

This Month With A Susquehanna River Guide

Lance Dunham

You know, June is traditionally a tough month to fish anyway with the first two weeks being post spawn, meaning to you non anglers the smallmouth bass have already laid their eggs and the big breeder females have slipped back into the deeper water to rest for a week or so and don't want to chase our lures. Kind of like "Leave me alone, I'm tired!" Your fish count goes down to 30 to 50 fish a day under good weather and water conditions because you are catching non breeders and the smaller male fish. Like I told my wife with a smile the other day. "Yes Dear, in the fish world the big fat ones are all the females". She assured me in the human world it certainly wasn't that way, "go look in the mirror"! Yes Dear, (I knew when to stop). However this June you could almost count on one hand the days without rain that we got which brings up three important fishing issues in addition to it being post spawn time. Number one how to stay dry, number two how to fish and what to use in the dark stained to muddy water that has now increased in current speed and number three, know both your boat and your own limitations when it comes to boating safety in high muddy water.

Number one is easy, wear good rain/outdoor gear in the rainy months, from your birthday suit to the outer layers. If you are dry, warm, and comfortable you can concentrate on fishing and not how miserable you feel. This will make a big difference in the number of fish you catch. There are hundreds of choices out there from cutting a head and arm holes in a big plastic garbage bag to the new fabrics that breathe and don't make you sweat inside while trying to keep you from getting wet from the outside. In all my 29 years of guiding, I've tried them all . Nothing is perfect and to say so would be pushing the envelope and your intelligence, but I finally got one now that's pretty darn close to perfect. I spend most every day outside on the river for eight or nine months of the year and when I'm pretty darn sure that at some point Mother Nature is going to try to get me wet I want to wear something comfortable all day without getting dressed and undressed on the boat for the weather that's sure to come. Not only is it a pain in the butt to do so but as in my case, it could be rather disturbing to all onlookers. The outdoor fowl weather gear that I use is called SilverMax by Medalist. It was originally developed for hunting but I've found it very useful for fishing also. One of the best things that I've found with it is that the zippers and cuffs water seal so well that I don't get wet going 40mph in my jet boat during a rain. So this doesn't start to sound like a commercial check it out for yourself at www.medalist.com like I did.

Fishing issue number two is what to use in dark stained to muddy water and how to use them. When fishing under those conditions you need to remember a fish can't strike at a lure unless they can see, hear, or feel it. In other words you need to upsize the profile of the lure. On the jigs such as the Alluring Baits Trick Sticks I'll go from a 3" size to a 4" dark solid color. You can't go wrong with black in muddy water. The JJ's Hair Jigs that I use, I'll go from a black Shorty jig to the larger regular size black Booger Jig and go as slow as I can along the bottom just so I don't get caught on the rocks. One of the most

productive lures that I used in dark to muddy water this June was the LD Thumper Spinner. I made this big worm spinner with a #4 Colorado Blade so I can put a heavy lead head jig on it so it will give off great vibration and I can still slow roll it along the bottom of the river under heavy current. On the 19th this month was the start of the really high water we got. I check the computer every morning for water conditions and the days weather so I know how to prepare for what's to come. It showed the river had come up a foot over night and was still on the rise so I expected to have a poor day but you got to make the best out of the conditions you're faced with. The first thing we did was to tie on a Thumper Spinner tipped with a 3" green pumpkin trick stick with a chartreuse tip commonly referred to as the LD Smallie Slammer. The water was brown and as I said on the rise so I knew the fish would be hugging the bank and other structure to get out of the current. We threw that big blade a foot from the shore line which was already flooded and slowly worked it back along the bottom to the boat. Long story short the bass just nailed that lure all day long and we ended up with 77 fish in poor to bad conditions. We lost about six lures because we were casting into the weeds and brush but it was well worth it to me, I'll just make more when I get home. I controlled the speed of the drift that day with my 74lb thrust trolling motor. One of the key factors in catching fish on the river in fast dirty water is to slow down your boat to give the fish time to find the lure or bait. There were just a couple of other boats on the river that day and we noticed they were dragging live bait. The current was so fast that they just zipped right by us, the fish would have a hard time finding their bait at that speed. They saw that we were catching fish and motored up river just to come whizzing by again and we never saw them catch a single fish. They went home after about an hour.

As good as the Thumper spin lure is in dirty, dark, even muddy water, it is just the opposite in when the river clears up a bit. Every lure has its place in fishing. The big blade seems to deter bites when the fish can see it well, so the solution is simple, we go down to the smaller #3 gold Colorado blade and then go to a #3 willow blade in light stained to more clear water. Have all three sizes on board for the best results. Another variation of the spinner I do is to take off the lead head jig from the spinner and replace it with a JJ's Hair Jig, this also worked well. And I had some success with big lipped crank baits such as the larger Reble Crawfish. These good old favorites will dig down to 6ft for the fish but are harder to control up next to the bank without getting caught.

Fishing issue number three is to know your limitations and the boat that you're in. Leave your ego at the shore line! If you are not experienced with operating a boat in fast current, especially a smaller one, I suggest stay off the river until it calms down. It's easy to get into trouble and flip a boat in strong current if you hit a rock or a floating tree branch that just got stuck that wasn't there yesterday. If you must try it, wear your PFD, keep your bow into the current and never, EVER, throw out an anchor in fast current to slow you down. When that anchor catches a rock the strong current will pull the boat down under the water quickly and you could very well end up as another tragic statistic.

On a lighter note, I have never seen so many bald eagles as I have seen this year on the river. In a 12 mile stretch I counted at least 9 different eagles. Sometimes they are in

groups of three or four. There are many young eagles around now that have not matured enough to get the white head and tail that we associate with the bald eagle. And I see even younger eagles still at the nest site that haven't flew yet but are hopping from branch to branch around their nest getting ready to test those huge wings. They've come a long ways in the last 15 years. Another thing I've noticed is the large amount of beavers on the river this year. At one site I've watched them build a lodge from scratch and now have young ones maybe half the size of their parents swimming close to them. If your boat gets too close they slap the water with their tails as a warning to all, unfortunately along with the fish that were scared by all the commotion. And as usual the great blue herons are all over showing us that the river has a large abundance of small fish along the shore line. Well that's all I have for this month, fish safely, put the old breeders back, and I'll see you on the river. For further daily reports, photos, and charter information, visit me on my NEW website at www.ldguideservice.com .

Good Fishing

Lance