

# See Spots Run...

## Cool Fall Provides Hot Times For Local Fishermen

BY DOUG RUTTER

At some point in September or October, an avid saltwater sportfisherman from the North Carolina sandhills will hop in his pickup truck and drive 156 miles to the Brunswick County coast.

He'll arrive around 9 o'clock on a Friday night. And when he does, there's liable to be dozens of fellow anglers jockeying for position at his favorite ocean fishing pier.

It won't bother him a bit. He'll turn a tiny crack in the crowd into a small campsite, slide a bloodworm on a hook and drop his weighted line into the ocean below.

It won't be long before he reels in his first large spot. Whatever troubled him before his trip will seem thousands of miles away when he lays eyes on that plump, yellow-bellied fish. "Deee-licious!"

The scenario is fictitious in this case, but stories just like it are played out year after year in the South Brunswick Islands as Labor Day passes and the summer tourists leave us behind.

Fall is a special time of year for anglers. The crisper weather never goes unappreciated after three months of hot, sticky days, and fishing conditions are usually at their best.

Anglers typically catch a variety of fish in the fall, including blues, spottailed drum and speckled trout

in the waterway, rivers and surf and large king mackerel offshore.

"What it comes down to is you have your hot weather fish and cold weather fish at the same time," said Joyce Land, who works at Tripp's Fishing Center at Shallotte Point.

But the fall belongs to the spot (*leiostomus xanthurus*), a tasty fish sized perfectly for the frying pan and named for the black dot found next to each of its gills.

"People love them little suckers," said Jesse Hayes of Captain Pete's Seafood at Holden Beach. He

points out that last fall's spot fishing was the best in four years.

Spots are a common catch from Virginia to Florida each fall because that's when they mi-

grate south along the East Coast. They seek out ocean water temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees.

"The biggest thing they catch in the fall is the spots. That's really what makes our second season," Hayes said. "The just hit the big schools of them as they run along the coast."

When the fish are feeding on the ocean bottom, they are easy targets for pier fishermen. When spots aren't feeding and are swimming in schools near the water surface, they often end up in gill nets.

Curtis Williamson, manager of Ocean Isle Beach Fishing Pier, relies on good spot fishing in the fall to generate business after the sum-

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BEACON FILE PHOTO

ANGLERS CROWD local fishing piers each fall when the spots start biting.

mer tourists are gone.

"Cooler weather makes the fall fishing better," he said. "I think you got cooler weather and the temperature of the water's down. I would think that has a whole lot to do with it."

"You have pretty good fishing in September and October. That's usually when you get all the people," Williamson added. "When the spots

really bite the pier is pretty full."

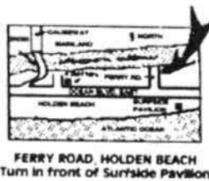
When the spots are abundant, Hayes said they often lure non-resident homeowners to the coast and other fishermen within a 200-mile radius. "Everybody in the world loves the spots."

Even people who don't like to fish like spots. "They'll come down here and buy 300 pounds to last through the winter," Hayes said.

Williamson said most people like the taste of spots, although he prefers flounder. "That spot is a good fish," he said. "It's about the most popular fish there is."

Hayes said fall isn't just special because the fishing is good. "Everybody's in a good frame of mind too. They've made it through the hot summer and know winter's on the way."

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