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With June in full swing, Lake Keowee bass fishing guide Brad Fowler advises anglers to change over to summer tactics to catch Keowee bass like this one.

With the heat on, it's time for anglers to adjust

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

The summer pattern for bass fishing entered into full swing last week when temperatures soared into the 90s.

For bass fishing fanatics who ply the waters of Lake Keowee, it's time to change tactics and plan on hitting the lakes come first light. Such is the advice of Brad Fowler, a bass fishing guide from Pendleton who calls Lakes Keowee and Hartwell home.

"It's definitely the summer pattern," Fowler said. "Generally, you'll have a couple of hours early in the day when bass pull up on shallow points, and then after that it's a game of trying to locate them around deep structure or get lucky and find them suspended out over deep water."

When Fowler's talking about bass on Lake Keowee, he's mainly referring to spotted bass, a smaller, more aggressive black bass species that have virtually taken control of the lake over the last 20 years. Largemouth bass are still found in the lake, but their numbers are slight compared to the spots.

"Keowee has a lot of long shallow rocky and red clay points, and spotted bass pull up in those areas to feed at daylight," Fowler said. "They're chasing baitfish, so the best way to catch them is by throwing Sammies or Spooks, something that imitates the bait they're eating."

Fowler claims having enough baitfish in Lake Keowee is not a problem — it's finding suitable fish holding structure that gets complicated. Since Keowee was cleared before impoundment, there's very little wood structure to hold fish.

Baitfish generally polarize around either the warm water discharge at the Oconee Nuclear Plant or congregate in the moving water tailrace coming out of Lake Jocassee above Highway 11.

"I rarely ever fish the hot hole," Fowler said. "And catching fish behind the Jocassee tailrace is not as easy as it sounds. There's a ton of bait up there, but that bait stays on the move and so do the bass.

"You can happen up on fish schooling throughout the day, but to catch one, you almost have to land your bait in the fish's mouth."

When fishing the area above Highway 11, Fowler admits he's mainly buying time until he sees spotted bass chasing baitfish on the surface. Shaky head worms and drop shot rigs will pick off an occasional fish that's holding on the bottom behind a rock out of the current. He always keeps a rod handy with a top-water lure or swim bait tied on for the occasions when the water around his Ranger bass boat erupts with surface feeding fish.

"It's a popular pattern, so those fish see a lot of different baits thrown at them," Fowler said. "Quick, accurate casts are needed because they won't stay up long, and it's the flash of something looking like it's getting away that draws strikes."

Before starting one of his guide trips, Fowler takes a few minutes to determine his clients' skill level. Parties with kids or beginners often lack the casting accuracy and prowess to put artificial baits in the strike zone. One of his secrets in those cases is to use live bait.

"Live bait on a drop shot rig is more simple and effective," Fowler said. "I fish several places off the main lake where there are points or humps that often have fish around them. Other likely places to find bass congregated during the summer might be deep water bridge pilings or one of the deep water boat docks on the lake, especially if the owner of the dock has placed brush around the dock."

As the summer pattern moves on from June to July to August, bass get even more finicky about when and where they'll eat, rarely even venturing into the shallows at any time when surface water temperatures are at their highest. It's at these times that Fowler relies on almost exclusive live bait tactics as the fishing can get tough.

But it's the thrill of that thump and pull on the line that keeps him coming back.

To arrange a guided bass fishing trip with Fowler on Lake Keowee, e-mail him at brad@fowlerfishing.com or connect with him via his website at www.fowlerfishing.com.

IN OTHER NEWS

— Advance sales of 2011-2012 state recreational hunting and fishing licenses are available now through the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Advance sales are available by calling 1-866-714-3611 or online.

All advance sale licenses will be mailed out beginning Monday in time to be received before all 2010-2011 licenses expire on June 30.

— Regular sales for 2011-2012 hunting and fishing licenses will begin Monday and will be valid immediately. You can buy your South Carolina hunting and fishing licenses multiple ways.

Licenses are available in person at any of the four regional DNR offices or by visiting one of the more than 500 license agents across the state. Licenses are also available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling 1-866-714-3611 or by visiting the DNR website at http://www.dnr.sc.gov/purchase.

Residents and nonresidents ages 16 and older must purchase the required licenses to hunt and fish in South Carolina. Persons born after June 30, 1979, must have successfully completed a hunter education course to obtain a hunting license.

— All hunting and fishing license prices remain the same for the upcoming 2011-2012 season. South Carolina residents born on or before July 1, 1940 are eligible for the Gratis Hunting and Fishing license. South Carolina residents born after July 1, 1940, and over the age of 64, are eligible for the $9 Senior License.