

Fishing & Hunting

By Richard Seale



Fishing & Crabbing

Modern technology does not always work. Any of you who read last month's article probably noted that only four crabs were in the photo. No one really knows what happened, and it does not matter except I apologize for any confusion caused. I am re-submitting the photo showing all five female crab stages. I hope all of them make it this time. As a review, the female in the bottom center is the normal female with a white, triangular apron. Going clockwise from this crab, the left most crab is a female with a triangular looking apron except it now has purple and orange stripes. This is the stage where the female sends out pheromones that advertise that she is ready to be mated. The top, or third crab, is a mated female with the large, rounded apron. The fourth is the female in the sponge crab stage, which is where she is bulging with eggs that look like a yellow-orange sponge. The last crab shows the female in sponge stage, but with the egg mass looking black. The black coloration is caused by millions of eyes of baby crabs in the zoea stage of life.

May turned out to be an exceptional fishing month in many ways. Crabbing at the end of April was good enough that I decided to keep track of our May crab harvest, all coming from my few pots off of the dock. I find it hard to believe, but I ran one hundred and twenty seven pounds of live crabs through my steamer in May. I did not keep track of all the

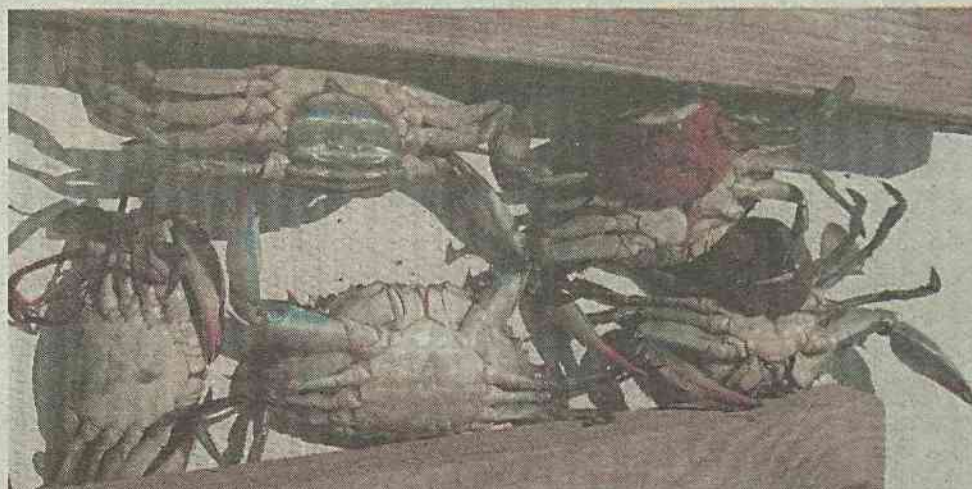
mated female and sponge crabs I caught and released, but it was between three and six a day.

We never spent a day without fresh cooked crabs in the refrigerator. We made crabmeat salad sandwiches several times a week for lunch, we picked some meat for the freezer, we picked crab meat and sautéed it in butter for dinner, and I made cracked crab claw meals for my mother. One week, when I was bringing a second meal in just a few days, I called her to ask if she wanted more cracked claws. Her answer was, "No need to call, just bring them!"

During May and into June, very nice sized Spanish and blues remained around Cape Lookout, Beaufort Inlet and along the surfline of Shackleford

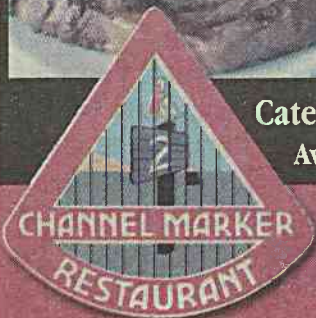
and our own Bogue Banks. Even surfcasters were landing some fish in the mid-teen inch bracket. The cobia run was short, but Steve Gould and his sons had remarkable catching adventures near Lookout, using the sight-casting method described last month. One weekend, they landed five cobia, and the next weekend, 13 cobia. Some were in the 80-pound class. Out near Big Rock, charter boats came in with 30 nice dolphin in their fish boxes. The black sea bass season was re-opened as of June 1 as scheduled. There seem to be many fish of legal length and larger being caught on the reefs and rocks. This level of good fishing will drop off as water temperatures go above 80 degrees F, so get out there while you can.

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