

Sight Fishing Bedding Bass

Beds, nests, sight fishing- all mean about the same thing during the bass spawn. Fishermen look for bass locked onto beds that are willing to aggressively defend them from all comers, even anglers in boats. And they become EASY to catch.

There are four fundamental stages to be aware of during spawning season- the initial spawn phase where males make beds or nests by fanning silt out of a depression and try to attract females, the active spawning phase when females have joined the males and actual spawning takes place, the incubation stage when the male guards the eggs in the nest and the fry stage when the male guards the newly hatched fry.

Spawning is not a specifically timed event and these four stages can all be happening at the same time in the same body of water, even in the same general area. Sight fishing is popular with anglers because very large females become easier to catch during these times and numerous smaller males, often called “buck” bass, can be easily caught. It’s a fun way to introduce new anglers and younger kids to bass fishing because they can actually see the fish they’re trying to catch.



The newly laid eggs and the fry produced from these bed fish are extremely vulnerable to virtually everything else in the lake that would dearly love to eat all they can find. Bass have to aggressively defend the eggs and fry from everything that moves so they become easy targets for anglers. Catching a spawning fish for fun or photo opportunities has been shown to have no ill effects provided the fish is returned very quickly to its place of catch. Keeping this in mind, be aware that a momentary departure of a bass from the eggs or fry will be of no consequence to the survival rates but a long term or permanent removal of a bass guarding eggs or fry means virtual elimination of all these eggs and fry due to depredation.

The same bass can often be caught over and over again within minutes when in its most aggressive state. This is especially true of smallmouth bass, which are by far the most aggressive of all bedding bass. This is some of the most fun you’ll have with younger children because they can catch a fish, let it go and catch the same fish again, all in minutes!

To sight fish, move slowly and quietly, looking for tell tale nest building signs of cleared depressions in the bottom. Look carefully, using polarized glasses, for the bass, which will often be in the very center of these depressions or almost as common, just off the bed under a branch or some other protective structure.

Largemouth bass tend to have a bright green appearance, almost like green moss and some anglers refer to it as “looking for the green stripes”. Smallies are often motionless, right in the center of the beds, and can oftentimes be extremely difficult to see if they do not move. A good practice when targeting smallies is to pitch into a bed even if you don’t see the fish, often you will see them almost immediately as they move toward your bait. Cast as close to the center of the bed as you can- precision is very important here.

If the bait is not in the bed it is not a threat and will probably be ignored. Another effective technique is to cast just slightly farther than the bed and drag the bait slowly towards, and then into, the bed. This tends to aggravate the bass because it can see the intruder coming, relentlessly, until it stops right in the bass's bedroom. If the bass doesn't eat it immediately, gently twitch the bait so it appears to be "working" in the bed, like it may be eating. Sometimes, there is a "sweet" spot in the bedding area, where anything that touches it is immediately killed while other things that are only close can pass by untouched. These are the spots the pros search for, especially when the bass is a very large female.

As for baits to use- for bedding fish it is best to use plastic baits like plastic worms or crawdad imitations, that you like to fish with and colored so YOU can see them. Colors like bright white, chartreuse, bright yellows or reds, something that makes it easy for you to see the bait so you know when it disappears into the fish's mouth. Remember that fish on beds will grab a bait to move it off the bed and not necessarily to eat it. They can suck a bait in and blow it back out before you can even blink so a quick hookset when the bait disappears is paramount. Great baits to use for bed fish include Roboworm worms, craws and creatures in Bed Bait color, Yamamoto tubes in pearl white or River2Seas's Nest Raider. The nest raider is available in 2 sizes, the 128 which is 5 inches and the 190 which is seven inches long. The seven inch, at 2 ounces is a BIG bait, used when you're targeting those giant females.

Normally, males guarding fry are not easy to see but when you see large clouds of fry (baby bass), the male is not far away- usually around a bush or other structure. Great baits for catching these fish include topwater frogs that you work on the surface just over the top of brush or stick ups (bass HATE frogs because they are voracious feeders). Senkos, rigged weedless and pitched into the brush piles or stick ups and allowed to sink slowly down where the bass is waiting are also deadly.

Have fun with sight fishing bass and remember to put those fish back, uninjured, as soon as possible so they can continue to generate even more fish for your fishing pleasure.