

May's Caprice: How Quickly Her Promises Evaporate

My last column treated of some of the ominous signs I had noticed which made me think we might be in for a dry year. I even mentioned "dust bowl." Thankfully all of my extraordinary powers of divination have proven bogus. My reward for letting myself slip into the polluted pothole of pessimism. No wonder the seers in many of the Greek tragedies are depicted as blind.

I lamented the paucity of birds visiting my back yard feeders, but within three days we have been flooded with many new arrivals: Three rose-breasted grosbeaks, a flock of over 20 brilliant goldfinches, a pair of indigo buntings, a brown thrasher, and many sleek, melodious white-crowned, sparrows. Harris, (black faced sparrows,) and enough cowbirds, starlings and red-winged blackbirds to start a rookery added interest.

I also wrote of a fruitless trip to Ten Mile hoping for a few of its brilliantly colored bluegill sunfish. But the trip I took opening day of walleye season turned out to be one of those wet-handed days when I caught so many bluegills, bass, crappies and, oh yes, a 15 lb buffalo fish that within two hours I was exhausted and headed for home.

I was blessed to be close to a number of very friendly and helpful young people who helped my get some of the bigger ones through the bushes and up on the shore. Few think to prune away last year's weeds and saplings --major obstructions to the 85 year old gimp too teetery to chance falling into the drink to prune them.

I also had the pleasure of helping a friendly older black man increase his catch. Like so many of today's anglers, he was using floats, hooks and bait, far too bulky for the bluegills he was after to inhale.

I had taken the opportunity the evening before this trip to tie up a few of my deadly “Big Stone Twinkler” panfish jigs. I gave one to my new buddy, James, and he also started getting bites, ‘one right behind another’ too.

Here’s my deadly set-up for can’t miss bluegill action:

1. Light line, not over 6 lb. Test.
2. A six to seven foot light action limber-tipped rod. Fiberglass works best for me.
3. I use a clip-on float, but no larger than 1” across, and wrap my line twice only around the bottom clip so that the float will tip and signal me when the fish barely touch it.
4. I use very small, (size eight 1/32nd oz. or smaller) jig heads and dress them with marabou plumes and a few strands of “Flashabou” for twinkle. I’ve caught literally everything out there on these tiny killers. My first fish of the day on the opener was a 4 lb. large mouth bass. She’s still out there of course.
5. I usually “tip” my jigs with either a piece of night crawler, a wax worm or a tiny plastic “scented” grub. Larger jigs tied the same way, all the way up to ¼ oz, I tip with minnows, leeches or night crawlers. The few strands of “Flashabou” in silver, lime, gold, or pearl make a huge difference in the number of bites I get.

The other thing I taught James was how to “read” the water to tell where the fish will be holding. I try to get my fly or jig in that seam where the fast water meets the slack water, and it’s also crucial to find the depth at which the fish are holding and adjust the distance between the float and the jig accordingly.

Fish usually lie in the slower water and wait for what the faster currents will bring them to eat. A typical cast should quarter 45 degrees up stream, and end

after the drift becomes unnatural. Watching good anglers on TV is the easiest way to get started.

In still water, (lakes or ponds,) I got started by putting on tennis shoes and wading the shoreline, casting out with the same float and fly set-ups as the one above. If you can afford a float tube or kayak, all the better, and get polarized glasses to cut the glare and show you what's down there. As a kid, once I got into the water, the folks had to beg and plead to get me out.

I fished that opener to commemorate the countless times Warren and I rose up at 3 am to be on the water at "first light." I wore the shirt he gave me for my retirement. It has my name embroidered and a logo for "Wms. (Williams) Custom Rods." I still cherish the several fine fly, spinning and bait casting rods he built for me. I think that shirt brought me luck, but I still missed having him along. Maybe some fine "bass water mornin' we'll open the season together one more time. I believe in miracles.

Gene Pinkney 5/16/23 for The Daily News