A look at the best bass paterns of the fall

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Although the calendar says it's only Labor Day weekend, the coolness in the night air in recent weeks has signaled fall is in the air.

Fall is a great time to fish for black bass around the Southeast, and in the Upstate in particular. Pleasure boaters are gone, and with college and professional football kicking off and deer season starting in a couple of weeks, the lakes are empty.

Professional angler Bryan Thrift, who hails from Shelby, N.C., loves fall fishing, as it gives him a chance to take a break after all the travel that comes with being a professional.

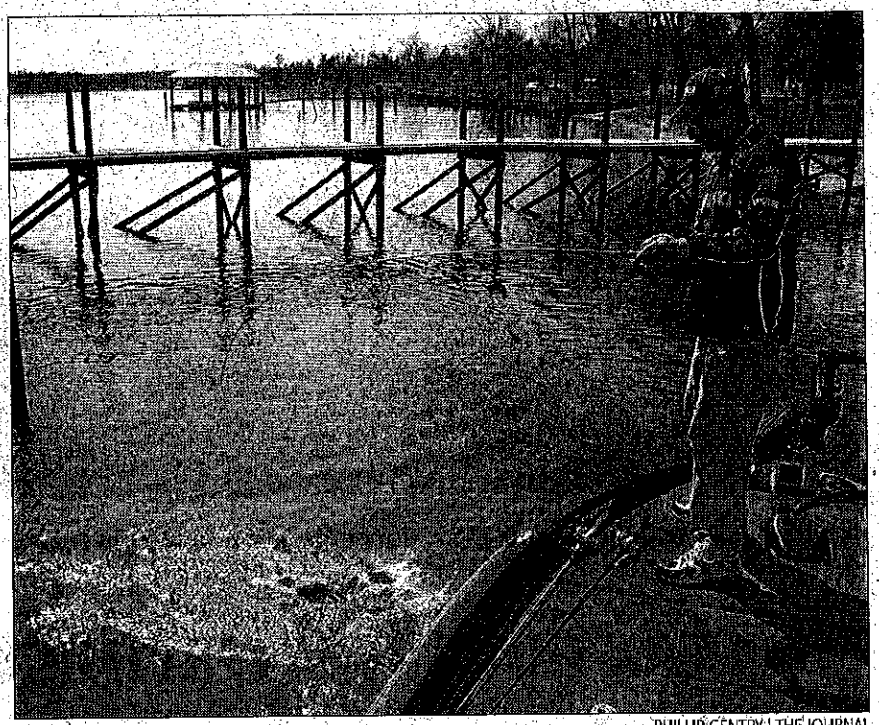
September provides an added bonus for the professional, as the nights are starting to cool off and bass are returning to shallow-water patterns.

Early in the month, before water temperatures cool significantly, Thrift looks for bass on long, main-lake points. Then as the month unfolds, he works his way closer to banks or works the largest tributary on whatever lake he's fishing. This works even better if the current is being generated at the dam.

"When the water is running over the long, main-lake points that stick out toward the channel, that's the time to be throwing a crankbait," Thrift said. "The bass will bunch up on the down current side of the point, and you can catch a good many fish on a crankbait that will work down 8 to 9 feet to the tops of the points where the bass are holding to ambush passing baitfish."

Many large impoundments in the Southeast will generate at different times of day — sometimes only an hour or two before shutting off. Thrift said it's important to watch for a reaction from bass when water is moving and when it's not.

"Right when the water shuts off — and it's not that hard to tell because of the current that's generated when it's running — bass will scatter off the points, and I'll get back over the top of them and bounce a shaky head worm on the bottom," Thrift said.



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Pro angler Bryan Thrift loves bass fishing in the fall, when cooler water, baitfish movements and less fishing pressure make things more comfortable.

Later in the month, or if the baitfish pattern isn't producing as well because of falling water temperatures, Thrift targets deeper boat docks. That's where he looks for a good jig bite. He said the crankbait works when fish are chasing baitfish, but the jig represents crayfish and other live morsels that bass look for under boat docks.

"A lot of it depends on sunlight," Thrift said. "A lot of sunlight will push bass up underneath deep boat docks where they can keep their eyes hidden. I'll skip a jig and trailer under there, especially if there's some kind of cover on the bottom. But on a cloudy day, they'll be moved out on the points, and it's easier to catch them throwing a crankbait over a lot of water."

A final consideration when bass fishing in the fall centers around only a handful of lakes that have blueback herring populations in them. In the Upstate, that means just about every lake within driving distance. Thrift said the presence of blueback herring in a lake will change typical fall bass patterns.

The biggest reason for the change is it's easier to pattern shad, and therefore bass that feed on them, but bluebacks and other river herring are constantly on the move and much harder to pattern. That tends to spread bass concentrations out.

"First thing in the morning, from daylight till say 7 or 8 o'clock, it's pretty common to get a decent topwater bite out off the main points on a herring lake," Thrift said. "I'll throw a big Zara Spook in a shad or blueback pattern and see if I can get a couple of fish to come up and bust it.

"On a good, windy day, bass will seek out an exposed bank with the nastiest wind blowing on it. On those days, they'll get right up next to the bank and face out. That's when you want to take a three-bladed spinnerbait, either a half-ounce or 3/8-ounce, and burn it from the bank out to about 6 to 7 feet deep."

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of "Upstate Outdoors," a broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. This week's guest on the show will be Jay Butfiloski, alligator project coordinator for the SCDNR. Contact Gentry at pgentry@bellsouth.net.