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July 2007
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Arizona hunter & angler



OUR
24th
YEAR

LURING
SHALLOW
SUMMER
BASS

Unit of the Month
UNIT 15ABCD, Part 2
Fishery of the Month
LAKE POWELL

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Even if you have to brave the desert heat to fish, it pays to get out on your nearest lake this time of year. Warmer water means active fish, and active fish eat more.

Even on the desert lakes, don't make the mistake of thinking that you have to use finesse baits in deep water to be successful. There are always some shallow fish to be had, especially early in the morning and just before dark.

Ben Koller of The Hook Up Outfitters in Glendale likes to go after all kinds of fish with a fly rod. The stripers at Lake Pleasant willingly gobble up flies and so do largemouth bass. Crappie and bluegill will also take a fly and some people even use them for carp.

Koller isn't a purist, so the first thing in the morning, he'll usually throw a topwater lure and see if he can get some action. A Heddon Zara Spook is just about everybody's favorite topwater at Pleasant, and Koller is no exception. Sometimes, he doesn't even have to leave the ramp before he starts getting the big stripers to come up.

Koller says that in the summer, a lot of fish stay in the thermocline, which is usually at 30 feet at Pleasant in the summer. But early and late, they come up shallow.

"Stripers are saltwater fish by nature," says Koller, "so they are designed to roam and that makes them hard to pattern." The only places that will consistently hold stripers are areas with lots of bait fish.

Once a striper hits about 6 or 7 pounds, it turns into a rogue, loner fish. Smaller stripers tend to school, and when you get into a school of feeding stripers, you'll likely catch a bunch that are all about the same size.

If Koller is guiding two fly-fishing anglers, he'll stand up front and throw a Spook to tease the stripers into coming up for the flies.

Koller recommends a 9-weight rod for big surface flies, and he uses weight-forward floating line with a 10-foot leader of 16- to 20-pound-test mono. If they stop eating on top, he switches to a 6-weight and 200-grain sinking line.

This line sinks about five inches per second, so he can count his flies down pretty easily.

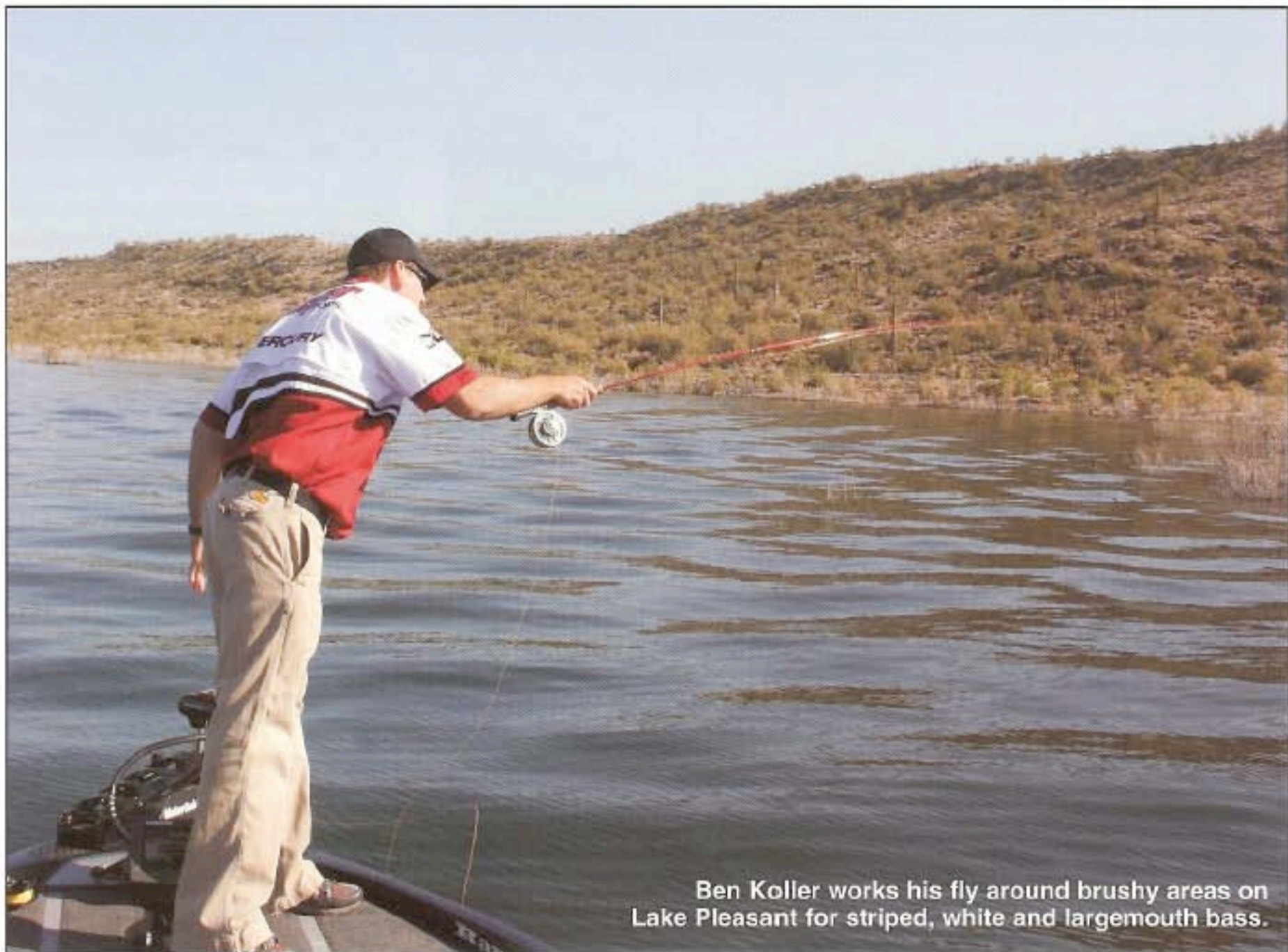
The stripers at Pleasant have been pushing sunfish into the brush, so Koller likes bluegill imitations. If they are after fry, he uses smaller streamers. He also catches largemouth bass on flies.

"Traditionally, fly rods are nine feet long," he says, "but the fly rod manufacturers have discovered that they have a huge market of bass anglers out there. Most bass tournaments don't allow rods longer than eight feet, so there are starting to be a lot of 8-foot fly rods available now."

One of the things he likes about stripers and white bass on a fly rod is how fast you can flip the lure from place to place.

"When they are busting all around you, you can lift it and put it on the other side of the boat immediately," says Koller. "You don't have to reel in and re-cast like you do with a regular rod and reel."

He has found that with the stripers, the



Ben Koller works his fly around brushy areas on Lake Pleasant for striped, white and largemouth bass.

Koller uses large streamer flies for striped and largemouth bass.



This 3-pound striper was fooled by Koller's super-sized streamer fly.

faster you can retrieve it the better they like it. He strips line just as fast as he can, giving it five or six good strips, and then pausing for a second.

"Also, any time you're throwing a streamer, tie it on with a loop knot. That gives the lure a whole lot more action. They're not like a crankbait with a bill. They don't have any built-in action," he explains.

Dean Farrell of Phoenix catches big fish at Pleasant on swimbaits and crankbaits in summer. He's got one that looks like a small carp – real ugly – and the bass smack it like crazy. It is an Osprey swimbait and Farrell fishes it very slowly.

"They'll hit it twice," he says. "They either stop it, or they take it out of your hands. They're vicious strikes."

Farrell fishes swimbaits on braided line and uses his Carolina-rig rod. Even if the fish aren't biting on it, a swimbait is a real good locator bait.

"Most guys don't throw swimbaits enough," he says. "They just don't stick with it long enough to realize what great lures they are, especially for big fish." He says that people throw a swimbait for a little while, then give up and pick up a drop-shot rig.

You don't have to throw gigantic swimbaits. The Osprey Farrell throws is about six inches long. During the spawn (which can run much longer than you think), he throws them around nesting areas. In summer, he likes to throw them around tires and docks, and fishes them through submerged brush.

Once he feels the fish have moved deep, Farrell will often move out to a creek channel and find the sharpest break he can. Then he ties on a Carolina rig, a jig, or a deep-diving crankbait. Crankbaits are great because you can cover a lot of water quickly with them.

The rod and reel you choose for fishing crankbaits will have a big effect on your success. A good cranking stick should be 6 1/2 to 7 feet long with quite a lot of "give" in the top half. Most of the major manufacturers market fiberglass rods specifically for fishing crankbaits that are not very expensive, however, top-of-the-line graphite ones can be.

Your line will also have an effect on the lure. Heavier line will make the lure run shallow and lighter line will allow it to get deeper. Use a good monofilament line in the lightest pound-test you can get away with and remember that the depths stated on the lure's box are pretty optimistic. Those depths are based on 10-pound-test line with optimum cast-