

Search and Ye Shall Find

If you've spent much time fishing during summer; you've undoubtedly experienced sporadic catches. Don't just chalk this up to the Dog Days of Summer and throw in the towel until cooler temperatures prevail.

There is a distinct reason for the here today-gone tomorrow nature of the fish during this period and can be summed up in one word-Food. There is a plethora of it now and it's everywhere. The aquatic food chain is now at full zenith. All forms of zooplankton, minnow species, and juvenile panfish have hatched and grown to the perfect eating size. The pickings are extremely easy and the fish can be hard to tempt let alone locate.

We need to view the fish's location in general and not specific terms. They will tend to be loosely scattered throughout the lake. While structural or cover related elements will still hold slightly higher concentrations; you will be better served to focus on large areas on not specific spots. There's little reason for the fish to congregate in any great numbers, as the food is dispersed evenly over the whole lake. Thus, they can be found most anywhere and in order to successfully target and ultimately catch them, we first need to locate them.

This where the intelligent use of electronics becomes of vital importance. I'm not trying to oversimplify things, but: if you can't find 'em you, you darn sure can't catch 'em. It would be wise to not even wet a line until you have spent an adequate amount of time scanning to locate sufficient numbers to present your lures to. This might take as little as 15 minutes if you land right on top of them, or an hour or two if you need to check out a number of areas. It might seem a little boring and redundant, but it's much better than trolling all day with nary a sign of a fish, let alone a bite.

When scouting, pay careful attention to the details your sonar is relaying to you. Don't just note that you are marking fish in an area. Look for patterns. Are you marking fish more consistently on top of a break or on the bottom? Doesn't need to sharp, a subtle 2 foot variance could be enough to do it. Is the bottom harder or softer where you mark these fish? Do you notice larger fish when seeing bait on your screen? These are just a few small variables that when added up and intelligently evaluated can make a huge impact. Armed with this knowledge, you can now narrow down your presentation options to those that have the highest percentage of working, given the circumstances.

Run of the mill units just won't cut it if you want to obtain all of the facts needed for a full comprehension of what's going on below you. Quality is key and I have relied on top of the line units from Raymarine for several years due to the following capabilities. Large high visibility color screens (the models I use have over 12 inches of viewing area) makes interpreting return signals very easy as fish size and relative bottom hardness are relayed in various shades and hues. GPS with background mapping quickly and accurately returns us to where fish have been seen and or caught. Also gives us a starting point for future outings. The best and most overlooked feature is the ability to mark fish at planing speeds, making for a quick survey with more time for fishing, catching, and ultimately enjoying your day on the water.

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