

Search and Destroy Summertime Bassin'

No sooner than the boat's wake disappeared in the early morning calm, I was on the front deck with my foot on the pedal moving the boat toward the pocket in the tules. Two rapid-fire casts, and two bass were in the well. As my partner climbed onto the back deck to make his first cast, I had already stowed the electric motor and was turning the ignition key. Varrrooommm, we were off to the next spot.

Moments later another feisty largemouth had my thumb in its mouth as I quickly unhooked my Sammy topwater. After motoring to the third spot, I smiled when I saw that my partner was now holding his rod at the ready, as the big Yamaha slowed my Skeeter bass boat to a stop. This time he was on the back deck casting a spinnerbait *before* I yanked the rope that deploys my electric motor. After commenting that I was glad to see he finally decided to start fishing, Bob set the hook on a heavy bass. That 4-pounder met his new friends in the livewell, and before the first hour of the tournament had passed we already had been to six different spots, and were culling a limit!

We hardly noticed that the afternoon heat was above 90 degrees that day, as we spent more time moving than we did sitting. Our strategy was simple; cover as much water as possible and pick off a bass here and there. Fishing lots of territory paid off.

No matter where you fish in the USA, if bass have moved into a summertime pattern you will likely increase your success by employing this same strategy. From a biological standpoint, the warming water associated with summer affects bass by increasing their metabolism, which causes them to disperse in search of food. Smallmouth bass reach their optimal activity level when water temperatures warm to about 68 degrees. Largemouth's peak activity levels are about 72 degrees. At these temperatures both species are as strong as Olympic athletes, which you will quickly notice when one decides to pick a fight with you. At no other time of the year will these same bass pull so hard, or act so acrobatic!

During the spring season, bass were concentrated where prime spawning areas were located. As soon as the spawning chores and recuperative rest are completed, bass tend to disperse in search of fertile hunting grounds. Like any predator, bass now find themselves in competition with their brethren. They are focused on satisfying their ravenous hunger, which seems to dominate their daily routine. Bass seek the best available cover, with Mama Pesce (the biggest of bass) staking claim to the best hunting location. A submerged tree separating shallow flats (her dining room) from deep water (her bedroom) becomes home to the largest bass, and they will chase away all those interested in claiming the prime spot for their own. This causes bass to disperse far and wide, in search of their own hunting grounds commensurate with their pecking order.

Smallmouth bass, as well as spotted bass and smaller largemouths, may even form small hunting groups, to effectively surround and trap baitfish. Each group of bass will also defend their prime range, and will chase away would-be contenders.

The overall effect of this competitive nature and increased need to feed is to disperse the population of bass around the lake or river, which allows the population to

spread and survive. Some surmise that nature spreads a species across the available terrain to ensure genetic diversity, which is also important to species survival by minimizing in-breeding. Regardless of the reason, to the astute fisherman this means you shouldn't become sedentary after the spawn. Once you pick off a bass or two from a single location, it is time to move to similar spots and try again. Chances are you already caught all the bass that one spot is likely to produce at that moment. Since bass are on the move in search of food, the same spot may again produce a fish or two several hours later, so it is often worth revisiting productive spots throughout the day.

Summertime puts the sun directly overhead, which also affects the location of bass. As the day progresses, the angle of the sun will have a direct effect on where bass are located. This is particularly noticeable if the water you fish is clear and/or shallow. Mornings and evenings often find bass cruising the shallows for breakfast and dinner. Under low light conditions crayfish, baitfish, and other menu items are the most active, making them easier for bass to find and capture. Like any other predatory species, bass increase their likelihood of success by hunting when they are likely to find their prey.

As the sun rises overhead, and its rays penetrate and illuminate the shallows, the baitfish scam for heavy cover or deeper water. Picture living in a cockroach infested apartment, and in the middle of the night you go to the kitchen for that midnight snack, and turn on the overhead light. The roaches scatter to escape the light. That is how summertime bass react to bright sunlight.

In most cases by 9 a.m. on a clear, calm summer day, most of the bass will be behind your boat if you are fishing the shoreline, particularly in clear water. It is not unusual to find all species of bass in 20 to 35 feet of water, and with a bad case of lockjaw. On the other hand, if it is overcast or windy, the sunlight doesn't illuminate the shallows, and the food chain is likely to be active regardless of the depth.

Tackle choices are less important than other seasons, as almost any quality lure that you can get in front of a bass will provoke a strike if the bass is in a positive feeding mood. Most of the fish you find in the shallows are there to feed, so they won't give you any trouble. Dish up the usual array of reaction baits, such as crankbaits, jigNpig, Senko's, Lucky Craft jerkbaits and topwaters, and spinnerbaits. When the bass move deeper, switch to Carolina-rigs and mojo rigs with various soft plastics like Yamamoto grubs or Baby Brush Hogs. When the mid-day bite gets really tough, use a mojo-rig on your Lamiglas 3-Power spinning rod with 8-pound McCoy line tied to a small reaper impaled on a light-wire Gamakatsu hook. If you are confident that your boat is positioned overtop of bass (such as when you spot them on your fish finder, or your boat is over a prime piece of deep structure), then pull out the QuickDrops and dropshot the spot.

So just what is the recipe for success for summertime bassin'? Focus your efforts on searching for bass instead of searching for the magic lure to use. Remember that bass are at their peak activity level, and will eat almost anything they can catch. You don't need to match the hatch nearly as much as you need to put a realistic lure in front of their mouths. And remember that they are spread all over the place. In the low-light periods keep the electric motor on high and cover all the productive shorelines you can. Once the sun starts making you sweat, turn around and start fan-casting deeper water. Give each spot just a couple of casts, and then move on!

At the end of the day, all things being equal, the angler that made the most casts to the most spots will catch the most bass! Ciao. (You can reach me at LimitBy9@aol.com).