

This Month with a Susquehanna River Guide  
Lance Dunham

The Month of May is truly one of my favorite months to fish and just to be outdoors. It's a time of birds nesting, cool water, pleasant days, and monster fish! It's recognized as an easy time on the river for anglers to catch walleyes, northern pike, muskie, and big smallmouth bass.

During the last 30 days of this writing we had caught 1376 fish and had released them all except for 10 walleyes which my clients kept for eating. There seems to be a better than average amount of walleyes this year, we caught 30 the first day of walleye season. And we caught northern pike and some muskie on a regular basis. The pre spawn smallmouth bass bite was second to none with many 19" and 20" smallies being caught and released.

The lures working for us this month were lead head jigs with stick worms, beaver tails, and tubes on them from the Alluring Bait Co. Also working well were suspending jerk baits such as the Rapala X-Rap and Husky Jerk and towards the middle of May the spinner baits started to work as well. It was also the start of top water lure action in a big way. I have always used Pop-Rs, Skitter Pops, and my favorite a 3" Chug Bug for all my top water fishing needs. However, and I shudder to say this, The Lucky Craft Sammy in the #85 size has done exceptionally well. I say shudder because the LC Sammy's cost on average \$15.00 each! I always said that I would never pay over \$7.00 for a lure but I was urged to buy a few by some guys on my forum and found out that they do work well. They work in the water like a wounded minnow with the head up twitching side to side. The one thing that I don't like about them is that after about a hundred fish caught on one the finish gets knocked off by the big hooks. Another thing about the LC Sammy is that it also has rattles in it which helps in attracting fish, and it gives them a very long casting distance. I've already had to beach the boat to get them out of the bushes or out of trees from a long cast. Yes, for a \$15.00 lure even I will climb a tree, it's not pretty, but I'll do it. I had a client with me one day this month and that lure was the only one we used. Of course the conditions were near perfect with an overcast sky, no wind, and a light stained river. We caught 65 smallmouth bass that day and 25 of them were over 16" long. As any decent guide would do, I always try to put my clients on the fish first, then, maybe I'll fish the water they already did if asked or if I need to show them a pattern. At one place my client caught a 18", then a 19", and then a 19 1/2" smallmouth bass in a row! We'd take the fish off the lure, photograph it, and I'd position him for the next cast. It was quite exciting to see the big fish come up out of the water to hit this lure.

Like I mentioned before, we are catching many Northern Pike and Muskie and some get pretty big. I keep a cradle net on board for anything over 36" because, those fish just won't fit into my rubber catch and release net. For those who may not know what a cradle net is, it consists of two long aluminum poles with a 60" net attached to both and one end is closed with additional netting. When bringing in a large pike or muskie one angler lays this net in to the water and when the fish is played out, the person with the fish slides the big fish in the net. The net guy then closes the net by putting the poles together and lifts the cradle up. This is the best and safest way to bring in truly large fish. The fish is not harmed and neither are you.

I was fishing with a long time client on a rainy day a couple of weeks back. The weather was perfect for the cool water fish meaning walleye, pike, and musky. We had already caught several walleyes and bass and I had caught a Northern Pike earlier in the day. I pulled in to a slow water eddy and we were catching some bass when my client says " Ah Lance, I believe I've got something unusual here". I turned to see he had a good sized muskie on his suspending jerk bait. He played the fish like a pro and slid it into the cradle net after about a ten minute battle. It ended up to be 40" long which was a good accomplishment considering he was using a medium light rod with 10lb Stren Magnathin line. After a few photos, the old fish was returned to the water to fight again another day. Muskie of this size and larger are rare on the North Branch because so many are taken out by anglers. This has finally been realized by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and I believe it was last year they increased the minimum length to keep these fish from 36" to 40". Myself and many anglers thank them for that. Why anyone would want keep an old fish like that is beyond me when you can get great looking reproductions of your trophy fish made by local taxidermist that last forever. If you want the name of my taxidermist that does this just contact me. My client that day has been fishing with me for over 20 years and it was his largest muskie yet. You can see a photo of this fish on my web site.

May is also one of the best times for bird watching on the river. Most all the birds were nesting and raising their young. We watched a baltimore oriel build a nest on a branch that hung over the river and I couldn't help thinking that when the young birds come out of that nest they sure better be able to fly. The bald eagles nest this year got even larger. Each year they come back to the same nest and add to it. Now it looks to be 4ft wide and just as deep. Another nest you don't see everyday is the red headed woodpecker. There is one in particular that's in a dead tree right by the river. You can hear them call as you float by and look up to see the red head sticking out of the hole in the tree to watching your every move. A red tail hawk has her nest in the top

of a broken pine tree with either eggs or young birds in it. We were alerted to it when we heard her screech several times. She seemed to be warning the blue jay that was harassing her to back off or suffer the consequences. There are also ducks and geese all over with their young in tow, little fluff miniatures of their parents. And the ever present bank swallows that sometimes number over 50 at a time chasing down the countless mayfly hatches.

As for other wildlife, we saw the usual mink, muskrat, beaver, deer, and turkey. The first week of spring gobbler season I had evening charters every day. The guys would hunt for gobblers in the morning, go back to their cabin for a nap, then go fishing with me in the evening, that's an outdoorsman's day! And we did see a river otter the other day slide off an island bank and dive in the water. I only see them a couple of times each season and I was pleased to see this one.

Well that's my report for the month of May. For further daily reports, photos, and updates, visit me on my website at [www.ldguideservice.com](http://www.ldguideservice.com) . Boat safely and I'll see you on the river.

Good Fishing

Lance