Fishing & Hunting

By Richard Seale

Endings and beginnings

On the first day of February, my GPS sounder showed a Bogue Sound water temperature of 51.7 degrees F. This is a surprisingly warm temperature for what is usually the coldest part of our NC winter. Although the temperature is not what I would call swimming weather, it is a relatively kind one for speckled trout and rock, which are in the sound and creeks preparing to spawn. The M17-style MirrOlures, which are suspended lures, as well as freshly unfrozen shrimp or live mud minnows, all fished in slow-moving retrieves, can reward folks with nice-sized legal fish.

Add to the mild water temperatures the mild daytime temperatures on many days, and a fishing trip is not only possible, but can be downright enjoyable. Find a low wind day with calm seas in the ocean, and legal-sized black sea bass can be landed from structured bottom sites from Atlas Tanker to Big and Little 10.

Safety first. The lower power requirements of text transmissions from smart phones can actually work from these locations much of the time. Voice communications require more energy levels to work. A good working and tested marine radio is the most reliable direct communication device relative to emergency communications. Obviously, a reliable GPS and a float plan with estimated return time are equally important when wandering offshore this time of year. A wearable life preserver that is actually *worn*, a true "weather eye," and running at sensible speeds relative to the waves being encountered can make the difference between a great day and a disaster. Even at temperatures in the low 50s, the effects of hypothermia are of real concern. At 50 degrees and below, exhaustion or loss of consciousness can be anticipated within half an hour to an hour of water time. Death is likely within water times of an hour to six hours. To see the full chart, go to www.pfdma.org/choosing/hypothermia.aspx.

Passing the torch. The duck seasons closed on Saturday, January 30. There were a couple of goose seasons that went on for a couple more weeks, but by the time this gets to you all migratory bird seasons will be finished.

For several years, I participated in swan banding programs that were being run at Mattamuskeet and Pungo reserves. Cannon nets were rigged in a semi-circle on points of land and the area was well-baited with corn. On a given day, when a good supply of high school kids, who served as "swan holders," and wild life biologists were on hand, the 5 to 8 net cannons were fired. They had been loaded with projectiles weighing about three pounds each, which, in turn, were tied to large nets that had been carefully stacked so as to deploy behind the projectiles. The projectiles carried the net over the swans that had gathered to eat the corn. Two of us would crawl under the net and into the maelstrom of swans trapped there.

It was critical to grab swans and get them out to holders as soon as possible. Otherwise, they had a tendency to pile up on top of one another and actually smother one another. The swans would weigh in the 18-26 pound range, and it was not unusual to have between 90 and 120 swans in the net. In short, we had to grab, get control of wings and feet, and pass out more than a ton of swans. The swans were very good at elbowing us with their wing "elbows" and scratching with their big clawed feet, but seldom bit us or the holders. We were not only pretty tired when we emerged from under the net with the last swan, but, despite heavy clothing, gloves and hats, our cheek bones would be bloodied like we'd lost a good fist fight.

Lauren Seale, 16-year-old granddaughter of Pine Knoll Shores residents Richard and Linda Seale, bagged her first swan recently in NC's permit-only limited season.—*Photo by Roger Seale*

Holders controlled swans in bear hugs until biologists could weigh, sex, and apply leg and neck bands. Once this was done, the biologist handed the swan back to its holder, who took it to the water's edge and released it to cheers.

Area farmers had been requesting some swan population control. Thousands of swans feed on winter wheat fields, inflicting real losses. North Carolina instituted a limited, 5,000 permit-only swan season based on data we collected. My sons and I, friends, and now my grandchildren, annually apply for swan permits, which are awarded by random drawing.

In mid-January, my granddaughter Lauren bagged her first swan. She did it in front of seven adult men, several of whom she did not know—with her first shot and relished the applause the men gave her. And so, in a cold and windy Hyde County field, I felt a torch had been passed.

Ask the Aquarium

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Barnacles are crustaceans and must molt to grow; however, they don't shed their calcium shells like other crustaceans. Instead, they create another calcium layer over the existing layer. As the calcium layers accumulate, the barnacle enlarges.

The barnacle's central opening is at the top of the shell. Six pairs of larval legs called "cirri" (feathery, fan-like structures) rhythmically wave in and out and back and forth from the opening. The cirri are like tiny hands, pulling water in and out to capture planktonic and tiny passing food bits for the barnacle. Barnacles that have formed beds must be covered with water twice daily to survive. When the tide falls below the barnacles' level, they retract their cirri and close their shells to avoid drying out.

Barnacles are most visible in shallow areas. Two of the most common are acorn barnacles and gooseneck barnacles. The term "acorn" refers to their resemblance to acorns of oak trees. The other common specimen is the gooseneck, so named for the flexible, tube-like holdfast it uses to attach itself to objects.

Discover more fascinating facts about North Carolina's aquatic environments and inhabitants by visiting the aquariums on Roanoke Island, at Fort Fisher and at Pine Knoll Shores, or Jennette's Pier in Nags Head.

Acorn barnacles make a very strong adhesive which they use to attach to floating debris. Many barnacles were attached to the rash of cold-stunned turtles that washed up on beaches recently. The painted numbers on the turtles are for identification. If they wash up on other beaches that have micro-chip capabilities they will be tagged they can continue to be tracked.