

## **Early Spring Bass on Lake Keowee**

- Bill Walker, Tournament Director, Keowee Anglers

Salem, Feb 24, 2014

Spring is coming, finally, even if it doesn't look like it sometimes! By the time you read this, the bass will be making their annual move toward the shallow spring spawning areas. To find the bass in March and April, you'll have to figure out where they're likely to spawn and then figure out where to drop back a little to intercept them as they migrate there from their winter depths.

When do they spawn? In Lake Keowee largemouth bass tend to spawn between late March and end of April where the water temp is 55°F to 65°F, while spotted bass tend to spawn from mid April to mid June where the water temperature is at least 65°F. Because Lake Keowee is so large and has temperature variation throughout its length, the spawn happens at different times in different parts of the lake. I have caught and cleaned spotted bass and found filled egg sacks inside them as late as the second week in June.

Around Mile Creek Park, if the historical pattern repeats this year, I expect the water temp to be about 59°F by March 1 and to reach 70°F near the end of April. But the area from Mile Creek Park south to the route 183/130 bridge has higher temperatures than other parts of the lake due to the warm-water discharge from the Duke Energy nuclear power plant. In the early spring the north and south ends of the lake can have water 5°F to 10°F colder than the area south of Mile Creek Park. So you will need to check out the water temperature in the area you plan to fish.

Where do they spawn? Largemouth bass tend to spawn in shallows with some cover and water depths of 1 to 5 feet. Because their spawning beds are so shallow, they prefer sheltered bay areas protected from wind and wave action, but with direct access to the sun's rays to warm the water. They also prefer areas with a firm bottom. (In my opinion largemouth bass are endangered in Lake Keowee, so if you happen to find a spawning largemouth, I urge you to leave the bass and its nest undisturbed to encourage the maintenance of the species in this lake.)

Spotted bass are more flexible in their choice of spawning areas. In addition to the locations where largemouth spawn, spots spawn on firm rocky bottoms as deep as 20ft. Consequently their nests are much harder to find. The increased depth also makes their nests less vulnerable to wind and wave action. So spotted bass also spawn on more exposed large shallow rocky points and flats on the main lake or in large bays.

Where do I intercept the bass as they move toward their spawning beds? During January and February Lake Keowee bass have been wintering generally in the main creek channels on the bottom as deep 60 to 95 feet of water. They have taken occasional forays into the shallower water for food on days when the sun has warmed the water a little. Now they will be moving up the creek channels or, in the case of some spotted bass, getting shallower around the main lake flats and points where they plan to spawn. And during their travels, on sunny days they will venture into the sun-warmed shallows looking for food. So, to intercept them, you have to figure out how far they have come along their migration path.

Unfortunately, I know no perfect formula for figuring this out. The nearer the end of April comes, the closer you can figure they are to their spawning grounds. The nearer the local water temperature gets to the 65°F to 70°F range, the closer they are to their

spawning ground. The rest is up to you. You have to work your way along the creek channels. Look for signs of fish on your electronics. Probe different depths with your drop shot rigs. Try the sunny shores and docks along the way with plastic worms and crank baits, to see where you catch them.

Once you find bass, then you can guess that in similar nearby locations in the lake they'll be at about the same depth. And, as spring approaches and the water warms, they'll continue moving on in their migration to their spawning areas.

So, the first step is learning your area of the lake and identifying the likely spawning areas. If you've fished this lake for a year or two, you've probably already located the likely spawning structures in your part of the lake. Then check the local water temp, and the calendar, and work your way along the likely migration routes from the deep water where the bass winter to the spawning places you've identified. When you find the bass, remember their location and the next time you go out you should be able to extrapolate their movements from the last place you found them.

As always, I wish you good luck in the catching! I find that in the weedless, clear waters of Lake Keowee I can always use some good luck in the catching. Still, even if I don't catch anything, being out on the water with a rod in my hand is always fun!