

Nature Notes

JULY, 2026

Whales

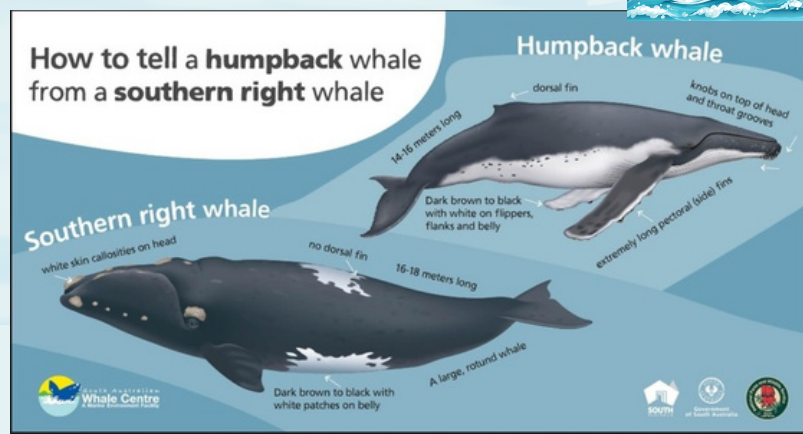


South Carolina's coastal waters are home to a diversity of whales! Pygmy sperm whales are the only whale that can be found here year-round, but many other species visit our waters during their migration. This includes humpback whales, beaked whales, pilot whales, sperm whales, and critically endangered North Atlantic right whales.

North Atlantic right whales are large baleen whales, growing up to 52 feet long and weighing more than 140,000 pounds. Instead of teeth, these whales have racks of baleen that they use to filter water for food like microscopic plankton. North Atlantic right whales typically live in coastal waters, rarely traveling to deeper offshore waters. During the summer months, these whales can be found in northern coastal regions. They use this region as crucial foraging and mating grounds. In the fall, the whales migrate over 1,000 miles to the southern coasts of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. They use this region as a nursery to raise their calves through the winter.

North Atlantic right whales got their name from being the easiest or "right" whale to hunt. The intensity of whaling targeting right whales has severely depleted their populations. In 1986, commercial whaling was globally outlawed. North Atlantic right whales were protected from intentional harm, but human activity continued to cause their populations to decline. Vessel strikes and entanglement in fishing gear are prevalent threats to these whales. Today, only about 380 North Atlantic right whales remain.

To protect this species, Dewees Island has joined hundreds of other sites in a marine safety and conservation network, known as StationKeeper. This network monitors vessel activity in protected waters and sends automatic speed and safety messages. Informing mariners reduces vessel strikes and protects marine habitats. Another system, known as the Right Whale Sighting Advisory System, further helps reduce vessel collisions with right whales by alerting mariners to their presence in the area. This system relies on whale sighting reports. If you encounter a right whale, stay at least 500 yards away to avoid causing disturbance, then report your sighting to the U.S. Coast Guard, the Whale Alert app, or NOAA Fisheries.



New Red Drum Laws Beginning July 1, 2026



1 fish/person/day

2 fish/boat/day

18-25 inch size limit

If fishing for gamefish (including red drum, cobia, and tarpon) with large hooks (4/0 or larger) and natural bait, non-offset/non-stainless circle hooks are required.*



*There are no restrictions on hook type when using hooks less than 4/0 or artificial lures.

A Ferry Tale FISHING YOUR WAYAROUND DEWEES



Mallee, Griffin, and I loaded up the "Little Red" golf cart with our tackle and headed out to Capers Inlet.

The plan was to fish the junction of the creek and the pass on the outgoing tide, hoping for schools of flounder and trout lying in wait just off the creek current. We fished late into the morning, catching two "keepers" that we placed on a stringer at the creek bank. One was a lovely flatfish and the other, a 20-inch silvery trout.

12:30 PM! Time for lunch. One more cast, I said to myself (words for which I have become famous). I waded out into the shallows for my last throw, and out of the corner of my eye I caught a large black dorsal fin splitting the water ahead, as it knifed up the creek. Mallee saw it too, and Griffin pulled out his camera.

My instant reaction was to save the stringer. I trotted quickly up the bank to where I had placed my two fish and reached down to pull the metal stake. A splash, a jump on my part, and I watched helplessly as my stringer slipped silently into the creek beside the gnashing teeth of a six-foot blacktip shark. "Clippy", my treasured stringer, will be missed almost as much as the evening meal so generously donated to the ocean gods.

The word fishing itself means the same to all. The feelings this word evokes vary widely. For some, the notion of handling a squirmy, slimy, scaly fish is offensive enough, much less making an effort to do so. For others, the word fishing brings back fond memories of moments with a grandparent, sitting near the water, rod in hand, bobber floating, and simply enjoying the experience.

There are those of us who seek adventure through fishing, whether we grew up with it or not, and these following words are for you.



TURTLE TRACKS

PROTECTING LOGGERHEADS AND HATCHLINGS

- Dewees currently has 16 active loggerhead nests. Most nesting ends by July 15, and hatchlings will soon begin emerging.
- Turn off bright outdoor lights after sunset and use red lights at night to help protect nesting turtles and hatchlings. Many of today's hatchlings may return to Dewees as adults to nest.





What is a Pollinator



A pollinator is a small animal, insect, or bird that helps plants reproduce by moving pollen from one flower to another. Pollinators native to Dewees Island include bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, bats, and a variety of other insects. These important species play a crucial role in our ecosystem by helping plants produce fruits and seeds. They are naturally attracted to bright colors and sweet scents. Without pollinators, we would have far fewer fruits and vegetables for both people and wildlife.

There are many native plants on our approved plant list that you can cultivate on your property to support these valuable pollinators. Flowers such as Butterfly Milkweed and Purple Passionflower are especially attractive to bees and butterflies. Groundsel, a medium-sized shrub with fluffy white flowers that blooms in October, is often covered with colorful butterflies as they migrate south for the winter.



The hibiscus bee is one of the native pollinators that frequently visits wild mallow, helping the plant reproduce while gathering nectar and pollen.

If you're inspired to add pollinator-friendly plants to your landscape, be sure to first review the Dewees Island Environmental Design Guidelines and obtain Lori's approval. Whenever possible, choose organically grown, locally sourced plants to help maintain the island's healthy ecosystem.

Summertime Butterflies

Palamedes Swallowtail

Host plant: Red bay

Has a vertical line of yellow dots on each black top wing, slightly smaller than the Giant Swallowtail

Gulf Fritillary

Host plant: Passionflower vines

Bright orange with black markings, up to 3.75 inches wide

Eastern Pygmy Blue

Host plant: Glasswort

Brown with spots, the smallest butterfly found here, with a wing span of less than one inch



Giant Swallowtail

Host plant: Toothache tree, aka Hercules club

Has a diagonal yellow stripe across each black wing, the largest butterfly found here at up to 6 inches wide

Red Admiral

Host plant: False nettle

Mostly black with two striking red stripes on each wing, up to 3 inches wide



Can you match the butterfly to the host plant?



Giant Swallowtail



Glasswort



Eastern Pygmy Blue



Toothache Tree



Gulf Fritillary



False Nettle



Palamedes Swallowtail



Passionflower Vine



Red Admiral



Red Bay

THE BUZZ

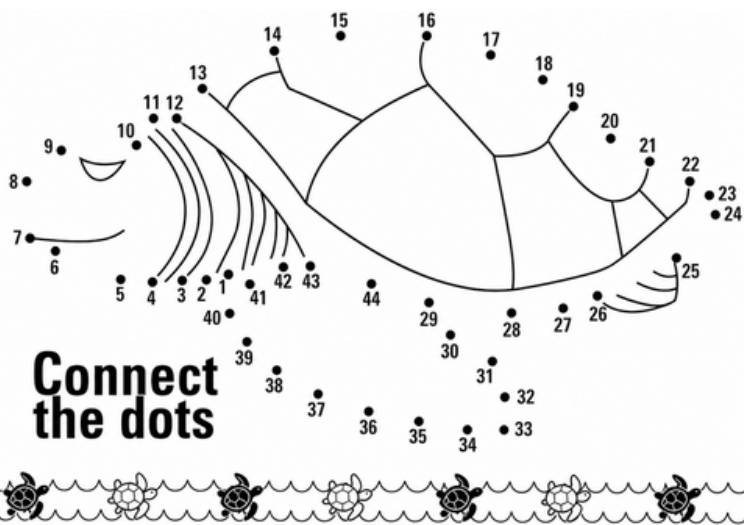


FIREFLY VIEWING ETIQUETTE

- Walk to Needle Rush in the early evening to observe the fireflies.
- Use a small red flashlight to find your way.
- Don't use golf cart lights.

CRAB DOCK CLOSURE NOTICE

- No hook-and-line fishing.
- Do not tie off crab pots, minnow keepers, or traps.



Connect the dots



Red-Winged Blackbird



Marsh Wren



Piazza Doyle



Marsh Matters

Saltmarsh cordgrass is the anchor of the marsh. Its networked roots hold the plants together, providing significant economic value to the local community. They withstand wave and tide action, absorbing energy and floodwater while protecting the mainland. As the cordgrass decays, the detritus feeds oysters, mussels, worms, fish, and crustaceans. The marsh also provides habitat for many fish, animals, and birds.

Can you spot these marsh birds and hear their calls?

- ☐ Marsh Wren
- ☐ Clapper Rail
- ☐ Snowy Egret
- ☐ Willet
- ☐ Red-Winged Blackbird

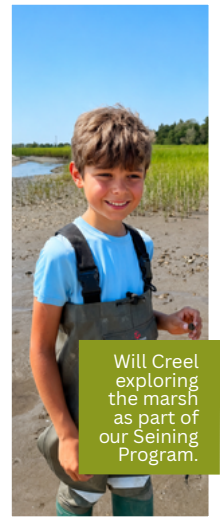


Willet

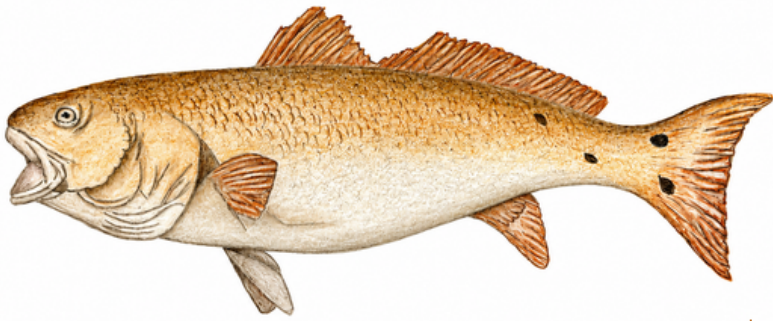
From the Editor

As always, I could not have done the newsletter without the support of so many. "It takes a village," or a community, to educate and protect our unique island home. Many thanks to Esther Doyle for her amazing artwork and creative insight, to Judy Fairchild for her knowledge and willingness to share, to our interns, Catie, Anna, and Haley, and to Patrick Miller and Ben Shuttleworth for their writing. To the many residents who have generously offered encouragement to continue this endeavor, I am personally grateful.

Lee Miller



Will Creel exploring the marsh as part of our Seining Program.



Tidal Talk

PATRICK'S VERSION

There are several popular places on the island to fish, along with a few less-frequented spots that can be just as rewarding.

- **The Beach** – Obviously, there's the beach! I've had success there using cut bait or live bait in the surf. Look for where two waves run into each other before pulling back into the ocean, or fish the deep pockets of water between the beach and a sandbar, especially on a rising tide.
- **The Creeks** – Big Bend Dock offers decent fishing from a sturdy platform with ramps leading down to the floating docks at water level.
- **Two Pipes** – Located at the northern end of the island, this is a productive fishing spot year-round, as is the area at the end of the Capers Inlet path.
- **The Impoundment** – Canoes and paddling gear are available for everyone to use. Flounder and plenty of oversized redfish can often be found here.
- **The Ferry Dock** – Easy access and excellent fishing in the current between the dock and the grass. Please be mindful of ferry traffic.
- **The Crab Dock** – A great, easy place to fish in the impoundment. Please pay attention to the posted signs indicating prohibited fishing times.
- **The Rice Trunks** – A good place to catch bait on the outside and enjoy good fishing on the inside.

On Dewees, water temperature, the lunar phase (tides), and the time of year are all major factors in your success. Fortunately, there's a handy-dandy resource that provides most of the information you'll need: the Dewees/Capers Inlet Solunar Fishing Calendar. It rates each day for fish activity and points you to the best times of day to get your line in the water.

Remember, fish bite best on rising and falling tides. Also note that the creek at Two Pipes can lag the Capers Inlet tides by as much as two hours in terms of water flow and productivity.

Morning and late afternoon are great times to wet a line, and evening or night can be extremely productive, especially during the hotter months. Combine those times with moving water, and you're usually in for a treat. Skip low tide altogether—about an hour and a half before and after—unless you're hoping to catch stingrays or oysterfish off the Ferry Dock, or cast for shrimp or bait off the Crab Dock. Remember, current is your friend.

If you're 16 or older and fishing in South Carolina, you'll need a fishing license. Purchase one through the official South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) website. (Heads up: SCDNR warns that fraudulent license websites exist, so only purchase through the official state site.)

Next, you'll need tackle. Our local shop is Haddrell's Point Tackle and Supply in Mount Pleasant—a great place to pick up gear, bait, and your fishing license. Medium to medium-heavy action rods are ideal, with 10-pound monofilament or an equivalent braided line. Most anglers prefer open-face spinning reels, but baitcasters work just fine, and Zebco 504s are great for the kids.

Mud minnows, live finger mullet, cut mullet, and shrimp (live or frozen) are all excellent bait choices. If you're comfortable using a cast net, you can easily catch your own bait, or you can use a minnow trap. Always place minnow traps outside the impoundment. Fresh fish parts work well as bait in the traps.

As for hooks, I prefer 2/0 circle hooks, whether fishing on the bottom or under a cork. They cause less damage to fish that are released. When using weights, choose tungsten instead of lead—it's better for people and better for the ecosystem. If you're practicing catch and release, use a rubber (gum) net to help protect the fish's scales.

A Few Things to Remember

- If an alligator is within 60 feet of your location, please stop fishing until it leaves or move to another spot.
- Do not leave bait buckets tied up and unattended on the inside of the island. They must always be marked with your name and lot number.
- Keep only enough fish for your family or friends to enjoy one meal.
- Please observe all SCDNR size and creel limits before keeping your catch.

Now go make some memories.

Keep a tight line!