OUTDOORS

Time is now for spotted bass on Keowee

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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BRIAN LATIMER | THE JOURNAL

Local bass pro Brian Latimer said Lake Keowee spotted bass are transitioning between spawning and post-spawning patterns on main lake points right now.

Anderson County FLW pro bass angler Brian Latimer said Keowee bass anglers can fish for both spawning and post-spawning fish at Lake Keowee right now, though it may be hard to tell if the fish you catch are actually on the bed or have finished spawning.

Latimer has given up on working the backs of creeks and pockets for the last few largemouth bass and has moved out onto the main lake areas of Keowee. In these open-water locations, he said you can still find spotted bass that are spawning, but the approach is much different for a spotted bass than a spawning largemouth.

"The bigger fish of the year always move up first and last," Latimer said. "If you're trying to catch post-spawn spots right now, I think you'll catch bigger fish by staying off the point and blind casting to a targeted area than you will if you're trying to sight fish for them."

Latimer said a strong pattern for this spawn/post-spawn transition pattern is throwing topwater baits anytime fish are seen blowing up on herring or casting to fish that are holding around rocky points. He keeps a clear Heddon Zara Spook or a Duo Realis Pencil 110 walking bait in chrome and white tied on for those fish.

Latimer said prevailing water temperatures are ranging between 60–65 degrees, and locating fish is a matter of easing around main lake points, blind casting topwater baits and watching for schooling fish. He said he may get only one bite or one blowup per point, so it's important anglers stay on the move.

"If they're not committing to the topwater bait, meaning they just want to follow it or maybe slap at it without really eating, then I'll switch to a Zoom super fluke or a hard jerk bait," Latimer said. "It's hard for them to get away with slapping at a jerk bait with three sets of sharp treble hooks, so even if they aren't aggressively feeding, you'll wind up with more fish in the boat."

Latimer believes color can cause a reaction bite in clear-water fish the same way bait with an erratic movement or a particular sound can. In the case of a color-reaction bite, it has to do with throwing a bait color that was never produced by Mother Nature.

"I have come to discover that ... clear-water bass, and that includes spotted bass at Lake Keowee, just like silly, loud colors," Latimer said. "The bright pinks, chartreuses (and) neon colors like that are really good bait color choices for fish that ordinarily you would throw natural or translucent color baits to."

IN OTHER NEWS

If you see or smell smoke near one of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources' heritage preserves this spring and summer, it may be coming from a prescribed fire.

Prescribed burns —also called controlled burns — are generally conducted in the dormant season, mostly in late winter and early spring. But periodic burns in the growing season can improve habitat in ways dormant-season burns cannot.

Growing-season burns, which are conducted after the new leaves appear in the spring, are much more effective in controlling undesirable hardwoods and are key in restoring and maintaining the herbaceous vegetation that are crucial to brood rearing for species like bobwhite quail and wild turkey.

The herbaceous native vegetation stimulated by growing-season prescribed burns, especially bunch grasses and legumes, provides excellent cover and insect-foraging areas for turkey poults and quail chicks, and for hens of both species.

About 90 percent of the diet of both young turkeys and bobwhite quail during the first few weeks after they hatch consists of insects, which provide vital protein for early development of feathers and muscle.

For more information on growing-season burns, visit the National Wild Turkey Federation website or the Longleaf Alliance website.

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 PJ Perea, editor of NWTF's Turkey Country magazine and Marty Walker from Palmetto Boat Center. Contact Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.