Factor in water color during your fall fishing activity

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Fall fishing can be a time of feast or famine as water temperatures begin to descend, as well as additional climatic factors such as lake levels, water flows and baitfish migrations. One factor that many anglers may overlook is the color of the water, or more specifically, the clarity of the water. Here in the Upstate, water clarity is typically one color, which is really no color at all with our lakes being so clear.

Water clarity can and does vary per lake based on geographic factors. A water control lake in the Midwest may remain murky, turbid, or even muddy throughout the majority of the year, while a natural, heavily vegetative water body like one of the natural lakes up north, may remain clear most of the year.

Local fishing guide Rod Wall spends much of his time fishing for a variety of species by trolling during the fall. Wall's success depends greatly upon which level fish are holding in the water column. Generally speaking, most of our local lakes range from manmade high land/hill land reservoirs to mountain reservoirs that remain generally clear unless environmental factors change that.

"In the fall, after the lake turn-over, fishing can be tough, especially with the dry spells lately that provide little freshwater coming through the system," said Wall. "In clear water, fish will tend to hold tight to cover and that's not a best-case scenario for me to catch them trolling. I'd much prefer to see them up in the water column chasing baitfish."

Like deer hunters begging for rain to water food plots, Wall does rain dances in October and November, hoping that a late season tropical depression, hopefully not to the extent of last week's Hurricane Matthew, will bring several days of soaking rains to an area he wants to fish.

"It's kind of the reverse of the spring," said Wall, "when fish are anxious for warmer water to flow in. In the fall, the main body water is practically dead, it's hot, there's no oxygen, and water washing in from a creek is like a fresh breeze on a hot day."

Fish in clear water lakes are cover loving on their best day, so anything that poses a threat to their comfort, security or well being sends them tight to cover. Wall said murky or even muddy water would relax those fish.

"I guess they view the water color as a form of cover," he said. "They can venture further out, and more importantly up, away from brush piles and tree tops and will actually suspend pretty shallow. That makes them easy pickings for trolling if you can figure out what they're going to eat."

Preferring mostly artificial baits over live, Wall said he's pretty much given up on the old bait color selection adage of bright colors for bright days and dark colors for dark days. He does like pink, red and chartreuse heads, and there are days when a bait with a built-in spinner blade is worth it's weight in gold.

To find what the fish prefer, Wall believes you have to show it to them. He also has to consider that the muddy water he's seeking will have a definite effect on what bait colors fish are going to hit.

"I'll run all different bright colors and head/body combinations until I catch a fish," he said. "Then I might run two of that combination. Before long I've got the day's color combination down to just one, two or maybe three and the catch rates are getting better as I hone in on what they want."

PHILLIP GENTRY can be reached at at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.