We all have our favorites. It’s only natural. Every angler has that one gem in their tackle box that they just know, when all else fails, will get the job done. For some, it’s a fly they have been hand-tying for years, while others have a spinner bait that just keeps on spinning. Fishing is often about much more than the act of catching fish, and certain pieces of tackle serve as mementos of past trips, evoking memories of loved ones and good times.

We asked several members of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission staff to pick out their favorite lures and explain what makes them so special. Here are their stories.

Our Favorite Lures
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission staff members dig into their tackle boxes for a favorite fishing lure
An Education in Fishing

A little over 20 years ago, I uprooted my college career and life in Wilmington and moved to the mountains. I landed in Sylvan and began studying down the road in Cullowhee at Western Carolina University. This was a very dramatic change, for in a matter of a day’s drive I went from surf fishing around Fort Fisher and crabbing in the salt marshes at Wrightsville Beach to climbing mountains and backpacking in the Plott Balsams that backed up to the farm I was now living on.

During my backpacking trips alongside beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move.

Walter searched through one of his many fly boxes and pulled out one for me to try. “I’ve been having a lot of luck recently using this fly,” he said. That day was special, as I will never forget my first fly, a light Cahill. It was small, maybe a size 20. I had never seen, much less held, such a delicate, precise and beautiful fly. Much to my surprise, after smacking the water with my fly line in a non-delicate way over and over, it happened. I saw a quick splash and my fly quickly disappeared underwater. I had fished enough to know a fish strike when I saw one, so I managed to set the hook in a stunning specimen of wild brook trout. I never knew that North Carolina mountain streams supported such beautiful fish. I was in awe as I held this wild brookie and admired its coloration and markings.

I’ve been fly-fishing for trout ever since that day and every time I tie on a light Cahill, it takes me back to that very first experience, catching a wild brook trout in Panthertown Valley. Thanks, Walter.

Lee Sherrill
Program Coordinator, Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education

As we made our way to Panthertown Valley, we were both excited for what lay ahead. We arrived not soon enough and after a quick rundown of backpacking gear I brought for Walter to use, he started to share all his fly-fishing gear and knowledge. I was amazed and instantly hooked. I tend to be somewhat of a gearhead with all my backpacking equipment, so to see all the fly-fishing equipment he brought had me grinning from ear to ear. “What’s that?” “What’s this for?” “That little fly will catch a trout!” So much to learn.

Walter hatched a plan to spend the weekend learning and I had no experience fly-fishing. So, while backpacking and fly-fishing.

A lifelong relationship was about to change. Oh, the struggles of college life. We were in Wilmington and began studying down the road in Cullowhee at Western Carolina University. This was a very dramatic change, for in a matter of a day’s drive I went from surf fishing around Fort Fisher and crabbing in the salt marshes at Wrightsville Beach to climbing mountains and backpacking in the Plott Balsams that backed up to the farm I was now living on.

During my backpacking trips alongside beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move.

During a class at WCU, a classmate named Walter Fisher and crabbing in the salt marshes at Wrightsville Beach. I brought for Walter to use, he started to share all his fly-fishing gear and knowledge. I was amazed and instantly hooked. I tend to be somewhat of a gearhead with all my backpacking equipment, so to see all the fly-fishing equipment he brought had me grinning from ear to ear. “What’s that?” “What’s this for?” “That little fly will catch a trout!” So much to learn.

Walter hatched a plan to spend the weekend learning and I had no experience fly-fishing. So, while backpacking and fly-fishing.

A lifelong relationship was about to change. Oh, the struggles of college life. We were in Wilmington and began studying down the road in Cullowhee at Western Carolina University. This was a very dramatic change, for in a matter of a day’s drive I went from surf fishing around Fort Fisher and crabbing in the salt marshes at Wrightsville Beach to climbing mountains and backpacking in the Plott Balsams that backed up to the farm I was now living on.

During my backpacking trips alongside beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move. How does one approach these beautiful trout streams, I pondered my next fly-fishing move.

Walter searched through one of his many fly boxes and pulled out one for me to try. “I’ve been having a lot of luck recently using this fly,” he said. That day was special, as I will never forget my first fly, a light Cahill. It was small, maybe a size 20. I had never seen, much less held, such a delicate, precise and beautiful fly. Much to my surprise, after smacking the water with my fly line in a non-delicate way over and over, it happened. I saw a quick splash and my fly quickly disappeared underwater. I had fished enough to know a fish strike when I saw one, so I managed to set the hook in a stunning specimen of wild brook trout. I never knew that North Carolina mountain streams supported such beautiful fish. I was in awe as I held this wild brookie and admired its coloration and markings.

I’ve been fly-fishing for trout ever since that day and every time I tie on a light Cahill, it takes me back to that very first experience, catching a wild brook trout in Panthertown Valley. Thanks, Walter.

Lee Sherrill
Program Coordinator, Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education

The Lesson of a Lifet ime

I have been fishing all my life, but my life as an angler forever changed more than 20 years ago during a crappie fishing outing on Jordan Lake with my friend and colleague, Bryan Scruggs. A retired wildlife law enforcement officer out of Lee County, Scruggs converted this bass angler into a crappie enthusiast with a few helpful pointers and tips, including introducing me to a green-and-white tube jig that mimics a juvenile shad. It is now a staple of my tackle box.

Back in the day, crappie fishing was done primarily at night, with everyone fishing under bridges with generators to power lights. In 1998, Scruggs took me out on Jordan Lake during the day in his 20-foot bass boat. Cast after cast I came up empty. When I was telling my tale, my Bronco II rolled back into the river. Luckily, my truck stayed running and I was able to drive it out, but the interior had taken in about 8 inches of river water. Then, with everything in my Bronco drenched, my boat would not start. There would not be any fishing on this day and I had to explain to everyone what had happened.

My mom was at the middle school for my brother’s baseball game, so I pulled in to explain why the inside of my truck was thoroughly soaked. As I told my story, quite an audience began to gather around me. While I was telling my tale, Coach Harrell, our high school’s football coach, started rummaging through my tackle box. He said, “Boy, no wonder you never catch fish. You don’t have a Rattlin’ Rogue.”

Ever since then, I have made sure my truck was in gear with the brake set while I launch my boat. I have also kept a Rattlin’ Rogue in my tackle box. The rattle and flash of this lure has produced rock, large-mouth and an occasional puppy drum for me throughout the years. I may never have learned about this bait if I hadn’t taken my Bronco for a swim in the Chowan River.

Travis Casper
Operations Manager, Wildlife Education Division

Keep Rattlin’

When I was a senior in high school, my mom and dad helped me buy a johnboat. Up until that point I had been a “professional” bank fisherman. Living in northeastern North Carolina near the Chowan River, it was not long before I began chasing rockfish with no success.

Sometime that spring, I headed to the boat ramp behind the Gates County Courthouse. When I was launching my boat, my Bronco II rolled back into the river. Luckily, my truck stayed running and I was able to drive it out, but the interior had taken in about 8 inches of river water. Then, with everything in my Bronco drenched, my boat would not start. There would not be any fishing on this day and I had to explain to everyone what had happened.

When I was a senior in high school, my mom and dad helped me buy a johnboat. Up until that point I had been a “professional” bank fisherman. Living in northeastern North Carolina near the Chowan River, it was not long before I began chasing rockfish with no success.

Sometime that spring, I headed to the boat ramp behind the Gates County Courthouse. When I was launching my boat, my Bronco II rolled back into the river. Luckily, my truck stayed running and I was able to drive it out, but the interior had taken in about 8 inches of river water. Then, with everything in my Bronco drenched, my boat would not start. There would not be any fishing on this day and I had to explain to everyone what had happened.

When I was a senior in high school, my mom and dad helped me buy a johnboat. Up until that point I had been a “professional” bank fisherman. Living in northeastern North Carolina near the Chowan River, it was not long before I began chasing rockfish with no success.

Sometime that spring, I headed to the boat ramp behind the Gates County Courthouse. When I was launching my boat, my Bronco II rolled back into the river. Luckily, my truck stayed running and I was able to drive it out, but the interior had taken in about 8 inches of river water. Then, with everything in my Bronco drenched, my boat would not start. There would not be any fishing on this day and I had to explain to everyone what had happened.
Despite our best efforts and attempts to catch fish using any of his treasure trove of fishing lures, including colorful crankbaits, realistic-looking plastic frogs, shiny spoons and garlic-scented worms, we haven't managed to land a single fish. It's become a running joke when we buy a new lure as to whether we'll even be able to catch anything with it. Turns out, we always have the best luck with simple, small hooks and live bait. We gather live bait the same way I did when I was a child: digging in our backyard for worms and grubs. This is part of the process of fishing and a big part of the fun. I have no doubt he'll continue trying to land a fish with his lures, and I can't wait for the day he does. Until then, he knows that even though they are not fancy or colorful, small hooks and live bait get the job done.

Fairley Mahlum
Director of Communications, Marketing and Digital Entertainment
The Stealth Bomber
Whether you’re a fly angler fishing a delicately placed dry fly or a bass angler swimming plastic frogs through weeds, everyone loves the excitement of an explosive top-water bite. My favorite lure brings the best of the fly-fishing and bass-fishing worlds together. Designed by Georgia fly angler Kent Edmonds, this fly pattern represents one of the most creative uses of foam that I have seen.

Crafted in the fashion of the Dahlberg Diver from 2 millimeter thick craft foam, the fly dives deep with a hard strip of line. As it dives, the folded tab at the rear catches air, leaving an immense bubble trail in its wake while also producing an attention-grabbing sound. Once the fly has reached its maximum depth, the hood then slows its ascent, causing it to wiggle side to side as it rises, adding to its fish-triggering features.

My bass version is tied on a size 2 Gamakatsu B10 hook, however, smaller flies can be created down to size 10 for panfish with equally exciting results. A template for forming the pattern can be found on Edmonds’ website (flyfishga.com), or foam cutters can be purchased from River Road Creations for a perfectly formed fly. A plate for forming the pattern can be found in the fashion of the Dahlberg Diver. The Hood then slow its ascent, caus

The Nylon stringer was digging into my hand with every step as I tried like hell to show off my first limit. In the rain. Soaked and chilled to the bone. I don’t think anyone noticed.

When I got home, my mom helped me scale and gut the fish, leaving the heads on because that’s the way her family did trout growing up in Montana.

The next summer, that Heddon ended up in a tree at Boy Scout Camp. I bought another but never really used it much, as I graduated to a Zebco 33 combo and a bevy of new lures to try. But 45 years ago that red-and-white Heddon River Runt helped fan flames that still burn bright.

Mike Zlotnicki
Associate Editor, Wildlife in North Carolina

Casting to Feeding Stripers
My favorite lure is the Strike King KVD Sexy Dawg Jr top-water hard-plastic lure. Casting this top-water bait to feeding striped bass (stripers) just before dark has become my absolute favorite. The timing has to be perfect and unfortunately, the fun only lasts for about 30 minutes or so.

You have to know where the fish are, so my husband and I troll during the day with downriggers. About an hour before dark, you will see a lot of splashing and bait swimming across the top of the water. Cast the lure in the middle of the splashing action and hang! Reel the fish in, take it off and cast your line back out if the fish are still on top of the water. You may have to watch a minute or two for them to start feeding again and you may have to motor to them as they travel. When you see them, cast again and you will likely reel in another one. It doesn’t last long but it is super exciting!

My husband and I spend a lot of time on the water. It is time well spent making memories and doing something we both enjoy together. It’s not just fishing! It doesn’t last long but it is super exciting!

And cast your line back out if the fish are

 teşekkür ederim. Reel the fish in, take it off and

swimming across the top of the water. Cast you will see a lot of splashing and bait

acting and bam! Reel the fish in, take it off and

slowing as it rises, adding to its fish-triggering features.

My bass version is tied on a size 2 Gamakatsu B10 hook, however, smaller flies can be created down to size 10 for panfish with equally exciting results. A template for forming the pattern can be found on Edmonds’ website (flyfishga.com), or foam cutters can be purchased from River Road Creations for a perfectly formed fly. Not only can I promise that the Stealth Bomber will produce fish for you, but I’ll bet you’ll have fun creating your own versions of this remarkable fly pattern.

Tom Carpenter
Director, John E. Peckham Fishing Education Center

Have a story to share about your favorite fishing lure? We would love to read it! Please send your story to josh.lesenhal@ncwildlife.org

Please visit ncwildlife.org/trout for more information about trout regulations, stockings, and angling opportunities.