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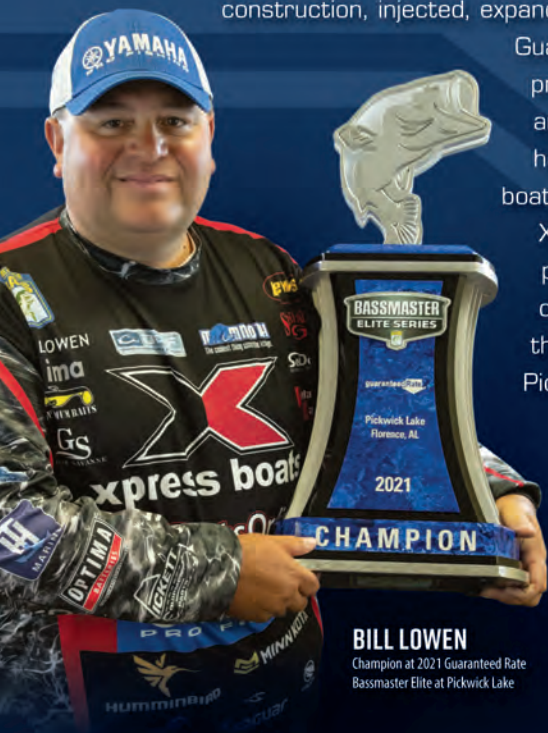


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FROM THE TOP
DOWN

30
SIR WALTER
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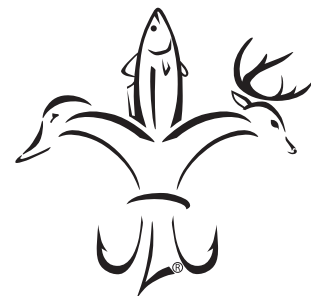
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Two classes of bass baits take over this month on largemouths in the Carolinas: topwater plugs and spinnerbaits. Learn how, when and why to fish them. Photo by Brian Carroll.



Carolina
SPORTSMAN

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Monday thru Friday, 7 am to Midnight
Saturday & Sunday, 9 am - 6 pm EST

CAROLINA SPORTSMAN (USPS #012969) is published monthly by Carolina Publishing Inc., Allen J. Lottinger, Founder, 14236 Highway 90, P.O. Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039. Mailed at periodicals postage rates and paid at Boutte, La., and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Carolina Sportsman, PO Box 433294, Palm Coast, FL 32143. All rights reserved. Reproduction of contents is strictly prohibited without permission of Carolina Sportsman. **EDITORIAL** information number is 336.416.9631. Editorial guidelines can be obtained by writing Carolina Sportsman, 433 Holinswood Ave., Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103. Carolina Sportsman is not responsible for the loss of queries, manuscripts or other materials.

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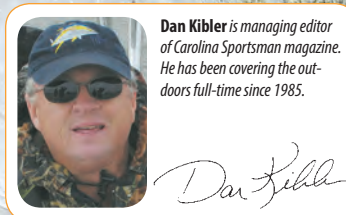
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Outdoor
UPDATE
with
Dan Kibler



Dan Kibler

MAY POLES: WE CALL THEM RODS

IF THERE'S A BETTER FISHING MONTH IN THE CAROLINAS, SHOW ME

I have killed a few turkey gobblers in May, caught my share of May bass, crappie, rainbow trout and stripers. But there's little question that the fifth page on the calendar seems a little bit brighter

because outdoorsmen in the Carolinas have so many options on their plates. It's almost tough to do it all.

The moderating weather has left all hints of winter well behind, and most of the time, the heat that portends summer won't arrive until the end of the month. It's that kind of weather that really makes fishermen of all suits happy beyond belief.

The website for a real-estate company that handles vacation rentals at a particular beach refers to spring and fall as "shoulder seasons." I haven't quite figured out the analogy, but I know that May and October are quite similar — the weather is just heading in

opposite directions.

The big draw for me in May is the opportunity to head for the coast. I know, there is a good speckled trout bite in April in a lot of places; it's a great time to go offshore and catch tuna. But in my household, April is for turkey gobblers. My affection for the sport is so complete that I can't remember the last time I caught a bass on a spinnerbait. I remember taking a day off in

April 1994 and instead sitting in a bass boat on Jordan Lake outside of Pittsboro, N.C. I caught a 7-8 and a 6-13 on the same little crankbait, 300 yards apart, on different pieces of riprap. I thought, "I've got to do this more often." I haven't. There are gobblers to work.

In May, after turkey season ends, my attention turns to speckled trout, redfish and flounder. Well, scratch the flounder, unless I'm fishing in South Carolina. In the next few days, I'll be planning a trip down there to fish topwater for speckled trout, maybe mud minnows under a float for flounder, a spinnerbait or a jig and swimbait for redfish. The numbers of gamefish are about equal to October, but the big advantage is, the amount of bait isn't. Inshore saltwater fish have to be a lot more aggressive in May than October, because the bait buffet isn't as complete.

Spanish mackerel are another draw. My wife can do wonders with one on a broiling pan, with just a hint of lemon juice. They're my favorite oily fish. Along some parts of the coast, king mackerel move in close enough that plenty are caught by the denizens on the ends of ocean fishing piers. Bull reds are moving in from their nearshore winter haunts. Offshore, it's big dolphin time, and about the only time you have a chance to catch a yellowfin tuna anymore, at least south of Cape Hatteras. Last but not least, it's when cobia make their way up the coast from Florida, just like the snowbirds heading north in spring, except the snowbirds are in big yachts and sailboats on the ICW, and cobia taste better.

I wish May lasted longer than 31 days. Try and wring every ounce of fishing fun out of it — after you fill that last gobbler tag. ■



Mason Rackley, 7, from Wilmington, N.C., killed his first turkey on opening day of North Carolina's youth season last month. Twenty-two pounds, 10-inch beard. Wow!

NC EXPANDS SUNDAY HUNTING

FORTY-FIVE GAMELANDS NOW OPEN SEVEN DAYS A WEEK

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has approved a proposal to extend Sunday hunting to 51 public hunting areas, beginning with the 2021-22 season.

The Commission recently accepted 40 proposed changes to wildlife and fisheries regulations after receiving comment from the public through various channels.

Sunday hunting was approved for 45 game lands now open six days a week and six more game lands open three days per week. Remaining in place will be limitations placed on Sunday hunting by the state legislature: prohibiting hunting with a firearm between 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., using firearms to hunt deer with dogs, hunting with a firearm within 500 yards of a place of worship and hunting migratory birds.

The Commission changed one facet of a new, private-land program called Wild Quail Management Areas that allows landowners to enroll in a program to help manage bobwhite quail populations. WQMAs had the contiguous-acreage requirement dropped from 1,500 to 500 acres, and participants will be required to have a minimum of 225 acres or 15% of the land, whichever is greater, maintained in year-round quail habitat.

The Commission attempted to make trout-fishing regulations easier to understand by combining Public Mountain Trout waters with a catch-and-release classification into a single classification:

Catch and Release/Artificial Flies and Lures Only. The Commission also changed the classification of a handful of streams and changed boundaries for public trout waters in a handful of streams. Proposed changes on Big Pine Creek and Meadow Fork in Allegheny County were suspended at the request of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

On the hunting side, the Commission voted to allow sling bows for deer hunting, to make slight changes in the bear seasons in Camden, Chowan and Pasquotank counties, to prohibit the pursuing or chasing of deer or bear with dogs on the Beaufort County portion of Goose Creek Game Land except for that area east of Smith Creek and south of Campbell Creek. ■



Bobwhite quail

BASSMASTER CLASSIC RETURNING TO HARTWELL

The Bass Anglers Sportsman Society announced in late March that it would be bringing the Bassmaster Classic, the “Super Bowl” of bass fishing, to South Carolina’s Lake Hartwell for the fourth time.

The Classic will be held March 4-6, 2022, out of Greenville, S.C., and Green Pond Landing in Anderson, S.C.

Alton Jones Sr., Casey Ashley and Jordan Lee won Classics on Hartwell in 2008, 2015 and 2018, respectively. In 2018, the three-day crowd of 143,323 fans attending Classic-related events set a record.

Weigh-ins will be held at the Bon Secours Wellness Arena in Greenville, with the accompanying Classic Outdoors Expo taking place at the Greenville Convention Center.

“Everything about Lake Hartwell and the city of Greenville make them the perfect setting for the Super Bowl of professional bass fishing,” said Bruce Akin, CEO of BASS.

“Lake Hartwell provides the perfect site for amazing competition, and the city of Greenville provides the hotels, restaurants and other facilities you need for an event the size of the Classic.”

Hartwell is a 56,000-acre reservoir on the Savannah, Tugaloo and Seneca rivers that holds a good population of largemouth and spotted bass. Since the 2018 Classic, BASS has brought an Elite Series event and a Bassmaster Eastern Open, along with a College Series tournament.

Fifty-five top anglers will fish in the 2022 Classic, qualifying through the Elite Series, Opens, the BASS Nation circuit, the College Series and the Bassmaster Team Championship. The purse will be \$1 million, with the champion winning \$300,000. ■

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NC FLOUNDER ALLOCATION STAYS PUT UNTIL 2023; SPOT, CROAKER GET NEW LIMITS

COBIA LIMIT CHANGES SLIGHTLY FOR 2021 SEASON

The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission has voted to keep recreational fishermen's share of the southern flounder harvest at 30% through 2022 before raising it the two years after that.

At a March 30 meeting in Morehead City, the Commission voted that instead of keeping the flounder harvest allocations at 70% commercial and 30% recreational through 2024, they would keep the 2021 and 2022 allocation at 70/30, then give recreational fishermen 40% of the harvest allocation in 2023 and 50% in 2024.

The vote was 5-4 for the changes, with Chairman Rob Bizzell, Robert McNeill and Tom Roller, who hold recreational seats on the Commission, and biologist Pete Kornegay and Dr. Martin Posey, holder of an at-large seat, voting in favor. The three Commission members holding commercial seats — Doug Cross, Mike Blanton and Sam Romano — were joined by at-large member Tom Hendrickson voting against the change.

At the same meeting, the Commission for the first time set recreational creel limits for spot and Atlantic croaker to bring North Carolina into compliance with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's management plans for both species.

North Carolina fishermen will have a daily recreational creel limit of 50 fish per person for hook-and-line and other gear.

Stock analysis shows a moderate level of concern for both species. The recreational creel limits and a 1% reduction in the commercial catch in the South Atlantic addresses those concerns.

The creel limits on spot will remain in place for at least two years, and for Atlantic croaker, three years.

A few days later, the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries announced a slight change to regulations for recreational cobia fishing, which opens May 1 in state waters.

A limit of one fish per day and two fish per vessel per day for private vessels will be effect from May 1-June 30. On July 1, the limit will drop to one fish per vessel per day. Previously, private vessels were allowed two fish per day until May 31.

The limit on for-hire (charter) vessels remains one fish per person per day, but four fish per vessel per day if four or more people are on board a vessel.

The NCDMF also announced that the minimum size for cobia will be 36 inches, fork-length measurement.

The recreational season for cobia in North Carolina waters will end on Dec. 31. ■



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FROM THE TOP DOWN

■ By Terry Madewell

TOPWATER BAITS FOR BASS REALLY HIT THEIR STRIDE IN MAY ACROSS THE CAROLINAS. HERE'S A PRIMER ON WHAT KIND OF TOPWATER LURES EXIST AND HOW AND WHEN TO FISH THEM.

Terry Madewell

In May, largemouth bass roam skinny water throughout the Carolinas, and topwater lures ARE A KEY TO EXPLOSIVE ACTION.

The warming water accelerates their already aggressive nature, and the flourishing aquatic vegetation creates prime topwater fishing habitat.

This combination makes topwater fishing exciting and often the most productive bass-catching technique available. The diversity of bass water and habitat found in lakes and rivers in the two states creates opportunities, while challenging anglers to use the right lures for specific situations encountered.

Kevin Davis, owner of Blacks Camp on South Carolina's Santee Cooper lakes, said the key to successful topwater action is matching the right lure to the right habitat.

"No lure is the top choice for all situations, but the available topwater lure options enable anglers to select the right one for existing conditions," Davis said.

Types of topwater lures are many, but to keep it manageable, we'll consider lures in specific categories and how each excel in Carolina waters.

NOISEMAKERS: BUZZBAITS, PROP BAITS

Davis's favorite topwater lure is the buzzbait, because it's highly effective, versatile and is the fastest-moving topwater lure he employs.

"I'll cast a buzzbait a long distance parallel to the shoreline, especially a long stretch of weeds, or far back into weedy cover,"

he said. "It covers large areas quickly and effectively, making it the ideal fish-finding lure."

Size matters, and Davis said on windy days, larger buzzbaits — $\frac{3}{8}$ - or $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce sizes — are good choices, but calm days are different.

"Smaller buzzbaits catch monster bass," he said. "My favorite lure on a typical, calm May morning is a 'Wes' Best' $\frac{1}{4}$ -ounce buzzbait, because the design makes it so versatile. The head is flat on top with a 'V' bottom that rides high in the water, enabling me to slow the retrieve. The smaller bait and slower pace enable me to keep the lure in the strike zone longer, crucial to hooking big bass."

Davis (843-753-2231) said other noisemaker/prop lures are great choices, including single-props lures like the Tiny Torpedo or double-props such as the Devil's Horse. As the lure is retrieved, the propellers spin, creating a disturbance that attracts bass.

"I like them when targeting specific objects" he said. "They're fished slower, so they're not searching lures, but they're perfect for targeting specific spots. They'll pull fish from a distance, and I'll often work them with pauses in the retrieve, although a steady retrieve works well."



Terry Madewell

The right lure worked in the right situation can produce some explosive strikes from largemouth bass this month.

WALKERS, FLOATER-DIVERS

Brett Mitchell, a Santee Cooper bass guide and tournament professional from Florence, S.C., said these stick-looking lures are usually equipped with multiple treble hooks. They're referred to as "walk-the-dog" and "floater-diver" lures simply based on the action the lures impart.

"Walk-the-dog lures such as the legendary Zara Spook are so named because the lures create a back-and-forth walking action across the surface," he said. "I impart this action by jerking the rod tip repetitively while reeling, and coupled with the lure design, it zig-zags from side to side. It takes practice to get consistent action, but it's lethal when worked properly.

"I think this surface disturbance mimics an injured minnow, and that's extremely attractive to a bass," he said. "I'll often 'pause for effect' during the retrieve, and that creates aggressive bites. Fishermen have significant control of the action the lure imparts, so I try different retrieves until I hit the hot pattern."

Mitchell (803-379-7029) said he'll work these lures around weeds and wood, but they're also an outstanding open-water bait on shallow points, humps and around isolated trees and stumps. It's also excellent for schooling fish.

"The floater-diver type lures have been productive for decades," he said, naming the Smithwick Rogue and broke-back Rebel as great examples of float-divers.

Mitchell said the lures are cast to or near a target, such as a stump, log or weedy point or pocket, and allowed to sit motionless for a short period.

"That gets the attention of a nearby bass, often prompting a quick strike," he said. "Another (technique) is to use the rod tip to make the lure dart and dive beneath the surface. Reeling the bait steadily to create a 'V' wake on the surface is another excellent option. This lure is relatively quiet, but sometimes subtle is best."

Mitchell said both type lures are excellent low-light options.

““

I'll cast a buzzbait a long distance parallel to the shoreline, especially a long stretch of weeds, or far back into weedy cover. It covers large areas quickly and effectively, making it the ideal fish-finding lure.



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FROG-TYPE LURES >

FROG-TYPE LURES

James Ramsey is a die-hard, 58-year-old angler from North Charleston, S.C., who caught his first topwater bass when he was 7.

“From May throughout the summer, I’m a big fan of frog-type lures,” Ramsey said. “They’re built weedless, so they’re ideal for fishing almost any type of habitat, and they excel at fishing thick vegetation that bass love — but is often too thick for other topwater lures to go.”

Ramsey said frog lures have different designs: walking, popping and plopping — the latter having a prop — and they’re all highly effective.

“Study the vegetation types you fish and work different frog versions to find what produces best,” he said.

Ramsey will use frog-type lures around mats of vegetation in lakes and rivers and will skitter, plop, walk and pop the lure based on the situation he’s facing.

“The lure is ideal for working across the top of matted grass and through thick vegetation, and bass will blow up on the lure right through thick stuff,” he said. “I enhance success by targeting unique features such as open holes, points, pockets and edges.

“When I stop a frog lure in an open hole, I’m on high alert for a strike,” he said. “Even with no line tension, the frog lure legs will quiver, and bass can’t resist it. I’ll often pause the retrieve when working through thick vegetation to let a bass home in on the target, and pausing at the edge of any cover is another tactic.”

Ramsey also uses frog lures to work isolated, woody objects,



A frog bait is very effective around vegetation that would affect the action of topwater baits that aren't weedless.

not just the thick weeds.

“It’s a highly versatile lure that’s effective in almost any place that’s wet,” he said.

Low-light conditions are best, but frog lures can be effective any time with cloud cover or when fish are far back in shady habitat.

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POPPING BAIT

David Murdaugh, a 55-year-old bass guide from Charleston, S.C., said popping baits are wildly successful in multiple scenarios from May through the summer and fall.

“Poppers excel when worked around, but not through, heavy cover, since they’re not weedless,” he said. “Accurate casting is crucial, and I want to get the lure close to the target and work it near the edges where bass may hold. Many types of poppers are on the market, but Pop Rs are a good choice to start the day.

Murdaugh (843-452-9655) said poppers are prime for early and late fishing in low light, and the noise they produce attracts bass from long distances, often enticing fish out of thick grass.

“In rivers where I have current, eddies and ample aquatic habitat, I’ll catch bass all day-long,” he said. “Often, a specific type of popper produces better on a given day, so I experiment with several varieties while searching for the daily pattern.”

Murdaugh said technique is simple: cast the lure and let it float a moment before beginning the retrieve. The pace can vary from slow pops to quick, aggressive popping.

“I’ll vary the action, and I may use a steady pop all the way to the boat, or a series of multiple pops, then pause and repeat. Imagination is a key, and while I have standard patterns I prefer, I’ve learned that an unusual pattern often triggers an aggressive bite.”

OLDIES BUT GOODIES >



A popping-type topwater bait is effective when accurately cast close to, but not into, various kinds of cover.



A steady retrieve or one involved a series of jerks and pauses can be equally effective when using a popping bait.

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OLDIES BUT GOODIES

Topwater lures from yesteryear are nothing more than history to some, but many veteran fishermen still catch huge bass on these lures.

Ramsey said his first topwater bass were caught more than a half-century ago on lures like a Devil's Horse and Jitterbug, and both are still among his favorites.

"Topwater fishing at night with a Jitterbug can be life-changing for a bass fisherman," he said.

Davis cherishes the lures of yesteryear, and many have a prominent place in his tackle box.

"I've caught bass my whole life on specific, old lures and continue to do so now," he said. "Some have kept their



A Devil's Horse produced James Ramsey's first topwater bass more than 50 years ago, and he's still catching fish on a modern version of the classic lure.

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magic appeal to big bass, even after decades of use; that's why they're still made."

Davis said too many "oldies but goodies" exist to mention them all, but he still uses a floating Rapala, Smithwick Rogue, Jitterbug, Devil's Horse, Zara Spook and the Hula Popper, perhaps the mother of all popping baits.

He doesn't use any lure out of sentimentality; he employs them because they produce.

"I admit, I treasure these lures for their history and influence on highly productive modern topwater lures," he said. "But I fish these relics because bass still love them even more than I do." ■



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

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A man with a white goatee, wearing a blue Lowrance baseball cap and sunglasses, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a large bass fish by its mouth, which is open and contains a yellow and white spinnerbait. The man is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt with "LOWRANCE" printed on it. The background shows a body of water and a distant shoreline under an overcast sky.

**SPINNERBAITS ARE THE REAL DEAL
FOR NORTH CAROLINA ANGLER WHEN
SPRING BASS FISHING ARRIVES.
HERE'S HOW HE FISHES THEM —
AND WHY.**

■ By Craig Holt

BLADE REVIVER

SPRING IS PRIME TIME FOR ANGLERS TO CHASE LARGEMOUTH BASS ON RESERVOIRS ACROSS NORTH CAROLINA,

and May is when spinnerbaits fished around wood, rocks or flats elicit strikes from prespawn and bedding female bass.

Although lunger hunters often use soft plastics, veteran angler Dennis Reedy of Siler City, N.C., prefers spinnerbaits and buzzbaits. In fact, he's had so much success with blade baits that he uses them year-round.

"They're big-fish baits," he said. "I think bigger bass chase them because of their profiles in the water; they look like big shad."

Reedy, 62, has been fishing spinnerbaits and buzzbaits for more than 42 years.

"My dad taught me to fish, but Wally Szuba (a tournament partner) taught me to use spinnerbaits," Reedy said. "He was good at it. We had a few good days, caught some big fish, won some money and I got gung-ho for them."

When Reedy and Szuba first began using spinnerbaits in the late 1970s, they began to appreciate their versatility.

"We won a November tournament at Kerr Lake, then a (Lake) Gaston tournament the next year in October," Reedy said. "We only threw Hawg Callers — double willow-leaves with either No. 4½ and No. 5 blades or No. 3s with No. 4s or No. 5s."

Reedy has kept his grip on an iron-clad blade preference rule for four decades.

"I'll throw 'em in January and February and during the summer and fall," he said. "I've caught 10-pounders on a spinnerbait when the temperature was freezing.

"It's just what I do. I'll throw at cover along the banks every month except June and July when I have to fish deep. I don't want to fish deep, but I've got to in order to compete. But I still catch 13- to 15-pound (5-fish) limits in shallow water in June and July. That's no big thing for me in the summer."

BILL MORGAN'S INFLUENCE

A meeting with spinnerbait guru Bill Morgan, who invented the famed Hawg Caller spinnerbaits, led Reedy and Szuba to tinker with his lures.

"We won tournaments with them, and word got out," Reedy said. "He gave us kits to build spinnerbaits. He sponsored us with blades, beads and skirts."

Morgan had experimented with different types of single-, double- and triple-blades — he was the first manufacturer in the Southeast to produce a triple willow-leaf bait — but Reedy and Szuba pushed Morgan's envelope, adding four Colorado blades to home-made models, trying to tweak the extra blade into more vibration. Reedy is still using a 4-bladed model.

"The spinnerbaits we used back then also had lighter wire than other brands," he said, "and they caught bass better than anything we tried."

Although light-wire spinnerbaits had a durability problem, Reedy viewed it as a small chink in his blade armor.

A GOOD TRADE-OFF ➤

Dennis Reedy casts a spinnerbait to a point off an island at the entrance to a flat where bass head in to spawn.



Craig Holt

A GOOD TRADE-OFF

In 1992, Reedy and Phil Cable of Apex fished Hawg Caller spinnerbaits in an early March tournament on Jordan Lake. That day, a bass slammed Reedy's lure, jumped out of the water and came loose.

"When I got (the spinnerbait) back to the boat, the fish had broke the wire," he said.

Working the trolling motor while Reedy tied on another bait, Cable spun the boat and cast a ¾-ounce Hawg Caller with a No. 4 Colorado and a No. 6 willow-leaf blade at a rip-rap corner where Reedy's fish had bitten, and a lunker slammed his lure. Moments later, Cable landed a 14-pound, 6-ounce bass that remains the lake record for Jordan.

"We never knew if Phil's bass was the same one that broke my spinnerbait, but we figured it coulda been," Reedy said.

The spinnerbait Cable was fishing, with a gold-plated head, became known as Hawg Caller's "Cable Special."

STAYING THE COURSE

Hundreds of tournaments and thousands of casts later, Reedy still throws spinnerbaits.

"I throw Hawg Caller spinnerbaits and some buzzbaits," said Reedy, whose favorite blades are still ¾-ounce models with Nos.



Dennis Reedy

4½ or No. 5 willow-leaves paired with No. 3 or 5 Colorado blades. And his color choice has remained consistent: gold.

"Back then, we got hung up on gold-plated heads and gold skirts," he said. "They seemed to work better and still do."

In addition to gold-plated heads, Reedy still likes gold-glimmer or chartreuse-white skirts.

"You can use (Hawg Callers) straight out of the box," he said. "But sometimes I change out the skirts to make them more appealing."

Reedy prefers Zoom split-tail trailers "of some description, usually white."

RODS AND REELS

Reedy's rods and reels naturally remain old school.

"I still use Lew's BB-1 reels (spooled with 20-pound Big Game monofilament), and my favorite rods are Bill Poe custom-made with G-Loomis blanks," he said. "I have (older) Poe rods that are still as good as the day I bought 'em."

He does make one adjustment — his reel's retrieve ratio — depending on water temperature.

"If I'm throwing a big-bladed spinnerbait and the water's cold, I'll usually use a 5-to-1 or 6-to-1 reel ratio," he said.

That pace creates a relatively slow return that's needed because bass often won't chase fast-moving lures. But when water temperature rises to 65 degrees or higher, their metabolism quickens.

"Later, I'll use a reel with a 7-to-1 or quicker if I'm burning one through the water," he said. "If you throw a spinnerbait near a school and burn it, they'll eat it."

Dennis Reedy has caught his share of big, North Carolina bass on spinnerbaits. **ABOVE:** Hawg Caller spinnerbaits were built with light wire, which many anglers credit for much of their effectiveness.

FAVORITE LAKE

Dennis Reedy fishes spinnerbaits around almost any kind of shallow cover he can find, including wood, rock, brush and flooded timber.

Although Reedy has had his share of tournament success at Jordan, Falls and Shearon Harris lakes — where he and a partner once landed a one-day 10-fish tournament limit that weighed 72½ pounds — Kerr Reservoir, aka Buggs Island, remains his go-to destination.

“I’ve caught some big sacks with spinnerbaits at Jordan and Gaston,” he said, “but I’ve won more money by far at Buggs Island. I’ve averaged 5-pounds-plus (per fish) with spinnerbaits there.”

Because Kerr has lots of shoreline structure — laydowns, pea-gravel banks, live buck brush, flooded sweet gum trees, rocks — it’s easy to understand why Reedy likes fishing there. With well-defined creek channels and large stump fields on flats, it’s spinnerbait heaven.

“I don’t think there’s such a thing as bad cover,” he said. “Buggs has got logs, rocks, bushes, standing timber and shade. At some point each year, bass will orient at one of those types of structure.”

The spinnerbait’s versatility is clear; it can be fished in and through live or dead structure and bounced off rocks or stumps. But no matter where he fishes, Reedy puts his blades to good use. ■



Dennis Reedy

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BUZZBAIT SUIT ANGLER'S TASTES, TOO

Few anglers have fishing lures named for them, but lure manufacturer Travis Decker of Dublin, Va., tabbed one of his popular Rush Lures buzzbaits the "D.R. Series" after Dennis Reedy of Siler City, N.C., a spinnerbait expert who also loves to fish buzzbaits.

"I'll throw a buzzbait year-round," he said. "It's a lure I use when I don't know what else to throw."

When reeled across a lake's surface, a buzzbait's gurgling noises and screeching blades elicit savage strikes by largemouths.

"A spinnerbait looks like a shad, but a buzzbait?" Reedy said. "I don't know. I think it causes reaction strikes. I think the sound and commotion piss off bass. And bigger fish tend to smack it."

Reedy uses buzzbaits when the water temperature is 55 degrees and higher.

"It's best to throw in flooded, shallow places," Reedy said. "I don't worry so much about cover as I do depth. I like to throw buzzbaits in water less than 3 feet deep. Main lake and creek flats are good. A bass is more likely to hit in 2 feet than to come up from 6 to 8 feet."

Although he grew up casting Lunker Lures, his favorite buzzbait now is a Rush Lures model.

"You can throw them like a bullet, and they don't tumble," said Reedy, who likes their ½-ounce size and bright blue head and skirt — and that they're named after him. ■



Rush Lures' DR series buzzbait

Rush Lures



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

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LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite

Topwater baits really shine in May, when shad, herring and bluegill are shallow, spawning, and when some bass are still guarding fry, looking toward the surface.

TIME FOR TOPWATERS

MAY BRINGS OUT THE BEST IN SURFACE FISHING FOR BASS

I love fishing in May; there's a lot going on. The bream will usually be bedding, the shellcrackers will start spawning, there will be bass protecting the fry, shad will be spawning, and if you're fishing a lake that has blueback herring, they'll be spawning.

That all adds up to some great topwater fishing for bass; May is my favorite month to fish topwaters. You just can't beat a big bass blowing up on a bait that's moving along the surface. It's usually a violent strike, and it's some of the most-exciting fishing you can do.

If the bream are spawning, you can usually find bream beds, and I like to fish topwater baits across the beds or just outside of them, where the bass will be lurking, looking to ambush something. If you have a shad spawn, find a bank where they're spawning, usually the first few hours of the morning. If you have bluebacks in the lake you're fishing, that



Yamamoto D Shad

changes everything, because bass will really key in on them.

Early in the year, you're looking to fish steeper points, places where you can cast to the bank from 20 feet of water. Now, however, you're looking for flatter points. If your lake has bluebacks, you need to spend more time fishing around flat points than anywhere else. They will be hanging around them.

MIX IT UP

I love to fish walking baits, sometimes maybe a frog or a buzzbait to mix it up, more because of fishing pressure than anything else. All of our lakes get fished so much, if everybody is throwing a

topwater walking bait, and if a bass gets caught three times, he'll get to be shy of it. My favorite is an X Rap Prop, especially if I'm fishing around bluegill beds more than shad or bluebacks. When I was a kid, I can remember everybody fishing a Devil's Horse.

When you throw a prop bait, it's very important to let the bait sit motionless after you make a cast and it hits the



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, Rapala, Buckeye, VMC, Humminbird, War Eagle, 13 Fishing and Yamamoto.

Dan Kibler

water. You need to let it sit and let the water settle back down before you start to work the bait back to you, very slowly, with a lot of jerks and pauses.

I also like to fish topwater with a soft-plastic jerk-bait, something you don't think of as a topwater bait. But the same way that lots of fishermen fish floating worms, I like to fish an unweighted soft jerk-bait, like a Yamamoto D-Shad in shad or white, on a 4/0 VMC offset hook. Everybody knows that Yamamoto baits are heavy because they contain so much salt, and with that hook, they're heavy enough to really cast a long ways, which is important.

I fish it on the surface, or within 2 or 3 inches of the surface. I work it fast; I don't pause it enough for it to sink. I'm working it the entire time —not super fast, but if you've got to keep it moving to keep it up. And I'll fish it on monofilament; if you fish it on fluorocarbon, it will tend to send more. The way I fish it, I'll see every strike.

TOPWATER TACKLE

I like to fish walking baits, prop baits and the soft-plastic jerk-bait on the same rods, 13 Fishing Envy baitcasters, medium to medium-heavy action, between 7 feet and 7½ feet. When you're



Rapala X Rap Prop

fishing flat points, it's important to make really long casts, and you can do that with a longer rod. Also, I want to fish them with baitcasting reel with a fast retrieve ratio, 7- or 8-to-1.

Here are a couple of other things. Early morning is actually better in May if you're fishing around shad, herring or bluegills. Earlier in the year, say, in March, early morning is not as good, because you need to wait for the water to warm up, but the morning is the best time now. There's a myth that early morning and late afternoon are the only times to fish a topwater, but in May, I'll throw a D Shad or an X Rap Prop all day long.

Second, I really like throwing these baits on points that have something on them: button bushes, willows, sometimes a little grass, pads, stumps. Often, there's no cover on points, but I like to find shallow points that have a little cover on them. I'm not really casting at targets, but I think scattered cover will hold fish. ■

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Gettys Brannon said fishermen need to be able to fish multiple lures on Lake Murray in May.

BE READY TO WORK FOR MURRAY'S BASS

Plenty of patterns will work in May

T By Brian Cope
 hroughout May, South Carolina's Lake Murray is a hotspot for largemouth bass, especially on days with at least a slight wind. Anglers who like using multiple lures and techniques will love fishing this month. Largemouth change patterns throughout the day, giving anglers a chance to catch them using different tactics.

Gettys Brannon of Columbia, a former FLW College Fishing national champion — he won on Lake Murray in 2015 — loves the variety May brings to Lake Murray.

"A typical day of fishing in May is hard to define," Brannon said. "But one thing is for sure: you want to come prepared for anything. You need to have a number of different lures tied on to different rods and have them on the deck. Swimbait, jigs and everything in between can catch bass right now, depending on where the fish are, the time of day, and the wind direction."

Early in the morning, Brannon said small coves are good starting points. If a little wind is pushing into the coves, baitfish will congregate along the shoreline's banks and seawalls, becoming easy pickings for bass. Topwater lures and jerkbaits are good choices. If no wind is present, skipping jigs under docks in the same coves will produce bass.

Those docks come into play again as the sun gets up, warming the water's surface and pushing bass into the shadows for shade and to ambush prey. Sticking with jigs is a good strategy. Once the day really heats up, Brannon said the bass will head to deep, open water. That's when he turns to Carolina rigs, working slopes



Brian Cope

and drop-offs.

Brannon said anglers need to keep two things in mind. First, you'll have to "weed through" stripers, especially early in the morning. It's a fun problem to have, and anglers may catch a dozen stripers before landing a largemouth. Second, you'll encounter your share of short-strikers and lure-followers.

"Sometimes, you'll feel your lure getting swiped at numerous times without hooking up," Brannon said. "Some anglers think these are white perch, but it's just as often a short-striking bass that isn't willing to fully commit. This is when it's handy to have other lures ready to cast. They'll often bite a new lure aggressively when it's presented quickly."

The lure followers — bass that will follow your lure throughout the entire retrieve but never bite it — can be caught the same way.

"If you see a bass do that, you can catch it, but not with the

lure it just followed. Cast something different to it immediately, and you've got a good chance of hooking up. If it simply follows that one too, try another," he said.

As long as anglers don't get in a rut with one lure or technique, they can catch bass on Lake Murray all day long this time of year, Brannon said. ■

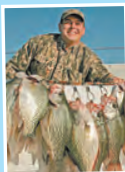
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JORDAN LAKE BASS ARE ON THE MOVE

Fishermen have plenty of May options

By Dusty Wilson

One thing is certain for bass fishermen on North Carolina's Jordan Lake this month: they have options. Whether fishing the shad spawn, bluegill spawn, water willow grass or the first bass moving into deep water, veteran angler Jonathan Phillips of Pittsboro, N.C., is excited about a month that has so much going on.

"You'll have a lot of bass that are done with their spawn, but they're still going to be hanging around the shallows," said Phillips. "The shad spawn will be happening at night, and for the first couple hours of the morning, the shad will be up on hard places like rock and riprap, boat ramps and even clay banks. The bass feeding on them are very vulnerable to fisherman, because they're blowing shad out of the water and making a lot of commotion. I like to swim a white jig around them on 20-pound fluorocarbon, but a brown jig can be even better, because they can key in on something different. They also react well to a double-willow spinnerbait in white or white and chartreuse."

The bluegill spawn, another key, occurs in short pockets off the main channel and main creeks. According to Phillips, bluegill beds are best found by getting on your trolling motor and using your eyes or sight-scanning sonar to check pockets in 1 to 3 feet of water. Once located, he throws a Brian's Prop Bee topwater bait or a Bagley Bang-O-Lure, and he'll swim a jig around the beds. Brown or green pumpkin are good colors, anything that mimics a bluegill.

As the sun comes up in the sky, Phillips switches to the willow grass that lines many of Jordan's creeks, especially in the river section of the lake. Here, he swims a jig, throws a buzzbait, pitches soft plastics or a floating worm. Phillips says the key is to throw to high-percentage areas of the grass such as indentions, points, and areas that have wood.

"In mid-May, the bigger fish will start to move offshore," Phillips said. "You won't catch the numbers you will in June, but it's a better quality of fish. They'll back out to 8 to 12, sometimes 14 or 15 feet of water in the creeks and the main lake where there are hard places like rock piles or stumps, also ledges. They react well to a crankbait. I like a Rapala DT-10 or a Strike King XD. You're trying to mimic a threadfin, so blue and chartreuse or a citrus color is a good choice." ■



Jonathan Phillips

Jonathan Phillips said big numbers of Jordan Lake bass won't have moved to deeper water in May, but the ones that are out, ready to hit crankbaits, will be quality fish.



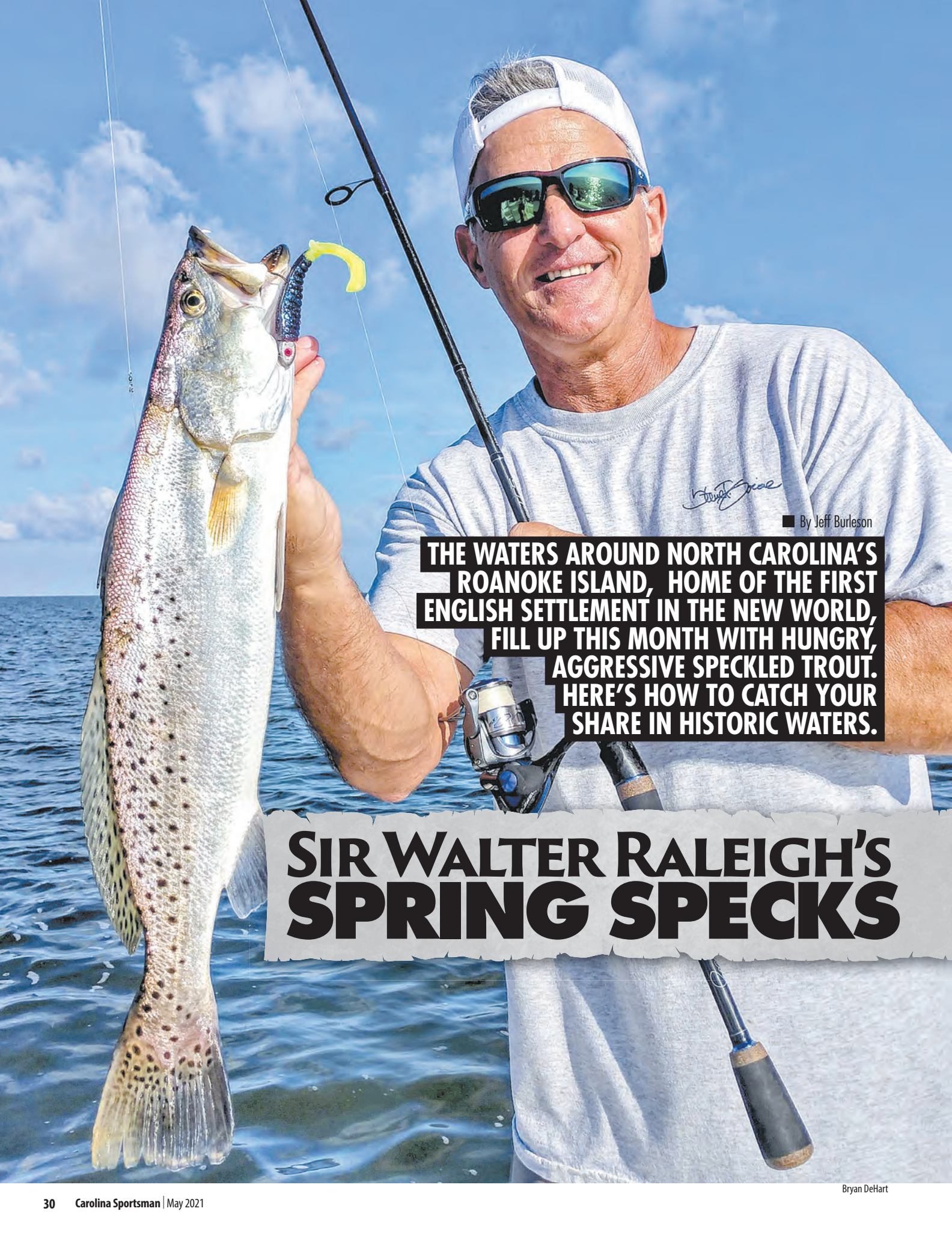
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By Jeff Burleson

THE WATERS AROUND NORTH CAROLINA'S ROANOKE ISLAND, HOME OF THE FIRST ENGLISH SETTLEMENT IN THE NEW WORLD, FILL UP THIS MONTH WITH HUNGRY, AGGRESSIVE SPECKLED TROUT. HERE'S HOW TO CATCH YOUR SHARE IN HISTORIC WATERS.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S SPRING SPECKS

ROANOKE ISLAND WAS THE SITE OF THE FIRST COLONY IN NORTH AMERICA.

One would think the group of 120 English settlers that Sir Walter Raleigh organized would have eaten their fair share of local fare in 1587 when they first arrived in the New World.

One could also believe that speckled trout would have been on the daily menu, especially in the spring, when the prime fishing season takes off for these speckled treasures.

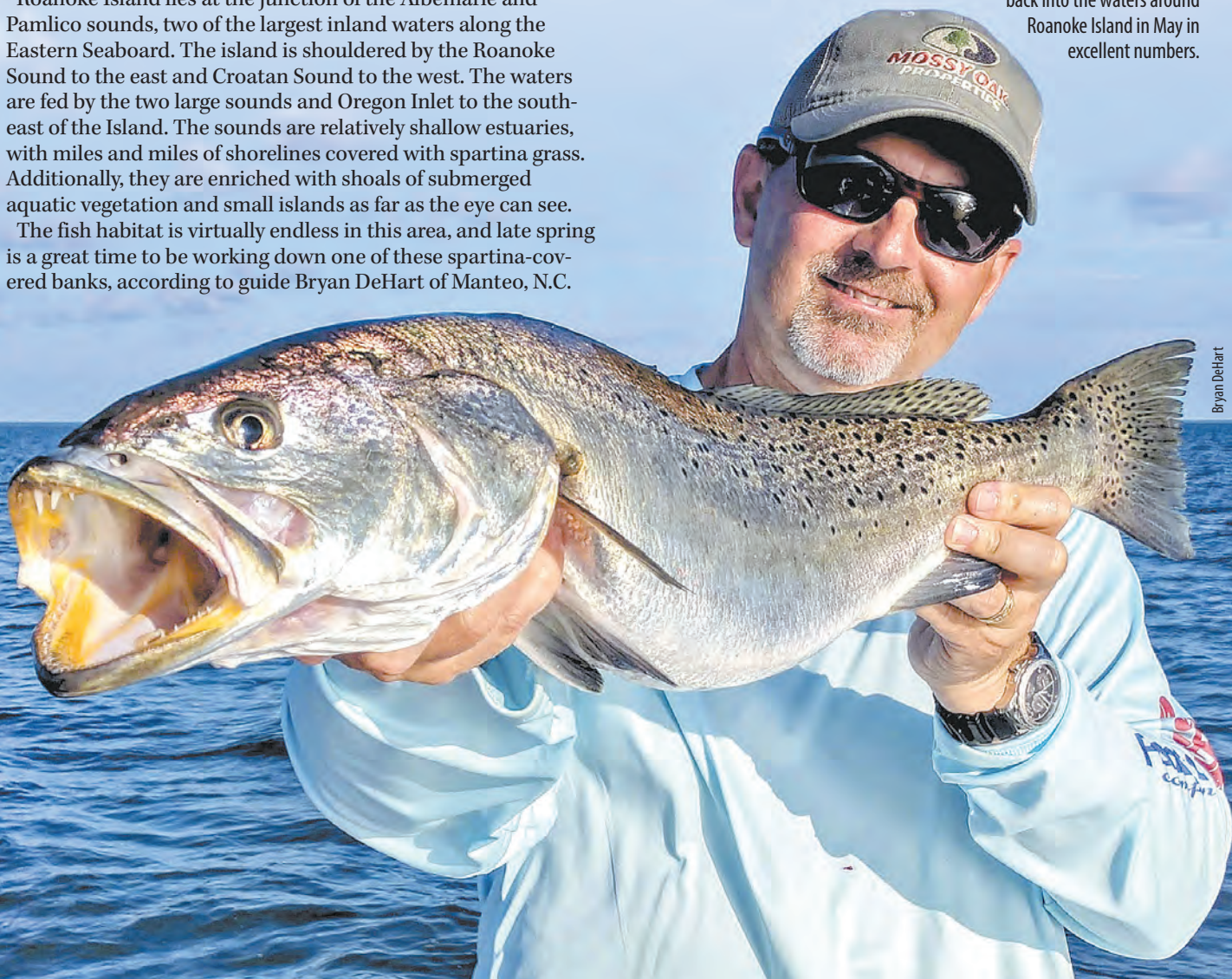
The pristine waters on either side of Roanoke Island are nothing less than ideal trout habitat, and May marks the best time to tackle these snaggle-toothed beasts.

Roanoke Island lies at the junction of the Albemarle and Pamlico sounds, two of the largest inland waters along the Eastern Seaboard. The island is shouldered by the Roanoke Sound to the east and Croatan Sound to the west. The waters are fed by the two large sounds and Oregon Inlet to the south-east of the Island. The sounds are relatively shallow estuaries, with miles and miles of shorelines covered with spartina grass. Additionally, they are enriched with shoals of submerged aquatic vegetation and small islands as far as the eye can see.

The fish habitat is virtually endless in this area, and late spring is a great time to be working down one of these spartina-covered banks, according to guide Bryan DeHart of Manteo, N.C.

“We lose our most of our fish in the winter months,” said DeHart (272-473-8632). “The trout migrate inland into the small tributaries on the western side of the sounds or out into the ocean and to the south. They begin showing back up in April in the likely places, but our strongest numbers are in May and early June.”

Guide Bryan DeHart said speckled trout move back into the waters around Roanoke Island in May in excellent numbers.



Bryan DeHart

The sounds fill up in spring with small fish, including juvenile spots, croakers and pinfish. The arriving schools of speckled trout have a smorgasbord of delicacies to eat, but they also arrive for a different reason.

“We have a huge spawn in May. It’s arguably the biggest spawning time of the year for trout in our area,” DeHart said.

The sounds cover an enormous area of water less than 4 feet deep, with a firm, sandy bottom. With a lack of significant tidal change, the sounds will remain flooded under normal conditions.

“We have tons of fish shallow this time of year, and they have plenty to eat, too. It is a favorite time of year to catch trout in our area. The trout are feeling good and eating like mad,” DeHart said.

The sounds lack a regular tidal change of lunar origin like waters farther south in North Carolina, but moving water remains critically important for speckled trout fishing. According to DeHart, water movement may be one of the hardest mysteries to solve, but anglers with a knack for understanding the currents and water levels can put fish in the boat all day.

Hard, suspending jerkbaits are very productive lures for speckled trout when they arrive around Roanoke Island in late spring.

“Moving water is a huge deal for catching quality speckled trout,” he said. “Our winds will prevail from one direction for a few days at a time until they switch. The sound is constantly equalizing itself, with currents going from north to south and then south to north. It may not be a typical diurnal tide, you see in most coastal communities, but it is important to fish areas with moving water.”

DeHart fishes most of the year, when he’s not duck hunting or chasing down a land lead at Mossy Oak Properties. When May arrives, his trout rods are rigged and ready, and he is always ready for the full moons in May and June. And he always is ready around the full moon in May and June — May 26 and June 24.

“The full moons are important astronomical periods,” DeHart said. “If I had to pick 10 days to fish all year, it would be the five days prior to the full moons in May and June. And it isn’t just small fish, either. We catch more quality fish shallow than any other time of year.”

DeHart also loves May fishing because his favorite lures, hard jerkbaits and topwater plugs, are most productive.

“Suspending jerkbaits and topwater lures are my go-to lures in May. The fish are aggressively feeding, and hard baits are unstoppable,” said DeHart, who uses a variety of hard baits.

He likes both poppers and walk-the-dog-type surface lures and Rapala X-Raps for subsurface options — but he also will not leave out any soft plastics, either.



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.



DESTINATION INFORMATION

WHERE TO GO/HOW TO GET THERE — Roanoke Island is on US 64 between the Dare County mainland and the Outer Banks. US 64 and US 264 offer the best highway access from inland. Several public boat ramps are available in Manteo, Wanchese, Oregon Inlet and Mann's Harbor; visit www.outer-banks.com/publicboatramps.asp. The waters around the western, southern and eastern fringes of Roanoke Island are prime trout spots during spring. Look for spartina-covered shorelines, any man-made structure, submerged grass on shoals, and places with good current. Any submerged grass beds with current can almost always produce a strong bite in spring conditions.

WHEN TO GO — The spring speckled trout bite begins in April and peaks in May during the spawn and before the water heats up to summer temperature peaks.

BEST TACKLE/TECHNIQUES — Speckled trout feed on soft crabs and small fish. About any traditional lure used for trout fishing will produce bites; topwaters, suspending jerkbaits and jigheads with soft-plastic trailers are top choices. Baitcasting outfits work fine, but light or medium-light spinning tackle is



preferred. While the majority of the Croatan and Roanoke sounds are void of heavy structure, braid remains the preferred line choice, with a 2- to 3-foot leader of 20-pound fluorocarbon tied on.

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Capt. Bryan DeHart, 252-473-8632. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds

ACCOMMODATIONS — Scarborough Inn, 252-473-3979; Roanoke Island Visitors Site (www.roanoke-island.com) or visit North Carolina's Tourism Website for more information (www.visitnc.com).

MAPS — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainsegullcharts.com; The Salty Southeast Cruising Guide (www.cruisersnet.net/cruisersnet-marine-map/?l=35.5593,-76.4663&z=14); N.C.'s Coastal Boating Guide (www.ncwildlife.org/Boating_Waterways/documents/NCCoastaBoatingGuideMap.pdf).

Big speckled trout, ready to spawn, offer fishermen a great reason to wet a line in the Croatan and Roanoke sounds in May.

"Trout are feeding heavily, and about any type of speckled trout lure will get them to strike, but I just love throwing topwater and jerkbaits. They are my favorite type of lure to use, and May is the time they work great in our area," he said.

Even though a lot of quality trout will be around in a wide variety of habitats, DeHart prefers certain areas for consistent success.

"Structure is a big deal; it can be bridges, shoals, submerged grass beds and marsh edges," said DeHart, who finds fish all around structure, but typically the best bite on the upcurrent ends — not the lee side where the current is slack.

"A common misconception is to fish on the lee side of a point or in calm water, but this isn't the case. Trout will be in the current waiting to ambush bait," he said.

Roanoke Island is a unique area culturally, and if inshore fishing is in your wheelhouse, the spring bite around Roanoke Island is tough to beat. May is generally the biggest spawn of the year, and the area is loaded with spawning habitat.

"We have tons of fish shallow; that makes it so incredibly good throughout the month of May," DeHart said. ■

ARE CRAB POTS TROUT MAGNETS? >



Bryan DeHart



Jeff Burleson

ARE CRAB POTS TROUT MAGNETS?

Spring is a great time to target speckled trout in the Roanoke and Croatan sounds, especially as the water warms and big schools of trout arrive. But when exactly will these fish move shallow?

Guide Bryan DeHart watches as lines of crab pots shifting around in the sounds and keeps abreast of the local crabbers for a good reason.

"Speckled trout absolutely love peeler and soft crabs," DeHart said, "especially big trout, which key in on these soft crabs, and May is one of the biggest shedding months. I like to watch the line of crab-pot buoys in the sound, and when the crabbers move them shallow, that is when I know the trout are shallow." Blue crabs shed their shells every year, beginning in April, and

Speckled trout are suckers for molting blue crabs late in spring, so keeping up with where crab pots are being fished puts you a step closer to a limit of specks.

they will molt throughout the year. But April and May are important months because they haven't molted all winter and need to shed their shells to grow. Blue crabs are known to molt around the full moons, which makes the cravings for soft crabs in May a big deal for speckled trout.

Trout will behave like crackheads when crabs start shedding. They want them so badly that they will fight to get inside crab pots to get the captured crabs. Local crabbers let DeHart know they get an increasing number of trout in their pots.

It is a crazy time, but crabbers can surely help you figure out where the trout are and when its time to fish shallow areas. ■

TURKEY HUNTING

BLUNDERS



GOBBLERS SURVIVE THE SEASON BECAUSE THEY'RE CAREFUL AND HAVE GOOD INSTINCTS, BUT ALSO BECAUSE HUNTERS MAKE A LOT OF MISTAKES. HERE ARE A FEW TO AVOID.

Rick Small

Turkey season arrives in spring when Mother Nature is showing off her awesome power, with the full spectrum touching all senses. Hunters not only get a chance to take a long-bearded gobbler, but they get to be immersed in an exemplary part of God's creations and can soak in the sounds, smells, and sights of a spring turkey hunting morning.

The gray, silent winter mornings pale in comparison to these colorful and musically vibrant spring mornings during turkey season. When a turkey answers that early morning call, both hunter and bird enter a trance until they often meet and one party comes out successful. But the hunter doesn't always strut out of the woods with a turkey draped over their shoulder.

What exactly goes wrong when a hunter leaves empty handed? Turkeys aren't necessarily smart creatures, but they know how to avoid danger when something doesn't measure up.

Every wild animal is equipped with a set of extraordinary senses or abilities to be able to survive. Deer use their eyes, noses and ears to detect dangerous situations, and they can mobilize their strength, agility and endurance to avoid any

potential threat to their livelihood. Turkeys have similar sensory capabilities, with a few exceptions. They can't smell much but can see nearly 360 degrees around them without moving their heads. And turkeys can pinpoint sounds by direction and distance with excellent precision. To entice a turkey into shooting range, hunters must make all the right choices. Sometimes, one mistake can lead to dismay and no turkey for the table.

R.J. Seiler of Stokesdale, N.C., a seasoned pro at taking trophy whitetails; he flips the switch in the spring and focuses on taking his turkey limit.

"I have been turkey and deer hunting for over 20 years, and if I could only choose one, it would be turkey hunting," Seiler said. "It's loads of fun, especially when everything goes to plan, but sometimes small mistakes can send the bird going the other way."

Turkey hunting blunders come in many shapes and sizes, from calling too much and moving at the wrong time to just plain missing the shot. Seiler believes one of the worst mistakes is impatience.

DON'T MOVE TOO SOON >

DON'T MOVE TOO SOON

“Moving too early is one of the No. 1 reason birds get bumped,” he said. “It can be easy to get impatient when the bird hasn’t showed up yet.”

When gobblers respond to calls, especially from hens, they are showing interest and will often come to the location where they heard the call. The amount of hunting pressure and the age of the bird will determine how quickly one comes, if at all.

“It’s easy to get impatient and want to move on the bird too soon and bump him,” Seiler said. “I have learned to sit tight for longer periods of time and give the bird every opportunity to show before I move. A lot of hot birds gobble hard for the first few hundred yards, then shut up, but they will still be on a steady march coming right in. You just have to be patient and wait on them without overcalling.”

Figuring out what birds are doing can be frustrating, because hunters have no idea what they are actually telling the gobbler when they belt out a series of clucks, cutts and yelps. A response from a gobbler could translate into several outcomes.

“When calling to a gobbler, I try to evaluate what is happening and effectively take his temperature with the way he responds and how involved his responses are,” Seiler said. “A hot, 2-year-old bird will gobble its head off and come to you fast as possible. Older birds may give you a courtesy gobble but have no interest in coming due to already being with hens.”

DON'T OVERCALL

Calling is one of the crucial and most-exciting parts of turkey hunting. It doesn’t take a world-champion caller to get a gobbler into range, even if the gobbler is a 4-year-old with a paintbrush beard dragging the ground. But calling

too much can leave a hunter empty handed at the end of the day.

“A lot of times, in my opinion, less is more when it comes to calling to a bird. I like to back off and make him do a little looking for me or make him think the hen that he has been hearing has lost interest in him,” he said.

Switching up the types of calls he’s making is one of his most important tactics for luring in a pressured bird.

“I am a fan of Hanks Custom Game Calls; their pot calls and mouth calls are among my favorites, and then a box call late in the season. I try switching calls to give them a fresh sound that they haven’t heard all season,” Seiler said.

Some gobblers just will not come in, no matter how sweet the sound is from a box, slate or diaphragm.

“Gobblers stuck with a group of hens will not leave the ladies, no matter how good of a caller you may be; you just have to leave that bird and find another,” he said.

Hunters can come back to hunt the troubling bird on another day or later in the day after the gobbler has finished breeding its hens.



When working a gobbler, stay put as long as you can before changing locations; birds will often gobble for a while, then come in silently.



Hunters have to do a lot of things correctly to have a successful hunt. Often, a single mistake can ruin your chances at a tom.

DON'T GET TOO CLOSE

Setting up too close to a roosted bird is another common mistake. Most of the time, hunters do not know exactly where the bird is perched, and it can be tough to know where to set up. The direction the turkey is facing will greatly influence how loud his gobbles sound from the roost. And with hundreds of neotropical migrants, owls, crows and even a nearby farmer's rooster competing for stage time, it can get noisy, and knowing the location of the roosted bird can be a critical detail.

Early in the morning, hunters want to get close enough to the bird to make it easy for the bird to come in and make the death march — but not too close.

"It is better to back off and let the morning play out from a distance than set up too close and get busted," he said.

DON'T RELY ON DECOYS ➤

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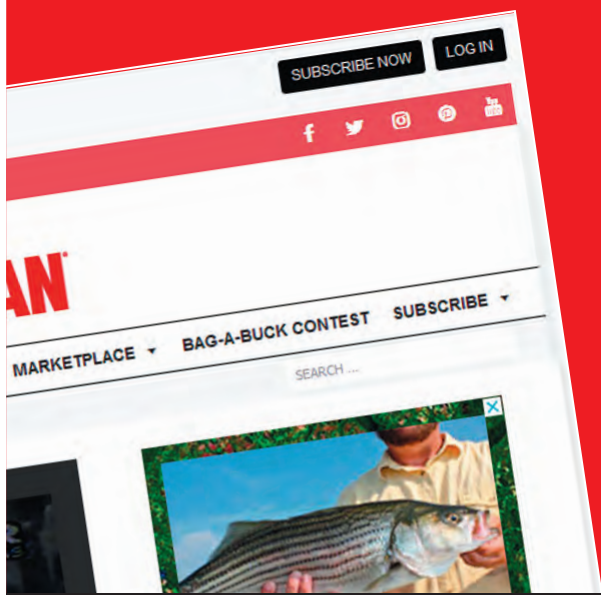
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North Carolina hunter R.J. Seiler tries to eliminate potential mistakes many hunters make when he's working a gobbler.

DON'T RELY ON DECOYS

Decoys can also change the trajectory of an incoming gobbler in more ways than one. Most of the time, Seiler will use a set of Avian-X decoys, including a three-quarter strutting jake and two hens — unless it's later in the season.

"In late season, I sometimes will not use any decoys at all. I will set up my buddy in front and then get 100 yards or so behind him to drag the bird through him for a shot. This technique can work very well any time of the season," he said.

While today's decoys can look like the spitting images of a real-life breathing, flapping turkeys, sometimes there can be some details that just do not sit well with an incoming bird. A hen decoy may cause an incoming gobbler to stop as soon as he sees the potential mate. In nature, hens are supposed to come to the gobbler, but most gobblers juiced up on sex hormones are too impatient and keep coming to the hens — at least until they can see her. Sometimes, omitting decoys altogether will keep gobblers moving around and looking for that yelping hen they want to mate.

If turkeys were completely careless, they would have gone extinct back when Native Americans ruled the continent. But they have natural instincts to live and recognize danger, even when doped up on sex hormones. Few hunts go as planned, but if patience and careful methods are utilized, the hunter can head home with a happy ending and meat for the freezer. ■



Jeff Burleson 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.

KNOW WHERE, HOW YOUR SHOTGUN SHOOTS

Before deer hunters release their arrows or fire their favorite deer rifles on opening day, they will make sure their weapon is shooting true. Few hunters do the same when it comes to shooting a shotgun at a turkey, but they will be the first to bellyache when they come up short on a double-bearded gobbler on opening day.

Turkey hunters should always pattern their guns with their turkey shot shells before a life-altering hunt.

Turkeys are a big target, but many hunters miss birds. Hunters need to shoot their guns at various ranges to see how their loads carry into the paper. It only takes one pellet to kill a turkey, but it sure increases the chances of a fatal shot when 80% of the load lands on a pie plate-sized target.

Veteran hunter R.J. Seiler always patterns new loads in his weapon of choice before the season.

"Patterning your turkey gun is very important," Seiler said. "I like to know what my gun is doing at 50 yards, even though very few of my shots are actually at that range."

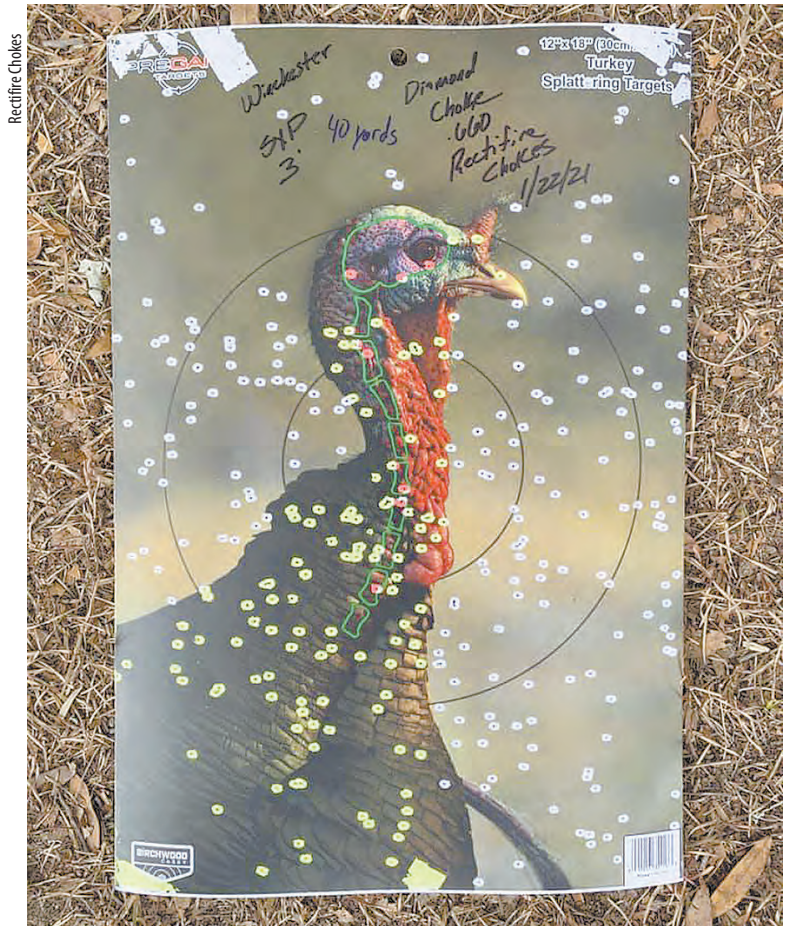
Seiler will go through various loads to see which pattern the best, giving him the tightest patterns at 50 yards.

This season, he is attempting a Grand Slam with his Thompson Center Encore, single-shot 12-gauge. He took his Osceola in Florida in March and will be heading to Kansas and Nebraska to get his Rio Grande and Merriams. Then, it's back to North Carolina to finish up with an Eastern in Rockingham County. He is using the new TSS load of No. 9s this season.

"The new TSS loads can kill birds at an extreme distance of 60 yards," he said. "It is imperative that I pattern my gun to see how these loads carry at these distances, and what choke and load combination works best."

Turkey loads of all sizes and brands pattern differently in various shotguns and chokes. The only way to know is to shoot and see what holds the best pattern.

"I am using Jebs Head Hunter 660 choke in my Encore and a Vortex Venom red-dot sight. It is deadly out to 60 yards, but I prefer to keep my shots 50 yards or less," Seiler said. ■



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MAY'S FULL MOON KICKS OFF BREAM FISHING IN THE CAROLINAS; THE BATTLING, LITTLE PANFISH WILL BED IN THE SHALLOWS THROUGH THE SUMMER, PROVIDING GREAT ACTION FOR FISHERMEN YOUNG AND OLD.

BEAR DOWN ON BREAM

By Phillip Gentry

Very few fishing standards are as widely held and undeniably truer than fishing for bream

AROUND THE FULL MOON IN MAY,

which falls this year on May 26. For generations, grandpas have passed along to their grandsons the simple wisdom that bream bed on the first full moon in May. Another simple aspect of grandpa's advice is that the same tackle, tactics and approach that supplied him with plenty of fresh bream fillets still work just as well today.

Matthew Outlaw of St. Matthews, S.C., is living proof. His fishing friends on social media often get their feelings hurt as he posts photo after photo of coolers loaded with better-than-hand-sized shellcrackers and bluegills. Ask him how he does it, and he'll just shrug; he grew up fishing in the Sparkleberry Swamp above the headwaters of Lake Marion, same as his father and grandfather. He's also fishing pretty much the same way those before him did.

For example, Outlaw is not a fan of using trolling motors for bream fishing. He fishes from a 14-foot john boat, and when he gets in the vicinity of places he thinks he may find bream beds, he gets out a short paddle and skulls.

"The worst thing you could do in here is run the trolling motor," Outlaw said as he sculled with one hand and flipped his cork back into a hole from which he had just snatched a feisty, hand-sized bream. By maneuvering his boat the old-fashioned way, using a short oar to hold the boat in position, Outlaw was able to land the cork in the still widening ripples the earlier fish had made upon its exit.

Just like the previous dozen or so times, the cork hit the water, paused, then suddenly sank from view as if it had been tied to a brick. Outlaw hoisted back on his long, jiggling pole and swung a carbon copy of the most-recent fish into his grasp.

Another example is his tackle. The bream-fishing rig is simple. Grandpa's bamboo cane pole has been replaced by an ultra-light, graphite jig pole widely known as a Breambuster, but from the tip of the pole forward, time stands still. A 4- to 5-foot length of 10-pound monofilament is rigged with a No. 6 hook, split-shot weight and topped off with a toothpick cork.

The bait, impaled right through the carapace, is a garden variety bait-shop cricket — one of about 200 that are in a wire mesh box at Outlaw's hip as he sits, feet dangling in the water, on the front deck of the johnboat.

No action or retrieve is needed; simply drop the rig into the bed and wait for the cork to go under or slew off to the side. When the action is hot, the cork may not sit on the surface for more than a second or two.



Matthew Outlaw is comfortable when he's in his john boat, probing the shallows of Sparkleberry Swamp for bream like this one.

Although Sparkleberry Swamp is well-known and yet widely misunderstood for producing larger-than-average bluegills and shell-crackers, it is a big place, full of trees and stumps and lily pads, and not all locations are suitable for bream beds.

Outlaw points out that the No. 1 factor for bream to bed is a hard bottom. Second is cover. He doesn't have much success around live cypress trees, finding instead that dead trees, stumps and fallen limbs have better appeal to spawning bream.

"I'll paddle into a swampy looking area, and if there's a stand of dead trees or a blowdown tree that's dead in the water, I'll ease over and probe the bottom with my rod. If I feel a hard sand, gravel or clay bottom, it's a pretty good bet there'll be some beds around it."

May is the month when male bream infiltrate the shallows and begin seeking out and creating nesting sites. They prefer hard

bottoms for nesting, even if that hard bottom is covered with several inches of mud. To get to the hard bottom, male bream will fan the bottom with their tails and create a saucer-shaped nest. Although this can be accomplished in open water, as in the case when water levels are low, bream feel much safer and more secure hiding their nests around structure.

"The hardest part about catching bream this time of year is finding them," said Outlaw. "I may spend a good half a day checking out possible locations before I come across bedding fish."

"I much prefer to have the water level about 3 or 4 feet above the original bank," he said. "That puts 2 or 3 feet of water up in the cypress and willow trees and makes it easier to locate bedding fish. If the water is too high, there can be acres and acres of places for fish to bed, and if it's too low, there's not enough shallow bottom."

Outlaw finds more bream on the beds around the full moon and then, around the new moon. He concurs that for a few days





A cage full of crickets will do wonders once a fisherman locates an area that's holding bream beds; crickets are probably the No. 1 bait for bluegills. **OPPOSITE:** Bream will move into the shallows in early May, the males first, then the females. The spawn typically begins around the full moon.

between these cycles, bream show a tendency to pull off the beds and hold in a little deeper water, but they're back a couple of days before the next moon and will repeat that cycle up to three times over the course of the summer.

"I start looking for bream on the beds the week before the full moon," he said. "Bream will go to fanning their beds, and when they do, they stink. You can smell them from 100 yards away. That fanning will also cause bubbles in the water. When I'm in an area I think bream would bed in, I'll approach with the wind in my face so I can smell them and I'll look for bubbles or fish popping on the surface."

Once he's found a couple such spots, it's time to start getting his fill. ■

ARTIFICIALS FOR BREAM >



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

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-bream), 20 crappie
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, redeye, bass%	none largemouth 12" smallmouth	5 lg/sm/r, 15 spots
Channel catfish	No restrictions	None
Blue catfish	No restrictions=	None=
Flathead catfish	No restrictions	None
Striped bass or hybrid bass	Varies by location&%	Varies by location&%
Mountain Trout	+	5
White bass	None	10 (except Sav. River)
Walleye and sauger+	None	8

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

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

= In the Santee Cooper system, only two over 32 inches with daily possession limit of 25 fish. In Congaree/Waterree 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.

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	Opens May 1, 36"	1 per 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:	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogony, schoolmaster		
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. * 1 cobia per day, two per vessel for private vessels. 1 per day, up to 4 per vessel for-hire.

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.

BEAR DOWN ON BREAM



The Bream Killer is a top-drawer artificial lure for bluegills and shellcrackers, especially fished as a dropper under a popping bug.



Phillip Gentry

ARTIFICIALS FOR BREAM

While the lion's share of bream across the Carolinas fall prey to natural baits, there are certainly artificials that are capable of filling a livewell just as quickly — without the mess and hassle. One of the best, time-tested artificial baits is Accardo's Ligon Bream Killer.

Some years ago, the Accardo Tackle Company acquired the rights to the Ligon Bream Killer and has been producing the slow-sinking, wet fly ever since.

"The Bream Killer is our best-selling fly, and is No. 2 in sales of all of our baits behind the Accardo Miss Prissy," said Don Davis, who runs breampbugs.com, an internet retailer selling all manner of bream-catching artificial baits.

The Bream Killer is hand-tied on a No. 8 hook with soft chenille topped with squirrel hair trim and white rubber legs. The slow-sinking action of the fly is more than big bream can resist. The Bream Killer is best fished with fly tackle but easily converts to spinning tackle with the use of a small popping cork or strike indicator to give the fly some weight.

Davis also suggests using the Bream Killer in a Popper-Dropper rig and has put together instructions on how to tie it.

"I like to use a 6-pound test leader tippet about 5 feet long and add whatever cork body popper you like," he said. "The bug becomes your strike indicator and can also catch fish. To this, I add another 4-pound test leader tippet about 4 feet long with a Bream Killer as the dropper. I simply tie the second tippet by sliding the line through the hook eye of the popper and tying it tight. You may want to experiment and vary the length and size of the secondary tippet to suit your dropper fly, cast and delivery. Seldom do the two lines entangle, and you will often catch two bream at the same time." ■

A man wearing a tan shirt, khaki pants, a baseball cap, and sunglasses is sitting in a green and black fishing kayak on a pond. He is holding a large fish in his left hand and a fishing rod in his right. The pond is covered with lily pads, and there are trees in the background. The Hobie logo is in the top right corner.

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Hard-fighting spadefish are a blast when hooked on light spinning tackle. **OPPOSITE:** Spadefish will follow the cannonball jellyfish 'chum line' to the surface as you raise it.

REEF FUN, IN SPADES

SPADEFISH PROVIDE SUMMER FUN IN NEARSHORE WATERS

As spring continues to warm the waters along the coast of the Carolinas, spadefish show up at many of the nearshore reefs. Some are just a few miles off the beach, offering many anglers a shot at this hard-fighting fish.

Spadefish are reef dwellers that congregate in huge numbers. One unique aspect of these fish over most reef fish is that anglers can sight-fish for them. It takes a little bit of work to get them within range, but once anglers have done their homework, they can pick and choose which fish to target with a cast.

These fish are especially attracted to reefs in the 35 to 65 foot depths. And when anglers find the reefs on their electronics, they'll find the majority of spadefish hanging tight to the largest structures of that reef. If the reef you're fishing has five structures and the longest one is 40 feet, target that one. If your reef has a 40-foot structure and a 200-foot structure, go after the 200.

Once anchored above that largest piece of structure, anglers can fish for spadefish passively or aggressively. Passively pursuing these fish is simple: bottom-fishing. No matter what you're catching,

if spadefish are present, their curious nature will bring them to you. They will slowly rise up to the surface as if following the fish you're reeling in.

When they reach the surface, spadefish will swim in the shade of the boat and peck at pieces of bait thrown to them. Some anglers fill fine mesh bags with shrimp or chum and dangle them in the water. This will keep spadefish interested, giving anglers a chance to target them with small pieces of shrimp, oyster meat or the fish's favorite meal — small pieces of jellyfish.

DO A CANNONBALL

For anglers who want to target spadefish more aggressively, their day starts off with netting cannonball jellyfish before heading to the reef. Some days, these are easily collected. Other days, it may take hours. On tough days, many anglers find them just off the beaches.

Once at the reef, anglers thread a stringer or a straightened wire coat hanger through about six whole jellyfish, keeping some other jellyfish onboard for later. They add a weight of about 4 ounces to the bottom of the stringer, tie the top of the stringer to a heavy line on

a big rod and reel, then lower the stringer to the reef.

The angler will feel the finicky bites of spadefish once the jellyfish have reached the right depth. Then it's time to slowly reel the stringer up, pausing to make sure the fish continue to peck at it.

When the stringer is just below the surface and surrounded by spadefish, it's time to put that rod in a rod holder to keep the jellyfish balls in place. The spadefish will nibble at the jellyfish, swimming off to eat pieces they see break away.

Now it's time for anglers to bait Nos. 1 to 4 hooks with small pieces cut from the jellyfish. Then, they pick out the spadefish they want to target and pitch the bait to it. It's not uncommon for several spades to go after a piece of bait, so anglers need to be ready for a quick bite.

That bite is usually most surprising for first-time spadefish anglers.



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



Capt. Robert Olsen



Brian Cope

A BIG SURPRISE

Seeing a spadefish only 10 or 15 feet from the boat, they assume they'll yank the fish in the boat on the hookset. Instead, the hookset is the beginning of one of the hardest fights they'll ever experience, even from a small spadefish.

As long as you keep the stringer of jellyfish in the water, spadefish should continue to congregate around it. They don't get particularly spooky when one of their fellow spadefish gets hooked, so you should be able to continue catching them for some time.

NON-TYPICAL GEAR

When targeting spadefish, it's best to use gear that is slightly underpowered for most reef-fishing applications. This allows anglers to cast the small, light pieces of jellyfish accurately. Most anglers use 2500 to 3000 series spinning reels, medium or medium-light rods, and 15-pound test fluorocarbon.

No. 1 through No. 4 hooks and the bait itself usually provide enough weight to cast without adding weight to the line. This allows the bait to float naturally in front of the fish. Anglers sometimes use a bobber to keep the bait in the strike zone longer. ■

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GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Age and genetics play big roles in antler development, but nothing has more to do with a buck growing a huge rack than nutrition.



HIGH-PROTEIN BUFFET IS DREAM FOR BIG BUCKS

R.J. Seiler

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING, INCLUDING FOOD PLOTS, HELPS GROW HORNS

Deer and other wild animals rely on their native terrain to obtain enough nutrients to survive. In most areas of the South, ample natural food resources are available in order to fuel populations of deer and other wildlife for most of the year.

Typically, during the spring and early summer, forests and open habitats are flush with greenery from herbs, forbs and other available foods. But depending on where these habitats are located, the available nutrient options may only provide limited nutrition during a critical time of year. Supplemental feeding through food plots or a high-protein feed can be beneficial on properties where landowners are trying to improve their herd and size of a buck's headgear. Spring and summer food sources are

often overlooked and deemed not very important because of the green-up and the appearance of widely available options. This couldn't be further from the truth. The quality and availability of spring and summer foods are extremely important for deer and other wildlife. It is a critical time of year for deer, and high-quality foods are required to produce desired outcomes.

It is always refreshing when native habitats provide necessary nutrients. It doesn't always work out that way, however. Deer can survive in most natural habitats, and if natural food is insufficient, deer will move to other places to find enough groceries to survive. For the landowner trying to improve his or her deer herd, high-quality food must be available throughout the year to keep the deer fed and as healthy as possible.

HABITAT OPTIONS

Landowners can improve their native food sources by improving access to the sun, nutrient supplementation and moisture management. At the same time, nutritious food plots can be maintained or new ones can be created to provide additional food opportunities for deer and other wildlife.

Beyond food plots and natural food options, landowners with an interest in growing large deer with bragging-sized racks should consider supplemental



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.

feeding with high-protein feeds. The late spring and summer is when the need is at its greatest for deer in the South.

Throughout May and into the summer, both bucks and does require highly nutritious food resources to fuel metabolic processes. Most does are dropping their fawns in May and June, and the high-quality foods are needed to fuel lactation. Bucks are in the middle of their antler growth cycle. All bucks can grow antlers, but only healthy deer can grow large antlers, and this is a very important point.

NUTRITION'S ROLE

Antler size and configuration is partially determined by both genetics and age, but nutrition is a major factor and should never be overlooked. With ample nutrition and age, large bucks can be grown even in areas with a perceived poor class of genetics. On properties with limited and poor-quality food resources, bucks will almost certainly have small, scrawny antlers, no matter how old or how great the genetics are. Nutrition is a crucial factor in antler development and landowners with an interest in having large-racked bucks must encourage a high protein and high-quality diet for their herd.

Protein is the limiting factor in natural foods and also the key ingredient that produces healthy animals. Many natural foods in deer country are often low in protein or have lower-than-

ideal protein content, even during the spring — or the high-protein foods are limited. In certain parts of the country — for example, south Texas, where large bucks are the norm — many wild foods at certain times of the year are naturally high in protein at 25% to 30%. Healthy animals eating high-protein food will wind up as bucks with large antlers.

EVERYTHING'S BIGGER IN TEXAS

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) funded, in 1989, a study performed by Donnie Harmel, John Williams and William Armstrong at Texas A&M University. The findings were pivotal about how landowners can make a direct impact on their deer's antler mass. The study produced findings on the correlation between high-protein diets, body size and antler size in captive whitetail deer. The results were undeniable.

The study produced a solid correlation between protein content in diet and antler size. Body weight and antler size are directly proportional to the protein content and quality of their diet. Otherwise, antler quality increases with the increase in protein content and availability.

Only healthy deer can grow large antlers, and it starts with available nutrition with protein content as the major contributing factor to body size and antler mass. Landowners must provide their deer with all the high-quality food they can eat, and not from supplemental feeding with corn, either. Sure, deer will consume as much corn as is available, and it works like a magnet for attracting deer into an area, but it isn't the best supplemental food source for producing a super healthy deer that will later produce a large rack.

In the TPWD study, the high-protein diets consisted of food with 16% percent or greater of digestible protein. Additionally, when deer were given the opportunity to eat as much as they wanted, antler growth also increased. Increasing the availability of high-protein food throughout the year will increase the size of deer racks on any property, regardless of location.

In today's marketplace, landowners have access to feeder types and a wide range of protein options specifically developed for deer. High-protein supplements come in the form of blocks, pellets and granular delivery mechanisms. For the best results, high protein supplements in the form of pellets or as a granular-type feed are going to produce the best opportunity for deer to gain mass and to digest/process the most protein.

One such product produced by Purina is Antler Max Deer Feed 20. This product offers 20% protein ration with other supplemental resources developed to support overall health, reproductive performance, antler growth and will support weight gain as well.

As a note, ongoing protein supplementation isn't exactly an inexpensive endeavor, and it requires a commitment. Supplements should be offered to deer in the spring and early summer to begin the program, but for the best results, protein supplements should be continually offered throughout the year and during every season. Body size is directly correlated to antler size according to the TPWD study, and a recurring commitment to provide high protein supplements can make a noticeable difference to the deer herd on any property.

Finally, there is a solution to produce large-racked bucks in the Carolinas. Supplemental foods high in protein is the key difference for producing large antlers. An increase in nutritional quality will improve both body mass and antler growth. ■



Jeff Burleson

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

May kicks off the best time for catching eating-sized channel and blue catfish from a kayak. **BELOW:** As the water warms, commercially prepared dip baits become productive for catfish.



Phillip Gentry

CAT 'YAK FEVER

AS CATFISH MOVE SHALLOW IN LATE SPRING, THEY COME INTO RANGE OF KAYAK ANGLERS

Late spring is great time to invade the shallows of almost any local lake, river or pond and tangle with some tasty, eating-size catfish. Although May can be a tough time to latch onto a trophy blue cat during the annual spawn, channel cats and sub-adult blues seem to be everywhere you look in water 10 feet deep or less.

An added bonus is the possibility of a flathead catfish, which tend to become more active as the weather and water warms up.

Catfishing from a kayak is no different than catfishing from any other style of boat. The 'yak angler, of course, has the ability to launch in locations inaccessible to larger craft. The tradeoff to the added access is storage space and range. Planning for storing and deploying the desired number of rods, whether only one or half a dozen, will make things easier when locate a good fishing spot.

A number of baits will fit the bill, but some of the most popular and easiest to keep and store are commercially made catfish dip baits, sometimes referred to as stinkbaits. These are fished with sponges, pieces of pool noodle or any

other permeable medium to which the bait will stick.

The best way to target channel cats and eating-sized blues with dip baits is to find an open-water area where deep water meets shallow. If the wind, waves, or current are pushing from shallow to deep, place the baits accordingly to call the cats in. The basic idea is to anchor your kayak on humps and points, in depth ranges from 5 to 20 feet.

HOLDING THE DIP

The purpose of the sponge is to hold the dip bait. If commercially made tubes or sponges aren't your thing, you can use a thumb-size piece of pool noodle on a Carolina rig. The older the noodle, the better.

Place the piece of noodle on the hook then drop the noodle in the bait jar and spread it on with a spoon. That way, you don't have to touch the bait and get it all over you.

Fishing for eating-sized catfish is not limited to still bodies of water like lakes, reservoirs and ponds. Fishermen report having great success with using dip baits and noodles for catfish in large



Phillip Gentry



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

THE CAROLINAS' BIG 4 CATFISH SPECIES

According to publications from the American Fisheries Society, 13 species of catfish reside within the Carolinas. Of these, four species are mad toms, a tiny catfish that's more at home in a fish tank or as bait rather than quarry. Six are bullheads, which never get much angling attention, except for the white catfish. The remaining four species are the heavy hitters that garner the most recreational angler interest.

White catfish. The white catfish is one of the larger bullheads. It has a moderately forked tail, which is the best way to distinguish it from others. Its coloration is bluish-gray above with a white belly. In the Carolinas, its habitat includes many of the lower coastal-plain rivers and waterways and stretches into the upper Piedmont. They are often confused with juvenile blue cats or channels of similar ages. The tail of a white cat is not nearly as forked as a blue, and the fish lacks the spots and yellow or greenish tint of a channel.

Channel catfish. This more-slender catfish is pale blue to olive with yellow accents above its white belly. Dark spots and an anal fin with a rounded edge



Phillip Gentry

Larger blue catfish may be finicky during their spawning season, but fish in the under 10-pound range are readily available.

distinguish the channel, although the spots may not yet appear on young fish and fade with larger ones. The tail is also deeply forked, and it has prominently large eyes. Channels reside just about everywhere in the Carolinas, owing in part to its favored status in pond stockings and

with commercial growers for food.

Blue catfish. The most-popular sportfish among cats in the Carolinas is the blue. It is a generally larger cat and sports a bluish-colored back that may bleach to near white in the cold. It also has a humped back at the dorsal fin which helps to distinguish it from the channel catfish. The blue also has a deeply forked tail.

Flathead catfish. Flatheads are easily distinguished from other cats by a flat head, protruding lower jaw, small beady eyes and a rounded, not forked, tail. Their coloration goes from muddy yellow to sea monster green, with a mottled tone. They prefer dark, hidden holes around undercut banks, logjams, and big rocks and is more active at night and during warmer weather. Flatheads were introduced in several Atlantic states and have taken hold in the Pee Dee, Santee, Edisto, Savannah, Cape Fear and Roanoke rivers and the reservoirs on those systems. Fisheries biologists don't hold the flathead in very high regard because they eat a lot of smaller native panfish species. ■

The primary difference with using this tactic in moving water is you will have to reel it in and check your bait a little bit more often because the current washes the bait off.

creeks and smaller rivers, basically anywhere channel cats are found.

The primary difference with using this tactic in moving water is you will have to reel it in and check your bait a little bit more often because the current washes the bait off. You'll also do better to throw the bait upcurrent from where you think the catfish are and let the scent wash down to them.

On known small-cat waters, light tackle will level the playing field for catfish up to 5 pounds, making for a great fight and good eating. Other locations may warrant sticking with bigger tackle.

From the middle of May through the month of June is considered "prime time" for using dip baits for catfish, especially during daylight hours. The later into the summer it gets, the more the bite will shift into early and late and often gets better after the sun goes down. ■

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Flathead catfish

WHERE — Blewett Falls Lake

HOW — The bottom of Blewett Falls is littered with stumps and logjams. Target flathead catfish in structure near the dam or in upstream area with current. When anchored near these current areas, fan cast live bait rigs to present live shad, bream, or perch in this structure.

LAUNCH — Duke Energy Yadkin-Pee Dee River Project, 800-777-9898, www.duke-energy.com/lakes/yadkin-peedee-pigeon-river

INSIDER TIP — In the warming water, it won't take flatheads long to find your bait, but it's best to feel the bottom with a weighted rig and know each line is knocking on wood.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Channel catfish

WHERE — Lake Murray, Lake Monticello

HOW — Many kayak anglers choose to drift stinkbaits or a local favorite, shrimp, on Carolina rigs or slinky weight rigs. Long clay points out to 10 to 15 feet of water are prime locations.

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

INSIDER TIP — While most channel catfish will be oriented to the bottom, they love to suspend up in the water column, especially when actively feeding.



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

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

- **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 MAY					BEST DAYS				
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE				
Sat 1					31				
Sun 2					36				
Mon 3					46				
Tue 4					37				
Wed 5					33				
Thu 6					35				
Fri 7					36				
Sat 8					48				

Sun 9					61				
Mon 10					72				
Tue 11					80				
Wed 12					72				
Thu 13					65				
Fri 14					56				
Sat 15					53				

Sun 16					54				
Mon 17					55				
Tue 18					59				
Wed 19					68				
Thu 20					56				
Fri 21					49				
Sat 22					46				

Sun 23					54				
Mon 24					63				
Tue 25					72				
Wed 26					75				
Thu 27					62				
Fri 28					50				
Sat 29					39				

25 50 75
AVERAGE

LUNAR PERIODS									
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED									
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT						
12:29 AM	4:59 am - 5:45 am	10:15 AM	5:24 pm - 6:10 pm	Low					
1:27 AM	5:58 am - 6:46 am ☀	11:19 AM	6:23 pm - 7:11 pm 🌙	Half					
2:16 AM	6:49 am - 7:47 am ☀	12:24 PM	7:14 pm - 8:12 pm 🌙						
2:57 AM	7:36 am - 8:44 am ☀	1:28 PM	8:01 pm - 9:09 pm 🌙						
3:31 AM	8:14 am - 9:40 am	2:30 PM	8:39 pm - 10:05 pm						
4:01 AM	8:51 am - 10:33 am	3:29 PM	9:16 pm - 10:58 pm						
4:28 AM	9:25 am - 11:23 am	4:26 PM	9:50 pm - 11:48 pm						
4:54 AM	9:55 am - 12:13 pm	5:22 PM	10:20 pm - 12:38 am						
5:19 AM	10:27 am - 1:03 pm	6:18 PM	10:52 pm - 1:28 am						
5:46 AM	11:00 am - 1:52 pm ☀	7:15 PM	11:25 pm - 2:17 am	New & Apogee					
6:14 AM	11:34 am - 2:44 pm ☀	8:12 PM	11:59 pm - Midnight						
6:45 AM	12:13 pm - 3:35 pm	9:09 PM	Midnight - 3:09 am						
7:20 AM	12:55 pm - 4:27 pm	10:06 PM	12:38 am - 4:00 am						
8:01 AM	1:42 pm - 5:18 pm	11:02 PM	1:20 am - 4:52 am						
8:47 AM	2:31 pm - 6:11 pm	11:54 PM	2:07 am - 5:43 am	High					
9:40 AM	3:23 pm - 7:03 pm		2:56 am - 6:36 am						
10:37 AM	4:18 pm - 7:50 pm	12:42 AM	3:48 am - 7:28 am						
11:38 AM	5:15 pm - 8:35 pm 🌙	1:25 AM	4:43 am - 8:15 am ☀						
12:42 PM	6:11 pm - 9:17 pm 🌙	2:04 AM	5:40 am - 9:00 am ☀	Half					
1:47 PM	7:08 pm - 9:58 pm 🌙	2:38 AM	6:36 am - 9:42 am ☀						
2:53 PM	8:07 pm - 10:37 pm	3:10 AM	7:33 am - 10:23 am						
4:01 PM	9:08 pm - 11:14 pm	3:41 AM	8:32 am - 11:02 am						
5:11 PM	10:10 pm - 11:56 pm	4:13 AM	9:33 am - 11:39 am						
6:24 PM	11:17 pm - Midnight	4:46 AM	10:35 am - 12:21 pm						
7:40 PM	Midnight - 12:39 am	5:24 AM	11:42 am - 1:04 pm	Perigee					
8:56 PM	12:24 am - 1:30 am	6:07 AM	12:49 pm - 1:55 pm ☀	Full					
10:09 PM	1:33 am - 2:25 am	6:58 AM	1:58 pm - 2:50 pm ☀						
11:14 PM	2:40 am - 3:26 am	7:56 AM	3:05 pm - 3:51 pm ☀	Low					
	3:44 am - 4:30 am	9:01 AM	4:09 pm - 4:55 pm						
12:09 AM	4:41 am - 5:33 am	10:09 AM	5:06 pm - 5:58 pm						
12:54 AM	5:30 am - 6:36 am ☀	11:16 AM	5:55 pm - 7:01 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.

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SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Guide Buddy Bradham said big flathead catfish are often overlooked by Santee Cooper anglers, but they can provide excellent fishing.

FORGOTTEN FLATHEADS?

ON SANTEE COOPER LAKES, THEY AREN'T TARGETED AS MUCH AS BLUES AND CHANNELS ARE, BUT THEY SHOULD BE, GUIDE SAYS

May is a prime month for catching catfish on the Santee Cooper lakes, with blues, channels and flatheads all active.

In recent years, blues and channels have become primary targets, and flatheads are often by-products of generic catfishing tactics.

Flatheads were stocked around the same time as the blues, in the mid-1960s, and by the early 1980s, both species were booming in quality and quantity.

FORGOTTEN FISH?

Buddy Bradham, 62, from Cross, S.C., began guiding on the Santee Cooper lakes for strippers in 1978. He quickly branched out to include catfish and evolved into guiding full-time for cats.

"By 1982, I knew catfishing offered a great opportunity here for huge freshwater fish," Bradham said. "I honed my techniques to specialize in giant flatheads."

Beginning in May and extending into the fall, Bradham said flatheads are trophy catfish targets. He learned how to specifically target and catch these fish.

"Catfishing was great for years, but the lakes went through a major recession in productivity, and the guiding business got tough," Bradham said. "I moved to Florida in 1999 and worked for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Department until I retired in 2019 and moved home to Santee Cooper."

"I tried the flatheads and found they're back in good numbers," he said. "But most catfishing talk was about the big blues, and I realized fishermen had forgotten about flatheads."

TARGET FLATHEADS

Bradham said techniques he used to target flatheads in the past are still effective.

"A modern graph is essential for flatheads," Bradham said. "Flatheads tend to cluster in specific areas, based on forage availability and habitat. They're found throughout both lakes, but I prefer Lake Marion from I-95 to the Wilson Dam because I think it's ideal habitat."

Bradham (352-277-6134) will search along the old river channel and creeks or ditches that cut through the open-water flats. He'll target irregular bottom contour features, and he'll usually



Terry Madewell

find flatheads nestled close to woody cover.

"Big flatheads have a unique sonar signature that's noticeably different from a blue catfish," he said. "They appear on the graph more of a big blob, almost like a thick patch of baitfish, hovering near the bottom. Blues typically have a well-defined arch shape."

"I love putting clients on big catfish of any type, and we'll catch blues while targeting flatheads, but I significantly increase the potential to hook a big flathead by searching for them in their preferred habitat and targeting their unique sonar signal."

TECHNIQUES

Bradham said he prefers anchored, vertical fishing when targeting flatheads.

"Once I spot a cluster of big fish on the graph that I believe are flatheads, I drop anchors



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.

above and below that location and pull the boat directly over them,” he said. “The bait is a key, and I prefer a live, wiggling bait. White perch are ideal; I’ll cut the tail off because they use the tail to stay upright, and this makes the bait flutter and more attractive to a catfish. Herring and gizzard shad are also good baits. I’ll put out rigs all around the boat.

“I’m literally targeting catfish that we see on the graph, and that’s exciting to me.”

Bradham uses 8/0 circle hooks on 7½-foot, medium-action rods. He loads 80-pound braid or monofilament on Penn reels with a 2-ounce sinker above a 24-inch leader.

“The heavy line and leader are essential, because we’re targeting giant catfish in stump-infested waters,” he said. “I’ll lower the rig to the bottom and wind the reel about three cranks — eyeball level for a big flathead.”

Bradham said that once he’s rigged, he’ll give a spot 30 to 45 minutes to produce.

“Sometimes we’re hooked up before I get all the rods set; sometimes it requires patience,” he said. “But when one flathead bites, watch the other rods, because odds are good others may hook up quickly. If 10 or 15 minutes passes without another bite after a flurry of flathead action, I’ll pull anchor and repeat the hunting process.”



Buddy Bradham's favorite bait for flathead catfish is a live white perch with its tail cut off to enhance its action.

Bradham said a flathead bite requires patience because the rod tip slowly bends into a deep arch; he lets the fish load up and then grabs the rod.

“This slow-motion bite exponentially intensifies the excitement of the moment,” he said. “A big blue’s bite is often an instantaneous event, with the rod tip instantly snatched deep in the water. I love them both.”

“This is hunting for giant catfish at its best by searching, identifying and catching specific catfish,” he said. “I’ll never forget the fantastic flatheads at Santee Cooper.” ■

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver



GROUPER CAKES

THIS POPULAR BOTTOMFISH REALLY SHINES ON PLATES

TIP!

Grouper is firmer and cuts better when it is cold, like straight out of the cooler or fridge.

Jerry Dilsaver

The outdoors world makes some serious changes as we enter May. Whenever they happen, we suddenly realize the world is bright and warm, winds lay out more than they blow, and the heavy rains become welcome showers. It's shirt-sleeve and shorts weather everywhere but in the high country and on most days, it warm to it there by noon.

By May, most hunting has ended, but some places have a week or so of turkey season left. Fishing has been improving all spring, and it's a great way to enjoy some fresh air and return with dinner.

Calm sea conditions and warmer weather are magnets that most offshore fishermen can't resist. The waters around the Gulf Stream are warming, and the action is heating up. One of the most-anticipated offshore fish along the Carolinas is actually a group included in the classification of shallow-water grouper: gag, black, red, scamp, yellowmouth, yellowfin, tiger, graysby and coney grouper, plus red hind and rock hind.

This recipe is a celebration of shallow-water grouper season reopening on May 1 after a 4-month spawning season closure, except for red grouper, which spawn later and receive an extra month of protection.

With steadily improving weather and sea conditions, fishing become a priority. The good news is that fishing might get even

hotter than the weather, as most summer species are arriving. It's a great time to be on the water and there is a great variety of fish for those who enjoy them.

Seafood is always a welcome addition to the dinner table, and when you catch it yourself, you know just how fresh it is and how well it has been cared for. Whether it's sitting on a bank, wading a small stream or flat or gently rocking in a boat on the ocean, fishing is a great way to spend a day and more often than not, fishermen bring dinner home from May fishing trips.

This recipe is an excellent way to enjoy fish and will work with almost any fish. However, it is special with the mild flavor of grouper, and grouper are a primary target of offshore bottom-fishermen during May. There is a little bit of prep time involved, but once everything is ready to mix, it goes quickly, and there are soon hot grouper cakes ready to be eaten. ■



GROUPER CAKES

Grouper are one of my favorite fish. Their mild flavor lends itself to being prepared in a variety of ways. This recipe came about as a way to use some smaller pieces that were left over after cleaning. Some of my friends call them fritters, but fritters have more breading and less meat. This is a combination that fits somewhere between salmon patties and crab cakes.

Whatever you call it, we liked it so much that we began making sure there were some small pieces left after cleaning grouper. It works well with those pieces from near the tail that aren't big enough to be meal-size fillets, trimmings from around the bone, meat on the head above the pectoral fins and rib meat. I won't include the cheeks, as they're special on their own. A fillet could be cut up too, that's happened before.

Don't chop the pieces too small. You'll still have most of the flavor, but it isn't quite the same. Try it with larger pieces chopped finely and see for yourself. Aim for cubes about the size of a fingernail. A tip for chopping the grouper is that it is firmer and cuts better when it is cold, like straight out of the cooler or fridge.

I don't add salt because the saltines have plenty. However, seasoning is always to taste, and if you like a lot of salt, add some pink Himalayan salt. I like the way it seasons. As for pepper, I like it and coarse-grind lots of it into the mix.

I used to crush saltines with a mortar and pestle, but now I put them in a heavy duty quart Zip Lock bag to crunch them up. Not everyone has a rolling pin, but just about everyone has steel drink tumblers, and they make a good substitute for this small job. Don't crush the crackers to powder, but get them pretty fine.

PREPARATION:

Chop the grouper, parsley and pepper. Crush the saltines and slice the lemons and limes. Beat the egg and mix it with the yogurt, Dijon mustard, Worcestershire, garlic, onion and Sriracha sauce, and season (to taste) with salt and pepper.

Using a second bowl, combine the grouper, crushed saltines, parsley and pepper pieces. Mix the yogurt and spices mixture with the fish mixture. Form into six to nine cakes approximately ¾- to 1-inch thick.

Use a large heavy skillet and cover the bottom with oil, then preheat over medium-high heat. Get this hot but do not allow the oil to smoke. Put half the cakes in the pan and cook until golden brown and crispy, 2 or 3 minutes per side. Remove the cakes and set on a strainer or paper towel. Cook the rest of the cakes and remove to a strainer or paper towel.

Serve grouper cakes with lemon and lime wedges, tartar sauce and spicy tartar sauce.

Spicy Tartar Sauce:

Spicy tartar sauce is easily made by mixing Sriracha sauce with tartar sauce. This is done to your personal heat

If you're not a fan of yogurt, you can substitute the same amount of mayonnaise. If you do this, use real mayo, not fat-free or reduced fat. If reduced fat appeals to you, try plain Greek yogurt. It reduces the fat and tastes better.

I don't often suggest brands, but I will with the Sriracha sauce. Texas Pete Cha Sauce is not as hot as some brands, but it has enough bite to satisfy all but hard-core fire breathers. Where it really shines is with its smoky, sweet flavor. It works well in the recipe and mixed with tartar sauce to make spicy tartar sauce. When making the sauce, understand that lighter pink sauce is milder and better tolerated by most. As you add more Sriracha sauce and the color become redder, the spice and heat factor increase also.

With this recipe, I make six cakes. This works well as the entree of a meal and for making sandwiches. I occasionally make these for sliders and use the same ingredients for eight or nine smaller cakes that fit rolls and slider buns.

One of the things my wife likes about this recipe is that when everything is blended except the jalapenos, I can make a couple of cakes for her before adding the jalapenos. If you have someone who is not a fan of jalapenos, you can make theirs with a bell pepper or plain, then add spices and the jalapeno pieces for those with more robust palates.

Understand that I still experiment with this and won't be upset if you change it a little. If you like fish, I believe you'll like this. Grouper cakes are tasty and fun to eat. ■

preference. Pink sauce is milder, and as more Sriracha sauce is added the color darkens and the sauce becomes more spicy. Add it slowly and taste before adding more.

Grouper cakes can be served either as sandwiches or sliders with lettuce and tomato or as the entree for a meal. They go well with a potato (baked potato, fries or tater tots) or corn-on-the-cob and salad or slaw. A big glass of sweet tea, or your favorite adult beverage, completes the meal. ■

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound grouper

1 large egg

¾ cup crushed saltine crackers (approximately 21 crackers)

½ cup plain Greek yogurt

2 tbsp Dijon mustard

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tsp Texas Pete Cha Sauce (Sriracha sauce)

2 tbsp freshly chopped parsley

1 tbsp minced garlic

3 tbsp minced onion

2 tbsp minced jalapeno pepper, or orange bell pepper for those with milder palates

Pink Himalayan salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Canola or peanut oil

Lemon and lime wedges

Tartar sauce



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



Big cobia arrive in nearshore waters off North Carolina's coast in May, and fishermen target them regularly.

Sportsman
**FISHING
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COBIA INVADE NEARSHORE NC WATERS

Annual migration hits its peak as spring weather warms the ocean

Like tourism in reverse, cobia stream north from Florida to North Carolina as spring begins to warm ocean waters.

"The magic number in May is 65 degrees around here," said guide Dale Collins of Pogies Tackle & Kayak in Swansboro. "Cobia and king mackerel start making runs from Florida at the same time."

Collins, who runs Fish or Die Charters (252-422-4326) said cobia swarm to nearshore waters from south of Bogue Inlet to Oregon Inlet, creating sight-fishing opportunities near channel-marker buoys, flotsam, cardboard, pieces of wood and seaweed mats.

Their natural curiosity, fighting spirit, often large size and great taste make them attractive targets.

"I'd start at inshore (artificial reefs) to find cobia and work my way toward shore," Collins said. "The Keypost Rocks (ARs 340, 342 and 345) are good places. From May through the summer, cobia move inshore, lay around buoys and come into inlets like Bogue and Beaufort. They hang out any

place with lots of baitfish."

Guide Bryan Goodwin of Harkers Island (252-725-3961) said fishing often depends upon weather patterns.

"If we're lucky enough, and a body of fish moves in, fishing can be great," he said. "But too much northeast wind keeps them off the beaches. A southwest wind can trigger epic seasons. They also migrate (north) along the edge of the Gulf Stream."

Both guides favor two fishing tactics.

"Sight-fishing or soaking baits on the bottom will work," Goodwin said. "Fairly calm seas, sunny days and clear water are best for sight-fishing."

Collins cruises the beaches, tries to spot cobia, then casts live menhaden or bucktails at them.

"If you've got a tower on your boat, that's best," he said. "The higher, the better off you'll be because you can see them."

Goodwin said it's a good idea to keep the sun at your back. Polarized sunglasses help anglers see sunning fish.

When Collins finds a bait ball, he'll cast

a 2- to 4-ounce bucktail with a ribbontail trailer or a live baitfish and let it sink.

Beaufort Inlet is a favorite cobia bait-soaking spot.

"A lot of guys go there, anchor and drop chum bags and lower baits to the bottom," Collins said. "Cobia will be in the channel out to the Knuckle Buoy."

Tackle includes 5000 to 6000 series reels mated to heavy-action rods with strong backbones.

"I use 50- to 60-pound Power Pro braid with 6 to 8 feet of 80-pound fluorocarbon leader," Collins said. "You need equipment that can turn a big fish. You also want heavy jigs that'll fall fast to get through a bait ball."

Collins favors 8- to 12-inch curlytail grubs or plastic eels like a Z-Man Hero model. Cobia love live eels and menhaden, but so do other species.

"If bluefish are eating my live or dead baits, I'll put a hard-shell crab on a hook," Goodwin said. "Cobia also like crabs, and bluefish leave them alone." ■

LITTLE RIVER AREA FILLS UP WITH FLOUNDER

ICW, other main waterways are first spots where big flatfish show up in late spring

S By Jeff Burleson

pring weather takes hold this month; there's little cool weather left on the menu. Anglers respond, and many of them take advantage of a hot bite along the coast, particularly the flounder bite just south of the North Carolina/South Carolina state line in Little River's tannic waters.

Flounder are some of the most sought-after inshore species across the Eastern Seaboard. Not only are they fun to catch, they are one of the best eating fish anywhere. And spring is among the best seasons to catch these fish around Little River.

It's a unique area, with the Atlantic Intra-coastal Waterway, shallow estuaries and docks and other structures on every corner. But the area's most-interesting feature is the tea-colored water. The dark waters of the Waccamaw River feed the ICW and fuel the region, bringing in a flood of nutrients and tons of baitfish. Historically, flounder have keyed in on this area to take advantage of the abundance of food, and May is the middle of the peak flounder season in Little River.

Tom Cushman of Captain Cushman's Calmwater Charters has fished this area for more than 20 years and is well-known for limiting out on flounder on many trips.

"Big schools of flounder move in from offshore to feed," Cushman said. (843-997-5850) "The schools moving in from offshore can be voracious and ready to eat whatever they can find."

The estuaries are filled with all types of baitfish and a new crop of shrimp moving into the creeks. Flounder will move in from ocean and find places to ambush the smorgasbord of bait.

"The fish move in and spread out along oyster bars, creeks mouths, and even in the main channels," he said.

Flounder, which associate with structure in order to ambush passing forage, will spread out as the weather continues to warm, but in spring, they are still moving in and will most often be found around structure along the main waterways.

"Sandy bottom areas near structure along the main channels are great places to find flounder in the spring," he said.

In Little River, the main creeks off the inlet will generally hold fish in May. Dunn Sound and the large, deep creeks that connect to the ICW are also great places to fish. But Cushman warns anglers not to ignore the ICW either.

"The ICW will be full of bait this time of year, and flounder will be ambushing this bait along the edges of the ICW and along docks and

other structure," he said.

Flounder can set up in certain places, but they're also still on the move and can shift from place to place. For best results, slow-trolling with live baits or jigging with shrimp-imitators of Gulp baits to cover a lot of water is the best way to find these fish.

May is one of the best months to fish for flounder around Little River, because it's also when bigger size-classes of fish show up. Flounder move into the area in schools of similar sizes, and at the end of the migratory push, the larger-size groups show up that can make retrieving these fish a real, but exciting challenge. ■

May is a great month for fishermen to find big flounder in the waters around South Carolina's Little River.



Tom Cushman

SOUTHERN NC INLETS FILL WITH SPANISH

Plenty of mackerel decked, boated, beached

S By Jerry Dilsaver
panish mackerel usually begin arriving along the North Carolina's southern beaches in April, and by Mother's Day, they are around in good numbers. These tasty, junior-size members of the mackerel family bite well, make excellent table fare and are favorites of many fishermen, caught from boats and piers and occasionally in the surf, which adds even more to their popularity.

Prime locations are around the tide lines just outside Masonboro, Carolina Beach, Cape Fear, Lockwood Folly and Shallotte inlets, and around the many near-shore artificial reefs and rocks and along the edges of Frying Pan Shoals. Schools may also be found in open water as they chase and devour a school of bait.

Rennie Clark of Tournament Trail Charters in Carolina Beach said many of his clients prefer to troll for Spanish, but a growing number like to find a school and cast to it, being able to fight fish without a planer or trolling sinker controlling the action.

Clark (910-465-8943) said his trolling spread for Spanish is primarily Nos. 00 and 0 Clarkspoons and mackerel tree rigs pulled behind 2-ounce trolling sinkers or No. 1 planers. The trolling speed typically between 5 and 8 knots, but don't worry about trolling too fast; Spanish have blazing sprint speed and can easily catch these lures if they want.

"On days off, my family and I enjoy casting to feeding Spanish more than trolling," Clark said. "They like to fight the fish on lighter outfits rather than using heavy outfits to wind in planers and trolling sinkers. My favorite jigs are 9-ounce Gomame .9 and .7-ounce Gomoku jigs from Williamson.

"These jigs come with treble hooks, and I replace them with No. 1/0 VMC ILSCB large ring J-hooks in the coastal black color, and I also switch out the standard split rings with stronger VMC No. 3, stainless-steel split rings," he said. "This combination works well for Spanish and is up to the task of handling Atlantic bonito, false albacore and big red drum when they show in the fall. If these aren't working, I downsize to smaller Maria jigs, and the bite usually picks up."

Pier fishermen also catch Spanish in May. Small, flashy lures like Got-Chas, Shad, Minnow and Stick Jigs catch smaller ones well, and live baits catch larger Spanish. One not-so-secret tip is that Got-Chas with gold hooks catch fish much better than the ones with silver hooks. It's wise to pay the extra money and catch more fish. ■

Rennie Clark unhooks two Spanish mackerel caught on a mackerel tree rig.



Jerry Dilsaver



TARGET SPRING BLACK DRUM in deep holes around Charleston Harbor's rock jetties

Guide James LaVanway (left) targets black drum with big chunks of bait in deep holes around the Charleston Harbor jetties.

By Brian Cope
Black drum are usually a by-catch for anglers fishing for sheepshead or redfish, but it's possible to target them, and one place South Carolina fishermen can catch them from keeper-sized to trophies is around the jetties that line Charleston Harbor. James LaVanway of Reel Fish Finder Charters catches plenty of these fish in May; he has a strategy for pinpointing them.

"If you're just anchored up alongside the jetties and fishing on the bottom, you will catch a variety of fish, including plenty of black drum," he said. "A Carolina rig with a 1- to 3-ounce sinker and a 3/0 to 8/0 hook loaded with any kind of fresh bait will do. Of course, you'll catch a variety of fish on that rig at the jetties."

But when LaVanway has an angler aboard who specifically wants to catch a black drum, he moves to between the north jetty and Sullivan's Island. He watches his electronics for deep holes, then sets his trolling motor on anchor lock. Using the same Carolina rig, he casts either live shrimp or fresh cut bait.

"There's no need to be stingy with bait here," he said. "I'll put three or four live shrimp on a hook — whatever I can fit. Big chunks of cut bait work just as well. Bigger baits will discourage small bait thieves. I'll use as little weight as I need to keep the bait on the bottom. Sometimes a 1-ounce weight works, but

sometimes you might need 3 ounces.

"When the black drum are here and hungry, you'll know it right quick. Your bait won't sit for long. The key is finding the deeper holes. The water is fairly deep off the Sullivan's Island beach, so you've got to look around, and find holes that are at least slightly deeper than the surrounding water."

LaVanway (843-697-2081) uses 4500 to 6500 series spinning reels on medium-heavy rods, and he uses 50- to 80-pound line.

"Even if you're hoping to catch some keepers (five per day, 14 to 27 inches), you're going to hook into some really big fish along the jetties and in these deeper holes away from the jetties. If you come out here with 15-pound test line, you're going to get broken off a lot, lose a lot of fish, and lose a lot of time retying," he said.

LaVanway said anglers need to have a venting tool on board and know how to use it.

"We've caught black drum up to 40 pounds here. And with them coming from deep holes, you need to take a quick photo, then vent them quickly before returning them to the water. These are trophy fish, and we need to do all we can to protect them," he said. ■

High Rock Lake's population of flathead catfish is as good as ever, as tournament catches prove.



Tony Garitta

HIGH ROCK'S BIG FLATHEADS ON THE PROWL

May is a big month for heavyweight catfish; live bait is the real ticket

Y By Tony Garitta
ears ago, 5-fish tournament limits of flathead catfish weighing more than 100 pounds frequently took place in May at North Carolina Catfish Association Tournament Series events on High Rock Lake.

Chris Fraley of Mount Holly, N.C., an NCCATS official, said May fishing for flatheads at High Rock has changed over the years because of increased pressure, but fishing for the big cats remains pretty good at the Yadkin River impoundment.

"High Rock gives up lots of flatheads from 20 to 30 pounds," said Fraley. "Occasionally, 40- to 50-pound fish hit the scales at tournament weigh-ins."

This month, Fraley searches for the whiskered brutes in major creeks, targeting points, flats, ditches and rocks in depths of 5 to 20 feet of water.

"While I'll sample a range of depths, most of the bites take place in about 15 feet of water," said Fraley, whose boat resembles a floating rod rack, with as many as 20 rods mounted around the craft, spider rig-style.

His tackle ensemble includes 7-foot, medium-action rods paired with Ambassador 6500 reels featuring clicking mechanisms that warn him he's getting a bite.

Big fish require stout line. He spools 25-pound line for the main line that's connected via a barrel swivel to a Carolina rig

consisting of a short, 65-pound leader tied to a No. 8/0 circle hook that sets itself when a cat takes the bait. The size of the weight, if used, is determined by the depth, wind and presence or absence of current.

Fraley anchors when he's targeting flatheads, then sets out his rods at various depths around the boat. He favors freshly caught bream for bait. Unlike other catfish species that consume cut and stinkbaits, flatheads dine on live bait: shad, bream and goldfish.

Fraley hooks the bait under the dorsal fin to keep it alive and frisky, letting the bait's antics attract flatheads. Since he's anchored and straight-lining, he doesn't add an in-line float to his rig to keep the bait off the bottom. A few turns of the handle keeps the bait off the bottom when he's fishing deep.

Fraley gives a likely spot 30 to 60 minutes to produce; then he motors off elsewhere.

He said neither current nor muddy water have much of an impact on his tactics.

"In the creeks, current doesn't have as much of an influence as it does on the main body or upriver," Fraley said. "As for muddy water, I'd rather fish old muddy water than fresh muddy water. Fresh muddy water hurts the bite."

Before planning a trip, fishermen should check the lake level. If it's near the full mark, passage under the bridges at Abbotts and Flat Swamp creeks might not be possible. ■

SPRO LITTLE JOHN MD 50

Summer is just around the corner, and for bass fishermen, it comes carrying the need to get just a little deeper to fool Mr. Largemouth.

That's where SPRO's Little John MD 50 crankbait enters the picture. A deeper-diving brother to the Little John 50, the MD 50 will reach down to 7 to 9 feet.

Designed by bass pro John Crews, the MD 50 has a longer, thicker lip and a steel ball that generates a loud, bass-attracting rattle. It dives quickly and deflects easily off structure.

The MD 50 features No. 5 round-bend Gamakatsu trebles. It weighs ½-ounce, is 50mm long and comes in 27 different color patterns.

MSRP: \$11.99.

**For more info, visit:
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MILLENNIUM Q200 BUCK HUT

If you like the idea of a shooting house for a deer blind, but you want one a little more portable than the big, wooden job you hoisted onto that 4x4 platform, the Millennium Q200 Buck Hunt may be just what the doctor ordered.

The Buck Hut measures 7-foot-4 wide and 4-foot deep by 7-foot tall, and it weighs just 323 pounds, making it relatively easy to move if you need to, but with a 500-pound capacity. The height makes it perfect for bowhunters who want to stand to shoot, but it fits sit-down hunters with guns and crossbows.

Blind material is a waterproof, heavy

duty, soft-shell material, with the frame powder-coated steel. Support legs include two that are adjustable for leveling on unlevel ground, and each stand includes an anchoring kit.

Windows can be shaped and adjusted for rifle, bow or crossbow, and each has an adjustable-height shooting rest.

The overall height is 15-foot-8, and the overall footprint is 11-foot-9 by 8-foot.

MSRP: \$799

For more info, visit: www.millennium-stands.com

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Frabill's series of floating trout nets brings to anglers who are wading or fishing from small boats or kayaks, a handy, excellent aid for finishing up a battle with a worthy, finned opponent.

First, the short handle makes it easy to move when trying to net a fish in swift or still water. The hoop is buoyant, so if it's dropped in the drink, it will stay on the surface. You shouldn't drop it, either, because an attached lanyard can keep it tethered to you or the boat.

The hoop is finished in gunmetal, so there's no shine to spook a fish that's on the way to the square-bottom of the net, which is built with tangle-free, dipped micromesh material so a fish's slime coat won't be damaged, and so you won't spend any time trying to untangle hooks from the net.

Nets come in five sizes, from teardrop to square, depending on the kind of fishing you're doing. There will be one to fit your needs.

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Cyril Gulledge

Cyril Gulledge of Matthews, N.C., caught this 5-pound, 5-ounce, speckled trout in the Ocracoke surf on Thanksgiving Day 2020.



Tammy Tucker

Tammy Tucker of Kannapolis, N.C., killed this big tom, with an 11-inch beard and 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch spurs, last April in Stanly County.



Jackson Hughes

Jackson Hughes of Apex, N.C., killed this 7-point, 126-pound Orange County buck on Sept. 23, 2020, with a crossbow.



Molly Trogdon

Molly Trogdon, 7, caught this nice speckled trout last fall near Belhaven, N.C.



Tracie Holladay

Tracie Holladay, 17, of Manning, S.C., caught this 24-pound flathead catfish in the Santee River on Dec. 28, 2020.



C.J. Addison killed this 178-pound, 11-point buck on Nov. 9, 2020, in Lancaster, S.C.

C.J. Addison

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Preston Scott

Preston Scott of Simpsonville, S.C., shows off the big hog he killed at Cherokee Run on the hunt he received as grand-prize winner in *Carolina Sportsman's* 2019 Bag-A-Buck contest.



Chase Buerlein

Chase Buerlein of Richmond, Va., caught this slot red on March 10, fishing with Capt. Rob Bennett out of Kiawah Island, S.C.



Annie Wokasch

Annie Wokasch, 9, killed her first wild turkey on April 19, 2020, in Nash County, N.C.



Dallas, Jamie Brooks

Dallas Brooks of Siler City, N.C., caught this 19-inch flounder near Carolina Beach, N.C., on a live mullet minnow on Aug. 6, 2020, the day before her husband, Jamie Brooks, landed this 22-inch flounder, also on a live mullet minnow. Both were personal bests.



Mac Green

Mac Green, 9, killed this nice buck on Oct. 31, 2020, near Turbeville, S.C.



Phillip Lee

Phillip Lee of Goldsboro, N.C., arrowed this 130-inch 8-point buck in Lenoir County on opening day of the 2020 bow season.



Mark Malloy

Mark Malloy and a hunting partner killed a 2-man limit of wood ducks on opening day, Oct. 7, 2020, near Reidsville, N.C.

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