



Long Island Bassin': FEED 'EM A CREATURE

The author works on reviving a nice bass pulled from an East End lake. Note the creature baits by the author's elbow.



Left to right: Typical Texas Rig, followed by a Lake Okeechobee or Reverse Texas rig (notice the weight is at the bottom, rather than near the hook eye) and the weedless rig with no weight – great for topwater action.

As Long Island's freshwater bass season gets underway, local lakes and ponds on Long Island begin to get cluttered with milfoil, hydrilla and lily pads. However, the one benefit of all this plant life is its ability to attract some of the largest bass in a body of water. Anglers on Long Island can catch fish using topwater lures like Dean Rojas SPRO Frogs, Heddon Zara Spooks, Strike King jigs tipped with Zoom trailers or they can opt for one of the many "creature" baits on the market today. Creature baits can best be defined as soft plastic frog/lizard type baits on steroids. They have multiple appendages that can be modified on some, are sleek, making the penetration of thick cover easy, and come in every color of the spectrum.

CREATURE CHOICES

I started using the YUM Wooley Bug when it was first introduced several years ago. The lure was relatively sleek in design, but had appendages that resembled a crawfish. Although crawfish are not exactly running rampant on Long Island, there are enough, plus there are other types of creatures crawling around that a bass will eat. One of the innovators in the creature craze was the Sweet Beaver

from Reaction Innovations; and since that time, Berkley has joined the fray with their Craw Fatty and Pit Boss. The Craw Fatty is sleek and offers claws, while the Pit Boss is a bit more rounded, but has trailing legs which wave and wiggle as they slide through cover. Other manufacturers offer creatures in a variety of styles, including one of my new favorites, the Big Bite Rojas Fightin' Frog. This creature is a bit larger and offers oversized claw-like legs.

The bottom line is that creatures in any shape and design will entice bass in our waters. The key to your success may not be the type of creature you use, but how you present it.

GO WITH A BAITCASTER

First off, in my opinion, these baits cannot be fished on a spinning outfit. You need a rod with some backbone

and a reel with a solid drag. In the last several years, I have switched my rods over to 7 feet or longer for most applications. In fact, I just picked up the new Abu Verdict rod in the 7-foot model to go along with my Abu Verdict VTC70-6 and Lamiglas XL 705C. If you read *Bassmaster Magazine*, you will see that most pros these days use nothing less than 7 foot, and in fact, some are pushing the 8-foot limit; except when using topwater lures like Zara Spooks. I feel that on Long Island, the 7-foot model is fine, and suitable for both shore and boat fishing. The new Daiwa Advantage 153 HSTA or Shimano Castaic are solid choices. Go with a retrieve of 6:3-1 or faster. In the line department, I use 17-pound-test Sufix Fluorocarbon. The fluorocarbon offers limited stretch, plus the sensitivity is great. Braid is also a good option; however, if you use braid, tie in a three-foot leader of fluoro with a double uni-knot. Make sure you use a drop of Berkley glue on the knot for superior strength. On the hook end, a wide gap 4/0 to 6/0 by your favorite hook manufacturer will ensure the fish is landed!

THE PRESENTATION

Creature baits and jigs are fished in much the same way. Flip it out, allow it to sink, and then wiggle it a few times. However, a creature can also be rigged in various methods, depending on your choice and cover.

If you are fishing dense cover like Lower Yaphank Lake, you might want to opt for a reverse Texas or Lake Okeechobee rig. Basically, either of these rigs will allow the bait to slide through the thickest cover. The idea is to have the weight at the bottom of the rig, rather than on top. Utilize a slim profile bait like YUM Wooley Bug or Strike King Rodent.

On lakes that are infested with lily pads, opt for the standard Texas Rig, with the weight on top of the hook. This rig will punch down and through lilies easily, and you can bang the weight off the stems of the lily pads on the retrieve.

For the most part, when using weighted baits, allow them to ease into the water, then slowly slide through the matted vegetation. As the lure sinks, you can twitch the rod, or allow it to settle. Once settled, wiggle or twitch the lure several times, and then allow it to sit still.

Rigging a Rojas Fightin' Frog weightless is a no brainer for dragging the bait across the tops of grass or lily pads. The bait will slither and flap about on a slow to medium retrieve. Keep in mind that when a bass grabs a bait on top, it is just like a topwater lure – wait to feel weight before setting the hook.

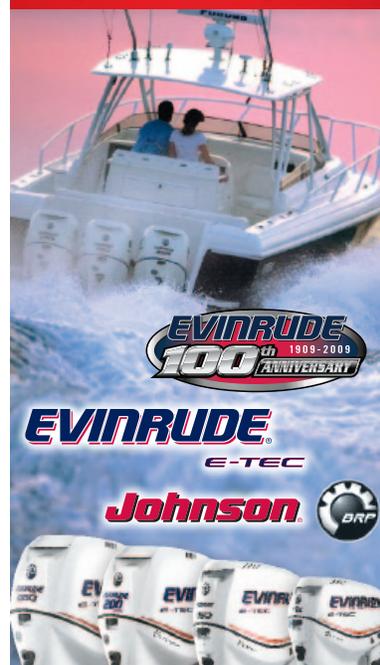
SLAMMIN' HOME

At a Bassmaster Open in Alabama several years ago, I had the pleasure to fish alongside Terry Scroggins. What I remember most about this trip was Scroggins' approach. He was not afraid to toss the bait up in the air several feet, and then drive his rod towards the water, forcing the creating down through the weed cover. He was fishing super thick weeds that even a one-ounce worm weight could not penetrate with a soft entrance. Just as I asked if he thought that his approach might spook a fish, he promptly set up on a five-pounder, and just smiled. This method might be worth considering later in the summer on some of our more heavily-fished lakes here on the Island.

Long Island lakes and ponds, as I have said in the past, offer anglers a great opportunity to score with trophy-sized largemouths. We have a good population of big boys in most lakes, but they are very adept at avoiding a hook. Maybe this new creature craze will entice a few wary fish from their lairs, since it is likely you will be presenting them something they have never seen before.

As always, please practice catch and release when largemouth bass fishing. Most of our lakes have a healthy bass population, with enough larger fish to continue the breeding chain, but these small lake fisheries would quickly fail with continued harvesting of those fish. By releasing your catch, you will be ensuring a healthy population for years to come, and providing a thrill for other anglers who follow in your footsteps. Who knows – maybe the next New York State record will come from Long Island. 🐟

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