

BASSIN'

FOR ANGLING EXCITEMENT AND SUCCESS, JUST SAY BASS



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*F*ishing for black bass — largemouth and smallmouth bass — is a popular and growing sport, with thousands of anglers spending countless hours bass fishing in New Hampshire each year. The Granite State boasts more than 250

waterbodies that contain one or both bass species; a 1996 survey showed that bass anglers were the most satisfied with their fishing experience out of any group of fishermen. What other reason do you need to begin or continue fishing for bass in N.H.! They are a great fish and a lot of fun to catch.

Unlike brook trout and pickerel, black bass are not native to the state. According to Jack Noon in his book, *The Bassing of New Hampshire*, smallmouth bass were introduced into N.H. in 1865, followed by largemouth bass in the 1930s. These fish quickly flourished and can now be found reproducing naturally throughout the state. Bass are not stocked.

Black bass are the largest members of the sunfish family, related to pumpkinseed and bluegill, and spawn in the spring. Smallmouth bass generally prefer lakes and streams with cool, clear water and rocky bottoms, while largemouth bass are found in warmer, weedy lakes and streams — though there are many waterbodies in N.H. that contain thriving populations of both species. Crayfish, small fish and insects are important food items for bass; largemouth are also known to eat water snakes, mice, frogs and — believe it or not — the occasional duckling.

Read on for some practical tips to try on your next bass-

fishing trip, and visit Fish and Game's website for lots more information on warmwater fisheries management and bass fishing in New Hampshire. — Gabe Gries, Fisheries Biologist II/Warmwater Project Leader, Region 2

Where to Fish?

Location, location, location — the real estate mantra should be yours as well when deciding which waterbody to fish for bass. Do I feel like probing weedlines, timber, or other heavy cover for bucketmouths? Or scouting open, rocky shoal areas for smallies? Or should I look for a place where I can fish diverse habitats and have a shot at catching both species? Am I interested in catching numbers of bass, targeting trophies, or a combination of quantity and quality? What type of access will I need — full boat-launch facilities, canoe/cartop, walk in/float tube, or shoreline casting? What type of angling experience do I want — an isolated, quiet, small pond, with few other recreational users, or an expansive lake with many options, amenities and other people? Obviously, many of these factors work together; for example, ponds off the beaten path with primitive access sites tend to receive relatively little fishing pressure and much less recreational traffic. But all of these factors make a big difference in your ability to fish effectively, your potential catch and the overall enjoyment of your bass-angling experience.

Some excellent sources to help you decide where to fish are the *New Hampshire Atlas and Gazetteer* by DeLorme and *Clark's Fishing Guide*, along with Fish and Game's statewide Boating and Fishing Access Map

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Act fast! A striking bass chose the wrong lunch. The angler will now reel the fish in for his own lunch — or gently release for another day.

BY

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Recommended New Hampshire Bass Waters by Region

WATER BODY	TOWN	LARGEMOUTH	SMALLMOUTH
Region 1 – Northern N.H.			
Mirror Lake*	Whitefield	X	
Umbagog Lake*	Errol		X
Moore Reservoir	Littleton/Dalton		X
Cedar Pond	Milan	X	X
Martin Meadow Pond	Lancaster	X	X
Region 2 – Central N.H./Lakes Region			
Wentworth Lake*	Wolfeboro		X
Balch Pond*	Wakefield	X	
Lake Winnepesaukee*	Gilford/other	X	X*
Squam Lakes*	Holderness/other	X	X*
Wickwas Lake*	Meredith	X	
Newfound Lake	Bristol/other		X
Ossipee Lake and bays	Ossipee/other	X	X
Merrymeeting Lake	New Durham		X
Winnisquam Lake	Sanbornton/other	X	X
Goose Pond	Canaan	X	X
Webster Lake	Franklin	X	X
Little Sunapee Lake	New London		X
Pleasant Lake	New London		X
Lovell Lake	Wakefield	X	X
Great East Lake	Wakefield	X	X
Region 3 – Southeast N.H.			
Harvey Lake*	Northwood	X	
Big Island Pond*	Derry	X*	X
Bellamy Reservoir*	Madbury	X	
Bow Lake	Strafford	X	X
Pawtuckaway Lake	Nottingham	X	X
Northwood Lake	Northwood	X	X
Swain's Pond	Barrington	X	
Lake Massabesic	Auburn	X	X
Canobie Lake	Windham	X	X
Powwow Pond	Kingston	X	
Turtle Pond	Concord	X	
Robinson Pond	Hudson	X	
Mendums Pond	Barrington	X	X
Jeness Pond	Northwood	X	X
Northwood Meadows — State Park Pond	Northwood	X	
Wheelwright Pond	Lee	X	X
Nashua River	Nashua	X	
Merrimack River and oxbows	Concord/other	X	X
Region 4 – Southwest N.H.			
Wilson Pond*	Swanzey	X	
McDowell Lake*	Peterborough	X	
Otter Lake*	Greenfield	X	
Highland Lake*	Stoddard	X*	X
Forest Lake	Winchester	X	
Lake Warren	Alstead	X	X
Lake Skatutakee	Harrisville	X	X
Lake Monomonac	Rindge	X	
Hopkinton Lake	Hopkinton	X	
Baboosic Lake	Amherst	X	
Haunted Lake	Francestown	X	
Island Pond	Stoddard	X	X
Gregg Lake	Antrim	X	X
Lake Horace	Weare	X	X
Connecticut River	Hinsdale/other	X	X

* particularly good for high catch rates

NOTE: This is just a sampling of local bass waters. Contact a Fish and Game regional office for more ideas.

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and *Freshwater Fishing Guide*. You can also contact a Fish and Game regional fisheries biologist or check our website for information (see sidebar). We can't make the fish bite — but, fisheries survey work, our own recreational angling experiences, and our many contacts can provide you with the knowledge you need to make the most of your trip. For instance, if taking children to learn how to bass fish, you may want to make a quiet location and a high catch rate the top priorities. If you need a depth-contour map or a general description of the extent and type of weed cover available, or just want to know how busy a particular waterbody may be in the middle of summer — we can help. — *John Viar, Fisheries Biologist, Region 4*

Bassin' Basics

Bass fishermen traditionally rely on medium-heavy to heavy action rods, in part because fish must sometimes be dragged through thick or rough cover — but also because the sheer size and fighting power of the fish sometimes demand it. That said, lighter-weight equipment increases the intensity of battle. An appropriate fly rod for bass fishing should be between a five and seven-weight setup. When fly-casting, the most important match is sometimes choosing a rod size that can throw the larger and heavier flies associated with bass fishing.

One key to bass fishing is finding the fish. Their movements can be yearly, monthly, daily and even hourly. A hopeful angler must consider water temperature, depth and cover. A careful examination of one of these factors will usually pinpoint fish. Sometimes you must look for fish indirectly by identifying a food source and tracking it — you can see how an electronic fish-finder can be a valuable piece of fishing equipment. In general, bass can be found in near-shore areas during the spring, early summer and fall. As water temperatures warm in the summer, bass typically seek out deeper, cooler water. During this time, if you find deep-water structure such as rocks or sunken logs, you will generally find bass.

A successful bass angler is one who can move around and employ different strategies and presentations. Bottom line: if bass fishing is slow, change something! Choose a different location, change lures (style, color, size, etc.), or target a different depth.

You can get some of the most important information about unfamiliar bass water by word-of-mouth. Ask about recent catches and proven bait preferences, and piece together weather trends and overall catch rates relative to effort.

Before I venture out into unfamiliar bass water, I prepare in the following ways: My first inquiry is into the access points offered on the waterbody. This will help me decide if I should

bring the bass boat, the canoe or the float tube. I'll also gain a good understanding of what type of angling pressure might exist. Next, I take a look at my *Freshwater Fishing Digest*, to learn of any special regulations. I also try to talk to fellow anglers who have fished this waterbody before and might be able to give me tips on what lures to use and where to fish. When possible, I like to print out a depth-contour map of where I'm headed.

Armed with this kind of information and the right gear, I've got a great chance of hooking into a fighting bass at my new fishing spot. — *Andrew Schafermeyer, Fisheries Biologist, Region 1*

Jig, Grub, Popper, Jerk!

When you think of bass fishing, the first thing that comes to most people's minds is fast, shiny metal flake boats. While a boat can be important, it won't catch fish: YOU catch the fish, with strategy, skill, practice, luck — and the right choice of bait.

With thousands of choices in colors, sizes and types of lures, making the right choice can be a daunting task — but there are a few lures that I just can't go without. By far the versatile ball-head jig and curl-tail grub combination has caught me more fish than any other bass lure. I crawl the grub along the bottom, imitating a crayfish. My friend, fishing guide Curt Golder, describes this technique as "tickling the bottom." The grub can also be bounced along the bottom as you retrieve it; or it can be presented faster, with a lift-and-fall action, to imitate a swimming baitfish. I prefer the two-inch lure, with colors to closely match the bottom color of the lake or pond I'm fishing. (After all, the crayfish and baitfish need to blend in or they get eaten.) Of course, there are exceptions to the rule — purple is a trusty bass-catcher. Tube baits or "squids" are great crayfish imitations, fished just like a grub. A



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stand-up style jig head has tentacles that tantalize bass.

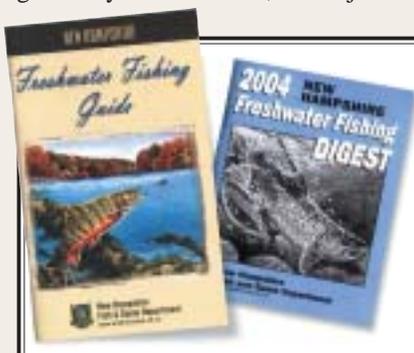
The past few years I've seen an increase in popularity of the soft, stick-like plastic baits, especially for new bass anglers; these do-nothing baits come in many sizes and colors, and seem to catch fish when nothing else will! Stick baits are impregnated with salt, which acts as a scent and flavor trigger. This bait's action is very subtle: it falls with a wobble, and darts around randomly, an action that drives bass wild. The technique is simple — cast the bait out, let it sink, then take a bite of your sandwich... lift the rod, reel the slack and repeat. Because of the way bass hit this lure, the strike can be difficult to detect, so pay close attention to your line. Any sign of slack or movement, set the hook.

I only use circle hooks on stick baits, because they keep fish from getting gut-hooked. By design, circle hooks set themselves — don't jerk the rod to set the hook, just start reeling when you detect a strike. The hookup ratio is very high, with very few fish hooked deep.

One method that really gets my blood flowing is fishing for bass with suspending jerk bait. These hard-bodied baits have neutral buoyancy, to maintain a position in the water column. I like to cast this bait as far I can, then bring it back with a sharp, jerking motion, with hard snaps of the rod

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Think like a bass: stumps, rocks and other irregular bottom cover provide bass habitat, especially as waters warm.



To download the *Freshwater Fishing Guide* and other popular fishing publications, check the Fish and Game website at www.wildlife.state.nh.us.

To contact our regional offices:

Region 1 (North Country), Lancaster; reg1@starband.net; (603) 788-3164

Region 2 (Central/Lakes Region), New Hampton; reg2@nhfgd.org; (603) 744-5470

Region 3 (Southeast/Seacoast), Durham; (603) 868-1095

Region 4 (Southwest N.H.), Keene; reg4@nhfgd.org; (603) 352-9669

Headquarters, Concord; info@wildlife.state.nh.us; (603) 271-3211



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If the corner of the jaw extends beyond the center of the eye, you've caught a largemouth bass (bottom). Otherwise it's a smallie (top).

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tip. Jerk, jerk, pause. Jerk, jerk, jerk, pause. This technique comes into play in early spring, as soon as the water temp hits 45 degrees.

Spinner baits are often misunderstood. How can that big thing catch fish? Well — they do! These lures come in a multitude of styles, sizes and colors, and all of them have their time and place. One of my favorite spinner baits is a single Colorado blade, which can be fished slowly. For a bait-casting reel, a double willow leaf is a popular choice.

I saved the best for last: the topwater plug — also called “popper” or “chug” — is by far the most exciting lure on the market today. Lures that walk side-to-side will call bass from a distance or up from the depths — bass literally explode out of the water for these lures. Their use requires a little more finesse. Cast the bait out, let the rings disappear. If the bass has not hit the lure yet, use your rod tip to pop the lure and let it rest. Keep trying this until you get a strike. Sometimes the bass prefer a more aggressive pop, pop, pop, stop. Just keep experimenting.

I have hundreds of lures and I can't live with out any of them; but, I had to choose a handful, they would be the jig and grub, the popper, spinner bait, the sinking soft-plastic stick bait and the suspending jerk bait. I make no guarantees of improved success by using these types of lures — these are just personal choices. The only true way to have success is to get out there and go fishing! — Mark Beauchesne, “Let's Go Fishing” Coordinator 

Gabe, Andy, John and Mark have worked at N.H. Fish and Game for a collective 26 years.



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Mark's top tackle picks. He says, "if you have these, you'll catch bass."

Squirmy Strategy

The soft plastic worm is almost 50 years old, and has the distinction of catching more bass than any other bait out there. One popular setup is the Texas rig. Try it yourself:



Thread a bullet-type non-lead sinker onto your line (it will slide on the line), then tie on a 2/0 offset hook.



Sink the point of the hook into the middle of the end of the worm, then pull it out the side of the worm at about 1/4 inch.



Bunch up the worm, and insert the hook point back into the side of the worm so that the point is hidden.



Make sure your worm hangs straight.

Fishing a Texas rig is for the patient angler. Cast out and retrieve with a gentle lift-and-fall motion, a foot or so at a time. Work the worm along the bottom, and don't worry about hanging it up. The bass will thump the worm — you will feel it or see your line jump. Keep your eye on the line and feel for a real tug. Now, reel down the slack, set the hook hard, cross its eyes! Remember, the hook needs to penetrate the worm *and* the fish's mouth.

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