



Our Favorite Lures

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission staff members dig into their tackle boxes for a favorite fishing lure

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.

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 Sylva 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 streams and catch fish, namely trout? I knew nothing about trout fishing. That was about to change.

In my Cell and Molecular Biology lab class at WCU, a classmate named Walter and I were consistently the last ones to arrive. Oh, the struggles of college life. We were assigned as lab partners and, unbeknownst to me, a lifelong relationship was about to begin that centered around backpacking and fly-fishing.

Walter had no experience backpacking and I had no experience fly-fishing. So, while struggling to understand what our professor was explaining about biological cells, we hatched a plan to spend the weekend learning from each other. I would be responsible for all things backpacking; Walter oversaw all things fly-fishing.



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 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 not-so-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



LIGHT CAHILL



MULTI-COLORED
TUBE JIG

The Lesson of a Lifetime

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 while Scruggs sat at the front of the boat and wore me out pulling in crappie. Finally, I borrowed one of his 5 1/2-foot rods rigged with the 1 1/2-inch green-and-white tube jig and a 1/32-ounce jig head. And the rest is history.

I have since shared the same tips with family and friends that Scruggs passed on to me that day. Use a 5 1/2-foot rod. Fish for crappie in 12- to 14-foot water. Optimal water temperature is 75 to 85 degrees. Crappie typically bite as your line descends in the water, so watch for twitches and set the hook at the first sign of a bite. And, of course, use a green-and-white tube jig. Variations of it can be found at most bait-and-tackle shops.

Don't get me wrong, I still enjoy bass fishing. But I find it hard passing up a chance to catch my limit of crappie.

Cameron Ingram
Executive Director,
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission

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.

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



RATTLIN' ROGUE



The Worm Turns Up Fish

There is a pond in our Raleigh neighborhood where I've been taking my 8-year-old son since he was old enough to

hold a simple bamboo pole with a hook and bobber. That's how

I got started angling as a child, learning the art of patience while holding the pole still and watching the little bobber like a hawk, awaiting any small motion or movement to hopefully snag the fish tugging on the other end.

As an adult and parent recalling that childhood memory, I relish my son's enthusiasm when he lands a fish, no matter the size. As part of his angling hobby, he enjoys shopping for tackle together with a particular emphasis on expanding his freshwater and saltwater lure collection. His tackle box is a menagerie of lures in all different colors, shapes and sizes.



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

10B
DIGITAL



10C
DIGITAL



BEETLE SPIN

Beetle Spin! Beetle Spin! Beetle Spin!

For me, fishing is about moments in time more than any fish at the end of my line. What you are going through and who you're with are what makes fishing trips special. Few memories of mine are more special than the time my son caught the biggest largemouth bass I have ever seen.

Jonathan was just 7 or 8 years old when we went fishing at a farm pond in Johnston County. Like most old farm ponds, this one had a big, dominant female bass in it. Jonathan was new to fishing and was spending the morning fishing for panfish along the edge of the pond. Meanwhile, I was casting for bass with a spinner bait or jig or purple floating worm when I heard him call out.

"Dad, I've got a big one. Come help!" I ignored him for the moment because I had been spending more time taking fish off his hook than mine, but he was persistent. "Dad, it's a monster! It's in the weeds. Come here!"

I looked over and sure enough, he's got something big at the end of his line caught up in the weeds at the edge of the pond. I raced over, helped him pull it out of the muck and held up a bass that was nearly as big as the boy. How in the world did he



catch that? The only way he could've caught a fish that big on 6-pound test line is if it got caught up in the weeds.

We didn't have a scale, and camera phones didn't exist back then, but I was able to measure the fish. Later, when comparing its length to relative weight charts, I realized that fish must have weighed 10 pounds. We admired the fish for a moment and slid her back into the pond, honoring the landowner's wishes.

At that moment, I knew my son would be hooked on fishing. What kid wouldn't be after catching one that big? I was already a lifelong fisherman, but his success got me hooked on something new: Beetle Spin lures. That's what Jonathan was using that day and it reinforced what a versatile lure it is. If I had to depend on one lure to feed myself it would be a black-and-chartreuse Beetle Spin. You can catch anything with it, from panfish to catfish to monster largemouth bass. I'm not sure if the color really matters, but black and chartreuse is my favorite.

Jonathan is now 32 and, like his old man, is an avid angler. We've fished all over the state and around the world together, but no trip may be more special than that day at a farm pond in Johnston County. The moments are what matter most.

John Stone

At-Large Wildlife Commissioner

The Long Walk Home

There are certain events in a person's life that are never forgotten, or even diminished by time. Your first kiss, the

birth of a child...or your first limit of bass. The first two were kind of messy, so I'll talk about fishing.

When my dad was transferred from Guam to Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina in the mid-1970s, we moved into a house near the base golf course. There were three lakes on the course with one about half a mile from our house on a large, oblong-shaped space of several blocks. The yards were small but worth \$3 each when mowed, which financed my fishing habit. The habit became an addiction one rainy summer morning when I was 11.

My dad would bring home old copies of *Field & Stream* and *Outdoor Life*, which I would pore over for hours. In one issue there was a story about bass fishing, and one of the pictures showed a jumping largemouth, gills flared, with a red-and-white Heddon River Runt in its maw. The article stated that red and white together "angered" bass into striking, and since it was in a magazine it had to be true, right? So, I hopped on my Huffy and rode down to the Base Exchange and purchased a red-and-white River Runt.

The next Saturday was overcast and threatening rain. Didn't matter. I grabbed my Zebco 404 combo with the Heddon tied on and a small tackle box and headed to the water. Of course, since I was clad in a T-shirt, gym shorts, tube socks and P.F. Flyers, it started to rain. Undaunted, I made my way around the lake casting parallel to the shore, and damned if the bass didn't love the Heddon!

In less than an hour, I put five bass weighing up to maybe 2 1/5 pounds on the Nylon stringer. The only other angler at the lake asked if he could buy my lure. I told him it wasn't for sale and hurried back toward the house. Only, I did not go straight back.

I took the long way home, with those five bass on the stringer slung over my



HEDDON RIVER RUNT



shoulder. 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 Strippers

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 bam! 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



STRIKE KING KVD SEXY DAWG JR

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!

Melinda Huebner

Administrative Specialist,

Habitat Conservation, Inland Fisheries and

Wildlife Management Divisions

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 Edmond's 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. Pechmann Fishing

Education Center

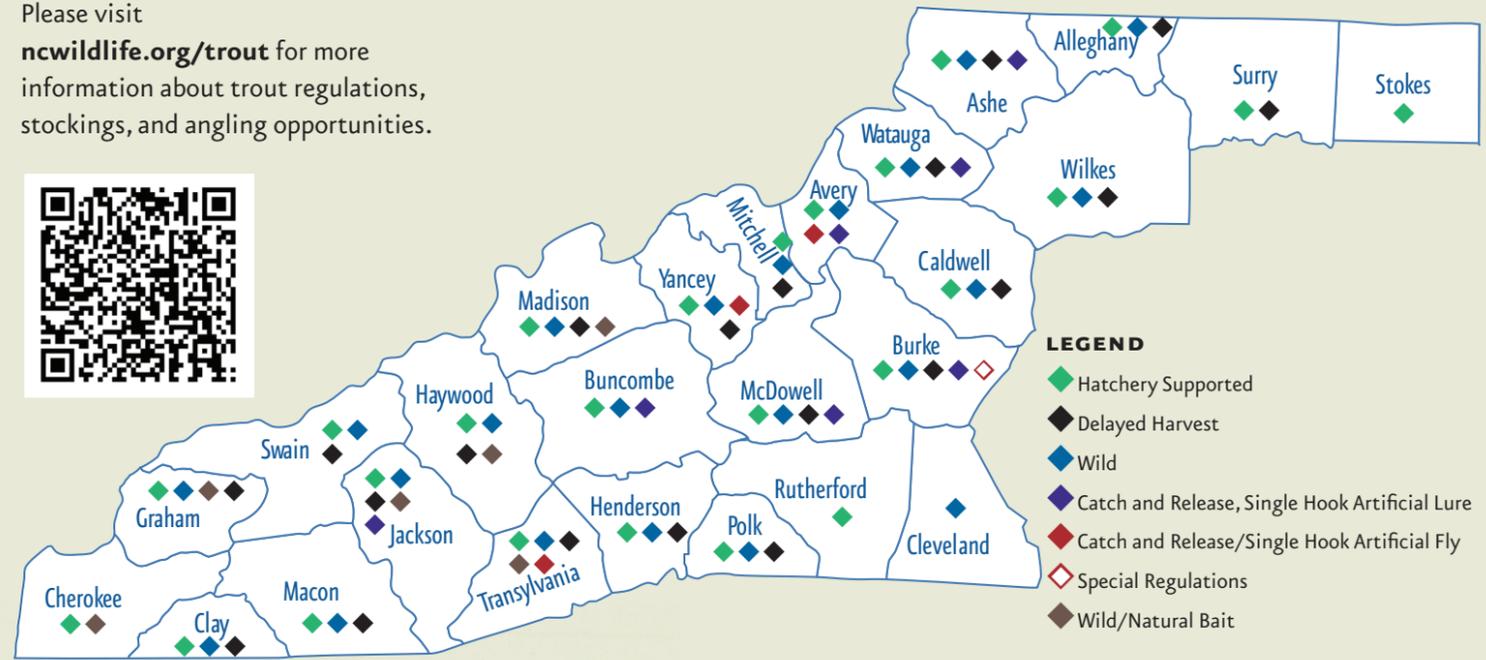
Have a story to share about your favorite fishing lure? We would love to read it! Please send your story to josh.leventhal@ncwildlife.org.



STEALTH BOMBER

MOUNTAIN TROUT MAP

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



2021 DELAYED HARVEST STOCKING DATES

COUNTY	LOCATION	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
Alleghany	Little River	4	7	6	4	2
	Helton Creek	1	1	3	1	1
Ashe	Trout Lake	1	1	3	11	8
	Big Horse Creek	4	7	6	4	2
	South Fork New River	4	7	6	11	8
Burke	Jacob Fork	3	6	5	12	9
Caldwell	Wilson Creek	2	5	4	12	9
Clay	Fires Creek	5	8	6	6	16
Graham	Big Snowbird	5	9	6	1	10
Haywood	West Fork Pigeon River	1	5	10	1	12
Henderson	North Fork Mills River	2	5	5	4	10
Jackson	Tuckasegee River	3	6	4	8, 12	2, 9
Macon	Nantahala	5	7	10	4	15
	Big Laurel Creek	1	1	3	5	1
Madison	Shelton Laurel Creek	1	1	3	5	1
	Spring Creek	4	7	6	7	5
McDowell	Curtis Creek	3	6	5	5	3
	Mill Creek	3	6	5	5	3
	Catawba River	3	6	5	5	3
Mitchell	Cane Creek	3	6	5	6	4
	North Toe River	2	5	4	12	9
Polk	Green River	2	5	3	7	4
Surry	Ararat River	3	6	5	13	10
	Mitchell River	1	1	3	1	1
Swain	Tuckasegee River	4	8	5	11	3
Transylvania	East Fork French Broad River	2	7	7	5	4
	Little River	1	1	3	6	8
Watauga	Watauga River	1	1	3	11	8
	Coffee Lake	1	1	3	11	8
Wilkes	East Prong Roaring River	1	1	3	1	1
	Stone Mountain Creek	1	1	3	1	1
	Reddies River	2	5	4	11	8
	Elk Creek	2	5	4	11	8
Yancey	Cane River	5	8	7	6	4

Dates listed are subject to change due to unexpected events, such as snow. Changes will be announced through press releases, Twitter, Facebook and on ncwildlife.org.