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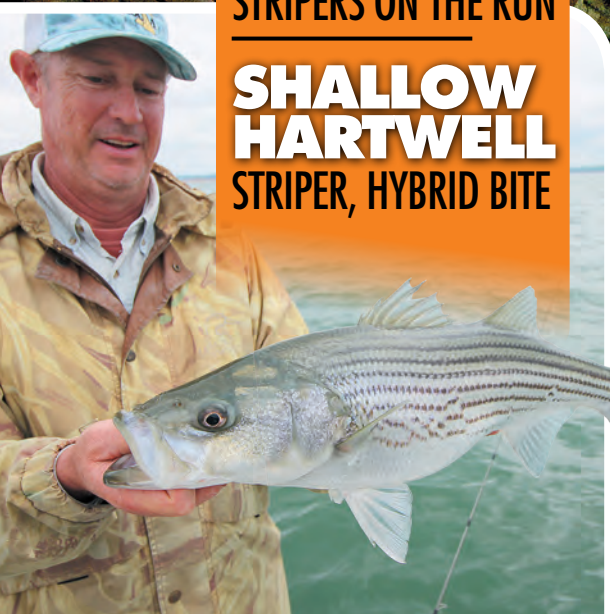


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**17**  
**OFF-DAY**  
**GOBBLERS**



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Turkey season opens for North Carolina hunters this month and continues for South Carolina hunters. Photo by Rick Small.

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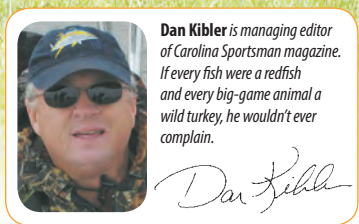
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# Outdoor UPDATE

with  
Dan Kibler



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

*Dan Kibler*

## NC BANS URINE-BASED DEER LURES

### NO MORE LIMITS ON SPOTTED BASS, BUT LIMITS ON BULLFROGS?

**A**dd North Carolina to the list of states that have banned lures made from deer urine.

At its meeting in late February, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission passed 44 proposed regulation changes for the 2020-21 season, but none more important than its ban on urine-based deer attractants.

In an effort to keep chronic wasting deer out of the state's deer herd, commissioners voted to make it illegal for any person to "possess or use any substance or material that contains or claims to contain any excretion collected from a cervid, including feces, urine, blood, gland oil, or other bodily fluid for the purposes of taking or attempting to take, attracting, or scouting wildlife."

Commissioners said the prohibition doesn't apply to "natural substances collected by an individual from non-farmed cervids legally taken in North Carolina or synthetic products."

In other words, you can't take deer urine or attractants made from the tarsal glands of deer into the woods unless you've collected them from a deer harvested in North Carolina. Synthetic deer lures remain okay for use by hunters.

South Carolina, Mississippi and Louisiana are other states that have banned, in one form or other, urine-based deer products in the past year or two as CWD has been confirmed in Mississippi and Tennessee. Studies have shown that the always-fatal disease, which effects whitetails, elk and some other members of the deer family, can be transmitted through bodily fluids such as urine and saliva, to name a few.

North Carolina passed another new regulation to try and do something about the unintended expansion of a gamefish species about which fishermen and biologists have mixed opinions.

The Commission voted to remove any creel limits or size minimums from spotted bass, aka Alabama bass, in any North Carolina waters.

Spotted bass, introduced by anglers into a handful of North Carolina reservoirs, have in many cases wreaked havoc on native bass populations, displacing largemouths and smallmouths because of their aggressive nature. The new regulation will allow fishermen to catch and keep them without any limit, hopefully to stop or at least slow down the growth of their populations.

Commissioners also voted to remove the "trophy" regulation managing big bass on Randleman Reservoir. No longer can anglers keep only one bass per day 20 inches or larger. The water-supply lake in Guilford and Randolph counties will be managed under statewide regulations: five fish per day, a 14-inch size minimum and an exemption for two small fish.

The Commission also removed the 20-fish daily creel limit and 8-inch size minimum for crappie on Badin, Falls, Tillery and Blewett Falls reservoirs, plus the Pee Deer River upstream from the South Carolina state line. Allowing anglers to take smaller fish aims to improve overall growth rates.

Another proposal that passed muster was an increase in the daily creel limit on channel catfish from six to seven on Commission-owned waters or waters in the Community Fishing Program.

One other regulation changes has, you might say, some real jump to it. The Commission voted to establish an April 1-Aug. 31 season for bullfrogs on property owned by the Commission, and a statewide daily limit of 24 bullfrogs. It also clarified that bullfrogs may be giggered with the aid of lights. ■

# NC'S 2020 FLOUNDER SEASON SET FOR 6 WEEKS

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries announced in late February that the 2020 recreational flounder season will be Aug. 16 through Sept. 30 in North Carolina's internal and ocean waters.

NCDMF closed the season last Sept. 4 after the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission adopted Amendment 2 to the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan, which called for a 62% reduction in harvest for 2019 and a 72% reduction for 2020.



North Carolina anglers can resume catching and keeping flounder on Aug. 16 of this year.

Dan Kibler

NCDMF reported a harvest reduction of 16% last year because of the late start to the closure. The commercial season was open for a short period in the fall, with landings indicating a 44% reduction for 2019.

NCDMF had a number of options for a 2020 recreational

season, but the six-week season was predicted to result in the needed harvest reductions.

North Carolina law mandates that fishery management plans include measures to end overfishing within two years and rebuild the stock to achieve sustainable harvest within 10 years of adoption of a fishery management plan.

Reductions in harvest are required because a 2019 South Atlantic Southern Flounder Stock Assessment found that southern flounder is overfished and overfishing is occurring throughout the region (North Carolina through the eastern coast of Florida). Overfished means the population is too small. Overfishing means the removal rate is too high.

The minimum size limit for recreational flounder will remain at 15 inches total length, and the creel limit will remain at four fish per person per day during the open recreational season. ■

# SC SENATE CONFIRMS BOYLES AS SCDNR'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

After seven months as interim director of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, Robert H. Boyles Jr. has been confirmed as the agency's executive director.

The S.C. Senate voted unanimously on Feb. 13 in favor of Boyles, a Mooresville, N.C., native who has worked for SCDNR for 22 years, including as deputy director of Marine Resources since 2003.

"I am humbled and excited for the privilege of serving as the next director of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources," Boyles said. "I look forward to working with our staff, our many constituent groups, partners, and leaders across the state to help build a durable natural resources stewardship ethic for South Carolina. We have many challenges, but I am confident that we can work together to help improve conservation of our natural resources for us and for our children."

Boyles served as interim director since May 2019 when Alvin Taylor, the former executive director of SCDNR, retired. The SCDNR board chose Boyles as his replacement, subject to Senate confirmation.

Boyles served on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council from 2005 to 2012 and as a commissioner on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, including service as vice chair (2006-2009) and chair (2010-2011).

Boyles received his bachelor's degree in mathematical economics from Wake Forest University and a master of marine policy from the University of Delaware. He was a Bradley Fellow in Marine Policy at the Duke University Marine Lab in 1991. ■



Robert Boyles

# TROUT SEASON OPENS APRIL 4 IN NC STOCKED STREAMS

About 1,000 miles of North Carolina's mountain trout streams that were closed on Feb. 29 for stocking will reopen on Saturday, April 4, at 7 a.m.

Hatchery supported streams in 25 counties have been stocked over the past month with more than 212,000 brook, rainbow and brown trout at a ratio of 40-40-20%. Almost all trout will be stocked at around 10 inches long, with about 4% stocked that are more than 14 inches long.

Trout streams in the state's Hatchery Supported Trout Waters program are marked with green-and-white signs.

The daily creel limit on these streams is seven trout per day, with no size minimums and no lure or bait restrictions. ■



Rainbow trout make up about 40% of the trout that North Carolina stocks in its hatchery supported trout streams.

# ENORMOUS SMALLMOUTH WEIGHED 7-3

## LAKE JAMES LUNKER FOOLED BY JERKBAIT

**W**hen Ken Whitesides of Connelly Springs, N.C., felt his jerkbait stop suddenly about 5 feet below the surface of Lake James the morning of Feb. 29, he first thought he'd hooked a log — even though the point he was fishing was about 12 feet deep.

Then, the log started to swim away. After a minute or so of the fish putting a bend in his fishing rod without coming anywhere near the surface, Whitesides figured he had hooked a big largemouth bass.

The fish finally made a pass by Whitesides' boat, and his fishing buddy, Heath Settle, got a look at him.

"He said, 'Holy crap, it's a smallmouth!'" Whitesides said.

A couple of minutes later, Whitesides led the huge fish close enough for Settle to get his hands under its belly and heave it into the bottom of the boat. Moments later, Whitesides had weighed it at 7 pounds, 3 ounces and taped it at 23 inches long and 16½ inches in girth.

It was a great early birthday present for Whitesides, who turned 26 exactly one week later.

"I thought if it was a smallmouth, it would have jumped," said Whitesides, a broiler production manager at Case Farms in Morganton, N.C. "It just took off running and wouldn't come up. Maybe because it was so cold, he couldn't jump."

The air temperature was 27 degrees when Whitesides and Settle launched at James. The surface water temperature was 47 degrees around 10 a.m. when the sun got up enough to start warming the water.

Whitesides and Settle, who had caught about five fish in a couple of hours, decided to fish points on the Catawba River arm of the 6,510-acre lake.

"The sun had gotten up, and it had started to warm up, so I told my buddy we needed to start fishing rocky points that the sun was warming up," Whitesides said. "And it was windy, so we were fishing windy points. I guess that fish was up there, eating crawfish or shad that had been blown in there.

"We were freezing our butts off when we pulled across a point that was about 12 feet deep. I cast up to about 5 or 6 feet off the bank, and it felt like I'd hooked a log," he said. "Then, when it started to move, I thought I had a big largemouth. I couldn't do anything with it."

Whitesides was fishing a Duckett baitcasting rod with an ABU Garcia reel spooled with 12-pound fluorocarbon, so he felt like if he could hang on, he could land the fish — until he saw it.

"When it finally rolled up to the top and I could see it, I got weak in the knees. I said, 'Dear Lord, let me land this fish,'" Whitesides



Ken Whitesides caught this 7-pound, 3-ounce smallmouth bass on a jerkbait fishing Lake James on Feb. 29.

Courtesy Ken Whitesides

said. "The first time I saw it, I had one or two hooks in him. Then, he went back down out of sight. The next time he came up, I could see he had all three hooks in him: one in his mouth, one on the side of his face and one in his gill plate. That's when I thought I could get him in, but I was still worried that he might throw the bait."

Finally, after a battle that lasted a handful of minutes, Whitesides got the fish close to the boat. He and Settle didn't have a landing net, so Settle leaned out, ready to lip the fish.

"He went to grab it, and he said, 'I don't know where to grab him,'" Whitesides said. "He finally grabbed it with both hands and just threw it in the boat."

Whitesides had a Golden Rule measuring stick that went to 22 inches, and the fish's tail hung off the end of the board. He marked the fish's tail where it hung over and measured it and came up with a total length of 23 inches.

"I fish Lake James a lot, and I saw one that was caught in a tournament last year that was 6½ pounds. I thought it was the biggest smallmouth I'd ever see," he said. ■

# NC COASTAL FISHERIES REFORM GROUP HIRES ATTORNEY

**T**he North Carolina Coastal Fisheries Reform Group has hired legal counsel in its efforts to change the way coastal fisheries are managed.

The NCCFRG announced in February that it had retained James L. Conner II, a partner in Calhoun, Bhella and Sechrest in Durham, N.C., to represent it.

"North Carolina's public trust marine resources have been undeniably neglected. We at the NCCFRG have a clear mission and a common-sense path forward," said Joe Albea, producer of an outdoor television show and a spokesman for NCCFRG. "Yet our message has been ignored by the politicians in Raleigh.

"We've gone to great lengths to reach out repeatedly to our general assembly, state agencies and to the duly elected governor of North Carolina, yet our requests for reasonable dialogue have fallen on deaf ears. Without access to political representation, we are left with no choice but to look to legal remedies at this juncture."

Conner, a former judge, is an experienced environmental lawyer who has been a Superior Court mediator and was selected this year as one of the top 100 lawyers in North Carolina.

NCCFRG is supporting two bills that have been filed in the N.C. General Assembly: HR 483 and HR 486.

HR 483, aka Let Them Spawn, would require any valuable saltwater species to be managed with a minimum size limit that allowed 75 percent of juvenile fish to reach maturity and spawn at least once. The bill has passed the N.C. House and moved to the Senate, where it is being discussed in committee.

HR 486 proposes reforms to the way commercial fishing licenses are sold, and to whom. It would establish classes of commercial licenses: crew, standard, heritage and retired. It does away with the Recreational Commercial Gear License but allows recreational license holders to use bait seines and crab pots.

It also increases the cost of most licenses, commercial or recreational. ■

**GOT PICS?** We want 'em

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# DIXIE DEER CLASSIC CONTEST WINNERS



John Henderson of Durham, N.C. took the best typical by gun, this 156 $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch Warren County trophy.



Drew Hall of Canton, N.C., killed this 183 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch Granville County buck that was the biggest non-typical by gun.



This 167 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Guilford County buck taken by Trefyn Carter of Trinity, N.C., was the best typical by bow.



Brayden Adams of Taylorsville, N.C., won for the best buck from South Carolina with this 12-point, 150-inch giant from Marlboro County.



Tracey McCorkle took this Mecklenburg County trophy, which scored 195%. It's the new state-record crossbow non-typical.



Erica Patterson of Summerfield, N.C., took best female by muzzleloader with this 141 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Rockingham County buck.



Tootie Morris of Rougemont, N.C., won best bow non-typical by a female hunter for this 17-point, 147 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Granville County buck.



Eric League of Summerfield, N.C., took this 151 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Rockingham County trophy that was the best typical by muzzleloader.



Gary Malone of Snow Camp, N.C., won the best non-typical muzzleloader category with this 177 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Alamance County buck.



Katie Smith of Rosboro, N.C., won for the best non-typical gun by female for this Sampson County buck that scored 142 inches.



Torey Pegg of Kernersville, N.C., killed this 197 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch Guilford County monster, the new state record archery non-typical. It was awarded Best in Show.

For more details about the Dixie Deer Classic's Big Buck Contest, visit [www.carolinasportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/2020-dixie-deer-classic-winners/](http://www.carolinasportsman.com/hunting/deer-hunting/2020-dixie-deer-classic-winners/)

# NC PRO IS CLASSIC CHAMP

**H**ank Cherry became the third North Carolina angler to win the Bassmaster Classic when he led from start to finish on Alabama's Guntersville Lake the first weekend in March.

Cherry, from Lincolton, N.C., won \$307,500 for a three-day catch of 15 bass that weighed 65 pounds, 5 ounces. He took the lead with an opening day catch of 29 pounds, 3 ounces, added 16-10 the second day and closed out the tournament with a 19½-pound limit. He relied on just a few lures: a Z-Man Jack Hammer Chatterbait, a Megabass jerkbait and a Picasso jig.

Cherry, 46, is the first Classic winner from North Carolina since David Fritts of Lexington won in 1993. Hank Parker of Denver won Classics in 1979 and 1989.

Todd Auten of Lake Wylie, S.C., made it a one-two finish from the Carolinas, taking second and \$54,500 with a three-day total of 58-10. He weighed in limits at 20-0, 18-0 and 20-10 and caught the biggest fish in the tournament, a 7-pound, 9-ounce bass.

Jason Williamson of Wagener, S.C., just missed the top-10, finishing 11th with 48-14, winning \$15,000.

Four other anglers from the Carolinas were in the 53-man field:



Bassmaster Photo

North Carolina bass pro Hank Cherry won the 2020 Bassmaster Classic on Alabama's Lake Guntersville.

- Shane Lehew of Catawba, N.C., finished 28th with 24 pounds, 4 ounces, and won \$10,000;
- Patrick Walters of Summerville, S.C., finished 32nd with 22-3 and won \$10,000;
- Matt Arey of Shelby, N.C., finished 43rd with 16-5 and won \$10,000;
- Brandon Cobb of Greenwood, S.C., finished 50th with 7-9 and won \$10,000. ■

— Brian Cope



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A man in camouflage gear, including a cap and jacket, is smiling and holding a large turkey. The turkey has its tail feathers fanned out. They are in a field with trees in the background.

**WHEN THE WEATHER DOESN'T COOPERATE, AND YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS A DAY IN THE WOODS, TAKE THESE TIPS FROM VETERAN HUNTERS TO BATTLE THE WIND, FOG, RAIN OR SNOW.**

# OFF-DAY GOBBLERS

By Terry Madewell

**As** if hunting turkeys in the Carolinas isn't tough enough, our seasons coincide with some of the most-erratic weather patterns, stacking the odds even more against hunters.

Those treasured spring days, dawning cool and clear with winds out of the south at 2 mph, are rare, and the work and life schedule of most hunters means they must chase gobblers when they can. Tough-weather days include fog, wind, rain and sudden cold snaps. Taking a hard pass on these days means your hunting opportunities dwindle significantly.

Tyler Chappell, a guide from Fountain Inn, SC, has hunted gobblers most of his 36 years. For many years, his professional work life was such he was free to hunt those poor-weather days, but had to work on fair-weather days.

"I went turkey hunting at every opportunity and learned how to cope with tough weather," he said. "No foolproof plan exists, but hunters can improve their odds significantly with a good strategy."

Of course, hunters have to be sensible, and if weather conditions are literally dangerous, with storms and lightning, then wait is the only option.

Chappell said his preferred fair-weather hunting style is "run and gun" — covering lots of territory. But the key for any of these tough weather days is to hunt with patience and perseverance.

"I've learned on tough weather days by slowing down the hunt, my success goes up," he said. "That's the core trait of tough-weather strategy."

**FOGGY MORNINGS >**

Terry Madewell

Foggy mornings require patience from hunters, but the conditions can work to your advantage.

## FOGGY MORNINGS

Chappell said with changing weather conditions during turkey season, fog is a natural by-product.

“On foggy mornings, the birds will gobble on the roost but not aggressively,” said Chappell (864-419-1462). “They can’t see predators or other turkeys in thick fog, so they’re very cautious. I don’t approach the roost area as close as normal, and once set up, I’m very hesitant to move.”

Chappell minimizes the amount of calling he does, but he does use a call with a higher pitch for better sound travel on foggy mornings.

He said one of two patterns are likely to occur: the bird will gobble but not fly down immediately; or the bird will fly toward the sound of the call, but often won’t gobble as it approaches.

“It’s difficult to predict which scenario is occurring, thus, the need to remain in position,” he said. “Fog can be an advantage, because if the gobbler stays in the tree, and I hold position until it lifts, odds are good he approaches the location of my calls when he flies down.”

Chappell said other possibility is the most-treasured sight he’s seen in the turkey woods, that of a longbeard simply materializing out of the shroud of fog.

“When a gobbler materializes from the fog, it’s absolutely magical,” he said. “Of all the sights I’ve seen hunting turkeys,



Tyler Chappell

those are my best memories.”

Chappell said be ready to take advantage of that moment. If the gun is in your lap and not popped on the knee, you may not be able to close the deal.

## WINDY DAYS

Chappell said strong winds make hearing and seeing difficult for hunter and prey, but it does make it easier to predict where turkeys will be.

“With high winds, everything in the woods is moving, and they can’t detect predators — either by vision or hearing,” he



said. "Their tendency move is to move to open areas."

Chappell's strategy is to slip around his property, checking areas using binoculars, scanning fields, pastures and any openings for turkeys.

When he sees a target, he'll formulate a strategy.

"I'll watch for a movement pattern from the turkey and then quickly move to an interception point," he said. "They may gravitate toward a food source or pass near a point of trees. If the only nearby option is open roads, they'll head for those. Once in position, I'll call, and if they're still a good distance off, I prefer high-pitched calls to better cut through the wind."

If the field has some topographic relief or is shielded by some vegetation affording visual protection, he'll set up decoys. He'll have to set up in the woods, essentially an unnatural thing for a turkey to do on a windy day, so the visual aspect of a realistic decoy is key.

"I'm giving myself a chance with this tactic, and it's worked a lot over the years," he said. "Calling is usually loud at first to get his attention, then once he's moving my way, I simply react to what he's doing."

#### **RAINY DAYS >**

On windy days, turkeys like to leave the woods for open areas. If you don't have fields, look for small open patches, even logging roads, and set up a decoy.



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## RAINY DAYS

Rain has multiple impacts, and strategies will vary. Callmaker John Tanner said hunting in the rain may be uncomfortable, but it can be productive.

If it's raining at dawn, turkeys are most likely going to remain in the trees until it quits.

"Rain creates a lot of negatives for turkeys, including diminished ability to see or hear," said Tanner (843-558-5472). "Also, gobblers are in the mode to strut and attract hens, and a soaking wet gobbler doesn't fit that image."

Tanner said gobbling on the roost is usually significantly reduced in the rain.

"Setting up in the rain before dawn can be worth the trouble," he said. "Get close to roost areas and set up adjacent to an open field."

When birds do begin to gobble, he'll have their position and can choose to move, or if in a good place, call from that spot.

"When the rain stops and a hunter is in position, this patience pays off, because this late start on the day has gobblers ready to find a hen," he said.

Chappell said if the rain doesn't begin until after fly-down, and he's already in the woods, his strategy changes considerably.

"I check the weather two or three days out from a hunt," he said. "If a high probability of rain exists, I'll have one plan already in place.

"I'll go to that property before the day I hunt (and) set a blind in a field close to where turkeys are using," he said. "I'll set the blind out in the field and have decoys for a quick setup. When the rain begins, my goal is to beat him to the field, get decoys set up and begin intermittent calling until I get a gobbler approaching. Decoys in a field during a rain are highly attrac-

Callmaker John Tanner said if you dress for bad weather and can tolerate it, it can put several factors in your favor as a hunter.

**BELOW:** Rain makes it difficult for turkeys to hear approaching danger in the woods, so many birds head for open spaces.



tive, because it's the natural place for a turkey to be. The blind does not create an issue."

Chappell said rain creates a bonus for the hunter and turkey.

"With a hard, soaking rain, worms and various bugs will be on the surface available for turkeys, and they take advantage of it," he said.

He said if you don't have the option of setting up before the hunt, put a decoy in the field and call from the edge of the woodline as you would on a windy day.

If Chappell is hunting property that already has blinds set up on fields, those are high-value, rainy day targets for calling gobblers.

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## COLD AND SNOW

Cold temperatures, especially after a short warming trend, impact turkeys, Chappell said.

"When the temperature noses dives after a warming trend, it impacts turkeys," he said. "Roost gobbling may be active on a cold morning, but they often hush after flydown. If you call and get a gobble from a roosted bird, sit tight. They'll likely approach in stealth mode."

He said a hunter's vigilance will often make or break the hunt. "If you see him first, you can let him approach or make a fin-

ishing call to alter his course slightly," he said. "If he's approaching my position, less calling is the best strategy."

If you don't get a gobble working early in the morning, he said to keep hunting. Most days, the sun will warm the air quickly, and by mid-morning, gobblers often get back into the spring mode and begin gobbling. It can be a prime time to be turkey hunting.

Chappell said hunters need to be proactive in planning and implementing strategies during tough-weather conditions. Be a weather watcher and if fog, rain, wind, or cold conditions occur approach have the right mindset and wear the right clothing for the conditions.

"Tough weather days are good times for killing a turkey," he said. "Fewer hunters are in the woods and the feeling of accomplishment of taking a gobble when others won't even hunt make it even sweeter."

"Learning to be successful in tough conditions will make anyone a more effective turkey hunter in any weather," he said. ■



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

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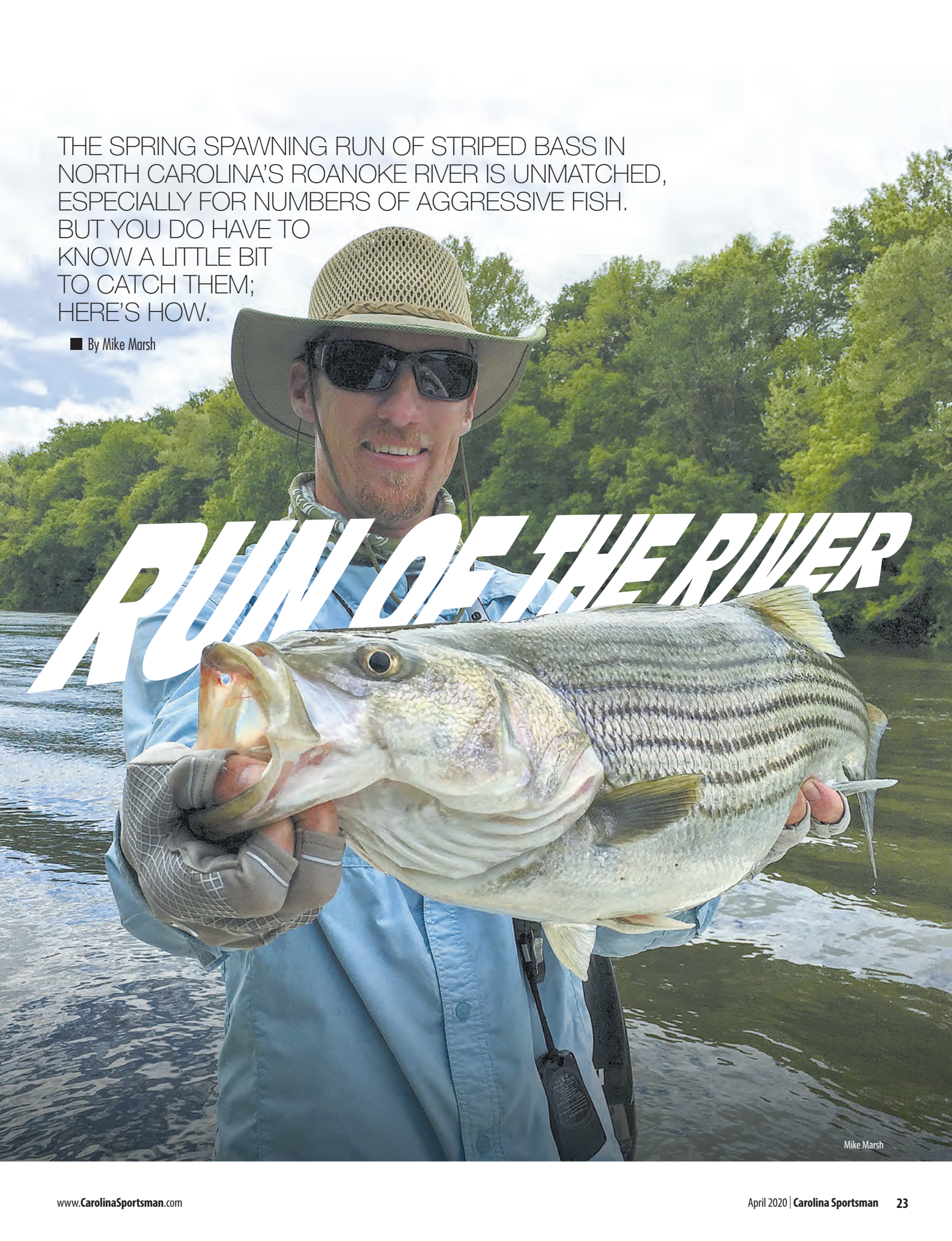


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THE SPRING SPAWNING RUN OF STRIPED BASS IN NORTH CAROLINA'S ROANOKE RIVER IS UNMATCHED, ESPECIALLY FOR NUMBERS OF AGGRESSIVE FISH. BUT YOU DO HAVE TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT TO CATCH THEM; HERE'S HOW.

■ By Mike Marsh

# RUN OF THE RIVER



Mike Marsh

# ***Mitchell Blake has been roaming North Carolina's Roanoke River for 33 of his 43 years.***

He begins fishing for striped bass in the Albemarle Sound in November and December before he follows their spawning run upstream to Plymouth, N.C., then all the way to Weldon, where they actually begin to spawn in April.

"I usually start fishing out of Weldon around April 18 or so," Blake said. "By that time, there have been eight or nine big pushes of fish up to that area of the river, and it creates epic striper fishing when all of those schools come together. The ideal water temperature leading to the best fishing is around 68 degrees."

Blake fishes from two different boats, both carrying outboards with aluminum propellers because of the river's shallow, rocky hazards.

"You just have to learn where the rocks and pools are located," he said. "I run inexpensive, aluminum propellers, because eventually, you are going to have to pay to play when you bang up a prop or skeg on a rock."

"I really enjoy doing my own thing, so I head upstream when I can, but there are times when you just can't when the water is too low. If you second-guess anything you want to do in the river, don't do it. There is no forgiveness, and if something goes haywire upstream of the ramp, you are going to be on your own."

Allowable water-flow agreements for the river have changed over the past few years, so greater amounts of water are released during the striper run through hydroelectric plants

Two fishermen get ready to try their luck on striped bass on the Roanoke River one foggy morning.



that impound lakes upstream.

Water flow affects the fishing more than anything else during the “keeper” season in March and April, when most anglers head to the area. The best fishing occurs when the flow is steady, and it doesn’t seem to matter much if the water level is high or low. A sudden release from the dam is such a temperature shock to the stripers that it disrupts the fishing until the flow stabilizes. High flows can also move the fish downstream and may even cause flooding that gives the fish a lot more places to hide, making fishing more difficult.



Mike Marsh



## DESTINATION INFORMATION

**HOW TO GET THERE** — Weldon, N.C., which bills itself as the “Rockfish Capital” of the world, is the primary jumping off point for striped bass, aka rockfish, in the Roanoke River. Weldon is just a few miles south of the North Carolina-Virginia border. The public boat ramp in Weldon is just east of I-95 at the US 158 exit., just downstream from the US 301 bridge across the river.

**WHEN TO GO** — The keeper season for stripers and hybrids is March 1-April 30 unless extended or closed by proclamation. The creel limit is two fish per day, with a minimum size of 18 inches and no fish between 22 and 27 inches.

**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Hairy Worms, bucktail jigs and live shad fished on Carolina rigs are primary weapons for striped bass in the river. A medium-action spinning rod and 3000 class reel spooled with 20-pound braid is standard tackle, with a 15-pound monofilament leader for live-bait rigs and a 20-pound mono leader for lures. Best lure colors are sexy shad, electric chicken and tutti frutti. Single, barbless hooks are required April 1-June 30 upstream of the U.S. 258 bridge. Fly-fishing with an 8-weight outfit, sinking line with a 4-foot leader of 15-pound monofilament at Clousers is an option.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Capt. Mitchell Blake, Fish IBX Guide Service, 252-495-1803, Fishibx.com; Capt. George Beckwith, Down East Guide Service, 252-671-3474, www.pamlicoguide.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** — Red Roof Inn, Roanoke Rapids, 252- 541-4260; SureStay Plus, Roanoke Rapids, 252-536-2300; Halifax County Convention and Visitors Bureau, 800-522-4282, www.visithalifax.com.

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

**"In** a typical day, I launch the boat and drift with live bait," Blake said. "The boat floats at the speed of the current, and I use a slip-sinker Carolina rig with an ounce or less of weight and a Little Demon No. 2 wire circle hook. I keep the weight as light as possible to keep the bait down in the current while allowing it to swim freely. I use threadfin shad for bait. If the water flow is low enough to use a cast net, I catch my own. If not, I buy live shad from a bait dealer."

Blake holds onto his rod until a fish strikes, then gives the line a steady pull to let the hook set itself. Most rockfish weigh between one and 10 pounds, with an occasional 15-pounder or much larger fish showing up. A really big one heading for log jams or rocks is difficult to control.

"When I'm drifting, I watch the depth finder for pockets of fish," he said. "If we go through a zone with a good pocket of fish, I throw artificial lures. Going back upstream, I switch down the Power Pole, tie off to a limb or drop a mushroom anchor. You should never use an anchor that will hang in rocks."

Blake's favorite lure is his own custom-tied version of the popular Hairy Worm, a bucktail jig with a plastic worm trailer. In place of the plastic worm, he ties long feathers to the jighead to give the lure a 6-inch profile. He uses a ½-ounce or smaller, round leadhead jig and adds large natural eyes. His favorite color is sexy shad, which is tied with natural bucktail with a blue back, chartreuse sides and white belly with long chartreuse feathers trailing behind. Another of his favorite hand-tied jig colors is electric chicken, which is pink on top and chartreuse below.

"I also like using a swimbait with a big paddletail," he said. "My largest fish have hit a Yee Ha swimbait. We have hooked fish that got into log jams that we could not stop, and they broke off"

The reason for making the pilgrimage to the Roanoke River in March and April is the sheer number of striped bass. While the fishing can be fantastic either side of the open, keeper season, many anglers what to take home a couple of fish for eating.

"In a ¾-day trip, two anglers can easily catch 50 to 100 stripers," he said. "Most everybody who wants to will take home



••• Capt. Mitchell Blake holds a striped bass caught on a jig on a family fishing trip to the Roanoke River.

their two keepers. It can get pretty crowded when the season is open, but everybody is very respectful of other anglers because there are plenty of open pools and lots of fish to catch." ■



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

**CATCHING STRIPERS ON THE FLY >**

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Mike Marsh

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## CATCHING STRIPERS ON THE FLY

Fly-fishing is popular during the Roanoke River striped bass run because the numbers of fish make it easy to be successful.

Guide Mitchell Blake of Fish IBX Charters rigs 8-weight, medium-action Temple Fork Outfitters fly rods with TFO reels spooled with Royal Wulf Striper Series lines weighing 200, 300 and 400 grains. A striper line is a clear, sinking line that stays supple in cold water. Which line he uses depends upon the current flow and the depth he sees fish on his depth finder. The leader is 4 feet of 15-pound test monofilament.

Blake casts a medium- or heavy-eye Clouser minnow in sexy shad or tutti frutti color patterns or a Flat Wing in blue/chartreuse/white. The heavy fly line is coiled on the deck and shot forward, rather than lengthened gradually with several false casts.

"I locate the fish and anchor beside them," Blake said. "Then I cast at a 15-degree angle upstream and let the line sink as it drifts, mending the line to keep it tight. When it is nearly perpendicular to the boat, I make short, fast strips. If a fish doesn't hit the fly as it sinks, it should strike during on the strips. If you let it drift too far downstream, the line lifts the fly out of the strike zone." ■

# SHALLOWS ARE KEY

## for Hartwell's April stripers, hybrid bass

**A**pril may be the most-popular fishing month on South Carolina's Lake Hartwell because it is the shallow month for most species, according to Preston Harden of Bucktail Guide Service.

"The bass are shallow, the hybrids and stripers are shallow and crappie are still spawning shallow," said Harden, who said mornings are as good as afternoons this month after fishing mostly in the afternoon in March.

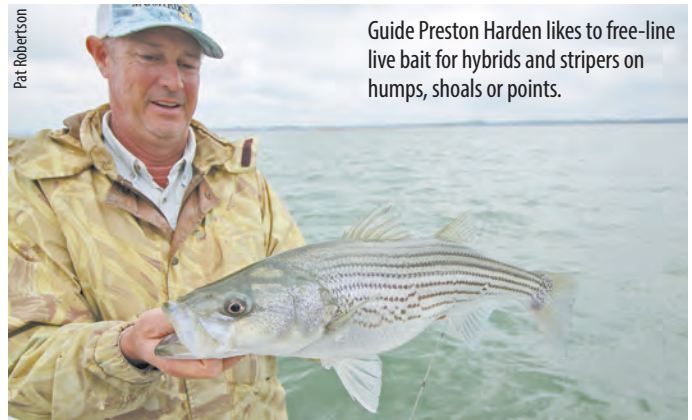
"The bass will stay shallow all day. Sometimes, the hybrids and stripers will feed shallow and then move out, but then they will move back later."

A lot of fishermen go up the rivers in April because the narrower waterways congregate stripers, and fish can get crowded in the upper reaches. While some fish do migrate up the lake to spawn, a lot hang on the shallow banks down the lake, he said.

"By April, hybrids and stripers are keying on herring, so if you can get a herring close to one, he will eat it," said Harden (706-255-5622). If you can get a herring within 20 feet of a striped or hybrid this time of year, he will eat it."

Harden's favorite way to fish is to get around a shoal, a hump or a point and put out free-lines with no weight.

"If they see it, they are going to eat it," he said. "I also like to fish



Pat Robertson

Guide Preston Harden likes to free-line live bait for hybrids and stripers on humps, shoals or points.

artificial in April. My favorite is a bucktail jig with a little Zoom Fluke. Just make it dance in the water. My next favorite is a Scrounger jighead with a Fluke. Another excellent lure in April, especially later in the month, is a white Sebille Magic Swimmer. It's a no-brainer; just reel it right under the surface and get it wobbling back and forth."

Harden explained that when stripers and hybrids are just feeding around but are not real aggressive, they will hit the Sebille.

"The main thing in April is keying on shallow water," he said. "This lake is full of 5- to 10-pound hybrids and there are a lot of 10- to 12-pound stripers. They have put so many fish in this lake in the past three or four years it is on the verge of being unbelievable. We may not be known for monster fish right now, but we do have the numbers. And a bonus is that the spotted bass have just come on strong." ■

— Pat Robertson

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# SPAWNING STRIPERS

## look for current breaks in Wateree River

**T**he Wateree River is the place to be early mornings in April for some exciting striper fishing. Jason Wolfe of Wolfe's Guide Service said anglers should start as early as possible. "I like putting in at the US 1 bridge and getting on the water when it's still dark," he said. "I motor upriver until I get just below the area with the largest collection of boulders. I'll anchor down there within casting distance of the bank, and I'll cast a Cotton Cordell Redfin wake bait along the bank. Any spot that provides a break in the current is a place to cast."

Wolfe said cuts in the bank, oddly placed boulders, downed trees or any kind of debris gives stripers a place to rest out of the heavy current. They like to hang out on the downcurrent side of these objects and will ease into the current to ambush baitfish that are swimming or getting washed past.

"After you've been anchored a few minutes, stripers will also set up behind the boat. Any place they can find a break from the current, they'll hold tight there in the early morning," said Wolfe (803-487-3690).

Once the sun provides good visibility, Wolfe pulls the anchor and heads upriver into the big collection of rocks and boulders.

"You really need a jet drive on your outboard to maneuver up this close to the Wateree Dam," he said. "And you've got to keep an eye on the river levels. Any time they open or close a flood-gate, it impacts the river level tremendously. It's a great hot spot for stripers this month, as long as you have the right equipment and pay careful attention."

In this area, Wolfe again looks for breaks in the current — and they are much easier to find. Every boulder or collection of rocks provides resting spots for stripers. He sticks with a Redfin and casts into eddies and slack water provided by those current breaks.

Wolfe suggest good baitcasting gear, including a high-capacity reel. He uses 20- to 25-pound line and prefers a 4-inch Redfin. He



Brian Cope

The Wateree River fills up with striped bass this month on their spawning run.

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said a steady retrieve is usually the best. April is one of his favorite months because the stripers swim upriver to spawn. Wateree Dam stops their movement, so this is where the fish wait.

"These fish are looking to spawn this time of year, but it's not quite warm enough. They run upriver and just hang out until the water temperature gets just right. So they are here in big numbers and they are hungry," he said. ■

— Brian Cope



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**S**ome offshore fishermen across the Carolinas have gotten a head start on spring. Even though the winter has been milder than usual, the warm-water fish moved to the south, and the arrival this month of warmer water will bring large numbers of fish that are eagerly anticipated.

Many seasoned offshore anglers are predicting an early start to spring fishing. Wahoo numbers dropped in January, but they never left totally. Plenty of big fish were caught during January, February and March, along with blackfin tuna found at the first good temperature break. Bluefins were around during winter, mostly east of Cape Lookout, along with a few yellowfins. Dolphin were farther south, waiting for warm water. Offshore fishing should begin improving by early April and be getting really good by the end of the month, heading into May.

The fishermen who target these big, pelagic fish all have their personal preferences when it comes to the spread of lures they troll behind their boats, both the kinds and locations, but there are a surprising amount of similarities; differences are more like tweaks than big changes.

Mark "Microwave" Chambers runs the charterboat *Due South* ([www.duesouthsportfishing.com](http://www.duesouthsportfishing.com)) out of Morehead City, N.C., after spending plenty of time in the cockpit with some of the finest captains from Cape Lookout to Cape Hatteras before moving to the bridge.

"I'm a bit old school," Chambers said. "I run wire leaders most of the year, as I don't want to miss any wahoo bites from being bitten off. I run wind-on leaders when we're tuna fishing or are being covered up in dolphin, but I'm worried about what happens when a big, lone wahoo comes in to see what all the action is about. Mono and fluoro don't stand much of a chance against their sharp teeth."



**OFFSHORE FISHING RETURNS TO THE CAROLINAS THIS MONTH; DOES THE PAST MILD WINTER POINT TO A BIG SPRING IN THE BLUEWATER? THESE FOUR CAPTAINS HELP IRON OUT THE DETAILS.**



**BACK TO THE BLUE**

BY JERRY DILSAVER

Brian Carroll

# CHAMBERS' TROLLING SPREAD CONTAINS EIGHT LINES.

Two are bridge poles, two on long outriggers, two on short outriggers and two off the transom. He often keeps the long outrigger lines on the bridge because he sees those baits better than his mate and can make adjustments more quickly.

The long bridge pole is the longest line down the middle, trolling a sea witch and medium ballyhoo. The long-riggers are set equal distances back with the same baits. The short bridge pole is set down the middle, a little bit shorter than the long-riggers, with a sea witch ballyhoo in calm conditions and an Ilander Sailure in rough seas. The short-rigger lines are next in length and set at roughly equal distances back with the same lures and baits as the short bridge pole. One transom line will be a planer line, with the planer on a bridle rig. Many times he pulls the other transom line with a 1- to 2-pound trolling weight to get it under the surface but not as deep as the planer. When there is a lot of grass, he runs a sea witch and medium ballyhoo or dink bait on the surface instead of the weighted line.

Chambers always has a couple of pitch baits rigged and ready to go for whatever shows up, often a sailfish; he catches a lot on dink baits, rigged as split bills or with a circle hook on top of their head. He also loves to battle big fish, and if there are blue marlin in the area, he puts out at least one large ballyhoo rigged in a chugger lure.



Jerry Dilsaver



Jerry Dilsaver

Dolphin are the last popular bluewater fish to show up in the waters off the Carolinas, but they make up a majority of the fish caught throughout the season.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Dolphin make a big appearance in the spring in the bluewater off the coast of both Carolina.

Joe Seegers runs the *Hooked Up*, a private boat out of Southport, N.C., but he cut his teeth as a mate in Hatteras and has spent cockpit time with many excellent captains.

“The *Hooked Up* is a little smaller than many charterboats, but I still run a slightly modified version of the charterboat spread I learned in Hatteras,” Seegers said. “I cut back to seven lines but have four dink pitch baits ready to go. In general, I usually run smaller baits on my longer lines and larger baits closer to the boat. I don’t run teasers, as they don’t have hooks, but rely on twin diesels to raise fish, and I want them to see big baits when they look up at the sound.”

Seegers’ longest lines are the long outrigger lines, which start 50 to 75 yards back. If he sees tuna breaking but not biting, he may drop them back as much as half the spool of a 50-wide reel. He usually begins with one naked bait and one small sea witch/small ballyhoo on the other, with both being crank-on fluorocarbon leaders.

Seegers runs his bridge pole — carrying a small bait and bright sea witch — between the long-rigger lines and the short-rigger lines. The outriggers sport wire leaders and use medium ballyhoo rigged into Hawaiian Eye Juniors, Sailures or other larger skirts. These baits are positioned one to two boat lengths back, depending on sea conditions.



## WARM WATER, BAITFISH AND STRUCTURE

Some fish species roam the Gulf Stream year-round, but their numbers increase as the water warms and baitfish schools proliferate in the spring.

The Gulf Stream is essentially a winding, warm-water river that flows northward through the ocean off the Carolinas. Extended periods of wind may move it closer to shore or farther away. As it moves, it carries baitfish, and its course may also be altered by collisions with subsurface structure.

Two of the best-known structures, with large, south-facing vertical faces are the Big Rock off Cape Lookout, and the Steeples off Cape Fear. When the Gulf Stream is closer in, as it typically is much of the spring, it collides with these structures, and the current flow is altered. One of the primary ways the Gulf Stream is altered is with eddies and back-loop eddies travel back to the south inshore of the Gulf Stream.

Eddies bring Gulf Stream water to structure that’s not under the main Gulf Stream flow. Several of these just inshore of the 100-fathom curve are well known and hold offshore fish well much of the spring. North to south, some of the best-known structure include the Big Rock, the Swansboro Hole, Same Ole, Steeples, the Blackjack Hole, Winyah Scarp, the Georgetown Hole, Southwest Banks and Edisto Banks. There are also a host of smaller and lesser-known locations that are often productive. ■

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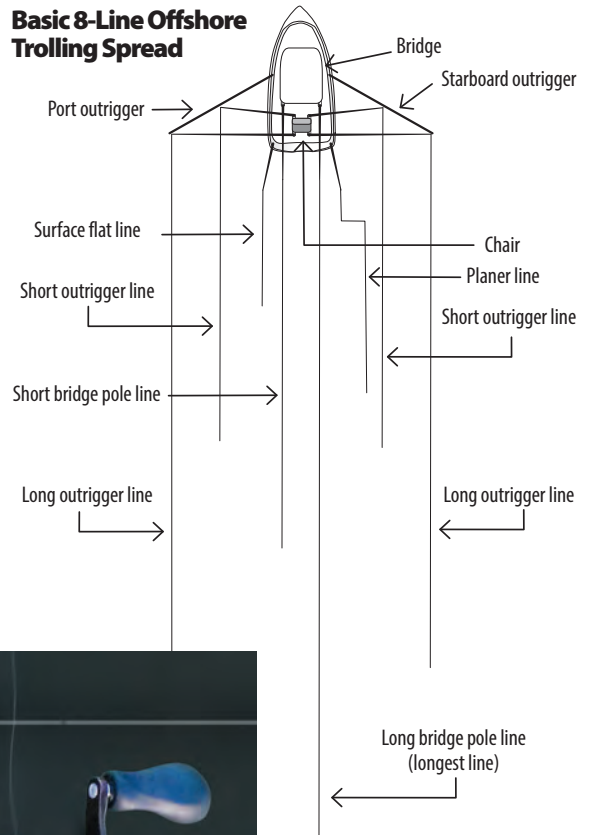
**BACK TO THE BLUE**



**O**ff the transom, Seegers fishes a planer on one side when shallower than 400 feet and usually rigs this on a purple/black or pink sea witch. If there are bluefish in the area, he sets the planer line with a very large bait for mako sharks. The other transom line is a naked, select ballyhoo-rigged split bill with wire when wahoo are around; as dolphin arrive, he switches to a dink bait fished from the transom clip with the reel in free-spool. When he hits tuna, the planer line is switched to a silver spoon.

Buddy Smith runs the *Underdog* ([www.underdogsporfishing.com](http://www.underdogsporfishing.com)) out of Murrells Inlet, S.C. He mated for several years on marlin tournament boats, then mated several years out of Oregon Inlet, N.C., before returning home in 2018 to run the *Underdog*.

**Basic 8-Line Offshore Trolling Spread**



“Our spring season begins in April with wahoo, and I fish all wire leaders then to prevent bite-offs,” Smith said. “We see some blackfin tuna all along, and as the water warms, dolphin begin to arrive. Neither of these have teeth, so we switch to outfits with wind-on fluoro leaders to avoid spooking any that might be wire shy.”

Smith usually fishes seven lines, but in calm water, he goes with eight. Smith’s bridge pole is the longest line; it almost always carries a Green Machine behind a bird. The larger Green Machine doesn’t get as many strikes, but it attracts larger fish. The two long-riggers are back fairly long, with wire leaders for wahoo and wind-on fluoro when blackfins or dolphins show in good numbers. These are medium ballyhoo rigged into sea witches, with blue/white on one side and black/blue or black/purple on the other.

In calm seas, Smith puts a second bridge pole line between the long-riggers and short-riggers, maybe a bird/Green Machine combo for tuna or a ballyhoo/sea witch for dolphin.

Smith likes to have something on the short-riggers that pops. He uses Iland Sea Stars and Sailures and Moldcraft Chuggers. The leaders will be wire early in the season, but mono or fluoro once the tuna and dolphin arrive.

Smith runs two lines from the corners of the transom, one planer line with a blue/white or dark sea witch, the other on the surface in a transom clip to keep the line angle low and the lure in the water. He also keeps several pitch baits ready to go.

Gaspar Marino owned and ran the *Wadmacallit* out of Mount Pleasant, S.C., for many years until he sold it in 2018. He now runs the *Wildlife*.

"I fish with what I call rotating rods," said Marino (843-514-4117). "I believe it's important to keep lines in the water, and this allows me to replace any rod with the next one that is ready. I fish up to a 9-rod

spread, and nine times out of 10, they will be rigged with a ballyhoo in a sea witch. Occasionally, I'll pull a lure or two, but it's later in the season when marlin might be around; I like the Moldcraft Wide Range because it works at almost any speed."

Marino consistently fishes two long-rigger lines, two short-rigger lines and two flat lines, then works the other lines in as the situation and sea conditions allow. He believes tuna can be boat-shy and dolphin rarely are, so when tuna fishing, his long-rigger lines are really far back, and his short-rigger lines are where the long rigger lines would usually be. This allows room for several lines fished from the bridge.

One of Marino's flat lines is fished in a transom clip to keep the line angle low. The other may be also. He runs a planer line from the transom earlier in the season when wahoo are around and when he is fishing shallower or in dirty water. While he believes the planer line can sometimes save the day, he is also concerned a planer may flash too hard in water that is very clear and might sometimes spook fish. He begins with dark sea witches, then lightens the colors as the sun gets

higher, but he often switches back to dark colors in the early afternoon when the action tends to slow.

Marino makes his own sea witches in 3/8- to 2-ounce sizes and in different head shapes that pull a little differently. He tracks where sizes and colors at all times and keeps those that are producing in the same locations and rotates colors and heads on the other lines to find what is working that day. He doesn't shy away from trying new things, and each fisherman should find his own equation, remembering it's all about having fun. ■



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

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# MEET THE MEAT FISH

Wahoo are a big part of winter and spring catches off the coast of the Carolinas. These aggressive fish are among the fastest in the ocean.



Unfortunately, they are not all found in all areas. Most fishermen between Charleston, S.C., and Morehead City, N.C., see blackfin tuna in their catch. Tuna are almost constantly moving and feeding. They are found spots along temperature breaks, color changes, weed lines current rips and anything else that indicates two currents pinned against each other as these often hold bait.

• **DOLPHIN.** With their bright colors, wildly entertaining acrobatics once hooked and mild, delicious flavor, dolphin are the favorite fish of many bluewater fishermen.

Dolphin tend to arrive off the Carolinas in May. They are the fastest-growing of the offshore pelagic fish and have a high reproduction rate, so there is a liberal limit of 10 fish per angler. The average year-old dolphin is 34.2 inches long. They generally begin spawning at 4 to 5 months and spawn several times a year. Dolphin are one of a few fish where the male grows faster, larger and lives longer.

• **TUNA.** Eight species of tuna are caught off the Carolinas;

Blackfin tuna are smaller tuna; they may move closer in for a while in the spring and fall, but are typically found around the inshore edge of the Gulf Stream. Yellowfin tuna are the most-prized of the Atlantic tunas; they are primarily caught from Cape Hatteras north.

A couple of decades ago, blackfin tuna weren't appreciated as much as they are today. They were considered secondary to yellowfin tuna, but when yellowfin migration routes changed, they began to grow in popularity. Blackfin will hit trolled lures, rigged baits and readily respond to vertical jigging.

• **WAHOO.** One of the most-prized gamefish in the ocean, very little is known about them. Many fishermen consider them to be tropical fish, but there is a surprising winter population off the Carolinas. They are usually found around Gulf Stream upwellings, eddies and on the warm side of temperature breaks. Wahoo are short-lived and grow rapidly. A 45-pounder may only be four years old. Wahoo also grow to exceed 6 feet long and 100 pounds. Wahoo are cousins of king mackerel, but have a lighter and milder flavored meat that make them excellent table fare. ■



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# IS APRIL NO. 1 LUNKER TIME?

■ By Brian Cope

**BASS PRO SAYS  
WAVES OF FISH WILL BE  
COMING AND GOING  
ALL MONTH, GIVING  
FISHERMEN OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR GREAT TRIPS.  
HERE'S HOW....**



Photo courtesy Cole Drummond

# April in the Carolinas provides bass fishermen with more than one opportunity to catch some big lunkers.

While March gets a lot of fanfare as the top month for big fish, plenty of fish are spawning in April as well. It's one of Cole Drummond's favorite times to go after bass.

"The weather is usually more stable in April than it was in March, so that always helps. And no matter how active bass were in March, you're still going to have plenty of fish in pre-spawn and post-spawn this month," said Drummond, a pro bass fisherman from Florence, S.C.

He finds prespawn bass at staging points as they wait to head in to spawn. Brush piles between the main lake and the flats in 7 to 9 feet of water are key areas. He'll fish around those with crankbaits, jigs and weighted soft plastics.

"If I'm using a crankbait, I usually like it to dig into the bottom to draw those reaction strikes. It's also good for bouncing off of the brush piles and other debris," he said.

What Drummond really likes to see when April arrives are bass spawning in the shallows and guarding fry after spawning.

"Bass spawn in waves," he said. "By April, one or two waves of fish will have already spawned and moved out, but others are moving in, spawning, then moving out. You'll see them in all

stages of the spawn this month."

Drummond said the smaller, male bass build nests in shallow water before the females arrive — and they aren't far behind.

"They might be 40 feet away in slightly deeper water, or they might be 40 yards away, but they'll be close, and they'll be heading shallow very soon," he said. "You'll know the males because they're just smaller fish. If you're (fishing down) a shoreline and catching lots of fish, but none of them are 4-pounders, that's all males building nests. When that happens, you can just ease out to slightly deeper water and start finding the bigger females," he said.

The moon phase plays a big part in the behavior of bass this month, Drummond said; he always wants to be on the water from four days before the full moon to four days after it.

"They're really active during that time period. They'll get real shallow — more shallow than most anglers are willing to fish," he said. "And if you'll put in the time and trouble to get to them, you will just catch them, plain and simple."

Cole Drummond (left) shows his dad, Steve Drummond (right) that April is good for numbers of fish as well as good-sized bass.



Photo courtesy Cole Drummond

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**W**hen Drummond says shallow, he definitely means shallow. When he heads onto a shallow flat off the main lake, and he starts bumping the bottom with his trolling motor, then sees a line of lily pads or other surface vegetation with shallower water behind it, that's where he wants to go more than anywhere else this time of year.

"Most people don't like it because it's hard to get in there and takes a lot of time. It can be hard on equipment, too, and there's no avoiding making a lot of noise," he said. "This is literally inches of water. But once you get in there, just wait a little while and things will settle down. The bass in here will come back to their nests or their fry once it quiets back down."

Once that happens, Drummond said a topwater frog is irresistible to the fish.

"A hollow-body popping frog is good, and the Stanley Ribbit frog is another good one," he said. "It's not hollow, but it rides on top and the legs drag and kick in the water. The fish get really mad when you reel that through, and they will just kill it. And you don't have to work the frog with any kind of action. Just straight reeling is all it takes."

Once the females spawn and are done guarding their fry, they'll head to those same spots they staged on before spawning.

"They'll go back to those staging areas, like brush piles in 7 to 9 feet of water," he said. "They'll be pretty worn out now — and hungry. The fish won't be as big since they've already spawned out, but they'll bite a little more aggressively, a little more predictably. And even very late, down to the last days of this month, you'll still catch some in pre-spawn mode. Those waves of bass are coming in, spawning, then moving out throughout the spring. So you'll catch some that have already spawned and others that are still in prespawn in the same spots." ■



**Brian Cope** of Edisto Island, S.C., is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He is web editor of *CarolinaSportsman.com* 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.



Dan Kibler

## LUNKER LINES ➤

A topwater frog is a great weapon for anglers searching shallow cover for spawning largemouth bass.

# FILL UP THE BEDS

Gary Abernethy likes to load the bed of a spawning bass with lures. Sooner or later, the fish will be rattled and eat one of them.

When fishing for bedding bass, it's not uncommon for fish to ignore your lures, or to grab them, move them out of their bed, then spit them out.

It can make for a frustrating day.

Veteran angler Gary Abernethy of Asheville, N.C., has a solution for that. He simply sets his rod down, allowing the lure to stay put.

"When you have fish doing that, it's just a matter of time before they get tired of messing with your lures. At some point, they'll eat one just to get rid of it, even if the fish isn't hungry," he said.

This is especially effective when the water is shallow and clear enough to see the fish.

"Cast a creature bait in there, and they'll sometimes act like they don't even see it. But they see it. Let it lay in the middle of its bed, set your rod down, and pick up another rod. Work a jig into the bed. If the fish ignores it, do the same thing. Pick up another rod. Even if it grabs it and spits it out on the edge of the bed, just let it stay put. Cast another lure in there. If the fish doesn't eat it, let it lay, too," he said.

Abernethy said the bass will start getting nervous as its bed fills up with other creatures that could eat its eggs or fry. It helps to have a good shallow-water anchoring system here to keep your boat steady so your lures stay in the fish's bed.

"Every fish has its own tipping point. You put three or four lures in its bed, and it'll get tired of dealing with them at some point. Just be ready, because when that fish decides to eat, it's going to happen real quick," he said. ■



Photo courtesy Gary Abernethy

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## LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite

Davy Hite fishes a Senko because it is a versatile lure that can be rigged several different ways to take advantage of whether bass are in prespawn, spawn or post-spawn mode.

# NO APRIL FOOL — SENKOS CAN GET IT DONE

FOR NUMBERS OF FISH AND A SHOT AT A BIG ONE, TIE ON THIS SPECIAL BAIT

**I** understand why April is probably the most-popular fishing month for most fishermen aren't bass pros. It's one of the few months when everything is biting — crappie, catfish, bass, everything. The water temperature is optimum, in the high 60s to low 70s, and it's just a great time to be on the water.

April is one of my favorite months to catch good numbers of bass — and still have a chance to catch a big fish. And topwater starts to become a factor, and everybody knows how much I love to throw topwater.

But my favorite bait this month is going to be a Senko. You can catch so many fish on it because you can rig it so many different ways for different circumstances. You can Texas-rig it weightless, because it's so heavy, or you can rig it wacky style, and because it comes in three different sizes, you can rig it for different applications, and it's not difficult to fish. You cast it out there and let it fall, and that little shimmy takes care of everything else.

I probably fish it more rigged weedless and weightless than anything else. I fish it like we've all fished a floating worm for years, but it's so much better. I cast it out, work it back, keeping it close enough to the surface to stay in sight, working it with the rod tip. If a fish flares on it and misses it, instead of having to reel in a floating worm and throw back in there, you just kill it, it falls, and they hit it on the fall. That's when the bait's incredible action takes care of everything.

Because I need to see the bait as I work it, I like to fish it either in black or in a really bright color like white — the same colors you'd choose if you were fishing a floating worm.

## SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE

I will fish all three sizes of the Senko this way: the 4-inch, 5-inch and 6-inch. I'll fish the 4-inch on spinning tackle — a 6-foot-6, medium-action Bass Pro Shops Carbonlite rod and Johnny Morris signature series reel spooled with 12- to 15-pound braid and an 8- to 10-pound fluorocarbon leader, with a 2/0 or 3/0 wide-gap VMC hook. I like to fish the smaller Senko in really clear water, or if I'm in a really tight spot.

I fish the 5-inch most of the time, but I'll fish the 6-inch if I really want to upsize to a big bait. I fish those two Senkos on a 6-foot-6 BPS Carbonlite baitcaster with 12- to 15-pound braid and a fluoro or mono leader, and a 3/0 or 4/0 hook for the 5-inch bait and a 5/0 hook for the 6-inch bait.

One thing to remember: there's an awful lot of plastic in a Senko. It's every different from a lot of other plastic worms, so don't try to downsize too much.



Dan Kibler

## GO WACKY

The second way to fish a Senko is rigged wacky style, with the hook in the middle of the worm so that both ends wobble as the bait falls through the water. It is very, very effective, especially when you can see bass on the beds and target them. They can't stand to have that bait fall into the bed with them. If I'm wacky rigging the 5-inch Senko, I'm fishing it most of the time on spinning tackle, with 15-pound braid on the reel and a 10-pound fluoro leader and a 2/0 or 3/0 VMC Neko hook. I

don't put a nail in the head like a lot of fishermen, and with the Neko hook, you rig it weedless. I also use an O-ring to slide the point of the hook



**Davy Hite** of *Ninety Six, S.C.* is a two-time BASS Angler of the Year who won the 1999 Bassmasters Classic and 1998 FLW Tour Championship. He is sponsored by Phoenix, Yamaha, Bass Pro Shops, Rapala, Buckeye, VMC, Humminbird, War Eagle and Yamamoto.

between it and the worm, instead of sticking the hook point through the Senko.

I fish a Senko rigged wacky style when I think I've got an idea where bass might be spawning. Even if I can't see them, if I can pinpoint the kind of cover they're spawning around. I can fish it in those places, when I'm don't need to cover much water but just keep the bait in the likely strike zone for the longest period of time.

## NO TRICKS

There are no secrets about how to fish it wacky rigged. You just pitch it at a target and let it fall. And you can pitch it around vegetation — maybe a hole in some grass — or you can fish it around docks very effectively. A lot of bass with spawn around docks, and you can drop it down next to a pier post. You're keeping the bait in a spot where you expect a fish to be for a longer period of time.

The only other way to fish it is Texas-rigged with a weight, maybe on a light shaky head jig. I like to do this when fish are down in thicker cover, like a brush pile, and they aren't aggressive enough to come up and get it.

When I'm fishing a Senko, I can get in an area and fish it around anything. I don't really have to run the spawn and try to stay in an area where all the fish are spawning, or where all the fish are prespawn or post-spawn, because it will catch them all. The only time I'll really target spawning fish is when I can actually see them on the beds, and I can catch 'em on a wacky rigged Senko.

So, tie them on a few rods on the deck of your boat and use them as search or target baits. They will really catch fish. ■

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## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

While bass relate more to the bank in small bodies of water than larger ones, a kayak offers a great way to probe areas just off the shoreline.



# CATCH SPAWNING BASS IN SMALLER WATERS

Phillip Gentry

**W**herever you kayak fish across the Carolinas this month, the most emphasis will be placed on bass fishing, particularly areas where a paddle boat and bedding bass come together in close proximity.

In waters that hold smallmouth bass, spotted bass and largemouth bass all in the same system, fishing for spawning fish can be a bit complicated. Generally speaking, largemouth bass prefer warmer and shallower water than the other two black bass species, which often make them the No. 1 goal for kayak anglers, especially when sight fishing for largemouths.

On the other hand, smallmouth and spotted bass may spawn in shallow water — but water that's too deep to see the beds. One way around this problem is fishing boat docks during the spawn.

For reasons known only to the fish, spawning near vertical standing cover is very common. An astute kayak angler can use water depth under a boat dock, especially if it's a dock that is fixed position rather than a floater, to target bass beds. Cast your bait next to the pilings,

work your way from shallow to deeper water and take note of the depth of water where you get a bite.

## GREAT BAITS

Two of the hands-down best baits for kayak anglers to target bedding bass — whether you can see the bed or not — are a plastic crawfish and a plastic lizard. Bass hate lizards and crawfish with equal zeal this time of year, as both crawfish and salamanders will greedily consume bass eggs from the nest.

Crawfish trailers can be rigged on a shaky head jig or heavier jig and fished almost vertically around boat dock pilings or other likely structure. Plastic lizards can be Texas-rigged or with a weighted flutter hook to slowly crawl the bait across the bottom, making sure to stop it and wiggle it anytime you see or feel structure that might be holding bedding bass.

Finally, don't underestimate a kayak's ability to get you into tight spaces that rarely see a hook. Overhanging trees, tight areas behind boat docks, or even weed choked ditches can hold some trophy fish this time of year. ■

## BEST BETS

### NORTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Largemouth bass

**WHERE** — Shearon Harris Lake

**HOW** — Shearon Harris has ample bulrushes and aquatic grasses where pre-spawn bass can be caught using weedless, shallow-water baits. Earlier in the prespawn, look for bass to stage on offshore humps in 12 to 20 feet of water.

**LAUNCH** — Two public access areas to Shearon Harris are Harris Lake boat ramp at 233 Crosspoint Rd. and Shearon Harris Boat Launch on Bartley Holleman Rd., both in New Hill.

**INSIDER TIP** — Large-mouth bass at Shearon Harris are managed by a minimum size limit of 14 inches and a daily creel limit of five fish,



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.

## TIPS FOR BASSING ON SMALL WATERS

Mike Johnson, general manager of the Clinton House Plantation in South Carolina, not only offers hunting opportunities to his guests, but also the chance to fish private, stocked ponds.

Fish in small ponds behave differently from their relatives in larger reservoirs, and Johnson has some advice on how to achieve better success when fishing any small ponds for bass.

"We have a lot of big largemouth bass in our ponds, some bream, catfish and crappie, too, but most folks come here wanting to catch bass," Johnson said. "We've found that because our bass can only travel so far, they behave a lot different than if they were in a big body of water."

While most anglers walk around the edge of a small post and cast out, Johnson said better access to fish can be gained by using a kayak or canoe to gain access to areas you can't reach on foot.

"The smallest piece of cover — a single stump, tree limb or even a bush hanging over the water — is a big deal to a pond bass

because they don't have the same amount of room here," he said. "Our fish use the shoreline a lot more than a big-lake fish would."

Being quiet is important anywhere you fish, but especially in a small pond. Your best chance to catch a big bass off a small piece of cover is to make a long, accurate cast that lands on the edge of the bank and then slides into the water.

"Soft plastics are probably your best bet — something with very little weight and is hooked weedless," Johnson said. "Even a big bass will spook if something slaps the water right over its head. I like to land my cast on the bank and just slide it in. Being weedless helps you pull the bait off the bank, over cover and through shallow weeds where big bass like to hide."

A final piece of advice is to match bait size with time of day. Smaller baits are better when bright sun is out and fish can see better. At daylight and dark, and even at night, bigger baits, even up to 10 inches, can catch a trophy sized bass. ■

with the exception that two fish may be less than 14 inches and no fish between 16 and 20 inches may be possessed.

### **SOUTH CAROLINA**

**WHAT** — Spotted bass

**WHERE** — Lake Russell

**HOW** — It's hard not to catch spotted bass on Lake Russell using a multitude of tactics. For larger spotted bass, fish isolated stands of submerged standing timber using 5-inch

swimbait or medium jerkbaits.

**LAUNCH** — For a listing of public boat ramps, visit <https://www.sas.usace.army.mil/russell>

**INSIDER TIP** — Don't get caught up trying to fish all of the standing timber in Lake Russell. Dial in to the better areas by ignoring the trees and looking for typical bass holding geography — humps, points, creek edges, then target the timber in those areas.

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## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

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The profile of the Popper Frog mirrors the small details like the tucked-in side legs of a live frog to help fool bass. It also features an aerodynamic shape that allows long casts, and it is weighted to land upright so you can immediately start your retrieve.

Built around a custom, razor-sharp double hook, the body

of the Popper Frog collapses when a fish strikes, providing better hooksets. Perfect for shallow water applications, it can be fished across mats or thick vegetation, and it excels in open water when more commotion is needed to trigger strikes from fish. The Hollow Body Popper is available in 10 colors.

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The Stingray Angler rides high and dry and provides serious stability and comfort. The hull has a pronounced stern keel for excellent tracking and rides well in swells, waves and choppy conditions. The rockered and flared bow is at home in coastal marshes, bays, lakes as well as cruising the local river. With molded-in handles around the kayak and a simple deck design full of functional features, you'll find it a breeze managing this kayak on and off the water. The framed padded seat system provides incredible comfort, adjustability, and control during a day on the water.

This kayak is available in four color schemes and features a 375-pound capacity and 31½-inch width for very respectable stability. The boat weighs 65 pounds fully rigged.

Additional features include hand-sewn seating on the removable framed padded seat, dual rod holders for hands-free fishing or just to store two additional rods and a bow hatch to keep your gear dry when stored in the spacious storage area.

The kayak's molded-in carry handles eliminate the hassle or wear and tear on straps or strings used to handle the boat on land. A reinforced skid plate helps increase the life of the hull and to top it off, the boat comes standard with a paddle holder to secure your paddle to the boat.

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Smallmouth bass at Lake James will be heading toward relatively shallow water — relative to their usual deep-water haunts — as the spawn arrives this month.

Colt Bass

## SHALLOW SMALLMOUTH?

### At Lake James, April is the month bronzebucks are in range

**G**uide Colt Bass said April can be one of the best months for smallmouth bass at North Carolina's Lake James.

"The smallmouth bass will be as shallow as they will be the whole year," Bass said. "A lot of fish will spawn this time of year, bringing them up into the 20-foot and shallower range for either the prespawn or spawn, depending upon the weather."

The movement to the shallows begins with the water temperatures in the low 60s.

On cloudy days, Bass ([www.coltbassfishing.com](http://www.coltbassfishing.com)) swears by Rebel Pop-Rs.

"That's all I use as far as topwater goes," he said. "They work, so why change?"

Under sunny skies, Bass favors crankbaits 3 inches and smaller, in mostly natural colors.

"I stick with 3-inch and smaller lures because the shad are pretty small this time of year," Bass said. "I stick with natural colors, because Lake James is so clear and doesn't hardly ever muddy up."

Bass occasionally gets adventurous and throws crankbaits in fire tiger, clown or lime colors.

"I really feel like where you throw a crankbait has a lot more to do with getting a bite than the color," he said.

His arsenal includes Rapala Shad Raps, Storm Smash Shads and Berkley Flicker Shads. He also uses Zoom Flukes in natural colors.

He primarily targets ledges, especially those featuring shallow water with deep water nearby.

"If there's a ledge, there's a smallmouth on it," Bass said. "I'll throw shallow and work my way off of them. There are lots of spots at James that will go from 4 to 50 feet in a matter of 20 to 30 yards. I'll catch more fish on ledges than I do anything else."

Bass said ledges are great morning spots because groups of fish will push shad into the shallow sections and gorge on them. At times, shad can be seen jumping trying to evade hungry smallies.

If ledges don't produce, Bass tries the backs of creeks and secondary points, mostly ignoring main-lake points.

"I don't fish many points this month because the fish haven't worked their way out to the main lake as yet," he said.

Current isn't that important to Bass.

"I know some guys swear by it, but I catch fish when the dam is pulling water and when it isn't," he said.

What Bass considers critical at James is clear line; he frequently uses 6-pound test.

"James is an awesome lake; you can catch fish in the 2- to 4-pound range and sometimes up to 10 fish in the mornings," Bass said. ■

— Tony Garitta

Bass pro Jamie Fajardo tries to intercept Shearon Harris Lake bass on their way into spawning areas this month.



Jamie Fajardo

# BIG HARRIS BASS

## head for the shoreline in droves this month

**W**hile the jury is still out on whether or not the loss of aquatic vegetation at North Carolina's Shearon Harris Lake is a natural phenomenon or otherwise — the fact is — the grass is in the past.

But the big bags of bass that Harris is known for are still there, and many fish are making a beeline to the shoreline as April approaches. Bass pro Jaime Fajardo of Fuquay-Varina, N.C., will be there to roll with the changes.

"The patterns have changed at Harris over the last two years," Fajardo said. "The typical pattern in April would be to target the primrose vine along the shoreline because it holds heat. But the primrose, hydrilla — even the black mat algae — are gone. Now the fish are roaming and cruising more than normal."

The reeds or bulrushes that grow in the shallowest water at Harris are the least scathed of the plant species, and Fajardo uses them to point to the first wave of bass on spawning flats in the backs of the creeks. Often growing in areas too shallow or too thick to fish, any spawning pocket containing reeds growing out into a point or fallen over and matted down in the pocket is a high percentage area in an otherwise featureless shoreline.

"For the shallow bite, I like a spinnerbait or Chatterbait if there's any wind," Fajardo said. "White with chartreuse is a good color. I try to fish south-facing banks where the sun's been beating down on it. If it's calm and slick, I like a Texas-rigged or wacky rigged Senko.

"But if a cold front comes in, those fish will back out of the 1 to 2 feet of water they're in to the nearby secondary points in 4 to 6 feet of water. That's when I'll throw a jerkbait or a Rat-L-Trap in Sexy Shad or white."

Fajardo's next pattern is to target the second and third waves of bass following the creek channel on their way to the flats. The creek bends will be the hot spots, particularly those with stumps, rocks or any other cover. The preferred depth is 8 to 12 feet, but bass could certainly be deeper. Bigger, slower-moving baits like a jig or a big worm on a shaky head jig or Texas-rigged that can be pulled through the obstacles is a winner. But a crankbait in a shad color to match the bait in the creeks can be deadly. ■

— Dusty Wilson

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# BEAT THOSE BUSHES

## With high water, High Rock bass go shallow

**W**hen the water heats up in April, urging bass to migrate to the shallows to spawn, many fishermen resort to sight-fishing for bedding bass — unless they're fishing North Carolina's High Rock Lake.

High Rock's dingy waters make visual fishing for bass almost impossible. Instead, fishermen beat the buttonwood bushes for spawners. They know that with high, murky water conditions, the majority of fish favor the rugged shrubs that provide cover and protection in the shallows.

Given this year's incessant rains, fishermen will likely find the water in the bushes this month. If they can barely get their boats under the ridges where NC 8 crosses Flat Swamp or Abbotts creeks, that means the water is in the bushes.

High Rock harbors an abundant number of buttonwood bushes in the extreme backs of creeks, nooks and pockets, though lakeside development has ravaged a lot of vegetation.

Spawning grounds dotted with bushes include Buck's Branch near the mouth of Flat Swamp Creek, the nooks behind the Brown Loflin Bridge in Flat Swamp, the backwaters behind the Second Creek Bridge, the One Bush area and Potts Creek priver.

Fishermen usually flip the bushes for bass with heavy baitcasting gear and reels filled with abrasion-resistant 14- to 20-pound line. Bushes don't budge; once a big fish wraps you up, he's gone. Many fishermen have switched to fluorocarbon instead of monofilament, arguing that fluorocarbon line has less stretch and a better feel. Those sticking to monofilament dislike the wiry nature of fluorocarbon.

The flipping baits of choice include Texas-rigged soft-plastic creature baits like Zoom's Super Hog, Missile's D Bomb and Yum's Woolly Bug. The old Zoom plastic lizard still gets plenty of use. High Rock bass mostly hit plastics in black, green pumpkin, red shad or watermelon colors. Other anglers swear by jigs or shaky-heads in blue/black and green pumpkin.

Anglers probe the bushes aggressively or cautiously. Some pitch their baits into the thickest part of the bush because the



Tony Garitta

**Chunky largemouth bass will head shallow to High Rock Lake's many buttonwood bushes if the water is high in April.**

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bass often hold tight to it, while others fish the edges first to avoid snagging and disturbing the brush or fish.

The late Scott Brandon, the father of High Rock Bass fishing, had his own strategy.

"Hit the odd bush, the one that stands apart from all the others," Brandon once said. "That's the one with the bass."

Flooded tree roots and willows in the back of pockets also attract spawning bass. With overcast skies, spinnerbaits come into play.

If the water isn't in the bushes, anglers fish gravel banks and cuts with Senkos, down-sized Carolina rigs, plastics and jigs. ■

—Tony Garitta

# BLACKWATER BASS

## Waccamaw River largemouths in spotlight

**W**hen the landscape transforms into its spring wardrobe and turkeys are gobbling in the background, it's a surefire message to anglers that largemouth bass are chomping on the lower Waccamaw River.

Spring fishing takes off on the blackwater rivers in the eastern parts of the Carolinas, and the Waccamaw River is hot this month, especially south of the South Carolina-North Carolina state line.

Todd Vick of Fishin' Freshwater Charters out of Murrells Inlet, S.C., practically lives on the Waccamaw throughout the year, and April is a prime time to target largemouth bass there.

"It's the time of year we crush some good fish on the Waccamaw," said Vick (843-333-8200). "We consistently catch fish in the 3½- to 4-pound range in the spring."

Bass are preparing to spawn and will slide out of winter holding areas on their way to shallower places. As they get ready, they are typically found holding along breaks within feet of their spawning grounds, waiting on water temperatures to rise.

"We look for backwater areas that are out of heavy current and will target the first drops where the fish will be staging before they slide up into the shallows to spawn. The fish are either on the beds or getting ready to be on the beds," he said.

One of three lures will get the job done for Vick. He always has square-billed crankbaits, jerkbaits and spinnerbaits tied on. His all-time favorite is a Rapala Husky Jerk, which is versatile and can be fished in a wide variety of places.

Vick fishes them using a variety of different retrieves, from stop-and-go to a steady retrieve. The intermittent pause is typically when bass become unhinged and attack the lure.

"No real wrong way to work a jerkbait," he said. "Figure out a rhythm that works, and when you start getting hit, it can be an incredible way to get fish on the end of the line."

Vick always has at least a portion of the lure in a specific color.

"Color choice is extremely important on this river," he said. "When the fish are moving into the shallows early in the year, they key in on red and any variation of red. It has to do with light refraction and the way they see it. Regardless of the reason, jerkbaits in red will outperform any other color this time of year."

Vick also follows a strict regiment when it comes to scheduling his trips. The stretches of the Waccamaw River flowing through central and lower Horry County is tidally influenced.

"I only fish the outgoing tide, from the beginning of the fall to the dead low tide and then



Todd Vick

Guide Todd Vick catches plenty of nice bass this month on the Waccamaw River.

one hour of the incoming. After that, the fish shut down, and you're better off going home," he said.

Tides in the lower section of the Waccamaw can have a range of several feet, so much of the shallow cover will be high and dry on low tides. Check the tide charts before fishing, because the tide can make a huge impact on where to fish and when to go. ■

— Jeff Bursleson

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With many states going to special early youth turkey hunting days or seasons, ground blinds are an option many adults are choosing to help keep young hunters, who often have problems staying still, out of the unwavering eyes of a boss gobbler.

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coating inside so that gobbler can't see inside.

The blind comes with brush-in loops for adding natural foliage, an easy access zippered door, ground stakes and tie-down cords, and it weighs just 14 pounds.

The shell is Durashell Plus fabric with a matte finish. The Rigger Spider Hub frame makes for easy set-up and takedown.

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

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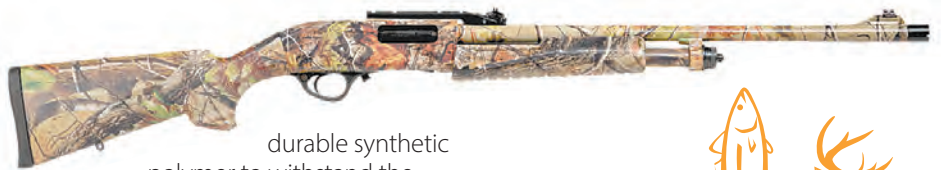
The FieldHunter Turkey is available in Realtree APG and Mossy Oak BottomLand patterns and comes with three interchangeable chokes. The 5-inch optics rail on top of the receiver will accommodate a variety of Weaver mounts for additional optics, and sights are green and red fiber

for low-light hunting.

All models come with an extended forend for faster cycling of shells. The forend and stock are both made from a

**MSRP: \$399.99.**

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durable synthetic polymer to withstand the elements, and both are equipped with mounted sling studs. All three models weigh less than 7 pounds.



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your posterior when you sit against that big oak.

But Millennium Outdoors may have made it easier, introducing two portable seats for turkey hunters: the TU01 Field Pro and TU02 Run & Gun seats. The Field Pro is foldable, with a 17x20x21-inch aluminum frame, and a padded carry strap. It weighs just 6.4 pounds.

The Run & Gun seat has the same seat frame and strap, but no back and weighs 4.2 pounds. Both come in Mossy Oak Obsession camo.

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TU01 Field Pro



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**AS WATER WARMS, ARTIFICIAL BAIT CHOICES FOR CAROLINA TROUT MAY CHANGE AS FAR AS SIZE, SHAPE AND COLOR. HERE'S THE LOWDOWN ON PICKING THE RIGHT ONES.**

■ By Jeff Burleson

SPRING  
SPECK

# SPECIALTIES

Jeff Burleson

## THE SPRING THAW

brings outdoorsmen out of hiding, into the woods for a long-bearded turkey dinner or onto the water for one of their finned favorites. For anglers with saltwater running through their veins, the springtime speckled trout bite is hard to avoid, but certain lures will bring more fish to the boat than others.

In the Carolinas, speckled trout are available year-round, but the spring and fall bites are significantly better than the winter and summer. Speckled trout are feisty feeders much of the year, and when the water temperature begin to trend upwards in spring, feeding activity shifts into another gear.

The menu changes for speckled trout and other inshore fishes on a monthly basis. From shrimp, menhaden and finger mullet to croakers, pinfish and other juvenile fish, the variety of groceries changes seasonally due to availability. Specks are going to eat, but what they eat in April may not be what they eat in July. For anglers, lure choice can be a critical component to the equation if you don't fish with bait.

Spring conditions in the Carolinas can change from chilly, near-freezing nightly temperatures to sweltering heat. Fortunately, water temperatures don't fluctuate as quickly as the air temperatures, and water temperatures trend upward all spring.

Jot Owens of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., guides in the waters around Cape Fear, and specks are one of his coveted species

he targets year-round. Owens' strategy in spring changes mid-season between periods of cool weather coming off the winter to a steady warming trend pushing toward summer.

"When the water temperature is below 60 degrees in the spring, there are no shrimp around, and trout are eating small spots, croakers, pinfish, killifish, silversides and other baitfish," said Owens (910-233-4139). "These smaller baits are thick and provide a steady diet for trout and other gamefish through late winter and into early spring."

On the winter side of the warmup, trout are making a living on the available baitfish living in creeks and near inlets. In early spring, when water temperatures remain low, Owens targets trout with lures that imitate baits common in their environments for that time period.

### SMALL STANDS TALL

"When the water temperatures remains below 60 degrees, the larger baitfish are few and far between, (and) that makes smaller lures better than larger baits. We get better numbers of fish and bigger fish too," he said. "My top two soft plastics are 3-inch Powerbait Pro Twitchtail Minnow and 3-inch Powerbait Cash Out Worm. Both have small profiles that mimic the available bait this time of year."

These small-profile soft plastics rigged on 1/16- to 1/8-ounce

The ability to change between baits that imitate baitfish and those that imitate shrimp as the spring progresses brings more trout home with some anglers.



Jeff Burleson

Slow-sinking soft plastics are killer baits for spring speckled trout as the water temperature breaches the 60-degree mark.



jigheads are the way to go in early spring conditions. The light jigheads small-profile lures produce a slow fall.

“The slow sink, even in deep water, will get these slow fish to bite,” Owens said.

As spring conditions arrive with more warm days, the water temperature will trend upward into the 60s consistently. Larger-sized baitfish become more available, and larger baits can produce more consistent bites.

“When water temperatures consistently stay in the 60s for a few weeks, larger baitfish patterns and techniques become relevant and produce good returns,” he said.

Not only do larger baits become available, the activity level of both trout and baitfish increases, and that opens the door to more aggressive techniques.

“We start off the day throwing Top Dog Jrs. along the grass lines, creek mouths and around oyster bars,” he said, “and after the topwater bite slows down — or if it never materializes — we switch to other hard baits that run just below the surface, like a MirrOdine or Catch 2000 Jr.”

Small menhaden often show up, offering trout and other gamefish a steady diet. Small, suspending hard baits such as the MirrOdine 17MR mimic the small menhaden and other 3- to 4-inch baitfish, and the suspending versions give trout an opportunity to take the bait without having break the surface.

Even as the water temperature rises into the 60s, soft plastics will remain part of Owens’ arsenal. Trout become more aggressive with the warmer water and will take larger lures, such as a

5-inch jerk shad and 4-inch artificial shrimp.

Lure choice and tactics during spring in the Carolinas can vary tremendously but can be easily dictated by the water temperature and the visible forage in the area.

“Trout are eating what is available to them throughout the year,” Owens said. “Look and observe the bait you see in the water this time of year, and it will tell you what types and what sizes of lures that you need to use.” ■



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

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## CHOICE OF LURES, COLORS DICTATES

# SPECKLED SUCCESS

Successful anglers who favor artificial lures will use a huge selection of colors throughout the year. With countless color combinations from which to choose, how does an angler decide which to select to dupe their prey?

At some point, fish have been caught on almost every color produced, but some will undoubtedly produce more fish than others under certain conditions and in specific locations. Some shapes and colors exactly mimic actual baitfish; for instance, Live Target's Slow-Roll Shiner in silver/smoke looks exactly like a small silverside. While these soft plastics will be readily eaten by trout and other predators, sometimes a lure in a completely unnatural color will get more attention.

One of the most-popular lure colors for trout in the Carolinas is chartreuse. In some circumstances, a lure with a tail tipped in chartreuse or fully chartreuse lure will beat down a natural-colored lure all-day long.

## Color Choices in Popular Soft Plastics

### Live Target Slow-Roll Shiners



Silver/Pearl



Silver/Smoke

### D.O.A. C.A.L. Shad Tails



Candy Corn (447)



Red/Silver/White tail (323)

### Berkley Powerbait Pro Twitchtail Minnows



Chartreuse Ice



Pink Ice



Pink Ice (405)



Chart Silver Glitter (318)

Jeff Burleson

Anglers can be swayed towards one color category or the other, depending on water clarity and water conditions. Guide Jot Owens of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., said color choice varies for him depending on whether he's fishing in clear, ocean water or stained, river or creek waters.

"In the ocean, I prefer brighter colors — chartreuse, pink, pearl white — and even some natural colorations when I have clear conditions," Owens said. "In stained waters, I will switch to darker colors, such as new penny, swamp gas and motor oil."

No doubt, color choices can make a difference, especially when fishing inshore waters for specks, because they are sight-feeders. Trout rely strictly on their eyesight to obtain their next meal. Different colors can make a passing bait stick out and grab their attention. Sometimes that is the natural blending in color, and other times it may be that gaudiest-looking color ever created.

Anglers need to experiment with different colors and lure combinations to get the job done. ■

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Jill Huffman of Lexington, N.C., caught this bull redfish in South Carolina's Winyah Bay on a popping cork rig.



## PUT A CORK IN IT

VERSATILE POPPING-CORK RIGS CAN BE USED TO TARGET ALMOST ANY INSHORE GAMEFISH

Brian Cope

**W**hen it comes to inshore fishing, many anglers agree that it's tough to beat a popping cork, and that goes for whether you're fishing with live bait or artificial lures. Popping corks can produce fish at any time, but they really shine when all other methods are failing to consistently catch fish.

The basic setup is a cork, a leader anywhere from 12 to 24 inches long and a soft-plastic lure or hook with live bait. You make a cast, allow the lure or bait time to sink to its maximum depth, then give the rod tip a quick twitch. This "pops" the cork, moving it toward the boat while pulling the lure or bait up toward the surface behind it. What comes next can be critical.

"A lot of times, anglers just continue popping the cork without thinking much about how long to pause between each pop," said guide Gifford Scott of SC Flats Fishing in Charleston, S.C. "But what you really want is to allow enough time for your lure or bait to sink again to its maximum depth before your next pop. And

that will vary depending on how long your leader is. It can also vary according to the weight of your bait, as well as the strength of the current."

### PAUSE HOW LONG?

A low-tech way to determine how much time to pause each time you give your cork a pop is to test it beside the boat, allowing you to see your lure or bait sink. Count it down, then pop it and count it down, then pop it again. You might vary this slightly once you get into it, but that's where you want to start.

"I don't like the lure to sit still under the cork at all. Once the lure settles and makes a very brief pause, I want it moving again," said Scott (843-412-6429). "If I'm using live bait, I don't mind it sitting another second or two, because it can move freely and attract fish on its own. But with an artificial lure, I want it to stay on the move other than that very brief pause."

Scott likes to use a D.O.A. shrimp under his popping cork, and he uses either medium or medium-heavy rods with

2000 to 2500 series spinning reels.

When it comes to popping corks, anglers have never had so many options. Cigar-shaped corks make a little less noise and disperse the least amount of water. These are often the best bet on calm days when a little noise goes a long way. Corks with concave heads that resemble a popping lure disperse a lot more water and make a louder gurgling or gulping sound. These can be deadly when the water is choppy, a lot of wind is present, or the tide is running particularly strong.

### SEEING RED

Rod Thomas of Capt. Ponytail Guide Service uses popping corks for big red-

continues on page 62



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

fish from North Carolina's Pamlico Sound down to Georgetown, S.C. He prefers big, concave corks paired with 4-inch soft-plastic swimbaits, a stout rod, 50-pound line, and a 5000 series spinning reel with heavy drag.

"A lot of folks think popping corks are only good in shallow, inshore waters. But this is a great technique for open water when chasing bull redfish. You want to really pop the cork, almost violently. That's when I get the majority of my bites. Some days I fish this way exclusively and don't even worry about having live bait. And my clients say they'd rather catch one big redfish in this manner than catch 10 on live bait," said Thomas (336-240-5649).

## WHEN TO USE?

Popping corks are effective in a variety of situations. Guide Addison Rupert of Low Country Outdoor Adventures in Charleston, S.C., often uses one in shallow, oyster-lined waters for flounder.

"The popping cork keeps the lure or bait just barely above the oysters, so you're able to attract the flounder without getting hung up," he said.

One of Rupert's favorite areas to use a popping cork is where a small creek empties into a main waterway.

"Trout and redfish, especially, will hang around areas like that, waiting for an easy meal to get washed their way. Popping the cork there will alert them, then they'll see your lure or bait as you work it through that moving water," said Rupert (843-557-3476). ■

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### 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	2/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 ( <a href="http://www.nmfspermits.com">http://www.nmfspermits.com</a> )	
Tarpon	77" FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12"	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster snapper	12" TL	10/day#
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day

% For shark seasons, bag and size limits, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division, 888-872-8862 or [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov). # Check with the SAFMC at [www.safmc.net](http://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. # No more than 6 redfish per boat.

### FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

% For lake-specific regulations, see the SCNDR's Regulations Digest or visit [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov). Keeper season in the Santee Cooper system is Oct. 1-June 15.

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

THE SPRING SPAWN BRINGS THIS SOUTH CAROLINA LAKE'S CRAPPIE TO THE FOREFRONT. HERE'S HOW TO DRAG DOZENS OF BAITS IN FRONT OF THEIR NOSES.

TROLL UP A

# Greenwood SLAB

By John Gribb

**W**hen the water temperature reaches the mid-50s with favorable weather, hordes of small boats ranging from center consoles splaying 16 rods across their sterns to small john boats dragging but a few lines, congregate to slow-troll productive Lake

Greenwood, trying to catch a cooler full of slab-sided crappie.

Though most anglers equate crappie fishing with casting to brush piles and structure in shallow water near the shoreline, the early season is when many Greenwood regulars go for big numbers by trolling with lots of rods, reminiscent of summertime offshore fishing but on a much smaller scale.



John Gribb

# As is the case with most of the Carolinas' most-popular gamefish species,

almost anybody can catch a few crappie during the prime periods when the fish are all over the place, feeding like crazy and almost jumping into the boat. But it takes skill and lots of experience to manage multiple rods and consistently catch lots of fish without hanging up on bottom structure or crossing lines with the squadron of other boats trolling the same area.

Russ Cason, one of those talented early season regulars frequenting Lake Greenwood — where he has a lakeside home — shared some of the techniques for crappie trolling that work whether you opt for his mass attack approach, opt for dragging 4 to 8 rods from a john boat, or even a couple of rods in the hands of friends.

Cason said the first trick is guessing where the fish will likely congregate and when they will arrive. He targets prespawn fish that are gorging themselves on minnows before heading to the

banks to spawn. Action typically starts when the water gets to 55 to 59 degrees, which happens earlier in the upper parts of Lake Greenwood near where the Saluda and Reedy rivers meet. The water coming from the rivers is more sediment-loaded, causing it to warm sooner than other areas. Fishing remains productive in Greenwood from the early, prespawn action when it's colder, until the water warms above about 78 degrees or about May 1, when the post-spawn action typically ends. The bulk of the spawning occurs in 65 to 75 degree water.

A good depth finder with GPS makes homing in on fish concentrations much easier. Cason looks for schooling bait fish on his electronics in about 20 feet of water as the focus for his trolling. The bait and feeding crappie are often holding at the 5- to 15-foot depth. With 16 rods spread across the stern, the 16-footers at right angles to the boat on each side; the 14-



John Gribb

12- and 10-footers gradually moving aft, and six light rods pointing directly astern, he covers lots of water with a single pass. The lines, all 6- to 8-pound test monofilament, are presented at various lengths and all tipped with a light jighead — 1/8-, 1/16- or 1/32-ounce — and a small, soft-plastic curlytail grub or live minnow. Cason favors chartreuse curlytails, Southern Pro crappie lures in black, red and chartreuse and Charlie Brewer Slider grubs in black/chart.

Russ Cason slow-trolls 16 rods on a smooth Lake Greenwood.



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Cason trolls at 0.7 to 0.9 mph — his GPS lets him know how fast he's moving — depending on the water depth. "If a line hangs up, just break it off," he said. "Don't slow down, or all the lines will hang up and you'll have a real mess."

When things are working and you cross a bait ball and get a strike from a crappie, it is surprisingly subtle, especially on the super long outside rods. After getting a strike, reeling in the fish to a waiting net is pretty simple if you can avoid crossing other lines.

At 11,400 acres, Greenwood is a big lake, and there are plenty of places that hold spawning crappie in the spring, including creeks around Greenwood State Park, across from Goal Island and the upper reaches of Hidden Lake, an area behind a railroad trestle in a creek that enters the lake on the north shore, just downstream from the SC 72 bridge.

SCDNR has placed fish-attracting structures around the lake, marked by buoys with the GPS coordinates listed on the SCDNR website and the Fishing Hot Spot map. Locals often sink Christmas trees to attract fish.

Cason said an ideal day is calm and mild with a stable temperature range for several days in a row. Greenwood is not known for really large crappie, but it holds lots of them. An 8-inch crappie weighs about a half-pound, and a 12-inch slab weighs about a pound. Cason often releases egg-laden females.

Once the water passes the 80-degree mark and the spawn is finished, fish move into their summer pattern and casting spinners, jigs or minnows to deep structure, brush piles, steep banks and shorelines is productive.

Greenwood's crappie population is managed by a 20-fish daily creel limit, with an 8-inch size minimum. ■

## FROM THE HOOK TO HOT GREASE >



**John Gribb** is a licensed charter captain, upland hunting guide and former Orvis endorsed saltwater fly-fishing guide who lives in South Carolina's Lowcountry. A freelance writer for more than 25 years, he specializes in small game and waterfowl hunting, freshwater and inshore saltwater fishing and sporting dogs.

Russ Cason lands a Lake Greenwood slab with one of his extremely long rods.



## DESTINATION INFORMATION

**HOW TO GET THERE** — Lake Greenwood is impounded by a dam on the Saluda River near Chappells, S.C. It lies in Greenwood, Laurens and Newberry counties. The lake has numerous boat ramps, including Harris Landing in Laurens County, Greenwood State Park in Ninety Six and The 45 at the SC 72 bridge near Waterloo.

**WHEN TO GO** — The crappie spawn on Lake Greenwood in March, April and May in water between 55 and 80 degrees. Look for baitfish and crappie holding in 5 to 15 feet of water, either waiting to move shallow to spawn or moving back out after finishing the spawn. Use tiny jigs, 1/8-, 1/16- or 1/32-ounce, tipped with soft plastics or live minnows.

**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Slow-trolling crappie jigs in a long-lining setup, with up to 16 rods in a spider-type pattern from the stern.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Anthony Davis, 803-356-2286; The Crappie Hole, Chapin, 803-345-5606, Hunters Headquarters, Greenwood, 864-223-1911. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.



**ACCOMMODATIONS** — Moon Landing RV Park and Marina, Cross Hill, 864-998-2492; Lighthouse RV Park and Marina, Cross Hill, 864-998-3500; Greenwood Chamber of Commerce, 222. greenwoodscchamber.org.

**MAPS** — Fishing Hot Spots, 1-800-ALL-MAPS, www.fishing-hotspots.com.



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The author shows off a Lake Greenwood crappie.

# CRAPPIE: From the hook to HOT GREASE

Who doesn't like fried fish? Along South Carolina's coast, fried flounder is often the choice, but for inland anglers, fried crappie or bream is the standard.

Most every crappie or bream fisherman has a favorite recipe, but during the spring spawn, these fish are so plentiful that eating them the same way all the time can get boring.

The most-common preparation is deep-fried, skinless fillets in peanut oil. Fillets are generally dusted in flour and/or corn meal and seasonings. Dozens of recipes share a combination of some or all of the following ingredients: all-purpose flour, corn meal or corn flour, garlic powder, cayenne pepper, buttermilk and others. Some suggest soaking the fish overnight in saltwater, which firms the flesh. The result is a simple, thin-crust flaky delight. Adding some beer battering and possibly an egg dip to the same process, and you get a fillet with a thicker crust.

Another old-fashioned favorite is whole crappie, bream or white perch scaled, gutted and headed and deep fried in a black, cast-iron pan. Scoring the flesh vertically with a sharp knife allows more thorough cooking and more taste of the coating. Again, soaking them in cold, saltwater firms the flesh.

Frying fish with very little oil, called sautéing, produces a much



lighter taste that is preferred by some. Pat dry, salt and pepper the fillets and press on some chopped herb and a drizzle of lemon juice, then sauté them with just enough olive oil or butter so they do not stick to the pan. Try any of these herbs: tarragon, dill weed, basil, marjoram.

Baking also produces a lighter fillet than deep frying. Fillets can be sprinkled with herbs, cheese, lemon juice, bread crumbs, butter or olive oil.

Fried crappie are wonderful with tartar or cocktail sauce on the side. ■

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# RUSSELL SLAB TRICKS

## Guide has two tactics for April crappie

There are two excellent tactics for crappie in April on South Carolina's Lake Russell, according to guide Wendell Wilson of Elberton, Ga. — one for numbers and one for quality.

"Long-line trolling with jigs is a good way to catch numbers of crappie this time of year," Wilson said. "The fish will be out in the open water, chasing shad 4 to 8 feet deep in 10 to 20 feet of water."

Wilson (706-283-3336) likes to pull 1/16- or 1/32-ounce curlytail jigs at .8 to 1 mph in the backs of the creeks. Pulling at that speed, he said, puts the jigs in the range the crappie are feeding in.

"There is no need to tip the jigs with minnows," he said. "We usually pull them out in the center of large coves in the creeks, well away from the bank. This pattern works really well this time of year, especially early in the morning and late in the afternoon."

While pulling jigs works in open water, the second tactic means getting right up on the bank, Wilson said.

Guide Wendell Wilson shows off a couple of nice crappie from Lake Russell.



Pat Robertson

"This pattern is completely different, and it's a lot of fun because we are targeting spawning fish on the banks. A lot of those fish will be the males still hanging around and guarding the nests."

Wilson said he uses a 12-foot fiberglass pole with the same length of line.

"We use a hook with a single split-shot and a float anywhere from 10 inches to 2 feet above the hook," he said. "We hook a medium minnow through the lips and go along the bank, dabbling the minnow around wood and rock cover. It's fun to see that float go down."

"We just drop it in and let it sit for 15 to 30 seconds, then pick it up and drop it into another spot. If the fish are there, they are pretty much going to bite it as soon as you drop the minnow in there."

While you won't catch as many crappie doing this as you will trolling jigs, he said, you will catch more quality fish.

"In March, you can catch crappie up to 2 pounds doing this, and in April you will catch crappie up to a pound and a pound-and-a-half. In early April, you might still catch a few 2-pounders," he said. ■

— Pat Robertson

### 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	33"	2/day
Bluefish	none	& 3/day 5/day
Red drum (channel bass, puppy drum)	18" min., 27" max.	1/day
Black drum	14" min., 25" max.	10/day
Flounder	Closed	Closed
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)	12.5" TL	15/day
Sea bass (south of Hatteras)	13" TL	7/day
Yellowfin/Bigeye tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin tuna	Contact NMFS ( <a href="http://www.nmfspermits.com">http://www.nmfspermits.com</a> )	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	4/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12" TL	1/day
Snappers: Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Sheepshead	10"	10/day
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day
Striped bass ^	28"-35" TL max (ocean)	1/day
Hickory shad	None	10/day
American shad	closed	closed

^ see NCWRC/NCDMF regs for inshore Management Area limits. % Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov). % 5 bluefish per day for recreational anglers on for-hire or charter vessels; 3 bluefish per day otherwise.

### 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	14" min.	4
Flounder	Closed	Closed

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

+ See specific lake exceptions in NCWRC regulations digest or [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org)

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

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

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

## GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Food-plot planters need to choose the right herbicide, set the right spray concentration and apply it correctly.



Jeff Burleson

# AVOID TOP HERBICIDE APPLICATION MISTAKES

PICK THE RIGHT CHEMICALS FOR THE JOB AT HAND, THEN MAKE SURE THEY'RE APPLIED CORRECTLY

**F**ood plots are wonderful projects for landowners with anywhere from 50 to 5,000 acres under control. They can provide native wildlife with a wealth of benefits across the seasons, and they can provide landowners with a sense of satisfaction when the greenery fills up with wildlife.

But managing a successful food-plot program can be easily derailed at anywhere along the process. It's tough to control Mother Nature's unpredictable ways, but unfortunately, most food-plot failures result from human error somewhere along the way. One of the chief sources of failure comes from herbicide management.

Herbicides are crucial for the success of any cultivated crop, from a large-scale soybean farmer in the midwest to the guy from Stanly County, N.C., with a ½-acre clover plot. Herbicides enable growers to control non-target vegetation in their fields. With a long growing season, generous rainfall and fertile soils, the Carolinas are prime grounds to

grow crops. But non-target plants have the same opportunities, and they will take advantage of them. Herbicides are essential components to any agriculture program. They can be a godsend if used appropriately but can crush dreams if used the wrong way.

## THE RIGHT CHOICE

The most-common mistake for a new food plotter is selecting the wrong herbicide for the job. Herbicides are far from created equal, and a specific herbicide must be selected with the end in mind. The three basic types are non-selective (broad spectrum), selective pre-emergent and selective post-emergent.

Non-selective herbicides are generally intended to kill all plants: grass or broadleaf. The most-common non-selective herbicide is glyphosate, aka Round Up. Non-selective herbicides are typically used for killing all vegetation before planting or are sprayed on existing crops of glyphosate-resistant strains of soybeans, corn or alfalfa.

Selective pre-emergent herbicides are typically added to the soil and are active there for an extended period of time. Selective post-emergent herbicides generally function through foliar applications and are only active when a target plant gets exposed at the time of application. These pre-emergent and post-emergent herbicides are selective to either grass or broadleaf plants and are chosen to control the opposite of the planted crop. For instance, herbicides that control broadleaf weeds can be sprayed on crops that are grass types like wheat and rye.

## APPLY CORRECTLY

The next most-common mistake is a misguided application of chemical to



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.

## ALWAYS USE PPE WHEN SPRAYING CHEMICALS

Herbicide treatments are a large part of any food-plot program. However, they are dangerous chemicals that can kill you quickly or over a period of time depending on the level of exposure and the type of chemical being used.

All chemicals should be treated with extra caution to prevent exposure. And personal protection equipment (PPE) should always be used when handling and applying chemicals to food plots, roadsides or anywhere else on the hunting land.

Even though herbicides are created for foliar destruction, they are extremely harmful to humans. People can be exposed to these harmful chemicals through direct, liquid contact or from chemicals in an aerosol form. They are generally sprayed into a fine mist that can be inhaled or end up in the eyes.

Gloves and long-sleeved shirts should always be used when pouring chemicals into tanks, and full protective gear is recommended when spraying: long-sleeve clothing, long pants, gloves, hats, eye protection and a protective face shield.

After spraying and handling chemicals, the applicator should always change into different clothes before heading home, and clothes should be washed thoroughly to remove any residue. Disposable PPE can be used. Several companies offer inexpensive PPE equipment for a few bucks that can be used for spraying herbicides that can be disposed of after use. Personal protective equipment is a must and should always be used for spraying herbicides. ■

the spray area. Herbicides are concentrated chemicals that typically come in a liquid form and must be applied evenly and at the right concentration. It's easy to read the label and determine a use-rate of three ounces per acre. One can easily determine how many ounces are needed for the area or square footage of their plots.

Problems arise during the application process. Most small-time food plotters are unsure of the flow rate of their equipment. And even when they understand the flow rate, the speed of application must be controlled accurately to facilitate even application across the area.

The best way to remedy misguided chemical application is to conduct test runs with a tank filled of water to familiarize oneself with the equipment and how long it takes to empty a tank over a specified time period per unit of area. Of course, the equipment must be calibrated, but the person applying the chemical also needs his own calibration, and a few tanks spraying water can be the perfect solution to this common folly.

Poor environmental spray conditions are another leading cause of herbicide folly. An even application of chemical is required to produce optimum results, and environmental conditions can affect application consistency. Choosing a poor application day is a top reason for poor herbicide results. It's not always easy to pick the perfect day when it's time to spray herbicides. But there are definitely some days that spraying should be avoided.

**CHOOSE YOUR DAYS ➤**

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## CHOOSE YOUR DAYS

Windy days produce excessive drift and an uneven application. A perfect scenario would be a day without any wind. Choose days when winds are predicted to be 10 mph or less.

Temperature and humidity can also make a difference in target and non-target species effects. Temperatures in the 70s and low 80s with high humidity are a killer combination for spraying herbicides. Herbicides tend to be more effective on warm, moist days than cold days or periods of low humidity. The warm temperature promotes respiration of targeted vegetation, and the high humidity provides adequate moisture for chemical transport and to prevent damage to non-target vegetation. Excessively hot, dry days can be tough on non-target vegetation or the crops that are being enhanced with chemical application.

Improper maintenance techniques are another leading cause of herbicide failure. Even though herbicides are liquid products, they can gum up spray nozzles, pumps and hoses when not flushed out thoroughly. These chemicals will dry out and form solids inside the equipment, causing issues during the next treatment. More important, the residual chemical from a former spray application may cause harm to the area treated

next. Tanks must be flushed thoroughly using the triple rinse method, and all nozzles should be flushed excessively to insure a full cleanout.

## MONITOR RESULTS

Finally, an effective herbicide platform needs a planned, post-application monitoring program. Herbicides aren't worth the time and expense if they don't control the weedy invaders effectively. Weeds come in a wide range of forms; some are much more resistant to herbicides than others. Herbicide application rates are listed in ranges, and sometimes it takes a stronger application rate to kill certain plants.

Regardless, food plotters should monitor the fields a week to 10 days after application to see the effects of the application. Sometimes spot treatment is warranted, or sometimes a total re-treatment is necessary. Evaluation of the treatment after the fact should be part of every food-plot herbicide program.

Herbicides can make a dramatic difference in the productivity of food plots. But mistakes can easily lead to dismay. Care should be taken to avoid the common application mistakes in herbicide treatment programs. ■



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POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
Wed 1	██	██	██	66	12:30 pm	6:11 pm - 9:43 pm	2:29 am	5:40 am - 9:12 am ☀	☉ HALF
Thu 2	██	██	██	56	1:30 pm	7:11 pm - 10:37 pm	3:22 am	6:36 am - 10:08 am	☉
Fri 3	██	██	██	50	2:37 pm	8:12 pm - 11:28 pm	4:12 am	7:36 am - 11:02 am	☉
Sat 4	██	██	██	59	3:47 pm	9:15 pm - 12:17 am	4:57 am	8:37 am - 11:53 am	☉
Sun 5	██	██	██	67	4:59 pm	10:20 pm - 1:02 am	5:37 am	9:40 am - 12:42 pm	☉
Mon 6	██	██	██	77	6:11 pm	11:25 pm - Midnight	6:15 am	10:45 am - 1:27 pm	☉
Tue 7	██	██	██	82	7:24 pm	Midnight - 1:47 am	6:51 am	11:50 am - 2:12 pm ☀	☉ FULL
Wed 8	██	██	██	87	8:37 pm	12:31 am - 2:29 am	7:27 am	12:56 pm - 2:54 pm ☀	☉
Thu 9	██	██	██	53	9:49 pm	1:35 am - 3:13 am	8:04 am	2:00 pm - 3:38 pm	☉
Fri 10	██	██	██	40	11:00 pm	2:39 am - 4:01 am	8:44 am	3:04 pm - 4:26 pm	☉
Sat 11	██	██	██	31		3:43 am - 4:49 am	9:28 am	4:08 pm - 5:14 pm	☉
Sun 12	██	██	██	29	12:08 am	4:45 am - 5:43 am	10:16 am	5:10 pm - 6:08 pm	☉
Mon 13	██	██	██	32	1:11 am	5:45 am - 6:37 am ☀	11:09 am	6:10 pm - 7:02 pm	☉ LOW
Tue 14	██	██	██	42	2:07 am	6:40 am - 7:32 am ☀	12:05 pm	7:05 pm - 7:57 pm ☀	☉ HALF
Wed 15	██	██	██	32	2:56 am	7:29 am - 8:27 am ☀	1:04 pm	7:54 pm - 8:52 pm	☉
Thu 16	██	██	██	27	3:38 am	8:15 am - 9:21 am	2:02 pm	8:40 pm - 9:46 pm	☉
Fri 17	██	██	██	28	4:14 am	8:55 am - 10:13 am	2:59 pm	9:20 pm - 10:38 pm	☉
Sat 18	██	██	██	29	4:46 am	9:32 am - 11:04 am	3:56 pm	9:57 pm - 11:29 pm	☉
Sun 19	██	██	██	41	5:15 am	10:06 am - 11:54 am	4:51 pm	10:31 pm - 12:19 am	☉
Mon 20	██	██	██	52	5:42 am	10:40 am - 12:42 pm	5:46 pm	11:05 pm - 1:07 am	☉ Apogee
Tue 21	██	██	██	64	6:09 am	11:12 am - 1:30 pm ☀	6:41 pm	11:37 pm - Midnight	☉
Wed 22	██	██	██	73	6:35 am	11:44 am - 2:20 pm ☀	7:36 pm	Midnight - 1:55 am	☉ NEW
Thu 23	██	██	██	66	7:03 am	12:18 pm - 3:10 pm ☀	8:32 pm	12:09 am - 2:45 am	☉
Fri 24	██	██	██	60	7:34 am	12:55 pm - 4:01 pm ☀	9:30 pm	12:43 am - 3:35 am	☉
Sat 25	██	██	██	53	8:08 am	1:35 pm - 4:55 pm	10:29 pm	1:20 am - 4:26 am	☉
Sun 26	██	██	██	50	8:47 am	2:20 pm - 5:50 pm	11:27 pm	2:00 am - 5:20 am	☉
Mon 27	██	██	██	52	9:32 am	3:11 pm - 6:43 pm		2:45 am - 6:15 am	☉
Tue 28	██	██	██	53	10:23 am	4:05 pm - 7:37 pm	12:24 am	3:36 am - 7:08 am	☉ HIGH
Wed 29	██	██	██	58	11:21 am	5:01 pm - 8:31 pm	1:18 am	4:30 am - 8:02 am ☀	☉
Thu 30	██	██	██	69	12:23 pm	6:01 pm - 9:23 pm ☀	2:08 am	5:26 am - 8:56 am ☀	☉ HALF

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ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS: ☀ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ☀ = DUSK WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.



# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Logan Doub**

Logan Doub killed the beautiful, 7-point Yadkin County buck on Dec. 25, 2019, after targeting it for three seasons. He shot it at 80 yards in a cut beanfield with a T-C .270.



**Keith Deal**

Keith Deal boated this 10-pound, 2-ounce bass at Jordan Lake on Oct. 26, 2019, on a spinnerbait.



**Bob Rehlund**

Bob Rehlund from Wake Forest, N.C., caught this 48-inch bull redfish in the Neuse River on Oct. 3, 2019.



**Owen Cisne**

Owen Cisne, 10, of Murrells Inlet, S.C., bagged his first 8-point buck on Oct. 26, 2019, near Manning S.C.



**Parker Sellars**

Parker Sellars, 11, caught this big bass near Spartanburg, S.C..



**Coover Paul**

Coover Paul of Greensboro, N.C. caught this 4.2-pound spotted bass in Belews Lake last October on a Splash It.

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

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

## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

# TERIYAKI WAHOO FINGERS

CUT THIS BIG, BLUEWATER BATTLE DOWN TO SIZE

You can broil or bake teriyaki wahoo fingers indoors, in your oven, but being outside on the grill makes the fish seem so much more tasty. **INSET:** A wahoo loin and a sharp knife are the beginning of wahoo fingers.

Jerry Dilsaver



**A**pril is a special time for sportsmen in the Carolinas. Spring arrived a few weeks ago, and Daylight Savings Time has been in effect since early March. The weather is warming, and there are plenty of things to do.

Even though this has been a mild winter, there has been a lot of rain, and sportsmen have already been looking for outdoor activities and dry, warming weather. An extra hour of afternoon daylight and the increasing activity of game and fish have given them plenty to do. They are waking up after their winter rest, and sportsmen are heading to the woods and water to make their acquaintance.

April is the time for chasing turkeys in the Carolinas, and strutting thunder chickens are booming their hen-seeking gobbles through the hollers, across open fields and through the coastal swamps and pocosins. A growing number of hunters live for this month to match wits with a full-grown gobbler.

Fishing opportunities abound from the mountains to the Gulf Stream. Almost every body of water holds challenging fish, but there is something special about leaving a coastal marina in the pre-dawn hours heading for the deep, blue waters of the Gulf Stream. There are several species that will make any fishermen

smile, but this month's quarry is wahoo.

It wasn't too many years ago that wahoo were considered solitary fish, and any trip that included more than one in the fish box was special. Fishermen didn't realize how many of these bluewater cousins of king mackerel were out there. However, as more fishermen chose to chase them, the tactics and techniques improved, and fishermen learned there were far more of them than they had ever imagined.

The best start to a spring dinner of wahoo fingers is to go catch them yourself, but as the catches continue to grow, a good friend might occasionally bring a few pieces by. If you catch them yourself, you'll be tired and smiling, but you should be smiling however you come up with fresh wahoo for dinner.

Wahoo aren't just one of the prized offshore catches, they taste extremely good. They are a cousin in the mackerel family but have lighter meat and a milder flavor. They will be excellent table fare as long as you don't overcook them. This recipe is as simple as I know, and it has great flavor. Cutting wahoo fillets into fingers makes it easier to use in meals and seems to also make it more attractive for those who think they don't like fish. Give this a try and see for yourself. ■

# TERIYAKI WAHOO FINGERS

The most-fun part of eating wahoo is being in the ocean at the edge of the Gulf Stream and reeling them in. It feels like work at the time, and on a good day, your muscles will be sore, but it's a lot of fun.

It's also fun to eat them, and that's what this is about. I believe wahoo is good prepared in any way, but this is a simple way that can be easily prepared after a day of fishing or on a day when you've been busy and want to relax outdoors in the late afternoon or early evening.

Most restaurants and fish-preparation guides suggest having 4 to 6 ounces per person. I would suggest allowing at least 8 ounces of fish per person. If there are leftovers, you'll be happy to eat them later.

When fixing this dish after a day of fishing, I use a fillet from the first wahoo cleaned that afternoon. Cut the fillet into strips a little larger than your fingers and immediately put them in a Zip-Lock bag with just enough teriyaki sauce marinade to cover them. Squeeze out all the air and put the bag on ice or in the refrigerator. If doing this at home and you have a vacuum sealing machine, put the fish and teriyaki in a sealing bag and seal it with the machine. This will force the sauce to penetrate the fish better in 10 minutes than it will in a couple of hours in a Zip-Lock. Finish cleaning the boat and the other fish and cook when you're finished.

I personally don't use any salt, but I add some coarse-ground black pepper. This can be added with the sauce/marinade or just prior to cooking.

I prefer to be outdoors and cook this on the grill; however, it is also very good baked or broiled in an oven, and those who prefer fried fish will find it also tastes very good fried. If you like breader on your fish, use a very light dusting to try it and then

add more if that is better suited to your tastes. The exception is for frying, but I still prefer not to bread it heavily. Use a plain or lightly seasoned breader so it doesn't overpower the teriyaki marinade. I have not tried this in an air fryer and would love some feedback if someone prepares it that way.

Another plus for this is it serves well in a variety of ways. I typically eat it as the entree for the meal and add vegetables, bread and a drink. It also serves well as a salad topper, and my favorite of these is with Asian slaw. For more informal meals or to make it more fun for kids of all ages, the fingers make a good base for sandwiches and sliders. This is versatile and tasty and there will be more than one way you will like it. Enjoy! ■

## INGREDIENTS:

8 ounces of wahoo fillet per person

Teriyaki marinade/sauce

Salt and pepper to taste

Seafood breader (optional according to taste)

Burger or slider buns (if you choose to try it this way)

Wahoo fingers can be eaten on buns or topping a salad.

## PREPARATION:

Cut the wahoo into strips a little larger than your largest finger. Put the strips in a Zip-Lock or vacuum-sealed bag and cover with teriyaki marinade, then squeeze all the air out of the Zip-Lock or vacuum seal the vacuum-sealer bag. You may add salt and pepper before adding the marinade or just before cooking.

Allow the strips to sit on ice or in a refrigerator for at least one hour. They will season better and faster when in the vacuum sealer bag. Spray a vegetable tray with non-stick cooking spray, put it on the grill and preheat the grill to medium.

Place the wahoo pieces on the vegetable tray. Cook until lightly done on each side, being careful not to overcook. The time will vary with different grills, but it is about 4 minutes per side on my grill. Remove from grill and serve while still hot.

Once the wahoo fingers are cooked, they can be used in multiple ways. I like this as the entree for a meal, with several vegetables or a vegetable and a green salad. It is also very good as a salad topper and I like this with Asian slaw/salad. Teriyaki wahoo fingers are also excellent as the meat in fish sandwiches and sliders. I like to put some Asian slaw on the bottom of the sandwich and add the wahoo fingers on top. The bottom line is teriyaki wahoo fingers are tasty and versatile. You'll like them in numerous ways, too. ■



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

# SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Panfish action is awesome in April on the Santee Cooper lakes, with plenty of shallow cover available.

## APRIL: THE SHALLOW MONTH AT SANTEE

BASS, CRAPPIE, PANFISH ARE GREAT TARGETS THIS MONTH

**A**pril ushers in awesome shallow-water fishing for several high-profile species in the Santee Cooper lakes, and the odds of hooking fat fish in skinny water are extremely high.

On the skinny water diet menu are huge largemouth bass, typically the first big rush of shellcrackers and bream to shallow bedding areas and slab crappie caught from the shallows to mid-depths.

### BASS BITE IS STRONG

The excellent skinny water bass bite that began in March continues through April, with fish now typically found in prespawn, spawn and post-spawn phases. Specific spots for each may differ, but the basic pattern is that the majority of the fat bass are in skinny water.

Chatterbaits, bottom-bumpers, spinnerbaits and crankbaits are all effective depending on the specific target and depth fished. And don't limit your search to just wood or weed cover, as some big fish bass will relate to the rocks along the long stretches of riprap in both lakes. Fish these rocks shallow at first — crank-

baits are excellent — but one exception to the shallow-water rule can be huge bass holding slightly deeper at the base of these stretches of riprap. Bottom-bumping lures and big spinnerbaits can rule that world.

Not all riprap is created equal. Target areas where the rocks turn, creating a bend, as well as area where the water is even slightly deeper than the surrounding areas.

### SHALLOW PANFISH

April is a very active month for panfish on Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie, with shellcrackers and bream making a major move to the shallows for spawning. Hardcore shellcracker anglers usually catch some quality fish in March in warm winters, but with the next full moon early, on April 8, this bodes well for a mass movement to the shallows for huge shellcrackers and bream.

The tactics are simple, fun and highly effective. Fish shallow cover, including cypress trees, weedbeds, logs, stumps — essentially anything that holds still — in water from very skinny down to 5 feet.

Most experts use a 10- to 12-foot, light-weight pole and swing, flip or sling-shot the bait to targets. Often, small openings in weedbeds and around cypress and gum trees hold multiple huge bream or shellcrackers. The basic pattern is to get in the right depth of water in areas with a firm bottom substrate and start fishing every nook and cranny.

Stay on the move until you find fish. When you catch a big panfish, work that area hard before moving on.

Light spinning gear will work, but some of the best targets may be difficult to reach with this tackle because of the thick cover these big panfish prefer. But you can still usually catch plenty of fish.

If you're targeting shellcrackers, live redworms are the best bait, and you'll catch plenty of big bream along the way. Crickets excel for bream, but if you catch



**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.

a shellcracker on a cricket, work that area with redworms as well. A good rule of thumb is to carry both.

## SLABS STILL STRONG

Crappie action is strong in April, and these fish are on the move. Some yummy leftovers from late arrivals for shallow-water crappie spawning offer anglers the opportunity to feast on this species in the shallows, particularly early in April with an early full moon.

Guide Stevie English (843-709-8138) said some days, it requires a good bit of searching to find these often highly mobile fish, but plenty of huge crappies are still available.

"I may try long-line trolling in some areas early in the month, but also the brush piles near drops and ledges attract crappie in big numbers during April," English said.

"When long-linng trolling, I'll work fairly shallow water along the edges of channels and drops, pulling small jigs — some with minnow trailers, some just small jigs," he said. "This is a strong pattern earlier in the year, but it can still produce during April.

English said another dependable pattern is fishing woody cover at 8- to 12-foot depths as papermouths begin their trek back to deeper water.

"Fishing the brush is often a game of patience, and sometimes we catch several fish on multiple brush piles," he said. "It's just as likely we'll fish a couple spots and hit one that's loaded with fish, and the action is crazy good. During April, it works either way. The crappie action is very good, it may take a bit of searching to find the right spot."

Santee Cooper's abundant shallow-water wonderland is your ticket to be at the right place at the right time for great skinny-water fishing. Go now. ■



Terry Madewell

Guide Steve English said April is prime time to target Santee Cooper's slab crappie as they finish spawning and head back to deep water.

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# HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite



Bob Satterwhite

## APRIL CAN'T BE BEAT

SPRING CONDITIONS BRING ABOUT SOME OF THE BEST TROUT FISHING OF THE ENTIRE YEAR, EXPERTS SAY

**B**eginning around the middle of March and continuing through May, mountain anglers enjoy some of the year's best trout fishing.

In the spring, when hatches occur frequently and in great variety, trout become veritable eating machines. Also in the spring, mountain streams are fuller because of frequent showers, which means more oxygen is in the water — another factor that makes fish more active.

James McLeod “Mac” Brown, a trout-fishing guide based in Bryson City, N.C., said he has more productive fishing days in the spring than any other time.

“Activity is narrowed to a couple of hours of the day in the summer and winter,” he said, “but in the spring, you have good fishing from daylight to dark.”

Brown has become very familiar with trout streams in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the adjoining Nantahala National Forest and he's collected valuable data about life cycles on mountain streams.

“Everything has a cycle,” he said. “Most insects come off the water in the early morning. They migrate upstream, mate in the trees, and the females return to the

water in the evening to lay their eggs.”

### IT'S A CYCLE

By observing these cycles, Brown said, a trout fisher can greatly increase his or her catch rate. Brown has compiled a chart that shows the different hatches that occur each month. In April and May, 20 different hatches occur, and for each hatch, he said, there are at least two types of dry flies, nymphs and emergers. You don't have to become an expert in entomology, though, to have good success with fly fishing. Brown said three flies — two nymphs and one dry fly — will serve you well.

In nymph patterns, Brown suggests using a Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear or Pheasant Tail. A beadhead will add extra weight to get the fly to the bottom where nymphs usually are found.

### GO BIG EARLY

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

Dry flies, Brown said, don't have the versatility of nymphs.

“You have to change more often, but if I

had to choose one dry fly, I'd recommend a rusty spinner pattern — one with wings straight out at the sides.”

When a mayfly dies, it falls to the water, Brown said. It floats with wings spread flat on the surface and doesn't move.

“Trout know that,” he said. “Color is important because most mayflies have a rusty color when they die.”

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

### PUT A SPIN ON IT

Regulations for wild-trout waters in the national forests and Great Smoky



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 Callowhee, N.C., close to the Tuckasegee River, Caney Fork, Moses Creek, and several other prime trout streams.

**OPPOSITE:** An angler works a big stretch of broken water in the Nantahala River in North Carolina's Macon County.

Mountains National Park stipulate that artificial lures, such as spinners, must have a single hook. A legal spinner can be made from a treble-hook spinner by clipping off the extra hooks. However, the spinners do not spin as well as those that are manufactured with single hooks.

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

Many spin fishers say a spinner's blade color should be keyed to the type of water being fished. If the water is clear, use a gold blade; if the water is slightly colored, use a silver blade.

## ANYTHING GOES STREAMS

Although rules are strict for wild trout waters, just about

anything goes in hatchery supported streams. Night crawlers, earthworms, meal worms, wax worms, crickets and other live baits are legal. Lures can be either single or treble hook. With rare exceptions, these streams do not have size limits. Fishers should note that hatchery-supported waters are closed during March. The season reopens at 6 a.m. Saturday, April 4.

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

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

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

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## CAPE FEAR WHITING are first among parade of spring panfish

**W**hiting, aka sea mullet or Virginia mullet, are the first panfish to arrive along North Carolina's southern coast each spring.

Many fishermen consider these fish, more properly known as Gulf, southern or northern kingfish, to be the best table fare of any of the spring panfish and eagerly anticipate their arrival. They typically arrive by mid- to late-March, and the action builds through April. Coming off a mild winter when some whiting never left the Cape Fear area, expectations are high for this to be an exceptional spring.

Whiting usually make their first appearance around the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Some will move into the river and feed along the edge of the shipping channel between Battery and Bald Head islands, while some stay in the ocean in the general area between Jaybird Shoals and the Hot Hole.

Jaybird Shoals, on the west side of the inlet, is on all charts, but the Hot Hole isn't. It is the local name given to the place where the water used to cool the Duke-Progress nuclear power plant at Southport is returned to the ocean. It is roughly a quarter-mile off the beach and marked by an obvious upwelling.

Later in the month, whiting will move closer to the beach and be within casting range of pier and surf fishermen.

Butch Foster of Yeah Right Charters ([www.yeahrightcharters.com](http://www.yeahrightcharters.com)) enjoys fishing for whiting with charters and his family. They are one of his favorite fish to eat and can often be caught in good numbers once located.

Foster prefers the edge of the shipping channel. He doesn't know if he has ever marked whiting on his fish finder, as they are usually milling about, right on the bottom. Foster said to anchor in 18 feet of water and start fishing. If you don't begin catching them pretty soon, try a little deeper or shallower. He said if they



Good numbers of whiting arrive in the Cape Fear area this month after making an appearance in March.

Jerry Dilsaver


are there and your bait smells good, they'll bite.

"I tie a double-drop bottom rig in the end of the mono line on a light spinning outfit," Foster said. "I begin with a surgeon's loop on the bottom to attach the sinker and then add a pair of surgeon's loops for hooks in the foot of line above that. I like the Eagle Claw L072 long-shank hook in No. 6 and bait them with small pieces of the freshest shrimp I can find."

Foster prefers tackle shop or seafood shop shrimp over grocery store shrimp and cites the preservatives used on grocery store shrimp as the difference. He has also used small pieces of Gulp baits and shrimp flavored Pro-Cure scent gel to cover the smell of older shrimp. Smelling good is key!

There are no size restrictions or creel limits on whiting in North Carolina waters.

— Jerry Dilsaver



Guide Noah Lynk targets big bluefish schooling off Cape Lookout in April, often hooking up with jumbo fish.

## Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

# CAPE LOOKOUT'S BIG BLUES ARRIVE

Strong terminal tackle is required for 8- to 20-pound chopper bluefish

**A**pril is when fishing along North Carolina's central coast starts to heat up.

At Cape Lookout, water temperatures average 62° F, with low and high averages of 58 and 65. Many saltwater gamefish move toward shallow water, following baitfish in order to add energy for spawning activity.

The most-active and biggest fish in April will be bluefish, normally thought of as nuisance, 2- to 3-pound bait-stealers.

"But you can catch chopper blues, from 8 to 20 pounds, some even bigger, if you're lucky, in April and May," said guide Noah Lynk of Noah's Ark Fishing Charters out of Harkers Island, N.C.

Big spotted seatrout are called "gators," but "chopper" bluefish are early spring's saltwater alligators. They got that name because anyone foolish enough to put a finger close to their mouths may suffer a severe bites, even lose a digit.

Surf fishermen quickly learned that choppers will lunge at hands and fingers like rattlesnakes and clamp down with disastrous results.

Lynk targets bluefish, keying on waters near Cape Lookout, Bardens Inlet, the Eastside shoals or Shackelford Banks.

"Bluefish will get in shallow water on flats, 2 to 6 feet, and feed on big menhaden, pinfish or other fish," said Lynk (252-342-6911). "If you throw a Yo-Zuri or small MirrOlure, they won't hit it. They like big stuff."

Lynk's go-to artificials are 8- to 10-inch Australian-made Halco lures or Savage lures.

"I don't use anything with cheap hooks," Lynk said. "Chopper

blues fight extremely hard."

Halco's Roosta Poppers feature No. 3 Mustad XXX treble hooks, but he switches out for 6/0 hooks and inserts stronger rings.

"If they don't have good rings, they can pull them out," he said. "I want a lure with solid wire (from back to front)."

Big blues swim in packs, sometimes their dorsal fins and tops of their tails above the water's surface.

"We were catching redfish once; a client hooked a fish but brought back half a drum," Lynk said. "I re-rigged, and they had a time catching big bluefish."

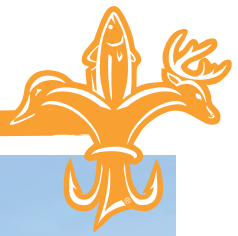
"If you see a school of blues, throw just close enough to get their attention. You don't want to hit 'em on the head."

A quick rod-tip twitch makes a concave-mouth Roosta Popper sound like a flipping baitfish and elicits reaction strikes.

"You don't want to make them chase a bait. Lure color isn't important," said Lynk, who uses medium- to medium-light Star Rods, spinning reels spooled with 12-pound braid with 5 to 8 inches of 40-pound fluorocarbon leader. He ties leader to hook with a loop knot and braid to leader with a surgeon's knot.

Bluefish creel limits changed Feb. 1, 2020, from 15 fish per angler per day to three per day except on charter boats, where the limit is five bluefish per angler. ■

— Craig Holt



# FLOUNDER POWER:

## Warmer Grand Strand waters ready to fill up

**By** April 1, anglers will have an extra spring in their step, possibly because the flounder bite takes off in a big way in the estuaries north and south of the Myrtle Beach, S.C., area, which provide rich and fertile waters abundant with marsh grass, oysters, mud flats, channels — a true fishy frontier.

In the spring when waters warm, flounder move into these shallow estuaries like there is no tomorrow. Three of the most popular places are Cherry Grove, Murrells Inlet and the Pawleys Island/Litchfield areas. These Grand Strand estuaries are shallow and heat up quickly when the weather steadily warms, creating ideal conditions for baitfish and famished predators.

Guide Greg Holmes of Fish Skinny Charters in Little River, S.C., looks for these shallow inlets to fill up with flounder very soon.

“Traditionally, April is the time when the water warms up and the flounder start filtering back into the estuaries,” said Holmes (843-241-0594). “The baitfish come out of hiding in the marshes and are joined by other baitfish coming in from the ocean. That draws flounder into the estuaries to feed.”

Even though water temperatures will rise everywhere, shallow inlets and estuaries are subject to a faster temperature recovery.

“The shallower inlets like Cherry Grove and Murrells Inlet will warm up (earlier). Flounder usually show up first in these shallower estuaries before they arrive in other neighboring waters,” he said.

When his schedule prevails, Holmes concentrates on the falling tides and on lower water.

“These shallower places warm faster and will provide warmer conditions on a falling tide than on a rising tide,” he said. “The fish will be more active on falling tides and will bite better.”

Flounder are feasting on any type of available forage. The typical spring forage base are mud minnows, along with some juvenile spots, croakers, pinfish and even some small menhaden. Flounder will not be choosy and will eat any type of small minnow.

Holmes will fish mud minnows on a Carolina rig or will soft-plastic lures on a jighead.

“I prefer to use brightly-colored artificial lures on a jighead this time of year, because they are highly visible and will catch the attention of the fish from afar,” he said. “Mud minnows are typically small this time of year, and they can blend into the mud. A brightly-colored jerk shad is very visible and produces bites.”

Soft plastics are versatile lures with a wide range of applications. Flounder filter into inlets and shallow estuaries to feed, and a 3- to 4-inch soft-plastic bait bouncing around along the bottom is just what the doctor ordered.

Light jigheads, ⅛- to ¼-ounce, are preferred, and any scented or unscented soft-plastic lure can produce during the spring. For best results, use bright colors such as pearl/white, chartreuse and pink — or a combination of bright colors. For an added effect, the jig and soft-plastic combinations can be tipped with small minnows for more visibility to get those fish to strike from afar. ■

— Jeff Burleson



Warming waters in smaller inlets along South Carolina's Grand Strand jump-start an early flound bite.

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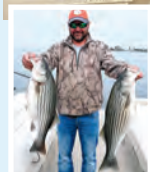


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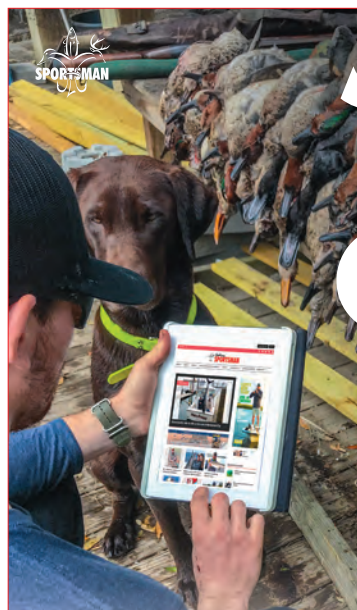
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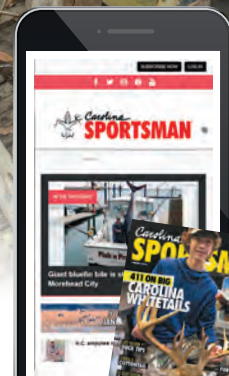


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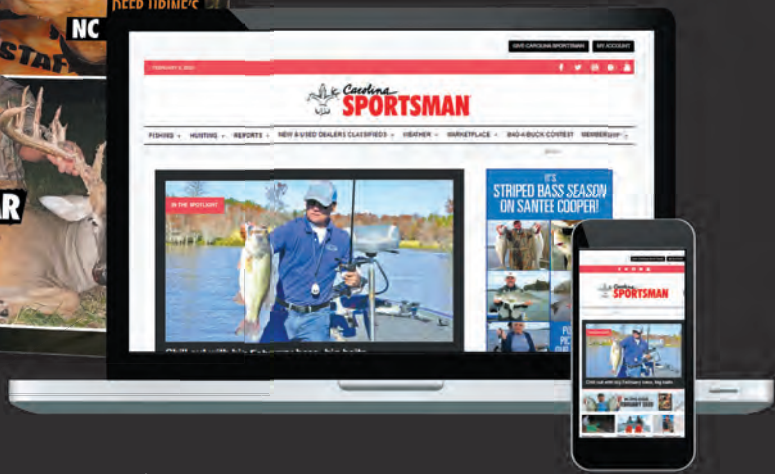
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