

Bass tougher to catch — but bigger

By Lem Mese
outdoors writer

Bass anglers are catching fewer fish, but bigger ones. And that's the way they like it.

Those twin conclusions came from a survey conducted last year by the State Department of Natural Resources of anglers at Pontiac and Kent Lakes in Oakland County and Whitmore Lake in Washtenaw County.

This report came out of the file as I contemplated that Saturday is opening day for bass fishing in Michigan. In fact, my fishing partner, C.O. Jones, climbing out of our boat at Kent Lake, was part of the survey of 862 bass anglers last year.

THE "LUNKER mentality" seemed strong, according to the survey results. Here's what DNR reported:

- "52 percent of the bass anglers would rather catch one large bass than four small but legal size bass."
- If there were a catch-and-release fishing prior to the season opener, "58 percent of the bass anglers would approve delaying opening of bass season from late May to July 1 in order to increase the size of bass available for harvest."
- Michigan increased the size limit on bass from 10 inches to 12 inches in 1976, and the result has pleased anglers. "Fisher men reported catching more bass but keeping fewer as a result of the size limit change. However, most anglers were happy with the new regulation, citing that though they were keeping fewer bass, they were catching more large bass."
- Anglers must catch two to six bass for every one they can keep.
- One has to hope they handled the throw-backs carefully. Handling alone can hurt a fish unless the angler uses his hands to avoid damaging the fish's protective slime. And then there's the damage the hook does.
- THE POPULARITY of the bass hasn't hurt its numbers. Compared to 30 years ago, the pressure on popular bass waters has increased 200 percent, DNR said.

outdoors

Despite the pressure, one bass population contained 22 percent more fish 10 inches or larger now than 30 years ago.

Of all the anglers stopped, 77 percent reported they fish for bass in Michigan at least once a year, and 27 percent of those said they usually release their catch.

That, at any rate, was what the bass anglers said. Fishermen, however, can be like politicians, saying one thing to sound macho but really preferring to do another.

IF BASS is your prey this weekend, you ought to know the difference between the two major species — largemouth and smallmouth.

Look at the side of the fish's head and draw an imaginary vertical line directly down from the eye. If the lip extends behind the line, it's a largemouth. If the lip doesn't go back that far, it's a smallmouth.

Largemouths tend to be greenish in color and have a black horizontal stripe along the body. Smallmouths like cold water with rocky or gravel bottoms. Smallmouths strike artificial baits hard, but they take their time with nightcrawlers. Let the fish run before you get the hook.

THE IRISH Setter Club of Michigan will have an all-day event Monday, and you needn't be a member of attend.

"Doggie Day" will be at the Silo course in the Highland State Recreation Area. It's south of Livingston Road and west of Milford Road in Highland Township.

President Jerry Mike (541-4928) says to pack a picnic lunch, bring water for your dog and enjoy these events:

- 9 a.m. — Field demonstration and competition for novice owners and dogs.
- 10 a.m. — Obedience demonstration followed by judging in these classes: Sub-novice (on leash), novice, open and utility.
- 1 p.m. — Conformation demonstration followed by judging, both puppies and adult dogs (no show-pointed dogs).

STONY CREEK Metropark northeast of Rochester has three Memorial Day weekend nature center programs.

In "Friday Night Live" at 8 p.m., naturalist Roger Bajorek will lead a night walk to discover the nocturnal world.

In "Voices of the Night" at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, naturalist Bill Thomas will lead a tramp to a pond, home of frogs and toads.

And in "What's Bugging You?" at 10 a.m. Sunday, Thomas will show where to find creepy crawlies and the beneficial things they do for us.

All programs are free, but register in advance by calling the nature center at 781-4621. Vehicle admission to the park is \$2 or \$7 for a season pass.

IF KENSINGTON is your favorite metropark — as it is for folks near I-96 — you can practically spend the weekend at the nature center.

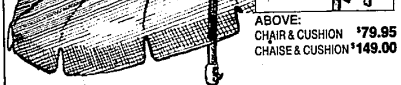
In "Animal Problems: Mammals" at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, naturalist Bob Hotelling will tell about the problems caused by raising and releasing orphan animals, particularly raccoons. His 90-minute program will cover diet, handling, attitude and bites.

In "Music of Spring," a family nature walk at 10 a.m. Sunday, naturalist Mark Soabo will make stops along the trail and interpret spring with the use of guitar music.

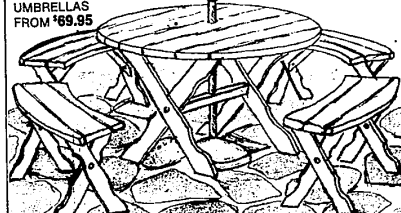
All are free, but register in advance by calling the park office at 685-1551. Vehicle admission to the park is \$2 or \$7 for the season.

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