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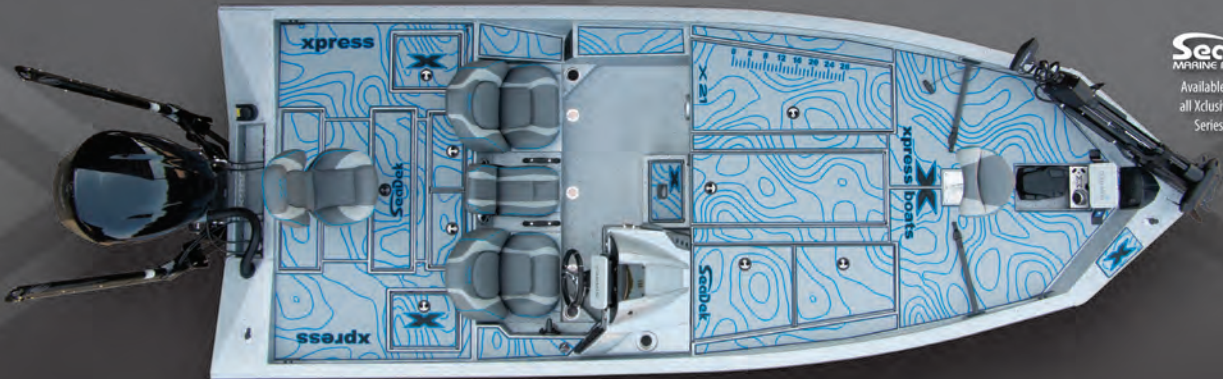


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Carolina SPORTSMAN CONTENTS

32
SUMMER
'SAIL'-ING

13
FAKE OUT
SUMMER SPECKS

Volume 28 | Number 6 | June 2021

FEATURES:

13 FAKE OUT SUMMER SPECKS

This veteran guide unveils his favorite artificial baits for catching summer trout in shallow water around the spawn.

> By Jeff Burleson



22 FOOLING BREAM

Many anglers don't buy worms and crickets when they head out to fish for bream. Here's how they choose the artificial lures they use.

> By Terry Madewell

32 SUMMER 'SAIL'-ING

Sailfish, dolphin make a big showing in summer around waters inshore of the Gulf Stream close to North Carolina's Cape Fear. Here's how to add them to your catch.

> By Jerry Ddilsaver

38 A BRIDGE TOO FAR? NO WAY

Bridges are crappie magnets year-round, but they shine brightest during summer. Here's how one angler slays them in hot weather.

> By Phillip Gentry

42 MAKE BLUE CATS DANCE A JIG

After the spring striper run shuts down, Roanoke River anglers can turn to catfish, without switching lures, to provide plenty of action.

> By Mike Marsh

FISHING HOTSPOTS:

- 21 Ocean Isle specks
- 28 Cooper River bream
- 47 Lake Gaston catfish
- 60 Edisto 40 bottomfish
- 61 Kerr Lake bass

OUTDOOR UPDATE:

- 6 NC DEER HARVEST UP
- 7 WHAT ALLIGATORS EAT

COLUMNS:

- 18 SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY
By Phillip Gentry
- 48 SOUND & SEA
By Brian Cope
- 50 LUNKER LINES
By David Fritts
- 52 GREENER PASTURES
By Jeff Burleson
- 54 COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE
By Capt. Jerry Dilsaver
- 56 SANTEE STRINGER
By Terry Madewell
- 58 STICKS & STRINGS
By Sammy Romano

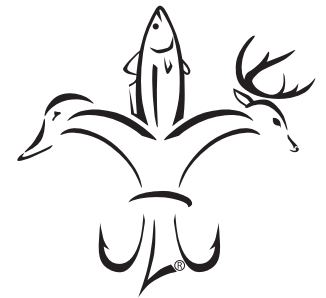
DEPARTMENTS:

- 51 Astro Tables
- 64 Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook
- 65 Sportsman Showcase
- 66 Advertiser Index

ON THE COVER:



June is a big month for speckled trout along the coast of North Carolina and South Carolina, in part because fish are spawning and feeding up, and because the weather is perfect: not too cool, not to hot. Photo by Brian Carroll.



Carolina
SPORTSMAN

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FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS OR SUBSCRIPTION ISSUES, CALL 1.855.224.1667

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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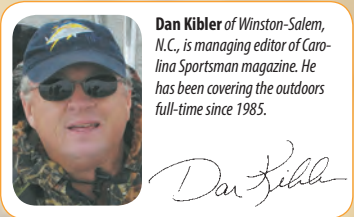
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Outdoor UPDATE

with
Dan Kibler



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

Dan Kibler

NC'S LATEST DEER HARVEST IS UP HUNTERS TAKE 169,973 WHITETAILS, INCREASE OF 4.7% OVER 2019-20

Deer hunters in North Carolina had a good 2020-21 season, tagging 169,973 deer, an increase of 4.7% over the previous season's harvest and a 9.1% increase over the average for the previous three seasons.



Stacy Atkinson of Florence, S.C., was checking his beaver traps in mid-April when he found this interloper, a huge alligator snapping turtle, in one of them. Not in the mood for turtle stew, he released the big rascal.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission released annual harvest numbers in late April. They showed harvest increases in all areas of the state, headed by a 23.7% increase in the Western zone.

According to Commission officials, the harvest increase was likely influenced by higher deer numbers and more hunter effort.

"The pandemic resulted in more time at home and opportunity to engage in outdoor activities for lots of people. The increase in new hunters and overall hunter participation is an encouraging trend that we hope will continue in the

future," said Jon Shaw, the Commission's deer-project leader.

Harvest numbers showed that 50.8% of deer reported were antlered bucks, 44.5% were does and 4.7% were button bucks. Guns were used in 76.9% of the harvest, followed by blackpowder

guns, 9.7%, archery, 7.7% and crossbow, 5.7%.

Deer taken on public game lands made up 3.3% of the total harvest. In counties where hunting deer with dogs is legal, dog-hunting accounted for 19.3% of the harvest.

Randolph County was the top county in terms of overall harvest, with 4,142 deer taken, followed by Anson with 4,037 and Rockingham with 3,667.

In terms of harvest per square mile of antlered bucks, Watauga County led with 7.01, Alleghany was second with 6.89 and Gaston was third with 6.88.

"Reported harvest data provide valuable trend information that biologist use, in combination with other recurring agency surveys and biological data, to monitor the herd. These data indicate we continue to move closer towards meeting density, sex ratio, and age structure objectives across most of the state," Shaw said. ■

Top Counties, Overall Harvest 2020-21 Season

County	Harvest
1. Randolph	4,142
2. Anson	4,037
3. Rockingham	3,667
4. Wilkes	3,596
5. Halifax	3,515
6. Northampton	3,499
7. Union	3,479
8. Stanley	3,307
9. Stokes	3,108
10. Moore	2,898

Top Counties, antlered bucks per square mile 2020-21 Season

County	Harvest
1. Watauga	7.01
2. Alleghany	6.89
3. Gaston	6.88
4. Mecklenburg	6.79
5. Cabarrus	6.64
6. Stanley	6.38
7. Cleveland	5.29
8. Ashe	5.20
9. Forsyth	4.69
10. Alamance	4.67

NCDMF CHANGES CITATION CRITERIA

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has made several changes to its Saltwater Fishing Tournament criteria, effective May 1.

The tournament, popularly known as the Citation Program, is a long-standing program that recognizes outstanding saltwater catches meeting minimum weight or release length requirements. Anglers are eligible to receive a certificate of their catch that is suitable for framing.

Changes to the requirements are:

- Atlantic bonito and striped bass will no longer be eligible for citations.
- Croaker will be eligible for a citation at 1 pound, 8 ounces.
- Black drum will only be eligible for a release citation. The minimum release length will remain 40 inches.
- Gag grouper will be the only species eligible for a grouper citation. The minimum weight will remain 20 pounds.
- Sea mullet will be eligible for a citation at the minimum weight of 2 pounds.
- Sharks will only be eligible for a release citation. The minimum release length will remain 80 inches.
- Gray tilefish will be eligible for a citation at the minimum weight of 12 pounds.
- Blackfin tuna will be eligible for a citation at the minimum weight of 25 pounds.

In addition to the criteria changes, there is a new, online application for anglers who have released qualifying species. Anglers are encouraged to use the online application for released fish but must visit a weigh station for fish that require a minimum weight.

NCDMF periodically reviews and changes the Saltwater Fishing Tournament criteria to reflect requests from anglers and input from division biologists and to better the program and benefit its participants.

The tournament year runs from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. Any citation-size fish caught in 2021 before May 1 will be eligible under the previous citation guidelines. ■



The stomach of a huge gator processed in Cordray's in Ravenel, S.C., contained (below) five dog collars, a spark plug, several bobcat claws and a bullet jacket.

STOMACH OF HUGE SC GATOR REVEALS PLENTY

By Brian Cope
When Ned McNeely brought a harvested gator from a private-land hunt to Cordray's Processing in Ravenel, S.C., on

April 8, 2021, the processors decided to take a look at what the 12-foot, 445-pound gator had in its stomach.

They found some very interesting items and told the story of the gator on their Facebook page.

"We don't usually open up the stomach, but we did today. Five dog tags (from dog collars), one bullet jacket, one spark plug, loads of turtle shells and several bobcat claws were inside," they wrote.

Cordray's found phone numbers on two of the sets of dog tags. One number was out of service, but the other one worked. It was the number of the hunter who had lost a dog more than two decades ago while hunting in the Lowcountry's Pon Pon area.

"Two of the tags were legible, and one phone number still worked. The owner said he had that lease 24 years ago," Cordray's wrote. The tag was from one of his dogs.

South Carolina's private-land alligator season doesn't get a lot of attention. It's much different than the public season that takes place every fall. The private land season runs from Sept. 1 to May 31. ■



Photos courtesy Cordray's



TRIPLE-DIGIT HOO

The crew of Reel Deal Sportfishing had a big day fishing offshore out of Sneads Ferry, N.C., on April 18. They hooked up and boated a 102-pound wahoo on light tackle: an Ugly Stik Tiger Lite Rod, a Penn Spinfisher VI 6500, a 50-pound monofilament leader and a 8/0 Gamakatsu circle hook. Capt. Daniel Gentry Smith-Powell said the fish spooled the reel down to the backing, and when they chased it, they were able to boat it 30 minutes later.

LONGBEARD HEN TAGGED

Chris Mooring of Princeton, N.C., thought a gobbler that walked out into a Halifax County field on opening day of turkey season, April 17, didn't look quite right.

"I saw what looked like a 2-year-old gobbler with a hen, but I thought its head wasn't red enough," said Mooring, a 49-year-old government contractor with the N.C. National Guard. "I got my binoculars up, and as it turned out, it was a bearded hen."

About one in 50 hens wears a beard, most thin and less than 6 inches long. That's what makes this bird even more special. After Mooring dropped her with a shot from his 12-gauge Benelli Super Black Eagle II, he got the bird weighed on certified scales and measured the beard. The hen weighed 11.42 pounds and carried an 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch beard. It's likely one of the five best bearded hens taken in North Carolina.

"I work with a group called Veterans Creed Outdoors," Mooring said. "We had five veterans out that morning; I was the only one without a hunter. I was really just scouting, looking at places for the afternoon hunt."

Early on, Mooring heard one gobbler deep in the swamp, but the bird shut up as soon as it left the roost. About 6:40, he headed to an old cotton field, grown up with weeds, where he saw a hen. She was feeding, but she kept looking back at one spot.

That's when he saw the hen with the beard of a gobbler.

"All three of them came together in the middle of the field, and she made it clear she was the dominant hen," Mooring said. "I made a move. I went back into the woods and went way around to the corner of the field I thought they might be going."

"They were just coming across that field, clipping seeds."

When the bearded hen got in range, at 45 yards, Mooring dropped her with a 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch load of Hevi-Shot, a blended load featuring Nos. 4, 5 and 6 shot.

"I was texting all the other guys,

but I didn't have good (cell phone) coverage out there," he said. "But I found out that everybody had great, close encounters, but nobody else had killed a bird." ■

Chris Mooring killed this hen with an 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch beard in Halifax County the morning of April 17.



SC LEGISLATURE TRIES TO BOLSTER FLOUNDER

BILL WOULD CHANGE LIMITS, INCREASE SW LICENSE FEES

South Carolina's Senate Fish and Wildlife Committee recently passed an amended bill concerning the state's flounder fishery that will include an increase in fishing license fees. The amendments to the original bill include deleting a slot limit and establishing a stocking program.

The original bill, introduced by Rep. Lee Hewitt (R-Murrells Inlet) and William Bailey (R-Little River), included a slot limit of 16 to 20 inches for flounder, allowing one fish of more than 20 inches per person and two per boat per day. That slot limit was dropped in the revised bill. Instead, a 16-inch minimum-size limit was called for, with no maximum size limit.

Sen. Stephen Goldfinch (R-Murrells Inlet) added a provision to require the S.C. Department of Natural Resources to begin a flounder stocking program for the species. He suggested anglers will fund the stocking program through an increase in fishing license fees.

"I think if we're going to ask anglers to come back to the table and reduce the catch again, we need the state to step up to the table and add some fish to the system," Goldfinch said.

The fishing license fee would increase by \$5 per year for South Carolina residents. For non-residents, an annual saltwater fishing license would increase from \$35 to \$50, and from \$105 to \$150 for a 3-year license).

If passed by the entire legislature, the flounder bill will establish the following changes:

- The daily bag limit will be five flounder per person, with a maximum of 10 per day per boat.
- The minimum size limit will be 16 inches.
- Saltwater fishing license fees will increase, with the increase earmarked to fund the flounder stocking program. ■



The South Carolina legislature is looking at lowering creel limits on flounder to help stabilize the fishery.



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NC DEER HERD STILL CWD FREE

No evidence of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been detected in North Carolina's wild white-tailed deer herd, according to biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

As part of their annual CWD surveillance effort during the 2020-21 sampling season, wildlife biologists collected 1,042 deer tissue samples from across the state from hunters, meat processors, taxidermists, road-kills and sick deer. The samples were sent to the Wisconsin Veterinarian Diagnostic Lab, a USDA approved laboratory for testing.

"Our sampling size was lower than the previous two years, likely due to COVID-19," said Jon Shaw, the Commission's deer-project leader. "However, the results are good news for North Carolina hunters, wildlife enthusiasts and conservationists. CWD is the single-biggest concern for deer herds and deer hunting in North America. CWD surveillance indicates our state is doing a great job managing limiting exposure to this highly contagious illness."

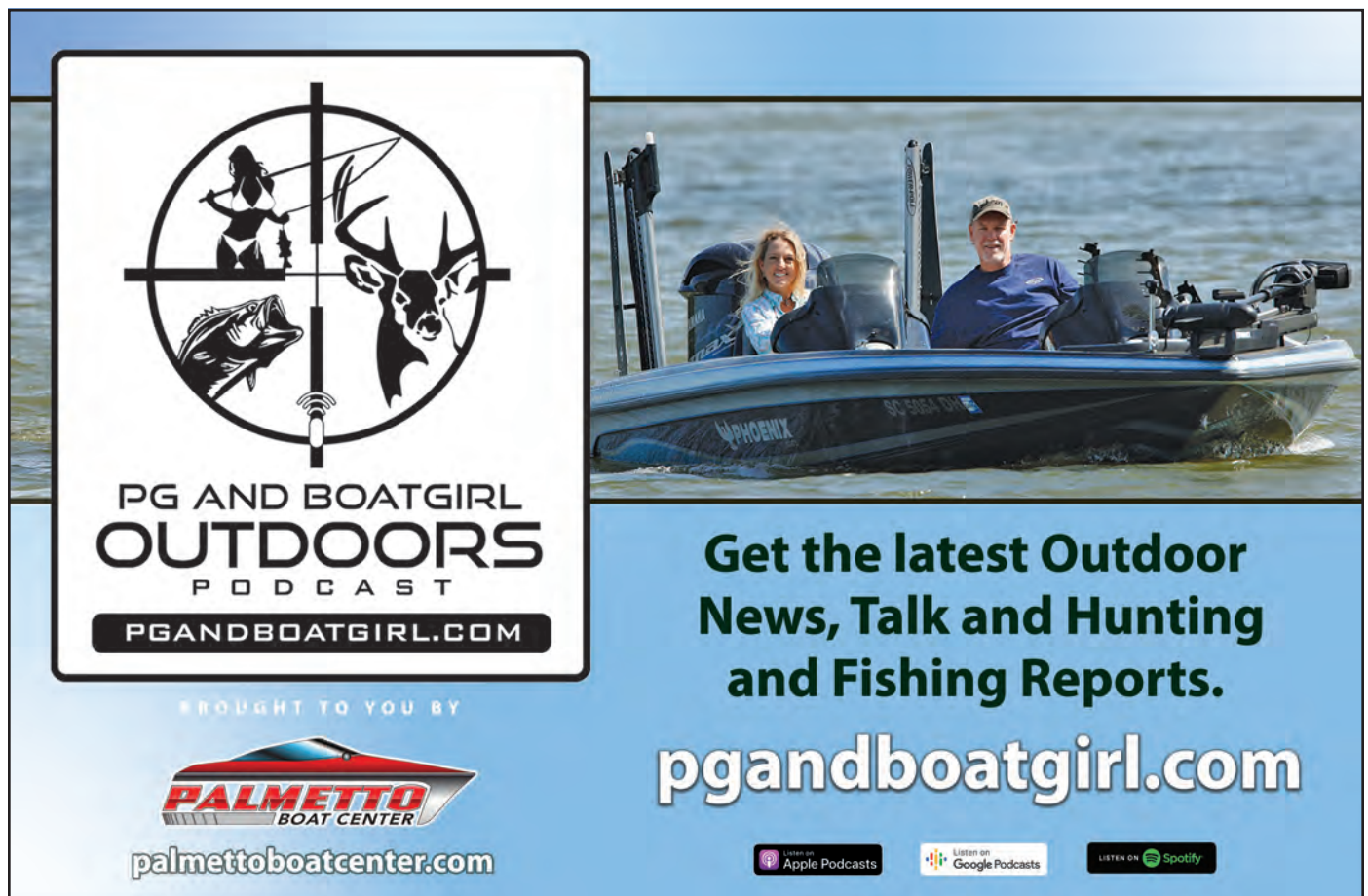
But these results are cautiously optimistic. Despite best efforts, the risk of CWD entering the state cannot be eliminated. CWD is 100% fatal.

"The Commission is committed to protecting the state's deer and elk herds, with early detection being paramount to managing the disease if found in North Carolina," Shaw said.

The Commission began testing for CWD in 1999 and increased surveillance after CWD was discovered east of the Mississippi River in 2002. The agency conducted systematic statewide surveillances in 5-year intervals beginning in 2003, with some opportunistic sampling occurring in off-years.


In 2018, biologists adopted an annual surveillance strategy to improve detection of CWD by collecting more samples overall, and also prioritizing sampling of higher risk individuals, such as road-killed and older deer. CWD has not been detected in more than 15,255 samples collected and tested across the state to date.

CWD is a transmissible, always fatal, neurological disease that affects deer and other cervids such as elk, moose and reindeer/caribou. Currently, three Canadian provinces and 26 states, including two states that border North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, have documented CWD. ■



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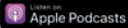
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NC SETS MIGRATORY BIRD SEASONS FOR 2021-22

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission voted at its meeting in late April to split the state into two zones with slightly different dates for duck season, and it set seasons for migratory birds for 2021-22.

The zones will be Coastal and Inland, with I-95 forming the dividing line. Each zone will have a three-part season, with the first two portions having slightly different dates. Federal framework requires these zones to remain in place through 2025-26.

Seasons in the Inland zone will be Oct. 21-23, Nov. 6-27 and Dec. 18-Jan. 31. Seasons in the Coastal zone will be Oct. 29-30, Nov. 6-29 and Dec. 18-Jan. 31. The annual teal season will be Sept. 11-29 east of US 17 only.

Bag limits will remain six ducks per day in both zones, with no more than four scoters, four eiders, four long-tailed ducks, three wood ducks, two mallards (no more than one hen), two readheads, two black ducks, two canvasbacks, one pintail, one mottled duck and one fulvous whistling duck. No black or mottled ducks can be taken before Nov. 20, and the bag limit on scaup will be one before Jan. 8 and two after Jan. 8. Hunters can take five mergansers per day, with no more than two being hooded mergansers. Sea ducks may be taken from Nov. 23 through Jan. 31.

Canada goose seasons will be Sept. 1-30 statewide, Oct. 21-30, Nov. 6-29 and Dec. 17-Feb. 12 in the resident population zone, and Jan. 15-31 in the Northeast zone, the latter by permit only.

Dove season will again be split in three parts: Sept. 4-Oct. 2, Nov. 6-27 and Dec. 9-Jan. 31 with a 15-bird daily limit and all-day hunting.

Woodcock can be hunted Dec. 10-Jan. 31, and the season on rails, gallinules and moorhens will be Sept. 9-14 and Oct. 2-Dec. 11.

Seasons on light geese will be Oct. 12-Feb. 12 and Feb. 14-March 31, the latter by permit only. ■

NCDWF GETS FIRST FEMALE DIRECTOR

A 25-year employee of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has become the first female to head the agency since its inception in the late 1920s.

Kathy Rawls, a native of Windsor, N.C., was named director of the NCDMF in late April. She replaces Steve Murphey, who retired on Jan. 31.

Rawls, 53, earned a bachelor's degree in marine biology from UNC-Wilmington in 1989 and worked three years for NCDMF, beginning in 1990. After leaving for the private sector, she returned to NCDMF in 1999 as a technician, worked her way up to biologist supervisor, and was promoted to manager of the agency's Northern District, based in Elizabeth City. She became chief of the Fisheries Management Section in 1914.

"There are already a number of women in pivotal roles at the division, and I do feel a responsibility to represent them and other



Kathy Rawls

female colleagues, but I also know that gender is not part of the job description," Rawls said. "The best way for me to represent women in the science field is to be a darned good director of the Division of Marine Fisheries, and being a good director will involve doing the best I can for the division, the marine fisheries resource and the people of North Carolina." ■

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THIS VETERAN GUIDE UNVEILS HIS FAVORITE ARTIFICIAL BAITS FOR CATCHING SUMMER TROUT IN SHALLOW WATER AROUND THE SPAWN.

■ By Jeff Burluson

FAKE OUT SUMMER SPECKS



Jeff Burluson

Summer breaks away this month with warming water, warming air temperatures *AND SOME HOT INSHORE FISHING.*

The summer fishing season takes off in June across both Carolinas, and anglers who love to fish artificial lures are in luck. The early summer can bring steady action for quality speckled trout on both hard and soft options.

Most anglers target these fish in the fall and early winter when fish are stacked up on every point, oyster bar and grass-lined bank. Everybody fishes for trout in the fall, but who wouldn't, because these fish are literally chewing in about every type of habitat around and on just about every stage of the tide. Anglers catch big fish, little fish and every size in-between.

Fishermen who target speckled trout can catch a limit almost every month, but June is one of the best times to catch a

limit of quality fish in the estuaries scattered from North Carolina's Outer Banks to the Savannah River on the South Carolina-Georgia border.

In June, trout will typically be scattered all over the place, but the larger, spawning fish will be heading shallow, according to guide Jot Owens of Wilmington, N.C.

"May and June are major spawning periods in the lower Cape Fear River, and a lot of bigger fish will be available in shallow water," said Owens (910-233-4139). "The best fishing is around the moons; it can be a full or new moon. These bigger fish get more active closer to one of these moon peaks."

Like many fish living in temperate climates, warm water and lunar effects invite spawning activity. It couldn't be any truer for speckled trout in the Carolinas. Trout begin spawning in May and will continue throughout the summer, but May and June are among the best times to find big sows in shallow water hammering finger mullet, peanut pogies and other finned meals.

Spawning behavior generates a hefty appetite, and the available forage fish make for a perfect buffet for trophy

Big female speckled trout are particularly active in May and June, feeding up while spending most of the two months spawning.



Jeff Burleson

trout. According to Owens, these larger speckled trout will be confined to specific habitats and specific types of water.

“In the summer, the best trout fishing is in and around river systems, and for us in the Wilmington area, that is the Cape Fear River,” he said. “We make that run from Wrightsville Beach to the lower river for just that reason. We may not exactly see the biggest numbers, but we definitely see the biggest fish this time of year.”

The lower Cape Fear contains a heavy tannic water input and provides a unique situation for these spawning fish, but the areas where these big fish feed continue to be associated with the typical ambush spots that trout have mastered.

“Shallow grass lines and areas with hard structure adjacent to these grass lines are good places to target,” Owens said. “Artificial rock piles, oyster rocks and anything that breaks water in shallow water are ideal places to find bigger trout this time of year.”

Basically, ambush spots are bait highways, and big trout know this and take advantage of the situation.

“Fish will push up on these shallow structures and ambush bait coming by,” he said.



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



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A slow-sinking, suspending MirrOlure is often the ticket to a good speckled trout bite after the topwater bite dies.

Since the majority of baitfish are small to medium sizes this time of year, baitfish patterns that can be easily fished in shallow water are prime lure options. Owens' first lure choice will always be a topwater offering.

"First-light topwater fishing is the best, especially for the biggest fish," he said. "You may not end up with big numbers for the day, but you will certainly see some really nice fish before the sun rises too high above the horizon."

Under most conditions, Owens' go-to topwater lure will be a MirrOlure Top Dog Jr., but he will fish a MirrOlure She Dog in cloudy or choppy water.

"The She Dog produces a higher frequency (vibration) and will throw a little more sound out there when you really need it," he said.

While topwater lures are really the optimum way to put a trophy trout in the boat, the action rarely lasts long, and other lure options come into play. Owens will turn to lures that perform just under the surface.

"Subsurface twitch baits are prime lure options this time of year. My favorites are MirrOlure Catch 2000s, Catch Jrs., and 17MRs. All of these hard baits suspend and will not run any deeper than 12 to 20 inches with most retrieves," he said.

Trout are set up to ambush food coming past in shallow water, and these hard baits are ideal for that type of habitat. Speckled trout can't refuse a suspending lure taking an erratic, stop-and-go posture. It is no doubt the best and only ways to truly work lures for trout, especially in shallow water.

The rattling cork is another proven method to take summer trout in shallow water, and it is one of Owens' favorite ways to



Jot Owens

suspend a 3-inch artificial shrimp.

"I tie a 1/16- or 1/32-ounce jighead 12 to 18 inches from the rattling cork, and I thread on a 3-inch Gulp shrimp," he said. "The action is perfect with the light jighead and shrimp pattern, because when you pop that cork a couple of times, it brings the shrimp real easily to the surface, and then it sinks slowly, too. They hit it on the drop."

Owens sticks with his standard, go-to colors including, pearl white, pearl white/chartreuse tail, or all chartreuse. The inshore grounds aren't flooded with larger shrimp this time of year, but the 3-inch Gulp Shrimp is hard for trout to pass up when it is presented right on the dining room table. A 12- to 18-inch leader is just enough to work an artificial shrimp just above the rocks and oyster beds or right along the grass edges.

Every season in the Carolinas carries its own techniques specific to each fish species in the area. And summer isn't any different for sow speckled trout. From May until the end of the summer, big speckled trout will be holding in shallow places early in the day, loading up on finger mullet and other baitfish after a full night of spawning activity. Anglers looking to score a heavy stringer of trout should choose tried-and-true lure options for steady action along the Carolinas' salty shorelines. ■

Great hard baits for speckled trout really shine in June. Most will be shallow divers or baits with a slow sink rate that suspend when twitched.

Top Speckled Trout Lures



MirrOlure Catch Jr 22MR

MirrOlure Top Dog Jr.

MirrOlure Catch 2000 20MR

MirrOlure MirrO Prop 10MR

MirrOlure Mirrodine 17MR

Rapala X-Rap Series

PRESENTATION IS KEY

Fishermen can present plenty of lures in different colors to speckled trout, but the lures' action will be its most important characteristic.

Artificial lures come in thousands of sizes, shapes and colors. From peanut pogy imitations to finger mullet and shrimp imposters, gamefish are duped every day into eating something laced with sharp hooks. Most artificial lures lack the realistic appearance that anglers would expect to work the best, but it is all about impressions, and that first impression that causes fish to commit to taking the bait.

Why would a fish eat something with a set of dangling, metal hooks, colored in chartreuse, pink, blue or purple, and rattling like a jar of marbles? Obviously, if they knew what they were putting in their mouths, they surely would not sink their teeth into it. But it is their natural instincts that lead to their downfall. The basic shapes, colors and rattles capture the fish's attention, and the presentation or the posturing of the lure makes them commit.

Guide Jot Owens is an expert at his craft, and catching fish of all species with artificial lures is his specialty. But it is not just because of the lures he chooses. While lure choice is important, the action is what makes these lures dupe even the most wary of fish.

"Many anglers like to swim lures at a constant speed. For some fish species, the constant speed can bring results," said Owens. "But for speckled trout, you need to add a pause in your retrieve



Jeff Burleson

to make the magic happen."

Both hard and soft baits should be presented with a slightly erratic or a stop-and-go retrieve. Sharp jerks should be followed up with a 2- to 3-second pause that will trigger bites when fish are watching.

"Trout are notorious for striking on the pause or on the fall after a sharp jerk of the rod tip," Owens said. "It is the way I work most, if not all, of my artificial lures when I am speckled trout fishing." ■

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY >

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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

Don't forget about speckled trout when launching your kayak this summer. Plenty of action can be found if you know where to look.



PADDLE UP A SUMMER SPECK

TOPWATER FISHING IS AN EXCITING WAY TO ENJOY AN EARLY JUNE MORNING

Phillip Gentry

For the majority of the year, fishing for speckled trout is a favorite pastime in both Carolinas.

However, most anglers believe spring and fall are the only time to catch good numbers and sizes of specks.

This simply isn't the case.

Speckled trout may not school in the same numbers that you'll find earlier and later in the year, but like their drum cousins, redfish and black drum, summer schools are more spread out.

Kayaking anglers certainly have no restrictions on places to catch summer speckled trout. In fact, some of the best spots will be shallow areas heavily inundated with rocks, oyster bars and grass flats that make the going pretty tough for larger vessels.

Fishing from a kayak doesn't necessarily affect when, where and how to fish for speckled trout, but there are a couple of considerations that might help you catch more fish.

The first is that the lower profile of a

kayak is much less likely to spook trout than a noisy outboard. Make sure your boat is equipped with both a good trolley type anchoring system and a stake-out pole. In some circumstances, you may want to also carry an anchor sizeable enough to hold the boat still if fishing an area with moderate current. Speckled trout are very fond of both heavy structure and current seams or rips, for example, where two ditches meet or where a smaller creek empties into a larger flow of water.

EARLY RISERS

Plan to start your trip early in the morning and allow yourself time to unload and paddle to your fishing area before sunrise. While trout can be caught throughout the day in June — or at least until the water temperatures peak — the early morning and late-evening bites are going to be the best.

An ideal situation would be a falling tide with the rising sun, with the tide

just starting to move at sunrise. A long stretch of oyster bar, rock bed, riprap or other hard structure will have trout rushing up into skinny water to feed before the water backs off.

The hands-down, go-to fishing lure in this situation is a topwater bait. Throw the bait up on top of the submerged structure and skitter it along with a moderate retrieve. The color is not as important as the bait's action. Some days, the fish will want a noisy bait that moves a lot of water, and others, they'll hammer a bait that more closely mimics jumping shrimp or mullet trying to elude predators.



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



Most walk-the-dog baits are cigar shaped with multiple treble hooks.

Phillip Gentry

WAG THE DOG

All topwater lures are different, based on the overall shape of the bait and the design of the head. The action is what tells the tale, and these can be broken down into two major categories: baits that chug or pop on the retrieve and baits that wiggle back and forth. Both have their places for catching speckled trout, but most anglers agree it's the wag that catches more fish. Perhaps this is why the best retrieve cadence for these baits is known as "walking the dog."

To walk the dog, let the bait settle in the water. Keep your rod tip low and to your left, unless you are left-handed. Continuously twitch the rod tip straight back during the retrieve, allowing just enough slack to let the bait move naturally.

Vary the speed of the retrieve until you find what works best. In cooler water, dormant fish may bite best with a slow retrieve. In warmer water, active-fish situations, speed it up.

Always, always work the bait all the way back to the boat. Specks are notorious for following a bait right up until the time it might get away before striking. Speaking of strikes, don't jerk the rod on anything you see in the water. Always wait until you feel the fish on the line before setting the hook.

If you get several blow-ups without hooking up, throw back with a weighted plastic bait and retrieve at a steady pace just below the surface. ■



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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

continued

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Speckled trout

WHERE — Lower Cape Fear River

HOW — Target speckled trout in the current seams or rips near shell islands and creeks on rising and falling tides.

LAUNCH — The lower portion of the Cape Fear River is accessible from numerous access points from Wilmington to Snow's Cut on the east side of the river or to Southport on the west side of the river. Go to <https://www.ncpaws.org/ncwrc-maps/boatingaccessareas>

INSIDER TIP — The jetty known as "The Rocks" near Fort Fisher is a good area to find current rips and speckled trout in the summer.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Speckled trout

WHERE — Beaufort/Hilton Head areas

HOW — Look for oyster bars that are submerged near the top of the tide. Cast topwater baits over the tops of the bars and work them off the edges.

LAUNCH — Multiple public boat launch sites serve the Beaufort/Hilton Head area and several good dump in sites for a kayak. https://www.saltchef.com/catch_fish/SC/Beaufort/boat_ramps.html

INSIDER TIP — Look for live oyster bars, which are dark, jagged, and look like rocks, versus dead oyster shell which will be bleached out white and is often piled up along larger waterways from dredging or current wash.

A long stretch of hard material such as rocks, oysters or hard-bottom is a buffet line for speckled trout especially if you can time falling water with rising sun over the structure.



Phillip Gentry

Because there will only be so many days that rising sun and falling water coincide, try working the topwater bait perpendicularly to the structure if the water is already down or throw a swimming plastic bait or shallow-diving stickbait that imparts a fair amount of action if the water is covering the structure by more than 3 feet.

Fishing current rips and seams would be the fall-back position for the kayak angler after the sun has risen and the day begins. Expect trout to retreat from the skinny water to 6 to 10 feet of water.

To effectively fish a seam or rip, position your kayak where you are located a half-cast below the intersection. This will allow you to work above and below the seam without having to reposition the boat.

Speckled trout tend to hold on one side or the other of the seam, so four casts is the bare minimum to decide if something is home or not. Concentrate on the upper outside, the upper inside, the lower outside and the lower inside of the seam while casting a soft plastic bait rigged

on a 1/8- or 1/4-ounce jighead. You might want cast eight to 12 times to work the upper, middle and lower sections of the water column.

Another good option for working a rip or seam is to use a popping cork to suspend a live shrimp or plastic imitation. Start by casting the bait above the rip and let the current carry the cork and bait where it will. Pop the bait a couple times before, during and after the cork moves from above to below and make sure to work each side of the seam. ■

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Speckled trout are spawning and feeding heavily in the waters around Ocean Isle Beach in June.



IT'S BIG SPECK TIME

Waters around Ocean Isle team with trout

Jy June is a month to catch citation-sized speckled trout and very possibly boost your personal best. There may not be as many specks around as during the fall, but the annual trout spawn peaks this month, and there are lots of nice-sized sow trout giving it their best to ensure healthy future generations. These big trout are working hard and are usually hungry, which helps fishermen.

Trout typically feed most aggressively at first light and sometimes again in late afternoon. However, they are opportunistic feeders and will often attack something that looks good at any time of the day. They gather around grass points, creek mouths, oyster rocks and other places that concentrate baitfish or shrimp. This aggressive feeding continues throughout their spawn.

Specks retain their length after spawning but lose a lot of girth without bellies full of eggs. Trophy trout are the big females carrying eggs. They are fat, sassy, eating and spawning machines and the backbone of the species. There are also plenty of smaller sow specks and plenty of males of legal size to be invited home to dinner.

Capt. Austin Kerr of Fellowship Charters (336-941-7292) in Ocean Isle Beach, N.C., loves to chase trout and usually convinces them to bite by fishing live shrimp. When live shrimp aren't available, he substitutes 3-inch Vudu Shrimp and twitches them seductively so they appear alive and ready to be eaten.

Kerr fishes from the Shallotte River to Little River Inlet, just across the state line in South Carolina. He looks for things that break the tidal current and give trout cover to stalk baitfish and shrimp. There is an average tidal change of better than 4 feet in these waters, so except for a few minutes right around the change, there is always moving water.

"My favorite way to catch speckled trout, especially these big ones, is to suspend a live shrimp about a foot above the bottom under a cork," Kerr said. "You can tell when the shrimp spots a trout or other predator, as it begins to move quickly and may come to the surface and even run across it. It's exciting to watch a shrimp get spooked and figure out how it's going to get eaten."

June is the best month to catch big, spawning sow trout. They're busy making more little trout and need nourishment. Hungry specks won't turn down a squirming live shrimp and usually eat soft plastic shrimp well too. The timing is right, trout are feeding heavily and the creeks and bays of southern Brunswick County are a great place to catch good numbers of June specks — including some genuine trophy fish. ■

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MANY ANGLERS DON'T BUY WORMS AND CRICKETS WHEN THEY HEAD OUT TO FISH FOR BREAM. HERE'S HOW THEY CHOOSE THE ARTIFICIAL LURES THEY USE TO FILL THEIR STRINGERS.

■ By Terry Madewell

FAKING OUT BREAM

Terry Madewell

Live bait may be the “go-to” tactic for many bream fishermen, but anglers armed with artificial lures think the advantage is theirs

FOR CATCHING MORE AND BIGGER BREAM.

But not all artificial lures are created equal, and using the right lure in the right situation is a key to success.

Dean Ilderton, 51, of St. George, S.C., has fished for bream since he was old enough to carry a cane pole. He said using artificial lures enables him to fish multiple types of bream habitat more effectively than he can using live bait.

“I still enjoy using live bait for bream fishing at times, but I love artificial lures for bream because of their versatility,” Ilderton said. “But artificial lures must be used in the right habitat and situation to be most effective. When I match the right

lure to the cover and water situation that I’m fishing, I’ve found the artificial lures can catch more and bigger bream. I can also cast these tiny baits into places live-bait rigs can’t go and catch bream otherwise missed.”

Ilderton said a wide variety of artificial lures are lethal on bream, including safety pin-type spinners such as the Beetle Spin, his overall favorite. But in-line spinners, small jigs of many varieties, tiny crankbaits and fly rods loaded with popping bugs or sinking flies and spiders are all deadly when used appropriately.

SAFETY PIN SPINNERS ➤

Dean Ilderton catches nice stringers of big bream like this one, relying solely on a variety of artificial lures.



SAFETY PIN SPINNERS

“Any place bream live is a great option for artificial lures, including lakes, whether big or small, rivers, swamps and ponds,” he said. “But the size of the lure does impact the degree of success. I’ll scale down the lure size in rivers and swamps because of the habitat and type of forage bream naturally eat.”

Ilderton fishes multiple rivers and will use a small version of the Beetle Spin, such as 1/32- or 1/16-ounce sizes, because the lure is less prone to snag in this cover-rich environment.

“Rivers and swamps typically have an abundance of low-hanging cover, from live trees as well as stumps, logs and fallen trees,” he said. “I’ll often have to finesse my tactics to catch river and swamp bream. Lots of fish-holding cover exists, and I vary my tactics searching for the daily pattern.”

“I often begin with a Beetle Spin because it’s more weedless and versatile than many lures,” he said. “I cast it around edges and even into the thicker stuff. Even when I misfire a bit on a cast and it lands in the cover, I work it all the way back, because sometimes that’s where the fish are. Like any fishing situation, swamps and rivers have daily patterns based on water and weather, so figuring that out is my goal.”

Ilderton said a favorite tactic for rivers is to literally cast his spinner onto the dry bank and work it into the water from that position.

“River bream are often shallow-water feeders and watch the river’s edge for something edible to fall into the water,” he said. “When I find an opening in the cover, I’ll cast



Safety pin spinners are versatile and will catch bream in a variety of habitats.

the lure literally onto the dry shoreline and then gently pull it into the water and begin the retrieve. It's amazing how often they'll gobble that lure right at the shoreline."

When fishing lakes and ponds, Ilderton will scale the size of the lure up to 1/16- and 1/8-ounce models because bigger bream in these environments often prefer more flash and size.

"I use a larger lure so I can cast further in lakes and ponds," he said. "While thick cover exists in specific areas, it's usually more open than in rivers and swamps, and longer casts and staying on the move speeds up the fish-finding process."

TINY CRANKBAITS

Ilderton said fishing lakes and ponds enables him to use a different type of bream lure as a fish-finder, one that's vastly overlooked by many anglers.

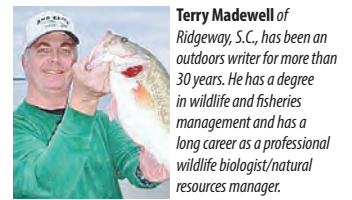
"I love tiny crankbaits, lures perhaps 1-inch long equipped with tiny treble hooks," he said. "This highly versatile lure is ideal for searching for bream. I'll cast it along shorelines around woody cover and weeds, as well as near rocky areas, essentially any place bream may congregate. I'll bump large objects such as stumps and pause the retrieve for a moment. I prefer a crankbait that suspends for this tactic. These lures typically don't run deep, but if I'm in clear water, I'll add a small split-shot a few inches up the line enabling me to effectively work the bait deeper if that's what I need to do to find fish."



Rebel Crickhopper

IN-LINE SPINNERS

Ilderton said small in-line spinners in 1/16- and 1/32-ounce sizes are deadly on bream but are snag-prone. The type of cover fished dictates how and when to best use them. He works them in swamp runs by casting along the edges as well as casting



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.

around shoreline cover in lakes and ponds.

"In open water, work these lures around targets such as stumps, logs and along shorelines," he said. "Shallow flats with scattered woody habitat are excellent for inline spinners. They cover lots of water quickly and effectively."

Ilderton prefers spincast tackle, especially the type with a trigger under the reel, when fishing any of his targets.

"I'll use either 4 or 6-pound line, and this rig enables me to cast accurately deep into heavy cover," he said. "Accurate casting is a huge benefit everywhere I fish, but especially in the confined spaces of rivers and swamps."



In-line spinners like this Rooster Tail allow anglers to cover lots of water and pull bream out of hidey holes.

Terry Madewell

MINI JIGS >

MINI JIGS

Frankie Jacobs of Lugoff, S.C., targets bream on multiple lakes; he has learned using tiny jigs for huge bream is a lethal tactic.

“Of all the artificial lures I’ve used, a small jig is absolutely the most effective for me to catch big bream,” he said.

Jacobs said the lure is effective when working shoreline edges, around brush and even when fished vertically over deep brush. But it excels when fish are bedding.

“I don’t simply swim it past the bed; I hop it along the bottom and literally drop it in a bream bed, and they maul it,” he said. “By June, the bedding action is strong on most lakes, but bedding or not, it’s a great lure throughout the summer.”

Jacobs uses ultra-light spinning tackle when fishing a jig, and he prefers highly visible, 4-pound line.

“I prefer a 1/32-ounce jig with a chartreuse, flat-tail grub,” Jacobs said. “Other styles and colors can work fine, but that’s my preference. I think the small jig and line allows the lure to fall at the right speed to trigger bream bites. I prefer bright-colored line to see minute line twitches or sideways line movement. Line-watching produces more hookups.”

“Jigs match crickets in terms of producing bream bites, but I think jigs are superior, because I don’t have to re-bait and can and immediately make the next cast,” he said. “Plus, I don’t run out of bait, and I consistently catch larger bream.”

Jacobs uses an electric motor to slip along the shoreline,



Mini jig/flat-tail grub

prospecting for bream concentrations or beds. He prefers sandy and gravelly coves and rocky banks with scattered weeds or woody cover. He’ll swim the jig deeper when fish are not bedding or and mid-day in hot weather.

“Jigs are awesome, but watch your line and hold that rod tight or they’ll snatch it out of your hand,” he said. ■

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POPPERS ARE TOPPERS

Veteran fisherman Dean Ilderton said fly rods and popping bugs or sinking baits can be ideal for big bream and rank among the most productive lures he's used.

"Depending on the habitat fished, the fly rod can be highly effective anywhere," he said. "When fishing swamps and rivers, overhanging limbs can be a problem, but I've found using a long pole and swinging or pitching a bug back into openings works well."

Ilderton said in open-water lakes and ponds, a fly rod with a yellow, white or green popping bug is highly effective.

"My favorite places for popping bugs are ponds, and they effectively fish exceptionally shallow water," he said. "Cast it all the way to the shoreline adjacent to weed lines and around woody cover. Let it lie motionless for a moment to tempt a strike, then retrieve it with a series of 'pops'. It'll attract fish from long distances and out of thick cover."

"Sinking lures are effective, too, but I prefer the poppers because I want that fish to bust the lure on top," he said. "Late evenings are my favorite time, but any low-light condition is excellent." ■



Terry Madewell

Fishing for bream with a fly rod, especially late in the evening, can be exceptionally productive.

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TC Lloyd

DOUBLE UP ON BLUEGILLS

Cooper River's bedding bream are worth a look this month

Guide TC Lloyd said bream bed all over the Cooper River in South Carolina's Lowcountry this month.

Jy Brian Cope
 une is a great month for bream fishing, and while most anglers think of lakes and ponds for catching these tasty panfish, rivers are also great choices. The Cooper River is full of big bluegills, and it's far from the most-popular bream hole in South Carolina.

But TC Lloyd of Southern Angling Guide Service said anglers who don't fish here this time of year are missing out.

"This river has some big — I mean really big — bluegills. Fighting them in the current is a load of fun. They fight like crazy. When it comes to catching big numbers of hard-fighting fish, this river is as good as any body of water in the Carolinas," he said.

To make it even more interesting, Lloyd uses a double-hook rig, which sometimes results in a double hook-up. When fishing lakes for bream, Lloyd usually uses a cork, but he does not use one on the Cooper River.

"We use a double-hook, drop-shot rig, so the weight is under the hooks," he said, "and we bait the hooks with crickets and just bounce the weight along the bottom. It works great for these

bluegills, and you'll occasionally catch a shellcracker. And when you hook two bream at a time, it's a crazy fight that you'll never forget. You'll swear you've got a giant catfish on the line."

Lloyd's rig is made up of two light-wire, No. 4 bream hooks and 10-pound line.

"I normally used 6-pound line for bream fishing, but in this river, you'll get hung up sometimes on the bottom debris. With that 10-pound line, you can straighten out the light-wire hooks instead of breaking off. Then, you just straighten the hook with a pair of pliers, and you're back to fishing," he said.

Lloyd (843-307-6678) said that using electronics isn't necessary on the Cooper, but he said it helps to locate beds quickly.

"You can get caught up watching your electronics too much, because you'll find beds galore with the side-scanning. But a lot of times, the bream are gone off the beds for hours at a time, so you can't rely only on what you find that way. But it is nice to know where those beds are. And if you're not catching them right quick, move on, but come back later and those fish might be back on them with a big appetite," he said. ■

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SAILFISH, DOLPHIN MAKE A BIG SHOWING IN SUMMER AROUND WATERS INSHORE OF THE GULF STREAM CLOSE TO NORTH CAROLINA'S CAPE FEAR. HERE'S HOW TO ADD THEM TO YOUR CATCH IF YOU'RE A KING MACKEREL FISHERMAN.

SUMMER 'SAIL'-ING

■ By Jerry Dilsaver

THE GULF STREAM IS FARTHEST FROM NORTH CAROLINA'S COASTLINE OFF CAPE FEAR,

making the runs from inlets at New River, New Topsail, Wrightsville Beach, Carolina Beach, Oak Island, Holden Beach and Ocean Isle Beach the longest for Tarheel State fishermen.

However, once spring warms the water and summer is on the way, that doesn't bother these fishermen all that much. It seems fishermen around Cape Fear have a bit of an ace in the hole, with schools of dolphin and pods of sailfish that move well inshore of the Gulf Stream to feed along the many rocks, wrecks and artificial reefs along with king mackerel, amberjack, barracuda and a host of bottomfish.

That's right, once the ocean water reaches the warm side of 75 degrees, a surprising number of dolphin, aka MahiMahi, and sailfish break away from the Gulf Stream and follow schools of baitfish closer to shore. This is so pronounced that the Capt. Eddie Haneman Sailfish Tournament, the only North Carolina tournament to feature sailfish, is held annually out of Wrightsville Beach at the end of July. The good news for fishermen is the action begins much earlier than that, typically by mid-June and

occasionally as early as Memorial Day. Roving dolphin and sailfish bite throughout the summer and into the fall.

Father and son Rod and Barry Bierstedt of OnMyWay Charters and Dream Catcher Guide Service in Wilmington, N.C., are among the best who treat clients to this often-spectacular fishing. They charter a pair of boats out of Carolina Beach and offer services for fishermen who would like to learn from their own boats. They target the Cape Fear area, from Little River Inlet to New River Inlet, and spend a lot of the summer catching a mixed bag of MahiMahi, sailfish and king mackerel, plus others.

BELOW: Just a few changes in tackle and baits, and a center console can be rigged to troll for dolphin and sailfish.



Rod Bierstedt

“We definitely have dolphin and sailfish, plus wahoo, tuna and more that move through our area inshore of the Gulf Stream each summer,”

Rod Bierstedt said. “They are moving through and feeding as they go, so it’s rare to fish the same fish two consecutive days. However, it’s sure nice when your plans and a school of fish come together. Let me emphasize that advance preparation and planning helps this happen, but it isn’t foolproof. Some days the fishing is great, and some days you struggle.”

Bierstedt said there are more dolphin than sailfish in the area, and they are easier to find. They are looking for two basic things: comfortable water and food — lots of food. Dolphin are one of the fastest-growing fish in the ocean; they are constantly eating and may reach 30 pounds in a year, which means feeding at every opportunity. If the water temperature isn’t in their comfort zone and there isn’t abundant food, they move on.

“I think the starting point for this and other offshore trolling is to be with one of the satellite sea surface analysis systems,” Bierstedt said. “There are several that do a good job, but ROFFS (Roffer’s Ocean Fishing Forecasting Service) is the longest-running, has the most experience and has the most expert analysts. You’re wasting time and money if you don’t know where to find the water conditions you are seeking. You may get lucky, but you may not and this happens more often.

“Water moves, bait moves and the fish move with them,” Bierstedt said. “Dolphin prefer cobalt blue water in the 71- to 80-degree range filled with baitfish. Clear blue/green blended water or water a few degrees cooler or warmer is a good second choice — as long as there is plenty of food. Sailfish are much the same, so they are often feeding together or nearby. Another thing to consider is current. These are fish of the Gulf Stream, and they like a little current. If the current is less than a knot, they may be elsewhere.

“The sea surface analysis service checks all this, plus salinity, chlorophyll, upwellings, rips and more,” Bierstedt said. “They may not always put you exactly on the fish, but they put you in the neighborhood. Their information is a great starting point. Once I get the latest SST shot and report from them, I compare it to the chart of the area and make a plan that includes secondary locations within 10 miles. This is a reasonable area to consider covering if the water has changed or the fish have moved.”

Bierstedt advises having 18 to 24 premium baits brined, and six to eight rigged and ready to go, with the others ready to be rigged. He said to look for ballyhoo and cigar minnows with clear shiny eyes, bright color on the beak and or tail and no blood or brown matter in the bag.

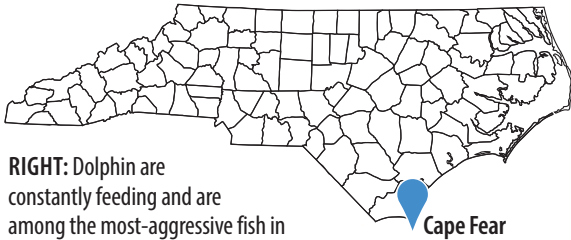
He said a number of bait and lure options that will work well: ballyhoo, strip baits, natural squid, cigar minnows and lures in a variety of combinations. He will use them all to see what the fish prefer on that day. He rigs ballyhoo with a variety of skirts and naked, plus strip baits cut from the belly of false albacore and squid. Skirts may be full-size sea witches, plastic lures or small king skirts. Some days, he said, dolphin pass all the other baits to eat baits rigged with small king mackerel skirts.

It is also important to get at least one bait or lure below the surface. This can be done by trolling a diving lure or running a rigged bait behind a planer. Bierstedt said this is an excellent location in the spread to run a strip bait. The strip bait can be rigged with two hooks, virtually eliminating short strikes.

Fish are naturally curious as long as the splashes are rhythmic. Bierstedt said it is important to make at least one section in your spread so attractive that fish can’t ignore it. He uses small birds in front of long ballyhoo lines, plus squid chains, spreader bars and dredges to get a fish’s attention. This brings curious fish right up into the spread, where they see all the baits and lures and get fired up and attack.

Bierstedt said a small boat can troll five lines without tangling,





RIGHT: Dolphin are constantly feeding and are among the most-aggressive fish in the ocean. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Dolphin prefer clean, blue water between 71 and 80 degrees with some current, but the presence of baitfish is probably even more important.



Rod Bierstedt

and at least one should be below the surface. A larger boat, with outriggers, can troll seven lines, and Bierstedt suggests putting two below the surface. Trolling speed is 5 to 7 knots, and each bait must be checked to make sure it is swimming properly. Bierstedt said two lines with baits that are swimming right and look natural are better than six or seven lines with half the baits spinning. Take the time to rig baits properly and check them before dropping them back into the spread. If they aren't swimming correctly, re-rig them or switch them.

Other summer catches in this area include king mackerel, wahoo, tuna, amberjack and more. Bierstedt said 30-pound class tackle should handle everything, with some larger fish requiring a little more finesse. The fishing is a mixed bag, and dolphin or a sailfish aren't guaranteed, but dolphin are a pretty good probability and sailfish are a distinct possibility.

These are pelagic fish that like the eddies that spin off the Gulf Stream and bring bait inshore. Dolphin are always hungry, so if you figure out where they'll be and troll their preferred baits, you'll most likely have opportunities to add them to the fish box. There's also a reasonable probability of getting a picture of you with a wide grin and holding the bill of a sailfish you're about to release. ■

DOLPHIN, SAILFISH ALLEY >



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

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Capt. Rod Bierstedt said fishermen working inshore of the Gulf Stream around rocks, reefs and wrecks around Cape Fear stand a decent chance of running into a sailfish.

DOLPHIN, SAILFISH ALLEY

When the ocean water warms, North Carolina fishermen are treated to roving schools of dolphin and small pods of sailfish well inshore of the Gulf Stream. These fish break away from the Stream in eddies that are carrying bait. The water is warm everywhere from June through August, so when the eddy dissipates, they continue feeding until the baitfish break up. This brings them close to land, often 10 to 20 miles off the beach and sometimes within just a few miles.

This phenomenon is very pronounced in the waters around Cape Fear, North Carolina's southernmost cape. Water temperatures often range into the 80s from the Gulf Stream all the way to shore, and being in their temperature comfort zone, MahiMahi and sailfish turn to their other prime trait: eating. Following the baitfish brings them through an area roughly from Frying Pan Tower to 23 Mile Rock and inshore. There are many rocks, shipwrecks and artificial reefs in this area, and it is popular with king mackerel fishermen. Feeding MahiMahi and sailfish often try to pilfer baits intended for kings and give unsuspecting fishermen cheap thrills and a welcome addition to the catch.



Rod Bierstedt

About 20 years ago, local fishermen began the Capt. Eddy Haneman Sailfish Tournament in late July. The tournament honors Haneman, one of the first to target and call attention to the number of dolphin and sailfish caught in this area each summer. Fittingly, dolphin is the secondary category in the tournament.

The boundaries in the Capt. Eddy Haneman Sailfish Tournament emphasize fishing well inshore of the Gulf Stream. They include the area inside of a line drawn from Masonboro Inlet to Frying Pan Tower, to WR 4 (John D. Gill shipwreck), to 23 Mile Rock, to Dallas Rock and back to Masonboro Inlet. This is Cape Fear's dolphin and sailfish alley. ■

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■ By Phillip Gentry

**BRIDGES ARE CRAPPIE
MAGNETS YEAR-ROUND,
BUT THEY SHINE
BRIGHTEST DURING
THE SUMMER. HERE'S
HOW ONE SLAB-MASTER
SEINES THEM WITH BAITS
IN HOT WEATHER.**



Tom Mundy

It's a fair assessment to say no two bridges are alike, but one thing that all have in common, at least the ones with sufficient water underneath them, is that, at some point during the year, *THEY ARE FISH MAGNETS.*

For crappie, bridges are frequently great choices nearly every month. These man-made structures offer shade, depth, food and even spawning sites.

Tom Mundy of Laurens, S.C., has had a love affair with bridges for as far back as he can remember. In fact, it was fishing under a bridge one afternoon that gave him the inspiration for a lure that has become the best-selling of his collection of Fish Stalker Lures baits. That same bait has helped propel his company from a garage business to a major manufacturer.

Mundy said one of the best things about fishing bridges for crappie is that they are easy to locate and even easier to fish. He said anglers who have never been on a particular lake before can find and catch crappie simply by understanding how the fish relate to bridge structure and how to properly fish them.

“In the summer, I’m going to concentrate all of my efforts on the portion of a bridge that spans water from 14 feet on out to

20 to 25 feet,” Mundy said. “Crappie are usually going to suspend somewhere off the bottom, but by concentrating on that depth range, you can eliminate a lot of area.”

The second aspect of Mundy’s summer bridge pattern is looking at how the sun hits the structure. Crappie are almost always going to relate to the darkest, shadiest areas they can find, he said, and those can be areas not directly underneath the structure if you are fishing first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon.

“Always follow the shade,” he said. “At 5 o’clock, those fish will move out from under a bridge and suspend in the shaded water as the sun moves. Everyone else is headed home when the best fishing starts.”



In the summer, look for crappie to suspend in water that ranges between 14 and 25 feet deep.



While he is graphing bottom depths, Mundy is also going to watch his sonar unit to see how fish are relating to the structure. There are plenty of units that will allow an angler to view the area to the side or in front of the boat, but he also believes crappie become so accustomed to boat traffic during the summer that driving right over the top of them rarely spooks them.

“Depending on what I see on the sonar, I’m either going to get right on top of the fish and drop straight down to them, or I’m going to cast out in front of the boat and let the bait sink down to the fish,” he said. “Either way, just get the bait to the fish and let it do its job.”

As summer wears on, Mundy said crappie tend to suspend deeper in the water column, but they may be higher in the water column early or late in the day and often very shallow at night.

Another feature he’s looking for, especially if it’s a bridge he’s never fished before, is the presence of any horizontal structure under the water.

“I love old bridges that have wood supports, like some of the older railroad bridges with cross ties between the supports,”

he said. “The next best thing is a concrete bridge built with an “H” pattern where the crossover of the “H” is under water. Either way, crappie are going to suspend under that horizontal structure.”

Mundy said he fishes artificial baits 90% of the time. He will tip jigs with minnows if he’s long-line trolling, but for fishing bridges, he fishes artificials 100% of the time, and he fishes much-lighter jigheads than most anglers.

“I use three jig weights,” he said. “A 1/24-ounce head is the heaviest I use; that’s for when crappie are deep, then a 1/32-ounce jig, which is my all-around favorite for most conditions. I use the 1/64-ounce when crappie are suspended above structure or really finicky.”

Regardless of the jig’s weight or fish orientation, Mundy uses 4-pound line for the majority of his presentations. His choice is a fluorocarbon made by Sunline called Super Sniper. The Japanese-made line is offered in 2-, 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-pound test; Mundy said when crappie get finicky in the heat of summer, he will drop down to 3- or even 2-pound line.

“It has no stretch, no memory, and it’s nearly invisible in the water,” he said. “I fish it on my signature Slabtail jig rod. It’s a 4-foot-10 ultralight spinning rod made by B’n’M poles.”





Tom Mundy

Tom Mundy prefers wooden bridge supports or concrete pillars that offer some horizontal underwater structure. **OPPOSITE:** Fish Stalker's Slabtail jigs were designed to ride flat and offer an enticing shimmer when presented to suspended fish.

The light line and the light jig are two pieces of a natural presentation that Mundy describes as "irresistible." The third piece is the bait itself. The Fish Stalker Slabtail jig is designed to ride horizontally in the water, even on the fall. The flat-sided tail offers a subtle, quivering action that makes the bait hard to resist.

At the beginning of the summer, Mundy prefers the larger, 1¾- and 2-inch versions, but he will drop down to the original Slabtail, a 1¼-inch bait, when water temperatures soar above the 80-degree mark.

"You put it down there on his nose, even if they're not actively feeding, and most times, he won't pass it up," said Mundy. ■



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

CRAPPIE AND CURRENT

BELOW: Look for crappie to hold in eddies around bridge pilings or around debris that has collected at the base of the structure.

One aspect of fishing for crappie around bridges that many anglers don't pay attention to is water current. Moving water may be caused by wind, natural flow or, in the case of hydro-electric impoundments, the release of water through the dam. Tom Mundy, owner of Fish Stalker Lures, said current can be good or bad for crappie fishing.

"Crappie usually feed pretty good in mild current, but heavy current will shut them down," he said.

Mundy's best advice is to watch and see where the current breaks on a bridge and work those areas to your advantage. Crappie may hold in front of a large pillar, which creates an upstream eddy, or they may hold behind the pillar in the downstream eddy. Mundy will fish the eddy on the shady side of the bridge every time.

"With the small baits I make and use, the trick is to present them where it will reach the crappie in a natural manner," he said. "Too much weight, or a tiny bait swimming against the current, doesn't look natural and won't get many bites."

Mundy likes to cast upcurrent and let the current wash the bait back down to the fish in a natural manner. In some cases, he may position his boat upcurrent and drop the bait so the current will push it to the structure where crappie are holding.

His final thought on fishing current around bridges is to remember that where there is current, there is often structure in the form of woody debris or logjams that stack up on the upstream side. Not only will this structure attract fish, but it will create current breaks different that what you might expect to find on what appears to be uniform bridge pilings.

"Sometimes, that structure will change almost daily, because stuff will wash in, and it doesn't take a lot of current to collect several sticks or logs," said Mundy. "The other thing is, anglers love to sink brush tops around bridge pilings to come back and fish at night, so don't think you know a bridge just because you've fished it in the past. Take time and look it over each time you visit or you may miss fish you didn't know about." ■

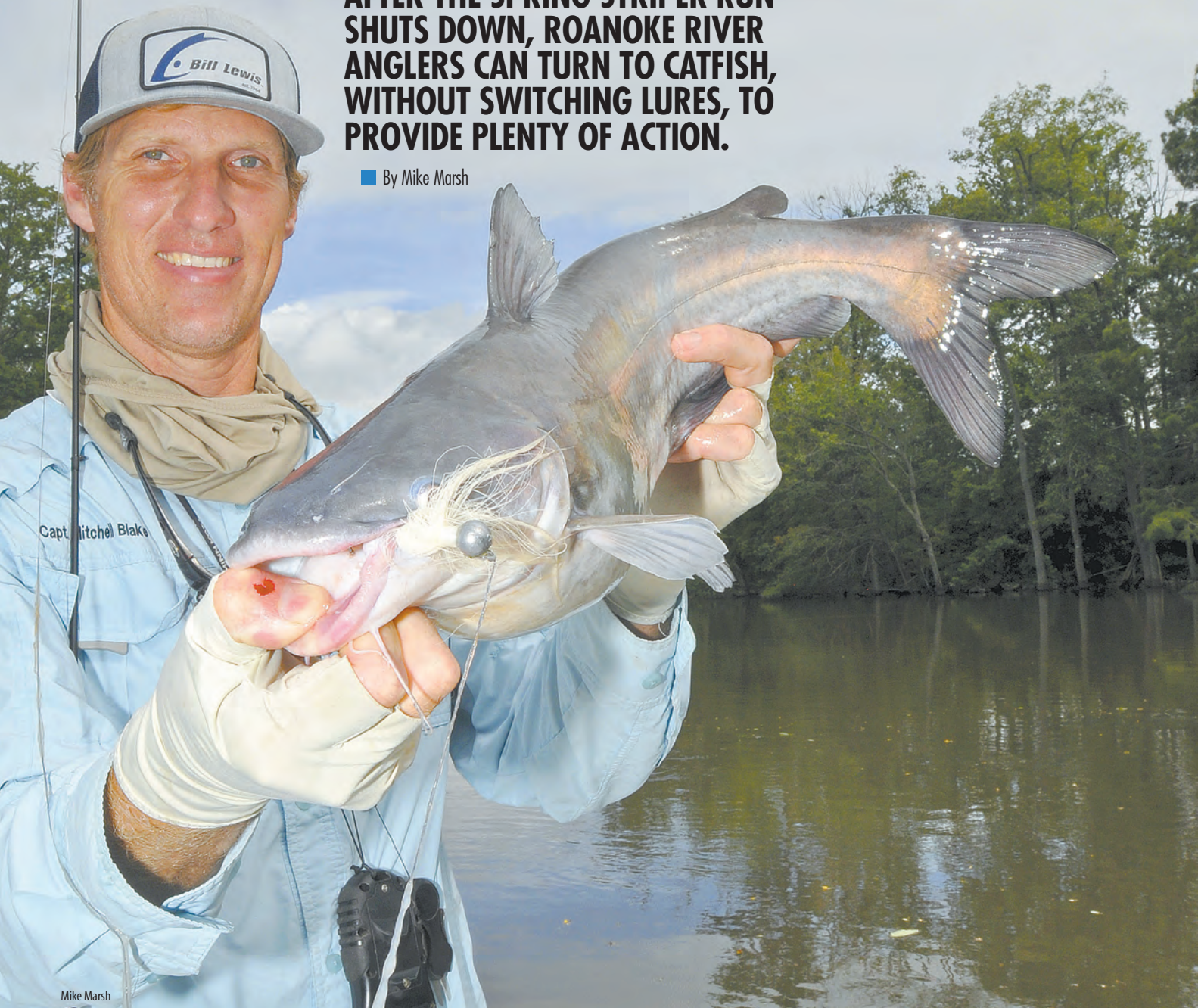


Phillip Gentry

MAKE BLUE CATS DANCE A JIG

AFTER THE SPRING STRIPER RUN SHUTS DOWN, ROANOKE RIVER ANGLERS CAN TURN TO CATFISH, WITHOUT SWITCHING LURES, TO PROVIDE PLENTY OF ACTION.

■ By Mike Marsh



Mike Marsh

To an angler in the solitude of the bottomland hardwood canopy arching from the banks of the Roanoke River, the catchy rap song, "Getting' Jiggy Wit It," by Will Smith throbs into mind. Although the tune is lively in contrast with the surroundings, somehow the opening line, "Bring it, Woo!" seemed an appropriate accompaniment to the rhythmic action of the fishing rod in the hands of guide Mitchell Blake
AS HE DANCED A JIG ALONG A SLOUGH.

A sudden strike brought an equal and opposite reaction. Blake set the hook hard, and the fish powered a sweeping curve in the rod when it bulldogged toward cover. The blue catfish on the end of the line, Blake's dance partner, eventually tired from all of its rocking, rolling and spinning. Lipping the fish with his Fish Grip, he admired it for a moment, held it for a photo and gave it respite on a bed of ice.

"It's that easy," Blake said. "Find the right slough and you're going to catch all the blues you want."

Blake, 42, from Chocowinity, N.C., operates as FishIBX. He grew up in Jamesville and has been guiding on the Roanoke, Neuse and Pamlico rivers and the Pamlico Sound for 22 years. Tagging along on the trip that day in 2020 was his 13-year-old son, Kaden. Anyone watching him match his father, cast for cast, catfish for catfish, would be envious of his opportunities, or according to the song's lyrics, "Wishing they was dancin' the jig. Here with this handsome kid."

"It takes hard-earned knowledge of all three river

systems to make a living as a guide, because the fish move around so much and the species change with the seasons," Blake said. "After April, when the stripers leave, the anglers leave, too. I was catching 70 stripers a day, and it dropped down to two fish a day. I was trying to locate the last of the stripers to see if I could get clients to come back for some catch-and-release fishing. As I was checking out a slough along the edge of the river, I saw marks on the depth finder screen. Thinking they were stripers, I hit them with a jig. But they turned out to be blue catfish. Both fish make marks that look the same."

Blake had struck the catfish mother lode. The biggest blue he had gotten jiggy at this time last year weighed 28 pounds, and that was only a few weeks after figuring out the new style of fishing. He was hooking and landing as many as 50 to 60 blues during a half-day jigging for them.

STAYING IN PLACE >

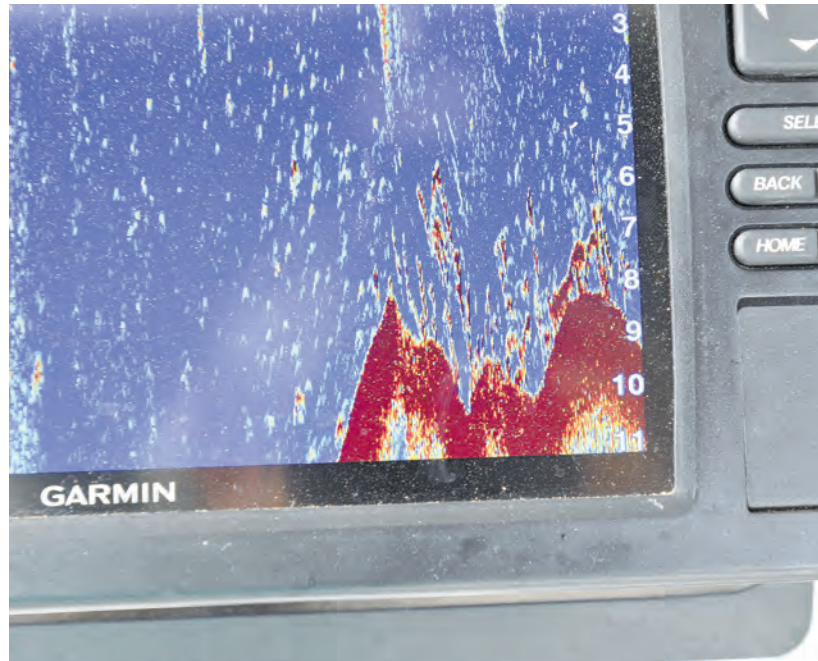


Mike Marsh

STAYING IN PLACE

Keys to catching Roanoke River catfish are finding them, dropping jigs enticingly in their faces and keeping hooks from snagging submerged roots and fallen trees. Blake uses old technology, watching for floating leaves along the edges to tell him where sloughs are located, as well as the new technology of a finely tuned sonar unit to confirm fish are actually down there. The most important piece of electronic gear is a self-anchoring Minn Kota trolling motor for his 23-foot bay boat.

“Your fishing is not nearly as productive when you use the old method of setting out an anchor, tying it off with a line and casting a cut bait on a bottom rig,” he said. “The riverbed is littered with woody cover that can hang up any anchor. Getting it loose can be a frustrating experience, if you even manage to get it loose. Every fish nearby is going to be spooked by the commotion. Once I find a productive spot, I just program it into the trolling motor and when I return to fish it, the i-Pilot feature holds me in the best position for working a jig into precisely the right spot. It doesn’t take long to figure out where the worst hang-ups are located and where the fish bite best.”



Mike Marsh



Kaden Blake, 13, shows off a nice blue catfish from the Roanoke River in the Jamesville area. ABOVE: Blue catfish mark as arches on a depth finder screen, very similar to the arches that striped bass produce when hit by sonar.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The town of Jamesville is on US 64, a few miles east of Williamston. The NCWRC's Astoria Boating Access Area is at 1333 Astoria Drive, off Main Street, about 1.1 miles from US 64.

WHEN TO GO — Blue catfish provide an excellent opportunity after the striped bass season ends in April, with great jig fishing extending into May, June and beyond.

BEST TACKLE — Any half-ounce bucktail jig with a soft plastic shad-tail or curlytail trailer that works for striped bass will also catch catfish. Use medium-action baitcasting or spinning tackle spooled with 30-pound braid

FISHING INFO/GUIDES — Mitchell Blake, FishlBX, 252-495-1803, www.fishlBX.com. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds

ACCOMMODATIONS — Holiday Inn Express, Plymouth, 252-793-4700; Road Trip Motel, Plymouth, 252-741-9486; Holiday Inn Express, Williamston, 252-799-0100; Quality Inn, Plymouth, 252-792-8400.

MAPS — DeLorme North Carolina Atlas and Gazetteer, 800-452-5931 or www.delorme.com.

SENSITIVITY TRAINING

Blake uses 30-pound braid, tying it directly to the jig without a leader. The braid is sensitive enough to allow him to feel the most-subtle strike and strong enough to pull the jig free from most snags, although the hook may bend under the pressure. If the hook bends, Blake fixes it with pliers. He also uses pliers to turn a quarter-inch side offset in the hook point in relation to the shank. The offset increases the probability of a hookup. If a catfish has the jig in its jaws and the hook is laying flat without the offset, it can slip out of its grip when the angler sets the hook. As the song says, "I just bite it. It's for the look. I don't light it."

"A catfish strike is not like a striper strike," he said. "It's more of a thump, like a speckled trout strike. A striper strike is a harder hit. It's more like a flick than a thump. I also get strikes from flathead catfish, channel catfish, largemouth bass, crappie, bowfin and gar."

Blake's son took to the technique quickly.

"I just started catching catfish on a jig, and it's fun," Kaden Blake said. "I think stripers are more aggressive, but catfish are here when the stripers are gone, and the action is just as fast for as long as you feel like catching them."

Out of the mouths of babes indeed come words of wisdom. All it takes for anyone else to get in on the same astounding action is gettin' jiggy wit it. ■



Mike Marsh is a freelance outdoor writer in Wilmington. His latest book, *Fishing North Carolina, and other titles, are available at www.mikemarshoutdoors.com.*

JIGGING UP BLUES FROM THE SLOUGHS ➤

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	36"	1 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: Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Sheepshead	10"	10/day
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day
Striped bass ^	28"-35" TL max (ocean)	1/day
Hickory shad	None	10/day
American shad	closed	closed

^ see NCWRC/NCDMF regs for inshore Management Area limits. % Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit hmspermits.noaa.gov. % 5 bluefish per day for recreational anglers on for-hire or charter vessels; 3 bluefish per day otherwise. * 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.

JIGGING UP BLUES FROM THE SLOUGHS

The edges of Roanoke River sloughs between Williamston, Jamesville and Plymouth are submerged, so anglers cannot actually discover their location by merely looking at the banks.

However, there is a way to find them visually by looking for current seams where the water is flowing swiftly but leaves are floating slowly on the surface.

A trout fisherman who enjoys fishing mountain streams in autumn should be very familiar with spotting this type of current disruption. The difference in flow velocity is stark, and a seam may lie parallel to a straight bank, in a cove or at a small nook in the trees.

In most places, the Roanoke River channel is about 20 feet deep; the outer edge of a slough typically rises to within 4 to 6 feet of the surface. The sloughs average 8 to 10 feet deep.

Beyond the slough is the bank, which usually has underwater roots, cypress knees, logs, fallen limbs and uprooted trees projecting from it. This woody structure helps hold catfish in the sloughs. Nevertheless, the main attraction is food, which includes eels, baitfish, crawfish and other creatures that are there as a consequence of the underwater anomalies and eddies that allow them to congregate and rest out of the main current flow.

After an angler visually locates a seam that indicates a potential slough, he can move close to the bank to scan the area with a sonar unit. Anyone who has located striped bass with their depth finder will notice that blue catfish make similar marks on the screen. Like striped bass, they form dense schools when they are stacked up in a slough.

An angler can locate several sloughs and return later the same day or on a subsequent trip to fish them. It may be possible to tie the boat off to a tree limb or trunk or drop an anchor to the bottom and fish. However, the most-important piece of the slough-fishing puzzle is using a trolling motor that has an anchoring feature to position the boat in just the right spot for the angler to make short, accurate casts with a bucktail jig and soft plastic trailer. ■



Kaden Blake battles a blue catfish that came from a Roanoke Rive slough. They can often be located by watching for areas where leaves are floating slowly along the surface in areas with a good amount of current.

Mike Marsh

Lake Gaston's monster blue catfish are spawning on different parts of the 20,500-acre lake throughout June.



Zakk Royce

GASTON CATS: AVOID THE SPAWN

Move up the lake for prespawn fish, then down for post-spawners

While many fishermen lament the catfish spawn — when blues are busy laying eggs and guarding nests — guide Zakk Royce of Gasburg, Va., is too busy catching them to be complaining.

His secret?

Run Lake Gaston and avoid most of the spawn altogether. At 34 miles long, Gaston can always provide a place where the fish are feeding.

"The good news is that not all of the fish will be spawning at the same time," said Royce (919-724-2474), who runs Blues Brothers Catfishing Guide Service. "The spawn is all about water temperature, which starts for blue catfish in the mid- to upper 70s. Because of the cool water flowing into the upper lake from the bottom of Kerr Lake, the upper end will be the last section to start spawning. That's where I'll be in early June, when the fish are beginning to spawn on the lower end."

According to Royce, early June is all about a mussel-bed bite. In water 20 feet and less, Royce will be targeting red-clay and sandy points, islands and sandbars on the upper end of the main lake where he has found mussels using his side-scan sonar.

Royce trolls a spread of Santee rigs on the bottom or anchors up and fan casts his baits. Once the water begins to warm into the spawning range, Royce is ready to shift to the lower lake, where spawning has been well underway and more fish are finishing their duties and ready to tie on the feed bag.

"The early mornings on the lower end will still be a shallow, mussel-bed bite, because it's an easy meal after they spawn," Royce said. "But as the month goes on and the water temperature rises into the 80s, the blues will begin to slip down into the closest-available deep water. Those fish can be caught on the bottom until the thermocline develops. Then, they'll start to suspend, and I'll catch them on float rigs."

Once blues are suspended, Royce will abandon his Santee rigs in favor of a 3-inch slip float that is adjusted to carry his shad or perch chunk in the strike zone. A 3-ounce egg weight resting on the swivel above the leader will keep the baited 9/0 circle hook straight down. Royce is careful to keep the baits above the fish.

By late June, Royce has another option. There is a good chance that the upper-lake fish he targeted in the early part of the month will be finishing their spawn and ready to eat. Then, he can stow his float rigs and go back to a mussel bed bite. ■



TIPS FOR HEADBOAT TRIPS

HOW TO CATCH MORE FISH ON THESE POPULAR BOTTOM-FISHING VESSELS

Brian Cope

Fishing from a head boat is one of the quickest and least-expensive ways to catch a lot of fish to which most anglers don't have easy access. All along the Carolina coastlines, these boats, aka party boats, head out every morning for a day of bottom-fishing. Getting aboard one of these can help you stock your freezer with grouper, snapper and a number of other great-tasting fish.

If you're worried that you don't have the proper gear, that's not a problem. These boats are loaded with all the rods, reels and other gear you need to rip gag groupers out of reefs and pull amberjacks up from the depths. All you need is a cooler to haul your catch home.

But first things first — before heading out, follow your preferred ritual of avoiding seasickness. Whether that means taking Dramamine or Bonine the night before and/or the morning of, or wearing an ear patch, wristband or some other method you believe in, do it. All the "I don't get seasick" bravado isn't worth a dime when you find yourself hurling over

the rails while your buddies are reeling in trophy triggerfish.

"Everyone is prone to seasickness at some point in their life. Just because it's never happened to you before doesn't mean it never will," said Capt. Dave Tilley of SaltwaterCentral.com. "I can't count how many anglers I've seen bragging about never being seasick, only to see those same anglers never get a hook in the water because they're too busy throwing up."

Tilley (910-264-3973) has captained boats of all sizes, including a stint on the *Continental Shelf*, a 100-foot vessel currently based in Myrtle Beach, S.C., that formerly fished out of Morehead City, N.C. He's got a few tips for anglers fishing from a headboat.

STEP TO THE REAR

"On a lot of head boats, especially the bigger ones, anglers in the rear and rear corners of the boat seem to catch the most fish. I'm not really sure why that is or if there is any scientific reason for it, but it's easy to see that's the case after

you've been on enough headboat trips. I'd advise anyone to try fishing from the rear if you get the chance," said Tilley, who currently captains the *Wild Rover III* out of Carolina Beach, N.C.

One of Tilley's golden rules for bottom-fishing from one of these big boats will go a long way to keeping peace with your fellow anglers, and for keeping your bait in the strike zone longer.

BOTTOM'S UP

"When you drop your bait down and you feel it hit bottom, don't let any more line out," he said. "Either reel up slightly to avoid getting hung in the structure, or just let it sit. Anglers who let more line out at this point will end up tangled with the angler next to them, or with an angler on the opposite side of the boat. It



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

OPPOSITE: Grouper are a prime target for head boats operating out of ports along the coast of the Carolinas. A tasty bottomfish, they are prized by most anglers and captains.

leads to a lot of unnecessary tension onboard, not to mention all the time wasted getting lines untangled,” he said.

For anglers wanting the most bang for their buck, Tilley said go with a full day — or even a multi-day trip when available.

TIMING YOUR TRIP

“If you’re booking a half-day trip or even a 6-hour trip, your captain is very limited as to where he can go and what fish are in his range,” Tilley said. “He can only go so far, and more often than not, that means black sea bass, mackerel, small snapper — not bad fish, but not as big of a variety on what you’ll have access to with a full-day or longer trip. Of course, if you’re bringing kids or if you just want to test the waters and see if you’d like to do a longer trip, these shorter trips are great.”

Tilley prefers trips that are at least 10, 12 or 14 hours. His main reason for this? Lots of grouper.

“Grouper are the most-prized bottomfish for a headboat, and with these longer trips, we have time to get where they are, time to fish and time to get everyone back to shore. These are the trips when we often catch limits of gag, red, and scamp grouper. All while catching numerous other species as well.

“I don’t want to discourage anyone from booking a 6-hour trip, because we’re happy to take you on a 6-hour trip and will show you the time of your life while doing it. But if you’re really after the most fishing bang for your buck, book a full day (or longer) trip. It will be a trip you’ll never forget.” ■



Brian Cope

The longer the headboat trip you can book, even overnights, allows your captain more time to get you to the fish so you can catch them.

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
Grouper (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 SCDNR's Regulations Digest

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

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

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

LUNKER LINES

David Fritts

A medium- or deep-diving crankbait can trigger bites from bass that aren't feeding and turn on a feeding frenzy.



Dan Kibler

JUNE: THE CRANKBAIT MONTH

DIVING PLUGS TRIGGER PLENTY OF BITES FROM BASS THAT ARE READY TO FEED AGAIN

It might take a while, but it will be worth it. That's how I explain the advantages of fishing a crankbait in June. It should be everybody's favorite bait this month. You can catch some fish on topwaters, you can swim a jig or drag a Carolina rig, but you can't beat fishing a big, diving plug.

Here's why. Except for a few lakes on the North Carolina-Virginia border — Buggs Island and Gaston — the post-spawn is over for most bass. There may still be some late spawners left on those lakes, but on most lakes, bass have recovered from the spawn, moved out, and they're ready to feed up and replace all that energy they spent fanning beds, laying eggs and guarding fry.

And there's no bait better than a crankbait when fish are in that kind of mood.

First, they're ganged up. There might be a dozen fish on a piece of gravel or shell bottom no bigger than my pickup truck.

There might be two dozen. If you play your cards right, you might catch them all. You can easily catch a limit and cull.

The reason is, there's something about a bass hooked on a crankbait that gets the rest of his or her buddies in a tizzy. I think the other fish believe there's a school of bait around, and they get into a feeding frenzy.

But you have to get that first one to bite, and that's the trick.

WHERE ARE THEY?

First of all, where to look?

Over the years, I've learned that when fish start to move out after the post-spawn, they show up from about halfway back in creeks all the way out to the main-river channel. First of the month, they'll be between 7 and 10 feet deep, and get deeper as the month progresses.

What you have to do is locate the area of the lake where fish are getting into this pattern, and follow that pattern around

the lake. I like to start around mid-lake and work down, and when I'm finished, I can move way upriver to that end of the lake. It's sort of like running the spawn, just a month later. The difference across the whole lake might only be a week.

They are hungry after the spawn, and one creek or the other, one end of a lake or the other, will always be better at one time. This is the reason High Rock is so good in June. They start biting first on the lower end, Flat Swamp Creek to the mouth of Abbotts Creek, then the bite starts moving up. It gets to Second Creek, then Crane Creek, then Swearing Creek. Lake Wylie is the same way. But it might only be a week or two before they're bit-



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

ing up the lake the way they bit down the lake.

So I start at mid-creek and work out, and at mid-lake and work down. I like to start fishing about 8 feet deep, sitting where I can fish 8, 10 or 12 feet. If you can't find them, you might have to go deeper. I am also looking for clear water. Every lake is a little different; Lake Norman is probably clearer than High Rock; it all depends. They can't all be dirty.

You want to look for them on little hard spots on the bottom, places with a little gravel, some shells, maybe some rock. If there's a stump on it, all the better. But so many times in June, fish will just get on a hard spot, and that's where you'll catch 'em all. Brush is not a big player in June. An old log might be about as good as a stump. You can tell a lot about the bottom by the way the lip of your crankbait digs in. You may drag up some shells and stuff.

KEEP ON CASTING

When you think you've found a place, start casting. A lot of younger fishermen want to see the fish on their depth finders before they cast. That's good, and I can see them with my Lowrance Active Target if they're up off the bottom, but when they're right on that hardbottom, they're harder to see. That's why I like to find them with my crankbait.

So I'm going to make a lot of casts, from a lot of angles, to try and get that first one to bite. Once you do, you can get them all fired up, and that's what makes a crankbait so good. You can get that first one to bite by changing the angle or retrieve, the speed, the color. You might hit a fish just the right way and get him to bite when he's not really feeding. The other fish see it

and think there's a school of bait, and it's on. But a lot of times it takes a lot of casts. I've done it many times, make 20 or 30 casts to a spot before you trigger one to bite, then you catch them every cast. And it will usually last a while.

One thing. When you're got 'em fired up, get your bait back in there as soon as possible. Don't wait 4 or 5 minutes before you make your next cast. I had 'em fired up at Buggs Island in an FLW tournament one time; I was catching them every cast, then I put one in the boat and got a hook in my finger, and by the time I got it out 10 minutes later, they'd quit biting.

COLORS AND TACKLE

Now, some details. Shad colors will be your best colors, something like Kentucky blue, blue/pearl, honey shad. It depends on the color of the water. If it's dirty, you might be better off with Lone Ranger, which is a faded, chartreuse/pearl color. In certain kinds of water, that color really looks like a shad.

If I'm fishing down on the lower end of a lake, I'm going to want to fish a Berkley Dredger. If I'm way up the lake where they might be a little shallower, I could go with a Frittside.

I want to be fishing a 7-foot-6 rod, my Lew's David Fritts Cranking Rod. A 7-foot rod will do, but a 7-foot-6 is better. You can make the longer casts you need. I want my BB1 reel spooled with a 10-pound, low-stretch monofilament like Sensation. Everybody thinks you need to be throwing fluorocarbon, but it has a lot of stretch, and it's really the diameter that is the key. If you get up to 12- or 14-pound test, your lure starts to lose action. ■



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

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

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

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2021 JUN

	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
Tue 1	██	██	██	██	41
Wed 2	██	██	██	██	54
Thu 3	██	██	██	██	46
Fri 4	██	██	██	██	42
Sat 5	██	██	██	██	44
Sun 6	██	██	██	██	45
Mon 7	██	██	██	██	57
Tue 8	██	██	██	██	69
Wed 9	██	██	██	██	81
Thu 10	██	██	██	██	88
Fri 11	██	██	██	██	80
Sat 12	██	██	██	██	71
Sun 13	██	██	██	██	61
Mon 14	██	██	██	██	56
Tue 15	██	██	██	██	55
Wed 16	██	██	██	██	58
Thu 17	██	██	██	██	67
Fri 18	██	██	██	██	55
Sat 19	██	██	██	██	47
Sun 20	██	██	██	██	45
Mon 21	██	██	██	██	54
Tue 22	██	██	██	██	62
Wed 23	██	██	██	██	73
Thu 24	██	██	██	██	76
Fri 25	██	██	██	██	63
Sat 26	██	██	██	██	53
Sun 27	██	██	██	██	43
Mon 28	██	██	██	██	39
Tue 29	██	██	██	██	41
Wed 30	██	██	██	██	47

25 50 75
AVERAGE

LUNAR PERIODS

TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED

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

Jeff Burleson

Seeds are not created equal. The variety that works in one duck impoundment in one area may not match other areas.



Jeff Burleson

CHOOSE SEED CAREFULLY

SEED VARIETIES CAN BE MATED TO NEEDS OF FOOD-PLOT PLANTERS

Landowners with the space, capabilities and resources should always consider cultivating portions of their properties for nutritional production for their native wildlife populations.

Wildlife must consume enough food to meet their daily nutritional requirements. Obtaining food for humans is as easy as walking to the icebox, the pantry or the nearest café or restaurant delivery option for a nutritional, sufficient meal. But deer and other wildlife must make a living off the land. On some properties, food can be very abundant — but scarce and marginal on others.

Landowners can promote the health and productivity of their wildlife with food plots featuring the specialized seeds available on the market today. But those seeds aren't always created equal, and landowners need to pay close attention to the specific variety and cultivar before they make a purchase.

Plants are genetically pliable where scien-

tists can produce seed to express a specific trait in a plant, such as disease resistance, or they can be developed to allow plants to grow under specific conditions.

BETTER SEED

Large companies such as Monsanto and Pioneer make huge efforts to come up with a better seed for their customers around the globe. On a smaller scale, landowners looking to plant something in their food plots or waterfowl impoundments can choose a variety that produces the traits that will work the best on their properties.

Unfortunately, there aren't too many companies, if any, investing millions in genetic modification of seed for wildlife plantings. But landowners with an interest in promoting wildlife on their land can benefit from the ongoing research and development of genetically modified seeds produced in the agriculture industry.

Specific varieties can help landowners choose a better option that works best on their specific properties to meet their goals.

IMPORTANT FACTORS

So, what types of varieties are available that would make a difference to landowners planting for wildlife? A landowner has to consider what aspects of a seed variety are considered important. Seeds are hybridized for a long list of reasons, and they are modified to make farmers more productive in the regions in which they live.

Pioneer is the world's resource for genetically modified corn. Since 1920, Pioneer's agronomists have made monumental advances in genetic modifications to corn to favor preferred traits in a wide range of climates around the world.

For corn, the most-important fac-



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.

tors are standability, stand uniformity, drought and disease-tolerance, carbohydrate content, stalk height and maturation period. At the end of the day, farmers choose the right seed variety for their specific farms to produce the highest yields. Landowners planting food plots can springboard off the 90 years of research and development to purchase the right seed varieties for their own projects.

HEIGHT, MATURATION PERIOD

While landowners want the best disease- and drought-resistance available, most people looking at seeds for food plots will typically choose a specific cultivar based on plant height and maturation period. These two aspects of growth can be very important for landowners planting waterfowl impoundments for height limitations and for perfectly timing their crop-maturation date. But plant height can also be an important factor in other areas for other types of wildlife species, such as bobwhite quail, mourning dove and wild turkey.

Fortunately for landowners, seed companies catering to wildlife enthusiasts have already selected specific cultivars that will cater to certain wants and needs. Where it counts the most is in waterfowl impoundments where



Jeff Burleson

Modern-day seed mixes offer food-plot planters options best suited to their needs and location.

maturation date and a short plant height can be superior traits.

Jim Riley at Warrior Wildlife Systems (406-580-4036) sells a wide range of specific hybrids for landowners. One of his premium seeds for duck hunters is made by CanaMaize Seed Inc. It is a conventional corn, but it has a 65-day maturation period and is short-statured — perfect for planting in duck impoundments. And it can be perfect for duck impoundments that have the ability to irrigate.

THE IRRIGATION FACTOR

A short maturation of 65 days is wonderful for waterfowl impoundments, but these fields must have the capability to irrigate because of the mid-summer planting. The early stages of a corn crop must have adequate soil moisture, and a mid-summer planting can be tough on the small, tender plants in the southern sun.

There are other good cultivars for waterfowl impoundments that aren't corn. Warrior sells a short-height grain sorghum that has a relative maturity of 85 to 92 days. This seed can be planted in waterfowl impoundments that require a relatively short maturation schedule, and the short height makes it ideal for impoundments with a minimal-height flooding ability.

If landowners want to go right to the source, there are companies that sell directly to farmers dozens of specific varieties of seed. Companies such as Harveys (252-523-9090), based out of Kinston, N.C., sells the latest cultivars of agriculture seed that are available every year. They can provide fact sheets for each cultivar and help landowners make a decision on which hybrid to purchase based on their site. ■

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

PECAN ENCRUSTED WHITING

FRIED OR BAKED, THESE TASTY FISH ARE A DINNER TREAT



A cast-iron frying pan is great for frying whiting fillets, because the heat is spread evenly. **BELOW:** The finished product is a great tasting fish fillet with plenty of trimmings in the breader.

Jerry Dilsaver

Along the Carolina coast, we have already enjoyed some summer-like weather, and it's about to ramp up another notch or two — or three. This is a special recipe to enjoy one of the spring fish that fishermen have been catching in good numbers this year. With the warmer weather comes warmer water, and the whiting catches that have been excellent will soon begin to taper off until the water cools again in the fall.



In addition to being whiting, they are also called sea mullet and/or Virginia mullet. These names are colloquial monikers as they actually belong to a family known as kingfish, which are cousins in the drum family. Whatever you call them, whiting are one of the most understated fish of the spring. They typically

don't get a lot of lip service or print in fishing reports, but everyone who has ever eaten them holds their fine fillets in high regard.

Whiting don't have the elusiveness of trout or the bulldog fighting abilities of their drum cousins, and they are probably one of the last fish that will be mentioned by piscatorial gourmards, but they are the preferred dinner of generations of coastal fishermen. They have slightly sweet, mild and firm white-meat fillets and are excellent table fare prepared in a variety of ways.

For most fishermen, a meal of whiting is pretty simple. They are good simply dredged through your favorite seafood breader and introduced to a pan of hot grease. The meat isn't as delicate as trout nor as firm as red drum, but few folks who enjoy eating fish consider it a second choice to either. And they freeze well, too.

This recipe is simply a way to dress up and celebrate a whiting dinner. Instead of just adding breader and frying them, it mixes crushed pecans and orange zest into a homemade breader that also includes seasoned Panko crumbs. This recipe is excellent fried or baked in the oven, but my family prefers it cooked on the grill. I had intended to cook this batch on the grill, but a thunderstorm interrupted those plans. I was upset at first but realized this created the opportunity to show the versatility of this recipe, so most was baked, with a few pieces fried to show it works well that way. ■

PECAN-ENCRUSTED WHITING

I like to eat fish. I grew up in a commercial-fishing family, and there was a time we ate stronger-flavored fish because they didn't sell, and I learned to like them. I liked milder-tasting fish too, but there had to be an abundance of them to get to keep any — that is, except for whiting. They have always been special to us, and we kept a mess or two when we caught them.

As youngsters, we ate our whiting fried. They didn't get fancy breaders but were covered with a mixture of flour and corn meal, with salt and pepper added. The breadier didn't disguise the flavor of the whiting; they tasted great. They still do.

One of my best memories of eating whiting is having them for breakfast one morning while camping on the beach. My parents had begun to prepare breakfast, and I was putting out a pair of surf rods to watch while we ate. The whiting started biting, and I was catching them as quickly as I could rebait and cast back out. My parents laughed as I didn't stop catching fish and my eggs got cold. When the action slowed a little, my dad cleaned a few of the whiting and fried them for me. A Nor'easter was brewing, and the growing wind blew sand in my fish, but those whiting were the best fish ever.

I think of that trip and those whiting every time I eat them; this is why I wanted to do a special recipe for whiting. My doctors tell me not to eat fried fish, so I worked on this recipe with pecans and orange peel to cook on the grill. Neither of these ingredients is overbearing, but you can taste them in the mix. It's not the same as fried fish, but it's pretty dang good, and I'll take a mess of whiting any time I can.

This recipe was intended to be cooked on the grill, but a late afternoon thunderstorm forced moving to Plan B. They're almost as good baked in the oven and I even fried a few pieces — just for old times' sake.

The cup of chopped pecans looks like a lot, but if you load up the pieces of fish and press on them to be sure the pecan pieces stick, it's a good measurement. I used seasoned Panko bread

crumbs, which reduced the need for salt to just a very light sprinkle. I went pretty heavy on the pepper, and if you like it spicy, you might try adding a few shakes of cayenne pepper too.

Whiting fillets are pretty thin, so you need to be careful not to overcook them. It only takes a few minutes, and I don't turn them when cooking on the grill or baking in the oven. They will be ready as soon as you notice the pecan breadier getting darker. They're ready to eat when the fish flakes easily.

If you're going to fry them, be especially careful. It cooks very quickly over the medium setting, but I'm concerned that cooking it on a lower setting might make it taste greasy. A cast iron or heavy aluminum pan is optimum for frying as they spread the heat evenly and you don't have hot or cold spots.

Only enough oil to cover the bottom is needed. This will be about ½-inch deep, and the pan should be preheated so you see and hear a sizzle immediately upon putting the fish in the pan. Peanut or safflower oil works well and resists scorching if it gets too hot.

I like to turn the fish once when frying. This takes some care to prevent breaking up the fish or raking off the pecan breadier. I like to cook smaller pieces of fish and turn them with cupped tongs.

This recipe works well however you would prefer to cook it. We enjoyed the fish in these pictures and I believe you'll appreciate dressing up whiting with some pecans and orange zest too. It makes one of nature's treats extra special. ■

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound whiting fillets

1 can chopped pecans (fine, not crushed)

¼ cup seasoned Panko bread crumbs

1 egg

1 tbsp milk

¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Zest of one orange

Lemon, lime or orange wedges

Tarter sauce (regular or spicy)

Peanut or safflower oil (if frying)

PREPARATION:

Cut fillets into serving-size pieces. Season with salt and pepper (to taste). Mix pecans, Panko, orange zest and parmesan. Mix egg and milk in a shallow bowl. Dip the fish pieces in the egg and milk mixture. Coat them with the pecan/Panko/parmesan/orange zest mixture and press to ensure it sticks to the fillets.

If cooking on grill, preheat the grill to medium heat. If cooking in oven, preheat the oven to 375 degrees, if frying, use just enough peanut or safflower oil to cover the bottom of the pan and preheat to medium heat.

Cook the fish until the pecan/Panko/parmesan coating is just beginning to brown. Only turn the fillets if you are frying and do



it carefully at about 3 to 4 minutes. Continue cooking until the pecan/Panko/parmesan coating is medium brown; be careful not to overcook. The fish is done when it flakes with a fork.

Serve while hot with lemon and/or lime and/or orange wedges, tartar sauce or spicy tartar sauce.

My intention with this was to cook it on a vegetable tray on the grill, but a thunderstorm dampened those plans. As noted above, it can also be baked in the oven or fried and we cooked some both ways for this meal. A tip for baking this is to cover a cookie sheet or shallow pan with parchment paper and cook the fish on it.

This combines well with a variety of vegetables. Potatoes are a standard with fish and they can be baked or fried. Slaw is also a standard with fish, but a fresh green salad or lettuce wedge works well, too. ■



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.

Guide Bobby Winters likes to fish live bait in low-light periods for June striped bass on the Santee Cooper lakes.



JUNE FISHING BUSTS OUT

BASS, BREAM, STRIPERS ALL BITING; TIME TO APPLY FOR ALLIGATOR PERMITS

Terry Madewell

A lot of “fishy” stuff is happening on the Santee Cooper lakes in June, with the common theme being excellent fishing for several species. If you’re a “gator hunter” it’s also time to plan ahead and apply for alligator permits for the 2021 season.

BASS STILL SHALLOW

Largemouth bass action remains excellent but has morphed from the spawn to more typical summer patterns, but excellent fishing in relatively shallow water still exists.

Most bass have migrated from the shallow, spring spawning areas and now relate to various forms of cover in slightly deeper water. They’ll scatter on flats with stumps, logs, brush and weeds located near drops — all excellent targets. Low-light periods produce good topwater action, with bass actively surface feeding; walk-the-dog type lures, buzzbaits and poppers are highly productive. Shad colored swimbaits and spinnerbaits are also effective.

Mid-day fishing is best around heavy

cover that provides protection from bright sunlight, and good ambush hide-aways — trees, logs and slightly deeper woody or weedy habitat — are prime targets. Crankbaits, buzzbaits and soft plastics are good choices and, accurate casts to specific targets will directly impact success as bass often nestle tight to objects.

BULL BREAM ACTIVE

As the water temperature rises, bream get very active, and June is an excellent month for targeting fish on the beds as well as scattered fish around weedy and woody cover when not bedding.

Bream are generally found in 2- to 6-foot depths in June, but water level and clarity impact the depth they are found. That pattern changes based on the habitat you fish, such as shaded swamps or the open water flats in full sun. Fish different depths until you find a productive one to target for the specific day and area you’re fishing. For example, swamp fishing often means shallower bream because of the shade-producing canopy.

One technique is to use a 10- to 12-foot,

lightweight fiberglass pole with no reel and swing or pitch the bait to a target. But plenty of successful fishermen also use light spinning or spin-cast tackle. If using the long pole, tie 8- to 10-pound-test line the length of the pole to the eyelet at the tip and use a No. 4 wire hook with a BB split shot a few inches above the hook. Use a small bobber that can be easily changed for depth control.

Most bream fishermen prefer either crickets or artificial lures when targeting bluegill, but it’s a good idea to have a box of worms in case you locate a bed of shellcrackers. If you catch a shellcracker or two using crickets, give the worms a try, and you may catch multiple shellcrackers from that spot. Both baits catch either species, but worms are usually best when targeting shellcrackers. Artificial lures such as Beetle Spins, tiny



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.



BREAM BAITS:

If you're on a spot that's filled with bluegills (above), crickets are likely your most-productive baits, but if you stumble onto shellcrackers, aka redear sunfish, go to red worms. They produce better for shellcrackers.

APPLY FOR GATOR PERMITS

Alligator hunting is popular on both lakes, and now's the time to submit applications for the 2021 season. Those planning to hunt alligators on the Santee Cooper lakes this year must submit applications by June 15. Applications can be submitted electronically over the internet at www.dnr.sc.gov. Go the "Alligator Hunting" link on the website and check out the complete application process. ■

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jigs and popping bugs also work well for big bream.

Fish around trees, logs, stumps and weeds, but stay mobile as you search for concentrations of fish. Small openings in dense clusters of trees, scattered stumps or a small stump in the open can hold multiple fish. If an area produces several fish but the action stops, start searching again, but unless you limit out, go back and check that spot later. Watch for mayfly hatches for excellent localized fishing.

STRIPERS ALL DONE

The keeper season for striped bass continues through June 15, then closes until Oct. 1. The first two weeks of June typically provide excellent opportunities, with the most-consistent bite typically on live bait, primarily blueback herring. The summer closure was brought about because of poor survival of released stripers during that time of the year, not poor fishing.

By early June, stripers are found throughout both lakes, with fishing productive in Lake Marion, the Diversion Canal and Lake Moultrie.

Bobby Winters, a guide out of Blacks Camp, said the slot limit offers anglers the chance to catch plenty of keeper-sized stripers and enjoy catch-and-release fishing.

Winters (843-751-3080) said any time of the day can produce striper action using live bait, but he typically prefers the low-light conditions of mornings and evenings because fish will occasionally school, and casting bucktails is also an option.



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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano



When a crossbow's string is accidentally severed, the resulting decompression can cause serious damage to the bow, and the person holding it.

CROSSBOW CROSSUPS

WITHOUT PROPER SETUP, ACCESSORIES, TRAINING, A NEW CROSSBOW CAN BE A DANGEROUS WEAPON — TO THE HUNTER

"It is rarely the violin that fails to perform, but rather, it is usually the violinist."

Perhaps nowhere could this statement be applied better than to modern crossbows and deer hunters.

Every year since crossbows were legalized and became widely used, I am awed by how many people borrow one or buy one online and start shooting it with no prior knowledge or training. As you can imagine; this rarely ends well, often leading to high repair bills and even bodily harm.

Every Monday early in archery season, there is a steady procession of folks walking through the front door of our bow shop with their heads hung low and crossbows in shambles. In most instances, this "walk of shame" could have easily been avoided by proper training and thus, familiarity with their weapon.

Why hunters feel confident operating a crossbow with no prior knowledge is beyond me. These same people wouldn't climb onto a tractor seat or into the cockpit of an airplane without some operating instructions, yet they have no fear when it comes to a crossbow.

Modern crossbows are complicated machines, and they become even more complex each year as manufacturers compete to make the fastest, most-compact models.

The first step for anyone looking at a crossbow is to buy one from an archery pro shop, not from a big-box store or online. Most of the time, the price will be the same, but a pro shop will set up your new crossbow properly and instruct you on its safe and proper use.

ACCESSORIZING

Furthermore, employees at a pro shop will match your new crossbow with the proper accessories, arrows and broadheads to guarantee the best shooting experience possible. If you have already bought one online or from a big box store, most pro shops will check your assembly, sight in your crossbow, and provide proper training for a reasonable fee. Get the training. Any time and money spent familiarizing yourself with your weapon will save a lot of money and grief down the road.

Most crossbows require a specific nock design, and failure to follow these requirements almost always leads to a train wreck. This is because newer designs such

as extremely narrow and reversed limbs cause the string angle to be extremely narrow at the trigger housing.

Failure to shoot a nock that captures enough of the string or shooting a nock that is not oriented properly will allow the string to "jump over" the arrow. The string often lands in the center of the arrow shaft, fracturing the carbon shaft, which cuts the string like a razor blade. This causes the bow to explode.

If you've never witnessed a crossbow come apart, let me assure you, it is very violent. Modern crossbows store huge amounts of energy, and it's nothing nice when they explosively decompress. As a rule, it is best to stick with the manufacturer's recommended arrow at all times to prevent this from happening.

ASSEMBLY WOES

Another common mistake I've witnessed is untrained individuals failing to properly assemble their crossbow. Not



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

routing the cables correctly, not tightening the prod sufficiently or improper installation of cable slides can all cause excessive cable wear or total failure.

Restrunging a crossbow costs nearly \$200 in many cases, so this can quickly become expensive. Many crossbow owners fail to realize that the service interval for restrung their crossbow is often 100 to 200 shots. Although they are extremely fun to shoot, it is best to treat them like a "hot" caliber rifle, strictly checking your sights, because paying to have your crossbow restrung can add up quickly.

LIMB CLEARANCE

It is also extremely important to make sure there is clearance for the limbs of your crossbow. People often fail to consider the expansion of the limbs when the arrow is released. When hunting from a box stand or tight space, it is best to check for limb clearance while the bow is uncocked. Remember, the limbs will return to this dimension as the arrow is released.

Perhaps the worst mistake of all is failure to ensure proper hand clearance. Each year, quite a few crossbow shooters amputate thumbs or fingers because they fail to do so. While crossbows can be repaired, this is often permanent. With training this could have easily been avoided.

Make sure you are totally familiar with your crossbow's operation, and if you do loan it to anyone, make sure they receive proper training before they use the bow. This is one case where prior training will definitely prevent total disaster. ■

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Sportsman

FISHING HOTSPOTS

Nice black sea bass carpet the bottom around the Edisto 40 artificial reef off South Carolina's Lowcountry coast.

EDISTO 40 REEF'S BOTTOM-FISHING GREAT

Black sea bass, grouper, spadefish, even cobia hang out in June

A By Brian Cope
nglers fishing out of marinas in South Carolina's Lowcountry marinas can make a day of it at the Edisto 40 reef. There's a mixed bag of everything from black sea bass to gag grouper to spadefish, and, according to guide Buddy Bizzell, anglers should also keep a lookout for cobia.

"You'll catch a lot of big, black sea bass here this time of year, but fishing on the bottom, you'll also catch grouper, grunts and spadefish," said Bizzell (803-603-2781). "And when you start reeling up a number of fish, cobia will often appear on the surface. It's like they're curious about why those other fish are going to the surface."

Once at the surface themselves, cobia will hang around in the shade the boat produces. They'll often quickly snatch a bait or lure thrown to them.

"They're curious and don't mind activity going on around them, but they are a little spooky, too. You don't want to cast

directly at them," said Bizzell, who likes to collect some jelly balls before heading to the reef. He'll string a few together and lower them down to the reef, then slowly reel them up, little by little, while putting cut bait on the bottom for the black sea bass, grouper and whatever else will bite.

In time, he'll have the jelly balls just below the surface where he can see if spadefish are pecking at them. He'll leave them in place even if no fish are around, and he'll toss other pieces of cut jelly balls into the water.

"If the spadefish are there, they'll show up under those jelly balls," he said. "They'll eat the strips I toss out. And then, we'll put some of those strips on a hook. The spadefish will take it right away. And they'll give anglers a fight they'll never forget."

If spadefish don't show up, the black sea bass and other bottomfish will fill the time. Bizzell uses at least 30-pound line and enough weight to carry the bait down. He puts his cut bait on a No. 2 hook

and prepares for anything.

And when those cobia show up, he drops a bait or lure within their eyesight and hopes for the best.

"Some days, they'll just stare at it. Other days, they'll follow it but never bite it. And then on some days, they'll bite it as soon as they see it," he said.

Bizzell said one option that works well is to cast a 1½-ounce bucktail away from the cobia, then retrieve it until you see the fish notice it.

"When it notices that lure, open the bail and let the lure drop," he said. "This mimics a baitfish swimming away scared, which is what the cobia would expect to see. Sometimes, that will trigger them to chase it down and devour it when they aren't taking it otherwise."

The Edisto 40 reef is approximately 6.5 miles from the North Edisto sea buoy. It consists of 1,200 tons of miscellaneous concrete. ■

GO SHALLOW FOR POST-SPAWN KERR BASS

Water level will be big variable as bass come off beds; key on bushes in skinny water

G By Tony Garitta

Guide Joel Richardson of Kernersville, N.C., relies on a shallow bite for post-spawn action at Kerr Lake, aka Buggs Island. Most of his fishing is in less than 10 feet of water.

"I rarely fish deeper than 10 feet in June, whether the water level is up or down," said Richardson (www.joelgrichardson.com). "If the water level is 302 to 307, I'll target the bushes, willows and gum trees with plastics; if the water level is below the 302-foot mark, I'll probe main-lake points, humps and stumps in 3 to 5 feet of water with Carolina rigs featuring 6-inch Zoom lizards or 3-inch French fry worms for finicky fish."

Richardson's Carolina rig consists of a 1/2- to 3/4-ounce egg sinker and a 2 1/2-foot leader with a 3/0 worm hook. He uses a 7-foot, medium-heavy baitcasting rod paired with a reel filled with 17-pound green monofilament for his main line and leader. He shuns fluorocarbon line with Carolina rigs.

Buzzbaits and Zoom Flukes are other options with the water barely in the bushes. The lower water level also triggers an explosive topwater bite with Zara Spooks or Pop-R lures.

If the water level exceeds the 307-foot mark, Richardson said it's best to stay home; the water will be up in the woods along the shoreline, covering picnic tables, bridges and road signs.

"The bass spread out in that mass of wood and vegetation and are hard to find," Richardson said. "They're still shallow but almost impossible to reach unless you navigate your way through the woods or locate openings to the bank."

Fishermen differ about which bushes are best. Some prefer fishing green vegetation, while others covet dead vegetation. Richardson has his own rule of thumb. When it's sunny, he favors the green bushes; when it's cloudy, he likes the dead vegetation. But he's adaptable.

"Notice whether your bites are coming from mostly green or dead bushes and fish accordingly," he said.

Depth is another factor.

"The deeper bushes, green or dead, hold the better fish," he said.

When Richardson fishes plastics, flipping or dragging, he likes green pumpkin, watermelon and junebug colors.

For Flukes and topwaters, he likes natural colors like white, pearl and Tennessee shad.

A cranking fanatic, he doesn't fling a crankbait until late June water when the fish

move to 10 to 15 feet of water and offers this cautionary remark. "Cranking isn't what it used to be with the introduction of blue-back herring," he said.

Richardson said Buggs has rebounded from the bass virus. "There's plenty of 1- to 3-pound bass in the lake," Richardson. "June is not a big-fish month, but you'll catch numbers of bass up to 4 pounds and some 5-pound fish." ■



The post-spawn in June finds Joel Richardson in Kerr Lake's shallows, finding plenty of bass.

Dan Kibler

REDFISH BITE PEAKS ALONG NC COAST

June offers great inshore fishing action

By Craig Holt

The peak of North Carolina's inshore red drum fishing occurs in June when water temperatures are optimal and bait is plentiful in creeks and bays.

From June through September, redfish also spawn in skinny water, increasing angling opportunities.

Although guide Allen Jernigan of Sneads Ferry, N.C., doesn't ignore obvious shallow-water redfish signs — tailing on spartina grass flats, dimpling water, fish exploding on or pushing baitfish — he doesn't worry if he can't see visible reds or feeding activities.

"When I pull into a marsh, and I can't see fish because it's windy or there's dingy water, I'll blind-cast where I've found schools or single fish," said Jernigan, who runs Breadman Ventures Guide Service (910-467-1482). "I don't worry so much about food sources as finding reds."

As the water warms, marshes and creeks fill with crabs, shrimp and minnows. Although mainly bottom-feeders on fiddler, oyster and mud crabs, grass shrimp, snails and baitfish, redfish are opportunistic and will travel to find food.

"Any bay or marsh can hold reds in June," Jernigan said. "I also like to fish oyster reefs because reds eat the tiny black crabs."

If he spots a school, Jernigan, who chases red drum from Topsail Island to the New River and Sneads Ferry areas, uses his trolling motor to maneuver his boat close enough to cast lures to them.

"A big school in June could have 100 fish, but they also may be scattered," he said.

But schooling redfish are temperamental, depending on past experiences with anglers.

"Sometimes, you can throw a lure into a school, and they won't scatter if nobody's pressured them," he said. "But if you bump 'em with a trolling motor, it's game over. They'll disperse and might leave a bay or creek. People who come flying into a creek or bay in a boat make wakes that also will shut down a bite."

On the other hand, unpressured schools may remain at a favorite, shallow-water smorgasbord for a week or longer.

"Some days, I've been able to sight-cast for 3 hours in one bay," Jernigan said. "Unpressured schools will meander around creeks and bays. The best tactic is to throw past a school and bring a lure across them or cast at its outside edges."

Jernigan's tackle includes 2500 and 3000 Series Shimano C14 reels mated to 7- or 7½-foot Stillwater rods made by his tournament partner, Jason Dail of Wilmington.



Allen Jernigan

Guide Allen Jernigan of Sneads Ferry loves the month of June when it comes to chasing redfish in marshes and bays in his home waters.

"We use 12-pound braid main line with 20-pound fluorocarbon leaders attached with Albright knots," he said.

Favorite lures include TopDogs, SheDogs or TopDog Jrs., Cajun Thunder Flats Intruder spoons and spinnerbaits. Jernigan also uses paddletail grubs on 5-inch, weedless swimbaits and jerkbaits.

"Depending on clients' skill sets, I also might use popping corks with 4-inch Saltwater Assassin curlytail or paddle-tail grubs," he said.

"Most June redfish will range from slot sizes (18 to 27 inches long) to occasional over-slot," he said. "From what I've seen, I also think 2021 may be one of the better red drum fishing seasons in the last four or five."

North Carolina's daily keeper limit is one slot fish per angler per day. ■



Jeff Burleson

BONNETHEADS ARE BOUNDLESS

Georgetown area anglers target sharks alongside inshore redfish

Bonnethead sharks occupy many of the same waters as redfish and feed on similar things.

Summer conditions have arrived in the coastal waters off North Carolina and South Carolina, and what better way to spend a warm day than to catch a rambunctious representative of the saltwater family, a bonnethead shark. It's prime time to start targeting them, and the pristine shell banks near Georgetown, S.C., are as good a place as any.

Greg Holmes of Fish Skinny Guide Service targets these toothy critters when he has a client looking for a different experience in the confines of the marsh.

"Summer is ideal for catching bonnetheads. We catch them when we are trying to — and sometimes when we aren't," said Holmes (843-241-0594). "Bonnetheads will patrol the same oyster-lined creek banks a redfish will, and they compete for crabs with redfish, too. Bonnetheads will eat all kinds of stuff, but they definitely have an affinity for the crab fare."

Bonnetheads are found swimming along the margin between oyster bars and mud banks on the lower end of the tide. They are looking for blue crabs, and that makes it easy for anglers wanting to target bonnetheads if they don't mind catching a few reds.

Holmes primarily fishes out of Georgetown ramps that access North Inlet and the Mother Norton area, but he will venture to the Santee Delta on occasion. Both places are ideal for finding bonnetheads from June through September.

"I like to target the transition area between the oysters and the mud bank on the main channels and larger creeks. The ones (closer) to the inlet always seem to have more bonnetheads

versus the ones in the rear of the estuary," he said.

These sharks are cruising the edges looking for crabs, shrimp or anything to eat. And the best times are typically on the lower phases of the tide.

"We do better when the water is out of the grass and is right along the edge of the oysters," Holmes said. "They like to swim along these edges looking for food, and sometimes you will even see their dorsal fins out of the water; that is a perfect giveaway."

As the water recedes, blue crabs will slide along the edges of structure, waiting out the tide or looking for food. It's a perfect opportunity for bonnetheads to fill up on their most-favored meals. Chunks of fresh, crushed blue crab is prime rib and lobster for these toothy critters and what Holmes chooses to use when targeting bonnetheads. He takes fresh crabs and cuts them into several pieces and threads them onto an offset circle hook.

"It really depends on the size of the crab, but you can get at least two pieces on smaller crabs and as many as five or six pieces on large crabs. I use a simplified Carolina rig, using heavy, 40-pound fluorocarbon and a couple heavy split shot," he said.

While bonnethead are the target, crushed crab is also a prime meal for redfish. Holmes often catches reds in the same areas as where he is targeting bonnetheads.

Bonnethead fishing is quite different than the typical shark fishing, with chunks of fish on the bottom in deep water. But they can make for an exciting afternoon especially on light tackle right in the prime summer season. ■



Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



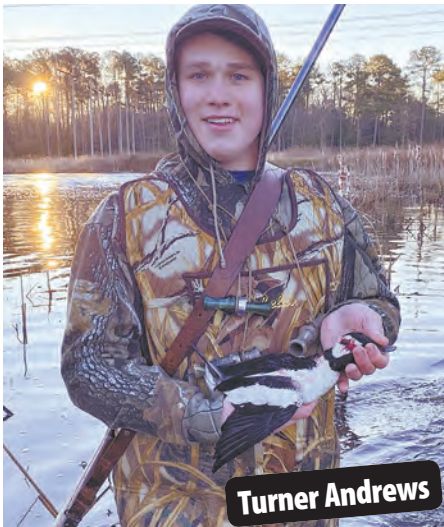
Randy Young

Randy Young caught this nice bass last July in a Stokes County, N.C., pond, 3 months after turning 65. It hit a spinnerbait.



Abram Bussert

Abram Bussert, 5, killed this turkey last spring, hunting with his father, Eric, in Cleveland County, N.C.



Turner Andrews

Turner Andrews took this duck on Feb. 8, the final day of 2021 youth waterfowl season in Virginia, near Yorktown.



Bryan Buckner

Bryan Buckner of Saluda, N.C., boated this 4½-pound large-mouth out of South Carolina's Lake Jocassee on Nov. 4, 2020.



Mike Larson

Mike Larson landed this 24-inch red drum on Oct. 24, 2020, fishing in a creek on Bald Head Island, N.C.



James Gavin

James Gavin boated this 64-pound wahoo fishing out of Wrightsville Beach, N.C., last fall.



Nate Cebula

Nate Cebula caught his first nice redfish on Nov 27, 2020, in the Wando River near Mount Pleasant, S.C.

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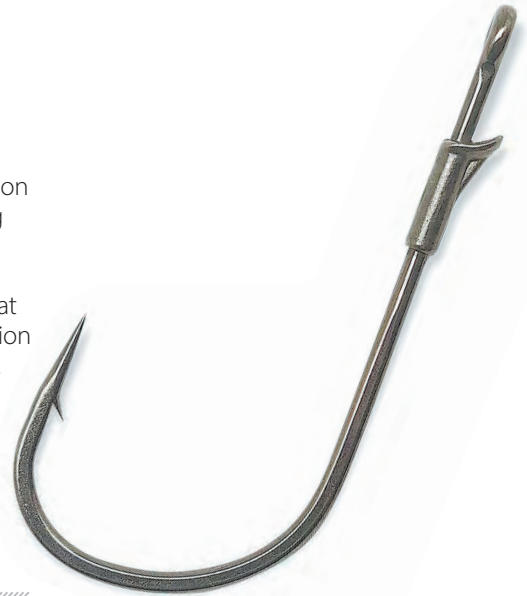
Bass pro Aaron Maartens helped design the G-Power Flip & Punch hook, which comes in sizes 2/0 through 5/0. The heavy, tournament grade wire hook features a welded eye and custom tin keeper for better holding soft-plastic baits on the hook,

a shorter hook point for faster penetration and to better avoid hang-ups or fouling while still being long enough to stick a nice fish.

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Snake boots and mud boots often have a lot in common: they're hot and heavy.

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AVIAN-X G-BLIND

The folks at Avian-X, who brought you some of the most life-like decoys ever made, have gone the extra step to making hiding from the ducks that are checking out those decoys even easier with their new G-Blind.

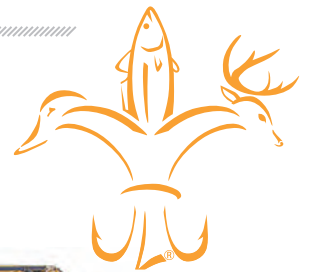
A portable, take-down blind that can seat four hunters and be set up in just minutes, the G-Blind is of the size and shape of traditional permanent blinds, providing overhead cover from ducks and weather, but in a sturdy aluminum frame and a skin of Mossy Oak's all-new Shadow Grass Habitats camo.

The G-Blind is 90 inches long by 60 inches wide, plus 53 inches tall, so hunters can shoot sitting or standing. The exterior has pockets and straps for adding natural vegetation. The G-Blind's real niche may be when you need a quick set up for hunting brush lines, fence rows or pond banks. An

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BLACK'S CAMP	27, 66	MUSGRAVE EQUIPMENT	12	STAR BRITE, INC	5
BLUE WAVE BOATS	27	NICHOLS STORE, INC.	15	SUZUKI MOTOR OF AMERICA, INC.....	30, 31
BOST ARGO.....	53	PALMETTO STATE TRAINING.....	21	TIME OUT SPORTS	19
BQ GRILLS	11	PG & BOATGIRL SHOW	10	TOON TIME, LLC.....	21
CAPPS TRAILERS	27	PLANO SYNERGY	26	WEYERHAEUSER COMPANY.....	37
CHEROKEE RUN HUNTING LODGE	27, 66	PRECISION MARINE, INC.....	9	XPRESS BY ALUMA-WELD, INC.	2
COLLINS INC.	68	SANTEE COOPER COUNTRY	57		
FRABILL.....	36	SARAH JUDY'S INSURANCE AGENCY	57		

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