

Topwater; Does Color Matter?



Topwater anglers usually fall into one of two categories. On one hand you have the traditionalist who has their favorite go to topwater lure. They will throw this lure, of which they only use one color pattern, in all types of weather regardless of their success. They will also pay little attention to the water clarity and use the same retrieve. That said, they will have their good days and boast to their friends about their expertise in fishing topwater baits. The reality is that on most days they will have just enough action with the lure to preclude them from using any creativity. The idea of varying the lures' retrieve for the most part never enters their mind, let alone changing lure color or switching to another lure.

On the other hand, you have the high-strung angler that changes color every five minutes. He will go through every color on the spectrum, keeping count of the number of casts made on each outing. This angler is always

looking for that new hot color that will tear up the bass. These anglers will also have good days on the water but the days of consistent catches will be rare. Ironically, they will catch fish when the traditionalist is not doing very well and vice versa.

Over the years I have learned that to consistently catch both smallmouth and largemouth on top you need to analyze the conditions you are dealing with. On any given day you need to choose a color that is best suited for the water you are fishing and the forage and mood of the smallmouth. This will usually mean adapting a little bit from both the traditionalist and the high strung anglers and adding the most important factor, common sense.

Topwater fishing on clear water lakes can be a tough nut to crack. It can be a feast or famine situation. When bass are on the feed it can be like catching fish out of a barrel, but at times, if every piece of the puzzle does not fit just right, fishing the topwater bite can be tough.

The rule of thumb when choosing the right color lure for clear water is to use natural looking color patterns. For example, if the lake has a ciscoe or whitefish population, blue/ciscoe or blue/pearl color topwater baits are a good choice. This is an excellent color when fishing points, humps, and over open water when smallmouth are suspending just below the surface.

Trying to get smallmouth to rise from deep water is a challenge, especially for an impatient angler. If the sun is bright, don't look for much topwater action even if you notice surface activity. The exception would be in the fall when bass are putting on the feed. Your best odds will be under changing weather conditions. If you are fishing under clear or partly sunny skies and cloud cover thickens, expect your odds of catching bass on a topwater bait to greatly increase. Points, humps and weeds will all see an increase in bass activity.



Other good colors on clear water lakes fishing over points and humps are clear, white, and Tennessee shad. Clear works best under bright skies. The light hits the clear bait and it acts as a prism, giving the lure high reflectivity in the water. Each time you pop or twitch the surface lure it shimmers, which looks like baitfish schooling at the surface. Smallmouth will travel a great distance to hit clear baits on a sunny day.

When fishing early and late in the day or during a light mist or drizzle use a black surface lure; not that other colors won't catch bass during these low light conditions, but a black bait is irresistible. Most of the big early morning and evening bass that I have caught have been with a black lure.

When I first hit the water I will try to match the color patterns of the dominate forage. On a typical day when bass are focused on a specific baitfish you can expect to catch the most fish by matching the color pattern. On other days you will need to trigger a strike and you will fare much better by using bright colored or clear baits. Which pattern works best will vary from day to day, and on some days just about anything will catch smallmouth. The pattern can change at any time during the day so, if the action slows down on one color, try another pattern.

You will also need to vary your retrieve and adjust to the activity level of the bass. Few topwater lures will let you make these adjustments better than the Hubs Chub. The Hubs Chub is a prop bait with a vertical drop which can be both popped and buzzed in the same retrieve. The four inch bait has incredible action when "Walking the Dog."

I also use a bit of common sense and try to match certain colors when fishing a specific type of structure. When I am fishing around weeds I like to fish a frog colored lure. Smallmouth and largemouth will gorge themselves on frogs and a yellow/green or yellow/black lure is irresistible.

Everyone who fishes for smallmouth knows that if you find rocks with crayfish, smallmouth will not be far behind. When fishing around rocks where smallmouth are feeding on crayfish, I prefer a topwater lure with a distinct orange belly with dark color contrast on the back or side. Here again, the Hubs Chubs' vertical drop makes the contrasting colors irresistible. Get ready for bone shaking strikes! Although orange is not a dominate crayfish color, it is present to some extent in small spots or blotches. There is no doubt in my mind that smallmouth equate orange with crayfish, even if crayfish don't swim across the surface.

Another hot color in stained water that both matches the forage base and can trigger a strike is white. Just as in clear water, white can be associated with just about any type of baitfish. A white bait should also have some red markings on its side or belly. In recent years I have also had great success using clear topwater baits in stained water. On bright sunny days a clear bait shimmers in the sunlight and resembles schooling baitfish.

Putting a pattern together to catch topwater bass is not complicated. While there is plenty of room for error, if you follow a few guidelines when selecting a color you should have a good success rate. However, there is nothing cut in stone, and on some days the topwater bite is just not going to happen. As the owner of HC Baits, the home of the original Hubs Chub Rattalur, I am constantly experimenting with different color patterns for all types of water.