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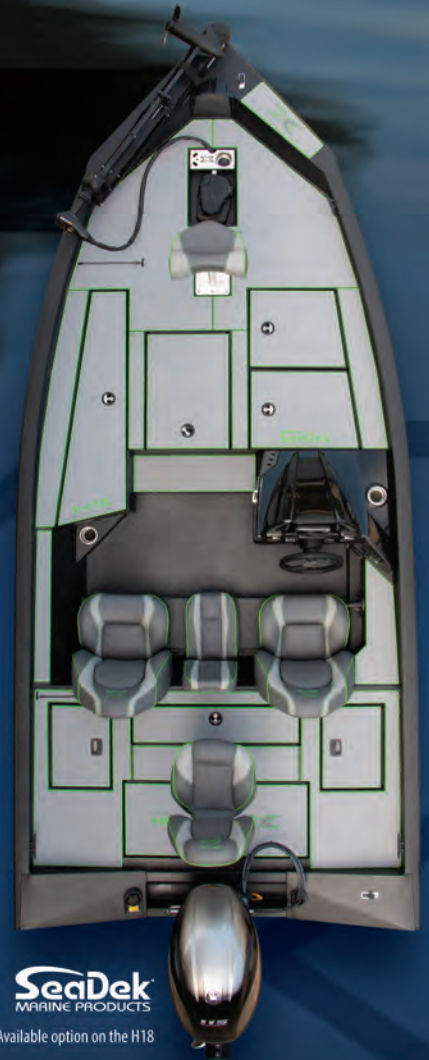
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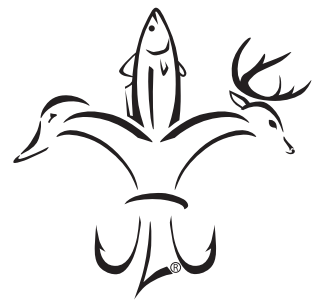
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19
DON'T WAIT
FOR PRESPAWN SLABS

9
DEER OF THE YEAR
2020



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Lots of crappie fishermen wait to get on the water until the crappie are spawning. They're missing some great, great fishing for hungry prespawners like this one caught by Pat Robertson of Blythewood, S.C. Photo by Terry Madewell.

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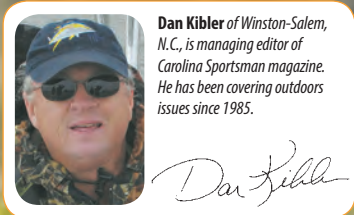
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WILL NC GAME LANDS ADD SUNDAY?

COMMISSION PROPOSES OPENING 51 GAME LANDS TO SUNDAY HUNTING

Sportsmen in North Carolina may be looking at having more than 50 public-hunting areas open on Sundays if the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is pleased with the results of public comment and an online public hearing in late January.

The Commission announced in December that it was considering a proposal to allow the authorization of Sunday hunting on game lands across the state.

Two published proposals would change allow game lands that are currently open six days a week, Monday through Saturday, to become “seven-day” game lands, and game lands that are open three days a week — Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays — to become “four-day” game lands, adding Sunday hunting.

A few Sunday restrictions will remain in place: no hunting from 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., no hunters can use firearms to take deer that

are being run by dogs, and hunting within 500 yards of a place of religious worship is prohibited.

Sportsman can attend the online public hearing by visiting https://ncwildlife.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_jef8D745QLml6b-b81hy8Q and “tuning in” on Jan. 21 at 6:30 p.m. or by calling 888-788-0099 or 877-853-5247 and using Webinar ID: 928 5632 3468. They can comment online by accessing the proposals at www.ncwildlife.org and emailing regulations@ncwildlife.org In its list of proposed regulation changes, the

Commission said the Sunday game lands changes were based on nine public meetings, three focus-group meetings, staff meetings and discussions with landowning partners.

The Commission said opening Sunday hunting on certain game lands will be based on the lack of Sunday use by non-hunters, proximity to other games lands and public lands where hunting is prohibited, and the value of unique properties to certain user groups. It chose six game lands to add Sundays to become four-day game lands, and 45 game lands to add Sundays to become seven-day game lands.

Not all hunters can take advantage of all hunting opportunities on all affected properties. The Commission is looking at a proposal to prevent the harvest of bears on Sundays on 20 game lands in the Coastal Bear Management Unit — Alligator River, Angola Bay, Bullard and Branch Hunting Preserve, Cape Fear River Wetlands, Carteret County, Chowan, Croatan, Currituck Banks, Goose Creek, Gull Rock, Juniper Creek, Light Ground Pocosin, New Lake, North River, Northwest River Marsh, Robeson, Sampson, Sutton Lake and Van Swamp — because the additional harvest of bears that Sunday hunting might entail could result in negative effects for those bear populations.

Two other proposals that might interest deer hunters include allowing hunters using muzzleloaders during blackpowder season to use pre-loaded powder capsules that can be loaded through a gun’s breech, and allowing hunters to use sling bows during archery season. They are currently legal in North Carolina for wild turkeys, small-game animals, non-game animals and non-game fish. ■



Two youngsters from eastern North Carolina were in on the Dec. 19 taking of this 642-pound Jones County bear: Abigail Harrison of LaGrange and D.J. Archer of Kinston. Rob Parsons of Shelby was a third shooter involved.

Sandy Bottom Volunteer Fire & Rescue

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2:08	\$500	3:12	Savage M110 Stainless .270	4:16	Canik TPSF Elite 9mm
2:12	Howa M1500 .204 Ruger	3:16	\$500	4:20	\$500
2:16	\$500	3:20	Glock 43X 9mm	4:24	Ruger American Ranch 350 Legend
2:20	Winchester SXP Shadow 20 ga	3:24	\$500	4:28	\$500
2:24	\$500	3:28	S&W M&P 40 2.0	4:32	S&W M&P 15-22 w/Red Dot
2:28	Taurus 605 357Mag Stainless	3:32	\$500	4:36	\$500
2:32	\$500	3:36	Winchester SXP Longbeard 12ga	4:40	Taurus G3 9mm
2:36	Ruger LCP II .380	3:40	\$500	4:44	\$500
2:40	\$500	3:44	Savage Axis XP 6.5 Cdmr w/scope	4:48	Browning A-bolt III 6.5 Cdmr
2:44	Savage R-93 17HMR	3:48	\$500	4:52	Half & Half Drawing
2:48	\$500	3:52	Browning Buckmark .22	4:56	\$5,000
2:52	Ruger 10-22 w/scope	3:56	\$500	5:00	\$10,000
2:56	\$500	4:00	Half & Half Drawing		
3:00	Half & Half Drawing	4:04	\$500		



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Sandy Bottom VFD reserves that right to alter event format as needed based on current COVID standards. Due to the current COVID conditions, we may have to hold a closed drawing and broadcast/stream the results.

**Contact any of the above to
have tickets shipped via USPS**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY! NC MAN WINS BAG-A-BUCK

All of Charles Joyner's hard work on a 42-acre hunting property in Granville County, N.C., paid off this year. Twice.

Joyner, a retired N.C. State professor from Wake Forest, N.C., has planted food plots, fixed logging roads and cut roads through a huge cutover on a 42-acre property; he doesn't want to think how much money he's put into making his sweet spot extra sweet.



"That would be some expensive venison," said Jordan, who was rewarded with a great 8-point buck on his 73rd birthday, Nov. 27. Then, he was rewarded again, when he entered *Carolina Sportsman's* Bag-A-Buck contest on Dec. 30 and was drawn as the winner of the monthly contest on Jan. 1.

Joyner was hunting from a portable turkey blind he'd assembled on top of a couple of levels of camo-covered construction scaffolding to give himself a view of a big, 3-year-old cutover.

The morning of his birthday, he watched several does leave the cutover and cross a road into some big timber. Five minutes later, the huge buck followed. He drilled him with his Browning BAR .270 at about 100 yards.

"I was surprised he came out," Joyner said. "I had a trail-cam picture of him from last season, and I had one in a bachelor group back in September. But I hadn't seen him."

For winning the fourth of four monthly contests, Joyner gets a one-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman* and a \$25 gift certificate to the online Sportsman's Store. He, along with every other entry, remains eligible for the grand prize: a \$50 gift certificate to the online Sportsman's Store, a three-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman*, and a two-day, deer/hog combo hunt for two at South Carolina's Cherokee Run Lodge. The winner will be announced later this month. ■

DIXIE DEER CLASSIC IS A CASUALTY OF COVID

It took a worldwide pandemic to break the Wake County Wildlife Club's 40-year streak of holding the Dixie Deer Classic, its wildly popular outdoor show.

The club announced in late December that the 2021 edition of the DDC, scheduled for March 5-7, has been cancelled because of concerns over the COVID-19 coronavirus.

"As everyone is aware, COVID-19 cases across North Carolina and the country have increased," the club said in a release. "We have continued to review the current state and fair-grounds restrictions which we would have to adhere to, and the impact they would have on the DDC. As a result, we regrettably decided to cancel the 2021 DDC due to the risk to our customers, exhibitors, volunteers and members from COVID-19.

"We will immediately start planning for a successful DDC in March 2022." ■

SC GAME WARDEN HELPS SAVE ACCIDENT VICTIM

A South Carolina wildlife enforcement officer has been credited with helping save the life of a Charleston County driver in mid-December.

LCpl. Griffin Anderson was the first first responder to reach the scene of a crash involving a pickup truck and dump truck on US 17 in Awendaw on Dec. 14.

The pickup truck began to catch fire with the driver trapped in his seat, when Allison and occupants of the drump truck were able to free and rescue him, seconds before the truck was fully engulfed in flames.

Both vehicles eventually caught fire.

The driver of the pickup truck suffered minor injuries and was transported to Roper Hospital in Mount Pleasant by Charleston County EMS. ■

SC ADDS 791 ACRES TO SPECIAL OCONEE COUNTY WMA

South Carolina added almost 800 acres to its list of public hunting areas in early December with the donation of a property in Oconee County that will be added to the Stumphouse Mountain Heritage Preserve.

The Nature Conservancy donated the property, named "Turnip Top" for the 1,600-foot mountain summit that's part of the property. TNC bought the property last July and transferred it to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources on Dec. 10.

"We are truly excited about being able to expand Stumphouse Mountain Heritage

Preserve with the acquisition of the Turnip Top tract," said Emily Cope, SCDNR's deputy director for wildlife and freshwater fisheries. "We are extremely grateful to both The Nature Conservancy and the South Carolina Conservation Bank for their continuous support of conservation and expanding public recreation opportunities in South Carolina."

Turnip Top has been a high conservation priority for decades for its size, connection to other conserved lands and impact on water quality. The property includes headwater streams that ultimately drain into Lake Keowee, a drinking-water supply for

many Upstate communities, as well as a popular recreation destination.

Those same forests house black bear, wild turkey, white-tailed deer and an array of migratory birds. The property is currently enrolled in the SCDNR Wildlife Management Area program.

TNC previously worked with public and private partners to protect Stumphouse Mountain when it was targeted for proposed development. Together, the partners raised \$4.3 million through 1,100 donations to purchase Stumphouse and protect it as a South Carolina Heritage Preserve. ■



Chris Harden killed this 18-point, 197-inch non-typical trophy in Moore County on Oct. 9. If the preliminary score holds up, it could be North Carolina's state-record crossbow buck.

DEER OF THE YEAR

2020

WILL HUGE MOORE COUNTY NON-TYPICAL BECOME NORTH CAROLINA'S STATE-RECORD CROSSBOW BUCK?

ONE LITTLE TRAIL-CAMERA PHOTO MAY HAVE CHANGED NORTH CAROLINA'S RECORD BOOK FOR WHITETAIL BUCKS.

Chris Harden of Raeford, N.C., was at his truck, ready to leave his hunting property in Moore County on the afternoon of Oct. 9. He had been in his stand since 1:30 without seeing much, and thirsty and tired, he went back to his truck about 5 o'clock, drank a bottle of water and decided to look at a SIM card he had pulled earlier that day from a trail camera. He had his card reader in the truck, and when everything was plugged in, there appeared a photo of a huge, non-typical buck the day before, coming to his corn pile.

Harden collected his Parker crossbow and hustled back to his stand, climbed in, and as 7 o'clock approached, the buck in the photo appeared, possibly headed for the record books.

"I couldn't believe it when I saw the buck walking to my stand, because I'd hunting this area for 15 years and hadn't seen anything like his rack," he said.

A few minutes later, he fired a Bone Collector carbon arrow tipped with a two-bladed, Swacker broadhead through the buck's vitals, and an hour later, he was standing over the trophy of a lifetime.

Harden's buck carried a main-frame 5x5 rack with eight non-typical points totalling 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The 162-pound buck had main beams at 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ and 24 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches and tines measuring as long as 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ and 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. It had 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches of abnormal points on the right beam, including a 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch protrusion from the base. The left beam added 6 abnormal inches

The deer green-scored as a nontypical at 200 inches gross and 197 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches net. When it is officially scored after a 60-day required

drying period, it could wind up as North Carolina's biggest non-typical ever taken with a crossbow, breaking the record of 195 $\frac{7}{8}$ — a Mecklenburg County buck taken in 2019 by Tracy McCorkle. An official score in excess of 195 will also put Harden's trophy into the Boone & Crockett Club's all-time record book.

Harden's buck wasn't a total surprise to him. A friend had told him a huge buck was in the area.

"Someone sent me a picture of the buck last year and said it was at the same area I hunted, but I didn't believe him," Harden said. "He also sent me a picture from 2020 of the same buck.

When Harden got back in his stand that fateful afternoon, he didn't have to wait long. Two does walked up to his corn pile, followed by two bucks, a 7-pointer and an 8-pointer, which chased them away.

"The does started blowing and running around like something was after them. They acted scared. Then, I saw horns coming through the woods," he said.

Harden shot the deer from less than 10 yards away

"I thank God his head was behind a tree," Harden said. "I was going to let him step out, but I looked through my scope and saw his shoulder."

The buck stood "7 or 8 yards" from his tree, and after Harden pulled the crossbow's trigger at 6:58 p.m., the deer ran about 50 yards and stopped in its tracks.

Harden feared he'd missed, so he recocked and reloaded the crossbow. When the buck walked to a fence and stopped, he shot it again, through the neck. The buck ran, jumped another fence and disappeared.

Harden waited an hour, joined by friends Jimmy Jacobs and Tripp Cox, and the three got on the deer's blood trail and found him. ■

DEER-OF-THE-YEAR GALLERY ➤

DEER-OF-THE-YEAR GALLERY



Cody Rhinehart of Orangeburg, S.C., dropped this 8-point buck on Sept. 5.



Hoyt Alcon of Gibsonville, N.C. tagged this 9-point, 140-inch Guilford County buck on Sept. 12.



Jerry Petree of Winston-Salem dropped this 8-point, 140-inch Forsyth County buck on Sept. 13.



Lawton Robinson of St. Matthews, S.C., killed this big, non-typical buck on Sept. 9 in Calhoun County.



Richard Shumaker of Mebane, N.C. tagged this 12-point, 160-inch Caswell County buck on Sept. 12.



Nathan McGee of Thomasville, N.C., arrowed this 13-point, 162-inch Guilford County trophy on Sept. 13.



Michael Collins killed this 10-point, 140-inch buck on Sept. 12 in Franklin County, N.C.



Hunter Pegg of Oak Ridge, N.C., took this 10-point, 152-inch Rockingham County buck on Sept. 15.



Chris Glosson of Rougemont, N.C., killed this 10-point, 152-inch Granville County buck on Sept. 15.



R.J. Seiler of Stokesdale, N.C. arrowed this 10-point, 142-inch Rockingham County buck on Sept. 15.



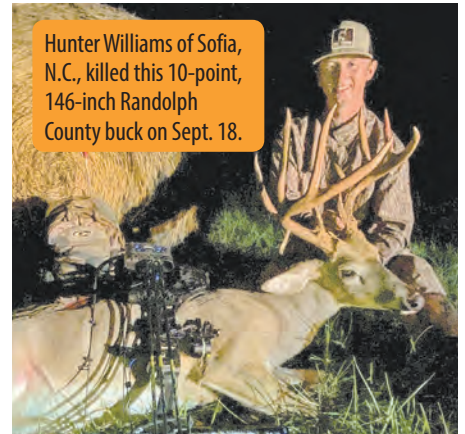
Cale Rogers of Snow Camp, N.C. dropped this 8-point, 155-inch Alamance County buck on Sept. 18.



Cameron Brooks of McLeansville, N.C., killed this 8-point, 133-inch Guilford County buck on Sept. 15.



Tommy Inman of Reidsville, N.C., killed this 12-point, 153-inch Rockingham County buck on Sept. 18.



Hunter Williams of Sofia, N.C., killed this 10-point, 146-inch Randolph County buck on Sept. 18.



Shane Atkins of Raleigh, N.C., tagged this 10-point, 143-inch Franklin County buck on Sept. 15.



Zach Porterfield of Roxboro, N.C., killed this 8-point, 150-inch deer on Sept. 18.

DEER-OF-THE-YEAR GALLERY

Erica Posten of Georgetown, S.C., killed this great 9-pointer in Georgetown County on Sept. 21.



Ashley Ingram of Newland, N.C., scored on this 8-point, 205-pound Avery County buck on Sept. 26.



Jacob Edwards dropped this 10-point, 156-inch Granville County, N.C., buck on Oct. 2.



Claire Tucker of Madison, N.C., tagged this 12-point, 149-inch Rockingham County buck on Sept. 28.



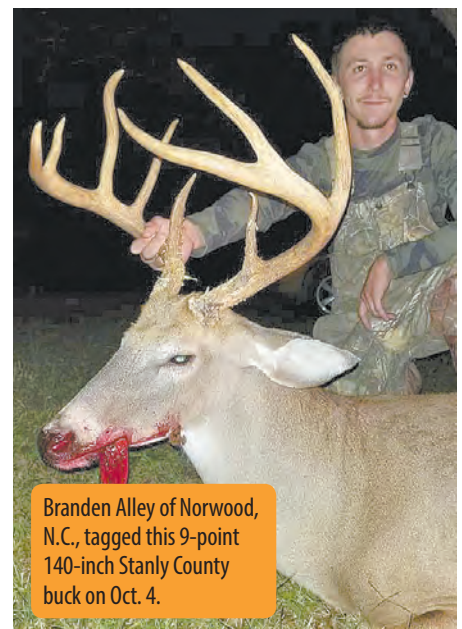
Julian Ridings of Shelby, N.C., took this 13-point, 139-inch trophy off the South Mountain Game Land on Oct. 3.



Wesley Thomas of Hillsborough, N.C., drilled this 169-inch non-typical Person County buck on Sept. 22.



Joey Dement of Centerville, N.C., killed this 10-point, 152-inch Franklin County buck on Sept. 30.



Branden Alley of Norwood, N.C., tagged this 9-point 140-inch Stanly County buck on Oct. 4.



Ravin Ginn Polk of Cummings, S.C., dropped this 9-point, 146-inch Hampton County trophy on Sept. 25.



Jonah Adams dropped this 8-point, 140-inch Surry County, N.C., buck on Oct. 5.



Holden Ayescue of Wendell, N.C., hammered this 10-point, 130-inch Wake County buck on Oct. 22.



Brian Thomas of Angier, N.C., tagged this 14-point Wake County non-typical on Oct. 14.

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DEER-OF-THE-YEAR GALLERY

Cody Tharpe of Holden Beach, N.C., killed this 12-point, 140-inch Brunswick County buck on Oct. 22.



Fidel Rodriguaz of Kernersville, N.C., busted this 16-point, 168-inch Rockingham County buck on Oct. 31.



Doug George of Gaffney, S.C., took this 12-point, 138-inch buck in Cherokee County on Nov. 1.



Chris Aycock of Warrenton, N.C., dropped this 22-point, 187-inch Warren County buck on Oct. 26.



Tommy Daniel of Asheboro, N.C., tagged this 12-point 169-inch Randolph County buck on Oct. 31.



Hayden Laws of Creedmore, N.C., tagged this 10-point, 140-inch Granville County buck on Nov. 2.

John Johnston killed this 10-point, 145-inch buck in Spartanburg County on Oct. 26.



Rohn Jones of Oxford, N.C., tagged this 11-point, 142-inch Granville County buck on Oct. 31.

Alex Kearns of Wake Forest, N.C., took this 16-point, 187-inch non-typical buck in Granville County on Nov. 4.



Miranda Allen of Gilbert, S.C., killed this 11-point, 227-pound Lexington County buck on Nov. 4.



R.J. Seiler of Stokesdale, N.C., took his second trophy of the season in Alamance County on Nov. 5. It was an 11-point, 146-inch specimen.



Cody Triplett of Sparta, N.C., dropped this 10-point, 157-inch Alleghany County buck on Nov. 6.

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DEER-OF-THE-YEAR GALLERY



Husband and wife Preston and Laura Richardson of Manson, N.C., scored on these Warren County bucks on Nov. 6 and 8. His was a 17-point, 157-inch trophy; hers was a 9-point, 146-inch specimen.



Priscilla Blackburn of Mountain City, Tenn., dropped this 153-inch Ashe County, N.C., trophy on Nov. 11.



Jonathan Anderson of Statesville, N.C., tagged this 10-point, 145-inch buck on Nov. 4 in Iredell County.



Dillion O'Dell of Clinton, S.C., killed this 10-point, 149-inch buck on Nov. 12.



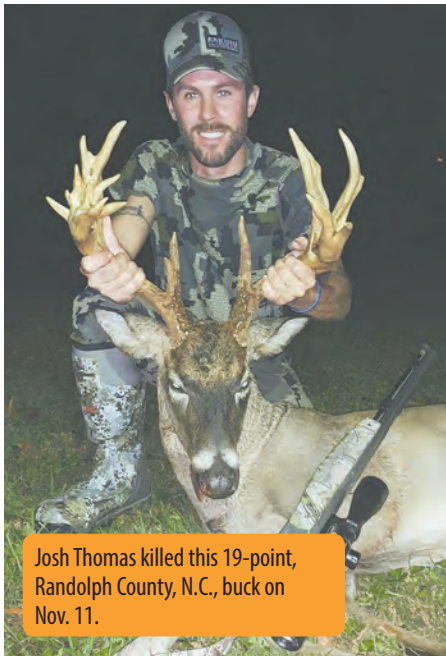
Hunter Pegg of Oak Ridge, N.C., made this 14-point, 182-inch Guilford County buck his second 2020 trophy on Nov. 14.



Robert Hamrick of Shelby, N.C., took this 10-point, 144-inch Cleveland County buck on Nov. 6.



Allen Smith of Reidsville, N.C., dropped this 9-point, 140-inch Rockingham County buck on Nov. 14.



Josh Thomas killed this 19-point, Randolph County, N.C., buck on Nov. 11.



Craig Hester tagged this 10-point, 157-inch buck in Person County, N.C., on Nov. 14.



Jeff Wright of Eden tagged this 10-point, 165-inch Rockingham County buck on Nov. 20.



Jerry Eubanks of Summerfield, N.C. killed this 15-point, 187-inch non-typical buck in Rockingham County on Nov. 14.



Kreed Thompson of Albemarle, N.C. killed this 10-point, 155-inch buck on Nov. 14 in Anson County.



Hunter Price of Princeton, N.C., took this 8-point, 156-inch Johnston County buck on Nov. 26.



Olivia Wilson of Summerton, S.C., dropped this 8-point, 147-inch buck in Clarendon County on Nov. 14.



Pearce Ruffin of Greensboro, N.C., tagged this 8-point, 156-inch Rockingham County buck on Nov. 17.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, go to www.carolinasportsman.com and visit the deer-hunting section.

DEER-OF-THE-YEAR GALLERY

Kevin Bowers of Kershaw, S.C., dropped this 15-point, 150-inch non-typical buck on Dec. 5 in Lancaster County.



To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, go to www.carolinasportsman.com and visit the deer-hunting section.

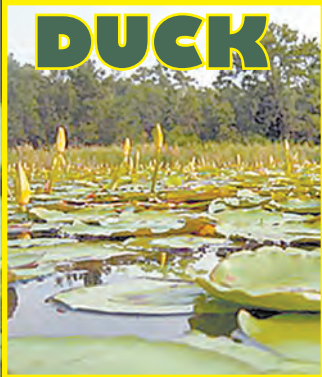
Donnie Craig of Jefferson, S.C., dropped this Chesterfield County monster in mid-December. The buck had a main-frame 10-point rack that grossed better than 170 inches.



Misty Weber of Gibsonville, N.C., tagged this 16-point, 153-inch Guilford County non-typical on Dec. 13.



Jason Threadgill of Troy, N.C., killed this 24-point Montgomery County non-typical on Dec. 30.



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Kaleb Justice of Snow Camp, N.C., dropped this 12-point, 145-inch Alamance County buck on Dec. 3.



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■ By Phillip Gentry

Phillip Gentry

PANFISH ANGLERS ARE A UNIQUE BREED.

Most of them profess undying love for their particular species of crappie, bluegill or shellcrackers, but they rarely spend much time fishing for them except during the spawning season.

Crappie anglers who understand the seasonal movements of these fish know that the prespawn — and even earlier — can be the best time to catch both the biggest fish and the best numbers across the Carolinas.

Guide Roland Addy of Edgefield, S.C.'s Carolina Crappie, probably puts it best when he talks about the “preseason” of crappie fishing.

“Murray, Greenwood and Clarks Hill are my primary lakes, but I see the same pattern on a lot of the typically deep, clear-water lakes,” said Addy (864-980-3672). “The lake authority will pull water levels down in the late fall, at the same time water and air temperatures drop. Once the levels stabilize, crappie will go into what eventually becomes their prespawn pattern. They’ll range further from structure and become more open-water oriented.”

Weather and rainfall plays a big part in these seasonal, winter movements, but by mid-January and into February, Addy said the open-water pattern is in high gear.



Philip Gentry



Philip Gentry

When it comes to locating these crappie, which typically suspend in the water column between 10 and 20 feet deep over much deeper water, Addy's first go-to locations are the mouths of creeks, particularly where they intersect the main-river channel or a more substantial tributary of the main lake.

"You'll often see baitfish on your sonar before you'll see crappie," Addy said. "The crappie are moving along with the baitfish, shadowing them and at times feeding on them, but it's all a very slow process."

Crappie are not really chasing baitfish, he said, as if they ever really chase baitfish the same way striped bass, black bass and white perch do. Feeding is a matter of opportunity and timing that dictates the presentation and tactics Addy will use to catch crappie.

““” *You'll often see baitfish on your sonar before you'll see crappie. The crappie are moving along with the baitfish, shadowing them and at times feeding on them, but it's all a very slow process.*



OPPOSITE: You can expect to find crappie suspended in open water around baitfish, but not necessarily chasing baitfish. **BELOW:** Tight-lining for crappie (left) allows the angler to subtly push baits toward suspended fish, while long-lining relies on a reaction bite as baits flutter past.

Black's Camp on the Santee Cooper Lake System

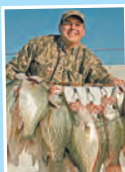
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Like a lot of crappie anglers, Addy has embraced recent sonar enhancements that allow him to scan not just below the boat but also to the gunwales, stern and even the bow. He uses that technology as a tool to hone his presentation to precisely where the fish are, but he admits it's not a magic wand.

"I can dial fish up on my Garmin LiveScope and watch them looking at my bait," he said. "A lot of times, that's all they do, look. It's frustrating when they won't bite, but at least it lets me know I'm in the right place once those fish become active."



Addy's three main tactics for winter crappie are long-line trolling (which he also refers to as pulling), tight-line trolling (aka pushing) and single-pole fishing.

Using all the sonar at his disposal, Addy first wants to target the depth and orientation of the crappie he marks. For long-lining, he wants to match his trolling speed to the depth of the fish using variables of jig weights, the line he has out and boat speed.

"Most times, long-lining is a reaction bite," he said. "Crappie are not going to chase a bait in the winter, but if several baits skim past just a few inches above the fish's head, they often grab it."

Addy's preferred baits for long-lining are curly-tail jigs and Sliders, baits that impart movement to get that reaction. He rarely uses jigs heavier than 1/16-ounce, preferring to add split-shot above the bait rather than using a larger jig. At times, he will double up and troll two 1/32- or 1/16-ounce jigs on the same line.

Tight-lining is the more-subtle approach during winter. Baits, either jigs or live minnows, are placed at precise depths and pushed into the path of suspended crappie at speeds not more than .5 mph.

"Using Livescope while tight-lining, I'll ease up to the fish using 12- to 14-foot rods and place the baits a foot or so above the fish," Addy said. "You can target specific fish you see on the screen or catch random fish that will also be suspended at the same depth."

Single-pole fishing for winter crappie is more dependent on sonar to locate and target specific fish. Addy said fish are not really oriented to structure and are sitting still, suspended up in the water column, even though general structure like a river or creek channel or the end of a long point may be directly below.

"I'll set my range to scan 40 to 50 feet out in front of the boat and watch for crappie," he said. "I can close the distance and pitch a jig or lower a minnow rig straight to the fish. If I don't see a lot of fish suspended, I might go look at the closest deep brush pile and usually find fish hanging off to one side or the other."

At the end of the day, Addy urged anglers to be versatile and change techniques and presentations until you find what the crappie want on that day. ■



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

Phillip Gentry

Virtual sonar allows single pole-jigging for open water crappie in real time, while the angler watches the bait on the sonar screen.

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Don't wait for prespawn slabs

Garmin's LiveScope has some features that enable crappie fishermen to see and cast to individual fish.

WHAT IS LIVESCOPE?

Anglers in general and crappie anglers in particular are always on the lookout for that one thing — that one bait, rod, tactic or piece of gear — that will help them catch fish better than anyone else. According to crappie pro Kent Driscoll of Cordova, Tenn., the latest, "one thing" is the new Garmin Panoptix LiveScope sonar system.

"This thing is a game-changer," Driscoll said. "The tournaments I've been fishing are all being won by boats equipped with these units. Single-pole anglers are winning tournaments with them."

Panoptix's all-seeing sonar is unlike anything ever seen on the water. It gives anglers the ability to see all around the boat in real time and in three dimensions. Whether idling around graphing or fishing, Panoptix transducers are available in Forward and Down configurations with mounting styles to suit your fishing needs.

"I've been a big fan of Humminbird's Side Scan sonar for years, and it's still hard to beat for scouting new areas and finding structure that holds crappie, but once you have located something you want to check out — a brush pile or a stump field or just open water — there's nothing like this," he said.



Phillip Gentry



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According to the Garmin website, it's easy to adjust the transducer mode to fit the angler's desired fishing techniques. LiveScope Forward allows you to see remarkably clear images of structure and swimming fish around your boat, and the LiveScope Down allows you to see directly below your boat. The view automatically updates on the compatible Garmin chart plotter.

Driscoll said he's been using the Garmin 1042 XSV 10-inch unit and admits he still has much to learn, but so far has been pretty amazed.

"This thing helps me determine so many details about what's out in front of the boat. I can tell if it's a crappie, bass, catfish or other fish like baitfish or something I don't want to see, like gar," he said. ■

SHEARON HARRIS SLABS ON THE MOVE

As weather warms in February, crappie are heading from deep-water areas toward spawning zones

Crappie in North Carolina's Shearon Harris Lake will be spending February making the transition from deepwater dwelling to a prespawn position. While it may seem like a daunting proposition, anglers aiming to load their boat can monitor water temperature and be prepared to roll with the changes to find success.

Whether tight-lining or long-lining, guide Freddie Sinclair of Clayton, N.C., will be on the move to find the fish.

"At the first of February, the fish are still going to be out in deep water," said Sinclair (919-553-4547), "on the main-lake points and ledges. But when we start getting any warming trends in the weather, they'll start staging up in the mouths of the creeks like Little and Big White Oak. Later in the month, when we start getting warmer weather consistently, they'll be moving towards the backs of the creeks. It's a transition period."

According to Sinclair, early February crappie are likely to be in 20 to 25 feet of water, but they are also subject to be higher up in the water column rather than on the bottom. Using his sonar and LiveScope, Sinclair determines their depth and positions his tight-line rigs to ride just above them.

From a near standstill to 0.5 mph, he runs a spread of 14- and 16-foot rods with single- and double-rigs, presenting jigs and live bait. A ¼- to ¾-ounce egg sinker weighs down each offering in a Carolina rig fashion. Sinclair will utilize this method as he follows fish into the mouths of the creeks until the water depth reaches the mid-teens and the fish spread out.

"Once the backs of the coves warm up to 47, 48 degrees and it stays, a few fish will move towards the back," he said. "But if it gets to 52, 53 degrees and stays, the end of February can be good. Once they move past the coves, I'll switch to long-line trolling because I can move the boat faster to find the scattered fish. I'll run the boat anywhere from 0.5 to 1.2 mph, depending on where the fish are positioned in the water column. The water depth might be 10 to 12 feet, but they may only be 2 feet deep, especially in the morning. Eventually they will move to the spawning flats off the main creek channels in 2 to 3 feet of water, making stops along the way, in 7 to 8 feet and so on.



Freddie Sinclair

Guide Freddie Sinclair catches crappie tight-lining in early February, then switches to long-line trolling as the water warms and fish move up in the water column.

Sinclair's long-line spread will be pulled by matching 9-, 10-, 12-, 14-, and 16-foot rods, each carrying a ½- or ⅙-ounce jighead featuring a soft-plastic grub or a live minnow. ■

— Dusty Wilson



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xpress boats

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2021 XPRESS X23B LOUNGE

The X-Bay Series from Xpress Boats has been enhanced for 2021 with the addition of the new X23Bay Lounge. This addition to our padded hull X-Bay line up takes the already popular bay boat to a whole new level with features designed for the angler and whole family. Key standard features include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, gulfsand paint with xtreme coat liner, large bay lounge console with fish box, fold down grabrail, removable windshield, seat cushion, back-rest cushion, Humminbird Piranha Max 4 graph, Minn Kota Riptide 46 trolling motor, 300 HP rating, and appearance package options.



Length 23"	Beam 102"	Capacity 9	Max HP 300
----------------------	---------------------	----------------------	----------------------

2021 XPRESS X23B DUAL

The addition of the X23B Dual to our padded hull X-Bay line up takes the already popular bay boat to a whole new level with features designed for the angler and whole family. Key standard features include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, gulfsand paint with xtreme coat liner, large bay lounge console with fish box, fold down grabrail, removable windshield, seat cushion, back-rest cushion, Humminbird Piranha Max 4 graph, Minn Kota Riptide 46 trolling motor, 300 HP rating w/ two Yamaha F150XB's (the first of its kind for our company), and appearance package



Length 23"	Beam 102"	Capacity 9	Max HP 300
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2021 XPRESS XT16

The newly redesigned Xpress Tactical Series has laser-like construction, engineered precision to provide the hunter and outdoorsman the finest outboard hull "HD:3" capable of handling most conditions seen by timber hunters to backwater fisherman. Open floor plan, narrower beam, wider bottom, deeper v for optimum outboard excitement. Redesigned transom, center keel and a SeeLite LED lighting system to illuminate even the darkest of destinations. Key standard features include a Hydro-Dynamic hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, camo paint, xtreme coat liner, duck boat accessory rail, and step pod transom.



Length 16"	Beam 68.5"	Capacity 3	Max HP 50
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2021 XPRESS H17

Built on the foundation of the famed Hyper-Lift Hull, this sleek, superbly appointed, open floor plan H17 is your solution to getting you to and from your destination safely and most certainly, quickly! Key standard features on this bass boat include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, choice of five hull colors, xtreme coat liner, SeaDek liner on decks, 7.5' capable rod storage, aerated livewell in rear deck, Humminbird Helix 5 graph, Minn Kota 45 Edge trolling motor, and appearance package options.



Length 17"	Beam 93"	Capacity 4	Max HP 90
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2021 XPRESS H18

The new H18 is built to go head to head with Mod-V style boats, which offer a rough, uncomfortable ride, however the introduction into this category with a padded hull design is truly a game changer. Built on the foundation of the famed Hyper-Lift Hull, this sleek, superbly appointed, open floor plan boat will provide you with years of excitement. Fast, dry, pad hull design is your solution to getting you to and from your destination safely and most certainly, quickly. Key standard features on this bass boat include Hyper-Lift Hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, choice of five hull colors, xtreme coat liner, SeaDek liner on decks, 8-foot capable rod storage, aerated livewell in rear deck, Humminbird Helix 5 graph, Minn Kota 45 Edge trolling motor, and appearance package options.



Length 17" 10"	Beam 93"	Capacity 4	Max HP 115
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2021 XPRESS H190B

The H190 Bay is the ideal option for anyone who is looking for a high-performance, beautifully styled, economically priced 19' bay boat. Built on the foundation of our Hyper-Lift Hull, this dream craft packs performance, fishability, and comfort into one amazing cost effective boat. Thin water or rough seas, you will not find a better solution. Key standard features include a Hyper-Lift hull, all-welded construction, longitudinal rib construction, unibody injected foam construction, choice of four hull colors, xtreme coat liner, Humminbird Piranha Max 4 graph, Minn Kota Riptide 46 trolling motor, and appearance package options.



Length 18' 10"	Beam 93"	Capacity 4	Max HP 115
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2021 EXCEL STALKER

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Model	1860	1960	2072	2172
Length	18'	19'	20'	21'
Beam	60"	60"	72"	72"
Capacity	5	5	5	6
Max HP	115	115	150	175

excelboats.com/stalker-console.html



2021 EXCEL BAY PRO

Excel has bragging rights to this smooth running and fast Bay Pro 230. This boat is an elite bay boat platform with features and options professional multi-species fisherman have been asking for. The Bay Pro 230 is big, 23' X 102" (8.5') to be exact, and the widest beam you can legally tow on the highway. Fit and finish is our specialty, and the Bay Pro 230 is so well built that many think it is fiberglass when they look down the sides of the hull. To top it off, we built this hull from 0.160 aluminum, unheard of for bay boats that normally have 0.125 hulls. To move this large boat, we built it on a 14-degree pad hull that lifts the boat, provides a dry ride and allows the boat to reach higher than normal speeds for a 23 foot boat varying from 200 to 250 HP.

Model	BP230	BP220	BP203	BP183
Length	23'	22'3"	20'3"	18'3"
Beam	102"	94"	94"	94"
Capacity	10	8	7	5
Max HP	250	200	150	115

excelboats.com/stalker-console.html



LAKE MURRAY'S COOL CATFISH

THE DEAD OF WINTER BRINGS OUT THE BEST IN FISHING FOR BIG BLUE AND CHANNEL CATFISH ON SOUTH CAROLINA'S LAKE MURRAY. HERE'S HOW TO FIND AND CATCH THEM.

■ By Terry Madewell

South Carolina's Lake Murray is a productive catfish destination year-round, but the dead of winter is prime time to target the

BIGGEST BLUE AND CHANNEL CATFISH.

Guide William Attaway from nearby Pomeria, S.C., said it's a catfishing bonanza.

"I like Lake Murray during winter for several reasons," Attaway said. "First, it's full of fat cats, with big blues and channel catfish the prime targets. Murray also has a good population of flatheads, and we'll catch some big flatties during the winter. Another plus is the great forage base composed of shad and herring. Plus, the lake is chock-full of white perch, another favored forage for big catfish.

Attaway also enjoys the "elbow-room" when fishing during the coldest months.

"Most everyone on the lake in February is fishing, a lot different than the rest of the year," he said.

Attaway said another winter plus is that it's an excellent opportunity to hook a trophy catfish, with big blues and channels getting fat on huge pods of shad and herring.

"The average channel cat we catch ranges from 6 to 12

pounds, with plenty of double-digit sized channel cats caught," he said. "Lake Murray ranks high in the state for quality channel catfish action. Blue catfish typically range from 10 to 20 pounds, but much-larger fish are in play on any given day, with fish in the 30- to 40-pound class realistic, and the top-end blues grow well beyond that."

UPSTREAM UPS YOUR CATCH >

Lake Murray's catfish won't be too far away from schools of baitfish or white perch during the winter.



Terry Madewell

UPSTREAM UPS YOUR CATCH

The entire lake can be productive, but Attaway prefers the area from Dreher Island and upstream. The upper end of the 50,000-acre lake has a variety of targets at fishable depths, including deep channels, points, humps, ledges and deeper flats.

"If the upper lake gets muddy from heavy rains, I'll certainly move down-lake," he said. "But the upper part of Lake Murray offers plenty of options to locate biting fish."

Attaway said the first step is to check an area with your depth finder, searching for a combination of forage and catfish in an area before fishing. He looks for big-fish marks he believes are catfish mixed with the schools of forage.

"During February, I often find catfish relating to the old river channel, and another good option is the deeper stretches of larger creeks," he said. "A third option are the flats or points in slightly shallower water. But for cold weather, I've found the deep river channel and adjacent ledges are the most consistent options."

Attaway said productive depths are in the 50- to 70-foot range, but that can change to shallower with dingy and/or warming water.

JUST DRIFTING ALONG

Winter is drift-fishing time for Attaway, who employs the basic Santee rig — a Carolina rig with a small float attached to the leader between the swivel and hook — to effectively cover a lot of territory.

"The forage and catfish are typically found in a general area more than just a single spot," he said. "A large but deep high spot along the river channel, an outside bend in the channel and along the base of the ledge are target variations I find productive".

Attaway will give an area at least 30 to 40 minutes to produce if he's seeing forage and fish as he drifts. This time of the year, he'll typically drift at 0.4 to 0.7 mph. If the water temperature gets really low, he'll use sea anchors to slow his drift even more.





Terry Madewell

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — Lake Murray is easy to access from either I-20 or I-26. Major towns around the lake include Lexington, Chapin, Gilbert, Prosperity and Irmo. Numerous launching ramps are found in any section of the lake you wish to fish. Visit www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/BoatRamp/BoatRampSelected/1224900



WHEN TO GO — February is an excellent time for both quality and quantity of a variety of catfish species. The majority will be blue and channel catfish, but also fat, winter flatheads. Channel catfish in double-digit sizes are likely, and blues in the 15- to 40-pound class are reasonable expectations.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Drift deep water using the Santee rigs with cut bait. Cut shad, herring and white perch are three top offerings used by expert catfish anglers.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — William Attaway, Slick Willie's Guide Service, 803-924-0857 or www.slickwilliesguideservice.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Lake Murray Country, 803-781-5940, www.lakemurray-country.com; S.C. Department of Parks, Tourism and Recreation, 866-244-9339; S.C. Carolina Association of Visitor Bureaus, www.discoverouthcarolina.com.

MAPS — Navionics Electronic Charts, www.navionics.com; Delorme's South Carolina Atlas & Gazetteer, 800-561-5105, www.delorme.com; Kingfisher Map 800-326-0257, www.kfmaps.com.



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.

“ I’ll use an assortment of sizes when I start that range from perch or gizzard shad heads down to small chunks of cut bait. I let the catfish tell me what they want on any given day. ”

His favored baits are chunks of gizzard shad, white perch and herring, and the size may vary on each trip.

“I’ll use an assortment of sizes when I start that range from perch or gizzard shad heads down to small chunks of cut bait,” he said. “I let the catfish tell me what they want on any given day. On really cold days, I’ve found that small, 1-inch by

1-inch baits can work great, even on big fish. Downsizing the bait can be a great option during very cold weather.”

Attaway drifts six to 10 baits, depending on wind and current. When wind-drifting, he’ll often fish six or eight baits, but if using his trolling motor on calm days he may pull as many as 10.

PLANER BOARD EXTENDS RANGE ➤

William Attaway said winter is a great time to do battle with one of Lake Murray’s big blue and channel catfish.

PLANER BOARD EXTENDS RANGE

"Using a trolling motor on calm days allows me to set a couple of planer boards," he said. "This gets baits well away from the boat, and the rest of the rigs are pulled behind the boat. The planer boards increase the spread of my baits, so we're fishing a larger section of water. Getting the baits further from the boat with the planer board rigs also seems to hook up more large fish."

Attaway said the typical bite in February is one of steady but not fast-paced, action. Occasionally he'll hit a hotspot and hook multiple fish.

"As long as I see forage and what I believe are catfish marks on the graph, I roll with that," he said. "When the bite stops, we'll pull the rigs and re-drift the same general area until action slows."

Attaway continues to refine the drift on each subsequent pass to better target the speed and depth and type and size of bait the fish prefer that day.

If the pattern slows and the bait or fish move, he'll adjust to stay on them. With the low water temperatures common in February, once he's on a solid pattern, it often holds for much of the day without any dramatic adjustments.

Attaway uses 7-foot, heavy action baitcasting rods with reels loaded with 40-pound main line and 50-pound monofilament leaders. The leaders are 18 to 30 inches long and have an 8/0 circle hook at the terminal end.

"I use small rattles in the float on the Santee rig, and I think on most days it helps," he said. ■



Terry Madewell

A big, white perch head on an 8/0 hook is a great combination for big, winter blue catfish.

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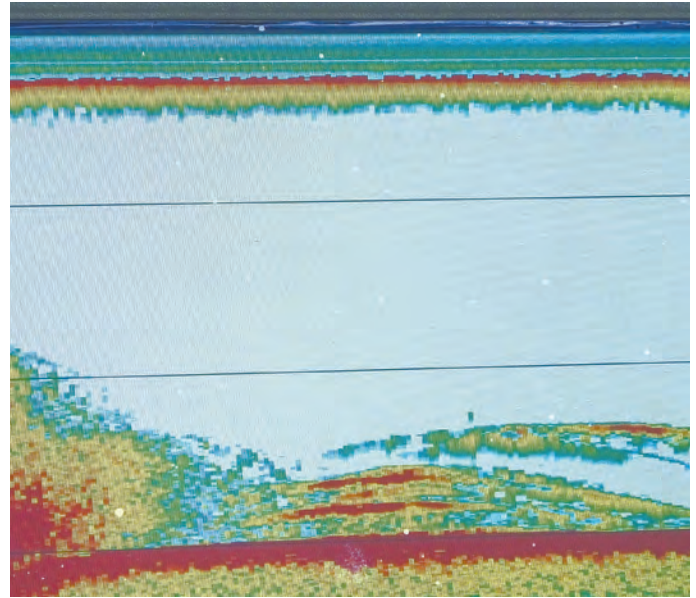
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Rather than fish an area with a solid mass of forage, guide William Attaway would rather fish scattered pods of bait with nearby big-fish marks nearby.



Terry Madewell

MURRAY'S WINTER BAITFISH CONCERNS

Guide William Attaway said he's learned that, on Lake Murray, not all pods of forage are created equal during the winter.

"I do want to see plenty of forage, as well as big fish marks, near the bottom in an area before fishing," he said, "but I've learned that just because I mark a massive concentration of forage covering the lake bottom, that doesn't automatically mean I'm going to catch lots of fish."

Attaway said the fish he catches in this situation are often stuffed full of forage and have fat, tight bellies. The easy opportunity to eat can make these catfish more difficult to catch.

"The kicker is, sometimes the action will be good drifting right through these huge concentrations of forage," he said. "But before fishing this mass of bait scenario, I'll continue to scan the lake bottom nearby hunting for scattered schools of forage."

"Typically, I'll find scattered pods of forage nearby, and if I see big-fish marks littered among scattered pods of forage, that's my prime winter target."

Attaway said another winter forage consideration can occur when fishing early mornings.

"I generally like to let the sun get up before fishing during the winter," he said, "not because of the cold, but because of the impact on forage. When I'm out early, before dawn, on really cold days, I'll scan areas where I've been catching fish, and the forage may be suspended well off the bottom over deep water."

"I've found that's a difficult pattern for catching catfish. But once the sun hits the water, the forage and catfish return to near the bottom, and fishing is much more productive. Getting out real early doesn't present the advantage as it may during other times of the year." ■



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A man wearing a blue jacket, a dark beanie, and sunglasses is smiling and holding a large, golden-brown fish. The fish has a white belly and a dark stripe along its side. The background shows a body of water and some reeds.

BIG, COASTAL RIVER OFFERS BETTER THAN 20 MILES OF FISHABLE WATER, MUCH OF IT FULL OF FEBRUARY TARGET SPECIES. THIS GUIDE EXPLAINS THE HOWS, WHERE'S AND WHYS OF WINTER SUCCESS.

By Jerry Dilsaver

DON'T FEAR THE CAPE FEAR

Jerry Dilsaver

Stuart "Stu" Caulder of Gold Leader Guide Service, a native of Wilmington, N.C., fishes the Cape Fear River from above his hometown all the way to the ocean, year-round.

He pays special attention to where bait is holding on various stages of the tide and how runoff from inland rains affects the river's coloration and clarity. That's important, especially when the water's cold and fish are holding tight and moving slowly.

Winter fishing in the lower section of the river holds good opportunities for red drum and fair opportunities for speckled trout, plus, there are black drum, generally below, and striped bass, generally above, the power line that crosses the river near Town Creek.

Caulder said a few generalities that are constant for winter fishing just about anywhere hold true in the Cape Fear. First, give the sun time to get up and warm the water. Fish will begin moving to places they feed as they warm, typically late mornings, around 11. On higher tides, they are typically shallower

and around creek mouths, points in the marsh, along grass edges, and redfish will move onto shallow flats that warmed while the tide was lower. As the tide begins to drop, they fall back with it to the first edges of deeper water.

The tide is about 3 hours earlier at Southport than at Wilmington, 24 miles upstream, which gives anglers a lot of opportunities to fish a preferred stage of the tide for several hours just by moving. Also, the tide moves more slowly in the last hour before and first hour after a tide change. Moving water is a key for most fish to feed, and fishing when the tide is moving more slowly allows a slower and more-precise presentation of the bait.

"I try to fish an area with banks that face southeast early in the day," Caulder said. "These areas catch the first sunlight of the day and warm more quickly. A degree of warmer water temperature in February is significant and can make a big difference in how fish bite."

LET'S GET SMALL ➤

LET'S GET SMALL

Caulder said many things many turn a winter bite on or off. One thing he keys on is changes in bait size. He said bait and lure size, jighead weight, current, tide stage and even the wind will make differences and can affect the intensity of a bite — and sometimes getting fish to bite at all.

Caulder fishes light, super-braid line with an 18- to 24-inch fluorocarbon leader, and he uses a loop to attach the lure for more natural lure action. When the current and wind are light, he may fish a soft plastic on a bare swimbait hook to get the most action. However, as the current or wind increase, he switches to a weighted swimbait hook or 1/8- or 1/4-ounce jighead to keep the lure from moving too fast.

Caulder said most folks realize stronger current pushes the lure faster, but they don't always notice that a stronger wind does the same. Current usually moves parallel to the bank, but the wind may be from a direction that pushes the lure out of the strike zone.

"I typically fish regular-size baits until the water drops into the upper 50s, but fish them slower as the water cools," Caulder



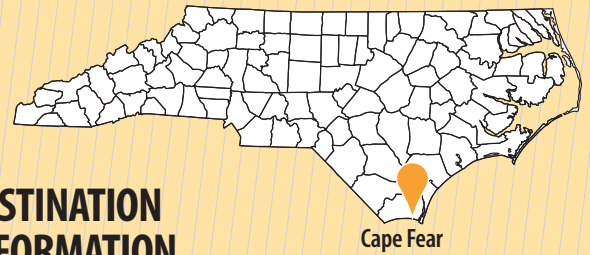
Fish soft-plastic lures slowly in cold water, and when the water temperature drops into the low 50s or high 40s, downsize or go lighter to get more bites.

Jerry Dilsaver

said. "However, once the water drops to the lower 50s and into the upper 40s, smaller baits typically bring a stronger reaction from everything but stripers. Drum tolerate the cooler water better than trout and sometimes mix with stripers in the Wilmington area and feed on larger baits. Trout really slow down and hit regular-size baits lightly, if at all. Switching to baits just a little smaller often makes a big difference."

Caulder downsizes both soft plastics and hard lures. He likes the D.O.A. CAL series of soft plastics and the D.O.A. shrimp, especially the new 2¾-inch version, which is small enough that cold, lethargic fish will attack it, while being big enough to be a tempting snack for a fish feeding more actively. It can be fished on its own or under a cork, suspended off the bottom.

"A lot of fishermen like rattling and popping corks to help draw attention to their baits," Caulder said. "That certainly works, but I like inserting rattles in my soft plastics, especially shrimp, which make a click if they move quickly. D.O.A. makes



DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The saltwater section of the Cape Fear River begins at the ocean between Oak Island and Bald Head Island and extends upriver to Wilmington. Main access is from I-40, US 421 and US 17. Popular ramps are at Dram Tree Park next to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge in Wilmington, the NCWRC ramp at Snow's Cut on US 421, the NCWRC ramp on Fish Factory Road in Southport, the Federal Point NCWRC ramp on Fort Fisher and Brunswick Riverwalk Park ramp in Belville. The last two are great for kayak launches.

WHEN TO GO — Red drum and speckled trout are found in the Cape Fear River year-round. Stripers join them for the winter and spring and are catch-and-release only. Black drum and flounder are possibilities most of the year; flounder are also catch-and-release only at this time.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Stu Caulder, Gold Leader Guide Service, 910-264-2674; Tex's Tackle, Wilmington, 910-791-1763, www.textackle.com; Island Tackle and Hardware, Carolina Beach, 910-458-3049, www.islandtacklehardware.com; Intracoastal Angler, Wilmington, 910-392-3500, www.intracoastalangler.com; The Tackle Box in Southport, 910-363-4725, www.marineserviceprosinc.com/tackle-shop. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Best Western Inn, Coastline Convention Center, Wilmington, 800-617-7732, www.coastlineinn.com; Riverside Motel, 910-457-6701, www.riversidemotel.net, Southport; River Hotel, 910-294-6070, www.riverhotelsouthport.com; dockage. For camping, Carolina Beach State Park, 910-458-8206, www.ncparks.gov/carolina-beach-state-park/home; Cape Fear Convention and Visitors Bureau, 877-406-2356, www.cape-fear.nc.us; Southport-Oak Island Chamber of Commerce, 910-457-6964, www.southport-OakIsland.com.

MAPS — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainsegullcharts.com, GMCO Chartbook of North Carolina, 888-420-6277, www.gmcomaps.com.

two sizes of rattles in glass tubes. The larger one is louder and fits their larger baits, but the small one makes a high frequency click and is just right to slip into the tail of their shrimp."

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HUNTING SEASONS

DEER

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

SQUIRREL

Oct. 124-Feb. 28, 2021 (gray & red)
Oct. 11-Jan. 31, 2021 (fox)

RABBIT

Oct. 12-Feb. 28, 2021

RACCOON, OPOSSUM

Oct. 12-Feb. 28, 2021

QUAIL

Nov. 21-Feb. 28, 2021

GROUSE

Oct. 12-Feb. 28, 2021

RAILS

Sept. 1-Nov. 20

(KING, SORA, VIRGINIA, CLAPPER)
(GALLINULES, MOORHENS)

CANADA GEESE

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

SNOW, BLUE, ROSS GEESE

Oct. 13-Feb. 13, 2021, Feb. 15-March 31, 2021, permit

DUCKS

Oct. 7-10, Nov. 7-28, Dec. 19-Jan. 30, 2021

EARLY TEAL

Sept. 12-30 (east of US 17 only)

SEA DUCKS

Nov. 23-Jan. 30, 2021

BRANT

Dec. 19-Jan. 30, 2021

DOVE

Sept. 5-Oct. 10, Nov. 14-28, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2021

TUNDRA SWAN

Nov. 7-Jan. 30, 2021. Bag limit 1, by permit only.

WOODCOCK

Dec. 10-Jan. 30, 2021

WILD TURKEY (Youth)

April 3-9, 2021
April 10-May 8, 2021



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HARD BAIT SLOWLY

Caulder said hard lures can be very effective. Most of the time, he said, he will be fishing in the winter around a creek mouth, point or oyster rock, retrieving towards a drop in fairly shallow water. He uses two suspending lures, the MirrOdine MR 17 and the Catch 2000 Jr., which fish similarly but have different profiles. Occasionally he uses a MirrOdine MR 14, which is even smaller, an MR 18 sinking lure for deeper water or a MR 27 or Catch 2000 when he feels a larger lure may be a better choice.

"These lures sink a little and then suspend," he said. "You can cast them to a creek mouth, point, oyster rock or sand bar and let the current push them to and through the strike zone, while you twitch them occasionally.

"If you need them to suspend a little shallower, switch to lighter hooks, and they move up a few inches. To get them to sink slightly deeper, add a SuspenDot or SuspenStrip, which are small stick-on weights, and they sink a few inches deeper."

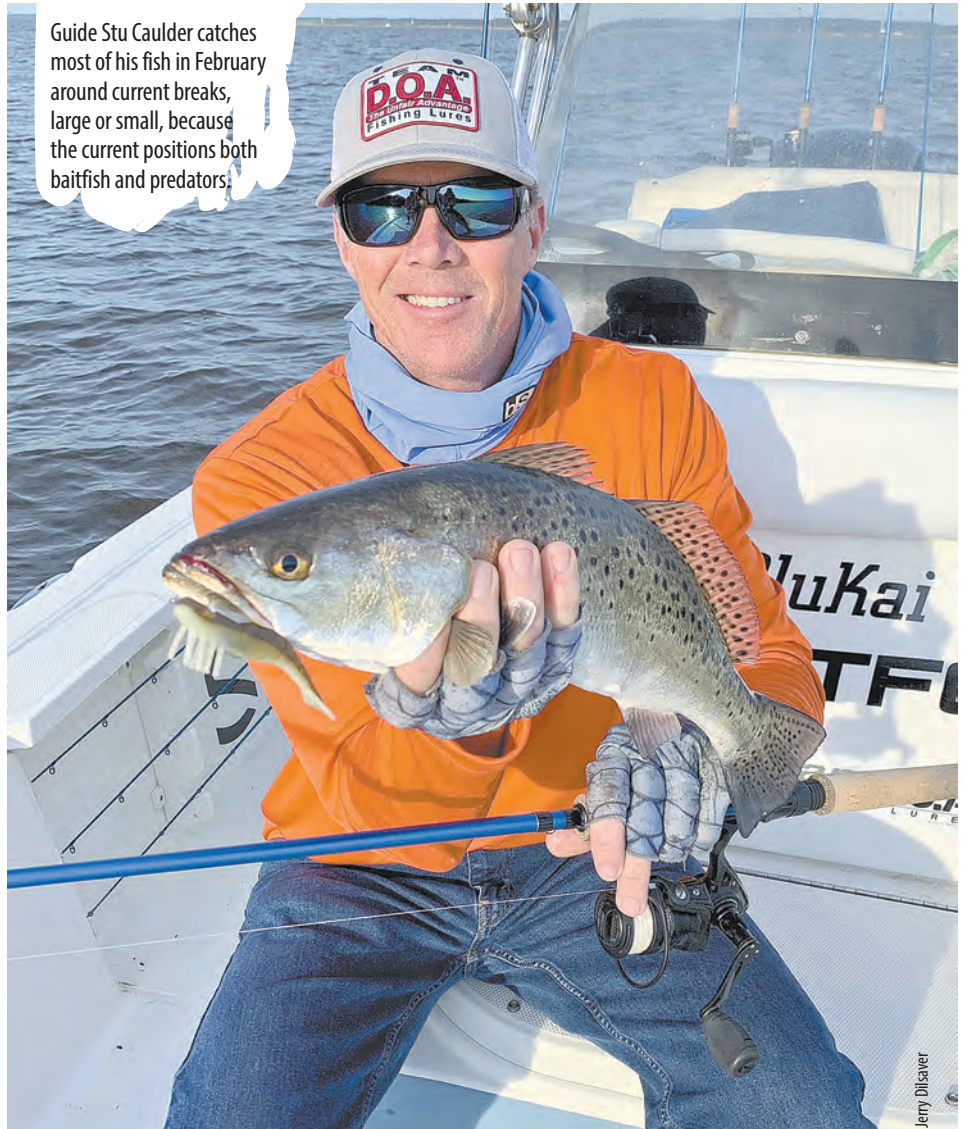
LOOK FOR CURRENT BREAKS

Finding productive spots to fish just requires a little looking around, according to Caulder, who looks for things that break the flow of the current and create eddies: creek mouths, points, docks, submerged structure, islands, sand bars and oyster rocks. It's simple to see something disrupting the current enough to create eddies. These eddies have a fast-moving side and a slower-moving side, and fish can suspend in the slower side without expending much energy, while being positioned to quickly dart out into the faster moving water to grab things they think will be tasty.

On a falling tide, creek mouths are the most-obvious places to find bait and hungry fish. The current running out of the creek creates a merging tide line, complete with eddies, just a few feet off the bank. The bait washing out of the creek reaches the larger creek or river and turns downstream with it. A couple of inches away, the water is barely moving, and hungry fish can easily hold while waiting for food to be swept past. This is the same principle, with points, pilings, jetties, bars and anything else that disrupts the current.

"Many fishermen look for big, pronounced points and bars

Guide Stu Caulder catches most of his fish in February around current breaks, large or small, because the current positions both baitfish and predators.



and such, but it doesn't have to be big," Caulder said. "It just has to break the current. Many times, that 6-inch or 1-foot spot where the bank sticks out a little is all the fish need, so don't overlook them. There are many places like this along the banks and around the marsh and spoil islands all the way down the river.

"I like fishing the whole river, but especially around many of the smaller islands below Snow's Cut," Caulder said. You just find that eddy, cast into it, twitch it just a little and get ready to set the hook. There may only be one or two fish in a small spot, and then you move to the next one. You can fill a morning, an afternoon or a whole day working these spots." ■

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6250	6.66	52.9	1.26	

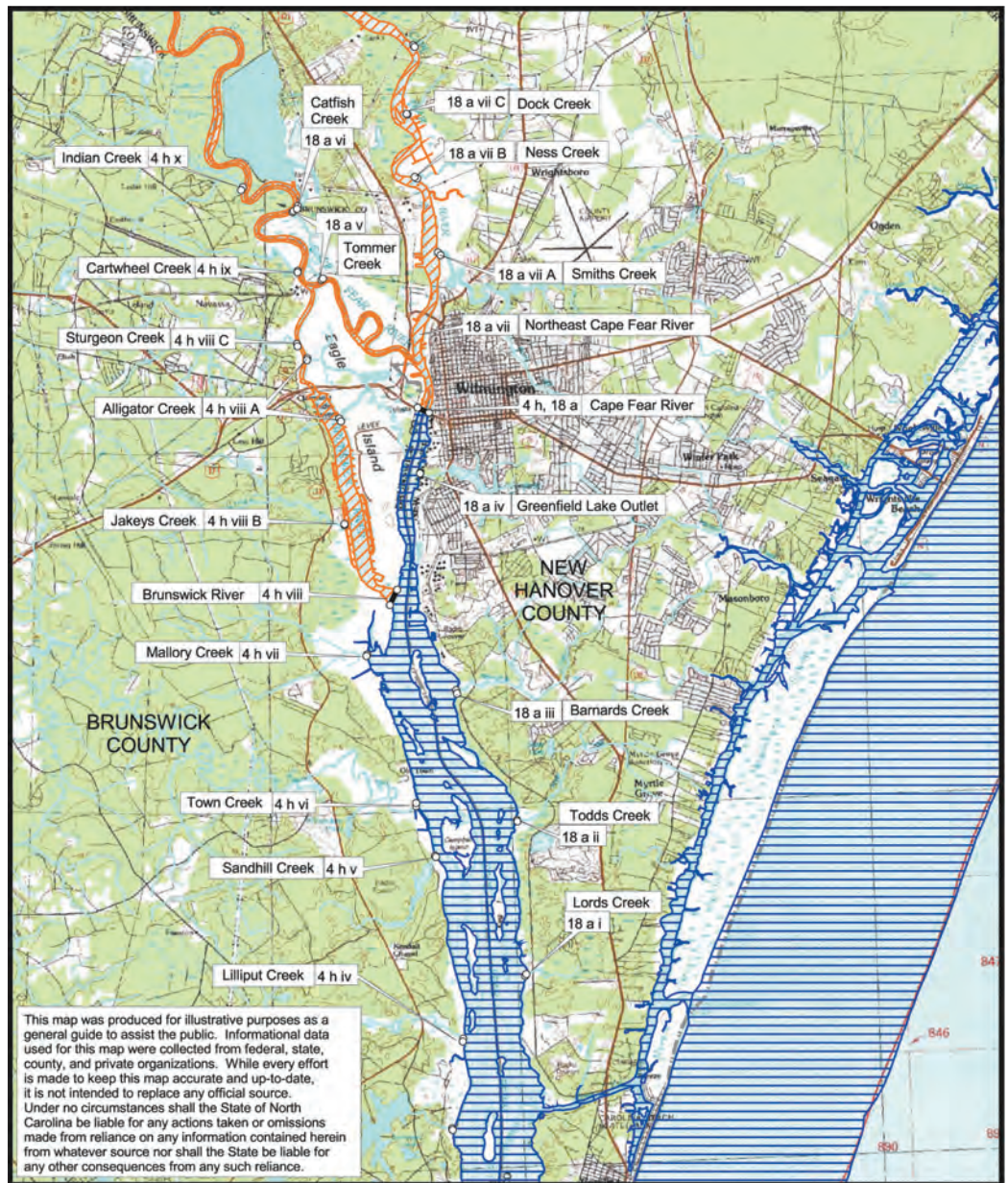
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KNOW THE CAPE FEAR'S FEATURES

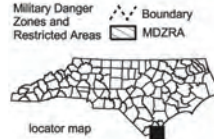
The lower Cape Fear River begins roughly at Wilmington, N.C., and runs more than 20 miles downriver to the ocean between Bald Head Island and Oak Island. The saltwater/brackish line varies according to rainfall, but the legal dividing line between Coastal and Joint/Inland waters is the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge and the mouth of the Brunswick River. Most of the creeks upriver from Snow's Cut are classified as Inland waters. The river and all water accessed from it or Intracoastal Waterway below Snow's Cut is Coastal waters.

Creel limits and size restrictions are the same for all, but different locations may require different licenses. Inland waters require a freshwater license, and Coastal waters require a saltwater license. Either is accepted in Joint waters.

The Cape Fear begins changing as it passes Wilmington. It widens substantially and the flow slows a bit. However, the river is tidal to Lock and Dam No 1, about 20 miles upriver from Wilmington, and the 4- to 6-foot tide change creates its own current. A unique feature of the river below Wilmington are dredge dump or spoil islands that line the edge of



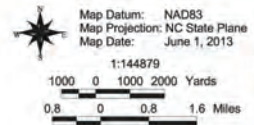
This map was produced for illustrative purposes as a general guide to assist the public. Informational data used for this map were collected from federal, state, county, and private organizations. While every effort is made to keep this map accurate and up-to-date, it is not intended to replace any official source. Under no circumstances shall the State of North Carolina be liable for any actions taken or omissions made from reliance on any information contained herein from whatever source nor shall the State be liable for any other consequences from any such reliance.



Military Danger Zones and Restricted Areas
 ○ MDZRA

Descriptive Boundaries for Coastal-Joint-Inland Waters
 ○ Lat/Long point
 ○ Boundary
 ■ Coastal Waters
 ■ Joint Waters
 ■ Inland Waters

Descriptive Boundaries for Coastal-Joint-Inland Waters (15A NCAC 03Q .0202)



Map 24

NCDMF

the ship channel.

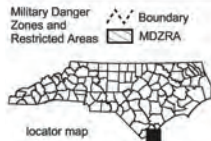
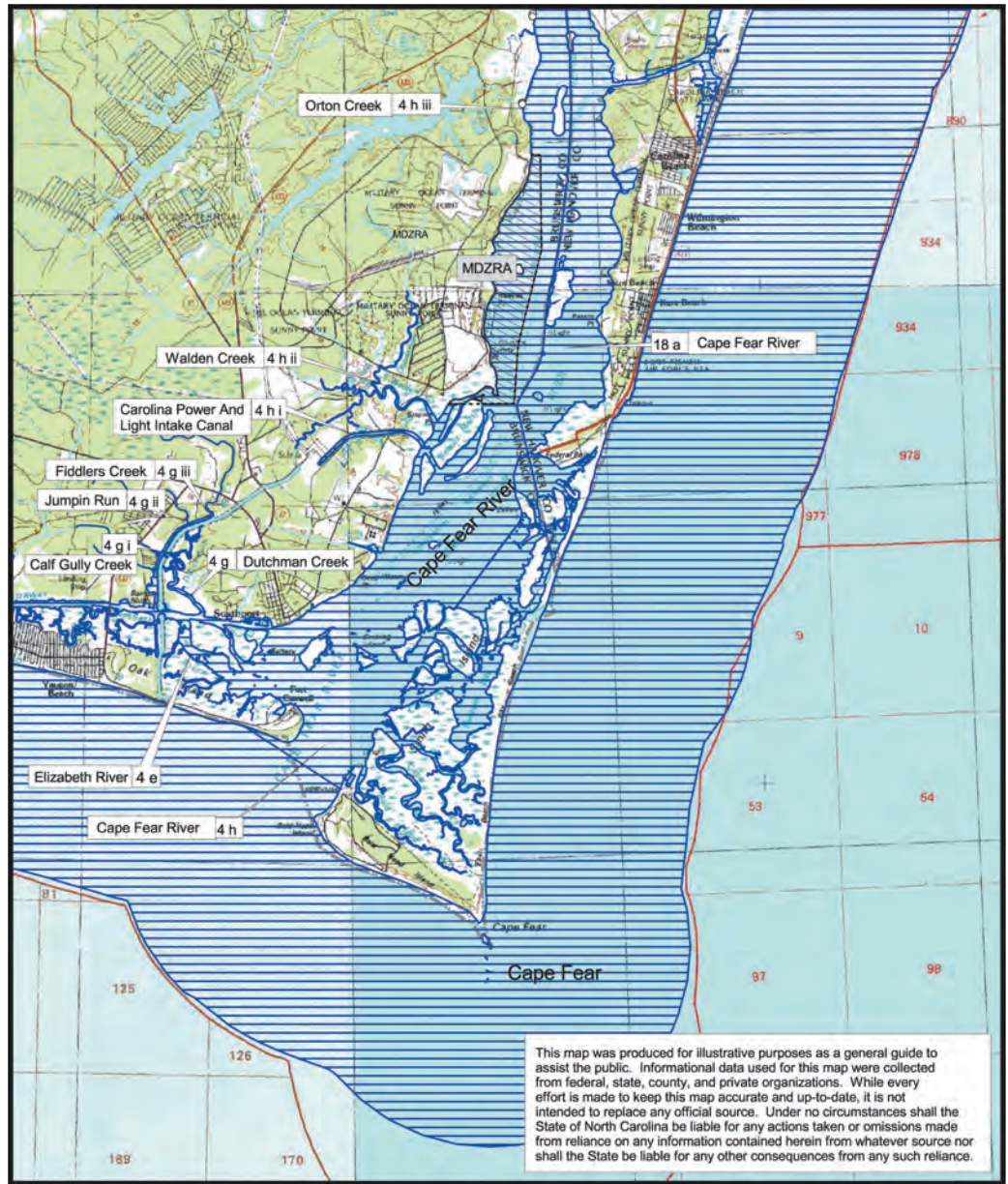
The wider river has natural islands and bays. Many bays and tributary creeks are shallow, with dark, muddy bottoms exposed to the sun for long periods each day. The shallow, dark bottoms absorb sunlight and warm the water, which helps keep the fish active and feeding. The bays and creeks have many points, oyster rocks and sand bars that give fish places to hide out of the current and save their energy for chasing food.

Tidal currents move bait and push it past points, oyster rocks and sand bars where fish hide out of the current waiting to feed. Bait tends to be pushed past the same spots on the same tidal stage each day and fish know this. Their feeding habits allow them to be patterned unless they are overfished or otherwise spooked from the area. ■



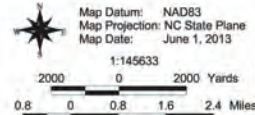
Jerry Dilsvater, a former SKA national champion and USAA Angler of the Year, is a full-time freelance writer based out of Oak Island, N.C.

REDFISH HOTSPOTS ➤



Descriptive Boundaries for Coastal-Joint-Inland Waters (15A NCAC 03Q .0202)

Map 27



NCDF

NC SURF REDS

give anglers at least one February target

February is a tough month for salt-water anglers along North Carolina's coast, unless they want to brave long, bouncing trips to the Gulf Stream.

In inshore and nearshore waters, the winter menu also is sparse except for one species: red drum.

Jot Owens of Jot It Down Fishing Charters in Wrightsville Beach, N.C., finds and catches plenty of inshore redfish during winter.

"The coldest weather affects the bite because it keeps most people off the water," said Owens (910-233-4139), "but in February, there are two areas where you can find red drum: in the surf and inside."

Chasing ocean reds is dicier but a better shot at big fish.

"You only want to fish the surf from the ocean in pretty weather



Jot Owens

Winter reds in North Carolina's inshore waters gang up for protection from porpoises.

with a light wind, no swells and clear water," Owens said.

Getting tossed over the side into frigid water is a recipe for hypothermia. The upside is that schools of red drum in the surf may hold thousands of fish.

"I look for them up and down the beaches at inlet mouths, shoals and drop-offs," Owens said.

When he spots a purple or maroon ball of reds, he casts 5-inch Gulp Jerkshads in pearl/white or chartreuse/pepper/neon threaded onto 3/8-ounce jigheads. His other favorite winter lure is a MirrOlure Catch 2000, a suspending twitch bait.

Owens uses 7- or 7 1/2-foot-long Fenwick HMG Inshore medium or medium-heavy action spinning rods mated to 2500 or 3000 Series Penn Battle III reels spooled with 15-pound braid and 2- to 3-foot fluorocarbon leaders.

"Surf reds average 22 to 30 inches," Owens said.

In inside waters, he also prefers mild days when the water temperatures flirt with the mid-50s.

"At higher tides on dark mud flats, the sun warms up the bottom and increases feeding activity," Owens said. "Oyster rocks also are good places."

He casts a 3- or 4-inch Gulp Shrimp on a 1/6-ounce jighead; the best winter technique is barely to move the lure.

"If the bite's lethargic, I use little pieces of fresh-cut shrimp on a small circle hook with a 1/4-ounce split-shot up the line," he said. "I try to throw just in front of but not into (reds) to avoid spooking them."

In creeks and shallow bays, reds may hang out in groups from three to 40.

"They'll hang around the same places day after day if you don't pressure them," Owens said. "Reds will go into really shallow water to get away from porpoises. Porpoises can be brutal, especially on trout, but also reds and black drum in winter, so drum try to get shallow." ■

— Craig Holt

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BE A WITCH IN THE DITCH

SC's ICW holds plenty of reds between Charleston, Georgetown

Guide Rob Beglin caught this nice winter redfish in the ICW near McClellanville.

Every month can bring fantastic fishing in some areas along the coast of the Carolinas for some species, but it will be hard to argue with the No. 1 inshore target in February.

Redfish, aka spot-tail bass or puppy drum, will hammer baits and lures this month. And the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway between Georgetown and Charleston is a winter haven for these bronzed beasts.

According to the almanac, February is the coldest month, and according to Rob Beglin of Inshore Xtreme Fishing Charters out of Pawley's Island, S.C., it is one of the best times to chase reds.

"In January and February, reds are schooled up, and there is no bait around to speak of," said Beglin (843-458-1920). "When you find a school, they will be hungry."

Beglin spends most of his time fishing in the Cape Romain/Bulls Bay area; he loves those waters because of the huge bays and creeks, a saltwater wilderness few people understand how to navigate, which protects fish from seeing too many lures and hook-impelled baits. Yet during the winter, many fish flock to the ICW, where water conditions are more favorable.

"The water gets cold this time of year, and the (ICW) water seems to be a few degrees warmer throughout the day," he said.

The ICW is basically a ditch traveling north to south, but it has shallow flats on either side with oysters, docks and grass.

According to Beglin, the redfish slide up on these shallow flats to feed on any available food, and they travel in large schools.

ICW reds don't follow a typical, stationary pattern in winter. They will migrate up and down the waterway when conditions change or when any bait becomes available.

"With the water being cold, they will move around some, and when they are thick in one spot one day, they can be gone to a different flat up or down the waterway the next day," he said.

Beglin prefers to fish on days when the low tide is during the middle of the day because the sun heats up the mud bottom and will raise the water temperature on these flats adjacent to the ICW. Even if only by a few degrees, a rise makes a difference.

Beglin said fish are especially spooky in February because of the size of the groups and the fear of dolphins.

"Dolphins migrate into our area and will eat redfish every chance they get. When we find a school, we always go into stealth mode with our approach and with our lures," he said.

Beglin stays away from popping corks, spinnerbaits or anything that makes a commotion. He prefers Gulp shrimp and jerk shad.

"We don't use anything that will spook the fish, and the smaller, scented plastics are the best lures to use and will get bit when these fish are ready to eat," he said. ■

— Jeff Burluson

Jetties and any other structure that holds barnacles are great places to fish for sheepshead, which bite good even during winter months. Marc Deschenes caught this one along the Charleston Harbor jetties.



WINTER WONDERS

Brian Cope

COLD WEATHER DOESN'T SLOW DOWN THE BITE FROM SHEEPSHEAD

One of the most winter-friendly fish for anglers in the Carolinas is the sheepshead. Whether you're fishing inshore, at the jetties, nearshore reefs, or even offshore, you can find plenty of hungry sheepshead this month.

Anglers struggling with a case of cabin fever can get through the doldrums of winter with a half-day or full-day trip in any inshore creeks featuring bridges, docks, downed timber or rock walls. Many of the bigger sheepshead move offshore for winter, but plenty "resident" sheepshead stay inshore and thrive around these structures.

With most fair-weather anglers staying off the water, these fish are relatively unbothered, less wary than they will be in a couple of months but just as sneaky. Some anglers experience more bites from these convict fish in February than at any other time of year, but their

hookup ratios aren't much better.

The No. 1 rule to sheepshead fishing this time of year, according to many anglers who pursue them, is to focus solely on this species during a trip.

"For the best chance at catching sheepshead, you can't dabble with other species" said John Long, who owns East Columbia Sports Shop and is a part-time resident of Ladys Island, S.C. "You have to target sheepshead in a very specific way that isn't effective for any other species. Instead of making long casts, this is a yo-yo game, dropping bait straight down very close to structure, and then reeling straight up."

SIMPLE BAIT, TACKLE

Long prefers fiddler crabs as sheepshead bait, but this time of year, they can be difficult to catch. He sometimes supplements his bait bucket with fresh oyster meat collected from barnacle clusters

in the areas he targets sheepshead.

The tackle for catching sheepshead is pretty basic. Long prefers a medium-heavy rod with a fast-tip, 15-pound line and a 3/0 hook. He uses big pinch-on weights about 12 inches above the hook, adding a 1-ounce sliding sinker above that pinch-on weight when the current is running really strong.

GET VERTICAL

"Find some structure with barnacles and drop your bait straight down so the bait is close to those barnacles," he said. "Sheepshead swim up and down looking for an easy meal among the barnacles."



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

LUNKER LINES

David Fritts

Flat-sided crankbaits like the Berkley Frittside fill the bill for February bass fishing.

THERE'S HOPE IN FEBRUARY

FLAT-SIDED CRANKBAITS ARE MADE FOR COLD-WEATHER BASS FISHING

February hasn't been a month I have really looked forward to as a bass fisherman, unless there was a trip to Florida or Texas involved. There are fish to be caught in the Carolinas, too, but you have to catch the weather and water conditions just right.

I began to change my mind a year or so ago when I tied on a bait I helped design that seemed to fit perfectly into the late-winter mindset of most largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass: Berkley's Frittside crankbaits. Now, when I get on the lake in February, I feel like I've really got a chance to consistently catch bass — plenty of them, and some nice ones.

The biggest thing about this flat-sided lure is its action; there's nothing else like it. It's got more natural roll than any other crankbait. If you look at how it twists in the water, it's got a good 3/4-inch roll in each direction. We worked on that feature, I don't know how long, but then the designers at Berkley moved the lip just a little, and the bait came to life.

It's so good, it doesn't matter who you are when you're throwing it. You can catch fish. It's a little like a souped up Mud Bug or Wiggle Wart. A Wiggle Wart has a lot of roll, but the Frittside has a lot more action that comes off that side-to-side roll.

I remember thinking when we were working on the bait that Ed Chambers' Tapp bait and the Steve Blazer bait were the best flat-sided baits ever, and if we could get a bait as good as one of those, I'd be happy. I think we did it.

One thing to know: the No. 5 has a little different action than the No. 7, and the No. 7 has a little different action than the No. 9. They're not quite the same.



CRAW OR SHAD?

The action is just what those February and March bass want. It imitates a crawfish really well, especially the No. 5 size. And it also glides through the water like a shad if you slow down your retrieve a little bit.

If you can still find them in the stores, the two colors you need to be fishing in February are red, to mimic crawfish, and honey shad. The No. 5 bait runs about 4 or 5 feet deep, so it's perfect for bass that are making their first move out of deep water as they stage, waiting to move shallow for the spawn in about a month or so.

'DEEP SHALLOW'

I want to start fishing it this month somewhere real deep — and real shallow. You need to have your boat sitting in deep water but be able to throw to the bank. I look for 45-degree banks, and I just go down the bank. You catch a few, and you'll figure out if they're on the points, in between points, around pockets. You're not going to go past a fish with this bait and not get bit.

My favorite places are riprap, rocky banks, the edges of grass beds, big stumps right under the water and brush piles. These

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The biggest thing about this flat-sided lure is its action; there's nothing else like it. It's got more natural roll than any other crankbait.

are places where bass will move because the water will have warmed up a little more, and places they'll hold. You can find them staging up in the creeks or around pockets if you've got deep water close by. Every lake is different; at Lake Murray, you might be sitting in 25 feet of water, casting to the bank, and they'll come up and hit it right at the boat. Buggs Island is the same way.

One thing about this bait and this time of year. You really don't want your crankbait digging into the bottom. Bass are looking up at the surface for their food. That's why you want it to be: above their heads. Last year, I caught small-mouth bass on Lake St. Clair in Michigan in 20 feet of water; they were coming up and hitting that bait 5 feet under the surface. The bait is probably more efficient when you aren't hitting the bottom, because you're not going for a reaction bite. You're looking for a bite because of the bait's action, that wiggle and roll.

I like to tie my line — 8-pound Sensation — directly to the split ring. I don't make any changes to the plug right out of the package. Now, a couple of tips. If the water temperature is in the 50s, you need to reel it in fast. If it's in the 60s, you need to reel it in real fast. When the water is cooler, I like a steady retrieve on a reel with a 5.1-to-1 retrieve ratio.

I fish these baits on a 6-foot-8 Lew's cranking rod and a BB1 baitcasting reel. I try to stay with as light a line as I can. These baits were made to fish on 10-pound line, but don't be scared to fish them on 8-pound. Just don't go above 12, or the weight of the line will start to impede the bait's action. I like to fish it on monofilament or copolymer line; some people like to fish it on fluorocarbon, but I don't think that's the best line for this bait.

What I like most about these baits and this time of year is that the average fisherman, with no special knowledge of crankbaits, can tie it on and catch fish. You can't ask for more in February. ■



David Fritts is a 64-year-old pro bass fisherman from Lexington, N.C. He won the 1993 Bassmasters Classic champion and the 1997 FLW Tour Championship, and he was the 1994 BASS Angler of the Year. He is sponsored by Ranger boats, Lew's, Lowrance, Power Pole and Berkley.

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 (parts of Oconee, Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg counties not in Game Zone 1) 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)	Oct. 1-Dec. 3	15 25 15
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

Youth Days: 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

Pay attention to how taxidermists address the small details on a mount before entrusting them with your trophy.



Jeff Burleson

PICKING A TAXIDERMIST

ALL MOUNTS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL; IT'S AN ARTISTIC DIFFERENCE

Hunting and fishing are arguably the most-popular outdoor activities in the country, and when a trophy buck takes a dirt nap, or a 10-pound speckled trout goes in the fish box, these treasured creatures will soon make their way to the taxidermist for a lifetime of enjoyment.

But all taxidermists aren't created equal. Taxidermy is an art form in every sense, and the best taxidermists are both outdoorsman and individuals with a creative touch. When a hunter or angler takes a trophy from the wild, he or she should take care in choosing the right person for the job.

Hunting and fishing are centuries old and were a way people have sustained existence from nature's creations, but these finned, furred and feathered creatures have provided civilizations with more than just sustenance. The feathers, bone, skin, hair and even the internal organs have provided for cultures from ancient times to the present. Animal parts are often transformed into utilitarian uses or are used as symbols.

To utilize these products for alternative uses, preservation techniques were invented; essentially, the art of taxidermy was born. But for most outdoorsman, taxidermists are selected to preserve a special deer, duck or fish that means something. And an experienced taxidermist is what is needed to get the most out of a treasured kill.

PLENTY OF CHOICES

According to Data USA, there are more than 531,000 taxidermists in the United States, but there are various levels of ability. Even though a person claims to be a taxidermist and has all the right credentials, making the right choice is a critically important step to receive a true work of art.

Steve Drummond with 301 Deer Processing and Taxidermy in Florence, S.C., is a total outdoorsman and an artist at heart who started at a young age.

"I have always liked to draw and create things I can be proud of, ever since I was young. I still like to draw and create things," Drummond said. "It started at

an early age for me; I am always trying to make the deer, fish or whatever I am working on look more and more lifelike."

Drummond operates both a deer-processing facility and taxidermy business in the same building. Deer are the primary subjects in his taxidermy showroom, but he does his fair share of elk, sheep, small game, fish, waterfowl — and dozens of African game species. It is not uncommon to walk into Drummond's showroom and see a zebra, Cape buffalo, or impala on the wall, waiting to be picked up. He is also one of the only taxidermists in South Carolina who can handle alligators.

"As you can imagine, alligators can be difficult due to the size and the thickness of the hide," he said. "But I enjoy working on them for people to make them look



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.

like they are going to snap at you," he said with a chuckle.

According to Drummond, successful anglers and hunters should carefully select their taxidermist. Most taxidermists typically charge the same relative price, but price should not be the primary factor in selecting a taxidermist. Anybody can cape out a hide, tack it onto a form and glue on some eyes. It takes an artist's touch to bring out the animal's lifelike appearance, both under and on outside the hide.

CHECK OUT THE WORK

Most taxidermists have a showroom for newly mounted subjects that are ready for be picked up. When hunters and anglers are visiting taxidermists during the selection process, they can look at the finished products to understand what their deer or duck will look like. Drummond advises new clients to look at the mounts and how realistic they look, both under the skin and visible. Even though the hide adheres to the form when glued in place, some features need to be modified under the hide to make the animal appear to be real on the outside.

"Look at the muscular features on the body and the detail around the eyes, ears, nose and mouth. This is where the artists touch makes a difference," he said. "We build natural features under the hide and then paint everything around the key features to make sure it looks as real as possible. We pay close attention to every little detail we can. Sometimes, it is the hairs around the eyes or the hairs coming out of the nose. It's amazing how these small features that seem insignificant can make the deer look so lifelike when finished."

The best taxidermists will exercise extreme diligence in these areas to make these animals and fish look like they are getting ready to walk into the room or swim out of it. Again, taxidermy is an art form and should not be rushed. Taxidermists work year-round to produce the best outcomes for their clients. With deer and duck season over, it is time to check out the taxidermists and take that trophy kill out of the freezer to the preservation specialist. Just make sure to select carefully and choose an artist that can make the memories keep on living. ■



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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry



WINTER'S KAYAK FISH

STRIPED BASS ARE WIDESPREAD, WORTHY TARGETS FOR PADDLING ANGLERS

Phillip Gentry

The time from mid-January through early March often gets labelled with such clichés as winter doldrums, cabin fever or simply too-cold-to-fish. That sentiment often doubles down if your preferred watercraft for fishing is a plastic one.

The Carolinas rarely, if ever, get iced over, and in the event icing of a waterway does occur, it's usually just smaller bodies of water that only last for a few days. What this means is that there's water available, if you can just find willing fish. That's where striped bass come in.

Fisheries biologists discovered around the same time that World War II ended, that striped bass, originally from north Atlantic waters and known to enter freshwater to spawn, could actually live their entire lives without returning to the brine. This led to a bunch of scientists figuring out a way to raise them in a lab, and 80 years later, both Carolinas are blessed with some great put-grow-and-take striped bass — and even hybrid striped bass — fisheries.

Most anglers fish for stripers and hybrids the same way. In lakes where both exist, they may feed together or, more likely, one species will be lower than the other in the water column.

Striped bass fishing tactics from a kayak fall into four basic categories:

Casting. Casting lures that imitate baitfish is effective. Weighted Flukes,

bucktail jigs, Alabama rigs and sinking crankbaits top the list. Vertical lures, such as jigging spoons, Rat-L-Traps and Little Georges are also effective.

Blind casting in deep water is not as effective as marking fish on a kayak-mounted sonar unit and casting or lowering the bait to the fish. When fishing vertically over deep water, many advanced kayak anglers will fish within the cone of their sonar transducer and can actively target fish in near real time.

Trolling. Artificial baits can be trolled behind your kayak, given the proper setup with spaced rod holders. Try to maintain a slower pace with pedal or paddle, as even striped bass will not chase a bait in the winter as far as they would in warmer waters.

Again, a sonar unit is useful for deciding if you need to be running sinking lures, deep-diving crankbaits or offerings closer to the surface. The advent of smaller umbrella rigs and Alabama rigs has made great trolling tools for stripers. With any hard, sinking lure that's trolled, you'll have to become skilled at first maintaining a trolling speed — easier to do with a pedal or trolling motor than one propelled by paddle alone — as you play the lure out to keep it from sinking to the bottom and possibly hanging up on bottom structure. You can also troll live bait.

Live bait. Striped bass maintain a nearly

100% fish diet, so baitfish is on the menu. Striped bass are known to favor herring, threadfin shad, gizzard shad, rainbow trout, white perch and bream. Live baits can be trolled behind your kayak on a free line with nothing but a hook.

Some kayakers even use planer boards to angle their baits further out to the side of the kayak when trolling. Live baits can also be fished vertically on a weighted Carolina rig.

Areas that tout well-known striped bass fisheries frequently have bait shops that will sell a variety of striper-preferred live baits. Almost all live bait must be kept alive and fished alive in order to be effective.

Cut bait. Few kayak anglers take advantage of cut bait when fishing for striped bass. Perhaps this is because cut bait fishing is considered a spring tactic when striped bass are working shallow points and humps. If fishing with cut bait, use freshly dead bait that you've recently obtained and store the bait in a Ziploc bag on ice. Cut the bait on site as needed to keep as much blood and scent in the bait when it's time to place it on the hook. ■



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

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Striped bass

WHERE — Lake Tillery

HOW — Look for winter stripers to hold 20 to 30 feet deep over 40 to 50 feet of water on the lower, main-lake area. Vertically fish a ½- to ¾-ounce gold, white or silver jiggling spoon at the level that you mark fish or lower live baits on down rods.

LAUNCH — A listing of ramps, bridges, and marinas can be found at <http://tillery.lakesonline.com/Boating/>

INSIDER TIP — North Carolina stocks nearly 30,000 stripers in Lake Tillery annually, a lot for a 5,000-acre lake. Tillery may not be the place to land a trophy, but your odds of finding a catchable striped bass is pretty good.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Hybrid striped bass

WHERE — Clarks Hill (Thurmond) Lake

HOW — Locate schools of baitfish by watching the sky for feeding birds or look for surface activity. You can cast near the bait or freeline live bait behind the boat.

LAUNCH — Multiple public boat launch sites are on Clarks Hill, and there are countless dump-in sites for a kayak. Choose areas that grant close access to open water. <https://www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/BoatRamp/BoatRampSelected/335836>

INSIDER TIP — Keep a top-water surface lure tied on a spare rod. Hybrids are known to school early and late or anytime bait-fish become nervous and rise to the surface.

Crappie minnows or shiners are good “match the hatch” substitutes for threadfin shad, which are hard to obtain and keep alive in a kayak.

WHADDYA MEAN, FISH WITH LIVE BAIT?

Die-hard striped bass anglers refer to blueback herring as “striper candy.” Truthfully, the two species share some common ancestry. Like striped bass, herring are anadromous, meaning they can live in both freshwater and saltwater. Herring also have a propensity for cooler water. The downside is, herring are hard to maintain for more than an hour or so without a circulating bait tank and some highly oxygenated water.

What those same die-hard anglers won’t tell you is that in the coldest months, like February, blueback herring are not the most effective live baits when striped bass are gorging themselves on 2- to 3-inch threadfin shad.

Rather than trying to collect threadfin, which are harder to keep than herring, try matching the hatch with a closer sized bait: crappie minnows. These baits come in two main varieties: fathead minnows and shiners. For striper fishing, shiners more closely resemble threadfin shad in size and are generally available at most local bait shops.

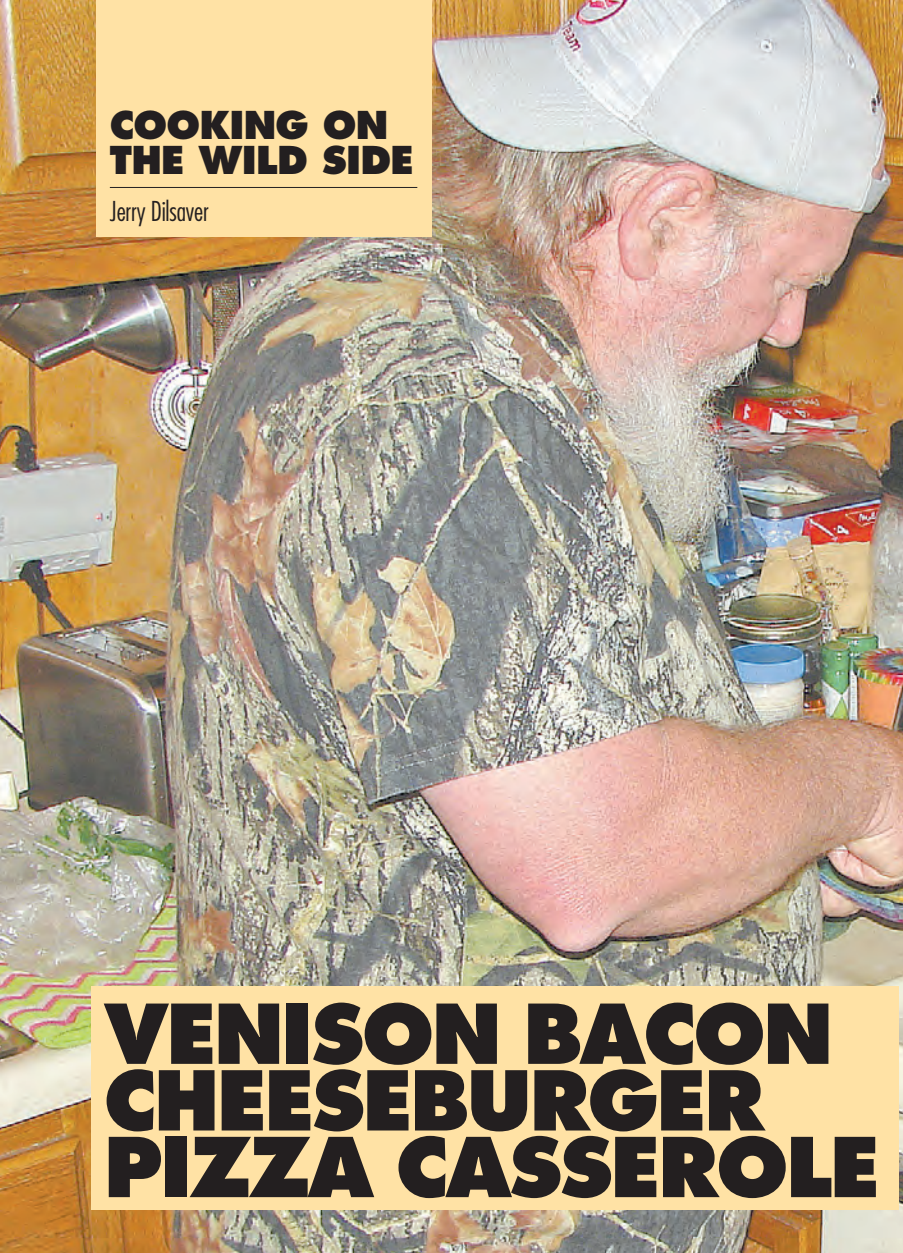
If your bait shop separates minnows into sizes, a shiner in the 3- to 4-inch range is a near-perfect fit for winter striper fishing.

As an added bonus for kayak anglers, shiners don’t require a lot of room or care, to keep alive and a small aerated bucket or cooler can keep three or four dozen alive for a week or two if the water is changed every couple of days. ■



COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver



VENISON BACON CHEESEBURGER PIZZA CASSEROLE

If two things taste good by themselves, surely they would go great combined in a casserole, right?
INSET: A cast-iron skillet does a great job of cooking a variety of dishes, including casseroles.

Most of us have been looking forward to the new year, not necessarily for 2021, but because we're glad 2020 is over. This is a fun meal that tastes really good, and it will be a great meal on a cold, February day.

This recipe is a gift, in many ways. Robert Cardwell, who has shared several excellent wild turkey recipes, provided it. It has quickly become a favorite.

February is one of the coldest months in the Southeast, when we have potential to see the most winter weather. Still, sportsmen are out doing what they enjoy. Fishing hasn't gone away, but it has slowed, and much of the crowd is gone from boat ramps and marinas. Deer season has been finished for a month, and duck hunters will be out of the water the day before February starts. A few hunters are traipsing through the woods in search of squirrels and rabbits, and quail hunters follow braces of pointing dogs over the rivers and through the woods.

This recipe works well for this time. There are multiple ingredients, but most can come from your fridge, freezer and pantry. In fact, that's what Cardwell credits for this recipe. It was his turn to cook dinner, and he hadn't prepared, so he went through the freezer, fridge and pantry and found all of the ingredients.

Since that first time, it has become a staple, and he has added or changed a few things from the original. And I changed and added more when he shared it with me.

Plain and simple, this is comfort food. It takes a little while to prepare, but it isn't difficult. Even better, it includes several things we all like. This proves my philosophy that if two ingredients are good, the odds are in your favor they'll be good together. This doesn't always work, but when you begin with venison, add sausage and bacon, then mix in cheese, the odds get really high it has to be good.

Sure, my arteries quake and quiver every time I fix this, so I do so sparingly, but there are times the ingredients come together and begin calling my name. I believe if you'll try this, you'll fix it again. It tastes good, is filling, is warming and brings a smile to your face. Heck, I smile just speaking the name, and that's about all you can ask from a venison bacon cheeseburger pizza made as a casserole.

Most readers will receive this issue toward the end of January. Hopefully, the New Year began well and is going well; I know we're all looking forward to 2021 after everything we went through in 2020. ■

VENISON BACON CHEESEBURGER PIZZA CASSEROLE

When I was younger, I would have called a pizza with these ingredients a “garbage” pizza. That isn’t actually a bad name, but an endearing name for using everything in the fridge that is about to expire. Robert Cardwell has put that idea together in a casserole. Who would have thought it? That’s why I appreciate so many of his endeavors. The man is creative!

This version is very close to Robert’s original recipe, but regular readers know I had to tweak it a little. You should feel free to do this also. This is excellent as it is, but some folks will prefer more or less spice. I rarely use salt and only use a little Himalayan pink salt with the egg noodles. Your tastes may be different; that’s OK.

Speaking of the egg noodles; here are two tips that aren’t on the package. First, use a little olive oil in the water when you boil them to help prevent them from sticking together. Second, before stirring them into the mixture, run hot water over them for a minute or two to loosen them back up and make them easier to blend into the mixture.

One of the things Cardwell likes about this is that except for needing a pot to boil the egg noodles, it could be cooked in a single, cast-iron skillet. This shouldn’t be changed. Cast iron heats well for both the stove top and oven segments of cooking. Also, don’t clean the skillet between cooking the bacon, browning the meats and sautéing the veggies. Pour out any excess drippings, but realize that with venison and one of the game sausages, there won’t be much except from the bacon. Use those juices to help season the veggies.

The first ingredient to consider is the meat. Bacon

PREPARATION:

Boil the egg noodles using the instructions on the package until al dente. Drain the noodles and set them aside. Chop the jalapeno and chop or slice any of the other ingredients that weren’t purchased already cut. Cook the bacon until crispy and drain the grease from the skillet. Season the venison with the garlic powder, oregano and salt and pepper (to taste) and brown it, then remove it from the skillet and drain any grease from the skillet. Brown the sausage and remove it from the skillet and also remove all but a light skim of the grease.

Sauté the onion and about one-third of the jalapeno in the sausage drippings. When the onion begins to turn opaque, add the banana peppers, onions, mushrooms and Rotel to the skillet and sauté lightly for another minute or two. Preheat the oven to 350. Cut the bacon into small pieces, but not as fine as crumbs.

Remove the skillet from the heat and mix in the venison, sausage, bacon, noodles, pizza sauce and 6 ounces of the cheese. Be sure to blend this well. Put this mixture in the oven and bake for about 15 minutes. Be careful not to singe any exposed egg noodles. Remove from the oven

is bacon, and it’s good, and that’s all that matters. Venison is the burger, but if you don’t have any, this is still surprisingly good using hamburger. I know that’s a sacrilege, but sometimes you’re out of venison burger.

The recipe calls for sausage, and this generally means purchased pork sausage. That works fine, but it is excellent with feral pig sausage and venison sausage. I expect it would also be good with bear sausage, but I haven’t had any to try. Mild sausage is fine and hot or spicy is better.

Cardwell’s recipe called for mixed green and banana peppers. This was another opportunity for me to fine-tune the mixture. I use a jalapeno pepper instead of the green pepper and sauté about a third of it with the onions to be mixed into the casserole and keep the rest to be sprinkled on top by those who like more jalapeno.

Cardwell’s recipe called for chopped tomatoes; I changed that to Rotel, which is available from mild to spicy and includes chopped green chilies. Even the mild is better than plain tomatoes.

This is a mix that begins with good ingredients and the blend of them is even better. Once you put the cheese on top, it’s almost ready. Finely shredded cheese will only require another minute or two in the oven to melt, while coarsely shredded cheese will take a few more minutes.

I think this is ready to eat when it comes out of the oven, but I’m experimenting with letting it sit for a few minutes before scooping some for the first plate. There definitely is some flavorful steam that escapes when it is cut immediately. ■

and stir the mixture well. Sprinkle the remaining cheese on top of the mixture.

Return to the oven and bake until the cheese melts. The time will vary from around 2 to 5 minutes according to how thick or thin the cheese was grated. Serve with the remaining jalapeno pieces sprinkled on top.

I like salads and serve this with a green salad or lettuce wedge. A piece of hearty bread helps get the last bit off the plate, and a slice of your favorite pie or some warm bread pudding caps this off just right. Of course, you could eat a second helping and forego dessert. ■

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ pound venison
- ½ pound sausage
- 4 pieces bacon
- 8 ounces shredded 4 Cheese Mexican blend
- 8 ounces egg noodles
- 14-ounce jar pizza sauce
- 4 ounces sliced mushrooms (drained)
- ¼ cup Banana peppers
- 1 Jalapeno pepper
- ¼ cup sliced black olives
- ¼ cup chopped sweet onion
- ¼ cup Rotel diced tomatoes
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼ tsp oregano
- Salt and coarse ground black pepper to taste
- 10- to 12-inch deep cast iron skillet



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

SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell



TC Lloyd

FEBRUARY: LONG-LINING TIME

LAKE MOULTRIE SLABS ARE ON THE MOVE. FIND 'EM BY SLOW-TROLLING LOWER LAKE

Despite Ol' Man Winter blowing cold air and a few icicles our way in February, a significant change in winter crappie fishing pattern is already underway. By late-January and early February, Santee Cooper's super slabs are on the move toward shallow water.

TC Lloyd, a crappie guide and tournament fisherman, focuses on Santee Cooper, and Lake Moultrie specifically, in February.

"I crappie fish as much as possible at Santee Cooper in February and March," Lloyd said. "It's my most-productive time of the year for slab crappie, especially on Lake Moultrie. Lake Marion is great, too, but fishing peaks later, because Moultrie warms quicker, and the bite begins earlier."

Lloyd (843-307-6678) said he doesn't go by a specific water temperature to catch early-season slabs; he begins long-line

trolling in late January.

"Water temperature plays a role, but experience has taught me crappie have a biological clock, and the increasing length of days is one trigger for their move towards the shallows," he said. "I begin fishing in late-January and by early February; almost overnight, it seems the crappies flood into the creeks and I'm already fishing and can get on a pattern quickly."

HEADING SHALLOW

Lloyd said crappies transition from the deep water of the main lake and move into the creeks and coves. The actual creek boundaries on Lake Moultrie are not as well defined as they are on some Lake Marion creeks such as Taw Caw and Wyboo, with very identifiable borders and channels.

"Crappies move from the deep water

into the creeks that course through the flats on Lake Moultrie," he said. "Using a topographic map and a graph, fishermen can locate creek and ditch runs that crappie use to migrate to the shallows throughout Lake Moultrie."

FIND 'EM, CATCH 'EM

Lloyd said his favorite method for catching limits of slabs during February is long-line trolling.

"I'll long-line from six to 10 rigs, and while crappies may be at a specific depth, I keep my fish-finding system simple," he said. "I search for fish by trolling



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.

OPPOSITE: February is a time when long-line trolling produces a lot of nice crappie on the Santee Cooper lakes, especially Lake Moultrie.

a variety of jig and grub sizes and colors. I use 6-pound line and vary the length of the rods I use to keep the lines apart as I troll.

He said a good example would be staggering 14-, 12-, 10- and 8-foot-long rods on each side of the boat and shorter rods directly off the back. That provides a wide coverage area while keeping the rigs spread apart, making it easier to reel fish in without tangling.

SIZE UP YOUR JIGS

Lloyd's preferred jig sizes include 1/8-, 1/16-, 1/32- and 1/48-ounce in varying colors. He prefers a Jenko curly fry grub and said lots of colors will work, with black/chartreuse, red/blue and most solid colors with a chartreuse tail being excellent choices. He occasionally tips the rig with a live minnow.

"If adding a minnow helps, go with it," he said.

"I cast the rigs a long cast behind the boat and will constantly vary my speed between 0.6 and 1.2 miles per hour until I find the pattern," he said. "Staggering the speed, along with different sizes of jigheads, enables me to cover a large portion of the water column until I discover the key for the day.

"Heavier jigs trolled slower go deeper, and lighter jigs and faster speeds mean shallower fishing. The most-productive trolling speed coupled with a specific jighead size and color on a given day is a simple formula for success."

PREDICT PATTERNS

Productive patterns vary with the weather, and warm, over-cast days are prime for crappies to move shallower. A couple of warm, sunny days may pull the fish up surprisingly shallow onto the flats, Lloyd said. Likewise, a cold front may cause crappies to retreat toward the mouth of the creek and perhaps deeper near the bottom of the water column.

"No magic formula exists covering all scenarios, but the more you long-line troll, the better you can predict what's happening and make quick adjustments," Lloyd said.

"Most of the time in February and March, crappies will be in open water and suspended," he said. "After a couple warm days, they may be found in 5 to 10 feet of water, suspended over 20 feet of water. If it's colder they may be suspended in 12 to 15 feet deep over 30 feet of water."

Lloyd said long-line trolling is not difficult, but anglers need to be methodical in eliminating unproductive water and make mental notes on what's working. And keep multiple rigs fishing in that productive zone.

During February the payback is well worth the effort, he said.

"Once on a strong pattern, by culling smaller fish, it's not unusual to have multiple 2-pound-plus crappies in your limit," he said. "February is my favorite time of the year for limits of slabs on Santee Cooper." ■



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Smallmouth and spotted bass are mixed in all over Fontana Lake, but smallmouth are more common on the lower end of the lake.

153 Charters

WARM WINTER WONDERS

Fontana's smallmouth bass moving up this month, looking for places to spawn

During February, a balmy day or two arrives that triggers smallmouth bass fishing on Fontana Lake in North Carolina's extreme southwestern corner.

The warm respite will prompt smallies to leave their deep or suspended haunts for shallower waters in search of potential spawning grounds.

"This movement puts the fish within reach of fishermen tossing light jigs and jerkbaits," said James McManus of 153 Charters.

Smallmouth and spotted bass are distributed throughout 11,700-acre Fontana, but McManus (153charters@gmail.com) said fishermen have a better chance of catching more smallies on the lower end of the lake, although mixed bags of the two species have become commonplace wherever anglers fish.

For smallies, McManus targets broken rock, pebbly points, outcrops and small boulders.

"Some sort of rock — and it changes day to day — is what fishermen need to key on," said McManus, whose favorite places include main-lake points between Points 4 and 5 and the mouths of Hazel and Chambers creeks.

Winter drawdown at Fontana exposes plenty of rocky places, but rains could reduce the amount of exposure.

Given a gentle breeze, McManus works down banks, hitting all the rocks along the way with small jigs, crankbaits, downsized Alabama rigs and drop-shot worms.

"The most important thing is finding a concentration of fish, so keep moving," he said.

McManus mostly employs light spinning tackle and 6- to 10-pound line in Fontana's clear waters.

Even snowy days can result in good fishing. Poor fishing usually happens after a cold rain or days following a cold front.

"My strategy then is to follow creeks towards their backs and look for suspended schools of smallies that may be up in the water column or hunkered down on the bottom," McManus said.

This dispersion of fish at the bottom or top of the water column explains why fishing is so difficult under these conditions. Fishermen respond by dropping ice jigs, small spoons or swimbaits in front of the schooling fish or fishing live bait.

McManus follows the golden rule for winter fishing. The colder the weather, the slower he retrieves his baits, often using stop-and-pause cadences, especially when he's fishing a crankbait.

McManus said the recent invasion of blueback herring into Fontana may influence the fishing.

"Like any environmental change, the presence of herring will change the habits of the fish population," he said. "All of us locals are having to relearn what used to be pretty constant tactics year to year. You need to keep an open mind, use your electronics and try new baits."

McManus urges fishermen to release smallmouth they catch and save the overly abundant spots for the frying pan.

"Spotted bass are taking over some of our lake, so I try not to keep any smallmouth," he said. ■

— Tony Garitta

COLD WEATHER, HOT FISHING

Winter striper run in Cape Fear River features a good mixture of big and small fish

There are striped bass in the waters of southeastern North Carolina, but they are typically overlooked by all but a few knowledgeable and dedicated locals.

Still, they are there. The primary areas to catch them are the Cape Fear, Northeast Cape Fear and Brunswick rivers around Wilmington, and the best times are from roughly December through April. However, there has been a moratorium on keeping stripers in the Cape Fear system for more than a decade, so if catch-and-release fishing suits you, there can be some good days on these waters.

Guide Jot Owens of Jot It Down Charters (910-233-4139) fishes these waters regularly and works with Cape Fear River Watch on striper restoration projects. He said the striper population is mixed and includes some larger fish from before Hurricane Florence in 2018, plus a lot of smaller fish since. Fishing is fun, but the catch ratio is down a little as the smaller fish hit hard but don't always get hooked.

"I fish for stripers using swimbaits in shallow water along the banks and around creek mouths, then switch to big-lipped diving lures to fish deeper, like around bridges and for deeper structure," Owens said. "I like the 5-inch, Berkley PowerBait Grass Pig on ¼- or ⅜-ounce Trokar TK 170 hooks for fishing shallow; the current determines the weight.

"My go-to crankbaits for deeper water are the Rapala DT and Mann's Stretch series."

Stripers like vertical structure and the numerous bridges, docks, bulkheads, sunken vessels and such around Wilmington provide plenty. There are also many smaller creeks and ditches that feed baitfish into the rivers on falling tides.

Different parts of the Cape Fear River are listed as either Coastal, Joint or Inland waters, so the correct license is required. A Coastal Recreational Fishing License is accepted for Coastal and Joint waters, while an Inland fishing license is required in Inland waters and also accepted



Jot Owens

The fishing is all catch-and-release, but Cape Fear River stripers make plenty of February anglers happy.

in Joint waters. Check to know how where you plan to fish is classified. In general, the main bodies of the rivers are either Coastal or Joint waters and the smaller creeks are Inland Waters. This is important to know as the fish don't recognize the boundaries and sometimes cross the lines.

Stripers have had a hard time in the Cape Fear River system, beginning with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers damming the Cape Fear River in the early 1900s to support commerce on the river, and most recently with all local waters dropping to almost zero dissolved oxygen in the flooding aftermath of Hurricane Florence in 2018. Still, a core group finds a way to survive and are supplemented by the stocking of fingerlings. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver



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SPARKLEBERRY BASS: TWO BAITS ARE TOPS

Spinnerbaits, floating worms will do the job

Many bass anglers keep their boats parked until March, which is accepted as a transition month for fish, but Stacy Atkinson of Florence, S.C., said February is really the time to go, especially during short spells of warmer-than-normal weather in Sparkleberry Swamp, headwaters of the famed Santee Cooper lakes.

"A lot of guys look to March as the earliest time to get after bass, but Sparkleberry Swamp is a huge area of shallow water with lots of flooded cypress trees," he said, "and February usually has some 55-, 65-, even 70-degree days. During those warming trends, that shallow water heats up quickly. That's when bass love to hang tight to the base of those trees, where heat is transferred into the water."

Many of the anglers who do venture out in February usually stick to slower-moving lures like Ned rigs, suspending jerkbaits or jigs worked slowly along the bottom, but Atkinson takes a different approach.

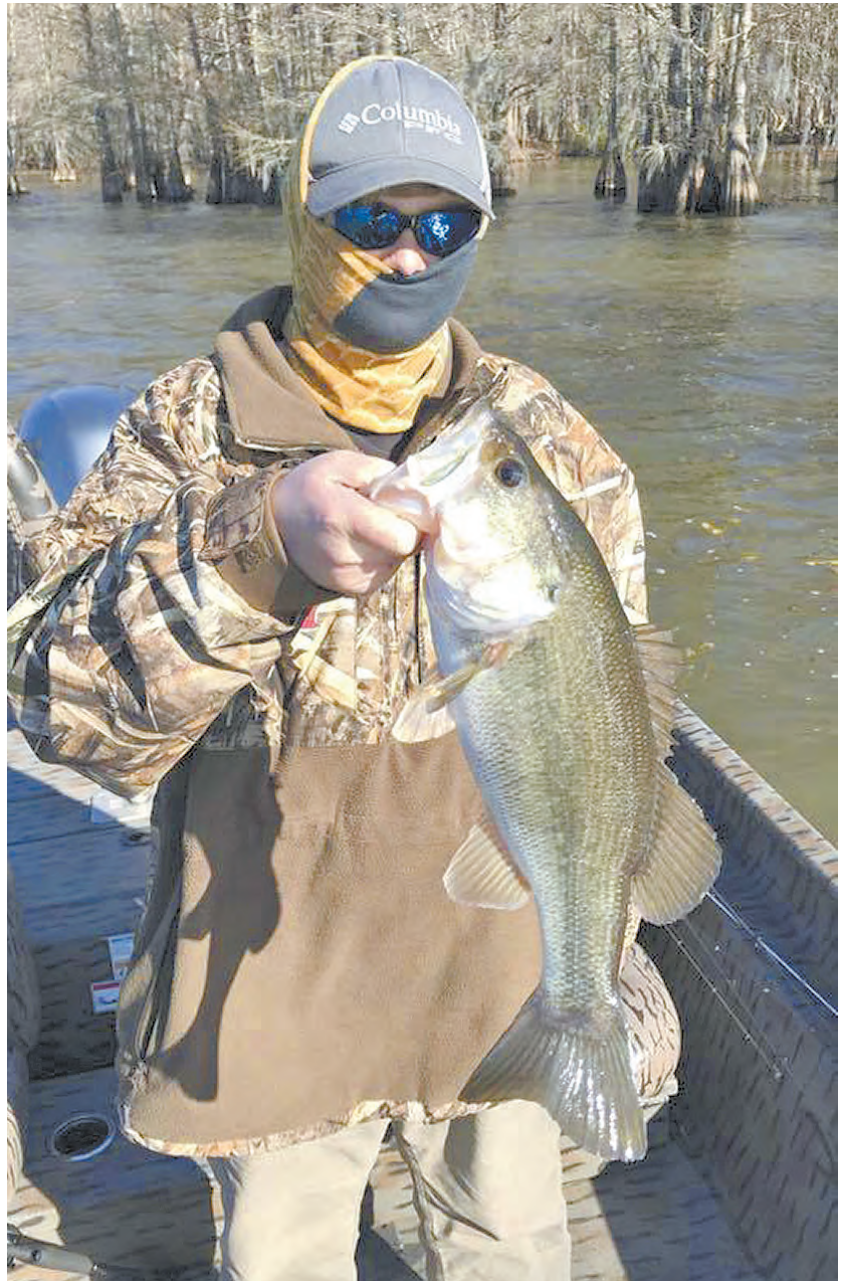
"There's really only two lures I use this time of year. I'll cast a spinnerbait and work it at different speeds and different depths," he said. "You can cover a lot of water quickly with a spinnerbait. Once I catch a few fish, I'll go back through those locations and work them more thoroughly with a floating worm. And I get laughed at a lot, but my favorite is a pink floating worm."

Atkinson, who operates Low County Wildlife TV, said floating worms are versatile lures that allow anglers to adjust their approach to suit the fish on any given day.

"You can work them as fast or slow as you want. And you can change your speed until you find what they want that day — or that hour," said Atkinson, who said you can rig these worms in a weedless fashion, or hook them "wacky style" — straight through the middle. This gives the worm a totally different look, with both ends flailing wildly with each jerk of the rod tip.

"You don't want to be out casting in open water," he said. "You want to get your worm passing close to the base of these flooded trees. That's where you're going to get most of your bites this time of year." ■

— Brian Cope



Stacy Atkinson

Flooded cypress trees make perfect winter haunts for Sparkleberry Swamp's largemouth bass.

GAMAKATSU G-BOXES

Gamakatsu is best known for the fishing hooks it makes; they're among the best on the market. Now, they're bringing you places to store them, their G-Box line.

Four different sizes and configurations of the G-Box are available, giving fishermen the ability to make boxes with the size of the lures and terminal tackle that need a home. The 3700D Deep Utility Case is built with deep compartments for storing bulky lures; the 3200D is a smaller

case with deep compartments

The 388DD and 318SD models are smaller, pocket utility cases that are perfect for storing terminal tackle or just taking a dozen or so lures for an afternoon trip to a local pond.

All G-Box models can be kept in a G-Case 7000, which has an optional rod stand a jig compartment.

MSRP: starts at \$9.70.

For more info, visit: www.gamakatsu.com.



G-Case 7000



SPRO GOUKEN FLUOROCARBON LINE

The folks who have brought you great SPRO fishing lures for years now bring you something to spool on your reel and tie on those fat, little crankbaits.

SPRO has introduced Gouken Fluorocarbon in 150-meter spools in five different sizes: 10-, 12-, 14-, 16- and 20-pound test.

A small-diameter line, Gouken is exceptionally sensitive, enabling you to make contact and feel your baits and everything they hit. Despite the small diameter, Gouken is a tough,

abrasion-resistant fluorocarbon that's great for power fishing and big hook-sets.

Like all fluorocarbons, Gouken is invisible in the water; light passes through it, rather than refracting off the material, making it perfect for targeting high-pressured, spooky fish.

MSRP: \$18.99

For more info, visit: www.spro.com

AVIAN-X HDR TURKEY DECOYS

If there's one thing you can say about all of the decoys that are sold under the Avian-X brand — mallards, pintails, teal — it's that they look incredibly realistic. Add wild turkeys to that list.

Avian-X has debuted their HDR (Heavy Duty Realism) turkey decoys, the HRD Hen and HDR Jake, beautiful, rubber-molded bodies that look like they're ready to gobble, yelp and cluck on their own.

The HDR jake comes in a size slightly smaller than a wild gobbler, to make sure it's not big enough to intimidate a tom that walks in for a closer look. It's in a half-strut pose, and it comes with two, interchangeable head/neck units, one in an aggressive posture and one more submissive.

Both decoys come with a synthetic, lifelike paint scheme, including detailed feathers and lifelike legs, and a mounting

stake that allows for natural, realistic movement without uncontrolled spinning.

The jake is ultra-durable, allowing it to take and survive repeated beatings from gobblers.

MSRP: Hen, \$89.99, Gobbler \$149.99

For more info, visit: www.avian-x.com





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Billy Burch

Billy Burch had a great October, catching this 25-inch speckled trout on a topwater Rapala Skitterwalk near North Carolina's New River Inlet.



Hunter Morris

Hunter Morris from Georgetown, S.C., killed this 8-point, 195-pound buck at Pinewood Farms in Sumter County.



Luke Kuhlkin

This catfish, caught in his backyard in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., was Luke Kuhlkin's first fish.



Cayden Currin

Cayden Currin, 9, used a crossbow to kill this buck on Sept. 18 in Granville County, N.C. It crossed 134 inches.



Buddy Little

Buddy Little killed his first turkey on opening day of youth season last April in Supply, N.C.



Ricky Ivey

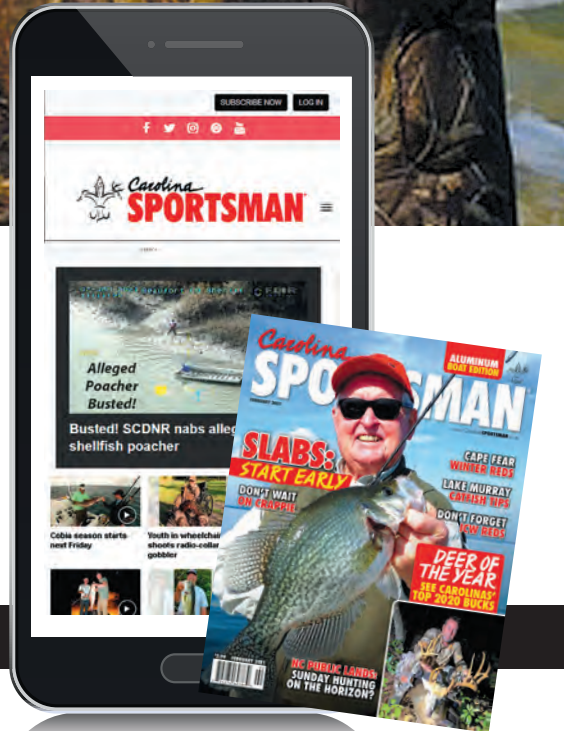
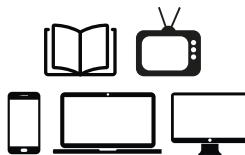
Ricky Ivey of Dunn, N.C., caught two bass on a single cast on the same plug.



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