

OUTDOORSUPDATE

OF THE OUTDOORS:

When Fishing, Small Can Mean Big

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

When I first moved into the area, I was anxious to learn about the outdoors and fishing in the area.

At that time, I didn't own a boat and my only alternative was to fish the river from shore, which sounded like a good idea at the time.

There's nothing wrong with shore fishing, except that I had never been a river fisherman, little alone one that fished a river from shore.

Needless to say, I wasn't equipped to fish from shore and was losing more tackle each week than the local bait shop stocked.

Good for them, bad for me as I've never been a quitter and refused to quit trying until I came up with a better plan. The only alternatives that I could come up with were to:

1. Somehow, figure out how to fish the lakes, the larger bodies of water without a boat.
2. Find some smaller bodies of water that would allow me to fish from shore.



Gary Howey

McConaughy or Waubay Lake.

The truth is you don't need to have thousands of acres of water to have a trophy fishery.

Some of the largest fish I've ever caught came from small lakes such as Lake Yankton, gravel pits, farm ponds and stock dams.

Year in and year out, in the upper Midwest, there are more state records/master angler fish taken from smaller bodies of water than there are taken from the larger lakes and reservoirs.

These smaller bodies of water weren't built originally as recreational ponds; they were built primarily as a water supply for livestock.

Once they were built, somehow fish found their way into the ponds. The Game, Fish & Parks Dept. stocked some, while landowners and neighbors stocked others.

The ponds that were stocked by or with the help of the Game & Parks and the D.N.R. usually have a good balance between predator and the prey fish. In these ponds you'll more than likely find largemouth bass, bluegill and catfish.

The bass and the catfish are the predator species while the bluegill become the prey.

If you don't have the correct balance on a pond, you'll end up with stunted fish,



Don't think that you need to fish a big lake to catch big fish. Joel Vasek of Geddes took this largemouth bass while fishing a small lake in South Central South Dakota.

as there just isn't enough food (prey fish) to feed the predators.

Once this happens, the bluegills will become the predator, attacking the bass nest gobbling up the eggs and the small fry.

There are some ponds, especially those out west that contain good numbers of perch, crappies as well as northern pike.

An ideal trophy fishpond would be one that has both shallow and deep-water areas. The shallows would be used for spawning, while the deeper water gives the smaller fish a place to escape the prey fish and to move to once winter sets in.

Structure is another thing that a trophy pond must have! It doesn't have to be much, just something changing the configuration of the bottom.

It can be downed trees, brush piles, rocks or weeds, all of which will help to make the pond more productive.

The structure gives smaller aquatic life, places to live; this in turn attracts minnows and smaller fish. They'll attract the larger fish, giving them a place to look for food, to hide and keep from becoming food for larger fish.

When I come across a pond that has deep water with structure adjacent to the shallow water, I'll spend a little time casting the shoreline and probing along the structure trying to tempt a fish into biting.

I'll start with something small, such as a 1/8th or 1/32nd-ounce jig, tipped with a piece of worm or a small minnow.

You'll want to put your bait down in the water as gently as possible. You should be able to tell the depth of the water and what's type of structure lies there by slowly working your bait along the edge of the brush or the weed line.

If the shallow water drops off quickly into the deeper water, try using a small slip bobber above the jig and let it bob along the edge of the weeds.

If the water looks "Bassy", I'll go to a jig and pig combination or plastic worm to work the pockets, along the trees and brush piles.

When casting a larger jig, you'll want to present it as gently as possible so as not to spook the fish. Hop the jig back to shore or along the edge of the weeds, keeping a tight line at all times.

Bass don't always hit like a freight train, as at times, they'll simply suck the bait in and without a tight line, the fish will spit it out before you knew he was there.

If your line moves to the side or your line goes slack before it reaching the bottom, rear back hard to set the hook because a bass has picked up your bait on the way down or is moving off to the side with it.

Remember as an old friend of mine once said, "jerks are for free and if you don't jerk hard and set the hook every time your line slows or moves off to the side, you just might be missing a fish."

In the spring, these smaller ponds are really productive, as the bass have moved shallow to spawn and can be caught from

Clearwater Tips

Because most small ponds are fairly clear water, unless you have a small boat or float tube, the best shore fishing will be during the spring.

Clear water allows vegetation to come up very quickly, clogging the shallow water shoreline, making it almost impossible to get bait through.

Once temperatures start to rise and shoreline vegetation appears, try using some type of bait that can be worked over the top of the weeds.

You'll find that spinnerbaits, buzzbaits or surface lures can be productive until the vegetation completely covers the shallow water.

the shore using a plastic worm, jig and pig or live bait.

As the water warms, the fish will move deeper where the water temperatures are cooler or along the edge of the weed line where oxygen levels are higher.

When the water warms try fishing ponds with shallow diving crankbaits, jig & pig or live bait early in the morning or in the evening.

Fish will move from the deeper water into the shallows when the shallow water is cooler to feed on insects and other shallow water critters.

As it warms up, go deep. You'll need to use baits that will get down to where the fish are. Try deep diving crank baits, Texas rigged plastic baits or jig & pig, fishing them along the weed edge or deeper submerged brush and trees where the fish will be holding.

What you'll need to remember when fishing these smaller bodies of water is to not over fish them. The predator/prey balance is extremely important in these smaller ponds.

Once this balance is thrown off, you'll end up with a large population of prey fish and to small of a population of predators needed to keep them in check.

A good rule of thumb to follow in order to keep the predator/prey balance in check would be: for every one pound of predator fish (bass, pike, catfish) taken from a pond, you should remove about four pounds of prey fish (bluegill, perch, crappie).

Catch and release, especially when it comes to the predator fish is very important in these smaller bodies of water.

Give these smaller bodies of water a try; you'll be surprised how many big fish call these small bodies of water home.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the producer/host of the *Outdoorsmen Adventures* television series. For more information on the outdoors go to www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

Late Start To Fla. Tarpon Season Not A Negative

BY SUSAN COCKING
(c) 2010, The Miami Herald

ISLAMORADA, Fla. — Tarpon fishing season has arrived in the Florida Keys — albeit a month late — but local guides are hoping for plenty of big fish pouring through the channels, bridges and along the flats through midsummer.

Captain Gary Ellis, who with his wife, Susan, runs the Redbone series of light-tackle fishing tournaments in the Keys and elsewhere, said he believes migratory tarpon managed to escape last winter's extended cold period relatively unscathed.

Two weeks of frigid water temperatures in January are blamed for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of fish throughout Florida.

"The migratory tarpon weren't impacted by the cold. They were homies we lost," Ellis said. "The migration has been to a degree normal, but 30 days late. We went into March with winter conditions, then into April with March conditions. From now looking forward, we're looking at a good tarpon season and big fish."

Captain Paul Hunt of Homestead, Fla., said that as recently as two weeks ago, water temperatures in Florida Bay had not broken the 70 degree mark — considered optimum for tarpon fishing.

Hunt guided his wife, Linda, and me to victory in a recent La tournament in Islamorada. Fishing Saturday morning and evening, and again last Sunday morning, Linda and I caught and released four tarpon, including two of more than 100 pounds. Although we didn't weigh the fish, we got plenty of opportunities to gauge their size as they leapt repeatedly out of the shallow waters. All fish were caught using live mullet suspended from floats — three in Race Channel in the backcountry and one in Teatable Channel oceanside.

A total of eight tarpon were caught and released among the fleet of 12 boats, but numerous guides and anglers reported broken lines, hooks that straightened or pulled out, and fish that chased live baits around but inexplicably gave up.

On The Trail Of The Ozarks Spring Gobbler

BY PAUL A. SMITH

(c) 2010, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

BRANSON, Mo. — Curtis Bradley spends his life preaching, mostly in his Baptist church.

But on many days of the three-week Missouri spring turkey hunting season, he takes his orations outdoors.

At the moment, he's focused on a message of inspiration. "Life is full of obstacles," says the self-described hillbilly preacher from Oak Grove, Ark. "Now, the question is, how do you deal with 'em?"

Bradley then pauses on the rocky creek bottom and points his outstretched hand up, way up, to a green Ozark Mountain ridge top.

And he laughs. He's deftly switched from theory to reality. He's also just seen the expressions on the faces of two boys from flatter country — Perry Peterson of Manchester, Iowa, and me.

"Those birds like to work a pasture up there," says Bradley. "It's only a couple miles."

His calculation doesn't include the vertical distance. But the prospect of strutting tom turkeys is sufficient enticement. Peterson and I fall into line behind Bradley as we huff and hike up a rock-strewn ravine and old hill road.

We've met in the Ozarks to pursue spring gobblers. It's a brotherhood of hunters, you might say, at a meeting of the Association of Great Lakes Outdoors Writers in Branson.

Branson is flush with musical and theatrical acts. But not all of them are indoors.

For Peterson and me, it represents a pilgrimage to famed turkey hunting country.

In the unqualified wildlife management success story that is the recovery of the North American wild turkey, Missouri is often called ground zero.

The Ozarks sustained a population of wild turkeys when most other areas of the continent had been depleted.

Missouri has held a turkey

hunting season since 1960. The Show Me State had such a strong population of turkeys that, in a storied trap and transfer program in the 1970s, it supplied Wisconsin with the birds that jump-started our state's reintroduction.

Missouri is perennially among the top states in turkey harvest, topping 50,000 in many years. But recently the turkey population has suffered from poor recruitment, according to the Missouri Department of Conservation, and harvests have fallen.

In 2009, spring turkey hunters registered 44,712 birds in Missouri.

As any turkey hunter knows, it only takes one.

I was curious to compare hunting in Missouri, where turkeys have been hunted much longer, to the Wisconsin experience.

Over two mornings of hunting on private property, I saw the gamut: Toms turning away from calling, hens leading toms away from my position and toms hanging up out of gun range.

Nothing unusual there. In fact, the birds seemed as responsive to calling as do turkeys in southwestern Wisconsin, where I do most of my hunting.

The biggest differences were the individual properties, the local population of turkeys and the amount of hunting pressure.

On Day 1, I hunted a property with few birds and lots of hunting pressure. On Day 2, Bradley led Peterson and me to his farm just north of the Arkansas line.

The farm sits in aptly named

Stone County. The hills here are covered with oak, but every wash is filled with limestone rocks.

The rugged nature of the area has left many of the hillsides undeveloped. With verdant growth of oak, hickory and other mast trees, wildlife flourishes.

Now, in the first week of May, the foliage is summer lush. Oak trees are fully leafed out, the hay is knee high in many pastures.

The three of us set up at 0 dark thirty in a cedar and walnut tangle at the edge of an alfalfa field. A clear sky reveals another local amenity — no shortage of stars.

At dawn, four gobblers sound off, the closest about 200 yards from our location.

A coyote trots in to investigate our turkey calls about 6:15 a.m. but abruptly turns tail when it ascertains our species.

Unfortunately, the turkeys also depart for other fields after fly down. We were left with a decision.

There was only one choice, really — scale the 500-foot mountain to the southeast of Bradley's farm.

The obstacle proved surmountable, despite lots of "rock rolling" and at least one unchoreographed seat plant.

About 7 a.m. we crest the back ridge and look out over a horse pasture. A strutting tom works the opposite side.

We crouch down a side ravine and traverse a wooded point off the strutter's field.

As we hunker in wild rose bushes and walnut saplings,

Peterson begins to call.

A long beard and five jakes show up immediately, red heads glowing in the morning sun, and eye our location from a distance of 80 yards. The strutter is still 200 yards away and gobbles periodically.

After a few more calling sequences from Peterson, who works as a regional field manager for Mossy Oak, the long beard slips into the wooded point.

We wait expectantly for the bird, eyes focused in the dense, shaded undergrowth.

Long minutes pass when Peterson checks our backsides. A tandem of long beards heard our calls and slip in silently over a grassy rise.

"Don't move," says Peterson. "Don't even talk."

The turkeys spot us and start the quick step and putt that normally precedes flight.

Peterson has the only shot, and an off-hand, wrong-shoulder one at that. He pivots and takes the second bird in line as the first flaps and flies.

The turkey has an 11 [-inch beard, 1 [-inch spurs and weighs 18 pounds. "They are like me, skinny," says Bradley. "We use all our energy getting up and down these hollers."

We hunt the rest of the morning but aren't able to draw another gobbler in range.

The hike back takes us down, up and over several high hills. Somehow, though, the added cargo of an Ozark gobbler makes the work easier.

OUTDOOR REPORT

Archery Center To Offer Women's Beginner Courses

The Easton Archery Center will offer a four-week beginners' course for women age 18 and up, beginning Monday, May 17.

Classes will run from 5:30-6:30 p.m. each Monday from May 17 to June 14, with May 31 off for Memorial Day. Archery equipment will be provided.

Class size is limited. For more information, contact the Easton Archery Center, 800 Archery Lane, or call 260-9279.

GFP Application Needed For Fishing Tournaments, Special Events

PIERRE — Fishing tournament organizers in South Dakota need to make sure that they have filled out the proper Game, Fish and Parks Department paperwork when planning their events.

Applications for fishing tournaments and special events must be filed with GFP no later than 30 days before the events are held.

During that 30 days, the Department can collect the necessary signatures and take care of any special requirements," said Dana Ertz, GFP special events permits coordinator. "Some events will require a proof of insurance or a special waiver."

Ertz added that it is important to use the current 2010 application because it is date-sensitive.

The 2010 application includes important information for tournament organizers, such as the dates during the year when fishing tournaments are not allowed to be held, as well as dates when salmon and walleye catch-and-release tournaments are restricted.

GFP Commissioner Gets National Honor

PIERRE — South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commissioner John Cooper has been honored by the Wildlife Management Institute with the 2010 George Bird Grinnell Memorial Award for distinguished service to natural resource conservation.

Cooper, who served as GFP secretary from 1995-2007, was recently appointed by Gov. Mike Rounds to a four-year term as a member of the GFP Commission.

Presenting the Grinnell Award, Wildlife Management Institute President Steve Williams

observed that Cooper's career has been widely acknowledged and acclaimed. "His prior accolades had no bearing on consideration for this award. What did have bearing was and is John's undaunted dedication to the higher principles and practices of professional resource management."

During his tenure as GFP secretary, Cooper was a leader in state and national wildlife management issues. He chaired the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Law Enforcement and Executive committees. He was AFWA president in 2005-2006, and he served on the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Adaptive Harvest Management Group, North American Wetlands Council and Governing Board of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

Muzzleloader Deer, Youth Deer Hunting Seasons Finalized

PIERRE — The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission has set the 2010 South Dakota Muzzleloader Deer season as Dec. 11, 2010, to Jan. 31, 2011.

There will be 1,000 "any deer" licenses available to resident hunters and unlimited single and double "any antlerless" deer licenses available to residents and nonresidents. A hunter may possess no more than five general muzzleloading deer licenses of any type.

After Dec. 31, all unfilled licenses will be valid for antlerless deer only.

The 2010 Youth Deer Hunting season will run Sept. 11, 2010, to Jan. 31, 2011. The statewide, antlerless-only season is open to residents and nonresident youth who have not reached the age of 18 by June 30.

Youth hunters may purchase up to two youth deer licenses and must be accompanied by adults while hunting.

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