

Hookin' Hot Summer Cats

Simple tips for catching Ol' Whiskers

BY MICK KLEMESRUD PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH

In the hazy heat of summer, channel catfish are generally the most active and accessible game fish in Iowa lakes and streams. And one of the most popular.

THE MENU

In streams, soft, sticky prepared cheese baits on sponges or devil worms are top producers. Use the smallest slip sinker possible to hold the offering in place, a longer rod and 8-pound test line. A snap swivel makes changing sponges or devil worms fast and keeps the slip sinker off the bait.

In lakes, prepared baits, chicken liver, frogs or live minnows or chubs are great cat food. Live bait is preferred by anglers prowling for big lake cats.

FINDING THE CAT LAIR

In streams, look for eddies, fallen trees or brush piles, below riffles or the outside bends of rivers, where the water is deeper. Avoid inside bends, especially near sandbars. You don't need to throw the bait to the middle of the stream; give it a short toss and let the current take it to a resting place.

If there's no nibble in 15 minutes, it's time to move. Also try below navigation and wing dams on the Mississippi River.

Lakes stratify, or form layers, this time of year, with cool, oxygen-deprived waters sinking to the bottom. Therefore, do not fish in water deeper than 8 to 10 feet. Target areas with vegetation. Fish the upper ends of the larger reservoirs where the water is shallow.

CATS PLAY ALL DAY

The July-August catfish bite is all day. Even during the hottest mid-day period, cats feed. It is easier on the angler to fish the cooler mornings or evenings.

LIMITS

Stream: 15 catfish daily, 30 possession

Lake: 8 catfish daily, 16 possession

FRESH IS BEST

Keep catfish alive as long as possible, then clean promptly. If they die while fishing, put them on ice to keep them fresh.

DRY BEFORE DIPPING

Each time before dipping the sponge or devil worm into a prepared bait container, dry it off with a rag. Oil-based baits stick better to dry surfaces.

LOAD UP

Bring extra devil worms. It is easier to unsnap a swivel and hook on a new devil worm than removing a treble hook from the mouth of an angry catfish. Salvage the worms later when cleaning fish.

GO LIVE FOR LARGE

If targeting large catfish, use live bait, like large minnows, sunfish or night crawlers. Catfish longer than 15 inches primarily feed on live bait. Plus, you increase Lady Luck for a flathead.

CATS FIGHT BACK

Catfish have three spines that can cause a nasty puncture wound or cut: one on each pectoral or side fin and one on the dorsal or top fin. The barb is sharp and serrated. If you are not comfortable handling a catfish, use a glove.

STATE RECORD CHANNEL CATFISH

38 pounds, 2 ounces and 40 inches long. Caught June 2005, Missouri River, Pottawattamie County, June 2005, by Dustin Curtis. 🐟