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HUNTING FOR BASS

In the spring, many anglers look for bass on the beds

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Various sunfish, small bass and other creatures flashed through the clear, shallow water fleeing our approach, but they didn't interest us as we moved slowly down the riverbank.

We scrutinized each patch of light-colored sand, intently looking for dark, oblong objects hovering near the bottom. Then, we spotted our quarry, a giant bass accompanied by a smaller male occupying an oval-shaped depression on the bottom.

"There she is! That's one big bass," proclaimed Shaw Grigsby, a professional bass angler. "She's at least double digits with a male of about four pounds next to her. Get ready."

When water warms sufficiently in the spring, male bass scour out saucer-shaped depressions about 20 to 30 inches in diameter by using their lower jaws as pivot points and rotating themselves with their tails. Females typically arrive about two to three weeks later. After spawning, females go about their business while males guard the eggs and fry developing in their nests.

After about eight to 10 days, the eggs hatch. When the fry reach about a half-inch long, the male chases them off the nest by eating a few of his own offspring. Then, the male might look for another female to repeat the process. A male bass might spawn with several females and remain on the nest for weeks.

For many people, the spring spawn also means "sight fishing" season. Anglers frequently spot and catch huge fish on shallow beds, but before they can catch bucketmouths, they need to find them.

"Sight fishing is like hunting," Grigsby explained. "The challenge is finding the fish. Once we find them,



Photo by John N. Felsler

Becky Smith admires a bass caught in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta near Mobile.

we can often get them to bite. Bass on the beds don't feed. They grab baits instinctively to protect their eggs and fry."

While on the beds, male bass eat very little, but they vigorously defend their nests against a multitude of predators that not only want to eat

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