

Different Strokes

Fish travel in schools, but are they smart enough to prefer different lures in different places?

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A bass is a bass and a snook is a snook. So why is it that bass, snook and most other species seem to show peculiar preferences for certain lures in one place but not another?

There's no absolute answer, but longtime bass angler Sheldon Holland of Sarasota offers some cogent observations, based on his unique access to a variety of private bass lakes where fishing pressure is not a factor.

Holland, a heavy equipment operator for a giant mine and land development operation of more than 20 lakes on the property, all of them spoil pits left from the mining operations. And, though all the lakes are within about five miles of each other, Holland has been impressed with the different lures and tactics it takes to score in different lakes.

"In spring, the fish turn on at different times in a shallow lake than in a deep lake, and the spawn may be a month later in a clear lake than in a murky one," Holland said.

"And, when the fish start to eat, they want different lures and different colors in the different waters."

Holland has seen some of the same factors apply in public lakes. And, because he's also an avid snook fisherman in saltwater, he said the variations also can apply to the flats.

"In murky water, the fish are



Big bass might readily grab a spoon or spinner in murky water or heavy cover. In clear or open water, more lifelike lures often do better.

usually easier to catch on artificials, either in freshwater or salt," Holland said. "They can't see the line or the boat as well, and I think they strike at the flash of a lure as much as the shape of it, so lures like spinnerbaits and spoons do a good job where the water is not clear."

He said clear water, on the other hand, requires lighter lines, longer casts, and often smaller and more lifelike lures. His favorite for those conditions is a small plastic lizard, usually dark green, with a small slip-sinker pegged in place at the head or a few inches above it. The peg that holds the sinker is a wood toothpick, jammed in the line hole and broken off flush. He typically uses a 2/0 to 3/0 hook.

In murky lakes, Holland said, bass usually spawn along the shorelines around cover, in water 2 to 4 feet deep. However, clearer lakes can have a much broader spawning area.

"I've seen beds in 8 feet of water where there's grass growing that deep," he said.

"Most people fish too shallow in these lakes."

Holland also likes mid-lake bars, drop-offs and humps where he can find them.

"For catching bass year-round, whether it's hot or cold, you can't beat that type of structure," Holland said.

He said the humps can be as shallow as 5 feet or as deep as 15. The important thing is to use a lure that gets down to them and follows their contour from shallow to deep.

"I might use a crankbait to find them, because that's a fast-moving lure that lets me cover a lot of water," he said, "and then when I hit a school I'll probably switch to a plastic lizard or plastic worm because that lets me fool the fish after they start refusing the crankbaits."

Holland said clear lakes fish better early and late, while murky water might produce all day. Again, the darker water makes it easier to fool the fish as the day gets brighter.

Holland is also a fan of moving water. He looks hard for it when he's snook fishing, because he has found that snook rarely feed where there is not a good flow. Points, passes and tidal creeks are good examples of areas where current sometimes produces good snook fishing.

Bass also take advantage of current when they can find it, though it's less common in a lake than in tidal waters.

"We sometimes pump water from one lake to another, and wherever that outflow comes into a lake, the fish will just be stacked up in front of it," Holland said. "You can fish a topwater, a worm or just about anything in that flow and catch fish after fish."

He said strong winds some-

Area Spots Among Top Bass Waters

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's 2004 rankings of the state's top 12 public bass waters include several within trailing distance of the Bay area.

Among the best is Lake Walk-In-Water, east of Lake Wales. Also named are Rodman Reservoir northeast of Ocala; Lake Toho at Kissimmee; Lake Okeechobee; Lake George on the St. Johns River; the Stick Marsh west of Vero Beach; Lake Istokpoga in Highlands County; and Lake Tarpon in Pinellas County.

Also on the list were Crescent Lake in Putnam County and Everglades Conservation Areas 2 and 3, where canals provide especially good fishing before the summer rains. The Suwannee River also was included, mostly for the number of bass rather than for large fish, commission biologists said. Deer Point Lake, a small but intensively managed lake near Panama City, also made the list.

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times create currents.

"If you have a big wind blowing the length of a lake, with a little channel or bay at the lower end, that wind will create current flow into the bay," he said, "and the bass will use that as a feeding area at times."

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show high and low tides Petersburg. These times e many rivers, bays and Gulf Coast (though maxima are similar throughout

