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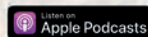
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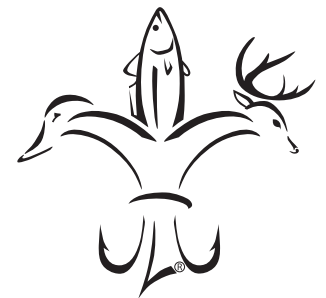


22

**BULL REDS  
THREE WAYS**

10

**GET AN EDGE ON A  
BIG BUCK**



**Carolina  
SPORTSMAN**

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

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

P.O. Box 1199, Boute, LA 70039-1199  
800.538.4355

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Deer season is in full swing in October in both Carolinas. Hunt edges and set your stand up in the right spot, and you might run into a trophy like this buck. Photo by Rick Small.

# 2600 PURE BAY

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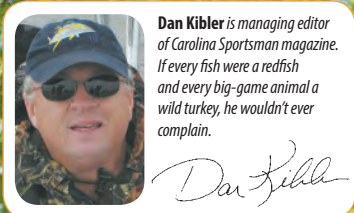
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Dan Kibler is managing editor of Carolina Sportsman magazine. If every fish were a redfish and every big-game animal a wild turkey, he wouldn't ever complain.

*Dan Kibler*

# Outdoor UPDATE

with Dan Kibler

## WE'VE GONE TO THE DOGS. GREAT! IF YOU LOVE GOOD DOG WORK, NEW COLUMN SHOULD DRAW A SMILE

**Y**eah, I admit it, I have shot a lot better than I did in the dove field on Labor Day weekend. We had tons of birds in our field 10 days before, then the remnants of tropical storm dropped

a couple of inches of rain in the area and dropped the temperature 10 degrees. I could almost feel the birds heading south.

Anyway, I didn't kill a limit either opening day or Labor Day, but I probably never had a chance. One thing I did get was a chance to see some fine dog work from my son's two Labs. Buckshot, the 7-year-old patriarch, made all the money spent on his training look worthwhile. His 2-year-old son, Boone, did some great work on his first hunt.

I bring up the dog work, because I grew up hunting quail behind good pointers and setters in middle Georgia. I met

a top-notch quail hunter in North Carolina about 20 years ago. He kept top-drawer pointers and setters, and I hunted with him two or three times a year and appreciated how great his dogs were. My uncle from Georgia even brought a couple of pointers up for him to break and get ready for the red clay piney woods.

So this all leads to something, right? Yep. Toward the back of this magazine, there's something new. This issue debuts a column on hunting dogs entitled "All Dogs Go to Heaven." It will run six months a year; the other six months, the "Head for the Mountains" column that Bob Satterwhite wrote before he retired this year, will return with a different author.

The hunting dogs column is being written by Pat Robertson, a veteran outdoor writer who cut his teeth as outdoor editor of *The State* newspaper in Columbia, SC. He is a life-long rabbit hunter who has trained field-trial champion beagles along with his wife, Jan, and he has judged more than 100 beagle field trials, but he's not a one-trick pony.

"There is nothing prettier than a quail dog on point, a Boykin at work in a dove field or a Lab making a retrieve in the duck marsh," he said. "And there is a



Phoebe Marie Britt of Socastee, S.C., took this great 8-pointer with a crossbow in Horry County on Aug. 20. For more big, early season bucks, see the Big Buck Gallery at the end of the Outdoor Update section.

### Bag-A-Buck Contest underway



Don't forget to post photos of your bucks in the Carolina Sportsman Bag-A-Buck Contest to be eligible to win monthly prizes including free magazine subscriptions.

To enter or see deer that have been entered, log onto <https://www.carolinasportsman.com/bag-a-buck/>

special feeling of excitement to see a pack of hounds hot on the trail of a wily fox or a coon dog baying his success at the tree his quarry scaled after a long chase on a moonlit night."

We hope plenty readers share his sentiments and enjoy his insights on the world of sporting dogs. ■



Edward Ryan had a fight on his hands when he hooked and landed this 12-pound, 14-ounce flounder fishing from a kayak on Sept. 9. The fish hit a finger mullet in the ICW near Carolina Beach, N.C.



Colby Clayton of Roxboro, N.C., wasted no time taking advantage of North Carolina's two-week flounder season, striking on the second day, Sept. 2, with this 11 1/4-pound fish caught out of Atlantic Beach on a live finger mullet.

SCDNR officers discovered these flounder in possession of three men on July 10 and charged them with illegal possession and sale. They also charged three men who purchased them, along with tripletail, sheepshead and red drum.

## SCDNR CRACKS DOWN ON FLOUNDER POACHERS

Conservation officers with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources charged three men and three businesses with illegal commercial harvest and sale of flounder in the Bluffton, S.C., area.

The July 10 arrests at the Alljoy Boat Landing in Bluffton were the culmination of a three-month investigation into illegal harvest and sale of flounder, tripletail, sheepshead and red drum.

Arrested at the landing were James Wooten, 33, of Bluffton; Dawson Loper, 21, of Bluffton; and David Festerman, 32, of Griffen, Ga. Multiple charges were brought against Wooten and Loper based on weeks of surveillance tying them to illegal harvest and sale of fish to a Bluffton-based food-truck business and two Hilton Head restaurants. Festerman was assisting the two men on the night of the arrests.

Wooten faces 21 counts of harvesting undersized flounder, 21 counts of harvesting over the limit of flounder; one count of harvesting undersized tripletail; nine counts of selling fish with no commercial wholesale dealer's license; two counts of having no commercial fishing license; as well as a boating equipment-related charge and two charges of driving under suspension.

Loper was cited for six counts of undersized flounder; one count each of over-the limit of flounder and undersized tripletail; as well as one count each of improper display of commercial decal on boat, no outboard motor decal and insufficient PFDs on board.

Festerman was charged with four counts of having undersized flounder and one count of having no saltwater fishing license.

Charges in this case have also been brought against individuals connected with the restaurants to which Wooten was selling the illegal catch. Under South Carolina law, any person engaged in selling fish or fishery products must have the appropriate commercial licenses, and individuals who knowingly purchase seafood from an unlicensed source can also be charged. Evidence gathered during the investigation implicated staff at Hudson's Seafood House and ELA's on the Water restaurants on Hilton Head Island and the Maiz Taqueria food truck in Bluffton.

Isaac Jimenez, Maiz Taqueria's owner, was cited for one count each of unlawful purchase of saltwater fisheries product, having no proper bill of lading and having no wholesale dealer's license. Earl Nightingale Jr., the owner of ELA's, was charged with two counts of unlawful purchase of saltwater fisheries products. Eric Seaglund, a chef at Hudson's, was charged with one count of unlawful purchase of a saltwater fishery product, and one count each of possession undersized tripletail and undersized flounder.

The three men arrested were taking fish by gigging at night. ■

## STORM DAMAGES NC'S PISGAH FACILITIES

**T**he devastating storm that swept through western North Carolina on Aug. 17, did plenty of damage to the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education and the adjoining Bobby N. Setzer Fish Hatchery in the Pisgah National Forest outside of Brevard.

The Education Center is closed, and all classes are suspended until further notice. The hatchery is operational but closed to the public.

Officials with the N.C. Wildlife Resource Commission said many buildings suffered water damage, and overflows in the hatchery raceway caused trout to be displaced — some washed into the nearby Davidson River or stranded on hatchery grounds.

Hatchery staff will develop plans to address trout stockings this fall and next spring that might be affected by the loss of some of the hatchery's one million trout.

Staff members at The Education Center moved to higher ground when the building began to take on water, and they were successfully evacuated by local emergency medical services. Hatchery staff and their families safely remained to care for the fish and the facilities.

## CCA-NC suit progresses

A Wake County Superior Court has rejected the state's motion to dismiss a lawsuit filed by the Coastal Conservation Association-North Carolina charging mismanagement of the state's coastal fisheries.

In the motion to dismiss, the state had asked the court to give it immunity from lawsuits of this kind, and it denied that it had any responsibility to manage coastal fisheries resources for the benefit of its citizens.

The court rejected each one of the state's arguments.

CCA-NC and 86 citizen plaintiffs contend that as a result of the state's failure to properly manage coastal fisheries, it had violated its constitution and the public trust doctrine.

# SC DEADLINE FOR LOTTERY DUCK HUNTS IS OCT. 15

**T**he S.C. Department of Natural Resources has set an Oct. 15 deadline to receive applications for its waterfowl lottery hunts on public lands.

Sportsman hoping to be drawn for one of the coveted hunts

must submit an application and non-refundable fee of \$20 for the regular lottery hunts and \$5 per youth applicant for the youth lottery hunts.

After the selection process occurs, only the primary applicant will receive email notification of the drawing's completion.

Hunts at Samworth and the Santee Delta WMAs will not be available this



year due to property renovations.

Applicants for the regular and youth lottery hunts also have the ability to opt-in for second-chance waterfowl hunting opportunities being offered by private landowners. There is no cost to the applicant.

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

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# SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Thatcher Hurt of West Columbia, S.C., took this 8-pointer in full velvet on Aug. 21 in Allendale County.



Jimmy Williams of Ridgeland, S.C., killed this 10-point trophy in Jasper County on Aug. 26. The 190-pound buck scored in the 130s.



Lance Hill of Sandy Run, S.C., killed this 11-point buck in Calhoun County on Aug. 22.



Garrett Webster of Chesterfield, S.C. killed this 10-point, 140-inch trophy buck in his home county on Sept. 1 with a Thompson Center .308.



Just a 6-pointer? Candace Jackson of Columbia, S.C., killed this tremendous 6-point trophy on Sept. 5 just outside the city limits of Lexington, S.C. The buck weighed 205 pounds.



# GET AN EDGE ON A BIG BUCK

EDGES, PLACES WHERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HABITAT MEET IN THE DEER WOODS, ARE SPOTS TO WHICH DEER HUNTERS SHOULD PAY ATTENTION WHEN LOOKING FOR AREAS TO SET UP STANDS.

■ By Jeff Burleson

# OF EVERY GAME SPECIES, deer are the most-popular pursued on the planet.

Hunters are uncanny, investing countless hours during their lifetimes looking for, essentially, a better mousetrap.

From different scents, revolutionary deer stands and a long list of high-tech gear, hunters continually try to outsmart mature bucks and improve their hunting experience.

But a deer's natural instincts shouldn't be forgotten. A white-tail will always have certain preferences in habitat types, no matter whether it was born in 1821 or 2021. Edges are crucially important and are among some of the hunter's best tools to understand and incorporate into their hunting strategies.

What is an edge, anyway?

Basically it is a place where two features meet, whether natural or man-made, such as a wood line along the edge of a lake or an agriculture field and a forested boundary. Edges can be abrupt or gradual and are found everywhere. But what makes one edge better than another?

Biologist Charles Ruth is the big-game program coordinator with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. According to Ruth, edges are often utilized by wildlife for several different reasons.

"Edges or transition zones are important for deer as travel corridors and food sources," Ruth said. "From a food standpoint, high-quality forage can be associated with edges because of the sunlight that is able to reach the forest floor."

## FORAGE OPPORTUNITIES

Essentially, new edges create growth opportunities for forage types that wouldn't be available to establish and flourish without the disturbance and prevalence of sunlight. Trees and heavy brush block sunlight from the forest floor, but when these areas are disturbed and light penetrates, growth of forbs and other tender vegetation can persist.

Since deer are ruminants, grasses can be attractive as a viable food source, but it's not just grasses, either. Edges create growth opportunities for forbs, shrubs and other young pioneer vegetation that offer deer something worth eating.

The width of the edge and the type of bordering communities can determine its quality. As Ruth said, edges are transition zones formed from two communities coming together. Typically, they are going to be abrupt at first and then will grow into a more-gradual zone that creates a wide assortment of forage opportunities from the ground to just out of a deer's reach.

"Edges could be a narrow feature or could be broad, and depending on the local factors will determine which one is better than another," he said.

## NARROW OR GRADUAL >



Edges typically provide ample food for deer because the change in habitats often allows sunlight to jump-start forage growth.

## NARROW OR GRADUAL

Narrow edges will typically have an abrupt transition point with some herbaceous plants fighting for survival on the short end and a few scattered shrubs and saplings along the timber border. A good example of an abrupt edge is along an agriculture field where the transition zone is narrowed each time the farmer plows or mows the field edge. Even though narrow, deer and other wildlife will patrol these edges looking for newly sprouted forbs and other tender vegetation.

Most edges between two or more timber types will have more gradual and broader transition zones that offer a wide range of foraging opportunities over time.

Ecotonal areas along swamps, rivers, wetlands and other places where moist soils exist create excellent foraging opportunities due to the presence of water and fertile soils. Both wetland and non-wetland plants will thrive in these areas, creating a buffet for deer. Edges along wetter areas are often some of the best places to find deer using them as a food source. Edges

Jeff Burleson

near water will often have a high site index due to the availability of moisture and nutrients, creating even better areas for food production.

## TRAVEL ZONES

Edges and transition zones are not just for feeding, either. They are the interstates of the woods, used by deer and other wildlife traveling from one place to another. Deer like traveling under the protection of the forest or heavy cover, but they also like to see and quickly evade predators when needed. Edges provide the ideal combination of cover and openness to create an ideal traveling situation.

Some edges are going to be better than others for travel, just like for foraging. Deer will have a destination, and they use edges and travel corridors to get from Point A to Point B. Hunters can take advantage of edges to increase their chances of encountering a deer that meets the criteria.

Edges are excellent places to hunt, especially in areas where baiting isn't allowed. As Ruth said, edges are good foraging and travel corridors; deer will use edges for feeding, but edges are usually utilized for foraging along the edge on the way to another destination. It's almost like street food for humans.

Primary feeding zones in the fall in the Carolinas are typically agriculture fields, oak flats, oak ridges — places that offer plenty of forage. Deer will use edges as travel corridors from bedding areas to the food. An edge may be a relatively narrow, wooded corridor along a stream bank.

## STREAMSIDE EDGES

In the South, much of the land is under some level of timber management, and foresters mark out streamside





Streamside management zones in areas managed for timber will provide deer with plenty of foraging opportunities along the stream. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The edges of cutovers will have plenty of new growth, drawing deer to use them regularly for food and travel.

Rick Small

management zones to protect water quality. These SMZs will have an edge along the creek edges along each side of the standing timber left from the previous harvest. Deer will utilize this entire edge complex for traveling and sometimes for bedding and feeding as well.

Deer will travel to food sources in places where food is natural or semi-natural like an agriculture field, but in areas where baiting is allowed may serve as a temporary — or somewhat permanent — food source that deer will gravitate to in fall and winter. Deer will use edges to travel to these food sources.

Whether deer are traveling to natural food or bait piles, deer will travel to and from via edges; they can make excellent places to set up a bow stand to encounter these deer on the way to their dinner table.

Fortunately for hunters, deer hoof it everywhere, and a well-used trail churned up with hoof marks is always going to give away which edge habitats are used more than others.

## SCENT-STATION EDGES >



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

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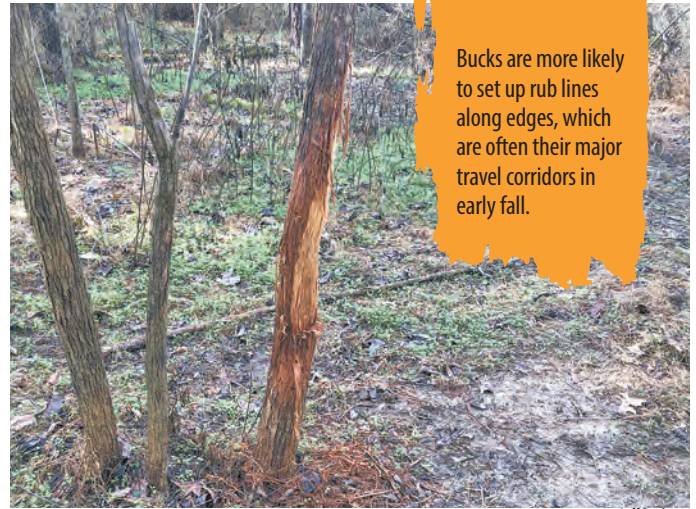
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## SCENT-STATION EDGES

Corridors that deer travel frequently will always be good places to set up in the rut, too. Both bucks and does will utilize edge habitats going from one place to another. Bucks make a living creating scent stations along these edges in the form of a typical rub or scrape. Not only are these features visual for deer, they are primarily used as scent stations to alert other bucks and to attract mates. A buck is more likely to place a rub or scrape along an edge than anywhere else. Edges are known travel and feeding corridors, and they will always choose these areas first when creating rubs and scrapes during mating season.

Edges are some of the best places to first explore when visiting a new property or a new area on an existing hunting property. Deer will surely be using edges wherever they can for feeding, traveling and for locating mates. Edges of swamps and any type of water feature should be highlighted and prioritized when looking to locate a stand. Edges along water features are premium places that deer use for feeding, traveling and setting up scent stations during rut and even bedding.

The edge concept isn't necessarily a new concept for deer hunters, but edges are sometimes underutilized or are hunted incorrectly. According to Ruth, edges are used for bi-directional travel when other things are equal. However, hunters also understand the power of the wind, and mature deer do so as well.



Jeff Burleson

Bucks are more likely to set up rub lines along edges, which are often their major travel corridors in early fall.

Deer will rarely travel downwind due to their inability to detect dangers in front of them. Hunters should set up along edges when the wind is favorable and not carry their scent across these travel corridors and edge habitats. As a result, deer will sometimes use edges from only one direction, and hunters can determine which edges are going to be preferred for deer on the prevailing winds.

Edges are important for deer and hunters who are looking to encounter their next trophy buck this season.

Ruth couldn't have said it any better. "Most any type of edge would benefit deer compared to a large area of a single habitat type." ■



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**S**electing the best place to locate a tree stand is as much a process of elimination as it is dedicated selection.

Barry Wenzel, one of the best-known archers in the country, tries to make sure he selects “just the right tree” for each specific location. Being a traditional bowhunter, Wenzel tries to limit his shots to 15 yards or closer, so his selection process may differ from most hunters in that regard — the steps he takes to select “just the right tree” do not.

Books have been written on this subject, and it can be an involved conversation. To simplify, it's divide and conquer. Basically, there are two approaches to selecting the proper tree for hunting: stands for bowhunters and stands for gun hunters. While there may be some similarities, there are key differences. Selecting the best tree-stand location is as much a process of elimination as it is dedicated selection.

■ By Pete Rogers

**FINDING THE BEST PLACE TO LOCATE YOUR TREE STAND IN A PARTICULAR AREA DEPENDS ON A HANDFUL OF FACTORS. HERE'S HOW TO PUT THEM IN ORDER.**

**STUDY  
FIRST,  
SIT LATER**

## ARCHERY STANDS

Nothing influences deer movement more than topography. Even the slightest change in topography will draw deer to an area. Whether it is a steep ridge or a slight rise in the ground, a topographical feature will cause deer to move through a particular corridor. Identify areas of topography that influence deer to use over other areas, and you are in the right area.

Deer are edge creatures, meaning they prefer to walk along edges. An edge is relative to your area. The easiest edge to identify is the edge of an agriculture field or even a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) field. Just inside the woods will be trails that parallel the field, as well as trails that are perpendicular to the field. Where these trails intersect is a good area to focus on for a stand locations. Other edges could be where pine plantations meet hardwoods or where two different types of terrain intersect. Anything that has a longitudinal change is an edge.

Being able to approach and get into your stand without detection is important, to the point that you may want to quietly clear a trail of leaves and undergrowth.

Funnels, pinch points or whatever you choose to call them, are key points on which to focus. These are highlighted by how the terrain narrows into an hourglass shape. By focusing on these funnels or pinch points, you will soon find areas where the terrain gets relatively narrow around a bend, creek, river or drainage. In big woods, look for where the topography changes drastically and pushes wildlife along its edge. Find the center of this funnel and hang a stand.

One of my favorite places to hunt with a bow is along a rub line. Bucks will mark territory by rubbing their antlers on trees. These can be random, but by spending some time walking your property pre-season, you will most certainly find specific areas where bucks tend to spend more time and mark more and more trees. Where there is a line of rubs, I hang a stand because I know the buck will be patrolling this area regularly. Placing a bow stand 20 to 25 yards from a rub line will put me in a great location.

But a great place to set up is only half the battle.

“If there is one thing, I want to say, it is if I can’t get to the stand without spooking deer, it is not a good location,” Wenzel said. “Regardless of how wonderful the funnel, bench or trail may be, if I can’t get there without every deer in the area know-



Pete Rogers



Pete Rogers

A change in habitat types is a great place to look for deer movements and set up a stand to wait for a big buck to pass.

ing I am there, it is useless.”

Access to the stand is arguably the most-important aspect of selecting the best stand location for bow season. Once you have located your area, study the access carefully. Wenzel’s point is crucial. I have abandoned some great stand locations because I knew I could not get there without alerting deer.

I go to the extreme and use a backpack blower and rake to remove debris from the ground to keep my egress and ingress as quiet as possible. Use as direct an approach as possible. When I can, I only approach from behind. Never approach your stand from the area or direction from which you expect deer to be coming.

## GUN STANDS ➤



**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.

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## GUN STANDS

I realize that I may be different in this regard, but my gun stands are very different from my bow stands. I set them a lot farther away from my intended target zone. That being the case, I set my stands accordingly.

In setting up gun stands, I look for completely different, yet similar things. Early season has me focused on food and travel corridors. If access to agriculture fields is available, set up looking east so the sun sets behind you, and study the edges. Try to place your stand a minimum of 100 yards from where you see deer entering and exiting a field.

In areas of cutovers — some of my favorite places to hunt — get as high as you can and cover as much country as you can. Personally, I do not like to climb high. While I am not afraid of heights, I find my hearing and distance judging is difficult at heights over 25 feet. I look for rises in the terrain and set a stand at the highest point to look over a clearcut.

In thick, wooded areas, I still want to cover as much ground as I can. After scouting and determining that the area is worth hunting, I look for where I can see the most country and set a stand there.

Gun-hunting can easily be done from stand sites that are used when bowhunting. Nothing says you must take long shots with a gun. Some of the biggest deer I've taken with



Pete Rogers

Try to locate a gun stand where you can cover as much ground as possible, but be around 100 yards from where you expect deer to appear.



# THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

Using technology to help scout for stand locations is one of the best uses of your time. Today's satellite images are so accurate that finding funnels, topographic features and edges are easier than ever.

Google Earth and apps like OnX, Hunt-stand and others allow you to identify locations and stand sites, know boundaries and even weather patterns in your area. Topographical layers can be added to learn the topography and how the deer move across the landscape, all helping you to identify key areas on which to focus your scouting.

Any time you are looking at moving stands or hunting a new location, use one of these apps to help you spend your time in the right areas when you're in the field looking for the best stand site. ■



Pete Rogers

rifles were at ranges inside of 20 yards. But the gun gives you options the bow does not, and the biggest is the advantage of range.

One thing I consider when selecting all my stand locations is wind direction. While scent and other factors are not as critical when you are hunting deer that are 200 or more yards away, the direction of the wind is still one of the most important elements.

"You will never see the deer that smell you," Wenzel said.

When you set your stand, sit in it with a compass and log the direction it faces. Make note of the wind directions that occur in the location. By knowing this, you are less likely to hunt a stand on the wrong wind and ruin a hunt. Each time a buck smells you in an area, it becomes less likely you will ever see him.

Selecting the right stand site is a process that often takes years to develop, but using these tips will help you make the right selection this season. ■

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## GREENER PASTURES

Jeff Burleson

Young bucks with inferior antlers are better choices for harvest than bucks with promising racks as sub-adults.



# MAKE INFORMED CHOICES

DON'T LET INFERIOR BUCKS WALK AND TAKE POTENTIAL TROPHIES TOO SOON

Jeff Hunt

**D**eer season in the Carolinas are some of the longest in the nation. While some hunters have already filled a tag or two by Oct. 1, the majority of the deer harvest begins this month and will likely peak between Oct. 15 and Dec. 1.

As a result, hunters will need to have a plan in place by the first of October for what they intend on shooting and what they intend to let walk to grow another year. But which deer and how many are part of that overall master plan?

By Oct. 1, most hunters have a scrapbook of just about every deer within a square mile of their stands. Some will even name these bucks and have a sliding scale on what is considered to be on the hit list or the protection list. Of course, new bucks will show up throughout the season that can easily become new candidates for the skinning rack. For hunters with adequate land and an interest in managing their herd for the future, a deer that fill a tag can make a major impact on the future herd.

What deer should hunters target for harvest and what deer should they allow to live and grow another year?

## FOOD OR ANTLERS

Hunters basically kill deer for two

reasons: the dinner table and trophy satisfaction. But in other situations, deer can be targeted to be removed from the population.

For years, biologists and deer managers have studied the science of what makes deer grow big antlers and bodies, and it is not rocket science. They need to carry excellent genes, have supreme nutrition and live long enough to realize their full genetic and phenotypic potential.

The question is, how can hunters determine whether their deer are genetically inferior or superior, or whether their deer are consuming adequate nutrition to be able to reach their full genetic potential? With the right answers, hunters and land managers will understand how to improve their herds through nutritional supplements or harvest decisions.

For a 12-year study in 1989, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department funded research performed by Donnie Harmel, John Williams and William Armstrong at Texas A&M on the Kerr Wildlife Management Area. The findings are crucial to show how landowners can make a direct impact on the future of their male deer on their properties.

This past May, we discussed that a direct correlation between high-protein diets, body size and antler size in cap-

tive white-tailed deer was undeniable. Basically, deer with more than adequate nutrition and superior genetic phylogeny will grow large bodies and large antlers.

Another important part of that study related to inferior and superior antler genetics. Spike bucks or bucks with inferior antlers as yearlings (1½ years old) will remain inferior in succeeding years compared to yearling bucks with large, forked-antler characteristics. Even with high-protein diets, these inferior bucks continued to produce less-than-preferred antlers in succeeding years.

So, should hunters shoot bucks with inferior antlers as yearlings or let them walk in hopes of producing a larger racked animal in following years?

## GROWTH POTENTIAL

According to the TPWD study, yearlings with spikes and other inferior antlers shouldn't receive any differential protection as opposed to superior-antlered yearling bucks. There was a solid correla-



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.

tion between body mass and total antler points in yearling deer. The yearlings with larger masses produced larger antlers with more points. And yearlings with smaller mass had inferior antlers with fewer points and often spike, unbranched antlers.

However, spikes and other yearling bucks with inferior antlers rarely remained spikes in succeeding years. They will grow, adding body mass and larger racks, but when compared to the superior yearlings with branched antlers, the less desirable yearlings continued to produce inferior antlers with respect to number of points and antler mass.

So where does this leave hunters trying to monitor their herd and make harvest/management decisions? Is a spike buck always a spike? No. Spikes will typically grow branched antlers and will increase in size, but inferior-racked bucks on yearlings are also indications they will not produce the desired results for most deer managers. The take-home message isn't necessarily shoot all the small bucks. The most-critical harvest decision a hunter will ever make on a farm is to not to shoot yearling bucks with bigger bodies and larger, branched antlers.

## BIG YOUNG 'UN, SMALL ADULT?

Here is the problem. Often, yearling bucks in the Carolinas that weigh 140 pounds or more and have decent, branched antlers, are often perceived as older or peaked-out animals and become targets for many hunters. Either a hunter believes they are 3½ to 4½ years old with a smaller body and antlers, or they are perceived as a shooter-worthy buck and is shot due to a local or club rule based on antler points or antler spread.

These yearling and 2½-year-old bucks with superior antlers and big bodies are the cream of the crop and should be allowed

to grow to maturity. They are the bucks that need to be breeding and passing along these types of genetics. And just maybe, one of these bucks can produce a record rack worth telling a the grandkids about one day.

On many farms and deer leases, smaller spike and inferior bucks are passed up as doing the right thing, and heavy horned and big-bodied deer are shot at first sight, when many times these bucks are the ones that really need to be allowed to grow a few more years.

Hunters are generally trying to make the right management decisions by passing up inferior bucks and shooting larger-racked bucks that appear to be mature. But in reality, many hunters are their own worst enemies, negatively impacting their genetic future by shooting good deer and allowing inferior bucks to procreate and lead the herd. In some areas, these inferior bucks can start to take over the gene pool when the superior bucks are killed and the poor bucks are continually allowed to walk and grow up to be older, inferior bucks.

So, what is the right decision for hunters to make in 2021?

The key takeaway is for hunters to make more of an effort to pass up the best-looking bucks roaming the farm. Generally, older bucks look different and definitely carry characteristics of an older deer. Older deer will exhibit a sagging belly, slumped back and wider or less elongated head, as well as other characteristics typical of an older animal.

When a buck walks out that is obviously a young deer with a big, immature body and big antlers, that's the one that needs to live another year. ■

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# BULL REDS

## THREE WAYS

**NORTH CAROLINA ANGLERS HEAD FOR PIERS, BOATS AND THE SURF THIS MONTH TO BATTLE BIG RED DRUM THAT MOVE INTO THE WATERS OFF BRUNSWICK COUNTY, DRAWN BY GOBS OF BAIT.**

■ By Jerry Dilsaver

# RED DRUM

are responding to conservation management strategies, and one of the most-obvious signs is the growth of the nearshore ocean fishery for trophy reds off North Carolina's Brunswick County, from Cape Fear west to Little River Inlet on the North Carolina-South Carolina border. Fishermen pursue the big drum each fall from the surf, by boat and from the decks of ocean piers.

This fishery began about 20 years ago around Little River. The big drum began arriving in late August and stayed through September on the shoals just beyond the inlet's jetties, occasionally venturing into the inlet to feed on scores of mullet minnows heading toward the ocean. These fish still visit, but the center of the action has shifted to the northeast to North Carolina's Oak Island, and the bite has stretched into November.

Many fishermen believe the huge amount of bait entering the ocean through the Cape Fear River's inlet has created this shift. Whatever the reason, many large redfish gather along the beach and around the nearshore artificial reefs off Oak Island.

There are similarities in the fishing, whether in the surf, from the piers or on boats. The biggest thing is the use of circle hooks to prevent deep-hooking these big fish, as they must all be released. Many rigs are similar, with the big difference being sinker preferences and whether the sinkers are fixed or slide.

Andrew Imes of Sunset Harbor, N.C., loves to fish, and big drum are some of his favorite targets. He double-dips, chasing them in the surf and from boat or kayak. He begins earlier in the year on their Neuse River run, but come fall, he fishes off Oak Island almost every day he isn't working. Imes has a guide business, Oak Anchor Outdoors (919-614-2633), for clients interested in surf and kayak fishing, but he reserves his boat for adventures with his father.

"Surf fishing is something anyone can do," Imes said. "All you need is a good surf rod, a reel that has a smooth drag and holds a lot of 20-pound line, rigs and bait."

George Arndt caught this 41-inch red drum off Yaupon Reef on Oct. 24, 2019.



Imes uses a rig that has a 2- to 3-inch bite leader of 80-pound mono between an 8/0 circle hook and a 100- to 150-pound swivel. This ties to an approximately 15-foot shock leader of 80-pound mono, which then ties to the 20-pound line coming from the reel. A 3- to 5-ounce frog-tongue sinker slides on the shock leader with a bead on each side to prevent it sliding past the knot or onto the swivel.

This allows fish to pick up the bait without feeling anything. Once the sinker slides to the end of the shock leader, it pulls the hook into the corner of the drum's mouth. All large drum must be released, and this helps prevent deep-hooking while turning the hook into their lower jaw where it can easily be removed.

Imes' favorite surf baits are spot and croaker heads. He also uses live cob-size mullet, but mostly when he's fishing during daytime hours. Once the sun begins setting, the fish respond well to the fish heads and chunks of cut bait.

"This fishing is about locating the fish, and finding schools of bait is the best way to do that," Imes said. "Riding on the beach isn't allowed, so I stop at beach accesses and look for schools of bait. Sometimes you can see the bait, but most of the time, div-

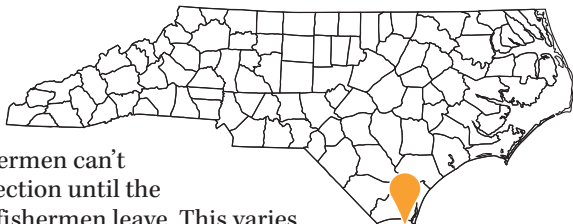
ing pelicans give them away.

"When I can't find bait schools, I go to Caswell Beach because it's closer to the mouth of the river, and that's where the bait comes out," Imes said. "There is only one public access, and it's usually pretty crowded. I generally wait until later in the day when the crowd leaves and fish into the evening.

Imes said many fishermen are overly concerned with how far they can cast, but it isn't always that important. Sure, there are times longer casts help, but many times the big drum are prowling just outside the breakers, especially late in the afternoon and into the evening.

Elliott Estes will fish anytime and anywhere, and his favorite target is big drum. He mates on Oak Island's Angry Pelican Charters ([www.angrypelicancharters.com](http://www.angrypelicancharters.com)) and fishes for drum or flounder most afternoons once the boat is cleaned and ready for the next day. He said the ocean piers get him to deeper water more quickly, and his schedule matches when king mackerel fishermen are leaving the pier each afternoon and the pier end is open. Many piers reserve their ends for king mackerel fishermen from opening until near dark, and





drum fishermen can't use that section until the mackerel fishermen leave. This varies from pier to pier; it's wise to call the pier in advance.

Oak Island

Estes uses a slightly different rig. The hook is a large, non-off-set circle hook, and the bite-leader section is only a few inches like the others. This attaches to a 100- to 150-pound swivel, with another 5- to 6-foot section of 80- to 100-pound mono from the swivel to the 40- to 60-pound shock leader. A 100- to 150-pound snap swivel slides on this leader between beads and attaches a 3- to 5-ounce pyramid sinker. The beads and knots limit the sinker to only sliding along this section of leader. He fishes with 15- to 20-pound mono on the reel.

"Before you head to the pier, get your bait ready," Estes said. "I use a variety that includes mullets, pogies (menhaden), pogy and spot heads, crabs and even yellowfin belly. Pogy and spot heads or mullet chunks are good baits most of the time, but if the sharks are bad, blue crabs are excellent baits, as drum like them and sharks no so much."



Andrew Imes, Josh Johnson and Brian Klamer all caught big reds from their kayaks just off the beach at Oak Island.



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**E**stes said if the bite is slow, you can fish two rods, but when it picks up, only fish one. He said to fight the fish hard to get it in and release it quickly. To remove the hook, they must be hoisted to the deck or beached. Estes believes using a pier net to lift and lower the fish causes less stress.

Big drum move in schools, and there are often more than a few. Donna Paris fishes both Oak Island piers for kings and catches a good number of big red drum incidentally. Both are carnivores and eat many of the same baitfish, so drum sometimes hit baits intended for kings. Paris recalled one time on Ocean Crest Pier when a huge school of large drum swarmed the end of the pier and ate every mackerel bait. Thirty-some fishermen were suddenly fighting drum, and it was a bit of a boondoggle for a while.

Imes said fishing in his boat or kayak allows him to reach deeper water than he can casting from the beach and gives the option to move with schools of bait. Fishing is very similar. The baits stay the same, but he switches to a shorter rod so it isn't unwieldy and switches to a rig with a 2-ounce trolling sinker, which doesn't hang up as of tied in-line a few inches above the hook. To cover more bottom, he sometimes switches to a 1- to 2-ounce bottom-sweeper jig, sweetened with a quarter crab or a 1- to 3-ounce bucktail jigged along the bottom.

"When I launch my kayak or get into the area by boat, I'm immediately looking for schools of bait," Imes said. "Sometimes, you never get more than a couple hundred yards off the beach. I have enjoyed some awesome days at roughly pier-end distance off the beach.

"If I can't find a school of bait, I head to one of the nearshore artificial reefs," Imes said. "Yaupon Reef is the most popular, and it is a huge reef. There is almost always at least one



A frog-tongue sinker will slide along the line, allowing a red drum to pick up a bait without feeling the weight. A bottom-sweeper jig is a weapon used by many kayak anglers for big reds.

school of drum there. I use my fish finder to locate them and begin fishing. It doesn't take long to hook up if you find the school first."

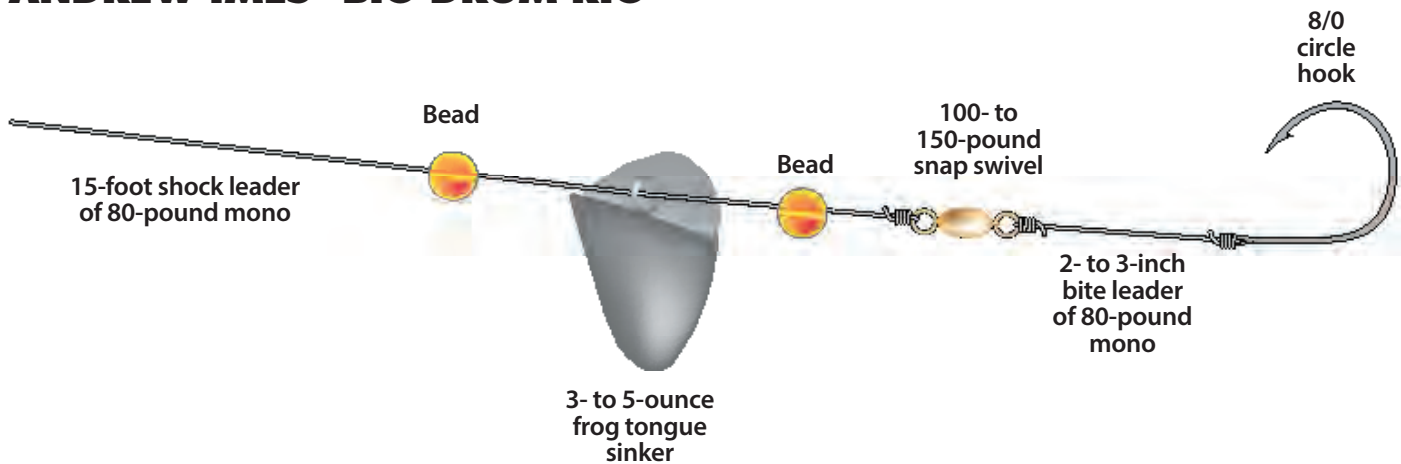
It isn't a revolution, but when the big drum invade Long Bay every fall, think of one way by land and two ways by sea to have a great time catching (and releasing) the invading redfish. ■



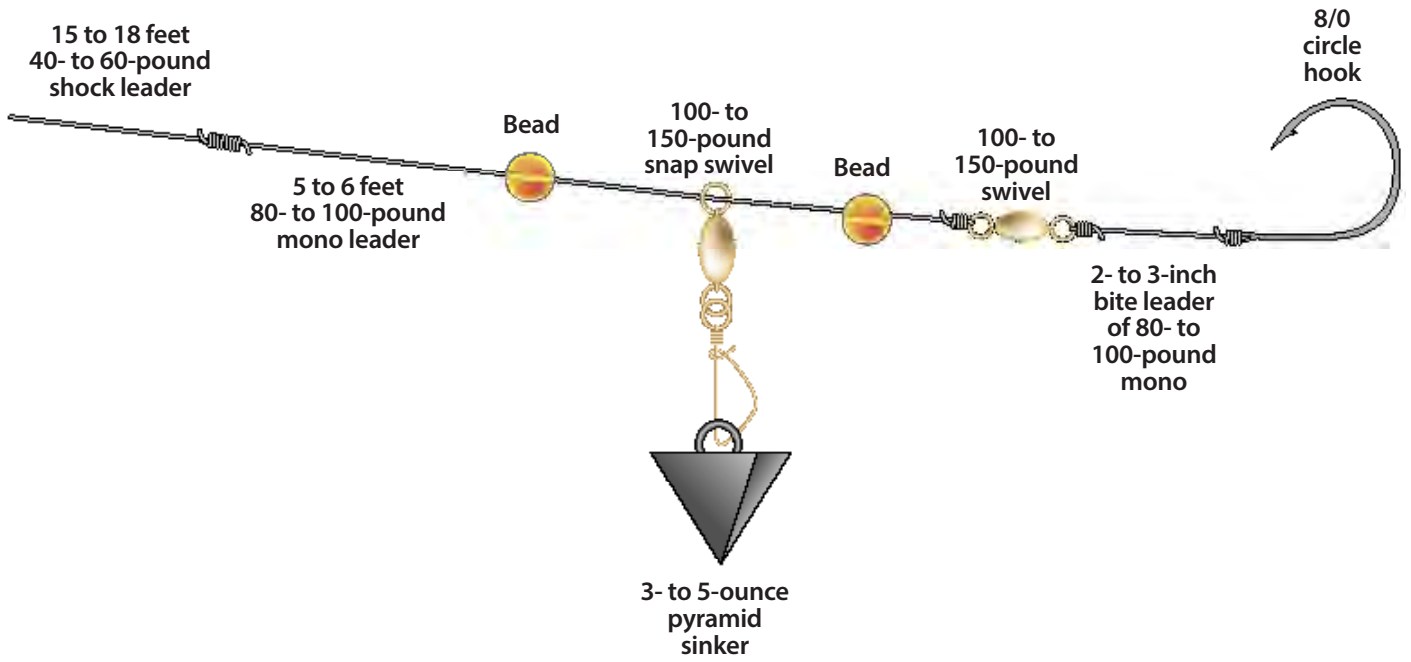
**Jerry Dilsaver**, a former SKA national champion and USAA Angler of the Year, is a full-time freelance writer based out of Oak Island, N.C.

**SOUND & SEA >**

**ANDREW IMES' BIG DRUM RIG**



# ELLIOTT ESTES' BIG DRUM RIG



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## OCTOBER'S PROMISE

FALL FISHING REALLY ARRIVES IN THE CAROLINAS THIS MONTH

Brian Cope

**S**altwater fishing in the Carolinas takes a turn for the better this month. As good as it was this past summer, it will get even better throughout this month, and that is true for a variety of species. This is one of the best months — if not the very best — to catch multiple species on the same outing. It's the month that many anglers look forward to all year.

The topwater bite for speckled trout gets many inshore anglers on the water at first light. It's a magical time for casting Whopper Ploppers and Super Spook Jr.'s around oyster mounds, grass lines and creek mouths. Artificial shrimp

under popping corks will work wonders in the same kinds of areas.

Redfish are available in huge numbers, and that goes for puppy drum and bull reds. The slot fish are feeding heavily inshore. The cooling water signals to them that it's time to fatten up and puts them in a feeding mood that can fill a limit quickly. Bull reds are staged up around jetties and nearshore reefs where they are gorging, getting ready to head offshore for several months. These aren't solo stragglers. They're packed into big schools, and chunks of cut mullet, whole blue crabs, and live baitfish can catch one after the other.

Flounder, though keeper season in North Carolina is over, can still be kept in South Carolina waters. Whether you're catching and releasing them or putting a limit on ice, these fish are as willing to bite as ever. Live baits like finger mullet slowing dragged across the bottom is about as good as it gets.



**Brian Cope** of Borden, 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.

## TARPON AND PANFISH

Tarpon are still here for the taking; this will probably be the last month to find them in our waters for a while. They'll bite anything from small D.O.A shrimp to big topwater plugs. Live mullet, pinfish and menhaden are also excellent baits. Drifting live bait is a productive method; some anglers fish with whole blue crabs on one side of the boat and live mullet or menhaden on the other.

Sheepshead are biting inshore and around nearshore and offshore reefs. Fiddler crabs, shrimp and clam meat dangled around inshore pier pilings and rock walls can catch big numbers this month. Those same baits dropped beside vertical structures on artificial reefs and live bottom are just as productive for anglers venturing away from shore.

October is a big time for a relatively small fish for pier and boat anglers alike. The fall spot run attracts many anglers. Spots make a run to the south this time of year, swinging past all the Carolinas' piers, where anglers catch them in waves, often two at a time. Cut shrimp, clams and squid are all good baits, but bloodworms are the most popular. Spots will also frequent estuaries like Murrells Inlet, one of the top destinations in the Carolinas for boaters targeting them.

## MACK ATTACK

Piers also offer excellent king mackerel fishing. These fish require some specialized tackle and tactics, but a diehard king fisherman won't miss a chance to target them in the fall. Live bluefish are the preferred baits, but anglers will use a variety of live baitfish including pinfish, mullet and menhaden.

Anglers on the planks also catch plenty of sheepshead, redfish, flounder, and whiting this time of year.

King mackerel aren't just reserved for pier fishermen this month. Trolling offshore, anglers in boats also catch their share of these water rockets. Spanish mackerel are

also on the menu, for pier and boat anglers alike.

Sharks also offer some big angling opportunities. The Carolinas have numerous species of sharks, in a variety of sizes that can keep fishermen entertained for a full day. Following shrimp boats at a distance and casting baits into their travel routes can get you hooked up quickly. Anchoring down in waters with 3 miles of the beaches can be just as productive, especially for anglers who cast out multiple rods and chum the waters

October also offers anglers a nice reprieve from the dog days of summer. The weather is much more tolerable, and the fishing is as good as it gets. Before long, many Carolina anglers will be spending the bulk of their time between hunting the woods and keeping warm by the fireplace. Right now, it's time to fish. ■

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## FREE-LINE BAITS FOR REDS, TROUT

### Probe shallow structure, drops along ICW near Isle of Palms

Lowcountry redfish are suckers for live mud minnows or finger mullet free-lined without weight.

**O**ctober is a great time for catching speckled trout and redfish in small creeks off the Intracoastal Waterway around South Carolina's Isle of Palms, according to Joe Dennis of Captain J Hook Charters.

His technique is a little different, but it puts plenty of fish in the boat.

One of the most-common ways of catching these fish is using a Carolina rig: a weight, a bead and a swivel and a leader and hook tied to the swivel. This gets the bait to the bottom and keeps your line from twisting. Using popping corks is another popular tactic.

But Dennis (843-245-3762) said free-lining can be just as effective, and even better on some days.

"I catch a lot of trout and reds free-lining: no weight, no bead, no cork, just a hook tied directly to the leader with a live mud minnow or menhaden on the hook," he said.

Dennis uses a swivel; he said that offers just enough weight to get the bait below the surface. It's not heavy enough to take the bait to the bottom, which he said is a good thing, because it keeps it from getting hung up. The current keeps the bait

floating freely and naturally.

When fishing this kind of rig, Dennis uses a medium to medium-light, 7-foot spinning rod with 15- to 20-pound Slime Line monofilament.

To find the fish, Dennis looks for oysters, rocks and deep drop-offs near grass lines. He said plenty of such places exist along the ICW in the Isle of Palms area north of Charleston Harbor.

"I love to fish around a grass line in 2 or 3 feet of water that drops down to 10 or more feet right off the grass line," he said. "The trout and redfish love to hang out along places like this. It's a good ambush spot for them. They patrol these areas looking for baitfish. When they see that baitfish free-lined in the water column, they just can't resist."

When the tide is completely slack, Dennis switches over and uses a Betts Billy Boy slip bobber.

"That slip bobber allows you to keep the bait just off the bottom," Dennis said. "If you're using a regular popping cork, you're fixed to fishing at a certain depth the whole time. But with that slip bobber, you can quickly and easily change depths by just sliding the slip knot up or down." ■

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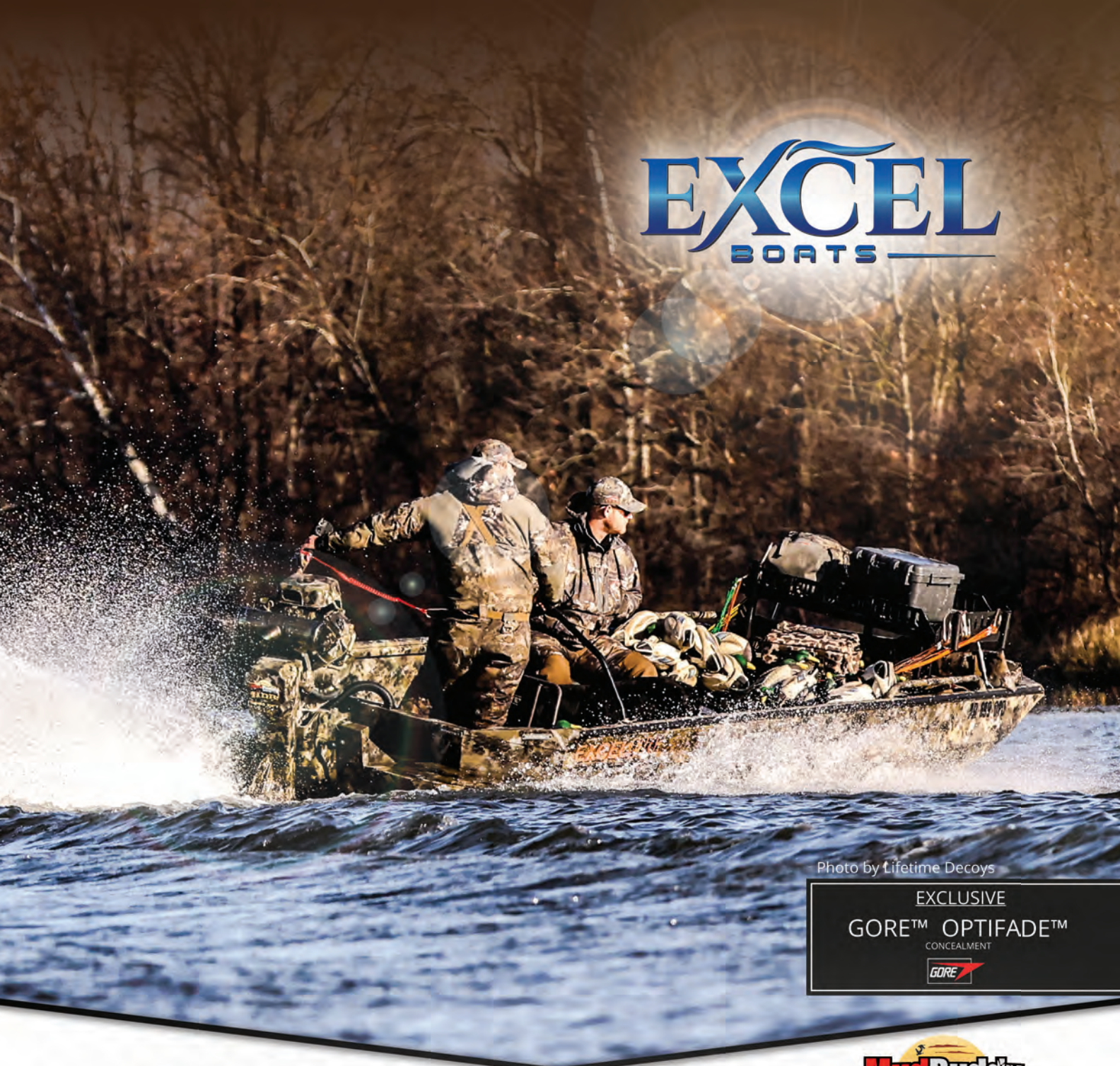


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**SANTEE COOPER, HARTWELL, CLARKS HILL OFFER THE KIND OF OCTOBER ACTION THAT STRIPER FISHERMEN DREAM ABOUT. HERE ARE THE DETAILS.**

■ By Terry Madewell

# SC'S FALL STRIPER TRIO

**S**everal lakes in South Carolina provide outstanding striper fishing during October, and topwater schooling and live-bait tactics both produce fast-paced, rod-bending action. After a summer of gorging on abundant forage, these fish are fat, feisty and almost frantic to add more to their gorged bellies.

Three prime striper fisheries across South Carolina include the Santee Cooper lakes, Lake Hartwell and Clarks Hill Lake.

## SANTEE COOPER

October ushers in a highly anticipated opening day for fishermen on the Santee Cooper lakes. Striper fishing is closed from mid-June through September as far as keeping fish, and the fishing is typically fantastic throughout October.

LeRoy Suggs of Cross, S.C., has spent 40 years guiding striper fishermen. Kevin Davis, the owner of Blacks Camp, said Suggs is one of only a few guides strictly specializing in striper fishing at Santee Cooper.

“Leroy is like a homing pigeon headed home at dinnertime, with an almost supernatural knack for finding stripers,” Davis said.

Suggs, 79, said the October-to-December time period is his favorite.

“I’ll have artificial lures and live bait ready for whatever the stripers prefer,” he said. “I like to locate topwater schooling action early, but live bait is effective when that’s not happening.”

Suggs (910-995-1168) said wind direction and speed impact his decision on which lake he’ll fish, but both Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie produce prime striper action.

“I’ll search for gull activity for schooling fish, and I motor around flats near deeper water while scanning with binoculars,” he said. “We can usually hunt them down.”

Suggs said a variety of lures produce fish when they’re schooling, but a ½- or ¾-ounce white bucktail, dressed with two chartreuse feathers, is a favorite lure.

“The technique is simply cast and retrieve,” he said. “A Berry Flex spoon is another excellent lure to cast and retrieve for



When guide Brad Sasser he gets on schooling Clarks Hill stripers, multiple hookups are common. **OPPOSITE:** Leroy Suggs has Santee stripers figured out.

schooling fish. When they’re not schooling, I’ll let the spoon free-fall through the fish, then power-reel and rip it back. That’ll get your pole bent in a hurry.”

Suggs said low-light periods are prime for schooling action but cloudy days provide potential for schooling fish at any time.

When schooling action slows, he uses live blueback herring and employs his graph to locate stripers suspended under forage. He drops live herring to the depth where stripers are marked.

“I like to get bait at a striper’s eye-ball level,” he said. “The lake is full of legal-sized fish, and limits of stripers are common.”

The creel limit is 3 fish per person per day in a 23- to 25-inch slot, but one striper longer than 26 inches can be kept daily.

## LAKE HARTWELL >

Terry Madewell



## LAKE HARTWELL

Chip Hamilton from Anderson, S.C., has guided exclusively for stripers for 20 years on Lake Hartwell; he said fishing this past summer was very good, and he's expecting excellent fishing in October.

"The first point I make about October striper and hybrid fishing is it's a transition period for fish patterns, and this can be beneficial for fishermen," Hamilton said.

One change for the better is the location of fish, he said. Summer action was primarily on the lower end of the lake, but that changes.

"Not all the fish have migrated from the lower end, so that's still a good area," he said. "Many fish make a fall migration to the Tugaloo and Seneca rivers. I typically find them in general terms, in the I-85 bridge area of the Tugaloo arm and in the Clemson area of the Seneca arm.

"Schooling action is another positive change, and (it) becomes a prominent part of the fishing strategy at Hartwell," he said. "I think this is the best month for schooling fish. Surface action occurs sporadically during late spring and

summer, but it's almost exclusively during low-light conditions. By October, it's likely to occur any time of the day, and some of the biggest schools of surface feeding stripers I've seen have occurred mid-morning"

Hamilton (864-304-9011) said high-probability targets include mouth of creeks or coves as well as near the deep water in the river channels. Fish may school over points, humps or deep water in the middle of the lake, but it's based on the location of forage.

"Not all lures are created equal this time of the year for schooling fish," he said. "I 'match-the-hatch' because most of the forage fish are 2 to 3 inches long, and the most-productive lures are in that size range. I like the Crème Lit'l Fishie to cast and retrieve right under the surface. The Zara Puppy and Sebile Magic Swimmer are great lures, too, in white or chrome patterns."

Hamilton said the size of live bait is crucial when fishing down rods or free-lines. He tries to get an assortment of sizes, but he prefers smaller blueback herring in October.

"Stripers and hybrids are gorging on forage that size, and on some days, they are really that picky in terms of the smaller live baits producing noticeably better," he said.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Guide Leroy Suggs nets a striper that tried to swallow Kevin Davis's live bait. **RIGHT:** Big topwater plugs are great lures to cast into stripers located schooling on baitfish at the surface — as long as the baitfish aren't on the small size, 2 to 3 inches long.



When searching for stripers, Hamilton usually motors slowly around creek and cove mouths near deep water and along the main-channel area. He's looking for a combination of forage with lots of stripers suspended underneath.

"Stripers roam a lot, and while they may stay in a general area for a while, they often move daily, so every day is a hunting process to find them," he said. "When I mark suspended fish, I'll drop bait to the depth fish are marked and use free lines.

"I employ both tactics because a quirk of early fall stripers here is they'll maul the bait on the down-lines one day, but the next day it may be the free-lines," he said.

The daily creel limit is a total of 10 stripers or hybrids per person with only three allowed at longer than 26 inches.

**CLARKS HILL LAKE >**



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



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\*\*\* Guide Chip Hamilton expects October to be a great month for hybrids and stripers on Lake Hartwell, even though fish are on the move.

## CLARKS HILL LAKE

Clarks Hill Lake is a super-sized striped fishery with 71,000 acres of water on the Savannah River.

Brad Sasser has fished these waters all his life, the past 30 years as a fishing guide. He said live bait and schooling action are productive October patterns.

"With normal weather, the stripers and hybrids begin migrating away from the lower end of the lake," he said. "They don't all leave at once, but that's the basic trend."

"In 2020, by the latter part of September, the fish began to migrate up the lake and into the tributaries," said Sasser (706-267-4313), whose bread-and-butter technique is live-bait fishing. He'll use down rods and free-lines to present the bait.

"I'll motor around creek mouths using the graph to locate fish," he said. "I'll begin searching in the 30- to 50-foot depth (range), but that's a basic guideline. I'll drop eight down-lines to the depth fish are marked, and action is usually fast."

"I prefer smaller blueback herring this month. When fish are really finicky about bait size, I'll downsize my live bait to medium shiners; that can be a killer tactic."

Sasser said that, along with creek and river junctions, long points and humps are productive; he'll target coves and pockets where a steady wind can herd scads of baitfish into a confined area.

"All of these places are prime targets for fish to surface school, too," he said. "Right at dawn or dusk is prime schooling time,



but by now, they'll often school mid-morning. Last October, for over two weeks, fish started schooling every morning about 8:30 to 9."

Sasser said topwater lures such as the Lucky Craft Sammy are productive, as is a jighead rigged with a white/ice Fluke trailer.

"When in schooling fish, I'll fish my down-lines shallow, along with two free-line rigs," Sasser said. "This invites chaos, but it's productive, super-exciting, and multiple fish are usually hooked up."

In this scenario, Sasser will drop one of the down-line rigs considerably deeper to probe for a really big striper.

"This is a good time for trophy stripers as well as numbers of fish," he said.

The creel limit for Clarks Hill is a total of 10 stripers or hybrids per person with only three allowed longer than 26 inches. ■

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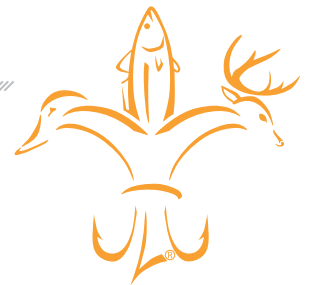
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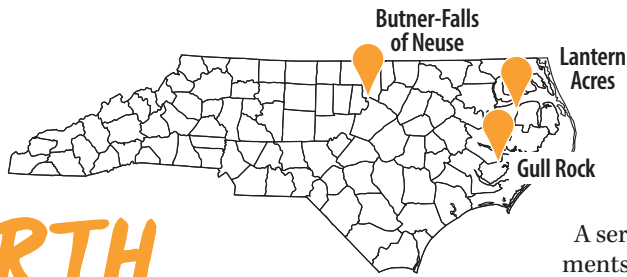
**T**hings might be a bit tough this hunting season, given the drought across much of North America's waterfowl breeding grounds, but hunters in the Carolinas can still expect some success — especially those who are hunting the states' public lands. Both the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources have been preparing their public-hunting areas for the coming migration, with some areas shaping up to be especially good options this season. Here's what each state's waterfowl biologist had to say about their respective offerings.

**KEY IN ON THESE HOTPOTS FOR THE BEST PUBLIC DUCK, GOOSE AND SWAN HUNTING IN THE CAROLINAS THIS SEASON.**

■ By Taylor Pardue

# DUCKS ON THE STATES' DIME

Brian Carroll



# NORTH CAROLINA

Doug Howell, the Commission's biologist in charge of waterfowl, is optimistic entering the 2021-22 season, despite what you may have heard from up north. True, annual surveys in the Prairie Pothole region have shown a decline in species such as mallards, but Howell reminds Carolina waterfowlers that the Atlantic Flyway is actually fueled by the Great Lakes region.

"Our birds come from, primarily, Ontario and Quebec and maritime Canada and, to a lesser extent, the Great Lakes states, depending on the species," Howell said.

That means you can still expect to see plenty of ducks flying south for the winter this year — especially if you're hunting one of these game lands.

## BUTNER-FALLS OF THE NEUSE

The Piedmont has several quality game lands for waterfowlers to consider, with Howell putting Butner-Falls of the Neuse just north of Raleigh and Durham at the top of his list.

"I think some of our best water would be in the Butner-Falls area in terms of opportunity," Howell said. "We've had managed waterfowl impoundments in place there since the early 2000s. It's centered around the Butner-Falls of the Neuse Game Land."

A series of four or five different areas with various impoundments offers waterfowlers somewhere to hunt throughout the season. Howell said hunters can expect to find North Carolina's "big three" — wood ducks, teal, and ringnecks — at Butner-Falls, along with a smattering of other species, including gadwall and shovelers.

"We've had some pretty dry conditions early in the year that may have impacted some of their plantings, but it's certainly not as extreme as we've seen in the northern tier of states and the western part of North Carolina," Howell said.

Per the state's regulations, waterfowl may only be taken at Butner-Falls of the Neuse on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; Christmas, New Year's Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and on opening and closing days of the applicable waterfowl seasons. A special permit is required when hunting waterfowl on posted waterfowl impoundments after Nov. 1.

## GOOSE CREEK COMPLEX >



Dan Womack

Blue-winged teal often show up in hunters' bags on the managed impoundments at Butner-Falls of Neuse Game Lands.

## GOOSE CREEK COMPLEX

Howell said Campbell Creek, Spring Creek and Pamlico Point, parts of the Goose Creek Complex in Pamlico and Beaufort counties near the town of Mesic, are also great places to hunt for waterfowl in North Carolina this season.

"The reason I say that (is) because there's so much area out there. One impoundment may be poor, and another one be really good at any given time," Howell said. "So there are opportunities there in terms of what we're seeing in terms of numbers. It's not one-size-fits-all."

The Commission practices a combination of traditional, moist-soil management and targeting native seed producers at Goose Creek. Native vegetation such as wild millet and panic grass is allowed to grow in the moist environment during spring and summer. Pamlico Point, since it is such a large area, is annually flooded to manage for submerged aquatic vegetation, specifically, widgeon grass.

Howell said that in terms in species, hunters can expect a little bit of everything at Goose Creek, even divers just outside the impoundments but still on the Game Land property. Scaup, red-heads and the whole gamut of ducks that visit North Carolina in a given migration can typically be found at those impoundments.

Per the state's regulations for Goose Creek, waterfowl may be taken only on the posted impoundments on Tuesdays and Saturdays before Oct. 1, and on the opening and closing days of the statewide waterfowl seasons. Beginning on the first open water-

fowl season day in October and through the end of the waterfowl season, hunting is by permit only on posted impoundments.

## LANTERN ACRES/GULL ROCK

A hidden gem of a game land, Howell calls Lantern Acres in Tyrrell and Washington counties near Columbia a "1A" impoundment that is flooded each fall to manage for moist soil. There is one catch, however.

"We always like to tell our hunters that it's quite a walk to get in there," Howell said of the roughly half-mile trek along the dyke. "If you want to hunt, you're going to have to plan on walking a bit, but it can be a very, very good place to duck hunt."

Waterfowlers can expect to see many species of duck at Lantern Acres, including black ducks. The same can be said for Gull Rock Game Land, too, with an important addition: swans.

"We're seeing more and more swans winter in that impoundment, so a person who didn't have a place to go on an agricultural field to hunt swans, that may be an option for them," Howell said. "It's also managed for aquatic vegetation; that's why the swans like it. The bottom is going to be a bit mucky, but it's accessible. We've got a lot of people who have taken advantage of that because they couldn't find a place to go on their own on private lands."

Per the state's regulations for Lantern Acres, waterfowl hunting on posted waterfowl impoundments is by permit only. For Gull Rock, hunting of any species of wildlife on posted waterfowl impoundments is limited to Tuesdays and Saturdays; Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, and Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and opening and closing days of the applicable waterfowl seasons.

Hunters spending any time on waterfowl impoundments on North Carolina game lands will run into a variety of species.

## SOUTH CAROLINA >



Taylor Pardue

**HUNTING SEASONS**

**DEER**

Region	Method	Season Dates
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  
DUCKS**

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

**(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

**HUNTING SEASONS**

SPECIES	SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND)	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
Doves	Sept. 4-6, Sept. 7-Oct. 2 Nov. 13-27, Dec. 17-Jan. 31, 2022	15	45
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		Oct. 17-30 (still hunting only)
	(Georgetown, Horry, Marion and Williamsburg counties)		
Rails	Sept. 8-12,		
King & Clapper	Oct. 4-Dec. 7	15	45
Sora & Virginia		25	75
Gallinules		15	45
	(common/purple)		
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	

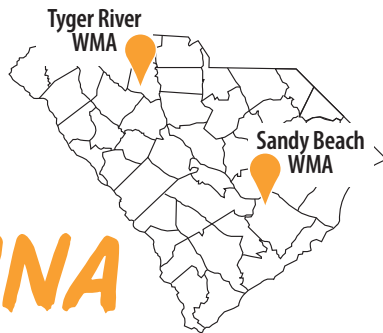
**DEER SEASON**

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

# SOUTH CAROLINA



Molly Kneece, SCDNR's chief waterfowl biologist, is also excited to see what the season holds for hunters in her state. She reminds waterfowlers who are new to South Carolina that they will need a state duck stamp — they're electronic now — in addition to a federal duck stamp, as well as a valid WMA permit to hunt on the following Wildlife Management Areas.

## SANDY BEACH

Kneece said Sandy Beach, a Category I, public-draw WMA on the northern shoreline of Lake Moultrie, is showing a good crop of corn, rice and millet, along with other waterfowl delicacies that are naturally found there.

"We are pretty much wall-to-wall crops on that property this year," Kneece said. "In places where we haven't planted, there are excellent sources of smartweed, wild millets, panic grasses and things growing there. We've really got the table set."

Kneece said that hunters who draw Sandy Beach can expect to see a range of ducks this season. Ringnecks are the most commonly harvested duck, followed by wood ducks and teal, with some gadwall mixed in. Depending on the weather, mal-

lards can also be taken.

The cutoff for the Sandy Beach draw is typically in mid- to late October, with the results being announced in November. The WMA can be hunted once a week during the season, only by those who are successful in the lottery process. The waterfowl-hunting portion of Sandy Beach closes to the non-hunting public Nov. 1 and will reopen Feb. 8.

## TYGER RIVER

Tyger River is a Category II WMA south of Union in Union County, meaning it is open for hunting on Saturday mornings throughout the waterfowl season. Hunters may not enter the WMA before 5 a.m. on hunt days and must leave by noon.

Per SCDNR regulations, data cards are also required for hunters accessing the Tyger River WMA and must be completed and returned daily upon leaving the area.

The property itself — an impoundment about 85 acres in total with a subsection that is plantable — is owned by the U.S. Forest Service and managed by SCDNR. The department has planted it in corn for 2021-22, with the manager-on-site reporting that the crop was looking "really, really good," Kneece said.

"They're excited about what they have on the ground this



**Taylor Pardue** is a freelance outdoor writer from Jonesville, N.C. He graduated from N.C. State University with a degree in fisheries, wildlife and conservation biology, and is a former newspaper reporter. He is an avid duck hunter and runs a waterfowl-focused hunting blog titled "River Fowler."



Taylor Pardue

Wood ducks are a species commonly taken by hunters on Sandy Beach WMA on the north shore of Lake Moultrie.

Hunters on Tyger River WMA in Union County take mostly wood ducks, with an occasional teal, mallard or black duck.



Brian Carroll

is generally lesser-known and (there's) not as much pressure fighting people as you might see in these Category 2 areas, you can generally find some good wood duck sites, and if you're fortunate and the weather is right, you may find a hidden mallard hole that nobody knows about." ■



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year," Kneece said. "They said that they also have a good crop of smartweeds coming through on that property, so it sounds like we've got some good habitat on the ground there in the upstate this year."

Wood ducks are typically the most common duck found in Tyger River, followed by teal. Mallards and black ducks can certainly show up in this WMA, but as with Sandy Beach, that is highly weather-dependent.

## OTHER WMAS

Many waterfowlers probably don't know that any WMA in South Carolina can be hunted for waterfowl if the area's small-game season overlaps with waterfowl season.

"If small-game season falls within waterfowl season, you can hunt those properties during waterfowl season," Kneece said. "Unless you really read into the details of the rules and regs, it's kind of a lesser-known thing."

"If you like to put your feet on the ground and go out and scout a site that you know



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## LUNKER LINES

Davy Hite

A shallow grass line may be a great spot to find October bass, hunkered down waiting for the plentiful threadfin shad to swim past. You can get a reaction bite from them, even if they're not hungry, with an erratic retrieve.



Dan Kibler

# GOD BLESS THOSE SHAD, BUT ARE THERE TOO MANY?

REACTION BITES ARE KEY TO CATCHING BASS WHEN THEY AREN'T FEEDING

**W**hen I think about October bass fishing in the Carolinas, I think about shad. All of our lakes have threadfin shad; some of our bigger lakes have blueback herring, but I really think about threadfins when it comes to bass fishing this month.

Shad migrate from the main lake back into creeks in the fall. They'll be in every major creek, and if you name any lake, it will have them. They live around the

mouth of creeks and on the main lake most of the year, but in September and October, especially October, they migrate into the backs of creeks. Bass key on shad and eat them.

The thing about shad is, there can be millions of them, and that can make it tough on bass fishermen. You might get to the place where you've got so many baitfish, it's tough to get a bass to bite a lure. It's like when you've got three people at an all-you-can-eat buffet that's 30 feet

long, and you can serve on both sides.

I talk all the time about making sure you're fishing around bait, and in October, that can be an issue because there's so much bait around, fish can eat anytime they want to. The problem is getting them to bite.

## REACTION BITE

The key to solving that problem is fishing baits that will cause fish to react. We want a reaction strike — when a fish isn't looking to eat but you can make them react to a bait and strike at it. It's like in the spring, when bass are bedding, they don't strike at lures to eat them; they strike to get them out of their beds.

Baits that I use to get reaction strikes

Yamamoto D Shad



**Davy Hite** of *Ninety Six, S.C.* is a two-time BASS Angler of the Year who won the 1999 Bassmasters Classic and 1998 FLW Tour Championship. He is sponsored by Phoenix, Yamaha, Rapala, Buckeye, VMC, Humminbird, War Eagle and Yamamoto.



Rapala OG Slim

are ones that I can work very erratically. These fish get a lot to eat, and the water is still warm, so you need a bait you can put in their lap and make them bite it, even if they're not feeding. I have two baits I key on when I'm looking for this kind of bite: a soft-plastic jerkbait and a flat-sided crankbait.

## TWO BAITS

Topwater fishing can be good from August through October; they'll definitely hit topwaters, but soft-plastic jerkbaits have a lot of action, and flat-sided crankbaits will really deflect when you run them into cover. That's why they're my main weapons.

I like to fish a Yamamoto D Shad for a soft jerkbait. I'll rig it on a 4/0 VMC offset worm hook on 14-pound fluorocarbon on a 6- or 6½-foot, medium-heavy baitcasting rod and a reel with a 6.3-to-1 retrieve rate.

My favorite flat-sided crankbait is a Rapala OG Slim, a relatively new bait. I fish it on a 7-foot, medium-action rod with a reel with a 6- or 7-to-1 retrieve ratio, spooled with 14-pound fluoro. I want my tackle to be a little bit heavier than normal for crankbaits because I'm fishing this bait around cover, sometimes vegetation.

## BAIT AND COVER

For reaction bites, you need to be fishing around bait and cover. If bass are suspended over deep water around schools of bait, you're not going to get a reaction strike. If you find them around stumps, brush piles, a dock or vegetation, they're in those places because they're ambush spots, and you can get them to react to a bait being retrieved erratically in front of them. If you can get a bait to deflect off cover, most of the time, a bass on that piece of cover will react.

An OG Slim will really deflect off cover when you hit a limb or a rock or a stump. Bass can't stand it. And you can produce erratic action with a D Shad with your rod tip, especially when you feel the bait bumping into something.

In October, bass will be in groups, but you can't count on those kinds of fish. I tell people that when you target schooling fish in October, it's like chasing ghosts. They can be one place one day, and the next day, there won't be a fish around. But bass

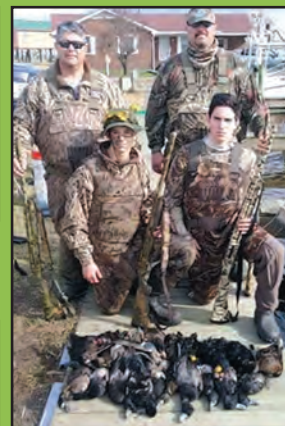
will hold around cover in little pods. You might catch more than one off a stump or a brush pile or a boat dock or grass line. But don't count on it.

This bite will usually last on into mid-November, but by Thanksgiving, it will usually be over, because the bait will change what it's doing. But fishing can be pretty consistent all through October — if you can force-feed fish that are living in place with way too much food. ■

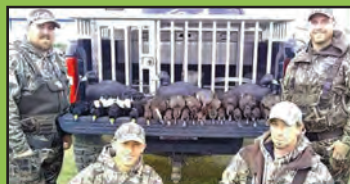
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# TACO MACK STUFFED PEPPERS

HERE'S A DIFFERENT TAKE ON AN OFTEN-MALIGNED FISH

**W**e've made it into fall, a special time in the Carolinas. It features the best weather of the year — except for those occasional hurricanes that can momentarily push the weather to the bad side. Still, it's the season most sportsmen find the best, nicest weather and most-pleasant temperatures of the year.

No other season offers more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors during the fall. Hunting seasons are going again, and fishing is as good as it gets. Mornings are cool enough to require a sweatshirt or light jacket, but days warm into shirt-sleeve weather. It's one of the best times for sportsmen, and there is little wonder so many sportsmen look forward to fall in the Carolinas.

Fall fishing is excellent, and king mackerel are one of the most highly sought-after species. They are available for all fishermen, too. Kings sometimes get so involved in feeding on a school of baitfish they follow them inside larger inlets and can be caught in protected water. However, the better fishing begins at the ends of coastal fishing piers and heads offshore from there.

Menhaden schools are making their way down most beaches, and kings are rarely far from them. They feel the

water cooling and feed more ravenously than usual. In this push to feed, they lose some wariness and will hit a variety of baits and lures, making them easier to catch; most fishermen are successful.

Fall kings range from 10 pounds to some reel smokers that weigh 50 or more. There's a lot of meat on a king, and most folks eat them with a few tried-and-true, basic recipes. This recipe is a different way that I'm pretty sure only a small handful of folks have tried.

I'm going to recommend trying this. Kings are high in Omega 3 fatty acids that can help keep your heart healthy. They taste good, and that's another good thing. Some folks say mackerel has a strong taste, and that's okay — for them. However, I disagree. Kings I have eaten that were cleaned well and cooked properly were good. Give this a try. The pieces are small, cleaned of all red meat and cooked properly. Besides, it's such an interesting recipe, you have to try it. I like it and I'm sure you will, too. It's unusually good. ■

Jerry Dilsaver



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Sautéeing onions and pepper tops is an early step in taco mack stuffed peppers. **INSET:** A dollop of chunky salsa tops off the mackerel-stuffed pepper.

# TACO MACK STUFFED PEPPER

I'll bet even long-time readers are scratching their heads, wondering about this recipe. I don't shy from the unusual, and this definitely fits unusual. However, get ready for a pleasant surprise. This odd mixture of ingredients, which I still find difficult to believe can combine this well, works. It isn't fish tacos, but it tastes like fish and like tacos and is served in a roasted bell pepper. You know you've gotta try it.

At least once a year, I remind readers that I like king mackerel. Thinking back to things my dad said about food, I don't think it will put hair on your chest, but it tastes good and is good for you in measured amounts.

I suggest using fresh king mackerel that was buried in ice as soon as it was caught. Many folks believe a smaller one will have a milder taste. Be sure to clean the mackerel well, removing all traces of the skin and any red or dark meat. It doesn't matter if the meat is from a fillet or a steak. A fillet will yield a slab of meat, while a steak will yield the four loins. The steak I had, I used a sharp fillet knife to remove the skin and trimmed each loin away from the backbone.

I cut the meat into pieces and season it with the taco seasoning immediately. It helps for the seasoning to sit a while. I usually use a salt-free taco seasoning, and several will come up if you Google salt-free taco seasoning. To keep this simple, I used a package of Old El Paso taco seasoning with 25% less sodium. If you would like a strong taco flavor, use about two-thirds of the package to season the fish. For a lighter taco taste, use less. About half the package is a good starting point.

The bell peppers really affect the taste. I like the milder and slightly sweeter taste of colored bell peppers, if they are available. If you make this using green bell peppers, take the time to get a pot of lightly salted water boiling and boil the peppers for 5 minutes. This will tenderize the peppers and take the edge off their taste.

## PREPARATION:

Cook the rice according to the manufacturer's directions and set aside. Remove all skin and bones from mackerel. Cut the mackerel into bite-sized pieces. Sprinkle the mackerel with the taco seasoning.

Remove tops, cores and seeds from peppers. Remove stems and seeds from pepper tops. Dice pepper tops and onion. Using some non-stick cooking spray, sauté the garlic, diced pepper tops and diced onions until the onions are opaque. Very quickly (approximately 1 to 2 minutes) sear the pieces of fish.

Mix the rice, pepper tops, onion, chili peppers and fish in a large bowl. Use a pepper rack or form aluminum foil to place the peppers in a baking pan so they won't fall over. Fill the peppers to rounded with the fish and rice mixture.

Preheat the oven to 350. Add ½ cup of water to the baking pan. Bake for 30 to 45 minutes being careful not to scorch the peppers. Sprinkle approximately 1 cup of cheese over the rice and fish mixture in the peppers. Return to the oven for 1 to 2 minutes to lightly melt cheese.

Serve each pepper with another light sprinkling of cheese

Some folks don't believe it, but cooking rice is an art. I like the rice fluffier and cook it a couple of minutes less than the package suggests. I let it sit a few more minutes than the directions before fluffing it. This helps the rice bond with the fish and veggies. If you like drier rice, cook it the full time suggested on the package.

If you like a different cheese, feel free to use it. This recipe is the simple version for anyone. When making this just for myself and friends who like spicier food, I use pepper jack. I also have some friends who add a spoonful of sour cream on the top. I encourage experimenting with a recipe.

Hot sauce is a personal choice; some like it, and some don't. Texas Pete Sabor Mexican hot sauce is a good one if you haven't tried these or don't recognize the difference. The Mexican hot sauces aren't vinegar-based like regular Texas Pete, Louisiana brand and many other hot sauces, and that is important when mixing with this. To me, the vinegar-based hot sauces just don't taste right. Give this a try; it adds flavor and isn't fiery hot.

This recipe will fill six peppers, but I only had four. I filled the four and used the excess with a plate of tortilla chips. That was good, too. I often eat it with tortilla chips on the side, and they really do add to the taco feel and flavor. Enjoy! ■

Filletted mackerel loins are trimmed of all red meat before being chopped into pieces.

and a healthy dollop or two of chunky salsa. An option for serving is to split the pepper, then sprinkle more cheese and add the chunky salsa. Tortilla chips go very well with this and add to the taco taste. I prefer low-salt blue corn chips. I'm a salad guy and would begin this meal with a green salad or lettuce wedge. A slice of key lime pie, with a big spoonful of whipped cream, is an excellent way to finish this meal. ■

## INGREDIENTS:

1½-pound wahoo fillet

1 medium sweet onion

1 pound king mackerel steak or fillet

6 colored bell peppers

1 parge pkg yellow rice

½ sweet onion

2 tbsp green chili peppers

2 tsp granulated garlic

2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

1 pkg taco seasoning

1 jar chunky salsa

Buttery flavored non-stick cooking spray.

**Options:** Tortilla chips, taco sauce, hot sauce or Mexican hot sauce and different cheeses.



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

## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

A bass caught in a kayak tournament is measured and photographed with an identifying marker to certify the catch.

# KAYAK TOURNAMENTS ARE STILL EVOLVING

TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES MAKING COMPETITIONS EASIER TO HOLD

Competition is a natural part of any sport, a desire to see who has the better skills on a given day. Kayak fishing is no different, and with years of fishing tournaments and competitions to draw from, it's only natural that kayak anglers would want to compete.

The question then becomes how to measure success. In a typical tournament, anglers would preserve their catch and transport it, preferably alive, to see who had accumulated the most fish or, more likely, who had caught the biggest.

One of the tenants of kayak fishing is the utilitarian approach: only taking along the bare minimum of what you need. The vast majority of the time, this means no livewell or other means to keep and transport caught fish.

When the modern age of kayak fishing first began to take off around 1990, tournaments experimented with anglers weighing only one fish, but anglers still had the burden of retaining the fish until the weigh-in.

The advent of digital photography offered kayak anglers the ability to record the catch and show the results immediately. As digital photography evolved

into smaller, highly portable and even waterproof cameras, it made the process much easier.

## MEASURING UP

Since calibrated scales are difficult to level with every event, it became apparent that the length of the catch would be the determining factor in giving it value. Anglers could lay their catch on a ruler, with both ends of the fish visible in the photograph, and a tournament official would determine the official length.

Rulers were not a new thing as kayak tournaments took hold. Anglers often used metal rulers to measure their catch for their own information, but also to ensure compliance with any minimum-size or slot limits imposed by wildlife agencies on a state or local level.

The photographic aspect presented a couple of challenges. If a tournament were held during a particular time frame or on a particular body of water, it would be easy for an unscrupulous contestant to have photos of large fish previously caught ready to enter the catch.

Tournament directors responded by issuing identifiers just before or at the beginning of tournaments. They were

as simple as a playing card or logo that must be included in the photograph to validate the time the fish was caught. Later, it became common for tournaments to use a word or random code as an identifier. The angler could either write the code on his/her hand or otherwise mark it where it would be visible in the photograph.

## TIME FACTOR LIMIT

Because fish can be preserved on "film" much longer than they can be kept alive in a livewell, many kayak tournament formats have moved from single day events to week-long, month-long or even year-long competitions.

Rather than having an official gathering where anglers stand around waiting to see who caught the biggest fish, photographs are uploaded to tournament sites or to a tournament director who keeps tally of inches or points.



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

## BEST BETS

### NORTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Smallmouth bass

**WHERE** — Lake James, Fontana Lake

**HOW** — Cooler, fall waters bring smallmouth back into shallow waters in North Carolina's mountain lakes. Look for them to congregate around rocky points and shoals.

**LAUNCH** — Visit [www.ncwildlife.org/boating/where-to-boat](http://www.ncwildlife.org/boating/where-to-boat); enter your destination lake in the search box.

**INSIDER TIP** — Soft plastics that imitate crawfish are the norm for fall smallmouth fishing in many lakes, however, because smallmouth tend to be scattered, a craw-colored shad rap or other shallow bottom bumping crankbait is a great search tool.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Speckled trout

**WHERE** — Little River

**HOW** — Look for trout to gang up and feed heavily as the water cools and bait begins to leave the marsh areas. Trout will be keying on shrimp so both live and artificial presentations will work great.

**LAUNCH** — Several public boat launch sites are around Little River, plus other dump-in sites for kayaks: [www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/BoatRamp/BoatRampSelected/](http://www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/BoatRamp/BoatRampSelected/)

**INSIDER TIP** — Standard popping corks are the norm when fishing live shrimp but tend to limit the depth of presentation because the leader has to be retied to fish deeper or shallower. Check out some of the newer adjustable rattling corks and rattling slip corks to allow you to better tailor your depth presentation.

## ONLINE KAYAK TOURNAYS MADE EASY

Welcome to Tourney X.

In order to compete, kayak anglers must first sign up on the Tourney X website. Once registered, the angler can pick the event they want to fish. Some tournaments span days, some merely hours on a given lake, but versatility and technology make things more simplified.

Once the angler is logged in, he or she can register for any tournament he or she chooses. When registering, the angler is charged the amount the tournament director requires.

Once registered, anglers need to download the rules. They can visit the dashboard, where they are able to submit a catch, cull a fish, view submissions and the standings. Anglers can go to the website via smart phone, log in and upload a catch straight from the water.

For monthly tournaments, anglers who want to upload their catches from home using saved photos on a phone or SD card, can use a home-based computer to upload.

"We have used Tourney X for many of our tournaments," said HOOK-1 Outfitter Chad Hoover of Kayak Bass Fishing. "The format is easy, simple to use, and it makes hosting a tournament so much simpler and quicker to do registration and weigh-ins."

For more information, visit [tourneyx.com](http://tourneyx.com). ■

The format has become so popular for tournament fishing that many clubs now hold month-long tournaments targeting species that otherwise would not get a lot of attention. For example, for the past few years, South Carolina's Low Country Kayak Anglers Club and the Pee Dee Kayak Anglers Club have convened to see who can catch the largest bowfin, aka mudfish, in an annual event known as the "Jurassic Classic."

Another favorite club format is to pick a different species each month and have anglers compete to see who is the best overall angler at the end of the year, catching bass, crappie, catfish, redfish and even carp. All fish are caught, measured, photographed and released to fight again another day. ■



Phillip Gentry

It might be difficult for old-school anglers to grasp, but there's a bass tournament going on right now, in cyberspace. Anglers don't show up for weigh-ins; they don't even bring fish to the ramp. They catch a fish from a kayak, take a photo and release him.

## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Bass will be moving into the shallows in the Santee Cooper lakes this month, especially later in October.



# SANTEE FISHING BUSTS LOOSE

YOU NAME IT, IT'S BITING AS OCTOBER, COOLER WEATHER ARRIVES

Terry Madewell

**O**ctober brings prime-time fishing for multiple species in Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie, headlined with striped season opening after being closed for 3½ months.

But the best bass fishing since spring explodes on the Santee Cooper lakes, with shallow-water schooling action throughout both lakes.

## BASS BUSTING BAIT

Largemouth bass are chasing baitfish in the shallows, and topwater schooling action is red-hot this month. But that's not the only productive pattern.

Guide Brett Mitchell said while schooling action occurs any time of the day — and he's always prepared for it — his bread-and-butter tactic is working points and pockets of weeds and aquatic vegetation in shallow water.

"Actually, the diversity of patterns during October is extensive; it's a matter of figuring out what's going on in the part of the lake you're fishing," said Mitchell (803-379-7029). "Most all types of lures, from fast-moving topwaters to soft plastics fished slowly, can be productive."

Mitchell will begin searching for active bass in the shallows around cover. Later, he transitions to slightly deeper water and targets weedy edges, specifically points and pockets, and trees and brush.

"During October, I'll always be tuned in to breaking fish in open water," he said. "The window of opportunity can be short and quick reactions will add bass to your catch."

## CRAPPIE, CATFISH

The fall feeding trend has crappie feeding heartily, and papermouths will begin to stack up on deeper brush and bite

more aggressively.

Both Marion and Moultrie are extremely productive, and most guides relate that the improved consistency of finding slabs on these targets is what makes October more productive.

Tight-lining minnows or small jigs at the top of the brush — or along the sides when fish are holding deeper — is a prime tactic. Productive depths range from 15 to 30 feet.

Catfish, including big fish, begin to perk up, too, with blues and flatheads typically on a strong bite.

Drift-fishing is typically the most-



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.

Striper fishing is great in Lake Moultrie and Lake Marion in October, especially if you can follow feeding sea gulls.

productive pattern, but the key to finding plenty of catfish in any given area is having a food source nearby. It can be scads of shad in any depth of water or shallower around mussel beds. Gizzard shad, herring and white perch are all productive baits.

## STRIPER UPDATE

Striper fishing is outstanding this month on both lakes, with schooling action and live-bait fishing productive. Most guides keep plenty of live bait for down-line fishing, because schooling action is good early in the month and becomes more consistent later in the month and into November. Following seagulls is a good tactic to find stripers in October.

The key for fishermen is that both lakes are full of stripers, with plenty in the legal slot-size available for anglers to harvest. And the impact of the most-recent steeper regulations appears to bode well for the future of the fishery.

Levi Kaczka, the S.C. Department of Natural Resources' biologist for the Santee Cooper lakes, said the statistical data for the steeper fishery since the regulatory change is excellent, and that changes are having the desired impact.

"The goal of implementing more-conservative harvest regulations was to address total annual mortality, which was estimated to peak around 65% to 70%," Kaczka said. "Our estimates from the last couple of years have been 43% to 45% annual mortality, which is a good thing because we're keeping fish in the system longer. We're also seeing noticeably higher growth rates."

## GROWTH VS. MORTALITY

Kaczka said the higher growth rates are interesting because mortality and growth rate typically show a direct relationship in systems where fish are being harvested. High mortality equals higher growth rates, and lower mortality equals lower growth rates, but fish live longer and eventually grow larger.

"The theoretical maximum size for a species in a system will be lower for the high-mortality, high-growth situation, and higher for the low-mortality, low-growth situation," he said.

Kaczka said the opposite is currently occurring for stripers at Santee Cooper: relatively low mortality while producing high growth rates. For anglers, that's a good thing, but it's a pattern that will likely eventually level off.

"I suspect this is the dynamics of the population catching up with regulation change," he said. "A much-higher percentage of our yearly gill-net catch is now susceptible to harvest. Because of what we're seeing in the data and conversations with anglers, it appears more people are catching limits of stripers. Due to this, I'd suspect to see mortality rates increase, but stabilize well below the pre-regulatory mortality of 65% to 70% since we're maintaining a 3-fish creel limit. This would create a balance of maintaining the fishery at a high level for fishermen to enjoy while protecting the resource." ■



Terry Madewell

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## ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN

Pat Robertson

Jan Robertson, the author's wife, poses with Cotton Hill Benjie after his field-trial win in March 22, 2020. The other dog is Belmont Tax Return, a littermate who placed second, handled by Sonny Price of Fyffe, Ala., who bred that litter and gave Benjie to the Robertsons in hopes they would campaign him to field-trial champion status.



Pat Robertson

# BENJIE'S LAST HURRAH

COUNTING RABBIT TRACKS BEHIND THE PEARLY GATES A GREAT BEAGLE REWARD

**C**otton Hill Benjie was not a great dog, but he was a solid, little, 13-inch beagle who held his own in field trials, and some days, he really excelled. One of the days he shined was March 11, 2020.

In beagle field trials, the hounds vie for points and first-place finishes. A dog must accumulate 120 points and have a minimum of three wins to be recognized as a field champion by the American Kennel Club.

First place earns a point for each entry in a class. Second place gets half as many points, third place a third as many points and fourth place gets one-fourth of the points. Benjie entered the competition at Savannah River Valley Beagle Club in Edgefield, S.C., that day with two wins and slightly more than 90 points.

Most beagle clubs are laid out with patches of fairly heavy cover — weeds, brush, grasses, broomstraw, briars and piles of cut limbs and small trees — that

provides havens for rabbits. The “gallery” — the group of handlers, observers and judges — moves through this cover, beating the brush with “tallyho sticks” to drive the rabbits out. A tallyho stick can be anything from a trimmed 3-foot length of a sapling to a ski pole or even a broom handle.

## RABBIT TRACKING

Once the rabbit has moved out of his hiding place, the dogs are brought to the line and released. The dogs in traditional trials are run in braces. Their job is to trail the rabbit with as little variance from the scent line as possible, until the judges have decided on a winner of the brace.

The dogs do not “chase” the rabbit in traditional trials, nor are they expected to catch it. Healthy rabbits are a precious commodity for a beagle club. A healthy bunny population has to be maintained year-round in order to have rabbits for

the next trial.

Once all the dogs have competed, the judges pick the best ones to run in Second Series, with the highest-scored dog back “high” or first in the first brace of Second Series, and so on, depending on how they were scored.

Benjie had an excellent run in First Series that day and came back high in Second Series. And he put on a show.

The gallery jumped a rabbit in one cover patch, and it crossed over a grassy lane into another stand of thick cover. Benjie and his bracedmate trailed the rabbit through the thick mass of grass, briars and low bushes.



Pat Robertson covered outdoors issues for more than 30 years for *The State* and *The Columbia Record* newspapers. Now retired, he is a full-time free-lancer living in Blythewood, S.C., where he and his wife, Jan, raise beagles and compete in field trials.

Beagles receive placements and points in field trials for doing the best job staying directly on a rabbit's trail and staying there ahead of the other dogs in his brace.

## UNYIELDING

Benjie was relentless, never yielding the front and never faltering in his pursuit. The rabbit exited the first cover patch and crossed over into a second cover stand. Benjie forged on, claiming every foot of the scent trail with his characteristic baying bark. In field-trial lingo, he was "counting rabbit tracks."

The rabbit left the second patch of cover and turned down the grassy lane for a few steps before ducking into a third cover stand. Locked on to the trail, Benjie followed the rabbit's trail with precision, with his brace mate right on his heels. Once he turned into the next cover patch, the judges had seen enough, and Benjie had his coveted third win, plus about a dozen more points, putting him within a few more trials of reaching that magic total of 120 points.

Unfortunately, as in all aspects of life, the highs always seem to be balanced by the lows. Walking past Benjie's kennel later that day, I noticed his head was drooping, and his eyes indicated he was experiencing some serious discomfort. A visit to the vet determined that Benjie had a kidney stone, and surgery was scheduled the next morning.

## NO MORE PAIN

The operation revealed that the kidney stone was the least of Benjie's problems. A cancerous mass encompassed his abdominal cavity. Benjie might have lived another month or two, but he would have experienced increasing pain as the cancer spread, so the humane decision was made to spare him an unwinnable fight.

He came so very close to that title of champion. He did not get the title, but in his best performance since coming to my kennel, he finished his last field trial like a true champion.

Will Rogers, the great humorist and social commentator, was quoted as saying: "If there are no dogs in heaven, then I want to go where they went."

If dogs do go to heaven, I expect Benjie is there counting rabbit tracks to his heart's content. ■



Pat Robertson



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# Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

Dieter Cardwell said the fall king mackerel bite off North Carolina's Cape Fear is as good as any king bite, anywhere.

## CAPE FEAR KING RANSOM

### Bait, cooling water set big mackerel up within sight of southern NC beaches

**O**nce the water temperature begins to drop, schools of hungry king mackerel move to just off the beaches of southern North Carolina. This typically begins in September and continues through October, sometimes into November.

The two keys are an abundance of forage fish and cooling water. The kings feel one, and it trips a trigger, telling them to consume all they can of the other to bulk up for leaner times during the winter.

Kings, from young of the year to patriarchs and matriarchs that have prowled the ocean for years, heed this call to feed. They follow bait schools and may be just behind the breakers or scattered out to the many rocks, wrecks and artificial reefs in the area. They are feeding without reservation, and this is a great time to catch some of the big girls that are often wary and avoid hooks at other times of the year.

Dieter Cardwell of Southport, N.C., knows these kings well. As captain of the *Tide Line*, he has led his crew to two wins in the U.S. Open King Mackerel Tournament, which has been the largest king mackerel tournament in the U.S. for the past several years and is held annually from Southport the first weekend of October.

"We're blessed with good king mackerel fishing in this area all year, but when the water starts cooling and there are schools of bait along the beach, it really gets good," Cardwell said. "In fact, sometimes it gets almost unreal. I've been fortunate enough to fish many places, and the fall bite off the Cape Fear River compares to anywhere.

"We slow-troll live baits to catch the largest fish," Cardwell said. "There are schools of menhaden spread from the point at Cape Fear into South Carolina. A little patience to get on them, and one good throw with a large cast net will catch all the bait you can use. We also like to have some live bluefish and often also supplement the spread with a shiny ribbonfish or two."

Cardwell said the basic rig is simple. It's approximately 6 feet of No. 5 wire, with a pair of 4X strong, No. 4 treble hooks at the end. The treble hooks are 5 to 6 inches apart. Kings seem to be able to find a hole between the hooks if they're spaced too far apart. For larger baits, like large bluefish and ribbonfish, a third or maybe even fourth treble hook is added. Ribbonfish are fished dead, so a small jig is used as the nose hook to prevent spinning.

This is a great time to catch kings in this area. They are here and feeding. Some of them are genuine trophies too and show why they earn the nickname smokers. ■

# SPOTS ADD TO ROANOKE RAPIDS FISHERY

## Upper end of small North Carolina lake is great bass destination throughout the fall

**S**potted bass have recently become part of the Roanoke Rapids Lake fishery that includes largemouth bass and striped bass.

"We have a lot of spotted bass now," said guide Tim Biesecker of Roanoke Rapids, N.C., who's been fishing the small reservoir downstream from Lake Gaston since 1978.

When anglers ask Biesecker about the little-publicized fishery, Biesecker likens it to Tuckertown Lake of the Yadkin River system.

"Both lakes are less than 5,000 acres, almost completely undeveloped, and their shallow rocky and stumpy terrain make them treacherous to navigate," he said. "They were once great crankbait lakes until they became infested with grass or black mat algae. The recent addition of grass carp to control grass at Tuckertown has eradicated much of the lake's elodea and hydrilla, but the black mat algae remains, while the grass at Roanoke Rapids Lake has intensified, if anything. As a result, crankbait fishing is

confined to small areas of both lakes."

While spots have become established in the gin-clear waters of Roanoke Rapids, they have yet to appear in the turbid waters of Tuckertown.

Biesecker said the surroundings at Roanoke Rapids Lake have changed in one significant way.

"The (U.S. Army) Corps of Engineers had an issue with the turbines at the hydro dam, so last fall it opened one to two flood gates for more than 6 months and did a lot of damage to the lake," he said. "Trees have been deposited in areas where there were none."

In the fall, Biesecker favors the upper reaches of the lake below Gaston Dam where spots, largemouth and stripers gather to bust shad on the surface in the mornings, evenings and on cloudy days. A long cast with a Zara Spook or Fluke into feeding fish could begin a tug of war with any of the three species.

"Look for current in the fall, whether hydro- or wind-driven," Biesecker said. "Current usually improves the fishing."

Huge rocks line the bottom near the dam, so the area should be navigated with care.

For bass in grassy places, Biesecker fishes a SPRO frog in black or white into thick grass mats where no other lures dare venture. He employs a heavy-action rod and baitcasting reel filled with 65-pound braid. Black frogs are his choice for cloudy days; white for mornings and evenings.

For grass edges and pockets, he switches to a 7-foot, medium-action spinning rod and 8-pound line using Flukes and plastic swimbaits weighted with 1/8- or 1/4-ounce jigs and unweighted Senkos if the water is clear. If it's dingy, he favors baitcasting gear and 10- to 12-pound line.

The presence of spots has encouraged him to toss bladed jigs, though he admits they can be a hassle to fish in areas with vegetation.

Biesecker (252-532-1846) has temporarily stopped guiding because of COVID concerns, but he will resume guiding once the latest surge subsides. ■

Largemouth, spotted and striped bass are all possibilities when fishing a topwater bait on Roanoke Rapids Lake.



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Noah Lynk runs into plenty of false albacore fishing off Cape Lookout in the fall.



Noah Lynk

## FALSE ALBACORE MAKE FALL MOVE

### Barden's Inlet, Cape Lookout areas fill up

October is when false albacore numbers begin to hit their stride at the central North Carolina coast.

Although not a good seafood choice, albacore — aka albies, alberts, little tunny — exhibit strength and speed, gather in large schools and provide non-stop, nearshore action from late August through Christmas.

Guide Noah Lynk of Harkers Island lives and works near one of the coast's top venues to find false albacore.

"I like the hook at Barden's Inlet (near Cape Lookout)," he said. "They like warm water temperatures and peak from late October through Thanksgiving."

Lynk and "Carolina All Out" host Chris Douglas filmed a recent false albacore trip offered on YouTube.

Extremely strong for their size, football-shaped albacore offer reel-screaming, light-tackle action, taking line at 40 mph.

Best ocean signs of albacore are gannets and terns diving on baitfish schools.

"They like to eat bay anchovies and glass minnows," said Lynk, 51, who owns Noah's Ark Fishing Charters (252-342-6911).

Lynk uses small lures to match the baitfish that albacore prefer. "Anchovies are an inch long," Lynk said. "They're small and clear with an eyeball."

Lynk uses 7½-foot spinning rods and 3000 or 4000 Series reels spooled with 12-pound FINS braid, casting ⅛- or ¼-ounce jig-heads with Salty Bay Baits Glass Minnows trailers or Sea Striker Jigfish. He likes 3-foot, 30-pound fluorocarbon leaders.

Spanish mackerel from 2 to 6 pounds also will attack albacore lures in October.

"They may be in the same areas, but they don't mix," he said. "Albacores might work one school of baitfish, and Spanish will be on another."

Spanish will suspend beneath feeding albacores, so Lynk fast-retrieves lures near the surface. If he lets them sink, mackerels may smack them.

Albacore weigh 6 to 10 pounds early in the season, but they may reach 20 pounds.

Anglers often mistake false albacore with striped or Atlantic bonito because of similar body shapes. But albacores are a tuna species, while bonitos are classified as mackerels.

Moreover, bonitos are in North Carolina waters only from mid-April through May, then they head north, while false albacore are present from early fall through mid winter.

Bonitos also have solid stripes below their dorsal fins, while false albacore have squiggly, worm-like shapes from under their dorsals to their lateral lines. Both have blue-black backs with silver sides.

"They both look like torpedoes," Lynk said.

Bonitos are great table fare while albacore do not make the grade as an edible fish. ■

## FISH THE SHALLOWS

### Wateree bass move to shoreline grass

**BY** Pat Robertson  
the time October arrives, the stifling, muggy summer heat that prevailed a short month ago is becoming a welcome memory as nights get longer and temperatures are in a fairly steady decline. Water temperatures are also begin to drop and that has a definite effect on fishing.

But for a bass fisherman on South Carolina's Lake Wateree, while water temperatures are cooling, the key to success is to find warmer water. That means working shallower water along the shoreline, according to veteran angler Dearal Rodgers.

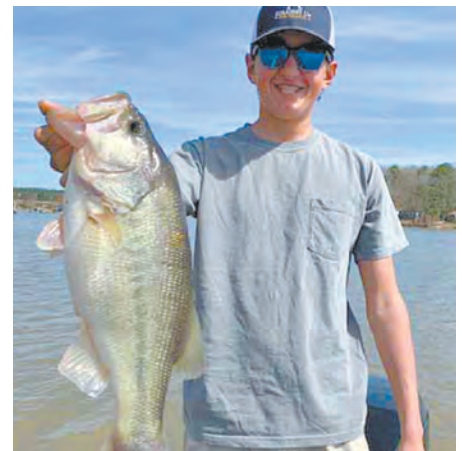
"In October, the shoreline grass is still

flourishing, and the water remains stained year-round. This combination of variables leans greatly toward shallow-water bites," he said.

"This time of year, I target grass from morning to night. I like to begin with topwater, and it's hard to beat a Buckeye Lures buzzbait or Snagproof Frog in the morning. As the sun reaches higher in the sky, I will transition to a swim jig in shad or bream colors and flipping a Strike King Rage Craw or Rage Bug."

The key with the swim jig is to let it fall in any hole that the grass creates, Rodgers said. Color choice can make a difference; he prefers green pumpkin, watermelon

Stable, cooling temperatures push Lake Wateree bass into the shallows.



Dearal Rodgers

red and junebug.

While the shoreline grass is a haven for October bass, Rodgers said docks are another productive target.

"As I'm fishing the shoreline, I don't miss any opportunity to cast under Wateree's many docks with a green pumpkin Mop Jig. Rigged with a green pumpkin trailer, it's always been my big fish bait," he said. ■



William Attaway

## COOLING WEATHER KICKS OFF MURRAY'S FALL CATFISH BITE

**T** By Pat Robertson  
he weather is variable from day to day in the fall, and that makes Lake Murray's catfish vary their patterns, according to guide William Attaway of Pomaria, S.C.

"Some days they will be hanging on the ledges of the river channel, some days they will be holding right on the bottom of the channel and some days they will be laying out on the flats," said Attaway ([www.slickwilliesguideservice.com](http://www.slickwilliesguideservice.com)), adding that before you can catch them you have to locate them.

"I spend a lot of time riding and looking at my

graph," he said. "I also look for loons. If you see loons diving on bait, a lot of times the fish will be feeding under them. If I see seagulls feeding, a lot of times catfish and stripers will be feeding under them, too. Birds are a dead giveaway for fish, but the main thing is just watching the graph."

And sometimes, he said, you just have to try your luck in a likely spot.

"If you are not marking any fish, it does not mean there are no fish there," he said. "Sometimes, they just stick to the bottom, and you can't read them on the graph. Sometimes it works to just throw out some bait and see what happens."

Channel and blue cats make up a good bit of the fall Lake Murray catfish take.

At times anchoring on a likely spot will provide success, Attaway said, but primarily, he drifts this time of year with cut bait — white perch, bream, blueback herring and gizzard shad — on a standard Santee drift rig.

Attaway said catfishing on Murray provides a mixed bag, mainly channel catfish, but with plenty of blue cats and even some flatheads.

"Occasionally, we will catch a white catfish, but not as often as we used to; I like to throw the white catfish back since we don't see many of them anymore," said Attaway, who says fishing for catfish on Lake Murray can be "pretty slow" the first half of October as they transition from summer to fall.

"But once they start to bite, they bite good, and as long as the lake doesn't flood they will bite good right on into the next spring." ■

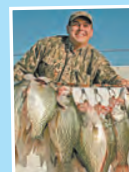
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Jeff Burleson

## MURRELLS INLET EXPLODES WITH TROUT

Cool weather starts the big migration of bait and specks, and this estuary holds them

**A** By Jeff Burleson  
nglers wait all year for the cooling trends to begin, and when the calendar turns to October, they get fired up in anticipation of the fall speckled trout rally. A small fishing village on the tail end of South Carolina's Grand Strand, Murrells Inlet is one of the best places to get in on the action.

Dyed-in-the-wool anglers can find a limit of specks in the Carolinas at any time, but it's no secret something spectacular happens in October. In the matter of a single day, the bite can turn from an occasional strike here and there to constant action in all the typical spots. The fish seem to show up overnight, and every angler in the region eagerly anticipates it.

One of the chief antagonists of South Carolina's speckled trout is guide Dan Connelly of O-Fish-At Expeditions in Murrells Inlet. Even though he will chase every fish species inshore and within 10 miles of the beach, the spotted seatrout is undoubtedly his most-favored flavor.

"October is a special time around here," said Connelly (843-241-7022). "We catch trout all year, but the hot action starts firing up in October from a chain of events that crescendo during this time."

According to Connelly, fish are traveling south, trailing large migrations of food and leaving their summer feeding and spawning grounds in the northeast.

"Water temperatures cool faster north of us, sending huge migrations of mullet, menhaden and shrimp down the beach to

us. The trout will follow their food south," he said. "These fish are accustomed to making this trip every fall to their winter homes, but the cold weather surely gives them a little push."

October is the first month in which weather events are significant enough to impact water temperatures, triggering the bait and predator migration. A cold front with nightly temperatures dipping into the 40s will trigger things, and within a day or two, these fish seem to show up in big schools with hearty appetites.

Fortunately for anglers, the migratory trek and cooling waters cranks up their appetites. The bottom line is, the fish arrive hungry and ready to fill up on shrimp, mullet, menhaden or whatever they can find.

Connelly uses a wide collection of bait and lure options, because frankly, they will all produce bites from speckled trout.

"Early fall is an epic time to catch giant trout and big numbers of fish on topwater plugs, and there is nothing more fun than watching a fish blow up on top of your lure," he said. "But we will use soft-plastic paddletail lures, artificial shrimp, and then live shrimp under a slip float."

Live shrimp is the kryptonite for trout. Fish may sometimes be finicky about certain lures, but not a lively shrimp in their faces. Live shrimp under a float is one of Connelly's ways to put fish in the boat fast, and he will get a tank-full of shrimp when he can.

"I love using live shrimp in the fall, but be prepared to burn through a lot of bait, as most of the other bait-stealing critters are still around in full force in October," he said. ■

# JORDAN LAKE BASS IN HOT PURSUIT AS SHAD SEEK CREEKS

**W** By Dusty Wilson  
With October comes the first real cool weather around North Carolina's Jordan Lake, causing bass and fishermen to feel a little more frisky. It will also cause shad to clamor into the creeks with the largemouths in hot pursuit. Local angler Jonathan Phillips of Pittsboro, N.C., will be there with a box full of his favorite baits to put them in the boat.

"In early October, I'll start in the first third of the creeks to about halfway," said Phillips. "By the end of October, they could be all the way to the back in the dirt. I like to target shallow rock, shallow wood and grass. I'm looking for bass in the 1- to 5-foot range. The fish will be moving around a lot, so you have to cover water with a good search bait. Targeting riprap with a Chatterbait or a spinnerbait is a good way to start in the morning, because the rocks will still be warm when the night air is cool."

Phillips prefers the creeks in Jordan's river section because the fish are concentrated in a smaller area and able to change depth more quickly as weather changes approach. Short pockets and secondary points featuring the necessary cover are especially productive. Phillips uses spinnerbaits and Chatterbaits in white or shad colors to work these banks. If they fail to produce, he'll switch to a shallow-running square-bill crankbait — size 1.5 to 2.5 — in a shad pattern. What he really loves is a buzzbait bite.

"A lot of people consider Halloween week to be national buzzbait week," Phillips said. "I use a True South V-Twin buzzbait in white and throw it on 20-pound mono. It's a great search bait. I like a gold blade or a silver blade with a soft-plastic trailer. Sometimes I fish it naked with a Horny Toad trailer to keep the bait up. They will bite other topwater baits that time of year. Pop-Rs, Sammys and Spooks can all be effective."

According to Phillips, the biggest challenge in October is the ever-changing pattern. The shad move, the bass move. Fish must be found anew every day, and that's under normal conditions. High water will send bass scrambling into the flooded willow bushes that ring the creeks, while extremely low water — more than a foot or two below the normal pool level — will make standing timber in the 6-foot range the go-to place to throw a Timber Tiger crankbait. ■

Angler Jonathan Phillips said Jordan Lake bass follow the movements of shad in October, while he follows the movement of bass like this one.





# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Lucas, Grady Hatch**

Brothers Lucas (left) and Grady Hatch killed 14 quail and four chukars on their first bird hunt, in Lenoir County, N.C., on Jan. 16, 2021.



**Conley Steed**

Conley Steed caught this nice bass in April from a private pond near Charleston, S.C.



**Tess McMichael**

Tess McMichael, 9, of Reidsville, N.C., caught her first Spanish mackerel in July out of Beaufort Inlet.



**Jake Osment**

Jake Osment, 13, killed this 21-pound gobbler on youth day in Cherokee County, S.C., this past spring.



**Davis Shandley**

Davis Shandley, 6, from Raleigh, N.C., boated this nice bass on Nov. 25, 2020, from Virginia's Smith Mountain Lake.



**Ethan Gore**

Ethan Gore dropped this juvenile tundra swan near Elizabeth City, N.C., on Jan. 9, 2021.

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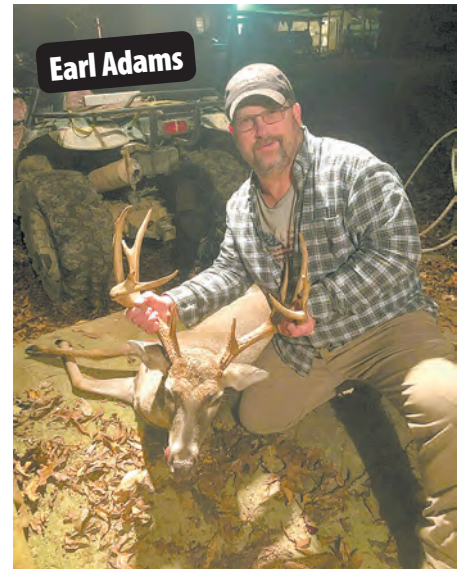
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**James Brooks**

James Brooks from Chatham County, N.C., harvested this 14-point buck — a 10-point main frame with four kickers — with a muzzleloader near Siler City on Nov. 3, 2020.



**Earl Adams**

Earl Adams tagged this beautiful buck near Mt. Gilead, N.C., on Nov. 14, 2020.



**Donnie Skinner**

Donnie Skinner of Charleston, S.C., took this tom on March 20 near Brunson, S.C., with a .410 TriStar and Rectifire choke.



**Douglas George**

Douglas George of Gaffney, S.C., killed this 23-pound gobbler last spring. It carried an 11-inch beard and 1½-inch spurs.



**Richard Cameron**

Richard Cameron killed this great muzzleloader buck last season in Guilford County, N.C.



**Kevin France**

Kevin France caught these two 5½-pound Randleman Lake bass on his March 20, a great birthday present to himself.



**Kreed Tyson**

Kreed Tyson, 9, killed this 155-inch buck last Nov. 14 in Anson County, N.C. The buck had an 18¾-inch spread.



**Will Turner**

Will Turner killed this 12-foot alligator on May 28 on a private-land alligator hunt in the Savannah River with a .22-250.



**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.)

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	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE				
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Sun 3					53				
Mon 4					61				
Tue 5					69				
Wed 6					71				
Thu 7					59				
Fri 8					47				
Sat 9					33				

Sun 10					25				
Mon 11					28				
Tue 12					37				
Wed 13					27				
Thu 14					23				
Fri 15					24				
Sat 16					25				

Sun 17					37				
Mon 18					47				
Tue 19					57				
Wed 20					64				
Thu 21					56				
Fri 22					49				
Sat 23					40				

Sun 24					38				
Mon 25					40				
Tue 26					41				
Wed 27					47				
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Fri 29					47				
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Sun 31					31				

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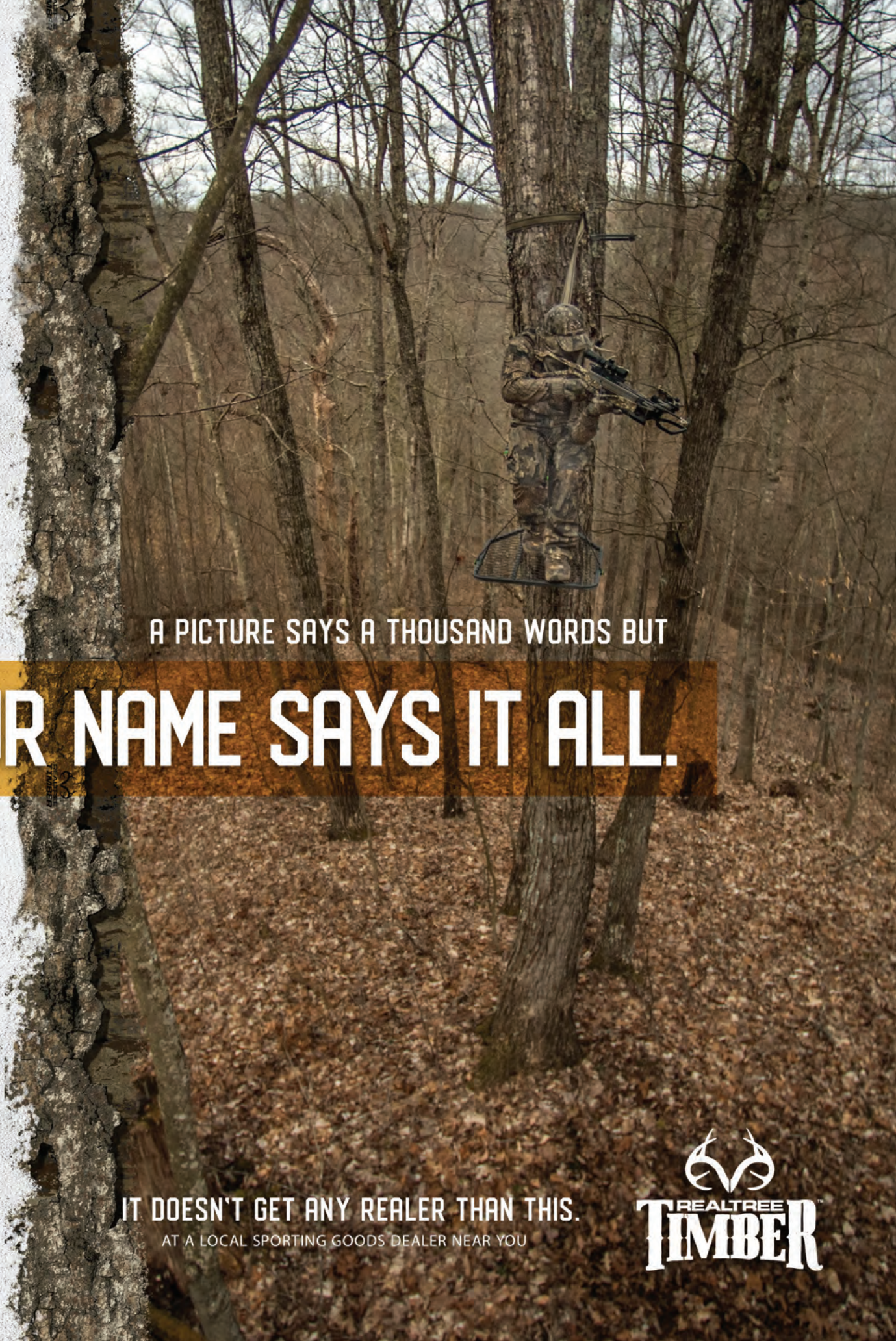
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