

Outer Banks of North Carolina

Many families enjoy the beaches of the Outer Banks of North Carolina every summer. Besides a great beach destination, the Outer Banks, commonly known as OBX, has earned a reputation of having one of the best fisheries on the East Coast. Much of the well-known fishing is done in the fall or winter in conjunction with seasonal migration. Big stripers, super-sized bluefish and record-breaking albies rule the fall and winter waters, but what about the summer? Yes, even in the hot sticky days of July there are fish to chase your flies.

Summer fly fishing can be wide and varied, but much of it is done with 6 to 8 weights and for smaller species. Speckled trout, flounder, croaker and bluefish are the common inshore targets and the occasional redfish or puppy drum. If you have an access to a boat, targets include cobia, black-tip and sharp-nose sharks, bluefish and other near-shore species.

Fly selection is very simple, but some of the biggest differences are the color combinations. Much of the water inside the Outer Banks is stained, so darker colors and unusual color combinations have proven themselves the most effective. The Outer Banks inshore fly box should include a wide selection of Bob Clouser's Deep Minnows. These flies are deadly on just about everything that swims. Favorite speckled trout colors are black over orange with copper flash, black over red with copper flash, olive over white and copper flash, brown over pink with silver flash, pink over chartreuse with silver flash, and, of course, chartreuse over white with pearl flash. One of the things that makes the Clouser Deep Minnow such a successful pattern is its versatility. It can be fished fast like a fleeing minnow, bounced on the bottom like a shrimp or crawled like a crab. Almost all of the fishing is done in the "blind". Anglers make long probing cast and fish the entire water column. As a rule there is little sight fishing

Early summer is bluefish time, so tie some of your Deep Minnows high-tie style. They seem hold up better to the bluefish's razor teeth. The average length for your Deep Minnows should be from 3 to 3.5 inches.

While Clouser's Deep Minnow is the most used pattern, there are several others that are worth adding to your fly box. Lefty Kreh / Bob Clouser's fly the Half and Half is another very essential pattern. Half and Halfs are super flies for schoolie stripers and anything that eats bigger baitfish. Jiggies and small epoxies are also excellent durable flies for bluefish. If you plan to try your hand at some early morning fly fishing in the surf, try some small bonefish flies as well as sand flea or mole crab patterns. Other effective patterns are the Wabbit Thing and if the floating grass is bad a Bendback.

Tackle for inshore water is very simple — 6 to 9 weights with an intermediate fly line. You can get by with a floater, but your success will greatly improve if you fish lower in the water column. Very light sink tips can also work but might find snags and grass. Leaders can be very simple 6 to 8 feet, tapered for the intermediate lines and 4 to 6 feet straight mono for sink tip.

As for clothing, waders are not necessary, but you will need to wear tennis shoes or wading boots and for foot protection. Most wading locations have a sandy bottom, but there are oysters and other shells that could cut your feet. When wading in dark or stained water, it is best to protect you feet and legs, so lightweight long pants are not a bad idea. At times the waters in the sound contain jelly fish or stinging nettles. Rays are uncommon, but it is still prudent to shuffle your feet. Stripping baskets are helpful.

Wading Trips

Do-it-yourself wading trips are fairly easy to plan and accomplish. The hardest part may be the distance of the drive. Many visitors stay in the Duck and Corolla areas, and while these areas have excellent beaches and nice accommodations, they have little access to saltwater back-country fishing. The Currituck Sound, which is the western shore of the Outer Banks from Duck north, is considered fresh water by the State of North Carolina, and a freshwater license is needed to fish there. (A saltwater license is required to fish elsewhere; see sidebar.) The lack of water movement in the Currituck Sound over the years has taken a toll, and the sound's large-mouth bass fishery is only a mere shadow of what it once was.

The best and easiest wading action takes place in and around Oregon Inlet. Oregon Inlet is 40-plus miles south of the northern beaches of Corolla, but it is not a bad morning's drive. The towns of Southern Shores, Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills and Nags Head are even closer to the inlet. Those who vacation farther south on Hatteras Island have primo wading spots in their back yards.

There are several easy and traditional wading spots just north of Oregon Inlet. The first one is at the Bodie Island Lighthouse Visitors Center. Park at the Visitors Center. Just before the parking area there is a dirt road on the right side of the road. A wooden gate blocks off the road, but people are welcome to walk ¼ mile down this dirt road to Blossie's Creek. Walk to either the right or left and you can fish from the bank or wade in the creek. If you move to the north (or right), you must cross a creek — use caution as the creek itself is very muddy and deep. Walk out front of the creek mouth. Blossie's Creek fishes best with current. As a rule when the tide is ebbing, fishing seems to be better but current flow is much more important. If the water is clear and light colored, light colored Clousers are a good choice, but most time the black over orange Clouser is a good first choice. You can expect to find speckled trout, occasional redfish, flounder, blues and early summer schoolies stripers. If you are there later in the summer, early morning and late evening are the best times of day. The water in the creek in mid to late summer can reach 90 degrees in mid-day.

The creek is deepest in the middle, and most of the fish will be hooked bringing your fly up the edge of the channel or drop off. Make your cast to the middle and let your fly and line sink as the current takes down the creek, or fish the sweep. Start your strip and change the speed and sink times until you find something that works.

Both sides of Oregon Inlet are easily accessible to wading anglers. The north side can be fished from the Oregon Inlet Fishing Center. The "Propeller Slough" is a small settle several hundreds yards south along the marsh bank on the eastside of the Oregon Inlet Fishing Center. Anglers should follow the marsh

bank out until it makes a sharp turn back to the Bonner Bridge. Then move out away from the bank to the right. The bottom is hard and the water is shallow. The channel is not five feet deep but it has a good current flow. This spot should be prospected when the tide is the lowest and fished on a flood tide, but the most important factor is to have some water movement. Once again, anglers need to fish the sweep with their flies. Besides speckled trout, you can expect to find flounder, croakers and other small fly-eating fish such as spots.

On the south side of the inlet, anglers need to be careful. Green Island Slough starts at foot of the Bonner Bridge on the west side. Green Island has plenty of current and a steep drop-off. Use caution when fishing here. Light sink tips are very useful here. Anglers will likely find bluefish, flounder and houndfish.

Vacationers on Hatteras Island have a wide range of wading spots on the sound side of the island. There is a traditional slough called the Dredge Slough or the 7 Mile Slough. It is in the Pamlico Sound on the western side of Highway 12. The slough starts at the Little Kinnakeet Life-Saving Station, which is 7 miles north of Avon. The slough runs south to Avon about 100 yards off the shoreline. There are four sand roads that access the slough. Some of the sand roads require four-wheel-drive vehicles and others do not; pick up an Off-Road Driving Map at a National Park Service Visitors Center if you need to know. There is not much tide in the slough, but there should be a large variety of species, including croaker, flounder, bluefish and speckled and grey trout. The same selection of flies and rods with intermediate fly lines will be the most effective. The Hatteras Island soundside is a great place to explore, so a little exploration of your own could prove lucrative.

Surf Fishing

Traditional surf-fishing time is late fall and winter, but summer can also provide some action. Most of the action will be in the early morning or late evenings. Look for a stretch of beach with a steep drop-off at your feet. The good thing about a drop-off is that most of the fish are going to be just off the beach working the drop-off ledge. Sea mullet (kingfish), croakers, bluefish and pompano travel on the ledges looking for minnows and mole crabs. Small bonefish flies, Clousers and mole crab flies will be the most productive flies. Intermediate fly lines are again going to be the most effective. Work the drop-offs with your flies. Move along the slough and look for places where the sloughs narrow up — these are natural ambush points. A stripping basket is very helpful when fishing the surf.

Boat Fishing

If you have access to a boat or time to take a charter, this will really expand your fishing horizons. The Outer Banks is better fished from a boat. The best inshore structure, like grass beds, oyster rocks and marsh islands, are not accessible on foot.

Speckled trout make their living over the grass beds and oyster rocks in the Roanoke and Pamlico sounds. There is a lot of wide open water in these sounds, but you can narrow down the water by looking for current edges or seams that come off points of islands. Duck Island in the Roanoke Sound has both oyster and grass beds and a sharp ledge on the edges of the slough that runs behind and on the

south end of the island. These areas are best fished by anchoring your boat along the edges of the slough. A simple fish finder or depth finder can find these edges. The cast should be across the current and as it sweeps down current. When you strip the fly back, you want the fly to cross or come up along the edges of the slough.

Rodanthe, the northernmost village on Hatteras Island, offers some of the best speckled trout fishing. It's in 3 to 5 feet of water around the grass to either side of the Rodanthe Channel in the Pamlico Sound. Besides speckled trout, packs of blues terrorize the waters, and there are always pinfish. Black over orange Clousers are the go-to fly here, with Chartreuse and white the second choice. Clouser Deep Minnows are the flies for prospecting. Intermediate fly lines are perfect, and they will fish the whole water column.

Outside Oregon Inlet there is a whole different world. The near-shore summer ocean (from the beach to 8 miles out) can be crowded with bluefish, sharp-nose and black-tip sharks, occasional cobia and even a dolphin (mahi). For the most part, these species are free swimming in the ocean and the old saying "they got tails but no homes" is certainly accurate description of this fishery. Fly anglers need to find a way to attract the fish to them. Chumming is the most effective. A block of ground frozen menhaden dropped into a mesh bag is the preferred way, and these are available in most full-service tackle shops.

The ocean is a big place, so where do you start your drift and drop your chum bag? First, look for water that is 68 degrees or warmer and clear. The best action takes places several miles south of the inlet. Tide lines or a change (where two different bodies of water meet) is also an excellent place to start. There is usually a dirty and clean side of the change, and you should fish the clean side of the change. Bait likes to travel along the edges, hiding in trash or scum lines so the predators also follow the edges looking for an easy meal. Drifting is the preferred method of chumming.

Patience is the key — it may take minutes or an hour before your first visitor shows up. The most common visitor to the chum bag is the black-tip shark, then the sharp-nose, and finally cobia and the occasional dolphin. In a perfect world, anglers would have three rods rigged and ready for this fishery. You would have one 10 weight /9 weight with an intermediate fly line and 20 pound tippet with wire bite guard and Orange and Red Big Eyed Wabbit tied on. The other rod would be a 9 or 10 weights loaded with a 350 to 450 grain sink 20 pound tippet and wire bite guard and a white Big Eyed Wabbit or a white Half and Half. The last rod would be a 10 weight with an intermediate fly line and 20 pound leader with an olive and white Lefty's Deceiver.

The first rod to try is the one with the intermediate line and B.E. Wabbit and wire leader. Make a cast in front or to the side of the fish. Almost all fish, including sharks and cobia, work the slick in a big circle. Look for the circle and try and intercept the fish with your fly. Slow strips to dead drift are the best. When your fly disappears in your quarry's mouth, a good strip strike is needed, then hold on! If the fish stays deep and an intermediate line is keeping the fly above your target, switch rods to the sink tip. This should deliver down to their level. Slow strips are still the preferred retrieve.

Dolphin and cobia can be a little more leader shy, so if you get the chance, try the weighted Deceiver with the mono leader. Cobia love Deceivers and if the dolphin get picky try a small chartreuse and white Clouser. The nice thing about chumming is the fish usually stay around for a few minutes and give you time to switch flies and rods.

The Outer Banks is a huge stretch of beach with many miles of water. It is easy to become overwhelmed, but don't let it intimidate you. Pick one or two of the places mentioned and concentrate on them. Take what you have learned from them, and go hunting for yourself. If you have the time and budget, hiring a guide can really bring you up to speed in any new area. Most guides have the local knowledge, techniques and the tackle. The bottom line is — do not leave home without your fly rod!

Flies of OBX summer



Clouser Deep Minnow

1. Black over orange w/ copper flash
2. Chartreuse over white w/ silver flash
3. Olive over white w/ copper flash
4. Pink over white w/ silver flash
5. Grey over white w/ silver flash
6. Black over red w/ copper flash
7. Brown over pink w/ pearl flash



Lefty's Deceiver (weighted)

1. Olive over white
2. Chartreuse over white



Sand flea/mole crab



Kreh/Clouser Half and Half

1. Chartreuse and white
2. Olive and white
3. White



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Fly Fishing North Carolina's Outerbanks



For the ten year that I resided on the Outerbanks of North Carolina I always had a boat. In fact I usually had several boats at any given time. Exploring the vast shallow regions of the Pamlico Sound in search of redfish and speckled trout was one of my favorite pastimes.

After I moved away from Hatteras Island it was not always convenient to drag a skiff with me every time I had the opportunity to visit Dare County. Thus began my search for fishing areas that were accessible from the shoreline.

My attempts to find places that consistently produced redfish were marginally successful at best. However, finding places that regularly produced speckled trout, small striped bass, gray trout, and other assorted panfish on a fly rod was relatively easy.



I will give directions to these locations beginning at the northern entrance to the National Seashore near Nags Head. There is only one highway through the Seashore, Rt. 12, all references of the highway will be Rt. 12.

Off Island Slough

A little more than four miles south of the entrance to Cape Hatteras National Seashore is Bodie Island Lighthouse. You should park in the lot at the lighthouse visitors center. At the south end of the parking area is a gravel road blocked to vehicles by a gate. A couple of hundred yards down this gravel road is a small private boat dock. Directly across the channel from the dock is Off Island which is occupied by a private hunt club.

The channel of Off Island Slough provides excellent fishing for several hundred yards to both the north and south of the boat dock. The area adjacent to the boat dock is very popular with bait fishermen. They are usually easy enough to avoid by wadding north or south of the dock area (The small creek just north from the dock has a very soft bottom; it is much easier to cross this area by wadding out into the main channel a few yards before proceeding north).

The tidal current in the center of Off Island Channel is strong enough that

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an intermediate line will not be sufficient to present your fly on the bottom in the deepest areas of the channel. Presenting your fly very close to the bottom is generally necessary to consistently catch speckled trout and redfish in this area during daylight hours. At night, and at sunrise it is possible to catch fish very close to shoreline using a floating or intermediate line.

Off Island Slough is often one of the first places where small redfish are caught in the early spring. Small striped bass regularly cruse the channel from March through January. Speckled trout can make a showing almost anytime the water temperature is above 54 degrees. During the summer the slough hosts a mixed bag of small bluefish, gray trout, and croakers.

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Herring Shoal Island Slough (Coast Guard Station Slough)

Approximately three miles south of Bodie Island Lighthouse is Oregon Inlet Fishing Center. Park in the lot in front of the Coast Guard Station (boat ramp area). Just to the right of the "no trespassing" sign on the fence surrounding the Coast Guard Station is a path along the outside perimeter of the station grounds. The property outside the fence belongs to the Park Service. The path leads to a channel that runs north and south behind the station.

This is not the easiest place to fly fish. The brush is usually fairly high along the shoreline and when you wade out into the channel you will be in five foot of water before you are twenty-five foot from the shore. Additionally, the current is always very strong. Despite these shortcomings, this is at times a very productive location for speckled trout.

You must get your fly down on the bottom to catch fish here. I would recommend at least a 250 grain high density shooting head. The only break fish have from the current are small ridges in the sand bottom of the channel. Close to the bottom is seldom good enough here, you must present the fly within inches of the bottom.

Propeller Slough

At the southwest end of the Oregon Inlet Fishing Center parking lot is a large ship propeller. Just to the west of this propeller is the continuation of the slough that runs behind the Coast Guard Station. On most days the water is clear enough to see the darker area of the channel. There is plenty of room for a backcast here and hundreds of yards to wade along. At daylight the fish often move up on the shallower ledges along the edge of the channel. This area is continually shifting. The sloughs shift with every storm. Bluefish, Spanish mackerel, speckled trout, redfish, flounder, striped bass are all possibilities when wading this area. This area is a good place to find big fish in very shallow water just at daybreak (before the charter boat fleet roars out).

DANGER

Strong currents, deep water,
and sudden drop offs make
this shore hazardous.

Green Island Slough

This is one of the most consistent hot spots for wadding anglers on the Outerbanks. It is also one of the most dangerous. Tidal currents are very strong, numerous steep drop-offs, and in some areas close to the bridge the shoreline is very unstable. Every inshore gamefish that is available on the Outerbanks can be caught in Green Island Slough. The slough begins at the south end of the Bonner Bridge (Oregon Inlet Bridge) and is accessible to wadding anglers for more than 1,000 yards back to the southwest. I recommend avoiding the area near the bridge where there are steep sod banks. Lots of snags and this shoreline is not always stable. Just beyond the sod banks the deep water veers away from the shoreline. You can begin wadding here. When the water is clear the edge of the deeper water is easy see.

Most local anglers only fish Green Island Slough during ebb tide. Falling water at daybreak is a great time to fish there, even during the doldrums of mid-summer. A sixty foot cast from waist deep water will land your fly in 10 or more foot of water in many places along this slough. At least a type IV shooting head (30') is necessary to get you in the strike zone due to the strong tidal currents. If you do not have a fast sink line, you may be able to scratch out a few fish by concentrating your efforts along the edge of the drop off. The edge between 4 and 6 feet deep can be a flounder hot spot. At first light many gamefish many cruse up along this edge.

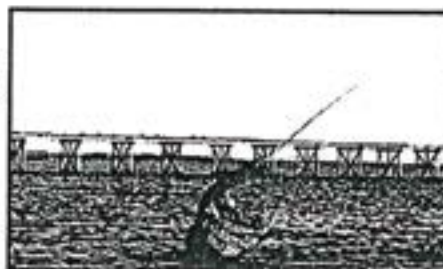
Close to the bridge on the eastern side is a wadeable bar that occasionally fishes well on the flood tide. In years past it has been a prime gray trout hot spot in early to mid-June. This is not a good location timid waders or poor swimmers.



New Inlet

Approximately six miles south of Oregon Inlet is what once was New Inlet. The opening to the ocean has long since closed and the only indication that this once was an inlet is the remnants of an old wooden bridge.

What remains of the old channel is best fished out near the bridge. Easiest access is to wade from the boat launch area out along the north marsh line to the base of the bridge. The dark bottom and slow currents allow this area to warm quickly in early



spring.

Poppers and gurgles are a good choice for attracting both specks and redfish during low light conditions.

Dredge Slough

When beach erosion threatened Rt. 12 just north of the village of Avon, the State used a dredge to pump sand from the back side of the Island on to the beach. For many years this deep slough on the soundside was a dependable summer fishing hot spot. Time has taken its toll, today this slough is mostly filled in. The remnants of the slough does not hold nearly as many fish as in the past. The best of the fishing here is now at night.

Beginning two miles north of Avon and continuing north for a couple of miles is a series of ORV trails that lead back to the soundside and the remnants of this slough. Small redfish and croakers are the primary fair here.



Canada Hole

Just north of Buxton is an area where the Island was breached several times by storms back in the 60's and 70's. The Canada Hole is the result of these storm breaches. There is a nice soundside parking area adjacent to the "hole" and the area is extremely popular with wind surfers. During the warmer months and on most weekends it is best to plan your fishing here for very early in morning or for after sundown.

Deep water and minimal tidal currents make this area an excellent fly fishing location. Every species of fish that frequents the Pamlico Sound is found in the Canada Hole at one time or another. Grey trout, croakers, speckled trout, and small redfish are caught here all summer

"Shot Tower Area"

South of the Hatteras Inlet Coast Guard Station is a ORV trail to Hatteras Inlet. Not far from the Station is an area that was the site of a Civil War munitions manufacturing operation. Molten lead was dropped from a wooden tower. As the lead fell, it

Outerbanks Mid-Winter
Trophy Striped Bass
FlyFishing

cooled in almost perfectly round musket shot. All signs of the operation have long since faded away, but it is still interesting to think about as you fish.

Grass flats lead out to the channel. Speckled trout and redfish are occasionally thick on these flats in the fall. Assorted panfish can be caught here all summer. Small striped bass are a good bet almost any night when the wind is blowing from the deep toward the shallows (north or northeast wind). Stingray wadding protocol is highly advisable on these flats during the summer.

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