



THE SMALLMOUTH HORIZON

Helping to Protect and Preserve Quality Smallmouth Bass Fishing

September 2010

Regular monthly meetings resume this month

Featuring Nate Sipple

**“Top to Bottom:
Trophy Smallmouth in
Diverse Conditions”**



Nate Sipple, on the oars, guiding Joan and Mike Pierce. Mike will be our November speaker.

Our September speaker will be Nate Sipple, full-time guide with Tight Lines Fly Fishing Company in De Pere, WI. Nate started fly fishing at the age of ten, growing up a stones throw from the banks of the fabled Kinnickinnic River in River Falls, Wisconsin. The trout streams of Western Wisconsin were a second (and sometimes first) home to Nate as he grew up. Nate was no stranger to the Mississippi and St. Croix either.

Not being a purist or dedicated to any one species, he pursues everything from carp and muskies to trout and panfish.

Shortly after moving to the eastern side of the state with his wife, Kristy, Nate took a job with Tight Lines as a full-time guide and will often be found working or hanging out in the fly shop in the off

season. Chasing smallmouth in the summer months, migratory brown trout, steelhead and muskies in the fall/winter and inland trout and steelhead in the spring, the season never ends for Nate.

Every angler has a picture of their ideal fishing conditions, but that's not always what we find when we hit the water.

This program will cover a variety of topics on how to trick fish into eating when the odds seem stacked against us. Rigging, casting, reading changing water levels, relocating fish and the importance of fly color/profile will be discussed in detail. Come and check out this great program and hopefully pick up some tricks that can extend your season, broaden your horizons and ultimately catch you more smallmouth in more conditions.



Steve Winters

*What we
did on our
summer
vacations*



Lyle Gear



Ray Mirande



Dan Johnson



Keith Weiland

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Articles, photos, information, and calendar events for the newsletter are encouraged and should be submitted by the 1st day of the month to: Dan Johnson, 426 Glenway St. Madison, WI 53711. Word files sent to: johnson7@tds.net are most appreciated.

Smallmouth bass fall fishing tips

by Jonn Graham
first published in
[Prairie State Outdoors](#)

As I sit down to write this article, I peer out my window at twin maple trees in the yard. Both are just beginning to show their fall beauty. Though only a small portion of their leaves have begun to change colors, the mere fact that a few “trend setting” leaves have changed signals a very exciting time for me and many other river bass chasers. The change signified by the ol’ trusty maple tree is that of impending fall.

Fall, in my opinion, is a great time to be a river fisherman. Heck, I feel fall is a great time just to be outside, whether you are an angler or not. What’s not to like—cool temperatures, no bugs buzzing about your head, beautiful foliage, very few other anglers (hunting season occupies many would be fisherman) and hungry, hard-charging bronzebacks makes this season, without a doubt, my favorite time to be on the water.

I just love how in the morning you need a jacket, but by noon, a short or long-sleeved shirt is in order. Or how the morning’s coolness causes the surface of the river to emit an eerie fog signaling a water temperature decline. I could go on and on about my fondness for the fall period, but one statement sums it up— fall is Illinois’ finest and shortest season.

When it comes to the riverine smallmouth bass, fall is a time of transition. Of course, that transition is from the summer “boom” period, where food and water conditions were prime, to the upcoming winter “swoon.” In winter food will be scarce and the river smallmouth’s energy levels will be at yearly lows. Luckily for the smallmouth stalkers, the river bass sense the oncoming winter season and provide fishermen one last fall feeding foray.

In fact, for my money, fall is the number one time to tangle with a truly giant riverine bronzeback. Most of my largest stream specimens have been caught during the month of October. It really seems that fall smallies are much like a whitetail buck in rut in that

they throw care to the wind and are just plain easier to find and capture.

When I think of fall, I divide the season into three different time periods: early, mid, and late fall. While these three divisions often overlap, there does seem to be a definite difference in the way the bass generally act in each fall subdivision.

Early Fall

What I term early fall (September) is usually marked by an inability to tell that fall has really begun. Early fall is marked by continued warm weather

during the daytime hours, but a gentle cooling effect at night. Smallmouth generally act the same way they did during the summer months. One slight difference, when it comes to smallie locations, is the fact that the early fall period quite often finds smallmouths in shallower haunts chasing down finned forage (minnows).

Many trips during this time of the year will not find smallies hunkered in the holes but out “cruising”, looking for an easy mark. These “cruising” esca-

pades prove that riverine bronzebacks are still incredibly active during this time period. Because of this I spend a lot of time chasing river bronze with quick, flashy topwaters. Buzzbaits, poppers, and walking baits are my favorites.

Also, when the calendar reads September, I bulk up my baits. Gone are the small buzzbaits and 2- and 3-inch walking baits. Now I prefer a bait that is at least 3.5 inches long and 4 inches or longer is not out of the question. Included in this philosophy are my bottom baits (jigs) as well. Throughout much of the year I utilize a small tube (2.75 inches), the 4-inch slider worm, and a few other various plastics that normally never measure longer than 3.5 inches long.



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But in the fall, I like to throw larger plastics all the way up to 5 inches. My belief is, one, the fish are actively searching out food in order to add weight for the oncoming winter. Also, the bigger smallies are definitely on the prowl during this time period. BIG BAIT = BIG FISH! This old adage really is true when it comes to riverine brown fish, especially in the fall.

Mid Fall

Mid-fall marks the initial movement and change in the bass' overall behavior. This period usually begins around the early to mid part of October and lasts as long as Mother Nature does not flip on the deep freeze switch. By this time the water has cooled to around 55 to 60 degrees as a result of cold nights and cool daytime temps.

Quite often this period is marked by a good afternoon bite—better many times than the morning/evening bite. Smallmouth locations during this time period can be perplexing. A cold mid-fall will push them into deeper water (wintering haunts) and slow their aggressiveness. But many times a warm spell sandwiched in between colder temps will bring the smallmouths out of the deep for a late season snack. Fishing during this period involves some searching and the search changes daily.

When it comes to mid-fall baits, the angler must be versatile. If a warming trend is going on, or if the bass are just supercharged for some reason, then larger topwaters and big soft jerkbaits can clean up. But if the fish are deep and sluggish, then many times using smaller jig and plastic combos are the only way to get a bite.

I must say that during this time period I am normally on the big fish hunt. I have forgotten about catching numbers of smallmouths, but am fishing for that one late-season trophy. Because of this, I often keep with the motif of big bait equals big fish. I am sure it probably hurts my success a little during this mid-fall time, but I am a gambler, much the same way a deer hunter passes on a nice doe and gambles that the big buck will move into range any second.

Late Fall

By late fall (end of October/early November) things have definitely changed. Gone are those balmy fall days (in most cases). Those days are quite often replaced with cool, rainy weather during the day, and down-right cold nights. This is definitely a tough time for all those who love to chase riverine bronze. The glory season has come to an end and winter is just

around the bend. Fishing can be tough to say the least. Perseverance really pays off now!

In other words, the more time you can spend on the water casting, the better your chances of finding, patterning, and catching the bass. By now, water is below 55 degrees and may be much colder depending on which flow you are fishing. The smallmouth, as you probably have guessed, have moved into their wintering areas where deeper water and slower current speeds prevail.

The bass' metabolism has slowed down, which, in turn, has made them feed less frequently. Timing really starts to become important now. Being on the right spot when the bass are feeding is tough but imperative. Speaking of timing, mid-day for me has always been the best time to be on the water during this late fall period. Noon to 3 p.m. is usually prime. Of course, any warming trends will tend to increase activity levels, but a common cold front will lock their jaws as well.

When it comes to late fall baits, I abandon the big bait = big fish mentality. With fish activity levels so low it takes a smaller bait that can stay in the strike zone to elicit any positive response from Ol' Mr. Bronzeback. I prefer a small 1/32 to 1/8 ounce hair jig either fixed under a float (float n fly) or simply cast into a likely smallmouth lair and then slowly reeled back or dragged on the bottom.

In addition, small tubes and grubs can be effective as well. Also, live bait can really save the day during these lean times. Small minnows affixed on a jig and fished slowly on or near the bottom can ring the dinner bell when nothing artificial will.

In conclusion, the maple tree is a great indicator of impending change. The changing leaves mark an exciting, pleasant period here in Illinois we call fall. For my money, nothing beats the fall season here in the Land of Lincoln. Not only is the weather pleasant and the scenery breathtaking, but also the big, hard-charging river smallmouths put on the feedbags and, in many cases, throw care to wind and bite with a renewed gusto not seen since early spring.

If the outdoorsman can fight the urge to put away the rod and pick up the gun, he or she can be rewarded with some of the best angling of the year. Don't be afraid to throw a few larger baits and remember as fall progresses, and the water temperature drops, change your fishing tactics accordingly.

And as always ... Hail to the Smallie.

Guide Jonn Graham offers smallmouth fishing instruction on the Mackinaw and Vermilion rivers in central Illinois. call him at (309) 399-7055 for information on his Camp Smallmouth.

Our Next Meeting:

**Tuesday,
September 21st**

Regular monthly meetings resume this month with a program presented by Tight Lines guide, Nate Sipple. See page one for the details.

We normally meet on the third Tuesday of each month at the Maple Tree restaurant in McFarland, Wisconsin. Our meeting and program begin at 7:00 p.m. but everyone is encouraged to come earlier and join us for a cocktail and dinner.

New and prospective members, visitors, and guests are always welcome.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, September 21st 7:00 P.M
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland

WSA Monthly Meeting
See details in this issue.

Tuesday, October 19th 7:00 P.M
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland

WSA Monthly Meeting
Mike Jacobs - "Smallmouth Fishing in Fayette County, Iowa"

Tuesday, November 16th 7:00 P.M
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland

WSA Monthly Meeting
Mike Pierce

Tuesday, December 14th
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland

WSA/BFF Holiday Banquet