



Pattern Topwater Smallmouth

The secret is to keep the topwater bait in the strike zone to trigger a strike. Many anglers make the mistake of pulling the topwater bait away from the shoreline. Prop baits with a vertical drop like the Hubs Chub are ideal for this situation. Give the topwater bait a couple of fast pops and then let the rear of the bait drop. Wait a few seconds then pop the bait again. If you fail to get a strike make another cast.

In late June 2019 we had one of those days where we could not do anything wrong. We started out casting topwater baits tightly to the shoreline, targeting wood and rocks. One of my clients, who was more experienced, made his cast spot on and started pounding smallmouth. The other guy was having more trouble finding the strike zone and was new to topwater fishing. He made another cast and the lure ended up in a tree. He was getting frustrated from not catching fish and the tree only made things worse. After we shook the lure off the tree I noticed a few smallmouth rising over open water. I suggested that he cast off the other side of the boat hoping to ease his frustration and finally catch a

smallmouth with a topwater lure. Unfortunately, the smallmouth kept rising but not on his lure.

It's hard for a guide when one client is catching fish and the other is getting skunked. I asked the depressed client if he could use a baitcasting rod. He said yes, so I grabbed one of my six-foot-six-inch medium heavy casting rods spooled with braided line and tied on a Whopper Plopper. I figured that those smallmouth rising were feeding and they should attack the Whopper Plopper. Besides, the Whopper Plopper is a fun bait to use and he would have some fun for a while even if he did not catch a fish. I made a few casts showing my client how to retrieve the Whopper Plopper. I should have only made one cast since on the second cast I had a strike and boated a 17-inch smallmouth. My client was now excited. He made several casts when he finally caught an 18-incher. Now he had confidence and he was on fish so the rest of the day went well.

It was an interesting day on the Menominee River. The client fishing tight to the bank continued to catch smallmouth on the Hubs Chub and the client casting the mid-river structure with the Whopper Plopper also kept catching fish. The client fishing the shoreline rigged up one of his rods with a Whopper Plopper but could not get a strike when fishing the shoreline. I grabbed a rod and made occasional casts throughout the day in the mid-river structure with a Hubs Chub and could not get a strike either. That was not the first time I had seen a pattern like that and it wouldn't be the last. That is why I am addicted to topwater river smallmouth! It was a perfect topwater day, we caught smallmouth tight to the shoreline, over grass, and over mid river structure.

On an average summer morning, I will start my clients fishing shaded shoreline, downed wood and weeds on the edge of the current. While all these areas can hold smallmouth, on any given day one area will be the most productive. There is no secret formula to unlock the mystery of what spot will be most productive.

That said, when push comes to shove, my first stop is the weeds. Why? Because when smallmouth are roaming weeds they are on the feed! Feeding smallmouth are active smallmouth and they will find it hard to pass up a topwater lure on a warm summer morning. If there is a weed bite it won't take long to figure it out.

It is important to approach the weeds with caution especially if you are looking for big smallmouth. Many river fishermen make the mistake of fishing too fast. If your trolling motor is on high or you are drifting too fast you will not only spook larger smallmouth but you will not be able to concentrate on the food chain. Keep your eyes open for not only rising smallmouth but surfacing bait fish. A few surfacing baitfish can advertise that several big smallmouth are in the area.

Zero in on the commotion and cast your topwater bait at the target since your odds to connect with big smallmouth are high. There is no need score a bull's-eye but you need to be ready for the strike. Once the lure hits the water, try to keep a tight line. It is irrelevant as to the bait you are using since you can expect the strike to occur shortly after the bait hits the water. Often the strike will occur before you get a chance to start your retrieve. If you don't get a response with a topwater bait, try a soft plastic jerkbait or a stick bait rigged wacky style. If you just use a topwater bait you will pass up big fish.

After the weeds, my next stop would be a shaded shoreline with cover. Many river smallmouth will move to deeper water or shoreline cover after dark. As the sun rises they will remain in that cover, and while not catchable at night, they will respond to a surface bait before the sun is high. A 20-inch smallmouth can be in shallow water and aggressively strike a surface lure. The smallmouth that moved to cover at night that is exposed to the sun in the morning will migrate away from the cover. If the cover breaks to deeper water, smallmouth will move deeper and tighter to the cover and won't respond to a surface bait.



3" Hubs Chub

Whopper Plopper 75