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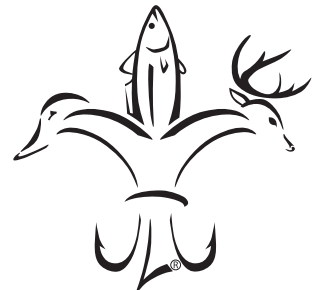
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Scott Taylor killed this 10-point, 140-inch trophy buck in Rockingham County, N.C., on Sept. 20, two days after killing a 9-point, 130-inch buck. Photo courtesy Scott Taylor.

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Carolina
SPORTSMAN
www.CarolinaSPORTSMAN.com

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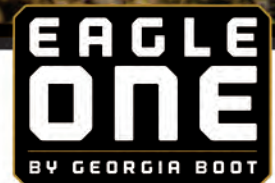
CAROLINA SPORTSMAN (USPS #012969) is published monthly by Carolina Publishing Inc., Allen J. Lottinger, President. 14236 Highway 90, P.O. Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039. Mailed at periodicals postage rates and paid at Boutte, La., and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Carolina Sportsman, PO Box 433294, Palm Coast, FL 32143. All rights reserved. Reproduction of contents is strictly prohibited without permission of Carolina Sportsman. **EDITORIAL** information number is 336.376.5101. Editorial guidelines can be obtained by writing Carolina Sportsman, 433 Holinswood Ave., Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103. Carolina Sportsman is not responsible for the loss of queries, manuscripts or other materials.

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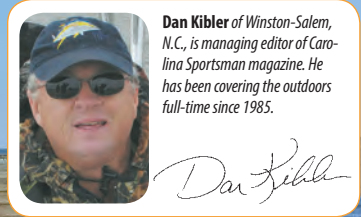
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Chris Bullock of Fountain, N.C., a crappie and catfish guide on Kerr Lake, made the most of a busman's holiday and caught this 11-pound bass on Jordan Lake on Sept. 3. The fish hit a Strike King 5XD crankbait.



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

OH, THE JOYS OF NOVEMBER

I QUIT HAVING BIRTHDAYS A WHILE BACK, BUT IT'S STILL A SPECIAL MONTH

November has always been my favorite month, even after I attempted, several years ago, to ignore the fact that my birthday falls near the middle of that calendar page. Age will do that to you.

But as a kid, dipping my toes into the world of deer hunting, November meant everything. Where I grew

up in Virginia, gun season for whitetail deer didn't open until the third Monday in November. And that was so long ago that bow-hunting wasn't the popular deal it is today. If you wanted to get a jump on deer season, you hunted squirrels in October,

scouting at the same time, since squirrels were usually around the oak trees that were magnets for deer.

My sophomore year of high school, I broke the middle finger on my right hand playing football, dooming me to a "C" in typing that quarter, which my father decided was reason for a delay in my first deer hunt. By the time the next season rolled around, my finger was healed, and we had a little place to hunt in the mountains of Shenandoah County. I didn't get to skip school for Opening Day, but I hunted plenty, and saw enough deer to get my blood pumping.

I got to skip school the next Opening Day, but there had been a huge storm, and we couldn't get across a

creek we normally forded in a VW beetle, so we had to cross on a walk bridge and hoof it back 3 or 4 miles to get to the property. I was a whupped puppy when I finally settled into my stand.

I killed my first buck that season, 1972, at age 16. When we found it, my dad and I hugged and jumped up and down for who knows how long. Four years later, in college, I killed the first buck taken on the family farm in Georgia. My grandfather hugged me, but he was too old to jump up and down.

Bag-A-Buck Contest underway



Don't forget to post photos of your bucks in the Carolina Sportsman Bag-A-Buck Contest to be eligible to win monthly prizes of great Sportsman swag from the online Sportsman Store.

To enter or see deer that have been entered, log onto www.carolinasportsman.com/contest/index.php?event=26

Forty-one years later, my son, a 13-year-old eighth-grader, killed his first buck. My dad was in the stand with him. The three of us hugged and jumped up and down for a long time.

Clearly, there's a reason I love November.

Oh, and there's all that Thanksgiving food.... ■



Dan Kibler

Jessup Dillard, 10, from Winston-Salem, N.C., had a big time with his Lab, Zack, at a Sept. 7 youth dove hunt in Davidson County sponsored by the Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation.

Lee Daugherty of Florence, S.C., and three friends killed a 12-foot-6, 726-pound alligator on Sept. 15.

SANTEE GIVES UP TWO HUGE GATORS

The Santee Cooper lakes have produced some big alligators over the decade-plus of public gator hunting, and this season has been no different.

John Cox of Lancaster, S.C., got together with four friends — Danny Greene, Drew Cox, Fat Cat Greene and Kyle Hegler — and took a 12-foot-10 beast on Sept. 14, the opening day of South Carolina's season.

They were in Danny Greene's pontoon boat, in a backwater hole in Lake Marion,

when the huge gator surfaced close by. Cox hooked him on the second try with a fishing rod and 10/0 snag hook.

The gator got loose 20 minutes later when the team tried to hook him with a snag hook on a rope. Cox hooked him twice more before he finally got a good hookset. They got a second hook in the gator and eventually got him close enough to the boat to shoot in the head, then shot him again after Cox was knocked off his feet by the gator while trying to get his tag in the animal's tail.

Four hunters from Florence, S.C. — Lee Daugherty, David Lowe, Ryan Fitts and George Mourounas — bagged a 12-foot-6, 726-pound Santee Cooper gator the next day.

Daugherty got a hook in the gator around 1:30 p.m., then they got a second hook in it. Lowe shot it between the eyes



with a bow; the point stuck, but the shaft did not.

After two hours, Lowe got another arrow in the gator, then Mourounas shot him perfectly with a handgun, and they finally got the animal in the boat. ■



John Cox of Lancaster, S.C., and four buddies killed this 12-foot-10 alligator on Sept. 14 at Lake Marion.

Buck passed up in 2018 wins first Bag-A-Buck

Ridgely Linville's entry of his 146-inch Barnwell County buck won Carolina Sportsman's Bag-A-Buck contest for August-September.

Ridgely Linville of Summerville, S.C., saw a nice buck last season, a 120-inch stud, but with a bigger one already at the taxidermist, he decided to let it walk.

What a great decision. On Saturday evening, Sept. 28, he saw that buck again. This time, carrying a 5x5 main-frame rack with two sticker points, Linville didn't have to think twice before dropping the buck at 170 yards with a single shot from his 7mm Mag. It weighed 205 pounds and had a 146-inch rack.

Linville entered the buck in Carolina Sportsman's Bag-A-Buck contest, and he was drawn on Oct. 1 as the winner of the August-September monthly contest.

Linville will receive a free one-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman* and a \$25 gift certificate to the online Sportsman's

Store. He will be eligible, along with every other contest entry, for the grand prize: a two-day deer/hog combo hunt for two people at Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield County, S.C., a \$50 gift certificate to the online Sportsman Store, a free, three-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman* and an Energy Elite bow.

All because he passed the buck in 2018.

"I saw him two or three times last year, but I had already killed a buck I thought would make the state record book, so I didn't kill him," said Linville, a 30-year-old UPS employee.

"The first trail-camera shot this year, near the end of June, you could see how much he'd blown up," said Linville, who was hunting on private land in Barnwell County.

But the buck disappeared from his trail camera for about two weeks in



September; Linville figured he'd moved to acorns and was by-passing his area. Until about 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 28, when the buck showed up, crossing a logging road within sight of Linville's stand. Moments later, the buck was down.

Linville's buck carried a 5x5 main-frame rack with a sticker on each beam. It was 15 inches wide, with 20- to 21-inch beams. ■

SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Don Hawkins killed his 11-point, 157-inch, 236-pound monster buck in Guilford County, N.C., on Sept. 13.



James MCue Jr., killed this 9-point, 200-pound Guilford County buck on Sept. 7. It scored 155% points.



Brandon Johnson of Mount Airy, N.C., killed this giant 8-point Surry County buck on Sept. 7, the opening day of statewide archery season.



Daniel Clarida of Reidsville, N.C., took this huge, 12-point Rockingham County buck on Sept. 15. It scored 150%.



Mark Haslam of Savannah, Ga., killed this two great bucks in Barnwell County, S.C., on Aug. 28.



Jonathan Phillips of Pittsboro, N.C., dropped this high-racked 8-point buck on Sept. 8 in Chatham County.

Tory Pegg of Greensboro, N.C., killed this 31-point, Guilford County non-typical on Sept. 7. It's the state-record archery non-typical for Buckmasters.



Mark Rice of Kernersville, N.C., killed this 10-point Rockingham County buck on Sept. 7.



Ryan Long of Greensboro, N.C., killed this 155-inch, 10-point Guilford County buck on Sept. 7.



Tootie Morris of Rougemont, N.C., took this 17-point, 200-pound, 159½-inch buck on Sept. 7 in Granville County.



ON THE COVER

Scott Taylor killed this 10-point, 140-inch Rockingham County buck on Sept. 20, two days after killing a 9-point, 130-inch trophy.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, visit www.carolinasportsman.com and visit the deer-hunting section.

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Outdoor
UPDATE



PATCH PROGRAM TARGETS YOUTHS

NC group offers reward patches for completing outdoor activities

Think of them as Boy Scout merit badges, without the scouts. That's a short description of a program to reward with patches any youths (and adults) who complete tasks involving the outdoors.

The N.C. Outdoor Heritage Patch Program is the product of the N.C. Outdoor Heritage Advisory Council, an offshoot of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Its role is to try and get more people involved in outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, camping and hiking — at the same time participation numbers are dropping nationwide.

Olivia Baughman, the Council's marketing and communications manager, said the program went cranked up this past July, and that there's been "good response" from the public.

"The goal is to help expose more youth to all of the outdoor heritage opportunities we have," she said. "Some kids already hunt, some fish, but they don't do everything else."

"We hope it's something that will encourage everybody to do more."

Twelve patches are featured in the 2019 offerings: hiking, bird watching, bear hunting, deer hunting, duck or turkey hunting and fishing for brook trout, catfish, dolphin, largemouth bass, red drum or striped bass.

Youth or adults can obtain forms from www.NCOutdoorHeritage.org, fill them out when a task is finished, and return them for a patch. They're free for youths ages 16 and under; people older than 16 can get each patch for a \$5 donation.

Baughman said the Council plans to add additional patches to the program every year. ■



THE

LOCKDOWN

THE PEAK OF THE RUT IS OFTEN A TOUGH TIME TO COME FACE-TO-FACE WITH A BUCK. HERE'S WHY AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

■ By Phillip Gentry

If deer season had a halftime intermission, that time would be now.

The season has been open — depending on which of Carolinas and which zone or region you hunt — since either mid-September, the first of October, or back during the summer in mid-August.

Many deer hunters have a phrase describing the middle of November; it's affectionately known as "The Lock Down." The reference is to the one- to two-week period when sightings of and encounters with bucks slow down dramatically or come to a screeching halt.

"Lock Down" is often used to describe the period of peak breeding for white-tailed deer. Generally, the entire breeding cycle can be broken down into the pre-rut, seeking/chasing phase, peak rut (lock down), and the post-rut.

The suggested reason for this reduction in buck sightings — but not necessarily deer sightings — is that at the peak of the rut, bucks are holding tight to females, especially mature females that have quit running from them and decided it's time to breed.

It's essentially the only time that real deer world even slightly resembles the beloved Disney movie *Bambi*. The great Prince of the Forest is closely attuned to the needs of Bambi's mother and won't stray from her side, and even Bambi might get a kick to the head if he doesn't learn to stay out of the bedroom.

The existence of a lock down is made under the assumption that all deer in a given area are breeding at the same time. According to Charles Ruth, deer project coordinator

BELOW: When bucks quit crisscrossing the woods and concentrate on a single doe, the chances of catching him cruising drop dramatically.

for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, years of age-data from wildlife biologists would support this, to a degree.

"Many years of deer reproductive data indicate that the peak breeding time is from mid-October to mid-November for the bulk of (South Carolina)," Ruth said. "Approximately 80% of the females examined over all years conceived during the period of Oct. 6 through Nov. 16. More specifically, the last week in October and the first week in November represent the peak, with the average doe conceiving on about Oct. 30. Of course there is a bell-shaped distribution of breeding dates around this average date."

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission produced a map in 2018 of dates of peak breeding in 84 of the state's 100 counties. According to the map (www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Hunting/Documents/Deer/Deer-Rut-Dates-2018.pdf), peak breeding dates run from Oct. 17 in the southeast to Dec. 19 in the western mountains.

Other deer hunters say the lock down is merely a myth, made up by unsuccessful hunters as an excuse for too-much hunting pressure on the same stands at the same predictable times of day. Another philosophy is that there is not a hard and fast rut, but that deer are prone to breed at any and all times from early October through the end of January. This suggestion is made by observation of fawns from the same year-class with decided age gaps and rutting/chasing behavior starting earlier and later than the prescribed time.

Ruth does offer a bell-curve behavior explanation, saying that rutting activity varies based on the topography of the state you are hunting.

"Our studies show the peak breeding along the immediate coast in South Carolina occurs from Oct. 1 through Nov. 1," said Ruth. "However, over most of the state, it occurs from Oct. 15 through Nov. 15. Then, you have a later rut up in the mountains in Game Zone 1 in the northwest part of the state, it peaks between Nov. 15 and Dec. 15."



Jody Shults rattled in this nice buck during the peak of the rut.



Jodie Shults

MAKE SOME NOISE

Veteran deer hunter and taxidermist Jody Shults prefers to get on the ground to stalk big bucks when the "Lock Down" arrives.

"Most hunters think rattling is only something that works in big, open areas like Texas or Montana," said Shults. "I'll rattle for bucks once the conditions get right, but I'd prefer to do it in tighter areas where I have a better chance of seeing the deer before he sees me.

"I only want to be able to see about 50 yards around me when I start rattling. That way, I can tell more about what a buck is doing. If he runs and goes the other way, it was probably a smaller buck. A good buck will often charge right in and start pawing around and rubbing trees, or a smarter one may circle around and try to get in behind the rattling sound."

Shults suggests that deer hunters forget the big, plastic rattling antlers commercially made for deer hunters and go with a real set of horns from a buck with a smaller rack. He prefers antlers from a 6- or 8-point buck with a 12- to 14-inch spread. He believes a buck responds better to a smaller deer that invades its territory than a monster, and that bucks judge the size of the invading deer by the sound produced by its rattling antlers.

"It's very similar to turkey hunting," he said. "I'll sit down next to a tree wearing a 3-D leafy camo suit and start rattling the horns, thrashing the bushes and pound the ground next to me to make it sound like hoof beats. Then I'll wait a couple of minutes and do it again. If nothing shows up, I'll pick up and stalk into another area where I can get a change of scenery and start all over." ■

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Because it's nearly a statistical impossibility for all deer to breed at the same time, the best method to increase trophy buck encounters is to change your hunting strategy. Closely monitor trail cameras, and change some camera locations to heavier cover. Try to re-establish buck movement patterns and pick a stand location that will allow you to intercept that buck during legal shooting times.

It is also the time to use the rutting tricks as well: more-aggressive calling, doe-in estrous attractants (where legal) and even some low-key rattling. If you are seeing does, and make sure these are not immature button bucks or yearling does, you are probably in as good a location as possible.

Outfitter Mike Noles of Conman's Guide Service in Creswell, N.C., said for properties that have a higher doe-to-buck ratio, a trickle rut is often the cure for continuing to see good bucks through the peak of the breeding season and a secondary rut.



Phillip Gentry

By hunting thicker areas on the edge of open areas, hunters may be able to pick up on deer movement, even when it has decreased during the rut.

"Our trickle rut is often more aggressive than the primary rut due to the reduced number of unbred does moving around with the same number of bucks," he said. "We suggest that our hunters use rattling and grunting tactics when the second rut comes in. But you need to be careful when hunting these secondary rut bucks. They have been mixing it up pretty good since the middle of October when the pre-rut started, and they won't tolerate a lot of loud antler crashing and dominant grunting.

"We have so many does in this part of the state that it is impossible for the bucks to get to them all during the primary rut," Noles said. "Most hunters reserve the latter part of the season for thinning out their doe herd and taking meat for the freezer, but from a biological standpoint, that is backwards."

Sooner or later, a suitor will come calling. ■



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.

PRAYING FOR RAIN ▶



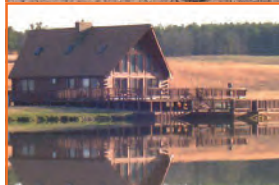
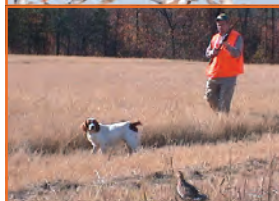
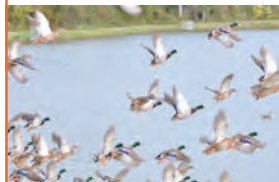
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Bucks like to freshen their scrapes immediately after a rain, so find a scrape line and watch it after bad weather passes by.

PRAYING FOR RAIN



Terry Madewell

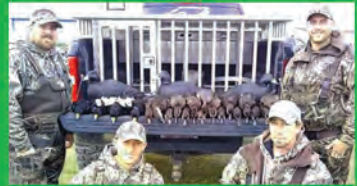
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It's always a good time to go deer hunting — unless you're Danny Dillard, a South Carolina deer-hunting legend.

Dillard is extremely selective when choosing times to hit the woods, and one of his favored times is right after a rain.

No, Dillard's not all wet. In fact, his strategy makes perfect sense. Rain, it seems, creates a "perfect storm," if you will.

First of all, a wet woods is a hushed woods. The sounds of rustling leaves and cracking sticks and twigs are muffled, which can work both for and against a hunter.

But there's no doubt that deer — and big bucks, in particular — feel more comfortable moving around in such conditions.

Such was the scenario in 2009 when Dillard bagged an Anderson County buck that qualified for the Boone & Crockett Club's all-time record book.

"I hadn't been in there much, because I didn't want to disturb it, but with all the rain, I knew I could slip in there quietly, and my scent wouldn't be as bad," Dillard said. "The key is to be near a scrape line when the rain stops."

Dillard was there at the right time on that fateful day and has attempted to replicate that strategy ever since. He said bucks

have an irrepressible urge to check their scrapes after they've been bedded down for a while, particularly after a heavy rain.

"I compare it to a teenager going on a first date or to the prom — he wants everything to be just perfect," Dillard said. "If he hasn't been out there in a while, and if he thinks his scrapes aren't perfect, he's going to come out there as soon as possible and start checking scrapes and making sure they're cleared out."

"I try to be there when he's doing that." ■

— Scott Keeper

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■ By L. Woodrow Ross

MOST OF US HAVE HEARD OF THE 90/10 RULE.

It states that 10% of fishermen or hunters take 90% of the fish and game. In fact, the disparity may be even greater. If your goal this deer season is to take a mature buck and join that 10%, there are steps that will help this to become a reality.

Russell Cooper is a successful bowhunter and former owner of Saluda River Archery in Piedmont, S.C. He has taken many great bucks, and his success is not an accident. He attributes much of it to the close attention he pays to scent control.

Cooper was analytical in his early approach to deer hunting. He recognized the superior sense of smell deer possess and studied how he could defeat them. He found that immature deer were more tolerant of human scent, but the mature bucks he targeted were very elusive.

Cooper began to experiment with cover scents, developing a couple of formulas that proved successful. He realized that

cover scents could not be 100% successful unless additional steps were taken to suppress human odor. He developed a formula for bathing that includes this recipe: combining hypo-allergenic laundry detergent, baking soda and alcohol. He uses a commercially available crystal rock deodorant that is unscented, hypo-allergenic and creates an invisible, protective barrier against odor-causing bacteria. In addition, Cooper also starts taking chlorophyll tablets before the season opens.

Another precaution Cooper takes is trimming foliage before the season so he avoids brushing against it as he travels to and from his stand. That would leave tell-tale human scent that would be detected by mature bucks.

Cooper goes so far as to have a separate washer and dryer that he uses only for hunting clothes. He is also an advocate of using UV-free detergents, knowing that deer can detect brighteners

BELOW: The attention Russell Cooper and Chuck Mulkey pay to scent control often pays off in nice bucks.



Hunting from a stand that's well off the ground can help keep your scent away from a buck's nose.



used in commercial detergents.

Cooper believes that mature bucks will notice any scents of human origin, even urine, and be alarmed, where younger bucks are not.

Cooper makes a cover-scent product he calls "Natural Cover." He has two formulas: one made from a proprietary blend of chlorophyll and evergreen oil, and one featuring his "smoke" formula. He is working on a third cover-scent formula that is a natural insect repellent as well.

Cooper said that Native Americans and early settlers used smoke to camouflage their scent. He said he's watched mature bucks that appeared to smell the smoke scent but were not alarmed because it masked human scent.

Chuck Mulkey, the owner of Chuck's Taxidermy and Deer Processing in Anderson, S.C., is also convinced of the superior scenting capabilities of deer. He tries to hunt from stands at a height of about 20 feet: a compromise high enough to avoid scent detection and low enough to have a good shot angle for archery hunting.

Early on, Mulkey hunted with little regard for scent control, but in his quest for big bucks, he was soon convinced that it was required. He now uses Scentlok and Dead Down Wind scent-control products, collects weeds and herbs common to areas that he hunts and distills a solution to spray on his clothing and gear to mask his scent by making it similar to the environment.

Mulkey also collects deer droppings, placing them near his stand. If he sees fresh droppings as he goes to his stand, he will step on them, so his boots leave the scent along his approach.

With regard to camo patterns, Mulkey prefers patterns with a lot of green for early season, but both he and Cooper like patterns that have bold areas of dark and light that make them blend into the foliage better. Cooper mentioned Vertigo, which has dark and white intermingled in a pattern that blends into most woodland environments. ■

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Any time deer hunters gather and conversation turns to white-tails, their sense of awareness with regard to predators is a topic. Deer have an uncanny ability to detect movement. They are uniquely adept at seeing blues and yellows. Clothing washed in detergents with brighteners (bluing agents) are easily spotted. They are far-sighted and can spot movement from amazing distances. Deer have excellent peripheral vision of 250, to 270 degrees.

The discussion will also focus on one of the most troublesome aspects of deer hunting: their ability to detect human scent. Every hunter should have a routine before each hunting trip that includes washing clothes in unscented detergent without brighteners and storing in a scent-free container.

Numerous cover scents are commercially available, made from natural or synthetic formulas. Regardless of the cover scent, several steps must be taken to avoid being detected.

- Shower with unscented soap or shampoo.
- Use unscented antiperspirant; bacteria causes human body odors and perspiration fosters bacteria.

- Avoid strong odors, such as smoking or pumping gasoline on the way to a hunting location.
- Setups must be downwind. Despite our best efforts, deer sometimes still detect our presence. Being downwind is good insurance. ■

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L. Woodrow Ross of Taylors, S.C., is a frequent contributor to outdoor magazines and newspapers. He is an instructor in fly-casting, fly-tying, primitive crafts and survival skills.



Rick Small

UNDERSTANDING By Rick Small
rubs

VETERAN OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHER SHARES HIS INSIGHTS ON THE MEANING OF DEER'S RUBBED TREES.

Rick Small

Rubs,

the marks that whitetail bucks leave on trees, are a means of communication and have several meanings to all deer.

As a wildlife photographer, I have watched bucks rub trees more times than I care to imagine. Bucks make rubs to strip the velvet off their antlers, but they do so for many other reasons. I have seen bucks use anything from honeysuckle, to briars, to bushes, to thick-limbed saplings to remove velvet. I saw — and got on film — one buck even use the strands of a barbed-wire fence to tear the velvet from his rack.

I am confident that my years of observations have helped me understand why bucks rub trees and bushes, even though my ideas may not hold true 100% of the time. The information can still be useful to hunters, helping them understand and pattern the behaviors of bucks on your hunting land.

Bucks make rubs by raking and twisting their antlers on trees, ranging in size from pencil-thin to thigh-sized. They make rubs for visual markings and scent markings to communicate their presence to other deer in their territory. Rubs also have the added benefit of helping to build and strengthen neck and shoulder muscles for use in their quest for dominance.

For visual markings, rubs are often made on tree species that have light-colored wood under the bark, which makes the rub more visible to other deer traveling through the area. Their choices depend on the tree species in their home ranges, but the trees I've seen used most often are pines.

An impressive buck rubs the base of his right antler on a rather substantial tree, leaving his scent and building his neck muscles.



Rick Small

Bucks that live in close proximity to each other may have differing tastes as to the species they prefer for their rubs. While some bucks prefer mostly soft wood, others favor hardwood species; pine vs. ironwood, for example. The species of trees rubbed can also have a bearing on “the look” of a buck’s antlers. Things such as the type of sap and the tree’s tannin content play a part in how dark or how light their racks will be stained.

Most rubs fall into the category of scent markers. Watching a buck make a rub can be very educational, much less exciting. A buck will rub his rack up and down a tree, trying to rub his forehead and eyes on the tree as much as possible. Using the bases of his rack for the majority of the rubbing, the buck will also twist, push and pull on the tree, depositing scent from glands located on his forehead and around his eyes. A buck will rub for a bit, stop to smell and lick where he just rubbed, then continue this sequence until he is satisfied he has left sufficient evidence of his presence in the area — sort of a “wash-rinse-repeat” scenario.

For a Rick Small video showing a big buck rubbing his horns on the strands of a barbed wire fence, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5deidL6CfGc>

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Understanding rubs

Almost all rubs on sizeable trees will at least be started by big bucks; smaller bucks may rub them after the bark has been torn off.

I have watched does and other bucks smell and lick rubs left by other deer to get an idea of which buck left that “calling card.” On several occasions, I have even seen two bucks take turns rubbing and scent-marking the same tree. Bucks also get the added benefit of building their muscles and stamina when they work each rub. With an overload of testosterone coursing through their bloodstreams for breeding, it is akin to you or I working out while taking steroids.

Rubs come in several categories: travel-route rubs, core-area/bedding-area rubs (both of which normally are in clusters), and boundary rubs. You can tell a lot about a buck and his territory by finding his rubs. Travel-route rubs are usually made on trees along the direction a buck uses to get from one part of his domain to another. They will be spaced out in a rough line along this route. The rubs will be on the side of the trees as the buck approaches them on his travels. Clusters, or rubs in close bunches, usually point to a buck’s core and/or bedding areas.



Rick Small

If nothing else, a rub will tell you a buck has spent time in that section of the woods.

How is the size of a rubbed tree related to the size of the rubbing it? I have never witnessed a young, small-racked buck start a rub on a tree of any size. Conversely, I have seen small bucks rub on large trees that already have a rub on them, probably made by a different, mature buck.

The larger the diameter of a tree, the harder it is for a small buck to rub his forehead and around the eyes to leave any scent. Large, mature bucks will rub most any size tree, from small to thigh-sized. Also, it is mostly true that the higher up a tree the rub goes, the bigger/taller the buck is that made it. ■

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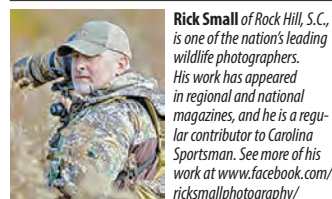
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Rick Small of Rock Hill, S.C., is one of the nation's leading wildlife photographers. His work has appeared in regional and national magazines, and he is a regular contributor to *Carolina Sportsman*. See more of his work at www.facebook.com/ricksmallphotography/

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Jeff Burleson

Deer will quickly find a new food source that appears in November, especially if it's a late-planted, tender cereal grain.

LATE-FALL FOOD IS A DEER MAGNET

WITH EARLY SEASON GOODIES GONE, WHAT'S LEFT?

Donna Brookshire

Over half the deer season is behind us, and the deer population in the Carolinas is much smaller than it once was back during August. But the season is long from being over.

Ample time remains for hunters to devise another strategy to scratch off a hit-list buck before Jan. 1. The combination of cooler weather and limited natural food sources makes cover crops on nearby agriculture fields a solid choice for a stand setup.

As the fall season ripens, the rut is far from over; bucks are on the prowl. Solid food sources turn into Grand Central Station in deer country. Acorns and other natural foods are becoming scarce, and lush greenery is a thing of the past. In agriculture areas, the fields of corn, peanuts, sweet potatoes and soybeans are picked clean, with few residual food stores left to supply deer and other wildlife through fall and early winter.

Most farmers plant cover crops to prevent erosion, retain soil moisture, and to provide a thick mat of vegetation to

combat the spring weed invasion. These cover crops are often made of cereal grains, including wheat, rye and triticale, crops that are cold-weather tolerant and are perfect opportunities to sustain during the winter. Deer, turkey and other wildlife species are crazy about these cereal grains, and a winter source of these grains is a prayer answered.

IMMEDIATE IMPACTS

Fortunately, these crops are appealing immediately after they break the soil's surface. It's like candy for deer and other wildlife, and these tender, green shoots are not only tasty, they are loaded with nutrition.

Deer and other wildlife will find these nutrient stores within days of arrival, and these animals will center their daily routines around these fields.

In the Carolinas, cover crops typically get sowed into the fields in late October and November, but they could be planted into December in some areas, depending on the previous crop and past weather conditions. Look for recent disking, and watch for those blackish-brown fields to

transform into a green hue after the tender rye or wheat begin to erupt through the soil's surface.

To get a jump on the herd movement, hunters can coordinate with their local farmer to see which fields will be getting a cover crop. Then, they can prepare their stands along the field edges or major travel corridors leading to and from these fields before the crops get into the ground.

Regardless, cover crops are target areas for deer and other species of wildlife during the late fall and winter months. With a solid food source available in these areas for the last half of the deer season, hunters can surely fill their last few deer tags. ■



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

PLANT CEREAL RYE RIGHT NOW

Not every hunting property features agriculture fields loaded with crops deer and other wildlife love.

If not, plant it, and they will come.

The fall food-plot planting season begins in September and is typically over by the middle of October — certainly by the end of October. But deer and other wildlife will flock to a field of cereal rye, even when planted as late as November, especially in areas with limited food resources. Cereal rye is a good, late-season choice for a food plot that will draw in the deer.

Cereal rye can produce as much as 25% usable crude protein, and it's quite tasty; it will bring deer in to munch daily. Luckily, rye is also resistant to heavy browsing and will readily re-sprout, providing a consistent, tender food source for the rest of the season.

Cereal rye isn't a new plant in the farming community. It originated in southwestern Asia and was imported to America in the 17th century by English and Dutch settlers. Rye is a small-seeded grain that is more tolerant of frost and drought than just about any other grain available, including wheat and oats.

Rye can be grown just about anywhere and in almost any soil type, including the clay-rich lands of the Carolinas' piedmont and the dry, sandy soils of the sandhills. Not only does it tolerate dry, sandy soils, it will thrive in these normally poor soil conditions. Additionally, rye tolerates higher-than-normal soil acidity than wheat, its distant cousin.

Rye is the most cold-tolerant cereal grain during germination and through its growth cycle. Most grass seeds germinate in temperatures between 50 and 70 degrees; rye can germinate during periods of 33-degree weather, and a well-established stand can withstand temperatures well below freezing for long periods of time. However, growth and re-growth from foraging will be slow in consistent temperatures near and below freezing. But in the Carolinas, consistent temperatures near and below freezing for long periods of time are few and far between in November and December.

One of the best aspects of planting rye is that it doesn't take a lot of specialized farming equipment to get a stand off the ground. A disk and a spreader are all that is normally required.

For the best results, a trifecta of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium should be applied



Jeff Burleson

IT FITS ANYWHERE:

Even the smallest of food plots, including this narrow shooting lane, can play host to a nice, late-fall planting of cereal rye, which will draw hungry deer.

at the time of planting in areas with a soil pH greater than 5.0. Forty to 50 pounds per acre of each should be applied for the best results. Rye should be broadcast-seeded at a rate of 140 to 150 pounds per acre right after or right before rainfall events to ensure the seeds and young seedlings get adequate moisture. Plants can withstand drought conditions only after the root systems develop deep into the soil strata. Prior to that, young plants need adequate moisture to survive.

Rye is a perfect late-season crop to establish on large food plots and even in shooting lanes only 20 feet wide, extending from a favorite tower stand. Deer love it, and it will quickly re-sprout after heavy use. ■



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STICKS & STRINGS

Sammy Romano



Randall Shaw

GARMIN'S XERO SIGHT EXPENSIVE BUT WORTH IT

RANGE-FINDING, ANTI-TORQUE FEATURES MAKE THIS A TOP-DRAWER SIGHT FOR ANY HUNTER'S BOW

Archery is a vast subject, with a nearly limitless number of topics, so it isn't often that I am compelled to revisit a product that has been featured in this column.

However, after installing a Garmin Xero A1i sight on my personal bow, I felt it was necessary. I highlighted this sight about two years ago after it debuted at the ATA show. It was the talk of the show, and although I ordered some for the shop, I was somewhat skeptical of how well they would work and hold up in hunting conditions.

Garmin has long been known for well-engineered, durable products that are user-friendly, and after more than two years of selling them, I'm happy to report that the Xero sights are no exception. Now that I am shooting this sight personally, I have an even better idea of how it works, giving me more insight into its benefits.

My initial reason for installing this sight

was its unique range-finding feature, but I've come to realize it has many additional, unexpected features that have drastically improved my shooting. I'll say this about the Garmin Xero A1i; I don't just like it, I love it!

NO RANGE? NO PROBLEM

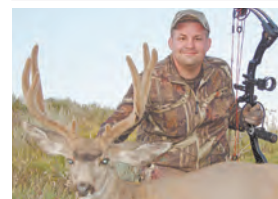
The primary feature of the Xero sight is its unique, range-finding feature. It not only ranges the target but also displays a lighted LED "pin" at the correct aiming point to hit the target dead center.

Yardage and shot angle are clearly displayed on an LCD screen just above the top of the sight ring, but because the sight illuminates only the correct aiming point, they are unnecessary to reference during the shot cycle. This is huge for the dynamic situations often encountered in the field while hunting.

The No. 1 worry for many bowhunters is distance to the target, with high or

low impacts often resulting in wounded game or longer tracking jobs. This helps to eliminate that worry, as well as the need to shuffle back and forth, clipping to and unclipping from your D-loop to pick up your range finder as the animal moves around.

The Xero uses a pressure switch mounted on the bow's grip to actuate the built-in range finder while at full draw, so if the target animal changes range during the shot sequence, it can quickly be ranged again, all without having to let down your bow. In my opinion, this is a game changer, especially when it comes to rutting whitetails. One drawback to the range-finding feature would



Sammy Romano is a life-long hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 24 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.

OPPOSITE: Garmin's Xero A1i sight (far left) covers every need a bowhunter might come up with when he comes to full draw on a trophy animal. The author said the sight was instrumental in making a killing shot on this alligator (left) because of its ability to compensate for steep-angle shots.

be the laser-striking brush between the bow and the target, thus illuminating the wrong pin. Garmin considered this, and this sight offers a fixed-pin option that can be used when hunting thicker cover.

UNEXPECTED BENEFITS, BETTER RESULTS

Although the range-finding feature alone would be well worth the investment, since installing the A1i on my bow, I have found several unexpected benefits of equal value. One is the reticle feature used while ranging the target. This is similar to the reticle on the IQ bow sights; it serves as both a torque indicator, as well as an additional reinforcement of anchor point. A reticle consisting of a green ring is centered around a red dot when the bow is properly aligned, leading to more consistent ranging as well as shot placement.

Today's ultra-parallel limb bows are more easily torqued, causing shots to impact left or right of the bull's-eye. This tendency is enhanced by the awkward positions often encountered in the field. Although I teach archery almost daily, I'm often guilty of torquing the bow myself. This feature has virtually eliminated my left and right misses.


Another unexpected benefit is sight clarity and an unobstructed view of the target. As an aging archer who struggles with being able to focus on both the pin and the target, as well as target panic, I now realize how much my inability to see clearly was a contributing factor to both my inaccuracy and target panic. Although there are magnified sights and peeps to help with this, I find this sight works much better for my eyes, and not having to worry about dew or snow in my peep lens is a major plus. The Xero A1i also has a light sensor, that when enabled, automatically adjusts the pin brightness to the optimum level, eliminating the need for tinkering with a sight light at dusk and dawn.

There are very few drawbacks to the Garmin Xero A1i. One is that it is currently not legal for use in Florida and

several western states. I expect this may change as regulations catch up to technology, because if anything, it helps to reduce the number of wounded animals. Another is its higher price. With a retail of almost \$1,000, it costs as much as many high-end bows. That being said, for all of the money hunters spend to get to the moment of a shot at a big-game animal with a bow, I consider this minimal due to its obvious benefits.

Last, it helps to have a second person when setting up the Garmin Xero. Although I found setup to be relatively easy, this sight is not for the archer who struggles to program a smart phone or TV remote. If you are one of those people, seek help from someone who is tech-savvy when setting your sight. Other than that, it will make you more effective than ever and lead to a better experience. Stop by a Garmin retailer and check one out soon. ■

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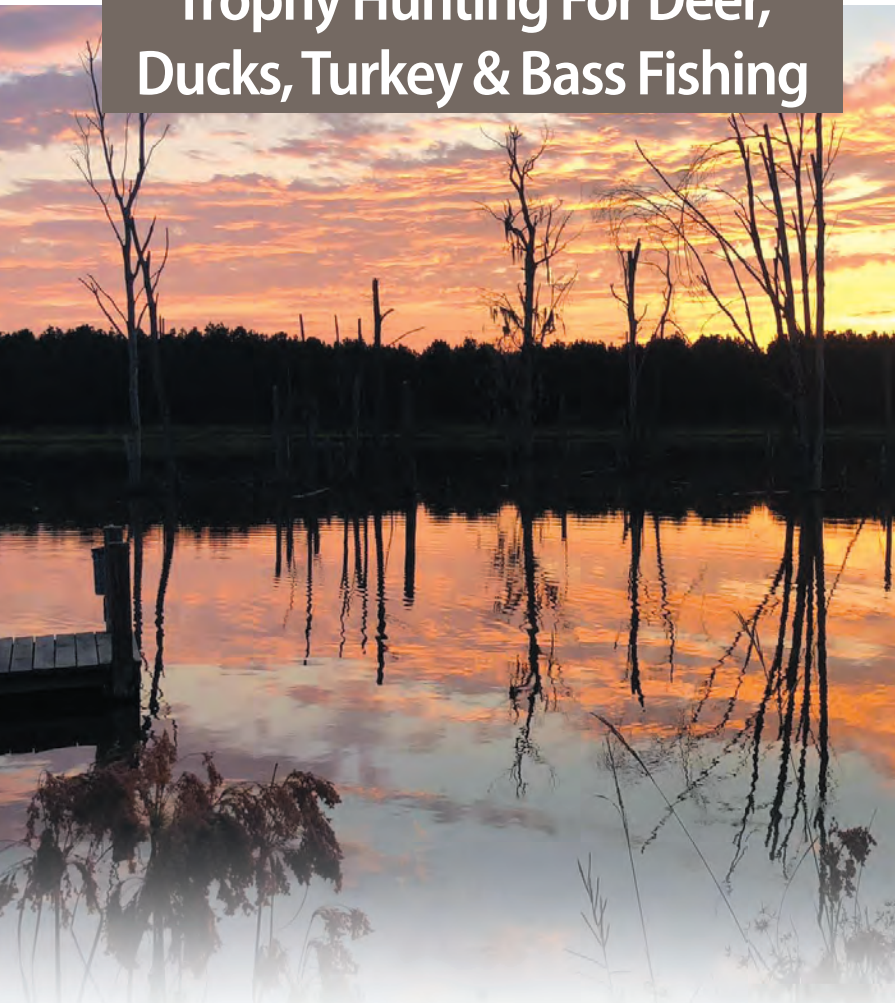
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WANT A BEAR RUG BUT DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO PRIVATE LAND OR THE MONEY FOR A GUIDED HUNT? HERE'S HOW TO SET UP ON EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA'S MANY GAME LANDS FOR A BLACK BEAR.

By Anthony Corbo

NO state offers its big-game hunters the opportunity to tangle with the biggest black bears in North America like North Carolina, especially on public lands, and especially in the eastern third of the state.

Public-land hunters who do their homework stand an awfully good chance of seeing and getting a shot at a bruin on eastern North Carolina game lands. Just get that hunting license, big-game license and bear stamp, visit the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's on-line bear page (www.ncwildlife.org/Learning/Species/Mammals/Black-Bear) and its on-line Game Lands pages (www.ncwildlife.org/Hunting/Where-To-Hunt-Shoot/Public-Places, which are full of maps that can lead you to a good starting point.

SCOUTING >

**D-I-Y
BRUINS**



Rick Small

SCOUTING

Boots on the ground. Scouting is the most-important factor in a public-land bear hunt. If I hunt one day, I have probably have scouted four to six times earlier.

I will be looking for food sources whether it's agriculture — corn and soybeans — or natural browse, including nut trees and berry bushes. Bears will defecate on or near their food. It lets other bears know the pecking order and establishes dominance, and it allows the bear to pinpoint his food sources so he can relocate them for future feeding.

Seeing one bear pile isn't significant. There will be many piles in an area, and this will tell you that you're in an area that bears are frequenting. Bears like to cross bodies of water — streams or canals — at a bridge or downed tree to stay dry. If you find either in a bear area, realize this spot will be the place they will want to walk to get across.

I use trail cameras, and this lets me know the bears in a specific area and builds confidence in my hunt areas. Use whatever camera you can afford, and use a bear box. Cameras should be checked during the middle of the day to keep disturbance to a minimum.

ACCESS TO LAND

Often, gates are placed across roads to prevent vehicle travel on public land. I do a lot of walking to learn new places. Walking a mile or two away from access points will alleviate 90% of potential competition. This can be good, because it will deter the less-motivated hunter. I have used canoes and bicycles to get away from parking areas.

The majority of time, I scout in Hyde, Tyrell and Washington counties in northeast North Carolina, all counties that have high bear densities. Many public lands will adjoin bear sanctuaries. Also, look for the possibility of draw hunts.

MAPS AND APPS

I am a big fan of the app HuntStand; however, I have also used onX Hunt. Utilizing these apps, a hunter can mark trails and stand sites. This is vital, because keeping your presence to a minimum and hiding your access points are imperative for a successful hunt. Additionally, you can read topo maps and look for bodies of water, dikes that can get you into isolated ground and view transition lines, walkable land to swamp areas and high points such as isolated islands and ridges. HuntStand has a GIS option that allows you to see property lines and landowners.

Also you can get in contact with people to see about an alternative access point then the traditional walking paths made by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.



Anthony Corbo

NORTH CAROLINA BEAR FACTS

2017-18	Statewide Harvest:	3,454
2017-18	Coastal Harvest:	2,138
2017-18	Coastal Harvest on Game Lands:	104

TOP COASTAL COUNTIES [2017-18]

1. Hyde	269
2. Beaufort	228
3. Tyrrell	185
4. Jones	158
5. Bladen	121

TOP COASTAL GAME LANDS [2017-18]

1. Croatan National Forest	26
2. Buckridge	19
3. Dare	15
4. Bladen Lakes State Forest	10

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STAND PLACEMENT

Hunting the wind. I like to hunt a crosswind or be on the downwind side of where I think the bear may come from, because a bear's nose is its best defense. Wash your hunting clothes in scent-free detergents, don't use the boots you plan on hunting in for anything else. Spray down with scent killer once you get out of your truck. I like to keep my hunting gear in a scent-free bag and get dressed in the field.

Watch your step. Don't walk on the trails where you expect the bear to come from. If I suspect a bear is using a



OPPOSITE: North Carolinas has some of the most-extensive, bear-filled public hunting lands in the Southeast.

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specific trail, I will do my best not walk on the trail or have the animal between myself and the stand site. A bear's nose is the one thing you don't fool.

Stay high. Being as high as you can is imperative so your scent will stay above the bear. I have used climbing stands and ladder stands. Climbers' advantage is they can be placed by one person and are mobile. You can get 25 feet off the ground if necessary. A ladder stand must be installed by two hunters but has the potential for you to buddy hunt — and a more secure feel.

EQUIPMENT

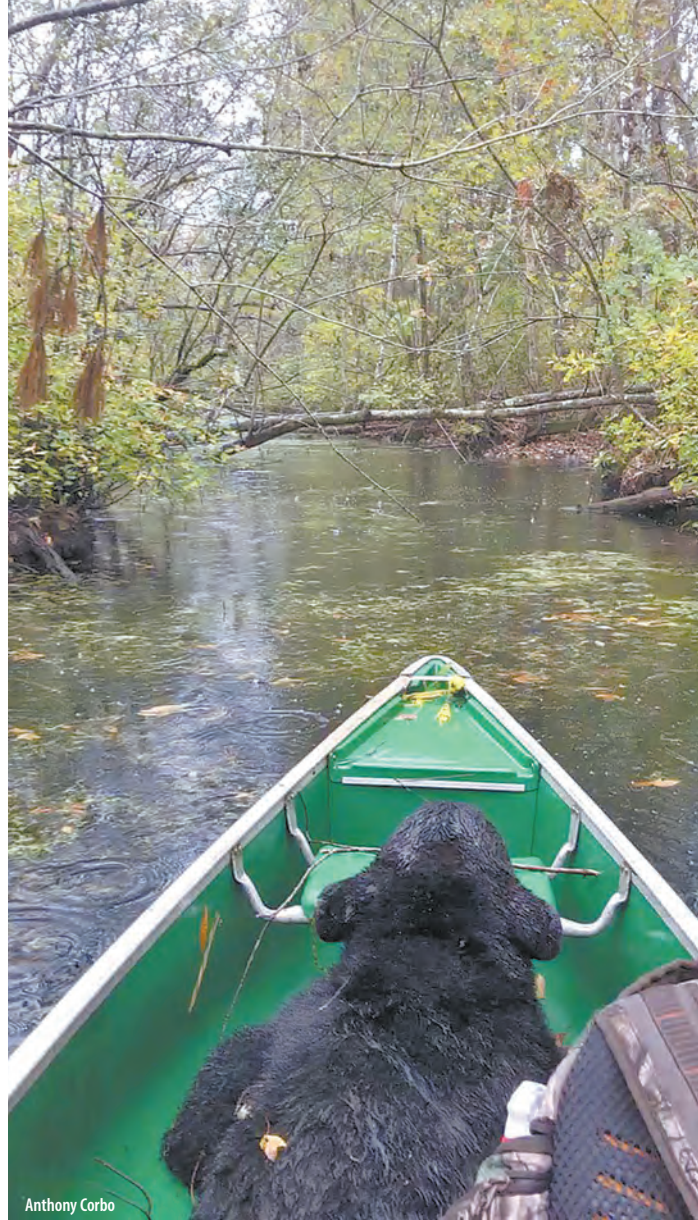
Climbing stands vs ladder stands. Any stand will work. I personally would rather have two less-expensive stands as opposed to a single expensive one, so I can have options. Ladder stands usually have better rests but only allow you to go so high. They are more bulky, heavier and harder to carry deep into the woods.

Shotgun or rifles. Whatever you use, be sure it is a shotgun with slugs or large-caliber rifle and quality ammo. A bear is a tough animal, so marginal or questionable shots will not bring your trophy down. I personally prefer a shotgun with a sabot slug for a heart or lung shot. Larger-caliber rifles with heavy ammo will also do the trick.

Most hunters aren't capable of making head shots; I recommend a broadside shot. Further back is better than in the shoulder; most of the time, a shoulder shot will end in a lost bear. Whether you use a rifle or shotgun, practice with your weapon and be proficient. If you have the chance to shoot a bear that is still showing signs of life after the first shot, take that additional shot. Tracking in a thick Carolina Bay isn't exactly easy.

TECHNIQUES

Calling. I have had success calling bears with both a doe can call and a single-reed rabbit-in-distress call. I turn the can call over four to five times every 20 to 30 minutes, changing the pitch and tone to sound like a doe in trouble or lost. Fawns and wounded deer are a favorite food among bears, especially older bears that have a history hearing such noises and assimilating it to a dinner bell. When using the rabbit call,



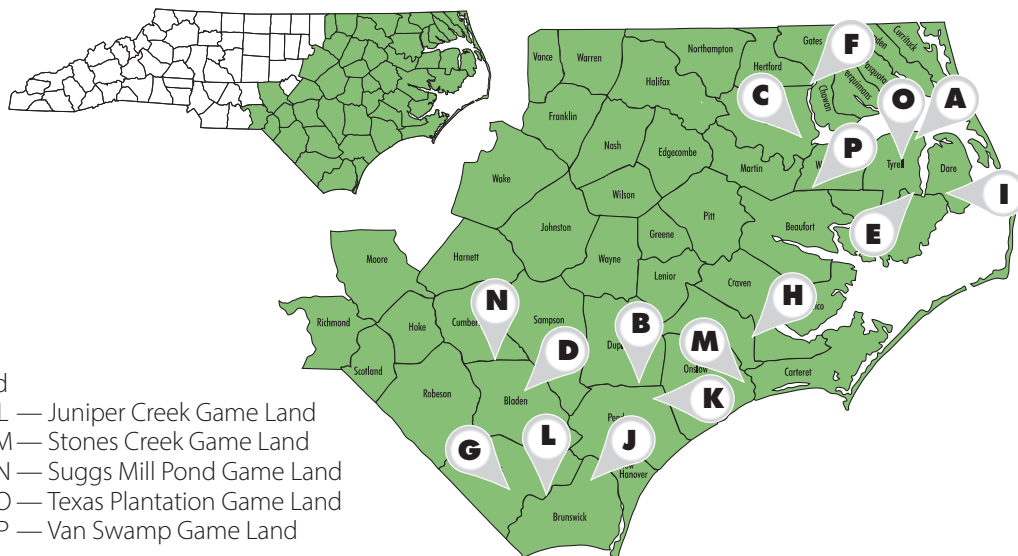
Anthony Corbo



Deer can calls, rabbit-in-distress calls and deer scent products can help a bear set-up seem much more realistic to a bruin. **ABOVE:** You can often better access some areas of public game lands via water in creeks or canals; be looking for fallen trees crossing the water that bears will use.

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA BEAR GAME LANDS

- A — Alligator River Game Land
- B — Angola Bay Game Land
- C — Bertie Game Land
- D — Bladen Lakes State Forest
- E — Buckridge Game Land
- F — Chowan Swamp Game Land
- G — Columbus County Game Land
- H — Croatan National Forest
- I — Dare Game Land
- J — Green Swamp Game Land
- K — Holly Shelter Game Land
- L — Juniper Creek Game Land
- M — Stones Creek Game Land
- N — Suggs Mill Pond Game Land
- O — Texas Plantation Game Land
- P — Van Swamp Game Land



change your tone and diction to add realism. I like to use calls in addition to doe urine to add additional authenticity to the set. You can lay down a drag rag, downwind on a trail for a bear to pick up the scent of the deer they think is in the area.

Be where bears traditionally want to travel. You can hunt hard and long, but if you aren't where the bears traditionally walk or feed, you are wasting your time. Hunt fresh sign and only the most recent information.

Baiting. If you see a deer during your hunt, you may shoot it and hunt over it. The bear's keen nose will smell the blood, and if the bear is within close proximity, it will come investigate.

BENEFITS

The potential to gain more knowledge and woodsmanship. Hunting public land will make you a better hunter. Learn from your hunts and apply your knowledge to future hunts.

Rewards are greater when you're successful on public lands; that's a trophy in itself.

It's more affordable than a fully guided hunt on private land or a lease. A guided hunt over bait or with hounds can cost, on average, \$2,000 to \$3,000. If you have more time than money or rather feel the pride and satisfaction from a D-I-Y hunt this may be for you.

DRAWBACKS

Planning and time is involved. To be successful on public land, it takes a lot of preparation, scouting, setting up and leg work. If you're not motivated and fully involved, success may bypass you.

There is the potential that someone could come and ruin your public-land hunt, because what's there for you is also there for your competition. Leave little or no footprint, and be stealthy with your findings.

Some game lands have smaller windows

NORTH CAROLINA BEAR SEASONS

- Oct. 14-Nov. 23 & Dec. 16-Jan. 1, 2020:** In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties
- Nov. 16-Jan. 1, 2020:** Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Union counties
- Oct. 12-Jan. 1, 2020:** Franklin, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties
- Nov. 23-Jan. 1, 2020:** Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties
- Nov. 12-Jan. 1, 2019:** Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Robeson, Sampson counties
- Nov. 9-24, Dec. 14-29:** Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell counties
- Nov. 9-17, Dec. 14-29:** Camden, Chowan, Craven, Hertford, Jones, Martin, Washington counties
- Nov. 17-Dec. 16:** Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Pitt, Wayne, Wilson counties
- Nov. 11-Jan. 1, 2020:** Edgecombe, Bladen, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Roberson, Sampson counties

to pursue a bear. Some are only open for three-day hunts, which means you have to be efficient with your hunts.

When you get your bear down, you have options based on manpower and the size of the bear. I have carried bear out on my back and put them on an army cot when there were additional hunters to assist. If you are hunting by yourself and you get a sizeable bear down, a pack-out may be the best option. A military style duffle bag is a handy thing to carry out the meat and hide. ■



Anthony Corbo of Shawboro, N.C., has been hunting bears, deer and turkeys on public lands for more than 20 years. He served in the U.S. Air Force and is a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom.

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A man wearing a white baseball cap with a blue logo and sunglasses around his neck is smiling while holding a large largemouth bass. The fish is held horizontally, showing its side profile. The background is a bright, sunny day over a body of water with some trees in the distance.

Fall and the lure of baitfish send bass on a trip back into the shallows of lakes' tributary creeks. Here's how to find them and catch them.

FOLLOW THE BASS HIGHWAY

By Jeff Burleson

I t's November, and fall is in full swing, with college football on the tube, big bucks on the move, and it's an excellent time to fish at the coastal and inland. While many anglers may choose to sit in a deer stand at dawn, there isn't a better time to chase one of the South's favorite finned targets: largemouth bass. Bass fishing in November can be off the chain in shallow water in many Carolina reservoirs.

Most bass anglers look forward to spring, when bass run into shallow water to spawn. During spawning season, bass are busy laying eggs and protecting their fry from predators. Without a doubt, the season can produce a good bite and lots of rod-bending action.

The fall shifts bass into the shallows as an area of similar real estate, but with an entirely different reasoning for travel — their appetite being the major cause.

Bass pro Jamie Pierce from Hallsboro, N.C., knows fall action on bass can be fantastic in shallow water.

"Bass move shallow in the fall and gorge on shad and other baitfish," Pierce said. "The fish really fatten up in preparation for the colder months on the way."

The critters inhabiting lakes and rivers undergo major lifestyle shifts in response to changes in the seasons and

environmental conditions. When it comes to bass, the fall shift can be super productive in the right territory, and the right territory is the shallow regions of the lake.

"The water flips this time of year; that causes the shad and the bass to move higher in water column and into areas with better oxygen," he said.

The water flip, aka turnover, is when the waters near the surface cool, the cooler, heavier water sinks and dissolves the summer thermocline. Poorly oxygenated water disperses, and lake life looks for better-oxygenated water near the surface, or better, in the shallow coves where highly oxygenated water is present. Additionally, shallow coves will have warmer water due to being protected from the wind, and they get more direct sunlight. The baitfish will move shallow first, and the predators will follow.

continues >



Bass fishermen have dozens of different kinds and sizes of rods to match the baits they're using and the places they're fishing them.

Jeff Burleson

SELECTING THE RIGHT ROD

A few decades ago, a 6½-foot spinning or casting rod was a standard tool for bass fishermen. But there isn't such a thing as a standard spinning or casting rod any more. Technological advancements in materials and field tests from professional anglers have enabled rod companies to produce the best equipment possible, to improve all aspects of fishing from casting to retrieving.

Rod manufacturing is driven by fishing technique, and in the bass-fishing world, the selections are as wide as the Mississippi River. Choosing the right rod can be daunting, but many rods built for the bass-fishing community have shortened the learning curve.

Pro angler Jamie Pierce has fished for bass from Florida's St. Johns River to the St. Lawrence River along the Canadian border. Rod selection is vital in his preparation process; he makes sure he brings the right equipment for the right job.

"I like certain rods for certain tasks," Pierce said. "My rods will have specialized characteristics from the length of the butt end, to the size of the eyelets, and the flexibility and power throughout the entire length of the blank."

Over the years, Pierce has used, literally, a boat-load of rods from about every company on the planet that makes them. He's currently using Douglas rods.

"(They) are lightweight, durable, and they have the exact rods that I want for a few of my specific techniques," he said.

Pierce uses two rods in the company's XMATRIX Series for most techniques he uses in most tournaments: a 7-foot, 8- to 12-pound class medium-action rod, and a 7-foot-2, medium-heavy rod with a fast tip.

"The 7-foot (rod) is my perfect topwater rod because it has good backbone, a fast-action tip, a shorter handle, and it's just the right length. The short handle doesn't hit you in the side, and you can control it better at 7 feet than a longer version. The fast action allows you to retain hooksets and provides a mechanism to work the topwater with finesse," he said.

The 7-foot-2 rod is for fishing spinnerbaits and other lures that are heavier in dense cover.

"I need this second rod to still have the soft tip to make it land where I want to and the extra backbone to get him out of heavy cover," he said.

High-quality rods provide anglers with improved ability with less fatigue because high-quality rods are made of lighter and stronger materials. ■



Target fall bass with baits that will draw reaction strikes.

Jeff Burleson

FOLLOW THE BASS HIGHWAY

Bass get aggressive and tuned into baitfish movements when they begin to feed up in preparation for winter.

"I head to the backs of the coves in the fall. On reservoirs with lots of fingers, I go into the backs of these fingers and stay in water less than 8 feet deep," he said.

Pierce heads back into coves and shallow places looking for visual evidence of bait on the surface and on his depth finder. If bait is present, bass will be there feeding.

In the fall, lure selection is less important than in other seasons. Bass surround schools of bait and attack, getting as many fish dinners in their mouths they can stand.

"Fish are quick to react on fast-moving and noisy lures that resemble shad or injured shad. Reaction baits are my first choice for fall fishing," Pierce said.

Pierce will use topwater lures, jerkbaits, lipped and lipless crankbaits, spinnerbaits and any other lures that will quickly grab a fish's attention.

"If you like to use reaction-type baits, the fall is by far the best time of year," he said. "Not only do these baits work well, you can catch big numbers of fish, too, because these fish are feeding in schools."

The weather can play a vital role in fall fishing success, but is it the actual rain, wind, cloud cover or sunshine, or is it something else?

Tournament fishing takes Pierce to the water in all weather conditions. Pierce recognizes certain weather patterns that produce better catches than others.

"We get a lot of cold fronts in the fall, and some of the best



action is during the worst weather days, when it's rainy and cold. But it's also when the pressure is at its lowest. The low-pressure days are the best for bass fishing in the fall," he said.

Approaching fronts impact the barometric pressure. As fronts arrive, the pressure falls, and the fish bite better than after a front when the pressure is rising. Pierce prefers to fish when pressure is either falling or at its lowest.

"The temperature and wind don't matter much as much as the pressure; the fish will feed unbelievably on days with falling pressure in the fall, he said. ■



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

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FIND BAITFISH, FIND BASS. CATCH 'EM SHALLOW ON A SQUARE-BILLED BAIT



Dan Kibler

Just about every bass fisherman you talk with will point to the spring as their favorite time to fish, but I can make a pretty good argument for November.

Late fall is probably my favorite time to be out on the water — certainly one of my favorites. You've got all the colorful leaves, and you don't have a lot of recreational boat traffic; most people have put their jet skis in dry storage.

And the fishing is good.

The very beginning of fall, at the end of September, that can be one of our toughest times to fish, but when you get into late October and November, the water temperature has cooled, but it's not cold enough to keep you off the water. The water temperature is in the 60s, maybe up to 70, and because fish are cold-blooded, they're very active at those temperatures. Also, on a lot of our Carolina lakes, the water level will be a little lower, so you'll have good water clarity, and you don't have to worry about having to fish in extremely dirty water like you have to in the spring.

THE HUNT BEGINS

Bass will be really keyed in on baitfish, and when I start back into a creek — I'm going to avoid the main lake — I'm probably not going to put my trolling motor down until I see baitfish on my Humminbird graph.

I'll start at the mouth of a creek and idle back for five or 10 minutes, from the mouth to the middle to the back. If I don't see baitfish, I'll pick up and go to the next creek. They might be around the mouth; they might be around the middle; they might be all the way back.

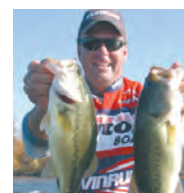
What this does is reduce the amount of time you waste looking for fish. This is especially important if you are just a weekend fisherman with limited time. You don't want to spend hours fishing and not catching. You want to find the bait, because that's where the bass will almost always be this month.

When I do see baitfish, either on my depth finder or visually, on the surface, I'll start fishing, and the first thing I'll throw is a square-billed crankbait, something

like a Rapala BX Brat, in a shad color.

What I'll be looking for will be the first shallow target I see, either vegetation, wood or rock. Wood could be willow trees, brush, blowdowns, stumps, even boat docks. I can cover a lot of water with that crankbait to try and get a pattern started; you have to get your first bite or two before you can really determine which pattern the bass will be in.

In November in the Carolinas, most of the fish are going to be in 1 to 6 feet of water, and that square-bill will cover those depths very well. It will come through cover; it rides over the cover, and that wide wobble also helps it kick over cover. The other thing is, the middle of the bait is balsa wood — the outside is hard plastic — so if you jam it into some-



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

thing, just stop winding, and it will float up.

I'll fish a BX Rap on a 7-foot, medium-action Bass Pro Shops Carbonlite rod with a Johnny Morris signature series reel spooled with 14-pound XPS fluorocarbon.

The other reason I start shallow in November is I want to eliminate the easy stuff first. It takes longer offshore to find gangs of fish, but if they're shallow, you'll know it immediately. You spend less time searching and more time fishing.

PAY ATTENTION

So, when you do get a bite on the crankbait, you need to take a minute and think about where that fish came from. Stop for at least 30 seconds and think about whether that fish came off wood, rock or some kind of vegetation; remember, you're only casting to targets. And how deep was that fish?

Then, you can go and look for other places like that. You catch another fish on that kind of spot, and you're getting a pattern developed. Once that starts to work, you can do some other things.

If I go to a place where I think I should catch a fish, and I don't get a bite on the crankbait, I'll pick up a Buckeye mop jig and work that cover thoroughly. But I won't start with a jig. I love to fish a jig as much as anybody, but I won't start with one, because you can spend way too much time fishing it, looking for fish. But if I'm on a place where I think the fish should be, I'll pick that place apart.

So, hopefully you killed that big buck back in September when the fishing wasn't too good, so plan to spend plenty of time on the water this month, looking around for a big, green trophy. The fishing should be great, and if you follow this advice, it might even turn out easy. ■



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Guide Mike McComas caught this chunky spotted bass off a Lake Jocassee point.



JOCASSEE'S BASS TURN ON

Pat Robertson

as weather cools in SC's Upstate

November is a favorite month on Lake Jocassee for guide Rob McComas of Mill Spring, N.C., because "a lot of big fish are very active, and a lot of fish are active, period."

"You can catch some big largemouth bass, and you can also find a lot of schools of spotted bass and smaller largemouths roaming around the lake," he said.

McComas said bass will be migrating back into the rivers in November. A lot of fish will be halfway to all the way back, but a lot that are not migrating will be on points and around good, laydown trees. Schools of spots and smaller largemouths will be roaming across almost any point in the 30-foot range, he added.

"The bigger largemouths will take topwater lures on cloudy days. If it is sunny, you might have to fish a little bit deeper, but not Jocassee deep," he said. "For the larger bass, I like to throw various topwater lures and swimbaits, and for the schooling bass, I like to fish a drop-shot."

The key to tricking bigger bass is stealth, McComas said.

"I try to make the longest cast possible on points and laydowns," he said. "I try to make my first cast or two the best casts I can make. I don't want to make a sloppy cast. I work my way in and get the boat in a good position, then make my first casts on the good spots."

McComas (828-674-5041) tries to parallel a laydown, but he really focuses on the retrieve so his bait comes by the end of the tree in the prime location. He prefers to cast and retrieve across points, however, rather than casting into or along them.

A little wind is a bonus when targeting the bigger bass in Jocassee's clear water, he said.

"I like to cast into the wind. If a point has a steeper side, I like to cast across the point and bring the bait back to where it comes over the deep edge, so I have my boat positioned on the deep side," he said.

One of McComas' prime baits is the MS Slammer swimbait.

"It's really a big wake bait," he said. "Sometimes, I like to wake it on top, and sometimes I crank it down under the surface."

When he locates schools of spotted bass and smaller largemouths on the graph, he lets the drop-shot fall right into the school.

"If those fish are active they will bite it pretty quick. I used to prefer watermelon and green pumpkin for worm color, but the last year or so I have got more into light purple and light pink."

As winter progresses and water temperatures decline even more, he said, he will fish more with jiggging spoons on the deeper fish. ■

— Pat Robertson

SCHOOLING SPOTS

keep Lake Norman anglers plenty busy

Gus Gustafson of Lake Norman Ventures said November is a good time to catch Lake Norman's big spotted bass.

"The spots are bulking up for winter and roaming the lake in large schools, especially below the (NC) 150 bridge," said Gustafson (www.fishingwithgus.com). "It's a good time to catch fish from 2 to 2½ pounds."

Even bigger spots are a possibility. Mt. Mourne's Roger Hoover won a Sept. 7 tournament in Norman with five spots weighing 16.47 pounds, the biggest going 4.27 pounds.

continues >



Gus Gustafson

Guide Gus Gustafson said nice spotted bass will be schooling over deep water in Lake Norman this month.

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LAKE NORMAN SPOTS >

Productive places for spots at the lower end of the lake include Davidson, Ramsey, Mountain and Reeds creeks.

Gustafson said spots congregate in 10 to 20 feet of water on the edges of points, roaming open water in pursuit of forage.

"Always fish the wind-blown points, because that's where the baitfish will be," he said.

Spots can be caught in a variety of ways, with a variety of baits. Gustafson uses spinning tackle spooled with 10-pound line. Occasionally, he fishes baitcasting gear.

"Avoid heavy tackle," Gustafson said. "Even a small spot is a spirited fighter, so light tackle is more fun."

Spots will whack small spoons, jigs, plastics, drop-shot rigs and crankbaits. Gustafson keeps a topwater bait rigged for

surface action.

“*Though mornings and evenings are best, spots can start busting the surface at any time.*”

“Though mornings and evenings are best, spots can start busting

the surface at any time,” said Gustafson. “I like a small Whopper Plopper. The bigger spots will be below the fish on the surface, so I fish baits that run a little deeper, like a lipless crankbait.”

Other places to look for spots that are more “homebodies” than “roamers” include boat docks near deep creek and river channels and boat ramps. “Docks and boat ramps attract baitfish, crawfish and bream, all baits that spots dine upon,” Gustafson said.

Another great place for spots is the McGuire Nuclear Station near Cowans Ford Dam. Large numbers of spots are drawn to the warm-water discharge, aka the Hot Hole, along with a large number of boats.

“On weekends, the Hot Hole is crawling with fishermen,” said Gustafson. “Fish it during the week if possible.”

Some anglers slow-troll for spots using live-bait rigs, lipless lures, small spoons and crankbaits. They’ll make passes along points in 8 to 18 feet of water and repeat the pass if any fish are caught.

Gustafson said waters above the NC 150 Bridge are better for largemouth, but spots are caught at Long Island and from the railroad trestle to the I-40 bridge. ■

— Tony Garitta

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Trout time

By Jerry Dilsaver

November is the peak of speckled trout fishing in North Carolina's southernmost county. Here's how the locals target trout in an area of diverse habitat.

- November offers fishermen some of the year's finest action on speckled trout.

The cork bobbed a little as it approached an oyster rock where trout had gathered to feed on shrimp and minnows washing down the creek behind Ocean Isle Beach. That got Brandon Sauls' attention. Suddenly, the shrimp that was hooked up under the cork was at the surface and jumping frantically, giving its all to escape from a predator.

continues >>>



Jerry Dilsaver



All of a sudden,

there was a swirl, and the shrimp and cork both disappeared. It wasn't a cautious take, either; the cork was unceremoniously jerked under by something that wanted the shrimp. Sauls leaned back into a sweeping hookset, and the light spinning rod bowed double, with line ripping from the small reel. The fish struggled hard and made multiple runs while starting and stopping and rolling.



- North Carolina's Brunswick County has loads of different saltwater habitat, most of it inviting for speckled trout.

The fishermen weren't sure whether the fish was a speckled trout or a redfish until it was finally led to the surface and flashed a side of small spots as it was led into a waiting landing net. But it was the fish's lucky day; after a quick picture, Sauls eased it back into the water.

Sauls and his fishing buddy, guide Mark Stacy, repeated this scenario multiple times that morning and left the trout biting when they ran out of fishing time.

"It isn't always like this, but our trout fishing can be very good at times," said Sauls, a former guide who runs an internet design and consulting company and now fishes just for fun. "We've got a diversity of habitat in just a few miles and usually can find somewhere the trout are biting. Our weather is also a plus for good fall fishing. There may be some cold

continues >>>

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — US 17 is the primary access route to the marshes of Brunswick County between Shallotte and the North Carolina-South Carolina border. NC 130, NC 179 and NC 904 cross US 17 and lead to Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach and Calabash. Public boat-access areas are on the ICW at Brick Landing on the mainland near Shallotte Point, beside the Ocean Isle Beach bridge on the beach side and beside the Sunset Beach Bridge on the mainland side.

WHEN TO GO — The best action typically begins in October, peaks in November and continues into December. Speckled trout are a highly sought-after fish in this area, and their popularity rose a few more points when flounder season closed in September.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Live shrimp fished under corks is the preferred bait for many fishermen. If shrimp aren't available, live mullet minnows and mud minnows are acceptable. As far as artificial lures, soft-plastic shrimp imitations such as Vudu and Gulp! lead the class. Topwater baits and diving/sinking baits can also be very productive in the right situations. Most fishermen find light and medium-light spinning outfits in 7-foot lengths to be plenty for specks and the occasional redfish. Use 8- to 15-pound braid with 12 to 24 inches of fluorocarbon leader.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Mark Stacy, Ocean Isle Fishing Charters, 910-279-0119, www.oceanislefishingcharters.com; Kyle Hughes, Speculator Inshore Fishing Charters, 910-840-7186, www.oceanislefishingguide.com; Ocean Isle Fishing Center, 910-575-3474, www.oifc.com; Anglers Marine, 910-755-7900, www.anglersmarinenc.com; Jimmy's Marine, 910-575-3600, www.jimmymarine.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Ocean Isle Inn, Ocean Isle Beach, 910-579-0750, www.oceanisleinn.com; Winds Resort Beach Club, Ocean Isle Beach, 910-579-6275, www.thewinds.com; Comfort Inn, Shallotte, 910-754-3044; Days Inn, Shallotte, 910-754-3300; Econo Lodge, Shallotte, 910-755-6444; Brunswick County Chamber of Commerce, 800-426-6644, www.brunswickcountychamber.org.

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

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Jerry Dilsaver

- Brandon Sauls hooks up a live shrimp with a small treble hook just under the shrimp's horn.

fronts that cool the water and get the trout going, but many days in November are shorts and T-shirt weather, especially in the afternoons.”

Ocean Isle Beach is in Brunswick County, which begins at the Shallotte River and runs south and west to the North Carolina-South Carolina border. The diversity includes the Intracoastal Waterway, Shallotte River, Calabash Creek, a bit of other open water, a medium-use inlet, a very small inlet, a variety of creeks, concrete-bottom canals, oyster rocks, riprap, holes and, about 100 yards across the state line, a jettied inlet. Sauls suggests that anyone fishing this area have both licenses from both states so they can move about as they like.

Sauls said trout fishing using live shrimp under corks is very productive and popular with many fishermen. He rigs them using a pole float so a wary trout only feels minimal resistance when taking the bait. His rig is a bobber-stopper setup, where the bobber stopper can be moved to adjust the depth of the bait below the float. There is a ½-ounce egg sinker below the float to hold the bait down and a 15- to 18-inch piece of fluorocarbon leader out to a No. 6 treble hook that is pinned just under the horn of the shrimp's head. Sauls said for best results, cast a little upcurrent from where you expect the trout have gathered, and allow the current to carry it into the strike zone. If it has settled and looks natural, one will pick it up.

Sauls said as well as the live shrimp rig works, they aren't always available, and there are other ways to catch specks that are more fun. He said artificial Vudu Shrimp are a surprisingly good substitute for live shrimp. They have segmented tails so their tails move freely in the current and with any twitch of the line.

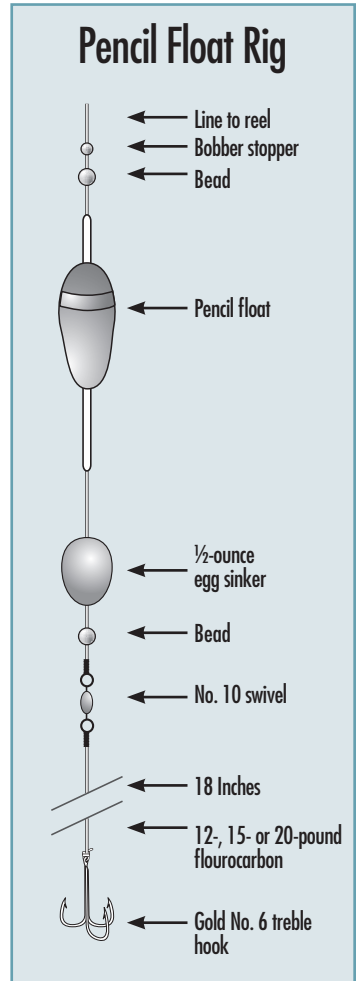
Sauls' favorite way to catch specks is using topwater lures, and the waters in and around Brunswick County stay warm enough for this well into November, sometimes into December. Once the areas of open water cool to 60 degrees and below, he concentrates on marsh creeks and pockets where the water doesn't full drain on low tide and stays a couple of degrees warmer. The trout are more active and feed more consistently in the warmer water.

Sauls' two favorite topwater lures are Top Dogs and Super Spook Jrs. They are slightly different in shape — the Top Dog is larger — but Sauls believes the big difference is in their sound. He said the Top Dog has a single, lower-frequency rattle, while the Super Spook Jr. has multiple, higher-frequency rattles. If the trout are feeding at or near the surface, one of them will usually draw strikes.

Moving water is a key, and matching the lure's movement and speed to the bait in the area is another. Sauls said baitfish are typically moving along the sides of the creeks or bays, and trout set up ambush at oyster rocks, points, creek mouths and other areas where there is a drop into deeper water. They hold in the deeper water and rush up to attack bait moving by in the shallows. Working the lure at the proper speed helps entice strikes and put fish in the cooler.

The late Mark Dickson was a pioneer inshore guide in this area, and he worked sinking/diving lures in addition to those Sauls mentioned. Dickson believed that on bright, sunny days — and once the water temperature dropped below 60 degrees — trout moved to the deeper holes. He had a few holes near riprap or off oyster rocks where it took a deeper-running lure to get down to them.

Dickson liked to fish Mirrolures in 52M, 52MR, TT and TTR series. These are all sinking lures, and the 52MR in a lure with higher-frequency rattles. Dickson liked to cast them slightly up and across the current, letting them sink and move with the current. He would twitch them occasionally to mimic baitfish, and as the water got colder, he concentrated on fishing these when the tide was slowing to change and just after a tide change. He believed keeping them in front of the trout longer helped tempt the trout into biting. He also believed in scented lures and was convinced that, in colder water, you had to move your bait slowly, even to the point of dead-sticking it, letting the scent convince lethargic trout to bite. ■



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

Speckled trout

Spotted seatrout, *Cynoscion nebulosus*, aka speckled trout, are members of the Sciaenidae family, which includes drums, croakers and gray trout (weakfish). They are prized gamefish that range from the Laguna Madre in south Texas to the upper reaches of the Chesapeake Bay, with catches reported as far north as New York.

Speckled trout can tolerate extreme variations in salinity; in North Carolina, excellent catches are often reported in waters designated as inland waters. As long as the water quality is tolerable and there is a good food supply, speckled trout don't pay much attention to where they are.

While the fall is when North Carolina fishermen heartily pursue speckled trout, they may be found in many locations all winter, which exposes them to cold-stun and kill events. Several times in recent years, kills have been severe enough to have the recreational season closed until June 15.

Their tendency to be caught in cold stuns and kills makes North Carolina speckled trout very cyclic. But they are prolific spawners, and most reach reproductive age in their first year. All trout that meet the 14-inch minimum size have likely spawned several times.

Speckled trout are batch spawners that usually begin spawning in mid- to late April and continue spawning every week or so through October. They grow quickly, and many will reach 14 inches in the late fall of their first year.

Fishermen should take a few seconds to look for tags on speckled trout they catch. A study done several years ago offers rewards up to \$100 for returned tags. Biologists with the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries are asking fishermen to return all tags. The gathered information will help fishery managers better understand the growth, movement and spawning habits of the fish. ■



Jerry Dilsaver

- Speckled trout are a fast-growing fish that often reach North Carolina's 14-inch size minimum in their first year.



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SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

Paul Brown baits, including the Corky, Fat Boy, Soft Dine and Devil, have the reputation of being more productive as the water cools in fall and winter. The author put them to the test.

WHEN IT'S COLD, THEY'RE HOT

PAUL BROWN BAITS HAVE THE RIGHT MOVES FOR FALL, WINTER TROUT

The feeling of the Corky “thump” is subtle, yet profound. In trophy trout circles, it’s a feeling that is known well. It’s a bite transformed into a mythical persona and one that gains steam in conversation when the thermometer retreats from the summer heat.

Let’s examine the sink rate and sink profile of some popular Paul Brown lures and decide if time of year turns this bait from ordinary to extraordinary.

CORKY SEASON

As an early 1980s baby growing up in New Orleans, I was fortunate to remember a time before social media. Days on the delta weren’t measured by likes and shares but seared into a camera’s film. Countless negatives at my parents’ house proved that we liked to fish — a lot. Better yet, magazines and other periodicals gave us monthly insight versus the Google keyword searches we now live by.

In one of those magazines, I remember reading about the legendary Paul Brown Corky. As I matured and the dawn of the internet arrived, I remember visiting www.wadefishing.com. On this early

internet site, I remember reading posts and gawking at pictures by Capt. Jesse Arsola and other South Texas legends. One thing I distinctly remember was, as temperatures cooled, big trout became more prevalent, and it never failed that the “Corky” was the lure of choice.

Fast forward, and it’s clear to see that the dawn of the information age set the foundation to a notional “Corky season.” In other words, when temperatures got colder, the more effective these baits became.

Now with a cult-like following, Paul Brown references show up on social media starting Oct. 1 and linger into the better part of spring. Why? Are these baits that much more effective in the winter than the summer?

I wanted to explore that possibility, examining sink rate and sink profile for a variety of lures in various salinities and water temps.

SINK RATE

I set up a 10-gallon tank. There was no current, and it was filled with tap water. I then filmed five descents of six lures: the Fatboy, Fatboy Floater, Corky

Original, Devil, Soft Dine and Soft Dine XL. Establishing the foundation, I did this at 0 ppt (parts per thousand) of salt and 71.9-degree water, which means the water column is void of all density. Below is the average of the five descents and measured in seconds/foot:

Fatboy: 1.64
Fatboy Floater: 2.16
Corky Original: 2.10
Devil: 1.3
Soft Dine: 1.73
Soft Dine XL: 1.83

I added 1½ pounds of kosher salt to the tank. Every pound of salt equals 10 parts per thousand of salinity. In addition, I decided to chill the water, using ice, to the lower 50s to simulate what would be true winter water.

Here are the sink results at 15 ppt and 52.3 degrees:

Fatboy: 1.98
Fatboy Floater: 3.22
Corky Original: 2.15
Devil: 1.63
Soft Dine: 1.97
Soft Dine XL: 1.99

Taking it a step further, I wanted to simulate a high-salinity estuary, so I

added another 1½ pounds of salt, which raised the salinity to 30 ppt. — a total of 3 pounds to 10 gallons. Keeping the temperature the same, I measured the descents again.

Fatboy: 2.30

Fatboy Floater: 4.23

Original: 2.58

Devil: 1.69

Soft Dine: 2.15

Soft Dine XL: 2.22

It's clear to see that all Paul Brown lures sink more slowly as salinities go up and water temperatures go down. As anglers, having a sound understanding of the baits' sink performance is critical in a sterile environment. As wind, tide and water clarity factor into the equation, sink rates may be impacted even more.

In other words, if I'm fishing in February, I can target some skinny water pretty effectively because I know in a sterile environment, a Fatboy will sink close to a foot every 2½ second. Factoring in wind and water clarity, it may sink even more slowly, which leads to this being an optimal choice for targeting big fish in skinny water.

Now that we've examined sink rate, let's look at sink profile.

SINK PROFILE

Like sink rate, sink profile is also paramount to visualizing what your presentation looks like to your targeted fish.

Fatboy: The Fatboy is known for its "wobble." This sort of built-in characteristic separates this bait from the others. It clearly wobbles side-to-side as it sinks. Better yet, it sinks horizontally, which gives it a great profile for big trout to target. Its sink profile did not change between salinities, just the sink rate.

Fatboy Floater: Contrary to popular belief, this bait doesn't float, except at 30 ppt and 51-degree water temps. Even then, it will only float for a half-second before it starts its descent. Unlike a regular Fat Boy, it doesn't possess the wobble and sinks tail first,

Big trout, caught in cold-weather situations, are more likely to hit a slow-moving, slow-sinking bait.

albeit very slowly, when the water gets colder and saltier.

Original: Of all of the Paul Brown lures tested, this one had the most-consistent sink rate, varying ever so slightly. It also had the most-consistent sink profile. Upon entry, it typically righted itself almost immediately and had a very subtle wobble, unlike its bigger brother, the Fatboy.

Devil: The Devil, as you would suspect, had the most unique sink profile, and like that of the soft plastics I've tested, its sink profile emulated a darter-style bait. Every time it entered the water, it sank with the head slightly forward and tail up. In addition, it glided gently through the water

continues>



Chris Bush



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SPECKLED TRUTH

continued

column, even with no current. Its profile did not change as salinity levels increased.

Soft Dine: This was an interesting find because I was really surprised at how much a regular Soft Dine wobbled upon descent. In stature, this bait has a much smaller profile than a Fatboy, but it possessed all of the same characteristics: horizontal descent, no glide and a ton of wobble. That was good to see, because it offers a great alternative to its bigger

profile cousin.

Soft Dine XL: Like the regular Soft Dine, I thought it would have a pronounced wobble, but it didn't. Instead it had a regular sink profile: little to no wobble and a horizontal descent. It also glided a little more than the Soft Dine.

WRAP-UP

Despite having a sound understanding and a tremendous amount of success

with these baits, I learned a lot by doing this experiment. Watching each descent coupled with having tangible sink-rate data, I can remember different trips and why one of these was successful. These baits perform differently given the water temperature and salinity levels in your estuary, and whether you fish in North Carolina or Louisiana, I encourage you to reflect on why these baits may have been successful.

CORKY SEASON, FACT OR FICTION?

Those images on high-gloss magazine pages in the mid-1990s presented the notion that these baits transcended their performance once temperatures fell. Now, with tangible evidence, it's safe to say that Corky Season is indeed a real thing. Let's examine why.

The first is water level. Regardless of estuary, water levels in the winter typically get lower. Because the descent rates of these baits slows as the water gets colder, you can fish them consistently and confidently where trophy trout roam: skinny flats with deep water nearby.

Second, and most important, it imitates a finfish. Here in my south Texas home, trophy trout can be found in surprisingly skinny water in the winter. Also, most other forage has vacated the shallow flats, leaving mullet and other small trout as their main forage. So, confidently fishing a bait that performs better in a shrinking water column, coupled with a mullet profile imitation, can lend itself to some epic winter trophy trout action.

I'm not dismissing the notion that these baits don't work year-round, it's just that their characteristics lend themselves to being much more productive in the winter. ■



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SENC SPECKS GOING great guns around bait concentrations

Speckled trout fishing has been good in southeastern North Carolina all year and is expected to be excellent this fall as even more trout reach keeper size. It seems odd, but the passing of Hurricane Florence last fall did the trout a favor when it kept fishermen off the water for several weeks.

A mild winter allowed all the trout to survive, and fishing has been very good all year. Those trout that weren't caught have spawned again, and trout fishing is the best it has been in years.

The water warmed early and has stayed warm this fall, with the last baitfish and shrimp just moving out of the creeks. During November, speckled trout should be found just about anywhere water flow is concentrated through the marsh, which concentrates the bait. It's a buffet for trout, and they are taking advantage.

Fishermen should find specks at creek mouths, points and along oyster bars and

rip-rap. When the bait is running hard, there should be telltale explosions as the trout attack and give away their locations.

If live bait is available, the most popular way to catch specks is to drift live shrimp suspended under corks. When live shrimp aren't available, trout will often hit live minnows and sometimes even dead shrimp. Some fishermen also catch fish using the latest soft-plastic shrimp shapes suspended under corks.

Speckled trout will also hit a variety of soft- and hard-plastic lures. Paddletails and shrimp shapes are the most-popular soft-plastic shapes and will usually produce. Suspending hard lures, like the MirrOlure MR 17 Series are local favorites that catch a lot of specks. Try not to work them too fast. If there is bait in the creeks, match its speed.

As long as the water stays warm, there will be topwater action. A Top Dog, Skitterwalk or Zara Spook walked through these areas should bring aggressive

November is prime time to catch speckled trout from Cape Fear west. Just find shrimp and baitfish, cast a lure and hang on.



Jerry Dilsaver

strikes. When this action slows the trout will still be feeding, just underwater.

The good fishing begins around the spoil islands up the Cape Fear River near Wilmington and continues in the creeks behind Bald Head Island, Oak Island, Ocean Isle Beach and Sunset Beach. Sometimes, bait holds in the canals at Holden and Ocean Isle beaches, and trout stay with it. There is limited riprap in this area, but it is always a good spot to check for specks. The Fort Fisher rocks are the most prominent and run for several miles, and there is riprap along the Intracoastal Waterway near the Duke Power Canal and at Browns Landing. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

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BIG SPECKS FEED UP

on live shrimp around Little River Inlet

If there was ever a prime time to catch speckled trout in the Carolinas, November would rank way up there. Not only is it a prime month to catch specks, it's when the big gators show up and stretch line to its limits.

A crafty angler can take home a few, fresh trout fillets most months, but fall is, hands down, a prime period to target specks when the water temperatures are tumbling and available bait is scurrying away to greener pastures. And it's no huge surprise when a 5-, 6- or 8-pound beast shows up.

Guide Tripp Hooks of Captain Hook Outdoors out of Ocean Isle Beach, N.C., frequently sees these tremendous fish in his catches.

"We catch a lot of trout in the fall, and some really big ones, too," said Hooks (910-540-7332). "It's not uncommon to catch a handful of fish over 5 pounds when we are fishing the right water."

Hooks fishes from Little River's tannic waters along the border between the two Carolinas north and east to Southport, N.C., but his honey holes in Little River typically produce the biggest fish of the season.

"We catch some big trout around Little River in November, and most of the bigger fish come from places with deep structure and good current flow. The bigger fish are usually in deeper water," said Hooks, who will fish from the deep ledges off the ICW



Big speckled trout make a significant appearance in the waters around Little River.

Tripp Hooks

to Little River's jetties.

"The jetties on a falling tide is one of my favorite places to go for a big fish. I like to get 20 feet off the rocks and make long drifts with my baits down 12 to 14 feet (under) the surface."

Hooks' best technique to catch a big trout is with live shrimp.

"Big trout will eat both big and small baits this time of year, but it is hard to beat a live shrimp under an adjustable float," he said.

The bait in the estuaries and creeks, including shrimp, becomes less and less abundant through the fall and into winter, but local bait shops will normally have live shrimp that come from more southern waters.

Typically, big trout move in and stay for the cool months and fortunately, trout will hit live shrimp all winter long under almost any type of condition. And a big trout will rarely turn its nose up at a live shrimp. ■

— Jeff Bureson



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LOWCOUNTRY TROUT

love structure, a rising tide, a fake shrimp

Anglers looking for a hot bite in November will find it from speckled trout in South Carolina's Lowcountry. The action can be fast and furious, especially on artificial shrimp under popping corks on a rising tide.

Guide Rick Percy of Reel Chance Charters in Beaufort, S.C. catches trout all year, but he said November is especially good for specks in these waters.

"November is a great month for trout here. You can catch them quickly when the tide is coming in," he said.

These fish will bite live or cut bait just fine, too, but Percy prefers artificial lures because it saves time. While bait fishermen are re-baiting their hooks, anglers using plastic shrimp are already reeling in another fish.

To stay on the hottest bite, Percy (803-535-6166) suggests anglers set up within casting distance of an oyster rake, the point of an island or some other piece of structure that will be completely submerged at high tide. As the tide comes in from low to high, water surrounds the structure, forming current breaks and slight eddies. Specks stack up in these areas, waiting for an easy meal tumbling in the current.

Anglers fishing together can hit the trout with a one-two punch here. With a plastic shrimp under a popping cork, the first angler can cast near the current break. As the current carries it into the break, another angler prepares to cast. Once the first angler hooks up, the other angler casts, allowing the current to ease his lure into place as his buddy reels in a speck. This can go on for several minutes. As the tide eventually covers the structure, Percy moves on to find another piece that isn't yet submerged. He sticks to the same plan, then moves on again once that structure is under water. He continues this until the peak of high tide.

Once the tide is fully in, he still catches trout, but he said the bite on the rising tide is as hot as

Lowcountry specks really hit on a rising tide around structure in the fall.



Mike Percy

any you'll find this time of year.

"When the tide is rising, it's going to cause those disturbances around exposed structure until that structure is flooded," Percy said. "Baitfish get washed into the disturbances and tumble around, and trout are there waiting for them. Instead of casting right on top of them, use a popping cork and cast into water that will carry your lure to the fish. Just make sure to keep slack out of the line and be prepared to set the hook." ■

— Brian Cope

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PREPARE BOATS FOR WINTER

Brian Cope

PROBLEMS WON'T POP UP IN SPRING IF YOU PREVENT THEM AFTER FALL FISHING ENDS

Some anglers in the Carolinas fish year-round. Others put their boats away once the weather cools, opting to wait for spring to get on the water again.

If you're in that group, you want to put your boat away properly so that when fishing fever hits in spring, you can get on the water without the trouble that many boaters commonly experience after their boat has been sitting for a spell.

One of the biggest mistakes made by boaters is keeping old gas in their outboard, gas tank and fuel line. That's a problem that will surely raise its head after a few months. It's easy to fix right now, but it won't be so easy in the spring after the damage has been done.

Some boaters add a fuel stabilizer to their gas tank when winter comes. If this is your option, make sure you crank the engine and let it run long enough that the stabilizer gets into your fuel lines and into the outboard.

Another option boaters use is to com-

pletely drain gas from their outboard, fuel lines and gas tank. With your outboard hooked to a water source — or with the lower unit submerged in water — disconnect the fuel line from your outboard. Crank the motor, and let it run until it runs out of fuel. Even on smaller outboards, this can take considerably longer than you might think.

Next, drain your tank and fuel lines. Use that gas in lawn equipment, a generator or anything else you'll be using soon. When gas sits for several months, it will get waterlogged and cause stalling and other problems. It's the No. 1 cause of issues to outboards that have been sitting for a while, according to John Long, master outboard technician and owner of East Columbia (S.C.) Sports Shop (803-776-8320).

FIGHT THE COLD

Even though most of our winter weather is fairly mild in the Carolinas, freezing temperatures make appearances

from time to time, so we definitely want to remove any water in our outboard motors. Usually, tilting the motor all the way down is enough to drain excess water and ensure nothing in the motor freezes. You may also flush your engine with antifreeze.

Fogging your engine is also an important step before storing it. This may sound complicated, but all it takes is a spray can of fogging oil. Check your outboard manual to see what type is recommended. Remove the spark plugs, spray fogging oil into the spark-plug holes, then replace the spark plugs. This will protect your pistons from moisture. Disconnect the spark plug wires to lessen the chance of any corrosion forming.



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.

It's a good idea to change your outboard's oil before storing. This will get rid of any water that may have gotten in before it has time to cause problems. And when spring arrives, you'll know your oil level and its quality are top notch.

You'll also want to disconnect your batteries and store them in a clean, dry area. It's a good idea to check on them periodically throughout the winter to keep them fully charged. And it's also a good time to clean any corrosion from battery posts and the boat's wiring. Spraying any exposed terminals and connection blocks with moisture-displacing lubricants like Corrosion X or WD-40 is another good step.

Before you store your boat, it's a good time to lubricate the steering mechanism and any other areas that require lubrication. Give the boat a thorough inspection and treat any areas with signs of rust or corrosion. Washing the boat and removing any gunk or slime now can go a long way to keeping your boat looking great.

FIND A PARKING PLACE

Where will you park your boat for the winter? It's best to keep the tires on a solid surface that doesn't retain moisture. Parking on bare dirt is a bad idea. Ground moisture will cause the trailer tires to break down prematurely, especially if they sit in pooled rainwater. Parking on level concrete or asphalt is better than on grass. And even on concrete, parking with the tires on treated wooden planks or some other moisture barrier will help even more.

It's easy to think nothing can go wrong while your boat is parked for a few months, but without taking these steps, you can find yourself frustrated or even stranded on the water once you take your first trip in the spring. ■

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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

Duck hunters can get places where powerboaters can't when it comes to waterfowl season.



DON'T BE SEEN IN A KAYAK THIS MONTH

YOU'VE GOT TO HIDE FROM WATERFOWL IN YOUR PLASTIC BOAT

Phillip Gentry

From the looks of things, it appears that an at-least moderate drought season will land across the Carolinas about the same time as duck season. Last year, there was too much water, and this year, there won't be enough.

Savvy hunters know you have to go where the birds are, and last year, that meant paddling back into flooded fields. This year's task will be much more difficult. Although receding water tends to concentrate ducks, it also means walking across huge expanses of boot- and wader-sucking mud to get to the water. It also means forget about getting in there with a powerboat.

Duck hunters should expect to spend their hunting time in the seat of their boats rather than paddling in, hiding the boat and ducking down behind a stand

of trees like last year. In order to hunt from your kayak, you'll need to make it invisible to flying eyes.

Kayak waterfowlers have a multitude of options when it comes to camouflaging their boats. You can buy ready-made concealment blind systems, stretch the covering over the bow and stern of your boat, cinch it down, and you're ready to go — or you can make it yourself.

Either way you go, it's important to know what your boat is going to look like to the birds. If you will be hunting low-water, marshy areas, your boat needs to look like sun-parched marsh grass. If you intend to hunt the mud flats at the upper end of a reservoir, your kayak needs to look like mud, a sandbar, or maybe a stranded log.

Time spent scouting your intended hunting areas will tell you where the birds will be flying and landing, but also

the terrain you'll need to match your blind to in order to fit in.

Waterfowl hunting in these conditions dictates you won't have the storage space for a big spread of decoys. During the early season, when the pickings include mostly resident birds anyway, a flock of a half-dozen usually does the trick.

In a typical, low-water scenario, try to arrange the blocks around your concealed kayak. Again, the reduced amount of water is going to limit where birds can and will land, so the emphasis is drawing them to you. ■



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

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The Topwater 120 offers large fishing-kayak performance, in a compact, nimble package. A marriage of stability and performance, the Topwater quietly glides through the water

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impressed by its overall fishability.

Available in both First Light and Olive as camo options, the Topwater 120 features an ultra-stable DoubleU™ Hull Design that offers unmatched stability and precision handling in a compact easy-to-transport size. Sneak up on the fish and game in the quietest pontoon-style hull on the market.

An oversized stern tank well, coupled with impressive hull capacity, provides one of the roomiest fishing kayaks on the market. The breathable ElementAir™ seat has high/low positioning, and EVA foam deck pads help with traction and all-day stand-up fishing comfort. Stay organized and easily access gear with three rod holders (one forward-facing) and thoughtfully-placed onboard rod and tackle storage.

MSRP is \$999.99.

Available at www.oldtowncanoe.johnsonoutdoors.com



D-I-Y: KAYAK DUCK BOAT

Rarely do kayak-bound duck hunters employ their tricked out fishing rigs as their waterfowl rig. For the fishing rig, shiny and bright is good, while the hunting rig needs to be exactly opposite. Other than comfortable seating, the amenities desired in a good fishing rig are lost on a hunting rig.

To make it blend in, start with a drab color or use some sand paper to create a rough finish on a brighter color and apply lots of drab paint. You can do the stencil or silhouette painting to impress your friends, but it won't fool ducks if you don't do some serious breaking up of your outline.

The internet is full of D-I-Y articles that suggest adding netting or natural grasses via loops or zip ties to the boat. Again, unless you can add something that's going to drastically change the overall shape and appearance of your boat, you're going to stick out like a sore thumb.

Consider ways to integrate your kayak into the landscape. If that's a sand bar, bring a shovel and dig in. If it's a dried-up stump field, go with darker shades and use a saw to integrate some old, dead lumber.

One of the best camouflage systems I've ever seen was no camouflage at all. A friend and I were hunting the early goose season right after Labor Day and discovered the more we acted like hunters, the more alarmed the flocks of geese became when we approached. Changing over into T-shirts and shorts, as well as talking loudly to each other while paddling, we managed to push several flocks into a dead-end cove and have our way with them when they could go no further. They were barely off the water when we splashed up into gun range.

Camouflage means matching your surroundings while not being noticeable. Apparently, camouflaging ourselves as noisy touring paddlers was much more effective than looking like the Creature from the Black Lagoon in a kayak. ■

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Waterfowl

WHERE — Headwaters of public impoundments

HOW — This season's drought will push a lot of resident waterfowl out of rivers and creeks into the headwaters of lakes.

LAUNCH — Find the nearest public launch site at www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/Where-to-Boat

INSIDER TIP — Low water will make headwater areas nearly impossible to hunt from a larger boat blind. These areas are easier to hunt from a shallow draft kayak that looks like a big grass patch.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Waterfowl

WHERE — South Carolina's Category II WMAs

HOW — Float hunt public waterfowl areas

LAUNCH — The attached list provides location and launch information: <http://www.eregulations.com/southcarolina/huntingandfishing/w-m-a-waterfowl-on-management-areas/>

INSIDER TIP — Before hunting public waterfowl lands, spend a few days before the hunt to study when and where birds enter and exit the area, then position yourself accordingly to take advantage of birds entering and leaving during the hunt.

YAKGEAR AMBUSH CAMO COVER

Transform your kayak into a hunting machine with the YakGear Ambush Camo Kayak Cover & Hunting Blind. The drawstrings at either end make this a universal fit on 12.5- to 14.5-foot kayaks and canoes. It uses two flaps in the middle, connected by buckles, to conceal the hunter until he is ready to fire. Lie down and wait for your shot, then sit up, and you're ready to fire.

Made of rip-stop material and available in Real-Tree Max5 camo, tears should not be a problem if you run into any thick brush. Also included is an oversized Velcro flap in the back of the blind for access to the rear storage area. Boat handles are accessible at the front and back through slits that are pre-cut into the cover. You can also add your own brush using pre-sewn vegetation webbing straps. A Stow bag is included for easy transport.



Two concealment flaps to hide the hunter before the shot is taken with rear flap to allow access to storage. Bow and stern rope drawstring allows you to pull the front and back tight to hold against gunwales.

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HUNTING SEASONS

DEER

Region	Method	Season Dates
Western	Bowhunting	Sept. 7-29 Oct. 13-Nov. 24 Dec. 15-Jan. 1, 2020 (bucks only)
	Muzzleloader	Sept. 30-Oct. 13
	Gun	Nov. 25-Dec. 14
Northwestern	Bowhunting	Sept. 7-Nov. 8
	Muzzleloader	Nov. 9-22
	Gun	Nov. 23-Jan. 1, 2020
Central	Bowhunting	Sept. 7-Nov. 1
	Muzzleloader	Nov. 2-15
	Gun	Nov. 16-Jan. 1, 2020
Northeastern/ Southeastern	Bowhunting	Sept. 7-27
	Muzzleloader	Sept. 28-Oct. 11
	Gun	Oct. 12-Jan. 1, 2020

BEAR

Oct. 14-Nov. 23 & Dec. 16-Jan. 1, 2020:	In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties
Nov. 16-Jan. 1, 2020:	Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Union counties
Oct. 12-Jan. 1, 2020:	Franklin, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties
Nov. 23-Jan. 1, 2020:	Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties
Nov. 12-Jan. 1, 2019:	Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Robeson, Sampson counties
Nov. 9-24, Dec. 14-29:	Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell counties
Nov. 9-17, Dec. 14-29:	Camden, Chowan, Craven, Hertford, Jones, Martin, Washington counties
Nov. 17-Dec. 16:	Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Pitt, Wayne, Wilson counties
Nov. 11-Jan. 1, 2020:	Edgecombe, Bladen, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Roberson, Sampson counties

SQUIRREL

Oct. 14-Feb. 29, 2020 (gray & red)
Oct. 14-Jan. 31, 2020 (fox) in Alleghany, Edgecombe, Moore, Scotland, Anson, Greene, New Hanover, Stokes, Ashe, Harnett, Onslow, Surry, Bladen, Hoke, Pender, Watauga, Brunswick, Johnston, Pitt, Wayne, Cumberland, Jones, Richmond, Wilkes, Duplin, Lenoir, Sampson

RABBIT

Oct. 14-Feb. 28, 2020

QUAIL

Nov. 23, 2019-Feb. 29, 2020

GROUSE

Oct. 14-Feb. 29, 2020

RAILS

(KING, SORA, VIRGINIA, CLAPPER) (GALLINULES, MOORHENS)	Sept. 7-Nov. 27 Sept. 7-Nov. 27
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CANADA GEESE

Resident zone, Oct. 2-12, Nov. 16-Dec. 7, Dec. 14-Feb. 8. Statewide: Sept. 2-30; NE Zone, Jan. 16-31, permit only

SNOW, BLUE, ROSS GEESE

Oct. 8-Feb. 8, 2020, Feb. 10-March 31, 2020 (permit)
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DUCKS

Oct. 3-5, Nov. 16-Dec. 2 Dec. 14-Jan. 31, 2020
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EARLY TEAL

Sept. 12-30 (east of US 17 only)

SEA DUCKS

Nov. 23-Jan. 31, 2020

BRANT

Dec. 28-Jan. 31, 2020

DOVE

Sept. 2-Oct. 5, Nov. 16-30, Dec. 9-Jan. 31, 2020
--

TUNDRA SWAN

Nov. 9-Jan. 31, 2020. Bag limit 1, by permit only.
--

RACCOON, OPOSSUM

Oct. 14-Feb. 29, 2020

WOODCOCK

Dec. 7-Jan. 28, 2020

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND)	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 2-7, Sept. 8-Oct. 12	15	45
	Nov. 16-30, Dec. 28-Jan. 30, 2020		
Crow	Nov. 1-March 1, 2020	No limits	
Quail	Nov. 20-March 1, 2020	12	36
Rabbit	Nov. 23-March 1, 2020	5	15
Squirrel	Oct. 1-March 1, 2020	10	30
Fox	Nov. 23-March 1, 2020	No limits	
Grouse	Nov. 23-March 1, 2020 (Game Zone 1 only)	3	9
Raccoon/ Opossum	Sept. 15-March 15, 2020 (statewide) Sept. 15-March 15, 2020 (Game Zones 3, 6)	3 raccoons per party No limits	
Other furbearers	Nov. 26-March 1, 2020 (bobcat, otter, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk)	No limits	
Bear	Oct. 17-23 (still hunting only) (Game Zone 1 only)	1	
	Oct. 24-30 (dogs), (Game Zone 1 only)	5 per party	
	Oct. 17-30 (Horry, Georgetown, Marion, Williamsburg counties)	1	
	(permit only)		
Rails	Sept. 27-Oct. 2, King & Clapper	15	45
	Sora & Virginia	25	75
	Gallinules (common/purple)	15	45
	Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28, 2020	8
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31, 2020	3	9
Wild Turkey	March 22-April 30, 2020 (Game Zones 3&4)	3	
	April 1-May 10, 2020 (Game Zones 1&2)	3	

DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
1		Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2020
2	Sept. 15-30	Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2020
3			Aug. 15-Jan. 1, 2020
4	Aug 15-31		Sept. 1-Jan. 1, 2020
Youth Day			Jan. 6, 2020

WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 13-28	6
	Nov. 23-30, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2020	6
Canada geese	Sept. 1-30, Nov. 23-30, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2020, Feb. 14-29, 2020	15
Blue/snow (light) geese	Nov. 23-30, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2020, Feb. 14-29, 2020	25
Brant	Jan. 2-31, 2020	2
Sea ducks	Nov. 23-30, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2020	6
Mergansers	Nov. 23-30, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2020	5 (1 hooded)
Coots	Nov. 23-30, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2020	15

COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

While some things have been a bit unusual this fall, one thing we have been able to rely on is sportsmen hitting the woods and waters and returning with excellent fare for the dinner table. The opportunities are abundant, too — at least as long as the weather doesn't interfere. Fall fishing will be very good through at least Thanksgiving, and hunting seasons are open.

One of the most-slighted fish that are abundant during the fall are king mackerel. Many fishermen enjoy catching them, but some say they have a strong flavor and aren't good to eat.



That's just wrong.

King mackerel are the everyman's gamefish in the Carolinas. There are schools offshore all winter, and as the water warms and baitfish arrive in the spring, some move inshore from the deep. Others migrate along the coast after wintering off southern Florida or summering off the Outer Banks and Virginia. They are noticeably larger when they return to the beaches in the fall for one last feast before heading south for the winter.

Kings are primarily caught by fishermen in boats, but many are also landed from the ocean piers. They get fishermen excited with clicker-melting runs and occasional T-top tall launches while chasing baitfish. Unfortunately, it's difficult to get all fishermen excited about eating them. They are delicious prepared in a variety of ways and they're good for you too, as long as they aren't eaten to excess. King mackerel are a prime source of Omega 3 fatty acids that help promote heart health and increase our good cholesterol.

This recipe is a unique way to prepare king mackerel. It pairs them with multiple vegetables in a light and easy meal. Hopefully, it's a way you'll like and prepare occasionally. Kings up to around 20 pounds have a milder flavor, and there are enough fillets in one of those to enjoy this six or eight times. This will be a great substitute for leftover turkey one of the days of Thanksgiving weekend.

Happy Thanksgiving to all. I hope you have many reasons to be thankful. ■

KING MACKEREL STIR FRY

A TWIST ON PREPARING A FISH MANY PEOPLE AVOID



Jerry Dilsaver

OPPOSITE: The author adds ingredients for king mackerel stir fry into his FireDisc cooker. **INSET:** Marinate king mackerel pieces in Teriyaki sauce for two hours in the refrigerator.

KING MACKEREL STIR FRY

I'll go ahead and say it up front and out loud — I like eating king mackerel. The only quantifier to that statement is that it must be cooked properly. It can't be fried in old oil, and it can't be overcooked. If you get those two things right, it's pretty good.

I prefer kings in the 15- to 20-pound range, as they sometimes are a bit milder and are large enough to have steaks the right size, but I'll eat larger ones, and they're good too. This was prepared with a couple of fillets from a king of approximately 25 pounds, and it disappeared quickly after the pictures were taken.

I like simple recipes, especially those that can be done in a single pot or pan. This doesn't quite meet that standard, as it requires a second pot or rice cooker to prepare the rice. However, it's still pretty simple; the most difficult part is chopping the vegetables.

I believe simple is better and keep it that way by marinating the mackerel in teriyaki sauce and using a little low-sodium soy sauce sprinkled over the combined rice, veggies and fish. Some folks like a sweet, brown sauce over their stir fry. That may work well with chicken or beef, but I think it's too much with mackerel.

King mackerel is the featured ingredient in this recipe, but there are lots of vegetables. If you have a grill with a side burner, all of this can be prepared outside on a mild November evening. Even when it's cooler outside, and I prepare the rice inside, I like to cook the stir fry outside on my FireDisc Cooker.

I've featured this cooker in several recipes in

PREPARATION:

Cut the king mackerel into bite-sized pieces, \ put the pieces in a Zip-Lock bag and add just enough teriyaki sauce to cover them, then marinate in the refrigerator for several hours.

Wash the vegetables and chop the broccolini, bell peppers and onion. Shred the cabbage and carrots. Cook the rice according to its directions. Heat a little olive oil in the FireDisc on high until it pops when sprinkled with water.

Cook the mackerel until almost done and remove. Put all the vegetables except the baby corns into the FireDisc and cook until tender, stirring frequently. Put the baby corns and fish in with the vegetables and stir frequently until warm.

Serve the stir fry over the rice. Top with roasted

the past and have tried to describe it several ways. I keep coming back to calling it a cowboy wok; that describes it pretty well. They're made in Texas and are a heck of a big steel, rounded-bottom pan and stand for cooking outdoors.

By cooking outside, I don't have to deal with the whoosh of steam when the fish and vegetables are dumped into the cooker. If you cook inside, be sure to have the stove vent fan running on high when you add them.

The biggest thing with this recipe is to be sure not to overcook anything. It goes south quickly if you overcook the fish or get the vegetables mushy. When you get it right, this is far better than you think it will be. It surprised me the first time we made it and it continues to do it. Give it a try and I believe you'll like it — maybe even enough to cook it again. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound king mackerel fillets
- 1 cup broccolini
- 1 red bell pepper
- 1 green bell pepper
- 1 cup snow peas
- 1 cup carrots
- ½ cup sweet onion
- ½ cup purple cabbage
- 1 can baby corn on the cob,
- 1 cup jasmine rice,
- 4 tbsp roasted sesame seeds
- Teriyaki sauce
- Soy Sauce (may substitute more teriyaki sauce, Tamari Sauce or Coconut Amino sauce)
- Salt and pepper



Jerry Dilsaver

sesame seeds and sprinkle with soy sauce (or teriyaki, tamari or coconut amino sauce) to taste.

This is a one-plate meal. It has meat, multiple vegetables and a starch in the mixture. All you need to add is a glass of ice-cold, sweet tea or your favorite adult beverage. If you would like dessert, it should be light, like pudding or sorbet.

I cook this in a FireDisc, but it could be cooked in a wok. ■



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.

SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Guides Bobby Winters and Leroy Suggs show off some nice, slot-sized stripers caught last fall at Santee Cooper.



Terry Madewell

NOVEMBER ACTION CAN BE UNMATCHED

FISH IN TRANSITION ARE ON A REAL FEEDING BINGE

After several months fattening up on forage, fishing for several species peaks in November on the Santee Cooper lakes. This month is the fall equivalent to the winter-to-spring transition in March when multiple species are on an aggressive bite.

Schooling action for striped bass is typically great early and late, with the live-bait bite productive when fish are not schooling.

Guide Leroy Suggs out of Blacks Camp said this is an excellent time for schooling stripers on the surface.

"The forage is abundant during the fall, as the shad have grown considerably during the warm-weather months," he said. "By November, huge schools of bait-fish roam both lakes, and casting bucktails or jigs with plastic trailers produces excellent action on schooling fish. My personal preference is to try to get away from the big crowd of boats, because multiple boats pursuing the same school

of stripers can impact our chances for larger fish."

Suggs (910-995-1168) said stripers often school by size class, and if he hits a school of mostly smaller fish, he'll move to another area. By letting his bucktail drop deeper before starting the retrieve, he can often hook up with larger fish, but sometimes, larger stripers are absent from some schools.

Guide Bobby Winters said the lakes are full of stripers in the slot-limit of 23 to 25 inches, and live bait — primarily blueback herring — will produce action when stripers are not schooling.

DROP BAITS DOWN

"I'll keep one eye peeled for schooling action, but by marking forage and fish on the graph, we can fish live bait at the depth stripers are holding and continue to catch them," he said. "I love a cloudy November morning for striper fishing."

Winters will also be on the hunt for big catfish in November.

"At this time of the year, forage is abundant, and big fish are feeding heavily," he said. "It's a prime time of the year to hook a real monster cat."

Winters (843-751-3080) said he'll drift-fish, and depending on the wind direction, he'll use six to eight rods. It's not unusual in November to have multiple hookups.

"I like to fish underwater drops, ledges and high spots," Winters said. "I prefer drifting up an underwater hill because I get more bites. We'll typically catch fish at a steady pace, but when we drift over a big school of shad, it's possible to have multiple hookups."

Monster largemouth bass are realistic during November, and fat, football-



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.

shaped bass in the 5- to 7-pound class are caught on a variety of lures. Action doesn't rival spring for numbers of top-end largemouth, but bass are usually on an aggressive bite.

Guide Inky Davis said this month is excellent for both big fish, as well as fast-paced action. Davis prefers the upper-bend of Lake Marion in the fall.

"The upper end of Lake Marion has more targets than I can ever fish, and fishing back in the flooded cypress trees, working small openings and ditch runs produces great action," he said. "These serve as travel routes and holding spots for bass during November."

Davis (803-478-7289) said November is a prime topwater time, and he fishes buzzbaits, floating worms, topwater twitch baits and heavy tailspinners rigged for quick, long-range topwater action. He runs crankbaits in the 3- to 7-foot depth range on stump flats and points and plastic worms cast snugly around trees, logs and weedbeds.

"An isolated tree, bush, log or patch of weeds is something I always target," he said. "These isolated targets are excellent for big largemouth."

Crappie fishing is also productive; guide Dave Hilton said most will be orienting to woody cover along drops and ledges.

"Find woody cover in 15 to 35 feet of water and work brush, logs and stumps with live bait or jigs," he said. "The specific depth varies with the water temperature, and usually, the crappie will be shallower early in the fall and gradually move deeper as the water cools."

Hilton (843-870-4734) will work minnows over the top and along the edges of sunken brush, and if he doesn't get fish quickly, he'll find another place. Usually the crappie bite is strong during November; it's just a matter of finding cover in the right depth.

It's prime-time fall fishing season at Santee Cooper exciting action on multiple species of fish. ■



Terry Madewell

STICKING SLABS:

Guide Dave Hilton shows off the kind of crappie that can be caught in November. These two slabs were caught off brush piles in Lake Masrion, a pattern that takes advantage of crappie orienting to wooden cover.

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HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

The Raven Fork, a tributary of the Oconaluftee River, is one of the top trout steams in Cherokee Enterprise Waters, with sections in both catch-and-keep and catch-and-release waters.

CHEROKEE'S WATERS ARE FISHING HEAVEN

HEAVILY STOCKED, STREAMS AND PONDS ON RESERVATION OFFER EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL LEVELS OF FISHERS

The Cherokee Reservation's Enterprise Waters are well known as one of the top catch-and-keep trout fisheries in the mountains, with generous creel limits and heavily stocked streams.

The 30 miles of streams and three ponds that make up Cherokee Enterprise Waters are stocked annually with 360,000 rainbow trout that run between 8 and 10 ounces, and a few brown and brook trout in the trophy category. Anglers may keep up to 10 trout a day, with no size, lure or bait restrictions.

In addition to catch-and-keep waters, the tribe has a 2.2-mile section of Raven Fork in the Big Cove area that is restricted to catch-and-release fly-fishing. Most of the fish are at least 20 inches, with some in the 30-plus-inch range.

Streams in the Enterprise Waters system are the Oconaluftee River, Raven Fork, Bunches Creek and Soco Creek. The three ponds are in Big Cove. Except for Soco Creek, Enterprise streams originate in the adjoining Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Oconaluftee, the longest section, runs through the town of Cherokee, eventu-

ally joining the Little Tennessee River upstream from Fontana Reservoir.

TIE ON A FLY

While bait fishers make up a majority of the anglers who fish Enterprise Waters, Cherokee streams also are excellent fly-fishing streams. Stocked trout quickly adapt to their new environment, and once they've been in a stream a couple of weeks without their daily allotment of trout food, they learn to eat whatever insects and aquatic life are available.

Float a small, Blue-Winged Olive over a likely run, and you'll get a strike even after a bait fisher has given up, convinced that the stream has been fished out. Despite heavy fishing pressure and frequent stockings, the streams do have limited natural reproduction. Plus, wild trout are either washed down or migrate from park streams.

Trout are raised from eggs at the tribal hatchery at the head of Big Cove, and approximately 800,000 trout are kept in raceways, everything from fry to stocking-size trout. Most of the trout are rainbows.

Enterprise Waters are stocked once a

week during the winter and three times a week during spring, summer, and fall. Most of the rainbows run between 8 and 10 ounces, but weekly stockings also include trophy trout that run four to 12 pounds and a few even bigger. The larger trout are stocked in the bigger waters of the Oconaluftee and lower Raven Fork.

Prime places for fly fishing are upper Raven Fork and Bunches Creek in the Big Cove area. Bunches Creek, a small stream, is a tributary of Raven Fork, and Raven Fork, a medium-size stream, is a tributary of the Oconaluftee River. Both streams are easy to get to and easy to wade. Bunches Creek is accessible from a gravel road; a paved road runs beside Raven Fork from where it begins as Enterprise Waters to its confluence with the Oconaluftee River.

For fly fishing, Blue-Winged Olives (Nos. 16 or 18) are deadly almost any



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.

time of the year in Cherokee or park waters. Other excellent patterns are Quill Gordon, Blue Dun, Hendrickson and March Brown, all in Nos. 14 or 16. Excellent attractor patterns are a male Adams, Royal Wulff, Thunderhead or Gray Hackle in Nos. 12 or 14.

For nymph fishing, recommended patterns are No. 10 March Brown, No. 10 Dark Stone, No. 10 or 12 Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear, No. 10 Secret Weapon or a No. 10 Tellico.

The tribe sponsors several high-dollar weekend fishing tournaments. This year's tournaments include a two-day, season-opening tournament in March with \$20,000 in prizes; the Tim Hill Memorial Trout Tournament in July with \$10,000 in prizes; and the Qualla Country Trout Tournament in September with \$20,000 in prizes. Entry fees are nominal.

Enterprise streams are closed for two weeks in March, but they open the last Saturday in March, a week earlier than state-managed, hatchery-supported streams. Only a tribal permit (\$10 per day) is required to fish Enterprise Waters; no other license is needed. Permits for catch-and-release waters are \$25 per day in addition to a \$10 tribal fishing permit.



ENTERPRISE WATERS TROUT:

Rainbow trout (above) are the main species of trout in Cherokee Reservation Enterprise Waters, and some of the stocked 'bows get pretty big. The reservation has more than 30 miles of streams, plus three ponds, as map (right) shows.



Children under 12 are not required to purchase a tribal permit, but they must be accompanied by a permit-holding adult.

Maps, brochures, and other information are available on-line at www.FishCherokee.com.

ASTRO TABLES

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

The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars). The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:
The 2019 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$13.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2019 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2019, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2020, and more. Comes with FREE 2019 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, plus \$3 s&h.
Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor. \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

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

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BEST DAYS		LUNAR PERIODS							
POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
2019 NOV					MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Fri 1	█	█	█	12	12:13 pm	4:47 pm - 5:43 pm	10:15 pm	4:16 am - 5:14 am	LOW
Sat 2	█	█	█	12	1:06 pm	5:40 pm - 6:36 pm	11:11 pm	5:12 am - 6:08 am	
Sun 3	█	█	█	18	12:52 pm	5:27 pm - 6:29 pm	11:07 pm	6:05 am - 7:01 am	
Mon 4	█	█	█	29	1:31 pm	6:10 pm - 7:22 pm		5:52 am - 6:54 am	HALF & END DS
Tue 5	█	█	█	21	2:07 pm	6:50 pm - 8:12 pm	12:04 am	6:35 am - 7:47 am	
Wed 6	█	█	█	17	2:38 pm	7:26 pm - 9:02 pm	1:00 am	7:15 am - 8:37 am	
Thu 7	█	█	█	19	3:07 pm	8:00 pm - 9:52 pm	1:56 am	7:51 am - 9:27 am	Apogee
Fri 8	█	█	█	22	3:35 pm	8:33 pm - 10:41 pm	2:51 am	8:25 am - 10:17 am	
Sat 9	█	█	█	34	4:02 pm	9:05 pm - 11:31 pm	3:46 am	8:58 am - 11:06 am	
Sun 10	█	█	█	46	4:31 pm	9:41 pm - 12:21 am	4:42 am	9:30 am - 11:56 am	
Mon 11	█	█	█	59	5:01 pm	10:18 pm - 1:14 am	5:39 am	10:06 am - 12:46 pm	SUN
Tue 12	█	█	█	65	5:35 pm	10:58 pm - 2:08 am	6:38 am	10:43 am - 1:39 pm	FULL
Wed 13	█	█	█	55	6:13 pm	11:43 pm - Midnight	7:38 am	11:23 am - 2:33 pm	
Thu 14	█	█	█	47	6:57 pm	Midnight - 3:03 am	8:39 am	12:08 pm - 3:28 pm	
Fri 15	█	█	█	38	7:47 pm	12:32 am - 4:02 am	9:40 am	12:57 pm - 4:27 pm	
Sat 16	█	█	█	34	8:44 pm	1:26 am - 4:58 am	10:38 am	1:51 pm - 5:23 pm	HIGH
Sun 17	█	█	█	33	9:46 pm	2:24 am - 5:54 am	11:32 am	2:49 pm - 6:19 pm	
Mon 18	█	█	█	37	10:51 pm	3:24 am - 6:46 am	12:20 pm	3:49 pm - 7:11 pm	
Tue 19	█	█	█	46	11:59 pm	4:25 am - 7:37 am	1:03 pm	4:50 pm - 8:02 pm	HALF
Wed 20	█	█	█	32		5:25 am - 8:25 am	1:42 pm	5:50 pm - 8:50 pm	
Thu 21	█	█	█	24	1:07 am	6:27 am - 9:07 am	2:18 pm	6:52 pm - 9:32 pm	
Fri 22	█	█	█	21	2:15 am	7:29 am - 9:47 am	2:52 pm	7:54 pm - 10:12 pm	
Sat 23	█	█	█	28	3:23 am	8:30 am - 10:28 am	3:26 pm	8:55 pm - 10:53 pm	Perigee
Sun 24	█	█	█	36	4:32 am	9:30 am - 11:12 am	4:02 pm	9:55 pm - 11:37 pm	
Mon 25	█	█	█	43	5:41 am	10:31 am - 11:57 am	4:40 pm	10:56 pm - 12:22 am	
Tue 26	█	█	█	46	6:49 am	11:34 am - 12:42 pm	5:23 pm	11:59 pm - Midnight	NEW
Wed 27	█	█	█	33	7:55 am	12:35 pm - 1:33 pm	6:10 pm	Midnight - 1:07 am	
Thu 28	█	█	█	23	8:58 am	1:32 pm - 2:28 pm	7:01 pm	1:00 am - 1:58 am	LOW
Fri 29	█	█	█	13	9:55 am	2:27 pm - 3:23 pm	7:57 pm	1:57 am - 2:53 am	
Sat 30	█	█	█	8	10:45 am	3:19 pm - 4:17 pm	8:54 pm	2:52 am - 3:48 am	

25 50 75 AVERAGE

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.

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

The author shows off a chunky Albemarle Sound striped, a favorite among fall fishermen.

Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

ALBEMARLE SOUND STRIPERS HEAT UP

Dusty Wilson

Jigging around channel markers, trolling, casting to schooling fish all work just fine

The striped bass is a hands-down favorite among cool-water fishermen looking to heat things up in eastern North Carolina, and there's no place better than the Albemarle Sound to light the fire.

Whether casting, jigging, or trolling, anglers can get in on the action about any way they please if they know what to look for. According to guide Jeff Onley of Elizabeth City, N.C., it's all about finding the right structure and pairing the right technique with it.

One such structure that Onley (252-333-6524), who runs Albemarle Fishing Charters, prefers in November is the sound's channel markers. Typically targeting the area between the Chowan River and the North River in 7 to 18 feet of water, Onley pulls up beside a pole and drops a ¾-ounce Stingsilver or Hopkins spoon. After bumping it off the bottom, he jigs

the lure alongside the pole while testing various depths until met with a thump.

"By November, they could be moving into the mouths of the rivers," Onley said. "That's where I'll target structures like piers, casting a ¾-ounce Rat-L-Trap or a 3- to 4-inch Berkley swimming mullet. My colors are blue and silver in the Rat-L-Traps and chartreuse and white in the swimming mullets. There are also rock piles you can cast over in the mouth of the Pasquotank River where the old lighthouses used to sit."

If an angler is unfamiliar with an area, trolling the shoreline's numerous stump fields is a good way to cover ground. The same Rat-L-Traps Onley uses for casting also make solid trolling baits, as well as Rapala Husky Jerks. Stump fields can be found with sonar, and those in 9 to 10 feet of water are preferred because the baits will usually ride above the wood at

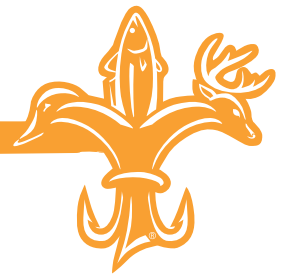
a speed around 2 knots. The Albemarle Sound bridge is also an excellent trolling area, but Onley switches to Yozuri Deep Divers and Mann's Stretch 20s in the deeper water.

If an angler spots birds diving into baitfish being pushed to the surface, he is fortunate enough to have located schooling fish and should get there as quickly as possible.

"Some people like to troll around or to cast to schooling fish," Onley said. "But the way to catch the bigger fish is to stop on the school and drop over Hopkins or Stingsilvers. Drop it to the bottom and jig it. If you let the school pass on by, that's usually where the bigger fish will be, not under the birds."

Onley prefers fishing 40-pound Power Pro braid without a leader on a 6½-foot spinning rod matched with a 2000 class spinning reel. ■

— Dusty Wilson



INLETS ARE OUTLETS

for migrating North Carolina red drum

When daylight hours decrease during late October and November and the mercury begins to dip, guide Jot Owens of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., usually targets spotted seatrout.

But every so often, a client wants something different, so he changes out the line on his reel, ties on some different lures and goes hunting for red drum — lots of red drum.

"If you know where they're likely to be, especially later in the month when the water temperature drops down toward 50 degrees, you can find schools of 20 to 200 fish," said Owens, of Jot It Down Charters (910-233-4139). "It can be a lot of fun."

Obviously, concentrations of reds offer exciting possibilities.

"If it's late October, the first place I'll look is shallow water, estuary creeks and along (marsh) grass lines where higher tides push reds up against the grass," he said.

He'll cast 3- to 4-inch Gulp! shrimp on 1/6-ounce swimbait hooks parallel to the marsh grass, as close as he can get.

"These weigh just enough to cast a good distance along the edges," Owens said. "The idea is to let a lure sink slowly then hop them along the edges without snagging grass or letting them hit bottom. It's not sight casting; the water's usually so clear you can't get close to the fish or they'll spook."

Two more places likely hold schools of red drum.

"When we get some cooler weather, good-sized groups of reds, slot and over-slot sizes, gather at the mouths of inlets," he said. "That's when you go up (in sizes) of lures to 5- and 6-inch Berkley Gulp! shads or 4-inch Gulp! shrimp with 3/8- to 3/4-ounce jigheads and 3/0 or 4/0 hooks.

"You want to cast lures where the current line meets the 'dead' water," Owens said. "That's where fish will be. It's also usually better during tide changes."

When fishing from a boat, Owens jigs lures from shallow to deep water. From the shoreline, it's just the opposite.

Top lure colors include sugar spice/glow for shrimp imitators and chartreuse pepper/neon/fire tiger for shad lures.

"In mid- to late November, with temperatures in the low 60s and 50s, schools of redfish leave inlets for the surf," he said. "When the ocean's calm, you can fish the surf from the shore or a boat and see big

numbers of redfish near inlets."

For long casts in the ocean, Owens uses a 7½-foot rod with a 2500 to 3000 size reel to throw 5-inch, ½-ounce Jerk Shads at redfish schools. Line is 15-pound Spiderwire braid with a 1½ to 2 feet of 20-pound leader.

"It's not like summer fishing when you (catch) one or two fish," Owens said. "You're either gonna catch six or 20 — or there'll be no bite at all." ■

— Craig Holt



Inlets along North Carolina's southeastern coast will fill up with red drum as the water cools in November.

Jot Owens

Redfish respond to falling water temperatures by gathering in big schools and chasing down baitfish.



Jordan Pate

GEORGETOWN REDS beginning to school up, feed heavily

The fall fishing season is well under way, and the waters around Georgetown, S.C., are hitting on all cylinders, from offshore to inshore. For anglers with redfish on the brain, these waters are some of the best places to trailer a boat and soak a bait or toss an artificial lure during November.

The Georgetown area is a large collection of waters extending from Debordieu Island south to the Santee Delta and more than 15 miles east. It is very broad, extensive and absolutely full of prime habitat for redfish.

Jordan Pate of Carolina Guide Service in Pawley's Island, S.C., literally spends more time on the water around Georgetown than on dry land, and November means plenty of redfish.

"Water temperatures are falling pretty hard this month, and the redfish are taking full advantage of it," said Pate (843-814-7900). "Lots of bait is still around, and the reds can be very aggressive as they congregate around places with a high (concentration) of food"

According to Pate, reds are beginning to gather into larger schools and eating constantly, fattening up for the winter. Successful anglers find places with lots of bait, normally in shallow water, because the baitfish are attempting to avoid predators,

but redfish are accustomed to shallow places, and anglers can find them picking off baitfish one at a time.

"We target shallow creeks and flats this time of year with clear water. It's an ideal time to sight-fish, and the clear water, abundant with fish, can make for a very memorable day," he said.

Pate will travel around from North Inlet to Cape Romain, looking for shallow creeks and flats that are holding reds. The best places will have large drainage areas dumping into smaller collection spots where the bait is corralled at low tide — but still shallow. Reds are accustomed to feeding in these areas, away from the dangers of porpoises. It's easy eating for reds and also for other companion species, like flounder and speckled trout.

Pate will typically use a crab or minnow pattern for his fly-fishing customers or a D.O.A. Shrimp, Matrix Shad or Gulp! for his others. Since the fish are hungry and gorging on bait, a wide variety of artificial and natural bait options will put fish in the boat in no time at all.

— Jeff Bureson

HARTWELL STRIPERS, hybrids heat up as weather cools down

By the time little kids in weird costumes have amassed all the Halloween candy they can eat, the oppressive summer of 2019 will be a near-distant memory, but fishing for stripers and hybrids on Lake Hartwell will be as hot as an August heat wave, according to guide Chip Hamilton of Easley, S.C.

"November is a really good fishing month," said Hamilton (864-304-9011). "The only thing that ever goes wrong in November is when we get some really nasty weather fronts coming down from the North. They can really mess things up."

That said, there are two major patterns for stripers and hybrids in November, Hamilton said. The main one is a carryover from October that can last through Christmas and well into January.

Hamilton locates groups of stripers and hybrids around underwater islands, humps and main-lake points that taper off slowly before dropping off in the channel.

"We are looking for clean, flat spots about 40 to 45 feet deep with bait on them. If there is no bait, there won't be any fish," he said. "We mainly just set up on those flats, humps and points and put out live herring on Carolina rigs just off the bottom. That is usually the go-to pattern every morning when we start out."

The other pattern is topwater schooling, he said, adding that you never know when fish will school or where. It just happens. "I am always looking for it. They will just decide to come off the humps and gather up and chase the bait out in the middle of the lake," he said.



Hybrid and striped bass really put on the feed bag on Lake Hartwell this month.

Chip Hamilton

The two main ways to catch these schooling fish are by casting artificial lures and pulling live herring on free-lines, he said.

"I have seen days when they hit artificials better than a live bait," he said. "The live herring we are using might not match the bait they are hitting, so we have to match the size with the artificial baits."

Hamilton said his artificials of choice are Sebile Magic Swimmers, Little Fishies and a Pulse jig with a Fluke body.

Throwing artificials into the schools is not finesse fishing, he said. "Just rip the lure right through them."

By Thanksgiving, fishing live herring on Carolina rigs is usually in full swing, he said, with a party of three or four fishermen on his boat landing limits totaling 30 to 40 fish. Sometimes artificials work better on the deep pattern, too, he added.

"Action on small jiggling spoons really starts picking up in November on the spots where we drop the Carolina rig, and it is a dynamite pattern in December and January," Hamilton said. ■

— Pat Robertson

Jigheads tipped with minnows and tight-lined vertically are the ticket to good catches of Jordan Lake crappie in November.



TIGHT-LINE JORDAN SLABS IN NOVEMBER

Crappie moving into deeper water, in channels, as baitfish are on the move

With more than 31 years of experience guiding for crappie, Freddie Sinclair of Clayton, N.C., commands attention when he recommends tight-lining in the fall for Jordan Lake slabs.

Sinclair has been stalking Jordan's crappie since 1981 and knows how to catch them.

"Tight-lining, aka vertical fishing, is the most effective way to catch fall crappie, as they gradually make their way along deep creek channels after forage when the water temperatures begin dropping in late November," said Sinclair (www.sinclairsguideservice.com).

Early in November, fish may be as shallow as 4 feet, but as the month progresses, the majority are 15 to 20 feet deep in creek channels where they can be reached by tight-lining. With a cold front, they'll suspend in the water column to 30 feet, he said.

"The presence of forage at these depths is more important than cover, be it rock, wood or brush," Sinclair said. "The fish are feeding up for the winter months ahead, and they're drawn to concentrations of forage. Current and water color aren't that important, either. Finding forage with your electronics is the essential factor."

Wind becomes a concern only if it gets so breezy that tight-lining becomes difficult.

"I like a little chop on the water, but calm water makes tight-lining much easier," said Sinclair.

For tight-lining, Sinclair sets out 8 rods 13 to 16 feet long on the bow of his boat to sample various depths. If it's windy, he may reposition the rods in the stern of his boat for better control. He moves along at 0.2 to 0.5 mph.

The rods have a flexible tip to detect the slightest nibble. They're paired with Daiwa spinning reels holding 6-pound Trilene Sensation line.

At the business end, Sinclair fishes 1/32- to 1/16-ounce jigheads tipped with minnows. He uses jigheads in black, chartreuse and pink for stained water and orange and blue for clear water.

"It's rare to find clear water at Jordan," said Sinclair. "It's usually stained."

While tight-lining, Sinclair also favors a down-sized Caroline rig with a No. 2 gold hook holding live minnows. His egg sinker ranges from 1/4- to 3/8-ounce depending upon the wind.

Other crappie strongholds in late November include the bridge near Farrington Point and the US 64 bridge that bisects the lake. Creek mouths and deep roadbeds hold crappie as well.

Sinclair said the crappie population at Jordan has stabilized, with most fall crappie running from 1 1/2 to 2 pounds. Black crappie dominate over white crappie.

— Tony Garitta

Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



Ethan Hedrick

Ethan Hedrick, 7, from Lexington, N.C., killed his first deer last Nov. 19.



Dale Jr., Dale & Oliver McClelland

Dale McClelland Jr., Dale McClelland and Oliver McClelland caught Spanish and king mackerel out of Murrells Inlet, S.C.



Camden Wayne

Camden Wayne, 9, of Millers Creek, N.C., killed this great Wilkes County buck last Nov. 25. It scored 155%.



John White

John White, 14, tagged a hen with a 7½-inch beard on April 9 in Pender Co., N.C.



Mark Komarzynski

Mark Komarzynski tagged this gobbler on April 21 in Beaufort County, N.C. It had 1½-inch spurs and a 10½-inch beard.

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or to images@carolinasporthsman.com**

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



Brayden Garrett

Brayden Garrett killed a double-branded brant in his limit of brant while hunting with his grandfather this past winter.



Scott Brown

Scott Brown of Asheboro, N.C., caught this nice blue catfish on cut bait at North Carolina's Badin Lake in early August.



Kaybree Jo Morton

Kaybree Jo Morton, 5, of Jacksonville, N.C., caught her first-ever redfish in the New River.



Brian Saunders

Brian Saunders killed this nice 8-point buck on Nov. 28, 2018.



Wyatt Lynch

Wyatt Lynch, 7, dropped his first turkey in Bertie Co., N.C., on April 13, 2017. It had an 11-inch beard with 1-inch spurs.



Caroline Moore

Caroline Moore, 9, of Lebanon, S.C., tagged this nice 8-point buck on Sept. 9 in 4 Hole Swamp near Ridgeville, S.C.



Ayden O'Neil

Ayden O'Neil of Miller's Creek, N.C., got in on the trout bite fishing with Yeah Right Charters out of Southport, N.C.



Shannon Bullard

Shannon Bullard of Fayetteville, N.C., downed this bird near Salemburg, N.C. It carried a 13-inch beard.



Jessie Queen

Jessie Queen, 12, killed her first turkey on April 24 in Randolph Co., N.C. The tom weighed 22 pounds with an 11-inch beard.



Cole Spencer

Cole Spencer caught this bluegill from Lake Broyhill on Camp Harrison near Boomer, N.C., on June 3 during a YMCA trip.

AVIAN-X OVERSIZED DECOYS

Worried about high-flying ducks noticing your decoys?

That worry goes out the window when your spread includes some of Avian-X's new oversized TopFlight decoys. The huge decoys — they come in six-packs of mallards and black ducks — are 17 inches long, 30% longer than normal-sized decoys. They look especially big from above; their width is tremendous.

Used by themselves or in spreads with typical decoys, these big blocks, with the typical, beautiful Avian-X paint jobs — the drakes' bright, green heads should be spotlights for passing flocks — should stand out plenty, especially in open-water situations.

MSRP is \$119.99 for a pack of six, which includes four drakes and two hens.

For more info, visit: www.avian-x.com



BIG & J'S "TO DIE FOR" DEER ATTRACTANT



Plenty of hunters supplement a white-tailed deer's diet with a number of things, corn foremost among them in most places where it's legal.

But if you think the sweet smell of golden niblets can draw deer in from long distances, step aside for Big&J's new "To Die For" deer attractant.

Made with a special hybrid sweet corn — five times sweeter than field corn, the manufacturer says — in granulated form, with the company's BB2 additive, To Die For features an aroma that is strong enough to be carried along by prevailing winds.

MSRP is \$12.99 for a 5-pound bag and \$24.99 for a 20-pound bag.

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POSTAL SERVICE: (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)

1. Publication Title: CAROLINA SPORTSMAN
2. Issue Frequency: MONTHLY
3. Issue Date: OCTOBER 2019
4. Annual Subscription Price: \$19.95
5. Number of Issues Published Annually: 12
6. Annual Subscription Price: \$239.40
7. Number of Copies of Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 10,000
8. Total Number of Copies of All Issues During Preceding 12 Months: 120,000
9. Total Number of Copies of This Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 10,000
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