

## The Right Place At The Right Time

Want to catch fish? I mean, REALLY catch fish? Then live by this phrase: "Nothing beats being at the right place at the right time." Go out of your way to put yourself in that position. Simply be where the fish are, and be there when they're feeding.

A perfect personification of this is my friend Matt Wilder, one of the best fishermen I've ever met. Matt likes to catch big fish and has done so many times with many species. First of all, he wants BIG FISH, so he fishes an area, lake, stream, river, or saltwater area, where a lot of big fish of the species he's targeting reside. Next he wants to find them when they're concentrated, where there are a lot of big fish in close proximity to each other. Lastly, he wants to be on that special spot when these fish go on the feed. And of course, he wants to have the right fly or lure, fished at the right depth, with the correct presentation! It's all really that simple to him, and it's gotten to the point where it's become instinctive.

I've been with him in Northern Quebec on the Whale River where incredible numbers of big Lake Trout would come out of a lake into the river starting at ice out, and they'd remain there well into Summer. They'd be there, in that shallow water, the entire time. You could get them on surface flies, like lemming imitations, where the take was a either a huge echoing explosion, or a three second roll through the fly. First you'd see a big head, then the back, then the adipose fin, and finally the tail, and it all seemed to take place in slow motion! And this was with a species that across the continent is known for spending almost all of it's time in very deep water, being shallow for only a short time. The laker also has a reputation as a slow fighter. Many of the fish here, in these highly oxygenated waters, certainly contradicted that! They fought very hard, with some quickly running off fifty yards of backing or so, and there were surprising numbers that jumped completely into the air after hook up, rare for a Lake Trout. Right place, huh?

The same place, a different year, and a little down river, was where we ran into an unbelievably large concentration of big Brook Trout in pre spawn. This happened in late July into early August, after the laker fishing had slowed. The flat was big and wide, of uniform depth, uniform bottom (small pebbles), with uniform current speed throughout, and it was covered, loaded, with big Brook Trout. Four of us, Jim Levison - photographer, Russ Maddin - primo Michigan trout guide and tyer, Matt, and myself enjoyed nonstop quadruple headers of five pound and bigger Brook Trout for three hours straight one afternoon! The biggest that day was seven pounds, and the next week someone caught an eight. You'd actually have four or five big brookies move into the eddy YOU CREATED just by standing in the river wading! Literally right at your feet! Maybe there were a thousand huge Brook Trout there. It was exactly as Lee Wulff described Minipi when he first discovered it, but this was decades later! Amazing!

I'll go fishing with Matt on the rivers of Arkansas chasing big Brown Trout, and of course, we'll find spots where you can not only get big fish (Matt's largest brown here is twenty eight pounds on fly) but at times get LOTS of big ones ( how about eighty fish in three and a half hours, all twenty inches and over - biggest twenty nine inches?) Right places, right time of year, right water level, right fly, right retrieve, right depth.

Huge (thirty to forty two lb.) Lake Trout on white sand flats in three feet of water, Victoria Island, Nunavut Canada, hottest part of the Summer, on fly. Big Striped Bass in concentrated schools way up tributaries running into large reservoir in Tennessee in hot weather. Stripers concentrated in deep water near dam during middle of Summer on another Tennessee reservoir. These are just some of his many very productive fishing experiences that were all usually thought out and planned long before he made his first cast. Matt Wilder, as an angler, (he's a music producer in Nashville when not fishing) LIVES by the concept of being at the right place at the right time and has been rewarded with incredible fishing because of it!

Certain places have a concentration of fish, some a concentration of large fish. Be it stream, river, lake, or saltwater area, find where these places are.

Many have that great concentrations of fish and great fishing at certain times of the year or season. This often depends on water temperatures, fish migrations, spawning times, a certain bait's availability, that particular bait's numbers and concentration, as well as ITS movements, and migrations. An example of temperature affect would be a shallow Spring Creek in Summer where most of the stream appears vacant of fish because they've all moved up to the deep water at it's headwaters near the streams source, so they could find cool water. A fish migration, would be following the Striped Bass moving South along the Northeast coast in November and finding a bonanza of big fish in Southern New Jersey. Targeting bait availability might find you fishing the big spinners of the Hex hatch at midnight in late June on Northern Michigan's Manistee River as a conveyor belt of big flies floats by you to the sound of "slurping" big browns! Or finding the "big brown clouds" of bay anchovies right off Montauk Point's iconic light in early October as schools of hard fighting False Albacore rocket through them like a buzz saw! A spawning run would be steelhead wherever you find them, Great Lakes or on the Northwest Coast and this could be in Fall, Winter, Spring or even Summer depending on where you are! These are just a few of the countless examples of situations that you can identify and target. Find the ones in the local areas and region you fish.

The right time includes right time of day as well, and this can make all the difference in the world! Very often fish feed at, and right after first light and again late in the day towards sundown. The "low light " levels. Overcast days can be very productive too. Night time can be the right time too, and with certain species of fish such as Striped Bass and Brown Trout you increase your "lunker landing" chances considerably if you fish in the dark.

A nice cloudy, drizzly day can be a great day to get big fish feeding. Trout, and BIG trout will start chasing baitfish in low light, and if the water is rising and getting a little cloudier (roily) so much the better. Make that inflow some warming water in the Spring and you have the perfect conditions for good streamer fishing. When that stream water gets to 50 degrees and above - GO GET 'EM! A day with intermittent drizzle will also give you better dry fly fishing. Hatches will come off better and slower (example: Those Hendricksons in May) and the duns will take more time to dry their wings before they take flight so they'll be on the water longer. The trout know this and will eagerly take advantage of it! Be there!

A lake or pond inlet in Spring and Summer (and in Fall too if the inflowing water is warmer than what it's flowing into) can be an incredible spot when rain forces an increased waterflow here. The fish know food will wash into this concentrated spot and the addition of the usually clouded water will make it harder for the prey to see the predator as well. It's the right place - right time

for largemouth and smallmouth bass, panfish, trout, and other species. You can often find a place like this very close to home.

Moving water is a constant in saltwater fishing: Tides, tide stages, changing directions of current, different speed currents, different tide heights. The right tide, tidal stage, current speed, and direction of flow (including outgoing and incoming) can be vital to when fish feed in a specific area. You want to find out when this is so you can put yourself "in the fish" consistently! Gather all the knowledge you can from experience, talking to other knowledgeable anglers, guides, seminars and presentations, readings, u tube, and on the net including Riversage Journal, and put together the optimal tidal "when" for the species you're chasing in the waters you're fishing. Try to stay "current" too, because feeding times can change quickly. Fish the wrong tide or tidal stage and you might see and catch nothing, even though the area is loaded with fish. They're just weren't feeding at that time. Be out there on the "right" one when they "turn on", and you could find yourself in a bonanza of rabidly feeding fish, and have yourself a day to remember! In the exact same place!

I like, and most often do best with no wind, but in some instances some wind is better. A heavy Northeast wind at Montauk or the outer beaches of Cape Cod blows the bait right to the beach, which in turn attracts the predators and gives you good fishing right in front of you in the surf. During the Spring tarpon run (migration) in the Florida Keys and along the West coast of Florida, ideal shallow flats conditions are a hot day, a cloudless sky (for good sighting conditions) and a slight wind, putting "a little ripple on the water" as they say, so that the tarpon will come closer to and be less wary of the boat and will grab the fly easier because they're less "on alert" than they would be on a "flat" windless sea, where they would see you more easily. The lighter wind here acts as camouflage and still isn't too heavy to impede casting.

Targeting moon phases can help you with your fishing success too. Doug Hannon, the "Bass Professor" found that three quarters of all the all tackle IGFA record fish were caught three days before to three days after both the full and the new moons and on the day of the quarter moon. These were the times of most activity in the ecosystem as well! Makes sense! I'm moon conscious and have caught bigger fish around the full moon, and especially on the new moon. There are certain places where the fishing is tremendous around the full moon, especially coming on to it and right on it, but there are also locations where it seems the fish "act funny" and simply don't bite on it. I'm talking day or night too. It seems that in many locations in the world this downturn is true - so check to see if the area you fish or want to fish is good on the full moon phase or not. It's well known that Striped Bass fishing at Montauk, the Race, and Western Long Island Sound is just dynamite around the full moon! Giant and record fish landed here at this time have proven it again and again. But in Maine and Cape Cod the bass fishing reverses and gets slow, with reports of lots of fish following but not taking around the same lunar phase. The guides say "Just wait a few days, they'll eat". Find out if your place is full moon sensitive and how so!

The new moon offers no controversy! Activity is condensed to fewer days than with the full, but fishing can be stellar around it anywhere you go. The best fishing BY FAR happens on the day and night of the new moon and the day/night following. Sometimes the day before the new moon is good too. It's worked for me so well that I plan my "exotic" trips to coincide with the new moon and the day after if I can, and have been rewarded with big and giant fish, even records, by doing so. This holds true for all species in both fresh and saltwater. The new moon generates concentrated super fish activity! Like Doug Hannon, I've come to the conclusion that it's the

increase in total ecosystem activity (which includes those big fish) that makes the new and full moon, and especially the new moon, special. Add moon consciousness into your journal of "right times"!

Now I'm going to review some scenarios that help target "right times". They're just a few of the MANY examples like this in existence. You want to find or find out about situations like this where you fish or want to fish.

1.) Cinder Worm swarm, or "hatch". - The small (1 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches long) cinder worm spawns in tremendous numbers in the Northeast's far inshore saltwater and estuarine areas in May, June, and July, some places (like Rhode Island) in the late afternoon, and in others mostly at night. This phenomenon draws huge numbers of Striped Bass, sometimes schools of hundreds and perhaps thousands, into surprisingly small shallow areas. It happens on the outgoing tide once the water gets to 60 degrees and is most prolific around the full and new moons.

2.) Bay Anchovies - Montauk Point NY - I touched on this before. Starting in September and going into October incredible numbers of small Bay Anchovies are washed into Montauk Pt., NY, coming there from bays and estuarine areas both locally and in the region, such as Narraganset Bay, RI. The bait often appears as multiple large, light brown clouds in the water, some an acre in size. When feeding gets full blown you have an invasion of False Albacore, bluefish, and Striped Bass in such numbers that it's hard to believe! They're all on the surface, and it's a sight to behold, let alone fish! The sound of the actual feeding can be deafening! A flyrodder's paradise!

3.) Eel migration - Chesapeake Bay - When there were large numbers of large Striped Bass on the East Coast, their migration south, (as they got to Chesapeake Bay (Nov./Dec.) would coincide with a migration of American Eels at the same place at the same time! Do you think that meant great fishing?

4.) Menhaden moving North in Spring - May, June, July along the New Jersey and New York Coast. Schools of big Striped bass on Spring migration run into compact schools of menhaden as both migrate North. It's a great time and place to catch a large Striped Bass or two. Hotspots are North Jersey, NY Bite, and Long Island South Shore inlets. With the huge downturn in the striper population this wonderful phenomenon is now less predictable day to day, and is sadly nothing like it was only a few years ago. It still happens though and in certain places can be quite good if you time it right.

Find the bait - find the fish ... It's just SO important to saltwater fishing! Predators follow bait movements and migrations. This is often predictable according to time of season and water temperatures. When you find concentrations of bait you often find fish. You as an angler want to know what the bait is, where it will be, and how to copy it.

This even occurs in freshwater too. Examples are schools of herring (Alwives for example) in lakes, shad kills in lakes that drop stunned and dead individuals into rivers below their dams in Winter and Spring, (The upper East Branch of the Delaware River in NY and the White River in Arkansas are two examples), lamprey spawns in early Spring in Northern Michigan, and even trout stockings in the same place. Here large numbers of small hatchery trout are released (stocked) into small areas along a river and big trout soon come in to feed on this suddenly

available food source. This happens in other locales in the Country too, such as Mountain Fork in Oklahoma and The Little Red River in Arkansas. Find out where it happens near you and make an effort to fish it.

Back to more scenarios:

5.) The Palolo Worm is even more important to Florida Keys tarpon fishing than once thought. They suspected that perhaps tarpon migrated to and away from Islamorada because of this worm's appearance (it's a Nerus worm, closely related to the Northeast's Cinder Worm) which occurs sometime around the full moon in late May. They knew that the tarpon loved eating it. But tarpon fly tournament winners in recent years started winning by using "palolo" worm imitations and found that these specific flies worked better than any others, not only when the worms were on the water, but during the entire May through June season! It was as if the "poonies" were LOOKING for it! Anglers also adjusted their retrieve, from a one handed strip to a faster rod butt in the armpit two handed hand over hand one (borrowed from Northeast saltwater anglers who'd been using it in their region for decades) which allowed the flies to copy both the naturals speed and movement much more closely than before. Hence, anglers caught more tarpon! Right place - Keys with migrating tarpon - at right time - May and June, with right fly and right presentation! A winning combination!

6.) Look at the Great Lakes salmon, steelhead, and Brown Trout spawning run. You have large numbers of big salmonoids squeezing into tributaries ranging in size from large rivers to small creeks region wide. When you "hit the run" right you can see and hook up with a lot of these fish. The chinook run can start in August and just get better into Sept. and October. The browns get good as you move onto later October and the beginning of November, and the steelhead run best from late October through November and into December. They may be around all Winter too because they spawn in the Spring. Try to get good reports, both regional and local, about the season's current runs because in some seasons certain species are "late" and the run itself ebbs and flows as it proceeds. Numbers of fish in the runs (for each species and even on the whole) can vary widely from year to year as well. A good internet source for Lake Ontario is the Douglaston Salmon Run Fishing Report, which comes out of a private area and fishing resort on the Salmon River in Pulaski NY. Find others.

Although many different flies work for those salmonoids, the standard would be one copying the salmon or Brown Trout egg. Browns, rainbows (many also run up from Lake), and steelhead will all be eating eggs at least some of the time. A good place to look for anadromous trout is right behind the salmon spawning on their beds.

Hey, it's the same in Alaska where in late Summer and Autumn Rainbow Trout "hunters" spot big rainbows immediately downstream from spawning salmon and drift egg imitations or beads into them with tremendous success! It's like giving candy to a baby! This particular fishing has become iconic in fly fishing!

7.) A good time to be on the West Coast is in the Spring when the salmon fry appear. And when they do it'll be in big numbers. You'll be on a stream and see little intermittent explosions here and there. It looks like some sort of rise and you'll try every dry, emerger, and nymph you have and get NOTHING, or at best a very small fish or two. You're thinking "tough day"! Tie on a #10 streamer or small fry imitation and it's as if the stream came alive, like someone suddenly pushed the "feed" button! Trout just come out of "everywhere" for that fly! Big ones too, and with

abandon! That slow day suddenly turns into dream stream through bonanza city! It's happened to me at the foothills of the Sierras and it was amazing! Those trout were just feeding selectively on the salmon fry and were looking at nothing else. It was certainly right place/right time, but you needed right fly to realize it!

So, in the end, learn as much as you can about the habits of the species you're targeting and about the area you fish. Not a bad idea to learn something about the bait they're feeding on as well. Be aware of the seasonal movements of both, as they often coincide. Find someone or somewhere where you can get good, timely, and accurate reports concerning the fishing in the areas you're going to fish, a friend, good fisherman, guide who will tell you, tackle or fly shop, perhaps somewhere on the net as well. And, oh yeah! Always remember that "Nothing, but NOTHING beats being at the right place at the right time!" Look forward to seeing you there!

Mark Sedotti