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**BAG-A-BUCK  
CONTEST RETURNS**



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**28**  
**AUTUMN ARSENAL**

**8**  
**NC'S BEST GAME LANDS DEER HUNTS**

*Carolina*  
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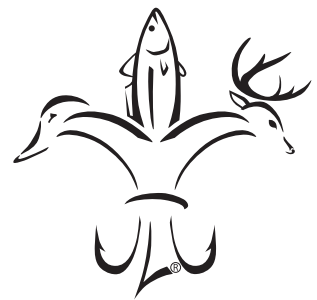
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Deer season arrives in North Carolina this month and really cranks up across South Carolina. Photo by Rick Small.



*Carolina*  
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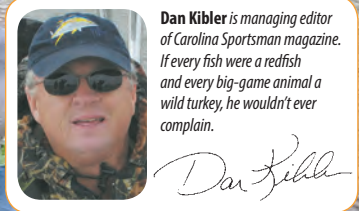


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# Outdoor UPDATE

with  
**Dan Kibler**

Gerald Murray of Hopkins, S.C., entered this buck he took in September 2020 that won the grand prize in Carolina Sportsman's Bag-A-Buck contest.



Dan Kibler is managing editor of *Carolina Sportsman* magazine. If every fish were a redfish and every big-game animal a wild turkey, he wouldn't ever complain.

*Dan Kibler*

## BAG-A-BUCK CONTEST RETURNS

### MONTHLY PRIZES, GRAND PRIZES HIGHLIGHT CONTEST OFFERINGS

**W**ant to see what kind of success deer hunters across the Carolinas are having? Want to take a chance to win some great prizes?

Lodge in Chesterfield, S.C., and a prize package that includes a Millennium M25 Hang-On deer stand.

The rules are simple. Subscribe to *Carolina Sportsman*. Take a photo of yourself with a deer you kill during the 2021-22 season. Upload the photo to the Bag-A-Buck contest link on [www.CarolinaSportsman.com](http://www.CarolinaSportsman.com), and write a short account of your hunt. Include the date and county of the kill, your name and hometown. Feel free to enter any other information that made the hunt interesting or memorable. You can enter multiple times, with multiple deer, as long as they are legal kills

*Carolina Sportsman's* Bag-A-Buck contest returns this year to give you the opportunity to answer both of those questions.

Run through *Carolina Sportsman.com*, the Bag-A-Buck contest gives hunters in the Carolinas the opportunity to post photos of deer they harvest and write short stories about how that success came about. Contest entrants will have two chances to win: four monthly contests for deer taken and entered in August-September, October, November and December, and a grand-prize drawing from among all entrants at the end of the season.



Brett Young killed this massive 9-point buck in North Carolina's Richmond County last season. The buck rough-scored 135 inches.

To be eligible for prizes, entrants must be subscribers to *Carolina Sportsman*.

The monthly contests will offer a 1-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman*, and a prize package that includes a True Flipper Knife. Winners will be drawn at the end of each month. The grand-prize contest, which will be announced online in February and in the March 2022 issue of *Carolina Sportsman*, will offer a 3-year subscription to *Carolina Sportsman*, a 2-man, 2-day combo deer and hog hunt at Cherokee Run Hunting

## Bag-A-Buck Contest underway



Don't forget to post photos of the deer you harvest in *Carolina Sportsman's* Bag-A-Buck Contest to be eligible to win monthly prizes.

To enter or see deer that have been entered, log onto [www.carolinasportsman.com](http://www.carolinasportsman.com) and visit the Bag-A-Buck contest link.

in your state of residence or in the Carolinas.

Gerald Murray of Hopkins, S.C., won the grand prize in last year's Bag-A-Buck contest, entering a trophy buck killed Sept. 5, 2020, on hunt-club land in Richland County, S.C. ■



## ANOTHER RECORD FALLS: NC'S CHANNEL CATFISH

**R**ecords are made to be broken. Apparently, that old adage is really applicable when it comes to catching huge catfish in North Carolina.

Barely a week after North Carolina's state record for blue catfish was broken, the state record for channel catfish followed suit.

Taner Rudolph of Jacksonville, N.C., was fishing with cut bait in the Neuse River on July 18 when he caught a 26-pound channel cat on a Shakespeare rod and reel combination. The big catfish broke a record that was less than a year old: a 23-pound, 5-ounce fish caught by John Stone in a private pond in Moore County.

Rudolph had the fish — which was 38½ inches long and 22¾ in girth — officially weighed at E-Z Bait & Tackle in Goldsboro, where Ben Ricks, a fisheries biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, certified the big fish as a channel cat and the new state record.

Rocky Baker of Four Oaks caught North Carolina's state-record blue catfish from the Roanoke River on July 10. That fish weighed 127 pounds, one ounce, breaking by 5½ pounds the previous record fish from Lake Gaston. ■

## NC OFFERS 2 DEER-HUNTING WEBINARS IN SEPTEMBER

**T**he N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the N.C. Wildlife Federation will offer two free, online, hunting-related webinars this fall.

"Introduction to Deer Hunting" will be held on Sept. 14, and "Practical Deer Processing: From Field to Freezer" will be held on Sept. 16. Both classes will run from 7 to 8 p.m. and are open to anyone interested.

"Both webinars are intended to prepare new and novice hunters for the upcoming white-tailed deer season," said Walter "Deet" James, a Commission staff member. "It's a fantastic educational opportunity for people who may not have access to an existing hunting community of family members and friends.

"Each (webinar) will be followed by a 30-minute question-and-answer session

lead by wildlife-education specialists."

Topics of the "Introduction to Deer Hunting" webinar will include whitetail habits and habitat, scouting techniques, essential equipment, tree-stand safety, effective shot placement, tracking techniques and field dressing. Topics of the "Practical Deer Processing: From Field to Freezer" webinar will include field dressing, skinning, safe meat handling and basic home processing.

Pre-registration is required at [ncwildlife.org/sbs](http://ncwildlife.org/sbs). A recording of the presentation will be available to all registrants afterwards. For additional information, contact James at 984-202-1387 or [walter.james@ncwildlife.org](mailto:walter.james@ncwildlife.org). ■

## NEW BOAT LANDING PLANNED FOR LAKE MOULTRIE

**S**outh Carolina's Berkeley County, in partnership with Santee Cooper, announced plans in late July for the Mega Boat Landing Project on Lake Moultrie. The site was previously the Atkins Boat Landing/Lions Beach site at the end of Broughton Road in Moncks Corner.

The project, which covers approximately 14 acres, will be renovated and expanded to include the following improvements:

- Six new boat launch ramps and a dock protected by a new breakwater;
- Event pavilion;
- Walking trail;
- Approximately 180 boat trailer parking spaces;
- Approximately 180 passenger vehicle spaces;
- A Berkeley County Sheriff's Office outpost dock for deputies to respond to lake emergencies.

Santee Cooper will design and permit the project's marine elements, including the docks and breakwater. Berkeley County Engineering will permit the design plans in cooperation with the town of Moncks Corner and S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. Berkeley County will perform all work on the land/parking lot. The proposed site plan for land use went before the Moncks Corner Board of Zoning Appeals on July 6 and was unanimously approved.

Total cost of the project is approximately \$6.5 million and is being funded from a 75% matching grant from the state of South Carolina, along with state water-recreation funds and Berkeley County accommodations fee. Santee Cooper has provided a long-term gratis lease to Berkeley County for the project.

This project is expected to be complete by fall of 2022. ■



Chris Holmes



# NC'S BEST GAME LANDS

# DEER HUNTS

**CHECK OUT THESE  
HALF-DOZEN PUBLIC-  
HUNTING AREAS IF YOU  
DON'T HAVE ACCESS  
TO PRIVATE LAND AND  
YOU LOVE VENISON.**

■ By Craig Holt

Craig Holt

# LAST SEASON,

North Carolina hunters tagged 169,973 whitetails, most of them on private property.

Deer live in a variety of habitats in the Tarheel State: the coastal plain's pocosins and swamps, large farms from the northeast to the southern Piedmont, oak ridges in the northern Piedmont, the Foothills and all sides of the Appalachian mountain ranges. They also haunt suburbs, small towns and the edges of large cities.

With whitetails spread across the state, hunters might be tempted to think public lands aren't needed. That assumption would be wrong.

Last season, hunters tagged 5,642 whitetails on public hunting lands. Although that figure represents only 3.3% of the total harvest, it's important.

Deer live where other wild animals live and are a vital part of public-lands ecosystems. Moreover, half of North Carolina's Game Lands (1.2 million acres) are inside federal properties such as national forests, where the best way to preserve floral habitat is by allowing hunters to control deer numbers.

Another reason Game Lands are good choices is they offer places where, for an inexpensive state permit, hunting is open and not banned by private-property restrictions. Also, whitetails use Game Lands as de facto sanctuaries, especially those near large urban centers. Finally, two game lands, the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests, are so large (500,000 acres each) they appeal to hunters who prefer "back-of-beyond" challenges where competition for venison or trophy racks isn't intense.

Here are profiles of six of North Carolina's top Game Lands for deer. Plan a visit this fall.

## JORDAN GAME LAND

Nearly 2.2 million people live inside the Triangle — Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill — along with whitetails.

With the state's largest human population, you might think the Triangle's Game Lands wouldn't offer decent deer hunting, but that assumption is wrong.

Jordan Game Land encircles a lake of the same name at the Triangle's southern end. With Jordan Lake's 13,940 watery acres at its center, whitetails roam across the remaining 32,828 public acres.

Last season, hunters bagged 332 deer on Jordan, the state's fourth-largest public-lands total.

"Jordan is an interface between the urban-development build-up around the edges of cities," said Chris Baranski, a wildlife biologist with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

"Lots of its boundaries include creeks that feature edge habitat for deer where they move from the Game Land to private land and vice versa. Deer also feed in agricultural fields, then return to (Jordan) for acorns, rest and safety."

Commission work crews maintain food plots for doves and rabbits at Jordan, along with waterfowl impoundments that are designated archery zones.

"We also plant some open land with clover or turnip patches," Baranski said.

Jordan has 10 archery zones for hunters, including seven around waterfowl impoundments along the lake's northern end near Chapel Hill and three near Old Chapel Hill Road, Herndon and Panther creeks.

## BUTNER-FALLS GAME LAND >



Weed fields are good places to seek mature bucks looking for does during mating season.

Craig Holt

## BUTNER-FALLS GAME LAND

With similar habitat and close to the same sizes, Butner-Falls of the Neuse and Jordan Game Lands are peas in a pod, with just 20 miles separating the two public lands in the northern Piedmont.

Both have lakes of similar sizes at their centers, surrounded by oak ridges, pine forests, thickets and enough private agricultural land to provide forage for whitetails. Butner-Falls hunters bagged 375 whitetails in 2020-21, second best among state public lands.

Butner-Falls runs northwest-to-southeast, following the contours of the 12,000-acre lake — the upper-third open, the rest riverine, snaking from north of Durham to northwest of Raleigh. The Game Land covers 28,670 acres, with farms and rapidly growing developments encroaching on its borders.

“Butner-Falls has more fields (than Jordan) at its upper end,” Baranski said. “As you go farther down the lake, it’s got miles of woods boundary.”

Archery and firearms deer hunters often use boats to reach hardwood ridges around Falls Lake, but access is limited to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers land — the Commission manages the Game Land’s wildlife, while the Corps owns the property — and private land creates another barrier.

“Some parts of the Game Land are only a couple hundred yards deep (around the lake),” Baranski said, “and private property runs right up to Corps land.”

Hunters who scout Butner-Falls have the best chance to punch a big-game tag. Boat-ramp parking lots are favorite access areas for scouting and hunting sessions.

## CROATAN NATIONAL FOREST

Hunters who chase deer at Croatan National Forest find totally different habitats and hunting experiences than at public lands in the Piedmont and mountains.

At 162,220 acres, the national forest lies between the Neuse River and Bogue Sound and sprawls across Carteret, Craven and Jones counties.

Croatan is the state’s third-largest public-use property. It gave

up 386 whitetails last season, ranking No. 1 among medium to large Game Lands.

“Croatan has lots of roads, probably the reason harvests keep growing, because it has good dog-hunting access,” said Richie Clark, a Commission biologist. “Besides civilians, it gets hunters from Camp LeJeune (Marine Base) and Cherry Point (Naval Air Station).”

“Its habitat is pocosins, hardwood regions, creeks and drainages, so it has lots of forage for deer. Deer also use food plots. We manage Catfish Lake waterfowl impoundment, a good place to deer hunt before it’s flooded. We flood the lake about the time muzzleloader season ends. Deer eat smartweed planted for waterfowl.”

No special permits are required for hunting Croatan, and deer seasons follow the Commission’s Southeastern zone regulations. Hunters must wear blaze orange, including archers.

“It’s a wide-open game land, and dog- and still-hunting is permitted the entire gun season,” Clark said. “Legal weapons include archery, muzzleloaders, rifles and shotguns.”

Hunters should carry a compass, because getting lost in such a large region is a possibility, and cell-phone signals can be problematic.

Early in the season, heat, biting flies and mosquitoes can make life tough, along with poisonous snakes.

## NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST/ MACON COUNTY

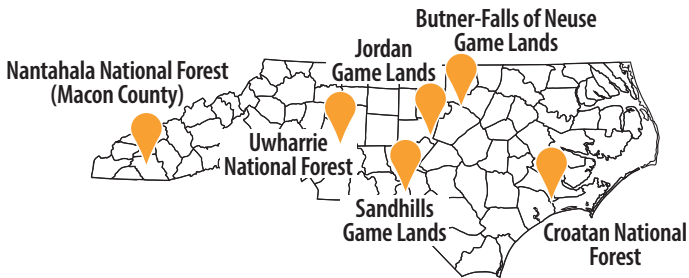
Although hunters dragged 606 deer out of the Nantahala National Forest last season, this area of the southwestern North Carolina mountains is so vast (526,870 acres), only one county stands out as a best spot.

Macon County’s portion (153,121 acres) yielded 201 whitetails, about one-third of the harvest for the entire national forest, which is spread across six counties.

“I’d say the best explanation is habitat,” said David Stewart, a Commission biologist who helps manage the Nantahala and Pisgah national forests’ combined 1,046,720 acres.

Craig Holt





Stewart said Mike Wilkins, a retired U.S. Forest Service ranger for the Cheoh, Tusquitee and Nantahala areas, is probably the other best explanation.

“He did as much active management as he could,” Stewart said. “He stayed on schedule with projects that produced habitat improvements, including controlled burns, and he cut a little timber. Macon County has more wildlife openings than any (federal land) in the mountains, which greatly benefits wildlife.”

Wilkins’ work crews created 350 acres of wildlife openings, including planted (linear) road openings, during his 29 years on the job.

Stewart said Macon County hunters who want to target trophy bucks must put in their time and effort to scout, walking miles to find deer sign near maintained trails.

“Those hunters don’t advertise their spots, but they kill some big bucks,” Stewart said. “I’d say edges of planted and maintained openings often draw deer and are better places to hunt.”

Stewart recommended hunters who plan to hunt mountain lands study maps available at [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) or check National Forest Service web sites.

“Mountain (Game Lands) are so big, hiking maps and county GIS maps can help,” he said. “Hunters on the ground often use Avenza and onXmaps. You’ll have to pay for some map downloads — or if you want to upgrade — but the onXmaps base program is free. If you’ve got a map App on an IOS, Android smartphone or tablet, you can open the program, and a blue dot on the screen will show your exact location.”

**UWHARRIE NATIONAL FOREST >**



Game-lands deer hunters often can find plenty of venison to put in the freezer.



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## UWHARRIE NATIONAL FOREST

At 52,352 acres, Uwharrie is the state's fourth-largest national forest and a top deer region since the 1950s.

Hunters tagged 352 whitetails last season, No. 4 behind three much-larger national forests.

With sections scattered across Davidson, Montgomery and Randolph counties, Uwharrie's Burkhead Mountains terrain resembles Jordan and Butner-Falls — except with steeper hills.

"The geographic range is huge, with longleaf pine habitat near the Sandhills in the south to flood-plain forests, hardwood bottoms and hickory and oak ridges," said Brady Beck, a Commission biologist. "Access is good, with many roads."

Beck's work crews annually plant food plots of millet, wheat and corn.

"The wildlife openings go through rotations, and some may be fallow or mowed," he said. "But some have small grains for birds or native warm-season grasses for small game, and some (are) in corn. Most plots are 1/3- to 1/2-acre in closed-canopy forests."

"Hunters annually shoot some big bucks at Uwharrie."

The Game Land draws hunters from Charlotte to Fayetteville, Winston-Salem and Greensboro. Camping is allowed in designated areas.

"This Game Land gets a lot of use," Beck said. "There are regulated camping and hunting-camp areas, public campgrounds and fee areas. The (U.S.) Forest Service handles camping inside the Game Land."

"ATV and UTV riders use it, along with hikers, horseback riders, hunters and nature watchers. It's kinda wide open and not unusual for hunters to see people riding vehicles or horses near where they hunt, so folks should be aware of that."

Beck recommended hunters visit the Commission's website ([ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org)) to find active GPS maps and try apps such as Avenza. The U.S. Forest Service website also features maps of Uwharrie.



Nantahala and Pisgah game lands offer trophies for hunters willing to put in extra time scouting remote areas.

## SANDHILLS GAME LAND

This 65,028-acre Game Land is scattered across Hoke, Moore, Richmond and Scotland counties. Hunters downed 194 whitetails there last season.

"Deer-dog hunting is done in larger blocks, while still-hunters like the smaller blocks," said Lee Criscoe, the Commission's crew leader at Sandhills Game land. "Permits aren't required to hunt, except during either-sex deer seasons."

"Hunters should check the regulations digest to see special regulations and closures that apply to Sandhills, which is a 3-day per week hunting area."

Wildlife crews actively manage food plots for deer and other wildlife at Sandhills.

"We plant 125 acres of corn, which are close to milo and clay-peas food plots," Criscoe said. "But 95% of the Game Land is longleaf pines and wire grass. Hardwood pockets can be found along the creeks, so preseason scouting is a good idea."

Still-hunting isn't easy at Sandhills.

"The success rate for deer is pretty good if hunters scout and find the right places," Criscoe said, "but they need to check the regulations book because seasons can be different depending on which county they hunt."

Permanent stands aren't permitted, but ladder and climbing stands are legal, as long as no nails are driven into trees.

"If I were going to hunt for deer at Sandhills, I'd look for grain-field edges, food plots and little stands of hardwoods," he said. "The area has very few red oak but has lots of turkey and black jack oaks." ■



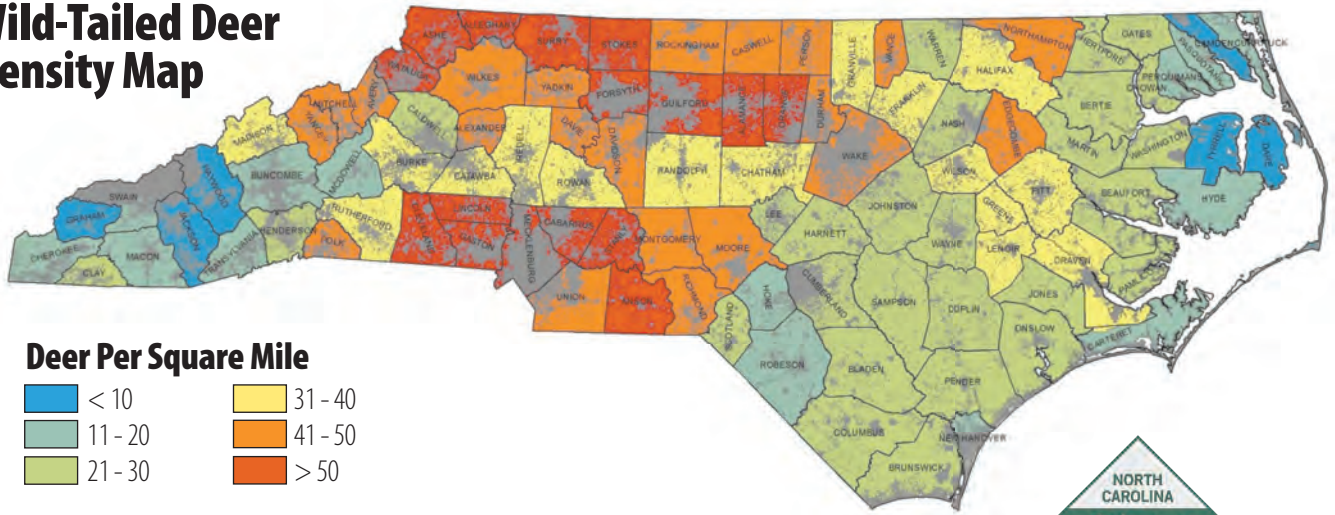
This fine public-lands buck came from Wake County.

Craig Holt









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


# 2020 North Carolina Wild-Tailed Deer Density Map



## Deer Per Square Mile

 < 10	 31 - 40
 11 - 20	 41 - 50
 21 - 30	 > 50

## No Density Estimate

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# GO SOFT (MAST)

DEER WILL PUT SOFT MAST ON  
THEIR MENU EARLY IN THE FALL  
WHEN THE FRUIT BEGINS TO RIPEN.  
HUNTERS NEED TO BE ABLE TO  
RECOGNIZE IT, PAY ATTENTION TO IT  
AND SET UP CLOSE BY.

■ By Pete Rogers



**S**eptember brings mixed emotions for deer hunters. We are longing to get afield, but at times, the sweltering heat makes it difficult to bear. For those of us who do not have large agriculture fields to hunt, we should be focused on one thing and one thing only: soft mast, the key to early season success.

That was the case for me once as I sat along the edge of a fallow field. Some earlier scouting had shown me loaded persimmon trees along one of the edges. Knowing that persimmons are a favorite wildlife food in September, I set up an ambush point. Just after daylight, a mature buck that had been feeding on the persimmons was making his way back to his bed. He didn't make it.

What really is soft mast, and how do you know what the best soft mast is for deer? How many different kinds of soft mast are there that deer key in on, and how can you manipulate them for your benefit?

Mast is a term used to describe a type of food or fruit that trees and bushes produce. Fruit trees produce soft mast, while oak trees, hickory, beech and others produce hard mast. Soft mast typically involves foods such as berries, plums, pears, persimmon, muscadines, scuppernongs, crabapples, apples, poke berries and others. Knowing how to identify these soft-mast species can help you maximize your early season success.

Let's look at these major foods individually and learn how you can identify them and use this deer candy to put a big buck on your wall.

## **AMERICAN PERSIMMON >**

## AMERICAN PERSIMMON

American Persimmon, *Diospyros virginiana*, is without question the favorite soft mast to find in the deer woods. When ripe, it produces a light-orange fruit about the size of a golf ball. This delicious fruit will attract every animal in the forest when they are falling: fox, coyote, squirrels, rabbits and, of course, deer. But locating persimmon trees is not the only thing you have to worry about. Persimmon trees are dioecious trees, which means that the trees are separated into male and female. Only the female tree produces fruit. There is no way to tell the males from the females except during the flowering and fruit-bearing season.

The field with the persimmons I mentioned earlier had far more male than female trees. Scouting in the summer when fruit is growing is the best method of determining if a persimmon tree bears fruit or not. I can assure you one thing: every animal in the forest knows where the female persimmon trees are, and they will flock to them in September. If you don't learn anything else, learn to identify persimmons and hunt them.

If you are preparing a food plot for deer, always throw in several female and male persimmon trees to help you along. You have to have both for the female to produce fruit.

## GRAPES

Muscadines and scuppernongs are a variety of muscadine grapes that share the same biological name, *Vitis rotundifolia*. The scuppernong is the state fruit of North Carolina. These two are next on the important list of soft mast to hunt. These wild grapes, as some call them, are plentiful, and wildlife will voraciously

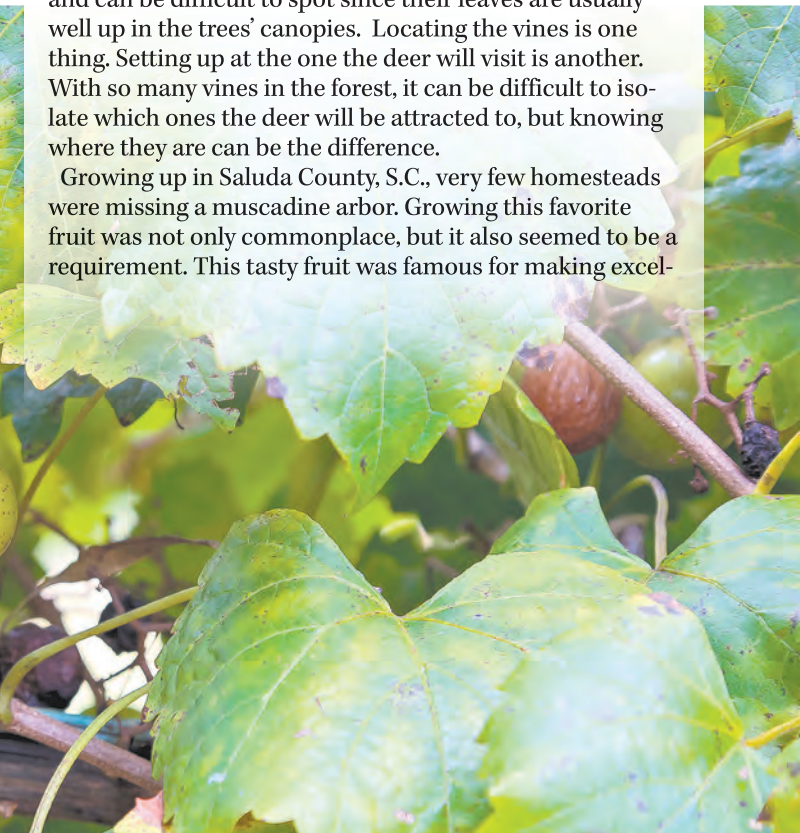


Persimmons are unmatched as a favorite food of deer and almost every other wild animal. Whitetails will flock to a tree filled with the fruit. **BELOW:** The scuppernong grape is the state fruit of North Carolina and another favorite food for deer in the fall.

feed on them. Muscadines are dark, while scuppernongs are pale in color. Both are incredibly tasty, and when I find them, I gorge myself on them.

Healthy vines will climb to the furthest reaches of trees and can be difficult to spot since their leaves are usually well up in the trees' canopies. Locating the vines is one thing. Setting up at the one the deer will visit is another. With so many vines in the forest, it can be difficult to isolate which ones the deer will be attracted to, but knowing where they are can be the difference.

Growing up in Saluda County, S.C., very few homesteads were missing a muscadine arbor. Growing this favorite fruit was not only commonplace, but it also seemed to be a requirement. This tasty fruit was famous for making excel-



Muscadine grapes thrive in most areas of the Southeast; the fruit usually matures in September.



lent jelly and preserves. Muscadine and scuppernongs are also fine table fare for any industrious teenager looking for a snack.

Both muscadines and scuppernongs are able to thrive in deciduous and pine forests of the South, from the high mountains to the maritime forest. Florentine explorer Giovanni de Verrazzano documented the abundance of scuppernongs (named for North Carolina's Scuppernong River) while exploring the North Carolina coast near Cape Fear in 1524.

Typically maturing from Labor Day to mid-September, the muscadine grape is a favorite of hunters and animals. Though these grapes tend to grow best in fertile, sandy loam and alluvial soils, they also grow wild in well-drained bottomlands and are not subject to extended drought or waterlogging. Both muscadines and scuppernongs are readily available afield.

One of the great things about muscadines and scuppernongs is their resistance to pests and diseases. This makes them a plant to consider when manipulating your land for better deer forage. With fruit being formed in just 3 to 5 years and lasting for decades, muscadines and scuppernongs are a delicious option for early season hunters.



**Pete Rogers** of Taylors, S.C., who works for USDA Wildlife Services, has been an outdoors writer and photographer for more than a decade. He has a real passion for trapping and enjoys sharing these experiences with his wife and five children.

**CRABAPPLE** >

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## CRABAPPLE

Southern Crabapple (*Malus angustifolia*) is a shrub tree that will reach heights of 20 to 30 feet in some areas. It loves pine forests but can be found in mixed forests. It prefers edges where sunlight is not hindered. Crabapples produce crops in 3 to 4 years and reach full abundance in 6 to 7 years. This, too, is a great crop for soft-mast manipulation. The fruit is palatable to deer, and it will attract them, typically from late September to early October. I have seen deer feeding on crabapples as late as the end of October, but this is not common.

## HONEY LOCUST

Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), not to be confused with its cousin, black locust, is another favorite food source for white-tailed deer. Easily identifiable, the trunk will have large thorns, some reaching three to four inches long. The large seed pods resemble green bean pods but are 15 times larger. Measuring around 10 to 12 inches longer and 2 to 4 inches across, these large seed pods are a delicacy for wildlife and when producing, can be a ticket for killing big bucks.

In some cases, honey locust is considered an invasive species and has been known to spread rapidly. It is still a desirable food source for wildlife in general and deer in particular. Where it is found growing wild, the honey locust tree is one

Crabapples will typically mature in late September and early October and become a popular feeding site for deer. **BELOW:** The seed pods on honey locust trees can reach 10 to 12 inches long and 2 to 4 inches in diameter. Deer like them after they have dried and hardened.



of the favorites. Similar to the persimmon, the honey locust is a tree that every animal in the woods knows where to find. If you are able to locate one, set a stand immediately and get ready. Even though the pods will begin dropping in September, deer tend to focus on them after they have dried and hardened. If you are looking to plant honey locust, be certain that no livestock can access the plant. It can be toxic to humans and livestock.

Soft mast is a personal favorite for early season success. Locating these delicacies will put game in your sights and trophies on your wall. ■

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## GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson



A good sighting-in session involving a bench rest or some sandbags will get your rifle ready for that big shot.

Will Grubb

# DON'T WASTE HARD WORK

## GET YOUR WEAPON SHOOTING STRAIGHT BEFORE DEER SEASON CRANKS UP

**D**eer season arrives this month for archery hunters in most North Carolina and South Carolina counties. In some areas of the Palmetto State, the firearms season is well underway. Whichever preferred weapon you used to take down Bambi's granddaddy, some pre-hunt firearms workouts and archery practice is in order.

Deer hunting has so many variables that must come together to get that trophy buck on the ground. Mature bucks spend their lives eating, breeding and avoiding dangerous places, but even the most sly bucks make mistakes that allow hunters the opportunity to take a trophy. When the time is right and that mature animal makes a mortal mistake, hunters must make their opportunities count and operate their weapon to its ability.

Too many times, hunters miss out on an opportunity to take a prized critter they have been watching from afar for years. It surely doesn't have to be that way. Hunters should eliminate as much error as possible before getting in a tree stand on opening day, and it should start with

their weapon of choice.

### SECURITY BRIEFING

The first concern for bowhunters should be the security of the rest, sight and other moving parts of the bow. Everything placed on a bow to aid an archer is typically adjustable and has mounting screws or mounting bolts. Over time, through different temperatures and travel, the hardware can loosen and give inaccurate readings. Always check all mounting hardware to ensure a continued secure connection to prevent unanticipated movement.

Of course, archery hunters need to send a couple hundred arrows into a target at different ranges to make sure their equipment is refined and ready for a hunt. A lot can happen to a bow while stored through the year that can detract from precise and accurate shots. Practice will give archers various benefits, from body conditioning to handling shots at various ranges, and it will give archers confidence in their equipment and where their arrows are going.

Archery shots are typically intimate

opportunities that don't happen often, and hunters may get only one opportunity. Practice may not solidify a perfectly placed shot, but it surely can reduce the chances of a missed opportunity.

Rifle hunters are not to be left out either. Even though rifles are precision instruments, along with their expensive scopes that ride on top, their accuracy can change unexpectedly. A bumpy road or a few rough moves in and out of the gun safe can negatively impact the accuracy of these weapons. Nobody wants to find out their rifle is shooting 6 inches high and 10 inches right when the buck they have been watching for 3 years is standing broadside at 75 yards.

### TIGHTEN THEM UP

The first thing rifle hunters should do is check the mounting screws. Loose



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.

# FALL PLANTINGS WILL HAVE LASTING IMPACTS

With the first day of fall coming three weeks into this month, temperature trends are here, and it is finally getting cooler, making way for the “feel good” fall weather.

In one form or another, deer season has arrived in the Carolinas. If cool-season food plots are part of the plan, it is show time; these plots need to get in the dirt now.

Deer typically have plenty to eat in the fall, with red and white oak acorns falling, not to mention soft mast ripening. Muscadine grapes and persimmons are deer magnets and are falling this time of year, offering wildlife even more.

To add to the buffet, large fields of soybeans, corn and peanuts dominate the Carolinas’ agriculture belt. Of course, corn is generally harvested by now, but the waste produced by harvesting equipment is a more-than-adequate food source for deer and other wildlife.

Regardless of the availability of natural and agriculture food options, deer will home in on tender food plots when located in a convenient, sheltered location. To be truthful, deer having other food options is a benefit for landowners and hunters trying to establish a winter food source in the fall. It reduces pressure and allows food plots to grow some before the deer mow down the crops as they erupt from the soil surface.

As the food plots develop and grow towards maturity, natural food sources will begin to deteriorate, and deer will begin to gravitate towards the food plots right when the rut begins to peak. ■



Fall food plots will sustain deer into the winter, long after natural foods have disappeared.

Andrew Kibler

screws can allow scopes to float around and provide inaccurate readings.

Fortunately for rifle hunters, it only takes a few shots on the bench to check a rifle and scope’s accuracy. It should never be avoided before going on a hunting trip if going behind the house, 60 miles to a hunting lease or to Wyoming to nail a bull elk.

Many hunters prepare for out-of-state trips, and some out-of-state hunters venture into the Carolinas to find a trophy animal. Baggage handlers at the airport aren’t concerned with the accuracy of your weapon before or after they have tossed the rifle case around like a rag doll. It is imperative to always shoot the weapon after arriving at your destination to make sure the crosshairs remain on target. And rifles should always be handled carefully. ■

**STICKS & STRINGS**

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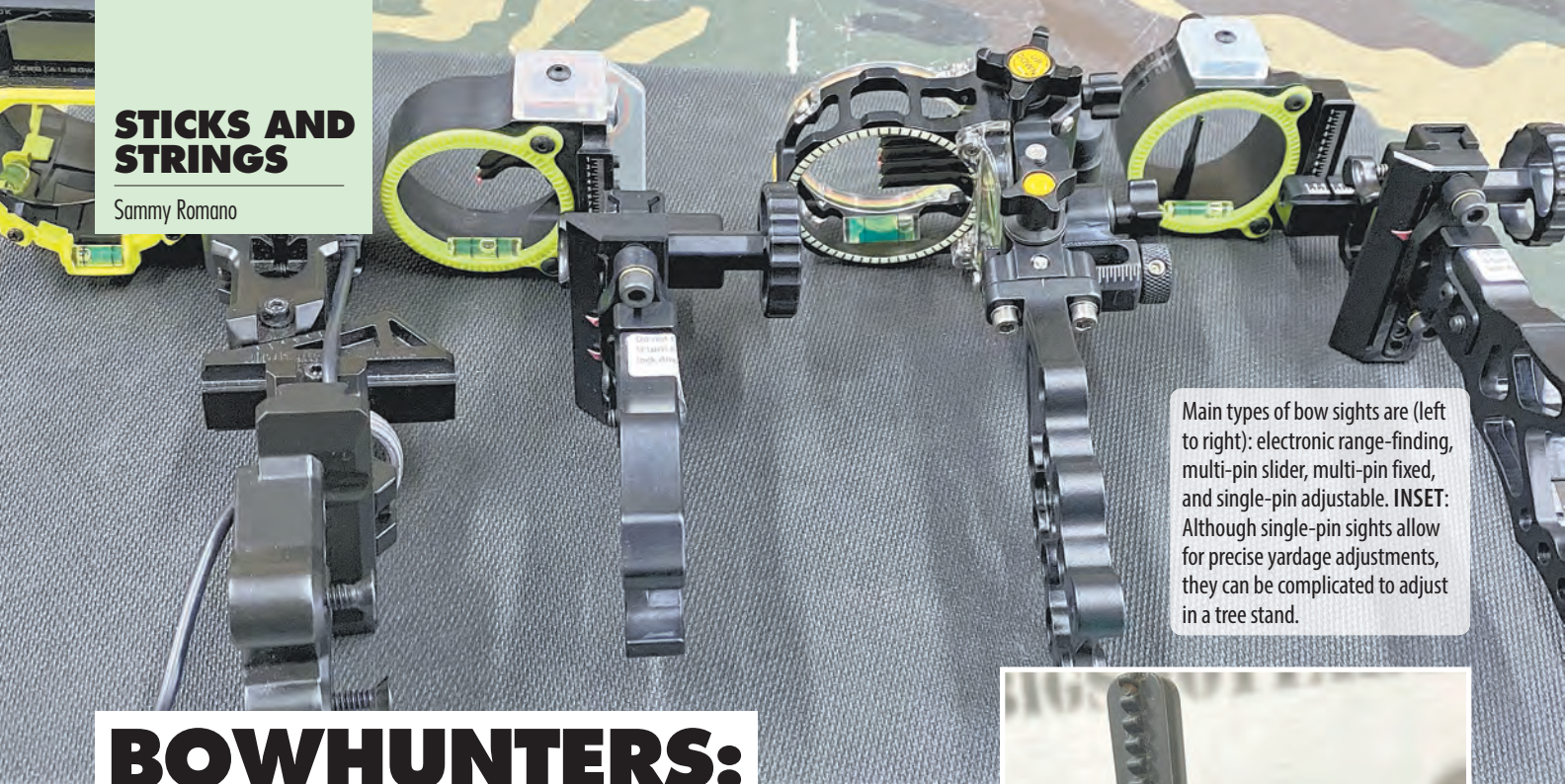



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## STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano



Main types of bow sights are (left to right): electronic range-finding, multi-pin slider, multi-pin fixed, and single-pin adjustable. **INSET:** Although single-pin sights allow for precise yardage adjustments, they can be complicated to adjust in a tree stand.

# BOWHUNTERS: SET YOUR SIGHTS

DECIDE WHICH SIGHT SUITS YOUR HUNTING SITUATION AND BUDGET, BUY IT AND LEARN EXACTLY HOW IT WORKS TO ENSURE YOUR SUCCESS

**M**odern compound bows are outfitted with many accessories, each serving to increase performance and/or accuracy, but the accessory that is most-individualized and most-frequently changed is the sight.

Bow sights are available in a mind-blowing array of designs. Although most work well, the design of many new sights is specialized. To get the most out of their sight, each archer should find the model that best suits their individual needs and hunting style.

In order to move forward, it is often helpful to glance back into history. The first bow sight was likely a matchstick or something similar taped to the handle of a recurve bow. Although crude and difficult to adjust, it served its purpose as an aiming reference point, allowing the archer to aim with more consistency.

Although sights have come a long way, with machined aluminum brackets, fiber-optic pins, battery powered lights, and even rangefinders built in, for the most part, they serve the same function.

To be effective, a bow sight needs only be clearly visible to the archer without obscuring the target, providing an aiming point that is adjustable to cause the arrow to impact the target in the desired

spot consistently. All other features are a bonus.

That being said, many factors, including the age of the archer, hunting methods, terrain and species targeted factor into choosing the best sight for a particular situation. An eastern whitetail hunter in a tree stand overlooking a feeder in thick cover has different needs than an antelope hunter on the open prairie out west.

## FOUR OPTIONS

When choosing a bow sight, I find it easiest to simplify things by breaking sights down into four categories:

- Multi-pin fixed;
- Single-pin adjustable;
- Multi-pin slider;
- Electronic range-finding.

Multi-pin fixed sights are the simplest, with multiple pins and an immovable bracket. These sights are ideal for hunting dynamic situations such as trails in wooded areas and unfamiliar stands with unknown shot distances. Once the archer reaches full draw, there is no need to let down to adjust the yardage, the bow is simply elevated or lowered to place the corresponding pin on the animal. This reduces movement by the



Sammy Romano

hunter, and leads to less task-loading before and during the shot process.

Single-pin adjustable sights feature a single aiming point with an adjustable bracket. They are an excellent choice for hunting in thick cover with limited shot distances, over feeders or bait, and in open fields where game animals are feeding slowly. Single-pin sights offer an uncluttered view, which really helps when aiming, especially for the aging archer who has trouble with multi-pin sights “clustering” — blurring and making it difficult to focus when aiming. The



**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).

disadvantage of a single pin adjustable sight is that the bow must be let down to adjust for different shot yardages. This can lead to rushed shots and even missed opportunities in dynamic hunting scenarios.

Multi-pin slider sights offer the best of both worlds, offering fixed pins with a less-cluttered view. The archer designates one pin — usually the bottom pin — and the adjustable bracket is used to dial this pin in for longer shots. This way, a 3-pin sight can be used to shoot far beyond 40 yards. These sights are gaining popularity, especially among western hunters who typically face much-longer shots but need fixed pins for surprise, close-range encounters. The disadvantage here is that the archer must have the presence of mind to remember to re-zero the dial. If not, a missed shot at point-blank range is inevitable.

Last are the newest, electronic range-finding sights by Garmin and Burris. They incorporate laser rangefinders and use a ballistic computer to illuminate the correct pin for the shot yardage. Although they are deadly effective, they are very costly, and their legality varies from state to state. I have been shooting a Garmin Xero A-1i for the past several years and love it. It has made hunting fun due to less pre-shot task-loading and anxiety. If these are legal where you hunt and you can justify the high price, I highly recommend them.

Regardless of which sight you choose, learn to shoot comfortably with it. Also, be sure to learn all of its features and how to adjust your sight should the need arise. Familiarity with your setup and learning how to shoot it well are the single most important factors when it comes to being successful in the field. ■

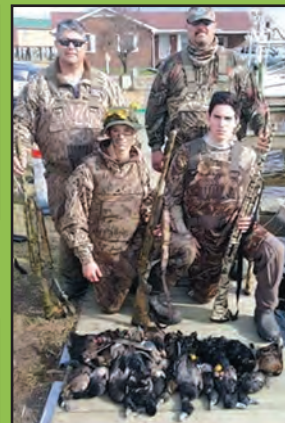
**COOKING ON  
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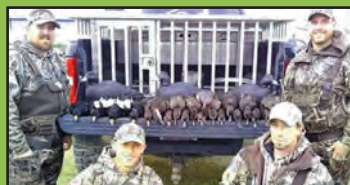
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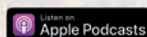


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## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Diltsaver

# VENISON EGG ROLL BURGERS

A UNIQUE WAY TO USE THAT  
LAST BIT OF LAST YEAR'S DEER

Grilling burgers always provides just a bit more taste than baking them, but venison egg roll burgers are good either way. **INSET:** A burger that weighs around a quarter-pound is the perfect size for this recipe.



**D**are to be different! Many folks live their lives according to that motto, but they eat the same foods time after time. Dare to be different on the dinner table, too. This recipe is different but easy to make, and I believe most folks will like it.

This is a very easy, tasty and unusual way to prepare venison, and it fits the season. Several hunting seasons open Labor Day weekend, and deer season is well underway in South Carolina's Lowcountry and a few weeks away across North Carolina. Once past Labor Day, fall is only a couple of weeks away.

Fall is a mixed time for sportsmen in the Carolinas. There are choices to be made on whether to set forth with rod or gun, and both include excellent opportunities. Some of the best fishing of the year is beginning and will continue for several months. And excited hunters will be returning to their comfort zones.

I usually provide a dove recipe in September, but I didn't hunt doves much last year, and there weren't any in reserve in the freezer.

What this means in the long run is y'all get an early venison recipe this year. Since it's earlier than usual and a bit out of place, something unusual should fit the bill well, and I specialize in unusual.

I don't know many folks who don't like egg rolls and even fewer who don't care for venison, so this recipe of venison egg roll burgers came to mind. In trying to be a bit healthier, it isn't a fried egg roll, but a grilled or baked (your choice) venison burger stuffed with egg-roll ingredients. Most readers should have a few packs of venison burger still in their freezer, and I'll recommend this as a fun and tasty way to prepare some of it. ■

# VENISON EGG ROLL BURGER

Give this a try. It is a tasty and fun way to enjoy venison burgers. The first bite is sure to get your attention, as the taste isn't what you expect. I like them, my wife likes them, and all my family and friends who have sampled them like them, too, so the consensus is they're pretty good. I like to be outside and prefer these burgers grilled, but the option of baking them in the oven is good, also. This allows enjoying them when the weather is wet, plus later in the year when it's cold outside.

There is a little prep time, but you can be eating not too long after starting, so it works well whether in a relaxed or rushed preparation. It also works well with hamburger for those folks that don't care for venison or have already used all their venison from the previous season.

Baking the burgers in the oven is pretty simple, and they taste good, but most of my friends agree they're definitely better cooked on the grill. The main thing when cooking them in the oven is to use a rack or broiling pan so they don't sit in their drippings and get greasy. I use a cooling rack over a baking pan to let the grease drop away but be contained for easy cleanup.

Cooking burgers on a grill requires more attention, but I think you'll agree it's worth the effort. The grilled flavor is an excellent addition to the

egg roll seasonings. Grills have different heat at similar settings, so there's the matter of finding the right one for your grill. The key is to cook them slowly enough to get the middle cooked but not to overcook and char them.

This is where cooking the burgers at lower heat and under the foil shines. It allows them to reach medium doneness without charring the edges. Then, removing the foil and raising the heat allows getting a little crisping around the edges to enhance the flavor. This may take a little experimentation. I'll caution again to be careful not to overcook the burgers. Not only does this affect the flavor, but it overcooks the cabbage, and that isn't good.

A quarter-pound is about right for these burgers. It's a reasonable size to be a hamburger steak, and it fits on a bun well for those who think hamburgers should be eaten with bread. This is a mild-flavored burger that tastes much like an egg roll. Warming and crunching an egg roll wrapper, then sprinkling it on the burger adds to the egg roll taste. This lends itself to being prepared mild and then adding spices. If you prefer this as a burger in a bun, try it with a slice of chilled tomato — you won't regret it. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

**1- to 1¼-pound** venison hamburger

**½** sweet onion

**1 bag (16 ounces)** angel hair (thin-sliced) coleslaw mix

**½ cup** matchstick sliced carrots

**1 tbsp** sesame oil

**1 tbsp** rice vinegar

**1 tbsp** minced garlic

**2 tsp** ground ginger

**¼ cup** Soy sauce

Salt, pepper to taste

Non-stick cooking spray

Aluminum foil

**Optional:** Egg roll wrappers, Chinese spicy mustard, more soy sauce, sriracha sauce, hamburger buns, cheese, tomato and your preferred hamburger fixings.

## PREPARATION:

Dice the onion and sauté onion and carrots in a frying pan in cooking spray until not quite done (still lightly crispy). Mix venison, sesame oil, rice vinegar, garlic, ginger, soy sauce, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Work the cabbage from the slaw mix, carrots and onion into the burger. Knead this with your hands to be sure it is thoroughly mixed.

Form the burgers to your preferred size. My venison burger packs are approximately 1¼ pounds, and I get 6 nice burgers. Cook the burgers by grilling or baking.

If you're grilling, place the burgers on a vegetable tray that has been sprayed with non-stick cooking spray and cover loosely with aluminum foil, then cook over low/medium heat for 8 to 10 minutes without turning. Remove the foil and cook an additional 4 to 6 minutes over medium heat. These times will vary between individual grills and the height of the grill above the fire.

If you're baking, place the burgers on an elevated tray — I use a cooling rack — in a baking pan. Cook them at 425 for approximately 12 to 15 minutes. Do not turn the burgers and be careful not to overcook them. These burgers will reach medium without crusting like grilled or fried burgers. Serve the burgers as hamburger steaks on a plate without bread to preserve the most of the egg roll flavor.

Bake several egg roll wrappers and crush them to be sprinkled on the burgers to add the full egg roll taste. If you choose to do this, be aware the cooking time is much shorter



Jerry Dilsaver

than the directions on the package, as the wrappers won't have any filling. Remove them from the oven as soon as they show any sign of browning, or they will brown too much.

Venison egg roll burgers can also be served on a bun, with a slice of tomato, cheese and your favorite condiments. Be aware that everything you add will mask some of the egg roll flavor.

These burgers have vegetables in the mix. Corn on the cob or a baked potato work well for a side, and I'm always up to add a fresh green salad or lettuce wedge. If you like to add a dessert, a slice of fresh baked apple pie is a great way to go. Adding a scoop of ice cream is a personal choice. Go for it. ■



**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).

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**COOLING WEATHER CHANGES WHERE YOU FISH AND WHAT YOU FISH FOR BASS IN THE CAROLINAS. HERE ARE TWO EXPERTS' IDEAS ON WHAT YOU SHOULD BE TYING ON THE END OF YOUR LINE.**

■ By Jeff Burleson

# **AUTUMN ARSENAL**

Jeff Burleson

# After a long, hot summer, fall – and hopefully, cooler weather – finally arrives this month for **CAROLINA BASS ANGLERS.**

Largemouth bass are apex predators in lakes, river systems and all other places these green fish call home. And they occur across the Carolinas, from Fontana Lake in the western part of the Tarheel State to the brackish Cooper River system just outside of Charleston in the Palmetto State.

With cooler weather trends beginning this month, fishing action heats up, and some lures fare better than others at landing a livewell full of bass.

Knowing which baits and lures to tie on is directly attributed to a bass's diet, and that can vary across their geographic range. Bass eat almost anything that wiggles, crawls, swims or even scurries across the water's surface that they can get inside their bucket-sized mouths. Their diet varies considerably across their range to include crawfish and worms, but undoubtedly, finned prey are their primary food in most habitats.

In order to understand what the best lure options are, anglers must understand what the primary forage species is in their home water and where the food lives in the fall.

Bass concentrate on eating most of the year, and that makes the location and positioning of the food source ultimately the most-important aspect to catching bass. Guide Brett Mitchell of Fishing with Brett Guide Service is a firm believer in considering where the bait is when selecting lures and places to fish.

## FOOD IS FOREMOST

"Food is always first," said Mitchell (803-379-7029). "It doesn't always mean the fish will be there when the food is there, but the fish will not be there if the food isn't."

Bass eat sunfish — bluegill, redears, redbreasts, flier bream, crappie and warmouth — in most bodies of water in the Carolinas. Each sunfish species can be found in dif-

ferent depths and habitats during the early fall. Many are found near creek edges and in shallower places where a substantial forage base is available. The one exception is crappie, because crappie will generally be situated along creek channels looking for small minnows.

In addition to sunfish, bass feed on shad and herring. Most reservoirs have substantial shad populations, and bass will key in on this forage base, relying totally on shad as their primary food. Some lakes will have large populations of herring as well that can be used as their primary forage base. Rivers across both states will have thriving shad populations that utilize every habitat imaginable to forage and to avoid predation from bass, catfish and other apex predators.

As the water cools in early fall, the food base shifts, and the bass follow. Initially, cooling water will invigorate bass, increasing their activity level.

Pro angler Dana Rabon of Conway, S.C., competes nationally on the Lady Bass Anglers Association tour, on lakes and rivers across the country in various seasons. She has had to learn to tackle the specifics of the local prey/predator relationships for all times of the year.

Fall is an exciting season for Rabon to target bass in a reservoir or in a blackwater river near her home.

**STAY ON TOP OF ACTION >**

Big bass don't like to bite too much in September, but putting something they'd like to eat in the right place is a good start.



Jeff Burleson

## STAY ON TOP OF ACTION

“As waters cool, the bass get aggressive and start feeding heavily on whatever bait is available,” Rabon said. “Most of the waters I fish have shad, and the shad start slowing down in the fall. That makes a topwater lure one of my favorites to use early in the day.”

Rabon will use either a buzzbait or topwater plug as her surface option for fall bass. They work wonders for several different reasons. First, the bass become super aggressive as the water cools. They will be chasing bait, pushing bait near the surface, creating surface action and an ideal scenario for topwater lures.

“I predominantly use a buzzbait, topwater plug or walking-type lure first thing in the morning near shallow ledges and creek banks. These lures imitate injured baitfish up near the surface” Rabon said.

A buzzbait creates a consistent gurgle, and bass can track it easily. Surface plugs and other topwater lures produce a slower, more erratic action. Both can produce bites; some days, one action type can be better than others.

Another topwater option that is great for all action is a

Berkley Choppo, a surface plug with a rear propeller. This floating, hard bait can be fished with a consistent cadence or be pulled erratically, creating gurgling noises and vibrations that are similar to a buzzbait.

While topwaters are often the most-exciting lures to use, the response generally only lasts for the first couple hours of the day. Rabon will switch to subsurface options as soon as the topwater bite falters.

## SUBSURFACE OPTIONS

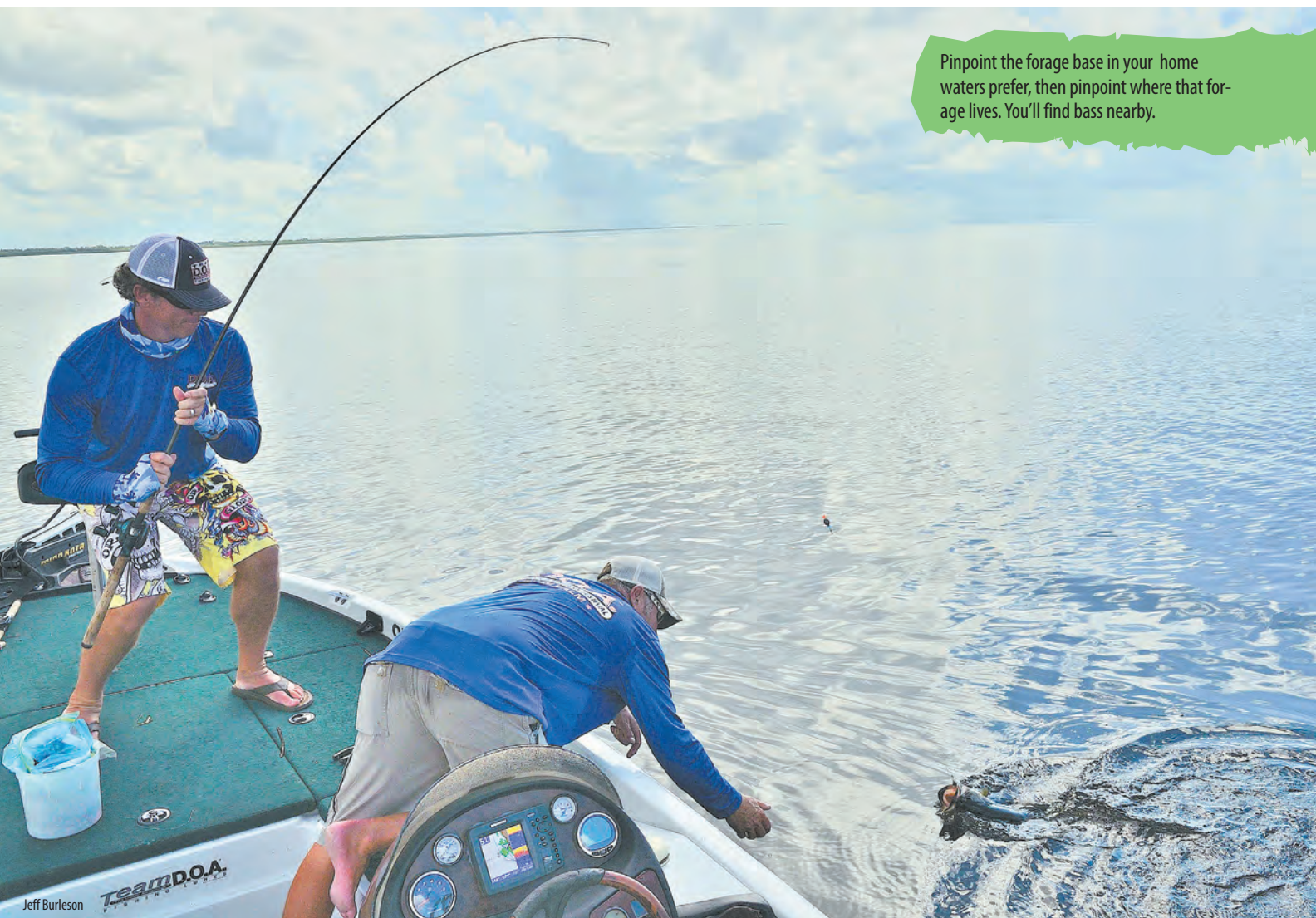
“As it gets cooler, I will try a spinnerbait, because this time of year marks the beginning of the first stages of the shad kill. The steady but slow action of a spinnerbait will trigger a bass to strike when the shad start slowing down in the cooler water.”

Spinnerbaits come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, but those with large blades and soft-plastic trailers are killer in the fall.

Other shad imitations are good options for the fall. Rabon will use Shad Raps in places where shad are getting herded by feeding bass.

“Depending on the direction and intensity of the wind, I like

Pinpoint the forage base in your home waters prefer, then pinpoint where that forage lives. You'll find bass nearby.





Dana Rabon

to use Shad Raps or small, square-billed crankbaits in the mouth of the creeks and up into the creeks around wooded cover," she said.

Structure and cover in creeks are ideal ambush locations for bass when the shad are slowing down. She will fish these by using a slow, stop-n-go retrieve.

## TAKE IT SLOW

"Slow-moving baits are the key this time of year because they mimic shad behavior," she said. "I also really like to use Flukes in these areas. They can be fished slowly and are irresistible to bass," she said.

As the water gets cooler, shad, along with small sunfish, will descend into deeper cover where the water temperature is more stable, but bass are onto this pattern as well. It couldn't be any more real in many of the Carolinas' large reservoirs.

"When I am fishing these large reservoirs, I will hit some of these rock and brush piles with a Texas- or Carolina-rigged worm," she said.

## BRUSH UP ON THINGS ➤

Dana Rabon fishes her baits with a much slower retrieve in the fall to mimic shad behavior and catch bass like these.

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## BRUSH UP ON THINGS

Bass are typically shooting shallower and hitting the creek arms in the early fall, but the plentiful brush and rock piles on most of the Piedmont, Upstate and mountain lakes are havens for holding bait, and a wolfpack of largemouth bass will not think twice about setting up on these brush piles to fill up on the free groceries.

Brush piles are very common in reservoirs. Rarely established for bass, brush piles are primarily created by anglers targeting crappie; they are very good at concentrating slabs. Brush piles are generally placed on ledges and in deep water. Bass love these brush piles and will fill up on shad, crappie and even pods of bluegill. They should never be overlooked in the fall, and lures that run deep and can be fished slowly are the best options.

The early fall bite can be ferocious in just about every part of the state. From blackwater rivers in the coastal plain to the large reservoirs that put the Carolinas on the map, largemouth bass are feeding and can produce serious fishing results. While tackle shops have nearly endless supplies of lures for the angler to buy, there is a select group of lures that will bring the fish to their knees, if they had knees. ■



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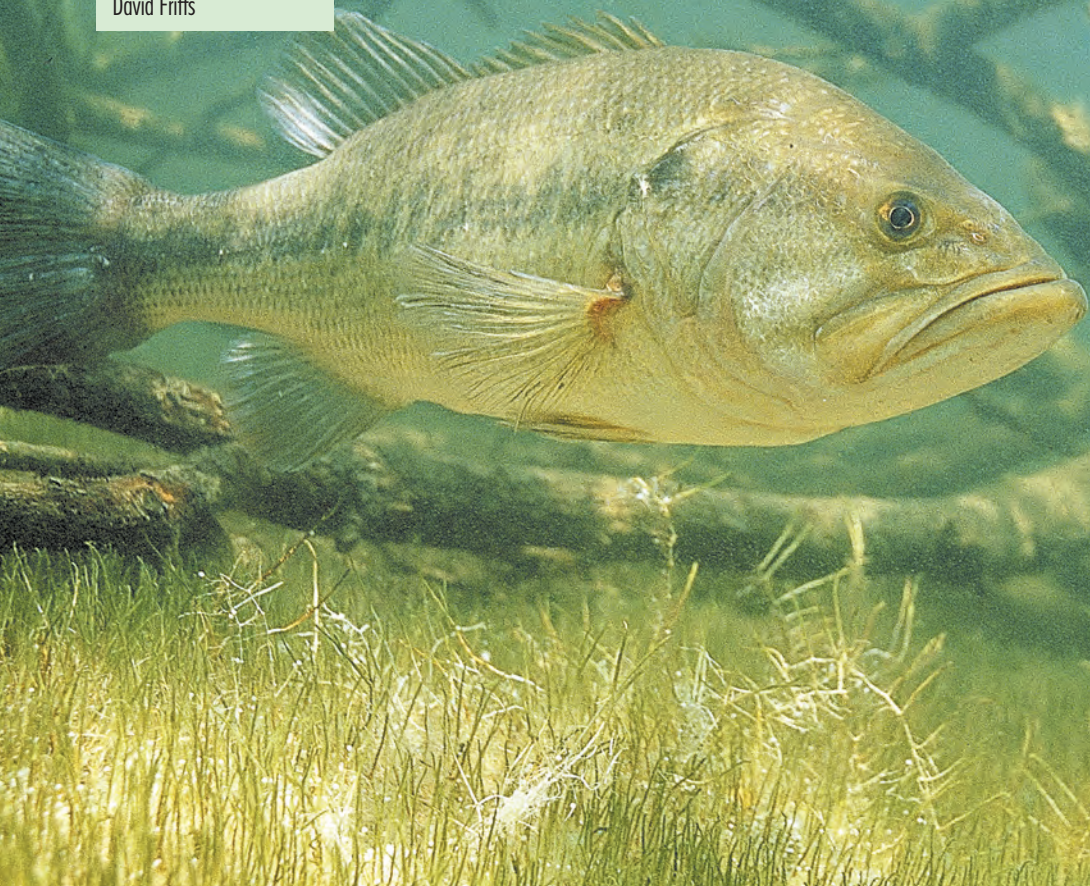
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## LUNKER LINES

David Fritts

Bass will set up shop around brush piles in September and into October, making them No. 1 targets for bass fishermen.



Eric Engbretsen

# SEPTEMBER'S PROMISE

BRUSH PILES ARE KEYS AS THE PEAK OF FALL BASS FISHING APPROACHES

**S**eptember is the month when all that work you did back in January and February pays off.

All those days on lakes, some drawn down for the winter, lashing limbs and small trees to cinder blocks and dropping them along contour breaks and channel drops, will be worth it.

September begins brush pile season for bass fishermen. Brush piles have been the ticket this month as long as I can remember, anywhere I go. I don't know why, but September is the month to start fishing brush.

Now, is September a great fishing month? Most bass fishermen would agree that it's a tough month, because fish are in transition. I've always liked fishing in September, but you've got to realize you're probably not going to catch a heavy stringer. Baitfish are just starting to move back into creeks for the fall, and bass are starting to follow, but they're scattered. By the end of September, the

fishing will be real good, and October will be great, but at least the first couple of weeks of September, it's tough.

## VIDEO GAME BASS

Back when we used flasher units, it used to be tough to find brush piles, even ones you put in yourselves. You'd have to idle around an area, try to line up things on the bank, maybe find it on your flasher, maybe find it with your crankbait. Now, with these units we have, like my Lowrance ActiveTarget, you can see 'em 70 feet away. Pull up, and there it is. That's what fishing has become: a video game.

There won't be fish on every brush pile just yet. You might fish 50 and not get a bite, then get 20 pounds off the next one. I've caught two or three fish off a brush pile on a crankbait, then they'd slow down, and I'd change to something like a jig or a big worm and try to catch a couple more.

I'm going to start out around Labor Day fishing the main lake and the mouth of creeks. I'm looking for contour breaks. By the end of September, in the creeks, they'll be on channel breaks, but early in the month, they're on contour breaks. Long points with contour breaks are really good spots. A hard bottom makes it even better.

## CRANKING TIME

When you're fishing brush, a crankbait is a deadly tool. I fish them year-round, but they're really good in the fall. I'm going to be looking for brush from 10 to 22 feet deep, so I'm breaking out a Dredger 14.5 to 25.5, depending on how



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

deep I find them. September and October colors are cream pie, which is the old “carp” color, bonehead, honey shad, lone ranger and even homer — the good shad colors. You have to experiment a little bit, but cream pie is usually the ticket.

I fish them on a 7-foot-6, Lew’s David Fritts cranking rod with a BB1 or BB1 Pro reel spooled with 10-pound Sensation, a low-stretch monofilament. Make a lot of casts to a brush pile from a lot of different angles. It might take a while to find the angle that they want. One thing to remember is, in the fall, bass want baits that are falling down to them. That’s why jigs and big worms are good. If you could get a lipless bait like a Warpig down to them, it would be great, but they’re bad to get hung up in brush.

## MOVE TO CREEKS

So you fish the main lake and the mouth of the creeks, maybe a little bit into the creeks, the first three weeks of September. Then, all of the sudden, you’ll start seeing shad come up in the creeks, and the fish will be on ’em. So by the last week of September, I might be fishing from the middle of the creeks all the way back.

I think a bunch of those bass all go back at the same time. I think there are probably some that live there all the time, and they just bite better. Whatever, it’s a big migration. When you go up north, to those lakes that have smallmouth and largemouth, there’s a big migration into the creeks where the water is warmer and where they overwinter.

Especially when the bass get back in the creeks, you’re looking for the depth they’re holding and the brush. If you know where enough brush piles are, at different depths, when you get them

figured out, you can just make a little milk run from brush to brush. Here’s one thing about catching them in the creeks; they’re a little easier to find with your bait and not your electronics. When they get on those slopes, they’ll get right on the bottom where you can’t see ’em as well with your electronics. But they’ll bite.

And they can act different in the morning and afternoon. You might fish the best brush pile you’ve got in the morning and catch nothing, and come back in the afternoon and catch 20 pounds. These fish go up and down, in and out, and if you fish enough spots, you’ll run into them. ■

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## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Guide Inky Davis said changes in the habits of shad will key a big increase in bass activity in September.



# SEPTEMBER CHANGE COMING

NEW BAITFISH PATTERNS MOVE PREDATORS INTO DIFFERENT AREAS OF LAKES

Terry Madewell

**S**eptember is a transition month for some species in the Santee Cooper lakes, and while some patterns remain similar to the summer patterns of August, others evolve into explosive action.

One strong pattern that fishermen look forward to this month is the surface-feeding largemouth bass action.

As the annual crop of threadfin shad grows and spreads throughout the lakes, more species will begin to find and devour this abundant and highly-favored forage.

This begins an excellent stretch of bass fishing, and topwater action becomes more consistent right on through the month, typically peaking in October. When bass are aggressively smacking shad on the surface, it's bass fishing at its finest.

Veteran guide Inky Davis from Manning said fishing patterns change for the better in September as bass begin chasing shad and schooling frequently,

“Bass make a move from dense cover to chasing forage, particularly feasting on the abundant year-class of threadfin shad,” he said. “As the shad mature, they reach a size attractive to bass, and they start moving into habitat where bass live. This activity becomes a visual advantage to fishermen in September.”

## SHAD ON THE MENU

As the water cools, even slightly, Davis said shad become a prime food source. He'll switch from focusing primarily on dense cover to working edges and isolated weeds and trees while watching, and listening, for schooling action.

Davis (803-478-7289) said while topwater action improves on actively schooling fish, topwater fishing lures are good, but not always the best choice, early in the month.

“Soft plastics continue to be productive, with a variety of lures of this type working well,” he said. “I also begin to run crankbaits and spinnerbaits frequently,

because they make great searching lures now that bass are more actively foraging on shad.”

Davis said that by late September, topwater lures begin to produce consistently around points, pockets and forage-packed flats.

“I'll fish the point trees of cypress stands, especially in situations where the water depth drops from a couple feet down to 6 feet or deeper,” he said. “If the wind blows steady from a consistent direction, it can cause shad to bunch up in downwind coves and pockets. This creates an excellent situation for schooling fish or for lots of bass packed into a small area. Multiple bass can be caught quickly in this situation.”



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.

“In addition to plastics, crankbaits and normal topwater lures, I always keep a heavy topwater and a tailspinner rigged and within reach so I can quickly cast ultra-long distances to bass schooling at my casting limit,” he said. “This usually results in a few extra bass caught during a day of fall fishing.”

## NOT ALL CATFISH ARE DEEP

Catfish action revs into a higher gear as September progresses and big catfish catches become more numerous. As the year-class of forage fish continues to grow and congregates into larger schools, the blue catfish in particular begin to cluster around them.

Catfish are going to be around something to eat, and as the pods of forage get into the open water areas of Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie, it gets easier to spot them on the graph at various depths. The areas where baitfish populations swell will attract catfish.

Most anglers drift using a Santee rig; cut shad, herring and white perch are excellent baits. The most-productive September depths vary with the food source in the area you're fishing. Forage also dictates where catfish will be found. Certainly, good catches will be made in deep water this month, but not all the catfish are as deep as some fishermen believe.

Finding big pods of baitfish can be a direct link to the best depths to find catfish in the area you're fishing, and shad will be found in multiple depths of water, often fairly shallow. Mussel beds are attractive to catfish in September, and often, the mussel beds attract catfish to feed in 10 to 20 feet of water.

Catfish action is good by day, but the nocturnal fishing can also be extremely productive. September is a great time to catch quantity and quality of catfish.

## SCOUTING STRIPERS

Striper fishing season is closed; it re-opens on Oct. 1. Although anglers can't keep stripers in September, it doesn't mean those fish aren't eating. Stripers will be mauling shad and surface schooling by late-September, and that action can be highly visible from a long distance.

If you plan to fish for stripers in early October, you can take a short break from bass, catfish or whatever species you're targeting this month and observe where the schools are working to prep for the opening of striper fishing. ■



Terry Madewell

Drifting with a Santee rig and cut bait will produce plenty of blue catfish in September.

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Jaime Fajardo said bass fishing has improved greatly at Shearon Harris since a poor spring.



Jaime Fajardo

# HARRIS BASS RETURN

## Fish moving to fall patterns this month

**D** By Dusty Wilson  
 espite a discouraging spring, bass in North Carolina's Shearon Harris Lake have again hit their stride in the summer, according to angler Jaime Fajardo of Fuquay-Varina, N.C.

This rebound is big news for anglers hoping to catch fish moving between their summer haunts and fall pattern areas. Beginning with a move closer to shore, Fajardo sheds light on the locales and techniques for loading up on bass in September.

"A lot of people have thought that the bass population has declined," he said. "We've had tournaments, and the weights have been terrible; nobody was catching them. Then, there was an algae bloom in the spring, and the fishing got really tough. But in June, the fish turned out in numbers. We were catching 50 to 75 in a trip."

Fajardo said that a factor in the fantastic fishing lately has been a spring shad kill that resulted from below-average water temperatures. With a decrease in bait, bass are more likely to notice and chase a well-placed lure preferably a crankbait.

In August, Fajardo reported that bass had moved from deeper water into 3- to 6-foot depths on long, gently sloping points from the main lake to about a quarter of the way into the creeks. In September, the bulk of the fish will be halfway back in creeks

on those same kinds of long, flat points in a similar water depths, he said.

"There's not much woody cover at Harris, so the fish just roam on top of those flat points, because that's where the bait is," said Fajardo. "When I say a point, I'm not talking about a steep

dropoff. I'm talking about the kind that flattens out before it drops off — the kind that's about 300 yards wide and stays shallow out about 50 yards. A lot of these are underwater points that don't extend from a point on the shoreline, so you'll have to use your charts to find them.

"The fish will roam on that flat and stop a lot of times when there's a contour change or little point and hold there. You'll have to cover a lot of water with your crankbaits."

The main crankbaits that Fajardo throws are lipless, but he will also utilize square bills. While the Rat-L-Trap is probably the best-known lipless crankbait, Fajardo prefers a ½-oz BOOYAH One Knocker in any shad color.

In early to mid-September, bass are most likely to be suspended in the 3- to 6-foot range. Fajardo will a long cast to the bank and burn the lure back, sometimes yo-yoing it to elicit a strike. ■

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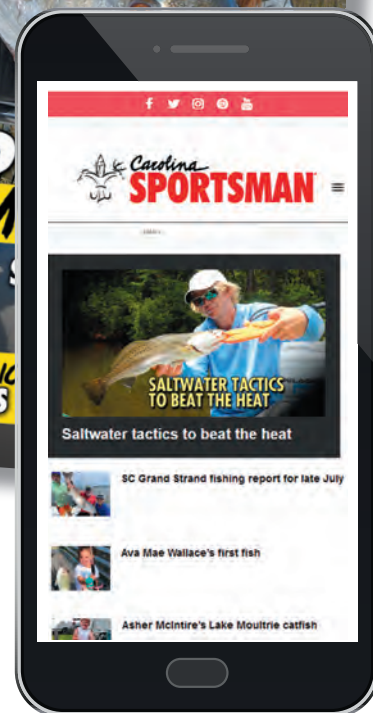
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**BOTH CAROLINAS PROVIDE PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUNTERS WITHOUT ACCESS TO PRIVATE LAND TO HAVE A GREAT DOVE HUNT OR TWO. HERE ARE THE DETAILS.**

■ By Mike Marsh

# DOVES FOR THE MASSES

Mike Marsh



# A DISTANT SPECK ROCKETES ACROSS A CROP FIELD.

Shotguns erupt, alarming the bird. Switching on its afterburners, the mourning dove rolls, dives, then climbs to avoid the din. A skillful or lucky hunter's shot pattern connects, and it tumbles to Earth.

Such is opening day of dove season in the Carolinas. However, with an ever-increasing human population, more agricultural fields are converted to suburban housing developments or urban centers. Would-be hunters who don't have access to private property or money for a day-hunt can be left in a lurch rather than having a lark-day.

A good solution is to look for a dove field planted and/or managed by one of the two state wildlife agencies: the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission or S.C. Department of Natural Resources. Agency staff prepares the fields, plant the seeds, gets the fields ready for the season by harvesting or mowing

»»» Paul Sasser took this dove on an N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission permit hunt over a millet field that had been burned to expose the seed and provide bare ground to attract doves.

Mike Marsh



down crops, then opens things up for hunters.

If you are a North Carolina hunter, you could do worse than a Game Lands dove hunt on Labor Day weekend, especially if you apply for one of the Commission's permit-only dove hunts, according to biologist Brian McRae.

"I personally cannot speak highly enough about the work and effort Commission staff put into providing opportunities to the public for dove hunting on Game Lands," McRae said. "They do an outstanding job of getting the dove fields in the best conditions possible to provide the best experience possible."

"We recognize the importance of dove hunting in terms of tradition, camaraderie and as a great introduction for youth and others to hunting. This is why our team spends so much time managing for doves and why we continually look to meet demand by expanding options. For example, when we acquire new properties, we consistently evaluate the property for suitability for fields and dove hunting opportunities."

McRae said three of the most popular and productive permit dove hunts are the Lower Roanoke River Wetlands Game Land in Martin County, the Johns River Game Land in Burke County, and Sandy Mush Game Land in Buncombe County. A total of 1,840 permits were offered over the past two years for these locations — and only one permit was not utilized.

"I would say that these permit hunts are popular because they consistently have doves on opening day. These are unique areas because of their locations, terrain and management. For example, the Lower Roanoke River area is surrounded by agricultural land and located in a migratory flyway near the river corridor. Similarly, Johns River and Sandy Mush dove fields are adjacent to rivers. (They) are flat and open areas that are uncommon in the mountains. In terms of management, all three of these areas are intensively managed for doves."

**T**he Conoho Farms tract on the Lower Roanoke River Wetlands Game Lands is planted with millet and sunflower, with the millet burned off before dove season. Hunts are Sept. 4, 6, 11 and 14. The Johns River (Sept. 4, 6, 11 and 18) and Sandy Mush (Sept. 4, 6, 8 and 11) fields are also planted with sunflowers in an effort to keep open ground and bare soil that are attractive to doves. Fake power lines have been erected at Johns River and Sandy Mush in an effort to attract and keep birds on the properties.

"It is not uncommon to see anywhere from 600 to 800 birds at Johns River or Sandy Mush on opening day," McRae said. "Obviously, this is not something seen every year, as our management is weather-dependent, and drought conditions or overly wet years can negatively affect our efforts."

David Turner, another Commission biologist, said the Lower Roanoke River Wetlands Game Land is consistently the best permit hunt in the northern coastal plain.

"There are two 20-acre fields, one in front of and one away from NC 125 near the wildlife depot," he said. "We planted corn, sunflower, browntop millet and milo."

Another coastal Game Land that offers permit dove hunting is Texas Plantation in Tyrrell County, near Columbia. It has 43 acres of sunflowers, millet and fallow fields. Standing corn in the waterfowl impoundment is not manipulated for doves, but doves may be there. Anyone hunting the impoundment must use non-toxic shot.

These game lands are similar to others with permit hunts. Issued by lottery, limited-entry permits spread hunting pressure. Hunters can apply for them on the Commission's website ([www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org)) or through a license agent.

Information about dove fields is available on the website's link to permit dove hunts. The fields are at Croatan, Green Swamp, J. Morgan Futch, Lower Roanoke River, Suggs Mill Pond, Texas Plantation, White Oak River, Johns River and Sandy Mush game lands. Disabled sportsman permits are available at Johns River and Suggs Mill Pond game lands.

At these game lands, limited-entry permits are required for the first two to four open dates. Thereafter, many are open without permits; some may require an over-the-counter permit for small game, including doves. For those without permits, some dove fields have no permit requirements.

## SOUTH CAROLINA: WIDE OPEN

South Carolina also plants some excellent public dove fields, but none require limited-entry permits; they are open to anyone with a proper hunting license, migratory bird permit and Wildlife Management Area license.

To manage hunter numbers and ensure good hunting without having fields "burned out" from excessive hunting pressure, fields have specific hunting dates. Some are open only three times and several have many open days. Therefore, hunters who don't mind driving around can scout several fields to extend their opportunities.

Michael Small, SCDNR's assistant small game program leader, said WMA dove hunts are extremely popular.

"We have 41 fields spread across 27 counties," Small said. "It's always hard to say which fields perform exceptionally year-to-year because it varies according to the number of doves. I have seen fields that looked spectacular, and the birds just weren't there, and other fields that didn't look good that had lots of doves."



**Mike Marsh** is a freelance outdoor writer in Wilmington, N.C. His latest book, *Fishing North Carolina*, and other titles, are available at [www.mikemarshoutdoors.com](http://www.mikemarshoutdoors.com).

## SOUTH CAROLINA DOVE FIELD REGULATIONS

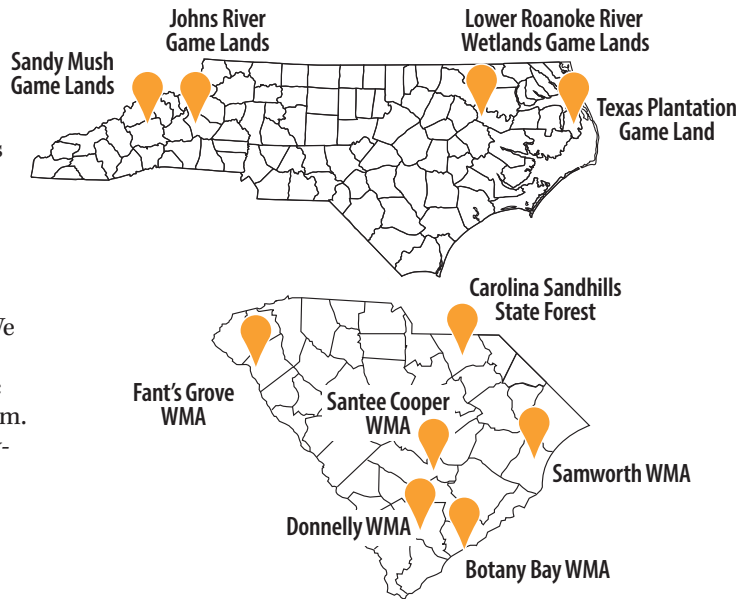
- Hunters are limited to 50 shells per hunt.
- Dove hunting on all public fields is restricted to afternoons. No entry onto fields before noon.
- No shooting after 6 p.m. during the first season segment. ■



Small said band returns prove local nesting success impacts opening day dove numbers. Most doves were hatched within a short distance of where they were harvested, and most are banded the same year they are harvested.

“We make every effort to have every field in the best condition possible to ensure a successful hunt,” he said. “The fields are planted in sunflower, corn, wheat, millet and sorghum. We mow and sometimes burn fields to expose the seed and create bare ground for visibility. Hunters may encounter electric fences surrounding fields and should use caution around them. Electric-fence locations vary each year, with technicians moving them to the fields where they are most needed to prevent crop damage by deer and hogs.”

Some dove fields that are the site of successful hunts on a regular basis include these suggested by Small:



**UPSTATE >**

Wildlife officials in both Carolinas plant numerous grain fields, then cut and burn them to provide opportunities for dove hunters.



Mike Marsh

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➤➤➤ Banding efforts show that most doves taken on Labor Day weekend are resident, local doves that have not migrated out of their home territory.

## UPSTATE

Fant's Grove WMA, owned by Clemson University in Anderson County, has 45 acres of dove fields. Like any dove field near a high population center, it is important to large numbers of urban hunters.

Several dove fields in the Greenville-Spartanburg area are vital for the same reason. The SCDNR Rifle Range in Pickens County has 40 acres of fields. In Oconee County, the S.C. Forestry Commission Piedmont Forestry Center has 18 acres, U.S. Forest Service Long Creek Tract has 20 acres, and the USFS Ross Mountain Field has 35 acres.

## PIEDMONT-MIDLANDS

Located in Chesterfield County, the Carolina Sandhills State Forest has two dove fields. Wilkes Chapel Field covers 54 acres and Davis Field covers 30 acres.

In Orangeburg County, near Orangeburg, Santee Cooper WMA has 35 acres of dove fields. In Lexington County near Columbia, Hallman Field covers 47 acres.

The Oak Lea WMA in Clarendon County, within driving distance of Columbia, has 102 acres planted.



Mike Marsh

## COASTAL PLAIN

In the northern coastal plain, Georgetown County's Samworth WMA is a reasonable drive from Charleston. It has 55 acres of fields.

In the Lowcountry, Botany Bay WMA on Edisto Island in Charleston County has 70 acres of fields. In Colleton County, Donnelly WMA has 80 acres.

In the southern coastal plain, Webb Wildlife Center in Hampton County has 30 acres. ■



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➤➤➤ In South Carolina, adults are now allowed to shoot doves on special Adult/Youth hunts as long as they are accompanied by a youth hunter.

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To increase participation, SCDNR's special Adult/Youth dove hunts, which formerly prohibited adults from shooting, now allow adults to take doves as long as they and their accompanying youths meet legal age requirements.

Adults must be 21 when accompanying one or two youths age 15 or younger. Youths ages 16 and 17 can hunt unaccompanied.

Locations, dates and contact phone numbers for fields are not finalized until late August. They vary season-to-season due to planting schedules, coordination with waterfowl management and landowner permissions.

Visit the SCDNR website or check the regulations for information. ■



Mike Marsh

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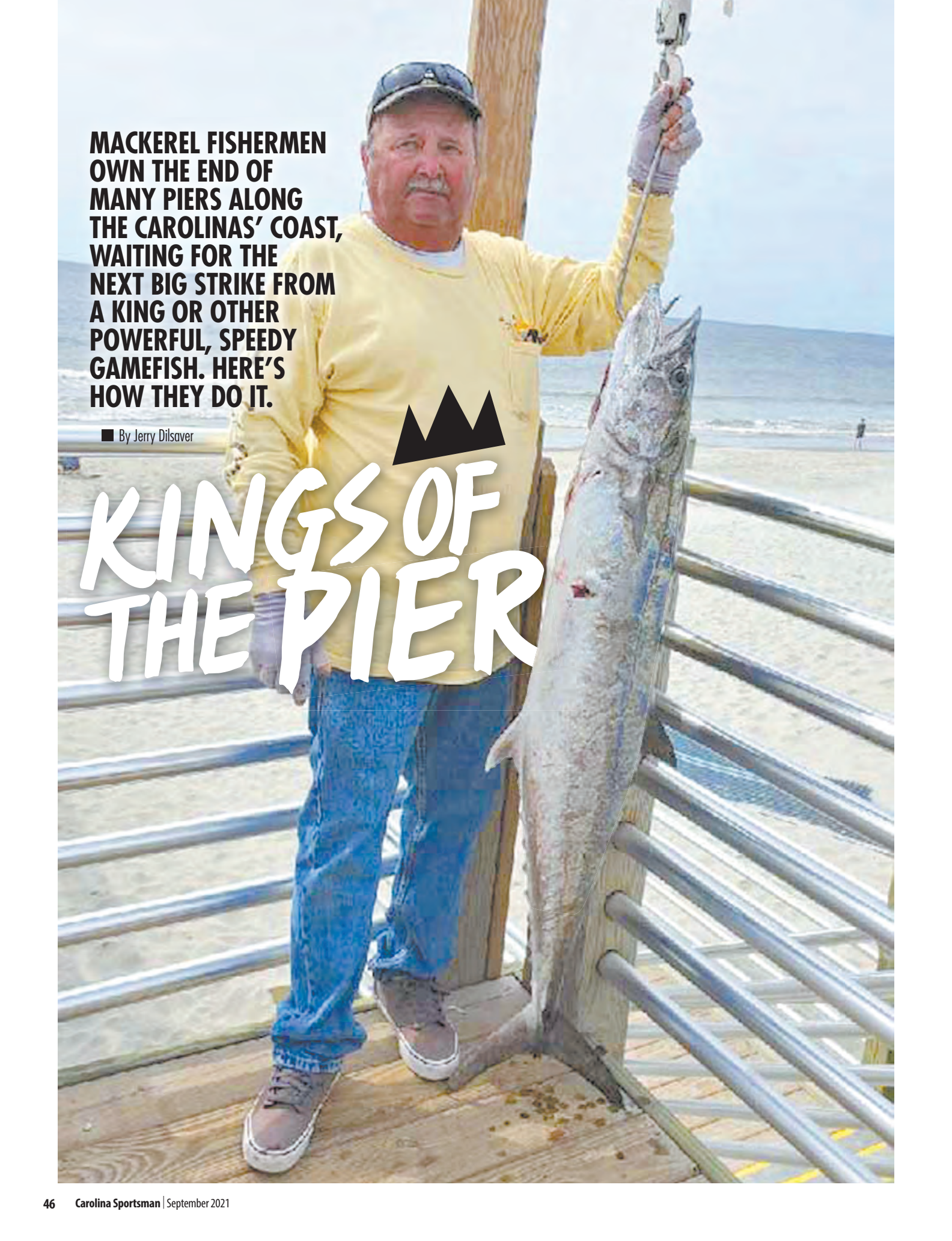
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A man with a mustache, wearing a yellow long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and a cap, stands on a wooden pier. He is holding a large, silver mackerel vertically by its tail with a metal hook. The pier has metal railings, and the ocean and beach are visible in the background under a clear sky.

**MACKEREL FISHERMEN OWN THE END OF MANY PIERS ALONG THE CAROLINAS' COAST, WAITING FOR THE NEXT BIG STRIKE FROM A KING OR OTHER POWERFUL, SPEEDY GAMEFISH. HERE'S HOW THEY DO IT.**

■ By Jerry Dilsaver

# KINGS OF THE PIER

# There are plenty of dedicated, big-game fishing folks along the Carolina coast who pursue their quarry without benefit of a boat.

They ply their craft, some very successfully, from the ends of ocean fishing piers scattered from the South Carolina Lowcountry to North Carolina's Outer Banks.

While their primary target is king mackerel, these fishermen often battle other species, including Spanish mackerel, tarpon, cobia, jack crevalle, false albacore and sharks. Less-frequent catches include dolphin, blackfin tuna and occasionally, a sailfish.

The fishermen at the end of piers stand ready for their next big strike.

The piers in Long Bay, especially on Oak Island, N.C., have a reputation for producing lots of big kings and a good mixture of cobia, tarpon, jack crevalle and others. This area typically has good spring and fall runs, with smaller, intermittent runs and isolated catches throughout the summer.

This year, Oak Island Pier is the only pier on Oak Island that has a T-end dedicated to fishing for king mackerel and other big-game fish. Ocean Crest Pier sustained serious damage during Hurricane Isaias in 2020, and the pier's end hasn't been repaired. Long Beach Pier was the third pier on the island, but it was lost to development more than a decade ago.

Ron Brewer has fished all of the Oak Island piers for years. His typical fishing day begins early, as he grabs a cup of coffee and heads to Oak Island Pier to line up and choose his preferred location along the railing for the day. The pier has 30 numbered stations on its offshore end that are reserved for king mackerel anglers, and Brewer has his favorites depending on wind, tide, time of year — and several factors he wouldn't divulge. The pier opens at 6 a.m., and many king fishermen are lined up by then as the stations are picked on a first-come, first-served basis.

## TWO RODS REQUIRED >



Got him on! A fisherman begins battling a king mackerel on the end of Oak Island Pier as others get ready to clear their rods for the fight.



Jerry Dilsaver

## TWO RODS REQUIRED

“We use a 2-rod setup for kings,” Brewer said. “The first is a longer, surf-fishing rod that is used to cast an anchor sinker as far as possible. The second is typically shorter, matched with a reel that holds a lot of 30- to 50-pound line, and is used to present the bait and fight the fish. We use mono on the anchor rod, but many fishermen use braided line on their fighting outfits to be able to get more line on a smaller, lighter reel.”

Once at his selected fishing station, Brewer’s first order of business is setting the anchor line. The anchor sinker is cast as far as possible directly in front of the station. The next step is getting bait. Bluefish and menhaden are preferred baits, but mullet, threadfin herring and other species are occasionally pressed into service. Many piers have a community live-bait well, and fishermen from the previous day may leave bait in it overnight to begin the day. Otherwise, bait can be jigged or caught in a cast net. Some fishermen closer in bring bluefish and other fish they don’t care to keep to the bait well for the king fishermen.

With the anchor rod set and bait in hand, it’s time to go fishing. A king rig for the pier is similar, but a little different from the rig used to slow-troll live baits. It’s made of wire and uses treble hooks, but is made to suspend the bait from above, not pull it by the nose.

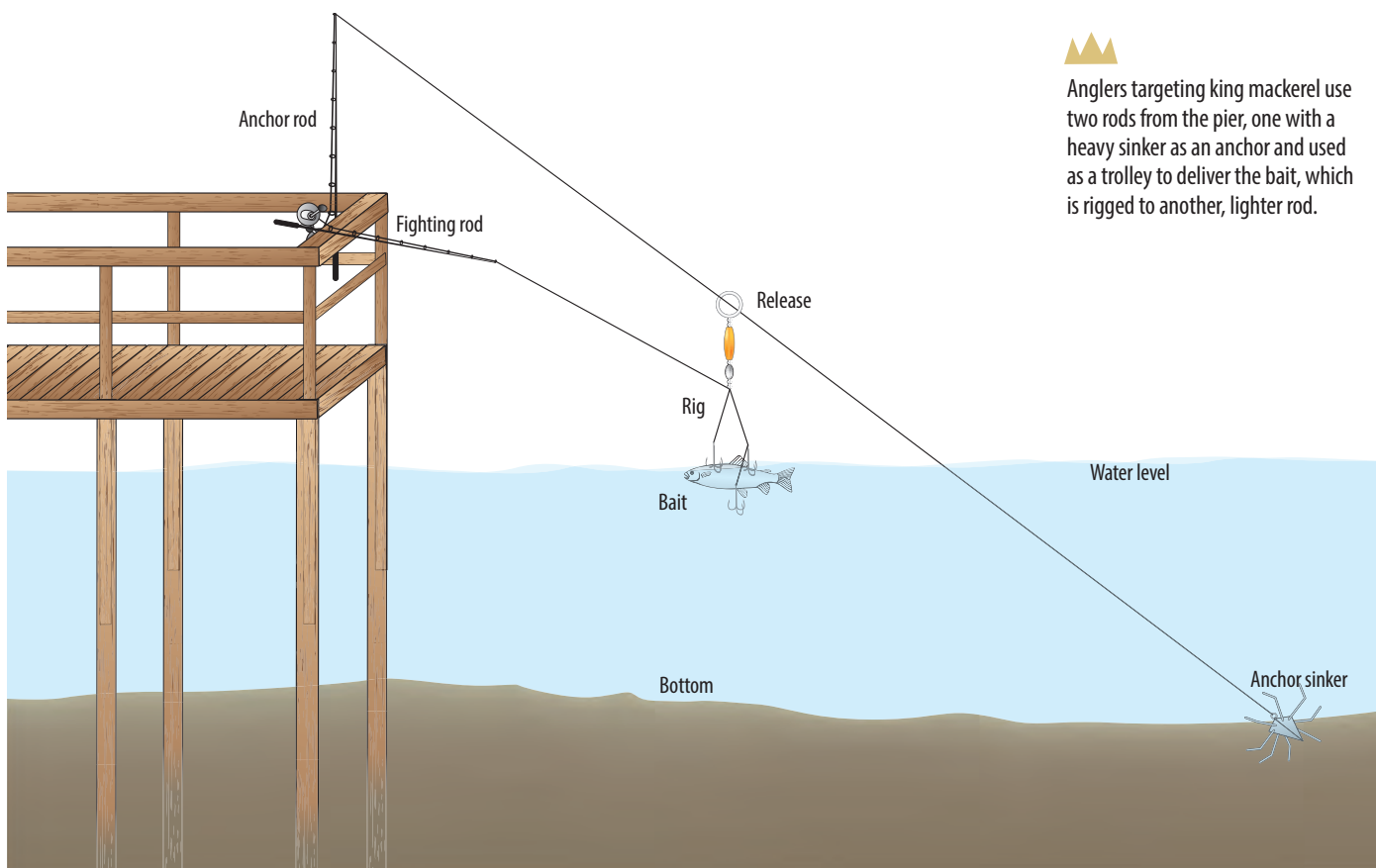
A bait is hooked onto the rig and lowered down the anchor line into position a few yards off the pier’s end, and the wait begins. Sometimes, a new bait entering the water catches a king’s eye, and the wait is short, but sometimes it takes a while, and occasionally, there isn’t a strike all day.

Brewer said sharks have visited much too frequently this year, but there have been several days of good king mackerel action, and a good number of Spanish mackerel, plus several cobia, tarpon and jack crevalle caught. Spring and fall are good times for pier anglers and fall begins this month. Kings are migrating along the beaches and feeding heavily as they go. There are days when double-digit numbers of kings are hoisted to the planks.



Oak Island

## TWO-ROD PIER KING SETUP



Anglers targeting king mackerel use two rods from the pier, one with a heavy sinker as an anchor and used as a trolley to deliver the bait, which is rigged to another, lighter rod.

## TEAM EFFORT

Preparation, catching and positioning baits are just the warm-up. When a fish hits, multiple fishermen spring into action. One is the lucky angler whose bait was eaten; the others move rods and crank baits in to make sure the fish clears the other lines on its first run. Moving over and under other rods and lines can appear to be a bit of a dance — sometimes fondly referred to as “the king mack two-step.”

When the fish tires and the fisherman leads it back to the pier, he again often needs a little help working it through the lines and into position to gaff. The gaff man is very important, as he must lower the gaff into the water without tangling anything, jerk it to set its hooks when the fisherman leads the tired fish over it and then hoist the fish up to the pier. Large fish usually require two gaffs for security and a little help to lift the fish from the water to the deck.

All pier-end catches are congratulated. There are too many things that can go wrong, and landing a big fish from a pier is

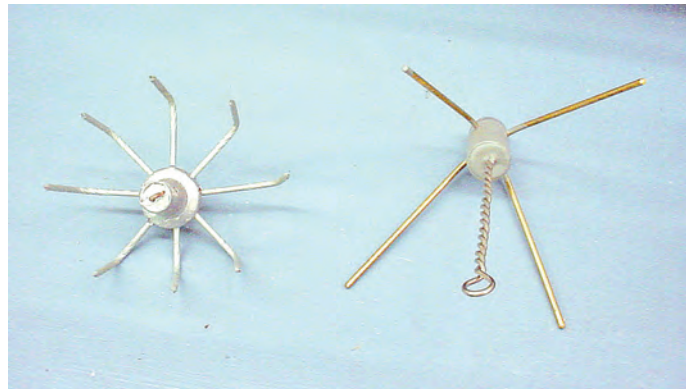
## BOATS' NO-FLY ZONE

Anglers in boats often fish around piers when good fishing is being reported.

Avoid this practice.

Big fish can cover hundreds of yards in less than a minute, and boats can't react fast enough to get out of the way.

Allow the pier end king fishermen room to land their fish.



Jerry Dilsaver



Heavy, specialized sinkers help anglers place their live baits when fishing from the end of a pier for kings or other big gamefish.

an accomplishment. There are core groups of anglers that fish most piers and know each other. They also share bait and jump in to help when needed. It's satisfying to all of them when a big king, cobia or whatever is hoisted over the pier's railing.

Yogi Berra was right when he said, “It ain't over 'til it's over.” When catching big fish from the pier ends, it ain't over until the fish thumps on the deck. ■

## RIGS FOR PIER KINGS >



Jerry Dilsaver of Oak Island, N.C., a full-time freelance writer, is a columnist for Carolina Sportsman. He is a former SKA National Champion and USAA Angler of the Year.

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# RIGS FOR PIER KINGS

Rigs used to target king mackerel from a pier are different from those used to slow-troll live baits from boats. They harness the bait from above, not from its nose going back.

Veteran angler Ron Brewer makes his own rigs — and the rigs sold in the Oak Island Pier's tackle shop, plus several others area tackle shops. These rigs use Nos. 7 and 8 coffee-colored, single-strand wire, three 4X strong, silver-gray, Nos. 4 or 2 Gamakatsu treble hooks and two 100-pound barrel swivels.

The rig begins with a swivel, then uses a single piece of wire for a couple of feet to another swivel. Two pieces of wire extend 6 to 8 inches from the bottom eye of this swivel and have treble hooks on the ends. Another piece of wire drops about 4 to 5 inches from one of the treble hooks to a third treble hook. The difference in wire sizes is due to availability, and the difference in hook sizes relates to the size of the bait: larger baits get larger hooks.

The rig is tied on the end of the line from the fighting rod. Some fishermen double the line for more abrasion resistance. A bait is attached by inserting one barb of the single, trailing treble hook just behind the bait's head and one barb of the top hook of the trailer with two hooks just behind the bait's dorsal fin. The lower hook can be left dangling or pinned in the bait's belly.

"King strikes come from below or the side, and the hooks are positioned to get as many hooks as possible in the king's mouth," Brewer said. "It's hard to believe they can miss three hooks, but they sometimes do. Sometimes when they miss, the treble hooks snag the fish anyway. Ideally, you want a fish hooked well, especially when leading it back through the lines and around the pilings to be gaffed, but sometimes they aren't, and sometimes they get away. It's fishing, not catching."

The baited rig is lowered down the anchor line to the water, confining it to a small area so it doesn't tangle with other baits. The release is a balance of enough strength to hold a struggling bait, but sensitive enough to release the line when a fish strikes. There are numerous variations in releases, and as long as they work properly, all is fine.



A king rig for pier fishing is designed for strikes from below, not from mackerel chasing a trolled live bait.





Jerry Dilsaver



Shower-curtain rings are often the business end of a pier king-rig release mechanism.

The release most Oak Island Pier fishermen are using begins with an 8- to 12-inch piece of the same wire as the rig. It is bent in half, and a small loop is formed in the bend and secured with a haywire twist. The release is attached to the line from the anchor rod using this loop. Double snap swivels and shower-curtain rings are two of the most-popular ways to do this.

Building the release is personal preference, and fishermen use different combinations of beads, floats and weights to quickly identify their release. Hold the wire ends together and thread a bead or two, then a small float and/or egg sinker or some combination of these up the wires. The last step is to bend the ends of the wire in opposite directions. The release is attached to the line from the anchor rod, and the rig is snapped into the release by pinching the ends of the wire together and sliding them through the top eye of the swivel at the end of the rig.

The rig holds the bait, the release holds the rig and the anchor line holds the bait in place until a fish hits. On the strike, the rig is pulled from the release and the fisherman fights the fish on the fighting rod. Hopefully, all goes well, and the fish is landed, but sometimes things go wrong and help fuel fish tales about the big one that got away. ■

**SOUND & SEA ➤**

**HUNTING SEASONS**

SPECIES	SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND)	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 4-6, Sept. 7-Oct. 2	15	45
	Nov. 13-27, Dec. 17-Jan. 31, 2022		
Crow	Nov. 1-March 1, 2022	No limits	
Quail	Nov. 22-March 1, 2022	12	36
Rabbit	Nov. 25-March 1, 2022	5	15
Squirrel	Oct. 1-March 1, 2022	10	30
Fox	Nov. 25-March 1, 2022	No limits	
Grouse	Nov. 25-March 1, 2021 (Game Zone 1 only)	3	9
Raccoon	Sept. 15-March 15, 2022 (statewide)	3 raccoons per party	
Opossum	Sept. 15-March 15, 2022	No limits	
Other furbearers	Nov. 25-March 1, 2020 (bobcat, otter, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk)	No limits	
Bear	Game Zone 1	Oct. 17-23 (still hunting only) Oct. 24-30 (dogs)	
	Game Zone 2	Oct. 17-30 (still hunting only)	
	(parts of Oconee, Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg counties not in Game Zone 1)		
	Game Zone 4 (Georgetown, Horry, Marion and Williamsburg counties)	Oct. 17-30 (still hunting only)	
Rails	Sept. 8-12,		
King & Clapper	Oct. 4-Dec. 7	15	45
Sora & Virginia		25	75
Gallinules (common/purple)		15	45
Snipe	Nov. 14 - Feb. 28, 2022	8	24
Woodcock	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31, 2022	3	9
Wild Turkey	March 22-April 30, 2022 (Game Zones 3&4)	3	
	April 1-May 10, 2022 (Game Zones 1&2)	3	

**DEER SEASON**

ZONE	ARCHERY ONLY	PRIM WEAPON	GUNS
1		Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan. 1, 2022
2	Sept. 15-30	Oct. 1-10	Oct. 11-Jan.1, 2022
3			Aug. 15-Jan. 1, 2022
4	Aug 15-31		Sept. 1-Jan. 1, 2022
<b>Youth Days:</b> Game Zone 1, Sept. 25, Jan. 8; Game Zone 2: Sept. 11, Jan. 8; Game Zone 3: Aug.14, Jan. 8; Game Zone 4: Aug. 14, Jan. 8.			

**WATERFOWL SEASONS**

SPECIES	DATES	BAG LIMIT
Duck	Teal only: Sept. 10-25	6
	Nov. 20-27, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2022	6
Canada geese	Sept. 1-30, Nov. 20-27,	15 (Sept.)
	Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2022, Feb. 15-March 1, 2022	5 (Others)
Blue/snow (light) geese	Nov. 20-27, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2022, Feb. 15-March 1, 2022	25
Brant	Dec. 13-Jan. 31, 2022	2
Sea ducks	Nov. 20-27, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2022	5
Mergansers	Nov. 20-27, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2022	5 (1 hooded)
Coots	Nov. 20-27, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2022	15

Brian Cope

Finding convergence zones is a big step to getting on numerous species of fish, like this dolphin caught by Zac Tilley (right) while fishing out of Morehead City, N.C.



Brian Cope

# FINDING FISH MAGNETS

'CONVERGENCE ZONES' ATTRACT FISH OF ALL SPECIES FOR MANY REASONS

**W**hen it comes to finding fish, no matter where you are on the globe, Dave Tilley has one piece of advice: look for convergence zones. These are places where at least two variables meet, and they are magnets for fish.

Tilley lives in Carolina Beach, N.C., and runs charters on the *Wild Rover III*. He also operates SaltwaterCentral.com and helps other anglers find promising fishing areas wherever they're fishing. Thanks to the ever-changing weather, currents, winds and other factors, convergence zones change constantly, especially in the deep blue sea.

"If you think about it, people like convergence zones, too," Tilley said. "When I would go to my son's lacrosse games, I wanted to be in a place that offered a good view of the field and was in the shade. Shade is a convergence zone — it's where the sunlight meets an obstacle that creates shade. If I could find an area like that pretty close to the hot dog stand, that was even better."

Those are the types of areas that fish look for constantly.

"Fish spend their whole lives looking for convergence zones," Tilley said. "They want to find the most-comfortable temperatures, and they want to be near food. Where two currents meet, where two temperature extremes collide, where wind comes in at different temperatures or speeds, where high salt content meets low salt content — these are all convergence zones. And those zones offer fish options to find what's most preferable to them."

## PARE DOWN SPOTS

For offshore anglers, especially those targeting pelagic species, current breaks, temperature breaks and depth changes combine to produce areas most likely to gather fish in big numbers. Long ago, predicting these factors was little more than a guessing game. These days, the internet and a host of weather-related forecasts offer anglers the opportunity to narrow down where fish-holding convergence zones are most likely to occur.

Tilley's website is full of tools that offer mapping services showing where convergence zones are from one day to the next. It helps anglers find current and

temperature breaks, along with wind models and other factors that come into play when searching for convergence zones that concentrate fish.

He also offers Fish Here maps for a small fee. Anglers share the place from which they are launching and the date they're fishing. The Fish Here map tallies the information, then predicts where convergence zones will be. It's a huge time and fuel saver for anglers and saves them a lot of headaches. It's time-consuming to put all the factors together, so taking time and guesswork out of it is very well worth it to many anglers.

Convergence zones don't just occur offshore, and finding them doesn't always require computer software or weather models. Anglers also find productive areas like these inshore. Current seams are often visible, especially when wearing polarized sunglasses. Where shade



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

meets full sunlight, shallow water meets deep water, narrow passageways meet open water — these are all visible clues on which inshore anglers should key in.

## MORE THAN TEMPS

Anglers fishing the surf will also catch more fish if they concentrate their efforts on convergence zones. Where the waves crash, the lulls between crashes, and the white foam meeting the beach are all examples. Observing how the waves break and finding areas where waves of two slightly different angles meet are also keys to knowing where to cast.

One of the most-common questions anglers ask Tilley concerns the ideal temperatures for certain species of fish.

“And the answer is, there isn’t an ideal temperature for each species,” he said. “There is certainly an ideal range that they’d like to be in, and they are constantly looking for that range. But factors other than temperature also come into play. Wind speeds, food sources, current speeds, depth changes, moon phases — they are all pieces of the puzzle.

“We’ve all heard the saying that 90% of the fish are found in 10% of the water. Well, a big portion of those fish are constantly bumping up against convergence zones. So as long as you’re spending a good chunk of your time fishing convergence zones, you’ve eliminated a lot of unproductive water right away. Convergence zones — whether offshore, nearshore, inshore or in the surf zone — make up a big chunk of that 10% of the water that most of the fish are in.” ■

**“”** **SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY ➤**  
*Fish spend their whole lives looking for convergence zones. They want to find the most-comfortable temperatures, and they want to be near food.*

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## HUNTING SEASONS

### DEER

Region	Method	Season
Western	Bowhunting	Sept. 11-Oct. 3 Oct. 17-Nov. 21 Dec. 12-Jan. 1, 2022 (bucks only)
	Muzzleloader	Oct. 4-16
	Gun	Nov. 22-Dec. 11
Northwestern	Bowhunting	Sept. 11-Nov. 5
	Muzzleloader	Nov. 6-19
	Gun	Nov. 20-Jan. 1, 2022
Central	Bowhunting	Sept. 11-Oct. 29
	Muzzleloader	Oct. 30-Nov. 12
	Gun	Nov. 13-Jan. 1, 2022
Northeastern/ Southeastern	Bowhunting	Sept. 11-Oct. 1
	Muzzleloader	Oct. 2-15
	Gun	Oct. 16-Jan. 1, 2022

### BEAR

Oct. 18-Nov. 20 & Dec. 13-Jan. 1, 2022:	In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties
Nov. 13-Jan. 1, 2022:	Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Union counties
Oct. 16-Jan. 1, 2022:	Franklin, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties
Nov. 20-Jan. 1, 2022:	Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties
Nov. 18-Jan. 1, 2022:	Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Robeson, Sampson counties
Nov. 13-28, Dec. 11-26:	Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell counties
Nov. 13-21, Dec. 11-26:	Beaufort, Bertie, Craven, Hertford, Jones, Martin, Washington counties
Nov. 13-21 Dec. 12-27:	Camden*, Chowan*, Currituck Gates, Pasquotank*, Perquimans (*Seasons open Nov. 12 by local laws)
Nov. 20-Dec. 19:	Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Pitt, Wayne, Wilson counties

### SQUIRREL

Oct. 18-Feb. 28, 2022 (gray & red)  
Oct. 18-Jan. 31, 2022 (fox)

### RABBIT

Oct. 18-Feb. 28, 2022

### RACCOON, OPOSSUM

Oct. 18-Feb. 28, 2022

### QUAIL

Nov. 20-Feb. 28, 2022

### GROUSE

Oct. 18-Feb. 28, 2022

### RAILS

Sept. 4-14, Oct. 2-Dec. 1

### COMMON SNIPE

Oct. 27-Feb. 28, 2022

### CANADA GEESE

Resident zone, Oct. 21-30, Nov. 6-29,  
Dec. 18-Feb. 12, 2022

Statewide: Sept. 1-30; NE Zone, Jan. 15-31, 2022 permit

### SNOW, BLUE, ROSS GEESE

Oct. 12-Feb. 12, 2022, Feb. 14-March 31, 2022, permit

### DUCKS

#### (Inland Zone)

Oct. 21-23, Nov. 6-27, Dec. 18-Jan. 31, 2022

#### (Coastal Zone)

Oct. 29-30, Nov. 6-29, Dec. 19-Jan. 31, 2022

### EARLY TEAL

Sept. 11-29 (east of US 17 only)

### SEA DUCKS

Nov. 23-Jan. 31, 2022

### BRANT

Dec. 18-Jan. 31, 2022

### DOVE

Sept. 4-Oct. 2, Nov. 6-27, Dec. 9-Jan. 31, 2022

### TUNDRA SWAN

Nov. 6-Jan. 31, 2021. Bag limit 1, by permit only.

### WOODCOCK

Dec. 10-Jan. 31, 2022

### WILD TURKEY (Youth)

April 2-8, 2022

April 9-May 7, 2022

## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

Marsh hens, rails, moorhens and purple gallinules all fall within the same general season time frames in September.



Phillip Gentry

# PADDLE YOUR WAY TO SEPTEMBER SHOOTING

CAROLINA KAYAKERS, GET READY FOR TEAL, GEESE, SWAMP CHICKENS

**E**arly waterfowl seasons in both North Carolina and South Carolina allow hunters and paddlers the best of the two sports. Warm weather and water let you hunt in shorts and short sleeves while letting the boat do all the work of transportation and camouflage. Here's some tips on what to expect for September shooting.

## TEAL

Pre-season scouting is the key to successful green-winged and blue-winged teal hunting. Teal tend to skirt the edges of grass and points in the marsh, and they'll often fly over little islands next to those points. A good pass-shooting strategy if you don't see birds on the water while scouting is to set up in these places and watch to see where birds are going.

Swamps and sloughs with expanses of open water will hold teal, as well as larger lakes and impoundments. Aquatic vegetation in expanses of shallow water is important. Make sure you are hunting an area that has a good food source. You are not likely to see many birds, if any, without food available. Prepared and flooded crop fields have the capacity to

produce some great teal shooting.

Hunting in a kayak allows you to be mobile, to go where the birds are. Try to hide the boat in surrounding vegetation rather than installing a blind contraption on your boat. That way, you can bug out quickly and efficiently if needed.

Teal season opens Sept. 11 in both Carolinas. It closes Sept. 26 in South Carolina and Sept. 29 in North Carolina. In the Tarheel State, hunting is open only east of US 17.

## CANADA GEESE

For everyone else in the Carolinas, there is Canada goose hunting. Over the past several years, early season waterfowlers have discovered the benefits of field hunting for resident Canadas, but this type of hunting can be hit or miss without up-to-the-minute scouting.

Stalking Canada geese is an often-overlooked way to hunt "sky carp" during the mid-day hours when birds are more prone to sit on the water. Stalking often requires you to cover a lot of water on inland lakes, so mother-shiping is a good choice. You can approach from a motorized boat within sight of loafing

flocks, perhaps a couple hundred yards, then deploy the kayak and try to ease within shooting distance.

## SWAMP CHICKENS

Marsh hens, rails, moorhens and purple gallinules are collectively known as "swamp chickens." These birds are best hunted during flood tides so there are fewer places for them to hide; otherwise, you may hear them but never see one.

Swamp chickens don't flush like quail or fly like doves. They are not hard to hunt and rank just below oystering in success rate if you find the quarry. Paddling through floating mats of marsh grass is much simpler in a kayak than a motorized boat. The hull slides over and through the vegetation. In this process, birds are often flushed or at least make their presence known by swimming off or making short flight hops. ■



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

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD HUNTING KAYAK?

To understand what kind, style and quality kayak you'll need for early season waterfowl hunting, it's important to understand what demands will be made of the vessel.

You will need few to no accessories. That means a boat with mounts, connections and other attachments to the hull won't be necessary and in fact, may create a hindrance, as hunting kayaks are frequently used to slip through overgrown, swampy, marshy areas with lots of vegetation and woody cover. The best hulls will be narrow and sleek, allowing the paddler/hunter to slip through the cover without hanging up.

The need for stability in a hunting kayak is probably not as high as in a fishing kayak. The need to stand and shoot doesn't exist, so it's better to have a sleeker design over a wider bottom. Hunting kayaks do need the ability to cover a lot of ground, quickly. The best hunting waters may be a mile or more from the launch site, and the hunter/paddler will need to get there before daylight.

Payload is another question. The days of hunting with dozens of decoys are pretty well over. One dozen duck decoys or a half-dozen goose decoys will usually do the trick, if they are needed at all. You read that right. A lot of early season waterfowling will consist of sneaking and pass-shooting, so you may get by in the gear category with nothing but a gun, paddle, call and box of shells.

Is a camouflaged boat a necessity? The answer can be found in the word camouflage, which suggests blending into the surroundings. A dull, drab-colored boat with a beat-up finish certainly meets the definition better than a shiny wrap or high-definition color scheme.

In some cases, the boat may be ditched under some vegetation once you get to the place you want to set up and shoot, but otherwise, comfortable seating will be near the top of the list. A comfortable seat that allows the shooter to move freely and shoot in all directions is also a bonus. ■



Phillip Gentry

## SEPTEMBER'S BEST BETS

Instead of breaking down best bets by state, this month, we'll do it by region.

### **EASTERN CAROLINAS**

North Carolina offers some teal hunting options in areas east of US 17, and the terrain east of I-95 in South Carolina is more conducive for some waterfowl species.

**WHAT** — Teal and swamp chickens

**WHERE** — Coastal marshes

**HOW** — If the stars align and some early flights of green-wings or blue-wings show up, grab your kayak and head for the marsh. North Carolina's season is Sept. 11-29; South Carolina's is Sept. 11-26. The seasons for marsh hens, rails, moorhens and purple gallinules align with the moons and flood tides. That's Sept. 15-20 in South Carolina and Sept. 4-14 in North Carolina. Look for swamp chickens to head for higher ground around marsh islands and atolls.

**LAUNCH** — Scouting for birds should include some notes about where the closest legal dump-in is located.

**INSIDER TIP** — Dogs and kayaks are not always the best option, particularly large dogs and cockpit-style boats. The heat and gators also play into the equation, so if you do take your

small, well-mannered, retriever with you, plan for water and other safety precautions.

### **WESTERN CAROLINAS**

**WHAT** — Canada geese

**WHERE** — South Carolina's Midlands and Upstate, North Carolina's Piedmont.

**HOW** — Canadas tend to feed in fields early, then head back to water to cool off and loaf through the middle of the day. If your group didn't bag 15 birds per person (the limit in both states) by field hunting in a layout blind, grab your yak and head for the closest water supply and stalk geese in the backs of uninhabited creeks and coves during mid-day.

**LAUNCH** — Again, go where the birds are and plan your launch sites accordingly.

**INSIDER TIP** — Unless you go with the standard decoy, blind, calling to the gun strategy in September, don't wear camouflage when stalking geese. Resident birds are surprisingly less spooky of paddle boats on the water in September than they will be in December, so keep the gun hidden and have a buddy paddle with you while you each flank within shooting range.

Sullivan McElveen caught this shark in Charleston Harbor while fishing with guide Dylan Rohlfs of RedFin Charters.



## Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

# SEPTEMBER SHARKS INVADE THE HARBOR

## Charleston anglers get shots at several shark species, plus bull reds

**W**hen Sullivan McElveen of Mt. Pleasant, S.C., caught her first shark in Charleston Harbor, she couldn't stop smiling. It gave her a new respect for sharks and an appreciation for why anglers target them.

"The biggest fish I'd caught before that was an upper-slot redfish, and I thought that was a fight," she said. "But the shark—wow! I still can't believe what a fight that was. Catching it was truly a thrill."

McElveen was fishing with Dylan Rohlfs of RedFin Charters when she hooked the shark, a 5-foot-plus bruiser that bit a big chunk of cut bait in about 35 feet of water.

Rohlfs said the Harbor is a great place to target sharks this month.

"The sharks are active here in the harbor throughout the year, including September," he said. "We catch a big variety, and

we catch them in all sizes. For anyone looking for a fun fight, a shark fishing trip can give you all you want."

Rohlfs said in September, anglers targeting sharks can catch bull redfish, which are also on the prowl in the harbor.

He said catching sharks just takes some basic knowledge and tools. Knowing how to read current breaks is a plus.

### A BIG FIGHT

"I like to anchor down, then cast two lines out," Rohlfs said. "I use an 8/0 circle hook, 80- to 100-pound braided line with a comparably-sized fluorocarbon leader, and a 4500 to 5500 series Daiwa BG spinning reel. Just about any type of cut bait will do, and once the lines are out, I like to keep the rods in rod holders. When a shark bites, you'll know it."

When a shark bites, Rohlfs said anglers

need to be prepared for a big battle. Anglers are often surprised, he said, at how strong of a fight these sharks put up.

"Once you've got the rod out of the rod holder, you just need to reel as you lower the rod tip, then stop reeling and pull up on the rod," said Rohlfs (843-277-5255).

"Then, reel down again, stop reeling and lift. Even with the fight of a shark, reeling down, then lifting the rod should be a smooth process. Let the rod do its job, let the drag on the reel do its job, and you'll get the shark in. Let it run when it's pulling against the drag, then get back to reeling."

Rohlfs said anglers can expect a variety of shark species this month, including bonnetheads, hammerheads, fine-toothed sharks, sandbar sharks and bull sharks. ■



# LAKE HICKORY STRIPERS LIKE IT COOLER

## Look for water that's just a couple of degrees cooler for the best September action

By Tony Garitta

Let's be frank. September is not the most-beloved month for fishing, whatever the species you target. Early September mimics the dog days of summer, with sweltering temperatures and lethargic fish hunkered down in deep holes. Late September offers some promise of better fishing, with slightly cooler water temperatures — but not cool enough to trigger a major movement to the shallows to unleash the bite.

The gradual transition period in late September makes locating the fish a painstaking challenge that can be intensified by the recent trend towards hotter, wetter summers.

"There's not going to be any one area on Lake Hickory that's a real hot spot for stripers in September," said guide Colt Bass of Colt Bass Fishing. "Any spot you can find with a little bit cooler water than the rest of the lake might be productive."

For that reason, Bass keeps his eye on his temperature gauge and his sonar unit, looking for potential places.

"It could honestly be something as simple as a deep hole, a shaded spot or a place where a creek feeds into the lake," said Bass ([www.coltbassfishing.com](http://www.coltbassfishing.com)). "Hickory may only be 4,223 acres, but it's a river-channel lake with numerous feeder creeks."

Bass said some fishermen make the mistake of looking for dramatic differences in water temperature.

"It doesn't take much; as little as 2 to 5 degrees can pack a bunch of stripers into one spot," he said. "I'll be looking for these cool water spots and fishing them with 4- to 6-inch live gizzard shad, the main forage for stripers at Hickory."

Bass said stripers in these cool spots will be in 25 feet of water or deeper.

To catch them, he uses a 7-foot, medium-heavy Shakespeare Ugly Stik rod paired with a 6500 Ambassador reel filled with 20-pound line with a Carolina rig at the business end. The Carolina rig features a 3- to 4-foot leader of 17-pound fluorocarbon, a 1-ounce egg sinker, and a No. 1/0 circle hook.

"A circle hook and a quick release is necessary for a live release in September, because of the warm water," said Bass, who arranges four

to six rods around his boat, vertically dropping his baits to different depths.

Other factors affecting striper fishing include current and water color.

"The fishing is always better when the lake is being pulled and when the water is clear," Bass said. "Dingy water will hurt you at Hickory."

Bass said the best bite will be from daylight until 10 a.m.

September fishing won't yield many strikes, but the ones you'll get will be from quality fish.

Bass said Hickory stripers run from 7 to 9 pounds, with plenty of fish in the teens. The lake also holds trophy stripers weighing 20 pounds or better. ■

Guide Colt Bass said Lake Hickory produces plenty of striped bass that weigh in the teens, even during September's doldrums.



# COOLER WATER SPURS STRIPERS, CRAPPIE

## Lake Russell fish remain mostly deep

**A** By Pat Robertson  
nglers on Lake Russell can expect striper and crappie fishing to remain strong through September, according to guide Wendell Wilson of Elberton, Ga.

"Stripers and crappie are the best things going for September on Russell," Wilson said. "You have the opportunity to catch a couple of big stripers, and when the water temperature falls back down to 78 to 79 degrees, crappie fishing really picks up."

Stripers will still be in the summer pattern and there are two ways to target them, according to Wilson (706-283-3336).

"You can go up into the Hartwell Dam tailrace and free-line herring or big gizzard shad along the river channel, or you can go down the lake and fish deep water with straight-lined herring down 30 to 50 feet deep," he said.

Stripers will run 8 to about 15 pounds, he said, with a daily limit including hybrids of two per angler. Hybrids can run up to 6 to 10 pounds, but the lake is full of 3- to 6-pound hybrids that can provide plenty of catch and release action.

"There may be a few stripers left in the lake that will push over 20 pounds, but we don't have near the 30-pound fish we had 7 years ago before the gill maggots got in there. Now, if you catch a 20-pounder, it's a big one."

Wilson said Russell also has a healthy population of feisty spotted bass that are often a by-catch species for striper-hybrid fishing. Large numbers of spots can be caught when they school up later in the fall.

The crappie will be holding near brush piles in 20 feet of water this month, and anglers can catch them on minnows fished 8 to 12 feet down.

"In September you can expect to catch pretty good quality crappie, 13- to 14-inch fish," Wilson said.

And if hungry stripers and hybrids and slab crappie are not exactly what you are aiming for you can just go fishing, Wilson said.

"If you just go and fish with minnows on the bottom in 20 to 25 feet of water, you can expect to catch white and yellow perch, small channel catfish and a few spotted bass," he said. ■



Wendell Wilson

In September, Lake Russell's healthy population of crappie will be holding above brush piles that are about 20 feet deep.



## LONG BAY BULLS ARE RUNNING

### Cooling weather, baitfish arrival spurs bite from big drum

Mark Patterson boated this bull red from his kayak a short distance off the beach at Oak Island.

**F** By Jerry Dilsaver  
all brings cooling water temperatures, and that kicks off the fall run of trophy red drum in the waters off North Carolina's Brunswick County, aka Long Bay. The cooling water triggers schools of mullet to surge through the inlets and migrate down the beach, and schools of menhaden are already there, just off the beach.

The two baitfish species create a buffet for hungry fish, and the big drum also receive notice of the impending winter and begin feeding seriously to bulk up for leaner times.

The baitfish may be just beyond the breakers or a bit farther offshore, and it doesn't matter to the drum. Fishing can be unbelievably good. Most of these fall drum exceed the upper limits of the 18- to 27-inch slot and must be released. Those exceeding 40 inches are eligible for a release citation. Take a quick picture to prove your catches.

This run of large red drum began about 15 years ago, and it continues to improve. A few are around all year, but the best push and best action comes from mid-September through October. They are a primary target for fishermen in boats, kayaks, pier anglers and even surf fishermen.

Mark Patterson, founder and president of the North Carolina Kayak Fishing Association, targets the big reds in the surf

and from his kayak. He said they can almost always be found between the beach and the nearshore artificial reefs, with Yaupon Reef (AR 425) being the closest.

"Pogies and mullet are the best baits whether fishing the surf or farther off the beach," Patterson said. "We use chunks of them on fish-finder rigs when fishing the surf and whole ones fished live on heavy duty Carolina rigs when fishing farther off — which many times isn't far. Every school of baitfish moving down the beach is a potential hotspot. To cover more ground around a large bait school, we cast and retrieve live baits or 6-inch curlytail grubs on 1- or 2-ounce bucktails."

Patterson said big reds may be anywhere along the beach, but he likes to surf-fish the area inshore of the Hot Hole at Caswell Beach. It is near the Cape Fear River Inlet, and lots of baitfish move by close to the beach. He prefers to launch his kayak at the SE 49th Street beach access on Oak Island.

"Once beyond the breakers, we typically head in the general direction of Yaupon Reef but are constantly looking for bait schools and diving seagulls feeding on bait," Patterson said. "If you find bait schools, stop and fish. Yaupon Reef is huge and almost always has a school of feeding drum, but many days we don't have to go that far, and that energy is better spent fighting fish." ■



Jeff Burleson

## LITTLE RIVER REDS ON A ROLL

### Border inlet fills up with baitfish, bull redfish in September

The author wrestled this powerful bull red aboard in Little River Inlet.

**F** By Jeff Burleson  
all fishing arrives soon, and Little River Inlet, straddling the North Carolina/South Carolina border, is arguably one of the hottest places to be on a September day — if you want to catch multiple 20- to 40-pound redfish on the same trip.

The inlet fires up this month with old drum patrolling and gobbling up mullet and menhaden. Anglers with the know-how can burn a day's worth of calories heaving in these spot-tailed beasts.

With bait becoming abundant, Little River is one of the first fisheries to fire off with bull reds. The fertile, tea-colored waters emptying into the ocean through the inlet makes them a seasonal hotspot and not to be missed during the fall run.

"We start catching them at the end of August, and they generally peak around the end of September," said guide Tom Cushman of Calmwater Charters (843-997-5850). "The baitfish are thick this time of year, and the big reds are taking full advantage of it."

The reds move and can be found along the beaches, but they are generally congregated anywhere bait is abundant.

"Mullet and menhaden are thick, and the inlet will have a steady flood of food coming in and out. The reds stack up," he said.

Baitfish will be continually flushed in and out of the inlet with the tide. Cushman said fishing on both incoming and outgoing tides can be great.

"Both the incoming and outgoing tides can be good," he said. "On some days, the incoming is better, and the outgoing is better on other days."

Cushman prefers to drift in or out, with the current dragging

baits along the bottom, or he will anchor up just beyond the channel at the end of the inlet on the outgoing tide.

"The big reds cruise just outside of the inlet on the falling tide and will scoop up bait as it flushes out," said Cushman, who will use either menhaden or mullet, depending on what is available when he fishes. He will use the same baits as chum.

"Chumming will help bring fish to the boat. I trickle chunks ... out by hand," said Cushman, who uses a combination of live bait, cut bait and even some live bait with short tails.

"It's kind of like catfishing in the ocean. Sometimes the live bait, the cut bait, or the baitfish with the tail cut off is the hot bait of the day. Other days, the other bait will be the winner," he said.

Cushman urges anglers to use extreme caution when handling these fish. Many bull reds get the short end of the stick and don't make it to their next birthday due to poor handling.

"Many big reds have been swimming in these waters for 20 to 40 years, and the last thing you want to do is kill them," he said. "Anglers need to use circle hooks and heavy equipment to get them to the boat quick and then release them fast."

Fish-handling techniques can make a huge difference in the number of release mortalities. Anglers should avoid holding the fish up using mouth grippers. They can be used to gain control of the fish's head, but their bodies must be supported, and the fish need to be released as soon as possible.

The bull redfish bite turns on around Labor Day and will continue until the water cools significantly in late October. It's a fun fishery that many anglers get excited about. ■

# TARGET SWANSBORO FLOUNDER DEEPER

## Drop-offs good when tide is moving

**N** By Craig Holt  
orth Carolina's long-anticipated but short recreational flounder fishing opens Sept. 1 and ends 14 days later.

Guides such as Dale Collins of Swansboro's Fish or Die Charters expect a wave of anglers to pound inshore and offshore waters and add these popular, tasty saltwater fish to their skillet and freezers.

"I think a lot of people will go every day of the season or as much as they can," said Collins, 52. "I also expect a lot of them will gig flounders."

Recreational anglers and giggers legally may keep four flounder of at least 15 inches per trip.

During the run-up to the season, Collins (252-422-4326) said many anglers who targeted red drum and spotted seatrout caught "lots" of flounder, just like the preview to last year's season.

"Flounder hit the same kind of baits you use for red drum and hang out at the same places," he said. "Redfish and flounder love 4- to 5-inch finger mullet, but they'll hit pin-fish, croakers and mud minnows. They'll eat anything struggling on a hook."

Many guides and tackle-shop owners said that 2020's short flounder season likely produced better results than previous longer seasons because of increased fishing pressure and stockpiled fish.

"I got a lot of calls this spring and summer asking about how to gig flounder. I've got a feeling during the 15 days of this coming season, I'll probably run 25 total charters," Collins said, mixing daytime between hook-and-line trips and night-time gigging trips.

Giggers use lights to illuminate flounder on the bottom in shallow water and impale them with steel rods or small tridents. Giggers also target bigger flounder, usually spawning females.

"Flounder sometimes only need as much water as will cover their backs," Collins said.

When he's fishing around Swansboro, Collins targets docks, boat ramps and anywhere there's a drop-off, including ledges, creek mouths with oyster points and other types of oyster rocks because they hold baitfish.

"In the marshes at high tide, we beat the banks against the grass," Collins said. "At low tide, flounders pull off and get in deeper holes."

Collins prefers Star Segis rods and Penn Conflict 2500 or 3000 series reels spooled with 4- to 15-pound moss-green Power Pro



Dale Collins

Guide Dale Collins shows off a flounder he caught during the 2020 short season near Swansboro.

braid and 30-pound Yozuri fluorocarbon leaders.

"I like gold Kahle hooks that match the sizes of the baitfish I use," he said.

The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission's latest attempt to reduce overfishing of southern flounder follows 2020's reduced flounder season when hoped-for 72%-percent target reduction of flounder taken missed by several country miles. ■



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

The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).

The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

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

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		POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
Wed 1						49
Thu 2						50
Fri 3						60
Sat 4						69
Sun 5						78
Mon 6						80
Tue 7						69
Wed 8						56
Thu 9						44
Fri 10						37
Sat 11						34
Sun 12						36
Mon 13						44
Tue 14						32
Wed 15						27
Thu 16						27
Fri 17						38
Sat 18						48
Sun 19						59
Mon 20						64
Tue 21						56
Wed 22						47
Thu 23						39
Fri 24						36
Sat 25						38
Sun 26						41
Mon 27						48
Tue 28						60
Wed 29						51
Thu 30						47
25 50 75 AVERAGE						

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

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

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**Garrett Stamey**

Garrett Stamey of Hildebran, N.C., got in on the flounder bite last fall with this 24-incher, fishing with Yeah Right Charters.



**Bryan Buckner**

Bryan Buckner from Saluda, N.C., caught this 4-pound hybrid bass at Lake Hartwell on Dec. 22, 2020.



**Dallas Brooks**

Dallas Brooks of Siler City, N.C., caught this pretty, 24-inch red drum on a live finger mullet near Wrightsville Beach, on Sept. 18, 2020.



**Alexandra Daly**

Alexandra Daly harvested her first deer, hunting in Wayne County, N.C., with Falling Creek Outfitters on Oct. 18, 2020.



**Matt Helmstetler**

Matt Helmstetler of Lexington, N.C., arrowed this piebald buck at 18 yards last Nov. 1 in Davidson County using a PSE bow.



**Brent Meche**

Brent Meche of Fort Mill, S.C., caught and released this 32-inch blue catfish at Lake Wylie on March 23.



**Levi Branch**

Levi Branch, 8, of Lumberton, N.C., made this woodie his first with his first duck kill last season.



**Blake, Julian, Coker, Izzie, Rett, Porter**

Just a typical weekend hog hunt in Boykin, S.C., from this past February. Pictured are: Blake Wooten, Julian Wooten, Coker Sanders, Izzie Wooten, Rett Thompkins and Porter Laney.



**Zack Staggs**

Zack Staggs of Pittsboro, N.C., caught this Jordan Lake bass on a Chatterbait this past March.



**Aubrey Winstead**

Aubrey Winstead, 7, killed her first buck on Nov. 2, 2020, in Beaufort County, N.C.



**Qesha Stewart**

Qesha Stewart, the owner of Rain Outdoors, took this nice buck in late December 2020.



**John Coley**

Jon Coley caught this 26-inch red on April 7, fishing with Daniel Griffree of On Deck Charters in the Newport (N.C.) River.



**Eli Mixson**

Eli Mixson of Ashton, S.C., killed this tom March 24 in Colleton County, using 20-gauge shotgun and Rectifire choke tube.



**Richard Steere**

Richard Steere of Garner, N.C., caught this 15-inch slab crappie on Jordan Lake on Jan. 23.



**Kate Pegram**

Kate Pegram, 6, caught this bluefish on a bottom rig in the surf at Emerald Isle, N.C., last December.

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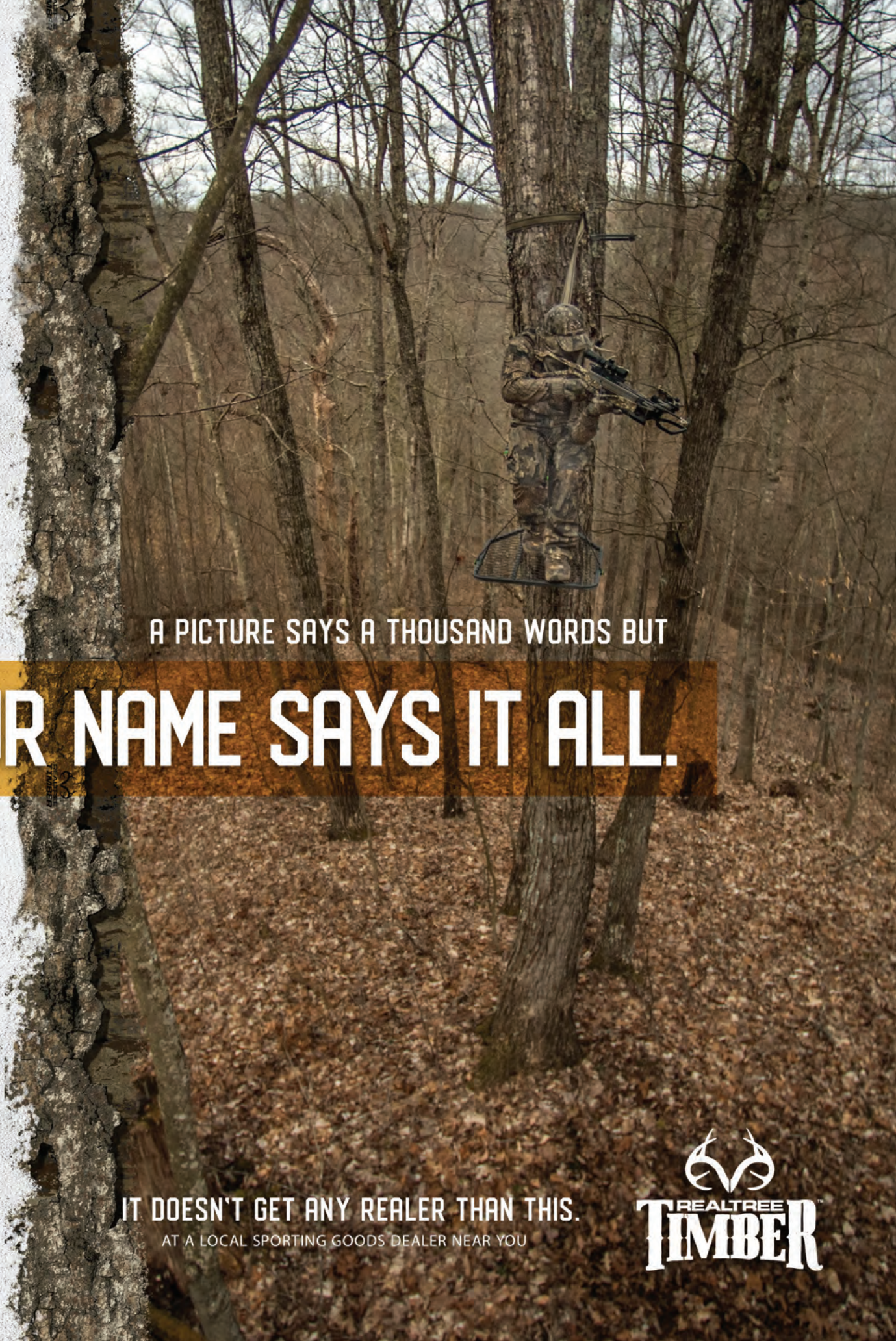
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