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Carolina CONTENTS

Volume 27 | Number 6 | June 2020

FEATURES:

15 SEEING RED COVER STORY
Redbreast sunfish are among the most beautiful of all the bream species, and they're thick in the blackwater rivers of both Carolinas. Here's where to go and how to catch them.
> By Brian Cope

23 BREAM BUSTING
Bream fishing reaches a fever pitch across South Carolina as summer arrives, and most lakes and rivers are full of these aggressive, hard-fighting fish. The key to catching the biggest and most bream is targeting the right waters with the best techniques. Here's where to find great bream fishing this month.
> By Terry Madewell

29 FLAT OUT FINE FOR FLOUNDER COVER STORY
Little River and Bulls Bay, two very different estuaries provide South Carolina fishermen great opportunities this month as inshore waters fill up with hungry flatfish
> By Jeff Burleson

35 SUPER GROUPER
One of North Carolna's favorite bottomfish takes center stage for many offshore anglers this month. Here's how one of the best puts these big battlers in the boat.
> By Craig Holt

41 JUST CATTING AROUND
To target big blues and flatheads, find places onLakeMoultriewhereyoucaninterceptfishmoving fromtheshallowswheretheyfeedbacktodeeperwater.
> By Phillip Gentry

OUTDOOR UPDATE:

11 NC DEER HARVEST UP
12 BIG GOBBLER GALLERY

COLUMNS:

47 GREENER PASTURES
By Jeff Burleson
50 SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY
By Phillip Gentry
54 COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE By Jerry Dilsaver
56 SANTEE STRINGER
By Terry Madewell
58 SPECKLED TRUTH By Chris Bush
60 HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS
By Bob Satterwhite

DEPARTMENTS:

22 Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook
31 Fishing regulations
34 Sportsman's Showcase
61 Astro Tables
67 Classifieds

ON THE COVER:

June brings out some great fishing for redbreast sunfish in North Carolina's blackwater rivers and flounder in South Carolina's coastal estuaries. Photos by Brian Cope, Mary Bell.

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A stimulus package for hunting clubs?

Won't paper company give us a break?

TO THE EDITOR:

Please, can anyone tell me why the No. 1 timber company in the U.S.A., Weyerhaeuser, which has hundreds, if not more, hunting-club leases across North Carolina and South Carolina, can't give the local, blue-collar hunters — a lot of whom have lost their jobs or work because of this coronavirus — a stimulus package, so to speak, by cutting the hunting club's a price break on leases or pushing the lease payment dead line back a few months?

Many just want to feed their families, have some fun, and if you can't work right now and have to buy toilet paper and hand sanitizer — if you can find it. It's hard to pay the club dues because of the never-ending lease increases. Every year, Weyerhaeuser keeps increasing and increasing the piece of hunting leases. Why? Just because they can, or are they trying to push the hunting clubs out of existence for some reason only known to them? I fear there will be clubs, old clubs that's have had leases for years, that just can't get members because of the cost, and no one wins if these clubs fold up and die, or does Weyerhaeuser have other plans?

JOHN JORDAN
Four Oaks, N.C.

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Outdoor UPDATE with Dan Kibler

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

GOOD NEWS FOR BOTH STATES

SC BOAT RAMPS RE-OPEN; NC DEER HUNTERS HAVE GOOD SEASON, NO CWD

North Carolina deer hunters and South Carolina fishermen got three pieces of good news over the past six weeks, only one of them related to the coronavirus — thank heavens.

In mid-April, Gov. Henry McMasters of South Carolina announced that he was re-opening public boat ramps across the state, that some state parks were reopening, albeit on a somewhat limited basis, and finally, shooting ranges were reopening.

That made it much, much easier for South Carolina fishermen to get to the bass, crappie, speckled trout and red drum they target during a peak spring fishing month. Plus hike and shoot.

In late April, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission announced that another season of testing has ended, with no North Carolina deer found to have chronic wasting disease, keeping the Tarheel State on the good side of a bad problem.

The Commission had been sampling deer for CWD since 2002, and it had ramped up sampling a couple of years ago. Last year, 2,300 deer were sampled, with no evidence of CWD. That leaves North Carolina — along with South Carolina — among 24 states where CWD still hasn't reared its ugly head. In addition, CWD has been found in four Canadian provinces and four other countries, three of them in Europe.

Sampling began in earnest in 2003, with sampling done every five years until 2018, when annual sampling began.

Next, the Commission released the 2019-20 deer harvest report, which showed a big increase in the number of whitetails that North Carolina hunters took last year compared to the 2018-19 season, and a significant increase over the three-year harvest average.

The total harvest was 161,941 deer, up 11.3% over the 2018-19 season and 6.7% higher than the three-year average. The harvest was up across the entire state, with the exception of the extreme northeastern corner of North Carolina, where a 2% decline was reported. The biggest increases continue to be in the western third of the state, where the harvest was up 20.8%. ▪

Jeff Stewart of Lancaster County, S.C., took this big gobbler on April 24. It had a 10½-inch beard, 1⅛-inch spurs and weighed 19 pounds.

OH, SO CLOSE

Colt Huffman, 4, of Lake Wylie, S.C., caught his first fish on Lake Wateree on April 20 — and it will be all downhill from here. Huffman, the son of Lee Huffman of Huffy's Guide Service, was fishing for striped bass with his father and sister, Allie, when he boated his first fish, a 1-pound, 14-ounce white perch — one ounce shy of the South Carolina state record, currently held by Rodger Taylor's Lake Wylie fish and a Santee Cooper fish caught by Frank Drose, Sr. The youngster was using cut herring for bait, and fishing with a Catch the Fever Striper Stealth rod, 15-pound test Slime Line monofilament, a ¾-ounce weight, and a No. 1 circle hook.

NC IS STILL CWD-FREE

North Carolina's deer herd is still free of chronic wasting disease, according to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

The Commission sampled and tested more than 2,300 deer during the 2019-20 season, and none of the samples came back positive for the always-fatal disease that affects whitetails and other members of the cervid family, including elk.

The Commission collected tissue sample across the state from hunters, meat processors, taxidermists, road-kills, and deer showing symptoms of disease. Samples were submitted to a lab in Wisconsin, which supsplied the results.

"CWD is the single biggest concern for deer herds and deer hunting in North America," said Jonathan Shaw, the Commission's deer biologist. "CWD has not been detected in North Carolina, due in part to past and current efforts to limit exposure of our deer and elk herds and environments to the infectious disease agent, prions.

"Despite these efforts, the risk of CWD entering the state cannot be eliminated, but the Commission is committed to protecting the state's deer and elk herds with early detection being paramount to managing the disease if found in North Carolina."

The Commission began testing for CWD in 1999, and surveillance increased after the disease was recorded east of the Mississippi River in 2002. The agency conducted systematic statewide surveillances in 5-year intervals beginning in 2003, with some opportunistic sampling occurring in years in between. In 2018, biologists implemented a revised annual surveillance strategy to improve detection of CWD by increasing the number of samples collected and targeting sources, such as road-kill and older deer, where CWD is more likely to be detected. It has not been detected in more than 13,700 samples collected and tested across the state to date. ▪

NC DEER HARVEST SEES BIG INCREASE

Counties from North Carolina's southern Piedmont led the way as deer hunters took 161,941 whitetails during the 2019-20 season, an increase of 11.3% over the previous season and a 6.7% increase over the three-year average.

Anson County was the top-producing county with 4,166 deer reported, followed by Randolph with 3,668. Three other counties in the region were in the state's top 15: Union County, seventh with 3,309 deer, Stanly County, 10th with 2,920 and Montgomery County, 12th with 2,806.

Jonathan Shaw, deer biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, said the statewide herd is coming closer to desired levels.

"Changes in population demographics can take several years, but early reported harvest and other supporting data indicate we're moving closer towards meeting density, sex ratio and age-structure objectives across most of the state," Shaw said.

The deer harvest was made up of 51.5% antlered bucks and 44.4% does. Most deer were harvested with a gun (76%), followed by blackpowder (10.9%), bow (7.3%) and crossbow (5.8%).

The harvests increased in all zones except for the Northeastern Zone, which saw a 2% decline. In the Western Zone, deer harvests increased by 20.8%; 9.6% in the Northwestern Zone; 8.6% in the Central Zone; and 6.7% in the Southeastern Zone. Deer Zone Map.

Public lands accounted for 3.2% of the total harvest. ▪

2019-20 NC DEER HARVEST

Top 15 counties by total harvest

County	Harvest
1. Anson	4,166
2. Randolph	3,668
3. Wilkes	3,512
4. Halifax	3,448
5. Northampton	3,439
6. Rockingham	3,147
7. Union	3,039
8. Surry	3,020
9. Stokes	3,017
10. Stanly	2,920
11. Moore	2,917
12. Montgomery	2,806
13. Chatham	2,664
14. Beaufort	2,643
15. Ashe	2,607

SPORTSMAN'S BIG GOBBLER GALLERY

Jake Flowers of Goldsboro, N.C., killed this Duplin County gobbler on April 11. It weighed 21 pounds and sported five beards that measured a total of 43 inches. The turkey's spurs measured 1⅝ inches.

Kasey WIlson, a school teacher from Morganton, N.C., killed this monster tom, which weighed 26 pounds, on April 11 in Burke County. The bird had a 10½-inch beard and 1⅜-inch spurs.

To read full stories about any of these trophy gobblers, access **www.carolinasportsman.com** and visit the turkey-hunting section.

Lilly Hammonds, 10, of Wadesboro, N.C., killed this 6-bearded tom on April 10 in Anson County. The beards totaled more than 37 inches in length.

Jody Cabiness of Littleton, N.C., took this Warren County gobbler on April 15. It weighed 20 pounds and sported 3 beards totaling 27½ inches.

Marcus Allen of Roanoke Rapids, N.C., took this 5-bearded gobbler in Northampton County on April 12. Its beards totaled 41 inches.

A DOUBLE TRIPLE

Michael Skipper of Fayetteville, NC., killed a turkey gobbler with three beards on April 11, opening day of North Carolina's spring turkey season. He liked it so much that he killed another bird with three beards the next day. Both were taken in Cumberland County, the first on Fort Bragg, the second on a neighboring tract of private land.

MAIER TO HEAD SCDNR MARINE DIVISION

Phil Maier, former director of the Coastal Reserves and Outreach section for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources' Marine Resources Division, has been named to head that division after serving as active chief for nine months.

Maier was appointed by Robert Boyles, who became SCDNR's director in March. A New Jersey native, he has worked for SCDNR for almost 30 years, in charge of programs ranging from environmental research to sea turtle monitoring to coastal land management. ▪

NEW ARRIVALS!

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By Brian Cope

SEEING RED

REDBREAST SUNFISH ARE AMONG THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF ALL THE BREAM SPECIES, AND THEY'RE THICK IN THE BLACKWATER RIVERS OF BOTH CAROLINAS. HERE'S WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO CATCH THEM.

Across the Carolinas, redbreasts are among the least common of the sunfish species, although in certain bodies of water, they are plentiful. Blackwater rivers and small streams hold good populations.

This time of year, the species' bright, colorful bodies stand out. They can bend a fly rod or cane pole, Bream Buster or ultralight rod like no other panfish. They can pull drag at an alarming rate from a small spinning reel. And they will eat anything. Minnows, crawdads, crickets, meal worms, maggots, catalpa worms, night crawlers, red wigglers, spiders, bugs — if it ends up in the water, a redbreast will eat it.

So an angler targeting redbreasts can have a tackle box just as diverse as a bass fisherman's, with scaled-down versions of a seemingly unlimited array of lures. But they can keep it as simple as a hook and a cork if they want.

Brandon Freeman of Gator's Outdoor Adventures and Guide Service in Florence, S.C., loves to target redbreast in both Carolinas. He splits his time between one-man boats with foot-controlled trolling motors and an aluminum johnboat, and he often "motherships" his one-man boats with his johnboat, deploying the smaller craft when finding smaller creeks and streams to venture up.

The Lumber River is one body of water Freeman favors for redbreasts. Its headwaters are along the border between Hoke and Scotland counties in North Carolina's Sandhills, and it flows for 133 miles, through Robeson County into South Carolina, where it joins the Little Pee Dee River on its trip to Winyah Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

"Lumber River State Park has good access, and just upriver from the landing on State Park Road — where the river makes a 90-degree turn — there's a section of water that juts out, forming kind of a pond," he said. "That's a great spot to look for redbreasts. These fish like moving water, and even though that little pond is out of the main current, the water still moves in there enough. They get a break from the strongest current and can make beds in there."

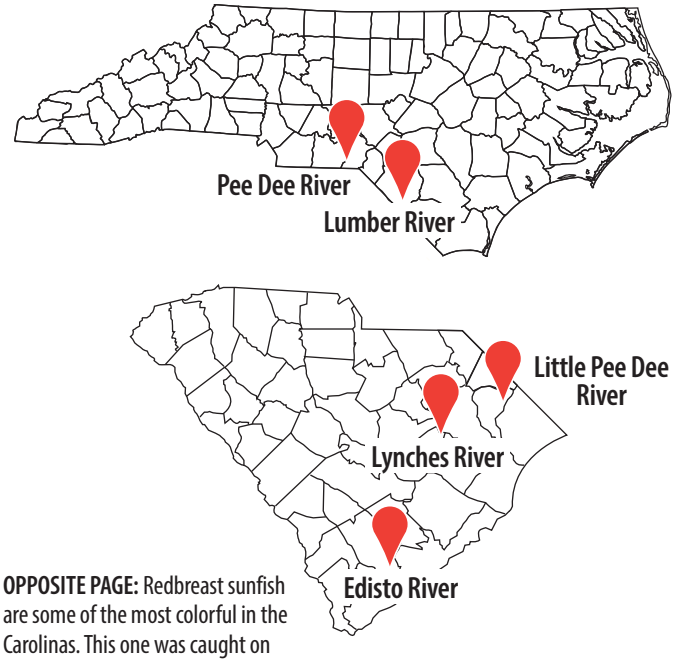
Freeman said this little pond section is very good after rainy weather.

"If you get on the water after a day or two of rainy weather, you'll find lots of runoff trickling in here," he said. "That runoff pushes insects and worms into the river, and the redbreasts will gang up at those spots. That really happens all up and down this river, but this is a good place you can fish out of the main current and still catch plenty of redbreasts."

Freeman said the stretch between the state park and the Tar Landing at the Lumber River Campground, which is on the opposite side of the river from the state park, is full of similar areas.

"Every time there's a 90-degree bend — and there's a lot of them in this stretch — you'll find little juts of calm water

Jeffrey Abney



OPPOSITE PAGE: Redbreast sunfish are some of the most colorful in the Carolinas. This one was caught on the Lumber River by Jeffrey Abney.

near the banks," he said. "Some of them are big pockets. Those areas are gold for catching redbreasts. It's just calmer than the main river. Redbreasts love those areas. It gives them easy access to the main river and the calmer pockets. And there's an eddy line of water where that main current meets the calmer water. Oh man, that slight turmoil created when those waters meet has bugs and insects all tumbling around."

These types of areas are what Freeman looks for on the Lynches River, Little Pee Dee River, the Black River, the Combahee and the Edisto River in South Carolina. He doesn't venture up to North Carolina's Tar or Pamlico Rivers often, but he said the same holds true on those waterways. North Carolina's section of the Pee Dee River is another spot he frequents.

"The Pee Dee River has lots of cuts along the banks, but not many sharp bends. But it does have an oxbow below Blewett Falls (Lake), with a small creek emptying into it. That's Island Creek, and you can get up in there with a small boat and really slay them. Hitchcock Creek is on the other side of the river and has lots of small fingers off of it.

"Really, all the blackwater rivers in the Carolinas are the same way. I find the smaller creeks off the main rivers are full of redbreasts. Even smaller rivers like Lynches and both forks of the Edisto in South Carolina have smaller creeks emptying into them. Where those smaller creeks meet the river, and even a ways up those smaller creeks, (they) are always good redbreast spots.

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Cole Drummond of Florence, S.C., shows off a chunky redbreast caught on the Edisto River.

Steve Drummond

Freeman (843-409-9162) said if any "top secret" exists for catching redbreasts, it's for anglers to fish areas where foam and debris are gathered on any of these rivers.

"You'll mostly find this at the sharp bends in all these rivers, and many are off of the main river in those little pockets," he said. "When debris gathers up, it'll create this white foam on top. It's not a pretty sight at all. Leaves, sticks, even trash like plastic bottles and such will gather up in a big pile, floating on top of the water. Most people avoid it because it's just ugly, but redbreasts love to get under that stuff. When I see one of those, I fish it hard."

As much as Freeman likes fishing these spots, he said it can be difficult. Casting spinners doesn't work because they'll get stuck on top of the debris. The best approach here is live bait under a cork.

"I cast upcurrent of the foam. The water carries the cork to the foam and stops it, but your bait gets swept under the foam. This is deadly. You can limit out in short order on just a few pockets with foam like this. But I normally just catch a few like this and move on," he said.

And one reason he doesn't load up in these holes is because he enjoys catching these fish in other ways. ▪

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.*

CAST WHAT YOU WANT, BUT KEEP IT
CLOSE TO COVER

Guide Brandon Freeman uses 4-pound Slime Line monofilament and a No. 4 or No. 6 hook when targeting redbreast sunfish with live bait. Crickets are his favorite live bait, but he said any kind of worm will work. Small, live crawdads are unbeatable, he said, but not as easy to find as other baits.

"When cleaning these fish, I often check their stomach just to see what they're eating," he said. "Most of them are crammed full of small crawdads. They'll have 8, 10, a dozen in them sometimes — and the crawdads are still whole. You can put out traps and catch them, but honestly, it's just easier to use crickets, and they bite them just fine."

But nothing beats the fun of catching these fish on small lures, Freeman said.

"With an ultralight rod and reel and small spinning lures like Beetle Spins, Mepps spinners, Road Runners and Hoopee Hookers, it's a lot like bass spinning with a spinnerbait," he said. "Small crankbaits like Rebel Wee Craw and Wee Crickhopper are a lot of fun, too."

Whatever you're using for bait or lures, Freeman said it's important to fish them close to cover — the closer the better.

"I swear, I hooked a log really deep with a Wee Craw one time, and a redbreast grabbed it and took off," he said. "You're wasting your time if you're fishing in open water. These fish are tight to tree stumps, the base of standing trees, piles of debris and sunken logs. A lot of folks avoid that stuff because they don't want to get hung up. But if you're not getting hung up from time to time, then you're not fishing close enough to catch redbreasts," he said.

Freeman likes to use lures in dull brown or dark red patterns, and he also uses white or chartreuse lures. He switches back and forth between the dark and bright colors throughout the day unless one is working particularly better than the other.

"With ultralight gear, you won't find a better fighting fish," he said. "And you don't need a big boat or fancy gear to catch them. I fish for everything from small rivers to offshore in my guide business, and to me, you just can't beat redbreast fishing." ▪

Brian Cope

Redbreast sunfish love live bait, but they will readily bite artificials like small crankbaits and tiny in-line and safety pin spinners.

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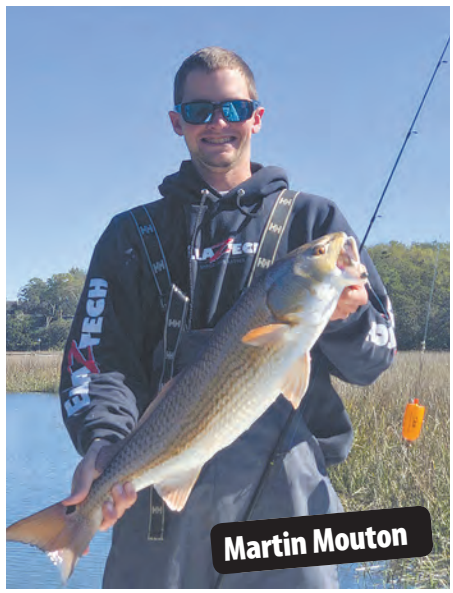
Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK

Cubby Weaver of Georgetown, S.C., caught this 7.2-pound bass in mid-February at Santee Cooper. The fish ate a square-bill crankbait.

Mary Bell from Mt. Airy, N.C., caught and released this 21-inch flounder last fall at Oak Island. The fish hit a Trout Trick.

Bryan Buckner of Saluda, N.C., caught this 4½-pound smallmouth bass while fishing lake Jocassee on Nov. 20, 2019.

Sid Holt of Burlington, N.C., caught this 37-inch red out of Southport, N.C., fishing with Yeah Right Charters last fall.



Martin Mouton caught this nice redfish on Feb. 18 in a marsh near Charleston, S.C.

Shawn Craddock, 10, caught his first red drum last fall, fishing in North Carolina's Pamlico Sound.

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BREAM FISHING REACHES A FEVER PITCH ACROSS SOUTH CAROLINA AS SUMMER ARRIVES, AND MOST LAKES AND RIVERS ARE FULL OF THESE AGGRESSIVE, HARD-FIGHTING FISH. THE KEY TO CATCHING THE BIGGEST AND MOST BREAM IS TARGETING THE RIGHT WATERS WITH THE BEST TECHNIQUES. HERE'S WHERE TO FIND GREAT BREAM FISHING THIS MONTH.

COOPER RIVER >

■ By Terry Madewell

BREAM BUSTING

Terry Madwell

COOPER RIVER

The Cooper River downstream from Lake Moultrie's Pinopolis Dam is a big-bream factory that produces outlandish-sized bluregills and shellcrackers in vast numbers.

Wyn Mullins of North Charleston, S.C., has fished the river for bream for more than 50 years. He said it is influenced by tides, and the key to fishing success is understanding and utilizing rising and falling water to your advantage.

"Bream action is excellent on the Cooper River, with bedding activity around the full moon, but great fishing also exists when fish are not bedding," said Mullins, who looks for bedding fish in at lease a foot or more of water at all times. If the water totally recedes during the low end of the tide, it's not a good bet for bed fishing. He keys on pockets with a sand and gravel substrate, and areas near a small ditch or creek are his favored targets for bed-fishing.

When searching for scattered fish, Mullins keys on deeper water along the main channel and creek intersections.

"They're going to be near or in deeper water and close to nearby aquatic growth that harbors summertime forage," he said. "By June, the river is full of aquatic growth."

Bream are usually found near the mouth of a pocket or creek junction when the tide is low or falling, he said. As the water rises, fish move further back into pockets because of sufficient water depth.

"The important aspect is to remember that tides impact where the fish are found because of changing water depths" he said.

Mullins said bream can be caught on any tide, but his favorite is either side of the high tide. Crickets are his bait of choice for bream and redworms for shellcrackers.

UPPER LAKE MARION

The upper end of Lake Marion is a mecca for bream fishing because of its size and the unique habitat that produces huge bream and giant shellcrackers in almost ridiculous numbers.

Guide Brad Taylor said some of Lake Murray's shellcrackers will bed in June, but he'll catch more fish on rocky humps and ledges.

Terry Madwell

Kevin Davis, the owner of Blacks Camp, said the upper end of Marion is a prime bream and shellcracker target.

"The diversity of cover in the flooded cypress flats provide ideal habitat," he said. "I look for the deeper runs or ditches cutting through these flats and fish the nearby shallow water."

Davis said the best way to find bream in this close-quarters habitat is to stay on the move, fishing various objects at different depths. Targets include cypress and gum trees, weedbeds, stumps, logs and brush. Most fishermen use 10- or 12-foot poles or small spinning or spincast rigs they can cast sidearm under branches.

"It's crucial to accurately place your bait near the target," he said. "Both shellcracker and bluegill will bite live crickets or worms, but to target shellcrackers, use redworms."

Davis doesn't linger in any given spot unless he is catching fish, and this technique consistently produces scattered fish or finding that bed of giant bream or shellcrackers.

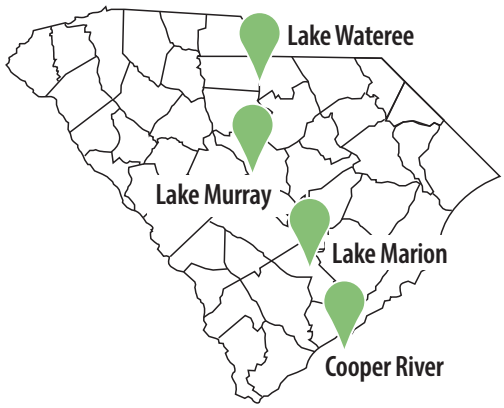
LAKE MURRAY SHELLCRACKERS/BREAM

Bream and shellcrackers are on a strong bite at Lake Murray, giving anglers the opportunity for a double-dip of these two panfish species.

Guide Brad Taylor said the key for finding either species is locating the right habitat, but each have specific preferences at this time of the year.

"Bream and shellcracker prefer sandy or pea-gravel bottoms when bedding," he said. "Shellcrackers may still bed in June but are much more likely found in big numbers on the rocky humps and ledges found throughout the lake."

Bream fishing is excellent whether the fish are bedding or not. Taylor (803-331-1354) said bream prefer shallow water in the back of coves around woody or weedy cover. He said about three days on either side of the full moon is prime time for bream bedding.



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When targeting shellcrackers, he fishes humps and ledges that rise to 6 to 12 feet and drop quickly into deep water. Taylor anchors near the top of the hump or ledge and fan-casts rigs around the boat toward deeper water.

"I use 10-pound test line with a No. 2 Aberdeen gold hook baited with about half a night crawler," he said. "A few inches above I clip a No. 7 split-shot, and above that I place a 2-inch slip float that is allowed to slide completely free. The float reduces snags in the rocks. When I reel the baits in to check them or move, the float will enable the line to rise straight up out of the rocks.

"I use eight rigs, and usually, by the time I get them set out, I'm getting bites if it's going to be a productive place," he said. "Once I get a depth pattern, it generally holds true for that day."

CLARKS HILL LAKE

June is a prime time for bream and shellcrackers on Clarks Hill Lake. Guide Wendell Wilson said fishing for bream and shellcracker is excellent throughout May and June.

"The really cool thing is that it's not difficult to be successful on either of these species, and the gear and tackle requirements are simple," he said.

Wilson (706-283-3336) said bluegill and shellcracker will bed on full moons, but both species are caught around the shoreline throughout the month.

"The bluegill are found on sandy bottom banks, and usually, if you find woody cover along that bank in 2 to 5 feet of water you have a potential hotspot," Wilson said. "Live bait is a killer, but a lightweight fly rod with a popping bug is a load of fun, and catching bream on topwater is exciting and productive.

"To catch shellcracker, I fish a bit deeper, and worms becomes key to consistent success," he said. "Fish those same sandy banks, but back off into 6 to 9 feet of water. Keep the boat in deeper water and cast toward the shoreline. One rig that works great is a to put a split-shot about a foot above a No. 4 wire hook with a gob of redworms on it. Cast it to the bottom with no float and slowly work it in. When you catch one shellcracker, odds are good more are in that immediate area.

"Another tactic that works great is to use a 1/16-ounce crappie-type jig, but you need to thread a piece of night crawler on the hook and cast it out and work it back."

Frankie Jacobs and his wife caught this big stringer of bluegills from Lake Wateree, a real sleeper lake for South Carolina bream.

SLEEPER BREAM LAKE: WATEREE

Lake Wateree is loaded with bream, and they're caught in prolific numbers, but with ample culling, quality fish in limit numbers are caught.

Local angler Frankie Jacobs hunts big bream at Lake Wateree; he said employing a variety of techniques is his key.

"Lake Wateree has some big bream, but you've got to cull to keep a limit of those fish," Jacobs said. "My wife and I often fish together, and she'll use live bait, such as crickets or worms,

while I prefer a small jig and plastic grub."

Jacobs uses a 1/32-ounce jig with a chartreuse, flat-tail grub that's deadly on bedding bream. On 4-pound test line, the jig falls at just the right speed to tempt bigger bream.

But he said live bait is an almost a can't-miss method

"Fish gravel or sandy shorelines in coves and pockets that drop into a few feet of water for bedding fish," Jacobs said. "Cast ahead of the boat around stumps, logs, weeds or docks."

When targeting bream that are not bedding, Jacobs recommends fishing faster and fishing woody and rocky shorelines along deeper water. Using worms is a good idea because a virtually untapped resource of healthy shellcrackers swim around in Lake Wateree.

"The lake is chock full of bream, but bring plenty of crickets, cull early and often, and you can haul a heavy limit home," 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.*

Terry Madwell

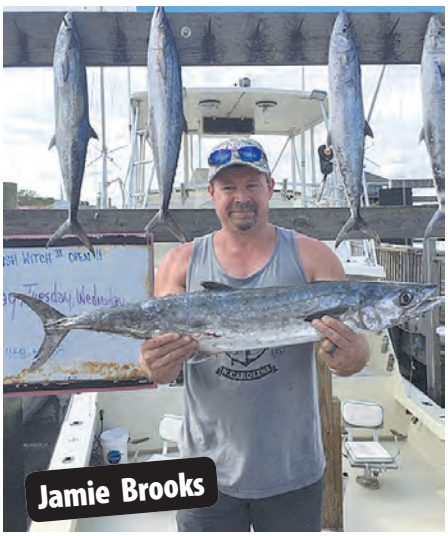
A container of redworms or night crawlers and a simple light-wire hook, split-shot and float, is a great combination for bedding bluegills and shellcrackers across South Carolina this month.

Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK

Taxidermist Bart Johnson proved last fall that he can kill 'em just as well as he can mount 'em. This is his best buck to date from Lancaster County, S.C., a 130-inch trophy.

Matthew Walters, 13, of Goldsboro, N.C., killed this 8-point, 190-pound buck in October 2019.

Dan Failor of Richlands, N.C., with a nice speckled trout caught on a topwater plug and released.



Jamie Brooks of Siler City, N.C., caught this king mackerel fishing with Capt. Carl Snow Jr. out of Carolina Beach.

Helms Cisne, 13, killed his first green-winged teal on Dec. 28, 2019, at Featherhorn Farms near Pinewood, S.C.

Brandon Hodges killed this 475-pound bear in Beaufort County, N.C., on Nov. 9, 2019.

Rebecca Rossi of Cary and her brother-in-law, Raymond Caparoso, had a monster catch of bottomfish out of Hatteras.

The first cast of the day produced this 26-inch flounder for Dea Lail of Icard, N.C.,

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FLAT OUT FINE FOR FLOUNDER

LITTLE RIVER AND BULLS BAY, TWO VERY DIFFERENT ESTUARIES, PROVIDE SOUTH CAROLINA FISHERMEN GREAT OPPORTUNITIES THIS MONTH AS INSHORE WATERS FILL UP WITH HUNGRY FLATFISH.

By Jeff Burleson

South Carolina is known for many things, but for fishermen and fish-eaters, it's the excellent fishing in both freshwater and saltwater environs. And the No. 1 culinary delight is the flaky, white flesh of the flounder.

South Carolina's inshore waters contain prime habitat for flounder, and some zip codes offer a better opportunity to connect with them as spring gives way to summer this month.

From Little River along the North Carolina border to the mouth of the Savannah River along the Georgia border, flounder can be caught most days from nearshore reefs to the westernmost reaches of the freshwater-saltwater dividing line. Some flounder overwinter in inshore waters, but most move to greener pastures when conditions aren't favorable to their needs. They experience seasonal migrations in and out of the estuaries based on weather and environmental factors, but late in spring, inshore waters erupt with flounder.

Beginning in late March, waves of flounder show up at the inlets and in the estuaries when the first few rounds of migratory baitfish arrive. As the waters continue to warm with spring's arrival, more and more slide into the estuaries to feast on the abundant forage. When June appears on the horizon, the annual migration into the estuaries is essentially over, and inshore waters are chocked full of these flatties.

While these flatfish can be found in most inshore waters this time of year, some places provide a better chance to consistently land them on a routine basis. These two are some of the better-known places that provide anglers with a good shot at connecting with these flat, tasty beasts.

LITTLE RIVER AREA >

LITTLE RIVER AREA

The waters around Little River along the North Carolina/South Carolina border are excellent places to consistently catch doormat flounder. Just make sure you stay on the south side of the state line; flounder fishing in North Carolina is closed until mid-August.

Brandon Huskins of Any Tide Fishing Charters fishes out of a shallow-draft skiff to tackle many of the best flounder habitats in this area, from the skinny backcountry to the jetties along the ocean's margin.

"Our flounder fishery is going to be hard pressed to beat. Cherry Grove, Tubbs Inlet, Little River Inlet and the ICW are all flounder hotspots," said Huskins (843-877-7068). "Flounder associate with structure, and we have so much great structure here in different habitats from waterway docks, oyster creeks, and drainages close to flats they love to be in."

Huskins will fish all of these areas in June, but he will concentrate on docks along the ICW on higher water for the biggest fish. The ICW in the Little River area receives a strong influx of nutrient-rich water from the Waccamaw River to the south. The Little River swing bridge is the saltwater-freshwater dividing line; that's where the nutrient-rich freshwater flow meets the saltwater, creating plenty of feeding opportunities for baitfish.

This area is littered with docks and marinas, making for feeding opportunities for flounder and other predators. While it has some oysters and rock piles along its floor, the majority of the ICW in this area contains clean bottom, offering a perfect place for flounder to set up and ambush bait around man-made structures.

Huskins loves these waters for flounder, using live finger mullet or mud minnows on Carolina rigs. When the tide turns around and begins to fall, he will often shift to creek mouths in front of oyster beds.

"Flounder will stage up along creek mouths to catch mullet and other baitfish flushing out of these creeks and flats," he said.

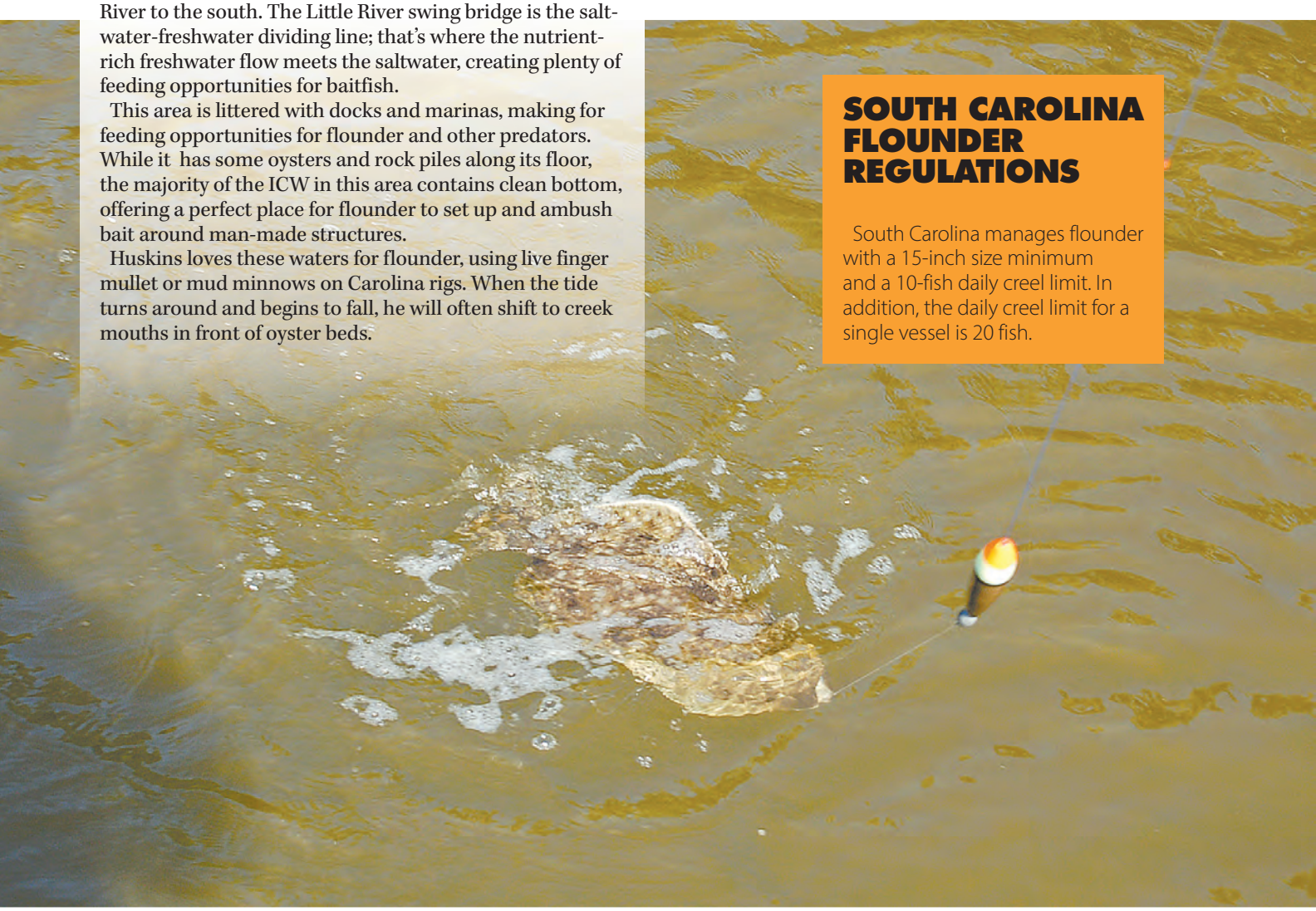
While Huskins likes live bait, his favorite way to target flounder is with artificial shrimp.

"I like to drift with the tide along the narrow creeks and channels, bouncing Vudu Shrimp along the bottom," he said. "You don't miss as many fish with the shrimp, and you can also cover a lot of ground by using artificial lures. Flounder will not turn down a shrimp fluttering along the bottom, either."

One of Huskins' secrets for increasing his chances for a hook-up is a double-rig.

"My secret for catching flounder all year-long is my tandem-rigged bait. I rig two of the same lures on fluorocarbon line staggered 3 or 4 inches apart," he said. "When the first comes across, it gets their attention, and then they will hit the second one as it appears in front of them. You can cover a lot of ground fast, and you will get more strikes and put more fish in the boat by using this method."

BULLS BAY/CAPE ROMAIN AREA >



SOUTH CAROLINA FLOUNDER REGULATIONS

South Carolina manages flounder with a 15-inch size minimum and a 10-fish daily creel limit. In addition, the daily creel limit for a single vessel is 20 fish.

Jeff Burleson

2020 NORTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.
Refer to official fishing regs at NCWRC and NCDMF websites.

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	36″	1/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 (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14″	4/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12″TL	1/day
Snappers: Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahoghany, 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. % 5 bluefish per day for recreational anglers on for-hire or charter vessels; 3 bluefish per day otherwise. +May 1-31, no more than 2 per day per vessel, except for-hire, 4 per vessel per day.

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

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

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

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

2020 SOUTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.
Refer to SCNDR's official fishing regulations pamphlet or www.dnr.sc.gov.

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 (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Tarpon	77″ FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14″	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12″	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahoghany, 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. # Check with the SAFMC at www.safmc.net or 843-571-4366. & Cobia, 1 per person per day up to 6 per boat. Closed May 1-31 south of Jeremy Inlet, 1 per person, up to 3 per boat, after June 1 south of Jeremy Inlet. # 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-breast), 20 crappie
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, redeye, bass%	none largemouth 12″ smallmouth	5 lg/sm/r, 15 spots
Channel catfish	No restrictions	None
Blue catfish	No restrictions=	None=
Flathead catfish	No restrictions	None
Striped bass or hybrid bass	Varies by location&%	Varies by location&%
Mountain Trout	+	5
White bass	None	10 (except Sav. River)
Walleye and sauger+	None	8

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

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

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

% For lake-specific regulations, see the SCDNR's Regulations Digest or visit www.dnr.sc.gov. 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 movement of baitfish into estuaries as the weather warms in the spring is the chief factor in flounder migrations.

BULLS BAY/CAPE ROMAIN AREA

The Cape Romain/Bulls Bay area is between Georgetown and Charleston, an area very unique to South Carolina and to entire coast — its interior estuaries are massive shallows that connect to the Atlantic Ocean. This region provides a primary nursery area for a huge collection of baitfish and gamefish, and it creates a primary feeding center for lots of predators, including speckled trout, redfish, tripletail, tarpon, sharks, sheepshead and doormat flounder.

Rob Beglin of Inshore Xtreme Fishing Charters lives in Pawleys Island but primarily runs his charters out to the Cape Romain/Bulls Bay area.

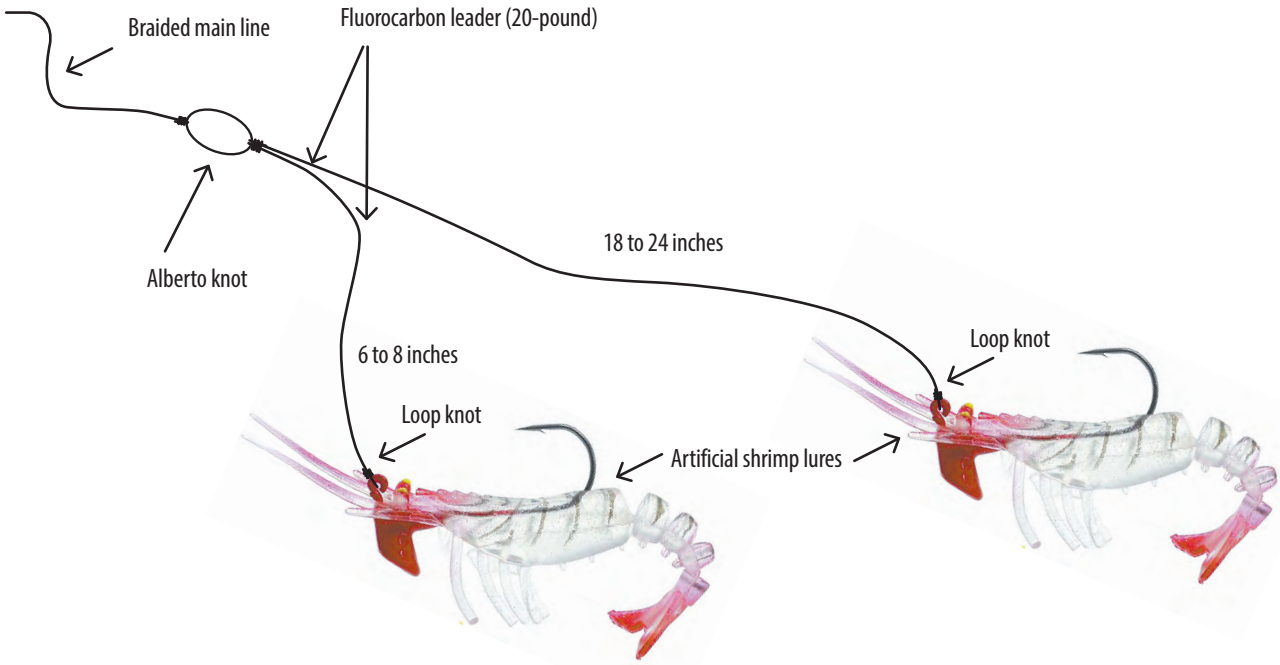
"This estuary is so much different than anywhere else around here because of the marsh layout and the abundance of shallow water, muddy bottom and shell," said Beglin (843-458-1920). "Most of this estuary is shallow, and it can be treacherous for a novice to the area, but it really can hold a lot of fish."

The flounder bite picks up in May and peaks in June for Beglin, who utilizes the same tactics for flounder that he does for redfish.

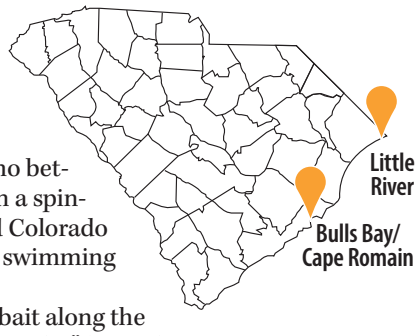
"They will often be set up in the same locations and taking advantage of the same conditions," he said. "We catch just as many flounder as reds on many days."

Since the estuary is broad and shallow, the falling tide is Beglin's favorite time to fish because bait and flounder get bunched together in the same areas. The smaller channels and creek mouths adjacent to structure are perfect places to find these fish.

TANDEM SHRIMP RIG



Flounder are sight-feeders, so finding the clearest water in an area will help anglers get more looks for their baits and lures.



"They don't have any other choice but to sit either in the center of the creek mouth or just outside it," he said.

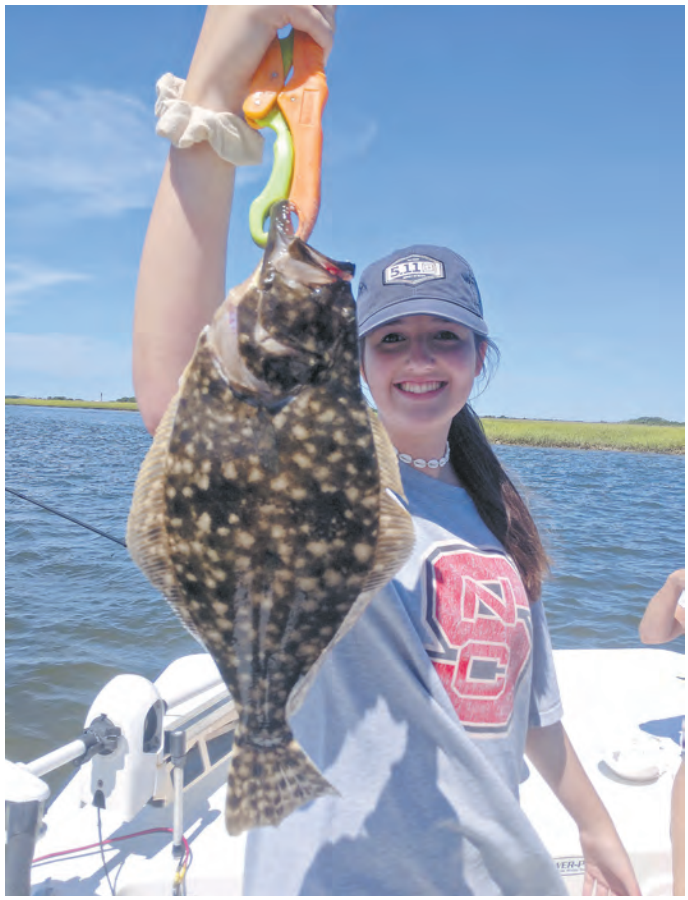
Beglin believes there's no better lure for flounder than a spinnerbait with a No. 4 gold Colorado blade and a 4-inch Gulp swimming mullet trailer.

"I slow-roll the spinnerbait along the bottom, and they can't stand it," he said.

Since flounder rely heavily on their eyesight for feeding, clear water is a bonus, and the wind can have a dramatic effect of the fishing conditions in the Cape Romain/Bulls Bay estuaries. Beglin likes a south to southeast wind because it keeps water in the bay and usually makes for good visibility.

"A southwest wind will blow the water out, and anything from the north will muddy the water up so much you can't see 3 inches in the water. The south to southeast wind is the best option for fishing this area," he said. ▪

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



Jeff Wolfe

EVOLVED PRO-GRO FOOD-PLOT SEED

Sportsmen who are committed to improving the land where they hunt through food plots aren't necessarily the best farmers, so every little bit of help they can get is great.

That's where Evolved's new Pro-Gro food-plot seeds come in. The proprietary, bio-stimulant seed-coating process helps produce bigger roots that grow deeper, resulting in stronger plants that can withstand weather extremes. The seed can adjust to a variety of soil conditions, and the coating ensures that each seed can reach its potential. The result? Larger plants and more forage per acre, which means more forage for deer to eat and bigger, healthier animals.

New for 2020 are five different seed mixes: Rack 'Em Raddish (2-pound bag), Sugar Beets & Bulbs (2-pound bag), Turnip (2½-pound bag), Mean Bean (10-pound bag) and Clover (2- and 4-pound bags).

MSRP: $19.99 to $34.99

For more info, visit: evolved.com.

MILLENNIUM SPYDERLOK ROD TREE

Millennium Marine's Spyderlok Rod Tree is made for fishermen who want to separate baits they're trolling or drifting.

The Rod Tree, made from anodized aluminum with stainless steel hardware, features three rod holders with oversized tubes for quick rod removal, gimbals in the bottom to prevent the rod from turning or twisting, and a durable rubber boat to protect rod handles.

The Rod Tree swivels 360 degrees horizontally and 180 degrees vertically. Anglers can adjust and position the rod holders as needed to spread their baits. A rod tree on each side of the bow or stern will allow six baits or lures to be positioned to run at different distances from the boat, and/or at different depths. It mounts on a base-plate or track system, and the mounting plate is flush with the carpet, preventing any stubbed toes.

Two knobs allow for easy removal or adjustment of individual rod holders.

The Rod Tree measures 31x6.5x30.

MSRP: $199.99.

For more info, visit: productwebsite.com.

BLACKJACK 256 COASTAL

BlackJack Boats has added a new center console model to it 2020 line, the 256 Coastal, which is sure to be a hit among inshore and nearshore fishermen.

Combining elements of offshore boats and bay boats, the 256 Coastal measures 25-foot-6, with a deeper casting deck and open stern deck to increase inshore fishability without sacrificing the ability to head offshore for bluewater battles.

The 256 Coastal has an 8-foot-6 beam and drafts 16 to 18 inches of water. It is rated for 400 HP, has an 80-gallon fuel capacity and weighs 2,900 pounds.

A 75-quart YETI cooler is the forward console seat, and the 256 Coastal has three fish boxes, a fiberglass leaning post, four rod-holders, storage and livewell.

Inshore fishermen will love the 6-gauge trolling motor harness, plus an insulated forward baitwell with a re-circulator and fill.

For more info, visit: blackjackboats.com

SUPER GROUPER

By Craig Holt

ONE OF NORTH CAROLNA'S FAVORITE BOTTOMFISH TAKES CENTER STAGE FOR MANY OFFSHORE ANGLERS THIS MONTH. HERE'S HOW ONE OF THE BEST PUTS THESE BIG BATTLERS IN THE BOAT.

Anthony Ng caught these two huge snowy grouper in 700 feet of water.

Because they are such a wonderful-tasting fish,

GROUPER ARE HIGHLY SOUGHT-AFTER, so coveted that fisheries managers restrict their catches.

Anthony Ng, 56, a Winterville, N.C. native, has fished for groupers with his brother, Alex, for more than 30 years.

"At first, we grouper fished just for fun," said Ng. "We've always liked taking friends grouper fishing, although I guided for a while. Alex and I have offshore fished since the early '80s.

"We had a passion for bottom-fishing because it's steady action, doesn't require trolling, and is anticipation friendly."

Ng bought a business that manufactured electric reels — Precision Auto Reels — in the early 1990s and sold it six years ago. The brothers soon stopped guiding and bought commercial fishing licenses. Marine fuel is costly, and selling fish helps offset expenses.

When Ng leaves Beaufort Inlet in his 30-foot center-console boat, he heads for the closest of his GPS fishing waypoints, in about 80 to 90 feet of water.

"First stop are ledges 20 miles out" Ng said. "We catch snowy groupers at 700 feet. Where we fish depends on what we're after, but many are at the same places. If the first stop doesn't work out, we move a little deeper."

When the Ngs fish relatively shallow hot spots, they anchor, then bait and drop circle hooks. Obviously, in 700-feet depths, anchors won't work, so they drift across prime spots.

For fish that may weigh 20 to 70 pounds, Ng prefers 6-foot rods with strong backbones and fast actions.

"Originally, we used Penn 4/0 113HN reels, but equipment has gotten better over the years," Anthony said. "Penn makes good Baja reels. Normally we spool 100- to 130-pound braid main line tied to (triple-swivel) fish-finder rigs."

Scamps are just one of many species of grouper that inhabit the waters off North Carolina. They can be caught as shallow as 80 feet.

Jerry Dilsaver

Robert Dean caught this state-record red grouper off Carolina Beach in 2017. It weighed 35 pounds, 11 ounces.

PUNCH HOLE, SAVE FISH, AVOID A TICKET

Catching bottomfish may create a problem for anglers if individual fish don't measure up to the size minimums or you have a limit of one species.

When fish are hauled up from deep water, their swim bladders expand, often pushing their stomachs out of their mouths and causing their eyes to bulge. They can't live long in this condition, so a too-small or over-the-limit fish needs to be returned to the water quickly as possible.

The best way to deflate a member of the grouper/snapper complex family is to put the fish on its side — in the shade and on a towel. About halfway to the tail and below its pectoral fin, scrape off a scale, and with a sharp, steel object — a turkey injector works — carefully puncture a hole in the swim bladder. Open the hole and press down on the bladder. Air should escape.

As soon as air stops, put the fish back in the water and move it back and forth to push water through its gills. It should become lively and swim away. ▪

SUPER GROUPER

Ng calls his favorite double-dropper set-up a "hi-lo" rig, with a 2-foot "hi" dropper line and 10/0 to 11/0 circle hook tied to a three-way swivel's middle eye. Four feet of 100- to 125-pound mono leader is tied from the bottom eye to a second three-way swivel, then a 3-foot dropper line and circle hook to the side. Six inches of 50-pound leader is tied to the bottom swivel eye then to a sinker: a 4-ounce bank sinker in shallow water, a 20-ounce sinker in medium depths and 4 to 5 pounds at extreme depths.

"If the weight gets hung, you can break it off without losing the entire rig," Ng said.

Baits may include live or dead menhaden with hooks impaled in bone, Boston mackerel, sardines, pinfish, croakers and spots.

"You've got to know when to start cranking," Ng said. "But you can't yank back on a circle hook; just keep steady pressure."

If a big grouper is hooked but swims into a hole, Ng often puts the reel into free spool; the fish may swim out. If it doesn't, plucking the line like a guitar string may make it seek open water.

Depth isn't the only key to success.

"I look at my depth finder to see the bottom and spot baitfish or target fish," he said. "We also fish ledges and wrecks."

Most people consider a ledge to be a rock outcropping or a cliff wall, but to saltwater anglers, ledges are small changes in the bottom contour, often only a foot or two.

Strong tackle is important. Grouper fishing along the continental shelf isn't for those without strong backs, legs and arms who use stand-up equipment. But cranking 50, 60 or 70 pounds of strong, aggravated fish to the surface exhausts most sturdy men after one tussle.

The Ngs turned years ago to electric reels, which can be plugged in to electrical outlets below the gunwales on specially equipped boats.

"The first thing a grouper will do is dive to get underneath something or into a hole — a rock, an outcrop or in a wreck," Ng said. "You've got to turn his head up, away from that stuff."

The "pump-and-crank" method, slowly pulling the rod tip up then lowering it as the reel turns, is effective.

"The first 5 to 8 feet are most critical, because big fish are full of energy," he said. "An electric reel doesn't stop (putting pressure on a fish). You can't allow him to turn, or he'll cut you off."

Popular deep structure outside Morehead City include 210, 240, East and 1700 Rocks and sunken wrecks such as the Atlas Tanker and Shad Boat.

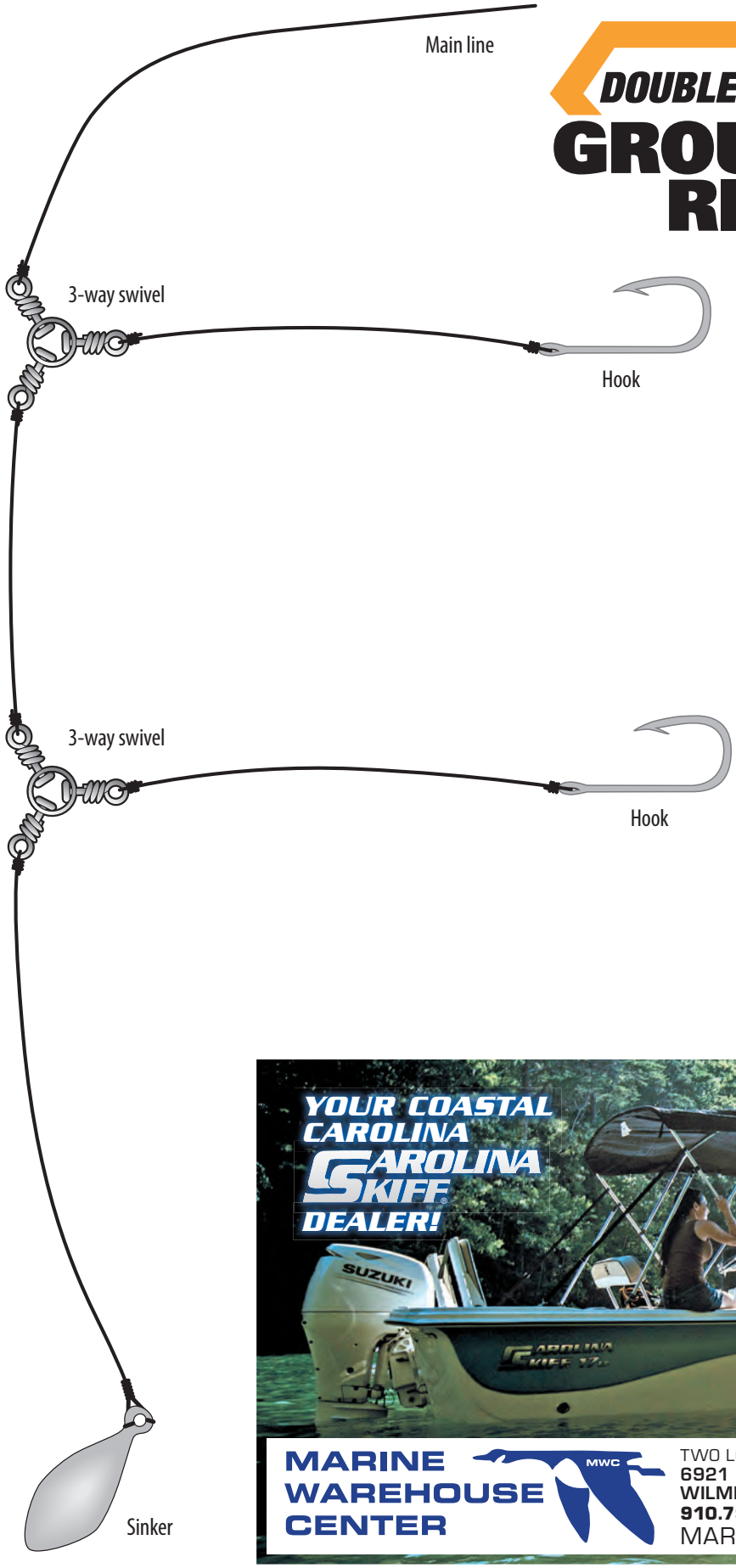
However, these places are hit hard by anglers. Ng has many small ledges marked in his GPS unit that hold snapper-grouper complex bottomfish.

It's counterintuitive, but Ng also finds grouper by watching baitfish activity on the surface.

Teddy and Joseph Wingfield caught these scamp grouper off North Carolina's coast. The bigger fish, caught by 9-year-old Teddy, weighed 32 pounds and is the state record. **RIGHT:** Gag grouper are one of the most widely distributed grouper across the south Atlantic.

Brian Carroll

DOUBLE-DROP GROUPER RIG



Black's Camp
on the
Santee Cooper Lake System

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"When we go from one spot to another, we're always looking for baitfish," Ng said. "Deep fish sometimes come to the surface and vice versa. Baitfish draw them up. Places that hold king mackerel and amberjack also hold grouper. Fuzzy marks on my depth finder show schools of baitfish. Solid blips may be groupers; they're gonna be close to baits."

Many anglers are familiar with large groupers — red, black, gag, scamp, tiger, yellowfin and yellowmouth. Snowy groupers are a more unusual catch because it takes deeper baits to reach their habitat. The Ngs also catch amberjack and smaller bottomfish such as grunts, beeliners and porgies, especially at ledges and wrecks.

The recreational grouper season in North Carolina begins May 1 and runs through the end of December.

While anchored and waiting for bites, Ng often casts free-line live baits with medium-action rods and 4000 Series spinning reels.

"We sometimes catch wahoo, king mackerel and dolphin, and once a white marlin," he said. "A 65-pound wahoo once hit a (bottomfish bait) on the drop."

Ng's best gag grouper weighed 68 pounds, his best snowy 56, his biggest red 32 and his best scamp 25 pounds. ▪

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

GINGER/ONION GROUPER

Groupers provide some of the best table fare, and angler Anthony Ng has a favorite recipe.

"I call it 3-G grouper," he said. "The 'G' stands for ginger, green onion and grouper."

First, cut grouper fillets and refrigerate them, sealed in a microwaveable bowl. Then, chop up green onions and mix in minced ginger. Cook those two ingredients in peanut oil and add salt for flavor, then pour in a bowl, seal and refrigerate.

Next, pour the chopped green onions and minced ginger sauce over the grouper, cover with wax paper and microwave for five to seven minutes.

"This recipe also works great for triggerfish," Ng said. "You also can bake it in the oven, grill it or stir fry grouper cut in chunks. Grouper has no fish smell, and there aren't any blood streaks to remove." ▪

JUST CATTING AROUND

TO TARGET BIG BLUES AND FLATHEADS, FIND PLACES ON LAKE MOULTRIE WHERE YOU CAN INTERCEPT FISH MOVING FROM THE SHALLOWS WHERE THEY FEED BACK TO DEEPER WATER.

By Phillip Gentry

Phillip Gentry

Paul Blackwell will be the first to admit that fishing for blue catfish can be tough on any lake across the Carolinas during the prespawn and spawn, but he is also the first to tell you that good catches of trophy sized blues are a real possibility if you pay attention to daily movements of the fish.

"It's all about looking for their daily pattern," said Blackwell. "You've got to be versatile and let the catfish show you what they want."

Blackwell, who runs Fish-On Guide Service on Lake Moultrie, one of South Carolina's two Santee Cooper lakes, starts his summer days anchored from daylight until the sun gets up, roughly 8 a.m. He's looking for blue catfish that have moved into the shallows overnight to feed. He's usually anchored in the back of a creek or ditch, looking to catch a fish or two on that first pass back out to open water.

"After that first stop, it's time to drop the trolling motor and start pulling baits. The idea is to stay between the catfish and the baitfish," he said.

The tactic is often referred to as drifting, but Blackwell only goes with the wind on windy days when he can't go against it with his trolling motor. His typical setup is six heavy action rods rigged with his own variation of the tried-and-true Santee drift rig.

"I run two rods with a 2-foot leader between a 2-ounce, Dirty South drifting weight and the 5/0 to 8/0 circle hook," he said. "Then, I'm going to run two more rods with a 2½-foot leader, and the final two rods will have a 3-foot leader between the weight and the hook."

Blackwell rigs a 3-inch pegged float between the weight and the hook and also rigs a small Versa-rattle between the cork and hook. To spread his lines out while pulling them behind his boat, he uses planer boards on at least the four outer lines.

"I don't drift because it's too hard to control where I'm fishing just going with the wind," he said. "I use the trolling motor so I can hit my specific marks: contour lines, humps and the edges of flats. I'm a shallow-water fisherman; everyone knows that. I'm going to be in less than 20 feet of water the whole time."

Paul Blackwell uses six rods when trolling and will vary the lengths of the leader to determine if it's a tight-to-bottom or suspend-up day for fish.

Phillip Gentry

DESTINATION INFORMATION

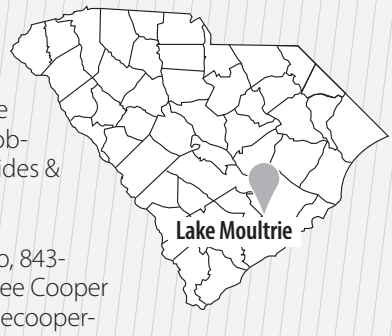
HOW TO GET THERE — Lake Moultrie is north of I-26 and east of I-95, between Charleston and Columbia. The two interstates provide access to fishing camps and boat ramps. For complete details visit www.santeecoopercountry.org.

BEST TECHNIQUES — At first light, anchor and fish cut white perch on Santee rigs for blue catfish, targeting fish around ditches leading from shallow water back to deep water. Later in the day, drift and target channel edges, humps, dropoffs, stumps and channel edges. Fish at night for flatheads on the edges of shallow flats where bream beds are found.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Paul Blackwell, Fish-On Guide Service, 864-202-3095, www.fish-onguideservicellc.com; Bobby Winters, Bob's Guide Service Encore, 843-753-3343, www.bobsguideserviceencore.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Blacks Camp, 843-753-2231, www.blackscamp.com; Santee Cooper Country, 803-854-2131, www.fishsanteecoopercountry.com.

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



Blackwell said in the early summer, blue catfish start to scatter out during the daytime. It's a prespawn pattern as catfish begin searching for locations to spawn. Because the fish are spread out, it can make fishing more difficult. That's why he wants to cover as much productive water as he can in a day's fishing.

Blackwell believes that areas that hold a lot of baitfish will only produce smaller blues, 20 pounds or less. For trophy fish, he's had better experience with areas that hold smaller pods of bait that are dispersed over a 2- to 5-acre area.

"I don't look for fish on the graph when I'm deciding where to fish," he said. "To me, how the bait is reacting will tell me what I need to know about the catfish. Occasionally, I'll mark a big fish on the graph, but that just tells me I'm doing the right thing by following the bait ahead of the catfish."

With his boat between the bait and the catfish, Blackwell starts looking for places the blue catfish are likely to pick as holding areas: humps, channel edges, drop-offs, stumps or the edge of a larger flat. That's where he's going to drag his baits.

Blackwell's basic drift rig is a 2-ounce drift weight, a 2- to 3-foot leader, a pegged cork, a Versa-rattle and a large, wide-gap circle hook.

Phillip Gentry

Blackwell said white perch is, hands-down, his best summer bait. He cuts them into two different pieces to tempt the catfish into taking the bait.

"I have two main cuts," he said. "One is what I call a 'catfish sandwich', and the other is what I call a 'double meat sandwich.'"

The sandwich cut removes one filet of any sized white perch, then cuts through the backbone and removes the bone from the carcass. The result is the head with one fillet left attached.

The double-meat sandwich is a perch with the backbone removed, leaving two fillets attached to the head that easily flap in the current as the boat moves.

"I really like the looks of the bait moving through the water," he said. "It's not stiff; it flaps and waves in the water, and it puts out a lot of scent."

Although Lake Moultrie is his home base, Blackwell said this is the way he would fish on any lake in either Carolina.

"I'm in the right areas. I'm in the right water depth, and I'm between the bait and the catfish," he said. "Sooner or later, that bait will connect with a trophy blue catfish, then it's 'Fish on!'"

Blackwell's final thought is to urge catfish anglers to release these big catfish, especially right before the spawning season. He's not opposed to taking plenty of photos to preserve the memories and has on occasion even been known to get in the water to see a big fish off to make sure it survives to fight another day. ▪

Phillip Gentry *of Waterloo, S.C., is host of "The Outdoor Show," a weekly radio podcast that can be seen at www.pgandboatgirl.com.*

FISHING THIRD SHIFT FOR FLATHEADS

Everything Paul Blackwell does to catch blue catfish this month goes right out the window when he's fishing for flathead catfish. His strategy, tactics, baits and even his mindset is exactly opposite when he's looking for big, yellow catfish.

"I fish entirely at night when I'm after flatheads," he said. "I'm also going to spot-fish for them. I'm anchoring up in an area I feel like they'll be feeding, and I'm going to stay put a while."

Blackwell advises that flatheads, especially on his home lake, Lake Moultrie, are very territorial. Based on his experience and by reviewing topo maps of the lake's floor, he's going to zone in on what he refers to as good "home spots."

"I start fishing about an hour after dark, and I'm going to go anchor in a flathead's home area," he said. "If you are looking at a lake map, that's going to be between a good stump or logjam and a shallow area where he will be feeding at night."

During the summer, flatheads key on bream beds for feeding. If a creek channel, ditch, culvert or other pathway leads from heavy cover to a shallow flat where you would be likely to find bream spawning, it's probably a decent bet to hold a big flathead catfish.

Blackwell's typical setup is six Big Cat Fever rods fan-cast around his boat. He likes to fish around wood, rock, concrete or other big pieces of cover that provide a holding area on one side and a buffet of live bait on the other. He will anchor the boat at both ends and set up between the two, right on the travel corridor.

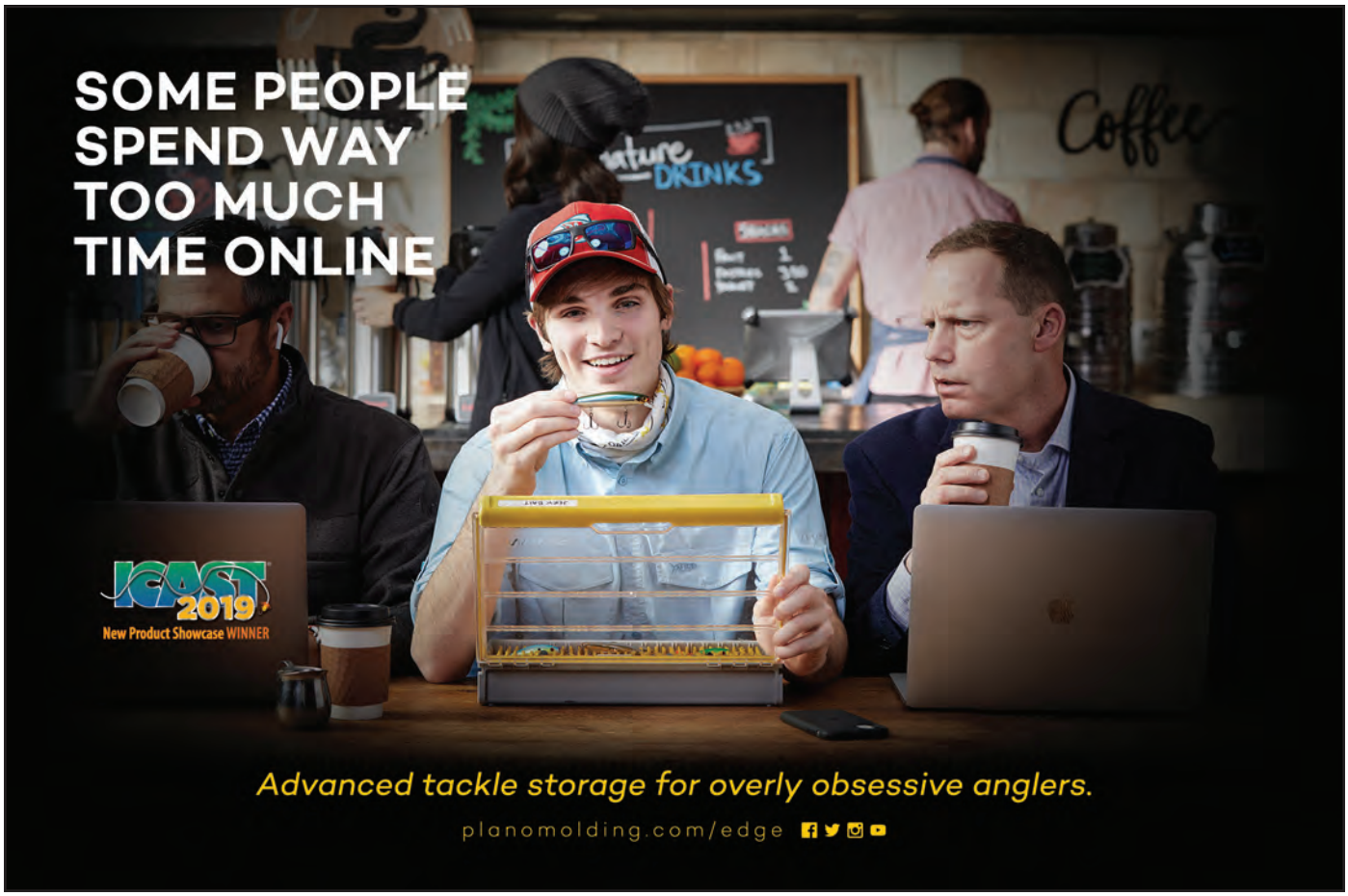
Paul Blackwell's tactics for flathead catfish are nearly the opposite of his blue catfish tactics in June.

Paul Blackwell

Blackwell will commit an hour-and-a-half to his initial spot, again usually starting around 9 p.m., and then go from there to another similar setup.

"You can usually find these areas in the backs of creeks," he said. "Look for ditches and then back out and look for cover, and you're probably in a decent spot."

That's how he works the entire third shift; each spot gets between an hour to 90 minutes before he's on to the next one. ▪



Blue catfish on Kerr Lake will be moving to their summer haunts in June, hanging around ledges and points along the main channel.

Austin Sartin

KERR'S BIG BLUES
are heading for deeper ledges, points

For anglers itching to get out on the water in June, Kerr Lake on the North Carolina/Virginia border could be just what the doctor ordered.

On the 49,500-acre reservoir, big blue catfish will be following a climate that's running ahead of schedule and nestle into their summer routine of chasing shad along the main-lake channel. Michael Lawrence, director of the Ice Bowl Catfish Tournament — held annually at Kerr —will be there to get the drop on them.

"We had such a mild winter," said Lawrence, of Scottsburg, Va. "The water temperature is usually not as warm as it is right now, and June will probably be a little warmer than usual, too. I think you'll see people covering water in the actual lake, instead of in the creeks, as the blues look for cooler water."

According to Lawrence, anglers will find larger fish on deep-water ledges along the main channel and points. On the lower end of the lake, where the water is deeper, the target depth can range from 35 to 40 feet deep. On the shallower, upper end, an angler should be looking at 18 to 25 feet. In the morning, fish are apt to be found on the shallower end of the spectrum as they move up points and on top of the ledges they will later fall into as temperatures rise.

"A ledge that has a steep transition and cover like logs or stumps on the deeper side is a good place to look," Lawrence said. "Fish hang around deep cover during the daytime. If conditions are fairly calm, drifting or power-drifting is a good way to cover the area. If it's not, anchoring up on the edge is an effective way to fish the shallow and deeper side of the ledge at the same time. You can catch fish as they are transitioning depths."

Lawrence favors 30-pound mono main-line and an 18- to 24-inch leader of 60-pound mono for his spread of rods in most scenarios, but will bump it up a bit if the cover is particularly heavy. Santee rigs will be presenting a bait of cut gizzard shad, but occasionally carp filets are on the menu. Depending on its size, the bait will be pinned to an 8/0 to 12/0 circle hook. Lawrence prefers smaller baits for finicky biters when the water warms. A 1- to 2-ounce sliding sinker above the swivel will keep the rig on the bottom, while a cigar float pegged 6 to 8 inches above the hook on the 18- to 24-inch leader will keep the offering from dragging in the mud. ▪

— Dusty Wilson

GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Thinning timber to get sunlight to the forest floor will increase the amount of ground-level browse available to wildlife.

jeff Burleson

FOREST MANAGEMENT CAN BE BENEFICIAL TO WILDLIFE

GROUND-LEVEL FORAGE IS PROBABLE PRODUCT OF TIMBER THINNING

Deer and other wildlife species need nutrition 365 days a year, plus an additional day in 2020 because of leap year.

Rural lands across North Carolina and South Carolina remain in a semi-natural condition. Outside of the city and suburban development lies rural Carolina, bursting with agriculture fields and rolling pastures. But rural areas are glued together with forests of various age, quality and species composition. These forests need ongoing management to encourage fiber appreciation and to promote wildlife forage availability.

Even though development and agriculture operations stand out, the states' land mass is dominated by forested land cover. In fact, 67% of South Carolina is considered forested, and North Carolina is not far behind at 60%.

Wildlife intermingles in these rural and suburban habitats to make a living, utilizing both the forested and non-forested components. Of course, wildlife will venture into the open grounds to feed, but the forested regions are a critical part of the landscape for their daily survival needs. Not only does wildlife need forests for escape cover, forested sites provide a mechanism for maintaining protected feeding opportunities.

FOOD IN FORESTS

Food availability in forests is extremely variable, depending on the soil type, drainage type, species diversity and age distribution. Under the right conditions, forage availability within forested land cover can provide wildlife with excellent opportunities to sustain a healthy lifestyle. However, accessible ground forage can decline as canopy cover closes. Sunlight is vital to all plants and will be absent below the canopy when the crown of dominant and mid-story trees monopolizes available beams of light.

Accessible forage availability in the understory can decline in any forest due to canopy closure, but it is highly likely in pine-dominated landscapes in pine monocultures. The Carolinas' forested land cover is dominated by pine forests, since most clear-cut forests are replanted in loblolly and longleaf pine seedlings soon after cutting. The growth rate and return on investment for planted pine is much greater than any other planted species in the Southeast. As a result, pine-dominated forests will have declines in forage availability on the ground level. And much of the forested region of the Carolinas are heavy to pine.

UNDERSTORY FOOD

A reduction in understory can be a benefit for hunters, providing open woodland vistas. But a more-developed understory will provide wildlife with natural foods and low-level ground cover as well.

Luckily, forestland investors who follow routine pineland management activities

>

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.*

will often encourage palatable understory growth as an indirect effect. Selective harvesting or thinning operations are part of any forest-management plan and will instantly open the canopy to allow sunlight to penetrate to the forest floor. Sunlight penetration and disturbances along the forest floor will encourage growth of understory species.

THINNING PINE STANDS

Thinning operations on pine-dominated forests are typically scheduled in two or three intervals. The first thinning operations begin when the trees are approximately 12 to 18 years old; the second thinning will occur six to eight years later. During each thinning, approximately one-third of the total volume is removed evenly to funnel nutrients and sunlight to the residual stems. As a result, the canopy is opened and sunlight filters to the forest floor. Mid-story hardwoods that lack beneficial wildlife value can also be removed at this time, too. Mid-story trees will grasp sunlight and shade out areas below as well.

During the thinning operation, the large machinery required to remove the timber causes enough disturbance along the ground to allow germination of understory plants. A follow-up prescribed burn can also aid and speed up forage production in the understory.

When pine plantation owners avoid routine thinning, the forage base within the understory can be diminished and completely absent on some sites. Routine thinning on pine sites will encourage understory growth that will produce cover and food to benefit deer, turkey and a long list of small game species.

Pine plantations are the primary forest type where understory forage can vanish. Yet hardwood stands can also benefit from selective harvests or thinning operations. Hardwood thinning can produce the same effect by opening the canopy layer to encourage understory browse. Encouraging sunlight to the forest floor can benefit both hardwood, pine-dominated and mixed stands.

HARDWOOD SUN HOGS

Crown closure in hardwood stands can be more dramatic than in pine stands. Hardwoods are more likely to develop large crowns, with towering branches extending as far as 30 feet away from the trunk. They can be major sun hogs.

When these large crowns are from white oak and red oak trees, the acorn production can be a major benefit to deer and other wildlife; a heavy thinning may not be preferred on stands dominated by acorn producers. But quite often, many of these hardwood stands are not dominated by wildlife-preferred, mast-producing trees.

Stands are usually mixed stands, with large components of pine available as co-dominant species, with gum, beech, maple and poplars making up the hardwood component. Thinning in these stands dominated by hardwoods and pine-hardwood mixes can always be beneficial to wildlife on the ground level.

The primary focus of forest-management tactics may be to promote fiber production and boost the rate of return. But routine thinning and prescribed fire on both hardwood and pine stands will encourage wildlife habitat improvement through understory cover and forage production. ▪

BOOST SUMMER PERENNIAL GROWTH

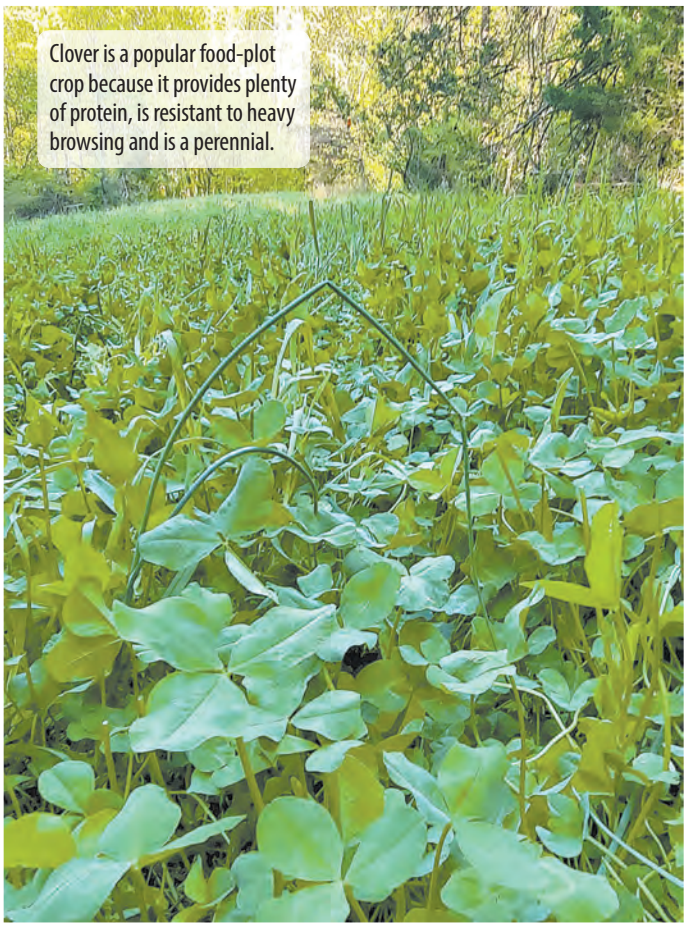
Perennial plots are some of the rainmakers for properties big and small, and the biggest perennial plot utilized for wildlife is undoubtedly white clover. Deer and other wildlife visit these plots on a routine basis to fulfill their daily nutritional intake.

Why wouldn't they?

White clover is rich in digestible protein and is resistant to heavy browsing. Clover will regenerate quickly when sunlight, adequate moisture and soil nutrients are available. And certain soil elements may need replenishment during times of need.

Perennial plots such as clover can benefit from nutrient supplements in summer to give these plots a growth boost. Since clover is a nitrogen fixator, nitrogen does not need to be added to these plants. But phosphorus and potassium supplements will directly benefit clover and other perennial plots in summer, especially when growth has showed a decrease in production.

As a part of the overall management regime, triple super-phosphate (0-46-0) and potash (0-0-60) can be added simultaneously during the summer to boost production. For the best results, choose days to apply supplements when adequate soil moisture is present around normal rainfall periods to allow plants to soak up the fresh nutrient boosts. ▪



Clover is a popular food-plot crop because it provides plenty of protein, is resistant to heavy browsing and is a perennial.

Andrew Kibler

Phillip Gentry

Kayaking in the ocean requires some preparation and precaution, but the reward is sometimes a battle with a really big fish.

Phillip Gentry

THE OCEAN BECKONS

WITH A LITTLE PREPARATION, YOU CAN FISH THE BIG WATER

Kayak anglers, like old sailors from a 1970s pop song, often yearn for the open ocean. And it's that time of year.

Bottomfish are moving from deeper, offshore waters to nearshore waters. and migratory fish are starting to make their way north or south. If you intend to put the US of A in your rear-view mirror and England off your bow — hopefully, way off your bow — there are a few things to consider to make it safely to and from open water.

First and foremost, open saltwater in both Carolinas means more current, more wind, more tide and possibly more and definitely bigger powerboat traffic than anywhere else. Open water should not be a solo trip, and beginners should seek the company of experienced paddlers to learn the ropes.

When launching and landing through the surf or into an inlet on the edge of the surf, conditions can change drastically between sunrise, when waters are typically calm, and the afternoon when wind and tides have changed. Spend some time studying tide and wind for the best locations to launch and land. Inlets frequently provide more protection than a heavy surf landing on the beach.

Like anywhere else, fishing tackle will be dictated by the species you hope or expect to catch. You may need substantially heavier tackle, particularly leaders, than you would use inshore. Nearshore fishing also provides an opportunity to catch numerous bottomfish that may not be of tremendous size, so don't burden yourself with overly heavy tackle if you're out to catch whiting and flounder.

STAY PROTECTED

Sun protection on a June day becomes a top priority, as there's no other protection from the sun than what you bring. Clothing has become the preferred protection over sunscreen, with today's lightweight, breathable SPF built-in fabrics.

Hydration is also at the top of the list. Water doesn't have to be kept cold to keep you hydrated, and having a large container — or several smaller containers — of fresh water tucked away in a storage space can be a lifesaver, especially if you find yourself on the water longer than anticipated.

Both Carolinas require that a Type I, II, or III personal flotation device be accessible to kayakers over the age of 12 (SC) and 13 (NC). Those under-age must wear the device. The best advice for any kayak angler at any time is to wear an approved PFD, period. Inflatable models must be worn to be considered approved devices but also offer comfortable, restriction free movement. ▪

Phillip Gentry *of Waterloo, S.C., is host of "The Outdoor Show," a weekly radio podcast that can be seen at www.pgandboatgirl.com.*

ANCHOR IN OPEN WATER

Fishing nearshore waters in the Carolinas ranges from being an exciting way to fish to a real pain in the butt to downright dangerous. In brief, paddling in or even within sight of the open ocean is not for novices, nor for experienced solo paddlers.

One of the biggest issues is current, which can range from mild to raging depending on things like tides and wind. You either go with the flow or anchor down and fish in it. Going with the flow is much easier and certainly less gear-intensive, but it can also land you further from shore or further down the beach than you planned to be.

To fish a stationary location, anchoring may be your best option. Anchoring on a sand bottom is very difficult without the use of a pivoting fluke anchor, aka a Danforth anchor. In order for the flukes to hold, the angle of the line needs to be more parallel to the bottom. In order to achieve this angle, at least 3½ times the amount of anchor line is needed to the depth of water in which you're anchoring. For example, 20 feet of water will require 75 feet of anchor line.

Aluminum Danforth anchors work well and don't weigh a whole lot. One way to cheat (a little) on the amount of anchor line is to lead off with 6 feet of anchor chain.

Once you've calculated the drop upcurrent from where you want to anchor, use a soccer ball-sized poly ball to float your connection point. Tie another length of 10 to 20 feet of line to attach to your kayak.

Anchoring in this fashion has two benefits. The first is to negate any direct downward pull against your boat. Strong tides can easily sink a kayak tethered directly to the bottom. The ball allows the force of tide to pull parallel to the surface.

The second is that the tag line can be quick released in an emergency or when a large fish is on, allowing you to fight the fish and return to the same spot without resetting the anchor between battles. ▪

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Whiting, sheepshead

WHERE — Outer Banks

HOW — Anchor or drift over any structure or deeper cut off the beach and use a Carolina or bottom-fishing rig with live bait.

LAUNCH — Some launch areas may be as simple as launching from the beach and paddling out to the area you want to fish.

INSIDER TIP — Drift fishing is also popular where anglers launch from one area, drift down the beach with the current, then take out at another.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Sharks, redfish and bottomfish

WHERE — Inlets from Charleston to Hilton Head

HOW — Anchor or drift using large pieces of cut whiting, mullet or other fresh fish. For bottomfish, use frozen squid on a fish-finder rig.

LAUNCH — Some inlets on the southern coast have beach access where you can launch in slack water, paddle into or through the inlet and fish nearshore sandbars.

INSIDER TIP — Plan your launch around the tide. It's much easier to paddle out on an outgoing tide, then come back in on the incoming tide.

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Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK

Lillian Lindler's first deer was this 9-point buck killed on Youth Day in Kershaw County, S.C., this past January.

Jessica Coggins of Mebane, N.C., caught this big slab crappie in Hyco Lake on a late-fall trip in 2019.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

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

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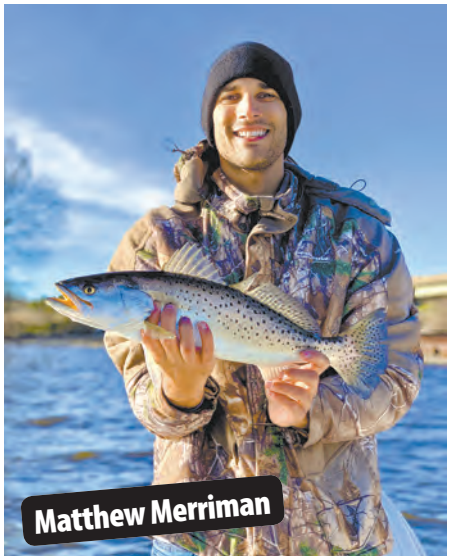

Matthew Merriman of the U.S. Coast Guard, stationed in Key West, caught his biggest speck in the Neuse River on Dec. 26.

Will Spaulding and his son caught a cooler full of nice black sea bass on Jan. 29 around Frying Pan Tower.

Matt Davis of Raleigh and Troy Greene of Chapel Hill caught these drum in the Cape Lookout surf on Oct. 19, 2019.

Mason Purcell, 7, of Hillsborough, N.C., killed his first turkey on April 6 with a 410 shotgun.

Travis Knott of St. Matthews, S.C., and Matthew Varnadore of Sandy Run, S.C., caught this nice mess of slab crappie last year on Lake Marion.

Shrimp scampi should be cooked on medium-high heat in a large skillet.

Jerry Dilsaver

COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

SHRIMP SCAMPI

RECIPE FROM SEAFOOD COMPANY MANAGER REALLY HITS THE SPOT

This has been an unusual year so far, and it's not over. Hopefully, we are far enough along in the COVID-19 pandemic that folks can enjoy fishing and the outdoors with minimal concerns and restrictions.

The June recipe is usually a fishing recipe, and this will follow that trend, maybe even be better. Everyone likes shrimp, and this will be a variation on a popular way to eat shrimp. Shrimp can be caught recreationally in both Carolinas. Readers who bait and cast a net for shrimp may have some of last year's fare ready to go in the freezer. If you don't, shrimpers off the Carolinas have enjoyed a surprisingly productive winter, and your favorite fishmonger should have fresh catch. A third option is to have them shipped in overnight.

This month's recipe is a simple and tasty version of shrimp scampi comes courtesy of Bay Hill Seafood Sales (www.bayhillseafood.com) in Greensboro, N.C., which supplies restaurants across the Southeast.

Everyone who works at Bay Hill loves to eat seafood and has their favorite recipes. Recently, the staff decided that while folks were staying home, and restaurants were limited and not using as much seafood as usual, they would offer employee's seafood recipes on their Facebook Page.

This recipe is from Susan Moffitt, operations manager at Bay Hill. Her family likes shrimp, and she has prepared it many ways over the years. Her version of scampi comes from a mixture of recipes she has prepared, with a couple of twists to better suit the preferences of her family. This is easy to prepare and is plenty for a family of four.

The recipe calls for medium-size shrimp and that may be the biggest issue. Many of the shrimp currently being caught are definitely in the large category, with some jumbos. Do yourself a favor and take the time to find medium shrimp for this. Save the jumbos for shrimp on the barbie or something similar. ▪

SHRIMP SCAMPI

This is what I consider a lighter-tasting shrimp scampi. Some recipes become heavy with the butter, wine or garlic, but this one doesn't. You can taste them all, but nothing is overpowering. If you prefer yours to be more buttery or garlicky, it's easy to add a little more of that ingredient.

Take the time to find medium-size shrimp for this recipe; I would think somewhere in the 25-count range is about right. These are large enough to be a full bite, yet small enough they don't get chewy when dropped in the hot butter, garlic and red pepper flakes.

Susan Moffitt, operations manager at Bay Hill Seafood, prepares this with both fresh and frozen spinach and notes this in the ingredients. Simply stated, it's better with fresh spinach. Yes, it requires a little more time to wilt 10 ounces of spinach, but it's time well-spent. I believe frozen spinach loses its flavor in the initial cooking, while wilting fresh spinach keeps the flavor in. I like to use a little buttery flavored Pam for wilting spinach, but a drizzle of olive or canola oil works well too.

TIP!

Warm leftover scampi in microwave on low power setting. It will keep shrimp from being tough or chewy.

Regular readers know I don't add much salt, while often using extra pepper. This recipe needs a touch of salt to suit me. Be careful and don't overload it, but the taste is better with it. As is usual, I used more pepper than salt.

I had some grated Parmesan cheese and didn't make a trip to the store for a block to grate. This worked pretty well, but it wasn't quite the same as fresh grated cheese. If you make a shopping list for this, get a block of Parmesan to grate.

TIP!

Adding a drop or two of olive oil to boiling pasta will prevent the pasta from sticking.

It must be the linguine, but I believe any leftovers taste better. The flavor doesn't get stronger, but it's a bit richer. The conclusion is the linguine soaks up any liquid as leftovers cool in the fridge.

A thought about the linguine. Most directions for boiling pasta don't suggest adding just a touch of olive oil to the water to help prevent the pasta from sticking. They should as it works and will help you when mixing the pasta, spinach and parsley into the shrimp.

Moffitt said she rarely has leftovers, so she hasn't noticed this. I prepared the recipe in full for only two people — it will easily feed four — and there were leftovers. The next day, I warmed them in the microwave at half-power, and they were excellent. If you warm these and many other leftovers in a microwave, the lower power setting is the trick. It just warms them and doesn't cook them further or make them tough and chewy. You probably won't have much for leftovers, but if you do, give this a try.

Enjoy! ▪

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound medium shrimp
- 8 ounces linguine
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 3 cloves garlic,
- 10 ounces fresh or frozen spinach
- ¼ tsp crushed red pepper flakes, or more, to taste
- ¼ cup white wine
- ¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh parsley leaves
- ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Using fresh spinach makes a big difference in the quality of the finished shrimp scampi.

Jerry Dilsaver

PREPARATION: Serves 4

Peel and de-vein the shrimp and mince the garlic. Cook the pasta according to instructions on the package, drain well and set aside. Sauté fresh spinach until wilted or cook frozen spinach until thoroughly hot.

In a separate, large skillet, melt butter at medium high heat, then add shrimp, garlic and red pepper flakes. Cook the shrimp until pink — about 2 to 3 minutes — stirring occasionally. Stir in wine and lemon juice and season with salt and pepper (to taste).

Bring the shrimp, butter, wine and lemon to a simmer and remove it from the heat. Quickly stir in pasta, spinach, lemon zest and parsley.

Serve immediately sprinkled with Parmesan cheese. ▪

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

SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Big bream will be scattered in June, but fishermen can cover lots of water with popping bugs to find and catch fish.

Terry Madewell

A GREAT JUNE MENU

STRIPERS, CATFISH, BREAM HEADLINE SANTEE'S OFFERINGS

Fishing action is wild throughout the Santee Cooper lakes in June, with nearly every species on a strong bite. But action for three of these species is particularly impressive, so go now, because June offers the last couple of weeks to get in on some outstanding striper fishing.

The keeper season on striped bass continues until June 15, and these last couple weeks offer excellent fishing on both lakes, Marion and Moultrie. Remember, the reason for the season closure isn't because of poor fishing, but poor survival for released stripers.

Bobby Winters, who guides out of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal, said the striper action is outstanding. Fish are scattered across both lakes and in the Diversion Canal.

Winters (843-751-3080) said he's had a tremendous spring in this area, and during these last few weeks before the season closes until Oct. 1, the striper fishing is best using live bait.

"With the slot limit we have, it's a great time to catch keeper-sized stripers as well as play catch-and-release, too," he said. "The Diversion Canal, lower Lake Marion and throughout Lake Moultrie are prime areas. With blueback herring, the fishing is very consistent, but occasionally, we'll work areas where casting bucktails can produce"

CATS CREATE CHAOS

Catfish action during June is excellent, but keeping up with the depths fish are found may require patience. Winters said that even when you're on a good pattern, catfish may make an unexpected move to a different depth.

"I'm constantly trying to think ahead to where the catfish will be," he said. "Even when on a strong pattern for a couple days, I know it can change quickly at this time of the year, so I watch where the forage goes, because the catfish will follow. They're going be eating something."

Winters said this is a prime time to drift-fish, because it enables him to cover more water and stay on the fish.

"I like to fish areas where we have some bottom depth changes, with hills and valleys on the bottom of the lake," he said. "Some of my favorite places for June

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.*

June is a great month to catch good numbers of eating-sized cats like this blue caught by guide Bobby Winters, with some trophy fish mixed in.

Terry Madewell

are areas where I'll drift in 20 to 25 feet of water, then fish over a hump that may rise up to 10 feet deep, drop back into deeper water. This depth variation gives the fish more options on a given day. When I determine a pattern for the day, I'll work it hard until it slows."

Winters aid June is an excellent time of the year for big fish, as well as numbers.

"It's not uncommon to hook a couple of really big fish during a day of fishing, but we're also likely to hook multiple fish in the 3- to 12-pound class at any given time," he said. "It gets really exciting and lots of fun when I've got three folks on the boat and five or six catfish rods are down at the same time."

"That's when chaos in the catfish boat is a really good thing," he said.

POP THE TOP FOR BULL BREAM

Bream fishing in June is a major part of the fishing discussion, and while it is a prime bedding month for Santee Cooper bream, it's also a great time to catch fish on flyrods and popping bugs.

One excellent tactic to catch big bream when they're not on the beds is to fish the long stretches of riprap,which are present in abundance on both lakes. Shorelines with a quick drop to 3 feet of water with lots of woody and weedy cover are also excellent choices.

A variety of popping bug styles will work, but most experts like the ones with tiny rubber legs for enhanced action for big bream and the occasional bite from a chunky largemouth.

Color preference can be a daily item, but chartreuse, white, black and orange are all potentially lethal on a bull bream at Santee Cooper. When working the along riprap or around weedy shorelines, staying on the move is important when buggin' for bream.

It's not unusual to catch a handful of fish from a general area, but usually they're not clustered as bream are when bedded. Keep moving and release small fish, and odds are great you can keep a 20-fish limit of big bream in short order. The best topwater fishing is typically early and late in the day for topwater bream, but cloudy days can provide action all day.

If the topwater action slows, sinking lures such as a green sponge spider or a black ant work well on the fly rod. Also, crickets or worms fished just slightly deeper will continue to catch plenty of fish along these same areas. ▪

Chris Bush

The author has added a new, improved jighead to the arsenal he takes to the water when he's targeting trophy speckled trout.

TEXAS EYE JIG CHANGES YOUR LURE PRESENTATION

Christopher Bush

Over the course of my angling life, I've experienced, first-hand, the evolution of tackle within the industry. From NED Rigs and Glide baits to braided line and terminal tackle, with every passing year, something new goes to market that gets us excited about the art of fishing.

Recently, I had that experience when I came across the Eye Strike Texas Eye finesse Jighead.

For those that don't know, the Texas Eye jighead is a "swing head" weight-and-hook combo. In other words, the weight located on the front of the 3/0 Mustad hook has free range of motion, unlike a traditional jighead style, allowing it to "swing" side-to-side. Paired with an super-sharp and strong, offset wide-gap hook, it's designed is to let an angler fish the lure snagless, depending on the spot within their fishery. For me, that area is on the seagrass-laden flats of the Upper Laguna Madre.

Skeptical at first, I heeded the encouragement of Dave Fladd, the owner of Eye Strike Fishing and the jighead's designer. Promising to send me a few to try, I politely declined and headed to the local Bass Pro Shops to buy the basics. Months later, I'm glad I listened to his advice. Lately, it's been a huge part of my fishing arsenal for targeting big fish in areas with higher than normal structure. It allows me to fish at a slower pace, vary the profile of my offering and add an unseen action to most inshore areas.

SIZE AND PROFILE

Undoubtedly, fish feed off of instinct to which size and profile play a vital role. Because the jighead is detached from the hook, the size of the soft plastic you choose varies largely on the situation you're fishing. My general rule of thumb is start with a 5-inch, soft-plastic jerkshad (non-paddletail). It is a great all-around profile that has great castability as well as silhouette. My preferred brands are the ZMan Finesse ShadZ, Cajun Lures Zydeco Shad and MirrOlure Provoker.

However, larger and smaller plastics have also been working extremely well, especially given the variable conditions here on the Texas Coast. Hard, prevailing winds, along with mud/sand sediment quickly cloud the water column. In this particular instance, I've found better success on a 6-inch Gambler Flapp'n Shad. The added inch, along with the exaggerated tail, increases my profile exponentially — giving big fish a bigger target in dirty water. Lately, in remarkably clean

Chris Bush *is an Air Force officer and a licensed charter captain, husband and father. He spends his time targeting big speckled trout and sharing knowledge on his website, Speckled Truth.*

Christopher Bush

The Eye Strike Texas Eye jighead is a swinghead. Paired with a soft-plastic bait like (from top): 5-inch Z-Man scented Jerkshad, Gambler Flapp'n Shad, Optimum Baits Victory Tail, it can be a devasting bait on speckled trout.

water with areas with dense grass, I've downsized my profile by using an Optimum Baits Victory Tail Shad. This slender minnow imitation has quiet water entry and a diminished presence, not off-putting to any big fish laying low in a high pressure situation. However, here's the key, and why the swinghead makes the difference. Regardless as to whether you go big or small, the Texas Eye allows you to present the bait exactly the same, every time — which leads me to action.

ACTION, FISHABILITY

The action is unlike anything these fish have seen. Despite swingheads being in the freshwater market for some time, Eye Strike modified it to meet inshore anglers' needs. Instead of the traditional "football" or "rugby" profile, Fladd decided to go with a thinner profile, not only to accentuate the "eye" but to allow the bait to come through structure with greater ease.

Darter profile baits on a traditional jighead provide excellent darting action, designed to trigger a strike. This is achieved by the angler snapping their rod tip in a 2- or 3-count motion before allowing the bait to descend to the bottom. However, with the same soft-plastic profile on a Texas Eye, the range of motion on the head, absorbs some of the shock applied by the anglers rod action.

What happens is, the hard, darting action turns to a more subtle glide, both side to side and up and down. This gives the bait a slightly longer presence in the strike zone, and since you don't have to worry about an open jighead getting snagged on the bottom or on grass, an angler can allow the bait to come to rest before continuing their retrieve, potentially garnering greater curiosity from a large fish.

Since this is a designed finesse application, I throw it solely on a 7-foot-6 Waterloo HP Lite medium/moderate rod, rated for 6 to 12-pound line, with a Shimano Stradic FL 3000 spooled with 20-pound Suffix 832 braid and a 4-foot monofilament leader.

It's important to note that when a fish does hit the bait, I almost always set the hook to the side. It's even greater to note that a softer rod tip like a moderate or moderate/fast is required, so the entire rod loads on the hookset and keeps the fish hooked while fighting the fish. Since I made this adjustment, my hookup-to-land ratio has improved exponentially.

THE DOWNSIDE

There is generally always a downside, kind of like ice cream and calories. In this particular instance, the Texas Eye provides very appealing meals for fish, especially big fish. However, durability equals the calories. In a recent podcast, I described lure longevity as being the least-important feature in my fishing approach. However, for most anglers, it's an important factor in deciding on a soft-plastic brand.

Other than ZMan fishing products (made of ElaZtech) and 3X tough Gambler Flapn' Shad (plastic hardener), a typical bait will catch no more than five to seven fish, sometimes even fewer. That's due in large part to the bait keeper on the front, which seats the bait on the hook. While fighting the fish, the thrashing around hollows out the nose, which over time renders the bait useless. It's not uncommon when I'm on a good bite to go through a pack-and-a-half of lures.

It's also slightly more time-consuming to rig and takes a little more practice than threading a soft plastic on a traditional jighead. However, it's all a matter of perspective. Just the other day, I only caught four fish while wade-fishing a gin-clear flat that had been holding some really nice fish. Of those fish, two went 27¼ inches and another 26½ inches, and I used three lures in the process. Again, though, to me durability is irrelevant, because I'm not looking for numbers, I'm looking for size — so going one lure for one fish of that size is an acceptable trade-off. ▪

Robert Satterwhite

A father and his son fish the hatchery supported stretch of the Nantahala River, which covers 4 miles in Macon County, N.C.

Wesley Satterwhite

SOCIAL-DISTANCING ON THE NANTAHALA

BIG NORTH CAROLINA RIVER IS TROUT FISHER'S PARADISE

Social-distancing was a natural practice for trout fishers long before the Corvid-19 pandemic. If another fisher gets within seeing distance, it's considered an intrusion.

Social-distancing, however, is not the problem for trout fishers; it's finding and getting to prime trout streams because of widespread closures of U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service facilities and state parks. Tentative limited openings in both Carolinas are being considered, if the coronavirus shows signs of leveling out.

Despite limited access, some streams are not affected by the shutdown, streams such as the Nantahala River in Macon County, N.C. Most of the water is accessible from roads, paved and unpaved.

Rising in southwestern Macon County near Standing Indian, the Nantahala flows northwest to the Clay County line, continuing along the boundary of the two counties and on to Fontana Reservoir. Long before the river reaches Fontana, however, it forms Nantahala Lake in Macon County.

NO PADDLES NEEDED

While whitewater enthusiasts extol the Nantahala's virtues as a prime paddling destination, area trout fishers see the river as one of the best trout fishing streams in the mountains. Ronnie Setzer

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

RICK TAYLOR'S ASTRO TABLES

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• The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each . . . 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)
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2020 JUN — BEST DAYS (POOR, FAIR, GOOD, EXCL) — LUNAR PERIODS (TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED)

	VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Mon 1	49	3:52 pm	8:57 pm - 10:55 pm	3:19 am	8:21 am - 10:39 am	
Tue 2	57	5:01 pm	10:00 pm - 11:38 pm	3:52 am	9:22 am - 11:20 am	Perigee
Wed 3	64	6:12 pm	11:02 pm - 12:24 am	4:28 am	10:25 am - 12:03 pm	
Thu 4	72	**7:24 pm**	12:07 am - Midnight	5:07 am	11:27 am - 12:49 pm	
Fri 5	74	**8:33 pm**	Midnight - 1:13 am	**5:51 am**	12:32 pm - 1:38 pm	FULL
Sat 6	62	9:39 pm	1:10 am - 2:06 am	**6:40 am**	1:35 pm - 2:31 pm	
Sun 7	50	10:37 pm	2:11 am - 3:03 am	**7:35 am**	2:36 pm - 3:28 pm	
Mon 8	39	11:28 pm	3:09 am - 4:01 am	8:35 am	3:34 pm - 4:26 pm	LOW
Tue 9	35		4:01 am - 4:59 am	9:36 am	4:26 pm - 5:24 pm	
Wed 10	36	12:11 am	4:48 am - 5:56 am	10:37 am	5:13 pm - 6:21 pm	
Thu 11	36	12:47 am	5:30 am - 6:48 am	**11:37 am**	5:55 pm - 7:13 pm	
Fri 12	43	1:19 am	6:06 am - 7:42 am	**12:34 pm**	6:31 pm - 8:07 pm	
Sat 13	54	1:48 am	6:40 am - 8:32 am	**1:30 pm**	7:05 pm - 8:57 pm	HALF
Sun 14	46	2:15 am	7:13 am - 9:21 am	2:25 pm	7:38 pm - 9:46 pm	Apogee
Mon 15	42	2:41 am	7:44 am - 10:10 am	3:20 pm	8:09 pm - 10:35 pm	
Tue 16	45	3:08 am	8:18 am - 10:58 am	4:16 pm	8:43 pm - 11:23 pm	
Wed 17	49	3:37 am	8:53 am - 11:49 am	5:13 pm	9:18 pm - 12:14 am	
Thu 18	62	4:08 am	9:31 am - 12:41 pm	6:11 pm	9:56 pm - 1:06 am	
Fri 19	75	4:44 am	10:13 am - 1:35 pm	**7:11 pm**	10:38 pm - 2:00 am	
Sat 20	87	**5:25 am**	11:01 am - 2:31 pm	**8:11 pm**	11:26 pm - Midnight	Summer
Sun 21	94	**6:13 am**	11:54 am - 3:26 pm	9:09 pm	Midnight - 2:56 am	NEW
Mon 22	85	**7:08 am**	12:50 pm - 4:22 pm	10:03 pm	12:19 am - 3:51 am	HIGH
Tue 23	75	**8:08 am**	1:48 pm - 5:18 pm	10:52 pm	1:15 am - 4:47 am	
Wed 24	63	9:13 am	2:50 pm - 6:06 pm	11:35 pm	2:13 am - 5:43 am	
Thu 25	57	10:20 am	3:50 pm - 6:52 pm		3:15 am - 6:31 am	
Fri 26	55	11:28 am	4:49 pm - 7:35 pm	12:13 am	4:15 am - 7:17 am	
Sat 27	58	**12:35 pm**	5:49 pm - 8:15 pm	12:48 am	5:14 am - 8:00 am	
Sun 28	66	**1:42 pm**	6:49 pm - 8:55 pm	1:21 am	6:14 am - 8:40 am	HALF
Mon 29	54	2:49 pm	7:49 pm - 9:35 pm	1:54 am	7:14 am - 9:20 am	Perigee
Tue 30	46	3:58 pm	8:50 pm - 10:18 pm	2:27 am	8:14 am - 10:00 am	

25 50 75 AVERAGE

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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**.

of Sylva, N.C., a long-time trout fisher and former guide, calls the Nantahala one of the area's premier trout streams.

"It offers some excellent fishing, and it has some big trout in it, especially in the lower section below the powerhouse," he said.

When Setzer fishes the stream, he usually heads for the delayed-harvest section, a four-mile stretch between Whiteoak Creek in Macon County and the Nantahala Power and Light Co. powerhouse. Setzer said this section has excellent populations of big brook, rainbow and brown trout, which are generously stocked in the stream in the fall and again in the spring.

"It's a very accessible stream," he said, "and much of it can be fished from the banks."

The upper section of the stream above Nantahala Lake is tougher to fish because of heavy overgrowth. The stream is small up to the Standing Indian area.

CADDIS INVASION

The Nantahala is noted for its excellent caddis hatches, which extends from mid-May to July. A variety of caddis imitations get good results. A No. 14 or 16 yellow-bodied Elk Hair Caddis works well in both the delayed-harvest waters and the hatchery-supported sections. Blue-wing olive hatches also are prominent in spring and early summer.

The stream gets tremendous pressure during the summer because of its easy access. On weekends during the delayed-harvest season, just about every pull-off is filled with vehicles. Many of the weekend fishers are from South Carolina, Georgia and outlying areas of North Carolina, especially the Charlotte area

The section above the powerhouse is hatchery-supported, but it has a good population of wild trout, mainly due to nutrients coming from Nantahala Lake. Plus, water quality is good enough to support natural reproduction.

Water levels above the powerhouse are constant, but the flow below the dam can be erratic. When the turbines are on in the powerhouse, the stream is strictly whitewater country as it gushes through the gorge. Water levels can rise quickly, and fishers are advised to exit the stream if they notice the river starting to rise.

US 19 west of Bryson City parallels the lower section of the river from Nantahala Falls to just below the powerhouse. Access to the delayed-harvest section is off US 19 on Wayah Road at the Nantahala River Launch Site Recreation Area. The road along the delayed-harvest section is paved with numerous pull-offs.

COVID-19'S EFFECTS

Corvid-19 has taken a toll on businesses in both Carolinas, including fly and tackle shops and guide services. Trout-fishing guide services were suspended at least until June, and many fly shops have closed until further notice.

The Cherokee Indian Reservations canceled its fishing program until further notice. Streams along the Blue Ridge Parkway are inaccessible in many sections due to closure of some sections of the park

On a positive note, the fishing should be outstanding once restrictions are lifted. ▪

Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

Speckled trout are on the feed in June along the coast of both Carolinas; the action around the states' border is particularly hot.

Jerry Dilsaver

BORDER BOUNTY: FAT JUNE SPECKS

Spawning trout provide plenty of action on both sides of the Carolinas' state line

The numbers of speckled trout around the border between North Carolina and South Carolina this month usually aren't quite as high as they get during the fall, but many are big sows laden with eggs.

This is the peak of the speckled trout spawn, and many fishermen are careful to only admire the large trout before releasing them to continue their business. However, there are also smaller but legal sow specks and plenty of males to be invited home to a trout dinner.

"This is an excellent time to catch trout. Big and little trout are feeding strong, and one of their favorite foods is live shrimp," said Tommy Rickman of Southport Angler Outfitters Guide Service (www.fishsouthport.com).

"One of the easiest ways to catch them is suspending live shrimp under a cork. I like the Betts Billy Bay Lowcountry Lightning floats because they let me quickly adjust the depth. I like to keep the bait suspended a little above the bottom, and this float makes that easy. It also has beads and I can click it as an attractor. On the business end, some fishermen prefer small treble hooks while others prefer 'J' or circle hooks and all produce."

Rickman said fishing live shrimp under a float is a favorite technique from the creeks behind Bald Head Island to the shell points in Dunn Sound, especially along the Little River Inlet jetties. It is also popular with pier fishermen, who present squirming shrimp from the planks of the many ocean piers between Oak Island and Myrtle Beach. The bottom line is, trout like to snack on live shrimp, and this is the most foolproof way to do it. There is no question of a strike — when the cork goes under, pause a second and set the hook.

Another popular way to catch specks is walking the dog with topwater lures. This technique requires a little practice to score consistently, but it is very popular. Attentive fishermen often see the trout sweeping up behind their lure to attack.

Seeing the trout strike can be nerve-wracking for novice fishermen, and it may keep their hookup ratio low. Once they learn to wait until they feel the weight of the fish to set the hook, their hookup ratio improves greatly. This is exciting fishing, but is typically limited to a few hours in the early morning and occasionally again in the late afternoon.

June is a good month to catch specks, and some will be large. They are spawning in the backwaters of both Carolinas, plus in the nearshore ocean — typically just beyond casting distance. Topwater lures will produce well in the backwaters, and live shrimp get their attention everywhere. A morning of fun "pullage" can also provide a speckled trout dinner. ▪

— Jerry Dilsaver

HARTWELL STRIPERS

get real hungry this month in tributary rivers

Lake Hartwell stripers are easy to pattern in June and they will eat a bait that is put in front of them, according to guide Preston Harden of Commerce, Ga.

"In May, fishing for them can be a little sketchy, because you have a window in the morning when the fish are active, then they disappear. But in June, the fish start migrating down the lake, and they start gathering in big groups," he said.

The developing thermocline pushes the fish out of the creeks and into the Tugaloo, Keowee and Seneca rivers, according to Harden (706-255-5622), and then they start migrating down the lake in search of cleaner water.

"At 35 to 40 feet you can see the thermocline on your graph, so you will find the fish at 30 to 35 feet deep. If you are fishing every day, you can pretty much stay with the migration all the way down the lake," he said. "Just idle up the river channel and mark some fish on the graph. Stop, and you will catch some of them, because they will take the bait so good."

While live blueback herring are the bait of choice, artificials can play a role in June, Harden said.

"Usually, June is not that much of a big artificial month because the fish have moved deeper, but you can start power-reeling for them because they are very active," he said. "I like to power reel with a 1-ounce jighead and a 5-inch paddletail swimbait. My next option is a big spoon. The 8- to 9-inch Ben Parker spoons have become really popular over the past few years."

"When you are in the river channel, throw the jighead or spoon and let it fall for about 20 seconds, down to 40 feet, then work it back up through them fast."

Guide Preston Hardin said stripers will be schooling up in June, heading toward the lower end of 50,000-acre Lake Hartwell.

Pat Robertson

Whether you go with live bait or prefer artificials, the key is to go big, Harden said.

"When the water warms up they will eat a big bait, so in June, July and August I want the biggest bait I can get." ▪

— Pat Robertson

DOCK-ING SUCCESS

Head for docks, piers for High Rock bass

June is a transitional month at North Carolina's High Rock Lake. The bass have finished spawning and are hungry and willing to bite. If an angler pulls up to the right stretch of piers or bank, he can catch a hefty bag.

Pulling up to that right stretch of piers or bank is more easily said than done. Though the bass bite is on, fishermen must do their homework to succeed.

For example, take the pier bite. For the past several years, the best fishing in June has been around piers, which presents a good news/bad news scenario for fishermen new to High Rock. The good news is that piers and docks are visible objects that can be found by anyone, and High Rock has an abundance of them in Abbotts, Swearing and Second creeks. The bad news is that High Rock's piers are constantly hammered by fishermen. Worse yet, not all piers are created equal. Some consistently hold bass, while others are duds.

Experienced fishermen, like Steve Sink of Winston-Salem and Robert Walser of Lexington, know which ones to fish and which ones to skip. They also know High Rock's quirks. Because of poor dissolved-oxygen levels in deeper water and limited river flow, the water around piers is never be too shallow to fish. Conversely, deeper piers aren't as productive in June.

"I've caught quality bass from piers in water so shallow, my trolling motor was kicking up mud as I moved from one pier to another," Walser said.

Sink targets specific piers instead of wasting time fishing long stretches of them, and he knows which piers likely hold a "kicker bass."

Tony Garitta

Veteran angler Steve Sink fishes piers for a big-fish bite this month on High Rock Lake.

David Wright of Lexington, a crankbait wizard who dislikes fishing piers but has been forced to go to them because of a fading deep-water bite, said the better piers are in shallow water on flats.

The offshore crankbait bite no longer rules in June, much to Wright's chagrin, because of the lake's oxygen issues and because the lake level no longer fluctuates as it once did.

"Unless the lake level drops 3 to 4 feet, which leaves many shallow piers grounded, good numbers of bass no longer move to offshore structure for very long," said Wright. ▪

— Tony Garitta

SWANSBORO SPECKS

stacking up with reduced fishing pressure

It's an ill wind that doesn't blow good fortune to someone or something, but that's been the fishing situation along North Carolina's coast this spring because of the coronavirus.

Stay-at-home orders kept plenty of fishermen away from the coast, shutting down boat ramps in a handful of counties, this on the heels of Hurricane Florence keeping fishermen away from the coast from mid-September 2018 until spring 2019.

But one bright spot has been rebounding fish populations because of reduced fishing pressure the past two years.

"The whole thing has been a little bit of a perfect storm for trout," said guide David Towler of Swansboro's Towler Time Charters. "Back-to-back mild winters helped specks. Catches were better last fall, winter and this spring, with bigger fish than I can remember in my lifetime, and I'm 35."

But with a rich target field ready to be explored this spring, the starting gate didn't open on time for anglers.

"The best bite starts at dawn in mid-May, usually near grass flats, then extends into early June," said Towler (910-554-4742), who uses 7-foot, medium-light or medium-action rods mated to 2500 class spinning reels spooled with 10- to 15-pound braid and 18 to 24 inches of 25-pound monofilament leader.

"I like to throw a SW08 Skitterwalk," he said. "Trout'll eat a Spook, but they miss a lot. The SW08 Skitterwalk has a higher-pitched rattle and hooks up better with trout. Hot Skitterwalk colors include black backs, silver sides and white or gold bellies."

SheDogs, Top Pups or Top Dog Juniors in the same colors work.

"A lot of people like the high-pitch rattle of a She Dog," said Towler, who likes the 4-inch 83MR in gold color, which often draws vicious trout strikes.

If the artificial bite is slow, Towler tries a Carolina-rigged finger mullet fished on the bottom or under a float with a split-shot, drifted with the tide parallel to marsh grass lines.

During warm weather, he prefers to fish incoming tides.

"When the sun gets up, trout pull out of the shallows and go to the first ledge or channel on the falling tide near grass flats," he said. "I'll go to heavier lures then."

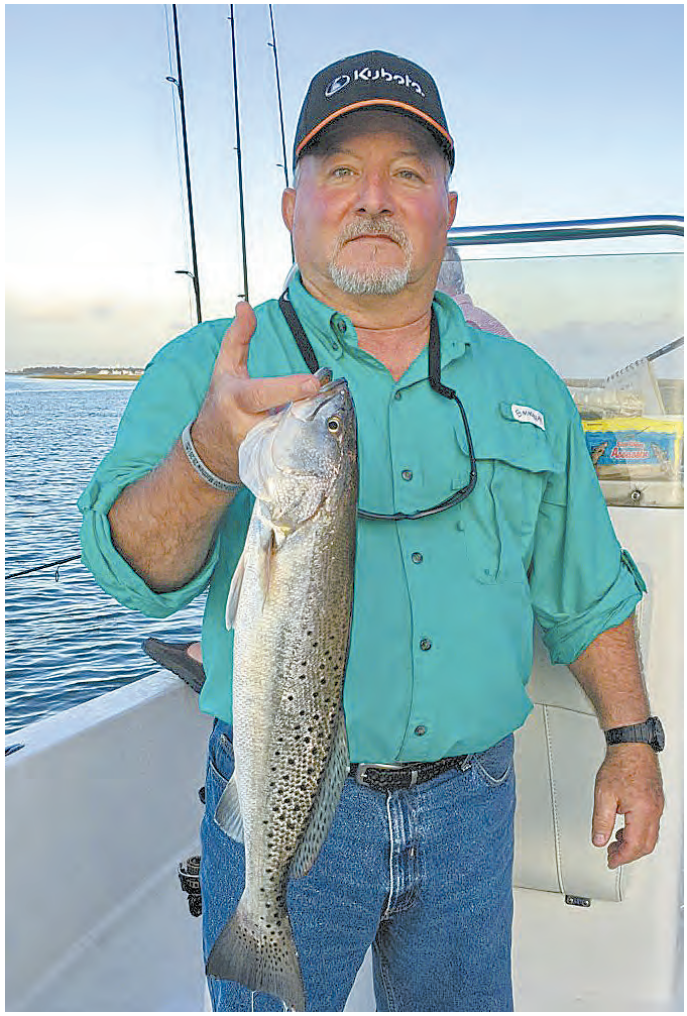
In June, Towler targets creek mouths within a half-mile of inlets.

"The water gets hot in the backs of creeks, sometimes 80 degrees, by June, so trout leave those creeks and get around mouths of creeks," Towler said. "The hotter it gets, the more they move toward inlet mouths."

By July, trout concentrate in the highest-salinity water around.

"I think they like saltier water when they're spawning," he said. ▪

— Craig Holt



David Towler

David Hamrick of Lancaster, S.C., shows a pretty spring speck caught fishing with his son-in-law, guide David Towler.

> *"When the sun gets up, trout pull out of the shallows and go to the first ledge or channel on the falling tide near grass flats."*

Jeff Burleson

Jeff Burleson

Redfish and speckled trout, along with flounder, are prime targets of inshore fishermen in Port Royal Sound this month.

PORT ROYAL'S TRIFECTA

Trout, flounder, reds are on the menu for inshore anglers

Summer has arrived, and inshore waters are firing off on all cylinders. Estuaries explode with life, with thousands of small fish and crustaceans kicking along in the shallow waters for which South Carolina is well known. One of the most-popular estuaries is Port Royal Sound, which is loaded with a South Carolina slam of speckled trout, redfish and flounder.

Guide Owen Plair of Beaufort SC Fishing Charters spends nearly every day on the Port Royal Sound, and his June fishing can be off the chain for all three of these favored inshore species.

"June is a spectacular month for a lot of resident and seasonal species," said Plair (843-812-3656). "You can sometimes catch 12 different species on a half-day trip."

Port Royal Sound is covered with oysters, marsh grass and other structures that serve as nurseries for juvenile sea life and double as feeding zones for larger predators.

"Baitfish choose places near structure to hide from predators," he said. "If I were a mud minnow, I'd rather be on the edge of an oyster or spartina bed than in 5 feet of water."

But inshore gamefish are masters at their game, and they find plenty of grub in and around these grass edges and oyster beds. And the movement of water changes the baitfish's positions, creating ambush opportunities on both sides of the tide.

"Moving water is critically important this time of year, because it will flush fresh bait out of the creeks or right back into the creeks," Plair said. "One of the great things about summertime is one spot can produce reds, trout, and flounder on the same rig."

Plair will use live bait and artificial lures. Live bait is a prime option for many anglers, and it is definitely a good choice to put fish in the ice chest. He recommends live mud minnows or shrimp under a rattling popping cork like the Cajun Thunder.

"The rattles will grasp the attention of predators and can be the perfect accompaniment to any live-bait choice," he said.

While Plair will regularly use live bait, he prefers artificial lures rigged weedless.

"Outside of a topwater Zara Spook for early in the morning, I like to use a weedless setup to stay off the shells and grass. You get more time fishing when the bait is weedless, and I usually catch more fish than when using live bait," he said.

Plair prefers to use a scented soft plastic like the Gulp Mantis Shrimp rigged on a 3/0, weedless Gamakatsu hook. His favorite color around Port Royal Sound is root beer with a chartreuse tail.

"The Mantis shrimp is my favorite, because it is scented and has a lot of movement from the tail and its small appendages," he said. "I have caught 8-inch trout with this bait to 30-inch reds, and even some jumbo cobia. It's one of my favorites that will catch about anything." ▪

— Jeff Burleson

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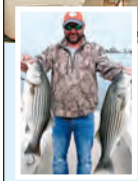

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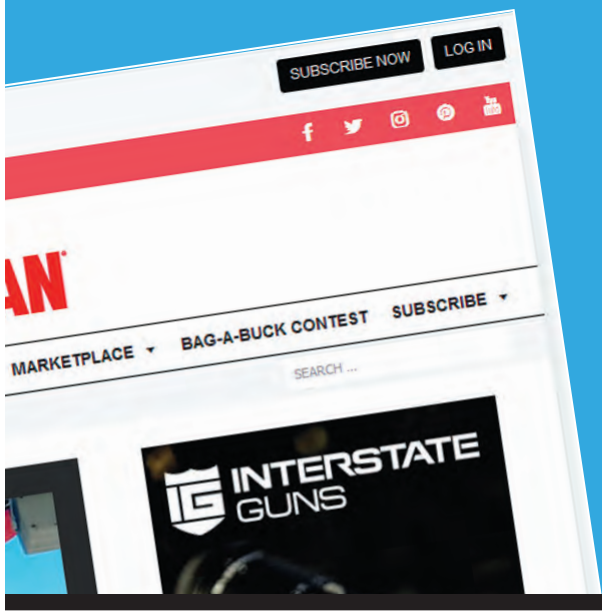

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CCA OF SOUTH CAROLINA 9
CHATLEE BOAT AND MARINE 68, 71
CHEROKEE RUN HUNTING LODGE 40, 66
COLLINS INC. 72
CWP PROSERIES 18
FRABILL 33
GEICO - SPECIAL MARKETING 5
L & S BAIT COMPANY 37
MARINE WAREHOUSE 39
NICHOLS STORE, INC. 49
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PERFORMANCE EAST INC. 4
PLANO SYNERGY 44, 45
PONCE D. MOODY FUNDING 8
PRECISION MARINE, INC. 17, 25
ROCK OUTDOORS 69
SANTEE COOPER COUNTRY 57
SARAH JUDY'S INSURANCE AGENCY 18
SEA ARK BOATS 27
SOUTHERN LAND SOLUTIONS, LLC 48
SPRO CORPORATION 19
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