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Top baits for  
spring bass

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Make mine a  
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Beat the bonito blast

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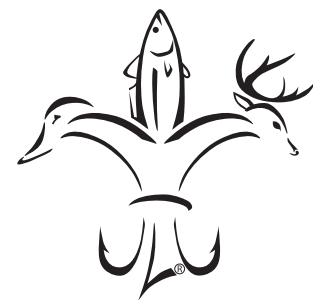
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April is a big-bass month across both Carolinas. Tune in for tips on baits and learn which North Carolina lakes are trophy destinations. Photo by Jeff Burleson

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**Volume 25 | No 4**

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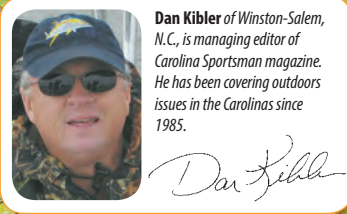
 **YAMAHA**

Some photos shown with optional equipment



# NC GETS NEW DEER, BEAR REGS

## DEER ZONES CHANGED, 2-BUCK LIMIT IS STATEWIDE, DOE DAYS MOVE IN WEST



**D**eer and bear hunters in North Carolina will need to pay attention to their regulations guides this fall, as the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, at its meeting in Raleigh on Feb. 28, voted to restructure deer-hunting management zones, move around either-sex days in the western third of the state, set a two-buck limit in the eastern half of the state — as well as change bear management zones, establish an alligator season and protect trophy blue catfish in a handful of lakes.

The Commission voted to add to the current deer management regions a fifth, dividing the Eastern deer section into Northeastern and Southeastern sections, while moving a handful of counties from the Western deer section to the North-western section.

The Northeastern section would range as far west as Vance, Franklin and Wake counties, south to Johnston and Wayne counties, east to Greene, Pitt, Martin and Bertie counties, and including all of the counties north of Albemarle Sound.

The Southeastern section would range as far west as Harnett, Moore and Richmond counties. Rutherford, Polk and Cleveland counties were moved from the Western to the Northwest section.

The Commission voted to lower the season limit on antlered deer from four to two in the two eastern zones and part

of the central zone to match regulations in the western half of the state that have been in place for more than 15 years. The statewide limit on antlerless deer would be four per season, with bonus tags allowed only during Urban Archery seasons.

In Western section counties, and in Polk, Rutherford and Cleveland counties, antlerless deer seasons of various lengths would move from the end of the gun season to the beginning.

The Commission set aside an earlier proposal to restructure season dates, dropping muzzle-loading season from two weeks to one, because of public response at a series of meetings across the state in February.

“We listened to the sportsmen,” said John Coley of Holly Springs, chairman of the Commission.

The Commission voted to divide the Coastal Bear Management Unit into five hunting zones with different season placements and lengths beginning as early as the second Saturday in November.

Fishermen on Kerr (Buggs Island), Gaston

and Roanoke Rapids reservoirs will be limited to one blue catfish per day larger than 32 inches.

And alligator harvests will be allowed from Sept. 1-Oct. 1 on a permit-only basis the Commission will set up.

All regulation changes will take effect on Aug. 1 and be in effect for the 2018-19 hunting seasons. ■



**Keith Deal** of Holly Springs, N.C., was tied up at the dock at Lake Wheeler in Raleigh, N.C., the morning of Feb. 25, doing some engine maintenance. While letting the engine tuner spray soak in, he picked up a spinning rod with a Senko tied on, made a cast nest to the dock and came up with this 9-pound, 10-ounce luncker.

more updates >



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# RED GROUPE CAUGHT IN '17 IS NEW NC RECORD

**R**obert Dean of Creedmoor, N.C., finally owns North Carolina's state record for red grouper. He caught the 35-pound, 11-ounce fish on June 10, 2017, but the paperwork took a while to be submitted, and the record wasn't officially recognized until Feb. 2, 2018.

Dean was fishing aboard the *Cheerio Lady* out of Carolina Beach, N.C., with Capt. John Batson when he landed the big bottomfish.

"We were about 43 miles off, and this was our first stop. It was a rock pile with some 3- to 4-foot bumps, so I drifted it once before anchoring," Batson said. "On that drift, one of the other fishermen hooked something he couldn't handle. It had him all bowed up and pinned to the rail before it got back into the rocks and broke him off. That was the fish Robert caught later.

"I anchored, and it was about 15 minutes later that Robert hooked this same fish.

It gave him a run for his money too, but he got it up. It had the first circle hook, with the broken line, still stuck in the corner of its jaw."

"We had only been fishing about 15 minutes when this grouper hit," Dean said. "I'd like to say I knew it was special right off, but that isn't so. It hit just about like any other grouper. I'd get a little line in, and then he would take some back. Once he got near the boat though, it changed a little. Something spooked him, and he took off like an amberjack. I don't know how long it took, but he worked me out after that. I finally had to work my way around the boat to get him where Capt. John could gaff him.

"Once Capt. John lifted him in the boat, we could see he had a hook with a short piece of line in his jaw, Dean said. "We took a closer look and realized it was a new hook — one of ours from earlier that morning. This was the grouper that had broken off just a few minutes earlier, and it was still feeding, even with the circle hook in its jaw."

Dean's fish broke the previous record by more than two pounds. That fish, a 33-pound, 8-ounce red grouper, was caught on Oct. 13, 2007, by Chuck Deeter of Oak Island, N.C., who was fishing with Capt. Anthony Ng of Winterville, N.C. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver



Robert Dean of Creedmoor, N.C., caught this state-record 35-pound, 11-ounce red grouper in June 2017.



Hunters in the Carolina Coyote Classic killed these 67 coyotes in a mid-February weekend.

# COYOTE CLASSIC SETS RECORD WITH 67 KILLS

**T**he fifth annual Carolina Coyote Classic had a record number of coyotes, 67, brought to the scales on Feb. 9-10 at American Legion Post 76 in the Albemarle, N.C.

Eighty-eight hunters from North Carolina and South Carolina killed 67 coyotes, led by Stephen Davis, who killed 14 coyotes himself, worth \$1,500 and other prizes. One of his coyotes was the biggest taken, a 40.7-pound male worth another \$220 and other prizes, including a rifle/scope combination, in what was called the "Fat Dog" competition. He also won \$150 for the smallest coyote taken.

Team Windwalkers Kryptonite took second place with 10 coyotes, winning \$1,000 cash and other prizes. It also won \$174 for the biggest female coyote taken.

Team Night Lyfe took third with seven coyotes, earning \$500 and prizes.

Team South Mountain took second in Fat Dog with a 39.9-pound male, worth \$132 and other prizes. Team Smokum Outdoors finished third with a 39.6-pound male, worth \$88 and other prizes. ■

# HUNTER OR HUNTED?

Logan Foster of Chester, S.C., killed this bobcat while duck hunting with a friend in a creek bottom in January. Foster said the bobcat stalked him while he was calling with a wood duck whistle.



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# DIXIE DEER CLASSIC UNVEILS NC'S BEST BUCKS OF 2017

**N**orth Carolina crowned its best bucks from the 2017-18 deer season at the Dixie Deer Classic in Raleigh the first weekend in March, and a couple of real specimens headed the list of award winners.

Rusty Pruitt of Newton Grove killed a Johnston County buck that was the best non-typical taken by gun last season. The deer scored 175% (Boone and Crockett Club's scoring system). Pruitt had the buck on trail-cam photos but had seen it only twice including the day after Thanksgiving when he killed it from a box stand.

"He was impossible to hunt. He would show up on trail cams around October of every year, then disappear for weeks. I just could not pattern it at all," Pruitt said, "I had just gotten in the stand (that day) and barely opened the windows. I wasn't there five minutes before I saw the buck standing about 150 yards away. I shot him, he fell like a rock, and then I drank my coffee. I realized I hadn't even had time to put my ear protection on, but I don't remember that bothering me."

Jim Williams with Eastern Carolina Taxidermy, who mounted the buck for Pruitt, judged the deer at 7½ to 8½ years old by tooth wear on its lower jawbone.

A remote hunt on Thanksgiving morning helped land Adrian Whitson of Burnsville, N.C., the top typical buck taken by gun in North Carolina this past season.

The 10-point buck, which scored 165%,

was killed in a remote area of Yancey County — a 30-minute ATV ride followed by a 20-minute walk from Whitson's vehicle.

"My brother-in-law was about 45 minutes away, and he came to help me get the deer out to my ATV. It wasn't an easy task, but I was glad to have some help, and it was worth it. It was definitely the deer of a lifetime for me, and I feel lucky to have had the opportunity," he said.

Eddie Callahan's Cleveland County buck won Best Crossbow Typical with a 153% score. The buck's rack wore some extra hardware, thanks to Callahan's second shot, which he thought was the kill shot.

"As soon as I shot the deer with the first bolt, it went to the ground, spun around, then stood up. I loaded another bolt as quickly as I could, fired again, and the deer dropped for good," Callahan said. "I couldn't see where I'd hit the deer the second time, couldn't find the bolt, but did find the nock on the ground nearby. The bolt apparently just shattered, but I finally found the broadhead when I grabbed the buck by the antlers and (it) cut my hand."

The broadhead had lodged solidly into the buck's right beam.

Jimmy Cockman's Guilford County buck was the best non-typical taken by muzzleloader. It scored 173%. Patrick Williams' Rockingham County buck scored 165% and was the biggest non-typical by bow. ■


— Brian Cope

## DIXIE DEER CLASSIC CATEGORY WINNERS FROM NORTH CAROLINA

- Best Typical by Muzzleloader: Wayne Hundley, Rockingham County, 153%.
- Best Typical by Bow: Austin Hanks, Rockingham County, 163.
- Best Typical by Gun: Adrian Whitson, Yancey County, 165%.
- Best Typical Gun by Female: Joanna Hutchins, Randolph County, 130%.
- Best Non-Typical by Gun: Rusty Pruitt, Johnston County, 175%.
- Best Non-Typical by Bow: Patrick Williams, Rockingham County, 165%.
- Best Typical by Crossbow: Eddie Callahan, Cleveland County, 153.
- Best Typical Muzzleloader by Female: Marlene Vargo, Granville County, 119%.
- Best Typical by Bow Female: Tootie Morris, Person County, 125%.
- Best Typical Crossbow by Female: Teresa Turbyfill, Rockingham County, 131%.
- Best Typical Gun by Male Youth: Jacob Elliott, Person County, 154%.
- Best Typical Muzzleloader by Male Youth: Holden Land, Granville County, 134%.
- Best Non-Typical Crossbow by Male Youth: Chris Glossen, Person County, 128%.
- Best Typical Gun by Female Youth: Payton Gross, Lee County, 109%.
- Best Typical Muzzleloader by Female Youth: Madison Dunkley, Person County, 136%.
- Best Non-Typical Youth Female: Haylie Richard, Granville County, 120%.



Three of the best bucks that showed up at the Dixie Deer Classic in Raleigh, N.C., the first weekend of March were: (left) Rusty Pruitt's 175% non-typical from Johnston County, (middle) Adrian Whitson's 165% typical from Yancey County, and (right) Eddie Callahan's 153% buck from Cleveland County, taken with a crossbow.

A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a dark jacket and a cap, is smiling. He is holding a large, silvery fish in his left hand and a small, white, soft-plastic lure in his right hand. The background is a solid blue color.

By Tony Garitta

# SWIMBAIT? GO SMALL

BIG SWIMBAITS MIGHT CATCH BRUISER BASS IN CALIFORNIA, BUT DOWNSIZING THESE SOFT-PLASTIC LURES IS THE WAY TO GO IN THE CAROLINAS, ESPECIALLY DURING THE PRESPAWN.

Tony Garitta

## SWIMBAIT? GO SMALL

**W**ith the introduction of Florida-strain largemouth bass into southern California in 1959, fish weighing as much as 20 pounds made that state's waters treasured fishing grounds for the next world-record fish. Twenty-one of the heaviest 25 bass ever caught have come from California waters, mostly the San Diego city lakes.

To catch huge bass from these heavily pressured, ultra-clear lakes, western fishermen went from one extreme tactic to the other.

First, they employed tiny baits in conjunction with light tackle, giving birth to finesse fishing. Before long, fishermen throughout the country became adept at split-shot fishing, tube jiggging and finesse flipping.

Next, with rainbow trout being a major part of the forage bass in California lakes, trophy bass hunters coveted large, imitation trout baits, resulting in the swimbait craze.

In contrast to finesse baits, swimbaits measured 8 to 11 inches long and weighed 4 to 6 ounces, and southern California became the swimbait capital of the world. Huge swimbaits, including the Huddleston Swim Shad Deluxe, Castaic Soft Trout, Rago and Savage Gear Real Trout, gained notoriety as big-bass baits.

A major drawback developed once these baits reached other waters, however. They generated few strikes in lakes with limited numbers of huge bass.

"If you fish those big swimbaits in our waters, you're not going to get many bites," said bass pro Matt Arey of Shelby, N.C., who downsizes his swimbaits to increase productivity.

In fact, Arey developed his own swimbait, the Lunkerhunt Fetch, that was introduced at the July 2017 ICAST show. The downsized swimbait met his specifications in action and size, a modest 5-inch model in contrast to the longer, bulkier California versions.

Arey said swimbaits are deadly in the spring and fall. He tested a Fetch prototype last spring at Lake Wylie during the spawning period, using the swimbait in conjunction with a Lunker Stick cigar bait.

One of bass pro Matt Arey's most-productive baits for spawning fish is a soft-plastic stickbait. **INSET:** Lunkerhunt's Fetch swimbait fits bass pro Matt Arey's needs during the spring, prespawn period.



continues on page 18 >

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**SWIMBAIT? GO SMALL**

**A**rey likes the swimbait's versatility in the spring, using it as a search bait for big, pre-spawn female bass cruising gravel shorelines near spawning grounds or suspended around docks.

"An unweighted Fetch is heavy enough to make long casts along the shoreline while running a few feet below the surface with a steady retrieve," Arey said. "It can be flipped under docks. Either way, it can be fished quickly to cover a lot of territory. If the fish are suspended in deep water under docks, I'll use a weighted swimbait hook to make the bait run a foot or two deeper. During the spawning period, I'm fishing water 5 feet deep or less, so deep is a relative term."

If a bass follows or rolls on the bait but won't commit to taking it, Arey tosses the Lunker Stick at the same fish. Its slow, spiral fall often triggers a bite.

A third option is what Arey calls a "glide bait," a broken-back plastic bait that's retrieved with a tantalizing twitch-and-pause retrieve.

He also checks to see if a bass is locked on its bed. If so, he'll taunt it with a variety of small baits to get it to strike.



Swimbait are productive search baits, especially fished around shallow cover.

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If he's practicing for a tournament, he marks the bedding fish using waypoints, so he can return to them when money is on the line.

"A swimbait and a cigar-type bait are a great one-two punch for catching prespawn and spawning bass," he said. "Making long casts with swimbaits while searching for fish is essential, because bass are spooky this time of year."

To find bedding fish, Arey looks for pockets with hard bottoms and flat banks along the main body, not just at the backs of creeks. He avoids soft, mucky bottoms.

"Bedding bass return to the same places year after year, so once I find these places, I know where to begin fishing," said Arey.

Although he designed the Fetch, Arey ties on as many as five different swimbaits, varying in size, color and action, to trigger strikes.

"A swimbait is a fickle bait," he said. "I'll fish a number of them, employing different retrieves until I discover

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## LUNKERHUNT FETCH SWIMBAIT

Bass pro Matt Arey tested six prototypes in an eight-month period to develop the Lunckerhunt Fetch, a swim-bait introduced at the July 2017 ICAST show.

Arey, a self-described perfectionist, said he rejected five of his own prototypes while attempting to give the bait a consistent action regardless of the rate of retrieve. He also considered size, weight, tail action, cadence, water impact, colors, overall design and fish-catching ability before molds were cast for the final product.

"I didn't want to launch a bait unless I felt it was 110-percent perfect," Arey said. "Making a swimbait is a fickle deal involving a lot of testing and trial-and-error and working with product engineers. I fished multiple prototypes to find out which one would trigger strikes. Last spring, I tested the Fetch at Lake Wylie with great success."

The Fetch was based on a homemade swimbait from Texas that had a large following.

"We greatly modified the bait

by making it with less plastic, thus reducing the bulk of the



The Lunckerhunt Fetch swimbait was designed by bass pro Matt Arey of Shelby, N.C.,

Tony Garitta

bait and improving its hookset capabilities," Arey said. "Despite the reduction in plastic, it can be cast long distances and maintains a steady action with a fast or slow retrieve." ■

>>>

which bait the fish will commit to taking. It's a clear-water bait, so I use natural colors like shad and bluegill."

Arey uses Okuma Helios TCS baitcasting reels spooled with 17- to 20-pound fluorocarbon P-Line. The reels are matched to medium-heavy or heavy action 7-foot-3 to 7-foot-6 Okuma rods. He ties swim-baits on with a Palomar knot. ■



Tony Garitta of Lexington, N.C., is a retired English instructor and an avid bass fisherman. He writes a weekly fishing column for the Lexington Dispatch. In his spare time, he can be found catching bass at Tuckertown and High Rock lakes; he holds the lake record at High Rock.

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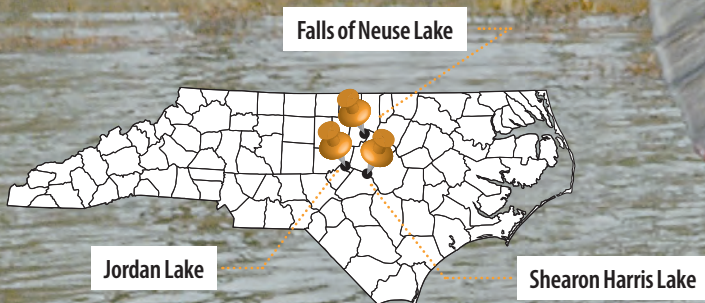
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MINING NC'S

# 'GOLDEN TRIANGLE'

By Craig Holt

Harris, Falls or Jordan, which is the best of North Carolina's best lakes for largemouths? Can you decide?





**F**ishermen having trouble choosing a month to target largemouth bass on the three lakes around the Raleigh-Durham area can get answers from two groups — serious anglers or biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission — and they can take those recommendations to the bank(s).

Both groups agree that late March and the month of April are the best times to sample the best North Carolina has to offer, in the state's "Golden Triangle" of bass fishing.

What's going on in late March and April is no secret. Big female bass are staging just off the banks, or they're already on the banks, making beds to lay eggs or taking a number to wait their spawning turn with nearby male (buck) bass anxious to fertilize their eggs.

"We try to sample (by electroshocking) when bass are spawning," said Kirk Rundle, a fisheries biologist with the Commission. "We can't wait until too late because the bigger bass move out into deeper water where we can't get at 'em. So we try to corral them around the shorelines."

March might seem a little early for bass to move toward the banks. After all, some of North Carolina's biggest snows have occurred then, and temperatures in the past have dipped below freezing for four or five days in a row. But starting in February, daylight hours begin to grow longer, with more sunshine to raise water temperatures, and warm fronts begin to blow through.

Once bass sense three or four consecutive days of warm weather, they'll move shallow and remain until finishing their spawn, even though later cold fronts may drop the mercury.



Craig Holt

Nature planned the movement of bass to shorelines for late March and April when water temperatures start climbing toward the magical 68-degree mark. That's when spawning hits its peak. It's also when dedicated lunger thumpers beat the banks, and biologists, wearing rubber boots and gloves and handling dip nets, cruise the banks in electroshocking boats and scoop up fish for scale samples, measurements and tagging.

However, like any other natural process, success may vary.

"(Electroshocking) depends on water temperatures," Rundle said, "but there are other variables in getting good samples. It depends on weather and where we start sampling. Timing has a lot to do with it. We might have to juggle lake sampling around anadromous shocking, such as this year at the Tar River. Plus, at the Tar, we have to go when the water is up; that might mean we miss a day or two at a lake during the height of the spring spawn."

It also means snapshots of a lake's bass population and fish health often vary from year to year on graphs, but not in the water.

"It doesn't mean a great deal if the numbers of fish we find differ from one year to the next," Rundle said. "If we sample fewer — or more — bass than the previous year, nothing may have changed. We look at long-term results and trends."

So those who study the graphs at the Commission's web site — [www.ncwildlife.org/Fishing/Learn-Resources/Monitoring-Surveys](http://www.ncwildlife.org/Fishing/Learn-Resources/Monitoring-Surveys) — shouldn't be alarmed or elated by lower or higher numbers at their favorite Triangle lunger hole.

"The main indicator of how healthy a lake is depends mostly on long-term body conditions, growth rates and numbers of fish above, at or less than keeper sizes or fish in slots," Rundle said.

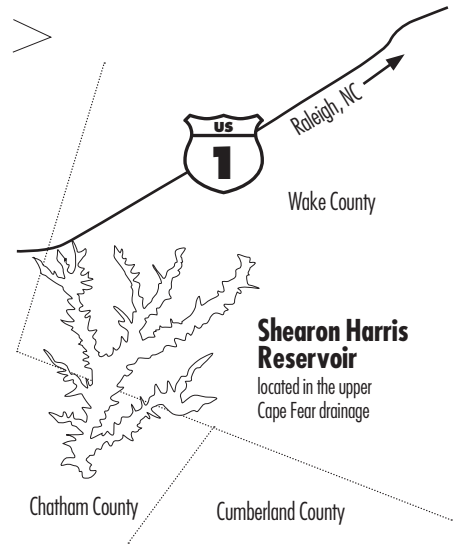
Here's a look at the three Raleigh-Durham area lakes that once again should rate 1-2-3 in North Carolina this year.

## SHEARON HARRIS LAKE

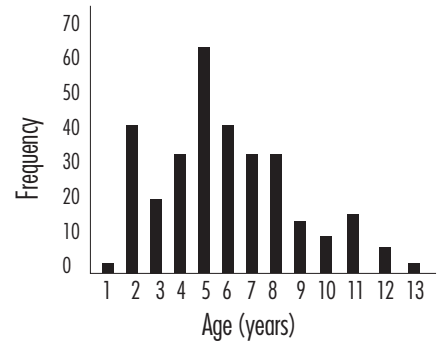
This 4,151-acre lake is almost entirely within Wake and Chatham counties.

Shaped roughly like a "Y", with three main sections and several feeder creeks, Harris is about 20 miles southwest of Raleigh off US. 1, and owned by Duke Energy, which runs a nuclear power plant on its northwestern shore.

SHEARON HARRIS RESERVOIR DATA



Age structure for the 2015 Shearon Harris Largemouth bass survey. Age at length data from the sub-set of fish that were sacrificed to collect data was used to estimate the age of those fish released back into the system.



continued on page 24



Jordan and Falls of Neuse lakes have plenty of bridges crossing various creek arms or main-lake areas, providing lots of riprap targets.

	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Sample Size	307	305	409	467	406	358
Relative Abundance (fish/hour)	73	59	94	96	74	72
% Below Slot (less than 16")	50	55	62	48	54	50
% Within Slot (16-20")	37	34	34	43	38	41
% Above Slot (Over 20")	13	11	4	9	8	9
Largest Fish	23" 8.3 lbs	25" 8.7 lbs	23" 6.2 lbs	24" 9.3 lbs	23" 7.3 lbs	23" 7.7 lbs

Survey results from the past 10 years (2007-2017) of Shearon Harris Reservoir largemouth bass

Craig Holt

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**W**hat makes Harris a top bass lake is obvious — its habitat resembles a Florida lake, with nearly every foot of shoreline featuring huge beds of aquatic vegetation. The hydrilla, primrose and elodea tangles rimming the lake offer excellent hiding and rearing spots for baitfish, and that sets the table for largemouths. Harris has minimal hard shoreline structure, but bass, being ambush predators, love its grassy perimeter. It does have riprap



Local anglers Bryce McClenney and Michael Christie weighed in a five-bass limit at 28.23 pounds, showing the kind of fish Shearon Harris Lake can produce.

at the New Hill/Holleman Road causeway, the only road that crosses its waters.

“During a February tournament last year, the winning team had a five-bass limit of 42 pounds,” Rundle said. “That’s almost 8½ pounds per fish.”

The next week at Harris, winning anglers caught a five-fish total weight that eclipsed 40 pounds.

In addition to Harris’s aquatic grass, it’s unique because of a 16- to 20-inch “no-keeper” slot that’s created a trophy pool.

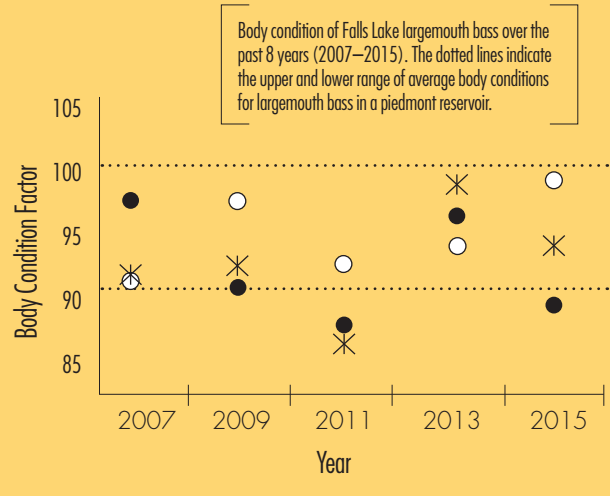
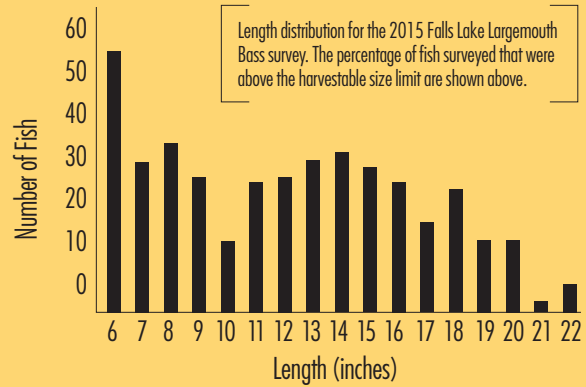
“I think about Harris as a really, really good bass pond,” Rundle said.

Favorite lures for guide Jeff Thomas of nearby Broadway, N.C., include a lipless crankbait in shallow water, a floating worm he rigs wacky style with a TroKar drop-shot circle hook and a blue/black jig’n’pig or a creature bait he flips to the bases of willow trees in spawning coves.

Fisheries biologist Jessica Baumann has helped coordinate Harris bass studies for 10 years. Her 2017 data showed 41 percent of 358 sampled fish inside the 16- to 20-inch slot limit, 50 percent below the slot, and 9 percent longer than 20 inches. Of all bass sampled, 64 percent were 14 inches or larger.

As far as age classes, in 2015, 65 of 406 sampled bass were age 5, 40 were age 2, 32 were age 4, 38 were age 6, 30 each were ages 7 and 8, 10 were 9 and 11 bass reached age 11.

“The capture ratio (catch per unit effort or CPUE) for all lakes averages 30.60 bass per

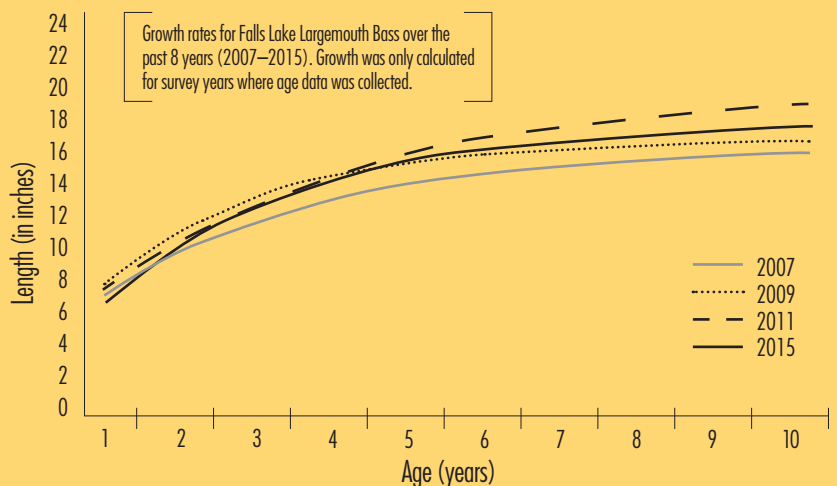


hour,” Rundle said.

Sampling in odd-numbered years, the Commission’s data showed that bass were shocked up at rates between 59 and 96 per hour, the latter a record in 2013, giving Harris double the bass of an average Piedmont lake.

## FALLS OF NEUSE LAKE

At 12,491 acres, this lake in northern Durham and western Wake counties is three times the size of Harris. It features the Neuse River channel coursing through its 26-mile trip from headwaters to dam, plenty of large and small feeder creeks, three major road crossings, five state recreation areas, one large commercial marina and nine boat ramps.



Falls' key feature for spring fishing is hard shoreline structures, from laydowns to buck brush, flooded wil- lows, rocks from pea gravel to automobile size, riprap on the sides of causeways and standing timber — plus big spawning flats.

“Our CPUE (in electro- shocking) for Falls bass in 2015 was 63 (bass per hour),” Rundle said. “The relative body score (length-to-weight ratio) is 93, which is good.”

It also compares well to Harris's 97 relative body score.

Keeper size on Falls is 14 inches, and 38 percent of bass electroshocked there were 14 inches or better. Five percent of Falls bass taped 20 inches or longer.

Falls Lake's female score was a near-perfect 99 for body condition in the 20- to 25-inch range, which bodes well for the future.

“If I were looking to catch a trophy largemouth bass, I'd start at Harris, then try Falls,” said Rundle.

Pro angler and guide Joel Richardson likes two lures that make plenty of commo- tion on the surface at the end of long casts.

“I'm not saying a spinnerbait isn't good for spawning fish, but I'll use it only where there's dirtier water, which you often get after a rain,” he said. “If I go to the back to a cove and find dingy water, that's when I'll throw the spinnerbait.”

He prefers a 3/8-ounce buzzbait in white or white/ chartreuse. If bass aren't hit- ting a buzzbait, he'll switch to a Texas-rigged lizard or a 7-inch floating trick worm in chartreuse and white.

Jordan Lake >>>

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FALLS OF NEUSE  
LAKE DATA >

## JORDAN LAKE

Part of the Haw-Cape Fear river drainage, this 13,022-acre lake also has bass numbers and sizes comparative to Harris and Falls lake.

“Bass health is great at Jordan,” said Corey Oakley, a fisheries biologist for the Commission who oversees Jordan. “At our (2015) sampling, we got 320 fish, with 13 percent longer than 18 inches and 7 percent more than 5 pounds.”

Data indicates that bass grow from 6 inches at one year to 18 inches at five years, giving them the “football” shape that’s made them famous. An 11.1-pound bass was shocked up as part of a 2010 survey.

Fifty-five of those large-mouths were a year old and 6 inches long. Five years later, survivors averaged 18 inches long. Sampling in 2016 put CPUE at 49 bass per hour, one year after sampling corralled 81 per hour.

With two main tributaries (Haw River and New Hope Creek), Jordan’s outline resembles Harris more than Falls. NC 751 crosses two eastern creeks, while US 64 transverses its center east-to-west. Many submerged road beds and one flooded railroad track provide excellent bottom structures.

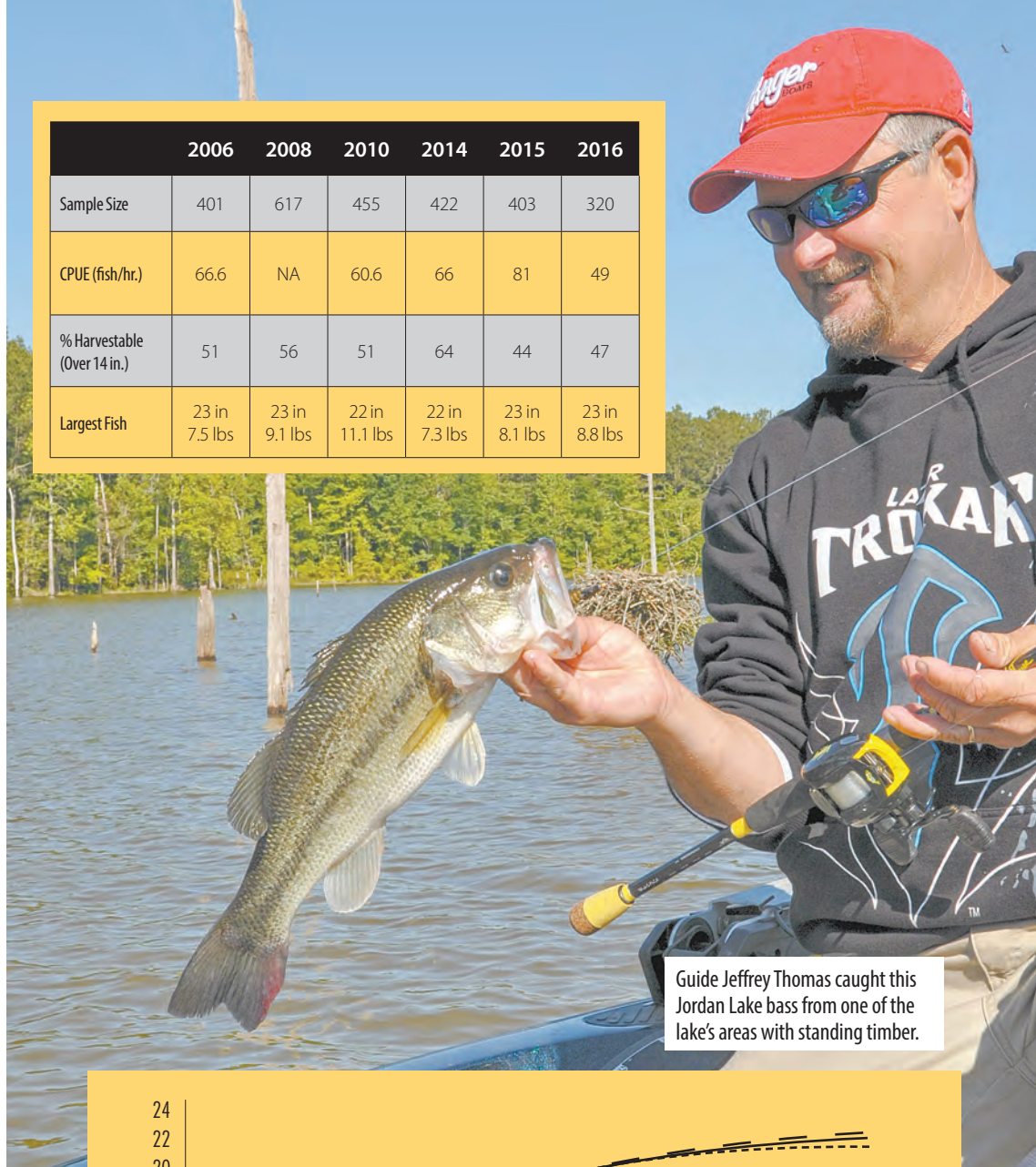
Thomas usually starts his spring days around the causeway next to the Ebenezer Church access area, along the riprapped bank.

“It’s a perfect place to find bass that will spawn in Beaver or Little Beaver creeks,” he said. “I’ll throw a Shad Rap or spinnerbait 2 or 3 feet off the riprap and parallel to it.”

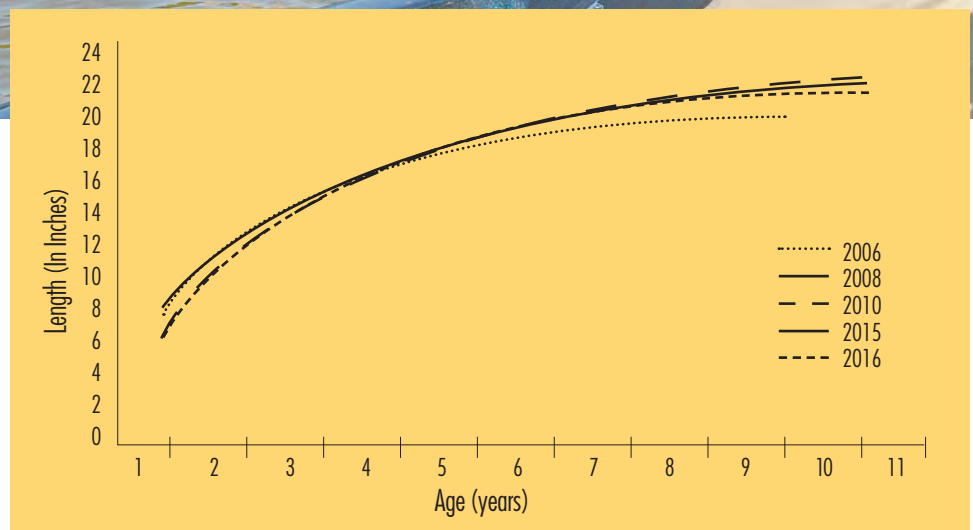
Two other productive spring spots are the shallow back of White Oak Creek with its flooded willow bushes, and tiny coves on the east side of Bush Creek as it leads to a sheltered crappie flat.

Once the water temperature reaches the mid 60s, big females will orient at willow roots in 1 foot of water and slam jig’n’pigs in those little coves. ■

	2006	2008	2010	2014	2015	2016
Sample Size	401	617	455	422	403	320
CPUE (fish/hr.)	66.6	NA	60.6	66	81	49
% Harvestable (Over 14 in.)	51	56	51	64	44	47
Largest Fish	23 in 7.5 lbs	23 in 9.1 lbs	22 in 11.1 lbs	22 in 7.3 lbs	23 in 8.1 lbs	23 in 8.8 lbs



Guide Jeffrey Thomas caught this Jordan Lake bass from one of the lake’s areas with standing timber.



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

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# Turkey Tricks

Taking a gobbler this month is on the minds of a lot of hunters across the Carolinas. Here's how the numbers line up for the spring seasons in both states, plus some tips from experts.

By Dan Kibler

Rick Small

**F**or the next four to six weeks or so, we won't be at breakfast very often. We'll fall asleep early, while you're barely finished watching Jeopardy after supper. Our fingers will be chalk-stained, and we're not even teachers. The bags under our eyes will have bags. If we're somehow outside in the backyard during any daylight hours, you might find us looking for a big, thick tree trunk to sit down against. Somebody from the office might call to ask where we are and if we're coming into work.

What! It's 9:30? Work? I'm still working a gobbler. Give it a rest. Welcome to turkey season.

South Carolina hunters will get into the woods on March 20, a few days before this magazine hits the newsstands. North Carolina hunters can take kids for a week before they get to carry their own shotguns on April 14, the latest date the season can possibly open.

North Carolina has had harvest increases the past three seasons: 5.5 percent in 2017 to a record 18,919, less than a percent in 2016 and 5.4 percent in 2015. Summer brood survey results have been less impressive, although the summer of 2017 showed a slight uptick, especially in coastal counties.

"If you look big term, I think we'll have a strong season as we have in recent years," said Chris Kreh, the upland gamebird biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. "I don't think we'll set a record like we did last year, but we should have a good season."

Kreh said a poor reproductive class in 2016 will leave fewer 2-year-old birds in the woods this year, after a relatively low jake harvest last year.



Turkeys don't disappear on bad-weather days; knowing how they react to wind and rain can put you a leg up on tagging a gobbler.

## Tricks for bad-weather birds

It has been said, and often, that a turkey would be nearly impossible to kill if its sense of smell was sharp as its keen eyesight and extra-sensory hearing.

And when Mother Nature brings wind, rain and unseasonable weather conditions to spring turkey season, hunters need to turn a page to a new chapter in their playbook to tag a tom.

Plenty of hunters will punt on nasty weather days because they can't clearly hear turkeys — or they don't want to get soaked from head to toe. But windy, rainy weather somewhat masks a turkey's most-valuable weapons: its senses. Turkeys can be vulnerable under the worst conditions and potentially susceptible to predation.

Rain or shine, diehard turkey hunter R.J. Seiler of Stokesdale, N.C., will be ready long before daylight on April 14, opening day of turkey season in the Tarheel State. He knows that while hunters yearn for nice days to do battle with old gobblers, a long-bearded bird might step out in an unexpected place when the weather doesn't cooperate.

"I concentrate on fields during rainy/windy days," Seiler said. "Turkeys always come to fields just before, during and after a rain event."

On rainy, windy days, turkeys compensate for their impaired hearing and vision by increasing their distance from both aerial and brushy cover. An open field or pasture is one of the best places for turkeys to keep a careful watch of their surroundings.

"Turkeys need the extra space to pick up on quiet, approaching predators," Seiler said.

Early in the season, turkeys are typically gathered in groups, with the exception of gobblers, who are on the hunt for available hens. That's why a flock of decoys can be a deadly technique during unfavorable weather.

"I spend a lot of time in a ground blind with decoys out in fields," he said.

Both hens and gobblers can be attracted to a flock during the spring for different reasons. But when an old longbeard breaches the wood line and sees his flock of hens riding out the storm in the company of other males (decoys), his guard will fall, and he may get to taste a copper-plated lead sandwich. ■

— Jeff Burleson



In full camouflage and tucked in against a thick tree trunk with slate call in hand, this hunter is ready to do battle with a big tom.



MWT

**T**ypically that 2-year-old cohort makes up the biggest part of our harvest, and they'll be in short supply this year, but overall, our flock is the biggest it's ever been, 265,000 birds."

South Carolina, well, that's another story. After 14 years of plummeting harvests from the 2002 season record, harvests climbed back up 10 percent in 2016 and 14 percent in 2017.

But that may not be great news. South Carolina hunters had their season expanded greatly in 2016, the same season the bag limit was cut from five gobblers to three.

Charles Ruth, the biologist who oversees wild turkeys for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, said hunter effort was up about 25 percent, turning into more gobblers being killed, despite the limit being cut. And the summer brood survey hasn't reflected any increase in the number of turkeys entering the statewide flock to bolster those kind of numbers.

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

South Carolina's best hatch over the last handful of years was 2016, which should put plenty of culpable, 2-year-old gobblers in the woods this year, but far fewer jakes.

North Carolina's best recent hatch was 2015, before a drop in 2016 and an increase last summer, which should put plenty

of jakes in the woods, fewer 2-year-old birds who are more susceptible to calling, and quite a few more older, wiser birds. ■

continues on page 34 >



**Dan Kibler** is managing editor of Carolina Sportsman. He has been writing about the outdoors since 1985.

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Trumpet calls are artificial wingbones, and they produce many of the same sounds as the original (second from right).



Pete Rogers

## Try the “other” three mouth calls

Mention mouth calls to a turkey hunter, and diaphragm calls will come to most minds.

Truth be known, three other kinds of calls are operated by mouth, and a turkey hunter’s arsenal should include all three. Here’s a brief look at each:

• **Wingbone.** The wingbone is a mouth call made from, you guessed it, the bones of a turkey’s wing. This tool has fooled turkeys for countless years, bringing them into range of waiting hunters.

Three bones — the humerus, radius and ulna — are cut, hollowed and glued together from biggest to smallest to form a tube. Held in the lips, a “kissing” sound will send a yelp through the tube.

A wingbone takes a lot of practice, but once mastered, few will argue that it

makes the most perfect yelps and clucks of all calls.

• **Trumpet.** The trumpet call is essentially an artificial wingbone, designed to create the same sounds. Due to its modern components, it can be manipulated during construction to fine-tune the sounds you’re trying to make. Trumpets have been made from every exotic wood known, as well as horn, antler, river cane, carbon, carbon fiber, aluminum, and yes, bone. One advantage trumpet calls have over wingbones is the mouthpiece is far more comfortable and customized. As a result, the trumpet is much easier to blow, which maximizes the control you have over the call.

• **Tube calls.** Tube calls may be the most misunderstood and underutilized in the arsenal. They are small, bell-shaped calls with a latex or nitrile reed stretched over the small end. The user places his upper lip across the reed and blows across it.

It is a great locator call; the volume that can be generated with a tube is unmatched. Skilled users can also purr, whine and even cluck on a tube. All turkey hunters need to own, master and use these calls regularly. If for no other reason, few birds have heard them, and for the call-shy bird, this may be the one sound that can make the difference. ■

— Pete Rogers

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## When a door **opens...**

Turkey hunters are always on the lookout for new places to hunt, and with land-management changes, good areas are always in flux.

Given the opportunity to hunt a new place for the first time, you need to make the most out of it.

By the time Tyler Chappell of Fountain Inn, S.C., opens the gate and enters a property for the first time, he's already developed strategies for hunting the specific property. Based on years of hunting and working as a professional guide, he's learned to always have a game plan.

"I get to hunt new places every year, and a learning curve for hunting land for the first time is inevitable, so having a strategy for that first hunt is essential," Chappell said.

"My mindset is the first key to success, I fully intend to kill a gobbler, so my attitude is intense and alert," he said. "I will learn a lot about the property this first trip, but it's not an excuse to not tag a gobbler."

Chappell said he'll use maps, on-line or hard copy, to preview property before he hunts.

"I study the road network for a movement strategy," he said. "I also target creek or river bottoms, open fields, food plots and check the topography for high spots for early morning listening. I'll have the basic layout in my mind of a listening point and have a clue of how to best approach a bird when I hear a gobble."

"I'll get in the woods early and select a listening spot close to the property entrance," he said. "I don't want to go too deep before dawn; I could bypass gobblers. Once it gets light, I can slip to other listening spots."

Chappell said if he doesn't get on a gobbler early, he'll use the walk-and-call approach.

"I model my movements like a silent, subtle predator and employ various calls to strike a gobbler," he said. "I always peek around road corners and bends. If I see him first, my odds go up. As I move, I'll work toward open fields, food plots, creek bottoms and flat areas or benches on the sides of hills."

Chappell (864-419-1462) said he calls every few minutes, varying from mouth, slate or box calls to imitate different hens. He doesn't get aggressive on new property, because he's simply acquiring the location of a gobbler.

"Usually, a bird will gobble, and I make my move," he said. "But if I get an aggressive response, since I am not intimately familiar with the topography, I'll set up and let him approach me. That's one of the positive factors to working along roads and around fields or open areas; I am already in an area the gobbler is willing to approach. On new property set-ups, my default tactic is to get the high ground in that immediate area and set up."

Chappell said patience is needed in new areas and mid-morning to early afternoon can be the best time to kill a gobbler.

"By mid-morning, I'll have a working knowledge of the property layout, and with subtle movement and calling, I probably haven't boogered gobblers," he said. "On new property, the mid-morning to early-afternoon hunting can be awesome. Hens have likely left the gobblers, and I can ramp up the calling a bit to strike an eager longbeard." ■

— Terry Madewell



Tyler Chappell

||| If you're hunting a new area this spring, having a good game plan is a key to getting a twist on turkeys.



Clarks Hill Lake is a great  
striper fishery, and for  
trophy fish, there's no time  
better than spring, according  
to these two guides.

# Spring into **BIG stripers**

By Terry Madewell

**G**etting your string stretched by a trophy striper can happen year-round at South Carolina's Clarks Hill Lake, aka Lake Thurmond, but if you want to boost your odds for trophy fish, go now.

Guide Tony Shepherd, 48, a retired U.S. Army paratrooper who has fished the lake since he was 16, said the late-March and April time period provides the opportunity for top-end

sized fish, with the bonus of fast-paced action.

"It's prime time for great striper and hybrid fishing," said Shepherd. "It's not uncommon to catch a 3-pound fish, followed immediately by a 30-pound striper, from the same spot. We'll sometimes have a couple of huge stripers hooked at the same time, creating a serious adrenalin surge."



## Shepherd said great fishing like this often come with a catch **to making that trophy catch.**

“When striper fishing, forage is always the key,” he said. “At this time of the year, the herring are in spawning mode, and day-to-day, their location can be anywhere from shallow shoals and points to deep water.”

Shepherd said the movement of forage creates a daily fish-finding process. When baitfish are shallow, stripers will be around them, and when they back off into deep water, the stripers will follow suit. Weather patterns and changing water temperature have a profound impact on where the forage and fish are found.

“I love the challenge and opportunity this time of year offers,” he said. “Patterns occasionally last a few days, but my mindset is (that) it will be a new game every day, and we’ll work out the process.”

Shepherd said all sorts of underwater topographic features are found at Clarks Hill, and they serve as potential striper and hybrid targets.

“Early on, a lot of the fishing is in the major creeks and tributaries, but as we progress, forage and fish move toward the main channel and deeper water,” he said.

“The shallow shoals and points where herring may spawn are great when that occurs, making those targets priority No. 1 for the stripers and hybrids. But the herring spawn isn’t an ongoing event, so it’s merely one piece of the fish-catching puzzle.”

Brad Sasser, a 36-year-old second-generation Clarks Hill guide, also touts April as a season for quality stripers, especially if they’re on a solid pattern when herring migrate shallow to spawn.

“I fish the hardbottomed, secondary points in the major creeks and tributaries because that’s where herring often prefer to spawn,” he said. “When herring move in, the stripers and hybrids will be on these points hammering the forage.”

Sasser said the exact time for spawning varies depending on water temperatures. He begins checking likely points in mid-March, but it may be into April in some years. Plus, strong fronts can shut the process down for a few days.

Pulling planer boards is a key, and the process adds significantly to the catch rate of big stripers.

“My preferred bait is live, 6-inch herring; they work great with a mid-sized planer board,” Sasser said. “Fishing shallow water, I’ll free-line herring behind the board. Using a planer board, I can stay well off of a shallow shoal or point where herring are spawning and not spook the bait or stripers. I can

effectively present the bait right on top of the fish, even in the generally very clear shallow water.”

Shepherd said other patterns are essential, because herring don’t spawn continuously, and if they’re not spawning, they’ll move toward deeper water. Other prime April targets include long, sloping points, channel ledges, humps and shallow flats near deeper water. As the season progresses, fish and forage will move toward the main channel area and out of big creeks and tributaries.

Regardless of the underwater target, he said having forage nearby remains crucial, and mapping out a daily strategy involves heavy reliance on his graph.

“Patterns are typically short-lived this time of the year,” he said. “Often, patterns change after a few hours, depending on weather patterns, but when on a good pattern, the action is fast. Occasionally, I’ll key in on something, and I’ll be able to tap into it for multiple days. With warming water as spring progresses, patterns will change, and we have to adapt.”



Terry Madevell

Shepherd said when a front blows through, stripers will often pushed out of a current pattern and suspend over much deeper water, often 45 to 50 feet deep, but stripers can still be caught fairly shallow over the deeper water, especially if the forage is suspended.

“One frequent (April) pattern is fishing relatively shallow in the water column but targeting stripers suspended over much deeper water,” he said. “At times, I may be fishing only 5 to 10 feet deep for suspended stripers, but they may be holding over 45 feet or more of water.”

“When my graphs marks a lot of stripers suspended, they’re likely taking advantage of suspended forage,” he said. “A typical example is stripers may be suspended at only 10 to 20 feet deep over 45 feet of water. In this case, I work planer boards with herring well behind them, so the bait works quite shallow. I’ll fish the boards at least 50 feet behind the boat and use the electric motor to move very slowly, because the water temperature is still fairly cool. This can be a great tactic for big stripers.”



## *Hybrid, striper interaction* **means fast action**

Guide Brad Sasser said late March and April are excellent times to catch both stripers and hybrids at Clarks Hill Lake, and that’s not necessarily a year-round happening.

“Both species are actively feeding and on the move looking for forage, particularly with herring spawning at this time of the year,” he said. “We never know what to expect in terms of the next fish, and I like the change of pace knowing we may catch a chunky hybrid on one rod and the next one may be a huge striper from the same spot.”

Sasser said this is not unusual, but at some times of the year, the catch may predominately be one species or the other. Hybrids tend to constitute much of the catch in early summer and stripers during late summer.

During April, he said, both stripers and hybrids are energetic and feeding, and they tend to home in on the same forage in the same place. The intermingling of the two species is primarily herring-driven.

“I like the April pattern, because we do catch a lot of really big stripers, but the action is fast enough with all sizes of stripers and hybrids to keep us busy,” he said. ■

**FACING PAGE:** Guide Brad Sasser runs into a lot of mixed schools of striped bass (left) and hybrid bass on April trips to Clarks Hill Lake.

## DESTINATION INFORMATION

**HOW TO GET THERE** — Clarks Hill, aka Lake Thurmond, lies downstream from Lake Hartwell and Lake Russell on the Savannah River. On the South Carolina side, the lake spans from just below Calhoun Falls down to the town of Clarks Hill. SC 28 parallels the length of the lake between these two towns. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains the majority of the public boat ramps on the lake; locate them here: [www.sas.usace.army.mil/lakes/thurmond](http://www.sas.usace.army.mil/lakes/thurmond).



**WHEN TO GO** — Late March through April is an unmatched time for catching trophy stripers and hybrids in Clarks Hill Lake.

**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Pull live herring behind planer boards or on free lines, especially when stripers are shallow, mirroring the movement of spawning herring. Look on long, tapering points. Fish may also suspend over deep water around schools of bait.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Tony Shepherd, Little River Guide Service, (706-210-3474), [www.littleriverguideservice.net](http://www.littleriverguideservice.net); Brad Sasser, Sasser’s Guide Service, 706-589-5468, [www.williamsasserfishing.com](http://www.williamsasserfishing.com); Herring Hut, Clarks Hill, S.C., 864-333-2000; Palmetto Angler, McCormick, S.C., 864-852-3373. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** — For cabins, hotel rooms and campsites, Hickory Knob State Park, [www.southcarolinaparks.com/hickoryknob/introduction](http://www.southcarolinaparks.com/hickoryknob/introduction); McCormick County Visitors Center, 864-852-3216, [mccormickscchamber.org](http://mccormickscchamber.org).

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Shepherd said fish may be at any depth in the water column, but when they see the bright flash of a herring near the surface, they'll often go into overdrive to come up and slam it.

"Finding stripers at Clarks Hill this time of year is simply a game of following and finding a moving target and doing so repeatedly, in a sense," he said. "Experience helps me a lot, but I also rely heavily on my graph, particularly in this type instance. With the graph, I can see fish and forage suspended over deep water, and I can quickly lock onto a pattern."

Many Clark Hill guides use similar tackle, but each will have their own twists. Shepherd said he prefers 7½-foot, medium-light action Ugly Stiks and ABU 6500 reels loaded with 20-pound monofilament and a 2½-foot leader of 12-pound Seaugar fluorocarbon.

"The fluorocarbon line is absolutely critical for the leader because of invisibility and abrasion resistance," he said. "I prefer small, circle hooks so the herring will have more mobility, and 1/0 Owner light circle hooks are very effective."

Sasser said the water in Clarks Hill is usually clear in April, and plays into using planer boards; they get baits away from his boat.

"Also, I like a bit of chop on the water to diffuse light; (it) makes the fish more likely to feed more aggressively," he said. "Too much wind obviously makes boat control very difficult. Some wind makes presentation easy and much more effective, but too strong creates boat-control issues, so optimum bait presentation is difficult to maintain."

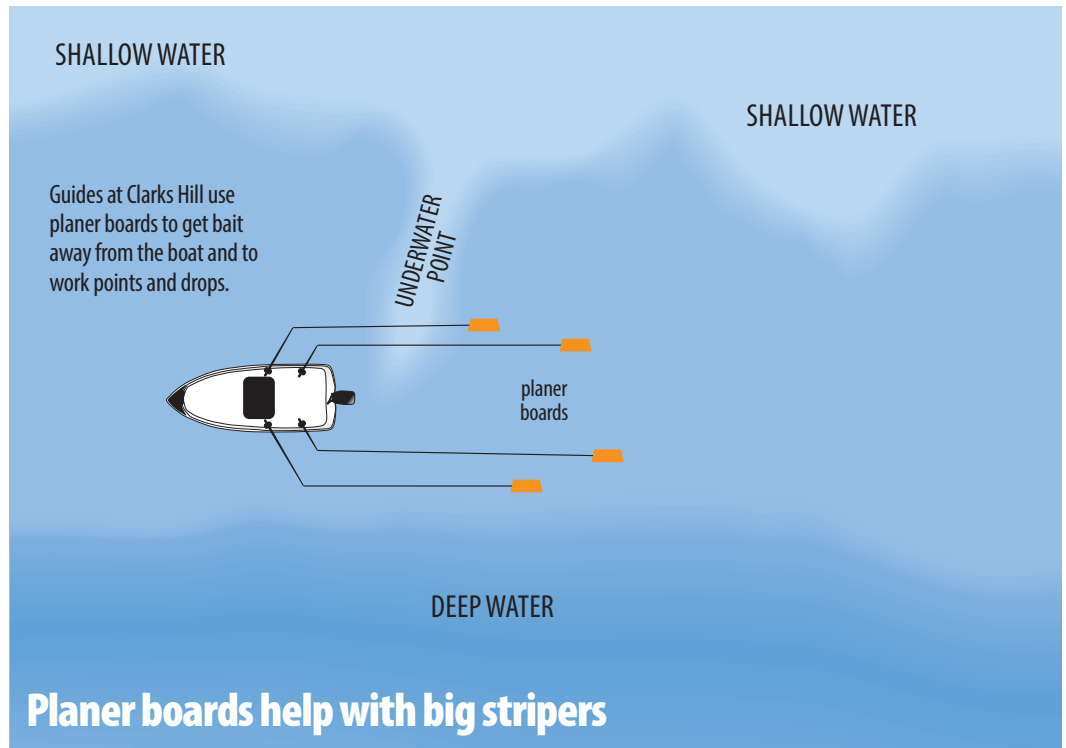
Sasser said he's on the move most of April, pulling planer boards with his electric motor. When severe wind conditions are present, he's forced to wind drift. Wind socks slow the speed of his boat, and he can still make an effective presentation.

"I'll figure out the best drift pattern in advance, based on what I see on the graph," he said. "I prefer to target a spot where I can make a long drift, and that's usually not difficult to find. Boat control is the key, and being able to use the electric motor to adjust speed and direction is preferred, but we'll still make good catches on windy days. I just have to adapt to best use the conditions to my favor."

Shepherd's summary of the most-essential things for April success is simple.

"First, begin with quality bait and keep fresh bait on the hook," he said. "Next, stay flexible in your presentation and don't assume that what happened yesterday will be mirrored today. Just because yesterday's action was wide open in only 10 feet of water doesn't mean we won't have a totally different situation today. It's April; patterns can change fast."

Shepherd said relying on his graph to determine not only where the fish are is crucial, but he uses it as a tool to deter-



mine the pattern for the day. Finally, pay attention to natural surroundings for clues. He said when he sees birds acting fishy, he'll often check that spot with the graph.

"I read bird patterns to search for forage," he said. "We know gulls are great for identifying where forage and fish are located. Loons dive down to get herring. Watch for things like that; they're good clues."

"Over the course of a day, these type things help in the fish-finding process," he said. "Sometimes, I check an area like this, the graph lights up with fish and forage, and it's game on. Then, I'll go find other similar areas and will often find more fish in similar areas without birds or other clues present."

Stripers may be a moving target during April, but these tactics can guide you to the string-stretching stripers at Clarks Hill Lake. ■



**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.

## Fresh, live bait bait is critical

Live bait is a part of most successful fishing trips for striped bass at Clarks Hill Lake this month, and guide Tony Shepherd said the quality of that bait can make or break a trip.

"Of all the things I've learned about catching stripers at Clarks Hill, keeping fresh, healthy live bait on my rigs is essential," Shepherd said. "I go to extreme lengths to keep my bait healthy. First, I simply remove any bait in my tank that appears to be stressed. Stressed herring take oxygen from other herring in the tank, and that bait has already become weaker, so I discard it immediately."

Shepherd does not recycle baits after he uses them.

"A herring previously hooked up is weakened and even if alive when I reel in, I discard it," he said. "They have less mobility and will likely not live as long. If I put it back in the tank I've found that when I catch the next bait for another rig, that weaker one is the one I frequently catch because it is less mobile."



Terry Madevell

Having plenty of fresh bait is a key to striped bass success on Clarks Hill in late March and April.

Shepherd said he only nets one herring at a time when re-rigging. By netting several to select just one, quality bait can be found, but the rest will get slightly scarred, downgrading their overall quality.

"Quality bait is imperative," he said. "I keep fresh bait on the hook all the time. After going to all the effort to find and pattern stripers, it's worth a little more effort to use the best bait possible all-day long. I've found I'll simply catch more and bigger fish with fresh bait." ■

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Anglers can target trophy sized fish at Clarks Hill by using larger baits.

## Go big if you want to target trophies

Guide Tony Shepherd said catching a trophy striper or hybrid is a distinct possibility on any given day in the spring, but he's developed a method to single out huge fish.

"It's the old big-bait-equals-big-fish concept," he said. "If I'm after a huge striper and not concerned with catching smaller fish, I select huge bait, and one local preference is a 12-inch gizzard shad. This is a bait big strippers in Clarks Hill already want, so it's a natural."

Shepherd will also use the wild herring that migrate from the ocean into the Santee Cooper lakes each spring, and these huge herring are great when used at Clarks Hill.

"A lot of these herring are in the 10-inch-plus size class," he said. "Using huge baits, I avoid bites from smaller fish, (and) that enables me to search for really big fish. We may only get a few bites — perhaps only a couple — on any given day, but the potential for a trophy fish skyrockets."

Shepherd said anglers have to develop a trophy hunting mentality, and patience is paramount to success.

"I liken this pattern to hunting for big bucks," he said. "A good analogy would be having the patience to pass up on a nice 10-point buck just to have the opportunity to get a 14-point trophy." ■



Terry Madewell

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# TOP BAITS FOR SPRING BASS

By Jeff Burleson



D.O.A.'s PT-7 topwater bait can be fished weedless across surface vegetation

Jeff Burleson



Bass heading to the banks or already there take different angler approaches and different baits. Here are some ideas for the search and spawn phases of spring fishing.

**A**s the sun thaws out the Carolinas after a chilly winter, spring is welcomed, especially by fishermen with an affinity for taming big largemouth bass in shallow water. With endless lure combinations available, there is more than one way to land a heavy stringer.

While conditions may differ from lakes in the mountains to those in lower elevations and even to coastal rivers, spring is go-time, when bass head shallow and have surpassed their normal fighting weights, and lure choices are similar.

For guide Joel Munday of Outdoor Expeditions USA in Holly Springs, N.C., prespawn fishing teak off in March in the lakes closest to his home: Falls of Neuse, Jordan and Shearon Harris.

“Our prespawn bite begins in March on our local lakes,” said Munday (919-669-2959). “It’s not until April usually when our full-fledged spawning begins, and it gets hot and heavy then all the way into May.”



**A**ccording to biologists, largemouth bass begin spawning when the water temperatures reach 63 degrees. Munday watches moon phases carefully for the best opportunities to find fish heading to the bank.

“We will have some early spawning during milder winters, but typically, the biggest movements of fish come from around the full and new moons in spring when you start getting buckets of fish moving in,” he said.

While many anglers can't wait to sight-fish for bass on the beds, some of the best fishing is long before fish make it into super-shallow waters. Munday first hits prespawn fish in deeper water adjacent to the spring bedding habitats.

“We cover some water and target depths between 12 feet and less,” he said, explaining that those depths will hold fish from early spring through early summer. “We never leave this zone alone this time of year.

“Not all the bass will go on the beds at the same time. We have waves of fish that move in all spring. We catch fish

that are either done spawning or preparing to move in to spawn. We will fish parallel to the bank and along secondary points, too.”

Covering water is a key to consistently putting prespawn fish in the boat. Munday will back away from the bank and fish water from 5 to 12 feet deep, using lures that he can cast long distances and retrieve quickly to find concentrations of fish; spinnerbaits, lipped and lipless crankbaits are his baits of choice.

“I like ½-ounce, light-wire spinnerbaits, ½- to ¾-ounce Rat-L-Traps, and crankbaits that run 7 to 12 feet like the Rapala DT series. I work the Rapalas where they grind and kick off the bottom to mimic fleeing crawfish,” said Munday, who will slow down when he finds an area holding fish and fish soft plastics, either Texas-

continues on page 46

## DREDGE THE JUNGLE WITH WEEDLESS TOPWATERS

The bass spawn invigorates anglers across the country, and while many will be pitching soft plastics to bedding fish or casting search baits in staging areas, many overlook topwater baits.

At some point during the spawn, both female and male bass will be protecting their eggs and fry on the bedding grounds. Intruders causing havoc near the surface can quickly spark aggressive behavior that can result in a topwater explosion.

Guide Joel Munday keeps his options open during the spawn, keeping a couple of surface baits tied on rods on the deck of his boat.

“We are trying to get bass to react this time of year. It's less of a feeding behavior and more of a reaction bite,” Munday said. “I will position the boat well off the beds and make long casts into the beds with poppers or buzzbaits to get them to react without thinking about it.”

While buzzbaits and topwater poppers are good choices, they can be impossible to fish in some areas where bass bed: those where vegetation blankets the surface and there's little open water around. In those situations, weedless soft-plastic lures that slide effortlessly across the top — frogs and rats are good examples — are must-have options. But baits resembling baitfish can also work, especially swimbaits fished weightless and weedless.

D.O.A.'s PT-7 is a weedless topwater lure shaped like a short cigar — embedded with rattles — that can be walked across the surface,

including vegetation.

Topwater options are proven to rise a fish to the surface during the summer, especially when frogs and snakes are dabbling in these shallow havens. But don't avoid topwater options in and around spawning areas. ■



Jeff Burtleson

Bass can be caught in various stages of the spawn in the same areas, often because there are too many fish for a limited amount of spawning habitat. **INSET:** Soft-plastics that can be fished weedless and weightless can be options for targeting bedding bass around vegetation.

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**SPRING BASS BAITS**

rigged or Carolina-rigged, in colors between naturals like green pumpkin and peanut butter to brighter colors for increased visibility.

“When targeting rocky areas, you can vary your colors a lot to mimic crawfish — like hues of orange and red. And you can use brighter colors for increased visibility to get fish feeding on search baits,” he said.

When bass head in to spawn, they will generally be in water 2 feet deep or less. But not all shallow water is created equal, and not all shallow water is suitable for spawning.

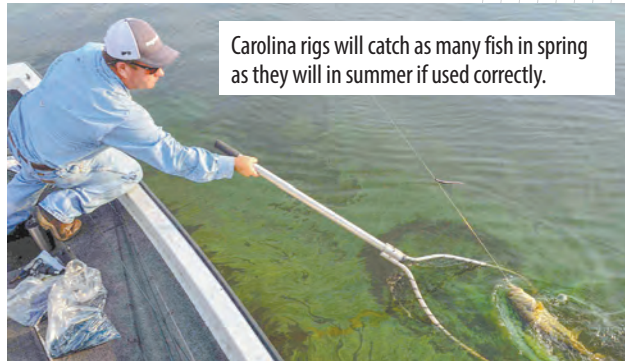
Tory McCallum of Dillon, S.C., is an accomplished angler, especially on the Santee Cooper lakes, Moultrie and Marion, and especially when fish move shallow.

“I spend most of the spring pitching soft plastics on shallow flats and blackwater

ponds around the lakes’ perimeter,” McCallum said. “Most of the time, I am fishing in huge areas of grass, lily pads and bulrushes in 2 feet or less.”

He concentrates on fish guarding beds or moving in and around shallow bedding areas. While he will sometimes fish over a dozen flats in a weekend’s time, each one has something in common besides loads of bass using them.

“I fish places with good spawning habitat that have plenty of cover



Jeff Burleson

**ENTER AND EXIT, STAGE RIGHT**

Every bedding bass that makes it onto the shallow dance floor must first enter a staging area and eventually leave by the same route.

These staging areas can be excellent opportunities to consistently put fish in the boat during the entire spawning season. One of the best things to mimic with a lure is the crawfish, and a Carolina rig pulled along the bottom will kick up mud just like fleeing crawfish.

The Carolina rig is widely used to catch a wide variety of fish from saltwater to freshwater. For anglers fishing staging areas, it is a perfect way to imitate crawfish scurrying along the bottom.

From actual crawfish imitations to finesse worms and creature-style soft baits, anglers can use a wide variety of plastics behind the sinker-swivel combination on a Carolina rig. To trigger a strike, a soft-plastic bait should float above and behind the mud trail being kicked up by the sinker. Add the clicking and clacking of the weight banging on the swivel or a plastic bead will get their attention. ■

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and a good sandy bottom,” he said. “Good habitat will hold spawning fish throughout the spring season.”

Good spawning areas will hold fish year after year and throughout the spring spawn.

“A bunch of fish will use the same area. I might catch five or six one day and then catch 15 a few days later. New fish will come in and recharge the area when others head back out to deep water after spawning. Good places hold fish and will always hold fish,” McCallum said.

While many anglers will use a wide assortment of creature baits and other soft plastics, McCallum utilizes a narrow selection of lures.

“I will use small swimbaits some early in the spring, but I love a 5-inch finesse-style worm the best on a Gamakatsu 3/0 Superline worm hook when they start bedding. It is my bread and butter,” he said.

One of McCallum’s favorites is the 5-inch D.O.A. finesse worm in avocado/red glitter and watermelon seed. He makes selective casts into places near bulrushes and larger holes in the vegetation. He then works his magic, letting the bait fall naturally into the beds; that is the key to getting a fish to bite.

“I throw past the hole and then drop it in there, letting it fall without wiggling it any. You will see your line twitch or move the other way when you get a bite,” McCallum said.

Fish are typically bedding in these areas and eat whatever invades their spawning space.



Waves of bass will move into shallow, spawning areas throughout the spring, replenishing active areas on a regular basis. Find one, and you’re in great shape.

During the spring, bass are eating and eating well. For the best results, anglers should concentrate on the right stuff to make it count when a true lunger is on deck. ■



Jeff Burlison 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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**B**ruce Trujillo looked at a dozen boats bobbing for position in the water around him. Choosing a path, he flipped a couple of Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow deep divers in the boat's wake and began trolling for Atlantic bonito.

"When everyone is jockeying for position, they scatter the fish and run them deep," he said. "If I can't see them on top, I troll to find them."

Trujillo's target on plenty of April and early May trips, the Atlantic bonito, is a tasty, football-shaped and football-

sized member of the tuna family that makes an annual run along the coast of both Carolinas in early spring.

Marked by a series of dark stripes on the back above the lateral line, they are often confused with false albacore — which have worm-like markings on their backs and are generally considered inedible — and the skipjack tuna, which has dark stripes below its lateral line. And they are generally the first pelagic fish to show up in these waters, giving anglers plenty to do after a long winter at the dock.

Trujillo, who runs Tight Loop Charters (910-675-0252) out of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., calls Yo-Zuri's deep-diving plugs his "search and destroy" lures. Besides bonito, he said they will catch Spanish and king mackerel that may lurk in the same areas; one of his favorites are the 5-Mile Boxcars (AR 372) out of Masonboro Inlet, and he'll catch them at the 10-Mile Boxcars (AR 376), the Mears Harris Reef (AR 370) and the Phillip Wolfe Reef (AR 378).

"You can't fish a Yo-Zuri wrong," he said. "I put out four of them: one long, one medium, one short and one in the prop wash. I use 40-pound fluorocarbon leader, not wire, because they are leader-shy like other tunas. They are enigmatic — here one day and there the next."

Trujillo also keeps close at hand spinning lures with metal casting spoons tied on in case the bonito surface. They may only come up for a minute or two, leaving you just enough time to make a cast or two, before they head back below the surface.

*Atlantic bonito don't give fishermen along the Carolinas' coastline much time to target them, but their annual spring run shouldn't be missed by any nearshore angler.*

BEAT THE

# BONITO BLAST

By Mike Marsh

Mike Marsh



**J**amie Rushing of Seagate Charters (910-232-9693) fishes many of the same areas as Trujillo, but he'll venture farther northward to the areas just off Topsail Beach.

"Atlantic bonito arrive around the second week in April and stay through Mother's Day, when the water temperature hits about 67 degrees," he said. "I fish the artificial reefs off Wrightsville and Topsail, as well as Sheepshead Rock and High Rock off Fort Fisher, where they often mix with big Spanish mackerel. On those hard bottoms, they eat at first light. You have to go early and look for birds working baitfish schools to find them. On cloudy days, they stay up a little longer."

If the fish are on top, Rushing casts a Sea Striker casting jig. If the winds are up and the seas are heaving, with waves making fish hard to find, he casts or jigs some heavy metal.

"If you are using one of the heavy, metal lures like a Diamond Jig or Stingsilver, you should buy a model with a single hook," he said. "If it has a treble hook, you should replace it. Treble hooks are harder to remove and are not as strong as a single hook. The single hook also results in more reliable hookups, with better odds of landing the fish."

Like Trujillo, Rushing sometimes trolls Rapala and Yo-Zuri lures. He also fishes with fly tackle, casting Deceivers, Clousers and jelly minnows on an intermediate line to surface-fish feeding. When casting a fly, it is important to use a heavy mono-filament leader, not wire, because fish are leader shy.

"If they go deep, I add a piece of lead-core line to help the fly sink," he said. "You might find multiple schools at different depths, and the lead-core will let you fish down to 50 feet."

Jay Baisch of Fishfull Thinking Guide Service in Murrells Inlet, S.C., said the Atlantic bonito run begins in late April at Little River Inlet.

"They might stick around until June," said Baisch (843-902-0356). "I find them in 20 to 25 feet of water, usually within 2 miles of the beach. When they are churning up the surface on a calm day, they are not hard to find. They are really boat-shy, so I put the throttle in neutral and cut off the engine to let the boat drift into them."

His favorite lure is a Got-Cha plug. He exchanges the treble hooks with the same No. 2 short-shank hooks he uses as nose hooks on king mackerel rigs.

"The Got-Cha is heavy and aerodynamic, so you can really rip it out there 100 yards," he said. "You have to reel it so fast you think nothing can catch it. The minnows they are eating are so much smaller than the lure, that you have to draw a reaction strike. Slow retrieves equal short strikes, meaning you will miss a lot of fish."

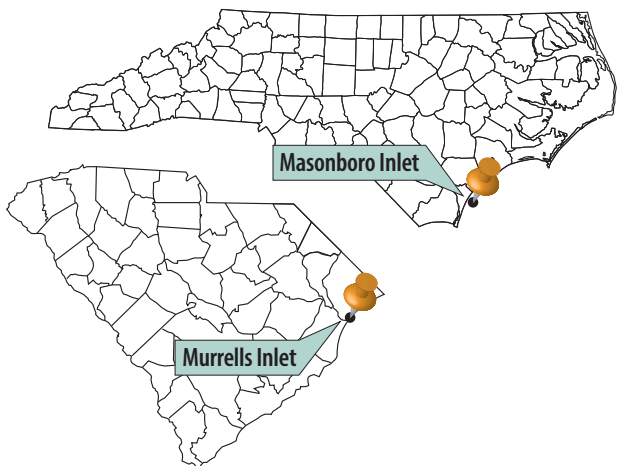
Baisch fishes at the Paradise (PA-09) and Pawley's Island (PA-11) reefs. On the way out, he begins looking for fish by running about a half-mile off the beach.

"I look for the birds feeding on glass minnows," he said. "The fish disappear and come back up. They corral a school of glass minnows and run them to the top, then go down and run them up again. If you watch them carefully,

Atlantic bonito are distinguished from false albacore or skipjack tuna by the dark, wavy lines on their backs.



Mike Marsh



you can run the boat in the direction they are heading to get in front of them. When they come up again, you should be in position to cast. You may only get in one or two casts before they go down again.” ■



Mike Marsh is a freelance outdoor writer in Wilmington, N.C. His latest book, *Fishing North Carolina*, and other titles, are available at [www.mikemarshoutdoors.com](http://www.mikemarshoutdoors.com).

**PICK A PINK LURE**  
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“Atlantic bonito arrive around the second week in April and stay through Mother’s Day, when the water temperature hits about 67 degrees.”



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Pink lures, like this Yo-Zuri deep diver, are favorites of Atlantic bonito.

# PICK A PINK LURE

"An Atlantic bonito doesn't care about the color of a lure as long as it's pink," said Capt. Bruce Trujillo.

Of course, these aggressive fish will strike other colors, with his back-up choice being blue/silver. However, various shades of pink, perhaps in combination with flashy silver or gold are the mainstays of many anglers who seek Atlantic bonito.

When casting a fly, it is important to use a

heavy monofilament leader, not a wire leader, because the fish are leader shy.

Sea Striker's Got-Cha plugs are heavy, tube-shaped lures; a hot pink head and gold body is the appropriate bonito color. The Got-Cha is a go-to lure for anglers who make long-distance casts to surface feeding fish from boats. If a school of Atlantic bonito sounds and heads deep, an angler can troll around the area with the same Got-cha, using it as a search lure to



Mike Marsh

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locate the fish.

HR Tackle Stingsilvers are other casting spoons. Made of heavy metal, these all-purpose lures can be cast long distances or jigged when the fish are deep. They are especially effective when the schools of Atlantic bonito are sparse or spooky. They also work exceptionally well on windy days when the angler must cast into the wind or cannot chase down a fast-moving school with a boat due to heavy wave action. ■

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# Make mine a **MirrOlure**

By Jerry Dilsaver



**F**ish can be caught any number of ways, but MirrOlures hold a special place with a number of saltwater fishermen, especially those who spend time in inshore waters.

If anyone knows these lures, it's Lee Parsons, a guide from Wilmington, N.C., who is often referred to be his peers as the "MirrOlure Guru." He's not only proficient in their use, but he's got an innate knowledge that allows him to rattle off model numbers and colors better than most folks remember what they had for breakfast.

But as far as basics go, it's a matter of picking the correct style and size for the task at hand, be it speckled trout, redbfish, Spanish mackerel or anything else with fins.

"The shape, size and weight are the important factors in choosing any lure, especially a MirrOlure," Parsons said. "We've always heard to match the hatch, and it's really that simple. The shape and size are used to match the bait the fish are feeding on at that particular time, and the weight gets it to the right level in the water column."

"Don't get me wrong, color is important, too ... but the size and shape will be recognized by the fish first," Parsons said. "Once you've got that matched, you can worry about color. Sometimes, color doesn't appear as important, and they will hit several colors. However, trout sometimes can get real finicky and only hit one color. I've even seen their preferred color change while I was fishing."

Two of Parsons' favorite lures are the MirrOdine 17 or 27MR. The 17 size is for earlier in the year when baitfish are small, and the 27MR becomes a better option as the bait grows. He likes greens and golds in clear water; when the water is cloudy, he switches to a lure with silver sides that will flash and help the lure get noticed.

Early in the fall trout season, Parsons uses mainly the 52M and Catch 2000 models. When the fall mullet migration begins, he uses the Catch 2000 because it suspends in 3 feet or less water, which is usually where the mullet are and where the predators are stalking them. The Catch 2000 also casts a little farther, which can be helpful at times, especially when fish are skittish.

When the bait moves deeper, Parsons

switches to the 52M or 52MR Series — the "R" designates a rattle in the body of the lure — which sink faster. The TT Series profile looks similar to the 52M Series, but it has a wider profile that helps it sink a little deeper when fished against a current.

How deep and fast will the lures sink, and how far should you let them sink before starting the retrieve? Parsons said every model, sinking or suspending, is different.

"A 52 sinks like a rock," he said. "A 17 is a slow sinker. The best thing you can do is

ally catches a fish or two on its own.

"Everyone likes catching fish on topwaters, and I'm no different," Parsons said. "I stay with smaller lures, like the Catch Jr. and MirrOmullet when the water is calm. When the wind picks up and the water gets choppy, I switch to larger lures with a higher-pitched rattle, like the She Dog and She Pup. Sometimes, the pitch of the rattle can be everything, so if what you're throwing isn't working, try changing that first."

continues on page 60 >



Redfish are a favorite target for many inshore saltwater fishermen, and topwater MirrOlures are usually the ticket to draw their strikes.

drop one down beside the boat and see what that particular lure does," he said. "Or you can let out a couple of feet of line and stick your rod tip down in the water and see how fast the lure sinks."

Parsons also likes the L29MR MirrOlip, a lipped diving lure with a rattle that dives to 5 or 6 feet. MirrOlure recently added the L30MR, a little smaller and a little lighter but with a larger lip. With it, Parsons said he has hit the bottom at 9 feet. One trick he uses a lot is to trail a L29MR behind his boat in the current. It will dive a little and swim very lazily unless the current is really strong, and it usu-

**TIP!**

Lee Parsons said 99.9 percent of the strikes he gets when he's fishing a MirrOlure is when the lure is not moving.

"When you think you're fishing slow enough, slow down some more. This is an old man's lure, and you need to fish it that way."

**NO NEED FOR SPEED;  
SLOW IS GOOD**

**Lee Parsons** emphasizes that many fishermen fish too fast, especially with stickbaits like MirrOlures. His retrieve includes plenty of twitches and pauses, with current providing most of the forward movement. The idea is not to see how much water can be covered, but to entice fish to strike.

"Most of the strikes come during the pause," Parsons said. "Some folks don't think that because they first feel the fish when they start to twitch the lure again. That fish actually hit the lure while it was paused, but the fisherman didn't feel it. Fishermen will have more success by fishing slowly and watching the line when the lure is paused. With braided line, the line will twitch slightly when a fish strikes, even if the line isn't tight. Let the lure move naturally at the speed of the current, and that tick in the line might be all the notice you get at the time of the strike."

Parsons said that with clean or smooth bottoms, he sometimes pauses long enough to allow the lure to reach the bottom and rest there momentarily. He said that, in some places, the current actually pushes it along the bottom. The idea is, a natural-looking lure moving along the bottom at current speed, maybe kicking up a little sand or mud, looks like an injured and easy-to-catch baitfish. ■

You can't retrieve a MirrOlure too slowly; most strikes come when the bait is not moving.

Jerry Dilsaver

“**I** don't think color is all that important for topwaters,” Parsons said. “Fish will be looking up at it, and the belly will always be dark against the sky. The most-important thing about color with topwaters is that you can see it clearly to be sure you are walking it. If the line is tangled and it isn't walking, it won't catch, so you're far better off to get it in, clear the tangle and make another cast.”

Parsons doesn't fish MirrOlures for red drum except for topwaters. He said drum hit sub-

surface lures hard and suck them deep, which makes them difficult to release without injury.

“Red drum are lots of fun to catch on topwaters,” Parsons said. “Red drum have ... to roll at least to their side to hit a surface bait. Usually you can see them rise and charge the bait as they turn on their side to strike it. You have to wait until you feel them to set the hook, and many times they miss and are snagged outside their mouth. Even when they get the lure in their mouth, they usually only get one hook and are fairly easy to release.”

Parsons said he has seen several trout swim past a bait and slap it with their tail to stun it before eating it, so when you have a missed strike, pause or move the lure very slowly, like it is stunned, and the trout may come back.

Parson likes to tie MirrOlures on using a small loop, as it gives lures the most-realistic action. His grandfather taught him the loop; he said it closely resembles the No-Slip Loop Knot.

Mark Dickson of Shallow Minded Inshore Charters in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., uses MirrOlures the same ways that Parsons does, but also in several ways — and for several species — that might be considered unconventional.

**TIP!**

When it comes to picking colors of MirrOlures, Lee Parsons said it's often not a matter of matching the color of baitfish, but of picking a color that can be easily seen in the water you're fishing. Variations in the color or stain of water you might be fishing are common. But don't confuse color and stain. Many coastal rivers have dark, tannin-stained waters, but they're clear. Ask “How far down can you see the lure?” when you drop it in the water. It's clear if you can see the lure 4 to 5 feet deep. In water that's stained, visibility can be less than a foot.



If a trout slaps at a MirrOlure and misses, don't move it, as the trout may return for another strike.

continues on page 62 >



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## MATCH THE HATCH

Guides Lee Parsons and Mark Dickson emphasize choosing lures that are the same body shape, size and color of the dominant forage in an area. Several of the Catch 2000 lures, plus the 52M and MR, TT and MirrOmullet, have the general body shape as a mullet, and all topwater MirrOlures have mullet shapes. The different sizes allow matching the size of the mullet that trout, drum and other predators are eating.

The 9MR and 19MR MirrOglass and MirrOminnow are slender lures that resemble glass minnows and silversides. The 9MR is smaller, with the 19 MR being an inch longer and more appropriate later in the year.



Jerry Dilsaver

Pick a MirrO lure by size and shape to match baitfish in an area. From top, 14, 17 and 27 sizes.

The 14MR, 17MR, 18MR, 27MR and 37MR MirrOdine Series lures are shaped like small menhaden or herring. These are mainly suspending twitchbaits that sink down about 24 inches, depending on salinity. However, the 18MR, named the Heavy-Dine, and the 37MR are heavier and sink faster and deeper. There are four sizes, with the 14MR being the smallest at 2¼ inches and ¾-ounce, and the 37MR being the largest at 3¾ inches and 1 ounce. The 17MR is the most popular for speckled trout in the Carolinas at 2½ inches and ¾-ounce. The Heavy-Dine is the same size, but weighs an additional ¼-ounce to sink faster.

The Soft-Dine series are soft versions of the MirrOdine lures. The SD is the same size and weight as the 17MR and the SDXL is lightly larger than the 27MR. Soft-Dine lures sink a little deeper than the MirrOdine series. ■

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**W**e have good populations of ladyfish in several locations, plus, there are usually good schools of bluefish, Spanish mackerel and more just outside the

(Little River) jetties,” said Dickson (843-458-3055). “One of my favorite things is to get these fish fired up and let the fishermen have at it. All of these fish are feeding on a mixture of shrimp, mullet minnows and peanut menhaden, and the action can be non-stop. We simply match the hatch for what they’re feeding on, and there are MirrOlures in just the right sizes, shapes and colors, regardless of the time of the year.”

Dickson positions his boat so he can cast upcurrent of riprap and docks that hold ladyfish. The MirrOlure Lumo Series, of with the smaller 14MR and 17 MR MirrOdines in the shape of a small menhaden, and the 9MR and 19

MR MirrOglass and MirrOminnow in slender, minnow shapes rarely make a pass through feeding ladyfish unscathed. Often the smaller sizes are better, but almost any size is fair game.

Another option for Dickson is to fill his baitwell full of small menhaden and anchor off the end of one of the jetties. He’ll thump a few menhaden on the boat’s deck to stun them, then throw them over the side. If there are any predators close by, it won’t be long before they are making small explosions in the water as they attack and eat the stunned baitfish.

“Once we get the area chummed up a little with all the live baits, the feeding fish get really aggressive,” he said. “They strike with abandon and will pile onto the smaller 14 and 17 size Lumo Series MirrOdines. When baits are larger in the fall, they’ll hit the 27 size, too.”

Monofilament or fluorocarbon leaders are fine for ladyfish, bonito and false albacore, but they don’t stand a chance with the sharp teeth of bluefish and Spanish mackerel. Dickson uses a short piece of 11- or 17-pound Surflon Micro Ultra 19-strand soft wire when these toothy critters are around to make a leader for the toothy critters. This isn’t one of the primary uses for MirrOlures, but MirrOdines, but they’re the perfect shape and do a lot of the work themselves, naturally suspending in the strike zone, with an occasional twitch that creates action the feeding fish can’t resist. ■



Guide Lee Parsons catches a lot of speckled trout on MirrOlures of different sizes, shapes and colors.



Jerry Diltsaver, a former SKA national champion and USAA Angler of the Year, is a full-time freelance writer based out of Oak Island, N.C.



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Filling a big, offshore trolling reel like this one with braided line would be prohibitively expensive, and the braid would have several drawbacks in trolling situations.

## TO BRAID, OR NOT TO BRAID

BRAIDED LINE HAS MANY ADVANTAGES, BUT GOOD, OLD MONO HOLDS ITS OWN

**B**raided fishing line is a mainstay among anglers, but this product has only gained popularity in the lifetime of many people reading this. Most never heard of braided line at younger ages, but they're now using it regularly and would feel lost without it during certain fishing situations. But for all its good qualities, it's not always the best line to use.

In speaking with saltwater guides and everyday anglers across the Carolinas, it's evident that braided line has its place, but monofilament is still the choice of many for certain applications — and not just because it's a less-expensive alternative.

Chance Davies of Georgetown, S.C., spent decades in Florida guiding inshore and offshore fishermen, and he prefers monofilament over braid “in all but the most mundane fishing situations.”

“If you're trolling, monofilament is the way to go. If you're fishing hard structure, monofilament is the way to go. If you're catching anything that requires you to

grab the line to boat a fish, monofilament is the only choice. If you're using small baitcasting reels, give me monofilament all-day long,” he said.

More often than not, Davies said the main reason is that monofilament has some stretch that braid simply doesn't offer.

“If you're trolling with braided line and hook a 60-pound tuna, something is going to break. It's that simple,” he said. “More often than not — and hopefully for everyone involved — it's the braided line that's going to break. There is a great degree of stretch that mono can take without breaking. And you better have that ability to stretch when a big fish decides to take your lure in any direction other than what you want.

“It's the same when fishing reefs. If you hook a grouper and he runs through a

Toby Grantham was using a long shock leader of monofilament when he hooked this scamp grouper off the coast of Morehead City, N.C.



Brian Cope

Brian Cope

hole in the reef, if you try muscling him up, you're going to pin him against the roof of the reef, and the sharp edges of coral will either cut your braid like a razor blade, or you'll break your line or rod. With mono, the line will stretch, allowing the fish to settle down and hopefully swim out on his own or with a little pressure from you. Braided line is useless in that situation."

But braid does have many advantages, and Davies said anglers can get the best of both worlds when using braid and mono together.

"Using braid allows anglers to spool much more line onto their reels, and when I'm using big trolling reels or even reels that I'm jigging with, I will use braid, as long as I use a long, shock-top leader of monofilament," he said.

And when he says long, he means long. He insists on using at least 100 yards of mono on his reels.

"On my jigging rods, the braided line never even touches the water. When it's time for new line, I just replace the 100 yards of mono and leave the braid. It's very economical, lets me fit plenty of line on the reel, and gives me the shock absorption I need," he said.

## BRAID'S TIME

When fishing inshore, Davies doesn't mind fishing braided line. He often uses a fluorocarbon leader, especially when fishing for flounder, redfish or speckled trout. With little structure to worry about, he said the fluorocarbon gives him more than enough shock absorption for these fish, and he likes being able to fit so much of the thin-diameter line on his 2000-series spinning reels.

"I also like how far you can cast with braid, which doesn't come into play when trolling or jigging. But it can help tremendously when casting to spooky redfish or in keeping your distance from a known flounder hole," he said.

When fishing for sheepshead around bridge pilings, Davies even uses braided line straight to the hook.

"Sheepshead don't seem to be line shy, so they bite just as well. And the braid helps the hook penetrate their hard mouths quickly, and lets me pull them away from the pilings in short order," he said.

But Davies does avoid braided line in one instance, even when fishing inshore.

"When I'm using a big slip float, I use mono. It's always more difficult to get braid to slide through as easily as mono does. I always have to add more weight when using braided line, so I stick with mono there," he said. ■

## KNOTS FOR BRAID:

Braided lines, particularly when they are new, have a slick finish, and many knots commonly tied by fishermen, including the improved clinch, tend to slip, so they're not the ticket for a knot tying braid to terminal tackle. The Palomar knot ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=10c3Q6-BnZ0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10c3Q6-BnZ0)) is a great choice, because it will not slip. The Berkley Braid knot is a similar knot that relies on loops to snug down the line in a fashion similar to snelling.



**Brian Cope** of Borden, 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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David Fritts

Soft baits catch plenty of shallow, spring largemouths, but they're not the only way to go.

# THREE GO-TO HARD BAIT

EVEN WHEN THEY'RE SHALLOW, BASS WILL READILY HIT THESE LURES

**M**ost people who know bass fishing understand that I feel most comfortable when I've got a crankbait tied on. So when bass go really shallow in the spring, that makes things tough on me, but anyone who likes fishing crankbaits can still catch plenty of fish.

I don't like to sight-fish for spawning bass, so I usually rule that out as one of my main strategies. What I'm looking for are fish that are moving in to a pocket to spawn but aren't quite there yet. They might be shallow, but they're still feeding, they're about as big as they're ever going to get, and you can catch them.

This month, I'm going to start on secondary points and fish all the way back into spawning pockets. I'll throw to little stumps I see, but you're going to catch plenty of fish where you don't see any kind of cover. One thing I do like to see is a shell bottom. I think they'll hold fish.

Typically, if I'm fishing anywhere in the

Carolinas in April, I'm going to have one of three baits tied on; I've caught plenty of bass on all three, even when bass have made a big move to the shallows.

The first bait I have tied on is a Berkley Digger 3.5. If you cast this bait out and retrieve it with your rod tip up, it will dive about 2 feet deep. If you retrieve it with your rod tip down, you might get it down 4 or 5 feet.

The Digger has a hard action, which is important, but size is the key. If you can find fish that have moved shallow, but they're not locked on the bed yet, you can

throw it around pockets, and fish will bite it because it's just the right size.

I'll fish it on a 6-foot-8, Lew's David Fritts Perfect Crankbait Rod with a BB1 reel with a 5-to-1 retrieve ratio. That gets you 21 inches per turn of the reel. I like to fish it on 8-point test in 100-Percent Trilene Fluorocarbon. I like Big Money color, which is blue/chartreuse/white.

The slow retrieve ratio is important because you don't want to be retrieving this bait anything but slow. Fish aren't going to charge a bait very hard at this point, so your retrieve needs to be fairly slow.

## THE LIPLISS OPTION

My second-favorite spring crankbait is a lipless crankbait, a Berkley War Pig. It comes in ¼-, ½- and ¾-ounce sizes; I'll stick with the smaller one, the ¼-ounce. You might experiment with colors, but chartreuse is a really good color in April.

One thing you need to do is find out



Digger 3.5



Lipless War Pig

whether you need to wind the bait fast or barely crawl it across the bottom. Sometimes fish won't charge a bait fast. The other thing you might try is yo-yoing the bait. When you're fishing this shallow, you're not trying to jerk it 3 feet off the bottom. You just want to barely raise the rod tip and get the bait to move up, then let your back down so the bait sinks a little.

I'll fish this bait on my cranking rod in 6-foot-8 or 7-foot medium-heavy action. I'll use the same reel, but what I'm spooling on the reel will be different, depending on how heavy the cover you're fishing is. Most of the time fish will be on little pieces of cover in April, but a lot of times, they'll just be on the bank, between beds. I don't want any stretch, so I'll fish it on 10-pound, low-stretch Sensation mono.

## JERK ON THIS

The third hard bait I really like to fish in April is a Cutter 90 jerkbait, which is a smaller jerkbait, again, a perfect size for April fish.

You're not fishing it the way you'd normally fish a jerkbait, cranking it down several feet and twitching it along. I like to fish it the way you'd fish an old No. 13 Rapala. The bait will suspend if you get it down, but it will float, too. You can let it sit on top and just barely twitch it, or you can wind it very slowly.

This time, I'll be fishing a graphite rod, like a Lew's TT1, medium-action, either 6-foot-6 or 7-foot. I want a little quicker retrieve to get the bait back when I'm done with one cast and ready for another, so I'll go with a BB1 with a 6.4-to-1 retrieve ratio. And I want to spool on 8-pound Sensation mono. ■



Cutter 90 jerkbait



Eric Engbretson

### SETTING UP SHOP:

Largemouth bass will spawn in just inches of water, barely enough to cover their backs, down several feet. Generally, they won't stay on their beds very long, so targeting them in slightly deeper water, heading back into pockets, where bass may stage and spend a week or so waiting for nature to take its course.



David Fritts is a 61-year-old pro bass fisherman from Lexington, N.C. He won the 1993 Bassmasters Classic championship and the 1997 FLW Tour Championship, and he was the 1994 BASS Angler of the Year. He is sponsored by Ranger boats, Evinrude outboards, Lew's, Minnkota, and Berkley.

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Jeff Burleson

**P**ests challenge farmers and food-plot developers every time seeds hit the dirt. Weeds, grasses and other competing vegetation are the chief pests that will ruin a food plot's success.

But herbicides can be the farmer's best friend, and the pre-emergence varieties are worth their weight in gold for developing a luscious, warm-season food source for wildlife.

Herbicides are critical for crop production; few crops are produced without the use of these chemicals. From pre-planting treatments to mid-season application, herbicides are used every day in the farming community. Without delving too deep into college-level chemistry, herbicides are chemical assailants that attack cellular processes within plants. Unwanted plants will quickly die when you disrupt a critical cellular process: blocking cell division, chlorophyll destruction, inhibiting mitotic processes

within cell walls, blocking electron transfer, blocking critical enzymes, inhibiting photosynthesis and disrupting protein synthesis — just to name a few.

Acreage slated for food plots will have millions of dormant seeds embedded in the soil and organic matter scattered along the ground. When soil is disturbed by plowing, a selection of these seeds will germinate and begin to grow aggressively, often out-competing planted food-plot seeds. Herbicides must be used to control these competing pests, especially during the spring planting season.

Pretreatment of food plots is always a good plan for establishing warm-season food plots, and there are several pre-plant herbicides available to inhibit non-target vegetative growth.

Before selecting a pre-emergent herbicide, the targeted food-plot seed must be selected first, because pre-emergent herbicides are labeled to control certain types of plant species, and one needs to

make sure that the selected food-plot seed isn't one of the species affected by the herbicide. Pre-emergent herbicides label the plants they control and what plants are benefited. The best action is to examine the herbicide's label to properly understand what food-plot seed will benefit versus what they control.

In addition to choosing the right chemical, careful examination of the product label is recommended to determine the adequate application rate and the types of plants affected by the chemical. Herbicide labels are comprehensive, with a listing of plants controlled by the herbicide. Additionally, labels will often list crops where the herbicide is labeled for use, as well as the recommended dosage rate per acre. Also, labels will list dangers and necessary human-safety precautions for handling.

For most spring food plots in which legumes and corn are planted, an application of either Prowl H2O

(Pendimethalin), Treflan EC (Trifluralin), Dual Magnum (S-Metolachlor) and/or Pursuit DG (Imazethapyr) can produce effective results for the warm-season planting cycle. In some cases, these chemicals can be mixed to produce optimum results. Just make sure to check the labels to make sure the proper pre-emergence herbicide is selected.

If used correctly, herbicides will have a dramatic effect on plot productivity and should always be incorporated into a food-plot program.

## CALL IN THE DUCKS

A productive duck hole can be anything from a beaver pond, waterfowl impoundment or a greentree reservoir. Throughout the winter, ducks flood into the Carolinas looking for energy-rich groceries. Ducks will travel extensive distances to feed on a daily basis. Having a productive meal sitting under a blanket of water will trigger guns a'blasting at sunrise. And spring is prime time to start preparing for next year's duck season in green tree reservoirs and beaver ponds.

Duck hunters in the Carolinas get the opportunity to take a mixed bag



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## MEASUREMENTS COUNT

Just like fertilizers and lime treatments, herbicides are necessary tools to make food plots shine and produce bumper results. Yet herbicides must be used at the correct concentration to receive maximum benefits. And too much juice will result in crop stunting and even death.

One of the most-common issues with herbicide application is the poor understanding of the capabilities of the application device. A wide range of herbicide applicators can be used from backpack and hand sprayers to vehicle-mounted boom sprayers. Herbicides must be applied at the recommended rate per unit of area. In addition to correctly identifying the area of application, the applicator should note the actual width of coverage and the dispensary rate on their equipment. Using a tank filled with plain water will give the applicator the ability to calibrate his or her spray equipment and completely understand the effective spray coverage before using costly herbicides.

throughout both states. However, in most years, wood ducks make up the majority of the harvest, and wood ducks will generally penetrate flooded forests and beaver ponds for their daily grub.

Wood ducks eat invertebrates and an extensive selection of vegetative matter, including red and white oak acorns,

with red oaks being preferred 2-to-1 over white oak acorns. Wood ducks rely on acorns as their primary food source during the winter. Greentree reservoirs and beaver ponds are prime locales for mature oaks with potential mast production for wintering ducks.

continues on page 70

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# GREENER PASTURES

continued

While greentree reservoirs provide great winter feeding opportunities, they must be drained from March and November to prevent the trees from dying and encourage acorn production.

Beaver ponds are also great places for duck hunters, and drawing down the water in these impoundments during the growing season will expose the bare soil and stimulate native grass and forb production. Water levels in beaver ponds can be controlled with a Clemson pond leveler — essentially a 20-foot section of PVC pipe and a couple of elbow joints buried at the base of the beaver dam.

Water in greentrees and beaver ponds should be drawn down, but not entirely, during the early spring. From early March into May, newly-hatched ducklings need water and cover near duck boxes and natural nest sites to reduce predation before flight-ready status has been achieved. Additionally, beavers may relocate as well if water levels drop too low and they are unsuccessful at restoring water coverage.

Wood ducks will travel 20 to 30 miles to feed on a daily basis. If landowners can enhance the native feeds on their properties



Drawing down waterfowl impoundments and beaver ponds will stimulate the growth of native plants.

Jeff Burleson

to premium levels, they can potentially draw wood ducks from all over the county and even from the surrounding counties where feeding habitat in other counties is deficient. ■



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

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## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

Some tremendous territory is available this month to bass fishermen in kayaks, like Lake Moultrie's Hatchery area, which regularly produces trophy largemouth bass.



# APRIL BASS FISHING IS TOUGH TO BEAT

PADDLING A KAYAK CAN GET YOU INTO SOME AWESOME AREAS THIS MONTH FOR LARGEMOUTHS

**A**pril is the top month for the bass spawn in both Carolinas, and there is nothing like setting the hook on a sho'nuff bucketmouth from a small plastic boat. The beauty of kayak bass fishing is that it's hard to find a body of freshwater in either Carolinas that doesn't hold bass.

Likewise, it's easy to find a way to drag a kayak off the back of your vehicle and, in no time at all, be casting to bass on a warm April day.

Sharing water with larger power boats presents a few challenges to kayak anglers. No. 1 is safety. Always wear your PFD and always have some way to signal other boats that you are on the water. Fortunately, the majority of kayak bass fishing in April is done in the backs of creeks and cuts, but on occasion, you still may be in open water crossing from

one side to the next.

April means bedding fish, which also means sitting in your kayak is probably not the best fishing position. Propulsion while standing is an advanced skill. Some kayakers use one end of their paddle to scull, while others have acquired an SUP paddle for just this occasion.

Standing gives you a better angle looking for bedded bass as well as casting to them once they are spotted. Some paddleboat manufacturers provide elevated-seat positioning for better views, but it's hard to beat the view from a standing position when looking for dark shapes silhouetted on a pea gravel or clay bottom.

Standing and flipping from a kayak is a lot of fun, as well as a productive way to catch big bass. If you are fortunate enough to have areas of grass mats to fish, a Texas-rigged worm or lizard using



Phillip Gentry

### IKE LIKES PLASTIC BOATS:

Bass pro Mike Iaconelli visited South Carolina's Lake Hartwell in February to practice for the Bassmaster Classic in mid-March, and his Hobie Pro Angler kayak was atop his tow vehicle, but it's not a marketing gimmick. "More and more big-name anglers are getting into kayak fishing," he said. "This is my third year in a Hobie, and I take it with me everywhere I go. Kayak fishing for bass takes me back to the basics of bass fishing, even with all the accessories like depth finders and Power Poles, you're still forced to get in there and figure it out. It takes me back to my youth when I fished from the bank or fished from a john boat."

a pegged tungsten weight is a great way to punch through grass mats and get to the bass below.

When bass are aggressively defending a bedding area, it's hard to find something they won't hit. Buzzbaits and spinnerbaits provide some exciting action, especially when the strike is preceded by a waking bass charging from cover.

Trying to tempt a bass that's already seen every bait from Tackle Warehouse tossed at it or into its bed is another story. Those fish have to be aggravated into biting, and sometimes you're better off to remember the spot and try again in low-light conditions or make a long cast to that spot after the fish has settled back down.

Hate me if you want, but April is also a great time for some Florida-style shiner fishing if you are fishing for fun. Use dollar bill-sized shiners (6-inch minimum) and toss them in a hole in a grass flat or right at the mouth of that undercut bank in the far back of a cut; those are exciting prospects. ■

## APRIL'S BEST FISHING BETS

### NORTH CAROLINA

**What** – Largemouth bass

**Where** – Shearon Harris Lake

**How** – Bass should be spawning around the first of April, especially with the full moon on March 31. Kayakers have two bets for catching spawning fish. The first is to find areas so densely choked with brush or cut off from the main lake so that anglers in power boats can't reach them. The second is to fish the same backs of creeks and pockets that everyone else will be fishing, trying to pick fish off the beds. Take your pick of creature soft plastics, paired with jigs or jigheads to bounce around on the bottom.

**Launch** – Shearon Harris Lake (unimproved access) off New Hill Holleman Rd., Holleman's Crossing, and Cross Point Landing are the standard launch sites

**Insider Tip** – Work deeper areas when targeting spawners. Larger bass will spawn deeper, and any submerged timber in less than 10 feet of water is a good bed.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

**What** – Largemouth bass

**Where** – Lake Moultrie, The Hatchery

**How** – The Hatchery area of Lake Moultrie is a kayak angler's dream. Lots of acreage to get away from the crowds of power boats, and plenty of big fish will be hiding around the cypress knees and stumps and under grass mats.

**Launch** – Hatchery Boat Landing off SC 6, South of Cross, S.C., in the Chicora Community.

**Insider Tip** – Stand up and use a push pole like the kayak version of a SuperStick and pole into the grass and reeds rather than paddle. Have a couple of flipping rods ready in vertical rod holders within reach for sight-fishing.

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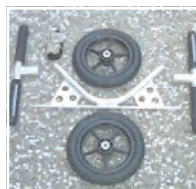
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## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

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Additional mounting options, other than the adjustable mounting bracket are available. The system includes a 15-foot power cable for a 12-volt battery, or if no on-board battery is available, add the Micro Battery Pak & Charger.

The Micro driver unit accommodates any 3/4-inch spike. The 8-foot-6 Micro Spike can remain in place or be removed from the driver unit when moving between locations.

Installation is a breeze for this quiet, compact system. MSRP is \$595. More information at [power-pole.com](http://power-pole.com). ■



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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*Some photos shown with optional equipment*



## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

# GOBBLER GRUB

THIS SIMPLE RECIPE FOR OVEN-ROASTED WILD TURKEY WILL LEAVE YOU STRUTTING

April is a special time of year in the Carolinas. There is something for all outdoor enthusiasts to do. If you like fishing, there are opportunities from the Blue Ridge to the bluewater, and hunters can get back into the woods for encounters of the gobble, gobble, gobble kind.

If you consider yourself a sportsman and don't look forward to April, you might want to reevaluate your opinion of yourself.

One of the things regular readers have grown to expect in April is another excellent turkey recipe from Robert Cardwell or Rockingham County, N.C. — and they won't be disappointed with this one. I can't say he is the only one who influences my gastronomical experiences with thunder chickens, but he has shown me a lot. For several years running I have featured one of his recipes in April, and there have been others going back more than 10 years. If you tried any, you won't need to ask why. He knows turkeys and knows how to prepare them.

If you still have a turkey breast in your freezer from last year, go ahead and try this. If you don't, you'll need to slip into the woods once the season opens and send one an invitation to dinner that begins with sweet purrs and encouraging yelps, but is followed by a loud bang pushing a magnum load of No. 5 shot. ■



Sliced and ready to eat, oven-roasted wild turkey, prepared with a few spices and barbecue sauce, will give you another reason to long for turkey season.

### TIP!

To help seasonings penetrate meat to be cooked, don't just brush it on and shove it on the grill or in the oven. Seal it in a Zip Lock bag for an hour or two, and the seasoning will wind up throughout the meat, not just on the surface.

# OVEN-ROASTED WILD TURKEY BREAST

I'm certainly not an expert turkey hunter, but I'm seeing a bunch these days. It appears they fared well during the record cold of January and are on the move and feeding hard early this year. Once we had a few nice days in February, I began regularly seeing some pretty large flocks in a variety of places, and that has continued.

This recipe is about as simple as one can be. Someone said the only way it could be any simpler would be if the turkey prepares himself. It definitely is simple and surprisingly good, especially considering the effort — or, more appropriately, the lack of effort involved.

Recipe author Robert Cardwell's instructions say to use Cracker Girl or your favorite seasoning, and he suggested Tony Chachere's Original Creole Seasoning if you don't have a favorite. This was fine with me, as Tony Chachere's is a personal favorite, but I have to warn folks not familiar with it that it can jack up the spice if you get heavy handed. Cardwell said it was fine to just put this on and keep going, but my suggestion is to season the turkey and seal it in a Zip Lock bag, with all the air squeezed out, for at least an hour — and several hours is better. This helps it penetrate the meat, and the seasoning is throughout the meat, not just around the outside.

Cardwell uses his own barbecue sauce but recommends John Boy and Billy's Original Grilling Sauce as a close substitute. One of the reasons he and I get along so well is he also likes a little kick in his food and this, mixed with a fair dusting of Tony Chachere's, provides just

that. Folks who make their own sauce with a bit of sweetness and kick might try using it rather than purchasing any.

Cardwell specifies a white wine to create moisture while cooking, but not which white wine. I don't care for the dry white wines many folks use for cooking, but I like sweet wines. I am particularly fond of the White Sangria from Duplin Winery in Rose Hill, N.C. This muscadine-based wine is just right for this recipe, and it helps channel my inner Justin Wilson to enjoy a glass (or two) while the turkey is cooking. I'll gar-on-tee both are excellent.

Cardwell cooks this covered the whole time, but I experimented a bit, and think I prefer it with the foil removed for the last 15 to 20 minutes. This gets a little crust to the outside and seals in some of the flavor. You might not recognize this eating it the first time, but it shows if there are leftovers, to reheat. Trust me, this isn't your Thanksgiving turkey and you won't mind these leftovers. You'll probably look forward to them and find a variety of ways to use them — I do. Enjoy! ■

## PREPARATION:

Season the turkey breast with the seasoning like Cracker Girl or Tony Chachere's. Remember, with Chachere's, that more makes it spicier and less makes it milder. Allow to season in Zip Lock bag for 1 to 4 hours. Preheat oven to 350. Spray glass baking dish with non stick cooking spray. Put breast in baking dish with outside facing up. Add ¼ cup white wine to baking dish. Lightly cover entire breast with barbecue/grilling sauce. Cover with aluminum foil and cook for 30 to 45 minutes depending on size (thickness) of breast. Remove foil and cook an additional 15 to 20 minutes (until breast reads 165 to 170 degrees on thermometer). Slice breast and return to baking dish before serving.

A green salad or steamed mixed vegetables go well with this. I also enjoy a slice of hearty warm bread with butter. A bowl of warm bread or rice pudding is an excellent dessert. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

One skinned turkey breast

Your favorite seasoning (Cracker Girl, Tony Chachere's, etc)

Sweet barbecue/grilling sauce (Homemade or John Boy & Billy's Original)

¼ cup white wine (Duplin Winery white sangria)

Non stick cooking spray

Aluminum foil



Slices of warm bread are a great garnish for this delicious turkey recipe.

All photos by Jerry Dilsaver



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

## STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano



# FOR TRADITION'S SAKE, TRY ONE

RECURVES OR LONG BOWS CARRY ARCHERS BACK TO A TIME BEFORE TECHNOLOGY

**M**odern advancements in technology have made it easier than ever to be a successful archer. Tools such as compound bows with high let-offs, electronic rangefinders, magnified fiber-optic bow sights, fall-away arrow rests and many other advancements have changed our sport forever.

But along the way, we have also lost something, and that is the basic simplicity of archery that attracted many people to the sport in the first place. Over the last decade or so, this has led to a resurgence in the popularity of traditional archery. Traditional archery is archery in its simplest form, a stick and a string. Using a recurve or long bow and shooting purely by instinct, without the aid of a sight or rangefinder, the traditional archer can become surprisingly accurate with both time and practice.

## WHERE TO BEGIN?

Although traditional archery is simple as far as less gear, it still requires being properly fitted and set up for an archer to perform at his or her best. Go to an archery pro shop, preferably one that is familiar with traditional archery, and get set up with the best bow and arrows for you. Draw weight is very important

here; unlike compound bows, traditional bows do not have any let-off, and the draw weight steadily increases as the bow is drawn back. For this reason, most archers typically shoot bows 15 to 20 pounds lighter in draw weight when switching from a compound bow. I have seen too many people mistakenly order too heavy a draw weight; the result is, they struggle terribly and don't enjoy shooting as much.

Choosing the proper-length bow is also important. Longer bows tend to be easier to point and don't "stack" the weight at the back of the draw as much, but they are much less maneuverable if you are hunting. They also have less finger pinch when drawn, making a clean release of the arrow easier. While shorter bows are easier to transport and more maneuverable in the field, they are more critical when it comes to the shot. In a recurve, I find a happy medium of 58 to 60 inches long to be the best for a majority of archers.

Recurves are also available in single-piece and takedown models, with each having its pros and cons. The single-piece wooden recurve is much more nostalgic and simple, but is usually much more expensive. It is also harder to transport, and if a limb is warped or cracked,



Sammy Romano

the whole bow is lost. Takedown bows offer the advantages of easier transport, the ability to replace damaged limbs at a lower cost and the ability to change draw weight by simply purchasing heavier limbs. The disadvantages are they're heavier and have more parts.

Arrows are important, too, and a good pro shop will help you select the best arrow for you and your setup. These days, most manufacturers offer carbon

**LEFT:** A recurve bow displays the nostalgic appearance of a traditional bow.  
**INSET:** Modern carbon arrows that look like wooden ones and are fletched with feathers are a major improvement over wooden alternatives.

arrows that look like wooden arrows and are fletched with feathers. They are superior in straightness and strength to wooden ones and are also safer and more reasonably priced. It is best to try a few arrows before investing in a full dozen if possible, as arrow selection is less of an exact science when it comes to traditional bows.

## WILL YOUR BOW SING IN TUNE?

Tuning of traditional bows is an art as well. There are three primary considerations. First is brace height, the distance from the string to the back of the grip. Most longbows should be braced at around 7 inches, while recurves typically require between 7 and 9 inches of brace height. You can adjust the brace height of your bow by adding or removing twists from the string. Add twists to increase the brace and remove them to decrease. Nocking point is next, and one-half inch above the bow's shelf is a good starting point. Lastly is arrow spine, which is

something of a trial and error process. Trust your instincts.

This is archery in its simplest and purest form. Rather than using a rangefinder to range the target and then a bow sight to aim, a traditional archer uses his or her instincts to tell where to point the bow.

The easiest and best explanation I can give for "instinctive shooting" is the analogy of learning to throw a ball. The first time you threw it, it likely didn't go where you intended. But your brain immediately began to subconsciously calculate the adjustments needed, and after a little practice, you were able to throw the ball with a fair degree of accuracy. There was no conscious thought of the distance to your target or aiming, you just naturally compensated by adjusting the angle and/or power with which you threw the ball.

Since a bow launches each arrow at the same velocity when shot with proper form, the archer adjusts the angle to hit their target at varying distances. With the exception of a few "naturals," this

form and instinctive shooting require both practice and dedication to achieve any degree of accuracy.

There is nothing quite like the feeling of becoming proficient with a traditional bow. The simplicity of a stick and string without the heavy and cumbersome accessories is nostalgic and a joy to carry into the woods or onto a range. While not for everyone, many people are rediscovering this neglected part of our sport and enjoying it more than ever. There is something about the flight of an arrow that you shot without sights that is hard to explain, but extremely rewarding. Pick up a traditional bow and discover this for yourself. ■



**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](mailto:samboka31@aol.com).

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## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

A nice stringer of Santee Cooper shell-crackers can make an angler's day most any time during April.

# BREAM BONANZA IS AT HAND

APRIL IS TIME FOR ALL KINDS OF PANFISH AT SANTEE

**T**he flooded cypress and gum tree forests and the abundance of shallow vegetation of Santee Cooper is Ground Zero for some of the best panfish action in South Carolina. Bull bream and super-sized shellcrackers abound, and anglers armed with the basic techniques of how, when and where to fish for this dynamic duo have an opportunity to limit on either species or a combination of both.

Depending on the moon phase, both species will be spawning during April, but limits of big panfish are caught whether bedding or not.

Guide Joe Dennis, who targets both species, said the key this month is to work shallow water, fishing grass and tree targets with a long pole.

"I believe in staying on the move looking for panfish," Dennis said. "Both species will be holding around shallow cover, and if I'm targeting bream, I use crickets, but if focusing on shellcrackers, I'll primarily use red worms. But either will catch both species. I'll use crickets as my default bait of choice as I work around trees, grass beds, pads, brush and stumps. But I'll typically have plenty of both with me on most days."

Dennis (843-245-3762) said his favorite tactic is to move quietly through the

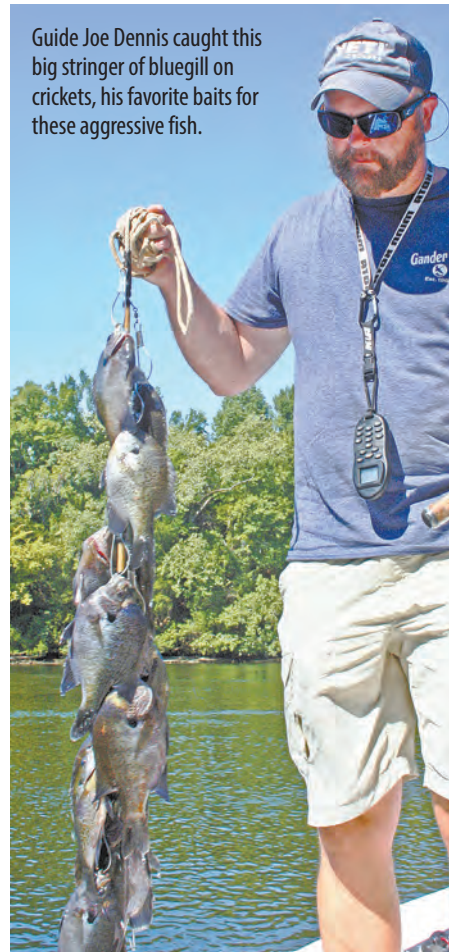
shallows and simply hunt the fish down. He employs an electric motor to move his boat through the maze of trees and vegetation and works the bait next to any object they see. If everything looks fishy, that's because it frequently is.

Dennis's basic rig is an 8- to 10-foot, light-action pole rigged with 10-pound line that's slightly longer than the pole. He uses a No. 4 wire hook, a small float and a split-shot to complete the rig. The float is a small cork with a hole through the middle with a toothpick line stopper, making changing the depth you're fishing quick and easy.

"I typically begin in about 3 feet of water and work both shallower and deeper until we catch a few fish and get the feel for the daily pattern," he said. "It's not unusual for everyone to see a prime looking spot and multiple corks surround the target. This is fine, because sometimes everyone hooks a big bream or shellcracker immediately. This is no time to be shy; often, a tiny spot holds multiple fish so everyone works that target until the fishing slows and we move on."

"If the water is clear, using polarized glasses help fishermen actually see the beds," he said. "That's a great way to find a bed but not the only way."

Guide Joe Dennis caught this big stringer of bluegill on crickets, his favorite baits for these aggressive fish.



Terry Madewell

Terry Madewell

## BAIT AND SWITCH

Dennis has learned that if he catches a shellcracker while fishing with a cricket, he'll immediately back off the spot and get worms on the hooks to probe for more shellcrackers. Where he finds one, often many more are nearby.

"That's frequently how I locate shellcracker beds," he said. "Another thing I watch for is a strange bite. Bream usually bite crickets aggressively, so if I get a passive, lethargic bite and don't hook the fish, I immediately think shellcracker. I drop the rig back in the same spot, but with a red worm on the hook, and often, a big shellcracker immediately loads on. Their preference is red worms, and they'll bite worms aggressively."

Dennis said this panfish-probing tactic is similar to bass fishing; once he gets a pattern for the day for bream or shellcracker, he can refine his search to specific areas. Some days, big bream may be holding primarily on the outside trees of cypress tree clumps, and at other times, they prefer isolated trees. The same is true for shellcrackers, with logs, stumps and weedbeds on sandy bottoms being

good bets for targeting them.

"The best part of this mobile style of fishing is that we'll usually enjoy good action throughout the day," he said. "Plus, we can usually begin culling fairly early, keeping some really big bream and shellcracker."

Dennis said although he stays mobile searching for fish, he'll give an area a reasonable time to produce. When he works into an area with small openings in dense clusters of trees, he'll patiently work the edges and the scattered stumps and other cover, places many anglers pass by.

"A single tree, downed log or even a single stump in the opening can hold a pile of fish," he said. "If I catch a bunch of fish in a specific area, I'll return later in the day and usually catch more fish. Whatever attracts fish to a specific place that day will pull more fish if you let it rest and quietly sneak back."

Dennis said it crucial to get the bait tight to cover, a big reason he likes the long pole over spinning or spincast rigs.



Terry Madewell

### IT'S BEDTIME FOR BREAM

Finding an area filled with shallow, dish-shaped depressions can mean panfish like bluegills and shellcrackers have bedded there before. It's a good bet they'll use the same areas again, and in stages, throughout the spring.

"It's simply a process of working the cover thoroughly," he said. "Most anglers are surprised at how many fish they've caught, steadily catching two or three from a spot and the occasional hot spot producing several fish. And that's the fun of April panfishing at Santee Cooper." ■



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



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[www.santeecoopercountry.org/CAR](http://www.santeecoopercountry.org/CAR)

Photo provided by Cajun Guide Service

## HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

Sections of North Carolina's Tuckasegee River are great spring destination for fishermen interested in taking trout on fly rods.

# SPRING TROUT ARE MOUNTAIN BLESSINGS

APRIL, MAY OFFER JUST ABOUT THE BEST TROUT FISHING YOU CAN IMAGINE, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT

**B**eginning around the middle of March and continuing through May, mountain streams start warming up, browns, rainbows and brook trout become active and hungry, and mountain anglers enjoy some of the best trout fishing of the year.

In the spring, when insect hatches occur frequently and in great variety, trout become veritable eating machines. Also in the spring, mountain streams are fuller because of frequent showers, which means more oxygen is in the water, another factor that makes fish more active. What all this means is that even a trout fisher with marginal skills has a greater chance of catching fish in early and late spring.

Most insects come off the water in the early morning. They migrate upstream, mate in the trees, and the females return to the water in the evening to lay eggs. By knowing these cycles, a trout fisher can greatly increase his or her success.

During April and May, at least 20 different hatches occur, and for each hatch, there are at least two types of dry flies, nymphs and emergers. You don't have to become an expert in entomology, though, to have good success with fly fishing. Two nymphs and one dry fly--will serve you well.

In nymph patterns, use a Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear or Pheasant Tail. A bead-head will add extra weight to get the fly down to the bottom where nymphs usually are found.

The best rule is to use larger patterns, such as Nos. 12s and 14s, in early spring and switch to smaller patterns as the weather gets warmer. You'll catch a lot more fish that way.

Dry flies don't have the versatility of nymphs, but if you want to go with one fly, choose a rusty spinner pattern — one with wings straight out at the sides. When a mayfly dies and falls to the water, it floats with its wings spread flat on the surface, and it doesn't move. Color is

important, because the majority of mayflies have a rusty color when they die.

Fly fishing, of course, is not the only method of catching trout. While a few streams are limited to fly fishing, the majority of mountain streams in western North Carolina and South Carolina's Upstate may be fished with flies or artificial lures. Live bait is limited to streams that are stocked with hatchery-raised trout and posted as hatchery supported waters. Live bait also may be used in streams designated as wild trout/natural bait waters.

Regulations for wild trout waters in the national forests and Great Smoky Mountains National Park stipulate that artificial lures, such as spinners, must have a single hook. A legal spinner can be made from a treble-hook spinner by clipping off the extra hooks. However, the spinners do not spin as well as those that are manufactured with single hooks.

Bright colors are best for spring fishing, especially yellow and chartreuse. Lure

size depends on the type of water you're fishing. Early in the spring, when streams are full, a 1/8-ounce lure is very effective; later on, when the water levels drop, or if you're fishing small streams, switch to a 1/16-ounce lure. Six-pound test line is recommended for larger lures and 4-pound test for smaller lures.

Although rules are strict for wild-trout waters, just about anything goes in hatchery supported streams. Night crawlers, earthworms, meal worms, wax worms, crickets and other live baits are legal. Lures can be either single or treble hook. With rare exceptions, these streams do not have size limits. Fishers should note that hatchery-supported waters in North Carolina are closed during March. The season reopens at 6 a.m. on Saturday, April 7.

Night crawlers and earthworms have been traditional fish bait in the mountains for decades, but some artificial baits, especially Berkley Power Bait, catch as many fish as live bait. Dyed salmon eggs also do well, especially when fishing for big browns.



**ALL BUGGED OUT:**

Spring insect hatches bring out the real predatory instincts in big mountain trout, like this brown. Dry flies, nymphs and spinners are often enough to tempt a trout to forgo its normal caution because the buffet line is long, wide and tasty.

In normal water conditions, chartreuse and yellow Power Bait gets excellent results. If the water is dingy, use fluorescent orange, red or pink.

Keep a variety of spinners such as Rooster Tails, Panther Martins, Mepps, Blue Fox, Joe Flies in a variety of sizes and colors. If one pattern doesn't work, keep switching until you find one that does work. ■



**Bob Satterwhite** has been writing about the outdoors, 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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## ELIMISHIELD SCENT-CONTROL PRODUCTS

Here's an equation deer hunters need to know. Physical exertion can lead to bacteria on the skin. Bacteria leads to body odor. Body odor leads to deer turning up their noses at stinky hunters.

Plenty of products on the market mask a deer hunter's scent, and some have attacked the bacteria question, but perhaps none has a better background with bacteria than Bryson Industries.

Bryson, of Thomasville, N.C., which has for years made products with which doctors use before going into surgery, has entered the outdoors industry with four products that allow hunters to "scrub up" and eliminate the cause of that human odor that wafts through the trees and throws deer into a tizzy. Their Elimishield line includes a laundry detergent, a hair and body wash, a scent-eliminating spray for clothing whose effects last for two weeks, and a foam product hunters can apply to their skin when they get out of their trucks to head into the woods.

**More Info:** [www.elimishieldhunt.com](http://www.elimishieldhunt.com)



## BIG LAKE'S BREAKER BOX

Hugh McLaurin of Big Lake Outdoor Products in Elloree, S.C., has been making game calls out of a variety of woods for years, and he knows that dymond wood, a laminate that isn't easy to come by, is one of the hardest, most-dense woods around, often used in the handles of custom knives.

He'd been making barrels for duck calls and strikers for turkey pot calls out of dymond wood, and one day about a year ago, he decided, maybe if dymond wood made a good striker, it would make an even better box call.

That's how Big Lake's Breaker Box came into being. Big Lake is debuting the Breaker Box this spring on its website, with the price expected to be in the neighborhood of \$60.

The Breaker Box can turn out some wonderful, raspy yelps and clucks, and depending on your mood and which side of the box you strike with the paddle, it can produce loud, aggressive calls or soft, plaintive yelps.

**More Info:** [www.biglakeoutdoorproducts.com](http://www.biglakeoutdoorproducts.com)

## N°12 EXPLORE SURVIVAL KNIFE

It's always a good idea to carry a knife when hunting or fishing. The potential uses are unlimited, and one thing's for sure — if you ever go on an outdoors adventure without one, you'll surely need it. And just in case the unthinkable happens, it's always good to have a knife with multiple uses.

The Opinel Survival Knife, which retails for \$49, is just that type of knife. With a sharp, locking, 4-inch blade and a sturdy handle, it cuts through any chore with ease. But it's more than just a knife. The survival orange handle will stand out to potential rescuers, and the built-in whistle can be used to alert others to your location with its 110 decibel rating.

That's all good and dandy, but it doesn't help you make it through a night in the woods. But the onboard fire starter will. This flint starter and striker will help build a fire that will keep you warm through the night, signal your position and also allow you to cook a good meal.

The retractable gut hook works great for everything from cutting vines to gutting fish or game. You'll like this knife so much, you won't mind getting lost with it.

**More Info:** [www.opinel-usa.com](http://www.opinel-usa.com)





**Branson Adams**

Branson Adams, 11, killed his first deer, this 3-point buck, on Dec. 20, 2016, in North Carolina's Johnston County.



**Isiah Carlton**

Isiah Carlton caught this nice, slab crappie at North Carolina's Randleman Lake last March.



**Mazie Buckner**

Mazie Buckner caught her first hybrid bass at Lake Hartwell on April 20, 2017, on a trolled jig.



**Jennifer Bodenheimer**

Jennifer Bodenheimer caught this Spanish mackerel on Sept. 19, 2016, out of Shallotte, N.C. aboard the *Jay Bird*.



**Armstrong Family**

Nov. 29, 2017, was a big day in Edgecombe County for the Armstrong family: Drury Armstrong's 7-pointer, Houston Armstrong's 9-pointer, Joshua Armstrong's 7-pointer.



**Bobby Marks**

Bobby Marks caught this great largemouth bass in a pond in Myrtle Beach, S.C., on May 26, 2017, on a Senko.

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

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Carolina Sportsman,  
433 Hollinswood Ave.,  
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103  
or to [dank@carolinasportsman.com](mailto:dank@carolinasportsman.com)**

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

# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Curt Whitt of Hillsborough, N.C., killed this 8-pointer on Sept. 11, 2016, with a crossbow, on his first hunt of the season.



Todd Vick caught these nice black crappie in the fall of 2016 in the South Carolina section of the Waccamaw River.



Will Werner, 13, caught this 40-inch bull red on the Ocean Crest Pier on North Carolina's Oak Island in October 2016.



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



James Brooks of Siler City, N.C., caught this 21-inch flounder on a live shrimp around Carolina Beach on Aug. 20, 2016.



Buster Sertick caught this nice bull red in the waters around Beaufort, N.C., in the fall of 2016.

## 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

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or to [dank@carolinasportsman.com](mailto:dank@carolinasportsman.com)

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

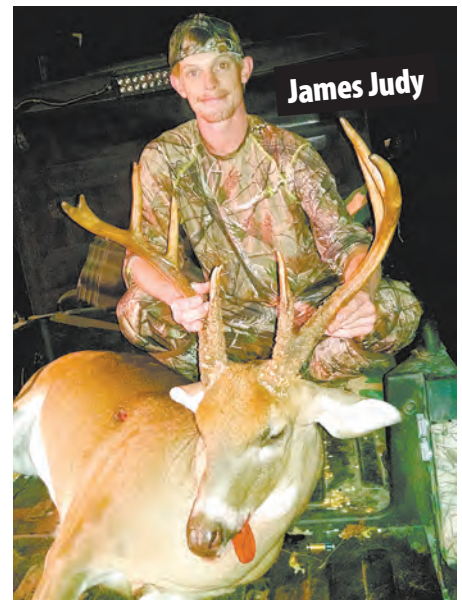


Evan Reeves killed his first buck, this 7-pointer, while hunting in Bladen County, in NC I caught



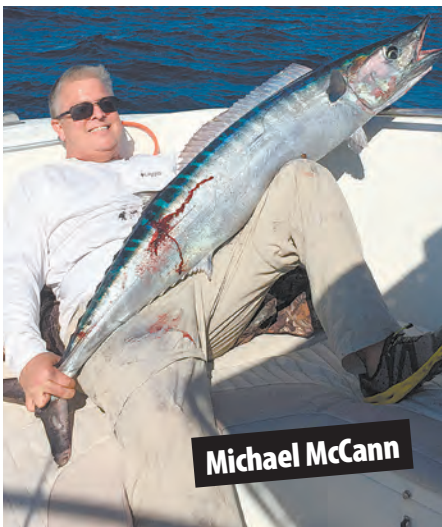
**Noah Lynk**

Noah Lynk of Noah's Ark Charters caught this big bluefish off North Carolina's Cape Lookout on May 2, 2017, on a topwater plug.



**James Judy**

James Judy killed this 10-point, 160-pound buck on Oct. 20, 2017, near Branchville, S.C.



**Michael McCann**

Michael McCann of Raleigh, N.C., caught this wahoo near the Blackjack Hole aboard the *Princess Colleen II* on Oct. 31, 2016.



**Matt Lineberry**

Matt Lineberry caught these nice crappie at North Carolina's Jordan Lake on Nov. 11, 2016



**Phillip Hale**

Phillip Hale of Southport, N.C., caught this large hog snapper on a fall trip with Yeah Right Charters.



**Logan Vaughan**

Logan Vaughan killed this nice gobbler in Spartanburg County, S.C., in March 2016.



**Cortney O'Dell**

Cortney O'Dell of Midway, N.C., harvested her first gobbler on April 10, 2017, in Alleghany County, with a .410 shotgun.



**Taylor Mullis**

Taylor Mullis of Summerville, S.C., killed this 170-pound sow with a .243 at 45 yards last October.

**SALTWATER**

**STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)**

<b>FISH SPECIES</b>	<b>Minimum Lengths</b>	<b>Creel Limit</b> (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)	Closed until May 1	Closed until May 1
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 ( <a href="http://www.nmfspermits.com">http://www.nmfspermits.com</a> )	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	Closed	Closed until June 15
Weakfish (gray trout)	12" TL	1/day
Snappers:	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster		
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.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov).

**FRESHWATER**

<b>FISH Species</b> (Inland waters)	<b>Minimum Size Limit</b>	<b>Creel Limit</b> (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](http://www.ncwildlife.org)

% Striped bass creel limits and size minimums vary by lake. See NCWRC regulations digest or [www.ncwildlife.org](http://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)**

<b>FISH SPECIES</b>	<b>Minimum Lengths</b>	<b>Creel Limit</b> (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 ( <a href="http://www.nmfspermits.com">http://www.nmfspermits.com</a> )	
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](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov). # For grouper/snapper, check with the SAFMC at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) or 843-571-4366.

**FRESHWATER**

<b>FISH Species</b> (Inland waters)	<b>Minimum Size Limit</b>	<b>Creel Limit</b> (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](http://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).

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2018 APR	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Sun 1	██	██	██	██	61
Mon 2	██	██	██	██	48
Tue 3	██	██	██	██	35
Wed 4	██	██	██	██	27
Thu 5	██	██	██	██	25
Fri 6	██	██	██	██	23
Sat 7	██	██	██	██	28
Sun 8	██	██	██	██	38
Mon 9	██	██	██	██	30
Tue 10	██	██	██	██	27
Wed 11	██	██	██	██	30
Thu 12	██	██	██	██	42
Fri 13	██	██	██	██	56
Sat 14	██	██	██	██	69
Sun 15	██	██	██	██	78
Mon 16	██	██	██	██	72
Tue 17	██	██	██	██	65
Wed 18	██	██	██	██	58
Thu 19	██	██	██	██	56
Fri 20	██	██	██	██	57
Sat 21	██	██	██	██	61
Sun 22	██	██	██	██	69
Mon 23	██	██	██	██	58
Tue 24	██	██	██	██	49
Wed 25	██	██	██	██	46
Thu 26	██	██	██	██	53
Fri 27	██	██	██	██	59
Sat 28	██	██	██	██	67
Sun 29	██	██	██	██	70
Mon 30	██	██	██	██	57

25 50 75  
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
8:57 pm	1:00 am - 2:58 am	7:56 am	1:25 pm - 3:23 pm	☉	
9:57 pm	1:54 am - 3:40 am	8:31 am	2:19 pm - 4:05 pm	☉	
10:56 pm	2:48 am - 4:20 am	9:07 am	3:13 pm - 4:45 pm	☉	
11:52 pm	3:43 am - 5:01 am	9:45 am	4:08 pm - 5:26 pm	☉	
	4:34 am - 5:46 am	10:25 am	4:59 pm - 6:11 pm	☉	
12:46 am	5:25 am - 6:31 am	11:09 am	5:50 pm - 6:56 pm	☉	LOW
1:37 am	6:14 am - 7:20 am ☀	11:56 am	6:39 pm - 7:45 pm ☀	☉	Apogee
2:25 am	7:02 am - 8:08 am ☀	12:46 pm	7:27 pm - 8:33 pm ☀	☉	HALF
3:09 am	7:48 am - 8:56 am ☀	1:39 pm	8:13 pm - 9:21 pm	☉	
3:49 am	8:30 am - 9:48 am	2:33 pm	8:55 pm - 10:13 pm	☉	
4:27 am	9:12 am - 10:40 am	3:30 pm	9:37 pm - 11:05 pm	☉	
5:02 am	9:53 am - 11:31 am	4:27 pm	10:18 pm - 11:56 pm	☉	
5:36 am	10:30 am - 12:26 pm	5:27 pm	10:55 pm - 12:51 am	☉	
6:10 am	11:11 am - 1:19 pm	6:28 pm	11:36 pm - Midnight	☉	
6:44 am	11:50 am - 2:16 pm ☀	7:30 pm	Midnight - 1:44 am	☉	NEW
7:19 am	12:32 pm - 3:14 pm ☀	8:35 pm	12:15 am - 2:41 am	☉	
7:58 am	1:18 pm - 4:14 pm	9:40 pm	12:57 am - 3:39 am	☉	
8:40 am	2:06 pm - 5:16 pm	10:47 pm	1:43 am - 4:39 am	☉	
9:28 am	2:58 pm - 6:18 pm	11:52 pm	2:31 am - 5:41 am	☉	
10:21 am	3:56 pm - 7:18 pm		3:23 am - 6:43 am	☉	Perigee
11:19 am	4:55 pm - 8:17 pm	12:54 am	4:21 am - 7:43 am	☉	HIGH
12:22 pm	5:56 pm - 9:12 pm ☀	1:51 am	5:20 am - 8:42 am ☀	☉	HALF
1:27 pm	6:57 pm - 10:03 pm	2:42 am	6:21 am - 9:37 am ☀	☉	
2:32 pm	7:57 pm - 10:49 pm	3:27 am	7:22 am - 10:28 am	☉	
3:37 pm	8:55 pm - 11:35 pm	4:08 am	8:22 am - 11:14 am	☉	
4:40 pm	9:53 pm - 12:15 am	4:45 am	9:20 am - 12:00 pm	☉	
5:42 pm	10:49 pm - 12:55 am	5:20 am	10:18 am - 12:40 pm	☉	
6:44 pm	11:45 pm - Midnight	5:54 am	11:14 am - 1:20 pm	☉	
7:44 pm	Midnight - 1:33 am	6:28 am	12:10 pm - 1:58 pm ☀	☉	FULL
8:43 pm	12:38 am - 2:14 am	7:03 am	1:03 pm - 2:39 pm ☀	☉	

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 GOLD BLACK TYPE.

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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

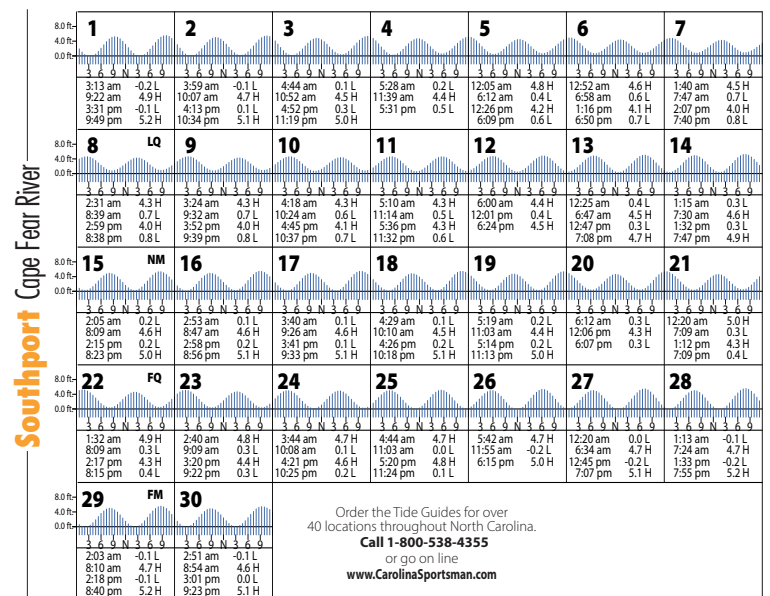
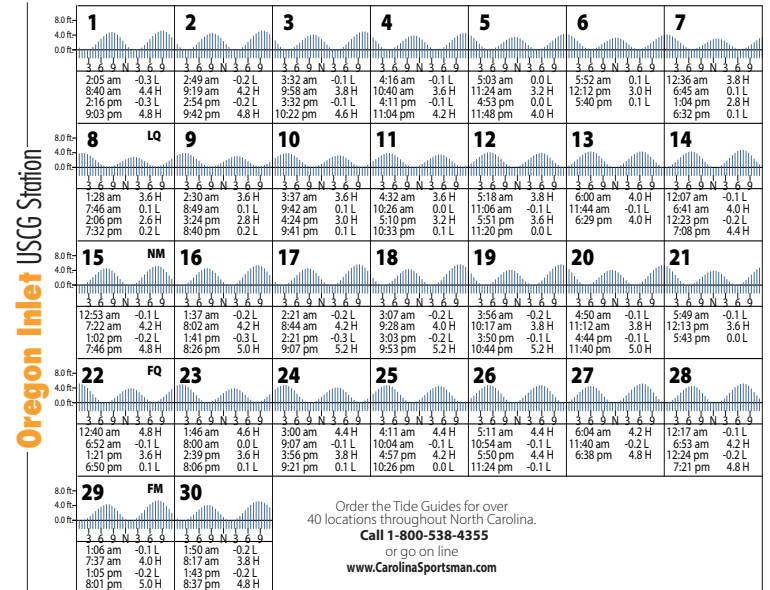
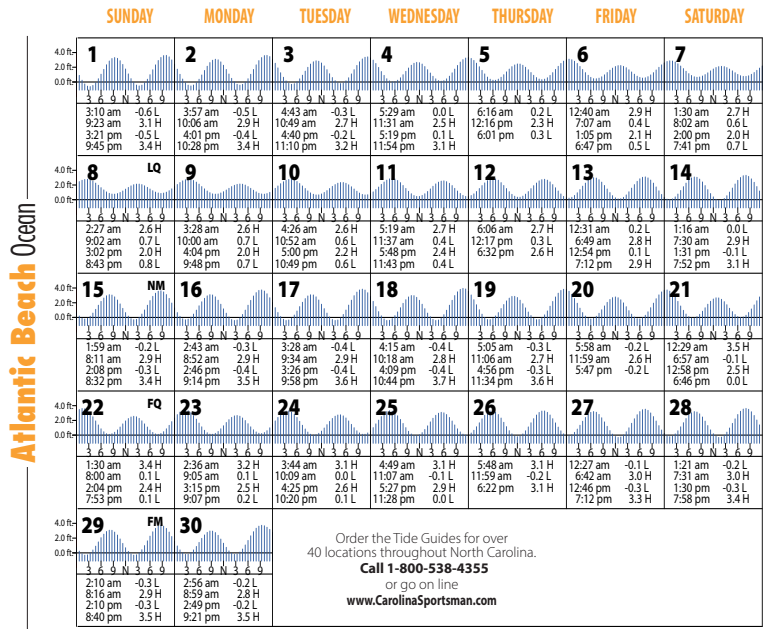
Cape Lookout Outer Coast	-0:02	0:10
Shell Point Harkers Island	2:07	2:45
Harkers Island Br. Outer Coast	2:23	2:42
Channel Mkr.Lt. #59 Outer Coast	1:40	1:38
Lenoxville Point Outer Coast	1:29	1:23
North River Bridge Outer Coast	1:24	3:19
Beaufort In. Ch. R. Outer Coast	0:22	0:22
Beaufort Duke Marine Lab	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	0:04
Oregon Inl. Channel Outer Coast	0:21	0:17
Old House Channel Outer Coast	1:04	1:19
Oregon Inlet (USCG Station)	0:00	0:00
Davis Slough Outer Coast	0:39	0:50
Cape Hatteras Outer Coast	-0:14	0:34
Hatteras (ocean) Outer Coast	-0:22	0:34
Hatteras Inlet Outer Coast	0:01	0:08
Ocracoke Inlet Outer Coast	0:02	0:10
Ocracoke Ocracoke Inlet	0:17	0:31
Cape Lookout Outer Coast	-0:24	0:42

#### Southport, Cape Fear River HIGH LOW

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

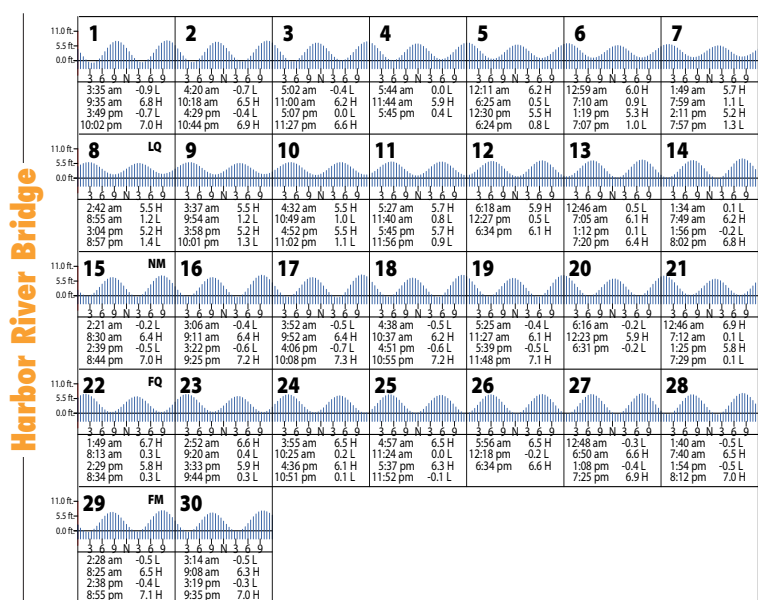
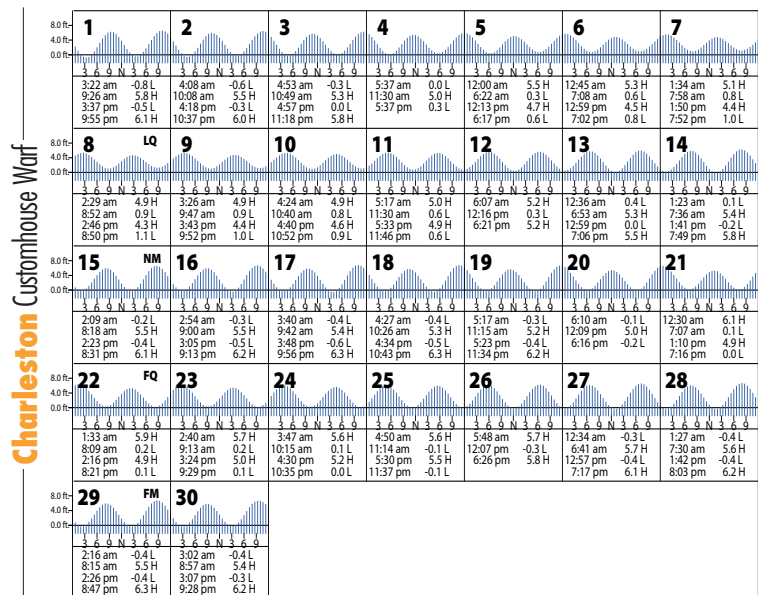
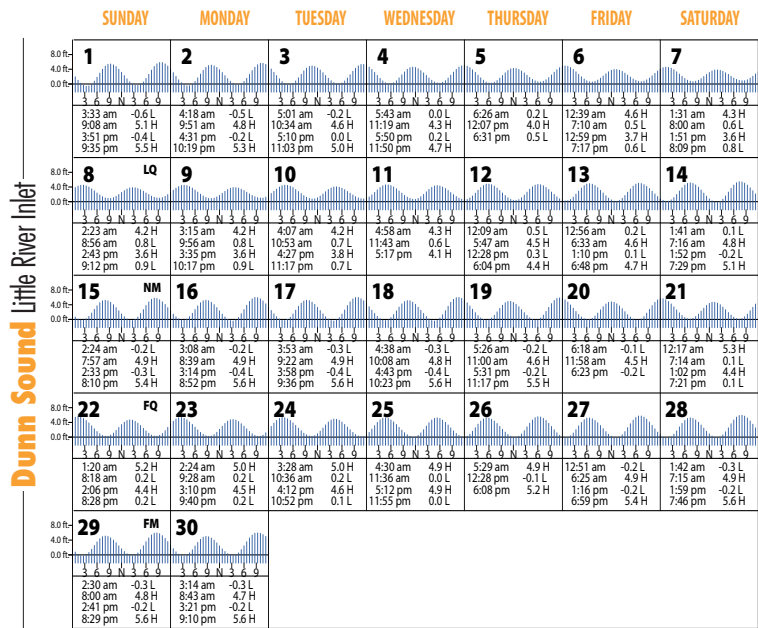


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## Tide Corrections

	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



# Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

## SPEAK SPANISH ALONG NC COAST

Spanish mackerel make their first real showing of the year along much of the North Carolina coast in April.

Wayne Crisco

April brings first showing of Spanish mackerel from Cape Lookout to Cape Fear

**A**pril might have been the “cruellest” (sic) month for T.S. Elliott, a depressed, distressed poet when he penned *The Waste Land*, apparently because he didn’t enjoy winter’s disappearance and the rebirth of spring.

It’s also certain ol’ T.S. wasn’t much of an angler.

Along North Carolina’s coast and elsewhere along the South Atlantic, April always brightens anglers’ outlooks because the water comes alive again with one fish, two fish, three fish, bluefish — along with red drum, bonito, false albacore and, in some places, giant bluefin tuna.

But no species combines sportiness, greater numbers and palate delights more than Spanish mackerel — which are thick as fleas just a couple of long casts off most beaches, feeding on schools of glass minnows.

Anglers can catch Spanish mackerel almost from Cape Lookout south to the South Carolina border, but a handful of spots between Cape Fear and Cape Lookout have been fishing favorites. Sheepshead Rock, aka High Rock, a mile off Carolina Beach and Kure Beach, usually sees hot action the last two weeks of April and the first two weeks in May.

Anglers can troll Clark Spoons and Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow plugs, or they can cast Got-Cha plugs to surface-feeding fish. Bigger fish arrive when the nearshore water temperature approaches and

reaches 65 degrees. Let the temperature drop two degrees, however, and they’ll move on.

Guide Wayne Crisco of Hampstead’s Last Resort Charters (910-465-0611) uses Diamond jigs to search for Spanish this month, and he’s liable to catch Atlantic bonito or false albacore.

“They all hit the same lures,” Crisco said. “The thing about Spanish is they school up underneath bonito schools feeding on the surface. If you burn a reel and keep a Diamond Jig near the top, you’ll likely get bit by a bonito. If you let it sink, Spanish will grab ‘em.”

Crisco uses 6½-foot, medium-action Shimano rods and Stradic reels spooled with 15-pound monofilament with a 2-foot 40-pound fluorocarbon leader tied to a ¾- or 1-ounce jig.

“You can expect Spanish teeth to bite through regular monofilament, but they’ve got sharp eyes — so I use tougher, 40-pound fluorocarbon,” Crisco said.

He finds Spanish the old-fashioned but proven way on the ocean.

“I like a slick (calm) day so I can see fish bustin’ on top and diving birds splashin’ down on chopped-up baitfish,” he said. “You can get more Spanish, too, if you cast a Diamond jig just behind the surface commotion and let it sink. The Spanish are deeper and trail bonito schools. Then, if you want a bonito, you can throw just in front

of a school and burn the jig back to you.”

If you’re a meat hunter, troll No. 0 to 00 Clark Spoons in a six-rod spread. It’s comfortable fishing, and filling a fish cooler doesn’t take long while trolling — the limit is 15 per day, with a 12-inch size minimum.

The key to trolling for Spanish is the correct speed, which is 4 to 5 knots; slower speeds won’t impart the correct action to a Clark Spoon. ■

— Craig Holt

## BEAUFORT SHEEPSHEAD SET TO BITE

**I**t’s a tough fish to catch, but the rewards — both in fun and table fare — are definitely worth wetting a line for sheepshead, and the inshore waters of Beaufort, S.C., are full of these toothy bait stealers.

Miles Browning of Beaufort grew up fishing for sheepshead along the concrete walls on Parris Island when his dad was stationed there as a U.S. Marine. He learned that fishing for these creatures was a constant battle between patience and anticipation.

“You’ve got to be patient enough to feel the bite, but you’ve got to anticipate the bite in order to set the hook in time. It’s

the most challenging fish I've caught, and it's been my favorite since the very first one I ever caught," he said.

Over decades of fishing for sheepshead, Browning has developed a style he calls active fishing. Instead of just holding a bait still and waiting for a bite, he keeps his bait moving slightly at all times. He doesn't use the typical Carolina rig that many sheepshead anglers do, and he also rarely uses fiddler crabs for bait.

"I use a jighead baited with oyster or clam meat. I fish around rock piles, concrete walls, bridge pilings and sunken trees. These waters, are full of that type of stuff. Sheepshead are around all of it. The sunken trees should have been there long enough for barnacles to get on them. Sheepshead love those," he said.

Browning lowers his bait until he hits the bottom or the structure, then he very slowly begins reeling up, anticipating a bite the whole time.

"I will reel up extremely slowly, trying to keep the bait as close to structure as I can, touching it even. I use a No. 6 circle hook, and when I feel the slight tap of a sheepshead, I just reel faster and lift the rod tip. I use a medium-light rod. Most people like a stiffer rod, but this way works best for me," he said.

"Since I'm constantly reeling, even though it is slower than Christmas, I'm staying active, which keeps me more ready for a bite. I get lazy just sitting there with my bait sitting still. I miss far fewer when fishing this way," said Browning.

For his best locations, Browning likes leaving out of Port Royal boat landing and hitting sunken trees along the banks, and from the White Hall boat landing which he said gives easy access to numerous concrete walls and walls made of big boulders. These are prime spots for barnacles to attach themselves to, keeping sheepshead interested. ■

— Brian Cope

## BIG-FISH MONTH FOR LAKE JOCASSEE TROUT IS AT HAND

Last year, on the day before April Fool's Day, Sam Jones of Greenville, S.C., netted a client's monster brown trout on his Lake Jocassee guide boat — 9½ pounds.

"There are some big fish that show up that time of year," Jones said. "April is a great time of year for catching some of Lake Jocassee's trophy brown and rainbow trout."

After following baitfish up the creeks and rivers in winter, trout are making their way back down to the main body of the lake, following the bait.

"The baitfish have been fairly shallow all winter, so the fish have been up closer to the banks, but the baitfish start going deeper in April and into May," said Jones (864-280-9056). "This pattern will stay about the same until the surface temperature gets up to 70 degrees or so. When that happens, the fish will start going deep and get into as summer pattern."

Some of the best spots to fish in April are the Whitewater, Horsepasture and Toxaway rivers, he said.

"Trolling 15 to 55 feet deep using downriggers is the most-common way, but you may also troll with leadcore line and planers like Dipsey Divers and Pink Ladies," Jones said. "Some of the best lures to troll with are Sutton spoons, Apex lures, Michigan Stinger, Dreamweaver and Doctor spoons."

The best colors, he said, are basic



Brian Hutto caught this 9½-pound brown trout last March 31 on South Carolina's Lake Jocassee.

silvers or golds, but sometimes using some bright colors like orange, pink, red and purple really turns trout on.

"Also, like most times of the year, large minnows trolled or drifted the same depths will work great. We caught the 9½-pounder on a large shiner."

Jones said when he is up in the rivers he follows the channels while trolling, just hitting the edges, especially the S-turns and big points that stick out.

"In April, we are catching fish from about 14 up to 20 inches. They have to be 15 inches to keep them," he said. "But some bigger fish show up. You can say you have had a great half-day trip if you catch three or four good-sized fish — and there are quite a few days like that in April." ■

— Pat Robertson

**Kerr Lake** up next >



The author caught this nice spring sheepshead.

Brian Cope

Bass pro Tim Grein of Winston-Salem, N.C., caught this Kerr Lake lunker on a spinnerbait in flooded shoreline cover.

# BUSHWHACK BASS AT KERR LAKE

High water, if not too high, can put anglers in heaven

**T**he persistent rains this winter may translate into a bust or bonanza for bass fishermen at Kerr Lake along the North Carolina-Virginia border, where the quality of fishing depends upon the water level.

Pro angler Tim Grein of Winston-Salem, N.C., who is familiar with the whims of the 50,000-acre lake, said the ideal water level ranges from 304- to the 306-foot mark in elevation. At that level, the numerous buttonwood bushes, gum trees and willows come into play. They'll be in 4 to 6 feet of water, keeping prespawn and spawning bass within the reach of fishermen's offerings.

If the water level exceeds the normal pool mark of 300 feet by 7 feet or more, Grein said fishermen can get bushwhacked at Buggs. The water will flood the surrounding woods, spreading the fish out in the endless cover, making them difficult to reach and catch. Ramps may close, and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission may warn fishermen to stay off the lake.

Grein said the bass begin staging when the water temperature is 52 degrees or more, which often happens by late March or early April. At normal pool, likely staging places include points, rocky

corners, rock veins and flats back in the creeks, especially if these places are along northern shorelines that are warmed by the sun.

For staging bass, Grein uses baits that cover lots of territory, including lipless crankbaits and medium-running crankbaits.

Given high water, staging bass may suspend in the bushes and gum trees. They can be taken with spinnerbaits and lightweight jigs.

Why lightweight jigs?

"If you flip a heavy jig, the jig goes below the fish, because they're not at the bottom of the bushes," Grein said. "A light jig falls slowly and gives the fish time to react."

Once the water temperature reaches 58 to 60 degrees, the spawn begins in earnest, and the lake becomes a paradise for flipping if the water level doesn't exceed the 306-foot mark. A fisherman can become arm weary yanking fish from cover. Effective baits include jigs, plastic worms and plastic critters. Stout tackle is required. There's no give to a buttonwood bush or tree root.

Grein lets the fish tell him the cover they prefer on a given day.

— Tony Garitta

**Lake Gaston** up next >

To assist fishermen, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and websites for Kerr Lake post hourly and/or daily lake levels. Sites include: [www.kerr.uslakes.info](http://www.kerr.uslakes.info) and [kerrlakeguide.com/water\\_level](http://kerrlakeguide.com/water_level).

## GOT PICS? Send 'em in!

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

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

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

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# BASS MOVING IN LAKE GASTON

START APRIL ON MAIN-LAKE POINTS, MOVE TO CREEKS AS SPAWN NEARS

**A**pril is a big month for bass fisherman at Lake Gaston on the North Carolina/Virginia border. As the spawn closes in, bass activity will reach a fever pitch, and anglers like guide J.T. Palmore of Blackstone, Va., will be focusing on fish in both the prespawn and spawning phases.

For starters, Palmore (804-586-7645), disregards the upper section of Gaston due to the cold water that flows in from the bottom of Kerr Lake. The water below the Eaton's Ferry bridge will be the first to warm up, and that's where Palmore will focus his efforts, near creeks like Pea Hill, Lizard, Stonehouse, Lee's or Jimmy's.

Although their interiors will be the target once the spawn erupts, Palmore hits the main-lake points nearby earlier in the month to catch the bigger, prespawn fish.

"You can catch fish on the secondary points in the creeks, but you're usually going to run into the smaller males that are getting ready to go up and make their nests," Palmore said. "I'll go out and fish some of the wind-blown, main-lake points with a ¾-ounce, double willow-leaf spinnerbait in white/chartreuse. Points with stumps and rocks in 3 to 10 feet of water will be the best."

Although Palmore said there's a possibility for spawning once



Dusty Wilson

Lake Gaston's bass will be caught on main-lake points and/or well back in creeks in April, depending on how the spawn progresses.

the water reaches 62 degrees in conjunction with a full moon, he said the optimal temperature is between 68 and 72 degrees. The closer the water inches toward this window, the more Palmore will focus on stumps and docks near which bass will spawn in the shallow, well-protected water back in the creeks.

"If the fish haven't gone into full spawn — before they hit the beds — they will suspend under those docks," Palmore said.

"That's when the wacky worm is really good. I'll wacky rig a green pumpkin or watermelon seed Senko with a 4/0 Owner circle hook with a weed guard and cast it using a spinning rod spooled with 15-pound braid tied to a section of 8-pound Gamma fluorocarbon leader.

"When most of the fish get on the beds, its typical bed fishing. I'll be sight-casting jigs with soft plastics like a crawfish pattern or a Baby Brush Hog in a watermelon seed color — anything that will aggravate the fish until they bite."

Although most of the spawn will occur in 2 to 3 feet of water, Palmore said bass will spawn as far down as light can reach their eggs. Well-protected coves with stumps and a sandy bottom and the ends of shallow docks are prime spots. ■

— Dusty Wilson

**Cherry Grove** up next >

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Some photos shown with optional equipment



# CHERRY GROVE

## is first, best spot for spring flounder

**M**any inshore anglers begin the spring fishing season in small inlets and estuary areas for one of the most targeted of all inshore species, the flounder.

For anglers living close to the North Carolina/South Carolina border, the pint-sized estuary known as Cherry Grove is dead center for a spring flounder smackdown. And after the completion of the monumental dredging project, this spring's Cherry Grove bite should be one to remember.

In 2016 and 2017, 165,000 cubic yards of dredged material was removed from 24 man-made canals between 42nd Avenue North to 62nd Avenue North in the Cherry Grove section of North Myrtle Beach.

Tom Cushman of Cush's Calmwater Fishing Charters said the dredging opened up and created more habitat for flounder.

"This is the first full season since the dredging," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "The dredging will offer more places for bait and flounder to hold at low tide."

Typically, Cushman concentrates on

the deeper sections to catch spring flounder.

"Cherry Grove is a shallow estuary, and we catch the most spring fish in the channel when they are migrating in," he said. "The new, deep-water canals will give us places to fish outside of the main channel at low tide when the fishing is usually the best."

As flounder move in, they arrive famished. Cushman will drift the main channel with several rods rigged with live mud minnows on Carolina rigs or flounder rigs with gold Kahle-style flounder hooks on the incoming and outgoing tides. He will fish through both the high and low tides this time of year.

Mud minnows are abundant in the creeks as spring arrives. Anglers can set minnow traps or pick up a few dozen from the local bait shops.

Cushman will also fish off his own dock, which happens to sit right on the edge of a bend in the channel, close to two large oyster banks.



The Cherry Grove estuary just south of the North Carolina/South Carolina border is a great place to start out the spring season catching flounder.

"I catch 5- to 6-pounders off that dock every year," he said. "You don't have to have a boat to catch quality and nice quantities of fish in Cherry Grove when the action is hot in the spring." ■

— Jeff Burlison

# DOLPHIN GIVE BLUEWATER ANGLERS A SEASON OPENER

It's a long run to the Gulf Stream from inlets along North Carolina's southern coast, but by April, there is a flotilla headed to a handful of spots every day. There might be a little hangover of March winds early in the month, but by mid-April, calm days are more prevalent.



Dolphin show up in the bluewater off North Carolina's southeastern coast in April, and bigger, better fish are among the first to arrive.

April fishing begins with wahoo and blackfin tuna, but as schools of baitfish tracking along the edge of the Gulf Stream continue to grow, so do the numbers of dolphin. Larger dolphin begin arriving later in the month, and fishing continues to improve.

The most-prominent underwater structure off Cape Fear is the Steeples, 20 miles south-southeast of Frying Pan Tower. It gets its name from a formation of tall, rock spires that rise from the bottom. These structures disrupt the flow of the Gulf Stream and push eddies, rips and upwellings with grass and lots of bait to the surface. Fish follow the bait, and the bite heats up. There are other outcroppings a few miles north (the Same Ole) and south

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(the Blackjack Hole) of that also interact with the Gulf Stream and attract fish.

As Gulf Stream waters are pushed to the surface, they interact with area currents and form hard edges with rips, color changes and temperature breaks. The rips help form grass or weed lines that attract dolphin. Many small baitfish use the grass lines for cover and dolphin prowl the edges looking for food.

Butch Foster of Yeah Right Charters in Oak Island, N.C., fishes this area often. He said dolphin like bright colors and are usually hungry. He rigs small and medium ballyhoo with sea witches and small plastic skirts and trolls the edge of the weed and grass lines.

When the grass is broken up, dolphin tend to gather along the edges of rips, temperature breaks and color changes. They are often on the warm or bluewater side of a change but will be on the other side if that's where the bait is.

Dolphin are a primary offshore fish during the spring, but wahoo and blackfin tuna are also in the mix. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

## BANK ON MONTICELLO'S APRIL BASS

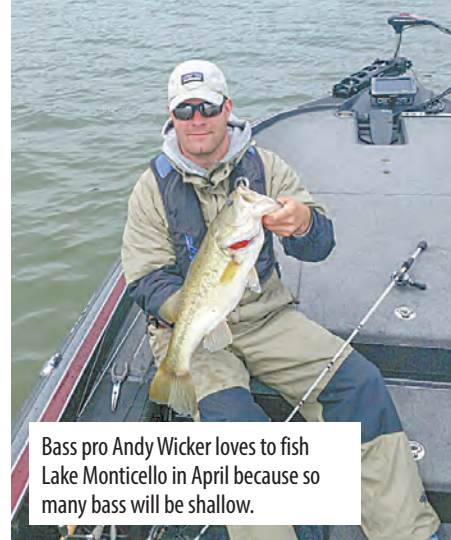
Fishing is as simple as it gets, with plenty of big, hungry fish moving to the banks

**F**or anyone who likes to catch bass, April is a fun time on South Carolina's Lake Monticello, according to bass pro Andy Wicker, who grew up learning on Monticello and Lake Murray.

"The bass will be on the bed, and you can just go down the bank and catch them on a floating worm, a Texas rig, topwater — just whatever you want to throw," he said. "Any kind of worm will do it for you."

Wicker said his April pattern is simple: go to the very backs of the pockets and big bays that are protected from the wind and move down the banks, covering water and fishing stumps, blowdowns, docks — whatever you can find in the water.

"That is the one time of year that the fish are going to move shallow, and there is not a lot of shoreline cover, so any kind of structure will hold fish," he said. "The rest of



Bass pro Andy Wicker loves to fish Lake Monticello in April because so many bass will be shallow.

the year, they are out 20, 30, 40 feet deep, but in April, you will find them up on the bank."

Fishing is better early than later in April, Wicker said, noting that early April promises to be even better than usual this year.

"With the warming trend we have had already, I feel like there is going to be better bed fishing in early April. It will be good the whole month, but it should be a lot better in the early part."

The size of the fish depends on the weather, he said. If a big wave of fish

continued on page 100 >

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Monticello continued

moves shallow early in the month, there will be a lot of big fish on the banks.

"Water temperature is critical," Wicker said. "They like the 59- to 61-degree water temperature that time of year, so in early April, I am going to try to find the warmest water possible, which normally will be on the south end of the lake."

"If you go when a wave of fish has moved up, you can catch a bunch of big ones on the bank, and there are some big ones in there. A big Monticello bass is about 8 or 9 pounds, but last year, one angler caught one in the 10- to 11-pound range."

Wicker said one thing that makes April bass fishing on Monticello so much fun is that smaller males are really aggressive and pretty easy to catch, so there is plenty of action.

"If you are not catching big females, at least you should be catching the males. And they are paired up, too, so if you catch one there is a big female close by, so you can go back and catch the female," he said. ■

— Pat Robertson

# RHODHISS STRIPERS GET HOT

## Spring run to upper end of lake produces great fish

**J**oe Jobin of Xtreme Striper Fishing divides April at North Carolina's Lake Rhodhiss into two phases. The beginning of the month marks the first.

"The first two weeks of the month, I'll be fishing the main body with down-lines baited with live gizzard shad," said Jobin (704-240-0165). "I'll be target structure and deep holes in 20 to 34 feet of water."

After April 15, Jobin moves to the river section and fishes the north and south banks up to the US18 bridge with planer boards — but just one bank at a time.

Jobin trolls the north bank, setting out a planer board as close to tree laps as possible without hanging. He also uses a free-line extending out from the middle of the stern. When he reaches the bridge, he turns around and heads south, trolling the other bank in the same manner.

"I troll one bank at a time because the river is narrow; if I let out lines close to both banks, a boat may come along and cut my lines," he said.

Besides fishing tree laps near the banks, Jobin trolls areas where the sand has been dredged.

"The river is only 4 to 8 feet deep, but the



Lake Rhodhiss can turn out some awfully nice striped bass in April when they move up the Catawba River.

Joe Jobin

dredged sand creates deep holes and pockets that attract stripers," Jobin said. "These places can be found with your electronics."

Jobin said the bite is better when the water is being generated, but a strong current could prevent him from trolling.

"When two or three gates are open, the current is so strong, I can't slow-troll effectively; I'll move too fast," said Jobin. "I have to anchor down over the holes and pockets and drop my baits to the fish. If only one gate is open, that's ideal for slow-trolling and for triggering the striper bite."

Fishermen can check online ([www.lakes.duke-energy.com](http://www.lakes.duke-energy.com)) to find out how much Rhodhiss will be pulled on any given day.

Jobin's tackle consists of 6½-foot, heavy action spinning rods mounted with reels holding

17-pound line. The main line is connected to a 17-pound fluorocarbon leader with a No. 6 treble hook at the business end. One prong of the treble hook is placed through the nostril of the bait.

In April, with water temperatures ranging from 42 to 52 degrees, live-bait fishermen can keep gizzard shad fresh and alive with just some care. Jobin said Rhodhiss stripers will run from 24 to 32 inches in April. Occasionally, fish larger than 32 inches are caught. ■

— Tony Garitta

Waccamaw up next >

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Guide Todd Vick said crappie fishing on the Waccamaw River can be excellent in April.



Brian Cope

# WACCAMAW RIVER SLABS

## APRIL FISHING GREAT IN COASTAL RIVER

**F**or crappie fishermen, looking forward to spring is what gets them through the winter. And while the big reservoirs take center stage, the Waccamaw River from Conway, S.C., to Georgetown, S.C., is a hidden gem for slab seekers.

Guide Todd Vick of Murrells Inlet's Fishin Freshwater Charters said this is easily one of the most-overlooked crappie waters in the Palmetto State. That makes his job easy; it doesn't take long to impress his

clients, many of whom scarcely entertain the thought of fishing in freshwater when they're so close to the coast.

Depending on the weather, Vick (843-333-8200) said crappie can be in one of two modes throughout this month.

"Some crappie will be spawning, and some will be in post-spawn mode. It all depends on the water temperature, which can change a lot this month, as cold fronts and warming trends are common," he said.

The spawning fish will be shallow, and anglers can catch them around downed trees close to the river banks. And while Vick will use jigs a little this time of year, he never hits this river without live minnows.

"You just can't beat live bait for these fish, especially when they are being finicky, which is common around the spawn," he said.

Vick fishes with 9-foot panfish rods with ultralight spinning reels spooled with 6-pound line, slip floats and No. 4 hooks. He uses just enough weight to get the line to slide through the cork properly. Searching the banks for surface weeds, downed trees and other debris, he puts his minnow into every nook and cranny he can find in that structure.

"You can have your minnow 6 inches away, and they won't bite," he said. "So you have to be patient and cover this water thoroughly. You should find crappie on that type of debris, so if you're not getting bit, you just need to make sure you're covering every inch of the area."

Other than these locales, Vick also looks for post-spawn crappie in deeper holes. These fish may be tougher to find, but they are just as willing to eat.

"There is some deep water in this river, and it's tidal, so at high tide, you can have some holes that are 20 feet and even deeper," he said. "The post-spawn crappie will go deep, so having a good depth finder will help. You'll find plenty under floating docks; just pitch your slip cork as close to the dock as you can. Adjust the cork depth according to your depth finder, and don't be happy with just one cast to each side of the dock. You've got to work every inch of the dock. These fish won't eat unless you put that minnow right where they want it," he said.

And no matter what the water depth is, Vick said you should always put your bait a foot or so above where the fish are holding.

"It's very rare for crappie to swim down to catch a meal. They will swim up a foot or two, so if you're marking fish at 20 feet, set your depth at 19 feet. Then adjust accordingly until you start to catch fish," he said. ■

— Brian Cope

**Murrells Inlet** up next >



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Jeff Burleson

## TOPWATER SPECKS AT MURRELLS INLET

SMALL SURFACE LURES FOOL  
PLENTY OF SPRING TROUT

**E**very month, anglers look for ways to make things happen on the water, but in certain months and seasons, a specific technique can produce whopper catches and personal bests.

Speckled trout junkies at Murrells Inlet, S.C. know spring means topwater, and good chances to land a true, gator trout.

J Baisch of Fishfull Thinking Guide Service has specks on top of his hit list, especially during the spring when gators are lurking.

"We have some big females around in April and May, and a topwater plug is a good way to get them to bite," said Baisch (843-902-0356).

"The key to making it happen is to fish the higher tides along grass edges and just on top of oyster beds."

While some speckled trout overwinter in deep, coastal estuaries, speckled trout in Murrells Inlet typically move into the ocean for the cold months. But as soon as the weather warms and the bait starts moving back in, specks begin to

patrol the area looking to feed. Big females are some of the first ones to arrive back inside, making big moves under spring conditions.

Speckled trout will begin scouting for places to begin their annual spawning ritual, and trout like to spawn near deep channels. But they will still stay close to a solid food source, and that makes structure edges good places to hover around.

"I like to fish along grass edges and on top of oyster beds on higher, moving water," said Baisch, who points to glass minnows as trout's primary food source for specks in spring, which points him to small topwater baits.

"I like the small Whopper Plopper. It has a prop on the rear of the bait that has been deadly for trout over the last couple years," said Baisch, who also likes Heddon Super Spooks in the smaller, Spook Junior size.

"I consistently do well on bone-colored topwaters with or without rattles. The bone color is my favorite," he said.

Baisch prefers smaller lures, but he uses larger ones, too.

"There will be a few finger mullet left over, and other baitfish moving in, where a big topwater lure will also get some attention because bigger fish can eat a bigger bait," he said.

Unfortunately, the topwater bite will sometimes last only 30 to 45 minutes right at dawn, unless cloudy, overcast conditions available to extend the bite out longer.

After cold-stun events in January, the S.C. Department of Natural Resources has asked anglers not to keep specks through September this year to bolster spawning stocks. ■

— Jeff Burleson

A man wearing a camouflage cap and a life vest is smiling while sitting in a yellow Hobie kayak. He is holding a large striped bass fish. The kayak is on a body of water with lily pads and tall reeds in the background. The Hobie logo is visible on the side of the kayak.

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