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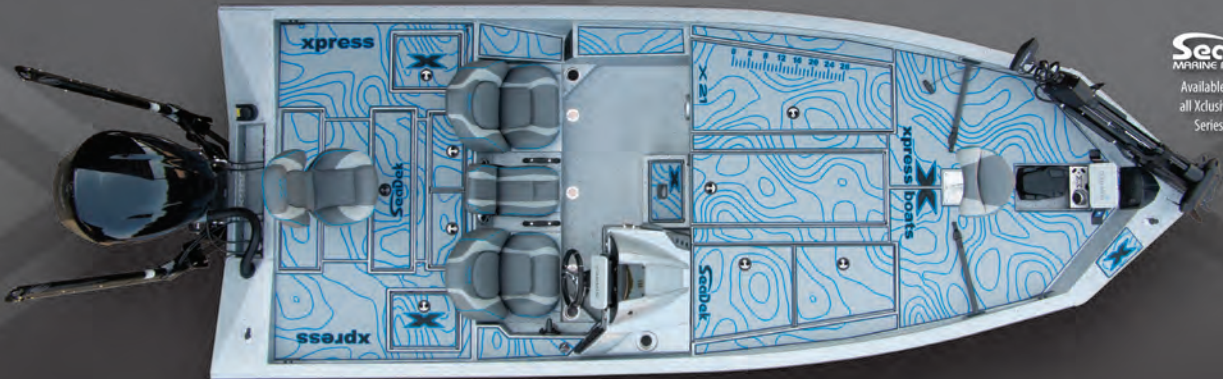


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38

PUT TOGETHER A RED PUZZLE



20

GET WET FOR BASS



Carolina CONTENTS

Volume 28 | Number 7 | July 2021

FEATURES:

12 DIVING DEEP FOR SUMMER BASS COVER STORY

Shallow, spring fishing is in the rear-view mirror. It's time to look for largemouths where they live in hot weather: deeper water.

> By Jeff Burleson

20 GET WET FOR BASS

Floating or wading for smallmouth bass in rivers can be a rewarding way to fish when summer pushes lots of anglers off the water.

> By Marty Shaffner

28 GET BUGGY WITH BASS

A fly rod and some kind of artificial bug can make for some great bass fishing, especially during the summer when small waters shine. Here's how to enter the fray.

> By Chris Burrows

34 BREAK THE COBIA CODE

According to a Charleston, S.C., fishing guide, cobia don't migrate just north-south, and that makes them available to South Carolina anglers throughout the summer.

> By Phillip Gentry

38 PUT TOGETHER A RED PUZZLE

Open water behind Hatteras Inlet presents anglers targeting red drum with challenges. Here's how one local guide overcomes them.

> By Dan Kibler

OUTDOOR UPDATE:

6 UNANSWERED PRAYERS

10 SC DEER HARVEST UP

11 READER REPORT

FISHING HOTSPOTS:

- 44 Neuse River
- 45 SC Lowcountry
- 58 Kerr Lake
- 59 Lake Norman
- 60 Cape Fear
- 61 Clarks Hill
- 62 Murrells Inlet

COLUMNS:

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

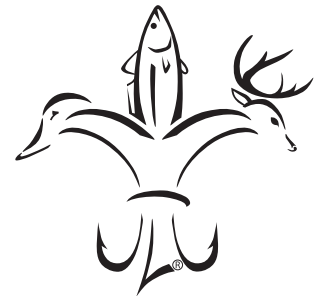
DEPARTMENTS:

- 43 Astro Tables
- 63 Sportsman Showcase
- 64 Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook
- 66 Advertiser Index

ON THE COVER:



Bass fishing is a summer blast across the Carolinas, especially if you can handle a fly rod around smaller ponds, lightweight spinning tackle in streams of all sizes, and crankbaits and Carolina rigs in deep water in reservoirs. Photo by Brian Cope.



Carolina SPORTSMAN

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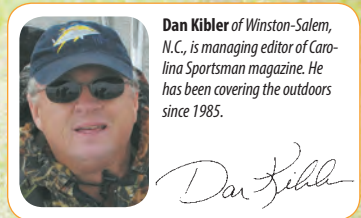
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Outdoor UPDATE

with
Dan Kibler



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

UNANSWERED GOBBLING PRAYERS

CAROLINAS' WILD TURKEY FLOCKS HEADING IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS?

I was thinking the other day when I saw the data on the spring wild turkey harvest in the Carolinas, that sometimes not getting what you want turns out to be a really good thing.

If you missed it, South Carolina's unofficial wild turkey harvest for the 2021 spring season was less than 10,000 birds. Biologist Charles Ruth of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources said the official figures, when all the data is tallied, is likely to be a bit higher, but the downward trend that began in 2002 is still working itself out.

North Carolina hasn't released its official harvest totals, but its up-to-the-minute data, available on-line, showed the second-largest turkey harvest ever, 21,974 birds, trailing only the record-setting harvest of 22,426 birds the previous season.

The thought of North Carolina, which got into the wild turkey business much later than its neighbors to the north and south, with twice the harvest of South Carolina, is shocking to a serious turkey hunter.

South Carolina's harvest numbers have been trending downward for a number of suspected reasons, including habitat loss, the expansion of coyotes across the Palmetto State and, for years, extra-long, early seasons and liberal bag limits. Also, with any regulation changes having to go through the state legislature

— not necessarily matching the changes biologists like Ruth might want for the good of the flock — South Carolina hasn't been able to turn things around.

That brings us to North Carolina and not getting what you wish for — unanswered prayers, as it were. Remember the old Garth Brooks song where a guy was praying to marry a certain girl, and years later, thanking the Lord for the wife he wound up with instead of the girl he'd prayed for?

That's what I'm thinking about, only in terms of turkeys, not women.

Years ago, it was common knowledge that one member of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's policy setting board wasn't happy with the matchless Mike Seamster, the Commission's wild-turkey biologist who has long since retired. Seems this commissioner wanted North Carolina's season to start way earlier than the traditional second Saturday in April. Apparently, one reason was that his South Carolina buddies got a head start on him of several weeks.

Back then, North Carolina hunters barely killed 10,000 turkeys in a season, and South Carolina hunters were at times almost doubling that number. But Seamster held firm, saying that North Carolina's season shouldn't open until the first peak of gobbling was finished, allowing for a lot of breeding to have taken place before the first gobbler was sent to that great oven in the sky. South Carolina's season still opens before or during the first peak of gobbling, so a lot of toms die before breeding.

Turns out, Seamster, the person most responsible for North Carolina building an outstanding statewide flock through a great stocking program, was correct all the while. Next time I tag a gobbler, I'll thank my lucky stars that commissioner's prayers went unanswered. ■



Damion Morgan killed this 20-pound gobbler, which sported a 10-inch beard and 1¼-inch spurs, on public land in eastern North Carolina this past spring.

VIRGINIA CWD CASE HAS NC OFFICIALS CONCERNED

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is on alert after the Virginia Department of Natural Resources announced a positive case of chronic wasting disease in Montgomery County, about 33 miles north of the North Carolina border.

The confirmed case was identified just outside the 30-mile range that the Commission and N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services have identified to activate a detailed response plan, but it highlights concerns about keeping North Carolina's deer herd free of the fatal disease that affects deer, elk and other cervids.

The case of CWD was Virginia's 22nd, but the first outside the state's northwestern corner, close to the West Virginia border.

"North Carolina has been fortunate to not have a reported CWD case," said Jon Shaw, the Commission's deer biologist. "We have successfully taken preventative measures over the past couple of decades to keep the disease out, but there is no way to completely eliminate the risk of CWD entering our state."

The Commission and NCDACS have taken steps to try and keep

CWD out of North Carolina, including prohibiting the importation of live deer until a USDA-approved test for live deer is available, and prohibiting the importation of carcasses and high-risk carcass parts from any residents who travel out-of-state to hunt members of the deer family.

North Carolina began testing deer for CWD in 1999 and has sampled more than 16,000 animals since, including submissions from deer and elk farmers at 27 fenced-in enclosures where animals are raised.

Shaw said deer hunters may be asked to submit samples of their harvest in the upcoming season, especially in Surry, Stokes, Alleghany and Rockingham counties.

"It's imperative that we continue to closely monitor the situation in North Carolina and our border states," Shaw said. "The Virginia case occurred 120 miles from their last confirmed case of CWD. That amount of distance is cause for concern in North Carolina. We feel confident we are ready to respond but would rather not have to pull out that playbook." ■

NC CONSERVATION ICON BRIDGES DIES AT 87

By Craig Holt

North Carolina's outdoor enthusiasts and its wildlife lost an icon on May 18 with the passing of Eddie Bridges.

Bridges, 87, a resident of Greensboro and native of Morganton raised more funds for wildlife habitat conservation during the past 45 years than any Tarheel State citizen as a two-term member of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and later as executive director of the N.C. Wildlife Habitat Foundation.



Eddie Bridges

After Gov. James B. Hunt appointed him to the Commission in 1976, Bridges, an Elon College graduate, discovered that the agency managing the state's fish and wildlife operated on a meager \$9 million annual budget, so he created the N.C. Wildlife Endowment Fund. The principal has grown to \$137 million through lifetime hunting, fishing and trapping license sales plus magazine subscriptions and private donations.

After leaving the Commission, he formed the NCWHF. Under his guidance, the Foundation often partnered with private and state agencies, adding hundreds of acres to North Carolina game lands — plus funding bluebird and wood duck boxes, a Caswell County waterfowl impoundment, wildlife seed distributions, a Jordan Lake largemouth bass study, adding bobwhite quail habitat at the Sandhills Game Land, restoration of trout streams, fishing piers at public lakes, a black bear study and the Bur-Mil Park Wildlife Education Center. His most-ambitious project was the \$1.2 million New River "oyster highway."

Chevron presented Bridges its 1989 Conservationist of the Year award. In 2004, Budweiser named him its national Conservationist of the Year. *Field & Stream* magazine named him as a 2012 Hero of Conservation. He was named to the N.C. Sports Hall of Fame. ■

NC GIRL IS NATIONAL MIDDLE-SCHOOL ARCHERY CHAMPION

Natalie Bell, a seventh-grade student at East Burke Middle School in Connelley Springs, N.C., and a member of the East Burke Middle School archery team, was the Female Champion for the 2021 National Archery in the Schools Program national tournament held this past April and May.

Bell scored 298 out of a possible 300 points to win the Middle School Division, beating out 2,964 other competitors. Her near-perfect score of earned her the title of top female archer in the nation, outperforming 7,306 other females across other categories, including the elementary and high school divisions.

This is Bell's second national title. In 2018, she was national champ in the Elementary School Division with 293x300, a score that place her 18th overall out of 6,689 female archers across all divisions. ■



Natalie Bell

CHERRY WINS CLASSIC

Bass pro Hank Cherry of Maiden, N.C., became only the fourth fishermen to win back-to-back Bassmaster Classic championships in mid-June when he won by nearly 2 pounds on Lake Ray Roberts outside Houston, Texas.

Cherry, who won the 2020 Classic on Alabama's Lake Guntersville, had a 3-day total of 50 pounds, 15 ounces on Ray Roberts, good for the \$300,000 first-prize money. Second place went to another North Carolina angler, Matt Arey of Shelby, who had 49-1 and won \$50,000.

Only Rick Clunn, Kevin Van Dam and Jordan Lee have won back-to-back Classics.

SC HAS NEW RECORD SHARK

N By Brian Cope
 ikki Colwell of Inman, S.C., caught South Carolina's new state-record spinner shark, a 173-pound, 5-ounce beast, on April 18, 2021. She was fishing with her father about 8 miles off of Edisto Beach.

Colwell is used to catching big sharks, and for many years growing up, said she drove her parents crazy with predictions of catching a record fish. She said it's a dream come true.

After catching several sharks throughout the day, many of which were on the small side, she and her father, Rob Cowell, were down to one piece of bait left. She put the bait — a large piece of cut mullet — on the bottom in about 40 feet of water. She was using a 400-pound leader tied to 130-pound line spooled on a Shimano Tiagra 50 mounted on a Daiwa boat rod.

When the shark hit, Colwell said it felt like a run-of-the-mill fish.

"The shark was not putting up a fight really. It did some head shaking here and there and took a couple of small runs, but nothing dramatic," she said.

Colwell, a pro staffer with Casting Queens, caught a 500-pound hammerhead last year, and compared to that shark, she said, the spinner was a walk in the park.

Until it saw the boat.

Once the beast was beside the boat, its relatively docile demeanor changed considerably.

"We got it to the boat, and that was when it really went crazy. We were about to gaff it, and it just went insane," she said.

Her father was preparing to gaff the shark, so she put the rod in a rod holder to try securing it with a tail rope. That's when the shark broke the tip of the rod and a couple of eyelets and went on a run. She was forced to hand-line the shark with one hand while reeling with the other.

She got the shark close enough for her father to gaff, then she slipped the tail rope on. Just then, the hook came free from the shark's mouth.

"It's a good thing we got the gaff in it and the tail rope on, because we would have lost it right then," she said.



Nikki Colwell's 173-pound, 5-ounce spinner shark, caught April 18, was certified in mid-May as a new South Carolina state record for the species.

After getting back to Edisto, they took length and girth measurements and calculated the estimated weight. The estimate beat the previous state record, but no scales on Edisto were big enough to handle the shark. They called Charleston Harbor Marina and found out it had an certified scale.

The drive was worth it.

They loaded the shark into the boat, iced it down with more than 100 pounds of ice, trailered the boat and drove to Charleston. It was worth the drive when the scale proved that the shark was of record size.

Because it was a Sunday, Colwell had to wait until the next day for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources to confirm the species and weight. Rob Colwell called a friend in Charleston who owns a restaurant. They left the shark in a walk-in freezer and headed home.

An SCDNR fisheries biologist confirmed the species the next day, and the agency also tested the scales to make sure they were working properly. Everything checked out, and Colwell got her certificate as the new state-record holder on May 17. ■

CCA-SC STAR TOURNEY OPENS JULY 1

The Coastal Conservation Association-South Carolina's annual STAR fishing tournament is set to open on July 1, with the top prizes this year being two fully rigged Polar Ranger Crew XP 1000s.

All CCA-SC members are eligible to enter the tournament, which will run through Oct. 3.

CCA-SC has caught, tagged and released 60 redfish up and down the South Carolina coast. The first two anglers entered in the tournament who catch tagged fish will win the top prizes.

"The STAR Tournament allows every registered member a legitimate chance to win," said Scott Whitaker, CCA-SC's executive director. "We release the fish with the hopes they will be caught, and if no grand prize is claimed by an angler catching a tagged redfish, all anglers registered for the tournament will go into a drawing where one participant will win one of our grand prizes."

A record number of fishermen, approaching 600, registered for the 2020 STAR tournament. Likewise, a record number of tagged redfish were caught, but all by anglers who had not entered the tournament.

CCA-SC has been instrumental in oyster recycling and oyster reef restoration, creating nearshore and offshore artificial reefs, implementing critical fisheries conservation measures and funding much needed scientific research for the improvement of the Palmetto State's marine resources and improving recreational saltwater angling.

"CCA-SC's 30-plus year tradition in conservation is anchored in passion for the resource and a growing group of active supporters for marine resource advocacy, habitat, sound science and angler education," said Michael Smith, co-chairman for STAR. ■

Guide Rodney Orr caught this 11.7-pound flounder trolling live bait in the Little River area on May 2.

SC GUIDE BOATS HUGE FLOUNDER: 11.7 POUNDS

G By Brian Cope
uide Rodney Orr caught a 29¼-inch, 11.7-pound flounder in the Little River, S.C., area on May 2.

He caught the big fish on live bait while trolling at around 10 a.m. It's not the first trophy flounder Orr has caught in his 15 years of targeting them, but it is his biggest.

"I don't expect to see another one that size for some time, if ever," said Orr, who operates Orr's Outdoors (803-899-0138). He has a lot of success from this time of year through the fall putting clients on big flounder.

"Every time I go out, with or without clients, my goal is to catch at least a 23-inch flounder. That's what I consider to be a big flounder," he said. "We catch a lot of 6-, 7- and a few 8-pound fish each year. But an 11-plus pounder is something I can't say I was really expecting. I sure am happy to have caught it though," he said.

Orr was fishing alone when he caught the big fish. That offered some challenges that he said he isn't used to.

"When you're fishing by yourself and you catch a 23- or 24-inch flounder, you've got your hands full with getting that fish in the net," he said. "This one, I wasn't sure how I was going to do it... still not sure how I managed to get it in the net."

Orr's technique is to troll with live bait. He said clients are



welcome to bring artificial lures if they choose, but he believes bigger flounder are keyed in on live bait strongly enough that it gives him and his clients the best chance for trophy fish.

"This is just a great time of year for big flounder in this area," he said, "and trolling live bait is the best way I know of to do it. There's nothing I love more than putting kids on these big fish, but it's fun seeing anyone catch them. These fish will be inshore throughout the fall in big numbers and I'm looking forward to trying to put an angler on a 30-incher. That's my ultimate goal." ■



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DEER HARVEST CREEPS UP IN SC

HUNTERS TAKE ALMOST 200,000 WHITETAILS

South Carolina deer hunters had a reasonably good season in 2020-21, taking almost 200,000 whitetails, an increase of 2.4% over the 2019-20 season.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources released harvest figures in early June. They showed that hunters took 107,212 bucks and 90,681 does for a total of 197,893, up from the total harvest of 193,073 from the previous season.

The increase continues a trend that began in 2016 after the harvest bottomed out, ending a 13-year drop in numbers. Charles Ruth, SCDNR's top deer biologist, pointed to declining coyote numbers across the state as a possible reason, along with changes in hunting trends. The 2020-21 season was also the fourth with the state's "all-deer" tagging system and statewide limit on the number of antlered deer that can be harvested. Most of the increase in this year's harvest was caused by an increase in the doe harvest.

"Prior to the tagging program," Ruth said, "increases in harvest were normally the result of increases in the buck harvest or a more equal increase in buck and doe harvest. This disproportionate harvest may be indicative of the new buck limit having the desired effect of decreasing pressure on bucks and increasing the harvest of does. It will likely take a few years for this to become clearer."

The top five counties in the 2020-21 harvest were: Anderson, Spartanburg, Saluda, Bamberg and Orangeburg. All four counties had harvests that exceeded 13 deer per square mile, a figure Ruth said was extraordinary.

By far, the majority of deer killed last season were taken with centerfire rifles (161,085), with archery equipment (11,676) and shotguns (15,040) contributing significantly. Muzzleloaders, crossbows and handguns combined for 10,092 deer, less than 5% of the total statewide harvest.

The SCDNR's annual Deer Harvest Survey also reported coyote and wild-hog harvest numbers. The coyote harvest was down 9% to 18,919, continuing what appears to be a declining trend in coyote numbers. On the other hand, 28,043 wild hogs were killed statewide, an 11% increase over the previous season.

"Hog numbers, and thus harvest, can vary substantially from year to year due to bottomland flooding during the fall and winter farrowing season, which can cause mortality in piglets (and some adults), as well as increasing vulnerability to hunters as hogs move to higher ground," Ruth said. "The dramatic decrease in harvest the last two years is likely related to these factors, as bottomland flooding has been relatively widespread the past few years, particularly in 2018, which resulted in a record hog harvest." ■



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BACK ISSUES

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READER REPORT

LITTLE GIRL, BIG WINNING RED

I have been fishing a lot with my family since we started camping at the coast several years ago. We love saltwater fishing, in the Pamlico Sound and out in the ocean in our boat, the *Rogue Mullet*. My dad, Garrett Baker, rebuilt the boat when I was born. We have gone offshore and caught cobia and dolphin, fished the shipwreck, the marsh, but I had one great day on the water last year, and we never left the sound.

I am a 12-year-old sixth-grader, and the first year we entered the Sarah James Fulcher Redfish Tournament at Cedar Island, we didn't catch a single drum. We entered again last year, and they told us the prize money had gone up to \$20,000. I begged my dad to enter the Calcutta. It was \$100 more, and I said, 'Dad, I'll pay you back.' I somehow convinced him — he's very easily manipulated. So I entered, and one of the people there looked at me and said, "I hope you win, darling."

The tournament starts at 6 o'clock and lasts until 10 o'clock at night. We spent the first couple of hours catching bait. My dad handled the cast net, dropped the mullet in the boat, and I picked them up and put them in the livewell. Then, we ran out into the sound and caught bluefish, and I caught a couple of Spanish mackerel, too. We had some large bluefish; that's what we like to use for bait. We cut the head and tail off, sliced it up and put three or four big slices on the hook.

At first, the weather wasn't that bad, but as it got dark, it got worse. It started raining hard, the wind was blowing, and my dad moved us around the edge of one storm. About every 30 seconds or so, a lightning bolt would like up the whole boat.

We changed clothes three times, and we finally started fishing about 8 o'clock. The first few fish I caught were stingrays. You could tell, because it was like lifting up dead weight. There was no head bump like you get with a redfish. The fourth fish, I felt the head bump, and at first, she just ran away. She was very strong. The noise the reel makes when a fish is pulling line and you're not reeling, it was really loud. Then, the fish was swimming back and forth. I was chasing it around the boat. It was definitely something big. It came up to the surface, and we saw that it was a huge drum, and it dove back down and nearly took me with it.

I stuck the rod in the rod holder and started reeling her up. Then, I took the rod out so I could lift the fish and get it to the surface. I'd get in 3 or 4 feet of line, and she'd pull out 10 feet. But she got tired, and it got easier to pull her up. Dad had the net ready. The first time, he missed it, but the second time, he managed to get the fish's head in the net. It's not a very big net, so he lifted it up by the tail and got it in the boat.

All the fish in this tournament are measured and released. We had to measure the fish — it was 51.75 inches — and take a video very quickly and get her back in the water. That took about 45 seconds. It was the only drum we caught. It was about 9 o'clock, and we had to be in by 10.

Dad texted a picture of the fish to the tournament people, and they said it looked like a contender, but we had to show



Corbyn Baker's 51¾-inch red drum won the fourth annual Sarah Jane Fulcher Redfish Tournament last August by ¾-inch.

them the video. About that time, the storm cleared up, and we ran in and just parked the boat on the beach, put out the anchor and jumped out, and ran to the tournament tent. We had 15 minutes to spare.

They were listing the fish on a white board, and they put my name on the top. There were 10 minutes left before the tournament was over, and there were lots of adults around, people asking me questions, asking where I fished, what I used for bait. They were counting down the time, and finally it was time, and a lot of people cheered. They were taking a lot of pictures. I'm kind of shy and didn't say much, but they made me go up on a stage and told me I didn't have to say anything, then they made me say something.

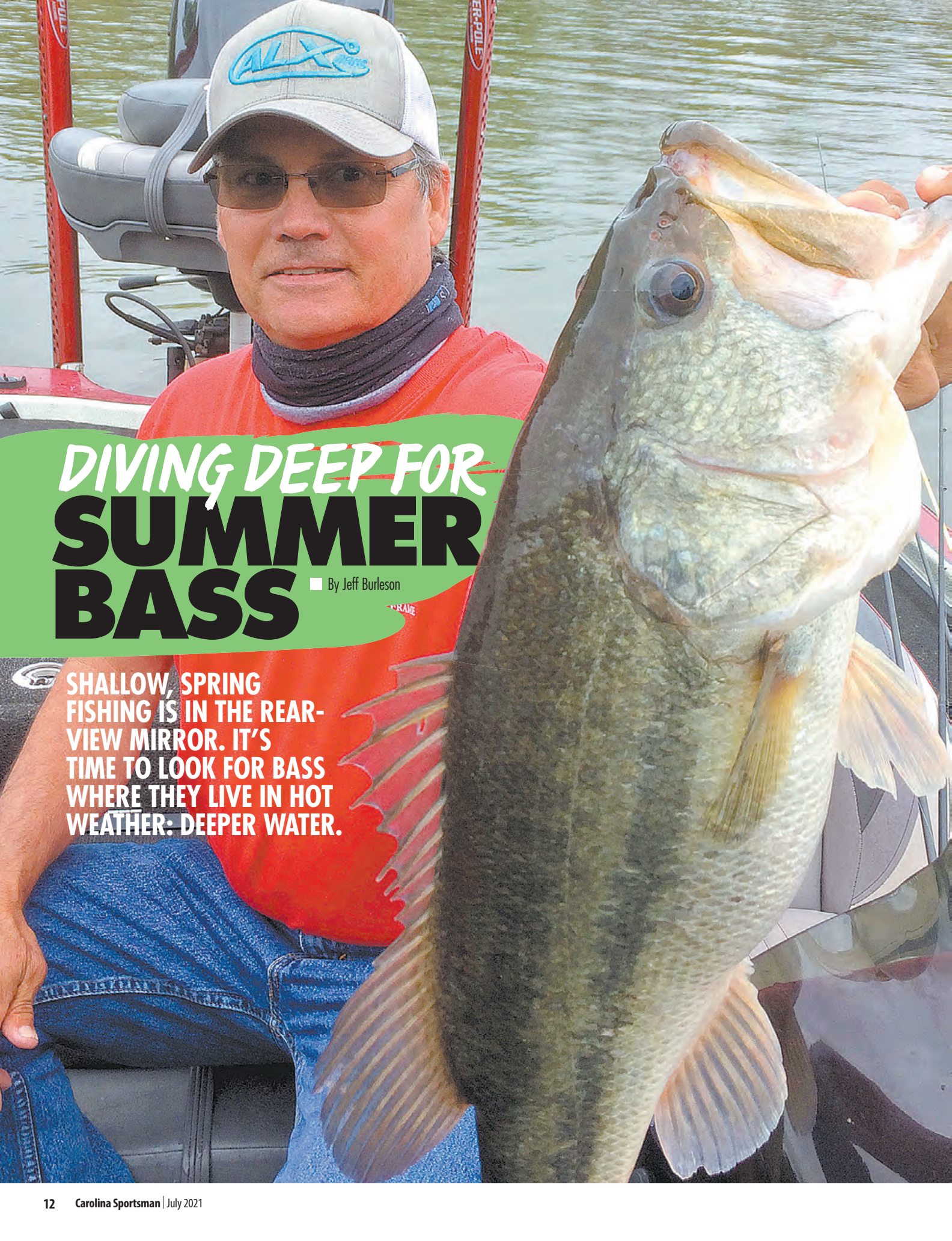
I'm glad I talked my dad into entering the Calcutta; that worked out pretty good. I won first place in three categories; that was worth \$30,000. They asked me what I was going to buy with the prize money, and I told them some new shorts for my dad. His fishing shorts were very much ripped up. I gave my mom \$100 to give my dad for the entry fee as I promised him. For now, I have put the money in the bank to pay for college.

This summer, my goal is to catch a nice grouper, a big dolphin, and a few more cobia. I'm going to fish the Sarah James Fulcher tournament again this year and hopefully help out. I can't wait. ■

— Corbyn Baker



This year's Sarah James Fulcher Redfish Tournament is Aug. 13-15 out of Cedar Island. For information, visit www.aperspective.org.



DIVING DEEP FOR SUMMER BASS

■ By Jeff Burleson

SHALLOW, SPRING FISHING IS IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR. IT'S TIME TO LOOK FOR BASS WHERE THEY LIVE IN HOT WEATHER: DEEPER WATER.

Summer is in full swing throughout the Carolinas, and the inland reservoirs continue to offer a wide range of angling adventures, from crappie and bream to line-stretching striped bass or just a big ol' blue cat.

And for bass fishermen,
**SUMMER ISN'T A
TIME TO SLACK OFF,**

because inland reservoirs can offer big-fish days for anglers in the know.

The Carolinas are reservoir-rich, with dozens of large lake systems stretching from the mountains almost to the coast, created for reasons including flood control, water sources, power generation and, of course, recreation. The climate — hot summers and mild winters — creates a perfect environment for an ecosystem of aquatic critters in these larger bodies of water. Bass are right at home, with deep, shallow and fertile waters perfect for making a living.

While most anglers patrol the shallows armed with bass pros' latest lures, the shallow margins aren't the only places bass live and feed, especially in the summer. Water temperatures can soar into the 80s or even 90s, and even though some bass will always be patrolling shallow areas, the heat will push forage into deeper water. Bass will follow, making for a summer pattern in deep water, well away from the shoreline.

Brett Mitchell of Timmonsville, S.C., fishes plenty of bass tournaments on plenty of lakes, in addition to guiding on the Santee Cooper lakes. Mitchell said summer bass can be in both shallow and deeper places.

"Many anglers go to the places they caught them in the spring on the beds," said Mitchell (803-379-7029). "You can catch some bass in the spawning grounds in the summer, but the majority of the fish will not be in the same places they previously spawned. They may not necessarily be super-deep, either, but you can count on these bass being in a different place than where they spawned."

Bass generally spawn in extremely shallow water, often in places around dense vegetation. They move in from staging areas and move back afterwards. Finding places they come from and return to is important — but not always clear.

"The fish may be shallow or deep, but they will not be far away from the grocery store," Mitchell said. "Bass aren't that complicated and food is what drives them from place to place. I have caught fish in 90-degree water but the food was there."



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.



In lakes from the mountains to the coast, bass act the same way when summer arrives; they move to places where the heat isn't as brutal.

Bass feed on a variety of forage species, including crawfish and some worms, but mostly they feed on other fish, primarily sunfish and shad. Shallow bass will feed on sunfish, but in places outside the lake's shallow margins, that preference turns to shad. In lakes that have large populations of herring, bass will focus on them outside of their spawning periods.

But shad are the primary food source for bass on most reservoirs in the Carolinas. They make a living in the summer using a lake's deeper regions for feeding and putting on the pounds.

"Food is always first," Mitchell said. "Bass will be around the food in the summer, and some of the best places to find the shad are deeper places. Primary points, secondary points and channel swings are my go-to places for finding summer bass."

Reservoirs are just dammed-up river systems with river beds, creek beds, and ridges inundated with water. Shad travel in schools and will stage on points and places with deep, submerged cover. Mitchell selects these primary and secondary lake points that have specific bottom types.

"Bass don't like a dirty house," he said. "The bottom content is major; they like a clean, hard bottom, but any anomaly tends to hold bait and bass. Rock piles, stumps, shell beds, brush piles, or even just a hardbottom can hold these fish along these lake features."

Reservoirs are known for deep water, but a good summer "deep water" spot doesn't have to be that deep. Mitchell typically fishes these points on the shallow side.

"I am looking for places 25 foot at the deepest and all the way up to 6 feet on the shallow end. The super-deep places often have oxygen deficiencies and no home for the bass or the shad," he said.

Mitchell utilizes his electronics to locate ideal points and channel bends, and experience pays off in these situations.

"The electronics allows you to see the bottom, what is on the bottom, and the bait and bass themselves. It is almost like a modern form of sight-fishing," he said.

Electronics have improved the way people find and focus on a fish. The extreme detail provided by the new technology can be the secret weapon for targeting summer bass.

Finding bass in the summertime on reservoirs can be the biggest feat; catching them can be a little easier if you're using the right stuff. Bass are feeding on forage fish in these areas, and any type of lure that imitates their food source can fool fish into committing. Crankbaits, jigs and plastic worms can bring success, and Mitchell's favorite offshore technique is fishing a Carolina rig.



Look offshore for bass when water temperatures reach the 80s. Areas with a hard bottom and cover are worth checking out.



Jeff Burleson

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“You just can’t beat the Carolina rig on these points and creek channels,” he said. “Crankbaits and other lures can get you bites when you have the right color combination, but with a Carolina rig, you will get bit even if the color is a little off.”

Mitchell uses a ¾-ounce egg sinker and 2½- to 3-foot leader with a wide variety of soft plastics. From lizards and other plastic baits with lots of appendages to just a straight finesse worm or a Senko-type version, they all can produce the action that a summer bass just can’t refuse.

There are a million color combinations on the market for soft plastics; Mitchell has one cardinal rule when it comes to using plastics for bass.

“All colors are good for bass as long as they are a form of green pumpkin or junebug,” he said. “Black and blue is a dark form of junebug, and green pumpkin with Texas red is also good, but it’s still green pumpkin. These two colors in about any version will catch bass in most lakes across the nation.”

Mitchell will make sure he is fully stocked in these colors to make sure his clients get bit. ■

Rain or shine, Brett Mitchell knows he can get bass to bite by fishing deeper water when summer and hot weather really arrive.



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REVEAL THE DEEP DEAL

Fishing for bass in summer in deeper water is much different than the spring fling. Essentially, spring fishing is more like hunting in the jungle and hoping a bass will be lurking below. Finding bass in deeper water on reservoirs is much different; there are two ways to understand what the bottom is like and if it is suitable.

First, guide Brett Mitchell uses a Carolina rig to determine what the bottom consistency is like.

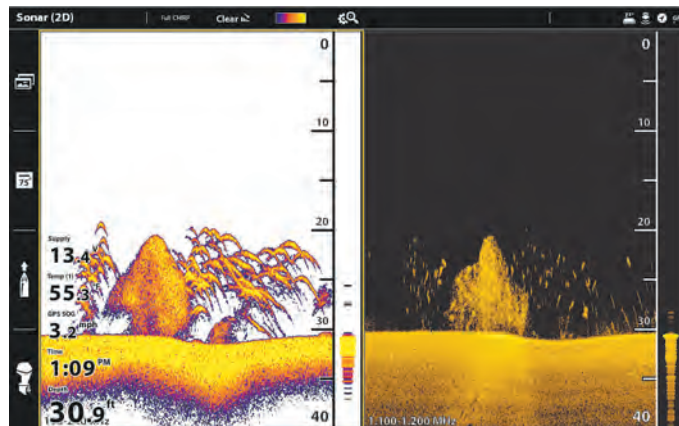
"If it feels like you are pulling it through pudding, you can pack up and move. Bass prefer a clean, hard bottom," Mitchell said.

"A Carolina rig allows you to check out the bottom and see if the fish are there, too."

Second, these days, an angler can't bass fish much in deeper water without the latest, greatest electronics. The new models on the market truly offer a clear picture of what is down below, and the advent of high-definition systems are revealing that in high detail. Humminbird's mega-imaging Solix and Helix units offer a clear picture of the bottom and just about any anomaly below the water's surface that can assist an angler in finding good habitat. Of course, bait fish and bass can be easily identified with today's clarity with super precision.

This year, Humminbird introduced live imaging that produces essentially an underwater radar system to show fish and baitfish in real time. It is similar to Garmin's Live Scope — formerly called Panoptics — but is quite clearer and provides an extreme definition of fish swimming under the boat in real time.

Electronics have changed the way people fish and it is essentially the modern way of sight fishing for bass and a whole assortment of angler favorites. ■



The newest marine electronics gives anglers a real picture of what's below the surface and where fish, including bass, live.

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GET WET FOR BASS

FLOATING AND WADING FOR SMALLMOUTH BASS IN RIVERS CAN BE A REWARDING WAY TO FISH WHEN SUMMER'S HEAT PUSHES LOTS OF ANGLERS OFF THE WATER.

■ By Marty Shaffner

When you mention bass fishing, many people envision big lakes, fiberglass boats with big outboard motors and baitcasting gear. But to a handful of dedicated anglers in the mountains and foothills of the Carolinas, it means something entirely different.

*IT MEANS WADING
UNCROWDED STREAMS
FOR SMALLMOUTH BASS
USING LIGHT SPINNING
OR FLYTACKLE.*

OPPOSITE: Rob Domico (left) quits concentrating on trout and targets smallmouth bass (below) in western North Carolina rivers in summer.

Kent Stanley of Boonville, N.C., is one of these people. He spends his free time in late spring and summer floating and wading, fishing smaller streams for smallmouth bass. He uses his kayak to cover distances between the best fishing spots, then getting out and wading to better cover these areas.

“I target areas with moving current and rocky structure that usually hold the most smallmouth,” Stanley said. “Some of my favorite hotspots are eddies of still water next to fast water that consistently hold fish, but I don’t overlook slower, deep water that can hold big fish, especially if rocky structure is present.”

Stanley fishes areas like these, and after covering them thoroughly, he’s back in his kayak floating to the next section of the stream with favorable habitat.

“It’s all about current, rock structure and depth,” said Stanley, who uses a variety of soft-plastic baits on spinning tackle and 6-pound line.



He does have a couple of baits he relies on more than others. A Zoom Baby Brush Hawg in pumpkinseed is one of his go-to baits, as is a local bait, a Little Lucy from Taylor's Tackle that has had a following on the New River for smallmouth for many years. It is a small stickworm that comes pre-rigged on a snelled hook. Stanley fishes it with a swivel above the leader with a split shot, the size of the weight depending on water depth and speed. He fishes it slowly, lifting it and letting it fall, twirling toward the bottom. He said almost any stickworm can be rigged this way if you can't find a Little Lucy.

Stanley also has a group of hard baits on which he relies on from time to time: a small, original floating Rapala minnow in silver/black and a Rebel Crawfish crankbait.

"I cast the Rebel Crawfish across and downstream and retrieve it, working it through likely looking spots, and sometimes, I fish the Rapala in the same way, but if the water is clear I'll sometimes fish it as a topwater lure," he said. "Casting it to calmer water and twitching it with pauses, and occasionally letting it dive slightly under the water and popping back to the surface can be deadly, at times.

Smallmouth can be moody about what they want on any given day, according to Stanley, and if the fish aren't biting, he is constantly changing baits.

"Don't be afraid to try something out of the ordinary," he said, remembering a time when he and a friend were fishing and having a hard time, only picking up an occasional fish. He found a pack of small, yellow curlytail grubs and tied one on out of desperation. On his first cast, he hooked a nice smallmouth, and they caught fish until every grub was beyond use. Even though it has never been the hot bait since, the odd bait saved the day that one time, so don't be afraid to experiment with different lures during a tough bite.

Rob Domico of Trout and Travel in Davidson, N.C., stays busy in the fall and spring guiding for trout, but as summer heats up, he breaks out short pants and wading boots to target hard-fighting smallmouth. Domico (704-661-0658) pursues smallies with fly tackle and enjoys the challenge and fight that fly-fishing brings.

A 10-foot, 6-weight rod equipped with a matching reel filled with floating line and a 2x or 3x leader (equivalent to 8- to 11-pound test line) is his preferred setup. Most trout fishermen are used to a lighter setup, but smallmouth aren't particularly line-shy, and to prevent breakoffs from larger bass and rocky stream bottoms, he prefers the heavier leaders. Even a 15-inch smallie can muscle you into a rock ledge before you can turn him when using tackle that's too light, Domino said.





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SAFETY FIRST

Kent Stanley uses a kayak to access good-looking smallmouth spots, then gets out and wades while casting.



he said. “(From) when the sun gets off the stream in the evening until it gets dark is my favorite. I like poppers and Dalhberg Divers cast to any slower-current areas and any still water, no matter how small it is to trigger explosive surface strike.” ■

Like Stanley, Domico looks for moving water with rocky structure to target for wade-fishing. Look for deeper runs and eddies next to fast water to hold the biggest fish, he said.

“I prefer wading over floating, because I can cover the water more thoroughly by wading, covering all the possible spots slowly, then wading on to the next likely looking spot,” he said.

As far as flies, Domico uses several sub-surface and topwater offerings, but Pat’s Rubber Legs stonefly nymph in orange, Wooly Grubber in black/pearl, and a black hellgrammite pattern are his go-to flies.

“Cast across and slightly downstream, and pull the fly through likely spots to trigger strikes,” he said. “If this presentation doesn’t work, I use the stonefly nymph and hellgrammite patterns fished under a strike indicator. Cast upstream and slightly across and let it dead-drift naturally. I let the fish show me what they want on any given day.”

If all else fails he does something a little unorthodox.

“I take a 2½-inch, Strike King tube bait, coffee-colored, rigged on a small Trokar jighead and fish it with the same down-and-across presentation as I do the flies. Even when the bite is tough this will bring some bass to hand.”

Most fly fishermen live for topwater action, and Domico loves it as well, but he has learned that topwater fishing while wading can be productive — but not necessarily all the time.

“If I’m looking to catch smallies on topwater, wade-fishing, I key in on very early or late in the day, with late being my favorite,”

TRIBUTARY STREAMS CAN HOLD SMALLMOUTHS, OTHER GAMEFISH ➤

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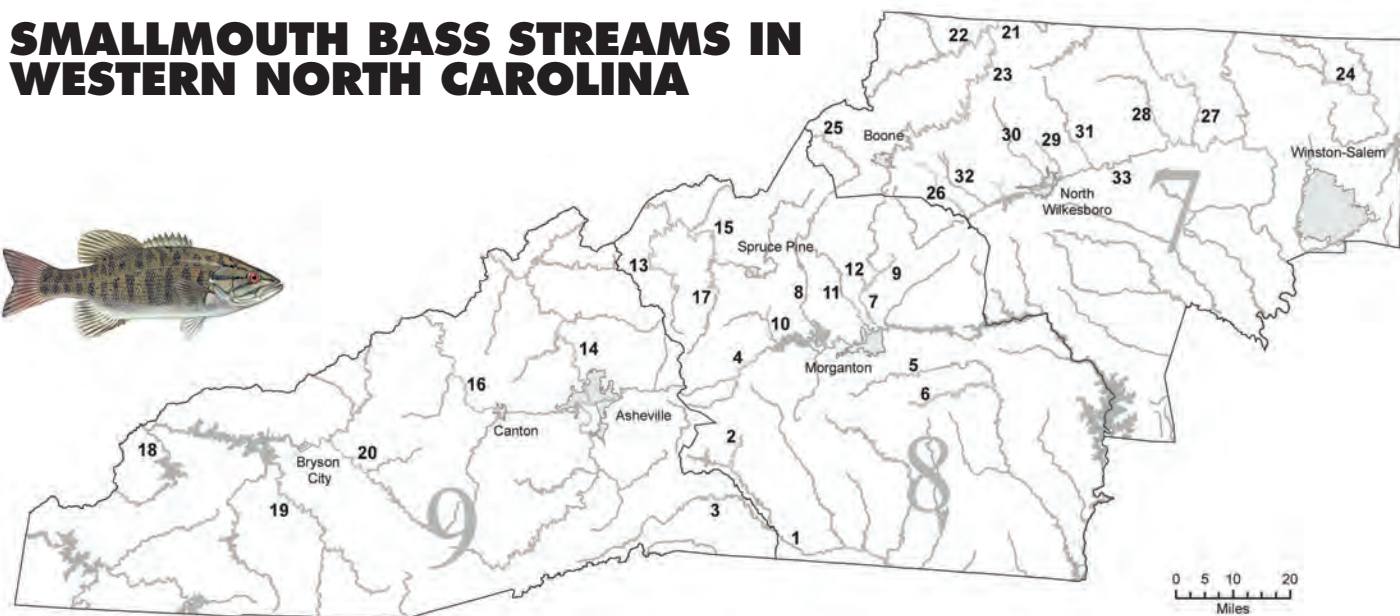
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SMALLMOUTH BASS STREAMS IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA



Stream Name	Stream Name	Stream Name	Stream Name	Stream Name
1 Broad River	8 Linville River	15 North Toe River	22 North Fork New River	29 Mulberry Creek
2 Cove Creek	9 Mulberry Creek	16 Pigeon River	23 South Fork New River	30 Reddies River
3 Green River	10 North Fork Catawba River	17 South Toe River	24 Dan River	31 Roaring River
4 Catawba River	11 Upper Creek/Warrior Fork	18 Cheoah River	25 Watauga River	32 Stony Fork
5 Henry Fork River	12 Wilson Creek	19 Little Tennessee River	26 Elk Creek	33 Yadkin River
6 Jacob Fork River	13 Cane River	20 Tuckaseegee River	27 Fisher River	
7 Johns River	14 French Broad River (Lower)	21 New River	28 Mitchell Creek	

Smallmouth bass image courtesy of Duane Raver/USFWS

NCWRC

TRIBUTARY STREAMS CAN HOLD SMALLMOUTHS, OTHER GAMEFISH

Kinnon Hodges of Elkin, a fisheries biologist whose territory in northwest North Carolina includes a handful of great smallmouth bass rivers, said that most of the larger tributaries of major smallmouth rivers in western North Carolina, along with the lower reaches of larger trout streams where water temperatures are too high for trout survival, will hold smallmouth bass.

There are also some sections of major rivers that can be waded, but care must be taken, because the big water can be dangerous. Wearing a life jacket is a good idea when wading any bigger stream or river.

Hodges said that fisherman can often expect to catch a mixed bag on these streams, depending on baits and lures used, although smallies are the dominant gamefish. Along with smallmouth bass, rock bass — aka redeyes — and redbreast sunfish are the two other most-common species you'll encounter. Some streams hold various other species of panfish; spotted bass and an occasional brown trout can be a nice surprise.

Hodges said a lot of streams will hold both smallmouth bass and trout, especially brown trout. As trout streams get larger, the gradient flattens out and the water temperature rises, and for a section of the stream, the species can co-habitate.

Hodges said that wade-fishing streams for smallmouth is a fishing opportunity often overlooked by most fishermen, and that most streams receive light fishing pressure. He also said that most of these streams are on private property, and permission must be granted by the landowner before anglers can wade-fish. ■



Marty Shaffner, of Elkin, N.C., guides fishermen for smallmouth bass and trout, plus he's an avid hunter. He has been a freelance outdoor writer for nearly a decade who has written about topics from fly fishing to deer hunting.



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■ By Chris Burrows

A FLY ROD AND SOME KIND OF ARTIFICIAL BUG CAN MAKE FOR SOME GREAT BASS FISHING, ESPECIALLY DURING THE SUMMER WHEN SMALL WATERS SHINE. HERE'S HOW TO ENTER THE FRAY.

GET BUGGY WITH BASS

Chris Burrows

IT'S A MIDSUMMER EVENING,

and Joe Jennings of Bolivia, N.C., is on a neighborhood lake in eastern North Carolina. He drops his mushroom anchor carefully at his third stop, his first two having produced no action.

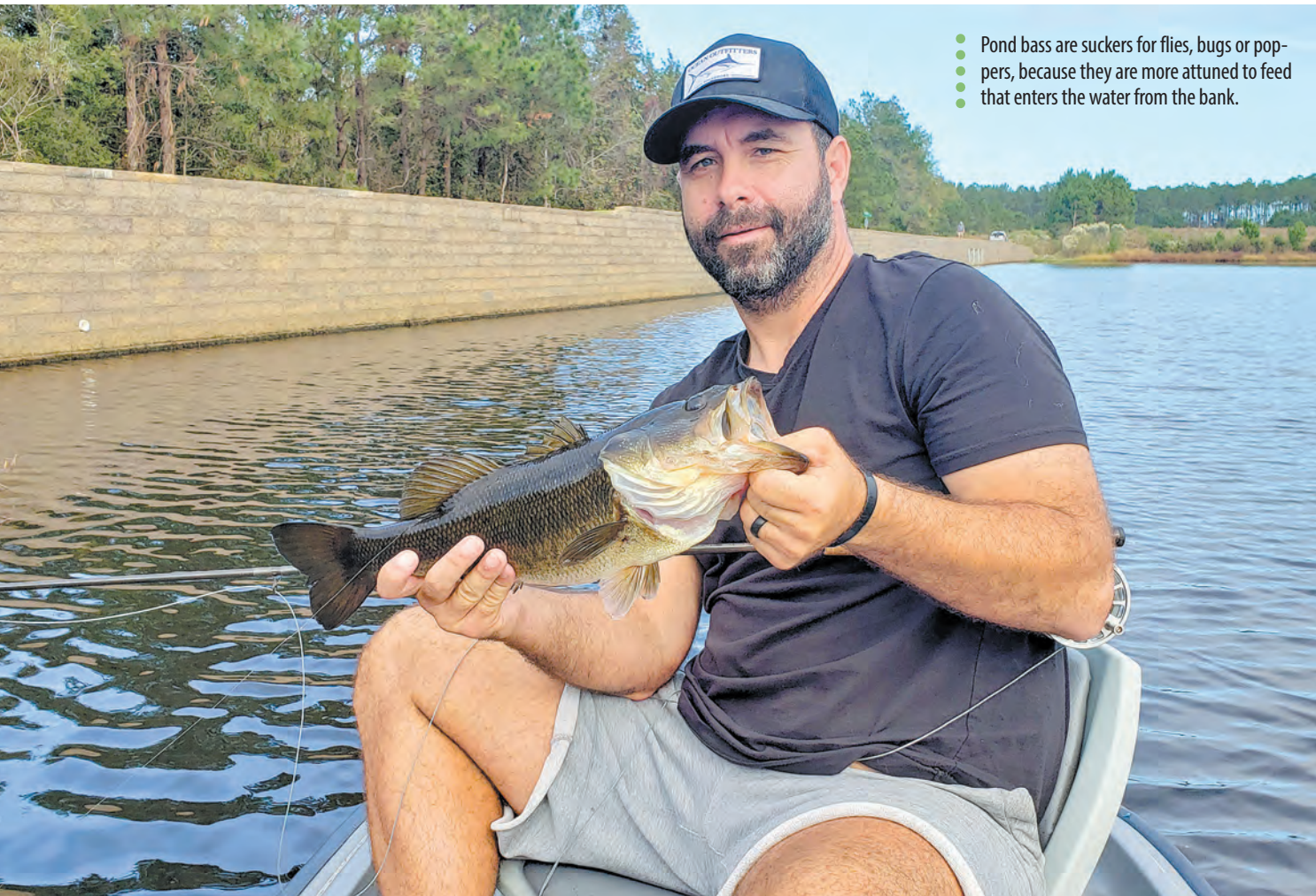
He's working a drop-off at the mouth of a cove, where the water falls from about 3 to 8 feet. The first cast with his 8-weight fly rod plops his Dahlberg Diver frog imitation into the stained water a few feet on the shallow side of the drop. He pauses for a second, then starts with a slow twitch.

As his bass bug comes across the drop-off, a wake forms behind it. A few more twitches of the diver yields no strike, so he reloads and makes exactly the same cast. A pause and three twitches, and the same wake comes back. This time, the large-mouth bass commits to the bug.

The wake picks up speed, the fake frog disappears in a flash, and the fight is on. The fish takes Jennings into his backing, and he is forced to play it on the reel. The bass jumps for open water, then turns and dives for cover. The backbone of the heavier rod and tight line does the trick, however, and soon, the 20-inch bass is swimming beside his 10-foot Sun Dolphin pond cruiser. The fish is lipped, supported for a quick picture and released to fight another day.

Jennings does the majority of his summer bass fishing in the evening, because the long days allow him a few hours on the water after work. While the schedule is born of necessity, the evening bite is his favorite. He said fish stay deep all day, out of reach for most fly-rod anglers, but get extremely active just before dusk.

"You have to be in the right place at the right time, but when you are, the fishing is absolutely epic," he said.



- Pond bass are suckers for flies, bugs or poppers, because they are more attuned to feed that enters the water from the bank.

Jennings carries two fly rods any time he is on the water in the neighborhood, which is actually built around a series of ponds and a 25-acre lake. He takes a 5-weight rod, typically with a Byron's Knucklehead No. 6 in a dark color tied on. He said the setup is perfect for his kids or any novice neighbor who wants to go fishing. The Knucklehead fly, which resembles a cockroach more than anything, gets plenty of bites from "suicide" bass in the 12- to 14-inch range, although he has used it to catch bass up to 4 pounds. The outfit is easy to handle for newbies and keeps them engaged in the fishing. But he does most of his work with the 8-weight, which is much better for working bigger bass bugs into and around cover. While you won't get nearly as many strikes, it is the one that consistently produces big bites and big fish.

With either outfit, Jennings employs a 12-pound fluorocarbon tippet at the end of the tapered leaders he ties. The abrasion resistance of the tippet is the key here, as largemouths often dive for any cover they can find in an attempt to shed the hook.

Jennings said that the retrieve of whatever fly you choose is the most-important aspect of the game when it comes to getting bites and solid hooksets. As soon as the bug hits the water, it is vital to get any slack out of the line. Line must be controlled at all times. Topwater bugs generally work best with a slow twitch, followed by a pause, giving the fish a moment to track and then commit to the bite. Sinking flies get a slow but steadier retrieve.

When the bite comes, Jennings immediately tightens down with his right index finger serving as a kind of check-valve on the line. He strips the fly line hard with his left hand, taking out even more slack, while sweeping — rather than lifting — the rod, keeping it parallel to the water surface. This method will get anglers tighter to the fish much quicker than the hookset used by most bass



Chris Burrows of Shallotte, N.C. has fished out of Charleston and Georgetown, S.C., but he has been in Brunswick County since 2005. He runs Carolina Wing & Fish Company in Shallotte but still fishes whenever he gets a free second.

fishermen with conventional gear.

Jerry Simmons of Supply, N.C., is another bass fisherman who often employs a fly rod. With a more flexible schedule and a bass boat, his fishing trips usually occur on the lower Cape Fear River. He likes to start his trips right around dawn, finding the fish before the heat of the day sends them deep and out of range. He often starts around submerged timber and feeder creeks, then switches to shaded banks and dropoffs as the sun gets higher.

With the river in constant change, and summer having its trademark thunderstorms and torrential downpours, Simmons said a spot that gave up a half-dozen bass one day might be completely barren the next.

He uses the spot-lock feature on his trolling motor constantly, trying to find the right hole before he runs out of time and the bite goes deep. If a spot does not produce after working each section of it with two or three cast-and-retrieve cycles, it's time to move on.



Chris Burrows

MATCH NATURAL BASS MEALS

Bass fisherman Joe Jennings, who admits to being a totally addicted of topwater fishing, said that “matching the hatch” is nearly as important in bass fishing as it is in trout fishing in mountain streams.

If there are frogs in the water, he fishes a frog imitation. If he’s seeing dragonflies all over the place, then a dragonfly imitation gets the nod. Once, after seeing a rash of water snakes, he tied on a water moccasin bug and promptly caught a 26-incher. Bass are largely opportunistic feeders, but they tend to get dialed in on what they see repeatedly in the water.

Jerry Simmons, another bass fisherman, is more likely to fish deeper in the water column with his fly rod, especially when working bigger water. His favorite bass bug is a Rich’s Ultimate Worm: the fly-rod equivalent of a Senko. This bug is as close to completely weedless as a bass bug can be, and he will often throw it right into cover before coming tight and working it out.

Another bug he uses consistently is an articulated streamer called a Drunk and Disorderly. It’s tied like a massive Muddler Minnow often used for trout fishing, and the broken-back nature of the fly gives it an amazing action.

Whatever fly you choose, Jennings and Simmons agree that dark colors are the most-consistent producers when the sun is either coming up or going down. While it’s always fine to experiment, it’s a common theme that their biggest strikes and fish caught have come from fishing big, dark bass bugs in the low light hours. ■

- Bass bugs tied on by fly fisherman can range from streamers that imitate tiny minnows to frogs, terrestrials and loud popping bugs.



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)

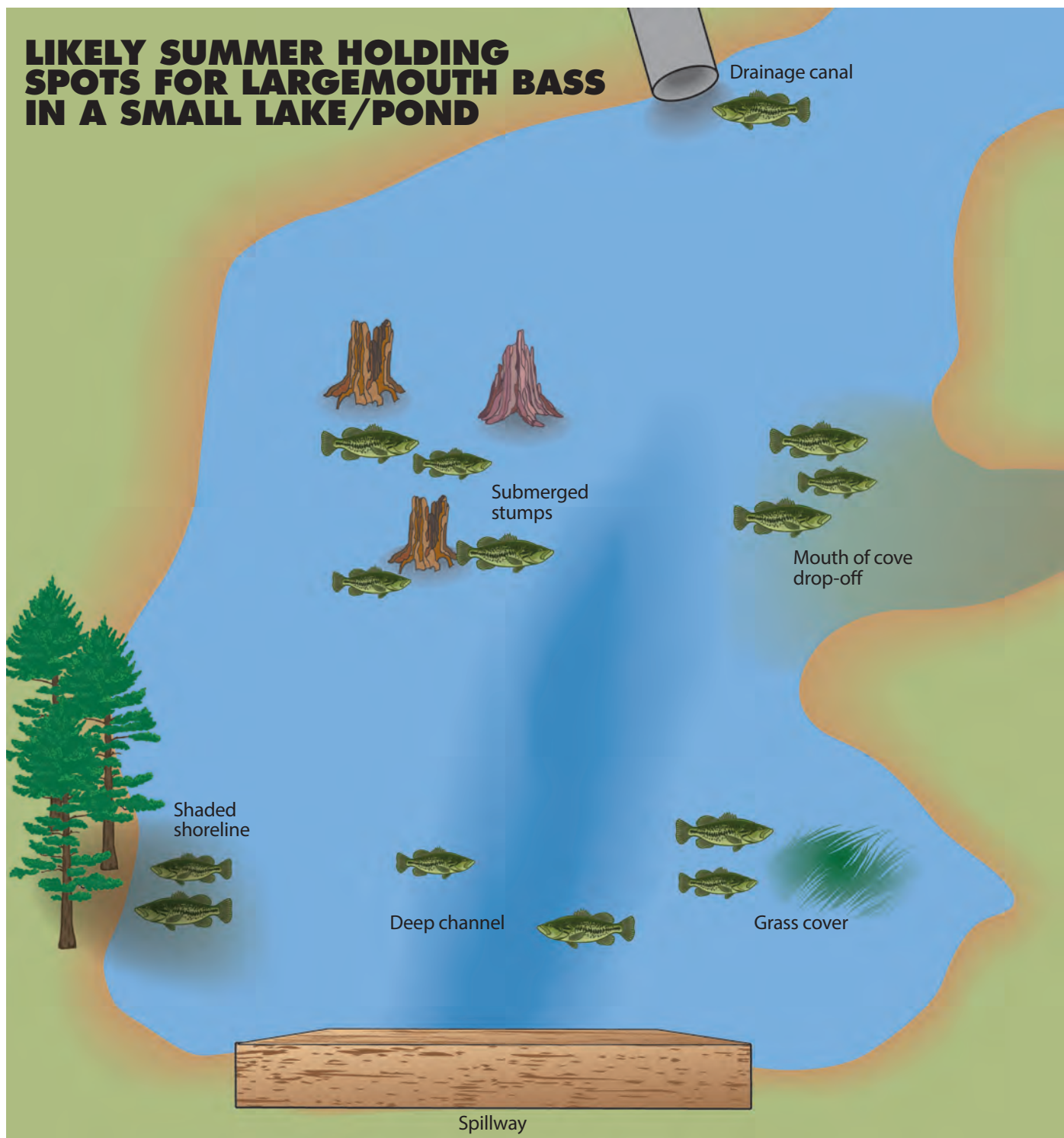
+ See specific lake exceptions in NCWRC regulations digest or www.ncwildlife.org

% 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.

LIKELY SUMMER HOLDING SPOTS FOR LARGEMOUTH BASS IN A SMALL LAKE/POND



Simmons favors a 7-weight, St. Croix Mojo Bass rod as his all-around fly-fishing outfit for bass. He “over-lines” the reel, meaning that he is fishing an 8-weight line. That combination favors the slightly slower action of the rod, allowing it to load up more easily for distance casting. While it is not the most-delicate casting outfit, it has plenty of power to turn over whatever size fly he wants to fish, even in a moderate breeze.

Simmons believes that bass are much more likely to spook from a boat’s shadow than the sound of something much smaller falling into the water, so the extra distance is well

worth the splash. Not to mention, bass spending time under branches or other structure are waiting for a meal to come their way, and they tend to home in on bite-sized splashes.

Both anglers have had their fair share of success with the long rod approach to bass fishing. While both will openly admit it’s not always the most-effective or efficient way to catch largemouths, they believe it is easily the most fun and rewarding way. If you do your research and put your time into reading the water, there’s no reason that your next trophy bass won’t be caught on the fly. ■



Chris Burrows

DON'T OVERLOOK THOSE TINY PONDS

- The smallest, most non-descript ponds can often produce some of the best bass fishing around.

While it's often easy to head to the largest body of water available, sometimes you are driving right past the biggest fish.

Largemouth bass are famous for being able to live just about anywhere, especially in the South. Eastern North Carolina is dotted with tiny ponds, creeks and swamps, and as long as they stay wet year-round, they will generally hold fish.

Builder-made ponds in residential neighborhoods are some of the best places to find a trophy largemouth, hidden in plain sight. To illustrate the point, the largest bass caught in angler Joe Jenning's Bolivia neighborhood of Avalon didn't come from the stocked lake, but from a man-made retention pond. It weighed better than 10 pounds.

Most of the fishing in such ponds is done from the bank, changing the game somewhat for fly anglers. It forces them to be more creative in how they attack the pond and look for fish-holding water. Small items like algae mats, drainage pipes or a downed limb suddenly come into play. Additionally, it makes you think

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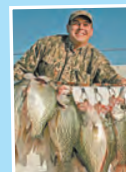
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A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a light blue shirt and khaki pants, stands on a boat holding a large, shiny cobia fish vertically. The background is a clear blue sky and ocean. The text 'BREAK THE COBIA CODE' is overlaid in large white letters on the left side of the image.

BREAK THE COBIA CODE

ACCORDING TO A CHARLESTON, FISHING GUIDE, COBIA DON'T MIGRATE JUST NORTH-SOUTH, AND THAT MAKES THEM AVAILABLE TO SOUTH CAROLINA ANGLERS THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER.

■ By Phillip Gentry

IN THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,

“cobia season” has historically been considered to last from mid-May until mid-June, the time when nearshore anglers can expect to see these migratory fish make their way from Florida to the coast of South Carolina and beyond.

Marine biologists believe that cobia then infiltrate river systems to spawn. In fact, the coast along South Carolina’s Lowcountry has special regulations in place limiting the harvest of these fish to allow them to finish spawning.

By mid- to late June, most anglers move their focus to other species and don’t give much thought to the seemingly random appearance of a cobia or two when bottom-fishing as far east as 20 miles offshore.

As a guide, this type of open-ended question — “Where do cobia go after they spawn?” — intrigued guide Justin Carter of Charleston’s Redfin Charters. Like other guides, Carter had experienced seemingly random but welcome encounters with cobia on summer offshore trips.

“I’ve always had this theory that we have two categories of cobia in our waters during the warmer months,” Carter said. “We get that north-south migration of fish that everyone knows about, and then we have this east-west migration, the one that most people consider random encounters,” he said. “It was after I spoke with several biologists that confirmed the east-west movement, at least in my mind.”

Carter (843-277-5255) said telemetry tracking of these fish over the past several years showed that many cobia move up and down the coast, but that another segment migrated offshore from South Carolina, into water as deep as 400 feet, to overwinter.

“From mid-May to mid-June, we find them inside 20 miles, even in nearshore waters down south, but after that, I’ve seen them getting progressively further and further out,” he said. “I’ve caught cobia as late as December at 20 to 26 miles off the coast.”

Carter frequently targets cobia later in the summer, but it’s rarely the only fish he’s trying to put in front of his clients. He finds cobia are attracted to livebottom areas, especially those with substantial bottom relief. Cobia also love to frequent many of the deeper wrecks and man-made reefs off the coast.

Carter said that, being somewhat nomadic, it’s not unusual to see cobia tailing larger pelagic animals such as large sharks, rays and sea turtles.

“I always expect to see cobia on an offshore shark-fishing trip,” he said. “They love to follow big hammerheads, dusky and sand tiger sharks around. I always keep a couple of cobia rods rigged when I’m chumming for sharks, because the cobia will often nose up to the boat right before the shark arrives.”

It’s hard to beat having a net full of live menhaden before heading offshore to areas that are frequented by cobia.



Phillip Gentry

Because of a cobia's natural curiosity, Carter said they can be sight-fished right behind the boat. He then has the choice of pitching the fish a live menhaden or casting a large plastic bait.

"When you see one, you've got about 60 seconds to get something in front of him," Carter said. "I have seen days when they would circle the boat for several minutes, but as soon you see him, the clock starts ticking."

To cut down on that narrow window of time, Carter frequently baits a free-line or two with a live menhaden and floats it behind the boat while his clients are trying to entice a grouper, triggerfish or other bottom-dweller into biting.

Carter's tackle of choice for cobia is an 8-foot, medium to medium-heavy St. Croix Avid rod paired with a 40-pound class Penn Slammer reel. He uses 40-pound braided main line tipped with a 6-foot section of 40- to 60-pound fluorocarbon leader. If he's live-bait fishing, he hooks a menhaden on a 4/0 Gamakatsu circle hook. If he's using artificial baits, it's either a 7-inch Z-man Diesel Minnow or a 9-inch HeroZ rigged on a 5/0 to 7/0, weighted hook.

To sweeten the pot, Carter will hang a chum bag or some other scent-dispersing gear off the stern of the boat. He uses chunks of old menhaden, commercially produced chum blocks or concentrated fish oils to put scent in the water.

Another tactic is to toss a handful of live menhaden in the



Commercial chum additives like Menhaden Milk are commonly used when cobia fishing offshore.

water to get things stirred up. Most times, it's a school of amberjacks that responds to free, live bait, but it has also been known to work when a cobia is nosing around.

"Don't throw freebies when you actually see a cobia," he said. "You don't want him to swim off, chasing free bait, when you're trying to get him to take one on the hook, and you also don't want to rile a school of amberjack up just before you pitch to a cobia." ■



Phillip Gentry of Waterloo, S.C., is host of "The Outdoor Show," a weekly radio podcast that can be seen at www.pgandboatgirl.com or heard on WZLA FM, 92.9, in Greenwood/Abbeville, S.C.



Phillip Gentry

INSHORE VS. OFFSHORE COBIA SPAWNING

According to research by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, it has been long thought that cobia spawned offshore and spent most of their lives living in open water. Later research suggested that some of these fish may move inshore in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay to spawn.

South Carolina anglers have long been familiar with the migration of cobia into Port Royal and St. Helena sounds. Harvested females were found to be gravid with eggs, and the conclusion was that spawning was taking place in these estuarial systems.

Studies conducted by examination of donated fish carcasses supported the theory of inshore spawning by distinct population segments, meaning that if the inshore spawning population was overfished, other cobia outside that segment would not replace those lost to overfishing.

Accordingly, SCDNR and federal fisheries managers made efforts in 2017 to reduce the overharvest of cobia both in South Atlantic waters and in areas identified by studies as critical spawning habitat in South Carolina by enacting some closures and creel and season limits.

South Carolina closes the season for cobia from May 1-31 in state waters south of Edisto Island's Jeremy Inlet. In federal and all other state waters, the season is closed when the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) is met.

The creel limit is one fish per person per day and no more than three per boat per day in state waters south of Jeremy Inlet. In federal waters and state waters north of Jeremy Inlet, the creel limit is one per person per day and no more than six per boat per day. There is a 36-inch, fork-length, minimum size.

More information on cobia research can be found at www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/stocking/research/cobiaspawning.html. ■

While most cobia are caught in South Carolina's inshore or near-shore waters on their annual north-south migration, plenty more are caught, most incidentally, on summer offshore trips.



Phillip Gentry



COBIA SUSHI ANYONE?

Guide Justin Carter said that fresh cobia makes for great sushi.

Eating sushi is nothing new to tourists visiting Charleston, S.C., but most people think of tuna, salmon, halibut, squid and octopus when it comes to sushi. Cobia hardly, if ever, makes the list.

"There are hundreds of great recipes for cooking cobia, but to me, one of the best ways to eat it is raw," said guide Justin Carter. "The meat is white and firm and it has none of that fishy smell associated with a lot of other fish."

While Carter doesn't go as far as packing along a bottle of soy sauce on his guide trips, he's been known to offer up a slice or two to customers at the cleaning table when he's dressing fish at the end of the day. ■

POT TOGE THER A RED PUZ ZLE

**OPEN WATER BEHIND HATTERAS
INLET PRESENTS ANGLERS
TARGETING RED DRUM
WITH CHALLENGES.
HERE'S HOW ONE
LOCAL GUIDE
OVERCOMES
THEM.**

By Dan Kibler



Brian Carroll

GOOD FISHERMEN

who target redfish along much of both Carolinas' coastlines might be taken aback at how different the fishery and tactics are behind North Carolina's Outer Banks, particularly the area behind Hatteras Inlet, between Hatteras and Ocracoke islands.

There's no huge tidal surge, no extensive marsh areas, no drains and creeks, no oyster rakes — not a lot of the things that anglers from Beaufort, S.C., to Beaufort, N.C., come to rely on to point them to the copper-colored battlers that are simply called “drum” by many locals.

So, faced with a blank slate and tens of thousands of acres of open water, where does an angler used to grass lines, oyster beds, big tidal pulls and visible casting targets start when he backs his boat down one of the marina ramps just east of Hatteras Inlet? In the summer?

That's an easy question for Rom Whitaker IV, a second-generation captain from the tiny fishing village of Hatteras, the son of an offshore charter captain.



BELOW: Most of the redfish that spend the summer behind Hatteras and Ocracoke islands are upper-slot fish, from 24 to 27 inches, plus some bigger ones.

Whitaker runs Sound Bound Charters, based at Hatteras Harbor Marina, and when drum become the subject, he has plenty of answers.

“Our drum work in from the ocean in May, and they come into the channels — Boot Slough and Sloop Channel — which are safe places for them,” he said. “They show up the first or second week of May, and they'll be schooled up, in schools of 200 to 500 fish. They'll be here in June, then they'll move over to the other side of the Pamlico Sound and spawn in the Neuse River; that's in July.

“I think a lot of the smaller, puppy drum stay on our side all summer. They like to get between Ocracoke and here on our side. There will be a lot of 25-, 26- and 27-inch fish around.”

It will be fall, after the big fish have spawned, before they return to the area, heading out of Ocracoke and Hatteras inlets, among others, on their way back to the ocean to overwinter.

SOUND ADVICE ➤



Jerry Dilsaver

SOUND ADVICE

The Pamlico Sound behind the Outer Banks may look like a huge expanse of open water, but it's what's underneath that counts. Much of the sound behind Hatteras Inlet for several miles on either side is made up of channels, shoals that are only inches deep on the high end of the tide and uncovered on the low end and flats of submerged grass, broken in clumps, 2 or 3 feet deep.

The channels are highways the drum use to move around the sound, most of the time in pods or schools. The flats are where they spread out and feed, using holes in slightly deeper water and clumps of grass as ambush sites to suck down mullet, blue crabs or silversides, three of their favorite meals. The huge schools of shrimp that draw trawlers are more likely to be found from mid-sound to the western shoreline.

"The channels are safe places for 'em, and they have all the things they like to eat," Whitaker said. "They will be silver in that clear water, but they do change colors. They can be bright orange when they get up on those grass flats where they'll live all summer long. These drum are very territorial; they will stay



Red drum that have been hanging out on grass flats behind Hatteras and Ocrakoake islands tend to become a more copper color the longer they're there. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Most big drum move across the Pamlico Sound in July to spawn, but a few hang around behind Hatteras Inlet, including some fish up to 40 inches like this one caught by Mary Joyner.

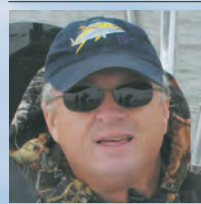
on a flat for months, but if you get four or five boats on 'em, they'll go deep, but they'll be back there the next day. They will stick together unless they get scattered by bad weather."

Whitaker admitted that he once chartered a small airplane from Billy Mitchell Airport in the village of Frisco, just a handful of miles back up the island, and went scouting.

"A couple of years ago, I rented an airplane in Frisco and flew all over," he said, "I found eight different schools of drum. I went back out in my boat and found three of them."

Generally, Whitaker said, the drum in a school or scattered across a grass flat will be of roughly the same size. You won't find many under-slot fish, and spring and fall when the big drum are moving through are the only times you'll see them. Most fish will be upper-slot size and just above, sometimes up to 40 inches.

SEARCH MODE >



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





Rom Whitaker IV



Dan Kibler

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)	16" TL	5/day, 10 per boat
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	closed	closed
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day#
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sheepshead	14"	10/day (30 per boat)
Spadefish	None	20/day (agg. grouper)
Black sea bass	13"	7/day
Dolphin	20" FL	10/day (60 per boat)
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin/Bigeye tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Tarpon	77" FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12"	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster snapper	12" TL	10/day#
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day

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

FRESHWATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEARCH MODE

Whittaker spends plenty of time on the tower of his skiff; the extra height gives him a much-better angle for spotting schools of drum and, around Memorial Day, the cobia that show up at Hatteras. He will check the edges over extremely shallow shoals, watching for schools of puppy drum that might be skirting the shallows, hunting for a meal. He'll point them out to anglers on the casting deck when they get in range for a shot.

"The tide plays a huge part in it. I like to have the water moving," he said. "You need a good ebb or flood for sight-casting. I don't want it slick, but just a pretty, sunny day with a little current running."

Whittaker would rather find them scattered on the expansive grass flats that make up much of the sound behind Hatteras Inlet. They go there to feed, too, he said.

"They spend a good bit of time on that broken bottom, laying in holes," he said. "They're singles then, scattered. You're looking for singles or just casting. When they get on those flats, I feel like they sit down in that grass, in those holes, where they might catch a blue crab or a minnow coming across the bottom.

"They'll sit in those sandy spots on those grass flats. We'll start upcurrent or upwind and drift across that flat in 2 or 3 feet of water, making long, downwind casts. If I've got three fishermen in the boat, we'll go across a flat, casting, and fish for 30 or 40 minutes, then go to another one. If I've got some good anglers who can cast, we'll catch drum. Boats with trolling motors, they can work the edges of those flats.

"I like them to cast a gold spoon and cast it as far downwind as you can and just reel it back. A good angler will pull that spoon over those clear spots and let it fall. That's why a good pair of sunglasses might be one of the most-important pieces of equipment on your boat."



Dan Kibler



Drifting across shallow, grass flats, anglers fishing behind Hatteras and Ocracoke islands pick up plenty of drum that are scattered and feeding.

DESTINATION INFORMATION

HOW TO GET THERE — The tiny village of Hatteras is at the southernmost end of Dare County, N.C., on US 12, US 64, US 158 and US 264 provide access to the Outer Banks through Manteo and Nags Head, where NC 12 takes anglers south to Hatteras

WHEN TO GO — Big red drum enter the Pamlico Sound through Hatteras Inlet in early May, leaving the places in the ocean where they overwinter. Smaller fish, including plenty in North Carolina's 18- to 27-inch slot limit, spend the first several years of their lives in the sound. Big fish move across the sound to spawn around the mouth of coastal rivers on the western side. Slot-sized reds work work sloughs behind Hatteras Inlet and endless grass flats the rest of the summer.

BEST TECHNIQUES — Drift across the grass flats in 2 to 3 feet of water. Make long casts with medium-light spinning tackle and Johnson Silver Minnow spoons and use a steady retrieve, except to stop and let the spoon fall when you bring it over a distinct hole in the grass. Sight-casting opportunities abound when schools of drum skirt shallow shoals in search of food.



FISHING INFO/ GUIDES — Rom Whittaker IV, Sound Bound Charters, 252-305-5229; Hatteras Harbor Marina, 252-986-2166; The Pelican's Roost, Hatteras, 252-986-0015. See also Guides & Charters in Classifieds.

ACCOMMODATIONS — The Breakwater Inn, Hatteras, 877-986-2565; Village Marina Motel, Hatteras, 252-986-2522; Lighthouse View Court Motel, Buxton, 800-225-7651; Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, 800-627-3160, www.outerbankschamber.com.

MAPS — Capt. Segull's Nautical Charts, 888-473-4855, www.captainsegullcharts.com; GMCO's Chartbook of North Carolina, 1-888-420-6277, www.gmcomaps.com.



SPOON- FEEDING

Whitaker likes to fish a 7-foot or 7-foot-6, medium-light Star spinning rod and a Penn reel. He will tie the gold spoon — the venerable Johnson Silver Minnow — to a 30-inch fluorocarbon leader and attach it to the main line, with “the smallest barrel swivel I can find.”

“You just cast it downwind as far as you can and reel it back,” he said.



The ageless Johnson Silver Minnow, a casting spoon, is an extremely productive lure when fan-casting for Hatteras puppy drum.

Until a few years ago, Whitaker was tying on a jighead and a soft-plastic trailer for most of his casting to drum. Then, an out-of-town angler showed up one day and taught him a lesson.

“All of us used to use jigs, but a boy from Florida came up a few years ago and really caught ‘em on a gold spoon, so a bunch of us started using those weedless gold spoons. You can cast ‘em a mile.” ■

REDFISH HOTSPOTS ➤



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

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

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

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

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2021 JUL					BEST DAYS				LUNAR PERIODS				TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED		
THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	MOON	PHASE
1	2	3	4	5					59	1:01 AM	5:58 am - 8:04 am ☀	1:08 PM	6:23 pm - 8:29 pm 🌙	☾	Half
									50	1:27 AM	6:31 am - 8:53 am ☀	2:05 PM	6:56 pm - 9:18 pm 🌙	☾	
									47	1:53 AM	7:02 am - 9:44 am	3:01 PM	7:27 pm - 10:09 pm 🌙	☾	
									48	2:19 AM	7:35 am - 10:35 am	3:58 PM	8:00 pm - 11:00 pm	☾	
									50	2:48 AM	8:12 am - 11:24 am	4:55 PM	8:37 pm - 11:49 pm	☾	Apogee
									61	3:21 AM	8:50 am - 12:16 pm	5:53 PM	9:15 pm - 12:41 am	☾	
									72	3:58 AM	9:36 am - 1:08 pm	6:50 PM	10:01 pm - 1:33 am	☾	
									83	4:41 AM	10:22 am - 2:02 pm ☀	7:45 PM	10:47 pm - 2:27 am	☾	High
									89	5:30 AM	11:14 am - 2:54 pm	8:37 PM	11:39 pm - Midnight	☾	New
									78	6:25 AM	12:09 pm - 3:45 pm ☀	9:24 PM	Midnight - 3:19 am	☾	
									68	7:25 AM	1:05 pm - 4:31 pm	10:05 PM	12:34 am - 4:10 am	☾	
									57	8:27 AM	2:01 pm - 5:17 pm	10:42 PM	1:30 am - 4:56 am	☾	
									50	9:31 AM	2:57 pm - 5:57 pm	11:15 PM	2:26 am - 5:42 am	☾	
									49	10:35 AM	3:53 pm - 6:35 pm	11:45 PM	3:22 am - 6:22 am	☾	
									47	11:39 AM	4:50 pm - 7:12 pm		4:18 am - 7:00 am ☀	☾	
									49	12:44 PM	5:49 pm - 7:47 pm	12:15 AM	5:15 am - 7:37 am ☀	☾	
									57	1:50 PM	6:48 pm - 8:26 pm 🌙	12:44 AM	6:14 am - 8:12 am ☀	☾	Half
									45	2:59 PM	7:48 pm - 9:10 pm 🌙	1:16 AM	7:13 am - 8:51 am ☀	☾	
									38	4:10 PM	8:52 pm - 9:58 pm	1:52 AM	8:13 am - 9:35 am	☾	
									47	5:23 PM	9:58 pm - 10:50 pm	2:33 AM	9:17 am - 10:23 am	☾	
									57	6:33 PM	11:04 pm - 11:50 pm	3:22 AM	10:23 am - 11:15 am	☾	Perigee
									67	7:37 PM	Midnight - Midnight	4:20 AM	11:29 am - 12:15 pm ☀	☾	Low
									71	8:33 PM	12:07 am - 12:55 am	5:25 AM	12:32 pm - 1:20 pm ☀	☾	Full
									61	9:19 PM	1:04 am - 2:00 am	6:35 AM	1:29 pm - 2:25 pm ☀	☾	
									51	9:58 PM	1:56 am - 3:02 am	7:44 AM	2:21 pm - 3:27 pm	☾	
									42	10:31 PM	2:40 am - 4:02 am	8:51 AM	3:05 pm - 4:27 pm	☾	
									38	11:01 PM	3:21 am - 4:59 am	9:55 AM	3:46 pm - 5:24 pm	☾	
									40	11:28 PM	3:55 am - 5:53 am	10:56 AM	4:20 pm - 6:18 pm	☾	
									42	11:54 PM	4:29 am - 6:45 am	11:54 AM	4:54 pm - 7:10 pm	☾	
									49		5:01 am - 7:37 am ☀	12:52 PM	5:26 pm - 8:02 pm	☾	
									60	12:20 AM	5:34 am - 8:26 am ☀	1:49 PM	5:59 pm - 8:51 pm 🌙	☾	Half

25 50 75
AVERAGE

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS: ☀ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON 🌙 = DUSK

WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

For more, visit primetimes2.com

Ralph Brummitt of Kenansville, N.C., landed this big drum last summer in the Neuse River while fishing with guide Glenn Grigg.



Glenn Grigg

BIG, OLD DRUM INVADE NC'S NEUSE RIVER

Popping-cork rigs have become productive way to draw strikes from big-shouldered fish

Often weighing 50 pounds or more, mature redfish spawn in North Carolina's Pamlico Sound during late summer and fall, spreading across the nation's second-largest estuary. Only the Chesapeake Bay covers more acreage.

This month, anglers will be chasing these red drum from the mile-wide mouth of the Neuse River to New Bern.

Guide Glenn Grigg of Merrimon, a small town near Beaufort, moved from Siler City 8 years ago and discovered fishing for these "old" drum.

Fortunately, it was about that time that popping-cork rigs were becoming popular for hooking up with these Neuse River beasts. Previously, soaking chunk baits on the bottom was the main tactic — although it often involved long stretches of waiting for bites.

"I look for old drum from Brant (Island) Shoals to New Bern," said Grigg, 40, owner of Back Creek Guide Service (252-515-2971). "I start catching them in late July when they start busting bait balls."

Just after safe light, Grigg will cruise to known hotspots, scan the river's surface for signs of feeding fish or check his sonar for bait balls. Once he locates baits or redfish, he'll move close enough for clients to cast popping corks or topwater lures.

Grigg uses medium-heavy, 7-foot St. Croix spinning rods and 4500 Series Penn Slammer reels spooled with 30-pound braid and a 20- to 30-inch leader of 40-pound fluorocarbon. When he uses a popping cork, he ties braid and fluorocarbon leaders to each cork, then a ¼- to ⅜-ounce jighead to the leader with the

hook inside a 5- to 7-inch Z-Man plastic grub.

"I love gold-and-black glitter Z-Man paddletails or jerk shads," Grigg said. "They look like menhaden. At times, I switch to green and chartreuse colors."

Best red drum spots include oyster beds.

"Some of the old-timers gave me charts that show oyster reefs," he said. "You can buy state maps that show (man-made) oyster reefs. They hauled a lot of rocks and put them in the river."

Red drum love menhaden, mullets and crabs.

"When I find bait balls, customers throw (popping corks) at the outside edges, pop it once, wait 10 to 30 seconds and pop it again," Grigg said.

His favorite topwater lure is an Australian-made Halco lure, a RoostaPopper. It's a 7- to 8-inch, hard stickbait that catches large bluefish, Spanish and king mackerel; anglers can cast them long distances.

A large drum may require 30 minutes or longer to land. It's a pump-and-reel game with the fish often exhausting anglers. Old drum have big shoulders.

"With the slot limit (18 to 27 inches), old drum have to be released," Grigg said. "It's important to wet your hands so you don't remove slime from scales, use a fish grip in his jaws and support his belly with the other hand or your thighs, then take pictures and quickly release a drum (into the water). And never hold an old drum vertically." ■

This redfish bit for one of Capt. Garrett Lacy's clients just as the tide began dropping out of a small feeder creek into the main waterway.



Garrett Lacy

MOVING WATER MOVES LOWCOUNTRY REDS

Concentrate on mouth of smaller creeks that feed bigger waters and wait for the tide

Redfish are some of the most-resilient fish in South Carolina waterways. They feel the heat just like the rest of us — and the rest of the fish — but it doesn't stop them from biting. Garrett Lacy of Charleston Fishing Adventures pays more attention to the tides than the temperature, because he said the redfish do the same thing.

"The redfish bite is much more dependent on moving water than the temperature, no matter how hot or cold the weather is," said Lacy (843-478-8216). "Of course, if you can catch a moving tide at daybreak or sunset, all the better. But when that doesn't work out, it's no reason to give up on these fish."

Lacy especially enjoys fishing on the outgoing tide. He said the redfish bite in Lowcountry waters is predictable when the water is falling out of smaller creeks that empty into the main waterway.

"The redfish get back in these small creeks during high tide for a couple of reasons," he said. "It's a good hiding place from dolphins, and high tide is also the only time they have access to these creeks and the food that's in them. They're full of baitfish

and crabs, and redfish flock to them when they get the chance."

And as the tide falls out of these creeks, redfish feel a sense of urgency to feed, knowing it will be several hours before the meals come easy again. Lacy sets up within casting distance of the mouth of one of these creeks, then casts either live bait or cut bait right into spots where the fish leave the small creeks and enter the main waterways. He uses spinning reels with 15- to 20-pound braided line and Carolina rigs with ¾- to 1-ounce sinkers and 3/0 circle hooks on fluorocarbon leaders.

While leaving the smaller creeks, redfish react the same way grocery store shoppers do when they see a candy bar or pack of gum conveniently located in the check-out line.

Lacy said the same fish will also eagerly eat in these same areas on the incoming tide. They'll wait at the mouth of the creek, ready to devour whatever they can find as soon as the water rises enough to give them access. Many of them haven't eaten much since the last tide change, and a meal placed in front of them won't last long. ■



FIRST-AID ADDITIONS

E.R. DOC SAYS INCLUDE ACE BANDAGE, PETROLEUM JELLY IN YOUR ON-BOARD KIT

Brian Cope

This is a great time of year to walk along an oyster mound in a shallow, inshore creek casting for redfish that are hiding from dolphins. It can also be dangerous. I severed an artery in my leg in such a creek recently, which is a quick way to turn a fun day into a life-threatening one.

Luckily, I was able to stop the bleeding before things got out of hand. Still, it ended my day, required a trip to the emergency room and put me at risk of infection. It also made me vulnerable to vibrio, a flesh-eating virus that is not uncommon in many saltwater creeks throughout the south.

I had gotten out of my kayak to walk along the oyster mound — a mound I'd walked on many times before. The mound sits 3 feet above water at low tide. It's one of those mounds that's solid as a concrete sidewalk. But this time, I stepped on it with my left foot, and the oysters gave way. My left leg sank into the underlying pluff mud all the way to my thigh. My right leg buckled and caught an oyster as sharp as a surgical knife just

below my knee.

UNNOTICED WOUND

I didn't even notice the cut right away. Covered in water, salt spray, sunscreen and pluff mud, the blood pouring down my leg didn't register. And wearing dark sun shades and focusing on fishable waters, I also didn't immediately see the blood spurting from my leg with every heartbeat, either. The cut was so clean that I didn't feel a thing.

I'd walked the whole oyster mound, stopping several times to cast, and by the time I looked down to see my injury, the previously sun-bleached, white oyster shell mound now looked like a multi-victim crime scene. A thick, solid line of red marked my journey, and large swaths of crimson showed my every step. It was bad, and I knew if I didn't stop the bleeding right away, I was going to be in big trouble.

I had a small first-aid kit, but it mostly contained bandages more suited for a child's playground than this. And no matter how much I wiped the blood

away before applying the largest bandage I had, it slid away, never making contact with the skin due to the massive amount of blood pumping and pouring from my cut.

A hand towel was stuffed away in my fishing tackle bag. I wrapped it around my leg and held it in place with the lanyard from a pair of fishing pliers. Luckily, this applied enough pressure to stop the bleeding. At this point, I knew the cut was more of an inconvenience than something more serious, but it could have been much worse, and I should have been better prepared.

Once in the emergency room, the doctor gave me a tip I'll never forget. He said most commercially-bought first-aid kits — especially ones that are small enough to fit into a small boat or kayak



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 PAGE: The next time you pack that tackle bag for a fishing trip in a kayak or small boat, add an ACE bandage or two as part of a first-aid kit.

without taking up too much space — are insufficient for anything more than a headache or a small cut. He suggested two items to always have on a boat that can help you out of most emergencies.

DOUBLE WHAMMY

“An ACE bandage can get you out of most of the trouble you’ll run into in situations like this,” he said. “Very deep cuts, and ones that result in severed arteries, will produce too much blood, too quickly, for any stick-on bandage you’ll find in a first-aid kit. But you’ll get enough absorption and enough pressure by wrapping that same cut with an ACE bandage almost every time.”

He suggested two ACE bandages are better than one. That’s in case of multiple cuts, and also, so you can make a bandage out of one and a tourniquet out of the other if necessary. One other item he suggested is petroleum jelly, which is available in thin packages that fit neatly into fishing bags or tackle boxes.

“Petroleum jelly stops the bleeding on some pretty serious cuts. Applying a good dose of that before wrapping will go a long way toward stopping some serious wounds,” he said.

“*Very deep cuts, and ones that result in severed arteries, will produce too much blood, too quickly, for any stick-on bandage you’ll find in a first-aid kit.*”

STOP THE BLEEDING

He also said for anglers who don’t have these items with them if they cut themselves as badly as I did, it’s important to stop the bleeding as quickly as possible, with whatever items they have available.

“Any type of absorbent material you can find, like a hand towel or cotton t-shirt or socks will do,” he said. “More people than you would imagine will waste time looking for what they consider to be a clean item while they continue to lose blood. Their reasoning is fear of infection from a dirty rag. They need to understand that infection is the least of their worries. We can treat infection. What we can’t treat is someone who has lost too much blood to make it to the emergency room in the first place.” ■



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GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Sure, everything is green in July, but it's not all good and tasty for deer. A food plot might just be the ticket to attract whitetails.



Donna Brookshire

DON'T FORGET SUMMER PLANTINGS

IT'S TIME TO PLANT PLOTS FOR EARLY SEASON HUNTING

The middle of the summer in the Carolinas is dead center of the hottest period of the year, but it can be an optimum time to take advantage of the conditions and get an early season food plot in production if timed out correctly and on the right site. Sure, it's hot and seemingly dusty dry this time of year, but young, developing plants can thrive if adequate moisture is present in the soil for them to utilize.

Daytime temperatures can spike into the upper 90s and sometimes into triple digits. As hot and dry as it seems, July is, ironically, the month that ranks the highest in measured rainfall. Of course, in the fall, during the peak of hurricane season, a named storm can dump 20 inches at one time, but climate data over the course of history can help a landowner understand when it could be beneficial to plant.

Rainfall is critically important for plants, especially during the early devel-

opment period of growth. Young, tender plants can die quickly in the summer sun if not adequately moistened on a daily basis. Of course, high levels of rain are typically from thunderstorms instead of a steady rain event. In summer, some areas can get 3 inches at one time, while another region may not have received a drop. It can sometimes seem like the lottery with rainfall in summer. But the warm, summery conditions with regular rainfall are perfect for jump-starting an early season food plot into production.

PREFERRED FORAGE

While deer generally have plenty of food available in the summer, they will still gravitate to a food source that they prefer over something marginally palatable. Even though there is green stuff as far as the eye can see, the reality is that food options in summer are not always the best. Deer tend to be grazers and begin to eat stuff that lacks taste and nutritional

value. But it is what is available, and they will eat what they can to survive.

Many hunters and landowners rarely consider food production in the summer because of the green landscape. Deer will continue to migrate to better food options any time of year; prove it by dumping out a bag of yellow gold anywhere, anytime. Deer will eat corn in the middle of a peanut field without thinking twice, so a green landscape doesn't always mean the best food options. With hunting season coming up soon, July and early August can be an ideal time to prepare something the deer like. While it may not ripen immediately when planted in July, the early deer season is



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.

Where a food plot planted in July is of prime importance. Best spots will have sandy, loamy soils and be away from other agricultural offerings — like this forest opening.



Ben Lecroy

right around the corner. A late-summer ripening can pull those bachelor groups in at just the right time.

In the agriculture belt, huge fields of tender soybeans and lavish peanut plants may be tough to pull deer away from, even if an ideal food plot is established. But the regions dominated with pine plantation and even hardwood ridges covered in acorn-producing oaks can be excellent areas to prepare a tasty food option for the early season. Oak ridges may be a buffet in the fall, but they don't offer deer anything until the bounty is released from their branches. Areas with open grounds are ideal places to create a food plot for early season availability.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Location is typically a crucial factor for establishing a food plot in more ways than one. Finding a place away from a current summer buffet of agricultural crops is the first step. Second, super sandy and dry sites aren't going to be very forgiving to a planting in the middle of summer. Rainfall is at its highest, but it can also be spotty, and a super-dry site will not bring a good chance of success. Soil type can be a major mitigating factor when determining site suitability.

A summer food-plot site may be completely different than what is ideal for a fall and early spring planting. Well-drained sands are not going to be the best soils for summer food-plot establishment unless they are in the bottom of the landscape. Soils need to be able to retain moisture, and loams with a sufficient clay content will allow plants to utilize banked moisture from previous rain events. Sandy loams are acceptable, but a clay-sandy

loam is by far the best soil for a summer planting.

Again, soil moisture is the key, and seeds that can be no-tilled are the best to retain as much moisture in the soil as possible. Seeds can also be planted in cut silage. The surface cover can provide shade and prevent moisture loss.

What are the best crops to plant in summer? This can be a little tricky unless you look at the primary objective. A mid-summer planting will be intended to attract deer for the early hunting season. For parts of South Carolina, this could be as early as Aug. 15, and the first half of September for the majority of the other parts of North Carolina and South Carolina, at least for bowhunters.

The best summer plantings are options that have minimum moisture requirements in the ground and from precipitation. Forage soybeans, Lablab and chicory are the top three that work well in the Southeast. These plants can and quite often should be planted as mixtures. Lablab should rarely be planted alone because it is a creeping vine that needs a host on which to grow. Lablab should be planted with either chicory or soybeans for the best results. ■

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Phillip Gentry

CAMPING, YAKS GO TOGETHER

NEW EQUIPMENT MAKES OVERNIGHTING IN A PADDLE CRAFT MORE COMFORTABLE

Camping is one of the most “summer” activities in which a sportsman can participate. Few outdoor activities can compare with sleeping under the stars, listening to the night sounds of nature around you.

Camping, however, means different things to different people. Sleeping in a portable trailer, a pop-up or a recreational vehicle with all the modern conveniences of home on wheels meets the definition. Pitching a tent in a campground with water and electrical connections next to a pickup truck that’s loaded with gear is also considered camping. Last, there’s the minimalist who carries everything needed in just a backpack. The latter may seem like survival training, but it’s still camping.

Wherever you fall on the camping scale, taking along a kayak may range from an additional outdoor activity to your sole means of transportation for the duration of the outing.

For kayak anglers who are interested in turning a fishing trip into a weekend event, spending a night or two out is a great way to log a bunch of fishing time and enjoy yourself.

Many kayak-fishing clubs plan overnight events that include tent camping. If this sort of outing is your goal, here are a few things to consider when planning

your trip to help make it more enjoyable. Choices are likely to revolve around whether the plan is to transport everything you’ll need in the kayak from the launch to a remote campsite or whether you’ll need to store everything in the boat during the trip or if you’ll have room in a vehicle to store gear.

FOOD AND WATER

One person should be able to survive for two to three days with food and water that will fit in a 25- to 36-quart cooler. That size is manageable in a kayak if you can transport them to a base camp or keep it in the truck while you go fishing. If the plan is to keep that much in a cooler in the boat for the whole trip, you might want to opt for freeze-dried foods and MREs that are designed for backpack camping and save space for transporting water.

If transporting water is an issue, the backpack-camping market has a fairly large selection of portable water-filtration systems that will fit in with your gear. Unfortunately, the systems only filter out microorganisms that can harm you and do little to alter the water’s taste.

A good tip might be to obtain a flat plastic or collapsible water container. A flat container can be stored under your kayak seat or in your tank well without

taking up too much space. A collapsible water container can be stored inside a storage hatch where it will mold to the available space.

CLOTHING

Summer is often the preferred time to camp because it doesn’t require a lot of clothing, and clothing that gets wet can be hung up to dry. For minimalists, three days of clothing is easily packed in a dry bag: one set to wear, one to dry, and a backup.

While protection from the cold may not be an issue, protection from the sun and insects definitely is, so make sure your clothing choices include sun-proof and bug-proof selections.

SHELTER

The current trend in hammock-style tents has gained popularity with the backpack and kayak set because a whole tent can be stored in a quart-sized bag. All you need is a couple of stout trees the correct distance apart.



Phillip Gentry of Waterloo, S.C., a veteran outdoor writer, is host of “The Outdoor Show,” a weekly radio podcast that can be seen at www.pgandboatgirl.com or heard on WZLA FM, 92.9, in Greenwood/Abbeville, S.C.

POWER

Unless you're staying in a campground that offers electrical hookups — and most do — you might want to consider how to obtain power to charge or recharge batteries. Lightweight, sealed-lead acid batteries are giving way to lithium-ion batteries. These offer a better power source to operate electronics, recharge cell phones and other small electronic batteries. Another option may be packing along a solar-charging station or lightweight generator if you have the space. ■

ACCOMMODATIONS ON THE GO

As blueways and multiple-day paddle trails become more popular, the overnight river float has also grown in popularity. For kayak anglers, a river float typically means putting in at one location, fishing through the journey, stopping somewhere along the way to spend one or more nights, then taking out further downstream. At dusk, hammock-tent cities pop up on islands or inside river banks and vanish without a trace the next morning.

Many outdoorsmen are fans of both kayak-fishing and primitive camping. Put the two together, and you can go places many people have never seen, much less fished.

The appeal of a hammock tent is knowing where and how you're going to sleep.

When you plan on camping in a ground tent, you don't know if the ground wherever you end up is going to be level, rocky, rutty — or even if it will be dry.

With the hammock tent, knowing you're going to find a level, comfortable place to sleep is as easy as locating two trees or sturdy branches the proper distance apart. Knowing you're going to be dry and level means you're going to be comfortable.

Several manufacturers have developed products for the hammock-tent market. One of the most popular in the Carolinas, is ENO — Eagle Nest Outfitters — an Asheville, N.C.,-based manufacturer (eaglesnestoutfittersinc.com).

They are made from lightweight, yet extremely strong, parachute material. Hammock systems are available with tree straps and rigging that allow for quick and easy set-up and take-down with no impact to the tree. ■



Hammock-style tents have gained favor with kayakers and backpackers because of their light weight and portability.

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Bass, rainbow trout, bream

WHERE — Western North Carolina impoundments: Fontana, Glenville, Santeetlah

HOW — Summer fishing in western North Carolina's mountain impoundments often provide a mixed bag. These lakes are deep and clear so better fishing is typically found early and late in the day and at night fishing around points or blowdowns near deeper water.

LAUNCH — www.ncwildlife.org/boating/where-to-boat/

INSIDER TIP — Live bait fishing is a sure bet to catch something, particularly if your interest is keeping a few fish for a campsite dinner. Worms, crickets and live minnows will produce fish that may be spooky faced with artificial baits.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Mixed bag

WHERE — South Carolina State Parks

HOW — Depending on whether you opt for the mountains, the coast, or somewhere in between, summer fishing opportunities around South Carolina state parks are nearly unlimited. Some parks offer access to larger public waterways while others offer park only access to managed ponds and rivers.

LAUNCH — <https://southcarolinaparks.com/>

INSIDER TIP — Gain unlimited access to all of South Carolina's state parks by purchasing an All Park or Select Park Passport from South Carolina State Parks Department.

COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

ASIAN MAHI SALAD

FOLLOW A HOT, JULY DAY OF FISHING WITH A COOL, EVENING MEAL.



Jerry Dilsaver

While the past 15 months have been something none of us could have imagined, we are getting through them and moving on. Fishing has been one thing that held on, maybe even improved, and it has been a godsend to many. Not only have fishermen been able to isolate on the water, they have been able to catch and release fish for the pure enjoyment or to supply tasty, fresh meals.

We're moving into July, and fishing can be a bit tough. It's hot, and that doesn't appeal to the fish, either. Fishing in July can be slow, and it's sure to make you sweat, but it's a good sweat, and most folks are smiling while the line is tight and they're reeling.

This recipe may be the simplest offered here yet. It is ideal for July, relaxing after a fun day of fishing. It's even better when you use a fresh MahiMahi fillet that was swimming a few hours earlier. Nothing is difficult about this recipe except maybe going into your favorite grocery store to pick up a bag or two of Asian salad mix. Once home, enjoying your favorite cold beverage makes it easy to spend a few minutes around a grill cooking the fish and in the kitchen mixing the salad.

I grew up calling them dolphin, but MahiMahi are a favorite fish by either name. They are occasionally caught during the winter, but are primarily an April to October visitor to the waters off the Carolinas. Once nearshore waters warm to near the same temperature as the Gulf Stream, Mahi tend to break away and follow baitfish closer to shore. They sometimes venture as close

as the nearshore rocks and artificial reefs, and this brings them within range of most fishermen with boats. This availability and their mild flavor have made them favorites of many.

Mahi are the fastest-growing pelagic fish in the ocean. Their appetites are always at full bore, and they attack baitfish with abandon. In captivity, one bull Mahi grew to 39 pounds in its first year. Mahi in the wild don't have the same unlimited food supply, but they grow quickly and may spawn in their first year.

Their prolific spawning provides schools of 18- to 36-inch fish that gather around weed lines and under almost any flotsam; these are the more-prominent fish in July. They're hanging with their siblings, eating with abandon and following schools of baitfish close to shore, and these traits make them favorites to invite home for a nice, evening meal.

No Mahi has a strong flavor, but these bailers from the summer are the mildest and are just right for this recipe. They taste great, the salad tastes good and both are good for you. When you combine the two, it makes a light, tasty, cool salad — an ideal meal to close out a summer day.

The next time you're out fishing and a Mahi wants to see the inside of your fish box, slide it in and give this a try. There isn't much preparation time, and you should enjoy the meal as much as you enjoyed catching the main ingredient. If you give it a try, you'll fix it again. Simple, quick and tasty make this just right for a relaxing summer meal on the deck or patio. ■

ASIAN MAHI SALAD

The only way I know to have a simpler fish meal than this one is to break out the soy sauce and wasabi and have sashimi on the leaning post while still fishing. That's not bad, and I have enjoyed it numerous times, but this Asian Mahi Salad is pretty darn tasty, too. It's also almost as easy to prepare. There are only a few steps and the time required to cook the Mahi and then cool it. Bury the freshly caught Mahi totally in ice so it chills quickly and doesn't lose quality in the hot sun.

I make this very simple by buying a bag of Asian salad mix rather than chopping the green cabbage, red cabbage, green leaf lettuce, carrots, green onions and sliced almonds it contains. The package also includes a small package of Asian sesame vinaigrette dressing and wonton strips. I mix this at approximately one-half pound of Mahi fillet to each bag of the salad mix. This combination and some crackers or extra wontons will feed two people for a meal and more as a side. Buy a second bag of salad mix and add another one-half pound of Mahi to double it.

I made it this time to eat with crackers, so I didn't include the wontons. If you are serving this as a side and not including crackers, mix in the wonton strips. The crunch and taste of the wontons or crackers is a significant part. Use your favorite crackers. For this meal, I used triangle-shaped Town House Pita Chips in several flavors. For a slightly different taste and texture, try Triscuit Thin Crisps in your favorite flavor.

I have had to get used to calling this salad. For years, I used it in fish tacos with a drizzle of chipotle salad dressing and called it Asian slaw, probably because of the two types of cabbage. Whatever you call it, the mix is just about perfect for this. I don't use all of the packet of dressing to keep it from overpowering the Mahi, but some of my friends add a little more after being served. As you regular readers know, I don't mind you tweaking the recipe to better suit your personal tastes.

The tender meat of smaller, bailer Mahi is the best. However, no Mahi is bad, and you can soak a fillet from a

PREPARATION:

The Mahi fillets must be skinned and all red or dark meat should be removed. Drizzle one side of the fillets with one spoonful of the olive oil. Rub this in and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Preheat grill to medium heat. Use a fish basket or vegetable tray and place the fillet on the grill with the seasoned side down. Drizzle the top of the fillets with the other spoon of olive oil. Rub this in and season to taste with salt and pepper. Close the grill and cook for 4 to 6 minutes; temperatures on grills vary. Turn the fillets and cook an additional 4 to 6 minutes until the fillet flakes easily. Be careful not to overcook. Remove the fillet(s) and immediately place on ice or in refrigerator to chill.

While the cooked fillets are cooling, mix the salad packet in a large bowl. Hold out the wonton strips if serving with crackers. Use a sharp knife to cut the Mahi into approximately thumbnail-sized pieces. Mix the Mahi pieces into the salad, stirring lightly to help prevent breaking up the pieces of fish. Serve immediately or return to refrigerator or

larger Mahi in some orange juice or 7-Up to help tenderize it without adding another flavor.

Don't get heavy handed with the seasoning, either. If you overdose it with seasoning, it can overpower the salad. I chose Mahi for this because of its mild flavor and firm fillets, but other fish will probably work well. The fillets should be skinned and cleaned, with no red or dark meat.

I rarely use salt, and when I do, it's not much. I am a little more liberal with salt on this. Something seems to hide the salt, so I use a little more — not much, but a little. I would suggest trying this with the salt you would usually use and seeing for yourself. You can always add a little after tasting. I like pepper, specifically coarse-ground pepper. The lime-infused olive oil gives just a slight hint of lime flavor and works surprisingly well with the vinaigrette salad dressing.

The last tip is to put the fish on ice or in the fridge to cool it as soon as you remove it from the grill. The quick transition from hot to cold locks in the juices and flavor. Be sure not to overcook the fish. It is ready as soon as it will flake easily. Enjoy! ■

INGREDIENTS:

½ pound fresh, skinless mahi-mahi fillet

1 package Asian salad mix (includes vegetables, sliced almonds, salad dressing and wonton strips)

2 tbsp lime infused olive oil

Himalayan pink salt and pepper

Chips and/or crackers



cooler to keep chilled. Serve with the crackers of your choice. I used triangle-shaped Town House Pita Chips.

This salad is versatile and can be used as the main course of a meal, a side salad or as a sort of grazing dish as shown in the pictures. Crackers go with this well when used as a grazing dish or the main course. Use the wonton strips if serving as a side salad. The texture of the wontons or crackers adds to the taste almost as much as their flavoring. ■



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



Crappie fishing can be great in July because fish are on a solid, deep-water pattern, mostly involving brush piles or marked, public fish attractors.

SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

BEAT THE SANTEE HEAT

JULY CAN BE PRODUCTIVE FOR SEVERAL SPECIES WITH SUMMER TACTICS

Terry Madewell

July is productive for multiple species of fish on the Santee Cooper lakes, Marion and Moultrie, for anglers with the right game plan.

Summer patterns are now solidly in place, but anglers must diversify their tactics to make big catches.

The largemouth bass bite is good during July, but it requires different tactics than the spawn and post-spawn periods. Guide Brett Mitchell said bass are on specific, hot-weather patterns.

“The early morning bite can be excellent with actively feeding fish in that low-light time period,” he said. “Baitfish are shallow, and the bass will be foraging so getting out early is crucial.”

He said that low-light periods in the early morning and late evening are tops for surface or shallow-water action. A variety of lures produce, but he likes buzzbaits, Pop-Rs, walk-the-dog lures, crankbaits and spinnerbaits.

Mitchell (803-379-7029) said the best locations are usually flats near slightly deeper holes or drops. He’ll often focus

efforts in shallows that are close to water depths in the 5- to 7-foot depth range

“The topwater action where bass roam away from the dense weeds to feed doesn’t last long but we can pick up some quality fish early,” he said.

For fishing during the mid-day, he said to work along edges and drops with heavy, weedy cover or the edges of drops littered with stumps and woody cover. Some of the best lures include creature baits worked such as soft frogs as well as soft plastic bottom bumping lures.

Mitchell said casting accuracy is a key to mid-day summer fishing because the bite zone target is often tiny.

“I fish both lakes during the summer, and depending on conditions I may be fishing either Lake Moultrie or in the upper end of Lake Marion,” he said. “I diversify my targets to stay on good bass action at this time of the year.”

DEEP CRAPPIE

Crappie fishing is consistently produc-

tive during the summer because they’re locked into deep-water patterns. Deep brush piles, public fish attractors as well as natural cover including stumps and logs along drops and ledges attract and hold crappie in good numbers.

Guide Steve English fishes both lakes at this time of the year, and he said a depth range of 15 to 35 feet can typically be productive.

“One good target is underwater brush at the base of a drop,” he said. “Live minnows or jigs produce fish. I’ll maneuver my boat over the top of the targeted cover and fish vertically. I use long poles with sensitive tips so I can see even the slightest bite of a crappie. I rely on electronics to get me directly over the deep brush or fish attractor.”



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.

Channel catfish and small blues are abundant on shallow flats near deep water in July, along with parts of the Diversion Canal affected by current.

English (843-709-8138) said some days require searching to find these often highly mobile, hot-weather fish, but plenty of huge crappie are available.

“Fishing deep-water brush can be a test of patience. Sometimes, we’ll catch a few fish on multiple brush piles, and that adds up to a good catch,” he said. “But often, we’ll hit one that’s loaded with fish, and the action is crazy-good.”

English said finding the productive depth for a particular day and targeting that depth can be the key to catching limits of crappie.



CATFISH: CURRENT, DEEP WATER

Catfish action is excellent during July, with big catfish found from 10 to 40 feet deep around the drops and humps, as well as the mussel beds scattered throughout both lakes.

Drift-fishing is the primary tactic for most anglers in the main body of both lakes. Productive depths can change the basic process to drift along humps and ledges, covering various depths of water. Most experts will use multiple rods, with some rigs fished on planer boards to achieve a wide spread and cover more water. Once you define a productive pattern, work that pattern.

Moving water is another major attraction for catfish, and the Diversion Canal is a prime place to find consistent current flow in July.

Fishing the Diversion Canal is productive around the clock; by day, most fishing is drift-fishing with the current flow. At night, anglers usually anchor fish. A variety of catfish are caught, with blues, flatheads and channels all part of the creel in moving water.

Diversify your catfish tactics to include using stinkbaits or small chunks of cut bait on light tackle near shallow flats close to deep water to find fast action on a mixed creel of channel and blue catfish. Fish the low-light and lower heat, portions of the day for best results. ■



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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

COVID & ARCHERY HUNTING

YOU'LL NEED TO REALLY PLAN AHEAD THIS SEASON TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first quarter of 2020 saw perhaps the greatest changes to the way we live in the United States.

The shutdown of businesses, both nationally and worldwide, affected nearly every aspect of our lives, especially as consumers. Shortages of raw materials and missing employees led to much-longer lead times in the manufacturing of many products. This was very evident in the archery industry, which faced the double-edged sword of reduced supply, as well as a huge increase in demand.

Most archery products, including bows, crossbows and accessories, were affected, with lengthy back orders the norm. Especially hit hard were arrow manufacturers and custom-string builders, with lead times of often up to several months.

THE EARLY BIRD....

As is often the case, success favors the well-prepared, and these supply issues were living proof of that old adage. Archers who had regularly maintained their bows' strings and had an ample supply of arrows and broadheads were able to capitalize on the extra time afforded in some cases by fewer hours of work, by shooting their bows or hunting more often.

Those who rode their strings until they were unravelling or broken and brought them to bow shops the customary 3 weeks before the season opened were left waiting for strings that often took several months to arrive, forcing them to hunt with questionable equipment — if at all. Many hunters had to tune and sight their bows in mid-season because they ran out of arrows or broadheads, both stressful and time consuming.

Both retailers and consumers will have to adjust their buying habits to avoid this situation in the future, but we are still in a huge hole when it comes to product availability. I think it will be well into 2022 before things seem at all normal again. As a retailer, nothing is more frustrating than customers trying to spend money with you and not being able to obtain the products they wish to purchase. We have increased both our order



Sammy Romano

quantities, as well as our forecast lead times, to try to get ahead of these issues. That being said, the consumer still plays a large part in the scheme of things.

As a bowhunter, here are several things you can do to avoid being inconvenienced by high demand and short supply. First and foremost, plan as far ahead as possible. Bring your bow or crossbow in to have it checked over or serviced right away, so it will be ready for fall hunting seasons. That way, if there are any unforeseen issues that require parts, you are allowing plenty of time for those parts to arrive.

When purchasing arrows, lighted nocks, and broadheads, buy **TWICE** as many as you think you will need. Arrows and broadheads are not perishable, and you will eventually — hopefully — use them anyway. Once you find an arrow/broadhead combination that flies well from your bow setup, it pays to have plenty of them, because these are the foundation of your tune. The last thing you want is to have to retune and resight in mid-season. Again, I predict these issues will continue through the winter, and the middle of hunting season is no time to need “a few more arrows.”

If you have your bow in for service or items on order, don't call the shop every day to “check on it.” The retailer or



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.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bowhunters probably shouldn't expect to see pre-COVID inventories at their favorite bow shop until sometime in 2022. **BELOW:** Manufacturing slowdowns dating to the spring of 2020 have left shelves empty of many archery accessories.

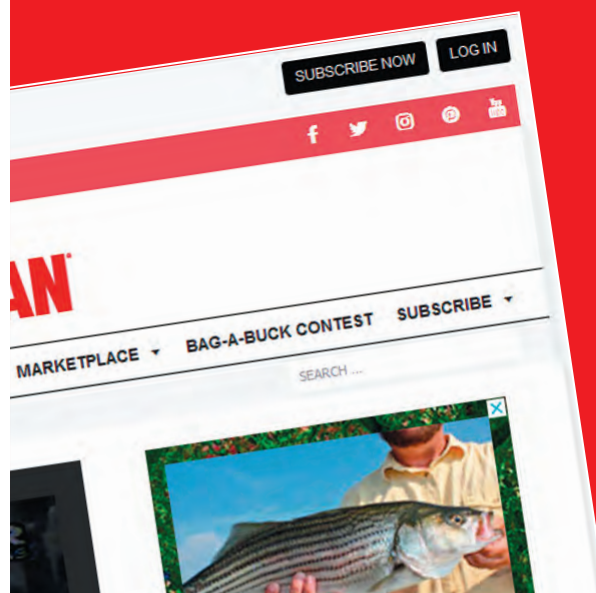
service center is already doing everything they can to get your bow back to you or items you wish to purchase in stock. They only get paid when they deliver, so they are trying their hardest. Calling constantly only further stresses the situation by tying up an employee who could be working on the other end to find inventory or do repairs. Remember, we are all in this together, let's work together to make the best of a tough situation and get everybody into the field this year. ■



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Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

When it gets hot and crappie move deep, guide Eddie Moody switches over from long-line trolling jigs to crankbaits.

TROLL CRANKBAITS FOR KERR'S JULY SLABS

Cut off those jigs and tie on plugs to hit deeper crappie while long-line trolling

T By Dusty Wilson
he scorching days of July may not be when most Kerr Lake anglers think about slab crappie, but guide and tournament angler Eddie Moody of Roxboro, N.C., begs to differ. He switches out jigs for crankbaits in his long-line trolling spreads and cranks in crappie before they even know what hit them.

"I'll start pulling crankbaits in June when the water temperature gets above 65 degrees and pull them through the first of September," said Moody (984-363-5256), who runs Slab's Guide Service. I like to see fish in the 15- to 25-foot range, suspended in up to 40 feet of water. That's when I know they are ready for the crankbaits."

While Moody admits that it's certainly possible to reach fish trolling jigs this time of year, he said that the slow speed necessary to get the jigs down to the fish

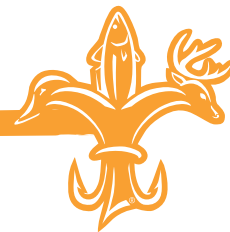
is the problem. Not only are you moving at a snail's pace and covering little water, lethargic summer crappie are not always in a feeding mood, and will often turn their nose up at the offering. Moody's plan is to trigger a reaction strike by buzzing the bait past their noses before they have time to think.

"The standard lures I use when pulling crankbaits are the Bandit 100s, 200s and 300s," Moody said. "I'll use just about any color, and I keep a red and an orange marker on the boat to dress them up. I start out trolling around 1.4 to 1.6 mph. That puts the 100 at 9 feet, the 200 at 13 feet, and the 300 at about 17 feet. I always put different depth baits next to each other; that way, I won't get tangled up when I make a turn."

Moody likes to pull his crankbaits on 8- to 10-pound Hi Vis Slime Line in order to

save lures that are not snagged on brush too badly. He typically runs 8 to 12 rods at a time, 12 when he runs planer boards, which he suggests in water depth under 25 feet. This keeps some baits away from the boat to target fish that might otherwise be spooked. He runs two planers off each side and the rest of the baits straight behind the boat. The distance for the baits behind the boat is a good long cast, plus a rod length.

Moody prefers the deeper water of the mid-lake area down to the dam this time of year. He concentrates on the intersection of creek mouths and the main lake because these areas are rich with contour lines that crappie use like highways. Deep brush piles are certain to hold big fish, but they're very risky when pulling a spread of expensive crankbaits. ■



FLATHEADS DON'T TAKE SUMMER OFF

Live bait is the ticket for Lake Norman's big catfish once the water gets really hot

W By Tony Garitta

hile most species of fish slow down in hot weather, flathead catfish in North Carolina's Lake Norman thrive in the heat.

"Unlike channel cats and blues, which become lethargic when the water temperature rises, flatheads are perfectly comfortable with water temperatures in the 90s and are active feeders," said Gus Gustafson of Lake Norman Ventures (www.fishingwithgus.com).

Flatheads also differ from other cats because they're huge predators that prefer live bait, including white perch, bream and goldfish. Occasionally, they'll eat freshly cut shad.

"They care little for stinkbaits or dead baits and reside slightly off the bottom near creek-channel edges and drops in 15 to 20 feet of water, waiting for prey," Gustafson said.

For those unfamiliar with Norman's expansive waters, he said the easiest way to locate summer flatheads is to spy shad being driven to the surface by schools of white perch.

Though this surface disturbance can occur anywhere at the lake, Gustafson said good bets are Mountain Creek and the waters around Lake Norman State Park.

"Historically, these places attract plenty of baitfish and large schools of white perch, so they're good places to start your search," he said. "I don't fish the warm-water discharges because the water there becomes too warm in the summer."

If there's no surface activity, Gustafson uses his electronics to find the forage in conjunction with perch.

When white perch are tearing into forage, the flatheads follow the action from below and feed on the scraps of baitfish left behind. Fishermen who lower live or cut perch into the melee will often be rewarded with flatheads tugging their lines.

Otherwise, Gustafson anchors in a likely area and sets out as many rods as he can manage without getting the lines tangled.

His rigs consist of stout 7-foot rods with light tips paired with Ambassadeur 6500 clicker reels filled with 30-pound monofilament, which he prefers over braid or fluorocarbon.

"With 30-pound line, you don't need a leader because flatheads won't spin and cut your line like big blues," he said.

Gustafson completes his rig with an egg sinker weighing no more than 1 ounce to reach the desired depth, taking into account current and wind. He

lowers the baits until they're just above the bottom.

He uses a No. 5/0 or larger, wide-gap circle hook to hold his bait. "With circle hooks, setting the hook isn't necessary," said Gustafson. "Just wind, and the cat will hook itself."

Gustafson said the typical Norman flathead weighs from 10 to 30 pounds with an occasional 40- or 50-pounder in the mix.

"You'll see bubbles when the fish comes up, so have a big net handy" said Gustafson. ■



Lake Norman Ventures

Lake Norman has flathead, blue and channel catfish, but it's the flatheads that stay active all summer and draw the attention of anglers.

Tripletail are a southern fish that usually make it to North Carolina waters only in summer.

CAPE FEAR TRIPLETAIL are an extremely welcome summer visitor

N By Jerry Dilsover
North Carolina's Cape Fear area is far enough south that the water warms significantly during summer and some fish, generally considered more southern fish, visit for a few months. Ladyfish and tarpon are regular visitors, with snook, bonefish and permit occasionally caught.

Another fish in this mix is tripletail, and most summers, there is a small concentration in the lower Cape Fear River and the ocean around Cape Fear.

Most tripletail caught in the river range from about 4 to 10 pounds. There are some really large ones too, but primarily in the ocean. The state record is a 27-pound, 7-ounce fish that Thomas Cutler caught from Ocean Crest Pier on Oak Island on Sept. 4, 2009.

Jeff and Christian Wolfe of Seahawk Inshore Charters first began chasing tripletail more than 10 years ago; they now have a group of regular clients who want to target them. Wolfe (910-619-9580) said they locate tripletail by looking for them floating on their sides on the surface and in the shade under structure like buoys, daymarkers, range lights and the multitude of crab trap floats in the lower river.

The Cape Fear River's ship channel is bordered by many spoil islands from dredging, and the protected waters between the spoil islands and the bank attract crabs, crabbers and tripletail.

The river usually carries a lot of effluent and is murky, and these conditions require a trained eye to spot tripletail suspended in the shade below structure. The river clears during times of no or little rain and makes spotting tripletail easier.

"Tripletail are carnivores and like minnows and shrimp," Jeff Wolfe said. "They are usually at or just below the surface, so we



Jeff Wolfe

use a small cork to hold the bait near the surface. Tripletail are very spooky, too. We don't approach too close to try to spot them, and we don't cast a bait directly to them. We cast baits upcurrent and let the current carry the bait to them.

"They're occasionally picky, but they're opportunistic feeders and usually ready to eat," he said. "Once you hook one, the deal is on. They are fast and strong and seem to know they can get away by swimming around a piling, the buoy's anchor chain or a crab pot's buoy rope."

Tripletail are hard-fighting gamefish that are also excellent table fare. They have a delicate white meat with a mild, slightly sweet flavor.

There are no size or number regulations for North Carolina tripletail. ■



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Brad Johnson, Dylan McDowell, Jeff & London Johnson, Hayden Panos

Brad Johnson, Dylan McDowell, Jeff Johnson, London Johnson and Hayden Panos show off a mixed bag of ducks taken with Green Creek Guide Service in Vandere, N.C.

FRESH, LIVE BAIT KEY TO CLARKS HILL'S SUMMER STRIPERS

Jy By Brian Cope
uly isn't often thought of as a transition month for fishing, but it can be exactly that for stripers and hybrids on South Carolina's Clarks Hill Lake. It's plenty hot early in the month, but guide Bradd Sasser of William Sasser Guide Service said the bite can be quite different from the first part of the month to the last.

Early in the month, Sasser said anglers can expect to catch plenty of fish in coves and pockets, especially if the lake is up or there's been a lot of rainfall.

"In those conditions, you'll find a lot of stripers holding in 25 to 30 feet deep in ditches, and they'll feed very aggressively," said Sasser (706-589-5468). "The bite will be extremely good right around sunrise. And the size of these fish will range greatly. We'll catch stripers in the 8- to 10-pound range, along with hybrids that run from 1 to 5 pounds,"

Toward the middle of the month, especially when the days really heat up, Sasser said the afternoon bite will pick up in deeper water.

"When the water temperatures get up into the mid- to upper-80s, these fish will go deep in the middle of the channel. That's when the afternoon bite really turns on. We'll catch them between 35 and 50 feet deep," said Sasser, who uses his electronics to find schools of fish, then presents live herring to them on down lines. He said it's important to make sure you keep fresh live bait on the line, especially on the hottest days.

Clarks Hill's stripers will be moving progressively deeper through July.



"As the heat really picks up, some days are better in the morning, and some days are better a little bit later in the day. It can change daily this time of year. But as long as you find the fish, they'll bite at some point," he said. ■



John Bryant Wooten

John Bryant Wooten, 7, of Goldsboro, N.C., killed his first turkey on April 3, 2021, with a .410 shotgun.



Keira Leigh Gardner

Keira Leigh Gardner, 7, caught this 22-pound catfish fishing with her grandfather on South Carolina's Lake Marion.



Paula Edwards

Paula Edwards killed this nice 9-point buck last season in Berkeley County, S.C.

Spadefish are light-tackle delights when you find them ganged up around nearshore reefs and wrecks.



SPADEFISH AROUND Murrells Inlet's nearshore structure

S By Jeff Burleson
ummer is here, and anglers of all kinds hit the water for some vitamin D and a little reel therapy. Both the inshore and offshore grounds offer opportunities all summer, but for anglers looking for something different, nearshore reefs are firing off on all cylinders with spadefish, a striped favorite that many anglers have yet to discover.

Dan Connelly of O-Fish-AI Expeditions is a jack-of-all-trades for inshore and nearshore adventures around Murrells Inlet, S.C., and spadefish are some of his favorite fish to target when the water gets hot. Not only are spadefish beautiful creatures, these black-and-white-striped fish are brutal combatants and tasty on the dinner plate.

"Spadefish are super fun to catch, and summer is the best time to go after them," said Connelly (843-241-7022), "but fishing for spades is much different than catching sheepshead or sea bass at the reefs. They can be very difficult to catch unless you incorporate the right techniques."

Spadefish are a reef species, and they always travel in schools, holding around reefs or oceanic structures 3 to 25 miles off the beach. They eat crustaceans, worms, plankton and jellyfish-like creatures, but their kryptonite is the cannonball jellyfish, aka jelly balls. These brown-topped jellyfish can easily be scooped up around inlets and sometimes in the entrance to the estuaries. Spadefish will mob a school of jelly balls and rip them to shreds until there isn't a morsel remaining.

Not only do spadefish travel in schools for protection, but they also have excellent eyesight that can pose an issue to anglers in super-clear water. Consequently, the technique for catching them is quite different: sight-fishing. But first, anglers must get the fish to the surface.

"If the fish aren't clearly visible once you get anchored above the structure, take a whole jelly ball (threaded onto a rope or line) and drop it down to the reef structure," Connelly said. "Once the fish start pecking at the jelly ball, slowly raise it towards the

surface, and the fish will follow."

When they are visible, Connelly will utilize a stealthy approach to target a specific fish or put his bait in the heart of the school.

"One must take a very finessed approach for catching large spadefish," he said. "(They) have terrific eyesight, and in the clear water, you must use thin, fluorocarbon leader and a small hook without any other terminal tackle."

A long, fluorocarbon leader ranging from 10- to 20-pound test and anywhere from 4 to 7 feet long is required. Connelly uses a small, No. 1 or 1/0 bat-holder hook either free-lined or with a small split-shot, and he cuts pieces of jelly ball for baits.

Spadefish go into a feeding frenzy when they start pecking at the jelly ball on the string, and small pieces will be free-falling all around. Anglers can cast to a specific fish or can just put the small chunk of jelly ball with hook hidden right in the center of the cloud of chewed-up chum. When the spadefish take the bait, anglers should set the hook and hold on for the fight of their life. Spadefish don't give up easy and take off towards the reef as soon as they feel any tension.

Spadefish are a unique fish to target and they can be a blast on light tackle during the middle of the summer. ■

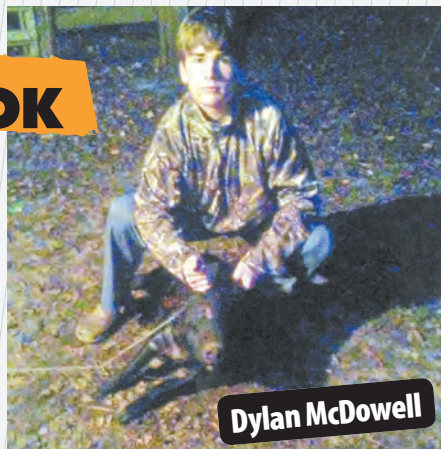


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Dylan "Big D" McDowell took this nice hog in November 2020 in Nichols, S.C.



Jerry and Richard Edge show off a nice turkey double taken April 5 in Nichols, S.C.

ESCORT 22LR

With small-game seasons approaching in a handful of months, it's time get that rimfire rifle that's been gathering dust in your gun cabinet back in shape — or replace it with the latest.

Hatsan, the Arkansas-based company that manufactures shotguns and high-level air rifles, has entered the rimfire market with a bolt-action .22 rifle, simply named the 22LR.

The little rifle, which is only 41 inches long and weighs 6.1 pounds, comes in two stocks — Turkish walnut and synthetic — and with some great features at an affordable price. It has classic, functional lines.



The 22LR has a hard chrome-plated steel alloy receiver and barrel, plus a smooth, chrome-plated bolt. It comes with 5- and 10-round magazines to suit the squirrel hunter or just a farm boy or girl out plinking or on the range. It also features studs for the addition of a sling. The receiver has dovetail grooves for scope mounting.

MSRP: \$219-\$249.

For more info, visit: escortshotgunsusa.com



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I have a couple of favorite caps I wear fishing, and they have something in common; they are a bit stained where the bill meets the cap, and they all have a lingering, ahem, aroma: sweat.

My next "fishing cap" won't have those problems. The reason: NoSweat's cap liners: disposable, moisture-wicking performance liners that stick inside any hat, cap or visor. The patented SweatLock technology is engineered to instantly absorb sweat, keeping the cap's material dry and odor-free — and free of any of

those aforementioned stains.

That is a big help if you wear eye-glasses, as sweat won't fog them up, and it won't find a way down your forehead into your eyes to sting.

The liners have a peel-and-stick adhesive that attaches them to the inside of the cap's crown. No only will the liner absorb sweat, it will wick it away from the head, keeping you drier.

MSRP: \$9.99 (pack of three)

For more info, visit: www.nosweatco.com

PLANO FIELD LOCKER ELEMENT BOW CASE

Flying somewhere to hunt something that's not among your normal targets or just rolling down the highway toward your regular tree stand, you can protect your compound bow from the rigors of travel with Plano's new Field Locker Element compound bow case.

The Field Locker Element has Easy-Glide wheels for dragging it through the airport, and the case is airport-approved. It features reinforced, molded construction, watertight seals that feature a Dri-Loc gasket similar to the Field Locker rifle series cases, double-density foam and industrial, draw-on latches.

The case is tough enough to meet or exceed Mil-Spec requirements, so it will accept padlocks, remain dustproof and waterproof, and has room inside for accessories including arrows and

arrowheads. Interior dimensions are 44x15x6.4 inches. Included is a pressure-relief valve that will handle pressure changes at any altitude.

MSRP: \$219.99

For more info, visit: www.planosynergy.com/new-products/





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Layla Jones

Layla Jones caught this pretty striper on Nov. 13, 2020, fishing in Roanoke Rapids Lake.



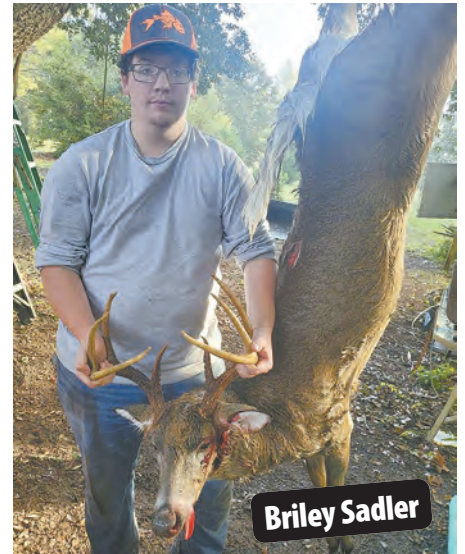
Brent Meche

Brent Meche of Fort Mill, S.C., killed this 87-pound doe on Nov. 2, 2021, on public land in Chester County, using a 30-06.



Lee Brown

Lee Brown from Ayden, N.C., tagged this nice buck on Oct. 17, 2020, in Pitt County.



Briley Sadler

Briley Sadler, 18, from Craven County, N.C., killed this nice 8-pointer in October 2020.



Chris Oleson

Chris Oleson dropped his biggest buck ever on opening day of gun season, Oct. 17, 2020, in Wayne County, N.C.



Owen Ramsey

Owen Ramsey killed this 120-pound doe at 30 yards with a crossbow on Oct. 17, 2020, in Wake County, N.C.



Eric Dison

Eric Dison killed this nice 10-point buck in the Foothills area of North Carolina on Sept. 21, 2020.



Madalyn Edwards

Madalyn Edwards killed this fine black bear on Oct. 24, 2020, in Surry County, N.C.



Titus Hutchins

Titus Hutchins of Inman, S.C., killed his first deer on Oct. 30, 2020, in Spartanburg County.



Ayden Kepley

Ayden Kepley, from Thomasville, N.C., caught this 50-inch red on the Gecko out of Ocracoke on Oct 18, 2020.



Jason Dunn

Jason Dunn from Snow Camp, N.C., killed this big male bobcat on Oct. 14, 2020, his third and one of four he saw that day.



Terry Eason

Terry Eason of Southport, N.C., caught this 77.4-pound wahoo at 18-Mile Rock, fishing in Bill Zeron's 22-foot bay boat. The wahoo hit a live menhaden being slow-trolled on a white bling Duster.



Jeffrey Stewart

Jeffrey Stewart with his best tom, from Lancaster County, S.C., in 2020. Carried an 11-inch beard, 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch spurs, 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds.



Matthew Merriman

Matthew Merriman caught a limit of nice black sea bass fishing out of Topsail Beach, N.C., on Dec 23, 2020.



Nicholas Flanigan

Nicholas Flanigan of Fort Mill, S.C., caught this 41-inch bull red on a mullet about a half-mile off Oak Island, N.C.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE..... 17	MARINE WAREHOUSE 68	STAR BRITE, INC 3
BACK CREEK GUIDE SERVICE..... 66	MUSGRAVE EQUIPMENT 67	SUZUKI MOTOR OF AMERICA, INC..... 18, 19
BLACK'S CAMP 33, 66	NICHOLS STORE, INC. 15	TIME OUT SPORTS 47
BLUE WAVE BOATS 5	PALMETTO STATE TRAINING..... 23	TOON TIME, LLC 33
BOST ARGO..... 16	PG & BOATGIRL SHOW 9	WEYERHAEUSER COMPANY 25
BQ GRILLS 24	SANTEE COOPER COUNTRY 55	XPRESS BY ALUMA-WELD, INC. 2
CCA OF SOUTH CAROLINA 27	SARAH JUDY'S INSURANCE AGENCY 23	
CHEROKEE RUN HUNTING LODGE 24, 66	SOUTHERN LAND SOLUTIONS, LLC 49	

Carolina Sportsman Back Issues 10

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