

Outdoors with Luke Clausen: Seeing is believing, sight fishing

by *Luke_Clausen*

More often than not, bass fishing is an exercise in faith -- faith in your knowledge to know the one spot where the fish will be in a huge lake. Even for the best anglers in the world, some days are just a craps shoot. So like most other people, you cast your bait and hope that something good happens.

And then there's sight fishing.

Ranger Boats Pro Staff member Luke Clausen is the 2006 Bassmaster Classic champion and the youngest angler in professional fishing history to eclipse the \$1 million career earnings mark. No longer relegated to bobbing up and down on the water wondering if the fish might be biting in some distant area of the lake, anglers who sight fish can actually see when there are and aren't fish. And better yet, sight anglers get to witness the bass attack their bait. No more second-guessing locations - you either see the bass or you do not.

But before anglers can claim victory over the inefficiency of randomly selected fishing areas, it's important to have a grasp of some the basics of sight fishing. Once the basics are covered, anglers will need plenty of practice before becoming proficient.

First, the bad things about sight fishing: it's doesn't work year round, it's easily affected by the weather and it's harder than you think. Shallow water heats up more quickly than deep water, so springtime (pre-spawn, spawn and post-spawn) will see bass leaving the deeper water heading to the shallows in search of food and nesting sites. Once the weather turns hot, the fish will be searching for cooler water again. Wind, rain, cold fronts all have an effect on fish behavior, plus they make it next to impossible to see through the water. Even when you do find a bass, it might take a minute or an hour for you to finally coax the fish into taking the bait. Sometimes you don't catch them at all.

The place to start sight fishing is on the front deck of a bass boat, using your trolling motor to quietly glide through the shallows of necks and tributaries. Looking through your polarized sunglasses (a must for minimizing glare on water and providing contrast) keep an eye out for an overhead view of a bass or a large dark spot (the bass's shadow) in hard-bottomed areas or around structure. Be sure to check areas shaded by trees and other structure - these are perfect ambush spots for bass.

Once you spot a fish that you want to cast to, stop your boat far enough away from the fish that it doesn't spook, but close enough that you can still see what's going on. If the bass is holding in a shaded area, cast a jig and trailer parallel to the shadow line. If the bass is on a nest, I like a white tube bait rigged Texas style. I flip the bait behind the nest and work it around the area looking for the one spot in the bed that - when entered by an intruder - will trigger the fish to strike. Other than the tube, I also like a soft plastic lizard and work it the same way. Sometimes the fish strike immediately; other times the bait literally has to be in front of their face.

I like a six-foot, medium-action baitcasting rod that is light enough so that I can feel everything but also has enough backbone to handle big, aggressive fish. I usually let water clarity and fish behavior determine my line selection. When the water is especially clear or if the fish have been under a lot of fishing pressure, I will go with lighter line.

While many books have been and will be written about sight fishing, the most important part of becoming proficient at it is practice. The more days you spend on the water, straining your eyes as you search the shallows for your next trophy, the better you will become.

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