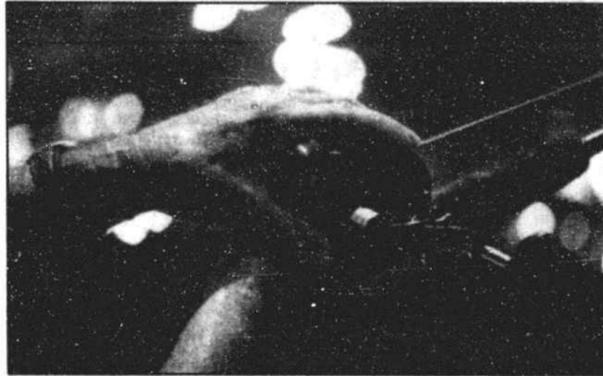




Capt. Mike

CAPT. MIKE Postell gives words of encouragement to the anglers lining the rails. Below, experienced hands control the outgoing line, feeling for the slightest sign of a bite.



BEAMING over her catch of the day, Edie Fulwood of Southport displays the red snapper she took home as a tasty reward of her offshore adventure.

DROP 'EM! Wetting A Hook's A Great Way To Pass The Day

BY ERIC CARLSON

HONNNNNKKKK! "Drop em!" The voice of Capt. Mike Postell crackles through the Mega-Flite's loudspeaker as he brings the 55-foot headboat to a halt directly over the colorful glob of static on his fish finder screen.

Along the gunwales, two dozen weighted and baited hooks plop into the bright blue Gulf Stream waters and plummet toward the bottom.

In what seems like only seconds, the first electric reel begins whining as it tugs something up from the rocky bottom 50 feet below. Then another reel sings, and another, and another.

Eddie Fulwood, a Rocky Mountain native recently of Southport, leans back and winces as the reel groans in protest and her pole bends into a smooth arc. She hauls back on the rod, winds up on the slack, hauls back and winds up again and again until a glowing pink form appears in the turquoise emptiness below.

A crew member grabs the gaff and skillfully slips the hooked end into a gill of a 20-inch red snapper. He plucks the flapping fish from the water and presents it to Edie like a doctor with a newborn. She couldn't be more pleased if it were.

"Pretty good for an old land lubber from Colorado," she says proudly, gasping for breath. "Whew! My heart is just thumping. This is a lucky boat for me."

Edie is one of 18 people who have signed up for an offshore fishing trip organized by the Brunswick County Parks and Recreation Department. The programs are scheduled for senior citizens several times during the summer, allowing participants to pay a reduced group rate for a half-day on the water while helping to assure the charter operator of a fully loaded boat.

Today's weather is ideal. Sunny and warm with enough wind to cool the skin, but not enough to raise a swell. After about 15 minutes of fishing at this spot, the action subsides. Not one to waste time, Capt. Mike signals that it's time to move on.

"All right. Bring 'em up!" his voice crackles through the loudspeaker.

With one eye glued to the fish finder, Mike maneuvers the boat to the next likely fishing hole. Sure enough, another cloud of red splotches appears on the screen's blue background. He slows the big diesel engine, then throws it into reverse.

HONNNNNKKKK! "Drop em!" Like a bevy of small-time gamblers searching for that lucky slot machine, the optimistic anglers shout encouragement at each new stop.

"This is the spot," says one, watching her bait drop out of sight through the bright blue water.

"Bet this is where the big ones are!" says another.

"We're gonna get Charlie the Tuna this time," proclaims a third.

"I'd settle for Charlie Grouper," comes the reply.

Again the reels begin to whine. All around the boat the lines return from the deep. Some anglers are disappointed to see their hooks stripped clean. Others are rewarded with flapping catches of black sea bass, grouper, snapper, and a few other unusual species. And into the buckets they go.

No sooner has the action begun to subside than Capt. Mike gives the order to move on. There is another roar of the engine, a few minutes of meandering across the blue Atlantic and once again that familiar cry.

HONNNNNKKKK! "Drop 'em!"

Not a bad way to spend the day.



STARING into the deep and hoping for a prized catch, Judy Loflin of Shallotte lets her electric reel do the work as she watches her line rise from the bottom.



"GOT ONE!" shouts Rena Griffith of Supply, during a recent offshore fishing trip sponsored by the county parks and recreation department.

'Big, Noisy And Conspicuous'

BY BILL FAVER

"Big, noisy and conspicuous" is the description given the Oystercatcher by the Audubon Water Bird Guide. These chicken-sized birds are from 17 to 21 inches in size and have bold patterns of black, brown and white.

Their feet are flesh-to pink-colored, and their bills are red. A white wing patch is visible when they fly. A close-up view reveals orange-yellow eyes circles with red eyelids.

They are found from Massachusetts southward to Argentina and winter along the North Carolina coast and southward. Large concentrations have been found at Cape Romain Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina where they live along sandy beaches, mud flats and edges of salt marshes.

They are seldom found far from these areas where

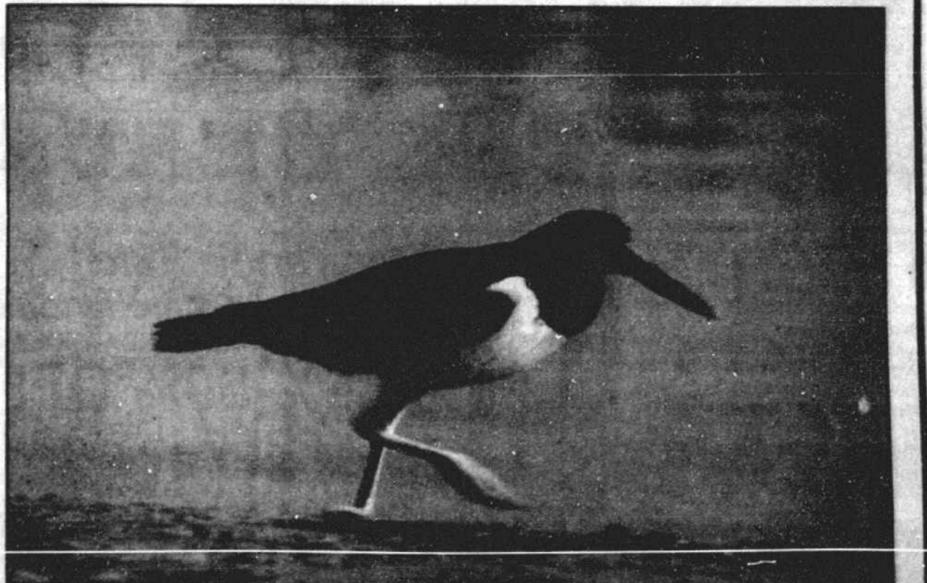
they feed on oysters, mussels, clams, cockles, crabs and other crustacea. They feed by inserting their large "oyster-knife" bill into the bivalve and cutting the muscles that hold the shells tight.

Feeding becomes an art in that the Oystercatchers must wade out at just the right time to catch the oysters open as the tide recedes or comes in. Even a slight touch or bump will cause the oysters to clamp together so the bird cannot insert its bill. Oystercatchers also feed on barnacles and snails and some marine worms.

Nests are usually placed in shallow depressions and are sometimes lined with small bits of shells. Two to four black-spotted buff eggs are placed in this nest, and both male and female birds share in the incubation.

Oystercatchers do not nest in colonies as do some other birds, but do group together in flocks for migration and wintering. Unlike Willets and some other birds who will give their nests away by swoops and cries at an intruder, the Oystercatcher will calmly fly away and wait for the intruder to leave. They do have a loud and distinctive "wheep, wheep, wheep," which helps in their identification.

They are good swimmers and divers and fly more like ducks than shorebirds. Their presence in our area adds to the variety of bird life we find along our coast. We are pleased that these "big, noisy and conspicuous" birds share the edge of the sea with us.



OYSTERCATCHERS are large dark and white birds with red bills.

PHOTO BY BILL FAVER