



# Swimbait for Bass and Walleyes

photo-Jason Miller

by **Chris Gorsuch**

Swimbait is one of the most versatile lures on the market today. The sheer variety of shapes, sizes, styles and colors allow anglers to target a wide range of gamefish including bass, crappies, pike, trout, hybrid Striped Bass, Muskellunge and Walleyes. Even Channel Catfish can't resist striking a swimbait. It's not uncommon for my clients to catch three or four different species of gamefish on any given day, and it's no wonder the list of lure manufacturers offering swimbaits continues to grow.

Swimbait comes in a wide variety of sizes depending on the targeted gamefish. While standard sizes and configurations can be found in most tackle shops, the offerings are seemingly endless. Bodies are generally offered in 3- to 5-inch lengths, smaller and much larger sizes are available. Some are molded with weights inside the swimbaits, but most require a weighted jig of some sort to complete the lure. Prices range from just a few dollars a pack to several dollars for each swimbait. With today's multi-port injection systems, color schemes are

only limited by imagination. Some are even airbrushed to match the forage that the swimbaits are representing.

Bass and Walleyes are ferocious, almost reckless feeders. It is what makes them so much fun to target. Often, I have witnessed bass, especially Smallmouth Bass, eat until these fish are utterly gorged with minnows and still strike a swimbait.

## Rigging and fishing a swimbait

Swimbait can be rigged several ways, and each have their benefits. Rigging and proper presentation are often linked together. One of the easiest ways to rig a swimbait is to use an open-style hook. Generally, a ball-head jig fits the bill. Ball-head, football-heads, minnow-heads and darter-style heads work well. The exposed hook provides excellent penetration during the hookset but will snag in timber or any heavy cover. Ball-head jigs come in a variety of sizes, and each fits a specific need depending on the application.

When fishing target points such as weed beds, rocky points, shorelines or gravel points, a 1/8- or 3/16-ounce weight is often preferred. This is an ample weight to cast



photo-courtesy of Robert L. Einodshofer

Robert L. Einodshofer caught this 10-pound, 9-ounce, 30½-inch Walleye while fishing on Lake Erie, Erie County.

the swimbait accurately but not too heavy that it impairs the motion of the swimbait. Cast the swimbait to the structure, let it fall on a slack line and start to reel. On most days, a steady, slow reel is all that is needed. On other days, a split second pause or twitch helps induce a strike. When casting to structure in heavy current on a river or in deeper points on a lake, heavier weights such as ¼-ounce weight or heavier weight may be required.

For suspending bass and Walleye, a ⅛-ounce jig will allow the swimbait to fall slowly and yet never reach bottom. Here, shorter casts and feeling the lure fall takes practice. Anchoring or holding over suspended bass and Walleyes works well on lakes and rivers, especially during the colder months. Twitching and pausing the almost vertical presentation can be extremely effective.

## Weighted offset hooks

Fishing swimbaits off a weighted, offset hook allows the bait to move and react differently than a ball-head jig, where the weight is completely forward of the bait. The styles of weighted, offset hooks vary significantly between brands. Some are back-weighted, and some are weighted a bit more forward. Others offer anglers the ability to slide the weight. While most are round, I prefer sled- or keel-styled, weighted, offset hooks. This “wedged sled” shape allows the bait to move around brush piles and rocks better, and it gives the bait the ability to “flutter” side to side as it falls. With the hook point protected at the top

of the bait, these weighted, offset hooks are significantly more snag free than exposed hooks. While that is a good thing, anglers also need to remember to set the hook harder on this style hook.

As with the ball-head jigs, fishing the swimbait on a weighted, offset hook is much the same procedure. Weights generally run from ⅛ to ¼ ounce, and the ⅜ ounce seems to be the magical weight when casting a 3.6- to 5-inch swimbait. Another added benefit with the sled- or keel-style weighted offset hook is that baits can be slow rolled across the bottom. The shape of the weight allows them to tick or drag along the bottom and limit the common snags of an open hook.

When bass or Walleyes need a bit more flash, using an underspin jig or a spinning jig is perhaps one of the best ways to go. This adds versatility to the swimbait and allows the bait to be fished slower due to the drag of the blade. It also adds attraction with the blade and can cause strikes when a plain jig is not creating the desirable response. I find a #1, #2 or #3 size Colorado blade works best on a medium spinning jig, while a #1 or #2 willow blade works best on the underspin jig. Adding a quick change swivel gives anglers the opportunity to swiftly change blade size and color to better match the attitude of the fish.

If you have not given swimbaits a fair try on your favorite lake or river, now is the time to open your world to the possibilities and versatility of these lures. ☐