

Fishing & Hunting



By Richard Seale

Shell games

With the surge of visitors to our area beaches and waters, it follows that many folks are newcomers to beach, ocean and sound critters that are on the shorelines and in the shallow waters of Bogue Sound. In recognition of this reality, and for the safety of both humans and animals, perhaps it is appropriate to present some information that could make a beach visit even more fun.

A great warm water and nice weather family adventure could be to go line crabbing. Bogue Sound supports a pretty good migratory population of blue claw crabs, *Callinectes sapidus*, which means “beautiful swimmer.” Most other crabs are only able to walk along the bottom of their habitats, but the blue claw crab has a rear set of legs, the last segment of which is flattened. This crab can swim up off the bottom and into the water column where it can cover great distances, particularly in tidal flows. To catch crabs, local waterside residents usually set crab pots, which are wire traps, from our docks or bulkheads. Since these vinyl-coated wire traps are really commercial fishing gear, traditional regulations allow one pot per lot resident without any commercial gear license. If you wish to set pots away from your property, you will need to buy a recreational commercial gear license.

This 12-month license costs NC residents \$70 and out of state folks \$500. This allows you to set up to five pots and other specified gear like gill nets out in waters like Bogue Sound. The crab pot needs to be attached to a float with your name and license number written on it, attached with a sinking rope. You are not allowed to sell any crabs you catch in such pots, and line crabbing does not require any license.

Line crabbing is best done at slack tides and in water about three or more feet deep. A wire hoop baited with a recently caught fresh, small fish or head of a larger fish, or a piece of chicken (like a neck or thigh) and tied on to a 15-foot piece of sturdy string line puts you, or your group, in business. If tide is running, you may need a 2- or 3-ounce sinker on the line at the hoop. There is no limit on the number of lines you can crab with—and you will need a long-handled crab net and a bucket or two. The scent of the bait will bring in crabs, who will latch on to the bait and tug on the line. You will see or feel the tugs.

If done properly and slowly, the crab will keep holding onto the bait until it is close to the surface. It is then that you can scoop it up with the net and shake it into a bucket. My life-long experiences with this kind of crab fishing bring great memories of laughter, shouts of “I need a netter quickly!”, “What, you missed him?”, “I can’t get the crab out of the net!”, and “I have two crabs on the bait!”—in general, lots of happy, excited confusion. The good news is that line crabbing usually also generates a great meal of freshly caught and cooked picked crab meat. The wonderful meat is in the claws and between the bottom and middle inner shells at the ends of the legs. The inedible stuff lies just under the top outer shell and in the middle of the body. A YouTube search will yield a number of informative and helpful videos.

Other shelled critters that do not require licenses to harvest are bivalves, like Quahog clams, which can be dug from shallow sand bar waters with special clam

rakes or, for a one-time visitor, just with a garden rake, or even felt with your hands or feet on a clean sandy bottom with no oyster shells.

Depending on size, clams can be eaten raw on the half shell. A newbie trick to opening small clams is to put them in the freezer for an hour or so. They will die and open a bit so you can get a knife into them easily (and more safely). Serve them with fresh cocktail sauce made with horseradish and ketchup or steamed open and served with melted butter. There are many other clam options from Clams Casino to all sorts of chowders. See the accompanying photo for temptation.

As I remind folks every year, when the water warms up to about 80 degrees, any cuts from underwater objects need to be quickly cleaned with peroxide or betadine and treated with antibiotic cream and bandages. If any infection starts, get to a medical urgent care place or hospital as soon as possible. I can guarantee you do not want to have a *Vibrio vulnificus* infection get ahead of proper treatment.

On public marsh shorelines, like near the local aquarium, you can pull brown mussels from the fibrous muck right along the water’s edge. These can be scrubbed with a brush, steamed open and served with garlic and melted butter.

You will encounter oysters close to shore in many Bogue Sound locations. The North Carolina oyster season is closed during all summer months, so don’t try to harvest any. The same goes for bay scallops. If you are checked by a marine patrol

officer and have these in your possession, you will get an expensive ticket.

A rather different “shell game,” but still enjoyable, is that the osprey pair on the BS McNeill Inlet osprey nesting platform on Adventure Flats to the west of McNeill Park seems to have at least one chick free of its egg shell. Momma and Papa are busy bringing in



Fresh seafood dinner—Photo by Richard Seale

fish and tearing off pieces to feed the chick(s). Please be reminded not to venture too near the nest by foot or boat. The screaming of the birds will tell you when you are getting too close for their comfort. If you see folks getting too close to the platform, remind them to stay further away as well. The adult ospreys will appreciate that respect, as would you around your home and kids.