Rocky banks, muddy creeks holding bass

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL



BRANDON BARBER/FOR THE JOURNAL

Brandon Barber recently took a day off from his fly fishing shop to do battle with some Hartwell bass.

What does a professional fly fishing guide and fly shop owner do on his day off?

He picks up his heavy tackle rods, heads to an impoundment he only fishes once in a blue moon and hones his other fishing skills.

Last week, Brandon Barber, owner of River-Blade Knife and Fly Shop, met another buddy near S.C. 11 and spent the day fishing for black bass.

"I'm not being elusive," said Barber, "because I fish Hartwell so rarely I'd have to look at a map to tell you exactly where we were, but the bass fishing was on fire."

Barber said after putting his boat in near the junction of S.C. 11 and Interstate 85, the two anglers began trying to figure out a pattern. Two things were immediately apparent to Barber that helped him find the fish.

After that he had his choice of which pattern, and which species, he wanted to catch.

"The lake was mega-low," Barber said. "All the boat docks were out of water because the water was down like 10 to 12 feet. That left a lot of exposed shoreline.

"Because the wind was blowing steady and had been for a few days, we started on the wind blown banks first."

Spotted bass are well known for their aggressiveness, and Barber can second that notion. He found that slick banks, even those in the wind, held few if any spots, but the rocky banks that dumped off into deeper water held clumps of spotted bass.

Though not overly large by Hartwell standards, he and his partner had their fill.

"We were catching 2-pound spots on nearly every cast just as soon as we'd pull up on a rocky bank," Barber said. "They weren't overly picky either. My buddy was throwing a jig and I used a variety of soft plastics. So long as it was on or near the bottom, they'd nail it."

The second pattern was fishing surprisingly shallow in the backs of creeks. Barber noticed that all the recent rains had muddied up the back ends of creeks and pockets while the main part of the lake was relatively clear.

"I guess with the sun out, the largemouth were trying to get warm," he said. "Classic pattern — muddy water, gold spinnerbait, throw it out there, slow roll it back and hang on."

IN OTHER NEWS

Spring turkey hunters should order tags now for upcoming season.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources recently began mailing turkey tags for the 2013 spring season. Hunters can determine if they will receive their tags by mail by checking their hunting license.

If "turkey tags" appears on their hunting license, the tags should have already been mailed to them. If "turkey tags" does not appear on the license, then they will need to order the tags.

Turkey tags are free and can be ordered online.

In order to legally hunt turkeys, all hunters including hunters under the age of 16, must possess a set of turkey tags. Hunters 16 and older must also possess a hunting license and big game permit. Hunters may not possess more than one set of turkey tags, and all harvested birds must be tagged prior to being moved from the point of kill.

For hunters who renew their license by mail they should check the "turkey tags" box on their license renewal form.

Tags are mailed to hunters in late January prior to the turkey season each year. For those hunters who do not get tags by mail, handwritten tags will be available in early March at the DNR office in Clemson and some local businesses.

Local Freshwater Fishing Report

LAKE JOCASSEE

» **Trout: Fair.** The best pattern is slowly trolling spoons or live bait from the surface down to 50 feet deep, with the bigger fish coming on live bait fished on free lines, planer board rigs and weighted lines. **Black Bass: Slow.** Captain Pat Bennett advises that the best winter action on Jocassee is found fishing over deeper water for suspended fish.

LAKE KEOWEE

» **Largemouth and Spotted Bass: Fair.** Guide Brad Fowler reports that bass fishing has slowed a bit on Lake Keowee. The primary pattern he is fishing remains unchanged, but increased fishing pressure and seasonal factors seem to be making it a little harder to catch fish.

LAKE HARTWELL

» **Catfish: Poor to fair.** Fishing is touch and go, but some results for blues in 20 to 30 feet in the mouths of creeks. It's still too cool for much channel cat action. **Striper: Fair to good.** Your best bet is using umbrella rigs in the main lake and deeper areas. Fish have been pushed out of the creeks due to rain and muddy conditions. **Crappie:** Fair. Some reports of fish being caught around bridges brush over 25 over water.

— Courtesy of SCDNR