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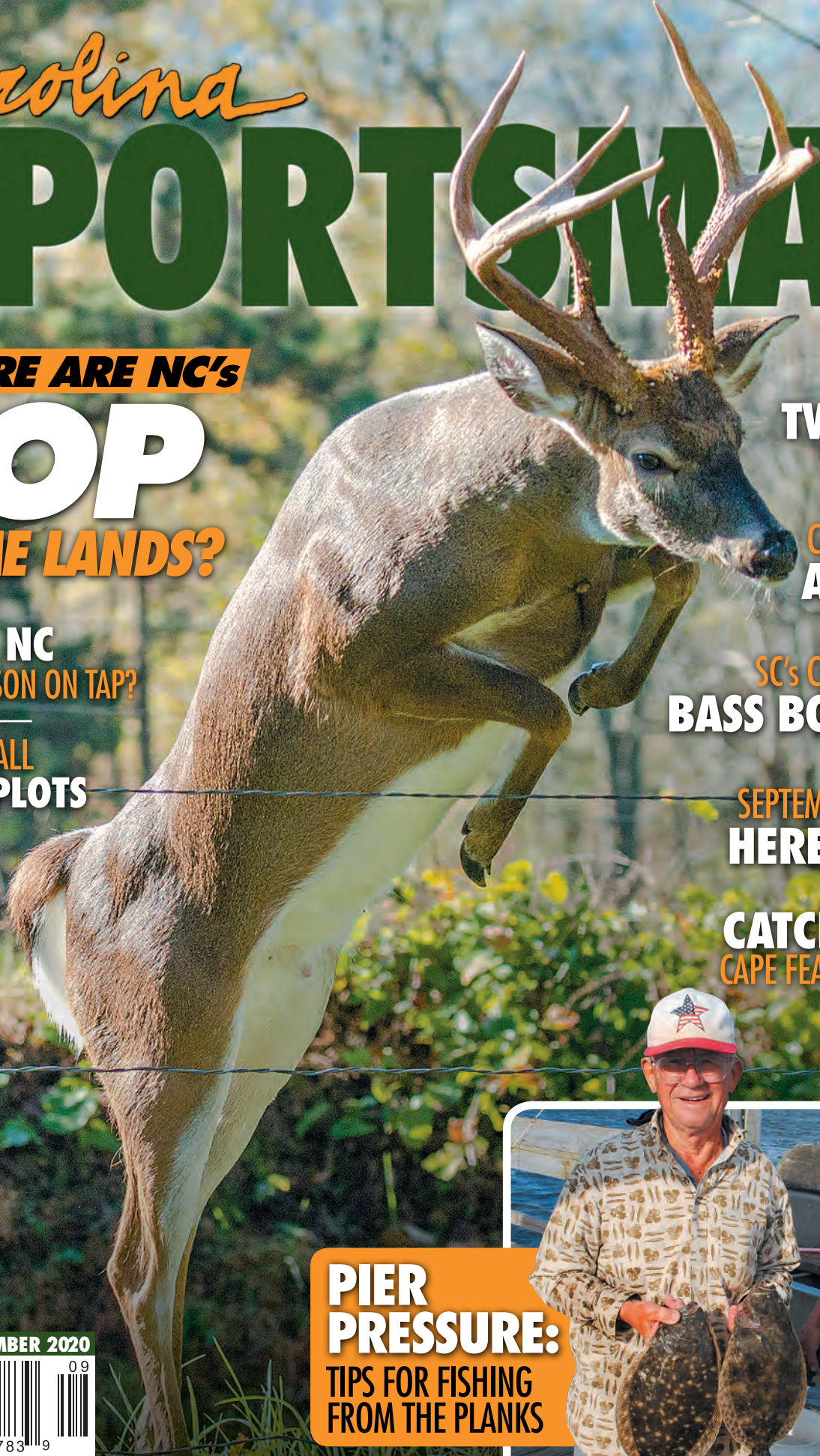
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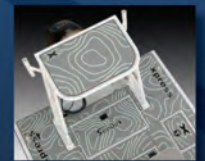
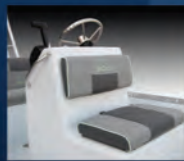


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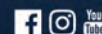
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**13**  
**GAME LANDS**  
**2020-21**

**39**  
**SAMPLE THE**  
**SUPER COOPER**



*Carolina*  
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Don't have a place to hunt, but you're still dreaming about that big buck jumping in your lap? North Carolina as several million acres of public land available, likely within a short drive of your home. Photo by Rick Small



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SOUTH CAROLINA

# Outdoor UPDATE

with  
Dan Kibler



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

*Dan Kibler*

## GROUP FILES SUIT OVER TRAWLING CHARGES THAT NC HAS ALLOWED SHRIMPERS TO VIOLATE CLEAN WATERS ACT

**T**wo months after warning the state of North Carolina that it planned to file suit, a conservation group punched the button on Aug. 5 in U.S. District Court.

The N.C. Coastal Fisheries Reform Group filed a federal suit charging that the defendants — the owners of a handful of large shrimp trawlers, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries — have been damaging or allowing the damage of state waters in violation of the federal Clean Waters Act, because shrimp-trawling operations in the state's sounds and coastal rivers has resulted in the discard of millions of pounds of finfish caught

common-sense regulations reform, it's time for the court to weigh in."

NCCFRG filed a Notice of Intent to file suit in mid-May, giving the state and shrimpers 60 days to work out some kind of agreement that would address the group's complaint. Albea said the matter was discussed by both plaintiffs and defendants, but defendants refused to give any ground, so the suit was filed in the Eastern District of U.S. District Court.

NCCFRG's charges are three-fold: that large, shrimp-trawling operations violate the Clean Water Act by dumping millions of pounds of finfish caught in their nets into state waters and by the disturbance of sediments on the bottom of bodies of water, and that the NCDEQ and NCDMF are failing to uphold North Carolina's Public Trust Doctrine by allowing, and even encouraging, such activities. ■



Guide Noah Lynk of Harkers Island, N.C., had to release this 26-inch, 7½-pound flounder he caught on July 5, but North Carolina's flounder season opened Aug. 16 and runs through Sept. 30, so he could keep it this month.

incidentally in trawl nets.

"We didn't want to end up in court, but we ran out of good-faith options. Two months ago, we reached out to the state and to the industry," said Joe Albea of Winterville, N.C., long-time host and producer of UNC-TV's Carolina Outdoors Journal and one of five NCCFRG principals listed in the lawsuit. "This matter of industrial-sized shrimp trawlers going into our inshore waters and killing millions of finfish and tearing up the bottom has to stop.

"If the politicians won't do the right thing and make

### Bag-A-Buck Contest underway



Don't forget to post photos of your deer in the Carolina Sportsman Bag-A-Buck Contest to be eligible to win monthly prizes of great Sportsman swag from the online Sportsman Store.

To enter or see deer that have been entered, log onto: [www.carolinasportsman.com](http://www.carolinasportsman.com) and click on the Bag-A-Buck contest link.

# NC GETS TWO NEW STATE-RECORD CATFISH IN JULY

## NEUSE FLATHEAD BREAKS RECORD

**T**yler Barnes of Pikeville, N.C. caught the North Carolina state-record flathead catfish on July 20 while fishing on the Neuse River. He caught the fish on a live bream near a logjam in about 5 feet of water. The fish weighed 78.9 pounds, was 52 inches long, and had a girth of 37 inches.

Barnes caught the fish using a Penn Fathom reel, a 7-foot-6, medium-heavy Big Cat Fever Rod, 120-pound J-Braid braided line, an 80-pound Hi Seas Quattro leader, and a 9/0 Charlie Brown circle hook.

Barnes' flathead beat the previous N.C. state record by almost a full pound. That record, a 78-pound fish caught out of the Cape Fear River by Brian Newberger, stood for almost 15 years.

Barnes was fishing in his fourth spot of the night when the big fish hit. Upon setting the hook, the fish began peeling drag out at an incredible rate. He knew it was a good fish.

"I didn't snatch it because it's a circle hook. But I just gave it enough where it would set the hook in him. Once I did that, it was on," he said. "The line was just peeling off the reel. I cranked the drag down just a little bit, just enough to turn him towards me. I get him up beside the boat, and he takes off again, just like I don't even have any drag."

After a few similar runs, Barnes, who was fishing alone, finally tuckered the fish out enough to try landing it. After a few unsuccessful attempts at netting fish, he was able to grab the fish with his bare hands and hoist it aboard his SeaArk.

Barnes took the fish to EZ-Bait in Goldsboro, where it was weighed on certified scales and witnessed by biologist Ben Ricks. ■



Joey Baird of Gasburg, Va. (right), caught this 121.9-pound blue catfish from Lake Gaston the weekend of July 4. It is North Carolina's state record. **BELOW:** Tyler Barnes of Pikeville, N.C., landed the North Carolina state-record flathead catfish fishing in the New River on July 20. It weighed 78.9 pounds.



— Brian Cope

## ANOTHER HUGE GASTON BLUE CAT

**J**oey Baird of Gasburg, Va., caught the new North Carolina state-record blue catfish, a 121.9-pound monster, out of Lake Gaston on the July 4 weekend.

His catch beats the previous state record by more than 4 pounds.

Baird was using a Big Cat Fever rod from Catch the Fever Rod Company of Roxboro, N.C. The company awards \$10,000 for state-record fish that are released alive.

Baird had planned to release the huge fish alive, but when he saw how big it was, he knew he had a shot at the cash. He immediately switched gears from fishing to figuring out how to keep this fish alive until he could get it weighed and possibly certified as a state record.

While waiting on a fisheries biologist to show up and certify the catch, Baird, who is a police officer, decided if his fish was a state record, he would donate the \$10,000 to his local fire department to help purchase a rescue boat, something he'd wished they had a few years ago when he answered a call involving a sinking car with a woman still inside.

Lake Gaston has now produced the last four N.C. state record blue catfish. Baird's fish topples the 117.5-pound blue cat caught by Landon Evans in 2016. ■

— Brian Cope

# ALLIGATOR, SHRIMP-BAITING SEASONS OPEN THIS MONTH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

**T**wo seasons that are near and dear to the hearts of many South Carolina residents will kick off this month: alligator and shrimp baiting.

The state's 13th public alligator season will begin at noon on Sept. 12 and end at noon on Oct. 10. Hunters chosen for permits by a lottery draw will be allowed to tag one alligator at least 4 feet long during the season.

Permits will be divided between four management units: Midlands, Pee Dee, Coastal Plain and Southern Coastal, with an equal number of permits (usually 250) divided between the management units.



South Carolina residents drawn for public alligator hunt permits can take to the waters on Sept. 12 in search of a gator at least 4 feet long.

South Carolina's statewide alligator population is estimated at 100,000.

Shrimp baiting season opens at noon on Sept. 11 and runs through Nov. 11.

Sportsmen who purchase a shrimp-baiting permit may keep up to 48 quarts (whole) or 29 quarts (heads off) per day during the 60-day season.

Shrimpers can use bait balls around up to 10 marked poles in an area no more than 100 yards long. They cannot be set within 50 yards of a dock, pier or public boat ramp. Cast nets with ½-inch mesh are the typical method of capture. No shrimp caught while baiting can be sold.

State officials predicted last spring an average to above-average season on white shrimp, which are the main targets of bait shrimpers. ■

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A proposed North Carolina ban on urine-based attractants has been delayed by a rule requiring legislative review in January 2021.

## DEER-URINE BAN IN NC DELAYED

### LEGISLATURE WILL REVIEW LETTERS OF OBJECTION RECEIVED

In an effort to help keep chronic wasting disease from infecting North Carolina's deer herd, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission approved a rule earlier this year prohibiting the use of natural deer-urine attractants, but the ban has been delayed, pending a January 2021 legislative review.

Because some urine-based attractants are collected from deer in states that do have a presence of CWD, and because it's not possible to test living deer for the disease, many states have banned the urine-based deer lures.

North Carolina's ban was set to begin this season; however, objections to this rule have lawmakers set to review it before taking more action. By default, the ban will not take effect as scheduled.

A release from the Commission said:

"A rule prohibiting the possession or use of any substance that contains excretion from a cervid for the purposes of taking or attracting wildlife, was approved by the Commission for the 2020/2021 season. However, 10 letters of objection to this rule were received by the NC Rules Review Commission, making it subject to legislative review in the January 2021 session. As such, there are currently no regulations related to the possession or use of cervid excretions, including urine and other bodily fluids. Any updates to this will be posted at [ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org) as they become available." ■

— Brian Cope.



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# NC DEER SEASON LOOKS GOOD

## PAST HARVESTS STABLE, WESTERN NC PROMISING

**D**eer season opens in North Carolina with the statewide archery season on Sept. 12, and for hunters, things are looking up — for the most part.

Harvests for the past handful of years have been relatively consistent, bouncing between 145,000 and 160,000 deer per season, and Jonathan Shaw, the deer-project leader for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, doesn't see any big changes coming.

"Overall, I think we're heading in the right direction," he said. "The either-sex ratio seems to be improving; the buck age structure seems to be improving, and we've seen signs of the herd stabilizing, as far as deer numbers go, over the past several seasons."

Shaw said that the Commission is still tweaking either-sex seasons in some areas to try and better align them with the peak of the rut — either to allow for a bigger doe harvest in areas that need the herd to be a little smaller, or to lower the doe harvest in places that could use a few more deer.

### TWEAK EITHER-SEX SEASONS

"We did shift the timing of some doe seasons a couple of years ago, from the end to the beginning of the season, and we continue to evaluate them, and to increase them when we have the opportunity, when we want to stabilize the herd in an area."

Last season, hunters reported tagging better than 161,000 deer, 44% of them does. With the statewide harvest up close to 7% over 2018-19 numbers, 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%. A 9.6% increase occurred in the Northwestern Zone; 8.6% in the Central Zone; and 6.7% in the Southeastern Zone.

The leading counties in total harvest were: Anson, 4,166; Randolph, 3,668; Wilkes, 3,512; Halifax, 3,448; Northampton 3,439.

Shaw will be paying careful attention to the deer harvest in the western third of the state, and to the ratio of bucks and does in the harvest — the former, because the herd in western North Carolina is on the increase, and the latter, because the statewide

### NC 2020-21 DEER SEASONS

**Northeastern/Southeastern Section — Archery:** Sept. 12-Oct. 2; Blackpowder: Oct. 3-16; Gun: Oct. 17-Jan. 1.

**Central Section — Archery:** Sept. 12-Oct. 30; Blackpowder: Oct. 31-Nov. 13; Gun: Nov. 14-Jan. 1.

**Northwestern Section — Archery:** Sept. 12-Nov. 6; Blackpowder: Nov. 7-20; Gun: Nov. 21-Jan. 1.

**Western Section — Archery:** Sept. 12-27, Oct. 11-Nov. 22; Dec. 13-Jan. 1 (buck only); Blackpowder: Sept. 28-Oct. 10; Gun: Nov. 23-Dec. 12.



North Carolina hunters reporting taking more than 161,000 deer across the state last season, and there's no indication that there will be a big increase or drop this season.

two-buck rule will be in its third season. The western half of the state has had a two-buck limit since 2000; the eastern half has had it for two years.

### WESTERN NC HERD GROWING

"There is a lot of potential in western North Carolina for some big, healthy deer, and in places, they're managing for good habitat out there — most of it on private land," he said. "We have some state-managed game lands in western North Carolina that are well-managed and have good deer population."

Unfortunately, on the million-acres in the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests, there's very little timber management and habitat improvement being done.

As for the two-buck rule, Shaw said that, surprisingly, he's interested in how it not-only affects the harvest in the eastern half of the state, but the statewide harvest.

### TWO-BUCK RULE EFFECTS

"It will take a while to change the buck age structure," he said. "Year one, you won't see any change. We have seen a little shift in the buck age structure and the sex ratio in the harvest. This is the first year we'd expect to see a shift. There are statewide implications, because a lot of hunters will travel statewide. Remarkably, one of the things we've seen has been a real decline in the button buck harvest. I expect that limiting the buck harvest will have an impact."

Shaw said one ecological factor could impact the harvest more than anything else: a tremendously good or poor mast crop. In years with a great mast crop, the harvest typically drops a great deal, because deer don't have to travel far to fill their bellies. In years of mast failure, the harvest generally rises because deer have to travel greater distances to find food.

"I think 2014 was the last year we had a really good mast crop, and a really low harvest," he said. "But I can't recall another year when we've had a really big swing, and I haven't seen anything this year about the mast crop." ■



# GAME LANDS 2020-21

**W**ith a growing human population of 11 million, North Carolina is changing from a rural state where access for hunting and fishing once was easy to one where it's shrinking.

So the value of public land where citizens may hunt, fish, hike, camp, photograph or watch wildlife increases daily.

Public areas where citizens may engage in these activities are called game lands. Statewide, they total 2.1 million acres and are managed by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Meanwhile, 322,000 North Carolina residents own hunting licenses, and 25,000 non-residents visit the state to hunt. The total number of fishermen is around 1.525 million. Together, they spend \$2 billion annually for their pastimes, each expecting some bang for their outdoors bucks. Most don't own private property, so game lands are left to supply these needs.

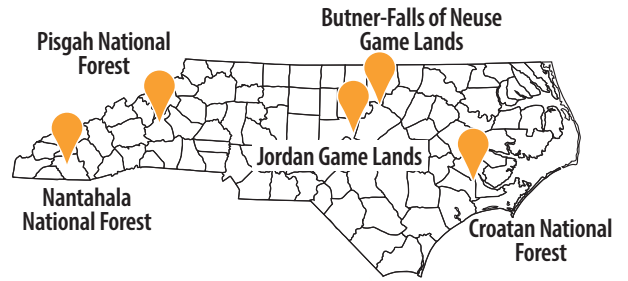
The following details some of North Carolina's valuable game lands to outdoorsmen.

**THE BUCKS STOP HERE >**

NORTH CAROLINA HUNTERS HAVE SEVERAL MILLION ACRES OF PUBLIC LAND AT THEIR FINGERTIPS. CAROLINA SPORTSMAN PROFILES THE ONES THEY SHOULD TAKE A LONG LOOK AT, BY SPECIES.

■ By Craig Holt

Rick Small



# THE BUCKS STOP HERE, AS FAR AS PUBLIC LANDS PLAY OUT

Game lands comparisons are difficult when considering access, whitetail numbers and hunting success. Hunting habitats are as different across the state as a sand dollar and a freshwater clam. Last season, hunters tagged 5,222 deer on game lands, 20% above the previous season but well behind the record 7,135 deer tagged on public lands in 2007-08.

North Carolina hunters killed more than 5,200 deer on public-hunting areas around the state last season.

## NANTAHALA, PISGAH NATIONAL FORESTS

There's little question that the Macon County section of the Nantahala National Forest is the best public-hunting area for deer in the western third of North Carolina.

"The Macon Ranger District has lots of wildlife openings, including logging roads, power lines and openings at higher and lower elevations, sanctuaries and wilderness areas" said David Stewart, a biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Last season, hunters took 200 deer of Macon County tracts that are part of the Nantahala National Forest. Three other counties weren't far behind: Transylvania, Cherokee and Jackson.

The Nantahala National Forest covers about 530,000 acres. The Pisgah National Forest is slightly smaller, at around 512,000 acres. Slightly more accessible to hunters from the eastern two-thirds of the state, the Pisgah National Forest produced 111 deer last year in Madison County, 105 in Brunswick County and 81 in Burke County.

Craig Holt



## BUTNER-FALLS OF NEUSE, JORDAN GAME LANDS

These two game lands are mirror images, with good deer populations and large reservoirs at their centers. Together they cover approximately 26,000 acres just north and south of the Raleigh-Durham area, respectively.

Similar landscapes include mixed hardwood-pine forests surrounded by small farms and housing developments.

Annual deer kills at the two game lands have tracked evenly for years.

"Both game lands are excellent for deer," said biologist Chris Baranski of the Commission. "Hunters shouldn't have any trouble (finding whitetails). Everything is developed except the game lands, so deer concentrate inside a large expanse of undeveloped land."

## CROATAN NATIONAL FOREST

The Croatan National Forest in Carteret, Craven and Jones counties in eastern North Carolina offers a different experience with its pocosins, swamps and forests.

Last season, hunters tagged 331 deer on the national forest's 162,247 acres, an increase of better than 20% over the previous season.

"Croatan is a popular place for deer hunting," said Richie Clark, a Commission biologist.

Wildlife food plots include oats and rye near Pelletier and Long Point Landing. The Croatan has white oak ridges near the Havelock ferry terminal and large drainage areas reachable by boat at Bryce's Creek and the White Oak River.

"Some of the biggest whitetail bucks in eastern North Carolina are killed (here) each season," Clark said. "Most come out of Jones and Craven."

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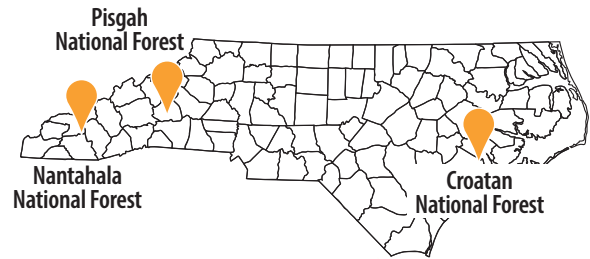
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\*These numbers are in reference to the inventory totals for Whitetail Properties Real Estate in North Carolina as of August 1, 2020.



# THE BEAR FACTS

## WESTERN GAME LANDS OFFER BRUINS GALORE



### NANTAHALA, PISGAH NATIONAL FORESTS

The sprawling Nantahala and Pisgah national forests, with more than a million acres between them, provide bear hunters with plenty of land to roam. Last season, hunters killed 550 bears on North Carolina public-hunting tracts in the western third of the state, out of a total area harvest of 1,290.

"As more people move into the western counties, developers have bought huge amounts of lands to build houses and created de facto bear sanctuaries," said David Stewart, a Commission biologist whose territory covers western North Carolina.

Hunters tagged 308 bears on Nantahala properties last year, with Macon County leading with 78 and Graham County with 56. Pisgah hunters tagged a record 270 bear last season, led by McDowell County with 70 and Burke County with 51.

"Nantahala and Pisgah game lands are popular places for bear hunting," Stewart said. "A good number of hunters hunt bears with dogs. Most hunters know where bear sanctuaries are because they've been hunting for years. There's a lot of still-hunting."

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Craig Holt

## CROATAN NATIONAL FOREST, TYRELL, PENDER COUNTIES

Hunters in North Carolina's coastal plane tagged more than 2,100 bears last season, but only 94 came from game lands

Hunters heading to eastern North Carolina probably should consider hunting in counties with a good population of bears rather than on individual game lands. With the exception of Croatan National Forest, game lands with good bear populations are relatively small.

"Croatan has pocosins and tupelo swamps that cover a large area of the game lands," said Richie Clark, a Commission biologist, "but it has pretty good road access."

Hunters tagged 21 bears in the Jones County section of the national forest last season.

Tyrrell County contains three game lands — Alligator River, Buckridge and J. Morgan Futch — where hunters tagged 34 bruins.

Pender County's Angola Bay and Holly Shelter game lands contributed 11 bears. No other eastern game land saw more than a handful of bear harvests.

**DUCKS** ➤

National forests in western North Carolina offer bear hunters better than a million acres of public-hunting land.

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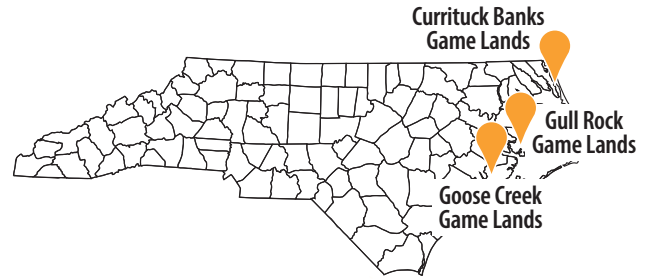


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# DUCKS CHOOSE THESE EASTERN NC GAME LANDS FOR WINTER HOMES



Eastern North Carolina has the more productive public waterfowl hunting opportunities than any area of the state, by far.

## GOOSE CREEK GAME LANDS

This 9,953-acre game land contains seven waterfowl impoundments scattered on both sides of Goose Creek in Beaufort and Pamlico counties. The impoundments are sectioned to allow dozens of hunters to enjoy their sport.

The most popular are Pamlico Point's four impoundments on Beard Island adjoining Pamlico Sound. Campbell's Creek has two impoundments with 11 sections. Spring Creek has six sections with six disabled-hunters blinds. Meanwhile, Hunting Creek, Smith Creek, Hobuken and Parker Farm boast single impoundments.

"The predominant harvest at Goose Creek is wigeons, gadwall, green-wing teal, ring-necked ducks, pintails, ruddy ducks, wood ducks and black ducks," said David Turner, a Commission biologist whose territory includes Goose Creek.

## GULL ROCK GAME LANDS

This 28,600-acre game land in Hyde County contains the Long Shoal River tract north of Englehard, the Outfall Canal tract south of Lake Mattamuskeet and a smaller, Long Shoal tract north of Fairfield. Each of these sections lies between Pamlico Sound and Lake Mattamuskeet.

Outfall Canal Road leads to Merle Road Loop Impoundment (seven sections, 250 acres) and doesn't require a permit to hunt. It has a nearby camp site and two parking areas.

"It often attracts ducks, geese and (tundra) swans," Turner said. "(We) manage it for moist soils and submerged aquatic grasses.

"If it gets windy, birds may fly off the sound. It's also got potential if you draw a swan permit. I've seen surveys that don't report a black duck or mallard but more swans than ducks."

## CURRITUCK BANKS GAME LANDS

This game land covers 228 acres and includes waterfowl blinds that were once private but were donated by Currituck County to the N.C. Wildlife Commission. They dot either side of Currituck Sound's mainland and the spit of land bounded on the east by the Atlantic Ocean. It's the first coastal region to see migrating waterfowl fly south.



"These game-land blinds offer hunting for ducks to geese to swans," Turner said.

The northern section includes Currituck Banks, while the southern blinds are inside Currituck National Wildlife Refuge.

Currituck Banks has two blinds across the sound from on the ocean side at Ships Bay and two mainland blinds, one at Cedar Bay and one at Hog Quarter Landing. Six Currituck NWR blinds are inside the Currituck Marsh Unit and three at the South Marsh Unit.

Hunting is by lottery draw, and individuals should visit [www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Permit-Hunting-Opportunities](http://www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Permit-Hunting-Opportunities).

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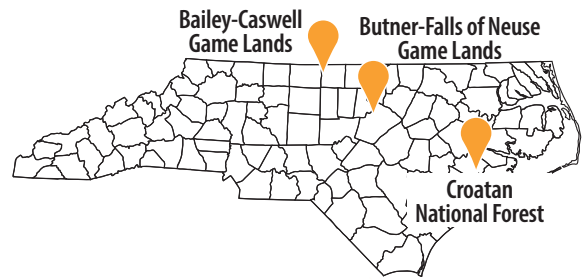
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# SMALL GAME: HABITAT IS EVERYTHING



## R. WAYNE BAILEY-CASWELL GAME LANDS

The R. Wayne Bailey-Caswell Game Lands, covering 18,150 acres in Caswell County, is a mixed landscape of managed fields, hardwoods, pines, hickories, thickets, small streams and steep ridges. Acorn-bearing oaks and hickories supply food for gray squirrels.

"About 50% of Bailey-Caswell has open hickory and upland hardwoods, so gray squirrel hunting is excellent," said biologist Baranski, who said the Commission also manages habitat for wildlife at Bailey-Caswell.

"We've got a lot of young clear-cuts, tons of acres in dove fields and burn blocks, so rabbit hunting also can be really good," he said. "We have eight fields planted in brown top and proso millet, corn, sun flowers and buckwheat, covering 190 acres."

Planted fields and burn blocks offer some quail hunting. The birds can't be hunted on CURE areas (a quail-restoration project), but rabbit hunting is allowed.

Hunters don't need special permits at this game land.

## BUTNER-FALLS OF NEUSE, JORDAN GAME LANDS

Because these two game lands are near Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, many outdoorsmen visit both to open the year's first hunting season for doves.

"Butner-Falls has seven managed fields (totaling 200 acres) that are extremely popular with the hunting public," Baranski said. "Jordan Lake has nine dove fields of 65½ acres."

Because of hardwoods on both game lands, hunters shouldn't have any problem finding squirrels.

"The northern end of Butner-Falls is a good place for rabbits and beagles," he said. "It has more fields and isn't too developed. At Jordan, the best rabbit habitats are edges of dove fields."

Jordan contains lots of bottomlands suitable for woodcock hunting.

## CROATAN NATIONAL FOREST

The Croatan National Forest's landscape varies from mixed pine and hardwoods to swamps to pocosins, said biologist Clark.

"It has a mixed bag of small game," he said.

The game land offers popular six dove fields in the Brices Creek region. Permits are required to hunt the first two days of dove season.

Hunting success on rabbits, squirrel and quail varies at Croatan. "A lot of people hunt rabbits close to the dove fields and at wild-life openings after deer season," Clark said. "It has former agricultural fields that hold cottontail rabbits and a few swamp rabbits.

"Quail mainly are found at fire-controlled places and transition areas between ridges and swamps."

Mixed hardwoods and pine forests contain gray squirrels and some fox squirrels. ■



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



Craig Holt

Good squirrel habitat on public-hunting lands matches good private-land habitat: big tracts of hardwoods.

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# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



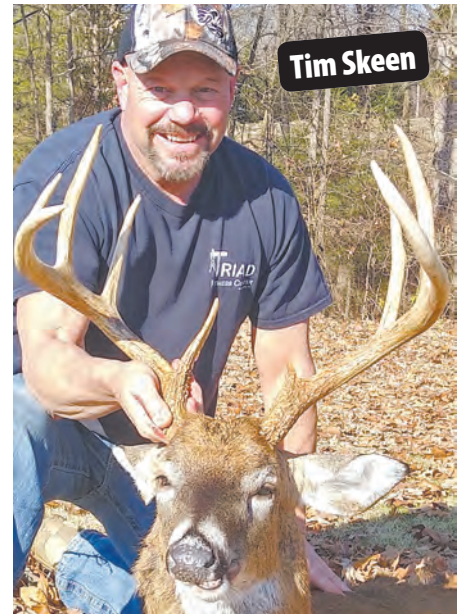
**Amy-Lauren Lum Won**

Amy-Lauren Lum Won from Kauai, Hawaii, filled her first buck tag with this nice, 185-pound deer on Nov. 19, 2019 near Barnwell, S.C.



**Mayson Parker**

Mayson Parker caught this nice bass at the family pond in Chatham County, N.C.



**Tim Skeen**

Tim Skeen of Winston-Salem, N.C., killed this 10-point, 132-inch Davidson County buck on Dec. 7, 2019.



**Sandra Pennell**

Sandra Pennell caught this 10.7-pound lunker bass on a crankbait in a Rockingham County, N.C., pond on April 26.



**Richard Wall, David Buis**

Richard Wall and David Buis killed these big South Carolina toms this past April 11 in Greenwood County.



**Loren Shull**

Loren Shull of Roxboro, N.C., bagged this trophy buck the day before Thanksgiving 2019 in Person County.

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

Having more weight toward the broad-head end of your arrow doesn't necessarily make for more accurate shooting or better arrow penetration on game.



## WHAT F.O.C. IS, WHY IT MATTERS

'FRONT OF CENTER' MEASURES HOW MUCH OF YOUR ARROW'S WEIGHT IS IN THE BROADHEAD END. IT MATTERS A GREAT DEAL

Every sport has its trends, and the sport of bowhunting is no exception. The latest craze is shooting extreme "F.O.C." arrows.

Log onto to any online archery forum, and you won't have to scroll far to see a thread about it. Like most subjects on most forums, a lot of strongly opinionated people post, many of whom are not completely knowledgeable and a few who actually understand the topic well. It is important to be educated about the topic so you can read between the lines to glean helpful information without getting lost in opinions and pointless discussion.

You might wonder "What is F.O.C., and why is it important?" F.O.C. is an abbreviation for "Front of Center," which refers to the percentage of total arrow weight that is on the broadhead end of an arrow.

Having sufficient F.O.C. balance to any arrow is crucial to accuracy, but even more so when it comes to a broadhead-tipped hunting arrow. The best analogy for this is a badminton "birdie," where the heavy tip pulls the lighter rear through the air. By having a higher F.O.C., your arrow becomes more accurate, especially at longer distances, and also gains momentum, helping to increase penetration on game animals.

During the bow-speed craze of the 1990s and early 2000s, many hunters mistakenly switched to lightweight broadheads in an effort to reduce the total weight of their arrows. The result

was often a loss of accuracy due to the "tail wagging the dog" effect and also poor penetration. In my opinion, the pendulum is starting to swing too far the other way, as people are being led to shoot arrows that are excessively heavy in an effort to achieve extreme F.O.C. weights that are much higher than necessary.

Heavy F.O.C. is nothing new, having been around since the dawn of archery. Native Americans and other early archers used broadheads made of stone that were extremely heavy, on wooden shafts fletched with extremely light feathers. It is only recently with modern materials that archers have had the ability to shoot lighter tips, causing their F.O.C. to be too low.

### MATERIAL CHANGES

With the addition of plastic vanes and heavier, lighted arrow nocks — which add weight to the nock end of the arrow — thus reducing F.O.C., the problem was exacerbated. Only recently have many archers started to worry about proper F.O.C. due to better education on the

Sammy Romano

### Determining F.O.C. %

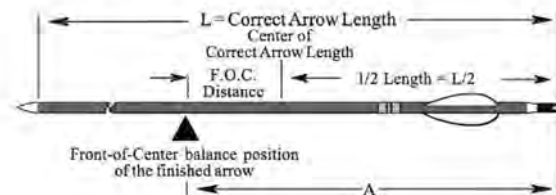


AMO-Standard F.O.C. balance formula

$$\text{F.O.C. \%} = \frac{100 \times (A - L/2)}{L}$$

L = Correct Arrow Length—Distance from bottom of nock groove to end of shaft

A = Distance from bottom of nock groove to finished arrow balance position (includes weight of point [+ insert], nock system and fletching)



subject. The longer shots that today's equipment allows for has also increased the need for higher F.O.C. weights. This might lead you to think, "If a higher F.O.C. is good, a much higher F.O.C. should be even better!" Not necessarily; that thought process is a slippery slope that can lead to other issues.

Our society is always looking for the magic bullet or super pill that will instantly fix all of our problems. Extremely high F.O.C. has occupied that



Sammy Romano is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 25 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.



niche recently in the archery world. There are even people selling test kits with super-high F.O.C. online. Although it often helps correct poor arrow flight due to improper form or tuning, this correction comes at a cost. Extremely high F.O.C. weight leads to extremely heavy arrows, which drastically affect trajectory. Unless the archer has a range compensating sight, such as a Garmin Xero, Burris Oracle, or E-Z-V, this can result in missing shots due to a range misjudgment of only one or two yards.

## ACCURACY OVER PENETRATION

I often hear people say, “I want to be able to penetrate both shoulders.” According to the Ashby Foundation, which has done extensive scientific research on the subject, arrow weights of at least 650 grains are required for consistent penetration when encountering large bone. But this will have the trajectory of a lead balloon out of most whitetail setups. One absolute is that you must hit the animal to penetrate it at all. Think about it this way: if you hit the dirt with a very heavy arrow, all you do is to penetrate deeper into the ground. Shot placement and proper target angle helps eliminate the shoulder as an obstacle on whitetails. Like most things in life, it is important to find a literal balance when it comes to F.O.C.

Easton Archery recommends an F.O.C. of 10% to 15% for hunting arrows. Anything over 15% is extreme, with 10% to 12% being ideal. F.O.C. for your arrow can easily be calculated using a thin edge — such as a butter knife blade, a pencil, a tape measure, and a calculator. Simply find the balance point of your arrow by laying it across the knife edge. Mark it with the pencil, and measure to it from the bottom of your arrow’s nock groove (where the string attaches). Next, measure the total length of your arrow from the bottom of the nock groove to the end of the shaft itself. Then, plug these numbers into the formula to calculate your arrow’s F.O.C.

## MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

If your F.O.C. is too low, you can easily increase it by using heavier broadheads or weighted arrow inserts to add weight to the front of your arrow. F.O.C. can also be increased by removing lighted nocks and fletching your arrows with either smaller vanes or feathers to decrease the weight at the rear. My personal whitetail arrow weighs 475 grains — which is fairly heavy

— with an 11% F.O.C. This will kill any whitetail in the world with proper shot placement. My Garmin Xero sight eliminates worry about trajectory costing me an animal.

Hopefully, this has helped explain F.O.C. and why it is important. Check your arrow’s F.O.C. and adjust it to get the most out of your setup this year. Do some research; keep an open mind, but be skeptical enough to verify the info in many forums. As always, if you have questions or need help, consult your local pro shop. Consider the source; when it comes to the subject of arrows, I would believe Easton Archery, the world’s oldest and largest arrow manufacturer, before a keyboard warrior in most cases. Increase your F.O.C. — but not too much — and watch your shooting improve. ■

*You might think, “If a higher F.O.C. is good, a much higher F.O.C. should be even better!” Not necessarily.*

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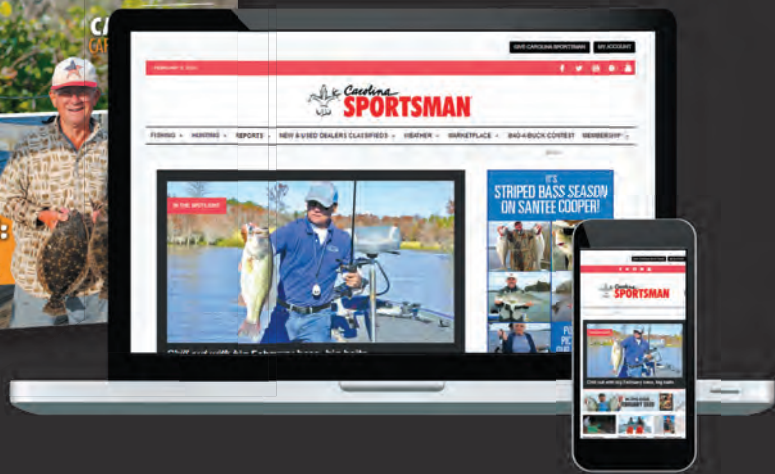
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WHEN THE SEASON  
IS OPEN.**

By Mike Marsh

# HEAD OUT FOR NC FLOUNDER

Mike Marsh

**G**uion Lee III launched his 22-foot center console from a boat ramp in Wrightsville Beach, N.C., early enough to avoid the crowd and be assured of a parking spot. After idling through the seemingly interminable no-wake zone, he punched the throttle forward.

“Most fishermen are beating the jetties and the ICW for flounder,” Lee said, “but the best fishing is in the ocean when conditions are right.”

After riding the rolling swells of Masonboro Inlet, Lee headed to a popular artificial reef. While a few boats were in the area, mostly trolling for Spanish or king mackerel, he had several rods rigged with bottom-bouncing bucktail jigs.

“Most people who head to the nearshore structure to catch flounder try to catch them at main artificial reef structures,” he said. “The Tug and the Liberty Ship are sunken vessels that have a lot of metal to snag lures. Anglers usually catch a livewell full of live mullet before heading here, but the problems with mullet are that you may soon run out of bait because there are so many pinfish, pigfish, sea bass and sharks. The other problem is, you can go through a lot of rigs when they hang up, and you have to break them off.”

Lee began searching the bottom for a small patch of structure. Once he found it on his GPS unit, with confirmation from his sonar screen, he slowed the boat, grabbed a rod from the holder and dropped a bucktail with an artificial shrimp impaled on the hook.

“The direction and velocity of the wind and current dictate the direction of the drift,” he said. “If the boat is moving too fast, or in the wrong direction, it makes it too difficult to fish with a bucktail. On those days, it’s better to try something else. I have fished this area enough to know from which direction and how fast the boat should be moving to avoid too many hang-ups.”

On a calm day, the author fished a nearshore artificial reef out of Wrightsville Beach and caught this nice flounder.

“The trick is fishing small individual pieces or patches of man-made structure or the natural ledges nearby. The spot we are fishing is probably a piece of concrete pipe. Pipes are some of the best structure, but you are going to snag one every so often.”

With the boat drifting and the engine idling, Lee watched the sonar screen intently. He lifted the rod tip a foot or two, then let it fall. It wasn’t long before he felt a thump. Setting the hook, he fought a flounder to the surface and landed it with a net.

“This one weighs about 3 pounds,” he said. “We catch a lot of fish of that size, but they can weigh up to 8 pounds. But, we also catch plenty of them that are too short to keep.”

Lee said every angler finds a few sweet spots and fishes them. Fishing the outlying structure spaces everyone away from the congregation of boats trolling or fishing the main structures with bottom rigs.

After he caught two keepers off the pipe pieces, he moved a short distance to a natural ledge. The fish bit constantly, with a flounder coming over the side every few minutes. There were also several missed strikes and some fish that shook loose before making it to the surface.



## DESTINATION INFORMATION

**HOW TO GET THERE** — The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has a public ramp in Wrightsville Beach that is convenient for most inshore and nearshore anglers. Wrightsville Beach can be reached from most areas of North Carolina via I-40, US 421 or US 74 through Wilmington. US 74 east from Wilmington carries you to Wrightsville Beach. The ramp is on the beach side of the bridge across the ICW. Two productive nearshore reefs for flounder are AR 370, aka the Meares Harris Reef, which is 2.3 miles from the Masonboro Inlet sea buoy, and AR 364, aka the Billy Murrell Reef, which is 6.1 miles from the Masonboro Inlet sea buoy.

**WHEN TO GO** — North Carolina's recreational season for flounder opened on Aug. 16 and will close on Sept. 30. The creel limit is four fish per day, with a 15-inch size minimum.

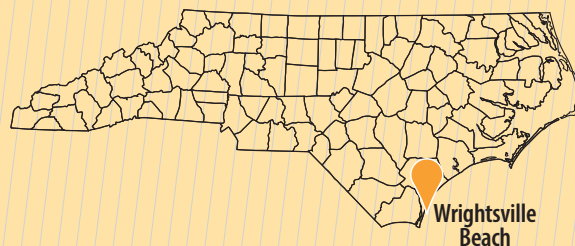
**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Vertical jig Spro bucktails in white, yellow or red with white Gulp! shrimp as trailers. Spinning tackle will do the job: a 7-foot Shimano Teramar South East with a Penn Battle II reel spooled with 20- to 40-pound braid and an 18- to 24-inch monofilament leader. Try to find isolated pieces of bot-

tom structure that are part of an artificial reef complex and drift across them.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — Guion Lee III, Green Creek Outfitters and Guide Service, 252-617-0024. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** — Wilmington Chamber of Commerce, 910-762-2611, [www.wilmingtonchamber.org](http://www.wilmingtonchamber.org); Wrightsville Beach Chamber of Commerce, (910-256-8116), [www.wrightsville.com](http://www.wrightsville.com).

**MAPS** — Maps Unique, 910-458-9923, or [www.mapsunique.com](http://www.mapsunique.com). NCDMF Artificial Reef Guide, [portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program](http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program).



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**"A** lot of those are short strikes, with the flounder just hanging onto the trailer," he said. "The trailer might be ripped off at the hook or damaged. As long as most of it is still there, it will attract a fish. But, when they aren't hitting the lure any more, it's time to replace the trailer."

When the jig snagged, Lee stopped the boat and backed up until he was pulling it from the opposite direction he had been drifting. While he lost a bucktail or two, he said it was easier than catching and rigging live baits. After a couple of hours, the activity tapered off, and Lee moved to another artificial reef offshore of Figure Eight Island, near Mason's Inlet. He said the smaller reef did not get as much angler attention as larger reefs.

"It also has scattered structure that you have to find on your own," he said. "The (NCDMF Artificial Reef Guide) has the coordinates of a lot of the structure, but either some of it was not marked or just the general area was noted."

The current and wind had decreased to the point that the ocean was relatively calm. Lee began using the engine to maneuver the boat over the structure.

"When the current dies, the fishing might seem easier," he said, "but it's actually more difficult to keep the boat running the direction you want. A little bit of current also makes the

fish bite better. Another factor is the tide. Fish seem to bite better on certain tides at certain spots. The only way to learn the connection between the tide and the strength of the bite is through experience."

While the bucktails he was using were in the higher price range, Lee also uses inexpensive jigs. He said some clients are adept at jigging. However, some clients just can't get the hang of it. ■



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

## NC FLOUNDER REGULATIONS

North Carolina's recreational flounder season opened Aug. 16 and will close Sept. 30.

Fishermen can keep four flounder a day, with a 15-inch size minimum.

North Carolina's recreational flounder season closed on Sept. 4, 2019, in an attempt to stop a precipitous decline in the southern flounder population. The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' goal was to reduce the recreational flounder harvest by 62% in 2019 and 72% in 2020. ■

A bucktail jig with a soft-plastic shrimp trailer is a great jigging tool when you're targeting flounder around nearshore bottom structure.



Mike Marsh

# JIGGING TRICKS

Guide Guion Lee III has some definite ways that he likes to jig vertically when targeting flounder around nearshore reefs and ledge.

"Lift the jig and let it down vertically or back it up against the current," Lee said. "If you don't lift it sharply enough or high enough and are letting it drag, it's going to snag."

"The most-important thing is using a jig heavy enough so you can feel the bottom under the conditions you are fishing. A 1-ounce jig usually works, but it may take a 3-ounce jig to maintain a solid feel."

"Using braid also helps maintain bottom contact, and braid is strong enough to straighten the hook to free the lure. Keep checking the hook point to be sure it's still sharp and straighten the hook with pliers if gets bent out of shape." ■



A spinning reel spooled with braid, a monofilament leader and bucktail is the ticket to jigging for flounder.

Mike Marsh

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# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Martin Mouton**

Martin Mouton boated this nice bull redfish on a topwater plug the morning of April 17, fishing in Charleston Harbor.



**Theresa McCullough**

Theresa McCullough caught this 3.3-pound, 17-inch slab crappie from a neighbor's pond in Battleboro, N.C., on March 30.



**Amber Butner**

Amber Butner, 17, caught this 19¼-inch brown trout in Alleghany County, N.C., on April 24.



**Amanda Leinbach**

Amanda Leinbach landed this 8¼-pound bass on April 28, her 37th birthday, from Sutton Lake near Wilmington, N.C.



**Finn Buckley**

Finn Buckley caught this 41½-inch redfish in South Carolina's Winyah Bay with Barrier Island Guide Service in late March.



**Ginger Welch**

Ginger Welch of Mount Airy, N.C., put her tag on this 8-point buck, taken in Surry County on Nov. 24, 2019.



**Jim Rodriguez**

Jim Rodriguez caught this 23-inch speckled trout April 5 in North Carolina's Blounts Creek on a MirOlure.



**Bryan Buckner**

Bryan Buckner of Saluda, N.C., landed this hybrid bass while crappie fishing on Lake Hartwell on March 14.

# WALKING THE PLANKS

■ By Jeff Burleson

**PIERS ALONG THE CAROLINAS' COAST PROVIDE TREMENDOUS FISHING OPPORTUNITIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE FALL WHEN FISH ARE MIGRATING UP AND DOWN THE BEACHES.**



Jeff Burleson

**T**he Carolinas' coast offer fantastic views of the Atlantic Ocean and some of the best fishing anywhere along the eastern seaboard, from backwaters to bluewater offshore grounds.

Anglers have plenty of opportunities along its reaches, and while many attack their finned foe above the waterline in a boat or from shore, the dozens of public piers along the shorelines position anglers for success for much of the year.

And the fall fishing season would not be complete without a trip to one of the many goliath structures scattered along the shorelines.

Beginning in the northeastern corner of North Carolina is the 696-foot Avalon pier, protruding from the Outer Banks, running south to the 1,120-foot Hunting Island State Park pier that juts out in to Frapp Inlet between Frapp Island and Hunting Island, S.C., the 487 miles of shoreline features two dozen piers open to the public.

For many, the sight of wooden railings and familiar smell

of sea spray along piers jostles childhood memories. For nearly a century, people have ventured to the coast to spend the day targeting finned delicacies to take home to the frying pan. In 1923, the first ocean pier in the Carolinas was constructed in Kure Beach, a small, beachfront community south of Wilmington, N.C., between Carolina Beach and Fort Fisher.

Piers have always provided entertainment for a wide variety of patrons. Aside from game rooms, short-order grills and guests soaking up rays, the fishing opportunities, without much question, are the major draw. And they should be. The fishing can be phenomenal along these colossal structures 20 feet or so over the water line.

From the foamy suds along the beach to the pier's terminus in deeper water, piers offer anglers ample opportunities to catch drum, trout, pompano, flounder, whiting and spots, plus king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cobia and even gigantic tarpon that can be much heavier than 100 pounds.



# ANGLERS CHOOSE THEIR POSITION ALONG THE PIER BASED ON WHAT THEY INTEND ON CATCHING.

From the shallow shoreline in the salty suds for most of the pier's length, light-tackle anglers monopolize these areas with lures, cut bait and some live bait, targeting just about anything and everything that swims]. The end of the pier is basically reserved for the diehard pier goers targeting king mackerel. They are some of the most-dedicated anglers around, setting up at dawn and fishing until sundown in hopes of landing a respectable king for the ride back home.

One such angler is Chris Ott of Conway, S.C., a regular on the Apache Pier in Myrtle Beach, S.C. He usually camps out at the end of the pier, in king mackerel territory, and he catches freezers full of king mackerel each year.

"I have been fishing Apache for six years now. It's one of the only piers you can still fish for kings on, and it's a good one too," Ott said. "In the last two years, we have caught more than 300 kings off Apache."

Ott utilizes the typical two-rod set up, one serving as a stationary, anchor line, and the second with a live bait hooked up, resting just at or below the water's surface. A live mullet, menhaden, bluefish or any other live baitfish can be deadly off the end of these piers, and throughout the year, Ott catches all kinds of species using this live-baiting technique.

"We catch kings mostly, but we also catch Spanish, cobia, tarpon and some big sharks," Ott said.

Ott spends most of his free time year-round on the pier, but his favorite times are spring and fall.

"The fall run in September through October can be epic for kings," Ott said.

The Apache Pier is one of the longest in the Carolina fleet of piers spanning 1,206 feet into the Atlantic Ocean. According to Ott, the length of the pier makes a difference, allowing fishermen to move farther from shore and over deeper water.

RIGHT: Chris Ott decked this nice king mackerel Apache Pier in Myrtle Beach, SC. BELOW: A pier fisherman swings a panfish over the railing, a scene repeated thousands of times on piers along the coast of both Carolinas.



Jeff Burleson



Chris Ott

But the nearshore pier sections can offer anglers a wide ranges of species. Glenn Cannady of Goldsboro, N.C. has been visiting Apache Pier routinely for the past 20 years. The king mackerel fishing at the end does not interest him; he fishes from the shoreline about 600 feet oceanward and brings fish home in his cooler on every trip. Flounder, whiting, weakfish, drum and spots make up the majority of his catch. His favorite seasons on the pier are the spring and fall.

“The flounder, black drum, red drum, whiting and spots pick up in the fall months,” Cannady said. “And if I had a choice, the north side of the pier can be the best because many of the fish are migrating south and will encounter the north side of the pier first.”



## PIERS OF THE CAROLINAS

### North Carolina

- Avalon Pier, Kill Devil Hills, 705 feet
- Outer Banks Fishing Pier, Nags Head, 650 feet
- Jeannette’s Pier, Nags Head, 1,000 feet
- Nags Head Fishing Pier, Nags Head, 750 feet
- Hatteras Island Pier, Rodanthe, 700 feet
- Avon Fishing Pier, Avon, 600 feet
- Oceanana Pier, Atlantic Beach, 1,000 feet
- Bogue inlet Pier, Emerald Isle, 1,000 feet
- Surf City Pier, Surf City, 937 feet
- Jolly Rodger Pier, Topsail Beach, 850 feet
- Seaview Pier, North Topsail Beach, 1,000 feet
- Johnny Mercer’s Pier, Wrightsville Beach, 945 feet
- Carolina Beach Pier, Carolina Beach, 700 feet
- Kure Beach Pier, Kure Beach, 712 feet
- Oak Island Pier, Oak Island, 880 feet
- Ocean Crest Pier, Oak Island, 893 feet
- Holden Beach Pier, Holden Beach, 700 feet
- Ocean Isle Beach Pier, Ocean Isle Beach, 968 feet

### South Carolina

- Cherry Grove Pier, North Myrtle Beach, 985 feet
- Apache Pier, Myrtle Beach, 1,206 feet
- Mount Pleasant Pier, Mount Pleasant, 1,250 feet
- Folly Beach Pier, Folly Beach, 1,045 feet
- Hunting Island Pier, Hunting Island State Park, 1,120 feet

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Flounder are a common catch around the many pilings that support ocean piers.

**B**ait choices can vary depending on what is running, but cut shrimp, bloodworms and live minnows are always good choices; Cannady prefers artificial bloodworms when spot season is in.

“There is no need to use bloodworms in the fall, because the artificial bloodworms work well when the spots and whiting show up thick,” he said.

Other artificial options can also bring meat to the hill, too. Casting spoons and jigs can be excellent options for catching a multi-species bag for most of the fishing season. The nearshore waters along and near the surf zone corral baitfish and make a perfect scenario for feeding predators.

The Apache Pier is one of the most-visited piers in Myrtle Beach due to the popularity of the campground, amenities, the friendly staff, its width and the fishing opportunities. But lots of piers along the coasts of the two states can bring success as well. Almost all piers will produce spectacular fishing during at least one point of the season due to the migration of species. In the fall and spring, many fish are traveling along the shore and will intercept the piers along their migratory route.

But the piers, and the habitat the piers are built over, are not created equal, either. Most piers range in length from 600 to over 1,000 feet, but the overall length does not always correlate to better fishing, especially when half the anglers are corralled in the first 200 feet from the surf zone. The variability in habitat will be typically greater towards shore than near the end. The combination of sandbars and sloughs near the beach will corral schools of fish that can make certain sections better than others. And some piers will span areas with some hardbottom that can congregate baitfish.

Any type of irregular bottom features can be beneficial for anglers, who should not ignore the pilings, either. The area under the pier can offer prime real estate to catch a wide variety of fish, including speckled trout, red drum, black drum, flounder and sheepshead.

Pier fishing is one of the time-honored traditions for Carolinians and the fall season is one of the best times of the year to visit right when the fall migration is within full motion. As fish encounter the pier on their southern migratory path, the hundreds of hooks covered with tasty offerings leave little to desire. ■



Dan Kibler

**NET RESULTS >**



*Jeff Burselson 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.*

# LOOK FOR HUGE REDS

During fall, saltwater fish are steadily moving somewhere with the tide and currents, but they are also well known for migrating from offshore to nearshore and from north to south or south to north as the seasons change.

One of the most-popular sights during the fall is the traditional redfish run, and piers scattered up and down the coastline are prime places to encounter one of these bronzed beauties.

Phil and Lorraine Blue of Pleasant Garden, N.C., come to Cherry Grove, S.C., every year to fish on the pier, and they absolutely love the fall fishing season. Of course, that's when the big redfish show up in the nearshore ocean, well within reach of their fishing gear.

"We start fishing in September and fish several weekends into the fall season," Phil Blue said. "It gets real exciting when a school of the big reds shows up in our lines."

Blue will fish near the end of the pier with fresh cut mullet, bluefish, or whatever he can catch for bait on a hook or with cast net.

Big reds show up in schools and will quickly terrorize a set of lines, giving anglers the fight of their lives from 20 feet above.

While these big redfish are quite fun to catch, many are oversized and too big to keep. Blue takes special care of these fish and gets them back in the water, sending them on their way. ■



||||| Lorraine and Phil Blue show off a couple of  
||||| bull redfish they caught from South Carolina's  
||||| Cherry Grove Pier.

Phil Blue

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# NET RESULTS

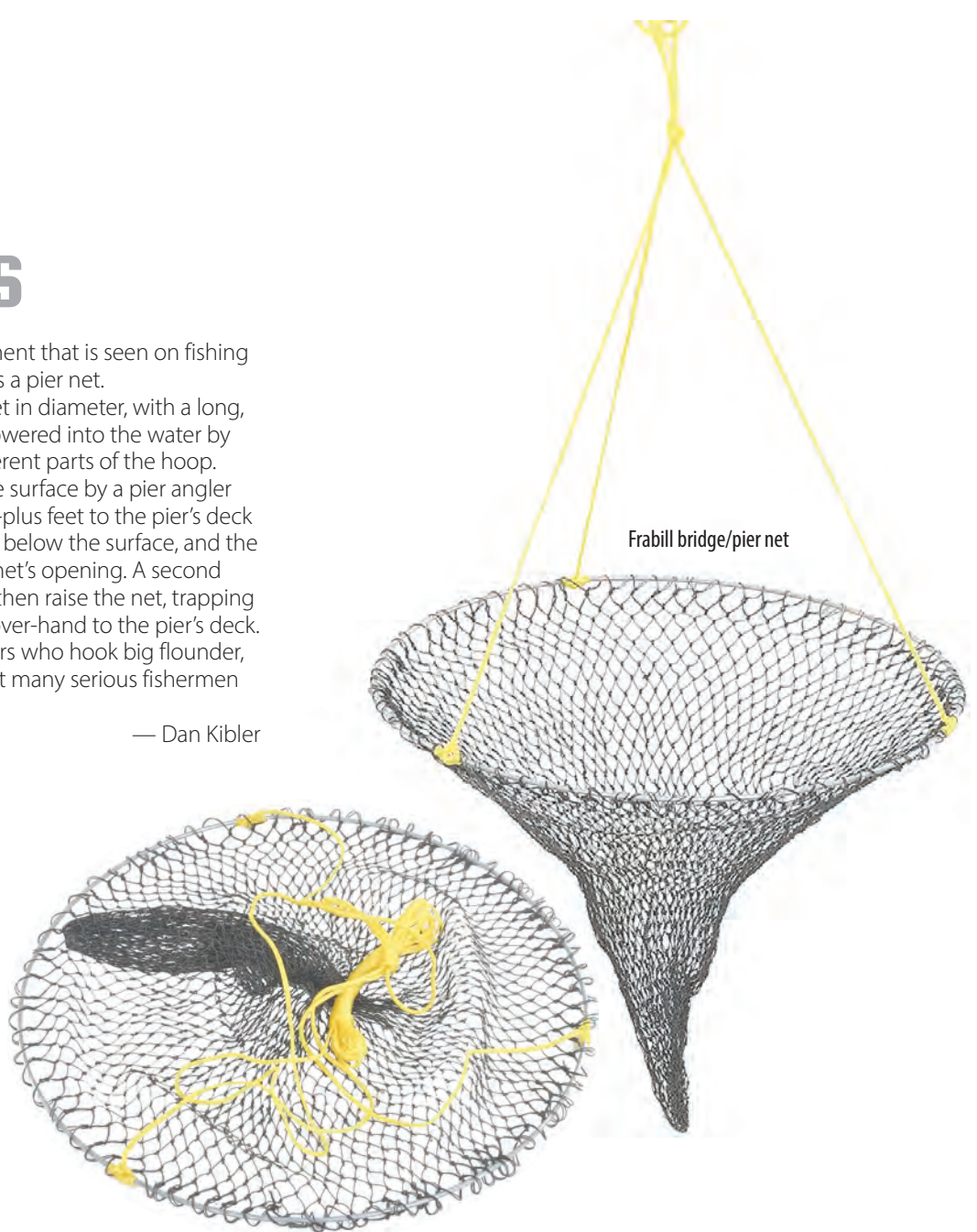
One specialized piece of equipment that is seen on fishing piers — but few other places — is a pier net.

A metal hoop, typically 2 to 3 feet in diameter, with a long, mesh net attached, a pier net is lowered into the water by three sections of rope tied to different parts of the hoop.

When a big fish is brought to the surface by a pier angler — a fish too big to reel up the 20-plus feet to the pier's deck — a net is lowered several inches below the surface, and the angler guides the fish above the net's opening. A second fisherman, holding the rope, can then raise the net, trapping the fish so it can be raised hand-over-hand to the pier's deck.

Many piers supply nets for anglers who hook big flounder, bluefish, redfish and mackerel, but many serious fishermen bring their own. ■

— Dan Kibler



Frabill bridge/piers net

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By Terry McDowell

# SAMPLE THE **SUPER** GOOPER

**BASS FISHERMEN IN THE KNOW FLOCK TO SOUTH CAROLINA'S COOPER RIVER FOR LATE-SUMMER ACTION.**

Many outdoorsmen turn their focus toward the woods in September, and the attraction of early season bucks is strong. But the allure of fast-paced,

# EXPLOSIVE LARGEMOUTH BASS ACTION

on South Carolina's Cooper River is even stronger with many diehard bass fishermen.

The robust bass population in the river, coupled with prime bass habitat, produces tremendous late-summer bass fishing. Multiple lures will work, but the topwater bite is the “go-to” tactic for outstanding fishing.

David Murdaugh has fished the Cooper River and the Santee Cooper lakes his entire life, and the 55-year-old has been guiding the past 11 years.

He said the Cooper River bass fishery is simply amazing.

“The largemouth bass fishing on the river is incredible, and the great action holds up through the summer and into the fall,” he said. “I’ve tracked tournament results for years, and the winning weights for a 3-hour tournament range from 17 to 25 pounds on any given evening. Plus, it’s very competitive, with several guys usually stacked near the winning weight. That’s close to 4- to 5-pound average (for) a five-fish limit in only three hours of fishing. Yeah, I like bass fishing the Cooper River.”

To get those kinds of results, Murdaugh said finding patterns quickly is one key, but the dynamics of the river require anglers to constantly revise their gameplans throughout the day.

“The Cooper River is dramatically impacted by tides, and the bass bite will ebb and flow with the tide,” he said. “Fishing success is more about adjusting to what the situation is at any given tide, but fishing can be good on any tide.”

Murdaugh said by mid- to late summer, vegetation growth is abundant, and while it holds scads of bass, getting a big fish out of it often creates intense drama when one is hooked. But the first priority is getting the big fish to bite.

“Topwater lures and plastic worms are two of my most effective tools,” he said. “Plus, I just love the thrill of catching bass on topwater, so it’s perfect for those who enjoy topwater action.”

Murdaugh said weedy cover such as hydrilla, hyacinth and other vegetation hold bass and is abundant along the river. But cover alone is not enough for consistent action on quality fish. Specific areas such as deeper ledges and creek and river junctions with weedy growth are both prime targets.



Summer bass fishing on the Cooper River is top-drawer; guide David Murdaugh said it's tidal fishing at its best.

“Fishing the breaks all along the river that lead into shallower water off the main channel is the general theme, but you’ll have to search for some of the more isolated ones that aren’t fished heavily,” said Murdaugh, who has also had success fishing long stretches of water adjacent to the river channel but keys on areas with multiple small points and pockets lined with weedy growth.

“Bass are looking to ambush prey, and they’ll hold on these small points and pockets,” he said. “Anything different can hold a big bass on the river, and they’re often targets fishermen can identify.

“A break that leads back into a shallow flat or small creek is excellent. The water flowing in or out of the breaks into the river creates an eddy and any nearby weeds, stumps or old pilings enhance the potential.”

Murdaugh said it’s around such areas that multiple big bass tend to congregate, so he’ll fish them thoroughly. And it’s not a bad idea to circle back to the area later to re-check it. He keeps his graph running and is always on the lookout for bass and forage.

“I like seeing shad and other potential forage on the graph; it’s another piece of the puzzle,” he said. “The more pieces I have connected in an area the better my odds of catching fish.”

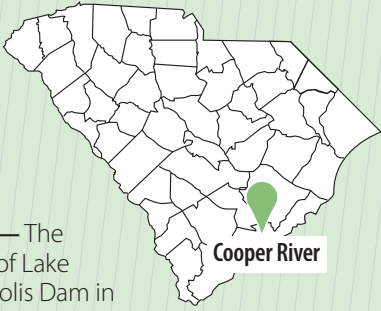
Murdaugh said the consensus is the late-summer habitat is ideal for topwater lures and worms.

“I’ll use a variety of lures during the course of a day’s fishing to determine what the fish want at that time,” he said. “Casting ability is crucial, and being able to thread the needle and hit the target puts more big fish in the boat.”

Murdaugh will switch lures regularly if he’s not consistently



David Murdaugh will flip big plastic worms at shallow targets during the summer.



**DESTINATION  
INFORMATION**

**HOW TO GET THERE** — The Cooper River flows out of Lake Moultrie through Pinopolis Dam in Moncks Corner, S.C. It joins the Ashley and Wando rivers in Charleston Harbor, but the best largemouth fishing is in the upper part of the river. Cypress Gardens Landing in Moncks Corner is a favored location to access excellent bass fishing.

**WHEN TO GO** — Bass fishing is excellent year-round, but the summer and early fall fishing can be fantastic and is often overlooked.

**BEST TECHNIQUES** — Topwater lures and worms rigged wacky style are prime choices for late summer and early fall trips.

**FISHING INFO/GUIDES** — David Murdaugh, 843-452-9566. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

**ACCOMMODATIONS** — Berkeley County Tourism, Moncks Corner, 843-719-4995, [www.berkeleycountysc.gov/dept/tourism/](http://www.berkeleycountysc.gov/dept/tourism/)

**MAPS** — DeLorme’s South Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer, 207-846-7000, [www.delorme.com](http://www.delorme.com).

getting bites. “I’ve learned to not get locked into any one lure unless I’m catching fish with it,” he said. “My favorite topwater lures for the river are a Pop-R, frog, Whopper Plopper and both the Tiny and Baby Torpedos.”

Murdaugh said all these topwater lures will catch big fish but his go-to bait for Cooper River hawks is a frog.

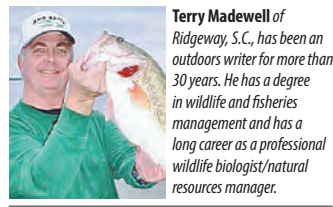
“I love my frog for big bass on the Cooper River,” he said. “It’s very consistent for me, but some days I’ll be a ‘hero or zero’ with the frog. It’s a matter of knowing when to stick with the frog or change when the bite is off.”

He’ll fish Flukes in situations such as schooling-fish action that occurs throughout the day this time of the year. He’s always got a Fluke and a heavy topwater for long-distance casting rigged and ready.

Based on the cover type, he’ll flip worms at specific, tight targets, and he’s also high on worm rigged wacky style.

“Good places to fish the wacky worm are stumps, logs, blow-downs and around breaks,” he said. “The combination of a rocky shoreline with thick vegetative cover that drops quickly is a prime target for wacky worms.” ■

**UNDERSTANDING TIDES  
IS IMPORTANT >**



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

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**UNDERSTANDING  
 TIDES IS  
 IMPORTANT**

Guide David Murdaugh said success catching bass on the Cooper River is directly linked to working the right patterns on the ever-changing tide.

“The key to catching lots of bass on the Cooper River is understanding and adapting to tides,” he said. “A good example is, I’ll have a period when water conditions are prime for a specific type area, and I’ll do well, but I’m also thinking ahead, knowing that the lifespan of this specific area is limited. I’m planning strategy for the next spot while still focused on fishing where I’m currently casting.”

Murdaugh said specific targets that are prime at one water level are not necessarily going to be good on another. But having moving water, whether outgoing or incoming, is better for fishing.

He said his favorite tide for bass fishing the river is a high and falling tide if he has several hours to fish.

“But if it’s a short time-window, such as a 3-hour tournament, I want a dropping mid-tide,” he said. “The key is studying the river to learn what happens to a specific area from one tide extreme to the other. A place that’s usually great on a high tide may not be special on a low tide, because of water level, availability of forage and the cover and weed situation.”

The bottom line, he said, is bass are caught on all tide levels, when fishermen understand the impact tides have and adapt to those changes. ■

Adapting to tidal changes is a key to consistent success on South Carolina’s Cooper River.



Terry Madewell

## LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite

Much of September fishes like a hot, summer month, as the calendar would indicate. But when the weather cools and baitfish start to move back in creeks, Davy Hite said bass will really become active and feeding again.

# SEPTEMBER'S CHALLENGES

BASS ARE LETHARGIC, BUT THE FIRST BIG BAIT MOVE WILL JOLT THEM AWAKE

Dan Kibler

**S**eptember is not a month that many bass fishermen in the Carolinas circle on their calendars. Fishing can be challenging, to say the least, in lakes all across the South, but there are some things you can do to try and have a good day on the water.

First, you have to understand the fish. Bass will be coming off the dog days of summer, and because the water temperatures are the hottest of the year, they will be lethargic, not feeding very much.

Now, understand, the water temperature can be pretty hot after the spawn is finished, and those fish feed, but they're feeding up to recover from the spawn, because the spawn has taken some weight off them.

But in September, the water has been hot all summer, and they're lethargic. Normally, the only time you think of bass as being cold-blooded and lethargic is late in winter when they've been in cold water and have slowed down. So, if you have some time you need to set aside in September to fish, try to make it the latter part of the month.

In late September, the days are getting shorter — we don't have as much sunlight — the nights are getting longer and the water temperature will start dropping. When it does, the fish come alive. That's when the first transition starts, when they start moving back into creeks.

## WHERE'S THE BAIT?

The first thing you should be looking for are creeks that the bait has moved back in first, because they don't all go back

at the same time in all the creeks. Big or small, I usually want to find a creek that's getting a little more runoff, because the bait will move back in there first.

Those shad and herring will start to move in late September, through October and into November. If you can find a creek where they moved back earlier than others, you can really have a good day in there — especially if you're fishing a tournament.

The bait isn't going to move all the way back in that creek to start with, and you don't have to go back that far to find them, even if they're not on the surface. Our electronics these days are so good that you can see the bait. I've got four Humminbird Helix depth finders on my boat, and whether I'm behind the console or on the front of the boat, I'm looking at them all the time. With my electronics, I can run along at a fast idle and see everything in front of and to the sides of my boat.

When you find bait that's moved back in a creek, you want to start fishing there, because other than right around the spawn, bass want to be around bait. They're like you and I; we want to be around the groceries when it's time for dinner.

When I find the bait, I try to determine the depth most of it is holding, and if I can, I'll look for fish on my electronics. In the Carolinas, we have lakes with standing timber, with good contour lines — and lakes that don't have either. I'm going to find the bait and try to present a lure around it — above, below or right in it. Bass may want to feed up, suspend in

the bait, or feed on the bottom below it. If you can pick them out on your electronics, you know where to start.

## PRESENT A LURE

If you find fish around bait 10 feet below the surface, you may be able to pull them up with a topwater plug, or you may have to crank a DT-10 crankbait down to them.

If they're on the bottom, you may have to Texas-rig a Senko and get it down to them. It all depends on the type of mood they're in.

A couple of more things to factor in. If you have some wind, you want to be fishing in it, fishing windy banks. Wind helps, and not just by cooling things off. The water is so clear, because we usually haven't had a lot of rain, that the wind helps you. I love to fish windy banks whenever I can.

Second, on smaller lakes that don't have a lot of tributary creeks, bait will move and bass will be more aggressive in the upper river sections of the lake in late summer and early fall. But I like lakes with lots of bigger creeks, because that gives you more options — there will be less pressure on just one area.

So, find the bait, and find the bass. There may not be a month when that means more than it does in September. ■



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

# HARTWELL SPOTS

## can save an otherwise dismal September

**F**or pro bass fisherman Brian Latimer of Belton, S.C., spotted bass are lifesavers on Lake Hartwell in September. That's especially true in the first half of the month.

"September is often thought of as a transition month, but the fact is, it's really an extension of August," he said. "It's still brutally hot, especially during the first two weeks. The largemouth are sluggish, and they will completely shut down in the middle of the day. Spots, on the other hand, you can catch them at any time of the day, and anywhere on the lake."

And while having some fish willing to bite can be a blessing, he said the behavior of spots can also be a curse.

"It's not really something you can develop a pattern over," he said. "They can bite deep in the middle of the lake one day, then shallow and sporadically the next. It can even change throughout the same day. These fish will keep you guessing. But the good thing is, if you stick to it and eliminate what's not working, you will catch your share."

Latimer said it's tough to beat the soft-plastic bite this month. Drop-shotting, Z-Man Ned Rigs, and ShadZ are all good choices. He watches his electronics closely and targets bait schools.

One thing anglers need to remember this month is that you



Brian Cope

Brian Latimer targets spotted bass on Lake Hartwell this month because they aren't as sluggish as largemouths.

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can't be afraid to completely change what you're doing, even if you've had some success doing it.

"You can catch a few fish on a deep ledge, then the bite goes cold," he said. "It's easy to stick with the same technique and in the same areas, but when the bite shuts down this time of year, you need to turn the tables. Even if it's just to reset your own mind, you've got to make a change."

When the fish shut down, Latimer said he will move from open water into small coves and fish around docks or shallow water.

"That doesn't always result in fish. Sometimes it does, in a big way, but even when it doesn't, making a change that drastic clears my mind and gets me thinking again," he said. "Even if I don't catch fish, it lets me eliminate that type of water and cover. And it gets me thinking about what I should try, instead of just sitting in the same spot wondering why the fish quit biting."

Latimer also said that September fishing is all a numbers game. He doesn't expect to catch many big fish, but the numbers will make up for it.

"You can catch big numbers of spots this month. The size will run small, for the most part, but with every small fish you catch, you're one step closer to catching a big one. It's really a numbers game. Eliminate water, change things up when the bite slows, and put as many fish in the boat as you can," he said. ■

— Brian Cope



**LEARN THE 'WHERE'S' AND 'HOWS' OF LATE-SUMMER SPECKLED TROUT FISHING FROM TWO OF THE CAROLINAS' TOP INSHORE GUIDES. THEY MIGHT ADD SOME HEFT TO YOUR COOLER THIS YEAR.** ■ By Phillip Gentry

SEPTEMBER

# TROUT TIPS

September can be a month of feast or famine when it comes to

# SPECKLED TROUT FISHING

anywhere along the Carolinas' coastline.

Water temperatures are likely to be in the upper extremes, and there's plenty of competition from real fish food that's not carrying a hook in its pocket.

John Boy Koonce of Shoal Bandit Charters in Charleston, S.C., loves what he refers to as "early season" speckled trout fishing. September comes in hot and starts to temper with a promise of what's to come later.

Koonce takes it all in stride. He's found a combination of tactics and locations that will put fish in the boat, whether you're fishing in his native North Carolina or his adopted state of South Carolina.

"You almost have to fish like it's the dead of winter," he said. "That means slow and deep. The good thing is, the fish are not as lethargic, so if you're in the right spot and presenting the bait properly, it won't take long for the fish to let you know."

Koonce (843-425-2939) starts off with his three favorite early season locations to find speckled trout.

## EDGE OF THE GRASS

This is a no-brainer for trout fishing year-round. Koonce said he looks for grass edges that have deep water within a cast distance of the grass.

"For trout, 7 to 8 feet is deep," he said. "Low tide is my favorite. Look for trout pushing bait up against the edge of the channel, but they'll be near or right off the bottom."

## CREEK BENDS

"On a charter, I fish a lot of boat docks, and the best ones will be in the curve of the creek," he said. "It's usually the deepest section of the creek, too."

Another advantage to fishing docks is that any structure nearby or along the channel edge will also hold redfish and flounder.

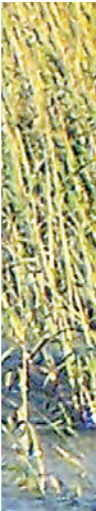
## INTERSECTION RIPS

Koonce loves to fish the intersection of a tributary and a main creek on a falling tide. The current creates a seam, or rip current, that's easy to see. He said in the spring and fall, he focuses on the shallower side, but not this time of year.

"I do better finding trout holding on the deeper side of the rip in the bigger creek," he said. "The rip will be well defined, but the trout are often off on the deeper side of the current, looking for bait that's being washed out."

**INCOMING WATER >**

Early in the month, Koonce will target the deeper side of the rip current formed where a creek and a large tributary meet to find trout. **ACROSS SPREAD:** Steep banks along a grass line are good places to target warm water speckled trout, which will typically hold deeper in the water column.



## INCOMING WATER

On a final note about locations, Koonce said the backs of the feeder creeks are going to be way too hot and murky for trout fishing this time of year. His best advice was to find locations closer to incoming offshore water.

“The offshore water is going to be cooler and cleaner, and that’s what you want,” he said. “Trout are sight feeders, and that cooler water gets them stirred up.”

Having defined the spots he wants to fish in September, he turns his focus to how he fishes them.

## POPPING CORKS

Fishing popping corks for trout is another no-brainer, particularly with live bait, but Koonce may make his leader incredibly long: 5 to 6 feet. While it does make the rig more cumbersome to cast and reduces casting accuracy, it gets down to the fish.

“I’ll put a couple extra split-shot on the leader to get the bait down and lob it upcurrent of what I’m fishing and just let the current take it down,” he said. “There’s not a lot of popping going on. I’d rather the bait just skip or drift along the bottom.”

## CAROLINA-RIGGING

The secret to Carolina-rigging for speckled trout is to use the lightest weight you can get away with. Koonce said usually, this would be a ½- or ¾-ounce egg sinker. In some cases, he may simply crimp a big split-shot of the same weight class on his main braided line just ahead of a 24-inch monofilament leader.

“I love Kahle hooks and mud minnows for Carolina-rigging,” he said. “Again, you might catch anything — which most of my clients don’t mind — but it also puts that minnow right off the bottom, and all you have to do is bump the weight back to the boat.”

## SLOW-ROLLING JIGHEADS

Taken right out of his winter playbook, Koonce said when he has identified a spot that’s holding trout, he’ll anchor up and throw a Z-Man Grubz in pearl blue on a ¼-ounce Eye Strike jighead.

“This is classic trout fishing,” he said. “Throw the bait, let it sink and just ease it back across the bottom. If you get a hit on the fall, then you know to start reeling a little sooner or a little faster, but the basic retrieve is low and slow all the way back to the boat.” ■



**Phillip Gentry** of Waterloo, S.C., is host of “The Outdoor Show,” a weekly radio podcast that can be seen at [www.pgandboatgirl.com](http://www.pgandboatgirl.com).



Phillip Gentry

When he uses a popping cork this time of year, John Boy Koonce lengthens the leader to 5 or 6 feet and lets the bait drift with the current.

Wading the flats in one of North Carolina's big sounds is a great way to catch speckled trout during the hotter months.

## EXTRA OPPORTUNITIES

Guide Aaron Beatson loves to wade for speckled trout on North Carolina's northern Outer Banks. It's a great way to stay cool as well as target some pretty decent trout.

Beatson, who lives in Kitty Hawk, N.C., said the best areas to wade will be on the outer edges of flats where a channel or cut allows trout to move up on the flats to feed and hunt along the edge of the flat. Wading and live-bait fishing don't exactly go together without extra hassle, so the standard soft plastics and 1/8- to 1/4-ounce jigheads are standard fare, along with popping corks.

Beatson (252-256-8083) advises to be on the lookout for slick spots on the flats.

"To me, it smells like watermelon," he said. "If there a little chop and you see a flat, oily looking area, it could be bigger fish, trout, attacking baitfish, and they'll leave behind an oil slick that smells like watermelon. It really stands out on the water once you know what to look for."

Don't overlook topwater walking baits, especially early and late in the day or under other low-light conditions.

Guide John Koonce of Charleston, S.C., said rock jetties can also be a September hotspot for speckled trout. He cautions anglers to avoid the natural tendency to fish right up against the rocks.

"While the water is still hot, the bluefish and trash fish will be up in the rocks, and they'll hit the bait before the trout," he said. "I find that trout like to hang off to the side and a little deeper on the rocks."

Koonce said the best presentation for target jetty trout would be to line up on the rips formed by either incoming or outgoing tides and cast parallel to the rocks on the deeper side.

Drifting live bait under a popping cork or slow-rolling a soft-plastic bait on a jighead are his preferred methods of fishing jetties.



Koonce said he sees a lot of glass minnows schooling along jetties and does his best to imitate that prey with his lures, using a smaller, silver or opaque plastic bait to try and match the hatch.

If he's using live bait, he usually finds large schools of menhaden somewhere between the launch and the jetties and will catch a tank full of them in a cast net on the way out. He said most of the menhaden may be too big for anything but really large trout, so he tries to pick out the smallest menhaden he can find from the tank. ■

**SPECKLED TRUTH >**

## SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

A 28-inch speckled trout and a Corky Fat Boy have a story to which the author listens.

# THE FAT BOY'S LESSON

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM A FAVORITE BAIT? IT HELPS YOUR MEMORY; THAT'S FOR SURE

Christopher Bush

**T**he teeth marks tell the story. Hopefully, the bourbon helps communicate that story.

Under a glowing lamp in my home, I'm surrounded by stories. Personified in various shapes, colors and profiles, these artificial lures bear the brunt of a deep, fishing underbelly located just below the surface. Through epoxied eyes, we've exposed them with good intent to some of the most savage and violent things. They wear the scars.

One bait in particular stands out: a very colorful Floating Corky Fat Boy, aptly named Texas Turnip. From the faint pink presence on its upper half to a glowing yellow chin, this bait looks fishy. However, its most notable feature is the distinct violet stripe running down its

dorsal. To a big-trout angler, profile and capability generally wins over color — at least from what I've seen — but this one is a little different. The Corky's famous exaggerated eye glares emotionless, and the blend of colors command a presence, so off she goes to the business end of a loop knot.

We often hear that fishing transcends time; I wouldn't argue otherwise. I still remember my dehydrated fingers configuring that knot and the gentle easterly breeze kissing my cheeks. Although nautical twilight was well under way, the cloudless sky made you question whether it was Texas or some flat located on the west side of heaven — jaw-dropping being the understatement.

## FAT BOY FINDINGS

For years, I've fished Floating Fat Boys and, more often than not, I've considered them a complimentary bait to wary fish uncommitted to topwater baits. That day, however, I learned their distinct and precise capability: big profile, skinny water and super-aggressive fish.

In the days leading up to this trip, life's questions started to mount. A pandemic environment with social unrest loom-



**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*.

ing, it was only fitting that a distant hurricane located in the northern Gulf brought water levels up, well beyond their mean. Boggled down by my own personal thoughts, I yearned for clarity, so off I went.

As I slid into my waders, I debated whether I should target deeper structure or focus my efforts up shallow. Remaining indecisive, a small slick out deep was the apparition I needed. The searing smell of watermelon quickened the pace of my pursuit, and my lure choice of a small soft plastic was the investigator for hire. Admittedly, I'm no stranger to this area, but given the fact it was early summer, my decisions went fully uncommitted. After almost an hour, with a few dink trout and an eager, young redfish, I quickly thought that the previous apparition was some sort of twisted joke crafted by the devil himself. Unlike him though, I remained true to my convictions to a higher power and believed that some big fish were up skinny — I had faith.

For years, I've always wade-fished with two rods. I keep telling myself that it's easier and more efficient to wade with just one, but year after year, I feel that subjecting myself to such clumsiness is worth the effort. In short, today was that day. As I abandoned the deep stuff, I swapped my finesse gear for something with a little more power. Now, soundly wedged between me and my wade belt, I unsheathed the Texas Turnip.

Corky Fat Boys are so unique. Their pliability, density and hardware are unmatched in the saltwater fishing world. Nose and tail bends applied by anglers up and down the coast from Virginia to Texas match not only their persona but the fish's as well. On this day, I chose a slight downward tail bend with a perfectly straight nose so I could keep the bait just above the grass in the water column. As I gave her one more quality check, her eyes and bright, shiny red hooks screamed, "Put me in, Coach!"

## TAKE STOCK OF SURROUNDINGS

With the wind at my back, I methodically threw onto a shelf lined with lush sea grass. Mulletts skipped happily nearby, but as the sun sank, carefree quickly turned to a matter of survival. Dinner-plate sized slicks earmarked those less fortunate, their oily residue a target for my lure to explore.

With more and more falling victim to a roaming wolf pack, the thump that followed made me question my bait's willingness to subject itself to such a savage world. Although it came back empty, the back hook neatly placed above the loop knot certainly remains one of the angling world's great mysteries.

Now realigned and my slack reeled in, I made another cast, 10 feet to the left of the previous one. A two-twitch cadence and a slightly elevated rod tip, I hear her trash-talking on the descent. This time not so lucky, a healthy 28-inch trout finds extreme offense to her communication style. With remarkable dissent, she hits the bait so hard that the braided line jumps, sending a shock wave all the way to your spine.

For more than 30 years, I've targeted trout, getting more serious with every passing day.

I can assure you that the "thump" is the apex of a trophy trout fishing world. A myriad of lures in my fishing kingdom try to emulate, with some getting close, but my Corkys, both active and retired, stare down their counterparts with undeniable bravado. After all, they've been exposed to the meanest of the mean without backing down.

## FACE THE TURBULENCE

With sunlight completely gone and multiple fish over 25 inches to include that 28, mosquitos encourage my retreat to fully functioning air conditioning. No doubt I found my clarity that evening. Even in the waves of the smallest bay, turbulence both in life and in fishing is always overcome by standing tall, being honest and always trusting that something larger than yourself is in control — trust being the key word.

As for the bourbon? It's a smooth Texas single barrel that has a great finish, but sadly, the ice has melted, and it's all but gone, minus one sip. As I look around, peering through the downward light, the lures hanging on my wall all have stories to tell. This one in particular, though, was not just about big trout pulled up on a shallow flat, or a Floating Corky Fat Boy, but about courage and how we navigate this unsettled world. The parallel here is that we share many of the same scars from our earthly life: ours being above and theirs below. It's when we go fishing that our worlds collide, and we gain greater perspective as to our purpose in life. Even though I don't envy my lures and the situations I put them in, they may argue the same — it's all about understanding. This day was all about clarity and the teeth marks communicate that. Hopefully, the bourbon found the words. ■

## TROUT HOTSPOTS ➤



Christopher Bush

# SHALLOW, SEPTEMBER

## Sneads Ferry specks, reds will be biting

**S**eptember is one of the best times to find the two species of fish that are ready to attack lures in shallow water.

"Everything is inshore in September," said Allen Jernigan, a veteran guide from Sneads Ferry, N.C. "And you can catch trout and red drum with the same lures."

Three factors influence the redfish and trout bites: weather, water temperature and large influxes of fresh water.

"One day, you might catch 30 or 40 in the morning with topwater lures and the next day only six or seven," Jernigan said. "Wind direction isn't important unless it switches. I don't care what direction the wind's blowing as long as it's the same direction for a couple of days. Water temperatures will be in the 80s in September, but weather systems that drop a lot of rain push trout and reds out of inside waters to inlets and the beaches" where salinity is more to their liking.

Jernigan, who with partner Jason Dail of Wilmington, N.C., finished second during 2019's inaugural Redfish World Series tournament at Hopedale, La., said he finds September reds and specks at shallow-water spots.

"Reds and trout orient mainly at grass beds, pot holes and oyster rocks," he said. "Trout also hang around ledges 3 to 5 feet deep. I don't throw lures to the banks for trout, but I fish the edges of dropoffs and at pot holes. On grass flats, you'll be going along in 18 inches of water, then come to a 4-foot deep hole that holds trout."

Jernigan uses 7-foot or 7-foot-2 medium or medium-light rods mated to Shimano Sustain or Stradic 2500 spinning reels spooled with 12-pound braid and 12 to 18 inches of mono leader.

"I usually don't worry about spooking red drum when I cast, especially big schools at grass flats," he said. "I cast over them or around the school's edges. If they hear a sound, it grabs their attention."

Jernigan's favorite trout lures include a MirrOlure MR 17 or surface-walker She Pup 75 MR.

"If they're not hitting those, I throw Saltwater Assassin curlytail or paddletails beneath popping corks with a 2- to 3-foot leader," Jernigan said. "Redfish often hit those same lures."

He also employs She Pups, Top Pups and Top Dog Juniors for red drum, plus ¼- or ½-ounce gold or copper spoons.

"A slow, steady retrieve works best with spoons," said Jernigan. ■

— Craig Holt

Guide Allen Jernigan looks for fall speckled trout along the edge of shallow flats.



Allen Jernigan

Topwater plugs like the old-reliable Heddon Zara Spook will fool plenty of big speckled trout in South Carolina's Winyah Bay this month.



Jeff Burleson

# WINYAH BAY SPECKS LOVE FALL TOPWATERS

## Cooling weather brings out the best in trout in the fertile waters around Georgetown, S.C.

**F**all arrives this month, and not soon enough. The heat of summer fades away, and cooler nights send water temperatures downwards. Not only does this refresh the diehard anglers of summer, but speckled trout begin to feel good and put a smackdown on biggie-sized meals at the surface.

And the inshore jungles of South Carolina's Winyah Bay are prime spots to get in on the action.

Two major populations of trout inhabit South Carolina's inshore waters. One migrates south into South Carolina's waters during the winter; the other group is considered resident fish that remain local throughout the year, including the summer.

While the migratory fish are still about a month away, the local trout are becoming more active as the water starts to cool. The best time is also the coolest: early in the morning, just before dawn, before the ball of fire bullies its way into the Carolina sky.

Jordan Pate of Carolina Guide Service is a native of Georgetown County and when not chasing tarpon or redfish, he patrols Winyah Bay for chunky specks.

"Winyah Bay is rich with habitat and is chock full of baitfish this time of year," said Pate (843-814-7900), "and the mullet are usually full grown this time of year; that gives trout a lot of reasons to get up early to eat."

Speckled trout are one of Pate's true passions, and he loves throwing topwater plugs in the fall.

"Trout are really keying in on larger baits because of all of the full-sized bait around," he said. "They will hit a large topwater plug without thinking twice about it."

Pate looks for the larger trout along shorelines, oyster points and any other structure near deep water.

"The trout will still keep deep water near them this time of year, but they will move into an ambush position early in the day at low light to feed," he said.

Trout typically prefer current and will be found near a place where the current is broken by some sort of structure or change in the bottom. Baitfish get swept into these currents and come right to the lurking trout.

The waters around Georgetown are littered with prime topwater habitat, from the base of the jetties all the way to the docks around Georgetown. Some of the best places are along shell banks on each side of the channel near the lighthouse and the marsh islands around Muddy Bay — many of Pate's favorite places to find speckled trout throughout the year.

Pate uses a wide variety of topwaters, but he prefers an old reliable one, the Zara Spook. The noisy, walk-the-dog action of the bait rarely gets ignored by a fat, sow trout. Pate will use a wide variety of colors, but bone and/or chartreuse versions are some of his first choices.

"The sound and cadence usually get their attention, but the color doesn't hurt either," he said.

As the season begins to ramp up, it doesn't take much encouragement for these fish to engulf a topwater lure in the right places. And the waters around Georgetown are tough to resist. ■

— Jeff Burleson

## MILLENNIUM R500 ROD HOLDER

Pontoon boats are increasingly being used and recognized as great fishing platforms, with anglers targeting a variety of species from their relative comfort.

Millennium Marine has taken a big step to try and help them out, debuting this year its R500 rod holder, specifically designed for pontoon boats or other boats that have existing rails. The rod holders mount seamlessly to round or

square-tube rails from 3/4- to 1 1/2 inches.

Constructed of anodized aluminum, the R500 has the company's patented Spyderlock technology that allows 360° rotation and incremental locking angles., allowing for drifting, trolling or still-fishing on anchor.

The R500 weighs 2.2 pounds and has rubber-coated contact points to protect your rods from damage. **MRSP: \$44.99**

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



## SHIMANO'S VANFORD SPINNING REELS

Shimano has taken another big step toward providing fishermen with some of the best tackle on the market, this time with a spinning reel, the Vanford series, that combines light weight, strength and many of the brand's top-draw features.

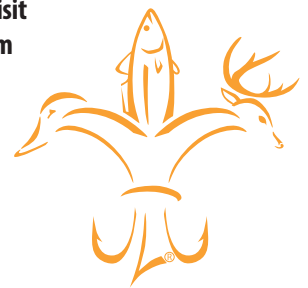
The Vanford series includes seven reels of different sizes, from the tiny VF500F, which weighs less than 5 ounces and handles 2-, 4- and 6-pound test, to the VFC500XGF, which weighs almost 8 ounces and handles up to 14-pound test mono or 40-pound braid.

The Vanfords have a Ci4+ body that's

light, but with carbon-fiber strength, plus a MagnumLight rotor that provides almost 50% less rotational inertia, plus the HAGANE gear, Silent Drive and MicroModule Gear II for smooth performance. The Long Stroke Spool allows for greater casting distance. Its X-protect technology insures that it will repel the potential problems that the toughest saltwater environment can provide.

**MSRP: \$229.99**

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



## WILDGAME INNOVATIONS RIVAL 20

Trail cameras have revolutionized the scouting aspect of deer hunting, and Wildgame Innovations' Rival 20 Lightsout camera is a great example of the hows and whys.

This camera will carry a 32GB card, allowing hunters to log thousands of photos, and it runs on 8 AA batteries. It comes with an adjustable strap and alligator clips to make it easier to attach to a tree, a stake — however you mount your trail cams.

The Rival 20 carries two lens, for daylight and nighttime images, it's a quiet camera with an infrared LED flash that won't alarm animals

when the shutter opens and closes. Images are of high quality, and the camera can be set to take photos at intervals of 5, 15 or 30 seconds, plus videos.

A bright, LCD screen allows for quick and easy selection of settings; it takes only a minute to set up once it's mounted.

**RSPV: \$159.99**

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





# TAKING AN IMPORTANT STAND

**SEVERAL FACTORS ARE IMPORTANT IN FINDING AND SELECTING THAT PERFECT TREE FOR AN ARCHERY STAND FOR DEER. HERE ARE SOME EASY TO FOLLOW TIPS.**

By Sammy Romano

**D**eer hunting, especially with archery gear, requires lots of preseason preparation for a successful outcome. Assuming you have your bow dialed in and have taken proper scent-control measures, stand placement is the main factor that will determine your success — or lack thereof.

With today's equipment, a majority of bow hunters are confident in their shooting ability out to at least 30 yards. Keeping that 30-yard maximum range in mind, think about the following:

You have to choose a tree-stand or ground-blind location that deer will pass within a 30-yard radius of, during shooting hours, offering a broadside or quartering away shot, all while totally unaware of your presence. Let's take this one step further and target trophy bucks, or even more specifically, one particular buck. Sound like a tough choice? It most definitely is.

The following are some guidelines for bow-stand placement and strategies I have adopted after 30 years of bowhunting white-tailed deer. By no means do I consider myself an expert; more often than not, the deer win, but I learn something every time I'm in the woods with archery gear, and I'm hoping this will help some of you become more successful.

**IT'S ALL ABOUT  
THE GROCERIES >**

## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GROCERIES

During early archery season, deer are focused almost entirely on food. They are coming off the late-summer stress period, and they need to consume huge amounts of food to build their bodies up for the upcoming rut and winter. This concentrates deer around food sources such as food plots, agriculture fields and mast trees.

Warmer temperatures cause deer to bed down early in the morning and get up to feed late in the evenings. Due to an abundance of food and cover, deer — especially bucks — rarely travel very far from their beds. This makes morning hunting a losing proposition in most places. It is nearly impossible to get ahead of or around deer that are headed back to bed in the predawn hours without spooking them, which will quickly educate them to the fact they are being hunted. For these reasons, a majority of my early season hunts are in the evening over or near a food source close to a cutover or other thick area. I use mornings to practice shooting or to scout new areas.

## FOOD PLOTS

Food plots are great places to hang a stand for early season bowhunting. Their tender, green growth concentrates deer, while offering great visibility and open shots. When hanging a tree stand on a food plot, I try to choose a tree that offers the best opportunity to cover the majority of a small plot or where a larger plot narrows down to funnel deer closer to me.

Inside corners are great places for a close shot at a big buck, because they love to slip in and stand just inside of the wood line where they can watch the field on either side of the corner. I look for a tree situated downwind of the plot with easy access. Ideally, I also try to pick a tree where the sun will be behind me as it sets in the evening; it's no fun squinting into the sun all afternoon, and it makes it more difficult for deer to spot you. Try to choose a tree with sufficient cover.

A major problem with sitting on a food plot is leaving your stand undetected at dark when the field is often filled with deer. One good solution is to have a buddy pick you up in a





vehicle so that the vehicle spooks the deer, and they don't notice you climbing down. Another trick I have used in recent years is to play a coyote howl on my smart phone. Although this runs the deer off, I believe they think it is random and won't avoid the area in the near future.

## MAST TREES

Mast trees, especially oaks, are a huge draw for whitetails in the early fall. Acorns contain huge amounts of fat that help deer gain weight rapidly. Because acorns are seasonal in their availability, deer will forsake almost every other food source to feed under a hot oak tree. The problem is several trees are often dropping at the same time, and choosing the "right" tree on any particular evening can be a matter of luck. Trees that are closer to thickets or cutovers are more likely to see daytime use, so I focus on them. If there are multiple oaks in an area dropping acorns, I try to find a stand tree that offers the opportunity to shoot to as many of them as possible within 30 yards. I always try to put my stand near the tree with the most feeding sign and fresh droppings, but this can change daily, so it can be frustrating.

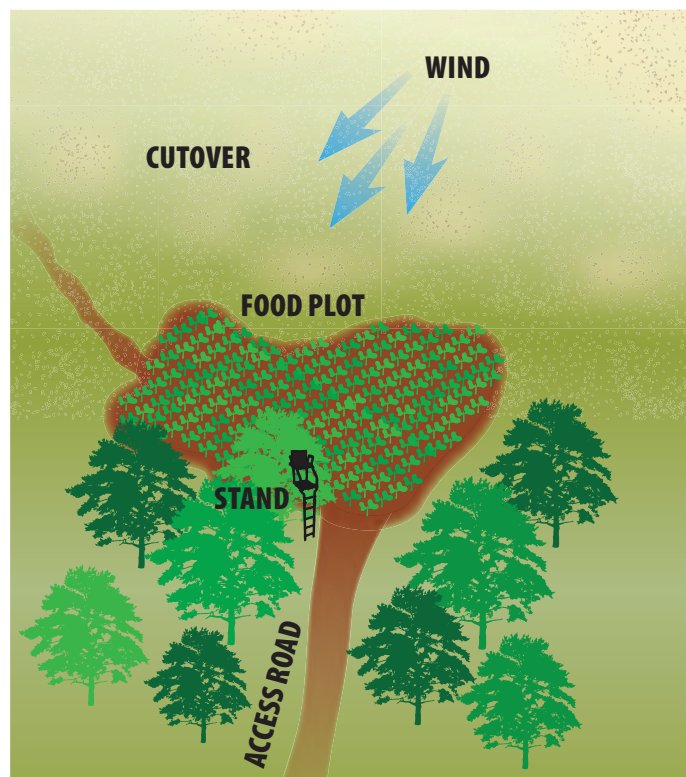
Soft mast such as persimmons and crab apples can be even better, especially the first week or two that they begin to drop. Resist the temptation to set up right on top of food trees, and try to find a tree 20 yards or farther away to remain unnoticed.

**OPPOSITE:** Food plots are great places to run into big bucks during the early archery season, because they'll be feeding heavily.

## CUTOVERS

Although they are a food source, in that they contain lots of browse, cutovers primarily serve as a bedding area for deer. Many properties have so many food sources, it can be difficult to single one out to hang a stand over. In these cases, hunting the edge of cutovers can be a great strategy.

I try not to penetrate into the cutover very far so I don't spook bedded deer. You want to set up on the downwind side of the cutover. There is often a heavily used deer trail within 20 yards of the inside edge of a cutover, running parallel to the edge.



Deer often walk this trail, peering out into the more open woods while remaining in the thicker cover of the cutover. Positioning your stand so that you can shoot to this trail is a great strategy that will greatly increase your shot opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

The perfect stand tree is situated 22 yards downwind from the trail or food source, with ample cover, the sun at your back, and easy undetectable access. These trees exist but are the exception rather than the rule. Hanging stands often requires some degree of compromise on one or more of these criteria, but I always try to compromise as little as possible. Put some thought into your stand locations this season, and your success should increase. ■

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT STAND TREE? ➤



**Sammy Romano** is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 25 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at [samboka31@aol.com](mailto:samboka31@aol.com).

# WHAT MAKES A GREAT STAND TREE?

When hanging a tree stand, I primarily focus on four considerations.

- Can I set up with the wind in my favor? There's no sense hanging a stand where the predominant wind is blowing towards the deer; you just can't beat their noses most of the time.
- Can I access AND leave my stand without spooking the deer I'm hunting? It only takes a few encounters on the way to or from your stand for deer to realize they're being hunted, making them avoid your stand area, or even worse become nocturnal.
- Consider the shot angle and distance. I try to pick a tree that will give me the maximum opportunity for a shot at a properly angled deer within 30 yards. This may seem obvious, but I've seen a lot of people compromise on this one, stretching it beyond their comfortable shooting range.
- Does the tree offer sufficient cover to conceal me well enough to draw my bow undetected? Drawing the bow requires a fair amount of motion, and an open tree will result in missed opportunities at the moment of truth. ■



Sammy Romano

Is there enough cover around your tree stand that you can draw your bow undetected?

## HUNTING SEASONS

DEER		
Western	Bowhunting	Sept. 12-27 Oct. 11-Nov. 22 Dec. 12-Jan. 1, 2021 (bucks only)
	Muzzleloader	Sept. 28-Oct. 10
	Gun	Nov. 23-Dec. 12
Northwestern	Bowhunting	Sept. 12-Nov. 6
	Muzzleloader	Nov. 7-20
	Gun	Nov. 21-Jan. 1, 2021
Central	Bowhunting	Sept. 12-Oct. 30
	Muzzleloader	Oct. 31-Nov. 13
	Gun	Nov. 14-Jan. 1, 2021
Northeastern/ Southeastern	Bowhunting	Sept. 12-Oct. 2
	Muzzleloader	Oct. 3-16
	Gun	Oct. 17-Jan. 1, 2021

BEAR	
Oct. 12-Nov. 21 & Dec. 14-Jan. 1, 2021:	In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties
Nov. 14-Jan. 1, 2021:	Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Union counties
Oct. 17-Jan. 1, 2021:	Franklin, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties
Nov. 21-Jan. 1, 2021:	Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties
Nov. 11-Jan. 1, 2021:	Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Robeson, Sampson counties
Nov. 14-29, Dec. 12-27:	Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell counties
Nov. 14-22, Dec. 12-27:	Beaufort, Bertie, Craven, Hertford, Jones, Martin, Washington counties
Nov. 14-22, Dec. 12-27:	Camden*, Chowan*, Gates, Pasquotank*, Perquimans (*Seasons open Nov. 13 by local laws)
Nov. 21-Dec. 20:	Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Pitt, Wayne, Wilson counties

<b>SQUIRREL</b>	Oct. 124-Feb. 28, 2021 (gray & red) Oct. 11-Jan. 31, 2021 (fox)
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<b>RABBIT</b>	Oct. 12.-Feb. 28, 2021
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<b>RACCOON, OPOSSUM</b>	Oct. 12-Feb. 28, 2021
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<b>QUAIL</b>	Nov. 21-Feb. 28, 2021
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<b>GROUSE</b>	Oct. 12-Feb. 28, 2021
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<b>RAILS</b>	Sept. 1-Nov. 20
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(KING, SORA, VIRGINIA, CLAPPER)  
(GALLINULES, MOORHENS)

<b>CANADA GEESE</b>	Resident zone, Oct. 7-17, Nov. 7-28, Dec. 19-Feb. 13, 2021
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Statewide: Sept. 1-30; NE Zone, Jan. 15-30, permit only

<b>SNOW, BLUE, ROSS GEESE</b>	Oct. 13-Feb. 13, 2021, Feb. 15-March 31, 2021, permit
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<b>DUCKS</b>	Oct. 7-10, Nov. 7-28, Dec. 19-Jan. 30, 2021
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<b>EARLY TEAL</b>	Sept. 12-30 (east of US 17 only)
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<b>SEA DUCKS</b>	Nov. 23-Jan. 30, 2021
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<b>BRANT</b>	Dec. 19-Jan. 30, 2021
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<b>DOVE</b>	Sept. 5-Oct. 10, Nov. 14-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021
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<b>TUNDRA SWAN</b>	Nov. 7-Jan. 30, 2021. Bag limit 1, by permit only.
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<b>WOODCOCK</b>	Dec. 10-Jan. 30, 2021
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<b>WILD TURKEY (Youth)</b>	April 3-9, 2021
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	April 10-May 8, 2021
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# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Ben Gibson**

Ben Gibson, 14, from Holly Springs, N.C., killed this nice 8-point buck last season in Orange County.



**Hayden Eubanks**

Hayden Eubanks, 12, from Gray Court, S.C., caught this 7-pound, 9-ounce bass from Lake Rabon, fishing with his dad.



**Eric Mills**

Eric Mills killed this big fox squirrel last season in Montgomery County, N.C.



**Haley Yates**

Haley Yates, 12, of King, N.C., tagged this 12-point buck in November 2019 in Stokes County.



**Rolland Bourgoin**

Rolland Bourgoin, 7, from Dillon, S.C., caught this 7-pound bass on April 17, fishing on Lake Moultrie.

## GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

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

**Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook,  
433 Hollinswood Ave.,  
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103  
or to [images@CarolinaSportsman.com](mailto:images@CarolinaSportsman.com)**

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



**Hunter Daniels**

Hunter Daniels on New Bern, N.C., killed this buck Thanksgiving morning 2019 with his grandfather's Remington 742.



**Cyril Gullede**

Cyril Gullede of Matthews, N.C., decked this 29½-pound king mackerel at Ocean Crest Pier on June 10, 2020.



## ELECTRONIC TROUBLES? WIRED!

WIRING IS AT THE HEART OF MOST PROBLEMS WITH MARINE ELECTRONICS

**T**oday's marine electronics perform more functions than those of yesteryear, and many anglers rely on them more than ever.

These products are also more efficient than older models; they can do more while using the same amount of power. And while a lot of anglers scour over the details of trolling motors, depth finders and marine batteries, many overlook one piece of the puzzle that is just as important: the wiring.

"The wiring is the one area that most boaters don't even think about when adding electronics to their boat," said John Long of East Columbia (S.C.) Sport Shop. "That's especially true when they've purchased a boat that has wiring already in place."

And that causes a lot of problems, according to Long.

"People will return brand-new fish finders and trolling motors, because the first or second time on the water, they notice problems," he said. "A lot of these problems are intermittent problems. The unit works great for a while, then, all of a sudden, it stops working. Or some functions stop working while the unit itself stays powered on. They put a meter on the battery which shows fully charged. So they think they got a bad depth finder or trolling motor."

### LIVE WIRES

Long said any time a customer calls him or brings a boat in with such problems, the first thing he asks about is the wiring from the battery to the trolling motor or depth finder.

"First, I want to know what gauge the wiring is, and how old it is. I also ask them if it's marine-grade wiring," he said. "The majority of people don't know the answer to any of those questions. All they know is they have a brand-new, fully charged battery, good fuses and brand-new electronics. But they're missing some features or losing functionality at some point during a trip."

In the majority of those cases, Long said, the culprit is an issue with the wiring. That issue can change from one case to the next.

"If wiring is involved in any boating malfunction, it is almost always the problem, especially when everything else is brand new," he said. "But wiring is also the hardest thing to check. You can swap out a trolling motor or a fish finder just by unplugging it and putting a new one in. Same with the battery. But the wiring is hidden under floors, sometimes runs through fuse panels and is often spliced in areas you can't readily see. Unless you ran the wiring yourself,

it's a bit of a mystery."

Long said checking the wiring connections, however, is fairly simple. He said you might have to open or even unscrew a panel, but once you can see those connections, you can tell whether they are corroded or broken. It's not uncommon, especially if the wiring is several years old.

If those areas look fine, Long (803-776-8320) determines what gauge the wiring is. To do this, he looks at the jacket on the wiring.

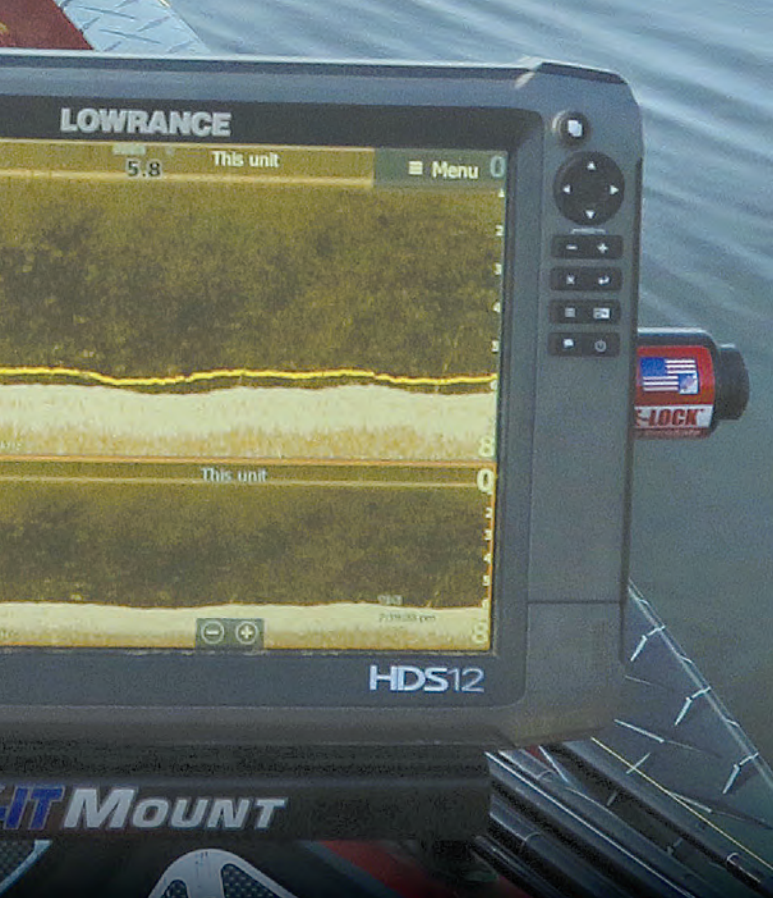
"It will have something printed on it like '10 AWG Marine Grade,'" he said. "That means it is 10-gauge wiring, rated for use on boats. When it comes to wiring, the bigger the number is, the thinner the wire is. And the thinner the wire is, the less power you can run through it. Many, many, many times, that's the problem I see."

### GAUGE MATTERS

One example Long gave was a customer who had inherited a boat and added a brand new battery and a Minn



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



If that high-tech depth finder doesn't work properly, there's a much better chance that there's a wiring problem than some kind of trouble with the unit.

Kota iPilot trolling motor. With a fully-charged battery, everything worked fine except for the Spot Lock feature on his trolling motor.

"He could troll all day just fine, and when he hit the Spot Lock button, his trolling motor would hold him in one spot for about 30 seconds," Long said. "But then it would release for no apparent reason. Everything else on the motor worked fine except that one feature. Minn Kota replaced the circuit card for the head unit on the motor, and he still had the same problem."

Long checked the connections and fuse panel. They looked fine, but he said the wiring, which was in place when the customer inherited the boat, was 10-gauge. Minn Kota's rating on that particular motor called for at least 8-gauge wiring.

"All the manufacturers — Minn Kota, MotorGuide, Humminbird, Lowrance — they all have their wiring recommendations on their websites," he said. "They'll tell you what gauge wire you need to run X number of feet away from your battery. When someone buys a boat — old or new — and it's already pre-wired, most people don't even think about the wiring. It's just not something they would consider could be a problem."

## GO OVERBOARD

Long said wiring is one instance where he doesn't mind going overboard.

"In that guy's case, the manufacturer recommended a minimum of 8-gauge wiring. I recommended 6-gauge, and he agreed. That's overkill, but one thing's for sure: if he ever has another problem with his trolling motor, it will not be because the wiring is too thin," he said. ■

## 2020-2021 SOUTH CAROLINA HUNTING REGULATIONS

Not an official document. Please refer to SCDNR's Rules & Regulations Digest.

### HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND)	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 5-7, Sept. 8-Oct. 11 Nov. 14-28, Dec. 25-Jan. 31, 2021	15	45
Crow	Nov. 1-March 1, 2021	No limits	
Quail	Nov. 23-March 1, 2021	12	36
Rabbit	Nov. 26-March 1, 2021	5	15
Squirrel	Oct. 1-March 1, 2021	10	30
Fox	Nov. 26-March 1, 2021	No limits	
Grouse	Nov. 26-March 1, 2021 (Game Zone 1 only)	3	9
Raccoon	Sept. 15-March 15, 2021 (statewide)	3 raccoons per party	
Opossum	Sept. 15-March 15, 2021	No limits	
Other furbearers	Nov. 26-March 1, 2020 (bobcat, otter, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk)	No limits	
Bear	Game Zone 1 Game Zone 2 Game Zone 2 (Georgetown, Horry, Marion and Williamsburg counties)		Oct. 17-23 (still hunting only) Oct. 24-30 (dogs) Oct. 17-30 (still hunting only) Oct. 17-30 (still hunting only)
Rails	Sept. 15-20, King & Clapper Sora & Virginia Gallinules (common/purple)		
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28, 2021	8	24
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31, 2021	3	9
Wild Turkey	March 22-April 30, 2021 (Game Zones 3&4) April 1-May 10, 2021 (Game Zones 1&2)	3	3

### DEER SEASON

ZONE	ARCHERY ONLY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
1		Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2021
2	Sept. 15-30	Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2021
3			Aug. 15-Jan. 1, 2021
4	Aug 15-31		Sept. 1-Jan. 1, 2021
<b>Youth Days:</b> Game Zone 1, Sept. 26, Jan. 2; Game Zone 2: Sept. 12, Jan. 2; Game Zone 3: Aug. 8, Jan. 2; Game Zone 4: Aug. 8, Jan. 2.			

### WATERFOWL SEASONS

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 11-26 Nov. 21-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021	6 6
Canada geese	Sept. 1-30, Nov. 21-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021, Feb. 14-March 1, 2021	15 (Sept.) 5 (Others)
Blue/snow (light) geese	Nov. 21-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021, Feb. 14-March 1, 2021	25
Brant	Dec. 13-Jan. 2-31, 2021	2
Sea ducks	Nov. 21-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021	6
Mergansers	Nov. 21-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021	5 (1 hooded)
Coots	Nov. 21-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021	15

# GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Getting your food-plot seeds in the ground at the right time, and in the right kind of soil, will go a long way to determining whether you wind up with a lush, green patch of vegetation deer will love.



Andrew Kibler

## TIMING IS EVERYTHING

WHEN FALL FOOD-PLOT SEEDS GO IN THE GROUND IS A CONCERN

**F**all is approaching, regardless of how the 90-degree days continue to pile up in the Carolinas. And planting season is here for land managers looking to get a cool-season crop in the ground.

A lot can go into planting a successful food plot, and environmental conditions when the seeds are planted can be a deciding factor.

Food plots provide wildlife with a supplemental food source, and they can double as a hot spot during the hunting season. If executed correctly, food plots can be a solid source of nutrition and a true benefit for wildlife and landowners.

The creation of food plots is basic farming, but on a much smaller scale and usually without the aid of a farm production company monitoring the crop every step of the way. If conditions are optimal, remain consistent and the stars align exactly right, a lush, green food plot can be achieved that has all the deer, turkeys

and other game birds and animals standing in line.

But Mother Nature does not always make it easy. Drought, flooding, sweltering temperatures, freezes and a wide range of conditions can make growing a successful crop difficult. Sometimes, things seem to work out, but she presents challenges that must be dealt with.

### NATURE'S CONTROL

Landowners must remember a few basic principals. For starters, weather cannot be controlled. Rain, drought and temperature swings are going to come and go, especially during the fall, when seasons are in transition.

Landowners should take command of what they can control. Acid-base correction, soil amendments, seed choices and planting dynamics can be championed successfully. And planning the ideal time to plant is also under the control of the landowner. Choosing the right environ-

mental conditions to plant for the fall season is a critical move to getting plants started off on the right foot.

Conditions for planting should be chosen wisely to produce a successful crop. Seeds are hearty and can withstand a long period between harvesting and planting. Most planting seeds are generally stored for up to a year after being collected. Until they are given the opportunity to germinate, these seeds will remain dormant and can withstand all kinds of environmental pressure. But as soon as the seeds are covered with soil and subjected to heat and moisture, the fragility factor rises through the roof.

The days immediately after germina-



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.

tion, when the tender shoots exit the seed capsule, are a critical time. However, the new shoots are generally fairly safe while under the protection of the soil layer, as long as rain does not drown them. When they breach the soil barrier, new plants see the sun's rays for the first time, and the photoreceptors begin transforming the sun's energy into green flesh.

## SOIL MOISTURE IS IMPORTANT

During this period, moisture levels in the soil are critical to fuel respiration and to protect the microscopic roots from drying out. Too much moisture, and the juvenile plants will drown. Too little moisture, and the plants will dry out and die.

However, some plants are more tolerant of higher or lower moisture levels than others. And the site's soils can help retain or shed water when needed. It is basic geometry.

Sandy soils are made up of large angled particles, with space left between them when close together. In most coarse sands, water passes through the soils fairly quickly. Fine sands can slow water percolation but usually will not stop it.

Clay and silt are very small and made up of flat particles; they can also be sticky. When packed together, clays and silts will prevent water from percolating through. Most soils aren't pure sand, silt or clays; they are typically loams — a fancy word for a mixture of soil particles. So, the more clay a mixture contains, the slower the percolation rate and the higher the water-retention rate. Soils that are mostly sand will not retain water as easily, and they can dry out faster.

Soil moisture must be retained enough to keep the root systems moist, but not eliminating air and respiration.

## PLANT AROUND RAIN EVENTS

Choosing the right weather conditions to plant is the name of the game. The rate of water retention in a soil type will determine the best time to plant. Early in the growth process, light to moderate rain events are preferred over heavy, drenching rains. The heavy rains can erode soil around new plants, exposing roots and flooding out plots in low lying areas.

Knowing when to plant is always going to be site-specific, but as a general rule, planting just before a light to moderate rain is preferred. In sandy soils, sites should be planted just after a light rain event and just before another light rain event on the horizon. In loamy to clay soils, where excessive standing water can result from moderate rain events, these areas should be avoided for planting when any heavy, flooding rains are in the immediate forecast.

While the weatherman isn't always accurate, the way to get a food plot started off on the right foot is to choose the best time to plant. And watching the weather may be the only way to predict when it's the best time to get seeds set. ■

In smaller food plots, crops have to be able to withstand heavy browsing from deer in early stages of their growth; cover crops will often help.



## MATCH SEED TO PLOT TYPE

Site selection is important for creating awesome food plots that attract deer, turkey and other wildlife species. Some sites will create better opportunities for some seeds over others. Size and location make a huge impact on the success and longevity of a plot.

Seed selection should be carefully determined based on the size of the plot, location of the plot, soil characteristics and, of course, budget. Landowners shouldn't always choose the plot seed that has the best pedigree, because it may not work for the site.

Two of the best and most-liked fall foods are soybeans and peas. But if a landowner plants a crop of legumes on a one-acre site deep in the woods, the deer will mow them down as soon as they emerge from the soil. Sure, one could erect a protection fence during the early growth period, but as soon as the fence comes down, a small plot of soybeans and peas will quickly be eaten. To a small degree, soybeans and peas will regenerate from browsing early in the growing process, but overall, they aren't very resilient to heavy browsing. They are wonderful deer foods, but they need to be planted in larger areas in order to provide season-long forage.

Small plots in deer-rich areas need a crop that can regenerate fast from heavy browsing. Landowners should choose plants like oats, rye, triticale and clovers for smaller plots. These plants, which regenerate quickly, can be planted more economically and will provide the season-long forage production that was intended. ■



## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

# GRILLED DRUM STICKS

SEPTEMBER'S SEASON  
CHANGE IS PERFECT  
FOR THIS NEAT MEAL

**D**rum, both red and black, are some of my favorite fish to catch in September. They're pretty obliging, too, as they attack the mullet minnows gathering in the marshes then heading through the inlets and along the beaches before heading south. It's only natural to invite a few home to be the guests of honor at dinner.

Yep, September is quite a month for sportsmen in the Carolinas. Fishing is improving, and hunting seasons are opening. Life in the outdoors is good. The best time for those who enjoy nature's bounty is beginning; we should get out and enjoy it any way we can.

I usually try to have a dove recipe for September, but I don't have any in the freezer, and dove isn't something you run out to the grocery store and buy. You've got to earn them, putting up with the sweltering heat and being at least a reasonably good shot.

Fishing? It's still hot, but at least you're on the water and in the marsh where any breeze will be cooler; you're almost guaranteed a sea breeze every afternoon. It's a heat that's easier to handle, and exercising your casting finger is easier than

exercising your trigger finger; it doesn't come with recoil.

Sometime in late August, things change in the marsh. There will be a few cool mornings, and everything will notice. The finger mullet that had been lazily milling about begin gathering in schools and edging towards the mouths of creeks and maybe even into open water. They're moving faster now, almost as if they have a purpose. It may be survival; to get to the ocean and head south, they must run a gauntlet of hungry predators.

Red and black drum are two predators that mullet minnows must avoid to reach the ocean. They both like mullet minnows almost as much as they like shrimp. Many mullet minnows will be eaten on their journey to the sea, and the tendency for drum to stay in the migration routes and gorge themselves makes them easy for fishermen to locate. When they're feeding that ravenously, they're pretty easy to catch too.

This recipe works well with red drum and black drum. There are some differences, but many folks can't differentiate after they're cooked. The main thing to remember is they both taste good. ■

# GRILLED DRUM STICKS

September will only be a little cooler than most summer months, but the difference is noticeable, especially in the evenings. Whatever the reason, enjoy it. This is obviously a meal to cook on the grill, and enjoying it outside is a plus, too. Just be sure to have the insect repellent fired up and working. Those blood-thirsty buggers don't respect the seasons.

This is a recipe that came about while trying to find a different, but simple, way to cook drum. Truly, this is about as simple as it gets, and you can visit with family or friends while it's cooking. Be sure to choose or make a variety of dipping sauces, ranging from mild and creamy to pretty spicy. You might even make a cheese sauce for anyone who likes fondue.

My current favorite dipping sauce is a combination of Ranch dressing and sriracha sauce. I am a bit of a sauce snob and make this exclusively with Hidden Valley Ranch, which is creamier, and Texas Pete Cha Sauce, which has a great smoky and sweet flavor. If you like creamy and spicy, be prepared for this to become your favorite for this and many other foods. The ratio of the mix is up to you and is easy to vary from mild to wild. The more Cha sauce you add, the spicier it will be.

I think this is just a little better with red drum, however, the limits are low, and without several people fishing, there might not be enough red drum to go around. Don't fret, this is still good with black drum.

The wooden skewers still sometimes burn, even after soaking them, but I like them better than metal ones. Metal skewers get very hot and are difficult to hold to turn the fish, and they stay

hot longer after removing them from the heat. I have threatened several times to do this with coat hangers, like roasting marshmallows, and leaving the end long enough it's easy to handle, but I won't remember to do this until I grab a hot skewer again.

I only use salt and pepper for seasonings with this so the flavors of the dipping sauces stand out. My preference is for pepper; I use very little salt. There is plenty in the dipping sauces.

There will be pieces of fish that are thicker and thinner. Try to match these together on skewers. My grill has a hot side, and I put the thicker pieces there so all will be ready at the same time.

This is a fun time around the grill, and the fish cooks quickly. Many of my friends say the best part is trying the many dipping sauces, and I agree. I made this just for us, and it has my Ranch and Cha mixed sauce, Tai sweet chili sauce and teriyaki sauce. Try a bunch. I'm sure there's a dipping sauce just right for everyone. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

**1½ pounds** of drum fillets — red and/or black drum

**Olive oil** or buttery flavored, non-stick cooking spray

**Coarse ground black pepper**

**Pink Himalayan salt**

**Dipping sauces:** teriyaki, sweet mustard, hot sauce, cocktail sauce, homemade sauces, etc.

**Wooden skewers**

## PREPARATION:

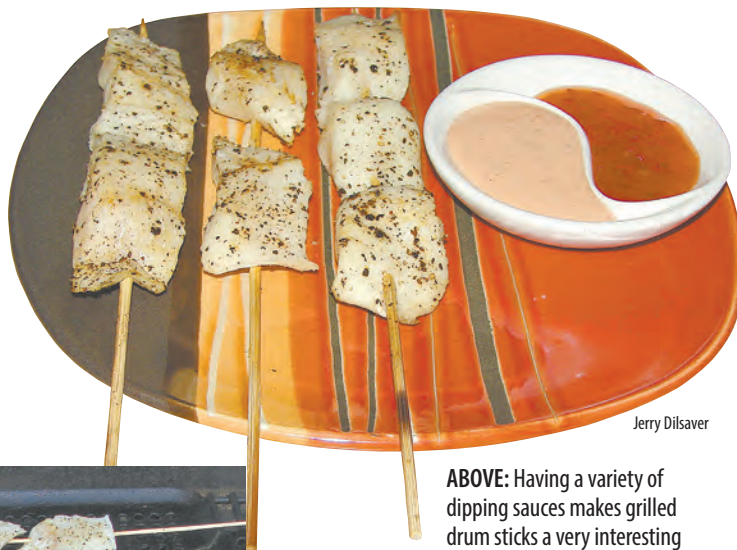
Soak skewers in cool water as instructed, usually a minimum of 30 minutes. Trim any dark or red meat from the fillets, then cut them into pieces approximately 1 to 1½ inches wide. They will be different lengths.

Slide the fish pieces on the skewers. Lightly rub the fish pieces with the olive oil or spray them with the cooking spray. Sprinkle the fish pieces with salt and pepper to personal preferences. Place the fish pieces and skewers in a Zip Lock bag and seal if possible. Put the bag of fish in the refrigerator to season for at least 30 minutes — longer allows the salt and pepper to season better.

Make any homemade dipping sauces while the fish pieces are seasoning.

Preheat the grill to medium heat. Cook the fish, being careful not to overcook them. The time will vary according to the thickness of the fish, but it should only be 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Serve the fish hot off the grill with an assortment of dipping sauces. ■



Jerry Dilsaver

**ABOVE:** Having a variety of dipping sauces makes grilled drum sticks a very interesting late-summer meal. **LEFT:** Wooden skewers should be matched to the size of the fish chunks you're grilling.



Jerry Dilsaver



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

## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry



# HERE, KITTY, KITTY

CATFISH FROM A KAYAK REQUIRE A LITTLE MORE PLANNING

**P**robably the first fish a kayak angler new to the sport attempts to catch is a large-mouth bass or a redfish, depending on whether your home waters contain sodium or not. Some anglers never look much further, while others find adding different species to the list of fish landed in a plastic boat to be part of the fun of it all.

Surprisingly, a lot of novice anglers are intimidated when faced with trying to catch catfish from a kayak, because catfish tactics are very different from tactics used to catch bass, panfish and popular saltwater species. In other words, you aren't casting to the fish.

Here are some kayak catfishing and gear tips to help alleviate that apprehension.

**Rod holders.** Multiple rods and baits require the use of rod holders in order to provide more opportunities for you to find catfish and catfish to find you. Rod-holder configurations and styles are varied and can be easily removed, so pick what suits your boat the best.

**Live bait.** Most anglers have caught a catfish on an artificial lure but were taken by surprise when it happened. Live bait is the way to go. If not live, then use freshly dead bait, which means you'll

need to collect or buy bait shortly before your fishing trip. Keeping bait alive in a kayak is a challenge, so the next best thing is to put live bait in a Zip Lock bag and store it on ice in a small cooler.

**Know the species.** Blue catfish are known to prefer fresh dead bait over live bait. Flathead catfish are known to prefer live bait over dead, although both species will make exceptions. Channel catfish tend to eat anything with a strong odor that they can hone in on with their superior olfactory facilities.

**Anchoring or drifting.** While using multiple rods, the two primary choices for presenting live, fresh dead or stink-baits is by anchoring in a likely spot and letting the fish come to you or drifting with the wind and covering more water with baits slow-trolling behind the boat.

Slow-paddling is also an option if the wind is not cooperative or not blowing in the desired direction. If anchoring, set your boat up with an anchoring system that will let you move the anchor point to the desired position or allow anchor points on each end of the kayak.

**Circle hooks.** All species of catfish are notorious for swallowing baits. Sometimes they may have swallowed a bait for several minutes before you know you even have a

bite. Although you usually catch the fish, the chances of hooking mortality go way up unless using circle hooks to decrease the chances of gut hooking.

**Depthfinders.** Not a necessity, but knowing the depth of water you are fishing is a big asset when fishing open water. Marking catfish on a graph is a plus, but not as important as marking bait in the area you are fishing.

**Line and tackle size.** One of the most-common mistakes when catfishing is line that's too light. Even small catfish have rough teeth that will abrade and cut light line. They also have a habit of rolling and wrapping up in your line, which can sever lighter lines. A good rule of thumb is 20-pound mono. Many veteran anglers prefer braid. Catfish are rarely line shy, so opt for the heavier line and match that line with at least medium or medium heavy tackle unless you know you're only likely to catch 1- to 3-pound channel cats. ■



Phillip Gentry of Waterloo, S.C., is host of "PG & Boat Girl Outdoors" podcast and a veteran outdoor writer.



Phillip Gentry

Many kayak anglers are intimidated when it comes to catfishing from a paddle boat, but needn't be, with the right gear and mindset.

## THE SANTEE CATFISH RIG

Larger catfish, particularly trophy-sized blues that are popular with a lot of anglers, are a lot more nomadic than most anglers give them credit for. They have been compared to cattle, just wandering along travel corridors, grazing as they go.

The best way to target roaming catfish is by trolling or drifting. Again, most anglers would not associate trolling — a tactic normally reserved for striped bass inland and large saltwater fish in the ocean — with catfishing, but it can and does produce numbers of big catfish.

The secret to trolling for catfish is to have the bait, typically a fresh dead or cut bait, move slowly along the bottom to resemble food that bottom-dwellers typi-

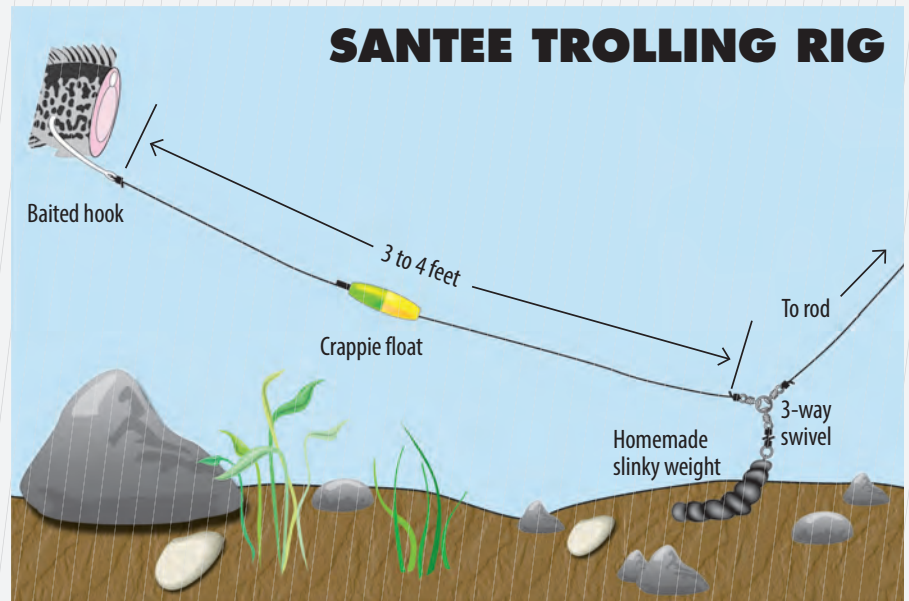
cally come across. To keep the bait low in the water column, the trolling rig will have to drag along the bottom.

Trolling over heavy cover is a recipe for break-offs. To combat this, catfish anglers on South Carolina's Santee Cooper lakes designed a special rig employing a slinky weight and crappie float to keep the weight on the bottom and the hook out of cover.

"I make my own weights using utility cord," said guide Spencer Edmonds. "I use anywhere from 16 to 23 pellets of No. 3 buckshot, stuff

that down in the cord and melt the end of the cord to hold it tight. "The deeper the water, the heavier the weight you need. Down on the lower lake, when I'm in that fixed wood, I like 23 or 24 pieces of lead, but on the upper lake, I normally use 18 to 20. I'm also using a snap barrel swivel so I can change if I'm fishing up and down a lot, all I've got to do is snap off one weight and snap on a different one to match the water depth."

After the weight, Edmonds pegs a 2-inch crappie float on a 3- to 4-foot leader between the hook and the swivel. Point the peg away from the weight so it won't hang. The added buoyancy of the float rides the hook and bait up off the bottom where it won't snag. ■



## BEST BETS

### NORTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Blue catfish

**WHERE** — Lake Gaston

**HOW** — This month will find blues on the move, following baitfish back into the creeks. Either drift fresh-cut bait like shad or white perch or anchor at the end of a secondary point and cast out lines.

**LAUNCH** — <https://www.ncwildlife.org/boating/where-to-boat/>

**INSIDER TIP** — Gaston has produced the four most-recent state records for blue catfish in North Carolina. Although numbers of smaller blues are good, don't go to Gaston with light tackle.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Blue and flathead catfish

**WHERE** — Santee Cooper's Lake Moultrie and Lake Marion

**HOW** — Drifting shallow flats with fresh cut bait

**LAUNCH** — <https://www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/boatramp/boatrampsearch>

**INSIDER TIP** — Blue catfish will gorge themselves on freshwater mussels at Santee. Find a mussel bed on a flat in 5 to 15 feet of water, and you greatly increase your chances of hooking a blue catfish.

## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

You can catch good crappie on the Santee Cooper lakes in September, but patience is a big key.



Terry Madewell

# DEEP WON'T CUT IT

CONSIDER WIND, WAVES, DISSOLVED OXYGEN AND LOOK IN SHALLOWER WATER IN SEPTEMBER

**S**eptember fishing at Santee Cooper can be a confusing time for many anglers, because logical thinking is not always the best in terms of where to fish.

Kevin Davis, who owns Blacks Camp on Lake Moultrie, said a lot of fishermen think that fishing deep water is the logical choice, because of high air and water temperatures. But for the most part, that's not the best choice.

## WINDY PERSPECTIVE

"By September, the weather and water temperatures are some of the hottest of the year," Davis said. "Traditional thinking would be to fish deep to beat the heat, but I've found that, for the most part, that's not nearly as productive as fishing the right places in much-shallower water."

Davis said dissolved oxygen is a key to hot-water fishing success, and it's not always best in the deep water. On the Santee Cooper lakes, it's water typically in the shallow to 20-foot depth range.

"But not all of the lake with less than 20 feet of water is equal in terms of dissolved oxygen," he said. "I'll consider the wind and wave patterns for the previous week, because this wind pattern creates the best situation for more dissolved oxygen in the water."

"A steady wind from the west, for example, typically means the best dissolved oxygen will be on the eastern side of the lake — from wind and wave action. That's true from any wind direction; go to the side where the wave action has been stirring the water. The dissolved oxygen is a key to finding fish."

## MUSSEL UP

Davis said another reason to focus on shallower water if you're catfishing is because one of their prime hot-weather feeding habits is eating mussels.

"Catfish gorge on mussels during the hot weather, and that includes September," Davis said. "Fishing mussel beds is a prime tactic, and most of the mussel beds are in fairly shallow water. The prime areas for mussel beds are the tops of hills and ridges in water shallow enough for sunlight to penetrate so mus-



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.

Catfish feed so heavily on mussels in late summer that they will often have huge, protruding bellies because they're filled with the shells.

sels can thrive.”

Davis said a lot of the catfish caught in September are fat from gorging on mussels, and catfish cleaned will often have a stomach full of empty mussel shells.

“Fishing around mussel beds on the downwind side of the lakes is perfect strategy for catching catfish, including monster cats,” he said. “Also, I strongly suggest anglers downsize their baits, such as cut bait, to better match the size of the mussels. This is a prime time to catch catfish of all sizes on smaller baits.”

Davis said the best tactic is drift-fishing to cover a reasonable amount of water. When you find a place where lots of catfish are feeding in a small area, anchor-fishing can be productive. But otherwise, drift for best results.

## HEAVY BASS, CRAPPIE COVER

Davis said the largemouth bass bite is good in September, but a lot of fish retreat to extremely heavy cover and to shallow water in windblown areas.

“I’ve found that bass will get deep into the grass mats where the cover is so thick above them it’s like an umbrella,” he said. “Some big fish can be caught, but fishermen will have to rely on lures that can effectively fish this thick habitat.”

Working the edges of the grass or weeds can produce some fish, but typically the bigger fish will back in the cover, where the oxygen content is good and they also have plenty of forage opportunities, Davis said.

“But they’ll certainly bite when anglers work lures over the top or punch a lure down through the cover,” he said. “The bite is much better when fishing very early and very late in the day under low-light conditions.”

Davis said September can be tough for crappie fishing, but fish will be holding tight to heavy cover such as brush piles around 20 feet deep.

“Decent catches can be made, but anglers will have to fish hard and be patient to catch crappie,” he said. “In a few weeks, in late October and November, the crappie action will likely be very good. To be successful during September requires perseverance, but crappies can be caught.”

Davis said the bottom line for any September fishing is to think skinny water, not deep water, and watch weather and wind patterns to stack the odds in your favor for better fishing.

“At this time of the year, when the water temperature is high and the dissolved oxygen is low, taking the time to plan your strategy often means the difference in only a few fish or a big catch,” he said. ■



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## HEAD FOR THE MOUNTAINS

Robert Satterwhite

Small, tributaries streams are prime spawning grounds for brook and brown trout in the fall.

# TROUT SPAWN IS FALL CYCLE IN MOUNTAINS

Bob Satterwhite

BROWNS, BROOKS HEAD UP INTO SMALLER STREAMS TO REPRODUCE

In September, autumn eases into the mountains, with the first, dull-red coloring of sourwood, dogwood and sumac leaves.

Joe Pye weed, ironweed, asters, gold-erod and oxeye daisies brighten fields, pastures and roadsides in a dazzling array of colors: deep purple, lavender, pale blue and bright yellow.

Tart fox grapes and fragrant muscadines hang in heavy clusters from ropey vines. Ripe hickory nuts, buckeyes and acorns spatter the forest floor. Mountain peaks and ranges, once obscured by summer haze, stand out clear and distinct as far as the eye can see.

It's a bountiful time for both humans and animals, and it's the time when brown trout and brook trout begin their annual spawning rituals. Spawning begins as early as mid-September and can continue into November, depending on weather and stream conditions.

Of the two species, the brown trout is the most visible and most active. The male brown trout's colors, especially the distinctive red spots on its sides, become more vivid, and males develop a pro-

nounced hook or kype in the lower jaw.

## THE BIG MOVE

At the beginning of the cycle, adult browns leave their usual hiding places in deep pools and begin moving upstream, searching for likely places to spawn, feeding heavily to build up strength and stamina for the mating ritual. The constant movement can continue for a couple of months, since all brown trout do not spawn at the same time. They're easy to find, easy to see and much easier to catch.

Large flies such as a Nos. 12 to 10 chartreuse, olive, or black Woolly Boogers are especially effective for prespawn browns. Other deadly flies are a No. 10 Bitch Creek Nymph and a Nos. 12 to 10 Girdle Bug. Spinning lures such as a ¼-ounce Mepps Aglia or a Panther Martin with a black body and yellow dots also work well on prespawn trout.

Females seek out spawning sites. Males merely follow to accommodate them. Once a female brown finds a suitable site, she uses her tail to dig out a small depression, or redd, in a clean, pebbly

area free of silt and sand, usually at the tail end of a run or riffle where water is shallow and flow is adequate to keep the redd oxygenated.

While the female does the work, the male waits patiently until the redd is prepared and she is ready to deposit her eggs. When the female indicates she's ready, the male joins her, and, side by side, backs arched, jaws open, they complete the ritual, with the female depositing her eggs over the redd and the male emitting a cloud of semen. Using her tail again, the female covers the eggs with pebbles and small rocks, anywhere from a couple of inches to 6 inches deep. Females can have several redds.

During spawning, neither the male nor the female feeds. The male, however, will strike at something he sees as a threat to the female or her eggs. Once eggs are



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

Big brown trout become very active when the spawn approaches in fall.



Bob Satterwhite

laid and covered, parental duties are over. The eggs and subsequent fry are on their own. Eggs can survive in temperatures below zero if the water doesn't freeze, a rarity for high-gradient Southern Appalachian streams. Once eggs are laid and covered, they remain in the redd until spring. When fry can forage on their own, they leave the redd.

Once spawning is completed, browns return to their former habitat. For post-spawn brown trout, egg patterns such as Glow Bugs are very effective because brown trout will eat the eggs and young of other trout.

## BROOKIES SPAWN LATER

Brook trout follow much the same spawning patterns as brown trout, only spawning comes later. Prime spawning time for brook trout is mid-October through mid-November. Since wild brook trout usually are found in small streams, they don't move as much or as far as browns.

As for catching either brook or brown trout during the spawning cycle, fishery biologists say angling activity does not adversely affect the spawn if a trout is not injured or played to exhaustion when it's caught. When released, the trout will resume its spawning activities. The key word is "release." Kill a spawning trout, and you've destroyed a generation of trout.

Best places to find larger brown trout during the spawning cycle are in the tributaries of large streams such as the Tuckasegee River, Nantahala River, the East Fork of the Pigeon

River, South Toe River and Davidson River in North Carolina.

Tributaries that feed lakes also are prime spawning grounds for lake trout. Big browns from South Carolina's Lake Jocassee move up the Thompson, Whitewater and Horsepasture rivers to spawn.

Other prime spawning grounds for big brown trout are the Oconaluftee River, Deep Creek and Bradley Fork in the North Carolina section of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Good weather and good fishing. Fall in the mountains is indeed a magical time. ■



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

The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars). The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Moon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

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

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

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2020 SEP		BEST DAYS				LUNAR PERIODS					
POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED						
					MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT			
Tue 1	██	██	██	56	7:49 pm	Midnight - 1:14 am	6:00 am	12:21 pm - 1:39 pm	☀	☾	FULL
Wed 2	██	██	██	62	8:18 pm	12:35 am - 2:07 am	6:59 am	1:00 pm - 2:32 pm	☀	☾	FULL
Thu 3	██	██	██	53	8:46 pm	1:10 am - 2:58 am	7:56 am	1:35 pm - 3:23 pm	☀	☾	FULL
Fri 4	██	██	██	45	9:12 pm	1:42 am - 3:48 am	8:52 am	2:07 pm - 4:13 pm	☀	☾	FULL
Sat 5	██	██	██	38	9:38 pm	2:15 am - 4:37 am	9:47 am	2:40 pm - 5:02 pm	☀	☾	FULL
Sun 6	██	██	██	36	10:06 pm	2:47 am - 5:27 am	10:42 am	3:12 pm - 5:52 pm	☀	☾	Apogee
Mon 7	██	██	██	40	10:36 pm	3:20 am - 6:16 am	11:38 am	3:45 pm - 6:41 pm	☀	☾	Apogee
Tue 8	██	██	██	43	11:09 pm	3:57 am - 7:07 am	12:35 pm	4:22 pm - 7:32 pm	☀	☾	Apogee
Wed 9	██	██	██	51	11:47 pm	4:38 am - 7:58 am	1:33 pm	5:03 pm - 8:23 pm	☀	☾	Apogee
Thu 10	██	██	██	62	12:17 pm	5:22 am - 8:52 am	2:31 pm	5:47 pm - 9:17 pm	☀	☾	HALF
Fri 11	██	██	██	54	12:32 am	6:11 am - 9:47 am	3:28 pm	6:36 pm - 10:12 pm	☀	☾	HALF
Sat 12	██	██	██	50	1:23 am	7:05 am - 10:41 am	4:22 pm	7:30 pm - 11:06 pm	☀	☾	HALF
Sun 13	██	██	██	51	2:22 am	8:03 am - 11:35 am	5:12 pm	8:28 pm - 12:00 pm	☀	☾	HALF
Mon 14	██	██	██	60	3:27 am	9:05 am - 12:27 pm	5:58 pm	9:30 pm - 12:52 pm	☀	☾	HALF
Tue 15	██	██	██	69	4:36 am	10:09 am - 1:15 pm	6:39 pm	10:34 pm - 1:40 am	☀	☾	HALF
Wed 16	██	██	██	77	5:48 am	11:12 am - 2:02 pm	7:16 pm	11:37 pm - Midnight	☀	☾	HALF
Thu 17	██	██	██	79	6:59 am	12:15 pm - 2:45 pm	7:52 pm	Midnight - 2:27 am	☀	☾	HALF
Fri 18	██	██	██	66	8:12 am	1:20 pm - 3:26 pm	8:26 pm	12:40 am - 3:10 am	☀	☾	HALF
Sat 19	██	██	██	52	9:24 am	2:24 pm - 4:10 pm	9:01 pm	1:45 am - 3:51 am	☀	☾	HALF
Sun 20	██	██	██	38	10:35 am	3:28 pm - 4:54 pm	9:39 pm	2:49 am - 4:35 am	☀	☾	LOW
Mon 21	██	██	██	30	11:47 am	4:32 pm - 5:40 pm	10:20 pm	3:53 am - 5:19 am	☀	☾	LOW
Tue 22	██	██	██	32	12:56 pm	5:34 pm - 6:32 pm	11:06 pm	4:57 am - 6:05 am	☀	☾	LOW
Wed 23	██	██	██	40	2:02 pm	6:35 pm - 7:27 pm	11:58 pm	5:59 am - 6:57 am	☀	☾	LOW
Thu 24	██	██	██	28	3:01 pm	7:33 pm - 8:21 pm		7:00 am - 7:52 am	☀	☾	LOW
Fri 25	██	██	██	23	3:54 pm	8:24 pm - 9:20 pm	12:54 am	7:58 am - 8:46 am	☀	☾	LOW
Sat 26	██	██	██	23	4:39 pm	9:13 pm - 10:15 pm	1:53 am	8:49 am - 9:45 am	☀	☾	LOW
Sun 27	██	██	██	23	5:18 pm	9:57 pm - 11:09 pm	2:54 am	9:38 am - 10:40 am	☀	☾	LOW
Mon 28	██	██	██	34	5:51 pm	10:36 pm - 12:02 am	3:54 am	10:22 am - 11:34 am	☀	☾	LOW
Tue 29	██	██	██	45	6:21 pm	11:11 pm - 12:53 am	4:52 am	11:01 am - 12:27 pm	☀	☾	LOW
Wed 30	██	██	██	55	6:49 pm	11:45 pm - Midnight	5:50 am	11:36 am - 1:18 pm	☀	☾	LOW

25 50 75  
AVERAGE

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

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A man with short grey hair and sunglasses, wearing a white t-shirt, is holding a large Spanish mackerel on a boat. The fish is silver with yellow spots and is held horizontally. The background shows the ocean and a clear blue sky.

Ken Richardson of Monroe, N.C., caught this really nice Spanish mackerel off Oak Island.

# Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

## NC'S CAPE FEAR: SPANISH SPOKEN HERE

The prince mackerel gives North Carolina fishermen a real thrill as fall approaches

**S**panish mackerel arrive off North Carolina's southern coast in late April or early May and stay until the water cools in the fall. These smaller mackerel are always welcome, as they are usually feeding, are willing biters and have a pleasing, mild flavor.

While the spring arrival of Spanish macks is eagerly awaited, the fall bite is even more highly anticipated. After feeding hard all summer, they are larger, fight harder and still hit the taste buds just right. They are a favorite on the line and in the frying pan.

Fall Spanish mackerel will often be feeding just beyond the breakers, lured there by a seemingly endless line of mullet minnows heading south. This puts them in the fishing range of almost everyone, occasionally even including surf casters.

Spanish macks are very popular with boat fishermen and are often found just

outside the inlets. They catch Spanish by trolling small, flashy spoons, slow-trolling or drifting small, live baits or by casting jigs to feeding fish. Unfortunately not everyone has a boat.

Pier fishing is available to everyone, and pier Spanish catches can be excellent. The Cape Fear region boasts seven public fishing piers, so this action is available from Wrightsville Beach to Sunset Beach. For a daily, weekly or seasonal fee, fishermen can use the piers to gain access to roughly the first 1,000 feet of the ocean, and this is usually where the larger fall Spanish roam.

Carolyn Riggan at Oak Island Pier in Oak Island, said, "Our fishermen caught some nice Spanish during the spring run, and we're looking at the fall run to be even better.

"There are several ways to catch Spanish from the pier, and my favorite is to light-line a live mullet minnow," she said. "I use

a clear, mono leader, so I get more strikes. Yes, I lose some fish and rigs to their sharp teeth, but there are days I catch a lot of fish while fishermen using wire leaders only catch a few. In my book, getting more strikes is worth losing a few."

Riggan's rig uses a single No. 2, extra-long shank, Eagle Claw L072 hook tied on the mono leader. She holds the rod and sets the hook as soon as she feels the fish run. Waiting too long lets the fish swallow the hook and bite the leader with its sharp teeth.

Riggan said a local favorite Spanish lure is a Got-Cha jig with a red head, white body and gold hooks. Yes, gold hooks are a must. She said fishermen also catch Spanish by jiggging straw rigs vertically, just off the bottom. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

# HARBOR RIVER REDS

## offer great small-craft action this month

**T**he Harbor River runs between St. Helena Island and Harbor Island in South Carolina's Beaufort County. Like many of the Lowcountry's rivers, its creeks are chock full of redfish and hiding places for them. It's a river that can keep an angler occupied for an entire day.

Machete Flats Landing offers easy access to Harbor River, no matter the size of your fishing craft. A seafood company is on the smallest section of this river, not far from Machete Flats. The docks here are redfish magnets. Keeper fish all the way up to bulls patrol them and will readily take live bait, cut bait or artificial lures like Gulp curlytail lures or D.O.A. CAL Shadtails.

For something a little wilder, head to the larger section of the river and duck into the smaller creeks. Small boats are best here, as the shallow creeks offer redfish safe haven from porpoises.

Dalton Reames of Sumter, S.C., fishes these creeks often from his kayak, which allows him to enter them at low tide. He looks for oyster mounds protruding above the water's surface, casting live mud minnows and shrimp all around the structure.

"I like to get in these creeks on the incoming tide," Reames said. "That lets me find the oyster mounds when they're still exposed. As the tide comes in, the redfish move in. It's good to get in place early so you don't disturb them once they start showing up."

These creeks heat up quickly on summer days, and even though September's are often just as hot, the water



The small, tributary creeks off the Harbor River are full of slot-sized redfish.

Brian Cope

temperatures are beginning a slight transition that the fish sense long before anglers do, so the fish flood into these areas.

With a two-fish limit, Reames cautions anglers to be picky when catching legal reds.

"Redfish in these creeks range from 15 inches to bigger than 30 inches, so if you want to keep a couple for supper, don't keep the first 15-incher you catch," he said. "You've got a good chance at some in the 20- to 22-inch range. And those have a lot more meat on them than a barely legal fish."

Reames suggests anglers get out of their boats and onto dry land whenever possible, increasing their casting options. Casting between the oyster mounds and grass lines will produce plenty of bites as the tide begins flowing ■

— Brian Cope

# HIGH ROCK'S CATS

## are best shot for September fishing action

**S**eptember ranks as one of the toughest months for fishing on North Carolina's High Rock Lake. The early part of the month is an extension of the sweltering heat of August, and later in the month, cooler weather puts the fish in transition somewhere between here and there in the depth zone.

But there's hope for anglers targeting channel catfish.

"It's a lot like that with September fishing for channel cats at High Rock Lake," said Maynard Edwards of Yadkin Lakes Guide Service. "Although channel cats are easier to catch in September than other species, you have to search for them, because they can linger in 6 to 20 feet of water."

Edwards (336-249-6782) begins his morning search by pulling baits at shallower depths, choosing among a number of productive flats at the mouths of Panther and Crane creeks. Around mid-day, he probes deeper waters on flats and humps outside of Sailboat Neck to what's locally known as "Big Boat Neck."

"Many fishermen neglect to notice what

depth they're fishing when they get a strike because of the excitement of hooking a fish," he said. "Once you get a strike, note the depth and keep pulling at that depth until the strikes stop."

Edwards pulls Santee rigs at about .6 mph. They have an in-line float attached 6 inches or so above the hook to keep the bait off the bottom. His slider weights range from 1½ to 3 ounces, depending on depth, wind and current.

His reels are spooled with 20-pound mono and matched with 7-foot, medium-heavy rods. A 2-foot, 20-pound leader with a No. 5/0 or 6/0 Kahle hook holding either the head or belly section of a 4-inch gizzard shad completes the rig. With inexperienced clients, he switches to circular hooks so hooksets aren't important.

"Just reel the fish in; the hook sets itself," said Edwards, who discards the tail sections of baits to keep his rigs from spinning and slits the belly sections to emit more juice and smell.

"Channel cats feed more by smell than sight," said Edwards. "The smellier the bait

Guide Maynard Edwards drags cut bait for High Rock Lake channel cats this month.



Tony Garitta

is, the better it is."

Edwards will fish from six to eight rods, depending on the size of his party. For pulling shallow water, he sets out planer boards.

Edwards said a normal, 5-hour trip results in around 20 cats from 2 to 6 pounds, with the possibility of a bigger fish.

"Trolling for cats is great for family outings because it doesn't require expensive equipment, casting skills or endless patience waiting for bites," he said. ■

— Tony Garitta

Big blue catfish are on the menu for plenty of Lake Gaston fishermen in September, with fish moving out of the main lake and into creeks.

# HOT GASTON BLUES

## Catfish are on the move in September



Zakk Royce

**W**ith any luck, North Carolina will begin to see signs of a temperature decline in September, but even if the heat hangs on, Lake Gaston's blue catfish will be feeling frisky with anticipation. According to guide Zakk Royce of Gasburg, Va., — the fish will be biting — but an angler will need to cover a variety of water depths to find the fish.

"The water temperature may still be warm, but September is a transition month, and shorter days and cooler nights are on the way," said Royce (919-724-2474), of Blues Brothers Catfishing Guide Service. "Also, all groups of blues will have the spawn way behind them. Their energy level will be back up, and they'll be hungry again. All these things come together to make super-aggressive fish. Having two or three fish on at a time is common.

"You won't be able to count on a particular depth, but it's not too complicated to find them. I usually start in the main-lake coves because the fish can run between shallow and deep water quickly, then venture out to the main lake channel ledges if necessary. The coves I target are where small feeder creeks dump into the lake; they're usually less than a-half mile long. I can troll depths from 25 to 30 feet in the mouth to 5 feet in the back in a short amount of time. If I'm not getting bit, I back out to the main-channel ledges and troll in 30 to 40 feet of water."

Most of Royce's trolling will be done with a spread of rigs bumping the bottom at a speed of a ½ to 1 mph, but a float rig may be added if fish appear to be suspended, especially in early September during a particularly hot year when a thermocline may still be present. He runs six rods in the spread: two straight back and two off each gunwale spread out by planer boards. They all pull Santee rigs featuring slinky weights ranging from 1½ ounces for the rigs on planers, to 2½ ounces for the others. The 7/0 to 9/0 circle hooks will carry cut shad or perch.

If blues are not in coves or the main-river channel, Royce will resort to checking main-lake points in 10 to 20 feet for fish that are still munching mussels in their summer pattern. The most-productive will be in close proximity to deep water such as a creek channel or the main river channel.

— Dusty Wilson

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