

USING FIREARMS SAFELY IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

Pay Attention, or Pay the Price!



ALWAYS BE SAFE WITH YOUR FIREARM



IF YOU ARE NOT 100 PERCENT SURE OF YOUR TARGET AND WHAT'S BEYOND, DO NOT AIM! DO NOT SHOOT!

Your careless mistake can cause severe injuries or death.

THE BASIC RULES

- Treat every firearm as if it's loaded.
- Don't point the muzzle at anything you do not intend to shoot.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until you're on target and ready to shoot.
- Always be 100% sure of your target and what's beyond.



Always use a good pair of binoculars. Rifle scopes are for aiming only.

TROUT: Topwater baits get big ones

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"In the spring, I mostly use topwaters and sinking baits for trout," advised Bobby Abruscato of A-Team Fishing Adventures (251-661-7696, www.ateamfishing.com). "On warm, low-light days, I'll fish topwater baits or jerkbaits in shallow water. If I can stay shallow, that's what I like to do."

Big trout normally eat fish instead of shrimp and usually prefer to make one substantial gulp that will satisfy them for hours rather than waste energy chasing a bunch of small morsels. A 5-pound speck can easily swallow a 12-inch mullet. To find big trout, first find the bait.

Since large trout mainly feed upon finfish, topwater baits frequently entice bigger, but often fewer, bites. Many of the best topwater baits resemble crippled baitfish, especially "walk-the-dog" lures. With short wrist flicks, anglers can make these baits slash irresistibly from side to side like mullets swimming near the surface.

"I like to throw anything that looks like a mullet, such as a black and chartreuse, black and silver or green and silver Top Dog," recommended Andrew Carter with Crazy Kjun In-Shore Fishing Charters (251-709-6894, www.krazykjun.com). "I vary the speed of the retrieve to find out what the fish want that day. Start out with a quick retrieve. If that doesn't work, slow it down. Sometimes, I just let it sit in the water and twitch it. Catching big trout on topwaters baits can be addictive. There's nothing like watching that bait and all of a sudden see an explosion in the water."

Finding a "slick" popping up on the water surface could indicate trout feeding on baitfish, making a good place to toss topwaters. When specks gorge on mullets, menhaden or other oily fish, scales and fish pieces float to the surface. This creates an oily sheen on the surface. Fish emerging slicks whenever possible. A small slick erupting on the surface may pinpoint feeding trout before winds and tides disperse the sheen. Always fish upstream of emerging slicks.

"Slicks popping up in the bay are good places to fish," Carter explained. "The key to fishing a slick is not to approach too closely and cast toward the edges. Make as long a cast as possible to avoid spooking the fish."



Photo by John N. Felsher

Bobby Abruscato of A-Team Fishing Adventures, shows off a speckled trout he caught on a topwater bait while fishing in the Gulf of Mexico near Bayou La Batre.

Topwaters also work well at night near lighted docks, rigs or bridges. Lights attract plankton; plankton attracts baitfish. In addition, bugs falling into the water add to the food web. Small baitfish might eat the stricken bugs. Large trout eat baitfish. Shrimp, baitfish and other prey move at night to hide from predators, until they pass beneath concentrated watts of illumination. Big specks frequently lurk beneath the lights to demolish any silhouettes passing overhead.

Docks can also produce good trout action during the daytime. As temperatures warm, trout may seek the shade under docks and come out to investigate any noises that could indicate food. Besides making surface commotions, many topwater baits carry internal rattles that mimic croakers.

"Sometimes, we fish the boat docks around Point Clear," Carter said. "In the past couple of years, we've caught a bunch of big fish in the middle of Mobile Bay during the summer. Dog River has some good flats. Gaillard Island has a couple really good areas for early morning topwater action."

Other good places to catch specks on top include the western side of Mobile Bay or off Dauphin Island. Grass flats in Mississippi Sound also produce good topwater action. The Mobile River can also produce big trout fish. Throw topwater baits toward the banks, points or docks.