

## Fall Fishing

The Fishing Club article in the October 2019 edition of the “Plantation Living” newsletter includes the following paragraph: “Fall Fishing is underway and according to the experts at Bassmaster Magazine, it’s the worst fishing of the year. They say that crankbaits are a fall essential. Are they right?”

I offer the following comments:

(1) It’s difficult to disagree with the experts at Bassmaster Magazine. However, I do both as to fishing here in Hilton Head Plantation, and fishing in Tennessee where I lived for many years. I have always looked forward to fall fishing, it is a prime season for all kinds of fishing, especially when bass are chasing baitfish on the surface. For example, in Tennessee, late July through mid-October were prime months for bass, hybrids and stripe to be feeding sometimes for hours on large schools of bait fish on the surface. Here, late September through February seems to be the prime season. For example, the Sunday afternoon before Christmas 2013 (late Fall, early Winter), I caught the most fish I have ever caught in one outing here in Hilton Head Plantation – at least 61 bass in 2 ½ hour outing, and the fish were still hitting when I had to leave (because I ran out of daylight, and was afraid of possible problems with alligators). During almost every other outing throughout the years, I have not had to pause fishing because my arms were too tired.

(2) The biggest part of fishing success is mental. Don’t ever let some article in a fishing magazine discourage you from trying. This is the reason I pay no attention to solar-lunar fishing tables which tell you what are supposed to be the best times to be fishing during any particular day. I go fishing when I can, and I don’t ever need to feel that I am not fishing at the best time; or if I am not having luck, I don’t need to know that this period is supposed to be the best time during that day.

(3) Bass have a preferred temperature range. Like people, if it is too hot or too cold, bass are less active. If it is too hot, and the oxygen levels are low, as often occurs in the ponds in our plantation during very hot summer weather, fish become lethargic. As the water cools in the Fall and Winter (especially the Fall), the fish become more active.

(4) It is my understanding that as the water begins to cool, bass and other fish instinctively feed more to bulk up for the coming cold water of winter.

(5) I had not been able to fish as much this past summer as I usually would have. Recently, I have started fishing more often. The last four times I have gone out (about 2 to 2 ½ hour outings), I have landed (a) 24 bass, (b) 19 bass, (c) 4 bass and (d) 15 bass, 1 crappie and 1 redeye. I missed or lost a lot of other fish. The largest was just under 4 ¾ (4.71). In my world, this is “good – fun” fishing, not the ‘worst” fishing of the year.

I think it is probably only going to get better, as the water continues to cool, especially if we have cool rains like we’ve had over the last two days. Since I had not been fishing a lot lately, I purposely tried to fish several different ponds in each outing, sometimes leaving a pond where the fish were very active (normally it is not a good idea to leave fish). As a result, I found that I could catch fish from many of the ponds I fished meaning that what was occurring was a broad pattern that could be expected to occur generally in all our ponds. I caught fish on a variety of lures; e.g. topwater (Baby Torpedo), wacky worm rigged both Texas style and through the middle of the worm, twister tail plastic worm rigged Texas style with 1/8 oz. bullet nose sinker, large and small spinnerbaits, and in-line spinners (Joe’s Flies 1/8 oz.). This also showed that the fishing activity was a broad pattern.

(6) On two occasions recently I have observed brief, sporadic surfacing activity (in the middle and upper end of Crooked Pond). I caught 2 bass from one of these events. This is a good sign. Surfacing activity can become more frequent and prolonged as the water continues to cool. Last winter, my wife (Marie) and I caught a lot of 3 to 8 lb. bass that were chasing schools of threadfin shad on the surface (primarily in Oyster Reef Cove Pond).

(7) I agree that crankbaits are a Fall essential. Crankbaits (lipped and lipless) are excellent lures to use during the Fall. However, many of our ponds are so shallow that crankbaits often snag on underwater vegetation and collect that vegetation which kills the action of the lure. This can limit using crankbaits to the deeper ponds within our plantation.