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Jump-start your turkey season



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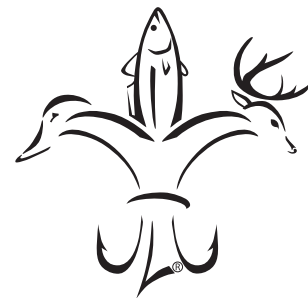
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Carolina
SPORTSMAN

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

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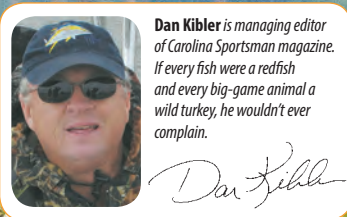
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Some photos shown with optional equipment



Outdoor UPDATE

with
Dan Kibler



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

Dan Kibler



IT'S SHOWTIME, AGAIN!

DIXIE DEER CLASSIC,
PALMETTO SPORTSMEN'S
CLASSIC ON TAP IN MARCH

Rick Small

Back about 15 or 20 years ago, an enormous hulk of a man, Paul Wight, showed up on televised wrestling shows. Wight, born in Aiken, S.C., standing 7-foot and weighing 380 pounds, started out with the WCW crowd billed as "the Giant." When WCW disappeared and WWE came to the forefront, Wright was billed as "The Big Show."

Wight probably won't be in the Carolinas this month, but March is clearly the month of "the big show."

The Carolinas' two biggest outdoors shows arrive this month: the Dixie Deer Classic in Raleigh, N.C., and the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic in Columbia, S.C.

These shows are big enough to fill the respective states' fairgrounds in multiple buildings and with outdoor exhibits, and they draw tens of thousands of customers to hear seminar speakers, tour hundreds of exhibitors' booths.

The Dixie Deer Classic hits first, March 2-4. Celebrity names include Lee and Tiffany Lakosky from "The Crush" television, Michael Waddell of "The Bone Collector" and Kyle Lamb of Vikings Tactics.

Seminars will include pond

management, turkey hunting, coyote trapping, decoy carving, turkey call-making and use. In addition, a kid's scavenger hunt will be held all three days, along with the popular Dock Dogs competition and the NWTF's Tarheel Open turkey calling contest.

Hours are 11 a.m.-8 p.m. on March 2, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. on March 3 and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on March 4.

The Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic is scheduled for March 23-25. Hours are noon-8 p.m. on March 23, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. on March 24 and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. on March 25.

Features will include the Extreme Raptor Show, a catch-and-release fishing pond, deer-antler scoring, and weigh-ins for the South Carolina Youth Bass Fishing Championship. Seminar speakers will include Joey Mines of the "Outdoors With Joey Mines" television show. ■



Mitch Simmons of Lake Waccamaw, N.C., had a good day duck hunting in Columbus County, N.C., on Dec. 23. His black lab, Ace, retrieved this nice brace of wood ducks. The photo was posted on www.carolinasportsman.com on Jan. 2.

SOUTH CAROLINA HUNTER WINS BAG-A-BUCK PRIZE

Jay Garner of Murrells Inlet, S.C., wasn't sure about killing the 8-point buck that stepped out in front of him in a Horry County peanut field the afternoon of Sept. 17, 2017.

"He was a little too nice to pass up, but he wasn't nice enough to mount," said Garner, who finally decided to drill the buck at 100

yards with his .300 Blackout, a wildcat he'd built himself.

The buck dropped on the spot.

A couple of days later, Garner entered the buck in Carolina Sportsman's Bag-A-Buck contest, and in late January, his entry was



Jay Garner of Murrells Inlet, S.C., was the grand-prize winner in Carolina Sportsman's Bag-A-Buck contest.

chosen from among 242 deer entered in the 4½-month contest as the grand prize winner.

Garner will receive a free, three-year subscription to Carolina Sportsman, a \$50 gift certificate to the online Outdoor Store at www.carolinasportsman.com, and a two-day, deer-hog combination hunt for two people at Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield, S.C.

"I was sitting on the ground — I hunt on the ground a lot — watching this peanut field," he said. "There were a bunch of does in the field, and he came out right at sundown, and he ran those does around.

"I think I had a couple of (trail-cam) pictures of him. I was thinking, 'I should shoot that deer.'"

Garner killed two more nice deer after the contest-winning buck, including a 140-inch 8-pointer he took on Nov. 11. ■

SC TURKEY SEASON COULD BE 'CONFOUNDING'

South Carolina hunters will take to the woods this month for a season that Charles Ruth, the deer and turkey project leader for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, is concerned about; statistics from past years appear to be in conflict.

"We've got some confounding things going on," Ruth said. "The past two years, with our new season dates, our harvest has been up 24 percent, when it had fallen by about 35 to 40 percent since the record harvest in 2002.

"But our reproduction has generally been poor, even though we had a little uptick over the past two years. It's not where it used to be."

South Carolina's season opens March 20 on private land and April 2 on public land, closing May 5 statewide.

Ruth said hunters are taking advantage of the extended season dates; hunter effort is up 27 percent, he said, more than making up for the lowering of the season limit from five to three gobblers. He fears the increased effort and increased harvest may negatively affect turkey numbers.

"The problem is, there can be mixed signals," he said. "More hunter effort can drive the harvest to a point where the whole thing can come crumbling down." ■



South Carolina's turkey season opens March 20 on private land and April 2 on public lands, closing May 5.

Dan Kibler

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

BLACK DRUM BONANZA!

Web editor Brian Cope of Edisto Beach, S.C., posted this story on www.carolinasportsman.com on Dec. 22, 2017.

Adam Kirby, the chef and co-owner of Bistro 217 and The Rustic Table, two restaurants in Pawleys Island, S.C., enjoys preparing seafood dishes for his customers, but he does more than just cook fish. He loves to catch them.

While fishing near Georgetown, S.C., on Dec. 18, he caught a black drum that broke the 100-pound mark, which would have made him ever-so-briefly the state record for the species, if not for South Carolina regulation requiring the release of any black drum that outside the slot limit, which is 14 and 27 inches.

The state record, an 89-pounder caught near Port Royal in 1978, has an asterisk beside it in the record book, a mark placed next to any species now regulated by a slot limit, meaning the record cannot be broken as long as the slot remains.

Kirby doesn't know the precise weight of his black drum, because

it bottomed out the 60-pound Boga Grip he used to weigh it, but by using the length-girth-measurement formula used by fisheries biologists and S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the fish weighed 110 pounds.

Even if Kirby's fish had become the state record, his friend and fishing partner Alistair Bremner would have topped that when he caught a bigger black drum less than an hour later. Using the same formula, Bremner's fish — 53 inches long and 43 inches in girth — would have tipped the scales at 122 pounds. That would have surpassed the world record of 113 pounds, caught in Delaware Bay in 1975.

Both fish were released, and while the state and world weight-class records will go unchanged, Bremner still has a chance at the International Game Fishing Association world record for the species' length. Kirby, Bremner, and Jim Maass, who was also on the trip, took a video of them measuring the fish, and they've filled out the initial forms with IGFA.



Alistair Bremner (right) caught this 53-inch red drum near Georgetown, S.C., on Dec. 18. The fish would likely have been a state and world record, but South Carolina regulations required it to be released because black drum are managed with a 14- to 27-inch slot limit. Adam Kirby (left) caught a fish almost as big an hour earlier.

SCDNR SETS ANTLER-SCORING SESSIONS FOR '18

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources has scheduled scoring sessions for whitetail deer across the Palmetto State this month.

The SCDNR scores racks every March and adds more animals to the state's all-time record book. Minimum scores for state-record listing are 125 points for typical animals and 145 points for non-typicals — scored according to the Boone and Crockett Club's system.

The record book currently lists 6,717 typical racks and 278 non-typicals.

Hunters must provide documentation, such as the date and county of kill, and they must sign a "fair chase" statement. Antlers in velvet, broken and repaired — or antlers separated from the skull plate — cannot be measured.

Here is a list of this month's scoring sessions:

March 1: Greenville, Cabela's, 1025 Woodruff Rd. Suite H101, 2-8 p.m. 864-516-8100.

March 2: Bath, Wilson's Taxidermy, 158 Victory Lane, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., 803-593-3357.

March 6: Anderson, Academy Sports, 3423 Clemson Blvd., 2-8 p.m., 864-261-2400.

March 8: 2-8 p.m., Pickens, Durham's Grocery, 3210 Walhalla Hwy., Six Mile, (864) 868-2070.

March 9: Gilbert, Price's Country Store, 540 Peach Festival Rd., 1-5 p.m., 803-892-2457.

March 13: Greenwood, Hunter's Headquarters, 1845 Calhoun Rd., 2-7 p.m., 864-223-1911.

March 14: Bonneau, Dennis Wildlife Center, 305 Black Oak Rd., 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m., 843-825-3387. Please all ahead.

March 23-25: Columbia, Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic, State Fairgrounds, 12-8 p.m. March 23, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. March 24, 1:30-6 p.m. March 25, 803-734-3886.

Deer can be scored at these regional SCDNR locations, by appointment only.

Camden: DNR Office, 632 West Dekalb St. Room 211, 843-309-5165.

Clemson: DNR Office, 311 Natural Resources Dr., 864-654-1671 (ext. 16).

Columbia: DNR office, 1000 Assembly St., 803-734-8738.

Florence: DNR office, 295 S. Evander Dr., 843-661-4768.

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TURKEY 101: NC SEMINARS

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and National Wild Turkey Federation are offering 11 free turkey hunting seminars in March.

The seminars are open on a first-come, first-served basis. Participants 16 and under need parental permission to attend. Registration online at www.ncwildlife.org/Learning/Skills-Based-Seminars.

Topics will include biology, hunting tactics, calls, decoys, firearms, ammo selection, camouflage clothing, turkey processing and cooking techniques. Seminars begin at 6 p.m. and end at 9 p.m.

Dates and locations are:

- **March 1:** N.C. State University, SAS 2203 Auditorium, 2311 Stinson Dr., Raleigh 27607
- **March 6:** Brunswick County Extension Center, Building N, 25 Referendum Dr., Bolivia, 28422
- **March 7:** Craven County Extension Center, 300 Industrial Dr., New Bern, 28562
- **March 8:** Onslow County Extension Center, 4024 Richlands Hwy., Jacksonville, 28540
- **March 13:** Bass Pro Shops, 8181 Concord Mills Blvd., Concord, 28027
- **March 14:** Cumberland County Extension Center, 301 East Mountain Dr., Fayetteville, 28306
- **March 20:** Mountain Horticulture Crops Research and Extension Center, 455 Research Dr., Mills River, 28759
- **March 21:** Haywood Community College, 185 Freedlander Dr., Clyde, 28721
- **March 27:** Burke County Extension Center, 130 Ammons Dr., Morganton 28655
- **March 28:** Forsyth County Extension Center, 1450 Fairchild Rd., Winston-Salem, 27105
- **March 29:** Guilford County Extension Center, 3309 Burlington Rd., Greensboro, 27405

Turkey hunters in North Carolina can attend free seminars around the state in March.

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Saltwater fishermen often run the tide, moving from spot to spot in a bay or coastal creek to take advantage of a certain water depth where fish are biting.

On Kerr Reservoir, guide Chris Bullock runs the spawn — the crappie spawn. He can get several weeks of top-drawer, pre-spawn fishing for slab crappie in March because he knows where they'll spawn first, where they'll spawn next, and when they'll be thinking mostly about feeding before they spawn.

Bullock, a native of Fountain, N.C., who runs Kerr Crappie and Cats Guide Service, knows that crappie are at their fattest in the days before they head to the shallows to spawn, and he keys on the movement of fish in different areas of Kerr Lake, aka Buggs Island, to make sure he's on them at the right time.

"The spawn starts up around Clarksville (Va.), and it progresses downstream," Bullock said. "They spawn first up there; they work their way down. When the water temperature gets to about 52 degrees, they're raring to go."

What Bullock keys on are brush piles

along the channels in creeks up and down the 49,500-acre reservoir along the North Carolina-Virginia border. When he can find slabs around brush in 8 to 12 feet of water in the creeks, he knows the spawn hasn't arrived, and he knows they'll be biting. When fish leave the brush, he said they head for shallow, spawning flats, and the move can be so fast that fish are here today, gone tomorrow.

One windy, cloudy March day in 2016, Bullock was scouting for a paid guide trip for crappie the next day, having spent several days in a row guiding fishermen who were targeting Kerr's trophy blue catfish. He spent several hours locating schools of slabs hanging on brush in a creek near the lake's Ivy Hill landing, and once he knew they were there, he visited other creeks to see if they were on similar cover, in similar areas.

The next day, his two clients, fishermen from Richmond, Va., carried home 106 crappie, none shorter than 9 inches and the biggest 20 ranging from 13½ to 16¼ inches long — true slabs. ➤



RUNNING THE

By Dan Kibler

SLAB SPAWN

Much like running the tide to stay in productive waters, this guide on Kerr Reservoir tries to stay one step ahead of the crappie spawn — one giant step.



Dan Kibler



This time of year scares me, because they'll be getting off the brush and going to the backs of the creeks," he said. "I love to catch 'em when they're offshore, when they're active. That's when you can catch lots of them in each place, but it doesn't take 'em long to go from brush to where they're gonna spawn. Maybe they can make it in one day. They can be halfway out one day, in the back of the creek the next.

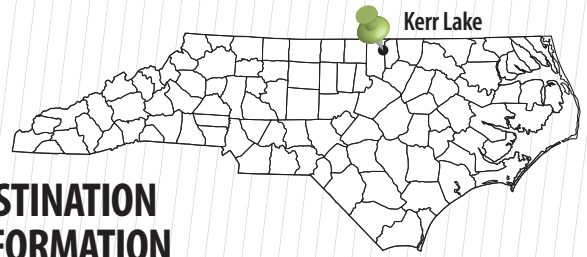
"If you can catch 'em before they move, they'll be feeding up." Bullock looks for brush piles — either ones he's sunk himself or others he's found with his electronics — midway back in major creeks in 8 to 12 feet of water. He loves to find brush that tops out just 3 or 4 feet from the surface; if his electronics shows fish, he'll back off the length of a good cast and have at it with tiny, soft-plastic artificials.

He'll fish 7-foot, light-action Lew's Wally Marshall spinning rods mated with Daiwa Sweepfire 2500 reels spooled with 6-pound Suffix monofilament in hi-vis yellow. He ties on 1/8-ounce jigheads and threads on Bobby Garland Baby Shad in green; he'll have several green/white 1/8-ounce bucktails tied on.

Bullock determines how deep he wants to fish — usually right at the level where crappie are holding or a foot or two above — and when he casts his jigs to the brush, he'll count them down to the right depth, one second per foot, before closing the bail on his reel and starting a very slow retrieve, maybe one turn of the reel handle every three seconds.



Dan Kibler



DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Kerr Lake, aka Buggs Island, lies along the North Carolina-Virginia border. US 58 roughly parallels the northern side of the lake, I-85 runs north-south east of the lake, and NC 39 and US 15 offer access to different areas. Dozens of public boat landings surround the lake. www.kerrlakeguide.com/boat-ramps-camping-picnic-areas.

WHEN TO GO — Crappie spawn when the water temperature reaches the high 50s, normally in mid- to late March. Good fishing will begin in late February and last into April. When the water temperature gets into the 60s, crappie move back to deeper water.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Cast grubs and jigs to crappie holding on brush piles in 8 to 14 feet of water midway back in the creeks until the water temperature reaches the mid-50s and sends those fish to spawning grounds in the backs of creeks, where anglers turn to tight-lining vertically with jigs or jigs tipped with minnows. Use light-action tackle and 6-pound test line.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Chris Bullock, Kerr Crappie and Cats Guide Service, 252-902-4039, www.kerrcrappieandcats.com. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Henderson-Vance County Chamber of Commerce, 252-438-8414, www.henderson-vance.org.

MAPS — GMCO Maps, 888-420-6277, www.gmcomaps.com.

Guide Chris Bullock said crappie are most active and willing to bite in the days just before they head shallow to begin spawning.

“This time of year scares me, because they'll be getting off the brush and going to the backs of the creeks.**”**

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If he catches a fish on his first half-dozen casts, he'll spend more time on the brush pile, often putting a dozen or more fish in the boat. If his first casts aren't productive, he might move right over the brush and fish his jigs almost vertically for fish that may not be quite as active. When he jigs vertically, he likes to move his knot to the side of the line-tie that faces the jig's hook to keep the grub in line. If vertical jigging doesn't work, he'll move to his next brush pile; he has around 3,000 of them marked as waypoints on his depth finder.

If Bullock finds crappie around brush in the Clarksville area, he'll move down the lake and fish brush in creeks between there and the dam, knowing fish in those areas will not likely have gone to the backs of creeks to spawn. But if he finds crappie on brush, say, in the Ivy Hill area, he can't be sure they'll be on brush around Clarksville; they might have already moved shallow.

"Just because you can catch fish on brush down the lake doesn't mean you can go up the lake and still catch 'em on brush," he said.

If Bullock can't find prespawn fish, he'll head to the backs of creeks and fish places he recognizes as spawning flats with a multiple-rod setup, tight-lining or "pushing" tiny jigs, often tipped with minnows. He fishes multiple Capps/Coleman rods from 6 to 18 feet long, arranging them around the bow of his boat in rod-holders, tying a 3/4-ounce trolling weight to 10-pound mono, then dropping down a 2-foot leader of 6-pound mono and a jighead.

"Once in a while, I'll troll a Capps/Coleman double-minnow rig, or I'll maybe tip a jig with a minnow," Bullock said. "I want to push at about .3 to .5 mph. If I'm in 6 feet of water, I want to be fishing 3 to 4 feet deep; if I'm in 8 feet of water, I want to be fishing 5 or 6 feet deep.

"Most of the channels are silted in in the backs of the creeks, but they've still got stumps back there. They'll spawn on stumps from 3 to 8 feet deep; some will go to the bank,



Dan Kibler

Brush piles and crappie will show up on good depth-finding equipment.

but very few. If the water's up, they'll get on the bank if there's brush there. If the water isn't stable, Mother Nature tells them not to go up there if they want to stay wet."

Bullock tight-lines until the water temperature reaches 55 degrees. When it heads into the upper 50s and toward 60, he'll long-line troll out the stern of his boat at .8 to 1.5 mph to find scattered fish with 1/16- and 1/32-ounce jigs.

"When I'm long-lining, I like to pull Road Runners, all different colors," he said. "In an hour or two, you can figure out which color they want best and switch over. I'll tip them with a minnow; you can catch 'em just on a Road Runner, but I think they'll hold the bait longer if it's tipped with a minnow." ■



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



When he's vertically jigging over brush, Chris Bullock will pull the knot tied to his jighead to the side facing the bend of the hook so the soft-plastic bait stays in line when jigged.

Dan Kibler

TECHNICOLOR MINNOWS WILL OUTPRODUCE NATURALS

The fishing industry is overflowing with innumerable attempts to reinvent the wheel. The slightest modifications in lure shape, material or color is heralded as “new and improved” and placed on the end cap at your tackle shop, while little attention is given to live-bait improvement other than keeping it alive.

And why should it? A live minnow looks real, smells real, feels real, is real. Why fiddle with it?

Well, there are times when a live bait that stands out from the crowd is going to get slammed first. And that’s the basis for Pautzke Bait Company’s Fire Dye, which gives anglers the opportunity to change the natural color of their live minnow into bright red, gold, blue or chartreuse without negative effects.

“Crappie are sight feeders,” said guide Chris Bullock. “They need to see what they’re going to eat before they pull up there and bite it. The farther they can see it, the better off you are. If you’ve had a lot of rain and the water is stained, those chartreuse-dyed minnows are going to come out on top — no doubt about it.”

Bullock tested Fire Dye (www.pautzke.com) last year while tight-lining a spread of eight, 16-foot rods in stained water in the Eno River near Durham, N.C. Rods were fitted with identical rigs, with jigs of varying color. Half the live minnows threaded on the jigs were natural colors, the other half dipped in Fire Dye chartreuse.

What Bullock and his party discovered was that the dyed minnows outperformed the others by nearly 5 to 1. Whether the jig color was black, Cajun cricket, key lime pie or even chartreuse, the chartreuse minnows were favored. After the test results were deemed conclusive, all jigs were outfitted with the chartreuse minnows, and a cooler was filled with crappie.

To duplicate that kind of success, anglers must do what they often do poorly — read the directions. While it is tempting to just fill a bucket with minnows and water and pour in the dye, that often leads to wasted effort.

“If you put too much water in, they either won’t dye quickly or dye at all,” said Bullock. “It has to be just enough to aerate, about 3 to 4 inches deep, then you pour in the bottle. After about an hour to an hour-and-a-half, you dip them out and put them in clean water. They’ll stay dyed and living the rest of the day.”

Pautzke advises anglers to



Chris Shaffer

Pautzke’s Fire Dye will turn live minnows from their natural color to a handful of bright colors to attract gamefish — without otherwise affecting the bait.

add one bottle of Fire Dye to 12 ounces of water for a long soak, or one bottle to 32 ounces of water for a short soak.

While Bullock favors chartreuse in stained water, red, gold, and blue can be productive in other circumstances — just like different jig colors. Anglers are advised to experiment and find the palate preference of crappie on any given day. ■

— Dusty Wilson

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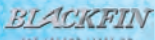
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Planer boards allow fishermen to slow-troll their baits and lures in extremely shallow water as prespawn slabs move toward the bank. Here's how to set up for this technique.

By Dusty Wilson

CRAPPIE ON A DIFFERENT PLANE

By the time March rolls around, crappie fishermen across the Carolinas are chomping at the bit for waves of slabs to invade the shallows. And even though tight-line and long-line trolling techniques are proven winners, guides like Brad Taylor of Batesburg, S.C., are adding another wrinkle, using planer boards to spread baits out even farther from the boat and access territory otherwise out of reach.



Dan Kibler



Most anglers would agree that spring crappie fishing is an endeavor where every inch matters — corroborated by the 16-foot rods that sprout from the bow of a serious tight-liner's boat. The question is, how many seconds can you give a fish to eye your bait before the hum of the trolling motor, the slap of water on a hull or the ping of a transducer give you away?

PLANER BOARDS TAKE BOAT NOISES OUT OF THE EQUATION.

“It’s not a lazy man’s game at all,” said Taylor (803-331-1354), “but it’s a very good way to catch those spawning fish. You can get a bait up there in shallow water where you couldn’t get a boat without spooking the fish or places where you wouldn’t want to take the boat — like a submerged stump field.”

Taylor’s long-line trolling spread consists of three planer boards off each side of the boat. The first runs about 20 feet out, the second 30 feet out and the third 40 feet out, each staggered slightly behind the other due to the length of line necessary to add the distance from the boat. The rod whose bait is farthest from the boat is set in a rod holder closest to the stern, with the others staggered forward. This keeps boards and baits apart and cuts down on tangles when a fish is hooked.

Taylor said the tips of his rods should be raised slightly to lift more line out of the water so the planers cut into the water and fan out. In addition to planers, Taylor often runs a tradi-

“It’s not a lazy man’s game at all, but it’s a very good way to catch those spawning fish.”

tional spread of four to six long lines off the transom from 20 to 40 feet behind his boat while fishing his home waters of Lake Murray.

“It’s a lot of work, because the guy on the shoreline side of the boat has to keep adjusting them to make them go around fallen trees or whatever is in the way,” he said. “You want to make that board go down the bank as close as you can get it. I like to fish them near cover and along breaks — places where the water will be 3 to 4 feet deep and drop off to 10 feet. Typically, the fish will be sitting off one of those drops. A lot of our spawning flats have a channel where the old creek bed went through, and you can run the boat through there and get the boards out into the shallow water.”



Planer boards allow guide Brad Taylor to slow-troll lures or minnows in very shallow water for crappie that have moved in to spawn.

Gaining a little weight isn't **ALWAYS BAD**

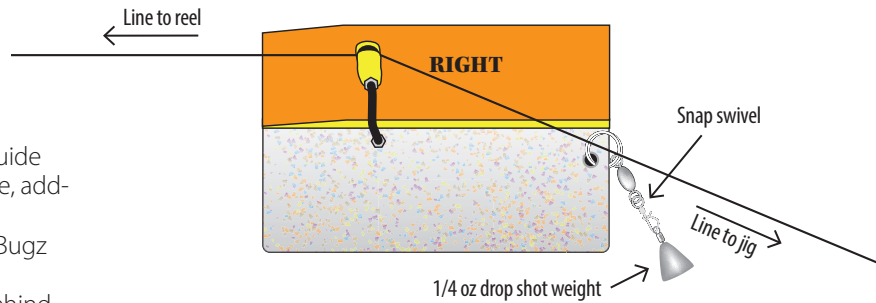
While most folks stress about putting on a little weight, guide Brad Taylor said that when pulling planer boards for crappie, adding a little weight can go a long way.

"You have to put something on them," Taylor said. "Water Bugz are the best that they've designed yet for crappie, but you don't have enough resistance with that little jig you pull behind them. If you add little weight to the back of the board, you'll get enough resistance to make it run hard."

Most of the time anglers in the south use planer boards, they're pulling bigger baits or lures for bigger fish; a healthy shad or a bigger pulls enough to causes the board to angle up and out and reach the optimal distance from the boat. A 1/2-ounce jig is doing next to nothing for this cause, but with a little modification, Taylor can increase the board's performance.

"The Water Bugz boards come with a spiral-type line holder on the opposite side of the line clip," said Taylor. "I take those off and put a snap swivel on it to hold the line. On the same swivel, I snap on a drop-shot weight. It's something you have to tinker with, but it doesn't take a whole lot of weight. A 1/4-ounce will make it dig." ■

Light planer boards like Water Bugz are more suitable for pulling light lures and baits for crappie.



Grand Opening Friday March 9

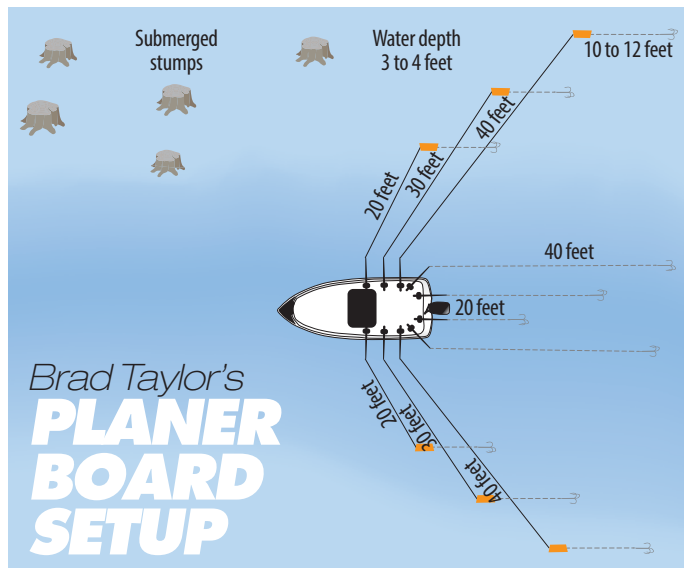
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At a depth of 3 to 4 feet — trolling about 1 mile per hour — Taylor advises running a 1/32- or 1/16-ounce jighead with a 2-inch curlytail grub 10 to 12 feet behind the planer board, often lengthening the distance between the board and jig on the deeper side.

Two of Taylor's favorite jig colors are chartreuse/black and yellow/white, but given the shallow cover involved, you're bound to be sacrifice plenty of jigs. That's why Taylor ties a short leader of 4- to 6-pound mono with a barrel knot to his 8- to 10-pound mono leader. This way, the leader pops below the knot on the lighter line before the clip is released, allowing the board to be retrieved without stopping the show.

“You want to make that board go down the bank as close as you can get it.”

“Crappie will rarely ever break the clip free when they're hooked,” Taylor said, “and you run the risk of losing the fish or breaking the line if you try to snatch it free. I always just reel him up, because typically, you don't have much line out. It works a lot better with two people. The guy fishing towards the front of the boat will reel him up beside the boat, and the other guy can dip the fish out at the back, but there are times when I just unclip the board and deal with the fish.”

While there are a number of smaller, lightweight planer boards designed to be less cumbersome for crappie, Taylor said these will often lack the necessary buoyancy to make the board cut into the water and fan out. He uses the same Water Bugz planer boards that he pulls for stripers, but he said any board of a similar size is sufficient. ■



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



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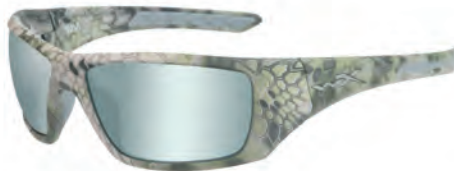
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Early season turkey hunting offers great potential for success, but it can be littered with obstacles along the way. Seasoned hunters find ways to navigate around impediments and tag their gobbler.

Two of the top turkey hunters in the Carolinas, Darrell Madden and Steve Cobb, share some of their secrets to success learned through experience for early season turkey hunting success.

SCOUTING IS FOREVER

Darrell Madden of Semora, N.C., has taken multiple turkey grand slams (Eastern, Merriam's, Rio Grande, Osceola) and has developed successful strategies for taking gobblers in various situations.

Madden said one of the most crucial is scouting with a purpose.

"Scouting never stops, whether preseason, during the season or anytime I'm in the woods, I'm still learning the lay of the land to help me with turkeys," he said. "Having

“Successful turkey hunting requires backup plans to your backup plans.”

specific goals beyond simply hearing a turkey gobble on the roost is crucial."

Madden said his golden rule of scouting is to get in, learn stuff and get out without turkeys knowing he was ever in the woods.

"I simply don't call to turkeys during preseason or when scouting," Madden said. "Different factors are at play when scouting versus hunting, and one is to learn where birds roost to give me a starting point. But I'm looking for

much more, because that's not always a high percentage opportunity for killing a gobbler.

"I want to know a gobbler's travel route for locating hens and his feeding habits after leaving the roost. If fly-down time doesn't result in a dead gobbler I want other options immediately available. My scouting purpose is to learn the habits of several gobblers at various times of the day."

Madden said this kind of information gives him an edge, allowing him to go directly to an area where a gobbler already wants to be at different times of the day.

"Successful turkey hunting requires backup plans to your backup plans, so I try to have as many options as possible," he said.

COYOTE CONSIDERATIONS

Madden said that the influx of coyotes into the Carolinas has had an impact on turkey behavior.

"I think turkeys gobble less overall than prior to coyotes being a big factor," he said. "Certainly, some still gobble their heads off, but often I hear a couple of gobbles, then they hush. Lots of hunters get discouraged too quick and leave that bird, but often, that gobbler is still in play; he's just being cautious."

He said the pressure from coyotes and hunters, plus lower turkey numbers in many areas, has taught him to be more passive in his hunting. To be consistently successful, he's willing to get into stealth mode, slow down and be patient.

"I've found it's best to sit on the turkeys longer than years ago, pre-coyotes," he said. "And this slowing down not only produces more gobblers for me, it's better for getting older, long-spurred birds into range."

SETUP IS CRUCIAL >

EARLY SEASON GOBBLERS PROVIDE HUNTERS WITH PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES, BUT THEY ALSO POSE SOME PROBLEMS. TWO OF THE CAROLINAS' BEST TURKEY HUNTERS DISCUSS WAYS TO MAKE THE DAYS THAT KICK OFF THE SPRING SEASON PRODUCTIVE.

JUMP-START *your* **TURKEY SEASON**

By Terry Madewell





SETUP IS CRUCIAL

Not all trees or set-up positions are equal in terms of being the best spots from which to call a turkey.

“I’m constantly scanning the woods for possible setup positions as I’m hunting, because that’s a huge part of actually killing a gobbler,” Madden said. “Sometimes, I only have a few seconds to pick the spot once a gobbler is committed and approaching.”

Madden said waiting until the moment of reckoning when a gobbler commits and is quickly approaching is a recipe to make the wrong choice.

“A good setup is much more than just picking a big, obvious tree,” he said. “Sometimes, that obvious choice works out, but I’ve learned the most obvious spot is not always the best; the top choice is often more subtle.”

“I want a setup with cover, but not in a thicket where I can’t make gun adjustments or slight

“*A good setup is much more than just picking a big, obvious tree.*”

movements when a gobbler makes a last-second course change. I want shade and shadows to blend with my cover. Don’t sit in a bright, sunlit spot, because regardless of the size of the tree, it’s like having a spotlight telling the gobbler to ‘look here.’”

Madden said the bottom line is getting in a setup that hides you but enables you to see the gobbler before you can be seen. Wearing a camo pattern that blends with the foliage where you’re hunting helps.

“Seeing a gobbler first, while being well concealed, gives me an edge,” he said. “I can then visually track the gobbler’s movement, and if I have to make any movement-related adjustments or finishing calls, I can choose the time and use terrain and vegetation to my advantage — not to my detriment.”

“Good calling is certainly important and is a key to getting a gobbler interested and approaching,” Madden said. “But once he’s on the way, I believe success at that point is 75-percent setup, 10-percent calling and the reminder simply woodsman-ship, timing and good or bad fortune. Stack the odds in your favor with a good set-up.”

IT’S NEVER TOO LATE >



Terry Madewell

ABOVE: Wear camouflage clothing in a pattern that matches the habitat you are hunting.



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Terry Madewell

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Darrell Madden wants to know a gobbler's travel plans for the entire morning so he can intercept him at several locations.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

Steve Cobb, a Hunter Specialties Pro Staff member from Union S.C. said many hunters chase gobblers early, then leave, thinking the time to kill a longbeard has passed.

"Actually, the prime time to kill a gobbler can be later, not right after birds fly off the roost," Cobb said. "A multitude of issues, some beyond your control — such as live hens — can complicate the situation and cause a gobbler to go in any direction but yours."

Cobb said the early season is often when gobblers get "henned-up," a common problem for hunters. He's learned that if he can't get out before dawn his odds of success are still high.

"I hunt when I can, and if I can't get into the woods until an hour or two after dawn, I'm not discouraged," he said. "In early season, gobblers often get with hens quickly, but once hens begin to move off, the odds for success improves dramatically."

Cobb said a gobbler without hens will move and gobble, trying to locate hens. If they hear good calling from a hunter, even one just getting into the woods, they often respond aggressively.

"I have actually slipped into the woods where I knew gobblers were likely to be and had an immediate response," he said. "At this point, the game is on, and I've been looking at a gobbler only a couple minutes after my first call. Other times, I've had to make multiple moves and calls before striking a gobbler."

TURKEY SEASON DATES

South Carolina: March 20-May 5 on private lands statewide. April 2-May 5 on WMAs. Youth days: March 17-18 on private lands, March 31 on WMAs. See regulations on specific WMAs for possible restrictions. Bag limit: 3 gobblers per season, no more than 2 per day.

North Carolina: April 14-May 12, statewide. Youth season: April 7-13, statewide. Bag limit: 2 gobblers per season, no more than 1 per day.



Cobb said he'll slip through the woods, using woods roads or trails to cover ground quietly. "Use caution when getting into the woods to not alert nearby turkeys," he said. "Good calling, woodsmanship and patience are prime allies to success."

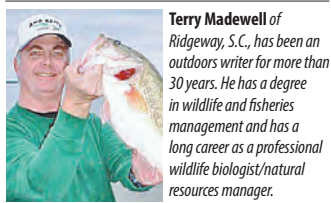
DECOYS: LIFELIKE IS CRUCIAL

Both Cobb and Madden said that lifelike decoys can be a game changer. "I've not always been a huge fan of decoys, because results were inconsistent," Madden said. "They would work incredibly well at times but seemed to create more problems than advantages at other times. But I've learned that the remote-controlled, jake decoy is very dependable for my hunting style."

Madden said a remote-controlled jake decoy gives the lifelike movement that's often needed to fool an old, wary gobbler. "But it's also that a jake would have the audacity to be in plain view," he said. "When the adult gobbler sees the jake fan and associated movement, it's usually game over. I can manipulate the decoy to turn left and right, but if I turn his tailfan toward the old gobbler, that's more than he can stand."

Steve Cobb said he generally uses adult gobbler decoys, and that position of the decoy is crucial.

"The challenge of another gobbler at the source of hen calls is often enough to get a gobbler to approach," he said. "I'll place the decoy where the incoming bird will see the full fan. If it's an older bird you're calling, when he gets a visual on the full-fan decoy, odds are excellent he's going to accept that challenge and approach." ■



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.



Steve Cobb said decoys, used properly, can really make a difference in getting a gobbler to commit.

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The spawn may be at hand, but one Santee Cooper guide said deeper water may be the ticket to some of the best crappie fishing of the year.

SACK SANTEE'S SPRING SLABS

By Terry Madewell

Early spring and crappie fishing form a perfect combination of potential and realization on the Santee Cooper lakes. If you're looking for a heavy stringer, they are legendary for producing huge crappie, and it helps that March is prime time for roe-laden slabs to be on a strong bite while shifting from prespawn to spawning.

The key is finding and staying on the ever-changing patterns.

Guide David Hilton of Ridgeville, S.C., fishes for multiple species on the Santee Cooper lakes, but in March, he targets slab crappie.

"The trick in March is not if the crappies will bite — they will bite — it's staying on a productive pattern, because crappies are a moving target," Hilton said. "Because of their tendency to move during the prespawn and spawn, my strategy is, if fish don't bite quickly at a place, I'm on the move to another spot and often to different water depths."

Hilton routinely fishes both lakes, working out of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal and Lake Moultrie and Bells Marina on Lake Marion.

"Both lakes are excellent in March and I'll often make the decision on specifically where to fish based on daily wind and weather patterns," he said. "For crappie-fishing success, boat control is a primary focus."

Hilton said depending on weather patterns and the time of the month, anglers may find crappie in various depths.

"I look for places where they congregate in big numbers to enhance my odds for success," Hilton said. "Much of my effort is in deep water over brush piles, leaning trees and other woody objects. I specifically want the cover to be around humps, drops and channel ledges.

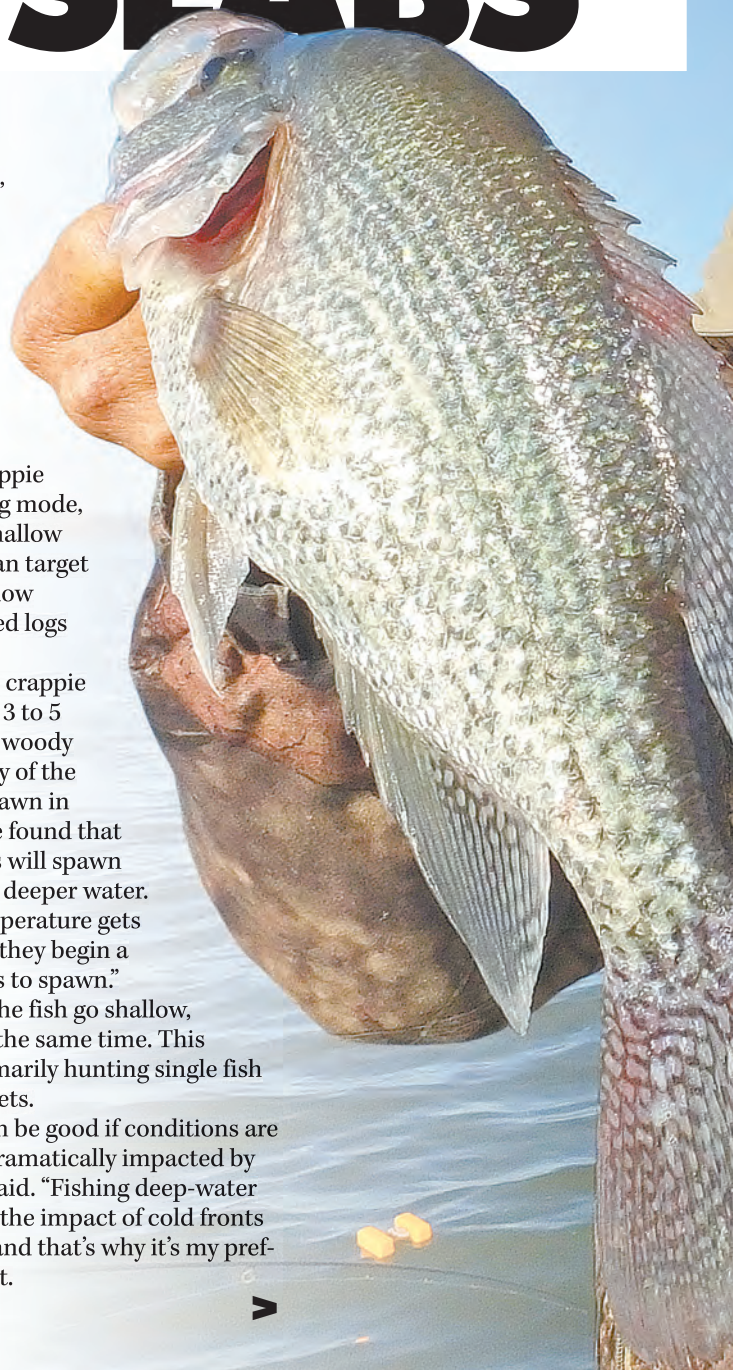
On these type places, I expect to catch multiple fish at any given time."

Hilton said that shallow-water fishing for spawning fish can be very good during March and into April. When crappie get into the spawning mode, some will move to shallow water, and anglers can target them by fishing shallow trees, stumps, downed logs and shallow brush.

"When they spawn, crappie will get into coves in 3 to 5 feet of water around woody cover," he said. "Many of the black crappie will spawn in the shallows, but I've found that many white crappies will spawn on the brush piles in deeper water. When the water temperature gets to about 58 degrees, they begin a move to the shallows to spawn."

Hilton said not all the fish go shallow, and certainly not at the same time. This type of fishing is primarily hunting single fish around isolated targets.

"Shallow fishing can be good if conditions are ideal, but it's often dramatically impacted by cold fronts," Hilton said. "Fishing deep-water cover vastly reduces the impact of cold fronts on the crappie bite, and that's why it's my preference; it's consistent.





Terry Madewell

“I prefer deep cover because the fish still bite,” he said. “But on pre-frontal days after a warming trend, crappie will usually get very active,” he said. “I’ll mark them on the graph over and along the sides of the brush or cover. These fish are often aggressive and catching multiple fish from any given spot is very likely.”

Hilton said the best depths during March will vary depending on water temperature and weather conditions.

“As a general guideline, fish hold a bit deeper early in the month because the water is colder,” he said. “If we’ve had a cold winter, crappie may be 25 to 30 feet deep in late-February and early March. But by the end of the month, I’m usually working the 14- to 15-foot depths. As the water temperature rises, the crappie get incrementally shallower, so I’ve got to constantly adjust my depth.”

“When I find them, the potential to catch a limit of slabs is high,” he said. “They’re very willing to bite, but fishermen need to be prepared to move either to shallower or deeper water. They could be on the top of a hump one day and at the base of it the next trip, or vice versa.”

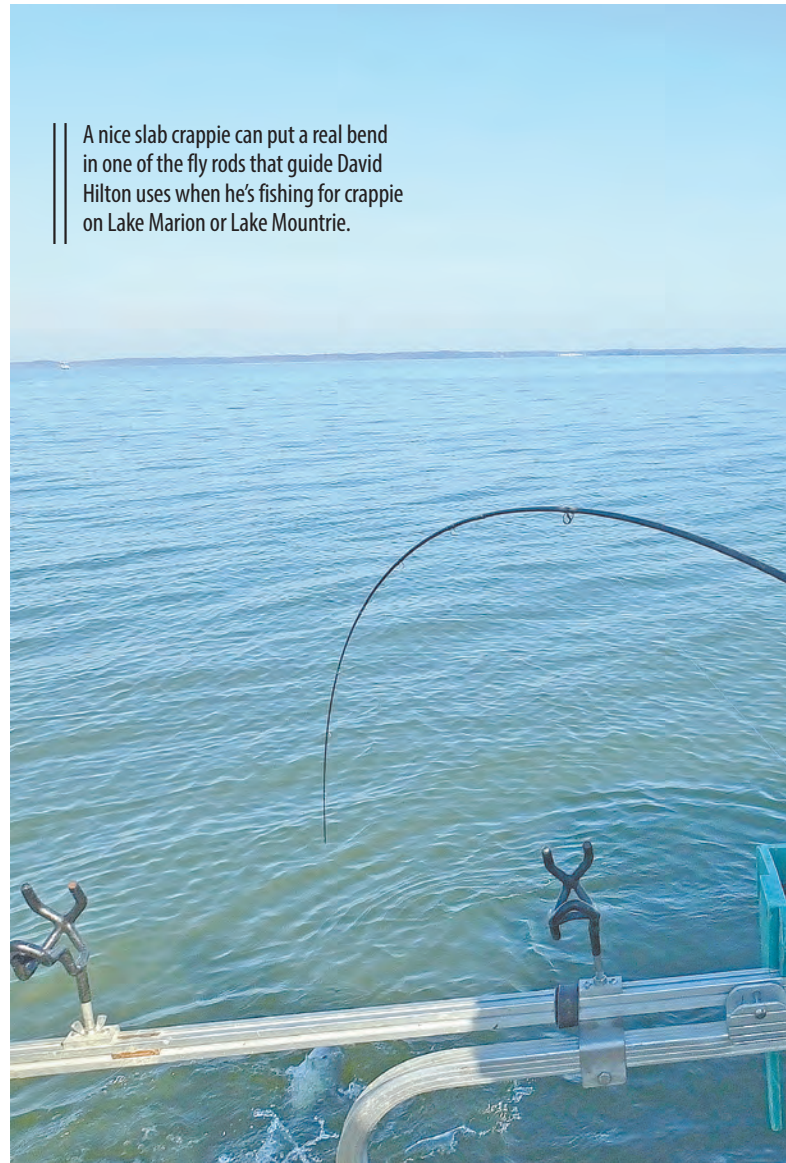
Hilton said several factors play a role in success, but none more important than the depth fished on any given day. It’s not just the depth of water where the brush is located it’s the precise depth where the fish are suspended over and around a specific target.

“Once I find the right depth, I want to maintain that depth on the line I have out,” he said. “I use 8½-foot Granger fly rods with small baitcasting reels to hold 10-pound line. I have a 1/0 wire hook and use a No. 3 split-shot about 8 inches above the hook.”



Terry Madewell

A nice slab crappie can put a real bend in one of the fly rods that guide David Hilton uses when he’s fishing for crappie on Lake Marion or Lake Mountrie.



DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The Santee Cooper lakes are easily accessed from I-95, I-26 and US 52. SC 6 is a key route along the south side of both lakes. For specific location of public boat ramps, visit www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/Boatramp/BoatRampLake

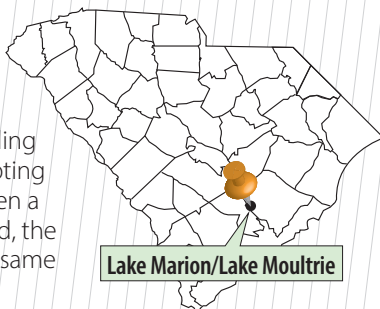
WHEN TO GO — March is a big month on the crappie-fishing calendar year on the Santee Cooper lakes as fish get into a full-blown prespawn mode, with the spawn to follow as soon as the water temperature reaches the high 50s.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Guide Dave Hilton said shallow-water fishing — dipping baits and lures along shallow, shoreline structure — can produce when the spawn is at its peak, but he prefers to fish for prespawn slabs around deeper brush piles, where they will be staging in big numbers. Fish will move from deeper brush to shallower brush as the month progresses, but 12 to 15 feet is an important depth. He uses long, limber fly rods and small spincast or baitcast reels spooled with 10-pound test, a No. 3 hook and



Terry Madewell

a small split-shot pinched off above the hook. He likes to fish live minnows. With depth control being so important, he avoids reeling in when a fish is hooked, opting to for a strip retrieve, so when a fish is boated and unhooked, the bait will return to the exact same depth every time.



Lake Marion/Lake Moultrie

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — David Hilton, 843-870-4734; Black's Camp, 843-753-2231, www.blackscamp.com;

ACCOMMODATIONS — Black's Camp, 843-753-2231, www.blackscamp.com; Santee Cooper Country, 803-854-2131, www.santeecoopercountry.org.

MAPS — Kingfisher Maps, 800-326-0257, www.kfmaps.com.

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Hilton pulls out line to match the length of the rod, then pulls additional line off the reel in measured increments to place the bait at a specific depth. Then, he swims the bait over the target, holding the rig as still as possible. When he hooks a crappie, he doesn't reel the fish in, he strips line in as if using a fly reel.

"Pull the line in with the left hand if you're right-handed and simply hold the line in your right-hand fingers and swing the fish aboard," he said. "Then re-bait and drop the bait back in the water, and it will fall to the exact depth the fish was just caught. Odds are good another crappie will quickly be hooked."

Electronics play a major role for Hilton; he uses his graph to find his target, then tosses out a floating marker buoy to mark the location. He doesn't place it directly on top of the brush, but off to the side so he can use it as a reference.

"The marker doesn't mark the spot to fish; it's a reference for me, enabling me to keep my presentation consistent," he said. "I'll maneuver the boat into the wind and approach the target using my electric motor to maintain the best boat control. I have my fishermen hold the rods in front of the boat as I



Keeping your baits at the depth fish are biting is important to pulling multiple crappie from the same brush pile.

approach the target and as soon as we begin catching fish I use the reference marker to keep the bait exactly where I want it.

"I have a graph in the front of the boat, but the marker enables me to fine-tune my presentation. As the action slows, I continue to move over and around the brush until we've fished it thoroughly. Each time we catch a fish, I'll use the marker to help me keep the boat on target. When we've fished the brush, I'll retrieve the marker and move."

Hilton said to simply keep repeating the process until limits are caught. ■



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.

BEAT THE WEATHER FOR BOAT CONTROL

Weather systems are a recurring consideration in March, and guide Dave Hilton said it's simply something anglers must anticipate and plan strategy accordingly.

"Fronts are gonna blow through in late February and throughout March," Hilton said. "With crappie already on the move in terms of prespawn and spawning phases, it adds a layer of complication to the fish-finding process. It usually means I have to slow down my presentation and perhaps fish a bit deeper."

Hilton said a front, with its cooler weather and change in barometric pressure, doesn't impact the bite as much as it makes boat control and bait presentation more difficult.

"The wind after a front is the biggest problem, because it's typically blowing considerably harder, and that often changes where I can effectively fish," he said. "That's why I've got brush piles in various depths of water in both lakes, giving me as many options as possible. The fish will still bite on the windswept, open-water spots, but it gets extremely difficult to control the boat and make the right presentation."

Hilton said he moves to protected areas based on wind direction, and he will be working brush and cover that's along the bottom of a hump or ledge.

"These deeper fish don't shut down, but boat control is essential to put the bait exactly where I want it to get that bite," he said. "Finding alternative areas to fish keeps my success high. I may have to fish a few more places but the fish are still on a good bite. Bottom line is, bait presentation is a key to catching lots of slabs in March." ■



Guide Dave Hilton said that weather fronts and the accompany high winds can make keeping your boat in position to fish individual brush piles very difficult, so he'll often adjust his fishing locations to avoid the wind.

Terry Madewell

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By Phillip Gentry

THE JIG IS UP BUT WHICH ONE?

Crappie fishermen have dozens of styles of jigs from which to choose. Learn when and where to tie one on, and which styles match which fishing situations.

Walk into any tackle shop this time of year and you'll likely be overwhelmed with choices of crappie jigs to use to tempt one of the country's favorite gamefish.

How do you decide which one(s) to buy and use?

Mike Bridges is a tackle distributor who handles hundreds of name brands and knows them all. On top of that, he is a crappie fisherman and has fished all over the country for these popular panfish and is adept at using nearly every tactic imaginable. He provided a run-down for crappie fishermen on how to pick the right jig for the job, as well as a few pointers to help anglers experience better success.

Crappie fishing tactics fall into two categories: moving presentations or static presentations. Moving presentations are pulling, long-line trolling, and casting, while static presentations are tight-line trolling, single-pole jigging, and drifting. Dock shooting often requires features of both camps.



Artificial lures probably account for as many crappie every year as live minnows, because there are so many ways they can be used: trolling, casting, jigging and drifting.



Pony head jigs like this Road Runner account for a lot of crappie, especially in stained water where the small spinner provides vibration and flash.

JIGHEADS

The basis of the crappie lure is the jig-head, a hook with lead molded onto to with or without attachments.

- **ROUND-HEAD JIGS.** The round-head is used to provide a fluttering fall when fished. It is typically used with tight-lining, single-pole jigging or when shooting docks.

- **MINNOW-HEAD JIGS.** Triangular-shaped jigheads lend their shape to swimming baitfish and are more hydro-dynamic, cutting through the water more efficiently. Minnow-head jigs are popular with long-line trolling and casting tactics.

- **PONY HEAD JIGS.** Sometimes referred to as Road Runner heads — after the manufacturer by the same name — pony heads employ small spinner blades on a swivel or split ring and add flash and vibration to the jighead. This is useful for stained water or other low-visibility conditions.

- **OTHER SHAPES.** Football heads, shad darts and other shapes see more limited use. Typically, the shape dictates whether the jig is designed to cut through the water or be more appealed when fished statically.

JIG BODIES

Jig bodies for crappie are typically either soft-plastic baits that are threaded on the hook by the angler or hair, feather or other synthetic materials tied to the jig body by the manufacturer.

- **TUBES.** Tube jigs are typically hollow body, with tentacles on the back end to provide static action. Tubes see more usage for slow, tight-line trolling or single-pole jigging when the bait is presented vertically into structure to the fish.

- **CURLYTAILS.** These plastic bodies are designed to be pulled fast enough through the water so that the tails flutter, providing action to the bait. Curlytails see more use in long-line trolling and casting or any presentation generally above one-half mile per hour.

- **PADDLETAILS.** Paddletail usage is similar to curlytails in that the bait has to be moving forward to provide action.

- **STRAIGHT-TAILS.** Straight-tails, or stingers, mimic a static baitfish. Very streamlined, straight-tails see more use in dock-shooting, vertical-jigging, or other single-pole tactics.

continues on page 44 >

WHEN TO TIP A JIG WITH A MINNOW

For all the discussion about crappie jigs, live minnows account for at least half of the crappie caught by anglers. No discussion about jigs is complete without a discussion of how and when to pair live minnows with jigs.

Some anglers will tip any jig with a minnow on almost every occasion and find success. It's generally accepted that jigs are tipped with minnows when the bite is slow, water temperatures are lower than 55 degrees, in low-visibility conditions or whenever it is desired to add scent to the jig.


Tipping with minnows sees more usage from the static group of crappie-fishing techniques. Trolling and casting tactics rely on impulse bites from crappie who see a jig swimming through the water and instinctively eat it. Adding a minnow behind a jig designed to provide swimming action in the water often inhibits the action of the bait and negates its usage.

Jigs designed with pulsating or breathing action are better choices for minnows. The bait contains color, static action, flash or vibration, especially if using an underspin, pony head jighead. The minnow adds a natural feel and smell to the bait often causing the fish to hold on to the jig longer, giving the angler more time to detect the strike and set the hook.

Don't overlook a live minnow hooked on a naked jig head as a very deadly bait under the right conditions, either as a trolled or static bait.

Another aspect of tipping your jig with a minnow is that the bait adds bulk to your offering. Crappie anglers who fish where white crappie are found understand that white crappie frequently prefer a mouthful of bait, whereas too much mass may discourage black crappie.

Another trick to remember when tipping jigs with live minnows is to make sure to hook the minnow through the lips so it remains alive and active on the hook. Some anglers will hook the minnow so it rides upside down, increasing its struggles but decreasing its lifespan on the hook. ■



Shooting under docks to get to hard-to-reach crappie is normally best done with a round-head jig that flutters when it falls.

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THE JIG IS UP

continues >

• CREATURE BAITS.

Similar to tubes, but designed to imitate specific, non-minnow type prey, creatures are usually better suited for single-pole tactics or for bream fishing.

• **HAIR JIGS.** This category encompasses all hand-tied baits using hair, feather, marabou, chenille or a variety of other synthetic material. The design allows the baits to pulse or breathe when held still in the water. Static techniques like single pole jigging, dock shooting, drifting, or tight-lining work best with hair jigs.

JIG COLORS AND WEIGHTS

Scores or articles can and have been written about choosing jig colors, both for jigheads and jig bodies. The basic rule of thumb revolves around water clarity and sunlight penetration. The clearer and cleaner the water, the better natural or opaque colors work. In stained, dark or muddy waters, brighter and/or darker colors get the nod.

Angler bias probably has more to do with color selection than fish preference. Successful anglers keep changing colors until they find one color that catches the most fish on a particular outing.

The deeper the strike zone, the heavier the jighead needed. Trolling anglers often go to great pains, using a gram scale bought at a local hardware store to measure weight in grams over accepting the weight, in percentage of an ounce, pre-printed on the package.

When trolling pony heads, the blade will cause the jighead to weigh more, but the resistance in the water of the spinning blade will affect how deep the jig runs. The type of blade, whether willow-leaf, Indiana



or Colorado, will also affect the resistance and trolling depth a pony head will find.

Single-pole anglers typically want enough weight to keep contact with the bait in order to detect strikes, but not too heavy, as an overweight jig does not feel or act natural to the fish. ■

Clockwise from top left:

- » Roadrunner (pony head jig)
- » Southern Pro tube jig
- » Bobby Garland Stroll-R on Bobby Garland Mo-Glo jighead
- » Curlytail grub on minnow-head jig
- » Hand-tied maribou jig with chenille body
- » Crappie Assassin paddletail
- » Roger Gantt hand-tied hair jig
- » Bass Pro Shops Crappie Craw (creature bait)
- » Jelly belly hair jig
- » Hand-tied mylar jig on minnow-head jig
- » Fish Stalker Slab Tail jig



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By Jeff Burleson

RED SHELL GAME

The emergence of crabs puts Grand Strand spring redfish on the prowl. Here's how to put a claw on them.

It might not match winter in northern climates, but South Carolina does have a season that's colder than the rest, and when it arrives, redfish gaggle up by the hundreds into tight groups in headwater creeks in marshes, providing anglers with easy-to-find targets.

But as soon as Mother Nature turns up the heat at the approach of spring, the fish appear to scatter and vanish into thin air. Fishermen who ply the waters at either end of the Grand Strand and know where to look and how to wiggle their worms can score big during the spring thaw.

Redfish are unique in that adults live apart from their juvenile relatives. Juveniles don't leave estuaries for several years, and they overwinter deep in the marsh to get away from predators like porpoises. But when spring weather arrives, food returns, the porpoises have something else to eat and reds break out of their schools to forage.

>

According to Jordan Pate of Carolina Guide Service, the inconsistent weather of early spring requires a different plan of attack in the micro-marshes of Pawley's Island and the waters of North Inlet and Winyah Bay near Georgetown.

"It's a tricky time of year for finding reds. The (schools) start to break apart when the threat eases and more food is available around the marsh," said Pate who believes rising water temperatures and the return of blue crabs trips reds' triggers. "Blue crabs become available again in the spring when water temperatures rise."

In the winter, blue crabs move into the ocean or inshore areas with higher salinity levels, burying themselves in the mud and sand. Was the water warms, they prepare to molt and then spawn.

Pate believes reds are so keyed in on the crabs, when their scent begins to roll through the marsh, they think food first, not safety.

"A redfish's main spring diet is crabs, and (spring) is when we see the first molt of the year. Redfish love a soft crab," Pate said.

Blue crabs molt when the water temperatures breaks the 60-degree mark, usually from late March through April. However, crabs aren't the only thing anglers will find in the bellies of spring redfish.

Greg Holmes of Fish Skinny Charters, who fishes the Little River area, said even though reds will gobble up every crab they find, they'll supplement their diet with mud minnows and incoming menhaden.

"Mud minnows dig out of the mud, and the first wave of menhaden shows up this time of year, too," Holmes said. "Food is more abundant, (and) that is just what they need to refuel after the winter."

Because reds scatter to hunt for food, many anglers have a hard time pinning down a dependable pattern after the break-up. Holmes starts fishing in places where reds spent the winter and works his way out to attractive areas.

"There will still be some fish in the winter holding areas, but many fish spread out near deeper water and will position on nearby oyster mounds, creek mouths, and ambush points," Holmes said.

Places where tributary creeks converge are prime staging areas when fish begin to move. Pate said staying on the move and beating the bank will be profitable for most anglers.

continues on page 51 >



Redfish that spend the winter inshore break out of big schools when the water begins to warm in March, bringing food to the marsh.

Jeff Burleson

DON'T FORGET

the early season flood

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — South Carolina's Grand Strand is a 60-mile section of beach from Little River near the North Carolina border to Georgetown, S.C. Small marshes are behind Pawley's Island and Litchfield Beach, and a larger one is at Murrells Inlet, but the majority of redfish habitat is around Winyah Bay and Little River. US 17 offers the best access to the entire area: two public boat ramps under the US 17 bridge at Little River offer access to that area. Three ramps in the Georgetown area are: South Island Ferry, East Bay Park and the Campbell Complex north of the US 17 bridge across the Sampit River.

BEST TECHNIQUES —

With patrolling marsh edges and oyster banks along creeks for crabs and other baitfish, cover plenty of water with artificial baits such as spinnerbaits, gold Johnson spoons, Gulp swimming mullet, D.O.A. Jerk and Airhead, Egret Mambo Mullet and others. When fish are located, stake out and use small pieces of blue crab on a jighead or a Carolina rig. Medium-action tackle is preferred, with rules spooled with 20-pound braid with an 18- to 24-inch section of 20-pound fluorocarbon leader.

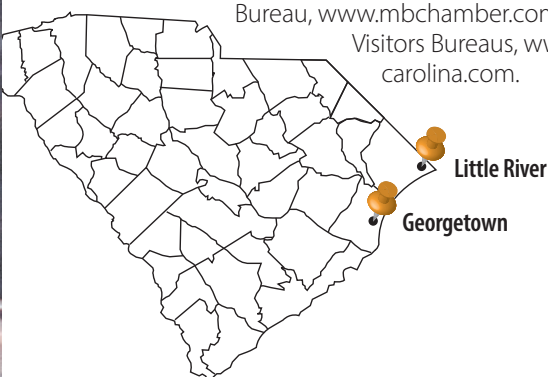
WHEN TO GO — Redfish can be caught year-round along the Grand Strand, but the spring pattern emerges in March when the water temperature hits 60 degrees, because that marks the point when blue crabs emerge from hibernation.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES

— Greg Holmes, Fish Skinny Charters, 843-241-0594, www.fishskinnycharters.com; Jordan Pate, Carolina Guide Service, 843-608-8307, www.carolinaguideservice.com.

MAPS — Navionics, 800-848-5896, www.navionics.com; The Good Spots, 800-411-0184, www.thegoodspots.com; Delorme's S.C. Atlas & Gazetteer, 207-846-7000, www.delorme.com.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Hampton Inn-Georgetown Marina, 843-545-5000; Hampton Inn-North Myrtle Beach/Harbourgate, 843-249-1997; Myrtle Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, www.mbchamber.com; S.C. Association of Visitors Bureaus, www.discoverouthcarolina.com.



Spring can force anglers to break out every trick in the book to get redfish to cooperate, in part because they're spooky from heavy winter fishing pressure.

Besides the return of blue crabs to the marsh as spring approaches, nothing else can make for great fishing like a flood tide. Tailing action isn't limited to summer and fall. When a particularly high tide arrives, blue crabs and fiddler crabs will head for higher ground, and reds will follow.

Guide Jordan Pate said he tries not to miss any flood-tide days during March, when most anglers haven't even thought about their tide tables.



Greg Holmes

... Redfish will pull up on flats and tail on high water, even during the early spring.

"We see tailers on the flood tides in late March. The earliest I have ever seen them on the tailing flats is the third week of March," Pate said. "As soon as the crabs become available, the tailing opportunities will start."

Tailing fish will slide up onto the flats as soon as there is enough water to cover their backs, and they will follow the water as it floods every inch of high ground.

According to tide tables, the first tailing tides should take place in the morning hours of March 1-3. Tailing tides will return April 29-31, in the afternoons. ■

KRYPTONITE WITH A CAPITAL "C"

During spring, crabs are to redfish as kryptonite was to the comic-book Superman. As soon as redfish detect a crabby aroma, they perk up and begin looking for hard-shelled delicacies. But anglers don't have to actually use a real chunk of crab to tickle these senses, either. Anglers can fortify their artificial lures with a little liquid magic and bring fish to the lure in record time.

Because reds are splitting out of huge winter schools, anglers need to cover a lot of water to find them, and that means using artificial lures. Some lures already come with fish-attracting scents, including the Gulp! peeler crab or D.O.A. shrimp-flavored lures. Some anglers prefer the reel thing. They can make their own crab marinade by crushing up blue crabs in a 5-gallon bucket or an old blender, with vegetable oil added to the mix. Soft baits can be soaked in the mixture, and the mixture can be re-applied throughout the day if the lure survives that long.

As far as a ready-to-use product, Pro-Cure Bait Scents (www.pro-cure.com) makes a blue crab scent in a gel that can be applied directly to both soft and hard lures. The gel is sticky, and a little bit goes a long way.

Of course, fresh blue crab is unmatched for getting reds on the hook year-round, but especially in the spring. Anglers should trim the legs, remove the outer shell and cut the remaining body of the crab into several pieces. Hooks — either a jighead or a Carolina-rig hook — can be inserted just inside the body near the legs' former homes. These baits will hold up well for several casts. ■



Jeff Burleson

A chunk of fresh blue crab, shell removed, is an unbeatable bait for redfish year-round, but especially in the spring.

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continues on page 48 >

“I like to cover a lot of ground throwing artificial lures. I concentrate on grassy banks, creek mouths and small points in Winyah Bay,” Pate said. “The reds are scattered in small groups, fending for themselves, and you have to cover a lot of ground.”

Pate likes lures that can be retrieved with a constant action, including Egret’s Mambo Mullet, spinnerbaits or a jighead and white Fluke.

Holmes said the size of the lures he uses can be important in the spring. He likes to downsize to match the hatch.

“The fish are focused on smaller baits because that is what is in there. I like to downsize my tackle to smaller-sized baits,” said Holmes, who will use 3-inch Gulp! swimming mullet on a light jighead or other small baits that imitate small menhaden or mud minnows.



Jordan Pate

Redfish leave the winter hungry because of a lack of food in the marshes. They aren’t picky about feeding up as the water warms.

While reds will scatter around the region, they will still be in small groups. Pate and Holmes have similar strategies they employ after catching a fish or two from an area. They will stake out and cast outfits rigged with small chunks of fresh blue crab on a jighead or Carolina rig.

“When you get on some fish, fresh blue crab is as good as anything you can get,” Holmes said.

For anglers ready to make good of a warm, spring day, both the northern end of the Grand Strand around Little River Inlet and the southern end of the Grand Strand at Winyah Bay offer prime spring redfish grounds with plentiful opportunities available to stretch a line. ■



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

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By Jerry Dilsaver

WILMINGTON'S MIXED BAG

Three rivers around this North Carolina port city hold plenty of fish, and fishing pressure is relatively light. Try these tips and add some new water to your angling resume.

Anyone travelling around the Wilmington, N.C., area has got to cross at least one of three rivers — the Cape Fear, Northeast Cape Fear and Brunswick — but because very few boats are visible from the bridges that cross those rivers, fishing is often under the radar for many, which is a terrible mistake.

The rivers provide good fishing year-round, and occasionally, fishermen are treated to one of those, “You had to be there to believe it,” days.

Stuart Caulder of Gold Leader Guide Service specializes in catching the fish that call the area home. One of his favorite places to fish is the area from the I-140 bridges across the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear downstream to the power lines that cross the Cape Fear below the State Ports, an area that includes the full length of the Brunswick River.

>



Wilmington/Cape Fear River

"Most of the year, there are trout, reds and flounder in much of the water around Wilmington," Caulder said. "Flounder fishing begins to slow in the late fall, but the others continue, and stripers arrive in the winter, sometimes by Thanksgiving, and add an extra dimension."

Stripers can't be creelied in the Cape Fear and its tributaries, and with cold-stun events causing the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries to close the keeper season on speckled trout until June 18, those two species are available on a catch-and-release basis only.

"But it's good fishing all year, with the opportunity to catch some stripers through the winter and spring, and there's always the potential for a big one," Caulder said.

The water in the rivers around Wilmington is tidal water, and Caulder said the stage and flow of the tide is important. One morning last March, he launched before daylight at the Dram Tree Park Ramp in downtown Wilmington and motored up the river to a point

holding some underwater structure that created a big boil with the moving tide.

Pointing to the boil, Caulder said, "The tide is still rising a little, but it has slowed and will be changing soon. Cast this X-Rap upcurrent of the boil and jig it lightly to get it to dive, but let the current push it across the structure and into the boil. If there are any stripers here, we should know pretty quickly."

The reaction wasn't quite immediate, but a hungry striper grabbed the X-Rap on the third cast. It wasn't a big fish, but it was a good sign, and after a short fight, it was netted and released. A few minutes later, Caulder set the hook on a bigger fish, which rose to the surface and flashed its striped sides in the early morning light several times before tiring and allowing Caulder to lead it to the waiting net.

"I was hoping they would be here this morning," Caulder said. "Sometimes they move in here when the flow begins to slow leading up to the tide change. This should be good for a little while, but it will slow or maybe stop completely when the tide stops for the change."

continues on page 58 >

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Wilmington is the eastern terminus of I-40 and the primary route most people take to get there, although US 74 and US 421 will bring many people from western North Carolina to Wilmington. US 17 is the best north and south route. Public boat ramps include Dram Tree Park on Castle St. next to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, on the Northeast Cape Fear River off US 117/NC 133 in Castle Hayne and at Snows Cut in Carolina Beach off US 421. A fee ramp is available at Carolina Beach State Park. Areas downstream of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge require a saltwater fishing license; a freshwater license is required upstream of the bridge.

WHEN TO GO — Flounder, red drum and speckled trout may be in the waters around Wilmington at any time, depending on whether freshwater runoff has pushed them downstream. Striped bass may be around until May or early June depending on the timing of their spawning run. Trout season is closed until June 15 because of cold-stun kills in January.

TACKLE/TECHNIQUES — Medium-light to medium-heavy, 7-foot spinning outfits will work fine, with reels spooled with braided line and a 1- to 2-foot fluorocarbon leader. Target creek mouths, dock pilings and bridge abutments with large, soft-plastic swimbaits and jerkbaits rigged weedless, plus MirrOlure MirrODine 17 MRs and 27 MRs and Rapala X-Raps. Troll with deep-diving lures, especially around bridges and channel edges.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Stu Caulder, Gold Leader Fishing, 910-264-2674; Tex's Tackle and Bait, 910-791-1763, www.texstackle.com; Island Tackle and Hardware, 910-458-3049, www.islandtacklehardware.com; Intracoastal Angler, 910-392-3500, www.intracoastalangler.com. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Best Western, Coastline Convention Center, 800-617-7732, www.coastlineinn.com; MainStay Suites, 910-329-1741, www.mainstaywilmington.com; Sleep Inn, 910-313-6665, www.sleepinwilmingtonnc.com; Cape Fear Convention and Visitors Bureau, 877-406-2356, www.capefear.nc.us.

MAPS — GMCO Chartbook of North Carolina, (888) 420-6277, www.gmcomaps.com; Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainsegullcharts.com.



Speckled trout are present in all the rivers around Wilmington, but they're a catch-and-release fishery until June 15 of this year.

Jerry Dilsaver

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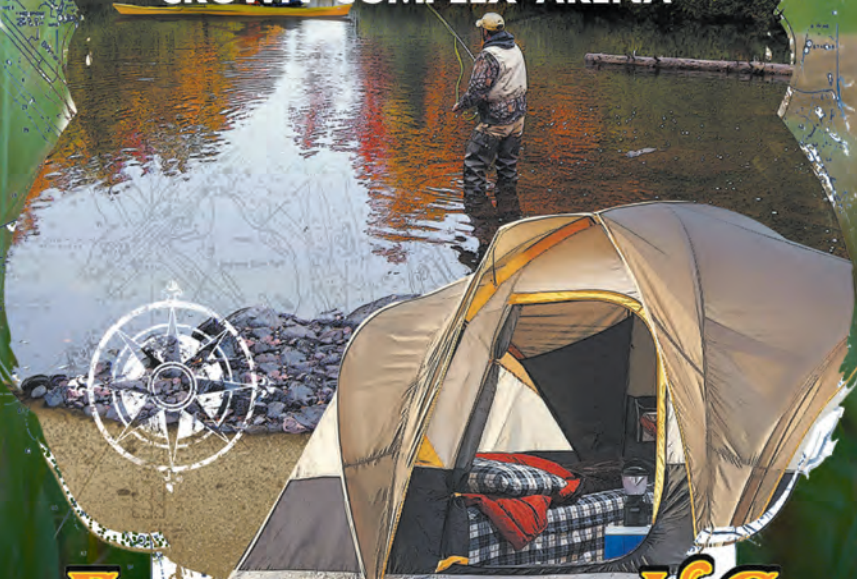
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Guide Stu Caulder shows off a nice, slot-sized redfish taken in the Cape Fear River.

A few casts later, the complexion of the morning changed. A fish hit and bulled its way to the surface, where it lifted its head out of the water and shook, trying to dislodge the lure.

"That's a trout," Caulder said, an element of surprise in his voice. "I've only caught a few of them here in a bunch of years."

The next few casts all produced speckled trout; Caulder guessed that bait being pushed past for the specks to hold in the moving water.

When the tide stalled just before beginning to fall, the action ended, and after fishing falling water for a bit, he knew it was time to relocate, heading upriver to a place where several small creeks dumped into the river. He pointed out that the tide had just switched, and water was beginning to flow out of the creeks, carrying some bait, and he set up to fish the area from just inside the creek's mouth into the river.

"I've tied some DOA C.A.L. soft plastics on light jigheads," Caulder said. "Cast them into the creek and twitch them lightly to bump them off the bottom and let the current push them out. Fish from right along the grass out to the middle of the creek.

continues on page 60 >



Jerry Dilsaver

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Depending on the amount of freshwater in the Cape Fear River and its tributaries, saltwater fish are liable to show up in all kinds of areas.

TIDAL, SALT, FRESH AND BRACKISH WATERS

The rivers around Wilmington, N.C., are all tidal and have a significant tide change. The boundary between Coastal and Inland Waters in the Cape Fear is the downriver side of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. All of the Northeast Cape Fear and Brunswick rivers are classified as Inland Waters and require freshwater fishing licenses. Coastal waters downstream require a saltwater license.

The salinity and the fish in the rivers don't respect this boundary. Any of the rivers may have a high-enough salinity level to hold saltwater species, or after heavy or extended rainfall, the salinity may drop enough they are better suited for freshwater species.

For flounder, speckled trout and red drum, Inland regulations mirror the Coastal regulations. There is a moratorium on possessing stripers in the Cape Fear River and all of its tributaries, and the speckled trout fishery is closed until June 15 because of cold-stun kills in January.

The water's salinity varies throughout the year, with rain the key factor. With a lot of rain, the rivers become mostly freshwater with lower salinity levels. In times of drought, saltwater pushes farther upstream, making for an interesting mixture of species that can include bass, catfish, stripers, drum, flounder, trout and more. ■



Jerry Dilsvaver

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There should be stripers and red drum here. The drum usually feed very close to the edge, while the stripers might be out in the middle. You'll know which as soon as you get a strike, because drum will typically run down the bank, and stripers will bolt for open water. I'll fish this MirrOlure MR 17 to see if they prefer it, and we'll switch to whichever they like best.

There weren't any hungry fish in the first creek, but they were waiting and ready in the second. The action was from as far up the creek as you could cast to the drop-off into the channel about 20 feet out into the river.

The key was not fishing quickly and concentrating on popping the lure up off the bottom and letting it flutter back down without moving it too far forward.

Almost all the strikes came while the bait was dropping, with a few right after it reached the bottom.

The puppy drum and stripers weren't very particular and liked both baits. Caulder switched to single-hook jerkbaits to make them easier to release. White and pearl sides and a dark back was the color combination they liked best.

At somewhere around half tide, the bite slowed in the creek mouth but shifted out to the shallow shelf before the drop into deeper water in the river. The fish whacked the lures and took off. Caulder said sometimes they can be like trout and the strike is just a light peck, so he uses braided line and sensitive rods that transmit even the slightest tick up the line to the fisherman.

The mixed-bag fishery around Wilmington is usually good. It can change a little and shift locations with an influx of rainwater runoff or salt water. The good news is that the fish don't move far and can usually be found. Stripers are usually upriver from the power line that crosses

below the State Port, and reds and specks rarely venture upriver beyond the I-140 bridges. Winter fishermen can usually find a few red drum, speckled trout and stripers. Stripers really shine from late February on as they are feeding heavily preparing for their spawning run up the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers. ■



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.



Stripers move into Wilmington's three rivers around Thanksgiving and stay into the spring.

Jerry Dilsaver

WILMINGTON'S THREE RIVERS

The area around downtown Wilmington, N.C., is home to three rivers — the Cape Fear, Northeast Cape Fear and Brunswick — plus, the Black River flows into the Cape Fear about 10 miles upriver.

The Cape Fear is the primary river, with its headwaters at Jordan Dam near Moncure. The Cape Fear is also dammed near Tar Heel, Elizabethtown and Riegelwood. Each dam has locks, although navigation on the river has almost ceased. Several year ago, a rock-arch fish ladder was installed at Lock and Dam No. 1, near Riegelwood. There are calls for similar fish ladders at the other dams, but projects have not been scheduled.

The Cape Fear River collects several smaller rivers and numerous creeks as it runs about 200 miles through central North Carolina to the ocean at Southport. The largest of these is the Northeast Cape Fear, which works its way downstream for about 130 miles from Goldsboro, dumping into the Cape Fear near the battleship North Carolina.

The Brunswick River is basically an auxiliary channel for the Cape Fear that splits off near the railroad bridge at Navassa and rejoins the Cape Fear across from the Wilmington State Ports.

The Wilmington rivers are all tidal, which moves bait up and down the river, plus in and out of the feeder creeks. The tide range is approximately 4 feet at Wilmington and gradually tapers off heading upstream. ■



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Buckets of various sizes have gone on countless fishing trips over the years. Only recently have fishing “buckets” become high-tech, following the lead of coolers.

IT'S ONLY A BUCKET, OR IS IT?

NEW, HIGH-TECH BUCKETS MAY BE EXPENSIVE, BUT THEY PERFORM PLENTY OF TASKS FOR ANGLERS

Besides rods, reels, line and hooks, what's the most-common piece of fishing equipment carried by anglers fishing from the bank to million-dollar billfishing boats and every other class of angler in between?

The 5-gallon bucket.

This container has withstood the test of time and is still used by low-tech and high-tech anglers alike; its uses are limitless. Whether it's storing tackle, anchors, cast nets or lunch or hauling water, holding bait or ice, serving as a livewell or cutting board, to being used as a seat, table or to hold fishing rods, the bucket has long been a useful tool for all anglers.

It's changed very little over time, and no one gave much thought to it not changing. They're cheap — if not free — and while they've always served an important role, no one has found it necessary to have a nicer bucket. But once one gets a crack or has a handle break off, it can cause a mere inconvenience or a major catastrophe, depending on what it's being used for when that happens.

In many ways, buckets have been similar to coolers, which, until a few years ago, were inexpensive enough and cheap enough to replace every year or two. But



The Kula 5 can double as a bucket or a high-tech cooler.



Yeti's LoadOut bucket retails for about \$40.

just as some companies stepped up to vastly improve everything about coolers, the bucket is finally being modernized.

Two buckets in particular are leading the revolution. The Yeti LoadOut, by the same folks who made it cool to spend \$350 on a cooler, is one. The Kula 5 is another. And while they both have the same 5-gallon capacity, they are vastly different.

The Yeti LoadOut is the same size and shape of a typical 5-gallon bucket, but

it's seriously over-engineered. The Kula 5 does double-duty as a bucket and cooler, and it features high-performance cooler insulation, so it's considerably larger.

Both buckets feature tie-down points, non-slip bottoms, heavy duty and comfortable handles, are virtually unbreakable and are guaranteed to last much longer than any other 5-gallon bucket available.

The LoadOut has an optional lid that is virtually unbreakable, makes the bucket

watertight and is easy to install and remove. A fabric apron with numerous pockets is also available. This attaches to the bucket and adds plenty of storage.

The Kula 5 comes with a hinged watertight lid with foam padding, making it perfect to use as a seat. A single, vulcanized rubber latch allows one-handed opening and closing. A stainless steel bottle opener is mounted to the Kula, and a leak-proof plug is positioned in the center of the bucket's slightly sloped bottom, allowing for quick and complete draining.

ARE THEY WORTH IT?

The LoadOut Bucket retails for about \$40. A 5-gallon bucket from Lowe's will run you about \$4, so you would need to go through 10 of them to equal the price of one LoadOut. But those buckets from Lowe's have uncomfortable handles, will slide on truck beds and boats, and they lack other features of the LoadOut. More important, the cheaper buckets will fail you at some point. With the LoadOut, you've got peace of mind that \$4 doesn't buy.

The Kula retails for about \$200. That's expensive for a bucket but less costly than most high-performance coolers. And like the LoadOut, when you need a bucket (or a high-performance cooler), you know it's going to be there, and you know it's going to last. It's got everything you could want in a bucket and more, and offers dual-purpose use that a hardware store bucket, the LoadOut, or a bulky rectangular cooler can't deliver.

Some anglers jumped on the high-performance cooler craze once those products became available. It took others quite a while to come to terms with spending that kind of money, but they eventually recognized the durability meant it could be the last cooler they ever purchase, so

A BUCKET LIST OF BUCKET USES:

A 5-gallon bucket might be the most-important thing you carry fishing after your rods and reels. Whether you're fishing from land, pier or boat, a bucket can perform these tasks: store tackle, anchors, cast net, lunch, water, bait or ice. It can be a livewell or cutting board, a seat or a table, and in some cases, even a rod-holder.

they eventually spent the money.

For many folks, that purchase has saved them from spending more money on multiple coolers in just a few years. Likewise, some anglers are already using these high-tech buckets, but many others are hesitant to shell out the money. But once their current inexpensive bucket leaks, or the handle breaks, or they tire

of it sliding across their truck bed, they have these options to turn to. ■



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

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LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite

A Buckeye Mop Jig (left) and a No. 7 Rapala Shad Rap are two baits all bass fishermen need to have tied on in March, when bass are really starting to feed and move toward shallower water.

MUST-HAVE BAITS FOR MARCH BASS

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THESE LURES TIED ON WHEN YOU HIT THE LAKE THIS MONTH FOR YOUR BEST CHANCE AT TRULY BIG BASS

Dan Kibler

Across the Carolinas, March is the best month, in my opinion, to catch a trophy large-mouth bass. I know you can catch one in January, February or April, but everything points to having your best chance this month.

Our March days can be very, very different, depending on the weather and water temperature. The days are getting longer, but that doesn't matter as much as water temperature, and it can be from one extreme to the other. By the last part of the month, it's usually starting to warm up pretty good.

That said, when I head out on Lake Murray, my home lake, or on any other lake in the Carolinas this month, I am absolutely going to have a handful of rods on the front deck of my Phoenix bass boat, with the best March baits I can possibly tie on. Here they are:

JERKBAITS

Jerkbaits really work better when the water is colder, so they're great in early March, when we're subject to have water

temperatures in the high 40s and low 50s. Fish can be lethargic, and a jerkbait will suspend in front of them.

I'm fishing a Rapala Rip Stop, which can get down to about 6 or 7 feet. I'll fish it on a 6-foot-7, Lew's Speed Stick jerkbait rod and a Lew's Super Duty baitcasting reel spooled with 10-pound fluorocarbon. I like to fish shad and herring colors.

I am looking for situations when I can see bait and bass suspended on my depth finder. A perfect situation is when we've had a few warm days in late February, maybe a week, and then we get a cold front and the water temperature drops back down. That's when I love a jerkbait. The fish have moved up, and they're so far along toward the spring that they won't go back down, but they'll move off cover and structure and suspend. That's when you catch 'em on a jerkbait.

The cadence you fish a jerkbait is very important. When the water temperature is in the high 40s, I'll slow down, but I'll mix it up. I'll start with a jerk-jerk-pause-jerk-jerk-pause cadence, at different speeds. If I see bait and fish on

my Humminbird and I'm not catching anything after 15 minutes, I'm going to change something up.

CRANKBAITS

I love fishing jerkbaits, but if I had to choose my Nos. 1 and 2 baits for March, they're going to be crankbaits. I love to fish a No. 7 Shad Rap, and a Rapala DT-6 or DT-10, depending on how deep the fish are.

Crankbaits come into play when I see fish relating to the bottom or to some kind of cover or structure on the bottom — as opposed to fishing a jerkbait when fish are suspended. I love that I can cover a lot of water with a crankbait and use it as a search bait.

Every bass fisherman in the country has at least one Shad Rap in their tackle boxes. It's the best cold-water crankbait ever. If the water temperature is in the mid-40s, the high 40s or the low 50s, that's what I'm going to be throwing. If the water temperature is in the mid-50s or higher 50s, I'm going to be throwing a DT-6 or DT-10.



I want to use crawfish colors: reds, browns, oranges. I want to look for wood, rock or even grass. This time of year, you may have some hydrilla, but you're more likely to have some kind of stubble left from vegetation that's gone dormant in the winter.

I want to fish these crankbaits on a 7-foot, Lew's David Fritts Perfect Crankbait Rod and a Lew's BB1 baitcasting reel spooled with 10- to 12-pound fluorocarbon. If I was fishing a stiffer rod, or a rod with a faster action, I'd use monofilament.

MOP JIG

I will fish a Buckeye mop jig anytime during March, depending on the cover and what bass are doing.

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but I'm adamant about this: a mop jig is a great, big-fish bait. Anywhere I'm fishing, I've got to throw it two or three times just to keep the big fish honest.

What I'm looking at is fishing it around targets that I might see: maybe a dock post with brush, blowdowns, stumps. Obviously, I'm going to throw it anywhere I catch a few fish on a jerkbait or a crankbait.

One important thing is, look for crawfish. In late fall and winter, you'll see more crawfish around the banks of most of our lakes, because the water is usually down and very clear. I've heard more people tell me about the big crawfish they've seen on Lake Murray this winter. What you're looking for is the color of the crawfish. They can be different colors at different times of the year — and on different bodies of water.

I want to match the color of the crawfish I see, whether they're brown or black with red spots — that's a big one — or any other color. I'm going to fish a mop jig with a crawfish trailer, a Yamamoto

WE GOT THE BEAT:

Cadence is extremely important when you're fishing a jerkbait like a Rapala Rip Stop (above) for late-winter largemouth bass that are suspended around suspended bait. Choose one cadence to start with — jerk-jerk-pause — is a favorite, but experiment, especially if you're not getting bit when you see fish on your depth-finder. Slow down, speed up, go to a different cadence, by try something else.

Flappin' Hawg.

I'll fish a mop jig on a 7-foot, Lew's Magnum Pitching Rod, the Super Duty reel and 14- to 17-pound fluorocarbon.

So when you hit the lake this month, make sure these baits are tied on, so you can get the most out of your March trips. ■



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

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Disking up old food plots or fallow fields will provide turkeys with great opportunities to search for bugs and other food. To prevent the downside — possible nest destruction or habitat loss for newly born fawns — get your disking done by mid-March.

MARCH: LION OR LAMB FOR HABITAT

IMPROVING SOME HABITAT CAN HAVE UNWANTED, NEGATIVE EFFECTS IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL

Jeff Burleson

March is a pivotal time of the year for wild turkey and deer; the two big-game species on which hunters spend most of their time and dollars. When it's crunch time for turkey hunters in March, it's also prime time for deer managers to make waves in food plots in preparation for warm-season plantings. But can something that helps one species counteract objectives for other species?

Well, maybe. It depends on where and when these land-management activities are under power. Disturbance at the ground level is typically very beneficial for promoting habitats.

Expired food plots and open areas often become part of March duties to create fresh bugging areas for turkeys or to break up soil. Disk harrows or PTO-powered bush hogs are the most-important tractor implements that every land manager should have parked in their sheds. Together, they disturb the land at ground level, consequently creating current and potential future opportunities for groceries that wildlife will utilize.

Turkeys love a plowed field, and land managers can disk up rows and fallow food plots to attract turkey in time for the hunting season.

The days are getting longer, and temperatures are warming the soil enough to jump-start the green season, too. Shallow tillage stimulates the growth of native grasses and forbs that both deer and turkeys love. Additionally, mowing can be beneficial by spreading native seeds and shortening overgrown vegetation.

The benefits of mowing and disking can easily be realized on most properties, but they can have negative impacts as well. Turkeys in the Carolinas will begin nesting and laying eggs as early as March, and a turkey nest will quickly become scrambled eggs in the path of a disk harrow or a bush hog. To prevent this, all their spring mowing and harrowing should be finished by no later than the middle of March.

Beyond turkeys, mechanically altering the ground layer can have negative impacts on deer recruitment. Even though deer don't begin dropping fawns until May, mowing grown-up fields leads to a shortage of prime fawning habitat and increases levels of coyote predation.

Coyotes are here to stay, and the arrival of deer fawns during the spring is like Christmas Day for a pack. Cover is critical for newborn fawns; they need cover from Day One. Overgrown fields and woodlots with high grass are critical to

create protection from coyotes and other predators. A deer fawn is born with minimal survival characteristics, and overgrown fields come into play to increase their rate of survival.

Typically, does will choose the same fawning grounds each year, and these areas should be identified and preserved during the fawning season. In the Carolinas, the fawning season begins in May and will usually be over by the end of June. The lack of good fawning habitat will directly impact fawn survival and the future quality of the deer herd. After fawning is over, the overgrown areas can be mowed and prepared for the fall planting season.

Land managers can still disk and mow certain areas to promote deer and turkey habitat, but certain areas need to be stay out of the tractor's path to encourage fawning habitat and survival.

Mowing and disk harrowing are two important tools that should be used every year to promote wildlife habitat. However, their usage should be planned accordingly to make sure that the activities are promoting targeted wildlife species rather than negatively impacting annual recruitment.

Hunters and land managers invest tons of energy in preparing open areas for

food plots and attracting turkeys during the spring season. While working the land can take away from other activities, it can be money well spent when lands load up with wildlife right when the time is right to pull the trigger.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Creating food plots and freshly tilled areas are perfect early spring maneuvers for boosting turkey and deer habitat, but the typical farm tractor and a full complements of implements are rarely available to most hunters. The financial investment and routine care for this machinery can be too much for the hunter who will use them only a few times a year. And many of the areas that hunters want to manipulate are off the beaten path and not suitable for a full-sized tractor, either.

While some hunters resort to ATV attachments, often they lack the intensity to do the job, especially in places that have never seen a tractor before. But a heavy duty, self-propelled machine with mower and tiller attachments is an ideal solution for handling more-remote, less-



Will Grubb

KNOW HOW YOUR SHOTGUN SHOOTS

When hunters shoot a deer with buckshot or with a shotgun slug and the deer doesn't drop on the spot, they will start to looking for a blood trail. But turkeys are quite different. When a turkey is shot in the body, it will typically take off like a jet, leaving nothing behind but a cloud of dust. Hunters understand that a well-placed shot and a tight pattern is vital to tagging a tom.

The easiest way to up the odds is for hunters to pattern their turkey guns with an ideal load and choke choice. Even though hunters intend on shooting a tight pattern, the type of load and choke selection will produce different results. Hunters should figure out what their ideal kill range is and shoot various chokes and loads on clean pieces of paper. Choose the choke and load combination that gives the most consistent pattern to ensure a solid kill shot.

accessible areas.

BCS America offers a solution for hunters and land managers: a single, walk-behind machine with various attachments to handle those out-of-the-way places.

Joe Fowler of Open Season is the dealer for BCS America that services customers in the Carolinas for their line of walk-behind tractors and attachments.

"Our tractors are perfect for the hard-to-get to places where you cannot pull in a big tractor," said Fowler (704-213-1264). "With the dozen different implements, you can mow trails, pulverize the soil and prepare ground in remote areas."

The BCS tractor has many PTO-driven implements, including: a flail mower, rotary tiller and rotary plow — perfect for

continues on page 70

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GREENER PASTURES continued

mowing and tilling areas in faraway places for the spring planting and turkey season.

"I load everything up in my trailer, but you don't need a trailer to transport the equipment," he said. "I can put the tractor, mower and one other attachment into the back of my Toyota truck with room to spare." ■



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.



A self-propelled mower or tiller allows land managers to improve habitat in places you can't reach with a tractor.

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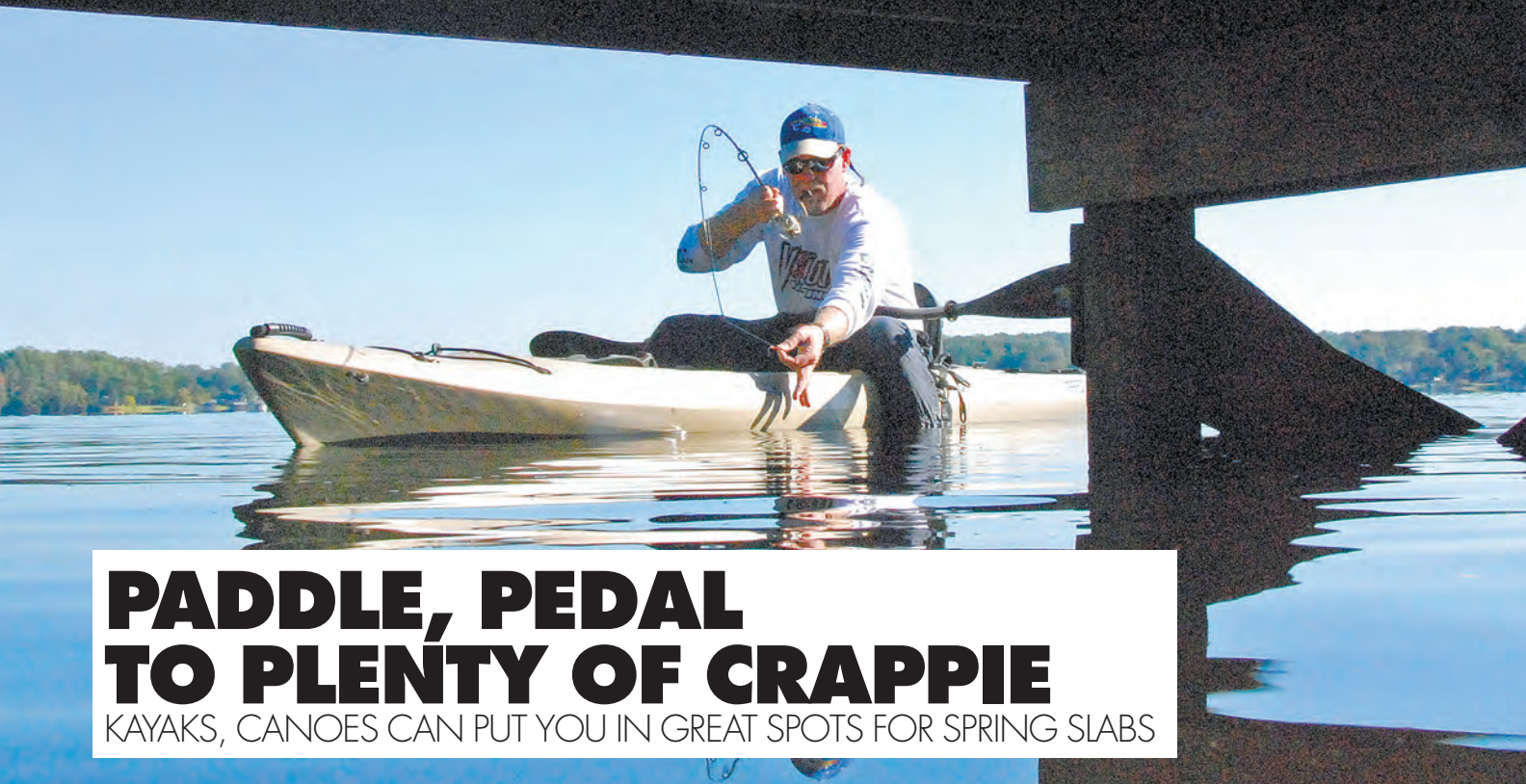
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PADDLE, PEDAL TO PLENTY OF CRAPPIE

KAYAKS, CANOES CAN PUT YOU IN GREAT SPOTS FOR SPRING SLABS

Phillip Gentry

March and crappie fishing go together like peas and carrots, but while many anglers fish for crappie, far fewer consider chasing the popular panfish from a paddleboat.

Across the Carolinas, you will find March crappie moving from late-winter staging areas into tributary creeks and even to spawning grounds; the spawn usually starts the last week of the month.

What better way to creep and crawl around logs, stumps and between boat docks than from a small, extremely maneuverable kayak?

A popular tactic for tracking crappie movements during late February and early March is by trolling, sometimes called long-line trolling — not to be confused with slow, vertical trolling, aka spider-rigging. While most anglers believe trolling requires the use of an trolling motor, a paddle- or foot pedal-driven boat achieves the same results.

Trolling with multiple rods means rod holders will be a necessity, and the gear

tracks and mounting balls and brackets available in the after-market kayak world provide numerous choices.

Anglers who prefer to troll or drift from the front of the yak can do so by installing a rack to hold rods out in front.

Once crappie begin committing to the shallows, kayaks are one of the best ways to get into wood-choked, backwater areas with a single pole and jig every fishy looking spot. These areas are often protected from current and wind, so boat positioning is simple. Use a hand paddle to scull between spots and an 8- to 11- foot jig pole to reach out and dangle a jig on 3 or 4 foot of line.

Another area where plastic boats outshine even the tried and true john boat is around boat docks. The plastic makeup of the kayak makes for a quieter presentation and is much more maneuverable.

Shooting docks, the practice of using a flexible, light-action rod to sling-shot jigs into the recesses deep beneath a pier or dock goes hand in hand with kayak fishing, as the angler is as low to the water as

possible without wearing swim trunks.

Shooting refers to holding in one hand the bait, a small crappie jig, while holding the line tight to the spool of a spinning reel with the other.

Bend the rod over and hold the jig between your thumb and fore finger under the reel. Release the jig and simultaneously release the line, which sling-shots the bait forward, parallel to the water, causing it to skip up under the platform or whatever you're shooting at.

Make sure to work the boat dock from all angles. Crappie won't take long to show their presence, so once a dock has been shot, quickly paddle on to the next one and starting shooting it.

STARKS' BEST DAY

What was scheduled as a bass-fishing, meet-and-fish outing on South Carolina's Lake Russell in March 2015 turned into a kayak perch-jerking outing for several members of the Upstate SC Kayak Fishing Club, including Bryan Starks from Simpsonville who landed a nearly

3½-pound crappie.

“The morning was rainy and had turned off cold but several of the members said they had heard the crappie were biting, so my dad and I packed our crappie rods,” Starks said. “Most of the club members were trolling jigs, trying to catch crappie.”

Starks was long-line trolling a jig-and-minnow combination from his Hobie Outback kayak around standing timber in Latimer Creek when one of the four rods bent over. Much to his delight, he had hooked the biggest crappie he had ever seen.

“I was using a Stump’s Jigs & Flies hand-tied jig with a minnow on a hook tied in-line, kind of like a stacker rig, above the jig. The jig was ¼-ounce in pink/silver/blue pattern. I was long-lining in water around 26 feet deep with a lot of submerged timber. The jig was trolling maybe 6 to 8 feet deep.”

During the lunch time break, Starks was curious what the big crappie would weigh and had another club member, Ronnie McKee, weigh the fish on his handheld digital scales. The fish weighed 3 pounds, 7 ounces. ■



SLAB OF A LIFETIME

Brian Starks of Simpsonville, S.C., caught this 3-pound, 7-ounce crappie in March 2015 on a kayak club fishing outing on South Carolina’s Lake Russell. The fish hit a hand-tied jig with a minnow trailer, long-line trolled in deep water around standing timber.

continues on page 74

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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

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The high level of control and accuracy offered by the forearm grip means you don't need a giant hoop to net your next big fish, and the portability makes the net an It features a foam-covered extension on the handle, allowing the net to be stored in a tube-style or flush-mount rod holder.

The full net measures 12x20 inches and handles even the biggest fish. It doesn't damage the fish, and the mesh is resistant to tangling with hooks.



The net measures 48 inches long, allowing a kayak angler full control of the netting and landing of any fish with no need to contort your body to land the fish effectively.

Yak Attack Leverage Landing Net, MSRP \$80. More info at www.yakattack.us,

B'N'M SHARP SHOOTER ROD

A continued quest for the perfect rod for dock-shooting led Mississippi-based B'n'M Poles to design and create the Sharp Shooter Deluxe 6. This rod has been field tested by B'n'M's pro staff for several years before release on the market two years ago.

The one-piece blank on the Sharp Shooter 6 is made of extra-stiff, 98-percent graphite that provides longer and more accurate "shooting" of jigs as small as 1/64-ounce. The rod's micro-tip eyelet reduces line wiggle to help the angler see movement, indicating a fish has taken the jig. The rod's handle is made of Portuguese cork and has a fixed reel seat and touch system



to provide superior feel. Additional features include Dyna Flo guides for smooth line flow and a hook keeper.

"Other rods for dock shooting are much shorter, 5 or 5 1/2 feet," said Ronnie Capps, a B'n'M pro staffer. "Having a 6-foot rod gives you more leverage to steer a fish out of the dock and is especially useful when fishing from a kayak because you can reach it all the way around the boat."

B'n'M Sharp Shooter 6 rod, MSRP \$59.99. More info at bnmpoles.com.

MARCH'S BEST FISHING BETS

North Carolina

What: Black crappie

Where: Badin Lake

How: During the prespawn, look for crappie to move into the backs of creeks. Most fish will be found from halfway back to the shallow flats at the back of the creek. Long-line troll 1/6-ounce curlytail jigs behind the yak at a slow, even paddle — .9 to 1.2 mph if you have GPS.

Launch: Fish Tales Marina and Circle Drive ramps will put you within reach of the back of several good creeks and coves.

Insider tip: When long-lining from a kayak, use rods of different lengths with the longest toward the front of the boat, decreasing length as you move toward the stern. If paddling, leave enough space between the last rod to get a decent paddle stroke in.

South Carolina

What: Black, white crappie

Where: Lake Marion, upstream from I-95 bridge.

How: The shallows above I-95 is stump infested, hand-to-hand, jig-pole fishing. Using a 9- to 10-foot pole, lower a 1/32- or 1/6-ounce jig around any standing or submerged timber.

Launch: Santee State Park, Low Falls Landing and Sparkleberry Landing will put you in the right areas

Insider tip: A brown jig with an orange head is a hard color combination to beat at Santee during the prespawn and spawning periods. The color mimics small crayfish that prey on nest eggs and fry and really tick nest guarding male crappie off.

SC/NC Border

What: Black crappie

Where: Lake Wylie

How: Shooting docks. Pick an area with a number of floating boat docks and shoot 1/24- or 1/32-ounce jigs as far back under docks as you can reach.

Launch: Pick your spot from the list at <http://wylie.uslakes.info>

Insider tip: This is a line-watching event, so fluorescent blue line helps you to see a fish inhale your jig as it is slowly falling through the water column under the dock.



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



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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

BLUEWATER BOUNTY

TRY THIS SPECIAL TUNA SALAD RECIPE AFTER YOUR SPRING BLUEWATER TRIP GOES GREAT



I enjoy game as much as anyone, but I'm thinking fish for our March recipe. The cold weather from early January has had negative effects on several species of inshore fish, but the offshore fishing remained surprisingly good. The wind and sea conditions weren't often ideal, but when weather windows opened, most fishermen found the fish biting from the top to the bottom.

While the old saying is about March winds, there are usually a few good breaks that allow fishermen in the Carolinas the time to make the long Gulf Stream run in calm seas and find excellent fishing conditions once there. The two staples of catches are wahoo and blackfin tuna. Wahoo always have the potential to be large, and March blackfins are usually healthy, with many exceeding 20 pounds.

This recipe is for blackfins, but it will work well with just about all tuna, including their smaller Atlantic bonito cousins that often make an early run closer to the beaches. Many fishermen confuse Atlantic bonito and false albacore. Atlantic bonito are prime table fare, while most folks don't particularly care for the stronger taste of false albacore. This recipe is one of many reasons to learn to tell the difference, and most of them involve eating Atlantic bonito.

This recipe began as a way to use the smaller pieces of tuna that are often left after cleaning. It has become a favorite and is now prepared with prime pieces of tuna loin. The combination with fruit gives it a lighter taste that naturally conjures up memories of beautiful spring weather and excellent fishing trips. Daylight Savings Time begins March 11, and spring arrives March 20. If the weather cooperates — with the hour of daylight shifted to the afternoon — this could be a nice meal to enjoy on the deck or patio. ■

TIP!

Know your tuna species. Yellowfin and blackfin are great table fare and easily recognizable. Skipjack tuna, which are very tasty, are sometimes confused with their cousins, Atlantic bonito and false albacore. Skipjacks have horizontal stripes below the lateral line. Bonito are also tasty and have horizontal stripes on their backs. False albacore, largely inedible, have worm-like markings on their backs and extremely red flesh.

A tuna salad, cooked with jerk seasoning and garnished with fruit, makes for a great spring meal.

JERK AND FRUITY TUNA SALAD

This recipe is about as simple as it gets. The tuna is cooked, but everything else is chopped and mixed. Consider the ingredients as a guideline rather than a firm list, and if you prefer one fruit or don't particularly like one, then add or delete to suit your personal tastes.

Walkerswood Traditional Jamaican Jerk Seasoning (www.walkerswood.com) is the key to this recipe, and I'd definitely worth taking the time to find. I was introduced to it years ago by a friend, Dawn Brown, whose husband is Jamaican, and it was very difficult to find except in gourmet and specialty shops. It is now available in several supermarket chains.

Walkerswood, a wet rub named for the rural Jamaican community where it began, is the real deal and still made in Jamaica. I like the "Hot and Spicy" blend, but there are standard and "Mild" versions also. For the best saturation, the jerk seasoning should be rubbed onto the meat and allowed to absorb overnight. Fish seems to absorb it better than beef, chicken and pork, and you should find several hours allows the flavor to saturate nicely.

Don't use canned fruit for this. It just isn't right and often has added sugar. The amount of

fruit needed is low, and I find that using one of the pre-cut, mixed fresh fruit bowls popular in supermarkets gives me all the fruit I need. There is usually also some left over for snacks.

I include poppy seed dressing in the ingredients list for this, but I don't use it in the salad or when eating the salad with crackers. I use a little poppy seed dressing when eating this as a sandwich, and it can be mixed into the salad or used as a spread on the bread.

Spring arrives this month, so it's time to begin enjoying fresh bluewater fish again. This recipe isn't quite as much fun as catching tuna, but it's a great way to enjoy them without a lot of preparation time and effort. This is a superb way to enjoy the first tuna of spring in a light meal that is just right to enjoy during a spring evening on your deck or patio. The blend and amount of the Walkerswood Jerk Seasoning can be tailored so even those with the mildest palate can enjoy the combination of fresh fish, fresh fruit and genuine Jamaican jerk seasoning.

Enjoy! ■



Jerry Dilsaver

TIP!

Canned fruit often has enough added sugar to overpower many recipes that call for fruit. Go fresh whenever possible.

INGREDIENTS:

2 or 3 blackfin tuna loin steaks (10 to 12 ounces total)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup cubed pineapple

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup cubed cantaloupe

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup cubed honeydew melon

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped mango

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sliced strawberries

$\frac{1}{2}$ kiwi

1 lime

Several lettuce leaves

Walkerswood Traditional Jamaican Jerk Seasoning (mild, regular or hot and spicy: to personal taste)

Poppy seed dressing

Triscuit whole wheat crackers (personal preference may be substituted)

Light rolls (croissant, kaiser, onion, etc.)

Butter flavor anti-stick cooking spray

Aluminum foil

PREPARATION:

Rub both sides of the tuna steaks with Walkerswood Traditional Jamaican Jerk Seasoning and seal in aluminum foil. There are different spice levels, and always remember that less is milder and more is spicier. Allow the tuna steaks to season for at least a couple of hours; overnight in the fridge isn't too long.

Return tuna to room temperature before cooking. Cube the fruit into pieces roughly the size of the end of your little finger. Spray a cast-iron pan with cooking spray and preheat to medium/medium high. Sear the tuna on both sides until the sear extends approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch into the steaks — approximately 2 minutes per side. Cut the tuna into small cubes. Mix the tuna and fruit in a large bowl.

Serve the tuna salad on a lettuce leaf with lime slices on the side for each individual to add to their personal taste. One serving style is with Triscuit crackers on the plate, and a second is on a light bun, with poppy seed dressing on the side.

This is a complete but light meal. It is excellent served alone, but some will appreciate adding a light dessert, such as flan or fried plantains.

LEFT: Cut fresh fruit into cubes for use in this jerk tuna salad.



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

STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

With deer season in the rear-view mirror, take time to scout your woods for sign you might have missed last season.

NO TIME BETTER THAN NOW TO PREPARE

POSTSEASON IS TIME TO CHANGE GEAR AND/OR FORM, REVIEW SUCCESS OR FAILURE, WORK ON LAND

Sammy Romano

As I write this, another year's deer season has coming to a close. For many hunters, this is a sad time of year, as thoughts of a long offseason become reality.

I've often heard it said, "Every ending is a new beginning." This is especially true when it comes to deer hunting with a bow. After the season, I like to reflect back and compile a list of things that went right or wrong. This is no different than a football team watching film to analyze its performance.

By doing this, I am able to isolate and focus on problems in my shooting form, stand placement, scent-control regimen, etc., so these errors are not repeated next season. The time to identify and correct these issues is now, not several months down the road when they are easily forgotten or overlooked.

ADJUST BOW, FORM

This past season, I struggled with a bad case of target panic, which made it very difficult to hunt with my bow. I was punching the trigger on my release aid so much that I had little confidence in my ability to make a clean kill. I switched over to my crossbow, but I am a vertical bow guy at heart.

I am already working hard to manage my target panic. By lowering my draw weight, shooting a hinge-style release aid and temporarily removing my sight, I am reducing my tendency to punch the trig-

ger. This requires developing new muscle memory, which takes quite a while and a lot of practice.

I don't typically take long shots at game anymore, so I have decided to start shooting heavier arrows, which should help with penetration at my new, lighter draw weight. I am also going to resume shooting fixed-blade broad heads. I never make major changes to my form or setup during the season, because it takes time to become proficient after doing either. By making these adjustments to my form and setup now, I should be ready in plenty of time for next year's bow opener. Bowhunters who wait until just before the season to make adjustments put themselves in a bad spot.

SCOUT THE WOODS

I also noticed that a lot of deer were skirting several of my stands this past season. I made a mental note of these, and I am going to relocate these stands to take advantage of what the deer were doing.

Late winter and early spring are the best time to scout and locate stands for next year. Post-season scouting is key to understanding how deer move through and utilize any piece of property. Because it is eight months before next season, a hunter can move about the woods freely without worrying about disturbing deer. In fact, jumping a big buck from his bed will only help to pinpoint one of his bedding locations, because he will have



If you're going to change archery gear, even just your release aid, this is the time of year to get it done so you have plenty of time to prepare before next season arrives.

plenty of time to settle down and get over the intrusion.

Also, with the woods barren, rubs and scrapes are easier to spot from longer distances. Game trails are usually well-worn from heavy use, making them

stand out. Most hunters have accumulated a long list of “honey-do’s” that make it difficult to get into the woods after the season. Even so, I can assure you, any time spent scouting now will pay off in spades when hunting season rolls around.

Another advantage to post-season scouting is the ability to clean trees that you intend to hunt next season. I am extremely allergic to poison oak/ivy, and during the late winter/early spring these plants are dormant, making it less likely for me to have a reaction.

I try to cut a section covering several inches out of all of these vines around the base of any tree I intend to climb or hang a stand in. This way, by the time I climb the tree, the vines have withered and died. Shooting lanes are also easier to trim without the weight of leaves on limbs and branches. Just be careful not to overdo it, as the woods will look much different after green-up in late spring and thus the next fall.

By reviewing this past season, you can make adjustments to improve your odds this fall. Like most things in life, you get out of deer hunting what you put into it. Success favors the organized and prepared hunter. ■



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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SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

More big bass head for the shallows in the Santee Cooper lakes in March than any other month, putting them in range of plenty of bass fishermen.

BIG-FISH TIME ON MOULTRIE, MARION

MARCH MEANS HUNGRY BASS, CATFISH, STRIPERS, MORE

Fishermen have multiple options during March, arguably the premier month for opportunities to catch super-sized trophies of several species at Santee Cooper.

It's a give-and-take situation, because March also brings the downside of potentially tough weather: cold fronts and bothersome winds. But most fishermen are adamant that the upside is worth it.

Guide Inky Davis said this is prime time for big bass in shallow water.

"During March, I believe more trophy bass are in shallow water, in prespawn and spawn mode, than at any other time of the year," he said. "After two or three consecutive warming days with (rising) water temperatures, the bass fishing can be awesome. But even when a front blows through, with all the shallow cover in both lakes, we can find enough sheltered water to effectively fish."

Davis (803-478-7289) will use bottom-bumping lures — plastic worms, lizards and jigs and trailer rigs — depending on the cover being fished. Bass can be super-shallow, and beds are often visible. For prespawn fish, he'll fish slightly deeper water, still less than 5 feet, and work bottom-bumpers along with crankbaits and spinnerbaits.

Catfish offer a prime shallow-water connection, and with the lakes filling up with spawning herring, the shallow-water action on big catfish is red hot.

Veteran angler Richie Wimmer said that as the shallows load up with bait — with panfish species as well as migrating blue-

back herring — the big catfish follow.

"This is a prime time to catch huge catfish in skinny water, sometimes multiple big fish," he said. "I look for slight depressions in shallow flats and along ditches coursing through the flats as prime targets. If I'm not getting bites quickly, I'll move to another area. When I hit the right combination of location with forage, the big cats will be active."

Wimmer said if the weather is windy, anchor up on a wind-swept point or flat, especially if it's near deep water. The wind will pile the forage up on these shallow spots, and catfish will move in for the feast.

Striper action will not be excellent in the upper end of Lake



Terry Madewell

Stripers begin moving this month into the upper reaches of Lake Marion as they begin their annual spawning run into tributary rivers.

Terry Madewell

A big, saltwater herring can make multiple baits for catfish and striped bass. Anadromous herring are a big part of the Santee Cooper lakes' food chain, and the lakes are a big part of the herring's life cycle.



Terry Madewell

SANTEE LAKES NEED BLUEBACKS

Scott Lamprecht, a fisheries biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, said blueback herring and the Santee Cooper lakes are crucial to one another. Bluebacks are an anadromous species, meaning they migrate to freshwater to spawn and return to the ocean to mature. It's an important part of the Santee Cooper ecosystem, as migrating herring enter the lakes through the Cooper River's Pinopolis Dam boat lock and the St. Stephen Dam fish lift on the Santee River. SCDNR recognizes the importance of the lakes to the blueback herring population and the role that these ocean-run adults play in the resident fish food chain, especially for stripers, bass and catfish. These fish and other migrating species can be viewed during March and April at the St. Stephen Dam fish lift.

Marion, a hot spot for big stripers this month.

Andy Pack of Packs Landing said the best bait is the migratory blueback herring, fished either as live, whole baits or as fresh cut bait.

"One pattern for big stripers on the spawning run is to anchor in shallow water, usually on river bends, and cast bait in all depths," Pack said. "During early March, cut bait is often the most-effective, but I'll always have a couple of live baits out. I'll sit on a spot for up to an hour, but if I'm getting bites, I'll stay put. This is one of the best times of the year to catch multiple, keeper-sized stripers."

Pack (803-452-5514) said shellcracker action can turn on late in the month — if the water temperature cooperates — and just before the full moon is a prime time for bedding fish. This month, the full moon is March 31.

Guide Kevin Davis out of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal said slab crappies are on the move at both lakes.

"This is the time for huge crappies, and the action is great in water ranging from

very deep all the way to the shallows during," he said.

"For consistency, I prefer deep cover such as brush piles, but crappies will move to the shallows to spawn."

Davis (843-312-3080) said he'll fish shallow cypress trees on Lake Marion, as well as logs, stumps and other woody cover in 3 to 5 feet of water. On Lake Moultrie, he fishes the backs of pockets with 3 feet of water, looking for a slightly deeper depression ringed with trees, stumps and other woody cover for spawning crappie action.

Whether you're looking for largemouth bass, catfish, stripers, shellcrackers or crappie, March can offer the opportunity to hook some of the biggest and

most-impressive specimens of the year. Go fishing now! ■



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



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HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

Start your fishing trips this month later in the day, after the sun has had a chance to warm the waters of trout streams and allow fish like this nice brown become more active.

TROUT IN THE IDES OF MARCH

PART WINTER, PART SPRING, THE THIRD MONTH OFFERS ANGLERS INTERESTING OPPORTUNITIES IN MOUNTAIN STREAMS



Jack Tamborski

March can be a fickle month. One day it's, typical spring weather: warm and sunny. The next day, it's typical winter weather: cold and dreary. It just can't seem to make up its mind on whether to be spring or winter.

Fickleness aside, beginning around the middle of March and continuing through May, mountain streams start warming up. Brown, rainbow, and brook trout become active and hungry, and anglers enjoy some of the best trout fishing of the year.

Fisheries biologists with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the N.C. Wildlife Resources and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources concur that mountain trout streams are in great condition, most with normal or full flows, thanks to the frequent winter and early spring precipitation.

Jack Tamborski, a guide for Tuckasegee Fly Shop in Bryson City, N.C., said he's

caught some of his biggest trout in March fishing on Deep Creek in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. During a trip last March, Tamborski said he was standing on a bridge that leads to the campground in the lower section of Deep Creek when he saw a flash in a large pool below the bridge. He dropped a mop fly into the pool, and to his surprise, caught a beautiful brown trout,

TECHNIQUE

Marc Hipp of Brookings Anglers in Cashiers, N.C., a veteran guide, said when the water is cold, trout are less likely to be concentrated in one area, so it's important to cover a lot of water. Trout are most active when stream temperatures are between 52 and 60 degrees, but even when they are lower, fish have to eat. Sometimes, you just have to spoon-feed them.

When using nymphs, Hipp said it's important to add enough weight to get a

fly down and bump it along the bottom where the trout are more likely to hold. Also, he said, use small, fluorocarbon tip-pets, such as a 4X or 6X.

Hipp said the best time to fish is late morning to late afternoon, after the sun has had an opportunity to warm the water.

And, he said, don't be a fair-weather fisher. "You can catch trout even when it's overcast and drizzling rain."

FLIES

A variety of flies can be used during March: dries, nymphs and streamers. Best bets are Early Winter Stone, Black Caddis, Blue-Winged Olive, Griffith's Gnat, Parachute Adams, Copper John, Woolly Buzzer variations, Squirmy Wormy, Pheasant Tail (regular and soft hackle), Hare's Ear and Sculpzilla,

As for size, the best rule is to use larger patterns such as Nos. 12s and 14s in early spring, switching to smaller patterns as the weather gets warmer.



Good trout flies to use in March: Sculpzilla, Woolly Bigger (olive crystal), Woolly Bigger (black with orange head), Black Caddis, Copper Head, Blue-Winged Olive.

Wesley Satterwhite

CLOSED WATERS:

In North Carolina, hatchery-supported waters will be closed to fishing during March, reopening at 7 a.m. on April 7. Cherokee Enterprise Waters also will be closed most of March, opening the last Saturday of the month.

Streamers such as Woolly Buggers and sculpin patterns often are thought of as large water flies, but Hipp said streamers can be just as effective in small streams.

SPAWNING RAINBOWS

Depending on the weather, rainbow trout spawn between the last of February and first of April. When fishing for spawning rainbows, use a long leader (at least 12 feet), cast to riffles above a pool and allow the fly to float into the pool. Let the fly drift until it begins pulling in the current, because rainbows often will strike near or at the end of a drift.

Egg patterns are especially effective for catching post-spawn rainbows. For a trout, food is food, even if it is their offspring.

Early spring is an ideal time to get out on a stream. The fish are hungry and active, and only a few die-hard fishers will be on the stream. ■



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

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LOWA UPLANDER GTX BOOTS

Whether you're walking through open fields pursuing birds, stomping through thickets after rabbits or hiking in to your turkey blind or deer stand, you need footwear that won't let you down — no matter what the conditions are.

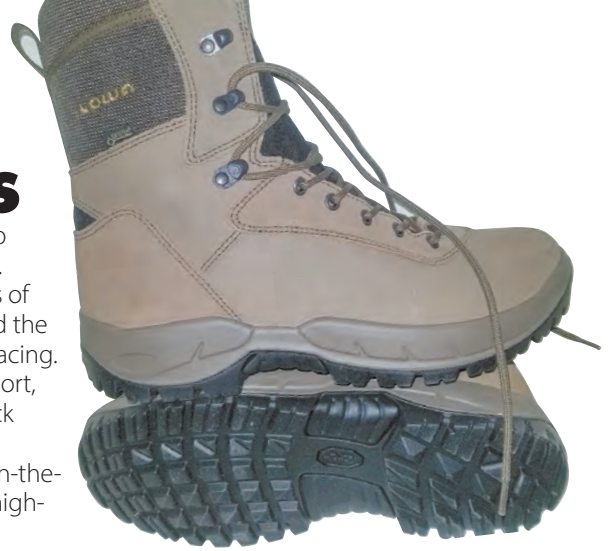
You want a boot that's waterproof, breathable, lightweight, comfortable, briar-proof and thorn-shedding. Those are all features that hunters long for in a pair of boots, and they're all delivered by the LOWA Uplander GTX. Originally designed as a bird-hunting shoe, hunters

will find themselves lacing these up when pursuing other game as well.

GORE-TEX lines the leather uppers of these 2.64-pound pair of boots, and the open hook eyelets allow for quick lacing. The boot offers padded ankle support, and the Vibram outsole makes quick work of all types of terrain.

It feels like a sneaker but delivers in-the-field performance only found in a high-quality hunting boot.

More Info: www.lowaboos.com



BUBBA BLADE FISHING PLIERS

By Andy Crawford



Bubba Blade has long produced top-quality fillet knives, but now it's also offering fishing pliers that should be on any angler's boat.

Bubba Blade's Fishing Pliers are designed to offer maximum control, strength and durability. They come with the company's patented no-slip grip handle, just like its knives, so you'll never have to worry about the tools slipping out of your hand.

But even better are the new super-tough tungsten cutters that provide dual-cutting blades; one

snips braided line, one cuts hooks. If the cutter becomes grooved, you can unscrew the blades and replace them to provide longer tool life.

The pliers' stainless steel jaws are titanium-bonded for strength and durability, and feature three sets of crimpers that make quick work of split shot and leader sleeves.

Bubba Blade Fishing Pliers come in a hard case and are outfitted with a lanyard.

Retail: \$54.95.

More Info: www.bubbablade.com

G. LOOMIS E6X INSHORE ROD SERIES

If you're looking for a new weapon of choice to target redfish and speckled trout this spring, the G. Loomis E6X Inshore Rod Series fills the bill — and then some.

The E6X Series offers both performance and value, and features a lineup of 11 spinning and five casting models with either moderate fast, fast, extra fast or magnum moderate fast actions.

All the rods feature G. Loomis' Multi-Taper Technology, where designers focus on swing weight — the proper rod balance needed to fish 'tip up' or 'tip down' techniques.

"Proper balance lets anglers concentrate on what is happening on the end of the line, rather than the tip of the rod," said G. Loomis' Bruce Holt. "With the E6X series and the G. Loomis Multi-Taper Technology behind them, we can provide light, sensitive, yet powerful rods for all types of inshore saltwater techniques — what anglers know and have come to expect from G. Loomis — and all at a very comfortable price."

Rods range from \$189 to \$239, with

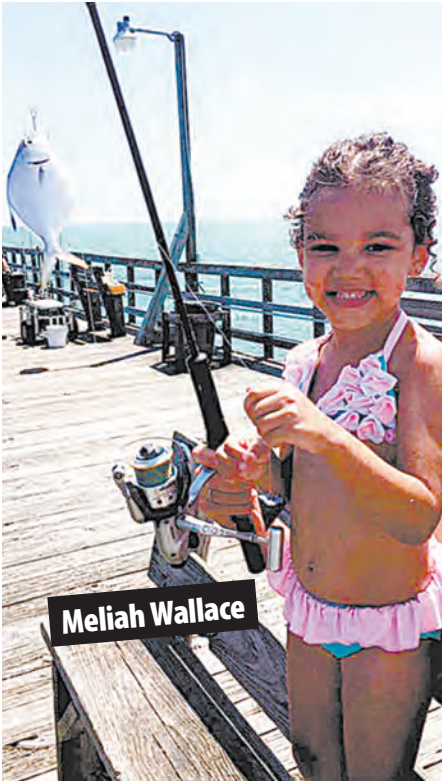
numerous technique-specific models designed to tight-line live bait, fish soft plastics, throw a popping cork, work a topwater lure and even catch larger species like tarpon, cobia, small groupers and sharks.

They're available at Academy Sports and Outdoors — check them out here: www.academy.com/shop/pdp/g-loomis-e6x-inshore-saltwater-casting-rod



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

Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



Meliah Wallace

Meliah Wallace, 4, from Kings Mountain, N.C., caught her first fish, this pompano, from Oak Island Pier on July 9, 2016.



Bryan Buckner

Bryan Buckner of Saluda, N.C., caught this 17-inch white crappie at Lake Hartwell on April 18, 2017.



Hunter Hammill

Hunter Hammill, 7, killed his first deer on Nov. 24, 2016, in Cabarrus County, N.C.



Kyle Warren

Kyle Warren caught this 7-pound flounder in North Carolina's Shallotte River on a live finger mullet.



Keith Mullis

Keith Mullis of Summerville, S.C., killed this 8-point, 180-pound buck in Wee Tee State Forest on Oct. 15, with his .30-06.



Larry Bailey of Mooresville, N.C., caught this 6-pound, 10-ounce bass on July 26, 2016 on Lake Norman.

Take your camera
TO THE WOODS!

Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of the most widely read outdoor magazine in the Tarheel State. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, doves, etc. to

**Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook,
Carolina Sportsman,
433 Hollinswood Ave.,
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103
or to dank@carolinasportsman.com**

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

Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



Collin Linton, 6, from Kannapolis, N.C., caught this 22-inch red in June 2016 fishing on the *Hook-Up* out of Hatteras.



Jeffrey Stewart killed this big, Lancaster County, S.C., 8-pointer on Oct. 25, 2017.



Amy Anderson of Mt. Pleasant, S.C., caught these fine shrimp deep-drop netting in Charleston Harbor last November.



Alan Darr caught this brook trout in October 2016 from the Catawba River in North Carolina's mountains.



Kevin Tinkler caught this bull red in October 2017 near Folly Beach, S.C.

GOT PHOTOS?
WE WANT 'EM

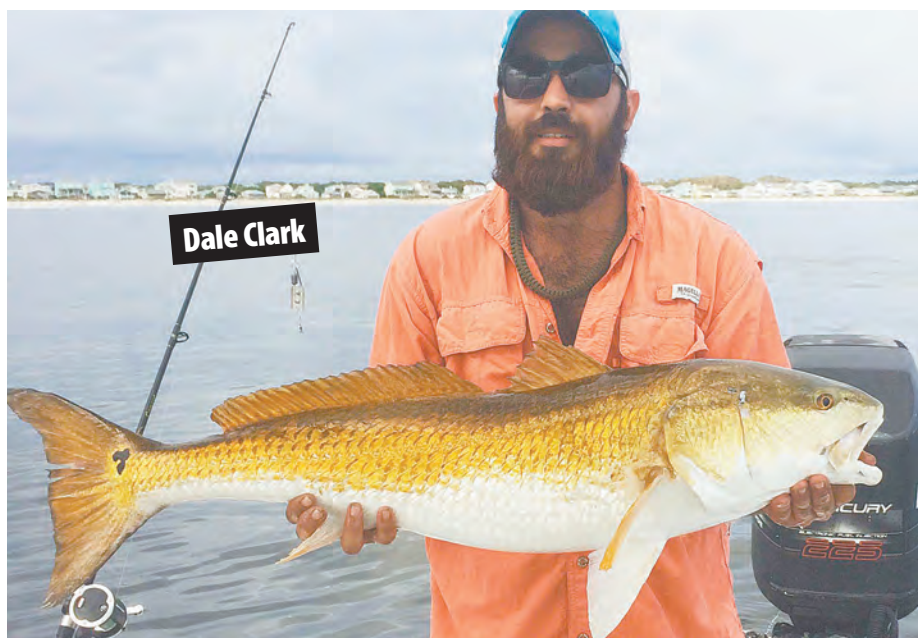
Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of Carolina Sportsman magazine. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your fish, deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, doves, etc. to

Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook,
433 Hollinswood Ave.,
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103
or to dank@carolinasportsman.com

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



Hal Epperson killed this pretty 10-point buck on his father-in-law's farm near Dobson, N.C. on Nov. 22.



Dale Clark caught this 42-inch red on a trolling spoon and planer board out of Southport, N.C., in September 2016.



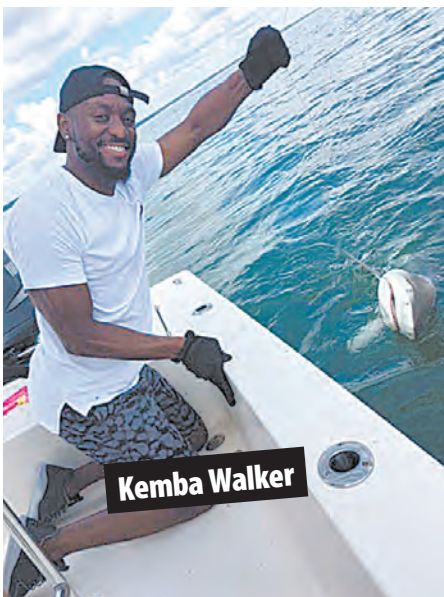
Russell Goad caught this 12-pound longnose gar on April 13, 2017, on a live herring in Lake Moultrie. Son Brad netted the fish.



Ronda Hoffman of Supply, N.C. caught this 46-inch bull red in the surf at Holden Beach, N.C.



Kasey Downey caught this bull red on Aug. 19, 2015, fishing near Oriental, N.C. The fish hit a piece of cut mullet.



Kemba Walker of the NBA's Charlotte Hornets caught this shark on a Sept. 2016 Charleston trip with guide Rob Bennett.



Jay Council of Winston-Salem, N.C., took this nice 8-point buck on Nov. 28, 2017, in Forsyth County.



Tanner Lynk of Noah's Ark Charters shows off a pair of nice Cape Lookout Spanish mackerel caught last summer.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	Closed	Closed
Bluefish	5 longer than 24" TL	15/day
Red drum (channel bass, puppy drum)	18" min., 27" max.	1/day
Black drum	14" min., 25" max.	10/day
Flounder	15" TL	4/day
Dolphin (mahi-mahi)	none	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw Grouper	closed	closed
Wahoo	none	2/day
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sea bass (north of Hatteras)	Closed	Closed
Sea bass (south of Hatteras)	13" TL	7/day
Yellowfin/Bigeye tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	Closed	Closed until June 15
Weakfish (gray trout)	12" TL	1/day
Snappers: Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Sheepshead	10"	10/day
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day
Striped bass ^	28" TL or more (ocean waters)	1/day
Hickory shad	None	10/day
American shad	closed	closed

^ see NCWRC/NCDMF regs for inshore Management Area limits. % For shark regulations, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit [hmspermits.noaa](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov).

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/day
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/day
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	33" FL	1/day
Bluefish	None	15/day
Black drum	14" minimum 27" maximum TL	5/day
Redfish (red drum, channel bass)	15" minimum 23" maximum TL	3/day
Flounder (state waters)	14" TL	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	Closed until May 1	Closed until May 1
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	Closed until May 1	Closed until May 1
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	closed	closed
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day#
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sheepshead	14"	10/day (30 per boat)
Spadefish	None	20/day (agg. grouper)
Black sea bass	13"	7/day
Dolphin	20" FL	10/day (60 per boat)
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin/Bigeye tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Tarpon	77" FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12"	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster snapper	12" TL	10/day#
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day

% For shark seasons, bag and size limits, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division, 888-872-8862 or hmspermits.noaa.gov. # For grouper/snapper, check with the SAFMC at www.safmc.net or 843-571-4366.

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

% For lake-specific regulations, see the SCNDR's Regulations Digest or visit www.dnr.sc.gov.

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

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.

2018 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. \$29.95 (plus \$3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

SPECIAL PACKAGE OFFERS:

- #1: **Wall Calendar, Astro Tables and "How to Know..." book....** \$19.95 (plus \$5 s&h).
- #2: **Same as #1, plus Software....** \$46.95 (plus \$6 s&h).
- #3: **Same as #2, minus book....** \$37.95 (plus \$5 s&h).

Send to: PrimeTimes 2018 - Dept. LS - 2487 NW 75th Ave., Ste. 100 - Ankeny, IA 50023

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

2018 MAR					BEST DAYS	
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	
Thu 1	█	█	█	█	78	
Fri 2	█	█	█	█	67	
Sat 3	█	█	█	█	53	

Sun 4	█	█	█	█	40	
Mon 5	█	█	█	█	31	
Tue 6	█	█	█	█	28	
Wed 7	█	█	█	█	25	
Thu 8	█	█	█	█	28	
Fri 9	█	█	█	█	37	
Sat 10	█	█	█	█	25	

Sun 11	█	█	█	█	19	
Mon 12	█	█	█	█	19	
Tue 13	█	█	█	█	19	
Wed 14	█	█	█	█	32	
Thu 15	█	█	█	█	44	
Fri 16	█	█	█	█	57	
Sat 17	█	█	█	█	67	

Sun 18	█	█	█	█	60	
Mon 19	█	█	█	█	53	
Tue 20	█	█	█	█	47	
Wed 21	█	█	█	█	45	
Thu 22	█	█	█	█	48	
Fri 23	█	█	█	█	55	
Sat 24	█	█	█	█	67	

Sun 25	█	█	█	█	58	
Mon 26	█	█	█	█	53	
Tue 27	█	█	█	█	50	
Wed 28	█	█	█	█	57	
Thu 29	█	█	█	█	65	
Fri 30	█	█	█	█	72	
Sat 31	█	█	█	█	75	

25 50 75
AVERAGE

For more, visit primetimes2.com

LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
5:59 pm	11:19 pm - Midnight	6:33 am	10:43 am - 1:39 pm	☉	FULL
7:06 pm	Midnight - 2:01 am	7:14 am	11:44 am - 2:26 pm	☉	
8:10 pm	12:19 am - 2:45 am	7:51 am	12:44 pm - 3:10 pm	☉	
9:13 pm	1:18 am - 3:26 am	8:26 am	1:43 pm - 3:51 pm	☉	
10:13 pm	2:14 am - 4:06 am	9:01 am	2:39 pm - 4:31 pm	☉	
11:11 pm	3:08 am - 4:46 am	9:36 am	3:33 pm - 5:11 pm	☉	
	4:01 am - 5:27 am	10:12 am	4:26 pm - 5:52 pm	☉	
12:08 am	4:53 am - 6:09 am	10:51 am	5:18 pm - 6:34 pm	☉	
1:03 am	5:44 am - 6:52 am	11:32 am	6:09 pm - 7:17 pm	☉	HALF
1:55 am	6:33 am - 7:39 am	12:17 pm	6:58 pm - 8:04 pm	☉	LOW
3:44 am	8:21 am - 9:27 am	2:05 pm	8:46 pm - 9:52 pm	☉	APOGEE & DST
4:30 am	9:08 am - 10:16 am	2:56 pm	9:33 pm - 10:41 pm	☉	
5:13 am	9:54 am - 11:06 am	3:49 pm	10:19 pm - 11:31 pm	☉	
5:52 am	10:36 am - 11:58 am	4:45 pm	11:01 pm - 12:23 am	☉	
6:29 am	11:17 am - 12:49 pm	5:42 pm	11:42 pm - Midnight	☉	
7:04 am	11:57 am - 1:43 pm	6:41 pm	Midnight - 1:14 am	☉	
7:38 am	12:35 pm - 2:37 pm	7:40 pm	12:22 am - 2:08 am	☉	NEW
8:12 am	1:15 pm - 3:31 pm	8:41 pm	1:00 am - 3:02 am	☉	
8:46 am	1:55 pm - 4:27 pm	9:43 pm	1:40 am - 3:56 am	☉	
9:22 am	2:36 pm - 5:26 pm	10:46 pm	2:20 am - 4:52 am	☉	Spring
10:01 am	3:22 pm - 6:24 pm	11:51 pm	3:01 am - 5:51 am	☉	
10:44 am	4:11 pm - 7:23 pm		3:47 am - 6:49 am	☉	
11:32 am	5:04 pm - 8:24 pm	12:55 am	4:36 am - 7:48 am	☉	HIGH
12:26 pm	6:01 pm - 9:23 pm	1:58 am	5:29 am - 8:49 am	☉	HALF
1:26 pm	7:01 pm - 10:21 pm	2:58 am	6:26 am - 9:48 am	☉	
2:29 pm	8:03 pm - 11:15 pm	3:53 am	7:26 am - 10:46 am	☉	Perigee
3:35 pm	9:04 pm - 12:06 am	4:43 am	8:28 am - 11:40 am	☉	
4:42 pm	10:04 pm - 12:54 am	5:28 am	9:29 am - 12:31 pm	☉	
5:48 pm	11:04 pm - Midnight	6:08 am	10:29 am - 1:19 pm	☉	
6:52 pm	Midnight - 1:36 am	6:46 am	11:29 am - 2:01 pm	☉	
7:55 pm	12:02 am - 2:18 am	7:21 am	12:27 pm - 2:43 pm	☉	FULL

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

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

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

**BLACKJACK...
INSPIRED PERFORMANCE!**

The new **BlackJack 256!**

BlackJack boats

For more information or to find a dealer near you, visit www.blackjackboats.com

YAMAHA

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

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	0:07
Oregon Inl. Channel Outer Coast	0:21	0:14
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

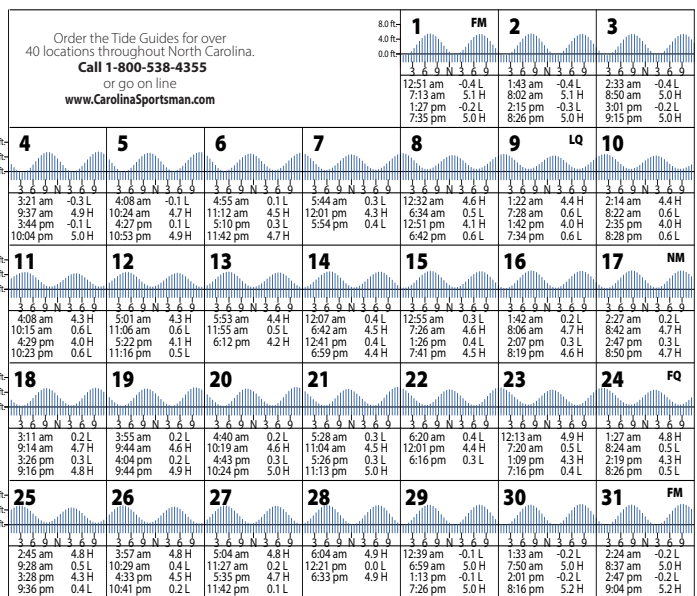
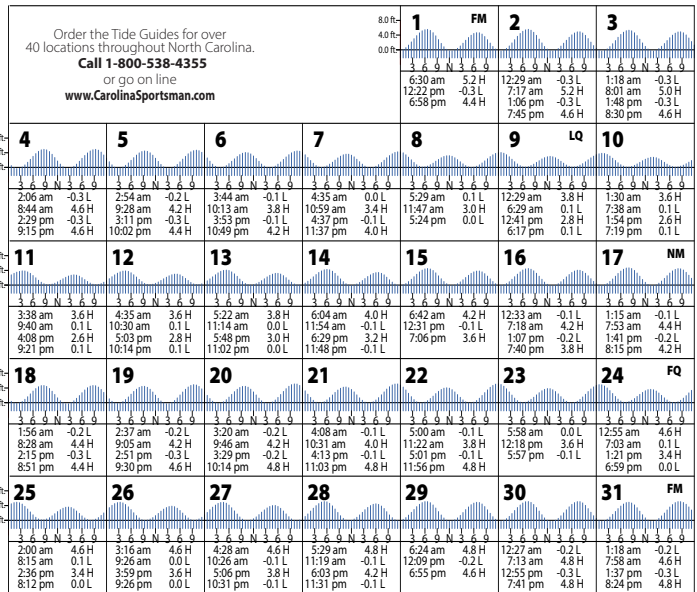
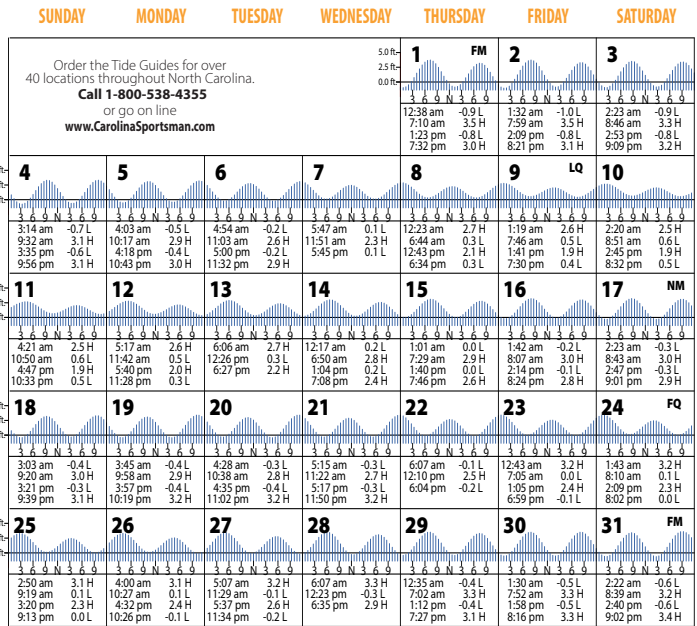
Southport, Cape Fear River HIGH LOW

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

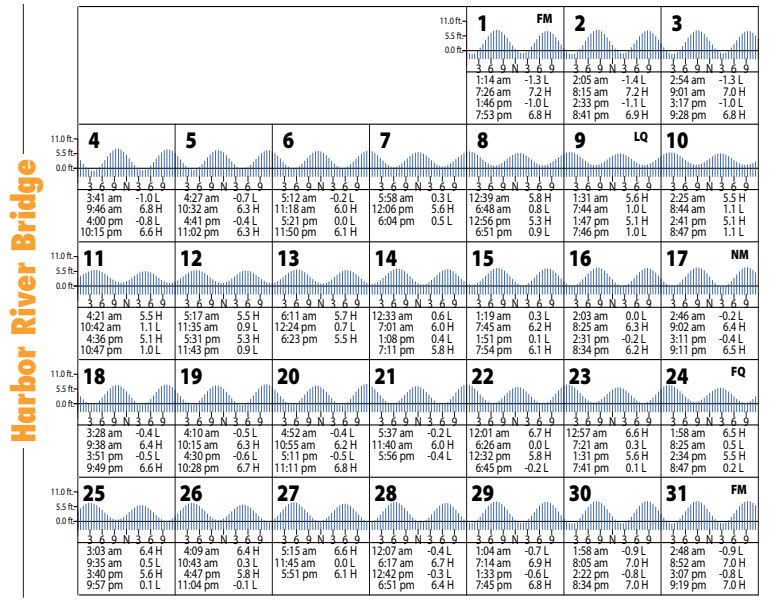
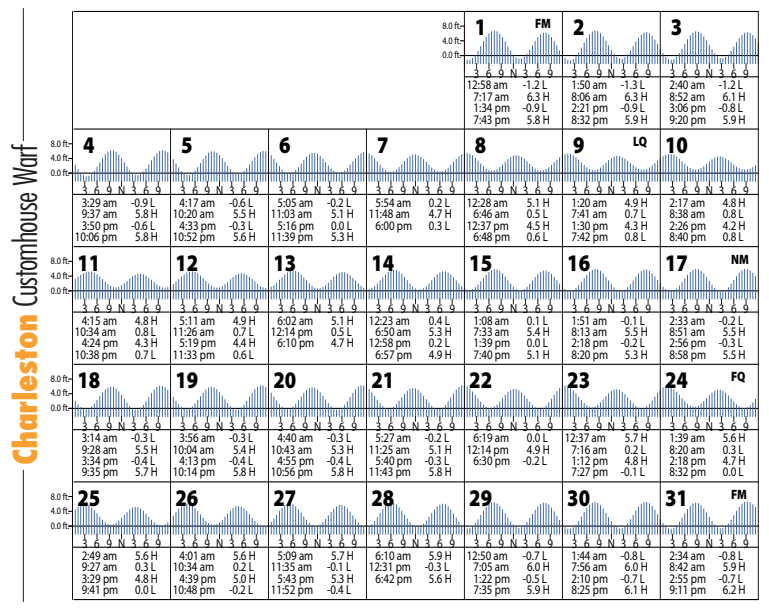
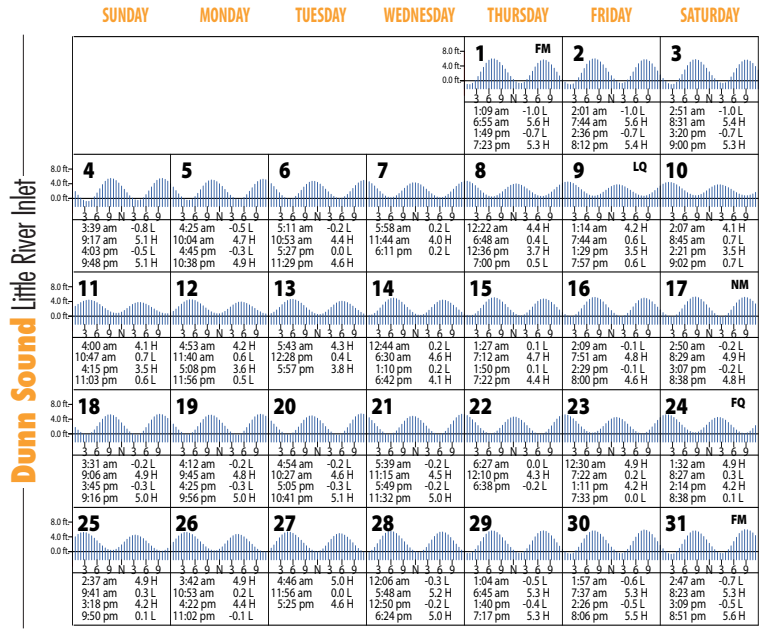


How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide

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



The marshes around Georgetown, S.C., are full of nice redfish in big schools through the winter.

Sportsman

FISHING HOTSPOTS



TRACK DOWN SOME GEORGETOWN REDS

HUGE WINTER SCHOOLS WILL TAKE FLIES, SCENTED SOFT PLASTICS THROUGH MARCH

For most of the year, anglers comb South Carolina's creeks, bays and shallow marshes for redfish, aka spot-tail bass.

But winter situations — like fish being in big schools — often make targeting reds almost like shooting fish in a barrel. March is the peak of the winter pattern, with water temperatures on the rise and feeding becoming a more normal, daily experience.

The shallow marshes around Winyah Bay near Georgetown, S.C., are prime places to hook feisty reds in the shallow backcountry on both low and high tides. That's where Jordan Pate of Carolina Guide Service makes his living, knowing he needs to pinpoint several schools and stay with them from December to April.

"Our redfish gang up into large schools back in the creeks when the water gets cold," said Pate (843-608-830). "Large groups of reds gather up in these shallow

areas to forage for small shrimp, crabs and glass minnows."

Pate typically ventures deep into small creeks off Winyah Bay, either near the Mother Norton area or between North Island, Debordieu and Hobcaw. These expansive marshes provide excellent habitat for redfish throughout the year and hold big schools of reds during the winter.

Pate prefers finding a depression or a deeper section in the headwaters of the marsh. These waters heat up some during the winter and provide a refuge for minnows, shrimp and often, big schools of redfish.

"I like to find areas that have a large watershed that drains into one, single spot when the tide falls out. These pools will hold large schools of bait and reds at the same time," he said.

While the most-opportune time to find congregated winter reds is at low tide, these fish can become hard to catch after a

long winter of pressure, and Pate will start fishing these areas on higher water, too.

"The reds will remain in large schools, even on the high tide, and the water will be clearer. When you find them, you can usually get them to bite," he said.

The big schools will stay together and patrol the marshes as units, and they feel much less pressure than when packed into a hole at low tide with only few escape routes available.

Most of Pate's winter anglers use his custom-tied flies and a fly rod, but artificial shrimp and small, scented soft plastics, like Gulp! can also make these fish perk up when a feeding opportunity arrives.

Pate expects March to continue to produce big smiles and doubled-over rods until the spring thaw in the Georgetown region, aka the "spring breakup," when the fish break into smaller groups and scattered into neighboring creeks. ■

— Jeff Bursleson



Oyster beds are hangouts for winter reds in the marshes along North Carolina's central coast.

Jot Owens

FIND REDS ON OYSTERS

NC DRUM HAVE TASTE FOR PLASTIC, CUT SHRIMP

March marks the first turn toward spring fishing along the central North Carolina coast as water temperatures begin to warm.

After a huge cold-kill of speckled trout in January, anglers such as guide Jot Owens of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., will target March red drum around oyster beds.

"I'll fish almost exclusively in estuary creeks with oyster rocks on dark, mud bottoms," said Owens (910-233-4139). "The dark mud holds heat from sunshine and attracts redfish, especially on bottoms with grass near them. Also, any day that's warmer than a previous day is gonna be a better time to fish for creek reds. Sometimes, you might have to wait until the afternoon and let the sun warm the water and bottom a little to get reds active."

Redfish are bottom-feeders that look for tiny, black mole crabs that live between oyster shells and in crevices around oyster rocks. Because the water is clear and visibility is excellent, it's a sight-fishing game from the green flag.

"You might see pods with from five to 30 or more redfish," said Owens, who favors 6½- to 7-foot medium-action rods mated to 2500 to 3000 series reels spooled with 6- to 10-pound braid and 2 to 3 feet of 10-pound mono leader.

"Because the water is cool, you need to put lures or baits near 'em," Owens said. "When you see which way they're swimming, you try to put a lure a few feet in

front of reds."

Gin-clear water means red drum will be spooky, so dropping a lure or bait on top of them scatters fish.

The water temperature (50s and low 60s) also indicates little to no lure chasing, which dictates lure sizes and small live-bait rigs.

"My favorite lure is a 3-inch Gulp! shrimp with ⅙- to ⅛-ounce jigheads to reduce splash when they hit the water," he said. "I can cast real tight to fish and not spook 'em."

Any color, as long as it contains some white, will work.

"I use (solid) white, pearl/white or sugar spice/glow, which is white with a few black pepper flakes in its body," said Owens, who also sometimes uses 5- and 6-inch Gulp! jerk shads in pearl, chartreuse, pepper, neon and new penny fished on light jigheads.

"Sometimes, I'll crimp a split shot about a foot above a ⅙- or ⅛-ounce Gulp! so it'll spiral down toward the bottom and resembles an injured shrimp," Owens said.

If reds aren't interested in soft plastics, he'll switch to pieces of fresh, peeled shrimp on a No. 2 Lupton or octopus hook 12 to 18 inches below a ⅙-ounce split shot.

"Gotta be peeled, fresh shrimp, through," he said. "They don't like old or frozen shrimp. They'll often hit a shrimp piece that's falling toward the bottom, if all else fails." ■

— Craig Holt



Tony Garita

BADIN TO REBOUND?

COLDER, STAINED WATER SHOULD TRIGGER LARGEMOUTH BASS

Last March, when unreasonably warm weather drove the big-bass bite to explode on North Carolina's High Rock and Tuckertown lakes, the trophy bass at Badin Lake just downstream didn't get the message. Few bruisers were caught, which was shocking, because Badin historically has been the best of the Yadkin River lakes for giant bass.

Bo Russell of New London, N.C., who

continued on page 94 >

Badin Bass continues>

conducts tournaments on 5,620-acre Badin, thinks he knows why.

"Badin started off with muddy water, then the lake cleared, and we had little rain thereafter," he said. "It got gin-clear and stayed that way. If there's one thing that will kill the bass bite at Badin, it's ultra-clear water. Don't get me wrong; plenty of 2- to 3-pound bass were caught, but big fish were scarce."

Russell said with this year's cold weather and run-off from heavy snows, Badin should have more stained waters this month, and fishermen should catch more line-stretching bass.

"I don't fish the Circle Drive area or most of Beaver Dam Creek because those places usually have clear water," Russell said. "I prefer the waters near the Alcoa landing and the main-stream section of Badin, which receives dirty water being pumped in from Tuckertown. The current also improves the fishing."

Russell said the water temperature should range from 50 to 65 degrees in March. If it's around 50 degrees or a little lower and the lake is fairly clear, he fishes a jerkbait or a shaky head jig. If they are higher than 50 degrees and the water has some color to it, he ties on a crankbait or a big spinnerbait. In either situation, he targets secondary points in the creeks, steep rocky banks and main-lake points in 8 to 25 feet of water.

When clear water forces fish deeper, Russell drags a Carolina rig.

"Near the end of March, the grass may come into play, but in early March, the grass is mostly dead," he said. "The fish don't seem to be on wood, either, so I'm mainly fishing rocky places."

Russell mostly uses baitcasting gear, spooling on 10-pound fluorocarbon for crankbaits and 12- to 15-pound fluorocarbon for jigs and spinnerbaits. With small jerkbaits, he switches to light spinning tackle. Early in the morning or on a cloudy day, he may briefly try a Whopper Plopper for a topwater bite.

Given some stained water, Russell thinks Badin will return to form this March.

He expects to see more five-fish, 20- to 26-pound bags weighed in at his tournaments. ■

— Tony Garitta



Guide Wendell Wilson catches Lake Russell crappie shallow and deep in March, when fish are moving in and out at different stages of the spawn.

RUSSELL SLABS ON THE MOVE

CRAPPIE CAN BE DEEP, SHALLOW ON SAME DAY

Pat Robertson

If catching slabs is your thing, March is the best month to fish for crappie on South Carolina's Lake Russell, according to guide Wendell Wilson of Elberton, Ga. "Crappie spawn sometime in March — some times early in the month, some times later in the month. The last couple of years, it's been the last week in March,"

Wilson said. "There will be some fish on the bank spawning and some always offshore at the same time."

Before the spawn, crappie will stage just offshore, and once spawning begins, fish will hold offshore, waiting on the earlier spawners to move out before they move in, he explained. That sets up the perfect

continued on page 96 >

IT ALL ADDS UP TO MORE FISH IN THE BOAT.



"I was fishing 15lb Tactical and 30lb X-Braid in isolated reeds and stick-ups. That lighter line got me more bites and I had absolutely no trouble getting them out of everything." *Tim Frederick*
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Russell Slabs continues>

opportunity for fishermen, providing plenty of action on the bank and plenty away from the bank, but nearby.

"There are a couple different methods to catch them," said Wilson (706-283-3336). "One of the most-popular is trolling 1/8-ounce curlytail jigs out in 10 to 15 feet of water along the creek channel. Another way that we like to fish once the fish commit to the bank is to use a 12-foot jig pole with a medium minnow and float and just dabble it around the brush near the bank."

Trolling, Wilson said, works along the channels back in the creeks. Trolling speed should be about 1 mph, but before the fish start to spawn, anglers should troll deeper and slower.

"That speed will work the entire month of March," he said. "The preferred jig color seem to change every year, but purple shiner and black/chartreuse are always good, along with the green/yellow, John Deere jig."

The jigging pole is rigged with 10- to 12-pound line, a No. 2 gold hook and a small Styrofoam bobber.

"Set the minnow from 10 inches to about 2 feet below the bobber and then just dabble it around any kind of wood cover along the bank — stumps, laydown trees and bushes. You should be fishing right up against the bank in 2 to 4 feet of water," Wilson said.

"Both tactics will work most of the month of March. Generally, trolling is better for numbers, while the jig pole and minnow will catch fewer but more quality fish. On Russell you are usually looking at 12- to 14-inch fish, which will be 1 to 1½ pounds, but occasionally you can get one topping 2 pounds. ■

—Pat Robertson



Big wahoo are a common bluewater catch late in the winter and early in the spring in bluewater areas of South Carolina's northern coastline.

WAHOO HAVE BLUEWATER COVERED

WINYAH SCARP, GEORGETOWN HOLE SHOULD HOLD PLENTY OF 'HOOS THROUGHOUT MARCH

Spring will finally arrive this month, and it will be a great time to plan a bluewater trip for wahoo, a top-of-the-food-chain

opponent and a premiere target for offshore anglers.

Even though the warm, Gulf Stream current rarely runs cooler than 70 degrees, more

baitfish arrive in spring, making wahoo lick their chops. Anglers can expect a tripleheader of dolphin, wahoo and tuna this time of year, but the big,

toothy wahoo are still take the top prize.

Luckily for offshore anglers, heading to a likely spot two hours away from the sight of land can be productive from any port off the South Carolina coast. But the Winyah Scarp is a monster-sized wahoo magnet and is best accessed from the ports along South Carolina's northern coastline, where Jay Sconyers of Ace's Up Fishing Charters calls home.

Sconyers will fish a variety of places offshore for wahoo, but the Winyah Scarp and the Georgetown Hole are his favorites because of the consistent water temperature and the abundant bottom structure.

"They can be in places as shallow as 120 feet, but we catch them regularly in 600- to 800-foot water, and the break is the best where the structure is located," said Sconyers (843-997-3270). "The Scarp and the Georgetown Hole are full of structure and hold more wahoo."

Anglers can catch wahoo a variety of different ways, but the most-common method is pulling cedar plugs or rigged ballyhoo at relatively slow speeds. When

using this method, a wide selection of fish will show up on the end of the line, from dolphin and tuna to king mackerel, bonito and the occasional billfish.

But when Sconyers is after jumbo wahoo, he will utilize a completely different, but solid, tactic.

"High-speed trolling is the best way to catch a big wahoo — and usually several of them," said Sconyers, who will run three rods rigged with 20-, 48-, and 64-ounce trolling weights and a skirted, rocket-head style lure trailing behind. Trolling at 14 knots, he is able to cover twice the amount of water compared to the typical, slower trolling methods. If the wahoo are concentrated on one end of the Scarp, Sconyers' high-speed trolling method will get him to the fish fast.

"We can cover more ground and find the fish faster this way. I can troll up and down the 10 miles of Scarp twice as fast as we normally would," he said.

While some wahoo are considered solitary, wahoo will congregate in small groups when food is concentrated in a

particular area. Sconyers will turn and troll back through a particular area along the Scarp after he boats a fish or two.

In addition to covering water, high-speed trolling eliminates many of the other species that typically hit his baits.

"When a rod goes off, it's going to be a wahoo 99 percent of the time. Out of the hundreds of wahoo we have caught this way, we have hung one king mackerel and one marlin. High-speed trolling takes all of the other fish, like kings and barracudas, out of the game," he said.

Filled with a mouthful of razor-sharp teeth and built for pure speed and force, wahoo carry a big stick that qualifies anglers to take their techniques to the next level. And high speed trolling is the surefire way to fill the box during the spring season at the Winyah Scarp. ■

— Jeff Burleson

Fontana Smallmouth up next >

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PRESPAWN SMALLMOUTH STARTING TO STIR AT FONTANA LAKE

The signs are out that fishing is about to pick up on Fontana Lake in North Carolina's extreme southwestern corner.

"Some early tree buds are starting to swell, days are longer and milder, and fish are getting real antsy to do their thing," said guide James McManus of 153 Charters.

Smallmouth bass will start relating to the banks this month, looking for suitable spawning areas, so there's no need to bounce jigs or spoons in 80 feet of water.

McManus (828-421-8125) said smallies will be cruising gravel and chunk-rock

banks with a little clay mixed in.

"We found the biggest smallmouth of the year starting early in the month on warming, gravel banks on the northern shorelines," said McManus, who throws small Rapala suspending jerkbaits right at the bank, giving the baits an erratic twitch. If the fish don't respond, he switches to small Zoom Flukes with 1/8-ounce jigheads to fish slightly deeper.

According to McManus, areas on the Tuckasegee River arm between Noland and Forney creeks hold plenty of smallies.

The biggest problem for fishermen

targeting smallmouths may be keeping spotted bass off their hooks.

"There are tons of spotted bass in the lake, and there is no way to target smallmouth exclusively, because the two species use the same habitat," McManus said. "However, the lower end of the lake still holds a higher percentage of smallies. Areas around Hazel Creek and main-lake, rocky banks give fishermen a better chance of hooking a smallmouth."

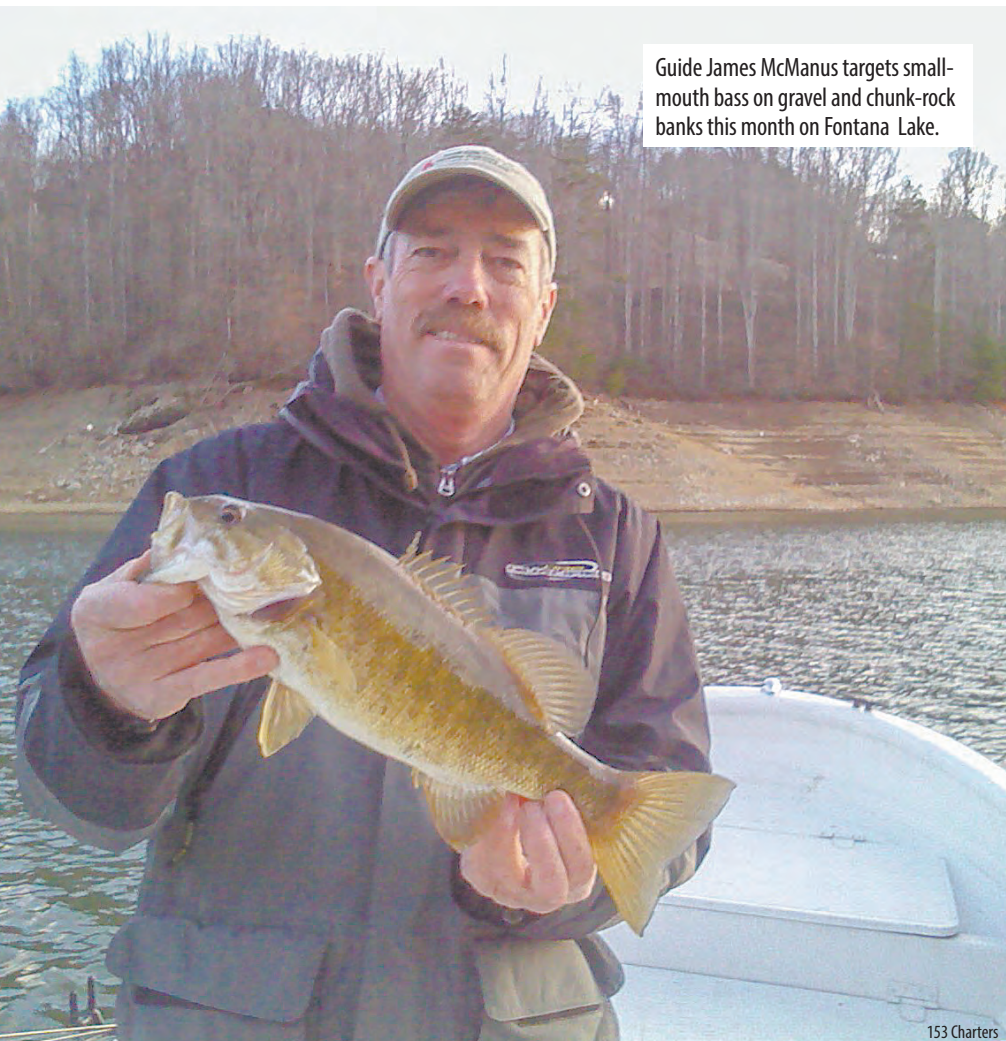
As a bonus, fishermen might catch walleye, which live this month in the same places as smallies and hit the same baits.

"If you want to sweeten the pot a little and target walleye, change over to a jig and night crawler and concentrate more on clay banks than rock banks," he said. "Throw your crawler right to the bank and walk it down the face perpendicular to the shoreline. Work your bait slowly, and when a slight tug is felt, let the fish run with the bait before setting the hook."

Artificial lure options for walleye include a small Shad Rap or Flicker Shad. McManus said generate more strikes than jerkbaits. ■

— Tony Garitta

Guide James McManus targets smallmouth bass on gravel and chunk-rock banks this month on Fontana Lake.



153 Charters

TRY SALUDA FOR SURPRISE RAINBOWS

STOCKED TROUT IN MIDLANDS RIVER ARE READY FOR MARCH LURES

The lower Saluda River, which begins just below Lake Murray Dam outside of Columbia, S.C., is stocked with rainbow trout, and because the water in the river comes off the lake's bottom and stays cold, they don't die during the summer.

This puts them within reach of many

anglers who otherwise wouldn't think of casting a lure for these fish, and March is a great month for it.

Garreth Duggar of Orangeburg, S.C., makes several treks to the lower Saluda this time of year. He enjoys the simplicity of fishing here, as well as the short driving distance it takes to catch fish for which he used to travel to the mountains of Oconee County.

Around 2000, Duggar discovered he was driving right past rainbow trout on his way to the mountains every March.

"I actually like fishing the lower Saluda much better. Up in Oconee County, a lot of it is hiking and fishing off the banks, but the lower Saluda is better suited for a canoe, and that's my favorite fishing," he said. "I take two ultralight spinning rods with 6-pound line. I put in at the canoe launch at Saluda Shoals Park, and I paddle upriver until I come to the set of shoals that stretches across the river. The trout are all around those rocks."

Duggar keeps a No. 4 Mepps Aglia-e spinner tied onto each rod, and he probes every nook and cranny of those rocks for trout.

"The Aglia-e has a spinner blade, and the body is made up of little colored beads that look like fish eggs. It's also similar to the pellets these fish are fed when they're in the hatchery. So it looks like food to them all the way around," he said.

Duggar first fishes at the bottom of that set of shoals, covering the eddies behind bigger rocks and also the areas with fast current. He usually catches a few fish here, then paddles his way up into the rocks, lodging himself against them to hold his canoe in one spot.

"This is my secret, and I don't know anyone else that

does it. Once my canoe is lodged in some rocks, I cast one of my spinners behind me. I get that one close to the downriver side of a big rock, and I find the line of current that will keep that spinner in one spot, just below the surface, with the blade spinning. Then, I set that rod in a rod holder, and I fish with my other rod like normal. You'd be surprised how many fish that lure will catch that way," he said. ■

— Brian Cope

Reds up next >

Regan Norris caught this beautiful rainbow trout in the waters of South Carolina's Lower Saluda River.



Regan Norris

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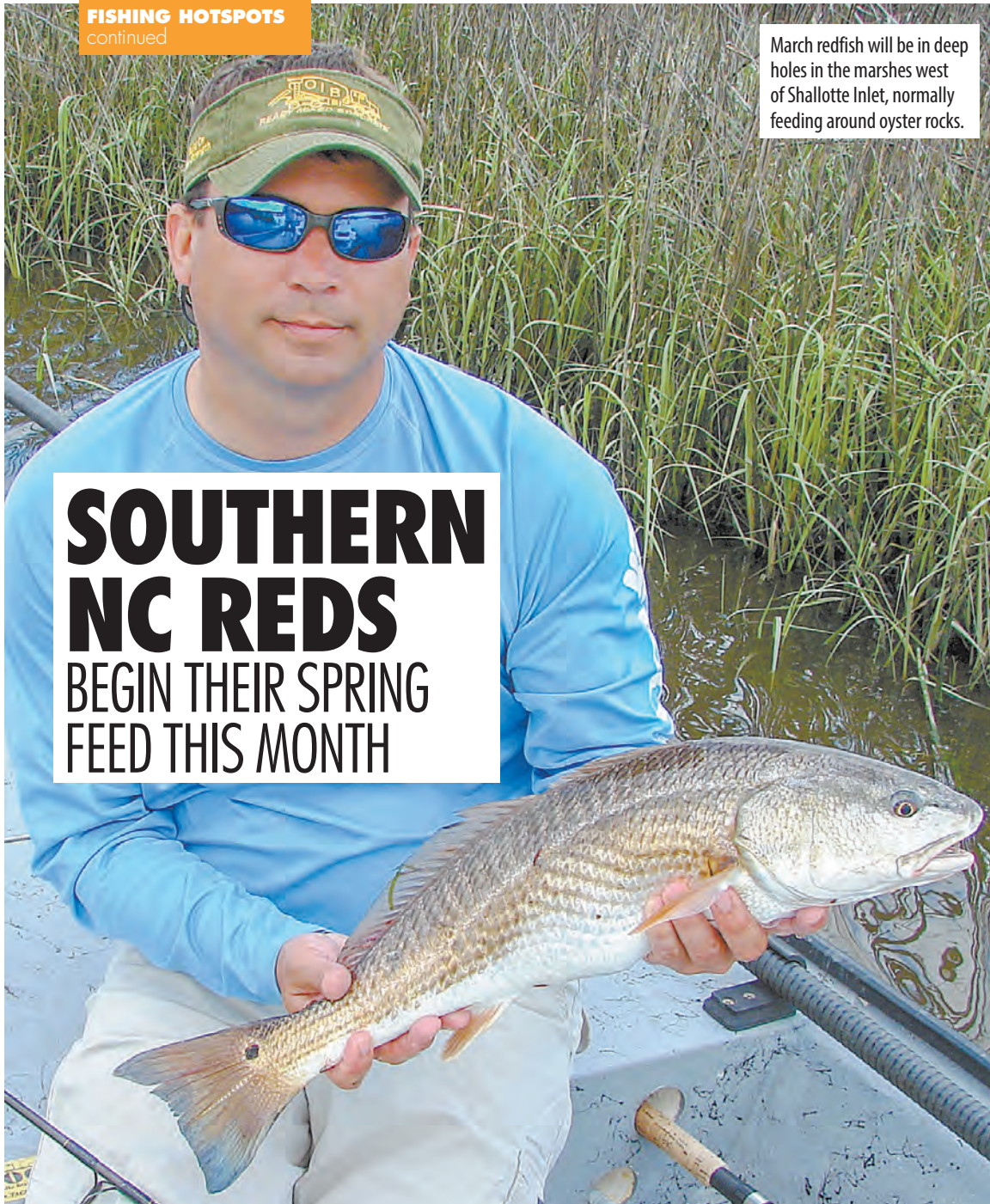
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March redfish will be in deep holes in the marshes west of Shallotte Inlet, normally feeding around oyster rocks.

SOUTHERN NC REDS BEGIN THEIR SPRING FEED THIS MONTH



The coastal marshes of southern Brunswick County are the southernmost saltwater areas in North Carolina and are often home to the first hearty bite to fire up when the water starts warming in the spring.

During warm winters, the action might continue all winter, but it surges to another level when the water begins to warm in March. A cold snap might put them off their feed for a few days, but they don't leave, and when the water warms again, they often fire back off on a serious feed.

Most years, spring begins trying to break winter's grip by late February, and the

water has already warmed at least a few degrees by early March. Drum — both red and black — are typically the first fish to respond to this warming. Some speckled trout may be biting, too, but their numbers were reduced by several cold stun/kill events in January, and all trout caught must be released until the season reopens June 15.

Red drum will be staging in deeper holes in the marsh, in and around creek mouths, or they may be working the shallow flats scattered across the marsh between Shallotte and Little River inlets. Food is the key to finding feeding drum; they will

be where they can grub crabs, shrimp and minnows from around oyster rocks that grow freely in the marshes and creeks, plus along the Intracoastal Waterway.

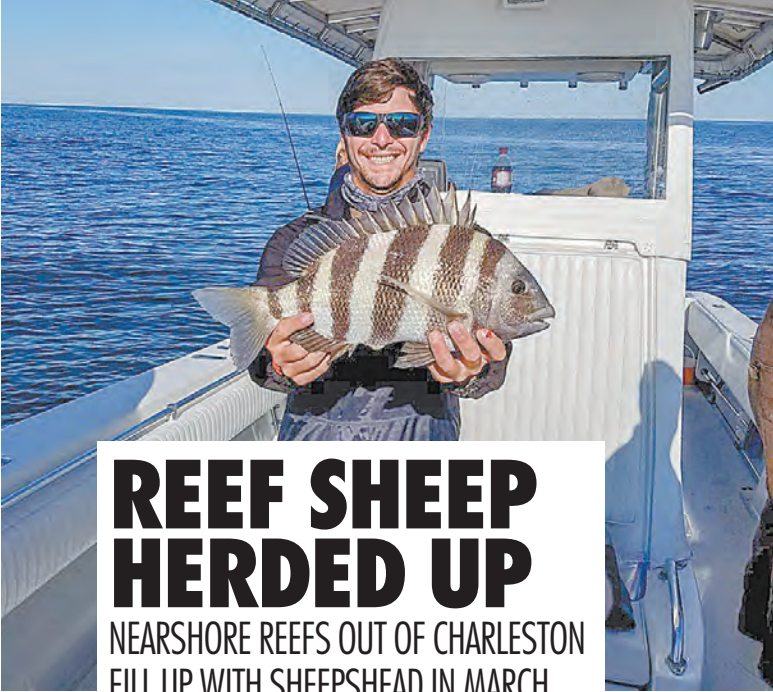
Most area guides agree red drum feed the heaviest when the tide first begins falling but also acknowledge that drum push up into the marsh to feed as the tide rises. Drum are usually hungry and will check out most baits or lures. Some days, they are picky, but even then they'll hit a few lures and cut baits. They also don't appear as wary as at other times of the year.

Guide Mark Stacy of Ocean Isle Fishing Charters ([www.oceanisle-](http://www.oceanisle-fishingcharters.com)

[fishingcharters.com](http://www.oceanisle-fishingcharters.com)) offered a couple of tips. He said fishermen using artificial baits should slow their retrieves. Fish are beginning to feed regularly, but they aren't aggressive yet. Some days, smaller lures are the key to getting bites. On certain days, using scented lures or adding scent to your lures, will convince a few more fish to bite.

Stacy said pieces of natural bait work well as the water warms. Pieces of menhaden, mullet and shrimp might be the final piece of the puzzle to convince fish to bite. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver



REEF SHEEP HERDED UP

NEARSHORE REEFS OUT OF CHARLESTON FILL UP WITH SHEEPSHEAD IN MARCH

Sheepshead are biting in March around many of the reefs off the coast of Charleston, S.C., including the 4K1, Charleston 60 and Edisto 40. If they've got 25 to 60 feet of water on top of them, they are prime sheepshead holes this time of year.

Guide Ben Powers of Reel Time Charters said fighting through black sea bass is always a problem at these reefs, but he said it's worth it to weed through them to get to the sheepshead.

"Some guys will spend 30 minutes on a reef and get tired of catching black sea bass, so they make a run to another reef, then do the same thing," he said. "The trick is to stay put, and after you've worked through the black sea bass for a while, you'll start getting into the sheepshead. Otherwise, you're wasting time running to a new spot, then spending half an hour on another batch of black sea bass. Just stay put, be patient, and you'll start catching sheepshead."

While many anglers use a common Carolina rig for sheepshead, Powers (843-475-9660) opts for something different, and he said his method allows him to feel the bite better because of the location of the weight, the hook and the absence of a swivel to attach his mainline to leader.

On the end of his leader, Powers places an egg sinker. About 12 inches above that weight, he uses a dropper loop to tie on a 2/0 Owner Mosquito hook. Powers allows the weight to hit the structure, then reels up one or two reel cranks.

"I like to set the hook myself when fishing for sheepshead, and that's why I prefer the Mosquito hook over a circle hook. And I tie my main line, which is PowerPro braid, to my 20- to 30-pound fluorocarbon leader with a line-to-line knot instead of a swivel. All of that allows me to feel the bite better, because there is nothing between me and the hook besides line," he said.

The size of his egg sinker varies depending on how hard the current is running, but it is usually between 1 and 3 ounces.

Powers said his most critical piece of gear when fishing this way is his Minn Kota iPilot trolling motor, which allows him to hold steady in one place with the Spot-Lock feature. This allows him to make slight adjustments much more quickly and easily than pulling in an anchor and resetting it every time he decides to move.

Fiddler crabs, sand fleas, live shrimp, and clams are all good baits to have on hand. ■

— Brian Cope

Shad run up next >

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Hickory shad — like this one the author caught — fill the Roanoke River and its tributaries this month.

ANNUAL SHAD RUN SPARKLES IN RIVER

HICKORY SHAD POUR INTO ROANOKE THIS MONTH

For anglers in the know, fishing the March shad run offers one of the first opportunities since the deep freeze of winter to catch a pile of fish. The Roanoke River will be brimming with hickory shad, and guide Mitchell Blake of Chocowinity, N.C., will be there.

Although Weldon, N.C., is the terminus for spawning shad on the Roanoke as they make their way from the ocean — and considered one of the hottest spots — Blake said that phenomenal fishing can stretch as far downriver as Jamesville. All it takes is enough water flow to create a

current and concentrate the fish.

“I’ve caught them in as little as 4 feet of water and as deep as 25 feet,” said Blake (252-495-1803), who runs FishIBX Charters. “Water depth doesn’t matter as much as the current, but the water levels will have a lot to do with where the fish are on any stretch of the river. In a low-water year like last year — and that looks to be the way we’re shaping up this year — it concentrates those fish in the main river body. But if we get enough rain, the water could be running over the banks. That will put them in the edge of the woods and in the little gullies and ditches that run out of them.”

On the water, Blake keeps his eyes peeled for current breaks, any structure that diverts the current flow for the fish to congregate behind and around. Treetops, rocks, points off the bank or areas where a stream or drain from swamps connect to the river are all prime real estate. In these places, Blake prefers to anchor up and work them over with flies and shad rigs.

“I like to present the lure or fly where it swings in the current,” said Blake. “For flies, I mostly use a 200-grain sinking fly line with a 4-foot leader of 8- to 10-pound monofilament. I’ve seen lot of fish caught on a fly rod, because you can use materials for a fly that create such fine movement and a shad will fire on it. I’ll use a 1¼-inch Clouser-type fly with a tiny, weighted eye. Pink/white and green/white did really well last year.”

The tandem shad rig used on light spinning tackle can be purchased pre-tied or tied easily by hand. Most rigs lead with a ¼- to ⅓-ounce crappie jig and a 2-inch curlytail grub tied to a dropper loop followed by a 1½-inch, ⅓-ounce gold or silver spoon tied a foot to 18 inches behind. ■

— Dusty Wilson

Murray Stripers up next >

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The author (left) caught this nice Lake Murray striped fishing with guide Brad Taylor.

MURRAY STRIPERS BEGIN TO STIR

LOOK FOR SPRING FISH ON FLATS IN ANY CREEK, GUIDE SAYS

Pat Robertson

With winter's chill finally being to be replaced by warmer weather, March is a strong month for striped bass on Lake Murray, according to guide Brad Taylor.

"There will be fish showing up in every creek around the entire lake in March," Taylor said. "Typically that time of year, they are starting to get up on the shallower flats in the creeks."

It is, he said, probably the best time of year to catch a big striper in Lake Murray.

"Most are caught on gizzard shad on free-lines, but there are a lot of ways to catch stripers in March. Some really big fish can be caught on cut bait around Buffalo Creek, Rocky Creek and the elbow bend right along the edge of the river."

Taylor (803-331-1354) said the bite on cut bait occurs mostly above Dreher Island, adjacent to the river channel in 20 feet of water, along little flats and ridges that run out into the channel.

While the winter school fishing is starting to fade with the warmer water temperatures, and anglers don't find chasing seagulls as productive, the gulls and loons that helped target those schools are still active and can help locate bait, he said.

"This time of year, I pull planer boards and free-lines and fish the biggest blueback herring I can find," said Taylor who focuses on 20- to 30-foot flats adjacent to the river channel and creek channels in the mid-section of the lake. "I normally have eight lines out, six with planer boards, a free-line and one with a cork out in the middle. I also will run a big gizzard shad on one of the lines

just for the opportunity to catch a really big striper."

A typical catch in March, he said, will be an average of 5 to 6 pounds per fish, but if luck provides a big striper, that one fish could run well over 20 pounds.

"The good thing about striper fishing this time of year is that normally when you catch one you catch a bunch. They are grouped up, and when you hit them, multiple hookups are very common," Taylor said.

Striper fishing is improving on Murray, he said, as the population has made a long recovery since it crashed in 2006.

"They drew the lake down back then to work on the dam and then they dumped poison in to kill the hydrilla and we lost the bulk of the stripers that fall," Taylor said. "But the fish are on a comeback, and in the past couple of years, 20-pound fish have become more common." ■

— Pat Robertson

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