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YAMAHA

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Mountain trout, the lake way



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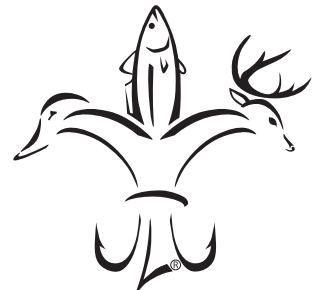




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Don't ignore
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ON THE COVER:



The Carolinas have so many great places to catch flounder, it's hard to name just one, so we picked four spots you shouldn't miss. Photo by Brian Cope.

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Outdoor UPDATE

with
Dan Kibler

A TURKEY DOUBLE-PLAY WITH A TWIST

Jason Snead of Manteo, N.C., was hunting with a friend near the Sumter National Forest between Spartanburg, S.C., and Newberry S.C., on March 25 when he killed these two gobblers with one shot. Even more unusual was that one of them was a rare, red/cinnamon-phase tom, a 1-in-300,000 gobbler.



Dan Kibler of Winston-Salem, N.C., is managing editor of *Carolina Sportsman* magazine. He has covered outdoors issues in the Carolinas since 1985.

Dan Kibler

SC'S FLATHEAD RECORD BROKEN

VETERAN FISHERMAN PULLS GIANT, 84-POUND CATFISH OUT OF COOPER RIVER ON TRIP FOR DINNER-SIZED BLUES

South Carolina has a new state record for one of its most-exalted species — the flathead catfish — thanks to a hungry angler from Hanahan, S.C.

Paul Daniels took his wife, Janet, fishing on the Cooper River on Feb. 11, hoping to catch a few blue catfish for Sunday night dinner.

Twenty minutes into the trip, fishing a live shiner, he hooked up with a flathead catfish, a brute that weighed 84 pounds, 9.6 ounces.

"I knew it was a big one as soon as I set the hook," said Daniels, who wrestled with the big fish until he got it in the boat.

Daniels didn't want to kill the fish, so he prepared to release it, but his wife convinced him that the fish was so big, he needed to weigh it first before returning it to the river.

A few minutes later, at Cooper River Marina, the huge fish tipped the scales at almost 85 pounds — topping the

previous record, caught in 2001, by five pounds.

"If it wasn't for my wife, I would have released it right back in the river," said Daniels, who had caught a 51-pound flathead from the same spot two years before. "She encouraged me to go weigh her first before we released her."

Daniels, who said he had fished the Cooper River for 50 years, credited a new drift weight he was using as a big factor in catching the huge flathead. He had his shiner rigged drop-shot style above a Drifting Stik.

"I have started using Drifting Stix," he said. "They allow us to fish heavy cover without getting hung up. The big flathead was in a deep hole covered with structure, (just what) the Drifting Stix is designed for."

Daniels said Drifting Stix are flexible weights that hold scents and slide through logjams and other submerged obstructions, putting them in perfect spots for catfish — the blues he was



Paul Daniels' 84-pound, 9.6-ounce beast is South Carolina's new state-record flathead.

targeting or the flathead he caught.

"You never know what you are going to catch in there," he said. ■

N.C. HUNTERS HAVE HIGHER DEER HARVEST

North Carolina deer hunters had a slightly better year across the board during this past fall's season, with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission reporting an 8-percent increase in the statewide harvest to 161,854 whitetails in 2017-18.

The harvest increased in every area of North Carolina except the northeastern corner of the state, which experienced a decrease of 3.9-percent over 2016-17 levels. The biggest increase was 13.3 percent in District 4, comprised of counties west of Cape Fear to the Sandhills and north to the outskirts of the Raleigh-Durham area.

The harvest was made up of 52.6-percent antlered bucks and 41.8-percent does. The remaining 5.6 percent were button bucks.

As usual, Northampton and Halifax counties had the best total harvest among the state's 100 counties, with Northampton at 4,120 and Halifax at 3,821. Anson County hunters took 3,692 for third, followed by Randolph with 3,670 and Wilkes with 3,438.

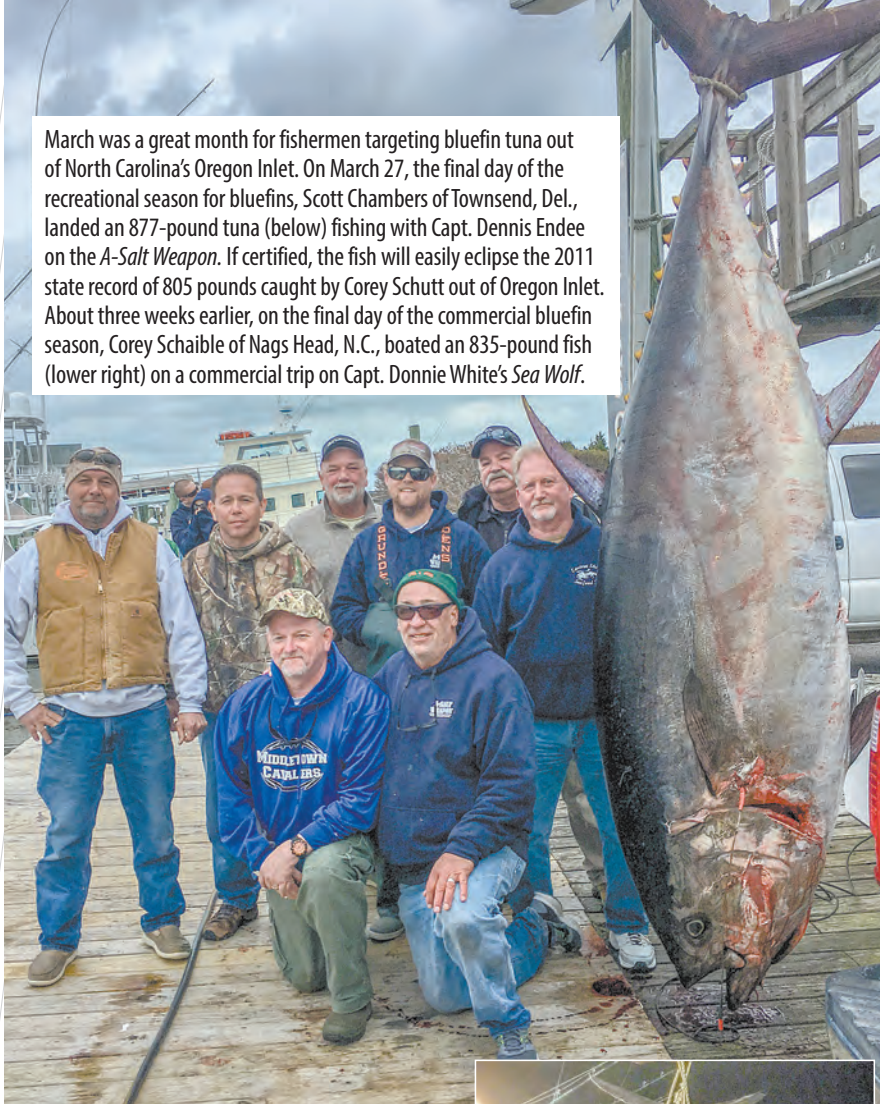
In terms of the number of antlered bucks killed per square mile, urban counties dominated the lists, with Mecklenburg first with 5.49 bucks killed per square mile and Forsyth second with 5.17. Two of Mecklenburg's neighbors were in the top 10, Cabarrus, fourth with 4.52 and Gaston, fifth with 4.46. Wake Count was eighth with 4.01.

Jon Shaw, the Commission's deer biologist, said the harvest over the past handful of years points a growing herd in the western third of the state and some declines in eastern counties.

"We primarily focus on long-term trends rather than annual variations to monitor the population, and (we) have observed increasing trends in deer harvest in western North Carolina, likely due to an emerging deer herd and improved deer habitat on private lands," he said. "In some areas, we have relatively stable harvest trends, while in large portions of eastern North Carolina, we are observing declining trends in harvest and deer numbers."

Hunters took 5,635 deer on the state's game lands. ■

March was a great month for fishermen targeting bluefin tuna out of North Carolina's Oregon Inlet. On March 27, the final day of the recreational season for bluefins, Scott Chambers of Townsend, Del., landed an 877-pound tuna (below) fishing with Capt. Dennis Endee on the *A-Salt Weapon*. If certified, the fish will easily eclipse the 2011 state record of 805 pounds caught by Corey Schutt out of Oregon Inlet. About three weeks earlier, on the final day of the commercial bluefin season, Corey Schaible of Nags Head, N.C., boated an 835-pound fish (lower right) on a commercial trip on Capt. Donnie White's *Sea Wolf*.



Opening Day of South Carolina's spring turkey season was good for Zack Couture (left), who killed this 22-pound gobbler in Fairfield County. The bird had a 10½-inch beard and 1¾-inch spurs.

IT'S TIME TO APPLY FOR S.C. ALLIGATOR TAGS

It's time for hunters to apply for tags for South Carolina's 2018 alligator season.

Applications from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources will become available on May 1, with June 15 being the closing date for sportsmen to apply for one of 800 tags, 200 for each of four alligator zones: Midlands, Pee Dee, Middle Coast and Southern Coast.

Hunters can get applications online from www.dnr.sc.gov. Applications must be accompanied by a \$10 non-refundable fee. Hunters can apply to hunt in any or all of the state's alligator zone, but if drawn, they must hunt only in the zone for which they are drawn.

South Carolina's 2018 alligator season will begin at noon on Sept. 9 and close at noon on Oct. 13.

Hunters will be chosen by a computer draw and notified in July. For those hunters chosen, tags will cost \$100.

In addition, special tags for Bear Island and Santee Coastal Reserve WMAs will be available, two per week per WMA. ■

South Carolina hunters can apply for 2018 alligator permits beginning on May 1.



(ABOVE)

TWO TIMES THE FUN

Scott Pittington of Patrick, S.C., took advantage of South Carolina's two-day youth turkey season. Taking to the woods March 17 with his father in Darlington County, he killed these two gobblers with one shot from his 12-gauge Franchi 912 Variomax shotgun.

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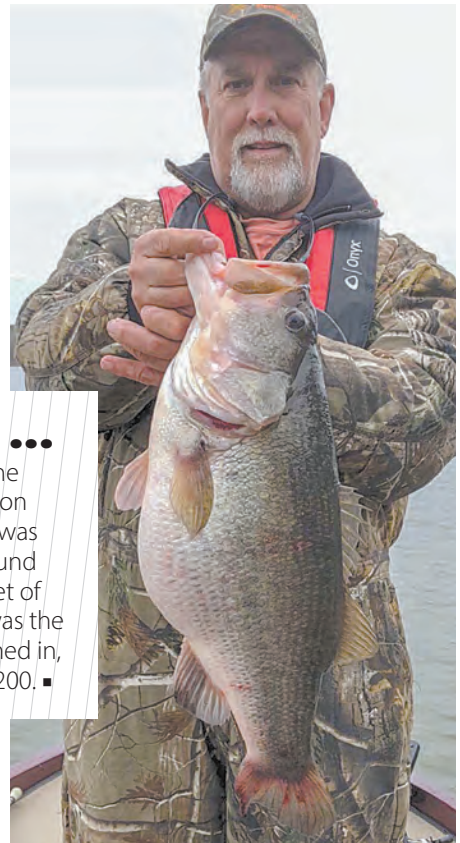
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All images will be considered, but those taken on the water or in the woods will have the best chance of being featured.

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

ONE FOR THE MONEY ...

Scott Ford of Fayetteville, N.C., had only one good bite in a March 27 team tournament on North Carolina's Jordan Lake, but at least it was a real good one. Ford caught this 11.85-pound largemouth bass on a jig in about 6 to 7 feet of water off a rocky point in Beaver Creek. It was the fish only that Ford and his son, Colin, weighed in, but it won big-fish honors and got them \$200. ■



NCWHF GETS TO \$500K GOAL FOR NC OYSTER PROJECT

Some people can't say no, and then there's Eddie Bridges, who refuses to take no for an answer -- especially when it comes to fish and wildlife.

Bridges, the 85-year-old, Greensboro-based dynamo for North Carolina wildlife, who has won nearly every national conservation-leadership award — Field & Stream's 2012 Conservation Hero of the Year honor, the Feinstone Environmental Award (1991), Chevron Award (2000) and Anheuser-Busch's Conservationist of the Year (2004) award — recently reached his first milestone toward fully funding the state's "Oyster Highway" in the New River as it flows through Jacksonville to the Atlantic Ocean.

The project will place habitat and oysters in the river under the direction of Pat Donovan-Brandenburg, a marine scientist who administers the Storm Water Division of Jacksonville's water-treatment complex, Sturgeon City. Oysters will be spread along a 26-mile stretch to cleanse the water, making it safer for humans, shellfish and finfish such as speckled trout, red drum, black drum, flounders and many other species. One oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water a day.

Bridges' first goal was to raise \$500,000 for the project, including matching money from the N.C. Wildlife Habitat Foundation he leads. He reached that goal at two big events in late February and early March.

At the NCWHF's annual fundraising banquet in Greensboro in February, Bridges presented Donovan-Brandenburg with a \$100,000 check from the Foundation. Shortly thereafter, John Pryor of Restorations Systems Inc., presented Bridges with a \$100,000 check for the oyster highway project.

That same night, Bridges spoke with Robert Smith, chairman of the North Carolina

chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, who had purchased a table at the banquet, and told him about the oyster highway. A couple of weeks later, on the last day of the Dixie Deer Classic in Raleigh, Smith told Bridges that the Federation was donating \$5,000 to the project. That allowed Bridges to free up a matching donation of \$5,000, which allowed him to reach the \$500,000 mark.

"I just keep plugging along," he said. "You try your best, and I try not to get discouraged when things don't work out. No



EDDIE BRIDGES

point in making people mad.

"The good Lord has blessed me, I think, because I'm always honest with people, and I'm in front of a good cause." ■

— Craig Holt





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FAB FOUR *Flounder's*

By Jeff Burleson

Flounder are arguably the most-recognizable inshore fish on the east coast. For die-hard anglers, they can be targeted all 12 months in the waters of both Carolinas, from brackish ecosystems to nearshore ocean reefs.

The inshore fishery that's within reach of small boats fires off hot late in the spring and early in the summer, and that's great for fishermen within a short drive of the North Carolina and South Carolina coasts, which have nutrient-rich estuaries that provide some of the best fishing through the flatfish's range.

The National Marine Fisheries Service reported that commercial fishermen brought to the dock more than 3 million pounds of flounder in North Carolina waters during the 2016 reporting period, making the Tarheel State the No. 1 flounder-producing state in the nation, with almost 40 percent of the nation's entire commercial harvest. The majority comes from the huge inland sounds for which North Carolina is famous, the Pamlico and Albemarle.

While South Carolina may lack a 3,000-square mile Albemarle-Pamlico inland estuary, the Palmetto State has plenty of excellent flounder habitat from Little River to the Savannah River that supports a generous recreational and commercial creel limit in spades.

Late spring and early summer are prime times for recreational fishermen to target flounder, which are turning on after a long winter. While they live in just about every estuary, creek or bay along the coast of both states, several areas are known locally or regionally as hot spots for flounder.

PAMLICO SOUND

To begin with, North Carolina's Pamlico Sound is one of the best and most-diverse flounder habitats anywhere and No. 1 on North Carolina's hit list for spring/summer flounder.

TRY THESE FOUR GREAT SPOTS TO PUT SOME NICE FLOUNDER IN YOUR COOLER AS FISHING KICKS OFF IN THE CAROLINAS THIS MONTH WITH SUMMER AROUND THE CORNER.

This sprawling area of water contains endless acres of pristine flounder habitat with a massive forage base to support it. Dave Stewart of Knee Deep Custom Fishing Charters in Minnesott Beach, N.C., said fishing takes off near the mouth of the Neuse River as soon as the water warms up to around 70 degrees.

"We have a lot of flounder that winter in the deep water in the river," said Stewart (252-670-2841). "When the water temperatures rise above 70 degrees, they move shallow and start looking for food."

The sound supports an overwintering population of summer flounder in its deeper areas; the amount of deep water supports a far larger winter population than other areas.

Stewart starts looking for flounder in places where they're rarely found during mid-summer.

"In the early season, they will be along deep marshes and creek mouths on oyster beds, shoals along deep channels, rock piles, jetties and on points of marsh islands — all near deep water. It will not be until later in the summer (that) they get up on the shoreline to feed in the super-shallow water," said Stewart, who will fish anywhere inside the crab-pot line from Cedar Island all the way to the Pamlico River.

According to Stewart, flounder feed on small fish, small shrimp and even worms. As a result, his primary lures are soft plastics rigged on light jigheads or screw-lock, weighted swimbait hooks.

"D.O.A.'s 4-inch shad tails or 3-inch shrimp — in white — work well for flounder, and D.O.A.'s new Sna-Koil dredged along the shoreline is a hot lure for flounder. They've been devastating," he said.

ROANOKE ISLAND UP NEXT ➤



ROANOKE ISLAND

Roanoke Island is at the northern end of the Pamlico Sound, straddling the Croatan and Roanoke sounds with direct access to the Atlantic Ocean through Oregon Inlet. The area between the sounds is practically a funnel for baitfish and shrimp and has perfect habitat for flounder.

Guide Bryan DeHart said flounder fishing can be great in May and June if you can get in the path of their migration.

"In May and early June, our fish show up in waves and are moving through, feeding along the way to their summer places. They are transitional fish," said DeHart (252-473-8632), "but the fishing can be consistent when you figure out their pattern on that day."

One of the characteristics that make this estuary unique is the lack of a discernible tide. Flounder and other predators don't get the luxury of setting up along a heavy current seam to feed. They must learn how to seek out bait and other forage outside of a tidal dynamic.

"We have wind-driven tides, and fish will position around points and shoreline structure to ambush incoming bait," said DeHart, who concentrates along marsh shorelines with various types of bottom, including the 3-foot cut banks and sandy banks next to marsh points.

"I fish various areas until I find a pattern. I work banks methodically like a bass fisherman," he said. "One of my most-important keys for catching spring flounder is the presence of bait. I bounce around to different habitats until you find spots with bait and there will be a good chance flounder will be there."

Scented soft plastics dredged along the bottom are DeHart's choice for spring and summer flounder lure options.

"I like Gulp or any other scented soft plastic, but a Z-Man Diesel Minnow with Pro-Cure (scent) is hard to beat for flounder, too," he said.

LITTLE RIVER

Little River Inlet and the marshes at Cherry Grove just south of the North Carolina/South Carolina border are prime spots that draw flounder anglers from both states.

Tom Cushman of Cush's Calmwater Fishing Charters fills most of his spring inshore fishing charters with sizeable limits of doormat flounder.

Marsh banks with a discernable dropoff and oyster rocks are excellent places to look for flounder as the tide rises and falls.

CAROLINA RIG OR JIGHEADS?

Which is better for live bait?

Few fishermen will argue that flounder prefer to feed in the lower third of the water column. Their body shape suggests that they spend most of their time along the bottom. As a result, lures and baits should stay on or near the bottom to capture a flounder's attention. When using live bait, the choice of terminal tackle can make a big difference in presentation.

J Baisch of Fishfull Thinking Guide Service in Murrells Inlet, S.C., switches between Carolina rigs and jigheads depending on the type of live bait he's fishing.

"I use jigheads mostly during the spring because I like to use mud minnows that time of year," Baisch said. "The escape route for a mud minnow is to bury in the mud or stay on the bottom. I like to use the jighead to control the livelihood of the minnow."

"May and June are the peak months for our spring flounder fishing. We catch big numbers of fish this time of year," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "Fish are moving in from offshore and into our inlets in waves, usually around the big tides from full moons."

Being based out of North Myrtle Beach, S.C., Cushman can easily fish Cherry Grove and Little River in South Carolina, estuaries that are relatively small compared to larger ones associated with larger river systems. The small estuaries are inviting to baitfish, shrimp and inshore migrations of flounder.

"Flounder are aggressively feeding and moving inshore in large schools of similar size," he said. "You will catch 30 to 40 12-inch fish one day, and then go back the next day and catch 16- to 22-inch fish. When the schools move in, it's exciting, especially when you catch a big fish early in the day — you know it's going to be a good day," he said.



Jeff Burleson

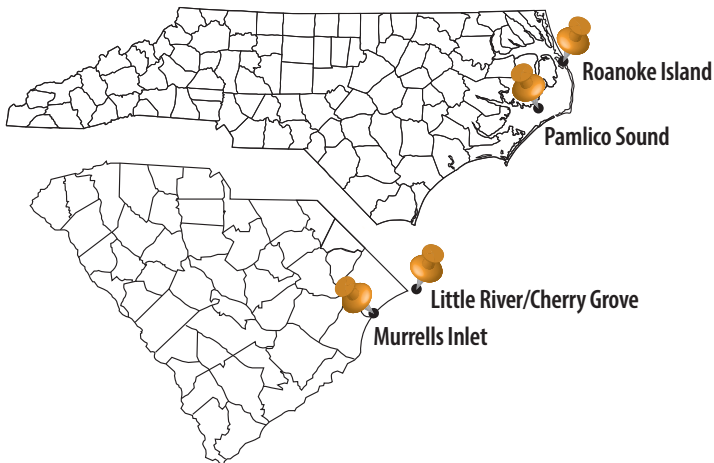
Jigheads are much better terminal tackle for flounder fishermen who are partial to using live mud minnows.



Jerry Dilts/aver

For most of the spring, mud minnows are the go-to bait because there aren't many other live baits to choose from inshore, but as the water warms, finger mullet begin to become more available and Baisch will switch to a Carolina rig. The escape route for a mullet is to go to the surface, and Baisch likes to allow mullet some tether room just off the bottom, but not too much.

"Mullet broadcast nice when they are 12 inches off the bottom. I like to keep them on a leash, a short leash," he said. ■



Cushman starts in the main channels at Cherry Grove and shifts to Little River as the water heats up, fishing around oyster bars and creek mouths. But he will stay on the move if the fish aren't in a particular spot.

"Flounder aren't sitting still this time of year. They are moving around with the tide and setting up in places the bait will come to them," said Cushman, who targets places where the sand hits oyster bars near a drop-off, such as a creek drain with an oyster bar located along the edges. He prefers to fish the last two hours of the falling tide and the first two hours of the rise.

Live mud minnows are Cushman's primary offering for flounder, but he will use finger mullet or small menhaden when available. He also likes Gulp soft plastics in the spring and early summer.

"Flounder will inhale a 3-inch Gulp shrimp or curlytail mullet. They love scented lures in white," he said.

MURRELLS INLET UP NEXT ➤

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MURRELLS INLET

The small fishing village of Murrells Inlet south of Myrtle Beach receives very little exposure from tourists, but the pint-sized estuary packs a big punch for flounder in late spring and early summer, thanks to its ideal saltwater flow.

“Murrells Inlet is an anomaly. We have the right bottom here — unlike the inlets to the south of us with unconsolidated pluff mud,” said J Baisch of Fishfull Thinking Guide Service. “We have hard mud and sand mostly. Also, we don’t have any freshwater feeding our estuary, and there is something about salt-in and salt-out this time of the year.”

Flounder prefer to enter Murrells Inlet early in the season. While freshwater inputs in brackish systems can offer baitfish and shrimp nutritional benefits, estuaries with a high saline content provide incoming life with similar water chemistry

The high salinity content of Murrells Inlet’s waters make for great late-spring fishing for flounder, which are moving in from the salty ocean.



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as in the ocean, which is preferred during the spring return.

Because it can still be cool in May, flounder will choose areas where the sun can warm the waters.

“I prefer to fish lower tides and moving water,” said Baisch (843-902-0356). “My favorite time is a good low tide in the afternoon when the sun heats up the hard mud and dark-colored oysters. But I will fish about any tide this time of year, because when the fish arrive, they are aggressive and ready to eat no matter what the tide is.”

Baisch fishes places along main-channel banks near the inlet as well as creek mouths and the edges of flats near deep channels with abundant oysters. Flounder will stage up on the edge of structure, waiting for food to be swept past. Live minnows fished on a jighead are his go-to baits. ■



Jeff Bureson 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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Go "stinky" FOR FLOUNDER

New fishing tools arrive on the market every year, and many are considered more gimmick than innovation.

However, scent-infused lures and spray attractants have proven effective additions to any soft-plastic lure for most fish.

Some fish species can detect chemicals in the water better than others, and those fish that make their living in stained to murky waters, smell is a critical component to their livelihood. Flounder are one of those species that uses their olfactory senses to locate food.

Guide Bryan DeHart of Manteo, N.C., is a firm believer in using scented baits or adding attractants on his soft plastics.

"I will not target flounder without a scented bait, like Gulp or another soft plastic sprayed with Pro-Cure," he said.

Gulp uses a water-based attractant infused into the plastic. As soon as the lures hit the water, the scent begins to leave the bait.

Fish can detect scents and other chemicals in the water column, and it might not always be a "fishy" smell they key in on, either. Sometimes, it is bile or free amino acids, a sign of recent feeding by other fish. As a result, Pro-Cure uses custom forage flavors but will add amino acids to their formula to lure other predator fishes into the area.

While flounder use their dual-sided vision to locate their prey,



Bryan DeHart

an added scent trail will quickly get them in the feeding mode. "Scented baits will definitely increase your chances of getting a fish to eat over a non-scented bait," he said. ■

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is known for its fantastic fishing, from 40-pound bull reds and gator speckled trout along its salty shores to world-record catfish and slab crappie from its notable reservoirs, Anglers don't have to trailer far to locate a super-productive fishery.

Largemouth bass are also one of the state's coveted fisheries, with ample opportunities for great fishing, to pick up fast and furious action for big bucket mouths, whether in reservoirs or rivers.

When bass pro Britt Meyers of Lake Wylie, S.C., heard that the BASS Elite Series was bringing a tournament to South Carolina two years ago, specifically to Georgetown, S.C., he knew that some of the state's best — and maybe overlooked — bass waters were within reach.

Meyers' home is only three hours from the Cooper River, and he knew that stretch of water was capable of producing big bass, and lots of them. And he was correct.



The Cooper River has been known for spitting out plenty of big bass over the past handful of years, qualifying it as one of South Carolina's best bass fisheries.

South Carolina's Cooper River is a coastal bass factory this month.

DON'T IGNORE THE Cooper

By Jeff Burleson

Jeff Burleson



"I traveled two hours and 110 miles each way to fish the Cooper River, because it was the best shot at a 20-pound bag," Meyers said. "On my morning of practice, I ran into them, quickly catching over 20 pounds of fish from a small area. In four days, I put over 880 miles on my Mercury engine, but it paid off with a win.

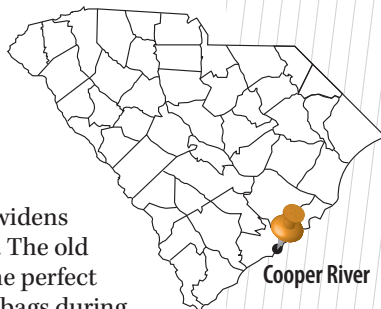
Myers selected the region upstream of Cypress Gardens and the railroad trestle where complexes of reclaimed rice fields are found, right in the middle of one of the best sections in the entire river for largemouth bass.

The Cooper is a unique system capable of producing large bass due to the fertile waters coming out of Lake Moultrie and from the varied forage base contained in the upper section of the Cooper. But the entire river doesn't offer ideal bass habitat because of the saltwater intrusion downstream and the narrow and deep-banked character of the river upstream near the Jefferies Generating Station at the Lake Moultrie dam.

Closer to the reclaimed rice fields, the river widens and provides ideal all-season habitat for bass. The old rice dikes, depressions and grass beds were the perfect combination for Meyers to pluck his winning bags during the spring of 2016.

"Instead of having a 50-mile area with bass all over, they are concentrated in the rice-field area. Everything these fish need was in these old rice fields, (including) flats with depressions, deep water, shallow water, current and submerged grass. Fish live in this area, and it is where I will fish every time I fish a tournament in this area."

One of the Cooper River's big drawing cards for bass fishermen is aquatic vegetation, submerged and emergent.



DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The upper section of the Cooper River is best accessed from the Dunham Creek landing off Cypress Gardens Road in Moncks Corner or from the US 52 crossing just below the Jefferies Generating Station in Moncks Corner.

WHERE TO GO — The best section of the Cooper River is the section just upstream of the Cypress Gardens region where the relic rice fields are located. The historic dikes have deteriorated and the fields are nearly completely flooded, provided excellent habitat for largemouth bass. The target area begins just upstream of the railroad trestle where the river appears to widen considerably, and it continues upstream for several miles. This area can be covered with vegetation and moving water.

WHEN TO GO — Fishing for largemouth bass in the upper section of the Cooper River can be good year-round. The best spring begins in March and will continue into May and early June.

TACKLE/TECHNIQUES — Heavy action bait-casting tackle spooled with braid is the norm. Fish around submerged vegetation with soft plastics and fish topwater plugs, spinnerbaits and crankbaits in the right situations.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Marc Deschenes, 843-708-5473, www.vipadventures.net; 843-708-5473; Brett Mitchell, 803-379-7039, www.fishingwithbrett.com. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Charleston Convention & Visitors Bureau, 304-344-5075 www.charlestoncvb.com.

MAPS — DeLorme's South Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer, 207-846-7000, www.delorme.com.





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Not only does this area provide a wide range of depths and underwater structure, it is covered in submerged aquatic vegetation that holds fish.

Meyers recommends using three basic lures around the grass, close to current in the spring.

“Topwater lures, shallow-running crankbaits and a heavy jig you can flip into the grass is what will produce the best bites during the spring,” he said.

Topwater lures and shallow-running crank baits are perfect for imitating the Cooper River forage base. Bass are readily feeding on a wide variety of larger forage fish, including shad, herring, sunfish and mullet. Any lure resembling these types of forage fish fleeing in the current is a perfect way to dupe a Cooper River largemouth.

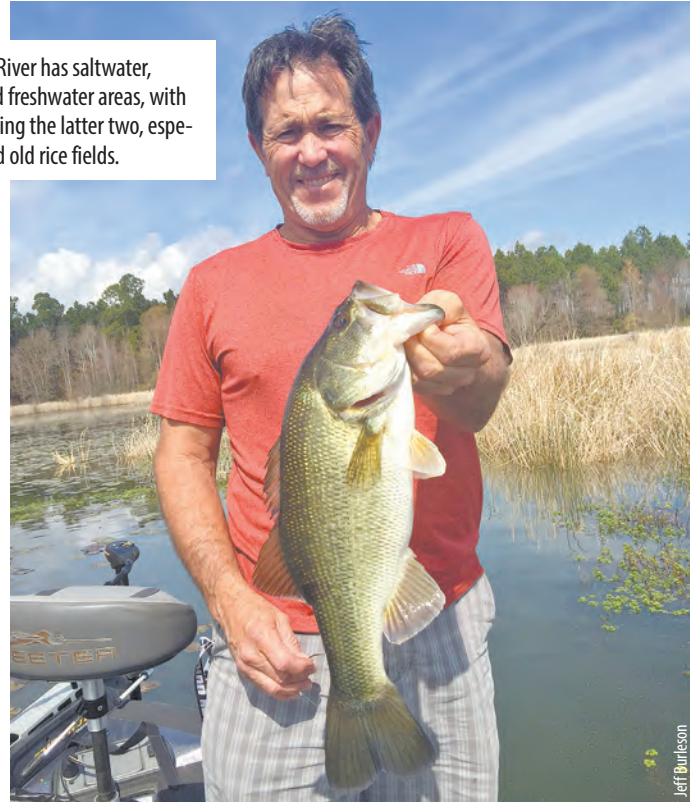
Meyers’ favorites are a Rapala DT-6 crankbait or a Green Fish Tackle TAT, (Totally Awesome Topwater).

“The hard baits will move a lot of water and make plenty of noise,” he said. “But many bass will be buried in the vegetation where I like to have something to flip into the grass. I like to pitch a heavy Green Fish Tackle swim jig or shakey head jig into the grass.” ■



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

The Cooper River has saltwater, brackish and freshwater areas, with bass inhabiting the latter two, especially around old rice fields.



Jeff Burleson

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Bass fishermen typically keep a tight watch on the water temperature and clarity and the direction and intensity of the wind. The tide is rarely a factor to consider, but for anglers fishing the Cooper River or other coastal rivers, the combination of the tide and wind can play a major role in success. If the wind and tide are moving in the same direction, water will really move. If the wind is opposing the tide, the water movement may be slow or stop. When pro angler Britt Meyers won a BASS Elite Tournament in 2016, he travelled from Winyah Bay near Georgetown to the Cooper River and ran the tide.

"Tides made a big difference for me in the Cooper," Meyers said. "On the first three fishing days, the best bite was earlier in the morning near the tide change, and (it) progressively got later in the day into the tournament. But the wind on the second day of the tournament changed things quickly."

Meyers went from catching 18 to 20-pound, (5-fish) creel limits to an 8-pound limit when the wind held back the tide.

"Tides can be very predictable with stable weather, but heavy winds can throw a monkey wrench in everything and prevent water from moving back upriver; which is what happened to everybody fishing on the Cooper the last two days of tournament," he said.

In coastal systems such as the Cooper, Meyers chooses to fish his best sports around the changes in the tide.

"I like the one-hour period around the tide change when the tide swings from high to low or from low to high. The fish tend to bite the best around these changes in current," he said.

On the second day of the tournament, Meyers waited until the tide was perfect to fish a point he knew to hold fish.

"At 11:30, I pulled up to a point next to a depression and caught two 4-pound fish on back-to-back casts. I waited all morning for the tide to be exactly right before I went to that spot," he said.

The combination of tides and wind in the Cooper River can leave great shallow bass cover high and dry or push fish into the same cover.



Jeff Burleson

While tides and currents make a significant difference in how and where inshore saltwater species bite, largemouth bass acclimated to the tides will behave accordingly. ■

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SPEAK A SPRING MACKEREL'S LANGUAGE

Fishermen in both Carolinas should pay attention this month for the annual arrival of hungry, tasty Spanish mackerel in nearshore waters.

By Jerry Dilsaver

One of the signs that spring has returned to the Carolinas is the arrival of Spanish mackerel in coastal waters. These little mackerel are targeted by fishermen from Hilton Head to Nags Head, and rightfully so. They are generally considered the tastiest member of the mackerel family; they arrive in large schools, the limit is liberal, they are typically easy to find and they are usually in a feeding mood. It doesn't get much better.

Spanish mackerel are primarily caught in the nearshore ocean, from just beyond the breakers to a few miles off the beach, but they may be farther offshore and occasionally follow baitfish into inlets, sounds and larger coastal rivers. This availability and abundance are two of the primary reasons for the popularity of "Spaniards."

They can be caught on live baits, jigs cast from piers and the surf and by trolling and casting from any boat seaworthy enough to go into the ocean. Add their forays into inlets, bays and rivers, and their pleasant, mild flavor, and it's easy to see why they are high on the preferred list of so many fishermen.

Rennie Clark, Jr. of Tournament Trail Charters (910-465-8943) in Carolina Beach, N.C., enjoys fishing the nearshore ocean a lot, especially when jigging and trolling for Spanish.

Jerry Dilsaver

“I AM FORTUNATE TO LIVE IN AN AREA WITH A GREAT SPANISH RUN, BOTH SPRING AND FALL, AND A VARIETY OF PLACES TO FIND THEM,”

Clark said. “We have a couple of inlets, several nearshore artificial reefs and a good spread of nearshore natural structure. All of this tends to concentrate bait, which concentrates fish. Our area also has a reputation for holding more large spring Spanish than anywhere else in the Carolinas.”

Clark, who fishes primarily out of Carolina Beach Inlet, has the option of heading south towards Cape Fear or north towards Masonboro Inlet and Wrightsville Beach. Masonboro Inlet is one of North Carolina’s few jettied inlets, and the rock structures concentrate the water flow, carrying baitfish around their ends. The water often is clearer to the north, as some flow from the falling tide in the Cape Fear River goes out Carolina Beach Inlet.

“I enjoy casting to feeding Spanish more than trolling,” Clark said. “It lets my clients fight the fish rather than having to wind in planers and heavy trolling sinkers. However, some days they are feeding deep enough that even the birds are having trouble finding them, so we go to spots

with good histories of holding fish and troll.”

Clark’s favorite jigs are Williamson’s .9-ounce Gomame and .7-ounce Gomoku jigs. They come equipped with treble hooks, which Clark replaces with coastal black, No. 1/0 size VMC ILSCB large-ring J-hooks to allow quick and easy removal from the toothy jaws of a Spanish, especially if the fish is to be released. He also replaces the standard split rigs with No. 3 VMC stainless-steel split rings for more strength.

“I use these jigs for everything from casting to breaking Spanish, bonito and false albacore, to vertical jigging for gray trout, black sea bass, overslot reds in the ocean and more,” Clark said.



Jerry Disaver



ABOVE: Spanish mackerel are among the most-popular of all nearshore fish that grace the waters off the coast of North Carolina and South Carolina. **BELOW:** Mike Eady has plenty of places to target Spanish mackerel within kayak range of his home port of Murrells Inlet, S.C.

Mike Eady

“They usually do the job well, but occasionally Spanish mackerel will get locked into feeding on a particular size bait, usually small glass minnows, and won’t hit larger lures. When this happens, I downsize to smaller Maria jigs, and the bite usually picks up.”

Clark prefers to find schools of feeding Spanish and cast to them, but sometimes that just doesn’t happen. Some days, the Spanish stay deep, even if they’re feeding, and when this happens, trolling is the way to locate them and sometimes the only way to catch them consistently.

Clark has two different trolling tactics. He begins in places that normally hold Spanish and trolls while looking for schools of fish on his fish finder. He prefers to troll slowly with Yo-Zuri Deep Diver lures, which dive a few feet on their

own, so they are easy to use and let fishermen fight the fish.

Some days, Spanish are holding deeper, so Clark breaks out his go-to lures, small planers and Mackerel Tree rigs. Clark prefers smaller, No. 1 planers, but occasionally Spanish are deep enough for a bigger No. 2 to be needed.

Mackerel Tree rigs are growing in popularity. They have several drops with short pieces of surgical tubing and a gold hook, with a Clark Spoon trailer. Clark said they can be difficult to handle at times but are very productive, with double strikes common and triples rarely a surprise.

Mike Eady has years of experience fishing and guiding from a kayak from South Carolina’s Grand Strand as far south as Georgetown, and he’s recently added a skiff to his arsenal at Yak Kayak Fishing and Outdoor Guides.

continues on page 32

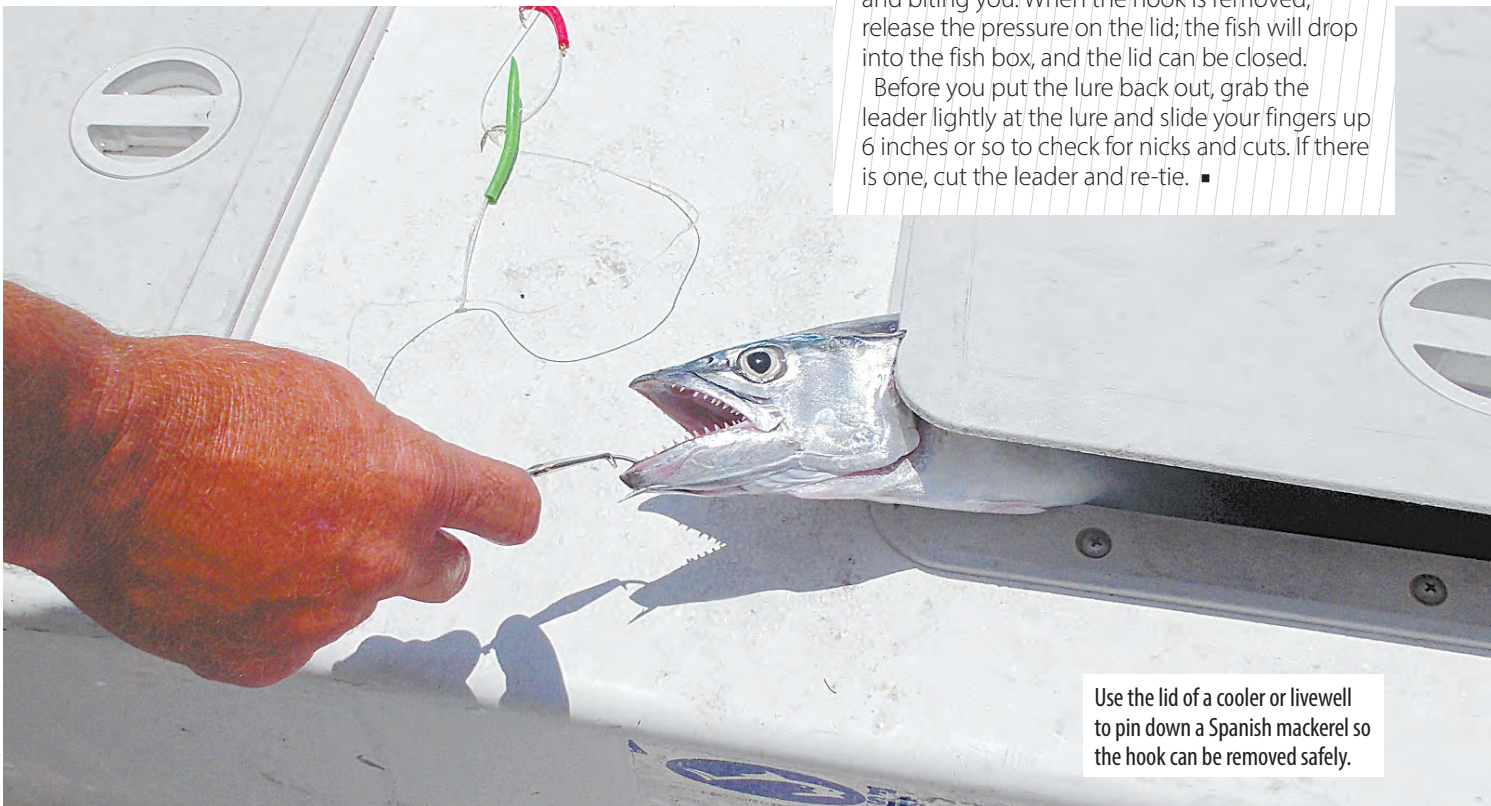
UNHOOKING SPANISH

DOESN'T HAVE TO COME TO A BLOODY END

Spanish mackerel are coated with a very slick slime and have razor-sharp teeth, which can be a dangerous combination. They are difficult to hold, and a single slip can put fingers in danger of a severe laceration. The slime may transmit germs or diseases to fishermen through open cuts, especially ones freshly made by a mackerel’s sharp teeth. The easier you can to handle and unhook Spanish, the better, and guide Rennie Clark, Jr. has a great trick.

Clark uses his livewell as a fish box, but a fish box or cooler will serve the same purpose. Spanish mackerel are not usually netted or gaffed but are flipped into the boat. Clark opens the lid on the fish box, flip a freshly caught Spanish into it and closes the lid. Some Spanish will throw the hook once the tension on the line is released. For those that don’t, crack the lid open and use the leader to pull the Spanish into a corner, with just its head sticking out. Close the lid on the Spanish’s gill cover and apply enough pressure to hold it firmly. Now, you can remove the hook without the fish struggling and possibly surging forward and biting you. When the hook is removed, release the pressure on the lid; the fish will drop into the fish box, and the lid can be closed.

Before you put the lure back out, grab the leader lightly at the lure and slide your fingers up 6 inches or so to check for nicks and cuts. If there is one, cut the leader and re-tie. ■



Use the lid of a cooler or livewell to pin down a Spanish mackerel so the hook can be removed safely.

Eady (843-246-0045) prefers to fish for Spanish mackerel from Murrells Inlet, S.C., where there is tidal flow out of the jettied inlet, flow from Pawley's Island Inlet a few miles down the beach, artificial reefs close to both inlets and a productive hardbottom area just offshore off one artificial reef. Two of the closer reefs, the jetties at Murrells Inlet and the tide lines from both inlets can be reached by boat or kayak, but a reef farther offshore and the hardbottom area require a boat.

Fishing from a kayak, Eady has developed several techniques that work well at slower speeds. The skiff allows trolling at the 5- to 8-knot speed many fishermen feel is appropriate for Spanish, but he also uses a slow-trolling technique and often stops and casts.

"I look for things that indicate Spanish are there," Eady said. "This can be birds hovering and diving over a spot; it can be bait showering, or it can be cutting fish on the surface.

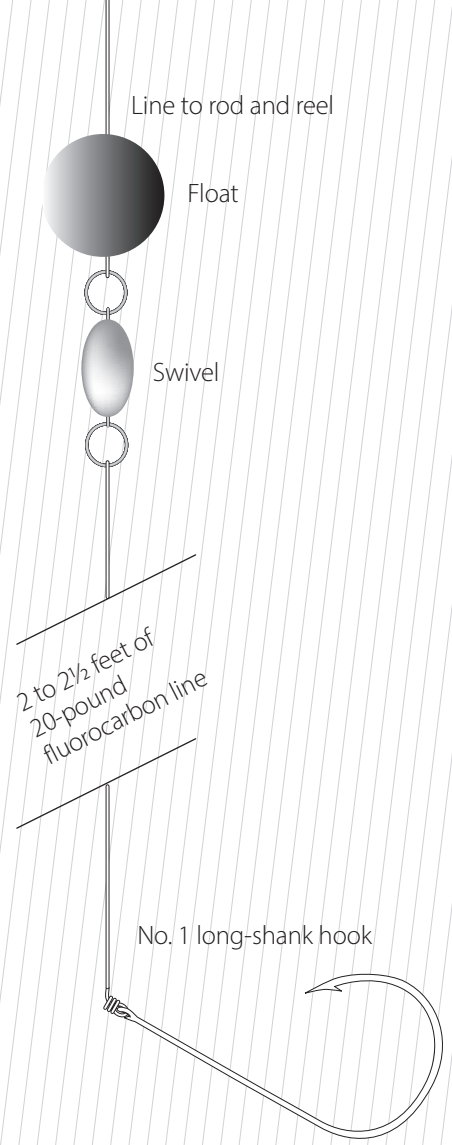
"Spanish usually show up at the 10-Mile Reef and Belkie Bear first and then move towards the beach as bait shows," Eady said. "This could be at any time from mid-April on, but certainly by mid-May. Early on, they will be spread, and we will conventional troll using Clark Spoons and Mackerel Trees behind trolling sinkers and small planers. The key to catching them is covering a lot of water. As the schools get larger, we slow our trolling speed and concentrate on fishing the schools."

Early in the season, Eady uses gold and silver Clark Spoons in 0 and 00 sizes and a variety of Mackerel Tree rigs. His rigs are a combination of red, blue and green tubing and mixed rigs of silver and gold Mylar with a Clark Spoon at the end. There are days the fish prefer one color or another, so the mixture is a must.

As the water warms, Eady said Spanish develop a preference for gold and silver; not only with Clark Spoons, but with Mackerel Trees. He said the Mackerel Tree rigs with the Mylar inside clear tubing catches fish as well and last much longer. Spanish will gnaw on exposed Mylar and tear it from the hooks.

At about the same time, Spanish usually slow down the speed at which they feed; Eady has taken advantage of this for years while kayak fishing and now

Guide Mike Eady's slow-trolling rig for Spanish mackerel includes a float that keeps his bait suspended about 30 inches under the surface, where mackerel often feed.



THE SAME, only different

Fishermen in North Carolina and South Carolina generally look for bait-fish, structure and water flow when fishing for Spanish mackerel. The primary places to find concentrations of the small mackerel are around inlets, in close proximity to wrecks and artificial reefs, and harassing schools of bait around natural structure.

Rennie Clark primarily fishes from North Carolina's Carolina Beach Inlet, a shallow inlet with a lot of flow from creeks, marshes and the ICW, but he can head north to Masonboro Inlet, which is deeper and jettied on both sides. After the Inlets, Clark checks several shipwrecks and then around nearshore artificial reefs, including the Phillip Wolfe Reef (AR 378) and the Meares Harris Reef (AR 370), also known as the Liberty Ship. The precise locations and other details about artificial reefs can be found at www.portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program, including a downloadable and printable reef guide.

Several nearshore hardbottom areas and rock outcroppings are in the area around Carolina Beach Inlet. High Rock is one of the most prominent and well known, approximately 5 miles south of the inlet, roughly off the N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher. It rises to within 9 feet of the surface. Johns Creek Rock is roughly the same distance north of Carolina Beach Inlet, off Masonboro Island, and it also rises nearly to the surface.

Mike Eady fishes primarily from Murrells Inlet, S.C., which is jettied, concentrating tidal flow and setting up a good tide line in the ocean. Pawley's Inlet, a few miles to the south, drains a small area, but there is enough bait flushing on falling tides to get fish's attention.

The PA-09 artificial reef, which includes Paradise Reef, the H.P. Springs, Jr. Reef, Grand Strand Saltwater Anglers Reef, Winston Perry Reef and Bob Hanson

Reef, is 3 miles from the south jetty at Murrells Inlet, with the PA-11 artificial reef, including the Pawley's Island Reef and Tommy Pierce Reef, is approximately 5.5 miles offshore, down the beach off Pawley's Inlet. While the water is only about 10 feet deeper, the PA-10 artificial reef, which includes the 10-Mile Reef, Bruce Rush Reef and 11-Mile Reef begins 10 miles off the beach. Detailed information on these and other artificial reefs can be found at www.dnr.sc.gov/artificial-reefs, including a downloadable and printable reef guide.

There isn't a lot of natural structure close to shore off Murrells Inlet, but a local favorite for early Spanish mackerel is a hardbottom area just offshore of PA-10 called Belkie Bear. There isn't significant height to the structure at Belkie Bear, but there is something about this area that concentrates bait, and therefore mackerel, before they move inshore each spring. ■

continues on page 34

IT ALL ADDS UP TO MORE FISH IN THE BOAT.



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also uses that experience in the boat, slowing his trolling speed from 5 knots or better to around 2 to 3 knots.

Eady said the creeks at Murrells Inlet and Pawleys Island are unique estuaries that are only fed through the inlets. They are tidal and don't go inland across US 17. There is no freshwater runoff from inland feeding them, and the water warms more quickly. Some baitfish stay in the area all winter, and mullet minnows show up earlier than in other areas. Spanish know this and gather just outside the inlets to feed.

"By mid- to late May, Spanish are thick and gather off the ends of the Murrells Inlet jetties," Eady said. "They may gather as the tide rises, but their numbers increase dramatically once the tide begins to fall and sweeps minnows and shrimp out the inlet. We'll position just to the outside of the harder current and cast small lures or drift minnows into it. Eady doesn't stop to cast often, but

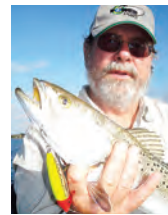
when he does, he likes to cast small Rat-L-Traps, which he said match the size of minnows being swept out the inlet and have an action Spanish like. Rat-L-Traps sink a little naturally, and this puts them in the strike zone for feeding Spanish.

"Our Spanish live-bait rig is a little different than most," Eady said. "Spanish have incredible eyesight and shy away from even a trace of wire, so we use 2 to 3 feet of 20-pound Vanish fluorocarbon for the leader. It's tied to a single, No. 1 long-shank hook that is hooked up through the bait's lips. Sometimes the bait is drifted back with the current



A Mackerel Tree rig consists of a long leader with a snap to which a Clark Spoon is connected, fished behind a handful of lures made from surgical tubing.

and allowed to sink, and sometimes it is under a float to limit its depth. We live bait with lighter rods and reels and fishermen have a lot of fun catching Spanish." ■



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

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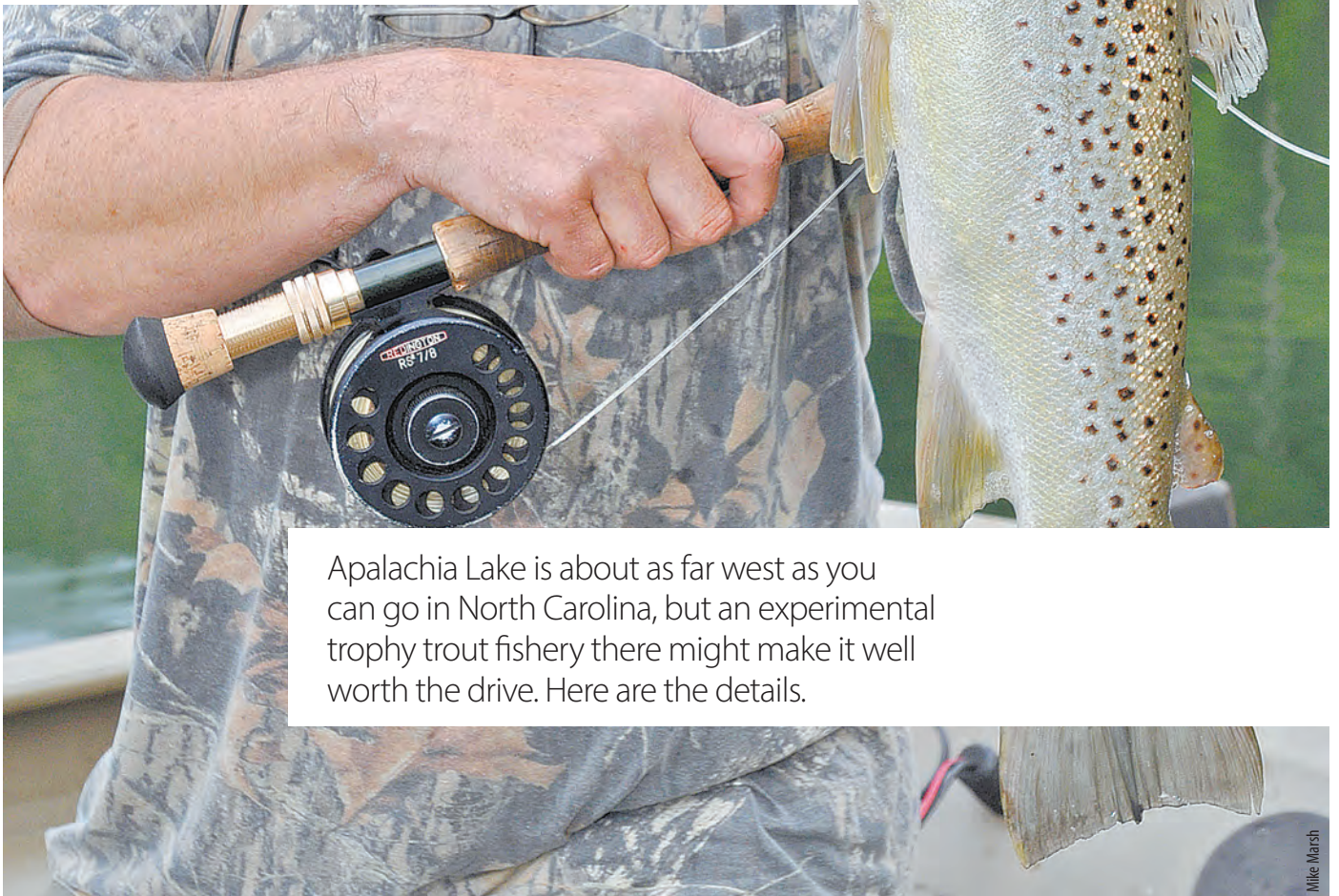
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Mountain trout, the lake way

By Mike Marsh



Apalachia Lake is about as far west as you can go in North Carolina, but an experimental trophy trout fishery there might make it well worth the drive. Here are the details.

Mike Marsh

A spring or summer Saturday with a nice weather forecast packs nearly every lake in North Carolina with anglers;

arriving before daybreak is a prerequisite for having a place to park a boat trailer and tow vehicle at most public ramps.

But one Saturday morning in June, only one boat was launched at the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's ramp on Apalachia Lake. Sliding his 18-foot aluminum john boat into the 1,070-acre lake was David Woody, a conservation technician with the Commission based in western North Carolina.


Apalachia Lake is so remote that few anglers visit. Only a few houses dot its shoreline west of Murphy, N.C., and it's as far west as boaters can travel and still be in North Carolina; the lake's

lower end is close to the Tennessee border. Until the past couple of years, it had a lackluster reputation as a place to catch small-mouth bass and sunfish, so even local anglers headed for Lake Hiwassee, directly upstream from Apalachia.

Heading down the narrow, run-of-the-river lake, snaking along between mountain peaks, Woody stopped when he saw a fish break the surface. Picking up his fly rod, he wet the line with a false cast, and a fish broke behind his boat. He turned



Mike Marsh



and shot his fly into the boil. It took only two strips of line before he set the hook in a monstrous brown trout.

He played the fish until it was exhausted and dipped it from the crystal-clear water with a landing net. He was still shaking with excitement when he put the trout in a measuring tray and weighed it on a digital scale.

“Sixty-two centimeters, which is about 24.4 inches long,” Woody said. “It weighs 5 pounds, 10 ounces. This is the biggest brown trout I have caught from Apalachia Lake.”

continues on page 40

Apalachia Lake flow changes often

The flow regime in Apalachia Lake is starkly different from what anglers expect from other mountain lakes. Water entering the lake through Hiwassee Dam is very cold, so the lake can support big trout, and it’s oxygenated by the Tennessee Valley Authority as it passes through the dam.

After water flows into Apalachia Lake during peak times of electric power generation, it is pumped back upstream into Hiwassee Lake during times of low power demand. Anglers usually find the water flowing gently in the morning, and they can be caught off-guard when the flow increases significantly during a hot afternoon. The surface temperature can also change dramatically, becoming much colder, which makes fishing for trophy trout difficult.

The powerful flow generated by water entering the lake can also have an impact on launching and retrieving boats at the ramp. Anglers should not leave their boats unattended, because they might be left high-and-dry or float free — even on anchor lines — and drift into rocks when the water level is rapidly changing.

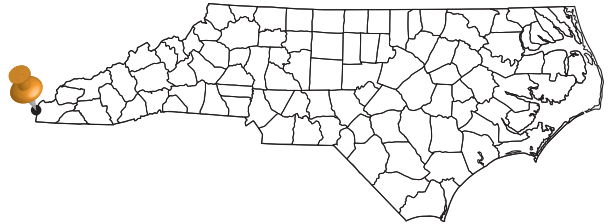
While water releases from Hiwassee Dam are scheduled, the schedule can change without warning due to weather conditions or power demand. The plant has two generators; if both are running, the water is too swift for good fishing. The best fishing occurs when one generator is running.

For scheduled release dates and times, visit www.tva.gov/Environment/Lake-Levels/Apalachia. ■

Fishing on Apalachia Lake in extreme western North Carolina is often directed by water flow through Hiwassee Dam and then a pumpback feature that returns it to the larger, upstream lake.

Photo: Mike Marsh

Apalachia Lake



Giving the fish a better look, he found a red patch behind its right eye; the discovery was almost as exciting as catching the trophy fish.

"I probably held this fish in my hands when it was stocked four years ago," he said. "The first year, we marked each fish with a red elastomer tag in the right cheek of the larger fish and in the left cheek of the smaller fish. This one was one of the larger fish; it was around 14 inches long when it was stocked."

Any brown or rainbow trout 18 inches long or weighing at least 2 pounds, 8

ounces, is large enough to earn a certificate for an outstanding catch through the Commission's North Carolina Angler Recognition Program. While fish of that size are rare in most mountain waters, producing such large fish is the goal of the Commission's trophy trout-stocking experiment at Apalachia. Amanda Bushon, the Commission's district fisheries biologist for western North Carolina, has been shepherding Apalachia's trophy trout fishery since its inception.

continues on page 42

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — I-40 will get anglers from most parts of North Carolina into the neighborhood of Apalachia Lake. From US 64/74 and NC 294 south of Murphy, take NC 294 west, turning right on TVA Hiwassee Dam Access Rd (SR 1314), then turn left on Powerhouse Road to the access area, which is at 555 Powerhouse Rd., Murphy.

WHEN TO GO — Trout bite year-round. The best months for topwater and fly fishing are June and July. The best months for trolling are February and March.

BEST TECHNIQUES — The best flies are large streamers that resemble blueback herring: Maribou streamers or Popsicles. The best lures also resemble herring, with Rapala and Rebel minnows, Lucky Craft Pointer, Bass Assassin and Kastmaster spoons good choices. When fly fishing, a 9-foot, 7-weight rod and 7/8 weight reel spooled with an intermediate sink tip or full sinking line.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Southern Appalachian Anglers, 828-691-1506, www.southernappalachiananglers.com. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds

ACCOMMODATIONS — Days Inn, Murphy, 828-837-8030. Econo Lodge, Murphy, 828-837-8880.

MAPS — DeLorme North Carolina Atlas and Gazetteer, 800-452-5931 or www.delorme.com.

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Trout tagging 101

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission implants elastomer tags into cheeks of all rainbow and brown trout stocked into Apalachia Lake.

The first four years of stockings included 1,500 10-inch fish and 1,000 14-inch fish of both species annually. Tags were red in 2012, blue in 2013, yellow in 2014 and orange in 2015. The 10-inch fish were tagged in the left cheek and 14-inch fish were tagged in the right cheek. All were implanted with metal tags in the opposite cheek to allow biologists to determine whether a trout is a stocked or a wild fish in the event the tag color fade over time.

Apalachia Lake is an experimental trophy fishery, giving the



Mike Marsh

The red tag in the cheek of this trout identifies it as a fish stocked in Apalachia Lake in 2012 at 14 inches long.

Commission flexibility in management in terms of the number of fish it stocks and adjusting creel limits or other regulations. It is currently undesignated trout water.

The Commission will adjust future stockings and regulations in response to angler surveys and sampling data. The main thing fishery managers will be studying is the growth rates of the trout; cheek tags are a great way of determining how large a fish has grown during a specific time interval. At some point, growth rates will slow as their population achieves a balance, with the main forage base of blueback herring. ■

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Apalachia Lake trout

The cold nature of Apalachia Lake's waters offers brown and rainbow trout with friendly habitat in which they can thrive.

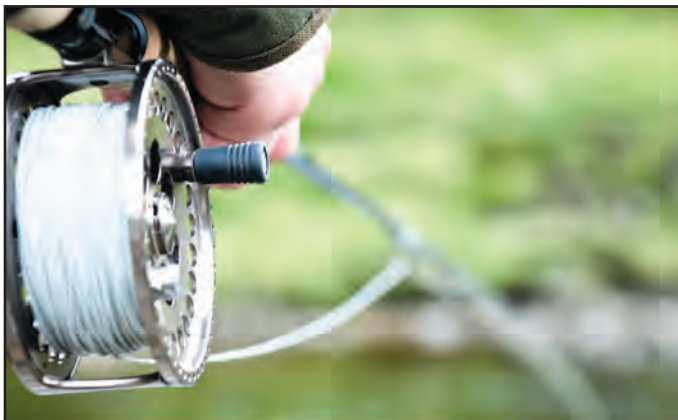
"The idea came from a similar management program at Lake Jocassee (in South Carolina) that is the shining example of what you can do with a lake that has abundant forage and good habitat," Bushon said. "Blueback herring showed up in Lake Hiwassee in 1998. They are popular baitfish for striped bass, which we now stock in Hiwassee, and (they) probably came from a live-bait tank. The herring probably moved downstream into Apalachia within the next couple of years. Apalachia is so remote we had not actively managed it until we started this trophy trout project."

The creation of the fishery is a case of using sour lemons to make lemonade. The blueback herring caused a reduction in reproduction and recruitment of walleye in Hiwassee. Stripers stocked in Hiwassee created a new fishery based on the newly arrived herring. The rainbow and brown trout the Commission stocked into Apalachia Lake have also taken advantage of the new forage species.

While there were initially a few wild rainbow trout swimming in Apalachia Lake, they had not shown up on many anglers' radar until the Commission stocked approximately 1,500 10-inch and 1,000 14-inch rainbow trout — and about the same numbers and sizes of brown trout — from 2012 through 2015. The cheek tags were red in 2012, blue in 2013, yellow in 2014



Mike Marsh



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White streamer flies tied with Maribou that resemble herring are great for fooling Apalachia Lake trout.

and orange in 2015. Commission personnel also implanted a metal tag, detectable with a metal detector, into the opposite cheek. If, over time, the color of the tag fades, the metal tag will confirm that a trout was raised in a hatchery and stocked into the lake.

Besides abundant forage, trout must have cold water with a high level of dissolved oxygen. The water in Apalachia comes through Hiwassee Dam, from the bottom of the lake, its temperature in the low 50s — cold enough for good trout survival and growth rates. The licensing agreement with the Tennessee Valley Authority requires its power plant to oxygenate the water it discharges through the dam.

Apalachia is a deep, 9.8-mile lake with a dam height of 150 feet, but the Commission's electrofishing boats and gill nets can only sample fish in shallow areas, so data on the growth and abundance of the stocked trout is limited. Angler surveys, which supplement the sampling data, show that approximately



Mike Marsh

12 percent of angler catch is brown trout and 8 percent is rainbow trout. Anglers' primary catches consist of smallmouth and largemouth bass, with some yellow perch and sunfish in the mix.

"The rainbow trout are not growing as well as the brown trout, although one angler caught a rainbow trout that weighed 3.78 pounds." Bushon said. "In our electrofishing surveys, we have

caught 19-inch rainbow trout that weighed 3.5 pounds and a brown trout that weighed 10 pounds. Anglers have reported catching brown trout that weighed 12 pounds."

Bushon said anglers are catching on to catching the lake's big brown trout, many by casting or trolling lures. Woody, however, is a dedicated fly-fisherman.

continues on page 44

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"If you want to catch a big brown trout, you should use a fly that looks like a herring," Woody said. "I use a white streamer fly. The fish were finicky today; I only saw four fish following my fly and hooked one. The most I've ever caught in one day was 14, but you can also get skunked."

Woody said he is one of the few fly-fishermen who loves fishing Apalachia Lake. He is only after big trout, not big numbers, and the odds of catching a big one are high. He fishes the lake once or twice a month during warm weather, and his hookup-to-strike ratio is about 5-to-1 because the big browns are difficult to keep on the hook.

To find fish, he launches at dawn and begins searching for signs of feeding fish. The trout run the herring to the surface for about the first two hours of daylight before heading for deep water.

"I cast to the fish, and he usually hits it right off if he is hot," he said. "A brown trout is an eating machine; if your fly looks like an injured herring, he is going to take it. A successful hookup and fight that leads to a landed fish usually takes four or five minutes. The important thing is using the reel's drag during the fight, because the reel is mechanical, not emotional. If you use your fingers, you may apply too much pressure and the hook will pull free or you may not use enough pressure with the same result." ■

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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.



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Late-season gobblers are tough, but not impossible, for hunters who know how to target them.



Late can be great

By Terry Madewell

As turkey season starts to wane and pressured toms get tough, don't hang up your turkey hunting vest. Try these tricks from veteran hunters and finish filling those tags.

Tactics for taking a gobbler in the waning days of the season are often dramatically different from strategies for early season success. Late-season hunting typically requires a diverse skill-set that includes patience, stealth, diversity in calling capabilities and mental toughness to commit to strategy.

By the tag end of the season, gobblers have been hammered for weeks by recurring and unwelcome human intrusions, and they become educated to human tendencies. Early season tactics can still be successful on those areas with relatively unpressured turkeys, but for most gobblers, strategy shifts are vital.

Terry Hiers of Blackwater Hunting Service in Ulmer, S.C., has learned in his years of guiding some helpful strategies

for late-season hunting.

"The last hunt of the season is just as important to me as the first one, but with a season of hunting pressure, the dynamics change in the turkey woods," Hiers said. "The first encounter with a turkey is usually the best opportunity to take him, and if we don't kill him, I'll have to change my pattern when I hunt that same bird and area later on. I believe gobblers pattern hunters, specifically the calls and tactics they use, so I change my patterns in late season."

Hiers (803-541-4868) prefers the soft and subtle method, even more late in the season. Hunting an area with gobblers he's previously hunted, Hiers often approaches from a different direction or route and employs different calling tactics and even different calls.

>

Terry Madewell

“I like using mouth calls, but I’ll use different ones in areas I’ve worked previously,” he said. “Plus, the specific calls are usually varied in late season. If I yelled to that gobbler before, I may start with clucks and purrs late in the season. Once I get a feel for what the gobbler will respond to, I can change my strategy based on what works that day.”

Hiers said that, in most cases, late-season gobblers have heard a lot of calls, and if he uses an aggressive yelp or cutt too quickly, he can’t take it back.

“I’ve learned that starting slow enables me to ramp up the volume and excitement of calls I use without unnecessarily alarming gobblers,” he said. “But getting too aggressive immediately can shut a bird down. I may end up with aggressive cutts and other loud calls to get him to approach, but it’s not the first thing I do in late-season.”

Hiers said one tip is that very aggressive tactics can work.

“When other options fail, I like to run a tube call with loud, aggressive fighting purrs, and this occasionally works exceptionally well late in the season,” he said. “It’s more of a last-chance call

that can produce a gobbler in a hurry, but I’m prepared to fail most of the time with this tactic. The same is true for gobbling at another longbeard late in the season. With many hens nesting, the competition among gobblers can be elevated. These calls are part of my overall plan but are tactics that only occasionally work in late season. But when they do work, it’s usually a very exciting hunt.”

John Tanner, a call maker from Hemingway, S.C., said food and socialization never go out of season for turkeys and are always a part of his late-season plan.

“A good food plot offers turkeys food and social contact, and the visibility of other turkeys is a plus,” he said. “Plots are good anytime during the season, but late in the season, they can be an excellent resource. I’ll use soft clucks and purrs with a variety of different calls to mimic multiple hens feeding. The use of decoys can be a very good for hunting food plots because of the visibility factor.”

Tanner said it can be a waiting game in terms of turkey activity, but food plots and green fields are potentially productive throughout the day.

>

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Spring turkey season in both North Carolina and South Carolina extends into May.

South Carolina hunters, who first got in the woods on March 20, can hunt through May 5 on private lands and most Wildlife Management Areas. The daily and season bag limits are two and three gobblers, respectively.

North Carolina hunters can hunt deeper into May this year than any other, with the season lasting until May 12.

Hunters who haven’t filled their season limit of two birds can take one gobbler per day.

In all cases for both states, check all applicable rules and regulations for any public-land hunting, as they may differ from regulations on private lands or between other public lands. ■



Decoys, used properly, can make a big difference on late-season gobblers.

Brian Carroll



Call-maker John Tanner likes to hunt food plots as the season wanes.

Terry Madewell



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Hens usually come and go throughout the day, so if I'm busy early and can only go mid-day or even late-afternoon, food plots and open fields are at the top of my target list,"

he said. "Whether I can hunt a couple hours or half a day, they have what gobblers are looking for: the potential to attract hens.

Tanner said with fewer hens available, gobblers may be more competitive for those hens. It's a situation that works as an advantage late in the season anywhere, not just on food plots.

"It's a good idea to move and check multiple areas," he said.

"For example, don't stay in a roost area all morning. After early morning, gobblers are on the move and are susceptible to calls.

Be prepared for anything in terms of a gobbler's behavior.

A longbeard may gobble and come in on a string, but more often, very cautiously. I'm always vigilant for the silent approach in late season." ■



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.

HEN/JAKE DECOY COMBO WORKS ON WARY TOMS

Gil Cutchin of Occoneechee Hunting Lodge in Northhampton County, near Jackson N.C., has seen changes in turkey hunting tactics over the years, especially when it comes to using decoys.

"In the beginning we used hen decoys to attract gobblers," Cutchin said. "However, through stocking projects and good management practices, the number of turkeys in the woods grew, and more hunters began pursuing them. With this extra effort in the woods, new methods of using decoys have developed, and some of them are deadly effective.

"My current favorite decoy setup is to use hen and strutting jake decoys together," said Cutchin (252-583-1799). "I use a real turkey fan on the jake, and if it isn't perfect, it's OK, maybe even better. A beat-up fan makes it appear the jake has been fighting, and one that is chasing hens most likely has. This combination tends to trigger a jealousy or territorial response that causes even wary gobblers to let their guard down and come within shooting range.

"Sometimes the older gobblers get so fired up they charge the jake. Not only is this very effective, it's fun to watch. Sometimes the way the gobblers react is hilarious. What's more important though is it gets them to let their guard down and come within shooting range."

When using decoys, even jakes, Cutchin only uses hen calls. His initial calling will vary in volume and intensity depending on the weather, especially the wind. How the gobbler responds determines the calling from there. A gobbler that appears to be fired up will usually respond well to soft and seductive calls. Gobblers



A decoy set up with a strutting jake and a hen is almost too much for any gobbler to resist.

Jerry Dilsaver

that are across fields or swamps and don't readily commit might need louder, raucous or more frequent calling. Calling is just to get the gobbler to search for the hen and see the decoys.

Cutchin said gobblers are looking for hens, and when an older gobbler spots a hen with a jake, it can't stand it. The decoy combo does the work once the hunter lures the gobbler close enough to see them. Not every hunt goes as planned, but Cutchin's success rate with this decoy setup results in many hunters getting an easy shot at a blown-up gobbler that dropped its guard to swoop in and steal a lady from a youngster.

Cutchin enjoys the show as much as or more than taking the shot, and this decoy setup often produces a show. Sometimes, he said, gobblers run right in between the hen and the jake, and sometimes bump chests or attack the jake first. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

LATE SEASON REQUIRES MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Joey Murphy, a call-maker from Lexington, N.C., said that late-season turkey hunting often requires a commitment to change and diversify in hunting and calling strategies, but mental toughness is crucial.

"A key to success is making the internal, mental commitment to actually be patient and not push pressured gobblers," Murphy said.

"Early season hunting can be fast-paced, and it can be frustrating to work slowly through the woods, setting up, calling and hearing no response — and then repeat the process," he said.

"But if I'm in areas where I believe gobblers are located, I adopt the mental outlook they can hear me. If I can get their interest, they will likely approach, but on their own schedule. I'm patient and call soft and seldom unless a gobbler cranks up. I may have to get more aggressive with my calling, but that's a situation I'll consider when it occurs.

"I've killed gobblers by doing no more than scratching in the leaves with my hands, mimicking a contented, feeding hen," he said. "It's easy to get distracted and bored when not hearing turkeys return calls, but I've learned that often the game is on — they just haven't informed me by gobbling."

Murphy said eternal vigilance is a must to see a gobbler approaching quietly, and seeing him first is paramount to success.

"To fool a savvy longbeard in the late season on pressured property is often the result of a strong mental focus, not just calling and woodsmanship skills," he said. "It usually takes all three, but overlook the mental commitment and you can miss an opportunity you never knew you had." ■



Jerry Madewell

A hard-earned longbeard is a great way to end the season, but you have to be mentally strong to fool a tom that's been pressured for weeks.

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A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a blue shirt, holding a large speckled trout. The fish is the central focus, with its mouth open and a lure visible. The background is a bright, slightly blurred outdoor setting.

With catch-and-release
of trout requested by state
officials, how should
inshore anglers respond?

SC'S SPECK QUESTIONS

By Phillip Gentry



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



Late this past December, the coastal regions of both Carolinas experienced some of the coldest weather in recent years, with water temperatures plummeting into the low 40s. Then, on Jan. 3, a severe ice and snow storm blasted the coast again.

In South Carolina, the Lowcountry was hit the worst, in part because the brunt of the storm was one day after the full moon, when lunar-induced low tides had left coastal marshes exceptionally exposed.

The resulting damage included fish kills that affected redfish, sheepshead and flounder, but the weather was exceptionally devastating to speckled trout. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources has estimated that the cold-stun events killed between 50 and 70 percent of the state's speckled trout. In addition, it's been estimated that over 90 percent of white shrimp, a critical

food source for rearing trout in the marsh, were also lost.

In response to cold-stun kills on its end of the coast, North Carolina closed its recreational and commercial fishery for specks on Jan. 5, to remain closed through June 15. In South Carolina, fisheries managers and lawmakers struggled with the implementation of legislation that would allow for an emergency closure of the fishery but would also make it illegal to attempt to catch speckled trout. Instead of a hard closure, SCDNR has asked anglers to practice catch-and-release of all specks through the end of September.

"Seatrout numbers have been above average in South Carolina in recent years," said Phil Maier of SCDNR. "We hope that strong starting point, combined with voluntary conservation efforts by anglers, will help the fish recover quickly." >

Speckled trout populations across the Carolinas took a huge shot from cold weather in early January, but there's still hope for some good fishing this year, even if much of it is catch-and-release.

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Spotted seatrout suffered cold-stun kills in 2010-2011, 2009-2010 and 2000-2001. Voluntary catch-and-release was encouraged on each occasion, and full recovery of the fisheries took several years in each case.

To complement these efforts, guides in the Charleston area and some South Carolina-based tackle manufacturers created campaigns to support the voluntary catch-and-release of speckled trout as well as helping SCDNR with replenishing the stocks lost to the cold weather.

As for the fishery itself, guides and anglers remain optimistic that the situation looked worse than it actually was. Guide John Koonce of Shoal Bandit Charters said his time on the water early in the spring gave him reason to be optimistic.

continued on page 58

RELEASE AND RESPECK



With its headquarters in Ladson, S.C., just a few miles from the saltwater fishing mecca of Charleston, folks at Z-Man Fishing Products understood what the cold-stun kill of speckled trout this past January could mean to local fisheries.

Z-Man immediately announced support of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources' request for voluntary catch-and-release of all South Carolina specks through September, but it went a step further, creating a window decal bearing the image of a speckled trout against the backdrop of a Lowcountry marsh to encourage anglers to release any trout caught this spring and summer.

"It was just our way to step up and educate the public on recovery efforts," said Daniel Nussbaum, president of Z-Man. "The Lowcountry has seen these types of cold-stun kills several times in the last 20 years, and the fish will recover, but what has changed is the angler population and the fishing pressure. With more people fishing, nature is unable to rebound as quickly.

"Trout will spawn five to six times between April and September, and having all of our remaining stocks available to spawn will help replenish the population."

Also, guide Joel LeVine of Charleston's Redfin Charters, a member of Z-Man's pro staff, created Project ReSpeck, a campaign to raise \$25,000 to donate to the Waddell Mariculture Center in Beaufort, S.C., to fund a new spawning tank for inshore saltwater species. Spawning tanks are capable of rearing up to 700,000 seatrout, with the goal of replenishing stocks in areas hit hardest by the winter fish kills.

For more information, visit www.zmanfishing.com or www.projectrespeck.com. ■

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“I believe there are some spots around the Isle of Palms and areas north that were hit hard,” he said. “A lot of these are the same areas that get a lot of fishing pressure, so that makes it much worse for everyone, but we’ve also caught some big trout and smaller trout in the deep water in creeks and in the waterway that protected a lot of trout, so I don’t think all the trout were killed.”

Koonce (843-425-2939) expects to find trout moving back into shallower waters as spring progresses and said they should still be found around oyster points and rips, especially on a low, rising tide.

One of his favorite low-tide patterns is to find trout holding along the tidal rip coming off of a floating dock. As water temperatures reach 70 degrees, typically in late April, these fish will become more and more aggressive.

“By then, we’ll have brown shrimp in the creeks, and those should offset the loss of the white shrimp,” Koonce said. “Plus, there will be finger mullet the trout will be feeding on (and) mud minnows, glass minnows and some small menhaden.”

The loss of white shrimp is of concern to anglers who catch their own bait. Since the majority of bait shrimp are imported



With white shrimp populations decimated by winter cold-stun kills, anglers may have to rely more on soft-plastic artificial shrimp for big trout.

Dan Kibler

from Florida, a lack of bait in bait shops should not be an issue. Koonce always likes to have bait on hand, but he doesn’t always catch his best fish on live bait.

“I will rig some live bait, usually mud minnows or shrimp, and fish them under a cork, but a lot of times I catch better fish throwing artificial baits in the spring,” said Koonce, whose No. 1 artificial is a hard-plastic MirroDine twitch bait, particularly when trout are feeding on small menhaden.

Soft-bait choices include the Z-Man Slim SwimZ fished on their new Nedlockz HD jighead.

“This is a 1/10-ounce head, so it sinks slow when rigged with the Slim Swimz,” Koonce said. “I can throw that on a long point, particularly if it’s one of those that has a big oyster pile on the end of the point and I can fish it real slow back to the boat.” ■



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When most people smack their lips thinking about blackened fish, red drum most often spring to mind. But anglers who fish around Surf City, N.C., are as likely to run across a fish of another color.

“Black drum are as tasty as red drum,” said guide Wayne Crisco, who fishes along the Intracoastal Waterway around Surf City, Sneads Ferry and North Topsail Beach. “You can catch more of them to take home, but I will take either one.”

“When I really want to get on fish, I head for bridges,” he said. “Several are easily reachable from Surf City. Two cross the ICW near Surf City and another one is at Sneads Ferry, but any bridge is going to hold fish.”

Crisco uses basic rigs to catch fish, especially the reliable bottom rig. Call it a fish-finder rig, flounder rig or Carolina rig, it has a leader with a hook and swivel and an egg sinker sliding on the line above the swivel.

“I usually use a silver Kahle hook, but a wide-gap or circle hook works.

It’s more important to put the bait in the right spot and to choose the right bait for the fish you want to catch.”

The best bait for most species is shrimp. Crisco buys fresh or frozen shrimp at a bait and tackle shop.

“I just hook the entire shrimp and cast it,” he said. “When you are fishing bridges, a cast might be an underhand lob.”

Crisco demonstrated that casting can also mean poking his rod tip through the bridge structure and flipping the rig like a bass or crappie angler tossing a jig under a boat dock. When the bait hit bottom, he turned the reel handle to take slack out of the line. Then he held the rod, waiting for a bite.

The rod tip twitched, and he set the hook.

“This feels like a good fish,” he said.

“The way it is running, it is probably a black drum.”



Red and black drum make for a great inshore combination for inshore anglers in the Surf City area, especially around bridges between the mainland and the beaches.

SURF CITY'S **SALTY COMBO**

By Mike Marsh

Mike Marsh

Deftly, Crisco moved his rod from one hand to another, pulling the fish away as it attempted to wrap the line around a piling. The 15-pound braid held as it scraped against the concrete, and he eventually worked the fish away from the piling to scoop it from the water with a net.

Cristina Asbury, who was fishing with Crisco, dropped her rig beside the piling, and it wasn't long before she set the hook and began working a fish away from the piling.

"It's a red drum," Crisco said. "Just keep the rod tip away from the structure and keep the pressure on the fish."

Those two species represent the majority of what most anglers catch when fishing the bridges, docks and seawalls around Surf City, but flounder, sheepshead and spadefish are other possibilities.

"If you want to catch red drum and flounder, you might want to stick with live or cut mullet," Crisco said, "but if it is sheepshead and black drum you're after, the best baits are crustaceans. The easiest to get is shrimp, but those fish also bite fiddler crabs and clams. Any bait you use is going to attract pinfish, pigfish and other bait stealers. The only thing you can do is to fish where they are not. The bait stealers are usually not as bad when the water flow is strongest."

Lee Parsons is another guide who fishes the area, and he fishes around the bridges, too, but he is more-often fishing the bays around Topsail Island, Surf City and New River, where he scans the water from the bow of his skiff.

"You have to know the tide times of the various areas to find the fish," he said. "Some of the areas I fish are flats where there is little to no water to float a boat at low tide. But those same places have a bounty of fish when the tide covers them."

Parsons catches red drum, black drum, flounder and other species using the same types of bottom rigs that Crisco uses. He also baits them with shrimp and mullet.

"I find a place along a shoreline with some type of anomaly that attracts fish," he said. "It may be an old bulkhead or dock, or it can be just a tiny creek or ditch entering a larger bay. At the ditch mouths, the best time to fish is falling tide."

Parsons also looks for crab pots, stakes that commercial fishermen have poked into the bottom to mark channel edges or obstructions and natural drop-offs. The prime structure he looks for that covers the largest amount of area is natural oyster beds.

"Oyster beds attract a lot of different fish and can cover acres," he said. "The only ways to find out if a certain oyster bed or other structure holds fish is to actually see the fish or work the area until you start catching them."

By using his trolling motor or poling, Parsons moves his boat

Fishing around ICW docks will produce plenty of nice redfish because they provide ambush points.



Mike Marsh

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Surf City lies between Topsail Beach and North Topsail Beach along the boundary between Pender and Onslow counties. Best access is via US 17 and NC 210 and NC 50. Popular boat access areas include Turkey Creek, on Turkey Point Road, Holly Ridge, and Hampstead, off Lewis Road in Hampstead. Surf City ramp, on the east side of NC 210 bridge, will close May 5 for renovations.

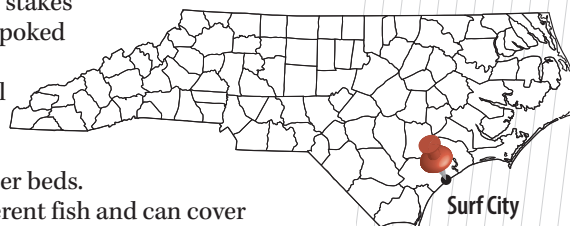
WHEN TO GO — May and June are peak months for catching red drum, black drum, sheepshead, spadefish and flounder.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Shrimp, mullet, fiddler crabs and clams fished on bottom rigs are tough to beat, along with mullet and shrimp fished on float rigs. Try MirrOlure Top Dogs for red drum on the flats.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Capt. Wayne Crisco, Last Resort Charters, 910-465-0611. Capt. Lee Parsons, Gotta Fly Guide Service, 910-540-2464. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Sea Scape Motel, Surf City, 910-328-5881; Island Inn, Surf City, 910-328-2341; Surf City Welcome and Visitors Center, Surf City, 910-328-2716.

MAPS — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, captainsegullcharts.com; Sealake Fishing Guides, 800-411-0185, thegoodspots.com.



along slowly. He may not cover more than 200 yards in a half-day of fishing. He uses polarized glasses to cut glare when he is staring down into the water.

“If you startle a fish, you can usually tell what it is by the wake it makes or by its mud trail,” he said. “A ray leaves a different type of mud trail than a flounder. A red drum makes a different wake than a black drum. A school of large mullet can fool you with their wakes until you see enough of them so you can tell what you are looking at.”

While a bottom rig can snag, resulting in a cut-off leader on an oyster bed or on some other underwater obstructions covered with shells, a float rig seldom snags. He uses a very short leader on his float rigs to keep the bait above the shells.

“My favorite bait for catching red drum on a float rig is a mullet head,” he said. “The head is durable and won’t come off after multiple casts, and the red drum just seem to like it best. I might catch a black drum or flounder but am more likely catch is a red drum.”

SHAKE and STIR

While inshore gamefish in the Surf City area will strike natural baits such as shrimp and mullet, they also take kindly to rattling lures.

One angler favorite is a MirrOlure Top Dog, which is retrieved using a “walk the dog” cadence — imparting a back-and-forth action by twitching the rod tip while taking up the slack with the reel. The side-to-side action imitates an injured baitfish, which incites an attack response in gamefish, especially red drum.

The lure will attract fish even more if it carries an internal rattle chamber. The sound of the rattle shaking can really stir up the fish if they are

lethargic, and it can help them attract fish them from long distances away.

Sometimes color matters, at other times, not so much. The most-important thing is selecting a color that contrasts with the water surface and sky reflections so the angler can see the lure to work it properly. ■



A MirrOlure Top Dog is a walk-the-dog topwater bait that imitates an injured baitfish and draws plenty of attention from red drum.

Jerry Olsener



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Cut bait or live baits fished on a float rig will draw strikes from red or black drum, and you rarely get snagged on structure.

Fishing an area of marsh, Parsons lobbed a cast about 40 feet from the shoreline, allowing the bait to dangle over an oyster bed.

"In this area, the fish have been out a good way from the bank the last several times I fished," he said. "The fish also prefer different retrieves on different days. I keep experimenting to see what works best. Recently, the fish have been a little picky. I make a cast and allow the bait to settle beneath the float. Then, I let it sit."

After a minute or so, he gave one small tug on the line with his rod tip. Taking up the slack, he allowed the bait to settle before tugging the line again. A couple of minutes later, he saw a wake made by a fish charging the bait. He waited until the fish struck the bait and hauled the float underwater.

"That's him," he said. "It feels like a good red drum."

Moments later, he landed the red drum, which was about 26 inches long. He released the fish and poled a few yards further before making another cast. Repeating the process, he landed a half-dozen fish in less than an hour.

"These days, it seems everyone has forgotten how to cover water," he said. "They run over fish to get to fish, making them spookier in the process. If you find a good spot, the best thing to do is fish it slowly and thoroughly before moving on to try another one. I can spend an entire day fishing one or two spots and catch more fish than someone who runs and guns from place to place if for no other reason than my bait is in the water longer." ■



Mike Marsh



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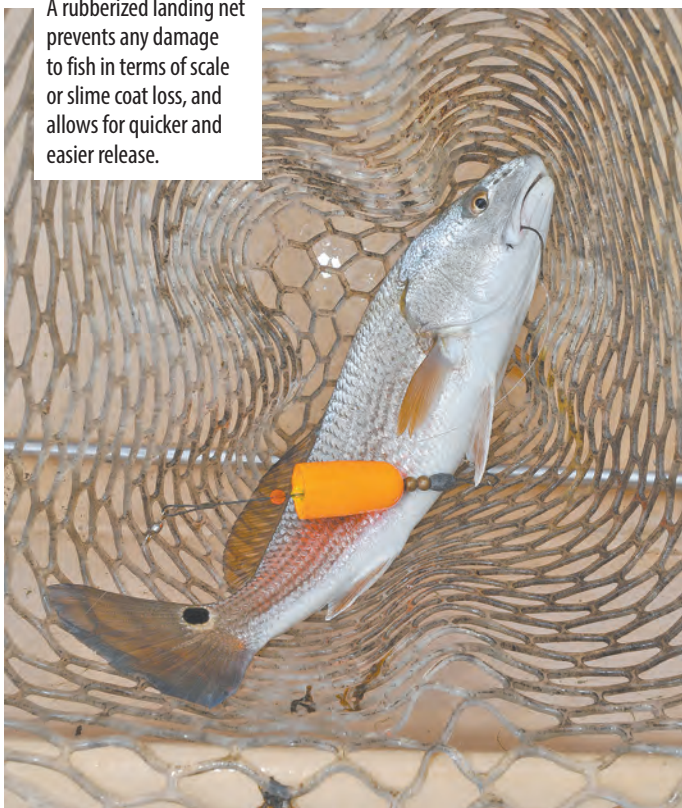
With a creel limit of one red drum and a slot limit of 18 to 27 inches, most fish are destined to be released. The bag limit for black drum is 10 fish between 14 and 25 inches, with only one fish greater than 25 inches, meaning that anglers will probably be releasing some black drum as well.

Aside from the conservation aspect of using a rubber net for landing fish, there are other advantages on the human side of the equation. First, rubber mesh will not billow, making it easier to corral fish in the strong current present around bridges in tidal areas that have large water-level fluctuations. Rigs and hooks also fall through the rubber mesh rather than imbed or tangle as they do in twisted monofilament or nylon, which makes them much easier to remove. When using a monofilament or nylon net, a hook snagging or a knot cinching down can result in 10 minutes of fishing time lost during the removal process or in having to cut and re-tie the line to the rig or lure. ■



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.

A rubberized landing net prevents any damage to fish in terms of scale or slime coat loss, and allows for quicker and easier release.



Mike Marsh

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SLIP BOBBERS DO THE JOB

TIE UP A RIG, PUT ON THE BAIT, MAKE A CAST AND LET THE CURRENT DO THE WORK

Brian Cope

I have to admit that I was skeptical watching my buddy bait a hook on a slip-bobber rig as we were letting the anchor and tide settle us into a good sheepshead spot over the submerged section of a rock jetty. I thought the whole rig would just get in our way fishing the rocks, but it worked so well that I've used slip-bobber rigs numerous times since.

The tide was coming in, so he made a cast between the boat and the shore, relying on the tide's movement to keep the cork and bait out of our way, and hopefully in the path of a fish. He put the rod in his Driftmaster rod holder, then put a fiddler crab on his sheepshead rod and joined me fishing vertically on the rocks.

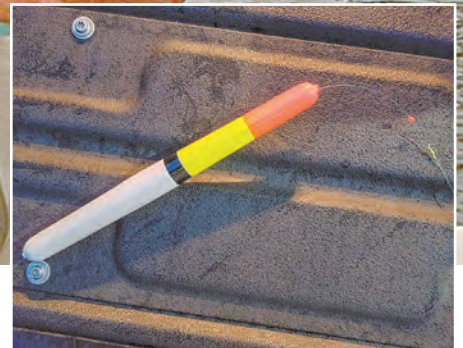
After catching several sheepshead, we had all but forgotten about the slip-bobber rig until we heard a ruckus as the rod bounced in the rod holder, then doubled over. The bobber was nowhere to be

seen, and I struggled to free the butt of the rod from the holder as my friend gave me an "I told you so" look.

A few minutes later, my buddy netted a keeper-sized redfish, which joined the sheepshead in the cooler. His set-it-and-forget-it rig worked, and it did it pretty much on its own.

Once the tide turned to outgoing, we cast the slip-bobber rig between the boat and the open ocean, and once again, the tide's movement kept it out of our way while we continued fishing vertically for sheepshead. We caught several other redfish on the rig that day. Each time we moved to another spot, all we had to do was slide the slip bobber's knot up or down the line to adjust for the depth of water we were fishing.

Later in the day, we moved into a smaller creek and focused our attention on flounder. This meant a lot of casting and slowly working our lures back to the boat, and it was another perfect opportu-



HOW DO SLIP BOBBERS WORK?

Slip-bobber rigs consist of a piece of thread tied into a knot on the fishing line, a glass or plastic bead, then the cork. The knot slides up and down to adjust the depth you're fishing, the bead keeps the bobber from slipping over the knot and the cork slides freely up and down the line, stopping when it reaches the knot. When using slip bobbers in strong current, you must use enough weight to keep the bait down, otherwise the current will push the slip bobber through the line all the way back to the hook. It may take as much as an ounce when the current is really ripping, so make sure your slip cork is big enough to handle it. They may be a little more difficult to find than popping corks, but if you look hard enough, you can find slip bobbers in most coastal tackle shops. Those designed for saltwater fishing are usually much bigger and able to stand up to heavy duty.

nity to use the slip-bobber rig.

With the rod already in the holder, we would open the reel's bail and allow the bobber to drift with the current down the outside edge of spartina grass, then close the bail when satisfied with its position. This passive method allowed us to work our flounder rigs while watching the bobber. If it bounced or went under, we could quickly close the bail and set the hook after setting down our flounder rods. If the bobber floated along, we could continue working our flounder rigs, concentrating on them while keeping eyes on the other rod's bobber.

Fishing this way also allowed us to cover more of the water than just casting out a bottom rig, which sinks and sits in just one spot.

Slip-bobber rigs are well-known in the freshwater panfish world, but they are just as convenient in saltwater, whether using rod holders in the manner above, or when fishing more actively. Their main advantage over other bobbers is the ability to change depths quickly, just by sliding the knot up or down the line. This is a big help, because whether you're fishing in multiple locations or staying anchored down for a while, the tide is always changing, which means so is the depth of any location you're fishing. ■



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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LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite

THREE GREAT BAITES FOR MAY

ONE OF THE BEST MONTHS FOR BASS FISHING DESERVES A HANDFUL OF PRODUCTIVE BAITES

I am a Taurus bull, so I really love to get on the water in May and chase bass. It is a great fishing month, because there are a lot of fish on the bank that are easy to catch. We've finally got stable weather across the Carolinas, and even though some of the months earlier in the year might be better for catching your personal biggest fish, May is probably the most fun for me to go fishing.

One reason I love May is because so many bass are still shallow. They haven't headed out to deep water for the summer; you can catch them around all kinds of shallow-water cover, and they're hungry and easier to catch. This is a time when you can catch fish only a wide variety of baits. I love to fish topwater baits, and I love the old saying "I'd rather catch one on topwater than two or three on

anything else." I think May is probably the best month for topwaters in the Carolinas, but fish will hit a variety of baits fished in a variety of presentations.

I really love to fish three different baits in May: a Rapala X-Rap Prop, a 5-inch Senko, and a floating worm. Here's how I fish them, and in what circumstances.

RAPALA X-RAP PROP

My favorite topwater bait to throw this month is a Rapala X-Rap Prop, which has spinners on each end of the bait. I love to throw it in May because you still have a lot of male fish up in the shallows guarding fry. You can make a real disturbance on the surface, then let it just sit still. I like to fish a buzzbait, but I really love to

fish an X-Rap Prop.

I fish it on a 6-foot-6, medium-action Lew's Speed Stick with a Speed Spool reel spooled with 14-pound monofilament. If I'm going to just get out and cover water, looking for fish, that's when I love an X-Rap Prop. If I'm not fishing at any specific cover, that's just perfect.

How I like to fish the bait is to cast it out and make two or three quick little twitches with the rod tip, then let it sit for two or three seconds. If I come to a target, say, a shallow stump, a lily pad or the corner of a dock, I'll give it one twitch

May across the Carolinas is a banner month for catching plenty of bass, including some big ones, in shallow water.



Rapala X-Rap Prop



Floating worm

and then let it sit as long as five seconds. One thing I've learned is that you have to be patient when you're fishing an X-Rap Prop. It's the key to catching fish — letting that bait just sit there. It can be tough, especially when you are fishing open water, and it's even more important when you are fishing one particular target.

SENKO

My favorite soft-plastic bait, hands down, is a 5-inch Senko. I like to fish it Texas-rigged on a 6-foot-6, medium-heavy Speed Stick and a Speed Spool filled with 12- to 14-pound XPS fluorocarbon. My favorite colors are green pumpkin or green pumpkin/purple flake.

There are about 50 different ways to rig a Senko. I will wacky rig it earlier in the year, and you can fish it that way in May, but I think it's better Texas-rigged and weightless on a 3/0 or 4/0 VMC offset worm hook. That combination is heavy enough to cast on a baitcasting outfit.

Typically, I want to fish a Senko around some kind of target. I want to get it next

to the target and let it drop and do its thing. One mistake I see people make is not letting the bait sink on a slack line. If it's falling on a tight line, it's going to hurt the bait's action, and it's going to pull it away from your target a little. I don't engage the reel until the bait hits the bottom. I watch the line floating on the surface, and I can tell when it's hit the bottom, and I can also tell if a fish hits it on the fall. Falling on a slack line, the bait produces the most action.

FLOATING WORM

My third-favorite bait to fish in May is a floating worm. I'm going to use really bright colors — whites, pinks and yellows — and I'm going to fish it on a 6-foot-6, medium action Speed Stick and a reel spooled with 12-pound XPS fluorocarbon. Lots of fishermen with fish a floating worm on spinning tackle, but I really prefer to fish it on a baitcasting outfit, because I like that leverage the rod gives me to get fish out of bad places.

I like to fish a floating worm if I'm trying



Dan Kibler

LET IT FALL:

When fishing a Senko weightless, make sure you let it fall on a slack line to keep it next to the target and to get the most action possible out of the bait.

to cover a lot of water, and I want to keep the bait moving just below the surface. I work it with my rod tip down, back and forth, and I might stop it momentarily, maybe for a half-second, but I'm keeping that bait moving. I'm using it as a search

continues on page 70

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bait, looking for any fish that might be up shallow, looking for an easy meal.

WHEN AND WHERE

Plenty of bass are shallow in May, but there are two different situations you really need to look for. The first is the blueback herring or shad spawn, depending on which lake you're fishing. You're more likely to catch herring spawning early in May, and early in the morning. Look for birds working and listen for splashes along the bank. The bass know when the herring are spawning; they're easy meals.

The second situation is the bluegill spawn. This will probably take place later in the month, especially around a full moon. Look for those bluegill beds, all those little craters on the bottom in one place. You can be sure there will be a bass somewhere close by, looking to get an easy meal.

A lot of guys fish around edges of the beds. You can do that, but I like to throw it right in the middle of 'em. I'm going to start with an X-Rap Prop, then go with a Senko. Both of them can be killers when you fish them across or through a bream bed. ■



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

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Jeff Burleson

Spring brings big changes every year, revitalizing nature's canvas with a sea of green. The forests and fields erupt in tender, new growth, from the tips of the trees down to the forest floor. Native grasses, fresh soft mass and nutritious forbs explode everywhere, providing deer and other wildlife a full buffet of nutritious options to fulfill their daily nutritional requirements.

So, why should hunters and land managers spend any time and resources on warm-season food plots if nature is already providing for wildlife in more ways than one? This is an interesting question for sure with many potential answers.

To start with, nature will provide nutrition for wildlife during the spring and summer — and throughout the entire year — with bountiful opportunities in almost every type of habitat imaginable. But even though food is available, it might not always be the preferred or most-nutritious options to produce the

highest-quality animals. If not over-browsed, natural habitats can support their animals as long as the population is below carrying capacity.

Alternatively, a super-healthy deer herd that has access to above-average, nutrient-rich foods, will produce strong fawns and can help provide the necessary nutrition to grow bigger bodies and potentially bigger sets of headgear. And few hunters will complain about having big-antlered deer or carriers of prime cuts of venison walking around on their properties.

Food availability during the spring in most habitat types would be considered high. Few species of wildlife will suffer much during the spring green-up — if any at all. Yet when a land manager plants a 5-acre field of soybeans or when a farmer plants his fields in peanuts; deer will arrive in herds, incorporating the new food source into their daily travels until the nutrient flow withers away.

Food is important to have available

year-round, not just during hunting season. Food plots should be available throughout the year to keep deer and other wildlife species feeding within the boundaries of the parcel you intend to hunt. Both warm- and cool-season food plots are important to the health of deer herds and to maximize the attractiveness of a property. The bottom line is, permanent food plots will keep deer close to a hunter's home away from home.

Summer food plots provide deer with high-protein sources for fueling several critical life-history mechanisms that occur in the warm season. While fall plantings have their importance in the annual nutrient budget, summer food plots provide nutrients when they are needed the most. Deer are drawn to protein-rich foods when they need to fuel antler production, lactation and nurture developing newborn fawns.

Land managers should choose palatable seeds with super-high protein levels in the 18- to 35-percent range. Most warm-

season food-plot mixes with components of legumes, including soybeans, lablab, joint vetch, peas, alyce clover, ladino white clover and peanuts are loaded with highly digestible protein from 15 to 35 percent. Soybean and peanut crops are typically only recognized for their end game as a fruit or nut, but these two crops are super foods in the natural world for deer, with 35-percent digestible protein in their seeds and leaves. Hunters can plant these crops and get their deer herd aboard the energy train with ease.

The spring and summer bring many native browse species for deer to eat, but most tracts lack the abundance of native plants with the required nutrient composition during the critical time of need.

continues on page 74

FERTILIZE FIRE BREAKS, FOREST OPENINGS

For one reason or another, property owners routinely crank up the bush hog on old fields, fire breaks and other places they want to keep maintained in an herbaceous state. These freshly-mowed areas stimulate the production of tender grasses and forbs, especially in the spring after routine rainfall when warm air and soil temperatures are suitable. Both big and small game will quickly take advantage of the tender greenery, as new sprouts of grasses and shrubs can be palatable and quite tasty.

But if landowners want to encourage more growth in these areas, they can be spiked with a general purpose fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, to stimulate growth and provide more available food resources for wildlife. Fertilizer should be broadcast just after mowing and just before an upcoming rainfall event to allow the fertilizer treatment to melt into the soil and to reach the shallow, herbaceous root systems.

For deer and other wildlife, the boost in nutrient reserves will be well received. Deer typically consume around 1.5 to 3 percent of their body mass per day. Any thing landowners can do to boost food availability will improve the chances for deer to achieve their daily nutrient intake requirement. And fertilizing native plants is an easy way to fuel the food chain. ■



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DRAW IN, HOLD DEER WITH FOOD

Deer will travel great distances to find food, and highly-nutritious food will pull deer off their native food sources in a flash. So regardless of how much native food is available, an alternative food source can shift deer to a higher-quality diet and can even attract them from neighboring properties and hold them until hunting season.

The single-largest contributor to deer movement is the availability of preferred foods. Deer will travel for miles to find a rich food source during any season. Food drives the movement of every species in the animal kingdom — and with good reason.

Typically, a whitetail deer's home range is limited to one square mile: 640 acres. But deer will expand their territory when rich food sources deteriorate, when they are pushed along from an overload of unnatural disturbance

they can withstand heavy browsing better than smaller food plots.

One of the best ways to create a summer-long food producer is to coordinate with a local farmer to plant peanuts and soybeans in the back sec-



TWICE THE PUNCH:

Warm-season food plots can not only provide deer and other wildlife with much-needed nutrition at a critical time of year, they can also pull deer from surrounding properties that don't have the same, tasty groceries, and hold them through the fall.

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or in search of suitable mates. Deer will live in much smaller locales when all of their needs are met, and a rich, year-around food source is a big part of the puzzle.

Strategic, warm-season plantings provide the herd with protein-rich forage that can pull deer from neighboring properties and retain them into the fall. Fortunately, spring and summer plantings play a double role. They sprout quickly, providing summer feeding, and they flourish deep into the fall, just in time for bagging a trophy.

For the best results, warm-season food plots should be large, greater than 3 acres in size, and acreages as large as 10 areas are better because

tion of a field or on interior fields. These larger fields can provide adequate food for local herd and pull in bucks from neighboring tracts until the deer season begins in the fall. ■



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

Bedding bream are so aggressive they often strike baits that are too big to swallow.

PADDLE UP A BREAM

KAYAKS, CANOES CAN GET YOU IN TIGHT WITH SPAWNING SUNFISH

Phillip Gentry

Walk into a restaurant across most of the Carolinas, ask for a Coke, and you might be asked “What kind of Coke?”

The same principle applies to bream. Southern anglers use the colloquialism to cover a variety of hard-fighting, good-tasting panfish that spawn around the full-moon cycle starting in late April and running through the summer.

The term “bream” often includes a variety of sunfish: bluegill, shellcracker, pumpkinseed, redbreast, warmouth and even fliers. The line is drawn at crappie, because although crappie are panfish, you’ll have to ask for them by name — because you don’t ask for a Coke if you really want a Cheerwine.

The best way to fish for any bream species is from a kayak. Old timers may argue that an old, beat-up john boat is the best bream-catching machine ever made, but as soon as the tin can gets to the spot on the other side of the pond, out comes the paddle.

Paddlecraft allow anglers to get up close and personal with bream beds, which are a good place to be — either looking

for them or trying to remain unobtrusive once you’ve found it.

Three schools of thought exist about live and artificial baits for bream: cricket/worm drowners, spin-casters, and fly-rodgers. All three tactics catch plenty of panfish, and all excel when applied from a kayak.

Regardless of your favorite tactic, locating the spawning grounds is foremost when paddling across the pond, lake, slough, creek or swamp you are fishing.

Most bream species prefer to bed in shallow water surrounded by plenty of structure. Typical bedding habitat will be shallow, muddy or sandy bottoms with docks, brush or rocks close by. Terrain and species may dictate a more-specific spawning habitat.

BE ‘SENSITIVE’

Locating bream beds requires at least four of the five senses. Look for visual signs such as saucer-like depressions on the bottom in clear water or tell-tale wakes of bream swimming. Foamy bubbles may also be present in backwater eddies from bream fanning, as well as stirred-up, muddy water. Look for beds

in shallow, flat areas in the upper reaches of most lakes.

Position your kayak away from the bed, being careful not to spook the fish, who will vacate if disturbed but will return after some time. Care should be exercised not to let your shadow cross the bed to keep from spooking fish.

Bedding bream put off a distinctive sweet, “fishy” smell when spawning, and anglers who approach from downwind can often nose their way into the right vicinity. If all else fails, feel your way to bream beds by fan-casting to likely looking areas or down a shallow, tree studded bank in the hopes of catching that one fish that will give away the bed.

If you’re in an area you think holds bream, listen carefully for the sounds of fish “smacking” the surface, indicating the males are feeding on water bugs that had the misfortune of skating across a bed. ■



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.

YAK ATTACK HAWG TROUGH MOUNTING KIT

One of the biggest differences between a powerboat and a kayak when it comes to entering fish in a tournament is the use of a livewell. Since paddlers use cameras to capture photos of caught fish, having a handy measuring tool at your fingertips is a must.

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kayak. In steps Yak Attack with its innovative, simple Hawg Trough Mounting Kit that makes the task easier. The bracket set solves that

problem by mounting it to the side of your Yak Attack Black Pak or milk crate for easy storage.

The kit includes stainless steel hardware and security bungee to mount the measuring board. The Hawg Trough is sold separately.

MSRP for the mounting kit is \$15. For more information, visit yakattack.us ■

SCOTTY FLY-ROD HOLDER WITH SIDE/DECK MOUNT

When it comes to bream fishing from a paddlecraft, especially with fly tackle, having a secure place to store your rod is critical. The problem is that while most fishing kayaks come with rod holders, they typically only fit spinning or baitcasting rods. Fortunately, you can buy aftermarket rod holders designed specifically for fly rods.

The Scotty No 265 Model is a perfect holder for rod storage or trolling with a fly rod and reel. This model works well with "short-butt" fly rods and holds a fly reel securely with a soft latching strap that snaps over the top. The innovative compact design of the rod holder allows for hands-free trolling with a fly rod and securely holds your gear setup.

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The rod holder comes with a combination base, paired with the combination side/deck mount base and can be mounted on the top or inside gunnel of the kayak.

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MSRP for the rod holder and base is \$19.95. More info at scotty.com. ■



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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

TAKE A FLIER:

The first thing most anglers who catch their first flier think is that they've caught a hybrid bream/crappie. The flier, *Centrarchus macropterus*, is a sunfish native to muddy-bottomed swamps, ponds, weedy lakes and backwaters, mostly in the coastal planes in both Carolinas. The biggest fliers, which can live up to five years, get to about 12 inches and a pound.

Fliers are well-known for having a sunfish-shaped body, with a tear drop below the eye. Across both sides of the body are horizontal lines of dark spots, and the mouth is small. With small, relatively deep bodies, fliers have large dorsal and anal fins that can sometimes be close in size, much like a crappie. The dorsal side of this fish is olive green, flowing into a grayish, pale yellow on the ventral side. Young fish have a spot on the dorsal; adults tend to lose this spot. Anglers mostly find them too small to keep, but as aquarium fish, they are beautiful and extremely popular.

Fliers will feed on aquatic insects, smaller fish, worms, leeches and sometimes phytoplankton. Fliers prefer heavily vegetated water; they will frequently hide under plant matter or swim around submerged tree roots or bridges. They like water between 70 and 85 degrees. ■



MAY'S BEST BREAM BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT – Bluegills, warmouth, fliers

WHERE – Northeast Cape Fear River and its tributaries

HOW – Paddling and fly-casting along the banks of the drainages that feed the river in Pender and Duplin counties as well as the main river itself.

LAUNCH – Shelter Creek Boating Access or Sawpit Landing, Burgaw, N.C.

INSIDER TIP – Line tangles are the No. 1 thing to watch out for when fighting a fish on a fly rod from a kayak. Make every effort to get the fish on the reel as fast as possible. Instead of stripping in line, try to quickly reel up any slack while pinching the line to the rod with your other hand. Once the slack is taken up, fight the fish from the reel, tangle-free.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT – Bluegills, shellcrackers and warmouth

WHERE – Sparkleberry Swamp, upper end of Lake Marion

HOW – A Bream Buster-type pole, 8 feet of 12-pound mono, small cork, split shot, No. 4 hook and crickets. Set the hook about 18 inches below the cork and drop the cricket into every place you think may harbor a bream. Once you've caught the first one, start to figure a pattern out.

LAUNCH – Low Falls Landing on the Calhoun County side of the swamp or Sparkleberry Landing on the Sumter County side.

INSIDER TIP – If you have a good nose, you can actually smell spawning bream. Otherwise, look for areas of frothy water or stirred up bottom from fish fanning.

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

LEFTOVER TURKEY HAS LIFE

CAST-IRON TURKEY TAMALE PIE IS A GREAT WAY TO REMEMBER THAT GOBBLER

A cast-iron skillet is a must when cooking this turkey tamale pie, which uses many parts of the wild turkey that some cooks discard. **INSET:** Yellow grits are an important ingredient to fold into the pie.



Regular readers of this column know there is always one turkey recipe each spring to go with the turkey season. Only once before have I added a second turkey recipe, but I'm going to do it again. It's a turkey pie, cooked in a cast-iron pan, that can be cooked in the oven or taken outside to the grill in the warming May weather. It makes a lot, too, so there will be plenty for lunches for a few days.

This recipe should be in time to be used with one of those late-season birds while they're still fresh.

It's rare to have much for leftover turkey, but this recipe is tasty enough that you might consider being sure there is a little. It uses turkey that has been cooked, and it is a really good way to use the legs, wings, back meat and other small pieces. Several folks who used to only breast out their turkeys admit they now save the wings, legs and other carcass meat after trying this. It's a tasty, feel-good kind of meal and can be finished outside on a covered grill. The prep work can also be done on the side burners of most larger grills.

I like doing this outside but was forced inside for the accompanying pictures as my deck isn't covered and rains came.

It might require a light jacket, flannel shirt or sweatshirt to enjoy being on the deck or patio on a cool May evening, but when this pie comes off the cooker, no one will complain. Part of that is the fine taste of wild turkey, but part of it is a treatment for extended cabin fever. This recipe really is tasty enough to help cure minor cases of Seasonal Affective Disorder caused by winter being so stubborn and refusing to leave. ■

CAST-IRON TURKEY TAMALE PIE

This recipe is about as simple as it gets, except that it requires a deep, cast-iron skillet. It uses several canned ingredients, and it just happens that certain sizes of cans hold the right amount. The prime ingredient is previously cooked turkey, and it isn't particular about how that turkey is cooked. There may be some left from preparing a whole turkey for another meal, or you might simply boil some to remove it from the bones. Those odd pieces, like wings, legs and back or other carcass meat work well for this. The turkey should be skinned before chopping, especially if the turkey was fried.

The sausage patty adds a little flavor and just enough grease to wilt the onions. You can use a domestic pork patty, but if you have venison or feral pork (even bear) sausage in your freezer, it was made to your preference for spice and/or heat.

The recipe calls for beans, and I prefer black beans; however, it can be done with red, chili or white beans, depending on personal preference. Each will change the flavor just a little, but all are good.

The little bit of ground chipotle pepper is just enough to give a hint of the smoky chipotle flavor without adding any heat. Folks who like a lot of spice will add more when they fix this in the future. I suggest even those who don't like much spice, try it with the chipotle first. You can leave it out later if you don't like it, but I don't

PREPARATION:

Chop the onion and chop/shred the turkey. Lightly brown the sausage patty in a deep, cast-iron pan, remove and crumble. Sauté the onion in the sausage drippings until opaque. Add 1 cup of chicken broth, drained tomatoes, chili powder, ground chipotle pepper, sugar, salt and pepper and cook on low for 8 to 12 minutes. Stir in the sausage, turkey, corn and beans. Once blended well and warmed, reduce the heat to warm.

Preheat the oven (or grill) to 400 degrees. Cook the grits in 3 cups of chicken broth and a pinch of salt until they have thickened and are almost finished. This is less liquid than suggested on the package and will require frequent stirring. Add the butter and cheese to the grits and mix well. Pour the grits over the top of the mixture in the

think you will. Salt helps kick the chipotle heat and I don't add much salt. If you prefer more salt, be aware it helps accentuate the spice of the ground chipotle.

As with any of my recipes, feel free to adjust it to your personal preferences. Add more cheese if you like and increase or decrease the amount of onion. I like yellow corn, but you might prefer white corn. I haven't done it yet, but I keep thinking one time I'll replace the tomatoes with Rotel.

This recipe has been southernized and works well using coarse-ground, yellow grits. An authentic Mexican tamale pie recipe would call for polenta or masa flour, but I prefer it with the yellow grits. Experiment if you'd like; and both should taste pretty good. Whatever you do, don't try this with white grits. It's not the same. Regular readers know I'm pretty flexible about substitutions and varying spices, but save yourself some time and effort by taking my word for it that you want yellow grits, polenta or masa flour for this.

This recipe offers a unique way to use turkey and even works with domestic turkey or chicken. There are a few minutes of prep, but it's really easy and allows for visiting with family and friends while it cooks and that's another reason to prepare it outside under a nice starlit spring evening. Give it a try, I believe you'll enjoy it. When you cook it again, you'll know you did. ■

large, cast-iron pan and spread evenly. Cook in the oven (or on a closed grill) for 25 to 30 minutes. Begin careful not to allow the grits' crust to scorch. Remove the pan from the oven (or grill) and allow to stand for 10 to 15 minutes before serving. Serve with salsa, sour cream and blue corn tortilla chips.

A lettuce wedge or green salad is a nice start to this meal and those wanting dessert will find that fried plantains or flan top it off well. ■

TIP!

Many cooks believe grits need lots of salt, but I start with only a little, knowing that more can be added, but it's impossible to remove.

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups chopped/shredded cooked turkey
1 sausage patty, venison or feral pig
4 cups chicken broth
1 small to medium sweet onion
1 large (28 ounce) can diced tomatoes
1 small (11 ounce) can sweet yellow corn kernels
1 regular (15.5 ounce) can beans (red, black or white)
1 small (4 ounce) can green chilies
1 cup coarse-ground yellow corn grits
1 cup shredded Mexican blend cheese
1 tsp sugar
2 tsp chili powder
½ tsp ground chipotle pepper
1 tbs butter
salt and pepper to taste
fresh salsa
sour cream
blue corn tortilla chips



Blue corn tortilla chips and sour cream accent a tamale pie.

Jerry Dilsaver



Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., is a freelance writer, as well as a former national king mackerel champion fisherman.

STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

The late Gene Sutherland loved the woods and whitetails in a life that spanned almost 70 years.



A LIFE WELL LIVED: KEEP IT PERSONAL

HUNTING MENTOR'S CLOSING LETTER HITS THE THINGS THAT MAKE US LOVE THE WOODS

This month, I am stepping a bit outside of this column's normal subject matter, but I feel strongly about this message.

They say youth is wasted on the young, and also that with age often comes wisdom. This is an opportunity to share with you the wisdom gained from a lifetime of experience in the woods, as well as in general. Take a moment to reflect on the true reasons why we hunt and shoot, and consider the difference you can make by mentoring someone.

I am going to share a short reflection

written last August by my mentor and friend, Gene Sutherland. He introduced me to archery as well as deer hunting, and were it not for him taking the time to mentor me, I might well not be involved in these passions today.

Archery season was fast approaching, and we were extremely busy at the shop. Gene called to tell me he was emailing me something he had just written. He said, "I know how busy you are, and I wrote this so you could use it in your column." I didn't use it at the time, because the time didn't seem right, but I saved it.

Here is what Gene wrote:

END OF THE ROAD

"My, my, how time goes by. How I cherished the opportunity to hear leaves crush under my boots. All I could think about was spending the weekend in the deer woods. All week long, I would put myself to sleep strategizing which stand would be best for me to sit, playing it out in my mind, to get a glimpse of "Big Boy." I would go over and over the many setups, trying to figure out the best one. This circular repetitive pattern was

strangely exciting. It all added to the excitement of the hunt.

"Then, it's go time. That first light of a cool, crisp autumn morning is something reserved for the hunters. The heart racing while walking to the stand, needing you to pay attention to calm it down. Once settled in, the simple sound of a limb cracking will make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. You have plenty of time to appreciate how beautiful the woods are, studying everything the woods have to offer, searching for the slightest movement. Then, after a few hours, nature's thermostat begins to act. Suddenly the chill of the woods turns to a cozy, comfortable place to be.

"The camaraderie — these are the bonds with friends and family that will never go away. Each and every person you share this bond with will be with you the rest of your life. All of the good times, laughs, sharing of viewpoints and stories and the relaxing times at the camp will be forever in your mind. I find it strange how I haven't had the urge to mention

any of the bucks I have harvested over the years. As serious as I was about killing deer, I feel no urge to mention this. Strange, just so strange. All that is important to me are the memories. The rides up to the camp, being with my buds, the beauty of the deer woods, and of course, the sight of a whitetail deer!

"Due to a number of physical problems, I have been unable to hunt for about 10 years. I can no longer walk. This and the sudden death of a hunting buddy kind of took the wind out of my sails. I lost interest and the desire to hunt. I was recently talking to one of my old hunting buddies, though, and I shared with him how I have been missing the beauty of the woods. He told me to get in touch with another old deer bud who is a landowner and ask for permission to make a hunt. He said he would gladly assist me, and would sit me in a chair at the end of the road...."

PAY IT FORWARD

As mentioned, Gene had been in poor

health, which had prevented him from hunting in recent years. I was the landowner mentioned at the end. I tried to get him to come up and hunt, but he wasn't up to it. Little did either of us know that he was coming to the end of his own road here on Earth. Sadly, on Feb. 18, Gene lost his fight with heart failure. He was larger than life and had an impact on anyone who was lucky enough to spend time with him. I think he would want anyone reading this to pay it forward and introduce a kid or someone who hasn't had the opportunity to this sport we all love so much.

This column is dedicated to Eugene Jefferson Sutherland Jr., July 28, 1948-Feb. 18, 2018. ■



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



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SANTEE IN MAY: A LOT TO LOVE

CRAPPIE, BREAM, SHELLCRACKERS, STRIPERS AND CATS
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Topwater baits fished early in the morning can produce a lot of big bass from the Santee Cooper lakes this month.

Terry Madewell

May is one of my favorite months to fish the Santee Cooper reservoirs, and while it's mostly because of the great fishing, it's also because of the typically great weather.

Much of the fishing is excellent in the shallows, especially for bass, bream and shellcrackers. Catfish and stripers may be found shallow or deep, and crappie action is excellent, with fish holding in deeper water after the spawn.

Dave Hilton, who guides for several species at Santee, is typically working on crappie in deep water since fish have moved out of the shallows.

"May is prime time to find crappie congregated in deep water, fishing over brush, logs and stumps," Hilton said. "The windy weather typical of March and April usually calms considerably by May, and most days I can crappie fish very effectively. I'll locate brush in 12 to 25 feet of water, depending on the time of the month and whether I'm fishing Lake Marion or Lake Moultrie. Moultrie crappie often will be a little deeper. The fish

transition to deeper water as the month progresses.

"The warming water temperature makes crappie more aggressive, and I won't linger long at any spot if we're not getting bites quickly," Hilton said. "Often, success is simply a matter of searching and finding an area that holds a wad of crappie."

Hilton (843-870-4734) will typically use live minnows on a long rod with a sensitive tip. He will sometimes fish small jigs vertically around the brush, adding a minnow trailer if needed.

PRODUCTIVE CANAL

Striper fishing is good in May throughout both lakes, and it's very good in the Diversion Canal. The upper end of Lake Marion in the Wateree and Congaree river arms still harbors some big stripers. Particularly early in the month, some stripers have not yet migrated back into the main portion of the lakes. Live blueback herring is an excellent bait, but cut herring can be very productive and can add a bonus, big catfish, to the creel.

In the lower end of Lake Marion and

throughout Lake Moultrie, fishing live bluebacks or gizzard shad on down-lines is the best tactic. Live bait can be effectively fished either anchored or drifting, depending if stripers are schooled tight or scattered over ledges and flats. Electronics are the key to figuring this out. Some anglers will anchor on river ledges in the lower end of Lake Marion and patiently wait for stripers to migrate through. This can be productive but requires some patience.

In the Diversion Canal, live-bait fishing from anchored boats over holes and humps is good, but these holes and rock piles can be fished with artificials, including large spoons and bucktails. Other target areas are where water enters the canal from adjacent flats, creating eddies. These are excellent places for early and late casting with bucktails, swimming minnows and even topwaters for stripers. You may even load up a hawg largemouth this month.

Catfish action is wide open for big blues, and with the water warming, flatheads are also on a strong bite.



Terry Madewell

A CUT-BAIT BONUS:

Striper fishermen on the Santee Cooper lakes catch plenty of nice fish in May using live shad or herring, but drifting cut baits can also put some nice blue catfish in your cooler at the end of the day.

Abundant numbers of hefty channel catfish are available and are an underutilized species that provide quality action.

Richie Wimmer, a veteran catfish tournament angler, said that by May, excellent fishing still remains on the shallow flats where ample forage is found. Also, plenty of big catfish are found in deeper water of both lakes as well as in the canal.

“May is also a time when nighttime fishing is really good and using a combination of live and cut bait, it’s quite possible to catch quality blue, flathead and channel catfish on the same trip,” he said.

Kevin Davis, who guides out of Blacks Camp on the Canal, said bream and a few big shellcracker will be in shallow water.

“Shellcrackers usually bed in March and April, but some bed on the (full) moon during May,” he said. “Shellcrackers not spawning can be caught deeper in the ditches and runs in the large flats as well as the Diversion Canal being a prime target.”

Davis (843-312-3080) said bream bedding action is still strong in May, and working around shallow flats with crickets using a long pole or light spinning gear is a great way to find a big bed of fish.

“Bream are very aggressive on the beds now,” he said, “but even if fish are not bedding, fishermen can catch quality limits by working around the trees and weeds. It usually doesn’t take long to cull out a good limit any time during the month.”

Davis said fishing for largemouth bass remains excellent in the shallows on both lakes. Fish typically move just a bit deeper, but they still orient on weedy cover and cypress and gum trees in slightly deeper water.

“Getting out early is a great way to catch big bass on topwater lures such as buzzbaits,” Davis said. “Fish around weedy points, trees, stumps, logs and grass beds adjacent to old ponds and ditch runs in the flats are prime targets.” ■



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.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia (opens May 1)	36"	1/day&
Bluefish	5 longer than 24" TL	15/day
Red drum (channel bass, puppy drum)	18" min., 27" max.	1/day
Black drum	14" min., 25" max.	10/day
Flounder	15" TL	4/day
Dolphin (mahi-mahi)	none	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw Grouper	closed	closed
Wahoo	none	2/day
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sea bass (north of Hatteras)	Closed	Closed
Sea bass (south of Hatteras)	13" TL	7/day
Yellowfin/Bigeye tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	Closed	Closed until June 15
Weakfish (gray trout)	12" TL	1/day
Snappers:	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. Cobia limit is 1 per person, 2 per day private boats, 1 per person, 4 per day charter boats until June 1, then 2 per day per charter boat.

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

A fly fisherman kneels on a huge boulder to work his fly down a mountain stream.

FOUR-OF-A-KIND BASIC TROUT FLIES

WET AND DRY FLIES, NYMPHS AND STREAMERS ALL BELONG IN A FLY FISHER'S FLY BOX, AND ALL CAN BE VERY EFFECTIVE

Mark Hipp

Fly fishers utilize four types of flies, with each designed to imitate a particular phase of an insect's life or a particular kind of aquatic life. Basic types of flies are dry, wet, nymph and streamer.

Dry-fly fishing is the most-exciting type of fishing because it is more visual than other methods. You can see a trout rising to an insect, and you can see a trout rising to an artificial dry fly. Hook a rising trout on a dry fly, and if that doesn't get your adrenaline pumping, take up bowling.

A dry fly is constructed so that it settles delicately and naturally on the surface of a stream and floats into the view of an unsuspecting trout. Basic components of a dry fly are hackle, wing, body and tail. Hackle, made from the long, slender feathers of a rooster, gives the fly its floating qualities. Hackle is wound in a full circle around the hook, just behind the eye. The stiffness of the hackle feathers allows the fly to sit on the surface. In addition to helping the fly float, hackle also simulates the wings, legs and tail of an insect. Dubbing, usually made of ani-

mal fur and secured with thread, forms the body of the fly. Various other materials such as tinsel, floss and peacock herl are designed to give the fly a realistic appearance.

Common dry-fly patterns are: Adams (male and female), Blue-Winged Olive, Royal Wulff, Royal Coachman, Caddis, May Fly, Thunder Head, Quill Gordon, Hendrickson, Cahill, Midge, Gnat, and Stone.

A wet fly looks very much like a dry fly except that it doesn't float on the surface. It imitates a drowned surface insect, an emerging nymph or an adult female that goes beneath the surface to lay its eggs. The basic components of a wet fly are about the same as a dry fly, only the fly is usually tied with soft hen hackle instead of stiff rooster hackle to make it more absorbent. A wet fly generally imitates the emerging stage of an insect, and the fly is fished beneath the surface and given occasional tugs to simulate a swimming insect. Most wet flies are tied with the feathers and hairs lying down along the shank of the hook so that the fly will slide easily through the water.

Wet flies often are used as droppers off dry flies.

Common wet fly patterns are: Black Spider, Coachman, Blue Dun, March Brown, Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear, Dark Cahill, Light Cahill and Zulu. Dry flies can be tied wet by using softer hackle.

Neither wet flies nor dry flies have to be exact imitations of an insect, merely a reasonable approximation. Looking up to the surface, a trout gets a distorted view of a floating dry fly. A wet fly usually is fished in fast water, and a hungry trout doesn't have time to scrutinize it.

Nymphs, however, have to be close duplications of the real thing since they represent the larval stage of an insect when the insect has very little swimming power. Nymphs tumble along the bottom or lie on the bottom. Since there is little distortion beneath the surface, a trout has adequate time to examine the fly. If the fly doesn't look like the real thing, the trout will go elsewhere to eat. In still water, nymphs make up about 90 percent of a trout's diet, and nymphs are available food year-round.

Nymphs are cast upstream above feed-



Jack Tamborski

A TROUT'S DIET:

Rainbow trout have a varied diet and will eat anything they can capture. They routinely eat the larval, pupal and adult forms of aquatic insects, plus terrestrials that fall into the water. They will eat fish eggs, shrimp, crawfish and small fish up to one-third of their length. No wonder they can be caught on a variety of flies.

ing trout and allowed to tumble naturally downstream to them. In dry-fly fishing, the fly always is visible, but in nymph fishing, you see neither the fly nor the trout taking the fly. Nymph fishing requires time and patience because you have to learn to detect a strike, which sometimes can be as subtle as a slight pause in the drift of the leader.

Common nymph patterns are Stick Bait, Hare's Ear, Tellico, Girdle Bug, Pink Lady, Secret Weapon, Pheasant Tail, Prince, and Zug Bug.

Streamers, also called bucktails, are the flies fishers use when they want to catch big browns and rainbows. Streamers imitate swimming aquatic life such as minnows, dace, and sculpin. They are usually stripped through the water to simulate the darting, swimming patterns of small fish. Streamers come in large patterns, anywhere from a No. 10 to a No. 4.

Common streamers are: Muddler Minnow, Woolly Bugger, Black Nose Dace, Shiner and Threadfin Shad.

Other flies, called terrestrials, imitate various crawling, flying or hopping insects such as Japanese beetles, grasshoppers, ants, inchworms and crickets. These flies can be fished either beneath the surface or on the surface. Best time to use terrestrials is early summer to first frost.

Size is an important, although not critical, factor in fly fishing. A fly should be as close as possible to the size of the insect or aquatic life it is imitating.

A trout fisher's fly box should include all versions of the fly to ensure a successful outing on a mountain streamers. ■



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

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/day
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/day
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	36" 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)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	closed	closed
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day#
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sheepshead	14"	10/day (30 per boat)
Spadefish	None	20/day (agg. grouper)
Black sea bass	13"	7/day
Dolphin	20" FL	10/day (60 per boat)
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin/Bigeye tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Tarpon	77" FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12"	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster snapper	12" TL	10/day#
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day

% For shark seasons, bag and size limits, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division, 888-872-8862 or hmspermits.noaa.gov. # For grouper/snapper, check with the SAFMC at www.safmc.net or 843-571-4366. & Cobia, 1 per person per day up to 6 per boat. Closed May 1-31 south of Jeremy Inlet, 1 per person, up to 3 per boat, after June 1 south of Jeremy Inlet.

FRESHWATER

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

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

+ See specific lake and river exceptions in SCDNR'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 SCDNR's Regulations Digest or visit www.dnr.sc.gov.

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



WEATHERBY MARK V CARBONMARK RIFLE

The latest edition to the Weatherby line is the Mark V CarbonMark, a bolt-action rifle with the company's 9-lug magnum action attached to a carbon-fiber barrel from Proof Research.

Offered in the company's .257, 6.5-300 and .300 Weatherby Magnum cartridges, the rifles feature aerospace-grade carbon fiber that's up to 30 times stronger than stainless steel and 64 percent lighter than traditional steel barrels. The 26-inch barrel is

finished in tactical grey Cerakote.

The Mark V CarbonMark, which retails for \$4,100, carries Weatherby's SUB-MOA accuracy guarantee, promising 3-shot groups less than an inch in diameter at 100 yards when used with Weatherby factory or premium ammunition.

More Info: www.weatherby.com



MERCURY'S V-6 FOUR-STROKE OUTBOARDS

Mercury Marine decided that its 75- to 150-horsepower FourStroke outboards were so successful, the company has debuted a line of bigger engines with the same features.

Earlier this year, Mercury introduced V-6 FourStroke engines in 175-, 200- and 225-horsepower models, explaining the engines are lighter, more compact and fuel-efficient.

Built on the 3.4-liter V-6 platform, the new engines offer plenty of options as far as mechanical or digital controls and hydraulic or power steering.

The 200-horsepower model weighs only 475 pounds, the lightest weight in its class by more than 10 pounds, and Mercury said it provides more torque than other outboards of similar sizes at cruising speeds, while providing fuel efficiency at up to 15 percent better than its competitors.

The new engines will be offered in black, three shades of whites, and four accent-color panels.

More Info: www.mercurymarine.com

CRANKA CRAB

Sheepshead fishing is part fun, part frustration, and one of the frustrations comes from the fish's ability to steal your bait before you know it. The main bait of choice among sheepshead anglers is a live fiddler crab. And catching the crabs, keeping them alive, and constantly rebaiting with them is no fun, and it's time-consuming.

But sheepshead anglers finally have a viable artificial alternative, and it's one of the hottest artificial lures on the market today. The fine details make the Cranka Crab look as life-like as the real thing, and the unique hook placement (one treble hook on each of the floating claws) means a much higher hookup rate for anglers.

As the body of the fake fiddler either sits on the bottom,



sinks, or rests in the water column, depending on the angler's intentions, the claws float upward, dancing and swaying in the current to entice the sheepshead into their own undoing. No need to set the hook; just lift the rod, then reel.

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More Info: www.crankalures.com

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ASTRO TABLES

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

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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

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

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

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

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2018 MAY	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Tue 1					45
Wed 2					33
Thu 3					26
Fri 4					25
Sat 5					26
Sun 6					32
Mon 7					44
Tue 8					37
Wed 9					35
Thu 10					38
Fri 11					42
Sat 12					55
Sun 13					69
Mon 14					82
Tue 15					91
Wed 16					83
Thu 17					76
Fri 18					65
Sat 19					59
Sun 20					61
Mon 21					68
Tue 22					55
Wed 23					47
Thu 24					43
Fri 25					41
Sat 26					48
Sun 27					56
Mon 28					64
Tue 29					66
Wed 30					54
Thu 31					43

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		
9:41 pm	1:33 am - 2:55 am	7:40 am	1:58 pm - 3:20 pm		
10:37 pm	2:24 am - 3:40 am	8:19 am	2:49 pm - 4:05 pm		
11:30 pm	3:16 am - 4:24 am	9:02 am	3:41 pm - 4:49 pm		
	4:06 am - 5:12 am	9:48 am	4:31 pm - 5:37 pm		
12:19 am	4:55 am - 6:01 am	10:37 am	5:20 pm - 6:26 pm		Apogee
1:04 am	5:43 am - 6:49 am	11:29 am	6:08 pm - 7:14 pm	☀	LOW
1:46 am	6:27 am - 7:39 am	12:22 pm	6:52 pm - 8:04 pm	☀	HALF
2:25 am	7:08 am - 8:30 am	1:17 pm	7:33 pm - 8:55 pm	☀	
3:00 am	7:48 am - 9:20 am	2:14 pm	8:13 pm - 9:45 pm	☀	
3:34 am	8:27 am - 10:13 am	3:12 pm	8:52 pm - 10:38 pm	☀	
4:07 am	9:05 am - 11:07 am	4:11 pm	9:30 pm - 11:32 pm	☀	
4:40 am	9:44 am - 12:02 pm	5:13 pm	10:09 pm - 12:27 am	☀	
5:15 am	10:24 am - 1:00 pm	6:16 pm	10:49 pm - 1:25 am	☀	
5:52 am	11:08 am - 1:58 pm	7:23 pm	11:33 pm - Midnight	☀	
6:33 am	11:55 am - 3:01 pm	8:30 pm	Midnight - 2:23 am	☀	NEW
7:19 am	12:48 pm - 4:04 pm	9:39 pm	12:20 am - 3:26 am	☀	
8:11 am	1:46 pm - 5:08 pm	10:44 pm	1:13 am - 4:29 am	☀	Perigee
9:10 am	2:47 pm - 6:09 pm	11:45 pm	2:11 am - 5:33 am	☀	HIGH
10:13 am	3:48 pm - 7:08 pm		3:12 am - 6:34 am	☀	
11:19 am	4:51 pm - 8:01 pm	12:40 am	4:13 am - 7:33 am	☀	
12:25 pm	5:51 pm - 8:51 pm	1:28 am	5:16 am - 8:26 am	☀	HALF
1:42 pm	6:50 pm - 9:36 pm	2:10 am	6:16 am - 9:16 am	☀	
2:33 pm	7:47 pm - 10:17 pm	2:48 am	7:15 am - 10:01 am	☀	
3:35 pm	8:43 pm - 10:55 pm	3:23 am	8:12 am - 10:42 am	☀	
4:36 pm	9:38 pm - 11:34 pm	3:56 am	9:08 am - 11:20 am	☀	
5:35 pm	10:31 pm - 12:13 am	4:29 am	10:03 am - 11:59 am	☀	
6:34 pm	11:25 pm - Midnight	5:03 am	10:56 am - 12:38 pm	☀	
7:32 pm	Midnight - 12:53 am	5:38 am	11:50 am - 1:18 pm	☀	
8:28 pm	12:17 am - 1:35 am	6:16 am	12:42 pm - 2:00 pm	☀	FULL
9:23 pm	1:10 am - 2:18 am	6:57 am	1:35 pm - 2:43 pm	☀	
10:14 pm	2:00 am - 3:06 am	7:42 am	2:25 pm - 3:31 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 BOLD 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

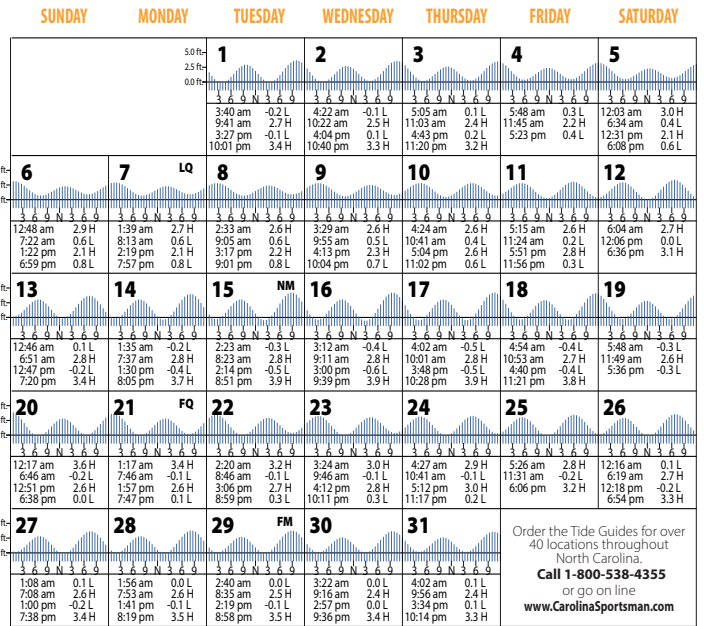
Oregon Inset, USCG Station HIGH LOW

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

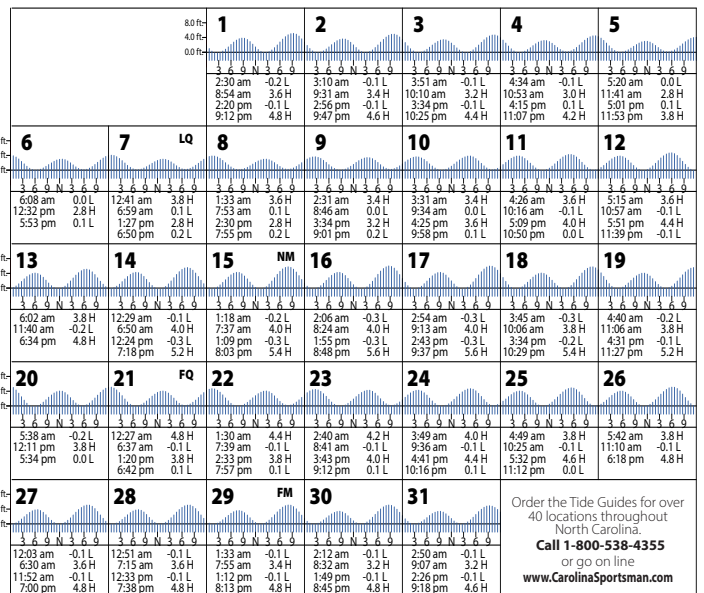
Southport, Cape Fear River HIGH LOW

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

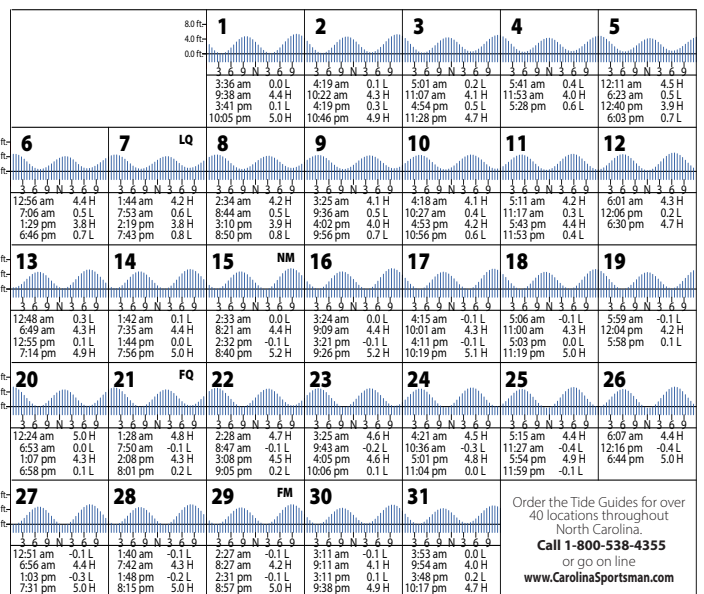
Atlantic Beach Ocean



Oregon Inlet USCG Station



Southport Cape Fear River



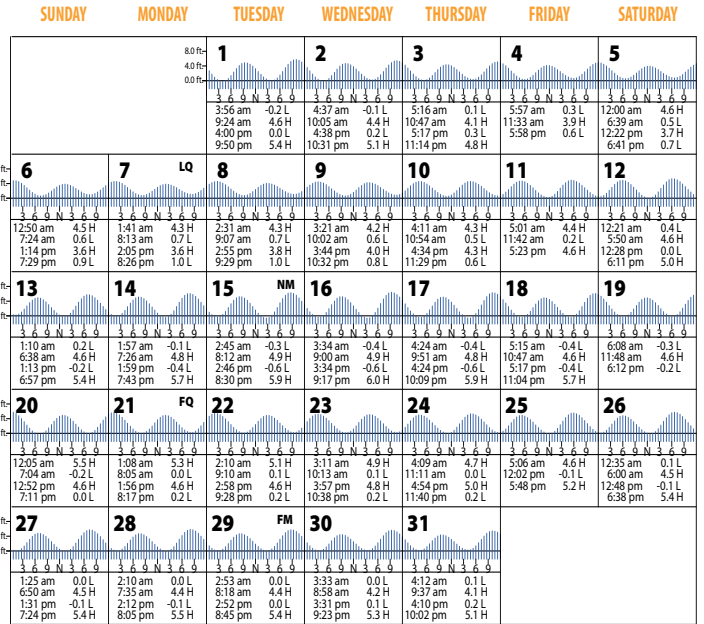
How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide

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

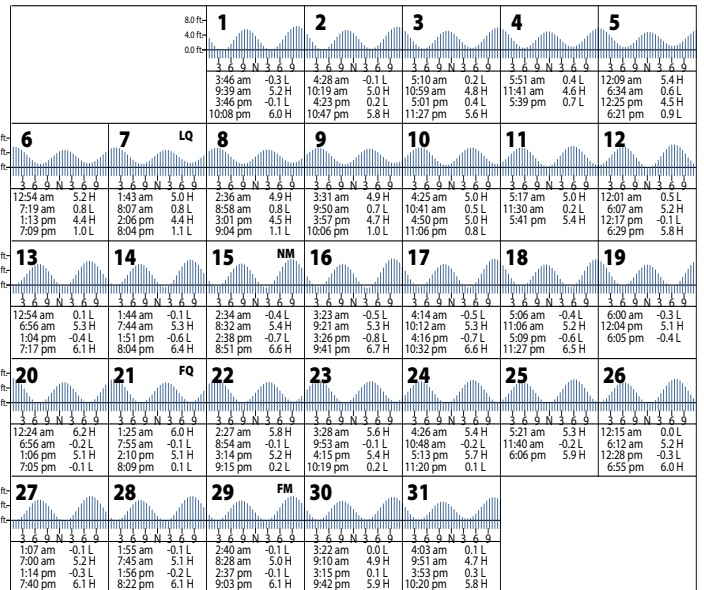
Tide Corrections

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

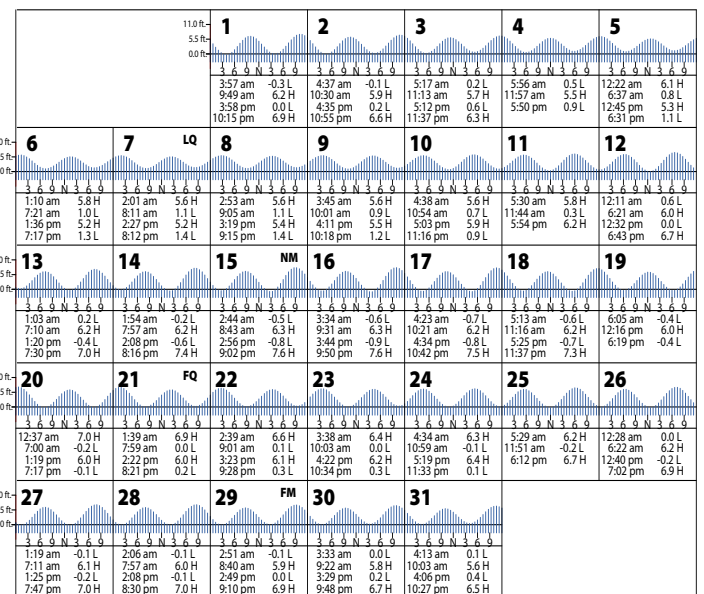
Dunn Sound Little River Inlet



Charleston Customhouse Wharf



Harbor River Bridge



Grouper like this nice scamp are well within reach of most Murrells Inlet boats when the season opens on May 1.

Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

GROUPEL SEASON WELCOMED BACK

Murrells Inlet offshore captains signal love of big reef-dwellers as May arrives

Grouper are popular throughout the world, usually occupying a big niche in seafood restaurants. While they are highly recognized on the dinner menu, few anglers ever make it onto an offshore boat to see one of these fish face to face. If they did, they would surely remember how much energy it took to winch them out of deep water.

Luckily for anglers living along the eastern seaboard, the recreational grouper season opens this month, just in time to catch these fish in an eating mood. The waters off South Carolina's coast are prime places to tussle with one of these hard-fighting delicacies.

When the season opens May 1, charter captains around Murrells Inlet, S.C., put them back on the daily menu. Tommy Werner, who runs the *Wild Thang*, will be one of the first captains in the area to target these fish.

"We have fantastic grouper habitat within a short run of Murrells Inlet," said Werner (843-798-9100). "We regularly

catch them at the Vermillion and the William Goldfinch (reefs) this time of year."

Werner's favorite spots are a little more difficult to find on marine charts than named offshore reefs equipped with marker boys.

"We catch plenty of fish at the generic reefs, but I prefer small, livebottom areas barely recognizable on a marine chart," he said. "These areas tend to hold bigger fish because they don't get as much pressure as the named reefs."

The livebottoms contain scattered coral and rock outcroppings that provide cover and food for invertebrates, small fish and larger apex predators. Complete food webs arise around livebottom areas that make it perfect for grouper.

Typically, grouper move shallower and closer to the shoreline during the winter to spawn, then migrate back to deep water in the spring as the waters warm. In May, Werner hones in on reefs and live bottom in 80- to 90-foot depths.

Grouper are among a crowd of reef

scavengers that will readily forage on just about anything they can find. Any meal-sized fish swimming around reef structure occupied by grouper will have an instant shortened life expectancy.

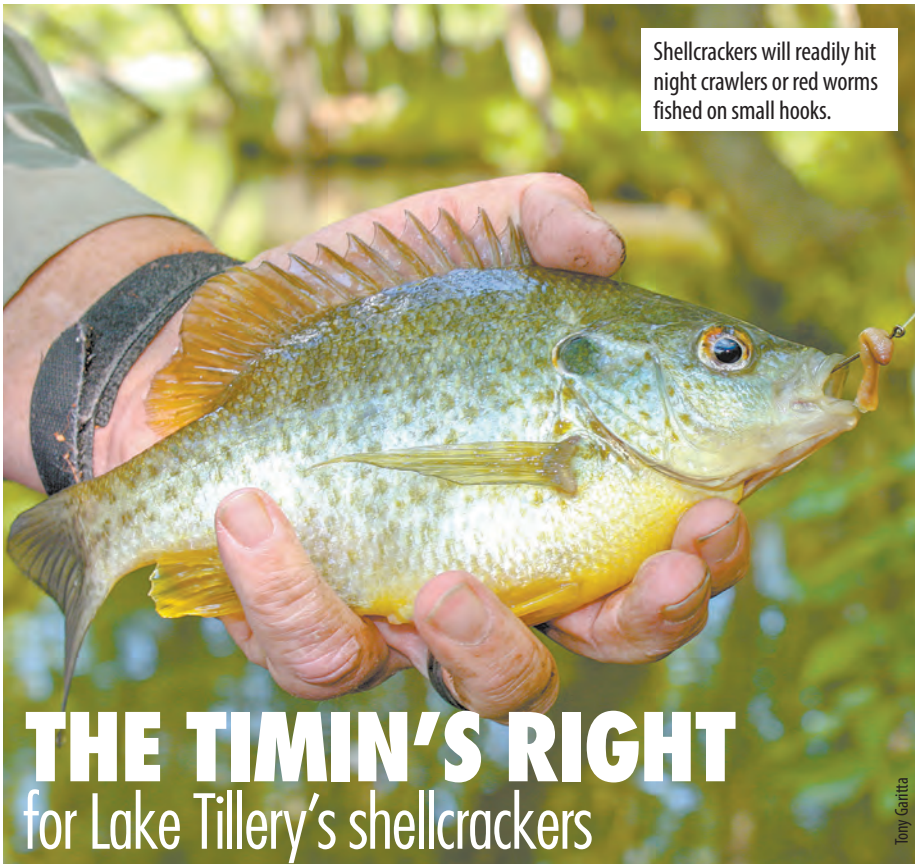
"Live bait is the best, especially for gags, and I prefer live menhaden if I can get it this time of year," Werner said.

Live pinfish or anything he can jig up around a reef will quickly tempt a grouper on these offshore hot spots. Werner will use a Carolina-style rig with a 12-ounce egg sinker, a 125-pound test leader and a 9/0 Trokar hook.

For the best results, Werner recommends powering through the first few seconds after the bite to pull fish 15 to 20 feet away from the structure.

"The faster you get them off the reef, the better off you will be, especially with scamps. They are notorious for shutting off after the third bite or if you lose a fish in the structure," he said. ■

— Jeff Bureson



Shellcrackers will readily hit night crawlers or red worms fished on small hooks.

THE TIMIN'S RIGHT for Lake Tillery's shellcrackers

Tony Garitta

The song *Good Timin'* by Jimmy Jones didn't have shellcracker fishing in mind, but the lyrics certainly apply. "A timin' is the thing, it's true. Good timin' brought me to you."

To catch nature's most-perfect nutcracker, the redear sunfish, aka shellcracker, stumpknocker and bream, fishermen must have good timin', because once the panfish finishes spawning, it's almost impossible to catch.

"The best time for shellcrackers in our area is from April through June," said Rusty Bowers of Albemarle, N.C., who got hooked on shellcracker fishing at nearby Lake Tillery while playing hooky from school with his brother, Rosco. "I'd recommend fishing during the full moons in April and May."

Around full moons, males create nesting colonies, with the females visiting to lay eggs. The spawning activity usually takes place in around a foot of water.

While spawning, shellcrackers prefer hardbottoms, feeder creeks, shallow stumps, roots and elodea grass.

Shellcrackers don't stay shallow very long, so fishermen must take advantage of the moment. They can be stacked in a creek one day and gone the next with the slightest weather change.

Once shellcrackers finish spawning, they

return to water 25 to 35 feet deep, and they're harder to find.

In clear water, shellcrackers can be caught by sight-fishing, using night crawlers, crickets, red worms or 1/6-ounce jigs. Otherwise, free-lining a worm without a float or weights is productive.

"I always key on wood," Rusty Bowers said. "Fish any tree roots or stumps in shallow water."

Unlike other sunfish, shellcrackers are particular about what they strike.

"You can't catch many shellcrackers going down the bank tossing a bobber and bait or artificials," Rusty Bowers said. "They're bottom-feeders and want the bait right near the bottom. If the bait's too high, they won't bite it. They also prefer natural bait."

Bait presentation is critical, too.

"If you wad up the worm on a hook, you won't get bit," he said. "The worm must hang straight. They won't hit tiny pieces of worm either, so use half or a whole night crawler. The point of the hook should be barely exposed."

If it's windy, Bowers crimps a BB-sized split-shot on the lines.

Shellcrackers are found in waters with aquatic clams, snails and black-and-white mussels, which they can crack open in a jiffy. Tillery, Tuckertown and Badin are

productive shellcracker waters among the Yadkin River lakes.

Shellcrackers are not puny fish. Rusty Bowers said Tillery has good numbers of 2-pound fish, with his best weighing 2 pounds, 13 ounces. The state-record shellcracker of 4 pounds, 15 ounces came from a private pond.

They're spirited fighters on light tackle.

"It wouldn't do for them to get to be the size of a bass because they really pull," Rosco Bowers said. ■

— Tony Garitta

CAPE LOOKOUT COBIA set for a May arrival in nearshore waters

For anglers who want to catch potentially huge, tenacious, great-tasting saltwater fish in nearshore waters

along North Carolina's central coast,

cobias fill the bill, especially in May

"Cobia usually show up during May and are a big draw here," said guide Joe Shute, who owns Cape Lookout Fly Shop in Atlantic Beach, N.C. "People like to sight-fish for cobia using 1- to 3-ounce bucktails with soft-plastic Hoggy and Sluggos."

Shute tries to spot schools of baitfish on the surface and then checks his fish finder to spot cobia beneath them.

"You can jig under baitfish schools or spot cobia near the surface, then throw lures in front of them," said Shute (800-868-0941).

Cobia will also attack live baits, mainly menhaden, dropped below bait schools on a Carolina rig. Some anglers will use live eels — if they can find a tackle shop that sells them.

Anglers also check around buoys, floats and channel markers where cobias congregate. Polarized glasses help see fish near the surface.

Some cobia will move inshore in May in preparation for the June spawn. North Carolina's state record is a 116½-pound fish caught in 2006. Greg Marquart of Macclesfield, N.C., landed 96- and 54-pound cobias within 30 minutes of each other last May near Bardens Inlet.

Even offshore charterboats sometimes run into cobia.

continues >

FISHING HOTSPOTS
continued



Cape Lookout Cobia continued

"Cobia will be up and down the beaches and ball up mullet and (baitfish)," said Thomas Wood (252-241-8346), who runs the *Dancin' Outlaw* out of Morehead City. "We throw Hogy lures at them, but live baits are the best."

North Carolina anglers can begin targeting cobia on May 1, with the recreational

season scheduled to run the rest of the year. The daily creel limit is one fish, with a 36-inch size minimum. Only two cobia are allowed per day on private boats from May 1-31, and one per day per boat from June 1-Dec. 31. Charterboats of any size can keep up to four fish per day. ■

— Craig Holt

HARTWELL IS HOT

Stripers, burgeoning hybrids, spotted bass make for a great May on border waters

Preston Harden admits right off the bat that he might be biased.

"Fishing really gets cranked up on Hartwell in May," said Harden, who runs Bucktail Guide Service from his Commerce, Ga., home. "I might be partial, but I think it is the best striper/hybrid fishing lake there is. We are just getting hot with schools of fish everywhere now — and Hartwell has some really big stripers."

Harden said the lake appears to have many more hybrids than stripers, thanks to heavy stocking the past three or four years. And there is a really big bonus: spotted bass are prolific, and they are feeding in the same areas, on the same baitfish, as the stripers and hybrids.

"Fish are easy to catch shallow on artificials early and late in the day, and if you can get near them and present a lively blueback herring, you can catch them really quick. They won't turn it down," he said.

Harden (706-255-5622) usually fishes with jigs while the water is cool, but when it begins to warm in May, he likes to throw

a topwater lure.

"If they won't commit to a Lucky Craft Sammy, I will throw a Sebile Magic Swimmer. The nickname for that one is the 'White Lady,' he said. "The one I like to use is white, and it is slow-sinking. Just reel it under the surface and keep it wobbling. Sometimes, when they just won't quite commit to a topwater lure, they will eat that Sebile."

Even a non-expert can work the Sebile.

"Anybody can do it. You don't have to 'walk the dog.' Just throw it out and reel it back under the surface."

One sure way to put stripers and hybrids in the boat this month is to give them a blueback herring for lunch.

"If you can get a blueback near one in May, he is going to eat it. Work them on free-lines early, and then on down-lines as it gets later in the morning," he said.

"The fish are actively feeding in May, and the early morning bite is usually the best. They might go a little deeper, especially in the middle of the day, as the month progresses. They really start transitioning

Big cobia invade the waters around Cape Lookout in May as they prepare to spawn in June.

to deeper water in June."

The only problem with fishing for stripers and hybrids — if it is really a problem — is that you can't catch the stripers and hybrids because the spotted bass won't leave you alone, Harden said.

In May, he said, stripers and hybrids hang around shoals, humps and points, and the spotted bass are taking over those areas, too.

— Pat Robertson



Guide Preston Harden said May is a great month to do battle with a really nice striped bass on Lake Hartwell.

The four major rivers that all meet just upstream from Georgetown, S.C., feature enough brackish water to attract spring redfish.



Jeff Burleson

GEORGETOWN'S RIVERS CAN BE REDFISH HAVENS

By May, spring fishing is going full bore inshore and offshore, and that includes fishermen who barely think about anything except redfish.

For most, the salty marshes and rich oyster beds are prime locations. However, anglers in the Georgetown area have something special: a major freshwater river system that ends right at the saltwater/freshwater mixing line.

Brackish habitats with great structure — logs and stumps — are great places to target spring reds, with double-digit days not uncommon.

Jordan Pate of Carolina Guide Service frequently patrols for reds well into the brackish zone.

"Despite common thought, redfish will venture well into the freshwater rivers to feed," said Pate (843-814-7900). "Some of the best bites occur at the lower end of the river systems, right after a recent rainfall event.

"We have the Pee Dee, Black, Waccamaw and Sampit coming into Winyah Bay right at Georgetown, and we catch redfish

within sight of International Paper's smokestack."

The rivers are loaded with submerged structure, including stumps, logs and remnant structures used on the historic rice plantations.

"The structure in these rivers may claim your favorite lures, but the logs and underwater obstructions provide habitat for mullet and shrimp that feed the redfish, and plenty of flounder and trout, too," Pate said.

It doesn't hurt that baitfish make a strong showing in May, moving into the brackish water and attracting reds and other gamefish.

Certain areas can hold fish better than others. Pate concentrates on ditch mouths, shallow flats and conversely, deep banks with structure.

"Productive spots to look for are small drains on falling water where there may only be a small temperature change of one or two degrees. I also find banks with less current flow are more productive than the outside edges of deep bends where the current is swift," he said.

The reds will quickly move to different areas when the bait begins to set up on different banks. Learning to cover ground is a key technique in these brackish water systems.

"I will cover a lot of ground with spinnerbaits, Chatterbaits, and small crankbaits. I may slow down and fish Flukes and other soft plastics when I start to pick off a few from a specific area," he said.

Since baitfish have plenty of avenues of escape available, redfish will become aggressive in these areas for fear of losing a feeding opportunity that makes noisy/flashy lures the golden ticket to quick action.

Typically, redfish will stay no more than a few miles upstream of Georgetown, but it is not uncommon during a dry season for reds to venture well upstream into the interior of the coastal counties.

"Under drought conditions, I have heard reports of redfish as far as 20 miles upriver," Pate said. ■

— Jeff Burleson

Edisto River up next >

SHOOT KERR'S

on-the-move crappie under docks

Although most crappie fishermen regard early spring and the prespawn period to be the best fishing of the year, guide Chris Bullock of Fountain, N.C., holds May in high esteem for sheer numbers of fish and the pleasure of using a unique approach.

As the spawning season fades and crappie clamor for cover underneath the wealth of floating docks on Kerr Lake, which straddles the North Carolina-Virginia border, Bullock will be perched on his boat, shooting jigs like a marksman. "When they first move, you might catch two to four keepers off a dock," said Bullock (252-902-4039), who runs Kerr Lake Crappie and Cats Guide Service. "Then, in a few days, you might catch 10 to 15. At its peak, we've caught 100 keepers off one dock."

Crappie treat boat docks as a form of shelter to escape the sun and a place to refuel on the abundant forage they attract after the spawn. When water temperatures climb into the 60s, most fish will head to the docks closest to their spawning flats in the backs of the creeks, where the water may only be 6 feet deep. As the water continues to warm, they will move out of the creeks to deeper docks until they reach the main lake and docks over as much as 10 to 20 feet of water.

"Bigger docks are better for numbers, but not necessarily bigger fish," Bullock said. "On hotter days, they'll be out towards the end, and you can shoot it straight on. But on cooler days, they might be closer to shore, and you'll have to shoot from the side."

Using a 7-foot Lews Wally Marshall ultralight rod paired with a 2500 to 3000 series spinning reel and 6-pound Sufix Elite Hi-Vis yellow monofilament, he frees enough line to allow the 1/16-ounce jighead to swing about 3 1/2 feet from the tip. With the bail's reel flipped open and one finger holding the line, he grabs the jighead between his thumb and forefinger and

pulls the jig back to bend the rod into a horseshoe shape while keeping it parallel to the water. Finally, he releases the jig at his target and releases the line a fraction of a second later, shooting and skipping the jig as far underneath the dock as possible.

"I count to eight or nine while the jig falls on a tight line and then start a slow retrieve," Bullock said. "Sometimes, a fish will hit it on the fall, and that will tell you how deep they are. But you'll have to experiment with it."

Bullock's jig trailer of choice is a Bobby Garland Baby Shad in key lime pie, chartreuse sparkle or Cajun cricket colors. ■

— Dusty Wilson

EDISTO RIVER SWAMPS ARE FULL OF NICE REDBREASTS

Sunfish will be spawning, feeding

This time of year, it's tough to beat fishing in the blackwater swamps for redbreast sunfish. These brightly-colored cousins of the bluegill are spawning, so their colors are brilliant, they are hearty eaters and strong fighters, especially on ultralight tackle.

Kevin Davis of Black's Camp in Cross, S.C.,

Floating boat docks will yield a lot of big crappie to Kerr Lake fishermen in May after the spawn and before fish reach summer holding areas.



Dusty Wilson

spends most of his year fishing the Santee Cooper lakes, but in May, you're just as likely to find him in a slough along the Edisto River swamp near Givhans Ferry with several cages of crickets, some night crawlers and a good supply of Johnson Beetle Spins. Redbreast will eat them all.

Redbreast are one of the least-common panfish in the Carolinas. You may luck into one here and there in other bodies of water, but these fish really thrive in the tannin-rich, tea-colored waters only found in blackwater swamps and rivers like the Edisto.

"These fish love to gather where the bank of the swamp drops off into the water," Davis said. "They'll hang out around all the roots growing along that bank, especially where there is a little current. And if there is a downed tree or log nearby, you can expect to catch a redbreast if you cast a worm, a cricket or a Beetle Spin in there."

One modification Davis (843-753-2231) makes to his Beetle Spins is that he completely removes the soft-plastic body of the lure and replaces it with a live cricket.

“Some people leave the lure’s body on there and add a cricket,” he said, “but I think it sinks faster without the body. It’s less buoyant without it, so it gets down quicker, and there’s some really deep water in these swamps.”



Blackwaters swamps and rivers are great spots to run into a handful of redbreast sunfish, which will likely be spawning this month.

Brian Cope

Davis also fishes directly on the bottom with live worms, using a light-wire, No. 4 Eagle Claw hook with a big split-shot several inches above it. He uses 10-pound braided line, and he said when fishing this way, you’re likely to either catch a redbreast or get hung up on bottom debris on every single cast.

“That’s why I like braided line,” he said. “When you get hung up on debris — or when you hook a fish that pulls you into debris — you can really put a lot of pressure on the line. You can just pull until the fish comes free, or until the hook literally straightens out. That’s why you want that light-wire hook. It will straighten out and you can reel it all in, fix your hook with a pair of pliers, and get right back to fishing without breaking your line,” he said.

Using crickets or worms under bobbers is also effective. Davis suggests casting as close to any cover you can find, including the muddy banks that are usually overgrown with roots. Allowing the bobber to drift down the edge of the bank, or very close to cover like logs or other surface debris usually results in a redbreast bite. ■

— Brian Cope

SPRING KING RUN THRILLS N.C. FISHERMEN

Piers, nearshore structure on either side of Cape Fear get hot in May

One of the high points of spring fishing is the annual run of king mackerel along North Carolina’s southern beaches. Kings migrate up the beach and take up residence for anywhere from a few days to a few weeks between the ends of fishing piers and nearshore artificial reefs. During exceptionally warm springs, it may begin in late April, but it has usually fired off by mid-May.

Kings’ appearance in May won’t be the longest or strongest run of the year, but it usually includes some of the largest fish. The record kings at Ocean Crest Pier and Oak Island Pier on Oak Island — and the defunct Long Beach Pier — all weighed better than 50 pounds and were caught during the spring run.

These big kings stayed south and west of Frying Pan Shoals for many years, but some have been turning the corner at Cape Fear the past few years and being caught from Kure Beach Pier, Carolina Beach Pier and Johnnie Mercer’s Pier in Wrightsville Beach. The better action around nearshore artificial reefs remains at Yaupon Beach Reef (AR 425) and Tom McGlammery Reef (AR 420) off Oak Island. A handful of nearshore hardbottom/livebottom areas and



Peter Balderas caught this 44-pound, 7-ounce king mackerel off the Ocean Crest Pier on Oak Island, N.C.

Ocean Crest Pier

wrecks also hold bait and attract early kings.

The spring run can be explosive and begin without warning. The triggers are the arrival of bluefish and water temperatures above 65 degrees. Once these thresholds are met, kings may arrive at any time.

Fishermen targeting kings from the ends of ocean piers use trolley rigs to position baits. Fishermen in boats slow-troll, anchor or drift live baits from just off the beach to several miles offshore. Standard rigs use wire leaders and two to three treble hooks.

This is exciting fishing, as kings make at least one long, fast run that buzzes a reel’s clicker into an almost painful wail. This fishing is available to all fishermen, as those without boats can fish from the piers. On calm days, boat fishermen may be in anything from hot rod center consoles to Jon boats and even kayaks. The action begins right off the beach. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

Lake Wylie up next >



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HICKORY STRIPERS MOVING

Post-spawn fish heading deep, but not there yet

Guide Colt Bass of Collettesville, N.C., said May is a productive month for quality stripers at Lake Hickory on the Catawba River system.

"Typical size on Hickory is going to be 7 to 9 pounds, although there are a lot of fish weighing in the teens caught this time of year, and you usually see a few over 20 pounds," said Bass (www.coltbassfishing.com).

Of course, Bass has to find the fish before he can catch them. If he doesn't know where the fish are, he searches by trolling bucktail jigs on downriggers and lead-core line off the sides and back of his boat using 7½-foot, medium-heavy Shakespeare Ugly Stik rods paired with Abu Garcia 7000 reels.

Bass looks for fish in shallow places with quick access to deep water.

"A lot of fish in May are going to be coming off of the spawn and moving from shallow to deep," said Bass. "If I can find one of these spots that also has bait around it, more than likely, there will be stripers."

Once he finds a likely spot, Bass changes tactics, putting out down-lines and planer boards. His live-bait tackle includes 7-foot, medium-action Ugly Stiks and Abu Garcia 6500 reels spooled with 20-pound Big Game. His spread consists of 4 to 6 down-lines fished vertically off the sides of his boat at different depths employing Carolina rigs with ½- to 2-ounce weights based upon wind strength and 3- to 4-foot leaders of 17-pound fluorocarbon completed with circle hooks Nos. 1 to 4/0 in size.

"I always use circle hooks," said Bass, who believes these hooks cause less harm to



Guide Colt Bass said plenty of quality Lake Hickory stripers will be caught this month as the spawn winds down.

fish that he might have to release.

Bass slow-trolls the rigs, sampling both shallow and deep water with a variety of live bait 4 to 7 inches in length. His baits include gizzard shad, threadfin shad and herring.

"I always use a few different-flavored baits in different sizes to see if the fish key in on any particular one," said Bass.

The planer boards run from off the sides of the boat rigged with live bait as well.

"If I don't get any bites after working the

spot thoroughly, I'll move to another likely spot and do it all over again," said Bass.

If he already knows the whereabouts of stripers, Bass skips trolling and immediately fishes down-lines and planer boards.

Bass said ideal conditions for May stripers are water temperatures from 60 to 75 degrees and clear water.

"The clearer the water, the better the bite," said Bass. "Muddy and stained waters are going to hurt you on Hickory." ■

— Tony Garitta



Lake Wylie is home to a great population of nice blue catfish, as guide Rodger Taylor (right) can attest.

Pat Robertson

FOLLOW WYLIE'S BLUES

As catfish head to the spawn, change your tactics to fill your cooler

Guide Rodger Taylor of Rock Hill, S.C., said that catching blue catfish on Lake Wylie this month can be great, but you need to be flexible.

"Early May and late May often require two different approaches," he said. "I like to fish early in the month, just as I do for prespawn cats in April. Prespawn fish are known to travel great distances toward the headwaters in southeastern reservoirs, so I like to use a prespawn approach to locating blues in early May."

Because of the spawn, May is a transition month, and as far as locations and techniques apply, the timing varies from year to year due to multiple factor, including temperature, rainfall, length of day and other influences, he said.

EARLY MAY

"My No. 1 technique in early May and for prespawn blues is anchoring on channel ledges, sloping points and shallow backwaters. Basically you are fishing areas

where there is a large number of fish in a smaller area and that lends well to anchor fishing," said Taylor (803-328-9587).

Early in May, prime locations is the upper, riverine section of Lake Wylie upstream from the confluence of the South Fork and Catawba rivers. Prime baits include gizzard shad, blueback herring, white perch and bluegill in that order of preference, he said.

"In early May, I prefer to use gizzard shad when bottom-fishing for prespawn blue catfish," he said. "Prespawn fishing begins usually in late March when fish are still feeding heavily on winter shad. Blueback herring and large threadfin shad are very good substitutes when gizzard shad are unavailable or hard to get."

LATE MAY

Taylor can tell when the blue catfish begin spawning when the number of fish he catches drops. He changes his approach to maintain good catch rates.

"I like to start fishing early in the morning in the river section," he said. "While the winds are light, I like to anchor up. Sometimes, this will produce a flathead or two and maybe a couple of late prespawn blue cats."

"By mid-morning, winds start to pick up, and the increased sun makes nabbing a flathead less likely, (so) drifting is a better option. Drift-fishing allows for covering large areas where post-spawn and prespawn fish are in transition and are more widely scattered out. I like to drift-fish the wider areas of the lake below the river confluence looking for transitional catfish."

Once the water warms in the spawning range, Taylor said top baits through July include gizzard shad, white perch and bluegill.

"Gizzard shad is a great catfish bait year-round but from late May through the warm-water period (through November), it is always a good idea to carry more than one kind of bait if possible." ■

— Pat Robertson



Jackson Smith

Jackson Smith, 13, of Greensboro, N.C., caught this big red drum in late summer 2016 on the Pamlico River.



Carley Grace Boggs

Carley Grace Boggs, 6, of Burlington, N.C., caught and reeled in her first keeper gray trout in Beaufort N.C., in fall 2016.



Avery Lane

Avery Lane, 5, caught her first largemouth bass in Lake Farmer in Caswell County, N.C., during the summer of 2016.



Katie Buckner

Katie Buckner of Saluda, N.C., caught this nice blue catfish, a 20-pounder, on Georgia's Lake Sinclair.



Greg Abbee

Greg "Diesel" Abbee of Greenville, S.C., caught this nice bass from a farm pond near Mauldin, S.C., on Labor Day 2017.



Bill Woodard

Bill Woodard of Wilson, N.C., caught this African pompano on a trip with Yeah Right Charters and Capt. Butch Foster.

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Hugh McLaurin

Hugh McLaurin of Big Lake Game Calls in Ellore, S.C., killed this trophy kudu, with 54-inch horns, on his first African safari.



Jeff Wiebe

Jeff Wiebe of Efland, N.C., caught this 51-inch, 45-pound striped on a live eel in the Chesapeake Bay in December 2016.



Caroline Coley

Caroline Coley, 11, of Holly Springs, N.C., killed her first buck, this 6-pointer, last season with a crossbow.



Scottie Townsend

Scottie Townsend shot this 8-point, 180-pound buck in full velvet on Sept. 16, 2017, near Hickory, N.C., with a crossbow.



Marti Shutte

Marti Shutte of Aynor, S.C., dropped this big 8-pointer on Oct. 7 in Horry County.



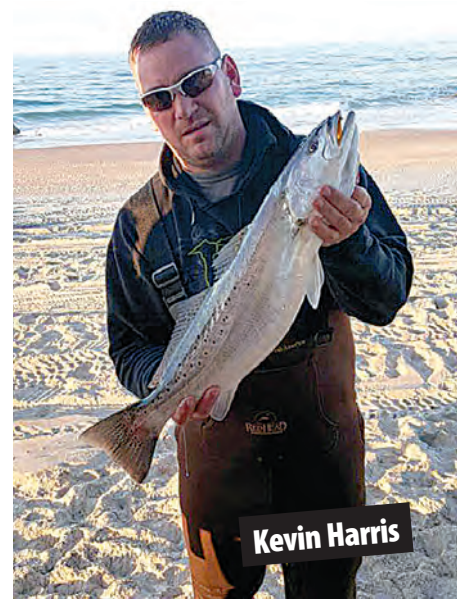
Shane Floyd

Shane Floyd of Lexington, N.C., caught this 8¾-pound bass at High Rock Lake on Feb. 25, 2017.



Ele Wooten

Ele Wooten of Snow Hill, N.C., caught this 41-pound catfish in Contentnea Creek.



Kevin Harris

Kevin Harris of Clemmons caught this 6-pound, 3-ounce speck in the surf at Cape Lookout on Thanksgiving Day 2016.

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Rob Jones

Rob Jones of Columbia, S.C., killed this 10-point, Fairfield County buck at the Wateree Buck Club on Nov. 24, 2017.



Fisher Waggett

Fisher Waggett, 14, killed this drake wood duck in Sampson County, N.C., in 2017 on Youth Waterfowl Day.



Ilias Carrillo

Ilias Carrillo caught this 8½-pound bass last December on Lake Sutton near Wilmington, N.C.



Douglas Brady

Douglas Brady Jr., 24, from Charlotte, N.C., caught this false albacore near Cape Lookout on Nov. 15, 2016.



Murray Porter

Murray Porter, 74, of Goldsboro, N.C., caught this 2-pound bluegill on Nov. 12, 2016, at Richmond Mill Pond.

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Jeff Page, John Tyson

Jeff Page and John Tyson boated this double limit of flounder last Labor Day at Murrells Inlet, S.C.



Kendall Griffin

Kendall Griffin, 8, from Greenville, N.C., killed this nice buck in Greenville County, Va., during the 2016 blackpowder season. It was her first deer.



Austin Adams, 12, of Washington, N.C., caught this 24-pound king mackerel, his first, on Sept. 16, 2017, at Atlantic Beach, fishing with his grandfather, George Adams.



Will Russell of Jacksonville, N.C., caught this 20-inch flounder on Sept. 25, 2016, in the ICW near North Topsail Beach, N.C.



Justin Strickland of Lillington, N.C., caught this 22-inch bass on Nov. 12, 2016, in Warren Mill Pond near Newton Grove.



Lorraine and Phillip Blue decked these bull reds off the Sea Cabin Pier in Cherry Grove, S.C., in October 2016.



Jimmy Sutton caught this 50-inch red drum in the Neuse River near Oriental, N.C., fishing with his son, Tim.



Bruce Sellars caught this 4-pound, 10-ounce bass on Lake Thurmond with Bear Creek Fishing Club last September.



Ethan Stauffer and father-in-law Dick Ford beached these puppy drum in the surf at Bogue Inlet, N.C., in October 2016.



Tyler Potter, 14, caught a limit of nice speckled trout on a cold, windy Nov. 12, 2016, in Beaufort, N.C.

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