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THE LAST HURRAH



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SANTEE'S COLD PANFISH



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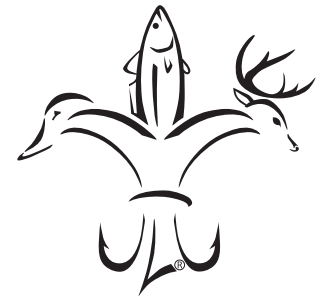
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RAINY DAY REDS



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BIG WATER, BIG SPREADS



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**Dan Kibler**



Dan Kibler is managing editor of Carolina Sportsman magazine. If every fish were a redfish and every big-game animal a wild turkey, he wouldn't ever complain.

*Dan Kibler*

## HOLIDAY HUNTING: TAKE A TRIP YOUNG MEMORIES MADE MAY WIND UP LASTING A LIFETIME

I have taken some great hunting trips in my 63 years, but I distinctly remember two I took in back-to-back Decembers, a half-century or so ago.

When I turned 12, we packed the station wagon as soon as the wrapping paper was in the trash can on Christmas morning, headed 600 miles south from our home in Virginia to the farm in Georgia where my dad grew up.

The next morning, we loaded a handful of pointers and a setter into a dog box in the back of my grandfather's pickup truck and headed out bird-hunting. If you have

of birds, which flew back across the lane onto my grandfather's farm. We marked them down, set the dogs on them, and I can take you to the exact spot, 51 years later, where they pointed some of the singles scattered in the pines.

When the covey exploded, I somehow killed one, a cock bird — maybe it just flew into the stream of pellets by accident; I take no credit. I can still remember the smell of the powder and hearing my dad shoot three times to my left before I'd even squeezed the trigger the first time.

We hunted for the better part of the week between Christmas and New Year's, and I killed more quail and a dove or two, plus a squirrel. It was a trip I'll never forget.

The next Christmas morning, my dad and I boarded a jet and headed to visit an uncle outside of Houston. On Dec. 26, — carrying a brand-new Stevens Model 311 side-by-side in 20-gauge, bored full and modified with 3-inch chambers — I was slogging down a levee between rice fields, navigating by the stars to a tiny pothole in the marsh, where we shot black ducks, widgeons, pintails, teal and mallards for five days — my first ducks.

There were side trips to one camp and another rice plantation, all filled with ducks. Walking between the boat and a sunken blind one day, I came close to stepping on a coiled, 4-foot western diamondback rattlesnake sunning along the path. I still have his rattles in the drawer of my desk.

The adults didn't let me anywhere near a duck call, but that didn't matter. I doubt in the past 50 years that I've seen nearly as many ducks as I did in that one week in south Texas. We picked ducks for hours and ate roast duck several times.

I have never come close to matching the joy of those two trips. I hope I carry those memories to the grave. So, if you've got the opportunity between this Christmas and New Year's, and you've got a son or daughter of the right age, try to take them on a hunting trip and provide some special memories. ■

### 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.

Log onto [carolinasportsman.com/contest/index.php?event=26](http://carolinasportsman.com/contest/index.php?event=26) for all the details.

to ask which kind of bird, you just don't understand how much bobwhite quail meant to country boys in the first half of the 20th century.

We hunted Levi's place, then we came back across the dirt road and hunted through Mr. Floyd's cut corn field. On the far end of the field, one of the young dogs ran up a covey



## GATOR GETTERS

South Carolina's alligator season ended with a bang in October, with three particularly big specimens taken by hunters.

At far left, Hunter Neeley and Crick Hooker of Chapin, S.C., took this 13-foot-6½ gator from Lake Moultrie.

At top left, Ryan Russell of Irmo, S.C., took this 12-foot-4 gator in the North Santee River on Oct. 5.

At bottom left, Chris Skibo and Brandon Dockery of Kings Mountain, N.C., took this 11-foot-11 monster out of Blacks Camp on Santee Cooper's Diverison Canal on Oct. 5.

For complete stories, visit [www.CarolinaSportsman.com](http://www.CarolinaSportsman.com).

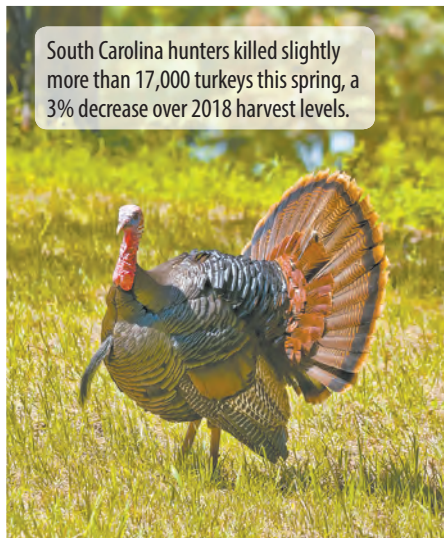
## TURKEY HARVEST DROPS 3% IN SOUTH CAROLINA IN 2019

**T**urkey hunters in South Carolina put fewer birds in the back of their hunting vests this past spring for the second-straight year, with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources announcing a 3% drop in the spring harvest.

Hunters took 17,374 birds last spring, including 15,783 adult gobblers and 1,591 jakes. In 2018, hunters took 17,939 birds, a 10% drop over 2017 harvest levels.

The harvest report points to a worrisome trend in the state's wild turkey population. A harvest increase of almost 24% in 2016 and 2017 is largely attributed to hunters having a 50% increase in the length of the season in 74% of the state, coming at the same time that turkey recruitment is the lowest over the past five years since brood surveys began in 1982.

The top five counties in terms of total harvest last spring were: Williamsburg (979), Orangeburg (738), Berkeley (717), Colleton (666) and Spartanburg (641). In terms of harvest per square mile, Spartanburg County led with 1.5 turkeys taken per square mile, followed by Pickens (1.4), Bamberg (1.3), Abbeville (1.2) and Williamsburg (1.2). ■



## SCDNR ADDS NEW WMA IN RICHLANDS COUNTY

South Carolina held a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nov. 6 for its latest Wildlife Management Area, a 782-acre property that the agency received in September from The Conservation Fund.

The Love Farm WMA/Nat Love Youth Special Hunt Area is near Wateree WMA in Richlands County. The property will include a public dove field and will be used for waterfowl draw hunts and special youth hunts.

The property, at 1900 Vanboklen Rd. in Eastover, was made possible with federal funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Restoration Program, the U.S. Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program, the S.C. chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and state funding.

## GOT PICS? We want 'em

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

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

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, visit [www.carolinasportsman.com](http://www.carolinasportsman.com) and visit the deer-hunting section.

# BIG SPORTSMAN'S BUCK GALLERY



Brian Barton of Yemassee, S.C., killed this huge Hampton County buck on Oct. 2. He had nicknamed the 14-point, 180-pound buck "Elvis."



This 6-point buck, killed by Ryan Inglehart of Roxboro, N.C., on Oct. 6, scored 135 inches.



Seth Vaden of Madison, N.C., killed this 149-inch, full-velvet buck, on Sept. 9 in Rockingham County.



John Fuller of Oak Ridge, N.C., killed this 12-point, Guilford County buck, on Sept. 23.



Katie Robinson Smith of Roseboro, N.C., killed this 11-point, 163-inch buck on Oct. 18 in Sampson County.

Chas Morton's big 10-point South Carolina buck was the October Bag-A-Buck contest winner.



# SC 10-POINTER WINS CONTEST

Vacation finished, Rock Hill hunter scores big

**C**has Morton, a 44-year-old hunter from Rock Hill, S.C., got home from vacation on the afternoon of Oct. 27, just in time to spend a few hours in a deer stand on a 90-acre lease in York County.

"At the last minute, I decided to go hunting," he said. "Since I hadn't been hunting... for the past week, I had hoped the deer wouldn't feel pressured."

Boy, was Morton correct. In his stand at 5 p.m., he was standing over a great 10-point buck by about 6:10, a buck he entered the next day in *Carolina Sportsman's* Bag-A-Buck contest — a buck drawn as the winner of the monthly contest for October.

Morton 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-year 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.

Morton had been watching the buck for better than two years. He got the buck in trail-camera photos during the 2017 and 2018 seasons and early in the 2019 season.

"He was a main-frame 8-pointer last year with stickers on both bases," Morton said. "This year, he showed up on camera in the same places. He had added two points, dropped the two kickers and gotten a little wider, but you could tell it was the same buck."

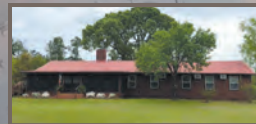
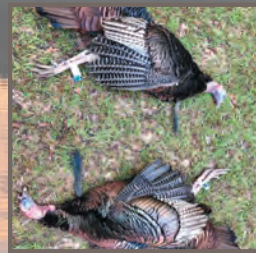
Morton hadn't been in his stand long that afternoon before a 4-point buck walked into the food plot he was watching. Around 6, four does arrived. He was watching them when he heard a grunt, looked up, and the 10-pointer was walking in.

"He gave me a perfect shot, and I took it," Morton said.

One shot from his .270 finished the 162-pound buck, which carried a 19-inch wide rack. ■



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# The Last Hurrah

**T**he last leg of deer season in the Carolinas arrives this month, in the middle of the holiday season, when many hunters are taking full advantage of their remaining vacation days.

After nearly three months, they have beaten down woods trails in search of a big buck. While many have a full freezer and a heavy rack at the taxidermist, some are still holding out for that trophy that has eluded them for most of the season.

It may be the last hurrah, but it's not close to being too late. Food availability and a limited number of hot does will funnel dominant bucks to specific places, and hunters with a tight grip on their properties can prevail before Jan. 1.

## YEAR-ROUND NEEDS

Deer are simple creatures with a few biological needs throughout the year, including food, water and cover. When fall arrived and deer entered the breeding season, daily activities made a dramatic shift, and the craziness began.

During the rut, deer start chasing, and hunters begin to see deer all over the place: travel corridors, bedding areas, food sources — anywhere deer frequent can be good places to observe deer activity. There aren't too many bad places to hunt during the peak of breeding activity, but situations change as the season progresses and winter arrives.

Natural food availability diminishes drastically during December, and surviving bucks battle it out for the few unbred does that remain, scattered across the landscape. Bucks are defenseless in the face of still-raging hormones when sweet-smelling estrus scents trickle through the woods. Hunters can zero-in on the right spots to find a wall-

hanger during the season's final month.

On farms that have been heavily hunted in past seasons, hunters will know places to go and what types of tactics to employ to increase their odds of seeing one of these elusive bucks. Trey Phillips, the huntmaster and co-owner of the historic Clarendon Club in Summerton, S.C., near the Santee Cooper lakes, has a long history of hunting and guiding on club property that has given him the ability to pinpoint the right places to set up his hunters for success.

"For more than 25 years, we have hunted the 1,800 acres at the Clarendon Club, and our food plots become the hot spots for our hunters from Thanksgiving through Christmas," said Phillips (803-460-0797). "At the end of October, we plant 60 acres of food plots with oats, rape and some other options, specifically for our late season."

## FOOD-PLOT SIZE, PLACEMENT

Phillips scatters food plots across the entire club's land-holdings. With an average size of 5 to 6 acres, the plots have adequate volume to withstand heavy browsing.

Deer become vulnerable to natural food shortages. If planted and fertilized properly, food plots will provide deer with a significant food source when natural food is diminishing. That will both bring in does and bucks.

"Our food plots get a lot of attention this time of year, and our rutting activity lasts well into January as well," Phillips said.

The deer population at the Clarendon Club is high, and many does fail to be bred in October and November; that extends intense rutting activity well into December. Does

continues >



A large buck with impressive, velvet-covered antlers is lying on a bed of gravel. A person's hand is visible on the left, touching one of the antlers. The buck's head is in the foreground, and its body extends towards the top right of the frame.

## Find the food, and you'll find late-season deer. Here are a few tips.

By Jeff Burleson

**RIGHT:** Big bucks might be tough, unless you factor in their food and breeding needs.  
**BELOW:** Food plots really begin to produce when natural foods disappear late in the seasons.

Jeff Burleson



Jeff Burleson

Hunters who keep intrusions into deer territory to a minimum, picking their spots, are a step ahead when it comes to tagging a buck in December.



## BE INVISIBLE TO DEER AS DECEMBER ARRIVES

Deer hunters in the Carolinas get more shooting days than hunters in more than 75% of other states, but more days in the woods doesn't always equate to better opportunities, especially on heavily hunted properties.

Deer become accustomed to hunter intrusion and will adjust their movements to stay away from human interference. It's critical for hunters to become invisible to deer during the season's last month, especially if a mature buck is a hunter's target.

By Dec. 1, some properties across the Carolinas have been under fire since late summer, and on some, the hunter footprint is excessive with daily play. As the season progresses and hunters move to new areas on their properties, a no-trace footprint should be used to ensure the deer don't leave or turn nocturnal.

Trey Phillips of the Clarendon Club in Summerton, S.C., switches up the timing of his hunts late in the season.

"We primarily hunt our food plots in the afternoons during the late season," Phillips said. "It's hard to get into the food plots in the early morning, because deer are already on the plots before daylight."

The bottom line is, by Dec. 1, every deer in the woods has been pushed by deer hunters at one time or another. Any disturbance

caused by a hunter can push a mature buck out of his pattern, and it's more of a problem late in the season than any other time.

At a minimum, Phillips encourages his hunters to always hunt stands where the wind is favorable. Any buck walking the woods in December is well-educated, and a hunter tackling a stand site on an unfavorable wind will end up empty handed.

Phillips also encourages his hunters to avoid using any active hunting tactics like grunting and rattling.

"Deer get a lot of pressure, and being quiet and invisible to deer is the best tactic for late-season success," he said. ■

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## THE LAST HURRAH

will be hunting a solid food source, and naturally, any buck still standing will show up, both to recover from its own, short-term weight loss and to breed any available does.

Phillips makes sure these feed lots remain active for the rest of the season, and if browsing pressure exceeds the capabilities

of his plots, he will supplement with corn to keep the deer in these areas.

## DON'T FORGET ACORNS

Some areas of the Carolinas have natural food available in December, and Phillips does, too. His acreage is in an area littered with mature, hardwood forests next to and within wilderness corridors. Deer are accustomed to the heavy acorn production in these bottomlands, and acorns remain available well into the winter. While food plots are high-profile areas for Phillips to concentrate his hunters, he can't ignore the massive, oak-covered bottomlands within the club's boundaries.

"The acorn flats are great. We typically find extensive rub lines going through the oak flats, and we focus on them," Phillips said. "We have a lot of oak flats, but the white oaks are the best flats to hunt that hold the most deer."

After Thanksgiving, many hunters put up their deer rifles, but December is still a great time to find a trophy buck looking for a potential mate. Prime food sources will concentrate deer, and hunting these areas can sure make that last few hunts worthwhile and maybe produce another trip to the taxidermist. ■

December bucks are torn between the need to regain strength from the first rut and their instincts to avoid hunting pressure.



Trey Phillips



**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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## GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

As December arrives, look at the number of deer you planned to take off your hunting property and finish the job.



# PULL THE TRIGGER FOR HERD BALANCE

KEEP DEER POPULATION WITHIN HABITAT'S ABILITY TO SUSTAIN

Chris Manley

**B**y December, many hunters have been regular visitors at their local wild-game processor, and for fortunate ones, a trip to the taxidermist highlighted a season during which a prized buck took its last breath.

But the season is far from being over, and hunters with large properties need to consider what impact they can make on their deer herd and habitat. December is the last month for deer hunters to put venison in the freezer and make any reasonable impact on the herd.

Deer thrive in the Carolinas because of the abundance of available habitat; they can live about anywhere and do. Deer and all other animals need adequate food, water and cover.

Even when suburbia compresses natural habitats, deer and other wildlife species find places to eat, sleep and drink, but it's not exactly ideal for them. Deer colonize any wooded area and find food wherever they can. As they multiply

and colonize suburban and urban areas, they experience a high rate of mortality. Vehicle encounters are the main cause of mortality in these areas, and that helps keep the population under control.

## LOCAL VARIATIONS

In rural areas, cover is plentiful, and food is generally quite abundant, especially in the agriculture belt. However, the deer density across the Carolinas is variable on a regional and local level. Cover is typically not much of a problem, but localized food availability is highly variable. Mortality is also variable on the local level. Hunters kill lots of deer on some properties, but other properties haven't had hunter harvests in a decade.

So how many deer can a property support? It depends on the available habitat; some can support more than others.

The best way to explain is from a pond-management standpoint. A pond can support a certain number of pounds of fish per acre. Catfish farmers can raise

a higher volume of fish in their lagoons by super-supplementing the food supply, manual aeration and by manipulating reproduction. Initially, lagoons are densely stocked with extremely high volumes of fish. Afterwards, farmers aerate ponds to maintain acceptable dissolved-oxygen levels and feed the fish high-calorie food around the clock to grow them out quickly.

In the wild, deer management is a little more difficult. Deer can't be grown with the same methods as catfish or any other type of closed-system management. They are free-ranging animals, and hunters can only affect the quality and quantity of the population by manipulating habi-



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.

tat, food availability and hunter harvest. While it may be more difficult than raising catfish in a pond, it's not impossible. Land managers and hunters can make a significant impact on the health and quality of a deer population.

Making harvest prescriptions to regulate the deer population on a property can be subjective and isn't an exact science unless it's 100,000 acres of contiguous land. Management on large properties is inherently easier because the manager has better control of the habitat and population within its limits. Management on smaller properties is more difficult because animals aren't confined to a specific area and can easily roam outside of the controllable boundaries.

## YOU MAKE THE CALL

Deer hunters and property managers can make harvest decisions based on the degradation of the habitat, camera survey results, harvested deer health, etc. Properties with too many deer will experience over-foraging of native vegetation and heavy damage to local agriculture crops.

Overcrowded deer populations produce lean, malnourished deer. Because of the rut, it's best to examine does this time of year, not bucks. Most bucks are typically malnourished in December due to the effects the rut has on their bodies.

The weight of does in overpopulated areas are typically less than does in more-balanced populations. Hunters can also examine the fat on a deer's kidneys. Kidneys lacking much external fat are an indication of poor food availability; kidneys covered in fat show an abundant food source.

But one deer isn't a good indicator of a herd health, either. It takes several deer to determine if the herd has adequate food. Examination of the entire property for degradation to habitat and crops is important to determine herd health.

Deer populations on specific properties can fluctuate throughout the year, and herd health can fluctuate over time. Reproductive females can drop anywhere from one to three fawns each year. If the habitat and food availability doesn't improve, the deer population can grow to a point where the habitat can't support it, and both the deer and the habitat suffers. Habitat can only support a certain number of consumers. Land managers can provide additional habitat to support

the higher number of deer or have hunters harvest more deer.

## DECEMBER HARVEST IMPORTANT

The best time to make a dent in the deer population is in December, when breeding is complete; almost all does have been bred and have fetuses in their wombs. On properties where deer populations are high and the habitat is suffering, hunters can make an impact by taking does late in the season.

On the other hand, if the habitat and forage availability are in pristine shape, with minimal crop damage around the periphery, no additional harvesting outside of the existing plan should occur. In this case, bred does should be protected to maintain the healthy balance on the property.

It's not an exact science, but the health of the deer and their habitats will serve as indicators for hunters and land managers to use to make harvest decisions. ■

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## GREENER PASTURES

continued

### PAY LOWER PROPERTY TAXES ON HUNTING LAND

While many hunters hunt on leased land, many hunt on their own land. For the latter group, programs are available to lower their property tax rate on eligible properties.

Nobody likes to pay taxes, but counties need revenue to fund programs, and property taxes are one of the largest forms of county revenue. Properties are taxed based on the land use, and higher-use properties like commercial, industrial and residential produce much more revenue per acre than undeveloped forestland and cropland. But when these properties are purchased, they are taxed at their market value and are never automatically taxed at the lower rate. It is up to landowners to request for the lower rate when eligible for certain uses.

Most hunting tracts contain agricultural and forest lands. Certain eligible properties being presently used for agriculture, horticulture and forestland can be accessed at a value consistent with that use rather than the higher, market value — if the landowner can demonstrate that the parcels' present use is consistent with the activities that qualify them for the lower rate.

For agriculture uses, landowners have to provide a history of

Landowners can reduce their property taxes on hunting tracts by proving the land is being used for agricultural or forest purposes, not at a higher market-value rate.



crop yields. Forestland is defined as land that is a part of a forest unit actively engaged in the commercial growing of trees under a sound forest management plan. Consulting foresters such as Southern Palmetto Environmental Consulting, ([www.southernpalmettoenvironmental.com](http://www.southernpalmettoenvironmental.com)) can prepare eligible forest management plans for tracts anywhere in the Carolinas.

For more information about applying for lower property taxes, contact Southern Palmetto Environmental Consulting, the N.C. Forest Service, the S.C. Forestry Commission, or your local cooperative agricultural extension service center. ■



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A slightly quartering-away shot yielded perfect shot placement on this buck a few weeks ago, resulting in a short, easy-to-follow blood trail.



Sammy Romano

## SHOT PLACEMENT IS NO. 1 CONCERN

LEARN YOUR TARGET'S ANATOMY, PRACTICE SHOTS FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES TO MAKE THEM ALWAYS FATAL

**A**t least once a day this time of year, a customer walks into the archery shop and asks, “Which broadhead that you sell is the most deadly?”

My answer is always the same: “There is not a broadhead on our shelves that won’t kill a deer quickly with proper shot placement, but by the same token, none of them will kill quickly, if at all, with poor shot placement.”

In our modern world of high-tech gizmos and gadgets, we have come to expect easy fixes and instant gratification. When it comes to clean, humane kills, however, there is no magic bullet that will make up for a poorly placed shot.

One of the hardest skills for a beginning bowhunter is to transition from shooting dots on a target to shooting at a live animal. Learning how to “pick a spot” when there is no clear aiming point is very different from aiming at a well-defined bulls’-eye. Even with a perfectly placed shot, an animal often travels some distance, but better shot placement leads to a much shorter and easier to follow blood trail. Understanding how an arrow

kills, as well as a thorough knowledge of your target’s anatomy, are keys to proper shot placement and therefore a successful outcome to your hunt.

Unlike a bullet, which often kills by shock, an arrow kills by hemorrhage and or suffocation. Because an animal usually runs out of oxygen more quickly than it bleeds to death, the best shot placement is always a double-lung shot. Animals shot through both lungs quickly expire and are usually found within 75 yards of the shot location.

### FIND THE LUNGS

The lungs also offer a much larger target than most other vital organs, with the heart and liver are in close proximity for arrows that are slightly off their mark. Single lung shots are often fatal — but not always — and with one lung still working, the animal can travel a long way before expiring. For this reason, it is best to shoot at animals that are broadside or slightly quartering away from the hunter. These angles offer the largest profile of both lungs, resulting in higher-percentage odds for a quick, clean kill. Lower stand heights also provide a much

larger profile of the lungs.

The heart on a white-tailed deer is situated just behind the front leg and low in the chest cavity. Heart-shot deer will often travel 75 to 150 yards after the shot, but they usually leave an ample, easily followed blood trail. The liver is just behind the diaphragm and is a vital shot, but deer through the liver often take much longer to expire.

One area to avoid is just below the spine. This “no man’s land” will result in a steady blood trail that gradually dries up, and although the animal often survives, it isn’t much comfort for anyone involved. Because of a deer’s tendency to flinch down at the shot, I typically aim at the top of the heart. That way, if the deer doesn’t react, I hit the heart and lungs, and if it does, I hit it through both lungs. Either will result in a short blood trail.

### THINK IN 3 DIMENSIONS ➤



Sammy Romano is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 25 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at [samboka31@aol.com](mailto:samboka31@aol.com).

## THINK IN 3 DIMENSIONS

Angled shots, whether due to a quartering animal or an elevated shooting position, require the archer to think in three dimensions. A good rule of thumb is to always think of where you want the arrow to exit the deer. This requires a bit of visualization since you cannot see the other side of the animal, but it will always result in proper shot placement. On broadside or animals quartering away very slightly, I always aim to exit behind the offside shoulder. This usually guarantees a complete pass-through, yielding a much better blood trail. On animals that are quartering away at a larger angle, I shift my aim to impact the offside shoulder itself as the angle increases. While this usually prevents a pass-through, it increases the likelihood of a double-lung shot providing an even better angle on the vitals.

Before heading into the field, every archer should practice shooting at a 3-D deer target from different angles to become comfortable and proficient at proper shot placement. Be honest with yourself about the potential lethal nature of your practice shots. Practice until you are certain you can make a double-lung shot for a quick, clean kill.

As bowhunters, we answer to a higher standard, and we owe it to the animals we hunt to make the best shots we possibly can. If you have any question about a shot or just don't feel confident, let down and "live to hunt another day." There's always next time. ■



Sammy Romano

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# THE SANTEE DOUBLE DIP

BREAM, CRAPPIE MAKE RUN-UP TO CHRISTMAS  
A REAL GIFT TO DEEP-WATER  
PANFISH ANGLERS.

■ By Terry Madewell



Terry Madewell

# FISHERMEN HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS WHEN FISHING THE SANTEE COOPER LAKES THIS MONTH, AND THAT'S AS IT SHOULD BE.

Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie produce angling action that ranks among the Carolinas' best for multiple species, and December fishing patterns are strong.

A unique combination of panfish species, each on strong bites, can be caught with on similar techniques this month. With minor tackle adjustments, slab crappie and huge bream can be targeted, creating the Santee "Double-Dip."

Excellent crappie fishing is no surprise, as slabs traditionally produce outstanding action throughout the fall and early winter, but the concurrent bream bonanza surprises even experienced anglers.

Kevin Davis, guide and owner of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal between the lakes, won't say the bream fishing from mid-November through the end of the year is as good as the bedding fishing during the spring, but the results are close.

"This late-season bream fishing is simply spectacular on both lakes," Davis said. "Fishermen aren't used to the concept of deep-water bream fishing, but it's the key right now."

The water temperature, Davis said, cools to the point where big, bull bream — the same size-class of fish traditionally caught off the beds during the spring — pile into open-water cover that anglers can easily target.

The good news is that public fish attractors are one of his prime spots for this action.

"The bream fishing is an extremely consistent pattern, and I've morphed my fall crappie-fishing tactics to target bream, too," he said. "The species have separate creel limits — 20 for crappie and 30 for bream — so it's not a simple trade-off on fish caught. However, the state law has a combined 40-fish creel limit per person on these species. Anglers must stay within the creel limit for each species, but it's realistic to expect big catches of both species on any given day."

The key in either lake is underwater cover in water from 12 to 30 feet deep. Brush is the top target, but Davis said he routinely fishes the public fish attractors scattered throughout both lakes as well as his own sites.

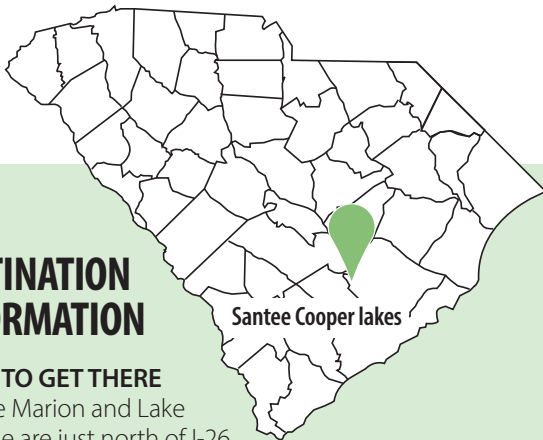
"I've found the key to the species present on a given fish attractor is often depth-related, with shallower water often preferred by bream," he said. "I've also found that a public fish attractor with hard material such concrete debris, in addition to woody cover, is especially attractive for the big bream."

Davis typically targets crappie first.

"When fishing for crappie on deeper brush, we'll occasionally find bream," he said. "It's more likely to find bream on deeper brush than it is to find crappie on shallower brush during December. At times, we'll catch several crappies, and then load up the bream rods with crickets and haul several big bream off the same brush."



Terry Madewell



## DESTINATION INFORMATION

### HOW TO GET THERE

— Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie are just north of I-26 between Charleston and Columbia, with I-95 crossing Lake Marion, providing access to fishing camps on both sides of the lakes. The Diversion Canal connects the two lakes and is a prime area for fishing either lake, with numerous fishing camps available for lodging, boat access and tackle supplies. For complete details, visit [www.santeecoopercountry.org](http://www.santeecoopercountry.org).

**WHEN TO GO** — Big crappie and bream will show up on the same deep brush through December.

**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Locate deep brush piles, including fish attractors constructed and sunk by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources ([www.dnr.sc.gov/fish/fishattract/moultrie.html](http://www.dnr.sc.gov/fish/fishattract/moultrie.html) and <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/fish/fishattract/marion.html>). Drop down live crappie minnows and live crickets around the brush, probing areas in 15 to 30 feet of water. Light-action rods are preferred.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Kevin Davis, 843-312-3080; Steve English, 843-709-8138; Santee Cooper Country, 800-227-8510, [www.santeecoopercountry.org](http://www.santeecoopercountry.org). See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** — Blacks Camp, 843-753-2231; Santee Cooper Country, 800-227-8510, [www.santeecoopercountry.org](http://www.santeecoopercountry.org).

**MAPS** — Fishing Hotspots, 800-338-5957; Kingfisher Maps, 800-326-0257, [www.kfmaps.com](http://www.kfmaps.com); DeLorme's South Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer, 207-846-7000, [www.delorme.com](http://www.delorme.com).

**OPPOSITE:** Guide Steve English shows off the kind of crappie that Santee Cooper anglers can expect this month — along with big bream.

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Some hard-fighting bull bream caught in the Santee Cooper reservoirs require a landing net.

**S**tevie English of Cross, S.C., is another guide who targets multiple species and who enjoys the December Double-Dip. He works the same type of cover as Davis and varies his crappie rig by using live minnows fished on a tight-line as well as jigs, and he also uses small jigs with a minnow trailer.

English identifies the brush on his depth finder, then uses his electric motor to position the boat directly over the target. He pulls line off the reel in 2-foot increments to keep the bait or lure just above the top of the brush.

“On most days, the crappie will be holding at the top of the brush, but occasionally, the fish are a bit deeper along the sides,” English said. “It’s important to check the entire brush thoroughly, because fish often congregate in small sections of (it). After thoroughly fishing a spot without action, I’ll make a move. At this time of the year, crappies and bream are fairly aggressive, so I don’t linger long without action.”

English said rods ranging from 6 to 10 feet with light tips are ideal for both species. The biggest difference between crappie and bream rigs is he’ll use a No. 6, long-shank, wire hook baited with a cricket for bream. He has separate sets of rods rigged for each species, allowing an instant change when appropriate.

“Generally, we’ll hold the rods and feel for the bite rather than fishing multiple rods from rod holders,” he said. “One rod is plenty when the bite is on, and we can tell if we’re getting short strikes on the crappie rig. If so, we’ll drop a cricket on a bream hook and often, a big bream loads on immediately.”



Terry Madewell

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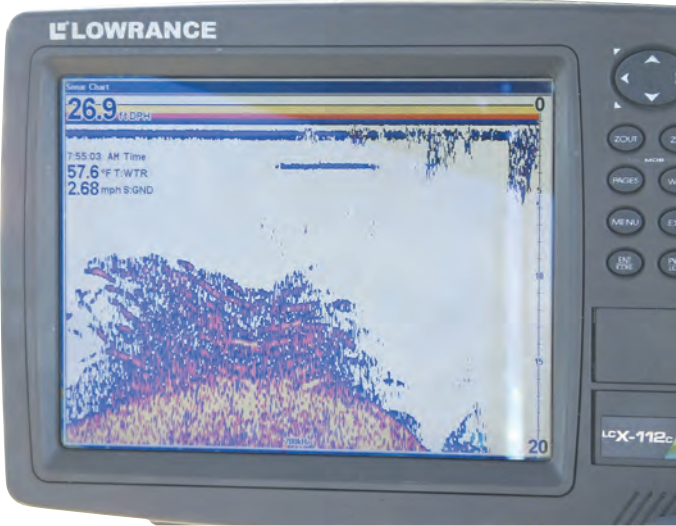


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Terry Madewell

Deep brush piles on the Santee Cooper lakes often load up with panfish — crappie and bream — in cold weather.

Davis said bream fishing in December is not a “Plan B” in case crappie don’t bite. Targeting bream is a legitimate trip in its own right, and odds are good limits of big bream can be caught in short order.

“I’ve found that even when guiding specifically for crappie, I’ll carry a couple boxes of crickets. Once we’re happy with the crappie catch, I’ll target a bream spot. When big bream start putting horseshoe bends in the rods, some seriously fun bream fishing is on.

“We don’t always catch bream mingled with crappie, so when I look for bream, I work attractors with shallower cover than the ideal crappie depths,” he said. “Sometimes, the best bream cover will be in water 15 to 20 feet deep, with the top of the brush or debris no more than 10 feet deep. Bream are usually very aggressive, and they’ll often take the cricket as it drops; multiple bream hookups are common. It’s crazy good bream fishing for December.”

Davis said that most anglers prefer to get out early, and good action can occur during low-light conditions, but often, the prime time begins about 9 a.m.

“During December, especially on bright days, the crappie and bream are going to be pulled to the cover as the sun gets higher, making them even easier to target and catch,” he said. ■



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

## FISH ATTRACTORS ARE HOT SPOTS ➤

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# FISH ATTRACTORS ARE HOT SPOTS NOW

Guide Kevin Davis doesn't tout public fish attractors just for hype, because on one December 2018 trip, he primarily fished these public areas and enjoyed an outstanding morning catching crappie and bream.

"In December 2018, I was on an excellent pattern for crappie and bream on the attractors," he said. "Most days, I never saw another boat working those sites."

Levi Kaczka, fisheries biologist for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources said 32 public fish attractors are maintained: 19 on Lake Moultrie and 13 on Lake Marion. "All 32 attractors have some amount of structure," he said. "We regularly replenish the attractor sites with various materials."

Kaczka said as recently as October 2019, SCDNR had technicians working on replenishing attractors with bamboo and brush.

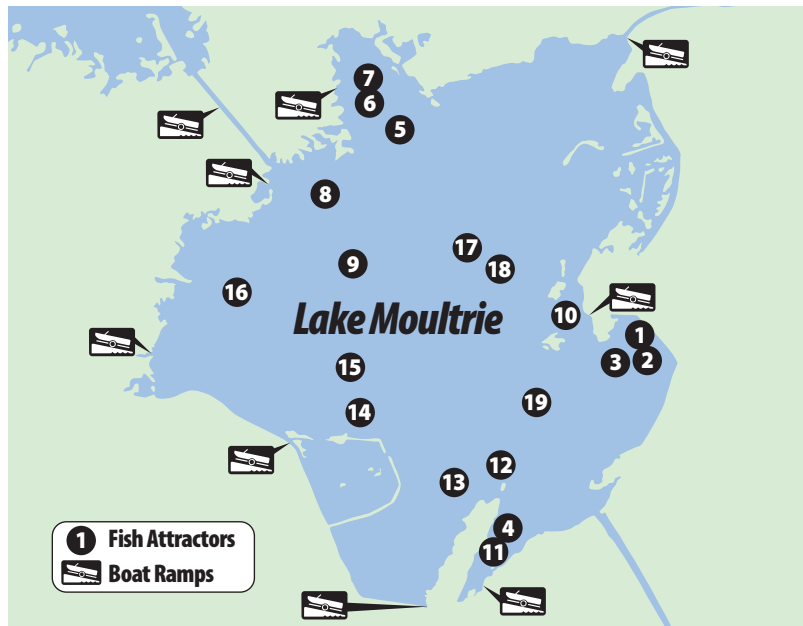
"This project is worked regularly, and our technicians maintain an excel spreadsheet to track work on all attractors," he said. "This helps ensure we consistently replenish all sites."

He said 18 attractors — nine in each lake — had large materials sunk on them as a cooperative project between SCDNR, Santee Cooper Country and the Santee Cooper utility. Materials included large, concrete structures such as culverts and pipes discarded when the lock gates were replaced at Pinopolis Dam.

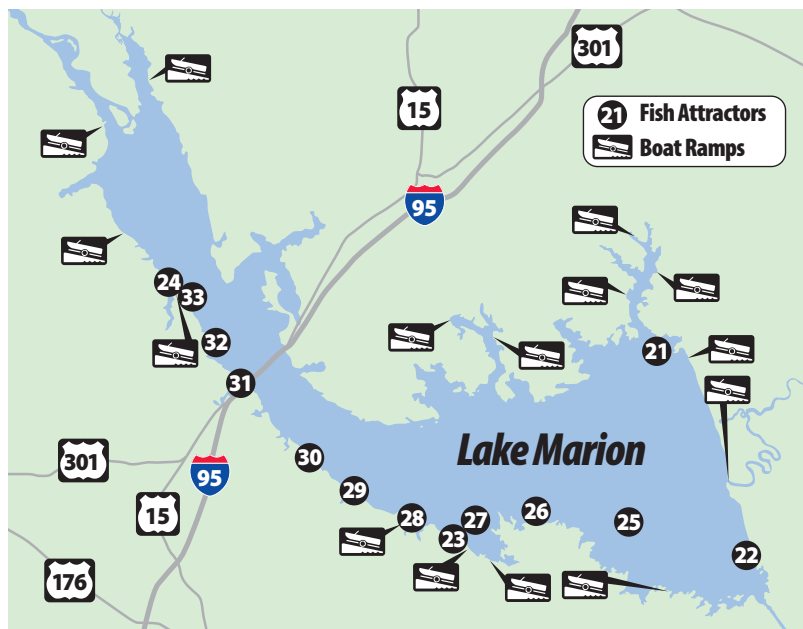
"The benefit of hard material is it lasts much longer than the organic materials," he said. "The advantage of the organic material is a higher level of habitat complexity that's more useful for smaller species as cover."

Although no biological studies have been accomplished to track fishing success around the attractors, Kaczka said SCDNR workers regularly see boats anchored over them. Discussions with anglers at landings report successful trips to the sites.

"Occasionally, we'll electrofish over attractors to get a snapshot of the fish they're holding, and we use side/down imaging sonar to view the materials and fish," he said. "What we see is encouraging, both in numbers and size variation of fish on these attractors." ■



Site	Latitude	Longitude	Site	Latitude	Longitude
1	33° 18' 24.30"	79° 58' 36.01"	11	33° 14' 00.60"	80° 01' 40.91"
2	33° 18' 00.61"	79° 58' 41.92"	12	33° 15' 29.09"	80° 01' 31.12"
3	33° 17' 59.78"	79° 59' 13.60"	13	33° 15' 15.80"	80° 02' 39.41"
4	33° 14' 23.21"	80° 01' 29.71"	14	33° 16' 29.10"	80° 04' 48.90"
5	33° 22' 32.70"	80° 04' 29.50"	15	33° 17' 19.21"	80° 04' 56.78"
6	33° 23' 04.42"	80° 04' 45.08"	16	33° 19' 03.00"	80° 07' 31.80"
7	33° 23' 12.30"	80° 04' 49.58"	17	33° 20' 06.40"	80° 02' 55.50"
8	33° 20' 59.60"	80° 05' 44.92"	18	33° 19' 50.70"	80° 02' 18.82"
9	33° 19' 49.19"	80° 05' 18.89"	19	33° 16' 43.00"	80° 00' 45.90"
10	33° 18' 51.08"	80° 00' 25.31"			



Site	Latitude	Longitude	Site	Latitude	Longitude
21	33° 31' 08.51"	80° 12' 18.50"	28	33° 26' 02.69"	80° 21' 43.49"
22	33° 24' 52.09"	80° 09' 07.60"	29	33° 26' 53.48"	80° 23' 35.09"
23	33° 25' 34.72"	80° 19' 28.99"	30	33° 27' 54.11"	80° 25' 11.21"
24	33° 33' 16.99"	80° 30' 08.89"	31	33° 30' 10.69"	80° 27' 35.39"
25	33° 25' 55.20"	80° 13' 26.62"	32	33° 31' 28.49"	80° 28' 40.80"
26	33° 26' 15.29"	80° 16' 52.00"	33	33° 32' 52.58"	80° 29' 32.89"
27	33° 25' 49.01"	80° 19' 19.98"			

# DEEP CRAPPIE RULE

## at Shearon Harris through December

Guide Joel Munday looks for crappie on Shearon Harris Lake to be in deeper water throughout December.

**S**tringing outdoor Christmas lights remains a holiday tradition for many families, while stringing big December crappie is becoming part of the festivities for fishermen.

"December is an excellent time for catching good numbers of crappie at local lakes, including Shearon Harris," said guide Joel Munday of Outdoor Expeditions Guide Service.

According to a weather-tracking service, December does not always feature frigid temperatures around Shearon Harris, which lies just east of US 1 near Holly Springs, N.C., north of Sanford and south of Raleigh. In Dec. 2018, 11 days were in the mid-50s and four days featured highs in the low-60s, giving fishermen several opportunities to wet a jig or minnow for slabs under reasonable conditions.

While the air temperature may be of importance to fishermen, the water temperature is the critical factor for crappie.

Munday (919-669-2959) follows a simple rule of thumb at Harris.

When the water temperature is in the upper 50s, most crappie will be in 15 to 20 feet of water hovering around brush, stumps and other cover. When the water temperature dips below 50 degrees, the fish will hold in 25 to 35 feet of water on main-lake points, drops and ledges.

When crappie are in less than 20 feet of water, Munday slow-trolls at 1 mph with his rods arranged in spider-fashion around his boat to sample various depths. He fishes jigs ranging from 1/16- to 1/4-ounce in size.

"I like to fish the smallest jig I can get away with based upon wind and depth," Munday said. "Effective colors at Harris include chartreuse, white and John Deere green."

His tackle consists of medium-light to medium-action 13 Fishing spinning rods coupled with 13 Fishing Creed GT spinning reels spooled with 8- to 10-pound test line.



Tony Garitta

Once water temperatures drop below 50 degrees, Munday vertical fishes (tight-lines) using a dropper rig with a live minnow and lowers the bait to deep structure holding crappie indicated by his electronics.

Monofilament serves as his main line which is connected via a swivel to a 1½- to 2-foot fluorocarbon leader tied to a No. 1 Aberdeen hook that holds the bait. The rig is completed with a 3/8- to 1/2-ounce sinker based upon wind, current and depth. ■

— Tony Garitta

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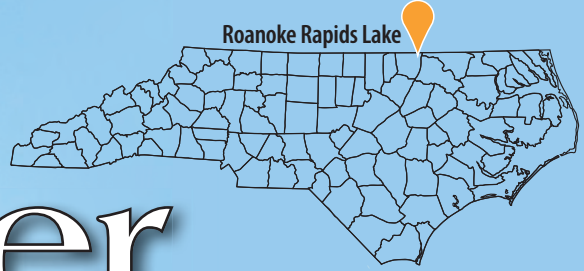
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Open-water hunting situations require bigger decoy spreads to lure ducks.



Roanoke Rapids Lake



# Big water, big spreads

By Jeff Burleson

Hundreds of decoys are what's needed to fool diving ducks on big waters like North Carolina's Roanoke Rapids Lake, where canvasbacks are still king.

Every year, the brief, early duck seasons are merely teasers for Carolina waterfowlers, with a few shooting rallies for hunters set up in the right spots. It's December when most of the northern flocks arrive within the states' borders.

Birds funnel into places decked out with a rich food source; these migrants are typically looking for the security of other feathered friends rafted together. Duck hunters with the right decoy spreads can bamboozle these incoming flocks into shotgun range.

Most types of hunting require gear and, quite often, specialized gear. Of all the available species in the Carolinas, ducks rank in the top tier for needed gear, especially in open-water situations. Hunters can stand right along the run of a beaver swamp and take a few pass shots at dawn, but serious duck-hunting on open water requires a significant gear investment to consistently lure winged visitors into shotgun range.

continues >>>



Jeff Burleson



## Carolinas' duck seasons

**South Carolina**  
Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2020

**North Carolina**  
Nov. 16-Dec. 2,  
Dec. 14-Jan. 31, 2020

Jeff Burleson

*Guide Darrell Mcauly of Carolina Waterfowler Guide Service knows what a massive investment is all about, but it's all the decoys he's bought that go in his huge spread that brings the birds in on a string.*

"I use 1,500 Herters decoys each year, divided into three spreads, at our three blinds on Roanoke Rapids Lake," said Mcauly (910-263-3499), who is from Hope Mills, N.C. "I love the Herters decoys because they sit up high on the water."

Mcauly's decoy spreads mimic what the birds are expecting to see on his home territory.

"We winter around 15,000 to 20,000 canvasbacks each year, as well as ring necks and some other species," he said. "These birds raft up in the middle of the lake and then break off into small groups to go to feed. They don't all come at one time. They come in small groups between five to 15 birds."

After daylight, ducks move off the main body of the lake, the furthest downstream on the Roanoke River system, and head to feeding areas along the points and places where a winter food source is available. According to Mcauly, mussel beds are the primary food source for divers.

"I know where the mussel beds are on the lake, and I set up 350 to 400 decoys right on top of these mussel beds," he said.

While Mcauly's hunters will routinely take home a mixed bag of ducks, the primary species on Roanoke Rapids Lake are canvasbacks and other diving ducks. Divers' chief survival mechanism is safety in numbers, and a large spread of decoys right on top of a rich food source is a deadly tactic.

continues >>>



Jeff Burleson

TOP: Decoy spreads for diving ducks need to be placed close to natural food sources.

ABOVE: Thousands of canvasbacks overwinter on Roanoke Rapids Lake.

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**M**cauly's decoy spread is made up primarily of canvasbacks, but he adds ring necks and any other divers with large white patches that stand out from afar.

"It's a numbers game, and you need a large spread of decoys in the right places to get these birds to come in," he said. "I make it look like a feeding area by placing the decoys close together on the flats."

Bringing the birds to the right area is the first half of the deal, but with a large spread, ducks can land in

a wide variety of places, sometimes out of shooting range if not set up correctly. Mcauly uses a duck's natural instincts to funnel the birds to within shotgun range.

"I run my decoy spread in pods, with one line out each side of the blind, and then start one out the middle about 20 yards, out leaving two runways on either side," he said. "I leave an

opening in the center and then put out about 30 decoys as blockers. The ducks don't like to fly over other birds, and they will land right in the runways (in front of) the blockers, well within range."

Mcauly also sets up most of his spread to the west of his blind, so that the sun is to his back. While a cloudy, overcast day is always preferred, some days the sun is out and bright. Having it at the hunters' backs reduces glare, makes it easier for hunters to shoot without looking into the sun, and it reduces visibility for the incoming ducks.

"We get a steady stream of ducks coming off the big water for an hour-and-a-half," he said. "They are looking to find the rest of the flock on one of the mussel flats."

## Consider premium waterfowl loads

In 1991, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service banned the use of lead shot for hunting waterfowl after studies showed that nearly 2 million birds died each year from ingesting the toxic material.

For the next decade, steel shot was the immediate replacement, and it still reigns as the most-popular waterfowl load, despite a lower shot-to-kill ratio compared to lead.

Over the past 20 years, waterfowl loads have significantly improved, with high-tech metal alloys and engineered wadding configurations to provide ballistics and knockdown power similar to traditional lead shot shells.

Premium shells feature tungsten, bismuth and even a new alloy called ITX made by Backridge, a Tennessee company.

These alternative metal alloys offer a denser material and pliability to provide knockdown power comparable to lead. Backridge's ITX-13 is famed to be denser than lead. Federal Black Cloud TSS — Tungsten Super Shot — is a tungsten load that is denser than lead, with a configuration with a mixture of heavyweight TSS pellets and irregularly shaped steel pellets. The different types of shot concert to cause catastrophic damage to its intended winged targets.

Besides Federal, RIO and Kent, virtually every manufacturer

has developed a non-toxic waterfowl load utilizing bismuth, tungsten or a steel variant to produce a shell with power to bring down birds. The technologically advanced waterfowl loads are more effective at killing than traditional steel shot, leading to fewer cripples and fly-offs.

However, the trade-off comes with the cost. Traditional steel shot is roughly 2½ times more expensive than lead, and the high-tech alloys bring a much-higher price tag than the steel shot. What should a hunter do? Is it worth spending the extra money on premium shells?

For most hunters in most situations, a box of 25 shells is more than enough to knock down a limit of six ducks. Except for a few above-average days, hunters typically only get a handful of shot opportunities, anyway. After spending a small fortune on decoys, gas, duck boats, blinds, waders, hunting leases, shotguns and other gear, choosing lower-quality shot shells is a bad place to reduce costs and save money. Hunters will be more efficient by shooting fewer times for the same bag.

Technological advances in non-toxic waterfowl loads have given hunters an extreme advantage over their prey. Consider using high-quality shells for waterfowl this season, and put more birds on the ground, more quickly and with fewer shots. ■



Jeff Burleson

They may be much more expensive, but non-toxic shot shells made from high-tech alloys are not a high price to pay for more ducks in your bag.

Ducks don't leave their rafts and come all at once, and that gives hunters the chance to adjust their spreads if the birds are landing out of reasonable shotgun range. A few adjustments to open a closer lane is sometimes all that hunters need to get them into killing range.

In addition to divers, McAuley also takes his fair share of puddle ducks in his diver spreads. The large spread brings in ducks of all species, but to sweeten the pot, he will utilize some puddle duck decoys.

"We will use some puddle ducks in the lanes, too, when we have puddle ducks around," he said.

Naturally, puddle ducks will be attracted to other ducks, especially when rafted up on a known food source. As long as the water isn't too deep, they will stay and feed on any available food and from green forage that divers dredge up off the bottom.

"Widgeon are often called robbers, because they will still grass right out of a diver's mouth," he said.

The remaining 40 or so days of the waterfowl season arrive this month, and hunters will be scattered throughout every swamp, beaver pond, salt marsh, and lake across the state after a six-pack of ducky goodness. While duck hunters will use everything in the duck hunter's playbook, the decoy fleet alone will produce the greatest impact on the day's successes. ■



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

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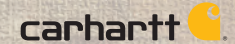
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Filling your hunting vest during the late season takes a lot more planning and a little more skill. Follow these tips to maximize your chances for success.

**FIND THE FOOD >**

A LIMIT ON LABOR DAY WEEKEND IS NO GREAT FEAT. KILL 15 LATE-SEASON BIRDS, AND YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED SOMETHING. HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR A DECEMBER LIMIT OF FEATHERED MISSILES.

**DOVES  
WHEN**

**IT'S  
COLD**  
By Justin Goethe

## FIND THE FOOD

As the season progresses through fall and into winter, hunters are forced to rely on migratory birds to fill their fields. Look for these transplants to concentrate in areas that contain food sources left over from the early season.

Crops such as brown top millet generally don't stand the test of time and will be unavailable as winter's cold winds begin to bear down. According to Michael Hook, small-game program leader for S.C. Department of Natural Resources, "Birds are not going to be there if they don't have something to eat. (We) typically plan (for) dove fields to have something left during the late season. Whether that be corn or sorghum or Egyptian wheat, (we) plan to have some type of grain available for them. If you plan to hunt private fields, you'll need to have that available as well."

## WATCH THE WEATHER

Late-season migratory doves are pushed south along

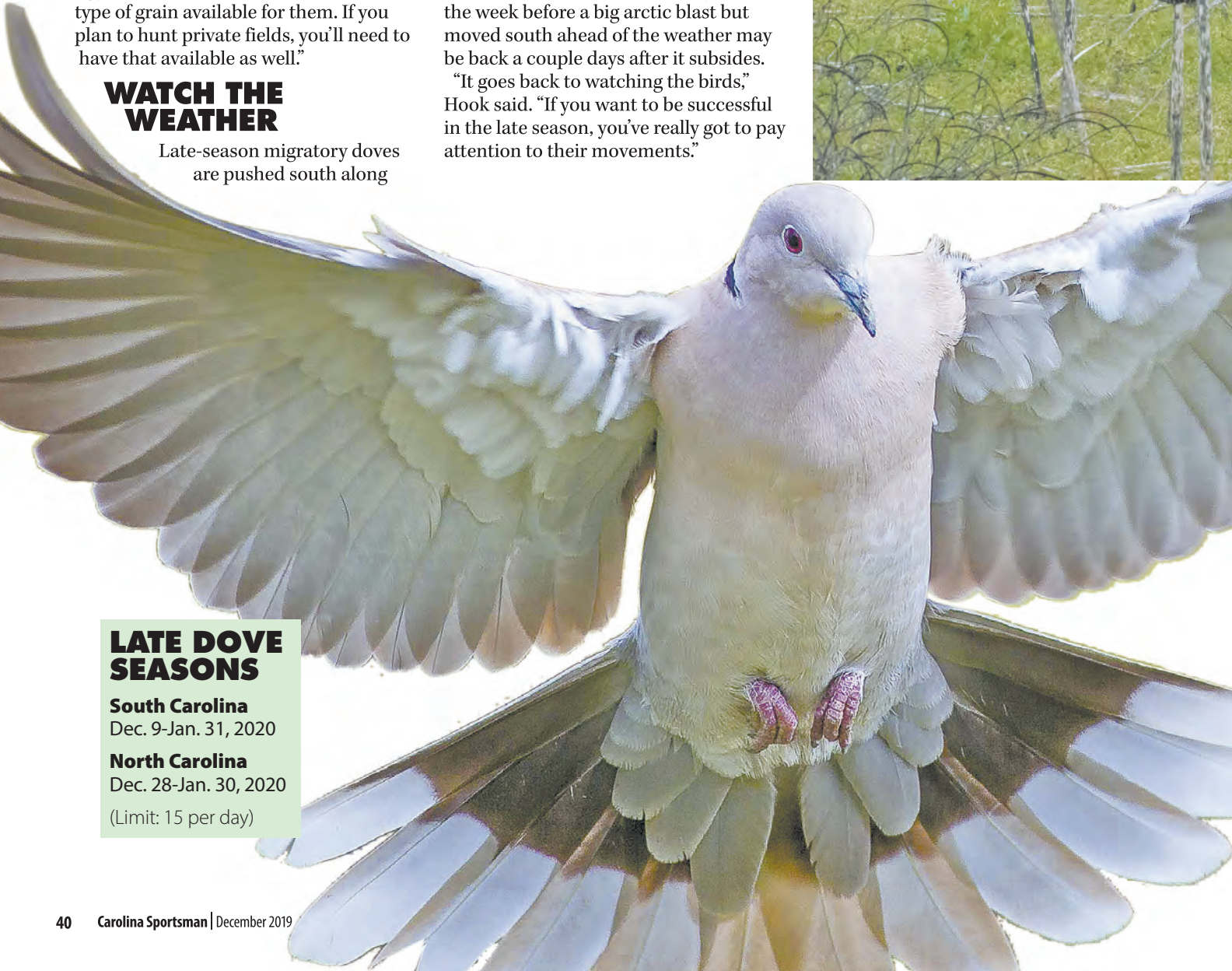
the edges of cold fronts moving down from the north. Hunters need to keep a careful eye on the weather, paying special attention to cold fronts moving into the mid-Atlantic states.

Migratory birds tend to stack up against these cold fronts, following them south first and then back to the north as they recede.

"Whether it be doves or woodcock, as a cold front comes down and pushes in, it'll move birds down from the northeast, but if it pushes further south, then as the cold front recedes, those birds will follow it back north," Hook said. "It's definitely not a 'these birds move from New Jersey to Florida, and that's it' kind of migration. They follow that cold line as it moves."

This means birds that were in your field the week before a big arctic blast but moved south ahead of the weather may be back a couple days after it subsides.

"It goes back to watching the birds," Hook said. "If you want to be successful in the late season, you've really got to pay attention to their movements."



## LATE DOVE SEASONS

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Justin Goethe

Migratory doves will sail into an area on the heels of winter cold fronts. ABOVE: Hunting fields that provide plenty of late-season grains for doves will draw big concentrations of birds.

## SCOUT, SCOUT, SCOUT

If you want to be successful in your pursuit of late-season doves, you must put in your time scouting. If possible, routinely check fields likely to hold doves throughout the winter. Look to see if their numbers start to increase ahead of predicted cold fronts and be ready to call the boys and hit the field as soon as they start to show up.

For public dove fields, Hook suggests that you maintain contact with the wildlife agency biologists responsible for each field.

“Call ... and ask: ‘How did your dove fields turn out this year?’” he said. “Do you still have crops standing? Are you still seeing birds using the field?” Usually, these guys are willing to spread the word because they want to see folks succeed. They want to see those fields used.”

Terry Walters has been shooting doves in South Carolina’s Lowcountry for more than 60 years. To keep up with bird movements throughout the fall and winter, he keeps in close contact with a group of like-minded friends.

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**“We** try to stay in touch with each other to see who has birds or who has had birds,” said Walters, who has a unique scouting strategy for checking on his local dove fields, “My scouting strategy is based on the weather, to be honest with you. If it’s real mild weather, usually the birds don’t feed until 2 or 3 o’clock. If it’s kind of windy or unusually cold, they’ll tend to feed earlier, so I like to be there around 12 or 1. Weather has a lot to do with the time of day that the birds will fly.”

**BE READY**

An important tip to keep in mind: late-season migratory doves are here today and gone tomorrow. Those birds might not stay in the field until Saturday when everyone is off of work. You may have to hit ’em with fewer shooters than you prefer or burn a day of vacation to get out there. If you want to bag a limit of doves with Ol’ Man Winter, you need to be ready to go at a moment’s notice. “If you see birds on Wednesday, they might still be there on Saturday, and if you see them this Saturday, that doesn’t mean they’ll be there next Saturday,” Walters said. Bagging a limit of doves in December and January requires vigilance and flexibility. You need to know where the doves are likely to be and keep a careful watch to see when they



Justin Goethe

arrive. Once they do, you’ll need to organize quickly to maximize your chances of success. Follow these simple steps, and you’ll keep that retriever busy long after the hot, dusty days of the early season are gone. ■

Keep your dove dog — and shotgun — ready to go at a moment’s notice when migratory doves move into an area and set up shop in a grain field.



Justin Goethe is a freelance writer from the South Carolina Lowcountry. He graduated from Clemson University and works full-time as an industrial engineer for the automotive industry.



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Justin Goethe

## IT PAYS TO READ THE FIELD

Aside from being a crack shot, Terry Walters has a knack for always being where the shooting is heaviest. This isn't a result of persistent good fortune.

"While I'm scouting, I try to read the field. I find a low spot in the tree line or a gap in the trees that might serve as a marker for birds trying to feed," he said.

Also, pay attention to weather conditions on the day of the hunt.

"The direction of the wind makes a big difference on how birds enter and exit the field," Walters said. "Most of the time, birds will try to enter the field from the same direction as the wind instead of flying against it."

"As a matter of fact, I have seen birds — fighting the wind — fly all the way around the tree line until they get to the side where the wind is coming from before they enter the field."

Depending on the weather, water availability could also be a factor.

"If it has been rain, rain, rain everywhere and all of your ponds, ditches, and cow-holes are filled, being near water don't really mean that much," Walters said. "But if it's dry conditions, a nearby body of water will go a long way in keeping the birds close." ■

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# Get down FOR TROUT

Purists love dry-fly fishing for mountain trout, but nymphs catch more and larger fish in colder months. For consistent catches, go deep with them.

By L. Woodrow Ross

**A** large, dark shadow was visible in a bathtub-sized pool. The pool downstream from where I stood had produced several average-sized rainbow trout for quick release. The shadow was in a tiny pool upstream in the middle of a turbulent riffle.

The fly was a black, No. 16, stonefly nymph with a split shot pinched onto the leader 6 inches above the fly. After repositioning, a diagonal cast upstream dropped the fly several feet above the shadow, which allowed the fly to enter the pool without the line first passing over the fish.

As soon as the fly entered the pool, a strike was felt. A quick hookset and a brief struggle brought a 12-inch rainbow to the net and a quick release. This fish definitely had not created the shadow in the pool.

After allowing the pool to rest, the fly was cast again above the pool. In a repeat of the previous scenario, a strike was quick to follow, but this time it was different; it was the fish that had created the shadow. He fought valiantly but was being drawn closer to the net. He made one last run toward brush in the lower pool, and I increased the pressure to turn him. As fate would have it, the hook pulled free. I muttered to myself, "I only wanted a photo".

The location was the North Mills River in western North Carolina, and this fish was likely a brood fish that had been released into the stream. It appeared to be at least 24 inches or better and at one point was only feet away. The brilliant color and black dots on his scales were vivid in the light that filtered through the overhanging tree branches.

This kind of action is not uncommon if you learn to fish nymphs. It is no secret that the greatest part of a trout's life is spent near the bottom of a stream. Except in the case of a significant hatch, dry-fly fishing will not produce similar results.

Everyone loves to catch trout on dry flies, and nothing compares with a splashy rise to a well-cast dry fly, but when the winter doldrums kick in, going deep with nymphs is the ticket for action. Also, the fish will usually average much larger.

There are two techniques for nymphing: fishing with an indicator or high-sticking. I like to stay in contact during the drift and do not feel it is possible with an indicator. The only exception is when the fish are rising a long cast away. This may happen on large water, and I remember catching large cutthroat trout on the Yellowstone River that would have been impossible without indicators.





L-Woodruff Ross



The “high stick” technique is the best strategy, especially on small streams. When properly executed, it will maintain direct contact with the fly. The procedure is to cast diagonally upstream, beyond the target area. Allow the nymph to settle to the bottom (use adequate split shot or bead-head flies). As the drift progresses and the fly draws nearer to the rod, lift the rod to maintain contact. As it passes, lower the rod tip to extend the drift. Watch the point where the line enters the water and any unusual movement or line stopping should elicit a hook-set.

Everyone has favorite flies, and any list is sure to be argumentative. My biggest trout have responded to black stonefly nymphs, but gold-ribbed hare’s ear, prince, brown hackle

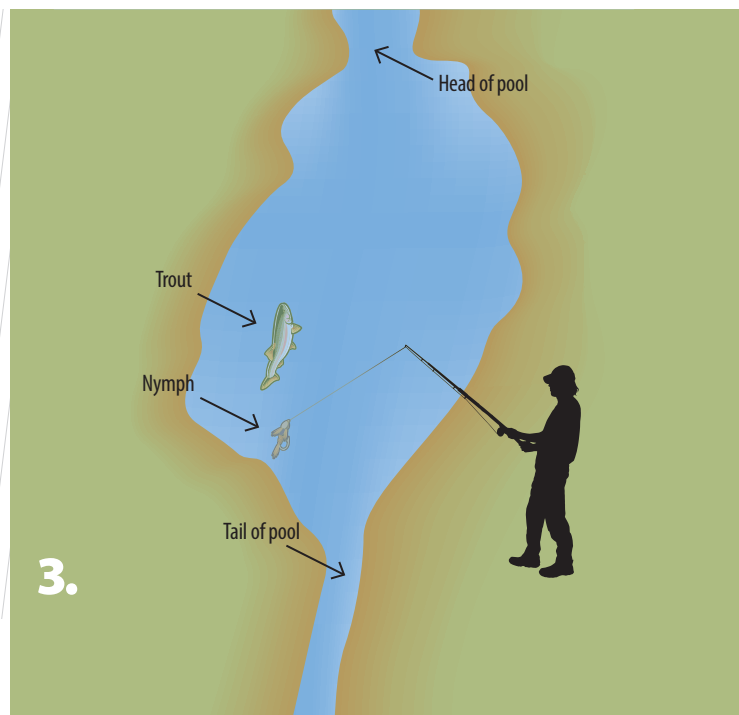
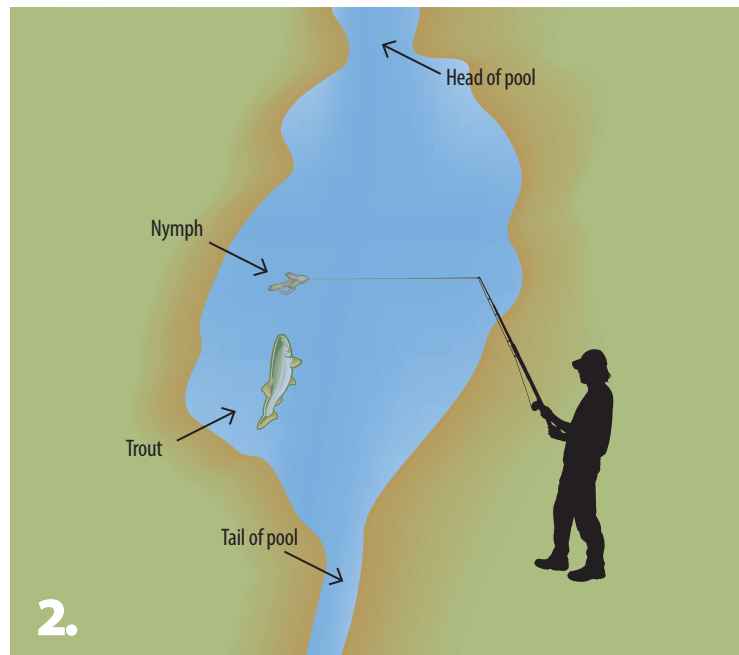
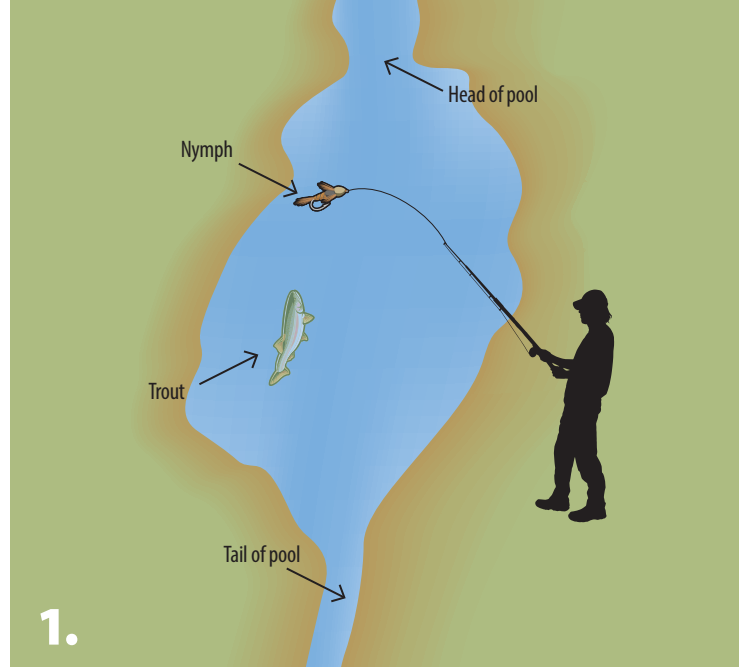
In cold weather, trout cannot afford the effort of moving up in the water column to chase a fly. The drift must present the fly where the trout can take it with minimal effort.

peacock, deep sparkle pupa, pheasant tail, mosquito larva and midge emerger are equally successful at times. The ability to tie your own flies is a plus, as you can match the local insect life and are not limited to a few basic patterns.

Matching insect life is important, but having the exact pattern will not assure success. If the presentation is incorrect, you will consistently fail to catch fish. It is critical to get the fly to the bottom of the stream. If you are not hanging on rocks or brush, you are not fishing deep enough. The fly or split shot should

# “High stick” technique

1. Angler casts well above fish, keeps rod tip down as nymph falls to bottom of streambed.
2. As nymph bumps downstream, angler continually raises rod tip to take up slack line and keep nymph on bottom in front of trout.
3. As nymph passes fish, angler lowers rod tip to allow nymph to drag along bottom going downstream in case other trout are present in tail of pool. ■



Trout will hit a variety of nymph patterns if the weighted flies are kept near the bottom of a stream.

tick along the bottom where the big boys are holding. If the pool is 6 feet deep and you are fishing at a depth of 3 feet, you are not likely to consistently catch fish.

In cold weather, trout cannot afford the effort of moving up in the water column to chase a fly. The drift must present the fly where the trout can take it with minimal effort.

If you are fishing a hatchery supported stream, egg patterns fished like nymphs will catch a lot of fish. The San Juan Worm is another sub-surface fly that is questionable to some. They are good options at times. This is a decision for the individual, and purists may choose not to use these patterns.

A good strategy for winter fly fishing is to nymph fish, but be prepared to change to dry flies if you see rising trout. This is the best of both worlds. You can catch fish holding near the bottom with nymphs, but if a hatch occurs, you can take advantage with dry flies. It is pointless to pound the water to a froth with a dry fly if a hatch is not occurring. You may pick up a fish occasionally, but nymphing will be much more productive. If you have not tried nymphing, you are missing a sure-fire method of catching more trout. ■



L. Woodrow Ross



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.

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Recognizing productive water ➤

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Get down for trout



# Recognizing productive water

Choosing where to fish is as important as your fly selection; fishermen need to learn to “read the water.”

If there is a large, submerged rock, the current will usually bulge over the top of it. Even a pool that appears featureless will have some bottom contours that will hold most of the fish. A couple of drifts will alert you to the features of the pool.

It is vital to note that structure in the water affects the velocity. This also applies to the bottom contours. A slight dip in the bottom will often allow the swifter current to pass over it and provide



L. Woodrow Ross

Learning how to locate and recognize parts of a stream or pool that, because of a change in bottom contour, will hold trout is a key to catching more fish.

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a safe haven for trout. From there, they can move slightly into the swifter water to take an insect but can quickly drop back into the slower water to conserve energy.

Casting upstream from these features will allow the weighted fly to drop to the level where the fish is holding by the time it reaches it. Failure to cast far enough above the contours or other features will result in a fruitless drift and give the impression that no fish are present. This is a common error among novice anglers and one that bears stressing.

Nymphing can be demanding and very tiring. Holding the rod high when “high sticking” places a strain on the shoulders and back. A day on the water will be demanding when nymphing, but it is well worth the investment of effort.

Due to the subsurface nature of fishing with nymphs, heavier and shorter leaders may be used. This will be an advantage when playing and landing the larger trout that this method will yield. It is possible to fish two nymphs of different patterns, but may result in some tangles. If you choose to do this, once you see that one fly is more productive, you may choose to use only that pattern. ■

## HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

A trout fisher works a pool on Deep Creek in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

# WINTER: BONUS SEASON FOR TROUT

DON'T PUT AWAY YOUR FLY ROD; TROUT WILL BITE IN WINTER

Wesley Satterwhite

**D**ie-hard trout fishers don't pay attention to the calendar or the weather, because trout fishing is a year-round, any-kind-of-weather activity. Plus, dedicated anglers know that the mere act of fishing can be as satisfying as catching fish. As Ray Bergman says in *Trout* — the bible of American trout fishers — “I believe that fishing was simply an excuse to get out in the open, to breathe air that came to me directly over open spaces, and to face nature when she bared her soul.”

Bergman said some of his best fishing experiences were on cold, windy days when others stayed close to the warmth of the hearth and he had a trout stream to himself.

Trout, of course, aren't as active in cold weather. Their metabolism slows; they don't move as much, nor feed as often. Yet on those rare, winter days when the temperature rises and the sun breaks on a dreary, gray day, hatches come off, and when hatches come off, trout feed.

Bruce Hurang of Asheville, a founder of Smoky Mountain Fly Fishers, said the best times to fish in the winter are on sunny afternoons, from about noon to 3 or 4 p.m.

“I watch for midge and small black stone hatches,” he said, “and I fish the deep holes. That's where you'll find trout. The shallow areas are usually too cold.”

Hurang suggests working the bottom of a pool slowly and fishing it thoroughly, quartering and sectioning off areas. Sometimes, he said, “You have to put a nymph on a trout's nose to get it to hit.”

## TAILWATER TROUT

Another good place to fish during cold weather months, Hurang said, is in tailwaters below dams. Most dams release water at the bottom, and water temperatures are constant, usually between 42 and 48 degrees.

Even on a “really rotten, cold and rainy day, you'll find blue-winged olive hatches coming off,” he said, and when a hatch

emerges, trout will feed.

For winter fishing, Hurang prefers olive, black and dark brown emerger patterns, small black stone wet flies and midges with dark wings.

## TIME, NOT LOCATION

Roger Lowe of Waynesville, a master fly tier and long-time guide, said, “The time of the day actually is more important than the pattern you use.”

Lowe suggests watching for temperature peaks, which usually occur around mid-day and early afternoon.



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

## HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

continued

For nymph fishing, Lowe recommends Secret Weapon, Woolly Bugger, Hare's Ear, Pheasant Tail, Stone Fly and Zug Bug patterns. The secret to successful nymph fishing, Lowe said, is to get enough split shot on the line to get the nymph down so it will bump along the bottom. For smaller nymphs, he said, use a couple of split shots (B or BB). With a Woolly Bugger and other large nymphs, use five or six split shot, especially if the stream has a heavy current.

Trout congregate in bigger pools in cold weather, usually toward the middle, where they wait for food to come to them. During cold weather, Lowe suggests fishing larger streams, especially valley streams, such as the Oconaluftee, Tuckasegee,

Nantahala and Watauga rivers, where water tends to be warmer. Streams with shaded banks are less productive because the water doesn't warm up as quickly.

Ronnie Setzer of Sylva, a long-time fly fisher and guide, said a big advantage of winter fishing is that fish aren't as easily spooked as they are in summer.

"You don't have to throw long lines, and it's much easier to keep out of a trout's vision," he said.

## WINTER WILD TROUT

Winter is a particularly good time to fish wild trout streams, Setzer said. Trout are more concentrated, and you don't have to cover as much water.

"I catch very few 4- and 5-inch trout in the winter," he said. "Most of them are 7 inches and longer."

According to Setzer, persistence is important for winter fishing.

"You may have to cast six or eight times in the same spot before you get a strike," he said. "Sometimes, they won't move more than a foot out of their regular feeding path."

One disadvantage of winter fishing is a shorter period of daylight, especially with Daylight Savings Time no longer in effect. Prime winter fishing hours are between 10:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. If you're on a stream after 4:30 p.m., you'll more than likely walk to your vehicle in the dark.

Delayed-harvest streams offer exceptional fishing during the winter. Streams were generously stocked in early October and again the first week in November.

Even when the weather is cold and wet, trout fishing is always a fine wintertime escape, and it certainly beats sitting in front of the TV. ■

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# RAINY DAY REDS

LATE FALL AND WINTER IS SIGHT-FISHING TIME FOR SCHOOLING CAROLINA REDFISH, BUT WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THE SUN DOESN'T SHINE AND YOU HAVE TROUBLE SPOTTING THEM? HERE ARE ONE GUIDE'S SUGGESTIONS.

■ By Phillip Gentry



Phillip Gentry

# WITH WATER TEMPERATURES DROPPING RAPIDLY,

inshore anglers in the Carolinas looking to catch redfish expect them to group up on shallow flats where the sunshine and clear water often gives away their location.

But what about those days when the sun doesn't shine? Does that mean it's time to target something other than redfish or stay at the dock altogether?

Justin Carter, a fishing guide from Charleston, S.C., said there's no need to give up on reds just because the weather won't cooperate. Much of his success is going to be determined by factors other than clear, blue skies.

"The first thing to look at is the water temperature," Carter said. "If it's still in the 60s, then you're going to have a more normal redfish feeding pattern. If the temperature is 60 or below, then you can expect the fish to be more sluggish."

Carter does almost all of his winter redfishing back in the

marsh, meaning estuaries, small creeks, sounds and back bays — the type of terrain that abounds on both sides of the Intercoastal Waterway in both Carolinas. This time of year, he'll confine his fishing to water that's 4 feet deep or less.

He said the majority of the bait will have left the shallows, and redfish will gang up more for safety from predatory dolphins. A lack of sunlight overhead and/or windy, rainy conditions tends to nullify the sight-fishing on which so many redfish anglers rely. To make up for that, he'll look for other visual clues that a school of redfish is in the area.

"I keep an eye out for shore-wading birds like egrets and ibises," Carter said. "Just one bird will get my attention, but two, three or four standing in the same vicinity means there are redfish around. I don't know how those birds know; I guess the reds are pushing stuff to them, but it's a good sign."



Other visual clues may include water pushing or just a flicker or two from a shrimp or baitfish.

Under such conditions, Carter said there is a need to cover a lot of water until you locate the school of fish. His choice of baits are soft-plastic artificials since he can fish them faster than live baits.

Carter is going to fish any moving tide where the water is up to but not all the way in the grass. He's also going to work areas where he historically catches redfish: creek mouths, boat docks, depressions and ditches.

"I'm going to cast the bait right up in the edge of the water. I don't want to make any kind of splash, because redfish get spooky in the winter, and the colder the winter is and longer it's cold, the more spooky they get," he said.

Carter said there's no reason to do anything special with the retrieve. A slow, steady retrieve just off the bottom produces the best results. On occasion, he may hop the bait, but nothing flashy or erratic.

"If we're fishing in overcast conditions, I want my bait colors to be a little flashier — maybe a gold or white bait with a chartreuse tail, something with contrast," he said.

As the water gets colder after New Year's Day, he will downsize his artificial baits from 5 inches to 4 to 3 and sometimes as small as 2½ inches. This downsizing coincides with the activity level of the redfish. The colder the water, the smaller the bait.



It's easier to fish artificials than live baits on those days when you have to hunt for redfish.

Phillip Gentry

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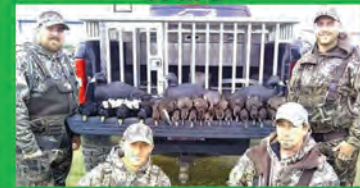
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# TOP BAIT PICKZ



Guide Justin Carter likes the Z-Man MinnowZ rigged on a 3/16-ounce Trout Eye jighead for winter redbfish.

Guide Justin Carter would rather spend his time on a rainy or overcast winter day casting artificial lures to redbfish than sitting in one spot along the shoreline, soaking live bait while waiting for fish to come to him.

As such, there are a lot of artificial baits and bait combinations to choose from. His top pick is a Z-Man MinnowZ rigged on a Trout Eye jighead with a 2/0 hook. Because he expects redbfish to be holding in shallow water — whether he can see them or not — he's going for the lightest jighead available, 3/16-ounce.

Developed by Ralph Phillips a South Carolina-based trout-fishing guru, the Trout Eye jighead is ideal for inshore saltwater

fishing. Gamefish key in on the eye of a baitfish, and a visible eye is a critical factor in their decision whether or not to strike.

Carter also has a great tip for retrieving the bait when you suspect the lure is in the strike zone.

"The plastic used to make this paddletail is more buoyant than other plastics," he said. "This means when I'm swimming the bait right along the bottom I can pause, causing the bait to glide to the bottom and, unlike other plastics that just sit on the bottom, this bait will float up, looking like a baitfish feeding unaware. That's a great way to get a strike from a less-than-aggressive redbfish."

Carter fishes the bait on spinning tackle rigged with 15-pound braid and tipped with a section of 15-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon leader. As the water gets colder through the winter, he'll downsize his line and his bait options to 10-pound braid with 10-pound fluorocarbon leader.

"This will work for all redbfish in the marsh, not just the under-slot fish," he said. "I can take this bait and this technique and catch every redbfish from 12 to 30 inches." ■

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**C**arter also wants to make longer casts; he said redfish are more aware of their surroundings in the winter than any time of the year. They might tolerate boat wake and noise and other disturbances when the marshes are full of life and activity in the summer, but not in the winter.

If he has a choice of what kind of inclement weather he'd prefer to fish, Carter said it's always going to be the beginning side of the front, when the rain and clouds first move in — rather than the back end as the weather is pushing out.

"A spike in the barometric pressure really affects these fish negatively because they live in such shallow water," he said. "The back side of the front also usually means colder and windier weather is at hand."

Since not all of his anglers are adept at casting artificial baits, he does have a few tricks up his sleeve for days when he uses live baits — mud minnow or shrimp if they are available. The first trick is the use of a slip cork. It bears mentioning this is not a popping cork nor is it a pegged cork, the same commonly used in freshwater fishing.

"I'll use a slip cork and adjust the bobber stop so the bait suspends just off the bottom," Carter said. "No popping, no noise; I just want to present the bait, right in the fish's face as it floats by." ■



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.



As water temperatures cool, redfish will group up in larger numbers and rarely leave water than more than knee deep.

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## STRIPER HOTSPOT

# NEW BERN STRIPERS gang up in rivers; shallow may be the ticket

**W**ith North Carolina experiencing a mild fall, Ashley King of New Bern's Keep Casting Charters thinks early December striped bass — aka "rockfish" — may be in much-shallower water than usual, oriented to mid-depth ranges of 8 to 10 feet around ledges along channel breaks instead of on the bottom.

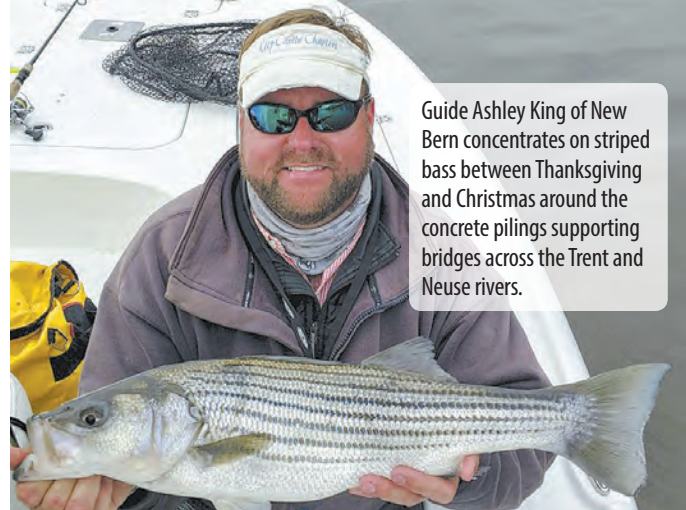
King (910-389-4118) uses a side-imaging depth-finding unit to detect fish in the shallows, near concrete bridge pilings that support highways across the Neuse and Trent rivers near New Bern and on the edges of ledges upstream in both rivers.

"In the past, stripers traditionally showed up Thanksgiving week," he said. "Using my electronics is a key for me. I'll look at shallow water then move all the way out to 17 feet as it gets colder. I troll in 10 to 12 feet of water, mostly 12 feet because I like pulling deep-diving X-RD 10 (lures) that run 10 feet."

Once he gets a few reaction bites from stripers, he will cast the same baits in white clown or hot steel colors.

"I paint up some special color combinations using fingernail polish," he said. "I also use big MirrOlures and paint them my own colors."

The idea is to mimic large baitfish, specifically menhaden.



Ashley King

Guide Ashley King of New Bern concentrates on striped bass between Thanksgiving and Christmas around the concrete pilings supporting bridges across the Trent and Neuse rivers.

When the mercury drops into the 40s, stripers will drop straight to the bottom. That's when King casts Z-Man Jerk Shads or soft-plastic paddletail grubs and bounces them off the bottom.

"The side-imaging radar is one of my seatrout tricks," he said. "I'll throw a 5- to 6-inch long Jerk Shad, Spro XL Little Johns or MirrOlures (in shallow water). If (stripers) are deep, I'll vary between a shad-like lure that weighs  $\frac{3}{16}$ - or  $\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce. When I go up the Neuse, I'll throw  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce or more weighted grubs to combat the current. That's my cold-water tactic."

Late-falls stripers usually average between 18 and 22 inches long, then grow as the year stretches toward January, sometimes reaching 25 to 30 inches. ■

— Craig Holt

## BOTTOMFISH HOTSPOT

# BOTTOMFISH GIVING anglers along NC's southern coast a chance

**D**ecember is a great month for fishing offshore along North Carolina's southern coast. Hurricane season is finished, and the gusty northeast winds of fall take a sabbatical before ramping up again in January. The seas are typically small, and it's a prime time to make quick runs offshore. Many days, fish boxes are full and fishermen are homeward-bound by early afternoon.

Bottom-fishing is the most-productive offshore fishing along the southern coast year-round, and it cranks up a bit as waters cool in December. Fish are feeding aggressively in preparation for lean pickings during the winter.

One of the biggest concerns is getting up to date on the regulations, as many species in the snapper-grouper complex have special size and creel limits, and several species may already be closed for the year due to allocations already being caught. The 2019 allocation for red grouper has been met, and the season is closed, and fishermen may only keep a single black or gag grouper. All shallow-water grouper seasons close Jan. 1 to April 30.

The action often begins pretty close to shore with gag and black grouper — plus black sea bass — being caught as shallow as 50 to 60 feet deep. More species join the catch as you move to deeper water, with a great variety of grouper, snapper, triggerfish, black sea bass, porgies and grunts joining the catch. Many

Gags and other grouper move closer to shore as winter approaches, giving North Carolina anglers more opportunities for bottom-fishing success.



fishermen highlight grouper and snapper, but don't discount the others. They taste good anytime, but especially on a cold, blustery, winter day when you can only think about going fishing.

Some fishermen prefer to drift, but many charter captains, like Butch Foster of Yeah Right Charters ([www.yeahrightcharters.com](http://www.yeahrightcharters.com)) in Southport, N.C., said you'll catch more and larger fish if you anchor so your baits aren't constantly moving.

Foster likes to fish a simple, double-drop bottom rig using medium-size circle hooks and pieces of natural bait. The hooks allow catching some of the smaller species, but they are sturdy enough to handle larger fish. He likes natural baits, as the bait thieves are almost always pecking on them as soon as they reach the bottom and the little pieces they tear off act like chum to lure in larger fish that might be more wary.

An offshore bottom-bouncing trip is a great way to spend a December day and should provide lots of fillets for the table and freezer. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

# LOTS OF GRAY TROUT

hang around Little River's nearshore reefs

**F**all is arguably the best time to fish along South Carolina's coast, and much of the craze is typically directed towards speckled trout and redfish. But another trout species, gray trout — aka weakfish — is eating the bottom out of the boat within sight of North Myrtle Beach's high rises.

There is nothing weak about a weakfish. These fish look, fight, and eat just as well as their speckled cousins, and as the water temperatures plummet this month, they stack up on the reefs and live bottom areas within sight of land.

Tom Cushman of Captain Cushman Fishing Charters, who fishes out of North Myrtle Beach, likes to take trips to nearshore reefs in December when he catches a calm day.

"Gray trout gather at the nearshore reefs to feed when the water temperatures cool off," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "The ocean lacks a lot of structure, and wherever you find structure will have lots of bait. The gray trout will be all around the edges of the reef on top of the sandy areas."

Cushman will drift around a reef site and deploy the anchor mode on his Minn-Kota I-pilot trolling motor when he catches a gray trout.

"The grays are almost always in schools, so when we catch one, we will usually stop and fish until they stop biting, and then we move around again," he said.

Grays aren't as food-selective as specks, which can be snobs when it comes to eating.

"Gray trout will eat about anything that resembles food: alive, dead, or in pieces," he said. "They will eat shrimp, finger mullet and even cut bait, where speckled trout want the bait to be alive and kicking around," he said.

Cushman typically uses a Carolina rig with a live mullet, but he will use chunks of dead bait, as well as artificial lures.

"Jigs with Gulp baits work well on the grays, too," he said. "Gulp shrimp, jerk shads or swimming mullet are usually the best. We vertically jig them off the bottom."

When fish get into a feeding zone, they will eat just about any type of artificial lure jigged vertically. ■

— Jeff Burleson



Tom Cushman

Nearshore artificial reefs out of Little River, S.C., fill up with gray trout after Thanksgiving and into the winter.

# SHRIMP = SPECKS

## Murrells Inlet trout keyed in on crustaceans

**M**other Nature didn't want to give up summer this year. The warm, summer-like temperatures carried well into fall and, consequently, delayed the speckled trout bite in South Carolina for more than six weeks.

But, they finally showed up, and that will make December the premier period to catch speckled trout; Murrells Inlet is a prime spot to catch a quick limit.

Dan Connelly of O-Fish-AI Expeditions is known for catching lots of big speckled trout in the fall, and he said that, no matter what the weather looks like, there is always a period when he can put his clients on trout.

"The absence of cool weather this fall delayed the fall action," said Connelly (843-241-7022). "But I tell my clients that the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas is always a safe period to expect trout to be here and feeding."

South Carolina's coast basically has two populations of speckled trout: a resident population and a migratory group. The migratory group moves down the eastern seaboard and will show up in the Murrells Inlet area when the water temperature drops into the mid to low-60s. This year, that cool water didn't show up until the middle of November. As a result, the mullet migration remained active for a month longer than usual.

"The mullet migration ends, but there are large groups of shrimp moving down the coast; that makes the trout key in on shrimp. This is when they start feeding hard in our area," he said.

Connelly will fish all over the Murrells Inlet area, but his favorite places for big trout and lots of them are near the ocean.

"I like to fish the jetties and places near the jetties this time of year. because the trout are feeding heavily on these big schools of shrimp," he said, which move down the beach and gravitate to the jetties for protection.

Guide Dan Connelly relies on the jetties at the outlet of Murrells Inlet for many of his December speckled trout.



Dan Connelly

"The bigger shrimp stay in the open ocean most of the time, and they have no protection," he said. "So when they are migrating and moving with the current, they come across the jetty structure and use it to hide within the crevices. The trout cruise along the pluck them out."

Live shrimp fished under a slip cork is Connelly's favorite bait; that's what big trout are looking for and feeding on. However, Connelly will also use artificial lures that mimic shrimp.

"When I use plastics, I love using D.O.A. shrimp because they have the best sink rate of any of the artificial shrimp, and the sink rate makes a huge difference. I prefer to use the ¼-ounce size in clear with gold glitter or clear with red glitter," he said. ■

— Jeff Burselson

As the water temperature falls, speckled trout become a little less aggressive and needed to be targeted with a slower retrieve. **INSET:** Match your artificial baits to the size of the forage on which trout are feeding; they often throw up in the livewell to give you a clue.



Dan Kbler

# SLOW DOWN!

## DECEMBER TROUT NEED A PATIENT PRESENTATION

By Pat Bonin

**W**ith less and less daylight and cooler water temperatures settling in, slowing down your presentation is often key to catching December speckled trout.

"I'm always telling my customers, 'Slow is the way to go,'" said guide Mike Gallo of Angling Adventures, who regularly fishes the Biloxi Marsh area. "And if you're not catching anything, go even slower."

Trout move deeper as the water cools, so Gallo likes to target shorelines with easy deepwater access that also feature flats with clear, moving water and signs of baitfish activity.

"If the water temperature is 55 and above, they like shallow water close to deep water," he said. "That way, if we get a cold front, they'll just drop down into that deep water without having to go very far."

But this time of year, especially, Gallo takes his fishing cues from clues provided by the first trout he catches each day.

"If he comes straight to the surface and shakes his head, he's not cold," Gallo said. "But if you hook a fish, and he's fighting, but it's a lethargic fight and he never comes to the surface and never shakes his head, he's cold.

"So if I change my technique, I need to change in a slower direction, not in a faster direction. Lots of things can be determined by catching one fish."

### LEARN FROM VOMIT

To that end, Gallo's first speck of the day doesn't end up on ice. Instead, it goes into the livewell to see if it will provide more clues that might turn an average day of fishing into a really good one.

"Every 10 or 15 minutes, I go and check the livewell, and I'm hoping he pukes something up: a crab, a shrimp or a baby fish," Gallo said. "Then, I get a clue on what he's feeding on, and I can mimic that."

If Gallo is fishing with a 3-inch Sparkle Beetle but sees that the trout in his livewell has spit up a 2-inch minnow, Gallo typically downsizes his lures.

"I'm going to go more in that 2-inch range, because that may be what's down there on the bottom," he said. "I happened to catch one, but if my lure really mimics what's down there I have a better chance of catching more.

"That's just matching the hatch. And if you can actually make out what it is they spit up — let's say it's a pogie — then salt-and-pepper is a great imitation for



matching a pogie."

He also pays particular attention to his electronics this time of year to identify the good, hardbottom that trout prefer. Being able to differentiate the bottom types is a matter of learning how the images display on the screen.

"Let's say you have one line showing the bottom that's 1/8-inch thick," Gallo said. "What that's telling you is the signal going down from your transducer and bouncing back up is bouncing back up quickly because that bottom is firm.

"But when it draws a bottom that's 1/2 inches thick and real fuzzy, it's telling you that's a soft, mushy bottom, and it takes a while for the signal to bounce back.

"So there are clues that you can see on your depth finder. Areas with a hardbottom and a gradual slope are gold mines for trout to hang out in." ■

## SOUND & SEA

Brian Cope

If you can't pinpoint any of a friend's fishing needs, you'll have a tough time hitting a homer with a Christmas gift, unless you give a guided fishing trip.

# FISHING GIFTS ARE TOUGH; HERE'S A GUIDE

**C**hristmas is approaching rapidly, so what are you putting under the tree for the saltwater angler on your list?

It can be a daunting task, trying to find the perfect present. If you're buying for a casual angler, it's tough to go wrong, but if you're trying to buy something truly unique and meaningful for a die-hard angler, the process can get a little stressful.

Let's face it, as anglers, it can be tough to buy gifts for us. We have our own favorite brands, or at least our favorite types of gear. So when thinking of what you should give that angler on your list, think about what you would like to receive if someone were to give you a fishing gift.

At some point, most serious anglers would say we would rather purchase our own fishing gear, simply because we know what we like. If you're an offshore bottom-fishing specialist, your cousin

who has never fished and has no interest in it probably has no clue what you would even use, much less actually like.

It's kind of like that Christmas when you pulled your distant niece's name as her Secret Santa. You stalked her social media pages to see that her passion in life was, defining the correlation between the compounds in desert sand and the emerging life forms found in a municipal trash dump. Her last post stated all she wants for Christmas is whatever it takes to complete that connection. Good luck buying her gift!

## WHAT'S NEEDED?

It can be just as difficult for one die-hard angler to buy for another. Even if you know their favorite species and method of catching them, you don't know what they're lacking in their arsenal that would be meaningful to them. Chances are, just like you, they've got all

they need. If they do need anything, they've more-than-likely got their mind made up about what it is, and when they're going to purchase it themselves.

You could always stick a bow on some fishing line. Chances are good they'll use it at some point, but what makes a Christmas gift special is the thought and meaning behind it. And trust me, while we all need fishing line and would appreciate such a gift, the true meaning of it stuffed in a gift sack is, "I had no clue what to get you, so here's some fishing line."



**Brian Cope** of Edisto Island, S.C., is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He has a B.A. in English Literature from the University of South Carolina and has been writing about the outdoors since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.

Brian Cope

The best Christmas gift you can give to someone may be a day on the water. You can provide that on a budget, or you can go all out. Whether that means walking a nearby creek, cranking the boat after Christmas dinner and putting your gift recipient on some speckled trout, marking your calendar with a mutually agreed upon date to go after sheepshead, or a gift certificate for a trip with a fishing guide, any angler will appreciate that experience more than a bag of fishing lures or a new fishing hat.

And you know that feeling of “It’s over” that you often got when you were a kid and you’d finished opening all your presents? They won’t get that feeling with a fishing trip as a gift. If it’s for a future date, they’ll look forward to it with all the anticipation of waiting on Christmas. If you take them on Christmas Day, it will likely be one of the more unique Christmases they’ve ever had.

## GIVE ‘EM A GUIDE

If you’re giving them a gift certificate for a guided fishing trip, consider giving them one for a guide who fishes outside of their normal

fishing haunts. This will open up another world of fishing for them. And it’s the best way to give them something that they wouldn’t buy for themselves. You can even gift them a guided trip for a species they’ve never caught, with a guide that specializes in putting clients on that fish.

And if you’ll be serving as their guide, think about your favorite fishing location, and consider taking them there. Or ask them what they’ve always wanted to fish for, but have never done so.

Getting back to that fishing line in a gift bag — it’s not a bad idea to put that in with their fishing gift certificate and/or a few fishing lures. That will give them a little something tangible to keep them from feeling empty-handed like gift certificates sometimes can. They’ll forget about the fishing line one day, but they’ll never forget about the fishing trip. Chances are, it will rank quite high throughout their lifetime of Christmas gifts. ■

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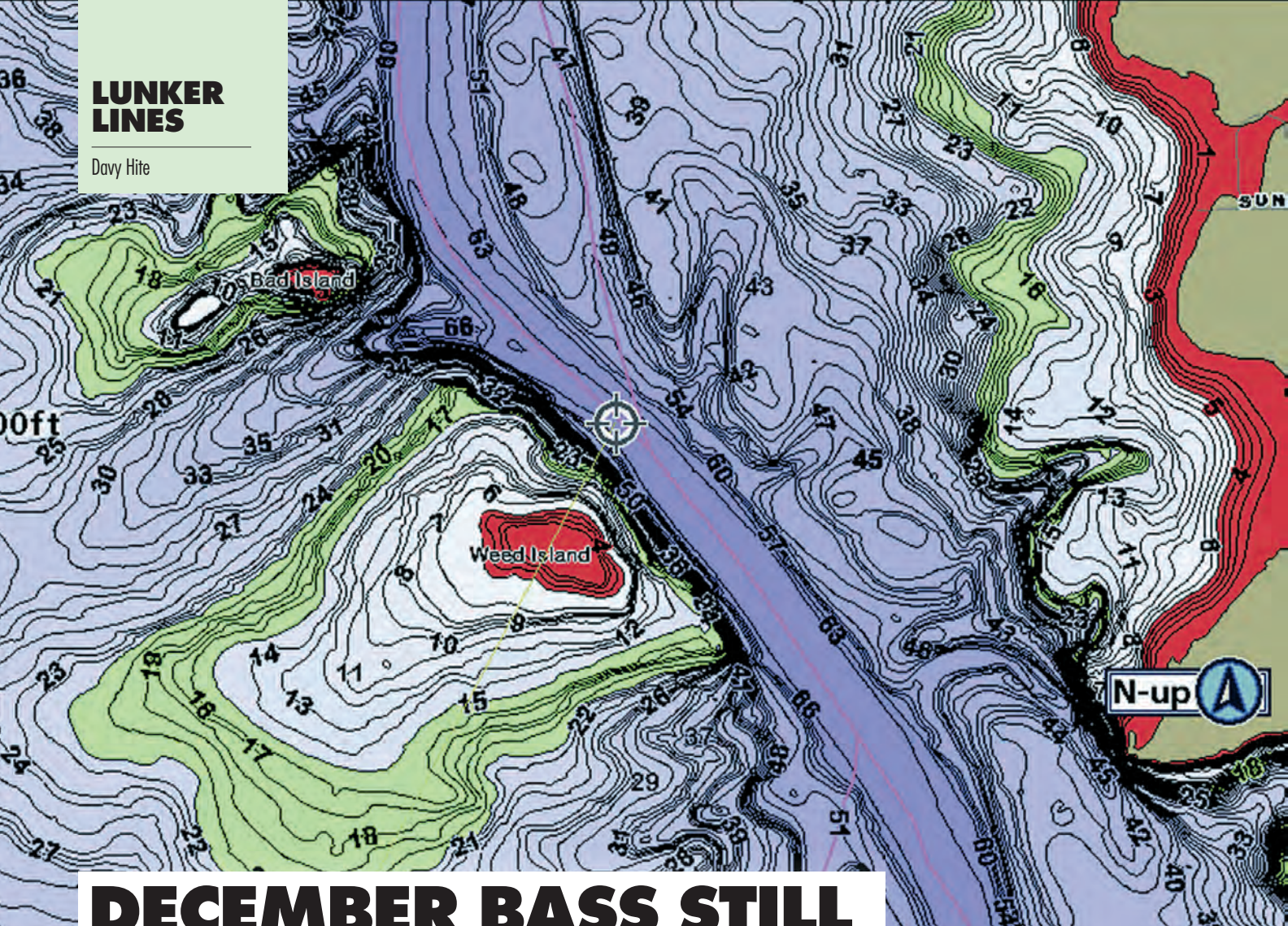
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# DECEMBER BASS STILL ACTING LIKE IT'S FALL

FIND A DEEP CREEK WITH GOOD CONTOURS AND BAITFISH, AND YOU'RE LIKELY HALFWAY TO SOME GOOD FISHING

I know that winter arrives in the Carolinas on the 21st of this month, but the really cool thing is that December is a transition month, and a lot of times, it seems like December fishes more like fall than winter for bass. We really don't get true winter patterns until January and February.

That said, bass moving between fall and winter patterns can provide an awful lot of great fishing for anglers who don't really put their tackle away when deer and duck seasons arrive, or for those who have filled all the tags they want to by Thanksgiving.

One thing December bass fishermen need to know that it's very, very important to pay attention to the water temperature, the water clarity and what the

bait fish is doing.

It seems like the past six or eight years, where we have usually had a lot of rain in the fall, we haven't had nearly as much, with the exception of tropical storms. When we don't get as much rain, we get good water clarity, and I tend to fish deeper when the water clarity is better. I also fish deeper when the water temperature is higher. Because the water is clear, I tend to throw a jerkbait, a swimsuit, even a little topwater in early December. These are all visual-type baits, and I like to fish them in deeper creeks and channels.

If we haven't had a lot of rain, I will fish a square-billed crankbait like a Rapala BX-Brat and a Mop Jig. If we've had a little more rain, I'll fish maybe a Shad Rap or a

Storm 360GT Coastal, a swimbait that's got a different body, a little thicker shad profile. If the water stays warmer, I'll had a topwater bait into the mix.

## DEPTH MATTERS

Where am I going to fish? I really like main creeks, deeper creeks. In October, in early fall, I like flatter creeks. I like deeper creeks in December, the ones that have a little ditch with a sharper contour.



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.

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Creeks that hold lots of baitfish and bass in late fall are more likely to have good, distinct contour changes that show up on mapping software associated with your electronics.

It is really important to look in those creeks, pay attention to the water clarity, use your electronics to get around some bait and fish.

What is a deep creek? That's relative. If you're fishing the Santee Cooper lakes, if you get a 5-foot contour change in 30 to 40 feet of water, that's deep. If you're somewhere else — Lake Norman, Lake Murray, High Rock Lake — it's not. It's all relative.

## CONTOUR LINES

What I want to do when I turn on my mapping software — and I use LakeMaster maps — is I look for creeks and the contour lines. I want to fish those creeks with tight contour lines around the channel; they're easy to see on the mapping feature on your electronics.

I hate to be redundant, but it is so important to use your electronics to find bait. If you aren't fishing around bait, you aren't going to catch any bass. It seems like the improvements in our electronics are never ending. We've come so far with them that you should be able to use yours to see bait and fish. Even when I'm fishing with buddies who use a different brand than I do, I can still see bait and fish.

If I can find bait around those channels and ditches, then I'm going to be very interested in fishing them, because bass are still totally concentrating on shad and herring in December. They aren't really ganged up — that will happen when it gets to be sure-enough winter, but that isn't until January and February.

I want to throw those baits, the BX-Brat, the Shad Rap, the 360GT swimsuit, maybe a Mop Jig. And when I catch a fish or two, I'm going to be very aware of how the bass wanted my bait. I am going to start off with a slower retrieve than normal in December. I may add some stop-and-go, maybe a little twitch or two, but I'm going to fish those baits more slowly, because as the water cools late in the fall, into December, the fish get a little more sluggish and aren't as likely to chase baits. ■



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Fish open water this month and as the winter progresses; many predator fish leave structure and shadow baitfish schools, making trolling or free-lining baits very productive.

# WINTER BRINGS FISH TO OPEN-WATER AREAS

LOOK FOR CLUES FOR LOCATION OF BAITFISH, HUNGRY PREDATORS

Phillip Gentry

**W**inter fishing from a kayak requires a bit of a mindset change as fish — bass, crappie, stripers and catfish — rarely spend as much time in the shallows as they are prone to do in spring. This means it's time to paddle to more open, deeper water to catch fish.

One of the best ways to pattern winter fish is by watching the skies. As the water temperature drops, baitfish schools, primarily threadfin shad, group tightly and may even start to die off as the colder water slows their metabolism.

This vulnerability makes them prime targets for aquatic birds like seagulls, loons and terns, which migrate inland from the coast over the winter when saltwater baitfish vacate the marshes for the open ocean.

If you've ever watched one of the nature-themed television shows about the blue ocean, a similar scenario is taking place in the dull-green waters. Baitfish are pushed towards the surface by predator fish, while birds dive down and pick at the schools from the surface.

At the top of the list or target species for this pattern are striped bass and hybrid bass, which become considerably more

active during the colder months.

Surface schooling action can be fast and furious for stripers, while anglers cast noisy topwater or sub-surface baits into boiling water to fool stripers charging up from below.

Anglers targeting largemouth bass, spotted bass or even crappie in reservoirs can find similar success targeting bottom structure as the sunfish species are less prone to chasing baitfish in open water than hiding around structure and ambushing them as they swim past.

## BLESS THOSE PERCH

Probably the most dependable of all winter fish species in the states' freshwater reservoirs are the non-native but delicious white perch, which are in the same family as striped bass. White perch feed aggressively throughout the winter.

Large schools of white perch will move frequently but tend to gravitate to points. Anglers choosing to target white perch will benefit from having a decent sonar unit attached to their boat. In addition to the water birds ear-marking feeding activity, look for white perch to stage on these long points on the windward side of the lake.

Anglers who prefer artificial baits simply need to tie on a small to medium-sized jigging spoon in flashy colors to tempt perch into biting. The size of the bait mimics the size and swimming action of threadfin shad. Live-bait anglers can drift or troll with multiple-hook rigs of small to medium minnows or pieces of cut bait.

Either method will frequently result in anglers catching a mixed bag of striped bass, hybrids, black bass, crappie and possibly even a catfish or two.

Finally, much of winter fishing success is watching the weather. Gray, overcast days will provide much better bird-watching, surface-schooling action longer into the day than a bright, blue bird day. Days with minimal winds up to 10 mph are also preferred over gusty windy days. ■



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.

## SHEEP-HERDING

Inshore fishing guide John Ward of Charleston, S.C., doesn't rely on catching that one perfect day out of a week of rough weather to travel to nearshore reefs to catch sheepshead. Ward finds he has all the inshore sheepshead action he can handle fishing around structure on local creeks and rivers.

"A lot of sheepshead will move out to the reefs during the winter, but it's a misconception that they completely vacate inshore waters," Ward said. "The key to finding sheepshead inshore this time of year is finding the right kind of structure."

Ward looks for a creek or river that holds a minimum of 4 feet of water during the low phase of the tide. What makes a location even better is to find fish-holding structure such as piers, docks, riprap walls or blow-down trees on the outside bend in a creek or river.

"The current will wash out the outside bend and make a deeper hole," he said. "Sheepshead love to bunch up in a deep hole during the winter."

Finding sheepshead bunched up on structure is the perfect opportunity for inshore kayak anglers.

"I want to anchor up out so I can fish straight down," Ward said. "That helps detect those famous quick bites without having to fight current or line angle. I'm also not concerned about putting a boat right on top of the fish. Sheepshead don't seem to be as spooky as other fish, especially during the winter, maybe because they're used to hiding under boat docks." ■



Phillip Gentry

All sheepshead don't all leave inshore waters during the winter; they can be readily found in numbers around deep structure.

## BEST BETS NORTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Sheepshead

**WHERE** — Bridges spanning deeper water

**HOW** — Not all sheepshead move offshore, especially early in winter, and they will often stack up on deep structure such as bridge pilings as the last of the bait moves to deeper water. This is finesse fishing, as fish won't move far to take a bait when water temperatures dip into the 50s.

**LAUNCH** — Find the nearest public launch site at [www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/Where-to-Boat](http://www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/Where-to-Boat)

**INSIDER TIP** — Try using live fiddler crabs on a bottom bouncer rig. Having two baits per rod helps tempt fish and doubles your chances at a hook up.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Striped bass, largemouth bass, white perch

**WHERE** — Clarks Hill Reservoir, aka Thurmond Lake

**HOW** — It's time to be pulling free-lines and planer boards while fish are feeding on schooling baitfish. Most tributary creeks from the mouth to the middle will hold bait, particularly on long points. Make sure to keep one rod rigged with a topwater bait.

**LAUNCH** — <http://stromthurmond.uslakes.info/>

**INSIDER TIP** — Watch for birds to give away baitfish locations by working schools of bait while fish feed on bait from below.

**NEW GEAR >**

## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

### SAV-A-JAKE SELF-RESCUE LADDER

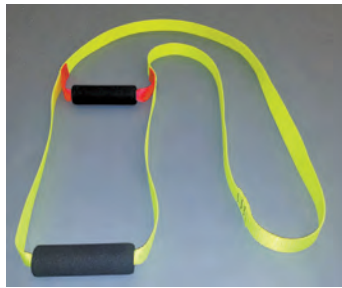
A few kayak anglers practice self-rescue during the summer when taking a dip in the water isn't really an inconvenience. How many practice self-rescue during the winter while wearing heavy clothes? With cold weather here, taking a plunge from your kayak can be a matter of life or death.

Sav-A-Jake International is introducing a new product: the Kayak Self-Rescue Ladder. This ladder system allows for easy re-entry into a kayak if you fall out. It also serves as an assist device to right the kayak if it is overturned. The ladder is made from industrial-quality nylon webbing which forms the flexible loop. Two foam steps/handles allow for a sturdy yet comfortable grip when using the product.

Simply hitch the top end of the loop to your kayak handle or cleat and secure. The flat webbing stays tight once cinched in place. The ladder works on both standard and wide SOT kayaks.

**MSRP is \$19.95.00.**

Available at [www.savajake.com](http://www.savajake.com).



### BULLWINKLE ROD STAGER

Hey, Rocky! Wanna see me carry a bunch of pre-rigged rods in my kayak?

Kayak anglers need to be able to have multiple baits and presentations rigged and ready to meet every situation that might be encountered. One of the challenges of carrying multiple pre-rigged rods is where and how to store them where they can be reached at a moment's notice but not be in the way of fishing.

The folks at Yak Attack have accepted this challenge with the development and design of the track-mounted Bullwinkle Rod Stager.

The Bullwinkle Rod Stager attaches to any YakAttack GearTrac, MightyMount and most other factory track system. An additional bonus for tournament anglers is it features a slot designed to hold the Hawg Trough Measuring Board. Now you can not only have a wide selection of pre-rigged rods at hand, you can also have your measuring board stored where it won't fall overboard, won't be in the way, and be ready for use as soon as a fish is boated.

**MSRP is \$30.00.**

Available at [yakattack.us](http://yakattack.us).



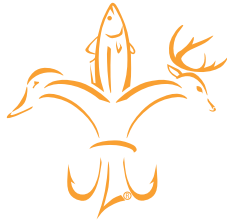
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## RANEW'S HANGING JUDGE GAMBREL

I have a gambrel to help rough-butcher the deer that my son, hunting buddies and I kill, and I also have a scale so we can certify who deserves bragging rights for taking heavy-weight bucks.

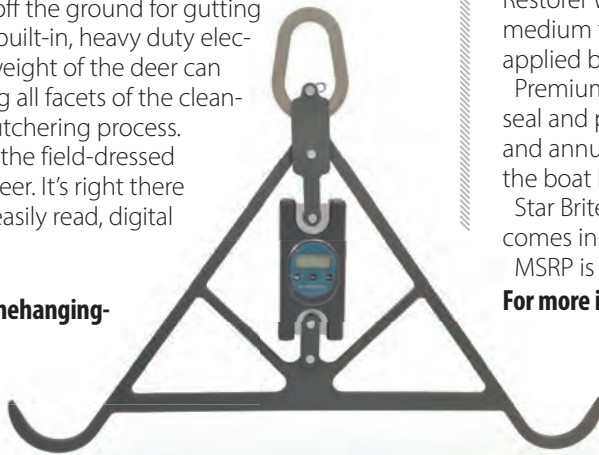
But the scale and gambrel are separate, and it takes two hoists of a nice buck to get his weight, then start the process of skinning and butchering.

Not anymore. The folks at Georgia's Ranew Outdoors combined a scale and gambrel into their new Outdoors Hanging Judge gambrel. The gambrel, which hunters can use to suspend their deer off the ground for gutting and skinning, has a built-in, heavy duty electronic scale so the weight of the deer can easily be seen during all facets of the cleaning, skinning and butchering process.

No more guessing the field-dressed weight of a whole deer. It's right there in front of you, in a easily read, digital format.

MSRP: \$69.99.

**For more info, visit: [thehanging-judge.com](http://thehanging-judge.com)**



## STAR BRITE PREMIUM RESTORER WAX

If you're putting your boat away for the winter, you're probably planning to winterize all the moving parts in the engine and fuel system.

Why not use the downtime to give the exterior a pick-me-up?

That's where Star Brite's Premium Restorer Wax enters the picture. Instead of a long process of rubbing, wet sanding and polishing to remove oxidation and restore the hull's sparkle, Premium Restorer Wax safely removes medium to heavy oxidation when applied by hand or with a buffer.

Premium Restorer Wax will clean, seal and protect a boat's gel coat, and annual applications will keep the boat looking its best.

Star Brite Premium Restorer Wax comes in 16-ounce bottles.

MSRP is \$20.49.

**For more info, visit: [starbrite.com](http://starbrite.com)**



## SHIMANO / G. LOOMIS BAITCASTING COMBO

Anglers wanting to put two of fishing's great names together will get a chance this month, with G.Loomis and Shimano matching up with a limited-edition baitcasting combo.

Shimano has owned G.Loomis for more than 20 years, but the two companies have never matched a top-drawer G.Loomis rod with a Shimano reel, like the combo that will match a Shimano Bantam MGL reel with a G.Loomis IMX-PRO 863C JWR rod.

The Bantam MGL reels offer three different gear ratios in right- and left-hand retrieves, with a super-light MGL spool that makes for better casting distance. The G.Loomis rod is a medium-heavy, 7-foot-2 model with Fuji K-Frame guides and a tapered, full-cork rear grip, good for a wide range of fishing functions.

The combo should be in a number of tackle shops by mid-November, just in time for Christmas shoppers.

MSRP is \$499.99.

**For more info, visit: [fish.shimano.com](http://fish.shimano.com)**



## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

# VENISON SAUSAGE, SHRIMP NACHOS

PERK UP A HOLIDAY GATHERING WITH THIS TASTY TREAT

**As** I get older, I can't deny that eating is a tradition on many holidays, especially Thanksgiving and Christmas. You probably will soon or have recently sat down for Thanksgiving dinner, hopefully with your family and some close friends. I hope you enjoy this time and want to warn you that Christmas will be here almost before all the dishes are dried and put away.

This recipe is a treat anytime, but it seems to shine around Christmas and New Year's Day. It's a fun recipe, best suited as a snack for family gatherings and parties, but it really shines when served straight from the oven at halftime of your favorite football game.

December is a great time for sportsmen in the Carolinas. For the most part, the temperature is moderate and the weather good. Those last few days of vacation can be taken to hunt or fish almost anywhere. Somehow, Mother Nature and Old Man Winter seem to know when the calendar flips over to January and the new year begins with colder, rougher weather.

The bottom line for December is that Christmas is approaching, and a week later, we'll flip the calendar to begin 2020. However, in the meantime, there is plenty for sportsmen to do, time to be with families and celebrate the birth of Jesus, and folks are going to eat. Give this a try as a snack at a family gathering or while watching sports on TV. Most people have liked it and hopefully you and yours will also. ■



The author adds seasoning to shrimp that are sautéing in drippings from the venison sausage **INSET:** Add several layers of nachos, covering them with sausage, shrimp and Mexican cheese.



# SAUSAGE, SHRIMP NACHOS

This recipe begins with venison sausage and shrimp, both of which can be gathered by Carolina sportsmen. Deer hunting is a favorite of many, and this is a great way to use some venison ground that's been into sausage. If you don't have any venison sausage or prefer the taste of pork, pork sausage works well here, too. I even have one friend who doesn't eat pork or venison but makes this with turkey sausage.

Hopefully, you caught some shrimp in a cast net this fall and put them aside in the freezer, or you can purchase some at your favorite seafood dealer. Use larger shrimp, at least 25 to 30 count, as you will be cutting them up. Don't use imported shrimp.

You will notice that jalapenos are listed as an optional ingredient. I like to chop a few and cook them with the sausage, then slice one or two to spread over the nachos. I made this batch for a gathering where no one else appreciated the flavor of jalapenos, so they were not used in the recipe. However, you can be assured I had a bowl on the side. I also only used a light sprinkling of blackened seasoning on the shrimp. As with any recipe, feel free to add or reduce any spice or ingredient to your personal taste. Some like it hot — and some not!

Use your favorite nacho chips, but I

recommend Trader Joe's Salted Tortilla Chips, made with stone ground white corn. Even though they are salted, they only have 50 mg of sodium in a serving of 10 chips. This is good, as there will be lots of sodium in other ingredients. These are thicker chips and don't get soggy as quickly with the queso and other ingredients as many tortilla chips. Some of my friends like to add a little salsa, and the crisp chips handle this much better.

You can cook this directly on the pan or a cookie sheet, but it can be a little messy and difficult to clean up. Covering the pan or sheet with aluminum foil helps greatly with cleanup and provides foil to wrap any leftovers to be warmed again.

Cooking the shrimp in the sausage drippings helps give them an extra burst of flavor. Be sure not to overcook them. Once the opaque is gone and they are pink, they're ready to go.

If you leave some of these nachos in a warmer for Santa, you might wake up Christmas morning with a lot of unexpected presents under your tree. Enjoy! ■

## PREPARATION:

Peel and de-vein the shrimp and cut it into approximate 1-inch pieces. Chop the scallions and separate the white bottom from the light-green upper. I don't use the whole top, only the lighter green part. Chop the tomatoes; I only use the firm outer layer.

Brown the sausage and the white bottom part of the scallions. Sprinkle blackened seasoning on the shrimp pieces. Remove the sausage and save enough sausage drippings to cover the bottom of the frying pan. Sauté the shrimp pieces in the sausage drippings over medium heat, stirring often.

Cover a baking pan or cookie sheet with aluminum foil. Preheat oven to 325. Arrange a full bottom layer of nachos. Sprinkle sausage, shrimp and Mexican cheese on the nachos. Sprinkle lightly with tomato pieces and add several spoons of queso in different areas. This step will also include jalapeno slices if you are using them. Add a second layer of nachos and repeat the previous step. Add a third layer of nachos and repeat step the previous step again, using the remaining tomato pieces and queso, plus adding the green scallion slices. Bake on middle rack until the cheeses and queso have melted. This should take around 10-12 minutes. Be careful not to scorch the

tortilla chips.

Serve immediately. It will cool quickly. Have several types of salsa available for those who want to add it. Even if you make this without jalapenos, have some sliced jalapenos in a bowl for those who would like to add them. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

**1 pound venison sausage (loose or country style)**

**1 pound shrimp**

**1 large bag plain tortilla chips**

**2 large roma tomatoes**

**2 bundles scallions**

**1 container queso cheese**

**1 package mixed Mexican cheese (7 ounces)**

**Blackened seasoning**

**Several types of salsa**

**Several fresh jalapeno peppers (optional)**



**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@captainjerry.com](mailto:Jerry.Dilsaver@captainjerry.com).

## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

More big fish and big numbers of blue catfish were reported after the 2014 regulations changes.



# SINGING THE BLUES OVER SANTEE CATS

LEGISLATURE NEEDS TO TAKE ACTION ON CATFISH REGS

Terry Madewell

**T**he South Carolina Outdoor Press Association held its annual meeting at the Santee Cooper lakes in October, and while the meeting was packed with great fishing opportunities, some comprehensive biological background information on the Santee Cooper fisheries was shared.

The status of the blue catfish, specifically management plans for the species, drew high interest. Levi Kaczka, a regional fisheries biologist for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, provided an excellent synopsis of how this extremely popular species evolved from its arrival origin to the current crossroads of future management decisions.

## WE GOT THE BLUES

This world-class fishery began when the SCDNR worked with its counterparts in Arkansas to trade some of our striped bass for some of their blue catfish. In December 1964, 30 sub-adult blues were

stocked in the Santee Cooper lakes, followed by adding an additional 150 sub-adults in April 1965.

These small stockings morphed into a strong fishery by the 1980s, generating increased angler interest in catfishing. The catfish population exploded, with a quantum leap in the 1990s.

## BOOM GOES BUST

SCDNR began tracking catfish with gill-net surveys in the 1980s, and a tremendous surge in the population was documented through the 1990s and until 2001. The lakes became a national destination for blue catfish fishing, and the catfish action filled a void left by a striper fishery that was, at the time, sagging.

Fishing camps, guides and local businesses flourished during the catfish boom, and catfish became relevant to regional economy.

Then the bottom dropped out of the fishery, and according to SCDNR sampling data, the population spiraled down

from a peak in 2001 to a historic low in 2013. But as overall numbers dropped, larger catfish were caught. SCDNR proposed to the state legislature a first-of-its-kind catfish law in 2007 to protect these bigger fish. The law stipulated that anglers could keep only one catfish over 36 inches per day.

Another factor in fewer catfish was the timing of a normal biological pattern.

“The 1990s was the boom phase typically associated with a rapidly expanding fish species,” Kaczka said. “The population expansion required balance with forage and other factors, and that balance is typically lower than the all-time high. Plus, several consecutive dry years in the late 1990s likely corresponded to



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.

poor spawning success of blue catfish.”

Kaczka said, based on the data, that nothing dramatic changed biologically in terms of forage or water quality over the next few years. But the resource was receiving year-round fishing pressure both by rod-and-reel and commercial fishing.

## FUTURE PROGNOSIS

The blue catfish does not have gamefish status but is recognized as a highly valuable resource and the 2007 regulation was not maintaining the fishery as hoped.

Kaczka said the goal was to produce a blend of good numbers of fish, while maintaining the opportunity to hook trophy catfish. In 2014, SCDNR presented another recommendation, and the 2014 blue catfish law was passed.

“The law sought a balance, by limiting the creel to only two fish kept over 32 inches to spread out the harvest of trophy catfish among Santee Cooper’s anglers,” Kaczka said. “An overall creel of 25 blue catfish was established, enabling anglers to keep plenty of fish for consumption while providing protection for the overall resources.”

The good news is that the 2014 law worked, and SCDNR sampling data revealed more quality and quantity of catfish in the system. Many rod-and-reel anglers went a step further by implementing “CPR” (catch, photograph and release) for big fish, keeping only smaller fish for consumption.

But the bad news was a “sunset clause” added to the 2014 law by the legislature, stipulating the law would expire in 2018, reverting back to the 2007 law, if not passed again in 2018. That’s what occurred.

The point for sportsmen now is not to debate why something occurred, but to focus on getting it fixed.

Kaczka said the wording of the 2014 blue catfish law was reintroduced to the legislature this year, but the bill stalled in committee. Fortunately, it’s a two-year process, and the proposal will be open for consideration when the legislature convenes next month.

Biological data supporting this law as good is very strong. Plus, the practical experience of every catfish guide and serious Santee Cooper angler I’ve spoken with in the past year supports the 2014 law as having a profound, positive impact during the years it existed.

If the legislature passes a new version of the 2014 law, the hope of continuing and expanding the renewed catfishing success exists. If not, we’ll need a new plan, and the politics will consume crucial time that this remarkable fishery needs for recovery, especially when a good plan sits on the table.

The fate of this valuable resource is now in the hands of our lawmakers. Let them know how you feel. ■

The fate of this valuable resource is now in the hands of our lawmakers. Let them know how you feel. ■



Terry Madewell

### CATS DOWN THE ROAD:

The future of the blue catfish fishery is important to the next generation of anglers on the Santee Cooper lake s, so South Carolina’s legislature needs to pass new regulations in the 2020 session.

# IT'S STRIPED BASS SEASON ON SANTEE COOPER!

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## SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

Big trout are out there for the taking, especially if you take measures to specifically target them.



# TIME TO THINK BIG

IT TAKES A 'BIG' MINDSET, 'BIG' STRUCTURE, 'BIG' BAITS TO TARGET TROPHY SPECKS

It's no secret; I love big trout. Aside from talking about them, I love sharing pictures of them, but more important, I love targeting them.

A common question I get is, "What's the most-important thing to know before targeting big fish?" As simple as that question seems, I could probably compose an hour-long dissertation highlighting the complexities of that pursuit, but I'll boil it down to two words: Think Big!

Follow my logic for a second. I'm not just talking about lure profile, I'm also talking about mindset and structure.

## BIG MINDSET

Mindset is first and most important, I believe. Having a "big" mindset helps manage expectation. It also helps frame the level of effort. I equate this to the BASS Elite Series, where the best anglers from around the world chase around for five bites in an 8-hour day. Knowing that

small fish won't win any money, they shift their mindset to target quality bites instead of quantity.

The same applies to fishing for trophy trout. If you're serious about looking for your personal best, you have to fish for your personal best. This often could mean fewer bites, but managing your expectations through a shift in mindset helps fill the void between fish. After all, it's about catching the one fish that could eat the other 25 you've been catching.

## BIG STRUCTURE

The second point is structure. As we become comfortable fishing an estuary or location, it's easy to learn spots and become pleased with their productivity. From ledges and dropoffs to flats and bottom contour, it's easy to accentuate why some areas are more productive than others. The same holds true with big trout — but they don't want struc-

ture, they want "big" structure.

Think about your favorite fishing areas and consider why some spots hold bigger trout. It may be the time of year and the structure on the bottom (spawning). It may be a bayou draining into another bayou (current) or it may be something like dock pilings or a cement wall (structure/bait association).

To highlight my point, I'll use Mississippi's Gulf Coast as an example. Not only was I fortunate enough to call it home for many years, I got to see first-hand how targeting big structure can lead to big trout.

Mississippi's coast is unique: small



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

but very dynamic. It has rivers, beaches and, I believe most important, man-made structures. Gulfport Harbor, right in the middle of the coast, is an enormous man-made combine that provides not only structure but lots and lots of “big” structure. From steep, 20-foot drops to concrete pilings and large boulder banks, everything about it was larger than normal. In addition, it is on the fringe of the Mississippi Sound. This contributes to great tidal influence, impacting bait variations and abundance. In short, this is a small ecosystem in the grand scheme of it all. As a result, it’s no surprise this area produces such large trout.

In addition, Gulfport Harbor isn’t the only man-made structure on the coast. Casinos and shipyards litter its beaches from Louisiana to Alabama, and in full confidence, most of them produce larger-than-normal trout. So the takeaway from the second point is if you have jetties, bridges, rigs, etc., in your area, it’s probably not a bad place to start looking for big trout.

## BIG BAITS

Last but not least, lures. This is probably, in my view, the least important, but it does hold weight when the other conditions have been met. Anglers notable for targeting big trout generally throw three things: a slow sink/suspend-style bait (Corky/27MR), a topwater, or a big soft-plastic, 4½ inches or larger. That’s not to say you can’t catch them on smaller, soft-plastic baits, but if you want to increase the size of the trout you catch, increase the size of your bait.

In the Dirty 30 and Trophy Trout citation data collected we see a noticeable increase in bait size as water temperatures begin to drop — a decline in small, soft-plastic baits and an increase in big, suspending or topwater baits. This tells us one of two things: first, that anglers are making a cognizant choice to throw larger plugs; or second, fish have shifted their diet to larger finfish, thus resulting in the action from No. 1.

Given slightly more thought, it makes sense because winters are harsh. More often,

heartier forage can sustain the brutal decline in water temperatures, leaving them isolated and susceptible to larger trout we target. Also, the winter is the capstone for many of the fish that hatched in the spring. Over the course of those six months, fingerlings grew to a more-sustainable size, in turn leaving larger trout to target something bigger than what was incredibly abundant in the spring: small finfish and/or shrimp.

So as we progress into the winter and you’re looking for that trophy fish, just remember, everything about big trout is exactly that — big. ■



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# Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

## AT RUSSELL, BAIT IS DECEMBER BOMB

Guide Wendell Wilson catches December stripers at Lake Russell around big schools of baitfish.

### Bass, perch, crappie, stripers are ganged up around shad, herring

**W**ith the approach of winter causing water temperatures to drop, there is one simple rule for fishing for any species in South Carolina's Lake Russell: find the bait and you will find the fish — all of the fish.

"December is one of my favorite months on Lake Russell, because the winter pattern is starting to set up, and you also have the gulls arriving to help you find the fish," said guide Wendell Wilson of Elberton, Ga. "By this time of year, we mostly just fish around the schools of bait, either on the main-lake flats or in the larger creeks."

Everything is concentrating on those schools of bait, according to Wilson (706-283-3336). By targeting them, anglers can expect to catch spotted bass, largemouth bass, striped bass, crappie and white and yellow perch. The pattern usually holds

steady throughout the month, he said.

"They will all be schooled up together," Wilson said. "We look for them in 30 to 50 feet of water. Once you find them, fish the bottom with either a drop-shot rig and medium minnow or with a jigging spoon."

Wilson said stripers and bass will sometimes come up off the bottom and suspend higher in the water column. In that case, he suggested casting an Alabama Rig with 2½- to 3-inch curlytails or paddletails that imitate threadfin shad.

"The A-Rig is probably the best single lure for stripers. A second choice is a free-lined medium shiner or a herring," Wilson said.

The weather also plays a role in which species to target, he said. The best days to fish for stripers are not the best days for perch and bass. Sunny, windy days are best for perch and bass, while cloudy and calm

days, even rainy days, are best for stripers.

Those are also days to target a trophy striper, he said, adding that if you do, you had better be prepared to deal not only with a ferocious fish, but with the standing forests of trees beneath Russell's surface.

"I hung one of the biggest stripers of my life on Dec. 3 one year. Unfortunately, he found a tree," said Wilson, whose fish ate a herring but only took a few seconds to strip the braid off his reel down to the backing before hanging the line in a submerged tree.

"I was fishing with a very heavy outfit, so it was not like I was not ready for him, but he had me hung up in about five seconds." ■

— Pat Robertson

# BADIN'S BASS BITE

## takes off in December's cooler weather

**G**uide Joel Richardson of Kernersville, N.C., said that Badin Lake in North Carolina's Uwharrie Mountains in the Piedmont, is a "great cold-water lake" that gives up plenty of quality bass during the winter.

"As a bonus, you are likely to catch stripers that often share in the same areas as largemouth. That's not a bad deal," said Richardson (336-803-2195), who finds a great December bite when the water temperature is between 45 and 55 degrees.

Richardson said the December bite is on at Badin when the water temperatures range from 45 to 55 degrees.

"Oddly enough, when the water temperatures are in the mid-40s, you're likely to see schools of largemouth driving shad to the surface," said Richardson (336-803-2195). "These aren't little schooling bass, but fish in the 3- to 4-pound range. Often, you'll catch stripers mixed in with the bass."

Richardson said finding forage in conjunction with fish isn't that much of a problem.

"You don't need expensive side-imaging units to locate the fish," Richardson said. "Just scan an area with your own eyes and look for diving birds feeding on forage. That's where the fish will be."

In December, Richardson targets rock in 4 to 15 feet of water, laydowns and docks.

"I fish rocky places with a Bomber Model 6A, a Strike King square-bill and deep-running Little N crankbaits in shad patterns in clear water, and chartreuse and brown patterns in dingy water," said Richardson, who also likes chrome/blue Rat-L-Traps for schooling or suspending bass. "I prefer dingy water, though Badin is usually clear in the winter."

Richardson probes waters from the islands in the Beaver Dam Creek area to the main body of the lake, all the way up the lake to Garr Creek, favoring the steep, rocky and stumpy banks that

Badin Lake is full of 3- to 5-pound largemouth bass, and some larger ones. The lake has always been regarded as an excellent cold-weather fishery.



Tony Garitta

characterize that portion of the lake.

Richardson favors docks and laydowns situated along the main lake. He fishes them with 3/8-ounce jigs in black/blue color combinations.

"You won't catch numbers of fish on docks and laydowns, but the ones you catch will be big," he said.

When cranking, Richardson uses a 7-foot cranking rod paired with a 5.1 gear-ratio baitcasting reel filled with 10- to 14-pound monofilament. For jiggling docks and wood, he switches to heavy tackle and 17-pound line.

"In December, the bass at Badin will run from 3 to 5 pounds, along with fish up to 8 pounds," said Richardson. "That's about as good as it gets for winter fishing in this state." ■

— Tony Garitta

# SPIN YOUR WAY

## to great bass fishing on Lake Murray

**T**here may be several different ways to catch bass on South Carolina's Lake Murray, but when Christmas carols are beginning to fill the airwaves, pro angler Andy Wicker of Pomaria, S.C., fishes the deeper, clear water with a Fish Head Spin.

"Depending on the situation, when the water temperature drops to 58 degrees and below, I will rig a small, plastic, finesse swimbait or a Zoom Fluke on the Fish Head Spin," said Wicker who grew up fishing Lake Murray with his father, Steve Wicker, also a tournament angler.

"The swimbait is usually a 3.3 to 3.8 Keitech in shad color. I throw it on a medium to medium heavy rod with 10-pound or 12-pound line," he said. "I lost a bunch of Fish Head Spins fishing the lighter line, so I buy them in bulk...."

"There are several ways to fish this, but my favorite is to slow-roll the bait on or near the bottom in 25 to 35 feet of water near sharp breaks. It always helps to have brush nearby."

Wicker said the bite is definitely better with a little wind to ruffle the surface, and it normally will last all day. Sunny, slick days are always the worst, he added.



Andy Wicker

Bass pro Andy Wicker goes slow with a Fish Head Spin for December bass on Lake Murray.

"This pattern is typically better on the lower end of the lake in the clearer water there, and it usually lasts right on through February," he said. ■

— Pat Robertson

One of guide Jason Wolfe's clients caught this 80-pound blue catfish last year. BELOW: Wolfe shows off a nice catfish caught during a Dec. 2018 trip.



# RIVER MONSTERS

## SC's Wateree River offers great winter fishing for big blue catfish

It's December, and the water has finally cooled considerably. Catfish anglers across the Carolinas love this time of year; that's especially true for those who fish South Carolina's Wateree River.

Jason Wolfe of Wolfe's Guide Service (803-487-3690) said it's a great time to catch some big cats on this river. He prefers to stick to the sections upstream and downstream from the US 1 boat landing between Camden and Lugoff. He likes to concentrate on deep holes and any type of structure that breaks the river's current and provides cats a place to ambush prey.

"You don't want to be all the way up at the dam, and you want to avoid the shoals that are just below the dam," he said. "You want to stay farther downriver, and you want to target deeper holes. This river has plenty of them in that section, and the big cats hang out in them. If you can get a good piece of bait in there when they're feeding, you can land some really big ones."

One of Wolfe's clients caught an

80-pound catfish in this area last year. That's an exceptional catch, but Wolfe said it's not unrealistic at all for anglers to target fish that size. Fish in the 10- to 25-pound class are more common, but 35- to 50-pounders are not at all unheard of, especially this time of year.

Wolfe uses Carolina rigs with egg sinkers, Abu Garcia 6500 reels spooled with 30-pound line, a 50-pound test leader, 8/0 dual action hooks, and a nice chunk of cut bait on each hook. He finds a deep hole with his electronics, then anchors above the hole to allow the current to keep his bait in the strike zone. A deep hole that has structure nearby is a gold mine.

"Fish anything that breaks the current in the river bends," he said. "Objects like trees and rocks give the fish a break from the current, and it provides them with an ambush point. These are the places you want to target."

Wolfe casts out multiple baits, places rods in rod holders and then waits. He prefers for a rod to load up completely



before removing it from the rod holder. That gives the fish a chance to hook itself good, leaving the angler with only the task of reeling it in.

"With the dual action hooks, you can allow them to hook themselves, or you can set the hook on your own," he said.

— Brian Cope

# FIND BAIT, FIND BLUES

## Search creeks on lower end of Lake Gaston

**D**ecember has the potential to be one of the best months to target big blue catfish at Lake Gaston on the North Carolina-Virginia border. Fish that remain active despite declining temperatures, and baitfish balls that point the way to success like a flashing neon sign make this fishery a must for winter anglers. According to guide Zakk Royce, he who finds the shad finds the blues.

"The whole food chain in December revolves around threadfin shad," said Royce (919-724-2474), who operates Blues Brothers Catfish Guide Service. "I like to start out in the deeper creeks on the lower end of the lake because the shad will really stack up in there, and it's a smaller area to work with than the main-river channel. I expect to find them anywhere from 30 to 50 feet deep."

What Royce hopes to find are clouds of bait on his sonar that are suspended in the water column, meaning predators below are pushing them off the bottom. The channel in the creek mouth is an ideal place to start, but Royce will scan as far back as the general 30-foot depth will allow. If the creek search turns up cold, Royce will next check the main-river channel nearby.

On the lower end, the channel can run anywhere from 50 to 80 feet deep and is subject to be home to some inactive fish amongst the eaters. If Royce finds a bite on this main-lake



Zakk Royce

Lake Gaston has a history of spitting out huge catfish, especially in past Decembers and Januarys.

pattern — but not quite the one he's looking for — he'll pack it in and head uplake to where the main channel runs in the 30- to 35-foot range. Here, blues are likely to be more active and more concentrated. Wherever he finds an adequate bait source, Royce's technique will be largely the same.

"I like to troll or power-drift with planer boards," he said. "I'm pretty particular about my speed; I like to stay at 0.5 miles an hour or slower. If I feel like the fish are there, but I'm not getting bit, I'll slow it down to 0.4 or 0.3. In December, you're mostly fishing on the bottom, but if I see a school bait on sonar with arches way off the bottom, I'll suspend some baits at that depth."

Royce's bottom-bouncing outfit consists of six rods — two pulled straight behind the boat and two off each side staggered by planer boards. He uses Santee rigs and slinky weights to lessen hangups. White perch is the bait of choice due to its concentration around the schools of shad, and how they can be readily loaded onto the boat via a Sabiki rig.

— Dusty Wilson

### ASTRO TABLES

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

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

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

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

**AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:**

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

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BEST DAYS					LUNAR PERIODS					
2019 DEC	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
						MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Sun 1	█	█	█	█	9	11:28 am	4:05 pm - 5:11 pm ☀	9:52 pm	3:44 am - 4:42 am	☾
Mon 2	█	█	█	█	11	12:06 pm	4:46 pm - 6:04 pm ☀	10:49 pm	4:30 am - 5:36 am	☾
Tue 3	█	█	█	█	18	12:39 pm	5:25 pm - 6:53 pm	11:45 pm	5:11 am - 6:29 am	☾
Wed 4	█	█	█	█	29	1:09 pm	5:58 pm - 7:44 pm		5:50 am - 7:18 am	☾ HALF & PERIGEE
Thu 5	█	█	█	█	22	1:37 pm	6:32 pm - 8:34 pm	12:40 am	6:23 am - 8:09 am ☀	☾
Fri 6	█	█	█	█	20	2:04 pm	7:06 pm - 9:22 pm	1:35 am	6:57 am - 8:59 am ☀	☾
Sat 7	█	█	█	█	23	2:32 pm	7:40 pm - 10:12 pm	2:31 am	7:31 am - 9:47 am	☾
Sun 8	█	█	█	█	37	3:01 pm	8:14 pm - 11:04 pm	3:27 am	8:05 am - 10:37 am	☾
Mon 9	█	█	█	█	50	3:33 pm	8:54 pm - 11:56 pm	4:25 am	8:39 am - 11:29 am	☾
Tue 10	█	█	█	█	63	4:09 pm	9:37 pm - 12:53 pm	5:25 am	9:19 am - 12:21 pm	☾
Wed 11	█	█	█	█	69	4:51 pm	10:25 pm - 1:51 am	6:27 am	10:02 am - 1:18 pm ☀	☾ FULL
Thu 12	█	█	█	█	61	5:40 pm	11:18 pm - Midnight	7:29 am	10:50 am - 2:16 pm ☀	☾
Fri 13	█	█	█	█	53	6:36 pm	Midnight - 2:50 am	8:30 am	11:43 am - 3:15 pm	☾ HIGH
Sat 14	█	█	█	█	44	7:37 pm	12:16 am - 3:48 am	9:27 am	12:41 pm - 4:13 pm	☾
Sun 15	█	█	█	█	39	8:43 pm	1:17 am - 4:43 am	10:18 am	1:42 pm - 5:08 pm	☾
Mon 16	█	█	█	█	38	9:51 pm	2:19 am - 5:35 am	11:04 am	2:44 pm - 6:00 pm ☀	☾
Tue 17	█	█	█	█	42	10:59 pm	3:21 am - 6:23 am	11:44 am	3:46 pm - 6:48 pm ☀	☾
Wed 18	█	█	█	█	50		4:21 am - 7:07 am	12:20 pm	4:46 pm - 7:32 pm	☾ HALF & PERIGEE
Thu 19	█	█	█	█	36	12:06 am	5:21 am - 7:47 am	12:54 pm	5:46 pm - 8:12 pm	☾
Fri 20	█	█	█	█	28	1:13 am	6:20 am - 8:28 am ☀	1:27 pm	6:45 pm - 8:53 pm	☾
Sat 21	█	█	█	█	24	2:19 am	7:20 am - 9:08 am ☀	2:01 pm	7:45 pm - 9:33 pm	☾ Winter
Sun 22	█	█	█	█	30	3:26 am	8:19 am - 9:51 am	2:37 pm	8:44 pm - 10:16 pm	☾
Mon 23	█	█	█	█	37	4:33 am	9:19 am - 10:35 am	3:16 pm	9:44 pm - 11:00 pm	☾
Tue 24	█	█	█	█	44	5:39 am	10:18 am - 11:24 am	4:00 pm	10:43 pm - 11:49 pm	☾
Wed 25	█	█	█	█	47	6:42 am	11:19 am - 12:15 pm ☀	4:49 pm	11:44 pm - Midnight	☾ NEW
Thu 26	█	█	█	█	36	7:42 am	12:14 pm - 1:10 pm ☀	5:43 pm	Midnight - 12:40 am	☾ LOW
Fri 27	█	█	█	█	25	8:35 am	1:08 pm - 2:04 pm	6:40 pm	12:39 am - 1:35 am	☾
Sat 28	█	█	█	█	15	9:22 am	1:57 pm - 2:59 pm	7:38 pm	1:33 am - 2:29 am	☾
Sun 29	█	█	█	█	11	10:02 am	2:41 pm - 3:53 pm	8:36 pm	2:22 am - 3:24 am	☾
Mon 30	█	█	█	█	12	10:37 am	3:20 pm - 4:46 pm	9:34 pm	3:06 am - 4:18 am	☾
Tue 31	█	█	█	█	13	11:09 am	3:57 pm - 5:35 pm ☀	10:29 pm	3:45 am - 5:11 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  
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Hunting/Fishing  
**SCRAPBOOK**



**Eric Marin**

Eric Martin, 13, boated this 9-pound, 1-ounce sheepshead fishing near Swan Quarter, N.C.



**Kace Mathis**

Kace Mathis and his father, Chris, caught these nice flounder near Mount Pleasant, S.C.



**Ty Flemming**

Ty Flemming of Gastonia, N.C., boated this nice flounder fishing with with Capt Butch Foster of Yeah Right Charters.



**Tammi Beers**

Tammi Beers caught and released this 30-inch red drum near Carolina Beach, N.C., on July 4, on a live finger mullet.



**Ella Macklin**

Ella Macklin, 9, from Bolivia, N.C., killed her first deer with a crossbow, hunting with her father.

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



**Brian Taylor**

Brian Taylor of Rocky Mount, N.C. killed this 23-pound gobbler on a hunt with American Veteran Outdoors and the NWTF.



**Robert Harrell**

Robert Harrell (right) caught this 45-inch redfish on Sept. 20 in Winyah Bay near Georgetown, S.C., He was fishing with Rod Thomas of Capt. Ponytail Guide Service.



**Michele, Alyssa Larrimore**

Michele Larrimore and her 10-year-old daughter, Alyssa, killed these two bucks on a farm in Williamsburg County, S.C., at 7:25 a.m. on Oct. 12. The Larrimores live in Marion County.



**Amy Miller**

Amy Miller of Laurinburg, N.C., caught this 6.14-pound, 26½-inch flounder on a finger mullet behind Ocean Isle..



**Jake Scott**

Jake Scott of Clemson, S.C., shows off a huge Chattooga River brown trout caught and released on Oct. 5.



**Mitchell Lackey**

Mitchell Lackey of Kings Mountain, N.C., caught this nice hybrid bass on Moss Lake.



**Landyn Elmore**

Landyn Elmore, 11, caught this 5.1-pound bass on a swim jig in a Lincoln County, N.C., farm pond.



**Jason Burleyson**

Jason Burleyson killed this bearded hen in Cabarrus County, N.C., on April 30.



**Jeff Stewart**

Jeffrey Stewart arrowed this 9-pointer with a drop tine in Lancaster County, S.C., on Oct. 11.



**Roston Barber**

Roston Barber, 14, from West End, N.C., landed this 24-inch black drum under the Sunset Beach bridge on cut shrimp.



**Sean Perry**

Sean Perry caught this 26-inch redfish in a creek behind North Carolina's Bald Head Island.



**Mack Adams**

Mack Adams killed this 9-point buck in North Carolina's Rowan County on Nov. 23, 2018.



**Brody Miller**

Brody Miller, 3, caught his first bass in a tributary of South Carolina's Black River on Aug. 21, 2019.



**Jordan Malloy**

Jordan Malloy, 16, caught her first bass, this 7-pounder, out of a private pond near Summerfield, N.C.



**Drew Pressley**

Drew Pressley, 20, of Germantown, N.C., caught this 18-pound channel cat near Walnut Cove, N.C., on July 20, 2019.



**Grayson Owens**

Grayson Owens tagged his first gobbler on April 11, 2018, in Davidson County, N.C., with a .410 shotgun.

## Take your camera **TO THE WOODS!**

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**HUNTING SEASONS**

**DEER**

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**

<b>Oct. 14-Nov. 23 &amp; Dec. 16-Jan. 1, 2020:</b>	In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties
<b>Nov. 16-Jan. 1, 2020:</b>	Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Union counties
<b>Oct. 12-Jan. 1, 2020:</b>	Franklin, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties
<b>Nov. 23-Jan. 1, 2020:</b>	Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties
<b>Nov. 11-Jan. 1, 2020:</b>	Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Robeson, Sampson counties
<b>Nov. 9-24, Dec. 14-29:</b>	Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell counties
<b>Nov. 9-17, Dec. 14-29:</b>	Beaufort, Bertie, Craven, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Jones, Martin, Perquimans, Washington counties
<b>Nov. 8-17, Dec. 14-29:</b>	Camden, Chowan, Pasquotank counties
<b>Nov. 17-Dec. 15:</b>	Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Pitt, Wayne, Wilson counties
<b>Nov. 11-Jan. 1, 2020:</b>	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

**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)

**DUCKS**

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

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

**DEER SEASON**

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

**WATERFOWL SEASONS**

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

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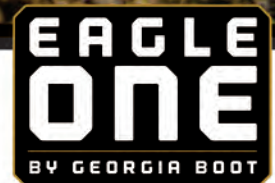
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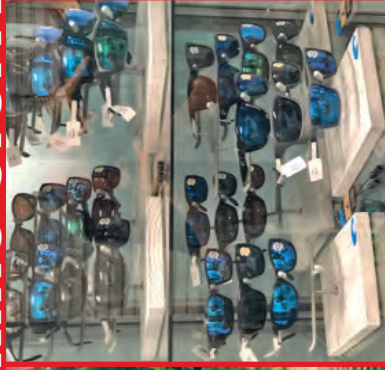


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