



# Conneaut Lake's Mixed Bag

by Darl Black

photos by the author

## Unique Natural Lake

Conneaut is a natural lake formed from glacial melt water. The maximum depth is 72 feet—deep for a lake of 925 surface acres.

Public access to the lake is obtained at the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Access on the northwest corner of the lake and the Fireman's Beach Ramp at the southwest corner.

My favorite time to fish Conneaut Lake is shortly after Labor Day until the lake freezes over. At this time, there is less recreational boating traffic and every fish species in the lake puts on the feedbag as the water temperature cools.

During the initial stage of cool down, most gamefish species move into the shallows to feed on shiners, minnows and young of the year perch. But as the water cools and the shallow vegetation begins to die, bait schools leave the shallows for deeper water with predator fish species in pursuit.

At the start of summer, the lake water begins to stratify. The upper layer retains sufficient dissolved oxygen for fish to survive. The lowest level becomes depleted of oxygen, making it inhospitable to fish. The barrier layer between the two is referred to as the thermocline. On Conneaut, the late summer thermocline usually becomes established somewhere around 28- to 30-feet.

In October, the thermocline breaks up as cooled oxygen-rich water sinks and mixes with the deeper oxygen-poor water. This is referred to as the fall turnover. Once the lake turns over, baitfish and predator fish are able to move deeper.

During September, the bite can be unpredictable. Fish remain in summer locations. October signals the start of incredible fall fishing opportunities.

*The fall turnover on Conneaut Lake occurs in mid October. Once the deeper water is re-oxygenated, fish may feed shallow or deep. But as shallow vegetation dies, baitfish move into deeper water and predator fish follow.*



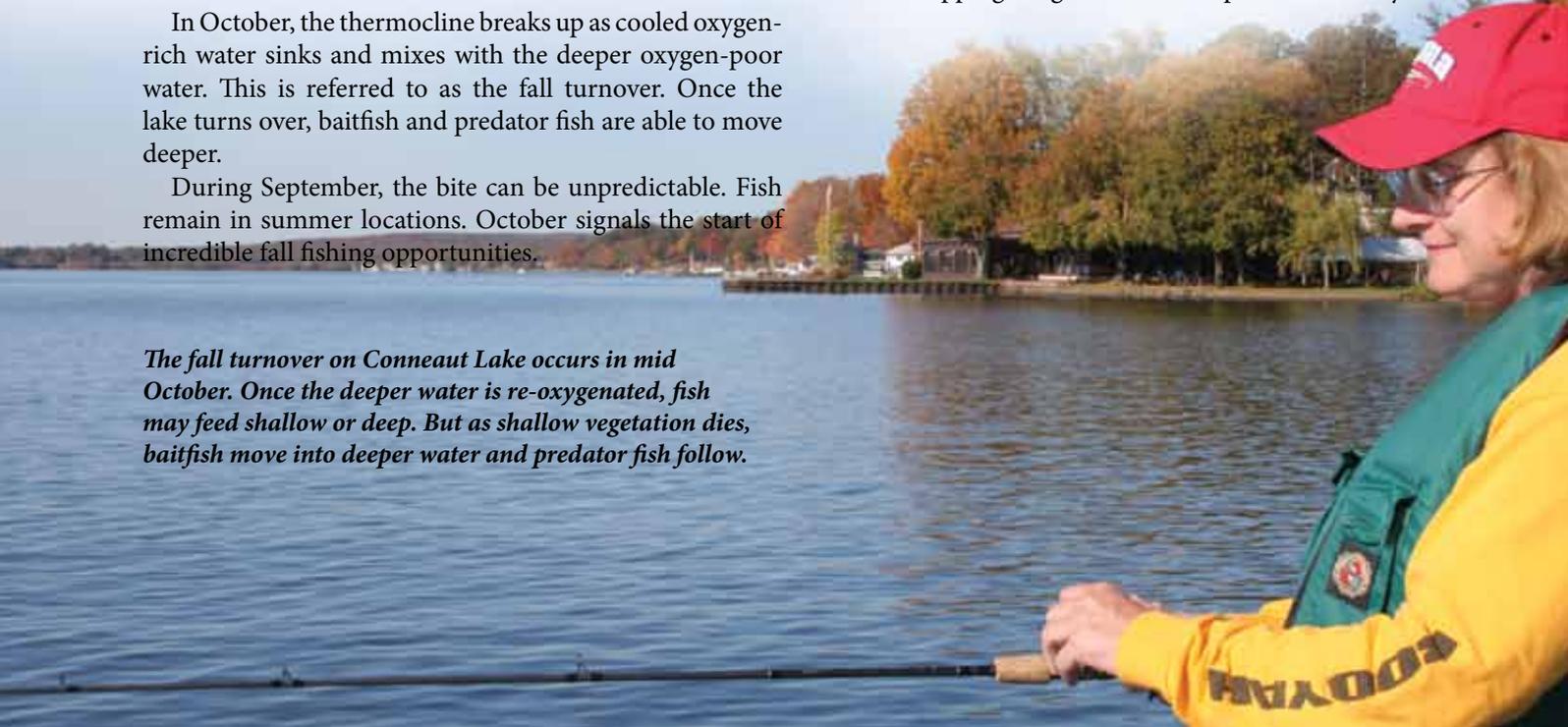
*Top lures for Conneaut Lake's largemouth in the fall include either a jerkbait or jig-n-pig.*

## Black Bass

Largemouth and smallmouth bass are Conneaut's most numerous gamefish. Bass can reach 6-pounds, and bass over 8-pounds have been reported.

Largemouth bass prefer living and feeding near weedbeds. Even in the late fall, largemouth remain near the deepest green weeds typically in 10- to 16-feet of water.

In early fall, you will find smallmouth bass in shallow rock outcroppings or gravel bars that penetrate weedy flats





*Once the thermocline breaks up, crappie and big bluegill begin moving to depths of 25- to 40-feet.*



*Toothy northern pike are plentiful in Conneaut Lake.*

near deep water. Later in the fall, smallies move to ledge drops or rock piles in depths of 12- to 24-feet of water.

With water temperature between 65 and 55 degrees, topwater lures are an excellent choice for largemouth and smallmouth bass. Lipless rattle baits, swimbaits, hard-body jerkbaits and spinnerbaits are effective on bass when there is a gentle wind.

When the water temperature nears 50 degrees, it's time to break out jigs, grubs and blade baits. A skirted jig with a pork chunk or soft plastic crawfish trailer is a lunkercatcher. For largemouth, pitch the jig combo along the deep weedline.

For smallmouth, target fast-dropping points and offshore rock piles. Cast the jig and return it with a slow bottom-crawling retrieve interspersed with the occasional rod pop.

## Muskies and Pike

The largest musky ever caught by an angler in Pennsylvania came from Conneaut Lake—a 54 pounder taken in the late 1920s. Since then, many muskies over 40 pounds have been recorded.

When I first started fishing Conneaut, I routinely hooked a musky. But the number of muskies dropped dramatically in the 1990s for unknown reasons.

Yet, there is a good chance another record fish lurks in the depths of Conneaut Lake.

On the other hand, I expect to catch northern pike every time I'm on the lake. Most pike caught are less than 2-feet long. By utilizing specific lures in the right area, 30-inch pike may be taken.

During the early fall, retrieve a spinnerbait or soft jerkbait over the tops of submerged vegetation on the flats. From mid October until ice-up, direct your efforts on the deep edge of larger weed flats and narrow bands of weeds that drop into deep water. Concentrate on vertical-drop presentations with bass-size spinnerbaits, jig-n-pork or soft plastic lizards on jigheads. Be sure to use baits with prominent splashes of chartreuse, hot pink or orange.

## Crappie and Bluegill

Schools of crappie and bluegill hold along deep weed edges during the early fall. They can be caught by slowly swimming small 2-inch soft plastic grubs on 1/16-ounce jigheads.

After the turnover, crappies and bluegill move to deep water and hug hard-bottom slopes in 24- to 40-feet of water. You can wait for a 1/8-ounce jig to flutter down 30-feet, or you can use a hard metal lure that sinks quickly. Jigging spoons and vibrating blade baits are effective on deep water panfish.

Go with a 1/4- or 3/8-ounce spoon or blade. Drop it straight down to the fish. Firmly raise and lower the rod tip to jig the lure. If any fish is in a feeding mood, it will smack it. Sweep the rod upward and reel.

## White Bass

There are a few lakes other than Conneaut where you can catch black bass, crappies and blue gills along with a respectable pike or musky. The last four state record white bass have come from Conneaut Lake. Right now the state record stands at 3-pounds, 15.7-ounces. ☐