

Ask a marine biologist

Illustration by Dianne Rome Peebles

# Spotted Seatrout

A summertime favorite for coastal Georgia anglers



In this edition of Coastlines Georgia, we're talking with CRD Marine Biologist Ryan Harrell, who works with our Marine Sportfish Population Health Survey. Ryan samples recreational species and has worked with CRD for 11 years. He frequently enjoys fishing for spotted seatrout out of his small boat with his kids Anders (9) and Vera Kate (6). He agreed to share some of his favorite tips.

## Coastlines Magazine: What are the best months to fish for Spotted Seatrout?

**Ryan Harrell:** Spotted seatrout can be caught year-round in coastal Georgia but the absolute best months are September through November. During the fall, post-spawn seatrout move into the estuary and rivers to gorge on bait before the winter comes. In the winter, fish move into deeper holes seeking warmer water. As the temperature begins to warm in the spring, Spotted Seatrout will begin feeding more and moving into saltier areas along the beaches and in the sound to prepare for the spawning season which takes place mid-April through September.

## CM: What type of rods/reels and tackle do you need to fish for Spotted Seatrout?

**RH:** A 7 foot medium-light or medium spinning rod with a size 2500 spinning reel is a good all around setup for spotted seatrout. Most anglers use 15 to 20-lb. braided line with a 15 to 20-lb. fluorocarbon leader. If live bait fishing you'll need a slip bobber, a bobber stop, the appropriate sinker for your bobber, and a 1 or 1/0 kahle hook.

## CM: What are the most effective baits and lures for seatrout?

**RH:** The most common bait used around here is simply a live shrimp fished under a slip bobber. Other live baits that work well are mudminnows and finger mullet. Artificial lures are also very effective. Paddletails, shrimp lures, and curly tails fished on a jighead will produce bites. These lures can be fished under a popping cork or just using a slow retrieve. One of my favorite ways to fish for seatrout during the summer months is using topwater lures with a "walk the dog" retrieve. This can be effective early in the morning, late in the evening, or all day if it's overcast. One thing to keep in mind is that seatrout have very soft mouths. It's important to keep the drag loose or you're probably going to lose some fish.

## CM: What type of structure or habitat should people look for when fishing for seatrout?

**RH:** During the higher tides fish can typically be found near the grass line over submerged structure such as oyster beds. When fishing the falling tide I like to concentrate on creek run offs. Often time, seatrout will be waiting right near the rip waiting to attack baitfish moving out of the creek. Anywhere near oyster bars, docks, or rocks typically hold fish. You have to be flexible when trying to locate fish. If you're not getting a bite, keep moving. Often, I will drift or use my trolling motor and work the bank with a popping cork. When I find the fish, I'll anchor for a while and move on when the bite turns off.

## CM: Do I have to have a boat to catch seatrout?

**RH:** There are many boatless spotted seatrout anglers out there. Just

Illustration provided by Georgia SeaGrant  
A popping cork rig, seen here, can be useful in attracting and landing spotted seatrout.



Ryan Harrell/CRD

Anders, son of CRD marine biologist Ryan Harrell, holds his first-ever saltwater fish, a spotted seatrout, caught all by himself.

about any public fishing pier or dock in brackish and saltwater will hold seatrout at some point. The beaches will hold fish during the spring and summer months. The bridges and banks of the St. Simons causeway are popular areas to check out spring through fall.

## CM: What is the typical size range of seatrout in the area?

**RH:** Most seatrout caught will be between 12 and 18 inches but 20 inch plus fish isn't uncommon. The men's Georgia state record is 9-lbs., 7-oz. while the women's record is 7-lbs., 8-oz. Both fish measured 30.5 inches. The Georgia minimum size to harvest a Spotted Seatrout is 14 inches (Total Length) and anglers are allowed up to 15 per person/per day.

## CM: What other species might you catch while targeting Spotted Seatrout?

**RH:** The fun thing about fishing saltwater is you really never know

what you might catch. When fishing for Spotted Seatrout you might catch other recreational species such as red drum, flounder, black drum, or gray (mangrove) snapper. Then again you might catch Ladyfish, sharks, Silver Perch, or other less desirable fish.

## CM: What is the best way to prepare and cook Spotted Seatrout once it is caught?

**RH:** There really is no wrong way to cook seatrout. Fried, baked, broiled, or grilled with your seasoning of choice are all great options. The meat is a bit softer than other fish so it's important not to over cook them or they get a bit mushy. Also, they don't freeze as well as other fish so I prefer to only keep enough for dinner and eat them fresh.

## CM: Is there anything you'd like to add or say?

**RH:** Seatrout are a blast to catch. They are plentiful, can be caught on

## Want to find places to catch spotted seatrout?

CRD can provide fishing maps of coastal Georgia counties. Stop by our office at 1 Conservation Way, Brunswick, GA 31520 and pick up a free copy. You can also find the same maps available online at [www.CoastalGaDNR.org/FishingMaps](http://www.CoastalGaDNR.org/FishingMaps)

many different baits and lures, and they are tasty too. I guess that's one of the reasons they are one of the most targeted species along the Georgia coast. Also, bobber fishing for seatrout is a great way to take kids fishing.

Learn more about common saltwater fish species online at [MarineFishesofGeorgia.org](http://MarineFishesofGeorgia.org)