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SIZZING SUMMER  
SC STRIPER  
SPOTS



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SUMMER  
REDS

Carolina  
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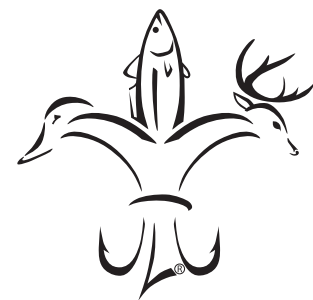
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Grassy banks in the marsh are a great place to probe for redfish with August's heat bearing down. Photo by Brian Carroll.



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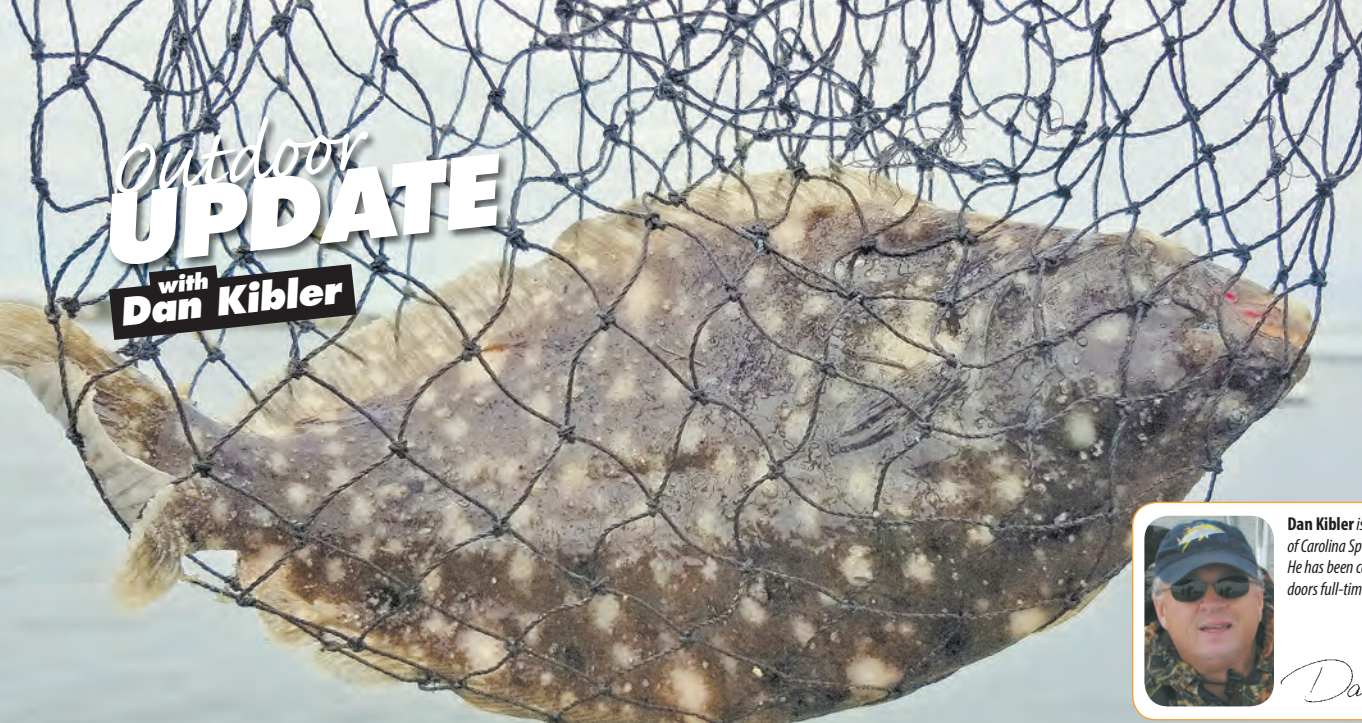
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# Outdoor UPDATE

with  
**Dan Kibler**



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

*Dan Kibler*

## WHO'S FLOUNDERING AROUND? STRUGGLING FISHERY ADDRESSED IN SC; ANGLERS PUNISHED IN NC

I am always interested in seeing how the powers that be deal with issues regarding fish and wildlife, and when changes happen that involved the same species, in both Carolinas, at just about the same time, it's instructive to watch how things develop.



Tony Reaves of South Boston, Va. (right), used a Chief AJ's sling bow to take this 97.8-pound sting ray on a mid-June bowfishing trip near Swansboro with guide Dale Collins. It's likely the biggest ray ever taken with that weapon.

On June 15, Gov. Henry McMaster of South Carolina signed into law a bill passed by both houses of the legislature that cuts way back on the number of flounder a fisherman can keep in a day's time, in response to data indicating that southern flounder numbers are on the way down.

The bill lowers the daily creel limit from 10 to six, not to exceed 10 fish per boat, per day, which is down from 20. In addition, it raises the minimum size from 15 to 16 inches.

The regulations, which took effect on July 1, appear to be a reasonably good, proactive move to protect flounder numbers while biologists try to figure out why those numbers are dropping.

Now, to the Old North State.

The folks who manage saltwater fishing there have been reporting troubles with southern flounder for years, based on precipitous drops in commercial and recreational landings. Those same folks, faced with data that shows more than 70% of flounder being caught are winding up the possession of commercial

fishermen, have little by little been chipping away at the number of flounder recreational fishermen can catch and keep, dropping the limit from eight to five to four, and raising the minimum size to 15 inches, while allowing commercial netters to pretty much continue business as usual.

In the fall of 2019, the powers that be closed the recreational season, and for 2020, they limited recreational fishermen to six weeks between mid-August and the end of September, with no change in the creel limit.

None of that worked. Despite the recreational season being compressed into six weeks, and with commercial fishermen getting around 75 days, the harvest was still too high, keeping the fishery from any sort of recovery. At least that's what the biologists' numbers say. Fishermen around North Carolina bragged all last year about how many flounder they were catching.

So in mid-June, the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries decided it needed to do something, what with thousands of flounder fishermen out there putting deposits down on places at the beach for the same six weeks as 2020. It compressed the recreational season into two weeks: Sept. 1-14. The 4-fish creel limit stayed the same, and the minimum size stayed the same, but now, everyone in North Carolina who likes catching flounder is going to head to the beach and keep everything that even breathes on their hooks for those two weeks. At least commercial fishermen will share the punishment; their season was cut, basically, to three weeks.

Will North Carolina fishermen look south of the border? Maybe imagining that, South Carolina used its flounder legislation to double out-of-state fishing license fees. If you can't manage your own flounder fishery, why come catch our fish? Good question. ■

# APPLICATION DEADLINE FOR SC LOTTERY HUNTS IS QUICKLY APPROACHING

**T**he S.C. Department of Natural Resources is accepting applications for deer lottery hunts on public lands through 5 p.m. on Aug. 15.

The multi-site, unrestricted multi-site, Webb gun, and Webb archery lotteries operate independently and maintain separate preference points.

The “unrestricted” multi-site lottery application will cover hunting opportunities on Bear Island, Donnelley and Bonneau Ferry WMAs, with no antler restrictions at these sites.

The other multi-site lottery application includes Belfast WMA, Botany Bay WMA, Hamilton Ridge WMA, Palachoucola WMA and Wateree River Heritage Preserve. Antler restrictions apply to these multi-site locations.

Due to COVID, the Webb gun lottery was not available in 2020. It will be available this year, and it is the hunter’s responsibility to adhere to any necessary COVID precautions in order to protect themselves, other hunters and SCDNR staff. If selected, you will be eating in the same room as other hunters and be lodging in the same room with other hunters not on your application.

SCDNR reserves the right to assign rooms for lodging in order to minimize mixing of hunters. If you are not comfortable being housed with other hunters, you can select the non-draw option to just purchase a preference point for the year.

For more information go to <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/hunting/drawhunts.html>. ■



A skeet range was among several shooting ranges added to the Foothills Public Shooting Complex in Cherryville, N.C.

NCWRC Photo

## NC SHOOTING RANGE EXPANDS BY HALF

**T**he Foothills Public Shooting Complex in Cherryville, N.C., just got a \$1.3 million facelift, with the addition of a skeet range, two combination skeet and trap ranges and a 5-stand range.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and Cleveland County opened the addition on June 23. Originally opened in April 2016, the complex includes a 250-yard precision rifle range, a 20-yard handgun range, a 50-yard rifle and pistol range, three 50-yard multi-purpose ranges and an archery practice range.

The \$1.3 million dollar expansion is the most recent investment into the Foothills Public Shooting Complex, which is now a \$4.3 million dollar facility and the largest outdoor public shooting complex in the Carolinas. Capital funding was led by the Wildlife Commission with supplemental funding received from the Outdoor Heritage Advisory Council. ■

# CAROLINAS HAVE GOOD BEAR HARVESTS; NC'S IS A RECORD

**B**ear hunters in both Carolinas had great 2020 seasons, according to data released from wildlife agencies in June.

South Carolina hunters tagged 116 bears, the third-best year all-time, including 59 during the season for still-hunting and 57 during dog-hunting season.

Oconee County led the way with 48 bears, followed by Pickens County with 40 and Greenville County with 27. Sixty-one male bears were taken, along with 50 females.

The largest bear came from Pickens County, a 445-pound bruin taken during the Still Hunt on private land.

Tammy Waldrop, the biologist who coordinates SCDNR’s upstate bear program, said a big acorn crop played a big role in hunting success.

“The acorn crop was good for most oak species this year. White oaks were really

good, and it was a bumper crop,” she said. “The natural food availability was widespread across the Upstate, so the bears did not have to move around much to find food.”

North Carolina hunters took 3,748 bears, according to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, the biggest harvest on record and an increase of 263 bears over the 3-year average. Male bears accounted for 2,107 of those harvested, with 1,566 females taken.

Hunters in North Carolina’s three coastal zones tagged 2,238 bears, with hunters in the mountain zone taking 1,429 and hunters in the Piedmont taking 81.

Top counties were all in the coastal area: Hyde with 258, Beaufort with 224 and Tyrrell with 217. McDowell County led mountain counties with 144, followed by Haywood with 139 and Buncombe with 121. ■



North Carolina hunters tagged 3,748 bears during the 2020 season, while South Carolina hunters reported 116.

Rck Small



Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament

# OREGON INLET BOAT WINS RECORD BIG ROCK

This 656-pound blue marlin won the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament and more than \$1.4 million.

**A** record field of 270 boats produced a record purse of \$4.7 million in the Big Rock Blue Marlin Tournament, held out of Morehead City, N.C., in early June.

North Carolina boats wound up with a lion's share of the prize money, with Oregon Inlet-based *Widespread* winning the tournament and its \$1,678,250 first prize with a 656.5-pound blue marlin. Jay Watson captained the boat, and Cole Pirrung was on the rod for the big fish.

*Natural*, based in Beaufort, N.C., finished second with a 521.6-pound marlin, good for \$453,700. The boat, captained by Carl Beale with angler Jonathan Fulcher on the rod, won another

\$833,000 for bringing the first 500-pound blue marlin to the scales.

*Outnumbered*, from Wrightsville Beach, finished third with a 512-pound blue marlin, good for \$301,800. James Breen captained the boat, and Billy Thompson was on the rod for the big marlin.

In addition to the top three spots, anglers caught and released seven more blue marlin and released 141 other billfish. *Wave Paver*, out of Port Canaveral, Fla., won \$207,188 in the billfish release competition, releasing two blue marlin and one white marlin. *Fin Print*, out of Morehead City, won \$529,125 for catching the biggest dolphin, a 48.3-pound fish. ■

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## NC PERMIT HUNT APPLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE

**T**he N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has applications available for permit hunts for a variety of species, including waterfowl, across the state. The program also includes special hunting opportunities for youth and persons with disabilities.

Deadline for applications for various hunts are Aug. 10, Sept. 1, Oct. 1 and Dec. 1.

Visit [www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Permit-Hunting-Opportunities](http://www.ncwildlife.org/Licensing/Permit-Hunting-Opportunities) for more details. ■

Rocky Baker (right) caught the North Carolina state-record blue catfish, this 127.1-pound monster, fishing the Roanoke River on July 10.

# NC'S BLUE CATFISH RECORD SMASHED

**R** By Brian Cope  
ocky Baker of Four Oaks, N.C. caught a 127.1-pound blue catfish from the Roanoke River on July 10, a fish that has been certified as a new North Carolina state record. It bested the previous record of 121 pounds, 9 ounces, which was caught from Lake Gaston last year by Joey Baird.

Baker caught the fish on a medium-heavy, Mad Katz Orange Catfish Down rod coupled with a Penn Fathom 20 reel and 40-pound Berkley Pro Spectrum line with a 100-pound leader. He was using an 9/0 Charlie Brown hook baited with a whole, 3-inch gizzard shad. He was fishing with his friend Justin Clifton, one of the designers of the Mad Katz rod.

Once the big catfish hit, at 9:30 p.m., Baker said the fight took 15 to 20 minutes, and it wasn't just him reeling in dead weight. It was an all-out brawl. He knew right away it was going to be an exceptional fish.

"We knew from the get-go based on the way we have our drags set," he said. "It slammed it, and it was rocking and rolling, pulling drag off to start with. So we immediately knew it was a good fish. It crossed the river, left to right, a total of six times."

Once Baker got the fish within range, Clifton got the head of the fish in their net, and, the two anglers put the fish into the boat.

"We were going to fish all night, but once we got that big one in the boat and it bottomed out my 110-pound scale, we had a feeling it might be a new state record," Baker said. "A friend brought us a big tank that we could keep the fish alive in, and he had a bigger scale. We weighed it again on that scale, and we felt like it was going to be the new state record."

Baker and Clifton made a 2-hour drive to EZ Bait and Tackle in Goldsboro, which has a large, oxygenated tank and a set of certified scales. They put the fish in the tank around 1 a.m. Sunday.

"I did not want that fish to die," Baker said. "That would have just killed me. But it wasn't doing too good in the tank. Luckily, Dwayne Bevell, the owner of EZ Bait and Tackle, got there and got more oxygen lines running in the tank. He also suggested we



close the lid, which I hadn't thought of. That just made it dark in the tank to put less stress on the fish. That really helped a lot."

At 5:30 a.m., Ben Ricks, a fisheries biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, showed up to certify the catch as the state record. Then, Baker and Clifton drove back to the Roanoke River and released the fish."

"That meant so much to me to see it swim off," he said. "After what that fish went through, I just didn't know if it was going to happen. But we got it back in the water, and in just a few minutes, it swam off on its own. And that was a huge relief to me, watching it swim off." ■

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# MOWING DOWN SUMMER REDS

By Jeff Burleson

**THE EDGES OF GRASS BEDS IN CAROLINA'S MARSHES ARE GREAT PLACES TO FIND REDS WHEN THE WEATHER REALLY GETS HOT. ONE GUIDE EXPLAINS HOW.**

Jordan Pate

# Summer in the Carolinas means fun, sun and lots of *FISHING OPPORTUNITIES.*

And one of the largest draws in the saltwater arena is the redfish, aka puppy drum in North Carolina or spot-tail bass in South Carolina. While fall and winter draws a boatload of anglers to the coast, the summer action should never be avoided when you've got a line-taming redfish on the brain.

Inshore and offshore species move around and position themselves in various habitats as the seasons change. Redfish will spend the majority of their juvenile lives within the protection of the grass-lined waterways and massive estuaries they call home. For the record, redfish are considered juveniles until they reach 36 inches long. The grassy and oyster-lined bays,

Juvenile redfish won't leave the marshes and other inshore areas; they live there year-round and will feed on anything that swims past, even during summer's heat.

creeks and flats are their homes, and these areas are considered their main stomping grounds throughout the year, especially during the middle of summer.

Redfish spend their lives eating, procreating and avoiding being eaten by larger marine species. But the juveniles are only concerned with eating and staying away from dolphins. Marshes make for an ideal neighborhood where finger mullet, menhaden, shrimp and other juvenile fishes flourish. During summer, these shallow areas are filled from one end to the other with a buffet of tasty critters.

Jordan Pate of Carolina Guide Service out of Pawleys Island, S.C., fishes from Murrells Inlet to the marshes just north of Charleston in search of redfish, speckled trout and tarpon. But redfish are his staple fishery, especially during summer.

"Our redfish remain in the bay all-year long," said Pate (843-814-7900). "The fish aren't as concentrated in the summer as they are in the winter, but once you find them in an area, they will generally stay in that particular area for a while — as long as the bait remains available."



Jordan Pate

**R**edfish are essentially the vacuum cleaners of the inshore territory, where crabs, shrimp, menhaden, mud minnows or anything else with a pulse is on the menu. But these estuaries are flooded with food options that consequently spread many of the reds around the estuarine and brackish waters.

Pate has more than 10,000 acres of flooded marsh in Georgetown County alone that are available to pursue reds in summer. He spends the majority of his efforts in the brackish waters of Winyah Bay and over in the green-water grounds at North Inlet and Mother Norton.

Redfish will be in just about any type of habitat near the inlet to 15 miles upriver in brackish territory. In the summer, they will readily be in all types of areas, as long as food is available.

As a general rule, summer is the nursery season for juvenile fish and shrimp. Any areas with shallow water and cover can serve as nursery grounds, and these same places are essentially cranking out more redfish groceries on a daily basis, which is



Water moving either in or out of the marsh, will position reds in spots where they can ambush bait as it passes by.

why redfish can be scattered out some in the summer. But it doesn't mean some of them won't travel in smaller groups.

"We find reds in small groups of twos and threes where they take advantage of a good situation that offers easy feeding without a large amount of risk to predators," Pate said.

Food is the most-important factor for finding redfish in summer. They will frequent an area that offers easy feeding opportunities, along some sort of edge habitat.

"Reds are feeding mostly on finger millet, menhaden and shrimp in the summer," Pate said. "There is a ton of food available that can scatter the fish around some, but grass edges can be excellent ambush spots. Bait will use the grass edges to hide. I drop my trolling motor and cover some water fishing along the grass edges."

Redfish will patrol the grass edges on both rising and falling water in search of mullet or shrimp darting in and out of the grass. The best times are often mid-tide on both sides of high and low, because the bait is either working its way back into the grass or leaving the grass before it dries out. In summer, places that hold lots of bait will have seemingly endless streams of bait passing by that catches the attention of redfish, as well as anglers.

Pate typically targets grassy banks with oysters present because the shells give the bait one more place to hide from



Choosing lures to target reds along grass lines is often a function of the clarity of the water in the area.

redfish. In areas where he has recently found reds, he may stake up and fish three to four rods with live mullet or menhaden on Carolina rigs with circle hooks or an adjustable float rig. But his favorite way to find and catch redfish is by covering water, throwing weedless artificial lures into the edge of the grass.

“I like to use weedless soft plastics like Flukes and swimbaits and work them on the grass edges in clear water,” he said. “And when the water is stained or a little off-color, I will use some lures with flash like a Johnson Silver Minnow or a spinnerbait.”

Redfish can't resist the flash and vibrations spinners and spoons produce. Pate will use different types of spinnerbaits, but they'll generally have gold blades in saltwater and brackish water.

“Weedless spoons are almost made just for



catching redfish in the grass,” he said. “They may not look that great coming through the water over blades of grass, but they can be super effective.” ■

**WEEDLESS TOPWATER  
MAKES MAGIC >**



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.



Jeff Burleson

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# WEEDLESS TOPWATER MAKES MAGIC

Every angler who enjoys fishing can appreciate a hookup from a chunk of cut bait, live bait or an artificial lure pulled at just the right cadence. But few anglers can deny that a surface explosion is among the most-exciting moments, and targeting redfish with topwater lures along marsh edges can produce some hot fishing over the summer.

Guide Jordan Pate is a redfish specialist, and topwater fishing is one of his favorite ways to put a fish in the boat.

"When I think of catching reds along the grass in the summer, I can't help but think about going early and using topwater," Pate said. "One of my favorites is D.O.A.'s PT-7 weedless topwater lure. It works great in the grass for redfish in summer."

The PT-7 was practically invented for casting into grass or up under a limb with precision. It is shaped like a typical walk-the-dog lure with rattles and foam embedded, but it lacks treble hooks and is a soft-plastic creation with a single, hidden 7/0 EWG hook.

Jeff Burleson



D.O.A.'s PT-7 is a topwater plug that's perfect for targeting redfish around grass where being weedless is an asset.

Pate uses PT-7s almost exclusively in the summer when redfish are patrolling grass flats and marsh edges for a tasty meal.

"One of my favorite attributes of these lures is the castability. You can cast them a mile," he said.

Other typical topwater lures are laced with lots of hooks and blades that get hung up in the wind. The PT-7 is aerodynamic and has just enough weight to allow anglers to make long and confident casts.

The PT-7 was created in the grassy marshes around Stuart, Fla., specifically for casting for redfish, snook and big speckled trout. The Carolinas' estuarine playgrounds offer endless opportunities to throw one of the only weedless topwater lures available that will turn a redfish on edge to get to it before something else does. And the summer couldn't offer better conditions to see it perform. ■

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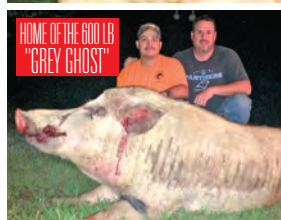
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## AUGUST HEAT DOESN'T DETER SWANSBORO REDS

Marie Towler, wife of guide David Towler, caught this red drum at the mouth of Browns Inlet.

**U** By Craig Holt  
nlike many of North Carolina's coastal fish, red drum remain in shallow, inside waters during August's heat.

The reason isn't difficult to figure — baitfish and crabs are concentrated in skinny waters.

Tidal changes also concentrate red drum, because falling and rising water that flows around marsh islands and through creeks and inlets push baitfish right past the noses of redfish.

Guide David Towler of Swansboro's Towler Time Charters can find summer reds.

"The best thing about fishing for drum is you need to fish high and low tides," said Towler (910-554-4742). "That's when it's coolest, and bites change."

Towler gets some guide trips from fly fishermen, but most anglers like catching reds with artificial lures or live baits cast with spinning outfits.

"Baitfish, especially finger mullet, push up into the grass on rising tides and get pulled out when it falls," said Towler. "I look for mullet schools. By August, baits have gotten big so I use 5- to 5½-inch finger mullets."

Explosive topwater bites are common during early morning hours. Towler likes his clients to throw MirrOlure Top Dogs, She Dogs or Top Dog Jrs.

"If the water's clear, I prefer natural colors," Towler said. "If it's stained, She Dogs have a higher-pitched rattle and seem to draw

more strikes. In dirty water I like a full-size, 5- to 5½-inch model" Towler also fishes popping corks trailing live mullet — never artificials — along marsh edges.

"If I'm fishing smooth bottoms, sometimes I get my clients to cast jigheads with soft-plastic swimbaits or twitch baits," he said.

At mid-tide (falling or rising), he looks for skinny creeks near marsh-grass edges that also feature oyster rocks. The corners of these small creeks with oysters nearby are gathering spots for redfish schools.

"That's when I throw a lure with a weighted, bass angler's hook," Towler said. "I like the slow fall you get with a weighted worm hook (and twitch bait)."

At low tide, he'll find any deep, moving water, cast a soft-plastic lure with a ⅓- to ¾-ounce weight and hop it across the bottom.

"I always throw upcurrent and retrieve a lure with the flow so it'll look natural," Towler said. "Baitfish swim with the flow."

Tackle uses 7-foot, medium-action rods mated to 2500 to 3000 series spinning reels spooled with 15-pound braid and a 2-foot leader of 25-pound fluorocarbon.

"I don't use braid at oyster rocks," he said. "Braid will tangle and wrap up in coon oysters, and oyster shells will cut it. Heavier monofilament or fluorocarbon works better around oyster beds."

Towler said a typical 3- to 4-hour morning trip in August often yields six to 10 reds from 22 to 30 inches long. Anglers may keep one per day between 18 and 27 inches. ■



Jeff Burleson

## CHANNEL ISLANDS TURN RED

### Winyah Bay's reds, forced to move by August's heat, still bite

**S** By Jeff Burleson  
ummer conditions peak in August with the hottest air and water temperatures of the year. Beginning at the microscopic level and continuing up to apex predators, the inshore grounds are busting at the gills with fertile groceries to feed the masses.

Redfish are a winner for summer anglers around Georgetown, S.C., because they tend to be confined to certain areas that can be easily accessed by anglers in almost any type of watercraft.

Georgetown is known for many fishing opportunities year-round, with redfish always being a top favorite. While fall and winter are generally hot times for reds in the super-shallow creeks, these lairs are less preferred by reds in summer. They move toward deeper refuge, but near places where bait continues to provide an adequate food supply.

Guide Greg Holmes of Fish Skinny Fishing Charters fishes for reds all-year long in Georgetown and neighboring areas. He moves out of shallow creeks in the summer, toward deeper water.

"The water gets real hot back in the creeks this time of year," said Holmes (843-241-0594). "I like places with access to deeper, cooler water."

Georgetown's waters are unique, with a diverse habitat assemblage, and deep water is very prevalent in Winyah Bay which the river channel passes through. The Black, Pee Dee, Sampit and Waccamaw rivers merge in downtown Georgetown, and the massive channel conveys flow out past North and South islands through the jetties and into the Atlantic. Between the channel and the shallow marsh, dozens of islands provide ideal habitat for

Run out of super-shallow water by the heat, redfish hang around islands along the main channel through Winyah Bay.

redfish and other piscivores during the summer rush.

"The channel islands have grass, oysters and even some wood on a few of them, right next to deeper water," said Holmes, who fishes a lot of these channel islands.

He said some islands are generally more productive than others. Many will have cuts between them that have been formed as a result of daily tidal movements. These cuts have deeper channels associated with them, and they create ambush spots for reds and other predators. The bays are full of small fish, crabs and shrimp that will be pouring through these cuts.

Holmes chooses the islands to fish based on the tide, but he prefers the island edges with some flooded structure that will hold fish and create ambush opportunities. Islands with oyster shells, grass or any other type of structure close to deeper channels are generally dead giveaways for summer redfish hangouts.

The lower end of the tide is still best for targeting reds. Holmes will fish around from island to island and hit the islands with submerged structure or grass.

Redfish are opportunistic eaters that will eat about anything they see in their strike zone. Live bait or fresh cut bait will always bring more fish to the boat than other alternatives. This time of year, Holmes prefers live finger mullet fished under a popping cork or on a bottom rig, but live pogies, live shrimp and any fresh cut bait will entice redfish into taking the bait.

The summer pattern along these channel islands in Georgetown will continue well into the fall when the water temperatures begin to decline. ■

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# TOP SC

# WMA WHITETAILED

**HERE'S A SURVEY OF SOME OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S BEST PUBLIC-LAND DEER HUNTS. CHECK THEM OUT, THEN TRY THEM OUT.**

By Terry Madewell

**W**ildlife Management Areas are a highly valuable resource for South

Carolina deer hunters, and these productive lands are scattered across the state. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources provides oversight and management on the WMAs, and many of these public lands offer excellent opportunities for bow and gun hunters.

Charles Ruth, the big-game project leader for SCDNR, tracks WMAs in terms of deer harvest, habitat and hunting opportunities. He said quality WMA hunting is within easy driving distance of most everyone in South Carolina. The Francis Marion and Sumter national forests cover several hundred thousand acres, and many other WMAs offer quality hunting throughout the state. Here's a look at some of the best:

Rick Small

## FRANCIS MARION, SUMTER NATIONAL FORESTS

Ruth said these large areas offer quality deer hunting and plenty of opportunities for big bucks or numbers of deer for those willing to get boots on the ground and scout areas off the beaten path.

“Areas with easy access will certainly be hunted more, and while potentially productive, the less-pressured areas are much more likely to produce quality bucks,” he said.

The Enoree Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest lies in Game Zone 2, and the Francis Marion National Forest lies in Game Zone 3.

Ruth said numerous big bucks are harvested each year from these areas, and they’re often taken by hunters who have invested significant effort to find and hunt the right, isolated spots.

He said these huge tracts of land can’t be condensed to specific focus areas that are consistently productive because the dynamics of the deer population are constantly changing as the habitat changes.

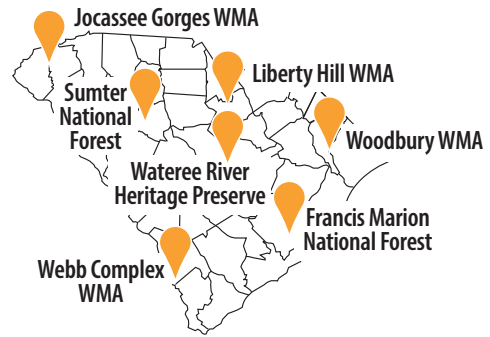
“Land-management timber harvests change the habitat significantly in the short term,” Ruth said, “but the subsequent regeneration of cutover lands during the next several years morphs into prime deer habitat, thus creating constant changes for the better.

“These huge areas have a diversity of deer habitat, but scattered throughout these WMAs will also be hardwood areas where the mast crops can have a profound influence on deer behavior,” he said.

“Do the legwork on these areas, and hunters can find what they’re looking for, whether it’s trophy bucks or simply good numbers of deer for the freezer,” he said.”

## JOCASSEE GORGES WMA

The Jocassee Gorges tract contains 43,500 acres in Pickens and Oconee counties in the rugged mountain country of the



Upstate. It is owned primarily by the SCDNR.

“Make no mistake; this is rugged, mountainous hunting, but it is unique in South Carolina because of this type habitat,” Ruth said. “This is as close to a wilderness hunt as you can have in South Carolina, and lots of legwork is required to access some of the areas. It’s not the ideal type hunt for everybody, but for those who enjoy a challenge and adventure, it’s perfect.”

Access on the property via a paved road system is extremely limited. SC 178 and Cleo Chapman Road, County Road 143, are the only paved roads that access the property. Paved roads in three adjoining state parks provide access to the boundaries of Jocassee Gorges. Approximately 138 miles of dirt roads provide access through the property.

Ruth said the area has a fairly low deer density, but that translates into an opportunity to harvest quality bucks. In addition, it’s one of a few places in the state where deer and bear can be hunted in South Carolina during the appropriate seasons.

“Mast is a prime food source for deer and bear at this WMA, and while the gun hunting season for deer is closed when gun hunting for bear is open, archery hunting for deer is open. If a hunter goes to the effort to get a bear tag for this area and finds a mast-heavy area with deer and bear sign, they can legally harvest a bear with a bow while deer hunting.”

## LIBERTY HILL WMA ➤

Getting off the beaten path and back into remote areas on WMAs gives deer hunters a better chance of filling a tag.



## LIBERTY HILL WMA

Liberty Hill is an 8,000-acre WMA straddling Kershaw and Lancaster counties that offers excellent deer hunting in a very diverse habitat.

Ruth said the area generally goes by Game Zone 2 hunting regulations in Lancaster County, although some of the WMA crosses into Game Zone 4 in Kershaw County. The habitat and opportunities remain the same, but he said to be sure to check the regulations guide for specific details for each game zone.

"This area borders Lake Wateree and is a great example of Piedmont hunting land and habitat," he said. "Of course, around the lake, some low areas exist, but the general topography is rolling, and significant elevation changes occur, providing considerable habitat diversity. As is typical of Piedmont hunting lands, a lot of mast trees are available, and as is usually the case, acorns are a huge draw for deer at the appropriate time."

Ruth said Liberty Hill WMA does have antler restrictions for bucks; that improves the odds of seeing quality bucks.

Access is easy via SC 97. Go to the Liberty Hill Post Office and turn onto Singleton Creek Road, go ½-mile and turn right onto Wildlife Road. Go about 3 miles to the parking area and informational kiosk.

## WEBB COMPLEX WMA

Ruth said one of the top WMAs in South Carolina is the

Webb Center Complex in Game Zone 3 in Hampton County. The Webb Complex consists of three separate areas managed as a unit: the Webb Center WMA, Hamilton Ridge WMA and Palachuola WMA.

"All Webb Center Complex areas offer quality hunting, but the gun hunts at the Webb Center property are unique in that in these draw hunts, hunters are taken to the stands and picked up after the hunt, very similar to a quality commercial hunt" Ruth said. "It's a completely catered hunt for those drawn. The Webb Center offers a high success rate, and big bucks are harvested. Deer harvested will also be picked up for the hunter, and it is an extremely popular draw hunt."

Bowhunting within specific season guidelines is open at Hamilton Ridge and Palachuola, but antlered deer must have a minimum of four points on one side or a minimum 12-inch inside spread.

Ruth said bowhunters have an excellent opportunity to hunt the Hamilton Ridge and Palachuola tracts without having to go through the draw process.

"From Sept. 15 to Oct. 10, archery hunting is open at Hamilton Ridge and Palachuola," he said. "Hunters can simply come and hunt, and all the info needed is in the Rules and Regulations. These two WMAs areas provide excellent archery hunting opportunities prior to any gun hunts.



Locating productive oak trees is a sure-fire way of finding deer on WMAs across South Carolina when acorns start falling.

Terry Madewell

## WATEREE RIVER HERITAGE PRESERVE

Ruth said the Wateree River Heritage Preserve WMA is a 3,674-acre tract of land 17 miles east of Columbia on U.S. 378 near the Eastover community. The property is in Richland County in Game Zone 3 and is bordered on the east by the Wateree River.

Access routes are available on the SCDNR website for WMAs. “The geography of the area is unique in that it changes from the Wateree River bottomland habitat to a fairly high elevation quickly,” Ruth said. “It’s so diverse that mountain laurel grows here.”

Like the Webb Center Complex, the only gun hunting for deer is through draw hunts, but archery hunting is allowed before the gun hunts with a drawing, and the specific dates are noted in the regulations guide, he said.

“The deer hunting is very productive, and with antler restrictions in place at this WMA, the opportunity to take quality deer by bow or gun is good,” he said.



**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.

### WOODBURY WMA >

Terry Madewell



Several WMAs that allow gun hunting only by draw will allow unlimited archery hunting in certain seasons.

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## WOODBURY WMA

Woodbury WMA in Marion County is in Game Zone 4 and has the attractive attribute of being a large property, covering 25,668 acres. The main entrance to Woodbury WMA is about 2.8 miles southeast of Daviston off US 378.

Ruth said this WMA being close to the Pee Dee and Little Pee Dee rivers makes it prone to flood, and it has been closed at times for extended periods in recent years. This pattern makes it difficult to get reliable deer harvest data, but the habitat is good — when not flooded — and it's part of a traditionally excellent region.

"It's a productive tract of land with lots of elbow room," Ruth said. "Because of its location near the rivers and the dense habitat, Woodbury also offers excellent opportunities for hunters to double up and harvest wild hogs while deer hunting.



Scouting WMAs before hunting season and locating deer sign is almost a requirement for taking whitetails.

"I think the potential for success at Woodbury is very high for hunters who get away from easy-to-access areas."

When water conditions permit, use of a boat to get remote can provide excellent opportunities, he said.

### WMA WRAPUP

For the draw hunts — at the Webb Center Complex and Wateree Heritage Preserve — hunters still have time to apply for 2021 hunts. Ruth said applications will be accepted until Aug. 15. Visit the SCDNR website, [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov), for complete details.

Specifics regulations for each WMA may vary, and they sometimes change from year-to-year. It's the hunters responsibility to check the regulations to ensure they're fully aware of all requirements for the specific WMA being hunted. ■

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Mounting a new scope on your rifle or your scope on a new rifle isn't a task you need to take lightly; your rifle's accuracy, to a large extent, depends on how the scope, rifle and mounts fit. **BELOW:** Lapping jigs allow you to perfectly align the rings once you have your bases in place.

Photos by Pete Rogers

# MOUNTING YOUR SCOPE: HOW TO DO IT RIGHT

YOUR RIFLE'S ACCURACY DEPENDS ON IT SOLID MOUNTING JOB

**W**hen it comes to mounting optics on our rifles, a saying from my mother rings as true now as ever, "There is doing it, and there is doing it correctly. Those are two different things."

Proper scope mounting is not difficult, but there is doing it and doing it correctly. You'll need these tools: a torque wrench for inch pounds, reticle level, lapping tools, removable thread locker. Below are the correct steps to follow when mounting a scope to your new rifle.

## BASES

It's all in the base. The foundation is critical for accuracy. The best accuracy is achieved with a single Picatinny rail base. Although this not an option for some rifles, a one-piece base is always best. Many hunters and shooters prefer a two-piece base approach, which is fine so long as they are correct for your rifle and mounted correctly. The Picatinny rail offers a more solid platform for the rings to be secured and a stronger, more stable anchor. The most important part of a base, regardless if it is a one-piece or two-piece, is that you have the proper base for

your rifle and scope. Check to verify that you have the proper bases for your make and model of rifle. They are not all the same.

## RINGS

When choosing rings, there are three major considerations: scope tube size, height and fit to your bases. If you have a 50mm





Tighten the rings only as much as the owner's manual suggests, and alternate tightening front and rear screws.

objective scope, your rings will need to be made for that scope. If you have a 44mm objective, then the rings need to be made for that size. The height of the scope affects accuracy, because if it is too high, you have to lift your cheek off of the stock to see clearly. Most scopes have tube sizes of 30mm. A few are a true 1-inch, but make certain your rings are designed for the one you have. Last, make sure your rings will fit your base. If you go with a Picatinny rail, your rings will need to be made for that base type and so forth.

## OPTICS

Lastly is the scope itself. Suffice it to say, get the best you can afford. The most-important criteria here is getting these three components to fit together perfectly.

## MOUNT THE SCOPE

By far, the most common mistake made when mounting a scope to a rifle is improper torque on the screws. I am still surprised to learn that many people don't know there are torque specifications for mounting a scope. "I just turn it as tight as I can" is the typical response.



A torque wrench can measure how much you're tightening the rings' screws.

Improper torque specs are the No. 1 reason for inconsistent accuracy. Every manufacturer of bases and rings has an owner's manual that specifies proper torque for their product. For example, Warne recommends that their bases are torqued to 25-inch pounds. If you have an aluminum receiver on your rifle, check your gun manufacturer specifications before torquing. Torque each screw to 25-inch pounds, alternating screws: one front screw, then one back screw, and another front screw and the last back screw. When done, check them all for proper torque settings.

*By far, the most common mistake made when mounting a scope to a rifle is improper torque on the screws.*

Once the base is mounted and secured to the proper torque settings, it is time to mount the rings to the base. Set the rings in the base and tighten loosely. With the top of the rings removed, set the scope in the rings and check for eye relief. Make sure the scope is set at the proper distance. Remove the scope and tighten the rings to the base to the proper torque settings.

Warne recommends setting their rings screws to 25-inch pounds. Do not confuse this with foot pounds. Check your manufacturer recommendations before using any thread locker.

Next, it is time to check for perfect alignment between the rings. Setting the lapping jigs into the rings, the points of the jigs should align perfectly. If they do not, you will need to lap the rings to smooth and align the rings perfectly. Using a lapping tool (a round, hand-grinding tool), gently run the lapping tool through the rings and level out any imperfections in the rings, periodically checking the jigs for alignment. Once you achieve perfect alignment, you are ready to set the scope in the rings.

After setting the scope in the rings, loosely tighten the cap screws. Place a level on top of the scope and align. Once aligned, tighten the cap screws to the proper torque setting.

Your scope is now mounted and ready to take to the range. ■

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# WHAT'S AHEAD FOR NC FLOUNDER?

SEVERAL TOP GUIDES  
OFFER TIPS FOR A  
LATE-SUMMER SEASON,  
HOWEVER SHORT  
IT MAY BE.

■ By Craig Holt

# FLOUNDER FISHING HIT A PEAK

last May and June, before last summer's Aug. 16-Sept. 30 recreational fishing season opened.

"Before the season, we caught lots of large flounder in the marshes," said guide Noah Lynk of Harkers Island. "It helped that giggers couldn't get out there and hit 'em. And I got tons of calls from people wanting to know how and where to catch flounder, so they'd be ready when the season opened."

Lynk expects the same scenario may occur before the 2021 recreational flounder season opens on Sept 1. Lynk isn't sure anglers will have a lot of success during the 2-week season because of hot water temperatures.

"Nobody knows what will happen," Lynk said. "People are guessing, picking up scraps of information."

A 4-fish daily creel limit from last season will remain in place in 2021. The 15-inch size minimum will also remain in effect this season.

Some of North Carolina's best saltwater guides offered these suggestions for getting the most out of the Sept. 1-14 flounder season.

## CAPE LOOKOUT AREA

For years, Lynk (252-342-6911) has tried to avoid fishing in deep water for flounder. The owner of Noah's Ark Fishing Charters, he fishes flats, inlets, rivers, marshes and creeks near

Harkers Island and behind Shackleford Banks, Beaufort and Morehead City.

He prefers targeting flounder on outgoing tides so clients can use Carolina rigs and barbless jigheads with finger mullet or mud minnows.

Before last year's short season, Lynk said, "We caught a ton of big, inshore flounder in 6 inches to 3 feet of water. After that, not so much."

Sizzling late-summer water temperatures push flounder toward deeper, cooler waters.

"Flounder don't like shallow, hot water," he said.

Capt. Joe Shute of Atlantic Beach's Cape Lookout Fly Shop (252-240-2744) targets flatfish in inside and offshore waters.

"The Haystacks (Newport River marshes) haven't closed totally because of sand migration," he said. "Flounder fishing is best (in spring) in 3 feet of water or less. Islands (edges) and mud flats in the Newport River are also good places."

But Shute said artificial reefs in up to 50 feet of water have always been favorite flounder haunts during late summer.

"Out there, most flounder fishing is vertical jigging 50 feet deep or more with bucktails and a Gulp grub," Shute said. "You can use live bait, but you'll lose a lot (of rigs) on hangups."

**SWANSBORO** ➤

Best bets for finding flounder in North Carolina waters during late summer's heat will be at deep structure off the beaches.

Craig Holt

## SWANSBORO

Guide Dale Collins of Fish Or Die Charters, who works at Swansboro's Pogies Tackle & Kayak Shop, likes inside waters near Bogue Inlet during August and September.

"I'll also try deeper docks and deeper ledges," he said.

Collins (252-422-4326) prefers artificial lures, especially a ¾-ounce Spro Glow bucktail with a 4-inch Gulp shrimp trailer that he hops along the bottom.

"I also use a Falling Tide spinnerbait," he said. "We fish for (red) drum with them, but by-catches usually are flounder."

Collins' stand-by live baits include 3- to 5-inch finger mullet on Carolina rigs with ½- or ¼-ounce egg sinkers and an 18-inch leader of 30-pound Yo-Zuri pink fluorocarbon and moss-green 15- to 20-pound Power Pro braid on the reel.

## EAST OF CAPE FEAR

Guide Jot Owens of Wilmington targets flounders in both inshore and nearshore waters.

"I'll do both, depending on the weather," said Owens, who owns Jot It Down Fishing Charters.

In inside waters, he uses 5- to 6-inch Gulp shad threaded on ⅜-inch Berkley Fusion jigheads.

"I'll try deeper holes in creeks and creek mouths — but always moving water," he said. "Residential docks near deep water up and down the Intracoastal Waterway also are good places."

Owens (910-233-4139) targets flounder 2 to 8 miles off the beach in 35 to 60 feet of water over hardbottoms or livebottoms, small ledges and artificial reefs.

"The key is lower relief, smaller structures so (lures) don't get hung," Owens said.

## WEST OF CAPE FEAR

From Southport to Sunset Beach, late-summer flounder anglers head to the ocean, according to guide Kevin Sneed of Holden Beach.

"When it gets really hot down here, flounder and people go to reefs," said Sneed, who owns Rugged & Ready Fishing Charters and Tackle Shop.

Islands, creeks and marshes near the mouth of the Cape Fear River and spoil islands upstream also lose the attraction. As water temperatures rise, bacteria blooms overtax the river's oxygen, forcing flounder into the ocean.

"Artificial reefs and ledges off inlets all hold flounder," said Sneed (910-448-3474). "People use Carolina rigs with live finger mullets and peanut pogies or 1- to 2-ounce bucktails tipped with 4- to 5-inch Gulp shrimp, jerk shads or Z-Man grubs." ■



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

**WHAT SEASON? WHEN? HOW? WHO KNOWS? ➤**





Noah Lynk

Anglers fishing deeper, open water for flounder in late-summer catch fish vertically jigging around structure. ABOVE: Flounder have long been a popular saltwater target in North Carolina waters, with their value as table fare attracting many fishermen.



Craig Holt



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# WHAT SEASON?

## NCDMF GIVES 2021 ANGLERS TWO WEEKS

If North Carolina fishermen thought six weeks was a short flounder season in 2020, the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' decision to cut that to two weeks for 2021 will not make them happy.

In late June, NCDMF announced that the 2021 recreational flounder season would open Sept. 1 and close Sept. 14 in inland and ocean waters. It kept the creel limit at four fish per day and the minimum size at 15 inches.

It also cut the commercial season from 75 days to between two and three weeks by area:

- Northern Area (waters north of Pamlico Sound), Sept. 15 through Oct. 1.
- Central Area (Pamlico Sound and its tributaries), Oct. 1 through Oct. 19.
- Southern Area (waters from Core Sound to the South Carolina line), Oct. 1-21.

A press release from NCDMF said the shorter seasons were needed "to ensure a sustainable fishery."

Guide Noah Lynk of Harkers Island was astounded by the decision to allow just two weeks of recreational flounder fishing.

"You've gotta be kidding?" he said. "They've gotta do something, but what are they trying to do, take away all the tourism money down here?"

"All they're going to do is make criminals out of everybody."

Lynk said that keeping the six-week season dates from 2020 and lowering the daily creel limit to two fish would have been a better alternative to a 2-week season and 4-fish creel limit.

In 2019, NCDMF recommended and the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission approved substantial harvest reductions in the flounder fishery to rebuild the southern flounder stock.

North Carolina's flounder fishery is managed under Amendment 2 to the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan. Amendment 2 included harvest reductions of 62% in 2019 and 72% beginning in 2020 for both the recreational and commercial fisheries. The total removals allowed in both years under these reductions were exceeded in both the commercial and recreational sectors, resulting in the seasonal adjustments.

The N.C. Marine Division of Marine Fisheries cut the recreational flounder season from six to two weeks for 2021.

Noah Lynk



From 2013 to 2018, commercial harvests declined from 2.2 million pounds to 900,000 pounds while recreational harvests dropped from 869,223 pounds to 495,289 pounds. A 2019 assessment required a 72% reduction to rebuild the fishery within the statutory time line. ■

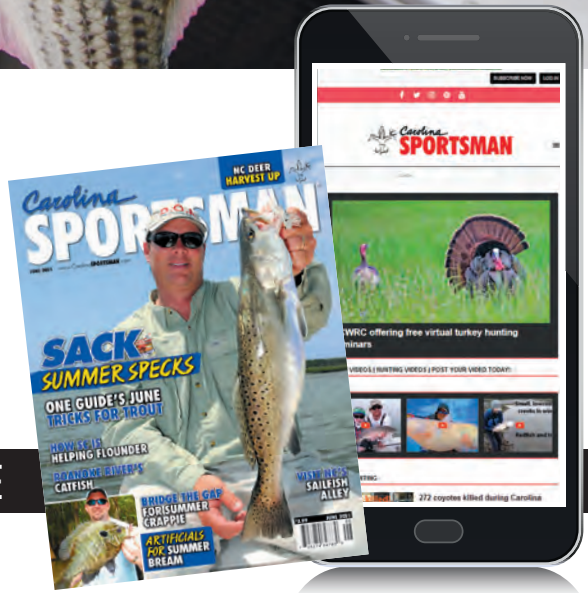


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**F**reshwater fishing in August can present anglers with challenges when water temperatures often climb to their highest levels. When they reach their summer highs in Carolina reservoirs, fish, including channel catfish, become lethargic.

However, on a scale of one to 10, channel catfish will still consistently rate a solid seven or even eight when it comes to their willingness to bite, possibly because of their incomparable sense of smell. It's hard to keep these tasty and scrappy fish out of the kitchen if you offer them something tasty that also has an appetizing aroma.

While smell is important, there are a few other factors that influence catching channel catfish in summer. If you're having trouble getting on the fish, you might want to give one of these tactics a try.

# JUST CATTIN' AROUND

**CHANNEL CATFISH OFFER SOME OF THE MOST-CONSISTENT SUMMER ACTION IN FRESHWATER. HERE'S HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR EFFORTS.**

■ By Phillip Gentry

## HIT THE RIVERS

A great option to fishing lakes and ponds is to head to the flowing water in rivers.

"I can't think of too many rivers that don't have channel cats in them," said fishing guide Mike Gault. "If it's big enough to put a john boat or a kayak in, it's probably worth fishing."

Gault's advice is to find an area on a river or creek where another, smaller tributary dumps in, and then look for structure immediately downstream, including shoals, rocks or downed logs.

"A lot of times, we'll get a little afternoon thunderstorm around 4 o'clock, and it'll be gone in an hour or two," said Gault (864-426-0709). "Fishing from then until dark can be off the chain, because you got a little extra water coming in, but not enough to mess the river up."

One of Gault's favorite baits for river catfish is a little piece of cut bream or whatever baitfish he can find, especially if it came from that river.

While channel catfish are not picky eaters, having a variety of baits to choose from will help you catch more fish.

## VARY THE MENU

Channel catfish are known for eating everything from hot dogs to marshmallows to homemade concoctions of soap, blood and fish guts. According to Bobby Dixon, owner of Fish On Bait N Tackle on South Carolina's Lake Greenwood, having a variety of baits on hand is often a great way to figure out what's working best on a given day.

"We carry five different kinds of worms, including Louisiana pinks, Canadian night crawlers, and catalpa worms," Dixon said. "On top of that, there's a big variety of natural baits like crickets, shiners, black salties and cut herring."

To top it off, Dixon said, are commercially produced stinkbaits and pre-packaged blood, shad and shrimp baits.

"Channel catfishing is all about getting the right scent in the water," he said. "My advice is to keep changing baits, and especially keeping a fresh bait on, so it's putting out that smell. If it has soaked for 15 or 20 minutes with no bites, it's time to change it out or change to another bait and see what they want."

## FLOAT TROLLING ➤



Phillip Gentry

## FLOAT TROLLING

Trolling baits on the bottom for catfish has netted a lot of good fish through the years for anglers who are familiar with rigs that use no-snag weights to drift along the bottom. Big catfish can't resist a piece of cut bait that's tumbling just off the bottom. Veteran angler Hank Lyles said the opposite is also true: he catches channel cats without his bait ever touching the bottom.

"I hit on the idea of trolling a whole night crawler under a cork a couple of years ago," he said. "You'd be surprised at how many big catfish will lay up in 3 or 4 feet of water during the summer — and I mean during the middle of the day."

To combat spooking shallow fish, Lyles pulls a pegged crappie float weighted with a split-shot. He can set the depth about a foot off the bottom and slow-troll stretches of sandy or clay banks, where the frequent wave wash from boat traffic continually erodes the bank. He uses Nos. 1 or 2 hooks under the rig.

The wave action is enough to call catfish into the extreme shallows, and the edge of a mud line makes for a great trolling run.

"Fish the side (that) the wind or the waves are washing on," he said. "That mixes up the water, churns up the bottom and gets the food chain started. Catfish will always come to that side to see what there is to eat."

## GET YOUR STINK ON

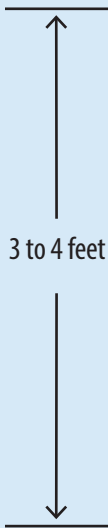
Using stinkbaits, aka dips baits, is not a new tactic, but it seems to hit a peak in popularity during the summer, owing in part to success stories quickly broadcast across the internet and social media.

"On many Carolina lakes, when you use stinkbait, you're going to catch a boatload of pound to 3-pound channel catfish," said guide Chris Simpson, "but wherever you go, dip bait is the way to fish in the summer. Channel cats are on the prowl, and it's

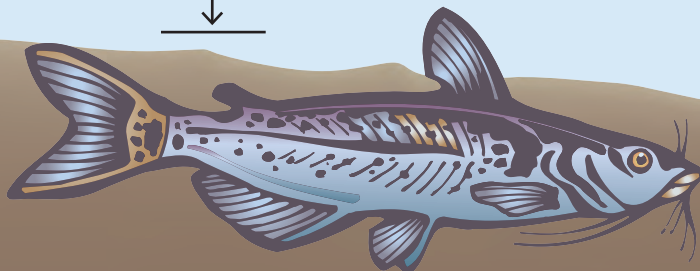


Above all it's senses, channel catfish use their sense of smell to find food, which keeps them more active even in warmer water.

Slow-trolling a live night crawler and under a float across shallow flats lets you cover more water and hone in on areas that might be holding more catfish.



3 to 4 feet



Crappie float

Split-shot



Night crawler on hook

real easy for them to smell this stuff better than just about any other type of bait.”

Simpson said the best way to target channel cats with dip baits is to find an open-water area where deep water meets shallow. If the wind, waves, or current are pushing from shallow to deep,



place the baits accordingly to call in the cats.

To get the stinkbait — which like peanut butter is designed to be very sticky — on the hook, it has to adhere to something. One of the simplest and easiest items is a small piece of swim noodle, the kind kids play with at the swimming pool.

“Basically, I just anchor on humps and points, usually shallow water, from 5 to 20 feet,” Simpson said. “The purpose of the noodle is just to hold the stinkbait, the dip bait. I rig a thumb-size piece of noodle on

Stinkbaits, aka dip baits, are designed to release scent in the water and draw catfish to your location.

a Carolina rig, then drop the noodle in the bait bucket and spread it on with a spoon. That way, you don’t have to touch the bait and get it all over you.”

## PAY ATTENTION

Several visual clues can tip you off to the presence or likelihood of channel catfish in an area.

The first is an area where birds are nesting or roosting. Mud swallows or barn swallows frequently nest under bridges that cross reservoirs. You can identify their nests as gourd-shaped vessels made of mud that are attached to the underside of a bridge. Typically, where there is one swallow nest, there will be several.

Swallows attract fish, particularly channel catfish, by defecating over the water, as well as having their young fall out of the nests. Another bird to keep an eye out for is a cormorant. Cormorants will roost in trees on overhanging branches and also defecate into the water.

During the summer when water temperatures reach their peak, mussels often die in shallow water due to the lack of oxygen. It’s common to see shells floating — with or without the soft insides of the mussel attached to the shell.

The most common places to witness this phenomenon are long, sandy points or shallow flats. ■

**SANTEE STRINGER >**



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

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## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell



# BILL WILL HELP BLUE CATS

LEGISLATURE PUTS FORMER SANTEE COOPER CATFISH REGS IN STATEWIDE

Terry Madewell

**C**atfish anglers on the Santee Cooper lakes received excellent news recently when the South Carolina legislature passed a bill reinstating the original 2014 Blue Catfish law.

Gov. Henry McMaster signed it on May 17, and it went into effect on June 16. The S.C. Department of Natural Resources worked with the legislature in support of the bill.

The 2014 regulation was removed in 2018 because stipulations of a “sunset clause” were not met, and the regulation automatically reverted to the previous legislation, passed in 2007.

Levi Kaczka, the SCDNR fisheries

biologist in the Santee Cooper area, said SCDNR thinks this bill will ensure that the blue catfish population at Santee Cooper remains healthy for both numbers and trophy-sized blue catfish.

“The creel and size limits are the same as those previously passed in the 2014 bill, specifically, 25 blue catfish per person, per day with only two fish larger than 32 inches in that 25-fish total,” he said. “The big change is the 2014 law only affected the Santee Cooper system, but the new law applies to blue catfish state-wide.”

Kaczka said this regulation supersedes the 2007 regulation which had no daily creel limit and a size restriction of one

fish over 36 inches per person, per day.

“The 2007 regulation provided the first protection for blue catfish contributing to the trophy aspect of the fishery,” he said. “With continuing to have no bag restrictions on fish under 36 inches, though, we continued to see declines on overall numbers. Big catfish contributed a large percentage of the population, but the overall size of the population was at



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

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Regulations managing blue catfish across South Carolina went into effect in mid-June. They should help the Santee Cooper lakes continue to produce good numbers and trophy fish.

an all-time low. With passing of the 2014 regulations, protection for trophy fish remained, while introducing protection for the population at any size.”

Kaczka said the goal of the 2014 regulation was to increase population size through a daily creel limit, while still providing opportunity for individuals to harvest a fair number of blue catfish.

“We immediately saw increases in both overall numbers and large blue catfish in excess of 32 inches,” he said. “Our surveys and biological assessment of the blue catfish population indicates that trend has continued since enactment of that regulation.”

Kaczka said harvest is an important aspect of any fishery, especially one where a trophy component is desired. But in the years after the 2007 regulations, the overall harvest rate in the Santee Cooper system was unsustainable for providing a fishery that was equally focused on size and numbers of fish.

“The 25 fish per day and two over 32 inches regulation was such a success, in my mind, because it solved several needs for the fishery,” he said. “First, it provided anglers the opportunity for high daily harvest rates and the opportunity for harvesting multiple trophy fish per day. Most important, the third reason, is the regulation provided the first two opportunities while protecting the blue catfish population sufficiently to not simply sustain, but increase in both size and numbers.”

Kaczka said the impact of reverting to the 2007 regulations for the past three years have been minimal.

“Winter gill-netting data since reverting to the former law hasn’t documented any decline,” he said. “The last two years of data show that numbers of large catfish are at an all-time high, and overall weight of winter gill-net blue catfish collections is at an all-time high. Plus, overall numbers are second only to those witnessed throughout the 1990s when numbers were strong but fish averaged somewhat smaller in size.

Kaczka said his assessment for no declines is two-fold.

“First, although regulations reverted to no creel limit for fish less than 36 inches, the harvest-oriented anglers in Santee Cooper continued to be mainly comprised of fishermen harvesting less than 25 fish per day,” he said. “Second, with blue catfish living up to 30 years on Santee Cooper, they’re less likely to show major population-level effects after a relatively short period of regulation change.”

Kaczka said SCDNR worked closely with the legislature to get regulations reinstated, because scientific data demonstrated that the 2014 regulation was a success both in terms of the data and anecdotally among most user groups, including recreational anglers and guides.

“Having science and angler opinion agree is a welcome occurrence, so from an agency standpoint, it made sense to support these regs being reinstated,” he said.

Kaczka said the Santee Cooper Country tourism board was a strong advocate of the 2014 law and supported and worked diligently to get the regulation reintroduced.

Kaczka said the new law impacts only blue catfish, and no sunset clause was included in the 2021 bill. The SCDNR is required to report to the legislature on the status of the fishery by Jan. 1, 2025. ■

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## SET YOURSELF ADRIFT

### Moving baits work best for Moultrie blues

By Brian Cope

**B**lue catfish in South Carolina's Lake Moultrie bite all year, in all kinds of weather, and that includes the stifling heat of August.

Anglers can make things more comfortable for themselves by fishing only in the early morning hours — or at night — but Jason Wolfe of Wolfe's Guide Service said fishing during the day can garner just as many bites.

"With catfish, you just never know," said Wolfe (803-487-3690). "The best time to fish for them is any time, all the time. My clients and I have caught them at noon on some of the hottest days of the year; we've caught them at daybreak, and we've caught them in the evening. No matter the weather, when they're hungry enough, they will eat. And all we can do as anglers is offer them bait and be there when it happens."

One thing that makes Lake Moultrie so good is there's usually enough wind to allow for drift-fishing, which is Wolfe's favorite method. He uses big chunks of cut bait, casts baits on multiple rods and uses drift socks to slow his drift when necessary.

"There's so much open water on this lake that it's usually got enough wind for drift fishing," he said. "I like to drift about .6 mph. As long as I can do that and drift over areas that have differing depths, I'm confident that we can catch blues, including some big ones here."

"You can find plenty of lines to drift by watching your electronics. You just want a line that puts your bait at different depths during a drift. That allows you to cover a lot of ground. And these fish can be at any depth this time of year. To anchor in one spot and cast to them only allows you to cover so much ground at one time. Drifting lets you take the bait to them, no matter what depth they're holding," he said.

Wolfe said it's tough to find a bad area on Lake Moultrie to fish in August, as long as you find areas that feature a depth change.

"Near the dam, near Short Stay, right along the edge of the river channel — this lake has plenty of choices. And any one of them can produce just as good as the other," said Wolfe, who uses Carolina rigs with Drifting Stix instead of egg sinkers or slinky weights to keep his baits sliding through stump fields and other debris. He said they very rarely get hung to the point that they won't break free on their own while drifting. He uses 40- to 65-pound monofilament and finishes it off with stout hooks in the 6/0 to 8/0 range.

"We'll catch a lot of 15- to 25-pound blue catfish drifting like this. But we will catch a 40-plus pounder often enough that you've got to be ready for them. We've caught them as big as 86 pounds. And it can happen dead in the middle of the day this time of year. The heat does not stop them from biting," he said. ■

Jason Wolfe shows off a 46-pound blue catfish caught during the middle of a hot summer day at Lake Moultrie.



Brian Cope



## HUK ROGUE WAVE FISHING BOOTS

Fishing footwear is a huge variable for anglers, but Huk's Rogue Wave fishing boots are made for just about any situation on boat, land or place in-between.

Designed for all-day wear under the worst conditions, they feature an 8mm thick, molded EVA footbed that provides plenty of underfoot cushioning and support. The GRIP-X outsoles deliver unbeatable traction to avoid slips and spills, no matter how slick the deck or dock may become. The rubber

and neoprene upper is incredibly durable.

The boots weigh in at 38 ounces per pair, lightweight for fishing boots. They are available in sizes 7-14 (full sizes only) and in three colors: grey, Huk blue and white, and in three camo patterns: Mossy Oak Hydro Standards, Storm and Mossy Oak Bottomland.

**MSRP: \$85-\$95.**

**For more info, visit:**  
<https://www.hukgear.com>.

## NOMAD ¼ ZIP LEAFY PULLOVER, PANTS

Great concealment and ease of movement are keys to the camouflage clothing that any bowhunter or turkey hunter chooses, and NOMAD's ¼ Zip Leafy Pullover and Pants certainly fills that bill.

The pullover and pants feature Nomad's 3D leafy fabric in the ultra-realistic Mossy Oak Shadow Leaf® pattern. Quiet and lightweight, they make a hunter virtually invisible in a tree stand or tucked behind bushes waiting for a gobbler to arrive.

The pullover utilizes 4-way stretch construction, allowing for maximum range

of movement. Likewise, the pullover features wicking moisture management, and it can easily be stowed away in a pack and is incredibly breathable. It also features an adjustable hood and zip front for custom venting and total coverage, as well as a zip dump pouch for quick access to gear.

The pants' Ever-Adjust waistband and button closure makes for a comfortable fit, while cargo pockets provide convenient storage for accessories.

**MSRP: \$100 per piece.**

**For more info, visit: [nomadoutdoor.com](http://nomadoutdoor.com)**



## BARNETT HYPER WHITETAIL 410

Barnett has been known for producing quality crossbows at affordable prices, and its latest offering, the Hyper Whitetail 401, will not disappoint.

Paired with Barnett's HyperFlite arrows, this crossbow offers 410 fps speed, delivering 141 foot pounds of downrange energy. The arrow's Front-of-Center location and improved ballistic co-efficient reduces wind drift, and the new

capture nock increases string-to-nock engagement by 30% for better accuracy, reduced string wear and longer string life. Combine that with burning arrow speed for a more-accurate shot at that big buck.

The Hyper Whitetail 410's metal-injected, molded trigger comes with a crisp, 3-pound pull for better accuracy, and an Anti-Dry Fire system and nock system ensure correct arrow placement. The bow comes with a Halo 4x32 scope and a premium, side-mount quiver and two arrows. A pre-installed, crank cocking system is available.

**MSRP: \$649.99**

**For more info, visit: [barnettcrossbows.com](http://barnettcrossbows.com)**





**TRY THESE THREE MAJOR RESERVOIRS IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR BIG STRIPERS OR PLENTY OF FISH WHEN SUMMER AND ITS BLISTERING TEMPERATURES ARRIVE.**

**T**he dog days of August may not be considered prime striper-fishing weather by many anglers, but sizzling striper fishing exists in several South Carolina lakes. Three destinations offer anglers the opportunity to target stripers with the potential for trophy fish or fast action.

# SIZZLING SUMMER

# SC STRIPER SPOTS

■ By Terry Madewell

Terry Madewell

## LAKE RUSSELL

Lake Richard Russell on the Savannah River is an often-overlooked striped fishery, because it's considered a trophy fishery and limits are lower than other lakes — two fish per day and only one longer than 34 inches. The stocking rate is lower to allow stripers to grow larger, and fishing pressure is not heavy.

Preston Harden of Anderson has been guiding for stripers on Savannah River impoundments for 20 years, and he targets Lake Russell for summer action.

"Lake Russell has plenty of stripers to make it productive for quality and quantity, and we catch lots of stripers in the 10- to 20-pound class, with occasionally much-larger fish netted," he said. "Plus, we catch big hybrids."

Harden (706-255-5622) said the key to his success is using electronics to find a combination of forage and fish.

"I often target the lower end of the lake. The productive depth varies and is a function of oxygen," Harden said. "I rely on my graph to help me pinpoint the depth (where) stripers are holding, and sometimes, they'll be found deep on specific targets."

Harden will graph points, humps, ledges and flats along the river channel, and once stripers are marked, he will use his electric motor to work the area. He'll drop baits on down-lines to the depth where fish are marked, and if fish are not too deep — more common in early morning — he'll also use unweighted free-lines behind the boat.

Harden prefers blueback herring for bait when fishing the lower end of the lake; he uses 1/0 Gamakatsu octopus hooks on 7½-foot, medium-light rods.

A key to landing big fish at Lake Russell any time of the year, according to Harden, is to pay attention to the lake's sub-

merged, standing timber. Depths greater than 30 feet often have standing trees, and stripers sometimes orient to tree-studded water; landing big fish from those areas is difficult.

"Plenty of deep-water areas with no trees nearby exist, so I focus my efforts on those areas," Harden said. "Fishing in proximity to submerged trees is sometimes necessary to find stripers, but I keep a reasonable distance."

Harden does upsize his fishing line to cope with larger stripers; he hopes to turn drag-screaming fish from reaching the trees.

"I believe line size makes a big difference in the numbers of stripers hooked, especially in clear water," he said. "I'll use a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader and 25-pound main line because of the larger fish."

Schooling stripers are common in low-light conditions, so Harden begins fishing early in the morning. Big, topwater lures are ideal; he uses large "walk-the-dog" topwater lures and heavy lures that imitate baitfish and can be cast long distances.

Harden said good fishing for quality stripers occurs in the upper reaches of the lake, in the tailwaters below Lake Hartwell Dam, but he said that area can often be crowded.

"In the upper end, where the cold-water release from Hartwell Dam occurs, using trout as bait is legal and can be effectively fished, even at this time of the year," he said. "On the lower end of the lake, I'll use herring, because high water temperatures are less conducive to trout survival."

The current South Carolina state-record striped bass, 63 pounds, was caught in 2009 from Lake Russell. The creel limit is two striped bass per day, only one of which can exceed 34 inches long. The regulation applies to all of the lake's waters.

## LAKE MURRAY ➤

Guide Preston Harden (right) does most of his damage during the summer on the lower end of Lake Russell.



Terry Madewell

## LAKE MURRAY

Lake Murray is a consistent striper fishery, and that includes the hot summer months of July and August.

William Attaway, a striper and catfish guide from Pomeria, said striper fishing is excellent during August.

“Finding the fish in the summer is a function of forage and ample oxygen content” Attaway said, “but it’s not always as simple as it sounds.”

Attaway said the largest concentrations of summer stripers are typically from the Dreher Island area down to the dam. He prefers to be on the water at first light and said open-water points and humps are prime striper targets. Water from 50 to 80 feet deep is a good range to find fish when graphing these areas.

Another pattern can be productive during the summer.

“Last year, with all the rainfall, I frequently found stripers back in deep coves off the main lake,” he said. “I attribute that to the heavy rainfall and water inflow into these areas we had most of the summer. The fish were at the same depth we fished in the main lake.”

After a couple of consecutive trips, Attaway expanded the search and found that the stripers would circle these coves, apparently following forage.

“Several times, we would get on a bunch of fish on one side of a cove, then they’d move off,” he said. “I learned by simply crossing to the other side of the cove and marking baitfish, the stripers would show up as they passed by. It was a consistent pattern.”

Attaway (803-924-0857) said regardless of the specific location, the use of electronics is a major key to finding stripers.



Terry Madevell



Terry Madewell

Guide William Attaway concentrates on deep water when searching for Lake Murray's summer stripers. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Guide Justin Whiteside likes to troll umbrella rigs for Lake Wateree stripers, especially during the middle of the day.

"Stripers bunch up in big schools and are easy to mark when you get on them," he said. "I may have to check multiple areas to find fish, but when on the right spot, I'll use the spot-lock to hold the boat."

Since regulations for Lake Murray during August require anglers not to release stripers they catch, Attaway said fishermen must keep their first five fish.

"I've learned that schools of stripers will occupy a depth range in the water column, so to target bigger fish, I'll drop baits through the top level of fish and fish near the bottom of where I'm marking fish," he said. "This significantly improves the size of fish we catch."

According to regulations, fishermen can't keep stripers on Lake Murray from June through September, and it is illegal to take or attempt to possess more than five striped bass a day per person.

**LAKE WATEREE** ➤



**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.

**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 ( <a href="http://www.nmfspermits.com">http://www.nmfspermits.com</a> )	
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](http://hmspermits.noaa.gov). # Check with the SAFMC at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) or 843-571-4366. & Cobia, 1 per person per day up to 6 per boat. Closed May 1-31 south of Jeremy Inlet, 1 per person, up to 3 per boat, after June 1 south of Jeremy Inlet. # No more than 6 redfish per boat.

**FRESHWATER**

FISH Species (Inland waters)	Minimum Size Limit	Creel Limit (per day)
Crappie/Panfish +	None	30 bream (15 red-bream), 20 crappie
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, redeye, bass%	none largemouth 12" smallmouth	5 lg/sm/r, 15 spots
Channel catfish	No restrictions	None
Blue catfish	Only 2 fish longer than 32 inches per day	25 fish per day
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

% For lake-specific regulations, see the SCNDR's Regulations Digest or visit [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://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.

Topwater plugs can be very productive baits on Lake Wateree's schooling summer stripers.



## LAKE WATEREE

Lake Wateree has been a put-and-take striper fishery since the 1980s and has long been a prime striped bass destination for anglers from both Carolinas.

Guide Justin Whiteside targets Lake Wateree for summer stripers.

"Lake Wateree is full of stripers and has an excellent forage base of threadfin and gizzard shad to support this fishery," he said.

Whiteside (803-417-0070) said summer is productive for striper fishing, and versatility is a key to consistent success.

"Live bait fished vertically on down rods, as well as on no-weight free-lines, is often exceptionally good in low-light conditions; I start fishing early mornings," said Whiteside, who prefers to catch his own bait, with smaller shad abundant and easy to catch with a cast net. He prefers 4- to 5-inch shad.

"I'll graph creek mouths, points, humps and channel ledges early in the morning, looking for a combination of forage as well as schools of stripers," he said. "Early in the morning, strippers may only be about 12 to 15 feet deep, but (they) get progressively deeper as the morning progresses."

The depth of the down-lines is determined by the depth fish are marked on the graph. He will lower the bait to the depth most of the fish are marked.

"Topwater schooling action is another August opportunity, and I have rods ready when this occurs," he said. "Bucktails and

small shad-imitation lures are ideal. The topwater action is scattered, but dependable enough to be rigged and ready, and low-light conditions are best this time of the year."

Whiteside said by August, a thermocline is often established across most of the lake, typically around 20 feet or slightly deeper, and he'll use that to his advantage for trolling.

"The thermocline keeps the strippers at fishable depths, but they often begin to scatter along the ledges and channels by mid-morning so trolling is an effective mid-day technique," he said.

Whiteside uses umbrella rigs because he likes the idea of multiple baits in close proximity to trigger reactive strikes from strippers. Deep-diving lures are viable options too.

"I'll vary the speed, and when I catch a striper, I'll tighten my depth and speed controls," he said. "I prefer a speed of 1.5 to 2.5 miles per hour, and it varies daily."

The creel limit is 10 fish per person, with no size minimum. ■

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## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

In August, catfish and striped bass will feed in flowing-water areas that offer a current break.



Mike Curtis

# IT'S AUGUST; BATTER UP!

TAKE A SWING AT THESE SPECIES, BUT STUDY UP ON YOUR OPPONENTS

**S**ports pundits all say that baseball is a thinking man's game. It might be boring to watch at times, but so much is going on under the surface that it's often hard to keep up with the game once you know what you're looking at.

Were they really referring to baseball, or where they talking about kayak fishing? Either way you look at it, the statement that fishing is mostly a mental game definitely applies. Maybe only the dumb anglers fish in August, but the truly smart anglers, those educated in the ways of whatever quarry they're after, they catch fish.

Like baseball, even the best batters don't hit it out of the park every time at bat, but those who are smart enough to look for the right pitch, and anticipate what's coming next, put the ball in play more often.

Accordingly, here's some August pitches to watch for.

Batter up! ■

## BEST BETS

### NORTH CAROLINA SALTWATER

**WHAT** — Sheepshead

**WHERE** — Inshore bridge pilings, entire coast

**HOW** — Sheepshead are not particularly boat shy, especially the ones that live under and around piers and boat docks. However, use the stealth of your kayak to your advantage. Move in, position your boat quickly and quietly and ease baits into the water. The best pilings will have water at least 6 feet deep, even on an outgoing tide and will have plenty of barnacle growth on the vertical posts.

Best and most widely available baits for sheepshead are fiddler crabs. Alternatives are live shrimp or sand fleas (which you'll probably have to go dig yourself). Use light action spinning rods with 15- to 20-pound braid and a short section of 20-pound fluorocarbon leader. Rig the line with a ¼- to ½-ounce egg weight to make a Carolina rig.

In August, bigger fish are typically found closer to the ocean. Dock or pier pilings close to open water will produce more and bigger fish. In some areas, it may be possible to fish wrecks or pilings off the beaches.

**LAUNCH** — <https://www.ncwildlife.org/boating/where-to-boat/>

**INSIDER TIP** — A reliable trick for hooking sheepshead is to use a No. 2 Aberdeen hook on your Carolina rig. The small gap of the hook often sinks into the lips of the fish as the bait is being chewed. Another benefit is the ability to straighten the hook out if/when the bait hangs up on bottom structure without breaking the line or leader.



**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](http://www.pgandboatgirl.com) or heard on WZLA FM, 92.9, in Greenwood/Abbeville, S.C.

## NORTH CAROLINA FRESHWATER >

**SALTWATER**

**STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)**

<b>FISH SPECIES</b>	<b>Minimum Lengths</b>	<b>Creel Limit</b> (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 until Sept. 1	Closed until Sept. 1
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 ( <a href="http://www.nmfspermits.com">http://www.nmfspermits.com</a> )	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	4/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12" TL	1/day
Snappers:	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogony, schoolmaster		
Sheepshead	10"	10/day
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day
Striped bass ^	28"-35" TL max (ocean)	1/day
Hickory shad	None	10/day
American shad	closed	closed

^ see NCWRC/NCDFM regs for inshore Management Area limits. % Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit [hmspermits.noaa.gov](http://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**

<b>FISH Species</b> (Inland waters)	<b>Minimum Size Limit</b>	<b>Creel Limit</b> (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](http://www.ncwildlife.org)

% Striped bass creel limits and size minimums vary by lake. See NCWRC regulations digest or [www.ncwildlife.org](http://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.

**SMALL CRAFT  
ADVISORY**

continued



Larger sheepshead will congregate around bridge pilings and dock piers that are closer to the open ocean.

Phillip Gentry

**NORTH CAROLINA FRESHWATER**

**WHAT** — Catfish and striped bass

**WHERE** — Tailrace waters below Piedmont reservoirs

**HOW** — The goal is to fish cut baits on the bottom in moving water. Use cut bait on 20-pound class tackle: a standard, 6-foot-6 medium-heavy Ugly stick, Abu Garcia 6500 reel and 20-pound Big Game mono will work well for both species. Live herring or gizzard shad is the bait of choice. Don't worry about transporting the bait alive. Net it ahead of time or buy it live by the dozen and seal each dozen in a quart Zip-Lock bag and bury the bags in ice in a bait cooler that will ride in the tank well of your kayak.

Weight each line with an egg or no-roll sinker that will hold in the current you'll be fishing. Use an 18- to 24-inch leader of 20-pound fluorocarbon. Cut the bait just before placing it on a 1/0 to 3/0 circle or Kahle hook.

You do not want to fish whitewater rapids. Look for areas with appropriate current and current breaks where catfish and stripers will hold in an eddy and watch the flow of water for something to eat. Ideally, position your kayak behind one of these large, surface-breaking current breaks and anchor or stake out the boat.

**LAUNCH** — Practically every tailrace section below a dam impounding a large reservoir has a public ramp or park just downstream. An alternative is a tributary where moving water enters the reservoir. These areas tend to be smaller and more kayak friendly than the tailrace behind an impoundment dam.

**INSIDER TIP** — Check the utility that manages a reservoir for a water-release schedule if one is published. Again, the goal is to fish moving water and not rapids, so position yourself accordingly.

## **SOUTH CAROLINA SALTWATER**

**WHAT** — Sharks, bull redfish, rays and tarpon

**WHERE** — Inlets along the entire coast

**HOW** — Anchor on the edge of the channel or a deep hole in the inlet. Fan-cast cut and/or live baits around the boat. Two to three rods is about maximum capacity in a kayak. Weight one line 40 to 50 feet out so the bait is on the bottom. Free-line a second line 80 to 100 feet out to cover the middle of the water column. Add a float or balloon on the third to keep the bait near the surface. Incoming tides are better than outgoing but moving water is better than slack water. Use heavy, 40-pound tackle with 80-pound braid and 8/0 to 12/0 circle hooks.

Bring along a lighter rod and some squid or shrimp to fish for bait. Whatever you catch (where legal) gets cut and put on the hook or fished live and whole.

**LAUNCH** — Target inlets that don't get a lot of boating traffic. This often means you have to pull your boat a long way from a public parking area, so get some wheels that roll in sand for your vessel.

**INSIDER TIP** — Will tarpon and bull redfish eat a bait on wire leader? You have to decide for yourself. The alternative to 100-pound wire leader is 100-pound mono. You'll lose more sharks and expensive hooks with mono than wire, but you won't be putting the taste of metal in a fish's mouth if you believe that makes a difference.

## **SOUTH CAROLINA FRESHWATER**

**WHAT** — Black bass, white bass, striped bass, white perch

**WHERE** — Piedmont and Midlands reservoirs

**HOW** — It's schooling time. Make your way to the lower main lake on these reservoirs by at least 6 p.m. You can troll deep-running crankbaits between long points and around humps out in the lake to pass the time, but keep your eyes peeled for surface activity.

Have a 7-foot, medium-action spinning rod or two with 12 – 15-pound test rigged with a topwater bait, something that will create a lot of commotion. An alternate bait is a white/black, chrome/black jiggging spoon that you can cast a long way.

Make your way to the surface feeding and work the area from the outer edge and determine which way the bait is being herded. Cast in front and work the bait hard, making a lot of commotion.

**LAUNCH** — Work backwards from the ends of long points or lower-lake humps, all favored schooling spots, and figure out where the closest place to dump a kayak is.

**INSIDER TIP** — In a kayak, you are limited to how fast and how far you can run and gun. Don't try to compete with the bass boats, if there are any around. If a school sounds, anticipate the next rise, which will be 100 yards or less, not across the lake. A lot of schooling action takes place just below the surface, so be diligent and keep working the immediate area.



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Guide Stacy Garbett of Palmetto Lagoon Charters fished a shady spot in the summer heat to entice this speckled trout into taking his bait.



Brian Cope

# BEAT-THE-HEAT TACTICS

PAY ATTENTION TO A HANDFUL OF FACTORS AND CATCH MORE FISH

Once the dog days of summer set in, water temperatures are as high as they'll be all year, and that definitely takes its toll on fish like speckled trout and redfish. They still have to eat, but they're less aggressive and more picky. Savvy anglers recognize their sluggishness and change tactics a bit to entice them into eating.

## GET THERE EARLY

One of the best ways to improve your chances of catching fish in hot weather is as simple as getting on the water as early as possible. The coolest part of an August day is typically first thing in the morning. Fish are often more willing to bite at sunrise than any other part of the day — no matter the season — but it's especially crucial this time of year. Offer the fish a meal before the day's heat sets in, and you've got a good chance of cashing in.

## SLOW DOWN

Slowing your lure presentation is another good hot-weather tactic. During hot weather, fish become as sluggish as we do. And when we feel that way, we're

not likely to chase down the fastest hot dog stand on the street. But if one is parked on the corner or barely creeping by, we're much more likely to put forth the effort to snag an Oscar Meyer. It stands to reason that fish are the same way. Slow your retrieve down, and you're more likely to draw strikes from otherwise reluctant fish.

## DOWNSIZE

Scaling down the size of your lures is also a good bet during the heat wave. When we're at an outdoor festival during the hottest time of the year, it's not often we feel like eating a large ribeye with all the fixings. But a few chicken nuggets or some popcorn shrimp are easy enough to snack on without weighing us down any more than the heat already is. Fish likely feel much the same way. A 4-inch lure may be more than they're willing to swallow, but a 2-inch lure will go down easier, without

adding to a speckled trout's already sluggish posture.

## ADD SCENT

Adding scent can also draw strikes from fish that are ignoring other offerings. We might bypass the thought of eating a bag of popcorn on a hot day, but it's a lot



Redfish Magic spinnerbait



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.

Rat-L-Trap  
saltwater model



Bill Lewis Lures

tougher to turn it down when we catch a whiff of it. A redfish might be content to let dozens of shrimp swim past, but the scent of one may be just enough to push him into biting.

## REACTION STRIKES

When it's scalding hot and the fish aren't in the mood to eat, drawing reaction strikes is often your best bet. Spinnerbaits are great at drawing such strikes. They can be worked at any speed and any depth. Predatory fish like specks and redfish often devour these lures, even when they're not actively feeding. Noisy lures like buzzbaits are also good choices, and lipless crankbaits with BB-filled bodies, like Rat-L-Traps, are also good bets.

## MOVING WATER

This should go without saying any time of the year for inshore

anglers, but fishing when the tide is moving is better than fishing a slack tide. That's especially true during hot weather. The slackest part of the tide cycle is when the water feels the hottest. The moving tide often triggers feeding activity for inshore fish, no matter the weather, but it can be especially true in August. The moving water is slightly cooler, and that slight cool-down is a big factor in getting fish to feed.

## WRAPPING IT UP

Finding the coolest water around is an important step in finding feeding fish. The shade of docks, trees and bridges often offers enough of a heat break from the rest of the water to put fish in the mood to eat. Incoming water from smaller creeks can also help trigger bites. Relatively deep holes in otherwise shallow water can be good as well.

Staying late, just like starting early, is another good strategy. As the sun begins to set, the heat of the day begins to let up. The fish also realize they're running short on light, and this usually triggers a burst of feeding.

Finally, breaking all of these rules, especially early in the morning, can put fish in your boat, often quickly during the heat of summer. Cast a big, topwater lure at sunrise, and you may lure a fish into thinking he's got an easy meal that will be all he needs for the day. Reeling any lure with great speed can trigger a fish's sense of urgency to attack it before it gets away. ■

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## LET'S GATHER AT THE RIVER

LOOKING FOR BASS IN THE RIVER SECTION OF A LAKE CAN BEAT AUGUST HEAT

**A**ugust can certainly be a challenge for bass fishermen on most of our lakes in the Carolinas, at least during the daytime. I do a lot of night-fishing in August, but another way I make the most of my fishing opportunities is to go as far upstream in a lake as I can, even to the tailrace below the next dam.

I grew up on Lake Murray, which is fed by the Big Saluda River, and on the right day, with a jet-drive boat, you can get all the way to the base of Greenwood Dam. Most people don't have a jet-drive that can run in a couple of inches of water, but I still like to go as far upstream as I can — and you can do the same thing in a lot of lakes. At Lake Marion, you can go up the Congaree or Wateree rivers; at Lake Hartwell you can go up the Tugaloo and Seneca; at Lake Gaston you can go almost all the way up the Roanoke River to Kerr Dam; at Lake Norman, you can get to the tailrace below Lookout Shoals Dam.

You go upstream for two main reasons: to get away from the majority of your recreational boat traffic, and because the

water will be cooler. You'll never get away from all of the boat traffic; typically, you won't have the whole place to yourself, but you can get away. And like fishing at night, the water temperature will be slightly lower from that cooler water that's coming through the dam, off the bottom of the lake that's upstream. A lot of times, the fishing will be much better.

### TACKLE TO TAKE

When I head out, I'll take the kind of tackle I need to catch shellcrackers or redbreasts. I love to take an ultralight spinning outfit loaded with 4- to 6-pound test line, and I'll take my bass tackle. Unless I go up after we've had a big storm, I'll know the water is going to be clear, again, because of the water coming off the bottom of the other lake. There is a variety of lures you can use in clear water, and I love to throw topwater baits in clear water, so I'll pack some Rapala Cover Raps and 5-inch Senkos.

You'll often have a lot of overhanging branches along the banks that will provide shade, and that will mean cooler water. Typically, there are rocks — even

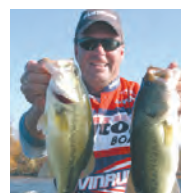
up the rivers upstream from Santee Cooper where you normally wouldn't find a lot of rocks. When you're in a river, there are lots of rocks.

If you're fishing a lake that has spotted bass, you'll catch a lot of spotted bass up in the river section, because they love that cooler, running water.

A couple of things to keep in mind. I like to go as far upriver as my equipment will allow me to safely go. If I can get to the tailrace below the dam, I'll go that far, but if I can't, I'll be satisfied with getting up as far as I can. A good rule is, if you've got to take it easy, you've gone far enough.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Here's what I look for when I'm fishing the upriver portion of a lake. I look for current breaks of all sorts, and the eddies



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The upper, river section of a lake, right up almost to the tailrace below the next dam, can provide some angling relief from August's heat.



that form around them. Keep your eyes open; you might find an eddy behind a rock, a boulder, a lot of a tree. You generally have deeper water on the outside bends of a river, and you usually have that shade.

When you find an eddy or what mountain trout fishermen like to call a current seam — a place where a current of one speed bumps up against a current of another speed, or no speed — fish will sit right in the seam. You have to make good casts, because two inches on one side of the seam is slower water, and two inches on the other side is faster water.

You can see these places, if you keep your eyes open and recognize them. Otherwise, you can visualize them. You can figure out where the water is going to bounce away from a log or stump or rock.

## CASTING DIRECTIONS

I like to put the bow of my Phoenix bass boat into the current and make casts about  $\frac{3}{4}$  upcurrent most of the time. You don't want to cast downcurrent, and you don't want to

cast where you're retrieving your bait across the current. So I make a lot of upcurrent and  $\frac{3}{4}$  upcurrent casts. That way, my bait will look more natural moving with the current.

When I'm fishing the little Rapala Cover Pop, I'm going to be fishing it on 15-pound braid, with a 10- to 12-pound monofilament leader, on a 6-foot-6, medium-action 13 Fishing baitcasting rod and a Concept 82 reel. I'll use the same tackle when I fish the Senko Texas-rigged.

You will usually catch real good numbers of fish when you're fishing well up a river. You can catch big fish, too. Jay Yelas won the 2002 Bassmaster Classic on Lay Lake in Alabama, fishing way up toward Lake Logan Martin Dam, fishing just the way I've described. I won a BASS tournament on Pickwick Lake one time, right in the tailrace below Wilson Dam.

So give this part of the lake, which a lot of fishermen rarely see, a good effort. You'll be pleasantly surprised with the kind of fish you can catch, and if it gets too hot, you can usually jump over the side and cool off.

I probably won't do any back flips, however. ■



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2021 BEST DAYS		POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
Sun 1						52
Mon 2						48
Tue 3						48
Wed 4						49
Thu 5						60
Fri 6						71
Sat 7						81

Sun 8						85
Mon 9						74
Tue 10						61
Wed 11						48
Thu 12						41
Fri 13						39
Sat 14						42

Sun 15						51
Mon 16						40
Tue 17						35
Wed 18						33
Thu 19						42
Fri 20						52
Sat 21						61

Sun 22						68
Mon 23						59
Tue 24						51
Wed 25						43
Thu 26						40
Fri 27						40
Sat 28						42

Sun 29						48
Mon 30						60
Tue 31						52

25 50 75

AVERAGE

LUNAR PERIODS			
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED			
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT
12:48 AM	6:08 am - 9:18 am	2:46 PM	6:33 pm - 9:43 pm
1:19 AM	6:47 am - 10:09 am	3:43 PM	7:12 pm - 10:34 pm
1:55 AM	7:29 am - 11:01 am	4:41 PM	7:54 pm - 11:26 pm
2:36 AM	8:15 am - 11:55 am	5:37 PM	8:40 pm - 12:20 am
3:23 AM	9:06 am - 12:46 pm	6:30 PM	9:31 pm - 1:11 am
4:16 AM	9:59 am - 1:39 pm	7:19 PM	10:24 pm - 2:04 am
5:15 AM	10:56 am - 2:28 pm	8:03 PM	11:21 pm - Midnight

6:17 AM	11:53 am - 3:13 pm	8:41 PM	Midnight - 2:53 am
7:22 AM	12:50 pm - 3:56 pm	9:16 PM	12:18 am - 3:38 am
8:27 AM	1:49 pm - 4:35 pm	9:48 PM	1:15 am - 4:21 am
9:32 AM	2:46 pm - 5:12 pm	10:17 PM	2:14 am - 5:00 am
10:37 AM	3:43 pm - 5:49 pm	10:47 PM	3:11 am - 5:37 am
11:43 AM	4:42 pm - 6:28 pm	11:18 PM	4:08 am - 6:14 am
12:51 PM	5:42 pm - 7:08 pm	11:52 PM	5:07 am - 6:53 am

2:00 PM	6:45 pm - 7:53 pm		6:07 am - 7:33 am
3:11 PM	7:48 pm - 8:44 pm	12:31 AM	7:10 am - 8:18 am
4:20 PM	8:52 pm - 9:40 pm	1:16 AM	8:13 am - 9:09 am
5:25 PM	9:54 pm - 10:40 pm	2:09 AM	9:17 am - 10:05 am
6:23 PM	10:54 pm - 11:42 pm	3:10 AM	10:19 am - 11:05 am
7:12 PM	11:47 pm - Midnight	4:16 AM	11:19 am - 12:07 pm
7:53 PM	Midnight - 12:45 am	5:25 AM	12:12 pm - 1:10 pm

8:28 PM	12:32 am - 1:48 am	6:33 AM	12:57 pm - 2:13 pm
8:59 PM	1:14 am - 2:46 am	7:38 AM	1:39 pm - 3:11 pm
9:27 PM	1:52 am - 3:40 am	8:41 AM	2:17 pm - 4:05 pm
9:54 PM	2:26 am - 4:34 am	9:41 AM	2:51 pm - 4:59 pm
10:20 PM	2:58 am - 5:28 am	10:40 AM	3:23 pm - 5:53 pm
10:48 PM	3:32 am - 6:18 am	11:38 AM	3:57 pm - 6:43 pm
11:18 PM	4:06 am - 7:08 am	12:35 PM	4:31 pm - 7:33 pm

11:51 PM	4:44 am - 8:00 am	1:33 PM	5:09 pm - 8:25 pm
	5:23 am - 8:53 am	2:31 PM	5:48 pm - 9:18 pm
12:29 AM	6:08 am - 9:44 am	3:27 PM	6:33 pm - 10:09 pm

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

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## GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Don't wait until just before the season opens to cut grain in dove fields. Get food on the ground early, attract and keep them.



# JUMP-START GRAIN HARVEST, CONDITION DOVES EARLY

Jeff Burleson

GET BIRDS USED TO A LOCAL FOOD SOURCE; THEY WON'T LEAVE THE BUFFET

**L**abor Day and dove season is almost here. Wing-shooters can finally rejoice on a weekend that means a great deal to people all over the nation.

Most dove hunters would never miss an opening day dove hunt in the Carolinas. It's not only an annual tradition but the best opportunity to take a limit with friends and family at the end of summer and the beginning of the fall hunting seasons.

But start planning now. August preparations can make an opening day hunt exceptional.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, mourning doves are considered a migratory species, and while that is accurate, the migrations are less significant than waterfowl and other birds that travel thousands of miles in a year. Typically, doves will migrate regionally, generally less than 500 miles in either direction, if not significantly less. But

on Labor Day weekend, when everybody is sitting in the field trying to take their limit of birds, those doves haven't migrated anywhere. Doves in fields on Labor Day weekend were likely in the area all summer and haven't migrated in from Canada — or even Virginia.

## HOMEBODIES

However, doves will make regional, opportunistic migrations as a result of a debuting food source that offers easy feeding. Doves are suckers for a prime feeding opportunity without any hunting or predation pressures. It will not be until later in the year that doves migrate any significant distance from their summer lairs. Some may not migrate at all and will stick around in the Carolinas as long as resources remain available.

Again, doves will quickly make opportunistic moves to a local food source. That poses a perfect opportunity for hunters with Labor Day around the

corner. They will gravitate to any cut grain field like corn, sunflowers, millet, milo or any other small grain. In August and September, the best dove shoots are generally in areas with very little cut grain. The few fields that are cut seem to suck up all of the doves in the area like an electromagnet. Hunters can magnetize their grain fields by encouraging the doves in an area to eat early in a safe, unpressured environment.

## GRAIN COMPETITION

It may seem difficult to compete when farmers begin to cut hundreds of acres of corn, because it's difficult to compete with large fields of grain availability.



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

That's exactly why hunters and landowners need to get a jump-start in August by making food available early to draw doves in by the thousands. As long as doves have plenty of food to eat without any hunting pressure, they will remain in fields until the opening day bloodbath, no matter how many cut fields show up on the horizon. Some doves will take advantage of these newly cut cornfields in late August when they are near roosting sites, but they can be conditioned to feed in a nearby place as long as food is available and pressure nonexistent.

## MOWING STRIPS

For the best results, hunters and land managers should mow strips, a few at a time, throughout their mature grain fields in early August. All of the standing grain shouldn't be mowed initially. There should be enough food remaining to last through the end of the first segment of dove season.

For a good start, 25% of rows could be mowed initially, and then another 25% a few weeks later. Or, half the rows could be mowed in early August to prevent removing too much of the crop at once. Bottom line, enough food needs to be made available in the beginning to draw the birds in without letting the food be completely consumed, because doves will certainly leave in a hurry if the food becomes decimated.

But the earlier the better in this scenario. Doves need time to find the food to begin the conditioning process and then have a steady supply until it's time to fire the first shot.

Conditioning birds to hunters' fields is an ideal way to have a great opening day and opening week of hunts. But hunters must start in early August to get the birds conditioned to eating like kings. ■



Opening day doves identify food sources well before Labor Day arrives.

Jeff Burleson



Jeff Burleson

Post-harvest watermelons left in fields will rot, explode and provide tasty seeds for doves.

## WATERMELON FIELDS CAN BE DOVE HOTSPOTS?

A typical dove hunt brings fortunate hunters to freshly cut corn, millet, milo or sunflower fields. Watermelon fields are rarely identified as a prime place to shoot a limit during the upcoming season, but they can be secret hotspots for doves in the Carolinas.

Watermelon fields are typically in sandy areas with relatively clean ground; those are the preferred table conditions for doves, which are a little particular about the condition of the ground. They like clean ground, and an exposed, clean soil surface is preferred.

Prime time to hunt for watermelon fields for doves is when the majority of the melons have been removed. In the Carolinas, the harvest season typically begins in July and will continue into August, depending on when the seeds were planted. But by August and September, watermelons have nearly all been harvested, with some rotten ones left behind.

Rotten or damaged melons are prime dove fare. Melons left behind by harvesters begin to rot, exposing tender, tasty seeds loaded with fat, carbohydrates and a long list of nutrients. Both seeded and seedless watermelons are great options, because seedless watermelons aren't really seedless; the seeds are just small. Cantaloupes and other types of melons also have seeds that can be treats for mourning doves. Doves will gobble these seeds up at first opportunity, and these fields can be incredible places to shoot a limit of doves in a hurry. ■

## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver



## GRILLED PESTO FLOUNDER

WITH BOW TIES, VEGGIES

Flounder is a mild-tasting saltwater fish that is a favorite of many, although most often fried. This recipe pushes that envelope. INSET: Two ways to serve: whole fillets on a bed of pasta or cut fillets into pieces and mix with pasta and veggies.

Jerry Dilsaver

**A**ugust is a pivotal month, a turning point, if you will, for sportsmen in the Carolinas. It is arguably the hottest month; however, it is the month when some outdoorsmen return to hunting and many more are getting ready to return. Fishing is about to pick up again, and sportsmen will have to choose between their rods and guns (or bows).

Flounder are usually one of the highlights in August and will remain so for Palmetto State fishermen. However, fishermen in the Tarheel State will have to wait until Sept. 1 to catch flounder. Maybe they'll purchase some from their favorite fishmonger and practice once so they have this recipe down pat when the season opens.

This is a different way to prepare flounder. The easiest way, which is very popular, is to reduce the flounder to fillets and introduce them to your favorite breeder and a pan of hot grease. I agree that's good, but so is this recipe, and it's a lot cooler to prepare and a different way to eat your favorite flatfish.

If you have good shade on a deck or patio, this is a good meal

to enjoy there. I have a small grill and prepare the pasta inside, while cooking the flounder and vegetables separately. Folks who have a larger grill — especially one with a side burner — can fix everything outside; I believe that's the best way to enjoy it. When cooking outside, there are always tales to be told, and it's perfectly correct to be sipping on a cold beverage, even those made for adults only.

This is a tasty, simple recipe for preparing flounder other than frying it. I like pasta and pesto, so it's a natural at our house. This is a simple recipe and is a bit healthier than frying. Give this one a try. I believe you'll eat it again.

Catching the guest of honor is a fun part of this recipe. This dish was planned for August, as flounder are readily available in creeks, bays, rivers and the ocean and the seasons were to be open in both Carolinas. Apologies to the Tar Heel fishermen, but soon you'll also be able to slip a finger mullet over the side and invite the flounder that eats it home for dinner. ■

# GRILLED PESTO FLOUNDER

I'll admit I'm not a big fan of eating flounder; however, I catch them often while fishing for other species, particularly red drum, and when they're in season and I hook one deeply, I'll take one home and eat it. Many folks fry flounder; I don't eat much fried fish but typically bake, broil or grill and dose them up with pepper and other seasonings.

I also like pasta, and one night while eating some with a pesto sauce, I decided pesto would be good on fish. One of my basic beliefs is that if two things taste good separately, there is a reasonable expectation for them to taste good together. I tried this on a flounder, and it was good. The next step was to try it with pasta, and it scored again. Now, we occasionally have grilled flounder, seasoned with pesto and served on or with pasta.

We also like to roast cut up vegetables; they — and almost everything — taste better cooked on the grill. They take a while to cook, and if you have a large, double-burner grill, start them on one side and add the flounder fillets on the other side with a few minutes to go. I have a small grill, and rather than let the veggies cool while cooking the fish, I often cook them in the inside oven. If you have a grill with a hot side burner, cook the pasta on it to keep everything outside.

I've tried this with several types of pasta and like it best with bow ties. They taste good and don't roll around in

your plate when you're trying to cut a piece of fish. They also gather pesto on both sides and add to the flavor. If you prefer less pesto flavor, use a round pasta.

I cook a whole, 12-ounce box of pasta, knowing I'll only use about  $\frac{2}{3}$  for four servings. This way, I have pasta in the fridge and ready to go for a snack or part of another meal.

Pesto is salty. I don't add any salt except a little when cooking the pasta as suggested by most pasta companies. I add coarse ground pepper, but I like pepper. Remember, you can add more salt and pepper to taste by individual servings, but if you cook using it, everyone gets the flavor.

I realize this is an unusual way to prepare flounder, but we like it a little more every time we do it. It's a nice change and I believe you'll like it too. Enjoy! ■

## INGREDIENTS:

3 or 4 flounder fillets

$\frac{1}{2}$  medium sweet onion

1-2 zucchini squash

1-2 yellow squash

$\frac{1}{2}$  package (15 to 20) cherry tomatoes

1 tub (7 ounces) basil pesto

1 box (12 ounces) bowtie pasta

1 tbsp Olive oil

Salt and pepper

Buttery flavor non-stick cooking spray

Aluminum foil

## PREPARATION:

Slice the squash and onion.

For vegetables on grill, preheat the grill to medium, spray a vegetable tray with non-stick cooking spray, spread the vegetables on the tray. Drizzle the olive oil on the vegetables. Season the vegetables with salt and pepper to taste. Cook at medium heat until done — about 30 minutes.

For vegetables in an oven, preheat the oven to 400. Cover a cookie sheet with aluminum foil and spray the foil with non-stick cooking spray. Spread the vegetables on the foil. Drizzle the olive oil on the vegetables. Season the vegetables with salt and pepper to taste. Cook at until done — about 35 minutes.

Cook and drain the pasta according to its directions. Spray a fish or vegetable tray with non-stick cooking spray. Lay the flounder fillets on the tray. Spread a rounded teaspoon of pesto on each fillet. Cook the fillets on the grill until they flake easily — 6 to 10 minutes depending on thickness. Be careful not to overcook the fish. Mix the remaining pesto well with the pasta.

This serves well two ways.

Cut the flounder fillets into pieces and mix each fillet with a cup of pasta and  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup of vegetables. Use a cup of pasta to make a bed on a plate and lay a fillet on top, then add a serving of vegetables on the side.

While it may seem there are many steps, this is a simple preparation that is a different way to enjoy the mild flavor of flounder. With a larger grill that includes a side burner, it can



Jerry Dilsaver

be totally prepared outside and served on the deck or patio to enjoy a cooler, late-summer evening. Even when cooking the vegetables and pasta inside, cooking the fish on the grill is also a great reason to eat outside.

For those who would like a little more, a green salad or lettuce wedge is a great addition. Dessert should be light too, like pudding or flan. ■



**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](mailto:captainjerry@captainjerry.com).

## STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano



Sammy Romano

# PROCESS, NOT RESULTS

ARCHERY COACH SWITCHES SHOOTERS' FOCUS FROM THE ACTUAL SHOT TO THE SETUP THAT PRECEDES IT

**A**s archers, we strive to become better at our sport, always seeking that perfect round where we shoot nothing but bull's-eyes.

We tune our equipment to the best of our ability, then spend countless hours at the range practicing, but with the added pressure of a big buck standing in front of us or standing at the line in

a tournament, we often fall short of our expectations.

As human beings, we rarely look to ourselves as the cause of these shortcomings, instead, blaming our equipment or making other excuses. In reality, it is often small defects in our form that lead to much bigger problems on the target.

One man who understands this better than almost anyone is Rod Jenkins. He

has won the IBO World Championship three times: once with a compound bow and twice with traditional bows, making him the only person ever to win in both categories. Additionally, he has won 14 national archery championships, a national service rifle championship and is a national pistol champion as well. He is prominently featured on the *Masters of the Bare Bow* instructional DVD series. This man can shoot, and he knows what it takes to win.

Several years ago, Jenkins retired from competition to focus his energy entirely on coaching other archers. Not only is he a great shot, but he is exceptionally

gifted in his ability to transfer his knowledge of the sport to other archers, having coached 17 world champions.

I was fortunate to attend one of his recent clinics, and he fundamentally changed my approach to the sport.

Jenkins was quick to point out that "Archery is perhaps the only sport in the world where participants constantly scrimmage, but never practice."

## DON'T SCRIMMAGE!

He likened this to a football team that never did drills, and instead, only scrimmaged. Without the solid foundation provided by doing drills to establish and reinforce the most-basic skills, it is virtually impossible to succeed when you hit the field for a real game. Much in the same way, increased mental pressure for an archer who hasn't drilled the basics of proper form often causes the shot process to break down, leading to misses and poor performance.

In Jenkins' mind there are only two types of shots: "perfect arrows" and "less thans." Nothing less than a perfect arrow



Rod Jenkins gives a shooter tips at an indoor archery range as part of a clinic, one of many the 14-time national champion puts on annually.



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](mailto:samboka31@aol.com).

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Rod Jenkins lectures a class of archers on the process that goes into making accurate shots, time and time again.

will do. He explained that most archers mistakenly measure their success based on where their arrow impacts the target. Instead, the true measure of success is a perfectly executed shot with the perfect shot process. Once an archer wraps their head around this concept and focuses on the process itself, he or she becomes very difficult to beat, because the focus on the process reduces the mental pressures associated with a critical shot. This process is reinforced through a series of drills where each component of the shot process is broken down and drilled separately. These drills include stance, grip, anchor point, expansion and several others.

Now the archer begins to put in the work, doing 21 days of drills. By doing these individual drills on a blank bale at point-blank range, the archer learns the proper shot process. After 21 days, the archer's mind begins to assimilate these individual shot components into one, solid shot process. Aiming is then reintroduced to the shot process through a bridge method.

## IT'S THE PROCESS

With the archer's mind thus retrained to emphasize shot process over results, mental pressure is lowered in the heat of the moment due to increased focus on proper process, leading to more accuracy and consistency.

All of this is assuming, of course, that the archer is drilling with proper form, and this is where an archery coach comes in. A good coach ensures proper form and alignment is followed, giving the archer the tools he or she needs to be successful.

If you are drilling improper form, you are only practicing to fail. The money spent on a good coach will more than pay for itself in time saved and results. I can't say enough about Jenkins' coaching and how much it has helped me, as well as my customers.

Jenkins does shooting clinics all over the world — for traditional archery, compound bows or a mixture of both. For those who prefer online learning, check out *Roots on Push* archery, featuring Jenkins and Jimmy Blackmon who offer this online learning program. I encourage every serious archer to focus on the basics and spend some time with an archery coach to better their shooting. ■

*Rod Jenkins can be contacted via e-mail at [rodjenkinsarchery@gmail.com](mailto:rodjenkinsarchery@gmail.com).*



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# Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

Capt. Brian Vaughn poses with a jack crevalle, one of his favorite fish to pursue during the hot months.

## A PAIR OF JACKS? ONE IS ENOUGH

### Powerful fish swarm Hilton Head's inshore waters in August

**A**ugust's hot weather puts the lockjaw on many fish along the Carolina shorelines, but one that gets little fanfare, the jack crevalle, chomps its way through hot weather. One of the best places to catch them this month is South Carolina's Hilton Head Island.

Capt. Brian Vaughn of Off the Hook Fishing Charters really enjoys catching and putting his clients on these fish. He said their bite is unparalleled for their size.

"Pound for pound, jack crevalle are the strongest species of fish that swim in our waters," said Vaughn (843-298-4376), who specializes in catching these fish with fly rods. He's an IGFA world-record holder for the species, having caught

a 35-pound jack in 2018 to set the 8-pound tippet record.

These fish are plentiful in the Hilton Head area from June through September, and these aren't small fish. Be prepared for a long battle when you hook a jack crevalle

"This is a great summer fishery for jacks. The pods around here will number from a few fish to hundreds. These fish average about 20 pounds, but some are bigger than 30 pounds," Vaughn said.

When using fly-fishing tackle, he suggests a 10- or 11-weight, fast-action rod paired with a large-arbor reel. And, he said, anglers need plenty of backing.

"You need about 200 yards of backing, because when you hook one of these fish, they will for sure get you well into

your backing. I prefer a 9-foot leader with a short piece of bite tippet of 40 to 50 pounds," he said.

Popping bugs are great choices and will draw impressive topwater bites. And once anglers draw a strike from one of these fish, they need to be prepared for a true battle.

"These fish are extremely fast, extremely powerful. A 30-minute battle is normal, and some fights can last hours," he said.

For those wishing to use conventional tackle, Vaughn said that's no problem. Spinning reels in 4500 to 6500 sizes are great, and stout rods are necessary. Large poppers draw plenty of aggressive strikes from these fish. ■

# AUGUST FLIPPING AT 'NEW' HIGH ROCK

## Offshore bass bite long gone on NC reservoir

**W**hen sizzling August temperatures bake High Rock Lake's serene waters, bass pro Robert Walser of Lexington, N.C., fishes shallow, knowing that the lake is no longer the deep, offshore structure haven it once was.

Even since Cube Hydro Carolinas took over ownership and management of the lake from Alcoa, the deep bite has been short-lived at High Rock, despite scorching water temperatures. Local anglers attribute the change to reduced water flow, poorly oxygenated water and steady water levels.

Indeed, the yo-yo of the Yadkin is no more. High Rock has become a shallow-water, pier fishing-lake, even during the dog days of summer.

A flipping fanatic, Walser loves the transformation. He fishes in less than 5 feet of water throughout August, targeting piers, laydowns, rails, rocks and washed-in logs.

"I don't like fishing deep," he said.

Occasionally, Walser fishes shallow-running crankbaits and topwater lures, but he catches most of his fish by relentlessly flipping shallow piers and docks with Zoom Z-Craw Jr. and Baby Brush Hog plastics. His gear consists of an 8-foot, Lamiglas flipping stick paired with a Pflueger Supreme reel filled with 20-pound Berkley fluorocarbon. He Texas-rigs his baits with 5/16-ounce tungsten weights.

"The rod is out-of-production, but I have it special-made, though I have to order a bunch of them," Walser said. "I once used custom-made 9-foot rods until I started fishing BASS, which restricts rod lengths to 8 feet. I prefer fluorocarbon line over braid because braid has a tendency to snag in wood."

Walser chooses his plastics based upon the mood of the fish.

"I like the Z-Craw with its wild tail action for aggressive bass, and the subtle Baby Brush Hog for finicky bass," said Walser. "My color choices include green pumpkin or black/blue."

Early in the month, Walser flips deeper piers; late in the month, he attacks piers on flats. He contends the water is never too shallow to catch fish at High Rock.

"I've caught fish from piers in water so shallow my trolling motor would kick up mud as I moved along," he said. "It's not unusual for me to get bites at the pier poles or dock structures closest to the bank."

Walser fishes piers in the upper end of the lake and the river section if High Rock is being pulled; otherwise, he'll fish piers in Abbotts, Crane, Second, Swearing and Flat Swamp creeks, harboring no favorites.

"My only problem is getting under the bridges to fish the piers in Abbotts and Flat Swamp with high-water conditions," he said.

Despite his penchant for flipping piers, Walser cautions fishermen not to overlook the morning topwater bite, especially on cloudy days.

"With poor water quality, the fish begin looking up," Walser said.

"There can be a topwater bite for about 90 minutes in the morning with Splash It or prop-type lures." ■

High Rock Lake is no longer a cranking paradise; bass pro Robert Walser said fish are shallow year-round — even in August.



Tony Garitta

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Jeff Onley

## HOT WEATHER, HOT WHITE PERCH

### Rivers that feed Albemarle Sound fill up with hungry panfish in August

White perch flock to the cypress knees along banks of Albemarle Sound tributaries in August.

**W**hen August arrives and the dog days of summer set in, finding a willing and able fishery can be a challenge, but guide Jeff Onley of Hertford, N.C., said that anglers can look no further than the tributaries of North Carolina's Albemarle Sound, where hungry white perch will be putting up quite a fight on light tackle and quite a meal on the table.

"I'll be fishing the shoreline in the rivers and creeks in August," said Onley (252-333-6524), who runs Albemarle Fishing Charters. "The mouths of the rivers at the sound will be good, as well as the mouths of the creeks and the cypress swamps coming into the rivers. Cypress knees, stumps and man-made docks will be the main forms of structure I will be looking for."

Three of Onley's favorite rivers will be the North, Little, and Perquimans, but most of the sound's tributaries will see their fair share of action. Onley admits that perch are catchable on structure in the sound itself as well, but the protection of the rivers make them fishable in most any wind condition.

Luckily, the main form of structure that Onley targets for perch production will be easy to find and readily visible, as most of the shorelines are abundant with cypress knees. His plan of attack consists mostly of chunking and winding, putting baits right up against the shoreline in 1 to 1½ feet of water and making a straight retrieve. Most fish will be caught between the shoreline and 2 to 3 feet of water.

"I'll be casting an ⅛-ounce Johnson Beetle Spin in white, orange, or green, or an Uncle Jesse's Lure, which is made by

Morris Bait and Tackle. It's an all-silver, double-bladed, spinner-bait," Onley said. "I like to tip both of those with a tidbit of shrimp. A ⅛-ounce Rat-L-Trap in blue back and silver works really well. It gets hung up more, but it does work."

Onley puts up some pretty impressive numbers, even on a half-day charter. Triple-digit catches of white perch are a real possibility, and any catch under 40 is an extreme rarity.

But that's not all. Yellow perch, largemouth bass and even red-fish will be mixed in to keep things interesting.

Onley keeps his tackle simple and effective, using 5-foot-6 ultra-light spinning outfits spooled with 20-pound Power Pro braid, which has the diameter of 6-pound mono. It ensures that anglers can feel the fight as well as pull lures free from snags without breaking off. Leaders are unnecessary in the stained water. ■

**GOT PICS?** Send 'em in!

Email images to: [images@CarolinaSportsman.com](mailto:images@CarolinaSportsman.com)

All images will be considered, but those taken on the water or in the woods will have the best chance of being featured.

\*Digital images must be sent in jpeg format. High-resolution images (taken on your camera's highest setting) will work the best. All images (physical and digital) become property of Carolina Sportsman and cannot be returned.

Tim Wallace (right) caught and released this 84-inch tarpon from Oak Island Pier on June 8.

# CAPE FEAR TARPON ARRIVED EARLY

## Summer visitors are in full force by August

**T** By Jerry Dilaver  
he waters around Cape Fear have several species of fish considered more southern that visit each summer. Tarpon are the most-highly sought-after, and they are incidental catches, also. The number of tarpon fishermen grows every year due to both planned and unplanned encounters.

The Cape Fear River is the only large North Carolina river that flows directly into the ocean, and it carries an abundance of bait-fish through its lower reaches into the Atlantic just west of the cape. Tarpon are one of several species that gather to gorge on the bait flowing out the river. They used to be considered only a hot-weather visitor, and catches usually peak during August and September but range from May into October. During the summer, tarpon are caught in the ocean, and they venture into the lower Cape Fear River on flood tides.

Many tarpon encounters are incidental rather than planned. The big fish grab live baits slow-trolled for king mackerel from boats and dangled from the ends of piers. The small treble hooks common on those rigs don't always hold long enough to subdue a tarpon, but if they manage to hold for a few jumps, a new tarpon angler may be born.

Area tarpon fishermen consider the sloughs that cross Frying Pan Shoals the most-consistent location for ocean tarpon. However, they range up and down the beach following bait schools. Jot Owens of Jot It Down Charters in Wrightsville Beach (910-233-4139) caught and released the first North Carolina tarpon in 2021 near Masonboro Inlet on May 24, and it was followed two weeks later by Tim Wallace's catch and release on June 8 at Oak Island Pier. Tarpon were on the beaches early this year and may begin moving into the river earlier than their typical July full moon.

Incidental tarpon catches are primarily by king mackerel fishermen using live baits on a king mackerel rig with treble hooks. Tarpon fishermen also use live baits, but they generally suspend the baits under a balloon or float using a J-hook or circle hook and occasionally on the bottom on a heavy-duty Carolina rig or Owen Lupton rig. Chunks of mullet and menhaden are the primary baits for the bottom rigs.

Jon Huff of Circle H Charters in Wrightsville Beach (910-617-2619) is recognized as the first guide to score a fly-fishing tarpon release in the lower Cape Fear River in 2015. Huff said visibility is limited, and you must stay alert to spot them, but there are Cape Fear tarpon willing to take a fly. Huff concentrates on the channels and bars around the marsh and spoil islands.

Tarpon may not be possessed in North Carolina and may not be gaffed or speared as an aid to catching them. ■



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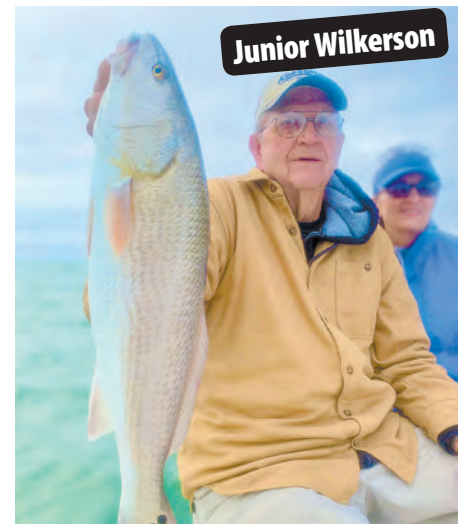
**Mitch Burgin**

Mitch Burgin caught this 3.65-pound spotted bass from North Carolina's Lake Norman this past March.



**Terry Camp**

Terry Camp caught this 39-inch, 30.16-pound striper from Clarks Hill Reservoir on May 9, 2021.



**Junior Wilkerson**

Junior Wilkerson of Hillsborough, N.C., caught this red last October on his final fishing trip, with Capt. Noah Lynk of Harkers Island. He died of pancreatic cancer on Jan. 1.



**Wade Burette**

Wade Burette caught these nice crappie on South Carolina's Lake Hartwell in March. The six biggest weighed 12 pounds.



**Adisyn McPherson**

Adisyn McPherson, 8, of Chadburn, N.C., got her first buck last season, hunting near Whiteville.



**Chad Hewitt**

Chad Hewitt of Farmersville, Ohio, caught this 22-inch rainbow trout, fishing with Matt Evans of The Catawba Angler out of Old Fort, N.C.



**Kaitlyn Lospinoso**

On her first duck-hunting trip, this past Jan. 4, Kaitlyn Lospinoso of Cary, N.C., killed this beautiful drake woody by spot and stalk tactics on the Jordan Game Lands.



**Rob Somich**

Rob Somich of Penrose, N.C., caught this great spotted bass, 21 inches long, from South Carolina's Lake Jocassee on Feb. 28, trolling a Berkley Flicker Minnow from his kayak.



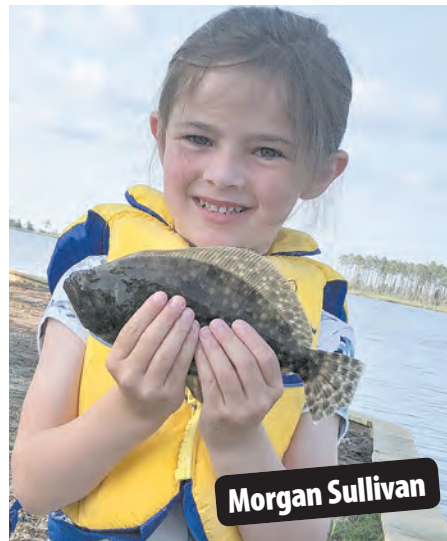
**Doug Pugh**

Doug Pugh of Pittsboro, N.C., caught this flounder in late September 2020, fishing with Yeah Right Charters.



**Lilian Pruitt**

Lilian Pruitt, a freshman at Clemson, killed this 20-pound tom in Laurens County on April 17. Jason Nabors did the calling.



**Morgan Sullivan**

Morgan Sullivan, 5, caught this tiny flounder on Bear Creek near Mesic, N.C., on a soft-plastic Z-Man bait.



**Robert Harris**

Robert Harris caught this nice shad in North Carolina's Tar River near Battle Park this past March.



**James Brooks**

James Brooks from Siler City, N.C., tagged this 21.2-pound Virginia gobbler with 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch spurs this past spring.



**Kent Blackwelder**

Kent Blackwelder (left) killed his best-ever buck, this 8-point, 144-inch trophy, last Dec. 2 in Iredell County, N.C.



**Lule Kuhlkin**

Luke Kuhlkin, 4, caught this castfish, his first fish ever, near his home in Mount Pleasant, S.C.

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