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Get the scoop on NC Game Lands for deer, early archery tips, and tons of fishing strategies in this issue of Carolina Sportsman Magazine.



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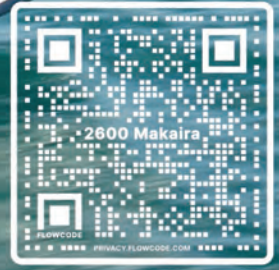
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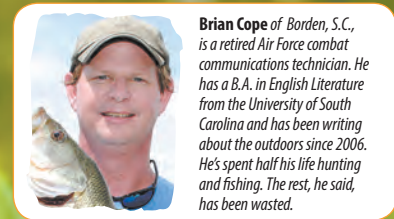


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OUTDOOR UPDATE

with Brian Cope



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

WHAT A GRAND TIME OF YEAR

SEPTEMBER SHOULD BE A FAVORITE MONTH FOR SPORTSMEN

When I was a kid, I hated this time of year. It only meant one thing to me — going back to school. I didn't exactly hate school, but I loved summer. Even as an adult, it took me a while to get over the feeling. But now, September is one of my favorite months.

I still love summer, and even though September's weather usually feels like summer throughout the Carolinas, it's still an obvious transition month for sportsmen.

Back-to-school time depressed me as a kid, but it now

means fewer crowds in all the places I enjoy fishing. It begins to get much easier to find lodging at reasonable prices, and far fewer boats are on the water.

It's been a great summer of fishing, but an influx of bait and shrimp, plus hints of cooling water temperatures put the fish in a different state of mind.

Also, depending on where you live in the Carolinas, deer season has either started or will begin soon. I grew up in South Carolina's Game Zone 4, where archery season starts on Aug. 15, giving way to rifle season on Sept. 1.

And deer aren't the only game in town this month. Dove season also cranks up, this year on Sept. 3. These hunts provide for great fellowship, fun shooting, and provide meat for memorable meals, often grilled during the first college football gatherings of the year.

DON'T FORGET THE GEESE

A handful of other lesser-known migratory bird seasons open this month. Marsh hens, rails, gallinules and moorhens have small but passionate followings.

And then there's my personal favorite bird hunting season — the early Canada goose season opens Sept. 1 with little fanfare as most hunters are focused on getting ready for doves or deer. It ends on Sept. 30. Throughout most of the Carolinas, the early goose season means a daily limit of 15 geese. That's a pile, and three times the limit we'll have later this fall.

I've spent many a September day in a small boat on one particular farm pond in Kershaw County, SC. I take along a shotgun and a fishing rod, casting for bass while waiting on the local honkers to show up. Usually, a group or two will come in, not at all concerned about my presence. Halfway through the month, some buzz right past with a few others attempting to land.

By the end of the month, most of these resident geese have been educated enough of my presence to know I'm up to no good. But it's not uncommon for a few to still pass close enough for a shot or two. And in between, I'm catching bass on topwater lures, Texas-rigged worms and spinnerbaits.

All in all, it's not a bad way to say goodbye to the summer. September, you've been away too long. I'm glad you're finally back. ■



A chance to kill a deer in velvet is just one reason to love September. Canada goose season cranks up on Sept. 1, and is one of the most overlooked hunting seasons in the Carolinas.

HATCHER INSURANCE REDFISH ROUNDUP

The Hatcher Insurance Redfish Roundup saw Mike Taylor and Christian Taylor take the top spot at Event 2 of the Redfish Madness Series that took place on July 9. They brought a limit of fish totaling 13.82 pounds to the scales and pocketed \$10,560 for the win.

Rennie Clark and Drew Arndt took second place with 13.10 pounds, good for \$2000. Team Eastern Outfitters, made up of anglers Anthony Osborne and Noah Harrison finished third with 13.04 pounds, taking home \$1450.

Tiffany Banks won the \$150 Lady Angler award for her 6.36-pound redfish. Team Pinch the Tail (George Ansell and Andrew Rahm) won \$2100 with the Big Fish of the tournament, a 7.33-pound redfish.

A total of 48 boats competed in the event, which was marred by an unusually low tide. Wind and rain also played a factor,



Team Taylor won \$10,560 at the Hatcher Insurance Redfish Roundup.

BAILEY YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHY
BAILEY YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHY@GMAIL.COM

making for a tough day on the water. Twenty-eight teams weighed fish at the conclusion of the event. ■

NEW BAG-A-BUCK PRIZES FOR 2022

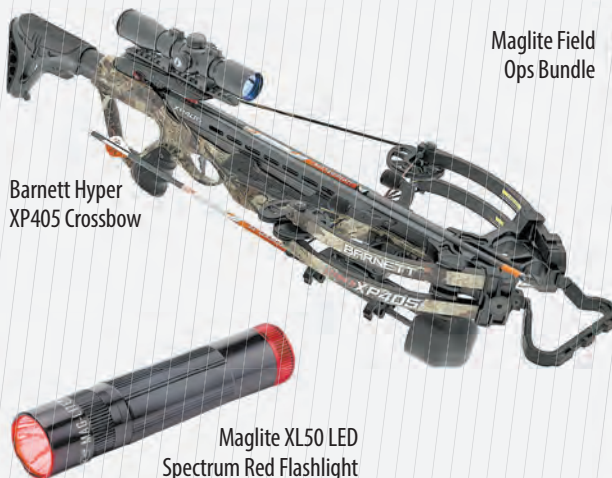
The Carolina Sportsman Bag-A-Buck contest has some new sponsors for the 2022-23 deer hunting season. Long-time sponsor Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield, SC is still on board with a 2-day, two-person deer/hog hunt combo for the grand prize winner.

Barnett Crossbows is also a grand prize sponsor with the Hyper XP 405, which fires 22-inch arrows at 405 feet per second.

We also welcome MAGLITE as a grand prize and monthly prize sponsor. Monthly prizes include MAGLITE's XL50 LED Spectrum Red flashlights. The Grand Prize winner will receive the MAGLITE Field Ops Bundle.

Other prizes are expected to show up, so we'll keep you posted as they arrive at our warehouse.

We'd also like to remind our readers that it's not always the biggest buck that wins our monthly or grand prize contests. It often comes down to the best story combined with the best photo. So don't be shy about sharing details of your hunt, whether you got stung by yellowjackets during the hunt, shot a buck on a special day, sat with a youth hunter when they shot their first buck, got engaged in the stand just before your prized buck stepped into range, etc. We want to hear all about it! ■



Barnett Hyper XP405 Crossbow

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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 and a shot at the grand prize.

To enter or see deer that have been entered, log onto

www.carolinasportsman.com/bag-a-buck

Maglite Field Ops Bundle



JOHN STARZ ELECTRIC REDFISH RUMBLE

On July 30, Event 3 of the Redfish Madness Series, the John Starz Electric Redfish Rumble, took place, and it was an exciting event. Rennie Clark and Drew Arndt took first place with 14.45 pounds. The win capped off a great season. They finished as champions of the 2022 Redfish Madness Series.

John Collins and Michael Collins took second place with 14.2 pounds, followed by Zach Wallace and Mike Markusic's

third place finish with 13.12 pounds. Clark and Arndt also won the Big Fish award, plus the TWT and took home more than \$15,000 for their efforts.

For the third time in three straight tournaments, Tiffany Banks won the Lady Angler award, pocketing \$150 and \$300 in Hook & Bones apparel.

Team Blackjack's 5.85-pound redfish was good for the \$150 Landmark Homes Bonus. ■

Drew Arndt and Rennie Clark (not pictured) won the John Starz Electric Redfish Rumble on July 30.



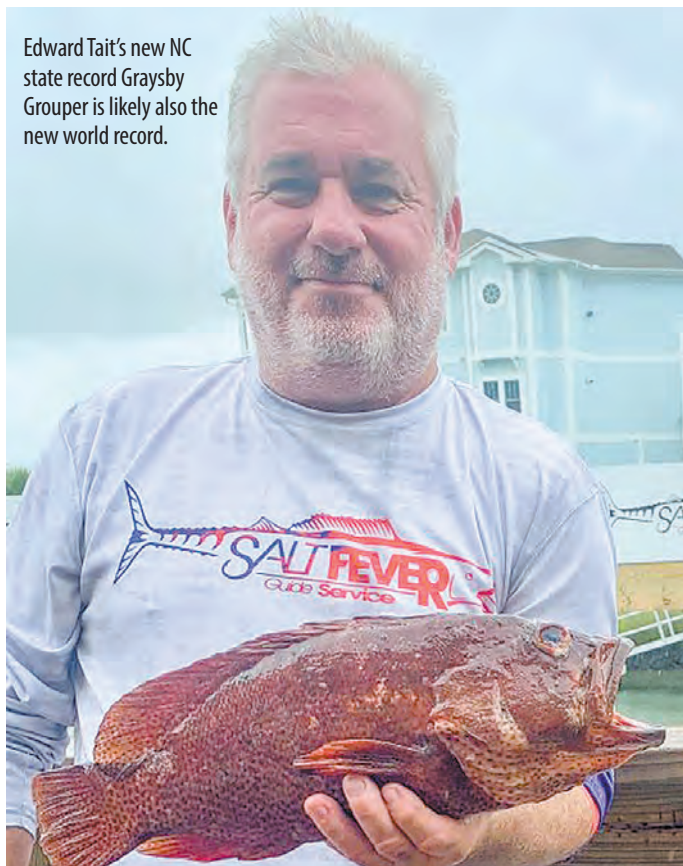
REDFISH MADNESS US OPEN

The Redfish Madness US Open One Man Championship, presented by Performance East, will be held Sept. 9-10 out of Swansboro. This is a one-angler-per-boat, 2-day tournament. Each angler will weigh a maximum of one fish per day.

This tournament has a guaranteed first place prize of \$20,000. A daily Big Fish tournament within a tournament (TWT), along with a High Roller TWT are also included. Only artificial lures are allowed.

For more information, contact Mike Mattice at 910-459-0229 or visit redfishmadness.com. ■

Edward Tait's new NC state record Graysby Grouper is likely also the new world record.



NC AND WORLD RECORD GRAYSBY GROUPE

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries recently certified a new state record Graysby Grouper (*Cephalopholis cruentata*) that may also be a world record.

Edward J. Tait of Little River, S.C. caught the 3-pound, 0.8-ounce fish offshore of Ocean Isle Beach on June 30, 2022.

The previous state record Graysby Grouper weighed 2 pounds, 3 ounces, and was caught offshore of Masonboro Inlet on May 31, 2022.

Additionally, Tait said he is applying to the International Game Fish Association for certification of the fish as the All Tackle World Record. The current certified world record Graysby Grouper weighed 2 pounds and 8 ounces. It was caught off Texas in 1988.

Tait's fish measured 17 inches total length (from the tip of the snout to the tip of the compressed tail) and had a 13.5-inch girth. He caught it with an Okuma ECS spinning rod and Okuma Tesoro 8000 reel using squid with 65-pound test.

A few weeks before Tait caught his record fish, another South Carolina angler set the North Carolina (and world) record for pompano dolphinfish. That angler was also fishing out of Ocean Isle. ■

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BLACK WIDOW LURES TURNS 25

Lure company makes scents for all hunters

Black Widow Lures is a family-owned business that's been making wildlife scents for 25 years.

Black Widow Lures, the first company to market fresh hunting attractants on a national scale, is turning 25-years-old. That's quite a feat in the outdoor industry, especially for a family-owned business.

But Black Widow has lures that go beyond natural deer attractants. They sell some of the best synthetic deer scents on the market. So they have great options for hunters in South Carolina, where natural deer scent lures are currently banned.

And of course, for states that don't restrict the use of natural deer urine, Black Widow has numerous offerings. That goes for hunters no matter what region of the country you're hunting. They collect it fresh, seal it in bottles, then ship their products out. At the end of hunting season, they take back the leftover scent from their dealers and destroy it. That's how they ensure every bottle of Black Widow scent is the freshest on the market.

Their Interdigital Gland Snap Caps are made up of gland secretions that come from between the toes on a deer. They give off a strong, musky odor, attracting deer to investigate.

Hang the company's Scrape Rope in a tree located along a scrape line, saturate it with the natural or synthetic lure of your choice, and watch how effective this is in keeping deer coming back.

Black Widow's Ultimate Rut Package contains numerous scents, wicks, sticks and scrape beads. As the name implies, it's best to





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use these products during the rut. Black Widow offers this for both Southern and Northern whitetails.

Widow Maker Scent Sticks are among the most versatile scent dispensers on the market. Load the reservoir with your favorite scent on a wick, then hang it from a tree branch or insert it into the ground. The product's design allows you to adjust how much of the wick is exposed. It comes in a three-pack, and all three are different colors, allowing you to use them as yardage markers. They're also reflective, making them easy to see in the dark.

The Widow Maker Scent Drag helps bring deer right to you. With a drag rag dispensing your deer lure of choice as you walk to your stand, you'll be laying down an attractant that deer can't resist.

The company's Hot-N-Ready Scrape Beads are infused with 2 ounces of doe estrus. Placed along scrape lines, the beads slowly release their scent over time, but that's not all they do. They also absorb the urine of other deer who visit the scrape. This keeps a constant supply of scent releasing into the area.

For hog hunters, Black Widow's Hog Balls are scent-infused beads, made with sow estrus. These attract wild hogs and keep them coming back for more. Bear hunters will love their Glazed Donut Beads — and so will bears.

Heading out of town to hunt elk or moose? Black Widow has you covered there too.

And for hunters simply wanting to mask their own scent, Black Widow has a full lineup, from Persimmon to Apple to Earth.

As the company stated earlier this year, they've provided "25 years of uninterrupted supply, 25 years of pride in our business. We are the last of the true family owned businesses in our industry and look forward to the next 25 years of Black Widow Deer Lures providing you with what you need to be successful!" ■



Cover scents like these are among the company's many offerings.

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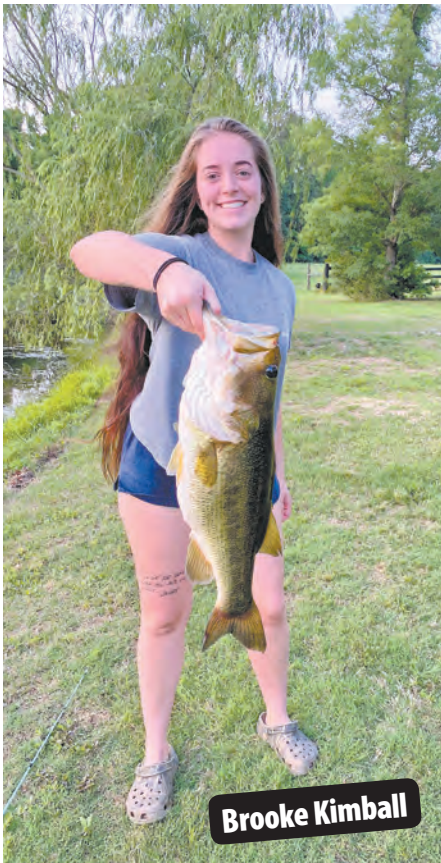
Matthew Cox

Matthew Cox of Owasso, OK caught this Cape Fear River redfish while fishing with his granddad, Michael Goins of Wilmington.



Riley Stewart

Riley Stewart was fishing with Gator's Outdoor Adventures and Guide Service at Santee when she caught this bass.



Brooke Kimball

Brooke Kimball was fishing in Carthage, N.C. when she caught this lunker largemouth bass



R Wayne Horton

While surf fishing the north end of Topsail, R Wayne Horton landed this 4.9-pound pompano on a piece of shrimp.



Travon Harris

Travon Harris caught this chunky bass in Lee County, N.C.



Quentin Turko

Quentin Turko caught this nice speckled trout while fishing the Outer Banks in May 2022.

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**ARCHERY HUNTERS FACE
UNIQUE CHALLENGES DURING
EARLY SEASON.**

By Pete Rogers

EARLY SEASON ARCHERY BUCKS

Pete Rogers

EARLY SEASON ARCHERY HUNTERS FACE UNIQUE CHALLENGES IN THE CAROLINAS.

With some seasons opening in August or September, the heat is one of the key issues archers must deal with when looking for big bucks.

How bucks deal with the heat and how hunters cope are all part of the game for patterning early season bucks. To help address this, hunters should focus on three elements to be successful: water, food, and temperature.

FIND THE WATER – OR CREATE IT

As the mercury climbs, the desire for bucks to drink increases. A mature buck needs about three quarts of water daily for every hundred pounds of body weight to survive the heat. To help pattern bucks, many hunters are either scouting natural water sources or building their own water holes to draw bucks to their stand locations.

Research shows that bucks will visit water before feeding in early season. The desire to drink is strong and locating your stand in an ambush location near water is a sure-fire method

for arrowing a mature buck.

Building a water hole is not difficult but does take some work. Small livestock watering troughs work well. Some will bury these to ground level to make them blend in with the landscape. Others simply place them on top of the ground. Regardless of which you choose, you need to ensure they always have water in them.

Chad Simpson of Campobello, SC agrees with this sentiment.

“I will set up a bow stand near water during the early season because I know those bucks will at some point come to the water to drink.”

Last September is a great example. Simpson hung a stand near an active spring at a pinch point between two clearcuts and was able to take a good buck as the deer made its way to the water hole about an hour before dark.

“Just like clockwork, the buck showed up heading straight for the water. When he got close to the water, I was able to take the shot,” he said.

FIND THE LOCAL FOOD SPOTS ➤

Small clearings and pinch points are good ambush spots for archers during the early season.



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FIND THE LOCAL FOOD SPOTS

Another area archers should examine is the preferred food source the bucks are visiting. If soybeans are nearby, it is well known that the bucks will be visiting those beans right before dark. Getting out before season and doing some long-range scouting will help archers determine where the bucks are entering the fields. Once this is established, place a stand near one of those trails along the edge of the bean field.

Chris Taylor of Utica, Kentucky agrees, "I set my stand where I can see both the edge of the field, and the travel routes I suspect the bucks to be taking into the field. This gives me the best chance for intercepting them," he said.

But for those of us who do not have agriculture near us or our leases, consider other prime food sources. One such food source is persimmons (*Diospyros virginiana*). Persimmons are some of the best and most-desired foods to focus on for early season bucks.

"Without a doubt, if a persimmon tree is anywhere on the property, I will hunt that tree or trees," Simpson said.

Persimmons are a magnet for bucks in our area.

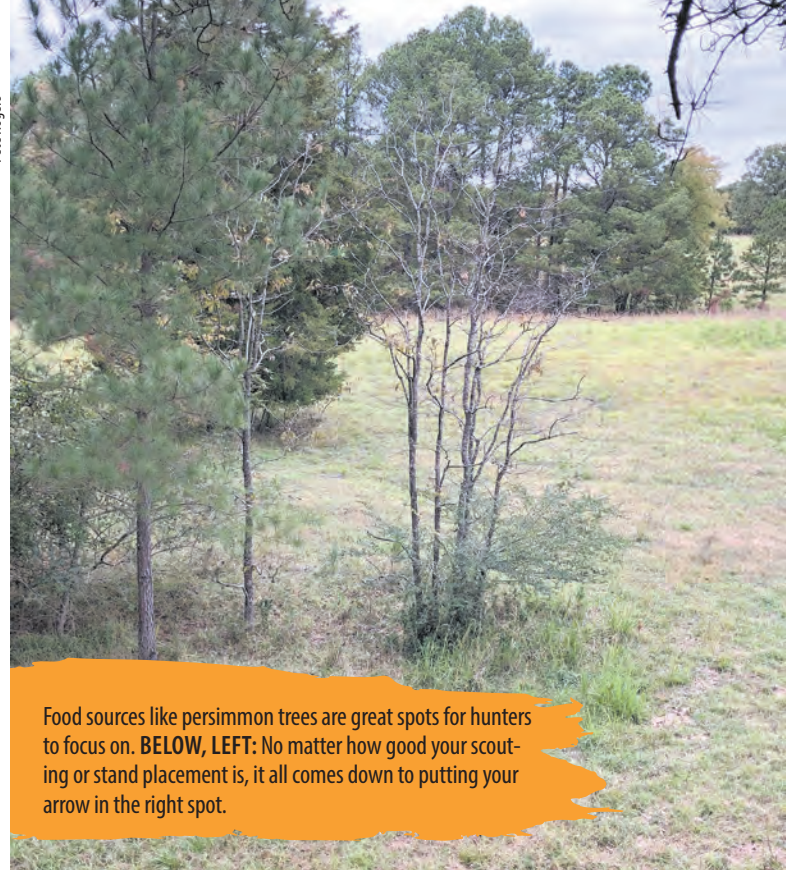
"They will leave all other food sources and hit the persimmon trees when the fruit is falling," he said.

Persimmon trees are dioecious, meaning there are male and female trees. Both are needed to produce fruit. Finding a persimmon tree alone is not necessarily a good thing. You need to scout them in late summer to see if the tree is producing fruit. If it is not, it's a male tree, and you are hunting in the wrong area. You must find a tree that has fruit on it.

"When I find a good persimmon tree, I hang a camera to watch and see the deer coming to eat," Simpson said. "Once I establish the deer coming to that tree, I will hang my stand 15 to 20 yards from the active persimmon tree with the prevailing wind in my face."

On one farm he hunts, he has seen a magnificent buck two years in a row coming to the tree, only to be foiled by darkness before the buck arrived.

"By watching this several times, I now know where the buck is



Food sources like persimmon trees are great spots for hunters to focus on. **BELOW, LEFT:** No matter how good your scouting or stand placement is, it all comes down to putting your arrow in the right spot.

coming from and have moved my stand to intercept him well before he gets to the tree," he said.

LASTLY IS TEMPERATURE

As the mercury climbs into the 90s and above, bucks will not move until last light or early morning. Being in the right place when they are moving makes for better success.

"In the afternoons, I will get to the tree about 2 hours before dark. It is so hot, I feel confident I am not spooking anything going in that late. But it puts me where I need to be at the right time," Simpson said.

Mornings are different in early season. Bucks are returning to bed after feeding all night. So setting up near bedding areas along travel routes or again at the water source is your best bet for morning hunts.

Early season is the best time to pattern bucks, while they are still in bachelor groups or just breaking up. The lack of pressure for 7 months makes mature bucks vulnerable. But don't think it is a slam dunk.

"The best chance you have on an early season buck is the first sit in that stand," Simpson said. "I never hunt the same stand more than once or twice in early season."

Regardless of how hard you try to cover your scent, with sweat rolling off you while you sit in your stand, you just cannot control a lot of the scent. By not overhunting those stands, you reduce the chance of educating that buck for another hunt.

Your chance at getting your early season buck increases by spending the time necessary to pattern him. Whether you are using game cameras or scouting, knowing where the buck will be puts you in the perfect spot to fill your tag. ■



Pete Rogers of Taylors, S.C., is employed with the USDA Wildlife Services and has been a sporting writer and photographer for over a decade. He has a real passion for trapping and enjoys sharing his outdoors experiences with his wife and five children.

CYBER SCOUTING ➤





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A good pair of binoculars is essential for early season success.



Pete Rogers

CYBER SCOUTING IS A GREAT TOOL FOR ARCHERY HUNTERS

Covert scouting has taken on a new meaning in recent years. With the use of cell cameras, detailed satellite photography, and apps like Huntstand, OnX Hunt and Huntwise, hunters have an advantage like never before. Putting all of these in place before season increases your odds for success. Other tools of the trade are good binoculars for long-range scouting.

Setting up on a vantage point the last hour of the day and using good binoculars can work wonders. Many of the bucks Taylor targets are located from several hundred yards away with binoculars. "I sit in my truck and watch the fields to see where the bucks are coming from," he said. "Once I see that and get a feel for where he is entering the field, I know where I want to hunt him."

"Another tool I use is OnX Hunt for cyber scouting a new farm. The detailed pictures and topo overlay help me to find pinch points, funnels, and key areas before ever setting foot on the ground. Once I identify these areas, I know where to concentrate

my scouting."

Cell game cameras have dropped drastically in price over the past several years. Being able to check your cameras from home saves time and intrusion into the property. But like all cell systems, you are limited by the signal strength.

Some of Taylor's best spots are so remote, he cannot use cell cameras. But he still uses non-cell cameras to scout. By checking them sporadically, he minimizes his intrusion into the area.

"I like to check my cameras from my ATV," he said. "By driving right up to it, I don't leave any scent on the ground. I swap SD cards, check batteries, and move on."

Any of these tools will benefit you to increase your chances on bagging that big buck during the early archery season. ■




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KEEP ALL YOUR ESSENTIALS IN A KILL KIT

Having a kill kit with all the right tools helps things go smoothly once you have a deer on the ground.



Taylor Pardue

"The fun stops when the deer drops," so be prepared to break down your latest buck or doe with these essential tools.

Many Carolinians just transport their deer to a nearby game processor whole. But it's important to keep a dedicated "kill kit" with you just in case you need to break down the animal yourself — or if you want to do the work yourself and cut out the processing costs. Here are a few suggestions for those looking to create their first kit.

1. Headlamp. You might think a knife would be the first suggestion. But you won't get far into a late-night processing job if you can't see what you're doing. The Black Diamond pulls double duty when setting up in the dark, given its red light setting.

2. A replaceable-blade knife. The Outdoor Edge 3.0" Razorlite EDC offers great results. But whatever brand you opt for, be sure to carry extra blades just in case your main one gets dull midway through processing a deer. (Be sure to bring a way to safely dispose of the old blade, too.)

3. A small bone saw. The Gerber pruning saw comes with an interchangeable bone blade (shown) and a wood blade. So hunters can just carry the one tool when heading afield to trim limbs of all kinds.

4. Latex-free disposable gloves. Whether you're allergic to latex or not, it's wise to opt for the latex-free versions in case a friend ever comes along to help you break down a deer. That way, you don't need to worry about their potential reaction to the gloves.

5. Zip ties. Some states require you to physically attach your punched tag to the animal's body in order to legally remove it from the field. Keep some of the smaller ones in your kit just in case. They don't take up much weight or space and then you're covered if you ever hunt outside the Carolinas.

6. Hand wipes. Disposable gloves will prevent your hands from getting too dirty. But wipes are still a useful, lightweight choice for cleaning up afterward — for your hands and for your gear.

7. Ballpoint pen. Some hunting license holders come with a small "pen" to fill out your tag info after a kill. But it's always a

good idea to have an extra around just in case.

8. Deer drag. This can come in handy if you need to drag your kill to a more suitable location for breaking it down, or for simply dragging out the carcass once you've field-dressed it.

9. Paracord. Paracord is useful to raise and lower you bow to and from your treestand. And it can also come in handy when processing a deer by, for instance, being tied to a tree to hold back the deer's leg while you cut.

10. Game bags. More than just keeping meat sanitary when packing it out, game bags ensure the meat stays clean from dirt and debris while you're finishing the rest of the job too.

Bug spray isn't necessary, but better safe than sorry, especially with so many tick-borne illnesses around — including alpha-gal syndrome, which can make you allergic to red meat such as venison. ■

— Taylor Pardue

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Lush fields separated by the highway made it easy to pattern deer during the author's Wyoming hunt.



EARLY LESSONS STILL PAY DIVIDENDS

IT'S ALL A PART OF THE BOWHUNTING JOURNEY

Early in my bow hunting career, after several years of bow hunting Mississippi, I had managed to take only a few hard-earned does. So when I received an invite to hunt the early season in Wyoming, I jumped at the chance.

This trip would offer a much better opportunity to both see and shoot a buck due to more plentiful animals that would pattern easier. The anticipation was almost more than I could stand. Little did I realize how many lessons I would learn on this week-long trip out west that would stick with me throughout my journey as a bow hunter.

We arrived in Kaycee, Wyoming a few days prior to the Sept. 1 archery opener. Our host was a rancher named Stuart Gosney.

Stuart reminded me of Curley from the movie *City Slickers*. A man of few words, the ones he did say often carried a lot of weight. Stuart owned a huge swath of land along a river bottom which was loaded with both whitetail and mule deer. I had shipped my Summit climber out ahead of time. And my dreams were filled with big bucks meandering carelessly under my carefully placed stand.

The first rude awakening? The few straight trees that existed were rarely located close to deer trails or obvious sign. We had to hunt from ground blinds or fixed homemade pallet stands. I was

at a loss having only archery hunted from portable elevated stands in the past.

Another lesson (one that has stuck with me long since) was the inherently nocturnal nature of buck deer. Even though we were hunting an area with little to no pressure, the bucks were often headed to bed as dawn's first light broke the horizon. This was easy to observe because the alfalfa fields the deer were feeding in at night lay on one side of the road. But the hills they bedded on lay on the other.

DIFFICULT HUNTING

The extra visibility afforded by the more open terrain allowed us to really pattern deer. But the hunting was tough because they were staying at higher elevations. It took several days to figure out why, and it was another lesson in deer behavior. The mosquitoes were almost unbearable that year, and they were biting us and the deer so much it was miserable. By staying at elevation, the deer were avoiding the mosquitoes. But that meant difficult



Mule deer were easy to pattern, but difficult to reach because they stayed at high elevations.

hunting for us.

With deer not traveling very far from their beds to feed, it was nearly impossible for us to intercept them along their travel routes. On the last morning of our hunt, Stuart relocated us to the top of the mountain. We had to drive almost 15 miles around using rough dirt tracks to get ahead of the deer as they returned to their beds. Another lesson learned — literally getting the extra mile.



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

SUCCESS!

As dawn broke, I found myself on the ground nestled into the root ball of a fallen juniper tree facing a cliff that dropped off into the river bottom. I was set up in white shale rock with scattered junipers making for narrow, but open, shooting lanes. After an hour of nothing, I heard shale rock rolling down the hillside and turned to face a mule deer doe at about 3 yards.

She wheeled and ran toward her bedding area just as I saw a buck's velvet-covered antlers break the cliff's edge. He too ran, but I drew anyway. I knew he hadn't seen me, and I'd read that mule deer often stop to look back. As he skidded to a stop in the loose shale rock, my sights settled just behind his shoulder. My Muzzy broadhead found its mark. I was literally convulsing I was so excited. I anxiously awaited Stuart's return so we could track my deer and recover it.

After about an hour, Stuart returned. We followed a short blood trail to my heart-shot forkhorn buck. Although he wasn't very big, he was a true trophy to me. One of the coolest moments of my hunting career was when Stuart took me aside, cracked open two beers, and told me, "You done good son." Stuart rarely gave attaboys, and I was happy to get one.

Hunting other parts of the country will not only broaden your hunting skills, but will also often teach you lessons that can be applied to your home hunting grounds.

It's all part of the journey. ■

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NC GAME LANDS DEER PREVIEW

HERE'S THE TOP PUBLIC
LANDS FOR NORTH CAROLINA
WHITETAILED.
■ By Craig Holt

Hunters in North Carolina are excited about the prospects for 2022-23 deer hunting. And many will be hunting on public land.

Most hunting occurs at private lands, but game lands are a good option for hunters who know what to look for.

This issue concentrates on public-lands deer because most activity occurs during cooler fall and winter periods.

For more information, visit www.ncwildlife.org and click on the Hunting application, then check Seasons & Limits to find precise hunting dates for all species. Regulatory updates also contain hunting regulations.

Hunters should note some game lands have permit-only seasons.

To apply for hunting permits visit the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission web site and search Permit Hunting Opportunities (ncwildlife.org/PermitHunt).

NANTAHALA AND PISGAH >

NANTAHALA AND PISGAH

The state's top two public lands (by 2021-22 deer harvest totals) might be a surprise, but there's a caveat — while other public lands may extend into two or three counties, Pisgah National Forest and Nantahala National Forest game lands spread across parts of 18 counties from the northwestern corner of the state to the southwestern tip. Those two total 1.1 million acres, each about 525,000 acres.

Both Nantahala and Pisgah are open to in-season hunting seven days per week.

Last year hunters tagged 570 deer at Pisgah while Nantahala hunters bagged 536.

The problem, as it has been for decades at the N.C. mountains, is relatively poor soil, scattered mast and boon-or-bust acorn numbers.

“(Deer success) depends on availability of mast crops,” said David Stewart, long-time land-management biologist for Districts 8 and 9. “A lot of times (mast) is good all over. Other times an isolated ridge has good acorns that produce every year. White oak ridges are especially good.

“The main factor for success is if hunters do their homework. Sometimes (food and deer) are up high or may be lower. Hunters should go where deer feed.”

Top harvests of Pisgah deer by counties came at Burke (1700), Buncombe (1101), Caldwell (1177), Watauga (1354) and Yancey (1509). But mountain counties have low numbers of antlered bucks per square mile, 0.96 in Haywood County to Watauga's elevated 5.59 bucks.

“Every year I run across one or two big (harvested) bucks,” Stewart said. “They're out there; it just takes work to find 'em. I tell folks to do their homework to get familiar with trails and areas so they're comfortable going to (chosen) spots.”



Because of the rugged nature of Districts 8 and 9, geo-locator apps (OnX or Avenza) are valuable. However, the WRC (ncwildlife.org) recommends checking its map apps — NC One Map (nconemap.com), North Carolina Digital Collections (<http://xr.com/wkuc>) and a Geodata server (basic.ncsu.edu/ngap) — that include up-to-date boundary changes.

Smaller game lands, in fact, often have more deer-hunting opportunities per square mile than Nantahala and Pisgah.



Public Lands offer great deer hunting for sportsmen who put in the time to scout. **BELOW:** Hunters are required to wear International Orange while hunting Game Lands in North Carolina.



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



Craig Holt



CROATAN

At the other end of the state, Croatan National Forest (162,220 acres) in Carteret, Craven and Jones counties ranked third (407) in tagged deer during 2021-22.

“Judging by habitat after prescribed-fire burns (which allow understory to grow), deer have plenty to eat at Croatan,” said District 2 management biologist Ritchie Clark.

In addition to third-ranked Croatan, Carteret County’s portion rated sixth statewide with 165 harvests and Craven County was 8th with 154 deer.

In District 2 — between Croatan and Wilmington — Pender County’s Holly Shelter ranked 7th with 155 harvested whitetails. Nearby Angola Bay added 50 deer.

BUTNER-FALLS, JORDAN

The northern piedmont’s Butner-Falls Game Land (40,505 acres in Durham, Granville, Wake counties) rated fourth with 394 tagged whitetails while nearby Jordan Lake (40,460 acres in Chatham, Durham, Orange, Wake

counties) hunters downed 324 deer for 718 total harvested deer.

The combined game lands (53,425 land acres after deleting lake acres) are inside the heavily-developed Research Triangle. So bagging 419 bucks last season (5.0 per square mile) far outstripped Nantahala and Pisgah’s rate (0.146 bucks per square mile).

“I think the explanation is (deer) live at interfaces with urban areas, places they don’t get hunted (urban and suburban communities are de facto sanctuaries) and places they can be hunted (game lands),” said Chris Baranski, Districts 3 and 5 game-management biologist. “Deer usually are protected (at Jordan and Falls) unless they go to game lands.”

He said both habitats are excellent for whitetails — bottom lands, hardwood ridges, fields and pine thickets — often with adjacent agricultural crops.

Game-lands fields, planted with millet, buckwheat and corn and pre-flooded green-tree and waterfowl impoundments, also offer sustenance for whitetails.

UWHARRIE ➤

UWHARRIE

At 52,000 acres, Uwharrie National Forest in Davidson, Randolph and Montgomery counties is historically comparable to Butner-Falls and Jordan. It ranked fifth last season among game lands with 356 tagged whitetails.

Because of its location in the southern Piedmont, Uwharrie has been a long-time location for public-lands deer hunters from Charlotte, Albemarle, Greensboro, Troy and Asheboro.

“It’s the likeliest place to have the best chance of killing a big deer,” said Greg Queen, District 6 overall biologist.

The habitat also contains upland hardwoods, pine forests and steep ridges as part of the Burkhead Mountain Range.

Uwharrie has multiple unrestricted camp sites at sections east of Badin Lake that adjoin most of its shoreline. That region also has a large archery-only section and firearms shooting range.

Hunting seasons follow county regulations, but deer chasers should be aware they will share Uwharrie with horse riders, hikers and bicyclists.

Uwharrie allows seven-days-per week access.

OTHER NOTABLE GAME LANDS

Other top deer game lands include the northern-piedmont’s R. Wayne Bailey-Caswell (18,150 acres, Caswell County, 174 deer killed in 2021-22); Sandhills (65,028 scattered acres across Hoke, Moore, Richmond, Scotland counties) that accounted for 142 deer last year; Yadkin River (formerly Alcoa Game Land, 11,600 acres, 169 harvested deer 2021-22) at the river’s shore and shorelines of High Rock, Tuckertown and Badin lakes; and the Lower Roanoke River Wetlands (31,708 acres, Bertie and



Craig Holt

Martin counties, 112 deer taken in 2021-22).

Hunters should check game lands for availability and if permits are required. ■

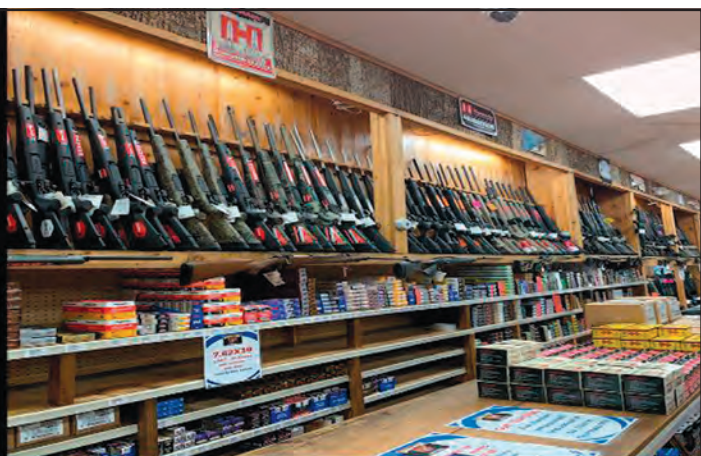
Game Lands are managed to provide plentiful food sources for deer. ABOVE: Trophy deer are killed on Game Lands in North Carolina every year.



Make sure you know the specific regulations for the Game Land you are hunting.



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- Carteret County
- Chatham
- Chowan
- Cold Mountain
- Croatan
- Currituck Banks
- Dare
- Elk Knob
- Embro
- Goose Creek
- Gull Rock
- Harris
- Hyco
- Juniper Creek
- Lee
- Light Ground Pocosin
- Linwood
- Lower Fishing Creek

- Mayo
- Nantahala
- Needmore
- New Lake
- North River
- NW River Marsh
- Pee Dee River
- Pisgah
- Pond Mountain
- Sandy Creek
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Jeff Burleson

PREVENT, REDUCE PLANTING FAILURES

GIVE YOUR FOOD PLOTS A CHANCE

The fall season has arrived in the Carolinas and the time for hunting down whitetails has crept up. It isn't too late to plant food plots for the cool season to create a reliable food source to benefit wildlife and to bring those bruiser bucks within shooting range.

But September in the Carolinas can either feel like a cool fall day or like the summer sizzler. And extended heat can lead to dry conditions. Decisions that are made in September will ultimately determine the productivity of cool season food plots. Landowners can reduce their risk by following a few important guidelines.

Any newly established food plot will always start off with seed and new tender plants that have nature sometimes working against them. Seed depth, moisture content, competition, and nutrient availability will ultimately control the success or failure of a food plot.

What are the leading causes of food plot failures anyway? Failures come from incorrect planting depth, unsuitable pH and critical nutrient availability, competition, and premature over-browsing.

As soon as the seeds germinate, their vulnerabilities get highlighted from the start. And initially, the planting depth is critical

for survival. Seeds come in all shapes and sizes. But basically, the size of the seed will directly control the depth of planting. Deeply planted seeds will prevent the small plant's root system from drying out. And it enables the plant to gain access to a deeper layer of nutrients embedded in the soil. But the deeper the planted seed, the further the tiny plants have to travel vertically to reach the soils surface.

PLANTING DEPTH IS CRITICAL

Seed size is important and is directly proportional to the depth of planting. The smaller the seed, the shallower the seed can be planted. And the larger the seed, planting depth can increase somewhat. The seed itself is made up of an embryo and an endosperm. The endosperm is the food source for the embryo that is packed with carbohydrates, proteins, and lipids to fuel early development.

The small plants must first utilize this energy source to nourish the plant prior to reaching the soil surface. Plants obtain energy from the sun through photosynthesis. But since no sun is available below the soil surface, plants must utilize their endosperm as an energy source prior to reaching sunlight. So,

seed planting depth is critical. Plantings should never be planted deeper than the recommended depths.

After the tender shoots erupt through the soil surface, the next phase of development occurs and is among the most important steps in the early stages. By this time, the tender shoots are extremely vulnerable to environmental conditions. Their plant walls are tender and soft. And they have exhausted all of their endosperm. Now they must grow out a couple of leaves or wide shoots to begin photosynthesis to create critical energy for growth. These brand-new plants need full sunlight without any aerial competition that would impede energy production from the sun. And again, these small plants' leaves, shoots, and roots are extremely tender, supple, and vulnerable to desiccation.

SOIL PH PLAYS A BIG PART ➤



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.

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SOIL PH PLAYS A BIG PART

Rainfall is important during this phase to keep every plant part from the roots to the shoot-tips moist. But too much rainfall can drown out these plants and prevent respiration, a critical component of photosynthesis. Not only do these plants need moisture to prevent desiccation, but they also need access to the gas, carbon dioxide, that is a critical component to photosynthesis. Without carbon dioxide, plants wouldn't be able to produce energy and they would quickly die as soon as the endosperm is fully depleted.

After the food plot plants are able to grow past these early phases of development, the plants have developed more and their root systems and above-ground structures have become more

resistant to drying out.

At this point, the remaining leading causes of planting/growing failures are from over-browsing and unsuitable micro- and macro-nutrient availability. Plants can only grow with the available macro- and micro-nutrients and that typically comes from fertilization and prescribed soil amendments. But these nutrients must be soluble in order for plants to uptake them into their tissues. And nutrient solubility is completely a result of chemical reactions that take place from soil supplements AND the pH of the soil environment.

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SEED SIZE DETERMINES PLANTING DEPTH:

For seeds to have the best chance at blooming into full food plots, they must be planted to the proper depth. This is a critical step that if not followed, often leads to failed food plots.

The soil pH directly controls the chemical reactions in the soil. And for most food plot plants, a higher pH between 6.0 and 7.5 is typically needed to convert the soil amendments into soluble forms of micro- and macro-nutrients that the plants can utilize for growth.

OVERBROWSING

The only way to ensure the soil amendments will benefit the plants is from a soil test prior to planting. And if the soils are too acidic prior to planting, the plants will most likely suffer right after the endosperm is exhausted. They will essentially run out of critical nutrients that are needed for development and will either die or get overtaken by competing vegetation.

Competing vegetation can be an issue anytime. But it is typically a greater issue in the springtime with warm season plantings. Yet, pre-plant herbicide applications and mechanical preparations can allow for the target plants to thrive and control competition effectively for a successful plot.

Over-browsing can always be an issue during the early stages of growth. It seems silly discussing when landowners get upset that the target animals are eating the food that was planted for them. But the plants need a little time to get established to provide longevity.

Over-browsing can be reduced by erecting scent barriers, fences, or some visual deterrents that can give the new plots a few weeks of growing time. But for the early season hunters, over-browsing early can also be perceived as an early season

opportunity as well.

Food plot failures can never be avoided completely because humans just can't completely control nature. Too many variables are out of our control. But growing plants from the seed up isn't a new endeavor either. And landowners can learn from their mistakes and mistakes of others to create a viable food source for the deer and other wildlife for the fall and winter season. ■

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COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

CHILLED VENISON TACO SALAD



This recipe uses many different ingredients that all taste good on their own, and even better all together. **INSET:** Venison cut into tidbits, then marinated in a Dr. Pepper/hot sauce mix is the start of this great recipe.

This has been one of the hottest summers on record and the first of the fall hunting seasons are beginning. Deer season on private lands in S.C. Game Zones 3 and 4 has already opened.

Sportsmen in the Carolinas that think September is still too hot and humid to don camo and go hunting, have plenty of options to go fishing. Both fresh and saltwater fishing is going strong throughout the Carolinas and will for several more months. Fish are waiting to be caught from the streams and lakes of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the coastal marshes and depths of the Gulf Stream.

Hopefully everyone had a successful deer season last year and have a few packages of venison remaining in the freezer. Give this recipe a try to get your season going and the odds are high you'll put aside a few packages to prepare this same recipe to get next year's deer season off on the right hoof. ■

TIP!

Set aside some venison at the end of this season and you can enjoy this recipe again next year.

CHILLED VENISON TACO SALAD

This recipe isn't difficult and eating it is fun. Everyone likes tacos and this has the feel of a street taco with a crunchy shell. The chilled ingredients are refreshing too, especially after a hot day.

To me, this is best with a crunchy taco shell or served like nachos with tortilla chips. However, if the crunchy taco shell cracking bothers you, use the crunchy shell and wrap it in a soft shell or flour tortilla. This allows you to have the crunch and the soft shell holds the taco together.

If you don't have a package of stew meat to make these, you can cut pieces from a steak or roast or use burger. It will take more time, but it will taste better with pieces of meat than with burger.

Too many red onions can get strong. So I mix

PREPARATION:

1. Cut the venison tidbits into approximately ½-inch size pieces. Put them in a Ziploc bag and cover them with Dr. Pepper and 1 tablespoon hot sauce. Squeeze the air out, mix the marinade through them thoroughly and marinate them for 30 minutes to 2 hours in the refrigerator.

2. Chop the onions, baby bell peppers and jalapeno(s).

3. Spray a frying pan with non-stick cooking spray and lightly brown the venison pieces. (They will make a lot of liquid cooking the Dr. Pepper out and you may need to drain it a couple of times.)

4. Once the venison pieces are lightly browned, add the taco seasoning and simmer according to the directions on the taco seasoning package.

5. Remove the venison pieces and most of the liquid. Leave some liquid to add flavor to the vegetables.

6. Add 1 tablespoon of vegetable or canola oil to the pan and lightly sauté the onions, bell peppers, jalapeno pepper(s) and corn.

7. Add the garlic to the onions, peppers and corn after they have sauteed a few minutes. Stir it in well.

8. Use a large bowl to mix the coleslaw mix, sauteed vegetables, beans and venison pieces.

9. In a small bowl mix the mayonnaise, sour cream and lime juice.

10. Add the mayo/sour cream mixture to the

them with regular sweet onions. Baby bell peppers are more tender and sweeter than larger ones and I like the different colors for a bit more visual appeal. I sprinkle a little taco seasoning on the sautéing vegetables to make their flavor bolder.

This mixture tastes better than the sum of its parts — and all of its parts taste good. Leave out or substitute any ingredients you don't like. Feel free to add more — just do it in small increments so it doesn't become overpowering. One night when you can't think of what to do for dinner, give this a try. Everyone I've prepared it for has commented positively and I'm pretty sure you will too. Enjoy! ■



veggies and venison and sprinkle liberally with taco seasoning, then mix well, but gently. After mixing this, taste the mixture and add more taco seasoning (to taste) and mix some more.

11. This can be eaten immediately, but is best after chilling in the refrigerator.

12. Serve with tortilla chips or as nachos and/or in crunchy taco shells.

13. Sprinkle with cheese to taste.

This contains all that is necessary for a complete meal. Still, I like salads and sometimes add a small green salad. Those who like a little something sweet to end the meal should find shortcake or angel food cake, with fresh-cut strawberries and a dollop of whipped cream, works nicely. ■



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

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound venison tidbits
- 1 Bag coleslaw mix
- 1 Cup multi-colored baby bell peppers
- 1 Jalapeno pepper
- 1/2 Cup red or black beans
- 2/3 Cup frozen kernel corn
- 1/2 Large sweet onion
- 1/2 Cup red onion
- 1 ½ Pkg taco seasoning
- 1 Pkg shredded cheese
- 1/2 Cup mayonnaise
- 1/4 Cup sour cream
- 1 TSP minced garlic
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 Dr. Pepper
- 1 TBL hot sauce
- Crunchy taco shells
- Assorted tortilla chips
- Cooking oil
- Non-stick cooking spray

**SMALL DOVE FIELDS OFFER
MANY ADVANTAGES OVER
LARGE ONES.**

■ By Pete Rogers

THE 5-ACRE DOVE FIELD



FEW THINGS ARE AS TIMELESS AS OPENING DAY OF DOVE SEASON IN THE CAROLINAS.

Generations gather to usher in a new hunting season. If ever there was a time for old men and youth hunters to spend time together, it is in a dove field.

A good dove hunt is about as much fun as anyone can have afield. Hordes of mourning doves pouring into a field followed by the distinct Bang! Bang! of shooters puts a smile on many faces.

Over the years, dove hunting has found its place in circles of hunters. Some live for it. Some can take it or leave it. For many others, it is mandatory!

Labor Day weekend is the traditional opening of dove season in the Carolinas. But preparation for that opening begins months before. And when it comes to dove hunting, bigger is not always better. Sure, some 300-acre fields have thousands of birds. But some of the best hunting and shooting often occurs on smaller fields with a few family members and friends.

John Fitzgerald of Piedmont, SC has a tremendous hunt every fall on his small field.

"I only have about 5 acres I can plant for doves. So I decided to give it a try, and we have found great success with it," he said.

SMALL BUT EFFECTIVE ➤

Pete Rogers



Pete Rogers

Dove hunting is a family affair, bringing different generations together to begin a new season.

BELOW: Wilted stalks of sunflowers draw doves in to feed on their tasty seeds. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** An over-and-under shotgun makes quick work of flying doves when in the right hands.



SMALL BUT EFFECTIVE

Fitzgerald describes his situation as small but effective. By partnering with a local farmer, he gets the seed and fertilizer and barter for the farmer to plant the field for him each May.

“It starts with sunflowers,” Fitzgerald said. “If you don’t have sunflowers, you are really pushing your luck.”

Fitzgerald lays out his field in such a way that allows for maximum hunters to cover the field.

“We plant five rows, skip three rows, plant five rows, skip three, etc,” he said.

This allows for mowing and plowing in those strips to make the doves more comfortable. Some years Fitzgerald will mix in millet, planting five rows of sunflowers, skipping three, planting five rows of millet, skipping three, and repeating that across the field. The variety seems to help, but he has no hard data to suggest that it does.

He insists that timing is critical for having the best dove field. According to Fitzgerald, “You want your sunflowers to be fully ripe about two weeks before opening day.”

This gives the doves time to find them and to begin a regular feeding into the fields. Most sunflowers get ripe within 70-100 days. So plan accordingly to make sure you have food for them.

NATURAL CAMO HELPS

A 5-acre field may seem small, but Fitzgerald is able to place seven or so shooters around the field safely. He will leave some tall weeds along the tree line for cover. He will also haul in round hay bales to use for blinds. Using the natural vegetation of trees, fence lines and a few round hay bales makes for a great shoot.

Fitzgerald said that for the last seven years, he and the other hunters have had their limit of birds within an hour to hour and a half. Some of the poor shooters take longer to get the



A pile of doves makes a tasty meal that signifies the beginning of hunting season.



A 28-gauge side-by-side is a classic shotgun that delights many dove hunters.

Pete Rogers

limit. But it's not due to a lack of birds.

Having a smaller field makes for better shooting a lot of times because large fields are so hard to cover. If enough shooters aren't present, the doves find the open areas and pour into those areas, preventing them from flying within any shooter's range. Fitzgerald and his friends agree that the smaller field is something that is worth the expense and time to have a good shoot.

GIVE THE BIRDS A BREAK

"For the entire first season, we will have great shooting. It helps that we only shoot on Saturdays, allowing new birds time to find the field between shoots," he said.

Having small parcels is not a hindrance to producing excellent dove hunting. Fitzgerald says it costs him a little over two thousand dollars to prep and plant his field. This includes paying the farmer for his time and equipment. But for the fun and family time spent around the dove field, it is money well spent. Not having a large piece of land should not deter you from having a great shoot. Use what you have and plan well. Hopefully, the doves will cooperate.

"One thing is for certain," Fitzgerald stresses. "All I can do is plant the field and ensure it grows. I cannot make the doves find it. But they usually do," he said. ■

SIMPLICITY IS THE BEAUTY OF DOVE HUNTING >



Pete Rogers of Taylors, S.C., is employed with the USDA Wildlife Services and has been a sporting writer and photographer for over a decade. He has a real passion for trapping and enjoys sharing his outdoors experiences with his wife and five children.

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SIMPLICITY IS THE BEAUTY OF DOVE HUNTING

The equipment for a dove hunt is as simple as it gets. But hunters need to keep some things in mind. First and foremost, make sure your shotgun is limited to three shells. If you are shooting a pump action or semi-auto, double check to make sure a plug is in the gun to prevent loading more than two in the magazine.

All gauges are used on the dove field, the 12-gauge being the most popular. However, some hunters find this to be a bit much for the diminutive dove. Sub gauges are just as efficient but will

Pete Rogers



A comfortable chair, a cooler of water and a Thermacell are all good additions to your dove hunt.

require more skill. A personal favorite is the 28-gauge. A classic side-by-side or even an over-and-under are sufficient for doves.

Many smaller-framed shooters opt for the 20-gauge, and this is an excellent choice. I would stay away from the .410 except for the most skilled shooters. This small gauge lacks recoil, but also requires excellent marksmanship to be successful.

Camouflage is important also, but not a deal breaker. Most wear a short sleeve T-shirt in some camo pattern and short pants. But stay away from any brightly colored clothing.

Another thing to consider when going to a dove field includes a small cooler with plenty of water. Triple digit temperatures are the norm. And sitting in the sweltering sun waiting for doves will dehydrate you quickly. A good cap, sunglasses, sunscreen, and some type of bug repellent, like a ThermoCell or some spray to keep the gnats and mosquitos away, are a must. Lastly is a good seat. Many dove hunters prefer a bucket or stool. But age has taught me a chair like those used in ground blinds works well and makes the hunt more comfortable. ■

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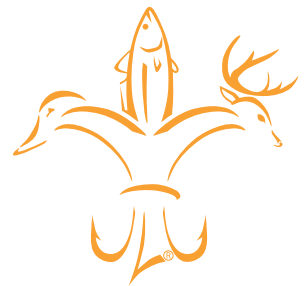
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ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN

Pat Robertson

Retrieving his favorite toy is a reward for SCDNR's newest K-9 recruit Hank, a chocolate Labrador Retriever.



A DOG WITH A JOB

HANK IS SCDNR'S NEWEST K-9 RECRUIT

The S.C Dept. of Natural Resources introduced its newest – and youngest – recruit, over the summer.

At 2 months of age, Hank, a chocolate Labrador Retriever puppy, zipped through the tall grass to find the rubber ball thrown by Lt. Brady Branham, grabbed it and eagerly raced back to proudly deliver it to Branham. If his exuberance is an indicator, in about a year Hank will be a full-fledged member of the DNR's K-9 team.

"The DNR's K-9 team is trained to help law enforcement officers track violators, detect hidden wildlife and concealed guns, recover evidence and support search-and-rescue missions," Branham said.

"This team is also employed by other law enforcement agencies when requested. With their superior sense of smell and hearing, the trained canines help reduce search time and recover more evidence, leading to stronger cases. The team is also used as a public outreach tool to educate the public and

deter crime through demonstrations and presentations."

Once Hank had enjoyed retrieving and playing tug with Branham a number of times under the hot morning sun in late July, Branham put him back in his kennel and made sure he had plenty of water to drink. Then he took out his fully-trained yellow lab, Rock, for a demonstration of how the dogs on the team help with locating items such as guns, clothing, even a spent wad from a shotgun shell. They are trained to find anything with gunpowder on it, Branham said.

Another officer had placed an item in the tall grass before Branham sent Rock to find it. Rock worked the area at Branham's direction, then suddenly laid down and stared intently at a spot in the grass. Branham walked over and retrieved the pistol that had been placed there, then tossed a plastic ball or cone for Rock to retrieve. Retrieving is play for the dogs and that is their reward for a job well done, Branham explained.

The SCDNR's K-9 program was launched

in 2017 when the agency acquired five Labs from Pacific Coast Canine, a kennel in Washington State that trains dogs for various aspects of police work. The owner, Ken Pavlick came to South Carolina for six weeks to teach the newly-formed officer-dog teams.

"We trained them in tracking, article searches and wildlife detection," said Branham, who has personally trained hunting retrievers for himself and others for the past 20 years. The unit has grown to seven fully-trained officer-canine teams plus two more being trained. That gives the agency at least two teams in each of DNR's four Law Enforcement Division regions, providing a response time of no more than an hour and a half to any location in the state. That



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.

Lt. Brady Branham said Hank has the potential to become an important part of SCDNR's canine team. **BELOW:** SCDNR's dogs are trained to lie down and stare when they find objects related to their search efforts.



Pat Robertson

capability can be critical, especially in search-and-rescue situations, he said.

"In just under five years we have logged over 1000 deployments, dogs on the ground," Branham said. "Our dogs have been instrumental in locating people. In 2018 a 2-year-old wandered away from his granddaddy. Our dog located him a half mile back in the woods between two ponds, in just about eight minutes."

Besides search-and-rescue, the dogs are trained in tracking, article search, wildlife detection and assisting in law enforcement investigations such as hunting accidents. They are imprinted on five species for wildlife detection – whitetail deer, Eastern wild turkey, black bear, waterfowl and doves, Branham said. In a hunting accident investigation, the dog teams are looking for all the components of the accident.

"If a shotgun is used we need to find the shot pattern, the direction of the shot, where people were standing when they were shot. If we can find the wadding, we can determine where the shooter was standing," Branham said.

Hank was donated to the DNR's K-9 Team by Backwoods Pond Labradors LLC in Edgefield. A puppy goes through a lot of socialization and environmental training during his first year in the program, Branham said. He has taken Hank out in public to different places to see how he handles people and new places.

"We expose them to everything – loud environments, dark places, staircases, slick floors, gunshots, driving vehicles – to make sure they are comfortable in every environment because that is where they are going to end up working."

As long as the dog continues to show a high intensity drive, he said, they move on into canine school where they learn tracking, article searches and wildlife detection.

Hank's potential is really high, Branham said.

"He is very young, but he is really social. He has not been in any environment yet that scares him. His retrieve drive is

high. He loves to go pick up his toy and bring it back and then play tug of war. He also loves to chase tennis balls. As long as he will hunt and chase those things right now, that's all we really want." ■

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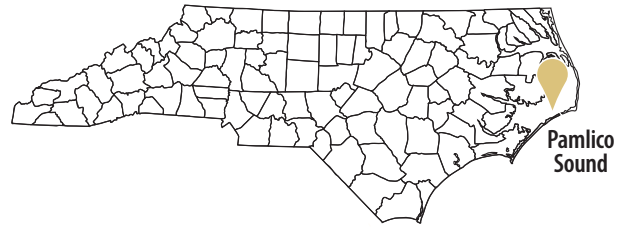


THE OLD DRUM RUN
PEAKS THIS MONTH.

DRUMMING IT UP ON THE PAMLICO SOUND

■ By Dusty Wilson

FROM SUMMER THROUGH FALL,



schools of adult redfish – often referred to as old drum or bull redfish – school up outside Outer Banks inlets and begin to infiltrate the Pamlico Sound itself as the urge to spawn propels them inward to suitable grounds closer to the rivers that flow into the sound. Those caught here in July will be a blessing for early-bird anglers vying for the first wave. But these numbers will steadily increase as more and more fish arrive and peak in September when pre-spawn, spawning, and post spawn fish are all available.

“September is the prime spawn month,” said Mitchell Blake (252-495-1803), who runs FishIBX Guide Service. “September gives you the opportunity to see a mass of fish, spawning groups I should say. And it gives you the opportunity to see big fish. The trophy redfish, those fish in the 40- to 45-inch range are a common occurrence. And there’s a lot of them. But you

also have a shot at fish over 50 inches.

“This is a much more broad fishery than it used to be. What used to be only a late evening soak-bait-kind-of-thing has evolved into people chasing these things with artificial lures. There is a lot more looking, a lot more hunting, a lot more interactions with these fish. And a lot more territory being covered. These fish have been caught all over now. From New Bern to the open sound on the Neuse River, from Washington to the open sound on the Pamlico River, and from Belhaven to the open sound on the Pungo River.”

At a glance, the idea that trophy redfish could be found in such an expanse is both promising and daunting. But Blake said these fish could be anywhere their food is.



These big fish are strictly catch-and-release only, and catching one is sure to put a smile on anyone's face. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Fly fishing is one of the most exciting ways to catch bull redfish.

Redfish like being in shallow water. And they are just as comfortable in a foot of water as they are in 25 feet of water. But, they will not tolerate fishing pressure when they are shallow. That's why trophy reds are rarely found in the creeks of these systems. They like shallow water, but not enclosed water. They always have an eye on an escape route. Blake said that reds prefer the main river body and the shorelines of the open sound.

One reason redfish prefer to feed in shallower water is because their prey has less space to maneuver and escape. So they don't have to work as hard. Blake looks for contour changes or breaks that will allow redfish to feed in shallow water and drop into a safer depth at a moment's notice in times of pressure. He calls these areas his routes and sets up his boat to fish these areas thoroughly.

"I like to fish shallow because you can cover more water. But rule No. 1 of trophy redfishing is looking for bait," said Blake. "Then I look for the contour changes within that area. If the bait's in 2 to 3 feet of water and the water's not disturbed, that's where I'm going to fish. If it's in 25 feet of water, that's where I'm going to fish."

"What I prefer is to visually see the fish chasing bait and busting it on the surface," he said. "You get schools of fish in September and they're hungry. All that competition for food puts on a show. But you can use your electronics as a tool as

well, especially to find large schools of menhaden. If you're confident in your electronics and your ability to read them and you're not seeing the fish, they're not there."

Blake's go-to method for working a pod of menhaden is a popping cork and soft plastic. This is a tried-and-true combination that exploits the redfish's competitive nature by mimicking the noise made by feeding fish. They simply will not tolerate another fish eating its food. This works on fish already busting bait as well as calling in fish from quite a distance.

Blake often ties a natural-colored swimbait underneath a popping cork because the most common baits attacked are menhaden or mullet. A ¼- to ½-ounce jighead with a sturdy hook will be needed. However, if he notices shrimp fleeing before a feeding red, a soft plastic imitation of that variety is in order.

"I like a big popping cork that makes a lot of noise," said Blake. "I'll tie it to a 30-pound braided main line and tie on a 5- to 6-inch swimbait or 4-inch shrimp with 3 feet of 40- to 50-pound fluorocarbon leader. I like to pop it hard on a stiff rod to the point it might seem too aggressive to some people. But I want them to hear and see me coming from 50 feet away."

"A popping cork will work in rough, choppy water. But that does cut down on its effectiveness," said Blake. "It's times like this I'll go with a big lipless crankbait like a 1-ounce saltwater Rat-L-Trap. It has big rattles and makes a lot of noise that the fish can hear underwater. I like to rip it off the bottom and let it free fall. It makes the fish think something is feeding and



This time of year, multiple hookups with extra-large redfish are not at all uncommon. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Getting an early start usually means getting a quick bend in your fishing rod.



they're missing out. I like natural colors and the exact opposite, really bright colors, especially if I'm fishing in deep water."

Although artificial lures have become the hip and modern way to catch trophy reds, the classic cut-bait-and-wait method still has its place. For starters, it's really the only strategy when fishing late evening or night because of not being able to see the fish's activity. And a lot of people prefer the after hours angle for tradition or comfort. Also, windy days can make lure delivery and boat maneuvering an inefficient chore. Not to mention that casting big rods all day is very taxing on the body.

"I use the good ol' Owen Lupton rig when I'm fishing cut bait — it's the only legal rig allowed when fishing for trophy redfish," said Blake. "Most of the time I look for a good hard bottom near the baitfish so your rig's not sitting in the muck. Then I look for a good transition from shallow to deep where there is a secondary underwater point and fan cast around this area. I'll go with menhaden or mullet to bait up with. But it has to be fresh, that's the key.

"There are also times when I know there's fish in the area and they're just not responding to lures. That's when you have to give them what they want. If you put it on his nose, he won't turn it down." ■



Dusty Wilson of Raleigh is a lifelong outdoorsman. He is the manager of Tarheel Nursery in Angier, and can be followed on his blog at InsideNCFishing.com.

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BULLS ON THE FLY

In the minds of most anglers, fly fishing conjures visions of pristine mountain streams where knee deep water is dotted with trout. These fish can be handled on relatively delicate tackle and fooled with offerings that measure from an inch long down to impossible-to-find-if-you-drop-it size. But over the years, the world of saltwater fly fishing has exploded. And this gives way to yet another spin on trophy redfishing.

The saltwater flats of the Florida Keys were the beginning and ending of saltwater fly fishing during the bonefish and tarpon boom in the 50s. But these days, a fly fishing purist can catch

It's a big thrill to catch old drum of this size on fly fishing gear.



anything on the fly, from false albacore to sharks. And manufacturers have plenty of tailormade tackle to make it happen.

Blake prefers to use a system that mimics the effectiveness of the popping cork, but is scaled down for fly fishing.

"We can catch them just like you can on spinning gear, using the same techniques," said Blake. "Gary Dubiel has a Pop-N-Fly combo that you can buy. Or you can make your own combo, which is what I prefer to do. I use a floating mainline and tie it to a smaller cork. I make the cork with a concave opening to make it as loud as I can and I put rattles in it. Then, I tie a couple of feet of 30-pound fluorocarbon leader to a big half-and-half fly in a shrimp or baitfish pattern."

Blake prefers a 9-weight rod for taking on bulls, but isn't concerned with the length. Whatever the angler can handle to get the fly out as far as possible is fine.

A stripping glove or finger guard will come in handy. Once an angler strip sets to drive home the hook after the take, a bull red will pick up the loose line in a hurry and burn fingers. Making sure that line is free of obstructions will be paramount. After the fish is on the reel, anglers will need to watch the knuckles on their reeling hand during runs. ■



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Line-to-leader connections used in freshwater can work well for saltwater anglers too.



Chris Burrows

FRESHEN UP YOUR SALTWATER TECHNIQUES

FRESHWATER TIPS FOR SALTY ANGLERS

Saltwater anglers can sometimes develop a bit of arrogance. I didn't realize how bad I had gotten until family life led me to reconnect with freshwater fishing, which I had been away from for nearly 15 years.

Years of fishing mostly offshore, with a few trout, flounder, and drum trips mixed in had caused me to develop some sort of weird bias against fishing in lakes, streams, and ponds, which was what I grew up doing. Thankfully, I saw the error of my ways.

While fishing for mountain trout and largemouth bass hasn't supplanted my desire to catch fish that swim in the ocean, I'm happy to say that I enjoy it all, once again. What's more, learning new techniques to catch freshwater fish (seems that a lot has changed in nearly two decades) has helped me develop as a saltwater angler too, especially with light tackle. It can be helpful to you too. Here's one way how.

People who are proficient at catching freshwater trout and bass are very often wizards when it comes to fishing with light line. Fly fishermen especially are extremely adept at making light line connections that don't diminish much of their line's rated strength.

WHICH KNOT?

We have a bit of a cushion when it comes to fishing offshore, and you are trolling 30- or 50-pound outfits for dolphin, often with leaders constructed out of 100-pound mono or No. 9 wire. Even if you hook a monster, the drag on the reel is generally set well beneath the rated breaking strength of the line. If you are wading a river in Western North Carolina and the fish are spooky, you may well have to go to a 6x or 7x tippet to get a bite. A 7x tippet has an average breaking strength of 2.2 pounds. And it's feasible to hook a trout that weighs well over that in a bigger river. It's a different experience entirely, but it comes down

to making good connections and using your tackle appropriately.

I struggled with one of my bass fishing connections for most of a season. My problem was finding a knot that connected braid to my fluorocarbon that not only held a good amount of strength, but also slipped through the guides on my baitcasting rods. I spent a lot of time experimenting with Uni-to-Uni connections, Albright knots, and the Slim Beauty. But I was less than enthralled with all of the results.

The loop-to-loop connection was the winner out of the bunch due to retained strength. But I just wasn't happy with the size of the knot that created the loop in the fluorocarbon. I had to leave



Chris Burrows began his charter fishing career out of Charleston and Georgetown, SC, but moved to Brunswick County, NC in 2005. He currently runs Wing & Fish Company in Shallotte and is involved with fisheries management at the federal level, but still fishes recreationally whenever he gets a free second.

the leader outside of the top guide when casting, which either drastically reduced my casting accuracy or forced me to fish a shorter leader than I wanted. This wasn't a setup I would be comfortable chasing drum or specks with. Eventually I decided I had to find a better way.

THE NAIL KNOT

A knot based on the venerable fly-fishing connection known as the "Nail Knot" saved the day. I tied Nail Knots religiously in the era of my life where I lived in the mountains and chased trout all the time. Returning to that hobby, virtually everyone has gone to a loop-to-loop since fly line manufacturers started selling lines with a loop welded into the end of the line. The Nail Knot has all but disappeared. However, it is a strong connection that looks complex at first. With some practice, it becomes relatively simple to tie if you use a straw or a purpose-made tool.

The Nail Knot is perfect for attaching a thinner diameter line to a thicker one, with the wraps of the knot being made from the thinner line around the thicker line. Fly fishermen use it to attach backing or their monofilament leader to thick plastic fly line. In this case, braided line forms the wraps around a fluorocarbon leader.

I started by simply tying the Nail Knot between the two lines and testing. Sometimes this worked, but sometimes it slipped off. After all, fluorocarbon and PowerPro are both very slick lines. I experimented with a different number of wraps, but always to the same result. Then I tried something a bit different and got exactly the result I wanted on the first try. Subsequent tests gave the exact same result.

PROPER TOOL HELPS

I tied the Nail Knot first, using 10 to 12 wraps around my Nail Knot tool. I made sure I left plenty of the tag end on both lines as well. I pulled the Nail Knot tight, to a point that it wouldn't back off. But I stopped short of cinching it down completely, and making the knot "pop" into place. Then, with the tag end of the fluorocarbon, I tied a five turn Uni knot around the braid. I pulled it about 80 percent tight but didn't pop it into place either. I then slowly put pressure on the running end of each line to pull the knots together and only then did I pop each knot to cinch them down completely. I put two half-hitches on the end of each knot, pulling them down as far as I could. Then I used my nippers to cut the tag ends as close as possible.

While I haven't put the breaking strength of the connection on the scale just yet, it more than passed the test where you put on leather gloves and try to break it yourself. What I found was a very solid knot where the castability of the connection far exceeds any braid-to-fluorocarbon knot that I had previously tried. It worked great on my last trip to the pond to catch bass. And it has already landed red drum well above the slot limit with no issues.

KEEP AN OPEN MIND

I adore fluorocarbon leaders. If there has ever been a magic bullet when it comes to leader material, that is it for me. Where others are fishing tiny traces of fluorocarbon or mono, or even

THE RIGHT TOOL HELPS:

The Nail Knot is one of the strongest fishing knots an angler can tie. It appears complicated at first, but you can make quick work of it when using a knot-tying tool specifically made for the job.

going directly to the hook with the braid, I want a few feet of fluorocarbon, always. It sinks, and I swear the fish don't see it like they see other leader material. Now I can pretty much fish any length of leader that I want, and I don't have to worry about a knot being inside the guides on my baitcasting rod.

I like to use a sliding popping cork with live shrimp in the fall and early winter for specks. And I know that this is where this new (to me, anyway) knot is going to pay off the most. That setup demands a long leader, because bobber stops simply don't work with braided line. I can fish pretty much any length leader that I want now, with the stopper knot as far up the line as I desire, and I don't have to worry about it.

We can learn a lot from anglers who don't even fish in saltwater. They fish in different places, oftentimes for species that we have never seen in person. Some of them are incredibly good at what they do. You might be surprised at how well some of their tricks translate to what we do in tidal creeks, sounds, the pier, or even offshore. A modified knot that came with knowledge I got early in my fly-fishing days is just one example of information that can be picked up if you just keep an open mind. ■

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Jeff Onley

THE ALBEMARLE MIX

White perch highlight this mixed bag fishery

On By Dusty Wilson
the rivers of North Carolina's Albemarle Sound, September is catching time, and healthy white perch are the main ingredient in a mixed bag fishery. According to guide Jeff Onley of Edenton, N.C., you only need a couple of baits and a steady retrieve.

"If we're catching 50 to 100 fish, it's going to be mostly white perch," said Onley (252-333-6524), owner and operator of Albemarle Fishing Charters. "But we'll catch yellow perch, flounder, redfish, and largemouth as well. I'm fishing mainly in the North River, the Little, and the Perquimans. But, I will fish the Chowan and Pasquotank if a client asks."

Onley prefers to start at the mouth of one of these rivers and work his way back until he finds a thick school of perch. He casts right into the shorelines, amongst the cypress knees, where the water is about a foot and a half deep. The mouths of the creeks that flow into the river are particular points of interest.

UNCLE JESSE'S LURE

"I'm catching them totally on an Uncle Jesse's Lure," said Onley. "They're made by a local lure maker, Morris Bait and Tackle, and

White perch are the highlights of Albemarle Sound's September mixed bag fishery, but they aren't the only species biting.

can be found in the local tackle shops. It's a double-bladed spinnerbait with an oblong weight in the middle and a hook at the bottom. If an angler can't get to those, I would suggest a Johnson's Beetle Spin in 1/8 ounce. It has a strong hook for the redfish. I tip both of these baits with a tidbit of shrimp. One small shrimp is enough to use about 4 times. It doesn't matter how it looks, it's just for the scent. It definitely picks up the perch bite and doesn't hurt for the other species either."

Onley ties these lures to 20-pound Power Pro braided line, noting that the murky water clarity makes a leader unnecessary. The braided line is light enough to enjoy the perch, but strong enough to pull redfish away from the cypress knees. Light to ultralight rods keep things easy and fun. Onley said a steady retrieve is best, keeping the bait in the middle of the water column. No jigging or erratic movements are needed.

For anglers without a motorized vessel, Onley said the rivers of the sound are an excellent kayak fishery with many spots available to put in a paddle powered boat. Kayaks can be rented through Native Girl Kayaking, an Elizabeth City business servicing the Albemarle region. ■

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REDFISH ON THE FLY

Lowcountry tailing redfish are perfect for sightfishing with the long rod

R By Brian Cope
 edfish invade the grass flats throughout South Carolina's lowcountry, and stalking them on foot with fly rod in hand is one of the most exciting ways to catch them. Many anglers wait for the full moon, but it's possible to catch them this way all month long.

Brian Hofstetter of Charleston said this is his favorite way of catching redfish. He does it mostly in the evenings due to his schedule, but said mornings can be great too. Each day is different because it all depends on the tide.

"It's a great way to spend an evening when the tide cycle is right for it. You need the tide to flood into the grass, and it has to be an area that has the right bottom. You want it to be a fairly hard bottom which is best for crabs to crawl along, and it's better for wading too," he said.

Armed with an 8-weight rod, Hofstetter ties on a fly in a relatively small crab pattern to match the area's fiddler crabs, which redfish feast on during high tide.

"The really high tides – some people call them king tides – can be great because it pushes water into

areas that aren't normally under water. So on the full moon and new moon, it can be very productive. But you can catch them this way on any moon phase. The most important thing is you just have to be available to fish during high tide, which obviously changes each day," he said.

Other than having the right rod and fly pattern, he said it's all a matter of keeping quiet and low, then waiting to see a redfish before making a cast.

"This is all about sight fishing. If you can't see the fish, you're just blind casting the whole time. I've definitely caught them that way before, but it takes a lot more time because you're casting to areas that may not have any fish at all. So you want the tide up to where they are picking crabs off the bottom in water that's shallow enough for their tails to stick up above the surface," he said. "Then you just make a cast, allow your crab to sink, then start working it back."

Brian Hofstetter shows off a lowcountry redfish that fell for his crab pattern.



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Hofstetter said September can be one of the better months to sight fish for reds.

"It's still very much summer weather, so it's still good for wading. I like to wear long fishing pants mainly to keep bugs off, but you don't need waders. And the water coming in is usually cooling down slightly this time of year — maybe not enough for us to really notice, but the fish do, and that helps the bite," he said. ■

HOT REDFISH ACTION

at the Murrells Inlet jetties

M By Jeff Burleson
 Murrells Inlet is well known for supporting a sustainable population of redfish, and September is a perfect time to connect with one of these bronzed beauties. And the jetties are one of the best places to find them chewing.

Capt. Tom Cushman of Cush's Calmwater Charters spends nearly every day on the water going after just about whatever will bite. But, this is one of his prime months to target redfish in Murrells Inlet from backcountry waters all the way to the jetties along the ocean's margin.

"September is one of my favorite months to fish Murrells Inlet for reds," said Cushman (843-997-5850). "Bait is everywhere in September and the reds are feasting all over the place. We catch them regularly at the jetties and back in the creeks."

Anglers catch redfish in a wide variety of places. But the jetties are the best bet for hooking into multiple reds in one sitting. And fish at the jetties are typically larger this time of year. The jetties serve two purposes. For one, it is a perfect place for redfish to stage up and feed as the tides flush out bait from the estuary. But the jetties also serve as a barrier to divert the migratory fishes moving down the coast.

Baitfish and some other species are beginning to exit the estuaries in the north and begin their southern journey as they migrate down the Eastern Seaboard. These migratory fishes get caught up at the jetties. So redfish set up along the rocks and feed.

The larger redfish also migrate down the coast this time of year. And the jetties provide a great stopping point. Anglers can have plenty of action fishing along all sides of the jetties and on just about any tide.

Cushman typically relies on live bait this time of year due to the availability of menhaden, shrimp, and mullet in the area.

"We will use live pogies, finger mullet, and even live shrimp at the jetties. The big reds can't turn down these live baits on the bottom," he said.

Cushman uses a Carolina rig with just enough lead to get the baits to the bottom. He prefers to fish in areas with a current seam or somewhere the fish can ambush their prey.

Redfish like this are a dime a dozen along Murrells Inlet's jetties in September.



Tom Cushman

Anywhere along the rocks on the inside or the outside can provide excellent places to sink a live bait. But, one of the best spots will always be the last third of the jetties on either side. It is always a killer place to land a fat redfish in September. ■

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY ➤

September is a great month for chasing flounder from a kayak.



Phillip Gentry

FOCUS ON FLOUNDER

FLOUNDERING AROUND TAKES ON NEW MEANING THIS MONTH

Though the association is rarely made, it would seem that fishing boats capable of maneuvering in just inches of water would go hand in hand with fish that can be completely submerged in just inches of water. Obviously we're talking about kayaks and flounder.

Often, kayak anglers treat flounder the same way as any other inshore angler, regardless of the watercraft underneath. Most flounder are caught incidentally while fishing for redfish or trout. Flounder are not an unwelcome species. On the contrary, most anglers relish flounder for their respectable fight on the rod and their excellent qualities on the table. But only a handful of anglers specifically target flounder. And only a percentage of those do so from a paddle boat.

Factor in reduced open seasons, increased size limits and diminished creel limits and it's understandable that flounder have waned in popularity as a stand-

alone fish to target from a paddleboat.

One of the most reliable signs of fall along the coast happens when inshore water temperatures begin to wane and scads of mullet and other baitfish (and shrimp) species migrate out of the creeks. Along the same time, flounder species, of which there are three that call the Carolinas home, begin to make their way from the estuaries and creeks to their eventual offshore wintering grounds.

LOOK FOR SIGNS

Few paddleboat anglers realize that just like flounder gigging, it's very possible to sight fish for flounder from a kayak. That's not necessarily done by seeing the fish, but by recognizing the signs that flounder are in the area.

A flounder is the only fish that can ambush bait in just 6 inches of water without the angler ever seeing the fish. That's one indicator – a splash right next to the bank with no back out of the

water, like a redfish. The other indicators are birds. When paddling along a quiet bank in really skinny water and you see several birds staring down at the water, that's probably going to mean a flounder is working that bank.

Another tip for finding fall flounder from a kayak is to look for culvert pipes in the backwaters where most powerboats can't get.

A culvert that's moving water from one side of a road to another, the kind you see off the side of the road when driving out to barrier islands, are potential flounder fishing hotspots.

Another location is anywhere you have some type of impoundment like a pond



Phillip Gentry of Waterloo, S.C., says if it swims, walks, hops, flies or crawls, he's usually not too far behind.

HOW TO HOOK A FLOUNDER

Flounder are gregarious fish. If they bit like redfish, you'd regularly see a lot more flounder in magazines and on social media than you do. The problem with flounder is the way they attack prey by latching on to the bait first and then positioning it to go down it's throat. That tendency makes them more difficult than most fish to hook and often leads novice anglers to believe that flounder won't take large baits. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It takes patience to consistently hook flounder. A good rule of thumb is the larger the bait, the longer the wait before setting the hook.

For the average shallow water, legal-sized flounder that takes a 2- to 3-inch mud minnow, it's best to start the countdown as soon as you feel the bite — anywhere from 10 to 30 seconds.

When fishing a deeper water drop-off for doormat flounder, up the ante to a 5- to 6-inch bait like a mullet or other baitfish. Under those circumstances, the wait extends anywhere from a minute to two full minutes.

After the initial bite, bring the rod tip up just to make sure the fish is still there and hasn't changed his mind and spit the bait. You don't want to aggravate the fish, just confirm he's still down there chewing.

Look for the two tell-tale signs that it's time to set the hook. The

first would be if the fish turns and starts to swim off at any time during the wait. The second is reaching the appointed time.

Then comes the hardest part in flounder fishing from a kayak. You've done everything right and gotten the fish to take the bait. You've waited the allotted time to make sure the hook is in the fish's mouth and not hanging outside somewhere. Now it's time to rip some lips.

But, when flounder fishing, it's best not to set the hook in the conventional sense. When using a kahle hook, which works similar to, but provides a lot more hook-ups than, a circle hook, just start cranking the reel handle and let the hook sink itself.

Now, throw all that advice out the window when fishing artificial baits.

The bite on an artificial lure is a reaction bite, like a largemouth bass. The fish on the other end is not going to hold on to the bait and attempt to chew it down to the hook.

On an artificial bait bite, you set the hook and hope the treble hook or soft plastic hook finds it's mark. At times, a flounder will latch on to an artificial bait and hold on to it during the fight to the kayak, only to open it's mouth and let go at the surface.

One way to provide a little insurance when fighting a flounder from a kayak is to stand up and let the fish dive as it approaches boat side, then lift the rod tip straight up. Since flounder swim on their sides, any hook that is beneath the fish when the line is pulled up vertically has a better chance of hooking into the fish. ■



Patience is the key when you get a flounder to take the bait.

or lagoon. Fish the side where the water is moving. The rushing water on either side of the pipe creates deeper holes. And flounder love to hang out in those holes when the water is dumping into them.

Those locations are also prime for kayak fishing because they're usually way back in a creek somewhere, hard to reach by motor boat, and you can get downstream where most bank anglers can't reach.

Finally, the classic sandy areas that offer ambush points where flounder can lie

downcurrent is a great place to target flounder, particularly when baitfish are migrating heavily in those areas.

The junction of two creeks is ideal, especially if there's a sandy bottom and some oyster rake or other structure where flounder can hide. Stake out the kayak downcurrent from the intersection and cast up current, working the bait along the bottom back to the boat. ■

SWANSBORO FLOUNDER ➤

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Flounder

WHERE — Lower Cape Fear River

HOW — Cast finger mullet on Carolina rigs around boat docks, piers, old wharf pilings or piles of rubble.

LAUNCH — Numerous access points from Snow's Cut to Southport. Check www.ncpaws.org/ncwrcmaps/boating-accessareas

INSIDER TIP — Always carry a net when flounder fishing from a kayak, and net the fish head-first.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Flounder

WHERE — Grand Strand

HOW — Hook finger mullet on a size 2/0 or 3/0 stand-up circle jighead and cast to the base of dock pilings or the edges of oyster rakes. Slowly hop the bait back to the boat. Trolling is another good strategy.

LAUNCH — Find boat launches at www.horrycounty.org/Departments/ParksAndRecreation/Boating

INSIDER TIP — A 5-inch suspending jerkbait is a great tool when flounder are being finicky, grabbing bait but quickly spitting the hook. It's hard to argue with three sets of treble hooks.

SWANSBORO FLOUNDER

NC's central coast flatfish are ready for season

D By Craig Holt
uring North Carolina's one-fish-per-day, Sept. 1-30, 2022 season, guides such as Capt. Jeff Cronk (336-558-5697) and Capt. Mike Taylor (252-725-2623) of Swansboro's Fish 'N 4 Life Charters will help anglers catch their limit at central-coast venues.

Favorite local spots include docks at Morehead City, the Beaufort Waterfront, Taylor's Creek, the big-ship ports, Morehead City sea wall and rock piles along the Intracoastal Waterway.

"The three main places to look for flounder in summer are channels, boat docks and bridge pilings," Cronk said.

Best flounder docks have crab traps (suspended and tied to docks) and those with fish-cleaning tables.

"People drop scraps off into the water and a lot of times they'll draw flounder, bluefish and ladyfish. But flounder will be on the bottom beneath them, waiting for food," he said.

Cronk and Taylor mainly use live 3- to 5-inch finger mullets, impaled on Kahle hooks as baits. They employ ½- to ¼-ounce barrel weights, depending on tide strength tied to a 2- to 2½-foot long leader above the hooks.

"It helps when water is moving during tide changes, especially when it falls out," Taylor said.

"When the tide falls, the fish stage behind docks and bridge supports where the current makes holes (in the bottom). When the tide's coming in, you reverse where you fish because the tide makes holes on the other side of structure."

Flounder, ambush bottom-feeders, aren't easy to catch with a hook and line. It's somewhere north of trying to detect a sheepshead's bite.

"A flounder will grab a bait and lock down tight," Cronk said. "I give 'em 10 seconds before I set the hook. I put my reel in free spool or flip the bail. You don't set the hook because as soon as he feels you, he'll spit it out. He'll swim after he locks down on the leader. But if he feels something's not right, he'll open his mouth and expel the hook and bait.

"That's when his teeth will scale a mullet when you pull the bait through his teeth. Flounders do not scale mullets in their mouths."

North Carolina's one-fish per person daily creel limit has a 15-inch minimum size limit. ■

North Carolina anglers are eager for the start of the 2022 flounder season.



BIG FLOUNDER FRENZY

Southeastern NC is home to trophy flatfish

Jon Hall caught this Cape Fear River flounder during NC's 2021 flounder season.

N By Jerry Dilsover
 orth Carolina's 2022 flounder season will only last the month of September and with a daily limit of only one flounder, it will be difficult to fill your freezer. Still, many fishermen will try. This is fishing and nothing is guaranteed, but southeastern N.C., with its abundance of ocean and inshore flounder habitat, is arguably the top spot in the state for flounder. It has not only good numbers of flounder, but also large ones.

The waters of Snows Cut, which connect the Intracoastal Waterway to the Cape Fear River at Carolina Beach, gave up the current state record 20-pound, 8-ounce flounder to Harold Auten in 1980. Some folks believe this is where the flounder that one day displaces Auten's record will be caught.

Capt. Dennis Barbour of Island Tackle and Hardware (910-458-3049) in Carolina Beach said they have been seeing good numbers of doormat flounder already this year. The closed season required them to be released to continue growing. Barbour said in addition to Snows Cut, numerous artificial reefs, blockade runner wrecks and rock structure in the ocean hold nice flounder. And they often lie waiting in the inlets and inshore around the many oyster rocks, bulkheads, spoil islands, docks and other structure in the Cape Fear River and numerous creeks that feed it.

LIVE BAIT IS KING

"I'm a live bait guy, and I like big live baits," Barbour said. "I'll fish baits, like king mackerel-size pogies and corn cob mullet that many people think are too large. But they keep the bait thieves at bay and attract larger flounder. Fishing these baits takes a lot of patience. But they catch flounder – big flounder. A flounder will grab a large bait and settle back to the bottom, sometimes holding it until it stops struggling before turning it to swallow it. He has to turn the bait to head-first to be able to swallow it. And if you try to set the hook too quickly, you'll miss and pull the bait away."

Barbour said flounder typically hold around structure, but also move across bare bottom heading into the Cape Fear River to spawn. Current that carries baitfish is the key to catching them. And the Cape Fear is a large river with a 4- to 6-foot tide range and predictable tidal currents. The currents are strong in the



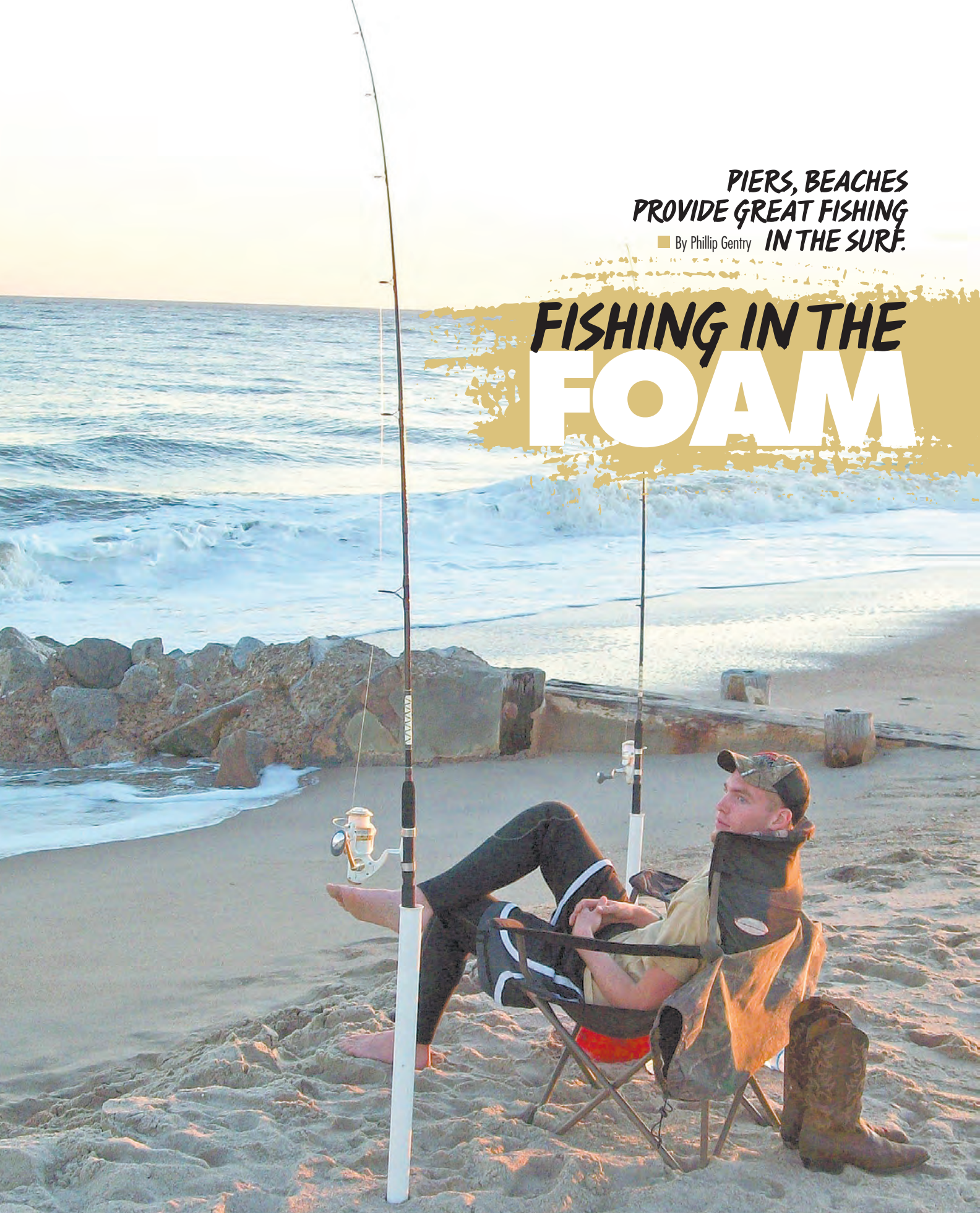
channels, but some places allow getting out of the stronger currents. These places are where Barbour prefers to fish.

Barbour uses his own Carolina rigs and prefers to fish low tide when it first begins rising, and high tide when it first begins falling. During these times, the current is light and the water is moving slow. The flounder know this too and usually feed actively. ■

**PIERS, BEACHES
PROVIDE GREAT FISHING
IN THE SURF.**

■ By Phillip Gentry

FISHING IN THE FOAM



John Selwanes has always been intrigued by what may or may not be swimming within *CASTING DISTANCE OF THE SURF.*

A native of Raleigh, N.C., Selwanes became entranced with coastal fishing at a young age and began spending much of his spare time on the coast.

Pier fishing is a passion for Selwanes as well as surf fishing from any beach in either North or South Carolina. In 2013, while he was still in high school, he created a website dedicated to coastal fishing from the shore aptly named Carolina Shore Fishing. The site hosts all of his video and YouTube experiences with coastal fishing.

The young outdoors social influencer said the month of September is one of his favorite months for both pier and beach fishing, giving him two different angles to attack the surf. With the mullet run in its beginning stages, Selwanes concentrates most of his efforts from Carolina and Wrightsville Beaches in North Carolina down to Myrtle Beach and Georgetown in South Carolina.

“Finger mullet are showing up within cast net range of the shore. So getting bait isn’t hard to do,” he said. “My go-to tackle is a 12-foot heavy to extra-heavy surf rod with a Heaver level wind reel spooled with 20-pound mono line. I use a length of 50-pound mono for shock leader and vary the length of it depending on what species I’m after and whether I’m on the pier or on the beach.”

SPANISH MACKEREL AND BLUEFISH

Selwanes said to expect both of these species to be heavy in the surf line and beyond starting first of the month. He targets Spanish and blues using artificial lures and prefers to present them in a more vertical manner. So one of the many piers on the Carolina coast will be his destination of choice.

“Generally speaking, the South Carolina piers are taller than those in North Carolina,” he said. “When you see a lot of cannonball jellyfish washing around outside the surf line, conditions are right for Spanish and blues due to the water clarity.”

His go-to baits are either Gotcha plugs or a homemade mackerel tree that he can jig up and down to entice bites. Very similar to a Sabiki rig, he makes his own using 40- to 60-pound mono line and 1/0 long-shank Aberdeen hooks. He prefers either silver or gold hooks and dresses the hooks in airline tubing, ribbon, or drinking straws to match the color of the glass minnows and grass shad the fish are feeding on.

“The North Carolina piers are better for casting the Gotcha plugs because they’re lower to the water,” he said. “It’s blind casting, trying to entice a reaction bite in the clear water. You’ll see a preference in the pier anglers of which side of the pier to target – North or South – depending on the direction of migration of the fish.”

BOTTOM FISH >

Selwanes prefers a mackerel tree, a rig similar to a sabiki rig, to jig for Spanish mackerel off the pier. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Learning to read structure on a beach will help increase your catch rates.



Courtesy John Selwanes

BOTTOM FISH

September is a great month to target all manner of bottom fish that live in or near the surf zone. These include whiting, flounder, pompano, spots and croaker. Selwanes targets these fish from the beach through the surf. His bait of choice for bottom feeders is sand fleas. He can gather these in the receding waves on the beach with a rake.

Reading the beach is an important part of knowing where bottom fish will congregate.

"I look for deeper holes and troughs," he said. "Most of the time, you'll find a good trough just past the surf line. And that's a great place to use sand fleas."

A secondary location may be behind the second bar that typically forms off Carolina beaches behind where the waves start to build.

"These areas change constantly. So you won't find anything on a map to tell you where the holes are. It's best to scout these out on low tide and make notes and come back when the water is coming up.

Selwanes' favorite rig for bottom fish is a Pompano rig. It is a standard two-hook rig with enough weight to hold in the current. A brightly colored Styrofoam float keeps the bait up off the bottom.



Phillip Gentry



John Selwanes from Carolina Shore Fishing displays a nice redfish he caught fishing from the beach. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Expect to weed through a number of coastal sharks, some as large as 5 feet, when redfishing from the beach. **OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM:** Gotcha plugs and shiny spoons are great for casting to schooling Spanish mackerel and bluefish from either the pier or beach.



Courtesy John Selwanes

REDFISH AND SHARKS

Selwanes has a pretty good theory about the habits of feeding redfish in the surf zone. Spanish and blues start the chain by feeding on minnows, shrimp and pretty much everything that comes in range. Due to their slash feeding, pieces of half-eaten or wounded bait makes its way to the bottom in the wash where they are cleaned up by bottom fish. Any congregation of bottom fish will draw larger redfish to feed on them. It's for this reason that cut mullet, croaker, whiting or spots make great redfish bait in the surf zone.

Holding these baits in place requires 6- to 10-ounce weights. He uses snelled 10/0 offset circle hooks on a short 80-pound leader. He's not a fan of steel leader because he believes it inhibits the natural movement of the bait in the water. Reds will spook from that.

"You're going to catch and lose a fair number of sharks when fishing for redfish in the surf," he said. "It's best to come prepared with a handful of pre-snelled hooks so you can tie back on quickly when a shark bites the leader off."

If he decides to go for sharks, he will use the same beach setup with 20 to 50 feet of 100- to 200-pound shock leader con-

nected to a length of 135-pound coated steel leader and the 10/0 circle hook.

"From the beach, you're in easy range of a number of sharks that will go up to 5 feet in length," he said. "Sandbars, black-tips, spinners, and a lot of Atlantic sharpnose sharks are the norm. Plus you can get into some good-sized stingrays," he said. ■

CAROLINA SHORE FISHING ➤



Phillip Gentry is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer who says that if it swims, walks, hops, flies or crawls he's usually not too far behind.

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FISHING IN THE FOAM

A website dedicated to the Carolina surf angler, Carolina Shore Fishing offers great tips and videos to help you catch more fish.

CAROLINA SHORE FISHING

Carolina Shore Fishing is primarily focused on fishing the waters of North and South Carolina and is run by John Selwanes. Selwanes has been fishing since he could hold onto a rod. Beginning with learning the world of freshwater fishing, he discovered what would quickly become a passion of his – saltwater fishing. Selwanes journeys across the Carolinas in search of his next fishing adventure, with camera and video recorder in hand to record and share what he's learned. Carolina Shore Fishing's mission is to spread the joys of fishing the Carolinas in an entertaining and informative format.

From fishing reports to destination information, the website is a resource for Carolina anglers looking to learn how to fish or how to take their fishing game to the next level. The site is packed with video tips of gear, baits, tackle and knowledgeable, insider information that will prove invaluable once you hit the beach.

Youtube.com/carolinashorefishing offers personalized video instruction on how to prepare, present, and execute strategies to help you catch more fish.



Courtesy John Selwanes

Both before and after, get tips on what gear to take with you on your next outing as well as how to cook your catch, should you decide to keep a few fish for the table.

For more information, tips, destinations, and tackle, visit youtube.com/carolinashorefishing. ■

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2022 NORTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

Not an official document. Refer to official fishing regs at NCWRC and NCDMF websites.

2022 SOUTH CAROLINA FISHING REGULATIONS

Not an official document. Refer to SCNDR's official fishing regulations pamphlet or www.dnr.sc.gov.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/vessel/trip
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	36"	1 per day*
Bluefish	none	& 3/day 5/day
Red drum (channel bass, puppy drum)	18" min., 27" max.	1/day
Black drum	14" min., 25" max.	10/day
Flounder	15"	1/day (Sept. 1-30)
Dolphin (mahi-mahi)	none	10/day
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw Grouper	closed	closed
Wahoo	none	2/day
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sea bass (north of Hatteras)	12.5" TL	15/day
Sea bass (south of Hatteras)	13" TL	7/day
Yellowfin/Bigeye tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	4/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12" TL	1/day
Snappers:	12" TL	10/day in federal waters
Gray (mangrove), yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster		
Sheepshead	10"	10/day
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day
Striped bass ^	28"-35" TL max (ocean)	1/day
Hickory shad	None	10/day
American shad	closed	closed

^ see NCWRC/NCDMF regs for inshore Management Area limits. % Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species, 888-872-8862, visit hmspermits.noaa.gov. % 5 bluefish per day for recreational anglers on for-hire or charter vessels; 3 bluefish per day otherwise. * 1 cobia per day, two per vessel for private vessels. 1 per day, up to 4 per vessel for-hire.

FRESHWATER

FISH Species (Inland waters)	Minimum Size Limit	Creel Limit (per day)
Crappie +	None +	None +
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted bass +	14" (2-fish exception)	5
Channel catfish	No restrictions	None
Blue/Flathead catfish	No restrictions	None
Striped bass, hybrid (Bodie) %	20"	4 %
Sauger	15"	8
White bass	14"	10
Walleye#	None	8
Muskellunge	42"	1
Kokanee salmon	None	7
Red drum	18" min., 27" max.	1
American and hickory shad	None	10 (1 American shad)
Spotted sea trout	14" min.	4
Flounder	Closed	Closed

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

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

% Striped bass creel limits and size minimums vary by lake. See NCWRC regulations digest or www.ncwildlife.org.

Lake James, minimum size is 15 inches. Lake Gaston, minimum size is 18 inches, creel limit 5.

@ Hook-and-line and flounder giggers restricted to 4 fish per day per trip, 15-inch size minimum.

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

FISH SPECIES	Minimum Lengths	Creel Limit (per person)
Greater amberjack	28" FL	1/day
Blue marlin	99" LJFL	1/day
White marlin	66" LJFL	1/day
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day
Sharks	%	%
Cobia	36" FL	1/day&
Bluefish	None	15/day
Black drum	14" minimum	
	27" maximum TL	5/day
Redfish (red drum, channel bass)	15" minimum	
	23" maximum TL	2/day
Flounder (state waters)	16" TL	5/day, 10 per boat
Groupers (black and gag)	24" TL	1/day
Red, scamp, yellowfin, yellowmouth	20" TL	3/day
Speckled hind/Warsaw grouper	closed	closed
Red porgy (aka silver snapper, pinky)	14" TL	3/day#
King mackerel	24" FL	3/day
Spanish mackerel	12" FL	15/day
Sheepshead	14"	10/day (30 per boat)
Spadefish	None	20/day (agg. grouper)
Black sea bass	13"	7/day
Dolphin	20" FL	10/day (60 per boat)
Yellowfin tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin/Bigeye tuna	Contact NMFS (http://www.nmfspermits.com)	
Tarpon	77" FL	1/day
Spotted sea trout (speckled)	14"	10/day
Weakfish (gray trout)	12"	1/day
Wahoo	None	2/day
Gray, yellowtail, queen, cubera, dog, mahogany, schoolmaster snapper	12" TL	10/day#
Red snapper	closed	closed
Mutton snapper	16" TL (federal waters)	10/day
Vermillion snapper	12" TL	5/day

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

FRESHWATER

FISH Species (Inland waters)	Minimum Size Limit	Creel Limit (per day)
Crappie/Panfish +	None	30 bream (15 red-breast), 20 crappie
Largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, redeye, bass%	none largemouth 12" smallmouth	5 lg/sm/r, 15 spots
Channel catfish	No restrictions	None
Blue catfish	Only 2 fish longer than 32 inches per day	25 fish per day
Flathead catfish	No restrictions	None
Striped bass or hybrid bass	Varies by location&%	Varies by location&%
Mountain Trout	+	5
White bass	None	10 (except Sav. River)
Walleye and sauger+	None	8

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

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

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

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

■ By Phillip Gentry

**FISH OF ILL REPUTE
HAS SAVED MANY A
FALL FISHING TRIP.**

FINDING VALUE IN WORTHLESS WHITE PERCH



Twenty or so years ago, not very many people knew what a *WHITE PERCH WAS.*

Starting with its misunderstood name, the white perch is not a crappie and it's not a true perch either. Years ago, white perch migrated in from saltwater to fresh to do their procreational business, then headed back out to the brine. Sounds pretty similar to its first cousins, the striped bass and the white bass, doesn't it?

In practice, white perch have a very gregarious nature. They move in schools, will eat almost anything, and taste – dare we say it – better on the table than either white bass or stripers. With all those attributes, the white perch's Achilles heel is that it doesn't grow very large. Most white perch the average angler will encounter is less than 8 inches in length. A 1-pound white

perch is something to brag about. And a 2 pounder will make the state record book.

The white perch also has a dark side. Due to their adaptability, they have found their way into nearly every body of water in both North and South Carolina (with a little help from anglers), where they out-compete many of the native species and have been accused of reducing game fish numbers by preying on both their eggs and fry.

Accordingly, white perch are not considered game fish and no limits apply to angler creel limits when fishing for them in either state.

FANBASE IS GROWING >

A white perch over a pound is something to brag about. The state records are right around 2 pounds for SC and just under 3 pounds for NC. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Catfish guide Rodger Taylor said fishing for white perch is very similar to striper fishing. When the bite is on, it's hard to keep up.



Phillip Gentry

FANBASE IS GROWING

Anglers fishing for largemouth bass, crappie, stripers, and bream don't particularly care for white perch, owing to their small size and propensity to attack baits intended for other species. It's only been in recent years that the white perch has developed its own following. Many of these anglers are catfish anglers first. They want the white perch to use as bait for blue and flathead catfish. But a growing contingent of white perch fans are out there.

Catfish guide Rodger Taylor from Rock Hill, S.C. shared some of his insights on patterning white perch.

"Just like any other fish, I start out looking for baitfish," said Taylor. "At the end of the summer, shad start to mass up and move into the creeks and just about everything else, including

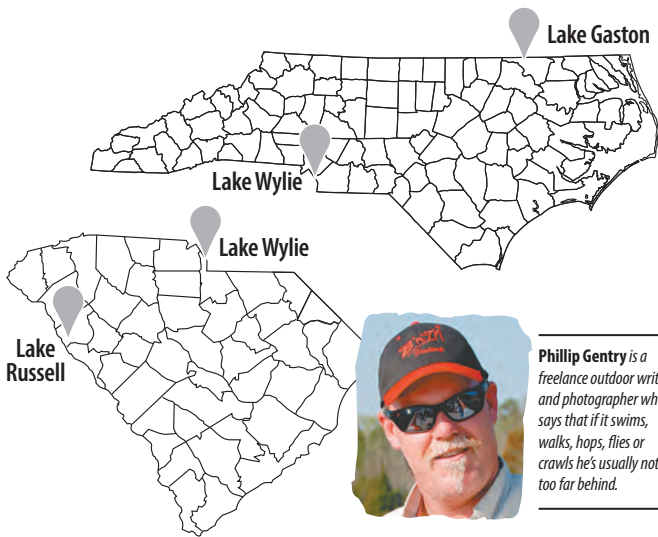
white perch, fall right in behind them."

Taylor said he does best by bottom fishing for white perch even on the days when he can see them schooling on the surface. His year-round target depth to find white perch is 20 feet. He finds them at this depth on long points or humps near deeper water. His ideal location would be a long tapering point that was 20 feet deep at the end of the point before it dropped off somewhere about halfway down a major creek arm.

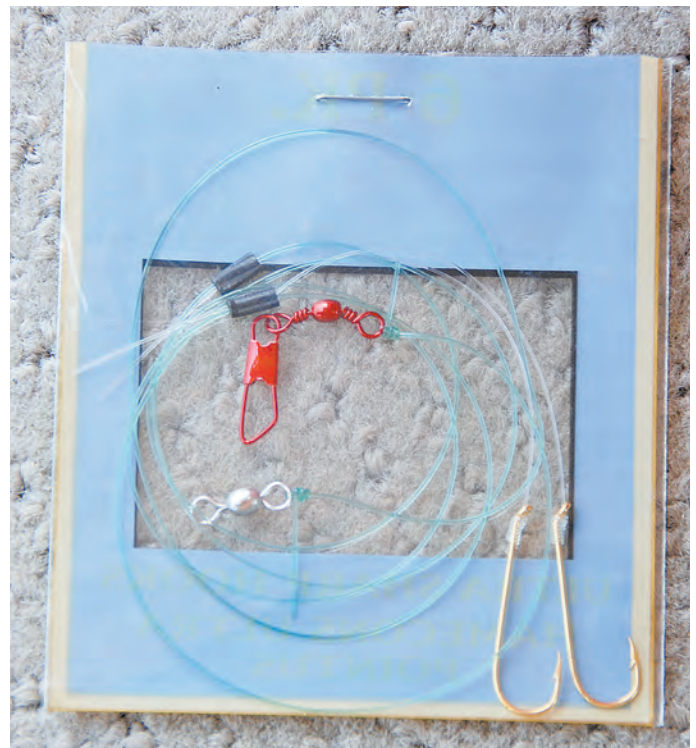
"These fish stage on these points and when a school of shad comes by they'll tear into them wherever they are. And then I'll move back to the points to go again," he said. "In fact, I do better on bare points with no cover that don't have bait holding on them. It's just hanging around nearby."

Taylor said it's a game of feast or famine. But with so many perch to be found, it's not a long wait till the next feeding time.





Phillip Gentry is a freelance outdoor writer and photographer who says that if it swims, walks, hops, flies or crawls he's usually not too far behind.



Phillip Gentry

OPPOSITE PAGE: Taylor and buddy Dieter Melhorn demonstrate just how many white perch can be caught when conditions are right and there's no legal limit on the fish. **ABOVE, RIGHT:** Taylor uses a homemade Sabiki rig to target white perch on bare points and humps. **BELOW, RIGHT:** Guide Wendell Wilson prefers a vertical live minnow approach when targeting white perch.

MINIATURE STRIPER FISHING

"I'll fish right on the bottom and when I catch one fish, I can usually catch 15 or 20 fish before they move off. Then I can either stay put and wait for them to come back or go hunt another point. We often refer to this as miniature striper fishing."

Taylor fishes for white perch using a homemade Sabiki rig that has two small gold No. 4 or 6 hooks on a stiff 3- to 4-inch leader about a foot or two apart. He uses a ¼- to ½-ounce bell sinker at the bottom to hold the rig tight. This causes the leaders to stick out from the main line. He baits the hooks and drops the rig to the bottom, using several rods set in rod holders. He said when the fish move in, it's all he can do to keep one rod baited and in the water before he gets a bite.

"This is classic bottom fishing," said Taylor. "In fact, I don't even reel in when I feel the first bite. Just set the hook and let the rig load up with whatever number of hooks you have on the rig."

FAST ACTION ON LAKE RUSSELL

Guide Wendell Wilson from Elberton, GA is another white perch fan. He's a little bummed because the white perch have pushed out the yellow perch that inhabit his native Lake Russell on the SC/GA border. Rather than sulk, he's learned to adapt.

Wilson prefers live medium minnows fished vertically on light tackle using a single or double No. 2 or No. 4 light wire gold hook on 6-pound test line to catch white perch.

"I might start out with two rods and set them in a rod holder. But once you get into the fish, you can't fish but one rod. The action will be that fast," he said.

Before he decides to deploy rods, Wilson wants to make sure he's in an area with fish. He claims the presence of baitfish at



Phillip Gentry

depths on or near the bottom will determine if he's going to fish a particular location. And he's adamant about marking fish on the graph before wetting a hook.

"If I don't see any bait, any shad, down deep, then I'm probably not going to fish there," said Wilson. "As long as the bait is more than half way down to the bottom, let's say I'm looking at 40 feet of water, and the bait is at least below 20 feet, that's fine. I'll stop and fish if I see enough bait. And that's true even without seeing any fish." ■

WHITE PERCH STRATEGY ➤

LAKE GASTON GUIDE'S WHITE PERCH STRATEGY

According to famed catfish guide Zakk Royce from Henrico, N.C. on Lake Gaston, catching scads of white perch year-round is not a difficult task. Royce said as August rolls over into September and throughout the month is one of the better times to catch bigger perch. He said the typical perch pattern through the year is to find them congregating on long points and humps in very typical schooling fish fashion. But as the water cools they move.

"I look for them in the backs of creeks in 10 to 15 feet of water when the weather starts to cool off a little at night," he said. "Not all creeks are as good as others. I find the ones with sandy bottoms are best."

The most likely reason for the seasonal move is the number of young-of-the-year shad that emerge from cover and can be found scattered all over the upper water column during September. Because the bait, and the predators eating them, are so shallow it's nearly impossible to mark fish on the graph. Royce said if he's perch fishing on a calm day, he can often see the perch schooling on baitfish, along with other predator fish. Since the



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Phillip Gentry

Gaston Lake guide Zakk Royce's crankbait and spinner jig trolling tactic is a proven winner for catching white perch.

perch are not stationary as they would normally be during other times of the year, he's developed a trolling tactic to catch them.

"I troll crankbaits for them," said Royce. "I've heard some of the crappie guys around the country do the same thing and I use the same 200-series and 300-series crankbaits they use."

Using a three-way swivel, Royce attaches a crappie jig, under-spin jig, or small safety pin spinnerbait adjusted to run above the crank on a shorter leader. He varies the amount of line out from longer at the rear of the boat to shorter as he goes up the side of the boat.

"The longest line might be 100 to 105 feet back, which dives to 10 to 12 feet," he said. "Then each progressive line out is shorter in 20 to 25-foot increments."

Royce also recommends changing crankbait colors frequently until you find what they like. Some days the bright chartreuse and pinks work while the natural colors won't. And vice versa. He can't explain why. He just changes colors until the fish decide. As far as the jig/spin color, he said it's hard to beat white.

As for the perch themselves, Royce separates them into two piles — the fish under a pound that he uses for catfish bait, and the fish over a pound that he's going eat himself. ■

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SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

September is an excellent month to catch catfish in the Santee Cooper system.



BASS, CATS AND DEER

SANTEE COOPER AREA IS WIDE OPEN FOR SPORTSMEN THIS MONTH

Terry Madewell

If you can take the heat, excellent fishing exists on lakes Marion and Moultrie and the rivers feeding water into the Santee Cooper system. Plus, it's time to get your deer-gear on.

SCHOOLING BASS

Largemouth bass action is literally explosive during September. Veteran guide and professional angler Brett Mitchell said the topwater fishing, and bass schooling action, can be excellent throughout lakes Marion and Moultrie.

Mitchell said food and habitat are the prime focal points when selecting where to fish this month. Largemouth bass get into serious schooling mode in September and the lakes are generally full of the current crop of threadfin shad. "Shad can be found almost anywhere.

But the creeks, coves, large flats and pockets are generally prime targets," he said. "Availability of cover is a key. Early, late and cloudy low-light conditions are prime for topwater action. When fish are not active on the surface, I'm fishing areas where plenty of forage exists. And I'm always looking and listening for schooling fish."

Good topwater choices include topwater poppers and walk-the-dog type lures. Crankbaits and swimming minnow lures are productive. Soft plastics are great when the schooling action stops but fish are still in the area. Wacky rigged worms are often a good choice.

Mitchell (803-379-7029) said a quick reaction and getting a lure to surface-schooling bass is a key to hooking hawks. Otherwise much of the success, or lack of same, relates to casting ability.

"At this time of the year, bass are often holding tight to cover," he said. "They can be patterned, but often accurate casts to tiny targets is the difference between culling a limit or simply scratching out a few fish. I've fished many days at this time of the year where a mere few inches of accuracy made the difference between not knowing a bass was present, to hooking several big fish. Between schooling action and pinpointing targets, September produces excellent action."

RIVER CATS



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.

DEER SEASON IS HERE:

South Carolina's Game Zones 3 & 4 offer hunters a great chance to kill a buck in full velvet, but the hot weather makes for some tough hunting. Go very early and very late for a break from the weather. This is also when the big bucks will be most active.

Catfishing can be excellent in the deep waters of both lakes. But two often overlooked areas are the Wateree and Congaree rivers in the upper end of Lake Marion. Both rivers offer miles of potentially productive water where anglers can locate and fish hidden honey-holes.

Fed from separate drainage systems, the commonality between the two rivers is the excellent catfishing. Localized opportunities vary year to year based on upstream rainfall and water conditions. Neither river is 'better' than the other on a long-term basis.

Both rivers are prime targets for big blue, flathead and scads of channel catfish.

Basic tactics include anchor fishing and drifting. However under most conditions, anchoring is the most productive choice. Anglers familiar with these rivers will anchor around the outside of river bends, along shallow shoals near drops and in deep holes.

Best baits include cut shad, bream and white perch for blues or flatheads. Nightcrawlers and stink baits produce channel catfish.

Rainfall, particularly heavy rain from tropical systems in September, can raise the water level of the rivers and impact the current flow. When flooding occurs and excess water is released from Lake Wateree's tailwater area – and for several miles downstream – produces amazing catfish action.

Access to the confluence of the two rivers is good from Packs Landing and Low Falls on upper Lake Marion. An access ramp sits at the US Hwy. 601 Bridge on the Congaree River near Eastover and US 1/601 bridge in Kershaw County and at US 378/76 bridge where it crosses the Wateree River near Sumter.

IT'S DEER SEASON

Outdoor adventures are not limited to fishing during September around Santee Cooper. If you live or hunt in this area, you're likely hunting in Game Zone 3 or 4 depending on the specific area around the lakes. In Game Zone 3, both archery and gun season opened on Aug. 15, while in Game Zone 4 it's archery only on Aug. 15, but gun season opens this month on Sept. 1.

The first few days of deer season offer a great opportunity for big bucks and plenty are in full velvet. Soybean and peanut fields are prime targets for late-evening hunting, as are fresh-cut corn fields. When rifle hunting, preparing for possible long-range shooting opportunities will enhance your odds of taking a big buck.

Early-season bowhunting is effective, but heat and humidity requires enhanced scent control measures.

Hunt as late as you can possibly see to identify your target because the big-racked bucks are usually the last to step into open areas to feed. ■

Deer season has already cranked up in Santee Cooper Country.



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LUNKER LINES ➤

Crankbaits fished around wood can make for an excellent day of bass fishing this month.



FIND WOOD, FIND BASS

CRANKBAITS ARE THE WAY TO GO THIS MONTH

Over the past 40 years, I've won a lot of bass tournaments in September. But I'm not about to fool anybody into thinking it is a great month to be on the water. On the contrary, it might be the toughest month to fish — for several reasons.

First, we usually don't have a lot of rain this time of year. So there isn't much water flow in our lakes, and that doesn't help. Deep fish on the main lake usually won't bite without water flow. So they don't bite as well in September.

Second, they're in transition. They're

starting to think about going up in the creeks. And some are already in the creeks. But mostly, they're on the move. By the end of the month, you'll have some moving up in the creeks and biting. But that's more of an October thing. September fish are tough.

A lot of times, we resort to going up the river to fish in September. Or you can go to the backs of some creeks and catch some resident fish. But these fish are harder to keep up with, because they are moving so much. They can be in one place one day, then gone the next.

One thing that will help is to lower your

sights a little bit. Know that weights aren't going to be as good as they usually are. If you catch 18 pounds, you're usually going to win a tournament. September is a month when 15, 16 or 17 pounds is a great weight. I enjoy it, even though I know it's going to be a struggle.



David Fritts is a 63-year-old pro bass fisherman from Lexington, N.C. He won the 1993 Bassmasters Classic champion and the 1997 FLW Tour Championship, and he was the 1994 BASS Angler of the Year. He is sponsored by Ranger boats, Lewis, Lowrance, Power Pole and Berkley.

Dan Kibler

WOOD IS GOOD

The place to start is on wood. Wood is your No. 1 cover in September, by far, whether it's stumps, brush or laydown trees. Those are the kinds of places where bass will hold. If you know where a big, isolated stump is, that's good for a big fish. But I like to find stump rows, because they can hold more fish. You can possibly catch a limit on a stump row. If you have a perfect brush pile in 10 or 12 feet of water, you can do well.

September is definitely a crankbait month, because a crankbait can trigger a sluggish fish into biting like no other lure can. If you get a good rain and some dirty water up the river or in the back of a creek, you might catch a few on a spinnerbait or a bladed jig. But crankbaits are the way to go. The Berkley Dredger 14.5 and 17.5 can be key baits this month. If you get some color in the river, it could be a Frittside Biggun', a good 6-foot bait. You find a brush pile in 10 feet of water, you can get a Biggun' down to the top of it and catch fish. And don't forget about a Berkley Digger. I think it might be the most overlooked bait in our line. It fishes like an old Killer B2, with a real wide action. It can be especially good in late September.

10-POUND TEST LINE

Colors? All of your chartreuses can be really good in September. Those colors really start to come on as fall approaches. I love the Lone Ranger color, which is chartreuse with a silver back. Spicy Mustard, which is chartreuse/brown back, is good. Rubbertail bream and Honey Shad are really good colors. Lone Ranger is a little more faded. I think it catches so many good fish. And Kentucky Blue has to be one

of your top three colors all year. I always keep one tied on.

Where you find fish will point you to your tackle choices. Most of the time, if you find fish deep, you'll want to have a 7-foot-6, 7-foot-11 or even a 9-foot Lew's David Fritts Perfect Crankbait Rod because you'll need long casts to get the bait down.

If you find fish a little shallower – or later in the month and into October when they move up – you're going to want the 7-foot or 6-foot-8 rod. I match them all with a Lew's BB-1 Pro reel with a 6.2-to-1 retrieve ratio, spooled with 10-pound Sensation.

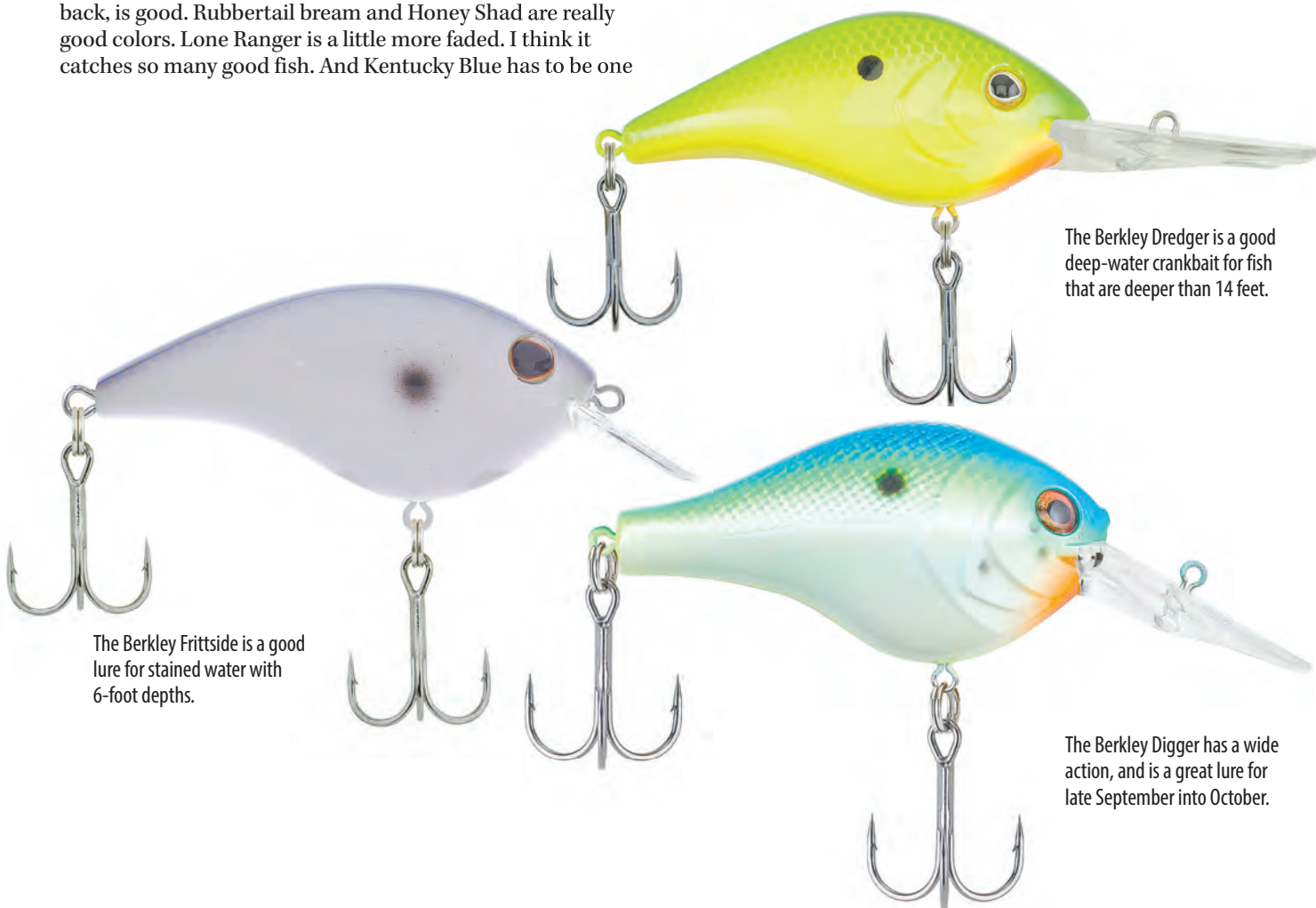
Ten-pound test line will get you more bites than 14-pound. That's been proven every month of the year. We design and build these baits around 10-pound line.

As far as retrieve speed, 6.2-to-1 is fine. Just don't burn the bait back too quickly. If you're losing fish, slow down. Wind the bait back fast enough to get some action, but not so fast that they can't get it good. ■

LONG RODS, LONG CASTS:

Crankbaits are designed to run at certain depths, but they can only get to their deepest depths if they have enough ground to cover during the retrieve. Making long casts, which is easier with long rods, will allow that lure enough real estate to reach its maximum depth before getting back to the boat.

ROANOKE RAPIDS HOT POCKET ➤



The Berkley Dredger is a good deep-water crankbait for fish that are deeper than 14 feet.

The Berkley Frittside is a good lure for stained water with 6-foot depths.

The Berkley Digger has a wide action, and is a great lure for late September into October.



ROANOKE RAPIDS HOT POCKET

Bass, stripers bite strong during overcast days

When the sky is overcast and Dominion Energy releases water through Lake Gaston Dam, the fishing gets hot on Roanoke Rapids Lake.

When overcast days coincide with pulled water, the upper lake of Roanoke Rapids features exciting action from schooling largemouth and striped bass.

"In the summer, Roanoke Rapids becomes an upper-lake fishery," said Tim Biesecker, who's retired from guiding but not fishing.

Upon sighting feeding fish, Biesecker unleashes long casts with heavy baits, like a ¾-ounce Zara Spook or a ½-ounce Rat-L-Trap, so as not to drive the fish down.

Whether his casts connect with leaping largemouth bass or plunging stripers is anyone's guess. But that's part of the fun. Neither species will be large. Schooling largemouth and stripers at Roanoke usually run from 2 to 4 pounds.

For schooling fish in clear water, he favors a 7-foot, medium-action spinning rod and matching reel filled with 8-pound line. In stained water, he prefers a 7-foot, medium baitcasting rod spooled with 10- to 12-pound line.

Most of the action takes place within sight of Lake Gaston Dam, an area gutted with rocks in shallow water. So anglers should navigate with care.

If sunny conditions prevail and there's little current, Biesecker targets largemouth bass in the vegetation which dominates the lake.

"In 1978 when I started fishing Roanoke Rapids, the lake was ideal for cranking. But that type of fishing is almost a thing of the

past with the intrusion of vegetation," said Biesecker.

His grass and stump tactics involve light spinning tackle with light or weightless plastics and stout baitcasting tackle for frog fishing.

In the mornings and evenings, he tosses a weightless Zoom Fluke.

Once the sun comes up, he works the outside edges of grass and open pockets and stumps with Senkos using ⅛- or ¼-ounce tungsten weights.

He also adds ⅛- or ⅙-ounce jigheads to Flukes to probe the grass along with weedless Sebile Magic Swimmers or downsized Carolina rigs featuring Zoom Baby Brush Hogs in pumpkin or cotton candy colors.

For the other plastics, he chooses white and pearl hues.

When fishing thick mats and heavy grass, he selects a white frog on sunny days, a black frog on cloudy days. His tackle consists of a heavy-powered rod paired with a reel spooled with 65-pound braided line to winch fish from heavy cover.

Cranking is restricted to mid- and lower-lake areas with shallow- and medium-running crankbaits where the water is deeper and the grass less pervasive.

Since most stripers run only 3 to 4 pounds, he limits his striper fishing to schooling fish. ■

TWO PATTERNS FOR HARTWELL STRIPERS

S By Pat Robertson
triper fishing on Lake Hartwell is usually split into two patterns in September, said veteran guide Chip Hamilton (<https://lakehartwellfishingcharters.com/>).

"The first part of the month they are coming off the summer pattern and they are kind of lethargic and sluggish. Towards the end of the month when the water cools down a little the bite increases tremendously."

Hamilton said the first couple of weeks of the month, stripers will be located over the river channels in water from 70 to 150 feet deep. But they will be holding in 20 to 30 feet of water.

"They are out in the middle of nowhere, chasing bait. And they will school a little. I usually go to an area where I have seen them before. Sometimes you will only see a couple on top and they will give up the entire school. But they will still be somewhat lethargic."

Hamilton said he will put out down rods, with live herring down to about 20 feet. He'll also pull a couple of free lines with live herring, basically the same pattern he runs in the heat of summer.

"A good day will produce about 20 fish. But you will be working pretty hard for them," he said.

A CHANGE OCCURS THIS MONTH

Then, as the weather begins to change, with fall just around the corner, the fish change, too, he said.

"More years than not as the weather starts to cool down they will start schooling on top which will carry on right into October."

The fish will start to migrate into the creeks, not very far in, he said, following the bait as those schools head into the creeks. The quality of fish increases, too, he noted.

"A lot of the bigger fish will start showing up. The bigger stripers you might not have been able to find in August will come in and start showing themselves again. And they are hungry."

He has caught a lot of 20+ pound fish this time of year. Although he is primarily a live bait fishermen, it is also a good time for artificials, he said.

"Spooners and those who pull umbrella rigs do very well. And with the fish schooling on top, topwater plugs and swim baits can be very productive," he said.

"In September you have to work to find the fish because they move around, but when you do find them you can sit right there and pick them off." ■



Pat Robertson

Chip Hamilton shows off a nice September striper he caught on Lake Hartwell.

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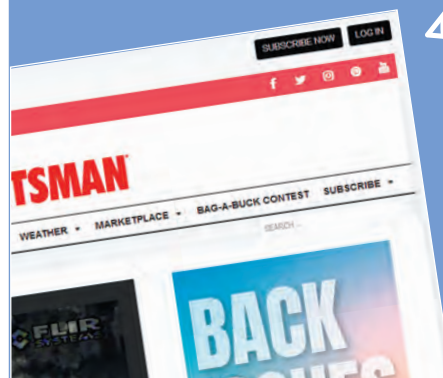
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The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black 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	VALUE
Thu 1			31
Fri 2			34
Sat 3			44
Sun 4			33
Mon 5			29
Tue 6			31
Wed 7			44
Thu 8			54
Fri 9			64
Sat 10			71
Sun 11			63
Mon 12			55
Tue 13			47
Wed 14			44
Thu 15			46
Fri 16			52
Sat 17			62
Sun 18			51
Mon 19			45
Tue 20			43
Wed 21			41
Thu 22			51
Fri 23			59
Sat 24			67
Sun 25			69
Mon 26			57
Tue 27			45
Wed 28			33
Thu 29			26
Fri 30			25

25 50 75
AVERAGE

LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
11:58 am	4:45 pm - 6:01 pm	10:41 pm	4:11 am - 5:47 am	☾	
1:06 pm	5:46 pm - 6:44 pm	11:19 pm	5:10 am - 6:26 am	☾ Half	
2:16 pm	6:48 pm - 7:36 pm ☀		6:11 am - 7:09 am ☀	☾	
3:25 pm	7:52 pm - 8:34 pm	12:05 am	7:13 am - 8:01 am ☀	☾ Low	
4:30 pm	8:56 pm - 9:38 pm	1:00 am	8:17 am - 8:59 am	☾	
5:26 pm	9:56 pm - 10:44 pm	2:05 am	9:21 am - 10:03 am	☾	
6:15 pm	10:49 pm - 11:51 pm	3:17 am	10:21 am - 11:09 am	☾ Perigee	
6:55 pm	11:37 pm - Midnight	4:31 am	11:14 am - 12:16 pm	☾	
7:29 pm	Midnight - 12:55 am	5:45 am	12:02 pm - 1:20 pm ☀	☾	
8:00 pm	12:19 am - 1:57 am	6:55 am	12:44 pm - 2:22 pm ☀	☾ Full	
8:28 pm	12:56 am - 2:58 am	8:03 am	1:21 pm - 3:23 pm ☀	☾	
8:56 pm	1:33 am - 3:55 am	9:09 am	1:58 pm - 4:20 pm	☾	
9:25 pm	2:07 am - 4:53 am	10:13 am	2:32 pm - 5:18 pm	☾	
9:56 pm	2:45 am - 5:47 am	11:17 am	3:10 pm - 6:12 pm	☾	
10:30 pm	3:23 am - 6:43 am	12:19 pm	3:48 pm - 7:08 pm	☾	
11:09 pm	4:06 am - 7:38 am	1:20 pm	4:31 pm - 8:03 pm	☾	
11:54 pm	4:51 am - 8:33 am ☀	2:18 pm	5:16 pm - 8:58 pm ☀	☾ Half	
	5:39 am - 9:25 am ☀	3:13 pm	6:04 pm - 9:50 pm	☾ High	
12:44 am	6:31 am - 10:17 am	4:01 pm	6:56 pm - 10:42 pm	☾ Apogee	
1:39 am	7:24 am - 11:04 am	4:44 pm	7:49 pm - 11:29 pm	☾	
2:37 am	8:18 am - 11:48 am	5:21 pm	8:43 pm - 12:13 am	☾	
3:37 am	9:09 am - 12:29 pm	5:54 pm	9:34 pm - 12:54 am	☾ Fall	
4:37 am	10:04 am - 1:06 pm	6:23 pm	10:29 pm - 1:31 am	☾	
5:38 am	10:58 am - 1:40 pm ☀	6:50 pm	11:23 pm - Midnight	☾	
6:39 am	11:51 am - 2:13 pm ☀	7:16 pm	Midnight - 2:05 am	☾ New	
7:41 am	12:45 pm - 2:47 pm ☀	7:43 pm	12:16 am - 2:38 am	☾	
8:44 am	1:41 pm - 3:23 pm	8:11 pm	1:10 am - 3:12 am	☾	
9:50 am	2:39 pm - 4:01 pm	8:42 pm	2:06 am - 3:48 am	☾	
10:58 am	3:38 pm - 4:44 pm	9:19 pm	3:04 am - 4:26 am	☾	
12:08 pm	4:41 pm - 5:33 pm	10:02 pm	4:03 am - 5:09 am	☾	

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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