

Dirks: Where to find shad and how to hook 'em

Delaware is one hot spot

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Shad expert and outdoor writer John Punola with a typical Delaware shad. Photo Credit: John Punola

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If you're suffering from cabin fever and need an angling fix, the shad are on their way. As the waters begin to warm from April through mid-June, shad in heavy numbers make their way up the Delaware River to spawn.

The American shad doesn't command the same respect or attention as our beloved trout, but it should. Local anglers often overlook it as a serious game fish. When trout fishing is slow, shad can be caught using basically the same types of equipment and in the same river at the same time.

I recently spent time with three local expert shad anglers, all of whom make all or part of their living based on their ability to locate and catch shad. This is their advice on catching shad:

- Well-known outdoor writer John Punola, who can be found at outdoorsusa-books.com, also known as the "shad man," has caught thousands of Delaware shad over the years. Punola catches almost all of his shad from shore. Depending on water levels, that includes shallow wading into the river, as well.

In the early season, when water is higher and swifter, Punola will use ¼-ounce shad darts. As the season progresses and water levels drop, he will drop down to a 3/16-ounce shad dart. His most productive dart colors are chartreuse/green, red/white, and black/hot orange, all with chartreuse tails. Another favorite color combination is black/chartreuse with a white tail.

"What I'm generally doing is casting into the current and allowing the current to swing the dart downstream," Punola said. "You just jig it enough to keep it from fouling on the bottom. That's usually enough action to attract a shad. Shad follow the lower contour of the river, which is the least resistance to them as they travel upstream. It's also the part of the river that generates oxygen, so shad do follow the

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Tackle Recommendations

Punola

Spin fishing: 7½ foot, medium action rod matched with 10-pound test braided line rigged with a 3-foot fluorocarbon leader.

Fly-fishing: 8½ foot, 7 weight rod with sinking line and a 3-foot fluorocarbon leader in 10-pound test.

Ritter

Spin fishing: A light to medium action rod from 5-foot-6 to about 6 foot with 4- or 6-pound test monofilament.

Fly-fishing: A 5 or 6 weight rod that's

oxygen trail and can be found in deeper water."

- Tony Ritter, at gonefishingguideservice.com, is a Delaware fishing guide who has invested more than 14 years fishing in the Delaware.

In order to find shad consistently on the Delaware for either fly or spin fishing, Ritter focuses his attention on river structures that attract shad.

"You want to fish in an area where the river pinches up, not in an area where they are all dispersed like a pool," he said. "I find the best places to find shad are plunge pools and tailouts of rapids. If you take a look at the topography of a river, anyplace there is a rapid, chances are the river pinches up. If a hundred shad come through, they are all going to get funneled through there."

- Plying the Delaware and other local waters since 1968, Mike Padua at sweetwaterguide.com is a guide's guide, and shad fishing is one of his favorites.

"A great way to fish from shore, whether wading or bank fishing near a good deep channel, is the tandem rig," he said. "That's a dart with a 12-inch dropper and a fly or flutter spoon. Remember the shad use the whole water column from top to bottom, so your offering does not need to be right on the bottom. Experiment with different weight darts and rigs until you catch that first shad."

Padua likes shad darts in red/white and green/chartreuse with a white or tinsel tail and a small flutter spoon in gold/silver or chartreuse. For fly fishing, he likes chartreuse over white Clouser minnow in hook sizes 4 or 6.

This season, broaden your horizons with some Delaware shad fishing. Catching a 3- to 6-pound shad can shake the winter jitters.

New outdoor radio program

The DirksOutdoors show will be broadcast on radio stations WTbQ (99.1, 1110) from 7-8 a.m. Saturdays, starting this week. The show will feature interviews with local, regional and national outdoor experts and cover many of the issues concerning outdoorsmen and women today. This Saturday's show will feature Times Herald-Record sports editor Matt Pepin and turkey calling champion Ted Nassivera Jr.

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between 8½ to 9 feet long with an OX or 1X leader.

Padua

Spinning: A 6½- to 8-foot rod spooled up with quality 6- or 8-pound line.

Fly fishing: a 6- or 7-weight fly outfit with a floating line with a 9-10-foot leader or a sink tip line (10- to 20-foot sink tip) with a 3-4-foot leader. For extreme high water conditions, a full sinking line is necessary with a 3-4-foot leader.

Where to Fish

www.nps.gov/upde/planyourvisit/fishing.htm

www.flyfishingconnection.com/mainstem.html

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