Many anglers have found success replacing jigs with shallow- to medium-running crankbaits when trolling, one of them being Kent Driscoll, a pro-staff member for B'n'M.

Driscoll pulls crankbaits on eight rods — four on each side of his boat. He uses super-stiff rods that keeps crankbaits from putting too much bend in the rod while trolled. He graduates the rods in length, starting with an 8-foot rod nearest the transom, then a 10-footer, a 12-footer and finally, a 14-foot rod nearest the bow.

"That's your basic setup," he said. "You're going to want to vary your speed from 1.5 to 1.7 to 1.8 — sometimes faster if you can get away with it; sometimes slower if the fish are in a negative mood. You just have to vary speeds to figure out what they want."

The depth a crankbait runs is a coordination of variables including the amount of line out, the working depth of the crankbait and boat speed. Driscoll usually trolls at 1.5 mph and 2.0 mph, using his variable-speed trolling motor. Such precise graduations in speed require the use of a GPS-enabled electronics system that will measure speed to the tenth of an mph.

Driscoll said that anglers trolling crankbaits will catch the lion's share of crappie by targeting suspended fish. In order to target crappie suspended at a certain depth, he uses a line-out formula. As an example, If he wants to target fish that are holding 12 feet deep, he lets out 110 feet of line. His formula is:

Amount of line out divided by 10, plus 1 foot. So to get to 12 feet he lets out 110 feet of line. One-hundred-ten divided by 10 is 11, plus 1, is 12 feet.

Anglers often add weight to trolled crankbaits. Using a 2-ounce weight in front of the bait, Driscoll doubles the line out for the depth he wants to fish. To reach 12 feet, he lets out 24 feet of line.

"Some days, the crappie want the bait slower, and some days, they want it a little faster" he said. "Covering as much water as possible in order to find willing fish is another secret to the formula. When you get those variables figured out, you can really wear some big crappie out." ▪



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TURKEYS:

BE PREPARED

BY MARTY SHAFFNER

Before turkey season arrives, plan to do plenty of scouting so you can learn areas birds are roosting, feeding and strutting and get a leg up on tagging that first tom.



Marty Shaffner

TURKEY SEASONS IN THE CAROLINAS

North Carolina

- Youth season: April 6-April 12;
- Regular season: April 13-May 11

South Carolina

- Youth Season: March 16-17 (private land), March 30 (WMAs)
- Regular season: March 20-May 5 (private land), April 1-May 5 (WMAs).

Rick Small

You have set up on a gobbler on the roost and made your best effort to call him in, but hens came to him, and they slowly worked their way away from you.

That's a heartbreaking, but all-too-frequent scene in the spring woods of the Carolinas. Many hunters either call it a day or get up and do the old "run-and-gun" — walking and calling, hoping to get a tom to respond. The big problem is, especially in the early season, henned-up gobblers aren't prone to answer a call after they have gathered their morning harem.

Proper preseason scouting can provide answers to this problem and help hunters score this season by using their eyes and ears to come up with a plan for taking their next turkey.

Darrell Combs of Ronda, N.C., has been turkey hunting since North Carolina opened a spring season in his area in the 1980s. Combs, who at one time held the North Carolina record for the biggest non-typical wild turkey, uses his ears to do most of his scouting, because the thick terrain he hunts lends itself to that kind of approach. He is afraid he'll spook birds by doing too much walking around in his hunting area before the season and prefers to do most of his scouting by listening from high vantage points in the early mornings in the weeks leading up to the season.

Combs not only listens for gobblers, but he takes mental notes of where they are roosted and in which direction they head after gathering their hens, which tells him where he needs to set up. He said it is much easier to call a gobbler in if you are already where he wants to go.

Combs also said you can also use the information you gather in unorthodox ways to harvest a bird. Combs' hunting buddy hadn't taken his second bird by the final week of the last year's season, and after noticing a certain gobbler was rooting almost every night in a patch of big white pines, they decided he should slip in early in the afternoon, set up and only call a couple of times and wait for the gobbler to show up. About an hour before dark, he was rewarded with a nice longbeard. It was a gutsy and risky call, setting up so close to the tom's roost. If he spooked the bird, he risked the possibility of the bird changing its roosting location,, but because he did his homework in the preseason, he was confident of his plan, and it paid off.

>

Bobby Mead of Moncks Corner, S.C., uses his eyes more than Combs because the Lowcountry terrain he hunts lends itself to a more visual approach. Mead has been hunting wild turkeys for decades. He began looking for turkey sign as a child, riding his bicycle down the long drive leading to where he caught the school bus. He began to notice strut marks in the path where strutting gobblers would drag their wings. He would take his shotgun and set up in those areas and wait for the gobblers.

Mead said he begins his search these days at food plots and intersections of farm roads where toms can strut and be seen from a great distance to attract hens. He is not just looking for gobbler tracks in roads and strutting birds in food plots, but lone gobblers strutting and single sets of gobbler tracks.

Mead said hunters always tell him about seeing big toms strutting in the fields, but when he asks, he finds out that most of the time, they were accompanied by plenty of hens. Mead is looking for lone gobblers to hunt first, because he said a lone gobbler is an easier bird to call up. After he has identified a few lone gobblers by sign or sight, he begins listening for their roosts. After he has identified them, he picks a set-up spot between their roosts and their strutting zones. He also said that after he has a bird or two under his belt, he picks one of those old toms to pursue, hoping by that stage of the season, some of his hens have left him for the nest. ▪



Marty Shaffner of Elkin, N.C., guides fishermen for smallmouth bass and trout, plus he's an avid hunter. He has been a freelance outdoor writer for nearly a decade who has written about topics from fly fishing to deer hunting.

GET THE KIDS READY

Hidden in the brush or nestled in a ground blind, spring means turkey season to hunters. And in the Carolinas, younger hunters get an early start on their elders with special youth-only seasons.

In North Carolina, hunters under the age of 18 get a week's jump, with an April 6-12 season. In South Carolina, hunters aged 17 and under get March 16-17 on private lands and March 30 on Wildlife Management Areas. These season provide up-and-coming hunters with an opportunity to take a longbeard before hunting pressure becomes a factor.

continued >



Madeleine Kearns was 14 when she killed this youth-season tom in Granville County, N.C.



When scouting, try to find a spot where a single gobbler is operating, because he'll have fewer

Many adults use the youth season as a time to scout for the regular season, taking their kids afield and figuring out what birds will be doing come the adult version of opening day. But too much scouting before youth season can be counter-productive.

Hunters should keep birds in the dark as long as possible by limiting scouting sessions to vehicles, to which many turkeys are accustomed. Hunters can gather plenty of information about roosting sites, feeding and loafing sites through the windshield or driver's side window.

Hunters who have hunted a property for many years will generally already understand where the birds typically roost, and they can visit the site a week or so before the opening of youth season to listen and see where birds are roosting. Hunters don't necessarily need to know exactly which trees toms are using for roost, just where the birds are sleeping and where they head when the hit the ground the next morning.

Calling of any kind should be off limits before the season opens. Turkeys will quickly become educated to calling during the season, and there is no reason to begin their education prematurely. Hunters can typically learn plenty just by listening.

Finally, adults should take their young hunters out for some target practice; make sure they shoot from positions they're likely to be in when a gobbler is 35 yards in front of them. If they will use a shooting stick or rest of any kind, they should practice shooting with the same equipment. ▪

— Jeff Burleson





AMBUSHING TOUGH TOMS

Some turkey hunters think ambushing a spring gobbler is taboo, that the only sporting way to harvest a bird is by calling him in, much like a dry-fly purist on a trout stream.

But some of the best hunters around have a different idea, especially when it comes to a particular, tough tom. The late Ben Rogers Lee, an Alabama turkey hunting great, was once quoted as saying, "There comes a time when you have to decide if you're going to call to a gobbler or kill him."

Eddie Barr of Devotion, N.C., has taken that advice on several occasions on the way to killing more than 100 gobblers in several different states. One of his favorite tricks for "uncallable" toms is to slip in within 50 to 60 yards of a roosted bird, if he can pinpoint his roosting area.

Some gobblers vary roosting locations but still work their way around the same area every few days. Barr eases in very early, in total darkness, sets up on the uphill side of the roost tree and makes no calls — even if the tom gobbles his head off. He said the best-case scenario is the bird pitches down within shotgun range, and he has him. If the bird pitches down out of sight, he slips the bird a couple of very light clucks or yelps and calls no more, no matter how much the bird gobbles. Most times, Barr said, an old tom can't resist coming over to take a peek, and you can take him.

Anybody who thinks this is unsporting has never tried to sneak to within 50 yards of a roosted old gobbler. It takes more hunting skill than sitting down against a tree 200 yards from a 2-year-old gobbler and calling him to the gun. ▪



Some tough gobblers require special tactics; don't be afraid to try an ambush when a bird steadfastly refuses to come to calling.

Marty Shaffner







Craig Holt

CHATTERING ON

ABOUT SHEARON HARRIS BASS

By Craig Holt

Chatterbaits, aka bladed jigs, are killer lures as bass start to stir this month in North Carolina's top trophy lake, Shearon Harris.

Each spring, Mother Nature makes her first brush strokes to paint the natural world a color that chases away winter's brown and gray hues.

Bushes, tree buds, ground cover and grasses become green as longer stretches of daylight activate plant chlorophyll to overwhelm winter's drab shades.

The season's first visual change also drops the green flag for anglers, who know it's time to put the pedal to the metal as the South's pursuit of bass begins.

Anglers notice how aquatic vegetation respond to the sun's warmth that also triggers the prespawn feeding urge. When surface plants seems to green-up almost overnight, their attention is triggered.

"It's the first time every year you really can target shallow fish," said Josh Hooks, 29, a tournament angler. "It's especially a good time to be at Harris Lake."

Shearon Harris, a 4,100-acre Duke Energy lake in Chatham and Wake counties south of Raleigh, N.C., and north of Sanford is a favorite of lunker hunters. The Y-shaped impoundment features a central section with several deep channels plus three major arms containing coves, stump flats, standing timber and, once upon a time, acres of submerged aquatic grasses.

"But it doesn't have as much elodea, hydrilla and milfoil as it used to," said Hooks,

a former member of N.C. State's "Basspack" fishing team, who laments the loss of submerged grass because of the baitfish it attracts and the fat largemouths it grows.

"The grass beds are dinner tables for largemouths at any lake," Hooks said. "The more grass, the more bass. Shad, minnows and fry hide in the stuff. Triangle guys always could identify lakes by bass shapes. The biggest bass, shaped like footballs, usually came from Harris...."

Ten-pounders were common, and Harris even produced a few 12s. In 2003, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission helped the lake maintain magnum largemouth numbers with a 16- to 20-inch, no-keeper, slot rule. It produced the state's finest trophy-bass fishery.

But by 2013, Duke Energy had released 4,000 sterile grass carp into the lake to eat aquatic plants. The company denied spraying herbicide to kill the grass — as plenty of fishermen alleged. The only spraying was an N.C. State University test inside a cove in the late 1990s. When winds spread floating strands of dead hydrilla across the lake, the spraying rumor gained traction, according to biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

After 2018's record rainfall, which didn't allow the lake level to drop, spring fishing in 2019 should be excellent, and Hooks knows how he'll get started: around the dominant remaining vegetation.

"The first thing guys at Harris should look for is primrose along the shoreline and at backs of coves," Hooks said. "There won't be a lot of primrose showing in early spring, but you should definitely fish it when you find it. You just need to go look for it."

Hooks' favorite lure for late February and March is a Chatterbait, often referred to as a "bladed jig."

"March is the prime Chatterbait time," he said. "As soon as you start to see primrose in coves, that's when you need to start throwing a Chatterbait. It just takes a little bit of green to pull bass to places with primrose."

Later, other lures will come into play, including spinnerbaits, jigs and floating worms.

Primrose, hydrilla, milfoil and elodea fronds grow together along shorelines on Harris. Other than primrose, the other species are dormant until water temperatures warm. Primrose strands, easily recognized, are green with small, yellow five-petal flowers.

"The back of White Oak Creek had primrose in the past, but that's not a guarantee it'll always be there," Hooks said. "You've just got to put some time in and look until you find it."

Why do Chatterbaits work well near that plant?

"You have to remember bass metabolisms slow down in winter, so when the prespawn time begins, they haven't eaten in a while, and they're hungry," Hooks said. "But they'd rather eat one big baitfish than expend energy chasing several smaller baits, such as (threadfin) shad. It's like eating a bag of potato chips versus a big, juicy, sirloin steak."





DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Shearon Harris Lake is off US 1 between Raleigh, N.C., and Sanford, N.C. It is serviced by two public boat ramps, Holleman's Landing on Holleman Road off Welfare Road from US 1, and Crosspoint on Christian Church Road off NC 42 from US 421.

WHEN TO GO — Spring bass fishing is excellent from February through April.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Fish Chatterbaits on medium-action bait-casting outfits across the top of and around submerged vegetation. As March approaches, go with floating worms and weedless frogs or rats. Try coves off the main lake and look for primose flowers and mats at the surface.

FISHING INFO/ GUIDES — Jeff Thomas, 919-770-4654. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Hampton Inn & Suites, Holly Springs, N.C., 919-552-7610; Palamino Motel, Sanford, N.C., 919-776-7531; Holiday Inn & Suites, Sanford, N.C., 919-776-6600; Hampton Inn, Sanford, N.C., 919-775-2000; EconoLodge, Sanford, N.C., 919-774-6411; Days Inn, Sanford, N.C., 919-213-7238.

MAPS — Kingfisher Maps, 800-326-0257, www.kfmaps.com.



Josh Hooks begins bass-fishing this month around primrose grass in the back of coves on Shearon Harris Lake.

Craig Holt

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To a bass, Chatterbaits are like a big piece of steak. First, they've got a big profile, like a wounded bream or a big baitfish. They're noisy, which mimics a wounded baitfish or a bass attacking a baitfish. It's almost an axiom that bigger baits catch bigger fish, especially during spring.

"The lure's metal lip also adds some flash when it comes through the water, plus, it vibrates," Hooks said.

Finally, Hooks, a native of nearby New Hill, N.C., who has fished Harris since he was in his teens, likes a Chatterbait with a jighead that wobbles from side to side and adds more vibration.

"I like to beef up mine with a big swimbait trailer or a 4- or 4 ½-inch white spinnerbait trailer on a ⅜-ounce head. It looks like a big baitfish," he said. "But if they are chasing, they'll go after just about anything you put in front of them. I still think if you build up a Chatterbait's profile, you'll increase your chances of catching bigger fish."

But the major reason to use a Chatterbait is that it's 90-percent weedless. Few spring lures can be thrown into vegetation without getting snagged.

"Most lures cast into grass get caught, but not so much a Chatterbait — if you retrieve it correctly," Hooks said. "It's really hard to hang up."

Many anglers who have a lure caught in grass or weeds will jerk the lure, but normally, that only causes more problems. That means a trip into the grass for your trolling motor — smashing into bass dining rooms — a sure way to scatter fish.

The technique to free a snared Chatterbait is the opposite: use a slow, steady retrieve and keep boats out of grass.

"You shouldn't jerk on a hung-up Chatterbait or try to lift it up," Hooks said. "Just crank the reel handle slow and steady; most of the time, they'll come through heavy stuff."

Early in February, Hooks checks the



Flooded vegetation in the back of coves on Shearon Harris Lake is a great target for March bass fishermen.






Craig Holt

A Chatterbait is a relatively weedless lure that's death on prespawn bass.

backs of coves along Harris Lake's northwest shoreline for potential bass habitat with primrose and other spots of green.

"If I can find a corner on a point with primrose, that's often a staging point for bass" he said. "In past years, I tried a hit-or-miss approach without much success. You could fish same-looking places and not see a fish for miles. I found out there's usually a reason (bass) are somewhere. It just means you really have to look for keys; you gotta pay attention."

One of the best late-February conditions includes a southeast wind during a period of mile weather three to four days or longer. Wind piles up warmer water at the backs or sides of coves and pulls bass toward grass. But Hooks said big females aren't committed yet to bedding and may relocate to different areas from year to year. Also, because of weather changes and heavy rains, they may often spawn a month later than normal.

"In March, sometimes they can be in the backs of coves or halfway back," he said. "You need to be aware of water temperatures."

Bass usually become active when the water temperature rises above 50 to 55 degrees, he said. "When it gets to 60 degrees, they look for spawning habitat."

Before the water gets that warm, he favors throwing a Chatterbait because it allows him to cover more water "and you get reaction strikes."

"I try to just tick the tips of grass beds," he said. "If you're getting bites by small bass, that means big ones are nearby. I fish all the way around grass beds. No matter how small or big, bass usually blast Chatterbaits, too."

Hooks' largest Harris lunker — nearly 10 pounds — whacked a Chatterbait in early March. ▪



Craig Holt *of Snow Camp, N.C., has been an outdoor writer for almost 40 years, working for several newspapers and magazines before becoming a full-time freelancer in 2009.*

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HOW A CHATTERBAIT WORKS



A weedless Chatterbait is a great late-winter, prespawn lure for bass, especially on lakes with emergent vegetation.

Craig Holt

Every Chatterbait, aka bladed jig, has a oddly shaped metal lip. The front lip or flange, has three holes drilled in a row, with the top hole a little larger than the other two. The bait's jighead has an eyelet that goes through the hole on the bottom of the lip, and a cross-lock snap swivel goes through the other two. Both holes are wide enough to allow the bait to wiggle when retrieved.

That certainly doesn't sound like a weedless bait, but bass pro Josh Hooks understands.

"The lip design and jighead's weight probably are the keys," he said.

The metal lip points downward when retrieved, digging toward the bottom like a crankbait. But the jighead, hook and skirt slide through a hole in the water created by the lip, which also prevents a Chatterbait from rolling and turning the hook downward, where it can get snagged.

Simply, the business end of a Chatterbait follows a cleared hole in the water the lip/flange produces as it bounces off submerged aquatic weeds.

Additionally, Chatterbait lips, made of thin metal, can be bent. The more the bend, the more wiggle the lip creates.

But does one brand work best?

Several companies produce bladed jigs, but the original Chatterbait was invented by Rod Davis of Greenwood, S.C. His company, RAD Lures, produced the first Chatterbaits, then sold out to Z-Man Fishing Products.

Hooks uses a Chatterbait knock-off produced by a long-time fishing buddy from Wake County. That bait features a football-shaped jighead that imparts more movement than factory models.

"It's my secret weapon for early-spring bass," he said. ■

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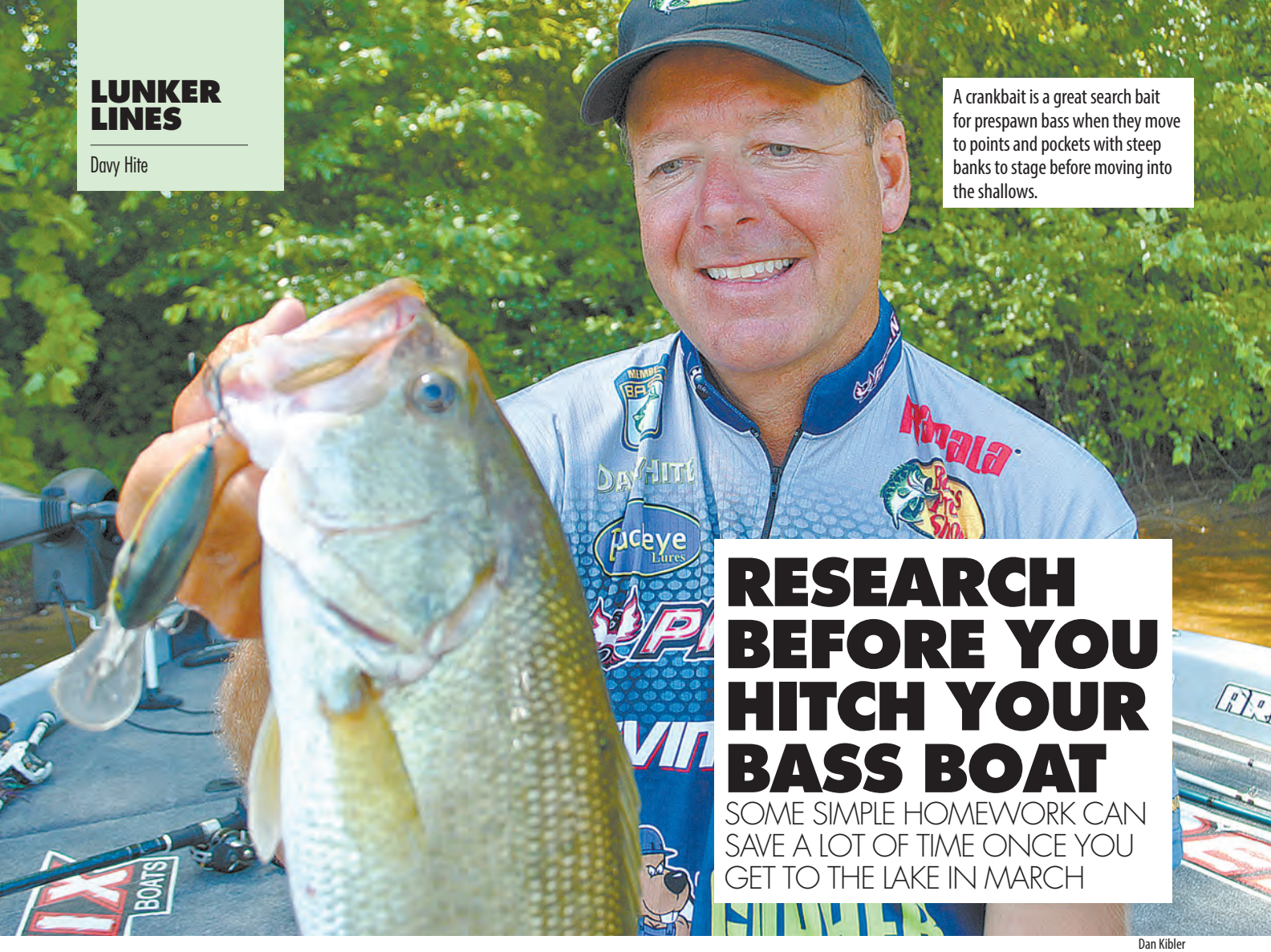
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RESEARCH BEFORE YOU HITCH YOUR BASS BOAT

SOME SIMPLE HOMEWORK CAN SAVE A LOT OF TIME ONCE YOU GET TO THE LAKE IN MARCH

Dan Kibler

March is one of my favorite months to catch a big bass, probably my favorite month at home in the Carolinas, because big fish are on the move and the weather is improving.

Fishermen who are getting ready for a trip to chase bass can eliminate a lot of the guesswork and wasted time by doing their homework and breaking down the lake before leaving home.

Start with understanding that on most lakes in the Carolinas, bass are going to be on a prespawn pattern in March. In a warm winter, you might get a late-February spawn at Santee Cooper, but you'll be fishing for prespawn fish.

I start by breaking any lake down into three sections: lower lake, mid-lake and upper lake. That sounds elementary, but we're trying to make things as simple as we can. I want to look at the weather for the week I'm going to fish, because March temperatures can vary from highs in the 50s to lows in the 50s and highs in the 70s. Then, I look at the wind predictions. If it's going to be blowing 20 to 25 miles an hour, I'm going to steer away from the lower end, which is usually the biggest and has the most open water; I don't want to be out in that kind of wind.

That sends me to the mid-lake or upper lake. I'm going to look at the weather again; if we've had a lot of rain, then the water could be extremely dirty and cold in the upper end. That would push us to the mid-lake. If it hasn't been a wet winter, then I'm going to want to fish the upper end and take advantage of the stained water. If the weather has been warm, that will be the warmest section of the lake; it will warm up the quickest of any where. On the other hand, if it isn't going to be windy, then the lower end might work out better because it will be the most stable part of the lake.

So, with a little homework, I've eliminated two-thirds of the lake before I've even left my house or hitched my Phoenix bass boat to the truck.

TIME-SAVING INFO

What we've done before we ever launch the boat is to save a lot of time and effort. I know — because I've done it — that a lot of guys just go straight to the nearest ramp and put in and run all over looking for places to fish. By dividing a lake into thirds and figuring out what third we want to fish, we can pinpoint a ramp close to that section and drive to it. It's much cheaper to drive your tow vehicle and boat to a ramp that's 25 miles away than it is to run 25 miles up the lake to where you're going to fish, especially at about three miles to the gallon through your outboard.

Now that I've got everything narrowed down before I put in, I'm going to spend the first hour on the water evaluating the water temperature. If the water temperature is from the upper-40s into the low 50s, I'm going to fish on the main lake. If it's in the upper 50s or the 60s, I'm going to fish pockets and ditches in the creek.

If I'm in the creek, I am going to fish from the main lake to about one-third of the way back in the creeks. I am going to look for points and pockets with steeper banks. Fish will be just moving up, out of the main lake, to stage on points or in pockets. I want to be fishing a place where I can have my boat in 10 to 12 feet of water and be a cast from the bank. They get on these kinds of places because the weather is still unstable, and bass can adjust to depth in the water column without having to swim 100 yards.

PICK A SEARCH BAIT

I will start with a crankbait like a Rapala DT-6 or DT-10 in crawfish colors, red crawfish for sure. If the water is real clear, I'll have two jerkbaits tied on: a Shadow Rap Deep or a Shadow Rap Shad in some kind of baitfish color. I will use those baits to cover water once I get on spots with those steeper banks; the weather is so iffy in March, that the water temperature can be in the upper-40s or the low 60s.

I am going to pay attention to my electronics when I decide which baits to pick up. I'll keep an eye on my Humminbird Mega-Imaging depth finder to see where the fish are in the water column. If they're on the bottom, I want to throw the crankbaits. If you find them suspended, say, midway up in the water column to the surface, I'll go with the jerkbait or with a swimbait or Alabama rig. If I'm going to fish a single swimbait, it will be a 360GT on a quarter-ounce jighead. If I throw a Alabama rig, I'll have five swimbaits on quarter-ounce jigheads on the Alabama rig.

An Alabama rig will really catch fish, if you can get it down and retrieve it at the depth where your bass are holding. I'll also throw a single swimbait or an Alabama rig when I know I'm casting around bass but can't get them to bite. I want to switch up baits and see if I can get a reaction bite.

An Alabama rig is really something to throw. I've said that if you're throwing a No. 5 Shad Rap, that's like throwing a potato chip. If I put down that rod and pick up an Alabama rig and throw it, it's like throwing a tennis shoe full of water. I'll fish it on a 7-foot-6 Johnny Morris Carbonlite rod, a medium-heavy flipping stick. That's what it takes for such as heavy rig.

So when you get ready to go this month, try and do an hour's worth of homework to eliminate several hours worth of work on the lake. It will give you that much more time to really cast at that 8-pound bass you've been dreaming about. ▪



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.*



SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell



With bass moving into extremely shallow water for the spawn, stealth tactics like a push pole instead of a trolling motor can make a big difference.

BLESS THE SANTEE BASS SPAWN

BIG FISH MOVING SHALLOW PUT MARCH ON MAP

Experienced bass anglers at Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie begin looking for big bass moving into shallower water by late February. The trend continues on through much of April, but to be consistently successful, anglers need a basic plan for this specific shallow-water fishing.

At 25, Evan Glenn of Bonneau, S.C., may a young bass angler, but he's earned veteran credentials in those years. He has been fishing tournaments regularly since age 10 and learned about big bass fishing with his father, Darrell Glenn, now retired from tournament fishing.

But Evan Glenn and most local bass gurus agree that March is THE month for the most bedding action by the largest bass.

Glenn said when weather and water conditions align, an early spawn can occur in February or early March, and some of the biggest bass of the year typically move to the beds on that first wave.

SPAWNING TRIGGER

Glenn said multiple factors impact when the spawn begins, and water temperature ranks high. He said that length of day and overall water conditions also impact the move to bedding areas.

"I'm on the hunt for bass moving to the beds once the water temperature gets to 50 degrees, and while that's a little cool for actual bedding it's time to begin the searching process," he said. "Fishing at this time of the year is not all about finding fish on the beds, so don't be single-minded in fishing styles. I'll work deeper, prespawn staging areas, enabling me to stay tuned in with the bass migration as the water warms. Once the water temperature reaches 55 degrees, more big fish start moving to real shallow water, and by 60 degrees, the spawn is usually on."

Glenn said by getting on prespawn patterns before the spawn, he knows when that pattern shifts, they've likely made the move shallower to spawning habitat.

"Not all the bass are going to move shallow at the same time, but now I'll begin to fish both spawning and prespawn targets," Glenn said. "To catch fish consistently, I refine top targets on nearly every trip because weather and water conditions impact where I'll find fish on a good bite."

PREFERRED AREAS

Bass prefer a firm bottom substrate, Glenn said, and sand, gravel and shell are usually high-percentage targets for him. He also likes pockets, coves and areas sheltered from heavy winds and boat traffic.

"The firm bottom substrate is where I find 90 percent of the beds, so I go with the high odds," he said. "I've learned that beds need to have exposure to sunlight for a good portion of the day, even when they're associated with some form of woody cover. I love isolated cypress trees, but some weeds, logs and stumps are

good targets. A real key is casting accuracy and placing the lure very tight to the cover. Plus, it needs to enter the as water softly as possible."

Glenn said trolling-motor noise in shallow water is a consideration, so he usually makes long casts to targets and often uses a push pole to navigate in very shallow water. He said Ninja-like stealth can add big bass to the catch.

TECHNIQUES, LURES

"Quality sunglasses are important year-round, but essential for this shallow-water fishing," Glenn said. "When working shallow water, I'm looking for individual fish roaming the shallows and fish on the beds as targets. Many factors are visual in March."

Glenn's tactics include a variety of lures, and spinnerbaits are a favorite for shallow water fishing.

"I like double- or triple-bladed willow leaf spinnerbaits," he said. "It's versatile, and I'll work it on spawning flats to catch bass just before going on the bed and for targeting specific bass on a bed. I use a trailer hook at this time of year; that's crucial."

CATFISH TOURNAMENT: The Third Annual Santee Cooper Monster Cat Quest is set for March 15-16 out of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal. This fast-growing tournament has grown from 72 boats in 2017 to 110 last year. Hopes are the tournament will expand to 200 boats this year. Call Chris Gaines (864-617-5929) for full details.



When targeting fish on the beds, he also works a ½-ounce size jig with a crawdad trailer, with black/blue and black/red his favored color patterns.

Glenn said not all bass spawn at the same time, and by late March and all through April, effective patterns include prespawn, spawn and postspawn techniques.

"To be successful on bass at this time of the year I'm versatile with my fishing techniques to fish multiple possibilities for the best fishing on any given day," 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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JORDAN LAKE BASS

ready for big move to shallow water



Warm weather in late February can send Jordan Lake's largemouth bass into shallower water, and they won't often leave before spawning a month or so later.

Bass fishing in March on North Carolina's Jordan Lake is heavily dependent on February's weather. Whether winter hangs on or spring winds blow in from the south determines whether bass remain in deep water or make the move to shallower locations on their way to the spawning grounds. With a warming trend in the forecast, odds are, March fishing will come in like a lion.

"Looking at weather trends, I think we're going to have a couple weeks of warm weather in February, and those fish are going to pull up," said Jonathan Phillips, a local tournament angler from Pittsboro, N.C. "They're going to start moving into the transition zones — those red-clay, chunk rock banks. Any time that water gets 47 to 50 (degrees), it really triggers that movement. Once they get there, they're probably not going to leave, no matter how cold it gets."

When this occurs, Phillips turns his attention to the creeks, focusing on the first third back from the mouth. He looks for areas where he can position his boat in 15 to 20 feet of water and cast into 1 to 2 feet. These conditions are usually found in areas where the creek channel swings close to rocky or clay banks. As the water continues to warm, Phillips will look for areas in 10 to 12 feet of water that are a cast away from the bank as he works his way up the creek.

"When we're starting out with 47- to 48-degree water, I like a No. 7 to No. 8 Shad Rap because it runs a little deeper," Phillips said. "As it warms and the fish move shallower, I'll switch to a shallower crankbait that runs in 3 to 5 feet of water. An S-Crank or the old-style Speed Trap is my favorite — in a crawdad pattern like crystal craw or a natural pattern like green pumpkin.

"When the water gets to the 52- to 54-degree range, you're going to start getting more Chatterbait and spinnerbait bites. I like to keep the color simple with white and chartreuse, but the fish will be relating more to bushes, stumps, and laydowns, so I'll use 20-pound fluorocarbon to keep from getting broken off."

In early spring, Phillips prefers the upper lake — above US 64, believing it to turn on faster in an area where the fish naturally live shallower. Also, this area is less affected by spring rains than the river section. While any of the creeks facing the warm southwest winds are subject to heat faster, Phillips lists No Name, Bush, and Morgan creeks as areas of interest.. ▪

— Dusty Wilson



DON'T STOP MOVING
for prespawn Lake Murray largemouths

March is one of the best months for bass fishing on South Carolina's Lake Murray, according to bass pro Andy Wicker of Prosperity, S.C., who grew up fishing on the lake.

"You can win a tournament anywhere on Lake Murray on any given day," he said. "March is also good for numbers and for size. In January and February, you might not catch numbers of bass, but you catch some of the bigger fish that time of year. But you catch more fish in March. The buck bass are moving up shallow, and it is a good opportunity to catch a bunch of them."

Wicker said early in March, he will concentrate on fishing in the area around Billy Dreher Island, but by the end of the month, he will be fishing within a few miles of the dam.

Early in the month, he said, the fish will be on a moving-bait bite.



Bass pro Andy Wicker of Prosperity, S.C., fishes mid-lake areas on Lake Murray in early March before moving to the lower end as the month progresses.

Andy Wicker

"Normally, I will be throwing a spinnerbait up shallow or a crankbait and jig on the docks," he said. "Depending on the weather, as the day progresses, normally there will be a good dock bite going with the bigger fish. This bite usually becomes better later in the day."

"Then, at some point, you will see them transition into the spawning mode and they will move to the shallow water in the backs of the pockets. When they do that they will be off the moving bait bite and that's when I will go with a Senko, a floating worm or a shaky head."

By the end of March, he said, the bass normally will be fully into the spawn, and that slower pattern will hold true through the end of the spawn. ▪

— Pat Robertson

Badin Lake up next >





Badin Lake produces plenty of nice largemouth like this one in March. This year should be no different.

Tony Garitta

BIG BADIN LAKE BASS

will be on the feed through March

Rusty Bowers, a veteran bass fisherman from Albemarle, N.C., said March is a great month for big largemouth bass at Badin Lake.

"If you're fishing a bass tournament with a 5-fish limit, you'll need more than 20 pounds to have any chance of winning," said Bowers. "In March, the fish generally run from 3½ to 5½ pounds."

Bowers uses a two-pronged attack to entice strikes from prespawn bass.

"I fish either a ½-ounce jig or a large Zoom Brush Hog creature bait," said Bowers, who favors the green pumpkin color whether he's fishing jigs or plastic baits. He targets tree laps and rocky points in 5 feet of water or less.

Bowers prefers water ranging from dingy to muddy, stain that should be readily available given the rains that have drenched the area this year.

From early to mid-March, Bowers targets rocky points, dragging his jig ever so slowly to get strikes from bass that are still mostly sluggish in the cooler water. Many times, he'll feel only a sight bump or see a subtle movement of his line indicating a strike.

Once the water warms into the high 50s or low 60s, he switches to the Brush Hog. He'll flip the bait into tree laps in pockets or along creek banks, probing each tree lap slowly and thoroughly.

"With the warmer water, more fish are moving shallow and preparing to go on the beds," he said. "Tree laps are natural stopping places along the way."

Bowers favors nooks and creeks around the Old Whitney area, home to numerous fallen trees. He said ideal fishing conditions in March would include a slight breeze, stained to dirty water, the lake being pulled, high water and a sunny day.

"Pulled water makes the fish more active, and a sunny day puts the fish tighter to cover, which is what I want when I'm fishing tree laps," he said.

Cold fronts force Bowers to change tactics.

"I'll fish a spinnerbait when there's a cold front," said Bowers. "I use a ½-ounce white spinnerbait with willowleaf blades in gold and silver."

Fishermen are likely to encounter dingy to muddy water this spring because of excessive rains. These conditions might surprise some fishermen given that Badin doesn't turn muddy that often. ▪

— Tony Garitta

SPRING'S STATE-LINE SPECKS

BY JEFF BURLESON



TROUT WILL START BITING AT THE FIRST SIGN OF WARM WEATHER, AND THE WATERS AROUND THE BORDER BETWEEN THE CAROLINAS IS A GREAT PLACE TO START.

Jeff Burleson

The seasons make a dramatic change this month with the onset of spring and warmer temperatures. If inshore fishermen didn't get their line stretched enough in the fall, March shapes up as an ideal time for a spring frolic in the waters along the North Carolina-South Carolina state line, with speckled trout in the spotlight.

Spring in the Carolinas is always unique, with unpredictable weather and bipolar water conditions. The runs of warm-weather days will overtop the cooler days, and the speckled trout bite takes off as soon as the water temperatures begin to trend upward, in places where anglers in boats of all sizes can target them.

Tripp Hooks of Captain Hook Outdoors is a diehard saltwater angler and guide based out of Ocean Isle Beach, N.C. Although he does a lot of fishing offshore, he loves following speckled trout throughout the year. The Intracoastal Waterway is his first stop and generally, his spring playground for specks.

"In the ICW, they have everything right there," Hooks said. "They have access to deep water and shallow banks right in the same place."

The trout bite in the ICW from Little River, S.C., to Holden Beach, N.C., fires up when spring arrives. The ICW provides a perfect environment for the unpredictable spring conditions.

"When the water is cold, the trout will be along the deep side of the 15- to 20-foot ledges, but when it starts to warm up a lot, the surface temperature will be warmer than the bottom, making the bite better closer to the surface," he said.

"The ICW is a go to spot, but the shell banks near the end of the Calabash and Shallotte rivers will also hold fish in spring ... "

In the spring, the air temperature can be 40 degrees one day and 75 degrees the next. Water temperatures remain relatively stable in the ocean during these roller-coaster conditions, but inshore waters can experience dramatic temperature changes during a period of a few warm days. While most fish prefer a more-stable environment, trout and other inshore finfish will take full advantage of the spring warm-up by moving into these shallow, warmer reaches to feed.

In addition to the ICW, Hooks will fish just inside the mouth of area rivers and large tributaries.

continued >



The Intracoastal Waterway is one of the first places to target speckled trout as the water begins to warm as winter gives way to spring.

Jeff Burleson

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The waters along the North Carolina-South Carolina border can be accessed from public boat ramps at Ocean Isle Beach, N.C., Holden Beach, N.C., and Sunset Beach, N.C., and under the US 17 bridge over the ICW in North Myrtle Beach, S.C. See www.dnr.sc.gov/pubs/boatfacilities.pdf and www.ncwildlife.org/Boating_Waterways for exact locations.

WHEN TO GO — March through May. The spring pattern begins when the water begins to warm in March and will continue until Memorial Day. When fishing inshore waters, choose the falling tide on warm days for best success. Concentrate on the ICW from the Little River swing bridge northeast almost to Southport, N.C. Man-made canals in Ocean Isle Beach, Holden Beach and Cherry Grove (S.C.) are ideal places. Also, check bridges, docks and the mouth of creeks.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Medium-light to medium-action spinning gear spooled with 10- to 14-pound braid is preferred, with a 16- to 24-inch leader of 14- to 20-pound fluorocarbon. Mud minnows are the only live baits available in spring; they can be fished under a small popping cork. Productive artificials are soft-plastic shrimp and suspending hard baits. Use natural and bright colors. Vary your retrieve, but a slower, stop-and-go retrieve will produce the best results.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Tom Cushman, Capt. Cush's Calmwater Fishing Charters, 843-997-5850, www.captaincush.com; Tripp Hooks, Captain Hook Outdoors, 910-540-7332, www.capthookoutdoors.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Hampton Inn, North Myrtle Beach, S.C., 843-249-1997; Causeway Inn, Ocean Isle Beach, S.C., 910-579-0743; Myrtle Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, www.mbchamber.com; North Carolina Tourism, www.visitnc.com.

MAPS — Navionics, 800-848-5896, www.navionics.com; GMCO's Chartbook of North Carolina, 888-420-6277, www.gmcomaps.com.



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Big trout are commonly caught in March and April around oysters and other hard, underwater structures.

Jeff Burleson

"The ICW is a go-to spot, but the shell banks near the end of the Calabash and Shallotte rivers will also hold fish in spring," he said. "I fish the first mile of these main creeks and rivers that are covered in shell."

The ICW and area rivers are covered with oyster banks that are a key component to speckled trout habitat. The ICW sustains the majority of the available baitfish in the spring. The shells provide a place for bait to hide and for the trout to ambush them. In addition to oyster banks, the ICW provides fish and fisherman with other types of habitat that can be prime spring trout locations.

Tom Cushman of Captain Cush's Calmwater Charters out of Little River, S.C., fishes for trout year-round, and he loves the ICW around Little River because of all of the man-made structure that concentrates bait for his trout and redfish expeditions.

"We have a lot of docks and other structures along the ICW that hold fish," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "Most of the docks extend into deep water to allow seasonal docking on all tides. The ends of the docks are deeper and usually the best place to find trout in spring."

Several bridges that cross the ICW around the state line will hold trout throughout the year: Ocean Isle Beach, Little River, Holden Beach and Sunset Beach.

"The Sunset Beach bridge is one of my favorite places for trout in the spring," Cushman said.

Marinas shouldn't be left off the list, either. The waters in the vicinity of the state line have several marinas that can offer a bonus fishing situation for spring fishing.

"The marinas will warm up and hold bait during the spring. We will catch them in the marinas or at the mouth of the marinas on the falling tide. The falling tide is always better in the spring," Cushman said, explaining that ocean waters flowing in on a rising tide are significantly colder than inshore waters and won't produce as good a bite as warmer,

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inshore waters flowing out.

Since baitfish are limited, anglers typically use mud minnows or artificial lures. Mud minnows aren't typically a trout bait, but specks will readily hit them, especially fished under a popping cork or on a jighead in deeper places. Hooks is a fan of soft-plastic lures and topwater baits.

"I like to throw a topwater lure early, late, and in periods of limited light," he said. "But the rest of the time, I will use Saltwater Assassin's paddletails and Vudu Shrimp."

Surface lures are most effective when trout have moved onto the shallower oyster bars and ledges in 2 to 3 feet of water. Both poppers and stickbaits can produce in the spring.

Hooks will work subsurface lures slowly, beginning in deep water and up the ledge to the shallower waters until he finds a school of takers.

"In spring, the trout will be in tight packs, not too far from each other. If you catch one, there will be several more in the same spot," he said. ▪

continued >

ZERO IN ON MAN-MADE CANALS



Man-made canals dot the coast on both sides of the North Carolina-South Carolina border, and they hold trout early in spring.

The beaches in lower Brunswick County, N.C., are filled with man-made canals that are used for temporary and long-term boat storage — nearly 40 between Holden Beach, N.C., and the South Carolina line, as well as, a few in Cherry Grove, S.C.

While these canals were built for homeowner boat access, they provide excellent winter and spring hangouts for redfish and speckled trout.

These canals are protected from the wind and often trap heat that warms the waters. While temperatures will not be a great deal higher, several degrees can produce ideal conditions for baitfish and predators.

All of the canals aren't created equal, however. They can be long, short and configured as a single canal or a collection of short canals with a collector and a single opening to the ICW. Trout can be found from the tips of the canals to the canal openings and anywhere in between.

Anglers should fish the entire reach of canals to find the best spots holding fish. The majority of these canals are relatively shallow and both subsurface and surface lures can produce fish. The best fishing is with artificial shrimp, sinking/suspending MirrOlures and jigs rigged with soft plastics. Anglers should also try mud minnows under popping corks. The action of a mud minnow can be deadly on trout and redfish in canals. ▪



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DON'T FORGET JETTIES IN SPRING

Speckled trout are a favorite of many anglers, and the jetties on either side of Little River Inlet can be ground zero for some of the biggest fish caught all year.

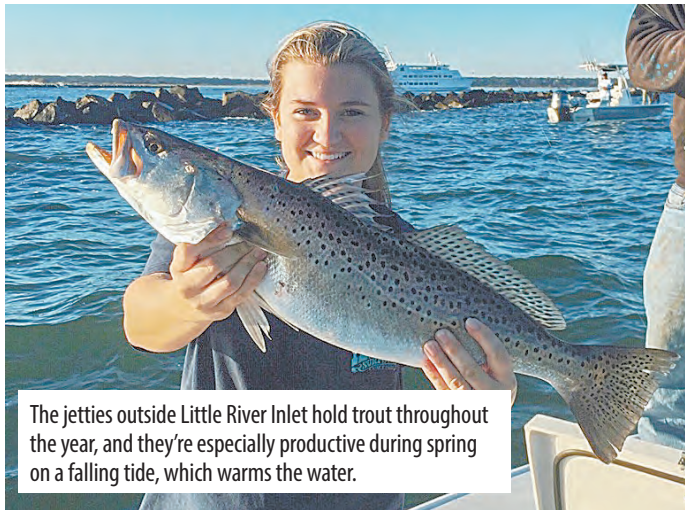
While most anglers fish the jetties during the fall, spring is also a good time to pitch baits along the massive collection of granite boulders.

While many fish overwinter inshore, plenty spend the cold months in the ocean where temperatures are more consistent. The jetties provide a unique feature that provides refuge and feeding opportunities. Trout don't have to be concerned about any major changes in water temperature while they're around the jetties.

In spring, the outgoing tide will push warmer water and baitfish up against the jetty rocks, where many trout will be set up looking for an easy meal.

Tripp Hooks of Captain Hook Outdoors loves to fish the jetties for speckled trout and redfish.

"I fish the jetties every time of the year," Hooks said. "They can be stacked up there one day and nothing there the next, but I always check the jetties. They are a good spot to try any time of the year."



The jetties outside Little River Inlet hold trout throughout the year, and they're especially productive during spring on a falling tide, which warms the water.

Jeff Burleson

Hooks fishes both the inside and the outside of the jetties.

"I like the inside on the falling tide and the outside on the rising tide because that is where the current is located. On the outside, on the rise, the water sucks around the rocks and pushes through," he said.

Hooks fishes as close to the rocks as possible. He will cast soft plastics on jigheads and artificial shrimp to the rocks and allow them to sink to the bottom before working them slowing off the bottom. ▪



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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Chris Bush



Jerkbaits will trigger strikes from speckled trout year-round, but they're especially productive in cold weather.

JERKBAITS CAN GIVE SPECKLED TROUT FITS

LEARN WHAT DIFFERENT BAITS DO, PICK THE SITUATIONS WHERE THEY FIT BEST, CATCH TROUT

The longer it sits, the harder they hit it.

For those not familiar with the reference, it involves casting jerkbaits and the merciless response that a speckled trout exhibits after staring down its hard-plastic foe.

Although this technique can be fished year-round, anglers across many state lines utter this phrase a little more often in the presence of Ol' Man Winter. Proven repeatedly, erratic movement coupled with a brilliant flash resonates well with trout behavior, but anglers seldom embrace their true capability. I want to explore three simple facets — size, depth and action — to becoming a more-proficient jerkbait angler and explore some brands and what capabilities they provide.

LURE SIZE

Spawned by bass anglers decades ago, jerkbaits have evolved to mirror our tech-savvy word. CNC machines replaced Buck knives and balsa wood, and as a result, offer anglers, regardless of fishery, a myriad of options. Flooded by "pro staff" marketing, the industry makes it tough for fisherman to sift through what works and what's 40-percent off.

For someone new looking to add one to their arsenal, size is the basic component that needs extensive consideration. I personally choose jerkbaits that range from 3½ to 5 inches long, and although I've caught big trout with large bits of forage waving at me from their throats, I still feel most confident with lures in this range.

Smaller jerkbaits like the Rapala RipStop 09 (3½ inches) offer finesse presentations on calm, clear days with exceptional water clarity, while larger profile jerkbaits like the Berkley Juke 100 present a heartier offering with a less-refined and cumbersome action. Aside from brand, which I'll suggest later, size dictates flash and action, and given water clarity (dirty or clear) and conditions (windy or calm), having a variety in that range accentuates your offering.

DEPTH

Normally dictated by the size of the rigid, plastic lip positioned at a 45-degree angle on the nose of the bait, its important to know the depth that the lure is rated for. How do you know? See the bait's packaging for details. Jerkbaits like the Rapala Shadow Rap Shad present a larger offering but only get down to a max depth of 3 feet, depending on salinity and terminal tackle. Comparable in size, though, the MirrOlure L30 (MirrOlip), can reach depths greater than 6 feet, a result of a slightly larger lip. Having said that, both lure ratings fall within manufacturer specifications. Understanding that simple concept affords you to choose the right lure/profile for the job. Since the majority of fish are suspended, an angler can effectively target that portion of the water column.

ACTION

"Action" is a fishing word used loosely

to describe lure characteristics. In this particular case, the action referred to is whether the bait descends, suspends or ascends after you finish your twitch cadence. Revisiting my opening comment about "the longer it sits" refers to all action types. Ascending jerkbaits like the Smithwick Rattling Rogue or the Texas Custom Lures MirrOlure Double D float back to the top, but they do so at varying rates of speed. Depending on whether fish are shallow or deep in the water column, the longer you can let the bait sit before it reaches the surface or bottom, the better chance you have at the fish responding to your presentation.

To highlight my point, on a recent trip, I found some really nice fish in about 3 feet of water holding over shell. After throwing an ascending lure (Double D) with little response, I chose a Berkley Juke 100 with a deeper dive/ascending capability. After one great fish, little other interest was shown, so I swapped to a Rapala Shadow Rap (4⅜ inches) which affords me to fish the middle column (1½ feet) with a suspending action. On consecutive casts, two above-average trout were landed and safely released.

Taking stock, I found that the longer I let the lure sit — sometimes upwards of 5 seconds — the harder they would hit it. Due in large part to water temperature, clarity and calm conditions, the trout were keyed in on small movements. Ascending or descending baits just weren't matching the fish's behavior, but like all things fishing, it varies from day-to-day.

This is the jerkbait game. If observant and confident with a myriad of lures and in tune with their capabilities of size, depth and action, you can not only catch a substantial number of fish, but at the same time, you can target bigger bites.

Hopefully this will help get you started, and as always please reach out if you have any questions. Until next time, tight lines, God bless and remember take what you need and release the rest. ▪

BRANDS/LURES WORTH USING

(NOT ALL ENCOMPASSING):

- Rapala Shadow Rap
- Rapala Shadow Rap Shad
- MirrOlure L30
- Bomber Long-A
- Yo-Zuri Sashimi JerkBait
- Rapala Rip Stop (09 & 11)
- Smithwick Rattling Rogue
- Strike King KVD Series
- Texas Custom Lures MirrOlure Double D
- Borbaleta LeLe
- Berkley Juke (78 & 100)
-Matrix Minnow



Chris Bush *is a U.S. Air Force officer and a licensed charter captain. He spends his time targeting big speckled trout and sharing knowledge on his website, Speckled Truth.*

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SPRING SPECKS

getting hungry at Murrells Inlet's jetties



Plenty of trout will overwinter near Murrells Inlet's rock jetties for the available bait.

Jeff Burleson

The Carolinas' weather can be very indecisive at times, and that couldn't be any more true than in March. For anglers, it is the tail end of winter and the beginning of spring, with many warm days on the horizon. For anglers targeting speckled trout, Murrells Inlet, S.C., can be a good place to enjoy the day.

Dan Connolly of O-Fish-Al Expeditions said the past winter gave up the goods and is continuing to give his clients plenty of speckled treasures

"When we don't have a harsh winter, we keep a pretty big population of trout in the Inlet," said Connolly (843-241-7022). "We have some fish that migrate in during the fall and others that are year-around residents. As long as we keep some glass minnows, shrimp or other bait for them to eat, the trout will stay around."

Early in spring, Connolly will camp out either at the jetties or just inside them in main creeks. Most of the available food will be near the ocean; that will keep trout and other predators nearby.

"Most baits are staying close to the ocean, and many of the bigger trout will be along the jetties unless we get warmer water early, and then the bait will slide into the creeks early, pulling some of the big fish with them," he said.

Trout will strike a wide variety of baits and lures throughout the year, but for Connolly, live bait under a slip cork is hard to beat.

"A slip float drifted in the current is my No. 1 technique because it is the most natural way to present baits," he said. "I prefer live shrimp when you can get them, but I will use mud minnows or mullet if I can find any."

Typically, specks will be found on or near the bottom. Water temperature is a driving factor, especially in March when temperatures can vary abruptly. Trout will work a large array of the water column to find the best water conditions and spots where food will most likely become available.

"I like to fish within 15 feet of the jetty rocks and towards the bottom end of the water column, but I often adjust my float accordingly depending on where I am fishing and how the fish are responding," he said.

He will also fish inside the estuary, especially when a warm trend arrives. Trout will follow the baitfish in, and Connolly will target trout at the mouth of creeks, next to deep holes, and along the main creeks abundant with submerged oyster rakes. ■

— Jeff Burleson



SUTTON LAKE'S ROLLER-COASTER BASS BITE

BY MIKE MARSH

After Hurricane Florence breached the dike at Sutton Lake last fall, the Cape Fear River entered the lake and the power plant shut down temporarily. Will 2019 be a good year or bad year for the lake's bass? Only time will tell.

Randall Soles lip-locks a largemouth bass for Jason Dew at Sutton Lake.

Mike Marsh

FISHING FOR SUTTON LAKE'S LARGEMOUTH BASS IS LIKE RIDING A ROLLER COASTER.

Sometimes the bass fishing is hot. Other times, it is not. This year, it might be harder to predict which way things go than ever before.

A 1,110-acre lake that served as a receptacle for water used to cool a coal-fired power plant retired by Duke Energy in 2013, Sutton Lake, which is across the Cape Fear River from Wilmington, N.C., has a history as one of North Carolina's top trophy bass lakes. The always-warm water contributes to fabulous growth rates, so good that the lake was once managed with an 18-inch size minimum to promote its trophy status.

Then, things began to change. Shortly after the coal-fired plant closed, a gas-fired combined cycle plant came online. The water in the discharge canal warmed up again, but not as warm as previously.

Hurricane Florence struck last September. Flooding from the river breached the dike in several places, and Duke Energy shut the plant down, reopening it in early December. And excavation of a coal-ash storage area caused the discharge canal that enters popular Pond 1 to be fenced off to anglers. A partial re-opening of the canal could take place when the mitigation project is finished, and it could increase Sutton's size by 55 acres.

One angler who will be fishing Sutton on plenty of days this month is Jason Dew of Whiteville, who competes on a handful of tournament trails.

"I have always had good luck at Sutton Lake in late winter and early spring, with March one of the best months," Dew said. "I've seen the fishing when it was on fire and we would easily have 40-fish days. But I have also seen it when it the fishing was off, especially just after the coal-fired power plant shut down. The cold-weather fishing is always better when hot water is discharging through the canal.

"I have been fishing at Sutton several times since Hurricane Florence hit," Dew said. "The water used to be as clear as glass, which was one of the problems you had to overcome when you fished the lake. But after the river water came into the lake, the water turned pitch black. As long as it stays that way, you have to change tactics. Right after the hurricane hit, the bass were biting like crazy. Two weeks later, they shut down. (In January), they are biting hard again."

continued on page >



Mike Marsh

Ned Connelly caught this big largemouth bass at Sutton Lake. The fish struck a Zoom Trick worm.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Beginning at the junction of US 421 and I-140, take US 421 north for 3.2 miles to Sutton Lake Road. Turn left and go 1.5 miles to the access area.

WHEN TO GO — Sutton Lake is open year-round and has excellent fishing for largemouth bass. Regulations prohibit anglers from keeping bass from Dec. 1 to March 31. March is a great month for catch-and-release of trophy largemouths.

BEST LURES/TECHNIQUES — Square-billed crankbaits like a Strike King KVD 1.5 or a Lucky Craft in crawfish or watermelon seed colors are popular, along with an Alabama rig. Anglers who like to fish a Carolina rig should go with a big worm like a Zoom Ol' Monster in plumb, watermelon seed or green pumpkin. Jigs will also work with soft-plastic trailers; green pumpkin candy with a green pumpkin trailer is popular. For tackle, a 7-foot-6, heavy or medium-heavy action baitcasting rod and a fast reel spooled with fluorocarbon works well.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Tex's Tackle, Wilmington, 910-791-1763.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Sleep Inn, Wilmington, 910-313-6665; Pleasure Island Chamber of Commerce, www.pleasureisland-chambernc.org.

SUTTON LAKE BASS FACTS

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has done plenty of sampling of largemouth bass in Sutton Lake over the years, and the on-again, off-again nature of the fishery has been on display, with population spikes every three to five years since the early 2000s.

"Sutton Lake has the fastest growth rate for largemouth bass of any lake in the state," said Kyle Rachels, a fisheries biologist with the Commission. "In 2018, we caught 55 largemouth bass per hour of electrofishing, which is pretty typical for Sutton. However, the average size was 16 inches, which is the largest average size we have seen in our 31-year dataset."

Rachels said the average size of bass sampled at Sutton since 1988 has been 13 inches.

Environmental factors contributing to good or poor fishing have included algae blooms and heavy growths of southern naiad and pondweed that required herbicide applications.

The fantastic winter fishing for trophy sized bass was what originally prompted the Commission to enact a regulation prohibiting keeping bass from Sutton Lake between Dec. 1 and March 31.

Recent angler surveys show that anglers release 98 percent of the bass they catch, but only 10 percent agree with the three-month prohibition, leading the Commission to consider opening the keeper season to 12 months. Currently, the daily creel limit is five fish, with a 14-inch size minimum.

Largemouth bass at Sutton reach 20 inches in six to eight years, one of the fastest growth rates in North Carolina. A survey in 2015-16 showed that fishermen catch 1.2 bass for every hour of fishing. ▪



Jason Dew (bow) and Randall Soles catch two largemouth bass at Sutton Lake.

Mike Marsh

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In March, Dew fishes deeper areas, which include the channels excavated along the dike edges that provided material for the construction of the dikes. He also fishes the Catfish Creek channel winding through Pond 1 and snaking close to the boat ramp.

"The fishing has been best in Pond 1," he said. "But, it has also been good in the last one, Pond No. 8. I'm not sure why, but it could be due to the pH. Normally, it is the coolest pond, so it doesn't usually have the best fishing in cold weather."

Dew locates the channel edges with his depth finder and works his lures inside the channel. He casts to the deep side, not the shallow side.

"Imagine you are standing in a ditch," he said. "If you cast your lure right or left, you are going to hang it up in stumps and trees. You have to cast it right down the middle of the channel. The fish are done spawning in March, so you can catch them on just about anything."

If Dew wants to cover lots of water, he uses crankbaits, preferring a Strike King KVD 1.5 or Lucky Craft square bill. He also uses an Alabama rig.

"For fishing the woody cover, I use a Carolina rig with a big soft plastic like a Zoom Ol' Monster," he said. "I also cast a ⅝-ounce Jewel football jig. Sometimes I add a Zoom Super Speed Craw trailer to the jig to make it more tantalizing."

One thing that anglers are going to have to be aware of is water clarity, or lack of it. Under normal conditions, the lake's water is extremely clear, making the use of light lines and leaders the rule for catching wary bass. The fish have seen just about everything and the clear water makes them cautious. However, the dark water Dew observed over the winter could carry into spring and summer, a possible indicator of excessive fertility that might also lead to another algae bloom.

"If the water stays dark," I will use lighter leaders," Dew said. "I might use to a fluorocarbon leader of 15-pound test on my Carolina rigs. If it's clear, I would normally use a leader of not more than 12-pound test." ▪



Jason Dew cast a crankbait to catch this largemouth bass at Sutton Lake.

Mike Marsh



Mike Marsh is a freelance outdoor writer in Wilmington, N.C. His latest book, Fishing North Carolina, and other titles, are available at www.mikemarshoutdoors.com.



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Brian Cope



Dalton Reames caught this flounder as the tide was coming in, offering the fish access to fresh feeding grounds.

RUN THE TIDE; KEEP MOVING

KEEPING UP WITH RISING OR FALLING WATER CAN KEEP ANGLERS ON FISH

Anglers understand that tide plays a major factor in fishing, but many don't understand it as well as others.

Some anglers say low tide is best; others believe in high tide. Either can be true on any given day, but the bite is usually best when the tide is moving, not while it is at its absolute peak in either direction.

Some anglers look at a tide chart and decide they want to be in a specific spot once the tide starts moving, so they get there early, anchor down, then wait for the tide to move. And once it's moving, they fish until it stops, then call it a day.

But a better plan is to move and fish with the tide shift. As the water rolls into or out of a creek, it either opens up areas for fish that haven't been accessible for several hours, or it forces them to leave those areas. Redfish, speckled trout and flounder will all visit those newly accessible areas, looking for small crustaceans and baitfish that are seeking shelter. Or they leave the same areas if the tide is falling and seek deeper holes nearby. This will keep them safely underwater and puts them in ambush spots as their prey also moves with the tide.

As the tide comes in, fish don't pick one spot to visit, then wait for the tide to complete its cycle. Instead, they move into a newly accessible area, eat what they can, and then move into the next accessible area. And as the tide goes out, they leave spots that will soon be dry and find ambush points in slightly deeper holes. Then, they move to the next ambush spot that is most favorable. They continue to move as the tide does, and anglers should, too.

DON'T SIT STILL

If you're anchored in one spot throughout the tide cycle and waiting for the fish, you're missing out on a lot of opportunities.

Staying on the move, or at least moving frequently, are both better options. When a tide chart says high tide will arrive in Old Man Kelsey's Creek at 3:11 p.m., anglers must realize that entire creek will not instantaneously become flooded. Depending on the size of the creek, it could take five minutes — or an hour — for the high tide to reach a specific spot.

So, rather than anchoring in that one spot, anglers can go with the flow. In whatever inlet or creek you're fishing, the point or landmark that is closest to the open ocean is usually where the tide charts are measured. On a rising tide, that's the area new water will come in first. On a falling tide, it's the area that is usually affected last. So those can be good starting or stopping points — but not anchor-and-stay points.

FISH GOOD SPOTS

The areas where new tides will be most noticeable to anglers and fish are the narrowest portions of a creek or inlet and the edges where water will either fall out of or move into. It makes sense to concentrate on those areas.

When the tide is rising, fish move into

areas that are just filling with water. But they won't stay there. They'll move to the next accessible area as the creek continues to flood. As the tide drops, fish move out of areas that are about to go high and dry. And they move again as the tide gets even lower. And as the tide continues to move, anglers who move with it will continue to target fish that are swimming into those areas.

If a creek has 17 oyster rakes that are exposed at low tide, anglers who move as the tide comes in can fish all 17 of them. They can fish them as soon as the water level makes them accessible to the fish. But anglers anchored in one spot throughout the tide can only fish the oysters that are within casting distance from their location. They will catch some fish, but they will miss the chance to catch even more.

Remember that on a rising tide, fish are moving into areas that the new tide is making accessible. And on the falling tide, fish are moving to spots that will keep them underwater and provide ambush spots. Their overall goal is to eat; be there to feed them. ▪



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.*



Brian Cope

GET THERE IN TIME:
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GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson



Timing the maturation and flooding of crops for waterfowl impoundments can have a huge impact on hunting success.

IMPOUNDMENT TIMING IS KEY

PLANTING FOR WATERFOWL MUST BE ON CALENDAR

Jeff Burleson

As March arrives, the dogwoods are blooming and the countryside is looking greener every day. No doubt, spring is here, and planting activities will begin very soon, depending on landowner goals. Timing is indeed everything, and landowners must decide when they want their efforts to be realized the most.

Landowner goals can vary tremendously by species of wildlife and season of availability. Looking for a sustainable nutrition program? A program to provide food for wildlife every month of the year is undeniably the best approach for total management, but, this rarely happens. Most landowner planting goals and maturity dates are specific to one hunting seasons, and that is okay. But the schedule is still important to make sure food becomes available at the right time and for the intended consumers.

Before planting the first seed, landowners or land managers must examine their goals and make sure they are on a schedule that will meet or exceed their expectations for their wildlife's needs.

When is the perfect time to plant a food plot or waterfowl impoundment? That depends on the intended crop, air temperatures, soil temperatures, maturation period and the anticipated period of availability. And then, it really depends on the targeted wildlife species.

On a broad sense, most land managers invest time and dollars in plantings for the benefit of one of three species: waterfowl, wild turkey or whitetail deer. While one is the intended target for most plantings, non-target species of wildlife such as rabbits, squirrels, dove, and quail will benefit from food-production efforts.

Food plots planted for deer and turkeys have a fairly specific maturity time interval and can vary some without any detrimental effects. But the timing for duck plantings is a critical part of the game. If a fall or spring food plot ends up being a little early or late for the deer, it's nowhere close to the major mistake of mistiming a crop in an impoundment. The maturation window for duck impoundments is vital to a good season.

TIMING MATTERS

Waterfowl plantings are always followed up with seasonal flooding to provide ducks with food in a flooded environment. The timing of plantings for waterfowl impoundments are less of a moving target than deer plots because of the annual migration of migratory

species into the Carolinas during the fall and winter. Migrating waterfowl begin arriving in September and will continue to show up until after the end of the year. But migrating flocks don't have to stay around when they pass through. Ducks must find something they like or need. They need something to make them stay, such as a rich, protected food source.

Landowners with waterfowl in mind must flood impoundments and have a mature crop of tasty energy morsels ready for immediate consumption to give arriving birds something to delay their southerly trajectory. Planting impoundments too early can also be detrimental to food availability when it is needed the most.

Duck impoundments can be planted with a wide variety of crops, including millet, sorghum, buckwheat, chufa, rice and corn. When flooded and mature, ducks will happily feast on any of these, but they aren't the only wildlife species that will readily gobble up these tasty crops when mature. Deer, turkeys, songbirds, wild boar and resident geese can decimate these crops long before the migrating ducks ever arrive.

Most waterfowl impoundments are typically small because of the in-depth efforts to enable water retention. A herd of deer can eliminate an entire crop if left mature for too long before flooding, and flooding doesn't eliminate browsing, either. A flock of Canada geese can strip a flooded field quickly, leaving nothing remaining for the ducks en-route from Canada.

continues on page 82





WORK BACKWARDS

The way to formulate a plan for impoundments begins with the end in mind. The anticipated flood date is the benchmark to work from, and activities are scheduled in reverse order.

When is the best flood date for impoundments in the Carolinas? The answer isn't clear cut. It can vary depending on when hunters want to start shooting ducks; that, in turn, will begin the attrition process.

Early teal seasons arrive in September, followed by short seasons in October and November. The bulk of the season, about 40 days, opens in December. The migrations begin in September and peak from late November through December.

Hunters need to decide if they want to hunt the early seasons, potentially sacrificing food availability during the last month when winter weather arrives. The best option would be to plant 500 acres of corn. At that rate, impoundments could be flooded in September, and ducks would never run out of food. But planting a large volume of crops that isn't going to produce a financial returns is not feasible for 99 percent of hunters. Most impoundments are significantly smaller, and food availability will be limited. The flooding date is a critical benchmark that landowners need to set and work back from.

Crop shrinkage after maturity isn't the only controlling factor either. Crops must have time to fully mature and dry out before cold weather arrives. An early October freeze can cripple crops that haven't fully matured. Additionally, most duck impoundment crops flourish from a combination of long, hot days and abundant summer showers that will produce high yields.

In the Carolinas, most impoundments are typically flooded in mid-October to ensure incoming ducks have a place to go and to accommodate the October and November duck seasons. But land managers with smaller fields could shift the flood date to Nov. 1 in hopes of extending food availability without sacrificing the November migration window.

Landowners need to allow for at least two weeks of drying before flooding, and planting dates can be established depending on the maturation window specified on the crop label.

Planting too early may produce a wonderful crop but can be worthless because of the heavy browsing it will receive from other wildlife. For the best results, landowners planting duck impoundments should always work backwards with the end in mind. ▪



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.*

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Hydrogen is a surprisingly essential nutrient for crops, but it isn't one that food-plot planters have to be concerned with, except for its effect on soil acidity.



Jeff Burleson

ESSENTIAL PLANT NUTRIENTS: HYDROGEN OFTEN OVERLOOKED

Hydrogen isn't one of the typical, essential plant nutrients most growers are accustomed to discussing or adjusting. However, it is a major, contributing factor to the fate of all plants and animals. Hydrogen is one of the 18 essential plant nutrients required for survival, but it is typically obtained through the atmosphere through photosynthesis or absorbed through the soil from one of the many compounds containing elemental hydrogen, like water itself.

Plants split water molecules through photosynthesis to create energy, while producing hydrogen ions and oxygen as byproducts. In addition, hydrogen ions come from a variety of other sources, including decaying organic matter, root respiration and other chemical/biological mechanisms.

All organic molecules in plants contain hydrogen. One of the most-important organic plant molecules is glucose, which is sugar that is made up of hydrogen, oxygen and carbon elements. When plants consume glucose, the hydrogen gets converted into other biomolecules such as: DNA, RNA, fats and carbohydrates.

The availability of attachable hydrogen ions also controls the acidity of soils or the environment where metabolic and chemical processes happen. Soil acidity is controlled by the level of attachable hydrogen ions. Essentially, the more hydrogen ions in the soil, the more acidic the soil is.

Farmers can't really control the level of hydrogen in plants, but it is important to understand that hydrogen is one of the most-important plant nutrients there is and it participates in every aspect of the plant's biological and chemical needs.

Hydrogen makes up 15 percent of the elemental volume found on earth. And in the universe, over 90 percent of all available elements are hydrogen atoms. That's a lot of hydrogen, right? ▪



COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

GRILLED DOUBLE-BACON VENSION CHEESE BURGER ROLL



The author begins to form the roll of ground venison and other ingredients before it heads to the grill for a 45-minute visit.

Jerry Dilsaver

Typically, the Carolina winter is on its way out by March, especially from the middle of the month on. There will be nice days and evenings that are just right for relaxing on the patio or deck around a small fire. This is a recipe that works well for these times, especially for a relaxed, informal dinner or snacks, and it features venison taken earlier in the year.

For outdoorsman in the Carolinas, March is sort of an in-between month. Hunting for feral pigs and coyotes is allowed all year, and preserves are an option until the end of March, but hunting is on sort of a pause. Turkey hunting is about to begin, and there is some scouting to be done, but, except for dedicated turkey hunters, the pace of hunting has slowed. Fishing has started but hasn't built into a frenzy yet. There is a big variety from the Blue Ridge to the blue water, but it's just starting for the year and isn't consistent yet.

This month's recipe includes venison, bacon and cheese. With this combination, it has to be good. Factor in that it's cooked on a grill, and it keeps adding points. While this is an excellent choice any time a light meal is in order, it is pretty close to perfect for watching college basketball, especially the conference tournaments and national championship chase.

The name for this recipe comes from having bacon inside and outside. This is a good base and tastes fine as presented. However, it's okay to modify it to suit personal tastes. Not everyone likes everything, and folks have personal preferences on spices, dips and more. This preparation includes the option of jalapeno peppers, which some folks enjoy and others not so much. This was prepared for me and my friends for a basketball game, and all of us enjoy a little extra spice. ▪

GRILLED DOUBLE BACON VENISON CHEESEBURGER ROLL

This recipe is something that just came about from wanting to do something unusual. I believe it does that, and it's really pretty tasty. Of course, it includes venison, bacon and cheese, so it had a head start on tasting good. Cooking it on the grill and enjoying a mild evening on the patio or deck is a big plus, too. Daylight savings time arrives March 10; that will allow enjoying it with an extra hour of sunlight.

As with many of my recipes, you should consider this a base and not be afraid to modify it a bit. This dish was for some of my friends who also have robust palates and enjoy a little spice, so I added some minced jalapenos. I also added a couple more spoons of Cha Sauce than listed in the ingredients. It had just enough bite to be noticed but wasn't overpowering.

The name comes from it having bacon inside and outside. I've also sliced it on the tray and melted a piece of cheese over it, so it was double bacon and double cheese. It's versatile, and there are lots of options for serving it.

One of my friends could live on burgers, and his favorite way to eat this is on slider buns. It is good that way, and you can use different breads and dress the sliders any way you want.

It also can be sliced and served as the entree for a meal. Another of my friends refers to it as "the fun Bambi filet" referring to it being wrapped in bacon. This lends itself to dipping and barbecue sauces, and that is one of my favorite ways to eat it. I like to brush a slice with a light, mustard-based barbecue sauce like Trader Joe's Carolina Gold and serve it with a potato and a salad. A baked potato or baked sweet potato is the healthiest, but I can't fault someone for having this with home fries, tater tots or regular fries. It's fun to make and hopefully it was also a memorable time getting the venison, so eating it should be a good time too.

A word of caution: don't cook this over a direct flame. The bacon drips and the flame will flare. A little close searing adds some character, but you don't want to burn it. Cook it over indirect heat, and a grease collector is a good idea. Some friends have broiling pans they have dedicated to their grills, and these allow it to get the grill flavor and separate it from the grease without flame-ups. ▪

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound ground venison
1 package medium-sliced bacon
½ cup bacon bits
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1 small sweet onion,
2 tbsp Texas Pete Cha Sauce
2 tbsp Worcestershire Sauce
1 tbsp crushed red pepper
Salt and pepper
Non-stick cooking spray
Toothpicks
Grilled vegetable tray
Optional: 1 Jalapeno pepper.

PREPARATION:

Mince onion and jalapeno. Put venison, bacon bits, cheese, onion and jalapeno in large mixing bowl. Add Cha sauce, crushed red pepper, salt and pepper (to taste) and mix well.

Cover a sushi roller with parchment paper and add mixture until the roller is full — the paper will barely go around it — then roll the mixture into a log. Cut a piece of bacon in half and cover the ends of the log. Wrap it with bacon, using toothpicks to hold the bacon in place.

Heat grill to medium. Spray a grill vegetable tray with non-stick cooking spray. Place log on vegetable tray. Cook log, turning occasionally as needed to cook all around, until bacon is done. Approximately 45 minutes on my grill.

Allow log to rest for 5 minutes. Slice in ¾- to 1-inch slices and serve while warm.

This can be served as snacks or a meal. Some folks like to have more Cha sauce, other hot sauces, barbecue sauces and other dipping sauces on the side. One popular option is to serve the slices on slider buns, with lettuce, tomato and all the fixins. A baked potato or baked sweet potato is a healthy side, but it also goes well with fries and tater tots. If serving this as the main course of a meal, a fresh green salad or lettuce wedge is an excellent side. ▪





Wrapped in bacon (top) and ready for the grill, then, the completed product (bottom).

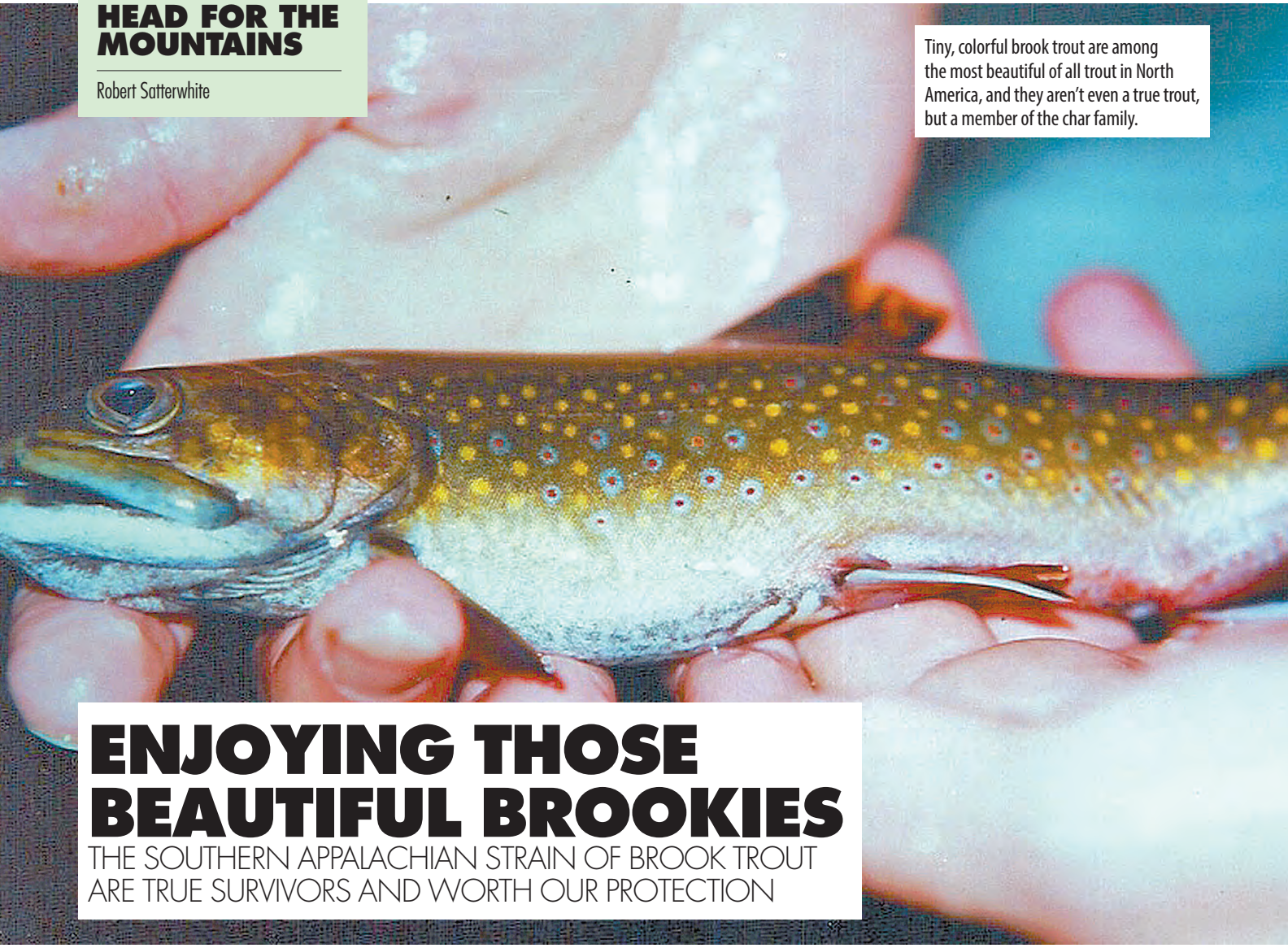
TIP!

Cooking meat dishes over an indirect flame will keep drips from causing flame-ups and burns.



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 captainjerry@captainjerry.com.*

Robert Satterwhite



Tiny, colorful brook trout are among the most beautiful of all trout in North America, and they aren't even a true trout, but a member of the char family.

ENJOYING THOSE BEAUTIFUL BROOKIES

THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN STRAIN OF BROOK TROUT ARE TRUE SURVIVORS AND WORTH OUR PROTECTION

Isolated by glaciation, their range narrowed by centuries of development, their numbers reduced by the introduction of exotic species, brook trout have endured either by design or by accident.

This ability to endure has elevated brook trout to a status that rival species, particularly rainbow and brown trout, can never hope to obtain. While brown and rainbow trout are widely dispersed in the southern Appalachians, brook trout, aka "specks" or "speckled" trout by many mountain anglers — are found primarily in isolated, high-elevation, back-country streams.

They've been called trout forever, but they're not a true trout, not like the rainbow or the brown or the cutthroat. They're a subspecies of the char family that includes lake trout, bull trout, Dolly Varden and arctic char.

Brook trout are distinguished by their colorful markings: rose red spots surrounded by blue halos, worm-like markings on their backs called vermiculations and white-tipped fins

The average life span of a wild brook trout is three years, so they don't get as big as browns or rainbows. Average size is around 7 or 8 inches, although some have been recorded in the 12- to 18-inch range.

They've been around forever, too, certainly before the first Europeans landed here, even before indigenous people crossed the Bering Strait and settled in North America.

MOUNTAIN TROUT

For thousands of years, brook trout had mountain streams to themselves. Around the turn of the century, however, brook populations began an irreversible decline as widespread logging, railroad construction, agriculture and unregulated fishing exacted heavy tolls on both numbers and habitat. Brook trout thrive in clean, cool water, and when water temperatures rose, where protective streamside vegetation was removed and sediment choked streams, brook trout numbers declined drastically. Stories abound, too, of fishers going to mountain streams and catching and keeping brook trout by the sack full.

Another killing blow was the introduction of exotic species. Rainbow trout from the western United States and brown trout from Europe were introduced to provide a more "exciting fishery." Brook trout are not aggressive and not as prized as brown and rainbow for their fighting ability. Rainbow and browns also tolerate warmer and less pristine waters than brook trout

Unable to compete for food with the

larger and more aggressive fish, brook trout were displaced entirely or pushed back until they inhabited mostly remote, high-elevation headwater streams.

THE PURE STRAIN

In the past decade, fishery biologists from the University of Tennessee, Auburn University and Western Carolina discovered a "Southern Appalachian" strain of brook trout that is genetically different from the more widely dispersed Northern brook trout.

The Southern brook, biologists believe, evolved over thousands of years after the last glaciers retreated and left the long, narrow, high-country peninsula known as the Southern Appalachian Mountains, which extend from Virginia to northern Georgia. These fish adapted to a warmer climate and more acidic water than to which their northern kin are accustomed.

During their studies, biologists identified more than 400 streams that contain Southern Appalachian brook trout. Most of these streams were at elevations above 3,000 feet and had no records of ever being stocked. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park has dozens of streams that contain only wild brook trout.

In North Carolina, Panthertown and Greenland creeks are prime wild brook trout streams. The two streams form the headwaters of the Tuckasegee River in the Panthertown Valley area of Jackson County. Fishing is limited to artificial lures with a single hook, and all trout must be released. The trout in Panthertown Valley, although wild, are not Southern Appalachian brookies.

While the major differences in the two strains are discernible only with the aid of a microscope, it is another means of identifying Southern brook trout that will provide state and federal fishery managers with valuable information in deciding how to manage native brook trout waters.

If you are fortunate enough to catch a wild brook trout, admire its beauty, its endurance, and its uniqueness.

And let it go. ▪

HIGH-MOUNTAIN TROUT: Most Southern Appalachian brook trout live in streams above 3,000 feet in elevation, where they were unaffected by logging early in the 20th century that decimated populations in lower elevations.



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.*

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Red drum are on the move in March as big ocean schools start to break into smaller groups and head inshore.

REDS ON THE MOVE
back into NC central coast's inside waters

March is a month when anglers can get slimed along North Carolina's central coast, or they can take precautions by fishing with light tackle and may come up clean as a whistle with a decent catch of red drum.

"We get this snotty, green algae that covers the bottom during the spring. (It) breaks up into black strands later in March and makes using the most-effective lures really tough," said guide David Towler of Swansboro's Towler Time Charters. "Plus, we've had so much pressure on red drum around here, they get spooky when the water temperature's in the 50s and waters are clear."

March arrives just as red drum schools begin to break up into smaller groups and head through inlets toward marshes, searching for food. Some fish remain in the ocean, but fishing in ocean rollers is problematic, so Towler mainly sticks to bays, marsh creeks and mud flats.

"You'll see schools in bays, but they're usually skittish," he said. "A lot of people try to get close enough to throw a lure in front of a moving school and let the reds come to the lure, but the commotion a hooked fish makes usually scatters reds. I try to fish school edges so I can move a fish away from schools."

Redfish mostly cruise in extremely shallow water in March, looking for bottom morsels or tiny black crabs that live in oyster rocks.

"Most of them are in water that's 2 to 3 feet deep; the water's clear and that helps make them spooky," said Towler, who uses 7-foot spinning rods, 2000- and 2500-class reels spooled with 10- to 15-pound braid and 18 to 24 inches of fluorocarbon leader.

Towler counts on getting some warm, sunny days this month, with water temperatures starting to climb toward the 60-degree mark.

"Places with a mud bottoms hold heat and red drum," said Towler (910-554-4742), who uses soft-plastic lures such as Z-Man pogies or 3-inch Gulp Shrimp rigged on weighted worm hooks. "There's not a lot of bait in the water, and most of it is small, so little lures work best. There's also little white worms on the bottom that look like night crawlers. I've cleaned drum and found these worms in their bellies.

"Most of the time, I use 1/16-ounce hooks that you can keep off the bottom so the slime won't foul them."

If Towler gets two or three warm days in a row, he'll fish the same lures on a 1/8-ounce worm hook and "dead-stick" them, allowing them to rest motionless on the bottom for 1 to 3 minutes. ▪

— Craig Holt

GO FAST, REALLY FAST

for Lowcountry's offshore March wahoo



Winter wahoo gang up off the South Carolina coast where different offshore currents collide, creating a hard edge with different temperatures on both sides.

March is wahoo time offshore of South Carolina's Lowcountry beaches, and for Jeremy Burnham of Atlantic Game and Tackle in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., high-speed trolling is the key to catching them.

"High-speed trolling is the way to go. These fish are super aggressive this month. They would rather chase down something fast instead of swiping at an easy meal," he said.

When Burnham says high-speed, he's talking about trolling anywhere from 9 to 12 knots.

The biggest challenge fishing fast is having lures heavy enough that they'll stay in the water when trolling at those speeds. Burnham said it's best to avoid lures that have a lot of action. He prefers straight, symmetrical lures with no built-in wobble.

"I use homemade lures with 5- to 8-inch heads, a 10- to 12-inch skirt and two hooks," he said. "It doesn't have to be pretty, either. I also don't think color is a huge factor, but I do like dark colors on overcast days and light colors on clear days."

Burnham also doesn't use wire leaders, which many wahoo anglers feel is necessary.

"I use 150- to 300-pound monofilament for my leaders," he said. "It's plenty strong, allows better action, and it doesn't scare away leader-shy fish. I break off my share of fish — probably more than I would if using wire leader — but, I get a lot more bites with mono leaders. So, in the end, I catch more fish with mono than I would with wire."

Burnham cautions anglers against trolling with too many rods. He uses two at a time but keeps several others rigged and ready to deploy if he has a fish break his line.

"You'll break off sometimes, and when you do, you better have another rod ready to get right out there. Otherwise, you're going to miss out on some fish. You don't have time to retie," he said.

In March, Burnham said wahoo love to hang out around places where different offshore currents collide.

"That makes a hard edge, and that's where there will be as much as 4 or 5 degrees difference in water temperature. That kind of change attracts baitfish and gamefish. Wahoo will be all over areas like that this time of year," he said.

Once he finds an edge and begins trolling, he puts one lure 75 yards behind the boat and the other 130 yards back.

— Brian Cope

Brunswick up next >



BRUNSWICK COUNTY

waters warming to spring fishing levels



Waters in Brunswick County backwaters warm up sooner than other areas in the spring and draw hungry red drum and other predators.

Jerry Dilsaver

Brunswick County begins roughly where North Carolina's coast turns west at Cape Fear and continues about 40 miles to the South Carolina border. The eastern end is influenced by the Cape Fear River, but once west of Lockwood Folly Inlet, there isn't a big-water influence.

In this area, the creeks, canals and marsh ponds between the Intracoastal Waterway and the beaches are often a little warmer during the winter, and that translates into more baitfish and crabs, followed by drum and trout, often active and feeding.

The Lockwood Folly River, Shallotte River and Calabash Creek are the larger streams in this area. None of these extend beyond Brunswick County, so their flow is minimal other than the tides. There are numerous canals, marsh creeks and marsh flats with low water flow on the beach side of the ICW.

The rivers and Calabash Creek have deeper channels and extensive, shallow flats. Trout often feed along the edges of the flats. Red and black drum ply the shallow pockets and flats foraging on baitfish and uprooting one-armed bandits and small crabs. The beach canals were dug to provide water access behind beach houses. They have natural bottoms at Holden and Sunset beaches, but many have concrete bottoms at Ocean Isle. This aids oyster and barnacle growth, which provides habitat for baitfish and crabs and fish follow them into the canals.

The marsh ponds are primarily between Ocean Isle and Little River Inlet. Reaching them requires some local knowledge, which comes from scraping bottom at low tide. The bottom is primarily dark mud, with scattered oyster rocks, and it is ideal late winter/early spring habitat for baitfish and crabs. Drum roam this area and home in on them.

While the water is usually a little warmer than farther north, it still isn't warm. Many area guides use scented, live and natural baits to attract red and black drum, plus occasional speckled trout. The favorites are soft-plastic shrimp and crabs, either containing scent or with scent added. They are fished slowly and occasionally dead-sticked to allow the scent to spread. Mud minnows are the primary live baits and are fished either on Carolina rigs or under floats.

Pieces of shrimp, cut mullet and crab, a local favorite, can be fished on Carolina rigs; their scent, especially crab, will attract predator fish. Scent moves with the tide and attracts drum from surprising distances. Shrimp doesn't have as much scent, but is rarely refused once a drum sees or smells it. ▪

— Jerry Dilsaver

GOT PICS? Send 'em in!

Email images to: **images@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.

BLACK DRUM STIR
in Little River estuary's deeper waters



Black drum will wake up early in the year and stage on structure in deeper holes in Little River's estuary.

Jeff Burleson

Spring fishing cranks up this month with plenty of opportunities for small-craft anglers to get into some rod-bending action. Black drum are an often-overlooked winter resident along the South Carolina coast, and March is prime time to target them in Little River's pint-sized estuary where they hunker down in deep holes most of the winter and wake up hungry.

Black drum prefer a combination of structure and deep water to feed and evade predation. Little River's estuary along the North Carolina-South Carolina border may be small compared to others, but the available water has all the right ingredients to support a thriving black drum population.

"Black drum will eat shrimp, small crabs, clams, and even small fish. We find them schooled up in places where they can get plenty to eat without a lot of effort," said Tom Cushman of Capt. Cush's Calmwater Charters. "Little River has an abundance of deepwater docks on the (Intracoastal) Waterway, oyster rocks and then the jetties themselves. The jetties will hold black drum just about any time of the year."

It's no surprise black drum are bottom feeders. They rely on their highly-sensitive barbels to detect potential prey species as they patrol along the bottom adjacent to structures.

Cushman (843-997-5850) will fish along the bottom close to structure using fresh shrimp or clams on a bottom rig or jighead.

"In March and April, the black drum will still be held up in the deeper areas. I like the deeper docks along the waterway, the jetties and holes in some of the deeper creeks in the area," he said.

Even though fish are beginning to bite more, and the water is warming up, the bite can still be soft because the water in the deep spots may still be on the cool side.

"It can be a real subtle bite. Let them eat for a few seconds, and then reel down on them versus a hard hook set," Cushman said.

Black drum are known to have strange feeding schedules around the tide. Typically, the bite will be better on the lower end, but it is not always the same throughout the year. It can change seasonally.

"They usually bite on the same tide sequence throughout the day. Once you figure out what stage of the tide they want to feed at your spot, you can count on them to eat," he said. ▪

— Jeff Burleson





Bigger baits and lures will typically produce bigger early spring crappie, according to guides and tournament fishermen across the Carolinas.

David A. Brown

USE BIGGER BAITS FOR BIGGER SLABS

BIG LURES, BAITS WILL APPEAL TO BIG CRAPPIE

By Dan Kibler

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to inspect a really big crappie. A local fisherman, a retired preacher in his 80s who spends almost every morning on the pier at a municipal lake in my hometown, caught a 3-pound, 7-ounce slab that broke the lake record.

The fish was around 18 inches long and fat as a Thanksgiving gobbler, but what struck me most about that crappie was the size of its mouth. There was little doubt in my mind that the huge slab could have easily swallowed a golf ball, and it wouldn't have surprised me if he could get a goose egg back to the crushers in his throat and at least choke on a tennis ball.

That made me think about the size of baits we use for crappie, and what a couple of Carolina slab hunters think about them.

"Have you ever looked at the mouth on a big crappie?" asked Maynard Edwards of Yadkin Lakes Guide Service. "It's not that small. It can swallow a pretty good-sized bait.

"Shoot, I've caught a lot of big crappie on crankbaits, and two of the biggest I've ever caught, close to 3 pounds, were when I was trolling 3-inch grubs for stripers at Badin Lake."

Tom Sprouse, a North Carolina crappie pro, said big baits mean big crappie.

"I'm a firm believer in big baits," he said. "With big baits, you weed out little fish. I know a lot of crappie fishermen believe bigger fish are more aggressive to larger baits.

"I know if you clean crappies, you'll be surprised at the size of the shad that are inside them.

"I know they're very aggressive; I've caught them with big shad tails sticking out of their mouths."

Edwards upsizes from a 2-inch to a 3-inch soft-plastic grub and the larger, offset hooks that come on Slider jigheads.

"Most of the hooks you find on jigs are No. 6s," he said. "I've gone to No. 2, and I use the Slider head. I think they'll hold a big bait better."

Sprouse goes with a bigger bait, often adding a live minnow.

"I'll use a Kalin grub and tip it with a No. 6 minnow," he said. "Most people by No. 4 minnows, because they can get more of them per pound, but you can buy No. 6s.

"I'll use a No. 2 hook; there are people I know who will use a No. 1. If fish are real aggressive, you can get away with a 3-inch grub, but I normally thick with a 2-inch grub and add a bigger minnow. The combination of the grub and minnow does it for me." ▪



Fertilizing small ponds this month will kick-start growth at the bottom of the food chain that leads to healthier fish populations, good fishing.

MARCH IS TIME TO FERTILIZE SMALL PONDS

By Jeff Burleson

With spring just around the corner and water temperatures on the rise, pond owners should proceed to the next level of their continual improvement program. The water tests from January and pH correction in February have prepared ponds for nutrient enrichment to fuel micro-organism growth and overall pond productivity.

Beginning at the microscopic level, fertilizer treatments promote growth of phytoplankton that are eaten by water insects and continue up the food chain, resulting in big, fat bream and lunker bass. A fertilized pond will provide three to four times the fish as an unfertilized pond, or 300 to 400 pounds per acre.

Fertilizer should be available throughout the growing season; a series of treatments can be made, or the pond can be treated at one time using a time-released version. Treatments should be scattered throughout the pond. The first application should be in early March, just as the growing season begins and waters begin to warm. Soon after the fertilizer treatments and the first bloom, the water clarity will decrease. As the water clears up and visibility increases to greater than 2 feet, secondary treatments can begin.

The key ingredient in pond fertilizers is phosphate. Treatments should contain a high ratio of phosphate, such as 0-46-0. As a general rule, granular or powdered fertilizer can be added at a rate between five and seven pounds per acre. If liquid fertilizers are used, they should be diluted before distribution and should be prescribed at a similar ratio.

If the pH has not been corrected with limestone treatments, fertilizers hold not be added. Phosphate amendments will only be effective if pond pH is approaching 7 or above. Water pH should always be corrected prior to fertilization. ▪

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.

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2019 MAR — **BEST DAYS** (POOR · FAIR · GOOD · EXCL · VALUE) — **LUNAR PERIODS** (TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED)

	VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Fri 1	18	3:39 am	8:16 am - 9:14 am	1:50 pm	8:41 pm - 9:39 pm	LOW
Sat 2	19	4:26 am	9:02 am - 10:04 am	2:42 pm	9:27 pm - 10:29 pm	
Sun 3	29	5:08 am	9:46 am - 10:54 am	3:36 pm	10:11 pm - 11:19 pm	
Mon 4	39	5:46 am	10:27 am - 11:45 am	4:31 pm	10:52 pm - 12:10 am	Apogee
Tue 5	51	**6:20 am**	11:07 am - 12:35 pm	5:26 pm	11:32 pm - Midnight	
Wed 6	58	**6:52 am**	11:43 am - 1:25 pm	**6:21 pm**	Midnight - 1:00 am	NEW
Thu 7	51	**7:22 am**	12:17 pm - 2:15 pm	7:17 pm	12:08 am - 1:50 am	
Fri 8	44	7:51 am	12:53 pm - 3:05 pm	8:13 pm	12:42 am - 2:40 am	
Sat 9	39	8:21 am	1:27 pm - 3:57 pm	9:09 pm	1:18 am - 3:30 am	
Sun 10	37	9:52 am	3:03 pm - 5:49 pm	11:07 pm	1:52 am - 4:22 am	DST
Mon 11	40	10:25 am	3:42 pm - 6:42 pm		3:28 am - 6:14 am	
Tue 12	43	11:01 am	4:27 pm - 7:37 pm	12:07 am	4:07 am - 7:07 am	
Wed 13	51	11:43 am	5:14 pm - 8:34 pm	1:08 am	4:52 am - 8:02 am	
Thu 14	63	**12:32 pm**	6:07 pm - 9:33 pm	2:10 am	5:39 am - 8:59 am	HALF
Fri 15	54	**1:27 pm**	7:06 pm - 10:32 pm	3:11 am	6:32 am - 9:58 am	HIGH
Sat 16	49	2:29 pm	8:07 pm - 11:29 pm	4:09 am	7:31 am - 10:57 am	
Sun 17	60	3:37 pm	9:12 pm - 12:24 am	5:03 am	8:32 am - 11:54 am	
Mon 18	68	4:48 pm	10:16 pm - 1:16 am	5:52 am	9:37 am - 12:49 pm	
Tue 19	78	6:00 pm	11:22 pm - Midnight	6:37 am	10:41 am - 1:41 pm	Perigee
Wed 20	81	**7:12 pm**	Midnight - 2:04 am	**7:17 am**	11:47 am - 2:29 pm	FULL & SPRING
Thu 21	67	**8:22 pm**	12:26 am - 2:48 am	**7:55 am**	12:51 pm - 3:13 pm	
Fri 22	53	9:30 pm	1:29 am - 3:31 am	8:31 am	1:54 pm - 3:56 pm	
Sat 23	39	10:37 pm	2:29 am - 4:15 am	9:07 am	2:54 pm - 4:40 pm	
Sun 24	32	11:41 pm	3:30 am - 4:58 am	9:45 am	3:55 pm - 5:23 pm	
Mon 25	29		4:28 am - 5:44 am	10:25 am	4:53 pm - 6:09 pm	
Tue 26	31	12:43 am	5:24 am - 6:30 am	11:08 am	5:49 pm - 6:55 pm	
Wed 27	40	1:41 am	6:17 am - 7:19 am	11:54 am	6:42 pm - 7:44 pm	HALF
Thu 28	28	2:35 am	7:10 am - 8:08 am	**12:44 pm**	7:35 pm - 8:33 pm	LOW
Fri 29	23	3:23 am	7:58 am - 9:00 am	**1:35 pm**	8:23 pm - 9:25 pm	
Sat 30	22	4:07 am	8:44 am - 9:50 am	2:29 pm	9:09 pm - 10:15 pm	
Sun 31	24	4:46 am	9:25 am - 10:41 am	3:24 pm	9:50 pm - 11:06 pm	Apogee

25 50 75 AVERAGE

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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**.*

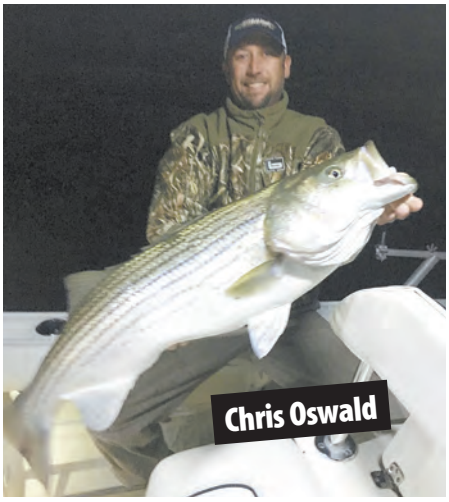
Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



Cousins Zachary Perryman and Levi Ring enjoyed a great day catching bream at Lake Thom-A-Lex in Davidson County, N.C.



Cyril Gulledge of Matthews, N.C., caught this tarpon from Oak Island's Ocean Crest Pier on July 3, 2018. It hit a live bluefish.



Chris Oswald caught this 39-inch, 21½-pound striper on Nov. 11, 2018, in South Carolina's Lake Marion.



Clayton Maynor of Zebulon, N.C., killed this fox squirrel with a .410, his first gun, in Wayne County in December 2017.



Richard Skinner and his son, Paul, caught these bluefish off Emerald Isle, N.C., last summer

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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Digital images must be at least 200KB and in jpeg format. Print photos cannot be returned.



Ann Weisgerber of Bessemer City, N.C., killed her first buck, this 6-pointer from Cleveland County, with a muzzleloader.



Jeff Stewart of Lancaster, S.C., killed these two nice bucks with a bow in October 2018.



Lucas Schiller killed his first deer, this 8-point buck, hunting with his father, Daniel Schiller, in the fall of 2017, near Grifton, N.C.



Margie Upchurch caught this 7-pound, 6-ounce flounder in the ICW near Carolina Beach, N.C., July 26, 2018.



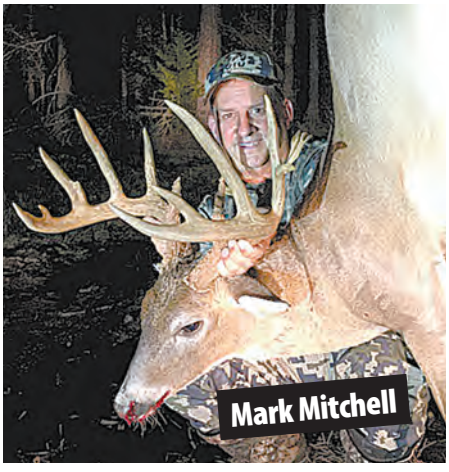
Nick Lowe killed this 222-pound buck, nicknamed "Deuce" on Oct. 11, 2018, near Fountain Inn in Laurens County, S.C.



Kayo Auge of Maysville, N.C., caught his first sheepshead on July 18, 2018, near Swansboro, N.C.



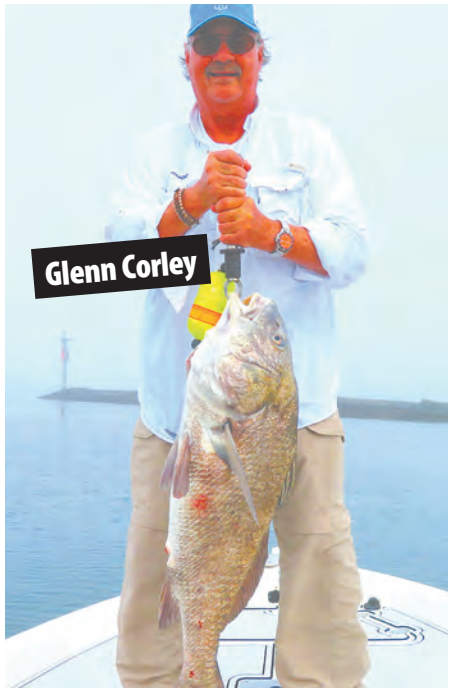
Brothers Lee and Brandon Patrick, caught this 30-pound blue catfish from North Carolina's Lake Gaston on June 18, 2018.



Mark Mitchell tagged this 13-point 146½-inch deer in Fairfield County, S.C., last fall, after letting him walk for two years.



Todd Hostetter caught this nice Spanish mackerel in the surf at Atlantic Beach in June 2018.



Glenn Corley of Richland, S.C., caught this 40-pound black drum out of Pass Christian, MS, with Capt. Conner Knight.



James Thomas caught this tailing redfish on a fly rod. He was fishing a tidal flat near Beaufort, S.C., on a high tide.



Carl Driver of Chapel Hill, N.C., caught these two bass on June 22, 2018, at Jordan Lake. The biggest weighed 7-7.



Jeremy Spencer caught this 25-inch redfish from under a dock on the ICW in Wrightsville Beach, N.C., on June 30, 2018.



Cory Sumner caught this nice redfish at Carolina Beach, N.C., in July 2018.



Gene Hardister killed this great deer in Randolph County, N.C., on Dec. 26, 2017.



Grace Horfort, 8, from Pittsboro, N.C., caught this bass on a live shiner at Disney's Fort wilderness in February 2018.

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2018 NORTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.
Refer to official fishing regs at NCWRC and NCDMF websites.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28″ FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99″ LJFL	1/vessel/trip
White marlin	66″ LJFL	1/vessel/trip
Sailfish	63″ LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	&	&
Bluefish	5 longer than 24″ TL	15/day
Red drum (channel bass, puppy drum)	18″ min., 27″ max.	1/day
Black drum	14″ min., 25″ max.	10/day
Flounder	15″ TL	4/day
Dolphin (mahi-mahi)	none	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24″TL	1/day#
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20″ TL	3/day#
Speckled hind/Warsaw Grouper	closed	closed
Wahoo	none	2/day
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14″ TL	3/day
King mackerel	24″ FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12″ FL	15/day
Sea bass (north of Hatteras)	12.5″ TL	15/day
Sea bass (south of Hatteras)	13″ TL	7/day
Yellowfin/Bigeye tuna	27″ CFL	3/day
Bluefin tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14″	4/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12″ TL	1/day
Snappers: Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahoghany, schoolmaster	12″ TL	10/day in federal waters
Sheepshead	10″	10/day
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16″ TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12″ TL	5/day
Striped bass ^	28″ TL or more (ocean waters)	1/day
Hickory shad	None	10/day
American shad	closed	closed

^ see NCWRC/NCDMF regs for inshore Management Area limits. % Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit hmspermits.noaa. & Harvest of cobia is illegal until May 1, 2019. # The harvest of shallow-water grouper is closed until April 1, 2019.

FRESHWATER

FISH Species (Inland waters)	Minimum Size Limit	Creel Limit (per day)
Crappie +	None +	None +
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted bass +	14″ (2-fish exception)	5
Channel catfish	No restrictions	None
Blue/Flathead catfish	No restrictions	None
Striped bass, hybrid (Bodie) %	20″	4 %
Sauger	15″	8
White bass	None	25
Walleye#	None	8
Muskellunge	42″	1
Kokanee salmon	None	7
Red drum	18″ min., 27″ max.	1
American and hickory shad	None	10 (1 American shad)
Spotted sea trout	Closed	Closed until June 15
Flounder	15″	4/day@

TL=Total Length; LJFL=Lower jaw to middle of fork in tail; FL=Fork Length (tip of snout to middle of fork in tail); CFL=Curved Fork Length (measure of a line tracing contour of body from tip of upper jaw to fork of the tail)

+ See specific lake exceptions in NCWRC regulations digest or www.ncwildlife.org

% Striped bass creel limits and size minimums vary by lake. See NCWRC regulations digest or www.ncwildlife.org.

Lake James, minimum size is 15 inches. Lake Gaston, minimum size is 18 inches, creel limit 5.

@ Hook-and-line and flounder giggers restricted to 4 fish per day per trip, 15-inch size minimum.

2018 SOUTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.
Refer to SCNDR's official fishing regulations pamphlet or www.dnr.sc.gov.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28″ FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99″ LJFL	1/day
White marlin	66″ LJFL	1/day
Sailfish	63″ LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	36″ FL	1/day&
Bluefish	None	15/day
Black drum	14″ minimum 27″ maximum TL	5/day
Redfish (red drum, channel bass)	15″ minimum 23″ maximum TL	2/day#
Flounder (state waters)	14″ TL	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24″TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20″ TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	closed	closed
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14″ TL	3/day#
King mackerel	24″ FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12″ FL	15/day
Sheepshead	14″	10/day (30 per boat)
Spadefish	None	20/day (agg. grouper)
Black sea bass	13″	7/day
Dolphin	20″ FL	10/day (60 per boat)
Yellowfin tuna	27″ CFL	3/day
Bluefin/Bigeye tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Tarpon	77″ FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14″	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12″	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahoghany, schoolmaster snapper	12″ TL	10/day#
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16″ TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12″ TL	5/day

% For shark seasons, bag and size limits, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division, 888-872-8862 or hmspermits.noaa.gov. # Check with the SAFMC at www.safmc.net or 843-571-4366. Season closed Jan. 1-April 30. & Cobia, 1 per person per day up to 6 per boat. Closed May 1-31 south of Jeremy Inlet, 1 per person, up to 3 per boat, after June 1 south of Jeremy Inlet. # No more than 6 redfish per boat.

FRESHWATER

FISH Species (Inland waters)	Minimum Size Limit	Creel Limit (per day)
Crappie/Panfish +	None	30 bream (15 red-breast), 20 crappie
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, redeye, bass%	none largemouth 12″ smallmouth	5 lg/sm/r, 15 spots
Channel catfish	No restrictions	None
Blue catfish	No restrictions=	None=
Flathead catfish	No restrictions	None
Striped bass or hybrid bass	Varies by location&%	Varies by location&%
Mountain Trout	+	5
White bass	None	10 (except Sav. River)
Walleye and sauger+	None	8

TL=Total Length; LJFL=Lower jaw to middle of fork in tail; FL=Fork Length (tip of snout to middle of fork in tail); CFL=Curved Fork Length (measure of a line tracing contour of body from tip of upper jaw to fork of the tail).

+ See specific lake and river exceptions in SCDNR's Regulations Digest

= In the Santee Cooper system, only two over 32 inches with daily possession limit of 25 fish. In Congaree/Wateree rivers, no possession limit.

% For lake-specific regulations, see the SCDNR's Regulations Digest or visit www.dnr.sc.gov. Keeper season in the Santee Cooper system is Oct. 1-June 15.

& In Lake Russell and its tributaries, the daily creel limit is two fish, only one of which may be more than 34 inches long.

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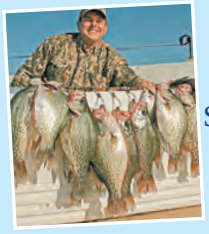
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