



Newsletter for the south Florida canal and urban pond angler

Our Purpose: To identify excellent south Florida freshwater fishing opportunities and to provide urban anglers with relevant information that will enhance the quality of their outdoor experience.

**Site profile:
Lake Osborne**

One of the most accessible fishing locales in Palm Beach County, Lake Osborne has also remained one of the County’s *best* fishing destinations over the years. Running from Lake Worth Road south to Hypoluxo Road, the site provides 275 acres of angling, and this is the time of year when much of that fishing is at its best.

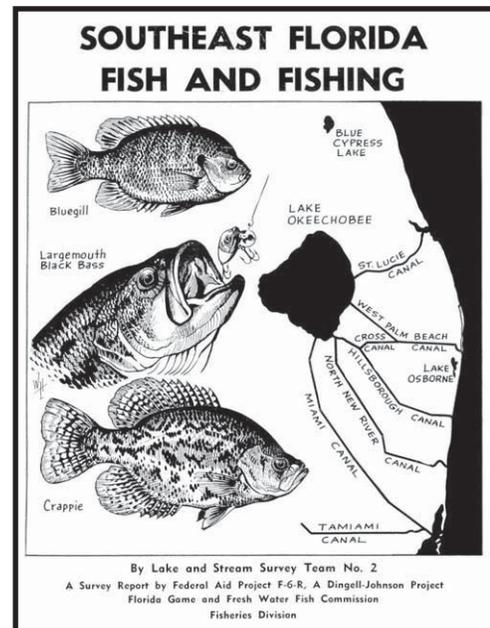
A FWC public fishing report from 1960 stated that Lake Osborne “offers some fine

fishing,” and rated largemouth bass and bluegill as “abundant.” The report stated, however, that fishing pressure was lower than expected for such a good lake, and cited the likely cause as heavy use by boaters and water skiers. That trend remains true today fifty years later, with many of the serious anglers on the lake targeting weekdays.

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Some things—including great fishing—have not changed much on Lake Osborne since this 1960 FWC fishing report.

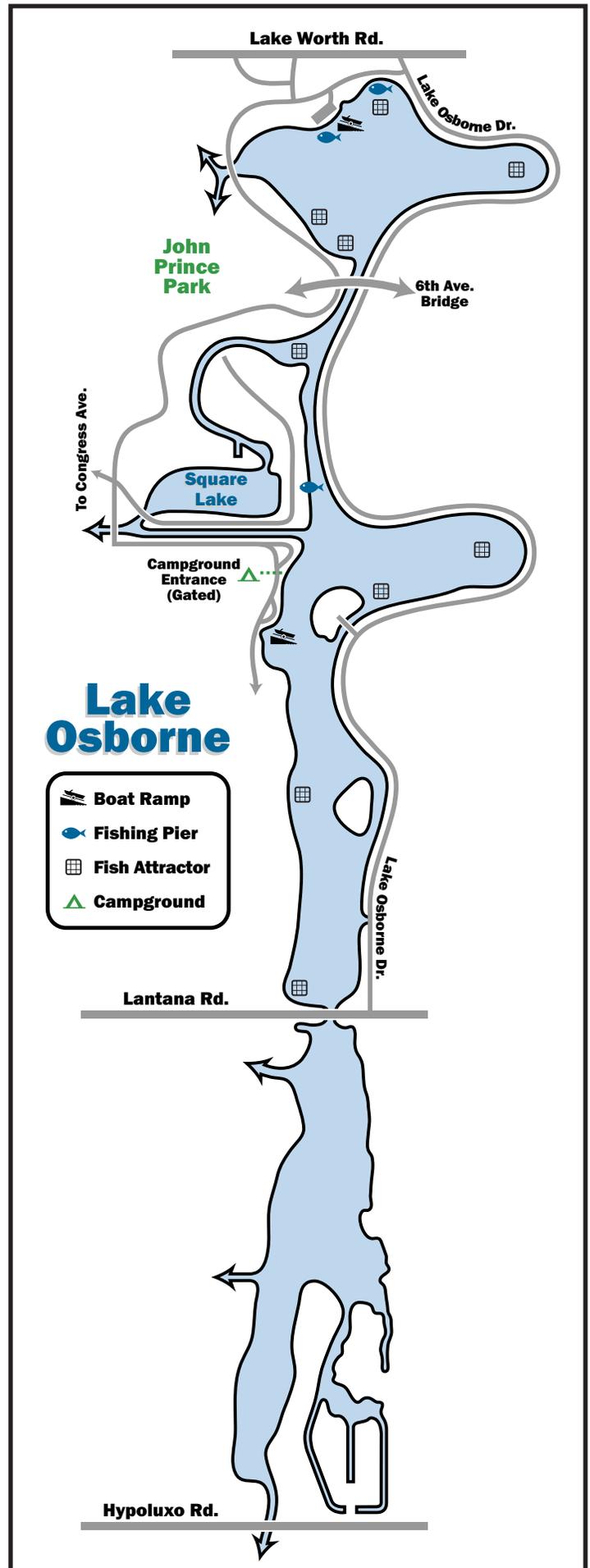
Largemouth bass are still abundant here, with a good size distribution of fish up to eight pounds available. The key to finding the bass is to find the vegetation, with the fish often located near hydrilla. Ongoing control ef-

forts make the amount of hydrilla in the system variable, however. If none can be located then numerous vegetation restoration sites, created through coordination between FWC and **Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department**, also harbor plenty of bass. Bass numbers are currently low in the just-restored Square Lake site, but this area is expected to provide excellent bass fishing in the very near future. The many deeper holes and channels in the lake also make good places for locating bass. Wherever you find them, Osborne largemouths respond well to all standard bass lures; if you're using bait, live shiners or shad—both available in the lake—are excellent.

Sunfish angling is good year-round, and excellent populations of bluegill and redear sunfish are present. These panfish are caught throughout the system, but sandy areas near seawalls can be especially good. The Square Lake restoration site already harbors excellent numbers of large sunfish. Live worms, crickets or grass shrimp make excellent baits, while tiny jigs, spinners or flies can also provide good results.

Crappie fishing improves as the weather cools. All of the marked fish attractors placed by FWC, particularly those adjacent to deep water, will produce “specks.” Small jigs or live Missouri minnows are the lure and bait of choice. If you don't find fish right away, keep moving and fishing at different depths until successful. A depth finder can be very helpful here.

Sunshine bass are a “bonus” fish available in Osborne, thanks to stocking by FWC. This hybrid of a striped bass and a white bass can't reproduce, so FWC must stock annually to maintain a population. As with crappie, fishing is best during the cooler part of the year. These open-water rovers prefer shad or other fish as their primary forage, so such baits or minnow imitations will be the way to catch them. Curiously enough, however, they are also partial to saltwater shrimp and fishing this bait on the bottom can also produce some



A map and brochure for the Osborne-Ida Chain of Lakes is available upon request via the contact information on the front of this newsletter.



nice catches. Their open-water ways usually make a boat necessary for pursuing them, but they can be ambushed from shore when passing under the 6th Avenue bridge. During the rest of the year, the deepest holes in the lake are where you'll be able to put some "sunshine" on the end of your line.

For the angler who considers the lawn chair almost as important a piece of fishing equipment as the rod, nice-sized **channel catfish** can be found here as well. Chicken or beef livers, as well as commercial "stink baits," will not go ignored. Any area adjacent to a deep hole or channel should produce fish. Most catfish anglers will set out a couple of rods to watch. Bigger fish can grow wary, so use little or no weight. Using circle hooks can help increase the number of solid hook-ups and landed fish.

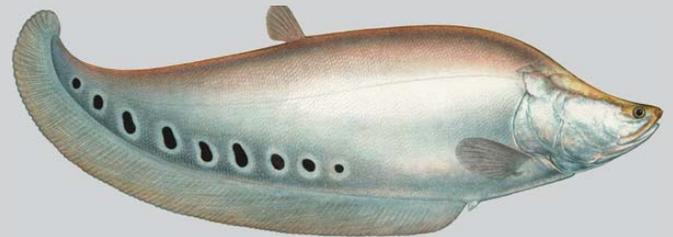
One thing that *has* changed since that 1960 fishing report is the role exotic or non-native fishes (from another country) now play in the angler's catch. The **butterfly peacock** or **peacock bass**, the only *legally* introduced reproducing exotic in the state, has surprised many by maintaining a stable population in Lake Osborne despite some cold winters and is becoming increasingly popular with anglers here. This species was introduced by FWC in the mid-eighties in order to control another exotic species, the illegally-released spotted tilapia. For bass anglers giving peacocks a try, the main things to keep in mind are to leave the plastic worms at home, stick with smaller lures (up to 3"), and crank them much faster than you're used to. Rapalas, Rat-L-Traps, and a variety of other lures including topwaters work well. **Although the daily bag limit is 2 peacock bass, only one of which may be 17 inches or longer in total length, a strong catch-and-release ethic is recommended.**

A variety of exotic panfish, all of them illegal introductions, can also be found in Lake Osborne. The most likely candidate for the rod is the **Mayan cichlid**. This fish loves wood, and can be found around fallen branches or shoreline stumps in addition to most of the places you might expect to catch sunfish. **Oscar** are also present, along with **spotted tilapia** and **blue tilapia**. Pretend you're hunting for sunfish and you'll have no trouble finding these, except that the oscar sticks much deeper in vegetation

than the other species. All of them might show up on a hook baited with a red wiggler or cricket, although the two tilapia are less cooperative than the Mayan or oscar. The same applies to lures, with small jigs being deadly for Mayan and oscar but generally ignored by tilapia.

Another non-native fish found in Lake Osborne, and arguably our oddest-looking exotic species, is the **clown knifefish**. This one is primarily a fish eater and can be taken on live shiners or shad as well as minnow imitations such as Rapalas and Rat-L-Traps. Knifefish can be found following under schools of shad, and just south of the Lantana Road bridge has been reported as an especially good area to try for them.

Note: Non-native fishes, except for peacock bass and triploid grass carp, must not be returned to the water, and should be consumed or disposed of properly. The FWC requests particular attention regarding this in the case of clown knifefish.



Clown knifefish

For help identifying some of these exotic fishes, check the following link:

**[Myfwc.com/DOCS/FRESHWATER/
FRESHWATER_EXOTIC_FISH_IDENTIFIER.PDF](https://myfwc.com/DOCS/FRESHWATER/FRESHWATER_EXOTIC_FISH_IDENTIFIER.PDF)**

Lake Osborne is conveniently located. The portion of the lake north of Lantana Road is bounded by John Prince Park, which has entrances off of Congress Avenue (south of Lake Worth Road) and off of Lake Worth Road itself (east of Congress Avenue). Lake Osborne Drive off Lake Worth Road follows the lake shoreline all the way south to Lantana Road, and parking is available along much of that stretch.

A double lane concrete boat ramp in good condition and the longest shoreline access of any other lake in the area combine with the urban locale to make Lake Osborne one of the most accessible sites around. It is definitely rare to find fishing of this quality so easy to

get to—how many other spots can you think of where a chance at an eight-pound bass will only carve an hour out of your evening?

Fish biology: “Think like a fish!”



“Think like a fish!” How many times have you heard or read that statement? But the underlying question is, “Do fish really think?” Freshwater anglers might be slightly embarrassed to find that they’re pitting their intelligence against an animal whose brain would be more evenly matched in the ring, size for size, with a peanut. An average largemouth bass, for example, will have a brain weighing well under a third of an ounce.

Let’s compare that to you and me. In the mid-1800s, scientist Paul Broca examined over 400 human brains and found that those of males averaged just under 3 pounds in weight, while those of females averaged a little over 2.5 pounds. But before any of you male anglers say something that results in your spending the night on the couch, note that an important relationship in brain size is the size of the brain *in relation to the size of the body*. This puts males and females on a more level playing field. Put another way, your brain, whether you’re male or female, makes up about 2.26% of your body weight (the largemouth bass brain makes up only about 0.40% of it’s body weight). For comparison with a few other members of the animal kingdom, check the chart to the right. Of course, brain weight will vary from individual to individual and between species. But it helps to explain why man is the dominant species on our planet, and why dolphins and certain monkeys are considered to be among the most intelligent members of the animal kingdom.

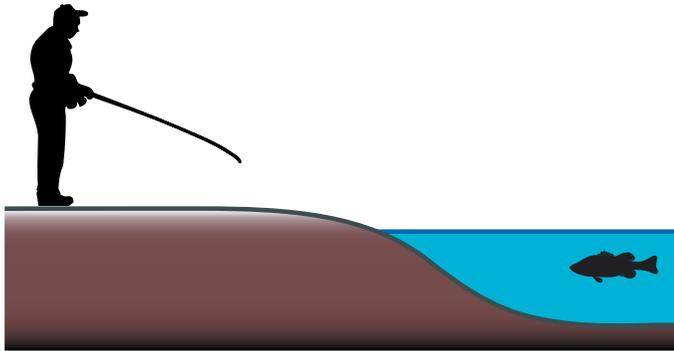
Species	Brain percent of body weight
 Man	2.26%
 Monkey	1.43%
 Dolphin	1.06%
 Cat	0.91%
 Squirrel	0.67%
 Frog	0.56%
 Bass	0.40%

The percentage of body weight accounted for by the brain in various organisms.

Sticking strictly with fish, a pike with a brain that weighs only 0.08% of it’s body weight wouldn’t be able to keep up with a bass intellectually, while the unusual elephantnose fish from Africa would be at the head of the class with a brain that’s a whopping 3.1% of its body weight. But wait—that’s an even higher percentage than humans! So why aren’t elephantnose fish ruling the world in some bizarre angler version of “Planet of the Apes”? For starters, they don’t grow larger than fourteen inches. And although brain size compared to body size can be important, there’s a point where a larger brain, regardless of body size, is even more important. In this case, the human brain wins the match handily at 2.5 to 3 pounds in weight, compared to the brain of the elephantnose fish at less than half an ounce.

But that’s still not the whole story. Some larger animals have brains that dwarf yours and mine. For example, an elephant’s brain weighs more than ten pounds, and the sperm whale can lay claim to the largest brain on the planet at over fifteen pounds. Whales are considered to be fairly intelligent, and elephants

have that mythical reputation for never forgetting—but are they smarter than we are based on brain size? Rest easy: what matters in these cases is how much of the brain is dedicated to cerebral (or “thinking”) functions as opposed to simple muscle control. Much larger animals like whales and elephants also need to have a much higher proportion of their brains dedicated to muscle coordination and movement; when it comes to reasoning functions, the human brain is still the undisputed winner.



Man versus fish: Is it a fair fight?

Returning to fish from our slight detour, then, we have to conclude that fish aren’t much of an intellectual match for man. So why can a bass be so wonderfully challenging to catch? The truth is that we’ve been comparing apples and oranges. When a man squares off against a fish, what gives that man an advantage is indeed intelligence. He can construct a rod and line and lure, and understands where a bass lives and what it likes to eat. What the bass has on its side isn’t intelligence, but a finely-tuned wariness for avoiding predators, and survival instincts that tell it what looks natural and what doesn’t in its own familiar environment. In the end, that’s the real battle: intelligence versus instinct. So if you literally try to “think like a fish,” you won’t actually be doing much thinking. But if you try to *understand* that fish have limitations in thinking but advantages in instincts, you are indeed on the road to understanding and catching more fish!

Quarterly fishing forecast

Everglades Water Conservation Areas (Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade Counties):

While there are indications of better-than-average winter fishing this year, consideration must be given to the season. High water levels and cool surface temperatures will continue through much of this period. Spawning bass should be

observable along the canal edges and in the marsh. Success can be had sight fishing for these fish by those that choose to target them. High water does allow anglers to utilize the numerous marsh access trails in WCA 3 off Alligator Alley and the L-67A Canal to pursue bass in the marsh, also known as “the flats.” Anglers should also be able to gain access to marsh fishing in areas of WCA 2, although no marsh access trails are maintained there. Fishing in this typically dense cover requires weedless presentations. Floating soft plastics, such as trick worms or soft jerk baits, are good choices. Alternatively, pitch large Texas-rigged plastics or a jig-and-pig into openings in the vegetation. **Please remember that displaying a 10x12 inch orange flag 10 feet above the bottom of the hull is required for all vessels entering the marsh.** Anglers seeking bass in the canals should also consider casting large deep-running crankbaits, or live baits. Choices such as shiners or chubs fished near deep holes, water control structures, or canal junctions can provide consistent catches of larger fish; in fact, during January and February this is probably the best bet. Anglers seeking panfish should probe deeper pockets along the vegetation with crickets or worms, moving frequently until fish are located. Those preferring lures should make long casts with beetle spins or tiny crankbaits parallel to shoreline vegetation.

Osborne-Ida chain-of-lakes (Palm Beach County):

This is the time of year anglers in south Florida can expect largemouth bass to move to shallow areas as the spawning peak arrives (January/February/March). Fish the outside edges of vegetation with topwater baits in the early mornings and crankbaits or plastic worms later in the day. Areas along any piers or seawalls will probably hold fish at this time as waters start to warm. Other spots to try for largemouth are the deep holes located in the northern and middle sections of the lake during cooler days. Fish the holes with live shiners, free-lined or with a small split shot. This technique is also a prime producer for sunshine bass that become active at this time of year. Trolling slowly or targeting active schools near vegetation lines at daybreak seem to produce the best catches. Another method of catching sunshines is to fish on the bottom with cut shrimp. The Sixth Avenue pass, at daybreak or just before sunset, is a good place to try this technique. Black crappie (speck) fishing will

be good around the fish attractors using live minnows or jigs. Channel catfish, bream, and Mayan cichlid can be caught from shore using chicken liver, live worms, crickets, and small jigs or beetle spins.

Metropolitan Canals:

Between October and November 2009, fish in 12 southeast Florida canals were stunned with electricity, netted, weighed, measured, and released unharmed back into the waterway from which they were collected. The overall electrofishing catch rate of largemouth bass was 22 fish over ten-inches-long every hour. A total of 389 largemouth bass were counted from 12 canals.

The populations of butterfly peacock in several well-known Miami-Dade canals are doing extremely well despite a great deal of fishing pressure, a testament to the good conservation ethic of catch and release practiced by many urban canal anglers for butterfly peacock and largemouth bass. This year the electrofishing catch rate of butterfly peacock larger than ten-inches-long in ten Miami-Dade and Broward county canals averaged 25 fish every hour. A total of 369 butterfly peacock were counted and released from these canals.

The electrofishing catch rate of bream (bluegill, redear sunfish, Mayan cichlid, and jaguar guapote) was 37 fish over six-inches-long every hour.

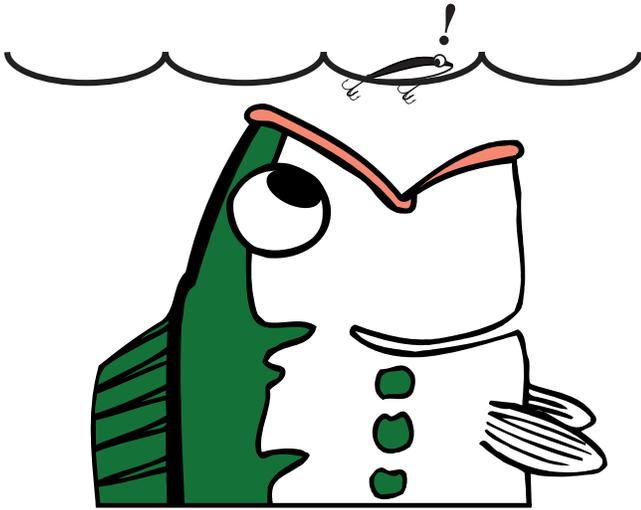
These results are from an annual electrofishing survey designed to monitor sportfish populations in urban canals in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. Each canal is sampled for approximately eight hours and based on these findings, fisheries biologists at the Non-Native Fish Laboratory in Boca Raton predict that anglers will enjoy excellent catches of largemouth bass, butterfly peacock, and bream this quarter. The recent survey produced some interesting facts:

- Southeast Florida urban canals produce good numbers of quality largemouth bass but have few “lunkers” over 6-8 pounds.
- Some of the best canals for largemouth bass were the Parkline (L-31W) and Snake Creek (C-9) canals in Miami-Dade County, North New River (G-15) and Cypress Creek (C-14) canals in Broward County, and West Palm Beach (C-51), and Boynton (C-16) canals in Palm Beach County.

- Some of the best canals for butterfly peacock were the Tamiami (C-4), Cutler Drain (C-100), Snapper Creek (C-2) and Biscayne (C-8) canals.
- The best canals for largemouth bass and butterfly peacock combined were Snake Creek (C-9) and Parkline (L-31W) in Miami-Dade County. Low catches of butterfly peacock in north Broward and Palm Beach counties were likely the result of low water temperature related kills experienced early in the year. These periodic kills were predicted and expected when butterfly peacock were originally stocked and a few consecutive mild winters will likely enable them to bounce back to historic levels.
- One canal yielded largemouth bass over eight-pounds, five canals yielded largemouth bass over five pounds, and seven canals yielded bass over four pounds. The largest largemouth bass collected this year weighed 8.1 pounds and measured 23.8 inches.
- The highest number of largemouth bass were shocked in the West Palm Beach (C-51) Canal, and the Tamiami (C-4) Canal had the most butterfly peacock.
- Four canals yielded butterfly peacock over four pounds, and three canals yielded five-pound butterfly peacock. The largest butterfly peacock collected this year weighed 5.8 pounds and measured 21.7 inches.
- Some of the best bream canals were Biscayne (C-8) and Snake Creek (C-9) canals in Miami-Dade County, Cypress Creek (C-14) and North New River (G-15) in Broward Canal, and Boynton (C-16) and West Palm Beach (C-51) canals in Palm Beach County.
- Snook and tarpon are found in many southeast Florida canals and the highest numbers of these sportfish were observed in the Tamiami (C-4), Snake Creek (C-9), and North New River (G-15) canals.

FWC is working on a comprehensive management plan for black bass in Florida and is seeking public input. To see a draft of the plan and PowerPoint presentation visit MyFWC.com/Fishing and select **Black Bass Management Plan**. You'll also have the opportunity to fill out a survey to provide the FWC with more information about what you think is important to having quality bass fishing in Florida.

Staying on top (Part 1)



I don't actually remember the very first fish I caught on a topwater lure. But I do remember, vividly, many of those that followed. There are several reasons why topwater fishing can produce memorable experiences. Fish caught right at the surface often put on more aerial acrobatics than ones dredged up off the bottom. And you can usually see your lure at all times, giving you a more precise awareness of when it's moving past promising structure than you usually have when using a plastic worm or crankbait. But the biggest and best reason is being able to actually see the fish strike, rather than just feeling a couple of taps on your line. I've experienced close-up topwater strikes so explosive they literally had me backing up the bank. This is not a technique for the faint-hearted! For me, topwater fishing is the most exciting kind of all.

Basic principles—Regarding gear, your usual fishing outfit should do fine. I do like a stiffer rod for solid hook-sets, and a longer rod makes it easier for me to work a “walk-the-dog” type lure, but you don't really need a specialized outfit for topwater fishing.

As with any type of fishing, paying attention is absolutely critical. Although I've actually had bass run around with a plastic worm for nearly half a minute before I realized it, the duration of topwater strikes are measured in fractions of seconds. I still painfully recall the morning I was slowly working my largest Hula Popper in a quiet cove. The morning had been unproductive, and I'd just about decided the lure

was really too big. I glanced away for a second, and when I looked back my lure was gone. It had been replaced by the boil you might get if you'd just dropped a cinder block in the water. Before I could close my slackened jaw, my lure popped back up—without the fish attached, of course. Pay attention!

One small detail of topwater fishing demands special mention: Don't set the hook too soon. Use the same timing you're used to when fishing crankbaits or other hard lures, and you might end up with your surface lure flying right back at you. Topwater anglers might tend to react when they *see* the strike instead of when they *feel* it, but pausing slightly before setting the hook will result in more hookups when fishing on top. This appears to be particularly true when using the Zara Spook (next page), but only experience will tell you how long to pause with specific lures.

You'll also need an extra dose of patience if you're going to spend much time topwater fishing. Many floating lures will spend most of their time sitting still if you're working them properly. In fact, most of my strikes with such lures come while the lure is resting rather than moving. A general rule of thumb is not to twitch or pop a lure until all the ripples from the last movement have subsided. In fact, many anglers do the same with any floating lure when they first cast it out, before beginning their retrieve. Fish, apparently, are very patient, and to catch them consistently you'll have to be too.

To every thing there is a season, and that includes topwater fishing. I've usually done best with topwaters in the spring, though they can be very effective year-round. Weather conditions also play a role; you'll do best when there's not too much surface disturbance on the water. If it's windy and choppy, it's probably time to reach for the worms and crankbaits. If the water is mirror smooth, start off with a subtle topwater such as a floater-diver minnow. If there's moderate wave action, it might take a large popper to attract the fish's attention. If the water surface is smooth enough but the water itself turbid, try something that puts out vibrations for fish to home in on such as a propeller bait or buzzbait.



Floater-diver minnow

—This was actually the first topwater lure

I was introduced to, and the missing “first topwater fish” from my memories likely

fell prey to one. Though I’ve caught primarily largemouth bass using this method, it also works on larger sunfish. While everyone is familiar with cranking a floating Rapala or Rebel minnow for bass or other species, these lures are also very productive on the surface. My personal favorite as a light-tackle angler is a silver number 5 Rapala original floater (use larger sizes if using heavier gear). I usually twitch it or crank it for a foot or two underwater, then let it pop up to the surface and wait for the ripples to die before repeating. This supposedly imitates a wounded minnow; regardless of what the fish might think it is, the technique is extremely productive and is perfect near shallow cover or structure. You can also twitch it continually along the surface without pauses, but I’ve had better luck with the previous technique.



Popper

—The venerable Arbogast Hula Popper and Rebel Pop-R are probably

the best examples for bass in this category.

This is the slowest method of topwater fishing, covering the least amount of real estate for the time invested. However, popper fishing for bass can be pretty effective at times. For the panfish angler, various brands of flyrod poppers are available and work well (Betts is probably the most widely known manufacturer). The best action of this type will be had if you can locate a large cluster of beds. Sunfish often make a distinct popping sound when hitting topwaters.

Zara Spook—This lure is at the other extreme from the ruckus-raising buzzbait (which we’ll cover next issue). When I’m fishing heavily pressured waters and wary bass, I’ll tie on a Heddon Zara Spook or similar lure. It takes time and concentration to learn the technique of rhythmically twitching the lure back and



forth (“walking the dog”), but it’s worth it. I’ve had

the Spook produce fish when nothing else worked, both in fresh

and salt water. I do a lot of ultra-light fishing and use tiny sizes of the Zara Spook, but find them harder to work properly than the larger, heavier versions. However, they can all be pretty productive if used correctly. Other manufacturers have similar lures of more recent vintage, including the Rapala Skitter Walk and the Rebel Jumpin’ Minnow.



“Walking the dog” takes time and practice to learn but will yield big results.

To properly work a Zara Spook or similar lure, twitch your rod tip methodically back and forth. Your goal is to get the lure swinging rhythmically *left-right-left* as you retrieve it. I’ve found that a longer rod is helpful, since it provides a longer “twitch” than a shorter rod. This will also help reduce wrist fatigue, but even so this lure requires some effort to keep it going and you will definitely notice it after a while. Larger sizes of the Spook, which are heavier and have more inertia to make them swing, are easier to work. Smaller, lighter sizes will require more wrist action on your part. Aficionados of the Zara Spook will tell you that a very consistent, regular action will draw the most strikes. And remember with this lure in particular to pause slightly before setting the hook.



Propeller bait

—The Heddon Torpedo and Smithwick Devil’s Horse are two classic examples of this lure type, also referred to as “prop baits.”

The smaller Torpedo does well on bass and sunfish (ultra-light versions are available), while the large Devil’s Horse is a big-bass lure. These can be reeled with a steady retrieve that keeps the propellers spinning, worked the same way with twitches thrown in, or fished with a stop-and-go retrieve with rests in between.