

How to catch bluegill after May

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FOR THE JOURNAL

Panfish anglers who think bluegill can only be caught during the month of May need to pay attention to avid panfish angler William Blakley.

Blakley still found bluegills on the bed during this week's full moon — and he doesn't expect the wave of bedding bream to end until mid-August.

"Bream usually bed at least four times from May until August," Blakley said. "You can pretty much count on it every full moon through the entire summer."

Finding and catching bedded bluegill is about as simple as it gets. According to Blakley, the fish will pull out a little deeper after successive spawns — which will be about 10-15 feet on a typical Upstate lake.

There is no magic formula for finding them, although Blakley said the beds are easily marked using his side imaging sonar and looking for saucer-shaped depressions in the bottom. Many times, the sophisticated electronics are not even needed.

"On a calm day I can usually spot the beds below by looking for foaming bubbles on the surface," he said. "It looks like you poured soda out with all the bubbles caused from the big bulls fanning the bottom."

When a bed is located, Blakley will position his boat a cast away from the



COURTESY OF PHILLIP GENTRY

May is not the only month to find bedding bluegills. The fish will spawn several times on the full moon each month throughout the summer.

spot and cast a live bait rig to the spot. The rig is comprised of 6-pound line with a split shot, a No. 8 light wire hook, and a slip cork adjusted so that it settles the bait — a live cricket — just off the bottom.

Blakley said it's just as simple as it sounds.

"I use a 7-foot ultra-light action spinning rod paired with a spinning reel," he said. "I'll catch 15-20 fish from a spot as fast as I can get them in the boat and then head for the next spot."

Blakley does have a method to his madness when catching bluegill in rapid succession.

"When I'm fishing, I try to throw right back to the same exact spot just as soon as they can get the fish in, rebaited and back in the water," he said. "Once you get them stirred

up, it starts a feeding frenzy. Some guys want to cast off to the side but that lets the school cool off and they don't bite as well."

Targeting the full moon bite is a good way to catch the bulk of bream on a nest, but several days before and several days after is also ideal, because the males will chase the females off the nest after she drops her eggs so he can protect the nest from other predators. The male will stay there until the eggs hatch, usually about five to seven days, and continue to guard the fry until they are able to swim on their own.

The continual bedding on consecutive full moons ensures that male bluegills will be either building new nests, fertilizing eggs or guarding the nest until the next spawning cycle arrives.