

Catching catfish on the go

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Freshwater anglers who are considering throwing in the towel for the season are missing out on some great catfishing through the heat of summer.

Water temperatures in the mid 80s and higher are not a problem for channel catfish and smaller blues between 2 and 10 pounds.

They flood into the shallows at random times during the day, seeking out whatever's good to eat.

For these small-time scavengers, that means not much isn't on the menu.

Most catfish anglers are lost without current. It's ingrained in many catfish anglers that water flow brings food to the fish.

A lot of the old timers may have grown up catfishing in a river, so the prospect of fishing in a lake or reservoir is somewhat foreign.

The only logical conclusion if a catfish man is fishing on water that doesn't move is to make the boat move — that's how trolling for catfish was born.

During the week, Hank Lyles from Oakway can be found standing behind a line of boats, turning wrenches as an marine mechanic.

But as soon as his week ends, it's a sure bet he'll be standing inside his boat with rods hanging out the sides, trolling for catfish.

His favorite catfish lakes are Monticello, Greenwood and, at times, Hartwell.

Lyles explained the basic setup involves six to eight rods stationed

around the rear gunnels and stern of the boat. He uses medium heavy catfish rods spooled with 20- to 30-pound monofilament line.

His bait rig revolves around a three-way swivel.

One eye is tied to the main line, while the second has a 3- to 4-foot section of 50-pound mono leader terminated with an 3/0-5/0 hook.

A crappie float, pegged at both ends, is attached to the leader about 4 to 6 inches from the hook. The float helps float the bait stay off the bottom and away from snags. Lyles attaches a specially made slinky weight to the third eye to weight the rig and crawl over the bottom.

"I've found that casting the slinky weight rigs often tangle the weight with the bait leader," he said. "Best to just let that line out with the reel in free spool and count off 60 to 70 feet — more if you are fishing deeper water, and maybe not so much if you're in the shallows."

Though he often refers to his style of catfishing as drifting, nine times out of 10 he's using a variable speed trolling motor to propel the boat forward at about half-a-mile per hour. In fact, he'd rather troll into the wind rather than with it to better control the boat's speed.

Lyles' baits of choice are white perch, bream, gizzard shad or stink baits.

He cuts the fish into bite-sized pieces and uses the stink baits smeared on a thumbnail-sized chunk of Styrofoam pool noodle.

"You want to look for humps, ledges, holes and



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Trolling for summer catfish is a great way to beat the heat and fill the cooler.

channels, the same kind of stuff you would anchor up on to catfish, but you're just going to troll through them," Lyles said. "I especially like a ledge. I can troll on top or get down in the channel."

Like any other fishing tactic, much of trolling for catfish in the summer is trial and error. Lyles said all of the Upstate lakes have plenty of 2- to 5-pound channel catfish to go round, but there's

also some bruisers lurking in the depths.

"Trolling for catfish will surprise you," Lyles said. "You're catching 2- to 5-pounders, and all the sudden the rod bows over with a 20-pounder, even the occasional 30- or 40-pound catfish."

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