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23

MAKE THE EARLY
TURKEY SEASON
COUNT



Carolina SPORTSMAN CONTENTS



Volume 28 | Number 3 | March 2021

FEATURES:

11 WHAT HAPPENED TO SHEARON HARRIS?

Once one of the best bass-fishing lakes anywhere, this North Carolina reservoir has changed over the past 10 years, and fishermen aren't paying it as much attention. The bass are still there, but the habitat and fishing have changed — and not for the better.

> By Craig Holt

23 MAKE THE EARLY TURKEY SEASON COUNT

Don't waste your days in the woods because of South Carolina's unusual regulations. Let the first 10 days of set up your success for the rest of the season.

> By Tery Madewell

32 NEW SONAR, SAME OLD CRAPPIE

The new, advanced marine electronics on the market let you see things below the water's surface better than ever before. But they're no substitute for basic crappie-fishing know-how — maybe something to take a good angler to the next level.

> By Phillip Gentry

38 FLUSH OUT RIVER REDS

The brackish water in the four rivers around Georgetown, S.C., are home to some great redfish action, especially in spring when things warm up and shake off the winter cobwebs.

> By Jeff Burleson

OUTDOOR UPDATE:

6 ROANOKE RIVER STRIPERS

45 GET TIED UP IN FLY-TYING

Plenty of homemade creations will fool fish, and they're not as difficult to tie than most people think. Here's a primer to becoming a fly-tier.

> By L. Woodrow Ross

COLUMNS:

16 **LUNKER LINES** By Davy Hite

18 **SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY**
By Phillip Gentry

50 **SOUND & SEA** By Brian Cope

52 **GREENER PASTURES**
By Jeff Burleson

54 **COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE** By Capt. Jerry Dilsaver

56 **SANTEE STRINGER**
By Tery Madewell

DEPARTMENTS:

44 Sportsman Showcase

61 Astro Tables

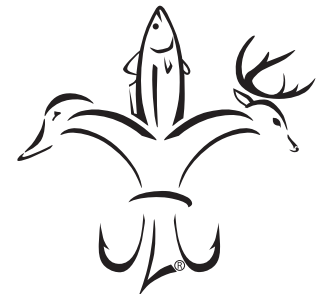
63 Fishing regulations boxes

64 Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook

ON THE COVER:



March, which kicks off the spring fishing season is one of the best months for bass fishing in the Carolinas, especially for big bass.
Photo by Brian Carroll.



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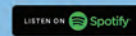


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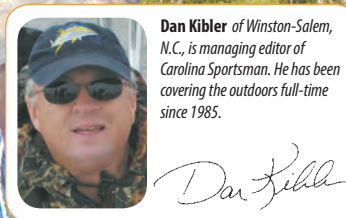


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When this photo was taken, May 2011, North Carolina's Roanoke River was literally crawling with nice striped bass like this one. But the fishery has fallen on hard times in recent years.



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

George Beckwith

ROANOKE AIN'T ROCKING NO MORE

LOWER STRIPER POPULATION CAUSES CATCH REDUCTIONS, SEASON CHANGES

What was once one of North Carolina's bluest of blue-ribbon fisheries, the spring spawning run of striped bass in the Roanoke River, has apparently fallen on hard times.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission announced recently that the annual harvest quota for recreational fishermen on the river had dropped from 68,750 to 12,800 pounds, making it necessary to change dates for the "keeper" season, cutting way back on anglers' ability to keep the fish that once made the area famous.

The 2020 stock assessment on the fishery conducted by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries showed that stripers were overfished, and that overfishing was occurring. It wasn't that too many fish were being caught and taken home for fish fries, but that a series of poor spawns has kept the population from being

replenished at the necessary rate for the number of fish being creelied, filleted and fried or baked.

"For decades, our primary concern on the Roanoke has been having enough water in the river in April and May to provide optimum spawning conditions," said Chad Thomas, a fisheries biologist with the

Commission. "The reverse is now true ... we are dealing regularly with periods of heavy rainfall and extreme high-flow events that flush fertilized eggs and fry out of the river channel and into the floodplain where survival is limited at best."

Rod Thomas of Capt. Ponytail Guide Service (336-240-5649), who has fished the river during the spring striper run for the past 26 years, said the drop in fish numbers has been noticeable for several years.

"It's for real," he said. "It's been going on for quite a while; it hasn't been a steep decline, but it finally got to where they had to do something."

"Wildlife, even their numbers, back in the day, 2008 to 2010, show it. When they (electro)shocked on Mondays, they were getting 1,200, 1,300, 1,400 fish. Last year, their best day was around 200."

"There are still a lot of fish; it's still a good place to fish, but it isn't what it used to be. For a 100-fish day now, you've really got to know what you're doing."

The creel limit will remain two fish per day, with no stripers kept between 22 and 27 inches, and only one fish larger than 27 inches allowed per day.

The keeper season, however, will be split between the lower and upper portions of the river. It will be April 10-16 downstream from the US 258 bridge at Scotland Neck to the mouth of Albemarle Sound, and April 24-30 upstream from the US 258 bridge to the tailrace below Roanoke Rapids Dam in Weldon.

The seasons match the time periods of highest average harvest over the past nine years, according to Commission data. ■



Todd Harris of Clemmons, N.C., landed this 10-pound, 4-ounce bass from High Rock Lake on Jan. 15. The fish hit a homemade, flat-sided crankbait.

Gerald Murray of Hopkins, S.C., won the grand prize in *Carolina Sportsman's* annual Bag-A-Buck contest for his entry of this 12-point buck killed in Richland County on Sept. 5, 2020.



SC MAN WINS BAG-A-BUCK GRAND PRIZE

There was no real reason why Gerald Murray of Columbia, S.C., set up his stand in a set of mixed hardwoods and pine trees to hunt the afternoon of Sept. 5, 2020, on hunt-club land in Richland County.

There were no big rubbed trees in the area. There were no trail-cam photos of big bucks. He had seen a couple of does in that general area during the 2019 season, and another club member had killed a couple of bucks on the other side of that piece of property.

"I went by faith, not by sight," Murray said. "Just blind faith."

It certainly paid off that afternoon, when Murray dropped a 12-point buck, a real trophy, at about 7:15 with one shot from his .300 Weatherby Magnum.

It paid off for him in early January, when Murray's name was drawn as the grand-prize winner in *Carolina Sportsman's* annual Bag-A-Buck contest. His entry was one of 239 in the contest, which featured four monthly winners.

Murray's grand prize includes a three-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman*, a \$50 gift certificate to the Sportsman's online store, and

a two-day deer/hog hunt from two people at Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield County, S.C.

"The Lord Jesus blessed me with this beautiful, 12-point buck," said Murray, who was hunting out of a climbing stand. "I was in there expecting to maybe shoot a 6-pointer or a 7-pointer. I first saw a doe and fawn about 6:30, and they left, and I hung in there. About 7:15, I saw another deer to my right. All I could see was what seemed like a lot of white sticks on the top of this big-bodied deer's head."

It was the 12-point, 175-pound buck that Murray leveled — despite a bad case of "buck fever" a few minutes later.

When he climbed down and went to look for his buck, he found a much better buck than he thought he'd shot. Clearly, there was no "ground shrinkage."

"I didn't realize he was as big as he was; he was bigger than I thought," said Murray, 49, who works at Prisma Health Baptist Hospital in Columbia. "I got the deer in my truck, and then I started calling everybody." ■

PALMETTO SPORTSMAN CLASSIC IS CANCELLED

Vaccines are being put in arms all over the Carolinas, but the COVID-19 coronavirus has claimed at least one more victim: the Palmetto Sportsman Classic.

The annual outdoors show, scheduled for March 26-28 at the S.C. State Fairgrounds in Columbia, S.C., was cancelled in mid-January because of the pandemic — for the second year in a row.

"The health and well-being of South Carolinians and others ... remain our top concern," said Dan DuPre, director of the Palmetto Sportsman's Classic. "We must take every precaution to protect the thousands of attendees, vendors and volunteers expected to attend the event.

"Organizers ... did not come to this decision

lightly. Over the last several days, we have heard your concerns and are taking our cues from similar events across the country."

The Classic is run by the Harry Hampton Wildlife Fund, in coordination with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, to raise money for many conservation projects across the state. Those organizations said the increasing number of COVID cases in South Carolina and the difficulty in getting vaccinations to the majority of state residents before the show were big factors in the cancellation.

The 2022 Palmetto Sportsman Classic is scheduled for March 25-27.

"We look forward to continuing this tradition," DuPre said. ■

NC HAS NEW RECORD CAT

There's one thing you have to say about 2020. On the whole, it may have been a year everybody wants to forget, but it was a great one for catfish in North Carolina.

Three state records were set last year, the third and last, a 23-pound, 5-ounce channel cat certified in mid-January.

John Stone of Pinehurst, N.C., a member of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, caught the record fish in a private pond in Moore County last September. The fish hit cut bait and was weighed on certified scales at a Tractor Supply store in Biscoe, N.C. It broke a 50-year-old record held by E.J. Bowden of Rocky Mount.

On July 5 last year, Joey Baird, of Lawrenceville, Va., caught a 121-pound, 9-ounce blue catfish from Lake Gaston. Fifteen days later, Tyler Barnes of Pikeville, N.C., caught a 78-pound, 14-ounce flathead catfish from the Neuse River.

To qualify for a N.C. Freshwater Fish State Record, anglers must have caught the fish by rod and reel or cane pole; have it weighed on a set of certified scales, witnessed by one observer and identified by a fisheries biologist from the Commission. ■



John Stone of Pinehurst, N.C., caught this 23-pound, 5-ounce channel catfish that is the new state record.

HARDEN BUCK IS NC RECORD

A great Moore County non-typical buck taken by Raeford's Chris Harden on Oct. 9 has been confirmed as North Carolina's state-record whitetail by crossbow.

Harden's buck was officially scored in mid-January by Jay Pope of Randleman and Joey Thompson of Asheboro, both scorers for

the N.C. Bow-hunters Association. The buck measured 196 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches, and it dethroned the previous state-record, a 195 $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch Mecklenburg County buck taken in 2019 by Tracy McCorkle.

Harden had pulled the SIM card from a trail camera, and he was at his truck, ready to leave the woods after hunting for 4



Chris Harden's huge Moore County buck, killed Oct. 9, has been certified as North Carolina's new state-record non-typical taken with a crossbow.

hours, when he put the card in his card reader, hooked it up and got a photo of a huge buck taken the previous afternoon. He got back to his stand in time to drop the buck just after 7 p.m. with his Parker crossbow.

The buck carried a main-frame 5x5 rack with eight sticker points, including one 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch "dagger" jutting from the base of the right antler. It had a 16-inch inside spread, main beams longer than 24 inches, three tines longer than 11 inches, and 30 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches of non-typical points. The buck's score qualified it for the Boone & Crockett Club's all-time record book as a non-typical. ■

NC state parks set record

The COVID-19 pandemic affected North Carolina in plenty of negative ways, but one positive, according to the state government, was that state parks received a record number of visitors in 2020.

Approximately 19.8 million visits to state parks and recreation areas were recorded last year, up 400,000 above the record set in 2017 and 1.2 million more than 2019.

Jockeys Ridge State Park in Dare County led the way with 1.9 million reported visits, one of seven state parks that had more than a million visitors: Carolina Beach, Pilot Mountain, Umstead, Fort Macon, Eno River state parks and Falls Lake State Recreation Area. Carolina Beach was up 78% from 2019. ■

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How could one of the best lakes in North Carolina become, almost overnight, one of the toughest to catch a bass?

Consider Shearon Harris Lake. In 2017, *Bassmaster* magazine ranked it as one of the top four lakes for bass fishing in the Southeast. Today's poll is anyone's guess.

First to dispel rumors:

- UFOs didn't beam up Harris bass;
- Commercial fishermen didn't set gill nets;
- Neither Duke Energy nor the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission killed the lake's hydrilla — but its submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) did vanish.

Actually, the answer to disappearing Harris bass is simple — they didn't.

By Craig Holt

WHAT HAPPENED TO SHEARON HARRIS?

ONCE ONE OF THE BEST BASS-FISHING LAKES ANYWHERE, THIS NORTH CAROLINA RESERVOIR HAS CHANGED OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS, AND FISHERMEN AREN'T PAYING IT AS MUCH ATTENTION. THE BASS ARE STILL THERE, BUT THE HABITAT AND FISHING HAVE CHANGED — AND NOT FOR THE BETTER.

Without shoreline grass, largemouths simply scattered across the lake's 4,151 acres.

Why and how did this happen? A number of factors came into play:

- The N.C. Division of Water Quality put 4,000 sterile grass carp in the lake to eat hydrilla;
- Natural forces already were reducing SAV;
- Baitfish dispersed;
- New fishing patterns emerged;
- More non-anglers began to visit the lake, many because of COVID shutdowns, and the lake's two boat ramps were overrun;
- Crowded weekends made for water-safety concerns;
- Major bass tournaments moved to other sites.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST ➤



BLASTS FROM THE PAST

Shearon Harris once resembled a Florida lake, thick with hydrilla growing from its perimeter to 15 feet from the shoreline. A slot limit — no keeping bass between 16 and 20 inches — helped create a base of big largemouths.

Anglers often landed hefty five-bass limits, while tournaments saw astounding catches and sizes of bass.

Spring was the best season, with lunkers attacking lures in grass-filled shallow waters. In April 1996, Sanford's Dennis Reedy and his partner landed a 10-fish 71.88-pound Harris creel during a Piedmont Bass Classic tournament, including a 9.82-pound lunker. Twenty-one years later, in March 2017, a five-fish limit caught by Shane and Bonnie Burns totaled 41.90 pounds, a PBC record.

However, by 2019, changing conditions made such whopper limits only fond memories.

GRASS EXPLOSION/IMPLOSION

Aquatic vegetation enhances bass fishing. Hydrilla, elodea, primrose, squarestem spike rush, hyacinth, bulrushes, water willow, maiden cane, pickelweed, softstem bulrush, giant cutgrass, American lotus, whitewater lily, spatterdock, water stargrass, American pondweed and eel grass offer hiding places for baitfishes, baby bass and adult fish.

But hydrilla has been classified as a federal noxious weed because it expands each year to choke out other plants. If hydrilla were a land plant, it would be kudzu.

Hydrilla once clogged coves on Lake Gaston on the Virginia-North Carolina border. Property holders hired mechanical harvesters to rip it out, sprayed chemicals and released grass carp until it finally lessened its grip.

Carolina Power & Light, which would later become Progress Energy, opened the Harris nuclear power plant in 1987, and hydrilla appeared soon thereafter. By the mid-1990s, hydrilla covered 1,000 acres. During that time, bass numbers and sizes exploded. CP&L sold out to Duke Energy in 2011.

Then, it began to decline.

"We worked with the N.C. Division of Water Quality to stock grass carp in the lake and treated hydrilla with herbicides only around boat ramps," said Kim Crawford of Duke Energy.

Kirk Rundle, a fisheries biologist with the Commission, mostly agreed with Crawford.

"As far as I know, no spraying was done, but almost 100% of the lake's hydrilla is gone now," he said.

Rundle said hydrilla began to disappear in 2015, with 232 acres left by 2018.

"Then, the N.C. Division of Environmental Quality and Duke Energy put 4,000 grass carp in the lake," he said.

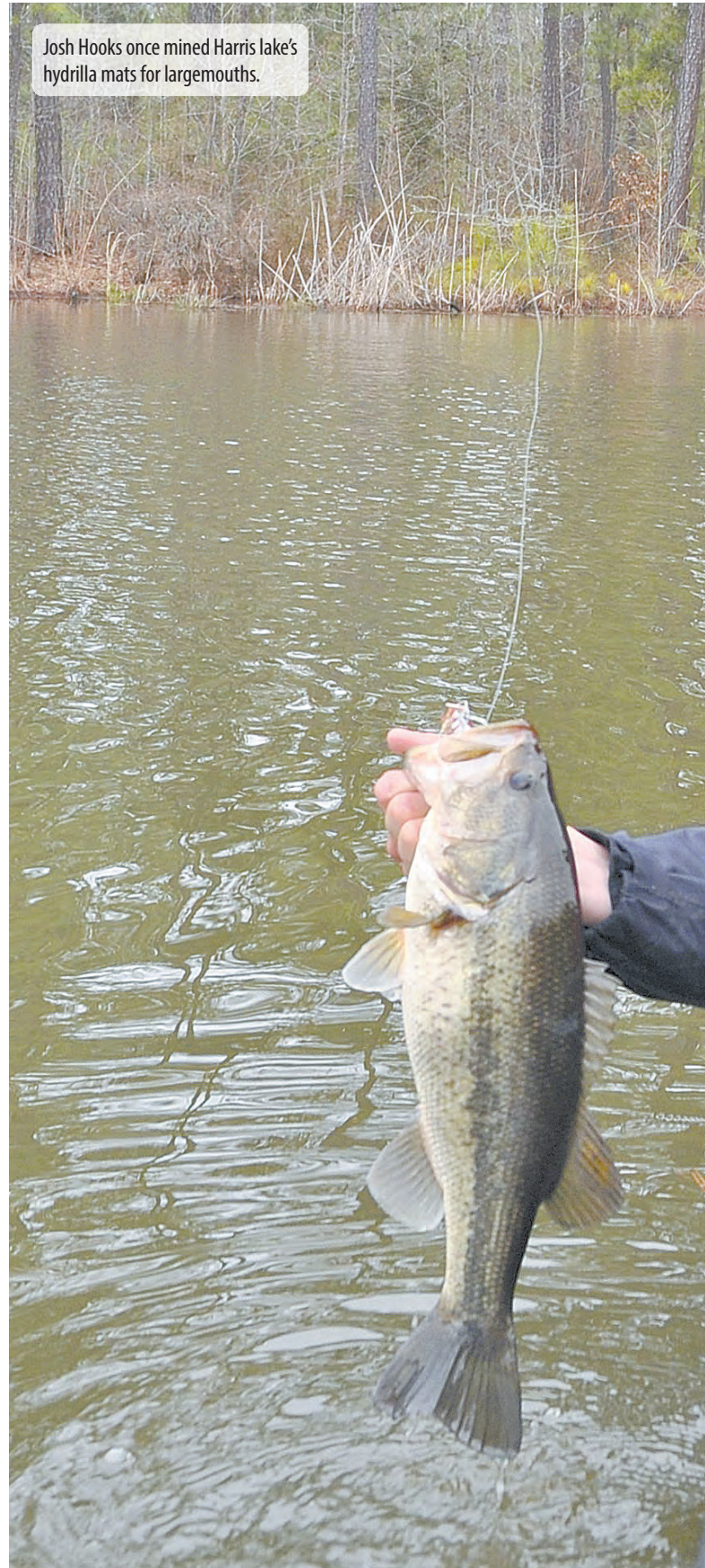
By October 2019, a survey found no hydrilla.

"I don't know if the grass carp affected it that much," Rundle said. "I think water quality also declined, and turbidity may have increased."



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

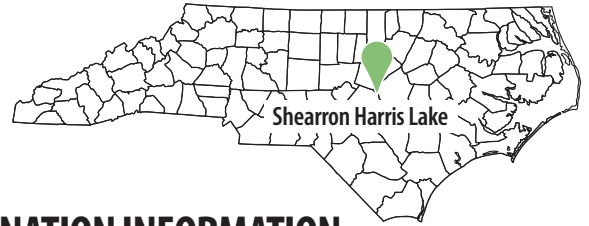
BAITIFSH SCATTER >



Josh Hooks once mined Harris lake's hydrilla mats for largemouths.



Craig Holt



DESTINATION INFORMATION

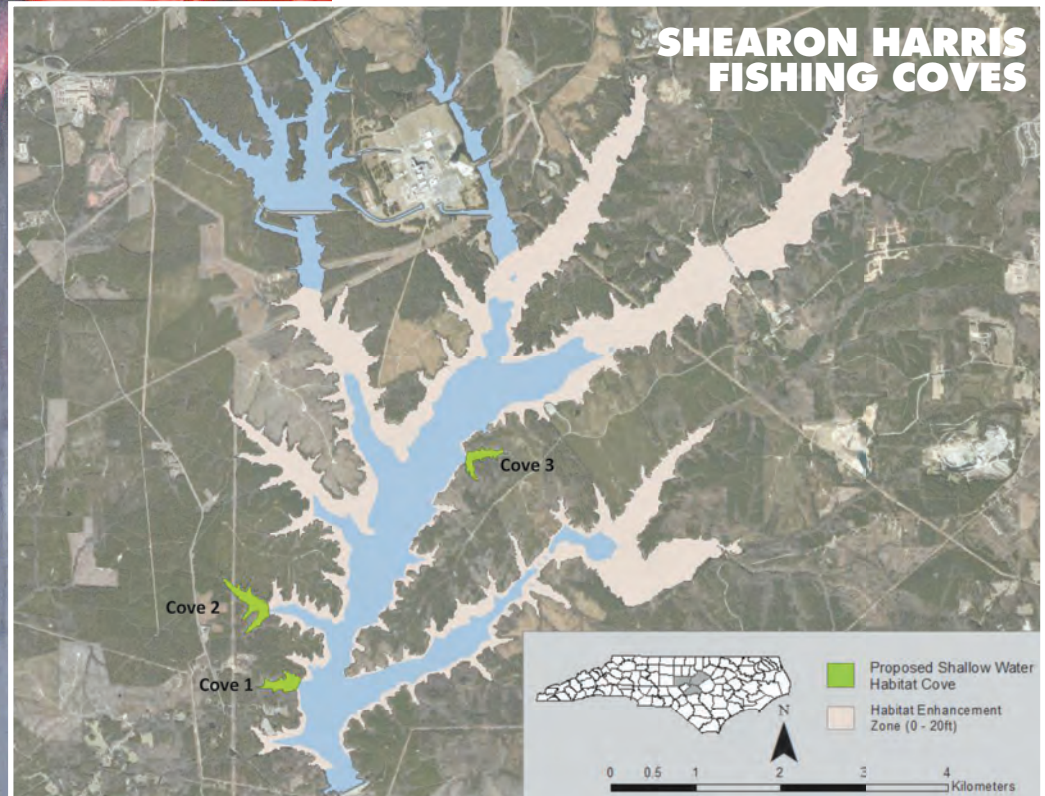
HOW TO GET THERE — Shearron Harris Lake is about 20 miles southwest of Raleigh, N.C., roughly just east of US 1 north of Sanford, N.C. It is served by two public boat ramps, Holleman's Crossing on Holleman Rd. and Crosspoint on Crosspoint Rd.

SIZE/CREEL LIMITS — Harris is managed with a five-fish daily creel limit and a 16- to 20-inch slot limit; no bass between 16 and 20 inches may be kept. There is a 14-inch size minimum, with a two-fish exception.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Bill Manning's Bass Fishing Guide Service, 919-723-8569, billmanningfishing.com. See also Guides and Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Econo Lodge, Sanford, 919-774-6411; Budget Inn, Sanford, 919-775-2814; Days Inn, 919-213-7238; Hampton Inn and Suites, Holly Springs, N.C., 919-552-7610;

MAPS — Fishing Hot Spots, 800-255-6277, www.fishing-hotspots.com; DeLorme, www.delorme.com.



What happened to Shearon Harris?

Jimmy Spencer of Asheboro caught this 8.38-pound bass during a 2012 Piedmont Bass Classics tournament at Shearon Harris Lake.



Courtesy Phil McCarson

BAITFISH SCATTER

With no vegetation to offer safety from predators, the baitfish, mainly threadfin shad, dispersed into schools that now roam open water.

“The (shallow-water bass) fishing at Harris is terrible, compared to what it used to be,” said bass pro Josh Hooks of Apex, N.C. “The grass is gone, and there’s no structure at mid-depth ranges. That means baitfish and bass have gotten out of Dodge.”

“In 2019, I caught fish in deeper water than ever. There’s some riprap at the new Holleman Bridge and bullrushes on banks where you can catch ‘em, but you can’t pattern ‘em.”

PBC EVENTS LEAVE

Phil McCarson of Durham, who operates the Piedmont Bass Classics tournament trail, said water safety, declining angler interest and tough fishing led him to move events from Harris.

“With everyone trying to use the lake, it’s gotten dangerous on weekends,” he said. “Launch ramps are crowded, and speed boats, wake boarders and water skiers roar around the lake, which is too small for a 90-boat tournament, plus the other folks. We’ve had some bad scenarios, and I’m afraid somebody will get hurt.”

McCarson said lack of shoreline grass pushed anglers to open-water areas and increased aggravations and collision risks. So he moved his tournaments to much larger Falls, Jordan and Kerr lakes.

NEW PATTERNS

When blueback herring numbers exploded at John H. Kerr Reservoir, aka Buggs Island, over the past 10 years, large-mouths changed their feeding habits, leaving shorelines to search the open water for schools of bluebacks.

Anglers adapted, and Hooks has used the same tactics at Harris.

“Old patterns have changed,” he said. “You can catch schoolies in summer, but they’ve become nomadic to chase baitfish and don’t sit on structure.”

Only two patterns work, he said: schooling fish and fishing the first offshore ledge in front of bulrushes.

He uses deep-diving crankbaits, Rat-L-Traps or Texas-rigs large plastic worms with heavy bullet weights when he finds structure that holds largemouths, and he casts Zara Spooks or Pop-Rs at surface-feeders.

“Forward-facing sonar helps you follow schools,” Hooks said. ■

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TIME TO REBUILD HARRIS BASS HABITAT

With hydrilla gone at Shearon Harris Lake, biologist Kirk Rundle of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission knows bass fishing has changed. He is leading efforts to keep several fish species healthy by planting and protecting native submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) and placing fish attractors in the lake.

In 2018, the Commission started a five-year Aquatic Enhancement Plan at Harris. It includes installing 30 acres of fish attractors — polytrees, mossbacks, Shelbyville cubes and spider blocks — by 2023, cutting and cabling 20 trees to fall into the lake, enhancing habitat in three fishing coves and an acre of family colonies of SAV. Fences will protect plant colonies from grazers such as turtles, muskrats and grass carp.

"If no more grass carp are stocked, the hope is founder colonies will grow," Rundle said. "In theory, once it gets started, after years (it) will work its way outside enclosures and provide fish habitat. Our estimate today is may take 10 years (to rebuild the SAV at Harris)."

Rundle is also concerned that spotted bass and flathead catfish may be put in the lake illegally. Spots crowd out largemouths, and flatheads prey on everything. The good news is Commission



NC Wildlife Resources Commission

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission plans to sink 700 fish attractors in Shearon Harris Lake by the end of 2023.

sampling shows Harris with as many bass as when it was flush with grass.

"Electrofishing and trap nets for crappie look at CPUE (catch per unit effort), then we check for weight, plumpness, age and growth," Rundle said. "Bass have adapted to what's going on out there. Harris is still the best bass lake in the state, and also has excellent crappie numbers."

That means to catch Harris bass, modern anglers, as Janis Joplin once sang, "have to try just a little bit harder." ■

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LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite



Tie on a bait that you have plenty of confidence in, and that's big a big-fish producer in the past, and go hunting for those big females in a hungry, prespawn mood.

IT'S MARCH, BIG-BASS TIME

THERE WILL NEVER BE A BETTER MONTH TO TARGET TROPHY BASS THAN THIS ONE

Dan Kibler

If you've been reading my columns in the past, or if you've heard me in a seminar or something, you know I believe that March is the month when you can catch your personal-best bass. So you'd better be fishing.

Marsh is a prespawn month, and even though you can catch prespawn fish in February, and April is a good prespawn month since we have a lot of fish that don't spawn until late April in the Carolinas, March is always when I've had my bet luck catching big fish.

If you're a tournament fisherman, you're catching numbers of fish, and that's fine. You might be a weekend fisherman, or a combination of the two, but if you're after that personal-best bass, you have to fish in March.

Now, here are some things I do when I'm trying to specifically catch big fish.

I have used live bait before, fished shiners in Florida for big bass, and I've taken people fishing and used live bait. If you

want to use crawfish or shiners, live bait, go right ahead. There's nothing wrong with it. But many serious bass fishermen will be using artificial baits, and in March, I turn to the lures I've caught my biggest fish on in the past: a Mop jig and a crankbait.

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPONS

For me, my No. 1 big-fish bait is a Mop jig; it's always been one of my favorites, all year-long, but especially in the prespawn. I also like to fish jerkbaits like a Shadow Rap Shad and crankbaits like



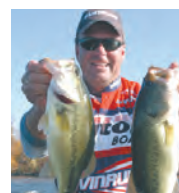
OG Slim

a Rapala DT-6 and an OG Slim. When you're targeting big fish in particular, you want the baits you have the most confidence in tied on, because confidence means so much.

So, I'll probably have a half-ounce Mop jig tied on. That heavy, rubber skirt makes



Mop jig



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

it such a great big-fish bait. I always use a trailer to target big fish, and most of the time, that will be a Yamamoto Flappin' Hog; they come in two sizes, and I want to use the larger one.

LOVE A CRAWFISH

When it comes to color, I like crawfish-type colors in March: browns, oranges and reds. I will go with a basic brown jig and accent it with different trailer colors. I will be fishing it on 15-pound fluorocarbon most of the time.

I really like to fish a crankbait in March because you can cover so much more water, and that's so, so important. Plus, big bass will really eat a crankbait. My favorites are a DT-6 and an OG Slim, which is a flat-sided bait that is designed by bass pro Ott Defoe.

WEATHER-WATCHER

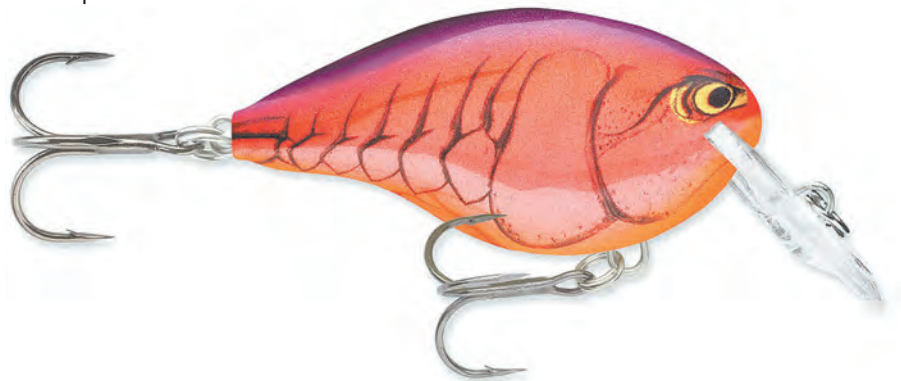
March is iffy, weather-wise, and I'll use the flat-sided baits when the water temperature is in the 40s and 50s. When the water is warmer, I'll go with the DT-6, which gives off better vibration.

Again, I'm going to fish crankbaits in crawfish colors, and I'm going to fish them on 10- to 14-pound monofilament — depending on the depth range I'm looking at. The OG Slim and DT-6 will both run about 5 or 6 feet deep, and they'll both run about a foot deeper on 10-pound test than 14-pound test, so make your choice of line size based on how deep you need the bait to get. In some cases, a foot can make a big difference.

So that should be a starting point. You can finish the deal by making time to get on your favorite lake, or the best big-fish lake within driving distance of your home, and spend plenty of time there this month. It might change the way you fish and approach big, prespawn bass, for a long time. ■

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Phillip Gentry

Just as in the world of power boats, there are kayak anglers whose fishing minds center only on bass.

KAYAK BASS BASICS

YOU HAVE A KAYAK AND PADDLE, AND YOU LOVE BASS. WHAT NEXT?

Phillip Gentry

New kayak anglers express a lot of different reasons for why they got started in the sport. Some say it's because a kayak is more economical than a powerboat. Others say there's just "too much" involved in powerboat fishing and want to get back to the basics. Still another group yearns for competition against other anglers with only human power to get you where you want to go. In a nutshell, this describes kayak bass fishing.

That's not to say all kayak bass anglers want to compete, but the solace of one rod, one paddle and a black bass on the line is more than enough for many.

For the new kayak bass angler, there is an entire world of knowledge, comrades, competitors and likewise rabid paddle fans. By way of introduction, there are few things to know.

Rods and reels. Depending on your skill level entering kayak bass fishing, your choices are baitcasting and spinning gear. Spinning gear is easier to use, but more baits and situations are best addressed with baitcasting tackle. Make it a point to learn to use both.

Bass Fishing 101. Largemouth bass love vegetation and woody cover. Smallmouth bass love rocks. Other than that, there

are volumes and volumes written about how to catch bass in a myriad of scenarios. A wacky rigged trick worm is hard for a beginner to fish incorrectly, and it's mostly weedless. That's as good as any place to start your learning process.

Take a net. Later on in your career, you will probably leave the net behind, but nothing is more frustrating than having a fish at the boat and trying to figure out what to do next. Where are my pliers? Where's my camera? I can't reach the end of the rod to unwrap the line that's wrapped up, and I'm about to lose this fish. A net is the closest thing to a pause button as you get when fishing. Get the fish in the net, then sort things out.

What kayak for bass fishing? Kayak fishing is not like powerboat fishing, where you have a specific boat design for bass fishing. You still only have two main types of kayaks: cockpit style and sit-on-tops. Sit-on-tops are better for fishing, period. After that, you can choose your layout, propulsion, storage, size, etc., based on your budget and preferences.

Go where others can't. Don't buy a kayak for bass fishing and then go to big, public lakes and compete for fish with anglers in powerboats. Certain tournaments may dictate where you can fish

in competition, but for learning and just fishing, find those hidden gems, which are typically going to be smaller bodies of water. Watershed lakes, farm ponds, swamps, oxbows and rivers abound, and the easiest way to find them is on Google Earth or another satellite app. Scout online, go find access and get permission.

Catch, photo and release. Whether you fish on-line tournaments, in-person tournaments or monthly points tournaments, the standard is to measure fish by length, not weight. Tournaments may designate what type of ruler is permissible. One of the most-widely accepted is called a Hawg Trough. All fish are released afterwards.

Join a club. Most clubs welcome new members, and about half those you meet will be bass fishing addicts. Try to give back as much as you take from your club, even if that just means buying breakfast for the folks who are taking you fishing until you get your feet under you. ■



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

ONLINE BASS TOURNEYS

For the tournament bass angler who's been bitten by the plastic-boat bug, kayak bass-fishing tournaments are growing by leaps and bounds — right behind the popularity of the sport itself.

Most tournaments are conducted in person, by kayak angling clubs, but in areas where clubs are few and far between or non-existent, several websites are holding on-line bass-fishing tournaments over the internet (www.ianglertournament.com, www.kayakbassfishing.com, www.tourneyx.com).

Online kayak fishing tournaments let you participate in conservation-oriented, catch-photo-release competitions when and where you want, against anglers in your own neighborhood and from around the world. Anglers fish on their own schedule, at their favorite honey holes, in conditions they choose, and the online check-in is always open. CPR formats reward anglers for catching the best fish and make bag limits, slot limits and species closures obsolete.

A major difference is that it is all but impossible to catch, retain and transport a fish far enough to get one, much less several, to a weigh-in site for scoring. The "weigh-in" is actually more of a photo contest. To keep everyone honest, tournaments use an identifier, which could be a playing card, a logo, or even a wooden poker chip.

If the tournament is a one-day event, the identifiers, which are specific to each tournament, are handed out beforehand



Karl Hudson

On-line bass tournaments aren't conducted in the same fashion as traditional tournaments, right down to how the fish are scored or measured.

and must be included in the photograph the angler takes of his catch. Typically, the rules state that the photo entry must include the entire length of the fish laying on a rigid ruler, mouth closed, with the identifier in the photo. The photo must also clearly show the length of the fish and be high-enough resolution so judges can zoom in to get measurements on a 1/4-inch scale. If the event is conducted over a period of a month, the identifier is typically some logo designed for the event and is posted on the host website before the tournament. ■

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Smallmouth bass

WHERE — Fontana Lake

HOW — Smallmouth bass move shallow during the early spring at Fontana, where they become susceptible to typical shallow, clear-water bass tactics.

LAUNCH — A listing of ramps, accommodations, and marinas can be found at www.greatsmokies.com/boating/

INSIDER TIP — It's hard to beat a suspending jerkbait to cover a lot of clear water for smallmouth bass. The more action, the better, as smallmouth become aggressive as the water warms.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Largemouth bass

WHERE — Lake Moultrie

HOW — Lake Moultrie fish may be in spawn or late pre-spawn in March. To find the biggest fish, look for grass mats around the perimeter of the oval-shaped lake. It's hard to beat fishing frogs on top of the grass but a lot of anglers will pitch and punch into the grass mats with Texas-rigged soft plastics.

LAUNCH — There are multiple public boat launch sites on Lake Moultrie and countless dump in sites for a kayak. <https://www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/BoatRamp/BoatRampSelected/1230046>

INSIDER TIP — March is one of the busiest months for bass fishing on Lake Moultrie. To find, and catch unpressured fish, make use of the remote areas: cut-offs, canals, and landlocked ponds (without trespassing), that power boats can't get to easily, if at all.

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TUCKERTOWN LUCK?

Decent water can lead to plenty of big bass

For many fans, March Madness takes place on the basketball court, but for fishermen, the action takes place with a roll of the dice at Tuckertown Lake.

If fishermen are unlucky, they'll be greeted with blustery winds, trashy water, cold temperatures and bass with lockjaw.

If they're lucky, piscatorial high rollers will find the lake fishable, with waters ranging from stained to a modest brown in the major creeks. Should these water conditions get coupled with a warming trend, they could find themselves battling staggish bass up to 6 pounds.

This season, gambling on a big-bass bite in March might be more against the odds than usual. Fall and winter brought heavy rains that kept Tuckertown unsettled and trashy. Only the far reaches of Riles and Ellis creeks — the latter aka Newsom's — have had fishable waters.

But if Lady Luck prevails, fishermen can find a treasure trove of quality bass.

Anglers can entice the heavyweights with green pumpkin and black/blue jigs crawled along steep, rocky banks, secondary points, road beds and ledges.

Ellis Creek features many of these productive places. On its left side, it has old road beds, an island and deep banks. On its right side, it has a gravel bank littered with tree laps and occasional stumps. The bridge at its entrance always deserves several casts. Docks in the creek shouldn't be ignored, either.

The points at the entrance to Flat Creek can be dynamite at times, as well as the high spot in the creek marked by a buoy.

The creek at the NC 49 landing has steep points and gravel banks, while Riles Creek usually contains the clearest water in the lake. It's home to rocky banks, stumps, tree laps and high spots.

Jerkbaits shouldn't be overlooked in off-colored water, as long as the water is only brown and not red or chocolate. Last year, David Berrier of Lexington, N.C., and I caught several bass in the 4- to 5-pound range before we left sight of the Flat Creek Landing, fishing jerkbaits in dirty, brown water.

Small, shallow-running crankbaits and lipless crankbaits in chartreuse, green or red crawdad are also worthy March baits. They



David Berrier of Lexington, N.C. caught this big Tuckertown bass in March, fishing a jerkbait in dirty water.

should track no more than 5 feet deep, or they'll get clogged by the black mat algae that dominates the shoreline. Fortunately, the algae is somewhat subdued in March, allowing fishermen to crank for bass. That won't be true later in the year.

Newcomers to Tuckertown should proceed with caution. Several of the red and green channel markers indicating safe passage around the stump-laden flat at the Flat Creek Landing have drifted off their designated places.

Fishing for big bass at Tuckertown can be quite a gamble in March, but the risk is worth it when those big ones start pulling your line. ■

— Tony Garitta



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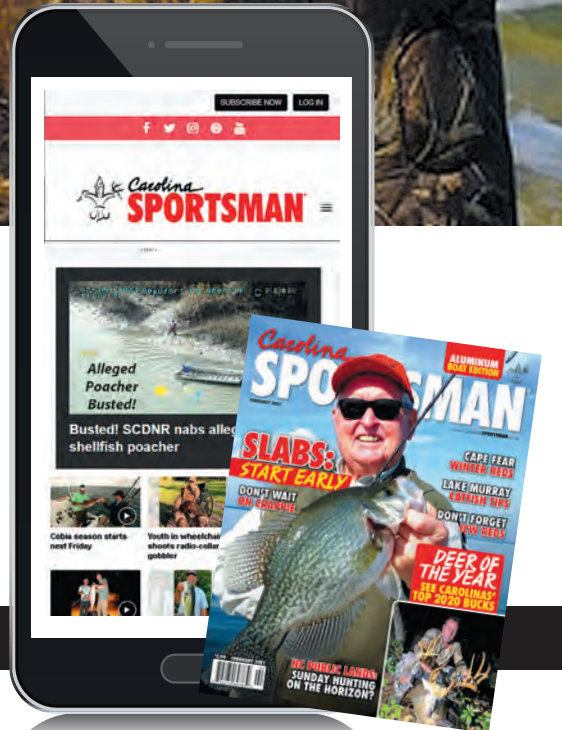
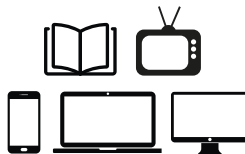
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■ By Terry Madewell

MAKE THE EARLY TURKEY SEASON COUNT

South Carolina's turkey hunting regulations allow a hunter to tag only one gobbler during the first 10 days of the season, making this segment strategically crucial for overall season preparation.

Steve Cobb from Union, S.C., is a premier hunter and an elite turkey talker who hunts a lot more days than he doesn't. This change has made a profound impact on the way he hunts but not as much on early season strategy.

"Turkey season last year was a unique experience, because I knew I could only shoot one bird the first 10 days, so I hunted backwards," Cobb said. "I didn't want to miss being in the woods, so I planned to kill my first bird late in that segment."

"The first several days of the season offer opportunities that don't exist once gobblers are pressured," he said. "I actually shot my first bird on the tenth day, but I hunted every day of that segment."

Cobb, a long-time member of Hunter Specialties' pro staff, said that during the early segment, he called for other hunters, or if he was alone, he tried to locate as many turkeys as possible. His plan was to kill a gobbler during this segment, but also to set up the rest of the season with great intel.

Terry Madewell



Cobb's strategy for hunting the first 10 days is dramatically different than his tactics for **THE REST OF TURKEY SEASON.**

"The best way to describe it is during the first segment of the season (is) I call turkeys to my position," he said. "The rest of the season I hunt turkeys. After the first segment, the pressure on the gobblers increases to the point where calling is no longer the primary key to success. It's still crucial, but curtailed calling, setup, movement strategy and decoy use are more relevant."

Cobb said practicing and honing your calling skills before the season is essential. Get really good with a couple of different calls, with a hands-free mouth call as one good choice. Realism is crucial, and unique calls such as the tube call are excellent.

A proper setup and staying alert for gobblers approaching silently are keys to tagging a bird in the early season.

"When a longbeard gobbles, hens in the area are supposed to go to him," he said. "That's typically what happens and is precisely why hunters get 'henned' early in the season."

Cobb said preseason scouting can help significantly in these first 10 days. Knowing where the gobblers are roosted, he'll set up between the hens and a gobbler. A setup close to a known strut zone enhances his odds by being where the gobbler already wants to go.

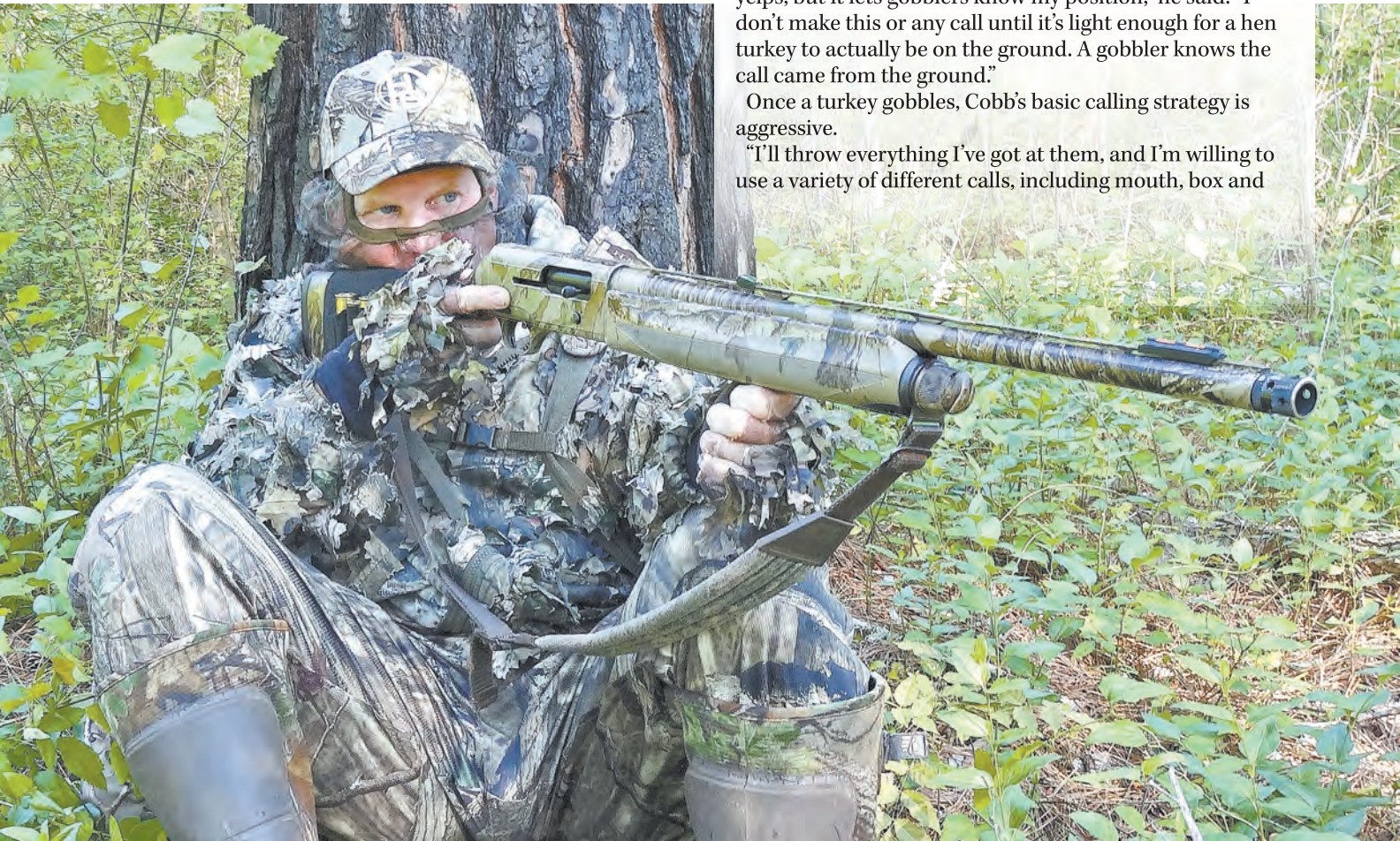
"If you haven't had the opportunity to scout preseason, you can hunt and scout, and if not successful that day, use the intel on your next trip," he said.

Setting up in an area where multiple gobblers are roosted is ideal, but he often doesn't call until the birds begin gobbling, so he can change his setup location if necessary.

"If I do call before gobbling begins, it's what I refer to as a 'ground tree call', essentially a series of three or four soft yelps, but it lets gobblers know my position," he said. "I don't make this or any call until it's light enough for a hen turkey to actually be on the ground. A gobbler knows the call came from the ground."

Once a turkey gobbles, Cobb's basic calling strategy is aggressive.

"I'll throw everything I've got at them, and I'm willing to use a variety of different calls, including mouth, box and



Terry Madewell

SOUTH CAROLINA'S UNIQUE TURKEY SEASONS

South Carolina's spring wild-turkey season regulations are, at the very least, among the nation's most interesting.

Seasons are split, with hunting on private land in Game Zones 3 and 4 — the Lowcountry, Grand Strand and Pee Dee regions — allowed March 22-April 30. Hunters can take only one turkey from opening day through March 31. The season in Game Zones 1 and 2 — the Midlands and Upstate — is April 1-May 5, with hunters allowed to take only one turkey from opening day through April 10.

The season on Wildlife Management Areas statewide is from April 1-May 5.

Resident hunters will be limited to three bearded turkeys per season, with only one turkey per day.

Nonresident hunters are limited to two turkeys per season with no more than one per day.

— Dan Kibler

pot calls," he said. "I'll use cutts and aggressive yelps to get a gobbler's attention before other hens can get to him. If I can get that bird really fired up, he'll likely approach my location quickly. While it's not the natural process, fired-up gobblers are curious and will readily approach a hunter making good calls before other hens reach him."

Cobb uses aggressive calling to get into a gobbler's head that the hen is ready to breed. He injects realism into his calling to sell that idea.

"After I hit him hard the first 20 to 30 seconds, I back off," he said. "Once he's gobbling every breath and closing the distance quickly, I'm likely done calling. I'm on high alert and get ready for the shot. If he suddenly gets quiet, he's likely committed to my location."

Cobb said it's hard to not call to a gobbling bird, but a point exists in nearly every early season hunt when he must make a sound decision. The bird will likely still gobble if he calls, but over-calling actually reduces the odds of success.

"It's possible to still screw up a kamikaze bird," he said. "Continuing to call as he's rapidly approaching conveys a message that the hen may be approaching him, since that is the natural order of turkey courtship. I've got to decide if I want to hear more gobbling or if I really want to kill that bird. If the decision is killing him, I'm done calling."

This scenario presents a fairly high success rate in terms of seeing the gobbler within range for an open shot.

Cobb said it doesn't always work quite that smoothly, and a common issue during the first 10 days is birds getting henned up. But that doesn't signal the end of the hunt.

"I rely on calling early in the season, so if hens are with the gobbler and he doesn't budge, I'll call to them," he said.

"Hens are quite talkative, and if I can hear hens calling, I'll call aggressively and replicate those calls. If she clucks three times, I'll cluck three times. If she yelps hard, I'll yelp hard with exactly the same pattern and rhythm.

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don't know what she's saying to the hen I'm simulating, but I convey that message right back to her," Cobb said. "A dominant hen often investigates, with the gobbler and other turkeys in tow."

Cobb said this creates another issue, because multiple sets of turkey eyes will be scouring the woods for your location. But it keeps a hunter in the game.

Another benefit of continuing to call to a hen is another gobbler, without hens, may hear the calling.

"If he gobbles far off, say 400 yards, and then a short time later gobbles at 200 yards, he's now my primary target," Cobb said. "Often, he'll work in because the competition factor for breeding is strong during this segment."

Cobb said to use the first 10 days of the season not only to tag your first gobbler, but to learn the woods you're hunting and locate multiple gobblers and their patterns. These first segment limits you to taking one gobbler but can exponentially enhance your success after the first 10 days. ■



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



Terry Madewell



Steve Cobb said it's important to be versatile, using a number of different calls to work early season gobblers. ABOVE: Cobb often relies on the competition between gobblers to breed hens when he's set up in an area with multiple turkeys.

Terry Madewell

UNIQUE SOUNDS GATHER GOBBLERS



Terry Madewell

Steve Cobb uses a variety of calls, including this tube call, to create realistic sounds and try to get a gobbler to respond.

Good calling is essential to turkey hunting success, and during the early season, using unique calls to mimic different hens is an excellent technique. One of hunter Steve Cobb's go-to calls is the tube call.

"I use a variety of different calls, so I have a lot of sounds in my calling arsenal," he said. "I often hunt public land, and changing calls and sounds on pressured land is an excellent tactic. The tube call is ideal. With practice, the tube can imitate any sound a turkey makes, from soft purrs to long-range locator calls and everything in between."

Cobb said in addition to versatility, a big plus for the tube call is that few hunters use it. But the unique sound of the call will often get a quick, gobbled response when other calls don't.

"It's air operated and does require some movement, but when carried with a lanyard around the neck, it's easy to use with minimal movement," he said. "If calling for someone else, I'll hold it under my mask, call, and the bird can walk all the way in. When alone, once I get a bird fired up and he's moving my way, I'll get the gun on the shoulder.

"It's a good tactic that hunters can use to elevate their calling technique," he said. ■

(For information on custom tube calls contact the author at tmadewell50@gmail.com)

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Early season is prime time for a non-dominant gobbler to try and slip in quietly and poach a hen from a tom that's already gobbling at her.

BEWARE THE QUIET ONE

Steve Cobb said this first segment of South Carolina's turkey season offers an excellent opportunity to tag a gobbler that sneaks in silently.

"This occurs anytime, but the first segment is prime time for another gobbler to slip in silently and poach a hen," he said. "This is often a mature, but not dominant, 2-year-old longbeard. "When hunting an area that likely has multiple gobblers, odds are good another bird may slip in quietly," Cobb said. "Whether I'm calling to another gobbler or the hens with him, vigilance is essential to seeing a silent gobbler."

The stealthy gobbler is slipping in unannounced to the hen before the gobbling bird arrives. Cobb said using a decoy is a good way to divert a gobbler's attention as he scans the woods for movement or sound. The approaching gobbler may cluck or yelp softly once he's nearby to prompt the hen to respond so he can lock in on her position. But generally, if Cobb doesn't spot

the birds slipping in, hearing the gobbler drumming is his first clue a silent suitor has arrived.

"It's makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck when I hear unexpected drumming," he said. "At this point, the odds of success basically depends on the gobbler's position relative to my gun, but at least I'm in the game. But if I see the gobbler first, I can make well-timed adjustments and improve my odds."

Cobb said good camo, a well-hidden setup and constantly scanning the woods for movement and sound can lead to killing a stealthy gobbler.

"As a rule of thumb, if I see him before he sees me, I have a decent chance," he said. "Gobblers approaching silently occurs frequently, so scanning the woods around me is part of my natural hunting scheme, because I've killed a lot of longbeards this way. It may be a brief, close-quarters encounter, but it's highly intense and productive." ■

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■ By Phillip Gentry

THE NEW, ADVANCED MARINE ELECTRONICS ON THE MARKET LET YOU SEE THINGS BELOW THE WATER'S SURFACE BETTER THAN EVER BEFORE. BUT THEY'RE NO SUBSTITUTE FOR BASIC CRAPPIE-FISHING KNOW-HOW — MAYBE SOMETHING TO TAKE A GOOD ANGLER TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

NEW SONAR, SAME OLD CRAPPIE

When asked what he thought about the latest advancements in modern sonar and what they might do for his crappie fishing, TC Lloyd, owner of Southern Angling Guide Service,

HAD SOME PRETTY GOOD ADVICE.

“A lot of crappie anglers have jumped into using the advanced sonar that’s come out in the last couple of years, and they end up hating it because it doesn’t change their success rates,” he said, referring to units like LiveScope, DownScan and MegaImaging. “Their expectation is they’re gonna just automatically catch more fish because they installed this fancy system on their boat.”

Lloyd, who lives in Hartsville, S.C., and fishes crappie tournaments in both Carolinas and beyond, said he was one of the first anglers on the several Carolina-based crappie circuits to install the new Garmin LiveScope on his boat, and even he wasn’t convinced at first.

“I probably had LiveScope on my boat for three or four months before I got the feel of it,” he said. “Of course, I wasn’t using it then as much as now, but I remember one day I saw a school of fish. I didn’t really know what they were, and I started following them with the LiveScope, and I cast out and caught one. It was a crappie, then I caught another and another, and that’s when I started to figure it out.”

Lloyd credits two things for helping him become a better crappie fisherman while

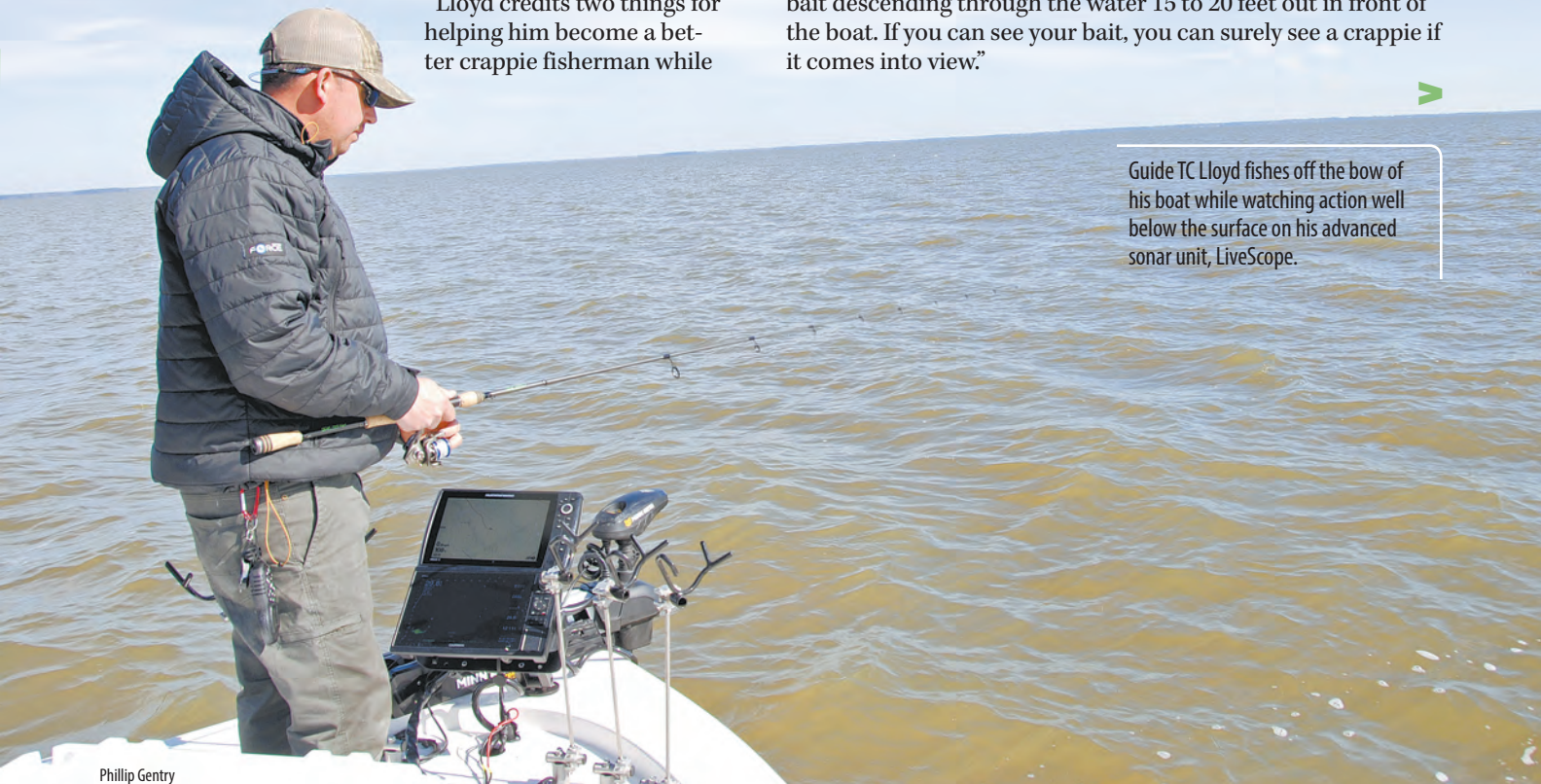
integrating modern sonar into his game plan. First, you cannot forget about seasonal crappie patterns. Even though crappie will maintain a similar pattern based on time of year, those patterns are highly subjective, based on the lake you are fishing. Even the best sonar will show no fish if there are no fish in the area.

Being born in the right generation is another plus for the Lloyd, 35.

“I guess I’m in that generation that we have used technology most of our lives, and we’re not afraid of new technology,” he said. “At the same time, I’m old enough to know that I still have to work, with or without technology, to find fish — and even harder to find tournament-quality fish.

“Work means you have to get out on the water, drop the trolling motor and start looking for fish, scanning back and forth, as long as it takes, until you can educate yourself on what you’re looking at” he said. “The LiveScope unit has three main settings: Noise Rejection, Gain and TVD. My suggestion is to adjust these three settings until you can clearly make out your bait descending through the water 15 to 20 feet out in front of the boat. If you can see your bait, you can surely see a crappie if it comes into view.”

Guide TC Lloyd fishes off the bow of his boat while watching action well below the surface on his advanced sonar unit, LiveScope.



Phillip Gentry

Lloyd said all things considered, there are two main strategies for finding and catching crappie using LiveScope. The first is to locate seasonal holding structure — brushpiles, stumps, lay-downs, bridge columns — and scan those areas to see if they're holding crappie.

The second strategy is to look for open-water fish. As a general rule, he said he finds more crappie on structure from late May through late November and more fish in open water from December through the first of May. It's not a hard-and-fast rule, and if he's not seeing open-water fish when he should, he'll immediately go to structure to look.

"If I'm fishing brush piles with the LiveScope in summer, particularly if I'm guiding, I'll still use multiple rods and live bait," he said. "You can see how the fish are oriented to the structure and how deep they are and then ease up to them."

For open-water fishing, his preference is a single, 7½-foot, light-action spinning rod, 6-pound fluorocarbon and a ¼-ounce crappie jig and soft-plastic bait. Since he's doing more pitching at a distance of 15 to 20 feet, he favors more straight-tail baits than curlytails. His bait size is more commensurate with whether he's chasing black crappie or white crappie than being able to see the bait on the screen.

"A bigger bait won't show up better on LiveScope, because it

Even when fishing known structure locations, forward-facing sonar can tell you how deep fish are and how they are oriented without getting close enough to spook them.



Phillip Gentry

LivScope has several settings that help the user see real time sonar in the best clarity to determine the species of fish in the transducer cone.

reads the density more than the size,” he said. “Some guys will add a split shot to the line, but for me, that’s too much potential for hanging up, damaging the line or losing fish.”

Regardless of whether he’s fishing on or near structure or over open water, Lloyd said he can boil LiveScoping down to four recommendations:

- You have to be able to tell if you’re looking at a crappie or some other fish. After a while, you start to recognize the shape of a crappie by how it swims and reacts, and then you can start looking for the bigger fish.

- You have to have good boat control. Sometimes crappie will only tolerate the boat getting so close to brush before they spook, and if they start spooking, you need to be able to back off and hold position.

- Casting accuracy is important. The LiveScope will tell you the distance, direction and depth, but you have to be able to put a bait on the mark.

- Bait presentation is important. Sometimes fish hit on the way down. Others want to see the bait dip and then move away, and still others, you have to hold it right in front of their face.

“I wish I could give you a magic formula, but it doesn’t work like that,” said Lloyd. “It takes time on the water, but once you start to figure it out, it’s about as addictive as fishing gets.” ■

LIVSCOPE’S ADVANTAGES ➤



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



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New sonar, same old crappie

New marine electronics like Garmin's LiveScope allows fishermen to better see and identify fish under and around their boats.

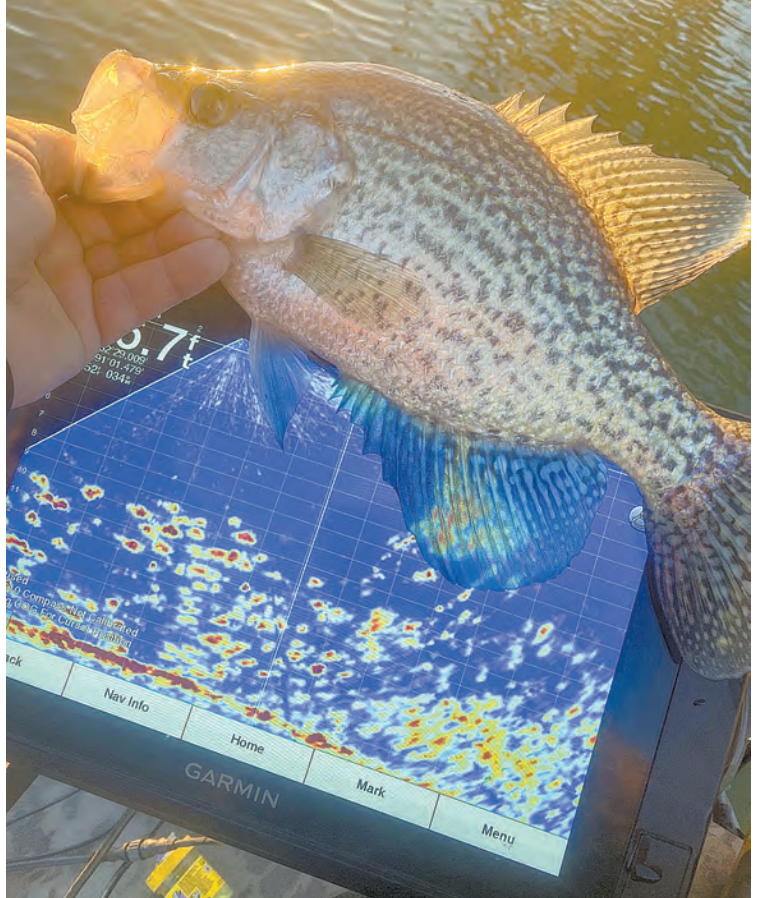
LIVESCOPE'S ADVANTAGES

According to the Garmin website (buy.garmin.com), the all-seeing Panoptix LiveScope 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, transducers are available in Forward and Down configurations, with mounting styles to suit your fishing needs.

"I've been a big fan of 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," said Kent Driscoll, a pro crappie fisherman.

The website specifications say 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. The sonar view remains steady even in rough conditions.



Phillip Gentry

Much of this new information has changed a lot of Driscoll's thinking about the way he approaches and actually fishes for crappie these days.

"I've learned so much about a fish that, up until now, I thought I knew a lot about," he said. "It has even taught me a lot about the mood of the fish I'm looking for."

Driscoll said his experience has saved him a lot of time in eliminating fishing spots that would show fish on other sonar units, but not crappie, nor the size crappie he needed to catch if he was going to be competitive in a tournament.

"It makes you slow down tremendously," he said. "I can pull up on a spot and immediately tell if it has crappie of the right size and if they are actively feeding by how they are orienting to structure. That helps me know if I need to change colors, styles or change baits altogether." ■

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Guide Eddie Moody targets the backs of creeks on the upper end of Kerr Lake to find the earliest active crappie in March.



CHECK THE CREEKS for early action on Kerr Lake's spring crappie

Once March arrives and water temperatures back in the creeks reach 50 to 55 degrees, the wait is over for Kerr Lake crappie fishermen.

Fish won't be spawning in every creek to start; knowledgeable anglers will begin in some of the smaller creeks on the upper end of the 49,500-acre lake along the North Carolina-Virginia border, and guide Eddie Moody of Roxboro, N.C., will be one of them long-lining a spread of jigs and "starting backwards".

"I like to start out in the creeks above Clarksville (Va.)," said Moody (984-363-5256), who runs Slab's Guide Service. "They're smaller and shallower, so they warm up faster. There can be as much as a 10-degree temperature difference between these creeks and those closer to the dam.

"When I'm in a creek I haven't fished yet, I start trolling in the back. The biggest fish will be the first ones back there on the spawning flats. If you start in the mouth and run into a school of 1-pound fish, you'll probably never make it to the back where the 2-pounders are. Starting backwards takes out the effect of human nature, and I know for sure what stage the fish are in."

This time of year, Moody targets female slabs, which will be bigger on average. Males crappie will sit on a spawning flat in 2 to 5 feet of water, guarding the fry. This is a popular time for tight-liners and single-pole fishermen to work the flats, but Moody will stay on the outside edge in 6 to 10 feet of water where the females will be resting after moving off the flats. They will move back and forth, laying up to 200 nests, he said.

Moody will troll a spread of 16 rods at speeds between 1 and 1.2 mph. He sets eight rods off the bow and eight off the stern, the rods being between 5 and 12 feet to spread out baits and cover as much ground as possible. Each rod will be spooled with 6-pound Slime Line and carry a jig or 1/16- of 1/32-ounce Road Runner. Moody tips all his jigs with a live minnow and prefers to dye them in Fire Dye from Pautzke Bait Company, believing the bright color is a big factor in the dingy water.

"The fish will be in different stages throughout the creek," said Moody. "If I'm not catching fish in the back, I'll work towards the mouth, staying in 6- to 10-foot depths along

the shoreline and going over any brush piles or stumps I've marked on the way. As I get closer to the mouth and the water gets deeper, I will move on down to 15 feet..." ■

— Dusty Wilson

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THE BRACKISH WATER IN THE FOUR RIVERS AROUND GEORGETOWN, S.C., ARE HOME TO SOME GREAT REDFISH ACTION, ESPECIALLY IN SPRING WHEN THINGS WARM UP AND SHAKE OFF THE WINTER COBWEBS.

■ By Jeff Burleson

FLUSH OUT RIVER REDS

Jeff Burleson

SPRING

brings anglers and outdoor lovers out of hiding, and when the warm breezes roll in, there's nothing better than cashing in on great fishing along the Carolina coast.

The spring bite is unique, featuring both freshwater and saltwater options, and in some cases, the action is great along the freshwater/saltwater dividing line. In the waters around Georgetown, S.C., the spring redfish bite can be a real page-turner and one not to miss.

Redfish, aka spot-tailed bass or puppy drum, are the Southeast's most-popular inshore gamefish for many reasons. For one, they are good on the dinner table; for another, these bronzed beauties are one of the most-exhilarating fish to chase on hook and line. And redfish are extremely tolerant of freshwater, which enables them to venture upstream into brackish-water lairs sometimes dozens of miles from the ocean.

But it takes the right estuary system to provide the habitat and adequate food resources to enable these fish to become brackish-water bandits, traveling miles from their saltwater roots.

One of these unique ecosystems is surrounds Georgetown.

The Georgetown estuary system is unique, but it's still similar to a few other systems along the coast of the Carolinas, featuring a massive amount of river-fed water. The Cape Fear, Neuse, Broad, Savannah and Cooper rivers provide unique opportunities in these types of brackish-water fisheries for redfish.

Jordan Pate of Carolina Guide Service, a veteran inshore guide in the Georgetown area, is known for catching big tarpon, gator speckled trout and all the bronzed beauties a man can ask for.

Pate loves to target redfish upstream from the freshwater/saltwater dividing line in Georgetown County.

"It's a real dynamic fishery. Reds are very tolerant of freshwater, and it can take you anywhere from several miles below the US 17 bridge to over a dozen miles above," Pate said. "The fish move up and down the river based on the salinity and the amount of freshwater flowing downriver. There is a sweet spot in salinity, but we don't always know where that is on any given day."

With millions of gallons of water coming downstream each day, a change in velocity and volume can shift move the bait and reds to different areas. Essentially, reds are following the bait, and they will be in places where it is best suited for bait-fish to live.



Jef Burleson

The area around Georgetown, S.C., features four brackish-water rivers home to redfish.

Pate emphasizes that fish are typically in the same reaches of the rivers, just above the freshwater/saltwater dividing line, but they can move well upstream and can fall downstream closer to the ocean with major changes in salinity due to the lack of rain in the watershed or flood conditions.

During normal conditions, a slight change in flow can be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

"My favorite time is when we get an inch or two of nearby rainfall, where you get localized runoff," Pate said. "Every little creek and ditch start streaming into the river, firing the reds up. It makes them congregate more, and we will have some 'lights-out' days when you catch it right."

The Lowcountry habitat is one of Pate's favorite characteristics of these lower river reaches. They are lined with living and dead cypress trees, docks, riprap and historic rice trunks — ditches cut into rice fields with dikes that could be opened or close to flood or drain the fields. The lower Georgetown area was historically famous for rice production, and the remnant rice fields are still quite abundant, creating a unique habitat

feature that congregates baitfish and reds.

"I bounce around from creek mouths, rice field trunks, cypress trees, drains and anything that will hold bait," he said. "When I find a consistent pattern that is holding fish, I find more of the same and target those areas. But it can change when the bait moves around or the salinity changes with water flow."

Even though these areas typically contain brackish water, they are in areas directly affected by the tides, and the fishing opportunities will shift as they rise and fall. Pate likes the lower half of the tide to target reds in the rivers.

"Basically, I stay away from high water. I fish on both sides of the low tide, and I shift to different banks, depending on the wind direction," he said.



Redfish will move in and out of the rivers that feed Georgetown's Winyah Bay, depending on how rainfall or the lack thereof affect the salinity in a local area.

Jeff Burleson



DESTINATION INFORMATION

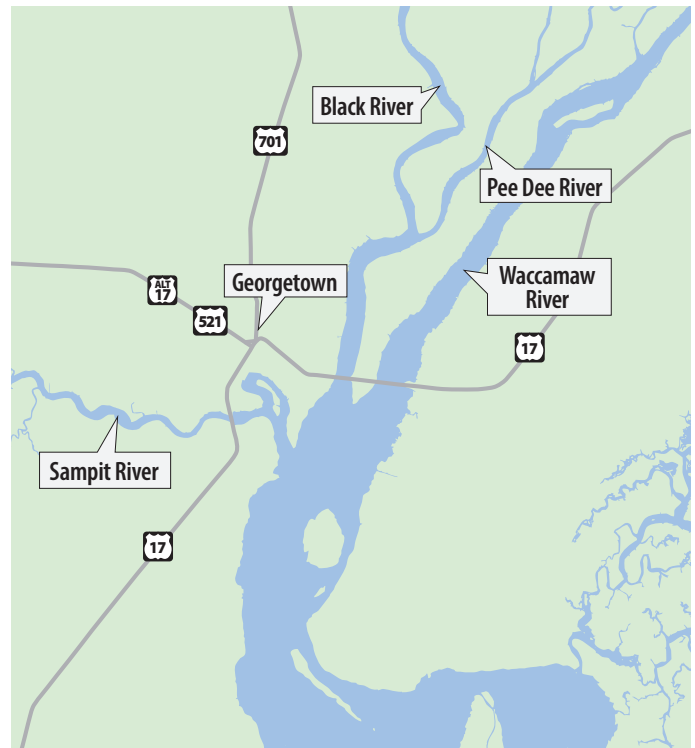
HOW TO GET THERE — The brackish waters around Georgetown, S.C., are accessible from several public boat ramps in the area, including the South Island Ferry southeast of Georgetown on South Island Road, and two public boat ramps at the mouth of the Sampit River and near downtown Georgetown. Redfish frequent the boneyards from the US 17 bridges to 4 to 6 miles upstream to as many as 12 miles up stream, depending on salinity and recent rainfall within the river basin's watershed.

WHEN TO GO — Redfish will inhabit the Waccamaw, Pee Dee, Black, and Sampit Rivers most of the year, but the spring fishing is the best when water temperatures reach the mid 60s.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Braided line is necessary in these environments. Spinning or baitcasting tackle with 7-foot, medium- to medium-heavy action rods are perfect. Gold spoons, spinnerbaits, Chatterbaits, and weedless soft plastics are all good options for river fishing for redfish. Fan-cast on all sides of the structure at different speeds; be prepared to cast multiple lures at the same structure. Concentrate fishing around areas with horizontal and vertical structure, clear water, moving water, and abundant bait.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Jordan Pate, Carolina Guide Service, 843-814-7900, www.carolinaguideservice.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — Georgetown Area Visitors Center, www.visitgeorgetown.com).



MAPS — Navionics, 800-848-5896; www.navionics.com; Capt. Seagull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainseagull-charts.com; Delorme's S.C. Atlas and Gazetteer, 800-561-5105, (www.delorme.com).

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The Georgetown area is made up of four major rivers — the Waccamaw, Pee Dee, Black and Sampit

— with the Waccamaw being the biggest and one of Pate’s favorite places to target brackish-water redfish. But wind direction can make a huge difference in where he decides to fish.

“The wind can make for poor conditions in certain areas,” he said. “I prefer a north wind on a falling tide and a south wind on a rising tide. I basically fish areas the wind doesn’t make difficult to fish.”

An unfavorable wind will make fishing conditions rough by discoloring the water and making unstable conditions, unfavorable for fishing.

It’s easy to pick lures for redfish in brackish waters, and bass fisherman are right at home in these waters, because flashy lures that

Jordan Pate



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Redfish will hold in Georgetown’s four rivers around the kind of structure where you’d find largemouth bass a little farther upstream — or in the same brackish areas.

produce a lot of vibration are excellent choices. Pate prefers gold spoons, spinnerbaits, Chatterbaits, and weedless soft plastics.

“Chatterbaits and spinnerbaits are nasty in the river,” he said. “They put off a great deal of vibration, and the fish will pounce all over them. But they are often holding tight to structure, and something you can fish around structure is a necessity.” ■



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

A STRIPED BONUS

Targeting redfish in the coastal rivers around Georgetown, S.C., can be fabulous; one of the unique aspects of the fishery is the presence of striped bass.

Stripers are anadromous fish, well known in land-locked reservoirs and in coastal waters along the eastern seaboard. Wild, sea-run striped fisheries are more common from North Carolina north to Canada, but South Carolina is lucky to have a sea-run population that utilizes the Waccamaw and Pee Dee river systems, and the brackish waters around Georgetown provide all the right stuff to accommodate a striper-feeding frenzy.

Guide Jordan Pate doesn't necessarily target stripers in the spring, but he sure will catch some in the Waccamaw and Pee Dee while fishing for reds.

"There can be a good striper bite in the Waccamaw and adjoining rivers in the spring" Pate said. "They can be a blast, especially when you aren't expecting them.

Stripers feed on the same things as redfish and other gamefish, and that makes every redfish lure and bait option ideal to put a hurting on sea-run stripers. They often travel in groups, which can make catching several of them a real possibility when one fish shows up on the end of the line.



Striped bass moving up coastal rivers in spring on their annual spawning run often run into fishermen targeting redfish.

Jeff Burleson

"We always seem to catch several stripers at a time. It's always an exciting bonus, and we know there are more in the area," Pate said.

In the spring, stripers are generally traveling towards the spawning grounds and in a feeding mode. They can travel in large groups and slash through pods of bait, creating a circus act on the surface. Any baitfish imitation that vibrates or flashes can bring these fish into the picture.

While stripers will generally be found in the same habitats as redfish, they are more typically found around places with moving water that creates pinch points. Major creek mouths, ditch mouths and riprap in deeper water with lots of current and current seams are often the best places to find stripers waiting for a tasty meal to pass by. ■

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Bass pro Boyd Duckett, a past winner of the Bassmaster Classic, has been manufacturing and selling top-drawer fishing rods for years. Duckett Fishing has added a handful of “Pro Driven” baits to the line this year, and the Triple Threat spinnerbait is one of them.

The bait, which features three arms and three willow-leaf blades in a unique horizontal configuration — sort of a mini-Alabama rig — comes in a ½-ounce size, and in four colors. The fish-head jig balances the bait,

and cosmetic details are unsurpassed, including life-like eyes and a fine-cut, color-graded skirt, plus a super-strong OMTD hook.

Greater flash and vibration are givens in this compact spinnerbait, which comes with an R-bend line tie.

MSRP: \$14.99

For more info, visit: duckett-fishing.com



PLANO FROST COOLERS

Plano, the Texas-based molding company that’s placed many of the industry’s best tackle boxes on store shelves around the country, has entered the cooler market with three models featuring the quality Plano purchasers have come to expect.

Plano’s line of “Frost” coolers features 14-, 21- and 32-quarter models, shock-resistant and injection molded to be able to keep the contents cool for up to five days, thanks in part to Plano’s Dri-Loc® seal and 1-inch, industrial-rated foam insulation.

Each model comes with a stainless-steel bottle opener on the lid, plus a small, hanging basket inside. The 32-quart model comes with a small twist drain and internal divider that can serve as a cutting board, plus integrated tie-down slots on the handle.

The coolers and drop- and shock-resistant for security and ease while travelling.

MSRP: \$99.99 to \$199.99

For more info, visit: <https://www.plano-synergy.com/new-products/>

ESCORT PS TURKEY HUNTER SHOTGUN

Escort has added to its line of semi-automatic shotguns a model specifically designed for turkey hunters, at an affordable price.

Escort’s PS Turkey Hunter comes in 12- and 20-gauge models, as well as .410, all chambered for 3-inch magnum shells. It’s got a short, 24-inch barrel, made for the close quarters hunting lots of turkey hunters are used to, and the 12-gauge model weighs only 6.9 pounds. Three interchangeable chokes, including Extended Extra Full, are included. It comes in Mossy Oak BottomLand or RealTree APG patterns, and sling studs are already mounted.

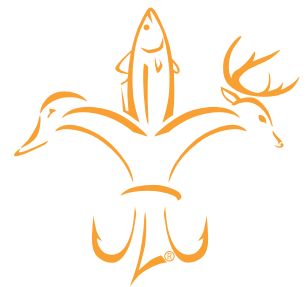
The gas-operated gun has Escort’s Smart Valve piston, which allows for flawless shucking and loading of

shells of all sizes and powers, plus the FAST loading system that allows for one-handed reloading.

The barrel is ready to accommodate a variety of Weaver mounts for scopes, and it features bright fiber optic front and rear sights for low-light hunting. The red front fiber is windage adjustable while the green fiber rear sight is both windage and elevation adjustable.

MSRP: \$499.99

For more info, visit: hatsanusa.com





PLENTY OF HOMEMADE CREATIONS WILL FOOL FISH, AND THEY'RE NOT AS DIFFICULT TO TIE THAN MOST PEOPLE THINK. HERE'S A PRIMER TO BECOMING A FLY-TIER.

■ By L. Woodrow Ross

Get tied up in FLY-TYING

Many fishermen who tie their own flies

would have you to believe that it involves infinite skill, that only a chosen few can do it successfully. Dispel that myth, and you get on the path to creating your own flies and fishing them successfully.

The first step in learning to tie flies is to have the necessary equipment. The most basic item is a fly-tying vise. It is advisable to invest a few dollars and purchase a rotary vise. The advantage is that the jaws of the vise may be rotated to wrap dubbing or thread around the hook. It is much faster and easier to use than a vise with stationary jaws.

My favorite vises are Renzettis, which start at around \$160. I use a clamp vise on my fly-tying bench and a Renzetti Traveler for a travel vise. You can purchase less-expensive brands for less than \$100, and non-rotary vises for less than \$20. They all accomplish the same task: to securely hold the hook horizontally so you can attach a thread base, dubbing, feathers or other materials to make an imitation insect will attract fish. The rotary vise merely speeds up and simplifies the process.

The tools and materials that you will need to begin the pro-

cess of tying flies include:

- **Bobbin.** This holds the thread and maintains tension for even thread application. A bobbin threader is necessary; its use is self-explanatory.
- **Scissors.** Small, sharp scissors are desirable. For some tasks, straight blades are best, for others, curved blades are helpful. Start with straight blades.
- **Half-hitch tool.** Used to quickly tie half-hitch knots to secure thread near the eye of the hook.
- **Tweezers.** Used to pick up small items such as hooks, beads, etc.
- **Hair stacker.** Used to align deer, moose or other hair for evenness before applying to the hook.
- **Whip finisher.** Finishes off the head of flies rapidly.
- **Dubbing wax.** Simplifies applying dubbing to thread before it's wrapped around the hook.
- **Head cement.** Secures thread at the eye of the hook.
- **Hackle pliers.** Holds the end of hackle to be wrapped around the hook.



The investment in your initial fly-tying setup need not be overly expensive to tie basic patterns. **OPPOSITE:** Become proficient at tying flies and you can fill a box with offerings that fish will find irresistible.

L. Woodrow Ross



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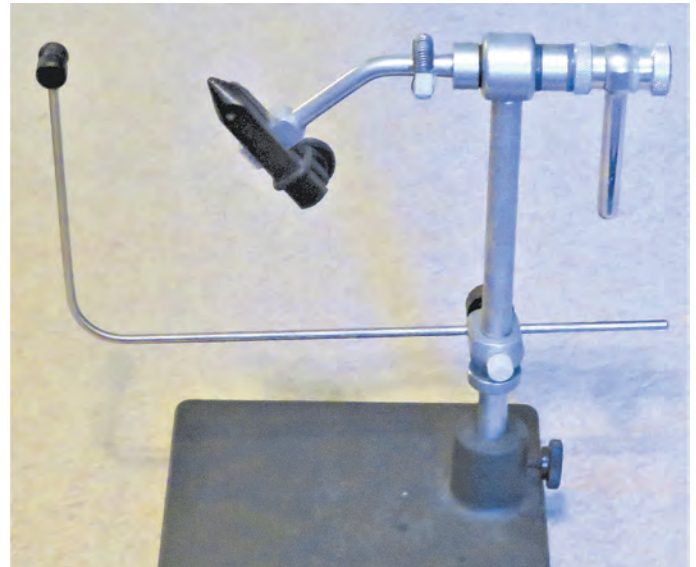
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A fly-tying vise holds the hook securely so you can wrap thread, hackle, dubbing or hair around the shaft to create a fly.

- **Thread.** 6/0 and 8/0 Uni brand thread, specialty threads, wire, lead wire, etc.

- **Hackle.** Long feathers taken from the backs of chickens, used to create flies.

- **Dubbing.** Synthetic and natural materials, often blended, to be wrapped around thread to add bulk and create the body of flies.

The object of fly-tying is to imitate insects that appeal to fish. This is accomplished with a variety of hackle, dubbing, hair and various synthetic materials that provide flash or other attributes that are attractive to the fly. Certain attributes are triggers that cause fish to react or strike.

Flies fall into four major categories: dries, nymphs, terrestrials and streamers. Dry flies imitate mature insects such as mayflies, caddisflies and stoneflies. Nymphs imitate an immature stage of these same insects. Terrestrial flies are land-based insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and inchworms. Streamers imitate small fish that are the quarry of larger fish looking for a bigger meal.

In the beginning, it is much easier to learn from a mentor than from written materials. The best scenario is to have a mentor, but read and practice on your own. When you hit a roadblock, reach out for advice. In all probability, he had the same questions earlier in his fly-tying career.

Tying flies is an interesting pursuit, and if you are expecting to do it to save money, you may be in for a shock. The real benefit of tying your own flies is that it forces you to learn more about entomology (the study of insects). The process of learning more about insects will make you a better fisherman. ■



L. Woodrow Ross lives in South Carolina's Upstate, where he enjoys traditional archery hunting, fly-fishing and fly-tying, along with many other outdoor pursuits. He has written more than 500 newspaper columns, numerous magazine articles as well as 32 books available on Amazon Kindle.

Tying four favorite PATTERNS

Each area has its own “go-to” patterns, but these four flies, one of each type, that will work throughout the country.

CADDIS DRY FLY

This pattern may be tied with deer or elk hair on standard dry fly hook sizes from No. 10 to No. 20. Attach hackle with desired color thread, near the bend of the hook. The hackle should be slightly wider than the gap of the hook. Apply dubbing wax to thread, apply

Hare’s Ear dubbing and wrap around shank of hook. Spiral wrap hackle around the hook, over the dubbing.

Both hackle and dubbing should be secured approximately 1/8-inch behind hook eye. Attach a bundle of deer or elk hair on top of the fly, tying it off behind the hook eye. Offset the hair so as the thread tightens, it will rotate to exactly the top of the hook and flare. Light gauge wire may be wrapped over the hackle and dubbing before the next step, but is optional. Secure thread at hook eye with head cement. Griffith’s is a good choice.



TELICO NYMPH

This is an old, popular pattern that utilizes black thread dubbed with yellow fur for the body, guinea feather fibers for the tail and pheasant tail fibers for the shellback. Brown hen hackle and peacock herl is spiraled over the body. This pattern may be tied on nymph hooks, sizes No. 6 to No. 16.

Secure the tail, pheasant shellback and peacock herl. Apply dubbing. Spiral peacock herl to 1/8-inch behind hook eye and secure. Pull pheasant fibers to 1/8-inch behind eye and secure. Attach hen hackle and wrap twice behind hook eye. Secure hackle and wrap thread to form head. Apply head cement.



LETORT HOPPER

Grasshoppers elicit legendary strikes in late summer. The Letort Hopper is one of the easier terrestrials to tie. Use an elongated hook in size No. 10 to No. 14. Using yellow thread, dub with yellow fur or synthetic and form body, stopping 1/4-inch behind hook eye. Attach an underwing of mottled turkey feather and an overwing of deer body hair. Spin the butt end of the deer hair to form a bulky head, slightly larger than the dubbed body. Secure thread behind hook eye and secure with head cement.



WOOLY BUGGER STREAMER

This pattern is an all-around favorite. It should be tied on elongated streamer hooks in sizes No. 2 to No. 10. It can be tied in various colors or combinations. Using thread color to match body color, attach a tail of marabou that extends past the bend of the hook by approximately two-thirds of the hook length. In order to sink the fly, attach lead wire of desired size simultaneously as tail is attached. Also, attach chenille for body and hackle that extends well past the hook gap. Spiral wrap chenille to form body, wrap lead wire and then wrap hackle to a point 1/8-inch behind hook eye. Hackle should be wrapped and spaced evenly along body length. Form head with multiple wraps of thread and secure with head cement. ■

Something as simple as a small lure enhancer like the purple Trout Trailer added to this Matrix Shad can be a big difference-maker this month when fish are finicky.



MARCH TO A DIFFERENT BEAT

FISHERMEN NEED PLENTY OF OPTIONS AS FISH BEGIN TO STIR CERTAIN DAYS

Brian Cope

At some point, anglers all over the Carolinas are happy to see March, when winter turns to spring. And even though some days are more like winter than spring, we know those long, consistently warm days are coming — and closer than they've been since the fall.

The fish like it, too, and the bite improves, no matter what species you're targeting. But as fickle as the weather can be, the fish can be just as fickle. This month, whenever you hit the water, be prepared. And be flexible.

Even with the weatherman giving out somewhat reliable predictions, smart anglers generally prepare for just about anything in March. Rain, wind, cold, heat — it's all possible, so dressing in layers and bringing along a jacket of some sort is always a good idea.

But the preparation — or over-preparation — shouldn't stop with just the clothes you're wearing. A good selection of baits and lures is also a must. The fish are warming up and easing into their spring feeding mode, but some days are better than others, and what works like a charm one day may not draw a strike the next.

GOING LIVE

Live bait is often a great choice this month, but even then, which live bait is best? Generally, whatever you can catch yourself in the area you're fishing is your best bet. So if you're hoping to catch some shrimp but your net or trap is full of mud minnows, don't toss them back. And don't give up on hunting for shrimp either. Or crabs. Or pinfish. The more choices you have, the better chance of hooking up.

The same goes for cut bait. Come armed with more than you think you'll need. Show up with only one type, and you may hit a home run, but you may strike out. Show up with two or three different types, and you'll likely have something the fish will hit consistently, something they won't, and something in-between. This month, more than probably any other, the hot bait can change day to day and even hour to hour.

Anglers who like to fish artificials fall in the same boat, but they probably find this month easier when it comes to being prepared than anglers who use natural. Their tackle boxes and boat hatches are usually full of a wide variety of lures, so

they're all set. But it's also easy for them to get stuck in a rut of using the same thing that worked this time last year, or earlier in the week, or yesterday.

TAKE A WALK

Topwater lures like the Super Spook are always good choices, and some days this month, they'll be unbeatable. But when they just aren't drawing strikes, try something slightly different, like a wake bait, or even a different-sized Spook or even another manufacturer's walk-the-dog type lure.

The Rapala Skitter Walk, the Berkley J-Walker, and the Mirrolure Top Dog all have a look slightly different look and their own subtle differences in actions. Some days, it won't matter to the fish. Other days, opting for an ever-so-slight alternative to what worked the day before can mean the difference between catching fish and getting skunked.



Brian Cope of Borden, S.C., is a retired U.S. 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.

CHANGE SIZE, MANUFACTURERS

And if you caught them hitting a D.O.A. Shrimp as hot as fire one day, but the next day they're ignoring it, something as simple as using a slightly larger or smaller bait just might get them cranked up again. Even switching to another company's shrimp might do the trick. The Betts Halo Shrimp is different enough in its profile and action that it might be the ticket.

Even swimbaits vary from one lure-maker to another. The angle of the foot on a Z-Man MinnowZ creates a different disturbance, sending slightly different sound waves into the water column than a LIVETARGET Slow-Roller.

SCENTS, LURE ENHANCERS

March is also a good month to try something a little different than your normal. If you don't often use a scent like Pro-Cure, it might make a big difference this month. Other lure enhancers like a Trout Trailer from Crappie Psychic added to the jighead, holding your soft-plastic lure in place, can also make a huge difference.

To really increase your odds no matter what mood the fish are in, this is a great month to have a rod secured in a rod holder with live or cut bait, then reel your preferred artificial lure past that bait. It's typical for many fish in late winter/early spring to follow a lure all the way to the boat but never strike.

When a fish like that suddenly happens upon a live bait or a chunk of cut bait giving off natural scent, it often strikes it immediately. The artificial lure makes it curious, and the natural lure seals the deal. ■



Come armed with a wide variety of lures this month, and don't be shy about changing frequently.

Brian Cope

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GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson



Jeff Burleson

PLAN THAT DUCK POND NOW

BUILT FROM SCRATCH, A DUCK IMPOUNDMENT IS TIME-CONSUMING, REWARDING

Duck hunters along the Eastern Flyway are blessed with a 60-day season scattered across several months. Diehards take advantage of almost every day to target their winged prizes, and others take as much time as they can get around weekends and holidays in swamps, beaver ponds, rivers, lakes and sometimes in flooded grain fields.

With duck season in the rear-view mirror, many hunters are digging for ways to make next season a better one. There is always another way to get more ducks on the water and in shooting range.

Ducks and other migratory waterfowl fly several thousand miles each year, migrating through the northern hemisphere. For such a small critter, they can travel enormous distances, but it takes energy to make these long-distance treks — a lot of it. Ducks must find rich food sources along their migration to make these trips successful.

For centuries, ducks have traveled established migratory corridors that have protection, lots of water and plenty of rich food to fuel their trek. Typically, these flyways are along major river sys-

tems and coastal areas where most of the food and water is located. Not much has changed in their migratory patterns, but the food banks in these corridors are lacking compared to historical trends because of increased development.

Due to federal and state protections of wetlands and waters of the United States, the Carolinas retain large areas of waterfowl habitat to keep ducks happy while migrating. Yes, more rich food sources can surely benefit waterfowl and keep more ducks within our states during the migration. And when more ducks come to stay, it can make a six-duck limit happen much more quickly.

BE THE FEED BAG

There are dozens of ways to improve waterfowl habitat, but one of the most important ways to keep ducks satisfied is food availability. More ducks will stick around longer if there are more rich foods available. One of the best ways to improve food availability is to create impoundments loaded with high-energy foods like corn, sorghum, millet and other agriculture crops. The best time to begin an impoundment plan is now,

regardless of the time of year.

Building an impoundment takes more effort than just digging in the dirt and planting some seeds. Half the effort of is in the planning phase. Landowners must find the best place to build an impoundment, and then they must jump through the legal hoops to make sure they are not breaking any state or federal laws doing so. Site selection is the most-important step.

A DIRTY JOB

Finding the best location for an impoundment is the most-important segment of the process. It starts with the dirt. Potential impoundment areas need to have dirt that can both hold water and be drained effectively.

Soils with the ability to hold water are loams, dominated by clay, silt and even some fine sands. Sites dominated by soils



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.

that are predominantly fine or coarse sands are incapable of holding water and should be avoided.

While it is important for sites to hold water, they must have the ability to be drained. For nine months, impoundments must be void of standing water to grow crops. Corn, sorghum, millet and chufa cannot grow well under saturated conditions. The root systems require oxygen throughout the growing season, and a well-drained to moderately well-drained site is required.

WHERE'S THE WATER?

Finally, a water source is needed to flood the pond for ducks in the fall and winter. Water can be sourced from a combination of rainfall and nearby ponds or water courses, but the best way to flood a pond is with a well and in-line pump system. With a well, landowners can always have direct access to water that can be used for both irrigation and for flooding.

Planning is critical for creating a duck pond, and the best ponds are built outside of wetland areas. Wetlands and streams are protected by the Clean Water Act of 1972; they can't be filled or cleared without a federal permit. Federal permits will be issued where the need for fill is justified, and a duck pond is not considered justification for filling wetlands. That leaves the best places to build impoundments outside of wetland areas.

But how does a landowner know if the area is considered a wetland or not? A local U.S. Department of Agriculture office, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or a private wetland consultant can determine if the proposed area contains any regulated wetlands or streams. It can take time to determine if an area is a wetland and get it verified by the regulatory agencies. That returns us to the original premise: it takes time to prepare and select the best area for a duck impoundment.

From the planning stages to construction and finally, flooding the crop, impoundments can be a long process. But it can sure be worth it when flocks of ducks make it their home during the migration. For the best results, start planning now for your next duck impoundment. ■



A lot of preparation goes into turning a piece of bare ground into a waterfowl impoundment.

Jeff Burleson

PATIENCE IS REQUIRED:

In new duck impoundments, the land has experienced a life-altering makeover where dirt has been moved in and out. It is no different than a new food plot or new agriculture field being created from scratch.

Most of the time, the topsoil has been removed, especially when a forested area has been converted to a duck pond, and many of the crucial organic debris and nutrients are missing from the equation. But it does not mean the pond will not grow anything. It will just take some time to get the pond's soil ready for production and the first year's crop may not be the best.

As soon as the site is leveled and the soil surface is prepared, the soil amendment process should be started with an initial soil test followed by liming immediately afterwards. Even if the perimeter dikes and the spillways are not yet completed, the soil amendment process should occur immediately.

Through soil amendments and trial-and-error, the field will soon get right to grow a field of gold nuggets for the incoming flights. But patience is key and it may take a few years until the ideal crops are produced. ■

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

MUST BE PERLOO

USE RICE TO STRETCH SOME LEFTOVER WILD GAME INTO A GREAT MEAL



The author mixes the ingredients in his Must Be Perloo into a cast-iron skillet for cooking **BELOW**: The finished product is a great example of late-winter comfort food for sportsmen.

Jerry Dilsaver

This month's recipe began as a refrigerator cleaning exercise and developed into this dish. It isn't quite jambalaya, but it shares the style and some ingredients, and it isn't quite paella, but it shares the style and some ingredients, too.

It's a southern dish that began by using rice as the primary filler to stretch a limited amount of meat and, except for the pre-cooked rice, it can be cooked in one cast-iron pan, it must be perloo. It really isn't quite perloo, either, but we couldn't decide what to call it, and after a lengthy discussion after a meal with no leftovers, we decided it must be perloo. Whatever you choose to choose to call it, I believe you'll like it, and it isn't difficult to prepare.

What is perloo? That's a good question. I grew up enjoying a dish my father called shrimp perloo that was shrimp, rice, tomato paste, peppers and onions, and it was good. It wasn't until much later that I realized it originated as a way to stretch a limited amount of meat by using rice.

I have some Cajun cousins who say it's a cheap knockoff of jambalaya that doesn't include the spices, and some Florida cracker cousins that call it a cheap and easy way to make paella. I like jambalaya and paella, too, so calling it a copy of one of them is okay by me.

This particular version isn't what my father made, but a quickie version that can be put together to make use of whatever meat is available. I began using it as a way to stretch partial packages



of venison and feral pig sausage, and almost everyone has enjoyed it. This version is simple and should have folks at your table asking for more.

March is an in-between time in the Carolinas and a good time to give

this a go. You should have some venison and may have or be adding feral pork. Enjoy the sunny days, and when a cold snap or rain holds you inside for a day, put this together and enjoy it.

We're almost to the excellent outdoor opportunities for Spring 2021. Daylight Saving Time begins on March 14, and spring arrives on March 20. This hour of daylight transferred to the evening and the warming weather will give sportsmen more time after work to slip into the turkey woods or drown some worms. It will also be a good time to enjoy some "Must be Perloo." The shorter prep time and the fact that any leftovers warm well make it a great meal to have when returning home a little after dark when fishing, hunting or scouting for your next outing. It's pretty good for lunch too. ■

MUST BE PERLOO

This is a sort of sideways way to make a perloo dish, but it has become a favorite over the years. The biggest difference is the meat and vegetables aren't cooked in the rice. The rice is already cooked, and this works particularly well for me, as I cook rice in bulk, then refrigerate it and have it ready to warm and eat or add into any dish I like. I used white rice for this particular meal, but brown rice also works well.

The directions of the rice package may be slightly different, especially between white and brown rice, but you will basically follow them. I like my rice fluffy and with a little flavor of its own, so I alter the rice directions just a little. When you add bouillon, do not get heavy handed, as it is very salty.

This recipe calls for venison or feral pork sausage; I like the taste of sausage and often have a partial package in the refrigerator's meat drawer. However, this can be made with almost any meat, seafood or combination of meat and seafood. Small amounts of chicken and shrimp combine well with the sausage.

Depending on the meat you use and how much fat you blend into your game, there may not be much for drippings to sauté the onions, pepper and garlic. When this happens, add a little oil, butter or non-stick cooking spray to the pan. I mix my game sausage very lean and usually have to add some buttery flavored, non-stick cooking spray to sauté the veggies. If the pan looks dry, I also give it another shot before adding the rice.

Regular readers know I'm not a stickler about the ingredients and the amounts of ingredients or spices. If you don't like something, don't add it. Conversely, if you like something a lot, add a little more. I do this with the black pepper and jalapeno peppers when I'm fixing only for myself. I have a friend in St. Augustine, Fla., who raises datil peppers. When he shares some of them, I use them in this when fixing it either for myself or my friends with robust palates who like spice. Datil peppers are a real treat, as they are lightly sweet, but they're a few notches above jalapenos on the heat scale.

The mini bell peppers are for taste and appearance. I think they're milder than larger bell peppers, and the multiple colors gives some appeal. If you can't find mini bells, use a red, orange or colored larger bell pepper. They don't have the hard edge like some green bell peppers.

This recipe calls for your choice of chopped tomatoes or Rotel. I always use Rotel when I can. The choice of original, mild, hot

PREPARATION:

A note on cooking the rice. Basically, follow the directions on the package. I add a little more water than required so the rice will be fluffy and not stick to the pan. I also use about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a teaspoon of Better than Bouillon — or a similar amount of bouillon cubes — per cup of water. Most package directions suggest a little butter or oil in the pan to prevent sticking. I use a splash of olive oil, even if the directions don't suggest it.

Chop the onion and peppers. Cook the sausage until almost done and remove from pan. If you have a second meat, cook or warm it with the sausage. Sauté onion, peppers and garlic in sausage drippings. Drain the chopped tomatoes (Rotel) and chopped green chilies and stir into pan.

or any of the other blends is up to you. I don't think the hot is that hot, but be warned; it uses habanero peppers, while the others use green chilies.

The last thing on the ingredients list is smoked paprika — a nice way to add a little hint of smoked flavor to the mix. I have friends who like a variety of sauces from soy sauce to sriracha sauce. If you like a particular sauce with rice, try it on a bite or two.

Must Be Perloo is really tasty and very simple to make. With the rice already cooked, prepping the peppers and onion is the hardest and most time-consuming part. If you cook rice just for this, its simmer time should give you plenty of time to prep the veggies. This is not a conventional way to make perloo, but since it isn't jambalaya or paella and counts on rice to make the meal, as the name implies, it Must Be Perloo. We occasionally find ourselves intentionally having leftover or extra portions of meat that are too small for a meal, but can be stretched into one with a few veggies and rice. This is comfort food that is filling and I'm pretty sure if you try it once, you'll have it again.

Enjoy! ■



Stir in rice and blend well over low heat for a couple of minutes. Add sausage and any second meat to mixture and warm to serving temperature while adding salt and pepper. Serve warm. Sprinkle paprika or sauces over individual servings to taste.

This is pretty much a meal in itself. A green salad or lettuce wedge is a nice addition and a light dessert, like flan or pudding, caps it off well. ■



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

INGREDIENTS:

½ to 1 pound venison or feral pig sausage

3 cups cooked rice

½ sweet onion

1 Jalapeno pepper

1 pack variety mini bell peppers

½ can chopped green chilies

½ can chopped tomatoes or Rotel

2 tsp chopped garlic

Salt, pepper (to taste)

Smoked paprika (to taste)

Sauces as desired

SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Isolated trees in shallow water are great targets for bass fishermen this month, according to guide Brett Mitchell.



Terry Madewell

MARCH: BREAKOUT MONTH

SPAWNING PUTS STRIPERS, LARGEMOUTH BASS, CRAPPIE IN ANGLERS' CROSSHAIRS

Santee Cooper is a shallow-water fishing paradise, and it's tough to beat the skinny water action of March. Multiple species of fish are in spawning mode, with stripers, largemouth bass and crappie in their annual reproductive rituals.

STRIPERS UPSTREAM

The striped bass spawning run is wide-open by March, and the action encompasses the upper reaches of Lake Marion and the Congaree and Wateree rivers.

Pack's Landing is an excellent starting point for locating stripers on their upstream journey, and by March, the saltwater herring run is also under way. The commercial season for herring opens in March, and this prime bait is usually available after that.

Guides Andy and Steve Pack said big

herring is the No. 1 bait for stripers on the spawning run.

"The river bends and sandbars, and even the flats in the upper end of the lake, are excellent targets to fish as stripers move upstream," Andy Pack said. "Fish the bends where sandbars form in the river, and on the flats, look for high spots along deeper runs."

Pack (803-452-5514) said typically, during the early part of the run, chunks of cut herring are the best bait.

"The majority of fish will bite cut bait best, but I usually have one or two live bait rigs out as well," he said. "Herring in any form is a fisherman's best bet."

BASS ON THE BEDS

Brett Mitchell, who guides out of Black's Camp on the Diversion Canal, summarized March bass fishing by saying the

action is phenomenal on both lakes.

"I think more bass are on the beds during March, and working the beds as well as pre- and post-spawn cover is the most productive strategy," he said.

Mitchell (803-379-7029) said the weather is hard to predict and impacts shallow-water fishing, but his experience has shown that the first big spawn will be in the first half of March.

"Depending on weather, we'll sometimes have limited spawning action in late February and early March, especially for really big bass," he said.

Mitchell will focus on small changes of



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.

depth and cover, and he said accurate casting to tiny targets is vital. He employs multiple lures when working shallow water, with twin-bladed spinnerbaits being a favorite. Lipless and shallow-running crankbaits are also excellent, as are multiple types of soft plastics

He also said fishing cypress and gum trees is highly productive. "Trees well back on a flat in 1½ feet of water are good during March, but I also like fishing trees in slightly deeper water, especially during early March," he said.

Mitchell prefers isolated trees over clumps of trees, and he recommends fishing any woody cover with two different baits — a spinnerbait and soft-plastic lure as an example — before hitting the next target.

CRAPPIE IN CREEK, COVES

Multiple techniques can provide limit stringers of slabs this month, and weather and water conditions play a role in the best technique.



March is prime time to catch spawning crappie in shallow water in the Santee Cooper lakes.

Terry Madewell

Guide Dave Hilton said crappie will be scattered in multiple depths of water; he prefers to target brush piles and fish attractors in both Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie.

"Crappie are on the move from deep to shallow water and back again throughout the month," he said. "I fish brush from shallow water down to 18 feet and find scads of fish. As fish move in and out of shallow water, they'll stage on these brush piles and are like sitting ducks. But I may have to check brush in 8 feet of water one day and maybe 12 feet the next. Don't linger at any given depth if you're not catching fish."

Hilton (843-870-4734) said tight-lining minnows over the deeper, woody cover is a the most-productive tactic in both lakes.

"I can almost always find good places to fish, but the key is being able to control the boat and fish the brush effectively," he said.

Another tactic is long-line trolling, and that technique is lethal during March. Fish the creeks and coves along the deeper creek channels or ditches all the way across the flats. Many of these flats are littered with stumps, making them ideal crappie hotspots.

A third tactic is to fish far back in the creeks, coves and into the shallow-water areas and use either jigs or live minnows around visible, shallow-water targets. Fallen trees, brush, weeds and stumps are excellent targets, and light spinning tackle or long poles with fixed line-length enables anglers to work around crappie-attracting cover. ■



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Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

NEW RIVER SPECKS BEGINNING TO STIR

An angler from Maryland caught this 9½-pound speckled trout while fishing with guide Ricky Kellum in January.

Trout action picks up in tributary creeks as water temperature starts to rise

Fishing in inshore waters begins to awaken along North Carolina's central coast this month, especially for spotted seatrout.

No one knows that better — or is in a better location — than guide Ricky Kellum of Jacksonville. He knows when and where the bite heats up for early spring specks in the New River.

"(March) is the month when you can catch specks way up the river's creeks," said Kellum, 53, who runs The Speckled Specialist Guide Service. "In March, we catch bigger trout in the creeks. They can weigh up to 4 or 5 pounds, and it's not unusual to get a 6-pounder.

"French's, Wallace, Duck, Northeast, Southwest, Mill and Stones creeks all can be good," said Kellum (910-330-2745), who uses artificial and live bait to target trout, depending upon the skill level of his clients.

Water temperature isn't a crucial factor, he said, but if it's 50 degrees or higher,

specks generally will actually chase lures and live baits.

"It's crazy how trout can be so active when it's cold," said Kellum, who often catches his biggest specks in January and February. "The river and creeks have a lot of natural springs. That water helps keep water temperatures higher than expected.

"The biologists say if the temperature gets above 50, we can catch 'em with topwater lures. Sunny days that warm up mud bottoms also get trout going."

His go-to surface lures include Zara Spooks, Spook Jrs. and Top Dogs with chartreuse heads and pink or white bodies.

"I also throw a chartreuse shrimp," Kellum said. "I use bright colors when the river has dark water."

Kellum's favorite sinking lures include a ¼-ounce Billy Bay Halo Shad, Betts Halo Shad or Perfect Sinker Shrimp.

"A (MirrOlure) MR 17 can be really good in March, too," he said.

If his clients aren't skilled in fishing

artificial lures, Kellum uses live mullets or mud minnows on slip-cork rigs.

"I fish them a foot or so off the bottom," he said.

With the completion of the New River Oyster Highway last spring, local anglers enter their third season of fishing oyster reefs stretching more than 30 miles from Wilson Bay to Stones Bay near Camp LeJeune.

"It's added greatly to the river's fishing," said Kellum, whose clients discovered a trout pattern by casting off the reef 20 yards on one trip "just for something to do" while waiting for the red drum bite to begin.

Kellum's tackle includes 7-foot, medium-action, fast-taper Cashion Rods mated to 2500 series Stradic spinning reels spooled with 10-pound Sufix braid and a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader, depending on water clarity. ■

— Craig Holt

NEARSHORE REEFS COVERED BY SHEEPSHEAD

Murrells Inlet is jumping-off port for great late-winter, early spring action on convict fish

Early spring is a unique time for saltwater anglers; there is always something to do to get a tug on the end of the rod and to bring fish back home for dinner.

Nothing says spring like floating in the ocean with a bucketful of live fiddler crabs and hunting down sheepshead. The fishing fires off at nearshore reefs with big, fat sheepshead in big schools, and the collection of nearshore reefs off South Carolina's Murrells Inlet is one of the true meccas for these striped fish.

Justin Whitten of Ambush Sport Fishing Charters cashes in on sheepshead every spring, and he doesn't have to go very far from his home base to find them.

"Sheepshead push off to the nearshore reefs in winter when the water gets cold," said Whitten (843-685-9910). "They move to the reefs to spawn and feed on barnacles."

The waters off the Grand Strand offer numerous shipwrecks and artificial reefs. Most, if not all of the reefs, will hold sheepshead during winter and early spring, but some are better than others.

"I prefer the reefs in 30 to 40 feet of water," he said. "They are a little further out, but they get less pressure from other fisherman compared to the reefs closer to the Inlet. The reefs with less pressure are the best ones to fish."

Sheepshead at these reefs will frequently shift around from place to place within the vicinity of the reef structure.

Whitten will start on one side and drop for 20 to 30 minutes, and if he doesn't start lighting them on fire, he'll quickly move to a different part of the reef.

"The fish will shift around the reef on different days," Whitten said.

"We must find them sometimes, and we will even drop down a camera and pan around to see them. The camera is the easiest way to find them, but the water isn't always clean enough to see them."

A high-definition sonar unit with down-scan and side-scan capabilities can also help find good structure, and even the fish themselves. If anglers lack a high-definition system,

just about any unit can show vertical structure where these fish hang out.

But all reef structure isn't created equal. Some sections are better than others.

"The biggest pieces of structure hold them better than the smaller pieces," he said. "We scan the bottom and set up on the largest piece of structure available and then go from there."

Sheepshead eat a variety of foods, including crustaceans, small fish and even squid. The bait of choice is a fiddler crab. Whitten hooks a fiddler to a No. 1 or 1/0 J-hook on a typical Carolina rig, with an egg sinker and 14 to 16 inches of leader.

The reefs can be full of sheepshead, but they will also have black sea bass and black drum, and they all will pounce on a fiddler crab when dropped on their dinner plate.

"Sheepshead definitely share the reefs with sea bass and some other fish. We often pick through the by-catch to get to the sheepshead, but we will catch some keeper-sized black drum, sea bass and even a few chunky tautog, too," he said. ■

— Jeff Burleson

Nice sheepshead will blanked nearshore reefs out of Murrells Inlet during the winter and early spring.



Jeff Burleson



Ben Powers

LOWCOUNTRY WAHOO BLITZ

Offshore anglers out of Charleston prepare for battle

This big wahoo is the kind of action that Ben Powers, a charter captain out of Charleston, expects to have on nice days in March.

March is a time many South Carolina anglers have been looking forward to for several months, and the Lowcountry wahoo bite is one reason. These fish get cranked up offshore of Charleston this month, and anglers who've been suffering through the winter are happy to see them and eager to catch them.

March can be a cruel month. With temperatures ranging from winter-cold to spring-like, with windy and rainy days mixed in, it can be a tease to anglers itching to don shorts and flip-flops. But wahoo are out there, so if you watch the weather closely and pick your days, a trip can be one you won't forget.

Trolling is the key to catching wahoo, but some anglers disagree on the correct speed. Some troll as slowly as 2 knots. Others crank it up to anywhere from 12 to 20 knots. Many start off trolling fast while scanning the ocean, looking for tell-tale signs of potential wahoo, then slow down if they're not getting consistent bites. Once they slow down, they focus their efforts on areas they have pinpointed as having the most potential.

Anglers find wahoo a number of ways, and they can usually find plenty without running all the way to the Gulf Stream. Temperature breaks are always good spots. Simply looking for life is also popular.

"Wherever you see signs of life, that's always a good place to troll, whether it's dolphins, baitfish, diving birds or even sea turtles," said Jeremy Burham, a Lowcountry offshore angler. "Any

type of live activity is a likely spot to find wahoo this time of year."

A basic spread for wahoo trolling includes rods off each side of the boat. The lines from these rods are let out the farthest. Rods off each corner have their lines slightly shorter. This helps keep the lures from tangling when turning the boat. Another rod is used straight off the back of the boat. This line is the shortest, and anglers like to keep that lure in the prop wash at the tail end of whitewater coming off the motor.

Skirted and naked ballyhoo are popular for trolling, but other lures like Ilanders, Yo-Zuri Bonitas, Blue Water Candy Hoodinis, and MagBay MagTrak lures also see plenty of action.

For anglers like Ben Powers of Reel Time Charters out of Charleston, catching a wahoo is one of the thrills March provides. It's also challenging. These fish don't come to the boat easily, and it requires stout gear, including reels with large line capacities.

"I hooked a good one on a MagBay MagTrak lure that I had about 100 feet behind the boat, right in the prop wash," said Powers (843-475-9660). "He dumped every bit of 500 to 600 yards of line. He was making some gnarly head shakes during the whole fight. It was just constant give and take. I was taking a little line, giving a little line. That's what this game is all about."

On a stout offshore rod, Powers uses a Shimano Talica II 50 reel loaded with 80-pound braided line connected to a short, 200-pound cable leader, which is connected to the lure. ■

— Brian Cope

BREAK OUT WAHOO!

Cape Fear waters fill up with fish in March

Fishermen are already taking advantage of all weather windows to head offshore of Cape Fear, and their odds of scoring big increase as March arrives. The fishing isn't as consistently good as it will be later, but fish are there to be caught, and wahoo lead the list of possible catches.

These turbocharged cousins of king mackerel move along the temperature breaks of the Gulf Stream all year. Their numbers drop during the winter but begin increasing as the weather and water begins to warm — usually in March.

The Gulf Stream is more than 50 miles from any of the inlets along North Carolina's southern coast, but a March ride to 30 to 50 fathoms often pays off with an abundance of wahoo fillets, plus occasionally a surprise tuna or dolphin for the fish box — or even a billfish release.

Capt. Joe Seegers of the *Hooked Up* out of Southport, N.C., said wahoo fishing off North Carolina's coast compares with anywhere in the world.

Seegers said finding clean, warm water between 150 and 300 feet of depth will usually produce wahoo off Cape Fear. Several popular spots in this area include the 100/400, Blackjack Hole, Steeples and Same Ole. A warm-water eddy is usually sweeping over at least one of these structures, and it brings in baitfish, which attract the predators.

"I look at the seawater thermals before leaving and head out to one of these structures that is showing 72 to 76 degrees," Seegers said. "Then, I look for a hard temperature change of 2 degrees or more in a quarter-mile. In a big boat with a fly bridge, you can often see even slight color changes or rips that might

Justin Conrad caught this 93½-pound wahoo on a January 2021 shakedown trip for Capt. Justin Askins' boat, *Social Distance*.



BREAK OUT WAHOO continued >



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- **Astro Tables** is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).
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2021 MAR		BEST DAYS			
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
Mon 1	█	█	█	█	55
Tue 2	█	█	█	█	42
Wed 3	█	█	█	█	33
Thu 4	█	█	█	█	34
Fri 5	█	█	█	█	41
Sat 6	█	█	█	█	28
Sun 7	█	█	█	█	22
Mon 8	█	█	█	█	21
Tue 9	█	█	█	█	22
Wed 10	█	█	█	█	32
Thu 11	█	█	█	█	43
Fri 12	█	█	█	█	55
Sat 13	█	█	█	█	62
Sun 14	█	█	█	█	53
Mon 15	█	█	█	█	46
Tue 16	█	█	█	█	38
Wed 17	█	█	█	█	37
Thu 18	█	█	█	█	40
Fri 19	█	█	█	█	43
Sat 20	█	█	█	█	50
Sun 21	█	█	█	█	62
Mon 22	█	█	█	█	53
Tue 23	█	█	█	█	48
Wed 24	█	█	█	█	48
Thu 25	█	█	█	█	57
Fri 26	█	█	█	█	66
Sat 27	█	█	█	█	76
Sun 28	█	█	█	█	78
Mon 29	█	█	█	█	66
Tue 30	█	█	█	█	54
Wed 31	█	█	█	█	41

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LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
9:00 PM	1:03 am - 3:19 am	8:21 AM	1:28 pm - 3:44 pm	○	Perigee
10:10 PM	2:03 am - 3:59 am	8:54 AM	2:28 pm - 4:24 pm	○	
11:20 PM	3:05 am - 4:41 am	9:28 AM	3:30 pm - 5:06 pm	○	
	4:08 am - 5:24 am	10:06 AM	4:33 pm - 5:49 pm	○	
12:31 AM	5:11 am - 6:13 am	10:49 AM	5:36 pm - 6:38 pm	○	Half
1:39 AM	6:14 am - 7:06 am	11:37 AM	6:39 pm - 7:31 pm	○	
2:44 AM	7:14 am - 8:02 am	12:32 PM	7:39 pm - 8:27 pm	○	Low
3:42 AM	8:13 am - 9:01 am	1:33 PM	8:38 pm - 9:26 pm	○	
4:33 AM	9:04 am - 10:00 am	2:36 PM	9:29 pm - 10:25 pm	○	
5:16 AM	9:52 am - 10:58 am	3:40 PM	10:17 pm - 11:23 pm	○	
5:52 AM	10:35 am - 11:53 am	4:42 PM	11:00 pm - 12:18 am	○	
6:24 AM	11:12 am - 12:48 pm	5:43 PM	11:37 pm - Midnight	○	
6:53 AM	11:46 am - 1:42 pm	6:42 PM	Midnight - 1:13 am	○	New
8:20 AM	1:20 pm - 3:32 pm	8:39 PM	12:11 am - 2:07 am	○	Begin DST
8:46 AM	1:52 pm - 4:22 pm	9:35 PM	1:45 am - 3:57 am	○	
9:12 AM	2:25 pm - 5:11 pm	10:32 PM	2:17 am - 4:47 am	○	
9:40 AM	3:00 pm - 6:02 pm	11:28 PM	2:50 am - 5:36 am	○	
10:11 AM	3:37 pm - 6:53 pm		3:25 am - 6:27 am	○	Apogee
10:45 AM	4:18 pm - 7:44 pm	12:26 AM	4:02 am - 7:18 am	○	
11:24 AM	5:02 pm - 8:38 pm	1:23 AM	4:43 am - 8:09 am	○	Spring
12:09 PM	5:51 pm - 9:31 pm	2:19 AM	5:27 am - 9:03 am	○	Half
1:01 PM	6:44 pm - 10:24 pm	3:13 AM	6:16 am - 9:56 am	○	High
1:59 PM	7:42 pm - 11:14 pm	4:04 AM	7:09 am - 10:49 am	○	
3:03 PM	8:40 pm - 12:02 am	4:50 AM	8:07 am - 11:39 am	○	
4:10 PM	9:41 pm - 12:47 am	5:32 AM	9:05 am - 12:27 pm	○	
5:18 PM	10:41 pm - 1:31 am	6:10 AM	10:06 am - 1:12 pm	○	
6:28 PM	11:45 pm - Midnight	6:44 AM	11:06 am - 1:56 pm	○	
7:39 PM	Midnight - 2:11 am	7:17 AM	12:10 pm - 2:36 pm	○	Full
8:51 PM	12:46 am - 2:52 am	7:50 AM	1:11 pm - 3:17 pm	○	
10:04 PM	1:51 am - 3:33 am	8:24 AM	2:16 pm - 3:58 pm	○	Perigee
11:17 PM	2:55 am - 4:17 am	9:02 AM	3:20 pm - 4:42 pm	○	

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

BREAK OUT WAHOO continued >

signify a temperature break. These are harder to see in an outboard boat, so you should pay more attention to the temperature gauge.

"We fast-troll a lot in the fall when almost all the water is warm, but not so much during the winter and spring," Seegers said. "This time of year, you're moving through colder water to get to the

warmer water, so stay at cruising speed until you reach warm water. Once I find the right water, I set a spread of rigged baits and work the area. The exception would be fast-trolling to move up or down the break and wanting to fish while covering ground."

Seegers said that clean, blue water is more important than the actual

temperature, but you must have water that is noticeably warmer than inshore and usually in the 70s. He also suggested having some mono or fluoro rigs ready to switch out in the event you spot a school of tuna or dolphin. They sometimes bite wire rigs but prefer mono or fluoro leaders. ■

— Jerry Dilsaver

WATEREE RIVER FILLS with hungry striped bass as March arrives

Strippers have been active on many waterways across South Carolina throughout the winter. One place where fishing really picks up in March is the upper reaches of the Wateree River. Fishing there gives new meaning to the fish's popular nickname: "rockfish."

"The Wateree River is one of the most-diverse bodies of water in the Midlands," said Jason Wolfe of Wolfe's Guide Service. "The upper stretch (from) just below the Lake Wateree Dam down to the US 1 bridge starts off looking like a mountainous river. It's full of shoals, rapids, huge rocks and boulders. Within a few miles downriver, the river levels out. The rapids are gone, the water is much calmer and it begins to look more like a Midlands or Low-country river."

Stripers travel the whole length of the river, coming up out of the Santee Cooper lakes, and this month, it's the rocky areas in the upper portion on which Wolfe focuses. The stripers are active here, and catching them involves casting into the heavy current, the eddies and the slack water around all the big rocks.

"That water ripping through those shoals creates a lot of disturbance," said Wolfe (803-487-3690). "The stripers love to hang around them, because the water here is highly oxygenated, the current pushes baitfish tumbling through, and the slack areas in between give the stripers a place to take a break out of the current to wait for the baitfish tumbling by."

Wolfe uses wake baits, casting them into the churning water created by the rocky shoals and using a steady retrieve. The Cordell Redfin Shad is his go-to lure. He said this relatively inexpensive lure just flat-out works. When the bite slows down or is especially tough, he mixes it up with a Megabass i-Loud, a premium, jointed-body wake bait with a rear prop that provides more movement, action and sound. The rear prop leaves a trail of bubbles that stripers key in on in the slack water.

The section of water from Wateree Dam to the end of the rocks is not an especially large area, but Wolfe said you can spend a whole day in it and never cast to every likely striper hole. It's also an area that requires caution along with the right equipment.

"You really need an aluminum boat with a jet-drive outboard here," he said. "You can break a prop and get in some serious trouble real quickly otherwise."

The churning water of the upper reaches of the Wateree River are full of hungry stripers like these this month.



Brian Cope

Wolfe also said it's a good idea to cast directly behind your boat at times.

"The current break that your boat is making — it doesn't take long at all for stripers to use that to set up in. They are always looking for anything that breaks the current like that. Once you're anchored, stripers will show up right in that break and set up to ambush prey. Remember to cast there frequently," he said. ■

— Brian Cope

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	36"	1/day+
Bluefish	none	& 3/day 5/day
Red drum (channel bass, puppy drum)	18" min., 27" max.	1/day
Black drum	14" min., 25" max.	10/day
Flounder	Closed	Closed
Dolphin (mahi-mahi)	none	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw Grouper	closed	closed
Wahoo	none	2/day
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sea bass (north of Hatteras)	12.5" TL	15/day
Sea bass (south of Hatteras)	13" TL	7/day
Yellowfin/Bigeye tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	4/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12" TL	1/day
Snappers: Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Sheepshead	10"	10/day
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day
Striped bass ^	28"-35" TL max (ocean)	1/day
Hickory shad	None	10/day
American shad	closed	closed

^ see NCWRC/NCDMF regs for inshore Management Area limits. % Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit hmspermits.noaa.gov. % 5 bluefish per day for recreational anglers on for-hire or charter vessels; 3 bluefish per day otherwise. +May 1-31, no more than 2 per day per vessel, except for-hire, 4 per vessel per day.

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/day
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/day
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	36" FL	1/day&
Bluefish	None	15/day
Black drum	14" minimum 27" maximum TL	5/day
Redfish (red drum, channel bass)	15" minimum 23" maximum TL	2/day
Flounder (state waters)	14" TL	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	closed	closed
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day#
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sheepshead	14"	10/day (30 per boat)
Spadefish	None	20/day (agg. grouper)
Black sea bass	13"	7/day
Dolphin	20" FL	10/day (60 per boat)
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin/Bigeye tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Tarpon	77" FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12"	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster snapper	12" TL	10/day#
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day

% For shark seasons, bag and size limits, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division, 888-872-8862 or hmspermits.noaa.gov. # Check with the SAFMC at www.safmc.net or 843-571-4366. & Cobia, 1 per person per day up to 6 per boat. Closed May 1-31 south of Jeremy Inlet, 1 per person, up to 3 per boat, after June 1 south of Jeremy Inlet. # No more than 6 redfish per boat.

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

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



Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Mason Purcell

Mason Purcell, 7, of Hillsborough, N.C., killed his first turkey on opening day of North Carolina's 2020 youth season.



Charlotte Beckham

Charlotte Beckham of Columbia, S.C., killed her first deer last fall in Kershaw County.



Mike Borski

Mike Borski of Yardly, Pa., caught this flounder while fishing with Butch Foster of Yeah Right Charters out of Southport, N.C.



Nicholas Flanigan

Nicholas Flanigan, 14, of Fort Mill, S.C., boated this 41½-inch bull red last Sept. 26 off Oak Island, N.C.



Dallas Brooks

Dallas Brooks from Chatham County, N.C., caught this 4-pound catfish from Jordan Lake on July 31, 2020.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

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

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433 Hollinswood Ave.,
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103
or to images@CarolinaSportsman.com

Digital images must be at least 500KB and in jpeg format. Print photos cannot be returned.



Ron Dills

Ron Dills caught this 22-inch redfish near Oriental, N.C., on Aug. 18, 2020.



Seth Meijer

Seth Meijer, 11, from Terra Ceia, N.C., killed his first buck, this 9-pointer, in Northampton County on Oct. 25, 2019.



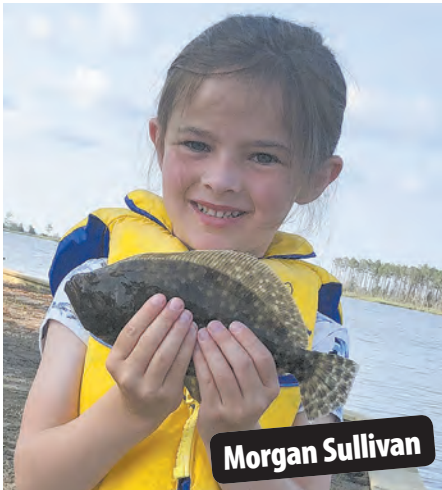
John Goins

John Goins of Winston-Salem, N.C., christened a new boat on Oct. 16, 2021, catching this nice bull red in the Oak Island area. He was fishing with his brother, Michael, and *Carolina Sportsman* columnist Jerry Dilsaver.



Davis Huckabee

Davis Huckabee, 12, caught this nice catfish out of Lake Marion on Oct. 17, 2020



Morgan Sullivan

Morgan Sullivan of Mesic, N.C., caught this tiny flounder on Gulp minnow in Bear Creek.



Noah Brown

Noah Brown of Whittier, N.C., caught and released this 24-inch, 5-pound flounder last June 29 near Ocean Isle Beach.



Frankie Cooke

Frankie Cooke killed this 8-point, 175-pound buck in Columbus County, N.C., last season.



Will Rose

Will Rose and his father, Dusty Rose, of Smithfield, N.C., celebrate this farm-pond bass caught June 24, 2020.



James Brooks

James Brooks of Siler City, N.C., caught this 23-inch red on a live finder mullet near Carolina Beach Inlet on Sept. 3, 2020.



Mark Smith

Mark Smith tagged this fine gobbler near Abbeville, S.C., last spring.

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