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16

Four top lakes for January slabs



Carolina CONTENTS

Volume 25 | Number 1 | January 2018



28

Late is great

FEATURES:

16 Four top lakes for January slabs (cover story)

A handful of Carolina lakes consistently produce crappie during the colder months, and these experts present the particulars to filling your cooler.

>>>By Terry Madewell

22 The cold truth (cover story)

Inshore winter fishing might seem difficult, unless you know the tricks veteran anglers use to tempt sluggish species to bite. Learn some of them here.

>>>By Jerry Dilsaver

28 Late is great

Duck season may be on the wane, but January brings North Carolina hunters some of the best big-water action of the season.

>>>By Dusty Wilson

33 Beat the cold

Learn how baitfish and bass adjust to changing winter weather conditions, and you'll be on the way to some great January stringers in the Carolinas.

>>>By Jeff Burleson

40 See about sea ducks

Don't miss a chance to add to your waterfowling experience. Head off the beach for a limit of unpressured sea ducks.

>>>By Jeff Burleson

46 Stem the furry flood

North Carolina hunters are trying to hold back the tide of a burgeoning coyote population.

>>>By Craig Holt

53 Something to crow about

Crow hunting is a great way to wing-shoot if you're tired of ducks and doves. Here's a primer for hunting these big, black birds.

>>>By Marty Shaffner

FISHING HOTSPOTS

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
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| 90 Falls Lake slabs | 96 High Rock stripers |
| 91 HHI redfish | 98 Georgetown specks |
| 91 Cape Fear stripers | 100 Edisto River bass |
| 92 Lake Norman crappie | 102 Grand Strand wahoo |
| 93 Lake Russell spots | |

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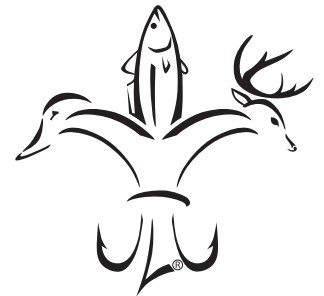
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Volume 25 | No 1

OUTDOORS UPDATE:

10 NC proposes changes to deer, bear regs

12 Check out the Big Buck Gallery

PLUS

56 Tips for catching winter trout on nymphs

ON THE COVER:



Crappie fishermen in the Carolinas have a handful of great lakes to fish in the winter, and January remains a great time to target speckled trout and reds at the coast. Photos by Dan Kibler (crappie), David Brown (trout).

DEPARTMENTS:

- 81** New Products
- 82** NC Fishing Regulations
- 83** SC Fishing Regulations
- 84** Astro Tables
- 86** NC Tide Guide
- 88** SC Tide Guide
- 90** Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook
- 106** Classifieds
- 108** Advertiser Index

COLUMNS:

- 60 Sound & Sea** By Brian Cope
- 62 Lunker Lines** By Davy Hite
- 64 Greener Pastures**
By Jeff Burselon
- 68 Small Craft Advisory**
By Phillip Gentry
- 72 Cooking on the Wild Side**
By Capt. Jerry Dilsaver
- 74 Sticks and Strings**
By Sammy Romano
- 76 Santee Stringer** By Terry Madewell
- 78 Head for the Mountains**
By Robert Satterwhite

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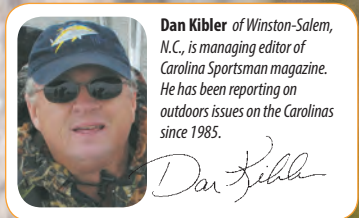
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Outdoor
UPDATE
with
Dan Kibler

North Carolina deer hunters may have to adjust to different season dates and buck bag limits across much of the state if proposed regulation changes are approved.



NC TO CHANGE DEER, BEAR REGS?

SPORTSMEN GET CHANCE TO RESPOND AT PUBLIC HEARINGS THIS MONTH

North Carolina hunters will have multiple opportunities this month to talk about proposed changes to deer- and bear-hunting regulations that have been proposed by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Nine public hearings have been sched-

uled, one in each district, between Jan. 9 and 25. At the meetings, the deer and bear proposals will likely draw the most interest among proposed changes to hunting, fishing and trapping regulations

that the Commission will vote on later, to become effective in the 2018-19 season. The deer-hunting proposals are the result of hunter responses to a 2016 mail survey, plus biological evaluations of the statewide deer herd. Hunters want to see more big bucks — “You think?!” — and

are worried about deer numbers they believe are falling.

The proposals would divide the existing Eastern deer section into Northeastern and Southeastern zones, with blackpowder and gun seasons offset by a week, the season limit on antlered bucks dropping from four to two, and the antlerless limit dropping from unlimited (with bonus antlerless deer available) to four. The

statewide limit would remain six.

In addition, blackpowder season would be cut from two weeks to one in four of the five zones, remaining at two weeks in the Southeastern zone.

Blackpowder season would start a week later in the Northwestern, Northeastern, Southeastern and Central seasons, and it would shift from early October to mid-November in the Western zone.

Proposals involving bear hunting would change bear management units in Coastal areas to match biological zones, so seasons in adjoining counties match, and move the Mountain bear season to early October to avoid an overlap with gun season for deer. For complete details, visit www.ncwildlife.org/Portals/0/Proposed%20Regulations/APPROVED_WRC_2017-09-28d_Deer%26Bear.pdf. ■

2018 NC Wildlife Public Hearings

| Date | District | City | Location |
|---------|----------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Jan. 9 | 4 | Dublin | Bladen C.C. |
| Jan. 10 | 5 | Graham | Old Alamance Courthouse |
| Jan. 11 | 6 | Albemarle | Stanley County Agri-Civic Cent. |
| Jan. 16 | 9 | Clyde | Haywood C.C. |
| Jan. 17 | 8 | Morganton | Western Piedmont C.C. |
| Jan. 18 | 7 | Elkin | Elkin H.S. |
| Jan. 23 | 1 | Edenton | Chowan County Public Safety Cent. |
| Jan. 24 | 2 | New Bern | Craven C.C. |
| Jan. 25 | 3 | Rocky Mount | Nash C.C. |

uled, one in each district, between Jan. 9 and 25. At the meetings, the deer and bear proposals will likely draw the most interest among proposed changes to hunting, fishing and trapping regulations

BAG-A-BUCK Photo Contest

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

Log onto CarolinaSportsman.com and click the bag-a-buck button

TOWNVILLE, S.C., HUNTER WINS NOVEMBER BAG-A-BUCK

Jacob Davis didn't hunt much in September or October around his Townville, S.C., home, because he didn't have many deer photos on the eight trail cameras he has out on his hunting property.

But after a neighbor showed him a trail-cam photo of a huge buck, Davis kicked off the dust, taking off work to hunt five days straight. He missed the huge buck the first day in the woods, Nov. 6, but killed him on Nov. 10.

Davis entered the 160-inch, 12-point typical in *Carolina Sportsman's* Bag-A-Buck contest, and his entry was drawn as the winner of the November contest.

His prizes are a \$25 gift certificate to the Sportsman's Online Store, and a year's subscription to the magazine. He will remain eligible, along with every other contest entrant, in the drawing for the grand prize: a three-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman*, a \$50 gift certificate to the Sportsman's Online Store, and a two-day deer-hog combo hunt for two people to Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge near Chesterfield, S.C.

Davis took the buck at 50 yards on the morning of Nov. 10 with his .308 rifle. He was hunting in a double-ladder stand on a big water oak on the edge of a 100-acre soybean field.

"I started hunting that stand when I was about 7 years old," Davis said. "I've killed a lot of bucks out of that stand."

But none bigger than his main-frame 6x6, which carried a 19-inch inside spread and tines as long as 11 inches.

"I didn't anticipate him scoring that high," Davis said. "I killed a 154-inch buck in Kentucky last year, and I didn't think this one was as big as that one. But my taxidermist said he thought he might be a 160-inch buck. He said it being a main-frame 6x6 had a lot to do with it. He said he's been doing taxidermy 30 years, and it was only the third perfect 12 he'd ever gotten in." ■



Jacob Davis killed this 12-point, 160-inch buck near his home in Townville, S.C.

SC BEAR HUNTERS HAVE BIG SEASON

South Carolina bear hunters had their second-best season on record last fall, according to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

Field reporter Glenn Corley of Richland, S.C., reported Nov. 3 on *CarolinaSportsman.com* that hunters took 108 bears — 61 boars and 47 sows — during the short, October season, a figure surpassed only by the 2013 harvest of 2013.

"It was a higher harvest than expected because of the low mast production in the higher elevations," explained Tammy Wactor, an SCDNR biologist. "The bears in the higher elevations were forced to move to the lower elevations to find food."

Still hunts accounted for 62 bears harvested, while 46 bears were taken during dog hunts.

Oconee County had the most bears taken, 46, including eight males and nine females taken by still hunters, and 17 males and 12 females by dog hunters.

Pickens County came in second with 35 bears taken. Still hunters accounted for 14 males and eight females, while dog hunters killed three males and 10 females.

Greenville County came in third with 27 bears taken, including 16 males and seven females by still hunters, and three males and one female by dog hunters.

The largest bear of the season weighed 597 pounds. Phillip Gosnell of Landrum killed the buck in Greenville County while still hunting.

Frankie Sanders of Mountain Rest took a 300-pound bear during a still hunt on public land. It was the second bear that Sanders has collected since he started hunting bears years ago. ■

GATOR SPECK

CarolinaSportsman.com user "Derek" posted this photo and report on Nov. 3.

"Alec Daneau spent his first day on the water in Pamlico Sound. It was a magical day for this young man. Outfishing everyone on the boat. Not only did he outfish us, but he also landed the slob of the day!

All in all, a great day on the water with a mix of 20+ specks, 15 reds, 12 flounder and 2 strippers.

This one blew us all out!

A 27.5-inch 6.5-lb Gator Speck.

Good job son. I couldn't be more proud.



SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Chuck Hiatt of Mount Airy, N.C., took this 140-inch 10-point buck on Sept. 18 with a crossbow.



Jeff Pierce of Grantham, N.C., took this 133-inch, Wayne County 10-pointer on Oct. 30.



Kenny Snyder of Efland, N.C., killed this 159-inch Orange County buck on Nov. 6.



Austin Hanks of Reidsville, N.C., killed this 163-inch Rockingham County buck on Nov. 10.



Cody Beaver of Durham, N.C., popped this 144-inch, 12-pointer on Nov. 5.



Brandon Campbell of Winston-Salem, N.C. killed this 145-inch Rockingham County 8-pointer on Nov. 3.



Bo Gibson's huge Rockingham County, N.C., 8-pointer carried a 25¼-inch inside spread when he took it Nov. 4.



Steve Rabon of Mocksville, N.C., killed this 151-inch buck on Nov. 20 in Surry County.



Brandon Dimont of Belews Creek, N.C., took this 11-point, 144-inch buck in Alamance County on Nov. 11.



Michael Camak of Hartsville, S.C., took this 144-inch, 11-point Darlington County buck on Nov. 8.

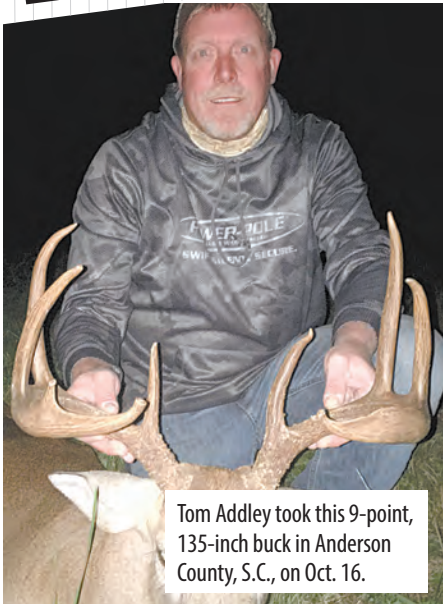


Roy McKenzie of Walhalla, S.C., took this 11-point, 148-inch buck on Nov. 11 in Oconee County.

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

more bucks... ➤

SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Tom Addeley took this 9-point, 135-inch buck in Anderson County, S.C., on Oct. 16.



Brian French of Wentworth, N.C., killed this special 8-point buck in Rockingham County on Nov. 14.



Jay Garner of Murrells Inlet, S.C., took this 140-inch, 8-point buck on Nov. 11 in Marion County.



Travis Smith of Bethany, N.C., used a muzzleloader to take this 8-point trophy in Guilford County.



Jake Oakley of Carthage, N.C., tagged this 145-inch, 13-point Harnett County on Nov. 14.



ON THE COVER

Coty Ingram of Newland, N.C., took this huge mountain trophy in Avery County. It was a 9-point, 145-inch brute, taken on Thanksgiving Day.

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The Santee Cooper lakes hold some of the best crappie populations in the Carolinas.

A handful of Carolina lakes consistently produce crappie during the colder months, and these experts present the particulars to filling your cooler.



4

top lakes for January slabs

By Terry Madewell

January may be cold in terms of weather and water temperatures, but many crappie fishermen expect to catch quality and quantities of crappies this month.

The key to cold-weather crappie fishing is that the fish are in very predictable patterns, with some lakes clearly better than others. We profiled crappie fishing at several lakes that offer excellent winter crappie fishing and secrets to success from top guides.

1 LAKE HARTWELL

A deep, clear South Carolina lake known primarily for black and striped bass, Hartwell has rightfully become known as an excellent crappie-fishing destination. The lake produces plenty of slabs and limit numbers of fish on a consistent basis.

Guide Steve Pietrykowski said January kicks off outstanding action that lasts through March; this is his favorite time of the year.

“Beginning in January, crappie fishing patterns become very predictable on Lake Hartwell,” he said. “Many fishermen are surprised at the quality of crappie fishing we enjoy here because it’s a clear lake. But from cold weather right through spring, crappie fishing is on fire, and we consistently catch limits, including plenty of slabs.”

Pietrykowski (864-353-3438) has been guiding on Lake Hartwell for 11 years and has learned the predictable patterns. He employs two primary techniques: long-line trolling in the creeks and fishing tightlines over sunken woody cover.

“Trolling enables me to cover much more water and is my go-to method when crappie are scattered,” he said. “Typically, I’ll troll with jigs and plastic grubs and will experiment with colors and size combinations daily. The speed range can be crucial and will vary from 0.7 to 1.0 miles per hour in January — and perhaps a bit faster later in the spring.”

Pietrykowski said crappies normally orient to specific targets, and he will focus on brush, submerged trees and other woody features in 10 to 30 feet of water. His preferred targets the edges of creek channels or ditches that provide a contour change in the lake bottom.

“I prefer fishing woody cover along a depth change such as a channel ledge over finding cover over a flat,” he said. “While both produce fish, the areas oriented to a depth changes hold more and larger fish and are much more likely to be consistently productive on future trips. To find fishable water, I often go well up creeks and feeder streams.”

Up in creeks, he’ll normally tight-line with multiple rods at specific depths, based on the depth of the target graphed. He uses jigs with live minnows instead of plastic grubs.

“I also use live minnows on a No. 2 hook with a large split-shot about 8 inches above as the weight,” he said. “Long rods with a fast tip and good backbone work best. I’ll graph to pinpoint the target, then use my electric motor to work over and around the object until we limit or action slows. If I need to move, I now have a pattern and will go to another target with a similar depth and cover situation and usually get right back to catching crappie.”

UP NEXT: **BADIN LAKE** ➤

Terry Madewell



Guide Steve Pietrykowski shows off the kind of crappie Lake Hartwell is capable of producing.

2 BADIN LAKE

Maynard Edwards of Lexington, N.C., operates Yadkin Lakes Guide Services; he's quick to name Badin Lake as his winter favorite for crappie.

"I think Badin Lake is great for cold-weather crappie fishing," he said. "During January and into March, this lake is productive. The key is fishing deep water near the bottom of the lake, not for suspended fish. The typical get-your-meal-ticket-punched pattern will be crappie hugging the bottom."

Edwards (336-249-6782) said fish are not always in extremely deep water, often caught in 12 to 20 feet of water and sometimes deeper.

"At times, I have to go to 30 feet and still fish near the bottom," he said. "I use my graph to will look for fish and forage, and I'll fish depths where I mark fish. But the normal winter pattern is locating fish in 12- to 20-foot depths.

"My primary winter targets are creeks and the protected coves with deep water," he said. "The fish are not always in the deepest water, but they'll usually orient to specific and unusual contours on the bottom. I like fishing humps and ledges in January."

Edwards said an ideal hump would be one whose top is in about 10 to 12 feet of water that drops to 25 to 30 feet. This area could have fish on it at some location on any given January or February day. He works down the sides and edges of the humps and drops until he finds where fish are set up that day.

Edwards said don't use poor weather as an excuse not fish; some of his best days have been when crappie were extremely deep and depth-specific in nasty weather.



High Rock is a winter sleeper lake

Guide Jerry Neely said that High Rock Lake is known more as a good warm-weather lake for crappie, but it's also a good January lake.

Guide Jerry Neely targets several lakes in January when he's crappie fishing, and he said one that can be sneaky good is High Rock Lake on North Carolina's Yadkin-Pee Dee system.

"High Rock is better known as a spring and summer lake, but I do well here during the winter," Neeley said. "The mid-lake area is a favored place, and I'll target a few different-type places."

"A favorite lure for the cold water during January is a 1/32-ounce hair jig. I'll cast to targets such as brush, logs and other woody cover in 10 to 12 feet of water," he said. "I like the hair jigs because the jig falls slower, making it more productive when the water is very cold."

Neeley (704-678-1043) said fishing deep docks can produce limits in January; he prefers docks with plenty of brush or pilings set in deep water. He'll work the pilings all the way to the bottom; and docks that have steps down into the deeper water are ideal.

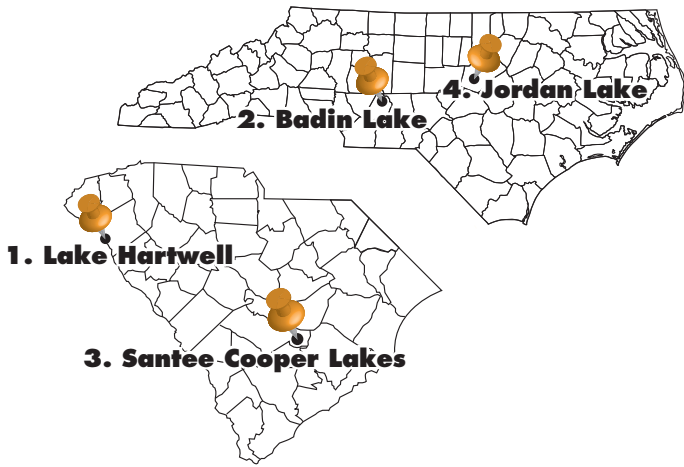
"I literally work the jig down the stair steps; often, big crappies



Terry Madewell

will hold under the steps and grab the jig as it falls," he said.

Neeley said to stay patient, because you may work several docks without a bite and then find a dock loaded with fish and catch 15 to 20 in short order. ■



“One of my best winter trips ever on Badin Lake was a day I found fish stacked up in 32 feet of water,” he said. “The amazing thing was how depth-specific they were. We caught many fish well over a pound in 32 feet of water — maybe the occasional fish at 31 feet — but we caught

Winter crappie will often produce some impressive individuals, bulked up for the upcoming spawn.



nothing when we tried 28 to 30 feet of water immediately adjacent to the 32-foot water where crappies were killing our bait. “I know many crappie fishermen that catch fish working for suspended fish during much of the year,” he said, “but at Badin Lake in the winter, I’ve found that suspended fish are the exception, and working near the bottom is the rule for consistent success.”

3 LAKE MARION/ LAKE MOULTRIE

The Santee Cooper system produces excellent year-round crappie fishing, and as January begins, experts agree that deep water is home to most of the slabs. But by the end of the month and certainly into February, crappie begin to take a turn toward shallower water.

Guide Kevin Davis, who guides out of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal, fishes both Marion and Moultrie and said January fishing is predictable.

“The primary pattern is crappies are on deep brush and other cover in depths down to 30 to 35 feet in Lake Moultrie, and usually a bit shallower in the lower end of Lake Marion,” he said. “I target open-water humps, drops and ledges in both lakes and use my graph to locate both forage and fish. If I don’t mark what I think is crappie, I’ll move. The fish do move around a bit in January, but when I get on them, we catch slab crappie in big numbers very quickly. It does often require a bit of patience.”

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Davis (843-312-3080) said after using his graph to locate a potential hot spot, he'll fish vertically over the top and side of the woody cover.

"The water may be 35 to 40 feet deep, but if the brush rises to 28 feet, that's where I begin the searching process," he said. "I work around the cover using my electric motor to maneuver the boat, and I'll fish progressively deeper along the edges until I find biting fish."

Davis uses 10- to 12-foot rods and tightlines minnows, jigs or often a jig-and-minnow combination.

"I often add a minnow to a small jig, because on some days, it simply produces more and larger crappie," he said. "Crappies bite light any time, but especially during the cold water in January, the bite can be very subtle."

Davis said the move toward the shallows is dependent on weather, but by late January, some crappie — but not all — are moving.

"I do see the gradual pattern of crappie beginning to move shallower by late-January, but I can stay on good fish action by fishing relatively deep water all month," he said.

4 JORDAN LAKE

Angler adaptability is a key aspect to winter crappie fishing success, according to Freddie Sinclair of Clayton, N.C., who has been guiding for 24 years and said Jordan Lake is his favorite January hangout.

Sinclair said depth is a focal point on any given day.

"The north end of the lake is not as deep as the lower, southern part, and fish are found near the bottom in 20 to 25 feet of water," he said. "On the lower end of the lake, it's not unusual to find fish in 30 feet, and under severe conditions occasionally as deep as 35 to 40 feet."

During the winter, Sinclair likes to target areas with depth changes including deep creek channels, humps, bends in the river and rock piles.

"Crappies are structure-oriented, and to me, structure is any change in bottom topography," he said. "Woody cover such as brush, logs, stumps and other objects tend to congregate crap-

pie on these areas. For example, a stretch of a creek-channel ledge can be potentially good, but a ledge that has cover such as brush becomes a specific target that's highly attractive to crappie in January."

Sinclair's employs the spider-rig, tightline fishing method, typically fishing from eight to 12 poles, varying in length from 12 to 16 feet. He prefers 6-pound test line.

"This rigging enables me to cover a lot of water, including different depths in the water column," he said. "I use hair jigs, jigs with curlytails and live bait, specifically small shiner minnows."

He likes black, pink, brown and orange patterns for dingy or stained water, and blue, chartreuse, red and pink for clear or slightly stained water.

Sinclair's rig enables him to work multiple depths with two-hook rigs. He ties a jig or live bait at the end and puts an egg sinker about a foot up the line. At about a foot up the line he places an egg sinker. About 18 inches above the sinker, he has a leader with another jig or hook for bait. He'll usually mix and match jig colors and live baits until he finds the daily pattern. His preferred jig sizes are 1/32- and 1/16-ounce.

"The size of egg sinker is important," he said. "I use the lightest I can on a given day, with wind being the determining factor. With light wind, I'll use a 1/4-ounce sinker and go progressively heavier to 3/4-ounce on windy days. I have two advantages with this rig: the lighter the sinker, the more bites I seem to get, and overall I prefer a smaller terminal-rig profile. It makes a difference."

"During January, I usually find the fish close to the bottom, and I key on forage and like to find threadfin shad in the area I'm fishing," he said. "I rely heavily on my electronics, and when I mark fish, I'll fish at or just above that depth."

"One of the best things about January crappie fishing at Lake Jordan is it's predictable," Sinclair said. "When I find them on a specific place, they tend to stay in that area until the water begins to warm." ■



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.



Spider-rigging with multiple rods allows anglers to cover plenty of depths and lots of water.

A crappie rig for winter fishing

Guide Maynard Edwards has a unique rig he's developed for winter crappie fishing, enabling him to fish near the bottom and suspended fish at the same time.

"I've found on Badin Lake, crappie hug the bottom during cold weather," Edwards said. "My rig is simple, and it's easy to pre-rig several to replace snagged rigs lost during a day of fishing."

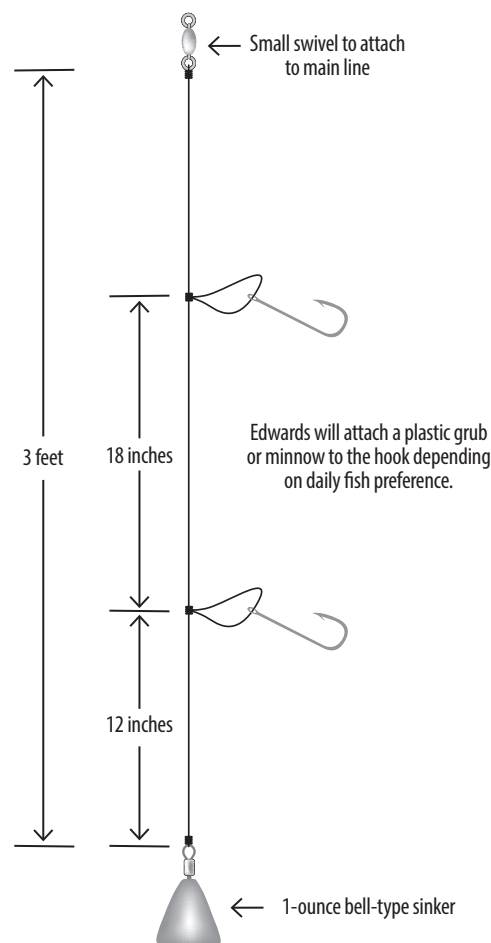
Edwards uses a 3-foot length of 10-pound line. He threads two No. 2 wire hooks on the line and then ties a small snap at the bottom. He moves the bottom hook about a foot up the line from the snap and ties the hook in a small loop. He repeats the loop-and-hook process with the second hook about 18 inches farther up the line. At the top end, he places a small swivel and ties a small snap to the end of his running line so he can

quickly connect to his pre-tied rig. He'll snap a 1-ounce bell sinker to the bottom snap when fishing.

"Once rigged, I'll put a small, curlytail grub on one of the hooks and often a live minnow on the other to determine the preference for that day," he said. "A small jig works, but since I have the weight on the bottom, a jig-head is not necessary. I usually keep the weight just off the bottom."

Edwards said he prepares multiple rigs before fishing trips.

"When crappie fishing, snags occur and I'll have about a dozen (tied around) a 12-inch piece of a swim noodle stored in my boat," he said. "I simply roll them around the noodle and secure them with a cheap safety pin. It's a simple but highly effective winter crappie rig." ■





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Guide Mark Stacy uses oily baits in winter to spread scent in the water and attract cold-loving redfish like this one.



Jerry Dilsaver

THE COLD WINTER



By Jerry Dilsaver

INSHORE WINTER FISHING MIGHT SEEM DIFFICULT, UNLESS YOU KNOW THE TRICKS VETERAN ANGLERS USE TO TEMPT SLUGGISH SPECIES TO BITE. LEARN SOME OF THEM HERE.

Pointing up a small channel to the light ripples in a patch of busy water, Mike Eady of Yak Fishing and Outdoor Guides cautioned the fishermen in his party to move slowly and carefully until they were in casting range of the disturbance. Eady said redfish were most likely the target, and while a bit sluggish in the cold, January water, they were on high alert in the shallows and would spook easily.

“Our winter fishing is a bit of a challenge, especially for reds in the shallow creeks” Eady said. “You have to get within casting range without spooking them and then cast something they want to eat. We use a lot of natural baits to get some scent in the water, but we use lures at times, too. With natural baits, you can let them sit and rely on the scent to draw strikes, but you have to move lures, and the colder the water, the slower you have to fish them.”

Eady and his partners, Johnny Wigfall and Mike Kachman, (www.yakoutdoorguides.com) offer kayak, boat and kayak mothership fishing. They concentrate on the waters of Murrells Inlet, S.C., all year, but especially once the water cools. It’s a unique body of water; it has no inland streams feeding it, but the ocean is Murrells Inlet’s main water sources.

This gives fishermen some diverse water to fish in a small area. It begins with the jetties at the inlet, some sandy bottom near them and then oyster beds and mud bottoms deeper in the estuary. The water begins at ocean temperature and may warm a handful of degrees in the headwaters of the creeks, especially with a mid-day low tide on a sunny day.

“During the winter, we target red drum, speckled trout and black drum,” Eady said. “We also occasionally catch some flounder, weakfish (gray trout) and tautog. Our main

natural baits are whole shrimp, pieces of shrimp, pieces of cut bait and pieces of mullet minnows and menhaden. These baits have natural oils that will spread their scent through the water with the tide or current, and it often gets fish’s attention and leads them to the bait.

“We fish these baits on a combination of Carolina rigs and single-drop rigs. Our rigs are made of 25- to 30-pound fluorocarbon to help disappear in the clearer, winter water, and the slightly stronger line helps pull fish out of holes in the jetties and off the oyster rocks. The biggest difference with our Carolina rigs is they are shorter from the swivel to the hook, maybe 6 to 8 inches; this helps prevent fish from tangling and breaking off.”

Eady said his single-drop rigs are made of 25- to 30-pound fluoro and feature a 3-way swivel. The bottom leg drops 6 to 8 inches to a loop where a banks sinker is attached. This sinker doesn’t hang up badly and holds pretty well with only a couple of ounces. Much like the Carolina rig, the drop from the middle eye to the extra long-shank hook is only about 6 inches. The shorter leader holds the bait just off the bottom and helps prevent hang-ups. The difference isn’t much, but Eady said there are days and locations when this rig gets strikes while the Carolina rig doesn’t.

Eady said the action sometimes begins in the ocean, with black drum and sheepshead on the nearshore artificial reefs. They like live fiddler crabs, which are scarce but can be caught on warm, sunny days. When fiddler crabs aren’t available, he uses frozen sand fleas, aka mole crabs, and pieces of shrimp. Black drum will eat pieces of frozen mullet, and sheepshead sometimes will. There are occasionally some weakfish feeding with the drum and sheepshead.



THE COLD TRUTH



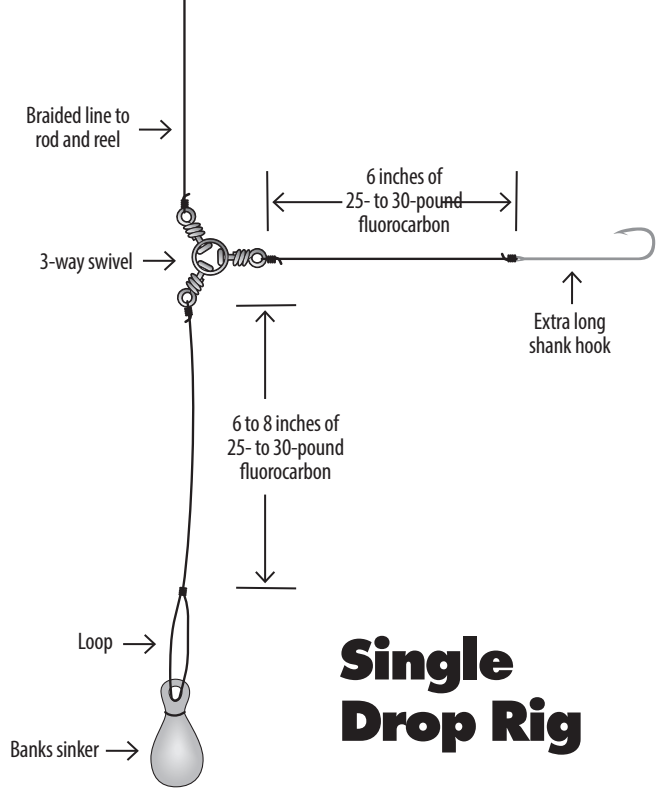
The next place is along the jetties, where Eady catches red drum, black drum, speckled trout, gray trout, occasionally some flounder and even a few tautog. He said crab is an ideal bait for tautog and drum but is rarely available. He uses pieces of shrimp fished on the single-drop rigs close to the jetties. The short leaders are a plus and rarely let the tautog get into a hole.

There is some sand bottom around the jetties, and the fish will hold on it. This is a good spot to fish natural baits, but Eady said the specks, red drum and occasionally flounder will hit soft plastics and sinking MirrOlures fished slowly along the bottom. Paddletails and Z-Man DieZel Minnows are the top soft plastics.

“Anything is subject to be different on different days, but as a rule, the trout generally prefer deeper water, often around the edges of the oyster rocks, while redfish are often very shallow and over mud bottom or on top of oyster rocks where the water is a little warmer,” Eady said. “Many times red drum will be so shallow we see their wakes moving as

they feed. They aren’t tailing, but will still let you know where they are.”

Mark Stacy of Ocean Isle Fishing Charters (www.oceanislefishingcharters.com) fishes the north end of South Carolina’s Grand Strand from Dunn Sound up to the Shallotte River in North Carolina. This area is a little different, as the Calabash and Shallotte Rivers are a little larger than the Murrells Inlet creeks and bring a little more cooler, inland water into the mix. These waters aren’t usually as warm as Murrells Inlet, but they are typically the warmest winter inshore waters in North Carolina.



Single Drop Rig

Stacy does many of the same things Eady does to catch fish. He rarely fishes the winter ocean but begins fishing at Little River, Tubbs and Shallotte inlets and fishes back into the Calabash and Shallotte rivers. Little River Inlet has

jetties, and they hold trout, both drum and occasionally flounder. Stacy said a few tautog are caught along the jetties, but the fishing isn’t consistent, so he doesn’t target them.

“One of the unique traits of the inshore area between Little River Inlet and Shallotte Inlet is shallow ponds in the marsh,” Stacy said. “At low tide, most of them are too shallow for even the fish to stay, but once the tide begins rising, red and black drum work their way into these ponds to feed. They aren’t aggressive like in the fall, but they are actively feeding, even though they’re moving slower.”

Stacy specializes in catching drum in these shallows and keeps a bare-bones flats skiff that only draws 5 inches of water to get into these areas as soon as possible on the rising tide. From years of experience, he knows the



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Speckled trout are regular visitors to the rock jetties that outline the mouth of Little River Inlet.

primary travel paths and sets up to intercept hungry drum as they come into these ponds.

“Drum have the best noses in the marsh, and we use that to catch them,” Stacy said. “Oily baits, whose scent spreads with the wind and tide are key. Pieces of menhaden work pretty well, but there is something special about pieces of crab. The oil in crab spreads well, and it’s almost like crack for fish. If there are any drum downwind or downcurrent of crab baits, they’ll smell it and come looking.”

Stacy said crabs are scarce during the winter; he has to buy them at seafood markets. However, one crab will make at least eight baits, so they last pretty well. He starts with live crabs and doesn’t kill them until he is ready to use them. He begins by removing the shell, and then divides the legs and flippers, with a chunk of meat on the body end of each. Each leg or flipper makes a bait.

Knowing that some fish will break off on the sharp edges of the marsh grass and oysters, Stacy makes a very simple rig. He ties a 1- to 2-foot piece of 30-pound fluorocarbon to the end of his line and adds a wide-bend circle hook to the end, with a couple of 1/8-ounce split shot about 8 inches above the hook. ■



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

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THE COLD TRUTH

The subtle presentation of a light rig like this split-shot rig helps fool winter reds.

Cold equals slow, subtle presentations, retrieves

Guides Mike Eady and Mark Stacy believe the primary thing fishermen must remember for successful cold-water fishing is that when the water is cold, the fish move very slowly and deliberately. In addition, their bites may be very subtle. They suggest using light tackle, with braided lines.

Fish won't have the energy to fight long and hard in cold water, so heavier tackle isn't needed. The combination of lighter, more-sensitive rods



Jerry Dilsvater

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and reels spooled with high-sensitivity, low-stretch, braided lines is the best combination for detecting subtle bites.

Slow and subtle is also the way to present baits. Natural baits can be cast and left to radiate their scent. Lures should be fished very slowly, and using lures with scent or adding scent helps convince fish to bite.

Eady suggests allowing hard lures to sink to the bottom occasionally, and he and Stacy agree that soft lures can be moved a little across the bottom and then paused for a few seconds. It isn't unusual for fish to strike while the lures are paused or as soon as they are moved after a pause. Twitching lures slightly and moving them slowly will entice more bites once the water cools below about 58 to 60 degrees. ■



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Late is **great**



Duck season may be on the wane, but January brings North Carolina hunters some of the best big-water action of the season.

By Dusty Wilson

Stuart Merritt

The last leg of the North Carolina duck season is here,

promising what is likely the heaviest month of duck activity. Although many birds have already been schooled by barking shotguns, a savvy hunter can still bring them down, and there's no better place to fill a limit with a variety of ducks than the Pamlico Sound and the southern Outer Banks.

"Usually, you will see the most ducks in January," said guide Stewart Merritt of Morehead City, "just because it's colder, and they're all pushed down to where they're going to winter. But sometimes, they don't decoy as well because they have had some pressure."

A waterfowler will attest to no greater feeling of helplessness than watching a flock of 400 birds sail past, just out of shotgun range. Step one to taking wary ducks is concealment. To stay hidden in plain sight, Merritt, who runs Salt Air Ventures Charters, transforms his boat into a floating island courtesy of his custom-made scissors rig.

Aptly named for the scissoring motion that allows the floating juniper frame to be unhinged from the bow and gunwales and slid into the water, this bottom layer will be laced with upright pine limbs to cloak the boat. Another board, bolted to the bow and gunwales, will also be laced with vertical limbs to camouflage the hunters.

Merritt's next step is to use the duck's keen eyesight to his advantage. While hunters must remain hidden, an enticing area for ducks to land must be visible. Decorating the surface with more than 300 decoys ensures that any birds he can see can also see his spread.

"I try to put the most decoys towards the biggest area of water I feel the birds are going to come from," said Merritt. "I'll try to place them where it plays with their eyes. I want it to be a long spread of decoys that looks like a real raft of ducks laying on the water — as opposed to putting them in a big circle around you.

"I use more redhead and bluebill decoys. You always will see some pin-

tails and gadwalls, so it's good to have three or four dozen of those out. At times, you'll see black ducks.

"Ducks will decoy to a specific decoy. That's why I keep the species separate in their own little bunches, trying to match what I'm seeing in nature."

Using a decoy net or raft with decoys attached at intermediate intervals, Merritt can set up more than 100 decoys as easily as paying it over



Scaup, aka bluebills, are among the most-common ducks taken off North Carolina's coastal sounds.

the side as the boat motors forward. Both his redhead and bluebill decoys are set out in this manner due to the large numbers used and their station in the oncoming flight path. Pintails, gadwalls and black ducks are tossed off the bow and opposite gunwale, while a few buffleheads are placed on the outer perimeter.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Cedar Island is the closest mainland area to Portsmouth and Ocracoke islands; a public boat ramp is a tenth of a mile from the Cedar Island Ferry terminal on Driftwood Road. Cedar Island is best accessed via US 70 through New Bern and Morehead City to NC 12, on to Sea Level and Cedar Island.

WHEN TO GO — The third installment of North Carolina's general duck season opened Dec. 16 and runs through Jan. 28. The entire six weeks is a great time for seeing lots of ducks.

BEST TECHNIQUES/EQUIPMENT — The mobility of a scissors rig allows hunters to switch locations to match ever-changing flight paths, however, many ducks are taken from traditional stake blinds. Hunters should position themselves between roosting areas on barrier islands and the areas on the Pamlico Sound where ducks have been frequenting. Enormous decoy spreads are essential to attracting ducks. Calling is sparse; hunters should concentrate on remaining concealed until the final moments. Most waterfowlers carry 12-gauge shotguns shooting 3- to 3½-inch shells, choked and patterned for shots of up to 60 yards. No. 3 steel shot coupled with an extended-range choke is a good starting point.

HUNTING INFO/GUIDES — Stewart Merritt, Salt Air Ventures Charters, 252-725-1725, www.moreheadcityncfishing.com. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Davis Bed and Breakfast, Davis, 252-723-0893, www.davisbandb.com; Beaufort Inn and Suites, Beaufort, 252-728-2600, www.beaufort-inn.com; Inlet Inn, Beaufort, 252-728-3600, www.inlet-inn.com.

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



A scissors rig will keep a boat full of hunters well-hidden from incoming ducks that are attracted by a big spread of decoys



Dusty Wilson

Choosing the location for his efforts is a matter of spending time on the water and noticing the flight paths the ducks use, as well as the areas in the sound where they go to rest. Once in the vicinity, Merritt uses the topography to cut the wind and the waves, while allowing the size of the spread to bring the ducks to him.

While small islands or a curve in the shoreline will serve as a windbreak, Merritt also takes advantage of what locals call “the reef.” That’s the first sandbar on the sound side of a barrier island that helps dissipate swells. He sets up inside the undulation where the water deepens, and besides sheltering him from the waves, it puts him in position to bust birds coming off the roost or returning to it.

“It seems like the general trend is that the birds will go roost up and down the banks, up and down the sound, against Portsmouth all the way up to Ocracoke,” Merritt said. “You’ve got some really big eel grass flats there, and I believe that’s where the birds like to feed and rest, spending the nights in the shallower water. Then they get up and might fly 5 to 10 miles to a place on the sound to hang out during the daytime, float around and eat.”

Although any day on the sound is subject to be stellar, the best days often meet certain criteria.

“It has a lot to do with the weather,” Merritt said. “If we’ve got

some really cold weather, the birds have to eat more. If they have to eat more, they’re going to get up and move around more. They might get up and fly and then sit back down just to stay warm. It seems like if you can get 30 miles per hour of wind, that’s the magic number. The birds are going to fly all day, and you’ll have those smaller bunches that get blown out of a group of 400. They tend to decoy really well.”



Dusty Wilson of Raleigh is a lifelong outdoorsman. He is the manager of Tarheel Nursery in Angier, and can be followed on his blog at InsideNCFishing.com.

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MERCURY

Goose flags, often employed to add motion to a spread of goose decoys, can be a valuable addition to a big-water duck hunter's bag of tricks.

Flag 'em down

When ducks won't come into shotgun range, a good guide will do just about anything for his decoy spread to be seen — including waving his arms in the air.

Well, not exactly.

But, after seeing the effectiveness of flagging for Canada geese, guide Stuart Merritt of Morehead City, N.C., experimented with the technique in his scissors rig and found that it will also turn the heads of big-water ducks.

A flag is basically just a polyester cutout of a Canada goose with its wings outstretched, held in place by a fiberglass frame. The imposter is attached to a flexible pole and is flapped profusely — to simulate life in the decoys — when a raft of ducks is spotted in the distance.

"If you can catch one's eye when they're flying by or just flying around, you can turn them," Merritt said. "You might turn the whole wad of them or you might break six or eight off.

"It's one of those things you have to try. You might do it a couple times without any luck, and then the third time, get 30 to come to you. But you don't want to do it when they're halfway close. You have to stand up, and the movement may not look right to them.

"Certain days, it'll make you look like a hero; certain days, it'll make you look like a fool." ■



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| 1:10 PM \$2500 Cash | 2:40 PM \$1000 Cash |
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By Jeff Burleson

BEAT THE COLD

Learn how baitfish and bass adjust to changing winter weather conditions, and you'll be on the way to some great January stringers in the Carolinas.



Anglers in the Carolinas battle a mixture of conditions throughout the year, from freezing winter temperatures to sweltering, hot, summer dog days. While most states experience a steady seasonal climate, the Carolinas often experience a yo-yo effect, when cool and warm days routinely book-mark each other during the winter.

Bass fishermen can find exceptional fishing in the many lakes and reservoirs

around the two states, but they have to know where to pinpoint bass when Mother Nature throws them a curve ball.

According to NOAA's National Climatic Office, January's average temperatures for Charlotte, N.C., just north of the South Carolina border, are a daily low of 32 and a daily high of 54 degrees. But at least several days this month, the temperature will normally swing into the 70s, then back into the 20s within a few days.

LAST JAN. 13, THE TEMPERATURE JUST BEFORE DAWN WAS 46 DEGREES, BUT SIX HOURS LATER, IT WAS 80.

THOSE KIND OF TEMPERATURE SHIFTS ARE REAL OCCURRENCE IN THE CAROLINAS, AND BASS WILL RESPOND ACCORDINGLY.

When temperatures fluctuate erratically, anglers must understand how fish react, especially during winter when it's supposed to be cold and gloomy.

Brett Mitchell guides on South Carolina's Santee Cooper lakes, fishes some pro tournaments and is the chief advisor to the University of South Carolina's bass fishing team. Abrupt changes in temperature change his fishing battle plan just as abruptly because of their effect on baitfish.

"There are two things that bass do: they spawn to make more fish, and they eat,"

said Mitchell (803-379-7029). "Their bellies control their movements until it's time to procreate, and during January, they are following the food source."

The primary forage fish in many major Carolinas reservoirs is shad: either gizzard shad or threadfin. Changes in water temperatures during winter will affect shad movements, and bass typically hover around large groups of shad. On Mitchell's home waters, the upper end of Lake Marion is the place he expects to bring in a heavy January stringer.

"It's easier to pinpoint the bait in upper end of the lake because of the creek configuration," he said. "I will start in the primary and secondary creek arms in 10 to 14 feet of water. This is considered deep water in the upper lake."

Bait will congregate in these areas, trying to wait out the cold weather. Mitchell concentrates on hard, shell bottoms, plus stumps, brush piles or anything that will hold shad and give the bass a place to ambush their groceries. He uses his depth finder to locate pods of bait, then locates places predators would use as ambush spots before making his first cast.

"I spend more time looking for bait than fish in winter," he said. "The shad ball up tight, and some die off when it gets colder. The bass will lie near the bottom and pick off the dying bait as it comes to them."

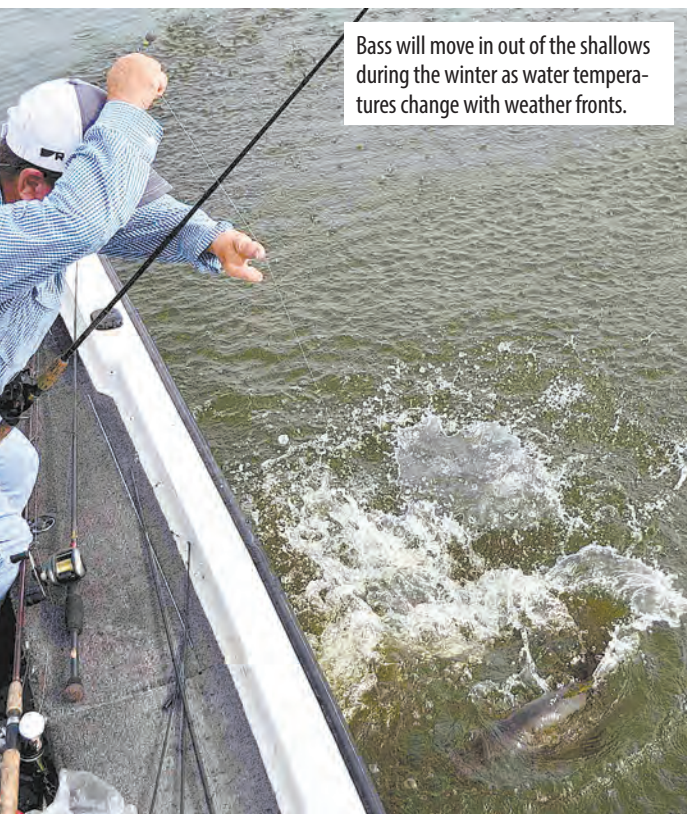
Under cold conditions, Mitchell chooses lures that resemble lethargic or dying bait. He likes to use

a jiggling spoon, spin shad — aka tailspinners — Carolina rigs or small jerkbaits.

"A jiggling spoon and spin shad look just like dying shad falling to the bottom," he said.



Guide Brett Mitchell looks for bait, even before he looks for bass, when he's fishing in January



Bass will move in out of the shallows during the winter as water temperatures change with weather fronts.

But when Mother Nature rebounds with a warm front that brings a wave of unseasonable, 70-degree weather, baitfish get happy and become more active. Several days of warm weather will heat up the upper part of the water column and the shallower areas in south-facing coves. The shad respond favorably, seeking out these warm zones, dragging bass with them into shallower waters.

"We will catch them in 6 to 7 feet of water around submerged cover in these shallower zones when it warms up to 53 to 59 degrees, but they will not move far away from deep water, either. They will not get caught too far in the shallows and risk getting stuck," he said.

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CATCH GIANTS SPAWNING FIRST

During these warm periods, the shad will become more active and can be more of a challenge for the bass. In these situations, a more-active approach will be necessary to mimic shad behavior.

“The bass are more apt to chase bait when the water is warmer. I like to fish swimbaits, spinnerbaits and lipless crankbaits,” he said.

Fortunately for Mitchell, bass are bunched up this time of year. When he finds a fish, several more, if not dozens, are often holding in the same pattern.

Shifts in weather directly affect shad behavior and movement in reservoirs, and it’s no secret that bass are easily led by their stomachs.

“It’s not the dissolved oxygen or the bass’s comfort level; it’s the bait that moves the fish this time of year. If the bait isn’t there, the fish aren’t there,” he said.

While the weather will not directly affect the bass, the forage base is at Mother Nature’s mercy. Bass will often move shallow to deep and many places in between during the winter. Anglers who want to smack an oversized limit of bass in January and February can build a better success story by keeping tabs on the location of the bait. ■



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.

When P.H. Flanagan of Manning, S.C., caught the state-record largemouth bass out of Lake Marion in 1949, he might never have dreamed that his 16-pound; 2-ounce beast would still reign as the biggest bass ever caught in the Palmetto State. But Santee Cooper is known for its big stringers of healthy bass, as are many other reservoirs scattered around the Carolinas.

Across their range from Canada to Mexico, largemouth bass spawn in almost every month. In the Carolinas, the majority of the spawning population of bass head to the shallows during the spring, generally between March and May, particularly from March through early April. And few will argue that the best time to top a personal record is during the spawn, when these slimy beasts are jammed full of eggs.

However, few anglers will be on the water when the biggest and heaviest fish head to the spawning grounds.

Guide Brett Mitchell starts looking for his biggest stringers long before other anglers even consider looking for spawning fish.

“Some of the biggest fish in the food chain spawn in February in South Carolina,” said Mitchell (803-379-7029), “but they are caught deeper.”

Most bass will head in and spawn in relatively shallow water, less than 3 feet deep. Mitchell finds his biggest bass spawning in deeper waters farther off the bank from where the typical bass spawns. He said Santee giants will spawn from 3 to 6 feet deep.

Since early spawners are doing their thing in deeper water, sight-fishing is rarely possible unless you’re on a super-clear reservoir. Mitchell will concentrate on deeper ledges adjacent to the traditional spawning grounds around the moon peaks.

“Fish move in to spawn around the new and full moons. I start fishing for these giants in February at Santee, three days before and three days after the moon peaks,” he said.

When targeting early trophy spawners, Mitchell will slow-roll spinnerbaits and work jigs. ■



Don’t put away crankbaits that work in deeper water when the first big wave of spawning bass move in early, because they often stay in relatively deep water.

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See about **SEA DUCKS**

Don't miss a chance to add to your waterfowling experience. Head off the beach for a limit of unpressured sea ducks.

By Jeff Burleson



Steve Roff

Most South Carolina waterfowl hunters cut their teeth chasing wood ducks in century-old cypress sloughs or maybe a gaggle of greenheads in acres of flooded grain, but available duck-hunting opportunities are in high demand. Lease fees and land prices continue to rise, and premiere waterfowl grounds under public control are steadily becoming overcrowded.

Luckily, there is another option for fantastic waterfowling along South Carolina's coast, and the prime waters around Georgetown are available without the competition.

Sea ducks!

Sea ducks are a group of migratory species that skirt the beaches along the Atlantic

weather to drive them further south along their migratory path."

While sea ducks don't mingle with dabbling ducks and other ducks in freshwater and brackish environments, they typically migrate concurrently with other species' movements over the fall season. As soon as hunters see ducks arriving inland, they can count on sea ducks showing up along the coast.

Hunters can also look for January's cold blasts to contribute to growing numbers of sea ducks along the beachfront. Brief periods of arctic weather will drive them south, making Georgetown's waters fill up, specifically off North Island and around the Winyah Bay jetties.

.....
BELOW: Sea ducks will often put beachfront structure like rock jetties along their preferred flight paths.



Steve Roff

seaboard to eat on the plentiful resources of mollusks, crustaceans — and even some small fish. According to Dean Harrigal, waterfowl biologist for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, scoters are the primary sea duck species that winter along South Carolina's coastlines.

"Our most-common sea ducks are surf scoters, black scoters, and white-wing scoters," Harrigal said, "but we will get old squaw and a few other species of sea ducks if we get a prolonged period of cold

Even though they could easily travel across the barrier islands and feed on the abundant inshore resources, sea ducks rarely cross over into estuarine environments, and it is uncommon for puddle ducks and divers to visit ocean waters to feed.

Steve Roff of Barrier Island Guide Service in Pawleys Island targets sea ducks as soon as they arrive, but it's not just sea ducks that show up in his decoy spread during the late season, which ends Jan. 28.





“We frequently get buffleheads, mergansers and ruddy ducks when we are in the ocean,” said Roff (843-446-7337). “We will get an occasional stray diving duck like ring-necks and bluebills, but it is usually just scoters that make up our bag limit.”

While a six-bird limit of scoters, mergansers and ruddy ducks may not boast the vibrant colors of redheads, mallards and pintails, the wing-shooting can be exhilarating — without competition from other hunters. Sea ducks are limited to the areas immediately along the beachfront, and with the exception of a few winter anglers, the coast is almost void of people — making for endless shooting opportunities. But where exactly do hunters go to find the best sea duck action?

Sea ducks are capable of descending to depths of more than 100 feet to feed, but according to Harrigal, most frequent the region from the beachfront out several miles.

Roff targets sea ducks near the shore and in places where he can avoid heavy sea conditions.

“We stay relatively close to shore when we can; that is usually just beyond the breakers out to two miles,” Roff said. “Depending on how rough the ocean is will determine where we find the best flights. They will fly further offshore when the ocean is flat and then hug the beach when it’s rough.”

““One thing about sea ducks that is nice? You don’t have to do everything perfect. You need to break up the boat some, but full camo is not required.””

For hunters accustomed to hunting large lakes and sounds, the strategy can be similar. Sea ducks often travel in large groups, right off the surface, to avoid aerial predation. Their flight patterns traditionally pass near natural and man-made landforms that hunters can take advantage of to get flocks in range.

“It is similar to hunting around sandbars and grassy points. They are not big on flying over land features but will bounce off these areas that make for perfect ambush places,” Roff said.

The ends of jetties are one of the best places to hunt sea ducks. These rock piles create a bounce point to concentrate birds, and they give hunters something to associate with so their boats don’t look out of place with little available cover in between ocean waves.

Luckily, sea ducks are not accustomed to the same hunting as more-traditional waterfowl species, and cover and camouflage are not critical. Roff doesn’t use much concealment.

“One thing about sea ducks that is nice? You don’t have to do everything perfect. You need to break up the boat some, but full camo is not required,” he said.



Steve Roff

.....
An occasional merganser will often show up in a bag of sea ducks like scoters.

Along the same lines, specialized decoys are not required. Roff uses a couple of long strings of black and white decoys. Standard ring-neck, bufflehead or bluebill decoys are the closest match to the mostly black scoter species.

“Some hunters have had great success with using spray-painted milk jugs,” he said. “You really don’t need anything special, but decoys definitely help,” said Roff, who usually uses two to three decoy strings. He will anchor a string of 25 off the bow and then tie another string of 25 off the stern.

Sea ducks typically trade off across the water in long flight lines. A flock of 75 might not always come into shotgun range, and hunters need to engage when birds are in range if whirling into the decoys or just passing by.

“The larger flocks don’t come to small spreads much, but they will come off their line, and you can get some good pass shooting,” Roff said. “If you get small groups of three to four birds, they will usually decoy well.”

Roff relies on No. 2 steel shot.

“The shots are rarely any more than 20 feet off the water, but they are moving fast. If you take the extra second to lead them and follow through your shot, you will knock down plenty of them,” he said. ■



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

Up next
SC’s sea duck zone ➤

Sea duck retrieval is critical

Sea ducks can be difficult to retrieve unless hunters can get their boat limbered up quickly and get to them before the dive or float away.

From shooting wood ducks in timber-filled swamps to mallards in grass-covered marshes, retrieving can be one of the most-challenging aspects of duck hunting.

Not only can ducks vanish in natural cover, they will often dive below the surface, and retrieving sea ducks in the ocean is no cake walk.

Ripples and waves will quickly conceal ducks floating at the water line, and current caused by weather and tide can be a problem. A downed duck can drift several hundred yards and out of sight very quickly.

Steve Roff of Barrier Island Guide Service said retrieving ducks in the ocean has its challenges, but if conducted correctly, it's not difficult.

"To start off with, we put a float on the anchor line like you do when tarpon fishing," said Roff (843-446-7337). "As soon as you shoot them down, you drop the anchor line and retrieve the ducks before they get too far."

Roff also instructs his hunters to keep an eye on downed birds while he gets the boat free and navigates around the decoys.

"The key to sea duck hunting is to work as a team. The hunter must keep their eye on the duck, and the captain will do everything else. If you take your eyes off the bird, you will have a tough time finding them," he said. ■



Steve Roff

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See about sea ducks



SC's sea duck zone and special regulation changes

Because of different season dates, a small percentage of waterfowl hunters have used sea ducks to extend their shooting, and this season, regulation changes ended that practice.

Dean Harrigal, waterfowl biologist for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, said declining populations of sea ducks caused seasons to be shortened.

"We had a big change in sea duck hunting (in 2016-17)," Harrigal said. "A long time ago, sea ducks were given a second season to promote taking of sea ducks from Oct. 1 through the end of January. Now, the season is congruent with the other 60-day duck season."



Steve Hoff

South Carolina has cut down on hunters' opportunities to take sea ducks like these scoters due to drops in the birds' numbers.

Hunting pressure in northeastern states has contributed to an initiative to reduce harvests by 25 percent. Additionally, sea ducks are also included in the six-duck bag limit. In previous years, sea ducks had their own limit, and hunters could take a six-bird limit of sea ducks and another six-bird limit of divers and puddler ducks killed inland on the same day.

Harrigal said sea ducks have a different reproductive strategy and may require a longer recovery period than other species.

"Sea ducks aren't like traditional dabbling ducks with short life spans and high reproductive rates. Sea ducks are longer-lived species with shorter reproductive rates as compared to other ducks," he said.

While SCDNR aligned sea duck seasons and bag limits with other ducks, some regulations remained intact, offering benefits for hunters to target sea ducks. The sea duck zone beginning one mile offshore and seaward remained intact. Hunters can still take five sea ducks in this zone versus only four outside of the zone. Additionally, hunters can retrieve and shoot down cripples under power in the sea duck zone.

For more information, visit www.dnr.sc.gov.

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North Carolina hunters are trying to hold back the tide of a burgeoning coyote population.

Stem the furry flood

By Craig Holt

Some North Carolina hunters believe a mature whitetail buck is the most difficult game animal to hunt. Others think a wild turkey gobbler is a tougher challenge.

But neither of these targets match coyotes in terms of wariness.

With a sense of smell equal to deer, eyesight and hearing that surpasses wild turkeys and a deeply-wired dislike of revealing themselves to humans, the members of the *Canis latrans* clan are ghost-like creatures, rarely seen or heard in daylight hours.

Yet they live among us in every habitat type.

Once rare in North Carolina, the coyote population has exploded, and today, coyotes cost farmers thousands of dollars in livestock losses, and they regularly snatch dogs and cats from suburban yards. Hunting them requires dedication, a willingness to spend money and hours waiting, at night, using calls to lure them into gun range.

"It's a challenge," said John Alden of Iron Station, N.C., a town in Lincoln County. "I didn't start hunting coyotes until eight years ago. I was unsuccessful at first, but I got hooked. Now I only hunt coyotes, not deer."

His uncle, Mike Alden, instilled in him a love of being outdoors, as they hunted squirrels, doves, groundhogs, ducks, crows and deer. "He taught me the fundamentals," said Alden, whose first electronic game call was "an old Johnny Stewart tape player."

"I killed three (coyotes) when I was at Western Carolina University. I spent all my extra time coyote hunting and read a lot of books about how to hunt them. I'm still learning."

Later, his landscaping business put him in contact with property owners, deer hunters and clubs who hired him to create food plots. That gave Alden access to lands where he now hunts coyotes.

High-tech callers boosted Alden's success rate. Today, he is one of the most-accomplished coyote hunters in North Carolina, having killed approximately 180 of the wild dogs.

During the 2016 Carolina Coyote Classic (704Outdoors.com), he surpassed most teams by bagging five coyotes in 2½ nights. Most five- and six-man teams shot three to four.



Craig Holt



“Coyotes do a lot of damage to farm livestock, and that includes poultry — they’ll eat biddies (chicks), ducks and calves,” he said. “But they also can really hurt wild game, including deer fawns. A coyote pack can take down a mature buck, and they love to get into turkey nests. They also kill and eat pets — dogs and cats.”

Alden said female coyotes often raise litters of eight pups twice a year.

“The average farm I hunt has six coyotes,” he said. “They mate in February and March. By September, the momma runs off her pups, so that’s a good time to hunt young coyotes.”

Even then, immature coyotes are super smart, “so the key to predator hunting is dedication and learning from your mistakes,” he said.

Alden is confident he played a role in changing N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission night-hunting rules.

“I attended all the public hearings in Districts 3 and 4 and fought for night-hunting,” he said.

In 2013-14, the Commission lifted a ban on night-hunting for coyotes and feral swine on private lands, except for five north-eastern counties that also had red wolves. In 2015-16, the five-county ban was modified to allow daytime coyote hunting, and coyote hunting on game lands from 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset was legalized.

Two approaches to hunting coyotes are important.

“You have to be aware of the wind at all times,” Alden said. “Coyotes can smell a person a mile away, especially if you don’t spray down your clothes and seats with some kind of scent killer. They also can hear a mouse squeak at 50 yards, and their eyesight is better than deer.”

One suggestion is to hunt upwind, which seems counter-intuitive.

“If you’re out in the open, and you have an electronic call, most of the time, a coyote will circle if you’re upwind,” Alden said. “In that case, you want to spray down good with scent killer.”

In one situation, however, he’ll set up a downwind ambush: when he faces woods where he expects coyotes to enter a field and has houses, a town or road at his back.

While hunting one night during the 2016 Carolina Classic 3 event, Alden and hunting partner Jesse Cadenhead sat on the ground in camouflaged chairs in the middle of a harvested corn field. They faced a woods line 300 yards to the southwest, with a busy two-lane blacktop and several houses with dogs outside at their backs.



Night-hunting for coyotes legal in all but five counties

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission decided on Aug. 1, 2011, to adopt temporary rules to allow 24-hour hunting of coyotes on private lands and daytime hunting on game lands, but two years passed before the rule was made permanent.

However, coyote hunting in Beaufort, Dare, Hyde, Terrell and Washington counties was halted by a federal judge in 2011, ostensibly to protect red wolves released as part of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service experiment to return these predators to part of their native range.

The law was later changed after a legal challenge demonstrated the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had violated its red wolf-release rules by not removing unwanted specimens from private property.

Six mated red wolf pairs were released in 1987 on Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, and 25 years later, their numbers totaled more than 100.

Landowners objected when the wolves moved off local refuges onto private lands. Many later cited devastating effects of coyote predation, particularly on deer fawns, and other small game.

In September 2016, Judge Terrence Boyle ruled red wolves must be protected unless they prove a threat to humans or damage private property. To prevent red wolves from being accidentally killed when mistaken for coyotes, night-hunting for coyotes was ended; the animals in those five counties can be hunted only during daylight hours and with a permit. ■



John Alden and Jesse Cadenhead took this coyote with the help of an electronic caller and a night-vision scope.

Craig Holt



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Alden placed a Fox Pro Inferno electronic caller with two directional speakers and Fox Bang technology — it automatically switches to a follow-up call, usually a fox-pup screamer, after a shot — about 75 yards from their seats and pointed the speakers at the woods. Factory-programmed with six-dozen calls, the Fox Pro can hold 200 sounds, including the popular dying rabbit, rodent squeak or fawn in distress. Alden chooses and activates sounds with a hand-held remote-control unit.

“Coyotes hear too many rabbit squeals,” he said. “I’ve been using a fawn-in-distress call, and they respond to that.”

Alden’s preferred calling sequence includes a vole in distress for three or four minutes, a pause of about a minute, then a rabbit or fawn in distress, another pause, then a bird in distress.

“But I often experiment (with calls) and use different sequences,” he said.

Alden also has a half-dozen mouth calls hanging from cords around his neck. He uses them when coyotes don’t respond to electronic calls.

“I sometimes use Fox Pro or Primos mouth calls,” he said. “They sound a little different than (electronic) calls.”

To pop a coyote — often at long distances — involves a little more than having good electronics. Must-have equipment includes a flat-shooting rifle, night-vision scopes and binoculars.

Alden’s favorite weapon is a 10-shot, DPMS Panther Arms AR-10 rifle — \$1,500 to \$2,000 retail — chambered for a 58-grain .243 cartridge, but hunters don’t have to break their budgets to buy a good rifle.

“I was shooting an AR-15 in .223, and that’s sufficient for coyotes,” he said. “I was just more comfortable with the .243. The .223 had an 11-inch drop at 300 yards, but shooting a 58-grain bullet, the .243 only drops 4 inches at 300 yards.

But scopes? Well now, that’s a different story.

“Don’t let the wind blow your scent to places where you expect coyotes to come from. You have to get ‘em into the open before they can circle downwind of you.”

The type of available light determines which scope he uses.

“On clear or partly-cloudy nights, I use a scope that picks up ambient light, a D760 night-vision scope,” he said.

If it’s cloudy or there’s no moon, he has an infrared illuminator scope that senses body heat through fog, dust, rain or snow.

Retail ambient-light scope prices vary from \$3,700 and higher, while thermal scopes may range from \$6,500 to \$19,600.

“If it’s a really bright night, sometimes I use the infrared to pick up the eyes of a coyote,” said Alden, who carries thermal-imaging binoculars to scan fields and spot coyotes at long distances.

His AR-10 propels a bullet at 3,600 feet per second — the length of 12 football fields — in an eye blink. That means a coyote caught in his crosshairs doesn’t have much chance.



Scent control is especially important when hunting coyotes, which typically circle upwind before moving toward a hidden hunter who is calling.

Craig Holt

“The longest I’ve killed a coyote is 300 yards,” he said, “but my average shot is 100 to 150 yards.”

Cadenhead, on the other hand, carries a 12-gauge auto-loader shotgun.

“Sometimes a coyote will bust out running right next to you after you send out one or two (decoy sounds),” Alden said. “Jesse uses the shotgun on ‘em. With a rifle you can’t (see a running coyote) up close.”

Those animals often are seeking mates or hungry, which makes them abandon normal caution.

Alden has three main tips for coyote hunters: wind awareness, changing calls and going to different areas.

“Paying attention to the wind is crucial to success,” he said. “Don’t let the wind blow your scent to places where you expect coyotes to come from. You have to get ‘em into the open before they can circle downwind of you.

“Two, if one call isn’t working, change to a different call. Don’t keep hammering on the same sound.

“Three, if you kill two or three coyotes at one field, leave and don’t come back for at least three weeks. Coyotes associate calls (that lead to gun shots) to danger — if you hunt the same place night after night you’re educating them.”

That’s why Alden seeks farmers and landowners for places to hunt. With the proliferation of coyotes in North Carolina, even though hunting won’t eradicate the animals, it’s the best available solution. ■



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

Does hunting reduce coyote populations?

Differences of opinion exist as to the overall effect of hunting efforts, especially big, organized hunts, on coyote populations.

Many hunters believe taking out coyotes helps wild-game populations by removing a top-end predator from the landscape, although no eradication attempt has been 100-percent effective.

On the other hand, the non-profit organization Project Coyote said hunting ignores the coyotes' role in the ecosystem, that hunting actually stimulates females to give birth to more pups.

"In a sense, (coyote-hunting events) are counter productive," Marilyn McGee wrote in a published report during the 2016 Carolina Coyote Classic 3, headquartered in Albemarle, N.C.

Biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission agree that coyotes can't be eradicated, but "spot controls" of the predators give local native wildlife species some relief.

"Coyotes affect a lot of other kinds of game," said John MacPherson of Charlotte, N.C.-based 704 Outdoors. "They have no natural predators except humans."

Many hunters in the Classic, especially those from South Carolina, said coyotes have definitely hurt their deer numbers.

Max Derugen of Stanly County lost his favorite family pet, which was left outside one night, then mauled and killed by coyotes. He helped start the Coyote Classic.

"There are so many people who've lost a member of the four-legged family," he was quoted in a local newspaper. "You wouldn't believe all the stories I've heard. I've had a lot of support." ■



Craig Holt

Do organized coyote-hunting events really help control the predator population? Most hunters agree that killing coyotes can help on a local, if not a landscape, level.

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By Marty Shaffner

SOMETHING TO **CROW ABOUT**

Crow hunting is a great way to wing-shoot if you're tired of ducks and doves. Here's a primer for hunting these big, black birds.

A lot of people ask me, "Why would anybody hunt crows?" I usually answer, "It's fun." Hunting crows is a great way to polish your wing-shooting skills for duck or dove season, and it is pure fun.

One hunting buddy calls crow hunting, "redneck duck hunting." It is somewhat like duck hunting in that calling, decoys and being well-hidden are involved in both. After a few trips, some hunters might find it is more enjoyable at times than duck hunting. It can be done after

other seasons have closed in late winter, but it can also be done in warmer weather, just make sure you check your state's regulations. And there's normally more shooting action that duck hunters get.

Lonnie Ray Harris of Thurmond, N.C., is a hard-core crow hunter. He has been hunting crows for nearly 30 years, during which time he has honed his techniques.

"I remember when I started crow hunting, I had nothing but a shotgun and a hand call, and if we killed four or five crows, we had a big hunt," he said.

>

Last year,

Harris and three friends killed more than 80 crows on one hunt. Clearly, he has learned some things over the years. Here a few of them:

Calls

Hunters can use a hand-held call, but nothing compares to electronic calls for hunting crows. Harris said you can't imitate 20 crows calling and a hawk whistling at the same time with three or four hunters blowing crow calls. He uses an old Johnny Stewart cassette caller, although he is looking to get one of the newer, digital electronic calls on the market. The advantage of the newer calls are they are more compact and can be operated with a wireless remote.

Harris said a caller needs plenty of volume, so a call with a large speaker or speakers is the one downside to electronic calls. Also, most with enough volume to be effective are fairly expensive. If you're on a budget, the older, cassette callers can be found and used fairly inexpensively. Harris uses several different sequences on his caller, but he said the crow/hawk fight is one of his favorites.

Decoys

Other than an electronic caller, decoys are responsible for Harris improving his hunting success more than any other piece of gear. As many decoys as you can comfortably carry is fine; you can't have too many, said Harris, who uses a mesh decoy bag to carry his fakes. Most of the time, he puts most of them on the ground, 2 or 3 feet apart, along with a

few in smaller trees in the setup area to mimic lookouts.

Setup

As in real estate, it's all about being in the right place before you set up to call. Harris said his favorite is a high knoll in short, young pine trees. The highest ground around is best, because if you are in a low spot, the crows probably will come in too high to give you good shots. A high ridge in a 2- to 4-year-old clear-cut can also be a good place to setup. Both of these types of terrain offer concealment and the advantage of being high, so crows don't come in too high.

But sometimes you have to make do with what you've got. Harris has had good hunts in other types of areas, but he always seeks out the highest ground he can and stays as concealed as possible.

Being concealed is of utmost importance. Crows have very keen eyesight and can spot you

and quickly turn before getting into shotgun range. Harris recommends dressing like a turkey hunter: in full camo with a head net and gloves. Any good camo will work fine as long as it blends in to your surroundings.

Guns and ammo

Harris said crows can be taken with almost any shotgun and load. He uses a 12-gauge Remington 11-87 in full camo — which helps in staying hidden — and he uses 2¾-inch shells delivering a 1¼-ounce load of No. 6 shot. He has used everything from No. 4 shot to No. 7½



Electronic callers are a great choice for crow hunters because of the volume needed to attract birds.

Marty Shaffner



but has settled on No. 6 shot as a happy medium. Crows are fairly large birds, and although most hunters prefer 12-gauge guns, for young hunters or those who are sensitive to recoil, a 20-gauge shotgun will work. A 1-ounce load of No. 6 or No. 7½ will work fine, although hunters may want to refrain from taking longer shots.

Crow hunting is a great sport for offseason wing shooting, is a lot of fun and will definitely make you a better wingshot. ■



Marty Shaffner of Elkin, N.C., guides for smallmouth bass and trout in northwest North Carolina and southwest Virginia. He has been a freelance outdoor writer for almost 10 years.



Mix up your decoy spread between fake birds on the ground and in trees or other places off the ground.



Neither North Carolina nor South Carolina has bag limits on crows, but season dates are different.

“Set up on ground that’s the highest elevation in an area so approaching crows are more likely to be flying low enough to be in shotgun range.”

When can you hunt crows?

Crows are a federally protected species, and both North Carolina and South Carolina have set hunting seasons for them.

South Carolina’s season opened on Nov. 1 and lasts until March 1. Electronic callers are allowed, and there is no bag limit. There are some differences in regulations for private land and Wildlife Management Areas. For a full list of crow hunting regulations, visit www.dnr.sc.gov.

North Carolina has a longer, but split, season that is closed during what is normally nesting season. Its regulations are a bit more confusing, too. The season began Aug. 1 and runs through Feb. 28, with hunting allowed only on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. A second

season will open June 6 and run through July 30, on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays only. Crows may also be hunted on Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year’s day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Independence Day — except when these days fall on a Sunday. There is no bag limit, and electronic calls can be used in North Carolina as well. ■

Get down FOR TROUT

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

By L. Woodrow Ross

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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







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

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

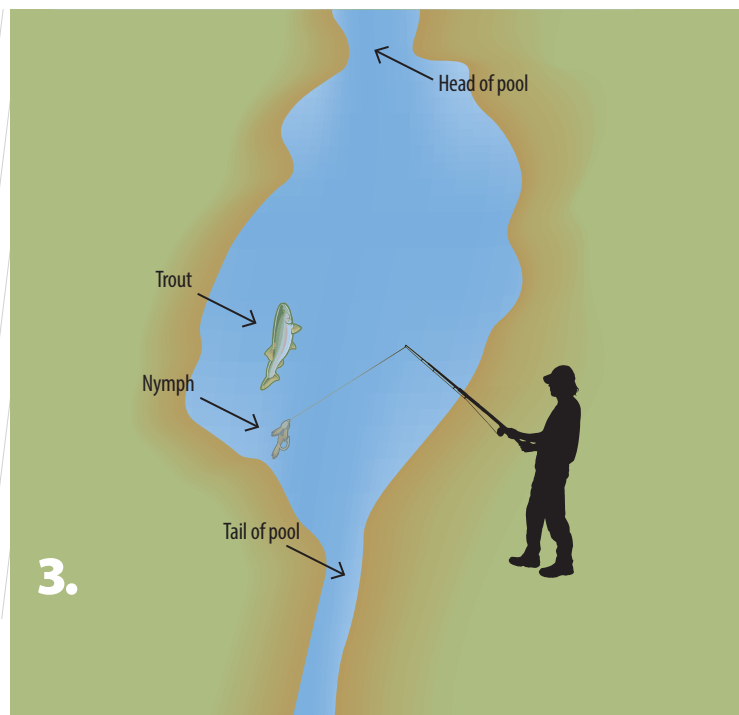
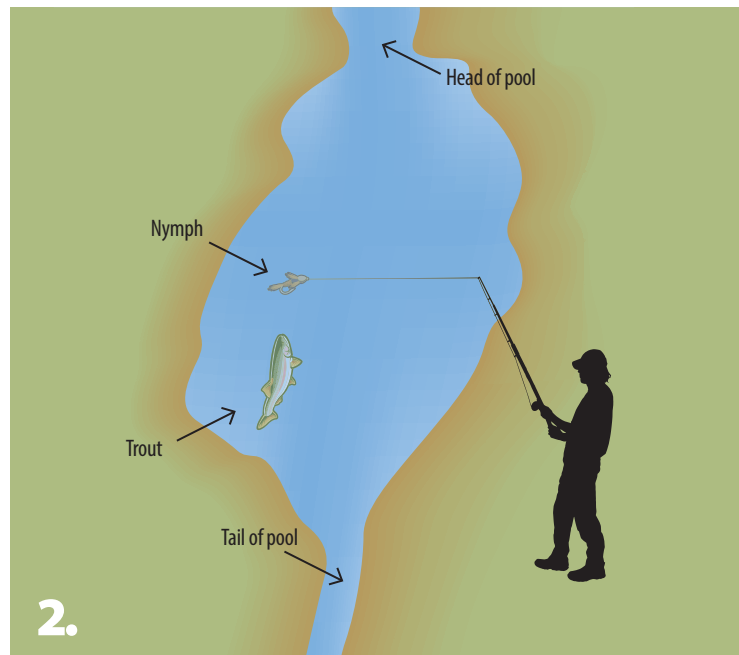
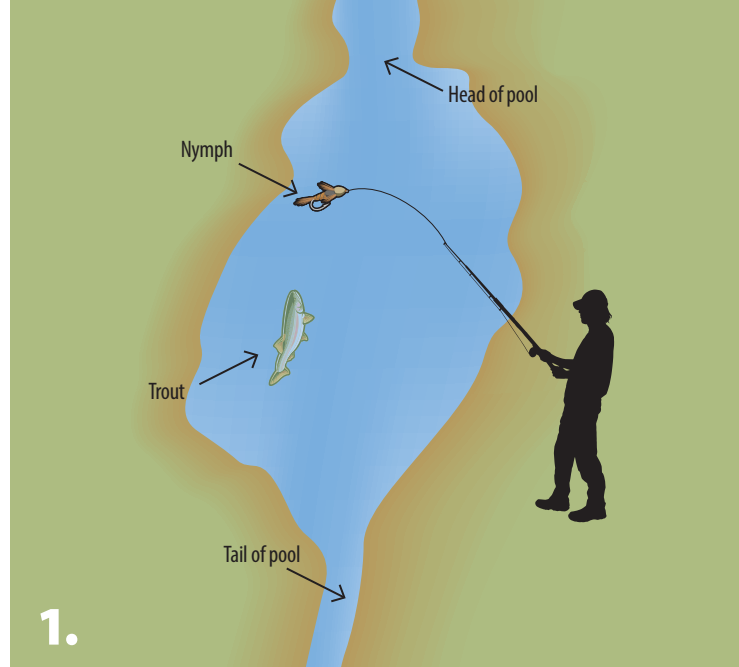
In cold weather, trout cannot afford the effort of moving up in the water column to chase a fly. The drift must present the fly where the trout can take it with minimal effort.

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

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

“High stick” technique

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



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

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

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

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



L. Woodrow Ross

L. Woodrow Ross

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



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

Recognizing productive water

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

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

It is vital to note that structure in the water affects the velocity. This also applies to the bottom contours. A slight dip in the bottom will often allow the swifter current to pass over it and provide a safe haven for trout. From there, they can move slightly into the swifter water to take an insect but can quickly drop back into the slower water to conserve energy.

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



L. Woodrow Ross

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

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

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

SOUND & SEA

Brian Cope

Guide Rod Thomas realized that taking advantage of just a narrow window of opportunities in terms of species and places wasn't the way to experience the best fishing around. He keeps an open mind and always fishes the best bite, at the best place, at the best time.



WIDEN THE NET

FOR YOUR BEST FISHING YEAR EVER, BE OPEN TO NEW AREAS, OPPORTUNITIES

Brian Cope

January is traditionally known as a time to make resolutions or goals for the next 12 months, and it's a great time to set your fishing goals for 2018.

Over and over, many anglers just head out to their local fishing holes to get their fishing fix. And maybe they squeeze a fishing outing or two into their family vacation in the summer. But year after year, most fish the same, familiar places over and over, rarely have a stellar day or ever catch anything memorable.

But some anglers across the Carolinas have caught onto what Rod Thomas of Capt. Ponytail Guide Service calls "widening the net." This has changed the fishing success of many anglers who have either heard him speak at seminars or joined him on a fishing trip or two.

Widening the net, said Thomas, simply means expanding the areas you fish based on where the hot bite is. He real-

ized this while working for a television show; one of his duties was to schedule and film fishing trips.

"It never failed that when I called a guide service and told them what species of fish we wanted to do a show on, they would give me a very narrow window of time and tell us we needed to be there during those dates in order to get the best footage for that species," said Thomas (336-240-5649).

Once he decided to guide full-time, Thomas knew he would not focus on just one area or species.

"I decided I was going to fish where the fish were, when they were biting. It's the best chance I have at putting my clients on the most fish, the biggest fish, and the hottest bite no matter what time of year it is," he said.

Of course, those who don't fish for a living find solace in getting away for an evening of fishing here and there, close

to home, and everyone just can't chase after the hottest bite of every month. But by widening your net, you can catch your biggest fish ever this year. Or experience 100-fish days. Or catch enough keepers to stock your freezer for a fish fry every month.

Across the Carolinas, different anglers will discuss the hottest bite at different times. Trying an internet search for "best saltwater fishing February Carolina," etc, can put you on the right track to planning your best fishing year yet.

"Expanding your range is truly the No. 1 way to become a better angler. The mark of a better fisherman is to catch more

GO OUT ON A LIMB:

Even if your fishing opportunities are limited, don't fall into the trap of going back to the same place for the same species, every time. Don't be afraid to target different fish, in different places, if the bite is on.

Guide Rod Thomas was fishing for bull redfish but had two lighter rods rigged; they came in handy when a school of false albacore exploded within casting range.



fish, bigger fish, and have the most hookups with the fewest casts," Thomas said. "The best way to do that is to simply go where the fish are biting, when they are biting. Widen that net. Expand the size of the area you fish, and you'll have the best fishing year ever."

STAY PREPARED FOR ANOTHER HOT BITE

I was fishing with Thomas last spring during the bull redfish run in Winyah Bay outside of Georgetown, S.C., and we were catching plenty of redfish in the 45-inch range. In the distance, we noticed a lot of surface activity, and it was heading our way.

"I don't know what these fish are, but we're going to cast to them," said Thomas, who quickly grabbed two rods.

These were not rods that we were using for the redfish. They were lighter rods with soft-plastic lures tied on, much different than the stiff rods we were fishing with cut bait for the bulls. No sooner did Thomas hand me a rod than the surface feeding was all around us. After a few casts, Thomas hooked up, still unsure of what species these fish were. Then I hooked up.

We fought the fish to the surface, finally landing them, and the school disappeared just as quickly as it showed up. They were false albacore, and they were closer to shore than Thomas had ever caught them. It wasn't something he was expecting to happen, but it's something he was prepared for.

Having those other rods rigged, even though they weren't suit-

able for our intended target, gave us the opportunity to catch those false albacore. If we'd cast our bottom rigs at those fish, or tried to re-tie with better suited lures, chances are we would still be wondering what that school was. ■



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 an outdoor writer since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.

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LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite

A Mop Jig is a big-fish bait, whether you're fishing it in spring, summer or fall. Carry ¼-, ⅜- and ½-ounce sizes in your tackle box to have all situations covered.

5 BASS BAITs YOU REALLY NEED

YOU CAN FILL YOUR BOAT WITH BAITs YOU'LL NEVER USE, OR GET THESE BAITs AND CATCH FISH

January begins show season around the Southeast, whether it be boat shows, tackle shows or outdoor trade shows. I have worked a lot of these shows in the past, and quite often, I go to ones I'm not working, because I'm ready to fill in holes in my tackle box, and a show is an easy place to do that.

Deer season is over, and while we've got good fishing year-round in much of the Carolinas, a lot of guys wait for the weather to warm up before they really get ready to fish. So they spend January and February getting their gear and tackle together. The shows are a good time to get things you need, and if you've got a few hundred dollars in your pocket, you can go to a show and easily get everything you need in a day's time.

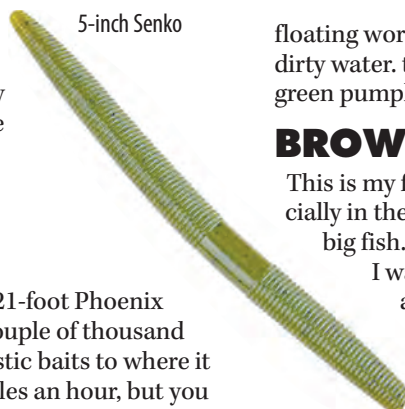
You can buy everything you see, or what you need. Here are five baits that any bass fishermen — tournament pro or weekend fisherman — needs to have in their tackle box. These are versatile baits

that can be fished year-round, and they'll catch plenty of fish — and some good ones.

5-INCH SENKO

You can load my 21-foot Phoenix bass boat with a couple of thousand pounds of soft-plastic baits to where it will only run 65 miles an hour, but you really don't need to. You need a few soft-plastic baits, and my No. 1 pick for the most-versatile on the market is a Senko. You can Texas-rig a Senko with a weight; you can fish it Texas-rigged and weightless; you can fish it rigged wacky style; and you can fish it on a Carolina rig. It will catch fish everywhere in the country.

I am going to want to carry Senkos in four colors: green pumpkin, watermelon/red, black/blue and white. I use the white



5-inch Senko

floating worm. I fish the black/blue in dirty water, the watermelon/red and green pumpkin any other time.

BROWN MOP JIG

This is my favorite big-fish bait, especially in the spring. It will catch you a big fish.

I want to carry several Mop Jigs at all times, in three sizes: ¼-, ⅜- and ½-ounce. I'll use the different sizes in different depths and water clarities, depending on whether

I need a slow or fast fall, a big or small silhouette. Brown is my favorite color. You should match it with a trailer that's your favorite brown, soft-plastic crawfish imitation.

RAPALA DT-6, DT-10

You can throw these baits from February through June anywhere in the country. They are my go-to bait when I need a search bait.



Rapala DT-10

Again, I want to have these baits in three different colors: pearl-gray shad, crawfish and bluegill. I'll fish crawfish early in the spring, then bluegill, and after June, I'll fish pearl-gray shad. These are really good baits.

VIBRATING JIG

Everybody makes these vibrating jigs now; the first ones were Chatterbaits. I'll throw a 3/8-ounce model, usually in black/blue.

These are such good, versatile baits, you can throw them in stained, dirty or clear water and around vegetation. They are search baits for me, just like crankbaits. I'll pick them up anytime I'm on a new body of water or on a body of water I haven't been on in a while, when I need to find fish. Just add your favorite black/blue trailer.

SHADOW RAP

When I first started throwing a jerkbait like a Shadow Rap, I only threw it in cold-water situations, but I've learned since that it's a bait that I can throw all year. It's great for schooling fish, great for early spring fish, great for postspawn fish. You just match your retrieve to the conditions. When it's real cold, you might get it down and then pause it three to five seconds between jerks. If it's warm, you only need to pause it maybe a second between jerks.

I like to fish the chrome/blue and herring colors. Both will catch a lot of largemouth and spotted bass across the Southeast.

So take some time to attend a show when you find one close to home. Make yourself a list like the one I've provided if you're just getting started and want to put the right stuff

in your tackle box, of take a few notes from what I've presented if you've got some holes in your tackle box that need filling. You'll save money and come out on the good end when it comes to catching plenty of bass this year. ■

TRAILER COLORS:

Two schools of thought exist when it comes to matching the color of soft-plastic trailers to jigs. You can choose a trailer that's the same basic color as the jig — brown/brown, black/black, green pumpkin/green pumpkin — because it's a productive color. Or you can fish a trailer of a slightly different color to try and make the bait even more visible to more fish: black/blue, black/red, green pumpkin/chartreuse. You typically don't mix dark colors with naturals, however.



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

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GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Green fields are prime food sources for deer during the winter, and they're a great spot to find shed antlers.

MAINTAIN GREEN FIELDS FOR DEER

WINTER FOOD SOURCE NEEDED; SHEDS ARE BONUS

Jeff Burleson

For the past four months, hunters have taken thousands of photos and sat for hundreds of hours in deer stands in hopes of taking after a trophy deer to peg on the wall.

While many bucks fell into hunters' traps and ended up in the freezer, a few wall-hangers slipped through the cracks and successfully survived the fall run. As winter settles in and hunting pressure subsides, deer gravitate to high-quality food sources, specifically green fields. These greener pastures are perfect places to collect antler bounty, giving hunters high hopes for next deer season.

For most hunters and land managers, January fails to make too many waves as far as preparing and maintaining food plots, but winter is one of the most critical periods of the year for deer, because little natural food is available. Deer hope to find caches of acorns left over, but few nuts will be available. They are forced to survive on woody twigs and other browse that is less-than-preferred to sustain a healthy body. The breeding season takes a toll on deer when they need quality food the most. A solid food source is desperately needed when cold weather sets in and little green forage is available.

Deer will often expand their typical travel ranges, seeking out something

green to eat, and that can often put them closer to suburban neighborhoods and highways. In spite of speeding cars, the green grass along the shoulder of highways and the greenery around flower beds become tasty alternatives to the natural options in their native habitats.

For some deer that live on hunting leases that have an ongoing food-plot plan, a late-season food plot of rye, oats and winter wheat produces a winter bounty, giving them a solid, cold-weather food source. When landowners incorporate a late shot of nitrogen into these fields, a winter food source will be readily available to draw in deer from afar.

In agriculture country, farmers utilizing cover crops or a winter rotation of wheat or rye provide massive forage centers for deer. While some hunters with oversized food-plot budgets will plant significant acreage, the majority of food plots are small. Large-production farmers make a major impact on the deer herd, with hundreds of acres of green groceries to fill their empty bellies.

Green fields are critical during the winter, and deer gravitate to them like no other. In the mid-South, deer begin dropping their antlers in January. As a result, fields become antler collection zones.

While some deer will feed in daylight

hours, the majority are still feeding nocturnally, and fields will receive a nightly deposit of shed antlers. After several months of sun bleaching, the antlers will typically be bright white, and a passerby should be able to easily detect a freshly dropped antler from afar.

Hunters making daily scans of heavily-used green fields can find which bucks made it through the season and also rack up their antler collection.

APPLY LIME NOW, SPLIT APPLICATIONS

The foundation for growing any plant begins with the soil. Plants need elemental goodness to fuel photosynthesis and produce rapid, healthy growth. Farmers and food-plot planters apply tons of fertilizers to the soil every year to grow a meaningful crop.

If soil chemistry isn't feasible, any fertilizer supplements will leach away or be unusable to target crops. It begins with the soil chemistry, and pH is the principal factor in setting the stage for growth. It must be contained within an accepted range in order for fertilizer treatments to be soluble for plant species.

With a few exceptions, most food-plot plants prefer a pH at or near 7.0, but a pH of 5.8 or higher can be acceptable



Jeff Burleson

SLOW GOES IT:

Dolomitic is the slower-acting form of agricultural lime, but its effects are longer-lasting. Consider an application as soon as hunting season ends and another a month or so before planting season.

in some varieties. While pH is important for the plants themselves, pH controls what compounds the fertilizers become after applied. As soon as applications of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash are applied to the soil, a chemical reaction occurs, converting these nutrients into various compounds. When pH is within a favor-

able range between 6.0 and 7.5, they become soluble to plants. If the pH is too low, these chemicals will remain unusable.

Typically, most forest soils in the Southeast are acid rich, leading to a problem in the food-plot plan. Acid-rich soils don't allow soluble fertilizer conversions and lead to a failed food plot. In order to elevate the pH, lime must be applied. There are several different types, including a fast-acting version of calcitic lime and a slower-acting dolomitic lime.

While the fast-acting variety is often used at the last minute, its effectiveness is short-lived compared to the dolomitic forms.

continues on page 66



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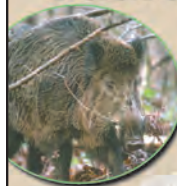
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GREENER PASTURES

continued

The slower-acting dolomitic lime will have a more-dramatic effect on soil pH, especially when applied several months before planting. The best way to change the soil pH is to schedule multiple applications or split the applications.

When food-plot plans are in place for spring, planners/planters can get a jump-start by applying the first half of lime in early January, followed by the remainder in March. If warm-season plots are not planned, the second application can be applied during the middle of summer, two months before fall planting. Splitting lime applications can be quite effective at making a difference in the soil pH and the productivity of the plot.

DIG SOIL SAMPLES

When a food-plot plan leaves the planning stage and hits the dirt, the end product doesn't always match what was envisioned. While a wide range of things can cause food-plot failure, the No. 1 cause of is unfavorable soil chemistry.

When deer season ends on Jan. 1, it's the

Take a handful of soil samples from each of your food plots for examination by county agriculture extension agents to get a grip on fertilizer requirements for future plantings.

perfect time to start figuring out what is going on with the plots, and the soil is the first place to investigate. Dig up soil samples this month on all plots and send them off to get an updated report.

Several samples should be collected from the first 6 inches of soil across each individual plots and mixed. Each plot should have its own, individual test to determine what types of soil treatments will be needed for the year.

Samples can be tested for a small fee at your county's agriculture extension office. ■



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, where he can be reached at 843-685-2405.



Jeff Burleson

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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

The author shows off a 25-pound Lake Hartwell striper, his best-ever from a kayak, on a cold, January day.

STRIPERS ARE A GREAT TARGET FOR PADDLERS

COLD WEATHER DOESN'T STOP THESE POPULAR GAMEFISH

Phillip Gentry

The striped bass has a long, colorful history, both as a commercial and recreational resource.

From the booming commercial fishery in the Northeast in the late 1800s, stripers were transported across the country from New England's coastal waters to the waters off California, the idea being reproduction of the burgeoning commercial fishery.

Although California's fishery has never equaled New England's, striped bass have been caught from just south of the Mexican border to British Columbia's Barkley Sound. Along the way, they moved into some of California's freshwater systems, where fluctuating water levels provided passage to and from O'Neill Forebay, San Luis Reservoir and Millerton Lake via San Francisco Bay.

To that end, a 67½-pound fish caught in 1992 from O'Neill Forebay still stands as the freshwater world-record striper.

Two things that should never be underestimated is what stripers will eat

and how they will continue to feed as the water gets colder and colder. A trip years back that produced my personal best kayak striper cemented those two thoughts.

Brad Knight, a Hobie pro staff member from Belton, S.C., and I decided a balmy 9-degree January day with water temperatures in the upper 30s would be perfect conditions to chase striped bass in Lake Hartwell. Knight deployed two umbrella rigs behind his paddlecraft and paddled up to 2½ mph, as measured on his sonar GPS, to elicit a bite. He wound up with several chunky hybrid stripers that day.

My plan was to mimic the yearling, threadfin shad dying off in the back of a creek by slow-trolling two ⅛-ounce crappie jigs piggy-backed with live crappie minnows. Although Knight accused me of crappie fishing — I was using 10-foot crappie rods and 8-pound line — my reasoning was to match the hatch and see if I could fool a striper.

On the third pass across a bend in a creek channel locally known as a good striper hole, one of my rods bent double and started peeling drag; I was helpless to stop it. Of course, the beauty of fighting large fish with light tackle in a kayak is the boat itself becomes part of the drag

system, and I was treated to something like a controlled sleigh ride.

What happened next was more providence than skill. With the spool almost empty, the striper, in search of something to wrap the line around, decided to seek the shelter of a boat dock. Fortunately for me, most of Hartwell's boat docks are floaters, with no pillars extending to the bottom, and this dock was also devoid of cover underneath.

While the striper wallowed under the dock, planning its next move, I managed to salvage my line and gain ground above the fish. A couple of short but tiresome runs brought him to the boat.

The big striper pegged my scales at 25 pounds. He was released in good shape and was the only fish I caught that day, but it was a day to remember.

I'll end this with a challenge. The first kayak angler to land four stripers in January 2018 — one saltwater and one freshwater each from both Carolinas — and e-mail me the photos at pgentry6@bellsouth.net will receive a Sportsman shirt and be featured in an upcoming column. Photos must show the fish, a kayak and enough background to reasonably establish your location. Submission deadline is January 31, 2018. ■



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.

JANUARY'S BEST BETS

SALTWATER

WHAT — Saltwater striped bass

WHERE — In North Carolina, fish the two US 64 bridges between the mainland and Roanoke Island across Croatan Sound. In South Carolina, the upper end of the Wando River holds stripers thanks to some supplemental stocking of native strains of river stripers.

HOW — Fish cut bait at the bases of the bridges near Manns Harbor using pinfish or crab. You can also cast a curlytail grub between the pilings. Moving water from wind or tide works best. On the Wando, stripers love crankbaits in chrome or blue hues.

LAUNCH — You can launch beside the US 64 bridge at Manns Harbor to fish the NC bridges. Paradise Landing off US 17 just before Awendaw gives you good access to the upper Wando.

INSIDER TIP — Inshore stripers aren't as big as their ocean-going kin. Downsize your baits and tackle appropriately.

The pilings that support the two US 64 bridges that link the mainland with Roanoke Island, N.C., attract plenty of stripers in the winter.

FRESHWATER

WHAT — Landlocked striped bass

WHERE — In North Carolina, head for Lake Tillery on the Yadkin/Pee Dee chain. In South Carolina, Lake Murray in the Midlands is hard to beat in the winter.

HOW — Try a two-pronged approach in either state. Free-line a couple of large shiners behind the yak while casting noisy topwater plugs or bucktails to schooling fish in and around the backs of creeks.

LAUNCH — The public ramp at 307-A Lakeshore Dr., in Norwood, N.C., will put you about midlake on Lake Tillery. Dreher Island State Park is a great centrally located kayak access to Lake Murray.

INSIDER TIP — Contact Rodney Criscoe at Joe's Bait and Tackle in Albemarle (704-982-8716) before you fish Lake Tillery; visit Lake Murray Reports Facebook page to find out where they're biting on Murray.



Phillip Gentry

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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

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This Wheellez kayak cart will make transport of your kayak or canoe through soft sand or dirt almost easy. The cart features inflatable Wheellez balloon wheels designed to disperse heavy loads over a large surface area for easy portage across adverse terrain and a durable aluminum frame with dual kickstand collapses to fit into most kayak hatches.



Rubber pads cradle the kayak's hull, holding it securely, and the cart includes two 13-foot tie-down straps to hold the boat to the cart. The cart weighs in at just under 10 pounds and can carry loads of up to 176 pounds. Suggested retail is \$240. Available online at rei.com. ■

Ballon tires help the Wheellez kayak cart transport paddleboats from truck or trailer to ramp and water with ease.

ENGEL BAIT AERATION COOLER

Specifically designed for kayak anglers, Engel's Bait Aeration Cooler keeps your live bait healthy, active and ready for show-time. Molded polystyrene insulation protects bait, whether you're fishing during the summer or when the thermometer bottoms out. A two-speed, 2x2 air pump maximizes aeration. Run the pump on high speed when the cooler is full of bait and turn down to conserve battery power later in the day. Water-resistant housing protects the motor and suppresses noise.

The cooler comes equipped with a high-impact plastic base, water-tight EVA gasket lid and corrosion-resistant self-stopping hinges, stainless steel latches and screws. It runs on two D batteries (not included) when out on the kayak.

Suggested retail is \$74.99 to \$84.99. Available in 3.25, 4.75, and 7.5 gallon sizes. More info at cabelas.com. ■



Engel's Bait Aeration Cooler uses two D batteries to run an air pump that helps keep live bait alive and kicking.

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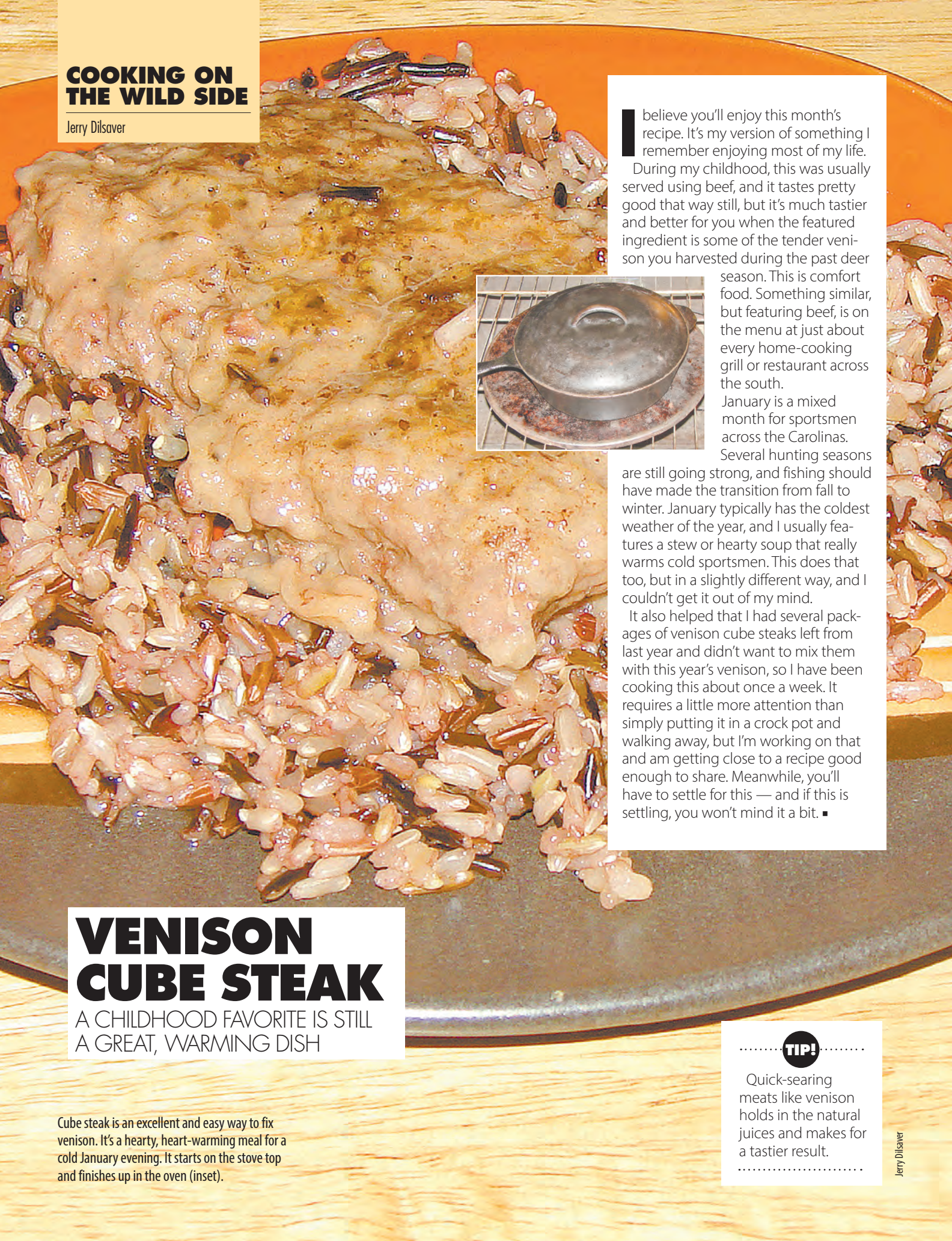
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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver



I believe you'll enjoy this month's recipe. It's my version of something I remember enjoying most of my life.

During my childhood, this was usually served using beef, and it tastes pretty good that way still, but it's much tastier and better for you when the featured ingredient is some of the tender venison you harvested during the past deer season.

This is comfort food. Something similar, but featuring beef, is on the menu at just about every home-cooking grill or restaurant across the south.

January is a mixed month for sportsmen across the Carolinas.

Several hunting seasons are still going strong, and fishing should have made the transition from fall to winter. January typically has the coldest weather of the year, and I usually features a stew or hearty soup that really warms cold sportsmen. This does that too, but in a slightly different way, and I couldn't get it out of my mind.

It also helped that I had several packages of venison cube steaks left from last year and didn't want to mix them with this year's venison, so I have been cooking this about once a week. It requires a little more attention than simply putting it in a crock pot and walking away, but I'm working on that and am getting close to a recipe good enough to share. Meanwhile, you'll have to settle for this — and if this is settling, you won't mind it a bit. ■



VENISON CUBE STEAK

A CHILDHOOD FAVORITE IS STILL A GREAT, WARMING DISH

Cube steak is an excellent and easy way to fix venison. It's a hearty, heart-warming meal for a cold January evening. It starts on the stove top and finishes up in the oven (inset).

TIP!

Quick-searing meats like venison holds in the natural juices and makes for a tastier result.

VENISON CUBE STEAK

I was a youngster when I first had cube steak, served with lots of gravy on a big serving of homemade mashed potatoes, complete with the lumps that gave it away. There were vegetables and bread, but they weren't nearly as important. Vegetables were tolerated because they were required for kids, and the bread was just a pusher to try to get all the meat, potatoes and gravy on the fork and sop up any leftover gravy. This was probably my original "clean plate" meal, and I remember seeing grown men sneak a quick lick of the plate on numerous occasions.

While the recipes were similar, my aunt's was slightly different than ours, and my grandpa's was still a little different from either. Some included broth instead of water, the amount of pepper, black pepper only or some white pepper, mushrooms or not, and I'm sure there were more. The bottom line is, they were all delicious; it was a meal that was often requested.

This is a natural for cooking venison. The quick sear is to hold in the natural juices, and baking it slowly in the gravy keeps it moist on the outside while enhancing the flavor and tenderizing it. It should be just shy of falling apart and cut easily with the edge of your fork.

There are many ways to prepare this; most are

PREPARATION:

Sprinkle the salt, pepper and onion powder on both sides of the steaks. Put the flour evenly in a shallow dish or on wax paper and press both sides of the steaks into the flour. Pour the oil into a cast-iron pan and heat stove top to medium or medium-high.

Once the oil is hot, put the steaks in the pan and cook until lightly golden brown (approximately two to four minutes per side). Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Add water to the pan to cover most ($\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{7}{8}$) of the steaks. Stir in the beef bouillon until it is totally dissolved. Sprinkle in 3 rounded teaspoons of the flour remaining in the dish or on the wax paper and stir to mix. Bring to a boil and stir thoroughly.

Remove from the burner, cover and place on middle rack in oven. Bake $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 hours until tender. It should cut with a fork. Check occasionally and stir and spoon some of the gravy onto the top of the steaks. Remove from oven and let sit about 5 minutes before serving.

TIP!
Baking applies the heat evenly to cube steak, and it helps keep the venison tender, which is a key to this recipe.

pretty similar. Some like to simmer the steaks on the stove top, but I like baking so the heat is applied evenly. This also helps keep it tender, and when you start with a tender piece of venison, you should prepare it to accentuate that tenderness. I consider this a responsibility.

I believe you'll enjoy this version. In addition to being melt-in-your-mouth tender, it has a nice flavor that is robust without being spicy. Many will want to serve it covered with lots of the gravy and more gravy heaped on mashed potatoes; it tastes good that way — really good.

However, for those like me who have become more health conscious, my suggestion is cooking it in the gravy to get some of that good flavor, then serving it without piling it on so there are less calories, carbohydrates and cholesterol.

It's really good served this way too. Enjoy! ■

Many people believe the way to serve this is with mashed potatoes, especially homemade, with lots of the gravy heaped on top. That certainly is good, but those of us who want the flavor but want to eat more healthy, it also serves well over wild rice with a minimum of gravy. I know it isn't quite the same, but it tastes good, and your arteries and cardiologist will thank you.

Vegetables are a must; I like steamed or roasted broccoli, but it also does well with steamed or stewed squash. A good, hearty wheat or rye bread adds a little extra taste and helps get the last morsels and gravy off the plate. This might be a good meal to skip dessert. ■

INGREDIENTS:

4 venison cube steaks (4 to 6 ounces each)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup vegetable oil

1 tsp beef bouillon (granules)

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp coarse-ground black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. white pepper

Sprinkle of onion powder
Onion salt may be used

Light sprinkle of salt (optional to taste)

Water



A short stay in a cast-iron pan is the first step in making a tasty meal of venison cube steaks.

Jerry Dilsaver



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.

STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano



A CROSSBOW THAT FILLS ALL THE BILLS

MISSION'S SUB-1 IS LATEST IN CROSSBOW DESIGN FROM AN INDUSTRY LEADER

Slightly more than a year ago, I heard rumblings that Matt McPherson and his engineers at Mission Crossbows were working on a revolutionary design that would set the bar higher for the entire industry.

As CEO and chief engineer of Mathews and Mission Archery, McPherson has been responsible for a lot of the innovations in bow design over the past 25 years, so I was anxiously awaiting the results. My wait ended in October when Missions unveiled the SUB-1 crossbow, and I was not disappointed.

This crossbow does what its name implies, delivering groups of less than an inch at 100 yards, and with less noise and recoil than any crossbow I've ever shot. It shoots arrows using what Mathews engineers call "Controlled Acceleration". There is literally no thump or felt recoil at the shot. Also, the arrow leaves the flight deck in a smooth, controlled manner, with less flexing and loss of energy, which leads to better consistency. Everything about the SUB-1's design revolves around delivering supreme accuracy.

ACCURACY BEGINS WITH FOUNDATION

The SUB-1's foundation is a CNC-machined aluminum I-beam. This is extremely rigid and durable, providing a precision flight deck from which to

launch arrows, thereby eliminating any vertical nock travel. It is joined to a CNC-machined aluminum stock that insures a tight fit, reducing noise while further enhancing accuracy.

The stock's fore grip and AR-style pistol grip are both over-molded for an ergonomic/sure grip. The rear stock is fully adjustable with a wide range of length of pull, and also features an adjustable cheek comb with 1¼ inches of height adjustment.

The SUB-1 utilizes short, wide limbs, borrowed from Mathews' proven vertical-bow technology. These shorter, wider limbs are very rigid, distributing stress better and providing more torsional stability for greater consistency. They are attached to the riser with Mission's adjustable limb-retention system, allowing the shooter to customize the draw weight to fit their individual needs.

The SUB-1 does not require the use of a foot stirrup, using the back of the riser as a foot rest. This serves to reduce noise, while at the same time increasing power stroke and arrow speed. For those who want a more-traditional design, foot stirrups are available as an accessory.

The SUB-1 is powered by the Sync X Cam System, which eliminates any possibility of horizontal nock travel while providing 80-percent let-off for easy cocking. The cam system delivers up to 350 fps of

arrow speed, yet is as quiet as or quieter than many vertical compound bows.

The Zebra string and cables are served for a majority of their length, requiring a minimum amount of maintenance. The cams have sealed bearings, eliminating the need to oil or lubricate them.

The SUB-1 comes with a standard rope-cocking aid, and because of its high let-off, it cocks very easily. But, it will also accept Mission Crossbows RSD crank cocking device.

BENCHMARK TRIGGER DESIGN

At the heart of the SUB-1 lies the revolutionary Benchmark Fire Control System that was more than two years in development. It features a two-stage, match-grade trigger that utilizes a fully contained rolling sear set at only 3.4 pounds, honestly the best trigger I've ever felt on any crossbow. It also features the Easy-Load bolt retention arm, which allows for easy loading while applying optimal downward pressure on the arrow.

It is topped with a rigid 7075 aluminum scope rail to eliminate flex and further enhance accuracy. Perhaps the best feature of both the Benchmark Fire Control System and the entire SUB-1 is its one-of-a-kind de-cocking button. This allows the shooter to safely and almost

Mission's SUB-1 crossbow promises minute-of-angle accuracy thanks to a number of design improvements including the Sync X Cam System (below).

SIZE MATTERS:

Shorter, wider bow limbs are more rigid than wider, narrow limbs, and they distribute stress better to produce a more-consistent, stable shooting platform.



effortlessly de-cock the SUB-1 crossbow.

The SUB-1 is a totally new crossbow design and is the most accurate crossbow I've ever shot. It is compact at only 30¼ inches long, 13.8 inches wide uncocked, 10.7 inches wide when cocked and weighs 7½ pounds. It has a 200-pound draw weight and a 13¾-inch power stroke, sending arrows downrange at a respectable 350 fps. Its 80-percent let-off makes it a pleasure to both cock and de-cock as well. It is available in both black and Under Armour Ridge Reaper Forest Camo. Like all Mathews/Mission products, it features their unparalleled lifetime warranty with some of the best customer service in the entire industry. As soon as I shot one, I ordered my own.

A ONE OF A KIND FEATURE

Anyone who has ever hunted with a crossbow knows how annoying it is to have to unload one by shooting it after the hunt. Over my years in the archery industry, I've seen countless arrows destroyed during this process, and several injuries caused by unwise attempts to bypass the trigger to avoid having to shoot the crossbow. The SUB-1 has a button that allows the user to safely unload the crossbow without firing it, using only the cocking aid. There are many things I love about my new SUB-1, but this is my favorite feature of all. ■



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



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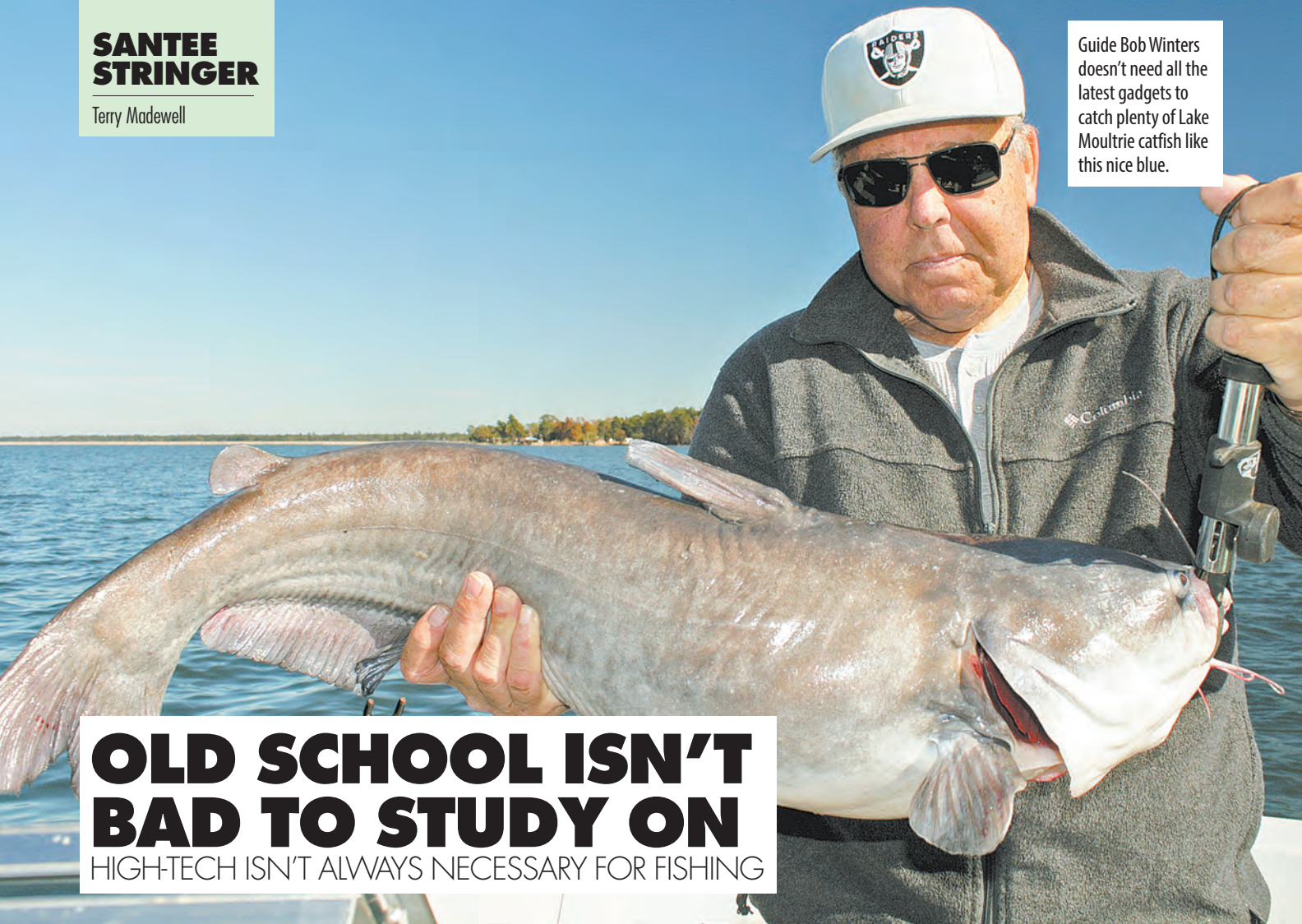
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Terry Madewell

Guide Bob Winters doesn't need all the latest gadgets to catch plenty of Lake Moultrie catfish like this nice blue.



OLD SCHOOL ISN'T BAD TO STUDY ON

HIGH-TECH ISN'T ALWAYS NECESSARY FOR FISHING

Terry Madewell

When guide Bob Winters stowed his gear after a day of fishing on Lake Moultrie, I caught myself wandering around his old Glassmaster boat, checking out the ancient flasher sonar unit. I recognized it because I'd used one myself long ago.

"I'm an 'old-school' fisherman," Winters said. "You won't see much high-tech equipment on my boat; I do a lot of things the old-school way."

Winters, 73, who works out of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal between the Santee Cooper lakes, has guided professionally since 1979. His heyday dates to the golden years when stripers were king and the big catfish had exploded onto the Santee Cooper scene. Winters was one of the iconic guides from the era when names like Joe Drose, "Big" John Sellers, John "Roundtrip" Ham, Tom Thaxton and others were making Lake Moultrie and Lake Marion household

words to the national fishing community. Winters said he prefers old-school qualities about most things.

"I've got a 1988 Glassmaster boat pulled by a 1994 Ford truck," he said. "I have what many consider an ancient Lowrance 2460 flasher as my electronic equipment. And to stay consistent; I have a 1968 John Deere tractor and a wonderful, 1960-model wife."

Winters (843-700-0626) said the fishing on the Santee Cooper lakes is excellent for catfish and stripers, even in the middle of winter.

"From mid-December through mid-January — and often beyond — both species are caught in big numbers and sizes," he said. "It's prime time."

Winters said fish tend to orient to deep water, and fishing near forage, often threadfin or gizzard shad, is crucial.

"I use my flasher to find the hills, drops and channels," he said. "But I enhance that with a lifetime of fishing knowl-

edge. I know where fish typically are at different times of the year, and with my flasher, I spot forage and mark suspended stripers as well as catfish on the bottom."

Winters said his commitment to the flasher is so strong he has multiple backup plans.

"I have three more 2460s tucked away in case this one gives out, and two Hummingbird Super Sixties as my fallback when those are gone," he said.

THE MENHADEN FACTOR ARRIVES

But the arrival of menhaden as a forage source also impacts winter fishing patterns.

"When menhaden are available, they become the primary forage," he said. "I'll fish for suspended fish relating to the menhaden schools when and if they move in."

Until menhaden arrive, Winters prefers

to drift flat stretches of bottom with live gizzard shad or blueback herring for stripers and targets the depths fish are marked on his depth finder. For catfish, he drifts hills and ledges using the Santee catfish rig with gizzard shad or herring as bait. But he doesn't use a circle hook for either species.

"I'm old school on hooks, too," he said. "I've tried circle hooks but prefer a standard 6/0 Eagle Claw hook for catfish and the 1/0 size for stripers. One reason is circle hooks frequently foul into the bait, and my regular hooks don't."

As for interpreting what's depicted on his old flasher unit, Winters hit a home-run on his first attempt. While drifting up a ledge from deep to shallower water — his preferred way to drift a catfish hot spot — he marked a momentary flash just off the bottom on the screen.

"That's a good fish; we ought to catch that one," he said.

Calculating the amount of line out and drift rate, some of the baits would arrive at ground zero in less than two minutes. Ninety seconds, later the rod was snatched three eyes deep into the water, and a big catfish was solidly hooked.

Winters isn't opposed to new technology,

he's tried most of it before opting back to old-school methods.

"I stay open-minded thanks to my son, Bobby," he said. "He's 23 and graduated college in December 2017 and is considering guiding as a profession. He likes new technology, and it clicks for him."

Don't be fooled the old-school philosophy, Winters' fish-catching standards are the same as any Santee Cooper guide.

"At the end of the day, we all want the same thing: to provide folks with great fishing," he said. "Whether that goal is a box full of fish or just a day of catch-and-release, the bottom line is, fishermen enjoying the experience and catching fish. I've experimented with a lot of techniques and equipment and simply use the ones that work best for me."



Terry Madewell

FLASHERS: REAL-TIME RESULTS

Modern depth finders with liquid-crystal displays provide anglers with an awful lot of information that an older, "spinning wheel" flasher unit can't, including GPS and mapping functions. But there's another big difference: an LCD unit shows what your boat has already passed over; a flasher displays the bottom and targets in real time.

He made the analogy that at the end of the day a box of fish in 2018 is remarkably similar to a box of fish in 1979, when today's "old school" was the new technology. Winters learned it well and still fills coolers today. ■



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



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Photo provided by Capt. Jimmie's Guide Service

HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

Three of the more popular spinners for trout are: (left to right) Mepps Aglia, Panther Martin and Ward's Rooster Tail. Other effective spinning lures are Blue Fox, Thomas, Acme and Joe's Flies.



SPINNING FISHING: A HAPPY MEDIUM

TAKE A SPINNING OUTFIT AND A FEW LURES WITH FLASHING BLADES TO THE STREAM AND YOU'RE SET TO GO

Wesley Satterwhite

Die-hard fly fishers, some of them, are scornful of bait fishers, portraying them as low-brow fish killers who consume every trout they catch. Bait fishers, some of them, are equally scornful of fly fishers, considering them elitists who catch fish not to eat but to release.

Between those two extremes, of course, are thoughtful fly fishers who occasionally kill a fish to eat and bait fishers who catch only enough to eat. And on each side, you will find trout fishers who consider their way of fishing as the only true way of fishing for trout.

The trout fishers who hold a special niche without attracting scorn from either side are the spinner fishers. The big advantage of spinner fishing over fly fishing is the cost. Getting outfitted for fly fishing requires a sizeable outlay of money: rods, reels, line, leaders and all the different flies, nymphs and streamers you have to buy. The end result could be hundreds of dollars, more if you buy the

expensive models. Depending on where you purchase it, you can get a complete spinning outfit, including rod, reel and line for under a hundred dollars and have enough money left to buy an assortment of spinning lures.

As for the advantages over bait-fishing: no mess, no fuss. You don't have to constantly bait your hook, and you'll avoid the irritating hang-ups when your hook and sinker are caught on rocks, debris, and other underwater hazards. Yes, you will occasionally lose a lure, but if you keep the lure moving, you're less likely to get hung-up.

EQUIPMENT

If you fish mostly small, mountain streams, a 5-foot, ultralight rod with 4-pound line will serve you well. Even a small trout will feel like a lunger when you reel it in. For larger streams, a 6-foot, lightweight rod with 6-pound line will serve you well. Most combination spinning outfits will have 6-pound line.

As for lures, use small lures, $\frac{1}{16}$ -ounce on small streams and a $\frac{1}{8}$ -ounce on larger streams.

TECHNIQUE

Mastering the art of fly fishing takes a lot of time and practice, but you can become a proficient spinner fisher with only a few trips to a trout stream.

The overhead cast usually works best, unless you have overhanging tree limbs to contend with. Use a side cast if you can't use an overhead cast. You can use the sling-shot technique to get the lure under rhododendron and other bushy growth that spill over creek banks.

The most difficult part of casting a spinning lure is controlling the distance. Keep your finger on the line and stop it when it reaches the spot you want to fish. This part may take a little time to master.

For best results, fish upstream. When you cast, let the lure sink before you starting reeling. Give the line a slight jerk to ensure that the blade spins, which

attracts the fish. Vary your retrieve between slow and fast. When fishing large pools, work from the outside in.

Spinning lures are legal for fishing trout streams in North Carolina, South Carolina, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Exceptions are those streams limited to fly fishing only.

SPINNING LURES

Spinning lures come in a variety of styles and sizes. The spinning blades also come in a variety of colors. Veteran spinner fishers say silver blades are best when water is murky, and gold blades are best for clear-water conditions.

Lures with single hooks are more likely to be found in specialty sporting goods stores such as Field and Stream and Cabela's. Lures with treble hooks are legal in most general, hatchery-supported waters. In North Carolina, lures with single hooks are required in wild-trout waters and in hatchery supported, delayed-harvest waters during the catch-and-release season. If you have difficulty finding a spinning lure with a single hook, cut off two of the hooks close to the shank. This will not affect the lure's action. The spinning, flashing blade is what tricks a fish into thinking it's a minnow. If you are unsure if a stream requires single-hook fishing, be on the safe side and have a small set of wire cutters handy to cut off the extra hooks. ■



Wesley Satterwhite

APPROACHING A STREAM:

This photo illustrates three water conditions: pocket water, riffley water and a large span of still water. For best results, work the open water first, starting on the outside and working in. Next, fish the pocket water on both sides of the riffles, and last, run your spinner through the fast water. It may take several casts to get a strike. Move to another spot after you've made at least three casts.

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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.

DOS AND DON'TS WHEN THE WARDEN ARRIVES

By Pete Rogers

When interacting with a wildlife agent, try these tips for a smoother encounter

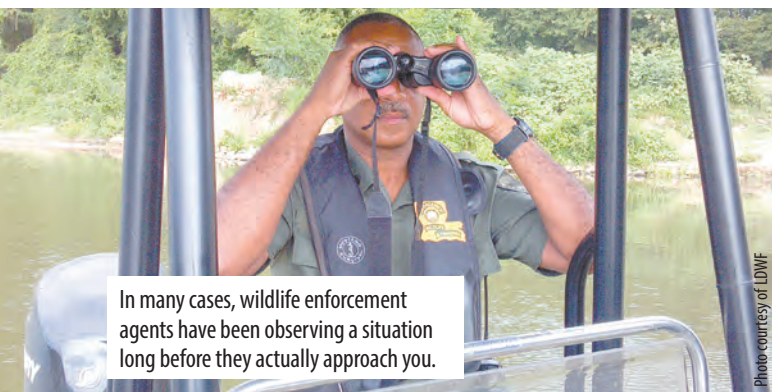
The words “game warden” often ring fear into the hearts of many sportsmen, but they don’t need to. Recent discussions with three wildlife agents who have almost 40 years experience in the field resulted in these ideas about how to do the right thing when you’re approached in the woods or on the water.

WHAT A GAME WARDEN WISHES YOU KNEW:

- When hunting out of a boat, all boating rules apply. Most violations waterfowl hunters receive are usually boating violations.
- The agent knows more about the situation than you think — they’ve likely been watching long before approaching you.
- You can buy a hunting or fishing license 24 hours a day. There is never a reason not to have a license.
- A state’s hunting and fishing rules and regulations guide is a summary, and doesn’t contain every law on the books. It is the sportsman’s responsibility to know the laws that govern the activity in which they are participating.
- It’s also the sportsman’s responsibility to know whose land he is on, whose land the animal he’s shooting is on and whose land the animal he’s recovering is on.

WHAT SPORTSMEN NEED TO KNOW:

- In a hunting situation, the threat to wildlife agents is high because there is always a gun involved.
- Once an enforcement agent identifies himself, go ahead and unload your gun, open the breech and set it down. Gun safety is important. Be aware that you are being approached by a law-enforcement officer, so do not handle your gun in an unsafe manner. Put everyone at ease by unloading and setting the gun down.
- If you’re carrying a handgun or another concealed weapon, let the officer know that you have another gun and **DO NOT** reach for it. Say something like, “Officer, I have a handgun in my field bag,” or “I need to let you know that I am carrying a handgun.” This will make the whole interaction go a lot smoother.
- If you’re driving a boat, you are the captain and you are responsible for everything that happens in the vessel. It does not matter who the actual captain is — when the agent approaches, the person standing at the helm is legally the captain and is responsible for all requirements for the boat.



In many cases, wildlife enforcement agents have been observing a situation long before they actually approach you.

Photo courtesy of LDWF

- If you do not have permission to be on that land, you are trespassing. Period.
- If you have doubts regulations, call your wildlife agency. In North Carolina, 919-707-0030. In South Carolina, 803-734-4004.
- Violation of game laws affects everyone. If you see a violation, report it. In North Carolina, call 800-662-7137, in South Carolina, 800-922-5431.

5 THINGS NOT TO DO WHEN CHECKED BY A GAME WARDEN

- 1- Under any circumstances, do not lie. Regardless of the situation, tell the truth.
- 2- Don't be rude and disrespectful; if there's no violation, there is nothing to worry about.
- 3- Do not handle your gun when a game warden is approaching.
- 4- Don't try to pull up to the game warden's boat. If an agent is approaching you, shift into neutral and let him pull up to your boat.
- 5- Do not try and cover up for someone else's violation.

CROSSPOINT WATERPROOF CREW SOCKS

The idea of waterproof, yet breathable socks sounds like an oxymoron, but thanks to the people at Showers Pass, they're actually a reality.

The company's Crosspoint Waterproof Socks feature a three-layer construction that sandwiches a waterproof layer between a knit outer layer and a breathable, moisture-wicking inner layer of Coolmax lining.

Designed for cyclists, the socks have great possibilities for hiking, hunting and fishing, along with other outdoor activities.

The socks are machine washable and priced at \$35 per pair.

More Info: www.showerspass.com



SHIMANO CURADO 200 K SERIES

Shimano made some waves in the fishing industry last summer when it debuted its new Curado 200 K series baitcasting reels at the annual ICAST show, where they promptly took home the honor as the best new freshwater reel.

The series includes three models, each coming in left-hand and right-hand retrieve, with six anti-rust ball bearings, micro-machined gears and Shimano's SVS Infinity braking system, this time with adjustable internal and external brakes, in light reels weighing between 7.6 and 7.8 ounces, thanks to side plates of graphite and C14.



The 200 model (and 201 left-handed retrieve) have a 6.2-to-1 retrieve ratio, allowing the angler to take in 26 inches of line per turn of the handle. The 200KHG (and 201KHG left-handed retrieve) have 7.4-to-1 ratios, getting back 31 inches per crank, and the high-speed 200KXG (and 201 KXG left-handed) have an 8.5-to-1 retrieve ratio, getting back 36 inches per crank.

The spool capacity on all six reels is 190 yards of 30-pound PowerPro braid or 155 yards of 10-pound monofilament.

The retail price on all six reels is \$179. They are available at a number of retail outlets, including Academy Sports+Outdoors (Academy.com).

More Info: www.fish.shimano.com

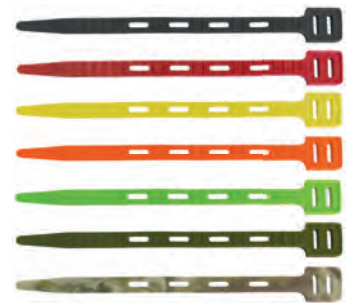
ONE-TIE REUSABLE TIE STRAPS

One-Tie reusable tie straps take the traditional plastic zip-tie strip to a new level, and that's great for outdoorsmen who need a way to tie down or tie up gear when a zip-tie or bungee cord just doesn't get the job done.

Manufactured by Wisconsin-based Taylor Made Products, One-Ties are strong, tie straps made from an automotive grade polymer in sizes from 8 to 32 inches, and retailing between \$1.99 and \$69.99 depending on size and the number of straps in a pack.

The One-Tie straps have outdoors uses including wrapping up bundles of fishing rods, tying down tackle boxes or other items that aren't stationary in the bottom of a boat, even hanging items from a backpack that are too big to fit inside. They're perfect for tasks including strapping together the sections of deer stand ladder sections for transport in and out of the woods, or for hanging items from your stand if there's no room for them around your seat.

They're available at Walmart, Menards, Lowe's and TrueValue retailers or online through Amazon.



New product submissions can be emailed to **Mark Hilz** at markh@lasmag.com.

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HUNTING SEASONS

DEER

| Region | Method | Season |
|--------------|--------------|---|
| Western | Bowhunting | Sept. 9-Oct. 1 Oct. 15-Nov. 19 Dec. 10-Jan. 1, 2018 (bucks only) |
| | Muzzleloader | Oct. 2-14 |
| | Gun | Nov. 20-Dec. 9 |
| Northwestern | Bowhunting | Sept. 9-Nov. 3 |
| | Muzzleloader | Nov. 4-17 |
| | Gun | Nov. 18-Jan. 1, 2018 |
| Central | Bowhunting | Sept. 9-Oct. 27 |
| | Muzzleloader | Oct. 28-Nov. 10 |
| | Gun | Nov. 11-Jan. 1, 2018 |
| Eastern | Bowhunting | Sept. 9-29 |
| | Muzzleloader | Sept. 30-Oct. 13 |
| | Gun | Oct. 14-Jan. 1, 2018 |

BEAR

| | |
|--|---|
| Oct. 16-Nov. 18 & Dec. 11-Jan. 1, 2018: | In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties |
| Nov. 11-Jan. 1, 2018: | Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Union counties |
| Oct. 14-Jan. 1, 2018: | Franklin, Harnett, Johnston, Hoke, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties |
| Nov. 18-Jan. 1, 2018: | Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties |
| Nov. 13-Jan. 1, 2018: | Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Sampson |
| Nov. 13-18, Dec. 11-23: | Beaufort, Camden, Craven, Chowan, Dare, Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Nash, Northampton, Pasquotank, Pitt, Tyrrell, Washington, Wayne, Wilson counties |
| Nov. 11-18, Dec. 11-23: Dec. 4-23: | Bertie, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Perquimans counties Robeson County |

SQUIRREL

Oct. 16-Feb. 28, 2018 (gray & red squirrels)
Oct. 16-Dec. 31 (fox squirrels) 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 & QUAIL

Nov. 18-Feb. 28, 2018

GROUSE

Oct. 16-Feb. 28, 2018

WILD TURKEY

April 14-May 12, 2018 (Youth Only: April 7-13, 2018)

RAILS

(KING, SORA, VIRGINIA, CLAPPER)

Sept. 2-Oct. 21, Nov. 22

CANADA GEESE

Statewide: Sept. 1-30

Resident zone, Oct. 4-14, Nov. 11-Dec. 2, Dec. 16-Feb. 10.
S. James Bay zone: Oct. 4-Nov. 3, Nov. 12-Dec. 30.
NE Zone, Jan. 12-27, permit only

SNOW, BLUE, ROSS GEESE

Oct. 10-Feb. 10, 2018, Feb. 12-March 31, 2018

DUCKS

Oct. 4-7, Nov. 11-Dec. 2, Dec. 16-Jan. 27, 2018

SEA DUCKS

Nov. 20-Jan. 27, 2018

BRANT

Dec. 16-Jan. 27, 2018

DOVE

Sept. 2-Oct. 7, Nov. 22-Jan. 15, 2018;

TUNDRA SWAN

Nov. 11-Jan. 28, 2018. Bag limit 1, by permit only.

RACCOON, OPOSSUM

Oct. 16 (at sunrise)-Feb. 28, 2018

WOODCOCK

Dec. 14-Jan. 28, 2018

HUNTING SEASONS

| SPECIES | SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND) | BAG LIMIT | POSSESSION LIMIT |
|---------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Doves | Sept. 2-4 (afternoons only) Sept. 5-Oct. 14, Nov. 11-25, Dec. 15-Jan. 15, 2018 | 15 | 45 |
| Crow | Nov. 1-March 1, 2018 | No limits | |
| Quail | Nov. 20-March 1, 2018 | 12 | 36 |
| Rabbit | Nov. 23-March 1, 2018 | 5 | 15 |
| Squirrel | Oct. 1-March 1, 2018 | 10 | 30 |
| Fox | Nov. 23-March 1, 2018 | No limits | |
| Grouse | Nov. 23-March 1, 2018 (Game Zone 1 only) | 3 | 9 |
| Raccoon/ Opossum | Sept. 15-March 15, 2018 (statewide) Sept. 15-March 15, 2018 (Game Zones 3, 6) | 3 raccoons per party No limits | |
| Other furbearers | Nov. 26-March 1, 2018 (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. 24-Nov. 5 (Horry, Georgetown, Williamsburg counties) | 1 5 per party 1 | (permit only) |
| Early Teal | Sept. 15-30 | 6 | 18 |
| Rails | Oct. 6-10 | | |
| King & Clapper | Nov. 3-Jan. 6, 2018 | 15 | 45 |
| Sora & Virginia, | | 25 | 75 |
| Gallinules | Nov. 3-Jan. 6, 2018 (common/purple) | 15 | 45 |
| Snipe | Nov. 14 - Feb. 28 | 8 | 24 |
| Early Geese | Sept. 1 - 30 | 15 | 45 |
| Woodcock | Dec. 18 - Jan. 31 | 3 | 9 |
| Wild Turkey | March 20-May 5, 2017 (statewide private land) April 1-May 5, 2017 (statewide WMAs) | 3 3 | |

DEER SEASON

| ZONE | ARCHERY | PRIM WEAPON | GUNS |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | | Oct. 1-10 | Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2018 |
| 2 | Sept. 15-30 | Oct. 1-10 | Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2018 |
| 3 | | | Aug. 15-Jan. 1, 2017 |
| 4 | Aug 15-31 | | Sept. 1-Jan. 1, 2017 |
| Youth Day | | | Jan. 6, 2018 |

WATERFOWL SEASONS

| SPECIES | DATES | BAG LIMIT |
|-------------------------|---|-----------|
| Duck | Teal only: Sept. 15-30 Nov. 18-25, Dec. 9-Jan. 28, 2018 | 6 6 |
| Canada geese | Sept. 1-30, Nov. 18-25, Dec. 9-Jan. 28, 2018, Feb. 13-28, 2018 | 15 |
| Blue/snow (light) geese | Nov. 18-25, Dec. 9-Jan. 28, 2018 Feb. 13-28, 2018 | 25 |
| Brant | Nov. 18-25, Dec. 9-Jan. 28, 2018 | 2 |
| Sea ducks | Nov. 19-26, Dec. 10-Jan. 29, 2017 | 6 |

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ASTRO TABLES

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

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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

The 2018 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$12.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2018 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

-and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2018, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2019, and more. Comes with FREE 2018 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$7.95, plus \$3 s&h.

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

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For credit/debit card orders, call toll-free **866-809-5063**.

| 2018 JAN | | BEST DAYS | | | LUNAR PERIODS | | | | TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED | |
|----------|------|-----------|------|-------|---------------|-----------------------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| POOR | FAIR | GOOD | EXCL | VALUE | MOON RISE | PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD | MOON SET | PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT | | |
| Mon 1 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 77 | 5:08 pm | 10:45 pm - 2:05 am | 6:37 am | 10:06 am - 1:26 pm | ☀ | ○ FULL & PERIGEE |
| Tue 2 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 66 | 6:14 pm | 11:50 pm - Midnight | 7:41 am | 11:10 am - 2:30 pm | | ○ HIGH |
| Wed 3 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 54 | 7:23 pm | Midnight - 3:06 am | 8:38 am | 12:15 pm - 3:31 pm | | ○ |
| Thu 4 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 42 | 8:32 pm | 12:54 am - 4:04 am | 9:28 am | 1:19 pm - 4:29 pm | | ○ |
| Fri 5 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 35 | 9:39 pm | 1:57 am - 4:53 am | 10:12 am | 2:22 pm - 5:18 pm | | ○ |
| Sat 6 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 31 | 10:42 pm | 2:58 am - 5:38 am | 10:51 am | 3:23 pm - 6:03 pm | ☾ | ○ |
| Sun 7 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 33 | 11:43 pm | 3:55 am - 6:21 am | 11:26 am | 4:20 pm - 6:46 pm | | ○ |
| Mon 8 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 40 | | 4:51 am - 6:59 am | 11:59 am | 5:16 pm - 7:24 pm | | ○ HALF |
| Tue 9 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 27 | 12:42 am | 5:42 am - 7:38 am | 12:32 pm | 6:07 pm - 8:03 pm | | ○ |
| Wed 10 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 19 | 1:39 am | 6:34 am - 8:16 am | 1:05 pm | 6:59 pm - 8:41 pm | | ○ |
| Thu 11 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 16 | 2:35 am | 7:26 am - 8:54 am | 1:40 pm | 7:51 pm - 9:19 pm | | ○ |
| Fri 12 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 14 | 3:30 am | 8:16 am - 9:34 am | 2:17 pm | 8:41 pm - 9:59 pm | | ○ |
| Sat 13 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 22 | 4:24 am | 9:06 am - 10:18 am | 2:57 pm | 9:31 pm - 10:43 pm | | ○ |
| Sun 14 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 30 | 5:16 am | 9:56 am - 11:02 am | 3:40 pm | 10:21 pm - 11:27 pm | ☾ | ○ Apogee |
| Mon 15 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 40 | 6:06 am | 10:44 am - 11:50 am | 4:27 pm | 11:09 pm - 12:15 am | | ○ LOW |
| Tue 16 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 45 | 6:53 am | 11:32 am - 12:38 pm | 5:18 pm | 11:57 pm - Midnight | | ○ NEW |
| Wed 17 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 36 | 7:37 am | 12:16 pm - 1:28 pm | 6:10 pm | Midnight - 1:03 am | | ○ |
| Thu 18 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 28 | 8:17 am | 1:00 pm - 2:18 pm | 7:05 pm | 12:41 am - 1:53 am | | ○ |
| Fri 19 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 22 | 8:55 am | 1:42 pm - 3:10 pm | 8:01 pm | 1:25 am - 2:43 am | | ○ |
| Sat 20 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 20 | 9:29 am | 2:20 pm - 4:02 pm | 8:58 pm | 2:07 am - 3:35 am | | ○ |
| Sun 21 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 23 | 10:03 am | 2:58 pm - 4:54 pm | 9:56 pm | 2:45 am - 4:27 am | | ○ |
| Mon 22 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 26 | 10:35 am | 3:36 pm - 5:48 pm | 10:54 pm | 3:23 am - 5:19 am | | ○ |
| Tue 23 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 34 | 11:09 am | 4:15 pm - 6:41 pm | 11:55 pm | 4:01 am - 6:13 am | | ○ |
| Wed 24 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 48 | 11:43 am | 4:56 pm - 7:38 pm | | 4:40 am - 7:06 am | | ○ HALF |
| Thu 25 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 41 | 12:21 pm | 5:40 pm - 8:36 pm | 12:57 am | 5:21 am - 8:03 am | | ○ |
| Fri 26 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 40 | 1:04 pm | 6:28 pm - 9:38 pm | 2:02 am | 6:05 am - 9:01 am | | ○ |
| Sat 27 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 42 | 1:52 pm | 7:23 pm - 10:39 pm | 3:08 am | 6:53 am - 10:03 am | ☀ | ○ |
| Sun 28 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 54 | 2:47 pm | 8:23 pm - 11:43 pm | 4:14 am | 7:48 am - 11:04 am | | ○ |
| Mon 29 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 65 | 3:49 pm | 9:25 pm - 12:45 am | 5:19 am | 8:48 am - 12:08 pm | | ○ HIGH |
| Tue 30 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 75 | 4:57 pm | 10:31 pm - 1:43 am | 6:19 am | 9:50 am - 1:10 pm | | ○ Perigee |
| Wed 31 | ██ | ██ | ██ | 79 | 6:06 pm | 11:36 pm - Midnight | 7:13 am | 10:56 am - 2:08 pm | ☀ | ○ FULL |

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

Atlantic Beach, Ocean

| | HIGH | LOW |
|----------------------------------|-------|------|
| Cape Lookout Outer Coast | -0:02 | 0:10 |
| Shell Point Harkers Island | 2:07 | 2:45 |
| Harkers Island Br. Outer Coast | 2:23 | 2:42 |
| Channel Mkr.Lt. #59 Outer Coast | 1:40 | 1:38 |
| Lenoxville Point Outer Coast | 1:29 | 1:23 |
| North River Bridge Outer Coast | 1:24 | 3:19 |
| Beaufort In. Ch. R. Outer Coast | 0:22 | 0:22 |
| Beaufort Duke Marine Lab | 0:57 | 0:50 |
| Gallant Channel Outer Coast | 1:04 | 0:55 |
| Newport River Outer Coast | 1:25 | 1:40 |
| Core Creek Bridge Outer Coast | 1:41 | 1:57 |
| Fort Macon USCG Station | 0:32 | 0:29 |
| Morehead City Outer Coast | 0:41 | 0:38 |
| Atlantic Beach Outer Coast | 0:00 | 0:00 |
| Triple ESS Marina Bogue Sd | 0:50 | 0:39 |
| Atlantic Beach Outer Coast | 1:03 | 1:13 |
| NC State Fisheries Outer Coast | 1:20 | 1:43 |
| Coral Bay Atl. Beach Outer Coast | 2:02 | 2:25 |
| Spooner Creek Outer Coast | 2:35 | 2:55 |
| Bogue Inlet Outer Coast | 0:28 | 0:26 |
| New River Inlet Outer Coast | 0:31 | 0:28 |
| New Topsail Inlet Outer Coast | 0:35 | 1:11 |

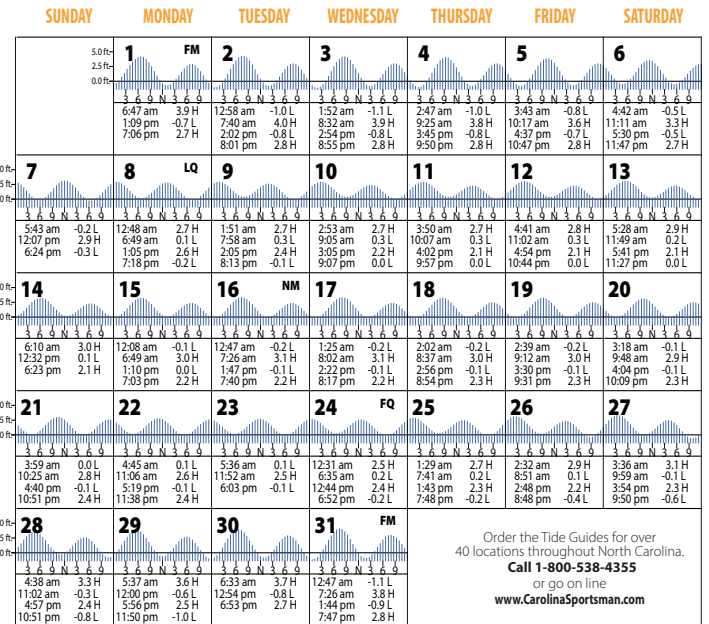
Oregon Inset, USCG Station

| | HIGH | LOW |
|----------------------------------|-------|------|
| Currituck Beach Lt. Outer Coast | -0:06 | 0:14 |
| Nags Head Area All Ocean Front | -0:22 | 0:34 |
| Kitty Hawk (ocean) Outer Coast | -0:10 | 0:18 |
| Jennetts Pr. (ocean) Outer Coast | -0:14 | 0:19 |
| Roanoke Sound Chan. Outer Coast | 2:07 | 2:08 |
| Oregon Inlet Marina Outer Coast | 1:02 | 1:57 |
| Oregon Inlet Outer Coast | 0:27 | 0:24 |
| Oregon Inlet Bridge Outer Coast | 0:13 | 0:04 |
| Oregon Inl. Channel Outer Coast | 0:21 | 0:17 |
| Old House Channel Outer Coast | 1:04 | 1:19 |
| Oregon Inlet (USCG Station) | 0:00 | 0:00 |
| Davis Slough Outer Coast | 0:39 | 0:50 |
| Cape Hatteras Outer Coast | -0:14 | 0:34 |
| Hatteras (ocean) Outer Coast | -0:22 | 0:34 |
| Hatteras Inlet Outer Coast | 0:01 | 0:08 |
| Ocracoke Inlet Outer Coast | 0:02 | 0:10 |
| Ocracoke Ocracoke Inlet | 0:17 | 0:31 |
| Cape Lookout Outer Coast | -0:24 | 0:42 |

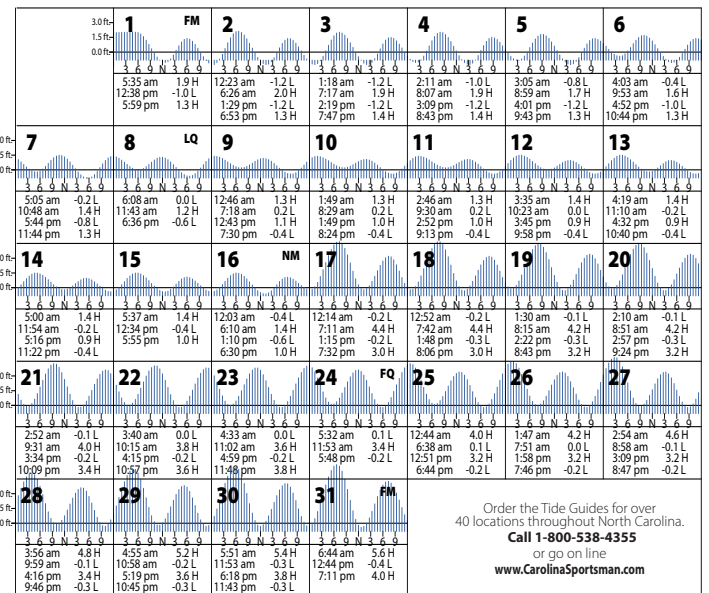
Southport, Cape Fear River

| | HIGH | LOW |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|
| Masonboro Inlet Outer Coast | -0:14 | 0:06 |
| Wilmington Beach Outer Coast | -0:48 | 0:49 |
| Cape Fear Outer Coast | -0:33 | 0:39 |
| Bald Head Cape Fear | -0:17 | 0:22 |
| Fort Caswell Cape Fear River | -0:12 | 0:16 |
| Southport Cape Fear River | 0:00 | 0:00 |
| Reaves Point Cape Fear River | 0:15 | 0:34 |
| Yaupon Beach Outer Coast | -0:39 | 1:00 |
| Lockwoods Folly Int Outer Coast | -0:29 | 0:23 |
| Shalotte Inlet (Bowen Point) | 0:10 | 0:17 |
| Tubbs Inlet Outer Coast | -0:19 | 0:23 |

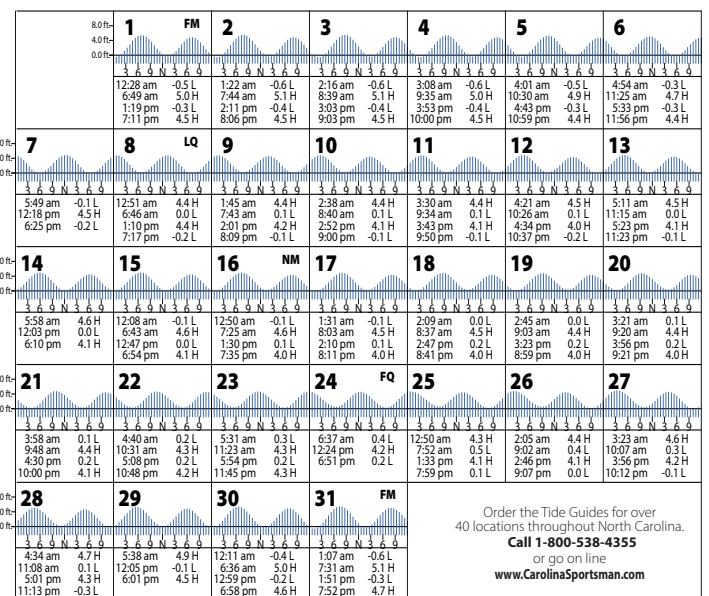
Atlantic Beach Ocean



Oregon Inlet USCG Station



Southport Cape Fear River



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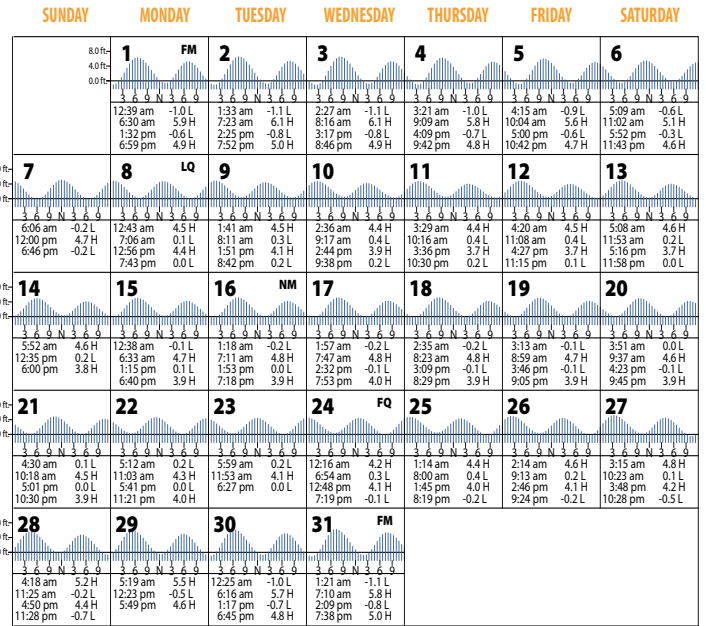
How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide

Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. The Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most active feeding periods each day in the TIDE GUIDE. To find the best time to fish your favorite honey hole, locate the spot under Tide Corrections that is closest to the area and add or subtract the time from the corresponding daily prediction.

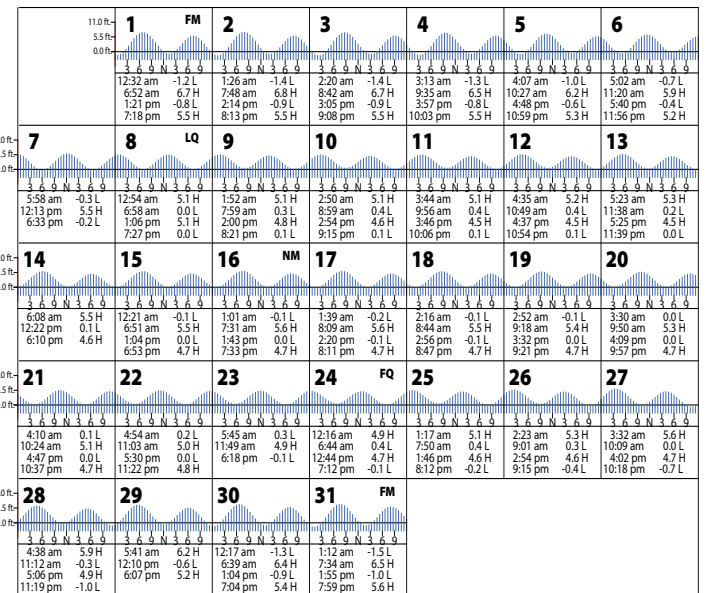
Tide Corrections

| | HIGH | LOW |
|---|-------|-------|
| Cherry Grove(inside) | 0:24 | 0:04 |
| Springmaid Pier Outer Coast | -0:07 | -0:30 |
| Murrells Inlet Outer Coast | 0:12 | 0:12 |
| Pawley's Island Outer Coast | -0:10 | -0:33 |
| North Inlet Outer Coast | 0:03 | -0:08 |
| Ent. (south jetty) Winyah Bay | -0:07 | -0:36 |
| S. Is. Ferry Winyah Bay | 1:08 | 1:13 |
| Georgetown Pee Dee River Br. | 1:55 | 2:27 |
| Black River (south of dunbar) | 3:33 | 3:57 |
| Sandy Island Thoroughfare Crk. | 2:51 | 3:12 |
| N. Santee Brg. Outer Coast | 1:23 | 1:42 |
| Brown Island S. Santee River | 0:41 | 1:19 |
| McClellanville Jeremy Creek. | 0:36 | 0:40 |
| Deweese Inlet Outer Coast | 0:07 | 0:03 |
| Breach Inlet Outer Coast | 0:05 | 0:01 |
| Fort Sumter Charleston Harbor | 0:07 | 0:06 |
| Gen. Dynamics Pier Cooper River | 1:50 | 1:42 |
| Horlbeck Creek Cooper River | 0:52 | 0:43 |
| Big Paradise Island Wando River | 1:35 | 1:08 |
| Wappoo Crk. Br. Ashley River | 0:38 | 0:41 |
| Folly Island Outer Coast | 0:01 | 0:01 |
| Folly River (below bridge) | 0:29 | 0:10 |
| Elliott Cut Stono River | 1:04 | 1:08 |
| Limehouse Bridge Outer Coast | 1:52 | 1:49 |
| Rockville Bohicket Creek. | 0:28 | 0:22 |
| Dawho Bridge North Edisto River | 1:05 | 1:01 |
| Edisto Marina Big Bay Creek | 0:06 | 0:25 |
| Willtown Bluff S. Edisto River | 1:45 | 2:38 |
| Eddings Point Crk. St. Helena Sound. | 0:29 | 0:22 |
| Fields Point Combahee River | 0:42 | 0:59 |
| Highway Bridge Combahee River | 1:56 | 2:34 |
| Summerhouse Point Bull River | 0:59 | 0:43 |
| Fripp Inlet Bridge St. Helena Sound | -0:09 | -0:20 |
| Broad Creek Port Royal Sound | 0:36 | 0:25 |
| Station Creek Port Royal Sound | 0:24 | -0:13 |
| Trenchards Inlet Port Royal Sound | 0:15 | -0:14 |
| Parris Island Beaufort River | 0:37 | 0:33 |
| Beaufort Beaufort River | 1:07 | 0:59 |
| Victoria Bluff Colleton River | 1:01 | 0:47 |
| Hilton Head Island Braddock Point | 0:05 | 0:05 |
| Bluffton May River | 0:52 | 0:31 |
| Daufuskie Landing New River | 0:21 | 0:34 |

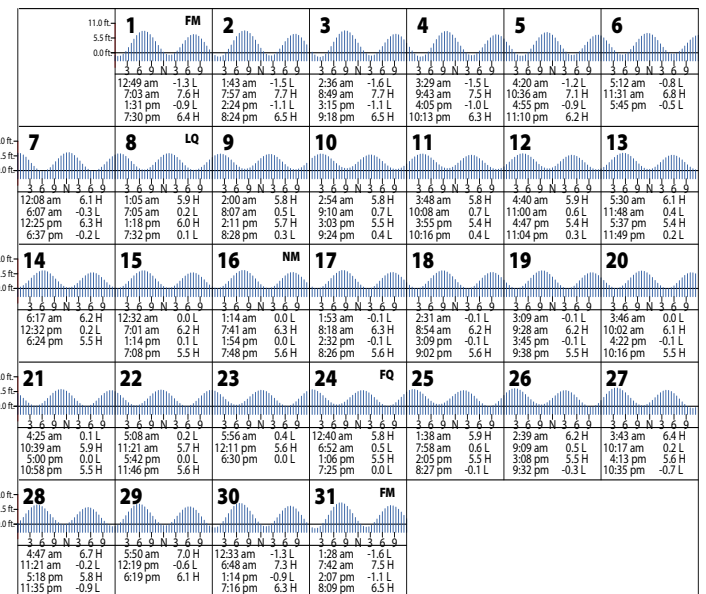
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WYLIE CATS WARM TO JANUARY COLD

Guide Rodger Taylor said January is a great month to catch blue catfish on Lake Wylie because of the cold weather.

PAT ROBERTSON

STRESSED BAITFISH LEADS TO HEAVY FEEDING BY BIG BLUES

Most fishermen leave Lake Wylie to duck hunters in January but for guide Rodger Taylor of Rock Hill, S.C., it is a prime month to catch a big blue catfish.

"January has become one of my favorite months to fish for blue catfish on Lake Wylie for several reasons," said Taylor (803-517-7828). "Blue cats, unlike flathead catfish, really bite well during the cold water period — late December through mid-March. Blue cat patterns may not be as predictable as they are in early spring or fall, but cold water blue cats are very willing biters, and the big boys come out to feed, too."

In fact, Taylor said, blue catfish seem to feed better as the water gets colder, all the way down to the low-50s. Wylie's coldest water temperatures are usually recorded from late January to early February, depending on weather trends.

"Fish can be as deep as 55 feet in the morning and as shallow as 3 feet in the afternoon, even on the coldest day of the year. You have to make adjustments to find the active bite during January," Taylor said.

"I like to start fishing deeper water in the early morning and work my way to shallow water as the day progresses and the sun warms the shallows. Once biting schools of blues are located, I like to keep working a pattern until the fish stop biting

or move off."

Taylor said gizzard shad are his go-to baits in January when they are available, but white perch also work very well.

"Drifting is my main tactic to locate schools of active blues on the larger water of the main channel. Setting up a drift to cover different changes in the bottom and different depths while using the wind or trolling motor to propel the boat slowly across the widest portions of the lake will help find the 'target' depth or structure the blues will be holding on," he said. "Using the sonar is key to seeking out bait pods and see their relationship to bottom structure."

Anchoring is also effective and usually produces trophy fish this time of year, he said, adding that while the average blue catfish caught will be between 6 and 14 pounds, trophy fish bigger than 40 pounds are caught in Wylie every year.

"I like to anchor in shallow water near deep-water drops, hard, shallow wind-blown points or shallow areas where collections of birds may be holding. Birds like gulls, cormorants, and herons often betray the location of wind blown/temperature stressed threadfin," he said. "The shad become slower and impaired in cold water, which allows both fish and birds to take advantage of easy meals. Blues will feed in very shallow water even in the dead of winter."

While mid-winter fishing on Wylie can be enjoyable because the lake is not overcrowded with boats like as in summer, there are some precautions that should be taken, Taylor said. ■

— Pat Robertson

FALLS OF NEUSE SLABS

loaded on brush piles, main-channel ledges

Anglers looking for cold-water crappie action will fall in love with Falls of the Neuse Lake near Durham, N.C., especially if they follow the example of Wes Jordan of Redbeard Cats Guide Service, who scans deeper water brush piles and channel edges before dropping a jig to load the boat.

Although Jordan (919-619-5753) regularly guides for catfish on Kerr Lake just up I-85 from his Creedmoor, N.C., home, his location puts him at the doorstep of great Falls Lake crappie fishing, and he doesn't let it go to waste. He rarely need to travel more than a couple of miles upstream or downstream from the NC 50 boat ramp at mid-lake to find what he is looking for.

"I like to get right over a brush pile or a channel ledge, a little hump, something

BELOW: Schools of nice redfish may number in the hundreds in the Broad River near Hilton Head Island, S.C., this month.

like that," said Jordan. "Usually, the fish are pushing a little bit deeper in January. I start at about 15 feet and work down. I've got about 10 brush piles; some I've put in and some I've found. The brush piles will hold a little bit smaller fish, while the channel edges will hold fewer, but larger fish. If you can find a brush pile on a channel ledge, you get a good mix of numbers and big fish."

When Jordan checks brush piles, he uses downsca imaging. The most productive piles will be lit up like a Christmas tree — the crappie shining like lights. However, finding slabs on the ledges of the old Neuse River channel that snakes through the main lake can be more challenging. Falling water temperatures drive throngs of shad into the channel, making it hard to differentiate between bait and crappie. But Jordan said that an angler who can find a few stumps on the ledge is likely to do well — if he knows the right technique.

"If you're running the trolling motor, it's hard to present the bait the way they want it," said Jordan. "They really don't want you moving the bait. You just about have to leave it in front of their face for five or 10 seconds to get them to bite it."

With that said, Jordan will normally pinpoint the area where he marks fish

GO TO SCHOOL on Hilton Head's winter redfish

It's back to school this month, but not just for kids after Christmas break. Redfish are in tight schools this time of year, and that makes them pretty easy for inshore anglers to find. While that doesn't always mean they're easy to catch, anglers can catch their share if they follow a few tips.

Charlie Beadon of Hilton Head Fishing Adventures said fishing this month for Lowcountry reds is world class. One of his favorite things about chasing redfish schools is the clear water, which allows anglers to see what's about to bite.

"This time of year, we see schools of redfish numbering in the hundreds as they cruise through crystal-clear water," he said. "The best part of the experience is that you get to see the fish take the bait before you set up for the fight."

The clear water makes it easier for fish to see anglers, too, but Beadon said as long as you keep the sun in your face, your profile is far less noticeable to them.

The Broad River near Hilton Head, S.C., is one of Beadon's favorite spots. The redfish stay in as shallow water as they can fit; they are a primary source of food for porpoises this time of year, so they follow the "safety in numbers" mentality, while trying to stay too shallow for Flipper to follow.

"When you spot a school, you want to keep a good cast's distance between you," said Beadon (843-592-0897). "You can spook them if you get too close. You want to cast to the front of the school, hoping for one of the lead fish to pick up your lure or bait. If you throw into the middle of the school, they'll scatter and the school will break up, making it harder to find them. They'll also get even more cautious when that happens."

Jigheads with soft plastic Gulp! lures are tough to beat, he said.

"When you see the direction the school is heading, you want to cast out in front of the lead fish. Let it settle on the bottom, then give it a twitch or two," he said.

At high tide, these fish will move as far

into the grass as possible, so Beadon likes the lower end of the tide cycle best, and he finds most of the redfish schools on mud flats.

"Once you catch two or three from a school, they will sometimes break up and scatter, and it's best to look for another school; they aren't hard to find. After 30



Brian Cope

minutes or so, they'll all settle back down, and you can hit that same school again.

"People sitting home because it's cold are missing out on some of the most-exciting fishing you'll ever experience. There is nothing like watching fish pick up your lure as you get a hard hookup." ■

— Brian Cope

CAPE FEAR COLD STRIPERS

Coastal NC rivers hold great January fishing

Although there is a moratorium on possessing striped bass anywhere in the Cape Fear River system, a surprisingly good catch-and-release striped fishery exists this month around downtown Wilmington, N.C.

These are migratory stripers that disappear after the spring spawn and begin showing back up around Thanksgiving when the water cools to below 60 degrees. January is the peak of striper activity around Wilmington, but fish will be occasionally caught through April.

Three rivers serve the Wilmington area — the Cape Fear, Northeast Cape Fear and Brunswick — and all hold stripers. There are also numerous creeks that flow into these rivers. All are tidal, with several feet of rise and fall on a regular daily timetable.

continues on page 92



Nice Falls of Neuse Lake crappie are there for the taking in January, if you know the particulars of finding and catching them.

Wes Joran

with a marker buoy, go past it to drop an anchor, and retrace his path to the other side for another anchor. Then, he adjusts the length of his anchor ropes to get right on top of it.

"I usually use a ½-ounce jighead with a white Bobby Garland baby shad on 6-pound monofilament," Jordan said. "A lot of crappie guys are crazy about color, but that's my go-to. I use an orange, chartreuse, white or red jighead. They all work pretty well!" ■

— Dusty Wilson



The author caught this nice Cape Fear River striper just a few miles from downtown Wilmington, N.C., where the January fishing is excellent.

Jerry Dilsaver

Cape Fear stripers continued

While the primary current in the rivers is always downstream, the tide moves baitfish up and down the rivers, plus into and out of the creeks. Stripers have robust appetites and can usually be found near anything that is holding bait, and there is an abundance of structure in the area. This begins with dock pilings and includes bridge pilings and abutments, fallen trees, stumps, sunken boats, debris piles and more.

The water in the area is brackish, with higher salinity in times of low rain and almost fresh in periods of high rainfall. Catfish and red drum are in the same areas, and some stripers are caught on live baits

and cut bait targeting them.

Jot Owens of Jot It Down Fishing Charters (910-233-4139) said stripers also hit lures and two primary tactics are involved. First — and easiest to master — is casting soft plastics around creek mouths and structure on the shallow areas between the channel and the banks. Larger jerkbaits are popular, and some fishermen use basic jigheads, but rigging weedless with swimbait hooks is growing in popularity. Stripers also feed along the edges where the shallows drop into the channel.

A ship channel runs up the Cape Fear River to Wilmington and barge channels continue up it and the Northeast Cape

Fear for miles above Wilmington. Owens uses hard, diving baits to reach stripers that are feeding along this drop. They can be trolled slowly to locate fish and cast to known productive locations.

— Jerry Dilsaver

GO LIGHT FOR CHILLED LAKE NORMAN CRAPPIE

Guide Gus Gustafson of Lake Norman Ventures said winter crappie fishing at Lake Norman presents a good news/bad news scenario

“The good news is the size of the crappie, with many of them running from 15 to 17 inches,” said Gustafson (www.fishingwithgus.com). “Fishermen who know the location of deep brush piles and deep docks can score at Norman.”

Sadly, Gustafson said the number of small crappie are on the decline.

“There’s not a lot of small crappie at Norman because of white perch that have overrun the lake,” said Gustafson. “Just like white perch have hurt the white bass population, white perch are hurting the number of crappie.”

To catch big slabs, Gustafson said anglers must fish slowly and meticulously.

The water temperature,

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Tony Garitta

Guide Gus Gustafson said it takes a slow, meticulous presentation to catch Lake Norman crappie in January.

THE COLDER, THE BETTER

Lake Russell spotted bass come on as mercury falls

For most people, the best thing to do on a bone-chilling winter day is to stay inside close to the fire, but for Jerry Kotal of Elberton, Ga., it's the perfect day to go fishing on Lake Russell on the South Carolina-Georgia border. "There are not many people out fishing in January, but you can catch more bass in the winter than at any other time on Russell," said Kotal

(706-988-0860). "I'd a heap rather fish in the winter than in the spring and summer because you don't have to fight the crowds."

And, he added, fishing for spotted bass is at its peak when the water is at its coldest.

"If the water stays cool, the fish won't pull up shallow until sometime in February. If the water stays in the 40s like a normal winter, then suddenly

continues on page 94

except at the hot-water discharges, will be in the 40s and 50s. Cold water pushes fish deep and makes them lethargic. They can be almost anywhere in the water column, depending on the weather.

"The bites you'll get will be very light, almost undetectable," Gustafson said. "Norman fishermen either tie their boats to bridges, double-anchor over deep brush or use the new trolling motors with the anchor-lock feature to keep their boats as still as possible while vertical fishing. It's almost impossible to detect light bites with the boat bobbing up and down or moving."

Downsizing baits is also critical. Gustafson said fishermen use 1/16- and 1/32-ounce crappie jigs and light spinning tackle and 4- to 6-pound line. Minnows are also effective, fished alone or tipped on jigs.

Most anglers use a count-down method or a deep-drop method to draw strikes.

"Not many fishermen slow-troll at Norman for crappie as they do at other lakes," said Gustafson, who said the wide-scan sonar units are essential for finding deep brush at Norman, though it's still a formidable undertaking on such a huge lake.

— Tony Garitta

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Lake Russell continued

gets up into the high 50s, they will start moving to the bank and suspending more."

When the water is cold and stays that way, he said, spotted bass will be holding in the 50-, 60- to 70-foot range.

"Some will be suspended around the standing timber, but there will be a lot of fish on the bottom," he said. "You can catch them on a drop shot, a jigging spoon or on live bait. They are feeding on small baitfish like threadfin shad, so you can use minnows or small blueback herring."

Kotal said when he targets spotted bass fishing in the dead of winter, he looks for groups of bait, usually close to the bottom, or for groups of fish.



Guide Jerry Kotal catches as many as 100 spotted bass on January fishing trips on South Carolina's Lake Russell.

PAT ROBERTSON

"Sometimes they will be holding so tight on the bottom that you won't know they are there until you catch one," he said.

While he is targeting spotted bass, Kotal said a day's catch likely will include a few largemouth bass, plus crappie, catfish and white and yellow perch — lots and lots of tasty perch.

"Sometimes you will get a surprise and get your line broke by a striper. A striper will take all the line off your reel very quickly unless you stop it," he said.

A typical day of fishing will produce anywhere from 30 to 100 fish, he said, and 100 fish in a day, including perch and other species, is not uncommon this time of year.

"The most bass I ever caught in one spot was 80 in about an hour. There was a fish on just about every drop," he said.

While the majority of bass will be spotted bass, Kotal said a good day might also produce five or six largemouth bass, but spots have pretty much displaced largemouth as the key bass on Lake Russell.

"We used to catch a lot of 5-pound spots, but now we catch a lot of 1½- to 2½-pound fish. A good-sized spot on Russell will run 3½ to 4 pounds, but we still catch some up to 5 pounds," he said.

The cold-weather pattern for Russell bass and other species runs from October through early February, Kotal said, and can last even into March as long as the water stays really cold.

If the water does warm up like it did last year when the water temperature got up in the mid-60s for about 10 days, the spawning urge will kick in, and the fish will move shallow and closer to the bank.

"If the water does warm up, spots will be around the deeper banks, and you have to throw a jerkbait or a Blade Runner to catch them," Kotal said. ■

— Pat Robertson

JANUARY REDS

pile into surf off NC's central coast

In a typical January, cold weather and cold water force most of North Carolina's saltwater baitfish and gamefish to migrate south or offshore, so catching a flounder or speckled trout can be tough.

However, red drum seem not to don't mind the cold water, so they can spend winter days this month hanging around inlets and shallow beaches that receive sunlight.

One of fishing's awesome sights is water that seems to glow orange because of sunlight reflected off the backs of reds just off a beach.

"If you go through an inlet and the water conditions are good, you can see hundreds

continues on page 96



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January Reds continued

— sometimes as many as 500 reds — in one school behind the breakers,” said guide Junior Sinclair of Fish Bones Charters in Jacksonville, N.C. “I did a lot of drift-fishing (inlets) from the time I was six or seven years old, (and) that’s when I started seeing reds in the winter behind breakers.”

Sinclair (910-358-2692) likes to cruise off the beaches of Bear and Browns islands, looking for diving birds or red-tinged water.

When he was young, Sinclair fished mostly with cut bait and live baits, but he’s since switched to artificial soft-plastic lures because they’re

more versatile and can be fished year-round.

“I like to throw a Redfish Magic (spinnerbait), but (I) remove the spinner for surf reds,” he said. “I do add a pearl-colored, 3-inch Strike King paddletail grub to it.”

“I like the toughness of its body because a redfish can chew up plastic lures pretty quick. You can catch multiple fish with it because they can’t beat it up.”

Sinclair said the “best bite occurs at the top of the high tide or on both sides of a falling tide.”

Sometimes in extremely calm



Guide Junior Sinclair spends January hunting for big schools of red drum outside of inlets and along the beaches around his Jacksonville home base.

conditions, walking lures such as Zara Spooks that resemble wounded baitfish will elicit strikes.

Sinclair likes a medium-action, 7-foot Fenwick rod mated to a Penn Battle reel and spooled with 10-pound Power Pro Braid and 3 feet of fluorocarbon leader. The small-diameter, braided line allows him to cast lures long distances, necessary because schooling redfish are notoriously spooky.

“Reds start to break up and start schooling in late November and early December,” he said. “If I’m inside, I like to find a little hole in an oyster bed. Sometimes you can see them right in the holes, because the water’s usually clear that time of year.”

Only a strong nor’easter can spoil conditions if the water muddies, making lures difficult to see, or if it chops up the surf too much, making it tough on anglers to keep their balance. ■

— Craig Holt

HIGH ROCK’S FORECAST: BETTER WINTERS

January stripers get active around mouth of major creeks

With the arrival of winter, fishermen on North Carolina’s High Rock fishermen historically store their gear and

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lounge near the fireplace, awaiting the return of spring before they resume fishing. "Around the second week of December, fishing for all species comes to a standstill at High Rock," said Gerald Beck, a Lexington, N.C., bass pro with several Bassmaster Classic berths under his belt. "High Rock has never been known as a good winter lake."



But as Bob Dylan said, "The times they are a-changin'" — along with the weather. In recent years, because of climate change or just weird weather, North Carolina winters have been fairly mild. The result has been some excellent fishing at High Rock for a variety of species including striped bass.

Jerry Hill of Triad Fishing and Guide Service said that whatever the conditions, water temperature is the key to catching winter stripers at High Rock.

"If the water temperature lingers in the lower 50s because of unseasonably warm

continues on page 98

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High Rock continued

weather, the stripers will roam the main body in pursuit of forage," said Hill (336-247-1265). "At this time, they're more open water-oriented than structure-oriented, so fishermen must use their electronics or watch for diving birds to find forage in conjunction with stripers."

Once the water temperature drops below 50 degrees, Hill said stripers follow baitfish to the mouths of creeks and gradually into the creeks; the strike zone is 10 to 14 feet.

"Usually, Flat Swamp and Abbotts creeks draw the most baitfish and the most stripers," said Hill. "The fish become more structure-oriented in the creeks and seek out points, humps and islands."

Wherever the fish may be, slow-trolls for stripers with artificials, disdaining the time required to catch live bait.

Stripers become sluggish in cold water, so Hill downsizes his baits and trolls slowly at 2 mph. He favors ¼- to ¾-ounce green bucktails with green, soft-plastic plastic trailers and ¾-ounce jigheads holding 3-inch Sassy Shad plastics.

His trolling spread consists of four 8-foot rods mated with Penn 320 reels spooled with 30-pound line. Two are fished on downriggers; two utilize lead-core line with 2½ to 3 colors let out. All the outfits employ double rigs on 3-foot leaders. ■

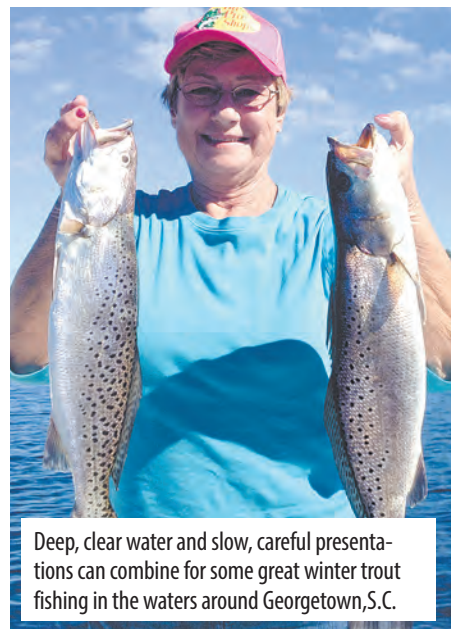
— Tony Garitta

DON'T MISS COOL SPECKS

Georgetown area attracts trout fishermen

Winter, and the presence of threat of cold weather, hems up many anglers indoors. While many fisheries, inshore and offshore, do deteriorate, speckled trout action is far from over in the waters around Georgetown, just south of South Carolina's Grand Strand.

Speckled trout have been nicknamed "winter trout," and for good reason. They are accustomed to cooler weather in their inshore territories, and the action can be great. If anything, the cooler weather concentrates fish into more-confined areas, so anglers don't have to spend as much time looking for them



Deep, clear water and slow, careful presentations can combine for some great winter trout fishing in the waters around Georgetown, S.C.

Jeff Burleson



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and have more time to crank them in.

Guide Jeff Lattig of Living Water Guide Service out of Pawley's Island, S.C., loves the winter in his neck of the woods. The cool weather produces less angler competition for big catches of South Carolina's speckled fare.

After Christmas, Lattig shifts to his winter gameplan, with a different type of location and a more refined tackle presentation.

"When it's colder, the fish look for deeper water that has more stable water temperature," said Lattig (843-997-4655). "Trout can take the cold water, but it needs to be consistent to avoid cold stun."

Occasionally, cold-stun events occur, and aggregations of trout are found floating belly up on the water's surface. Due to their cold-blooded physiology, trout become lethargic in extremely cold water that inhibits their mobility. They are susceptible to getting caught in places when

continues on page 100



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Georgetown continued

the water temperature falls too rapidly from an approaching winter weather storm.

Georgetown has no shortage of speckled trout habitat, including winter hideaways. Lattig fishes from behind Debordieu Island in the North Inlet area south to the Santee Delta and Cape Romain. As winter creeps into the region, Lattig ventures up the main creeks and rivers into the more temperature-stable waters where deep water is available.

"I concentrate in inland areas with creek bends that have 10- to 15-foot water present," Lattig said. "And if it gets real cold, the fish will slide into deeper spots."

Trout will be congregated in these deep pockets and often willing to cooperate with a well-placed lure. Lattig prefers to lighten up as much as possible to offer a soft presentation; a 1/8-ounce jighead is usually his go-to lure.

"I like to slow-roll paddletail grubs along the bottom," he said.

Winter fishing also means super-clear water, and when the water is clear, anglers must switch their color palettes over to lures that are nearly translucent. Some of Lattig's favorites are Saltwater Assassin's shad tails in Opening Night and Egret's 3-inch Wedgetails in Easy Money and Mystic.

"Easy Money and Mystic are good winter choices and some of my favorites when the water is gin clear," he said.

While fall fishing for specks is often the pinnacle for most inshore anglers, winter is never a time to take a bye. Look upriver, far from the ocean, and expect deep holes near the freshwater fringe to stack up with specks during the coldest months. ■

— Jeff Burleson

JIGGER-POLING FOR EDISTO BASS

"Lost art" is great technique for January river action

Jigger-poling seems to be a lost art among bass anglers, but it was once a fairly popular way of catching a limit of bucketmouths on South Carolina's Edisto River. It's a technique that Billy Garner of Ridgeville, S.C., still uses, and January is a great time for it.

"It's very effective on really cold, even miserable days," Garner said. "Those are the days that I have the most luck jigger-poling. It's not something you'll see many people do. Any time I do it, if I run across anyone else on the water, they're always curious enough to ask me what I'm doing."

With a collapsible, 16-foot fiberglass bream pole, Garner cuts enough of the tip off that a tip guide from a standard bass casting rod will fit snugly on the end. He glues the rod tip on and runs 60-pound braided line through the eye, tying it onto the pole using a bowhunter's knot. With a section of 24 to 36 inches of line coming off the rod, he

finishes things off with a topwater plug.

"It works best if you have a partner paddling the boat, or in my case, I use a small sneak boat with foot pedals to steer my trolling motor," he said. "Then you just ease down the bank, especially where a lot of overhanging tree limbs are, and you point your rod at the bank, pulling the plug along. You want to hit the rod tip in the water two or three times, then pause, then hit it again," he said.

"It's the most exciting bite you'll ever get. It's a huge explosion, very close to you, and getting the fish in the boat is just as exciting."

And just as unconventional.

With no reel and a very limber rod, Garner said the only way to get the fish in is to pull the rod straight in, hand over hand until you've got the whole rod in the boat, then grab the line if you need to or lip the bass if he's close enough.

"Sometimes you'll toss the rod out

Big largemouth bass live along the banks of South Carolina's Edisto River, where a well-presented lure can fool them into striking



Brian Cope

the other side of the boat by the time you get the fish in. It really goes against everything you learn as a bass angler, which is to allow the equipment to do the work. In this case, once you hook the bass, you're using your own hands to bring the bass to you, and that's why you have to use 60-pound braided line," he said.

The trick, Garner said, is to keep the lure as close to the bank as possible.


"It's deep enough along the banks — especially where you have lots of trees and debris — and bass love to hang out there," he said. "Some days you've really got to be persistent, and you can't be shy about smacking the water with the rod tip. Other days, it's on like gang busters. Cold, bitter, even rainy days is when they just seem to hit it the best." ■

— Brian Cope


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WAHOO! IT'S TIME OFF S.C.

Grand Strand anglers have plenty of winter targets

For most of the year, South Carolina's offshore fishing grounds are open for a variety of pelagic predators, from tuna and king mackerel to dolphin. Yet many of these fish must be intercepted along on their migratory routes — with one exception.

Wahoo are one of the regulars patrolling these offshore waters, and the winter, when the waters cool off, marks the season for the colossal wahoo to show up in a set. It's not just a good time to catch wahoo; it's prime time for the giants that will push the 100-pound mark.

Tom Cushman of Calmwater Fishing Charters always looks forward to the winter when the big dogs show up offshore and take his tackle to its breaking point.

"January and February is typically when you catch the big ones off the Grand Strand," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "It's the weather that stops us from going most of the time. We have some rough weather during the winter around here, but when

we can get out, it's an awesome fishery."

Just last year was one of Cushman's best winter seasons for oversized 'hoos.

"We had a good year last winter with three over 90 and one just over 100 pounds," he said.

Cushman hunts for water temperatures in the 70s and if he finds a temperature break offshore in water from 160 feet and deeper, he will usually get some action. Last year, Cushman found a 4-degree break in 500 feet that held several heavy hitters, but he caught some of his biggest fish in 69- to 70-degree water around structure in 160- to 180-foot depths.

"The temperature breaks hold baitfish, and in the ocean, any place that holds baitfish will attract predators," he said.

Cushman often starts at familiar places along the continental shelf off Little River Inlet: the Black Jack, 100/400, Steeples, and other places along the continental shelf with good bottom relief.

Wahoo will follow something of a pattern



Big wahoo are commonplace in offshore waters off the South Carolina coast during the winter.

that has the potential to change on a daily basis, he said. When he picks up a fish at a certain depth, he will hone-in on that contour to dredge up another bite.

"I always try to keep fishing an area where you catch one, and you will usually catch more. Circle back and work the area," he said.

While Cushman will toss out a few high speed rigs on occasion when going to different numbers, his standard wahoo and tuna spread consists of a collection of six surface and two downed lines with rigged ballyhoo, naked ballyhoo, and large artificial lures. ■

—Jeff Bureson

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Morgan Engle

Morgan Engle caught and released his first redfish this past summer in the surf at Sullivan's Island, S.C.



Harrison Whitt

Harrison Whitt of Hillsborough, N.C., caught this 27-pound catfish at Roanoke Rapids Lake on July 3, 2016.



Jimmie Hailey

Jimmy Hailey of East Bend, N.C., caught this 25-pound jack crevalle while flounder fishing near the Holden Beach bridge.



Gary Partain

Gary Partain of Camden County, N.C., took this 410-pound black bear after dogs had it treed up 9-inch thick pine tree.



Ronnie Spivey

Ronnie Spivey of Rocky Mount, N.C., caught these two flounder on May 24, 2016, in the Bogue Sound marsh area.



Jordan Simpson

Jordan Simpson of Elon, N.C., caught this nice flounder on a live mullet near Ocean Isle Beach, N.C.



Scott Bonning

Scott Bonning of Gaston, S.C., killed this 172-pound, 130-inch buck on Aug. 21 in Aiken County.



Johnny Flynn, Austin Sykes, Lane Sykes

Students at Hillsborough, N.C.'s Orange High School, Johnny Flynn, Austin Sykes and Lane Sykes had a great opening day of turkey season last April with calls supplied by Darrell Madden of Slammer Series Turkey Calls.



Josh Rogers

Hunter Josh Rogers of Pennsylvania killed this 350-pound boar on a hunt at Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield County, S.C., and that wasn't all; he also killed an 8-point buck and a doe.



Doug McKinney

Doug McKinney from Midlands, N.C., killed this 11-point, 160-class buck on Nov. 15 in Union County.



Kallie Phillips

Kallie Phillips, 12, killed this nice 8-point buck on Dec. 31, 2016, in Chatham County, N.C.



Shannon Holcomb

Shannon Holcomb of Greenville, N.C., took this 22-pound, 15-ounce gobbler in 2016 near Blounts Creek, N.C.



Mikey Dorfman

Mikey Dorfman, a 17-year-old autistic boy, caught this 18-pounder striper on July 25 at Lake Hartwell.



Kayla Maw

Kayla Maw of Franklinton, N.C., caught this 50-pound carp in a Franklin County pond on July 2, 2016.



Ambrose Cooper IV

Ambrose Cooper IV of Wilmington, N.C., caught this double-header of vermillion snapper out of Carolina Beach last year.

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|--|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|---|--------|
| A.K. MCCALLUM CO..... | 7 | EXCEL BOATS..... | 3 | SANTEE COOPER COUNTRY..... | 77 |
| ALBEMARLE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CORP..... | 32 | FORT MACON MARINA..... | 24, 95, 98 | SARAH JUDY'S INSURANCE AGENCY..... | 82 |
| ALBEMARLE FISHING CHARTERS..... | 106 | FOURTH GENERATION OUTFITTERS..... | 45 | SASSER GOLF CARS..... | 95 |
| BIG LAKE DUCK CALLS..... | 31 | FROST WATERFOWL TRUST, LLC..... | 31 | SHIMANO AMERICAN CORP..... | 35 |
| BLACK RIVER PLANTATION..... | 106 | G3 BOATS..... | 103 | SLEEP INN/MAIN STAY INN..... | 101 |
| BLUE WAVE BOATS..... | 9 | GOOSE CREEK MARINE..... | 85 | SOUTHEAST PRODUCTIONS..... | 84, 99 |
| BOATS INC..... | 69 | GRAHAM MARINE..... | 44, 92, 97 | SOUTHERN FARM SHOW..... | 52 |
| BUTLER MARINE..... | 111 | GREG'S OUTBOARDS..... | 79 | SUZUKI MOTOR OF AMERICA, INC..... | 38, 39 |
| CAPTAIN FROGGY'S CHARTERS..... | 107 | K2 MARINE..... | 61 | TD CONVENTION CENTER UPSTATE BOAT SHOW..... | 101 |
| CAROLINA AGRI-POWER, LLC..... | 65 | KING MACKEREL TACKLE..... | 44 | TMM REAL ESTATE, LLC..... | 65 |
| CAROLINA COMPOSITES, LLC..... | 4 | MARINE WAREHOUSE..... | 27 | TRI-COUNTY OUTDOOR SALES..... | 43 |
| CHATLEE BOAT AND MARINE..... | 21, 30, 93, 108, 109 | MOREE'S SPORTSMAN'S PRESERVE..... | 65 | VANCO OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT..... | 75 |
| CHEROKEE RUN HUNTING LODGE..... | 101, 107 | NAUTIC STAR BOATS..... | 5, 37, 67 | WHITETAIL PROPERTIES..... | 15 |
| CLEAR RIVER TAXIDERMY..... | 82 | NICHOLS STORE, INC..... | 51 | WILSON MARINE..... | 79 |
| CLOVER ENTERPRISES..... | 70 | NOAH'S ARK FISHING CHARTERS..... | 106 | XPRESS BY ALUMA-WELD, INC..... | 2 |
| COLLINS INC..... | 112 | O'BRIAN TARPING SYSTEMS..... | 97 | YADKIN LAKES GUIDE SERVICE..... | 106 |
| CONTENTNEA CREEK HUNTING PRESERVE..... | 106 | OPEN WATER INC..... | 26 | YOPP BROTHERS..... | 63 |
| DOWN EAST GUIDE SERVICE..... | 106 | PALMETTO BRUSH CONTROL..... | 66 | | |
| DUDLEY'S MARINA..... | 70 | PALMETTO STATE TRAINING..... | 83 | | |
| E.Z. BAIT AND TACKLE..... | 96 | PERFORMANCE EAST INC..... | 49 | | |
| EASTERN CAROLINA BOAT SALE..... | 71 | POGIE'S..... | 83, 106 | | |
| ED'S MARINE SUPERSTORE..... | 87 | POWER MARINE OUTFITTERS..... | 25 | | |
| ENTERCOM UPSTATE..... | 102 | PRECISION MARINE, INC..... | 19, 94 | | |
| | | RAY'S TRACTORS..... | 82 | | |

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