

Spring Time Clear Lake



By Ross England

Clear Lake in northern California, finally challenged for its title: Bass Capitol of the West by Amistad and Falcon lakes, remains one of the best bodies of water easily accessible to millions of bass anglers is still unknown or forgotten by many. Two and a half hours from either San Francisco or Sacramento, it is little known outside of the bass fishing fraternity.

Clear Lake is a natural lake nestled into the Coast Range at an elevation of 1315'. There are 100 miles of shoreline surrounding 43,663 surface acres of fertile water. The area is one of the cleanest air basins in the entire state.

Clear Lake would have remained fairly unknown even in the fishing world if the Florida strain had not been introduced in the mid 70's... that has changed everything! The abundant food supply and the ability of the Florida's to grow to larger proportions than their Northern cousins produced a lake record of 15+ pounds followed by the still standing 17.52 pound bass landed by local Jerry Basgal in 1990.

There are few bodies of water that consistently produce limits averaging 15 pounds but even 20 pounds on Clear Lake doesn't guarantee a tournament angler a

paycheck. During team events in the spring, it isn't a question if 30 pounds will be topped, the question is: How many teams will top it? The latest data from the Fish & Game web site is from the 2006 permitting season. Of the lakes in the state of California that held 10 or more permitted events, only 7 of 15 had average weights better than two pounds per fish. Diamond Valley led the way with a 3.59 average, then Clear Lake with 2.91 followed by the Delta with 2.60 pounds. Another impressive fact is that Clear Lake held a total of 56 permitted tournaments, the Delta held 75 and Diamond Valley held only 20. Clear Lake obviously stands up to the pressure.

I run a premium, full time guide service here called Clear Lake Guide Service. We customize each trip to the clients needs whether it's learning how to use a certain bait, hunting larger fish, or going for numbers. Our client list continues to grow, so we feel that our careful attention to service and accurate information is paying off. This year we have branched out to offer novice fishing classes, check it out at www.clearlakeguideservice.com. Enough about that, let's get into spring bass fishing on Clear Lake!

Let's set up some basic framework. Spring means spawning, on Clear Lake spawning takes place as early as the middle of March and as late as August. For our purposes we will define that while April and May are the prime spawning months, any time between April and July can have pre-spawn, spawn, and post-spawn fish available. Primarily, spring here is during March and April when the bulk of the fish will be either in pre-spawn or spawn.

It is unbelievable, but if you review tournament results during this period, wins have been accom-

plished on rip baits, swim baits, rattle baits, and plastic worms. My first choice is the swimbait but some giant weights come on rip baits during spring events. Water level and clarity govern which baits to use. 2008 presented conditions that were awesome for the 7" Osprey and 8" Huddleston. Light hitch, dark hitch, and striper are consistent colors for the Osprey. All of the Huddleston hitch and trout patterns work here, primarily in the ROF 5. Spro's BBZ-1 and River2Sea's Kong are good hard baits as well. Of course, if we get high water early, don't come to Clear Lake without a bagful of 3:16 Mission Fish (6") in shad or hitch patterns, white if the water is off colored.

The solid performing rip baits include Lucky Craft's Staysee 90 and Pointers in the 100 and 128 size. River2Sea's Jerk Shad 88 and Normark's Shad Rap round out the rip baits choices. Colors vary according to water color but the standards are Ghost Minnow, Chartreuse Shad, American Shad and Table Rock Shad. There are many brands and styles that work well, but these are the stand-bys.

Last but not least, if the fish aren't in the chasing mood, the shaky head worm will not only put numbers of fish in the boat but also can put a bigger fish in there too. Sizes from 1/8 to 1/4 ounce will cover most depths and situations. Our choice of plastic is the venerable Zoom Trick worm, but use what you got as long as it is in some version of watermelon or purple.

Yes, spinner baits, jigs, senkos, drop shotting, Carolina rigging, and even some top water on the right days will work, but if you are coming to Clear Lake to fish for a nice fish then fish for a nice fish. That takes care of the what's, now

come the where's.

As a general rule, the upper end of Clear Lake warms earliest. It is effected less by shade and north winds and also catches longer hours of daylight. On shorelines with docks bass will stage on breaks, weed lines and the deeper outer dock pilings prior to moving up on the shallower portions of the dock or shoreline cover to spawn. Remember, at Clear Lake a one or two foot break is the equivalent of a five or ten foot break on your favorite reservoir. Shorelines with tules offer continual cover from deep to shallow water for bass. Staging areas can be the little points of tules that stick out just a foot or two further than the rest, a break, rock, tire, post or line of submerged weeds nearby.

Other good staging areas on the lake include entrances to harbors, marinas, sloughs, drainages and keys. There aren't that many of them so if you are fishing the weekend it can become combat fishing! Hot spots in 2008 were Clearlake Oaks Keys, Cache Creek and Rodman Slough. All three of these areas are expansive and offer fantastic springtime fishing with protection from most winds. Springtime on the main lake can be brutally windy at times!

Finally, don't make the mistake of thinking that because of the numbers, records and history that Clear Lake is an easy lake to just drop in on. It can present you with some real head scratching days that will cause you to question what you know about bass fishing. It happens to all of us believe me, take a deep breath and look out at the scenery, it is an incredibly beautiful place during spring.