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19
DOLPHIN
DAYS



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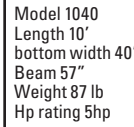
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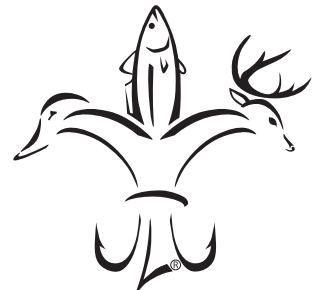
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THE BLUES



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A favorite of bluewater fishermen in both Carolinas, dolphin, aka Mahimahi, make their biggest appearance of the year this month. Photo by Brian Carroll.

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TALES OF TURKEY SEASON'S TAIL END

DON'T QUIT; THERE'S TIME LEFT TO FILL A TAG
AND MAKE PLENTY OF MEMORIES

Early May is really a time for turkey hunters to keep the faith. In North Carolina, hunters are about mid-way through a season that ends on May 11. Hunters in South Carolina have five more days to try and fill out that last gobbler tag.

For many, late-season hunting is nothing to write home about, because gobblers have heard just about every call possible for weeks, are tired of responding to them and are wary of just about everything in the woods that moves. Plus, the stupid ones are already dead.

But it's worth nothing that an awful lot of big gobblers aren't killed until late in the season. Two of the biggest gobblers I've tagged over 28 years of hunting were both killed late in the season: one the Tuesday before the season ended on Saturday, and one on the last day of the season.

I'm not about to claim great turkey hunter status, but it's clear that on at least two occasions, I did something correctly. Or, at least, on two occasions, I didn't screw something up. Both hunts were bang-bang deals, 15 minutes from the door of the truck shutting to the bird flopping on the ground. But that's what often happens if you can catch a big, dominant

bird out scouring the countryside looking for a hen, any hen, that hasn't totally gone on the nest. Sort of like a guy at 1 a.m. last call in a bar who doesn't want to go home empty handed. Both situations can get you in a lot of trouble, feathered or otherwise.

Get in the right area, call, and if he gobbles back at you, sit down immediately; there's a good chance he's coming. Caught at the edge of a field and some woods, I slid down the bank of a creek to hide from one tom, the 19½-pound gobbler that died on the last day of one season at the second farm we'd hunted that morning. The 22-pound bird I killed one Tuesday morning, I was kneeling in a logging road, because I didn't have time to hide anywhere else. I'd yelled real loud as soon as I shut the door on my truck, and he gobbled right back, in an adjacent field, maybe 100 yards away. I barely got 15 yards down the road, looking for a tree to sit against and for some way to stick a decoy in the ground before he gobbled

again, having already cut the distance in half. I could imagine him almost jogging toward me. He stepped out a couple of moments later, right where the logging road entered the field, looking for the one hen he'd missed that spring. When he finally dropped down out of a strut, I busted him.

Those are two memories I will take to my grave. They're enough to keep me going when the birds have pretty much quit gobbling and you'd think they've gone to the beach on spring break. If it doesn't work out, there's plenty of fishing ahead to fill the days until the next turkey season. ■

Jeffrey Stewart didn't wait until late in the season to kill this nice tom. He tagged it on March 28 in Lancaster County, S.C.



Dan Kibler of Winston-Salem, N.C., is managing editor of *Carolina Sportsman* magazine. He has been writing about the outdoors full-time since 1985.

Dan Kibler

FISHERIES GROUP WANTS NEW MANAGEMENT OF NC'S SPECKLED TROUT

A conservation group has proposed changes in the way the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries manages spotted seatrout, aka speckled trout, in North Carolina waters.

The N.C. Coastal Fisheries Reform Group, formed 10 years ago to promote the proper management of North Carolina's coastal marine fisheries, proposed at a meeting of the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission that speckled trout be managed in a manner far different from the way they are presently, in order to improve the viability of the fishery.

The management strategy includes the following:

- Spotted sea trout will remain both a commercial and recreational species.
- Amend an NCMFC rule to remove the exception for "hook and line" from the list of approved types of commercial gear, which will then allow commercial taking of spotted sea trout using hook and line.
- Restrict commercial take of spotted seatrout to hook and line only.

- Prohibit possession of spotted seatrout in any fishing operation when or where a gill net is present.
 - Allow commercial and recreational fishing for spotted seatrout year-round.
 - Set a daily recreational creel limit of six fish between 15 and 20 inches and allow only one of the six fish to exceed 20 inches.
 - Set the commercial daily creel limit of 75 fish between 15 and 24 inches but allow 150 spotted seatrout to be possessed aboard a commercial fishing vessel if two licensed commercial fisherman are aboard.
- NCCFRG pointed to Florida's successful management of spotted sea trout under similar regulations that have been in force since 1994.

North Carolina's four-fish recreational creel limit is the lowest of any state from Virginia through Texas. Virginia's limit is five, Florida's is split between four and five, depending on the area of the state. Louisiana's limit is 25, Mississippi's is 15, Alabama's is 10, Georgia's is 15, South Carolina's is 10 and Texas's is 5. ■



North Carolina anglers can keep only four speckled trout per day, the lowest creel limit of any state in the South Atlantic and Gulf.

Dan Kibler

IS CWD CURE CLAIM OFF BASE? EXPERTS SAY YES

Over the past several months, numerous magazines and newspapers have published articles about a Louisiana State University researcher finding a cure for chronic wasting disease (CWD), but the vast majority of state and national wildlife agencies discount these findings — and the claims of a cure actually aren't new.

Dr. Frank Bastian, a disease researcher and clinical professor of neurosurgery and pathology at LSU, recently said he is within a year or two of a cure for CWD, and wildlife biologists and other scientists studying the disease are wrong about its cause.

Bastian made the same statements in 2017. In fact, as far back as 2002, he pointed to similar findings in an interview for *North American Hunter*, so skepticism among Bastian's peers is understandable.

"It's been over 15 years since he first made those claims, yet no other researcher has been able to reproduce his findings. And there's no sign he's made

any progress since then to suggest he's any closer to a cure," said Merrill Cook, a wildlife biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Bastian's response is that no other researchers are trying to reproduce his results because all the research funding is being swayed by those who believe prions, rather than spiroplasma, are at the root of CWD.

According to most researchers, CWD is caused by mutated proteins called prions that cause holes in brain tissue and other areas of a deer's central nervous system. But Bastian disagrees, saying that prions aren't the cause of CWD, but simply a product of a bold bacteria called spiroplasma, which he believes is the cause of the disease.

Bastian said CWD can be produced without any presence of prions, but Brent Race, a scientist with the Laboratory of Persistent Viral Diseases at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious

Diseases, found the opposite while trying to reproduce Bastian's findings. While failing to duplicate those findings, Race said he found that prion infection can occur even in the absence of spiroplasma.

Chronic wasting disease is a 100-percent fatal, transmittable disease that affects deer, elk, and other members of the cervid family. Deer pass the disease on through contact with other deer or contact with urine, saliva, infected carcasses, and even through infectious materials in soil, which can hold remnants of the disease for up to 20 years.

CWD is sometimes referred to as the "zombie deer disease" because infected deer often salivate heavily, look lost, are emaciated and confused. But the infection hasn't led to aggressive biting or other behavior by deer. And so far, no humans have contracted the disease, but scientists worry it's a possibility. And no deer in either North Carolina or South Carolina has been found to have died from CWD. ■

— Brian Cope

NC MARINE AGENCY OVERRULES DIRECTOR; SOME GILL NETS OUT TO PROTECT COASTAL STRIPED BASS

During a special meeting held in mid-March, the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission voted to prohibit the use of gill nets upstream of the ferry lines in the River system and in the Neuse River system to protect striped bass.

The vote overruled an earlier decision by the Steve Murphey, the director of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, in which he opted to continue allowing gill nets in those areas after commission members voted to ask him to issue a proclamation closing the areas to gill nets. The Commission called this special meeting to address that earlier decision. The director now must comply with the

Commission's vote.

The gill-net restriction went into effect on March 18. The closure is expected to remain in place for around two years, which is when Amendment 2 of the N.C. Estuarine Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan will be adopted, which could continue the ban or put other management practices in place.

The Commission is also seeking to close the same areas to recreational harvest. During the meeting, commissioners asked the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to adopt this closure. The area is what is known as "joint fishing waters," because it is managed by both agencies.

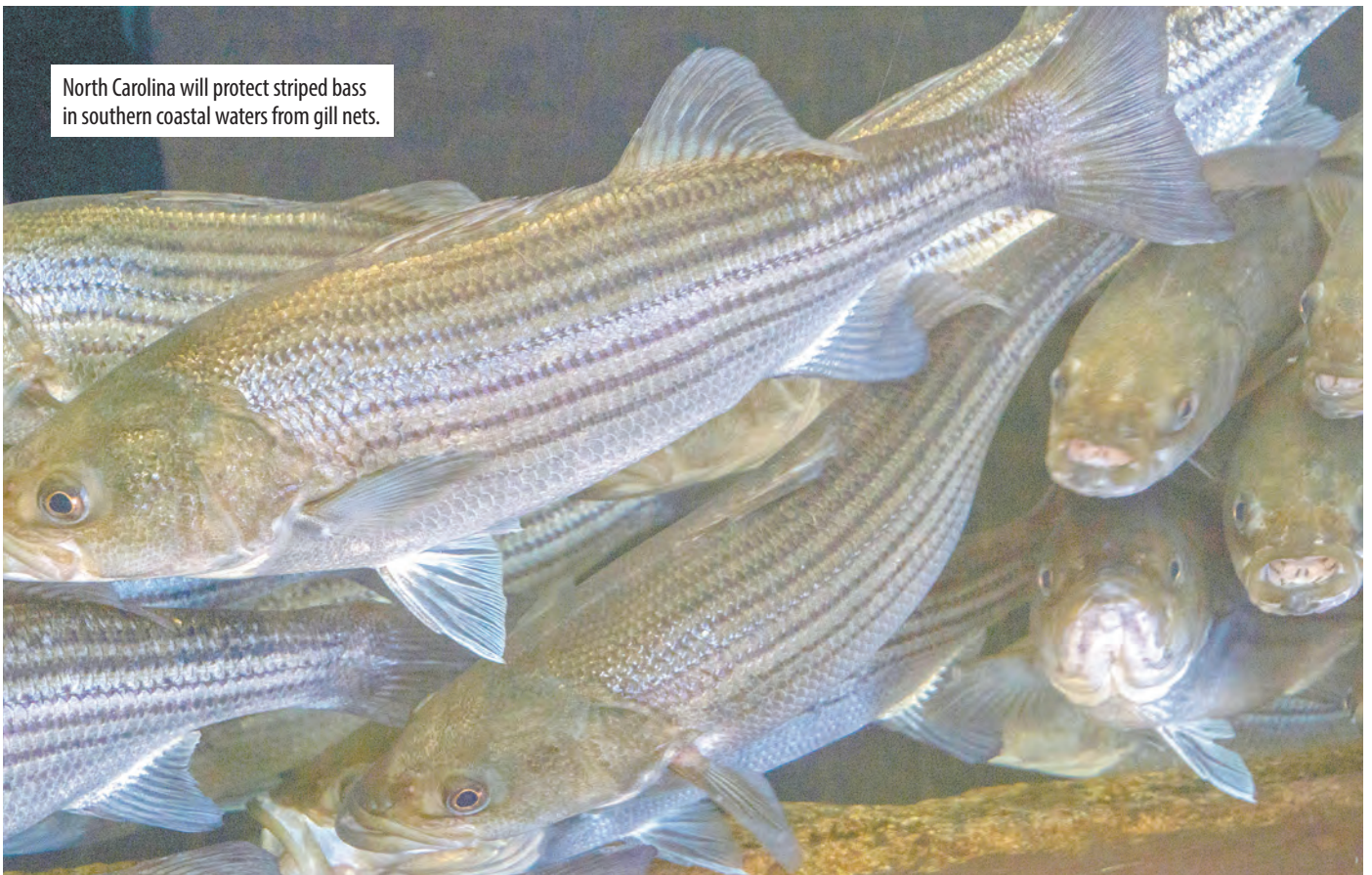
The closures should protect recently



Al Morris Jr., 14 (bottom left) caught this 400-pound swordfish fishing out of Atlantic Beach, N.C., on March 24. The fish was 41 pounds shy of the state-record fish, caught in 1979.

discovered naturally-spawned stripers and the larger hatchery-released females. Biologists believe the closure could lead to an increase in wild-born stripers in the area. Historically, the striped bass population in these waters have all been hatchery-raised fish. ■

North Carolina will protect striped bass in southern coastal waters from gill nets.





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DOG DAYS PRESENT SEVERAL TRAINING CHALLENGES

Every waterfowler or upland hunter who pursues game behind a hunting dog knows you can't leave them in the kennel all year and expect them to perform on opening day.

To have a reliable hunting partner, you must train your dog year-round, hone his skills, and discourage some of the bad habits he may have picked up during the hunting season.

In the Carolinas, this often means training our dogs in some downright miserable weather conditions. The soaring thermometer through the summer brings with it a host of pitfalls for both dog and trainer trying to get into shape for the

season. Chad Autry of Millstone Retrievers in Salemburg, N.C. (910-263-0324) recommends keeping training as fun as possible for dogs and taking into consideration the stresses placed on them by summer heat and humidity.

The key to training in hot weather is to pay attention to the dogs. When a dog begins to lose drive and motivation and his tail stops wagging, it's time to wrap up the training session. Keep sessions short

and shoot for early morning or late afternoon, even when training in water.

Proper nutrition is essential during summer training, as much as proper hydration. Always feed a high-quality food high in fat, carbohydrates and protein, and follow



Heat is the factor that forces trainers to pay close attention to their dogs during summer training sessions.

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your veterinarian's recommendation when it comes to feeding your dog. Watch for signs of heat emergencies in the field such as lethargy, disorientation, rapid breathing and heavy drooling and panting. Autry recommends checking your dog's temperature inside his mouth, around his gums. If the inside of the mouth feels noticeably warm, he is likely overheated or close to it. He recommends, in extreme cases, putting your dog in a tub of cool water.

Most people who work dogs during the summer have concerns over the high probability of encounters with venomous snakes. Grayson Guyer of Lost Highway Kennels in Winston-Salem, N.C., runs a snake-avoidance training program during the summer. He believes that training dogs to stay away from dangerous snakes is the key to avoiding problems and costly vet bills.

Guyer (910-639-2690) said dogs are naturally curious, and because snakes have such a strong odor, dogs are often bitten when they go over to investigate the snake. Guyer's program uses live snakes so that the sights, smells and sounds the dog encounters are realistic. He introduces dogs to snakes in a safe setting and provides negative stimuli, such as an e-collar shock, so the dog will avoid future encounters.

In case a dog is snakebit during a training session, Guyer said to treat it as a medical emergency. Keep the dog as calm as possible and rush it to a veterinarian. Traditional treatment such as tourniquets and Benadryl are not effective. The best medicine for a snake-bitten dog is a heavy foot on the gas pedal on the way to the vet's office.

— John Bowen



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Jonathan Dill of Greenville, S.C., killed this 31-pound gobbler on March 20.

EXACTLY HOW BIG IS BIG? HOW 'BOUT 31 POUNDS?

Jonathan Dill of Greenville, S.C. killed a 31-pound gobbler on March 20 during a morning hunt in Greenville County. The bird had a 12-inch beard, and 1¼-inch spurs.

The huge turkey — Dill had trail-camera photos — charged into his decoy spread around 9:30 on the opening day of South Carolina's season, after exchanging calls with the hunter for more than an hour. A group of hens arrived first before the gobbler came in ready for a battle.

Dill shot the bird with a Mossberg 935 Magnum 12-gauge and a load of Winchester Longbeard XR from a blind he made of cedar branches he picked up.

"I've been deer hunting my whole life, but I'm fairly new to turkey hunting, so I didn't really know how out of the ordinary

it was for a gobbler to weigh this much," he said.

Dill set up two decoys — a hen on the ground and a jake in the breeding position behind the hen. Then he set up his blind and waited for the woods to wake up. When it was time to call, the gobbler answered him right away. Dill could tell the bird was close.

"He answered, and it was loud. It sounded like he was about 100 yards away. But then I didn't hear from him for a good while," he said.

As the day brightened more, Dill called again, and this time the bird answered with a thunder.

"He was much closer then. It was so loud and close, it honestly scared me when I heard him. Then, I saw the group



of hens. A few minutes later, he came in all blown up and just marched straight to my decoys. About 15 yards away from me, he turned sideways to look at the decoys, and I pulled the trigger. He dropped right on the spot," said Dill. ■

— Brian Cope

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SPORTSMAN'S BIG BASS GALLERY



Peyton Sorrow, 15, of Greenwood, S.C., caught this 14-pound bass in a private pond in mid-March. The fish hit a spinnerbait.



Casey Griffith of Guyton, Ga., had the big fish in a March 9 FLW BFL tournament on the Santee Cooper Lakes. It weighed 10 pounds, 2 ounces.



Johnny Wilder of Butner, N.C., boated this 10.69-pound bass on March 16 in a tournament on Falls of the Neuse Lake. The fish hit a bladed jig.



Phillip Bridges of Snow Camp, N.C., caught this 10.49-pound bass in a farm pond near his home on March 23. The big fish hit a tiny Charlie Brewer Slider jig.

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*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.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bass, visit www.carolinasportsman.com and visit the bass-fishing section.

May brings a big push of dolphin into the bluewater off the Carolinas, and anglers who know their habits can fill a fish box in a hurry.

DOLPHIN DAYS

By Jeff Burleson

Bluewater aficionados covet the spring dolphin run, even though the offshore trek to reach these blue-green prizes takes nearly half a day.

May marks the beginning of the best dolphin fishing, when their northward migration brings them off the Carolina coastline. If there was ever a time to experience double-digit catches of these beautiful and tasty fish, there is no better time than these few precious weeks. >

TWO DEADLY DOLPHIN TRICKS

Dolphin fishing is one of the greatest draws to the Gulf Stream, because not only are dolphin highly coveted for their tasty flesh, they are exhilarating to catch.

Some key tactics can make the action a little more consistent.

Kevin Sneed of Rigged and Ready Fishing Charters out of Holden Beach, N.C., loves catching dolphin, and he will do a few things a little different than on the typical offshore wahoo or tuna trip.

Sneed will have a handful of spinning rods rigged with 65-pound braid, 80-pound fluorocarbon leaders and 6/0 live-bait hooks.

"I like having several pitch rods ready, because when you get up close and personal with a school of dolphin, you can spoon-feed them

with a chunk of squid, half a ballyhoo, bucktail or any other artificial lure. One day, I tore them up with Gotcha plugs," Sneed said. "I take a handful of the squid or cut-up ballyhoo and toss it in to chum them up some."

Catching dolphin while trolling can be fun, but it's not nearly as exciting as pitching baits

and lures to feeding fish, the latter being the fastest way to fill a 10-fish limit for everyone in the boat.

Anglers can also take advantage of a dolphin's natural instincts. They travel and feed in large groups, and a feeding fish will attract other fish to investigate and join in the festivities.

"Typically, when we do hook one, we will leave one hooked up beside the boat to attract other fish. And it works very well," he said. ■

ABOVE: Having pitch rods and baits at hand allows dolphin fishermen to load up when a school is located. **LEFT:** A bull dolphin that hit a trolled lure is gaffed and headed to the fish box.

Dolphin, aka Mahimahi, are one of the fastest-growing fishes in the ocean, owners of a king-sized metabolism. They travel

the eastern seaboard from New England to the tropics. They must eat massive quantities of forage to sustain their growth and fuel their metabolism during these long, migratory behaviors, so their travels take them to many places where forage fish are most abundant.

Dolphin travel in large schools and can be found in places that offer the best opportunity to feed without expending excess energy reserves. Their travels begin during the early spring, and they start to trickle within reach of Carolina anglers in April, but it's not until May that the largest groups of fish show up.

Kevin Sneed of Rigged and Ready Charters out of Holden Beach, N.C., anticipates the dolphin run annually and for him, it's like clockwork.

"We start picking at them in April, a few fish on every trip," said Sneed (910-448-3474). "During the first part of May, they are here thick, and we catch them real good."

For a fish that travels more than 5,000 miles a year from New England to the

Bahamas and back, it can be a little tricky to know where they may be on any given day off the Carolina coast.

Sneed, who has more than two decades of experience fishing offshore, believes the fish gravitate toward specific areas along the Gulf Stream.

"Dolphin are real sensitive to temperature, and water temperature is the most important factor for finding dolphin this time of year," he said. "We find them along a hard temperature break. I like to find a least a 3-degree break within a mile or less. It may go from 68 to 71 or 68 to 73. And if we find it along a structure, the bait will be thick in these areas, and the dolphin and tuna will be all over these places. The dolphin are generally feeding on the warmer side of the break."

Sneed will usually start in places near the Winyah Scarp or the 100/400, but dolphin may be more concentrated in other places with better temperature breaks.

He prefers to find good temperature breaks, and knowing exactly where they are may not be the easiest task without any assistance from remote-imagery sources.

continued >



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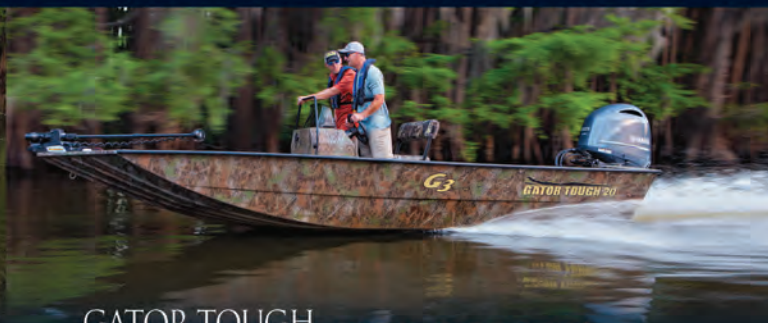
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DOLPHIN DAYS

Dolphin are feeding almost non-stop along their northern migration, so they're not hard to tempt with a variety of baits and lures.

When the ride from port to the fishing grounds is already a 2-hour trip, riding for hours looking for a temperature break may not be the best way to utilize the day. Sneed uses an online sea-surface temperature service, Hilton's Offshore (www.hiltonsoffshore.com) to provide a map and location of the best temperature breaks available.

"It allows us to increase our time with lines in the water," he said. "Without this type of imagery, we would waste a lot of time and fuel looking at our temperature gauges."

One of Sneed's tactics is to nearly eliminate the typical sea witch-ballyhoo rig on his spring trips. Dolphin are very eager to eat, and it isn't necessary to rely on rigged ballyhoo this time of year.

"I troll a wide assortment of lures — and not many ballyhoo — that time of year," he said. "Dolphin are known for short strikes, and you will not know you are pulling a ballyhoo rig without a tail. A spread of lures is easier to manage and provide a



better opportunity to land more fish." Since flying fish rank at the top of dolphins' dietary wish list, lures that imitate flying fish are real winners. Sneed prefers lures built with flashy, bright materials. "Sea Vixen makes a flying fish in blue and white that is one of my favorite ones to use," he said. "Also, anything that is pink/white, pink/blue, or a lure with mylar built in is almost always going to be a big hit."

Sneed also pulls a Rapala Magnum lure that will dive down 40 feet. He will toss it over the side and put it in the prop wash. "The Rapala is an easy lure to put out

quick to test out the area, and if we get bit right away, I will put out entire spread," he said.

By primarily using artificial gear, bait malfunctions are avoided, the greater fishing time produces greater rewards in the fish box. ■



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

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Tuckertown's **FROG HEYDAY**

■ By Tony Garitta

Change in lake's aquatic vegetation has made frog lures a big part of almost every bass fisherman's tackle box. Here's the lowdown on frogging at this North Carolina reservoir.

After bass pro Dean Rojas almost won the 2004 Bassmaster Classic on Lake Wylie by fishing a hollow-body frog, frogging for bass became a craze, not only in the Carolinas but throughout the country. Manufacturers produced

numerous versions to meet the demand.

Two Lexington, N.C., fishermen, Orlando Giles and Mike Ray, caught fever and adapted the technique to Tuckertown Lake, a 2,600-acre reservoir downstream from High Rock Lake on the Yadkin River. >

“FROG FISHING AT TUCKERTOWN IS DIFFERENT FROM FROG FISHING AT WYLIE,” RAY SAID.

“At Wylie, froggers toss their baits at willows, piers, brush, ditches and points in fairly clear water. At Tuckertown, we target black mat algae, stumps and grass in dingy water.”

Neither Giles nor Ray gave much thought to frog fishing at Tuckertown until the lake underwent a habitat transformation in the early 2000s, when grass and algae invaded.

Before that, canary reed grass was the dominant shoreline grass, with stumps, tree laps and rocks the other primary lake features. Most bass were caught with crankbaits, jigs and plastics.

That quickly changed.

In September 2006, Dr. Rob Richardson, a professor at N.C. State University, research technician Andrew Gardner and two biologists

from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission sampled Tuckertown and identified the invaders as black mat algae (*Lyngbya*) and elodea grass.

Black mat algae consists of stringy mats of entangled filaments that can live year-round and are virtually indestructible. The mats rise to the surface when oxygen becomes trapped underneath, essentially floating them. Conversely, the mats sink when oxygen is forced out.

The algae spread throughout the lake, cloaking shoreline cover and killing almost all of it. It gradually crept out to deep-water structure.

The algae gave fishermen fits, clinging to crankbaits, jigs, plastics, topwaters and spinnerbaits, rendering them almost useless unless a fisherman was willing to handpick the foul-smelling menace off his bait after each cast.

continued on page 26 >



Tony Garitta

Orlando Giles regularly targets bass at Tuckertown Lake with plastic frog baits. **BELOW:** Black mat algae adorns plenty of Tuckertown's shallow cover, rendering it unfishable.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE —

Tuckertown Lake is about 20 miles south of Lexington, N.C., near the community of Healing Springs. Two public landings serve as the main access to the lake: the NC 49 landing and Flat Creek Landing off CR2191.

WHEN TO GO — Bass devour frogs from the end of May through the summer during the hottest weather.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Fish shallow stumps, grass or pockets cloaked with black mat algae. Use heavy tackle and 50- to 65-pound braided line to hoist the fish from thick mats of algae.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Maynard Edwards, Yadkin Lakes Guide Service, 336-249-6782.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Days Inn, Lexington, N.C., 866-599-6674; Super 8, Salisbury, N.C., 855-799-6862; Best Western, Albemarle, N.C., 866-599-6674.

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Robinson's crew identified the grass as elodea but didn't find any hydrilla, though hydrilla would later infest Tuckertown. Two patches of lily pads were observed in Ellis Creek, aka Newsom's, in a cut near the house trailers and in the back of the creek. Lily pads were absent from other creeks.

The elodea affected the choice of lures and fishing techniques, but the vegetation wasn't as much of a nuisance as the algae. Most fishermen welcomed the elodea, but all detested the algae.

Eventually, fishermen discovered a hollow-body frog offered one effective way to fish the black slop with few hang-ups.

Ray, who had prior frog-fishing experience at Lake Norman, encouraged Giles to try the frog at Tuckertown.

"I resided at (Lake) Norman in 1964, before the lake became developed," said Ray. "I fished a frog in the backs of creeks, so I recognized its potential."

Another change in habitat took place between 2015 and 2016 because of the Aquatic Weed Project, whereupon Tuckertown was treated with a herbicide that killed much of the grass. Grass carp were added in the lake to further curb the growth of grass.

With the grass greatly diminished, Giles and Ray now focus upon shallow pockets choked with algae for most of their frog fishing. They have plenty of places to fish; the algae had spread from one end of the lake to the other.

"We fish shallow pockets," said Giles. "I'm speaking of water 2 feet deep or less. We look at our surroundings, and if there are little frogs skipping about the bank, we know we'll get bites."

Giles said frog fishing is best in hot

weather, though artificial frogs will catch bass from late May through early fall.

The retrieve varies. Giles and Ray either reel the frog straight in, pop it, drag it, twitch it or use a stop-and-go retrieve.

"Let the fish tell you which retrieve is best," said Giles.

Both anglers use the Spro Bronzeye Frog and alter the bait.

"We trim the rubber extensions for easier retrieval and for reducing short strikes," Giles said. "We might shorten one side more than the other to give the frog an erratic action to make it walk easier. We bend the double hook out slightly for a better hookset. We make other changes, too."

Getting a firm hookset with a frog is a problem, even with the right equipment, which usually means a medium-heavy baitcasting rod with backbone and a fast tip. Ray uses a 6-foot-9 Cashion or 7-foot Duckett rod with a Quantum Smoke reel featuring an 8.1:1 gear ratio to move the fish quickly from the matted gook.

Giles is a bit different from other bass fishermen; he uses spinning gear. For frogging, he fishes a heavy action spinning rod, and like Ray, his reel is spooled with 65-pound braided line.

"For every 20 bites with a frog, you'll land about eight or nine fish," Giles said, "but every fish will be a big one. The first three bass we caught with a frog each weighed around 6 pounds. It takes a big, aggressive fish to blow up on a frog

Angler Mike Ray recognized from his experience on Lake Norman that frogs might work on Tuckertown.



Tony Garitta

through that thick algae."

In one tournament at Tuckertown, Ray and Giles brought in three bass weighed a total of more than 19 pounds, including a 9-pounder Giles caught.

Color choice is fairly basic. Black or black/green frogs for mornings and overcast days; green frogs and frogs in natural patterns for sunny days. If a bass slaps at a frog of one color, try another color.

Current and water color aren't factors.

"We don't fish a frog in current," Giles said. "Tuckertown is often dingy, but the water under the algae mats is fairly clear. The mats serve as filters."

To catch a bass that's a real toad, give a hollow-body frog a try. ■



Tony Garitta

The presence of black mat algae in Tuckertown Lake makes a frog bait a great one to use.



Tony Garitta of Lexington, N.C., is a retired English instructor and an avid bass fisherman. He writes a weekly fishing column for the Lexington Dispatch. In his spare time, he can be found catching bass at Tuckertown and High Rock lakes; he holds the lake record at High Rock.

THE EVOLUTION OF HOLLOW-BODY FROGS

Fishermen in the Carolinas cite the 2004 Bassmaster Classic on Lake Wylie as the catalyst for the explosion in hollow-body frog fishing for bass.

But frogging is nothing new. Fishermen have been using hollow-body frogs for bass for more than 100 years. And while the Spro Bronzeye may be the best-known hollow-body frog, but it's by no means the first.

The first hollow-body frog dates to 1895. Called the Hastings Weedless Casting Frog, it was produced by the Hibbard, Spencer & Bartlett Company of Chicago, at a time when the rubber moulding process was in its infancy. The frogs were hand-painted and featured Carlisle hooks with weed guards. If water entered the frog, one squeeze would expel the liquid.

Frogging experienced a rebirth in 1969 with the introduction of Bill

Plummer's Superfrog, later renamed the Superior Frog, which is still sold today. Manufactured by Harrison-Hoge Industries, the frog wasn't a hollow-bodied rubber frog like today's models, but rather a foam production.

Plummer's frog began as a toy frog given to Plummer's 5-year-old daughter, then converted into a lure with a single hook.

True hollow-body rubber frogs followed, such as the weedless Snag Proof Frog of Ohio with double hooks, by Snag Proof Manufacturing in 1961, and the Scum Frog by Mississippi's Southern Lures in the 1980s.

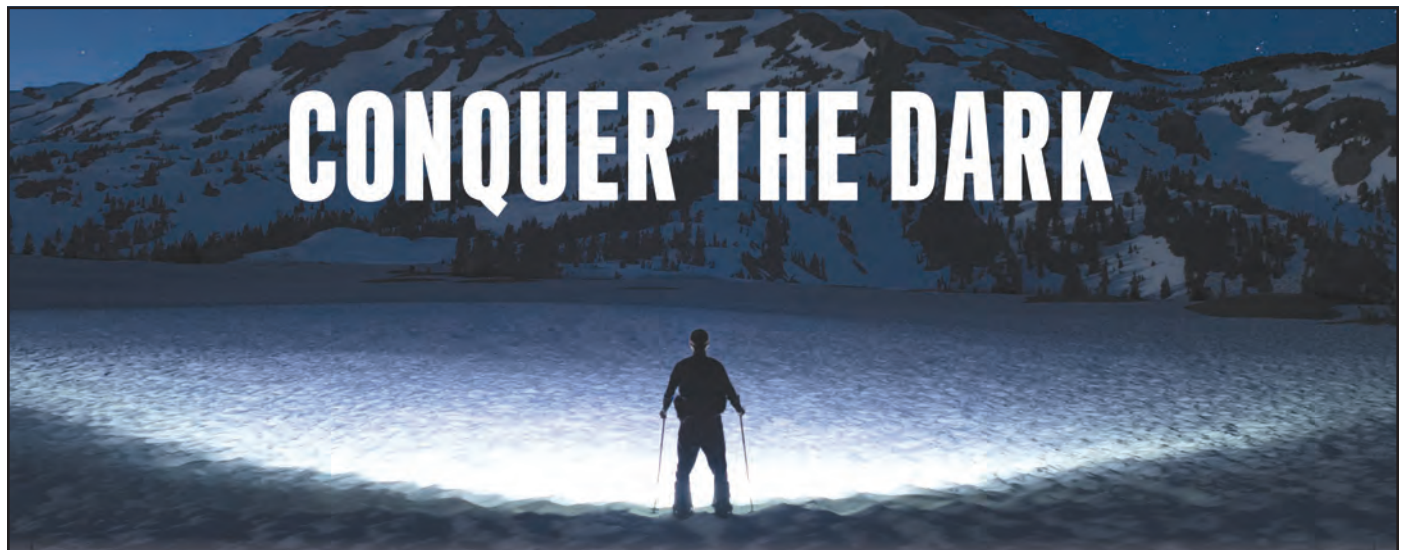
Today's hollow-body frogs include the Booyah Pad Crasher Frog, River-2Sea Frog, Strike King KVD Sexy Frog, Livetarget Frog and the Lunckerhunt Poppin' Frog. ■



Buzz frogs (left), modern hollow-body frogs (middle) and early frogs (right), including the Bill Plummer frog at top.

Tony Garitta

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THE BAITFISH SPAWN IN MAY ACROSS CAROLINAS IS AN A NO. 1 CHANCE TO CATCH BASS ON A LIPESS BAIT

Dan Kibler

Plenty of lures that we use to target bass are associated with a certain season or period of time when they are most effective. You can certainly think of a handful: floating worms in April, a Shad Rap in March, a jig or a jerkbait in February, a Carolina-rigged lizard during the summer, a square-billed crankbait early in the spring, a medium-diving crankbait in the fall.

One bait that often gets pigeon-holed into the late-winter, early-spring pre-spawn is a lipless crankbait. A lot of the fishermen I know fish one in March because it's so versatile; you can fish it deep or shallow, fast or slow, and it's a real weapon against bass that are waiting to make that big move to the shallows. Ott Defoe, the Tennessee bass pro who won the Bassmaster Classic in his home state this past March, caught most of his fish in that tournament on a lipless bait.

But I'm here to tell you that if you put your lipless baits away after the bass spawn, you're missing out on some great fishing. And the reason is the other spawns that follow the bass spawn.

In May, and on into June in a lot of our Carolina lakes, we'll have blueback herring and shad spawning in shallow water, and that's a perfect time to fish a lipless crankbait. My favorite is a Storm Arashi Vibe. In March, when most fishermen throw a lipless bait, you're fishing reds, browns, oranges — crawfish colors — but in May, you need to be throwing your shad and blueback colors, your baitfish colors. I love to throw a lipless bait when the baitfish are spawning. I'll throw it where I see them spawning and where I think they're spawning.

- I'm going to look in these kinds of places:
- Flat points in less than 5 feet of water where blueback herring spawn;
 - Any place when shallow cover where

shad spawn;

- Steeper points with little bluff ends, but they don't have to have rock;
- Deeper areas where baitfish and bass will set up after the baitfish spawn, little small channel swings in the 5- to 10-foot range;
- Floating docks that are over water that's a little bit deeper;
- Submerged vegetation like hydrilla or milfoil, if you have any.

A big advantage of a lipless crankbait is that you can fish it close to the surface, a foot or 2 deep, by holding your rod tip up during the retrieve, or you can let it sink down to 10 feet and keep it close to the bottom on your retrieve. You can even yo-yo it with your rod, raising the tip from 9 to 12 o'clock and riding it back down.

A very important part of fishing lipless crankbaits is the rod you use. It needs to be a crankbait rod with a parabolic action. I like to fish an Arashi Vibe on a

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bass that have recovered from the spawn and a ready to start feeding again will key in on the baitfish spawn in May, and a lipless crankbait is one lure that will catch them.

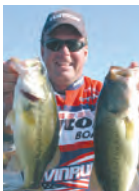
rod that is a combination of fiberglass and graphite. I don't want a stiff rod or a noodle. I like a 7- to 7½-foot, medium-heavy action Bass Pro Shops cranking rod and a reel spooled with 14- to 17-pound XPS fluorocarbon. I love the sensitivity of the fluorocarbon, that there's not as much stretch as in other lines, and we don't mind it sinking a little bit.

With the combination of a rod that will bend and a line that won't stretch gives you the ability to fight and land fish. We all know that one of the problems with lipless baits is that you'll lose some of the fish you hook because you're fishing a heavy bait. When they jump, then can get some leverage and throw it. With this combination, you can land a higher percentage of fish. Ott Defoe hardly lost any fish on a lipless bait when he won the Classic.

The other thing is, you can make long casts with this bait and this rod. Typically, you're going to be making long casts when you're fishing the flat points where herring spawn. You might be 40 or 50 yards off the point and still be sitting in 5 feet of water.

I pretty much stick with a half-ounce bait if I'm fishing from 1 to 10 feet deep. You can make it too complicating trying to switch to heavier or lighter baits. One thing I do like to do is change out the hooks that come on the bait to slightly larger hooks. I will replace the No. 4 trebles that come with the bait to No. 3 VMC hybrid hooks. I think the bigger hooks help when it comes to losing fewer fish.

So when the bass finish up spawning, don't put your lipless crankbaits away. Pay close attention to when the baitfish in your local lake or reservoir spawn, key in on them for a couple of weeks, and make sure you have a lipless bait tied on. The action can be fast and furious. ■



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

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RUSSELL BASS KEYING

on blueback herring spawn

Bass, largemouths and spots, will be keying on the herring spawn at Lake Russell in May. Largemouths will be on long, sloping points, and spots are in deeper water off main-lake points.

Pat Robertson

Spawning dictates fishing for largemouth bass on South Carolina's Lake Russell this month, according to guide Wendell Wilson of Elberton, Ga. With the spawn about finished, the bass are recovering and looking to fatten back up on blueback herring, which are in the midst of spawning.

Herring will be in shallow water early in the morning before the sun gets up and begins to warm the water, and the bass will be there, too, looking for an easy meal.

"The bass will be feeding on long, sloping points early in the morning, and you can catch them on topwater lures,

jerkbaits and any kind of swimbait," said Wilson (706-283-3336). "May is one of the best months to catch a good largemouth, over 5 pounds, in Lake Russell,"

It is also a good time to catch a big spotted bass, too, Wilson said, in deeper water off main-lake points.

"Swimbait is the best for spotted bass, which can go up to 4 pounds," he said.

While hefty largemouths are the target on the long, sloping points, anglers should be prepared for a possible surprise, Wilson said.

"We have more strippers in the lake than we have ever had, a lot of 12- to 20-pound fish. They are feeding on the same points as the largemouths, and they will hit the same lures and also live baits," he said.

If big largemouths, spotted bass and strippers are not enough and someone is just looking to fill a cooler with eating fish, crappie will fill the bill on Russell this time of year, Wilson said.

"May is not necessarily a time for size in crappie, but it is a really good time for numbers. They will be ganged up on shallow brush piles in the creeks in 10 to 15 feet of water all day long. Target them with minnows or jigs 4 to 6 feet down."

It's also a good time to catch a good mess of catfish, he said.

"The catfish are starting to bite good now and you can catch good numbers on cut herring on the shallow points." ■

— Pat Robertson

POSTSPAWN BASS

are top targets at Lake Wateree

May is the time of year to catch lots of largemouth bass, including some big ones, on South Carolina's Lake Wateree, according to veteran angler Dearal Rodgers of Camden, S.C.

"Although some spawning activities will still be happening at Wateree in early May, I like to target postspawn fish," Rodgers said. "One of the best ways to catch these postspawn bass is by targeting the shad spawn early in the morning."

Shad will spawn heavily throughout May around floating docks, grass patches and rocks, he said.

"Look for shad flicking the surface around these areas, and the bass aren't far behind," he said. "My favorite baits to target these bass are buzzbaits and spinnerbaits in shad patterns with a mixture of gold and silver blades."

Another tip for finding this bite is to look for blue herons lining the bank, Rodgers said, because they always know where the spawning shad are.

"Once the sun comes out and the shad spawn is over for the day, I like to target docks," he said. "Here, bass are feeding on bream, and my favorite bait to mimic the bream is a Buckeye Mop jig in green pumpkin with a Zoom Big Salty chunk."



Big, postspawn bass will be keying on the shad spawn at Lake Wateree throughout May.

Rodgers said bass will often suspend in the shaded areas, so get the jig to them by skipping it under the docks. Heavy line, at least 17-pound test, is a must for this technique.

"As the end of May approaches, get out (a) Norman's DD22 crankbait and get ready to plow the deep points and ledges with it," he said, noting that his favorite color is chartreuse with a blue back.

"Lake Wateree offers great opportunities to catch numbers and quality size bass in May," he said. ■

— Pat Robertson

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6

BIG 6

for spring stripers

These half-dozen bodies of water in the Carolinas are sure-fire places to get your string stretched by a big striper between April and June.

By Terry Madewell

Outstanding striper fishing is found throughout the Carolinas, but some lakes seem to be more consistently productive at certain times of the year.

With late-April and May being a bit of transition time for stripers that are going through a spawn or “false spawn,” fish are often on the move but typically also feeding heavily.

Be sure you know the regulatory requirements in advance before fishing any striper lake. Management strategies often require diverse size, slot and creel limits, and changes to regulations may also happen during the year on specific lakes or rivers.

Here’s a look at bodies of water in North Carolina and South Carolina that consistently provide anglers ample

opportunity to get their strings stretched.

LAKE HARTWELL

May typically produces sensational striper fishing on South Carolina’s Lake Hartwell for quality and quantity of fish, and anglers can enjoy fast action using live bait and artificial lures.

Live-bait fishing is the early morning “go-to” tactic for many fishermen, according to Preston Harden of Bucktail Guide Service.

“Blueback herring are the preferred bait for most Lake Hartwell striper fishermen,” Harden said. “The key is to always keep fresh bait on the line and to keep adjusting the depth to keep at or just above the depth stripers are marked on the graph.”

>



Hardin, who lives on the lake near Townville, S.C., relies on his electronics to find the fish and forage concentrations. Strippers are in large schools, and the specific location will vary daily, but the fish are usually found throughout the 56,000-acre lake by May.

“Some fish will still be up the rivers in late April, and early May,” said Hardin (706-255-5622). “But as the month progresses, the lower half of the lake begins to hold more fish. I fish nearly every day, so I track fish movements closely, and when I get on a big school of fish, they tend to linger in the same general area for a while, making the fish-finding process easier.”

Hardin said prime places to find strippers are mid-lake humps with deep-water access. Also, long points in the larger creeks and coves are among the first places he checks, but humps and points on the main lake can be excellent.

“If I see a reasonable number of fish on the graph that I believe are strippers, I’ll usually drop baits,” he said. “I don’t have to have a screen full of fish to set up. Once we hook a couple of fish, the fighting fish seems to pull every stripper in the area to the boat.”



Terry Madewell

A big stripper from South Carolina’s Lake Hartwell might be more than a match for any angler using any class of fishing tackle.

Hardin said that the entire month of May is productive, but if you get a chance to fish on a cloudy day or a day featuring light rain, get your gear and go.

“I love the overcast and misting rain days,” he said. “The action is better for longer periods of times.”

Working artificial lures is extremely effective, and Hardin is always watching for schooling fish action.

“I only need to see one or two fish blow up on forage to go after them,” he said. “I’ll usually pull a couple of free-lines with live herring out the back of the boat, and we’ll cast in front of the boat using topwater, ‘walk-the-dog’ type lures being a favorite.”

LAKE HIWASSEE

Although the North Carolina state-record striped bass, weighing 66 pounds, was caught from 6,000-acre Lake Hiwassee in 2012, odds are good the fish didn’t spend its whole life growing in those waters.

Shane Goebel with Big Ol’ Fish Guide



Terry Madewell

Strippers in many reservoirs make a big, “false” spawning run into the upper reaches of tributary creeks and rivers in the spring.

Service said that the record fish may herald future fishing trends, because Hiwassee Lake’s stripper fishing is booming, as recent stockings in the lake has developed a very strong class of fish.

“Many believe the state-record fish likely originated from (Georgia’s) Lake Nottely and was likely carried into Hiwassee during a high-water event,” he said. “I also think it’s a harbinger of things to come, because last year, we caught several fish over 30 pounds from Lake Hiwassee, and the lake is teeming with strippers in the 10- to 15-pound class.”

Goebel (828-361-2021) said the fishing patterns for mid-April through May and into June are fairly predictable, with most strippers moving up the rivers and numerous large creeks.

LAKE HICKORY: a sleeper for big strippers

Guide Craig Price said one of his favorite places to catch big, spring strippers is on Lake Hickory, a 6,200-acre reservoir with two impoundments upstream from Lake Norman on the Catawba River chain in North Carolina’s Foothills.

“Many of the fishing patterns are the same as Lake Norman for this time period,” he said, “but when strippers begin to migrate down this lake, one major difference is Lake Hickory doesn’t have the long, sloping points characteristic of Lake Norman.”

Price said another key on Lake Hickory can dramatically change patterns.

“As the water warms through May and into June, I’ve learned that when water is released into the upper end of Hickory the water is cooler and highly oxygenated,” he said. “That, plus the current flow, draws fish from downlake toward the upper end.”

“Good-sized strippers are caught at a lot of lakes, but in this part of the state, if I’m trying to catch a stripper in the 15- to 25-pound class, I’d pick Lake Hickory.” ■



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“They’re looking for some moving water, and they’ll go upstream, and that’s where we’ll fish until early May,” he said. “The Hiwassee River will hold fish, but also places like Chambers Cove, Beaver Dam Creek and similar areas have fish in good numbers. The lake is loaded with fingers off the main lake that will hold strippers in April to early May.

“We fish these areas with live bait and prefer blueback herring and gizzard shad,” he said. “We’ll slow-troll with electric motors and pull free-lines and planer boards in the back of the creeks to start the day. As the sun gets up, we’ll typically move out a little deeper using the same technique.”

Goebel said the deeper he gets into May, he’ll gradually transition with the fish as they move back to the main-lake area, focusing on mouths of creeks, points and humps. As water continues to warm, the fish will begin to school up.

“I’ll use electronics to find strippers and forage, and by late May and June, we’ll be setting up on the schools and fishing ver-

tical with live bait,” he said. “As the strong year-classes of stocked fish continue to grow, along with other strippers that have flooded into the lake, I think in 10 years, we’re going to have some real monster strippers in this lake.”

LAKE MURRAY

Striper fishing patterns on South Carolina’s Lake Murray are quite diverse during May, with both artificial lures and live bait producing excellent results.

Guide Brad Taylor of Batesburg, S.C., said his philosophy is that strippers are typically on shallow points, humps and flats early in the morning, feeding aggressively. They can be taken with various artificial lures including “walk-the-dog” type topwater lures, as well as Flukes and bucktails.

“This is exciting fishing, because we’ll often find the fish in fairly shallow water in low-light conditions,” said Taylor (803-331-1354), “but when they scatter, we’ll search the deeper areas and find them in schools suspended over deeper water.”

Taylor targets underwater topography



The “spaghetti-noodle” images of a school of strippers are a real homerun for fishermen in the spring.

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Fresh bait, be it blueback herring, gizzard shad or threadfin shad, is a real key to striper-fishing success on any lake or river in the Carolinas.

changes as striper holding areas and employs his graph to check points, humps, ledges and deep holes.

His live bait of choice is blueback herring, and he rigs multiple rods to present the bait in different ways. He'll work live bait on down rods for deep, suspended fish and position baits at or just above the targets on the graph. He'll pull free-lines with no weight well behind the boat to target fish higher in the water column. Planer boards are used to pull rigs away from the boat at a pre-determined depth and over the ledges where shallower flats drop into deep water.

ROANOKE RIVER

Weldon, N.C., is known as the "Rockfish Capital of the World", the striper fishing on the nearby Roanoke River in northeastern North Carolina certainly fully lives up to this moniker.

"The fishing on the Roanoke River, in the part I fish near Weldon, is crazy good during the last half of April and first half of May," said guide Greg Griffin. "The fish move up the river on a spawning run from the Albemarle Sound; that actually begins in March. But they reach the waters below the Roanoke Rapids Lake by mid-April in huge numbers."

Griffin (919-434-4183) said that off-the-chart type fishing doesn't last long, but while the run is on, it's sensational. The keeper season ends April 30.

Griffin, from Holly Springs, N.C., said both anchor-fishing and drifting are effective, but he typically prefers to anchor.

"I like to set up on a huge school of fish and have everyone in the boat hooked up," he said. "Electronics are the key to my success; I'll use my graph to locate huge schools of fish and then anchor just above them using my electronic anchoring system on the trolling motor. I usually find them in deeper stretches; sometimes they'll be stacked 8- to 15-foot thick."

Griffin uses a basic Carolina rig with a 7-foot, medium-action rod and a reel loaded with 12-pound line. To the terminal end, he ties a 3/0 circle hook; his preferred sinker weight is a ½-ounce, but he will use up to 2 ounces when discharge is high from Roanoke Rapids Lake and the water level rises.

Griffin said various baits will produce, but herring are by far the best.

"Live herring is king; I think will out-produce anything else by 10-to-1," he said. "But cut herring works well, so I can get multiple baits out of a single herring."

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CLARKS HILL LAKE

Clarks Hill Lake, which covers 71,100 acres on the Savannah River along the Georgia-South Carolina border, supports an excellent population of stripers and hybrid bass, and the mid-April to early June time period typically produces dependable and fairly predictable patterns.

Guide Allen Icenhour of Trenton, S.C., said May patterns are very dependable.

“Stripers and hybrids will be found in the lower end of the lake, and the patterns are not difficult to determine,” he said. “I rely on down-rod fishing using live bait, usually blueback herring. At this time of the year, the fish will orient to specific targets such as humps, points and drops in the lower end of the lake. The basic depths they prefer are from 20 to 40 feet, with the stripers moving progressively deeper as the water temperature rises.”

Icenhour (803-480-9472) depends on his electronics to find schools of stripers or hybrids. Marking a lot of fish that he believes to be stripers is the best indicator of a place to fish, although in May, it doesn't take a screen full for him to stop and check an area.

His basic fishing rig is a 7½-foot rod with a light tip, a reel spooled with 20-pound line and a 6-foot fluorocarbon leader. He'll use a 1- to 2-ounce egg sinker depending on depth fished.

LAKE NORMAN

Lake Norman is a big lake (32,500 acres) with lots of places for stripers and hybrids to hide, but Craig Price of Fish

On Guide Service said the May to June time frame produces lots of action, and it's a time when striper patterns are fairly predictable.

“The water temperature controls the exact timing of what I call the false spawn,” he said. “But from mid-April into May, we usually have fish far upriver in the old Catawba River channel. The action usually begins in March, but as fish finish the spawning effort, they begin migrating back down the lake.”

Price (704-996-0946) said the river fishing is usually live-bait fishing with herring and threadfin shad being top choices.

“We'll have current, and I'll fish a variety of baits and rigs to cover all depths for the water column,” he said. “I'll fish from a fixed position, using either spot lock or tying to a shoreline tree and use free-lines, lines rigged with a ⅛- or ¼-ounce weight and cut bait fished on the bottom.”

Typically, Price will find a pattern for the day and work that pattern. As the season progresses, many stripers begin to migrate back down the lake, and he adjusts his targets accordingly.

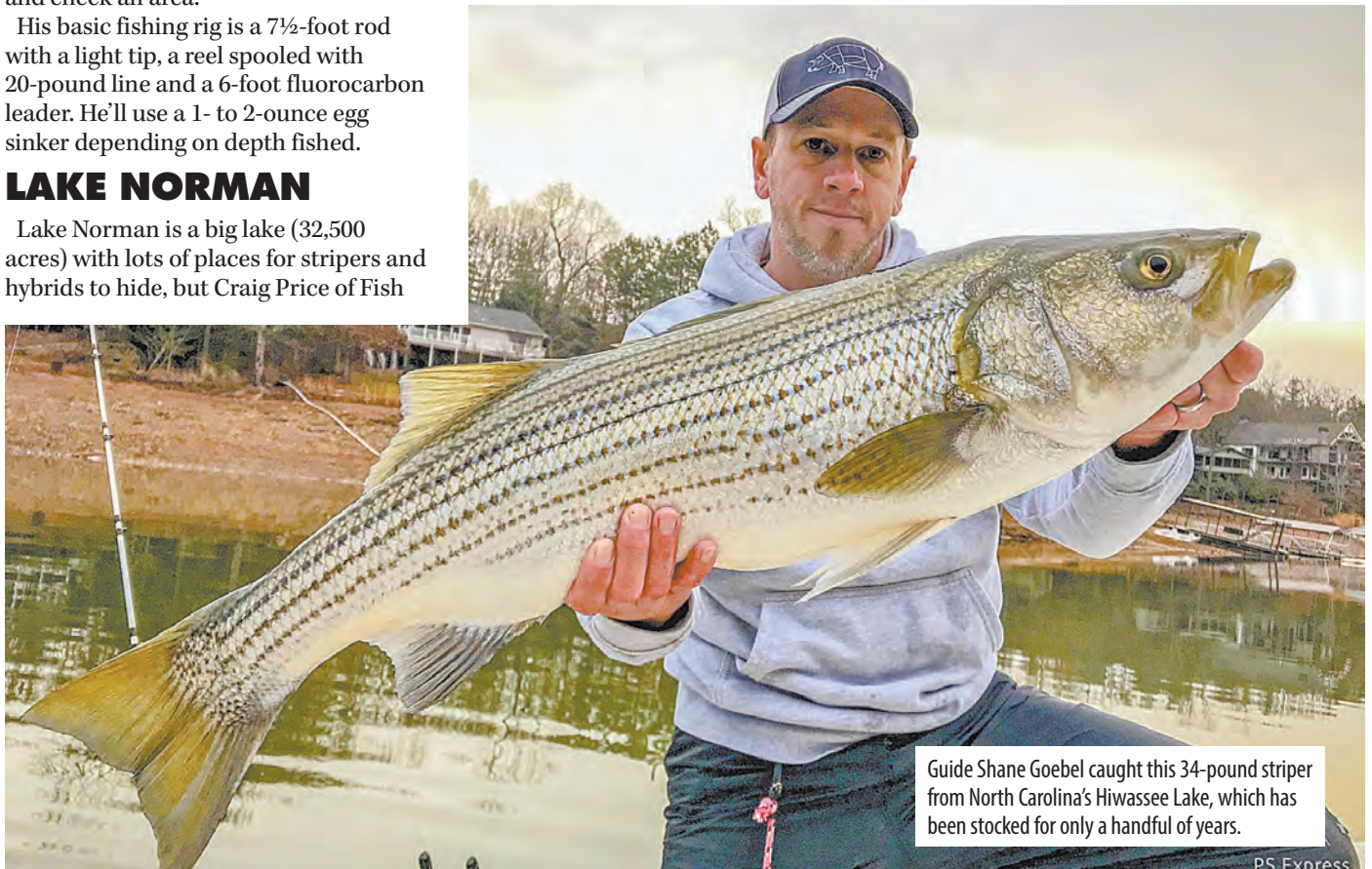
“By mid-May, I'm typically fishing the mid-lake area and working long, sloping points and deep banks,” he said. “Live bait continues to be productive, but I'll also fish artificial lures, with the Alabama Rig being very productive at times.”

The transition continues from May into June, and Price said stripers continue moving further down the lake and spreading out. He targets the creek mouths where they meet the old river channel. He said the deeper points and ledges are also productive.

“The action stays good throughout this transition, but the key is staying on top of the striper movement as they migrate from the upper end back down the lake,” he said. “I use electronics and time on the water to help me stay in touch with the fish.” ■



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.



Guide Shane Goebel caught this 34-pound striper from North Carolina's Hiwassee Lake, which has been stocked for only a handful of years.

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Lake Rhodhiss produces some of North Carolina's biggest stripers, and May is a prime month for action.

MAY IS BIG-FISH TIME for Lake Rhodhiss stripers

Joe Jobin, recently retired as a fishing guide, said he's noticed a big change related to striper fishing at Lake Rhodhiss near Morganton, N.C. Lakeside development.

"While striper fishing remains excellent at the lake, it no longer takes place in a serene setting," Jobin said. "In the past few years, the number of lakeside homes has about tripled. The intense development has resulted in more boating traffic and increased fishing pressure."

Jobin said the best fishing takes place in May before the summer recreational traffic breaks loose. He fishes the river section from the Johns River Access Area all the way to the US 18 bridge.

The river narrows near the bridge, which forces him to pull only one planer board close to the shoreline near the ends of tree laps where stripers hold. At the same time, he'll run two free lines out of the back of his boat. After he makes one pass through the area, Jobin will switch sides to fish the opposite bank with the same setup.

"The river is so narrow, I can't put out two planer boards, because if another boat comes my way, I'll risk losing one of the planer boards to the passing boat," he said.

Another hot spot is about a half-mile from the bridge, where sand-dredging has created potholes about 20 feet deep in the river bottom, which is typically only 4 to 6 feet deep.

"Stripers covet those deep holes," Jobin said. "Good numbers of big fish are caught

there."

Jobin said the Duke Power (www.duke-energy.com/lakes) has water discharge information that's of use to fishermen.

"If one generator is open, the current is perfect for trolling for stripers," he said. "If two generators are open, the current is too swift for trolling, and fishermen have to anchor to fish."

A live-bait specialist, Jobin usually has live gizzard shad at the business end of his rigs, which feature a No. 6 treble hook through one nostril of the shad to keep the bait fresh and lively. His baitcasting gear employs 20-pound line that enables



Joe Jobin

him to move a big striper away from snags and tree laps.

In May, Jobin said most stripers at Rhodhiss run 8 to 12 pounds, but 20-pound stripers are not uncommon.

— Tony Garitta

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Late can be great

As turkey season winds down in the Carolinas, big toms are lonesome and at risk, especially around lunchtime and in the afternoons. These four veteran hunters understand why.

By Craig Holt

Although turkey hunters in the Carolinas often believe gobblers are easier to kill early in the spring season, that's only partially true.

Young male birds come to calls more readily early on, but veteran hunters know they can more easily lure trophy turkeys into range in the latter days.

This holds true for South Carolina with its March 20-May 5 season on private lands, and in North Carolina, with its traditional four-week season, this year April 13 to May 11.

Four expert hunters — Tar Heels Larry Smith of Chatham

County and Ted White of Robeson County and the Palmetto State's Cliff Timmons of Greenville and Chris Hawley of Murrells Inlet — consistently tag late-season birds.

Smith, 71, has hunted turkeys for 5½ decades. He downed his best gobbler ever the last week of the 2018 season.

"I hunted him from 6 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.," he said, "starting when he gobbled from a tree that morning."

Making soft mouth-call yelps and cutts, Smith moved four times in six hours, trying to ambush the walking boss bird. >



'Ghost' call for gobblers

Experienced hunters use locator calls to get responses from turkey gobblers, hoping to make a bird reveal his location but not necessarily lure him to the hunter.

Crow calls and owl hoots are popular locator calls, but if birds are tight-lipped, some hunters use a gobbler call.

The "Haint" call stands above others in producing realistic gobbles.

"It's a little difficult to learn to use but sounds exactly like a gobbler," said Cliff Timmons of Greenville, S.C. "Once I was walking out of a 200-acre area near Union and using my Haint call. I met some other hunters who said, 'You can't use electronic calls in South Carolina.' They were surprised it was a gobble call."

Timmons only uses the Haint call on private land, never on public land because of the chance of attracting another hunter.

"I move a lot and use the Haint to locate a bird, move on him, get hidden, then use hen calls," he said.

"Haint" is a rural Southern pronunciation of the verb "haunt." Southerners use the word as a noun or a verb. A "haint" is a ghost, but a person or dog's spirit might "haint" a house. ■

Gobbler calls like the 'Haint' are great locator calls, especially late in the season.



Larry Smith's huge 2018 gobbler sported spurs that were 1½ and 1⅞ inches long.

"Hens were nesting, so he was looking," he said. "After lunch, I yelped and saw him at 80 yards."

The gobbler closed to 30 yards before Smith, his back against a tree, dropped it with a Knight TK 2000 muzzle-loading shotgun. The tom weighed 23½ pounds and carried an 11½-inch beard and spurs 1½ and 1⅞ inches long.

Smith recalled something the late Dick Kirby, a famed call-maker and hunter, once said: "Early in the season, he'll gobble, and hens go to him. As the season progresses, fewer and fewer hens show up, then no hens show up. When that happens, it's the day you can kill him."

Smith has bagged many gobblers between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., but he said if hunters call too much or too loudly, mature birds often "hang up" outside of gun range.

"If you hammer him with calls, he'll gobble and wait for you to show up," he said.

For Smith, using decoys also is problematic late in the season.

"I've had gobblers come in, see a decoy, walk away and gobble, waiting for the hen (decoy) to follow," Smith said. "If I use a decoy, it's a jake, not a hen, because gobblers will run off (mating) competition."

Full-body camouflage clothing is a key, including a face mask and gloves.

If a gobbler answers a call, Smith sits with his back to a tree.

"I rarely use a gobbler call, but if I do, it's to make a dominant bird think another gobbler or jake is in his territory. Fighting-purr calls also may work.

"If I'm hunting public land, I don't gobble. That can be dangerous."

Timmons often hunts in Upstate South Carolina, which features habitat similar to North Carolina's foothills and mountains. Deep ravines are interspersed with fields scattered at ridgetops or stream bottoms, and tactics are different.

"A friend and I didn't fill any tags until April 28 (2018) when we tripled in



Lancaster County," he said.

The gobblers were with a hen on a ridge above them when Timmons used a hen call.

"The hen took them in the opposite direction," he said. "We climbed the hill then went down a ravine to a logging road. We thought we could call them



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down to a logging deck. I called, and they gobbled way off.”

The two hunters walked down the road several yards, then sat down against trees.

“I began to hen yelp and cutt, then added two or three Haint gobbler calls and got them fired up enough to leave the hen,” he said.

After two hours, the three gobblers walked up the road to within 25 yards. Timmons dropped two, and his buddy shot the other gobbler.

“I do a lot of scouting,” Timmons said. “Hen signs are good; I’ll check out those hot spots from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. I’ve had a lot of luck then. I also listen for turkeys (flying up) to roost in the evening.”

In fields, he places a lone hen decoy.

“My favorite field ambush spot is the edge of a cedar thicket where we sit Indian style on the ground,” he said.

South Carolina’s Lowcountry — a handful of counties from the South Carolina-Georgia line northeast to around Georgetown and 50 or so miles inland — presents a different challenge.

“I hunt mostly the Williamsburg area,” said Hawley, president of the Murrells Inlet chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. “It has pine forests, some fields, uplands and a lot of swamps.”

Early in the season, he sets up blinds along field edges, but later on, he stalks gobblers in swamps.

“In the swamps, you don’t know what a gobbler is going to do,”



Cliff Timmons didn’t score until the last week of South Carolina’s 2018 season, then took these two toms.

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he said. "It's hard to know how far a gobbler is. At a big field, you might hear or see him a long distance. But I've set up in a swamp and had them drop right on me."

Hawley calls and stalks swamp birds during the season's final days. If he thinks a gobbler is headed toward a road or field, he'll walk to one of those openings.

"If he's coming and stops gobbling, I'll shut up," Hawley said. "If you overcall, that's a no-no. I use mouth calls and a custom-made John Tanner slate call. When he goes silent, I put away the calls."

White, an assistant principal at Lumberton High School, agreed the season's final days are "the best time to hunt a mature gobbler."

"If you catch a big tom alone, it can be as much fun as calling a 2-year-old bird," he said. >

Scouting is the key to success.

"You should get to know your area," White said.

Eastern North Carolina features plenty of large crop fields that attract turkeys, fields that may be surrounded by swamps where turkeys roost. They'll pitch down from those roosts into fields, and decoy setups featuring a jake and hen or strutting decoys are productive.

"Turkeys like spring wheat fields," he said. "The first three or four days after corn planting, they pull up sprouts. But they may come in silent; you might only hear drumming. At fields, I like to set up at logging or old tram-road entrances."

"In woods, you also might call one you've seen from a ridge."

White prefers diaphragm mouth calls and aluminum pot calls. "I also sometimes use a gobbler yelp, which has a deeper tone than a hen yelp," he said.

He agreed overcalling is a huge mistake.

"Gobblers expect hens to come to them" White said, "so patience is crucial. If you can see him, stop calling. If you can't see him, but he's hot, also shut up. Sit still 30 minutes longer than you can stand. You'll be surprised at the results." ■



Craig Holt of Snow Camp 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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By Jerry Dilsaver

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Singing the blues

Jerry Dilsaver



Noah Lynk enjoys fishing so much that on the few days he isn't guiding other fishermen, or when he has a cancellation, he goes fishing.

He has fun all the time, and occasionally, he discovers something new — like the large bluefish that spend part of the spring on the sandbars around Cape Lookout.

Fish up to 20 pounds make for quite a surprise, and Lynk has turned the fishery, which usually begins in mid-April and can last until June, into a regular part of his guide trips.

When the time comes, Lynk begins the day checking the close-in sandbars just off the point at Cape Lookout. He firsts looks for the large “chopper” blues closer in, but sometimes they prefer the outer lumps, off the end of the cape and beyond Shark Island. He spends plenty of time on the mini tower on his boat, searching for the shadows that give away the schools of marauding bluefish.

On one such morning, he spotted an area of whitewater just out of sight of the exposed nearshore sandbars, caused by swell coming from different directions and crashing into each other over a sandbar that was barely under the surface.

“Hopefully, they’ll be here,” Lynk said. “We’ll see if they’re here pretty quick.”

Lynk eased into the shallows around the sandbar searching for fish, all the time keeping a close watch for a large or odd wave. He had worked more than halfway around the whitewater when he got excited and pointed to a dark spot in the water.

“There they are,” Lynk said. “I thought when we didn’t find them up close they would be out here where it’s a little rougher. It must keep the bait stirred up better. It’s time to see if anybody is hungry.”

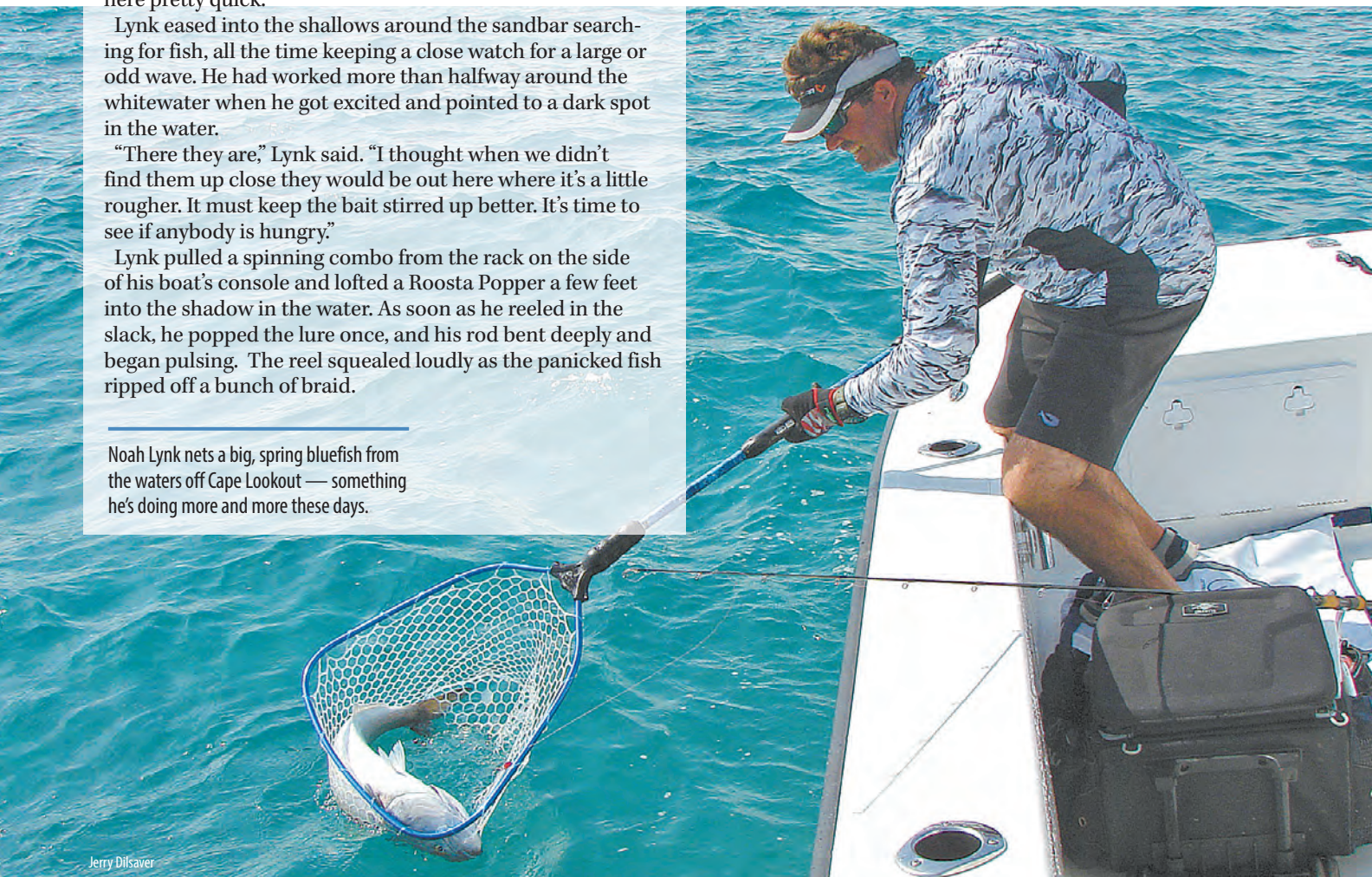
Lynk pulled a spinning combo from the rack on the side of his boat’s console and lofted a Roosta Popper a few feet into the shadow in the water. As soon as he reeled in the slack, he popped the lure once, and his rod bent deeply and began pulsing. The reel squealed loudly as the panicked fish ripped off a bunch of braid.

Noah Lynk nets a big, spring bluefish from the waters off Cape Lookout — something he’s doing more and more these days.

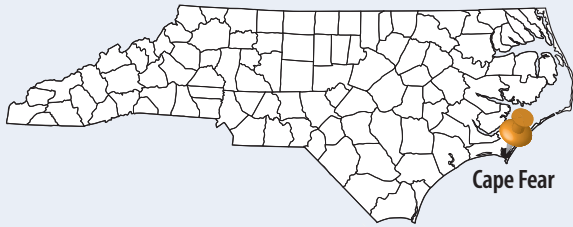
“Oh yeah, they’re here,” Lynk said, a grin spreading across his face.

A while later, Lynk led a tired bluefish to the landing net and managed to get most of it in before lifting it from the water. He carefully removed the hooks while avoiding the fish’s sharp teeth; the bite from a small bluefish is painful, and Lynk said that no one wanted to find out how much a bite from one this size hurt.

With everyone armed with an outfit and a topwater lure, Lynk eased back toward the whitewater. On this approach, the bluefish spread out and weren’t making the shadow that made them easy to spot. However, part of the school swam past the boat and paused off the bow. The first cast landed in the middle of the small group, and all of them turned to attack the lure. The water frothed as the first ones ran into each, and one of the ones a little farther back grabbed the lure first. It hadn’t moved more than a few yards when another tried to take the lure from it and found the other hook.



Jerry Dilsaver



DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — US 70 and NC 24 are main highways to access the Morehead City area, and US 70 continues to Harkers Island Road and Harkers Island. A public ramp on the mainland just across from the island is popular. Several marinas on the island have fee ramps.

WHEN TO GO — Bluefish arrive around Cape Lookout in the spring, usually sometime in April. Smaller bluefish will be around until the late fall. The large bluefish are migrating north and just passing through. They take advantage of the abundance of forage fish along Cape Lookout Shoals to feed ravenously and stay until the water warms, usually leaving by the middle of June.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Sight-casting to big bluefish is the ticket. Use a spinning rod rated at 6 to 14 pounds with 3000 to 4000 class spinning reels spooled with 12-pound braid and a short leader of 30-pound fluorocarbon. The best lures are large, loud and make lots of splash, like Halco's Roosta Poppa, C-gar and Sli-Dog and Jerk Minnow and Surf Walker from Savage Gear.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Noah Lynk, Noah's Ark Fishing Charters, 252-342-6911, www.noahsarkfishingcharters.com; Cape Pointe Marina, www.capepointemarina.com, 252-728-6181. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Cape Pointe Marina (www.capepointemarina.com) has R.V. sites and Harkers Island Fishing Center (www.harkersmarina.com) has a small motel. Both have ramps and dockage. There are also rental condos and cottages on Harkers Island. The closest chain motels are roughly 30 minutes away in Morehead City and on Atlantic Beach. Contact the Crystal Coast Tourism authority, 800-786-6962, www.crystalcoastnc.org.

MAPS — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainsegullcharts.com; Sealake Fishing Guides, 800-411-0185, www.thegoodspots.com; Grease Chart, 800-326-3567, www.greasechart.com; Maps Unique, 910-458-9923, www.offshore-fishing-map.com; GMCO's Chartbook of North Carolina, 888-420-6277, www.gmco-maps.com.

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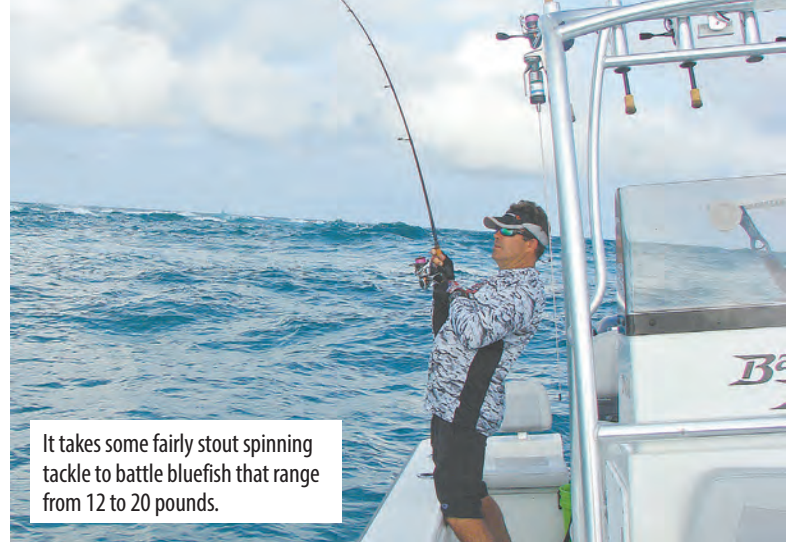


This was a mess for a couple of minutes as the big bluefish slugged it out against each other. Lynk was helpless; all he could do was keep the line tight. Finally, one pulled free, and Lynk began working the other fish to the boat, but it came off just a few yards off the boat.

Most times, that would be upsetting, but on this morning, it wasn't a problem. There were hundreds of hungry bluefish feeding around this small sand lump along the shoals. Lynk eased the boat back within casting range of the school, and a pair were quickly hooked.

The action continued wide open for several hours. Lynk would approach the whitewater from downwind and point out the school of bluefish. His fishermen would cast to them and pop their topwater lures as soon as they got the line tight. At least one would be rewarded with a hard strike, and there were several doubles. If the lure was popped more than a half-dozen times without a strike, the school had turned or moved quickly. When the fish saw the lure or saw and heard the splash, they attacked immediately and without hesitation.

Once the fish were in the fish box or released, Lynk would ease back to within casting range to continue sight-fishing topwaters for fish from 12 to 20 pounds; to say it was exciting was an extreme understatement. It was a feeding frenzy, and it appeared that colors didn't matter. The bite was spurred by the lures' popping action. Lynk pointed out that it was important to use large lures so the fish couldn't swallow them and become deep-hooked.



It takes some fairly stout spinning tackle to battle bluefish that range from 12 to 20 pounds.

Jerry Dilsaver

The blues didn't tire or leave and were still ravenously attacking lures when it was time to head in. Lynk didn't want to leave any more than the fishermen did, but he had to trade them for an afternoon group back at the marina. It had been a good morning fighting big, rambunctious bluefish along the shoals within sight of the Cape Lookout Lighthouse.

These are big fish, feeding hard before continuing their journey northward, and Lynk expected the second shift to find them just as hungry and aggressive. ■

BLUEFISH >
UP NEXT



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

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Singing the blues



Spring blues are usually long and skinny, but they're a handful for Cape Lookout anglers on their northern migration in late April and May.

Bluefish

Bluefish, *Pomatomus saltatrix*, are nearshore, saltwater pelagic fish found around the world in most temperate and subtropical waters. They range in size from 7-inch snappers to large fish found primarily from Cape Hatteras northward that are called chopper or Hatteras blues. The nicknames come from a mouth full of pointed sharp teeth that are always willing to clamp down on anything in their range.

Bluefish weighing up to approximately 3 pounds travel in large schools. They are very aggressive and seem to always be feeding. They readily attack anything their size or smaller and sometimes larger fish, too. Fishermen have long joked about schools of wildly feeding bluefish being the saltwater counterparts of piranha.

As they grow larger, bluefish typically abandon the large schools and live in smaller groups that might more correctly be called packs. They feed on schools of forage fish and occasionally attack ruthlessly in a frenzy called a blitz. North Carolina's Outer Banks is famous for bluefish blitzes, when packs of bluefish chase many species of fish through the surf zone unto the beach. Bluefish are voracious predators and are almost always feeding.

A spring run of 6- to 20-pound bluefish moves up the North Carolina coast each spring. Depending on how quickly or slowly the water warms, bluefish are in the Cape Lookout area from



about the last week of April through mid-June. The current North Carolina and world-record bluefish is a 31-pound, 12-ounce fish caught by James Hussey at Cape Hatteras in 1972.

Opinions vary as to the table quality of bluefish. The opinions are skewed towards those who talk disparagingly about the table quality of bluefish, but many people enjoy them. Larger bluefish eat a lot of menhaden, which are oily themselves and contribute to the stronger flavor of larger bluefish. Smaller, younger, bluefish eat small minnows and crabs, and most fishermen agree they have a milder flavor. Bleeding larger fish and removing the dark strip of meat on each side helps mellow the flavor. Smoked bluefish is a favorite of many who don't care for it prepared otherwise. ■

The advertisement for Southside Outdoors features a collage of images and logos. At the top left, a white speedboat with a Mercury outboard motor is shown on the water, with the text "Live the dream GLASSTREAM POWERBOATS" overlaid. To the right, a camouflage-patterned boat is shown with two people in waders, and the text "HAVOC BOATS Wreckin' Havoc" is visible. Below these images is the central logo for "SOUTHSIDE OUTDOORS" in large red letters, with the phone number "843-292-1195" and address "2304 Claussen Road Florence, SC". Logos for "MERCURY", "SUZUKI MARINE", "TOHATSU Outboards", and "YAMAHA" are arranged around the central text. At the bottom left, a white boat with a Suzuki outboard motor is shown, with the "AQUASPORT" logo below it. At the bottom right, a pontoon boat with a Starcraft motor is shown, with the "STARCRAFT MARINE" logo above it.

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CAPE LOOKOUT COBIA

make their annual visit in May

Cobia visit North Carolina's coast from March through November, but May is the best month to find these fighting fish concentrated in nearshore waters, especially those around Cape Lookout.

"When the water temperature gets 62 to 65 degrees, (menhaden) go through inlets to spawn, and cobias follow them," said guide Noah Lynk of Harkers Island (252-342-6911). "That's usually in May."

Lures that imitate menhaden and live shad fished higher in the water column or freshly-cut shad chunks or live baits soaked on the bottom, will catch cobia.

"You also can use croakers, spots and even eels," said Lynk, who runs Noah's Ark Fishing Charters. "Many people sight-fish at floating structures such as buoys, channel markers, jetties or near menhaden schools; some bottom-fish at inlets, cobia travel routes."

Many anglers anchor and put out free-line float rigs with live baits or soak live or cut baits on the bottom using slider rigs.

"Cut baits work, as long as they're fresh," said Lynk, who uses four rods when he anchors, one with a free-line shad, one with a one-ounce barrel weight to cover mid-range depths, and two slider rigs.

"The key for anchored fishing is to have wind and tide going the same direction," he said. "Otherwise, your baits end up under the boat, and you'll have a train wreck of tangled lines."

One of his favorite May sight-fishing trips includes paralleling Shackleford Banks, then heading east to check out Bald Head Bay and circling Cedar Hammock, Morgan

and Great Marsh islands, seeking fish at Cape Lookout rock jetty, checking Barden Inlet, trying the inside and outside of Cape Lookout's "hook," then scanning for cobia at Shark Island and passages across the East Side's shoals.

Cobia near floating structures often will slam ½- to 1-ounce bucktails with 9- to 10-inch soft-plastic trailers or 6-inch-long paddletail lures cast to them. Lynk also throws Halco topwater baits at cobia, like the SliDog, C-Gar and Roosta Popper.

"You're not going to catch a lot of cobia," Lynk said. "If I catch one keeper, it's a blessing. Cobia are like ghosts; they appear and disappear. The best places to fish are where you know cobias hang out or move through, like inlets and shoals." ■

— Craig Holt



Noah Lynk caught this big cobia sight-fishing with a big, topwater plug.

Noah Lynk



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DIAL UP SOUTH
CAROLINA'S

By Terry Madewell

RIVER

**THE WATEREE, CONGAREE
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AND MILES OF
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR FISHERMEN TO
DO BATTLE WITH
BIG CATFISH,
STRIPED BASS,
ESPECIALLY IN
LATE SPRING.**

WATERS



Terry Madewell

Madewell

Rivers are an often-overlooked fishing resource in the Carolinas, and the truth is, some rivers are loaded with monster catfish and stripers that receive relatively low fishing pressure.

Such is the case with the two South Carolina waterways, the Wateree and Congaree rivers, with a combined length of approximately 120 miles of fishing opportunities. The best part is a lot of these river monsters can live undisturbed in long stretches of remote and not-heavily fished water.

The Congaree begins at the confluence of the Saluda and Broad rivers, the Wateree starts below Wateree Dam. Both rivers roll down highly serpentine courses over rocky shoals and debris-laden river bends in the upper reaches. They merge, forming the Santee River in the upper end of Lake Marion in a coastal-plain topography of sandbars, high bluffs and large floodplains.

Their junction in the Santee Cooper system is one key to the outstanding fishing. The system is home to legendary sized catfish and stripers, and water flow in these rivers attracts these big fish.

Justin Whiteside of Rock Hill, S.C., has fished these rivers his entire life and guides on them when water conditions are right. He and his clients have enjoyed many up-close-and-personal experiences with river monsters.

"To me, river monsters can be associated with catfish and stripers in excess of 30 pounds," he said. "Make no mistake, we've caught a lot of catfish much, much larger than 30 pounds, but that's a reasonable goal on any trip. While 30-pound stripers are certainly unusual, we've caught and released several stripers that size over the years, and I've caught one stripper over 40 pounds from the Congaree River. But the

opportunity to hook big stripers at this time of the year exists. Catching stripers 30 inches or better is a distinct possibility."

On one half-day trip in May 2018, Whiteside and two anglers boated three catfish over 30 pounds, along with two more over 20. Also, two stripers over 30 inches were caught and released. Two more river monsters of unknown species were hooked that couldn't be turned.

Whiteside (803-417-0070) said definable fishing patterns exist to enable anglers find these river monsters, and generically, the same type of places work on either river.

"Both species are highly attracted to eddy water in rivers, and the places I target are simply anything that creates an eddy," he said. "We often catch both species from the same spot."

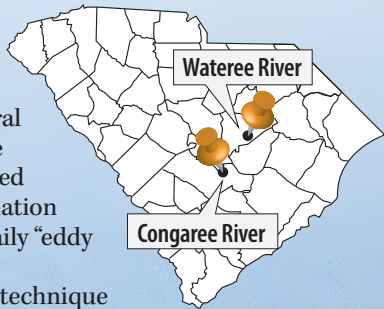
Prime targets for Whiteside include the confluence of creeks with the rivers, and even ditches or drainages with a good flow after a heavy rain will produce the desired eddy effect. Also, logs, downed trees, rocks or other obstructions in the water create fish-catching opportunities. Downstream points of islands and deep holes are potential hotspots for both species.

Whiteside said water flow varies considerably, even daily, this time of year, so places where eddies existed on one trip may



Terry Madewell

BELOW: The top-end for river catfish is extremely big because the Congaree and Wateree are directly connected to the Santee Cooper lakes.



be dry or covered by several feet of water the next. The productive areas are limited only by an angler's imagination and ability to break the daily "eddy code" on the river.

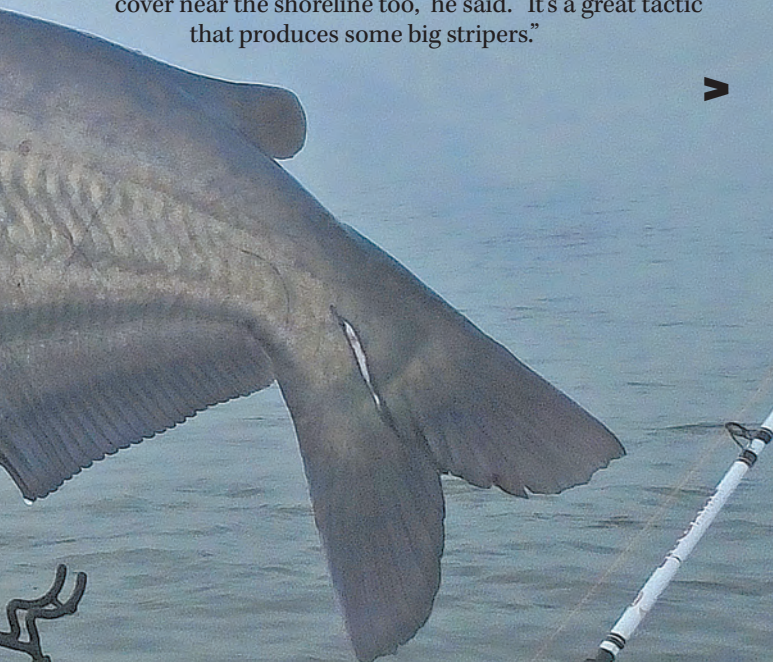
Whiteside said his basic technique is to anchor-fish; he drops an anchor upstream of his intended target and drifts to where he wants the boat positioned. If fishing a creek mouth, he'll set up to be able to fish the water where the creek and river meet and work the eddy. He'll also work rigs work further downstream, frequently using balloon rigs to target a specific eddy.

"I specifically target each species in some ways," he said. "For stripers, I often use a smaller hook and bottom-fishing rig and also often fish small, live shad on free-lines. Sometimes, I'll add a small split-shot to get the bait a little deeper in the water column.

"Stripers are much more likely to be found throughout the water column, and we'll catch them on the bottom as well as on the free-lines close to the surface," he said. "Live shad and herring are prime baits for stripers, but we catch a lot of stripers fishing cut shad and herring on the bottom on smaller rigs. Small baits will catch big stripers in these rivers."

Whiteside also uses planer boards from an anchored position to get live baits up on gravel and sand bars to target stripers.

"I'll use planer boards to fish close to bushes and other cover near the shoreline too," he said. "It's a great tactic that produces some big stripers."



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RIVER MONSTERS



Bait is a key on the Wateree and Congaree rivers; use big baits to target catfish and downsize when targeting stripers.



Terry Madewell

To target catfish, Whiteside prefers big baits and big hooks and typically uses cut bait with gizzard shad, threadfin shad, herring, white perch and bream. He serves a smorgasbord of baits on multiple rods early in the day, looking for the preferred bait. Some days it's crucial to have just the right bait, but often, they'll all produce well.

Another excellent setup Whiteside employs is fishing submerged debris mid-river that he marks on his graph. He anchors so the boat is almost directly over the cover, because the fish maybe holding immediately downstream in the water below the obstruction or actually in the debris.

"Usually, they'll stage just below the debris, but on some days, I'll have to fish almost vertically into the cover, because that's where the fish are," he said. "To get the line down near vertical will require heavier sinkers than if casting downstream of the target."

Whiteside said the entire length of both rivers provides excellent fishing, but water and weather conditions play a role in where he begins his search.

"After years of fishing and studying these rivers, I've learned that when the water is high and current flow strong, the big fish seem to be drawn further up the rivers," he said. "During late April and May, the water level may also be reasonably stable and the current flow average. In those instances, I've found the middle and lower ends to be the best choices."

Whiteside said many of the stripers caught are in the typical size-class of the Santee Cooper lakes' fish: 23 to 32 inches. But much larger stripers can be caught.

Whiteside always he carries extra fuel in case he needs to make a long run to remote areas to fish.

"Getting to remote areas for monster-sized fish is a part of the adventure of fishing these rivers," he said. "It may require effort to get to the right places, but I love the process of searching for and finding these big fish."

He said when a huge, hard charging catfish or striper is hooked in the river current, it creates a challenge and fish-fighting adventure an angler will long remember. ■

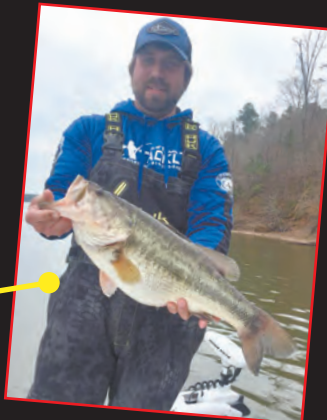
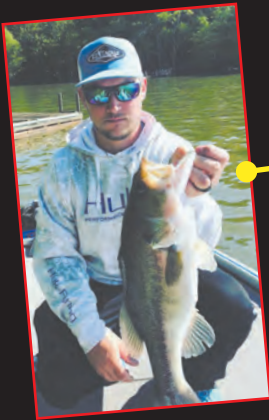
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Terry Madewell of Ridgeway, S.C., has been an outdoors writer for more than 30 years. He has a degree in wildlife and fisheries management and has a long career as a professional wildlife biologist/natural resources manager.

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GET AWAY FROM THE CROWD FOR BIG FISH

The Wateree and Congaree rivers offer anglers incredibly productive fishing for outlandish-sized stripers and catfish. Justin Whiteside said they are accessible with the right equipment and effort. "The more remote you're willing to go, the less pressure the stripers and catfish receive," he said. "That's another of the things I love about these rivers; I can still get away from the crowds. Combined, they offer a vast amount of water, much of it requiring effort or planning on the part of fisherman to access the remote areas. The flip side of this means the resources available for catching giant catfish and stripers is practically unlimited."

Access information for the Congaree River is available online, and one site with access information is www.sctrails.net/trails/trail/congaree-river-blue. For the Wateree River, check www.sctrails.net/trails/trail/wateree-river-blue.

Make sure you know the fishing rules and regulations for fishing these rivers before going. As part of the Santee Cooper system, specific regulations apply. ■



Stripers and catfish are often caught from the same spots in the Wateree and Congaree rivers because both species are attracted to eddies where they can feed out of the current.

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May Day is a little-known and less-celebrated holiday that marks the first day of the fifth month.

Mayday is also a distress call that most boaters and anglers hope they never have to make.

But it's not the only distress call with which we should familiarize ourselves. Two other distress calls are more commonly used, and they can help save lives and equipment, but many boaters and anglers aren't familiar with them.

To be sure, a mayday call is the most serious, and it should only be made when someone's life is in danger, when a boat is sinking, or when an uncontrollable fire is onboard the vessel.

The next most-serious call is a pan-pan (pronounced pahn-pahn). It is used when no immediate threat to life is present, but if that threat could become a reality. This call could be made if a boat has a slow leak, if all engines are disabled and in rough seas. This call is akin to

saying, "If I don't get some help soon, then my situation could become life-threatening."

In many cases, a boat with a slow leak can make it to shore with the aid of a pump. And it's not uncommon for a pan-pan to result in a rescue helicopter lowering a pump to a boat in this situation.

Another call anglers and boaters may hear on the radio is the securite call (pronounced sea-cur-i-tay). This call is used to warn boaters of some type of navigational hazard or situation. It is often used to report partially submerged or floating debris that could pose a problem for boaters. Approaching storms can also prompt this call, and when a large vessel — think a container ship — enters a narrow passage, this call is often used.

Most times, boaters will hear these calls from the U.S. Coast Guard or other mariners, but if you do have to make one of these calls, the proper procedure is to use Channel 16 of your VHF radio, repeat the distress call three times, then say

your boat name, your location, and what the problem is. You can add additional information, including how many people are onboard, whether anyone is injured, a description of your watercraft, and any other information that could help a search party find you. Be detailed but efficient, and speak in a normal cadence and as calmly as possible.

For example, "Mayday, mayday, mayday. This is the fishing vessel Michelle Jane located 65 miles southeast of Beaufort Inlet, and we are sinking. We have three adults onboard. One adult has a broken arm and a large open wound on his right shoulder. We hit floating debris, which punctured our hull. The boat is a 34-foot white catamaran with outriggers. We



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.

A working VHF radio may be the most-important safety feature on any boat operating in saltwater or freshwater.

are inflating an orange life raft and are preparing to ditch.”

Once you’ve made your call, pause for a response if time allows, then repeat the call as often as possible, continuing to update your location. GPS coordinates are best, but if they’re not available, give as much location information as possible. If you cannot determine your location, provide your last-known location and your best guess as to which direction you are currently traveling.

Another less severe but potentially life-saving example is “Securite, securite, securite. This is the flats boat Wasting Time. We are traveling the Waccamaw River into Winyah Bay and just spotted a 40-foot long floating tree. It was last seen floating under the US 521 bridge heading up the Waccamaw River approximately 75 feet off the west bank. It’s branches are visible about 10 feet above the water’s surface.” ■



VHF RADIOS NOT JUST FOR BIG BOATS:

Smaller craft should always carry VHF radios, because hazardous conditions can be present in even the smallest bodies of water. Having a VHF will not only allow you to share important information with other boaters, but it will give you the advantage of hearing information that could save your own life.

Plenty of VHF options are available in a variety of sizes. Some portable units are the size of a basic walkie-talkie and don’t require hard-wiring to the boat. Boaters can use these even when they change boats without having to uninstall any equipment. Not having the means to communicate can quickly turn an inconvenience into a life-threatening situation. A VHF radio will offer you peace of mind, keep you updated on navigational hazards, and it could save your life one day.

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Where does your deer herd spend the summer? Ride around in May and see what's planted in agricultural fields in your area, like these soybeans



FIND THE FARMER'S FOOD

DEER WILL BE ON AGRICULTURAL OFFERINGS FOR MUCH OF THE CAROLINAS' SPRING, SUMMER

Jeff Burleson

As summer arrives, it's easy to get distracted by the beach, sun, fishing and other warm-season activities.

Even though deer season is several months out, a diehard hunter can benefit from preseason preparedness to make their fall more productive. May is a perfect time to scout out fields for upcoming food banks, and there's no better place to check out the countryside than in the comfort of cool air conditioning with a hunter's play list sounding off in the background.

Many hunters rely on corn piles and feeders to bring their four-legged targets into the strike zone. Many others spend countless hours producing food plots. But it will be hard to compete with local farmers who are generally cultivating hundreds of acres of cropland full of tall corn, juicy soybeans and tasty peanuts. Certainly, several acres of food plots and big, fat corn piles will have a positive impact on a hunter's success. But deer

and other wildlife will know exactly where the farmer is making his bread.

Crops such as soybeans and peanuts are instantly attractive to wildlife. Corn will not be attractive until late summer and early fall when it has developed a sweet, tasty aroma. At the expense of the farmer, deer and other wildlife will feast in these croplands on a daily basis as soon as they become palatable. With soybeans and peanuts, the new, tender shoots are like ice cream for deer, packed with nutrition. Deer will incorporate these food banks into their daily travels and will often stay very close to these fields for the majority of the summer and at the beginning of hunting season.

In late August when corn becomes palatable, deer will incorporate these fields into their daily feeding schedules as well. Even when corn is harvested around Labor Day, the harvester routinely scatters a significant portion of grain onto the ground to provide a significant food source for deer and other wildlife species

during the fall.

Agriculture fields provide a significant food source for deer and other wildlife throughout the year, and by May, all of these fields will be in production. A quick drive through an area will help hunters understand where their deer herd will be spending much of the summer and fall. And for hunters with the option of hunting near these fields can find a good place to set up long before the season ever arrives.

Hunters can always find useful preparations throughout the year to make their fall season more productive. ■



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.

PLANT COWPEAS NOW!

With turkey season almost over and hunters having thinned out the gobblers, it's time to get that spring food plot in the dirt — if it's not already planted and growing well. Iron clay cowpeas are one of the best warm-season forages available to supplement a deer's diet.

Spring and early summer food plots are quite important for the deer herd, really more important than fall plots. During the spring and early summer, bucks are growing antlers, does are lactating and fawns are growing a few pounds per week. Deer need prime forage to fuel their biological needs and iron clay cowpeas are both high in protein — 20- to 30-percent crude protein — very palatable and especially attractive to deer and other wildlife.

Iron clay cowpeas are native to the arid region

of east Africa and are drought-tolerant; that makes them a perfect plant to put in the dirt late in the planting season in the Carolinas when the sun is shining hot and bright. When planted in moist soils with a pH of 6.0 or above, cowpeas will grow vigorously and provide instant forage.

Cowpeas can be both broadcast at 80 pounds per acre or drilled at half that rate. Soil should be broken up well, and all seeds need to be covered up by a shallow lens of soil for the best germination rates. Just as with any other legume, cowpeas don't need heavy inputs of nitrogen for planting or maintenance. But cowpeas will require heavy supplements of potassium and phosphorus for optimum growth. ■



SULFUR'S VALUE

Sulfur is the 16th element on the periodic chart, with 16 protons inside the nucleus. Along with nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, calcium and magnesium, sulfur carries an important role in the growth and yield potential in plants. While it may not be highlighted in planting guidelines for a particular crop, sulfur is the fourth most-needed nutrient, and it is needed in high quantities.

Sulfur is contained in many of named fertilizers, but is often overlooked as a major component of the nutrient package. Potassium sulfate, regular super phosphate, and ammonium sulfate are used very frequently for their inputs of potassium, phosphate, and nitrogen to the soil. But these three commonly-used fertilizers are high in sulfur, providing from 12- to 24-percent sulfur in a readily soluble form.

Sulfur is important to plants in more ways than one. Sulfur plays an important role in photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation, disease resistance, protein synthesis, enzyme and vitamin production and seed formation — to name a few. When a sulfur deficiency is present, leaves will yellow, beginning with the younger leaves, followed later by the older leaves.

Land managers should always use sulfur-containing fertilizers when making fertilization decisions early in the process. But if sulfur deficiency symptoms become apparent, calcium sulfate, aka gypsum, can be added to capture sulfur in the soil and offset detriments. ■



Iron clay cowpeas are a drought-resistant forage plant that's perfect for late-spring and summer food plots in the Carolinas, in part because of high protent content.

Jeff Burleson

COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

Steamed in parchment paper with vegetables is a great way of cooking the mild fillets of bottomfish. **INSET:** It takes about 12 minutes for a packet of fish and vegetables to cook thoroughly.



PARCHMENT PAPER GRILLED FISH

BOTTOMFISH IS A FAVORITE ON THE TABLE, AND THIS RECIPE IS A GREAT ONE

Sometimes it seems like it takes spring a while to get going, but it usually manages to make its arrival felt by May. This is time to enjoy being outdoors, especially if that includes enjoying a meal of fresh fish hot off the grill.

There is a little bit of turkey season left, but this is the time to enjoy some fresh fish. Fishing is good and improving. This month's recipe is based on a deep-water ocean bottomfish. Not everyone runs offshore to where golden tilefish live, but it's available from your favorite fish market, and it's good.

Fishermen are already plying the offshore waters. Wahoo and a few tuna never left during the winter, and they were joined by a growing number of dolphin beginning in April. All of these fish are excellent table fare, but the shallow-water grouper season reopens on May 1, after its annual spawning closure, and a lot of folks are eager to do some bottom-bouncing.

Almost all bottomfish are welcome on most tables. They are white meat and mild in flavor. They taste good to begin with and are just the thing to use in simple recipes like this.

This recipe uses golden tilefish, but it works almost as well

with grouper, beeliners, large grunts and more. The only requirement is for the fish to have a 6- to 8-ounce fillet that isn't so thin it overcooks easily. Wrapping it in parchment paper helps, as the fish is steaming in its own juice. The proper term is "fish en papillote," and it is a nearly foolproof way to prepare fish, especially those with milder flavor and tender meat.

The trip for golden tilefish is a bit longer than for many other bottom fish, but fishermen often get to or beyond these depths while chasing dolphin, wahoo and tuna. Paying attention to the fish finder while trolling down a rip, color change or temperature break can provide spots to return and look for bottomfish. Some days, when trolling is either frenetic or slow, dropping a few baits into the deep can provide a change — and some different dinner guests.

This recipe works well with a variety of fish, but is just that little bit better with a mild, white-meat fillet cut fresh from a healthy bottomfish. It also cooks quickly and cleans up quickly as it can be eaten from the parchment paper, which is then put in the trash. Give it a try. ■

PARCHMENT PAPER GRILLED FISH

This is a nice way to combine a couple of things into a tasty meal. It works well with just about any mild fish. I like it with offshore bottomfish, as the meat is usually firm, but mild. This particular version was made with golden tilefish, and it was really good. If you haven't eaten golden tilefish, it is very tender, mild and a little sweet to the taste. Golden tilefish are deep-water bottom-dwellers, and most fishermen catch them only rarely, if at all. Commercial fishermen have been catching them, and your favorite fishmonger should have some.

This type of cooking actually steams the fish and vegetables in their juices, the little bit of oil, lemon juice and the spices. For years, I cooked like this, using aluminum foil to wrap the fish. It still works, but I have been convinced that parchment paper is better for recipes that include vegetables and citrus fruits high in vitamin C.

Recent research suggests that when aluminum foil is used during cooking, some aluminum leaches into food. The same research said the aluminum leaching increases with higher heat, like roasting and broiling, and foods that are high in acidity, such as tomatoes, vinegar, and vitamin C-rich produce.

My first reaction was that parchment paper might burn at higher temperatures, especially on the grill. This was easy to check, and most parchment paper is rated for use up to at least 400 degrees. The Reynolds Kitchens parchment paper I used is rated to 420 degrees. If you would prefer to cook this in an oven, preheat to 400 degrees and check the fish at 10 minutes. It should cook in 10 to 12 minutes unless it is a thick fillet.

My grill has double burners but no thermostat. I preheat it with both burners on high, then reduce one to medium and cook on

that side. I keep the packets on a vegetable tray; they're easier to handle.

It takes about 12 minutes for two packets with fillets that are ¾-inch thick. Thicker fillets will take a few extra minutes, but since you're cooking with steam, the margin of error is wide. But don't cook until the fish appears dry or you won't like it.

The listed ingredients are for four meals. For this, I prepared and cooked two and saved the ingredients for two for the next day. This fillet was very thick, so I cut ¾-inch slices off it and used two of them as the base for each meal.

I'm not afraid to change things and encourage experimenting. My wife doesn't care for spicy foods, so I prepared hers with pepper and Cavender's. I like to kick things up a step or two, so I used extra pepper and some ground Chipotle pepper, with just a pinch of sea salt. It also works well with a few slivers of fresh jalapeno peppers added to the squash, a touch of garlic, or your favorite spice blend instead of salt.

Give this a try. It works in the oven or on the grill. I like being outside and like it grilled better, but that's a personal choice. ■

INGREDIENTS:

4 fish fillets, 6 to 8 ounces each

½ pound medium shrimp

1 zucchini squash

1 summer squash

1 lemon

Coarse ground pepper and pink sea salt

Cavender's All Purpose Greek Seasoning

Olive oil or non-stick cooking spray.

Options: jalapeno pepper, garlic, powdered jalapeno, chipotle peppers, Tony Chachere's Original Creole seasoning, aluminum foil.

PREPARATION: Serves 4

Wash the fillets and pat them dry. Peel and devein the shrimp. Slice the squash very thin. Slice the onions thin and cut the slices into pieces a couple inches long.

Cut 4 pieces of parchment paper roughly square at the box width. Center a fillet on each piece of parchment paper. Brush the fillets lightly with olive oil or spray them lightly with non-stick cooking spray. Salt (or seasoning of choice) and pepper fillets to taste.

Lay slices of squash and onions on fillets. Place several shrimp on top of vegetables on each fillet. Lightly season vegetables and shrimp. Squeeze lemon juice over shrimp, vegetables and fillet (to taste). Fold parchment paper in from the sides and roll the edges together to seal.

Preheat grill to 400 degrees (medium high to high, depending on the grill). Cook approximately 12 minutes. The fillets will not brown, they are done when the squash wilts, the shrimp turn pink and the fish is beginning to flake. Allow to set for 2 to 3 minutes before serving. Be careful opening the paper, as there will be hot steam escaping.

This goes well with a baked potato or baked sweet potato. It is also good to begin with a green salad. Since this is for May and things are warmer, a bowl of homemade ice cream makes for an excellent dessert. ■



Parchment paper is a great alternative to aluminum foil, especially when grilling and especially when vegetables are involved.



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.

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

Kayaks are made for getting into remote places and finding unpressured bream beds.



MOONING OVER A BREAM?

KAYAKS ARE THE WAY TO GO WHEN HUNTING FOR SPAWNING SUNFISH

Phillip Gentry

In the angling community, it's no secret that bream and shellcrackers are easiest to catch during the spawning season surrounding the full moons in April and May.

The ability to find a bream bed is an innate ability in some anglers. Ask an older angler — because the old guys are always the first to find bream beds — and you'll most likely get a somewhat vague answer like "Follow your nose".

J.D. Desrosiers of Greer, S.C., prefers to follow the nose of his Bonafide kayak when finding bream beds. Desrosiers didn't say if being closer to the water in a plastic boat helps him smell bream beds, but it does have other benefits.

"A lot of folks are on the water looking for bream beds this time of year," he said. "Bream fishing from a kayak helps me get into areas other anglers can't get to. I can recount a bunch of times I've slid over a sandbar in only a couple inches of water in a swamp or back of a creek and found untouched fishing grounds."

The other bream-centric predictor of better fishing is moon phase. If

Desrosiers is planning a trip out of town to go bream fishing, he's most likely going to plan around fishing the full moon or new moon from April through September. Otherwise, if he's fishing a local river or in his backyard on Lake Cunningham, he'll go whenever the opportunity arises.

Desrosiers prefers to fish lakes with weeds, grass or other aquatic vegetation, especially areas with a sandy bottom. His choice of tackle is consistent with bream fishing in general, nothing different because he's in a kayak. A 5-foot, ultra-light spinning outfit paired with 4-pound monofilament is his No. 1 choice; he can fish a variety of live or artificial baits. His close second choice is a 4-weight fly rod with floating line, a light tippet and a variety of bream-sized popping bugs.

"I will use everything I can when it comes to bream fishing," he said. "One of my favorite rigs is a weighted bobber with a small hook underneath. That's a killer tactic with either red worms or crickets. I'll also cast a lot of artificial baits like Rooster Tails, Beetle Spins, and

small crankbaits — all the usual stuff."

Desrosiers approaches bream fishing in ponds and reservoirs on a systematic basis. He will visually scan an area, focusing on weed lines, cypress trees or riprap, and then begins fishing. If he's catching small bream, he'll pull anchor or raise his Power Pole micro and back off to deeper water, where he often finds larger fish.

"One thing I've learned is to play the drag on your reel," he said. "Some anglers set their drag loose when bream fishing because the fish tend to be small, but a big bream will make a hard run and pull drag quickly. I'm talking about pound to 2-pound fish; they'll get you in heavy cover in a heartbeat, and you risk losing the fish. That's when you need to tighten it up a notch or two." ■



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.

REBEL CRICKHOPPER

The Rebel Crickhopper is a big bite for summer and fall bass, trout and other fish. The most-realistic grasshopper crankbait you can find, the Crickhopper, is a tremendous lure when twitched at the surface, but for anglers targeting trout, a straight, medium retrieve is effective in tailraces or lakes. The bait's profile and realistic paint jobs accurately mimic a real grasshopper. It can be used as a topwater or a crankbait and is a realistic grasshopper imitator and great multi-species lure.

For bream or bluegill, it can be fished using ultralight spinning tackle with 4- to 6-pound monofilament. When fishing bream beds or shallow flats, cast next to overhanging trees or bushes. Once the lure lands, don't immediately begin the retrieve, but impart short, erratic movements to the bait with twitches of the rod tip. It's best to twitch the bait a couple of times without moving it too far from the cover.

It's not uncommon for bedding bream or bluegills to watch and wait for up to a minute or more, before deciding to bite.

The Crickhopper comes in two styles: the Crickhopper crankbait and the Crickhopper Popper. When twitched, the Popper produces a loud splash that attracts fish. The Crickhopper is available in eight color patterns and the Crickhopper Popper in two color patterns.

MSRP for both models is \$5.99. More information and availability at <https://www.rebellures.com/rebel-crickhopper-fishing-lure>



RIVER PANFISH

Talk about planning a fishing trip for bream, and most anglers conjure up the image of a farm pond tucked on the backside of a pasture or the back corner of a cove in a lake or reservoir. Few people think about fishing for bream in a river.

J.D. Desrosiers of Greer, S.C., a member of the Yak Attack pro staff, said river fishing for bream and shellcrackers might be one of the most-overlooked fishing opportunities to be found, particularly during May.

"I've seen some big bream come out of a river," he said. "A couple of years ago I saw a 2.96(-pound fish) come out of the Congaree River above Sparkleberry."

Desrosiers said the best place to look for panfish in any river, big or small, is a deep pocket. A slow-moving, deep hole with bluish-green water is a great place to work a Rooster Tail.

"I might be giving up a secret, but I love natural-colored Rooster Tails," he said. "Something in a black minnow or brown is my favorite. A lot of folks use white or bright colors, but I don't like them in a river. I want something more subtle."

Desrosiers recommends a 1/8-ounce bait in slow-moving current or he might move up to a 1/4-ounce in moderate flow. He casts across the pool, let the Rooster Tail sink and then rips it back diagonally to the current so the blade flashes without imparting a lot of speed to the bait.

Other good bream hideaways are any blowdowns or rock outcroppings that affords a current break for fish to hold and dart out to attack prey. ■

continues on page 70



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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Shellcrackers, aka redear sunfish

WHERE — Lake Tillery

HOW — Fish shallow flats, humps and saddles mid-April through mid-May using large red worms or half a night crawler on a split-shot rig and a No. 2 Aberdeen hook.

LAUNCH — Swift Island and Morrow Mountain are two popular boat ramps. It's also possible to car-top a kayak into the lake from numerous public right-of-ways.

INSIDER TIP — Shellcrackers don't bite as well in muddy water. If you have the choice, look for clear water or slightly stained water.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Bluegills

WHERE — Sparkleberry Swamp, upper end of Lake Marion

HOW — Systematically cast a cricket under a cork (about 18 inches) around structure until you find a concentration of bream. There will be plenty of fishy looking structure.

LAUNCH — Low Falls Landing on the west side of the lake or Pack's Landing (Rimini) or Sparkleberry Landing on the east side of the lake.

INSIDER TIP — It's easy to get turned around in Sparkleberry where GPS and cell phone service are sketchy. Take along a hand-held compass in case you need to navigate back out.

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SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

A long pole, even a long fly-rod, enables a fisherman to nestle a bait tight to heavy cover.

MAY IS UNMATCHED FOR SANTEE BREAM

PLENTY OF TASTY PANFISH HEAD IN TO BED

Terry Madewell

May is an outstanding month for fishing on the Santee Cooper lakes, but the bream fishing is off the charts in popularity and productivity. The influx of anglers wanting in on this fast-paced action is known to lead to traffic jams at boat landings, especially on fair-weather weekends in early May.

BREAM BUSTIN' RIG

Bream, specifically bluegill and other sunfish species, will bed during May and will continue to bed over the next two or three months. Shellcrackers, aka redear sunfish, typically bed in April, but plenty of these panfish will bed again during May. Anglers commonly catch limits, with bluegills and shellcrackers contributing to the catch.

Plus, when they're not on the beds, the techniques for taking bream are still very similar to bed-fishing in terms of locating fish.

Most local experts use the "hunt and peck" method for finding bream beds. The

process is to search shallow water while slowly moving until a hot spot is found.

A highly popular rig for fishing the heavy cover is a 9- to 12-foot pole referred to as a Bream Buster. Most anglers use 8-pound line with a small bobber rigged so depths can be changed quickly. When tying line to the eye of the pole, a good tip is to use a drop or two of super glue to ensure the tip isn't literally snatched off the pole by a hard fighting bream. The line should be as long as the pole and tied to a No. 6 wire hook about 8 inches below a small split-shot.

The bait of choice for most "breamaholics" is a live cricket, but red worms work great and improve the odds of hooking more shellcrackers. Drop a cricket near a bream in May, and you'd best be prepared to battle a bull bream.

Using a swinging motion to control the presentation enables an angler to nestle the bait next to trees, weeds, logs and brush. It's ideal fishing around and under the unforgiving snags such as low, overhanging cypress limbs.

Simple spinning or spincast (push-button) rigs work well for most fishing situations if you prefer.

LOCATING, CATCHING

Not all bream habitat is created equal, so focus on areas with a firm substrate; bream prefer sand and gravel over mucky bottoms. They also love to orient to cover, especially when not bedding.

Probe different depths as you search until you determine a pattern. With a slip or pegged float, you can change the depth of the bait quickly and accurately. Typically, 2 to 4 feet is prime depth, but it can vary deeper or shallower based on the habitat being fished.

If the fish caught are small or "hen"



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.



Terry Madewell

LIFTING A LIMIT:

South Carolina groups seven different sunfish under the designation “bream” — bluegill, flier, warmouth, pumpkinseed, green sunfish, redear (shellcracker) and spotted sunfish. The daily limit is 30 fish per angler. The only popular sunfish not included is redbreast, managed by a 15-fish limit.

bream, release them and keep moving. If you catch a couple of big bream in the same area, work it thoroughly. One or two big bream on the outer edges can betray the location of an entire bed.

If you’ve found a bed, you may catch a limit right in that area — or at least get a strong start. If fish are not bedding, you may catch a handful of keepers or maybe more from that spot.

When the action slows, don’t linger; resume the search and be sure to keep a good count on the bream caught. It’s surprising how quickly you can reach a limit, or multiple limits, with steady action.

SANTEE HOT SPOTS

When everything looks like great bream habitat, it’s hard to narrow it down. First, look for other boats. If a lot of boats are tight against the trees and weeds, you’re in a good area. Be respectful; don’t try to get too close to others. Odds are high plenty of beds are available, so go find one you can fish with some amount of privacy.

Productive areas include the upper end of Lake Marion, especially the Pack’s Flats area, along with the target-rich environment around Low Falls and down to Jacks Creek. The lower end of Lake Marion has Eutaw, Mill, Taw Caw, Potato and Wyboo creeks, all loaded with bream. The flats around Rocks Pond produce bumper catches.

Lake Moultrie has amazing bream fishing in the shallow ring of water around the lake, with the area around Blacks Camp legendary as a bream-



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bed haven. The Hatchery is renowned for monster bream, and the Bonneau Beach area has coves and pockets of all shapes and sizes that hold bream.

Other months can offer excellent shallow water bream fishing but May is THE month for finding more bull bream in shallower water than at any other time of the year. ■



HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

Many mountain trout streams in the Carolinas offer not only the opportunity to catch beautiful trout, but they're set in some of the most-beautiful scenery.

THREE STREAMS THAT DELIGHT THE SENSES

THE CAROLINAS OFFER TROUT FISHERMEN PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES IN MAY; THESE ARE SOME OF THE BEST

Bob Satterwhite

May is an ideal time to head for a mountain stream. Creeksides are blanketed with Trillium in all its manifestations, Jack-in-the Pulpit, Showy Orchis, Bloodroot, Hepatica, Tick-Weed, Fringed Phacelia and a host of other spring beauties.

Streams are full due to the frequent and heavy winter rains. Fishing is productive from daylight to dark, and beginning in late April and continuing through May, at least 20 different hatches occur.

The following are three streams that are excellent fisheries and excellent places to see breathtaking scenery.

BIG CREEK

Big Creek in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Haywood County, N.C., is a tributary of the West Fork Pigeon River. Large brown trout are prevalent in the lower section of the creek. The upper section has good populations of rainbow trout. Big Creek is a stair-step stream, with huge boulders and numerous plunge pools and waterfalls.

The fishing can be frustrating at times because you can look down from the trail and see scores of trout in the big pools. By the time you get down to the water to make a cast, the fish have disappeared. The best way to fish the stream is to stay in the water — where and when you can — and stealth-fish the big pools. The water is extremely clear, and the trout are easily spooked. This section is known for its white-fringed phacelia, which bloom from mid-April to mid-May. You can find large patches of ramps at the Walnut Bottoms section. Access is off I-40 west of Waynesville.

BRADLEY FORK

Bradley Fork is a tributary of the Oconaluftee River in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Swain County, N.C. It is a jewel of a stream, with good numbers of rainbow and brown trout. Most of the browns are in the lower section near Smokemont Campground. A medium-sized stream, Bradley Fork has a nice mix of riffles, runs, pocket water, and small plunge

pools. The trout don't get big here — 10 to 11 inches is about the maximum — but they're plentiful. A good trail runs alongside the stream for about 2 miles. From Cherokee, follow US 441 north to the entrance of Smokemont Campground, which is about one mile from the park entrance. Drive through the campground to a parking area for anglers at the far end. Bradley Fork Trail follows the creek about 7 miles.

WHITewater RIVER

The Whitewater River is in the Jocassee Gorges area in Oconee County, S.C. It is noted for its breathtaking waterfalls. Both the Upper and Lower Whitewater Falls drop 400 feet and are considered the most scenic falls in the Southeast.

The upper section of the river has a mix of rainbow and brown trout — mostly stocked — and the lower section is wild trout territory. The entire river is protected in the Jocassee Gorges Project. Access to the river is from the Bad Creek Hydroelectric Facility off SC 130. The trail to the river starts at a gated parking

area that is open for access only during daylight hours but always open for departure. The stream is about a half-mile hike from the parking area and has good access from trails on the east and west sides that follow the entire length of the river.

WHAT TO TIE ON

Area fishing guides recommend the following flies for late April and May:

Hendrickson (all day), Red Quill, Female Adams, brown and gray Caddis (all day), March Brown (all day mid-May), Light Cahill (afternoons and evenings) Yellow Midge (early May), Sulphur (early May afternoon and evening), Black Soft Hackle (early May), Cream Midge (mid-May), Blue-Winged Olive (early afternoon mid-May), Adams (early afternoon mid-May), Paradrake and White Wulff (late May evenings) and Stone Fly nymph (mid-morning, early May).

Hatchery-supported streams in western North Carolina opened April 6 and will remain open until the end of February 2020. According to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, 93,000 rainbow, brook and brown trout will be stocked in most hatchery-supported streams through June. Most of the stocked trout (96 percent) average 10 inches, and four percent are 14 inches and longer. Creel limit is seven per day with no size limits or bait restrictions.

The Commission has a stocking schedule by county on its website: www.ncwildlife.org. ■



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 Tuckasee River, Caney Fork, Moses Creek, and several other prime trout streams.



Bob Satterwhite

FISHING PLUNGE POOLS:

The water in plunge pools in steep sections of trout streams is often so clear that trout are extremely spooky. You have to approach these pools in a stealth-like manner, almost like you're stalking a game animal. Don't let them see you first, and make that first cast count.

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SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

Colors, profiles, sounds and vibrations are different characteristics that topwater baits bring to anglers targeting trout.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE TOPWATERS' POTENTIAL

TROUT WILL BUST SURFACE BAITS WHENEVER CONDITIONS ARE RIGHT

Christopher Bush

Before we dive into this month's discussion about topwater plugs, take a step back in time with me.

In May 2014, I reached the pinnacle of my trout-fishing endeavors. With noble intent to learn more about my "new" homewaters of Corpus Christi, Texas, I was covering an area with a MirrOlure She Dog when an 11-pound giant, 30½ inches long and 17¼ inches in girth, rudely interrupted my quest.

The take was subtle. Over the crest of a wave caused by a strong east wind, I saw a noticeable swirl, and my line went tight. What followed was a remarkable head shake I compare to an underwater coffee can and a fight I'll never forget.

Earmarked by shot nerves and a quivering voice, I called and messaged those close to me about my accomplishment. Cap-stoning the event was even more impressive. Truth be told, I botched the attempt to release the fish, and since her fate was decided, I chose to clean her after I made the 2½-hour trek back to San Antonio. What I found was mind blowing. As I ran the file knife down her stomach cavity, a 15-inch trout emerged. A world-class fish had what I considered a "nice trout" in her mid-section, yet

was still searching for the dessert to an already healthy meal. Fortunately for me, it was my topwater.

LIMITLESS POTENTIAL

Now let's fast forward and discuss how that relates to the topic at hand. I reflect on that story to show the true capability topwater baits possess. We all know you give up bites when fishing surface plugs. Heck, if I had a dollar for every time I heard an angler say, "I'd rather catch 'X' quality trout on topwater versus a limit on a jig or live bait," a Powerball ticket would seem secondary. Instead, I'd suggest fishing topwaters and truly understanding how their limitless upside allows you to fish them confidently.

So how do I know when to fish topwater? The answer is, year-round. Seasonal trends as well as micro-weather events can determine a good surface bite even if the months don't coincide with fishing literature. In other words, a warmer-than-normal winter can keep the topwater bite steady, even if it's January or February. Going a step further, more acute weather anomalies can lead to periods — or days — when topwaters can be effective. In short, steady or spikes in water temperature as a result of rising

air temperature can excite big fish in a surface environment.

The other equally important question is, "What plugs should I throw?" Despite limitless options, my encouragement is to keep it simple within the parameters of size, sound, color and profile.

PROFILE AND SIZE

Size and profile go hand-in-hand. A general rule of thumb is to match the lure to the conditions and baitfish in the area. In clear skies and clear water, I'll choose smaller-profile lures like Heddon Spook Jr, MirrOlure MirrOmullet or MirrOlure Top Pups. In the event, larger finfish are present or conditions become less than perfect, I'll upsize to a Heddon One Knocker, MirrOlure Top Dog Jr. or YoZuri 3DR Series Pencil. Remember, topwater baits mimic baitfish, primarily mullet, so choose the best combination of size and profile to achieve that result.

SOUND

Of the four characteristics, I believe sound is the most important. I call it audible presence. Lures like MirrOlure She Dogs or He Dogs have a tremendous audible presence. In clear, calm conditions, the high-pitch presence can be

overpowering. The same can be said when conditions are less than ideal, too. Having a bait that “hunts” because of wave action on a pronounced pause can draw just as many ferocious strikes as a consistent walk-the-dog cadence. Again, match the audible presence to the conditions; it can be the difference in success or failure.

COLOR

In my opinion, I find color the least important of the four. The color spectrum varies widely, but keeping in line with our simple approach, basic colors often get the job done.

In colder months, I find nontraditional or brighter patterns more productive. I attribute this to clarity and density. Clarity fluctuates, but trout-green water in the winter looks totally different than trout-green water in the summer. The only thing I can attribute that to is water density as a result of water temperature. With less substrate in the water column and generally more overcast skies brought about by weather events, the contrast seemingly works well. Outside of that, I stick to natural colors, as well as chartreuse, pearl, bone, gold, silver and pink.

Additionally, custom color patterns are something to consider if you’re looking to be different from other anglers on the water.

Topwaters have limitless upside year-round when looking for that once-in-a-lifetime trout. As a result, remain encouraged and draw confidence from the past that if there is a trophy in your midst, chances are they’ll eat your bait. ■



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



Christopher Bush

PICKING A PLUG:

In general, go with smaller topwater baits under clear skies and in clear water; Upsize on overcast days or when water conditions are less than perfect. Similarly, go with brighter colors on overcast days and natural colors on bright-sky days.

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**FISHING
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Big flounder are a regular May catch in the estuaries around Little River Inlet, especially when baitfish are pouring in from the ocean.

FLOUNDER INVADE LITTLE RIVER ESTUARY

Jeff Burleson

Warm water brings baitfish, flounder through state-line inlet

The weather calls anglers back to the water in May, a perfect time to enjoy the outdoors. Luckily, the good weather also brings excellent flounder fishing to Little River on the North Carolina-South Carolina border.

While many flounder overwinter inside Carolina estuaries, the majority of the flounder population re-enters inshore waters in spring as the waters warm and forage floods the estuaries. The first arrivals show up in March; they will continue to slide into the area as water temperatures climb. By May, the majority of the flounder population has returned and is feasting on anything it can find.

Tom Cushman of Capt. Cushman's Calmwater Charters calls May one of his favorite months to catch flounder locally.

"May is prime time for flounder here," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "May and June are two of the best months to catch flounder in Little River because the fish are here and hungry."

In addition to flounder showing up, schools of small menhaden and mullet

arrive every week to give the flounder, redfish and speckled trout plenty to eat. As the bait enters the estuaries, it immediately looks for any type of structure — grass and oyster bars, for example — as places to hide to avoid becoming dinner for some hungry predator. But flounder know where to set up and ambush these baits, and unfortunately for the flounder, so does Cushman.

"I catch them along the grass and oysters in 1 to 3 feet of water," he said, "or in sandy areas beside oyster bars with deep holes nearby that flounder can escape to if danger approaches."

Flounder will spread out and move often throughout the day, to feed and on different phases of the tide. As the tide falls and approaches the low ebb, minnows and other forage species become vulnerable to predation. Due to a flounder's thin profile, they can set up in just inches of water; that makes few places safe for small minnows.

Cushman will typically use either mud minnows or small mullet as live bait,

rigging them on a ¼-ounce jighead or a two-hook, fish-finder rig. While he anchor up and fish places where he frequently catches flounder, he will often drift to find concentrations of fish.

"I like to drift slowly with the current in creeks with double-rigged minnows, on both sandy and muddy bottoms," he said. "And when you hook up in a spot, I keep fishing that same spot, because there are probably more fish in that same area."

Flounder move in during the spring in large schools and will often remain in them through spring. Anglers can look for fish to be ganged up and holding in similar-type habitats throughout the estuaries.

In addition to live bait, Cushman uses artificial lures with good success. Both shrimp and minnow imitations can be productive.

"I will work paddletail grubs, Vudu Shrimp, D.O.A. Shrimp, and also Gulp baits," he said. "The artificial lures work real well and will often pick up a redfish or trout too." ■

— Jeff Burleson

Doug Smith caught this 26½-pound king at Ocean Crest Pier on Oak Island last May 14.

SPRING KING RUN HAS PIER, KAYAK ANGLERS ON FIRE

May is a special time along many Carolina beaches, and that is especially so along the beaches of Long Bay, between North Myrtle Beach, S.C. and Cape Fear, N.C.

Most fishing is good in this area, but there is an annual run of king mackerel that isn't duplicated anywhere else in the two Carolinas. These kings move up the beach between mid-April and Memorial Day and thrill pier, kayak and other nearshore ocean fishermen.

This run has been tracked for decades, and pier tournaments and kayak tournaments are planned around it. The northern end of Long Bay holds a lot of baitfish, and the migrating kings move close to the beach, using it as a layover to feed up before moving again. The pier-record kings for Ocean Crest and Oak Island Piers and the former Long Beach Pier were all caught during this run.

"The spring run wasn't the best last year, but it's already shaping up to be good this year," said Jonathan Grady, holder of the (unofficial) North Carolina record for king mackerel caught from a kayak. "The water didn't get as cold as in the past few winters, and there was bait showing up at the end of March. The water temperature was right at 60 then, and it only has to warm into the upper 60s for the kings to arrive. A few snapper bluefish are already showing, and kings usually arrive a couple of weeks after the bluefish get thick."

Grady slow-trolls two live bluefish behind his kayak, one on the surface and the other a few feet below. Wire leaders are a must; he begins with a pair of treble hooks and adds another if the baits are large. Grady said the kings are occasionally closer in than the ends of the piers, but he usually finds them from the pier ends out to Yaupon Reef.

Pier anglers cash in on this run also. Most of the kings run 20 pounds and larger, the largest recorded being a 53-pound, 6-ounce brute Bo Crump caught at Ocean Crest Pier on May 7, 1998. Crump added kings of 41 and 36 pounds later that day to fill his 3-fish limit.

Boats close to the beach can



get in on the action, but don't crowd the pier ends; stay at least 1,000 feet off to give pier fishermen room to fight and land fish. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

Deep-hole Shrimp up next >

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DEEP-HOLE SHRIMP

are on May's menu in SC

South Carolina's annual shrimp-baiting season doesn't open until the fall, but shrimping without bait begins on May 1. Commonly known as deep-hole shrimping, it arrives each year with little fanfare, but May Day is a welcome date for those who enjoy tossing a net.

No baiting is allowed, but if you find the right hole, no baiting is needed. For Amy Anderson of Mt. Pleasant, S.C., May 1 ranks up there with Dec. 25 on her list of favorite days of the year.

"May is a great time for deep-hole shrimping. It's warm enough to enjoy time on the water, the shrimp are in the deep holes, and the jellyfish aren't as thick as they will be later in the year. It's a great time to catch some red legs," she said.

Charleston area rivers like the Folly, Ashley and Cooper offer good deep-hole shrimping. The best spots are usually where a smaller creek empties into the main river.

"That's usually where the deepest holes are," Anderson said. "A depth finder helps pinpoint those holes. The depth can change from 15 feet to 35 feet to 50 feet very quickly. You want to know where that deepest hole is; a depth finder can help you do that quickly. It can help you find that hole over and over without wasting time."

Anderson, who prefers deep-hole shrimping even during shrimp-baiting season, said it requires less equipment and makes for a less-crowded waterway. It also doesn't require a special license like shrimp-baiting does. A recreational salt-water fishing license is all that's needed.

"Baiting requires all those poles. Other shrimpers have to keep a certain distance away from your poles. When deep-hole shrimping, the only equipment that you absolutely must have is a deep-hole net," she said, referring to the specialized cast nets that have a wide band of weighted material along the edges that helps it open fully on its way to the bottom.



You don't have to wait until South Carolina's baiting season to net some tasty shrimp; Amy Anderson shows the proof.

Brian Cope

"And when deep-holing, several boats can be in a really small area and targeting the same deep hole without crowding each other out. That's not possible when shrimp-baiting," said Anderson, who said you can always find a deep hole close to boat landings around Charleston.

"You can be within sight of the boat landing in most of these rivers, and you'll be on top of some deep holes that provide good shrimping," she said. "Once you get to the mouth of a small creek that empties into the main river, start paying attention to your electronics. Find the deepest hole and try to get your net to land right on that hole. If you're a foot off, you might not catch anything. But when you get the net in exactly the right spot, you'll bring up dozens of shrimp on one cast."

Deep-hole shrimping is legal from May 1 through Dec. 15. The daily limit is 48 quarts whole or 29 headed, per boat. ■

— Brian Cope

BIG DRUM MOVE IN

around Hatteras, OBX inlets

May marks the return of big red drum in a big way to the near-shore waters of North Carolina's Hatteras Island after the winter's offshore respite.

Anglers can climb towers atop their vessels to spot the sea of bronze when massive schools numbering in the hundreds congregate before creeping into casting range or anchoring in sloughs to chunk cut baits when the conditions deteriorate.

"May is when we have our banner days," said guide Rom Whitaker IV of Hatteras, NC. "The fish are moving closer to the

>

beach as the water warms up and staging around Hatteras, Ocracoke and Drum inlets. They like inlets because the current from the tide helps them feed."

Whitaker (252-305-5229), who runs Sound Bound Charters, chooses days with light winds and clear water for sight-casting. He cruises the backside of the outer sandbar off the beach in approximately 20 feet of water with his eyes peeled for a school using the bar to corral baitfish. Patience and a pair of polarized sunglasses with copper or amber lenses are a must-have. Once a school is in his crosshairs, Whitaker goes into stealth-mode.

"I approach the fish from the upcurrent or upwind side," he said. "When I'm just outside of casting range, I'll put an angler on the bow, cut the motor, and drift into them. You want to cast to the far side of the school and work it back through. Give the bait a few seconds to sink, and make a slow retrieve while jigging it. We'll hook a fish, then try to hook three or four more."

Whitaker will cast a gold spoon or a bucktail on 30-pound braid with a 4-foot leader of 40- to 60-pound fluorocarbon. He likes a 1½-ounce Johnson Silver Minnow that he rigs with a split ring and swivel to increase action and decrease line twist. The bucktail is typically white, 2 to 3 ounces, with a soft-plastic trailer to enlarge the profile and add action.

When conditions will not allow sight-fishing, Whitaker has a strong backup plan. He anchors in a slough on the ocean side of one of the inlets and fan-casts four or five rods baited with fresh menhaden or mullet. Timing is crucial when anchoring, because the bite will occur during an incoming or outgoing tide, not on slack water. A 4- to 10-ounce egg sinker on a Carolina rig is required to pin the 8/0 circle hook and bait to the bottom. Bait thieves and heavy current will make consistent bait checking important. ■

— Dusty Wilson

Winyah up next >



Inlets along the southern end of North Carolina's Outer Banks fill up with big drum this month.

Ron Whitaker IV

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WINYAH BAY ROCKS

are May sheephead paradise

By May, the spring bite in saltwater offers South Carolina anglers plenty of options. Those looking for a cooler full of sheephead can't go wrong on a trip to the rock jetties outside Winyah Bay.

The jetties that armor the flow downstream from Georgetown, S.C., hold numbers of sheephead, and spring is a killer time to keep the lines stretched.

Catching sheephead is nothing new for Dan Connolly of O-Fish-A-I Expeditions. Based out of Murrells Inlet, S.C., Connolly routinely fishes the waters of Murrells Inlet and Georgetown for speckled trout, flounder, redfish and sheephead, aka the king of the rocks.

"Sheepshead are at our jetties year-round, but spring is prime time," said Connolly (843-241-7022). "Some stay all winter at the jetties, and others are just returning after spawning at the reefs."

Connolly will fish both the Winyah Bay and Murrells Inlet jetties, but the volume of structure at Winyah Bay can hold more fish than anywhere else.

"At Murrells Inlet, we have a strong sheephead population, but Georgetown can be more productive, with bigger fish at times. There are more rocks and deeper water that can hold more fish," he said.

One of Connolly's tried-and-true techniques involves a five-gallon bucket of chum.

"I spend an hour collecting barnacles, oysters or the tiny mussels that grow together on structure. You can get them corralled under your boat about any time with chum," he said.

Connolly chooses places along the jetties with light current and water that is at least 10 feet deep. Whether he finds an eddy or is fishing on the outside of the rocks, the light current allows the chum to



Sheepshead flock to the rock jetties that line the mouth of Winyah Bay.

Jeff Burleson

bring the fish to him. He positions his boat near the rocks with his trolling motor and fishes vertically.

Preferred foods are china-back fiddler crabs, available at most bait shops. Connolly uses a standard Carolina rig with a 1/2- to 3/4-ounce egg sinker, a short, 1-foot leader, and a 2/0 to 3/0 strong bait hook.

After tossing a few scoops of chum into the water, Connolly will drop his

bait vertically to the bottom and make a couple of cranks to keep the bait just off the rocks with a tight line. And this is when the magic happens.

"You rarely will feel a sheephead bite. So I slowly raise and lower the line 6 inches, and if I feel any resistance at all, I immediately set the hook. And then you hold on!" he said. ■

— Jeff Burleson

Shane Floyd showed young son Austin the potential of Tuckertown Lake bass.



Tony Garitta

LATE MAY CRANKING

for Tuckertown Lake bass

Bass fishing on North Carolina's Tuckertown Lake in May involves two phases: a slow one early in the month and an explosive one later on.

The first two weeks of May can be a drag, with some bass lingering on the beds while the ones coming off are weary from spawning and unwilling to chase baits.

The only way to get strikes is with slow, methodic presentations using Senkos fished weightless or wacky-style, shaky head jigs, standard jigs or Texas-rigged plastics.

When bass fry appear, a topwater bite may show up, but Tuckertown's murky waters often curb surface action.

Then, around Memorial Day weekend, the lake suddenly comes alive with hungry bass fully recovered from the spawn and postspawn blues. The rejuvenated fish eagerly pursue any crankbait that wobbles their way.

This is the moment crankbait fishermen like Shane Floyd of Lexington, N.C., have been patiently waiting for since the beginning of May. Not only are Tuckertown bass prone to whack crankbaits, but they're often bunched up at one spot.

"You only have a short window of opportunity to catch fish with crankbaits," Floyd said. "Last year after Memorial Day, I took my son, Austin, to Tuckertown after hearing the fish were chomping crankbaits. I hardly had a chance to throw one because Austin caught several fish around 3 pounds on a trick worm using a Zebco outfit for children. I

was kept busy netting his fish. Obviously, the fish like trick worms, too."

Once Floyd began cranking a medium-running Fat Free Shad, he wasn't disappointed. Bass weighing up to 4 pounds were all over his crankbait. About a week later, the bite faded.

Despite May's brief cranking bonanza, cranking isn't what it used to be because of the black mat algae that has infested the lake.

"Only a handful of places remain where I can throw a crankbait without getting that junk on it," said Floyd. "I crank points in 10 to 12 feet of water featuring relatively

clean bottoms. Many prime places I once fished have become choked out with algae.

"My crankbait must run above the algae, if there's any" said Floyd. "To do that, I've gone more to shallow-and medium-running crankbaits." ■

— Tony Garitta

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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	33"&	2/day&
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
Grouper (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, mahogany, 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.gov. & 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.

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
Grouper (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, mahogany, 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 SCNDR's Regulations Digest

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

% For lake-specific regulations, see the SCNDR'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.

ASTRO TABLES

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

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

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

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

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

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2019 MAY		BEST DAYS		VALUE
POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL.	
Wed 1				45
Thu 2				58
Fri 3				72
Sat 4				80
Sun 5				73
Mon 6				66
Tue 7				58
Wed 8				55
Thu 9				57
Fri 10				62
Sat 11				72

Sun 12				60
Mon 13				53
Tue 14				50
Wed 15				56
Thu 16				62
Fri 17				71
Sat 18				74

Sun 19				61
Mon 20				48
Tue 21				36
Wed 22				30
Thu 23				29
Fri 24				29
Sat 25				36

Sun 26				47
Mon 27				40
Tue 28				39
Wed 29				42
Thu 30				45
Fri 31				59

25 50 75

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LUNAR PERIODS		TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED			
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
4:55 am	9:52 am - 11:54 am	4:57 pm	10:17 pm - 12:19 am		
5:25 am	10:27 am - 12:45 pm	5:54 pm	10:52 pm - 1:10 am		
5:54 am	11:02 am - 1:38 pm ☀	6:52 pm	11:27 pm - Midnight		
6:26 am	11:40 am - 2:30 pm ☀	7:52 pm	Midnight - 2:03 am		NEW
7:01 am	12:23 pm - 3:25 pm ☀	8:54 pm	12:05 am - 2:55 am		
7:40 am	1:08 pm - 4:24 pm	9:57 pm	12:48 am - 3:50 am		
8:24 am	1:59 pm - 5:21 pm	11:00 pm	1:33 am - 4:49 am		
9:15 am	2:52 pm - 6:22 pm		2:24 am - 5:46 am		HIGH
10:13 am	3:52 pm - 7:18 pm		3:17 am - 6:47 am		
11:15 am	4:52 pm - 8:14 pm	12:56 am	4:17 am - 7:43 am ☀		
12:21 pm	5:54 pm - 9:06 pm ☀	1:46 am	5:17 am - 8:39 am ☀		HALF
1:29 pm	6:56 pm - 9:52 pm ☀	2:31 am	6:19 am - 9:31 am ☀		
2:37 pm	7:57 pm - 10:37 pm	3:11 am	7:21 am - 10:17 am		Perigee
3:44 pm	8:57 pm - 11:19 pm	3:48 am	8:22 am - 11:02 am		
4:51 pm	9:57 pm - 11:59 pm	4:23 am	9:22 am - 11:44 am		
5:57 pm	10:56 pm - 12:42 am	4:57 am	10:22 am - 12:24 pm		
7:03 pm	11:56 pm - Midnight	5:33 am	11:21 am - 1:07 pm ☀		
8:09 pm	Midnight - 1:24 am	6:10 am	12:21 pm - 1:49 pm ☀		FULL
9:12 pm	12:54 am - 2:10 am	6:50 am	1:19 pm - 2:35 pm ☀		
10:12 pm	1:52 am - 2:58 am	7:34 am	2:17 pm - 3:23 pm		
11:07 pm	2:49 am - 3:47 am	8:22 am	3:14 pm - 4:12 pm		
11:57 pm	3:42 am - 4:40 am	9:14 am	4:07 pm - 5:05 pm		LOW
	4:33 am - 5:31 am	10:08 am	4:58 pm - 5:56 pm		
12:41 am	5:18 am - 6:24 am ☀	11:03 am	5:43 pm - 6:49 pm		
1:20 am	6:00 am - 7:16 am ☀	11:59 am	6:25 pm - 7:41 pm ☀		HALF & APOGEE
1:55 am	6:39 am - 8:05 am ☀	12:55 pm	7:04 pm - 8:30 pm ☀		
2:27 am	7:16 am - 8:54 am ☀	1:50 pm	7:41 pm - 9:19 pm ☀		
2:56 am	7:50 am - 9:46 am	2:45 pm	8:15 pm - 10:11 pm		
3:25 am	8:26 am - 10:34 am	3:42 pm	8:51 pm - 10:59 pm		
3:54 am	9:00 am - 11:26 am	4:39 pm	9:25 pm - 11:51 pm		
4:25 am	9:37 am - 12:19 pm	5:39 pm	10:02 pm - 12:44 am		

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

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

Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Kinston Reeder

Kinston Reeder of Lexington N.C., caught his first king mackerel on his first trip to Frying Pan Tower on Oct. 13, 2018.



Jack Harty

Jack Harty, 10, caught this nice red drum fishing with his grandfather in North Carolina's Pamlico Sound on Sept. 2, 2018.



Billy Davis

Billy Davis, 8, killed this doe hunting in Alamance County, N.C., with his dad and grandfather on Oct. 30, 2018.



Jeremy Walker

Jeremy Walker of Walhalla, S.C., arrowed this buck on Nov. 20, 2018, while it chased a doe.

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Lee Baker, Anderson Allen

Lee Baker of Winston-Salem, N.C., and Anderson Allen of Denver, N.C., simultaneously bagged these opening day gobblers on April 14, 2018, in Shelby, C.



Nora Martin

Nora Martin, 11, killed her first deer last fall in Barnwell County, S.C.



Logan Beers

Logan Beers, 13, of Bethel, Ct., boated this 26½-inch red on July 19, 2018, fishing with his uncle in Southport, N.C.



Wynter Jones

Wynter Jones caught her biggest bass last Labor Day weekend on North Carolina's Mountain Island Lake.



Wyatt Conaway

Wyatt Conaway caught this nice bass on North Carolina's Shearon Harris Lake on a hot dog fished under a float.



Andrew Whitley

Andrew Whitley, 9, of Greenville, N.C., with two 7-foot gators taken Sept. 9, 2018, in South Carolina's Lowcountry.

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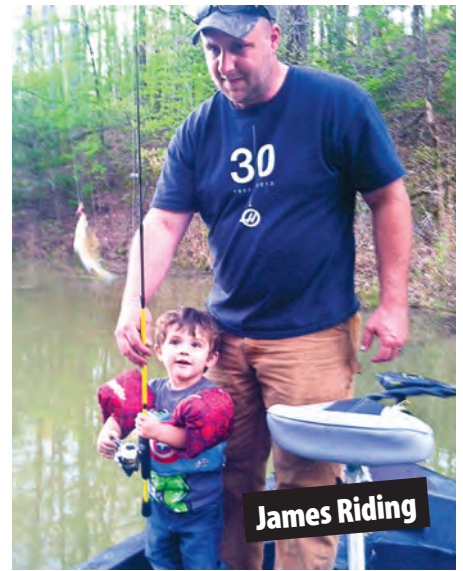
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Charlotte Lentz caught this 3-pound largemouth bass fishing with her father, Matt.



James Riding of Anderson, S.C., caught his first bream from Lake Hartwell in April 2017. He was 2½ years old.



Kurt Diesing, visiting from Florida, caught this 8-pound, 10-ounce bass last year at Oak Hollow Lake in High Point, N.C.



James Scheer of Wilmington, N.C., took this nice buck in full velvet the second day of the 2018 season near Reidsville, N.C.



Conner Fail from Barnwell County, S.C., caught this false albacore fishing out of North Carolina's Masonboro Inlet.



Kandi Winkler of Burlington, N.C., caught this sheepshead at Emerald Isle, N.C., on July 21, 2018.



Will Anderson killed this 10-pointer buck on Oct. 27, 2018, near Chester, S.C.



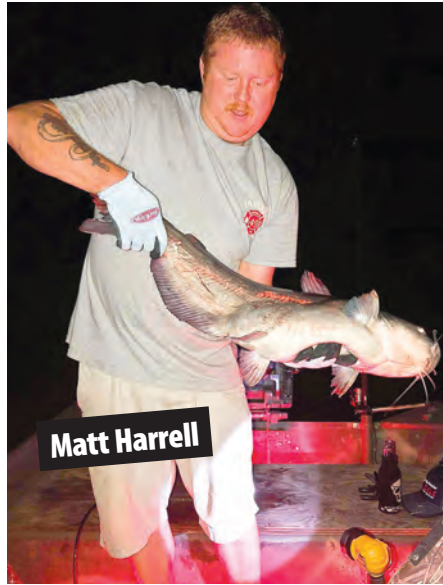
Clayton Maynor of Zebulon, N.C., killed his first gobbler with a crossbow in Franklin County last April.

Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



John Johnson

John Johnson caught these two bass, both weighing more than 7 pounds, at Shearron Harris Lake on Oct. 4, 2018.



Matt Harrell

Matthew Harrell of Jason, N.C., caught this 16-pound catfish on June 8, 2018, in the Neuse River near Goldsboro, N.C.

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Jack Tucker

Jack Tucker, 9, killed this 185-pound, 7-point buck last fall in Aiken County, S.C.



Robert Harrell

Robert Harrell boated this 40-inch red drum on Aug. 10, 2018 in the Neuse River near Oriental, N.C.



Kendra Dumong

Kendra Dumong of Wilson N.C., caught these two wahoo on Sept. 1, 2018, out of Atlantic Beach.



Justin Jones

Justin Jones tagged this 15-point buck on Oct. 13, 2018, in Surry County, N.C., with a crossbow.



David Poole

David Poole killed this nice 8-point buck on Nov. 10, 2018, near Pelion, S.C., in Lexington County.



McKenna Fulcher

McKenna Fulcher caught this nice speckled trout last October in the Morehead City, N.C. area.



Cara McDaniel

Cara McDaniel of Broadway, N.C., caught this largemouth bass last summer on Jordan Lake.



Robert Chavis

Robert Chavis killed this 8-point, 17-inch, 200-pound buck on Nov. 3, 2018, near Williston, S.C.



Brian King

Brian King of Bailey, N.C., caught this 46½-inch red near Cedar island on Aug. 31, 2018.



Amber Keener

Amber Keener killed this nice 11-point buck with her .243 near Green Sea, S.C., last fall.



Trent Burr

Trent Burr of Chesterfield, S.C., killed this 12-point buck on Nov. 24, 2018. He works at Thompson Creek Deer Processing.

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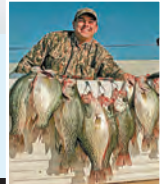
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