



**8 Great Destinations
Start Planning Now**

Salt Water

SPORTSMAN

**STRIPER
CENTRAL**
NEW YORK'S FINEST

**DISCOVER
CRYSTAL COAST**
NORTH CAROLINA VARIETY

**MONTAUK
MAGIC**
FLOUNDER, SEA BASS
AND MORE

**YEAR-ROUND
SAILFISH**
CAROLINA TO
THE KEYS

P. 50
**NEW
ELECTRONICS
2018**

**Tuna,
Wahoo,
Reds, Trout**
Louisiana, Inside and Out

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STRIPED TORPEDO: A nice wahoo comes over the transom off Cape Lookout, North Carolina.

PHOTO BY: Tom Spencer





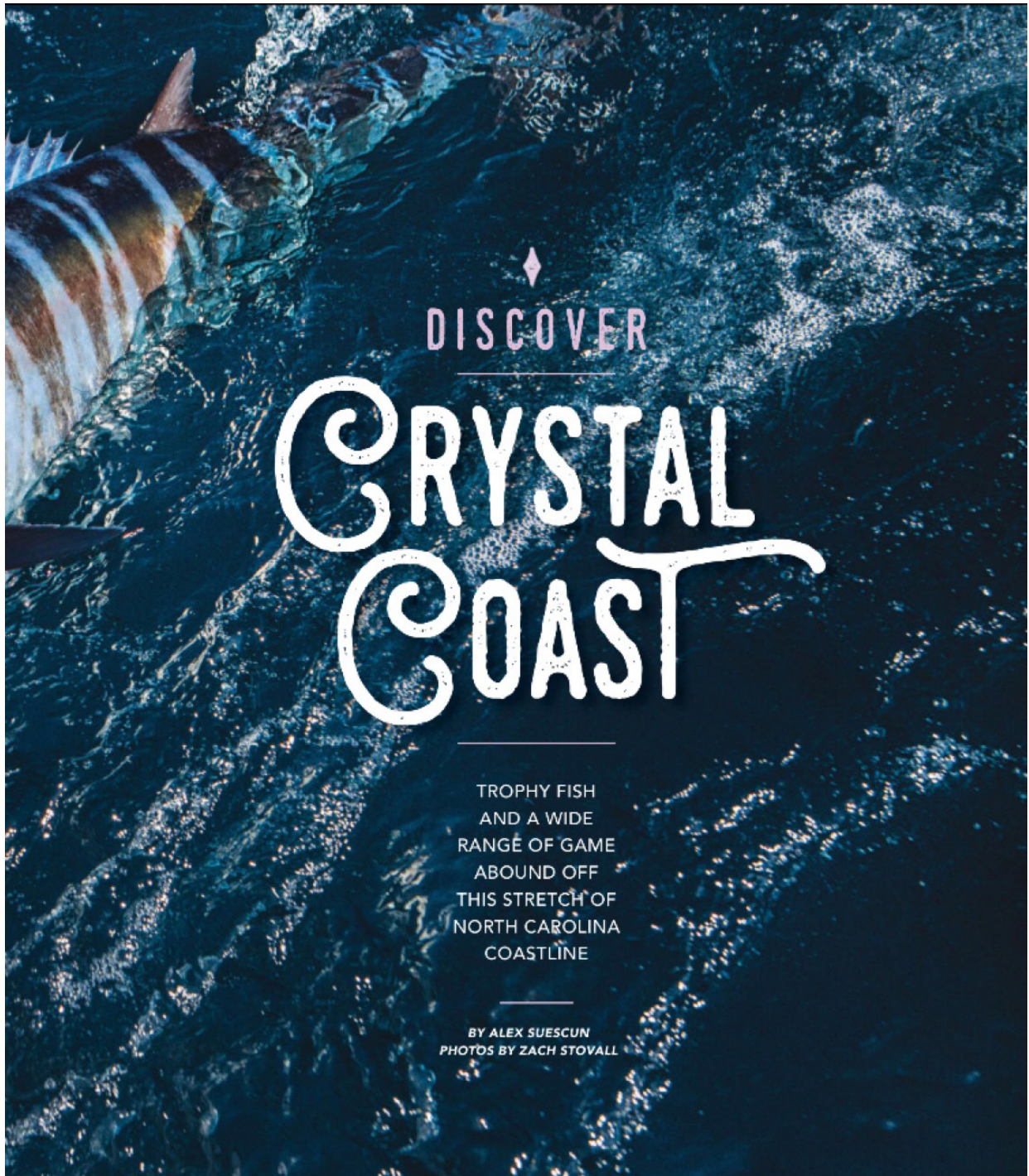
**SWS
Planner:**

Crystal Coast,
North Carolina

WHAT:
Wide array of offshore,
nearshore and inshore
species

WHERE:
Cape Lookout to Bogue
Inlet, North Carolina

WHEN:
Year-round action
with a number of
seasonal species



◆
DISCOVER

CRYSTAL COAST

TROPHY FISH
AND A WIDE
RANGE OF GAME
ABOUND OFF
THIS STRETCH OF
NORTH CAROLINA
COASTLINE

BY ALEX SUESCUN
PHOTOS BY ZACH STOVALL

WHO:
Seaworthy boats
with electronics
are a must for
runs offshore.

Capt. Mark Chambers, Reel Country Sportfishing, 252-342-0097
Capt. Joe Shute, Fish Finder Charters, 252-240-2744, captjoes.com

FAST ACTION:
Wahoo are a top
Crystal Coast
offshore quarry.



Q

THE SUN
HAD BARELY
CLEARED THE
HORIZON
WHEN THE LINE
POPPED OFF
THE RIGHT-
RIGGER CLIP.
YOUNG JACK
GEER JUMPED
IN THE FIGHT-
ING CHAIR,
AND HIS DAD
HANDED HIM
THE ROD JUST
IN TIME TO SEE
THE SAILFISH
THAT CLAIMED
POSSESSION OF
THE BAIT TAKE
TO THE AIR.

As Jack cranked with all his might, a second sail grabbed a bait and somersaulted frantically before racing for parts unknown. The boy's mom, Kristi, took this one, and

not yet 20 minutes into our fishing, we had ourselves a sailfish doubleheader. Both sails were coaxed to the boat, legered and released, giving the entire crew aboard *Reel Country*, the 58-foot Buddy Harris out of Morehead City, good reason for celebration.

EFFECTIVE SPREAD

While North Carolina's Crystal Coast is renowned for the variety of species that converge in the area, it was October, and wahoo are autumn's offshore headliners. So Capt. Mark "Microwave" Chambers instructed Dylan Rhudy, his mate, to rig primarily for the striped torpedoes. But with sailfish suddenly dominating the scuttlebutt around the docks, Chambers made sure to add a couple of small naked ballyhoo to the trolling spread. The tactic paid off, as Jack's older brother, Michael, later added a third sailfish to our release tally.

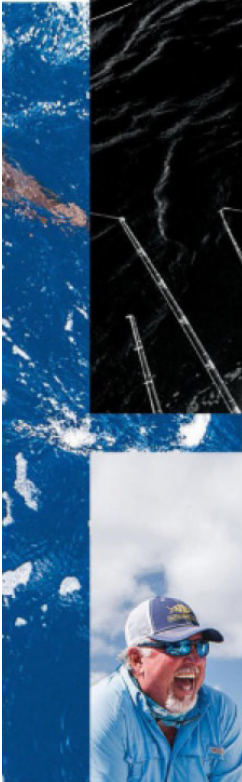
Like the day before, when Luke Snedaker and Zach Davenport (friends of the captain) helped us boat five up to 50 pounds, the

'hoos made more than a cameo. A rod off the starboard corner — with a planer well ahead of the bait, keeping it 20 feet below the surface — was the first to connect. It was my turn, and after some huffing and puffing, I brought a solid 30-pounder to gaff.

HITS PARADE

The hits kept on coming. Bryon Geer, the boys' dad, did his part, adding to the wahoo in the fish box, and I was lucky enough to reach for the rod after the savage attack of another, closer to 40 pounds, that skyrocketed with the mangled bait clamped in its toothy jaws.

As if three sailfish and four nice wahoo weren't enough, dolphin made the scene after lunch. Pushed by the prevailing easterly wind, large patches of sargassum appeared in our path, strewn along the edge of the continental shelf, some 42 miles off Cape Lookout. Hungry dolphin were on patrol, and several pounced on our spread, putting on an acrobatic show before chilling in the fish box.



SAILS AHOY:
Many sailfish patrol the area's blue water in summer and fall, opposite.

FAMILY AFFAIR:
Jack and Kristi Geer battle sailfish; family and crew offer support, top.

STARTER MODEL:
This 20-pounder kicked off a bite that yielded five 'hoos up to 50 pounds, above.

Fertile Waters

From its offshore waters to its beaches, inlets, sounds, rivers and creeks, North Carolina's Crystal Coast offers ideal habitat for an array of prey and predators, offering anglers year-round opportunities.

CLAY OF THE LAND

The Crystal Coast hosts many fishing tournaments and seasonal festivals, and the beauty of the natural surroundings makes it a superb destination for outdoors lovers. For instance, while cruising along Shackleford Banks, we spotted wild horses known as Bankers, descendants of a herd dating back to the 1500s. There's no shortage of places

to eat in the area, and accommodations range from historic bed-and-breakfast inns to hotels and beachfront rental homes and cottages. We stayed at Suncatcher in Pine Knoll Shores, one of several outstanding properties managed by Bluewater Vacation Rentals (877-496-1783). For more information or help with lodging, visit crystalcoastnc.org.

CLOSER TO SHORE

Determined to sample as many options as possible during our visit, we hopped aboard *Fish Finder*, Capt. Joe Shute's 23-foot Parker, for some nearshore and inshore fishing. Shute told us the remnants of recent Hurricane Jose had prompted a substantial influx of false albacore and, armed with fly rods and a box full of Clouser Minnows, we zeroed in on shrimp boats trawling near Beaufort Inlet in hopes of finding the albies trailing behind.

We hit pay dirt right away. The aggressive fish stuck around the boat while I fought one of their schoolmates, which enabled us to amass some 20 releases in about two hours. That's when Shute pointed to the 13-weight fly outfit racked under a gunwale and said it was time to set our sights on larger game. By that he meant the 6- to 8-foot spinner sharks we spotted finning across the wakes of the shrimp boats.

APEX PREDATORS

The game plan, Shute explained, was simple: run up to a nearby shrimper, cast across its wake, let the fly sink, and set the hook hard when a shark took it. I did exactly as instructed and soon found myself in a serious tug of war with 120 pounds of ticked-off shark. Despite the tight drag, backing sizzled off the reel until the shark and yours truly settled into a 20-minute give-and-take that culminated with the dehooking and release of the dogged spinner.

"No time to waste," said our guide, who a minute later had us back in position for another shot at the hungry sharks. Soon lots of dorsals zigzagged in front of the boat, so I repeated the procedure and again hooked up. We stayed on the spinner shark



NICE BONUS:
When the tide slowed down, the trout started chewing.



EYES IN THE SKY:

Bird activity behind a shrimp boat signals fish feeding underneath, top left.

SERIOUS GAME:

Big and aggressive spinner sharks made for tough fly-fishing battles, top middle.

SPEEDY TARGETS:

Packs of little tunny, aka false albacore, raced each other to the fly, top right.



merry-go-round for another hour before going back to the albies, then had a nice lunch on the waterfront and a short run back to the dock.

INSIDE FLUSH

The next morning started with a quick look-see at “The Hook,” the local name for Cape Lookout, which shields Lookout Bight from winds coming from three of the four quadrants. Albies churned the calm surface to a froth in every direction. They launched brief attacks on schooling baitfish before disappearing and turning up again some 50 yards away. Shute, an expert at false albacore guerrilla warfare, kept up with the fish until we’d released a few and the tide stage was right to try for redfish and trout inside Beaufort Inlet.

After cast-netting our



supply of shrimp in Harlowe Creek, we anchored off a couple of marshy shorelines lined with oyster beds and proceeded to catch black drum, black sea bass, and bluefish, as well as the intended targets, redfish and trout. Although the area enjoys a legitimate reputation for trophy redfish, only small ones obliged this time. But the half-dozen plump trout we brought over the gunwales would make any angler’s day. They averaged 2½ pounds, and Shute boated a kicker of 4 pounds.

GAME FISH GALORE

The dozen species we landed during our brief stint in North Carolina’s Crystal Coast was but a small sample of the array available. Blue marlin make their annual incursion in the spring, wahoo peak in spring and fall,

dolphin, sailfish and white marlin abound in the summer, blackfin and yellowfin tuna come to forage at different times of the year, and during winter, giant bluefins move into 40 feet of water a half-mile from the beach.

Bottomfishing for snapper and grouper is pretty good too. Cobia roam the Shackleford Banks and adjacent beaches in May.

The kingfish bite is red-hot in the fall, when big smokers come close to shore. Spanish mackerel and bluefish congregate at nearshore wrecks and hunt along the beaches during summer and early fall, sometimes venturing into the sounds. Little tunny (aka false albacore) follow suit in spring and fall, while other popular inshore species like redfish and seatrout are available year-round in one spot or another. ●