

OUTDOORSUPDATE

OF THE OUTDOORS:

Spring Is The Time To Snag Big Fish

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

Spring means, warmer weather, longer days and the time of the year when you'll have your best chance to take a big fish.

The reason for this isn't too hard to figure out as this is the time of the year when most species spawn, so the females are now full of eggs and at their heaviest.

A spring bite is not a real aggressive bite, but there's a lot of trophy fish to be taken this time of the year.

The walleyes and their smaller cousin, the sauger will spawn when water temperatures hit that mid forties while large-mouth bass won't spawn until temps hit the mid sixties.

When water temps reach the mid forties, walleye and sauger will start to spawn along gravel and rocky areas in the shallower water.

As the shallow water starts to warm, the females will move shallow, followed "very" closely by the males.

There could be several males pursuing the ripe female, while bumping the side of the female, they'll emit their milt, fertilizing the eggs, completing the spawning process.

The female then moves off into deeper water to recuperate, while the males hang around, keeping a sharp eye out for another receptive female that might arrive.

Walleye and sauger are what we call random spawners, which means that once the eggs have been fertilized they're on their own as neither parent waits around for the fry to hatch.

The main thing needed in order for walleye and sauger to have a successful hatch is highly oxygenated moving water and once the walleye and sauger have spawned, the fertilized eggs are now at the mercy of Mother Nature.

If all goes well, and some predator doesn't gobble the eggs up, the fry will appear in about two weeks.

Bass, on the other hand, spawn differently than walleye and sauger. Like other members of the sunfish family, they build nests in the shallow water, usually in an area having a firm bottom made up of sand gravel, rock or mud.

Using their tail, the male fans out a slight depression or nest, removing any silt or other debris.

This is why when you catch a male bass it's tail will be roughed up or worn



PHOTO: TEAM OUTDOORSMEN PRODUCTIONS
Roger Merkel of Hartington, Neb., caught this 25-inch walleye last week on the Missouri River below Ft. Randall using a Lindy Jig and Minnow combination.

off this time of the year.

Their nests are generally two to three feet in diameter and can be found nestled in between cattails and rushes or on the sunny side of a stump or other underwater debris.

As with other species of fish, the female moves up into the nest where the male bumps against her fertilizing the eggs being depositing into the nest.

At that time, the female will move off to either drop into deep water to rest or go onto the next nest to deposit the remainder of her eggs.

Male bass will hang near the nest, oxygenating the eggs by fanning them with its tail and chasing off any intruders, including other members of the sunfish family (Bluegill and Green Sunfish), as they become a prime predator on the

bass nests this time of the year.

When the fry emerge, which is about two days with the right temperature, they'll hang around the nest with their father until they're about an inch long and able to navigate around the nest on their own.

This is when Mother Nature pulls one of her meanest tricks, as the last thing the father will do before leaving the nest is to gobble up as many of its young as possible, chasing them out of the nest to be on their own.

I guess that this is the way that young bass are welcomed into the real world and to find out from this point on, they can't trust anyone, not even their own father.

Since bass nest in shallow water, an excellent way to fish for them in the spring is by sight fishing.

Under some conditions, wind action and glare make it hard to see the nests; this is where I rely on ONO's polarized sunglasses, which cuts the glare off the water, allowing me to see the bass and their nests.

After locating the nest, I'll pitch a jig and pig or plastic worm out from the nest and slowly work it into the nesting area.

Once the male spots the intruder, he'll charge the bait, often times just picking the intruder up and moving it out of the nest.

By using polarized glasses, I can see the bass pick up the bait long before I detect the bite, allowing me to set the hook before the fish spits the bait.

No matter what species of fish you're after this time of the year, what we need to remember is to put those big spawners back as they are the future of fishing.

There's no problem with taking one for the wall, but as far as eating every fish we catch no matter what size it is, "not a good idea!"

It may seem as if the number of fish is endless, but the fact is that everything cycles and if we keep those big spawners at a time when numbers are low, somewhere down the road it's bound to hurt the numbers.

Take a picture and put it back as fishing in the future may depend on it.

Spring is the time of the year we've all been waiting for when you can finally get out on the water and this could be your opportunity to and catch that fish of a lifetime.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a syndicated columnist whose articles appear in publications throughout the upper Midwest. For more information on the outdoors go to www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.



Gary Howey

TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



PHOTO: CAPTAIN NORM'S
Pat Carney of Vermillion caught this 6-pound Channel Catfish on March 31 below Gavins Point Dam in Yankton.

S.D., Wyoming Youth Hunting Championships May 8

PIERRE — South Dakota and Wyoming are teaming up to present youth hunting championships for each state this spring in Wyoming.

The Youth Hunter Education Challenge will be held May 8 in Upton, WY. Young hunters do not need to qualify in a regional or district tournament to compete in the event.

All South Dakota and Wyoming youth 18 and younger who have passed a hunter education course are eligible to showcase their hunting skills and probably learn more in the process.

This is the third year the challenge has been hosted at the Upton club, and the second year of South Dakota participation.

The challenge tests youngsters in sporting clays-style trap shooting;

.22-caliber firearms; muzzleloader firearms; archery; wildlife identification; orienteering; and hunter safety.

"The challenge is designed to be a fun event for all participants — not just the winners," said Jim Dawson, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's hunter education coordinator.

The event is sponsored by South Dakota Game, Fish and 14 and younger — are eligible to advance to the international competition July 26-30 at a top-notch shooting complex near Mansfield, Penn.

The event is sponsored by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, Wyoming Game and Fish, Upton Gun Club, Wyoming friends of the NRA, and various local businesses.

While youth from both South

Dakota and Wyoming will participate in the event, they will not be competing against each other. A winner will be crowned for each state.

To participate, youngsters must submit copies of their hunter education cards, birth certificates and photos, and pay a \$10 entry fee. Entry forms are available through the Wyoming Game and Fish Web site at <http://gf.state.wy.us/downloads/pdf/education/2010%20YHEC.pdf>.

Entry forms must be submitted by April 30.

For more information, call the Wyoming Game and Fish's Jim Dawson or Jeff Obrecht at (307) 777-4600 or Rick Rothleuter at the Upton Gun Club at (307) 281-9880.

For One Missouri Fisherman, Obscure Locale Provides Fruitful

BY BRENT FRAZEE

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MONTRÖSE, Mo. — If you're an angler, you would like the way Rick Jackson has decorated his house.

The minute you step in, you're greeted by mounts of a 4-pound crappie and a bluegill that weighed just short of 3 pounds. Walk into the garage, and there's a 10-pound bass hanging on the wall.

All fish of a lifetime. And all caught just minutes from Jackson's home in little Montrose, Mo.

Head any direction out of town, he'll tell you, and you'll run into a place that is capable of producing some of the best fishing in the state.

No, we're not talking about Truman Lake. Or the Montrose Power Plant Lake.

We're talking about little bodies of water so obscure that they're not even on a map — strip pits.

Once, west-central Missouri was at the heart of the state's coal industry and was actively mined. But once that era ended in the early 1980s, a new era dawned. Those pits filled with water and were stocked with fish.

Today, many of them are dream fishing holes — places Jackson calls "a little slice of heaven."

"I only have to go a few miles outside of town to find all the fishing I'd want," said Jackson, 59, who has been fishing the strip pits since he was a child. "The amount of strip pits in this area is unbelievable."

Most of them are on private land, but I have permission to fish about 50 of them. And I'm out on them every chance I get, especially in the spring.

That's where Jackson was Tuesday. He rambled down the back roads in his truck with his jobboat sticking out of the bed, and passed many good-looking pits, all filled with fish, he said.

"I've caught fish out of all of these," he said. "But we're going to a better one."

He finally pulled his truck up to a gate to a pasture, then drove through and bounced down a country lane until he reached the edge of a remote pit. He slid his boat into the water, attached a trolling motor and was off.

It wasn't long before he was casting a plastic crawdad imitation to the shallows along a rocky bank. He felt a tap, then a pull. When he set the hook, a 3-pound bass shot to the surface and exploded out of the water.

The fish pulled hard, then made a run. But it didn't take long for Jackson to take the fight out of the fish and pull it into the boat.

"That's a good, solid fish," he said before releasing it. "But there are bigger ones in here."

Moments later, Jackson was holding the proof — a bass he estimated at 5 pounds.

We spent the rest of the day fishing two other pits and catching fish. By the time we were done, we had caught and released 63 bass, almost half of them 15 inches or bigger.

We used everything from suspending stickbaits to jig-and-pigs to tube baits to entice those fish. But that came as no surprise to Jackson.

"March is the best month to catch a big bass on these pits," he

said. "The water's just warming up, and the big ones are just starting to get active."

"They're usually shallow, and they're looking for something to eat."

Jackson laughs when he labels his style of fishing as "primitive."

"I'm just out here in a leaky old boat with a handful of lures," he said.

But it's hard to argue with success. Jackson has been around long enough to know which strip pits are the most productive and when they'll turn on.

And he knows the factors that will activate that fishing. For example, his log book indicates he always finds his best fishing three days either side of a full or new moon. Overcast days are usually most productive, and the wind plays a big part.

That's how it was Tuesday. Jackson keyed on the banks and cuts where the wind was blowing in and found the fish concentrated in the shallows.

He used his customary arsenal

— a Paca Craw plastic bait, a brightly colored tube bait with a big blade attached, and a white Mepps spinner.

Jackson has learned through experience. He started fishing the pits years ago when his family lived in the Kansas City area and his dad worked as a maintenance man at condos on the Plaza.

His dad received permission from some of the residents to fish strip pits and ponds on their land near Montrose, and he took Rick and his other son, Joe Jr., with him to fish the area.

The Jacksons quickly found success and became hooked on the area. Joe Jr. caught an 11-pound, 5-ounce bass one March day years ago, and the boys caught and released many other trophies.

Joe was killed in 1990 in a deer-hunting accident, but Rick carries on the family tradition. Once March arrives, he has the Gone Fishin' sign out.

"My biggest bass is 10 pounds, but I'm still trying to beat that," Jackson said. "There are bigger



BRENT FRAZEE/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT
Angler Rick Jackson holds his catch at a strip pit near Montrose, Mo.

ones out there, and March and April is the time to get them.

"That's when you have your best shot."

OUTDOOR REPORT

Lake Thompson
Lakeside Use Area
Looking For Earth
Day Volunteers

DESMET — Volunteers looking for a way to participate in Earth Day are asked to join the Shoreline Cleanup at Lake Thompson Lakeside Use Area near De Smet on Earth Day, April 22, from 2 – 4 p.m. CDT.

"Earth day is a good day to clean up the winter mess in preparation for the summer season," said John Christensen, park manager at Lake Thompson. "Participants will pick up garbage and debris from a section of beach."

Volunteers are asked to meet at the Lake Thompson Lakeside Use Area, wear comfortable shoes, and bring good gloves. Water, coffee and cookies will be provided.

The cleanup is open to everyone, and park entrance licenses are not required. Lake Thompson Lakeside Use Area is 5 miles south and 3 miles east of De Smet.

Project WILD
Workshops Scheduled

LINCOLN, Neb. — Training is available for educators who wish to teach youth about the natural world. Project WILD workshops are scheduled for Bellevue, Hastings and Omaha, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Project WILD is an interdisciplinary conservation and environmental curriculum designed for teachers, nonformal educators, college students, and resource professionals. Participants receive certification in Project WILD and Aquatic WILD, hands-on instruction from an environmental education specialist, and Project WILD and Project WILD Aquatic K-12 curriculum and activity guides. Growing Up WILD is an early childhood education program designed for ages 3-7.

April 24 — Growing Up WILD, Bellevue, Camp Brewster at Fontenelle Forest, 8:30 a.m.-noon, contact Kate Murphy at (402) 731-3140 or kmurphy@fontenelleforest.org.

April 29 — Project WILD and Aquatic WILD, Hastings, Prairie Loft Center for Outdoor and Agricultural Learning, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., contact Amy Sandeen at (402) 463-0565 or amy@prairiecroft.org.

June 22 — Growing Up WILD, Omaha, Chalco Hills Recreation Area, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., contact Heather Guthridge at (402) 315-1777 or hguthridge@papiand.org.

For more information on Project WILD or Growing Up WILD, contact Lindsay Rogers at (402) 471-5581 or lindsay.rogers@nebraska.gov.

Wiper Workshop At
Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium
Set For April 22

LINCOLN, Neb. — A wiper fishing workshop is scheduled for April 22 at the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

The workshop at 6:30 p.m. will be led by Daryl Bauer, fisheries outreach program manager for the Commission. He will discuss habitat, management and fishing techniques for this popular fish.

The aquarium is located in Schramm Park State Recreation Area, 5 miles south of Interstate 80 exit 432. For more information, call (402) 332-3901.

Crimestoppers Seeks
Information On
Antelope Shootings

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska Wildlife Crimestoppers is offering a reward for information about antelope that were shot and left lying in Kimball County.

There have been four incidents in recent months in which a total of seven antelope were found shot and lying within a few miles of each other. The most recent included two antelope found March 30 about 14 miles south of Dix near the Nebraska-Colorado border.

Conservation officer Scott Brandt of Gering said the most recent antelope found, a buck and a doe, were lying near a road, about 20 yards apart. They were gut-shot with a large-caliber rifle. In the three earlier incidents, the antelope were shot in the neck with a small-caliber rifle.

The reward of up to \$1,000 is for information that leads to a conviction in the case.

To report any information on the antelope, or any game law violation, call Nebraska Wildlife Crimestoppers toll-free at (800) 742-7627. Callers may remain anonymous.

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