

A look at some summer catfishing tips

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

Catfishing during the summer months can have its challenges, particularly during the spawning season for blue catfish. Unlike other fish species that become a little easier to pattern and catch during the spawn, the popular blue catfish are notorious for being hard to catch while procreating.

For anglers who are up for a good challenge, don't give up. Try a couple of these tips to help you get over the hump.

UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON

Mature blue catfish are still located in their typical areas but are pretty much in hiding during the spawn. Females look for holes to back into and effectively take themselves out of the equation. Males are also finicky because they lose their appetite as a measure to protect the young. You can recognize when you get a bite from a male catfish — it will be a grab-and-smash bit before spitting the bait out. The bait will look like it's been squeezed with a pair of pliers.

WATCH YOUR CALENDAR

On Upstate reservoirs, the spawn typically lasts from late May until the middle of July. As a consolation, male catfish will start to bite with more predictability around the first of July. When catfish anglers start catching mature male blue catfish again, they'll be in poor shape. Post-spawn blue catfish fish are long and skinny



PHILLIP GENTRY | FOR THE JOURNAL

Although blue catfish spawn during the summer and are harder to catch, that doesn't mean you have to give up on catfishing altogether.

and look like they been beaten up. Despite their condition, when they come off the spawn, they are ready to eat and mad at the world, so expect some of the hardest bites and fights of the year with post-spawn males.

TARGET NON-SPAWNING CATFISH

While mama and daddy blue catfish are off making babies, many veteran catfish anglers

target juvenile blues up to 10 to 12 pounds, as well as larger channel catfish. June and early July are not a bad time to take a break from trophy catfishing and restock the freezer or invite some friends over for a eating-size catfish fish fry.

LOOK SHALLOW

Smaller catfish have often been barred from deeper waters by mature fish, and you can find a

lot of the juveniles in water only 3 to 12 feet deep. In fact, these smaller blues and channel catfish will eat a variety of baits and seem to congregate everywhere there's a decent food source.

START TROLLING

A good way to locate catfish in a reservoir is by trolling. You can drag baits on the bottom in any catfish reservoir, and you'll find the fish pretty quick.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT FLATHEADS

Summer is a great time to target flathead catfish. Unlike blues, flatheads spawn in early May and are usually done before Independence Day. You can occasionally find them during the daylight, but to consistently catch good flathead catfish, you need to fish real early in the morning or the last hour or two before dark, and of course you can fish at night when they're the most active. One thing to remember about flatheads is they love to move from deeper water into shallow water and heavy cover like fallen trees or holes in a revetment bank at night. Anchor up and throw live shad to them to get a bite. Fresh-cut bait will often work, but the better fish typically want something live, and they'll eat a big bream or perch in a heartbeat if you can catch some beforehand to use for bait.

PHILLIP GENTRY is a freelance outdoor writer who has been writing a wide variety of outdoor articles across the Southeast since 2004.