

Jerk-N-Trout

by Chris Gorsuch

Big trophy sized brown trout in New York and Pennsylvania are no surprise. With state and private stocking associations, cold flowing rivers thrive with healthy trout populations that hold trout year over year. What may be surprising is the time of year that offers some of the best opportunity for these trophies. Cold water releases in boundary waters of the Upper Delaware River and upper extent of the Lehigh River are both becoming renowned for their trout fishing. While spring and autumn are the seasons that usually offer the most angler activity, the summer months should not be ignored.

With a good source of natural forage and cool oxygen rich water, these trout thrive right through the warmer months. From the season opener through the month of May, the rivers are full of anglers seeking these trophy trout. In the warm water months of summer, angler attention often fades and the once busy pools are for the most part vacant in many locations below New York's *No-Kill* waters. Due to some harvest, the trout population is reduced, but there are plenty of active trout to be found. For years I focused primarily on smallmouth bass in these rivers. My affinity for smallmouth bass has lead to a number of discoveries with these larger trout. One discovery is that these hold-over trout are very aggressive, opportunistic feeders. They are every bit as aggressive as bass.



One lure that performs well almost year round is the Jerkbait. Whether you know them as stick baits, minnow baits, twitch baits or jerk baits; bass and trout can't seem to resist them. I realize 3.5 to 4.5" minnow baits might seem to be a misfit for terrestrial feeding trout, but using these baits stands to reason. The minnow base in these rivers is the prominent forage for some of these larger trout. Not to get caught up in an old cliché, but big bait - big fish applies here. It is not always the case, but it has happened enough for me to sit up and take notice. On

more than one occasion, I've approached a popular stretch of the river where other anglers are working smaller artificial baits. In waiting my turn, I'll move in as they move further down the river. A few casts later and I'm battling a trophy sized trout that ignored the previous offerings. This is not to discount the value of smaller bait profiles, just to reinforce how effective minnow baits can be even in heavily fished areas.

Before jumping into the where and how, perhaps some time should be spent with the lures. Jerkbaits come in many styles, colors and sizes. Each type fit a specific angling situation. Some float, some suspend and others can be counted down to work in a variety of depths. The bill size and speed of retrieve will also help to control the depth. The size and profile of the bait will both match a specific bait fish and each brand has a slightly different action. Some have a tight wobble while others are more erratic. Selecting the right lure for a section of water can

make all the difference.

Smaller lipped floating type minnow baits work well in shallow water. They tend to catch the bottom less and when paused that rise, a quick jerk or turn of the reel handle and they bounce, rising and darting like a wounded minnow. These floating lures work well in swift current as you can see them on the surface and start to work them when they reach the desired target area. For depths of 4 to 8 feet, the suspending baits work well and have been the go-to lure for

me on most rivers. Countdown lures also have a place, but in most of the areas I fish, current impacts the ability to allow the time required for the lure to reach the required depth.

Size and color will also play a role. Generally having at least 2 body sizes will allow the angler to define the mood of the fish. There are times when the trout are so tuned in to a specific size, that an angler must choose the correct size to get a response. Often in these cases, simply changing to a larger or smaller jerkbait will trigger a strike. The color pattern of the lure seems to be more for the angler than the fish. Angler's can keep it pretty basic but most will have a variety of choices. A rule of thumb is to have a color pattern that matches the prey in the flow. Lures with silver sides and a black back match much of the minnow forage. For a bit more flash, those with gold sides and a brighter belly work well. The condition of the water should also dictate what colors are selected. In slightly stained water, brighter colors and larger profiles will often be a first selection. However, in crystal clear water, lures with a little less flash may be the first colors selected. Sunshine and cloud cover can also play a role and every accomplished angler will experiment day to day.

Dialing in on specific types of water is the key to eliminating non-productive areas. Focus on areas with deep water near current. Trout relate to current and water depth as much or more than any fish I chase. Deep water in many pools might only be 4 to 6' deep but will have significant current near by. Water flow and current speed can also dictate where the active fish will be in a given pool. Fish will move from the tail-outs to the head-water to find the conditions that best suit them. When feeding, they are extremely aggressive.

The heavy flow in the head-water may seem to be too swift to work minnow baits effectively. Search these areas for ambush points, some kind of structure where the

trout can lay waiting for prey that is sucked

Down from the head water will often be



down through the turbulent water. Structure such as a slightly larger rock or small ledge may be all that is required to create these ambush points. Study the water surface and look for areas that break up the nervous water.

Under cuts along the bank and mid river areas that have shoals that lead into swift deep water can be worked with the lure directly down stream. Rather than swinging the bait out into the current and working it back. You can stand directly up river of the target area and allow the current to work the bait. Twitching it every once and a while. This can be very effective as the bait is in the strike zone for longer periods of time. This works with many other types of lures as well.

eddies, gravel bars, humps and small pools where minnow forage will hold tight. Current seams near the edges of these areas can be explosive. While I do not ignore deep slow moving pools, there are times when I will focus on more active water. Tail-outs and push water where one pool ends and another starts can also be very productive water. Where the current picks up speed and just before it pushes water over the rapids, there is a break. This break is perfect for swinging a jerkbait into the zone. These areas are usually very visible by the still surface area that almost rises before going over the top end of the riffle.

Retrieve speed and twitch frequency will be a day to day discovery. Allow the trout to determine the length of pause verses a steady retrieve or an erratic sequence of directional twitches. Vary the speed and try

different things. Some days they may want the bait sitting almost still, other times, they might want high speed retrieval. Holding the rod tip low will allow the angler to work the bait and be in the best position for hook setting. Longer rods with a softer tip seem to be best fit for fighting these larger fish.

Generally, larger jerkbaits offer the best action. Having a variety of sizes and colors will help on days when the bite is not as automatic as we would like.

Another key is gage height of the specific area of the river. Rising water turns fish on, whether this is coming from rain or dam releases. On both the Delaware and Lehigh Rivers, there are scheduled dam releases throughout the warm water months. Keying in on this and monitoring the gage height and flow during each outing will assist in making the most out of your time on the water.

Above all else, protect this resource and practice catch and release in all parts of the river. Leave as much of the fish in the water as possible when removing the hooks. Collapsing the barbs and limiting the time out of the water will keep these brown beauties healthy and ready to battle again.

