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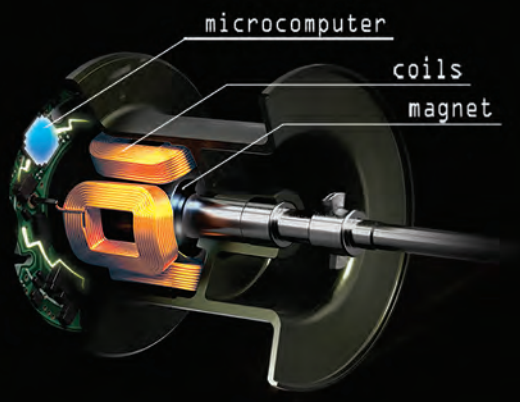

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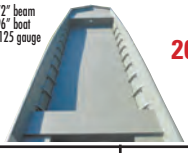
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There's no better time or place to be a bass fisherman than April in the Carolinas. Photo by Terry Madewell.

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HALL OF FAME FOR TWO SPORTSMEN

FRITTS, HITE, BASS PROS AND COLUMNISTS, GET ULTIMATE HONOR

It was an especially proud day for me in mid-February when the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame announced the induction of David Fritts and Davy Hite into that exclusive group.

Fritts and Hite have been writing the bass-fishing column, *Lunker Lines*, for *Carolina Sportsman* the past 2½ years, alternating months, and before that, they wrote *Lunker Lines* for *North Carolina Sportsman* and *South Carolina Sportsman* magazines.

I knew both long before the birth of the three magazines. Fritts, a month younger than me at 62, is from Lexington, N.C., about18 miles from my home. I have spent plenty of time in his boat, in his shop, even in his garage, once admiring an entire wall stacked in cases of Mountain Dew, one of his sponsors at the time.

In his boat, I have been amazed at what he can do with a crankbait, but more important, what he can do with his depth finders. It is astounding what he can still find with just a flasher unit, his favorite piece of electronics.

I met Hite at the 1993 Bassmaster Classic on Alabama's Lake Logan Martin. It was the first of many Classics for both Fritts and Hite, and Fritts won it. But Hite won $500 for another feat. During the press tournament two days before the Classic, he pointed at the tip of a laydown pine tree, said he'd had a fish roll on a bait there in practice, and instructed me to let fly. On my second cast, the bass swallowed a Hawg Caller willow-branch spinnerbait, and somehow, I got it in the boat. It weighed 6 pounds, 1 ounce, and won the tournament, which paid me $500 and Davy, my pro, $500.

I have spent plenty of time with Hite since then — much of it discussing our sons' high-school football careers — and I've walked the banks of the pond he built in front of his house in Ninety Six, S.C., several years ago and caught bass and bream.

Fritts and Hite belong to an even more exclusive club than the Hall of Fame. They are the only pro anglers who have won this triumverate: the Bassmaster Classic, the FLW Tour Championship and BASS Angler of the Year. Fritts has won all three. Hite has won both tournaments and two Angler of the Year awards.

Davy Hite of Ninety Six, S.C. (top) and David Fritts of Lexington, N.C. (above) bass-fishing columnist for *Carolina Sportsman*, will join the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame this year.

It's my pleasure every month to call these guys and find out what they want to write about to help anglers in the Carolinas catch more fish. I've learned plenty of things myself going over their writing efforts, little fishing tips I'd never considered that have helped me catch more fish.

If anybody could make me a better fisherman, that might be one of their greatest accomplishments. ■



Dan Kibler *of Winston-Salem, N.C., is managing editor of Carolina Sportsman magazine. He has been covering issues concerning the outdoors on a full-time basis since 1985.*

STRIPER POSSESSION: A NO-NO IN NC'S CENTRAL, SOUTHERN INSHORE SALTWATER AREAS

The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission has adopted a no-possession limit for striped bass in internal waters in the central and southern coastal areas of the state, but the director of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has broken with the nine-member Commission and will not implement its request to further restrict the use of gill nets that interact with stripers across much of the area.

The Commission voted at its February meeting to institute the no-possession rule via proclamation from Steve Murphey, director of the NCDMF.

The restriction on possession of stripers begins just south of Oregon Inlet and runs to the South Carolina line. Waters impacted include the Pamlico and Core sounds and the Tar, Pamlico, Pungo, Neuse and White Oak rivers and their tributaries. The change does not impact the Cape Fear River, where a no-possession rule already exists.

Recreational catch-and-release fishing will still be allowed in the impacted areas. The 2019 commercial season will not open in the same areas.

Research has shown that stripers in the Central Southern Management Area are not a self-sustaining population, and that fishermen are mainly catching fish raised in hatcheries and stocked. Data suggests that the past two spawns have been good, so the no-possession rule will protect those fish.

At its February meeting, the Commission voted to ask Murphey to further restrict the use of gill nets in areas where stripers are typically encountered, but Murphey responded in a March 4 letter to the Commission that measures were already in place to restrict nets, and further restrictions would not have a significant impact on the population. ▪

CAROLINA COYOTE CLASSIC TEAMS BAG 149 SONG DOGS

Varmint hunters from around the Carolinas killed 149 coyotes over a February weekend in the annual Carolina Coyote Classic held outside Albemarle, N.C.

The Classic drew 107 hunters from both Carolinas, up from 88 in 2018. The number of coyotes killed more than doubled from the 67 taken in 2018.

Steven Davis and Colt Minton, competing as Team Merciless, won the competition by killing 17 coyotes — three more than Davis did last year when he won the tournament. Davis and Minton took home $2,200 and other prizes.

Terry Garner and John Newton won $1,320 for finishing second with 14 coyotes and took third place in the Fat Dog contest for the biggest coyote with a 40.12-pound coyote, good for $107 and prizes.

Team MFK — Jamie Terry and Jason Groseclose — killed 11 coyotes to finish third and win $880 and prizes. They also won the Fat Dog contest for the biggest male coyote killed, a 41.77-pound animal. That got them another $268 and prizes including a Thompson Center Compass .243.

Team Thompson Creek Outfitters took a : coyote to finish second in the Fat Dog contest, good for $161 and prizes. ▪



Hunters in the Carolina Coyote Classic took 149 coyotes during the three-day competition in February in Stanly County, N.C.

704 Outdoors



Leslie Karpinski caught her first red snapper last July during the short season fishing out of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., with Capt. Lowell Mason on the *Sarah's Worry Too.*

SNAPPER SEASONS SET

NOAA Fisheries has announced a five-day recreational season on red snapper in federal waters of the South Atlantic region this year.

Fishermen in the Carolinas will have July 12-14 and July 19-20 as open fishing days for red snapper, with fishermen allowed to catch and keep one red snapper per day. On charterboats or headboat vessels, the captain and crew can catch and keep one fish per day. There is no minimum size limit.

The total annual catch limit will be 29,656 red snapper.

Commercial fishermen will be able to catch 12,854 fish during a season that lasts from July 8 until Jan. 1, 2020. The commercial catch limit will be 12,854 fish. Commercial boats will be limited to 75 pounds gutted weight per trip. ▪

SCDNR OPENS BONNEAU FERRY FISHING AREA

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources has opened a public fishing area on the Bonneau Ferry WMA in Berkeley County.

The adult-youth only fishing area will be open from Thursday to Sunday during daylight hours from March 1-Oct. 31, except on Saturday mornings in April until 11 o'clock due to youth turkey hunts. It will also be closed in the fall on any scheduled deer hunt days.

Areas to fish include Quarterman Lake, the largest reservoir on the property at 100 acres, New Lake and several smaller ponds.

"Bonneau Ferry is one of the few areas in South Carolina that is well set up for bank fishing, and we have always focused on adult-youth opportunity out there — whether it be for hunting or fishing," said Will Carlisle, an SCDNR biologist. "Anything we can do to get families outside and enjoying all that South Carolina has to offer is something that's going to contribute to more future hunters and anglers here and aid conservation efforts."

In order to fish the area, a youth (17 years or younger) must be actively fishing and must be accompanied by no more than two adults at least 18 years of age, and adults may only fish if they are accompanied by a youth. Boats are allowed; however, they may only be operated under the power of an electric motor or by paddling. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

Daily creel limits are two largemouth bass, 10 panfish (crappie, bluegill, redear, pumpkinseed and redbreast) and five catfish. Crappie must be at least 8 inches to keep. No size limits apply to any other fish. ▪

FISH ATTRACTORS ADDED AT TWO PIEDMONT NC RESERVOIRS

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has installed 160 fish attractors in High Rock and Tuckertown lakes on the Yadkin River system.

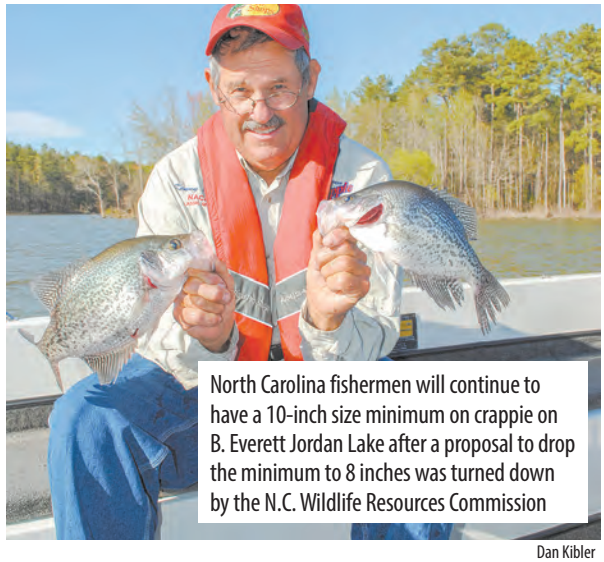
The Commission added five PVC trees in 20 sites on High Rock and five PVC trees in 12 sites on Tuckertown.

The fish attractors are marked with buoys, and they can be found on the "Fish Attractor" page (www.ncpaws.org/wrcmaps/WRC-FishAttractors.htm).

"Our goal with these structures is to give anglers an easily identifiable place to find and catch fish," said biologist Lawrence Dorsey. ▪



CRAPPIE SIZE MINIMUM WILL STAY AT 10 INCHES ON JORDAN



North Carolina fishermen will continue to have a 10-inch size minimum on crappie on B. Everett Jordan Lake after a proposal to drop the minimum to 8 inches was turned down by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission

Dan Kibler

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission voted on Feb. 21 to adopt 43 hunting and fishing regulation changes that will take effect on Aug. 1, but it did not adopt a proposal to change the minimum size for crappie on B. Everett Jordan Lake.

The Commission had proposed dropping Jordan's minimum size from 10 to 8 inches to make it identical to general statewide regulations for crappie. Opposition at public meetings and from public comment moved the Commission to keep the 10-inch size minimum in place.

The Commission voted to end the closed harvest season of Dec. 1 to March 31 for black bass at Sutton Lake. The minimum size limit is 14 inches, and the daily creel limit is five fish.

The Commission also voted to establish a 9-inch size minimum for crappie on Kerr Reservoir at the request of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fish, which is the primary organization involved in fishery management on the 49,500-acre lake on the two states' border.

Rabbit season will open the Monday on or nearest to Oct. 15 instead of the Saturday before Thanksgiving to give rabbit hunters more opportunities outside the gun deer season.

The Commission voted to open a season on fox squirrels in all 100 counties. Previously, fox squirrels could be hunted in 27 counties.

A handful of proposals change boundaries and designations for mountain trout streams, establish or change seasons on individual game lands across the state. The Commission also voted to open the trapping season in a section of eastern North Carolina on Nov. 1 instead of Dec. 1. ▪



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Outdoor UPDATE

BASS ELITE COMING TO GEORGETOWN

One hundred of the nation's best professional bass fishermen will descend on Georgetown, S.C., for four days of top-drawer competitive fishing as the BASS Elite Series sets up shop April 11-14.

Daily blast-offs and weigh-ins at the Carroll Campbell Marine Complex are open to the public. The tournament is being held in conjunction with the Winyah Bay Heritage Festival.

This is the BASS Elite Series' second visit to Georgetown; Britt Myers of Lake Wylie, S.C., won in April 2016 with a four-day total of 56 pounds, 3 ounces.

Anglers will have a tremendous amount of water to cover, including the nearby Sampit, Waccamaw, Black and Pee Dee rivers. Myers and a number of pros chose in 2016 to make a long ride to fish the Cooper River, which is included in allowed tournament waters, along with the Santee River and the entire Santee Delta.

A handful of anglers from the Carolinas will be competing in the tournament: Matt Arey of Shelby, N.C., Todd Auten of Lake Wylie, S.C., Hank Cherry of Maiden, N.C., Brandon Cobb of Greenwood, S.C., Rob Digh of Denver, N.C., David Fritts of Lexington, N.C., Shane Lehew of Catawba, N.C., Shane Lineberger of Lincolnton, N.C., and Patrick Walters of Summerville, S.C. ▪



GOT PICS? We want 'em

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.



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DIXIE DEER CLASSIC CROWNS NC'S

TOP WHITETAILS FOR 2018 SEASON

Stokes County in northwest North Carolina along the Virginia border was certainly well-represented at the Dixie Deer Classic in early March in Raleigh, where the best whitetails in the state were recognized.

Greg Collins of Westfield took the biggest typical buck during the 2018 season, a 166⅝-inch brute taken Nov. 17, opening day of gun season in Stokes County. It was awarded Best in Show

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime deer for me. I'm sure I'll never be lucky enough to see another one like that," Collins said.

Alek Knight of Westfield had the second-largest typical, a 163⅛-inch Stokes County trophy that he killed in September during archery season. It was the best archery buck entered in the show.



Greg Collins

OTHER CATEGORY WINNERS WERE:

- Karrie Newton of Bullock for her 145-inch Granville County buck that was the best typical taken by a female gun hunter.
- James Carrier of Vass killed a Harnett County buck that scored 157⅞ and won the N.C. Typical Gun award.
- Chuck Vlasek of Sanford took a 175⅝-inch Alamance County buck that was the biggest non-typical by gun.



Alek Knight

- Devin Layne of Cameron took a Lee County whopper that was the biggest non-typical taken by an archer. The buck scored 175⅞.
- Denver's Chris Parrish took a 153-inch Randolph County buck that was the best non-typical taken with a muzzleloader.
- Elijah Evans, 12, from Haw River, took a 159-inch buck that was the biggest typical taken by crossbow by a youth hunter.
- Dennis Godwin of Wade won for the best N.C. Typical Crossbow with a 142-inch Orange County buck.
- Dennis Lower of Sanford won the N.C. Non-Typical Crossbow category with his Lee County buck that scored 178⅛.
- Lexington's Chris Benfield took top honors for N.C. Typical Muzzleloader Female with her Person County buck that scored 149⅞.
- Melissa Thomas of Parkton killed a 116⅝-inch archery buck in Harnett County that won the N.C. Typical Crossbow Female category.
- Chase Fraley's massive Moore County buck scored 160, earning him the N.C. Non-typical Gun Male Youth award. Fraley, from Carthage, killed the buck in November.
- Robert Garner of Robbins won the N.C. Typical Gun Male Youth award with a



Chase Fraley

Moore County buck he killed in November. His buck scored 153⅜.

- Jeb Manning of Broadway took a 130⅝-inch buck from Chatham County that was the biggest typical taken by a male youth.
- Creedmoor's Ava Camillo took the N.C. Typical Muzzleloader Female Youth category with a buck she killed in Granville County. Her buck scored 115⅝.
- Scotty Sexton of Robbins won the Non-Hunting category with a buck that scored 146. Sexton hit the deer while traveling in Moore County this past December with his F-250, which suffered $5,100 in damages.

The President's Award went to 6-year-old Owen Ramsey of Raleigh for his Wake County crossbow kill from September. Ramsey's buck taped out at 92 ⅜.

Jeff Murphy of Madison won the N.C. Bear Award for a Pamlico County bear he killed with a 500-yard shot in November. The bear scored 21⅜, which also places it in the prestigious Boone & Crockett Club's all-time record book for black bears.

A President's Award was given to 6-year-old Owen Ramsey of Raleigh for his Wake County crossbow kill from September. Ramsey's buck taped out at 92⅜. ■


Owen Ramsey


James Carrier


Devin Layne


Ava Camillo

SC ADDS WMA IN UPSTATE

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources has acquired 1,757 acres near Cleveland in northern Greenville County that will be used to provide recreational opportunities to the public, including fishing, hunting and hiking as Tall Pines WMA.

The land, on the north and south sides of Moody Bridge Rd. is about eight miles north of Travelers Rest. It contains upland and wetland areas, two lakes, numerous streams and a mile of frontage on the South Saluda River.

The purchase price for the property was about $4 million. Of that, $3 million came from the S.C. Carolina Conservation Bank, $500,000 from the SCDNR Heritage Land Trust Fund and $500,000 from the SCDNR Timber Management Account.

BY CRAIG HOLT

DON'T KEEP OFF THE GRASS!

MINING THE SHORELINE GRASS AT FALLS OF NEUSE LAKE THIS MONTH IS A GREAT WAY TO GET YOUR STRING STRETCHED BY A BRAGGING-SIZED BASS. HERE'S HOW....

The small cove off Falls of the Neuse Lake's main body was a foot or two deep around the edges, and the water was murky in early April 2018.

Aquatic vegetation covered the surface, extending from 4 to 12 feet from the shoreline.

"Bass should be (shallow) this month," said guide Kennon Brown of Roxboro, N.C.

As he spoke, he spied a tail fin, as wide as a man's spread-open hand, waving in the air. A female largemouth bass was nose-down, clearing debris from the bottom at a place she'd chosen to lay her eggs. >

Spinnerbaits also are a good spring lure when bass go shallow to spawn.

Craig Holt


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"Look!" said Brown, 71, of Hawg Hunter Guide Service. "It'll make your heart thump a little harder when you see a fish like that, but I don't know if we can get her interested in a lure."

We estimated the fish at around 10 pounds — maybe more — because of the size of that fin. That's no small fish at Falls, a river-fed 12,500-acre lake north of Raleigh and Durham that boasts a lake-record fish of a few ounces more than 13 pounds.

Unfortunately, Brown was correct. The female ignored lures for 15 minutes. Finally a shadow from Brown's bass boat spooked her; she quickly dove and swam away

"It's not too unusual," he said. "A female sets her mind on clearing a bed, and she's not going to be distracted. But she'll come back. A few more weeks with the right water temperature, and this will be a place where I'll be, too.

"When they're laying eggs, a bass will hang around her nest. If anything comes near, like a soft-plastic bait, she might pick it up and move it away. That's the time for sight-fishing, if the water's clear enough so you can see 'em. Sometimes, if you can get her mad enough, she'll whack it."

During spring, female largemouths create beds and spawn at different times on Falls. Other fish may be in a prespawn mode, in a mood to eat before they begin to bed. If they haven't moved shallow, bass often stage in 5 to 12 feet of water, and they will be susceptible to lures.

"There's always male bass, too," Brown said. "They're gonna be near females. After she leaves, they'll guard a nest and really thump lures, especially ones that look like salamanders.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Falls of the Neuse Lake is north of Durham and west of Raleigh. I- 85 crosses the upper end of the lake, NC 50 crosses at mid-lake. Public boat access areas are scattered along the shoreline, with Hickory Hill just south of I-85, Ledge Rock in Ledge Creek downstream from I-85, NC 50 and Upper Barton Creek in mid-lake.

WHEN TO GO — Late March through April is the time to be on Falls Lake, as bass move from prespawn through the spawn in different parts of the lake.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Fish a floating worm, weightless and weedless, around shallow grass and willow bushes.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Kennon Brown, Hawg Hunter Guide Service, 919-358-3207, www.hawghunt.com.; Rollingview Marina, 919-596-2194. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — The Inn at Creedmoor, Creedmoor, 919-529-2034; Quality Inn & Suites, Creedmoor, 919-575-6565; Sleep Inn, Wake Forest, 919-556-4007. Falls of Neuse State Recreationa area (877-722-6762) and Rollingview Recreation Area (919-676-1027) offer camping.

MAPS — Fishing Hot Spots, 800-255-6277, www.fishinghotspots.com.



"They won't be as large as the females, but they'll usually be hungry and smack lures, whether from hunger or simply their instinct to guard nests against intruders."

GRASS INVASION

Although Falls Lake didn't have a lot of submerged aquatic vegetation for years after its impoundment in 1981 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, some shoreline grass has appeared.

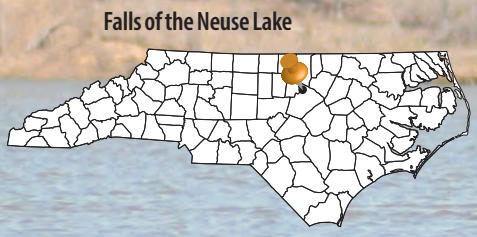
"Duck weed and eel grass began showing up three or four years ago, and now it's just starting to thrive," Brown said, "but only some parts of the lake have got it. Boats, boat trailers and birds probably transported it from other lakes to Falls, especially from Harris or Mayo.

"It's really good for bass fishing, because it puts plenty of oxygen in the water. It also is a good hiding for baitfish, especially in the summer, because of the shade it creates."

Bass begin to move into the patches of duck weed and eel grass in February, Brown said.

continues >

Anglers may find male bass eager to bite lures, even if spawners are busy making beds.



Craig Holt



A wide-gap No. 3 offset hook is a good choice for a floating worm during April.

"The second or third week of March is the pre-spawn here, but it starts close to the dam," Brown said. "The spawn moves up the lake to the center part. You'd think it'd move from the (upper) parts where the water is shallower and warms up quicker, but it doesn't at this lake."

Brown prefers a 7-foot, Lews Custom Speed Stick rod mated to a Lews LS5 baitcasting reel spooled with 12-pound P-line fluorocarbon.

"It's sinking line, because monofilament floats when you don't use any weight," said Brown, because it allows him to fish his favorite spring bass lure — a floating worm — across the top of grass mat on the surface or drop down into holes in the grass.

FLOATING ALONG

"I look for two things: tailing fish or holes in the grass," said Brown, who fishes a floating worm weightless on a 3/0 Trokar hook with a swivel in front of 12 inches of fluorocarbon leader to keep line twist at bay.

"Floating worms have great action and apparently look like small snakes or night crawlers to bass," Brown said.

One oddity about spring largemouths in North Carolina lakes is they prefer brightly colored floating worms, including pink, yellow and white. Although day-glo colors aren't natural in the outdoors, they apparently grab the attention of bass — along with their twisting, spinning movements — as they're retrieved.

"The best retrieve is a slow one," Brown said. "You can move them across the tops of grass a small rod-tip twitch at a time, then, if you pull it across a hole in the grass, just let it fall toward the bottom. You don't have to do anything to a floating worm; they'll wiggle on their own as they sink."

In order to avoid hang-ups, anglers may rig these lures two ways:

• Pushing the hook's barb through the top quarter-inch of a worm, then through the body until it slightly breaks the skin on one side. Next, push the worm's body to cover the barb. The worm must hang vertically to work correctly.

• Hooking the barb into the side of the worm, barely concealing its tip under the "skin" on one side.

In these weedless setups, when a bass strikes, the barb should easily come through the worm's body or side and stick in a fish's mouth when an angler jerks his rod tip.

But spring bass attacks vary.

"You have to be aware of light taps on your line," Brown said. "Sometimes, a bass sucks a plastic worm into his mouth, and you'll see your line twitch and feel a slight 'tick'. Other times, you might not feel anything, but you'll see your line moving off because slack can keep you from feeling a bass's weight. That's when you have to reel in line until



Craig Holt

you feel him. Then you jerk his jaws.

"Other times, a fish will just blast a lure, and there won't be any doubt what's happened."

SHE'S ON THE LINE

One key to success when fishing vegetation is line watching.

"When I find a large hole in grass, I'll cast as far towards the bank as I can, behind the opening, and move the worm slowly toward the opening," Brown said. "When the lure starts to drop toward the bottom, that's when a bass may suck it into its mouth. You'll often see the line make a small twitch. But don't jerk the line then. You should raise your rod tip fast, but not hard, to see if you can feel the fish's weight. If you feel him, then set the hook.

"If nothing's there, I'll lower the rod tip again and let the worm fall to the bottom. This type of fishing requires a lot of patience, because it's not fast fishing. If I get the worm back to the surface, I'll start the retrieve again."

Anglers who fish Falls of the Neuse, which stretches 28 miles from the dam in Wake County to the outskirts of Durham at the I-85 bridge, know the lake fishes in three distinct sections. Falls Lake has a narrow, curvy lower section that resembles a moderately deep river with steep sides; an open middle portion with large feeder creeks from the NC 50 bridge to I-85, and a super-shallow flats habitat upstream of I-85.

"You can find shallow places in the lower (portion) of Falls," Brown said. "They include little coves and flats that might have pea gravel, sand bottoms or rocks, and all have bass beds."

Many anglers choose suspending jerkbaits in late March and early April because bass will stage near spawning areas until the water temperature rises to between 62 and 70 degrees.

The spawn can be two weeks apart between the lower and upper sections of the lake.

"But the central part of the lake is where I do most of my fishing," said Brown, who loves to find said.

BASS AND WILLOWS

His favorite place to find shallow bass is Ledge Creek. Its upper end contains several acres of shallow water filled with willow bushes; bass like to beds in the roots of the willows. The back of Lick Creek also has dozens of willow trees in shallow water, plus flats with submerged grass.

Little Lick Creek, west of Rollingview Recreation Area, also has grass and trees in its back section. Underwater vegetation, in fact, covers half the creek.

Grass and stumps line the shoreline of the upper portion of the lake from the mouth of Little Lick Creek northwest beneath Old Weaver Road to the I-85 Bridge and beyond.

"But you might have to move around to find bass that'll chase a lure," Brown said. "Depending on where you're at, you might be finding prespawn, bedding or postspawn fish.

continues >



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"For most people, prespawn and postspawn are the best times, because when bass are spawning, they aren't thinking about eating. If a spawner hits a lure, it's usually a reaction strike to anything in their nest area. The males do reaction strikes, too, but they don't lose their appetites like females."

The reason Brown fishes certain coves and creeks at the lake's midsection is the sun's angle. Rising is the southeast, on sunny days its rays bathe the northwest shoreline longer than anywhere else. That heat draws baitfish, encourages aquatic vegetation to grow, puts oxygen in the water and draws bass.

"But on cloudy days, after a few sunny days and if the wind's from the southeast, it'll push warm surface water to northwest banks," he said.

The most-recent study by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission revealed that half of Falls of Neuse bass were 14 inches long, while 20 percent were longer than 16 inches. The agency's biologists noted that Falls of the Neuse has a healthy largemouth population with good age and size distributions.



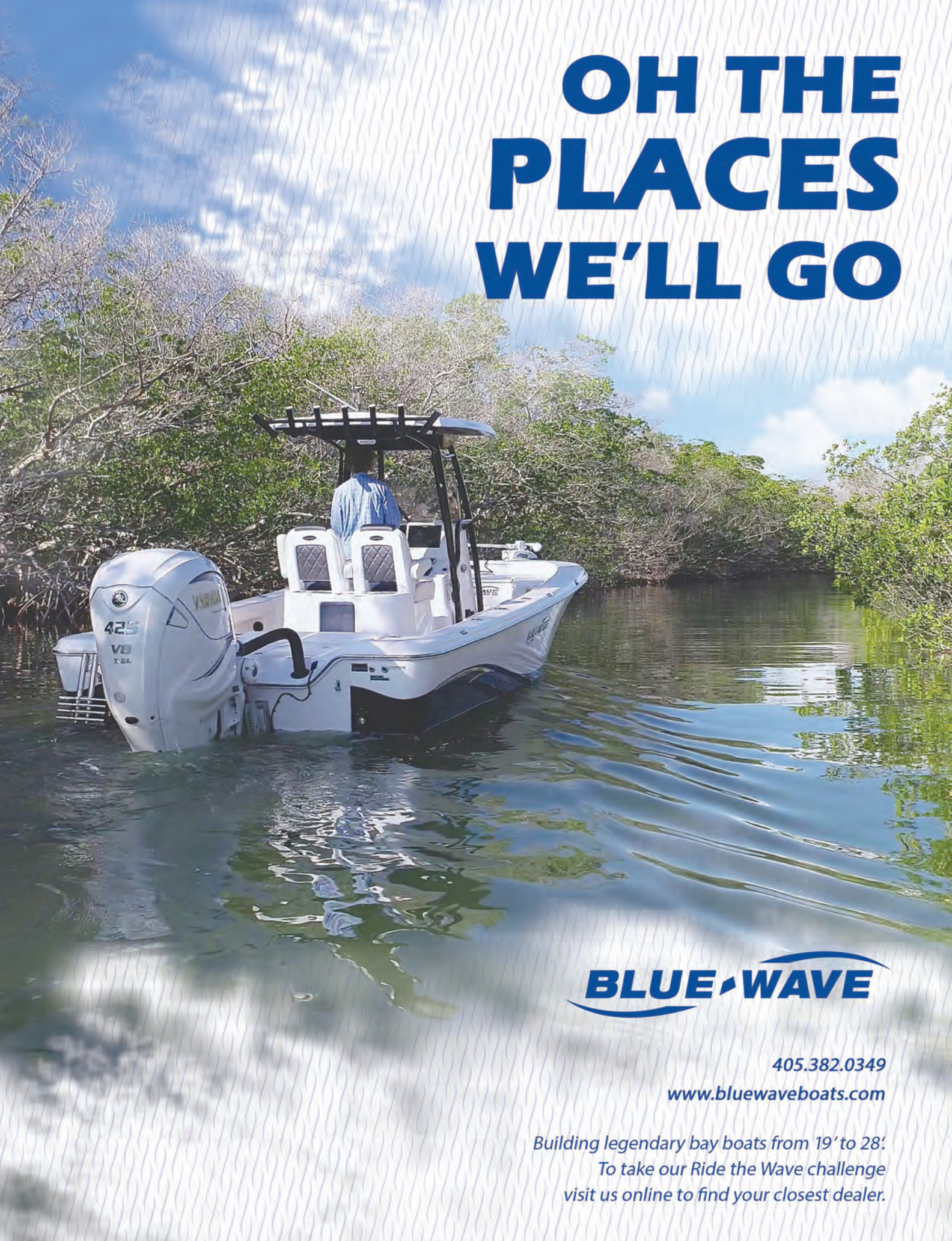
Craig Holt

With wind blowing into this Falls Lake cove, Kennon Brown battled a 4-pounder last April.

"I've caught 17 (bass) over 10 pounds from Falls Lake," Brown said, "but I sure would like to hook up with one of those tailing fish. You can bet I'll be back here soon, trying to get one of them." ▪



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


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David Fritts

AN ALTERNATIVE TO SIGHT-FISHING

HUNT FOR BASS IN SPOTS WHERE FISH ARE LATE MAKING THEIR MOVE TO THE BANK



Swim a worm with a big, ripple tail through shallow water and you'll run into some bass that haven't locked down on the bed yet.

My favorite months to bass fish in the Carolinas are ones when most of the bass are off the banks, when you need good electronics to locate fish and the spots where they live, and when they'll bite a crankbait.

Everybody else loves April.

This is a month when you can turn your electronics off and just go fish what you can see. It's probably our biggest month for sight-fishing. But if you don't like sight-fishing, or if the water in the lake you fish most often gets stained so you can't see spawning fish, there are a few things you can do.

I like to fish moving baits and find fish that are still staging, that haven't gone to the bank to spawn. I think a lot of fishermen get caught up sometimes with all of the fish up on the bank and ignore the others.

I will have three baits tied on this month: a Power Worm with a ripple tail, a square-billed crankbait like a Berkley Square Bull, and a jerkbait like a Cutter.

SLOWLY BUT SURELY

These baits have one thing in common: you can fish them slowly, but you can still cover a lot of water. Fishing a swimming worm is something that not everybody thinks about. Sometimes, it takes something a little different, and you can always find a few fish doing this.

I like to throw a grape or black worm this time of year, sometimes a finesse worm, but most of the time a big worm with a ripple tail. I am going to crimp on a tiny split shot a few inches up the line from the hook, and I'm going to throw that worm out and wind it back very slowly. The worm has enough action that you don't need to do anything with it other than reel it directly back in.

The square-billed crankbait is another great weapon. You can fish it slowly, and it will deflect off any kind of shallow cover like stumps, rocks or laydowns. I think chartreuse is probably the best color, but they'll hit gold or sometimes shad colors. And a good thing about April is that you can actually catch 'em on a jerkbait fished real slow, something like a Cutter. Get the bait down a foot or two and just work it slowly back out of shallow water to the boat.

These three baits — a swimming worm, square-bill and jerkbait — they're three baits that will work if you're not sight-fishing, and they should work in any kind of water. I like to fish them on a 7-foot, medium-action Lews Custom Pro rod. It's an awesome rod to fish a jerkbait or a swimming worm.

FLAT IS WHERE IT'S AT

Now, where to fish them. They are going to be shallow. I'm going to be looking

from secondary points to the back of pockets. They are probably going to be on flatter stuff, not on drops — flatter points and pockets.

A lot comes down to covering water, moving around — keep getting it — trying to find fish that aren't in yet or on something a little different than fish on the bank. In most of the Carolinas, pockets and creeks on the north side of lakes will have more spawning fish, because they've gotten more sun and they're warmer. The fish in the southside creeks and pockets will go in a little later. That's where I'm going to start looking. I want to fish for prespawn fish that haven't moved to the bank yet.

And I like to stick with clear water, so I'm going to do most of my fishing on the mid-lake or lower end of the lakes. I know the upper ends will be a little warmer, and fish will move in up there a little ahead of those in the rest of the lake.

One thing that's good about fishing this way is that on a lot of lakes, especially bigger ones, you can run from area to area where fish are in prespawn, almost like running the tide in a coastal river. You figure out where they are in one creek or pocket and try that kind of area in other, similar creeks or pockets. You just have to find them, find places where not as many have moved up. ▪



David Fritts *is a 62-year-old pro bass fisherman from Lexington, N.C. He won the 1993 Bassmasters Classic champion and the 1997 FLW Tour Championship, and he was the 1994 BASS Angler of the Year. He is sponsored by Ranger boats, Evinrude outboards, Lew's, Minnkota,and Berkley.*





SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry



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

SHALLOW-WATER BASS IS APRIL'S PADDLING DRAW

TIME SURROUNDING THE SPAWN CAN'T BE BEAT IN A KAYAK

Two things will keep a sportsman awake at night during April: the thought of turkeys gobbling on the roost and big largemouth bass hanging on the bed. Some figure out how to scratch both itches, but if big, watermelon-colored fish staring back at you from the shallows gets your blood pumping, staring back at the fish from atop a kayak will set it to a boil.

Bass fishing is the fastest-growing segment of the fastest-growing component of the fishing community: kayak fishing. Kayak bass tournaments provide great competition weekend events or as ongoing, online events.

Ask any bass fisherman, and most will say late March into April is their favorite time to chase largemouth and spotted bass that frequent both Carolinas. Depending on which area of the two states you fish, bass may be finishing up the spawn and heading into postspawn in the southern and eastern regions of South Carolina or they may still be in prespawn in the northern and western regions of North Carolina.

One thing is for certain: ample rainfall over the past few years will have many backwater areas in major impoundments full of new-growth foliage and rising water. Such locations make for great spawning areas and less-pressured areas for paddling bass anglers.

THE PREY EQUATION

Another spring event that makes bass fishing great is the timing of the spawn for bass prey species, particularly bluegill and threadfin shad. The presence of prey will move trophy largemouth into shallow waters during the prespawn and keep them there during the postspawn, while assisting with recovery.

The wide variety of soft-plastic baits on the market mimic everything from baitfish to frogs to crawfish, and that tends to make the old-fashioned plastic worm a thing of the past. For shallow-water fishing for spawners, these baits can be rigged weedless to cast into heavy cover without snagging or they can be attached via Carolina rig, Texas rig or directly to the end of a jig for more-precise placement. This is especially useful when sight-fishing for bedding bass when fish tend to stay put unless a bait or lure is dropped right inside the nest.

Kayak anglers are not limited to only fishing where paved public ramps provide access to water. This opens up a myriad of farm ponds, water-retention areas, creeks, rivers and sloughs as well as many small-body, motor-restricted lakes and the backwaters of big lakes.

April is a shallow-water bass fisherman's dream; there is no better time to be on the water with a paddle in one hand and a fishing rod in the other. ▪



North Carolina's Lake Julian,which covers 300 acres in Arden, N.C., near Asheville, is a kayak bass fisherman's dream.

Saturday Mel

ASCEND 12T

To craft the fully updated Ascent 12T sit-on-top kayak, designers took Ascend's most-popular sit-on-top model and made it even more stable, functional, and comfortable. The advanced tunnel design, with a wide transom and flared bow, makes for a kayak so stable you can stand and cast.

The design also produces outstanding tracking and easier paddling. When standing, you'll stay comfortable thanks to the non-skid foam deck mat.

Port and starboard accessory-mounting rails and a recessed bow storage area with flush-mounted bungees also allow endless accessorizing for true customization. Flush-mounted paddle holders ensure easy-reach paddling, and the deep-molded drink holder/storage and watertight storage areas deliver reliable containment for your vital gear.

The Ascend 12T works perfectly with the optional RedHead® waterfowl blind, making it a perfect option for duck hunting in addition to all your angling demands.

This 12-foot kayak weighs 77 pounds. Maximum weight capacity is 350 pounds.



Suggested retail price is $599. Available at basspro.com.

MOUNTAIN HONEY HOLE

Saturday Mel, a member of the Hobie Kayaks regional team from Hendersonville, N.C., competes in kayak bass tournaments, including many of the big impoundments in North Carolina, South Carolina and beyond.

During the spring, competition between powerboat anglers and kayak anglers puts a lot of pressure on spawning bass. Those are the days when Mel exercises his "go-anywhere" paddling option and fishes smaller impoundments where power boats are limited or not allowed at all. Near the top of his list is Lake Julian, near Asheville, N.C.

Lake Julian is a lake covering approximately 300 acres in Arden not far from Asheville's famous Biltmore House.

"The lake is loaded with spotted bass," said Mel. "There are a few big bass to be found, but there are so many spots I think it keeps the lake from growing really big ones. The average size is maybe 2 to 2½ pounds."

Mel said another not-so-secret aspect of Julian is that it is stocked with tilapia. The bass tend to follow the schools of tilapia and feed heavily on them.

"It's pretty deep — I think around 80 feet is the deepest part — but it tends to fish more like a big pond," Mel said. "You can work your way down the bank throwing soft plastics in watermelon color; they love watermelon up there."

Julian also serves as cooling agent for Process Energy's Asheville plant, which makes the lake thermal.

"You can watch the stacks, and when both of them are releasing steam, you know they're running water and that's when the fishing is the best.

Lake Julian has one public access area at Lake Julian Park, including a boat launch. Daily or annual fees are charged to use the boat launch. A local lake permit is required. Lake Julian Park is located at 406 Overlook Rd, Ext, in Arden. ▪

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Spotted bass
WHERE — Lake Adger near Saluda, N.C.
HOW —Adger has a later spawn than most North Carolina lakes. Throw Senkos, jigs and soft plastics to find spawners and prespawn fish around numerous laydowns and rocky points.
LAUNCH — Public access is by easement across private property. No charge for use. Ramp is located on the upper end of the lake off Lake Adger Rd in Mill Spring.
INSIDER TIP — Muskellunge are stocked in Lake Adger. Not every bite on large soft plastics will be from a bass.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Largemouth bass, spotted bass.
WHERE — Lake Murray near Columbia, S.C.
HOW — Throw soft plastics, jig 'n' pig around boat docks.
LAUNCH — Lake Murray has numerous public and private access. Info at http://www.lake-murray.com/boat-ramps-public-access-areas
INSIDER TIP —Lake Murray has a good shad spawn that occurs at the tail end of the bass spawn. Look for shad to congregate around boat docks with suitable cover.

ST. CROIX MOJO YAK CASTING ROD



This rod was brought out by St. Croix to provide an ideal rod for anglers interested in kayak fishing, combining the framework of the Mojo series with updated components. Constructed from high-modulus SC III graphite blanks, Mojo Yak Casting Rods have been specifically crafted using Integrated Poly Curve mandrel technology to provide precise, technique specific actions that meet the demands of kayak enthusiasts.

Two models are available: 7-foot, medium-fast and 7-foot-6, medium-heavy. Both have 3D guides, Fuji reel seats, split-grip handles and Kigan hook keepers. They come with a 5-year warranty.

Suggested retail price is $150 for the 7-foot rod and $160 for the 7-foot-6 rod. More info at stcroixrods.com.

LAKE JAMES SMALLIES

stack up in clearest water

Muddy water has plagued fishermen this spring on many North Carolina reservoirs, and clear water will be a main issue at Lake James for smallmouth bass.

"April can be a great month for smallmouth bass fishing at Lake James," said guide Colt Bass of Colt Bass Fishing. "Once the water warms, the fish really come to life."

Successful fishing for smallies requires switching depths and tactics based upon water clarity.

Bass (www.coltbassfishing.com) said mornings are best for catching smallmouth in the shallows and on the surface.

"I start every morning focusing on the surface bite down to 5 feet," said Bass, who likes surface lures, Flukes, jerkbaits and shallow-running crankbaits.

The shallow bite is short-lived once the sun comes up.

"Lake James is so clear that when the sun comes up, it's time to go down to as much as 20 feet," said Bass, who searches for smallmouth on humps, rock faces, old creek channels, long natural points and islands in 10 to 20 feet of water.



Big smallmouth bass are very active in April on North Carolina's Lake James.

Colt Bass

Bass, who fishes live bait, spoons, Flukes and Shad Raps in natural colors, said smallmouths are ready to feed before they begin spawning, so he rarely fishes deeper than 20 feet because the instinct to spawn keeps fish shallow despite the clear water.

April can be a breezy month, and Bass said the wind can be a critical factor as much as water color.

"I like to pay attention to the wind and how it's making the water move," he said. "The wind often congregates fish on certain sides of points, humps and other structure. After catching fish at a few spots, I'll notice a pattern that I can build off of."

Clear water also dictates his choice of tackle.

To cast to breaking fish, he prefers spinning gear. Otherwise, Bass uses medium-light 7-foot baitcasting rods paired with Ambassadeur 6500 reels spooled with clear 10-pound line. When he fishes live bait, usually shad, he switches to a Carolina rig with circle hooks. For his main line, he uses monofilament; for his leader, he uses fluorocarbon.

Bass employs planer boards to position his baits away from the boat, which can frighten the fish in clear water.

"Water clarity is no joke at James," said Bass. "You must be stealthy to have success."

Most smallmouth at James weigh around 2 pounds, but every April a good number of 4-and 5-pound smallmouth come to the net amidst the stunning mountain scenery encasing the lake. ▪

— Tony Garitta

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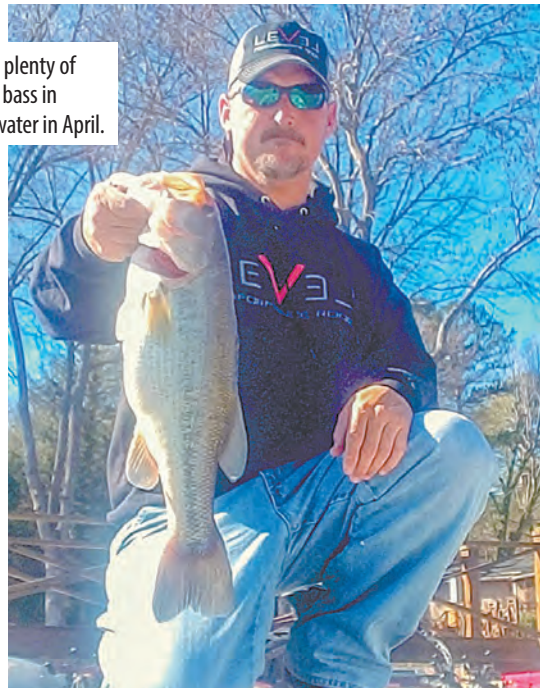




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BANK ON HIGH ROCK

You can't bass-fish too shallow



Chris Brown catches plenty of nice High Rock Lake bass in extremely shallow water in April.

Chris Brown

Chris Brown, a veteran fisherman from Lexington, N.C., said it's almost impossible to fish too shallow in April at High Rock Lake for prespawn and spawning bass.

"When you think you're fishing shallow, fish shallower," Brown said. "The fish move shallower in April more than at any other time."

After persistent rains, Brown said High Rock will likely be high and muddy this month. If that's the situation, there's little doubt where the bass will be.

"When the lake is full or nearly full, the bass always move into the buttonwood bushes and willows at the backs of nooks, pockets and creeks" Brown said. "You just need to find the productive ones. When you do, you can catch a good sack of fish."

Some anglers contend that bigger fish come from the willows, which are scarce compared to buttonwood bushes.

The high water has its drawbacks. Many fishermen won't be able to get their boats under bridges at the mouth of Abbotts and Flat Swamp creeks. The water behind both bridges hold some prime bushes, that they can be accessed from public ramps in the creeks, upstream from the bridges, if they are willing to restrict themselves to a given creek.

The other drawback is extremely muddy and trashy water. Fishermen have learned to catch fish in awful-looking brown water, but at times this season, parts of the lake have turned chocolate and filled with debris.

The river might run red.

"Areas set off from the river, like Potts Creek and the Pasture, could have fishable water," said Brown, who uses either a spinnerbait in sexy shad or a jig in green pumpkin or black/blue for the shallow bite.

"Sexy shad-colored spinnerbaits are an effective color in clear or dingy water," said Brown, whose favorite places include Crane and Swearing creeks, plus mid-lake pockets. "I use black/blue jigs in muddy water, green pumpkin jigs in clear water."

Brown rarely tries sight-fishing.

"The lake always has some color to it, making it difficult to see fish, even with polarized glasses," he said. "The exception is Bucks Branch in Flat Swamp when it's clear."

Should the water drop out of the bushes, bass move to piers and corners, where Brown catches them on soft-plastic creature baits and Chatterbaits.

"If the water stays up, fishing can be really good," he said. ■

— Tony Garitta



4 TIPS FOR TOUGH TOMS

Try these ideas from veteran turkey hunters and you'll be closer to putting a tag on a nice Carolina gobbler this month.

By Terry Madewell



To build a blind, use vegetation that's native to the area you're hunting so turkeys won't suspect a trap.



Turkey hunting in the Carolinas pits hunters against more than just a gobbler's sharp eyes, absurd hearing and vigilant persona. Successful hunters must also adapt to extreme habitat diversity, ranging from mature mountains to swamps. Coping with these complex situations often forces hunters to employ more than one strategy to be consistently successful.

Experienced hunters have learned to be successful in diverse situations and here's some tactics by highly successful Carolina "gobbler getters."

HIDE IN A NATURAL BLIND

Staying hidden from an approaching gobbler is crucial to success anywhere you hunt. Guide Tyler Chappell of Fountain Inn, S.C., said he doesn't always have the luxury of gobblers coming to predetermined spots.

"I love hunting from ground blinds, but often to get on a gobbler, I have to hoof it," Chappell said. "I enjoy hunting gobblers on foot, but it entails improvising setups on the fly. Calling is crucial, and woodsmanship is essential, but all of that is for naught if I don't set up correctly to be invisible to an approaching gobbler." >

Terry Madewell

Chappell (864-419-1462) said a little too much cover is much better than not enough, regardless of the terrain you hunt. He's said the biggest problem he sees when guiding is hunters not going the extra step to conceal properly.

"Whether using decoys or not, I want to be hidden, and I'll select the best existing cover to ensure we're hidden," he said. "I'll cut limbs and bushes from that immediate area and place them around the setup to further blend with that particular spot. No specific recipe exists for exactly what to do; every situation is different. I just get well hidden, and when the gobbler approaches, by staying still and not being seen, we'll get the shot."

Chappell said it's hard to hide too well, but you do have to plan for having a shot.

"It surprises my clients sometimes how well we hide," he said. "But when the gobbler comes in looking for the source of the calls but can't see us, we have a huge advantage. But you do need to leave shooting options."

He said this tactic works in mountains, rolling topography, flat land and swamps by using surrounding materials.

HOLD YOUR GROUND OR MOVE

Most experienced turkey hunters have experienced making a move on a gobbler only to call from the new position and hear the longbeard gobble from the position they just abandoned. It's not science, it's hunting, but you can stack the odds in your favor.



Guide Tyler Chappell called this boss gobbler into extremely close range with a mouth call.

Gobblers have a tendency to play hard to get, and reasons are widely varied. But the decision to move or not move often makes or breaks the hunt. No definitive formula exists, but a calculated decision based on the individual traits of the gobbler that's just out of reach is the best course.

Darrell Madden of Semora, N.C. has faced this decision many times, and he makes his decision based on years of experience.

"Every gobbler must be treated individually, but I do have guidelines I consider," he said. "If I'm getting gobbles from a bird that I cannot see, and he's locked into the same basic location, I don't move at first. He could be henned up or just be ornery, but I'll use different calls and give him every chance to approach."

If the bird continues to stall, Madden will figure that a barrier such as a creek or other object may be in play. If he can remain hidden from the gobbler while moving, he'll slip out, circle, cross the barrier, get on the gobbler's favored turf and set up again.

"I don't want to try to force a gobbler to do something he is resisting," he said. "That seldom ends well for the hunter."

If Madden has the gobbler in sight — such as a longbeard strutting in a field — he may try "fanning' with a gobbler's tailfeathers to pique the bird's curiosity.

"Couple that with some hen calls, and often he'll approach," he said. "The tail fan makes him more comfortable in the sense that the hen he can hear but can't see is accompanied by a gobbler he can see."

continued >





Turkey hunters can make use of drones (top) or trail cameras (bottom) to scout multiple areas for turkeys while hunting.

ADVANCED GIZMOS PROVIDE AN EDGE

Knowing exactly where a gobbler is at a specific time is a wonderful asset in planning a strategy. That technology exists, and Andy Shaw of Fountain Inn, S.C., employs it while hunting.

"Success is often a matter of location and knowing where the gobbler is," Shaw said. "I've started using game cameras strategically placed on food plots that are linked to my cell phone. The cameras are motion-sensitive and when a turkey walks into that plot, I instantly have a photo and know his precise location."

Shaw said he knows his property well and can quickly reach that spot, approaching from a direction that won't bump the gobbler and setting up quietly before making the first call.

"It helps knowing the position of the gobbler," he said. "It enables me to set up in the perfect position to see him if he approaches."

Shaw said gobblers often will move in silent in this scenario, but he's highly vigilant because he knows the odds are significantly enhanced. He'll see the gobbler slipping in because he's expecting it.

Another tactic he employs is using aerial drones to scout multiple areas while hunting.

"I'll use a drone to check multiple food plots during the course of a hunt," he said. "I don't have to get close to the field, because I can scout them from a distance with the drone. I'll see turkeys in a field, see the exact position and often the direction they're moving. With that information, I can make a stealthy approach and be in the best position to call." ■



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Andy Shaw used modern technology to pattern this gobbler before setting up to call him into range.

If a bird gobbles and walks away, he'll make a move to circle and get in front of the gobbler. If he has a good idea where the gobbler is headed, he'll arrive first and be set up and ready.

"But experience has taught me that trailing a gobbler, even at a safe distance where I can't be seen, and trying to call him back to a spot he just left is a low-percentage option."

MILITARY MISSION STRATEGY

Chappell said he'll make a military-style move on gobblers when they occasionally gobble at his calls and randomly at other sounds in the woods, but are moving as if on a specific mission.

"It's simply they have a single-minded purpose at that particular moment," he said. "I don't take it personal; it's just what gobblers do. I'll move and flank them and track their progress via the occasional gobble at my locator calls or real crows or other noises. I'll set up where the gobbler only needs to make a minor course adjustment, if any at all, to approach my position, using subtle calls to finish him. For the gobbler, it may be a quick detour rather than a total commitment, but this can get him in range."

A GO-TO CALL AT CRUNCH TIME

This is the ace-in-the-hole play for a gobbler that's needs a little something extra to make a full commitment to approach your position.

"Diversity in the use of calls is an excellent skillset for hunting turkeys," Chappell said, "but sometimes a gobbler is gonna need those soft purrs and clucks to make a binding commitment, and every hunter needs a go-to call to make realistic sounds under intense pressure."

Madden said often on a run-and-gun hunt, no time exists for a decoy setup; he has to simply plop down in an instant.

"If hunting alone, I prefer a mouth call because of lack of movement with a gobbler in tight but not quite close enough," he said. "It can be done with a friction call if a hunter can hide hand movement and still be able to get the gun into position. If calling for another hunter, a friction call works beautifully." ▪



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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Jerry Dilsaver

TURKEY CORDON BLEU (ALMOST)



Flatten the turkey breast with a mallet to render it thin enough to roll it into a ball.

Jerry Dilsaver

PUT THAT WILD GOBBLER'S BREAST TO WORK IN A BIG, DELICIOUS WAY

April is a special time in the Carolinas. Winter is over, and the few cool mornings are pushed away pretty quickly by warming sunshine.

The warm days bring out a lot of sportsmen. Fishing opportunities abound from the tallest mountains to the deep drops of the Continental Shelf. A few hunters may be enjoying chasing varmints, but April is turkey time.

Turkey restoration is a huge success story in both Carolinas. Wild turkeys live in every county in both states. Hunters who look forward to matching wits with a wise, old gobbler now have opportunities everywhere. The right yelps and clucks will invite Tom Turkey home to be the guest of honor at dinner.

Turkeys are one game bird most family members will try. Maybe it's because their first exposures were to beautifully browned turkeys at Thanksgiving, but many folks unwilling to try other game will sample turkey. Because of this, we need to be at the top of our game when preparing a wild turkey for the table.

Many hunters only breast out their turkeys, and they're missing some good eating. I like to keep the legs and wings for a variety of things, but this is a recipe for those folks who only keep the breasts. It sounds enough like something they've enjoyed with chicken to get most folks to try it. Hopefully, they like the differences a little better than the original.

If you still have a turkey breast in your freezer from last year, you need to get it out and fix this recipe soon. It's time to be adding fresh meat for the coming year. If you enjoy wild turkey as much as we do, the cupboard is bare, and you'll need to slip into the woods and use your best sweet purrs and come-hither yelps to convince one to walk within range of a magnum load of shotgun pellets. A fresh young gobbler will almost always be better table fare, but this recipe can soften up an old bird and have him tasting primo. ▪

TURKEY CORDON BLEU (ALMOST)

In addition to being tasty, this recipe is also pretty simple. There are numerous steps, and it takes a little time because of marinating the breast, but it's definitely not difficult. It's simple, and it's good — that's about all you can ask for. The most-difficult thing is not overcooking it. That's a cardinal sin and will dry it out and make it tough. The marinade tenderizes it some and helps keep it moist, but it's not infallible.

The turkey I used for this recipe had two things going against him. He was an old bird, with longer spurs that were beginning to hook. He was also heavy at 23½ pounds, and sometimes this combination means the bird can be tough and stringy.

The other thing was, he came charging in to a jake decoy and jumped to the side as I dropped the decoy and shot. It wasn't torn up badly, but this side of his breast caught the edge of the pattern at a strange angle when he jumped. I trimmed some and pulled feathers from several holes and even pulled one No. 6 pellet out of him.

My hope was the pellet holes and judicious use of the rough side of the mallet would allow the marinade to penetrate into the inner muscle and keep it moist and help with tenderness.

The "almost" in the recipe name gives away that this is not simply cordon bleu made with turkey. It uses the marinade, prosciutto instead of ham, different cheeses and spinach leaves. It's almost cordon bleu, but just a little different to suit personal tastes.

This breast was so large, I cut it into two pieces and made two rolls. The one for my wife was stuffed with jarlsberg cheese, and mine was stuffed with pepper jack. Feel free to experiment.

One reminder is, in order to avoid overcooking. Some cheese will run, and it will crust, but you must get the turkey cooked. But If the turkey is overcooked, it will be dry and tough. Take your time, enjoy an adult beverage around the grill as the sun begins to set and enjoy this. ▪

INGREDIENTS:

1 side of a turkey breast

1 package thin-sliced prosciutto

3 slices jarlsberg cheese (for one piece)

3 slices pepper jack cheese (for one piece)

Spinach leaves

Zesty Italian salad dressing

Salt and pepper to taste

Non-stick cooking spray

Toothpicks



Jerry Dilsaver

Turkey cordon bleu (almost) should be cooked for 35 to 45 minutes on a medium grill, then sit for 10 minutes. **BELOW:** Once stuffed and rolled, the turkey breast is ready to be coated in bread crumbs.



PREPARATION:

Use the flat side of a meat mallet to flatten one side of a turkey breast to approximately ¼- to ⅜-inch thick. Put the turkey breast in a ZipLock bag and add enough zesty Italian salad dressing to cover it. Press all the air out and seal the bag. Put the bag in the refrigerator and marinate for at least 2 hours. Add a couple of shots of rum and marinate longer for an older turkey.

Remove the breast from the bag and flatten again, this time by pushing down rather than swinging the mallet. Cut the breast into two manageable sections. Sprinkle the breast pieces with salt and pepper to personal taste.

Cover the breast pieces double or triple layers with prosciutto. Cover the prosciutto with cheese, leaving a few small gaps between slices. Use jarlsberg on one piece and pepper jack on the other. Cover the cheese with spinach leaves.

Roll the breasts up and peg closed with toothpicks. Put some plain bread crumbs in a container and roll the breasts in the bread crumbs until they are well covered. Spray a cast-iron frying pan (or pans) with non-stick cooking spray. Place turkey breast(s) in frying pan.

Preheat grill to medium. Cook approximately 35 to 45 minutes. This will vary with each grill and turkey. Once the middle of the rolled turkey breast reaches 165 degrees, cut off the heat and let it set for about 10 minutes. Serve while warm.

A lettuce wedge or green salad is a nice start to this meal. Mashed potatoes or a baked potato accompanies it well on the plate, and hot bread pudding is the ultimate dessert. ▪



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.*

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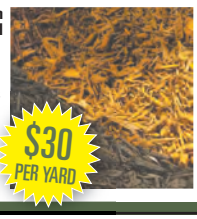
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By Phillip Gentry

CRAPPIE 102: SINGLE-POLE TECHNIQUES

SINGLE-POLE TECHNIQUES CAN PUT PLENTY OF SLABS IN YOUR COOLER IF YOU UNDERSTAND HOW TO GET YOUR BAITS IN THE RIGHT PLACES OR TO THE RIGHT DEPTHS.

In the world of crappie fishing, tactics for catching these tasty panfish probably outnumber those for almost any other fish species. Last month, "Crappie 101" covered things you need to know about fishing with multiple rods, all set in rod holders, with the boat providing locomotion to the baits.

This month, "Crappie 102" discusses strategies where you hold a single pole in your hands, where you have to provide all the motion yourself.

CASTING UP NEXT >

Phillip Gentry

CASTING

Most anglers learning to fish started out by casting a rod. Casting works great for crappie as well, but moreso if you are able to control how long your bait stays in the depth zone where the fish are holding.

Two methods for controlling a bait's depth while casting are using a slip cork to suspend the bait at a prescribed depth or counting a bait down.

Slip corks work great with either live minnows fished on a light-wire, No. 2 Aberdeen hook or with a crappie jig in the 1/32- to 1/16-ounce range. Set a bobber stop at the desired depth and cast the bait or lure. Pulling and stopping will cause the bait to swing and not only adds more action to the bait, but covers more water.

Crappie jigs can be fished at a prescribed depth by counting down the jig as soon as it hits the water. Leaving the bail on the reel disengaged, count seconds until the bait reaches the desired depth. Typically, a bait will free-fall an average of one foot per second on 6-pound line At that point, engage the reel and slowly and steadily reel the line in to keep the bait at the desired depth. Bear in mind, crappie tend to feed in an upward direction, so stop the bait a foot or two above the level at which you have marked fish on your sonar.

JIGGING

Jigging for crappie entails a traditionally long, limber rod to reach out to place the bait, usually a 1/32- to 1/8-ounce crappie jig, alongside visible, fish-holding structure like standing timber, stumps or a pier.

Jigging implies and up-and-down movement of the bait, but in essence, most strikes are elicited by simply placing the bait in the vicinity of the fish. As with any presentation, the bait should be at or slightly above the level of the fish, since crappie are generally inclined to look up and feed up.

For this reason, the most-effective jigs for using a jig pole have static action, meaning that the rubber, plastic, hair or other material comprising the bait tends to "shimmer" in place, giving the bait a lifelike action while sitting still.

Another effective presentation for jigging involves swinging the jig forward above the surface and allowing it to swing back toward the angler under the surface, like a pendulum. If the jig swims past structure on it's circular fall, all the better.

Depth of presentation is key to jig fishing, as mentioned crappie feed and face up. Jig fishermen frequently measure the depth of presentation by the amount of line out. Some pole manufacturers even assist in this endeavor by placing marks at one-foot intervals down the length of the rod.

DOCK SHOOTING UP NEXT >



Docks are natural hiding places for crappie, so learning to get your bait or lure under the structure is important.

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DOCK SHOOTING

Dock shooting refers to holding the bait, typically a small crappie jig, in one hand, while using the other to hold the line tight to the spool of a spinning reel with the bail open.

To execute the shot, bend the rod over and hold the jig between your thumb and forefinger, under the reel. Release the jig and simultaneously release the line, which sling-shots the bait forward, parallel to the water, causing it to skip up under the boat or dock or other overhead structure.

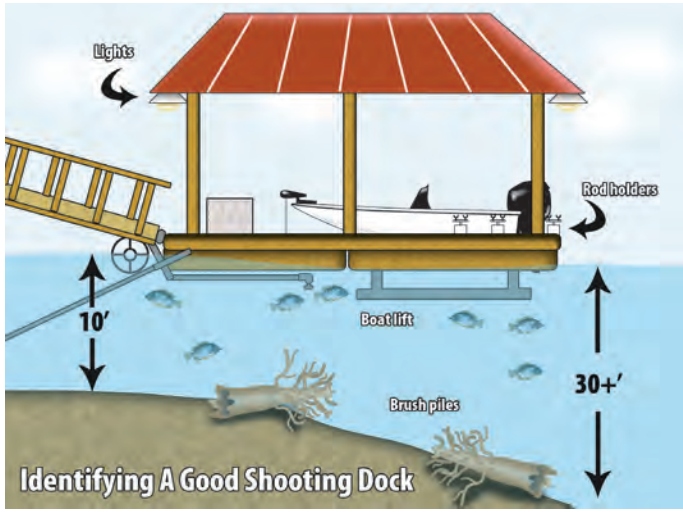
Boat docks come in two basic styles: floating docks and piers or pier docks. The big difference is a floating dock has little or no support structure attached to the bottom. A pier dock has vertical, and more often than not, supplemental diagonal and horizontal supports, for stability. The two styles of docks fish differently.

Some dock shooters prefer floating docks because there's no support structure under the dock to get hung up on. If the fish are under there, and you feel any kind of catch or tension on your line after you shoot the jig, you'll know pretty well it's a fish.

Piers can be more aggravating to shoot because of support pier and cross members, which may snag the jig on the fall or retrieve. However, more structure often means more fish.

Making a good shot is important, but what happens after the shot is just as important to detect bites. By using a 1/32-ounce, rubber-bodied jig, the bait sinks slowly and gives the fish a long time to look at it falling under the protected area. Any movement of the line — a pause, twitch or shudder — signals a crappie has inhaled the bait and the angler should set the hook.

The next few seconds are important to get the fish's head turned around and begin guiding the fish out of the heavy structure. ▪





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

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WINTER FINESSE TACTICS

Phillip Gentry



Slow and subtle is not just a bass fishing tactic when it come to winter or deep-water fishing; it works on crappie, too.

According to Tom Mundy, owner of Fish Stalker Lures in Laurens, S.C., the science behind finesse fishing for crappie in cold water is understanding that the colder the water gets, the tighter crappie will school on structure such as rocks, bridge pilings, submerged timber and brush piles.

Crappie won't move very far to take a bait, but some years ago, Mundy discovered that if you put that bait right in the fish's face, again and again, the action can be non-stop. Along with designing a whippy, lightweight rod for manufacturer B'n'M, Mundy also began producing tiny, shrimp-like slabtail finesse baits that could be fished on tiny 1/64-ounce jigheads.

Mundy uses the finesse tactic any time crappie are found in deep water, both spring and summer, but he has better success, in terms of the size of crappie caught during the winter.

"Boat positioning is real important," Mundy said, "You want to be right over the top of the brush. Some people frown on fishing under the trolling motor, but I'm fishing in 20 to 25 feet of water, and the trolling motor only goes down about 3 feet, so I don't view that as a potential disturbance to the fish below."

Mundy pays close attention to the line and his pole's sensitive tip as the jig sinks. Once it settles, he retrieves it using a slow, continuous turn of the reel handle.

"It took me a long time to distinguish between a bite and the jig bouncing off a limb," Mundy said. "The secret is watching the rod tip. When a crappie sucks the jig in, the rod will go from a limber bounce to a stiff look; that's when it's time to set the hook."

"You can also watch the line," he said. "The line will twitch long before you feel it with the rod, or it will start piling up in the water, which says the crappie sucked it in and is holding still while the line's still sinking." ▪

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STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

Target Kerr Lake slabs on the move



Guide Chris Bullock likes to target prespawn and postspawn crappie on Kerr Lake throughout April.

Chris Bullock

According to guide Chris Bullock of Fountain, N.C., Kerr Lake crappie will be on the move this month. While some early spawners will be leaving the shallow flats in the backs of the creeks, new arrivals will be coming in daily to fill their place. To take advantage of the transfer, Bullock aims to set up in the middle, catching them coming and going by long-line trolling.

"In April, I'll be targeting fish midway into the creeks, looking for them anywhere between 8 and about 18 feet deep" said Bullock, who runs Kerr Lake Crappie and Cats Guide Service. "First thing in the morning, I'll start out in the dead middle of the channel and look to see what I'm marking. If they're not in the channel, I'll move over to the ledge. If they're not on the ledge, I'll pull over next to the bank and run the shallow flat."

Depending on rainfall and water clarity, Bullock (252-902-4039) believes the bite to fire up faster in the northern creeks above Clarksville, Va. — Buffalo and Bluestone — and progress southward through the month. But if rain dirties the waters, these will be the first to experience it and force anglers down to mid-lake creeks like Grassy, Big Beaver Pond, and Panhandle. Eventually, the bite will wind up on the lower end in Butchers, Mill or Eastland, which is the lowest Bullock will long-line because the water there is too clear.

"When you're long-line trolling, you have to learn where your jigs are at what speed," Bullock said. "I'll run anywhere from 0.7 to 1.5 mph. That's the advantage over tight-lining — you can cover ground faster. At 0.7, a 1/16-ounce jig is running 9 to 10 feet deep. At 1.5, it's about 5 feet deep, but I only do that to check shallow water. Every time you speed up or slow down a tenth of a mile per hour, your jig will rise or fall 6 to 10 inches. You can go to a 1/32-ounce to run shallower on cloudy days."

Bullock pulls a spread of 8 to 12 rods and reels spooled with 6-pound monofilament. To put distance between the baits, he uses rods ranging from 6 to 16 feet in length, with the shortest closest to the transom. To start, he uses a wide range of jig colors and body styles — curly, straight and paddletail — and hones in what the fish are wanting. But his secret weapon is dying the minnows that tip his jigs with Pautzke Bait Company's chartreuse Fire Dye. ▪

— Dusty Wilson



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CHATLEE BOAT & MARINE

By Pat Robertson

FAST & FURIOUS

When blueback herring spawn on Lake Hartwell this month, striped bass and hybrid bass will pile into the shallows to gorge themselves. Be there when they get there, and you've got some fast action at hand.



Chip Hamilton admires a nice hybrid bass from Lake Hartwell.

Pat Robertson

It is nighttime — the crack of dawn is still an hour or more away — and South Carolina's Lake Hartwell is dark. Chip Hamilton points his boat straight at the bank of a point jutting out into the lake and revs the engine briefly to drive the bow up on the bank.

There are no boat lights nor any lights rigged to shine on the water near the boat, but Hamilton uses a small light in the boat to start baiting Carolina rigs with live blueback herring. One by one, four baits are cast out the back and off the sides of the boat. If the fish are there, the first rod will have a fish on before the fourth bait hits the water.

It's spring, and that means it is striper/hybrid bonanza time on Hartwell, the sprawling reservoir on the Savannah River along the South Carolina-Georgia border. >


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By dawn's early light, the feeding frenzy is beginning to wind down, but on a good day, that's fine, because the cooler is filled with limits of stripers and hybrids — and on a really good day, there will be a bonus of nice spotted bass and largemouth bass in the mixture.

"If you can get on a point where the fish are stacked up, a four-person limit of 40 fish is not a problem," said Hamilton, who runs Lake Hartwell Fishing Charters. "This kind of fishing can start as early as March, and I have seen it go all the way to the end of May and the first of June. Usually, it is wrapped up by the middle of May, but it will go into June if the water temperature has not gotten too hot."

The feeding frenzy starts to kick in, he said, when the water temperature hits the 60- to 62-degree mark and holds on until it gets into the low 70s.

"Once the water temperature gets into the 70s, that's when it begins to phase out," Hamilton said.

Red-clay banks are key for this bonanza, and there are two phases, he said.

"The first time we do it is when the fish are doing a false spawn," he said. "They will be up on the banks, and when you put a bait in front of them, they will readily take it. The second phase is when the baitfish, especially blueback herring, spawn. The fish move up onto the banks to eat them."

continues on page 56



Hybrid bass will mix in with stripers in April, as both species head shallow to take advantage of the herring and shad spawns.

Pat Robertson

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Bonus bass make for a **spring slam**

The primary targets for Lake Hartwell's early dawn, red-clay bank fishing are hybrids and stripers, but bonus spotted and largemouth bass can turn a great morning of fishing into a springtime slam.

"If the hybrids and stripers are there thick enough to catch a 20-fish box up to a limit of 40 fish, the catch usually is just stripers and hybrids," said guide Chip Hamilton, "but if there are not a lot of stripers and hybrids on a particular morning, we often fill out our limits with spotted and largemouth bass."

Hamilton doesn't know whether bass are schooling with the hybrids and stripers or just waiting their turn at the baitfish bunched up against the bank.

"I think it really just depends on how thick and aggressive the school of hybrids are. If the hybrids are thick and aggressively feeding, we usually don't catch any bass," he said. "Largemouths don't like to school with hybrids because of how aggressive they are, but spotted bass don't really care."

Typically, he said, the spotted bass catch occurs at the beginning of the feeding frenzy or at the end when the hybrids start to slow down.

"But usually, when there is a flurry of hybrid feeding, you don't catch any spots," he said. ▪



Largemouth and spotted bass may visit spreads of baits intended for stripers or hybrids in March.

Pat Robertson

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Patience is not a virtue

Fishing success often depends on being patient. You put your lines out, wait — and hope for a bite. But not when fishing the spring hybrid/striper feeding frenzy on Lake Hartwell.

"You have a small window to catch these fish," said guide Chip Hamilton. "We put the boat in a couple of hours before daylight, and it's over at good daylight. If the fish are there, you will know it in a few minutes."

In fact, Hamilton said, it is so automatic that he has developed a formula to determine if he has picked a good spot to fish.

"We bait the first rod and cast it out, and by the time we bait the fourth rod and cast it out and lean back against the console, if we don't have a bite, that is not good," he said. "I call it the 'cigarette rule.' Once the fourth rod is out, I tell my party to go ahead and light up a cigarette if they smoke. If we don't have a fish on by the time they finish the cigarette, we are moving."

If he has picked a good spot that morning, Hamilton said, once the egg sinkers on the Carolina rigs hit the water, they will have a fish on.

"Half the time, you don't get the fourth rod out before you are netting the first fish," he said.

It can be so automatic that if Hamilton has had repeated success on a particular point, he will have his fishing party hold their rods while he baits them, then he quickly casts them out without having to stop and put a bait on in between.

"If I feel that strong about a place, I want to have everyone ready before I cast the first rod out. It can be fast and furious," he said.

But sometimes, he said, after that first fish or two, the bite might slow down or stop for whatever reason.

"If we sit there for 15 minutes and don't get another bite, I reel in and leave. I know that on that particular pattern, I should be steady catching fish," he said. "You can't waste time being patient. If they are there, they are going to eat. If not, you have to move." ▪

Red clay will make your day

Location. Location. Location. The key to success for this springtime striper-hybrid fishing bonanza is a red-clay bank on a gently sloping point, Hamilton said.

"I believe that some of the mildly rocky points are good, but we don't pull up on them because the rocks just beat your baits to death."

Hamilton said one guide did pull up on a point with smaller, gravel-sized rocks and stabilized his boat with Power Poles away from the bank.

"He did very well on this point several days in a row, but I would not fish it because of the possibility of tearing my boat up on the rocks. It's just harder to fish a rocky bank unless you are using Power Poles."

The other advantage, Hamilton said, is that the red clay helps pinpoint which point and which sloping bank to pull up on.

"Why red clay is better than sand I don't know. I have caught them on sandy banks, but the sand was mixed in with the red clay."

And that is a critical factor. If there is no wind you can't pinpoint which bank to go to. But if there is a good wind rocking the bank, it creates a mud line and the baitfish will pull up into that mud line because they feel safer there, he added.

"Trial and error has shown that red clay is better than sand," Hamilton said. ▪

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Lake Hartwell straddles the border between Georgia and South Carolina on the Savannah, Tugaloo and Seneca rivers. The best access is via I-85 to areas around Clemson and Anderson. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, local governments, South Carolina and Georgia maintain boating facilities around the lake. For information visit: http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/About/Divisions-and-Offices/Operations-Division/Hartwell-Dam-and-Lake/Plan-A-Visit/Boating/

WHEN TO GO — Depending on water temperatures, the annual herring spawn, which triggers the striper/hybrid feeding frenzy along the banks, can begin in late March and last through late May, sometimes into early June.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Well before the first crack of dawn, run your boat up onto a red-clay bank to stabilize it, then cast live blueback herring on Carolina rigs behind and off the sides of the boat in less than 4 feet of water. If the bite is slow, move to another red-clay bank.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Chip Hamilton, Lake Hartwell Fishing Charters, www.lakehartwellfishingcharters.com, 864-304-9011. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Lake Hartwell Country, www.crownofthecarolinas.org/where-to-stay; Anderson Convention and Visitors Bureau, www.visitanderson.com/Lake-Hartwell;

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Pat Robertson

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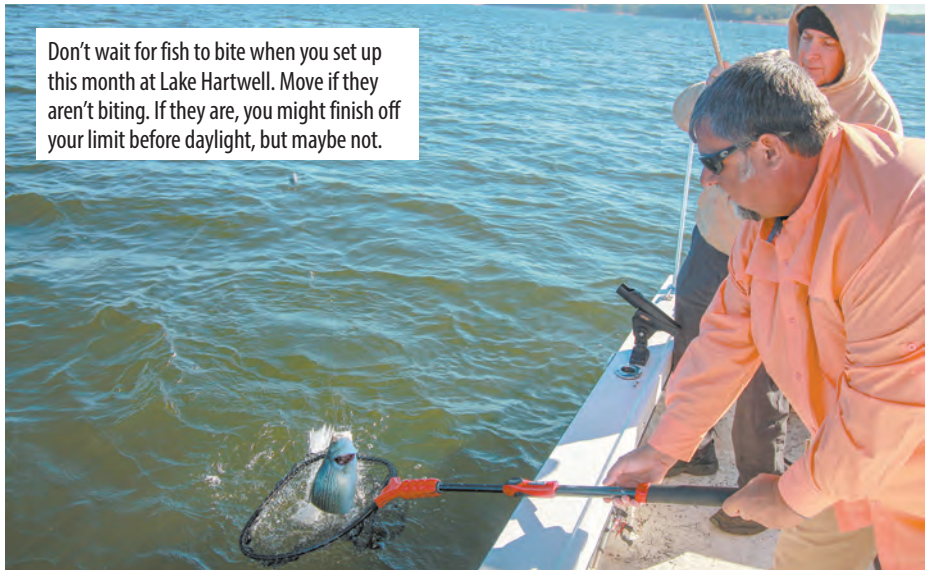
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Don't wait for fish to bite when you set up this month at Lake Hartwell. Move if they aren't biting. If they are, you might finish off your limit before daylight, but maybe not.

Hamilton prefers gently sloping, red-clay banks on points jutting out into the lake near deep water.

"I have caught them on rocky points and sandy points, but if I fish 10 points, at least eight of them will be red clay, and Hartwell is full of red clay," he said.

"The water your bait is in can be as shallow as 18 inches or even 4 feet deep, but not super deep. You want your baits sitting in about 2 to 4 feet with a decent cast. If you are on a deep point, that's not good, and if you are on a long, sloping point that is not good."

The ideal place to set up, he said, is a point where the water level goes out to just shy of 20 feet before it drops off into deeper water.

"That is the best situation," he said. "The fish patrol at 12 to 14 feet. When they see the bait up there near the bank, they ease up there and get it."

In fact, Hamilton said, there is no need to match the bait to the baitfish this time of year. Most of the baitfish are blueback herring, but smaller threadfin shad may be spawning up the creeks.

"If you are upriver and they are feeding on the smaller threadfins and you throw a 5- to 6-inch herring out there, they will eat it," he said. "The size of the bait doesn't matter that much; they are just ready to eat this time of year."

The basic rig for this type of fishing is a Carolina rig with an egg sinker and a 2-foot leader.

"The egg sinker hits the bottom, and the bait can swim around the sinker," he said. "If you cast it out into 2 feet of water, the bait can make it to the surface. All of a sudden, you hear the same sound when fish are schooling and one blows up on the bait. You know he ran that bait all the way to the end of the leader and got it. It's a real adrenaline rush to hear that and feel the rod bend with a hostile hybrid."

But the bank-bite feeding frenzy only lasts as long at darkness reigns, he said.

"The reason is because Hartwell is so clear for the most part. The sun makes them move out to deeper water for comfort and safety," said Hamilton, who believes some of the best action is just before the move. "A lot of times at the crack of daylight, they know the bait is ready to leave the bank, so they just absolutely gorge themselves. They know the easy feeding is about over.

"When the daylight is strong enough to turn off the light in the boat, you have about 20 more minutes to fish the bank. I will give it an extra 15 or 20 minutes to see if a big striper comes by in search of a quick meal. Many times, I've had some nice stripers come in right at daylight, 12- to 15-pound stripers, occasionally a 20-pounder."

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A heavy, overcast sky or even a little misty rain can prolong the bank bite a bit, Hamilton said, but eventually it will be over and he will back off to fish free-lines over a nearby ditch or pocket if his party has not already limited out.

The only way to describe the bank bite when the fish are in a feeding frenzy is "chaos," Hamilton said.

"The hybrids will be 2 to 3 pounds up to 8 or 9 pounds," he said. "A big hybrid is a real job up on the bank. It's harder to fight the fish on the bank versus straight down in deeper water because he is able to do more sideways fighting. But that is good for the customer; it's all about the fight."

It can be really chaotic when everybody on the boat is fighting a fish in that shallow water, he noted.

"On some of my more-exciting trips, we have had four fish on at a time," Hamilton said. "You just cast the rod out, turn the reel handle and hand it to the customer. If the fish are there, you just set the hook."

The pattern can be pretty consistent while the herring are spawning and hybrids and stripers are gorging in the shallow water, Hamilton said.

"If they are there one day, they will be there the next day — or not far from that spot," he said. "One spring, I fished one point, sitting in the same direction each day, and caught a limit for everyone on the boat for 13 trips in a row. That was several hundred hybrids just sitting in the same spot every morning." ▪



Pat Robertson *covered outdoors issues for more than 30 years for The State and The Columbia Record newspapers. Now retired, he is a full-time free-lancer living in Blythewood, S.C., where he and his wife, Jan, raise beagles and compete in field trials.*





HEAD TO THE DAM



Clarks Hill stripers gang up

Guide Tommy Dudley said big stripers are a good possibility at Clarks Hill Lake in April, especially close to the dam on the lower end.

Pat Robertson

Striper fishing this month on South Carolina's Clarks Hill Lake is pretty simple, according to guide Tommy Dudley of Plum Branch: go to the dam and get there early in the morning — very early.

"The fish stage up at the bottom of the lake in April, and the hot spot is Clarks Hill Dam, pure and simple," said Dudley (706-833-4807). "But you have to hit it early. You need to be there by absolute first light."

The pattern, he said, usually begins in late March and continues at least to the middle of April.

"There are tons and tons of fish down there at that time, and it gets pretty busy," he said. "Usually, they are suspended. They can be right out in the open water and right up against the rocks at first light — but they will be there."

When the bite is going good at the dam, Dudley said, there is another bite underway at the very opposite end of the lake

"The top end of the lake is tricky in the spring. There are a lot of fish up there, and there's a lot of spawning activity below Russell Dam, but the fishing is tricky depending on water flow through Russell Dam," he said. "You have to monitor it to see when there will be a good flow, but it can be another really good hot spot that time of year."

After the first couple of weeks of April the fish start moving away from the dam and heading up the lake.

"They start moving up the rivers, and you have to start moving and finding them up the rivers, the major tributaries coming into the main river channel. Go to the mouths of Little River, Keg Creek and the Lake Springs area," said Dudley, who normally finds fish in 20 to 30 feet of water, relating mostly to underwater hills with some in the actual creek ditches.

Traditionally, he said, the main pattern has been to pull live baits on planer boards, but for the last couple of years, he has concentrated mostly on fishing down lines.

"As always in the spring, you have to watch the weather patterns," Dudley said. "Cold fronts coming through will keep knocking the fish up and down. But the good thing in the spring is that the baits live well.

"And the other good thing is that you can catch limits of fish, plus it is a good time to catch some big, fat fish, quality fish." ▪

— Pat Robertson

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GET RED-Y FOR SPRING

By Jeff Burleson

WARMING WATER PUSHES REDFISH INTO A FEEDING MODE AFTER A LONG WINTER. HERE'S WHERE AND HOW TO FIND BRONZE BATTLERS READY FOR A SPRINGTIME TUSSLE.

Even though spring officially arrived last month, April is when spring fishing patterns visit coastal estuaries. Water temperature is the true barometer for spring fishing, and when they rise above 60 degrees, the waters up and down the coast of both Carolinas come alive.

Crabs emerge from the mud, and waterways get bombarded by the first platoons of peanut-sized pogies, aka menhaden — just what the doctor ordered for feisty redfish, who leave their winter stance and welcome new arrivals one mouthful at a time.

Anglers can get ready for April almost everywhere along the coast. From North Carolina's shallow Pamlico Sound, which experiences no lunar tide effects, to the 9-foot tide swing in Beaufort, S.C., habitats vary, and fishing options can seem just as puzzling. But the tactics that Jason Dail of Silver Spoon Charters uses in his backyard at Topsail Beach, N.C., won't be much different from those being used in Venice, La.

>

Jeff Burleson

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For Dail, who fishes redfish tournaments from his home state to Louisiana, fishing new water doesn't frighten him, because he has learned redfish behave similarly during spring no matter where they're swimming.

"Reds break up from their winter schools and leave their winter hideouts when it warms up," said Dail (910-540-0319). "During the winter, reds are either around the inlets, along the beach or congregated in the back of creeks in large schools."

Water temperature is the driving factor for changes in patterns and fish movements no matter their location. Not only does warming water rev up a redfish's engines, it fires up the movement of bait, and Dail thinks bait is a key factor in all redfish movement.

"The reds leave their large schools and are on the move in the spring, looking for food," he said. "The peanut pogies show up first from both the ocean and the waterway. Redfish move towards these main waters to feed."

No matter where he's fishing, Dail checks the water temperature and prepares his game plan accordingly. Warming water sends him to the mouths of creeks, primary creek banks, waterway banks and other places between the ocean and the backs of creeks. Dail will start at both ends and work his way towards each other.

"First thing I do is look for life and then structure in these areas. Both the bait and redfish will associate with structure of some kind," he said. "When you find the bait, the redfish will be there or very close by, ready to feed."

Once he's found the kind of area he wants to fish, it's fishing as usual, with normal tactics back in play.

"It's oyster bars, rocks, docks, structure or grass lines, and usually in shallow places less then 3 feet deep," he said. "I fish around these structures until I find a taker to develop a pattern, and then you can reproduce it somewhere else."

Jeff Wolfe of Sea Hawk Inshore Charters has fished North Carolina's lower Cape Fear River for more than 40 years, and he loves spring fishing.

continued >

Finding concentrations of bait moving through inlets and into inshore areas is a good start to catching a nice redfish.



Jeff Burleson

SPRING'S DEADLY COMBO

With warm water pulling redfish out of their winter patterns and accelerating their activity levels, they're looking all around for a meal, and anything they see or hear will turn some heads.

That's what makes the popping cork a surefire way to get a redfish's attention in spring.

Not only do popping corks suspend lures and baits over structure, the chugging and clacking sounds and vibrations reverberate throughout the surrounding waters. Reds aggressively looking for a meal will respond quickly.

Popping corks mimic fish feeding at or near the surface, and predators are drawn to the noise, then see a fish or shrimp barely moving, just below the commotion. That's often too much for the redfish to ignore.

A popping cork rig consists of a cone-shaped cork rigged on a stiff wire with beads on either end, leading to a section of fluorocarbon leader and a lure or bait. Live shrimp or minnows, or an artificial lure such as a D.O.A. shrimp or soft-plastic shad-bodied option on a light jighead.

The leader needs to be short enough to keep the lure near the area of commotion, and a short leader also makes it easier to make long, accurate casts. Regardless of the depth, the leader should be about 24 inches long.



Jeff Burleson

A popping-cork rig fished over structure will fool plenty of spring reds.

For anglers who want ready made rigs, D.O.A. sells its Deadly Combo rig: a popping cork pre-rigged with 24 inches of fluorocarbon leader and a 3-inch shrimp. It will stimulate all senses and produce a quick reaction bite right during the spring frolic. ▪

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"Reds are moving out towards bigger water, and we have lots of shallow oyster bars and structure right near their wintering grounds," said Wolfe (910-619-9580). "They become perfect places to catch them in the spring when it warms up. I don't have to look very far for them in the spring. They are typically in the same places each year when it transitions to the spring."

Experience in a core area gives anglers an edge on knowing where to go first in the spring. Both Dail and Wolfe prefer the lower stages of the tide between the last half of the fall and the first few hours of the rise.

"The fish are bunched up a little more. The bait and fish don't have as many places to go that give us an advantage," Wolfe said.

"Small crabs don't leave the estuary in the winter like their older relatives. They dig into the mud instead, and they will dig out during the spring. There are lots of little crabs around. Redfish just love crabs and will eat these little guys on a regular basis."



The lower end of the tide cycle will concentrate bait and other forage that redfish thrive on in the spring.

Jeff Burleson

Wolfe uses a wide variety of baits and lures during the spring: live bait, dead bait and an assortment of artificial options. He said live mud minnows, peanut pogies, blue crabs and frozen shrimp are hard for a redfish to resist. He'll fish these baits on a Carolina rig or a light jighead. When using artificial lures, Wolfe will choose scented soft plastics.

Dail will use live bait on occasion, but small artificial lures are his primary weapons; working them with less action and speed are another key to spring success.

"Fish will already be feeding on small baits, and bait will be moving a little slower than normal, too," he said. "I choose pogie patterns with paddletails like Saltwater Assassin's 3-inch Sea Shad rigged weedless on a 1/16- to 1/4-ounce swimbait hook. Chicken on a chain, grey ghost and opening night are my favorite colors."

Dail prefers swimbait hooks because he can fish them around structure more easily. Jigheads alone can be structure magnets, and this time of year when sea lettuce is releasing, the jigheads often collect plenty of it. ▪



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.



Spinnerbaits can be fished relatively slowly when spring redfish are the targeted species.

Jeff Burleson

FRESHWATER LURES ARE GOOD SPRING CHOICES

Saltwater tackle and lures make up a big portion of the fishing industry, but they don't match what is manufactured to catch largemouth bass, lures that regularly fly off store shelves.

While many bass lures are designed to mimic small shad, they are very similar to the size, shape, and color of small menhaden, aka peanut pogies — the primary spring diet of redfish. Anglers can use a wide selection of freshwater lures and get a big reaction.

Face it, redfish are the largemouth bass of the saltwater lair; they're even known as spot-tail bass in many South Carolina locales. But redfish can be a little sluggish coming out of the winter, especially if the water is still running a little cool. Jason Dail of Silver Spoon Charters out of Wilmington, N.C., prefers to use lures that mimic the size and action of the available spring forage.

"The smaller the lure, the better in the spring, and then I size up as the summer arrives," Dail said. "I also fish slower in the spring, too, and then increase the speed over the summer."

One of Dail's favorite spring crossover lures is a spinnerbait. Not only does a spinnerbait produce a lot of flash and vibration, it can be retrieved very slowly.

"Betts' Magnum Spinnerbait with No. 1 and No. 2 Colorado blades are very effective in spring," he said.

In addition to spinnerbaits, many other bass lures that provide a perfect imitation for peanut pogies moving at a slow speed. Since anglers are fishing in shallow water around structure, shallow-running and suspending hard baits are perfect options for imitating small saltwater baitfish. Berkley's 3-inch Juke and the its 2¾-inch Flicker Shad look almost exactly like a peanut pogie, and both can be fished slowly and just below the surface, over the top of oyster bars where the redfish hang out. ■



Brian Cope



SPOON-FEEDING SPRING REDFISH

Spring redfish are on the lookout for the baitfish and shrimp that are arriving in inshore waters, and they'll be feeding aggressively, which makes a spoon a great lure to throw.

THE VENERABLE JOHNSON SILVER MINNOW IS HARD TO BEAT FOR APRIL INSHORE ACTION

According to Aaron Beatson, a fishing guide from Kill Devil Hills, N.C., he doesn't leave the dock in the spring without a handful of one type of simple lure. The Johnson Silver Minnow gold spoon is his go-to redfish tricker. He said it's an easy lure for anyone to use, and it's just deadly on red drum of all sizes early in the spring.

"It's a cast-and-retrieve type of lure. You don't have to do anything special for it to work," said Beatson, who runs Carolina Sunrise Inshore Fishing Specialist Charters. "A twitch here and there doesn't hurt, but you basically just need to crank it in and let the lure do the work for you.

"Everything, including operating the boat, is simple when fishing this lure. You just find a piece of real estate, like a large flat that has sandy or grassy bottom, preferably in water that's 1½ to 2 feet deep, position the boat so that the wind will push you across the entire area, turn the motor off, and start casting."

On especially windy days, Beatson ties a 5-gallon bucket to the bow of his boat and another to the stern. They act as drift socks, slowing his 20-foot skiff's sideways drift to a reasonable speed. And when the wind isn't kicking, he allows the wind to carry his boat.

"Ideally, you want four anglers on the boat," he said. "Two of them will stand on the front — or whatever part of the boat is positioned forward. They'll cast spoons with the wind as far as they can, into the area that the boat hasn't passed over yet. Then they crank it back in. They can burn it in, or they can reel it steady.

"I like 2500 to 3000 (class) spinning reels and flimsy rods. You can cast these lures a mile with that setup: 10- to 20-pound braided line and a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader that's about 2 feet long."

And while he keeps things simple, Beatson said he does add one thing to the lure that many anglers don't think about doing.

"I add a small red or orange bead directly in front of where the knot connects to the lure. It does two things. It acts as



Johnson Silver Minnow

an attractant with its bright color, and it also keeps the knot from picking up grass. It's a small thing that makes a big difference in a day of fishing," he said.

While the two anglers up front are casting spoons, Beatson said a third casts a popping cork with a 3-inch Gulp swimming mullet under it.

"That popping cork really attracts the red drum and brings them in," he said. "The popping sound gets them in a feeding mood."

The fourth angler is casting either a spoon or a popping cork rig.

"Some days, it takes two popping corks working together to really give off the impression that a bunch of shrimp are in the area and flicking their tails," Beatson said. "Those guys with the popping corks will catch some drum, but some will also come around to investigate the noise, and end up hitting those spoons. It can really start a feeding frenzy."

Anglers should also always be on the lookout for disturbances or swirls in the water's surface. Those are telltale signs of feeding redfish, and they'll often hit a well-placed spoon. Those swirls, Beatson said, are always worth casting to.

"Sometimes they'll hit it immediately, and you better be ready for it," he said. ▪



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.*



When big reds are present, put away your lighter tackle. Long fights on lighter tackle can put too much stress on fish whose release is required.

Aaron Beatson

BEEF UP FOR BIG REDS

While he enjoys fishing this way with the lighter tackle mentioned above, Aaron Beatson said on some days, you have to beef up your gear. It all depends on what size fish are present.

"All sizes of red drum will hit these spoons, and you can catch some really big ones. Fifty-pound drum will hit it, and they'll wear your gear out, spool you, break rods, and even if you are able to land them, it will wear them out past the point that you should.

"These fish are old trophies, and you don't want to cause them any harm. So you really need to beef up if you're getting hit by these old drum. On some trips, I've switched to straight cobia gear with these lures when the big drum are hitting."





Spot-tail bass, aka redfish, hit the spring hungry after a winter in the ocean, and they move into Georgetown's estuaries in April with a big appetite.

Jeff Burleson

SPRING SPOT-TAILS

fill Georgetown's estuaries

Spring kicks off along this month for inshore anglers in the Georgetown area, with spot-tail bass fired up and feeding at will.

Matt Bellamy of Captain Matt's Saltwater Charters is especially excited about this spring's fishing season in his area because of Georgetown's fishing history.

"April and May are stellar months for catching spot-tails. Out of five trips between the middle of April last year and Mother's Day, we landed over 400 fish," said Bellamy (843-568-8203). "They are in schools moving in from the ocean and are hungry for about anything."

Spot-tail bass, aka redfish, spend the winter in two places: the ocean or holes in the backs of creeks. As the water begins to warm, baitfish become more plentiful, which can create a feeding frenzy in the estuaries. Since the majority of baitfish are moving in, areas close to the ocean become feeding zones.

Bellamy lives in Pawley's Island, but he will trailer to Georgetown region to fish North Inlet, Mother Norton, Santee Delta, or even as far south as Cape Romain.

"The bait is moving in from the ocean, and the redfish are hungry ready to eat about anything," he said. "I like to set up on oyster bars, creek mouths or other places that create rips in water around 3 feet deep on the incoming tide. The rising water seems to bring the bait in, and the fish just take advantage of the situation."

Later, spot-tails will spread out as the bait filters into the estuaries, but until then, fish can be caught in places near the confluence with the ocean off the main rivers and sounds.

Bellamy's favorite bait is a mud minnow fished under a float.

"I start off using mud minnows until they get fired up, and then we switch to artificial lures most of the time," he said.

Bellamy uses a variety of soft plastics that resemble small baitfish, but he will also use crab imitations during the spring molting season. Blue crabs molt every month, with the largest molting period in April and May, and spot-tail bass take full advantage of the plethora of soft crabs available.

Soft crabs can be purchased at many seafood markets during the spring. Anglers can get three to four baits out of each crab, and there isn't a spot-tail that will not eat a soft crab. ■

— Jeff Burleson

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Jeff Burleson



PLOTTING TO PLANT A PLOT

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION CAN'T BE OVERSTRESSED

A great food plot of clover or another wildlife food crop needs to be located with the utmost care.

Jeff Burleson

Ever heard the marketing claim of "Location, location, location"? Professionals follow proven techniques to make products and services for the companies they represent more attractive to others.

Location dynamics is a high priority for marketing professionals, and for landowners building food plots and waterfowl impoundments, it couldn't be more important. It is critical and should always be examined thoroughly before making investments of time and finances.

Location is important in more ways than one. Often, those planting food plots and building impoundments can get off track in the beginning, and that causes issues later in the process that can thwart a happy outcome. Even though a heavily used plot teeming with wildlife is the typically the anticipated outcome, food production must be the primary goal. Abundant food resources will lead to wildlife arriving and making hunters excited to see the fruits of their labor. Killing a good buck or longbeard is just a bonus.

Finding a good location on the property that deer and turkeys will like is definitely a big aspect in locating food plots. Places screened from major highways and other disturbances will give wildlife a sense of security. Food plots located in or adjacent to normal travel corridors can also get a lot of use by targeted species. Plot configuration or shape can play an important role in how wildlife utilizes these areas during the daylight hours.

But location and configuration of a food plot isn't only about the best place a hunter believes they can see the most deer activity during daylight. It is important where food plots are placed on the property with respect to habitat, but the specific site conditions can be a major limiting factor between a high-traffic food plot and the desert.

IT'S NOT THAT EASY

For anybody who has experimented with food plots understands the hurdles and difficulties involved with amateur agriculture. Growing plants can seem easy, but it can be a difficult process, especially when the site conditions are less than ideal.

Ask a farmer; all sites need soil amendments, and many need some sort of drainage alterations. Some need more amendments and care than others. Drainage and soil chemistry characteristics should always be a major part to any potential site.

The foundation for any food plot must be proper soil conditions, as well as access to water, air and sufficient sunlight. Plants are living organisms that convert the sun's rays into energy in preferred environments. Plants need a pH-balanced environment with enough nutrient supplementation, adequate soil-moisture retention and enough air penetration in the upper soil horizons to promote root respiration. When a site has all the right stuff and Mother Nature cooperates, farming can be successful.

Landowners should select a few places that would work within their habitat plan. Places with loamy soils — a mixture of all soil-particle textures — are generally the best with adequate drainage.

Soils come in three basic textures: sand, clay and silt. The difference in soil texture is mostly a function of particle size.

Sand particles are generally the largest, allowing water to flow easily around the particles. But on sandy sites, the water can drain too quickly, causing plant roots to dry out and die.

Clay and silt particles are extremely small and naturally adhere to each other easily and hold moisture. Silts and clays will stick together, forming tight connections that can inhibit water drainage. Soils that are all clay usually hold water too long and can be problematic as well.

Most natural soils are combinations of two or more of the three basic soil particles, but a loam is a mixture of all soil types and can be the best of all. Loams allow soils to retain enough water, keeping it moist but not allowing it to dry too quickly. Loams are ideal for growing most crops.

Landowners should choose potential food plot sites that are predominantly loams with the ability to control the water retention, with small ditches and swales to remove water when it's not needed.

A pH test of each potential area is the second step in testing for compatibility with the intended crop plans. Most crops can be grown with a pH approaching neutral or at least above a 5.0.

When all of these factors are controlled, hunters can grow something that wildlife want to eat. When all of the conditions are correct, it can seem very simple to grow out a lush and hearty food plot. And not only will the crops grow well, the wildlife will surely come to feast. ▪

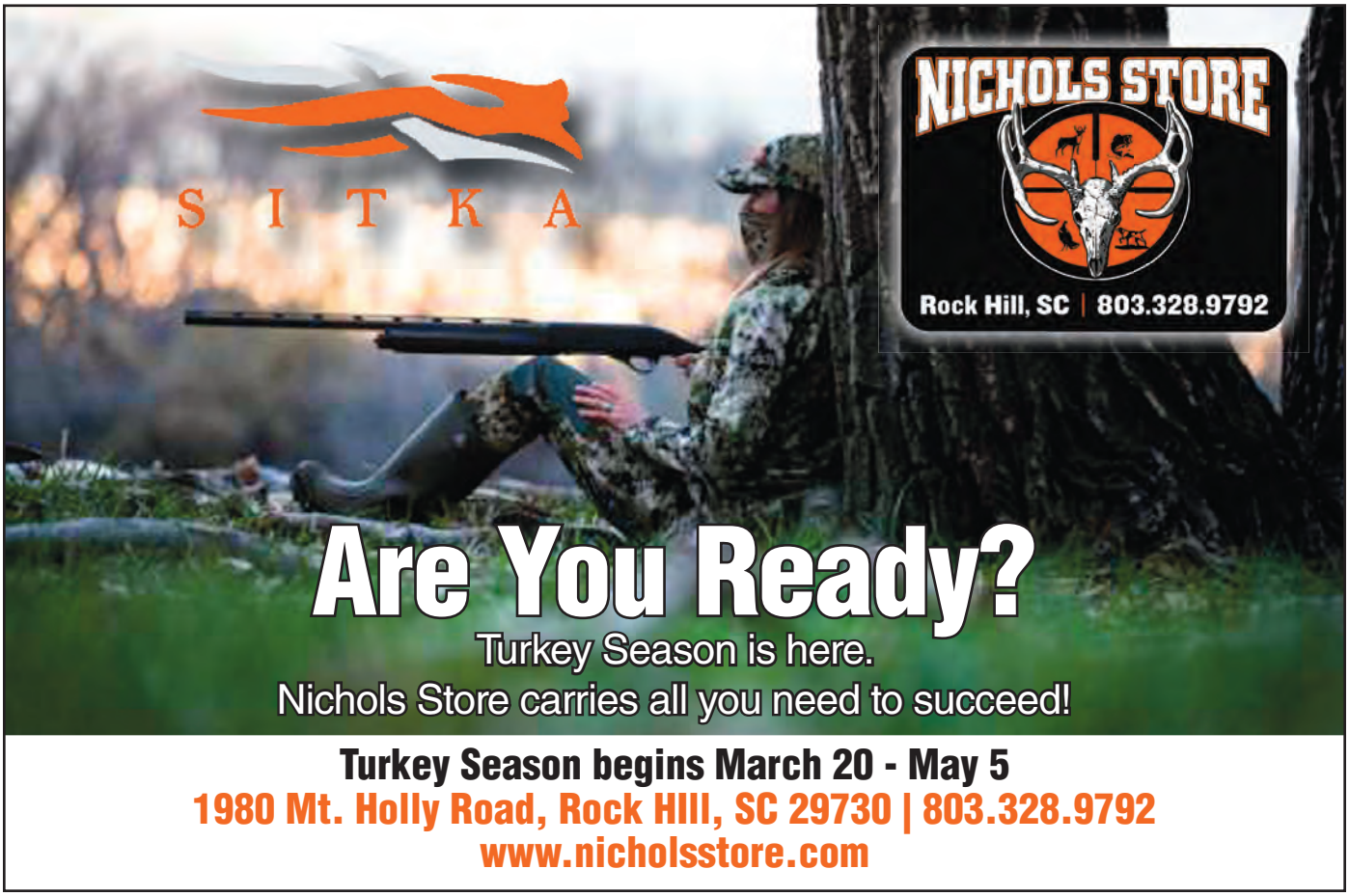


Jeff Burleson *is a native of Lumberton, N.C., who lives in Myrtle Beach, S.C. He graduated from N.C. State University and is a certified biologist and professional forester for Southern Palmetto Environmental Consulting.*



Jeff Burleson

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THE BEST IMPOUNDMENT SITES MIGHT SURPRISE YOU



Good soils, good drainage and available water are concerns involved in choosing a waterfowl impoundment site.

Jeff Burleson

Out of the 15 million hunters across the nation, it comes as no surprise that deer is the most-popular species hunted. But more than 2 million hunt ducks, and hunters spend a ton of money, making duck meat one of the most expensive morsels of protein on the planet in terms of cost per pound.

From the marshes, lakes, rivers and swamps to the grain fields of the midwest, hunters kill ducks in a wide variety of places. Duck impoundments are a surefire way to concentrate ducks, and landowners with the means can make one heck of duck hole if constructed in the right place.

What makes a good duck impoundment anyway? Just like food plots, duck impoundments must be placed in areas that can receive ducks. Luckily, if ducks can travel from Canada to the Carolinas and further south, they sure are capable of traveling the extra mile for the right reasons. A consistent food source without too much hunting pressure will allow ducks to collect and grow in numbers on an annual basis.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that impoundments need to be placed in lowlands to attract ducks. Building an impoundment along a natural drainage way can make flooding the site easy, but it also creates several legal and practical concerns.

In most instances, the lower section of a site along drainages is associated with federally-protected wetlands and natural streams. The Clean Water Act of 1972 prohibits filling and mechanized clearing in these areas. Beyond the legal ramifications, it's nearly impossible to completely dry out these places to functionally cultivate and grow a crop for ducks. And low areas are subject to mid-season floods from rains that can destroy a crop before it's ready to flood.

The best sites are places that are a little higher in elevation that don't flood naturally and have good, loamy soils, with a clay loam being the best choice so impoundments can not only support crops but hold water during the winter.

Impoundments need to be built with a series of connected ditches; borrow material can be used to build perimeter dikes. The lowest section will need an outlet and mechanism to contain and release water. Impoundments can be filled with pumps, transporting from a nearby water source or a groundwater well properly installed for water on-demand.

Too many landowners get distracted with the need to build an impoundment in the lowlands when crop production should be the most-important aspect. If built on higher ground in soils that have the capability to retain water, adding and removing water shouldn't be of any concern because water wells and a good drainage system can take care of these concerns very easily. ■



2019 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 30, 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.

2019 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.

Terry Madewell



TARGET SANTEE'S APRIL TRIUMVERATE

SHELLCRACKERS, STRIPERS, BASS ARE IN FULL-ON FEED

Shellcrackers are easy to identify by their markings; the ear flap will have a light-colored outline.

Fishermen flood the Santee Cooper lakes this month to sample the sensational shallow-water action that ranks among the best of the year. With warming water temperatures, the spawning urge heightens for multiple species, and an influx of high-quality forage such as herring into the shallows creates ideal shallow water opportunities.

SHALLOW SHELLCRACKERS

Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie harbor some of the best shellcracker fishing in the world, and these huge panfish often begin spawning earlier than bluegills. When weather and water conditions are ideal, they'll sometimes begin to bed in March, but by April they are typically spawning throughout the lakes.

Shellcrackers have a tendency to spawn very shallow, and occasionally, anglers won't search quite shallow enough. They prefer sandy, gravel bottoms and often get in water so shallow their fins are barely covered. With water conditions normal, the beds can often be seen.

The best technique is to use a lightweight, 10- to 12-foot pole with some backbone near the butt, get into the cypress swamps and fish along the edges of grassbeds and around the trees, stumps and logs. While working the grass or pad edges, flip your bait into any hole or pocket back in the weedy growth. Shellcrackers will often bed back in the weeds when spawning. If you catch a shellcracker along a weedy edgeline, don't move on without working nearby shallower water.

The bait of choice for experienced Santee Cooper shellcracker fishermen is a red worm. Some thread them onto the hook and use it as a single, wiggling morsel, while others hook a couple worms in the middle to leave multiple ends of worms dangling. Shellcrackers will take either, but on some days, one may work better than the other.

Most shellcracker experts recommend using a slip float so depths can be adjusted quickly and work the shallows until you find the beds. Fish until the action slows and repeat the process.

STRIPERS ON THE MOVE

Stripers will begin their spawning migration during March, but April is typically the time when fish really begin to flood into the upper reaches of Lake Marion.

A large area of the Santee River in upper Lake Marion offers potentially great action, with the area from Packs Landing up and down the river channel, being a prime area to target. Stripers are migrating upstream on their spawning run and are more accessible when confined in the main run of Santee River channel and also far up both the Congaree and Wateree rivers.

According to guide Steve Pack at Packs Landing, stripers tend to move up the river and typically will be found along the edge of the channel.

"We'll anchor on bends in the river and along shallow shoals that drop into the deeper water," he said. "Typically, we'll have plenty of current, so we'll cast our rigs downstream and give the fish 20 to 30 minutes at each area. Sometimes, we'll catch a few, then have to move but some days the action remain steady all morning from a single spot. It's a pattern we have to determine daily."

Pack (803-452-5514) said fishing holes and drops in the flats will sometimes produce as well. The bait of choice for stripers

is the big herring that migrate into the lakes every spring.

"A bonus when fishing the herring, live or cut, is we catch some huge catfish," he said. "We're targeting stripers, but by fishing herring on and near the bottom, we get plenty of catfish bites and some of the fish are huge."

WILD, SHALLOW BASS

By April, largemouth bass are literally in prespawn, spawn and postspawn modes, meaning a wide diversity of cover can be productive. The common denominator for all three patterns is the action is in shallow water.

Guide Brett Mitchell, who works out of Blacks Camp, said it's likely that more bass are active in shallow water than at any other time of the year.



BONUS FISH:
Catfish are a bonus when fishermen target striped bass in the upper reaches of Lake Marion this month, fishing cut herring on the bottom.

"With the diversity of patterns during April, the opportunity to target (your) favorite type of fishing is excellent," he said. "Anglers can work any lure from topwaters to bottom bumpers and everything in between and find bass willing to bite."

Mitchell (803-379-7029) said he'll cover a lot of water during April, working cypress and gum trees, weed edges, depressions and flooded ditches that course through shallow flats are all potentially productive.

"With plenty of bass still bedding this month, the potential for huge fish is still excellent," he said. "But we'll also have some great action on staging prespawn fish and postspawn bass roaming the shallows." ▪



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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Photo: Cajun Guide Service

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Robert Satterwhite



LOOKING FOR A BROWN-OUT

Streams at lower elevations, with less gradient are perfectly suited to brown trout, which grow larger than their rainbow and brown trout cousins.

THIS EUROPEAN IMPORT HAS CHANGED THE WAY TROUT FISHERMEN PLY THEIR CRAFT ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

When it comes to trout fishing, brown trout are the kings. They grow bigger, live longer, fight harder and are more difficult to catch than brook and rainbow trout.

Beautifully colored and easy to identify, they have golden brown sides, bright yellow bellies and dark and red spots liberally sprinkled on their backs and sides. The English priest-poet Gerard Manley Hopkins called the spots "rose moles" in one of his poems.

Although widely distributed in the West and East, browns are not native to North America. They're native to Europe and eastern Asia and were brought to the United States in 1883. Fred Mather, a New York fisheries biologist, acquired brown trout eggs from Germany and Scotland and placed them in hatcheries in New York and Michigan. Some fishers still refer to brown trout as "German browns." The fish eventually were distributed throughout North America.

Browns adapted well to their new habitat and thrived in conditions less suitable for rainbow and brook trout, particularly silted and low-gradient streams.

Unlike brook and rainbow trout, which have short life spans of 3 to 4 years, brown trout can live up to 20 years. The downside is that fewer than 20 percent of browns survive after spawning in the fall.

RECORD KEEPING

The state record for a brown trout caught in North Carolina waters is 24 pounds, 10 ounces, from the Nantahala River. The section of the river that produced the record brown is stocked, delayed-harvest waters, so the record brown was likely a hatchery-raised fish that had survived several seasons. The state record for a brown trout in South Carolina is 17 pounds, 10 ounces, caught in Lake Jocassee; this one, no doubt, was a wild brown. The world record is



BIGGER IS BETTER:
Don't be afraid to target brown trout with bigger lures or flies. Browns, especially big ones, feed on larger baitfish, crustacaens and terrestrials than either brook trou tor rainbows.

40 pounds, 4 ounces, caught in the Little Red River in Arkansas in 1990.

With a few exceptions, wild trout streams throughout western North Carolina and Upstate South Carolina contain a mix of rainbow and brown trout. The bigger browns thrive in large valley streams, subsisting primarily on crawfish, salamanders, sculpins, and similar aquatics.

THE BROWNEST WATERS

Prime brown trout streams in North Carolina are the Nantahala River, Toe River, Big Snowbird Creek, Davidson River, Hazel Creek (lower section), Tanasee and Forney Creek (lower section). The Catawba River in Burke County from Muddy Creek to the Morganton city intake dam is classified as special-regulation waters and regularly produces trophy browns. Creel limit is two trout per day 14 inches or longer. Fishing is permitted year-round, and the stream has no bait restrictions.

The best brown trout fishery in South Carolina, by far, is Lake Jocassee in Pickens and Oconee counties. Jocassee's browns average 3 to 5 pounds; other prime brown trout steams are the lower Saluda River below Dreher Falls and the lower Chattooga River.

Best places to catch browns are undercut banks, around downed trees and around rock ledges. Brown trout also favor large, murky pools. Best time to fish for browns is late afternoon and early evening when the sun is off the water. Browns also are active after a storm and are less spooky than normal.

To catch big browns, use big flies, spinners and lures. Big streamers such as Woolly Buggers and sculpin patterns are effective, as are lures simulating crawfish and minnows. During the summer, large terrestrial patterns work well, particularly grasshopper and junebug patterns.

Fishing for browns requires much patience and leg work, but the reward of hooking a big brown is worth every bit of the effort. ▪



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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This 27½-inch speckled trout fell to a Texas Custom Lures MirrOlure Double D, a new subsurface lure.

NEAR-SURFACE BAITS FOR "ALMOST TOPWATER"

THESE LURES WILL TEMPT SPECKS THAT WON'T QUITE "TOP OUT"

Christopher Bush

For those new to the column, I mentioned earlier that I'll be discussing lures and techniques in an ascending manner. Remaining true to form, we explored the middle part of the water column with various jerkbaits, and as we progress to the surface, I would be remiss if I didn't discuss the zone just below the top.

Year after year at about this time, anglers start to unveil a seemingly neglected box of topwater plugs. Split-ring pliers and fresh hooks often accompany a cold beverage of choice to the serenade of a Spotify playlist on workbenches or boats. Along those same lines, experience on the water proves that fish may not be as eager to reward our spirited intent. To help bridge that gap, insert this month's discussion.

The 6 to 8 inches of water just below the surface can be extremely productive if fished effectively and with specific purpose. Short strikes and swirls often confirm lack of fish commitment to surface baits, but providing the right lure targeting those mere inches remains invaluable.

Three lures that help you fish that part of the water column efficiently are the Borboleta Lele, the Texas Custom Lures' MirrOlure Double D and the tried-and-true MirrOlure 7M.

BORBOLETA LELÉ

Produced by a company in Brazil, Borboleta's self-proclaimed, most-famous lure is the Lelé. At 3 inches, it's smaller in stature than the other two, but this bait not only produces plenty of bites, but big ones as well. Outfitted with No. 4 treble hooks and weighing ⅜-ounce, it's unique shape provides not only a great profile, but excellent action. Designed to be twitched down on a steady two-count cadence, the bait darts downward approximately 8 to 10 inches and floats back to the top. It can be fished on an accelerated walk-the-dog cadence, but most bites come on the pause as the bait retreats back to the surface. Speaking of floating back to the surface, the Lelé is slower than a 7M but faster than the Double D. In other words, if you wanted a smaller profile offering with an exaggerated ascent profile, this bait gives you that capability.



Borboleta Lelé

MIRROLURE 7M

The angling world is fortunate that the 7M exists. Decades ago, experienced anglers wouldn't be caught without the "topwater" capability of this ever-so-consistent bait, but somewhere along the way, we lost our appreciation for this lure's fishability. On a recent trip, I asked Dr. Jay Wright, who holds three line-class, fly-rod world records for speckled trout, "What is your favorite artificial lure to throw when looking for big fish?"

Without hesitation, he said, "a 7M", then reached under the gunwale of his flats boat and pulled out a spinning rod outfitted with a 7M in a mullet pattern.

For those that haven't fished this bait or know its capability, it's very similar to the Lelé, but its ascent rate is very fast. In other words, from the time your stop your twitch cadence, the bait retreats to the surface in less than half a second.

Having said that, this bait provides an exceptional offering and perfect solution to connecting with those fish that remain uncommitted to eating a surface plug. Unlike the other baits, its carries three sets of treble hooks, which can be cumbersome, but can be adjusted. As


MirrOlure 7m

stated, the 7M is the subsurface extension of a topwater since it ascends so quickly, and a great "stand-by" option on less committed topwater fish.

DOUBLE D

Newer in terms of packaging and sales, this lure is the most recent to hit the market. Many anglers outside of Texas have yet to see the Double D, let alone fished it exclusively. When I saw and understood this lure's capability, it was a no-brainer, and it started producing some large fish.

At first glance, people confuse the Double D with a MirrOlure MirrOdine XL (27MR) since its profile is exactly the same. But the internal mechanism is different, and instead of sinking like the 27MR, the Double D floats back to the top after an angler's twitch cadence. This lure has the slowest ascent rate of the three, as well as dive depth, 9 to 12 inches.

The majority of the bites come on the exaggerated pause, which can be upwards of 3 seconds before surfacing. In other words, this bait is a great cold-water offering or when a more pronounced, below-the-surface profile is to be achieved. Having said that, do not be fooled by its slow fishability. Big fish in

Texas Custom Lures
MirrOlure Double D



water temperatures as cold as 53 degrees have completely engulfed these baits at or near the surface after an exaggerated pause, and they do so with authority. Bottom line, add this lure to compliment your topwater arsenal when fish won't commit; it's the easiest decision you'll ever have to make.

In a nutshell, below-the-surface twitch baits provide the perfect hybrid capability for those finicky spring topwater trout. If you haven't explored these types of baits or their capabilities, I encourage you to do so and don't forget about those critical inches just below the top — it can pay huge dividends. ▪



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.*

ASTRO TABLES

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

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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

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2019 APR

	BEST DAYS POOR FAIR GOOD EXCL VALUE	LUNAR PERIODS (TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED) MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Mon 1	24	5:21 am	10:05 am - 11:31 am	4:19 pm	10:30 pm - 11:56 pm	
Tue 2	36	5:54 am	10:42 am - 12:20 pm	5:14 pm	11:07 pm - 12:45 am	
Wed 3	48	6:24 am	11:18 am - 1:10 pm	6:10 pm	11:43 pm - Midnight	
Thu 4	62	6:54 am	11:53 am - 2:01 pm	7:06 pm	Midnight - 1:35 am	
Fri 5	70	7:23 am	12:27 pm - 2:53 pm	8:03 pm	12:18 am - 2:26 am	NEW
Sat 6	63	7:54 am	1:04 pm - 3:44 pm	9:02 pm	12:52 am - 3:18 am	
Sun 7	58	8:26 am	1:42 pm - 4:38 pm	10:01 pm	1:29 am - 4:09 am	
Mon 8	51	9:02 am	2:24 pm - 5:34 pm	11:03 pm	2:07 am - 5:03 am	
Tue 9	49	9:42 am	3:11 pm - 6:31 pm		2:49 am - 5:59 am	
Wed 10	51	10:28 am	4:02 pm - 7:28 pm	12:04 am	3:36 am - 6:56 am	
Thu 11	57	11:20 am	4:57 pm - 8:27 pm	1:05 am	4:27 am - 7:53 am	HIGH
Fri 12	68	12:19 pm	5:57 pm - 9:23 pm	2:04 am	5:22 am - 8:52 am	HALF
Sat 13	58	1:23 pm	6:58 pm - 10:18 pm	2:58 am	6:22 am - 9:48 am	
Sun 14	52	2:31 pm	8:02 pm - 11:08 pm	3:47 am	7:23 am - 10:43 am	
Mon 15	51	3:40 pm	9:05 pm - 11:55 pm	4:31 am	8:27 am - 11:33 am	
Tue 16	59	4:50 pm	10:07 pm - 12:39 am	5:11 am	9:30 am - 12:20 pm	Perigee
Wed 17	67	5:59 pm	11:10 pm - Midnight	5:49 am	10:32 am - 1:04 pm	
Thu 18	74	7:07 pm	Midnight - 1:22 am	6:25 am	11:35 am - 1:47 pm	
Fri 19	76	8:15 pm	12:10 am - 2:06 am	7:00 am	12:35 pm - 2:31 pm	FULL
Sat 20	62	9:22 pm	1:12 am - 2:48 am	7:37 am	1:37 pm - 3:13 pm	
Sun 21	49	10:26 pm	2:11 am - 3:33 am	8:16 am	2:36 pm - 3:58 pm	
Mon 22	36	11:28 pm	3:11 am - 4:19 am	8:59 am	3:36 pm - 4:44 pm	
Tue 23	30		4:06 am - 5:08 am	9:44 am	4:31 pm - 5:33 pm	
Wed 24	28	12:25 am	5:01 am - 5:59 am	10:34 am	5:26 pm - 6:24 pm	
Thu 25	32	1:17 am	5:52 am - 6:50 am	11:26 am	6:17 pm - 7:15 pm	LOW
Fri 26	42	2:04 am	6:39 am - 7:41 am	12:20 pm	7:04 pm - 8:06 pm	HALF
Sat 27	32	2:45 am	7:24 am - 8:32 am	1:15 pm	7:49 pm - 8:57 pm	
Sun 28	27	3:22 am	8:04 am - 9:22 am	2:10 pm	8:29 pm - 9:47 pm	Apogee
Mon 29	28	3:55 am	8:41 am - 10:13 am	3:05 pm	9:06 pm - 10:38 pm	
Tue 30	30	4:26 am	9:17 am - 11:03 am	4:01 pm	9:42 pm - 11:28 pm	

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**.



Barbara Foster of Southport, N.C., hoists a tasty, chunky spring whiting.

Jerry Dilsaver

WE LOVE THOSE WHITING, THE FIRST SPRING PANFISH

ANGLERS ARE WAITING IN LOWER CAPE FEAR RIVER

The first panfish to arrive along North Carolina's southern coast in the spring are whiting, aka sea mullet or Virginia mullet.

Yes, the little fish with many names typically arrives by mid- to late March, and it arrives to eager anticipation that has been building for weeks.

The name whiting covers northern, southern and gulf kingfish, and they are a favorite target of a lot of early spring fishermen. Their arrival may vary from year to year, but these tasty panfish are one of the first fish to arrive each spring, and eager fishermen are waiting.

Whiting usually show first just outside of the mouth of the Cape Fear River, on a section of softer bottom several hundred yards off the beach between the mouth of the river and the Oak Island Lighthouse. They are usually there for a couple of weeks to a month or more. At some point, they move inshore to just beyond the breakers along the beaches and into the lower river.

Whiting like two places in the lower Cape Fear River. One group stops just inside the river and holds for several weeks to several months along the edge of the shipping channel, between Bald Head and Battery Islands. The other group moves a little farther upriver to near the Southport-Fort Fisher ferry, on the Fort Fisher side. Fish may be spread from along the rocks that separate Buzzard Bay, Second Bay and The Basin from the river to Fort Fisher, especially along the drop into the ferry channel.

Do not anchor in the ship of ferry channels; anchor along the edge a short cast to the drop. The edges can also be fished while drifting or using a trolling motor to follow the contours.

The basic setup for catching whiting is a medium-action spinning or casting outfit and a double-drop bottom rig. Some fishermen prefer plain rigs, while others prefer beads or small plastic squids just above the hooks. A 2- or 3-ounce sinker, Eagle Claw L072 hooks in Nos. 4 or 6 and pieces of fresh shrimp or Fishbites synthetic bloodworms complete this rig.

Some fishermen like to use a small speck rig for a little more sight recognition in the dirty water. The bucktails on the speck rig are tipped with small pieces of shrimp or Fishbites, and fishermen lightly jig this rig.

Currently there are no size restrictions or number limits on whiting in North Carolina waters. ▪

— Jerry Dilsaver

BLESS THE BLACKFIN!

SC tuna kick off spring run

After a long, unsettled winter, spring kicks off with warm weather, calm sea, and hot action in South Carolina's offshore waters. — some of the best tuna fishing of the year gets rolling this month.

Captain Robby Remson of Carolina Hook & Line in Murrells Inlet, S.C., can't wait for spring for one reason: blackfin tuna.

"Early April is my favorite time for offshore fishing here," said Remson (843-340-0779). "In the first two weeks of April, we always catch our biggest tuna — upwards of 30 pounds."



Blackfin tuna are an early season favorite for South Carolina bluewater fishermen along the Grand Strand.

Jeff Burleson

Blackfin tuna are pelagic fish that inhabit the warm waters along the Gulf Stream current and stay year-round.

"Unlike a lot of other species that come and go, we catch tuna all year, but April is always exceptional, and May can be really good too," he said.

Tuna travel in schools, often large schools, to feed and for protection. Even though blackfin tuna can get up to 30 to 40 pounds, they are far from the top of the food chain and can be very susceptible to predation. As a result, they can be very temperamental, and that makes it difficult for anglers. Remson has honed his tactics to get his baits in front of these fish.

"We fish our lines much further back than you normally would for dolphin and other species," he said. "It's the difference between catching them and not on most days."

Tuna are attracted to bait schools, and when anglers run over or near a school of bait with tuna close by, they will dive deep. Remson prefers extremely long lines to allow enough time for the tuna to re-surface when his baits are in the strike zone.

"The tuna will not want to dive deep for long, because they don't want the school of bait to get away from them. But the boat noise will definitely make them dive," he said.

Remson avoids using planers for tuna fishing because of the same reason. Additional hardware in the water can increase the threat level, making tuna stay deep or dive even deeper.

Remson uses at typical ballyhoo-sea witch rig with a preference for the smaller-sized ballyhoo. However, he is a true fan of old-fashioned cedar plugs in the smallest sizes he can find.

"Most people use the 6- and 8-inch versions, but I prefer the smaller, 4-inch versions," he said. "They out-fish ballyhoo most days and are more manageable, especially when you get into heavy grass. You can just shake it off and go back to fishing."

Remson will use a variety of cedar plug colors, but red head/silver body and purple are his favorites. ▪

— Jeff Burleson

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NEW RIVER SPECKS

should warm up in April

North Carolina didn't experience bone-chilling, cold-stun fish kills this past winter, so spotted seatrout fishing should be extraordinary this spring, especially from Jacksonville to New River Inlet.

"April is when the trout bite really turns on," said guide Ricky Kellum, "especially since we didn't lose any fish this winter.

"Trout start moving out of creeks and toward the main river by April, but there still will be fish in creeks toward Sneads Ferry, such as Duck, Frenchs, Stones and Mill."

But the main attraction will be topwater fishing at main-river points, he said.

"The main body of the river is where I'll try first because baitfish will be out there," said Kellum (910-330-2745). "Finger mullet will be in the river in April."

April may be Kellum's favorite because topwater fishing heats up.

"The topwater bite is best on the banks of the river and sand flats," he said. "The only reason fish are out there is that's where the bait will be. That water gets warm because it's shallow, so that bite is controlled by temperature — whether it's sunny and warm or cold and cloudy — and baitfish schools."

His favor river trout lure is a Zara Spook Jr., white body/chartreuse head, but he also likes to bone color, a shade of ivory.

"I also like a MirrOlure 808, which is orange and gold. It not only catches trout, but red drum in the main river," said Kellum, who also fishes Catch 2000 suspending lures and 17 MR MirrOlures in electric chicken color.

"Trout also always will hit the Betts Halo Shad," he said. "Any kind of shrimp-imposter lure also will be good," he said. "I like to throw a 5-inch Zoom Golden bream without any weight. If I'm fishing the flats where I know I won't get hung up, I'll put a soft-plastic Fluke or paddletail lure on a 3/16-ounce jighead."



Enhanced New River oyster habitat and a warm winter should help guide Ricky Kellum find more spotted seatrout during April.

Ricky Kellum

Kellum expects fishing to get a boost in 2019 from the 26-mile "Oyster Highway" — a project started in 2018 to place oyster rocks and young oysters in the New River to create a chain of oyster reefs. The major goal is to grow more oysters to filter the river's water, but oyster bars and reefs also provide excellent habitat for many fish species.

"I know they put a ton of oyster rocks in the river last year," he said. "The current reef put in the river (AR-398) has been a great place to find all kinds of gamefish." ▪

— Craig Holt



WATEREE BREAM:
Look for deeper holes in April



Deep holes in big, open-water areas of Lake Wateree hold bream before they move up in May.

Brian Cope

Most anglers in the Carolinas are waiting until next month's full moon to get after bluegills. April can be a tough month for them, unless you know where to find them. And Jackson Bailey of Rembert, S.C., has a spot that never fails him in the early spring.

Bailey found this Lake Wateree honey hole by accident about 15 years ago, and he said it continues to produce for him this time every year. The trick is going deep.

"I was actually catfishing, anchored down right in front of the dam on the lower end of the lake just off the Buck Hill Landing boat ramp," he said. "I was fishing on the bottom with a whole night crawler, and I kept getting strong bites, but I couldn't set a hook in one. I scaled down my hook size, thinking it was smaller cats, and man, I caught a big ol' bluegill. It was over 60 feet deep there, and it surprised me to catch that."

Bailey fishes out of a pontoon boat with what he calls "probably the first fish finder ever made," and the only reliable function is the depth reader.

"I never have gotten into upgrading electronics since the first one came out," he said. "It had very few features to begin with, but now the only one I can count on for accuracy is the depth. So it doesn't take anything fancy to do this. I just look for deep holes. It's really deep in that part of Wateree, but if you look hard enough, you'll find some slightly deeper areas that are twice the size of the boat. They might be just half a foot deeper than the rest, but that's plenty. The bream like to be either in that hole, or just on the edge of it."

Thinking that first bluegill was a fluke, Bailey put another whole night crawler onto his hook and made another cast. A minute later, he pulled another bluegill up.

"I caught about a dozen in that hole, then I pulled up anchor and looked around for more deep holes. I blanked on a couple of spots, but I caught my share out of a couple of others. On that first trip, I was using a Carolina rig with a 1-ounce egg sinker because I was targeting catfish. But now I use a ½-ounce sinker above a swivel, then about an 18-inch leader of 6-pound mono. I've tried even less weight than that, but it takes so long to get down and if the dam is drawing any current, it will never reach bottom," he said.

Bailey alternates between using a whole night crawler on a No. 4 Tru-Turn hook and using just a small piece of worm. He lets the fish decide what he'll stick with. ■

— Brian Cope





South Carolina's Lake Monticello produces plenty of big blue catfish in April, when fish move shallow in "waves."

William Attaway

CATCH THE APRIL WAVE

for Lake Monticello's big catfish

To borrow a surfing term, catching catfish on South Carolina's Lake Monticello in the spring — especially in April — comes down to "catching the waves."

The fish come up from deeper water to feed and spawn in "waves" or "swarms," according to guide William Attaway.

"It sounds crazy, but the fish will come through in a swarm. Then it might be another half hour or 45 minutes before another warm comes through," he said.

Sometimes, he said, no more waves or swarms of fish will come through for a long time, which makes for inconsistent fishing and increases the necessity for catching as much out of a wave as possible when one does come through.

"When I go to Monticello in the spring, I usually anchor on long, shallow points," said Attaway (803-924-0857). "Humps and backs of coves are good places, too."

Once he picks a spot, Attaway double-anchors his boat, then puts out a dozen rods with cut bait. "I want to catch all I can when they do come through," he said.

Attaway uses cut bream, perch and gizzard shad and has even used pieces of carp and caught the catfish on them.

"I like to fish for big fish, too, so sometimes I will put on a piece of bait three fingers wide. I'll use 1-inch by 3-inch strips of bream or perch, either steaks or fillets," said Attaway, who scatters a dozen baits on Carolina rigs out so that some are in the shallowest areas and some in the deepest.

"You have to see what is going on with the fish and move more rods in the direction where you are catching the most fish," he said.

Prime fishing spots are over the mussel beds in Lake Monticello, Attaway said, because the freshwater mussels are like catnip to the catfish.

A typical spring trip to Monticello, Attaway said, will produce two or three blue catfish in the 30-pound or larger range, with the possibility of hooking one the monster blues that roam the depths of the lake, plus a bunch of catfish in the 10- to 12-pound range and a lot of smaller ones. ▪

— Pat Robertson



A soft-plastic tube is among the best baits to toss in front of bass during the spring, especially when they're spawning.

David A. Brown

TUBE TRICKS

GET THE MOST OUT OF A GREAT CLASS OF BASS BAITS

By David A. Brown

Designed to imitate a range of forage, soft-plastic tube baits are among the most-versatile and most-productive baits in a bass fisherman's arsenal. A simple drop-and-hop approach will certainly earn you a few bites here and there, but paying closer attention to how you rig the tube, how you change the tube, how you enhance the tube and, of course, how you present the tube, can improve your productivity.

RIGGING OPTIONS

Solid-body tubes are most often Texas-rigged for flipping and pitching to docks, laydowns, grass and bedding fish. Elsewhere, tubes with hollow or mostly hollow forms can be used in these presentations, as well as bottom-oriented tactics.

For basic Texas-rigging, wide-gaps worm hooks will accommodate a tube's body while allowing ample room for clean hooksets. Some hooks designed for tubes have screws that twist into the tube's head for a secure hold, or a wire hanging from the hook's eye that holds the tube. For deeper fish, a leadhead gets the call. You shove the jighead into the tube and push the eye through the body so you can tie your line to it.

If you're going to drag the tube across the bottom, tie your line to the eye at a 60-degree angle. If you want to hop or jig the tube, tie your line to the eye at a 90-degree angle.

ENHANCE TUBE'S APPEAL

High salt content makes a tube tastier to a bass; the longer a fish holds onto the bait, the greater your opportunity for a solid hookset. Various manufacturers impregnate and/or lather their baits with proprietary liquids formulated to tempt a bass' natural tendencies toward smell and taste. Spray scents can instantly increase or maintain a bait's attraction. Also helpful are scented gels and sauces. The hollow cavity of most tubes makes an ideal scent chamber. Squeezing a glob of gel inside is one option. Another involves dousing a small piece of sponge with your favorite liquid scent and placing it inside a hollow tube for gradual dispersion.

In addition to smell and taste, sound plays a big role in fish attraction. Jigheads made with rattles are one way; rattling inserts are another.

IN CONCLUSION

With the countless combinations of size, color, rigging and attractants, dialing in the right tube set up may seem overwhelming. Not to worry; just start with a single scenario — shallow or deep — and work with a couple of darker colors for low-light conditions and a couple of lighter baits for sunny days. Focus on making good presentations to your target area and take heart in knowing that those little tentacles will do most of the work for you.



Nolan Hardin of Pumpkintown, S.C., shot his first buck near home on Oct. 20, 2018.



Rachel DiMauro caught this 6-pound sheepshead in North Carolina's Masonboro Inlet on half of a blue crab.



Sam McLamb IV, 11, caught this bull dolphin on spinning tackle off Cape Fear on June 22, 2018.



Lagree Tucker's biggest buck ever, this 8-pointer, was killed with a .243 in Aiken County, S.C.



Jamie Brooks from Siler City, N.C., caught this 27-inch red drum on cut pinfish near Carolina Beach Inlet.



Will Hunt of Lexington, N.C., boated this 47-pound flathead catfish at High Rock Lake on April 14, 2018.

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



Bryan Buckner of Saluda, N.C., caught these nice smallmouth bass on South Carolina's Lake Jocasse on Oct. 31, 2017.



Denise Failor of Richlands, N.C., caught this pretty redfish on a Top Dog on the Neuse River



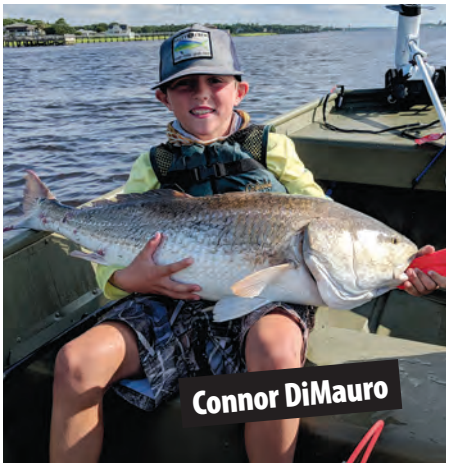
Dianne's Winningham caught this great bass on July 21, 2018, in South Carolina's Cooper River on a Carolina-rigged worm.



Michael Bell and three friends killed their limits of ducks on a hunt last fall near Delco, N.C.



Danny Thames caught this 41-inch redfish at South Carolina's Little River jetties in October 2018.



Connor DiMauro, 9, caught this 42-inch red drum on a live finger mullet in the ICW near Carolina Beach, N.C.



Chuck Stewart and Carlos Bundick of Stem, N.C., with a nice catch of crappie from Falls of Neuse Lake on Oct. 23, 2017.



Christina Register of West End, N.C., killed this nice Hertford County tom on April 14, 2018.



Scott Smith tagged this nice 9-point buck last fall in Darlington County, S.C.



Taylor Freeman of Lexington, N.C., caught this 27-inch redfish on July 28, 2018, around a pier on Figure Eight Island.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

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Raegan Jordan of Loris, S.C., killed this 20-inch, 10-point buck on Oct. 24, 2018. It weighed 190 pounds.



Brayden Garrett caught this nice king mackerel on Aug. 17, 2018, out of Holden Beach, N.C.



Morgan Willis of Morehead City, N.C., killed this fine Martin County buck, a 19-inch 8-pointer, on Nov. 27, 2018.



Mark Lineberry, Lynn Routh and Jody Williams caught and released this big blue catfish on July 5, 2018, at North Carolina's Badin Lake.



Allison Babler boated this 24-inch redfish from her kayak in the ICW near Ocean Isle Beach, N.C., on Aug. 10, 2018.



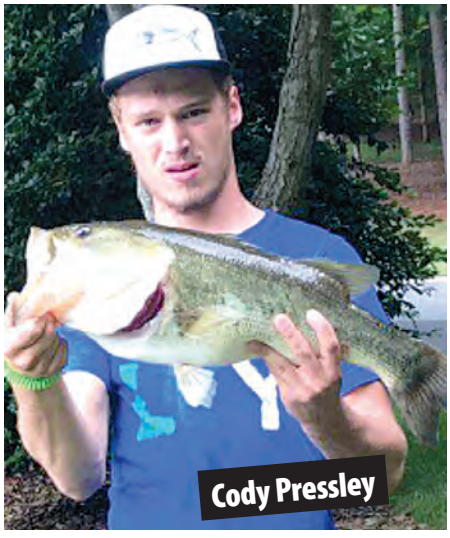
Mike Frame caught this 9-pound, 29-inch long bass from Atkinson's Mill Pond near Selma, N.C.



David Schofield, 10, killed his first buck, this this 8-point, 140-pounder on Nov. 15, 2018, in Greenville County, S.C.



Jay Annis of Farmville, N.C., caught this spinner shark in the surf on Bald Head Island on Aug. 12, 2018.



Cody Pressley of Mint Hill, N.C., caught this 5-pond bass from a local pond.



Jacob Wallace, 15, killed his first buck last fall near Rock Hill, S.C.



Cole Turner caught this 5-pound bass in Johnson's Pond near Fuquay-Varina, N.C., on a crankbait.



Haley Searcy killed her first nice buck in November 2017 in Randolph County, N.C.



Lilly Thrift, 8, of Winnabow, N.C., used a crossbow to kill her first turkey on the final day of the 2018 season.

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