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CRACKING DOWN

23
BIG BAITS, BIG FLOUNDER

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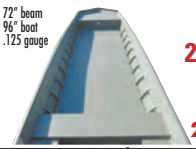
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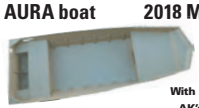


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ON THE COVER:





June brings with it great fishing as summer species enter the picture. Bream are bedding across the Carolinas (top), and flounder arrive inshore in good numbers. Photos by Terry Madewell (bream), Jeff Burleson (flounder).

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Biologist T.J. Johnson measures and shows off a spotted bass sampled by electrofishing from North Carolina's Belews Lake, where spots are pushing out largemouths.

Dan Kibler

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

SPOTTING A BIG BASS PROBLEM

NC BIOLOGISTS WORRIED ABOUT EFFECTS OF UNAUTHORIZED STOCKINGS

Most bass fishermen love spotted bass. They're aggressive, almost always willing to bite, acrobatic and combative. They love them so much that many of them want them in their favorite or local lakes, and they will load their livewells full and transport them hundreds of miles to make that happen.

I don't think many fisheries biologists love spotted bass — at least none of the ones I've talked to over the past 20 years. They get to deal with the mess that spotted bass often leave in their wake. On many occasions, spotted bass out-compete the largemouth and smallmouth bass that are native to certain waters, beating them for food and for the best habitat for spawning, often pushing them completely out of the picture. Cleaning up after them isn't as easy as taking a broom and dust pan and sweeping up a few crumbs.

Biologists in North Carolina are trying to figure out what to do about them. Already, spotted bass have eliminated smallmouths from 7.600-acre Lake Chatuge on the North Carolina-Georgia border near Hayesville, N.C. And they're in the process of eliminating largemouths in 3,864-acre Belews Lake north of Winston-Salem.

There probably isn't much that can be done about Belews, but those same biologists are turning their eyes to two other reservoirs in the northern Piedmont area: 2,800-acre Lake Mayo in Person County and 3,750-acre Hyco Lake in Person and Caswell counties. They don't want to see spots get into those lakes, because they're too much like Belews, and they can almost predict the demise of those lakes' populations of largemouth bass.

Kin Hodges of Mount Airy, N.C., is a biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission whose territory includes Belews Lake. He and his assistant, T.J. Johnson, have been watching the disaster there as it has developed after what was apparently an unauthorized stocking of spotted bass, most likely from Lake Norman.

"Spotted bass are on the way to taking over Belews; they're replacing the largemouth bass, but they aren't living past three or four years," Hodges said. "They don't live long in power-plant (aka hot-hole) lakes. What we're afraid of is that we're going to wind up, very shortly, with no largemouth bass and a lake full of spots that are 10 or 11 inches long."

Electroshocking is pointing to that eventuality. Already, Hodges and Johnson are finding almost no largemouth bass two years or younger, especially in the clear, relatively infertile lower end of the lake. Spots were first documented in Belews in 2014. By 2017, spots made up about 40 percent of black bass sampled. This spring, spots made up 75 percent of black bass sampled, most on the small side.

"Spotted bass do better in non-fertile lakes, and when you start with a hot-hole lake and all of the problems that causes, you can nuke it (with spots)," Hodges said. "When you put them into a very productive lake, they don't dominate as much.

"They are already in Lake Lookout (Shoals), Lake Hickory and Lake James on the Catawba River. We're hoping those lakes are productive enough that the spots won't take over and dominate. But we are worried about Hyco and Mayo. They are very similar, hot-hole lakes, not far away. We haven't documented spotted bass there yet, but we can't predict where this will end up."

The lesson here is, don't move fish where they don't belong. Instead of improving a lake, they may ruin it. ■

Young angler lands huge Kerr Lake catfish

Seven-year-old Carson Grimes of Roxboro, N.C. caught a 105-pound catfish while fishing with his dad and twin brother on Kerr Lake on April 20. He hooked the fish on a small piece of cut bait that was less than 3 inches long.

Carlos Grimes, the young angler's father, netted the fish while Carson's brother, Trevor, took video of the battle. Carlos Grimes said the fish was a welcome surprise after a few days.

"We went camping and fishing a few days, and we didn't have any luck," he said. "We were having a hard time even catching shad for bait, so ... I bought some bait from the tackle shop. My hope was to just get these kids to catch something. Just anything would have been fine."

Once on the lake, Grimes anchored down and put out some baits. Trevor caught a small fish, and then Carson said he had a fish on.

"He fought it the whole time on his own. Every now and then I would just push up on the middle of the rod to remind him to keep the rod tip up," Carlos Grimes said.

After a few minutes, he saw the fish's tail and was shocked.

"I've caught my share of catfish up to 60 pounds, and I'd never seen anything like the size of that tail," he said.

Carlos Grimes put his net in the water, and his son guided the fish into it. That's when they realized just how big the fish was.

"I've got the biggest catfish net I could find, and I'm lucky I had it," he said. "I was trying to figure out how I could weigh the fish and get a photo before letting it go. Then I saw another boat passing by and we waved them down.



Carson Grimes, 7, caught this 105-pound blue catfish from Kerr Lake on April 20.

"The other guy had a 110-pound scale, and we had to stand on top of my bait tank to get the fish high enough off the floor

The fish was 56½ inches long and 41¼ inches in girth.

To watch the video, visit www.facebook.com/carlos.a.grimes/videos/pcb.2086156754840495/2086139604842210/?type=3&theater ■

— Brian Cope

NO CWD YET, NC EXPERTS SAY

North Carolina wildlife officials found no evidence of chronic wasting disease in more than 3,000 whitetails sampled during the 2018-19 season.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission began testing for CWD in 1999 and increased its testing efforts in 2002 after CWD was discovered east of the Mississippi River for the first time. The Commission has conducted systemic testing efforts in 5-year intervals beginning in 2003. In 2008, biologists began a new annual "surveillance strategy" by increasing the number of samples collected from hunters, meat processors, taxidermists and from road kills and deer showing signs of disease. Samples were sent to Wisconsin Veterinarian Diagnostic Lab, a federally approved facility, for testing.

So far, CWD has not been detected in more than 10,000 whitetails, including more than 3,000 sampled last fall.

Hunters who submitted samples with their harvest authorization number can view CWD test results by clicking on "View My Past Harvests" on the agency's Big Game Harvest Reporting webpage.

CWD is a transmissible, always fatal, neurological disease that affects deer and other cervids such as elk, moose and reindeer/caribou. CWD has been documented in 26 states and three Canadian provinces.

Infected deer have been found in two states that share borders with North Carolina: Tennessee and Virginia. However, the affected deer were found well away from North Carolina; the Tennessee deer were found in counties that border Mississippi (which has confirmed 19 cases of CWD), and the Virginia deer were found in two counties that border West Virginia.

"CWD is the single, biggest concern for deer herds and deer hunting in North America," said Jonathan Shaw, the Commission's deer biologist. "CWD has not been detected in North Carolina, due in part to ... efforts to limit exposure of our deer and elk herds and environments to the infectious disease agent, prions.

"Despite these efforts, the risk of CWD entering the state cannot be eliminated, but the Commission is committed to protecting the state's deer and elk herds with early detection being paramount to managing the disease if found in North Carolina." ■

more updates...

CCA-SC CRANKS UP STAR TOURNAMENT FOR TAGGED REDFISH AGAIN

For the third-consecutive year, the Coastal Conservation Association of South Carolina is tagging redfish and giving away Sea Hunt boats to the first two registered anglers who catch one of the tagged fish between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

CCA-SC will tag 60 redfish before the last week of May. This year's tags are purple, and say "CCA STAR 2019" followed by a tag number and a phone number to call in order to claim your prize.

Only anglers registered for the tournament are eligible for prizes.

The two boats are Sea Hunt BX 22 bay boats with Yamaha outboard motors and Wesco trailers. The packages are valued at over $40,000 each.

The tournament runs from May 27 until Sept. 2. ▪

— Brian Cope

South Carolina anglers will have two chances this summer to win fully rigged bay boats for landing redfish tagged by CCA-South Carolina.

Dan Kibler

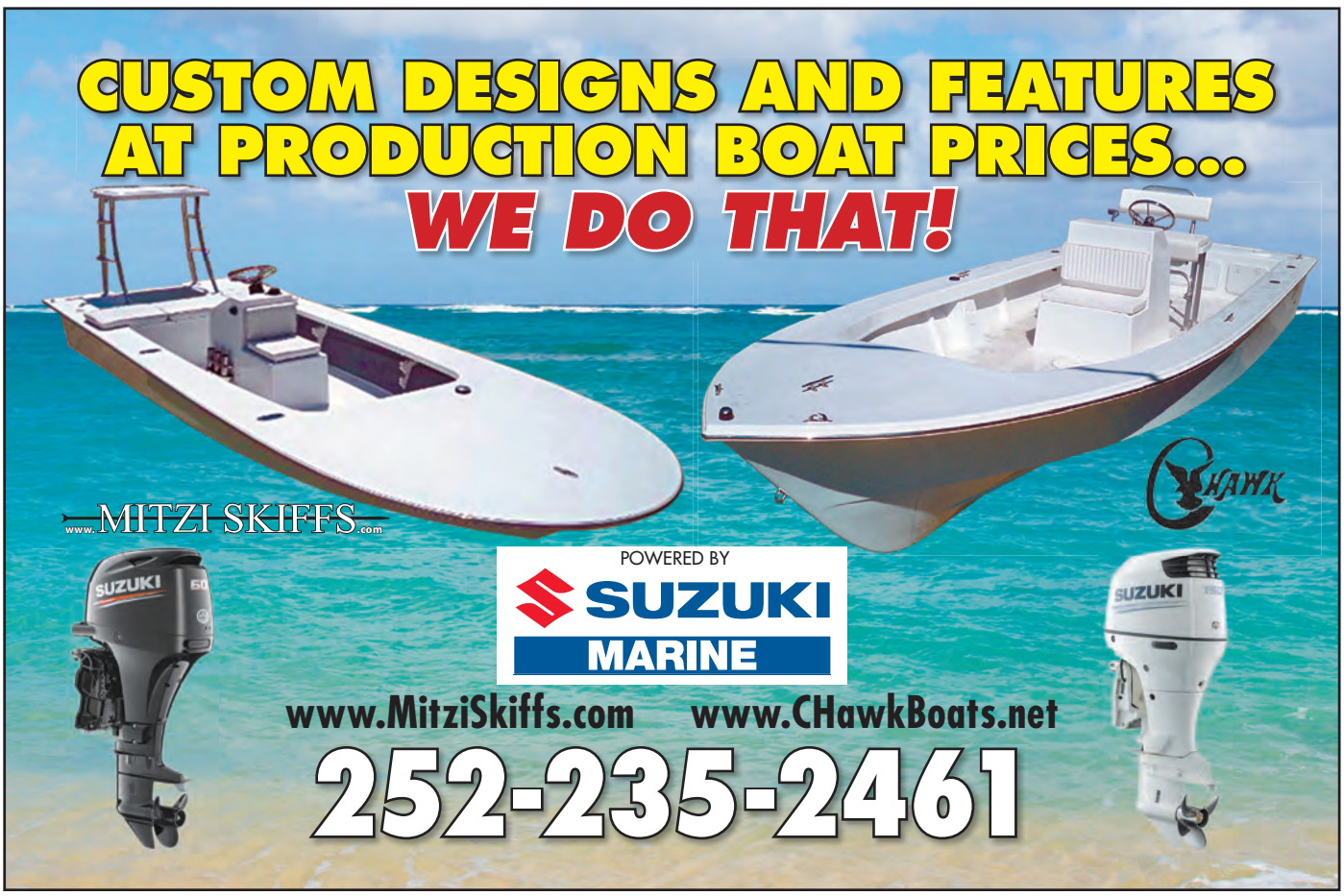


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IVORY SPURS MARK NC TOM

Dustin Lee Joyner of Nashville, N.C., killed a giant gobbler in the Red Oak area of Nash County on April 13. And the bird's size — it weighed 28.79 pounds — wasn't its most impressive feature — at least not to Joyner. It was the turkey's spurs that really caught his attention.

Besides being 1¾ inches long, the curved spurs were almost ivory/white, except for darker tips.

"I'd never seen ivory colored spurs like this. I thought that was real interesting," he said.

The gobbler also carried an 11-inch beard.

Joyner had plenty of trouble getting the gobbler started the opening day of North Carolina's spring gobbler season. He was fighting a vocal war with the remnants of a thunderstorm that was rumbling in the distance, and there were nearby hens.

"The noise was firing this old tom up," Joyner said. "He would gobble after every rumble in the clouds. After about 30 minutes of calling, I was unable to pull him from the hens in the field."

Joyner decided to make his jake decoy a little more visible to the gobbler, and as soon as he moved it, the big bird noticed and began paying attention. After that, it took just a few minutes it took for the turkey to close the distance.

When the bird was 20 yards away, Joyner pulled the trigger on his Stoeger M3500. A clean shot to the head ended the bird's party. ▪

— Brian Cope





Dustin Joyner's huge turkey, taken April 13 in Nash County, N.C., sported ivory colored spurs that measured 1¾ inches each.

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Carolinas involved in cobia-tagging project



SCDNR

Four states will be tagging cobia and studying their movements to learn more about the species' populations and seasonal movements.

Four states on the South Atlantic coast will be teaming up to conduct a study on cobia migrations to learn more about the populations and movements of a fish that's a favorite among anglers but currently under protection by strict creel limits.

Biologists from marine agencies in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida will be tagging 27 cobia with both pop-up satellite archival tags and acoustic transmitters.

"The satellite tags will record information about each fish's movements, including depth, water temperature and location," said Matt Perkinson, a biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

The acoustic transmitters will provide additional location information by emitting a "ping" that is recorded when cobia travel within a quarter-mile of an extensive network of listening devices maintained throughout the region.

An addition 20 fish will be tagged only with acoustic transmitters in an effort to build on the results of a previous cobia-tagging project. All project fish will also receive an orange, streamer-like tag with an alphanumeric code beginning with the letter "M".

"The combination of tag types will allow us to follow cobia movements when they're relatively close to shore, where the listening devices are mostly stationed, as well as in Gulf Stream waters," Perkinson said.

Funding for the project comes from the federal government.

Anglers are asked to release any tagged cobia they catch, if at all possible. If a fish is harvested, please save the acoustic transmitter located in the body cavity on the underside of the fish, along with the satellite tag. Contact Justin Yost at 843-953-2011.■



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NC WATERFOWL SEASONS SET

THIRD DUCK SEGMENT ENDS JAN. 31; MALLARD BAG LIMIT DROPS TO 2

North Carolina waterfowl hunters will have to mark their hunting calendars very carefully during the 2019-20 season after dates were set in late April by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

The Commission divided the duck season into the usual three segments, but the last segment will last until Jan. 31, 2020, thanks to changes in federal frameworks that previously forced states to end the season no later than the last Sunday in January.

Hunters can hunt Oct. 2-5, Nov. 16-Dec. 2, and Dec. 14-Jan. 30, 2020. The bag limit remains six birds per day, but the daily limit on mallards has been lowered from four to two, including no more than one hen — in response to a long-term decline in Atlantic Flyway mallards.

Youth (under 18) waterfowl days will be Feb. 1 and Feb. 8, concurrent with veterans/military waterfowl days.

The season on brant geese has been reduced from 60 to 30 days (Dec. 28-Jan. 31, 2020) in response to several years of poor reproduction.

The resident Canada goose seasons will be Sept. 2-30 statewide, with expanded methods allowed west of US 17, including shooting until 30 minutes after sunset, the use of unplugged guns, the use of electronic calls, and a 15-goose daily bag limit.

Other Canada goose seasons will be Oct. 2-12 and Dec 14-Feb. 8, 2020, in the resident population zone, with a five-bird daily limit; Jan, 16-31, 2020 in the northeast zone, with a valid permit and a one-bird daily limit. Light geese (snow, blue and Ross) can be hunted Oct. 8-Feb. 20, 2020, with a daily bag limit of 25, and during a conservation order season from Feb. 10-March 31, by permit only, with hunting until 30 minutes past sunset, the use of unplugged guns and electronic calls, with no daily bag or possession limits.

Dove season will be divided in three segments: Sept. 2-Oct. 5, Nov. 16-30, Dec. 9-Jan. 31, 2020, with a 15-bird daily bag limit.

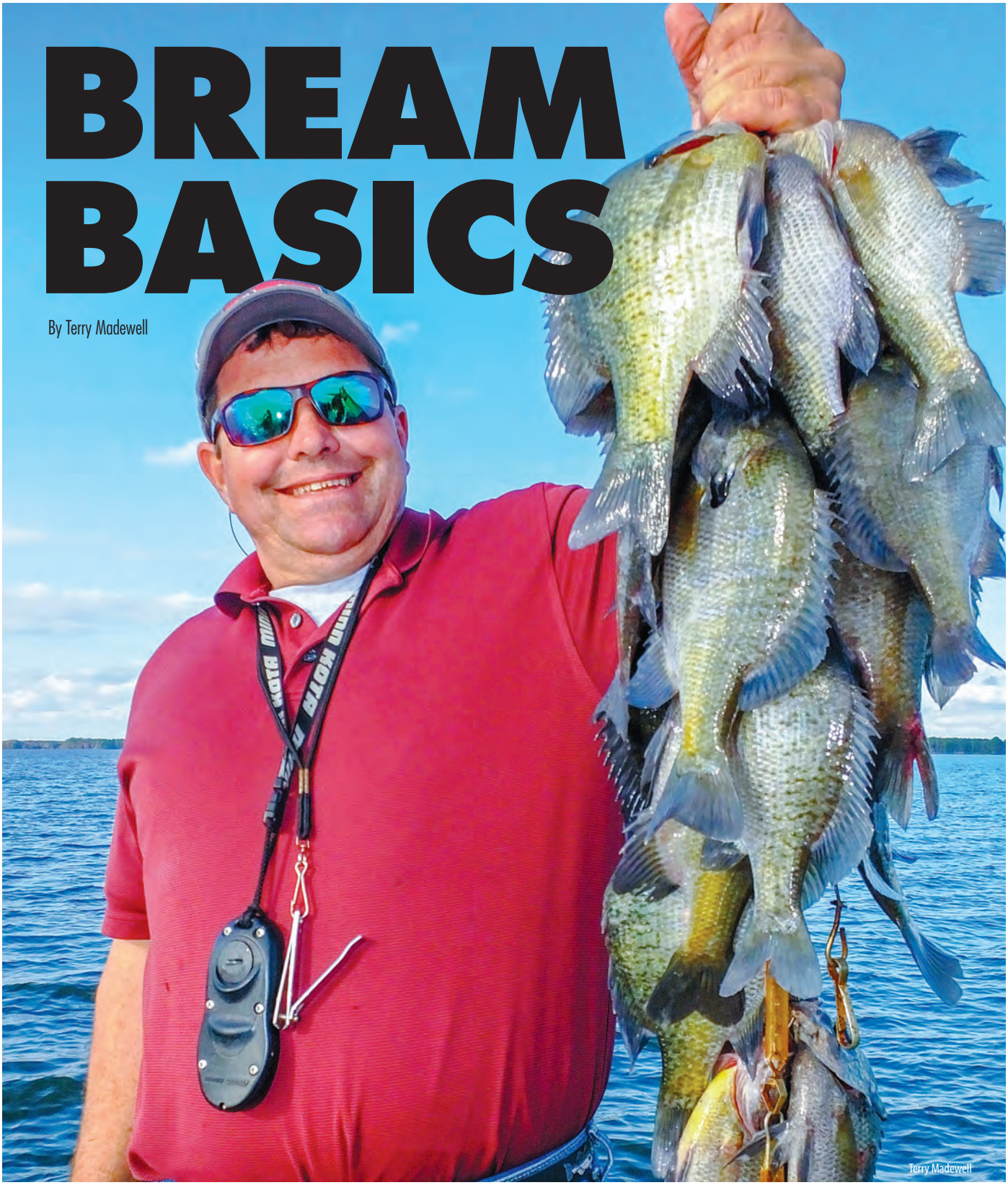
Seasons on rails will be Sept.7-Nov. 27. The bag limit for king and clapper rails is 15, sora and Virginia rails 25, Gallinules and Moorhens 15. Common snipe can be hunted Oct. 28-Feb. 28, 2020, with a daily bag limit of eight.

Woodcock season is Dec. 7-Jan. 28, 2020, with a daily bag limit of three.

The season on tundra swan is Nov. 9-Jan. 30, 2020, by permit only, with one bird allowed per permit. ▪

BREAM BASICS

By Terry Madewell



JUNE IS PRIME TIME TO CATCH BEDDING BREAM ACROSS THE CAROLINAS, BUT YOU HAVE TO FIND THEM FIRST.

Here's how to learn where to look....

Bream fishing is one of the most highly anticipated events of the spring fishing season, and with just cause. By late May and June, bream have flooded into the shallows and will aggressively attack crickets, worms and artificial lures in their vicinity. If you find a bed of spawning bream, the action can be simply sensational, and limits of the biggest bream of the year can be taken in short order. >

But even a species as prolific and abundant as bream has patterns that makes catching them easier.

Kevin Davis guides on South Carolina's Santee Cooper lakes and has fished for bream throughout the Carolinas and the southeast, and he's developed shallow-water tactics that work for him everywhere.

"The key is to understand that not all bream habitat is created equal," said Davis, who runs Black's Camp on the Diversion Canal between Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie. "It's easy to think fishing around cover such as brush, weeds, trees or docks seals the deal. But the fact is, the bottom substrate is a major location key for bream. They prefer sand or gravel bottoms for bedding, not mucky bottoms, so targeting the right bottom substrate is a key. They'll fan out small, circular individual beds, and they may have a few beds — or hundreds — in a specific area. Find this, and you're in the bream-catching business."

Davis (843-753-2231) said by wearing polarized sunglasses and scanning shallow water, he'll spot the beds visually if the water is clear. If the water is dingy, he'll use light spinning tackle or 12-foot long fiberglass poles to fish around woody and weedy cover growing on the right kind of bottom.

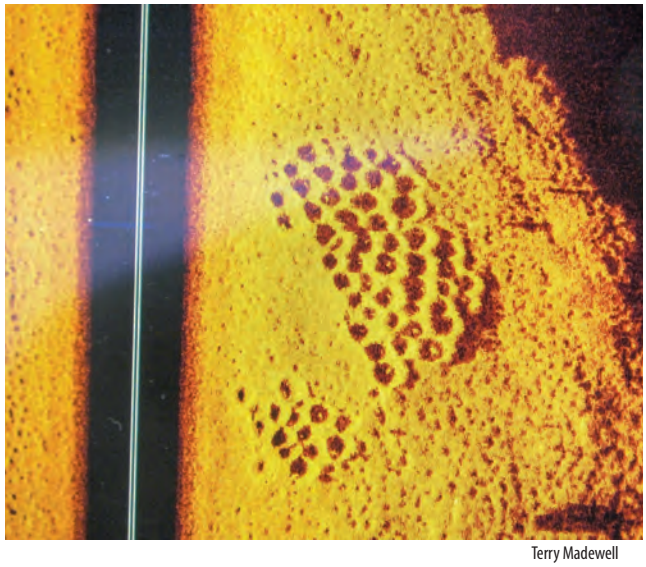
"I enjoy fishing the shallow water for bream at this time of the year, because the action is consistently good, whether I'm on a bed or not," he said. "Catching a bull bream or two at the same spot is an indicator to stop moving and fish the entire area thoroughly. But when I catch a small 'hen' bream, I'll keep moving until I find larger fish."

Davis said bream don't all bed at the same time, and his timing preference for peak bedding action is three days before and after a full moon. While June is prime time for bream bedding, he said not all bream bed at the same time, nor do they bed continuously.

"The traditional peak bedding times are in sync with moon phases, but bream may bed any time the water is warm enough," he said. "Even when they're not bedding, June is a killer time to catch limits of huge bream. I fish the same technique as I do when searching for a bream bed — fishing

continued on page 20 >





Terry Madewell

SIDE-SCAN FOR BREAM BEDS

Guide T.C. Lloyd of Hartsville, S.C., said plenty of fishermen employ side-scan sonar when targeting fish like bass, crappie and catfish, so why not use it for finding bream beds?

"I've always enjoyed the traditional methods of finding bream beds, but using the side-scan sonar allows me and my clients or family and friends to spend much more time hooking and fighting big, bull bream," he said. "While not everyone has side-scan imaging graphs, they're becoming much more prevalent on sonar units."

"I'll set my side-scan search to 80 to 100 feet on either side of the boat," he said. "I want to see the beds clearly; they'll show up as clusters of dimples in a honeycomb pattern on the screen. Some bedding areas will have hundreds of individual beds, while others may have a dozen or two."

"The individual beds show up slightly darker in the fanned depression where they're slightly deeper, and hot marks in the center of the beds are fish actively on the beds," he said. "I save these spots as waypoints, then return later and find bream actively bedding in July and August.

"Many of these same bedding areas will be productive, because the bottom substrate on the lake in that specific area is ideal for beds. I have found June is consistently the peak month for the most beds and usually the largest bream."

Lloyd said that, far from the shoreline on open-water flats, bream often bed in areas with no additional wood or weed cover.

"If the bottom composition and depth are right, they don't need additional cover," he said. "I've found huge beds over a half-mile from the shoreline. And the exact location of a big bed may change from one year to the next, that same general area will likely have bedding bream next year." ■

LEFT: Bream beds appear like honeycombs when viewed on side-scanning sonar. **TOP LEFT**: A full stringer of bull bream awaits the angler who finds a bedding area.

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Bedding bream aren't picky; they'll hit a variety of baits and lures, headed by crickets, worms and small spinners.

shallow cover and moving until I hit catch some big bream. When the action slows, I move and hunt the next spot."

He said bream still congregate in big numbers, but not like when they're bedding. He may catch a couple or several any a given spot instead of dozens, but by moving and finding multiple areas, the number adds up quickly.

Davis said the best baits for June bream are live crickets and red worms, but small spinners on light tackle and fly-rod popping bugs are productive.

"Crickets seem to produce better action on bluegill, and red worms are best for shellcrackers, but both works for either species," he said. "I'll typically have worms and crickets with me, and if I catch a shellcracker on a cricket, I'll search the area with worms before moving."

Bream fishing in the Carolinas is serious business for bream-fishing addicts, who are always on the lookout for new and improved methods to catch them.

T.C. Lloyd of Hartsville, S.C., guides for a number of species, often relying on modern electronics to help him put his parties on fish. He said he has elevated his bream-fishing with those same electronics.



Terry Madewell

"crickets seem to produce better action on bluegill, and red worms are best for shellcrackers ..."





"I've always loved catching big bream on the beds, but now with the side-imaging electronic resource available, I've learned how to look for beds and actually see bream marked on those beds, before I set up to fish," he said.

Lloyd uses the side-scan capability on his graph to mark bream beds. And he doesn't look for beds just in shallow water near the shoreline. With side-scan, he can find beds far from the bank.

Lloyd (843-307-6678) said that he used to search for bream beds by fishing good bottom substrate and cover it with traditional bream fishing gear. While learning the intricacies of the side-scan process, he slowly motored around the shoreline scanning both sides of the boat. He began finding beds far away from the bank, often on the opposite side of the boat from the shoreline.

"This morphed into my current process; now, I search far from the shoreline in places where the bottom substrate and depth are right," he said. "If the bottom conditions and depth are right, huge bream beds can be found far from the shoreline."

Lloyd said once he locates a bed, he'll anchor a short distance away so he doesn't spook the fish. He'll cast to his target using light spinning tackle, and when the action slows, he repeats the process.

Catching big bream during June is a tradition in the Carolinas. This year have a game plan enabling you to spend more time fighting big bream than searching for them. ▪



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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BIG BAITS, BIG FLOUNDER

By Jeff Burleson

As June arrives, anglers flood the estuaries along the Carolinas' coastline in search of doormat-shaped beasts.

The combination of warm water and abundant forage creates the perfect invitation for large schools of southern flounder.

BELOW: A big flounder is more likely to rise off the bottom to grab a big bait or lure than a smaller mouthful.

The Carolinas are well known for producing big catches of America's favorite flatfish, and a mud minnow fished on a Carolina rig is known as the most-reliable tactic. But for the pros in the flounder-pounding world, a live-bait rig is a thing of the past. It was ditched years ago for artificial options that produce bigger hauls in more ways than one. And not just any old plastic bait, either. The true flounder pounders use strictly artificial lures and some real big ones.

Jot Owens of Jot It Down Fishing Charters qualifies as one of the North Carolina's flounder pounders; he regularly catches doormat-sized flounder out of his home port of Wrightsville Beach, targeting structure with large artificial lures.

"Juvenile flounder congregate on sand bars, creeks with dropoffs and in open water along creek channels," said Owens (910-233-4139). "The bigger fish are like red drum; they are more structure-oriented than the younger stock."

Larger flounder are also found in smaller numbers and are often solitary. Docks, bridge pilings, oyster bars, bulkheads or any underwater structure can be a good location to find a large flounder. Owens fishes all of those kinds of places, but he prefers old docks along the ICW loaded with live oysters.

"Big flounder love structure, and the big ones will break their cover to get a big meal," he said. "They aren't going to waste energy on smaller baits in these cases. Bigger baits will bring bigger fish to the table."

While he may not catch as many flounder, the size of the ones he catches more than make up for the lower numbers; he rarely has to measure one to see if it's a keeper.

His secret for consistently catching big flounder can be spelled out in one single word: efficiency

"We must cover a lot of ground to consistently catch a heavy stringer of flounder, and efficiency is the key," he said. "Working a jig across the bottom is more efficient than other traditional methods because it rides over structure and provides a realistic presentation. The more efficient you are, the better you will do, and a well-fished jig in heavy cover will produce plenty of big flounder."

>



Jeff Burleson



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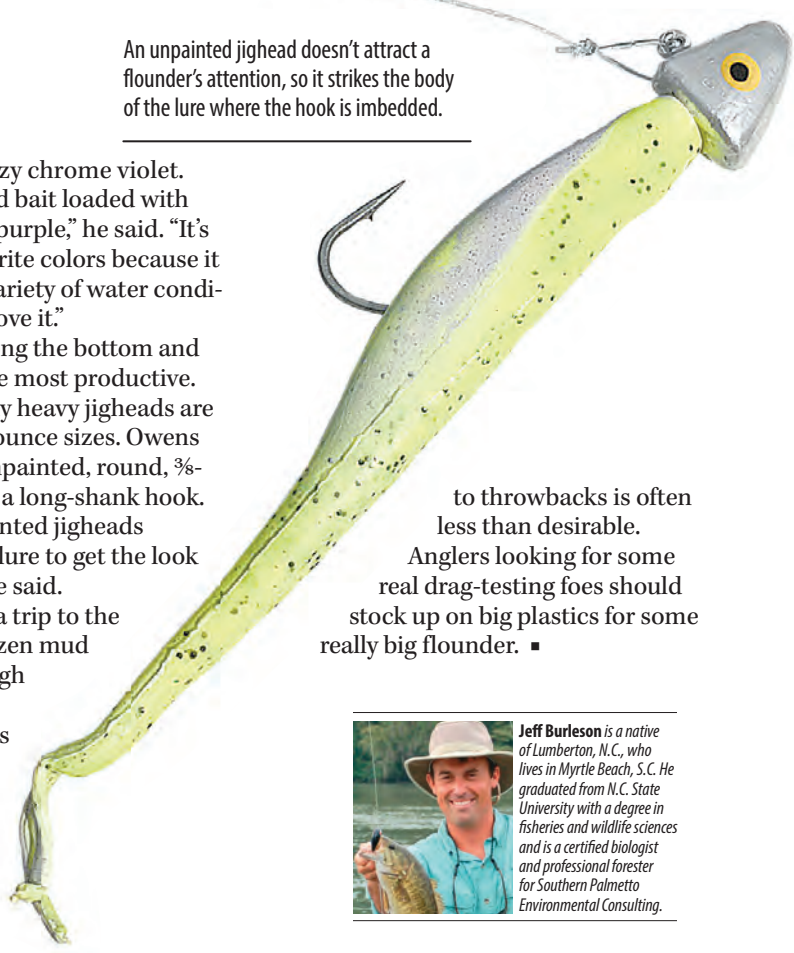
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An unpainted jighead doesn't attract a flounder's attention, so it strikes the body of the lure where the hook is imbedded.

The second key to catching big flounder is a big presentation. Adult flounder are efficient feeders. While they will eat smaller baits, they want a bigger reward for their efforts. The larger flounder have a tendency not to move until the perfect opportunity presents itself to ambush a meal.

"My go-to flounder bait for sizable flounder is the 6-inch Gulp Jerk shad. It's a large bait, but the fish can easily see it, and the bigger fish have no issues taking it down all at once," he said.

Owens uses a variety of other soft-plastic lures, including the new 5-inch Powerbait Grass pig, a bait with a paddle-shaped tail that provides extra action and vibration. Visibility is important to catch the attention of an adult flounder holding motionless on the bottom. The larger lures offer a clear message to the fish.

Owens prefers pearl/white, chartreuse/pearl and other similar color combinations. One of his new favorites in the Grass Pig is the crazy chrome violet.

"It's a clear-colored bait loaded with flecks of silver and purple," he said. "It's one of my new favorite colors because it highly visible in a variety of water conditions, and the fish love it."

A presentation along the bottom and near structure is the most productive. As a result, relatively heavy jigheads are preferred: ⅜- to ½-ounce sizes. Owens prefers to use an unpainted, round, ⅜-ounce jighead with a long-shank hook.

"I prefer the unpainted jigheads because I want the lure to get the look over the jighead," he said.

For most anglers, a trip to the bait shop for six dozen mud minnows and enough hardware to build several Carolina rigs is the main plan for the day. While these anglers can catch plenty of flounder, the ratio of keepers to throwbacks is often less than desirable.

Anglers looking for some real drag-testing foes should stock up on big plastics for some really big flounder. ▪

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.*



NO TIME TO WAIT

For years, anglers targeting flounder have looked at their watches and started counting to 10 or 20 as soon as they felt a bite.

Why?

Many fishermen believe that flounder slowly take in a bait, a little bit at a time, until the hook is well down their throat, and only then is a good hookset guaranteed.

For any angler who has ever watched a flounder eat in clear water, the slow take isn't what actually happens. Similar to speckled trout and many other gamefish, flounder gulp their food into their mouths in a single motion and then down the hatch a few seconds later.

Over the past two decades, many fisherman have used a 10-second count to make sure the bait was all the way. That came from setting the hook and coming up short with a mashed minnow missing scales. Guide Jot Owens has the answer for these shortcomings.



Jeff Burleson

A big flounder has no problem taking a big bait completely into its mouth in one motion.

"Flounder don't nibble the bait. They inhale it. People get confused on the smaller flounder bites. Large flounder; they get it all," Owens said. "If you are using live bait or artificial lures, you should always set the hook immediately if you get a bite or feel dead weight. No waiting around for anything!"

There can be another disadvantage of waiting to set the hook. If the fish feels the sharp hook point inside its mouth, it can spit it out just as easily as it inhaled it. A quick hookset doesn't leave any time for the fish to spit the bait back out.

To catch more flounder, always set the hook immediately after feeling the bite or a heavy feeling of dead weight. ▪

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Brian Cope



When things go right, gigging can produce a haul like this one from a trip by Capt. Joel Campbell with Charleston Gigging Charters.

YOUR LATEST GIG? FLOUNDER

A MOONLESS NIGHT, PLENTY OF BOAT LIGHTS AND FLATFISH ARE A JUNE TREASURE

As the boat drifted down a shallow, Lowcountry bank lined with spartina grass, Morgan Watt's voice broke the silence of the moonless night.

"Watch this creek mouth coming up. We should see one there," said Watt, who is from Sumter, S.C.

A set of Hydro Glow lights on the side of the boat lit up the clear water. A few swimming baitfish stood out in the glow against the calm, oyster-shell lined bottom. Then, without a word, Watt's fishing partner, Terry Eades — who is also from Sumter — stabbed a five-pronged gig into the water. A cloud of dust erupted as Eades stood on the boat's gunwale, holding the gig firmly in place.

Finally, he raised the gig pole. An 18-inch flounder was impaled on the prongs, and as Eades removed it for the cooler, Watt made another stab. This time, it was an 18-inch redfish, which are legal to gig in South Carolina.

Gigging is an often-overlooked pastime that offers many benefits to anglers. Aside from helping stock the freezer, it allows them to see a different aquatic world than usually see in the daytime. It offers clues about what to look for when fishing during daylight hours, and, at this time of year, it gives anglers a respite from the sun.

TAKE A KID GIGGING

Watt and Eades both regularly take their sons gigging. The kids delight in getting a look at the underwater world with the benefit of gigging lights, as well as being under the stars and observing wildlife in a way they can't when the sun's out.

"If you want to get a kid interested in the outdoors, take them gigging. They'll see things they just can't see in the daytime," Watt said. "They'll observe crabs, fish and wildlife along the shoreline that react differently at night. And sometimes the fishing can be tough in June. They'll get plenty of action gigging, and that will keep them interested."

While Watt enjoys seeing specialized boats that are purpose-built for gigging, he doesn't use one. He uses his regular fishing boat, and he believes more anglers should do the same.

"Specialized gigging boats are great, but a lot of folks don't gig simply because they think they need that," he said. "I attach Hydro Glow lights to my rod holders, and I carry two extra batteries with me. I hook two lights to one battery on the front of my boat's right side, and I do the same on the back of my boat's right side. You can see everything between my boat and the bank."



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.*

DRIFT ON THE WIND

Watt relies on the wind to push him along the bank. It takes some trial and error on some nights, but he said it's a very effective method.

"You have to find a bank that keeps the wind in your favor," Watt said. "Then, you push off with your gigs to keep you the right distance from the bank. It's easier than constantly adjusting a trolling motor while also keeping your eyes out for fish."

Watt likes gigging as the tide begins moving from low to high, exposing water that the fish are eager to access.

"If you gig on the falling tide, those fish are more skittish," he said. "They're trying not to get left high and dry, and they know they're about to be exposed to predators. They have a lot on their minds and just seem unpredictable. Some will leave the shallows much earlier looking for a safe place.

"But on the incoming tide, these fish get into extremely shallow water, and they just seem more relaxed. They're safe from (porpoises), they've got plenty of food available, and you will always be able to find fish moving into the shallows. The water is also often cleaner than it is on the falling tide, and the boat isn't being sucked away from the bank on the incoming tide. It's being pushed toward it, which is easier to manage with the gig poles." ▪



GIGGING: IT'S NOT JUST FOR FLOUNDER

With the exception of redfish in North Carolina waters, it's lawful to gig any legal gamefish in the Carolinas. The same size regulations and bag limits apply to gigging as to fishing with rod and reel. Morgan Watt and Terry Eades see plenty of sheepshead and redfish while looking for flounder, and they occasionally spot tripletail. They most often pass on gigging these fish, but when they do, Watt said it is best to gig them from the side of the head and push down, rather than gigging from the top.



INSHORE FLOUNDER

MAKE BIG SHOWING IN NC WATERS IN JUNE

As water temperatures rise toward summer levels this month, flounder skitter through inlets to inshore waters: bays, marsh creeks, rivers and sounds.

Millions of baitfish have already left the ocean for the safety of shallow-water hiding places and the food provided in acres of brackish and saltwater: oyster reefs, docks, bulkheads, pilings, islands and other structures.

Finger mullet show up inside in June and stay through early November, and flounder love them. And guides such as Matt Littleton target flounder.

"Last year, we had a lot of small flounder, so this year should be good," said Littleton, of Friendly City Guide Service in Swansboro, N.C., "We catch flounder mostly when we fish for red drum. They stay in the same places and hit the same baits."

With a 15-inch size minimum and four-fish daily creel, limits aren't unusual, he said.

"The best time to fish is a dead-low, rising tide," said Littleton (910-330-4764). "As soon as the tide starts to push up, flounder go with it.

"You'll find them in areas that are 'structury' — anything man-made. They use (it) as ambush points. Flounders sit on the bottom near oyster beds and along the edges of inlets."

One inside spot that mimics deep offshore structure is the State Port Wall at Morehead City, where baitfish must be dropped vertically 35 to 45 feet. The wall famously produces gigantic flounder but eats bottom rigs. Littleton uses 20-pound braid at and 40-pound fluorocarbon leaders because of snags.

"I drop down a 2½-ounce bucktail with a 4-inch Gulp! shrimp, the same rig I'd fish deep offshore at artificial reefs or wrecks," he said. "(Success) is a matter of anchoring your boat right and moving your lure around the bottom."

In hot weather, flounder wait 2 to 5 feet deep around the edges of inlets, waiting for bait to be swept past by tidal currents.

Littleton's go-to terminal tackle is a Carolina rig — a ½- to ¾-ounce barrel sinker and 6- to 8-inch leader of 20-pound fluorocarbon and a 2/0 or 3/0 circle hook.



Matt Littleton

Guide Matt Littleton of Swansboro, N.C., targets flounder around any kind of old structure in inshore waters.

Littleton's biggest inshore flounder weighed 6½ pounds under "an old busted dock and hit a shrimp you'd normally throw away," he said. "A hungry fish will eat any size baitfish."

His best spots to find flounder are old structures, such as dilapidated docks or pilings that don't receive a lot of boat traffic. ▪

— Craig Holt

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Shellcrackers have finished spawning on South Carolina's Lake Murray and moved into deeper water, but that's no reason to put away your worms and bream hooks. One guide says you can still fill your cooler very nicely.

CRACKING DOWN

By Pat Robertson

As summer approaches, the legions of brightly colored shellcrackers that prowled the shallow water along the banks of South Carolina's Lake Murray's in April and May seem to have disappeared, but they have not gone far. They have just moved offshore into a little deeper water.

"By June, shellcrackers can be found in 10 to 20 feet of water, most in the 10- to 15-foot range, said guide Brad Taylor of Batesburg, S.C. "But I would not hesitate at all to fish for them as deep as 20 feet, and I have caught them that time of year in 21 to 22 feet of water."

The short migration offshore is a part of the natural succession of reproduction on the lake during the spring, according to Ron Ahle, a fisheries biologist for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

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"There is a seasonal sequence," Ahle said. "Typically, the shellcrackers come in to spawn right at the tail end of the largemouth bass spawn. Then, after the shellcrackers spawn, here come the bluegills."

Ahle said the spawning sequence occurs earlier from the middle part of the lake up to the Saluda and Little Saluda rivers because the water in that area warms faster than the lower part of the lake. Once shellcrackers, aka redear sunfish, leave the shallows, they will congregate on areas with a hard bottom, such as gravel or even rocks, ideally littered with woody debris such as stumps and sunken limbs.

By June, Taylor said, shellcrackers have finished spawning and settled into their summer pattern. They will stay in deeper water through summer and on into fall.

Once fish move offshore, Taylor targets them on the bottom with worms and just enough weight to get the bait down to the fish; his favorite outfit involves a slip cork because of the debris.

"When you reel in with the slip cork, the line runs through the cork; it allows you to pick the bait straight up off the bottom so you don't get hung up in the limbs and other trash," said Taylor, who fishes with 10-pound monofilament and a light-wire Aberdeen hook.

"Those fish do like cover, and that's where that 10-pound line comes in handy," he said. "When you do get hung up, it allows you to pull the hook out without breaking off. You actually bend the hook and pull it away from the debris."

While crickets are top baits for bluegills, earthworms are the preferred bait for shellcrackers, but one particular type of worm is best, Taylor said.

"The most popular worms for shellcracker bait in this part of the world are blue worms, if you can get them," he said. "Blue worms are a kind of worm that you dig out of the swamps around here. They are very hard to find, but hands down they are the best shellcracker bait. You can go to the standby worms — night crawlers and red worms — but you had better hope your buddy in the back of the boat doesn't have a cup of blue worms, or he will outfish you."

While a lot of people catch a lot of shellcrackers fishing from the bank, Taylor prefers to fish from a boat for a couple of reasons. First, he can anchor and put out a half-dozen or more lines with baits in different locations and at varying depths to cover a bigger area and, second, if the fish are not biting, he can move quickly to another spot.

"I like to fan-cast about six to eight rods around the boat and let them sit for a few minutes, and then move them," Taylor said. "I like to pick out a target and know where my bait lands

continues on page 38 >





Big shellcrackers leave the shallows after the spawn and move to hardbottom areas in deeper water.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Accessing Lake Murray is easy because it lies between I-20 and I-26. The major towns around the lake include Lexington, Chapin, Gilbert, Prosperity and Irmo. There are numerous launching ramps in any section of the lake you wish to fish. The shellcracker action is good lake-wide, but guide Brad Taylor likes the middle to upper half of the lake because of more feeder creeks and small pockets which harbor shellcracker populations. Visit www.lakemurrayfun.com/ramps.shtml for a list of boat ramps.

WHEN TO GO — Shellcrackers can be caught year-round in Lake Murray. Although some anglers consider prime time to be during the spawn in April and May, some of the best fishing can be in June and through the summer months when the fish move a little further offshore into depths up to about 20 feet. Target hard bottoms with submerged woody cover.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Fish night crawlers or red worms on the bottom in gravely or rocky areas with submerged woody cover. The absolute best baits are blue warms dug out of local swamps. Use enough weight to get the bait to the bottom and a slip cork so a retrieve will bring the hook straight up with less danger of getting snagged on stumps and submerged limbs.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Brad Taylor, 803-331-1354, www.tayloroutdoors.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Lake Murray Country, 803-781-5940, www.lakemurraycountry.com; RiverWinds Landing (camping), 803-364-0036, www.cabinrentalsonlakemurray.com; S.C. Department of Parks, Tourism and Recreation, 866-244-9339; South Carolina Association of Visitor Bureaus, (www.discoversouthcarolina.com.

MAPS — Navionics Electronic Charts, www.navionics.com; Delorme's South Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer, 800-561-5105 or www.delorme.com; Kingfisher Maps, 800-326-0257, www.kfmaps.com

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LAKE MURRAY SHELLCRACKERS HEALTHY, NUMEROUS

South Carolina's Lake Murray is blessed with a solid population of shellcrackers, and it is a healthy population, according to biologist Ron Ahle of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. Although the agency does not sample shellcrackers in Lake Murray, the fish, along with other species, are often brought up to the surface when biologists do electrofishing sampling for largemouth bass in the spring, Ahle said.

"I can tell you there are a lot of shellcrackers in the lake, and they are pretty good-sized fish," he said. "Quite a few will go to a pound or a pound-and-a-half, and there seem to be more of them this year than I have seen in a while."

The fish they have sampled also appear to be very healthy, he said.

"They look good, very robust. When you are out there looking at all the different species, the shellcrackers are always impressive ... probably because they are capable of eating snails and aquatic clams during the life stages of the clams — and the lake is loaded with those things."

In fact, that's where the fish gets its name. Shellcrackers have hard, bony plates in their throat which allow them to crush the shells of snails and mollusks. Shellcrackers go by other names, including Georgia bream, cherry gill, chinquapin, improved bream, rouge ear sunfish, sun perch and even stump knocker because of its preference for areas with rocky or gravel bottoms and woody debris.

Although a bass angler, Ahle said shellcrackers also hold a special allure. He used to keep a couple of ultralight outfits and a box of red worms on his boat just in case he runs into a congregation of shellcrackers.

"I'd catch a few to carry home," he said. ▪



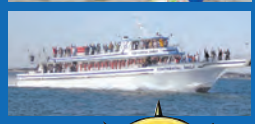
Brad Taylor shows off a Lake Murray shellcracker caught by young Ben Robertson .

Pat Robertson

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IS IT A SHELLCRACKER OR BLUEGILL?

Shellcrackers, aka redear sunfish *(Lepomis microlophus)*, are one of several prominent species of sunfish that inhabit lakes, river and ponds across the Carolinas, including bluegill, redbreast sunfish, green sunfish, pumpkinseed and warmouth.

Shellcrackers are easily distinguished from other species, especially bluegills, by examining the fish's black ear flap. A shellcracker, will have a distinct, lighter-colored edge around the ear flap. In males, it's red, and in females, orange. Ear flaps in bluegills are all black.

Shellcrackers also often have distinct vertical bars along their flanks that other sunfish don't have. ▪

— Dan Kibler



Pat Robertson

An orange or red margin around the black ear flap is the distinguishing mark of a shellcracker.







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when I cast it out. Then, if I get a bite, I can re-bait and go right back to that same spot."

It doesn't take long to find out if a spot is going to produce fish, Taylor said. If they are there, you will be getting bites. If the baits sit idle for 15 or 20 minutes, it's time to move to another spot.

Sometimes, he said, it's a good idea to move frequently — catch one or two nice shellcrackers off a spot and then move to another spot so you don't deplete the population in one area. And, he added, usually you catch bonus fish — such as bluegills, catfish and white perch — while targeting shellcrackers. One June day a year or two ago, he took a man fishing for shellcrackers to show him how to catch them in the summer.

"Every stop we made, we'd catch one or two shellcrackers, all of them pretty big — a pound or better — then we'd move to another spot. We also caught a catfish or two or a bluegill or two at every stop. When we came in, we had more than 20 big shellcrackers and a cooler also filled with catfish and bluegills — a really beautiful mess of fish."

Taylor said the average size for a shellcracker on Lake Murray is probably around three-quarters of a pound, but it is not uncommon to catch fish up to 1½ to 2 pounds.

"The biggest one I ever caught myself was about 2½ pounds, but I have seen a shellcracker caught in Lake Murray that weighed 4½ pounds," Taylor said. ▪



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



SPRING REDS FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

Three North Carolina fishing guides fit their lure offerings to changing conditions when transition reds are the target

By Craig Holt

Truth be told, fishing for red drum during May and June isn't easy.

Veteran anglers call these months "the transition" time, because huge schools of redfish are moving from the ocean to inshore waters, following spawning menhaden into North Carolina's sounds, marsh creeks, rivers and bays.

Once behind the barrier islands, schools fracture into smaller pods spread across millions of watery acres where they find saltwater habitats teeming with multiple food sources. Warming marsh waters bloom with oyster reefs infested by tiny black crabs, while bays, creeks and rivers contain other crab species, mud minnows and juvenile fish. Shrimp and finger mullets soon join the migration.

What's a hungry red to do other than partake of this shallow-water smorgasbord?

A key for anglers is finding the food sources, but the hottest bites vary depending on water clarity and temperature, depth, tides and wind direction, factors known to serious local anglers and guides.

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Those components also affect the artificial lures used. Which ones should an angler choose? Three guides who chase reds from Harkers Island to Carolina Beach shared their ideas.

TOPWATER

Guide Noah Lynk of Harkers Island fishes the waters around Cape Lookout every chance he gets.

"Topwater fishing for drum is best at low tides in shallow water," said Lynk, 49, of Noah's Ark Fishing Charters (252-342-6911). "Red drum are mainly bottom-feeders with a low-slung mouth, so they have to get above a topwater lure."

Lynk uses all the MirrOlure walking surface baits, including Top Dog Jrs. and Top Pups, small lures that resemble small menhaden.

"Lure color doesn't matter as long as it's got a white belly," said Lynk, who also takes sound into consideration, because MirrOlures have rattles with different sound pitches: high, medium or low.

"If (redfish) don't react to one, I'll try another until I find one they like," he said.

The best topwater strike zones for redfish are in 1 to 2 feet of water near marsh-grass edges and oyster-rock points.

"Reds grub in protected grasses for crabs, little shrimp and small minnows," he said. "I like oyster rocks near grass, but sometimes I find them on shoals in the middle of a bay."



Noah Lynk, a Harkers Island guide, finds red drum near marsh creek edges during early spring.



David Towler's favorite topwater redfish lures (first three from top) include a MirrOlure 808 Top Dog Jr., Heddon Super Spook Jr. and MirrOlure 18 Top Dog Jr. ,while subsurface favorites (third row) are a Rapala X-Rap Twitchin' Mullet and Strike King KVD Shallow-Diver square-bill crankbait. His favorite soft-plastics (bottom row) for bottom bumping are a Z-Man Pogyz Mulletron and Pogyz Houdini.

He looks for the backs of fish, "or you might see swirls, beat-up water."

Lynk said the key to hooking a red drum with a topwater lure is to not try to set the hook as soon as a fish strikes.

"You get a lot of blow-ups, so don't snatch a lure," Lynk said. "Wait 'til you feel his weight, then set the hook."

Guide David Towler of Towler Time Charters has fished the waters around Swansboro for years. He likes to cast a 4-inch Top Dog Jr. or She Dog Jr. for surface-feeding reds, plus a MirrOlure 808 (orange belly/gold sides/black back) .

"The bulk of the baitfish in late May and early June will be little (menhaden), so I use smaller lures," said Towler (910-554-4742). "I like flats and 2- to 5-foot (deep) channels around oyster rocks and marsh edges."

Towler makes parallel casts to marsh banks or across oyster rocks.

"You can fish topwater lures all day in June, especially when (menhaden) are plentiful inside," he said. "A 3¾-inch Zara Spook Jr. with a white belly and silver sides is a great lure, because it looks like a crippled minnow and sits up a little higher in the water."

Towler said the red drum bite in inshore waters around his base in the town of Hubert begins when the surface water temperature reaches 64 or 65 degrees.

Farther south, Jot Owens of Wilmington's Jot It Down Guide Service hunts redfish from Figure Eight Island to Carolina Beach. His favorite surface lures are 4-inch Top Dog Jrs.

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and Top Pups with a red head and white body or a MirrOlure 808.

"I only use a 3½-inch Top Pup when it's really calm," said Owens (910-233-4139), who fishes topwaters in depths of 8 inches to 2½ feet.

"Best places are shallow flats, marsh and creek edges," Owens said. "I like oyster rocks near grass."

Topwater fishing is best during early morning or late-evening hours, he said. "Low-light conditions are best; cloudy or foggy days are a bonus."

SOFT PLASTICS NEAR THE BOTTOM

Owens prefers a 3- or 4-inch Gulp shrimp impregnated with shrimp or menhaden scent.

"If I'm throwing it on deeper structure, 5 to 15 feet deep, I'll use a ¼- or ⅜-ounce jighead," he said, "but I like some tidal current. I'll throw these lures in shallow water on higher tides and in deeper holes on lower tides. Good places are (Intracoastal Waterway) docks and holes the first two hours of a falling tide and the first two hours of a rising tide."



Jot Owens prefers (top row) a MirrOlure Top Pup and Top Dog Jr. for topwater redfish bites, while his preferred subsurface lure is a (bottom left) 17MR MirrOlure and for bottom bumping a 3-inch Berkley Gulp Shrimp in sugar-spice-glow color.

Owens said he doesn't "get crazy" about lure colors, but sugar-spice glow — a natural pearl color with pepper metal flakes — is a favorite.

Lynk switches to soft plastics when the topwater bite dies out.

"Many Flukes and paddletails will catch reds, but my favorite is a Fishbites Fight Club shrimp," he said. "They're scented with shrimp and (menhaden) and come in jerkbaits, paddletails and curlytails."

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He prefers ⅛- to ¼-ounce jigheads because they sink slowly.

"You're likely to get bit by (spotted) seatrout, too," Lynk said. "I like a short leader to work these lures 1 to 2 inches off the bottom and above oyster shells."

Towler's preferred soft-plastic lure is the Z-Man Scented PogyZ, a 3- or 3¼-inch lure that "looks exactly like a little pogey, which are everywhere."

"I fish with them in the exact same places as I do my topwater lures, which means where I see pogeys," he said. "I throw them parallel to marsh shores and around oyster rocks."

He threads weighted worm hooks on teardrop-shaped PogyZs, which have paddletails, fat bellies and gray backs and mimic small menhaden.

Another effective mid-range, soft-plastic paddletail is a black back/silver flake Z-Man DieZel MinnowZ Mulletron.

SUB-SURFACE BAITS

Lynk's favorite sub-surface lure is the 4-inch Halco C-Gar, a combination mid-depth, walk-the-dog lure.

"It sinks quickly, but you can pop it to the top quickly," he said.

A C-Gar's weight makes it ideal for long casts to single fish or fish-pod edges.

"If the wind's right, you can throw it 40 yards," Lynk said. "I might try it at the Cape Lookout Coast Guard station, the rock jetty at Fort Macon, the Cape Lookout jetty, the Haystacks (Newport River marshes), North River or east banks of Cape Lookout. Reds also hang around aquaculture farmers' floating (oyster) bags."

Lynk also throws a 17 MirrOlure, a suspending lure.

Towler's most-effective mid-depth lure is a favorite of large-mouth anglers, a Mann's Baby 1-Minus crankbait.

"It's a fat, short-lipped lure," he said. "You can slow-roll it, and it wobbles. Reds also will tear up a bronze Cordell stickbait. I try to keep those lures in the 3- to 4-foot (depth) range."

His favorite colors include pogey (white-gray-green) and Houdini (red/white with red glitter).

Owens likes a MirrOLure 17MR that runs a foot or two deep.

With clear water and a bright sky, reds move from flats to marsh creek channels with water in 5- to 6-foot depths.

"You can find that depth just off the marsh creek edges, so I'll throw the 17 MR parallel to the banks," Owens said. "I also catch a lot of sea trout with that lure." ▪



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







SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry



So many redfish spend the late spring and summer in hard-to-reach places that kayaks become a great way to reach them.

REDFISH: THE PERFECT FISH FOR KAYAKERS

JUNE BRINGS PLENTY OF TARGETS INTO CAROLINAS' INSHORE AREAS

Phillip Gentry

If there was ever a fish perfectly suited for kayakers, it is the redfish. Skinny water boats go hand in hand with skinny water fish, and if you're looking for a big, hard-fighting, fish that loves skinny water, reds fit that bill.

Another plus for anglers who don't have the range to run up and down waterways looking for clean-water points and shell rakes is that redfish tend to school in sizeable groups that typically don't stray far from one particular location.

Third, with "boating season" underway, some of the best places to get away from the boating crowd are shallow-water grass flats and tiny pockets tucked away in the back of creeks. What fish are you most likely to find tucked away in these places on a warm, spring day? Redfish.

June brings warmer water and plenty of food into the back of coastal areas. Likewise, juvenile redfish that fit into the slot limits of 15 to 23 inches in South Carolina and 18 to 27 inches in North Carolina, tend to gravitate to those areas.

Two patterns tend to hold the lion's share of puppy drum this time of year. Shallow-water creeks and the edges of larger creeks are one. Even though food is more plentiful than it was two or three months ago, staying out of deeper water and away from dolphins is still a primary objective. If there is some barrier that has to be crossed — an oyster rake, a sandbar, or a pasture of grass with only a foot of water on it — you're looking at prime water to find June redfish.

It's safe to say that redfish are spooky pretty much year-round, but they remain ultra-spooky in small areas of shallow water where sounds are amplified. Look for redfish to be holding along the edges of anywhere you find water deep enough to contain them. June is a great month for topwater baits early and late and on the rare cloudy or overcast days.

If not pursuing a topwater bite, a weedless presentation of soft-plastic shrimp, crabs or baitfish is a great choice. Of course, don't forget about presentations where live and fresh-cut baits are presented in high-traffic areas like drains, cuts and around structure.

A very popular pattern through the summer is fishing marsh-grass flats that only hold water around the full and new moons. Kayakers often stand in their boats and pole quietly across these flats looking for the tails of a school or pod of redfish as the fish upend themselves trying to suck fiddler crabs and other creatures from their newly flooded dens.

The best presentation from a kayak is to spend some time assessing the general direction the fish are heading, then pole or quietly paddle at an angle, to intercept them, stopping the length of a decent cast away.

When making the cast, land your bait well beyond and in front of the fish and allow the bait to settle into place and remain still. This presentation more mimics the "hide-and seek" behavior of most prey over meandering directly into oncoming danger. ■



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

EGRET'S 3.5-INCH SHRIMP

Egret Baits, makers of the original Vudu Shrimp, have added a new "Weedless" version to its line. The bait is designed for gliding through and over grass. It's perfect for coastal marsh fishing for redfish, speckled trout and flounder. It can also be used in open water when a "gliding" action may be better suited. It allows a slower presentation.

The bait has a wider tail to give it balance and buoyancy as you work it slowly through the shallows. The Vudu Weedless comes with a belly style hook configuration thatr makes it much more weedless than the original Vudu Shrimp. The bait, which comes rigged on a wide-gap, 3/0 hook, fishes great under a popping cork or free-lined with light tackle.



The 3½-inch bait comes in nine different colors, including natural brown, purple/chartreuse, new penny and clear. All baits come with a ⅛-ounce weight on a 3/0 hook and are sold in packs of two.

MSRP is $7.75.

Available at egretbaits.ecwid.com.

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Redfish

WHERE — Marsh bays and creeks behind Bear and Browns inlets near Swansboro

HOW — Throw hard topwater baits early and late, then fish scented, saltwater plastics that mimic shrimp or mullet through the day.

LAUNCH — Popular public ramps include Cedar Point at NC 24 on the ICW, Emerald Isle off NC 58 and Willis Boat Landing on Saltwater Lane in Hubert. Good private ramps include Dudley's Marina at the Swansboro causeway and Casper's on Water Street in Swansboro.

INSIDER TIP — Reds may be spooky until water temperatures reach 70 degrees. Poling into position and presenting free-lined baits with no popping cork work best.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Redfish

WHERE — Shallow saltwater flats around Georgetown

HOW — Sight-fish for tailing redfish on full-moon tides from June 14-19. Look for any tide greater than 5.7 feet to push water onto flats. Sight-cast crab-imitating soft plastics or fly fishing.

LAUNCH — South Island Ferry on South Island Road, East Bay Park downtown, and the Campbell complex next to US 17 bridge.

INSIDER TIP — Don't overwork baits for tailing redfish. Land the bait far enough away and in front of fish to prevent spooking then let the fish find the bait.

continues on page 46



CONSERVE THE RESOURCE

Following a declining trend in the state's redfish population, South Carolina's General Assembly passed new creel limits for redfish anglers that became effective last July. The daily creel limit was changed from 3 fish per angler to 2. The second part of the change — a 6-fish boat limit regardless of the number of anglers on board — has little or no effect on kayaking anglers.

The limits were changed due in large part to efforts by the Coastal Conservation Association-South Carolina and anglers concerned about overuse of the resource due to higher populations in coastal areas, reduced numbers from cold-water fish kills, and fishing mortality from catch-and-release.

Under both the past and current legislation, fish are only legal to harvest when they fall between 15 and 23 inches in length — a size range that the fish attain by the age of 18 months.

Despite the majority of anglers practicing 100-percent catch-and-release, it's estimated that nearly 15 percent of released fish die a from hooking mortality and poor handling.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources urges anglers who target red drum to use the following best practices for release:

- Use a rig that minimizes the chance of hook damage: a short leader, fixed sinker weighing 3 ounces or more, and barbless, non-offset and non-stainless hooks;
- Use gear that shortens the fight time: 20-pound and higher test line;
- Keep the fish in the water as much as possible. If you want to take photographs, do so during the time you're reviving and releasing it. ■

HOBIE MIRAGE PASSPORT

Hobie is world-renowned for designing pedal kayaks that are fun and functional, but one of the admitted drawbacks of owning a Hobie fishing kayak was the premium price tag attached.



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The Passport offers hands-free pedal propulsion with Hobie's Mirage Drive Classic. The fins sweep through the water to propel you forward. The dual fins allow you to explore shallow waters and make shore landings a breeze by simply pushing one pedal forward so the fins fold up flat against the hull.

The Passport has molded-in rod holders and dual-mounting tracks that keep your accessories within reach while the 8-inch Twist-n-Seal Hatch keeps them dry. The easy-to-use steering system and simplified version of the twist-and-stow rudder puts navigation at your fingertips and a smile on your face.

The Passport is 10-foot-6 long and 34 inches wide, at a weight of 65 pounds.

MSRP is $1,299.00.

Available at www.hobie.com.





Don't put up your tackle when June arrives; just put your bull's-eye on channel catfish in the shallows of three South Carolina lakes.

CALLING SUMMER CATFISH

By Phillip Gentry

Around Memorial Day, as schools let out, many anglers sigh deeply and put aside any thoughts of serious fishing, relinquishing lakes to the recreational crowd. It's also the time when many freshwater fish vacate the shallows and warming water for more-moderate climates.

Fishermen considering throwing in the towel for the summer are missing out on some of the best, eating-sized catfish action to be found. Water temperatures in the mid-70s and higher are not only not a problem for channel catfish and smaller blue catfish in the 2- to 10-pound range, those fish flood the shallows at random times, seeking out whatever they can find to eat. For these small-time scavengers that means there isn't much that's not on the menu.

Hank Lyles of Fountain Inn, S.C., can be found on weekdays turning wrenches as a marine mechanic, but as soon as his workweek ends, it's a sure bet he'll be in his boat with rods, trolling for catfish. He picks Monticello, Greenwood and Murray as his favorite South Carolina lakes for summer catfish.

"Monticello is a lot different than any of the other catfish lakes in the state," Lyles said. "Catfish can be anywhere, anytime, probably because of the water movement pumped into the lake from the Broad River. You might find fish 60 to 70 feet deep one day and 3 to 5 feet deep the next."

>



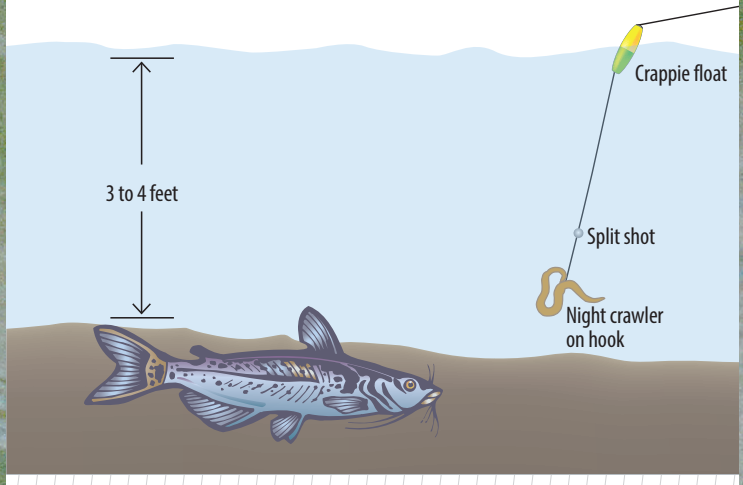
Anglers may be surprised how shallow decent-sized catfish will be during the middle of the day in the summer.

NIGHT (CRAWLER) PATROL

Trolling on the bottom for catfish has netted a lot of good fish through the years. Big cats can't resist a piece of cut bait that's tumbling just off the bottom. Veteran fisherman Hank Lyles said the opposite is also true, trolling baits that never touch the bottom.

"I hit on the idea of trolling a whole night crawler under a cork a couple years ago," he said. "You'd be surprised at how many big catfish will lay up in 3 or 4 feet of water during the summer — and I mean during the middle of the day."

To keep from spooking shallow fish, Lyles pulls a pegged crappie float with a split shot between the float and hook. He can set the float so the bait rolls along about a foot off the bottom and slow-troll sandy stretches of bank where



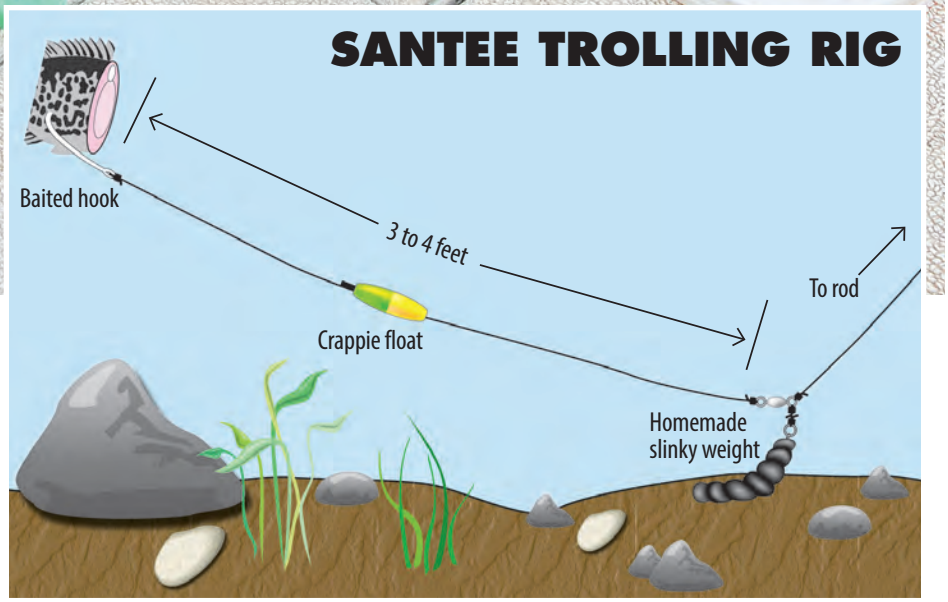
frequent wave-wash from boat traffic continually washes the bank. He uses a No. 1 or No. 2 hook under the rig.

The wave action is enough to call catfish into the extreme shallows, and a trolling run along a mud line can be great.

"I guess the waves and commotion washes a lot of worms and mussels loose," Lyles said. "The other bonus to this kind of trolling is that you wind up catching a good number of big shellcrackers that are hanging out in the same area." ■

Philip Gentry

Preparing stinkbaits requires a medium, such as a slice of pool noodle, to adhere to so the bait stays on the hook.



Greenwood and Murray fish similarly; the bottom topographies and tributary systems are similar, although Murray is much, much bigger. On both lakes, Lyles is staying near the shorelines on the main lake, or he may work into one of the tributaries if the bottom has a lot of up and down to it.

"Like I said, you put your time in on Monticello to find fish; Greenwood and Murray are easier to pattern, and I'll target water that's 5 to 25 feet deep when I'm fishing those two lakes, making sure I'm crossing a lot of long points and over humps as I go," he said.

Regardless of the lake he's fishing, Lyles will slow-troll a variety of baits, using a drift rig and some medium-heavy tackle in his search for fish.

"I mostly use a variation of the Santee drift rig with a slinky weight that a buddy up in Rock Hill makes for me," he said. "It's the standard rig with a three-way swivel. One eye goes to the 20-pound main line, one to the weight and the third has a length of 30-pound leader with a crappie float pegged in-line and a 5/0 to 7/0 hook."

Lyles admits slinky weights are not as critical as they would be if he were fishing one of the Santee Cooper lakes or the canal that connects them. He said anglers who don't want to use the slinky weight can use a regular bell sinker or an inverted, no-roll sinker, just make sure the fat part of the no-roll is the leading edge so it won't wedge into a rock or other obstruction.

"I cast my rigs, and when I do that, I've found the slinky weights often tangle with the bait leader. Best to just let that line out with the reel in free spool and count off 60 to 70 feet, more if you are fishing deeper water and maybe not so much if you're in the shallows," he said.

While the tackle may be a bit stout for the 2- to 5-pound channel cats that make up most catches, he's glad he's got the beef

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when a 25-pound blue or an even larger flathead decide to take the bait.

Though he often refers to his style of catfishing as drifting, nine times out of 10, he's using a variable-speed trolling motor to propel the boat forward at about .5 mph. In fact, he 'd rather troll into the wind rather than with is to control boat speed.

Lyles' baits of choice are white perch, bream, gizzard shad or stinkbaits. He cuts the fish into bite-sized pieces and uses the stinkbaits smeared on a chunk of Styrofoam pool noodle about the same size as the cut baits.

"The cut bait works better in cooler water," he said. "In fact, the water has to be at least 60 degrees before the stinkbaits will stick to the noodle. I use either Charlie's or Doc's catfish bait, and I prefer the blood-flavored stinkbaits."

Lyles said at Monticello, white perch is his favorite bait, followed by bream. Like any fisherman, he experiments with different baits and has used shrimp and blueback herring, but his experience has shown perch and bream to be the most productive.

Bream and stinkbaits are his choices at Greenwood and Murray, rolling over into all stinkbait as the summer rolls on and the water heats up.

"Those stank baits will surprise you," Lyles said. "You're catching 2- to 5-pounders, and all the sudden the rod bows over with a 8-pounder, even the occasional 10- to 12-pound channel." ▪



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





SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell



CATFISH AFTER DARK

LOOK SHALLOW FOR NIGHT-FISHING ACTION

Terry Madewell

Catfish action on the Santee Cooper lakes is excellent by day throughout the year, but by mid-May and into early June, the nocturnal action perks up considerably. Daytime fishing in deep water is still effective, but now many knowledgeable catfishermen migrate to skinny water and find fat cats on a strong bite.

WHY AND WHERE

Guide William Attaway finds it worthwhile to trailer his pontoon boat from him home in Pomaria, S.C., to target big blues and flatheads on the shallow flats at night on Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie.

"The key for catching catfish remains consistent, day or night; they're going to be where they can eat," Attaway said. "At this time of the year, the shallow water is flooded after the sun goes down with critters that catfish love to eat."

Attaway (803-924-0857) said bream, perch, gizzard shad and other food sources are available; that attracts the catfish to the skinny water.

"When I set up, I'm in shallow water, often less than 4 feet deep, but it's crucial to be near deeper water," he said. "Catfish use the creeks, ditches or depressions that lead from the main lake to funnel from deeper water back into the shallow flats and coves.

"As food sources transition to the shallows, so do catfish," he said. "Not all the catfish move shallow, but enough make the trip to have some seriously good night-fishing action. Often, we set up so shallow (that) cypress trees are all around the boat."

Attaway studies maps as well as his graph to locate potentially good areas where even slightly deeper water funnels fish to the shallows.

HOW TO SET UP

Attaway said it's crucial to anchor in such a way that his boat stays absolutely stationary.

"It's not unusual to get some breeze at night, and that actually makes it more comfortable," he said. "Also, the occasional storm passes through, and even if we don't get hit, the wind can quickly go from calm to breezy. If not anchored securely, the boat turns and lines and baits get crossed, and it's always more difficult to fix problems in the dark. As the wind slacks off and then increases again, the boat will continue to bounce around."

Attaway said he originally used anchors that dug into the bottom with 150 feet of line off the bow and stern, and that's effective. But now he uses long poles that slip through rungs on brackets he's made.

"I run the pole through the rung and punch the pole deep into the bottom on each end of the boat, and that's it," he said. "The boat stays stationary all night."

The next big factor is rigging and bait. He uses the same rods, day or night, usually 7½- to 8-foot rods with medium-heavy tips and reels spooled with 50-pound test line and tied to 8/0 circle hooks. He employs baits he feels are in the shallow; bream, perch, shad and herring are all excellent choices.

"I fan-cast the rigs all around the boat with the goal of having some in 2 feet of water, while others will be incrementally deeper down to 7 or 8 feet deep," he said. "The bite pattern will change from night to night, so I always start out with this bait distribution. Sometimes a depth pattern evolves, but on some nights, it stays random. But it's crucial to use fresh bait; I keep plenty of live bait in the bait tank

OPPOSITE PAGE: Glow tips are a great idea for fishermen targeting Santee Cooper catfish after dark; they are a tremendous help seeing and recognizing bites.

and will use them live and also as fresh-cut chunks."

Attaway said once he is set up, he doesn't use external lights on the boat but uses fluorescent rings on his rod tips to better see bites in the dark.

WHEN, WHERE

Attaway is always set up for the night, anchored and fishing well before dusk.

"Sometimes we'll have a flurry of big-fish action right at dusk," he said. "Typically, the best action will occur just after dark and then periodically steady bites throughout the evening. Often, another very good burst of multiple bites occurs right about midnight. "



Terry Madewell

LATE-NIGHT BUFFET LINE

One reason Santee Cooper anglers can fill coolers of nice catfish at night is that all kinds of fish the big blues like to feed on will move up into shallow water, leading catfish into areas where anglers can locate them and put baits in front of them.

Attaway has fished all night in the past but now typically pulls his rigs in and heads to the landing by 1 to 2 a.m.

"Many times, we'll have a big box of catfish long before then, but usually by that time, we've caught plenty of fish, and everyone's ready to head back," he said. ▪



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



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ANCHOR, CATCH CATS
this month on Clarks Hill Lake

Pat Robertson

June is a good time of year to stock up on eating-sized catfish for fish fries, said guide Chris Simpson of McCormick, S.C., who guides on Clarks Hill Lake, aka Thurmond Lake.

"June can be a really good time to fill coolers with 1- to 10-pound blue and channel catfish. Clarks Hill has some good sized channel catfish and the blues are starting to thrive and spread throughout the lake pretty good," said Simpson (864-992-2352), who guided on Lake Monticello, Lake Murray and Lake Greenwood before moving to McCormick and Clarks Hill a couple of years ago.

"The best way to consistently fill coolers with eating-sized catfish is to anchor on points and humps," he said. "Sometimes, humps and points with vertical ledges produce better, and sometimes gentle, sloping ledges are better. You will have to diagnose that each time you're out there."

Simpson said cut herring is a good, all-around bait to catch numbers of catfish, and it will also fool some big blues or flatheads, and, occasionally, some bonus hybrids and stripers.

"If specifically targeting 1- to 10-pound catfish is your goal, then stinkbait is a very good choice," he said. "Triple S Channel Cat Bait, formerly known as Sonny's Channel Catfish Bait, is a very reliable choice. Team Catfish Secret 7 dip bait is also good."

When fishing in the daytime, Simpson recommends giving each spot 35 to 45 minutes to produce; if nothing is biting, move on to another spot. Fish can be caught from 3 feet out to 30 feet deep, he said, and you should fish spots where you can cover that range of depths.

> **Guide Chris Simpson said anchoring and fishing cut bait or stinkbaits will produce plenty of eating-sized channel and blue catfish on Clarks Hill Lake this month.**

"Night-fishing can yield some big blues and flatheads," he said. "Bigger chunks of cut bait like gizzard shad, white perch and bream are good choices for bigger blues. Live bream and white perch are best for flatheads. And stinkbait will still work fine for the eating-sized fish."

Simpson said the nighttime bite for big fish requires more patience. He recommends anchoring on a point, hump or shallow flat close to deep water and waiting as the fish travel constantly through these areas throughout the night. ▪

— Pat Robertson

The waters around Beaufort, S.C., offer plenty for vacationing families who want to wet a line and have fish for supper.

SUMMER FUN FOR EVERYONE

By John Gribb



John Gribb

Inshore anglers all have their favorite targets, and all of them actively feed during summer in the waters around Beaufort, S.C. Cobia are still around and legal to possess in June, speckled trout feed around grass edges and oyster drops in the early and late hours, flounder have moved into their summer haunts in the creeks and inshore flats, and fun fish like ladyfish and food fish like whiting and sheepshead are around. Of course, redfish — aka spot-tails, puppy drum, red drum — the perennial favorite, are feeding aggressively in all the high- and low-tide spots.

Family fishing outings often center on finding some cooperative fish that are biting, whether the goal is landing a few keepers for supper with bait rigs or tangling with some of the sportier variety for the pure joy of the fight. The best summer advice is to remain flexible. If you start out floating a baited cork rig for flounder and they aren't biting, you may have to try a bottom rig for whiting or even small sharks. Find something that's biting and have fun.

Redfish are a favorite target, and in the warm, summer water, they feed aggressively on mullet, fiddler crabs, shrimp and mud minnows on all stages of the tide. Tuck Scott, head guide of Bay Street Outfitters in Beaufort said, "The schools are still on the low-tide flats but more loosely congregated."

Scott likes targeting reds on points, mud flats and oysters with mud minnows on a cork with his bait fishermen, or ¼-ounce jigs with a Gulp! paddletail trailer for his spinning-tackle clients. He opts for lighter colors until the water turns murkier, and then he goes darker. For artificials, he likes the MirrODine twitch bait that suspends from 6 inches to 2 feet deep, where most redfish are caught.

By June, there are plenty of redfish moving through the deep grass with the rising water, and Scott targets them in open pockets and then follows them on to high-tide flats when there is enough water to pole the boat.

WADING FOR REDFISH

Light-tackle and fly fishermen have really jumped onto the sport of wade-fishing for spot-tails.

According to John Holbrook, a fly-casting and fly-tying instructor at Bay Street Outfitters in Beaufort and a wade-fishing expert, said, "Redfish move onto hard-bottomed flats in greatest numbers during warm months when the rising tide floods enough water onto them."

Tide heights vary, but generally, there will be enough water on your flat when the tide chart predicts a 7½-foot height or more at the mouth of the Savannah River.

Holbrook describes good wading flats as having a hard bottom, short spartina grass, two or more entry and exit spots, access to deeper water and lots of fiddler crabs. Though grubbing fiddler crabs is the main reason redfish show their tails — and an important key to finding them — they also feed on small fish, shrimp and other creatures at high tide.

When redfish move onto the flats, they do announce their presence but not as obviously as some presume. Though tailing fish are the classic show, also watch for subtle signs like V-shaped wakes, called "pushes," fleeing or popping bait, and nervous water.

"And don't forget to keep looking behind you for fish that sneak by," Holbrook said.

Once you spot fish, getting in casting range without spooking them is a challenge. Whether you shuffle slowly or move aggressively, once your wake reaches the fish, they will spook.

All flies and lures need to be weedless. Once within range, cast well ahead of moving fish but right in front of tailing fish. The redfish strike in shallow water is an unmistakable swirl. ■



Wading high-tide flats for redfish is a popular and expanding technique for inshore fishermen.

John Gribb


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The cold weather in the winter of 2018 severely reduced the number of trout in Lowcountry waters last year, and they are recovering. Trout will be around this month, but not in pre-2018 numbers. The fish that survived cold-stun events will be in deeper water and best targeted at half-tide and rising by focusing on structure such as bridge pilings, rocks, fallen trees and shell banks that reach out from points. Trout like cleaner, moving water, not silted up with mud and sand. Popping corks and large, 3- to 5-inch finger mullet or very large mud minnows strung onto No. 3/0 Kahle hooks are an excellent setup for trout.

Fishermen who focus on fun fish like the ladyfish or the often-maligned Spanish mackerel are thrill-seekers. Ladyfish show up in shallow water around points and oyster banks and will slash at most any artificial lure or fly with abandon, often missing the hook the first time but returning for a second try. When hooked, they put on an aerial show reminiscent of tarpon in the Florida Keys, leaping skyward, shaking their head and body violently the instant they feel the jab of cold steel and often throwing the hook before they land in the water. They are fun, but don't keep them unless you need crab bait.

Normally found in deeper water along current lines, Spanish mackerel ravage bait in schools, often frothing the water with their



DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The Beaufort/Port Royal area is easily accessed from I-95 or US 17 via US 21 and SC 170. The Chechessee River landing at the foot of the SC 170 bridge is a popular access for much of the area. The Sands Landing in Port Royal puts you close to Paris Island spots, and Sam's Point Landing on Lady's Island is great access to the waters around Beaufort. Trenchard's inlet is most easily accessed from Station Creek Landing on St. Helena Island.

WHEN TO GO — June is an excellent month; fish whenever you have the opportunity. Plenty of fish will bite at any stage of the tide this month.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Richard Sykes, 843-838-2245; Tuck Scott, 843-271-5406; Owen Plair, 843-368-3656; Shannon O'Quinn, 843-368-1558; Jack Brown, 843-838-9369; Bay Street Outfitters, Beaufort, 843-524-5250; Boat and Dock Supply, Port Royal, 843-986-0552. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Beaufort Area Chamber of Commerce, 843-986-5400.

MAPS — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainsegullcharts.com; Top Sport Map N233 (available at most local tackle shops).



John Gribb

Ladyfish are an acrobatic summer fish that can provide some excellent action for anglers young and old.

exuberance. Tie on a jigging spoon with a piece of wire leader and cast into their midst. It's hard to miss.

At the other end of the spectrum are the food fishermen who target bottomfish like whiting or spot by soaking small chunks of fresh shrimp or worms on small hooks. On any given June weekend, near Trenchard's Inlet and other similar venues, a half-dozen or more small boats, jammed with friends, will be targeting whiting on the edge of a channel drop-off nearer to the ocean. Spot are generally found in more shallow water, in estuaries with sand or muddy bottoms. These little, 8-inch fish are plentiful and easy to catch if you find them. Whiting are often filleted and fried, while spot are often fried whole like bream. Both whiting and spot are excellent food fish.

Sheepshead, the fish with the vertical, black stripes and big front teeth, are excellent-eating fish targeted from piers, dock pilings and riprap. They are notorious for stealing bait from fishermen with slow reactions. The active fishery is in the summer, with concentrations in shallow water after their migration inshore from deeper water. The most-popular bait is a fiddler crab, but small pieces of clam or shrimp should also work. Scott likes to target them around the pilings of newer docks.

Of course, the likely favorite food fish is flounder, which are targeted on shallow, sand or mud flats, around creek mouths and all sorts of bottom structure including shell, rocks and around riprap. A jighead and trailer is often chosen for casting to flounder, or a bottom rig with live bait. Drag or drift likely areas repeatedly, because flounder are ambush predators that attack bait swimming close by, and they tend not to chase too far. Blind-casting under docks or near rock riprap walls can also produce strikes.

If all the fish in the sea seem to be avoiding you, sharks are always around to target, and catching small sharks is pretty easy. Chop off a chunk of mullet or the wing of a skate, thread it onto a big circle hook, and cast it into the water. The size of the sharks is mostly related

continues >



to the depth of the water you fish. The shallows is where the bonnethead and sharpnose sharks — two of the species legal to keep and tasty to eat — roam at this time of year. Put the rod in a rod holder, sit back, relax and let the bait and circle hook do the job. A shark will eventually find it, eat it and turn away. The line will come tight as the swallowed bait slides back out of the shark's throat and the circle hook lodges in its usual place in the corner of the shark's mouth. When the rod starts bouncing around, simply pull it from the rod holder and hold on.

There is literally something for everyone in June in our inshore waters. ▪



John Gribb is a licensed charter-boat captain, upland hunting guide and former Orvis-endorsed saltwater fly-fishing guide who lives in the Lowcountry. A freelance writer for more than 15 years, he specializes in small game and waterfowl hunting, freshwater and inshore saltwater fishing and sporting dogs.

KEEP YOUR LURE ON THE MOVE

A huge key to catching predatory gamefish in shallow water with lures or flies is keeping your offering on the move. Whether you are targeting redfish, bonefish, speckled trout, striped bass or any aggressive feeder, a lure cannot simply plop into the water and sit there on a limp line. To look alive, it must move.

The rule does not apply to deep-water presentations where free-dropping lures often draw strikes or with surface poppers where a twitching lure can tempt ferocious attacks.

Learning a simple technique that has your lure arrive at the target on an almost tight line and then move almost immediately will help you catch more fish. With open-faced spinning reels, distance control is fine-tuned by fingering the spool. To achieve the desired effect, snub the line firmly as the lure lands and begin slowly sweeping the rod away before re-engaging the bail. Re-engaging the bail with the reel handle allows slack in the line. Many good spin fishermen re-engage the bail manually, because it better controls line tension and reduces line twist.

Fly-rodders face a different challenge, but the goal of moving the fly immediately after it lands remains the same. Here, the technique involves pointing the rod directly at the target as the fly lands and making one long strip to remove all the slack. Then, while keeping the rod still and pointed at the target, continue stripping at whatever speed is appropriate for the bait you are imitating. The initial, long strip tightens the line, moves the lure a little and puts you in the correct position for the strike.

Very few aggressive fish strike motionless objects. In shallow water, move your lure right away and catch more fish. ▪



Speckled trout are partial to moving baits or lures.

John Gribb

LATE COBIA ACTION

GREAT IN LOWCOUNTY WATERS THROUGH JUNE

Many anglers in South Carolina's Lowcountry give up on cobia fishing around the beginning of May, but the "man in the brown suit" sticks around well past then.

Rick Percy of Reel Chance Charters in Beaufort, S.C. said plenty of cobia are around throughout June and even later.

"The harvest season closes on May 1 in this part of the state, and a lot of anglers just quit fishing for them," Percy said. "Then, it opens back up on June 1, but by then, most anglers have forgotten about them and have moved on to fishing for other species. The cobia, they'll stick around for a good bit longer. We catch a lot of them in June."

Sight-fishing is Percy's main way of catching June cobia. Any of the Lowcountry bridges are hot spots. These fish are very curious and will check out any kind of debris or floating structure, but Percy said you'll often spot them just below the surface anywhere around bridges and where the rivers meet the ocean, even if there's no structure is around.

"Sometimes there's no rhyme or reason to why they're in certain locations," said Percy (803-535-6166). "You just have to slowly cruise between the bridge and the ocean and look. They're not hard to find," he said.

And when he sees one, Percy likes to cast a 1½-ounce bucktail or Spro jig with some type of soft-plastic trailer. He suggests casting beyond and in front of the fish. Putting the lure right in its face is a big mistake.

"Once you've cast it beyond and in front of the fish, work the lure back in a way that the fish will catch up to it. Don't reel it past the fish," Percy said. "When he sees it, you'll know, because he will turn his body to face it. When that happens, stop and let the lure sink. Eight out of 10 times, that fish will stand on its nose to get that lure."

If the fish doesn't pick up the lure, Percy said the best thing to do is start jigging it, but don't swim it past the fish's face.

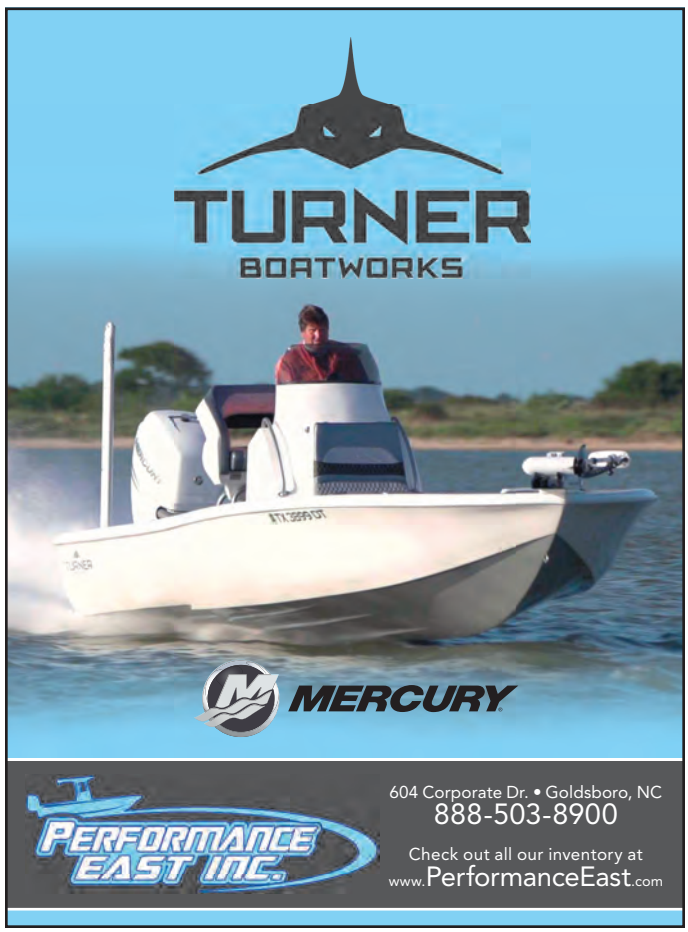
"If you swim it past its face, it will either swim away or follow the lure all the way to the boat. It will stay a foot behind it but never strike at it," he said. "When you let it sink, that looks natural to the fish. A real baitfish would look for the safety of deep water when it encounters a cobia. Swimming right past just isn't natural. He'll follow it out of curiosity, but he isn't going to bite it," he said. ▪

— Brian Cope

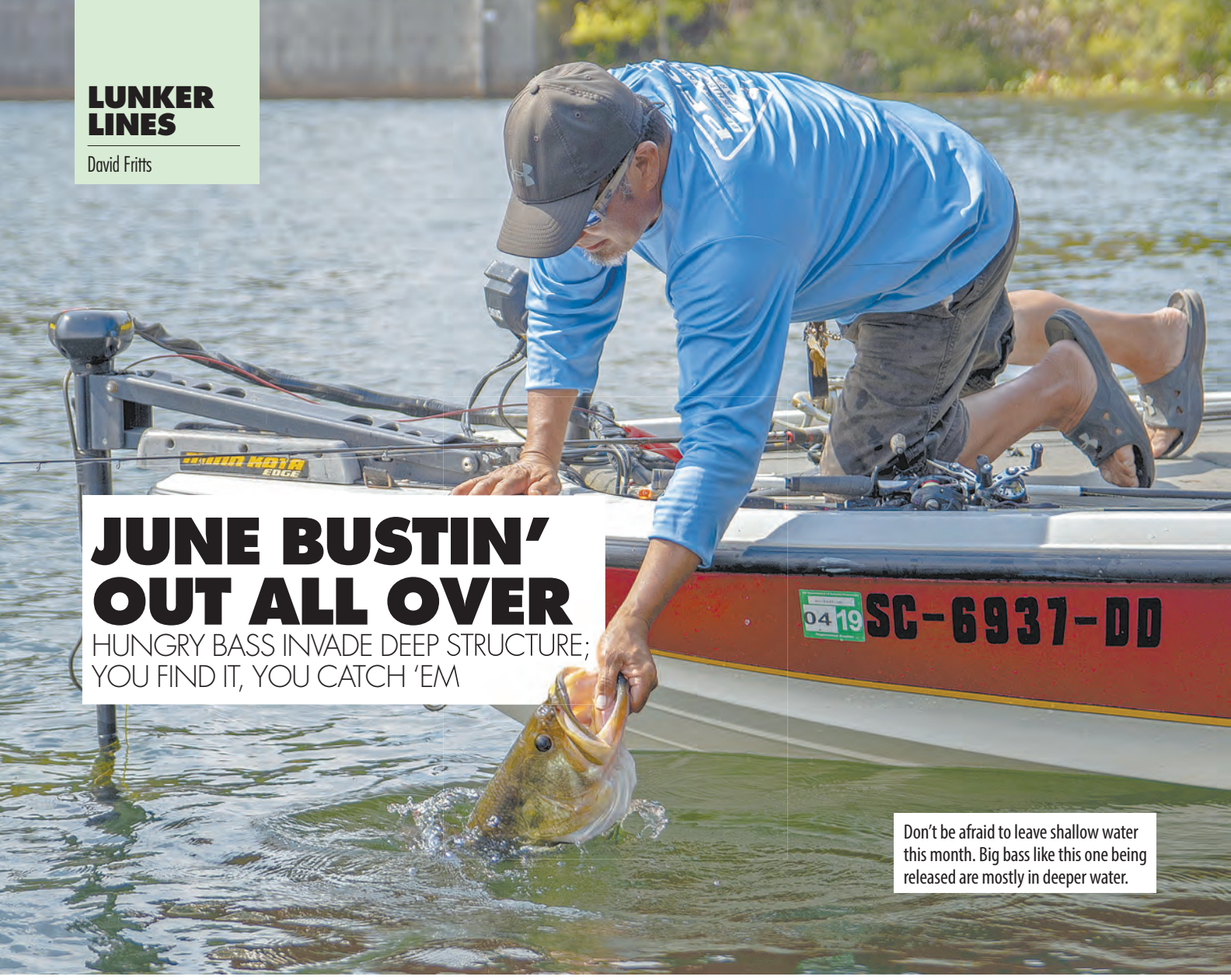


Reel Chance Charters

Cobia will hang around bridges over bodies of water in the Lowcountry, often cruising at or just below the surface.



David Fritts



JUNE BUSTIN' OUT ALL OVER

HUNGRY BASS INVADE DEEP STRUCTURE; YOU FIND IT, YOU CATCH 'EM

Don't be afraid to leave shallow water this month. Big bass like this one being released are mostly in deeper water.

A lot of bass fishermen can't wait for spring when fish move shallow and feed up for the spawn, when they're in range of anglers of all talent levels.

Me? I can't wait until spring is almost over. When Memorial Day rolls around, I really start to perk up, because I love fishing when the spawn is over and bass move toward deep water. It's how I grew up fishing on High Rock Lake. You had to be able to fish a crankbait, or you had your head handed to you in every tournament.

So don't be surprised if I tell you that June is my favorite month to fish for bass — it's just a little bit ahead of October, my second-favorite month. If every month could be June or October, I'd fish every day, year-round.

One reason I really like June is that fishing can be so easy. You can catch bass on just about anything. I prefer catching them on structure, catching fish that have moved out and are ganged up a little bit. You can catch fish on a lot of different baits, a buzzbait, a little flat worm, a shaky head finesse worm, but to catch a big stringer, you need to be fishing a crankbait for fish that have moved out to deeper water.

At different lakes, the bass act a little different as far as when they move out and how far they move out. Just assume that they're going to move to the first deeper water outside of a spawning area. Some lakes, they don't get real deep; some places, they get 20 or 25 feet deep. A Berkley Dredger 25.5 is made for those kinds of lakes. You can get that bait down that deep, and it doesn't work you too hard. Sometimes, you can take a big, lipless bait like a War Pig and yo-yo it up and down and catch a big fish.

DEEP IS IMPORTANT

On a lot of the lakes I fish in North Carolina — Buggs Island, Gaston, Norman, Wylie — they are going to get out there close to a creek channel or the river channel. Don't be scared to fish deep. People tend to stay a little too shallow. You may catch some fish on a topwater early in the morning, but they're going to be moving out. About 80 percent of the fish will be in deep water.

You're looking for some kind of cover or structure that's out on a sharp break, where the water drops pretty quickly off the end of a flat. Normally, the best places are going to have wood on them — not brush piles, which are better in the fall, but mostly stumps on rocky bottoms, hard bottoms. The key is finding out what kinds of places they're on, where they're ganging up, catching them, and

then trying to find other spots that are the same kinds of places. The sharp break is the most-important part, however.

When I find a spot, I'll set up in deep water and make a long cast toward shallow water, then retrieve my crankbait from shallow to deep. I'll change the angle of my casts some, so I run my bait through, say, a stump field from different angles. But my favorite way to fish a bait is across the current. They just bite better that way.

I don't think bass bite the way they used to. In years past, I could pull up on a spot where they were ganged up, and it might just take four or five casts to get them fired up, then you could catch 'em all. Now, it might take you 20 or 25 casts to catch a fish and get the school fired up. You almost have to coax 'em into biting now.

FEELING BLUE

Changing colors is another thing I'll do when I'm on a spot where I know there are fish and can't get them to bite. Colors in the blue range are great in June: blueback herring and key blue are probably the best. I also like rubbertail, which is a bream color, and lone ranger. Both of those colors have got a lot of chartreuse and green.

Making long casts is important, because you get the most depth out of your crankbait on the longest cast you can make. I like to fish a deep-diving crankbait like a Dredger 25.5 on a 7-foot-11 Lews David Fritts Perfect Crankbait rod. I realize that a 7-foot-6 rod might be a little easier for most people to handle. I spool a BB-1 reel with 10-pound Sensation. You want a low-stretch monofilament, not fluorocarbon.

BRIGHT IS RIGHT

One thing to understand is that most bass fishermen think they can catch fish better in low-light conditions like early morning and late afternoon, but if you're fishing deep structure, you want a bright, sunny day. I have caught a lot more fish over the years in the middle of the day and the afternoon when the sun has been out a while. They bite better on structure when the sun is out.

An interesting note. When you get on a nice gang of fish that are out there, a lot of times you catch the biggest bass first. And a lot of times, you cach a bunch of 3-pounders, then all the sudden you catch a 6-pounder. There is no rhyme or reason, but sometimes it works like that.

So get to your favorite lake and spend some time out away from the bank. The big fish are out in deep water, and that's where you have to target them. ▪



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



Jeff Burleson



Get your trail cameras up and running this month to get an early idea of what your deer herd looks like.

ASSIGNMENT JUNE: WORK THE LAND

MINERAL SITES, TRAIL CAMS, SOIL TESTS ON CALENDAR

Jeff Burleson

Summer is almost here, bringing the longest days of the year under hot, sunny skies. Many outdoorsmen are on the water trying to catch big bass, king mackerel, or pan-sized bluegill. Even though deer season and the fall planting season is still several months away, June is a great time to participate in activities to encourage the quality and sustainability of wildlife on hunting parcels. Here are the top wildlife management activities for June every landowner with significant acreages should consider for growing big whitetails.

THE FAWN BRIGADE

June is the peak of the fawning period. In the Carolinas, does begin dropping fawns in May and will continue as late as early July, but June is the peak. Does will drop their fawns in areas with abundant ground cover adjacent to food sources, water and close to protection. Early successional forests, high-grass pastures, overgrown food plots and agriculture fields offer excellent places to drop fawns. After they are dropped, they will not travel very far with their mothers, often staying in the same place for several days until they gain strength. Regardless, they will rely on brushy/grassy cover to hide from predators.

Even if grasses are out of control, it's a good time to let these vegetated areas flourish until after July 4, when fawns



Jeff Burleson

ANTLER PRODUCTION:
One good mineral site per 100 acres of land is recommended to provide deer with the calcium and phosphorous they will utilize through the summer, when antler production is at its peak.

are able to run fast and evade predators. Land managers should avoid mowing these areas, even if they are in potential fall food-plot sites. Allowing these areas to grow up will keep escape cover intact for young fawns.

Fawn protection is not the only reason to restrict mowing. By June, many food plots have grown up and grasses have taken hold. For many land managers, the urge to mow down these areas, especially plots of clover, are on the mind. While mowing can help damper weed growth in clover and some other perennial plots, these plots may already be under stress from the intense heat and lack of rainfall. Even though weeds may be a problem, a short cut on these perennial plants may damage them just enough to kill them.

Drought conditions stress herbaceous plants, and even though weeds may be overtopping the target crops, the roots down below will be shaded and protected from the powerful sunshine.

Landowners should restrict mowing this month in perennial plots and places that fawns may be using for cover.

SPREAD THE SALT

Existing mineral sites need replenishing, and new mineral sites should be established. Both bucks and does need an abundant mineral source. Does need calcium and phosphorus to fuel milk production for their nursing fawns where their milk is rich in minerals to assist in bone development. And of course, bucks are in peak antler-growing mode for the next

continues on page 66



two months. They utilize phosphorus and calcium for antler production from their diet and from banked sources in their skeletons. Bucks store minerals in their skeletons to be used for antlers and other activities that may require bone production. Deer must obtain a large portion of their mineral needs from their diets, and when these elements are not available, antler growth suffers. Having an abundant source of minerals at their disposal will assist bucks in the metabolic processes that creates antler tissue.

While the traditional mineral block is attractive and deer will definitely use them, granular mixes are more effective. Deer can uptake larger amounts of supplemental nutrition from granular mixes than from just licking a mineral block. Granular mixes can be placed near water and existing food sources. As a general rule of thumb, one mineral site per 100 acres is recommended to provide deer with the necessary supplements to grow big antlers and improve overall health.

TRAIL CAMERAS AND PH

With antler growth full-on in June and July, hunters should gather their stockade of trail cameras, replace all the batteries and get them set up in the field as soon as possible.

For many hunters, working a system of trail cameras on their hunting properties is just as much fun as hunting itself. Trail cameras have enabled hunters and land managers to gather information about their herd 24 hours a day in full-color format. With antler production going great guns, it's time to get the cameras out there to see what the 2019 season will provide.

Last, with fall food plots in mind, June is a perfect time to gather soil samples for testing to get a better indication of the status of the soils with respect to pH and nutrient loading. Soil-test results will provide landowners and land managers with a set of instructions to improve the soil pH and how much fertilizer to add for their upcoming fall plantings. If soil-test results are returned quickly, there is still time to adjust the soil pH to some degree before the fall planting season. Adjusting the pH is the most-important aspect to any food-plot planting plan. ▪



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.*



Supplemental feeding in a pond can jump-start the food chain, resulting in fast-growing fish.



Jeff Burleson

ADD FOOD TO THAT POND

Many anglers fish from a boat or along the bank of their favorite fishing hole near their homes. But those anglers who own enough land to have their own ponds, managing the fisheries can be rewarding.

Ponds can be designed to produce a wide range of results from big bream, big bass, big catfish or lots of fish to be caught. While most landowners aspire to have balanced ponds that flourish independently with the ideal predator-prey relationship, many others want their targeted species to get as big as quickly as possible. In these cases, the one true way to grow big fish quickly is through their diets.

Landowners can feed a supplemental diet and grow fish to epic proportions in a small amount of time. The most-efficient way is to install fish feeders around the pond's perimeter. These feeders can be set to scatter food along the pond's surface on timed intervals, preferably once at sunrise and once just before dark.

One of the secrets of supplemental feeding is that fish will convert feed at a 2-to-1 ratio. For every pound of feed, the fish will gain half that much in body mass up to a certain point per species.

Supplemental feeding affects the entire food chain, too. Typically, the fish food is sized to feed bluegill and other sunfish living in the pond. The increased production will give bass and catfish more energy packed forage. Additionally, the phytoplankton will get a boost in growth from the excess nutrients entering the water, and that gives forage fish more to eat, too, contributing to more food across the entire food chain. Supplementing ponds with food allows owners to sustain a higher population of fish than without supplementation as well. ▪



COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver



Grilling king mackerel filets that have been soaked in a 7 Up hot sauce marinade makes for a great fish dinner on a warm June evening.

Jerry Dilsaver

7 UP HOT SAUCE KING MACK FILLETS

DON'T BE AFRAID OF OILY FISH; THIS RECIPE WILL TURN ON YOUR TASTE BUDS

While we've had some warm weather already, summer will arrive June 21, and you can expect temperatures to rise. The good thing is that fishing has been heating up, too.

Spanish mackerel, bluefish and king mackerel are three fish typically available along the beaches of the Carolinas without requiring a long run on a late spring or summer day. However, folks have contrasting opinions on their quality as table fare. Opinions range from "I love them," to "There's no way I'm eating that."

These are fish with gray meat, and many folks consider them to be oily, with a strong flavor. This recipe is designed to counteract the stronger flavor, and for lack of a better description, it bleaches the meat and turns it much lighter, often to white, with the combination of marinating and cooking. Don't let the hot sauce scare you, either. At this amount, even the most sensitive palate doesn't taste it. However, those who like it's flavor and the spice can easily add more to kick it up a notch — or three.

These fish are good for you, too, so if you make them taste good, you could be doing yourself a favor by eating them more often. They contain Omega 3 fatty acids that lower triglyceride levels, decrease the potential for cardiac issues, help alleviate arthritis and have other health benefits. And I promise they'll taste better than you are thinking. This has been an introductory recipe for years, and folks who previously didn't care for them, now enjoy them prepared this way.

It seems like there are numerous steps in the preparation, but they flow together, and this is really a simple recipe. Once marinated, the fish can be fried or baked, but it best grilled and eaten on the deck or patio enjoying the cool-down at the end of the day.

To insure top table quality, begin by putting mackerel and blues in the fish box and covering them with ice as soon as they hit the deck. This is the right thing to do with any fish, and especially so with oily fish. When cleaning them, take the time to remove all the red meat, skin and gristle so the fillets are just prime meat. It takes a few more minutes, but it's time well spent. If you take the time to do this once, I am certain it will become one of the ways you prefer mackerel and blues and it helps people who won't eat them to enjoy them. ▪

7 UP HOT SAUCE KING MACK FILLETS

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds of king mackerel fillets

1 cup of 7 Up

2 tsp of hot sauce (Trader Joe's Chili Pepper Sauce)

1 cup spicy seafood breader

Salt and pepper to taste

Non-stick cooking spray

Not everyone appreciates the taste of mackerel and bluefish. They have grayish meat that has more flavor, and some folks consider them to taste strong. Some say it's an acquired taste, and maybe it is, but I like it.

I grew up in a commercial fishing family, and we often ate what wouldn't sell. The flounder, trout and drum were usually sold, and we were left with the fish with a stronger flavor. That wasn't an issue with me, however. These fish actually have some taste and aren't easily overpowered by the marinade, spices or breader used when cooking them.

Besides, even though I had already developed my tastes, I was an adult and had been eating them for years when health researchers determined the Omega 3 fatty acids they contained are beneficial to our health. I guess I was just a couple of steps ahead on the healthy eating front. Enjoying game and fish will do that for you.

This recipe is an easy way to prepare these fish, and it just happens to turn their meat from gray to white while they are cooking. The quality and flavor of fish can be seriously impacted by how they are handled on the boat and how they are cleaned. Getting them covered in ice immediately is important anytime, especially when the temperatures are in the 90s and the sun is bearing down. Don't just throw fish in the fish box or cooler, but be sure they are down in the ice and fully covered.

The next step is cleaning them thoroughly. Mackerel and bluefish have bloodlines running down their sides, and they are removed easily with a sharp knife. I split the fillets at the middle of each side and make sure to remove any bloodlines, red meat or bones that run from the backbone. Remove the rib cages to make it a true fillet. Try not to rupture any of the internals, and rinse the fish often while cleaning.

The citrus juices in 7 Up help break down the meat and neutralize the flavor. It's not as strong as squeezed citrus used in ceviche. Other drinks with citrus juices exist, but the ones I have tried are too sweet.

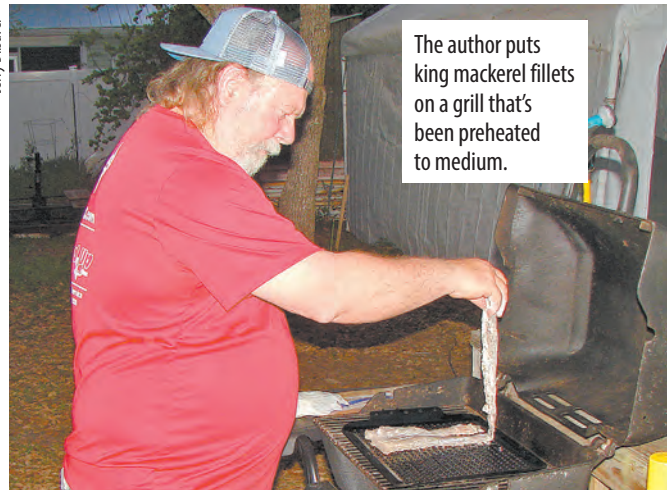
I don't know exactly how the hot sauce acts with the citrus, but it does. Even though you don't taste any spice or heat, the flavor of the fish isn't the same without it.

The kind of hot sauce is important. This works best with a Texas Pete, Louisiana, or similar hot sauce. For this meal, I used Trader Joe's Chili Pepper Sauce. It doesn't have any salt and is about two-thirds up the hotness scale. You don't notice this in the cooked fish, but you will if you add more at the table.

I don't fry fish very often, but if you want to, roll the fish in the breader rather than just sprinkling some on. Be cautious not to overcook it. If you wait until the breader is browning, you will overcook it. It will cook a little once removed from the hot oil.

One thing to always remember is that all fish dishes are best with fresh fish you caught earlier the same day. Enjoy! ▪

Jerry Dilsaver



The author puts king mackerel fillets on a grill that's been preheated to medium.

PREPARATION

Clean the fillets so there is no red meat, any bits of skin, gristle or anything that could influence its taste remaining. Wash the fillets, pat them dry and place them in a Ziploc bag.

Mix one cup of 7 Up and 2 teaspoons of hot sauce. Pour the 7 Up/hot sauce mix over the fillets and work the bag so the mixture penetrates all around the fillets. Work all the air out of the bag and seal it. Marinate in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to 2 hours.

Preheat grill to medium. Spray a vegetable tray with non-stick cooking spray. Remove fillets from bag, allow to drip, and place on a plate or platter. Sprinkle seafood breader on the top side of the fillets. Place fillets on grill, with the breaded side down. Cook 4 to 6 minutes, turn the fillets and cook 4 to 6 more minutes. Remove and serve hot.

This can also be fried or baked in the oven. If frying, liberally coat both sides of the fillets with breader and fry. At 350 degrees, the fillets will cook in just a few minutes. If baking in the oven, cover a cookie sheet with aluminum foil, spray the foil with non-stick cooking spray, and cook at 350, turning once at 4 to 6 minutes, then another 4 to 6 minutes.

Serve this with whatever sauces you prefer with seafood. Some folks like this with tartar sauce, and I like to mix a little of the hot sauce used for the marinade with some tartar sauce.

This combines well with a variety of vegetables. Potatoes are a favorite side, and they can be baked or fried. I have served it with baked shredded sweet potatoes and green beans. That's a little unusual, but it works. A fresh green salad or lettuce wedge is a great way to begin. Just add your favorite beverage, and all will be well. ▪



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

Robert Satterwhite



Campgrounds come in all shapes and sizes, but most operated by the governmental agencies have picnic tables, tent pads,grills, lantern hangers and bathroom facilities.

CATCH TROUT, SLEEP UNDER THE STARS

THESE FOUR CAMPSIGHTS WILL PUT YOU IN REACH OF SOME OF THE BEST TROUT FISHING IN THE CAROLINAS

June is an ideal time to plan a fishing-camping trip to the mountains. The weather is perfect, with warm days and cool evenings, making sleeping out a true pleasure.

The trout fishing, too, is excellent. The water is still cool enough for trout to be feisty, yet warm enough to wade without bulky, hot waders. Evening hatches are prime, especially golden stones, yellow mayflies and light cahills. Terrestrials such as inchworms, beetles and ants are very productive, particularly around the middle of the month.

The U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and state parks in North Carolina and South Carolina operate hundreds of campgrounds. Fees are nominal, usually between $15 and $20 per night, depending on the services provided. Unless the campground is designated as a primitive site, campsites have sturdy picnic tables, tent pads, fire grills, lantern hangers, flush toilets, drinking water and parking spaces for RVs. A few USFS campgrounds and most state-park campgrounds have hot-water showers.

While the campgrounds listed are selected to represent a wide geographical area, the primary emphasis is on access to excellent fishing.

Campgrounds are a lot less expensive than motels, and you don't have to travel far to fish.

Here are four of the best:

• **Black Mountain Campground –** Pisgah National Forest, Yancey County, N.C. Located adjacent to the famed Toe River, Black Mountain has 46 sites for tents and RVs.

Fishing: The South Toe River is one of the top wild-trout streams in the mountains and is known for its trophy browns and rainbows. From the concrete bridge at the campground downstream to the game-lands boundary, the South Toe is catch-and-release, artificial flies only fishing. From the game-land boundary to Clear Creek, the stream is wild-trout water, and from Clear Creek to Yancey County Recreation Park, the stream is hatchery supported water. Other nearby streams worth visiting are: Upper Creek and Lower Creek (catch-and-release, artificial flies only), Big Lost Cove Creek, and Camp Creek (both wild-trout waters).

Directions: From Burnsville, N.C., take US 19 east 5 miles, turn right on NC 80, go 12 miles, turn right on FR 472 and go 3 miles to the campground.

For reservations, call 877-444-8777.

• **Smokemont Campground –** Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Swain County, N.C. Located near the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Smokemont has 142 sites for tents and RVs. Flush toilets and drinking water are available.

Fishing: Bradley Fork, one of the most-underrated trout streams in the park, runs through the campground and joins the Oconaluftee River. Other good trout streams close by are the Oconaluftee River, Chastain Creek (a tributary of Bradley Fork), Raven Fork and Straight

Fork. Cherokee Enterprise Waters are only a short drive from the campground.

Directions: The campground is on Newfound Road, US 441, 6 miles north of Cherokee. The campground is open year-round, and sites may be reserved between May 15 and Oct. 31 by calling 877-444-6777.

• **Stone Mountain State Park Campground –** Wilkes and Alleghany counties, North Carolina. The family campground has 37 sites for tents and trailers on two loop roads, drinking water, flush toilets, and hot-water showers. The campground also has a dump station. Backcountry camping is permitted along Widow's Creek.

Fishing: More than 17 miles of the park's streams are designated as trout waters, with rainbow and brown trout dominating the lower parts, and brook trout inhabiting the upper reaches. Garden, Widow's, and Big Sandy Creeks are wild-trout streams. The East Prong of the Roaring River is a delayed-harvest stream. Harris Creek in the western portion of the park is designated as special trout waters (catch-and-release, artificial lures only). Additionally, Stone Mountain has a "trophy" trout fishing program on Bullhead and Rich Mountain creeks. For a fee, anglers get exclusive rights to one of eight sections on the streams. Only fly fishing is permitted, and hooks cannot have barbs. All trout must be released.

Directions: From the south, turn off US 21 north onto SR 1002 and go to the John P. Frank Parkway. From the west, take NC 18 north, turn right on SR 1002 and follow the parkway to the park. For reservations, call 877-722-6762 or visit the ReserveAmerica website.

• **Devils Fork State Park Campground –** Oconee County, Salem, S.C. Located on Lake Jocassee, undeniably the best lake for trout fishing in North Carolina or South Carolina, the campground has 59 sites with electric and water hook-ups, 25 primitive camping sites, a boat-in camping site and four boat ramps. The only access to the lake is from the park.

The campground offers fairly access to the excellent trout streams in the Jocassee Gorges. Maps to the streams are available at the park ranger station.

For those who prefer luxury accommodations, the park has 20 furnished villas.

Directions: The park is in Salem, S.C., in Oconee County. From SC 11, take the Lake Jocassee Road exit to the park. For reservations, visit the South Carolina State Parks reservation website or call 866-345-7375. ▪



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



Chris Bush



How do moon phases affect the feeding behavior of speckled trout? Not as much as you'd think.

SOLUNAR INFLUENCE OR MOON PHASE?

WHAT DOES THE DATA FROM TROPHY TROUT CATCHES TELL US ABOUT THESE FACTORS?

Solunar. Despite being a simple keyword search, neither Google nor "Alexa" cannot describe its impact to the inshore angling world. Perhaps, it's because it deals with the sun, space, planets, gravity and a majority of other "nerdy" things I tuned out of while in my high-school science classes. As it turns out, it's pretty important. Actually it's really important when it comes to trophy trout, and here's why.

MOON PHASE, TROPHY SPECKS

As the son of a fanatical trout fisherman, one thing I was quick to discard was the Solunar rating: the days it predicted as the best. Instead, I learned that productivity directly centered on moon phases and was a great precursor to success on the water. Often, Solunar ratings leading up to a full or a new moon would be abysmal, yet we would still launch the boat and have great success on numbers of fish. Additionally, we would fish days rated as stellar, not associated with an optimal moon phase, and we would struggle to catch a handful of fish.

So why does this matter? The longer I've pursued and studied trophy class trout, the less I've seen a correlation with certain moon phases. Don't get me wrong, it's important, and moon phase is a direct contributor, but the more I study trophy trout catch data, the broader that scope becomes.

Here's what I mean. Speckled Truth runs Dirty 30 and Trophy Trout citation programs and captures catch data for trout 27 inches or longer across nine states. In Texas alone, there have been 71 Trophy Trout citations registered since Oct. 1, 2018, and part of registering is divulging the day a huge speck was caught. In this particular instance, I grouped Dates of Catch (DOC) in one of four quarters. For example, the first quarter was the 1st through the 7th, the second was the 8th through the 15th, the third quarter the 16th through the 22nd and fourth quarter is the 23rd through the End of the Month (EOM).

I divided months in four pieces to give me a good indication of a higher periods of production. For example, Pre New Moon would accurately be reflected by catches happening during the the first quarter. Post New Moon/Pre Full Moon would coincide with second quarter, Pre Full Moon with the third and Post Full/Pre New with the fourth quarter.

As the Trophy Trout Citation data revealed, 19 fish were registered in Quarter 1, 15 in Quarter 2, 13 in Quarter 3 and 24 in Quarter 4. To try and validate my initial notion, I did the same with the Dirty 30 list, which has 47 entries, and honestly, I was shocked; it was almost the exact opposite. Quarter 1 had 11, Quarter 2 had 13, Quarter 3 had 12 and Quarter 4 had 11.

What does that tell me? First, we have a very small but maturing data set. However, what it suggests, which we hope to validate over the course of time,

is that big fish aren't as predictable to moon phase as I initially thought.

Far too often I hear, "The week before the full moon is you're best chance at catching a trophy." While I won't dispute that theory based on my own successes, my aperture is far wider now than it once was. There in lies the importance of Solunar.

SOLUNAR AND FISH-OF-A-LIFETIME

The Solunar theory is actually a pretty old concept. Hypothesized by John Alden Knight back in 1926, the theory centered on "fish and animal movement based on the location of the moon and their bodies." Starting with more than 30 factors, Mr. Knight kept only three to provide ground truth to his concept: the sun, moon and the tide, the latter for tidal waters. After years of study and refinement, Solunar charts accompany most, if not all, outdoor journals.

The idea is that moon overhead and moon underfoot can attribute to feeding behavior just as much as sunrise and sunset. Of course, these gravitational effects have impact on tide, but not all inshore estuaries have tidally influenced water. For example, the infamous Baffin Bay in Texas has almost no tidal influence. Additionally, East Matagorda Bay as well as the Lower Laguna Madre near Port Mansfield also have very little tidal influence. However, if you examine both lists, 87 of the 118 total entries, 74 percent, came from estuaries with extremely limited water movement.

What does that tell me as an angler? Big-fish feeding behavior is more closely related to Solunar times, the major and minor feeding periods, rather than moon phase. In other words, if your life-long goal is to catch a giant trout, statistically, your odds are better fishing higher-rated days based on the Solunar versus a certain moon phase, but that's under the presumption your fishing high-potential water, a different conversation for another time.

Anyway, let's hope this information is helpful and at least gets the wheels turning to maybe explore the subtle nuances of targeting these big bites. ▪



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.*



WHERE'S THAT MOON?

Solunar tables predict fish and wildlife feeding behavior based on the location of the moon. When it's overhead and underfoot, you're more likely to run into a big speckled trout, so keep an eye on those major and minor feeding periods.

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Joshua Chauvin



USE PAINT BRUSHES TO STEALTH UP TRAIL CAMERAS

Spring is when I finally take my trail cameras out of the woods and paint new ones bought on clearance for the upcoming season. Since I only hunt public land, I've always use cheap cameras. I look for three very important features in a trail camera: quietness, no-lights and coloration.

I've been running dozens of cameras annually, upgrading with newer ones as some get destroyed or stolen. Every season, I get hundreds of different bucks on film. This allows me to only hunt the places visited most by mature bucks in the two dozen or more units I scout.

A common theme is, when mature bucks notice a camera, they seldom return. Often, when a daytime buck notices a camera, he becomes nocturnal at that location. Sometimes, he'll come back, but he closely watches the camera, looking for the non-natural feature that alerted him. Spooked a second time, a buck is gone for good.

I usually have several cameras in an area, so I often know when a buck leaves or stays.

WHAT SCARES PUBLIC-LAND DEER?

• **Light.** Nowadays, blackout cameras are very common, so I won't buy a camera that doesn't have this feature. Sure, you'll sacrifice some nighttime range, but to avoid spooking the buck is worth it. Some bucks may not mind the flash of a red LED light. In my experience, however, more often than not, it'll send smart bucks running for the hills. The lights also can give away a hidden camera position to thieves.

• **Camera sound.** Loud cameras that make a click to record will instantly spook an animal. Sometimes, they'll sprint off. Sometimes, they'll stay for multiple sets to investigate. Then they leave the area for good.

I was frustrated for years with noisy cameras constantly breaking and others having horrible, over-sensitive triggers. I put cameras in thick locations to hide them from people. Also, these dense tangles are where public-land animals move best, so a sensitive trigger is not helpful around all the brush when the wind blows. The wide-spreading sensors of some more-expensive cameras have performed poorly in these brushy areas.

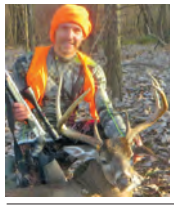
I'm looking to scout many areas in the cheapest way possible.

CHEAP CAMERAS THAT DO THE JOB

The good news is some of the cheapest cameras have proven to have all the qualities I like.

I first snatched up some Wildgame Innovations Cloak cameras a few years back. I was surprised at how durable they were after using more than a dozen in Colorado and in the humid southeastern heat for two years. I even left a bunch in the Rocky Mountains over the winter. The next year, they all fired up without a flaw. I was impressed.

The cameras have great battery life and are simple but effective. They have a less-than-one-second trigger for both



Joshua Chauvin *is a health-focused ultra-marathon runner who goes on solo, manual-powered public-land adventures focusing on hunting big game and large fish by using challenging methods and weapons. He enjoys self-filming and sharing the tactics and details from his expeditions to help others learn from his unique techniques.*

This photo shows 10 trail cameras — nine the author painted himself and one unpainted.



This buck looking at the author's self-painted camera wasn't spooked and returned many times.

video and picture mode with hardly any false captures of moving brush. Many other cameras had the same fast picture-taking ability, but they took nearly 3 seconds to start in video mode; this often missed anything that passed by. I love video mode for capturing fighting bucks and chase scenes during the rut.

I found that the Wildgame Innovations Nano model had a trigger that was too under-sensitive. However, all the same great features in the Cloak versions came on with their Terra models as well.

I've been able to find the Cloak and Terra 6, 7, 8 and 10 GB models all for less than $33 each with free shipping and no sales tax by searching eBay and Google Shopping for deals that sporadically pop up.

SHOP POSTSEASON

The deals are frequent after the season when places clear out the previous year's inventory for upgraded models. These Cloak and Terras do have the slightest noise, but rarely is it loud enough to spook an animal unless it's practically standing next to the camera. For the low price, it's worth the trade-off.

I find the cheapest SD cards by buying them in large lots on eBay. Inexpensive, Class 4 cards work well with my cameras. Also, I find bulk AA alkaline batteries online. They last just as long as the name brand ones for a quarter of the name-brand price.

DIY CAMOU

I notice that animals aren't spooked by my painted trail cameras once they look in their direction. However, I've had plain black, green or grey ones, and have had animals spook after spotting them.

Unfortunately, many cameras on sale are often non-camouflaged. There's no need to spend more money on expensive models. You can paint the cameras yourself for only pennies in cost.

I use small paint brushes to paint them mostly grey, like the majority of trees I set them on. I take white paint and stir in black to create various shades of gray. I paint on some browns and mix a touch a black to darken the browns. Then, I finish with a small amount of green, adding in some black to get the desired tone.

Deer seem to not notice and not be bothered by my camouflaged cameras when they look at them. Most important, camouflage matters to keep cameras hidden from thieves, and also from bears and elk, which both like to destroy cameras.

I've set numerous cameras on carcasses in Colorado and popular bear locations in Louisiana. Bears have looked right at my camouflaged cameras and walked on by, but when the same bears saw my non-camouflaged cameras nearby, they were instantly demolished.

RED ANGERS BEARS

Keep in mind, if the camera has a flashing red light or makes a loud noise, the elk or bear angrily attacks it, no matter the color pattern.

The main reason I paint my cameras in the spring is for the smell factor. I'm very picky about my scent-control measures when hunting. I've had big bucks bust me downwind when not taking precautions. Vice versa, I've taken several nice bucks that came from downwind when I did take extreme scent-control measures, so I take the same approach with my cameras.

BEWARE OF ODOR

I paint my cameras and leave them in a covered outdoor area for months to allow the scent to fade away. I make sure to wash my camera-setting backpack and camera straps in scent-free clothes wash and leave my bag outside for months as well. Bears also have remarkable scenting ability, which is another reason to take the scent-control methods.

Sure, gluing real tree bark, moss or leaves to the camera makes it even more stealthy. However, I found this to be impractical, as most of it fell off during my long hikes. I'm resetting dozens of cameras over many different locations all-year long. Also, most glues have an unnatural smell, so I wouldn't want to glue on the extra cover when I set them.

All of these measures may seem extreme to some, but my deer-hunting success has skyrocketed in the past few years with an ability to not only find bucks, but to keep from alerting them of the surveillance without spending top dollar. ▪



After seeing the red lights from the author's older camera, this buck was never filmed again.



A blackout camera never alerted any of these bucks, and they returned often to feed.

Brian Cope



Ethan Cox shows off a chunky warmouth caught on ultralight gear in a millpond. Warmouth are often overlooked or misidentified by fishermen.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: WARMOUTH SUNFISH

DON'T MISTAKE THIS SPORTING SUNFISH FOR ONE OF ITS CLOSE RELATIVES; IT'S REALLY SPECIAL

The warmouth is one of the more interesting and often misunderstood — and just as often, misidentified — species of the sunfish family.

This fish *(Lepomis gulosus)* is native to the southeastern United States, and while many people believe it is a cross between a crappie and a bass, a crappie and a bream, or a bream and a bass, it's actually not the product of any crossbreeding, but is its own species of sunfish. It is closely related to bluegill and redbreast.

The very name "warmouth" has some mystery behind it. Some believe the name comes from the markings that extend from the mouth to the eyes, which resemble the war paint used by Native Americans. Others think the sheer size of its mouth, which is similar to the mouth of a bass, gives the fish its name: "Mouth so big you could have a war in it!" Still others believe it's the mispronunciation of "more mouth," which this fish has over it's sunfish relatives.

Proportionately longer than most other sunfish, warmouths typically have red eyes, a mottled or splotchy body of olive brown with a purple sheen and prominent lines that run down the body, as well as away from the mouth. The dark ear flaps are short, stiff and sometimes sport a small, reddish spot. And previously mentioned, their mouths extend to about the midway point of their pupils, allowing the lips to flare like that of a bass or crappie.

When spawning, male warmouths often display a bright red or orange spot at the base of the dorsal fin.

These fish are usually found in slower-moving water, like swamps, small streams or brown- and blackwater tributaries of rivers, but it's not unheard of to find them in ponds and some lakes. They have a high tolerance for dirty, muddy water. Warmouth do most of their feeding on smaller fish, insects, crayfish and shrimp.

Like most sunfish, the males build nests mainly by fanning out areas with their tails, and big groups of nests are often built together, sometimes among dozens of other warmouth nests. In tight quarters, warmouth will also construct nests among the nests of other sunfish species. They spawn throughout late spring and summer as long as water temperature is warmer than 70 degrees.

Females lay between 2000 and 20,000 eggs and divide them up between multiple nests. Warmouth guard their eggs and stay with hatchlings for a short time period.

Anglers can catch them with live worms, crickets, small crayfish, minnows and small artificial lures like Beetle Spins, Roostertails,and ultralight crankbaits such as the Rebel Wee Craw and Crickhopper lures. Fishing tight to cover like stumps, logs, vegetation and river banks is a good bet for anglers. Incoming waterways like smaller creeks or even rainwater run-off are always promising spots, too.

Using ultralight rods and reels will ensure anglers a fun and good battle and will make these spunky fighters feel much bigger than they are. They are often caught among bluegill, redbreast shellcracker, and other sunfish.

These fish are often misidentified as bluegill, redbreast, smallmouth bass, crappie and green sunfish.

Warmouth are known by several other names across the south, including stumpknocker, limb bream, mo-mouth, molly, goggle-eye, red eye, red-eyed perch, and red-eyed bream.

The average warmouth ranges from 6 to 8 inches long and has a life expectancy in the wild of about 8 years.

North Carolina's state-record warmouth weighed 1 pound, 13 ounces when it was caught on May 7, 1976 by Emma Sears from McLeod's Pond in Richmond County. South Carolina's state record weighed 2 pounds, 2¼ ounces, and was caught in 1973 in Clarendon County by W. Singletary.

The world record warmouth was caught from the Yellow River in Holt, Fla., in 1985. It weighed 2 pounds, 7 ounces. ▪



A short ear flap, a long mouth, red eyes and dark, vertical bars are markers of warmouth sunfish.

Image courtesy of SCDNR



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.*

By David Brown

DROP-SHOT THE LEDGES

With today's advanced sonar units boasting the ability to see detailed images of not only what's under the boat but also the bottom, it's pretty easy to locate the sweet spots for bass on a ledge.

Find a nice little nook or a hefty brush pile, and you have your target for casting and winding those crankbaits, spinnerbaits and jigs.

But what do you do when your hot bite suddenly cools? Unless you just enjoy looking for new spots, you should pull directly over the ledge and take a good look at your targeted spot. Often, the fish are still there; they just got tired of seeing the same types of presentations.

This is where your drop-shot can really shine. Fish move up on the ledge to feed, so it's not surprising to smoke a bunch of them on reaction baits. However, they will wise up eventually, so the savvy anglers must shift gears to pick off a few more.

As long as the fish remain on the ledge, it's a safe bet that they're still in the food mood — so it's just a matter of keeping an easy meal available to them.

Few rigs can achieve this level of consistent vulnerability like a drop-shot. The fish might scatter when too many crankbaits buzz past them, and they might get tired of watching a buddy yanked to topside after tipping down on that football head. But a slender worm or small shad figure that just sits there wiggling in the current — now that's just too much to resist.

A couple of considerations:

- Take a good look at the spot you'll drop on, and if there's brush, timber or anything else that can snag an exposed drop-shot hook, Texas-rig your bait.
- If fish are suspending off the ledge, try a longer leader that keeps the bait at the fish's eye level.
- Use a weight sufficient for the depth and current of the spot you're fishing. ▪



A drop-shot rig will produce bass that have been hammered with other baits.

Brian Cope



Sportsman

FISHING HOTSPOTS

FALLS LAKE BASS MOVING TO LEDGES

FISH GANGING UP ON MAIN-LAKE CHANNEL BENDS, READY TO FEED AGAIN AFTER SPAWN

Come June, the roller coaster that is bass fishing will reach another peak at Falls of the Neuse Lake just east of Durham, N.C.

After the high of prespawn and the low of postspawn, bass will regroup and gang up on main-lake points and main-channel ledges to gorge on the mass of shad leaving the creeks. Guide Joel Munday of Outdoors Expeditions USA in Holly Springs, N.C., fishes these areas with a variety of bottom-bumping baits as well as topwater plugs.

"In June, the fish haven't been out on the main lake very long, so they're fresh," said Munday (919-669-2959). "They'll be out of the postspawn funk, schooled up good and eating several times a day instead of just every once in a while. And the thermocline hasn't set up yet, so you don't have to worry about that."

Munday likes to start at the top as shad huddle near the surface first thing in the morning in the normally clearer water of the lower lake. Great places are main-channel bends that are close to a sloping point. Bass will school up there to ambush from below anything that resembles a shad.

Munday's favorite topwater bait at Falls is a Rebel Pop-R in a shad color, but a Zara Spook will get the job done — or a swimbait retrieved just below the surface.

As the sun gets up, Munday will continue to target ledges on the main channel where points intersect, usually starting on the lower end of the lake and working his way up as far as the Cheek Road bridge. But he shifts gears to the bottom of the water column with Carolina- and Texas-rigged worms, football-head jigs and crankbaits. On the deeper, lower end of the lake, Munday will fish water that reaches to around 16 feet deep before plunging into the channel, where as the upper end may only reach 8 feet or so before the drop.

The lower end of Falls of the Neuse Lake is the best place to start targeting bass on main-lake points and channel drops.

"I'll start by having my clients make a long-distance cast over the ledge and identify what the bottom feels like," Munday said. "I tell them to drag the bait slowly until they get around a piece of cover and then slow down again and hop or work the bait. On the worms, we'll usually use a ½-ounce weight, but the with the jigs we might go up to a ¾-ounce. I like to stay with natural colors like junebug, red bug, green pumpkin or peanut butter and jelly on the jigs. The crankbaits will need to dig into the bottom. I like anything in the Rapala DT series in a natural shad color." ▪

— Dusty Wilson



Sam Jones

Trolling spoons along the thermocline in deep water will draw strikes from big trout like this Lake Jocassee rainbow.

JOCASSEE'S TROUT

hitting spoons trolled in deep, clear water

For guide Sam Jones, there is no better time and place for family fishing fun than June on Lake Jocassee in South Carolina's Upstate. School is out, the deep-summer heat is still over the horizon and there is no prettier setting than the deep, clear lake in the mountains.

"June is a good time for catching some of Lake Jocassee's big rainbow and brown trout," said Jones (864-280-9056). "The weather and water have warmed up, making for some great family fishing outings. There is nothing like watching the smiles on everyone's face once the fight with a big fish is over."

Jones, from Greenville, S.C., grew up fishing for trout in streams and rivers with his grandfather and has been fishing for trout on Lake Jocassee for more than 30 years. He said that by June, trout will be holding in the cooler water created by a thermocline about 80 to 120 feet deep, and they will hold at those depths right on into late fall.

"Trolling 60 to 120 feet deep using downriggers is the best way to get them in the boat," Jones said. "Some of my favorite lures to troll with are silver or gold Sutton spoons and Doctor spoons. Apex lures and Rapala lures in shad and trout patterns are always a good choice, too. Large minnows trolled or drifted will also produce some good fish." ▪

— Pat Robertson

HAIL TO THE KINGS!

Grand Strand nearshore waters fill up

Summer kicks off with a bang along the South Carolina coastline this month, and taking advantage of the great fishing doesn't mean fishing inshore or heading well offshore.

June is a fantastic month to visit the Grand Strand, where king mackerel are abundant and feeding heavily nearshore on the abundant bait schools.

The warm water and the baitfish bring the kings in close. By June, large schools of menhaden are trucking in by the thousands and the mullet are also around, giving these fish plenty of forage. From the breakers out, there is plenty of food for king mackerel and other big predator fishes to eat.

Tom Cushman of Captain Cush's Calmwater Charters sets his sights on the nearshore bite this month.

"Kings are literally everywhere this time of year. We catch them from the beach all the way to the Gulf Stream," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "But we typically find them concentrated on artificial reefs, ledges and livebottom in 35 to 100 feet of water."

King mackerel migrate into Carolina waters during the spring as water temperatures rise, following the baitfish that congregate around nearshore structure. Kings will shift around and set up for the best opportunities to feed with the least amount of effort. They are eating mostly cigar minnows and menhaden, and Cushman tailors his offerings to match their diet.

"Nothing is as good as a live menhaden, bluefish or mullet with a treble hook in its back, but we will also slow-troll frozen cigar minnows or pull trolling spoons at higher speeds," he said.



Nearshore structure off South Carolina's Grand Strand holds plenty of baitfish and king mackerel in June.

While kings can be found over a large area, they will be concentrated on schools of bait on livebottoms, ledges or artificial reefs. Cushman usually begins a trip at a

continued >

GOT PICS? Send 'em in!

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

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

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

Grand Stand continued >

reef, livebottom or just off the beach if he finds a pod of bait. From there, it's a matter of following the kings.

"The perfect setup is the green water around the bait pods we see all over the nearshore region in June. Cobia, kings and even a sneaky sailfish will slide in to feed on these bait pods," he said.

Kings can be caught at various depths, so baits are fished on flat lines and lines carried deeper on downriggers. Keeping a mixture of deep and shallow running lines will insure all of the territory is covered to maximize the bite potential. ▪

— Jeff Burleson

OCEAN SPECK-ULATION

SENC piers produce plenty of trout in June

June is a great time to catch large speckled trout across both Carolinas, with the spawn peaking this month and some big, sow specks being caught.

Ocean piers are special places to run into big June specks, especially the piers along North Carolina's southeastern coast, because not all of the trout have moved into the backwaters yet.

For the special breed of anglers who chase trout from the planks, high above the ocean, the rig of choice is a slip-bobber and float rig used to present live shrimp and minnows a couple of feet off the bottom.

The importance of the slip bobber is to allow the quick adjusting the depth of the bait as feeding trout move in or out along the pier. The rig is very simple, with a hook about a foot below an egg sinker and the slip bobber on the line above. Most fishermen use a No. 6 or No. 8 treble hook.

"We try to pattern the trout, but they are feeding and move in and out with the shrimp or minnows they're eating," said Luke Horn, a regular at Ocean Crest Pier on Oak Island, N.C. "One day, they will be right behind the breakers, and the next, they'll be out near the pier's end. I usually fish with Roger Gates, who is a master at this, and we start at opposite ends of the pier and work along the pier until we find a school. Once you find them, the deal is on. They are in schools, and unless something spooks the school, they are ready to eat."

Allen Lakey, another regular fisherman at Ocean Crest Pier, said windy conditions make the cork bob too much, and the bait doesn't look right. When the wind really blows, he fishes a rig locally called a "sidewinder" rig. This is much like a drop-shot rig and uses a sinker to go to the bottom while positioning a live minnow a couple of feet above the bottom.

Area piers all suffered some damage from Hurricane Florence in September 2018. Sunset Beach Pier, Ocean Isle Pier, Holden Beach Pier and Ocean Crest Pier on Oak Island are open. Oak Island Pier is being rebuilt, and expectations are for it to reopen around Memorial Day, but the offshore end may not be completely finished. ▪

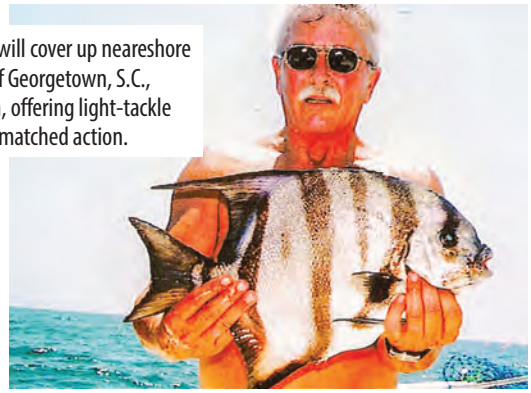
— Jerry Dilsaver



Piers along North Carolina's southeastern coast produce a lot of nice speckled trout in June at the peak of the spawn.

FLUSH WITH SPADES

Reefs off Georgetown offer spadefish action



Spadefish will cover up nearshore reefs out of Georgetown, S.C., this month, offering light-tackle anglers unmatched action.

Bright sunshine and warm temperatures make the water sizzle and the spadefishing along the nearshore oceanfront out of Georgetown, S.C., truly outstanding this month.

Matt Bellamy at Captain Matt's Fishing Charters in Pawley's Island, S.C., fishes the inshore and nearshore waters between Murrells Inlet and the Santee Delta. As summer arrives and the weather really gets hot, he can't resist taking his clients to artificial reefs to catch spadefish.

"The spadefishing is incredible for us here," said Bellamy (843-568-8203), "and the hotter it gets, the better it gets."

Spadefish primarily feed on small crustaceans and jellyfish, especially the cannonball jellyfish that move into the region to feed on zooplankton on the submerged structures.

"We have very large schools of jelly balls here in June, and we catch all the spadefish we want to," he said.

Spadefish have small mouths and eat small bites, with jellyfish being one of their staple foods. And they can be coaxed into being spoon-fed right next to the boat.

Bellamy threads several jelly balls on a rope or heavy line attached to a weight and drops them down 15 or 20 feet towards the reef structure. Spadefish will find the jelly balls and begin to tear them apart. An entire school will get in on the action in a feeding frenzy. Bellamy slowly brings jelly ball teaser toward the surface.

"I like to keep the teaser down about 15 feet and then start fishing around it with weighted lines with long 3- to 4-foot fluorocarbon leaders," said Bellamy, who typically ties on a small, silver No. 2 hook and threads on a small slice of jelly ball. He may substitute a small piece of a soft-plastic Gulp! bait.

"Any kind will do, because you are only using a small piece the size of a pencil eraser. They will snatch it up in a heartbeat," he said.

When spadefish get into a feeding frenzy, they will eat at will, and anglers can catch as many fish as their arms can take, spades being real hard fighters that don't give up easily.

Bellamy likes to fish around reefs in the clearest water he can find, because spades rely on their vision to find food. Reefs in 30 to 50 feet of water usually produce the bests action in June, with spadefish found right on the structure. ▪

— Jeff Burleson

Lake Hickory up next >

ASTRO TABLES

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

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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

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

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

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#2: ***Same as #1, plus Software...$47.95*** (plus $6 s&h).

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2019 JUN — BEST DAYS (POOR / FAIR / GOOD / EXCL / VALUE) — LUNAR PERIODS (TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED)

	VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Sat 1	72	4:58 am	10:15 am - 1:15 pm	6:40 pm	10:40 pm - 1:40 am	
Sun 2	87	5:35 am	11:00 am - 2:12 pm	7:44 pm	11:25 pm - Midnight	
Mon 3	94	6:18 am	11:50 am - 3:12 pm	8:48 pm	Midnight - 2:37 am	NEW
Tue 4	86	7:07 am	12:45 pm - 4:11 pm	9:51 pm	12:15 am - 3:37 am	
Wed 5	77	8:04 am	1:43 pm - 5:13 pm	10:51 pm	1:10 am - 4:36 am	HIGH
Thu 6	68	9:06 am	2:44 pm - 6:10 pm	11:44 pm	2:08 am - 5:38 am	
Fri 7	62	10:13 am	3:47 pm - 7:03 pm		3:09 am - 6:35 am	Perigee
Sat 8	59	11:21 am	4:50 pm - 7:52 pm	12:31 am	4:12 am - 7:28 am	
Sun 9	60	12:29 pm	5:51 pm - 8:37 pm	1:13 am	5:15 am - 8:17 am	
Mon 10	68	1:36 pm	6:50 pm - 9:20 pm	1:51 am	6:16 am - 9:02 am	HALF
Tue 11	54	2:42 pm	7:50 pm - 9:58 pm	2:25 am	7:15 am - 9:45 am	
Wed 12	45	3:47 pm	8:48 pm - 10:40 pm	2:59 am	8:15 am - 10:23 am	
Thu 13	42	4:52 pm	9:45 pm - 11:21 pm	3:33 am	9:13 am - 11:05 am	
Fri 14	48	5:56 pm	10:45 pm - 12:03 am	4:08 am	10:10 am - 11:46 am	
Sat 15	57	6:59 pm	11:41 pm - Midnight	4:46 am	11:10 am - 12:28 pm	
Sun 16	65	8:00 pm	Midnight - 12:49 am	5:28 am	12:06 pm - 1:14 pm	
Mon 17	69	8:57 pm	12:37 am - 1:39 am	6:14 am	1:02 pm - 2:04 pm	FULL
Tue 18	57	9:50 pm	1:32 am - 2:30 am	7:04 am	1:57 pm - 2:55 pm	
Wed 19	46	10:36 pm	2:24 am - 3:22 am	7:57 am	2:49 pm - 3:47 pm	LOW
Thu 20	36	11:18 pm	3:12 am - 4:14 am	8:53 am	3:37 pm - 4:39 pm	
Fri 21	32	11:54 pm	3:55 am - 5:07 am	9:49 am	4:20 pm - 5:32 pm	Summer
Sat 22	35		4:36 am - 5:58 am	10:44 am	5:01 pm - 6:23 pm	
Sun 23	37	12:27 am	5:15 am - 6:47 am	11:40 am	5:40 pm - 7:12 pm	Apogee
Mon 24	46	12:57 am	5:49 am - 7:37 am	12:35 pm	6:14 pm - 8:02 pm	
Tue 25	58	1:26 am	6:24 am - 8:26 am	1:30 pm	6:49 pm - 8:51 pm	HALF
Wed 26	51	1:54 am	6:58 am - 9:16 am	2:26 pm	7:23 pm - 9:41 pm	
Thu 27	50	2:24 am	7:32 am - 10:08 am	3:24 pm	7:57 pm - 10:33 pm	
Fri 28	53	2:55 am	8:10 am - 11:02 am	4:24 pm	8:35 pm - 11:27 pm	
Sat 29	67	3:30 am	8:51 am - 11:57 am	5:26 pm	9:16 pm - 12:22 am	
Sun 30	79	4:09 am	9:39 am - 12:55 pm	6:30 pm	10:04 pm - 1:20 am	

25 50 75 AVERAGE

For more, visit primetimes2.com

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

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

JUNE IS TOP-DRAWER

for Lake Hickory largemouths, spotted bass

Over the years, the big striped bass roaming Lake Hickory's 4,223 acres have received most of anglers' attention, but guide Andy Fox of Fishers of Men Guide Service said fishermen shouldn't overlook two of the lake's other major attractions: largemouth and spotted bass.

Fox said Hickory, a narrow, riverine lake in North Carolina's Foothills, harbors quality largemouth bass up to 5 pounds, with a generous number of 3-pound fish. Trophy bass are present for the taking as well.

Bass tournaments on Hickory are frequently won with 18-pound stringers of mixed largemouth and spotted bass, the latter on the increase in terms of their percentage of the bass population.

"While largemouth bass are more plentiful, lots of spotted bass are showing up at Hickory," said Fox (828-312-8771). "The spots grow big, with several 6-pounders reportedly caught. While spots are the more aggressive fish, largemouth remain in the majority, though that's subject to change like it has at other reservoirs where spots have appeared and eventually taken over."

In June, Fox said he begins his mornings looking for a topwater bite from both largemouth and spots.

"They'll strike surface lures like Pop-Rs, Spooks and Whopper Ploppers," said Fox. "Look for breaking bait-fish along shallow points, cuts and rocky areas."

One creek usually filled with forage is Gunpowder Creek.

Once the sun comes up, Fox fishes brush-laden docks near steep, rocky banks. He flips the docks with standard jigs and shaky-head jigs and soft-plastics. Green pumpkin and watermelon are effective colors.

By mid-June, when the heat turns on at Hickory, Fox targets rocky points, channel drops, steep banks and ledges in 4 to 15 feet of water. He probes the structure with deep-running crankbaits in natural shad or sexy shad colors.



Guide Andy Fox said that bass fishing really cranks up on Lake Hickory in June.

"I also fish shaky head jigs by dragging or hopping them along rock structure," Fox said. "There's no particular area of the lake that's better than others at this time. It's a matter of finding forage in conjunction with deep structure. June bass also school on structure, so it's possible to catch several fish from one place."

By late June, Fox mostly fishes at night, which is common practice at mountain reservoirs because of the daytime heat. ▪

— Tony Garitta

IF THE WATER'S UP

Kerr Lake bass will be in shoreline cover

Veteran angler Tim Grein of Winston-Salem, N.C., said bass fishing on Kerr Reservoir, aka Buggs Island, can be a great, shallow-water deal if the water level is "right."

"The water can rise, putting the lake's trees, bushes and willows in play, or it can recede, putting points, flats and drops in play," Grein said.

For the best shallow-water action, the water level needs to be between 303 and 306 feet above sea level, slightly higher than the 301.5 normal pool level. It puts shoreline wood and vegetation in 3 to 5 feet of water.

If the water gets higher than the 307-foot mark, flooding occurs, spreading the fish throughout the dense cover and woods and making it difficult for fishermen to reach the fish. The water can rise above picnic tables, roads and boat ramps. That's the time to stay home from the 49,500-acre reservoir on the North Carolina-Virginia border.

When the water level is between 303 and 306, Grein doesn't focus upon the lake's numerous buttonwood bushes like many other fishermen.

"Lots of guys catch fish from the bushes, but the bushes are better during the spawning period," he said. "For postspawn fishing in June, bushes aren't my thing."

Grein targets sweetgum trees along the sides of points and willow bushes wherever he finds them. He flips them with a ⅜-ounce green pumpkin Missile D Bomb or D Stroyer plastic baits, working them slowly through the tree roots and willow branches on a heavy action, 7-foot baitcasting outfit spooled with 22-pound fluorocarbon.

If the water level drops to 300 or below, the game changes. Grein fishes a Carolina rig, dragging plastics along points, drops and shoals in 10 to 20 feet of water.

"Many of the stumps on points have rotted out, so rocky points are coveted, though productive points can be almost bare; they're just feeding places for bass," said Grein, who also fishes deep-running Spro Little John crankbaits in nasty shad and cellmate colors.

June features great topwater fishing as well. Whether the water is high or low, Grein begins his mornings with surface lures. ■

— Tony Garitta



Bass pro Tim Grein tries to target shoreline gum trees and willow bushes when the water level rises a few feet above normal at Kerr Reservoir.

Tony Garitta

2019 NORTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

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

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

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

^ see NCWRC/NCDMF regs for inshore Management Area limits. % Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit hmspermits.noaa.

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

2019 SOUTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

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

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

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

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

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

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



Roger Qualman caught this 29-inch redfish on a topwater plug in August 2018 near Adams Creek in Beaufort, N.C.



Gray Coble of Wilmington N.C., caught this 45-inch red drum in the surf at Fort Fisher in November 2018.



Cooper Johnson of Beaufort, S.C., killed these squirrels at his Granddad's farm in Inez, N.C., on Dec. 29, 2018.



Finley Zeron caught this dolphin near Frying Pan Tower while light-lining a live menhaden.



T.J. Fairrington of High Point, N.C., caught his first citation red drum off Ocean Crest Pier on Oak Island in October 2018.



Katie Buckner caught this nice gar at Lake Hartwell last October, crappie fishing with 8-pound line and a minnow.

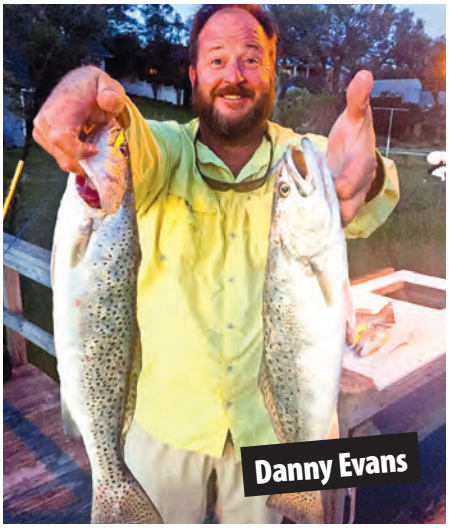
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But hang on to the negatives, because the photos cannot be returned.

Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Danny Evans of Hampstead, N.C., caught these two nice speckled trout on Oct. 31, 2018, near Topsail Inlet.



Connor Jones killed this 9-point, 200-pound bow buck on Oct. 2, 2018, in Wake County, N.C.



Ryan and Lane Floyd caught this 37-inch redfish in Georgetown, S.C., near the ferry landing.



Jacob Howard of Burlington N.C., caught this nice flounder out of Swanquarter pn Aug. 6, 2018.



Brody Watson, 17, of Asheboro, N.C., caught this 22-inch speckled trout at Sunset Beach on a 4-inch Gulp shrimp.



Hardy Tippet of Laurinburg, N.C., tagged this 8-point buck on Nov. 17, 2018, in Scotland County. He also killed a 10-pointer on Nov. 20.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

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

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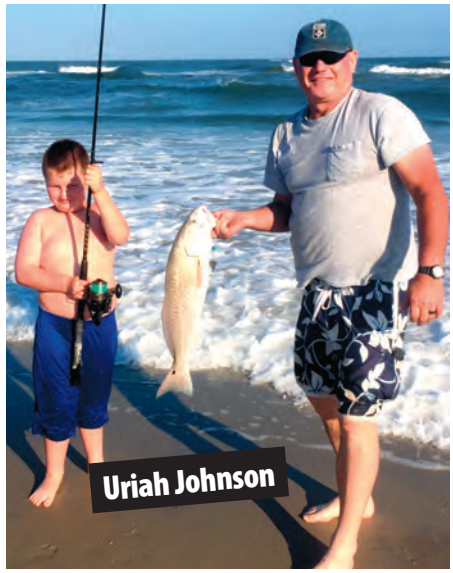
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Anne Rogers tagged her first buck ever last fall in Dillon County, S.C. — this 220-pound, 9-point trophy.



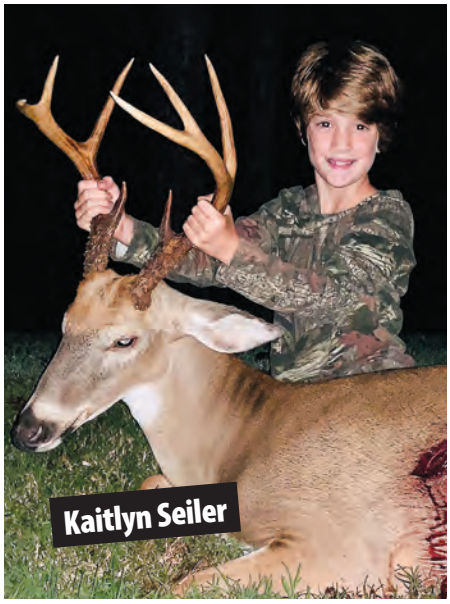
Ben Robertson tagged this tall, heavy, 8-point buck with his .270 on the family farm in North Carolina on Nov. 17, 2018.



Uriah Johnson, 7, of Ocracoke, N.C., caught his first red drum fishing off the beach on Ocracoke with his cousin, Joe Powell.



N.H. Bell from Ponzer, N.C., caught this flounder on Sept. 6, 2018 near Swanquarter.



Kaitlyn Seiler killed her first crossbow buck on Sept. 29 in Rockingham County, N.C.

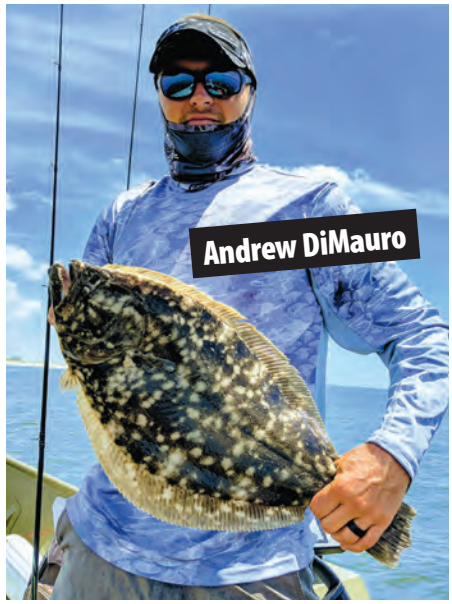


Alexandra Crawford took her first buck, this 7-pointer, at Falling Creek Outfitters in Wayne County, N.C.





Gerard Kelly and Gerard Kelly Jr. from Irmo, S.C., killed these three nice bucks last fall in Silverstreet and Winnsboro, S.C.



Andrew DiMauro caught this 5½-pound flounder caught in North Carolina's Masonboro Inlet on a Spro bucktail.



Hunter Hammill killed this great 11-point, drop-tine buck, on Nov. 12, 2018, near Gold Hill, N.C.



Luke Bayse took this nice buck in early November after first shooting him Oct. 13 near Pittsboro, N.C.



Andrew Whitley, 9, killed this 428-pound bear, his first, with a 20-gauge shotgun on Nov. 17, 2018, in Little Washington, N.C.



C.J. Addison of Lancaster County, S.C., and four friends killed these five limits of gadwalls this winter.



Roberta Grove from Oak Island, N.C., caught this 20.10-pound king mackerel off Ocean Crest Pier last fall.

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Makai Carlough caught this 7½-pound, 27-inch flounder last Sept. 2 behind Pawley's Island, S.C., on a mullet minnow.



Bailey Hollingsworth of Lexington, N.C., caught this 3¾-pound spotted bass from Lake Norman this winter.



Chuck Stewart of Stem, N.C., shows off a great catch of Flat River crappie from Nov. 25, 2018.



Adidas River caught this 5½-pound bass from Lake Bowen in Spartanburg, S.C., on April 13.



Jensen Anders of Carolina Beach, N.C., caught this nice red on Nov. 17, 2018, fishing with guide Tony Mungo.



Easton McPherson, 9, tagged his first buck, this 13-pointer, on Oct. 18, 2017, near Clarendon, N.C.



Al Wilkerson of Julian, N.C., caught this 24-inch red drum in the surf at Ocracoke Island on Thanksgiving Day 2018.



Dallas Brooks from Siler City, N.C., caught this 31-inch drum in the ICW near Carolina Beach on Aug. 31,2018.



Eric Ellis took this fine buck, which measured 138 inches, in North Carolina's Bertie County last fall.



Cary Bolt killed this gobbler, which carried a 10½-inch beard and1⅛-inch spurs on April 21, 2018, in Wilson County, N.C.

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