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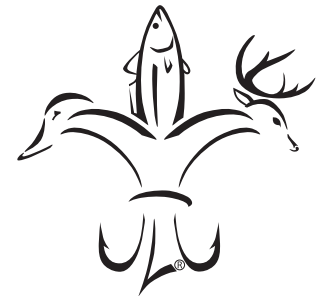
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**PUBLISHER:** Tony Taylor, [tonyt@lasmag.com](mailto:tonyt@lasmag.com)

**MANAGING EDITOR:** Dan Kibler  
336.416.9631 / [dank@carolinasportsman.com](mailto:dank@carolinasportsman.com)

**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR:** Jeff Caldwell

**ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER:**  
Desiree P. Lewis

**ART DIRECTOR:** Kevin Orgeron

**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:**  
Jeff Cashio, Alissa Zeringue

**CONTROLLER:** Juanita Guidry

**SALES DIRECTOR:** Jay Forrest  
225.278.0258 / [jayf@lasmag.com](mailto:jayf@lasmag.com)

**NC ADVERTISING SALES REP:** John Cain  
919.601.6966, [johnc@carolinasportsman.com](mailto:johnc@carolinasportsman.com)

**SC ADVERTISING SALES REP:** Bret Holten  
843.442.7250, [breth@carolinasportsman.com](mailto:breth@carolinasportsman.com)

**ADVERTISING SALES:**  
Asa Faulkner, Mark Boyd, Peter Church, Burton  
Angelle and Mark Hilzim (National Sales)

**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR:**  
Ricky Naquin 985.859.7744 / [rickeny@lasmag.com](mailto:rickeny@lasmag.com)

**CIRCULATION FIELD MANAGER:**  
Mitch Eby 919.602.3862 / [mitchebync@gmail.com](mailto:mitchebync@gmail.com)

**ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:**  
[JayForrest@lasmag.com](mailto:JayForrest@lasmag.com) / 225.278.0258

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Lewis Hemingway, 15, of Georgetown, S.C., killed this 24-point, 181-inch buck in Williamsburg County, S.C., on Oct. 22, 2019. Photo courtesy Lewis Hemingway.

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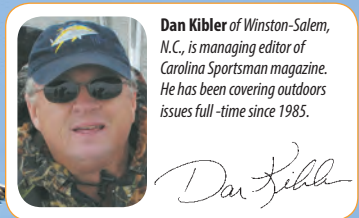


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# Outdoor UPDATE

with  
Dan Kibler



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

## JANUARY: NO MORE BIG DECISIONS WITH DEER SEASON FINISHED, OTHER OPTIONS TAKE CENTER STAGE

**W**hen New Year's Day finally arrives, it takes a lot of options off the table for hunters in the Carolinas. In my case, one less option makes the rest of the options more palatable.



North Carolina hunters kill plenty of big bears, but this 460-pound bruin killed by Jerry Alcon of Gibsonville, N.C., on Nov. 14 was special. The huge Washington County bear was killed with a bow.

Five years ago, when the Lab puppy my son wanted for his college graduation present, the peerless Buckshot, joined the family, we had a sudden, new focus on duck hunting. That focus often runs counter to our focus on deer hunting.

Do we take a Saturday morning off from deer hunting, right in the middle of the rut, to dabble in our little Yadkin County wood duck hole, just because duck season is open around Thanksgiving? How much of our time off during Christmas should be devoted to putting venison in the freezer, or how much time should we spend crouched down in a duck blind, hoping to shoot something for Buckshot to retrieve?

When Jan. 1 arrives and deer season ends, those tough decisions are made for us. For a month, we can concentrate on setting the alarm clock for 4 o'clock on Saturday mornings to make sure we get to our duck

holes before anybody else and knock something down for the dog to retrieve.

Plenty of small-game hunters around the Carolinas cheer the arrival of January because they'll have the woods to themselves, and there will actually be more woods available for squirrel, rabbit, dove and even the few, hard-core quail hunters that are still around. When deer season ends, a lot of hunt club land or other leased or private lands become available for hunters carrying scatterguns and wearing shell vests.

### Bag-A-Buck Contest underway



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

To enter or see deer that have been entered, log onto [www.carolinasportsman.com](http://www.carolinasportsman.com) and click on the Bag-A-Buck contest link

January also brings with it the fishing, boating and outdoor shows that fill arenas across the Carolinas with the latest products. Make sure to check them out. ■

# OBX SURF PRODUCES WORLD-RECORD WHITING

**T**wo all-tackle world records. Thirty-six years and four days apart. From the same beach.

Back on Nov. 7, 1983, the late David Deuel of Vienna, Va., caught the all-tackle world record red drum, aka channel bass, in the surf at the village of Avon on North Carolina's Outer Banks. The fish was 60 inches long and weighed 94 pounds, 2 ounces.

On Nov. 11, Brett Jordan of Florence, S.C., caught a southern kingfish — aka sea mullet, whiting, Virginia mullet — that is being touted as the new all-tackle world record for that species. It weighed 3 pounds, 1 ounce, and was caught in the surf near Ramp 34 north of Avon.

According to the *Island Free Press*, a newspaper that serves Hatteras and Ocracoke islands, Jordan was fishing with a friend, Larry Hart, using an 11-foot Okuma rod and Abu Garcia bait casting reel with a hand-tied rig and a sand flea for bait when he caught the huge whiting around 4:30 p.m.



Randy Bayne

South Carolina angler Brett Jordand caught this 3-pound, 1-ounce southern kingfish, aka whiting, from the surf at Avon, N.C., on Nov. 11, 2019.

After Jordan beached the fish, Hart weighed it on a set of scales and realized the fish was special. Jordan took the fish to Frank & Fran's, a renowned Avon tackle shop where a replica mount of Deuel's record drum hangs — the store's former owner had weighed in Deuel's fish years earlier — got the fish weighed on official scales, and began the paperwork to submit the fish to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' citation program.

Stephanie Bayne, whose family owns Frank & Fran's, did some research and discovered that the all-tackle world record southern kingfish, caught in 2002 in Virginia Beach, Va., weighed 2 pounds, 13 ounces, making Jordan's fish a potential word record by four ounces. Paperwork was begun immediately with the International Game Fish Association to apply for the world record.

According to the *Island Free Press*, Jordan's fish was 20 inches long and 11 inches in girth. ■



## SCDNR HAS NEW BOSS

**T**he S.C. Department of Natural Resources Board announced on Nov. 21 the selection of Robert H. Boyles, Jr. for appointment as director of SCDNR.



Robert Boyles

Boyles' appointment to replace Alvin Taylor, who retired in May, is subject to confirmation of the state senate.

Boyles is a 22-year veteran of SCDNR; since 2003, he has been Deputy Director for Marine Resources, and he has been interim director since Taylor's retirement.

"(Boyles) has proven himself more than capable in leading our agency, and I speak on behalf of our entire

Board when I say we are looking forward to working with Robert as he leads the DNR into the future," said Norman Pulliam of Spartanburg, chairman of the DNR board.

Boyles has worked in South Carolina government since the early 1990s in areas ranging from marine research administration, conservation policy and management, marine operations, and interstate fisheries management.

Boyles has served on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, including stints as vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Commission. He has also served on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and on the Outer Continental Shelf Policy Committee of the US Department of the Interior.

Boyles received his bachelor's degree in Mathematical Economics from Wake Forest University, and a Master of Marine Policy from the University of Delaware. He has completed fellowships in marine conservation and policy at the Duke University Marine Lab in Beaufort, N.C., and the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration in Washington, D.C.

"I am humbled by the support of the SCDNR Board, and I look forward to working with our staff, our many constituents, and leaders in government to tackle the challenges that lie ahead in managing the tremendous natural resources of South Carolina" Boyles said. ■

## GOT PICS? We want 'em

Email images to: [images@CarolinaSportsman.com](mailto:images@CarolinaSportsman.com)

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

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

Michael Hicks of Maiden, N.C., won the November Bag-A-Buck contest with his entry of a big, Ashe County 8-pointer.

# NC MAN WINS B-A-B



**M**ichael Hicks of Maiden, N.C., and some buddies who hunt a 400-acre tract in Ashe County had plenty of trail-camera photos of big bucks in the months leading up to Nov. 9, the opening day of blackpowder season in Northwest North Carolina.

But Hicks had never seen the big 8-point buck that walked out of a stand of pines in front of his ridge-top box stand on that morning around 7:45.

It didn't take long for Hicks to become very familiar with the buck. He dropped it with a 60-yard shot from his T-C Encore muzzleloader, entered it in *Carolina Sportsman's* Bag-A-Buck contest, and his entry was drawn as the winner of the November contest.

Hicks 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.

"This was the first time I'd ever seen this buck. As soon as I saw him, I knew he was a shooter," Hicks said. "Our piece of land backs up to the (New River) state park, and I figure he'd come off the state park, chasing does. There was one in front of him when he came out."

Hicks' 200-pound buck had an 18-inch spread and 10-inch tines. ■

## NC hunting/fishing license fees will increase beginning Jan. 1

**H**unters and fishermen in North Carolina will pay a little more in 2020 to get in the woods or on the lakes and rivers than they did in previous years.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission announced increased license fees a few months ago; they will take effect on Jan. 1.

Most license fees will be bumped up a few dollars, whether they're short-term, annual or lifetime licenses.

Here is a list of some of the new license fees (with 2019 fees in parentheses).

- Short-term inland fishing: \$9 (\$7);
- Short-term coastal recreational fishing: \$7 (\$5);

- Annual inland fishing: \$25 (\$20);
  - Annual coastal recreational fishing: \$18 (\$15);
  - Annual inland/coastal fishing: \$43 (\$40);
  - Annual instate hunting: \$25 (\$20);
  - Annual comprehensive hunting \$39 (\$36);
  - Annual hunting preserve: \$22 (\$20);
  - Annual hunting/inland fishing combination: \$35 (\$25);
  - Annual sportsman license: \$53 (\$50);
  - Annual unified sportsman: \$69 (\$65).
- Separate trout licenses will no longer be available, as trout-fishing privileges are now included in the inland fishing license.

# SC BEAR SEASON SUCCESSFUL

**S**outh Carolina's 2019 Upstate bear season was a good one, according to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. Hunters killed a total of 112 bruins in Game Zones 1 and 2.

In Game Zone 1, hunters killed 107 bears, 46 during the still hunt and 61 during the dog hut. The take included 44 males and 63 females.

Hunters took the most bears, 52, in Pickens County, including 24 during the still hunt — 11 males and 13 females — and 28 during the dog-party hunt — eight males and 20 females.

Oconee County came in second with 30 bears: six males during the still hunt and 24 — nine males and 15 females — during the dog-party hunt.

Hunters in Greenville County took 25 bears, 16 during the still hunt — seven males and nine females — and nine during the dog-party hunt — three males and six females.

Game Zone 2's Piedmont Hunt Unit gave up five bears during its season, four males and one female, all on still hunts.

According to Tammy Wactor, a biologist with SCDNR, an abundance of acorns and natural foods made for a good season. ■

— Glenn Corley

# SC boat owners face registration change

**A**s a result of legislation changing the way counties collect property taxes, boat owners in South Carolina will begin to see changes this month in the way that boat registrations are issued by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

The changes to the registration process will be phased in over the next three years as current registrations expire and will result in a registration process for boats that closely mirrors the system used for vehicles.

The most visible and immediate change will be that boat registration renewals will be done on an annual basis, rather than every three years as they are currently. The fee for the new annual registration will be \$10. Once fully implemented, the annual registration fee will be included on and paid via the boat owner's county property tax bill. ■

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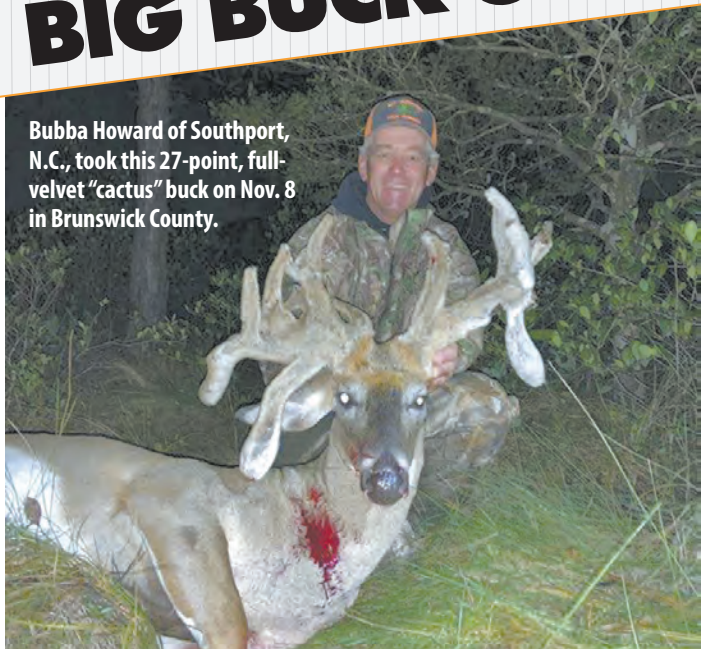
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# SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Bubba Howard of Southport, N.C., took this 27-point, full-velvet "cactus" buck on Nov. 8 in Brunswick County.



Brian Davis killed this Randolph County, N.C., buck on Nov. 5. It scored 147. He tagged out days later with a 127-inch 9-pointer.



Blake Leviner of Morven, N.C., took this 9-point, 156-inch buck in Chesterfield County, S.C., on Nov. 9.



Bass pro Matt Arey of Shelby, N.C., limited out on two Cleveland County bucks with a bow this fall, including 'Scout' — a big 9-pointer with 10-inch tines.



Nicholas Thomas of Heath Springs, S.C., took this Lancaster County buck on Nov. 16 — with a .357 air rifle.



Anthony Brown of Butner, N.C., busted this 130-inch Durham County buck on Nov. 9.



Andy Till of Orangeburg, S.C., killed this 142-inch, 11-point buck on Nov. 3 in Orangeburg County.



Jenna Miller, 15, killed this 136-inch buck on a youth hunt Oct. 5 at Fants Grove WMA in Clemson, S.C.



Jordan Tucker of Morven, N.C., took this 167-inch 10-pointer in Anson County on Nov. 2.



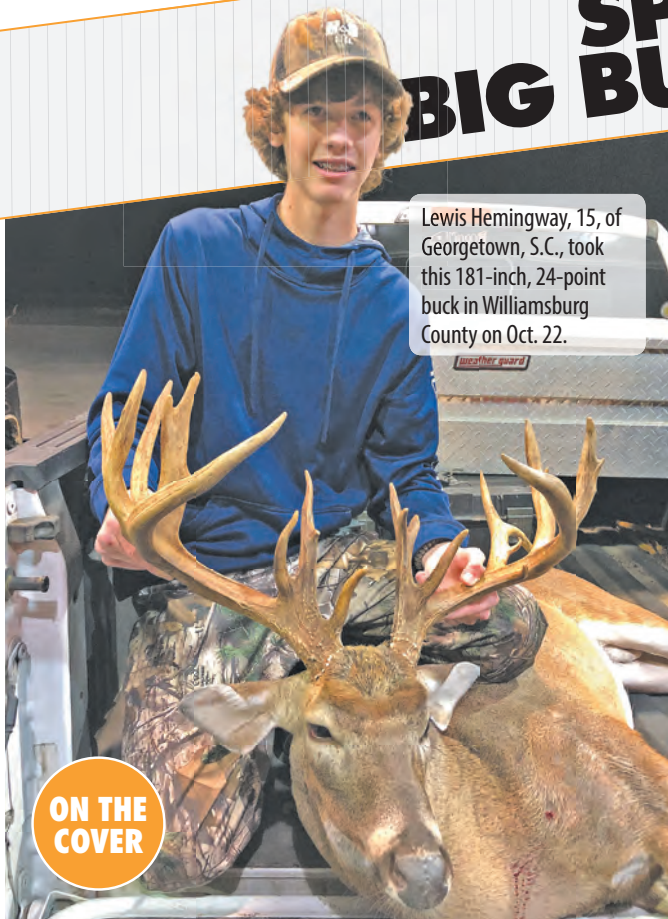
Archery shop owner Jonathan Brown of Madison, N.C., arrowed this 9-point, 150-inch Stokes County buck on Nov. 4.



Chris Currin of Rougemont, N.C., took this 140-inch, 9-point trophy on No. 3 in Granville County.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, visit [carolinasportsman.com/bigbucks](http://carolinasportsman.com/bigbucks)

# BIG BUCK GALLERY



Lewis Hemingway, 15, of Georgetown, S.C., took this 181-inch, 24-point buck in Williamsburg County on Oct. 22.

ON THE COVER



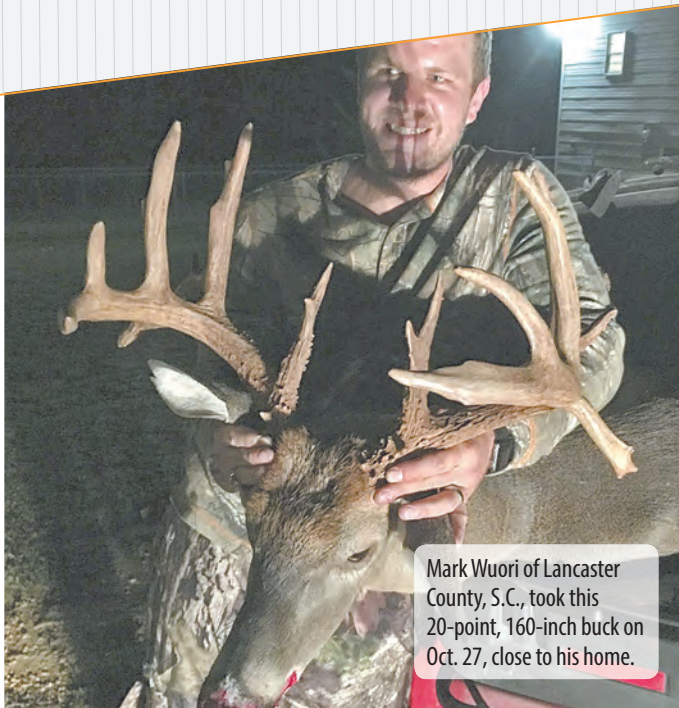
Taxidermist Curtis Vaughn of Mt. Tirzah, N.C., busted this great Person County buck on Nov. 13. It measured better than 174 inches.



Haylie Richard of Butner, N.C., bagged this 129-inch Granville County buck on Nov. 14 with a bow.



Veronica Backlund of Siler City, N.C., tagged this Chatham County 10-pointer on Nov. 12.



Mark Wuori of Lancaster County, S.C., took this 20-point, 160-inch buck on Oct. 27, close to his home.



Bud Long of Greensboro, N.C., took this 156-inch Rockingham County buck on Nov. 8.

Josh Kelly of Broadway, N.C., busted this 145-inch Harnett County trophy on Nov. 3.



Eric League of Reidsville, N.C., arrowed this 10-point, 155-inch buck on Oct. 23 in Rockingham County.



John Lasher of Bahama, N.C., took this 145-inch, Durham County buck on Nov. 14 with a muzzleloader.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, visit [www.carolinasportsman.com/bigbucks](http://www.carolinasportsman.com/bigbucks)

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THE ROUGH WATER AND SHALLOW SANDBARS OF CAPE LOOKOUT SHOALS FILL UP WITH BIG RED DRUM DURING THE WINTER FOR FISHERMEN WHO CAN TAKE CARE AND TAKE ADVANTAGE.

■ By Jerry Dilsaver



**T**he wind chill was around freezing, but the winter sun was shining as Noah Lynk cruised across Back Sound from Harkers Island to Cape Lookout. On the second day of a light winter nor'easter, locally called a "mullet blow," Lynk was taking a group of hardy fishermen to the shoals off Cape Lookout in search of redfish.

They beached the boat on the lee side of one of the exposed shoals and walked across to fish the rough water on the windward side. With the weather stable and the barometer rising a bit, Lynk believed reds would be shaking off the cold

and scouring the sandy points of the exposed shoals in search of food.

"This fishing seems to be best when the wind is from the northeast, and that also makes it the easiest and most comfortable," said Lynk, who operates Noah's Ark Fishing Charters out of Harkers Island. "We can run down the beach from Bardens Inlet to the shoals and be in calm water all the way. Once we reach the shoals, I look for a point with plenty of wave action, and we beach the boat on the calm side and walk over to fish the rough side."



Jerry Dilsaver

## Lynk said big drum feed in the turbulent water where crashing waves stir up the bottom and expose **whatever is there to the feeding drum.**

Some days, he said the action might only be 20 yards off the sand, and on others, it is as far as you can cast, even wading out as far as is safe. The best action is often on days when the waves are really crashing, so beaching the boat and hiking across the exposed shoal and casting while wading is the only option that works. The waves are often coming from different directions, so waders must exercise caution.

“The fishing is simple,” Lynk said. “You cast as far as you can out into the stirred-up waves off the point and retrieve the lure. I usually begin with a slow, steady retrieve that lets me feel the lure tapping the bottom occasionally. If this doesn’t draw strikes, I speed the retrieve up a little, then add some jigging motion. Sometimes, it’s more of a jigging motion, only reeling to keep the line tight. It might take a few casts to find what they like that day, but these drum are usually feeding, and when you find a school, there will be a retrieve motion and speed they like.

“We use longer rods and heavier jigs to get maximum casting distance,” Lynk said. Most of the time, we’re casting into the wind, and it can be stiff. Even using these ounce-and-a-half and heavier jigs, it’s sometimes all you can do to reach where they’re feeding. The extra weight also helps the lure stabilize in the rough and swirling water. Some days, the weather is nice, and the winds are

light, but many days it’s rough and windy — and they can be good fishing days, too.

“There won’t be any question when one hits,” Lynk said. “They are in shallow, turbulent water, and (they) hit hard. They’ve got tough mouths, so you need to set the hook firmly, but they’ll be helping as they burn line off the reel heading back to deeper water. They might not fight as hard as they do when the water is 75 degrees, but they represent themselves well. You’ll be arm-tired and smiling when you release one.”

Lynk said he sometimes has to move a few times to find a school, or if the school he is fishing moves because of a tide change. He said fishing is very tide-dependent for both depth and moving water. This can be exaggerated at times, as sometimes there are extreme winter tides around the shoals.

Lynk prefers to concentrate on the rising tide but has had excellent catches on the falling tide. He concentrates on the rough points where waves are crashing but always searches the water around him for signs of fish. Occasionally, a red tint in the water or hovering birds gives away the location of a school, and you have to be paying attention to take advantage.

Occasionally, Lynk said, he takes a fisherman who isn’t a good caster or just prefers to fish bait. As odd as it may seem, Lynk said that while these fish will hit pieces of



cut mullet or menhaden, they aren't as aggressive as they are with moving lures. He estimated that bait gets roughly half (or less) the strikes as lures.

"While cleaning fish in the past, I noticed that many of these fish had bellies full of tiny sand fleas," Lynk said. "Most are very small, with the larger ones being about half the size of the nail on the little finger. The



Jerry Diltsaver

Redfish from slot-sized and above are common visitors to the Cape Lookout Shoals during winter months, where guide Noah Lynk targets them.

past few winters, we have occasionally impaled some of these on hooks while fishing. This has to be what the drum are coming to the shoals to eat during the winter. I didn't know when or where sand fleas spawned, but this might be it."



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**T**he fish Lynk and his clients catch at the shoals range from upper-slot fish to some in the lower 30-inch range. He estimates they are 3 to 5 years old and spending their first to third winters in the ocean. Sometimes, a really big fish— 40 inches or better — crashes the action and earns a fisherman a release citation from the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. Another occasional surprise is big speckled trout. Lynk said they don't catch a lot of trout, but when they do, it's usually one that gets its picture taken.

“You are sort of on your own when doing this, so preparing properly and being safe is of the utmost importance,” Lynk said. “While the shoals may shift often, local knowledge of long-standing sloughs and places to safely navigate helps greatly. Carrying extra clothes, including a full set of dry clothes, ranges from a good idea to a potential lifesaver. Getting wet is bone numbing and can bring on hypothermia and worse if you can't get warm and dry.”

Things that can happen that would be laughed off during the summer that have the potential to be deadly serious during the winter. A motor that won't start or run means longer exposure to the cold at best and can become life threatening at its worst. Running aground can delay a trip, and not everyone has the experience to run in this area after dark. Lynk said leaving a float plan with someone is critical, and he always takes enough extra food to handle being stranded overnight. There aren't a lot of fishermen around to lend a helping hand in January.



Jerry Dilsaver

Shoals reds are much more likely to hit artificial lures than live bait when the pull in to fill up on bait and crabs shuffled about by the waves.

Lynk said the object and reward of making a trip like this is a day of exciting fishing, and it happens with amazing regularity. However, he cautions anyone that attempts it on their own to be properly prepared. ■



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

## CAPE LOOKOUT SHOALS: A DANGEROUS FISH HAVEN

Cape Lookout Shoals runs from the point at Cape Lookout offshore for about 9 miles. At times the shoals are narrow, with a maximum width of about 2 miles. Cape Lookout National Seashore ends 10 miles to the west at Beaufort Inlet.

The dangers of Cape Lookout Shoals were well known even to early sailors. The combination of shoals, shallow water and swift currents that constantly shift the shoals, and the tendency for rapidly developing and severe storms make this area particularly dangerous. A lighthouse has stood at the Cape since 1812, and well into the 1900s, a lightship was

anchored offshore from the end of the shoals.

The same features that make Cape Lookout Shoals dangerous for navigation make it a haven for fish. The variety of fish that at least temporarily call Cape Lookout Shoals home at various times of the year is large. The shoals, shallow water and swirling currents trap and disorient baitfish and make them easy prey for larger predators. The water is typically warm from spring to fall and only occasionally cools below the mid-50s during the winter. Red drum like shoals for a winter location. ■



Jerry Dilsaver

Action on the Cape Lookout Shoals can be fast and furious in the winter when redfish invade the shallows to feed in the rough water.

## DESTINATION INFORMATION

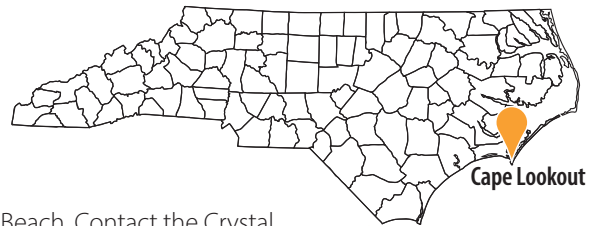
**HOW TO GET THERE** — Harkers Island is the closest launching point to reach Cape Lookout. US 70 leads east from Morehead City to Harkers Island Road, which leads to Harkers Island. A public boat ramp is on the mainland just before the bridge to the island, and several marinas operate fee ramps on the island.

**WHEN TO GO** — Red drum live around Cape Lookout most of the year, and larger ones take up residence around the shallow shoals as the water begins to cool after Thanksgiving. They roam this area throughout the winter, feeding on baitfish, crabs and other food uncovered by the waves and pushed through the area by the tides and currents.

**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Find a shoal, beach your boat on the lee side and wade to the windward side to casting lures such as a Clark Spoon 1½-ounce Shad jig, Halco C-Gar 120 and Halco Slidog 125. Big drum aren't as rambunctious in the colder water, so using lighter tackle is an available option. Star spinning rods in 7½- and 8-foot lengths and 3000 to 4000 class Kunnan reels spooled with 12-pound Fins braid and a short leader of 30-pound fluorocarbon. The combination allows for good casting distance and accuracy and has enough backbone to land larger fish.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Noah's Ark Fishing Charters, [www.noahsarkfishingcharters.com](http://www.noahsarkfishingcharters.com), 252-342-6911; Cape Pointe Marina, [www.capepointemarina.com](http://www.capepointemarina.com), 252-728-6181. Also see Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** — Cape Pointe Marina ([www.capepointemarina.com](http://www.capepointemarina.com)) has RV sites, and Harkers Island Fishing Center ([www.harkersmarina.com](http://www.harkersmarina.com)) has a small motel. Both have ramps and dockage. Rental condos and cottages are available on Harkers Island. The closest chain motels are in Beaufort, Morehead City and



Atlantic Beach. Contact the Crystal Coast Tourism authority ([www.crystalcoastnc.org](http://www.crystalcoastnc.org)), 800-786-6962 for information.

**MAPS** — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, [www.captainsegullcharts.com](http://www.captainsegullcharts.com); Sealake Fishing Guides, 1-800-411-0185, [www.thegoodspots.com](http://www.thegoodspots.com); Grease Chart, 1-800-326-3567, [www.greasechart.com](http://www.greasechart.com); Maps Unique, 910-458-9923, [www.offshore-fishing-map.com](http://www.offshore-fishing-map.com); GMCO's Chartbook of North Carolina, 1-888-420-6277, [www.gmcomaps.com](http://www.gmcomaps.com).



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# BALD HEAD MARSH

## holds plenty of hungry, winter redfish

**B**ald Head Island, at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, is a bit of an anomaly. It is the only location in North Carolina classified as subtropical climate and the northernmost location on the East Coast with this climate designation. The slightly warmer climate attracts winter visitors of the two-legged and finned varieties. The two-legged visitors often have memorable winter moments in the Bald Head Marshes chasing the finned visitors.

An abundance of marsh bays and creeks are between Bald Head Island and the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, accessible only by water. The easiest access is by staying on Bald Head Island, but many fishermen use the Federal Point boating access area at Fort Fisher or cross the Cape Fear River from Southport. In recent years, kayak fishermen have begun launching at cross-overs in the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.

The marsh system behind Bald Head Island holds fish all year but may be best known as a winter haven for red drum, speckled trout and black drum. The system includes three shallow bays and an abundance of small, interconnecting creeks. All of these are primarily dark, mud bottoms that absorb sunlight and stay warmer than the adjacent river water. The creeks have deeper holes and shallow flats, often adjacent. All of this is separated

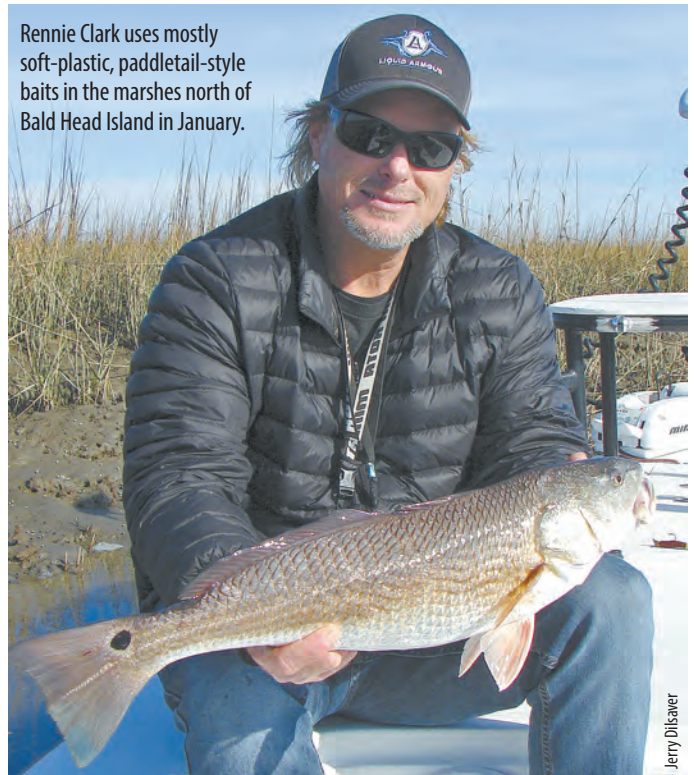
from the Cape Fear River by "The Rocks," a rock wall constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the late 1800s to keep the Cape Fear River in its natural channel.

The warmer water and diversity of habitat makes this a special place for baitfish, crabs, predator fish and fishermen. The bays are shallow and the creeks laced with barely submerged oyster rocks, sand bars and mud flats, which requires caution or local knowledge to move through the area. The channels are narrow, and it isn't a place for Sea Tow's quick assistance.

Rennie Clark of Tournament Trail Charters ([www.tournamenttrailcharters.com](http://www.tournamenttrailcharters.com)) zips across the bays and through the creeks quickly because fishes the area quite a bit. He knows the holes holding black drum and speckled trout and where red drum move onto the flats to feed.

Clark primarily fishes this area with soft plastics. His favorites are Category 5 paddletails. He said it is important to fish slowly and keep the lure in front of the fish until it has to have it. A touch of scent also helps seal the deal and convince the fish to bite. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver



Rennie Clark uses mostly soft-plastic, paddletail-style baits in the marshes north of Bald Head Island in January.

Jerry Dilsaver



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Guide Jeff Cronk said cold weather pushes redfish back into marshes in January.



# BACKWATER REDS

## keep January anglers in plenty of action

**F**inding red drum this month in the backwaters from Emerald Isle south almost to Cape Fear depends upon weather conditions the previous two months.

"Cold-water fishing for reds behind (barrier islands) is affected by the preceding November and December," said guide Jeff Cronk of Swansboro. "The majority of red drum follow baitfish to the surf zone those months because of northeast winds.

"As winter weather begins, you can see schools of several hundred to several thousand in the surf, but they don't stay there.

"When the weather gets really cold in January, the reds move back inside, along with baitfish — small menhaden, glass minnows and mullet minnows. You can't find any reds at the beaches, but they do stay close to the surf zone."

Before frigid weather fronts hit in January, December usually is more moderate,

ideal to push huge schools into the surf zones along beaches, but they disappear when baitfish skedaddle after temperatures drop below 40 degrees.

"It's shallower in the bays, so if (water temperature) moderates, it pushes them onto flats in the bays," said Cronk, of FishN4Life Charters (336-558-5697). "Reds go there to find bait in creeks behind the beaches. Places with muddy bottoms draw reds, especially near oyster beds (with) little crabs and mud minnows."

Overnight temperatures may bottom out, but redfish will become active on sunny afternoons in creeks and marshes behind barrier islands.

"They might be slow to bite in the morning, but let the sun hit (the water), and they'll turn on," said Cronk, who favors scented lures for reds that range from 18 to 31 inches long.

"I'll use 1/6-ounce (jigheads) or Zoom

Super Flukes with a weightless worm hook," he said. "I also like 3-inch Gulp split-tail minnows. I want lures to fall slowly."

Cronk avoids splashy summer lures that may spook fish in 1 to 2 feet of gin-clear water. Better yet, clear water makes sight fishing possible.

"If I know a school is in a bay, I might anchor up and wait for them to come by, and cast in front of them after they pass my boat," Cronk said. "I cast when the entire school's moving away. If I can see them, they can see me."

That's also an excellent chance to "dead stick" lures.

"I drop a scented lure 10 to 15 feet in front of a school, then barely twitch it," he said. ■

— Craig Holt



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## SHALLOW REDS RULE in McClellanville's vast backwater areas

**W**inter has set in, and many anglers have retired their boats until spring, but along the South Carolina coastline, fishing opportunities are far from over, and the shallows in the McClellanville area are redfish hot spots.

Anglers know where the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge is and will head to this relatively desolate area to take the wide-open spaces. One is Matt Burke of Skinny Water Guide Service, who spends as much time in the area midway between Georgetown and Charleston, chasing redfish in super-shallow water.

"Redfish congregate in schools over the winter in shallow water about as skinny as they can get it," said Burke (843-340-6705). "They choose shallow water for thermal warmth and to avoid predators."

Cape Romain and Bulls Bay offer a wealth of habitat in the super skinny category. The scattered islands and shallow marsh is pristine and a perfect situation for harboring a wintering population of redfish; they congregate in groups in shallow flats back in the bays and along the shallow margins along the ICW.

Redfish will be schooled in groups from 15 to 100. Burke doesn't

think the size of the school is as important as its level of activity. "The size of the school really doesn't matter. I prefer active fish. I like to see some fish movement of some sort. It can be the fish pushing around or even just with bait flipping," he said.

"I look for mid-day low tides between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. The exposed mud will heat up with the sun that warms up the water as it rises. When the water warms up, the fish are a little happier."

Burke approaches a school carefully and makes deliberate casts.

"I prefer to cast nearly weightless flies in the winter to have the lightest presentation as possible," he said, preferring No. 4 flies that could be a small shrimp, minnow or crab. It's the gentle presentation that will get a red's attention. He will also use spinning tackle and small scented soft plastics on a light jighead.

Apart from duck hunters and some transient traffic along the ICW, most saltwater estuaries are void of traffic due to the chilly conditions. But for anglers looking to have a little wintertime fun, the redfish action in the shallows around McClellanville can be epic and well worth the price of admission. ■

— Jeff Bursleson

Redfish school during winter in the waters around McClellanville, S.C., offering anglers plenty of great fishing opportunities.

# SLAB HAPPY

CRAPPIE FISHING ON NORTH CAROLINA'S JORDAN LAKE ONLY SLOWS DOWN A LITTLE WHEN WINTER ARRIVES. JUST FIND CONCENTRATIONS OF BAITFISH, AND YOU'LL BE ON YOUR WAY TO FILLING THAT COOLER.

■ By Craig Holt



Craig Holt

# Freshwater anglers in North Carolina have two main species to target during the coldest months — **CRAPPIE or CATFISH.**

Freddie Sinclair of Clayton, a veteran guide on lakes around the Raleigh-Durham area, said that targeting and catching crappie — if done correctly — can warm up even the coldest January angler.

Sinclair, a 62-year-old former facilities manager at N.C. State University's McKimmon Center, has charted the movement and population of crappie on B. Everett Jordan Lake south of the Raleigh-Durham area for 30 years or more, the last 15 as a guide. He knows crappies' favorite haunts during all seasons.

"Winter's different," he said. "You're mostly fishing without anyone else around, but crappies aren't hard to find; they're concentrated in schools, most of the time beneath baitfish.

"Find the baitfish schools, and you'll find the crappies."

That starts with effective electronics, not to look for crappie but schools of baitfish.

"In cold water in January, most of the times they'll be in 20 to 30 feet of water, but occasionally, you'll find a school in 15 feet of water," Sinclair said

Many channels crisscross the bottom Jordan Lake's 13,940 acres, so it's not enough to know those places; a second key unlocks the door to slabs when line guides freeze.

"I'm going to be fishing deep creek channels, drop-offs and such," Sinclair said. "That's where baitfish congregate. But they like the ledges. Sometimes, you can find them in shallow water on the ledges close to the deeper channels. Main-lake points also can be good. Of course, everyone likes to fish bridge pilings."

You might be tempted to think Sinclair has solved the problem with those two bits of information. But there's more.

"The absolute best structure is deep, sunken brush piles," he said.

Anglers are known for taking Christmas trees to lakes in January, tying a cinder block or other weight to them and dropping them over the side of their boats. They make wonderful hideouts for baitfish and magnets for crappies.

"Rock piles and main-lake points also hold crappies in winter," said Sinclair, who uses Southern Crappie Rods in 10-, 12-, 14- and 16-foot lengths — three on each side of the bow of his boat — and spinning reels spooled with 6-pound monofilament tied to 1/32- to 1/48-ounce jigs. "Some I'll tip with a minnow on a plain jig hook; I also tip hair jigs with minnows."



Craig Holt



Chartreuse is a color Sinclair likes in crappie lures.



## DESTINATION INFORMATION

**HOW TO GET THERE** — Jordan Lake is south of the Raleigh-Durham area. US 64 crosses the lake at mid-lake. NC 751 is a prominent access route east of the lake. Public boat ramps are scattered around the lake.

**WHEN TO GO** — January and February.

**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Fish ½- or ¼-ounce crappie jigs in brown/chartreuse, black/chartreuse or blue/black, with some ice-blue in each jig, or use live crappie minnows on ½- or ¼-ounce, plain jigheads. Use Southern Crappie rods in 10- to 16-foot lengths with 6-pound-test line. Beginning at the mid-point of creeks or coves, tight-line crappie jigs or minnows on jigs from shallower water toward the mouths of creeks or coves and deeper water. Most fish found in 42- to 46-degree water, 20 to 30 feet deep. If baitfish schools can be located with fish-finder units, vertical fishing may be effective.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Freddie Sinclair, Sinclair's Guide Service, 919-291-2804, [www.sinclairsguideservice.com](http://www.sinclairsguideservice.com). Wilsonville General Store, 919-362-7101; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 919-542-4501. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** — Holiday Inn Express-Apex, 919-387-3636; Comfort Inn-Apex/Holly Springs, 919-387-4600; Hampton Inn & Suites, Holly Springs, 919-552-7610. Camping is available at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, 919-362-0586.

**MAPS** — Fishing Hot Spots, 800-500-MAPS.

## SLAB HAPPY

**I**f Sinclair drops down minnow-tipped jigs in January, he'll jig vertically in and around a baitfish ball. If baitfish aren't around, he tight-lines — moving 1.2 to 1.3 mph with his trolling motor with jigs hanging vertically in the water column, and tight-lining is his favorite way to fish.

Sinclair often starts halfway to the back of a creek, checks the water's depth and trolls from shallow to deep because he doesn't want to entangle hooks in structure.

Ideal surface water temperatures range from 44 to 46 degrees. Even if the mercury drops to 42 degrees, weather never shuts down the crappie bite.

"They might go a little deeper with really cold weather," he said, "but if you can put a minnow in front of them, they'll hit it. The bite never shuts down. Their attacks can be light, but if a crappie's hungry, he'll slam a minnow. My son and I fished Santee-Cooper (S.C.) once when it was 14 degrees."

A crucial point is to watch rod tips and react quickly by simply lifting them to set the hook. Never try to lift a fish into a boat. Crappies have tissue-thin mouths. To prevent lost crappies, keep pressure on a hooked fish, and land it with a net.

Sinclair believes Jordan will be great this winter because flooding last year closed a number of boat ramps and lessened the fishing pressure.

"I think that'll make this winter and spring good at Jordan because the ... (crappies) weren't pressured by anglers so much," he said.

Courtesy Freddie Sinclair



Sinclair said anglers can expect to catch more big crappies, specimens ranging from 1¼ to 2 pounds at Jordan, ■

**ABOVE:** Bright or cloudy conditions make no difference to crappies that are hungry. **BELOW:** Freddie Sinclair often uses a winter combo of a ½-ounce jig and grub and a live minnow.

Craig Holt



# N.C. PUTS NEW FISH ATTRACTORS IN LAKES

This fish attractor made from PVC pipe is one of a number being sunk on North Carolina reservoirs over the next two years.



Craig Holt

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is producing and placing fish attractors of a new design in lakes it manages to simplify locating gamefish.

"We're starting a (statewide) habitat enhancement project," said Kelsey Lincoln, a Commission fisheries biologist whose territory includes Jordan Lake. "It'll include a ton of fish attractors at Jordan and Harris lakes (that will mostly) attract crappies."

Biologists and other Commission staff members will sink the structures at different depths. They won't be sunken-tire reefs (1960s-70s), PVC pipes with paddle wings (1980s) or shoreline trees felled in lakes (2000s).

They'll include three models:

- Large PVC pipes that will crisscross at different angles (mostly for bass);
  - A 5x5x5 box-like attractors of corrugated pipe and PVC pipe;
  - A "poly tree" made from a vertical piece of hard PVC pipe with holes drilled through which flexible 3- and 4-foot PVC sections are inserted. The whole structure will be set in a concrete base.
- "The poly tree actually looks like a tree," Lincoln said. "The criss-cross structure is to attract bass mainly."

Anglers who visit [www.ncpaws.org/ncwrcmaps/fishattractors](http://www.ncpaws.org/ncwrcmaps/fishattractors) can view maps of Jordan and Harris and obtain GPS coordinates

of fish attractors.

"The project will be completed during the next two years," Lincoln said. ■



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

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# SANTEE PANFISH

## won't wait for spring to start biting

**F**or most panfish anglers, January can be a tough time. But while waiting for spring to catch their fish is a normal thought, the truth is, crappie and bream are biting in January just as hot as they will come May.

That's especially true on the Santee Cooper lakes.

The trick, said guide Joe Dennis of Father and Son Outdoors, is finding them deep on brush piles.

"They certainly are not shallow like they will be in the spring, but these fish are stacked up in big numbers on brush piles in water as deep as 40 feet. These fish are thick and healthy, and they are feeding just fine this time of year," he said.

Dennis said crappie and bream are mixed in with each other on these brush piles. He catches plenty of bream on the same minnows he's using for crappie. But he also takes crickets along if he can find them, which can be difficult this time of year.

Dennis (843-245-3762) uses 14-foot long B'n'M poles with up to 10-pound Slime Line mono. He uses No. 4 Rockport Rattler jigheads and will often use a ½-ounce egg sinker about 3 feet above the jighead. That helps him present the jighead in a vertical fashion.

"If you find a brush pile in 40 feet of water, sometimes the fish are hanging out around the top of that brush pile," Dennis said. "So you want to present your bait just slightly above them. Sometimes you have to experiment a little until you start getting consistent bites. Once you get on them, you can often catch a limit quickly. Sometimes you'll pick up a dozen at one brush pile, then they'll stop biting. Just move on to another brush pile when that happens."

For those brush piles that look loaded with fish, but don't produce bites, Dennis said to keep them in mind, move on to another brush pile, and come back later in the day.

"Sometimes, even when the fish are there, they just aren't in the mood to feed," he said. "But they'll feed at some point during the day. It's always a good idea to go back to those. Sometimes the bite is red hot as soon as you return."

Dennis does most of his panfishing this time of year out of Canal Lakes Resort, then heads to deep water in the Lake Moultrie, the "lower lake." He said Bell's Marina is a good choice for anglers wanting to try the upper lake, Lake Marion. ■

— Brian Cope



Brian Cope

Guide Joe Dennis of Father and Son Outdoors loves fishing for panfish this time of year on Santee Cooper's Lake Moultrie.

# DEEP HARRIS SLABS

will save your January fishing trip

**A**nglers shouldn't let the fear of frostbite keep them from getting in on one of the year's best crappie bites. According to guide Greg Griffin of Holly Springs, N.C., January is one of the most-predictable months for finding crappie at Shearon Harris Lake. Good sonar will light the way, and live minnows will save the day at this 4,100-acre impoundment southwest of Raleigh.

"One of the most-important things is to have a good map for your sonar unit," said Griffin (919-434-4183), of Greggofish Guide Service. "The crappie are going to be relating to the creek channels — not in the channels, but right on the edge and all of the bends and curves. The depth range is pretty much set between 28 and 38 feet."

The creek channels Griffin refers to extend from the creek itself on out into the middle of the lake in most cases. Although not

as defined as a deeply cut river channel, the relief is noticeable and a magnet for crappie. Finding the necessary depth will usually carry an angler far from shore.

"If you find that type of area and you find the bait nearby, you will almost always find some crappie," Griffin said. "The mid-lake area is a good place to start looking. The majority of the fish will be between the Holleman boat ramp and the dam. They move around in big schools, and a section of the lake will fire off and stay hot for a while."

At the depths where fish will be holding, Griffin believes their sight to be compromised, so he uses live minnows to appeal to slabs' sense of smell and allow the fish's lateral line to pick up on the bait's movement. A No. 4 light wire hook won't drag the bait down and will still handle plenty of crappie. To keep the bait off the bottom, Griffin ties a dropper rig with a

Cold weather drives Shearon Harris Lake's crappie into deep water, but it doesn't stop them from biting.



Greg Griffin

$\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce bell sinker on the bottom and the hook about 12 inches above it.

"You want to contact the bottom with the bait and then just keep it tight," Griffin said. "The fish will generally have their bellies pretty close to the bottom and that puts the bait right up in front of their eyeballs, since they're on top of their head. You can also use a Carolina rig. Drop it straight to the bottom and — with a 12 to 14-inch leader — give the reel two cranks. ■

— Dusty Wilson

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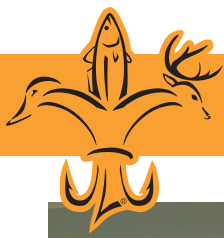


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Toby Bost of Winston-Salem, N.C., caught this 21-inch speckled trout from the surf in Duck, N.C., on Oct. 23, 2019.



Mady Pressley of Mint Hill, N.C., caught this nice bass out of pond in Mint Hill.



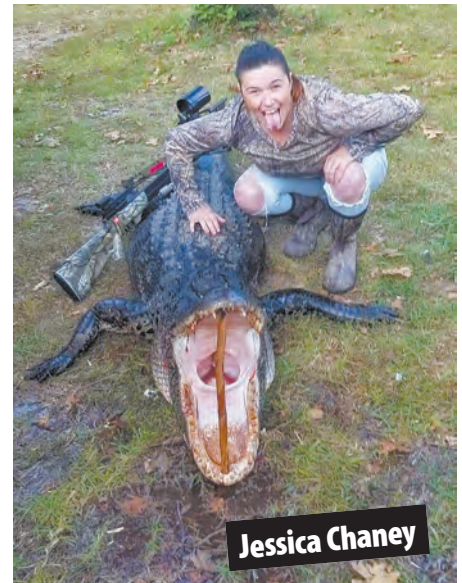
George Tate of Wentworth, N.C., caught this big speck on Sept. 19 in the New River, fishing with guide Ricky Kellum.



Kate Morton, 6, killed her first deer, this spike, with a crossbow on Sept. 19, 2019, in York County, S.C.



Tracy Brown of Greenville, N.C., killed her first turkey on April 23, 2019, near Oak City, N.C.



Jessica Chaney from West Columbia, S.C., killed this 10-foot-3, 398-pound alligator near Georgetown, S.C., on Sept. 23, 2019.

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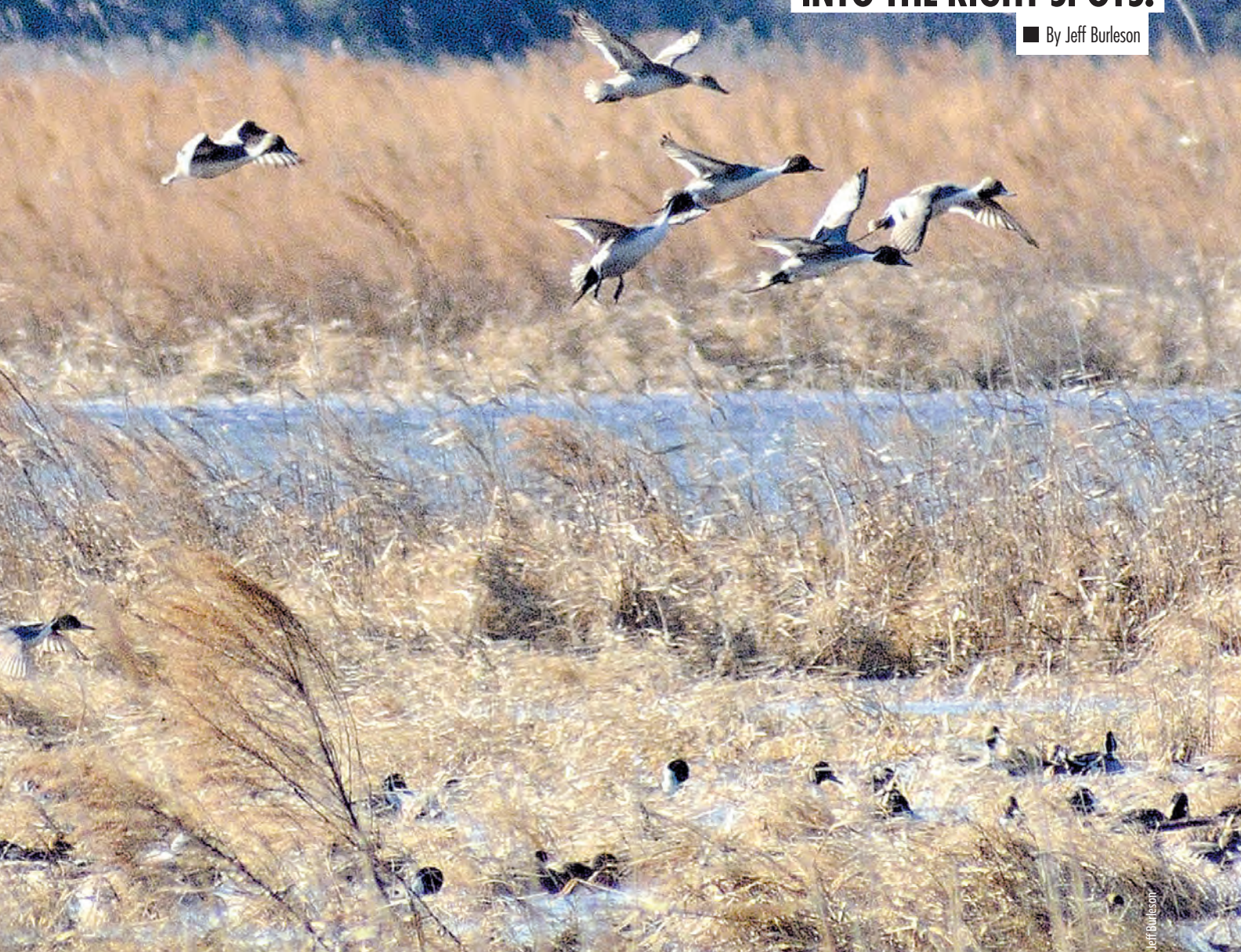
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# IT'S NEVER TOO LATE FOR DUCKS

**AS DUCK SEASON ENTERS ITS BACK HALF, THE PLACES YOU HUNTED IN PREVIOUS MONTHS MAY NO LONGER HOLD BIRDS. IT MIGHT TAKE A LITTLE SCOUTING TO GET INTO THE RIGHT SPOTS.**

■ By Jeff Burleson



Jeff Burleson

# A 60-day duck season sounds like an eternity until it arrives.

Much of the first half of the season is divided up to give hunters the chance to take a few birds early in the migration.

But as Jan. 1 rolls around, a duck hunter's opportunities are dwindling fast; it's now or never. Some of the best days in the blind are in the last three weeks, in places most hunters fail to dream about finding ducks this time of year.

Seek out and find the places sheltered from most hunters, and ducks will be there in droves.

Waterfowl species are attracted to rich food sources during their migration to fuel their high metabolisms. And while a solid food source is vital to the survival of the flock, protection from hunters and other lethal threats is just as important.

Of the nation's 14 million hunters, only 1.5 million target ducks annually, but that's still a lot of hunters chasing them across their North American range. Hunting begins on the breeding grounds of the north and lasts all the way to the end of the migration at the end of January. From the time the season opens in Canada on Sept. 1 to end of the January in the lower 48, surviving birds learn where to go, where to eat and where to avoid a constant spray of steel and tungsten death pellets penetrating their feathers.

Ducks receive tons of pressure all season, and they learn to locate places that are void of hunters to loaf and to remain alive. Bryan DeHart of Manteo, N.C., the founding partner of and a real-estate broker for Mossy Oak Properties of North

Carolina, spends plenty of time selling top-notch hunting properties. When he isn't, he's guiding fishermen in the Roanoke Sound, chasing whitetail bucks in Halifax County or shooting a limit of ducks in eastern North Carolina.

"Eastern North Carolina almost has more water than dry land," said DeHart (252-473-8632), "but that is one reason why the ducks, geese and tundra swans migrate into our state for the winter. We have an abundance of food and cover in a flooded environment."

In addition to the 3 million acres of natural sounds, rivers, swamps and creeks, eastern North Carolina is home to one of the greatest concentrations of waterfowl impoundments on the eastern seaboard. Without a doubt, ducks have an endless supply of flooded territory to call their temporary home, but hunters are also getting more efficient at finding and taking home a daily limit of birds.

"Ducks are getting hunted everywhere," DeHart said. "In our area around the Pamlico and Albemarle sounds, ducks typically raft up offshore to loaf during the day, but a lot of hunters around here have started using scissor rigs, and ducks are starting to find other areas to hide and loaf."

Ducks are accustomed to flying long distances to find what they want, and with the abundance of flooded habitats across the Carolinas, ducks can seek and find places to avoid danger.

As the end of the season approaches, get out and scout to find unpressured water that ducks will visit to avoid hunters.





Jeff Burleson

Look in areas off the beaten path to find places where ducks like this woody are holding up late in the season.

## DUCKS TAKE REFUGE

Most hunters typically target the same general areas throughout the season, but as hunting pressure accelerates, successful hunters learn to find ducks in sheltered places where they don't normally venture on an annual basis.

"If you want to find sheltered ducks, you have to work at it, and you have to work harder than the rest of the guys to find where the ducks are going," he said. "You have to find a spot that nobody else is hunting; it could be a cove off a main creek, a remote river channel, beaver pond, swamp or a unique place in the middle of the marsh that is hard to access."

### SCOUTING PAYS DIVIDENDS >



Jeff Burleson

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## SCOUTING PAYS DIVIDENDS

Hunters can scout during the day to see where ducks are or observe where the ducks are flying during hunts. DeHart pays attention to where ducks are going on his hunts and then uses Google Earth to determine their potential destinations.

“A lot of these places are small potholes that aren’t accessible to the typical duck boat,” he said. “You have to be willing to walk a lot, too, but the hunting can be worth it when you find a hole with several hundred ducks using it during the middle of the day.”

DeHart also encourages hunters to respect all property rights. Even though there is a plethora of open-access, public land opportunities in the Carolinas, there is also a lot of private land where ducks will go. Hunters should always check land ownership and ask permission before scouting or hunting on any properties.

Out of the way duck holes may not be accessible by water, but hunters can often reach them by hiking in waders or hip boots.



Alec Kearns

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“If you are willing to work and walk to these areas, the hunting can be really good for a few hunts, and then you may have to go look again,” he said.

Remember, ducks have moved to these places for protection and will not stay long when their protection veil has been lifted.

Duck hunting is one of the most enjoyable methods of outdoor recreation on the planet. And the last month of the season in the Carolinas can be one of the best times of the year to go. For the best action, seek and find the loafing areas away from the common hunting zones to bring home a quick limit. ■

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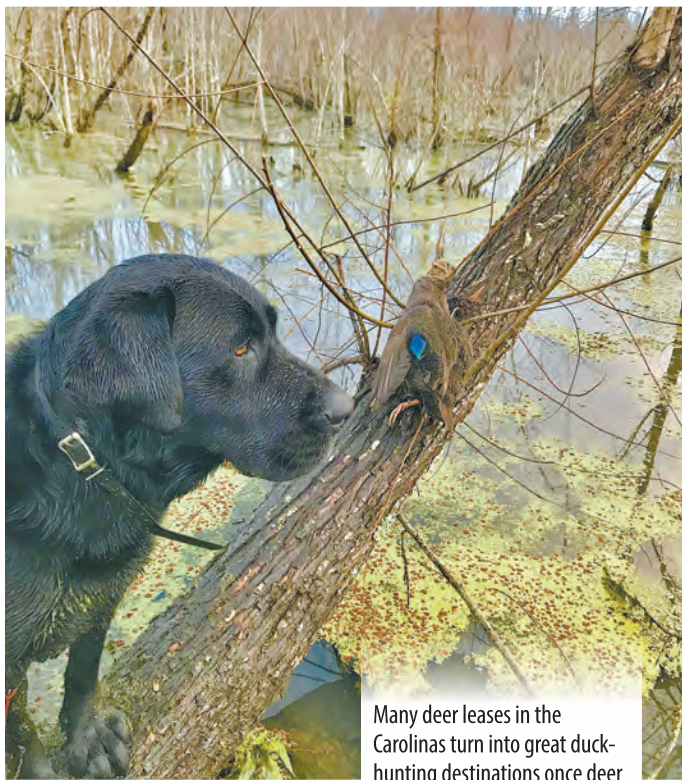


Jeff Burleson is a native of Lumberton, N.C., who lives in Myrtle Beach, S.C. He graduated from N.C. State University with a degree in fisheries and wildlife sciences and is a certified biologist and professional forester for Southern Palmetto Environmental Consulting.

# DEER LEASES OPEN UP PRIME DUCK OPPORTUNITIES

White-tailed deer remain the most-targeted game species in the United States, and it's one of the most-popular hunting sports in the Carolinas. But as deer season closes in the two states on Jan. 1, deer hunters evacuate their hunting properties, opening up thousands of acres of potential loafing areas for duck hunters.

Bryan DeHart of Manteo, N.C., spends countless hours scouting properties for his clients at Mossy Oak Properties. According to DeHart, many large properties dedicated to deer hunting hold large flocks of ducks late in the season when deer stands are empty.



Tory McCallum

Many deer leases in the Carolinas turn into great duck-hunting destinations once deer season ends.

"Most deer-hunting properties have a lot of water on them in swamps, beaver ponds, runs, and sometimes even man-made ponds," said DeHart (252-473-8632). "These swamps and flooded areas have been harassed by deer hunters for several months. But after Jan. 1, they are out of the woods, off the roads and off these properties."

When under pressure, ducks are constantly looking for sheltered areas away from hunters. As soon as deer season closes, these large properties open prime habitats for ducks to go and rest. With a little scouting and time investments looking for ducks, hunters can find a gold mine right in the heart of their hunting neighborhood. Hunters can end their duck season on an epic note in places long from where they typically toss out their decoy set. ■



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## GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson



Very few places in the Carolinas don't have the potential to support huntable populations of rabbits.

# BRUSH UP ON BUNNIES

Jeff Burleson

WITH DEER SEASON OUT OF THE WAY, SMALL-GAME HUNTING TAKES SPOTLIGHT

**E**ven though the holiday season has ended and the new year is here, hunters can still receive wonderful gifts from Mother Nature. Hunting seasons are still open in the Carolinas for several species, including rabbits. Hunters with a pack of beagles and a small farm can have a blast.

During the past century, the Carolinas have experienced rises and falls of many wildlife populations in certain areas of both states. Some areas were almost entirely void of wild turkey and white-tail deer. While most counties in both states are well stocked with these big-game species, there continue to be fluctuations in their populations.

Rabbits, on the other hand, are abundant across every county in North Carolina and South Carolina. Even with the increase in predators and decrease in natural habitat, rabbits are resilient and continue to flourish everywhere.

## BABY MAKERS

Rabbits are prolific breeders. After only a few months of life, rabbits are

biologically mature enough to breed. They have 30-day gestation periods and can have as many as 12 babies in each litter. And unlike many mammals, rabbits can become pregnant immediately after birth; that can enable a population of rabbits to multiply very quickly. Most female rabbits in the wild have around 20 babies per year.

A flourishing population of these furry critters is music to a rabbit hunter's ears. Winter is prime time to break out the beagles for an old-fashioned bunny chase. One of the best aspects of running rabbits with dogs is rabbits are known to cover a small territory where hunters can have good success without getting out of hearing range of their trucks.

Rabbits typically will not leave their home range when being pushed by beagles. They will not flee too far away from their escape cover. Any hunter knows rabbits like to run in circles and will return to where they were initially jumped.

Rabbit hunters are in luck as far as finding a place to chase a bunny, because rabbits can and do live about anywhere.

From woodlands and cutovers to farm fields and old home sites, rabbits flourish in a wide variety of habitats.

## PASS THE GREENS

Rabbits are herbivores and will feast on tender, green, herbaceous foliage, as well as, low-lying, woody vegetation. These types of foods are abundant on about every tract of land on this side of the planet throughout all four seasons, but tender, green vegetation is more limited during the winter. And rabbits prefer green vegetation high in protein and carbohydrates during winter. Places thick with white clover and other flourishing green vegetation will bring rabbits in like corn does for ducks in a waterfowl impoundment.

But, a strong food source for rabbits also brings in another group of consum-



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.

## CREATE BRUSH PILES

Brush piles aren't just for crappie fishermen anymore. Rabbit and bobwhite quail can benefit from brush piles as escape cover near food sources. Winter food sources for small-game species are important to sustain animals through the winter, but the escape cover around these food sources is just as important and really critical to survival. Brush piles are perfect additions to any winter food source, and landowners can easily create these features on their property with little effort.

Brush piles provide winter escape cover for small-game species. Additionally, brush piles can provide thermal protection during the cold days. Brush piles should be created immediately adjacent to the open food sources and as far away from tall trees as feasibly possible. The tall trees can serve as perches and launch sites for hawks and other avian predators.

Building brush piles can be as simple as dropping a few large treetops or something much more advanced, built with cut logs, wire, and living plants. While small brush piles can be beneficial and better than nothing, brush piles greater than 5 feet tall and 10 feet wide are recommended to provide enough space to support a large group of individuals.

Live-logging is another good practice to promote low lying cover. Live-logging are trees that are partially felled that keep a portion of the trunk connected to the root system. These trees

Jeff Burleson



Hunters can build brush piles, providing cover for rabbits, by felling trees and piling bushes.

are encouraged to live and create branches at ground level. Live-logged trees can last for many seasons.

The best brush piles are made with living materials or materials that will not decay in a single season. The overall goal is to provide long-term cover adjacent to prime sources of winter food. However, brush piles can be restored or re-created as needed to ensure enough winter cover is available for small game. ■

ers: predators of the aerial and terrestrial variety. There aren't many predators parading across the Carolinas that wouldn't like rabbit for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Rabbits will proliferate in places both abundant with food and in close proximity to escape cover. Rabbits will flock to good food sources, but there are less rabbits picked off from predators in areas abundant with escape cover.

## GROUND COVER ESSENTIAL

Rabbits need thick brush at the ground level; that can be blackberry briar thickets, stump piles, fallen treetops, heavy grass/shrubs or any type of ground cover discouraging to a hawk, fox, neighborhood cat or coyote. Rabbits will dig burrows called "wardens" inside the protection of the thick cover.

Rabbits are social animals and live in relatively large colonies. Suitable winter food sources abundant with cover are prime places to find them. In addition, the annual breeding season kicks off in January; that will encourage rabbits to gather in these prime habitats, providing beagles with plenty of targets to chase. Hunters can release dogs into the briar patch repeatedly and often keep running out new rabbits on each release.

Rabbit hunting is one of the last remaining outdoor traditions in the Carolinas, but with plenty of rabbits and ample habitat, it can continue for further generations. Not only is rabbit hunting an enjoyable activity, tasty rabbit meat is one culinary option not to miss. ■

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# Chill with an **UMBRELLA**

■ By Phillip Gentry

FRESHWATER UMBRELLA RIGS ARE A GREAT COLD-WEATHER TACTIC FOR STRIPED BASS IN RESERVOIRS ACROSS THE SOUTHEAST. HERE'S THE SCOOP....



Phillip Gentry

# For anglers who target striped bass across most of the Southeast, the name Mack Farr is synonymous with **umbrella rig fishing.**

Farr, a guide on Georgia's Lake Lanier who has been fishing professionally for more than 30 years, has taken the concept of trolling umbrella rigs — originally a saltwater-fishing tactic — and adapted it to fishing for stripers in landlocked, freshwater reservoirs.

According to Farr, umbrella-rig fishing is best on just about any lake that has a sizeable population of stripers when water temperatures drop to the low- to mid-50s. At that point, he said, the fish become dormant and won't chase live bait. In fact, Farr has compared the two, side by side under winter conditions.

"It's an impulse bite," Farr said, "The fish are in a neutral or even negative mood, and this big screaming rig comes through, and their first instinct is to kill it."

Farr also said umbrella rigs are an excellent catch-and-release tactic, because stripers are typically hooked inside the mouth or somewhere on the outside of the jaw. Combine that with cold water, and even the biggest fish can swim away unharmed after release.

Another bonus is that "U-rigs" — as they're often referred to — have multiple baits rather than a single hook. It's not uncommon to spur the competitiveness of other stripers in the school when a striper comes ripping by with other baits hanging out of its mouth. Reeling in two, three or even four striped bass on one rod is not a feat for the light-hearted.

Pulling an umbrella rig is more commonly done with the use of the outboard motor on whatever boat you're using, although some anglers prefer to use a 24- or 36-volt trolling motor to keep from spooking schools of stripers feeding near the surface.

"I can teach anyone to pull umbrella rigs off of any type of boat so long as the boat will idle down to or maintain steady speeds at 2 or 3 miles per hour" Farr said.

Farr puts the rigs out on stout baitcasting tackle with line in the 50-pound class. He runs two rigs, one on each side of the boat and cautions anglers when deploying rigs.

"Only let the rig out 20 to 30 feet at a time," he said. "Leaving the reel in free spool will send it to the bottom, where it will hang up. I keep my thumb on the spool as it goes out and then flip the level (wind) and pull the rig back up every so often until I have the desired amount of line out."

Farr typically will run rigs out between 60 and 150 feet behind the boat, depending on the water depth, the weight of the rig and the speed of the boat. He manufactures umbrella rigs, and the packaging on his products carry a chart that's a good starting point for learning how far back to put the rigs to reach the desired depth.



The colder and nastier the weather gets in January, the better umbrella rigs work for catching striped bass.



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“ always space the rigs at least 30 feet apart so they don’t hang if the lines cross” Farr said, “and it’s wise to put the heavier of two rigs further back so it will run deeper and under the other during a turn.”

With two rigs deployed, Farr will maintain his boat speed between 2.5 mph and 3.0 mph as measured on his sonar/GPS unit. A constant speed is not desired, and rpm changes in the motor will cause the rigs to veer and flair like a real pod of bait-fish. The trick is knowing when to zig and when to zag.

“I’m constantly watching my sonar” he said. “I want to know what’s under the boat so I’ll know whether to speed up to clear the top of a hump or brush pile and when to slow down or even pop the boat in idle, which makes the rigs drop and flutter. This is a great tactic when pulling through a suspended school of fish. Drop that rig right on their heads and then put it back in gear, and the rig comes back up, usually with a fish in tow.”

One of the chief complaints Farr hears about using umbrella rigs is that rigs are so heavy, it’s not like really fighting a fish with close to 2 pounds in jigs and metal on the line.

“That’s why I take the boat out of gear when a fish is on” he said. “Let the angler fight the fish, not the fish and the boat, and it’s really a good fight.”

Farr admits that the exception to this is when there’s obviously a big fish on the rod that’s real close to standing timber. Then, he’ll use the boat to help get the fish into the clear, then pull it out of gear. ■

Phillip Gentry



Umbrella rigs can be used behind any type of boat and under nearly any condition, so long as proper trolling speeds can be maintained.



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

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Mack Farr's Mini-Mack umbrella rig is light enough to cast at striped bass, but it's also a great tool for slow-trolling.



Phillip Gentry

# Lighten up with MINI-MACKS

Having made and sold umbrella rigs primarily for striped bass fishing, Mack Farr watched the rise and crest of umbrella-rig fishing for black bass with interest. He acknowledged the utility of a lighter weight U-rig that could either be cast to schooling fish or slow-trolled under more controlled conditions. His concept was the Mini-Mack.

"When we designed the Mini-Mack, it was for casting to striped bass. It's a lot sturdier than some of the more-recent rigs that have become popular with black bass anglers," he said. "I actually realized how well it would work for slow-trolling by mistake."

While filming a television show, Farr ([www.captainmacks.com](http://www.captainmacks.com)) set the rod in a rod-holder while the film crew was moving down the bank to another casting spot. The rod bent over with a nice-sized striper.

"That set off a light bulb, and when I got home, I started experimenting with trolling these rigs instead of casting," he said.

The first plus is lighter weight; an entire Mini-Mack weighs slightly more than 2 ounces. Accordingly, it can be fished using conventional striped bass tackle, 20-pound class tackle vs. the 50-pound class. With lighter weight and lighter tackle, the rig can be fished slower.

"The big rigs work on reaction, but this is more finesse, if you can say that about a rig that has five hooks on it," Farr said. "It does lend itself better to contour fishing and getting closer to fish holding structure."

The other added feature is the ability to slow-troll a Mini-Mack behind a planer board. This begs a comparison between the effectiveness of rigs versus live bait.

"I've put them head to head," Farr said. "Don't get me wrong; I'm still a big believer in bait. I'm going to have live bait with me on just about every trip I take, but I've had slow days when I'm free-lining six live-bait rods with little success, and I swapped one out for a Mini-Mack rig and started catching fish." ■



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Compass 360 has introduced the DuraTek 5mm Bootfoot Chest Wader, made to keep hunters and fishermen warm in cold weather.

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Features include plenty of storage — often a concern in waders — including front-waist storage pockets, a

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owl calls, and shellholders.

The vest has wide shoulder straps and two adjustable buckles to close the front. An added feature is an attached padded seat with 2 inches of open-cell foam padding and ¾-inch of closed-cell foam padding. It's designed to slide under the hunter's seat when sitting. No carrying an extra seat pad anymore.

**MSRP is \$249.95**

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## BARNETT HYPERGHOST 425

Barnett launched its HyperGhost line of crossbows this past fall, featuring the 405 and 425 models, which are full of the latest features and technology that hunters want in a crossbow.

The 405 comes with an upgraded stock and Barnett's step-through riser, plus the new Retractable Underarm County balance Support (RUCS) that hooks under a shooter's arm to counteract the weight of the riser for better balance when the bow is shouldered. The 405 features a monochromatic Mossy Oak® Treestand finish with skull detail delivers arrows at a blistering 405 feet-per-second speed. It comes with three HyperFlite arrows.

The 425 features a 1.5x5x32 illuminated scope, a the RUCS, a SoftLok floating bristle arrow retainer and anti-dry fire TriggerTech trigger. It also comes with HyperFlite arrows.

**MSRP of the HyperGhost 405 is \$1,099 and \$1,299 for the HyperGhost 425.**

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



**T**here is a fine line between being passionate about something and being obsessed with it. Erik Stout of Blythewood, S.C., would say that he is passionate about rabbit hunting. Observers who witness his dedication to the sport and love of his rabbit dogs might say he leans more towards being obsessed. However, it is defined, Stout admits when he is not rabbit hunting or tending to his beagles, he is thinking about rabbit hunting.

Stout is so enthralled with the sport of chasing rabbits with hounds that he saves his sick leave, annual vacation time and any other time he can take off from his job at Linrick Golf Course in Richland County and uses those days to hunt rabbits during the season. From Thanksgiving through the end of rabbit season on March 1, Stout tries to work two days a week, leaving four or five days to rabbit hunt just in South Carolina. He also travels to other states to rabbit hunt when their seasons are open.

In his rabbit-hunting crusade, he and his "Knockout Stout" beagles have chased rabbits across at least a half-dozen other states, traveling as far as Iowa to hunt cottontails and Mississippi to hunt swamp rabbits. But most of the time, he spends his off-days hunting rabbits mostly in South Carolina's Midlands with a group of hunters ranging from older, retired men who can hunt any day of the week to eager, younger guys who are helping revive the sport but can hunt only on their days off.

## THE SOUND OF BEAGLES AS THEY CHASE A RABBIT THROUGH THE WOODS AND FIELDS OF SOUTH CAROLINA CAN MAKE A VETERAN HUNTER'S HEART SKIP A BEAT.

■ By Pat Robertson



# RUN, RABBIT RUN!

Pat Robertson

## **A breakfast eatery is the perfect gathering place for a rabbit hunt,**

because a good, hot breakfast of eggs, grits and sausage or bacon goes a long way on a cold morning of following a pack of eager beagles. At the Huddle House in Saluda, hunters drift in one and two at a time, down steaming cups of coffee and engage in good-natured banter before lining the pickup trucks up in a convoy to head for the hunt site.

Once there, Stout and his friend, Kenny Baker of Blythewood, take the beagles out of the box from the back of the pickup and put on their tracking collars.

“I don’t leave home without my Garmin tracking collars,” Stout said. “I like to know where my dogs are at all times. They might fall into an old well or get out in the road.”

Once all the beagles are outfitted, the hunters don hunting jackets or vests and load their shotguns, then Stout works the pack of beagles into the thick woods behind the pull-off where

the trucks are parked. A few “whoops and hollers” of encouragement get them in hunting mode, and soon, they are hot on the trail of a rousted cottontail. As it slips through the woody cover near the logging road back into the woods, Baker spies it and shoulders his shotgun. BAM! The first bunny of the day is headed for the frying pan.

Stout’s love of rabbit hunting began when he was about seven or eight years old, when two family friends who had beagles would pick him up and take him hunting on Saturdays. The first rabbit he shot was on one of those hunts off SC 215 in upper Richland County, not far from where he grew up. When he was eight, his father, local taxidermist Jim Stout, gave him a 20-gauge Franchi shotgun, the same gun he still carries to hunt rabbits.

His first venture into rabbit hunting did not stick, he said. His dad’s taxidermy shop was filled with the heads of trophy deer and strutting gobblers, and he turned to hunting those with enthusiasm. After finishing school, he went to work and met a co-worker who had beagles and loved to rabbit hunt. After hunting with his co-worker a few times, Stout had the urge to have his own rabbit dogs.

“I got my first beagles 14 years ago, and that’s when it really became a passion for me,” he said. “It grew into something I love. I love it more than turkey hunting. I just love to hear the beagles running. Sometimes I even run them at night just to listen.

Erik Stout puts a tracking collar on one of his beagles.



Pat Robertson

# CAN SOCIAL MEDIA DRIVE RABBIT HUNTING REVIVAL?

Can Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social media be key to a resurgence in rabbit hunting?

For years, the interest in rabbit hunting has been on a decline, but that may be changing, according to Michael Hook, the small-game project leader for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

"I think there has been a small resurgence recently, both with rabbit hunters and quail hunters," he said. "It seems like with social media, the younger generation is getting more interested in hunting with dogs. They are excited about beagles and bird dogs."

Hook said it is almost like enthusiasm for rabbit hunting and quail hunting skipped a generation.

"With the older generations, that is what they did. The deer and turkey were not here, and then deer and turkey came in vogue," he said. "Now people are saying rabbit hunting is fun. I remember Granddaddy talking about it."

It is hard to judge the effect of social

media on the sport or even to get a good grip on who and how many people are participating in rabbit hunting because of low hunter-participation in SCDNR's annual rabbit hunter survey.

"The most-recent rabbit hunter survey data I have is from the 2014 Responsive Management SC Hunter Harvest Report," Hook said. "It was estimated that in 2014 we had an estimated 11,995 hunters hunting rabbits. They spent an estimated 90,526 days hunting rabbits to harvest and estimated 101,277 rabbits. The majority of those rabbits were harvested on private lands, as only an estimated 7,172 rabbits were harvested on WMAs."

Hook said SCDNR has made a major push to get more rabbit hunters to complete the annual survey in hopes of getting more meaningful measures of hunter effort and harvest. Potential cooperators should contact the SCDNR Small Game Project at 803-734-3609 or email: hookm@dnr.sc.dov. ■

Almost 12,000 South Carolina hunters reported that they hunted rabbits five years ago, spending more than 90,000 days afield.



Pat Robertson

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Alvin Stevenson with one of the prizes of the hunt.

Pat Robertson

“**T**here came a point in life when, as much as I love deer hunting, that I would rather go hear those beagles sing than go deer hunting. That’s when I knew I loved it and was passionate about rabbit hunting.”

Stout’s early hunting pack was comprised of unregistered “grade” dogs, but he kept wanting to improve his pack, so he studied hunting beagles, and about 10 years ago, he bought four dogs in Florida that were registered with the American Kennel Club. He raised his first litter of AKC beagle puppies a year later, but he kept working to improve his pack.

“I just love the color of bluetick dogs, and I found this lady at Oak Hill Kennel in Kentucky who had blueticks,” Stout said. “I asked around about her and her dogs, and I watched the videos of her dogs. Everybody had good things to say about her, so I called her one day and asked about getting a puppy. She said I would have a year to a year-and-a-half wait, but she would put

me on the waiting list.”

A year later when she called, Stout told her he would love to get another puppy if someone had backed out of the waiting list.

“She had a female, a beautiful little puppy. I drove eight hours to get them and I loved them,” he said. “I named them Smokey and Remi, for Remington. They started really easy, so I went down to South Georgia to get another one out of the same bloodlines, and from that point on, I started breeding on my own.”

Still working to improve the performance of his pack, he began infusing some hare-hound bloodlines into his breeding program. Breeding to the hard-running Branko line out of Canada has produced the cross that he has been working for.

Stout said he breeds his beagles with the aim to produce the nearest thing to a complete rabbit hunting dog. He said he wants a dog in his pack that has good hunt (desire), good drive (speed), good nose (scenting ability and an honest mouth (tonguing only on the scent of a rabbit).

“I like a fast dog, but not one that will run over, then line at the end,” he said. “I like speed with control, and I don’t like a bunch of extra mouth. If one is running over the track and keeps on barking, it just drives me crazy. I try to breed dogs with gears, with speed to run it as fast as the scent allows, but with the nose and ability to slow it down and walk it out when the scenting is bad.” ■

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

## RUN, RABBIT RUN!

# GOOD RABBIT HUNTING FOUND ON PUBLIC LAND

Erik Stout has a network of hunting buddies, some with beagles some without, but they all have one thing vital to rabbit hunting, or any other type of hunting for that matter — access to good places to hunt.

"I am blessed with a good group of guys to hunt with. We have the OGs — older guys who are retired and up to going hunting anytime — and the younger guys who are still working, so they usually go on the weekends," Stout said. "But everybody has places to hunt or they find places for us to hunt."

Not everybody who wants to hunt rabbits has private land to hunt, but in South Carolina, that does not have to be a major stopping block, according to Michael Hook, the small-game project leader for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

"There is good rabbit hunting available on public lands on both the named and unnamed Wildlife Management Areas across the state," Hook said. "Most anywhere we are doing quail work on the big, named WMAs will have good rabbit hunting, too."

Across South Carolina are a number of unnamed WMAs under timber management that also provide good rabbit hunting opportunities, he said.

"Anywhere there is active timber management and they leave a lot of stuff on the ground, for a couple of years that will provide good rabbit hunting," Hook said. "For two to three years after the



Any Wildlife Management Area in South Carolina that is having habitat work done for quail, or timber management done, should have good habitat for rabbits for several seasons.

timber is cut, there is habitat succession, providing good cover for rabbits for seven or eight years before the trees growing back begin to shade out the ground cover. Look for brushy, weedy thick areas with a lot of briars.

"You can find some good rabbit hunting on these smaller area and the good thing is you usually have the place to yourself." ■

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Plenty of marine dealers and fishing vendors will have their wares on display at boat shows around the Carolinas from January through March.



## SHOW US SOMETHING!

SHOW SEASON CRANKS UP IN CAROLINAS IN JANUARY, RUNS THROUGH MARCH

Brian Cope

It's showtime! Whether you're looking for a boat, fishing gear or just want to talk and hear about fishing, you'll find all of that and much more at boat shows and fishing expos across the Carolinas starting this month.

The show season starts on the weekend of Jan. 10-12. In North Carolina, the Bass and Saltwater Fishing Expo ([bassandsaltwaterfishingexpo.com](http://bassandsaltwaterfishingexpo.com)) cranks up in Raleigh at the N.C. State Fairgrounds. This year's show will feature the largest, multi-dealer fishing boat show ever held in eastern North Carolina. More than 30 marine dealers will be on hand with everything from \$500 johnboats to the most-upscale offshore fishing machines.

This show will also have more than 100 retail and specialty shops set up throughout buildings on the fairgrounds. They'll have thousands of fishing products ranging from plastic worms to rods and reels, to high-tech boating electronics. And everything in between.

This show is famous for giveaways. Randomly-drawn attendees will win close to 100 free gifts donated by vendors, including a grand-prize drawing on the final day for an awesome prize package, and you don't have to purchase anything to win.

A full schedule of saltwater and freshwater fishing seminars will give anglers the insight only available from fishing professionals and their years of experience. They'll share techniques, lure and tackle choices and give you tips that you simply can't get anywhere else.

And especially for the kids (and kids at heart), the Mountain Trout Pond Simulator will be stocked with rainbow and brown trout up to 3 pounds. A few dozen of these fish will be tagged for special prizes for anglers lucky enough to catch one. And while the tagged fish must be released, other fish may be kept (limit of two untagged fish per angler). On the same weekend in South

Carolina, the 38th Annual Grand Strand Boat and Sportsman Expo ([grandstrandboatandsportsmanexpo.com](http://grandstrandboatandsportsmanexpo.com)) will have anglers hopping in the Myrtle Beach Convention Center. It's the Grand Strand's only boat show and will feature many inland boat and fishing tackle dealers, as well as more from Wilmington to Charleston.

Aside from dealers, this show will also have inshore and offshore seminars from some of the best fishing guides and crew members in the Grand Strand area. And this show is well-known for having some of the best kayak-fishing seminars in the southeast.

With this show being in the Myrtle



**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.

Beach Convention Center, it's all under the same roof, so attendees don't need to shuffle from one building to the next or to roam between indoors and out.

Other boat shows this month include the Upstate South Carolina Boat Show, which runs Jan. 23-26 in the Greenville Convention Center. The Charleston Boat Show is Jan. 24-26, at the Charleston (S.C.) Area Convention Center.

In February, the Central Carolina Boat Show (greensboro-fishingexpo.com) runs from Feb. 28-March 1 at the Greensboro Coliseum Complex in Greensboro, N.C. This show is very similar to the Raleigh Bass and Saltwater Expo, but on a somewhat smaller scale.

That same weekend, the Dixie Deer Classic (dixideerclassic.org) will be held at the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh. This show is focused on deer hunting, but does have exhibitors from other areas of the outdoor world. This includes the Southeastern Call Makers Competition and NWTF/DDC Tarheel Open Turkey Calling Championship.

More than \$60,000 worth of outdoor gear will be given away at this event. And the main attraction, the Dixie Deer Classic's awards ceremony will feature more than two dozen awards to deer hunters for big bucks in various categories from North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.

In March, the Pee Dee Outdoor Classic (peedeeoutdoorclassic.com) in Florence, S.C. is from March 13-15 at the Florence Center. It will feature boating and fishing vendors, displays, manufacturers and seminars. Hunting, hiking and camping companies will also be on hand. Stacy Atkinson, from the popular regional television show "Low Country Wildlife TV" will also have a booth talking about what's kept him on the air for a decade.

And this year, the Pee Dee Outdoor Classic will be held in conjunction with the MK Gun and Knife Show.

Rounding out the show season will be the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic (psclassic.com) at the S.C. State Fairgrounds in Columbia, S.C. This show runs from March 27-29, and is made up of vendors and exhibitors from all facets of the outdoor world, with a big emphasis on hunting, fishing, and boating. These include deer antler scoring sessions, a kid's fishing pond, coyote trapping seminars, fishing seminars, cast netting lessons, and plenty more.

The winter can be a tough time for anglers, but these shows will get us through it, and have us prepared for getting on the water when springtime finally shows up. ■

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## LUNKER LINES

David Fritts

When putting out a brush pile, make sure you trim back the smaller limbs along the trunk to make it easier to get lures through without hanging up.

# BRUSH UP FOR BASS

USE JANUARY TO CREATE GOOD BASS-HOLDING COVER

**S**omebody asked me the other night, “What do you do during January?”

He was asking me about how I fished for bass in January, which is arguably our toughest month in the Carolinas. But I gave him an answer he wasn't suspecting.

“January,” I said, “that's when I put in brush piles.

And that's really the truth. For years and years, almost every weekend in January and February, if I wasn't working a fishing show somewhere, I was on a lake, putting in brush piles, hoping they would become bass hangouts later in the year when I returned in my Ranger boat.

So, why not talk about putting in brush piles? They might be one thing that all bass fishermen can do to help drive their catches upward.

January and February are great times to put out brush for several reasons: first, it's cold, and the lakes are basically

empty compared to the rest of the year. You're less likely to have somebody see you putting in a brush pile, finding it and fishing it themselves. Second, on a lot of our lakes, the levels are much lower during the winter, so you have a better idea about what the bottom looks like where you're going to fish later in the year; it makes it easier to pick spots to sink brush.

So let's divide the science of sinking brush pile into two sections: where and how.

## WHERE TO PUT IT

First, you want to put brush out somewhere that's not obvious, and that's important, because with electronics as advanced as they are, with the Lawrence unit on my boat, I can go right down a creek channel and find every brush pile, so I want it to be a little bit out of the way. You can put it on the side of a point instead of on the end, or it can be on the side of a drop or a railroad trestle.

You want to put brush out on places with hard bottoms, places that bass normally use. Sinking one on a soggy, muddy bottom defeats the purpose.

You want to put brush out at different depths so they'll hold bass during different times of the year. I like to put brush out where the top will be 5 to 7 feet from the surface, and I like to put brush out where the top will be 14 or 15 feet from the surface. These are good depths for bass in the summer and fall when you're going to be fishing brush. And remember, brush is the No. 1 cover in the fall, so try to have brush out in the depth range your bass hold in the fall.

Don't mess up what's already a good



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

spot. If you're catching fish off a point or on a section of a drop, don't add a brush pile there. The spot is already good for a reason. All you're going to do by putting a brush there is mess it up, scatter the fish out and make them harder to catch.

Flats are great places to put brush piles, especially if there isn't any cover around. A flat that runs anywhere from 100 to 300 yards off the bank before it drops into a channel is great. If you can find a little rise where the bottom is a little harder — you should be able to tell on your depth finder — you can make a good fishing hole. When a bass is swimming along on a flat, if there's no cover there, he's going to keep swimming until he finds some cover. Hopefully, that's your brush pile.

## WHAT TO PUT OUT

Second, you want to put out some cover that isn't actually brush. Some of the best cover I've put out during the winter are little piles of rocks. You've got plenty of rocks around if you've got riprap on your lake, and bass actually hold on rocks as much or more than they'll hold on brush. Build a rock pile.

And following that lead, the brush you put out shouldn't be all that brushy. One problem in putting out things like Christmas trees is that it's hard to get a lure back through them, especially a crankbait. Trees like cedars and pin oaks are hang-up magnets.

I like to put out two kinds of trees as brush: gums and willows. What I like to do is cut down a tree, then go down the trunk and trim the limbs off about two feet from the trunk. You don't want any long limbs or leaves. The short, stout limbs will help keep the trunk up off the bottom, which you want. I have found that willow trees are the kind of trees that big fish get on when the water is up — and when they're in deeper water.

## HOW TO SINK THEM

When it comes to sinking them, you want to sink that tree trunk sticking out in the direction of where you'll set up in your boat. You want the limbs pointing at your boat, so when you cast into it, you're retrieving in the direction the limbs are running, so you're less likely to get hung up. This is especially important when you're fishing a crankbait, which is more likely to bounce off a limb if it's pointed in the same direction the crankbait is running.

It's not hard to sink a tree that way. You take coat hangers or wire and wire the cinder block to the bigger, trunk end and drop it. Once in a while, a tree will roll on you when you drop it, but it's not difficult to sink it in the direction you want to. Sometimes, because a willow tree will want to float, you have to sink it with a block on either end.

If you don't have enough cinder blocks or run out, you can use big rocks. Just take your wire and make a four-way loop around the rock, then attach it to the rock and drop it.

When you've got your brush sunk, know this. Only about 10% of the brush piles you sink will ever hold bass. Some of them might wind up as great brush piles for crappie, but if you catch bass off one of every 10 you sink, you are doing a great job.

Now, go get that chain saw, oil up the bar and chain and get going. ■



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Kayak fishing, either in freshwater or saltwater, can be particularly productive in winter if you follow some advice.

**SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY**  
Phillip Gentry

# WINTER FISHING TIPS FOR KAYAK ANGLERS

**K**ayak fishing is not only the fastest-growing fishing sport, it's also a year-round sport. Those who think only die-hard kayak anglers fish during the winter are missing out. It's not even necessary to face Mother Nature head on.

With some forethought and planning, kayak fishing can be just as enjoyable in winter, and a whole lot more productive, than summer. Whether you're a pro or just getting started, here are a few tips that will help you catch fish and catch more fish during the cold months.

**Dress warmly.** You've already heard and read of this ad nauseum, but it bears repeating. If you stay warm and dry, you'll be happier and fish longer and catch more fish. Drysuits, dressing in layers, even full-body wetsuits or neoprene waders — whatever you're comfortable in — put together the ensemble and wear it. Keep a spare set of clothes handy in case the dry part doesn't work out by the end of the day.

**Be safe.** Again, you've heard and read this ad nauseum, but for good reason. Wear your PFD, file a float plan, fish with a buddy, stay within your limit. Live to paddle another day.

**Scout in advance.** Scouting for fishing? The best freshwater fishing is going to be in deep water; the best saltwater fishing is going to be in shallow water. Find these places on topo maps and charts before fishing. Locate suitable areas adjacent to hand-carry launch sites. Check the wind and weather forecast and choose your fishing spots accordingly. The sun and deep water adjacent to the shore are your friends.

**Fish later in the day.** Give your fishing area time to warm up. Some of the best winter fishing is mid-day and afternoon after surface water temperatures have risen a few degrees.

**Slow down.** Avoid the urge to run-and-gun in cold water. Most fish will school or school tighter in the winter. The key to catching them fish is first locating them, then taking time to work them slowly to entice strikes.

**Use a depth finder.** Unless you're sight-fishing a shallow flat, most winter fishing is going to be vertical, over deeper water. That requires the use of a depth finder, both to identify baitfish, predator fish and yes, even watch your bait as you vertical fish.

**Vertical is best.** Most of these sce-

narios work best when vertical fishing for your chosen species. Get on top of the fish. Watch them on your sonar and learn to use a jiggging spoon, drop-shot, shaky head, bucktail jig or other heavy, metal bait. These styles of fishing might be slow and boring, but they catch a lot of winter fish.

**Use braided line.** Fish bites in cold water are mushy at best. Using braided line lets you feel them better. If you are concerned about line shyness, use a length of fluorocarbon leader.

**Remember topwater baits.** Sometimes the area of warmest water is that sunbaked layer on the surface. Even in cold water, baitfish are often pushed to the surface by feeding fish, and topwater baits are the best way to get bit. Rarely is blind-casting topwater baits effective like it is in the summer. If something is going on at the surface, you'll see it first, then cast to it. ■



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.

## FIFTY IS NIFTY

The magic temperature when fishing in the winter is 50 degrees. In mild winters, water temperatures may not get down to 50 or may not stay less than 50 for very long. In hard winters, 50 comes and goes like a crisp fall day, leaving icicles in its path.

Both freshwater fish and saltwater fish will feed actively in water warmer than 50 degrees, although it may be for shorter periods of time because their metabolism is slower. Less than 50 degrees, and you need to plan on soliciting a reaction bite. That rarely means a fast and furious presentation, but more likely that annoying "in your face," "easy to get," "too good to pass up" appeal. That's where jigging spoons and drop shots and the like shine. The kayak angler is set up over the fish and is putting that bait on its nose.

As well as live bait works most of the time, both live bait and the predator fish you're after become lethargic less than 50 degrees and dead less than 40.

It is not unreasonable to plan your fishing around water that stays warmer than 50 degrees throughout the winter. This might be artificially generated by water releases from dams or power plants or naturally occurring on mud flats, out of the wind and super-heated by the sun.

While much of this is simply fishing knowledge, the kayak angler can take advantage of unique opportunities to find heated water because of access and portability. The extreme upper end of a reservoir may be much warmer than the impoundment end, and a cut-off slough may warm faster and stay heated longer than a normal tributary arm. The same can be said for shallow saltwater flats that lie upstream behind two or three sand bars that keep the dolphins and power boats at bay. ■

## JANUARY'S BEST BETS

### NORTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Hybrid striped bass, aka Bodie bass

**WHERE** — Lake Norman

**HOW** — Fish hot-water discharge canals of Duke Energy's Marshall coal-fired power station and McGuire nuclear station

**LAUNCH** — Parking and public access areas are available at the station sites.

**INSIDER TIP** — Most anglers cast fish imitating lures to schooling fish located by watching diving birds. While doing this, free line a large live shiner behind the boat to pick up stragglers.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Redfish

**WHERE** — Flats and marshes on either side of Intracoastal waterway, from Little River to Savannah

**HOW** — Target reds on low water at the entrance to drains and creeks off these flat areas by casting live and small artificial baits out in front of schooling fish.

**LAUNCH** — Public launch sites are scarce, especially to remote areas that don't get fished. Do your homework and find mostly private or semi-private areas to launch if you want to get to unpressured fish.

**INSIDER TIP** — Use scents like pro-cure on artificial plastics in the winter. The baits don't have to move much to get bit. Smelling like something to eat works wonders.

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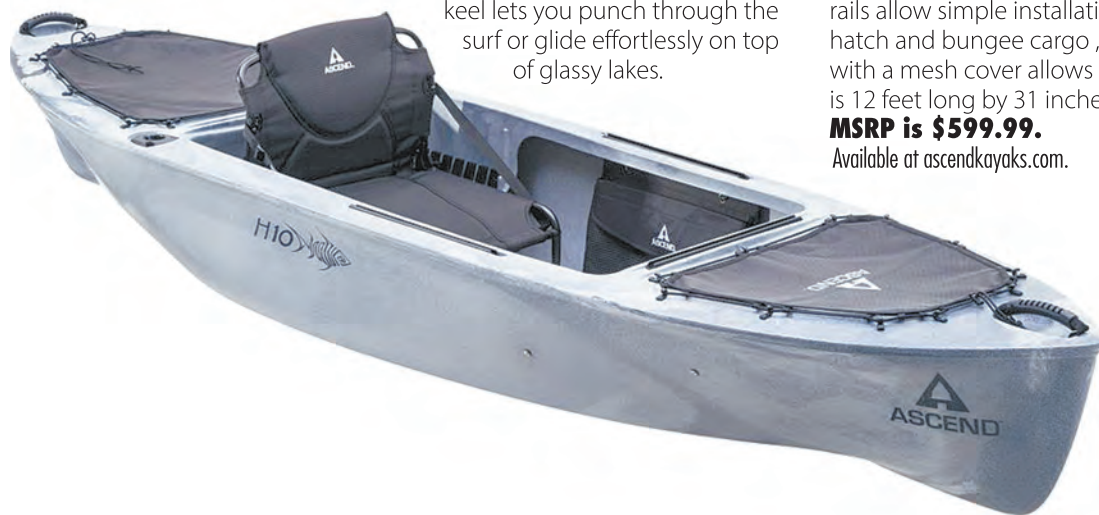
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Giving your jigging presentation a whole new level of realism, the LIVETARGET Flutter Shad jigging spoon offers a highly realistic finish that will get you more bites and put more fish in your livewell.

Delivering an anatomically accurate profile, the Flutter Shad is crafted using LIVETARGET's injected core technology, which enables the inner-core to host a lifelike shad silhouette with a metallic finish and produce a strobe-like flash that shines incredibly bright to attract fish. It also features a durable exo-skin that generates its signature finesse fluttering action on the fall that no bass can resist.

Ideal for any vertical jigging scenarios, the Flutter Shad can be used with a lift-and-drop technique to produce a tight shimmy, and it can also be snapped off the bottom to impart an erratic twitching action that triggers aggressive strikes. Complete with a rear feathered treble hook, the Flutter Shad is available in the most life-like colors ever developed in a jigging spoon.

The Flutter Shad is available in six colors: gold green, silver black, silver blue, silver bronze, silver pearl and silver violet, and in five sizes:  $\frac{3}{8}$ -,  $\frac{1}{2}$ -,  $\frac{3}{4}$ -, 1- and  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce.

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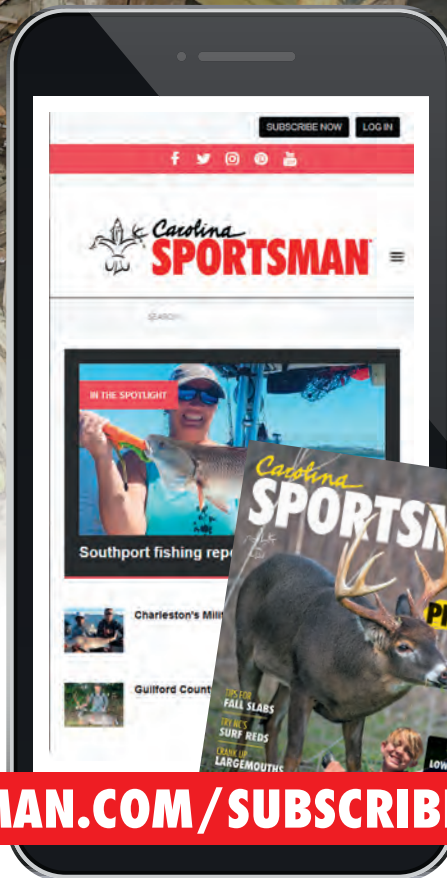
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## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

Every now and then, an idea comes to mind that won't go away. That's what happened with this recipe. The idea popped up one day in a conversation that about chicken pot pies and tater tots, and it wouldn't be denied. I think most sportsmen agree that venison is tasty, and many people enjoy tater tots, so it was natural to combine the two.

Winters in the Carolinas typically aren't harsh, but there are days when the weather gets raw, and it's nice to have some warm, comfort food. This is comfort food at its best. It's another way to use some of the venison harvested before deer season closed.

Most years, I feature a soup or stew in January. Those can be left in the hunting shack in a crock pot, set to serve when you return from a morning or afternoon afield. This takes a little more time to prepare but warms well, so leftovers can still be carried to the hunting or fishing camp. And it's just a little more fun to eat. Most hunters like venison, creamy soups and tater tots. This recipe combines those in a mixture that is good, good for you and tends to create humorous conversations regarding the combination.

Many hunters would eat venison at every meal, but children, wives and other significant others often require more variety. This is a nice option that often gets youngsters or squeamish adults to try venison because they like tater tots. It's a nice, full-flavored mixture, as it includes fresh mushrooms, tomatoes, peppers and cream of mushroom soup.

This recipe is good anytime, but especially so for those cold, winter days. It's a good substitute for chili while watching basketball on TV. I make this with ground venison, but expect it would also be tasty using the trimmings from cleaning and processing a deer that are usually saved as stew meat. As with any recipes, feel free to adjust the seasoning or any ingredient to suit personal tastes. This mixture makes two pies, and the reason you need to make two will become fully apparent once you taste it. ■

## VENISON TOT PIE

WARM THINGS UP WITH SOME GREAT COMFORT FOOD

# VENISON TOT PIE

Welcome to another fun installment of Captain Jerry's fun foods from game and fish. I guess it's possible to not enjoy this, but you would have to not like either venison or tater tots. They're pretty much the two ingredients that shouldn't change, while the others may be adjusted to better suit personal tastes.

My wife laughs whenever I mention using tater tots in a recipe, but she began slowly coming around to liking this when I showed her how the tots formed the pie crust. She still picks out all the jalapenos, which is one of the reasons I use brightly colored bell peppers instead of green. I also think the brightly colored bell peppers tend to be milder and sweeter than the green ones.

A friend said I was only making venison chili and pouring it into a tater tot crust. That's an interesting idea but isn't correct. This has more of a beef-stew flavor, but I think chili would be an excellent filler for the tater tot crust.

This is filling and warming, which makes it ideal for a meal or snack on a cold, January day. If you would prefer a more robust taste,

add another jalapeno, some cayenne pepper or maybe some hot sauce. I add the hot sauce on my plate; this goes well with Valentina and Trader Joe's Chili Pepper sauces. The Trader Joe's sauce has more of a vinegar base, while there is almost no vinegar taste in the Valentina sauce.

If everything isn't eaten at the first meal, this reheats well, but it seems to respond better to a slow warming at 250 degrees in the oven. The microwave tends to make the tater tots a bit soggy. I warm this slowly and let it take 30 minutes or so to get up to temperature in the oven.

I prefer to cook the stove-top part in a cast-iron pot; it works better for browning the meat, sautéing the vegetables and bringing the ingredients up to temperature while mixing the bouillon throughout. Cast iron distributes the heat; there aren't hot spots right over the burner rings at medium and medium high settings.

Keep this recipe in mind and give it a try sometime this winter when you would ordinarily cook a soup or stew. I guarantee it will warm you up and it's a good hearty and filling combination. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound ground venison**
- 1 large bag of tater tots**
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup**
- 1 pack of fresh, sliced mushrooms**
- 1 can diced tomatoes**
- 1 large sweet onion**
- 1 bell pepper, red, orange or yellow**
- 2 jalapeno peppers**
- 4 slices mild cheddar cheese**
- 1 tsp minced garlic**
- 1 tsp Better Than Bouillon Roasted Beef Base**
- Cavender's All Purpose Greek Seasoning**
- Coarse ground black pepper**
- Non-stick cooking spray**
- 9-inch, deep-dish Pyrex pie plate, deep frying pan.**

## PREPARATION:

Lightly defrost 5 cups of tater tots (until they are soft enough to compress). Preheat oven to temperature suggested in tater tots' instructions. Spray pie plate with non-stick coating, then cover bottom with tater tots and compress to approximately half thickness to form the bottom crust. Use partial tots to fill any holes. Stand tater tots on end around edge of pie plate and add 6 to 8 loose tots in the bottom of the plate. Cook tater tots two-thirds of the time suggested in the instructions.

Chop the onion, bell pepper, jalapenos and mushrooms. Mix garlic with venison and season with Cavender's and black pepper, then lightly brown venison in deep cast iron frying pan. Remove venison from pan and set aside. Pour off venison drippings except for enough to lightly cover the bottom of the frying pan. Season peppers and onions with Cavender's and black pepper (to taste) and sauté in venison drippings. Add mushrooms to peppers and onions and stir often for a minute or two.

Drain the tomatoes and add them, the cream of mushroom soup and the Better Than Bouillon to the vegetables in the frying pan. Stir the mixture well, then slowly stir in the venison until all is mixed well. Cook on medium, stirring often, until warm all the way through. Spoon the venison and vegetable mixture into the pie plate to the top of the tater tots ringing the pan and bake at 350 for 15 to 20 minutes. Be careful not to overcook the tater tots.

Cover the pie filling (but not tots) with cheese and place the extra tots saved from earlier on the cheese, then put the pie back in the oven for a few minutes to melt the



Jerry Dilsaver

cheese. Remove from the oven and allow the pie to set for 3 to 5 minutes before serving. Serve while warm.

This is actually a complete meal in itself. I like salads and usually begin with a green salad or lettuce wedge. A warm roll or slice of hearty bread is also a good addition.

I usually forgo the bread and save room for a slice of warm pecan or apple pie for dessert. Don't forget a scoop of ice cream on the pie. ■



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

## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Guide Brett Mitchell said Santee Cooper's blue catfish go on a feeding frenzy when baitfish flutter to the bottom because of the cold water.



# COLD CATFISH EQUATION

Terry Madewell

COLD WATER MAKES FOR GREAT FISHING ON SANTEE COOPER LAKES

**C**old air and water temperatures, combined with a north wind, can make fishing the Santee Cooper lakes uncomfortable and difficult during January, but the reward for toughing it out is excellent fishing for some species.

Forecasting fishing can also be tough because not all Januaries are created equal. Bitterly cold weather can plunge the water temperature into the low 40s, creating tough fishing for some species — but not for blue catfish.

Action will vary from good to sensational in late December through January.

Guide Brett Mitchell said that during warm winters, drift-fishing will continue to be a productive technique as it was through the fall, although most fish will be caught in deeper water.

“Regardless of how the water tempera-

ture plays out, the catfish are going to be focused on food,” Mitchell said. “And at this time of the year, the favored forage will be threadfin shad clusters found in both lakes. Find these pods of baitfish, and odds are good blue catfish are nearby feeding on them.”

Mitchell (903-379-7029) said white perch will typically be feasting on the shad, and until the water gets really cold, catfish will eat perch and shad.

“Both lakes produce excellent fishing,” Mitchell said. “On Lake Marion, the lower end of the lake seems best for winter fishing, and on Moultrie, the humps and drops that are near deep water, often 30 to 50 feet, are prime areas to check.”

## BAITFISH FEAST

Mitchell will use white perch, herring and shad as his primary baits when drift-

fishing. He'll work channels and ledges in Lake Marion and drift humps and deep holes in Lake Moultrie.

If the water temperature dips into the mid-40s, the scattered pods of shad tend to combine into huge masses, the perfect post-Christmas feast for blue catfish. At this time, smaller threadfin shad are difficult to beat as the primary bait.

“When the cold water causes the shad to begin to die off, it triggers the blues to key on them as their primary forage,” said Mitchell, who said that as shad struggle in the cold water, they begin to flutter 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.

the bottom, where voracious blues will be waiting on them. He simulates that reality by dropping multiple shad on a hook to a catfish's eyeball level.

"In this scenario, anglers can anchor so the boat sits over the targeted shad schools and sit on these places and fish vertically," he said.

Before fishing, find a school of shad you're not targeting to fish and catch your bait. One good throw of a cast net should provide all the bait you need for the trip.

Mitchell ties on a circle hook or Eagle Claw live-bait hook with a 1- to 2-ounce sinker about 12 to 18 inches above the hook. He uses at least 30-pound test line and loads the hook with multiple threadfin shad before dropping the rig to the depth of the bottom of the baitfish schools on his depth finder.

If the rig bumps the bottom, turn the reel handle about three times and set the rod in a rod holder or keep it in your hand. A hard-charging blue will snatch it into the water if unattended.

When fishing multiple rods, it's not uncommon to have multiple fish hooked and fish flopping on the bottom of the boat. Sort the mess out, put out more baits and do it again.

Mitchell said this is fun fishing at a very productive time, and plenty of great, eating-sized fish can be caught. Big fish are also caught using the same rig.

A warm January when the water temperature doesn't dip below the low-50s



Terry Madewell

### LIVE IS NO JIVE:

Live bait will produce some nice striped bass in the Santee Cooper lakes in January in many of the same ways that cut bait produces good catfish action. Locate pods of baitfish and get your baits in front of them, either by drifting or fishing vertically.

can mean good action on striped bass.

Guide Kevin Davis at Blacks Camp said striper action is best near the deeper water on either lake, with the lower end of Lake Marion and the area near the Pinopolis Dam on Lake Moultrie being his top picks for consistent action.

Davis (843-312-3080) prefers fishing deep water in January because that's where the primary striper forage is located.

"Several baits can work on stripers with herring, gizzard or threadfin shad all effective," said Davis, who uses his graph to mark pods of baitfish; stripers will be marked around them. He lowers the live bait to the level he's marked fish on the graph and uses multiple rods when drifting live bait.

"If the bait and fish are in a small area, I'll spot-lock the electric motor on them. If in a wider area I'll drift over them," he said. "Some topwater schooling can occur, so keep those rigs handy even in the cold weather." ■

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## HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

Brown trout (opposite page) love bigger streams and waters like South Carolina's Horsepasture River in the Gorges State Park.

# THE MAGNIFICENT BROWN TROUT

GERMAN IMMIGRANT HAS TAKEN OVER THE TROUT WORLD

Wesley Satterwhite

**T**he brown trout is the undisputed king of trout fishing, particularly in the East where it first established a foothold.

Beautifully colored, a prodigious fighter and a challenge to catch, brown trout populate streams throughout the United States and streams and lakes throughout the world, even in unlikely places as Afghanistan, Pakistan and South Africa.

A member of the salmon family, *Salmo trutta*, its markings are distinctive: dark, red dots surrounded by halos cover its back and sides from tail to head; an uninterrupted stretch of golden yellow covers its stomach and fins. Unlike the brook trout, a true American native, the brown is a migrant species, shipped in from Germany more than 100 years ago because of the persistence of a New York fish farmer.

## THE BEGINNINGS

Fred Mather, a fish culturist and the father of brown-trout fishing in the

United States, first worked with the newly formed U.S. Fish Commission in the late 1800s, hatching shad, grayling and sea bass at his hatchery in Honeoya Falls, N.Y. On a trip to Germany to deliver salmon eggs, he met Lucius von Behr, president of the German Fishing Society, and became intrigued with the idea of transporting brown trout eggs to America. After several unsuccessful attempts to ship them, he developed a refrigerated container to keep eggs alive during their journey from Germany.

In 1883, the U.S. Fish Commission released an initial batch of 4,900 fry in the Baldwin River in Michigan, a tributary of Pere Marquette River. The initial release was so successful that the Commission began stocking browns in other streams. Soon, everyone wanted brown trout, and by 1900, they populated thousands of streams in 38 states.

German browns eventually were mixed with Loch Levin brown trout from Scotland, and the new strain became

known as the "American brown trout." The only discernible difference in the two is that the Loch Levin browns have all dark spots on their backs and sides.

## TROUT LITERATURE

Writers have been extolling the virtues of brown trout fishing since 200 A.D, when a Roman, Aelian, described "a fish with speckled skin" in "On the Nature of Animals." Thirteen hundred years later, Dame Juliana Berners of England wrote about brown trout in her "Treatyse of Fysshng wyth an Angle" in 1496. Izaak Walton included brown trout in his "Compleat Angler" in 1653, and anglers have been writing about brown trout fishing ever since.



**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.



Wesley Satterwhite

## FISH FOR BROWNS

Brown trout can thrive in marginal waters where brook trout and rainbow trout cannot, and they grow larger, primarily because of their diverse diet. They feed on invertebrates, crustaceans, darters, sculpins, frogs, minnows and the young of other trout. The world record for a brown is 42.1 pounds, caught in New Zealand, surpassing the previous record, a 41.7-pound brown caught in the Manistee River in Michigan. The state record for South Carolina is 17 pounds, 9½ ounces, caught in Lake Jocassee in 1987. The North Carolina record is 24 pounds, 10 ounces, caught in the Nantahala River in 1998.

Browns prefer big water and deep pools, holding in areas with adequate hiding places to ambush their prey. Large dry flies, streamers, spinning lures, jigs and minnow imitations are the preferred lures for catching browns.

Top brown trout waters in South Carolina are Lake Jocassee, Chattooga River, Thompson River and Whitewater River. In North Carolina, notable brown trout streams are Hazel Creek, Deep Creek, Nantahala River, Toe River and Horsepasture River.

## PROPAGATION, STOCKINGS

Like brook trout, brown trout spawn in the fall, migrating to tributaries to lay thousands of eggs. Biologists say that only one egg in a thousand survives to fry size. Once they reach fingerling size, however, they mature quickly. Average life span for a brown is five years. The longest recorded lifespan is 20 years.

Browns are stocked in hatchery-supported waters in South Carolina and in hatchery-supported and delayed-harvest waters in North Carolina. South Carolina stockings mostly are fingerlings. North Carolina stockers are larger adults and are stocked in fewer numbers than brook and rainbow trout.

Whether stocked or wild, brown trout fishing offers the rare opportunity of catching a trophy-size trout, and the king of the trout world. ■

### HUNTING SEASONS

#### DEER

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

#### BEAR

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

#### SQUIRREL

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

#### RABBIT

Oct. 14-Feb. 28, 2020

#### RACCOON, OPOSSUM

Oct. 14-Feb. 29, 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.

#### WOODCOCK

Dec. 7-Jan. 28, 2020



# A LOOK AT 2020'S NEW HUNTING BOWS

MATHEWS, HOYT AND BOWTECH HAVE IMPRESSIVE NEW MODELS NOW AVAILABLE

New bows for 2020 from (left to right): Bowtech, Hoyt and Mathews.

**N**ovember is one of my favorite months for several reasons, but perhaps none bigger than the launch by most manufacturers of the next year's new compound bows.

I eagerly await for them to reveal their newest technologies, much like a kid on Christmas Eve waits to open presents the next morning. Technology moves fast in this industry, with some years seeing far more advancement than others — 2020 is one of those years.

Although there are many quality bow manufacturers in today's marketplace, I am focusing on Mathews, Hoyt and Bowtech, what I call "The Big Three." These manufacturers are in it for the long haul and consistently produce quality bows that push the envelope when it comes to new technology. All have a solid offering for 2020, making it a tough decision when choosing a new bow.

For 2020, Mathews' flagship hunting bow is the VXR, which is offered in two axle-to-axle lengths: 28 and 31½ inches. This bow builds on Mathews' revolutionary Switchweight Technology by using the Crosscentric Cam with Switchweight Modules. This cam system allows the archer to adjust the peak draw weight

of his/her bow from 60 to 75 pounds in 5-pound increments, all without losing any efficiency, by simply changing the cam modules. Draw length and let-off can be adjusted as well.

The VXR features Mathews' new Extended Bridged Riser, which contains six bridges for increased length, stability and rigidity in key areas, while reducing weight at the same time. The 3D damping has been extended forward to optimize its effects and provide better balance. The popular Engage Grip helps promote proper hand position and reduce torque. Once again, the riser includes the Integrate Rest mounting system, which is a dovetail machined on the back of the riser, allowing a QAD integrate rest to be mounted.

Mathews has always been known for quiet, smooth-shooting bows, and the VXR takes this to another level. There is **ZERO** movement or hand shock at the shot. This bow is crazy quiet and sounds like it is a black hole that actually absorbs noise. Its quietness is furthered by the new Enhanced Stabilizer Bushing, which is enlarged and has a concave face, increasing the stiffness of any forward stabilizer by 10%. The VXR 28 is available in draw lengths from 25½ to 30 inches,

while the VXR 31½ is available in 26½- to 31-inch offerings, a fit for virtually any archer. Perhaps the coolest feature of the VXR is the new, optional Silent Connect System (SCS) Kit, which allows for quick and silent attachment of the new Mathews Genuine bow rope and bow sling. These screw onto the back of the limb pockets and add very little weight, while providing a streamlined, neat attachment point for those accessories. The last new feature is actually a new color "Green Ambush," best described as a powder-coat, duck-boat green — really cool. This has been the best seller in our shop so far.

Not to be outdone, Hoyt has built on its REDWRX series with the new RX-4 carbon riser bow. The RX-4 is Hoyt's shortest hunting bow ever, and at only a 29½-inch axle-to-axle length will be extremely maneuverable in both the tree stand and ground blind.

Hoyt offers the same in an aluminum



**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).

# STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

## 2019-2020 SOUTH CAROLINA HUNTING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.  
Please refer to SCDNR's  
Rules & Regulations Digest.

riser bow called the AXIUS. Both bows feature the new ZTR cam system, which has a more solid back wall and is the quietest, smoothest cam Hoyt has ever produced. I was blown away by how much smoother these bows shoot than last year's bows.

Both models feature Hoyt's patented adjustable grip system, which allows the shooter to customize the grip location to aid in tuning. These bows feature Fuse strings and cables that are low stretch and minimize peep rotation. New for this year, Hoyt features the Integrate Rest Mounting System, this eliminates the rest bracket, making for a cleaner, lighter, lower-profile rest attachment. Hoyt also offers a new color for 2020, Under Armour Forest, which has been extremely popular in other brands.

For 2020, Bowtech offers the Revolt and Revolt-X. These bows feature the Deadlock Cam System, one of the most innovative cam systems I've ever seen. It allows the use of an Allen wrench to precisely adjust the cams left and right on the axles for perfect alignment. This focuses the energy directly in line with the arrow for perfect arrow flight. This adjustment can then be locked down securely for permanent repeatable accuracy.

These bows also feature the Deadlock limb pockets, which lock every component in the entire bow structure as one to ensure maximum accuracy. I love the grips which are comfortable and virtually eliminate torque.

The Revolt is 30 inches axle-to-axle with a 7½-inch brace height, making it extremely forgiving. The Revolt-X is 33 inches axle-to-axle with a 6½-inch brace height. Both bows are adjustable from 26- to 31-inch draw lengths.

Do yourself a favor and go test shoot this year's new class of bows, I can guarantee you'll be impressed with them all. ■



Mathews' EHS damping system has been changed to improve balance.

Sammy Romano

### HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND)	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 2-7, Sept. 8-Oct. 12 Nov. 16-30, Dec. 28-Jan. 30, 2020	15	45
Crow	Nov. 1-March 1, 2020	No limits	
Quail	Nov. 20-March 1, 2020	12	36
Rabbit	Nov. 23-March 1, 2020	5	15
Squirrel	Oct. 1-March 1, 2020	10	30
Fox	Nov. 23-March 1, 2020	No limits	
Grouse	Nov. 23-March 1, 2020 (Game Zone 1 only)	3	9
Raccoon	Sept. 15-March 15, 2020 (statewide)	3 raccoons per party	
Opossum	Sept. 15-March 15, 2020 (Game Zones 3, 6)	No limits	
Other furbearers	Nov. 26-March 1, 2020 (bobcat, otter, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk)	No limits	
Bear	Oct. 17-23 (still hunting only) (Game Zone 1 only) Oct. 24-30 (dogs), (Game Zone 1 only) Oct. 17-30 (Horry, Georgetown, Marion, Williamsburg counties) 1 (permit only)	1 5 per party	
Rails	Sept. 27-Oct. 2, King & Clapper Sora & Virginia Gallinules (common/purple)	15 25 15	45 75 45
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28, 2020	8	24
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31, 2020	3	9
Wild Turkey	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
1		Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2020
2	Sept. 15-30	Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2020
3			Aug. 15-Jan. 1, 2020
4	Aug 15-31		Sept. 1-Jan. 1, 2020
Youth Day			Jan. 6, 2020

### WATERFOWL SEASONS

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

## SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

It took the author several years of catching big trout like this one before he was able to pinpoint when big trout most like to feed.

# LOOK OUT THE 'WINDOW'

BIG SPECKLED TROUT HAVE PARTICULAR TIMES THEY FEED DURING THE MOON CYCLE. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR SUCCESS AND FRIENDS' SUCCESSES AND PINPOINT WHEN THAT BIG-FISH FEEDING WINDOW OPENS

**W**ith the holidays in our rear-view mirrors, it's only fitting that we deal this month with some sort of diet intervention, particularly a tryptophan detox. While catching up with my father over a cold beer, we started talking about one of my favorite sayings: "Feed the Machine."

The phrase, although not original, is used in an original sense. During my time on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I coined the phrase, with intent to describe big-trout feeding windows. In other words, it touches on getting in on the action while the getting's good.

Mike McBride, a legendary Texas trout angler, friend and fishing mentor, once said to me that his mission — while guiding all those years — became one of proving theories, right or wrong, but more or less searching for the science of it all. "Feeding the Machine" fit that narrative. It was indescribable, but the

meaning was never clearer. I believe that big-trout feeding windows are fairly scientific. Variables like moon phase and solunar, water levels and water temperature are just a few that play a part in opening the window. However, one observation I couldn't pinpoint, other than my stupid slogan, was when the big-fish feeding window was open, it was **OPEN**.

## START TAKING NOTES

Here's my challenge to you. Let's face it; we're all pretty addicted to some form of social media, and chances are, if you're reading this, you like to fish. I encourage you to start paying close attention to your social-media feed and the fishing pictures many of your friends post. What you will find is that quantities of small fish in those pictures will be found throughout the month. However, start noticing that twice monthly in a 3- to 5-day span, larger fish will start popping

up on your news feed. Whether it's at the cleaning tables or on the water, these micro windows start to appear.

The benefit of having Speckled Truth is the volume of anglers I interact with from various states and fisheries. What I've found is that big fish feeding windows are immune to state lines. In other words, when the bite window is open, I'll see photos of big fish being caught in North Carolina, at the same time friends from Florida, Alabama or Texas are also on an epic big-fish run.

Personally, while on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I fished so often that I even narrowed down the window. Both big-fish feeding windows appeared



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

monthly on the two days preceding and four days after a full or a new moon. Almost 150 trips validated that trend while I winter-waded at night along the coast. Trip after trip, I'd come home empty handed in areas that would produce big fish consistently. Intellectually, which was always a struggle for me anyway, I couldn't put together why some nights were better than others.

## NOTICE TRENDS

With sheer determination, I fished until I saw the trend. I'd go from catching one, maybe two, mid-teen fish to, all of the sudden, catching three 7-pound trout, as well as a handful over 5, in a week's time. Shockingly, I finally then did something smart: I started documenting trip's outcomes: failures and successes. Then, and only then, after stepping back and looking at it holistically, I saw these windows take shape. With my newfound knowledge, I joked with my wife about doing whatever was necessary to go "Feed the Machine."

Whether I had to bathe the dog twice or wash the car in a bikini top, I didn't care. My goal was to catch the biggest trout possible, and if weather was conducive during those times, I was out there giving myself the best chance at a big fish. Why? Because they were vulnerable to making a mistake.

Last, let me remind you that I lived in Biloxi from 2009 to 2013. Since that time, I've seen and fished similar trends not only here on the Texas coast, but in Florida as well. My point is they exist. Social media gives you those glimpses, and chances are there is a scientific explanation. However, if you're serious about catching big fish, start targeting them during these windows.

So in closing, be observant both at home and on the water to



### TIMING IS EVERYTHING FOR TROUT:

Several years of record-keeping on the author's part brought him to the belief that big speckled trout, real trophies, are more likely to bite during several distinct feeding windows: from two days before to four days after a full or new moon.

what is going on in your estuary. Challenge yourself to explore more and get in tune with these big-fish feeding windows. After all, once its open all that is left to do is...Feed the Machine! ■



**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-Moon, 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).

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MOON	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD		MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT						
Jan 1	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	21	11:37 am	4:32 pm - 6:24 pm	11:24 pm	4:22 am - 6:00 am	Apogee
Jan 2	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	35	12:05 pm	5:05 pm - 7:13 pm	12:19 am	4:57 am - 6:49 am	HALF
Jan 3	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	28	12:32 pm	5:37 pm - 8:03 pm	12:19 am	5:30 am - 7:38 am	HALF
Jan 4	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	27	1:00 pm	6:11 pm - 8:53 pm	1:14 am	6:02 am - 8:28 am	HALF
Jan 5	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	31	1:30 pm	6:48 pm - 9:44 pm	2:11 am	6:36 am - 9:18 am	HALF
Jan 6	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	34	2:04 pm	7:28 pm - 10:38 pm	3:09 am	7:13 am - 10:09 am	HALF
Jan 7	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	47	2:43 pm	8:14 pm - 11:36 pm	4:10 am	7:53 am - 11:03 am	HALF
Jan 8	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	59	3:28 pm	9:05 pm - 12:35 am	5:12 am	8:39 am - 12:01 pm	HALF
Jan 9	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	71	4:21 pm	10:02 pm - 1:34 am	6:14 am	9:30 am - 1:00 pm	HIGH
Jan 10	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	76	5:22 pm	11:03 pm - Midnight	7:14 am	10:27 am - 1:59 pm	FULL
Jan 11	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	67	6:28 pm	Midnight - 2:33 am	8:10 am	11:28 am - 2:58 pm	HALF
Jan 12	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	58	7:38 pm	12:06 am - 3:28 am	8:59 am	12:31 pm - 3:53 pm	HALF
Jan 13	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	47	8:48 pm	1:09 am - 4:19 am	9:42 am	1:34 pm - 4:44 pm	Perigee
Jan 14	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	38	9:57 pm	2:13 am - 5:05 am	10:21 am	2:38 pm - 5:30 pm	HALF
Jan 15	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	34	11:05 pm	3:15 am - 5:47 am	10:56 am	3:40 pm - 6:12 pm	HALF
Jan 16	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	35		4:16 am - 6:28 am	11:30 am	4:41 pm - 6:53 pm	HALF
Jan 17	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	42	12:12 am	5:14 am - 7:10 am	12:03 pm	5:39 pm - 7:35 pm	HALF
Jan 18	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	28	1:18 am	6:14 am - 7:50 am	12:38 pm	6:39 pm - 8:15 pm	HALF
Jan 19	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	20	2:24 am	7:14 am - 8:32 am	1:16 pm	7:39 pm - 8:57 pm	HALF
Jan 20	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	18	3:29 am	8:11 am - 9:19 am	1:57 pm	8:36 pm - 9:44 pm	HALF
Jan 21	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	25	4:32 am	9:10 am - 10:08 am	2:43 pm	9:35 pm - 10:33 pm	HALF
Jan 22	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	34	5:32 am	10:05 am - 11:01 am	3:34 pm	10:30 pm - 11:26 pm	LOW
Jan 23	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	43	6:27 am	10:59 am - 11:55 am	4:29 pm	11:24 pm - Midnight	HALF
Jan 24	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	47	7:15 am	11:50 am - 12:48 pm	5:26 pm	Midnight - 12:20 am	NEW
Jan 25	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	38	7:58 am	12:35 pm - 1:43 pm	6:25 pm	12:15 am - 1:13 am	HALF
Jan 26	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	29	8:35 am	1:17 pm - 2:35 pm	7:23 pm	1:00 am - 2:08 am	HALF
Jan 27	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	21	9:08 am	1:55 pm - 3:27 pm	8:19 pm	1:42 am - 3:00 am	HALF
Jan 28	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	19	9:38 am	2:29 pm - 4:17 pm	9:15 pm	2:20 am - 3:52 am	HALF
Jan 29	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	22	10:06 am	3:03 pm - 5:05 pm	10:09 pm	2:54 am - 4:42 am	Apogee
Jan 30	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	25	10:33 am	3:36 pm - 5:54 pm	11:04 pm	3:28 am - 5:30 am	HALF
Jan 31	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	34	11:00 am	4:08 pm - 6:44 pm	11:59 pm	4:01 am - 6:19 am	HALF

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Kerr Lake, on the North Carolina-Virginia border, is full of big, hungry blue catfish, and winter is a great time to target them.

## Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

# JANUARY: BIG TIME FOR BIG CATFISH

kerrcrappieandcats.com

### Kerr Lake's big blues don't slow down much in colder weather

**G**uide Chris Bullock said you won't catch many blue cats in January at Kerr Lake, aka Buggs Island, but the ones you do catch will have some bulk to them.

"Heavy blues are like heavy people," said Bullock ([www.kerrcrappieandcats.com](http://www.kerrcrappieandcats.com)). "They's got to keep eating to keep their figures. They can't go days without dining like smaller catfish. That's why smaller blues are difficult to catch in the winter. They can go weeks without eating."

For big blues, Bullock, who is from Fountain, N.C., uses big tackle. He mounts 15 to 16 Shakespeare 7-foot Ugly Stik bait-casting and spinning rods designed for catfishing around his pontoon boat. The baitcasting rods hold Ambassador 6500 reels and the spinning rods Okuma bait-runner reels, both spooled with 65-pound monofilament.

The main line carries either a 3-ounce pyramid sinker or a no-roll flat sinker. The sinker weight may vary depending upon the wind and current. The pyramid weight is used for flat terrain and the no-roll sinker for ledges and drops.

A 2-to 3-foot leader of 40-pound monofilament is connected to the main line via a swivel, with a No. 10/0 circle hook at the end of the leader. About 6 to 9 inches from the hook, Bullock attaches an in-line float to keep the bait off the bottom.

"It's your basic Santee rig, only beefed up," said Bullock, who uses pieces of 3- to 4-inch shad and live shad to complete the rig.

When the water temperature ranges from 38 to 48 degrees, winter fishing for cats begins.

"Fishing is better with water temperatures in the high 40s, but cats can be caught with water temperatures in the lower 30s," Bullock said. "Just don't expect many bites."

Bullock said Buggs has no special places for cats. Electronic searches for forage in conjunction with blue cats must be made. Bullock suggests beginning these searches in one of two areas.

"If you're new to Buggs Island, begin at the mouth of Grassy Creek to the US 15 bridge, or start near the bridges at Clarksville, Va., and move upstream," he said. "In

the shallower stretches, look for forage and cats in 10 to 20 feet of water; in the deeper stretches, look for forage and cats in 30 to 50 feet of water. Target stump-laden creek channels and long, slender points with gradual drops."

Bullock said water color isn't a factor; he's caught cats in water resembling pea soup. Current is another matter. He maintains fishing is always better when the lake is being pulled; he checks the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' website schedule, which shows power-generating plans.

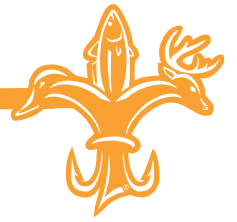
Wind is a nuisance factor since Bullock anchors to fish likely spots, distributing his rods to sample various depths.

"I fish out of a pontoon and have had special anchors made that will hold the pontoon fast in the wind and current," he said.

During a winter outing, Bullock said his clients usually catch three or four blues ranging from 20 to 40 pounds.

"If they get lucky, they might catch a trophy blue weighing 50 to 100 pounds," he said. ■

— Tony Garitta



# BAITFISH ARE KEY

## to big Clarks Hill blue catfish in January

**G**uide Chris Simpson didn't want to make an absolute statement, but he wanted to get the message across: January fishing for blue catfish on South Carolina's Clarks Hill Lake is mighty good.

"I would not say January is the absolute best month for catching big blue catfish on Clarks Hill, but it can be good," said Simpson, who lives in McCormick, S.C. "Some big fish can be caught this month — with a lot of patience."

Baitfish are the key, he said, and finding the fish depends on how cold the water gets.

"If it's cold in January, the baitfish will ball up heavily, often in the mouths of the bigger feeder creeks, but if it is really cold, they might actually ball up in the main-river channels — in the Broad River, Savannah River, South Carolina Little River and Georgia Little River."

Simpson (864-992-2352) said that if there are no big concentrations of baitfish on the main-river or creek runs, it might pay to look in the mouths or even the backs of secondary creeks and coves off the bigger channels.

"Sometimes, the main-lake situations may not be working, so

you need to look in the creeks," he said.

The best approach, he said, is to anchor around points and humps that are near the channel or even touch and drop off into it. Once anchored, fan-cast a number of rods around the boat at different depths.

"As far as the schools of baitfish, if they are really huge, it may indicate there is nothing feeding on them," Simpson said. "Sometimes finding smaller, broken-up schools may indicate the predator fish are feeding on them, and that should provide a better chance of catching fish."

Top baits include live and cut gizzard shad and white perch, he said, noting that while blueback herring will also catch large fish, it is more easily torn off the hook by smaller fish.

"Typically, this time of year you are gunning for 20-pound-plus fish. You may not catch many in a day, maybe 4, 5 or 6, but that is par for the course when you are going for bigger fish," he said.

Some days, smaller fish up to 10 pounds may be pretty active, he said, and you can catch them while waiting on the bigger fish to bite. ■

— Pat Robertson



Pat Robertson

Guide Chris Simpson first looks for Clarks Hill's blue catfish this month in the main river or creek runs.

# WAHOO TAKE OVER

Big offshore predators love January's water

**J**anuary, the middle of winter, brings chilly weather and abnormal energy bills. For some anglers in the Carolinas, the cold generates more than just a big bill. Triple-digit fuel bills several times a week can be the norm for anglers making trips to the Gulf Stream, but when monster wahoo are biting in January, another big fuel bill is well, worthwhile.

Trask Cunningham, a member of the Choice of Two/Ocean Isle Fishing Center fishing team, lives in Horry County, S.C., and fishes like it's his job — and sometimes like it's a life-or-death situation. He and teammate Corey Bellamy typically catch tournament-winning king mackerel and some massive wahoo, including one last year that pushed the 100-pound mark.

Cunningham said the January bite can be incredible.

"We have epic bites this time of year off the coast of North Myrtle Beach," Cunningham said. "Temperature shots, the time of day and moon phases have the greatest impact on winter wahoo fishing."

The week leading up to a full moon can produce an epic bite, especially when Cunningham and Bellamy find a temperature break at 74 to 76 degrees.

Cunningham and Bellamy typically fish out of Little River Inlet but will travel more than 50 miles offshore and sometimes much further to find wahoo. In January, Cunningham prefers some areas off the coast of North Carolina.

"The northern areas are best in January. The Blackjack and the Scarp are some of our favorites," he said.

Even with a long trek, an early start can be a day-maker.

"We leave early in the winter, in the dark, and are normally fishing by sunrise. The fish typically feed early, at noon, and late on a full moon," he said.

Cunningham and Bellamy use a wide assortment of rigs on both surface and deep lines on planers. They use medium to large ballyhoo rigged on a variety of Ilander trolling lures of various color combinations of purple, blue and white.

Sometimes they can pull right up and start catching fish immediately, but other times, the fish are a little hard to locate. Wahoo are highly mobile and are known to travel great distances in one day, making it tough for an angler who has already traveled 65 miles from the dock in the dark.

When the fish are scattered, Cunningham switches to searching via high-speed trolling with specialized, high-speed lures.

"High-speed trolling is a great technique this time of the year," Cunningham said. "It allows us to cover ground efficiently to find the wahoo that are stacked up over a certain area or break, and once we find a concentration of fish, we put ballyhoo back out, and it's usually non-stop action." ■

— Jeff Bureson

Big wahoo work up a big appetite in the waters off the coast of the Carolinas in January.



Trask Cunningham



## LAKE NORMAN BLUES work on cut bait around lower-lake ledges

**K**evin Custer of Statesville, N.C., a consistent winner on the N.C. Catfish Association tournament series, begins his quest for big Lake Norman blue catfish at High Rock Lake. Custer goes to High Rock to fill his bait tank, throwing a cast net. "I go to High Rock to catch shad," said Custer. "Catching bait is easier there than at Norman."

After he gets about two dozen shad, he drives to the Pinnacle Access at Norman and motors to the lower end of the lake to fish Reeds and Work creeks, two winter hot spots for hefty blues.

He uses his electronics to find drop-offs and ledges in 25 to 30 feet of water and anchors nearby in 10 to 15 feet of water. He casts his Santee-rigged baits down the sides of the ledges into deep water. He may cast a few baits in shallow water on the tops of the ledges and high spots.

The wind determines the whereabouts of bait and where Custer drops anchor.

"If the wind is blowing against the ledge, bait will pile up against the ledges and drops, and the blues will follow," Custer said. "I'll anchor in a position that allows me to cast my baits against the ledges and drops."

Custer's Santee rig is composed of a 3/8-ounce egg sinker slid on

to his main line consisting of 30- to 35-pound monofilament. A swivel connects the main line to a doubled 24-inch leader with a 3-inch in-line float placed a short distance from a No. 8/0 Gamakatsu Octopus circle hook.

"I use a 30-pound monofilament leader that's doubled for strength and that's abrasion resistant," he said. "I usually fish rocky terrain that's rough on line; plus, big blue cats are notorious for rolling and cutting your line."

Custer's stout gear consists of a 9-foot-6 Shimano TDR trolling rod that has plenty of backbone and an Ambassadeur 6500 reel. He sets out six to eight rods in rod holders.

Custer cuts fresh shad into three pieces — head, center and tail — and discards the tail pieces.

"The tail pieces aren't bloody enough to attract many cats," he said.

Custer said the colder the weather, the better the fishing. He likes the water temperature to be around 42 degrees because that's when the big fish become active.

"I've caught many 40- to 50-pound blue cats at Norman in cold weather, so bundle up accordingly," Custer said. ■

— Tony Garitta

Winter on Lake Norman usually means excellent catches of quality blue catfish.

# JANUARY=JOCASSEE

## Trolling will produce plenty of big trout

**J**anuary is a great time for catching trophy brown and rainbow trout on South Carolina's Lake Jocassee, according to guide Sam Jones of Greenville.

"The 55- to 60-degree water is right where those cold-water trout are the happiest," he said.

There is the opportunity to catch some big trout, with some of them measuring 20-plus inches. There will also be some smaller trout that must be released, he added.

"You will catch a good amount of the trout from the recent stocking that will be under the 15-inch size limit," he said. "Be sure to be gentle with them and get them back into the water as soon as you can."

Jones (864-280-9056), who has been fishing for trout on Lake Jocassee for more than 30 years, said trout can be just about anywhere on the lake in January.

"The area around the dam is a great year-round spot," he said. "The rivers and creeks hold a lot of bait in the winter and are always producing some trophy fish."

Jones said his main winter technique is to troll 20 to 40 feet deep using downriggers with Sutton, Apex, Doctor and other brands of spoons that resemble an injured baitfish. They work well, he said, along with minnow-type lures like Rapalas and live minnows trolled at the same depths.

"I also like to put a rod or two out 100 feet or so behind the boat as a flat line with shallow-diving minnow lures on them," Jones said. "Side planers also work great with the same lures." ■

— Pat Robertson

Jim Houlihan of Greenville, S.C., shows off two of the kind of trophy trout that Lake Jocassee produces during the winter.



Sam Jones

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**Jonathan Spence**

Jonathan Spence tagged this 9-point buck in January 2016 in Marion County, S.C.



**Chase Summerlin**

Chase Summerlin, 8, of Rocky Mount, N.C., killed his first buck, an 8-pointer, in Edgecombe County on Oct. 25, 2019.



**Tori Comeaux**

Darren Nichols of Rock Hill, S.C., guided Louisiana native Tori Comeaux to her first buck this past season.



**Peyton Carrington**

Peyton Carrington of Wake Forest, N.C., caught her first flounder with Butch Foster of Yeah Right Charters in Southport, N.C.



**Robbie Rose**

Robbie Rose of Wilmington, N.C., caught this 23-inch speckled trout on Oct. 7, 2019, in the Pungo River.

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

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



**David Williams**

David Williams caught and released this big flathead catfish on July 16, 2019, in the Neuse River near Seven Springs, N.C.



**Jesse Jordan**

Jesse Jordan took this 8-point buck with a brow tine that curved into its skull on Oct. 9, 2019, in North Carolina's Person County. The buck was his first with a bow.



**Randall Moss**

Randall Moss beached this 30-inch red drum, which weighed 9 pounds, 7 ounces, in the surf at North Carolina's Topsail Beach this past fall.



**Geneva Goodnight**

Geneva Goodnight caught this big red near South Carolina's Otter Island this past fall.



**Wes Robinson**

Wes Robinson caught this 6-pound sheepshead on the Lockwood Folly River near Varnumtown, N.C., on Sept. 13, 2019.



**Colt Yurigan**

Colt Yurigan, 4, landed this 10-pound, 3-ounce bass in Sept. 29 from a family farm pond near Mebane, N.C.



**Joe Anderson, Emma Ingram**

Joe Anderson and Emma Ingram caught and released these nice drum at the mouth of North Carolina's Neuse River



**Matt, Sarah Kinnion**

Matt, 7, and Sarah Kinnion, 5, caught some nice bream in a pond near Blounts Cree, N.C., in July 2019.



**Rylan Thomas**

Rylan Thomas, 8, made this nice buck his first deer last fall in Allendale County, S.C.



**Chuck Stewart**

Chuck Stewart of Stem, N.C., caught this 8-pound sheepshead on North Carolina's Outer Banks on Sept. 26, 2018.

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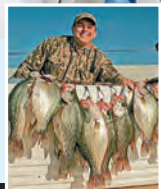
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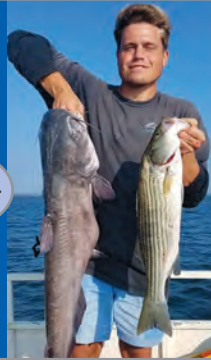
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