

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

Spring: The Time For 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 weight.

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

The walleyes and their smaller cousin, the sauger are some of the first fish species to spawn, spawning when water temperatures hit the mid forties while largemouth bass won't spawn until temps hit the mid sixties.

Walleye will start to move shallow and spawn along gravel and rocky areas when water temps reach the thirties.

With the warmer temps the females will begin to make the move shallow, followed "very" closely by the smaller males.

It's not uncommon to see several males pursuing the ripe female, while bumping the side of the female as she drops her eggs, when they'll emit their milt, fertilizing the eggs, completing this seasons spawning process.

Once the female has dropped all her eggs, she'll move off into deeper water to recuperate, while the males hang around, keeping a sharp eye out for another receptive female that may make an appearance.

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

In order for walleye and sauger to have a successful hatch, the eggs need 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



Darrin Laue of Castlewood is pictured with the South Dakota state record 6lbs 9oz smallmouth bass he caught during the early season on Lake Poinsett a few years ago.

about two weeks.

Jigs and live bait rigs worked along the break lines will account for the vast majority of the walleye and sauger taken this time of the year.

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. The male using their tail, will fans out a slight depression or nest, removing any silt or other debris and because of this, when a male bass is caught this time of the year, it's tail will be roughed up or worn off from sweeping sticks and debris while building it's nest.

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 as they're being deposited in the nest.

Once this is completed, the female will move onto the next nest to deposit the remainder of

her eggs or off into deep water to rest.

Male bass will remain near the nest, oxygenating the eggs by fanning them with their tails 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 with the right temperature is about two days, 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 cruelest 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 a good set of polarized sunglasses, as they'll cut the glare off the water, allowing me to see the bass and their nests. Once I've located the nest, I'll pitch a jig and pig or plastic worm out from the nest and slowly move it towards nesting area.

When the male spots the intruder, he'll charge the bait, hoping to chase it away and 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 as an opportunity to spit the bait.

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

Of course, 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 the President of Outdoorsmen Productions LLC, the Producer/Host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series and the Co-Host of the Outdoor Adventures radio program. For more information on the outdoors go to www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



ABOVE: Jim Jurgensen, center, caught this 13-pound, 8-ounce Wiper at Lake Yankton.

RIGHT: Mike Hood caught this 5-pound, 11-ounce Smallmouth bass below Gavin's Point Dam.

PHOTOS: CAPTAIN NORM'S



Briefs: Hunter Education Course Set

A South Dakota Hunt Safe/Nebraska Hunter Education course will be held Saturday, April 14, from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. and Sunday, April 15, from noon-4 p.m. at the NFAA Easton Yankton Archery Complex.

The course is sponsored in part by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks and The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. There will be certified instructors for both states teaching the 10-hour course.

Successful completion of this course is required by law of every person under the age of 16 who

wishes to hunt in South Dakota and Nebraska. Residents of either state must be 11 years of age or older to take the course. Parents are encouraged to attend. There is no charge to take the course.

Pre-registration is required and space is limited. Interested persons may register for the course at the NFAA Easton Yankton Archery Complex located at 800 Archery Lane, Yankton, from 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Friday or noon to 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

For additional information, call 605-260-9282.

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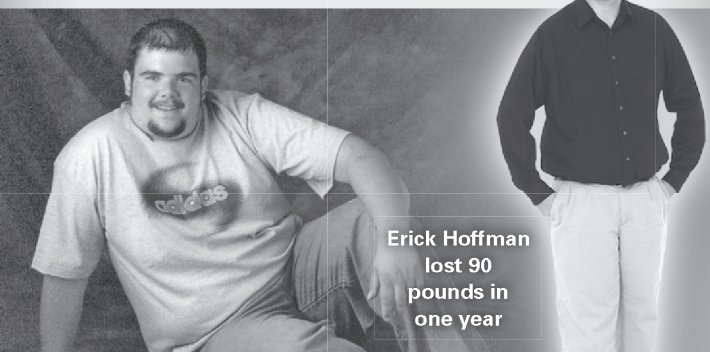
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