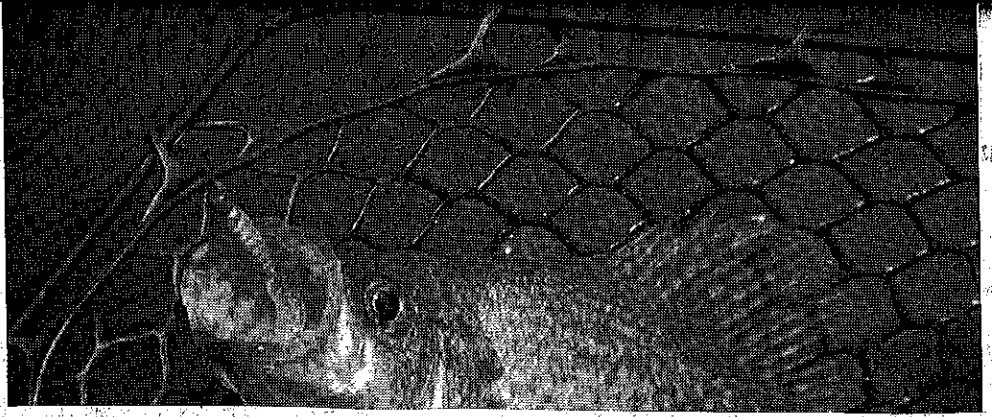


PHILLIP GENTRY | THE JOURNAL

With spring finally here, Upstate anglers need to take advantage of the beautiful weather and hot fishing going on now in any of our local lakes.

What's not biting right now?

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
THE JOURNAL

Over the last few years, Upstate anglers have often been forced to play a game of hide-and-seek with spring. Just when it appears the weather and the fishing are about to reach perfect conditions, winter seems to make an unwanted appearance.

But at some point, spring bursts on the scene like a runaway train, and every fish that swims is competing to jump in the boat with you. We reached that peak here in the Upstate right after the rain ended Monday.

Lake Hartwell guide Bill Plumley said crappie fishing has been wide open on Hartwell, with fish moving into the shallows to spawn.

Local crappie angler Mack Chapman said crappie fishing in some of the creeks off the Tugaloo River — Gumlog and Eastanollee, in particular — have been good lately.

"I fished Gumlog earlier this week and had a cooler full in about half a day," Chapman said. "My biggest was a 3.2-pound crappie that I caught just fishing a jig around a stickup on the bank."

"My problem with the crappie is that I can't make time to fish for them because the striped bass and hybrids have also moved up on the banks, and that's what everyone's wanting to catch," Plumley said. "Lately, I've been pulling the nose of the boat up on a long point and throwing out live herring on the bottom. If it even has a chance to hit bottom, it's not long before a hybrid, striper or a spotted bass has picked it up and (is) running off with it."

Plumley suggested anglers can expect to do well on both the Seneca and Tugaloo river arms of the lake, as well as down near the dam. He said long clay points that start out shallow and taper off into deep water were the best areas to fish, with most of his bites coming from 2 feet out to about 20 feet deep.

Keowee bass guide Brad Fowler said topwater fishing for Keowee's generous population of spotted bass is always a good option this time of year, especially early and late in the day, or on cloudy or overcast days.

After the morning topwater bite, he's off to search for bedding bass in the backs of creeks and cuts anywhere he can find some underwater structure, typically boat docks or near blown-down trees.

"It's easy to find depressions in the bottom where these bass are bedding," Fowler said. "There are so many bass and so little cover that the spawn tends to drag on into May. My preferred tactic is to sight-fish for bass on the beds and throw a trick worm or a worm on a shaky head into those beds and see if I can get the fish to bite."

Anglers who fish the cool, deep waters of Jocassee are also finding plenty of trout and bass willing to hit a trolled spoon or live bait in areas around the upper creeks. Local guide Steve Pietrykowski indicated that live bait and light tackle had been working for him lately catching some big largemouth, big brown trout and numerous spotted bass in the 2-pound range.

"I had several dozen herring left from my striper trip from the day before at Hartwell and used them with a group of young kids on Jocassee," Pietrykowski said. "I love to live bait up at Lake Jocassee. We put out baits and caught some really nice bass with one really fat largemouth and a nice brown. The rest were all those fat 2-pound spotted bass, which are all fun fish to catch on crappie rods. I saw the brown eat the bait on the surface."

With the warm spring weather finally settling in, the weekend forecast looks to be stellar weather, so anglers need to plan accordingly and get out on our local Upstate lakes and catch some fish.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of "Upstate Outdoors," a weekend outdoors radio program heard on WORD 106.3 FM and can be reached at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.