

# Taking a look at some winter options for

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With the whitetail deer season in the rearview mirror, many Upstate sportsmen find themselves with ample time and little to do.

Fortunately, there's plenty more action to be found through the winter months, and if you're just as versatile with rod and gun, there's twice as much action.

If you're drawing a blank, here are a few suggestions:

## SPOTTED BASS FISHING

While not native to South Carolina, nearly every major lake in the Upstate now has a healthy supply of spotted bass.

While spotted bass do not achieve the same size as their largemouth cousins, the "spot" definitely has a more aggressive attitude. Spotted bass tend to school more than largemouth, and when the natural forage base of threadfin shad and blueback herring begin to group en masse during the winter, spots go on a rampage.

Casting bucktails, jigging spoons or other long-distance baits is the best way to target schooling fish. Look for seagulls to give away baitfish locations. Concentrations of spotted bass may be found along saddles, drop offs or other bottom relief.

Vertically present a

4-inch drop-shot worm or jigging spoon for these fish. Drifting the area with live minnows suspended anywhere in the water column is also productive.

## GOOSE HUNTING

Canada geese were released into the state by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources nearly 50 years ago, and resident Canadas are now an everyday sight, especially around the state's major reservoirs, lakes and ponds.

Patterning Canada geese for hunting is a matter of scouting out birds prior to the hunt. Most hunters find success by targeting two separate and distinct areas — open grass or grain fields, and bodies of water.

The prospective goose hunter can wear out a lot of back roads and boat gas looking for concentrations of geese to hunt, but once found, the hunter is typically rewarded with some excellent hunting opportunities.

Geese are creatures of habit — where they leave from at dark is almost always where they'll come to the next morning. Unlike many other forms of hunting, farmers and residents are not as reluctant about granting hunting permission, as some goose populations within the state are to the point that they have

# Upstate sportsmen



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Goose hunting is just one of several winter hunting and fishing opportunities available in the Upstate.

become a nuisance to landowners.

Since many larger water bodies across the state are considered public property, hunting geese on these waters doesn't require prior permission. It's best

to check local regulations before hunting.

## RABBIT HUNTING

Another available statewide venture for winter-weary hunters is rabbit hunting. A crisp



morning of listening to a pack of beagles trying to outsmart a foxy cottontail brings back old memories for a lot of seasoned hunters.

Many mistakenly blame a lack of rabbits for modern hunts that don't measure up to the "old days." The problem lies with adequate habitat, not populations.

Since most private-land rabbit hunting takes place on leased deer land after deer season is over, providing dual usage for rabbits is a concern. Many available rabbit lands in the state are high canopy pine plantations. If an entire area is same-year pines, then the rabbit population will be pretty scarce due to the mature trees choking out the ground-level cover.

On the other hand, if the land is a mix of clear cuts, young pines and mature pines, look for bunnies around the clear-cut areas that have been cut within the last four or five years.

Fortunately, rabbit hunters who own dogs are often on the lookout for "standers" in order to surround running rabbits. With a little bit of asking around, it's not that hard to get a hunting invitation.

### **STRIPED BASS FISHING**

The Savannah chain lakes of Hartwell, Russell and Thurmond have earned a nationwide reputation for landlocked

striped bass, which are annually stocked into these lakes. Unlike other species of fish, the cold-water loving stripers feed heavily throughout the early winter in preparation for coming colder weather.

Free-lining live bait is a favorite tactic among local anglers who can be found trolling store-bought blueback herring, gizzard shad or extra-large shiners in search of linesides.

Look for striped bass and hybrid striped bass to hold around the mouths of secondary creeks that dump into larger tributaries during the day. Overnight, striped bass will often push baitfish into the extreme shallows in the backs of creeks or around shallow flats, and most anglers begin fishing these shallow waters early in the day then work back toward deeper water as the sun gets overhead.

One of the best ways to locate a striper holding spot is to watch the sky for birds, seagulls, loons or herons. These coastal birds move inland during the winter to feed on baitfish and can be seen from long distances diving on schools of bait pushed up by schooling stripers.

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