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12
LATE SEASON DEER STRATEGIES

42
CHRISTMAS CRAPPIE HOTSPOTS

Carolina
CONTENTS

Volume 29 | Number 12 | December 2022

FEATURES:

12 LATE SEASON DEER STRATEGIES *COVER STORY*

Bag your last minute buck with these tips.

> By Terry Madewell

20 LONG-RANGE MUZZLELOADING

Modern muzzleloaders are highly accurate at long distances.

> By Pete Rogers

28 GOVERNMENT RABBITS

These public lands will put you on the bunny.

> By Mike Marsh

42 CHRISTMAS CRAPPIE HOTSPOTS

Slabs are biting in several Carolina lakes this month.

> By Terry Madewell

56 BULL DRUM ON THE CRYSTAL COAST

Cape Lookout provides winter action for giant reds.

> By Brian Cope

COLUMNS:

18 GREENER PASTURES

By Jeff Burleson

26 STICKS & STRINGS

By Sammy Romano

34 ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN

By Pat Robertson

48 LUNKER LINES By Davy Hite/David Fritts

50 SANTEE STRINGER

By Terry Madewell

64 COOKING ON THE WILD SIDE By Capt. Jerry Dilsaver

66 SOUND & SEA By Chris Burrows

68 SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

By Phillip Gentry

DEPARTMENTS:

17 NC Hunting Regulations

35 SC Hunting Regulations

36 Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook

72 Sportsman Showcase

74 Advertiser Index

ON THE COVER:

Donnie Johnson killed this 160+ buck near the Neuse River in Johnston County, NC.



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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@carolinasportsman.com.


ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:
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OUTDOOR UPDATE

with **Brian Cope**



THE GIVING MONTH

DECEMBER GIVES SPORTSMEN THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Johnnie Spivey caught this 51-inch drum in Beaufort County, NC on Oct. 31.

December marks the end of deer season in the Carolinas, but it's one of the most giving months for sportsmen. Although it's typically thought of as a winter month, the fall doesn't officially end until Dec. 21, the first day of winter.

stays steady, and even sheepshead will keep you plenty busy when you find them.

One of my favorite December memories is from a different sort of "cast and blast," that for Curtis Begley and me involved catching bass in a pond from a johnboat, and disembarking from the craft occasionally with a .22 to plink squirrels from trees around the pond. I don't even remember whether the temperature was hot or cold that day, but I remember enjoying the outdoors, gladly taking what December was giving us.

Don't pack away your outdoor gear this month. It's the giving month. It's also the last month before full-blown winter. Just watch the weather and take whatever outdoor adventures it offers. ■



Youth hunter Ledy Ray Burgin shot her first bear during a family hunting trip in Avery County on Oct. 17.

And throughout the Carolinas, December usually has plenty of fairly mild weather. Cool mornings, and slightly less cool afternoon days are sometimes interrupted by Indian summer days, when we're all glad we haven't packed our shorts away.

For hunters, December gives us every game animal that's not a turkey at some point, at least in some section of the two states.

And the fishing is excellent for numerous species, or at least it can be when conditions are right – and every year in December, conditions are right for at least a small string of days.

For freshwater anglers, bass, crappie, stripers and catfish bite well throughout this month. Bream too, if you know how to find them in deep holes. For saltwater anglers, speckled trout can be fantastic, redfish action

Bag-A-Buck Contest

underway

BAG-A-BUCK

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

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

LEE COUNTY HUNTER KILLS CRYPTORCHID BUCK

Sitting in his Nashville, TN studio on Oct. 21, Taylor Phillips of Sanford, NC got a text showing a trail camera photo in Lee County that led to him killing a 14+ point cryptorchid buck on Oct. 23, 2022.

The buck had such a crazy rack that Phillips wasn't sure how to count the points on it.

"I counted 14 for sure, and it was just hard to say what else I should count after that. It's just something you have to see up close to understand," he said.

And the number of points isn't even what makes it a crazy rack. It's a gnarly mass that is unique for many reasons.

"The main beam on one side of his rack was 4 1/2 to 5 inches thick. It's just crazy," Phillips said.

Phillips shot the deer with his Ravin crossbow at 49 yards. But it wasn't an easy shot. Even though he felt comfortable enough to pull the trigger, he said doubts immediately crept into his head.

"With about 30 minutes of shooting light left, I looked up from my phone after getting a text and saw a 4-pointer walk straight to the corn," he said.

Phillips checked his crossbow, which was mounted on a BOG tripod. His boots, which he'd removed earlier due to the heat, were at the base of the tripod, hindering him from adjusting it to his liking. He fiddled around, trying to get things straightened out when the big buck suddenly appeared.

"I happened to have my range finder in my hand. He walked out at 11.8 yards. I about had a heart attack," he said.

This deer's close proximity was a problem because the tripod wouldn't allow him to aim that far down at such a harsh angle. Again, he waited.

The deer walked out farther away, but still, Phillips didn't have a clean shot. The buck moved again, but not in the direction expected. Cramped in the small box blind, Phillips wrestled his boots, the tripod, the seat and the walls of the blind, finally getting his crossbow in position.

DOUBTS CREEP IN

By now the deer was on the verge of being out of the range Phillips was comfortable shooting. And it wasn't slowing down.

"I finally just yelled at him 'hey!'" he said.

The buck stopped. Phillips immediately pulled the trigger. And just as immediately, he heard what he thought was the thwack of his arrow hitting the deer.

"But it was not an ideal situation. I was cramped up when I pulled the trigger... it was not a comfortable shot... not a comfortable situation," he said. "I felt sure I'd hit him. But I didn't know if I'd hit him in the front, in the back, or where I aimed. It was just an uneasy feeling."

After 20 minutes of looking and not finding blood, he started over from a different angle. He found a tiny drop of blood. Then a little more. He went and got his side-by-side, came back and found a lot more blood.

Not long after that, Phillips found the deer wrapped around a tree.

"Once I saw him, I kind of freaked out. It's the biggest deer I've ever seen in my life," he said. "My neighbors called to see if I was

Taylor Phillips killed this cryptorchid buck in Lee County, NC.



okay and I told them I'd shot the buck. It was really exciting."

Something else made it a special moment for Phillips.

"I just bought this farm this year. It was my dream farm. And growing up, I didn't have any land to hunt. If I was going hunting, it was because a buddy was taking me on his land. So to be able to capitalize on this and kill the buck of a lifetime on my own land within the first year of purchasing it, it just left me pretty speechless," he said.

"Being in Nashville and making a living writing songs, and being able to have the success I've had and that giving me the opportunity to purchase this property a mile from where I caught my first fish, a mile from where my grandparents' house was, it honestly brought tears to my eyes. It's something I'll never take for granted."

"It's exciting for me, because now I have the opportunity to get a friend involved in the outdoors and hunting that might not have had that opportunity otherwise. Now I can be that friend like I had, that gave me the opportunity. I feel like it's all been heaven sent," he said.

To commemorate the hunt and the buck's uniqueness, Phillips is having a full body mount created by Taylor's Taxidermy in Lillington.

Editor's note: Taylor Phillips wrote the #1 hits "Hurricane" by Luke Combs, as well as "Good as You" and "Homesick" by Kane Brown. ■

Randy Seay of Marion, NC killed this white buck in Orange County, NC on Oct. 29.



ORANGE COUNTY, WHITE DEER

Randy Seay of Marion, NC killed a white buck in Orange County on Oct. 29, 2022 during a morning hunt. He'd never seen the 7-point buck in the flesh before, but he did have one trail cam photo of the deer, which was taken 2 weeks prior to the hunt.

The circumstances of the hunt weren't ideal. Seay was sitting in his tower stand while folks on the neighboring property continuously beat and banged on metal roofing. The noise didn't seem to bother the deer, which appeared at 8:27 a.m.

"I looked behind me and saw a white object moving, and I realized it was the deer that was on trail camera 2 weeks earlier," he said.

The white buck was 20 yards away. Seay took aim and pulled the trigger on his Optima CVA Pro muzzleloader. He was sure he hit the deer, but the deer didn't seem to think so.

"I hit it, but it stood there looking straight ahead. I reloaded and shot again. He didn't go any further," he said.

Aside from neighbors working on the metal roof, another occurrence almost prevented Seay from killing the deer.

"Another hunter was hunting 3 miles away a week earlier. He shot the same deer with a bow. But he only grazed him," he said. ■

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MOUNTAINS TO SEA E-BIKES LET YOU HUNT LONGER, FARTHER, MORE EFFICIENTLY

When I turkey hunted in Jones County, NC with Steve Banks last spring, I asked him how he could cover the several thousands of acres he hunts known as Bankstown. A true southern outdoorsman who loves tradition, Banks also appreciates and embraces the technological advances in products that help make hunting and fishing more enjoyable, more effective, and more efficient.

His secret weapon? An e-bike. I was a little surprised at first, but he convinced me to take it for a spin. This e-bike was well-equipped for hunting. The knobby tires were big and wide, and it had shock absorbers to smooth out the rugged terrain. And I learned quickly that it was capable of going much faster than I'd expected.

It was easy to see how a turkey, deer or even a small game hunter could benefit from an e-bike. Whether you're running late for a distant blind, carrying more gear than you're comfortable walking with, or simply need something to get in and out quickly with, this e-bike was the ticket.

The true secret to the e-bike was how silent it runs. No other vehicle allows you to carry your hunting gear deep into the woods in such silence.

HAUL IT ALL

A bike trailer, which connects to the e-bike's frame, expands its usability. You can haul decoys, blinds, tree stands, camping gear or your harvested game easily. Why drag a 160-pound deer to your truck when you can e-bike it out?

The Fletcher, NC-built Mountains to Sea e-bikes offer lots of options for outdoorsmen, in a wide range of price points. Featuring Shimano drivetrains, Tektro hydraulic disc brakes, Kenda tires, shock absorbers, full-color displays and some of the smallest, most powerful and efficient electric motors available, these bikes are not only built to last, but to offer all the comfort and convenience available in e-bikes.

With premium saddle seats, high-quality stems and LED lighting, these bikes even offer USB ports, so powering your cell phone, electric handwarmer, flashlight and any other device is as easy as plugging it in. Racks and baskets expand their cargo, meaning hunters never need to go without their essentials, or even their creature comforts.

These e-bikes are also perfect for scouting, tending food plots and checking trail cameras. They allow hunters to limit their time – and their scent – in the woods while still giving them the chance to get their chores done efficiently.

Unlike traditional bicycle manufacturers that have been retrofitting and working around their existing platforms, Mountains to Sea Bikes, founded in 2017, has always had one goal — to bring the highest quality electric bikes to the market at the most affordable prices.

These bikes are equipped with traditional bike pedals, so if you're looking to get some exercise in while on your adventure, that's no problem. But when you're ready for assistance, rest your legs. They are capable of speeds up to 28 mph, with a range of 20 to 75 miles on each charge.

Choose from stock or custom order your e-bike at shop.m2sbikes.com. ■



SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY

OUTDOOR
UPDATE



Stella McKinney killed this wide-racked, 200+ pound buck in Avery County, NC on Oct. 29, 2022.



Braxton Penfield killed this buck in Marlboro County, SC on Oct. 18, 2022.



Cody Ahlstrom's Union County buck from Sept. 29 had 14 points and green-scored 144 2/8 inches.



Josh Wall killed this 143-inch beast in Allendale County, SC on Oct. 11, 2022.



Harper Meyer shot her first buck, this 8-pointer, on Oct. 24 in Darlington County, SC.



Kayla Pendergraft's NC buck, Show Stopper, green-scored 144 4/8 inches.



Leon Allen's Beaufort County, SC buck had 11 points and weighed 201 pounds.



Jeff Dabbs killed this Lancaster County, SC 12-point buck on Oct. 22.



Ty Tilton tagged this 14-point Williamsburg County, SC beast on Oct. 23.

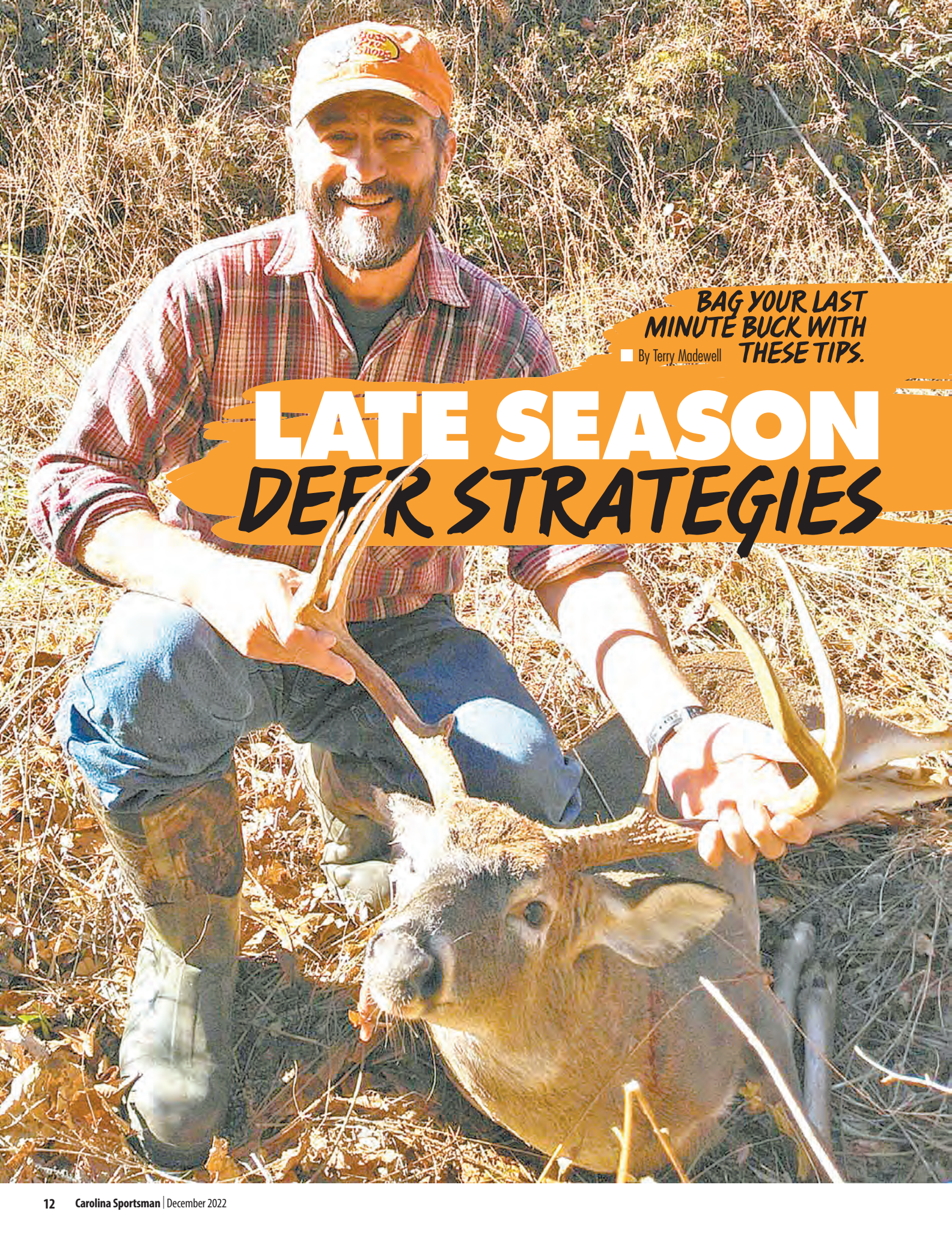


Trevor White killed this 13-point, 155 1/8-inch buck in Alamance County, NC Oct. 19.



Stephen Outlaw killed this Randolph County, NC buck after a years-long quest.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, visit www.carolinasportsman.com and visit the deer-hunting section.



**BAG YOUR LAST
MINUTE BUCK WITH
THESE TIPS.**

■ By Terry Madewell

LATE SEASON DEER STRATEGIES

LATE SEASON DEER HUNTING offers a blend of challenges and opportunities.

In terms of challenges, for many areas in the Carolinas the rut has ended and big bucks have regained their acute sense of survival.

Even in areas where the rut is still on, the weather can get nasty. And that creates problems — or opportunities, depending on your viewpoint.

The opportunities include hunting less-pressured deer because late-season hunting is not for everyone. And while hunting pressure has been intense, it's reduced in December.

Diehard deer hunters embrace late-season hunting and know big bucks are still taken this month.

Two diehard hunters, who are also professional taxidermists, have taken big bucks in late-season, and just as importantly have mounted many big buck racks taken at this time. In doing so, they've gleaned valuable information from other hunters regarding how, when and where they were successful during late season.

Chip Hamilton from Anderson, SC and Adam Cantrell from Brevard, NC (Tarheel Taxidermy) share secrets to late-season success for big bucks.

HUNT WHERE THEY ARE

Chip Hamilton said the post-rut, late-season hunting changes dramatically from what hunters experienced during the rut.

"Hunting the same patterns successfully employed during the rut is not the best tactic for late-season," Hamilton said. "Deer behavior changes dramatically when the rut ends, especially for big bucks. Most mature bucks, those 4½-years-old and older, are extremely active during the rut. They're on the move

either hunting for, or breeding with, a doe. That's their whole story during the rut."

But as the rut wanes, their testosterone levels drop dramatically, he said. Their world changes from propagation of the species back to self-survival.

"At this point, survival now means they need to eat, rest and recover from their intense rut activity," he said. "Their acute sense of safety is restored and they need to eat and restore their body."

Hamilton (Lake Hartwell Fishing Charters, 864-304-9011) at one point owned his own taxidermy shop and a deer processing business while also working as a full-time striper fishing guide on Lake Hartwell for 29 years. He's sold, but still works in, the taxidermy and processing business, to focus on his fish-guiding business.

He makes a great analogy of late-season deer hunting to fish spawning. He said the spawn correlation to the rut is amazing.

"The spawn and rut occur at different times of the year. But fish species change their food-first habits from the rest of the year to making more fish during the spawn," he said. "But when spawning is complete, they move back to familiar habits, primarily finding forage and mauling it."

"Big bucks go to secure places in post-rut with thick, gnarly growth, close to food sources," he said. "That's where they'll stay during the cold weather in post-rut."

Hamilton said that wherever you hunt, locate that secure area where a buck can hide and identify nearby food and water sources. This is where he'll spend his time. And to kill him, you'll have to learn his movement strategy from bedding areas to the food sources.

LATE-SEASON FOOD SOURCES >

Small, protected food plots and bait sites are ideal for late season hunting. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Terry Robinson with a buck taken late season in the NC mountains, a few minutes after seeing a doe.





Hope Robinson with a big buck taken during the rut in the NC mountains in December. BELOW: Aiden Cantrell killed this December buck on public land near Brevard, NC.

LATE-SEASON FOOD SOURCES

Hamilton hunts multiple areas around South Carolina from the Lowcountry to the Piedmont. Specific types of natural vegetation will be available depending on the specific area being hunted.

“Learn what options a deer may have,” he said. “A clear-cut, especially a large one of 100 acres or more, will have a lot of natural food sources for late-season deer. Learn what’s on the property you hunt and when it is most likely available.”

Also be opportunistic, he said. For example, in one area he hunts, white oaks often drop acorns late. And knowledge of this prime food source provides a tremendous advantage.

“In addition to natural food sources, we can employ food plots and bait stations to lure deer to specific areas during post-rut,” he said. “Plant green crops that grow best in the area you hunt by checking with local wildlife officials or agricultural extension services for specific crops to plant.”

Bait stations attract deer. But big bucks in late-season are wary of areas where a lot of human intrusion has occurred. This includes where deer have been killed and loaded into vehicles.

“Bait stations in the prime safety habitat that have been reserved just for big bucks can be very effective,” he said. “Have specific areas you simply don’t hunt until late-season to target a big buck. And even if you’re still looking for venison for the freezer, most of the deer, including does, will gravitate to those type spots.”



If you're wanting to add venison to the freezer, late-season is still productive for does.

HUNTING PRESSURE

Adam Cantrell said that even with less hunting pressure during cold, nasty weather in the mountains where he hunts, getting away from deer that have been pressured is important.

"I hunt public lands, mostly in the mountains, so deer receive a lot of pressure," he said. "I make the extra effort to get far off the beaten path, away from areas where access is easy."

Cantrell (828-553-8241) said public land hunting offers big buck opportunities, if hunters are willing to do the legwork.

The deeper he walks in away from other hunters, the better those opportunities seem to be.

"I'll get back into the remote areas and start walking ridgelines," he said. "I'm searching for a specific type of place, a flat that lies between two ridge fingers for example, or a saddle area. I look for fresh deer sign and activity. I'm always in stealth mode."

Cantrell carries a climbing stand on his back as he scouts. And when he finds a localized hotspot of deer activity, he'll set up and hunt if the time is appropriate. If not, he'll select his setup site and return the next day.

"We have quality bucks in the mountains on public land," he said. "Our overall deer population is not high. But that tends to produce quality animals. Last year I had several 140-inch class bucks brought to my taxidermy business from public land hunters late in the year. It's worth the effort to get away from the crowd."



GO EARLY, STAY LATE >



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GO EARLY, STAY LATE

Cantrell said that time of day can be important. But in December, in the public land mountain hunting, the best deer movement is often mid- to late-morning.

“But I don’t risk going in real late because low light times are potentially good. So I’m in the stand early,” he said. “But my experiences, and many experiences related to me by hunters bringing big bucks to mount, is that the time period from 10 a.m. until noon can be extremely good for big buck movement during December. In the mountains, the rut is still a factor in many areas. So deer movement can be quite good.”

He said a prime example occurred last season when a public land hunter brought him a big buck to mount.

“He shot the buck about 10:30 a.m. and called a buddy for help with the big deer,” he said. “He stayed in the stand to wait. And by 11 o’clock, 30 minutes later, he watched five more racked

Low light conditions offer prime time for deer movement but mid-morning can also be excellent.

bucks walk down the same trail where he’d just shot his trophy. That speaks volumes for hunting right through mid-morning.”

Cantrell said if the rut is still a factor where you hunt (and it can be in the mountains), deer will likely be moving for that reason. Plus, with the scarcity of food sources, deer are often on the move searching for grub. Even if does are moving and searching for food, bucks are likely to follow.

“Whatever the reason, if you’re hunting fresh deer sign, patience can be your biggest ally,” he said. ■

GREENER PASTURES >



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.

LOW LIGHT CONDITIONS

Another hunter with lots of late-season hunting success is Terry Robinson from Mills River, NC. Robinson is a hunting buddy of Adam Cantrell and they both hunt public lands in the North Carolina mountains as well as private, leased land in South Carolina. They have the unique perspective of both types of hunting.

Robinson said one major key to success in late-season hunting is having quality optics. While the optics are a plus for any hunting scenario, they're useful for different reasons for the places he hunts.

"In South Carolina, in the Orangeburg area where we hunt, the rut has ended by December and deer are back to survival mode," he said. "They like to hole up in thickets and dense cover, but they still need to eat. But that sense of security is such that they often wait until the last minute, literally, of daylight to walk out."

Robinson said this trait means high quality optics with a 50mm objective on the scope can mean the difference between killing a big buck or simply not seeing it at all.

"A successful hunt can literally come down to the ability to see and identify your target for even a minute or two longer," he said. "That's when the big bucks will walk out."

In the mountains where he hunts, the rut is on in December. So deer are prone to move anytime of the day, he said. However, that includes early mornings and late evenings when light is low.

"Again, the large objective on a quality scope enables me to see earlier in the morning and later in the evening than less expensive scopes with less light-gathering ability."

Robinson recommends getting the best scope you can afford because it offers advantages anytime of the hunting season. ■

HUNTING SEASONS

DEER

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Western | Bowhunting | Sept. 10-Oct. 2 Oct. 16-Nov. 20 Dec. 11-Jan. 2, 2023 (bucks only) |
| | Muzzleloader | Oct. 3-15 |
| | Gun | Nov. 21-Dec. 10 |
| Northwestern | Archery | Sept. 10-Nov. 4 |
| | Muzzleloader | Nov. 5-18 |
| | Gun | Nov. 19-Jan. 2, 2023 |
| Central | Bowhunting | Sept. 10-Oct. 28 |
| | Muzzleloader | Oct. 29-Nov. 11 |
| | Gun | Nov. 12-Jan. 2, 2023 |
| Northeastern/ Southeastern | Bowhunting | Sept. 10-30. |
| | Muzzleloader | Oct. 1-14 |
| | Gun | Oct. 15-Jan. 2, 2023 |

BEAR

| | |
|--|---|
| Oct. 17-Nov. 19 & Dec. 12-Jan. 2, 2023: | In and west of Surry, Wilkes, Caldwell, Burke and Cleveland counties |
| Nov. 12-Jan. 2, 2023: | Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Durham, Granville, Guilford, Lee, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Union counties |
| Oct. 15-Jan. 2, 2023: | Franklin, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Scotland, Vance, Warren, Wake counties |
| Nov. 19-Jan. 2, 2023: | Alexander, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Stokes, Yadkin counties |
| Nov. 14-Jan. 2, 2023: | Bladen, Brunswick, Carteret, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pamlico, Pender, Robeson, Sampson counties |
| Nov. 12-27, Dec. 10-25: | Dare, Hyde, Tyrrell counties |
| Nov. 12-20, Dec. 10-25: | Beaufort, Bertie, Craven, Hertford, Jones, Martin, Washington counties |
| Nov. 11-20 Dec. 10-25: | Camden*, Chowan*, Currituck Gates, Pasquotank*, Perquimans (*Seasons open Nov. 12 by local laws) |
| Nov. 19-Dec. 18: | Edgecombe, Greene, Halifax, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Pitt, Wayne, Wilson counties |

SQUIRREL

Oct. 17-Feb. 28, 2023 (gray & red)
Oct. 17-Jan. 31, 2023 (fox)

RABBIT

Oct. 17-Feb. 28, 2023

RACCOON, OPOSSUM

Oct. 17-Feb. 28, 2023

QUAIL

Nov. 19-Feb. 28, 2023

GROUSE

Oct. 17-Feb. 28, 2023

RAILS

Sept. 3-Nov. 23

COMMON SNIPE

Oct. 27-Feb. 28, 2023

CANADA GEESE

Resident zone, Oct. 21-29, Nov. 5-26,
Dec. 17-Feb. 11, 2023

Statewide: Sept. 1-30; NEZ, Dec. 28-Jan. 31, 2023 permit

SNOW, BLUE, ROSS GEESE

Oct. 11-Feb. 11, 2023, Feb. 13-March 31, 2023, permit

DUCKS

(Inland Zone)

Oct. 21-22, Nov. 5-26, Dec. 17-Jan. 31, 2023

(Coastal Zone)

Oct. 28-29, Nov. 5-26, Dec. 17-Jan. 31, 2023

EARLY TEAL

Sept. 13-30 (east of US 17 only)

SEA DUCKS

Oct. 28-29, Nov. 5-26, Dec. 17-Jan. 31, 2023

BRANT

Dec. 17-Jan. 31, 2023

DOVE

Sept. 3-Oct. 1, Nov. 5-26, Dec. 10-Jan. 31, 2023

TUNDRA SWAN

Nov. 5-Jan. 31, 2023. Bag limit 1, by permit only.

WOODCOCK

Dec. 10-Jan. 31, 2023

WILD TURKEY (Youth)

April 1-7, 2023

April 8-May 6, 2023

Turnips are heavily favored by deer during winter, giving hunters a chance at late-season success.



LATE SEASON NUTRITION

DECEMBER FOOD PLOTS EQUAL HUNTING SUCCESS

Jeff Burleson

For the past 3+ months in at least parts of the Carolinas, hunters have had ample opportunities to kill a deer and fill up their freezers with venison. Our deer hunting seasons encompass parts of summer, fall and winter. That's an incredible amount of time to sit in a deer stand. As December rolls in, some deer hunters are still trying to outsmart their four-legged nemesis. The kryptonite that will lead to a deer's downfall this month is their stomach and the urge to feed.

Deer eat every day, but when it gets cold and the mating season is winding down, food sources come at a premium. And this month, few remaining natural food sources are available to scratch that itch for deprived bucks and does.

Without the aid of agriculture crops or the hard work of hunters to provide food, deer must rely on winter browse all winter long, unless some remaining acorns remain buried under leaves or other lit-

tlers along the soil surface.

HARD TIMES

This time of year, deer will often eat leaves, buds, twigs or anything else they can find with a calorie. Such winter browse is low in protein, carbohydrates, and leaves deer low in energy. So if any foods rich in protein and carbs are available, deer will quickly gravitate to it.

The Carolinas still have plenty of farmland, with numerous farms existing in every county of both states. And luckily for deer and other wildlife, some soybeans remain, but fields of winter wheat are typically newly-planted by December, and are thriving. Deer will hammer these green fields this month throughout the day and night.

Where clover and alfalfa are planted, deer will eagerly browse on these perennial, protein-packed options as well.

For hunters and land managers that have invested time and money in food

plots, this month is when they will become especially fruitful, especially when brassicas, clover, rye, oats or other winter varieties are established.

White clover is a perennial variety, and is typically planted in the fall. It can be maintained throughout the year, and the second and third seasons of clover can be especially productive in terms of attracting wildlife. It thrives in winter and can be a real hotspot for deer in the late season. It's one of the most favored winter crops available. So it is an excellent option for establishing in food plots with a pH near 7.0.



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.

MORE OPTIONS

Cereal grains are mass produced all over the Carolinas, and do a great job attracting wildlife. They will not be ignored, especially when young and tender. Deer will browse in newly-planted and well-established fields of wheat, rye and oats. They provide a solid and nutritious food source for deer and other wildlife in the wintertime.

Brassicas such as turnip, rape and radish are other wintertime favorites. While brassicas aren't necessarily winter varieties, they become hotspots in December when cold and frosty weather becomes a regular occurrence. It's not until December that the foliage on brassica varieties becomes palatable. And it's also when those root vegetables produced from these brassica varieties become super tasty.

The deer will soon find these crops and destroy every one of these plants in a hurry. But it can surely be a hunter's hotspot in the late season. They aren't especially produc-



Jeff Burleson

CROCKPOT FILLER:

Even if you're not looking for a late-season trophy, but would rather just fill the freezer, you'll find plenty of does chowing down on whatever available food plots they can find this month.

tive in the early season, but when December comes, hunters will be glad they planted them months ago.

With the long mating season finally over, and deer hungry and looking to fatten up to make it through winter, solid food sources are critical. Food that is rich in energy is not only desired, but a critical item for survival. And for deer hunters waiting to tag one final trophy of the year, the nearest food source is the only place to be. ■

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MODERN MUZZLELOADERS
ARE HIGHLY ACCURATE AT
LONG DISTANCES.

By Pete Rogers

LONG-RANGE MUZZLELOADING



The big buck appeared, stepping out of the woods at 285 yards. Much too far for a muzzleloading rifle.

OR IT USED TO BE, ANYWAY.

Lowering the gun on his shooting sticks, setting the reticle of his scope on the buck's shoulder, the hunter eased on the 2.5-pound trigger. And when the smoke cleared, the buck lay right where it stood only seconds earlier.

Rifle hunters know that accuracy is everything. From the days when they hunted for their next meal to today, when we are chasing bigger and faster game with our muzzleloaders. We all want to get the most out of our rifles and with that involves reaching longer distances than ever. The old days of "under 100 yards" are long gone and we are seeing effective shots well beyond what was once thought possible.

In 1985, Tony Knight revolutionized the world of muzzleloading rifles when it invented the inline ignition system. In doing this, the modern muzzleloading era began, and it has been a boom ever since.

Since that time, everything has changed, from the ignition systems to the stocks, barrels, triggers, and ramrods. You name it, and it has been changed, upgraded, and improved.

After Tony Knight began that revolution, no other company has led the way more than CVA when it comes to ingenuity, accuracy, and efficiency in the modern muzzleloader. With the improvement of the Accura and the introduction of their Paramount rifle, no other company has been able to achieve the long range accuracy or consistency that CVA has.

While the Accura is capable of shots as described above, the Paramount has totally changed the game. Basically, the Paramount is a magnum muzzleloader. With its redesigned ignition system, the Paramount can withstand magnum loads that were not possible in other muzzleloading rifles.

THE NUMBERS >



CVA has led the way to a revolution of muzzleloading technology for 40 years. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The author killed this buck with a 285-yard shot from his CVA muzzleloader.

Pete Rogers

THE NUMBERS

Here is some data to compare, using the standard .50 caliber as a benchmark. A standard .50 caliber muzzleloading rifle can and often does use either 100 grains or 150 grains by volume to shoot. However, the Paramount has a maximum powder charge of 170 grains by volume. This extra 20 grains is enough to push bullets farther down range.

While testing these .50 caliber muzzleloaders at the Talladega Marksmanship course in Alabama, shooters were consistently hitting steel targets out to 400 yards. After some studying the wind and adjusting the scopes, they hit steel targets at 600 yards.

Things really got interesting when they switched to a lower caliber. The Paramount comes in the standard .50 caliber as well as both a .45 caliber and a .40 caliber. (Check your local game laws to see if these are legal in your area).

The .45 caliber uses a maximum powder charge of 160 grains by volume (112 by weight) and the .40 uses 150 grains by volume (105 by weight) respectively. Both lower calibers are more than enough for even the biggest game. In the opening of this story, the hunter was shooting a .45 caliber.

How are they able to achieve these magnum loads? The proprietary ignition system is central to the advancement. Improving the VariFlame ignition, these Paramount rifles do not use the standard .209 shotshell primer for its ignition

source. Rather, they determined that using a large rifle primer gives the exact amount of ignition necessary to get things rolling down the pipe.

With a rotating locking bolt, the VariFlame is locked into place and that enables it to withstand the pressures generated. The other key component is the use of Blackhorn 209 powder as the propellant. Many hunters balk at using loose powder for the convenience of the pellets by Pyrodex and others. And there is no arguing that dropping pellets down your barrel is more convenient. But to achieve maximum accuracy and long range performance, loose powder is a must.

OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE

Blackhorn 209 powder enables you to get within a grain or two of the exact loads each time. And that keeps your bullets hitting your targets well beyond what was once thought possible.

Again, at the Talladega Marksman course, shooters with the .45 caliber Paramount using 98 grains by weight hit targets out to 800 yards consistently. Is there enough energy to kill at 800 yards? Well since the rifle is pushing a 235 grain bullet at speeds that are equivalent to a .308 Winchester, most definitely.

Many hunters and shooters will opt for the maximum load in their rifles, which in most cases is 170 grains (119 by weight) in a .50 caliber rifle. However, while it will shoot it, it is not going to perform at its best at those charges. For example, your truck



Pete Rogers



Pete Rogers



Pete Rogers

Modern muzzleloaders are highly accurate at much longer distances than early versions. **RIGHT:** Time at the range will increase your own understanding of what works best in your rifle. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** An example of bullets used in today's muzzleloaders.

may run 120 miles an hour, but it performs best at 70. The same is true for your muzzleloading rifle. It may shoot 170 grains, but the most optimal performance is achieved at much lower levels.

Recent testing with a .45 caliber Paramount determined that 88 grains by weight was the sweet spot and enabled a 200-yard zero and sub MOA groups.

With these advancements, the modern muzzleloader is no longer primitive. It is a well-designed long range rifle capable of efficiency and accuracy never thought possible previously. Getting the most from your muzzleloader is not as difficult as it may seem. Does it take some time? Yes. Will it make you a better hunter and shooter? Absolutely.

As hunters and shooters, we owe it to ourselves and to the animals we pursue to get the most possible from our rifles. It builds confidence in our rifles, and our abilities. When it matters most, we know it will get the job done. ■



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

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WEIGH, DON'T MEASURE

When it comes to getting the most accuracy out of your rifle, consider weighing your powder rather than measuring it. Using a reloader's powder dispenser such as an RCBS, getting consistent charges is possible. And it aids in making your shots more accurate. By taking multiple charges to the range and testing, you can find the exact one that suits your rifle best.

Recent testing, I took three powder charges of 7 different measurements to the range to find the best ones for my rifle. Powder charges weighed from 86 grains by weight all the way to 98 grains. Testing all of them showed me that the best for my rifle was the 88-grain charge. It gave me the most consistent grouping providing sub MOA groups at 100 yards and MOA at 200 yards.



Weighing your powder ahead of time and having reloading tubes on you when hunting removes some of the fumbling and frustration of shooting loose powder. And one more thing, Blackhorn 209 is noncorrosive, so you do not need to unload your rifle between hunts. Simply remove the primer and keep it loaded until you are ready to use it. ■

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Crossbows can shoot faster and farther than ever before, but is that necessarily a good thing?

CROSSBOWS: FASTER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

In recent years, crossbow design technology has exploded. They are faster and more accurate than ever. For the most part, this is a good thing, with some exceptions.

The wider legalization of crossbows, even during the general archery season, means an aging population continues to enjoy archery hunting. The ease of transition from rifle to crossbow also brings firearms hunters into the woods earlier.

For the most part, this has been successful and a good thing, but it has caused some new challenges.

A crossbow doesn't require the hunter to draw it in the presence of game, but uses an arrow as a projectile. This requires archery shot placement, which can be confusing for first time archery hunters because they are holding and aiming what feels like a rifle.

Many of these firearms hunting converts are not familiar with archery shot placement or how arrows kill game. This leads to improper shot placement and often, to wounded animals. The key to preventing this is education about proper archery shot placement. Avoiding large bones and only taking shots that

guarantee double-lung or heart/lung hits are keys to consistently recovering game animals.

Another issue of late is crossbow hunters taking shots at longer distances than what is ethical. It is up to each hunter to decide what is an ethical shot for them.

Several years ago, a newcomer to the crossbow industry advertised their crossbow as "your next rifle," bragging of 3-inch groups at 100 yards. In my opinion, this was the worst thing to happen to our sport in a very long time.

Although the bow was more than capable of these tight groups, they didn't factor in the fact that animals rarely hold still. Also, wind drift impacts arrows severely and can lead to horizontal errors of several inches to more than a foot. This led to hunters pushing the limits of shot distances and many lost or wounded animals.

It also began an "arms race" among crossbow manufacturers that led to drastically increased speeds and extremely compact crossbows. Both of these come with a heavy price (both literally and figuratively).

As crossbows become more compact in width, this narrower profile causes sev-

eral problems. Reverse limb crossbows have extremely acute string angles which dramatically increases the chance for a dry-fire due to the arrow not being fully seated against the string.

Extremely narrow crossbows also cause extreme cable stretch that can lead to total failure and hefty repair bills.

As a general rule, the more compact the crossbow, the more frequently it requires string and cable replacement. With prices often at or above \$200 for this maintenance, this can add up to a lot of money.

And as speeds have increased to well in excess of 400 and even 500 fps, damage from dry-fires or failures is often catastrophic. Many of these spend more time in the repair shop than they do in the woods each year. For this reason, I don't recommend buying any crossbow that shoots in excess of 425 fps.

One manufacturer who has stayed



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.

CROSSBOW COST:

Crossbows have come a long way, especially since they've been legalized during archery season in many states. But the advancements in crossbow technology have come at a heavy price in more ways than just dollars.

above the fray is Mission Crossbows. They have continued building high quality crossbows that are the most durable and maintenance-free on the market. Their bows come with a lifetime warranty on both ends of the bow, something offered by no other manufacturer to the best of my knowledge. Their bows will group under 1 inch at 100 yards, but they don't flaunt this fact. We see less of these for repair than any other brand, and they require less frequent maintenance. For these reasons, they are my recommendation when shopping for a crossbow. ■



Broken strings and cables are becoming more commonplace among extremely narrow crossbows.

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GOVERNMENT RABBITS

THESE PUBLIC LANDS
WILL PUT YOU ON
THE BUNNY.

■ By Mike Marsh

After meeting for breakfast at a fast-food restaurant in Hamlet, N.C., four hunters headed for the hinterlands of Hoke, Moore, Richmond and Scotland counties.

THEIR DESTINATION WAS 61,225-ACRE WRC SANDHILLS GAME LAND.

Turning off the pavement onto a sandy road, their pickups made several more turns. The roads eventually narrowed to a trail unsuitable for vehicles.

Hopping out, Warren Purcell pointed to a cramped opening barely big enough for vehicles to turn around in when leaving after the hunt. Whining beagles in truck-bed kennels gave away the intended quarry. Purcell and his hunting partner, Cecil Paul, had arrived at a favorite rabbit hunting spot. Purcell, a retired N.C. State Employee, lives in Rowland. Paul has a residential rental business and lives in Gibson. Their guests were Ramey Leviner, a Seqirus CADD technician from Rockingham and Tyler Jacobs, a student at Robeson Community College from Lumberton.

"Few hunters could find this spot, even if you showed them a map," Purcell said. "We have hunted here several years.

Rabbits have plenty of cover. But it has big openings. That allows good shooting."

They were near Gum Swamp and Crawford lakes, but have many other productive places in Sandhills GL. Nevertheless, they scout new spots every season.

"You have to find cover," Purcell said. "WRC Wildlife technicians burn a portion, then next year burn another portion. We look for areas the second and third year after a burn. The technicians tell us where the burns are and if they see rabbits. Then we look for droppings and cuttings."

Another public land they hunt is Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge near Wadesboro. The ranger staff tell them about good hunting areas there, too. However, the season is more restrictive at Sandhills GL.

MATCH 'EM UP ➤



Ramey Leviner, Warren Purcell, Cecil Paul and Tyler Jacobs with cottontails bagged at Sandhills Game Land. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Cecil Paul shows a Sandhills Game Land rabbit to the beagles.

MATCH 'EM UP

“Over the past 7 years, we have killed more rabbits on government lands than private property,” Purcell said. “During deer season, we don’t have access to much private property because deer hunters believe hunting rabbits with beagles disturbs deer.”

In 1984, Purcell hunted one morning with William McCallum. That afternoon, they went to a field trial at Robeson County Beagle Club. Intrigued, Purcell began going to trials in afternoons and on Saturdays. His dog, Bubba “did decent” in trials.

“At first, they let me help by ‘fun’ judging,” Purcell said. “Eventually I judged field trials in N.C., S.C. Ga. N.J. and Va. Judging helped me put together a good hunting pack. I learned that one dog that is a great dog by itself may not work in your pack. A pack has to run a tight line, stay on the rabbit and keep it moving.”

When he was between 12 and 30 years old, Paul maintained beagle packs.

He stopped rabbit hunting at age 40 when he worked at



Mount Air Farms as a poultry technician. When he became a rental property manager, he had time for hunting again.

“I met Warren and he got me into field trial judging in 2013,” Paul said. “He has judged the AKC Gun Dog Brace Field Trial and I have judged the UKC National Gun Dog Brace Field Trial. Judging helps us select the right dogs for our packs. We try different dogs during a hunt to see how they work together. We like to be able to run on any given day. When the scent is good, even a yard dog can run a rabbit. When it isn’t, and we know the capabilities of our individual dogs, we can match them to the conditions and still have a good hunt.”



Longleaf pine ridges kept open by prescribed burning provide great rabbit hunting. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The author bagged this rabbit during a hunt with Warren Purcell and Cecil Paul.

TEAMWORK AMONG DOGS

The best days to hunt have lows in the 40s and highs no greater than the 60s. The humidity must not be too dry.

“A truly big-nosed dog can smell a rabbit on a bad day,” he said. “We hold our dogs accountable. If we jump 150 rabbits in a season, we want to bag 140. If a dog doesn’t make it, we find someone else who wants it. Field trials give us contacts with other hunters looking for dogs. With two of us making a combined pack, we expect to bag 10 rabbits per day. That takes dogs that run smoothly. If a dog’s nose will handle a turn when he’s going fast, that’s good. But, if he’s running fast on a low-scent day and loses the scent trail, that’s bad.”

While a competitive dog might seem to be best, it is not the case. Teamwork is more important.

“I may have a dog that is a bit competitive and Cecil may have one that is also competitive. That doesn’t work when scenting is not good. If they are running with a lot of stop-and-go, that’s due to competitiveness. They will run past the check (the place where the rabbit stopped and switched directions). A dog may circle and pick up the scent. But it’s better to have a dog that stays right on the scent, working it out until he figures out the way the rabbit went. That takes a dog with a big nose. You’ve got to have anchor dogs that have big noses for poor conditions. You also need check dogs to figure out how to pick up the scent again from the point of loss.”

TALLY HO! ➤



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





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TALLY HO!

After the hunters released their beagles, it wasn't long before they were trailing a rabbit. They packed together, turning so tightly, shoulder-to-shoulder they resembled a flock of birds in flight.

Running through a low drainage pocket with standing water, the rabbit befuddled the beagles. They ran it a while, lost the scent, then picked it up again. They coursed the rabbit through plum thickets and dense stands of multiflora rose. Eventually, they forced the rabbit to run across a wiregrass ridge with long-leaf pines and turkey oaks. A shot downed the first rabbit.

The hunters moved through different types of cover with the beagles, urging them on vocally. Suddenly Purcell shouted, "Tally Ho!" As is the case during a mounted fox hunt, the cry signaled a rabbit had been jumped and another race was on.

The hunters broke for lunch with four rabbits bagged. Then they switched several dogs in the pack for the afternoon hunt. A hunter jumped a rabbit and took a shot that missed. Purcell and

Hearing his beagles in the thicket, Cecil Paul prepares to see a rabbit chased into the open area.

Paul do not shoot at rabbits on the jump, preferring to let their dogs sort out the trail. The dogs ran hot and cold, appearing at one point to have lost the scent for good. An hour later, whether or not they had returned after a half-mile circle running the same rabbit might have been debated by others. However, Paul was certain it was the same one when he bagged it. The day's take was seven cottontails.

"We kill 85 percent cottontails," Paul said. "Sometimes, if it's a marsh rabbit that won't come out of a bottom, we go into the thick cover. Any shot will be at close range. If there's enough water for a marsh rabbit to swim, it can be very difficult. Our dogs lose more marsh rabbits than cottontails because of high water." ■

WEATHER APP SHOWS SCENTING CONDITIONS

As the sun climbed, the dogs began having trouble holding the line. Most hunters know that hounds stay on scent better in the early morning and late afternoon. Purcell said that effect was usually due to humidity.

During the hunt, he constantly checked his cell phone. It showed that, by 10 a.m., the humidity had dropped substantially. It was a "bluebird" day, with bright sunlight burning off the dew. The temperature continued to increase from the low 40s into the upper 50s.

"I can use the AccuWeather app to check humidity and other atmospheric conditions anywhere I am hunting," he said. "The humidity has fallen to 27 percent. Humidity below 40 percent means tough scenting conditions. A sudden barometric pressure or temperature change can also create poor scenting conditions. If it's a cold day that suddenly warms, it could take a day or two before good scenting conditions return. Wind, rain and ice are other conditions that make it difficult for dogs to stay on the scent."

At 4 p.m., as the sun dropped slowly lower, the dogs began holding the line better, resulting in faster races for the dogs and more shots at rabbits for the hunters. The AccuWeather app showed the humidity had increased to 46 percent. ■

ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN >



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ALL DOGS GO TO HEAVEN

Pat Robertson

GRAND AMERICAN HUNT

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2022 Grand American Overall Night Hunt Champion Iron Swamp Carolina Clifford owned by Wade Windham



THE GRAND AMERICAN

THIS IS THE ULTIMATE COON HUNT

On Friday and Saturday night, Jan. 6 and 7, 2023, the woods and swamps from Newberry's upland forests to South Carolina's coastal marshes will be filled with the sounds of hounds baying and the night sky will be lit by super bright lights stabbing at the upper reaches of big trees.

Massive manhunt after a major prison breakout? Alien invasion? Halloween in January?

No, none of those. It's just the biggest and best known coon hunt in the world – The Grand American held annually out of the Orangeburg County Fairgrounds for almost 6 decades.

Veteran coon hunters from the Midwest to the Northeast and everywhere in between – and beyond – will bring several hundred of the best coon hounds in the world to compete for the Grand American Championship.

David McKee of Whitmire, S.C., Grand American President for the past 14 years, explained how the hunt is set up.

“There are two separate hunts, one on Friday night and one on Saturday night. The first casts each night are for two hours. Then we take the top four double cast winners from both nights and they go back out on Saturday night, about 3:30 to 4 a.m. and hunt for an additional hour.”

Iron Swamp Carolina Clifford, a Treeing Walker owned by Wade Windham of Mount Pleasant, S.C., scored 800 points on Friday night's cast and 600 points Saturday night, enough to qualify for the Final Four Hunt in the wee hours of Sunday morning this past January. Clifford was the only hound in the one-hour final cast to tree a coon and earned the title of 2022 Grand American Overall Night Hunt Champion.

“This is a dream come true,” Windham said in an interview with Travis Boland, sports editor of the Orangeburg Times and Democrat, after accepting the winner's trophy. “I have been coming to this hunt since I was 6-years-old. This has been a goal of mine for a long time.”

Winning the Grand American title can elevate a coon hound to rock star status in coon hunting circles. The demand for stud service multiplies and the fee for that service can be substantial. Puppies bred by the Grand American Champion become much more valuable in the coonhound market.

The Grand American is the kick-off event for the United Kennel Club's annual calendar of coon hunt trials around the country. It annually draws upwards of 400 coonhounds, a hundred or more vendors selling everything from hip waders and sturdy rain jackets to sophisticated GPS dog tracking systems, and provides the opportunity to buy or trade for a high class coonhound or a puppy with solid breeding potential.



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.

58TH ANNUAL GRAND AMERICAN COON HUNT

Jan. 6-7, 2023

Orangeburg County Fair-grounds
314 Alexander Road
Orangeburg, SC

No Admission Charge
Parking \$5

EVENTS

- 10 a.m. Friday – Opening Ceremonies

- 10:30 a.m. Friday – Bench Show
- 10:30 a.m. Saturday – Bench Show, with Youth Bench Show following
- 1 p.m. Friday & Saturday – Treeing Contests

Information: David McKee,
(803) 528-9050.

While the number of people attending the Grand American declined a little during the past couple of years due to COVID, McKee said the number of hounds entered remained steady.

In addition to the night hunts, the weekend features treeing contests on Friday and Saturday afternoons and bench shows each day. A UKC Licensed Youth Bench Show will be held on Saturday following the regular bench show.

Past studies show the Grand American draws about 30,000 participants and observers and pumps more than \$7 million into the Orangeburg County economy.

You don't have to be a coon hunter to enjoy attending the Grand American. It is an event everybody who loves hunting dogs should experience at least once in a lifetime. ■

HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK ➤



2022 Overall Bench Show Champion Skyline's Push My Luck RED, owned by Beth Jenkins of Virginia.

2022-2023 SOUTH CAROLINA HUNTING REGULATIONS

Not an official document.
Please refer to SCDNR's
Rules & Regulations Digest.

HUNTING SEASONS

| SPECIES | SEASON DATES (PRIVATE LAND) | BAG LIMIT | POSSESSION LIMIT |
|------------------|--|--|------------------|
| Doves | Sept. 3-Sept. 5, Sept. 6-Oct. 8 Nov. 12-26, Dec. 24-Jan. 31, 2023 | 15 | 45 |
| Crow | Nov. 1-March 1, 2023 | No limits | |
| Quail | Nov. 21-March 1, 2023 | 12 | 36 |
| Rabbit | Nov. 24-March 1, 2023 | 5 | 15 |
| Squirrel | Oct. 1-March 1, 2023 | 10 | 30 |
| Fox | Nov. 24-March 1, 2023 | No limits | |
| Grouse | Nov. 24-March 1, 2023 (Game Zone 1 only) | 3 | 9 |
| Raccoon | Sept. 15-March 15, 2023 (statewide) | 3 raccoons per party | |
| Opossum | Sept. 15-March 15, 2023 | No limits | |
| Other furbearers | Nov. 24-March 1, 2023 (bobcat, otter, weasel, mink, muskrat, skunk) | No limits | |
| Bear | Game Zone 1 | Oct. 17-23 (still hunting only) Oct. 24-30 (dogs) | |
| | Game Zone 2 | Oct. 17-30 (still hunting only) (parts of Oconee, Pickens, Greenville, Spartanburg counties not in Game Zone 1) | |
| | Game Zone 4 | Oct. 17-30 (still hunting only) (Georgetown, Horry, Marion and Williamsburg counties) | |
| Rails | Sept. 9-14, | | |
| King & Clapper | Oct. 7-Dec. 9 | 15 | 45 |
| Sora & Virginia | | 25 | 75 |
| Gallinules | | 15 | 45 |
| (common/purple) | | | |
| Snipe | Nov. 14 - Feb. 28, 2023 | 8 | 24 |
| Woodcock | Dec. 18 - Jan. 31, 2023 | 3 | 9 |
| Wild Turkey | March 22-April 30, 2023 (Game Zones 3&4) | 1 | |
| | April 1-May 10, 2023 (Game Zones 1&2) | 1 | |

DEER SEASON

| ZONE | ARCHERY ONLY | PRIM WEAPON | GUNS |
|---|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | | Oct. 1-10 | Oct. 11-Jan.1, 2023 |
| 2 | Sept. 15-30 | Oct. 1-10 | Oct. 11-Jan.1, 2023 |
| 3 | | | Aug. 15-Jan. 1, 2023 |
| 4 | Aug 15-31 | | Sept. 1-Jan. 1, 2023 |
| Youth Days: Game Zone 1, Sept. 24, Jan. 7; Game Zone 2: Sept. 10, Jan. 7; Game Zone 3: Aug.13, Jan. 7; Game Zone 4: Aug. 13, Jan. 7. | | | |

WATERFOWL SEASONS

| SPECIES | DATES | BAG LIMIT |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Duck | Teal only: Sept. 9-24 Nov. 19-26, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2023 | 6 6 |
| Canada geese | Sept. 1-30, Nov. 19-26, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2023, Feb. 15-March 1, 2023 | 15 (Sept.) 5 (Others) |
| Blue/snow (light) geese | Nov. 19-26, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2023, Feb. 15-March 1, 2023 | 25 |
| Brant | Dec. 13-Jan. 31, 2023 | 2 |
| Sea ducks | Nov. 19-26, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2023 | 4 |
| Mergansers | Nov. 19-26, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2023 | 5 (1 hooded) |
| Coots | Nov. 19-26, Dec. 12-Jan. 31, 2023 | 15 |



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



Chris, Jaclyn Boyes

Chris Boyes and 7-year-old daughter Jaclyn show off a Father's Day catfish.



Caitlyn Garland

Caitlyn Garland was fishing out of Ocean Isle Beach when she landed this cobia in May.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of Carolina Sportsman magazine. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your fish, deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, doves, etc. to

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



Weston McCollum

Weston McCollum caught this dolphin at the Big Rock Kid's Fishing Tournament with Tanner Tucker and Colton Baker.

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| BIG ROCK LANDING | <i>Kinston</i> |
| SPECIES | Dolphin |
| WEIGHT | 11.5 |
| BOAT | CAYAN |
| ANGLER | Weston McCollum |
| CAPTAIN | Thomas Hankley |
| DATE | July 16, 2022 |



Wayne Powell

Wayne Powell of Swansboro, NC landed this 23-pound, 5-ounce king mackerel at the Bogue Inlet Pier.



Sarah Myers

Sarah Myers caught her first bull redfish in Winyah Bay out of Georgetown, SC on Oct. 17.



Ron Armstrong

Ron Armstrong of Yadkinville, NC caught this 30-pound flathead at High Rock Lake in July.



Barker siblings

Siblings Caroline, Bren and Cross Barker all went hunting on Oct. 19, and each killed a nice buck.



Dallas Brooks



Paige Vick

Paige Vick of Murrells Inlet, SC killed her first gator while hunting with her husband on Sept. 12 on the Waccamaw River.

Dallas Brooks caught this catfish during a trip to Jordan Lake in July.



Jordan and Matt Hauser

Jordan and Matt Hauser were fishing out of Tubbs Inlet on Sept. 4 when they caught this flounder.



Rex Poplin

Rex Poplin was fishing out of Cricket Cove Marina in Little River, SC on July 8 when he caught these red snapper.



James Brooks

James Brooks of Siler City, NC caught this 22-inch flounder while fishing near Carolina Beach.



Mason Watson

Mason Watson and his dad Chris caught several black drum while fishing in Little River Inlet in August.



Lyndley Whitfield

Lyndley Whitfield killed this gobbler on April 16, her dad's birthday, with a Remington 1100 gifted by her granddad.



Angel Windon

Angel Windon caught her first citation wahoo, this 47-pounder, while fishing out of Atlantic Beach.



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



**Bransyn Whitman,
Cooper Tuttle,
Jackson Cash**

Dove hunting on Sept. 3 in Davidson County, Bransyn Whitman, Cooper Tuttle and Jackson Cash killed their limits.



Greg Nettles

Greg Nettles of Camden, SC caught some nice redfish near Charleston in October.



Tom Gallo, Sam McLamb

Tom Gallo and Sam McLamb caught these wahoo out of Beaufort Inlet while trolling homemade lures.



Ben Wicker

Ben Wicker caught this catfish on Lake Wylie while fishing with his uncle.



Chelsea Lance

Fishing the Santee Cooper lakes, Chelsea Lance caught this Arkansas blue catfish.



Kimmie Lawrie

Kimmie Lawrie of Pelion, SC was fishing below Wateree Dam when she caught this Arkansas blue catfish.

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D By Terry Madewell
December may signal the end of the calendar year but it also heralds the beginning of great cold-weather crappie fishing in the Carolinas. Crappie action can be sensational if anglers employ the right tactics for specific lakes.

Falling water temperatures cause many to overlook crappie, but these fish tend to become predictable in cold weather. The key for slab-slayers is adapting with the right tactics for December conditions.

Several Carolina lakes provide excellent crappie fishing throughout late-November and December.

CHRISTMAS CRAPPIE HOTSPOTS

SLABS ARE BITING IN
SEVERAL CAROLINA
LAKES THIS MONTH.

JORDAN LAKE

Jordan Lake near Raleigh, NC is a productive year-round producer of quality crappie. And late-season, deep water fishing offers anglers the opportunity to catch slabs in big numbers.

Travis Bradshaw of Willow Springs, NC has been guiding on Jordan Lake for 6 years. He said it's an excellent time to take limits of slabs.

"The crappie fishing in December is productive and it's not unusual to catch plenty of fish in the 1- to 1½-pound class," he said. "Size and creel limits exist, but keeping a limit of 11- to 13-inch fish is a good possibility. And we'll catch and cull a lot of fish on a typical day."

But anglers must have a good game plan and be willing to work out the daily pattern to catch fish consistently, Bradshaw said.

"The overall pattern is consistent for fishing deep water with tightline rigs," he said. "But the exact fish-catching scenario changes daily so I have to work out the daily fish pattern on every trip."

Bradshaw (919-669-6989; Pigpen Guide Service) said the basic pattern is to fish water depths ranging from 25 to 45 feet of water with deep ledges and flats as his primary targets.

"But my key as to exactly where to fish changes daily," he said. "I trust my electronics and I search for schools of shad with crappies mixed in and around them. At that point I can determine whether the fish are near the bottom or suspended."

Bradshaw said don't get locked into a single pattern because the crappie may be right off the bottom one day, but suspended at mid-depths the next. That's where the use of his graph is essential.

"A graph speeds up my fish-finding process exponentially," he said. "Without a graph, anglers can still catch fish. But it'll be a more difficult and lengthy process to figure out. Crappie do relate to the bridge pilings in deep water and multiple bridges on Jordan Lake produce good action without

relying as much on electronics."

Bradshaw said his basic tightline rig is a dropshot weight on the bottom and either one or two leaders from 6 to 18 inches above the weight.

"I adapt to what the fish give me and some days I'll use two-hook rigs. Other days they bite best on single-hook rigs," he said. "I'll try them both if necessary to determine the best bite. But crappie can be finicky regarding depth. So fishing two depths can help at times. I use live minnows exclusively, and this time of year I prefer small minnows."

LAKE WATEREE >

Jordan Lake guide Travis Bradshaw focuses on deep water for December crappie fishing success. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Kevin Davis said fish deep brush with a jig-minnow combination or Roadrunner jigs for best results.



LAKE WATEREE

Crappie fishing professional guide and tournament angler TC Lloyd, from Hartsville, SC, said Lake Wateree is one of his favored “go-to” spots for limit stringers of slab December crappie.

“For consistent success at Lake Wateree, I fish the upper end of the lake this month,” he said. “I focus on the area from Singleton Creek all the way up past Wateree Creek upstream to the dam. The main river channel area is my prime target. Fish may be on the top of the ledge, down the slope, or in the main deep-water area of the channel.”

Lloyd (843-307-6678) said for the past 3 years he’s employed his “Live Scope” unit to mark crappie when searching the channel ledges and deep holes. He’ll motor along scanning and searching for schools of crappie. With practice he’s learned to identify crappie using this technology.

“It makes the locating process much quicker,” he said. “But fishermen using traditional sonar can mark schools of crappie along the ledges, or deep in the middle of the river, and find plenty of action.”

Lloyd primarily tightlines for crappie and said either live minnows or jigs will produce. But he typically prefers jigs.

“Depth control is essential,” Lloyd said. “The fish are not always deep or near the bottom. They can be found most anywhere in the water column. One trip I may find them near the bottom in 20 to 25 feet of water. But they may be suspended

shallow, but holding over deep water the next trip. Trust your sonar and cover water to find the pattern of the day. Lake Wateree can reward anglers with excellent catches of big crappie during December.”

LAKE MOULTRIE

December provides awesome action for slab crappie on Lake Moultrie, and late November and December are excellent for crappie pushing beyond the 2-pound mark.

Longtime angler Kevin Davis fishes out of Blacks Camp (843-753-2231). He said December is ordinarily a deep-water fishing situation. And the size of the crappie is extraordinary.

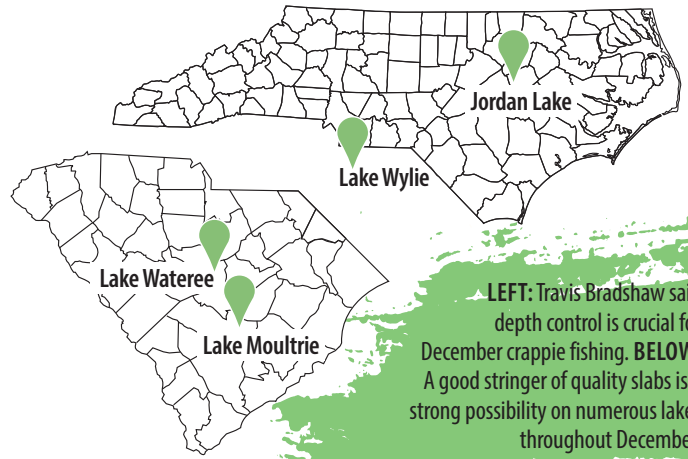
“The bite for slab crappie is excellent,” Davis said. “It’s not uncommon to catch crappie weighing 2 pounds, and occasionally considerably larger. The fish we keep typically average over a pound.”

Davis said fishing is consistent on deep-water brush throughout Lake Moultrie. Prime locations to target include the base of ledges, depressions in natural ditches, ends of underwater points and mouths of underwater creeks.

“Productive depths vary even within the same day because the lake is so huge. But most of my fishing will be in water 20 to 45 feet deep,” he said. “Crappie tend to orient to the top of the brush and along the side. So the depth to fish may vary with each individual brush pile. I use my graph to determine the depth fish are holding and the position of the crappie in rela-

Anglers can catch some of the biggest crappie of the year during December if they’re willing to put in the time each day to figure out the correct pattern.





LEFT: Travis Bradshaw said depth control is crucial for December crappie fishing. BELOW: A good stringer of quality slabs is a strong possibility on numerous lakes throughout December.



tion to the brush. And I target that depth.”

Davis prefers a 1/16-ounce jig in solid color patterns with black, scuppersong and chartreuse all productive. And he’ll use a live minnow trailer in December.

“I place a No. 1 split shot 8 inches above the jig/minnow to enable me to better fish the rig vertically,” he said. “A crappie bite can be subtle. So if the split shot is placed further up the line, we’ll often not see or feel the bite. Little things make a big difference in December.”

Davis said he uses electronics to find the brush and look for forage and fish.

“If I don’t mark bait and fish on the graph, I move on to the next spot,” he said. “Some days we’ll catch limits fishing a couple of places. But often we’ll have to fish several spots.”

Davis said numerous public fish attractors are marked by buoys on Lake Moultrie. These can produce good crappie fishing. Check the SCDNR website for exact coordinates. ■

HOTSPOT ON THE BORDER ➤



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

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CHRISTMAS CRAPPIE HOTSPOTS

Lake Wylie's crappie migrate out of the creeks this month, and Chris Nichols finds lots of success.



HOTSPOT ON THE BORDER- LAKE WYLIE

Chris Nichols from Gastonia, NC, is a professional crappie and catfish guide. He said December is a favorite time to fish Lake Wylie on the North and South Carolina border.

Nichols (704-860-7951) said the winter patterns on Lake Wylie are not difficult to understand.

"We'll catch big crappies during December, once the late fall pattern sets in," he said. "The key for me is for the water temperature to drop below 60 degrees. Once this occurs the fishing perks up and crappie begin a migration out of the major creeks."

Nichols said the movement is triggered by the migration of shad from the creeks toward the deeper water of the main lake. Shad are temperature sensitive. So as water temperature plummets, crappies move toward deeper water following forage.

"By late November the crappies are found in 18 to 20 feet of water at Lake Wylie. But during December they gradually migrate deeper to 22 to 25 feet of water," he said.

Nichols said he uses electronics to identify the potential hotspots and he'll typically find crappie in close proximity to large pods of shad.

"It's important to know crappie can be at various depths in the

water column on different days," he said. "I'll sort this out daily. But once I get the pattern in one creek, I can usually duplicate it that day on other creeks."

Nichols uses a two-hook tightline rig and he prefers live minnows in December. He uses a 2-ounce bell sinker at the terminal end of the line with a leader and hook about a foot above the sinker, and another leader 2 feet up the line. He said commercial rigs work well but said anglers can easily prepare their own.

"Fishing multiple depths is ideal because this species is depth sensitive," he said. "I fish right at the depth I've marked them or slightly shallower. Depth control is crucial." ■

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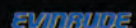
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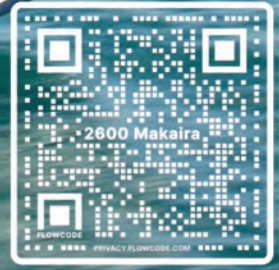
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IT'S TRANSITION TIME

MIX IT UP WITH CRAWDADS THIS MONTH

Dan Kibler

To me, December is very much a transition month in a lot of ways. I spend most of the fall using shad-type baits, trying to imitate blueback herring and shad, because bass are so keyed in on those baitfish in most of our Carolina lakes. I probably use them 90% of the time. And I don't stop using them in December, because I think bass will stay on shad and bluebacks all the way into January and February.

But December is the month when I start looking for more than just baitfish, the way I have all the way back to October or September. In December, I start fishing around places where crawfish can be found, like around a variety of different rocks and vegetation. And I begin using baits that imitate crawfish: mop jigs in reds, oranges and browns, especially in tournaments.

I know that tournament schedules start to slow down in December. But through

the years, I've fished a number of them this month. And if you're fishing for five bass on tournament day, you started thinking about catching five larger bass.

I can probably catch more fish looking for baitfish using my Humminbird electronics, and you can catch a lot of different kinds of fish using baits that imitate shad and herring. But if I'm fishing a tournament in December, I'm going to throw baits in places where crawfish live. That's because bigger bass start to concentrate on crawfish this month.

MAIN LAKE MOVE

My favorite baits to imitate crawfish are a mop jig with a Yamamoto Flappin' Hog as a trailer, and a Rapala DT-4, DT-6 or DT-8 in crawfish type colors. I think the "demon" color is the best. Those baits will run in the depth range I'm usually targeting.

When I fish a jig in December, I'm not flipping and pitching as much as I'm

casting. So instead of using a rod that's as long or heavy as I do when flipping and pitching, I go with a 7-foot, medium-heavy Team Lew's Signature Series baitcaster, paired with a Lew's Pro Spool reel with an 8.3-to-1 retrieve ratio. I really think reels have come a long way. They're set up to where you can have the speed of retrieve with the internal strength you need to fight a big fish.

In December, fish are moving back toward the main lake. But they're still in creeks. I don't think all of them come out on the main lake as the water cools. But they won't be way back up in the creeks. They'll be in the creeks closer to the main lake.



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.

WINTER OR FALL?:

It may seem like an overused phrase, but December in the Carolinas is more of a transition month than a winter month. The first part of the month is usually more like fall, and that can extend throughout the whole month during some years, depending on weather cycles

Another thing about December, the days you're fishing can be so different. So you

have to adjust the way you fish. Some days you'll have highs in the low 40s. Other days, the high temperature will be 70. The colder it gets, I'll slow down my retrieve. With a jig, I want to keep it in contact with the bottom, hopping it along. I'm not swimming it. I fish it pretty fast. I don't let it sit still.

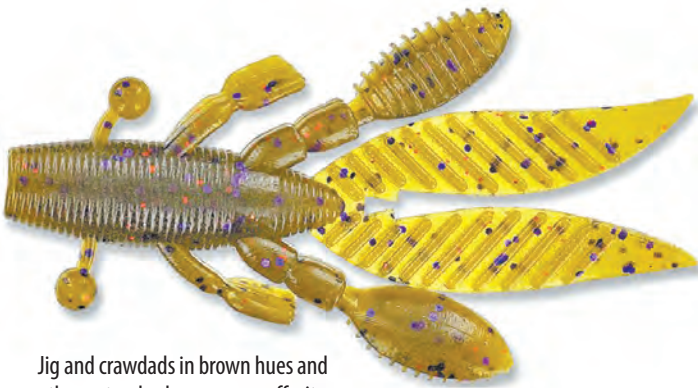
KEEP CONTACT

I want my baits to remain in contact with some kind of cover, either man-made or natural rock and vegetation. Riprap can be good in December because those rocks hold heat. I'll fish rocks and vegetation with the crankbaits and the mop jig. And another bait I like to fish is a Spot Remover, a shaky head, with something like a 5-inch Senko. That can be a great presentation when you know you're fishing the right places but they aren't hitting a crankbait or a jig.

Hopefully, the guys who interrupt fishing in the fall to deer hunt (and I'm one of them) will have filled enough tags to have a freezer full of venison. That way, it's fairly easy to squeeze in some time on the water, because the fishing can be great.

Fish can often be very aggressive, because December is more of a fall month than a winter month, and bass will really feed up in the fall. ■

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SANTEE COOPER SMORGASBORD

PLENTY OF OPTIONS FOR ANGLERS THIS MONTH

December weather cools the air temperature but not the fishing success on the Santee Cooper lakes. The year-ending month ranks high for multiple species to provide excellent fishing.

Numerous options can make decisions difficult and while planning a fishing trip with Stacey Weatherford from Moncks Corner, a life-long Santee Cooper angler, we went pro and con on the best options.

Weatherford solved it by suggesting we fish for multiple species on the trip and see how that scenario played.

"I'll bring the rigs and we'll start with small fish and work our progression to big fish," he said. "If we want to focus on a specific target, we can do that at any point during the day."

BULLS AND SLABS

Bream fishing for bedding fish is the reason landings are full of johnboat

trailers during the spring. But when cool weather sets in, bream fishing pressure tapers.

"After bed-fishing ends many anglers think bream fishing is finished," Weatherford said. "But that's not the case. December can serve up some of the fastest and most productive bream fishing of the year."

When targeting bream Weatherford prefers brush at the base of open water ledges, in water depths ranging from 15 to 36 feet deep. He'll place a lot of his own bream brush piles, but he said the public fish attractors located around the lake are effective in concentrating big bream.

"The bream bite is usually aggressive. And while crickets are my preferred bait, on some days, I literally have to thread redworms on the hook because the big bream will steal crickets as the bait drops to the target depth," he said. "They have

Bull bream are caught from deep water in December with fast-action and big numbers common. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Catfish are good options at Santee all year long, and anglers catch plenty of them in December.

to work harder to steal my worm, so I take both baits."

Weatherford positions the boat directly above the target and vertically tightlines with spinning gear loaded with 10-pound test line, with a couple of split shots about 8 inches above a No. 4 wire hook.

"After a few minutes of fishing, bream usually move shallower in the water column and are often only 5 to 8 feet under the boat," Weatherford said. "It's ridiculously good fishing because it's like having huge bream in a cricket-eating competition right under the boat. This is the scenario where you want to bring a youngster to fish."



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.



Terry Madewell

Weatherford said the deep-water brush attracts crappies but he typically doesn't find these fish loaded on the same brush as the bream.

"They are certainly found together at times, but the best scenario for me is to find bull bream on one brush pile and slab crappies on another.

"I generally expect to find crappie deeper and on different brush," he said. "By December, when you find the crappie, the slabs often congregate and we can occasionally catch multiple fish from a single brush pile."

Weatherford tightlines live minnows, or a jig and minnow combo, under the boat at the depth crappie are graphed.

STRIPER AND CATFISH

After working the deep brush for the panfish species, Weatherford said it's time to feast on larger and more aggressive predators including stripers and catfish.

"Striper action is sweet in December, with topwater schooling and live bait fishing for deep, suspended fish both excellent tactics," he said.

He scans the lake for seagull activity as these birds often betray the location of feeding stripers. If they school on a calm morning, you can hear them a long distance away.

Topwater lures are worked in schooling fish and produce savage bites, as do flutter spoons, bucktail jigs and large Roadrunners.

"If the fish aren't schooling, drop live, blueback herring to

MIX IT UP:

Many anglers pigeon-hole themselves into fishing for one certain species all day long. But with cold-weather uncertainties, it's a good idea this month to hit the water prepared to try several different species, which can lead to some very fun fishing.

the depth fish are marked on the graph as the backup plan," Weatherford said.

He'll often drift fish for stripers in areas where scattered schools are marked. But when he locates a general area where stripers are stacked like pancakes, he'll anchor.

After the stripers, we finished the day drifting for catfish in deep water with Santee Rigs. A variety of baits are productive, but left-over herring are generally too tempting for big catfish to ignore. Since our first stop was on brush for bream, we saved some bream, and the always-willing-to-bite white perch, as potential cut bait options.

Weatherford prefers to drift deep water for December catfish, typically from 20 to 45 feet deep. And he primarily fishes ledges in this deep water.

"My plan is to be fishing up and down ledges connecting shallower to deeper water," he said. "The ledges with significant depth changes are ideal because this provides catfish a wide option of depth preferences. We can get on some strong catfish patterns this month."

For more information on Santee Cooper December fishing, contact Santee Cooper Country at <https://www.santeecooper-country.org>. ■

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SLABS ON HIGH ROCK

Big numbers, big crappie bite this month

One of the best times to catch slab crappie on High Rock Lake is during December. The fish are packing on the protein as they prepare to make it through the bitterly cold winter weather.

For fishing guide Shane Walser of Yadkin Lakes Crappie Guides (336-978-3737), this month is one he's been looking forward to since the dead of summer.

"If you don't mind the cold, this is a great time to be on the water. There's very little boat traffic, and the crappie get schooled up in tight schools. You can catch a lot of fish and have a lot of fun doing it," he said.

His top tactic this month is tight-lining, also known as spider rigging. It involves fishing with long, limber rods placed in rod holders, then trolling slowly through likely fish-holding areas. The mouths of creeks are key spots that Walser focuses on.

"Especially in the wintertime, these fish really pull out of the creeks and stay in the creek mouths. They school up in big groups of 75 or 100 fish. You can find them pretty easy on your depthfinder, and they can be pretty easy to catch," he said.

But that doesn't mean they bite all day long.



December is one of Shane Walser's favorite months to fish for crappie at High Rock.

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DOUBLE HOOK RIGGING

"You can't be afraid to leave fish this time of year. If you find a big school it can be tempting to just stay put until they start to bite. But if you aren't catching any, you need to leave and find another school, because somewhere on this lake this time of year, the fish are biting," Walser said.

Keep that first school in mind, though.

"Come back to that school later in the day and you'll probably catch them in a feeding mood. But don't be afraid to leave them for other fish when they have lockjaw," he said.

Walser uses a double minnow rig, which is made up of a ¾-ounce egg sinker. He ties a minnow hook on the end of the line, then pegs the egg sinker about 8 inches above it. On the other side of the sinker he uses an 18-inch leader that he ties to a Jenko three-way swivel. A 6- to 8-inch leader is used off that swivel and terminated with another crappie hook. And the mainline going back to the reel is tied to the third eye of the swivel.

He uses jig bodies on the hooks or live minnows, and sometimes he uses both at the same time on one hook or both hooks.

"If you're going for numbers, minnows will do the trick. When targeting bigger fish, the soft plastic jig bodies are best," he said. ■

Small crowds and great fishing await December mountain trout anglers.



The Catawba Angler

MOUNTAIN TROUT

NC's Catawba River is great in December

By Brian Cope

North Carolina's mountain streams provide great fishing action in December, according to fishing guide Matt Evans of The Catawba Angler (828-460-2390).

"It's an overlooked month to trout fish. The crowds have dwindled and the fishing is just as good if not better than it was in the fall," Evans said.

Evans guides out of Old Fort, NC in McDowell County, but fishes in many other parts of western North Carolina. Conditions change quickly depending on weather and other factors, so he stays prepared to hit different rivers and streams. The Catawba River is one of his most reliable.

This month, Evans said trout are keyed in on blue wing olives, midges and early black stones. What size you use depends on the water temperatures, which range from the upper 30s to lower 50s.

"If the water is hovering at 40 degrees, you want to downsize your flies. Trout won't be chasing a bunch, and will be eating smaller offerings," he said.

With the water usually crystal clear this month, he said it's also time to break out the 6x and 7x tippets for more subtle presentations.

"We're throwing small flies, sizes 16 to 22, and you need a small diameter tippet to get them down," he said.

Long leaders are also key. On his float trips down the Catawba, he uses 12-foot leaders. Shorter leaders, he said, just don't cut it.

"One of my favorite offerings this time of year is running a heavy point fly like a stone or an egg pattern, then have some sort of blue wing olive emerger pattern two feet above it. This set up has proven itself year over year on NC trout waters," he said.

Evans also likes using a fly called the Trusty Rusty this month. It represents a spent mayfly, with its normally upright wings flat to the water.

"The best patterns are going to be tied in gray because that is the color of blue wing olives," he said.

Sleeping in is no problem this month. Evans said the best fishing will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., which is when the water temperature is generally warmest this time of year.

Being comfortable on the river is an important part of enjoying the fishing, said Evans. He suggests fishing in layers.

"It's better to have more clothes on than not have enough. A ski cap or toboggan is priceless on cold, windy days," he said.

For anglers not interested in catching numbers of trout as much as they are catching truly big fish, Evans said streamers are good options this month. ■

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Brian Cope

RIVER PERCH JERKING

Savannah River's yellow perch are biting

By Brian Cope

One fish that gets little fanfare throughout the Carolinas, the yellow perch, has a strong following among some anglers on the Savannah River and its chain of lakes on the Georgia/South Carolina border.

Albert Moody of Clarks Hill, SC is a big fan of these "other pan-fish" that many anglers view as a nuisance species.

"They're a lot of fun to catch, and they are surprisingly good to eat. If most people eat them just once, they'd give this fish their due," said Moody, who fishes the Savannah River from a pontoon boat within sight of the dam that holds Clarks Hill Lake on the other side of it.

Moody said anglers can catch these fish throughout the year, but the best bite occurs after Thanksgiving.

"The colder it gets, the better the bite. It's not bad in the fall once the water temperature begins dropping. But come December and into January and February, it can be really good," he said.

We fished with Moody last year, and while we had a good day, he said it could have been considerably better. The problem, he said, is that it was a bluebird sky day that started off chilly but warmed up nicely. Too nicely for these fish.

"What you really want is a cold, damp, dreary, cloudy day. On

PJ Perea of Aiken, SC was fishing with Albert Moody on the Savannah River when he caught this chunky yellow perch.

those days the yellow perch group up tighter, are easier to find, and the action is fast," he said.

LIGHT GEAR, SMALL HOOKS

This is pretty simple fishing, with light rods and reels. Small minnows on jigheads are great baits, and Moody also catches them on soft plastic grubs on jigheads. Carolina rigs with light bullet weights are also good choices.

Anglers will find yellow perch in a variety of places. Slightly deeper holes in the river, sunken debris, rock piles, docks. If it looks like a good spot for a bream or crappie, you can catch perch there too.

Corks can be helpful, but Moody usually fishes without them.

When the conditions are right and the river's current isn't too strong, Moody will cast out and let the boat drift. He slowly – very slowly – reels in as the boat drifts. This allows him to cover a lot of water and different depths and types of structure quickly. When one area produces well, he'll crank the outboard and pull back up to the beginning of that drift, then do it again.

"This is really an untapped fishery. There's a few of us around here that love it. But most others think we're wasting our time. They don't know what they're missing," he said. ■

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BULL DRUM ON **THE CRYSTAL COAST**

**CAPE LOOKOUT PROVIDES
WINTER ACTION FOR
GIANT REDS.** ■ By Brian Cope



By December, puppy drum are beginning to school up in huge numbers along the inshore creeks, and the bull red drum have left for the winter.

BUT ONE PLACE ANGLERS CAN STILL HOOK INTO THE BIG BRUISERS IS CAPE LOOKOUT.

And while earlier in the fall, anglers can find the bull drum in the Pamlico Sound, this month, they're spending time in more open water and the shoals off of Cape Lookout. That would normally make them difficult to find, but anglers have some help from Mother Nature in the form of gannets, birds which group up and dive on schools of baitfish getting pushed to the surface by the giant drum.

Sanford, NC's Chris Douglas, host of Carolina ALL OUT, fishes for the bull reds along Cape Lookout this time of year, often with Mike Laws, who is adept at finding and catching these fish. Leaving from Cape Pointe Marina on Harkers Island, they head to the shoals.

"These big fish have left the inshore waters by late fall after their spawn is done. And this month they're heading out to feed on the massive schools of menhaden that form on our coastline as the baitfish spawn in late fall and early winter," said Douglas.

The first thing they look for is the swarms of gannets.

"The shoals extend for a long way, and the baitfish get pushed up against them. And the birds will show you where the biggest groups of them are. And then if we can get close enough in there to make a cast and get our lures in there, then there's a very good chance to hook up," he said.

ROUGH WATER, GREAT FISHING >

The bull drum at Cape Lookout run anywhere from 20 pounds to 50 pounds. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The Cape Lookout lighthouse is in eyesight of some of the biggest schools of bull drum on the east coast.



ROUGH WATER, GREAT FISHING

December can be a fickle month in Cape Lookout. Some days can be bitterly cold, but other days bring Indian summer weather. But no matter the temperature, the water is usually churned up and rough. So having the right boat, as well as a good driver, is imperative.

It's also imperative, Douglas said, just to be on the water, watching and observing, ready to capitalize when the birds gang up and identify the hot pockets of baitfish, which in turn show anglers where the bull drum are.

"And when the birds show us where, that's when we start pitching to them," he said.

Their lure of choice is a white bucktail jig.

"When you see the birds dive, you'll know the bait is there. And sometimes you'll see the drum, some even on top of the water working the bait," said Laws, who uses 30-pound braided line when pursuing these fish.

"The seas are rough. But Mike and his Jones Brothers Bateau handles it like a champ. Sometimes you'll see the gannets diving right on the shoals and it can be rough. Then all of a sudden you'll see another group of birds a half mile away, and it's on," said Douglas.

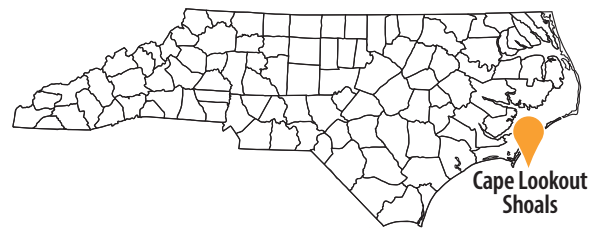
"This is a great reason to come to North Carolina right here," he said. "It's all about watching these birds. You'll see them diving like missiles, because these big red drum are pushing the bait to the top."

Many of these drum are in the 35, 40 and 50-pound range. A hookup with one can lead to a 10 minute or longer fight.

Even aside from the fishing, Cape Lookout is a great tourist destination with lots of historical importance.

DRIFTING ALSO WORKS

"We are fishing right here in the shoals. People come here from all over the country to see the lighthouse. And we can see



the lighthouse, but we're also seeing these big drum all up and down the shoals here.

"It's just an awesome experience right here in North Carolina. It's great to live in a state that you can do this. And even if you're not from this state, you can come out here and do this. There's plenty of great outfitters and guides out here on the Crystal Coast. This is truly an awesome opportunity. And fishing here in December, it's a great Christmas present," he said.

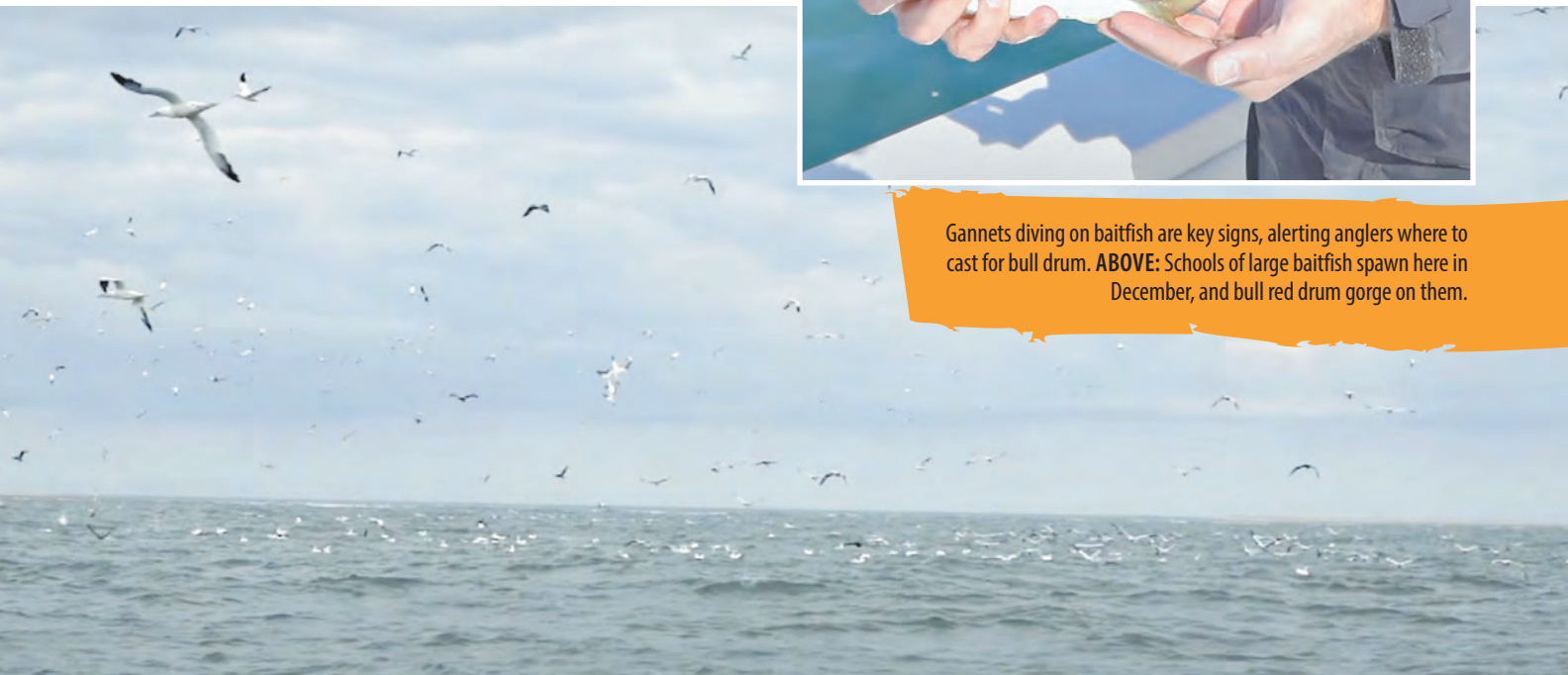
Throughout the day, the bait will go deep as the redfish take breaks from pushing them to the surface. When this happens, the birds are less of a factor. But the baitfish – and the drum – are still present. The trick then is to drift down the line of shoals, casting as you go. When you've drifted past the shoals, it's time to crank up, run back up, then drift again.

"You can still see some birds in the distance. Not in the big numbers and diving like they are when the bait is pushed up. But the fish are still here. It's just a matter of getting them to bite," said Laws.

MULTIPLE HOOKUPS >



Gannets diving on baitfish are key signs, alerting anglers where to cast for bull drum. **ABOVE:** Schools of large baitfish spawn here in December, and bull red drum gorge on them.



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MULTIPLE HOOKUPS

Catching them in this area, and this time of year, is different in several ways from catching them in the sounds and backwater creeks throughout summer and fall. Aside from the casting techniques, the fish actually take on a different look.

“They’re not super red now because they’re out here in this salt water, and they clean up really nice. They turn really red when they get into the Pamlico and the sounds in that tinged water, but they turn silver, almost white, out here in the ocean,” said Douglas. “They’re almost like a different fish.”

But one thing that doesn’t change?

“They’re just so strong. Strong and awesome. They are definitely still eating machines.”

When fishing with multiple anglers, it’s always good to have a net man. But don’t expect too much help, because some days the fish are feeding so aggressively that double and triple hook-ups are the norm.

When you get tired of casting and reeling, it’s a good idea to



make a cast, then place the rod in a rod holder. As the boat drifts, the lure naturally glides through the water, bouncing up and down with the wave action.

“Sometimes an angler can be working as hard as he can, and the rod in the rod holder will hookup first,” said Douglas.

“The Crystal Coast is one of the great fisheries in our state. It’s a great place to catch these big drum, in sight of the Cape Lookout lighthouse. And it is an honor to catch these fish,” he said. ■

Anglers fishing here need to be prepared for some of the biggest fights of their angling careers. ABOVE: White bucktail jigs are great lures that these big fish can’t resist.



CAROLINA ALL OUT

You've probably seen some videos from Carolina ALL OUT on the Carolina Sportsman website. It's hosted by Chris Douglas, who chronicles the outdoor experience across the state of North Carolina.

Raised in central North Carolina, Douglas also spent time in South Africa as a teen when his family moved to the mission fields there. Experiencing African safaris expanded his already full passion for the outdoors.

After moving back to North Carolina, Douglas decided to study Radio and Television Broadcasting, which led to a career filming and producing outdoors shows across the globe. He is the only producer to capture 23 of the top 29 North American big game animals on professional video equipment.

Although he thoroughly enjoyed his many adventures throughout the world, his true passion was to come back to North Carolina and showcase his home state's hunting and fishing.

"I love North Carolina, and it's just such a diverse state," he said. "It offers so many options for outdoorsmen, and it's always been important to me to share as many of those options with the public as possible.

"I've been fortunate to travel the world, meeting great people and experiencing world-class outdoor adventures. But North Carolina is my home, and I've always wanted to showcase what we have here. Being able to do it has been a dream come true," he said.

In sharing those adventures, Douglas seeks out experts in all regions of the state, then teams up with them to show viewers what they can experience close to their own homes.

Visit CarolinaALLOUT.com to see the show's TV schedule, and check out their YouTube channel at youtube.com/carolinaallout. ■

STONO SPECKS >



Brian Cope is the editor of Carolina Sportsman Magazine and CarolinaSportsman.com. You can reach him at brian@sportsmannetwork.com

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I've been fortunate to travel the world, meeting great people and experiencing world-class outdoor adventures. But North Carolina is my home, and I've always wanted to showcase what we have here



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GO SLOW FOR STONO SPECKS

Speckled trout feed heavily in this lowcountry river

By Brian Cope

The Stono River in South Carolina's lowcountry is a haven for speckled trout. The trick, said fishing guide Gifford Scott of SC Flats Fishing (843-4112-6429) is staying on the move until you get that first bite.

And once you've landed that first trout, Scott said you're almost certainly in for your share of others.

Likely spots include small creeks off the main river, wooden docks, and oyster shell banks where secondary creeks meet the main river channel.

"On some days, you'll find them in all three types of spots. Other days, they're holding tight to just one type. And this time of year, it changes daily. You can think you've got them figured out because you caught them in a certain

spot a few days in a row, then the next day, they aren't there. So you just have to keep moving to the next spot, and try all three types of areas until you find them," he said.

For lures, Scott said swimbait on jig-heads are all you need. His favorite is the D.O.A. C.A.L. Shad Tail on a Ralph Phillips jighead. He varies the size and weight of his jighead depending on conditions.

"When it's really windy and when the current is really ripping, you've got to size up," he said. "But I like to use the smallest weight I can get away with.

"That 3-inch Shad Tail is a good one because it has some weight on its own. It's good paired up with a 1/4-ounce jighead. But if I can reach my target with a 1/8-ounce, all the better," he said.

He likes to try different colors throughout

each day, and he always has D.O.A.'s 400 Greene in the mix.

"That's a color that just works whether the water is dingy or clear. You always want to have one that's good in many different circumstances," he said.

More importantly than color, said Scott, is the speed of your retrieve.

"I can't stress enough how slow you need to reel it in. Experiment at first of course, but if you're not getting bit, always try slowing your retrieve before moving to another spot. You need to reel slower than you think. And when you're reeling that slow, you need to slow down again. Painstakingly slow," he said.

Scott said this time of year, it's not uncommon to catch a dozen in one spot, then for them to shut down. That's when it's time to repeat the process. ■



WRIGHTSVILLE SPECKS

December's speck bite is as good as it gets

F By Brian Cope
or Capt. Jot Owens of Jot It Down Charters (910-233-4139) in Wrightsville Beach, NC, December is just another fishing month, and it's a month he loves for catching speckled trout.

"This month, we typically have some cold days. But then we have runs of mild weather. This keeps the bite going. In December, I catch some of the biggest speckled trout all year," he said.

The specks will bite a variety of bait and lures this month. Live bait is a good choice for anglers seeking numbers of fish.

"Try smaller mullets, mud minnows and live shrimp. In water 2 to 6 feet deep, I float these baits with a cork and small treble hook. In deeper water, I rig them on light Carolina rigs with a small No. 1 Eagle Claw L42 J-hook," he said.

When fishing this way, Owens said anglers need to remember how soft a trout's mouth is.

"When you feel that trout, you need to lightly set the hook. With their soft mouths, fast hooksets with light power work best," he said.

For anglers targeting larger trout, Owens said artificial lures work best. He's a big fan of Mirrolures, especially their 17MR and 22MR

The Wrightsville Beach area offers great speckled trout fishing throughout December, and Capt. Jot Owens said the weather is usually pretty mild.

in water up to 6 feet deep, 18MR, 51M and 52MR in waters with current between 4 and 15 feet deep.

He said numerous colors will work, including pink back/white belly, purple back/pink belly and blue back/pink belly.

Soft plastic grubs are also good, he said. He's especially fond of Berkley Gulp's 3-inch shrimp and 5-inch Jerkshad. His preferred colors for the shrimp include sugar spice glow, pearl white and sangria. For the Jerkshad, he likes pink shine, pearl white and chartreuse pepper neon.

Another good soft plastic lure is the 3-inch Berkley Powerbait Pro Twitchtail minnow. Owens like this in chartreuse ice, pink ice and pearl white colors.

When using any of these soft plastics, he rigs them on jigheads in 1/16, 1/8 and 1/4 ounce sizes. And any time he's trout fishing, he's using a fluorocarbon leader.

"I like jigheads in red, gray or white, and I always use a fluorocarbon leader when trout fishing. I prefer Berkley Pro Spec 20-pound fluoro. But if the bluefish show up, I'll switch to 30-pound Pro Spec," he said. ■



Jerry Dilsaver

KING MACKEREL DRESSING BALLS

TIP!

This recipe is my take on Robert Cardwell's idea of mixing fish and dressing, a unique and tasty idea.

The Holiday Season begins at Thanksgiving and doesn't end until time expires in February's Super Bowl. You'll have many opportunities to amaze your friends, family and co-workers with just how good king mackerel can taste.

The way kings have been biting this fall, you should have plenty in your freezer to make this several times and allow you to adjust the spices, amount of dressing, amount of fish or whether to bake it or fry it to get the perfect taste for you.

If you like fish with a little bit of flavor, you should like it as prepared here. If you prefer milder flavored fish, try it with dolphin, grouper, striper or catfish. The fish balls and dressing idea is unique and using king mackerel is special. Make it as special as you care to enjoy it.

Merry Christmas and my best wishes for health, happiness and prosperity in the New Year. ■

OPPOSITE PAGE: These finger foods are sure to be a treat at many of the holiday gatherings coming up, so make plenty of them. Easy to make, and even easier to pop in your mouth, they'll disappear quickly.

KING MACKEREL DRESSING BALLS

Credit for this recipe goes to Robert Cardwell of Stoneville, N.C.

Robert and his friends John Cruise and Curtis Bolick, travel to the N.C. coast regularly to catch king mackerel.

Robert was looking for an easy way to prepare kings that was as simple as marinating and grilling them. This isn't quite that simple, but isn't much more effort and it sure tastes good. It was Robert's idea to mix the chopped king fillets with Pepperidge Farm dressing mix and see how it tasted. Most enjoyed the first version and he added some Worcestershire sauce, Dijon mustard and some Old Bay seasoning the next time.

I added chopped sweet onions and jalapeno peppers, with a spoonful of minced garlic.

PREPARATION:

1. Chop the king mackerel, onion, jalapenos, Bok Choy and parsley.
2. Sprinkle the Old Bay seasoning on the fish.
3. Beat the egg and slice the lemons and limes.
4. Smooth out the chunks in the dressing mix.
5. Sauté the onion, jalapeno, garlic and Bok Choy in the peanut oil until the onion glazes.
6. Use a medium bowl and thoroughly mix the fish, stuffing mix, sauteed vegetables, mayonnaise, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, parsley, and pepper.
7. Preheat the oven to 375.
8. Cover a cookie sheet or shallow baking pan with a sheet of parchment paper.
9. Roll balls of the mixture to approximately ping-pong ball size and arrange them on the cookie sheet.
10. Cook for approximately 20-25 minutes, being careful not to overcook.
11. Remove the balls to a platter or serving tray and serve with lemon and lime wedges, tartar sauce and your favorite dipping sauces.

EXTRA TIPS

The dark pieces of meat are strong and can turn people off, so trim these. Once the fillets are clean, cut them into smaller pieces. The more thoroughly this is mixed, the better it will taste.

Most folks will like the onion, but some will take time to pick out the pieces of jalapeno. Leave those pieces large enough they're easier

You need a few things, like the fish, stuffing mix, egg and mayonnaise, to bind it all together. After that, the option for spices is wide open.

When cleaning the fish, trim out all the dark meat, whether it's red or brown/black. Once the fillets are clean, cut them into smaller pieces. The more thoroughly this is mixed, the better it will taste.

Chop the onion and jalapeno pretty well, but don't mince them into oblivion. Some will take time to pick out the pieces of jalapeno.

The dressing mix will be a bit chunky, but is easily smoothed by placing in a bag, then rolling a rolling pin over it. If you don't have a rolling pin, a pint jar works well too. ■

to find.

I bake the balls, but they are excellent fried also. A deep fryer with peanut oil heated to just before smoking will be best for frying, but the balls could be cooked in a frying pan in a pinch.

You'll need a few dipping sauces to accompany this. The one I like best is a simple sauce made by mixing a little Texas Pete Cha Sauce with mayonnaise. Sweet chili sauce is another good one and chipotle ranch dressing works well too. For those that favor flavor that isn't quite so robust, Ranch dressing or Tartar sauce is a good start and Tzatziki sauce has a hint of dill and cucumber.

This will be a hit at parties, a bigger hit at functions for hunters and fishermen and especially good while watching the big game. Enjoy! ■

SOUND & SEA >

TIP!

Smooth the dressing in a zip lock bag and roll a rolling pin over it. A pint jar also works well.

INGREDIENTS:

1 Pound king mackerel fillet

1 Large egg

1/2 Cup sweet onion

2 Fresh jalapenos

1 Baby Bok Choy

1/3 Cup stuffing mix

1/3 Cup mayonnaise

2 TSP Dijon mustard

2 TSP Worcestershire sauce

1 TBSP chopped parsley

1 TBSP Old Bay seasoning

1 TSP minced garlic

1 TSP coarse ground black pepper

1 TBSP peanut oil

Lemon and lime wedges, tartar sauce and dipping sauces for serving

Jerry Dilsaver



Baking is one option for these treats, but frying is another good way to prepare them.



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.

Having a second station on a fishing boat offers many advantages when fishing for all species.



Chris Burrows

I WANT TO SEE

A SECOND STATION OFFERS MANY ADVANTAGES

Saltwater options are typically limited this month. Trout and redfish are usually in play for inshore anglers. And offshore anglers may find a bluefin here and there. A good weather forecast can mean decent wahoo fishing off the beach, and black sea bass may be an option under the right conditions.

Let's be honest though. Many days in December don't translate into great fishing. Often the boat is on the trailer, with the outboard already winterized. Many anglers are already dreaming of spring and starting to maintain their tackle. This is a big project month.

December also means Christmas. And no matter how old you are, you can still write a list for Santa Claus. Whether I'm deemed naughty or nice, I have one thing on my list this year, and it's a major item. And it's not cheap. But it's something

that would pay dividends in just about any fishery. I want a second station. That's all I want.

Granted, I have asked Santa for this for about the last dozen years, and I still don't have one. Maybe I've been naughty, who knows? In the end, I just want to be able to see.

GET VERTICAL

Just 6 to 8 feet (or more) of heightened perspective makes a world of difference in the saltwater world. All the high-functioning charter boats at Oregon Inlet, Hatteras, Harbor Marina and the Morehead City waterfront are all fly-bridge boats for a reason.

Getting that additional height changes everything. Navigation is much safer when you can see what's in front of you. Seeing, from up high, that rip in the water where the sandbar is offers precious time

to change course and stay in the channel. Ditto for barely submerged objects.

Often, what you can see up high from a second station is completely invisible when you are at water level.

Several years ago, a fishing buddy rescued three guys whose hull had split, causing their boat to submerge in a matter of minutes. The trio had lost all electrical systems almost immediately when their boat took on water. They didn't have time to make a distress call. Luckily, my friend saw their vessel from the second station of his 2690 Triton Express from 2 miles away. He realized quickly



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.

that something wasn't right. He said he would have never seen them from his boat's main helm.

Nothing beats vertical relief when it comes to fishability, for both inshore and offshore. When trolling, adding rod holders to the second station gives that few extra feet up, which drastically changes the angle of the line on your shotgun baits. This allows you to pull baits much farther back than before, without worry of tangling your long rigger baits. It makes a tremendous difference with spooky fish on slower days.

SEE MORE, CATCH MORE

You can also see debris that you would have previously trolled right past, the type of flotsam that dolphinfish adore. Ditto that for color changes, hard edges or schools of bait. Often, you'll see that dolphin or sailfish charge to the bait from well behind it. You can sometimes even beat the fish to the rod, skyrocketing your hookup ratio. With more baits in the water, you'll see more, you'll catch more. What's not to love?

Even when closer to shore, running up and down the beach in spring looking for cobia is so much easier when you can get a bird's eye view. Height gives you an opportunity to cast farther and more accurately. You'll find pogies much more quickly from up top as well.

Obviously, sight casting is going to be more effective when you can see.

You can get really elaborate with a second station, adding thousands of dollars in elec-

tronics, an additional top for shade, or even a hailer system to make sure your crew hears you. All of that is nice, but not always completely necessary. What's most important is having somewhere solid to stand, reliable steering and throttle control, and something to hang on to when things get a bit rough.

You don't even necessarily need an existing hard top. I have seen many a functional second station made with a simple plate welded to the frame of an existing T-Top, with another frame fixed farther up the frame to accommodate steering and controls.

Admittedly, the expense of a second station isn't for everyone. It's kind of a niche thing. And they have drawbacks. The boat will be a bit tougher to trailer. And whoever is running it from up there loses shade and a good bit of comfort, especially when it's rough. But if they know how to use it effectively, they will ultimately have more tricks in their bag to put more fish in the box.

I like those tradeoffs, so go ahead and sign me up. Santa, are you listening? ■

ADD IT UP:

Almost all the major bay boat manufacturers are now offering second stations on their builds. They add a bit more cost to the boat, but they increase the resale value as well. And you will catch more fish with a second station.

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY ➤

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SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY

Phillip Gentry

Stripers, either in freshwater or saltwater, are prime targets for kayak anglers this month.



STRIPERS FOR CHRISTMAS

KAYAKS AND STRIPERS ARE A GREAT MIX FOR DECEMBER

Phillip Gentry

Look for an article about kayak fishing and most likely you'll find photos of a plastic boat on the water on a warm spring or summer day. While warm weather kayak fishing is great, it's still hard to beat the cooler months for finding hot fishing action from a kayak.

One big reason is that waterways tend to be less crowded, meaning less boat traffic and less competition. Oftentimes, a kayak angler may have an entire area without another boat in sight. Cool weather fishing this month will require some cold weather gear but maybe not the stuff you'll have to wear if it were February. It's not uncommon to find daytime temps in the 60s across the Carolinas, and that's not bad.

On big water freshwater impoundments and open water bays and sounds in the salt, striped bass are a more-than-worthy quarry for December. Due to their cold North Atlantic nature, striped bass feed heavily in December before water temperatures dip too far.

The stocking of striped bass in freshwa-

ter reservoirs in both Carolinas has created some great fisheries for all anglers. During the month of December, maybe more so than any other time of the year, striped bass will pursue baitfish relentlessly to stock up on fat reserves.

Because the water column will be nearly the same temperature from top to bottom and in both shallow water and deep, striped bass, and hybrid striped bass in those reservoirs where they are stocked as well, tend to gravitate with the bait and in places where it's easiest to ambush prey.

Long points and humps are usually at the top of the list for locating December stripers. And on a typical Carolina reservoir, it's best to start in the mid-lake area rather than moving to either extreme to find fish.

Shore and sea birds are your best friends this time of year. Seagulls, terns, loons and cormorants will have done the aerial reconnaissance ahead of time so watch the areas where those birds are feeding to help refine your search.

Coastal striped bass are not entirely

different from their freshwater counterparts. In some cases, striped bass have been restocked in coastal bays and sounds from freshwater stocks. Coastal striped bass, those that live in coastal rivers rather than the true sea-run stripers that come down from Virginia this time of year, will key on currents for feeding and hold behind structure to look for food.

For this reason, bridge crossings and other man-made structures are good places to look for coastal striped bass. The abundance of striped bass in coastal rivers currently doesn't match what you can find in freshwater reservoirs, so pay attention to small details if you see or hear of striped bass being caught.

The typical migration run for coastal striped bass is toward the sea but not



Phillip Gentry of Waterloo, S.C., is an avid outdoorsman and veteran outdoor writer.

BEST BETS

NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Saltwater striped bass

WHERE — Croatan Sound. Fish the two Hwy. 64 bridges behind Roanoke Island in the sound.

HOW — Cut bait or down rod the bases of the bridges using pinfish or crab. You can also cast a curlytail grub between the pilings. Moving water from wind or tide works best. Additionally, stripers will hit crankbaits in chrome or blue.

LAUNCH — Launch beside the bridge at Manns Harbor to fish the two bridges.

INSIDER TIP — Inshore stripers aren't as big as their ocean-going kin. Downsize your baits and tackle appropriately.

SOUTH CAROLINA

WHAT — Striped bass

WHERE — Lake Murray

HOW — Freeline a couple of large shiners behind the 'yak while casting noisy topwater plugs or bucktails to schooling fish in and around the backs of creeks. Few anglers use down rod presentations for striper from a kayak, but they may be missing out on some great action.

LAUNCH — Multiple public boat launches and countless dump-in sites for kayaks are available on Lake Murray. Dreher Island State Park is a great centrally located kayak access to Lake Murray. For other public ramps, visit dnr.sc.us/boatramps

INSIDER TIP — Seabirds -- gulls, terns and loons will give away the location of baitfish near the surface. Striped bass are usually somewhere in the area.

Stripers are hearty fish, and their fight is just as strong in cold water as it is any other time of year.



into the open ocean, so the lower reaches and inlets or coastal rivers is a good bet. In North Carolina, some sea-run fish may move between nearshore areas and inshore bays. So the closer to an inlet you are, the better your chances of locating fish will be.

The best baits for coastal striped bass will be on an available basis, so look for them to feed on crabs, the few remaining shrimp in the area, and by-catch species like pinfish and minnows. ■

COMMON SENSE KAYAK STRIPER FISHING

One of the most commonly utilized striped bass fishing tactics is the use of a down rod, vertical presentation of live bait over an area where striped bass are holding. Down rod fishing is primarily used from a power boat, but can also be a deadly strategy from a paddleboat.

The most popular rig for down rod fishing is a Carolina rig. The main line from the reel is attached to a barrel swivel. Above the barrel swivel is threaded a weight heavy enough to hold the bait in a vertical presentation.

An effective down rod presentation is to graph fish that are thought to be striped bass on your depth finder before setting out rods. Using a down rod is a great way to multi-task for stripers when you are casting off the front of the boat.

If striped bass are not holding tight to one location but are in the general area then it is often preferable not to anchor the boat and just drift with the wind or current through the target area. An occasional paddle or peddle stroke will keep the boat moving with the fish you see on the graph.

Depth presentation is the key to down rod fishing. It's helpful to note the precise depth the fish are using and deploy a couple of baits at or just above this depth. If space is available, placing a bait 10 feet below the level active fish were marked may entice a larger more

solitary striped bass that often hangs out below and off to the side of an active school.

One of the most common mistakes striped bass anglers make when fishing down rods is to set baits out at a specific depth and just leave it. Being a vertical presentation, fish moving right below the kayak will be, within the transducer cone angle of your depth recorder. Constant monitoring of the depth finder and readjustment of baits to the level the fish enter the cone at will greatly increase your chances of hooking up fish.

Bear in mind that a school of striped bass is a very competitive atmosphere. While it may take a little time to convince that first fish to take the bait, often times once a fish is hooked and fighting the line, other stripers will move in out of instinct as the erratic movements of the hooked fish will signal feeding to the others. ■

SPOON FED STRIPERS ➤

SPOONING FOR STRIPERS

Lake Murray stripers love to be spoon fed

Tony Alexander loves spoon feeding Lake Murray's stripers in cold weather.

They call him the Spoon Man, and for good reason. Tony Alexander of Batesburg-Leesville, SC is a master at spoon-feeding stripers on Lake Murray. And he especially likes doing it during the cold weather months.

"You'll see a lot fewer boats on the lake this month, but the fishing can be really good. One species of fish that doesn't mind the cold weather is stripers. They bite like crazy this time of year," said Alexander.

He finds schools of fish two ways this month. Watching the birds is one way. They are flying overhead, watching for schools of baitfish that get pushed to the surface by stripers below.

"That's the easy way, and on days when the birds are working, they will show you where to cast," he said.

When the birds aren't working, however, Alexander still finds his share of fish.

"I watch my electronics for deeper holes -- those in the 20 to 40 foot range. If I see clouds of bait, I drop the spoon," he said.

Stripers will often appear as large Vs under the bait clouds, but under certain conditions, they may not appear at all, even when they are present. Sometimes, they are too close to the bottom to show up. That doesn't stop Alexander from lowering the spoon



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to them.

"I drop the spoon all the way to the bottom. Once it hits, I rip it up, let it flutter back down again, then rip it up once more. I'll do that over and over and over. At some point, if the stripers are there, one will grab it. And then it's game on," he said.

If he could have his way, the weather would be bitterly cold when he goes fishing.

"The colder it is, the more tightly the bait schools pack up. The cold also causes lots of baitfish to die. The dead ones just flutter about in the water, and the stripers attack them. That's what the spoon looks like to them, so it's very effective, especially when it's extremely cold," he said.

Alexander prefers to use medium powered casting rods, bait-casting reels and 12-pound test line. White and chartreuse are his favorite colors for spoons and he prefers 1/2-ounce Binks spoons and Bubba spoons.

Follow Alexander at [tiktok.com/@tonyfish66](https://www.tiktok.com/@tonyfish66). ■

SLOW DOWN FOR STRIPERS

on the Albemarle Sound

T By Brian Cope
 he 2022 fall striped bass season on the Albemarle Sound opened Nov. 1 and will run through Dec. 31, or when the quota has been reached. And that's not bad considering the NCDMF announced earlier this fall that the fishery would not open at all.

One thing that won't change for Capt. Scooter Lilley of CWW Charters (252-799-9536) is how he will fish for stripers here this time of year.

"We use 3/8-ounce HeadlockZ jigheads, made by Z-Man, with a 6-inch Z-Man SwimmerZ soft plastic. We'll fish the break lines in a little bit deeper water in the sound, using our electronics to find schools of bait and stripers," he said.

He'll start off fan casting his lures, letting the lures sink for several seconds before beginning to work them back to the boat. And he does that very slowly.

"You just want to slow wind it back. That bait's got a lot of action, it just moves back and forth. And you want to let it sink to the bottom, then just slowly work it back," he said.

If the fishing is slow, Lilley uses his Lowrance electronics in conjunction with his Panoptix unit, which shows whatever is present in real time.

"When I pull up to a point, I'll drop that Panoptix down. And it, along with my Lowrance, the fish just can't hide from that. And usually, when you find them, you can catch them," he said.

And when you find them, Lilley said the action can be fast and furious.

These stripers are coming in from the open ocean, preparing to make their annual runs up the Chowan and Roanoke rivers. They'll stage up in the sound until their biological clocks tell them its time to head upriver. Over his many years of guiding, Lilley has identified numerous spots the fish feed during this trek.

When one school stops biting, Lilley moves on, watching his electronics closely.

"I'll watch my screen and see the fish when they're 40 or 50 feet ahead of us. Then I'll just ease into casting range. Make a good cast, let it sink, because these fish are all along the bottom. Sometimes they'll hit it before you even turn the reel handle once," he said.

These fish are aggressive this time of year, so when they hit, you'll know it, said Lilley. He catches a lot of them in the 18- to 25-inch range.

"They'll really thump it. They'll hit it so hard you'll forget how cold it is," he said. ■



Capt. Scooter Lilley likes how aggressive stripers are during December in the Albemarle Sound.

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For more info, visit: thaw.acgbrands.com

LIVETARGET CROAKER SWIMBAIT

Croakers, a/k/a hardheads, make up a big part of the diet for redfish, speckled trout and many other saltwater species.

LIVETARGET brings its life-like touch to this croaker-mimicking swimbait. Casting in open water or under docks, expect rod-jarring hits from a variety of gamefish.

The realistic dorsal fin does more than look good. It acts as a hook shield for the extra-wide gap hook, which is pre-rigged and perfectly balanced.

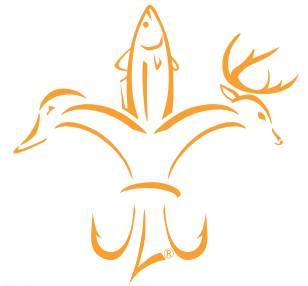
An extra eyelet on the lure's bottom allows anglers to add another hook, a blade or other fish-attracting accessory.

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1 ounce; and 5-inch, 1.75) and two color patterns, including yellowfin croaker and Atlantic croaker.

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For more info, visit: livetargetlures.com.



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The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).
 • The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

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

• **PrimeTimes'** forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

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| BEST DAYS | | | | |
|-----------|------|------|------|-------|
| 2022 | POOR | FAIR | GOOD | VALUE |
| DEC | | | | |
| Thu 1 | █ | █ | █ | 29 |
| Fri 2 | █ | █ | █ | 26 |
| Sat 3 | █ | █ | █ | 29 |
| Sun 4 | █ | █ | █ | 39 |
| Mon 5 | █ | █ | █ | 51 |
| Tue 6 | █ | █ | █ | 62 |
| Wed 7 | █ | █ | █ | 67 |
| Thu 8 | █ | █ | █ | 57 |
| Fri 9 | █ | █ | █ | 48 |
| Sat 10 | █ | █ | █ | 38 |

| | | | | |
|--------|---|---|---|----|
| Sun 11 | █ | █ | █ | 31 |
| Mon 12 | █ | █ | █ | 31 |
| Tue 13 | █ | █ | █ | 30 |
| Wed 14 | █ | █ | █ | 29 |
| Thu 15 | █ | █ | █ | 32 |
| Fri 16 | █ | █ | █ | 40 |
| Sat 17 | █ | █ | █ | 28 |

| | | | | |
|--------|---|---|---|----|
| Sun 18 | █ | █ | █ | 21 |
| Mon 19 | █ | █ | █ | 19 |
| Tue 20 | █ | █ | █ | 27 |
| Wed 21 | █ | █ | █ | 36 |
| Thu 22 | █ | █ | █ | 45 |
| Fri 23 | █ | █ | █ | 50 |
| Sat 24 | █ | █ | █ | 42 |

| | | | | |
|--------|---|---|---|----|
| Sun 25 | █ | █ | █ | 33 |
| Mon 26 | █ | █ | █ | 24 |
| Tue 27 | █ | █ | █ | 21 |
| Wed 28 | █ | █ | █ | 28 |
| Thu 29 | █ | █ | █ | 42 |
| Fri 30 | █ | █ | █ | 34 |
| Sat 31 | █ | █ | █ | 31 |

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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| LUNAR PERIODS | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|-----------|--|
| TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED | | | | | |
| MOON RISE | PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD | MOON SET | PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT | | |
| 1:33 pm | 6:29 pm - 8:27 pm | 12:26 am | 6:17 am - 7:55 am ☀ | ☾ | |
| 2:00 pm | 7:04 pm - 9:22 pm | 1:31 am | 6:54 am - 8:52 am ☀ | ☾ | |
| 2:27 pm | 7:36 pm - 10:18 pm | 2:34 am | 7:29 am - 9:47 am | ☾ | |
| 2:54 pm | 8:11 pm - 11:11 pm | 3:36 am | 8:01 am - 10:43 am | ☾ | |
| 3:24 pm | 8:50 pm - 12:06 am | 4:38 am | 8:36 am - 11:36 am | ☾ | |
| 3:57 pm | 9:31 pm - 1:01 am | 5:41 am | 9:15 am - 12:31 pm | ☾ | |
| 4:36 pm | 10:16 pm - 1:56 am | 6:43 am | 9:56 am - 1:26 pm ☀ | ☾ Full | |
| 5:20 pm | 11:05 pm - 2:51 am | 7:43 am | 10:41 am - 2:21 pm ☀ | ☾ | |
| 6:09 pm | 11:57 pm - Midnight | 8:39 am | 11:30 am - 3:16 pm | ☾ | |
| 7:04 pm | Midnight - 3:43 am | 9:29 am | 12:22 pm - 4:08 pm | ☾ High | |
| 8:01 pm | 12:50 am - 4:32 am | 10:13 am | 1:15 pm - 4:57 pm | ☾ Apogee | |
| 9:00 pm | 1:43 am - 5:15 am | 10:51 am | 2:08 pm - 5:40 pm | ☾ | |
| 9:58 pm | 2:34 am - 5:56 am | 11:23 am | 2:59 pm - 6:21 pm ☀ | ☾ | |
| 10:57 pm | 3:26 am - 6:32 am | 11:52 am | 3:51 pm - 6:57 pm | ☾ | |
| 11:55 pm | 4:17 am - 7:07 am | 12:18 pm | 4:42 pm - 7:32 pm | ☾ | |
| 12:54 am | 5:08 am - 7:38 am | 12:43 pm | 5:33 pm - 8:03 pm | ☾ Half | |
| | 6:01 am - 8:09 am ☀ | 1:08 pm | 6:26 pm - 8:34 pm | ☾ | |
| 1:55 am | 6:55 am - 8:43 am ☀ | 1:35 pm | 7:20 pm - 9:08 pm | ☾ | |
| 2:59 am | 7:52 am - 9:20 am | 2:05 pm | 8:17 pm - 9:45 pm | ☾ | |
| 4:07 am | 8:53 am - 10:01 am | 2:40 pm | 9:18 pm - 10:26 pm | ☾ | |
| 5:20 am | 9:56 am - 10:52 am | 3:23 pm | 10:21 pm - 11:17 pm | ☾ Winter | |
| 6:35 am | 11:06 am - 11:48 am | 4:16 pm | 11:31 pm - Midnight | ☾ Low | |
| 7:47 am | 12:14 pm - 12:52 pm ☀ | 5:20 pm | Midnight - 12:13 am | ☾ New | |
| 8:51 am | 1:17 pm - 2:03 pm | 6:33 pm | 12:39 am - 1:17 am | ☾ Perigee | |
| 9:45 am | 2:16 pm - 3:12 pm | 7:49 pm | 1:42 am - 2:28 am | ☾ | |
| 10:29 am | 3:07 pm - 4:19 pm | 9:04 pm | 2:41 am - 3:37 am | ☾ | |
| 11:05 am | 3:50 pm - 5:22 pm ☀ | 10:15 pm | 3:32 am - 4:44 am | ☾ | |
| 11:36 am | 4:29 pm - 6:21 pm ☀ | 11:23 pm | 4:15 am - 5:47 am | ☾ | |
| 12:04 pm | 5:03 pm - 7:19 pm | | 4:54 am - 6:46 am | ☾ Half | |
| 12:30 pm | 5:38 pm - 8:14 pm | 12:27 am | 5:28 am - 7:44 am ☀ | ☾ | |
| 12:58 pm | 6:12 pm - 9:08 pm | 1:30 am | 6:03 am - 8:39 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

WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

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| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| ABYSS BATTERY 55 | CENTRAL CAROLINA HABITAT SOLUTIONS 19 | SOUTHEAST PRODUCTIONS 59 |
| AGRI SUPPLY COMPANY 19 | CHEROKEE RUN HUNTING LODGE 33 | SUZUKI MOTOR OF AMERICA, INC..... 40, 41 |
| AMSOIL - ROGER FARINA 49, 73 | CLIMAX GENERAL STORE / BUFFALO RIDGE JERKY... 49 | THE REEL OUTDOORS 49 |
| BAREFOOT ARCHERY, INC..... 31 | D&H RV AND MARINE 39 | TWIN LAKES WHITETAILS 24 |
| BLACK'S CAMP 52, 73 | DOWN EAST HEARING CARE ASSOCIATES 3, 70 | XPRESS BY ALUMA-WELD, INC. 2 |
| BLAZE PARTNERS 27 | ED WATKINS MARINE 46 | YEAH RIGHT CHARTERS 73 |
| BLUE WAVE BOATS 47 | LAKE GASTON JET SKI, POWERSPORTS & MARINE 5 | |
| BOST ARGO..... 8 | MARINE WAREHOUSE 75 | |
| BQ GRILLS 53 | NICHOLS STORE, INC. 15 | |
| CAPPS TRAILERS 45 | O'BRIAN TARPING SYSTEMS 61 | |
| CAPTAIN FROGGY'S CHARTERS..... 23 | REALTREE OUTDOOR PRODUCTS 25 | |
| CAROLINA COMPOSITES, LLC 76 | SANTEE COOPER COUNTRY 51 | |

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