

A look at third-shift fishing

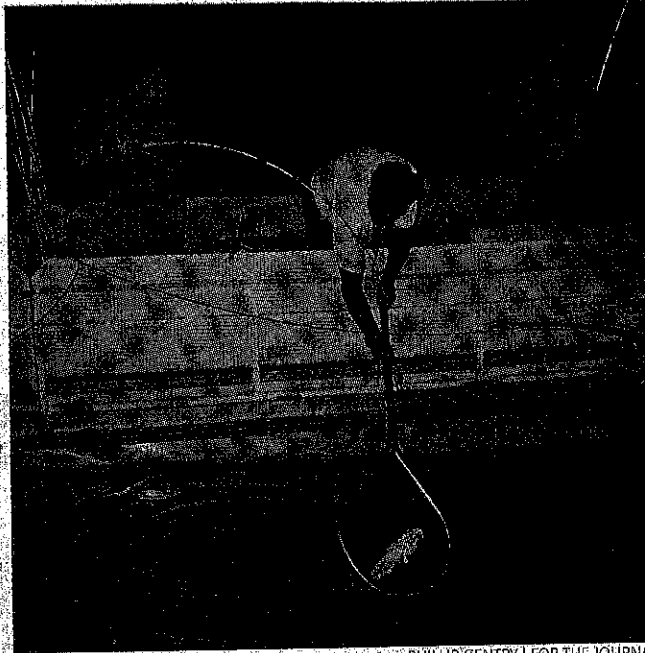
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FOR THE JOURNAL

If a Memorial Day weekend visit to an Upstate lake doesn't convince you that it's time to start fishing at night, then a look at some of the recent catches coming from the lakes might seal the deal.

Night fishing is a common pastime during the summer months on Upstate lakes. After dark the crowds die down, and you can have the lake almost to yourself — plus the cooler nighttime temperatures are more pleasant, and the cover of darkness can make all the difference in the world in your fishing success. In addition, pretty much any fish you can catch during the daylight will also readily bite after dark. It's not uncommon to come home with a mixed bag of bass, catfish, crappie and a striped or hybrid.

The lion's share of night fishing is done from a stationary boat tied to a bridge or anchored on a drop-off. Many anglers fish in the dark or supply battery-powered lights to light up their fishing area. Rods are placed in rod holders, and baits — almost exclusively live minnows — are staggered at 2-foot intervals from about 4 feet down to the bottom to the thermocline. Favorite store-bought baits are shiner minnows, which are 1.5 to 3 inches long and are a preferred bait for most fish. Limber fishing rods in the 6- to 8-foot range combined with 6- to 10-pound test will work fine for night fishing.

If you own or have access to a deep-water dock that has suitable structure around it, you already know how good the crappie fishing can be at night. For those who



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Escalating daytime temperatures and holiday crowds may be indicating it's time to become a nocturnal angler.

don't have this access, bridge crossings and public fish attractors are the next best things.

"It's a different world at night," said Albert Smith, a veteran night fishing angler. "I don't have to put any structure under the bridges. There's usually some there that has been washed in or that someone else has dropped, and fish just love to hang out under bridges at night. It's nothing to catch 100 fish on the right pattern. I guess the dark makes them less spooky."

Although deep-water brush piles out in open water are another good option, bridges offer a number of attractions for nighttime fishing.

"A bridge is a natural bottleneck that funnels everything through it, especially baitfish," Smith said. "Most lakes have a pretty decent population of threadfin shad, and that's one of the main food sources for all sorts of fish. There's also some cover for hiding around. Anytime you have deep

and shallow water come together in a small area, you can expect it to attract fish."

Another option is to slowly vertical troll at night. Smith trolls more to find congregations of fish than to actual fish. He may slow troll a while until he crosses paths with a school, then lock the trolling motor and fish in that school.

"I put my lights out and draw bait first," Smith said. "If I've been in one spot a while and don't have bait or I'm not catching fish, it's time to move. What I'll do is I'll turn untie and turn the trolling motor on and set course down the edge of the channel moving at just 0.1 to 0.2 mph. If you've got bait and start losing it, slow down. You can go too fast. Move down that break till you start getting bites, then put the anchor out and fish."

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of PG & Boatgirl Outdoors. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at pgandboatgirl.com.