

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION IN ANGLING FOR BLACK BASS

IT has only been during the last twenty-five years that black basses have become familiar, as game fishes, to anglers east of the Alleghany mountains, and only about forty-five years since the first black bass was planted in the waters of Eastern New York and the other Middle States. In the year 1853, a small number of them were brought from the Youghiogheny River in Western Pennsylvania, to Cumberland, Md., and primitively planted in the Baltimore and Ohio canal, from whence they found their way into the Potomac River, and that has since been the great stock reservoir for nearby eastern waters, particularly the Delaware, Susquehanna and Schuylkill Rivers. As early as 1825 the black bass found its way into the Hudson through the newly-opened Erie Canal, but attracted very little attention until recent years.

The habits of the bass (small-mouthed) are an interesting study from an angling standpoint, as they show peculiarities widely different from those of the ordinary river or lake fishes. They are certainly more gifted with resources to escape, when hooked, than many of the more lauded game fish, resorting to sulking at the bottom of the waters and then bracing, as it were, their pectoral fins between two stones and rapidly and strongly "jigging" or tugging at the line. When pulled from this position by main force, the only resource of the angler, they surge swiftly from side to side of the pool, seeking and often getting release by cutting the leader on the sharp corner of a submerged rock or by winding the line around a sunken snag.

THE first attempt to free themselves is shown in a leap into the air, sometimes as high as three feet, which is often repeated three or four times, shaking their entire body, not the head alone, as has been stated, in a frantic manner. The leap is frequently made as the fish rushes towards the angler, causing the line to slacken a condition which never occurs, to my knowledge, except when the Atlantic salmon, the ouananiche of Lake St. John, the rainbow trout, the tarpon and bonefish is hooked. Failing in the leap to escape, the black bass is apt to turn down stream, as if aware that the swift current will add strength to its efforts to escape. But the bass when exhausted comes to the net supine and helpless, unlike the trout which sometimes seems to be "playing possum," for that will often come inert to net of shore.

but when taken in the hand to unloose the hook, seems to be gifted with a second life as shown in its muscular contortions drawing the body into tense convulsions, knotting the muscles, as it were, and taking the strength of the angler's hand to hold it.

THE elect of the angling craft devote their outings to the capture of black bass with the artificial fly, choosing, knowingly, those that are tied on No. 4 hooks, and in a bunched or "palmer" fashion, commonly called "buzz" by the fraternity, which with a light fly-rod, a leader somewhat stronger than those used in trout fishing, a landing net and a single-action click reel, holding fifty yards of letter E waterproof enameled silk line, will usually meet all the tackle requirements. Thus equipped, the experienced fly fisherman seeks the pools and quiet reaches of the stream and the sedgy shore, among the grasses and lily pads of which the black bass are often found, particularly in the gloaming, chasing minnows, splashing, jumping and churning the waters into flecks of foam. At such times the black bass seldom turns tail upon the feathers, lightly thrown and delicately manipulated on the water, and when hooked on these shallows, he is more frightened and resists capture with more vigor than when fastened in the deeper pools.

Doubtless the ration of fly-fisherman for black bass to those who use other lures for them, mainly live baits, is not one in a thousand. This large disproportion can be easily accounted for. Of late years this fish in eastern waters has to a great extent shouldered out the trout as a popular game fish, primarily, no doubt, from the comparatively greater expense in reaching trout streams, the greater cost of trout tackle and the growing scarcity of trout in waters free to the public. As these adverse conditions grow, the facilities for fishing for black bass increase, for when black bass obtain a footing, particularly in fluvial waters, they stay there, seeking the upper reaches during the summer seasons for better feeding grounds, and on the approach of winter falling back into the lower and deeper waters for protection during their period of hibernation or semi-torpidity.

THE tackle in general use by the bait fisherman consists of a wooden rod, or split bamboo, seven to nine ounces in weight and eight to ten feet in length; one to two hundred feet (No. 9) of cuttyhunk line; a six to nine feet leader, a

multiplying reel and a supply of books, Nos. 4 to 10. The baits used vary with the locality fished, and consist of the so-called "lamp eels," which, by the by, are not eels at all, dobsons or helgramites, small catfish, crayfish, live or artificial minnows, grasshoppers, trolling spoons, and even cockroaches are said to be the most alluring of them all.

The method of the bait fisherman most frequently in use, is that of still fishing from a boat. The baited hook is thrown twenty to fifty feet outward, and a float can be used advantageously to keep the hook from sunken rocks or snags, but where a current exists, the advanced method is to allow the line to drift down stream from fifty to one hundred feet, where it is apt to remain oscillating slightly in midwater, care being taken that the hook does not catch on bottom obstructions, which can usually be prevented by keeping the line in motion. This adds also to the attractiveness of the lure.

THE black bass, as a rule, in a relatively quiet current, takes the live minnow bait by the head, moves off a few feet, then stops and turns the minnow crosswise in his mouth and turning it again swallows it as he moves off the second time. The accepted time to strike into the fish's mouth or gullet, as the case may be, is when he stops the second time, and a majority of anglers follow that course with more or less success, but the result is problematical in many cases. What a black bass is doing under water is a conundrum not yet solved to the satisfaction of experienced bass fishermen.

In trolling fifty to one hundred feet of line, regulated by the depth of water and bottom formation of the fishing swim, is payed out and the rod held at a right angle to the gunwale of the boat. The fish, as a rule, hooks itself, and the angler governs himself accordingly, the size and vigor of the fish determining the time in which it should be netted.

TOWARDS evening and even after dark it is well to order the boatman to keep the boat near shore, for during these hours the black bass are seeking minnows in shallow water. At midday and later on until 5 P.M., the fish are usually found in relatively deep water, particularly during the months of July and August. In this case, a lead of four to six ounces in weight is placed at the end of the line, and a gut leader, about three feet in length attached to the line, three to four feet above the lead. The boatman rows slowly and the

lead may be felt touching very gently the bottom, the baited hook on the gut leader trailing about two feet above the bottom. This is called "deep" or bottom trolling, and is very effective when searching for feeding grounds, old or new. It should be used by an angler unaccompanied by a guide, when visiting waters that he has never fished, as no surer method has been found to ascertain the feeding grounds of fish.

ONE of the saddest trials is the capture or purchase of the most alluring baits. If an opportunity to buy them occurs, one is apt to be charged an exorbitant price, sometimes as high as three dollars a hundred for live minnows, crayfish or "lamp eels," half or more of which are apt to die before the fishing day is over. For the writer, however, some of the most enjoyable hours are those passed in the capture of live baits. It fills up the off days or early morning hours, at which times the bass do not seem to be in a biting humor, and best of all, it will make one independent of the local bait peddler who, of all creatures, has the least conscience ament crime within the law. Live baits are easily obtained.

First, the so-called "lamper eel," which is not an eel, it belongs to a very low order of water animals; it has no bony skeleton, no gills, ribs or limbs, being a naked, eel-shaped creature with a sucker mouth, the lips of which are fringed with fine hairs. It inhabits the fresh waters of rivers and brooks and gets its living by attaching itself to other fishes, feeding upon them by scraping off the flesh with its rasp-like teeth. They are found usually in the mud close to the shores, and a shovel is the only tackle necessary to capture them. Dig deep and throw the mud upon the dry bank and search thoroughly through it with the hands for the wigglers. They are more slippery and agile than the eel, and of all live baits the most difficult to impale upon the hook; a dead one is not attractive to the bass, but very much so, to the bother of the angler, for the small sunfish and chubs.

The small catfishes which are favorite baits with many bass fishermen, bear several popular names such as "stone cats," "mad Toms," "black bullheads," "pouts," etc. They are found under the stones along the shores. Take a hammer with you and on seeing a stone with a shelving side, no matter how slight the angle, strike quickly and fiercely on its top; lift it up at once and you will find underneath one or more catfish, each from two to four inches long,

stunned and helpless; seize them quickly, avoiding touching the spine on their backs, as they recover and disappear almost in an instant. This bait is very tenacious of life and on a single one, as bait, as many as five black bass have been caught before the catfish died. This result, however, is, in a measure, owing to the fact that in many instances, the black bass, like many other fishes, when striking fiercely at a live bait, and sometimes even when they appear to have gently mouthed it, force the minnow from the hook several feet above it on the line or leader. A satisfactory angling diagnosis or explanation of this peculiar condition is yet to be made.

MANY fishermen prefer a crawfish or more properly crayfish, to any other live bait. It is a crustacean and is found under the stones near the shores of rivers and brooks, and frequently in lakes. It is well to use a small hand net of fine mesh to capture them, as the crayfish is quick in its movements. A better plan, however, is to place a bait of decaying flesh or animal garbage in a piece of net on the places they are known to frequent; they will gather around it in numbers.

The alcoholic preserved salt-water shrimp which is closely allied to the crayfish has been found very attractive to the black bass of Greenwood Lake, and doubtless would be in any other water.

The dobson or hellgramite, with its forty-seven *nom de plumes*, such as "devil," "clipper," "climber," "stone dippers," "gogglehoy," "horned devils," etc., is the water larva of a fly, somewhat resembling and closely allied to the "devil's needle" or "dragon fly," a large well-known lace-wing fly. It is also found under, above, just below and on the low water line of rivers and other waters of low temperature. Lift the stone quickly and seize the animal instanter, for it is a rapid mover and disappears in a trice. It has nearly as many legs as a centipede, with two nippers on the front of the head, with which it often seizes the hand of its captor, inflicting a harmless and small wound, the pain ceasing in a moment or two.

The live minnows used in taking black bass are of many species with many and varied local names for the same fish. The most common in use, and confusedly so, are generally known, as chub, shiner, dace, silver minnow, golden shiner, darter, etc. In this connection it is important to remember that black bass take more eagerly any live bait brought

from waters that are distant from its habitat. The most successful method of procuring minnows for baiting purposes is by the use of a seine, not less than fifteen feet in length and of very small mesh. Such devices as glass minnow traps or dip nets are not, as a rule, successful, although in some waters the former seems to be fairly effective. Old anglers who do not care to spend the entire day in fishing, and are not equipped with a seine as above described, delight in catching their minnows singly on an almost microscopic piece of worm placed on the point of a midge hook. On a shady shelving shore with a light rod and delicate tackle minnow fishing has its pleasures.

Grasshoppers, at certain seasons of the year, are most attractive bait for black bass. They usually abound and are easily caught with an insect net on the fields adjoining the fishing waters. The little green-backed frog is also used by some black bass fishermen. They are caught in hand nets, but the pursuit of them is often tedious and tiresome. They are very effective when used in "skittering." Skittering is simply casting live bait twenty to forty feet, first on one side, then on the other, as the boat moves forward, the bait being trailed on the surface of the water. Impaling either the grasshopper or the frog upon the hook is to many a repulsive act, hence the use of these lures is somewhat restricted among the craft.

When other live baits fail in supply, fishermen find in the large garden worms called "night walkers" an attractive bait for bass. Sometimes these worms are difficult to find, owing to a dry season or other causes.

CASTING FROM THE REEL.

IT is exceptional to find an eastern angler who casts a live lure "from the reel," although this method has been followed in the West for generations of the craft, long before Dr. Henshall, who did so much to make it known, published his instructive "Book of the Black Bass." It is essential that the line should be wound evenly upon the reel, that it may be cast without overrunning or "catching" as it runs out, and fishing-tackle makers have attempted with more or less success, to meet this difficulty. A recent examination of the Shakespeare reel, impels me to commend it in this respect; its mechanism approaches closely to perfection in the evenness with which the line is wound upon the reel.

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