

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.gov

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MIDWINTER ICE FISHING

By Joe Wilkinson
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

It wasn't hard to see why Dave Wilson plunked his ice tent down, just around the corner from Lake Macbride's main boat ramp. Around him, the ice was pock-marked with refrozen holes, drilled by ice anglers in the days before.

Still, in 15 feet of water, about 40 yards from shore, he had little to show for his Wednesday morning effort. "A few bluegills," reported Wilson, pointing toward the Aqua-Vu camera sitting on a plastic bucket beside him. "The water seems a little murky. I don't know if that's affecting things. Usually, though, I can see both my jigs." As Wilson, of Central City, twitched the closer fishing rod, we pick out the jig, but not the one just two feet to the right.

A few yards away, Robert Heims, of Cedar Rapids, seconded the assessment. "Just a few little bluegills. I'm waiting for the crappies," said Heims. "I can see the crappies once in awhile just swarming under the jig. They just won't take it though."

Each angler has had decent success in earlier outings this winter. Wilson followed the old adage, 'if they're not biting...move,' a few minutes after I talked with him, towing his set up out towards the middle of the lake. "Crappies have been hitting the last couple weeks," relayed Paul Sleeper, DNR fisheries biologist, based at Macbride. "(Anglers) have been getting a lot of little bluegills, too," he said, holding his fingers about five inches apart. "There are a lot of them on Macbride that size."

Of course, any plans for fishing Macbride have to factor in the prospect of a lake drawn down seven or eight feet for construction. That brushpile or downed tree that you hammered last winter might be above the water this year.

In the middle of winter, ice fishing can be hit or miss. After a flurry of activity just as the ice freezes, fish settle into a more dormant state as the water temperatures stay just above 32 degrees. That's when a little more strategy sometimes pays off.

"There really isn't a bad time to fish, even in midwinter," professes Mick Klemesrud, information specialist—and avid ice angler—with the Department of Natural Resources. "I would recommend going at first light and then last light of the day. Fish will bite all day, but you're going to have most production in those 'low light' hours."

He has hit several lakes around central Iowa in the last couple weeks. "In midwinter, you want to look to deeper water and structure," says Klemesrud. "If you're in a lake that has about 30 feet of water, you are going to want to look at 20, 22 feet of water as the area holding fish; about 2/3, maybe 3/4 of the maximum depth of the lake."

As for structure, you take what you can get. It might be the outside of a creek channel; where the contour drops a couple feet. Deep brush, pallets or stake beds are also spots that will hold fish; looking for water that is a degree or two warmer than the stuff closer to the ice...and where smaller baitfish or other snacks will be seeking cover.

On Bussey Lake, off the Mississippi River, above Guttenberg, the ice fishing action is a bit more predictable. Dredge cuts in the backwater lake point anglers toward the fish that pack in during the winter to get out of the current. About 20 ice shacks were up the other morning. Just as many anglers sat out in the open, on buckets or 'carry in' chairs as they drilled through about a foot of ice.

"It was an early morning bite. It's slowing down now, in the middle of the day," relayed Cory McNeal of Cedar Rapids. He motioned toward the bucket next to his chair. Big, thick, brightly colored bluegills filled the bottom quarter of it. "We're actually pretty close to getting our limit. Hoping to finish up and get 25 bluegills. We probably threw back 30 or 40 small ones."

That panfish limit; 25 daily for bluegill and pumpkinseed (combined) and 25 for crappies has been in effect for several years on the Mississippi River and its backwaters. A similar daily limit takes effect January 21 on all inland public waters (see below).

On the Mississippi, several of the angles I talked with had pulled in a bass or northern on tip-ups in the days prior. None had one to show for it that day, though, several kept their eyes on the orange-flagged tip up rigs near their primary holes.

No surprises. No wonder-bait. Just plugging away in the middle of the winter, keeping things small. "Smaller's always better. Use the smallest hooks, lightest lines; then wax worms, maggots, that sort of thing," suggests Klemesrud. "Use the smallest you can find, to get the job done."

New Year, New Limit

A change in the daily possession limit for crappies and for bluegills is the major change facing anglers across Iowa this year. Fishing regulations for 2009 are being distributed across the state.

Those fishing along the Mississippi River have worked within a daily limit of 25 and a possession limit of 50 for bluegills and pumpkinseeds (combined) and for crappies for the last few years. Now, inland anglers will need to get used to that daily limit. Though the Natural Resource Commission opted away from the possession (overall) limit on inland waters, it did approve a daily limit of 25 each for bluegills and crappies.

New Year, New License

With the New Year comes a new license. If you don't hunt until fall or maybe don't fish until spring, you might not concern yourself with it for now. However, if you do any late season deer hunting, maybe chase rabbits through February or plan to call in a gobbler this spring, you'll need your 2009 license and habitat stamp (if required)...same for any cold water fishing. The 2008 licenses expired January 10.

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

IOWA HUNTER BAGS RARE WATERFOWL TROPHY SPACE AGE RESEARCH REVEALS AMAZING BIRD MIGRATION

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

INDEPENDENCE----For 16-year-old, Jena Siglin, this year's waterfowl season ended with a bang, a band, and the surprise recovery of a satellite transmitter.

"It was Saturday, and my Dad and I had been duck hunting on the Wapsipinicon River," recalls Siglin. "Hunting was kind of slow, but as we were driving home, I spotted some ring-necked ducks sitting on one of my Dad's ponds. I immediately decided to try and get one."

Utilizing the pond's earthen dike for concealment, Siglin carefully made her stalk. Inching as close as possible, the hunter rose, took her shots, and successfully bagged two birds. Upon retrieving the ducks, Siglin was surprised to find that one of the birds carried an aluminum leg band. Even more thrilling was the discovery of a unique piece of "jewelry" around the duck's neck. That item proved to be a fully functioning satellite transmitter. The satellite radio had been placed on the duck by wildlife biologist, Steve Cordts who is studying ring-necked ducks in northern Minnesota.

"I was so amazed," says Siglin. "The first thing I did was call Scott Kinseth who is our local DNR Conservation Officer. He was really helpful and said he'd help me figure things out. He put me in touch with the right people."

"After I got the names, I started emailing biologists. I reported the duck's band number as well as the numbers on the radio. Steve Cordts sent me pictures of radioed ducks on his project and a DNR lady mailed me a map of where the bird had nested way up north. My Grandpa really got into this thing, and we looked at another map to see where the duck had been before it came to Iowa."

Swift of wing and prized for its flavor, the ring-necked duck is extremely popular with hunters across the nation. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, around 400,000 ring-necks are harvested annually. Although biologists place leg bands on a sample of the wild population each year, only eight ring-necked ducks carried satellite transmitters during the 2008-2009 hunting season.

“This was only my second year hunting ducks,” says Siglin. “Last year, I bagged two ducks. This season I shot five.

“Although I’ve been going along with my Dad and his friends for a long time, it’s mostly been just sitting and listening. This was the first year that I’ve been majorly out there with my own gun and everything,” said Siglin. “After this season, I’m definitely hooked on duck hunting.”

As it turns out, Siglin’s unique trophy will provide more than a delicious duck dinner. She’s having the bird mounted, where it will claim a prominent position among her outdoor memorabilia.

More Satellites

While we’re on the subject of satellite transmitters, my friend Alan Afton sent an interesting note the other day. A professor at Louisiana State University, Afton serves as chief coordinator for the ongoing study to examine the alarming decline of lesser scaup [bluebill] ducks.

An important part of this project has focused on migration staging areas along the Mississippi River at Keokuk. During last spring’s migration, more than 4,500 scaup were captured and banded there. Before release, 26 of those ducks --- all females --- were implanted with satellite transmitters. During the past several months, scientists have monitored the movements and survival of those birds from outer space.

Upon leaving Iowa last spring, most of the radioed scaup traveled to extreme northwest Canada or Alaska to nest. Come fall, the surviving hens headed back south.

Two of those ducks had an exceptionally interesting fall migration, reports Afton. Satellite tracking stations recorded one bluebill hen [radio number 80897] sitting on Devil’s Lake, North Dakota on November 14. The bird apparently felt the sudden urge to move, and was next reported on November 17, sitting on an inland lake in south central Cuba. The three-day flight covered an incredible straight line distance of 2,100 miles.

Equally amazing, was the flight of a second female scaup reported in Pierce County, North Dakota on November, 13. On November 16, satellites discovered the duck on Cuba’s north shore. Three days later, the bird had joined the first hen on that southern inland lake.

As the fall migration led both hens on a southeasterly course, it is all but certain the birds passed through Iowa. We can only imagine, but one of those ducks may even have been in that flock of wind driven bluebills that rocketed past your blind last November.

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WEATHER PUSHES BACON CREEK TROUT STOCKING BACK TO JAN. 29

SIOUX CITY – The Bacon Creek Lake trout stocking planned for Jan. 15 has been moved to Jan. 29, at 2 p.m. due to concerns about extreme cold weather and driving conditions. Bacon Creek Lake will still receive 2,000 catchable sized rainbow trout.

Bacon Creek Lake is one of a handful of Iowa lakes outside of trout country that receive trout during the late fall, winter and early spring as part of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources cool weather trout stocking program.

Bacon Creek is a 34-acre lake on the east side of Sioux City and the only trout fishery in northwest Iowa.

Anglers are required to purchase a trout fee, in addition to a 2009 fishing license, to fish for trout in Iowa. The fee is \$11 for Iowa residents and \$13.50 for non-residents. There is a five fish daily bag limit and a 10 fish possession limit for trout.

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OUTDOOR PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR COMPUTER WALLPAPER

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has a way to dress up the computer with high quality Iowa outdoor photography. Go to www.iowadnr.gov and look under “DNR Media / Extras” for seasonal images of Iowa and wildlife for use as computer desktop wallpaper.

The images are available in various sizes to match computer resolutions. Check back throughout the year for new images.