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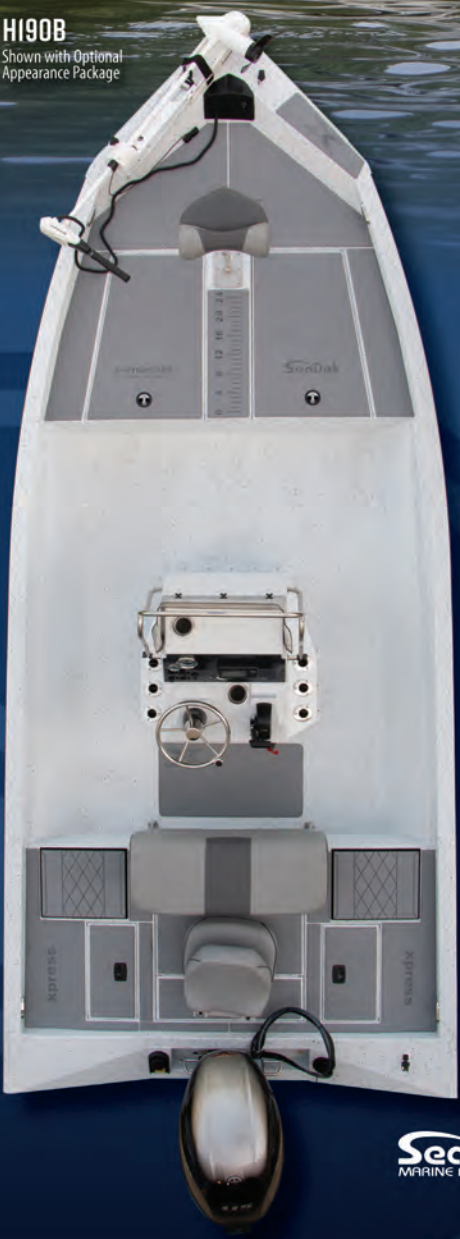
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SADDLE HUNTING 101



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Carolina SPORTSMAN

www.CarolinaSPORTSMAN.com

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Carolina Sportsman is published monthly by  
**CAROLINA PUBLISHING INC.**

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**CAROLINA SPORTSMAN** (USPS #012969) is mailed at periodicals postage rates and paid at Boutte, La., and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Carolina Sportsman, PO Box 1199, Boutte, LA 70039-1199. All rights reserved. Reproduction of contents is strictly prohibited without permission of Carolina Sportsman. **EDITORIAL** information and guidelines can be obtained by emailing Brian Cope at brian@sportsmannetwork.com.

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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.

## CWD, HD CONCERN HUNTERS, WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS

Two confirmed cases of CWD were found in Yadkin County, N.C. earlier this year.

**W**ith two confirmed cases of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Yadkin County and an outbreak of hemorrhagic disease reported in at least 39 counties, North Carolina's 2022 deer season opened with some changes in play for many hunters.

Less serious in some ways than CWD, hemorrhagic disease kills its share of deer but disappears once weather conditions (usually the first frost of the year) become unfavorable for biting midges, which spread hemorrhagic disease. Many deer also survive being infected with hemorrhagic disease and build immunity to it.

CWD, however, is much more concerning. A mere two cases doesn't seem like much, but based on data about the disease, wildlife biologists expect those numbers to grow. And unlike hemorrhagic disease, CWD is a 100-percent fatal disease, killing every deer that becomes infected with it unless it dies of other causes sooner.

Deer do not build immunity to CWD, and it is not

detectable in living deer.

NCWRC has established Primary and Secondary CWD Surveillance areas. Hunters in these areas must abide by certain requirements. These include mandatory testing of harvested deer samples, new regulations on deer carcass transport, use of attractants/scents, wildlife feeding and fawn rehabilitation.

Hunters in Alleghany, Davie, Forsyth, Iredell, Stokes, Surry, Wilkes and Yadkin counties (or at least portions of those counties) are most impacted by these new regulations. Check [ncwildlife.org/CWD](http://ncwildlife.org/CWD) for a detailed map and complete list of regulations. ■



Hemorrhagic disease has taken a toll on North Carolina's deer herd this year.

## 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.

To enter or see deer that have been entered, log onto [carolinasportsman.com/bag-a-buck](http://carolinasportsman.com/bag-a-buck)

# NEW NC STATE RECORD SWORDFISH

**W**ith the swordfish of a lifetime on the line and a blown fuse on the electric reel, Cary Carney of Newport, N.C. hand cranked the fish in during an epic battle that lasted 2.5 hours. The 504-pound, 8-ounce fish has been certified as North Carolina's state record for the species, surpassing the old record by more than 60 pounds.

Carney caught the record sword on Aug. 21 while fishing with his son Brandon Carney aboard the Willow B. They were fishing about 1300 feet deep when the fish bit their bait, an albacore belly with a glow skirt on a 10/0 hook with an 11-pound weight rigged about 100 feet above the bait.

Unlike many swordfish bites, this one wasn't subtle. The fish hit with force, immediately stripping line off the reel against its 26-pound drag. The fish didn't jump during the fight, and the crew of the boat, which included Brandon Carney, Cary Carney, Shelly Carney, Stephen Beaman, Joshua Meekins and Justin Meekins, got first sight of the fish about 30 minutes into the battle.

## ANOTHER FIGHT BEGINS

A full 2 hours after that, with the boat 12 miles away from the hookup point, the fight was finally done, with Carney the victor.

Now, the crew figured out how to get the trophy fish onboard, which was no easy task. Another hour later, they'd brought the fish in tail first, hoisted it in using the T-top frame for leverage, and muscled it in, wrapping its body around the console.

They packed 100 pounds of ice on the fish and headed to Portside Marina where the certified scales at EJW Outdoors of Morehead City finally showed them the weight of the fish.

The swordfish measured 104 inches in length and 53 inches in girth. Its sword was 47 inches long.

## RED HIND STATE RECORD

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries also recently certified the state's new red hind record. Jared Lambert of Wilmington's 7-pound, 11.2-ounce red hind measured 23.06 inches total length.

Lambert caught the record fish on Aug. 6 near Frying Pan Tower. It beat the previous record, a 7-pound, 1.6-ounce fish caught off of Cape Lookout in 2021.

Lambert was using a live pinfish as bait.

## CUBERA SNAPPER RECORD

Another N.C. state record, a 58-pound, 8-ounce cubera snapper, was caught on Aug. 3. Thomas Madsen of Byram, N.J. caught the fish offshore of Hatteras. This bested the previous state record by 8 ounces.

Madsen was fishing with Capt. Tyler Fleetwood of Sea Dream Fishing Charters when he caught the fish, which measured 49.5 inches total length and had a 41-inch girth. ■



The crew of the Willow B stands with the new NC state record swordfish.



**BIG BUCK GALLERY >**

# SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY

OUTDOOR  
UPDATE



Cayden Hensley was our first 2022 Bag-A-Buck entrant with this S.C. Game Zone 3 velvet buck, which he killed during the weekend of his 10th birthday.



Brittany Stevens of N. Augusta, S.C. killed this piebald, full velvet 8-point buck in Aiken County on Aug. 16.



Jayden Todd killed this 8-point buck in full velvet on Youth Day in Georgetown County, S.C.



Dylan Deese killed this Dillon County, S.C. buck on Aug. 15.



Danielle Swartz of Wagener, S.C. killed this 10-point, full velvet buck on Aug. 17.



Nichole Bradley of Beaufort, S.C. killed this 8-point buck in her home county on Aug. 15.



Reece, a/k/a Judge Mullet, killed this buck on Aug. 21 while hunting with his granddad.



Daniel Nicholson of Pageland, S.C. killed this Chesterfield County buck on Sept. 3.



Erica Rabon Thompkins of Conway, S.C. made her first bow kill with this Horry County buck on Aug. 16.



Sally Smith of Blythewood, S.C. killed this 8-point, Richland County buck on Aug. 19.



Reagan Prince of Cross, S.C. killed this 11-point buck on Aug. 13, Youth Day in Berkeley County.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, visit [www.carolinasportsman.com](http://www.carolinasportsman.com) and visit the deer-hunting section.

**BAG-A-BUCK WINNER** ➤



# BAG-A-BUCK

# WINNER

## SC HUNTER WINS AUGUST BAG-A-BUCK Buck green-scored 162 inches

**T**anner Herndon of Rosinville, S.C. is a 21-year-old hunter that's already placed multiple deer in South Carolina's records list. And he added another with the 12-point, 222-pound Dorchester County buck he killed on Aug. 29.

The buck has been green-scored at 162 inches.

Through trail-cam surveillance from the deer's birth, Herndon estimated the buck at 5½-years-old.

Herndon killed the buck with a .243 during an evening hunt on his family's farm

After word began to spread about the big buck, Carolina Sportsman field reporter Brian Carroll called Herndon to get the scoop, entering the hunter in our Bag-A-Buck Contest, which awards monthly prizes as well as a Grand Prize.

### BIGGEST GRAND PRIZE EVER

Herndon was drawn as the winner for August, and will receive a 1-year subscription to Carolina Sportsman Magazine and a MAGLITE XL50 LED Spectrum Red flashlight, along with some other swag.

Herndon and every other entrant in the contest is eligible for the Grand Prize, which includes a 3-year subscription to Carolina Sportsman Magazine, a 2-day, two-person deer/hog hunt at Cherokee Run Hunting Lodge in Chesterfield, S.C., a Barnett Hyper XP 405 Crossbow, a MAGLITE Field Ops Bundle, a Grey Man Tactical Vehicle Hunting Gun Rack package, a Seneca Dragon Claw Ready-to-Hunt Combo, which includes a .50-caliber airgun/arrow gun with scope, ammo, arrows and compressor. It's our biggest Grand Prize package yet!

We accept entries for the Bag-A-Buck contest all season long for bucks killed by hunters from North and South Carolina during the current deer hunting season. Sign up through Jan. 1, 2023 at [carolinasporthunter.com/bag-a-buck](http://carolinasporthunter.com/bag-a-buck). ■

Tanner Herndon won the August Bag-A-Buck prize, which includes a MAGLITE XL50 LED Spectrum Red flashlight.



### Show us your buck!

Enter your buck at [carolinasporthunter.com/bag-a-buck](http://carolinasporthunter.com/bag-a-buck)

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Digital images must be at least 500KB and in jpeg format.



Trey Patton was fishing on the Wateree River when he caught this catfish.



Charlie Renfro caught his personal best blacktip shark at Holden Beach on June 8.



Ryan Sanders of Elgin, S.C. caught this 78.14-pound catfish in June.



Ryan Conte caught this blue catfish while fishing at Buggs Island in mid-June.



Eric Inman caught and released this 36-pound, 45-inch striper from the Lower Saluda River in May.



Jim Bates caught this 35-pound striper on the Savannah River using a live shiner as bait.



Stephen Flook III, "Little Trout Master" caught this one while fishing with his dad below Georgetown, S.C.



# SADDLE HUNTING 101

**HUNTING FROM A SADDLE  
OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR DEER HUNTERS.** ■ By Philip Hunt

**S**addle hunting has swept the whitetail community in a flood of information and hype the past 5 years. What used to be a fringe style of hunting has entered the mainstream. Saddle hunters were once a small tribe of DIY enthusiasts that hung from trees in homemade apparatuses. Now close to a dozen commercially available options make saddle hunting more accessible to the masses.

**SWITCHING FROM STAND  
TO SADDLE >**

Corey Hunt



Saddle hunting offers hunters many advantages, such as the ability to shoot in all directions. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The author installs a platform - one part of the saddle hunting equation - on a tree with a ladder stand attached.

## **SWITCHING FROM STAND TO SADDLE**

While hunting out of a tree is nothing new, hunting out of a saddle can unleash many advantages to the average hunter. For those looking to hunt deep in the woods while carrying a fraction of the weight of a normal treestand, saddles are a great solution.

Other hunters may not be comfortable in most commercially available treestands. Tall, short, or wide hunters are limited in options with traditional lock-ons and ladder stands. The distance between the seat and the foot platform can cause knee and back pain for hunters whose dimensions are not the same as the bulk of customers for whom most products are made. Saddles are infinitely adjustable for any size.

Another reason to switch to a saddle is the variety of trees that can be hunted. Trees with leans, forks, or otherwise tough-to-deal-with anatomy are easily hunted with a saddle.

## **BASICS OF SADDLE HUNTING**

A saddle is composed of a saddle, bridge, and tether. The saddle is a piece of cloth or webbing that resembles a camo diaper. The bridge is a piece of rope that connects both sides of the saddle in front. The tether attaches to the tree and the bridge. The size of the saddle, length of the bridge, and positioning of the tether all play important roles in the comfort of a saddle.

To rest your feet, the most popular option is a platform. These resemble miniature lock on stands without a seat. Some people prefer to use a ring of steps or screw-in steps. But foot comfort

during long sits leads most hunters to a platform.

## **CLIMBING WITH A SADDLE**

Any climbing methods of treestand hunting can be used with saddle hunting. A set of climbing sticks, the bottom of a climbing stand, and pre-set sticks or ladders are all common ways of climbing while saddle hunting.

A set of sticks seems to be the most popular, while ounce-counters are becoming proficient climbing with no sticks or one stick with a webbing loop. A quick search on the internet will lead you into a never-ending rabbit hole of climbing methods in the saddle community.

## **SADDLE SAFETY**

When used correctly, it is nearly impossible to fall out of a tree while climbing or hunting. Since a lineman's belt or preset safety rope should be used at all times, the hunter is never disconnected from a rope.

At hunting height, the tether is connected to the bridge with a carabiner. At that point, the hunter can lean into the saddle making sure the tether is secure, then disconnect from the lineman's rope or safety rope.

## **SADDLE COMFORT**

Once safely tethered to the tree, it is time to get comfortable. The best way to be comfortable during a hunt is to have practiced before you hunt. Some hunters like their saddle high and lean into the saddle. Others wear the saddle lower and sit like in a swing. Figuring out if you are a "sitter" or a "leaner"



Corey Hunt

requires practice.

Try to sit in a saddle for at least one hour straight. Any issues with “hip pinch” or other discomforts will become evident during that time frame. Any pain you encounter has been felt by others before. The saddle community is very helpful and a quick post on social media or a forum will surely be answered with helpful advice.

For sitters, the most common issue is pain from your knees touching the tree. Knee pads, pieces of foam, and seat cushions are all options to avoid this issue.

Leaners should have footwear that offers lots of support. And they should test out their footwear and find the most comfortable way to position themselves on the platform.

Another factor for saddle comfort is tether height. No certain height is correct, but it is best to start around eye level. This height is comfortable for most and allows greater movement around the tree. A tether lower than eye level will be shorter, thereby limiting movement around the tree. A tether higher than eye level will allow for easy 360-degree movement around the tree, but will make the hunter feel like they are being pulled into the tree.

Many variables are involved in being comfortable in a saddle. No saddle hunter sets up in the same way. While daunting at first, an almost infinite number of methods can make a comfortable hunt based on saddle position and tether height.

## SADDLE SHOOTING >

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## SADDLE SHOOTING

Once you are safe in the tree and have outwitted the prying eyes of wily whitetails, the last aspect of saddle hunting shows up. Shooting a bow or rifle from a saddle is very simple. Just like every other aspect of saddle hunting, it requires a bit of practice.

Many bow hunters claim it is easier to shoot from a saddle. Hunters have three anchor points for stability when saddle hunting — two feet and the tether attachment. These provide a solid base for shooting. Practice beforehand, shooting different angles around the tree to become comfortable and ensuring the bow cables do not contact the tether or bridge.

Gun hunters usually rest their firearm against the tree or tether. With a little practice, it is simple to find a steady hold to take a good shot.

### IS IT FOR EVERYONE?

The short answer is no. Not everyone will find saddle hunting comfortable or relaxing. Everyone should give it a try though. The ability to hunt any type of tree, bring new life to a heavily used stand, and lightening your load when hunting deep in the woods should be reason enough to give saddle hunting a try. ■

As with all types of tree hunting, a safety rope is a must.



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# HUNTING CLUB HACKS

As mentioned before, the saddle has made a splash in the public land running and gunning community. Many hunters in the Carolinas hunt private land, leases, and hunt clubs that have pre-set stands in proven areas.

Hunt clubs always seem to have a doe that will check if someone is in the stand next to a good plot or feeder. The staring contest that ensues when a hunter's outline is spotted usually ends with a blow and white tails bounding away.

A saddle allows the hunter to set up on the opposite side of the tree that the pre-set stand is located. Climbing is easy with the ladder or sticks present on the tree stand. Once in the stand, attach the platform to the other side of the tree, secure the tether and slip behind the tree.

With small movements, the hunter can keep the tree in between the observant deer and their silhouette. Heavily used stands and stands on feeders can possibly pay off when the rest of the club members have accepted defeat from the deer that check the stand before they come into range. ■



**Philip Hunt** is an award-winning freelance writer and photographer from S.C.'s upstate. He's an avid fly-fisher and bowhunter, with a secret passion to soak bait for catfish.



Setting up your saddle behind a ladder stand can help fool observant deer into thinking no one is there.

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CUTOVERS HOLD  
BIG BUCKS ALL  
SEASON LONG.

■ By Terry Madewell

## HUNTING CUTOVERS ALL SEASON

**M**any types of habitats attract and hold deer during the hunting season. And these habitats often change from the spring and summer. Changes in the innate behavior of deer create changes in behavior and habitat requirements. This behavior shift begins from late-September through November depending on the location within the Carolinas. And they are dictated by the onset of the rut, the

prime time for hunters to target trophy bucks.

While multiple types of habitat will attract deer, one type found throughout the Carolinas is a prime target throughout the season. This deer-magnet is the clear-cut (cutover) areas that are in the early stages of regeneration. And this thick, gnarly habitat is ideal for holding deer during the season for multiple reasons.

## HUNT CUTOVERS ALL SEASON

Within the Carolinas, the exact timing of the rut varies considerably based on multiple factors within each state. Physical location is a key component. But what's important to hunters is that deer behavior changes from primarily eating and hiding to propagation of the species.

Charles Ruth, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Big Game Program Coordinator, said the biological changes of deer during this time creates a prime opportunity for hunters.

Ruth said multiple types of habitats are likely to harbor deer. But timbered clearcuts in the early stages of regrowth are ideal for multiple reasons.

"Cutovers in the first few years of regrowth provide a diversity of habitat that's ideal to attract and hold deer," he said. "It's prime for bedding areas. It's great cover that provides deer a sense of security and typically offers multiple natural food sources. With a properly placed stand, hunters can see large areas of habitat, thus increasing the potential to see bucks on the move."

## PLAN FOR HUNTING CUTOVERS

Dean Pittinger from Early Branch, S.C. (near Hampton) is celebrating his 50th year of deer hunting in 2022. He said cutovers are a primary habitat he'll hunt throughout the season. He's taken multiple bucks that would qualify for the S.C. State Record book, with a 148 4/8 buck his largest.

"Cutover areas are key to my personal style of hunting," Pittinger said. "I hunt them throughout the season. But my tac-

tics change as the season progresses."

He said the first key to success is recognizing that every cutover is different based on size and location.

"A good example is during early season prior to the rut, and even into pre-rut and the rut, cutover areas will hold plenty of deer. But the deer move in and out heading to food sources," he said. "While the deer I'm hunting basically bed and live in the cutover, I'll hunt the edges of the clearcuts in the early season. I target areas where deer are crossing between that area and the route to food sources."


Pittinger said the food source may be a large agriculture field such as soybeans, peanuts or other crops. But it can be big white oaks or persimmons in a hardwood stand adjacent to the cutover.

"I spend time finding the food sources and the routes deer take from the cutover to the food," he said. "No single type of stand works in all situations. I may climb a tree that's two or three trees deep in the adjacent old growth stand that affords good vision of a productive trail between the two habitats. Getting off the open edge gives me extra concealment that's crucial when hunting trophy bucks."

He said in some situations he will use a ground blind or he'll literally sit against a tree with the gun propped on his knee or supported in a shooting stick as if he was turkey hunting. Blending with the habitat and having the wind in his favor is far more important than forcing the issue with a stand that doesn't blend with the habitat.

"And you can catch deer going to or returning from the food source when you determine the right spot to hunt," he said.

## CLEARCUTS AND THE RUT >



Cutovers in early stages of regeneration provide outstanding habitat for big bucks throughout the season. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Hunting the gnarly habitat of cutovers requires hunters to be vigilant because big bucks don't linger when crossing an opening.

## CLEARCUTS AND THE RUT

Pittinger said once the rut begins, he can still target bucks seeking does along the edges of the cutover. But generally he'll begin to hunt more within the confines of the habitat.

"Food sources change and once the rut is on, I'll also target prime food sources within the cutover," he said. "Thick cover is a safety factor for bucks and does. And eating isn't their primary motivation. But bucks are going to check food sources for does. This is a prime opportunity to use feeding stations, such as corn, to attract deer to specific areas in addition to hunting natural food sources."



Pittinger said numerous options to hunt these areas exist. Ground blinds are excellent and he'll set up blending with the natural cover using any topographic and habitat factors to his advantage.

"When bucks are moving, searching for does, I'll often set up with my back literally to a corn pile or food source," he said. "The buck typically isn't going to come to the food. He's going to step out in a road or trail opening and look for a doe. If no doe is visible, he's quickly gone to check another spot. When hunting like this in heavy cover, once I set up, I get down on the gun and I'm ready to shoot. I stay ready until it's time to leave or I kill the buck. The window of opportunity to make a shot can be very short. And I've killed some huge bucks simply because I was ready to make the shot quickly."

Another setup Pittinger employs is to climb a large tree adjacent to the clearcut that overlooks an opening and/or food source.

He'll focus on, or even hand cut, a small opening or lane to watch for bucks checking a natural food source. Or he'll create a food station that he can hunt from a tree stand or climber from an adjacent pine or hardwood stand. Again, he'll stay off the exposed trees along the edge separating the different habitats, opting to hunt from a setup off the front tree line to minimize his visibility to a big buck.

"I'll do what I have to do based on the sign I see within the cutover area to get the crosshairs on a big buck," he said. "I'll get creative to take advantage of any opportunity while minimizing the chance of a buck seeing or winding me."

Deer move freely from cutover areas to agriculture fields, and hunters can find travel routes and set up stands to see more deer. **INSET:** Food sources are crucial to successfully hunting cutovers and the food can be within, or adjacent to, the cutover.



## LATE-SEASON CUTOVER HUNTS

Deer cling to cutovers in late-season, Pittinger said, because of the gnarly habitat and cover which provides protection. As the rut winds down, deer begin to move less, especially during shooting hours. But the need to eat increases.

“But it’s a different situation now,” he said. “Deer will return to survival mode when the rut ends. And often the best hunting is late in the day.

“Patience is essential at this time but deer will come to good food sources. And corn feeding stations are effective,” he said. “Deer will remain in the heavy cover of a cutover even more and feed primarily in low-light times. A key now is having a quality scope that produces exceptional light-gathering qualities because the big bucks are often going to step out late. A high-quality scope that provides even a couple minutes of extra visibility to identify the target is often the key.”

This season, look for cutovers and use them as one of the various habitats you hunt. If you adapt your strategies as the season and patterns change, they’ll produce big bucks throughout the hunting season. ■



**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.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR HUNTING CUTOVERS >



Dean Pittinger said cutovers are a prime season-long habitat for big bucks, but as the seasons change so does his hunting strategy.

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Dean Pittinger said a lot of strategy is involved in hunting cutovers, but they provide great, big buck habitat.



affected. But big bucks can be camera shy."

Also, scent control must be taken to the max, he said. He bathes

before hunting and keeps his clothes clean and scent-free. And he hides as best he can when setting up to hunt.

Pittinger said not all cutovers are created equal in terms of productivity. The habitat of two cutovers in close proximity may both provide prime habitat. But having water and good food sources nearby are advantages that may make one more productive.

He also doesn't overhunt an area because excessive human intrusion is taboo. He'll play the wind to his advantage and his ingress and egress plans are crucial to avoid crossing areas where he thinks deer will be moving.

Pittinger studies deer sign in the area being hunted. And he develops a hunting plan where he'll see the deer while he is well hidden.

"To be successful, hunters need the mindset that hunting a trophy buck is different than simply killing nice bucks," he said. "Restraint is essential and scent and wind precaution enhances the opportunity to see big bucks. If you want to kill a trophy, you'll have to often pass otherwise nice bucks.

"If you have access to cutovers, spend plenty of time learning about that specific area, then hunt with a good plan," he said. ■

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR HUNTING CUTOVERS

Despite cutovers being prime habitats for deer throughout the season, Pittinger said hunters pursuing big bucks must control what they can.

"One is scouting and keeping up with deer patterns without alerting deer," he said. "I'll use trail cameras in pre-season to identify big buck territories so I can target them. But I take the cameras down when I begin hunting. I've learned they're a liability to me killing big bucks. Younger bucks and does are much less



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# **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT FOR ARCHERS**

■ By Craig Holt

**S**uccessful deer hunting resembles the story of a visitor to New York City who asked a cabbie, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?”

Without turning his head, the driver deadpanned: “Practice.”

It’s a joke with a grain of truth that applies to hunting — becoming proficient requires hours of dedicated practice.

For archery hunting, that mostly means getting in position to down a doe or a wise old buck.

In reality, it’s a little more complicated than that. The first requirement is another truism from the three immutable laws of real-estate success — location, location, location.

About 30 years ago, David Morris, deer hunter and outdoors magazine publisher, said to a Dixie Deer Classic audience in Raleigh that he wouldn’t hunt in North Carolina because the state’s whitetail herd, in his estimation, didn’t carry enough quality headgear.

At the time, he probably was right. But the problem never

was genetics. It was tradition and expectations cemented in hunting laws that allowed Tar Heel hunters to shoot brigades of young bucks each season.

Even with that pressure, deer remain the state’s most sought-after big-game animals.

North Carolina wasn’t like Kentucky (half the size of the Tar Heel State) where a one-buck rule since 1989 produced, on average, about two dozen Booners per season, including 37 in 2021. But once word of the Bluegrass State’s success got out, pretty soon North Carolina hunters weren’t satisfied with just one or two “book” bucks per year arriving at the Classic.

## **CHANGE HAS BEEN GOOD**

Bowhunters in particular needed closer shots and encouraged tighter scrutiny of state deer hunting not focused on snap shotgun shots at dog-pursued whitetails or 200+ yard attempts with rifles by still hunters. That eventually led to a sea change in regulations — and more discerning decisions by most hunters

about which bucks to take.

North Carolina still doesn't compare to Kentucky when it comes to Booner bucks. But changes have happened anyway, creating a more balanced herd. Urbanization has made hunting with hounds a rarity. And hunters are more selective about squeezing their triggers, in part because of improved equipment.

The electronic age also has flooded the market as hunters study deer habits, and hunting techniques including tapes, videos and dozens of TV programs dedicated to up-close hunting.

With state hunting laws allowing use of baits, a gazillion varieties of artificial deer foods have flooded the market, not to mention new calls to entice whitetails within shooting range.

Still, three main tactics have been in use since Cherokees, Lumbees and Tuscaroras of prehistory used self-made bows, wooden arrows and stone arrowheads to drop whitetails while Daniel Boone later aimed "Old Tick Licker" at them.

Those baseline factors remain: wind direction, food sources and proficiency with a weapon.

With North Carolina's 2022 archery season (including crossbows or sling bows) starting Sept. 10, we talked to hunters who used sticks and strings to bag bucks in 2020 and 2021 and brought their trophies to the 2022 March Dixie Deer Classic in Raleigh.

## EASY ENOUGH FOR A 1ST GRADER

When I talked to Hillsborough's Ransom Summers and his dad Kelly Summers, the boy's mind was on his first attempt at

youth football, not an eye-opening experience 2 years earlier when he was 7-years-old.

"He was a little worried about missing school that day (Sept. 15, 2020)," his dad said. "We decided we'd hunt in the morning and I'd take him to school late."

But while they sat in the two-person ground blind, they saw moving deer and decided to remain until lunch for a chance at a monster buck they'd seen a season earlier. They went home to change clothes and take the first-grader to Pathways Elementary.

They ate a quick sandwich, then 20 minutes later they were back in the blind. That was a good decision, as the youth arrowed a 156 7/8 gross inch (150 3/8 net) giant that capped the Dixie Deer Classic's 2022 Youth Crossbow title.

"We'd seen too many deer moving," Kelly said. "We also had trail-cam photos of the big guy from that morning."

That day, they sat until about 30 minutes of shooting light remained. And the buck, unaware of their presence because of a north wind, walked toward their feeder.

Resting a Horton Vision 175 crossbow on a Bog tripod, the boy centered its sight on the buck's shoulder and drilled the deer at 17 yards with a Rage collapsible broadhead.

Ransom was accustomed to the pressure of a single shot because his father allowed him one practice shot a day.

"It was good to have the rest," he said. "I saw the deer just after my dad did. After the shot, the deer ran about 40 yards and I saw him fall. I was excited."

## MOWING DOWN A MONSTER ➤

Smart bow hunters know that persimmon trees can lure deer in for close shots. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Ransom Summers was 7-years-old when he downed this deer to earn the Youth Buck Award at the 2022 Dixie Deer Classic.



## MOWING DOWN A MONSTER

Another crossbow hunter, Marc Jacobs of Elon College, had seen a sprangle-rack buck hanging out with other deer at a church's field where members had rights to hunt. But he didn't.

Later, Jacobs saw a man mowing a yard next to the church. "I stopped and asked permission to bow hunt behind his house," Jacobs said. "His son lives beside him, and the man said it'd be okay for me to enter the woods behind his yard."

Jacobs returned and cut a trail to a small creek that had several tree rubs along its banks. He later set a ladder stand and trail camera and began to scatter corn near the creek.

Within days, he had images of a high-rack 4x4 mainframe with five abnormal points.

"My wife Brittany and I hadn't seen anything like him," Jacobs said.

A trail camera revealed the stud whitetail visited the site each morning and evening.

"We sat in a buddy stand but left each day by 2 p.m. because we didn't want to put out too much scent," Jacobs said.

Alarming, the buck disappeared before archery season began.

"We worried someone might have shot him or he got hit by a car," Jacobs said. "But I told my wife I was going to kill the deer Sept. 19. I had a feeling."

Shouldering a Ravin R29 crossbow fitted with a 400-grain Carbon Express bolt and tipped with a Sw Hacker broadhead, the hunter realized his prediction, drilling the buck at 6:23 p.m.



Marc Jacobs downed this huge deer with one shot from his bow in September 2021. OPPOSITE PAGE: Dennis Leonard drilled this trophy Mecklenburg County buck on the second day of the 2020 archery season.

Craig Holt

His wife videoed the episode.

"I didn't want any question about taking this deer," he said.

The deer's rack totaled 161 6/8 gross inches and 148 3/8 net to capture the Adult Male Crossbow award for the Dixie Deer Classic.

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## A TROPHY FOR THE MASSES

Savvy bow hunters understand whitetails have infiltrated suburban habitats across the south.

Even Mecklenburg County, surrounding Charlotte, N.C.'s massive metropolitan area, has its share of Boone & Crockett bucks. Two of the last top-three non-typical crossbow bucks, both Booners, came from the county that's home to 1.2 million humans.

In September 2020, Dennis Leonard added a compound bow 4x4 mainframe trophy that taped 177 3/8 gross inches and 155 3/8 net. He captured the Adult Male Bow Typical division at the 2022 Dixie Deer Classic. The buck weighed 205 pounds.

The wind was a key factor for Leonard, plus he was hunting a whitetail many coveted.

"I shot him the second day of the season. But I hunted the first day after he'd been hanging out with two bachelor bucks," Leonard said. "When he didn't show up, my heart sank. I stayed in a Summit Climber the whole opening day. I knew he was in there, and I wanted first crack at him."

Leonard's trail camera began taking photos during July 2020, but not of this deer.

"I never got a picture of the buck until the night before I shot him. And I had 10 cameras set up around the property," he said.

After his Mathews Monster M7 compound bow flung a Carbon Express arrow from 10 feet away, putting a Rage X-Treme broadhead through the deer, Leonard pulled SIM cards and saw the buck had shed 99 percent of its velvet the



previous night. Only dried tatters remained on the rack.

The hunter credited scent-awareness and stealth with setting up the deadly shot from 10 yards that put down the buck after a few leaps.

"I'm wind and scent wary," Leonard said. "I don't put out scent. The only thing I do is wash my hunting clothes in Earth Scent soap. I also don't wear my hunting boots anywhere except in the woods. I do wear a facemark and gloves."

**THE 42-YEAR LEASE TROPHY >**

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## THE 42-YEAR LEASE TROPHY

Luke Bayse of Thomasville thanked his dad and a fortunate stop at a Chatham County country store 42 years ago for finding a golden hunting spot 66 miles east of their homes.

Bayse's dad "heard Chatham County had some big bucks. So he drove over there and stopped at a store," Bayse said. "He asked a guy if he knew anyone who had some land to lease for deer hunting. And he did."

So began a long-term lease near Northwood High School that culminated in 2019 when the younger Bayse arrowed a 5x5 typical with a nearly perfect antler rack that scored 140 gross inches and netted 132 1/8.

"I put my Cadillac tree stand 25 feet up in some hardwoods next to a cutover where deer bedded," he said.

He scattered minerals that June and July to get the local deer herd accustomed to visiting the area. Then he "amped up" his feeding routine as September's opening day approached.

"We got lots of pictures of him in velvet and thought he'd be a good target buck," Bayse said.

His trail cameras began snapping photos of the buck during late March.

"We had some corn out because it was too early for acorns to start dropping," he said. "For 3 years and leading up to opening day, I had thousands of pictures of the buck. Then he disappeared for 10 days. We thought someone had shot him or he got run over."

But Bayse continued to climb into his stand in a bottom adjacent to a clear-cut bedding area.

A week after opening day, he got into his stand at 5:30 a.m. and climbed 25 feet above the forest floor. He used a rope to pull up a Mathews Triax bow fitted with Carbon Express arrows and Rage Hypodermic mechanical broadheads.

"I first saw the buck at 85 to 90 yards, standing at the edge of



A 42-year lease culminated with this 2020 archery buck for Luke Bayse (left) and his dad. **BELOW:** Whitetails love corn, especially when acorns aren't plentiful.

a roadbed," he said. "I had a bunch of deer around me, does and 2- and 3-year-old bucks. One of the nicer, younger bucks saw me draw back, stomped, and the bigger deer walked toward me."

Bayse held his draw until the buck presented a clear shot. Then he released an arrow that sliced through the 10-pointer. The 170-pound deer immediately bolted but covered just 75 yards before it crashed.

"Oddly enough I had a bad wind blowing. But I was so high up they didn't smell me," he said. "There are houses around this place. So I think deer are used to the smell of humans. I've seen deer feeding in yards and bucks bedding down in yards." ■

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# HOW TO SET UP YOUR BOW

THIS TRIED AND TRUE METHOD WORKS EVERY TIME

**T**hroughout my bow hunting career, I have refined my process for setting up a bow. And I continue to do so even today. That being said, the basic procedure is still the same as it always was.

By sharing how I approach this, I can hopefully save some of you many of the pitfalls that I have encountered along the way.

Certain steps must be followed in a specific order if you are to be successful. Failure to do so often results in frustration, additional work, and even total failure. I highly recommend that you consult a pro shop if you are not completely knowledgeable about and/or comfortable with the adjustments needed.

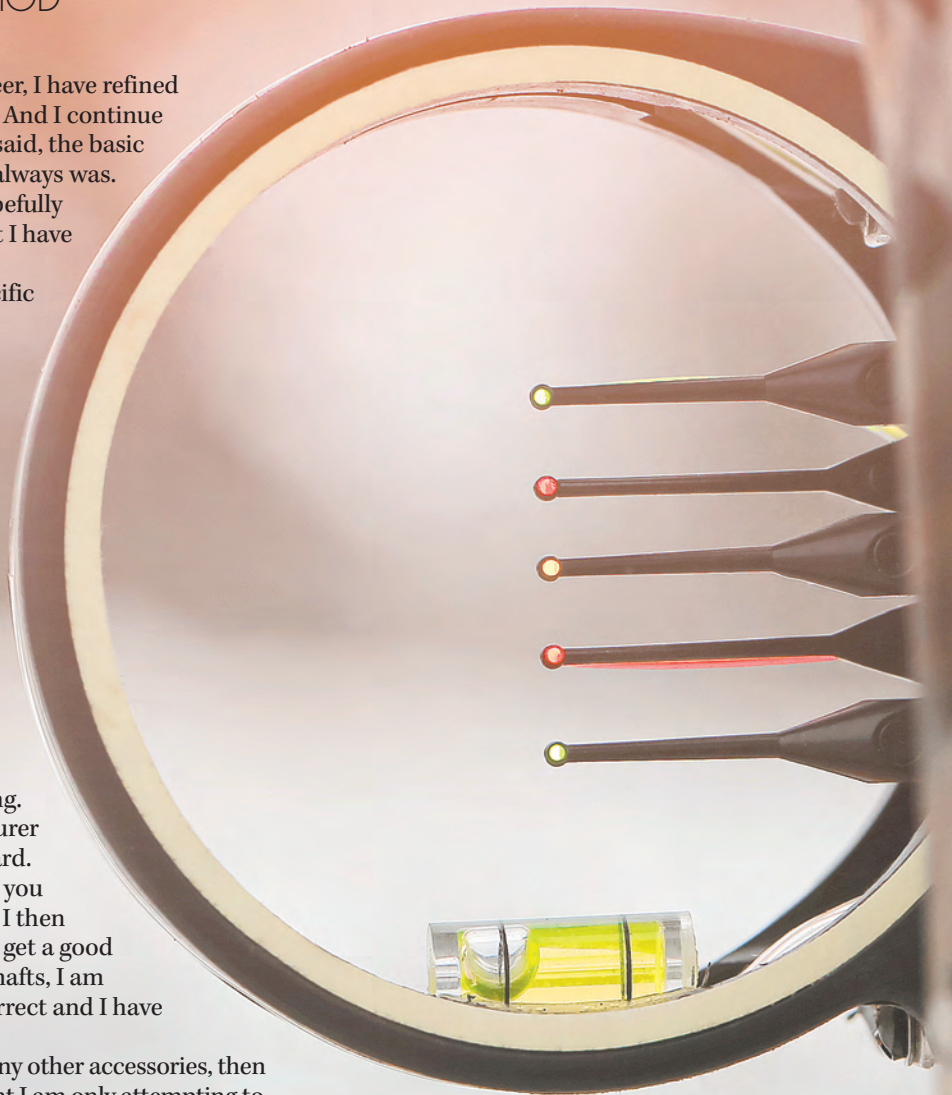
After unboxing a new compound bow, I first assess it for any shipping damage. Next I make sure that both the string and cables are in their respective tracks on the cams.

If all looks well, I first mount the arrow rest to the riser. After that, I adjust the rest for center shot and tie on the nock loop, squaring it to the arrow rest. Next I check the cams for proper lean and timing. This varies by both model and manufacturer and is most easily checked on a draw board. Most pro shops will perform this step for you for a reasonable fee. Assuming all is well, I then proceed to the paper tuning rack. If I can get a good paper tear with both fletched and bare shafts, I am then confident that my arrow spine is correct and I have achieved straight arrow flight.

The next step is to mount the sight and any other accessories, then I proceed straight to the range. At this point I am only attempting to verify that my tune is perfect. I sight the bow in at 20 yards using practice points. Then I use a fixed blade broadhead to check my tune.

Hunters are mainly concerned with how accurately our broadheads fly. Perfect setup, arrow flight, and proper form lead to perfect broadhead accuracy. We owe it to the animals we hunt to accept no less.

By shooting a broadhead-tipped arrow (at a broadhead target of course), and then following with a practice-tipped arrow aimed at the same spot, any flaws in your tune will be revealed by variations in their points of impact. The two arrows should strike the target in the same spot or very close together. Any other result is less than acceptable. The list of issues that can lead to variation here is endless. Professional help makes this much less frustrating to diagnose.



Sighting in your bow should be done in a controlled setting, before you take aim at wild game.



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

### NEED HELP?:

Setting up your bow can be tedious, but it's a necessary part of archery hunting. If you're not comfortable with any steps involved, it's always best to consult with a pro shop.



Don't wait until the last minute to get your bow ready for hunting season.

Once I have both my practice tips and broadheads flying to the same point of impact, I level all of the axes on my bow sight. This ensures ultimate accuracy at varying ranges as well as steep uphill or downhill shot scenarios. I then remove the sight and begin breaking in the bow at a 5-foot shooting distance.

Removing the sight eliminates the urge to aim and allows me to focus on my shot process. The male brain was not designed to multi-task, and if the sight is on my bow it only distracts me from focusing on proper form and shot execution.

After around 500 shots, I retune the bow, straighten out my peep rotation, remount my sight, and repeat the broadhead flight test. Only once that is perfect, do I finish sighting in my bow. Now I know my sights will be set for the season, and I probably won't have to repeat this task. I generally do this over several days, rather than trying to cram it into one shooting session. Tired muscles lead to inconsistency, which can be frustrating when fine tuning a sight.

Each year I see countless customers come crashing in at the last minute before leaving for a hunt in an all-out panic because their broadheads aren't flying well. This could have easily been avoided by following the steps outlined above. This is a tried and true method that has stood the test of time. Hopefully it can help some of you avoid this during your own bow hunting journey. ■

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Jeff Burleson

# LIQUID LIME OFFERS INSTANT RESULTS

SOIL REACTS MUCH QUICKER TO LIME IN LIQUID FORM

**H**unters around the globe are always looking for ways to improve their hunting opportunities. Any seasoned hunter understands that a solid food source can be a hot spot for taking game during the fall hunting season. And with deer season underway, it is not too late to plant a solid food plot to get the deer coming in like obsessed maniacs.

Food plots in the south can have some environmental hurdles to overcome. Acidic soils are always at the top of the list. But a different approach to correcting the acid-base balance can make fall plots be successful. And in a much quicker way.

Acidic soils can be a food plot killer and just a tough complication with planting in any part of the world. The soil pH affects plants in two ways, including that the plant walls and roots must tolerate the acidic conditions themselves. And

then the pH condition affects how plants are able to utilize macro and micro-nutrients applied in the soils.

Plants need a long list of elements to grow and thrive. But some of the most important are nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus.

These elements bind with other elements available in the air and in the soil based on the pH conditions. And when pH levels are on the acidic side, these nutrients will be unavailable to plant and are confined within insoluble forms.

But the pH can be typically raised and corrected with year-round alkaline source applications that can often take long periods of time. However, another way can aid food plotters with flying colors.

## MAGIC ON TOP

For most food plots, the top three inches of soil is where the magic hap-

pens. Applying liquid applications of lime to raise the pH is almost like a miracle and is just what the doctor ordered.

The liquid lime is easy to apply, and it works very quickly to alter the pH in the top layer of soil almost immediately. It's perfect for preparing the soil to plant this month.

Blake Morris of Laurinburg, N.C. is an avid hunter. But he is also a food plot contractor serving southeastern N.C. and northeastern S.C. According to Morris, liquid applications of lime is his "go to" method for overcoming acidic plot sites. He rarely plants anything without it.

"You can apply lime at any time. But the



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.



### **NO TRACTOR NEEDED:**

A tank sprayer mounted on an ATV is all that's needed to apply liquid lime to your food plots.

best time to apply liquid lime is immediately right before planting," Morris said. (843-506-9173) "It works fast and will boost the pH right in the upper horizon of the soil."

Typically, lime is added as a pulverized or pelletized form. It is usually added in the winter and throughout the year in several split applications. And it typically takes many years to fully raise the pH. Quite often, the tonnage of solid-source lime required is a major endeavor and can be very costly. The liquid applications will not last as long as multi-year applications from solid lime sources. But it can be more than sufficient to get a solid crop of buck forage oats or iron clay peas off the ground.

## **ALWAYS TEST YOUR SOIL**

According to Morris, it is always good to start with a soil test to find out what the pH is and how many tons of lime are prescribed to raise the pH to acceptable levels. Yet, nearly all food plot sites in the South will be on the acidic side due to the high levels of organic material in the soil.

Often, food plot sites are within a forested region covered in pine trees. These soils will typically fall on the acidic side. A healthy application of liquid lime can be beneficial with or without a soil test.

Ease of application and quick results are benefits of using liquid lime. It can also be less expensive than solid sources.

"For comparison, 2.5 gallons of liquid lime is equivalent to a ton of pelletized lime. And 2.5 gallons of liquid lime is roughly \$0.50 and one ton of lime is approximately \$300 when you are buying it by the 40-pound bag. So, liquid lime applications are less expensive than pelletized or pulverized applications," he said.

On most sites, food plotters can expect to spend less than \$100 per acre for a proper lime treatment. In many cases, \$50 per acre of liquid lime will be sufficient to raise the pH to healthy levels for a fantastic food plot.

As a general guide, 2.5 gallons per acre should be used when the pH is hovering around six. And when pH levels are below six, 5 gallons should be used per acre where the pH will be raised by approximately one point on the pH scale.

It is nearly impossible to spread the correct amounts of pelletized lime without the proper equipment. But liquid lime can be used with any traditional boom sprayer mounted to a tractor, ATV, or UTV. It can be sprayed without any major effort.

## **WHAT EXACTLY IS LIQUID LIME?**

Liquid lime contains the chemical makeup of any other lime application. It's calcium carbonate, but it is reduced to ultra-fine limestone particles and is mixed with a surfactant.

Solid lime sources are in much larger particles and they take longer to break down and interact with the soil. Since the particle sizes are so small in a liquid form, the results are almost instantaneous. And the purity of the liquid form of lime is also exceptionally higher.

However, if the soils are naturally acidic, they will buffer the pH back down to its natural levels and a liquid lime application will be needed on an annual basis and just before planting each year. But, this isn't any different than what a farmer would do with solid forms of lime. The acid-base correction is needed on

an annual basis regardless. And the liquid form is much more cost-efficient and 100 percent more effective than solid-form applications.

Several different brands of liquid lime are available from the local garden center or can be purchased from online sources. Cal Flo Limestone and PlotStart are two of the commercial versions available for the general public. These can be purchased locally or online at a variety of locations.

## **EASY TO APPLY**

The use of liquid lime isn't exactly a new thing, but it will revolutionize your food plot growing abilities. Finally, food plotters can spread fertilizer after planting and know the plants will be able to utilize the nutrients to maximize growth.

In the South, most food plot sites are on the acidic side of the scale. And acidic conditions are nearly always something food plotters will have to deal with. Morris's liquid application method is really the cat's meow for planting food plots. Anybody with a tank sprayer mounted to an ATV, UTV, or tractor can apply liquid lime to change the outcome of their food plots.

Morris plants and builds food plots for landowners in several counties in NC and SC. He can assist landowners with their own efforts or provide turnkey services to improve the food availability on your hunting property. For more information or for food plot contracting, contact Blake Morris at (843) 506-9173. ■

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## ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN

Pat Robertson

Hunting preserves throughout the Carolinas offer excellent hunting for quail and chukar.



# SHOOTING PRESERVES OFFER TOP BIRD DOG WORK

### WATCHING THE DOGS IS HALF THE FUN OF HUNTING

**T**he scene is forever burned into my memory.

We had turned the two pointers out just as the sun was emerging over the treetops and they raced across an open field, both suddenly braking to a stop at the same time. The black speckled “rip-rap” marked pointer and the liver and white colored pointer were silhouetted like two stone statues against the rising sun, 30 yards apart, back-to-back.

They held like statues marking both groups of a split wild covey of quail, one of the most beautiful hunting scenes I have ever had the pleasure of witnessing. We got three birds out of the two groups on the covey rise, more of an afterthought to the memory of that remarkable scene.

No matter the species or the hunting sport, outstanding dog work is what makes a hunt. For most of us, wild quail

hunting is a thing of the past. But outstanding dog work can still be found on the numerous hunting preserves scattered across the Carolinas.

Some preserves have kennels of trained bird dogs and guides on staff. Others use contract guides who bring their own dogs. Typically, these guides will use their older, well-trained dogs on guided hunts, but will be training younger dogs to bring along for future hunting.

Mike Johnson, manager of Moree’s Sportsmen’s Preserve in Society Hill in eastern South Carolina, and Jeffery Maness, owner of Shady Knoll Gamebird Farm in Asheboro, N.C., said hunters can experience a lot of good dog work on a hunt at their preserves.

## LEAVE IT TO THE DOGS

“We have 10 contract guides with pointing dogs of all species – pointers,

setters, German shorthairs and Brittany Spaniels,” Johnson said. “We also have a dozen kennels available. A lot of guys come in, rent a cabin, we kennel their dogs and they take them hunting.”

Moree’s cadre of guides is led by two veteran guides, Billy Benson, 84, and Leroy Jordan, 81.

“Mr. Billy has been guiding here for 36 years. He hunts English setters and German shorthairs. Leroy hunts English setters. Our guides’ dogs will all point and retrieve. All you have to do is be able to shoot well enough to hit them,” Johnson said.

Moree’s offers hunts on quail, chukar



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.

One of the big joys of quail hunting is watching the dogs work.

Pat Robertson



and pheasants and can provide a mixed bag hunt designed to the hunter's wishes. While the birds are pen-raised, they are flight-conditioned very well, he said.

"My customers, almost everybody tells me they are as close to wild birds as they have ever seen."

Maness said Shady Knoll produces a quarter of a million quail a year for shooting preserves. Special care is taken to assure that the birds are flight-conditioned and easily flushed. Breeding healthy, full-feathered birds that look and act like wild birds is the goal at Shady Knoll. And one essential element is keeping the birds in the dark, he said.

"We dim the lights down and keep it dark and I tell my customers to keep the birds in a fairly dark facility. When they come out of that darkness into the light it makes them really flighty."

Shady Knoll also offers guided hunts with several experienced contract guides and also provides birds for self-guided hunts for hunters who have their own bird dogs.

"We have German shorthairs, a couple of pointers and a Brittany. And we are starting to use Cocker Spaniels," Maness said. "That is getting a little more popular. We will bring a pointer in to point the birds. Then the little Cocker will come in and flush the birds and retrieve the downed birds."

Like Moree's, Shady Knoll also offers hunts on pheasant and chukar partridge and mixed hunts along with quail. Most preserves in the Carolinas offer this same wing-shooting experience, along with excellent pointing and retrieving by well-trained bird dogs of various species.

You might not experience a memorable scene with back-to-back points. But you can certainly find a lot of excellent dog work at the shooting preserves in the Carolinas.

## A CLICK AWAY

UltimateQuailHunting.com provides an online listing of 47 quail hunting lodges, guides and outfitters in the Carolinas, 30 in North Carolina and 17 in South Carolina.

The hunting preserve season in both states runs Oct. 1 through March 31, providing 6 months of bird hunting opportunity and some excellent pointing and retrieving.

In North Carolina a controlled hunting preserve operator, guest, or customer can take quail, mallard ducks, chukar partridges, Hungarian partridges and other domestically raised game birds, except wild turkey. A valid North Carolina hunting license or controlled hunting preserve license is required to hunt on a preserve.

In South Carolina a regular resident small game hunting license or a special hunting preserve license is required.

At most preserves in both states, guides and well-mannered, trained bird dogs are available. Or hunters can bring their own bird dogs. Most of the game birds are pen-raised, but well flight conditioned to give hunters as close to a wild bird experience as possible. ■

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# SKINNY CREEK

*MANY SMALL CREEKS HOLD REDFISH  
THROUGHOUT ALL TIDE CYCLES.*

By Brian Cope

# REDFISH

**So** many tiny saltwater creeks dot the coastal Carolina landscape that the majority aren't even named, at least not officially. The majority are also ignored by anglers, in part due to how inaccessible most of them are at low tide.

But anglers who discount the fish-holding ability of these creeks throughout both tide cycles are missing out on some top notch fishing.

Some of these creeks seem to dry up completely when looking at them from the main waterway. But adventurous anglers with the right watercraft and tools find plenty of redfish willing to bite. And that's often true when not so much as a trickle is coming out of those creeks.

Dalton Reames of Sumter, S.C. is fond of fishing these creeks, and his traveling mode of choice is a 12-foot kayak.

"It's just not possible to get into or out of many of these creeks, especially at low tide, unless you are using a kayak," said Reames.

Through cyber-scouting, exploration and sometimes sheer luck, Reames has found numerous creeks throughout the Carolinas that he loves fishing in October, when redfish of all sizes stack up and put on the feed bag.

"October is a great month for this. The air and water temperatures are usually still warm enough to wade. But you can feel fall weather coming on, and the fish feel it too. That cooling down period really cranks up the bite," he said.

**PLAY THE TIDES** ➤



## PLAY THE TIDES

Reames has enough small creeks scoped out that he can access at least one of them no matter what the tide cycle is. He checks the tide chart closely, so by the time he gets there, he knows the best place to drop his kayak.

“For some creeks, an outgoing tide is fine. For others, I need to approach them on the incoming tide. My preference is to enter a creek as the tide is flooding into it. If I time it right, the tide will help carry me into the creek and I’ll still have enough moving water to fish until the tide is high,” he said.

And once the tide goes out, he can pull his kayak onto a sand bar or oyster mound, then wade fish.

“The creeks I like best will have multiple shallow pools in them at low tide. They can be as deep as 4 feet, sometimes even deeper. And they are loaded with baitfish and blue crabs. You can always count on plenty of redfish staying behind in these creeks,” he said.

Live bait is deadly in these shallow-water pools. But Reames likes trying a variety of artificial lures.

“I know the fish are here. So I like to use different lures just to see what they’ll bite. Some days, they’ll bite anything you cast. Other days, they’re more picky. And occasionally, they’ll shut down at low tide,” he said. “At least for artificial lures.”

On slow days, Reames still enjoys being there throughout the low tide cycle. He knows the bite will crank back up once the tide begins flooding in again. And he likes getting a look at the structure in the creek while it’s all visible.

“You’re generally going to catch more fish when the tide is moving. But that’s not always the case. On some days, the bite at low tide is unbelievable,” he said.

## GEAR UP

When it comes to fishing with live bait, Reames relies on 2000- to 3000-series spinning reels and medium-heavy, fast action rods. He uses Carolina rigs with 3/0 circle hooks, 15- to 20-pound braided main line, and a 12- to 15-pound fluorocarbon leader. He uses a 1-ounce weight above the leader to get his bait down.

If casting artificial lures, he uses the same setup, ditching the 1-ounce weight and replacing the circle hook with his lure of choice. Gulp and other soft plastic lures on jigheads are good choices. He also likes using D.O.A. shrimp and No. 5 Mepps Aglia spinners. The double-bladed versions are deadly on some days, especially as the tide is falling out.

While he uses live bait when he’s got time to catch it himself, he has no problem showing up to the creek without it. He has just as much success with Fishbites and Berkley Gulp Surf Bytes, which he uses on Carolina rigs. These are

strips of bait that release scent and particles through the water, drawing in fish.

“I’ve had a few people laugh about me using Fishbites and the Gulp Surf Bytes. But they work great. Much better than I ever expected they would. They are easy to take along and easy to use. And they absolutely catch fish,” he said.

## TECHNIQUES

When the tide cycle works perfectly, Reames floats into these creeks as the tide is rising. He drift fishes with soft plastics on jigheads. And he floats with the tide, only using his paddle to steer.

Redfish are his main target, but he also catches speckled trout, flounder and the occasional black drum this way.

Once the tide turns and begins falling out, he likes to beach his kayak. Then it’s time to get out and wade fish.

“As soon as enough of a beach or an oyster mound is exposed, I’ll park the kayak. And I’ll fish two different ways at the same time,” he said. “I’ll put a live bait, Fishbite or Gulp Surf Byte on a Carolina rig, cast it out, then put that rod in a rodholder on my kayak. And I’ll use another rod to cast artificial lures.”

This method allows him to work different depths, different





Brian Cope

parts of the creek, and use different lures, all in a small area. He stresses making sure your rod and rod holder are secure to your kayak before leaving a baited rod there.

“When a redfish hits that rod, it will literally turn your kayak on its side. Sometimes I use an Engel cooler with rod holders attached. I make sure it is strapped down, and even a small redfish will rearrange it when it first hits,” he said.

### NO TIME TO HURRY ➤

Reames usually has more luck when the tide is moving in either direction. **ABOVE:** Spinning reels in 2000 to 3000 sizes are good choices for this type of fishing.



Brian Cope

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## NO TIME TO HURRY

Reames said that anglers need to commit to a full day when fishing like this. That's mainly because most of the creeks he fishes simply aren't navigable at low tide, even in a kayak.

"If you were in a dire emergency, you could get out as long as you don't mind deep scratches in your kayak from dragging it over oyster mounds. But it's not easy. And in some creeks where oysters give way to pluff mud, you're basically stuck until the tide begins coming back in," he said.

Of course, anglers can always leave before the tide gets to dead low, but Reames said that defeats the purpose of this type of fishing.

"You'll always find the most action if you can fish both the outgoing and incoming tides. That moving water is what really gets the fish in a feeding mood. In order to do that, you have to allow yourself to get stranded at low tide. And like I mentioned earlier, dead low tide can be phenomenal on some days anyway," he said.

Reames said that's also why anglers need to check the calendar and the tide charts to make sure they have enough daylight for fishing these creeks.

"Some days, the tide and time just don't work out. And on some days, it all lines up to fish certain creeks but not others. And on some days, you'll only have enough in your favor to catch either high or low tide, but not both," he said.



Brian Cope

Reames has explored often enough that when he looks at the tide chart, he already has a good idea of where he's going.

"Exploring is a big part of it for me. On some days, I'll explore much more than I fish if the tide isn't favorable. And that's how I've come to know so many areas and what the tide cycle needs to be in order to fish them," he said. ■

Luckily this cooler, with rod holders attached, was secured to the kayak when a redfish bit. **ABOVE:** Dalton Reames enters skinny creeks with a kayak, then dismounts to wade once the tide drops low enough.



The right pair of shoes is essential when fishing these skinny creeks on foot.

## CHOOSE THE RIGHT SHOES

One of the most important pieces of gear for this type of fishing is the right pair of shoes. Some of these creeks have oyster mounds scattered throughout them. Others are completely lined with oysters. Either way, you'll be stepping on plenty of razor-sharp shells that can slice through the wrong pair of shoes – or through your feet if you're wearing shoes that get sucked off by pluff mud.

He's tried several brands, but Reames is a big believer in KEEN's Newport H2 closed-toe sandals with Vibram soles.

"The bungee laces and the heel strap allow you to cinch them as tight as necessary. The closed toe protects the front of your feet. And the soles are perfect for walking in these creeks. I've never once worried about anything slicing through them," he said.

A nice bonus is that once he's out of the creek, these shoes are easy to loosen and slip off, then back on once back at the boat ramp.

"It sounds like a little thing. But I can't stress how important wearing the right pair of shoes is when fishing like this. This is no place for open-toed sandals, Crocs, or an old pair of sneakers," he said. ■



**Brian Cope** of Borden, S.C. is the editor of *Carolina Sportsman Magazine* and *CarolinaSportsman.com*. Reach him at [brianc@sportsmannetwork.com](mailto:brianc@sportsmannetwork.com)



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# FISHING THE MULLET RUN

INVASION OF MULLET TURNS ON  
THE GAMEFISH BITE. ■ By Mike Marsh

**W**hen the fall mullet run is underway, waters churn with gamefish feeding frenzies.

Striped mullet, which anglers also call jumping mullet, finger mullet and other names, migrate along the Carolina coasts, often forming gigantic schools.

Mullet imitations abound, but styles and colors change constantly. Professional guides who are on the water every day must keep their clients “in the fish” to earn a living. So anglers should pay attention to the lures they choose.

Capt. Mike McDonald of Gul-R-Boy Guide Service (843-546-3625), fishes South Carolina’s Winyah Bay, launching his boat from South Island Ferry Landing. His favorite lure is a soft plastic because it catches speckled trout, red drum and flounder.

“My go-to lure is a Bass Assassin,” McDonald said. “The best color is Purple Chicken. It has a purple back, silver belly and chartreuse tail. The bright tail is constantly blinking, saying ‘Here I am!’ while the other colors make it look exactly like a mullet. Another good search bait is a 3-inch Z-Man 10X Tough MinnowZ in Opening Night color.”

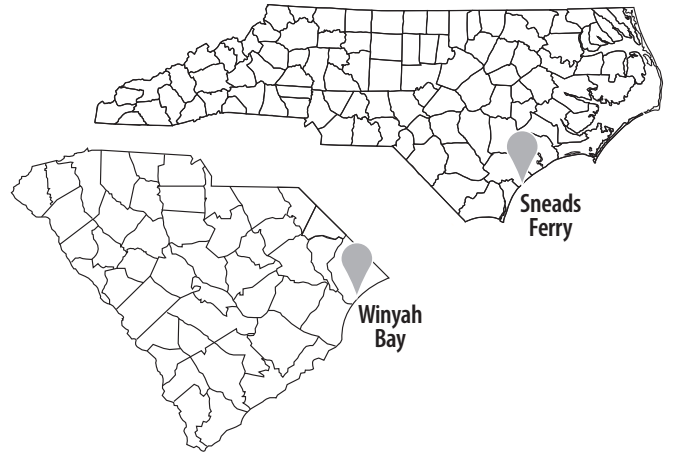
McDonald rigs soft plastics on a white, ¼-ounce jighead for fishing most areas. However, he downsizes to a ⅛-ounce jighead when he fishes oyster beds.

“I keep the rod tip high to prevent the lure sinking deep enough to snag on oysters,” he said. “If I lose a couple of lures, I fish it on a Cajun Thunder or Comal Tackle Reddi Rattle float. I snatch the line twice to make the float click twice and let the lure settle until the float stands straight up before I do it again. If it doesn’t stand straight up, the lure is inside a fish’s mouth or hung in shells.”

## LOOK FOR OYSTER BEDS

When he arrives at a likely spot in the marsh, he looks for schools with big, 6- to 12-inch mullet. As the tide falls, they gather at the mouths of small drains. If he spots oyster beds, he concentrates his efforts around them.

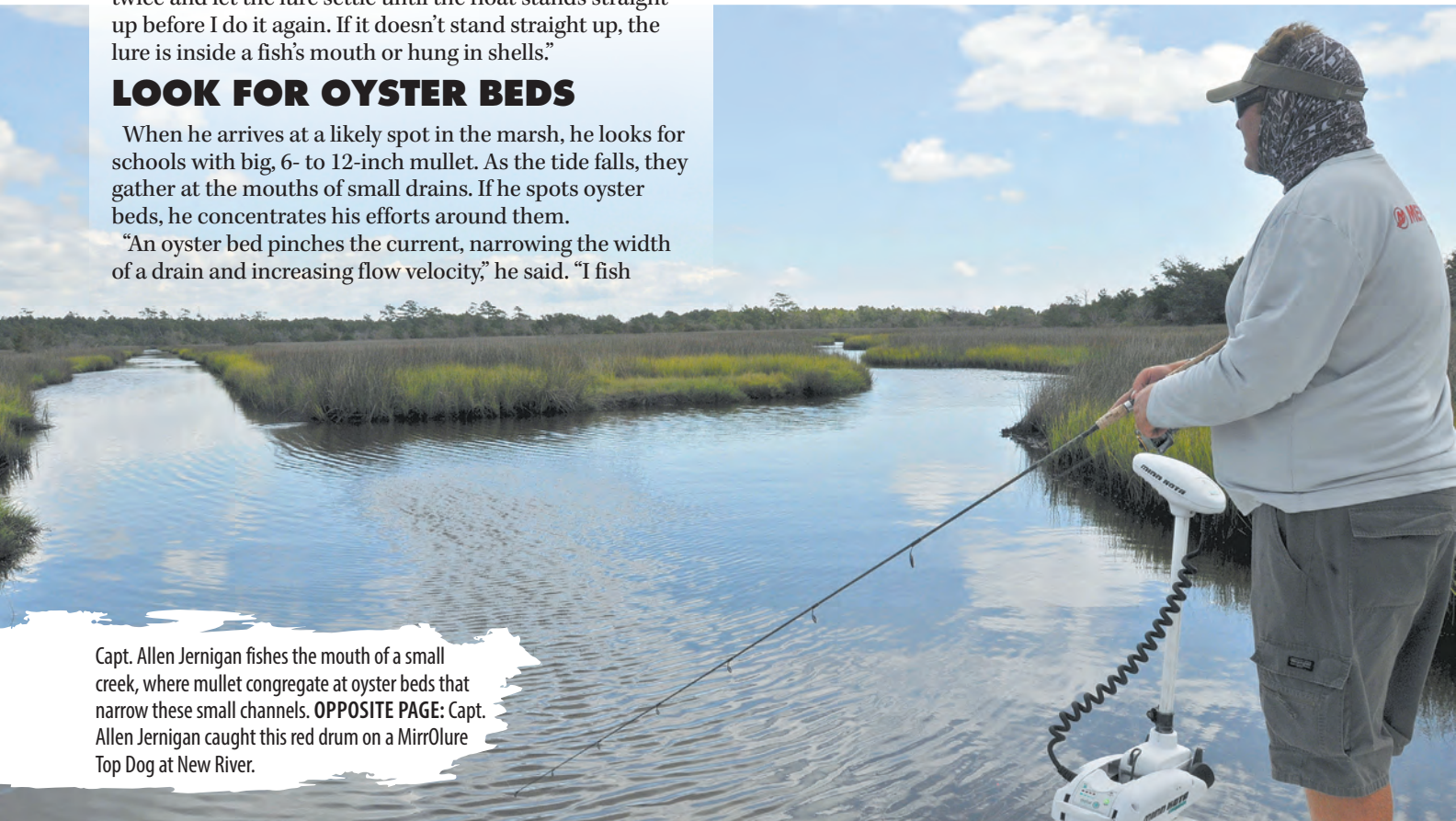
“An oyster bed pinches the current, narrowing the width of a drain and increasing flow velocity,” he said. “I fish



upstream, downstream and on top of it. If I see mullet showering, I cast a topwater lure. My favorite topwater lure is a Heddon Super Spook Jr. in rainbow color (X9236SPTM). Trout really love that lure in the fall because it looks like a mullet. It works great anywhere during low-light hours, even when you don’t see mullet showering. Red drum really light it up then, too.”

Capt. Allen Jernigan of Breadman Ventures (910-467-1482) and Team Bumpin Mullet fishes the Southern Redfish Cup and Professional Redfish League. He also prefers topwater lures for red drum when mullet schools swirl. He guides at North Carolina’s New River, launching his boat at Snead’s Ferry BAA.

“I use a MirrOlure She Pup,” Jernigan said. “But I replace the factory hooks with VMC Permasteel 4X-Strong treble hooks. If you hang a big bull red, they hold better than factory hooks. They are also sharper so I get more hookups. My favorite colors are pink, white or blue-and-green. The redfish are below, looking up at all of those mullet swimming on the surface. When



Capt. Allen Jernigan fishes the mouth of a small creek, where mullet congregate at oyster beds that narrow these small channels. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Capt. Allen Jernigan caught this red drum on a MirrOlure Top Dog at New River.



they hear that walking sound, they say 'Hey, what's that?' The lure draws such a powerful reaction strike that I have seen them come from 10 feet away, making a wake to the lure to strike it."

## SPINNERBAITS, POPPING CORKS

Jernigan looks for redfish making dimples and pushes in open water, or for their backs and tails sticking up from the shallow shoals and potholes. When mullet schools swim by their favorite ambush points, redfish explode on them because they are feeding ravenously, fattening for the oncoming colder weather.

"If they get so zoned in on mullet in shallow water that they won't hit a topwater lure, I cast a spinnerbait and work it beneath the mullet," he said. "Redfish will pound the spinnerbait when they can't detect a topwater lure above a big mullet mass."

Jernigan uses a Cajun Thunder Thunder Spin. He rigs it with a pink-and-green Saltwater Assassin paddle tail on a yellow jig-head. The lure's heavy-duty frame can withstand the strike and fight pressures exerted by a 36-inch red drum.

The same spinnerbait and topwater lures also catch speckled trout. However, when Jernigan fishes for specks specifically, he often works a popping cork.



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



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## FISHING THE MULLET RUN

“Use a Four Horsemen oval cork,” he said. “The wire through the float is so strong it won’t bend and it is weighted so you can sling it a mile. I tie on 30 inches of 20-pound leader and a 1/8-ounce jighead with a Saltwater Assassin in opening night color. If I am in an area where the trout were hitting in the morning and have shut off, I look for a nearby drop-off of 4 to 8 feet and cast the popping cork rig. I pop it twice and the light jig allows the lure to fall slowly with tail wiggling. It’s so tempting that a trout can’t stand it.”

### CHOOSE YOUR COLORS

Capt. Mike Taylor of Taylor Made Charters (252-725-2623) fishes North Carolina’s Neuse and White Oak rivers, Queen’s Creek and nearby ICW and inlet areas. His favorite lure is a 5-inch Berkley Gulp Saltwater Paddle Shad.

“It is a phenomenal lure for redfish and trout,” Taylor said. “It is identical in size to the mullet during the fall run. Pearl white is a good color in any water. But if the water is really dark, I use root beer with a chartreuse tail.”

Taylor rigs it on a 1/8-ounce jighead and uses it as a swimbait, casting it along shallow edges, at oyster beds and in grass beds at high tide. He also fishes it as a twitch bait in small creeks near Bogue, Bear and Browns inlets. Casting the lure, he lets it sink to the bottom on a tight line. Then he pops it up twice with the rod tip and lets it fall to the bottom again.

Always watching for mullet with predatory fish crashing them, he keeps a topwater lure rigged and ready. His favorites are the



Jernigan’s rods stay loaded with lures and ready for action this time of year.

MirrOlure She Pup, Heddon Super Spook and Super Spook Jr., and Rapala Skitter Walk.

“I like bigger topwater lures when it’s windier and rougher and use smaller ones when it’s calm,” he said. “With the Skitter Walk, I like the green top, silver sides and white belly. For all MirrOlure Top Dog series lures I like the 808 color (orange belly, gold sides and black back) or a pink belly with gold sides and black back. With Spooks, I use chartreuse with silver or gold sides. Greens and silvers make lures look like mullet in clear water and golds and oranges make them look like mullet in dark water. Mullet change colors with the water clarity. ■

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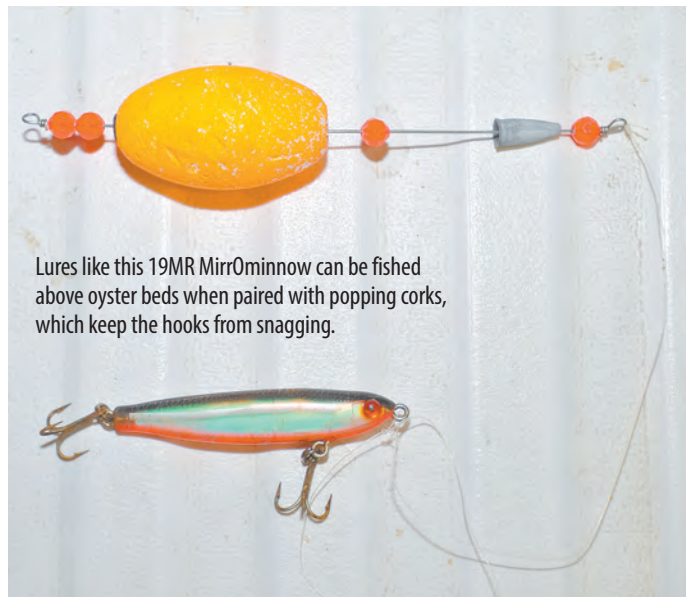
Dine and Shop in Historic Henderson, NC

# TOSS THEM A TWITCHER

Capt. Mike Taylor was the only guide of the three interviewed for this feature who said one of his favorite lures is a subsurface hard plastic. The advent of the soft plastic revolution has nearly relegated the use of hard plastics to a dying artform. His go-to hard lures are MirrOlure 17MR and 27MR twitch baits in the classic 808 color (orange belly, gold sides, black back). However, that only touches the surface of the many MirrOlure mullet-like styles, sizes and colors that indicate the overall effectiveness of subsurface, hard plastic twitch baits.

The original MirrOlure classics were the TT series and 52M series. The flat-sided TT (Tiny Trout) has specks on its sides, which distinguish it from the solid color sides and rounder profile of the 52M. The TT also sinks slower than the 52M, which has a sinking rate of approximately one foot per second. These original lipless twitch baits are reeled with a cast, countdown, reel, stop, twitch retrieve that imparts darting action to the lure.

The 17MR MirrOdine and, more recently, its larger version, the 27MR MirrOdine, were designed specifically to use as suspending twitch baits. That means they are more buoyancy-neutral. So they do not sink as fast when the retrieve is paused. They also have a different body shape that allows them to dig in and swim with a side-to-side wobble during a steady retrieve. The TT and 52M have little side-to-side wiggle or diving capability and are therefore more dependent upon the angler to impart lifelike movements by making pauses and twitches in the retrieve.



Lures like this 19MR MirrOminnow can be fished above oyster beds when paired with popping corks, which keep the hooks from snagging.

"The 17MR and 27MR are absolute murder for fishing the rivers," Taylor said. "They catch everything – speckled trout, red drum, largemouth bass, bowfin. You name the fish and it will strike these lures. I fish them along shorelines, grass bed edges, oyster beds, boat docks and anywhere else I see schools of mullet working."

Mullet Skin is a recent finish that makes the 27MR lure look exactly like a mullet. The model number is MRCS27-Mullet. ■

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It's easy to haul into the dove field where it doubles as a seat, and it's just as easy to carry onto the beach, river

banks, piers, kayaks, paddleboards or boats.

The interior floor gently slopes to the center where the drain plug is located, so melted ice quickly and completely drains while sitting upright.

The padding on the lid makes it nice for sitting or standing, and the textured feet keep it from sliding while in the boat or truck. The attached bottle opener is a nice touch.

The KULA is available in 5-gallon and 2.5-gallon sizes and numerous colors.

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



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The MR300 offers a 15-foot zone of protection against skeeters. This

new addition to the company's product line uses the same proven, battery-free, scent-free, mess-free and DEET-free technology that we've all grown accustomed to from Thermacell products.

Add Thermacell's new Multi-Insect Repellent Refills and you'll chase off the black flies and no-see-ums as well as mosquitos.

Don't put up with pesky insects. Get the MR300 and focus on more important things, like catching fish!

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

## GATORZ EYEWEAR DELTA M4

The Delta M4 from Gatorz Eyewear offers full coverage with its squarish frame and large lenses. It's the perfect combination of comfort, function and style.

Heat-treated for strength and durability, the hand-crafted aluminum frames are easily adjusted, including at the temples and nose, to conform to your face, providing a comfortable fit for a piece of gear that's essential for enjoying the outdoors no matter what the sun's mood is. The construction offers unmatched durability.

High-quality TRURAY lenses give 100 percent UV protection and are available in several polarized styles and numerous colors applicable to any outdoor situation or activity. The anti-scratch lens coatings

offer worry-free wear and crystal clear vision. The dual 5-barrel hinges are made of stainless steel and securely riveted in place. Gatorz are made in the U.S.A.

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



**SOUND & SEA >**

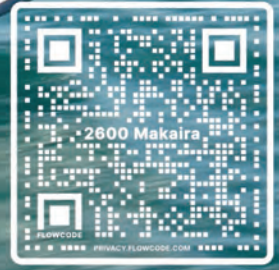
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During the fall season, use bigger nets than you would in spring or summer.



Chris Burrows

# CATCHING BAIT

CAST NET SKILLS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CATCHING FALL BAIT

**O**kay, sometimes you can catch king mackerel on dead bait nearly as well as you can on live. But the fall in the Carolinas is most definitely not that time. When the kings hit the beaches in October, they are coming to gorge on the waves of big menhaden present at the same time.

Mullet and bluefish are often present as well, but it's usually the big pogies that get the job done in October. Forget the skirts, or anything fancy. A single, naked pogie on two treble hooks is the most deadly-effective fall king mackerel bait of all time. Literally every citation king I have caught while targeting them has come on a big, single, naked bait.

Menhaden in the fall can be a great deal trickier to net than late spring or summer bait. The smaller bait common in the warmest months tends to run right up onto the beach and hang around. But fall bait tends to move. Filling your

livewells in October can often be difficult. So anglers must find ways to compensate for the greater difficulty.

First, you need the correct net for the season. You need a minimum of a 10-foot net in October, and 12-foot is preferable. Perhaps even more importantly, you need enough weight on the net (the aggregate weight of the lead on the lead line) to get the net to go down when it hits the water.

## FIND THE PROPER WEIGHT

Tackle companies often push and sell too many nets that are just too light for big, active fall baits. For example, the 10-foot Betts Super Pro is weighted at just 14 pounds. If you must throw that net at a school of bait in 30 feet of water, your haul is probably going to be a bit lighter than you would prefer. On the charter boat, we ultimately went to a custom 10-foot net that weighed in at

more than 18 pounds on the lead line. The additional 4 pounds made a huge difference in deep water.

The mono on the net also makes a difference. We experimented for a while with nets constructed of a thinner mono. The net definitely got down quicker, but some durability issues quickly became apparent.

Obviously thicker mono is going to be more durable. But the thicker gauge slows the rate of sink. The size of the gaps in the net are vital. In the fall, nothing smaller than 5/8-inch mesh will do the job. The bigger the gap, the quicker the sink. Once again, you have to get the net down.



**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.

Throwing a net at fall bait requires good boat positioning from the captain to intercept the school while drifting as much as possible. And it forces the actual net thrower to use some good techniques.

## SPIN AND THROW

Everyone has their own twist on how to load and throw a net, but they all have one constant. Just like swinging a golf club, you must maintain acceleration through the process of throwing, right up until you release the net from your hands. You can only get poor to moderate results if the technique isn't there.

The late, great, Capt. Roger Gales used to spin with the net in a complete circle, using his feet and body rather than just his arms to accelerate and launch. If he wanted to throw at a spot that was at 11 o'clock relative to the bow of the boat, he started by pointing directly at 11 o'clock, with the net already coiled and loaded.

Being left-handed, Capt. Roger started to turn his body toward his left shoulder, going counterclockwise, and slowly speeding up the same way. The last third of the circle was where he ramped up to full effort, and he began the release of the net when he was pointed somewhere between 11:30 and 12 o'clock.

When he reached the 11 o'clock point where he had started, only the loop to retrieve the net was left in his hands. Once I figured out that (being a righty) I had to load the net and spin the exact opposite way that Capt. Roger did, I found out

that it took very little effort to fling and open my net.

## PRACTICE ON LAND

My results got markedly better in terms of how much bait I brought to the boat. Even if I had to throw the net a bunch of times, I was a lot less sore than before, where my technique was a lot more violent and often made me visit the chiropractor on non-fishing days.

With whatever net and whichever technique you eventually land on, it's always a good idea to practice on dry land before you get the net wet. Play around with it a bit and find what works for you best. Don't be afraid to change things up and just see if a tweak here and there can improve your cast net game.

You don't have to throw the net a certain way just because your buddy does. Just make sure your lead line is free of tangles and that you're accelerating the whole way through the throw. Pretty soon, you'll be competent enough that you'll have to throw at the side of the bait balls, rather than the center, so you don't catch too many fall menhaden. You only need what you're going to fish with, and then maybe a few more for some fresh chum. In terms of bait, it's all you really need for catching some smoker kings. ■

### CAST NET TECHNIQUES:

Many techniques allow anglers to make fully open and accurate cast net throws. Some look awkward during the process, but have great results. Experiment with different ideas until you find what works best for you while putting as little strain on your body as possible.

### COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE ➤

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## COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE

Jerry Dilsaver

# JERK KING MACKEREL ON DIRTY GRITS

**T**his recipe combines two foods most sportsmen like. And if two things taste good independently, it's almost certain they'll taste good together.

Jerked fish is a treat and most folks like grits. This recipe not only combines jerk fish with grits, but it dirties up the grits for even more flavor. I'll promise you this is going to taste even better than most folks imagine.

October is a great month to catch king mackerel, which is used for the fish portion of this recipe.

Some folks consider king mackerel not a prime fish for the dinner table, but I like them and prepare them in a variety of ways. This recipe is one that most readers probably haven't tried, or even heard of before. I like it and I'll recommend it as a good way to try king mackerel. It might even change your mind and convince you to eat it prepared in other ways. ■

### TIP!

Add more Half and Half and use less water to make your grits creamier.

Cook the king mackerel fillets just long enough to let the jerk seasoning penetrate the fish. **INSET:** Jerked fish is delicious, and creamy grits are too. Combine the two for an even more tasty dish.

# JERK KING MACKEREL ON DIRTY GRITS

I call this a “why not” recipe. A bunch of us were sitting around one day talking about cooking fish and the subject turned to king mackerel.

Someone said, “Have you ever jerked a king?” Wow, no, but only because I hadn’t thought of it. Now that I have, it has become a regular method and I find it tasty.

I use and recommend Walkerswood jerk seasoning. It’s a wet jerk seasoning available in mild or hot & spicy. The mild is a bit salty with good jerk flavor. I love the hot & spicy flavor, but have to be careful about using too much – and I like spicy foods.

I like yellow old fashioned grits and the ones made at the Old Mill of Guilford in Oak Ridge, N.C. are my favorite. I often omit or limit salt in my recipes. Well, grits need some

salt. I use a teaspoon.

The preparation for the grits is creamy, but not runny.

I like to use cast iron as it heats evenly to the edge of the pan. I eat a lot of fish very rare and pan seared, but suggest cooking these a little longer to give the jerk seasoning time to penetrate the fish. A half minute to a minute makes a big difference.

Plate this and serve it as soon as the fish is done. The grits should still be warm and just the right temperature to eat. Give it a try and I believe you’ll prepare it again. It’s a different way to eat king mackerel. I enjoy it and believe you will also. ■

## PREPARATION:

1. Slice the cherry tomatoes into halves and chop the green onions.
  2. Cut the king mackerel fillet into 1/4 to 1/2 inch slices.
  3. Rub the king mackerel slices with the jerk seasoning and allow it to marinate a few minutes.
  4. Pour the Half and Half and water into a large pot.
  5. Add a splash of cooking oil to the liquid in the pot and stir well.
  6. Bring the liquid to a boil and thoroughly whisk in the grits.
  7. Allow the mixture to return to a boil and reduce the heat to simmer.
  8. Cook the grits on simmer for 8 to 12 minutes (check the directions for the brand of grits used) until they begin to thicken. Stir often.
  9. When the grits first begin to thicken, stir in the butter, the mozzarella cheese and half the cheddar cheese.
  10. Set the grits aside.
  11. While the grits are cooking, brown the sausage while breaking it up fine.
  12. Remove the sausage from the pan, and with medium heat, sear the king mackerel slices in the drippings to your preferred doneness.
  13. Remove the king mackerel slices and add the garlic, corn kernels and half the green onion to the pan.
  14. Sauté the vegetables a minute or two to allow them to warm and absorb some of the flavor from the pan.
  15. Stir the sauteed vegetables, drippings and sausage into the grits.
  16. Cover a plate or shallow bowl with the grits mixture, then add several of the king mackerel slices and top with cherry tomatoes, green onions and lightly sprinkle a little more cheddar cheese.
- This is one of those meals that is rather difficult to pair with sides. I like to add okra, either fried or steamed, and fried squash

## TIP!

Cast iron pans heat evenly to the edge of the pan and are great for this recipe with just a light covering of oil.

## INGREDIENTS:

- ¾ Pound king mackerel fillet
- ¼ Pound ground sausage
- 1 Cup yellow grits
- 2 ½ Cups Half and Half
- 1 ½ Cups water
- ½ Cup mozzarella cheese
- 1 Cup cheddar cheese
- ½ Cup cherry tomatoes
- ½ Cup kernel corn
- ½ Cup green onion
- 2 TSP minced garlic
- 2 TBL Walkerswood Jerk Marinade (mild or spicy)
- ½ Stick butter
- Splash of cooking oil
- 2 TSP salt



works too. I believe cornbread is the best bread to accompany this and jalapeno cornbread or muffins sit well with me. If you like fried or baked plantains, they are the perfect dessert. If this doesn’t suit your fancy or you can’t find any, just remember that ice cream goes with everything. ■

## SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY



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

Phillip Gentry



With so much bait accumulating during fall migrations, matching the hatch is often the best strategy for kayak anglers.

Phillip Gentry

## IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, JOIN 'EM

LIVE BAIT IS TOUGH TO BEAT IN THE FALL, SO TEAM UP WITH IT

**A**h fall, a time when every shrimp, bait-fish, crab, and anything else on a fish's diet in freshwater or salt, moves from Point A to Point B. Fall is a great time to be on the water in a kayak as well. All of the recreational boaters are sitting in the stands at the football stadium and half of the fishing traffic is sitting in a deer stand.

One thing that may not be high on the list of autumn activities is throwing an artificial lure. Although artificial baits might be the right choice in a few situations, it's hard to compete with the real thing when there is so much of it parading through the water.

Kayak fishing with live bait adds a bit of challenge to an already challenging sport. It's very simple to pack along a box of crankbaits, or soft plastics and hook rigs and just go. But live bait requires special arrangements, especially live

baits that live in the water and therefore need water to remain alive.

### STOCK UP WITH BAIT

Depending on whether you're fishing fresh or saltwater and the species of bait you want to use, kayak anglers have several options available to stock up with bait just prior to and sometimes during their main fishing outing.

For many, the prospect of throwing a cast net from a kayak is a daunting task. However, a 6 to 8-foot cast net represents a good investment in terms of weight and space for catching bait, even from a kayak, and can be done in either salt or freshwater.

With some practice, throwing a cast net from a standing position in a kayak is not as hard as it may appear. Stability and balance are required. Or if possible, paddle to a sandy area, get out of the boat and walk the shoreline casting the net.

Larger baitfish can be caught using con-

ventional rod and reel methods.

### BAIT ON THE GO

Freshwater catfish, striped bass and a host of saltwater species will readily take whole, live or fresh cut baits. These baits can be collected by bringing a smaller conventional fishing rod with lighter line and small hooks to catch them and store in a cooler, baitwell, or trolling bucket.

It's not necessary to collect an entire days' worth of bait before moving to the intended species as the predators won't be far away from the baitfish and the kayak angler can fish for both targets from the same location. ■



Phillip Gentry of Waterloo, S.C., is an avid outdoorsman. If it swims, walks, hops, flies or crawls, he's usually not too far behind.

## BAIT CONSIDERATIONS

A large dipnet or smaller landing net can be used to catch floating bait from the kayak. Crabs and shrimp frequently cling to structure or may be free-floating close enough to the boat to scoop up.

If on an extended stay, pack a fish or crab trap (where legal) to capture bait and keep handy when fishing. The trap can be baited the day or evening before and left out overnight to collect bait. The bait can be collected periodically throughout the day or extended stay trip.

Crab traps can be continually rebaited with fish carcasses if your kayak fishing trip includes keeping a few fish for the table. Blue crabs can be stored in a closed but breathable container using only wet grass or moss to cover them to keep the creatures from dehydrating.

A word or two about on-board livewells is in order if your kayak fishing adventure takes you far from an area where cast-netting or trapping bait is possible. On board containers run the gamut from specially designed insulated coolers to a simple 5-gallon bucket with a lid and possibly a battery-operated aerator to add some oxygen to the stored water.

Some baits may require water circulation to keep them from suffocating in static water. At around 8 pounds per gallon, even the largest kayaks are going to limit the amount of water you can safely carry. Add in the weight of circulation pumps and batteries for a power source and you can see whether or not including these baits in your arsenal is a critical choice.

Fortunately, the cooler the water and air temperature, the longer any type of stored water bait system will function to keep bait alive and healthy. ■

## BEST BETS

### NORTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Crappie

**WHERE** — High Rock Lake

**HOW** — Target boat docks and piers that are over or near water with at least 10 feet of depth. Use slip corks, split shot, and No. 2 Aberdeen hooks. Cast as far under structure as possible. Set the cork to ride between 2 to 3 feet, or deeper if fish are down in the water column.

**LAUNCH** — High Rock Lake has several public boat ramps and numerous dump-in sites around the lake. Check out <https://www.ncpaws.org/ncwrcmaps/boatingaccessareas>

**INSIDER TIP** — A longer rod will be useful for pitching the slip cork rig into hard-to-reach spots.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

**WHAT** — Speckled trout and slot redfish

**WHERE** — Ashley, Cooper and Stono rivers

**HOW** — Look for tight schools of speckled trout as the water cools. Live shrimp 18 to 24 inches under a popping cork is tough to beat. Let the cork drift through bend areas in a tributary to a larger creek. Also look for seams in the current anywhere you find cleaner water.

**LAUNCH** — [www.dnr.sc.gov/boatingaccess](http://www.dnr.sc.gov/boatingaccess)

**INSIDER TIP** — Catch your own shrimp in shallow water with a cast net. They are easy to spot flipping in the water this time of year.

## HOBIE LIVEWELL V2

After creating arguably one of the best livewells specifically fitted to their line of fishing kayaks, Hobie has now come out with their newly redesigned Hobie Livewell V2.

The new model sports a fresh color scheme, modern lines and more built-in features than ever before. This livewell is plug-and-play with most Hobie kayaks and includes all the same built-in functionality of their original models.

Upgrades over their prior model livewells include: a high quality sealed marine switch for ON/OFF control, adjustable downspout for easy water level control, and removable tank partitions for keeping live bait healthy and out of hard-to-reach places.

Also included is a high output pump that circulates aerated water to keep bait alive. Plus, the battery and charger are included as well.

One of the best new features is an adjustable downspout for water level control and drainage. Since the tank holds up to 8 gallons of water, adjusting the water level without having to pick up the whole tank is a major plus.

Additional kayak angler-friendly features include three vertical rod holders with pre-marked locations for adding more, a removable tank partition that provides a rounded surface for keeping bait healthy, and heavy-duty straps to secure the Livewell V2 to the cargo area.



**MSRP is \$450.**  
Available at [www.hobie.com](http://www.hobie.com)

Hobie has redesigned its line of kayak fishing livewells with more features to help keep bait and fish alive and healthy.

**MORE NEW GEAR >**

SALTWATER

STATE COASTAL WATERS REGULATIONS (0 - 3 miles)

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

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

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

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

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Old Town's Sportsman Salty PDL 120 offers many features in a lightweight package.





# THE KINGS OF OCTOBER

King mackerel fishing is fast and furious this month

**W**hen the water and air cool in October, the king mackerel action fires off big time along the southern N.C. Coast. Kings sense the approaching colder weather and begin feeding aggressively.

Even better, they're available for all fishermen, with a bite that begins at the pier ends and extends offshore for 20 miles or more.

"I really like king fishing in October," said Capt. Cane Faircloth of Ollie Raja Charters in Holden Beach ([www.holdenbeach-fishingcharters.com](http://www.holdenbeach-fishingcharters.com), 910-367-2998). "The mornings are cool enough to wear bibs and a hoodie while catching bait. But you'll be in shorts and a T-shirt when the action heats up.

"The really hot action used to be a little earlier in the month. But over the past 10 years or so it has shifted a little and peaks more around the middle of the month.

Once the water cools to around 72 degrees, king fishing can get almost magical."

Faircloth said kings of all sizes are grouped together and feeding hard during October. They tend to move around in the general area of the inlets and along the beaches out through the Cape Fear River Channel to the Cape Fear Sea Buoy, the former location of the Sea Buoy, Lighthouse Rocks and the artificial reefs in this area.

Faircloth said kings move with bait and clean water and may be in one location in the morning and another in the afternoon, but will usually be feeding.

Faircloth said the keys to finding the right spot are locating schools of bait and the right water. He said bait is easier to confirm as you can see it on the surface or fishfinder.

The best water has some green tint, but learning to read it can be difficult. When you don't know, pick a spot and troll for a

while. If kings are there, they'll let you know.

"We usually slow troll live pogies, as many can be caught in a cast net and we can go fishing," Faircloth said. "I use a 10-foot cast net and recommend fishermen learn to throw a larger net. Sometimes bait outruns smaller nets and it can be very frustrating.

If the bluefish are in or if it's a tournament and we're concentrating on larger kings, we take the time to catch some bluefish for bait. Always carry some frozen cigar minnows in case there isn't any bait that morning."

Faircloth said to troll multiple surface lines at different distances behind the boat, with at least one line below the surface. If hungry kings are in the area, you'll know pretty quickly. ■

Expect to see numerous big king mackerel caught along North Carolina's southern coast as fall weather eases in.

**LITTLE RIVER BLACK DRUM ➤**

# BORDERTOWN BLACK DRUM

Little River is a black drum haven

**L** By Brian Cope  
 ittle River is a great fall fishing destination, and anglers can expect to catch a mixed bag in the small creeks and the grass-lined banks of the main waterway. The jetties are also a great option when the weather isn't too rough.

Speckled trout, redfish, flounder and black drum make up the list of usual suspects anglers can catch in the waterways around this fishing village which sits on the border of North and South Carolina.

Black drum are a bit of a wild card. Anglers catch them mostly as bycatch when targeting the other species. But this is a great time of year to catch them. And anglers can improve their odds of catching them by fishing tighter to cover than they normally do for the other inshore species.

Soft plastic lures like the Z-Man Trout Trick will catch all of these fish. And no matter which species you find, if you'll make your next few casts as close as possible to whatever structure is nearby, you stand a good chance of hooking into a black drum. If that nearby structure happens to be wood such as sunken logs or the footings of a dock, then black drum are even more likely to be there.

D.O.A. shrimp and soft plastic swimbaits are also good options.

Black drum will readily bite soft plastic lures, especially when they are presented tight to cover.



Brian Cope

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High tide, or at least a rising tide, is usually best for targeting black drum because that's when the majority of structure gets flooded. These fish will flock to those areas quickly as soon as the water is high enough.

A great way to spend a day here is by starting to fish just as the tide is coming in. Cast topwater lures for speckled trout until the tide is full. Then pitch those soft plastics around oyster mounds, grass-lined banks and around docks.

Specks will continue to bite and lucky anglers will also hook into a redfish or two. And those who want to target the black drum can do so by casting in the manner mentioned earlier — very tight to structure.

Medium to medium-light rods are good for this method, and 15-pound test braided line used in conjunction with fluoro-carbon leaders in similar sizes is sufficient. It's best to keep a somewhat loose drag since some bull redfish are still around. Hooking one of these is always a possibility when fishing here this time of year. ■

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Russ Burwell caught this false albacore with Capt. Lee Parsons of Wrightsville Beach, NC.



Craig Holt

# NEARSHORE FALSE ALBACORE

**In** By Craig Holt  
October just about any guide from Nags Head to Holden Beach will spend time in nearshore waters throwing lures at schools of false albacore.

That's because the water fills with tiny glass minnows pouring out of N.C.'s many inlets.

"The size of the lures really doesn't matter because what we cast is a lot bigger than a glass minnow," said saltwater guide Jeff Cronk of Swansboro (Fish4LifeCharters). "When albies are feeding, matching the hatch doesn't matter much."

Expert anglers may use fly tackle, depending upon their casting expertise but most anglers stick to spin tackle.

"I like to throw Maria jigs or other types of hard baits that are 2- to 3-inches long," said Cronk (336-558-5697). "But I'll throw top-water lures if fish are hammering on top."

Maria jigs are shaped 3- to 4-inch metal, difficult to obtain but sink readily so anglers can "burn" retrieves across the surface or let them fall. Some anglers troll them. Ten-pound-test braid is Cronk's line of choice.

But no angler can reel fast enough to outrun a motivated false albie, which come in 4- to 14-pound sizes during the fall and can strip 100 to 200 feet of backing in an eye blink.

"I also throw 4½-inch Yo-Zuri Banana Boats and Albie Snax," Cronk said. "I prefer Reilly rods."

## FIND CLEAR WATER

Cronk looks for false albacores in clear water, which sometimes requires a 4-mile run off the beaches. He finds false albies from Bogue to Beaufort Inlets.

"If the water is muddy in the a.m., but you have a 20 to 30 mph southwest wind, it'll clear up the water within a mile of the beach," he said. "But I've also found false albies over live bottoms and artificial reefs."

Cronk likes to land false albies by grabbing the leader about two feet above the lure and lifting fish by the tale.

"You want to immobilize his head because he can shake and put a barb in your hand," he said. "I land big bluefish the same way."

The only problem with a false albacore lifted by the tail is it'll throw up dozens of glass

minnows which, if not cleaned off the deck or gunwales, will "harden like super glue" if not washed off immediately.

Contrary to popular rumor, false albacore meat is delicious when eaten fresh as sushi. After all, false albies are a member of the tuna family. But they don't taste like canned tuna. ■

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# FALLING FOR CRAPPIE ON JORDAN LAKE

CRAPPIE ANGLERS REJOICE  
AS COOLER WEATHER  
HEATS UP THE BITE.

■ By Brian Cope



# CRAPPIE ANGLERS LOVE OCTOBER NO MATTER WHERE THEY FISH.

It's true for Capt. Travis Bradshaw, who loves fishing Jordan Lake this time of year. He runs Pigpen Guide Service (919-669-6989) and fishes this lake year-round, but he especially enjoys doing it this month.

"The summer weather can drag on, even into October, but for the most part, the days begin to get cooler this month and that improves the fishing for crappie, and for other species too," said Bradshaw.

This is also one month that Bradshaw pays particular attention to the moon phase. He notices a big change in crappie behavior leading up to, during, and just after October's full moon.

"The full moon drives crappie into deeper water. So if you're not finding them at the normal depths you've been catching them, look for deeper water on ledges during the full moon phase," he said.

Outside of the full moon phase, Bradshaw said crappie will still be found along ledges throughout the lake. They're not ganged up tightly like they will be later this year, but they are typically grouped up more than they have been in many months.

"October is a transition month for these fish, and for anglers. And you never really know when the weather is going to cool down for good. But it's going to happen at some point this month. It's already cooler at least in the mornings during the early part of the month, but most years, we're still wearing shorts on most days, even if we start the morning off with a hoodie or jacket," he said.

**COOLING OFF** ➤

Anglers can expect to catch a good pile of crappie at Jordan Lake in October. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Capt. Travis Bradshaw enjoys crappie fishing on Jordan Lake this month.



Brian Cope

Anglers can expect to catch crappie in a variety of sizes this month, but later in the month, most will be fatter than they have been all year. **BELOW:** Bradshaw fishes with multiple rods at each corner of his Carolina Skiff.

## COOLING OFF

That's one of the reasons he enjoys fishing so much this month. "In the summer, the strongest bite usually comes in the morning. By the time the sun gets up, the bite tapers off. But this month, especially once it really cools off, the sun will make the bite better. So you can fish longer – all day long really – without the bite slowing down. Plus, we as anglers don't feel like we're broiling under the sun," he said.

One thing that doesn't change this month is Bradshaw's preferred bait.

"Live minnows is as good as it gets," he said. "And I usually stick with smaller-sized minnows."

He also relies on the same method to find crappie this month – his electronics.

"You're going to find them in different places and in different depths. But once you locate them on your electronics, it's just a matter of getting them to bite," he said.

On some days, that's easier said than done. But finding the fish is half the battle. When he locates fish that are lock-jawed, he will move on to find another ledge with crappie.

"Sometimes you'll find fish that just won't bite. It's always tough for some folks to leave an area that they know fish are in. But sometimes you'll find another group that's biting. And you can always go back to the ones with lockjaw later in the day. Some days that's all it takes is a little time, and when you come back, they're ready to feed.

## FORGET THE ANCHOR

For the most part, Bradshaw is trolling over these fish, picking up a few as his minnows pass over or past them. Then he circles back around and passes over them again. That usually

adds a few more to the fishbox. If that doesn't work, he will often troll over them in the opposite direction. Sometimes that really cranks the fish up.



**Brian Cope** of Borden, S.C. is the editor of *Carolina Sportsman Magazine* and *CarolinaSportsman.com*. Reach him at [brianc@sportsmannetwork.com](mailto:brianc@sportsmannetwork.com).



Brian Cope

"If you find a big group and they're biting really good, you might want to use the Spot-Lock feature on your trolling motor to hold you in place. But I prefer to troll very slowly almost always. Sometimes you'll troll through and pick up one or two. Other times you'll troll through and all your rods will go down at once," he said.

Once he has all his rods rigged and baited, he casts them, then places them in rod holders spread throughout his boat. He has rod holders in the front, the back, and the sides of his Carolina Skiff, allowing for multiple anglers and multiple hookups throughout each trip.

"If you want to see a family or a group of friends have some fun, troll slowly with minnows once you find a group of crappie this time of year. At some point, you'll have so many rods bend over that you can't catch them all. But it sure is fun watching everyone try," he said.



## EQUIPMENT ESSENTIALS

Bradshaw prefers a No. 2 Aberdeen hook, but will bump up to a No. 1 when he uses bigger minnows. He uses monofilament anywhere from 4- to 10-pound test, and as much weight as he needs to get his minnow down to the fish.

"I'll use as light a weight as I can, depending on the wind and current. I'll go as heavy as 1/2-ounce when I have to, but it's usually smaller than that," he said. "I prefer to use less weight which allows the minnow to swim around more freely. But sometimes you just don't have a choice."

Many crappie specialists swear by certain lengths of rod. Bradshaw doesn't believe that to be terribly important. But he does like to use rods of different lengths to keep his lines from tangling when he's making turns while trolling.

When it comes to keeping his minnows alive, Bradshaw uses an Engel bait cooler with an aerator attached. But he said on some days, dead minnows work well.

"If you go through all your live minnows and you've got some floaters in the baitwell, don't give up for the day. When the crappie are hungry, they won't turn down a dead minnow."

So what's Bradshaw's overall feeling about crappie fishing on Jordan Lake this month?

"It's probably my favorite month. Fewer boats are on the water, the days are generally cooler but not uncomfortably cold, the fish are beginning to group up tighter and the bite can stay strong all day. We also begin catching some bigger fish this time of year," he said. ■



An aerated cooler is helpful for keeping bait alive.

Brian Cope



Travis Bradshaw caught this black-nosed crappie at Jordan Lake.

Brian Cope

## BLACK-NOSED CRAPPIE

Jordan Lake is home to both white and black crappie. And Bradshaw has even caught a couple of rare black-nosed crappie here.

Black-nosed crappie are all black crappie with a recessive gene. They have a black stripe that runs down their back, all the way from the top of the dorsal fin, down the nose and onto their top lip.

On some black-nosed crappie, the stripe extends under the mouth and on the underside of the fish's body. They are biologically identical to other black crappie, except for those involving hybridization. No pure white crappie has ever been recorded with this trait.

The first black-nosed crappie recorded by fisheries biologists came from Beaver Lake in Arkansas, so they are sometimes called Arkansas crappie or Arkansas black nose crappie. They have since been reported in more than a dozen states, including both Carolinas. They are quite rare though, with many lifelong crappie anglers never having caught or even seen one.

Black-nosed crappie have no trouble breeding, but they were once thought to be sterile. They are even used in fish hatcheries to create hybrid crappie by mating male black-nosed crappie with female white crappie. The result is a hybrid crappie that has the black stripe, although it is slightly less dark. This helps fisheries biologists track the hybrids created while using male black-nosed crappie.

Many fisheries biologists believe the black-nosed crappie has superior eyesight amongst other crappie. Due to certain behaviors they've witnessed from the unique fish, they believe the recessive gene that causes the black stripe also offers them improved vision. ■

**SANTEE STRINGER** ➤

## SANTEE STRINGER

Terry Madewell

Road Runner lures are great options for stripers at Santee this month.



Terry Madewell

# STRIPER SEASON REOPENS

EXPLOSIVE ACTION MARKS EXCELLENT STRIPER OUTLOOK

**T**he big news at Santee Cooper is the striper fishing opens again on Oct. 1, after a 3½ month closure. The closed season is designed to reduce the stress-related mortality of stripers that would be caught and released during that time of year.

Striper fishermen should be excited about this October. Levi Kaczka, SCDNR Regional Biologist for the Santee Cooper lakes, said the status of the striper fishery remains excellent. And the outlook for the fall season is for plenty of stripers within the slot limit to be available to anglers.

Multiple methods are used by anglers to make limit catches during October. First, topwater schooling action is typically great early and late, with topwater lures often producing explosive strikes. Also, swimming baits and jiggging spoons all provide great action. Plus, live bait is pro-

ductive when the fish are not schooling on the surface.

Striper Guide Leroy Suggs, out of Blacks Camp (843-753-2231) on the Diversion Canal, said October is prime time for great striper action.

“The fall forage is abundant and following the bait is the key to finding stripers,” Suggs said. “Huge schools of baitfish roam both lakes Marion and Moultrie and the stripers follow.”

Lures with a bit of flash are lethal on October stripers and the Road Runner Bucktail Pro and Swim-N-Runner in ¾- and ½-ounce sizes are highly effective lures for big fish.

Adding a plastic trailer to the bucktail can enhance the lure and is a good combination. These lures, along with spoons, produce excellent action on stripers.

Suggs said if he can get away from the crowds of other boats chasing stripers, his odds of hooking bigger fish improves.

## HERRING HELPS

“Multiple boats pursuing the same school of stripers impacts the opportunity to hook bigger fish,” he said. “If I can get on an isolated school of fish the catch rate of bigger fish improves.”

Suggs (910-995-1168) said stripers frequently school by size class. And if he hits a school of mostly smaller fish, he’ll change locations looking for keeper-sized fish. Also, by allowing his lures to drop deeper before retrieving he can often hook up with the larger fish. But sometimes larger stripers are absent from some schools.



**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.

## STAY ON THE MOVE

Fishing for stripers and crappie can be excellent this month, but anglers need to stay on the move when the fish aren't cooperating. There's a fine line between having patience and wasting time. Fish areas thoroughly, but if the action is slow, it's best to move on and find fish that are more active.

Live bait is highly effective when stripers are marked on the graph suspended above the bottom and scattered over a large area. In this situation, drifting live blueback herring is an excellent technique.

Suggs said he can see the basic depth of suspended fish on the graph. And he'll drift herring at that depth, or slightly shallower. Stripers will readily move shallower to attack a bait. He said a 2-ounce sinker above a 2-foot leader will usually keep the bait in the targeted zone.

The legal daily limit for Santee Cooper is three stripers per-angler and the slot limit for keeping fish is 23 to 25 inches. However one fish can be kept that's greater than 26 inches as part of the three-fish creel limit. Note that fish in the 25- to 26-inch size (a/k/a the 'no-fry' zone) are not legal to keep. So measuring fish is a necessary practice.

## DEEP WATER CRAPPIE

The most consistent crappie fishing for October is working deeper drops where brush, logs, stumps and other woody cover exists. Crappie love woody cover and forage fish often cluster on these woody features providing increased incentive for crappie to linger around brush.

Veteran crappie fisherman Kevin Davis said October can generate huge slab-crappie action.

Davis said his primary target this month is brush piles along the base of a ledge in water from 20 to 35 feet deep.

"I tightline live minnows around the brushtop first, and then deeper along the edges until I find crappie," Davis said. "Some anglers are highly effective using small jigs, or a jig-minnow combination, fished vertically or by casting. Depth control with this tactic is essential.

"I use my electric motor to position the boat over the top of the targeted cover so I can fish vertically most of the time," he said. "I use rods with sensitive tips so I can detect the light bite typical of deep-water crappie."

Davis said October often produces fat slabs in both lakes Marion and Moultrie. But the crappies tend to move as the forage travels.

"When targeting crappie on deep brush in October I'm patient and will fish an area thoroughly. But I'm ready to move if the action is slow," he said. "At this time of year, crappie holding around deep cover are usually active. And once we find them, the action is wild." ■



Terry Madewell

Fishing deep for crappie this month can result in some absolute slabs.

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Crankbaits are productive lures for bass this time of year.



Dan Kibler

# FIND THE BAIT, FIND THE BASS

LOOK FOR SCHOOLS OF SHAD AND HERRING THIS MONTH

I really love getting on some of our lakes and rivers in the Carolinas in October. The weather is usually great, the fishing is usually great, and you don't have to battle all that boat traffic you see in the late spring and summer.

The big key to catching bass in October – and it's a good time to catch a lot of fish, even if it isn't a great time to catch your personal best – is finding baitfish. Bass are focusing on shad and herring a lot. So you can pattern them really well.

I tend to look for threadfin shad over herring in October. They're easier to locate, back in the creeks, and usually there are bunches of them. I don't need my electronics to find them. You can see them on top with your eyes. If you're in the right place, pods of shad should be everywhere. If there aren't any shad, move.

One of the biggest things a great tournament angler can do is cover a lot of water in a short amount of time. They know

that if the bait isn't there, then the bass aren't there, and they leave.

On the one hand, having lots of shad around is good, because where there are pods of shad, there will be bass. But on the other hand, if there are pods of shad, that means there's a lot for bass to eat besides your lures. That makes finding a bait that fish will react to very important.

## TOPWATER TIPS

I love to fish topwater baits; they are some of my favorite baits ever to catch bass. I didn't always get to use them much in tournament situations, but I love catching bass on top. And this is a great time of year to tie on a buzzbait, a walking bait or a popper.

I usually have all three baits tied on, and I'll fish them throughout the day, because topwaters make noise and create movement on top of the water. Fish that are not necessarily hungry can be competitive, and if they think other fish are feeding at the surface, they may come

up to investigate.

My favorite walking bait is a Rapala Skitter V. My favorite popping bait is an Arashi Cover Pop. I will throw them on 20-pound Suffix braid with a 10- to 12-pound leader of Suffix mono.

## CRANK 'EM UP

The other thing I really like to do in October is fish a crankbait. They will get fish to bite when they're not necessarily hungry. I like to fish a Rapala DT-6 and an OG Slim. The DT-6 is a round bait with good vibration, a very unique thump. The OG Slim is a flat bait with a totally different thump and vibration. It will deflect off cover in a totally different way than a DT-6.



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

**NO ELECTRONICS NEEDED:**

Many lakes throughout the Carolinas have populations of shad and herring. During the fall, big schools of these baitfish are easy to locate even without electronics just by watching the water's surface. Find them and you'll find the bass.



The Rapala Skitter V is a good topwater lure to use in the fall.



Rapala's OG Slim deflects off cover nicely.

I've really begun to like the little version of the OG Slim, an OG Slim Tiny. I fish crankbaits in baitfish colors, shad colors. I like to fish the herring color, and a color that Rapala calls "Big Shad." I'll fish the DT-6 on a 7-foot Lew's cranking rod with a Lew's BB-1 reel with a 6-to-1 or 7-to-1 retrieve ratio. I'll fish the OG Slims on a 6½-foot Lew's cranking rod and the same reel.

**KEY ON COVER**

I said earlier that bass are reasonably easy to pattern in October. That's true – if you can find what kind of cover they're relating to. Fishing around drops and contours is not as important in October – nothing like it is in the spring – because they're concentrating on following bait. And a lot of the creeks the bait is getting in are silted in — that's why they're back there.

Cover is the key. They will get on rock, hardbottom, wood or vegetation. You just have to throw at all types of cover and figure out what they're on. Once you find them, it's reasonably easy to duplicate those kinds of spots. And you can develop a milk run between spots that are very much alike. The only thing is, depending on the creek you're fishing, they might be a mile from the back or all the way to the back.

The only drawback from October bass fishing is that it's not a time of year when fish are ganged up. This isn't May or June when you can catch 15 or 20 in a row on one spot. It's going to be one or two here and one or two there. But when you have them dialed in, it can make for great fishing. ■

**LAKE WATEREE BASS ➤**

**SALTWATER**

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

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

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

**FRESHWATER**

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

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

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

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

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



Dearal Rodgers

## CHANGES COMING TO WATEREE

### Lake level will drop next month for 1+ year

Get in on the hot bass bite this month before Duke Energy drops Wateree's water level in November.

**O**ctober of 2022 will be the last time people can fish in Lake Wateree under normal conditions for more than a year. But it could be beneficial because it will provide an opportunity to study the lake bottom in the areas exposed by the lower water level.

Duke Energy plans to draw the lake down to make modifications to Wateree Dam. The project could last 14 to 16 months, possibly longer.

The lake level is expected to drop 6 to 7 feet during the project which is expected to begin this November.

"This will be a good time to look at the lake bottom that is exposed and learn things that will help fishing when the lake comes back up," said veteran bass angler Dearal Rodgers of Camden.

Rodgers, who grew up fishing on Lake Wateree, said it also might help with a situation that has developed with black scum in the lake.

"That scum is in the coves and in a lot of spawning areas. Hopefully, the drawdown will cause it to dry up and it will be gone when the lake comes back up."

Rodgers said this October will be a good time to experience great fall fishing on the lake before the levels recede.

"Look for the bait because the bass will be where the shad are," he said. The shad can move for various reasons, he said, laterally and vertically up and down in the water column.

"Whatever the reason, this time of year finding the bait is essential," he said. "The bass will move with the bait and suspend around the bait, staging on whatever cover is available – stumps, rocks, grass, brushpiles, docks, even a PVC pole."

Rodgers noted bass will also suspend and baits need to be worked in the upper levels of the water column.

"Topwater baits like a Pop-R or a Sammy are good. Spinnerbaits also work well because they are versatile and can be reeled in that upper level of the water column. Square-billed crankbaits also do very well!"

Another element to take into consideration when the fish are suspended is sunlight, Rodgers said.

"When fish are suspended like that they will use shade as cover. If there is shade on one side, like a dock or a stump they usually will be in the shaded area, so you want your bait to come through that shaded area," he said.

"A Shakey Head worm is a good bait to use that time of year. I use a Spot Remover with a 1/8- to 1/16-ounce head, usually with a dark blue or black grape-colored trick worm."

A potential advantage to the drawdown, he said, is that it could concentrate the fish into smaller areas and they might be easier to find. As the lake level returns to normal, anglers can use what they learned about the lake bottom to mark key structure and cover sites for better bass fishing, Rodgers said. ■

# TURNOVER TURNS ON FALLS BASS

## Falls of the Neuse bass bite cranks up

**O** By Dusty Wilson  
 ctober should finally usher in the air mass that settles the September turnover and turns on bass fishing at Falls of the Neuse Lake once again. Shad – prompted by the cool down – will begin to fill the creeks where they can be corralled by hungry bass eager to take a bait. Joel Munday of Holly Springs, NC will be hustling to keep up with bass on the move.

“We should start having bass making their way to midway or even to the backs of the creeks,” said Munday (919-669-2959), who runs Outdoor Expeditions USA. “I like to target an area with at least a couple of feet of water on it, adjacent to some deeper water.”

“Most of the fish will be on points, secondary or even the main points in a creek. I’m going to be getting into the cover like laydowns or bushes, anything available. But, the fish seem to relate to one kind of cover or another at a given time. If I’m getting bit on a rocky point, I will move on to another rocky point when it’s over.”

Munday will spend a great deal of time chunking and winding a spinnerbait, preferring a Dave’s Tournament Tackle double willow blade in a Tiger Shad pattern with a white or chartreuse split tail soft plastic trailer. He slow rolls the bait, trying to make contact with whatever cover is present, but not dragging it along the bottom. Spinnerbaits are best for overcast days with a little wind and can mimic anything from a small school of shad to a bluegill, depending on the color pattern.

### WATCH WATER LEVELS

“If it’s flat calm with bright sun, I’ll work the same areas with a light Texas rig, 3/8-ounce or less,” said Munday. “A Zoom trick worm is a favorite out there. I like the natural colors like green pumpkin or watermelon seed. I won’t spend a lot of time in any one area. Throw it into the cover and shake it. If it gets bit, great. If not, move on.”

Munday notes that Falls is a flood control lake and is subject to rise 4 to 5 feet above normal. If this is the case, he prefers to fish the upper end, where the water will get into the bushes and the bass will follow. If the water is clear and stable, he prefers to fish from midlake to the lower end.

Munday also said to keep an eye peeled for a red hot topwater bite later in the month when schooled up bass are busting shad on the surface. A walking bait like a Zara Spook is his go-to lure. ■

### HIGH ROCK CRAPPIE >



Joel Munday

Joel Munday looks for Falls of the Neuse’s turnover to settle down this month, which should crank up the bass bite.

Plenty of treats await crappie anglers at High Rock in October.

# HIGH ROCK'S TREATS

## Crappie treat anglers to hot fall bite

**W** By Tony Garitta  
ater temperatures at High Rock Lake begin to drop this month, triggering a major movement. Large numbers of crappie begin following and feeding upon bait to fatten up in preparation for winter.

"The fish start following bait and initially head back into the creeks like a spring pattern. Then some will head out to the mouths of creeks and channels," said Midway's Shane Walsler of Yadkin Lakes Crappie Guides.

The duplicity in this back and forth movement can throw fishermen off stride in their search for crappie. But it wouldn't be October without some "trick or treat" in the mix.

But Walsler (336-978-3737) said fishermen can mostly get treated to some excellent crappie fishing if their search includes looking for baitfish and understanding what their electronics are indicating about the forage.

"When I am looking for crappie in conjunction with forage, I am looking for broken and scattered bait on my Garmin units," he said. "This indicates feeding fish are in the area."

Conversely, if Walsler views large circular balls of bait, he doesn't fish the area because the crappie are not feeding as much.

"When I starting looking for locations to fish, I will scan three to



Shane Walsler

four creeks before I start fishing unless I see an area where the bait is broken up really well," said Walsler.

With his Garmin unit, he can also opt to try for roaming fish in open water.

Likely crappie haunts in October include Abbots and Second creeks and Blacks Bottom.

Walsler's crappie tackle consists of a 10-foot Precision Jig Double Cork Handle rod by Catch the Fever. This offers him the choice of casting, pitching or vertical fishing all with the same rod.

Although High Rock is not a clear lake like Badin, Walsler still favors light line, using 6-pound Slime Line Super Stretch monofilament with his spinning gear. The forgiving line reduces the chance of having the hook tear out from the paper-thin mouth of a crappie.

He entices crappie bites with jigs and live minnows. He uses Rockport Rattler Jigheads and Smith Brothers plastics in a Monkey Milk color. For live bait, he rigs a No. 4 Aberdeen hook with a 1/8-ounce split shot.

Walsler cites October as his favorite month for crappie fishing. It may become your favorite month too if you follow his golden rule: "Find the bait and you will find the fish." ■

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Mon 3				31
Tue 4				29
Wed 5				30
Thu 6				42
Fri 7				54
Sat 8				65
Sun 9				69
Mon 10				62
Tue 11				54
Wed 12				46
Thu 13				42
Fri 14				43
Sat 15				43
Sun 16				46
Mon 17				55
Tue 18				45
Wed 19				39
Thu 20				38
Fri 21				36
Sat 22				44
Sun 23				51
Mon 24				59
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Wed 26				50
Thu 27				39
Fri 28				28
Sat 29				23
Sun 30				22
Mon 31				27

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LUNAR PERIODS				
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
1:18 pm	5:46 pm - 6:28 pm ☀	10:54 pm	5:06 am - 5:58 am	☾ Low
2:23 pm	6:50 pm - 7:28 pm ☀	11:55 pm	6:11 am - 6:53 am ☀	☾ Half
3:22 pm	7:48 pm - 8:34 pm		7:15 am - 7:53 am ☀	☾
4:11 pm	8:42 pm - 9:38 pm	1:04 am	8:13 am - 8:59 am ☀	☾ Perigee
4:53 pm	9:30 pm - 10:42 pm	2:15 am	9:07 am - 10:03 am	☾
5:28 pm	10:14 pm - 11:42 pm	3:27 am	9:55 am - 11:07 am	☾
5:59 pm	10:51 pm - 12:43 am	4:37 am	10:39 am - 12:07 pm	☾
6:27 pm	11:28 pm - Midnight	5:45 am	11:16 am - 1:08 pm ☀	☾
6:55 pm	Midnight - 1:40 am	6:51 am	11:53 am - 2:05 pm ☀	☾ Full
7:23 pm	12:02 am - 2:38 am	7:55 am	12:27 pm - 3:03 pm ☀	☾
7:53 pm	12:38 am - 3:34 am	9:00 am	1:03 pm - 3:59 pm	☾
8:26 pm	1:17 am - 4:29 am	10:03 am	1:42 pm - 4:54 pm	☾
9:03 pm	1:57 am - 5:27 am	11:06 am	2:22 pm - 5:52 pm	☾
9:46 pm	2:42 am - 6:22 am	12:07 pm	3:07 pm - 6:47 pm	☾
10:34 pm	3:30 am - 7:16 am	1:03 pm	3:55 pm - 7:41 pm ☀	☾
11:27 pm	4:22 am - 8:08 am	1:55 pm	4:47 pm - 8:33 pm ☀	☾ High
	5:15 am - 8:57 am ☀	2:40 pm	5:40 pm - 9:22 pm	☾ Perigee
12:24 am	6:07 am - 9:43 am ☀	3:19 pm	6:32 pm - 10:08 pm	☾
1:23 am	7:01 am - 10:23 am ☀	3:53 pm	7:26 pm - 10:48 pm	☾
2:23 am	7:53 am - 11:03 am	4:24 pm	8:18 pm - 11:28 pm	☾
3:23 am	8:46 am - 11:38 am	4:51 pm	9:11 pm - 12:03 am	☾
4:24 am	9:39 am - 12:11 pm	5:17 pm	10:04 pm - 12:36 am	☾
5:26 am	10:33 am - 12:45 pm	5:44 pm	10:58 pm - 1:10 am	☾
6:29 am	11:30 am - 1:18 pm	6:11 pm	11:55 pm - Midnight	☾
7:35 am	12:28 pm - 1:56 pm ☀	6:41 pm	Midnight - 1:43 am	☾ New
8:44 am	1:30 pm - 2:38 pm	7:16 pm	12:53 am - 2:21 am	☾
9:56 am	2:32 pm - 3:28 pm	7:58 pm	1:55 am - 3:03 am	☾
11:08 am	3:37 pm - 4:23 pm	8:49 pm	2:57 am - 3:53 am	☾
12:17 pm	4:43 pm - 5:21 pm ☀	9:48 pm	4:02 am - 4:48 am	☾ Perigee
1:18 pm	5:44 pm - 6:26 pm ☀	10:55 pm	5:08 am - 5:46 am	☾ Low
2:10 pm	6:40 pm - 7:32 pm		6:09 am - 6:51 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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