

# Fishing & Hunting



By Richard Seale

## Many levels of excitement

The Easter weekend beach invasion brought several fishing groups to McNeill Park. It was still very early in the year, so, from what I saw, most of the fish caught were pin fish, croakers or white perch. All were small, but the excited sounds of young boys and girls showing off a “prize” wiggling fish swinging from a rod end certainly testified that size was not the main objective. Dads, and a few moms, were usually called upon to get the fish off the hook and rebait with shrimp. It was good to see these smiling and laughing family groups outside and enjoying time together.

Just to the west of the park sits the McNeill osprey nesting platform. During the last two weeks of March and the first week of April, a female osprey took possession of the platform. Most of the time, she just sat quietly on the old nesting material. As April arrived, male ospreys began to appear—and some landed on the platform with the female. As many as three males would come to nearby trees and dock pilings.

I have no idea how the female picks the one for her, but by Easter she seemed to have decided on her partner. They both started spending nights on the platform, flying into the trees and hauling sticks back to the platform and could be seen eating fish they had caught—which were just like what the humans were landing from the waters at the park. Last year, a couple of times, a second male would try to land on the platform when the female was there alone, but she drove off those interlopers. Two osprey chicks were successfully hatched and fledged from the nest.

As I write this, the female can be heard screaming for the male to bring more sticks. Come to the point at McNeill with binoculars and enjoy the excitement of watching this fishing family set up house for the 2021 nesting season. When storms howl through the days and nights over the summer, try to remember these birds tending their young during that event. Like our country's flag seen “through the dawn's early light,” we feel happy excitement when we see the birds safely on the platform at first light after a wild and stormy night.

Beginning in April and going into May, some really special ocean fishing can be experienced not far off shore. The false albacore, bonita and cobia show up and are hungry. The bonita are long, slim fish that are very fast moving and migrate past our area in schools. They feed early in the morning, usually near and over submerged structures such as artificial reefs like 315. For the best results, you need to be there around dawn. Casting or trolling various spoons is the fishing protocol, except when the school charges to the surface. The trick then is to cast spoons or lures into the slashing, jumping confusion. A hookup results in a fine fight. Part of the protocol, however, is to not run your boat into such a feeding school as you will cause the school to dive—making you very unpopular with other fishermen. A successful fight can result in some fine table fare. These fish are prime eating cut into steaks and grilled. I am unaware of any NC regulations on this species of fish.

Cobia are also very good eating and can be big fish, up to 90 pounds. They are normally fished with live whole bait fish like croaker—or freshly dead with slashes for more scent emissions. The bait is threaded on big hooks from an anchored boat and on a running tide. A sliding sinker rig allows the bait to be drawn out from the sinker and move freely in the water column. When a cobia hits, it normally

takes the fish in its jaws and makes a strong run. It then stops and swallows the bait. It takes discipline and controlling your excitement to not grab the rod and try to set the hook before the fish stops on its first run. Doing so almost always pulls the bait out of fish's mouth without a hookup. Be sure to check the current NC proclamation regulations regarding limits and size.

The false albacore is also known as a “bloody tuna.” It is a true tuna fish, so getting one on your line is a wonderful fight akin to hooking a torpedo. These fish are normally school feeders and love to chop through schools of silverside minnows. They are a favorite of fly fishermen since they come to the surface in a wildly feeding school. Again, boat handling is of importance. Getting a flashy minnow fly into the feeding school has a high level of hookup success, and getting close enough to get the fly there can result in getting too close and causing the school to dive. A lot of local guides take customers out to fly fish for these 10- to 20-pound fast, strong live torpedoes, and anglers come from all over the country for a chance to try their hand. As a result, boat traffic conflict can get serious. When a boat has a fisherman get a hookup, proper courtesy calls for other boats to let that boat have room to fight the fish. The fish often strips well over 100 yards of line from the reel, so this can mean really pulling away a good distance.

The gear for fly fishing is a 10- or 12-weight rod, saltwater floating fly line, 200 yards of 20-pound backing line attached to the fly line, and 6 to 10 feet of 20- or 30-pound tippet leader. Local fly and fishing shops can get you rigged with appropriately tied flies on proper strength hooks. You can also fish with Sting Silver or Hopkins rigs on a spinning rod. Reels need to have reliable and adjustable drags. Either rod setup provides a very exciting fight. Although a “Fat Albert” fish can be made pretty edible with quick bleeding and then soaking overnight in milk, most folks consider this a catch-and-release sport fish. This fish is not regulated in NC.

## Building a new home or remodeling?



## Don't forget the water!

Kinetico® products  
have the Mike Holmes  
seal of approval



 Kinetico®

Showroom located at  
5633 Hwy. 70 East, Newport, NC  
or visit [www.kineticonc.com](http://www.kineticonc.com)

252-223-4444

**Advanced**  
Water Systems

Advanced Water Systems, Inc., is your local, independent,  
authorized Kinetico dealer serving eastern NC, SE Virginia  
and coastal South Carolina

**SPRING SPECIAL**  
Check and test  
any brand softener  
and add one bag  
of salt for \$25.00  
+ tax.