

This Month With A Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

The month of July traditionally starts the low water river season and this July was no different. I saw several boats with propellers hitting their lower motor units on the rocks when they failed to read the river waters correctly. Most of the time the river has a stained to dirty water color making it almost impossible to see the bottom even in 12" to 18" of water. This gives the boater a false sense of security and they will put their boat in dangerous situations where ordinarily they wouldn't do it if they could see the river bottom. I met such a boater at a local river access. His boat had a V shaped bottom and it was powered by a rather high powered propeller motor for the size of his boat. He said his boat would go very fast and I had no doubt that it would. He asked me where I was going to fish that day and I told him that I would be going several miles up river past some very shallow riffles and rocks with my jet boat. He said that he was also going up river and I questioned if he thought it very wise to try it with his boat since it was clear, at least to me, that it just wasn't made for shallow water. Well you would have thought that I just insulted everything near and dear to him with the way he reacted. I'll skip his exact words, they couldn't get printed here anyway, let's just say he'd see me up there and leave it at that. He launched and zoomed up river out of sight. Yep, he sure did have a fast boat alright. My client arrived soon after and it was about another half hour before we launched. As we were going up the shallow water I saw the same boat up along the side of an island where I wouldn't have taken even my jet boat. It's motor was almost upside down and the lower unit (where the propeller is) was just gone! The two guys were standing along side of it in ankle deep water, one with a cell phone to his ear. It appeared that everyone was alright and I was sure that I was the last guy that boater wanted to see so we continued on our way. I'll bet it took most of the day to get that fast boat back to the access. The water temps were in the high 70's to the low 80's which made the fish move to somewhat faster water, and when the bright sun came out, they moved to the deeper, but still moving water. The fish were very aggressive this past month without any floods or even high water to slow down the bite. My boat caught and released over 2,300 fish in the last 30 days alone! I keep meticulous records of each charter I do and this month we had a new record amount of fish caught in one days time for the month of July. Ordinarily I don't mention the real names of my clients in my fishing column but I received their permission to do so this time. On the 16th of July, Rick Liebert and his son Ricky from Eagles Mere Pa. came fishing

with me. These gentlemen have been fishing with me now for 10 years and they started when Ricky was 8yrs old. Ricky was one of the most inquisitive youngsters I ever had on board asking questions about fishing and the river for the entire time we were out, he kept me on my toes alright. Now he is a fish magnet with a wealth of fishing knowledge under his belt. We started off the day with some small spinners that I made and ended up jig fishing for the rest of the time with stick worms. We caught and released 160 fish that day, which covers my guiding career records of 28 years for the month of July! Everything just came together that day, all three of us were constantly catching fish and I don't think that the three of us got snagged on the bottom more than five times together for the entire day which gave us more time to fish. Rick summed it up when he said that being able to catch that amount of fish in one day is a testament to the conservation efforts of the Pa Fish and Boat Commission along with the educational efforts of local fishermen that practice catch and release, with a good guide of course. Thanks Rick. Rick also joined the NBSA that day which is the North Branch Smallmouth Alliance. This is a group of anglers dedicated to the preservation of quality smallmouth bass and their habitat through conservation and education on the North Branch of the Susquehanna River. They are currently working on putting up metal educational signs as to the age and safe handling of the smallmouth bass at all the accesses along the North Branch. You can see a copy of this sign along with some other information like how to join on the groups web site at www.nbsmallmouthalliance.com . Anyone that fishes the North Branch and cares about catching quality smallmouth should join this fine organization.

The lures that we used mostly this month starting with top water lures were the Storm Chug Bug, the Rebel Pop-R, and the Lucky Craft Sammy. Because of the heat and bright sun these lures were used in the early morning hours and just before dark with good results. In the mid water section we used the LD Spinner Bait and some inline spinners such as the Blue Fox Vibrant #3 in gold color, along with the Rebel crayfish crank bait. The all time fish catcher for us this month on the bottom of the river has been the 3" Trick Stick from the Alluring Bait Co. put on an 1/8oz lead head jig. This is what we used mostly to catch those 160 fish on the 16th. And don't forget the old reliable tube jig, it always is a winner. The river now has a lot of shallow weedy areas and we've been having some fun with a weightless fluke worked around the weeds and over the shallow rocks. What's a fluke you say? It's a plastic bait in the form of a minnow rigged with a 2/0 or 3/0 hook with no weight, I use the 4" and 5" versions combined with a 2/0 circle hook through the nose of the lure . The fluke is usually

loaded with salt in the plastic to give it a little weight to make it sink very slowly if you want it to. To use the fluke just cast it out, let it sink about 6” and work it back by keeping your rod tip low to the water and twitching your wrist to make the lure dart around in an erratic motion attracting the fish. White or pearl seems to be the color used most. This is another lure that you can use and actually see the fish strike the lure so don’t set the hook until you feel the weight of the fish. The weightless fluke can be difficult to use when you get a light wind . The bow in your line caused by the wind will make it stay on the surface and you will loose that darting action. To combat this you need to add just a tiny bit of weight to the lure by inserting a very small or a piece of finishing nail directly into the nose of the plastic fluke. Overcast or cloudy days seem to work best with this lure. There are many manufactures of the fluke out there but I use the “Duper Fluke Jr” from Alluring Baits, works like a charm.

The wildlife has been active on the river as usual, the young eagles have finally all left their nests but there was one late eaglet that didn’t leave until the first week of July! Seems life was too good at home. Another day we were jetting up the river this month and we came upon six bald eagles in one area of 50 yards or so. It’s good to see the comeback of this majestic bird. One more bird comes to mind here before I go. One early morning we were fishing with top water lures and this little kingfisher flew by and landed in the tree in front of us. He watched our lures for a while and then all of the sudden flew at my lure thinking no doubt that it was a wounded minnow and an easy meal, I yelled at him and jerked my lure out of the way just before he reached it. Thinking that it was the last I’d see of him, I cast out again and again he did the same thing. Four times he did this to me so I gave up fishing that spot and motored away. That was one determined little bird.

Well that’s my report for this month, boat safely and I’ll see you on the river. For further reports, photo’s, and charter information, visit me on my website at www.ldguideservice.com .

Good Fishing

Lance