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Learn walleye habits to catch these elusive fish in hot weather

Often walleyes are taken accidentally because fishermen don't take the time to learn how to consistently catch them.

I'd always wondered how the heck to fish for walleyes at night in the late summer.

In 1992, I sat down with Jeff Rader of Rader's Lodge at Lake Waconda in north central Kansas near Glen Elder.

Most Kansas fishermen refer to Lake Waconda as Glen Elder, so don't get confused if you look for it on the map. Glen Elder actually is the state park around Lake Waconda.

Rader, a professional fishing guide who knows Lake Waconda like the back of his hand, gave me some tricks that have helped me in fishing for walleyes, sauger and saugeye on lakes throughout Kansas, Colorado and Nebraska.

Since this season has been pretty much a bust for me, I decided to see if there was anything in my old fishing journals, short of dynamite, to help me improve my catch rate.

I found out that Rader had told me that some fishermen stumble upon walleyes at night while fishing for catfish.

"A walleye picking up a flash, a vibration or scent of the fisherman's bait will blunder into the hook and neither the fish or fisherman realize what has happened, he said.

"In other words, we do not have many fishermen who actually go out and purposely fish the correct techniques for walleye in the evening. They may go hoping, but they have not the slightest idea of how to go about helping out their hope.

"It is amazing that although walleye fishermen have been stalking these fish for centuries, few have a game plan that works based on knowing when, where and why these fish bite during the dog days of summer.

"This is a specialized sport, requiring the upkeep of equipment, knowledge of the lake and the proper techniques to learn about walleye and about night fishing that may not guarantee anything, but will most certainly raise your chances."

Little real technique of night walleye fishing has ever been worked up because fishermen and writers have been saying for years that walleye are taken at night only by sheer luck.



The Jayhawker

By Jim Merriott
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And so fishermen await luck.

The place to start, according to Rader and close friend and colleague Ron Becker, another fishing expert on Lake Waconda, is with the walleye.

Many fishermen consider walleye to be the craftiest fish in the lake.

If you think largemouth bass are spooky and wary you are correct, but be prepared, on a night fishing walleye trip, to match wits with a creature far more difficult to catch. The walleye is far more shy and secretive than the bass.

Put a good walleye fisherman down on Lake Waconda with the fish undisturbed and he will collect some in a couple of nights.

But put a good walleye fisherman at the same lake during the dog days of summer and this angler is in for a long night.

So just how do we fish Lake Waconda in August?

First, Rader said, get it well fixed in your mind that the night walleye is a real adversary. Walleye have never gained much respect as a game fish in the Great Plains, but not because of lack of game qualities.

Oh, no, he said. It's because few walleye fishermen are good enough to outwit them!

When you have been convinced of this, then begin to study the late-night habits of walleye, and you'll end up with better results.

Becker and Rader believe that unless you have a good idea of where the walleye are on Waconda, you are just spinning your reel gears.

This sounds obvious, but it takes a lot of planning to find out where to start the night.

One good way, Rader said, is to isolate holding spots by using an underwater hydrosurvey or "topo" map. Isolating the areas where big females rest is one of the keys. Knowing where they rest and where they go for their quickest meal will unlock the door to night walleye

fishing.

Here are some prime ways to learn walleye patterns on Waconda and other area reservoirs:

STUDY — Talk to the local anglers; see how many walleye, sauger or saugeye have been taken over the past few seasons during this time of year.

TAKE PHOTOS — That's right, take pictures of the lake during the day to find where the low spots are. Kansas has been going through a drought over the past 10 years. However, this year several lakes have higher water levels, which has made fishing tougher. Keep the photos in your fishing log, and when the lake comes up you will be able to look at the photos and know what structure is below the surface.

Among good sources of walleye information are the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks' creel census and stocking reports.

However, those figures aren't infallible. After all, a heavy concentration of walleye fishermen may have lowered the total figures.

Once you have studied the statistics, you are ready for the pinpoint stuff.

From the Kansas Department Wildlife and Parks files, ask for a breakdown on the best general areas, and if there are current creel census figures, you need to know the up-to-date figures.

You will quickly get a picture of Lake Waconda walleye population.

A large lake like Waconda might sustain numerous large white bass, but only a few large walleye.

In addition, walleye are not the least bit aggressive right now, so check the water temperature. Walleye hang deep in cooler, deeper holes during the days, then move to feed on the flats in the shallows during the evenings. They like that comfort zone. They also like to find underwater highways that quickly get them food and then get them

back to the security of the deep. They are predators; they only have three functions in life — eat, keep from being eaten and reproduce.

When you fish for them, think in terms of their food, safety and comfort. Comfort to a walleye can be lying on the bottom. Remember the cardinal rule of walleye — fish close to the bottom. Even if the bottom is in a shallow flat, walleye very seldom hit on top, unless the wind stirs up the insects in the water chop.

Recognize the characteristics of the walleye. A large female is a predator, an eating machine. It will eat almost anything it feels like eating. Some large walleye have had 16-inch shad in their bellies when hooked.

Walleye do have their preferences — nightcrawlers, shad, minnows and perch are their favorites. Remember, even though it is warm, walleye start relating to the fall bite due to the length of the daylight hours. This time of year, each day gets a little shorter.

Long daylight hours means shorter feeding spurts at night. Walleye have a tendency to gorge themselves, then rest. Sometimes they hit fast and furious, and at other times extremely slowly.

Toward the end of the summer vegetation is at its fullest, and bait fish are at their largest. That means more weeds, more hiding places and shorter feeding cycles. Find good feeding structure and be persistent.

If you are interested in making the trip to Cawker City and fishing Lake Waconda, contact Glen Elder Dam-Waconda Lake, c/o Glen Elder Wildlife Management Area, The Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission, Box 1028, Pratt, 67124 for map information.

Write Park Manager, Glen Elder State Park, Glen Elder, 67420, for current information on the lake and accessibility and reservations for camping.

Write the Beloit Area Chamber of Commerce, 123 N. Mill, Box 582, Beloit, Kan., 67420, or call (785) 738-2712 for further contacts.

Call the Rader Lodge hotline, (785) 545-3482, for updated fishing information.

Lake Waconda is north off I-70 at U.S. 281 at Russell and south of Cawker City.

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