

# Don't overlook winter catfishing

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
FOR THE JOURNAL

**W**hile many anglers are waiting on the weather before heading out to their local waters to chase some catfish, veteran catfish anglers understand these anglers miss out on some hot catfishing action by staying inside during cold weather.

It's a misconception that catfish of any species simply go away during the winter. Anglers who apply a couple of easy tactics can end up with a trophy-sized bruiser at the end of the line or a cooler full of tasty eaters ready for the skillet.

Drifting and trolling for catfish has become one of the most popular tactics in the last few years, but one of the most productive times of year for anchoring to fish is wintertime. Patience is the key to fishing from anchor in the winter, as trophy catfish will continue to bite — even with colder water temperatures — but anglers need to give them more time in the winter to find the bait.

When fishing at anchor in the summer, most anglers allow catfish an average of 20 minutes to show themselves before moving on to the next spot. In the wintertime, give each spot at least 45 minutes. Catfish metabolism is slower, and it often takes more time for them to make up their mind to bite and to find the bait.

Along with channel catfish and blue catfish, flatheads are high on the list of target species year-round, but it's a fallacy that flatheads don't bite in cold water. It's even possible to catch flatheads in single-digit temperatures. The key is knowing where to look.

One of the best patterns



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**Anglers who wait for warmer weather to begin catfishing are missing out on some of the best action of the year.**

for flathead fishing in the winter is fishing standing timber in 25- to 30-foot depths. Much of that depth and structure will be in old river runs off the main channels, particularly in the Savannah chain lakes — Hartwell, Russell and Clarks Hill.

Flathead catfish like to bunch up during the winter, but they will still feed. It's possible to catch five to six large flatheads — even as many as 10 — out of an area that is no bigger than 30 feet by 30 feet. The secret is to keep trying spots until you find the fish.

Another misconception about any species of catfish is that they are only found on the bottom. In the dead of winter, when water temperatures are at their coldest, look for catfish to focus their feeding efforts higher in the water column on bright, sunny days.

Feeding upward is especially true in clear water. When sunfish species like bream, crappie and bass move up — especially around rock bluffs, dam

facings, steep rip-rap banks and anything that will absorb sunlight and heat the water — catfish are usually not far behind and will even suspend in the water below potential prey. In other words, when the bait comes up, so do the catfish.

One catfish species that remains consistently active in almost every body of water, even through the winter, are channel catfish.

One preferred bait during the winter is fresh-cut shad. It's also possible to use frozen shad that's been stored over the winter, but many anglers find that bigger shad baits do better for freezing than the smaller baits.

Fan cast the cut shad around deep areas and allow time for the scent — which moves slower in cold water — to bring the fish in.

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