



DEEP WATER BLUEGILLS BY BOAT

by Vic Attardo

photos by the author

There I was, humming and singing a tune by B.B. King, and the thing that put me in the mood for this was the dozen or so fillet-ready bluegills captured in my cooler.

Though it was hot and sticky, I was feeling good about the blues.

Summertime bluegill fishing is a whole other thing from easy spring fishing and requires a change in location and technique to get it right. Indeed, the bluegills already in my collection weren't spawn-time bluegills. And, they certainly weren't the bluegills lined-up in shallow water with side-by-side nests. These were muggy-weather bluegills holding in deeper waters. In this case, an 18-foot deep flat accessible only by boat. And, that's the first lesson in catching summer bluegill, the need to get out of the shallows and fish deeper water.

It's important to know what bluegills are doing in this season and weather. Chances are the oval panfish are hanging in loose packs around thick cover. They're probably not traveling a great deal, though they'll move around in the morning and evening. Mostly, they're waiting for food to come to them. Fortunately, this makes bluegills highly competitive and competitive bluegills are catchable bluegills. But, it is mostly the smaller bluegills that will race to bait in frantic groups. The bigger plates are slower to react, but when they decide to eat the little guys, move away.

When I was visiting Conneaut Lake, Crawford County, for a couple of days, I had the blues on my mind. I knew Conneaut Lake, Pennsylvania's largest natural lake, is rich

with 8- and 9-inch bluegills, but the trouble is finding them. Some anglers in another boat said they had searched the shallow weedy shore that extends down from Conneaut Lake's ramp, but they did not find fish. I didn't think they would, not in the middle of a July day.

Instead, I took off across the lake and fished a flat I suspected was the size of several football fields. On this flat, the weeds pushed up at least 5 feet from the bottom, but there were spaces between the stalks.

I went at the bluegills with a drop-shot rig and ice jigs, a trick that had been taught to me years before by an excellent Conneaut Lake angler and a veteran of Desert Storm, Bryan Stuyvesant.

Since then, the best way I found to handle the placement of bluegills around tall grass is to make short casts, just short enough to get the baits away from the shadow of the boat. Next, reel the dropshot weight until you feel it pulling away from a weed or keep it where the weeds are slightly open. Then, jiggle the rod tip to get the jigs moving. I use both marabou tipped and soft-plastic adorned jigs.

Also, I learned that it doesn't hurt to have the jig tipped with a 1-inch long piece of nightcrawler.

With this technique, you'll know pretty quickly if bluegills are in the area and if you have the right combination of offerings.

To catch large numbers of these mostly stationary fish, it's necessary to cover water. After pauses and twitches, which hopefully garner some bluegills, I'll move the rig a few feet. If



You'll be in a good mood with a dozen or so fillet-ready panfish.

you're using an electric motor, keep pace by drifting the boat behind it. In clear water, it's important not to fish an area the boat has just floated over. Keep your rig out from the bow or stern while performing this maneuver.

A constant variable is jig color, but I have four main colors. These are black, white/silver, olive and dark orange, both for the jig head and feather or plastic, with a splash of red at the collar or hook.

Of course, not every deep-water situation is as deep as Conneaut Lake.

Rose Valley Lake, Lycoming County, is another of my bluegill haunts with bluegills up to 10 inches long and fat pumpkinseeds up to 9 inches long. Around spawning time,

I'll throw a Tar's Olive Flash along the shoreline with my fly rod and catch bluegills until I'm silly.

But, the bluegills back out with warm weather. Then, it becomes a deepwater game. Rose Valley Lake is not really deep. Beyond the shoreline, the lake is thick with old stumps, which makes lure work problematic. However, tubes and grubs work in this structure. Here, I prefer to anchor and work a slip bobber with bait in snaggy waters.

But to get it right on Rose Valley Lake, it's necessary to get into an area with a contoured bottom structure that bluegills find comfortable. These are very slight discrepancies at the bottom and difficult to see on sonar, but bluegills know about them.

To catch large numbers of panfish, it's necessary to cover water.

At Rose Valley Lake, I often anchor in 7 feet of water and cast around the boat. I retrieve the slip bobber and bait pausing at intervals to see what it brings. Time after time, the bobber will sink at a specific contour or break that I didn't know was there. When I cast again beyond this spot, I have to wait until the bait gets very close before the bobber sinks again. It's in these spots that the bluegills hang. Sometimes, these spots will attract moving bluegills, and that's where they take the bait.

When shore fishing in the summer, I look for deep water in the form of a trench or drop-off within casting distance. Rather than fish the clear, golden water of a pond or lake edge, I fish the dark water from shore. If there's a trench that's at least 4-feet deep, I've got a spot for bluegills. Once again, I pursue these deeper bluegills with a slip bobber and worm but more frequently a Tar's Flash on a short leader. I keep the weighted fly moving with staccato strips to feel the strike when it happens. If I would let the fly hang in the water without movement, the bluegills would spit it out.

When shore fishing to deep water, there can be key locations next to a few rocks, a few weeds or a washout. A washout is where seepage comes down from the sloping shore and forms a slight indentation in the bottom out into the deeper water. These spots can be gold mines for bluegills. Dragging a nymph around the outside corners of washouts produces quality fish.

These are just a couple of ways that you can enjoy singing the blues this summer. ☐



At Rose Valley Lake, Lycoming County, it is necessary to work an area with contoured bottom structure that bluegills find comfortable.



This nice pumpkinseed was caught at Conneaut Lake, Crawford County.