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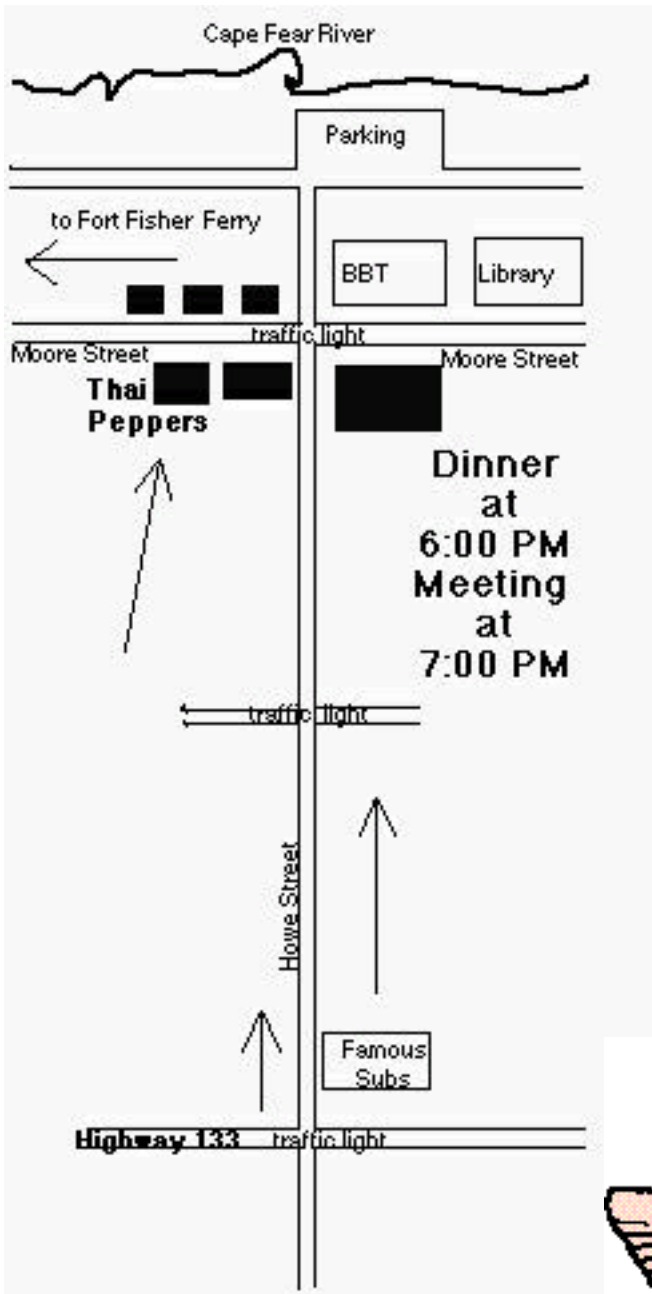
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Through My Mask

by Bryan Woodard

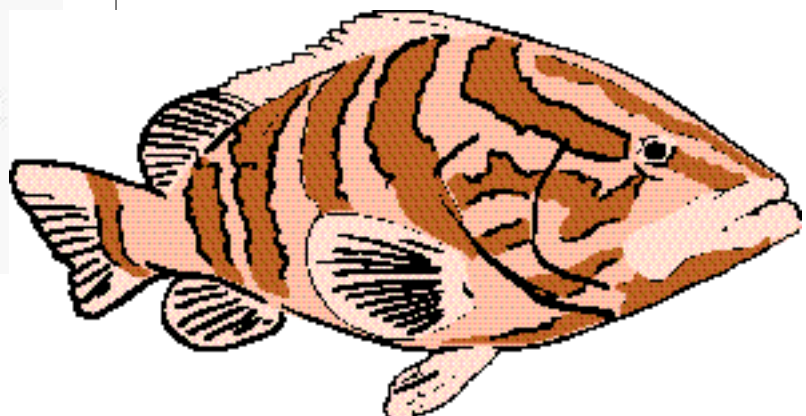
Hi, Steve is on vacation- sort of. He is working in South Carolina and won't be back until the November meeting.

As everyone knows Hurricane Floyd roared through here and totally screwed up life from the continental shelf break 40 miles offshore all the way to the mountains.

If anyone has been diving off the Cape Fear they are keeping it secret. I sure haven't heard about it. Wayne Strickland tried the Houston a couple of weeks ago, found visibility at 90 feet and 35 miles offshore to be less than 2 feet. He lost a prop on the Scuba South II coming in from that dive and was in a repair mode last time we talked.

As of now we do not have a speaker lined up for the meeting on October 12. But, dinner will be served at the usually time.

Steve is working on getting a speaker from the Weather Service for a upcoming meeting and I have talked to Discovery Diving in Morehead about their meeting with us in the near future.





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7:00 p.m. at Thai Peppers
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Udate From the Dive Shops

Adventures Etc

The Lobster tournament and the Treasure hunt scheduled for later this month have been canceled. Another victim of Floyd.

Aquatic Safaris

Trip to Crystal River area planned for November 18 —21. Kings Spring, Catfish Corner, Blue Grotto, Rainbow River, and a night dive are some of the stops planned for this trip. The cost is \$275 and includes air, lodging, spring fees, and boat rental. Check with Roy about Transportation options.

September Meeting

Floyd was to hit late that night, President Steve was out of town, and nothing urgent was pending... so there was no business meeting. However, those of us who intended to stay put for the storm were given a preview of the video Bryan has produced. It's WONDERFUL! It features many members of our club doing what dive club members do best (besides eat). Local sites, very fishy, good viz, and recognizable stars make it a very special tape. I believe he is designing a cover and is to make copies but it is best to ask him for details. Good conversation, good food (which is what we do second best) filled the evening. Sally

To the Beat of a Different Drum

by
Scott Fowler

When Jacques Cousteau made his movie *The Silent World*, he did not have our next group of fishes in mind. As divers, we all know that the sea is not at all silent. In fact, it is far from it. The sound of fish munching and courting assault our ears as soon as we roll of the boat and hit the water. This month's group of fish, family Sciaenidae, commonly known as the Drums, is one of those underwater revelers we hear.

We are all familiar with the drums. Croakers, Kingfish, spot, and even our state fish, the Red Drum all belong to the same family. But many divers do not realize that when they see those small black and white fish with the really tall dorsal fins, they are looking at the close cousin of those massive Red Drum that can peel the line off of fisherman's rods.

Drums get their name from the fact that they have special muscles that can cause their swim bladders (basically a built-in BCD) to vibrate and produce a low resonating drumming sound. They are usually bottom dwelling continental shelf fishes with somber coloring. However, the juvenile forms of the genus *Equetus* can be very striking. This genus includes the Cubbyu, Highhat, Jackknife fish, and the Spotted Drum. Of these four, all occur in our area with the exception of the Spotted Drum, which you will have to travel a little further south to see. In all four species, the juveniles look quite different than the adult form and are much more attractive. They are unfortunately, very similar in appearances. They are easily distinguished however. By using a few easy to remember ID tricks, I will describe both the adult and the juvenile forms of each fish and hopefully this will help you with your field identification.



Perhaps the most common of the four you are likely to see is the Cubbyu, *Equetus umbrosus*. The adult coloring is very bland. It is usually pale brown with about seven dark stripes on its side. All of the finds are of a darker color. Max size for the

Cubbyu is about eight inches. The



Juvenile is black and white horizontally striped fish with a rather tall dorsal fin, but not nearly as tall and obvious as the other three members. The easy way to ID the Cubbyu juvenile is the black oval vertical area between the eyes. Both the adult and the young are very prevalent on the natural ledges and artificial reefs in our area. You can usually spot them hanging out underneath the ledge or near crevices. The 5-mile ledge, off of Wrightsville Beach, is swarming with these fish.

A very similar fish, but not quite as abundant in our area is the Highhat, *Equetus acuminatus*. Although the body shape of the adult is about the same as the Cubbyu, you can tell the difference by looking at the markings. Like the Cubbyu, the fins are dark but the body alternates between dark brown and white horizontal stripes (notice the lack of white stripes on the Cubbyu). The maximum size of the adult Highhat is about the same as the Cubbyu. The juveniles are strikingly similar to the Cubbyu but two things will give them away. One, the dorsal of the Highhat is relatively larger and two instead of the oval the juvenile Highhat has a horizontal bar between the eyes. Also, with maturity, they will develop a black spot on the dorsal fin. Highhats are found in the same areas as



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Cubbyu and often form small groups together, under and in the ledges.

The next member is not as common as the former two species. In fact, I have only seen one in our area and it was on a night dive in deeper water. The Jackknife Fish *Equetus lanceolatus*, is a little easier to distinguish. Although the maximum size is about the same a very obvious single black band runs from the top to the dorsal fin, continues along the mid-body, and ends at the tip of the caudal fin. Furthermore, the fins of the jackknife are white, unlike the dark fins of the previous two.



Additional black bands may be present on the head. The juveniles especially the very young, are beautiful fish, their dorsal and caudal fins are long and flowing. The very young are yellow-gold and black. With maturity the gold begins to fade and turn white. They still retain the long stripes from the dorsal to the tail fin just like their parents.. In addition to that, an easy way to ID them is a black vertical dash on the nose (remember this, it will help you to distinguish the jackknife fish from the next Drum). You can see them forage in the sand areas during the day but are usually seen at night, which would explain my encounter with them on the Hyde. This is probably my favorite Drum and the young definitely make a beautiful addition to an aquarium.

The last member of this group is the Spotted Drum, *Equetus punctatus*. This is the only fish of the group that prefers the clear tropical waters and are thus relatively abundant down in Florida and the Keys. I have never seen one in our area, but would not be surprised if Bryan Woodard has sighted a few during his excursions on the ledges around Frying Pan Tower. This adult Drum is a little larger than the others, topping out at a whopping nine inches.

Although it has a mid-body stripe similar to the jackknife fish, it is easy to ID this guy due to the fact that the second dorsal and the caudal fin are black with white spots hence it's common name. Additional black and white bands may be present on

the head but these should not make your identification more difficult. The juvenile's body shape is almost identical to the juvenile Jackknife, except for the three easy to spot differences. First, the Spotted Drum has no yellow markings. Second, the dorsal fin is usually much larger, the longest of the four. and finally a black spot is present on the nose. The neat thing about these fish is that they are pretty much unafraid of divers. Down in the Keys, I could get right next to them and instead of retreating, they would come closer. The other Drums in this

family are almost as brave, but none have the curiosity of the Spotted Drum. Also, they tend to establish a swimming circuit over an area and slowly swim this pattern constantly, stopping only to grab a snack or investigate a funny looking diver.

The next time you go on a dive, jot down a few of the ID tricks on a slate and see if you can tell the difference between the closely related members of this group of fish. after you get the hang of it and ID your first few fish, you may just find yourself "hunting" for the less common members of this group. Suddenly, before you know it, you'll become a regular fish watcher. Good Hunting!!

Club Goes on Line with New Website

www.bcinet.net / liveclub





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Cape Fear Descenders' Presents: Top 10 Things Divers liked about Hurricane Dennis

By Sott and Amy Fowler

10. Creation of new inland dive sites...some in your own front yard.
09. Creation of new offshore dive sites...sorry captains.
08. Rare chance to earn that new specialty...Hurricane Diver.
07. Rain rinsed gear.
06. Can now do night divers in the afternoon.
05. Fish are seasick and are now easy pickings.
04. most hurricanes hit and leave; we all had a chance to enjoy this one.
03. Almost had a new artificial reef down at Shell Island.
02. Had a chance to see if those new Bio-fins really do work against the current.

And the number one thing that divers liked about Hurricane Dennis is...

01. Two words: Drift Diving

Dolphin Dive Charters Donates free Dive to some luck Cape Fear Descender

At the August meeting Tuck Rion Captain and owner of Dolphin Dive Charters based in Little River South Carolina gave an interesting presentation of the wrecks he dives regularly showed us artifacts he found over the years and a video of some of the dives. It was an interesting and informative meeting. As the meeting was ending and members departing Tuck was telling myself and Steve Bland how much he had enjoyed the evening and that he would like to donate a dive trip to the club.

The luck Club member wins the trip can choose between a dive to the *St. Cathan, Hebe, USS North Carolina* or *The Lady Margaret*. There is no time limit on the gift certificate so you can use it anytime in the future. The charter is valued at between \$80 and \$100 depending on which site you dive.

A drawing for the trip is planned for the next meeting tickets are



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MEMBER BENEFITS

- Newsletter Keeps you abreast of local diving information including offshore charters, lake activities, meetings and social gatherings.
- Educational There will be interesting and educational guest speakers at each monthly meeting plus seminars and speciality courses.
- Charters Cape Fear Descenders will work hard to book comfortable boats to exciting offshore wrecks. Charter costs are usually less than typical walk- on rates.
- Socials Throughout the year the club will sponsor social events such as picnics, quarry days, and the holiday banquet. These events should draw good crowds, good company and good fun.

Club membership is based on the calendar year January 1st, through December 31st. Membership dues are payable January 1st. There is a grace period that extends through March.

CLUB DIVING INSTRUCTORS

Tom Roberson	PADI	457-4776
Wayne Strickland	NAUI	457-5201
Jeff Marlow	PADI	(910) 799-1794
Cheryl Smith	PADI	(910) 793-9799
Richard Mathews	PADI	(910) 686-9290
Scott Fowler	PADI	(910)815-3736

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**PO Box 11123
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