



# Warm Weather Awakens Anglers

*Spring, Summer Bring Action to Arkansas Waters*

BY JOE MOSBY

Although it's not strictly set by a date, fishing season has arrived in Arkansas.

Crappie are among Arkansas anglers' favorite pursuits. Photo by Eric Engbretson.

The temperature rises, countrysides and hills bloom and green up. With these yearly hallmarks come the best of crappie, white bass, largemouth bass, bream and catfish action.

Of course, it's more about anglers getting into

action than fish realizing it's time to get moving.

Fish start moving into shallow water during spring, where it's easier for the average angler to catch them. Deep-water fishing isn't for everybody. It's difficult for some, tiresome for others.



But when the fish are shallow enough for casual fishermen to use corks or bobbers, anglers come out of the woodwork.

Spring and early summer fishing season arrives on a somewhat south-to-north course in Arkansas. The bream in Millwood Lake, in the southwestern corner of the state, turn on earlier than they do in Lake Norfolk, in extreme northern Arkansas. But more of a yardstick than geography is depth and type of lake. Shallow lakes warm up sooner than deep lakes. This may be more of a factor in the Millwood versus Norfolk bream example. They are both Army Corps of Engineers lakes, but Millwood is generally shallow and “dark.” Norfolk is deep and clear.

Late winter and early spring is spawning time for Arkansas’s native fish, which excludes trout. Walleye generally are spawning by mid-March, and white bass spawn in late March. Striped bass, cousins of the whites, make spawning runs near the same time as white bass, but actual spawning of stripers takes place only on the Arkansas River, not in lakes. Black bass – largemouth, spotted and smallmouth – come along in April, with bream. Catfish are late-April or May spawners.

Spawns are just the beginning of great fishing. Fish are more active in warmer water than in cold water and so are anglers.

Some rules of thumb for spring fishing include movement of water and water temperature. Springtime in Arkansas means rain, which means fertile runoff into lakes and rivers. Veteran anglers explore after a rain and look for places where water is coming in from fields and hillsides.

The incoming water brings with it food in several forms. Animal life in the water feeds on this food, and the larger animal life feeds on the smaller types. At the top of this aquatic food chain are the predator fish – bass, crappie and other varieties anglers seek.

Fly-fishermen have an axiom – “match the hatch.” They use flies that imitate certain insects the fish are feeding on. The same principle works for other types of fishing and for other baits. If you know what fish are eating, it’s much easier to use bait that matches their natural prey.

There is another yardstick used by experienced anglers to find fish in spring and early summer. They begin working their bait near the bottom of the lake or river and gradually move up, fishing more shallow, until they locate their quarry. It is often more efficient that starting shallow and going deeper. **AW**

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 “Spawns are just the beginning of months of great fishing. Fish are more active in warmer water than in cold water and so are anglers.”  
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Now's the time to find a bank and cast a line. Photo by Jeff Williams.



# Elbow Room Adventure

## *Avoid Crowds, Explore Unknown Waters*

BY JOE MOSBY

When anglers hit the water in spring and summer, some Arkansans complain about crowded conditions on lake and river hotspots.

Others move their action, shifting strategies a bit – they head for the pools and other smaller waters.

Once upon a time, fishing in Arkansas included two venues. One was rivers and streams, including large waterways like the Arkansas and White rivers, down to hundreds of brooks. The other venue was oxbow and other natural lakes. This, of course, was before impoundments were built for flood control, power and recreation. Since then, the focus of many anglers has shifted.

Some streams remain untouched. They flow at the speed of rain runoff. Big rivers have been altered by dams or a series of dams for flood control and navigation. The Arkansas River is a good example. Although it's not what it was 50 years ago, it's much more accessible to fishing.

### Little Pool, Big Fun

Pools in little creeks and streams are definite possibilities for productive fishing any time.

Arkansas is awash in these hidden fishing spots – the flatlands, the Ozarks, the Ouachitas, the piney woods. Pick out a stream, maybe close to a camping spot, and go exploring. Take along a light or ultralight rod and reel with 6-pound line. Take some small lures or tiny lures, small hooks and live bait. Take a fly-fishing rig if that is in your arsenal of fishing weapons.

Fishing the pools of small streams usually means working on foot, not from a boat. Naturally, the techniques and approaches on mountain creeks aren't the same as fishing a bayou in east-Arkansas flatlands.

### Shhh

One constant, however, is to be quiet and go slowly.

Fish don't have ears we can see, but they can hear – they can hear quite well. Any unusual noise, like a rock dislodging or clicking against another, can send fish into hiding for long enough that an angler gives up and moves on.

Shallow places in a creek – shoals, rapids or even dry areas – will be interspersed with pools. Even sluggish bayous and sloughs of eastern Arkansas have deeper holes.

Approach a pool slowly and quietly. Look for hidey holes, like shadowy spots under a ledge. Look for drop-offs in the water. Look around the head of the pool, the place just downstream from a shallow area or shoals. Fish these first – slowly and attentively.

In all likelihood, you won't come back with a dinner-plate-size bream or a 4-pound smallmouth bass. But you just might hook into enough green sunfish and other species to complete an interesting and fulfilling day of fishing.

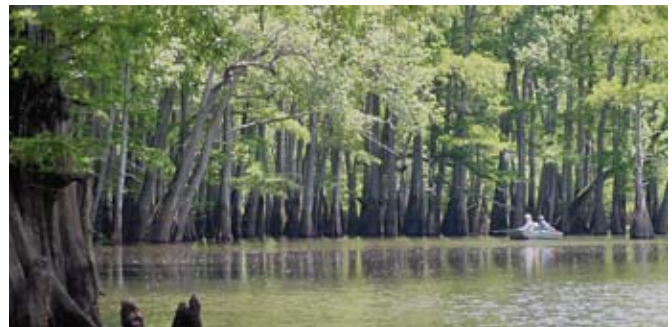
### Fishing for Adventure

Most anglers are part explorer. They like to find new places to pursue their prey. Largemouth bass fishermen especially are prone to hook up a boat and pull it hundreds of miles to fish a lake they have never seen before but have heard or read about. Instead, try finding a smaller lake that perhaps has been overlooked for years. Arkansas Game and Fish Commission wildlife management areas are loaded with lakes, bayous, creeks and ponds.

Late-summer stream fishing may run counter to this line of thought. Your chances are better on a creek you have some knowledge about, probably a creek near home.

A little homework can help. Call around; ask about fishing on Caney Creek or whatever the nearby stream is called. Check at a bait shop. Better yet, try to talk someone into letting you tag along if the creek is completely new to you.

As always, ask permission if you're seeking adventure on private land and always abide by state fishing regulations.



Try fishing where crowds may be sparse, such as Henry Gray Hurricane Lake Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Jeff Williams.



# Jig or Minnow?

## *Choose Colors, Types of Bait From Wide Variety*

BY JOE MOSBY

Which is best for catching crappie – live minnows or artificial jigs? The debate continues, although they both work well and sometimes one works better than the other.

They also work well when combined – a jig tipped with a minnow.

But which type and color of jig is the most productive? Anglers choose from hair jigs, chicken feather jigs, plastic jigs, tube jigs, Mylar jigs. And that's just for starters.

In Lake Conway's early days, a frequently heard bit of advice for crappie anglers was "use any color jig as long as it's white or chartreuse." Then yellow came into popular use, or maybe yellow was in the mix all along, just not as prominent as white and chartreuse.

Somewhere along the line, they started painting the heads of jigs various colors instead of the familiar lead or silver tones. One time, a red-head jig with a chartreuse

skirt brought in the crappie. Next time, it might be a black-head jig with a white skirt. White-head jigs with chartreuse skirts could catch crappie some days, but a chartreuse-head jig with white skirt would work the next time out.



Have a variety of jigs on hand to coerce crappie and panfish.

Today, there are more jig types and color combinations than you can shake a stick at. Blue and green skirts on crappie jigs have worked – at times – on Lake Conway for some years. Pink is popular – sometimes. Curly tailed jigs are favored sometimes over straight-tailed models.

If you ever get past the issue of jig colors, then you get into jig sizes – their weights. Quarter-ounce jigs sometimes are too big for crappie, so anglers go to one-eighth-ounce jigs. Then somebody switches to 1/16-ounce and catches a

boatload. Next time around, it's 1/32-ounce that's working. Some crappie specialists use model airplane paints from a hobby store to color the heads of bare lead jigs.

# Flippin' - not the City

## *Arkansas Tournament Introduced Fresh Technique*

BY JOE MOSBY

Thirty-five years ago, a new fishing technique burst onto the scene, and it happened in Arkansas.

Flippin' won a national Bass Anglers Sportsman Society tournament on Bull Shoals Lake – that's flippin' without a "g." Dee Thomas of California won the tournament practically on the outskirts of the town of Flippin, home of Ranger Boats.

Thomas was little-known and was the first California bass fishermen to make it to the national scene, although others would be close behind.

Flippin' is used by everybody today – professionals, amateurs and casual fishermen. It's the technique of pulling several feet of line from the reel, then swinging the rod in an arc to drop a lure in a precise spot. Thomas used the technique in the backs of creeks and coves along

Bull Shoals' shore.

He explained – and demonstrated at the tournament weigh-in – that the technique is quiet, and it allows a fisherman to access hard-to-reach spots that are not conducive to conventional casting.

Thomas was a quiet and friendly fellow, and he did not claim to have invented flippin' but said, "Dave Gliebe and I have been using it for a while out West." Gliebe came into the national picture a year or so later.

On Bull Shoals, Thomas used a lead-head jig as his lure, and this remains probably the lure of choice for the technique. But it works with plastic worms, too.

Flippin' is easy to learn. With just a little practice, anyone can drop a jig or worm into a target area the size of a teacup.



# Seeing Spots

## *Don't Forget Black Bass Family's Other Member*

BY BENJAMIN BATTEN AND MICHAEL EGGLETON

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, black bass were first on the list of prey for freshwater anglers – largemouth, smallmouth and spotted, in order of popularity.

The largemouth is glamorous and the smallmouth is known as a savage fighter. The spotted or Kentucky bass doesn't often share the spotlight, maybe because it isn't as widespread.

We think spotted bass deserve better press.

### **Middle Ground**

Spotted bass live between largemouth and smallmouth. They are less tolerant of warm, turbid, still waters than largemouth bass, but more tolerant than smallmouth bass. Smallmouth rely on sight to find prey because they live in clear water. Largemouth bass, especially those that live in murky water, use their lateral lines to detect prey. Spots are adept at finding meals with both senses.

Like smallmouth, spotted bass prefer rocky bottoms with flowing water. They are found in temperate rivers and many reservoirs in the Southeast. They have been transported to parts of New Mexico, Colorado and California. All three black bass are opportunistic predators that will eat whatever prey fits their mouths. However, largemouth bass rely mostly on other fish as prey, but smallmouth lean toward crayfish. Spots eat some of each.

### **Big and Bigger**

Largemouth are far and away the largest. The world record of 22 pounds, 4 ounces was caught in Georgia's Lake Montgomery by George Perry in 1932. The smallmouth record – 11 pounds, 15 ounces – was caught by David Hayes in 1955 in Dale Hollow Lake, which straddles the Tennessee-Kentucky state line.

The spotted bass record weighs in at 10 pounds, 4 ounces. It was caught in Pine Flat Lake in California. Most anglers consider any spot bigger than 5 pounds a trophy.

As a sport fish, the spotted bass comes highly praised by anglers who regularly catch this feisty species. They are known to be pound for pound, among the toughest fighting species in fresh water. Several traits make them highly appealing to anglers, including their tendency to school more than other black bass, their aggressive feeding and their fighting ability.

They school to increase their odds while chasing schools of prey fish. When anglers find these schools of spotted bass, the action can get hot and heavy. Spots have a tendency to latch onto their prey more than largemouth bass, which use their namesake mouth to suck in prey like a vacuum cleaner. Spots grab prey, which requires them to be more aggressive. Some anglers believe spotted bass are less cautious than largemouth, and more likely to strike.

Spots are arguably the best fighters among black bass. Largemouth prefer to ambush their prey and are adapted to environments where water flows slowly. Largemouth use short bursts of energy – they are the sprinters of the black bass family. Spotted bass have evolved in higher-flow environments, which requires them to be constantly fighting currents when searching for food. This makes the spotted bass the marathon runner of the black basses, which gives them their ability to fight intensely for longer periods of time.

### **Spot Hotspots**

Now that we know some of the basic biology of the spotted bass, the obvious question is: Where can they be caught?

One of the best spots for spots is the Arkansas River. Fisheries scientists at the University of

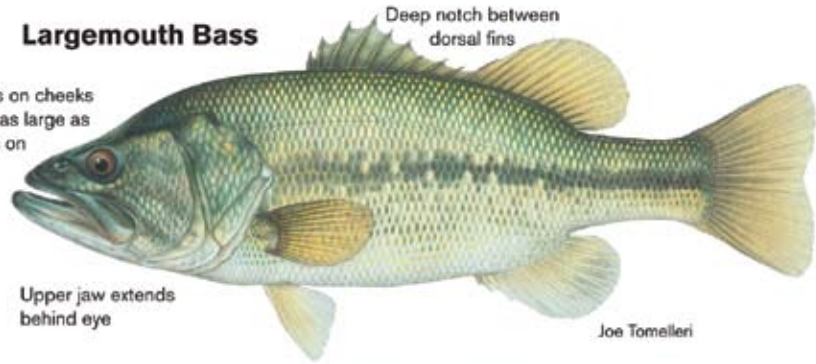


## BASS IDENTIFICATION

### Largemouth Bass

Scales on cheeks about as large as scales on body

Upper jaw extends behind eye



Joe Tomelleri

### Spotted Bass

Scales on cheeks much smaller than scales on body

Upper jaw extends to the eye



Joe Tomelleri

Dark spots in rows

Arkansas at Pine Bluff conducted a thorough assessment of spotted bass in the Arkansas River in 2004-05.

They found that the greatest numbers of spotted bass were found in Redfield (Pool 5), Dumas (Pool 2), Toad Suck (Pool 8) and Murray (Pool 7).

These pools also had some of the largest fish. Spotted bass can be found anywhere

with a rocky bottom. In the Arkansas River, fish along riprap banks and in any of the many dike fields.

UAPB scientists compared their findings to spotted bass populations in similar river systems in the Southeast, including the Ohio River, Tennessee River, Cumberland River and the middle Arkansas River in Oklahoma.

Arkansas River spotted bass are more abundant than in any other system except the lowest reaches of the Ohio River. Also, Arkansas River spotted bass were in the best condition (a measure of "plumpness"). Overall, the Arkansas River seems to be a very good spotted bass fishery.

### What's the Catch?

The last piece of the puzzle is catching spotted bass. According to Frank Leone, an Arkansas Game and Fish Commission fisheries management biologist, who regularly pursues spotted bass, the best time to go is April-November. Leone says he concentrates on current breaks, especially around dike fields. Some of his favorite baits include jigs, crank-

baits, Carolina-rigged soft-plastic baits, and jighead worms.

Leone also says he often catches 20-30 fish per outing, so the action can be pretty fast and furious. This high catch rate makes spots a perfect target when fishing with inexperienced youngsters – an intermediate step between fishing for bream in a pond and spending all day chasing sometimes finicky largemouth bass.

Fellow angler Jeremy Risley, an AGFC assistant district fisheries biologist, emphasizes the importance of spotted bass to tournament anglers during late summer and early fall in the Arkansas River when largemouth bass become particularly hard to catch.

Next time you want to go fishing, but don't feel that you have the time or patience for largemouth bass fishing, try spotted bass – the other black bass.

*Ben Batten earned a master's degree in fisheries management from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and is an ecologist for the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality. Michael A. Eggleton, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Aquaculture and Fisheries Center at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.*

Call (501) 223-6352 for a free waterproof identification card illustrating the differences between the spotted bass and its cousin, the largemouth.