

Fishing pro teaches tricks to catching walleye

BY BILL PARKER

Jon Bondy was bundled up like an Eskimo when Dave Hank of Livonia and I met him at the Wyandotte Marina for a fishing trip. And he wasn't alone in his attire. Hank wore a snowmobile suit and I was wearing coveralls beneath a Field & Stream duck coat. We all wore boots, gloves and a hat, and appeared ready for a day out on the ice. The problem was we were going spring walleye fishing on the Detroit River.

Michigan residents know all too well about the moody personality of Mother Nature here in the spring. One day she's warm and bright, the next, nasty and cold. We happened to catch her on an off day last week and ventured out under cover of clouds and snow in 25 mph winds.

"Could we really catch fish in this wintry weather?"
"At this point, they're 75 percent spawned out so now they're

starting to bite the jig pretty good," said Bondy, a professional fishing guide who has lived on the river for the past 18 years. "They're trying to hold on to fat reserves but because they burn a lot of fat during spawning."

Walleyes spawn in the spring, and it is estimated that upward of one million fish venture up the Detroit River in search of gravel beds on which to spawn.

"You can catch them here into mid-June," Bondy said. The preferred technique for catching spring walleyes on the Detroit River is vertical jigging. Bondy tips lead-headed jigs with a short (three inch) natural colored worm and a minnow. The offering is then lowered into the water and jigged within 12 inches of the bottom.

"Walleye will be right on the bottom," Bondy said. "and yet have to keep your bait in the strike zone."

When we arrived at one of Bondy's favorite spots, just upstream from Mud Island, we lowered our baits and began drifting downstream. Within minutes Bondy was bringing a fish to the boat. Moments later I felt a single, distinctive tug on my line and quickly set the hook.

Nothing.
I rebaited and tried again. A little while later I had another hit. A quick line set and...nothing.

"Tricky little buggers," I thought to myself.

Spring walleyes don't normally hit with a vengeance, but their strikes are distinct and certainly detectable. The key is to hone your reflexes to set the hook immediately because they strike like a flyweight fighter - move in, strike quickly, move out.

Moments later, Hank landed a nice 18-inch walleye, then another a little while later. I got another hit, set the hook...nothing.

I considered all the excuses, but none seemed appropriate. The snow got in my eyes...My reflexes are dampened because of this cold weather...Must have been a snag...Oh, I'm experimenting with fishing with a bare hook.

Bondy said there are four key elements to fishing the river - line, jig, motor and presentation. He suggests anglers use six-pound test monofilament line.

"Anything heavier and you won't get the hits, and anything lighter will break off too easy," he said.

For jigs, Bondy prefers Sticker jigs, by Stopper Lures in Hastings.

"For starters they have an ultra sharp mustad point with a very sharp tip," Bondy said. "Walleyes have bony mouths and you need a sharp hook to get a good set."

"I can't agree more," I thought to myself as yet another walleye swiped my bait.

The other reason Bondy likes the Sticker jig is because of its oval shape. "They seem to go through the river current better than a ball jig," he said.

The third necessity is a good trolling motor. The key to successful jigging is a vertical presentation and to achieve that you must keep the boat at the same speed as the current.

"It's called vertical jigging for a reason," Bondy said. "If it's on an angle and not vertical you can fish all day and you won't catch a fish."

The final component is to keep a tight line while keeping your bait in the strike zone.

Once you have the equipment and technique down you need to find a productive place to fish. You can accomplish this like a lot of folks do by simply watching where other anglers are fishing. Or you can venture out on your own.

"Get a good map and look for breaks," Bondy said. "A lot of

people go out and just start drifting. They'll probably pick up an occasional fish, but they don't realize that if they would just follow the structure in the river they would catch a lot more fish."

We ended up with 10 "enter" walleyes ranging up to 20 inches in length. Not bad for about three hours of fishing on a cold, snowy and windy April morning. Thanks to the graciousness of Bondy and Hank, we all took some fish home for the dinner table.

If you're interested in taking a trip for walleyes on the Detroit River call Bondy at (519) 948-2308.

(Bill Parker writes a weekly outdoor column for the Observer & Eccentric. Newspapers, hunters and anglers are urged to report their success. Questions and comments are also encouraged. Send information to: Bill Parker, c/o Outdoors, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.)

OUTDOOR CALENDAR

ACTIVITIES

OAKLAND COUNTY SPORTFISHING

The Oakland County Sportfishing Association meets at 7:30 p.m. the third Wednesday of every month at Santa Rita Hall, 1985 Cass Lake Road, Keego Harbor. Call (248) 693-4389 or visit the club's web site at <http://go.to/ocsa> for information.

DOWNRIVER BASS ASSN.

The Downriver Bass Association, a non-tournament bass club, meets at 6:30 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Gander Mountain (14100 Pardee Road) in Taylor. For more information, call Ron Fodor at (734) 676-2863.

DETROIT AREA STEELHEADERS

Detroit Area Steelheaders Inc. membership meetings are held the last Tuesday of each month at Knights of Columbus, St. Pius X, 6177 Chicago Road, in Warren. The public is welcome. More information can be obtained by calling Ed Wilcox at (810) 767-7365 or club President Ray Banbury at (810) 598-0310.

METRO-WEST STEELHEADERS

Metro-West Steelheaders meets at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month in the cafeteria at Garden City High School. Call Dominic Liparoti at (248) 476-5027 for more information.

MICHIGAN FLY FISHING

The Michigan Fly Fishing Club

meets at 7:30 p.m. the first and third Wednesdays of each month at Livonia Clarenceville Middle School, located on Middlebelt Road between Seven and Eight Mile roads. Call (248) 478-1494.

FOUR SEASONS

The Four Seasons Fishing Club meets 7:30-9:30 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month at the Civic Park Senior Center, 16218 Farmington Road. Call Jim Kudej at (734) 591-0843.

HURON VALLEY STEELHEADERS

The Huron Valley Steelheaders meets the third Thursday of each month at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 27600 Hall Road, Flat Rock. Call Carroll White at (734) 285-0843 for more information.

SOLAR

The School for Outdoor Leadership, Adventure and Recreation (SOLAR), a non-profit organization interested in promoting the appreciation of outdoor activities, meets at 7:30 p.m. on the third Tuesday of each month at the Colony Hall in Southfield. Call (248) 988-6658.

CLINTON RIVER BASS 'N' RATS

The recently organized Clinton River Bass 'N' Rats meets the first Monday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at the Gander Mountain Lodge. Call (810) 247-8900 for direction and information.

3-D ARCHERY SHOOT

The Linden Sportsman Club will hold a 3-D Archery Shoot on Sunday, May 6. The club opens

at 9 a.m. and the registration stops at 3 p.m. Cost for adults to shoot is \$8, with discounts for members of sporting organizations and for younger shooters. Kids 11 years of age and younger shoot for free, but they must be accompanied by an adult. Kids 12-17 shoot for \$5. For more information or directions to the club, call Pat at (248) 576-6671. On the day of the shoot call the club directly at (810) 735-5822.

METROPARKS

BIRDWATCHING

Birdwatchers can participate in an international bird census by counting birds at Kensington

and Oakwoods metroparks on Saturday, May 12. Interpreters at Oakwoods and Kensington expect to have more than 60 species of birds identified at the parks during the count. A "Spring Bird Count" is scheduled for 7 a.m. at the Kensington Nature Center. Bring binoculars to help census Kensington's migrant and resident birds as part of the North American Bird Migration Count. Experienced leaders will guide each group. Pre-registration is required. For more information, call 1-800-477-3178. The "North American Bird Migration Count" at Oakwoods near Flat Rock is set for 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Pre-registration is required. Call (734) 782-3956.

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