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Fall Delta Fishing, a bass is just a bass.

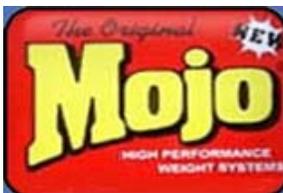
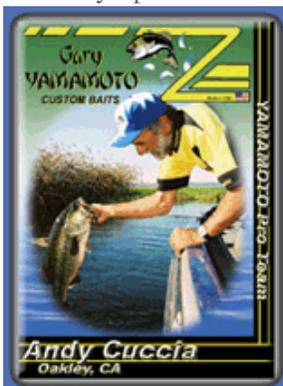
Fishing here on the California Delta can have its extremes. It indeed can produce some of the most exciting bass fishing in the country today. There are a lot of giant bass that roam these fertile waters, with great numbers too, that offer many opportunities to a wide array of angler preferences. On the flip side, it can also be one of the toughest places for anglers to fish on an annual basis. The diversity of this river system, with its many meandering levee walls, deep dead end sloughs, back water ditches and canals, open flooded lakes, the dock laden communities and main river channels, provide the bass here, many different options in how they spend their daily and annual lives. The river system is loaded with a wide array of vegetation, no less than 10 major varieties of surface and sub-surface plant life exists. Toss in the facts we have daily tides sweeping in and out of the system, some ever changing weather patterns coming off the San Francisco Bay coast line and the wind tunnel created by the interior mountain range surrounding Mt Diablo, we've got an endless and confusing puzzle here that is foreign and can be very confusing to many anglers.

As a guide here, who lives on the water, I am afforded the opportunity to see and experience many daily and seasonal changes that most anglers aren't aware of or totally over look. What most anglers get caught up here with is the tide, the current and the wind. Probably as much as 95% of the anglers here spend all their time in 0-6 feet of water chasing the bass. Constantly working the tulle clumps, fishing the trough between the rocks and that first grass line, or chucking and winding on the outer edge of the same grass. Anglers get stuck in this box of bad habits here. What they tend to over look, with all these variables present here, a bass is still a bass. Largemouth bass have very specific tendencies that govern their annual life cycle. When we fish the lakes, it all makes sense and we can follow those seasonal patterns and stay on the fish, or find them with regularity. Here, anglers get too caught up in what they have heard and read, and forget this all important fact about the fish. The bass has a very specific life cycle, the only difference here is it lives in a totally different neighborhood. Yet their tendencies will be the same here as they are on any lake. If anglers would apply, what they know and use on our lakes, they will find fishing here on the Delta is a lot easier than they realized.

This past spring and summer has presented anglers with many challenges in staying on the fish. After two consecutive, long cold winters, which killed off much of the grass here, the warm winter of 09, has allowed much of that grass to rebound, to where it is now thicker in many areas than it has been in four years. It's kind of funny as I surf the internet, and listen to all the dock talk when tournaments come to town, I hear how the Delta has gotten tougher due to all the weed spraying that takes place here. What's funny about this to me is, this is typically coming from anglers who don't live here, who really have no idea what is going on in regards to spraying and its relationship to the grasses here.

Yes, they have sprayed in Frank's tract over the years, most recently dumping pellets

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in areas to control the weeds for boating traffic in, out and around the lake. This has been happening since they built the storm wall on Piper at the south west end of Bethel Island many years ago. But what limited control that goes on in Franks, is not what killed the grass out in Sherman, Big Break, up in Sycamore, down in Whiskey, Italian and areas around Whites and Disappointment. Anglers got caught up in the phenomena of the fish factory of Frank's. They got spoiled and never ventured anywhere else, hence as far as they know, all the grass has been killed off, when that is far from what really happened. Yet this is what anglers read and believe.

We also see a lot of spraying to control the water Hyacinth, which is an invasive species to this river system. They no longer use a chemical pesticide to kill this plant, but in fact a growth like hormone that fertilizes and speeds up the growth cycle, bringing it to a fast end of life. They've done a great job the past two years of doing this, yet I still hear and read about all the Hyacinth in the system. What these folks don't understand is this surface plant all over the river right now, it is not Hyacinth, but in fact a common native species called Periwinkle.

I mention these two vegetation aspects at the top of this article for one reason, outside of Clearlake, the Delta is one of the two fisheries here that is inundated with various grasses and vegetation. And any astute bass angler, that has paid attention over the years to the various TV programs, magazines and tournament results that come in from the east, south and central part of this country, grass is a huge part of a bass' preferred habitat choice. Spending time fishing the various grass types here is a key element in locating bass on this river, just like anywhere else in the country. Remember, a bass is just a bass.

Another overlook area in patterning fish here is the lack of time anglers spend fishing points. If you think about it, typically what is the first thing most of us do when we venture out to our favorite lake, during the summer, fall and winter? We go find a point and start fishing. DUH! Anglers don't do that enough here and they should, you're missing out on a lot of fish. We're just too comfortable with the currents and wind, to put our trolling motors down and cruise miles down a rock levee bank covering water. Or we fish long meandering walls of tules. We spend countless hours doing this, not getting bit. Yet in our travels down these sections, when we catch a fish or two on a subtle point, we just keep going. If we were to stop and thoroughly work that area, you would find that other fish are probably there using that subtle point too.

The Delta offers so many options when thinking about points. We have the very obvious points on the many levee rock walls throughout the 1000s of miles of water ways here. There are also many more points available, on the ends of each tulle island. And if you observe it even closer, you will find many smaller tulle points within these vast tulle groves. These subtle points are major ambush places that bass use here. Most anglers will make one cast to such a spot and continue moving. Why is it that we don't make several casts to those spots? We do this on lakes, don't we? The many docks throughout the Delta also proved them with a point of ambush. Docks can be a huge pattern here, yet most anglers over look them.

Another example of points within a pattern is in the grass itself. Most anglers here will claim the struggle on the low tides. Yet the savvy river anglers, prefer to fish at low tides, having better success on the low tides than most. Why is that? It's simple, when the tides fall out, exposing the weeds, you can now see all the little subtleties of the weed's contour. You now can see the little pockets, the ambush points the weeds provide a bass. We can now make more precise casts to these locations. When the tide is up and covering the weeds, we're basically blind casting. Focus and understand the points here. Remember, a bass is just a bass.

In the fall, determining, or recognizing the preferred forage, is critical in locating and catching fish. This river system has a wide array of forage to offer the bass to feed on. The bass here are very aggressive and opportunistic, and will eat just about anything that plops out onto their dining room table. Yet there are three major forage sources the bass eat regularly here. Each one of these tends to be seasonal. Most common is the crawdads. When available, the bass will eat these year round. Most of the dads are found on the rocks, yet many during the summer, can also be found in the tules. Bluegills are a favorite dish of the bass in late spring through summer. Starting in June, the shad begin to appear as they spawn all throughout the river system along the weed lines. The shad tend to spend most of the summer hanging around these weed lines, where they have the comfort of hiding in the weeds for protection as well as the forage source for them that is available in and around the same weeds.

In the fall, the shad become a preferred forage source for bass. By September, they have grown to 3-5 inches and schools can be found all over this place. The key in locating and catching the bass, is as simple as finding the shad. What anglers tend to forget is that the shad here do the exact same thing as shad on a lake in the fall. They migrate into the backs of coves at night, then migrate back out into the deeper main lake during the day, and back again. Here on the Delta, those shad migrate into marinas, small coves, flooded lakes, and the backs of dead end sloughs. They then move back out to deeper moving water during the day, and back again at night. Understanding and following that daily migration of the shad, will help you to catch more bass as you fish those migration routes the bait is using.

Two tall tell signs that bait is present, the birds and the stripers. How many of you won't hesitate to go run up on the birds and boils on our lakes? Keep an eye out for that here too. You will be surprised how many black bass, are getting excited and involved in that striper boil! The bass let the stripers do all the front end work. As the stripers go flying through these massive schools of bait, injuring the shad, the blackies just sit down below and pick off what bait falls down to them. Many times too, the black bass will be pounding the schools with the stripers. It's an opportunistic chance for the bass to feed. It's an aggressive behavior, triggered by the feeding frenzy of the stripers and the distress omitted by the shad. A bass has gotta come get him some in these conditions. It's all the same, a bass, is just a bass.

With all this in mind, patterning bass in the fall can be really easy here. The choice of baits is widespread. The common denominator though, is focus on the shad colored baits. Although you can bottom fish and dropshot shad colored baits, you are far better off tossing the many reaction bait options available to anglers today. Don't wait for the colder months of November to start tossing jerk baits here. Any Lucky Craft in that Chartreuse Shad color pattern, be it a Stacy, Pointer or Bevy Shad, will trigger strikes from aggressive bass. I prefer using these types of baits along the deeper weed lines found along the tule islands.

Another excellent option here that most anglers overlook for black bass is a white jig, especially a buck tail hair jig. So many times over the years, I've been tossing that big white jig here for stripers, and an 8 pound largemouth clocks it. Next thing you know, I'm flippen and pitching that bait where ever I find shad. This bait represents those injured shad falling away from the school that was just invaded by a big striper. It's an easy meal falling down into the lair of a giant river bass. Fish it fast, fish it erratic to trigger strikes. Lipless crankbaits in white, chrome or American shad like patterns, will put plenty of fish in the boat day in and day out here, especially when fished around the grass flats and docks where shad are present. Regular diving crankbait will also work along the rock levee walls, but expect to get

caught in that box of catching smaller fish, and running out of water as the tide drops.

Over the past three years, my number one bait out here has been the big Hammer paddle tailed swimbaits. The Pearl white, 138 Phantom and Blue Shad in either 5.5 or 6" inch is best. Fishing these on a 1/2 oz or 3/4 oz jig head is easy. It produces a lot of numbers, and also attracts some of the bigger bass this river has to offer at this time. Chucking and winding these paddle tails all day is easy fishing and very productive on the river. Another great option here is using the big topwater baits. Using a big white MS Slammer, or an injected white Black Dog Lunger Punker, will garner some of the bigger strikes you'll see here in the fall from our black bass.

The fall is all about the shad on this river system. You find the shad, you are naturally gonna find the bass, just like anywhere else in the country. Two more tips I should pass along, first and foremost, leave you 8-12 pound fairy wands at home! Come out here in the fall with heavy duty tackle. On any given cast, you may have a giant striper grab your bait. This leads me to my second tip, if you're struggling patterning the black bass and catching stripers, go chase stripers, they'll make you forget about catching blackies, until you stumble onto them doing so.

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