

Fishing waters come in a variety of colors . . . some offering greater promise than others. by Buck Perry, Educational Editor

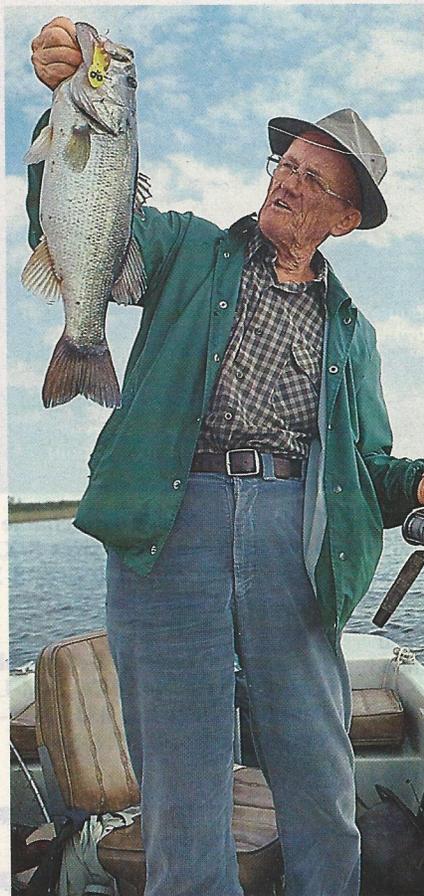
BUCK PERRY

EXPLAINS A MAJOR KEY TO FISHING SUCCESS

A few years ago I received an invitation to fish one of the huge reservoirs on the Colorado River. The invitation from the resort contained a color brochure describing the wonderful scenery, lovely accommodations and, of course, the "fantastic" bass fishing. One item that attracted my attention was a description of the lake. The brochure claimed the lake had the most beautiful fishing water of any place in the West. This statement truly stood out, for I had observed the lake several times from the air during a number of flying trips west. A mental note was made to look at it again on the next flight.

It wasn't long before another trip west was planned, so a flight was scheduled that promised a midday view of the lake. As the region seldom had cloud cover, I figured my view of the lake would be a good one. It certainly was!

A few weeks later, as my partner and I approached the resort for a one-day fishing trip, we got a panoramic view of a



"Although above-water observations may show areas of fish-attracting cover, in my estimation they are secondary to the one thing that would probably have more to do with my fishing results than anything else."— Buck Perry

large portion of the lake. It was gleaming blue in the bright desert sun.

My partner had only one comment: "That's not beautiful 'fishing' water, that's drinking water."

My comment was short also: "This is desert country, what did you expect?"

Before we left the dock, several questions were asked about a lake map posted on a wall. Then, as we pulled away from the dock, my partner had something to say about the thick moss she could see on the bottom.

The only comment was: "With this clear water, what did you expect?"

We began to check the water as any good structure fisherman (Spoonplugger) would, and soon had some answers. It was very difficult to control our lures effectively due to the heavy moss on the bottom but, as far as we could determine, there were no fish in the shallows. We confirmed this by questioning other fishermen seen along the shoreline.

Our first bass was caught while trolling a free-swimming lure slightly above the
continued

Crystal-clear water is great for underwater photography; but the question is: Does it make fishing easier or more difficult for the average fisherman? ▶

BUCK PERRY

moss at approximately 35 feet. It weighed about two pounds. With greater lengths of wire trolling line, we still had moss at 45 feet. [No need to say much about the difficulty we were having in controlling our depth in deep water.] Every time my partner let her line out and immediately hung a gob of moss, I was blasted for ever bringing her to such a lousy fishing hole in the first place.

After several trolling passes on a good-looking spot at 45 feet (according to the depth sounder) with no action, I told her to relax while I made an eight or nine-mile run to another section of the lake. (I hadn't noticed her rod had been lying in the bottom of the boat since the last wad of moss!)

About nine miles from the dock we started trolling shallow-running plugs (Spoonplugs) along the shoreline. In a short period of time we caught several small fish.

To make a short story even shorter, we put two limits of "good" bass in the live-well. Most all of them came from a casting position in water not exceeding 15 feet deep — and with no moss!

When we got back to the dock our departure was somewhat delayed. We

learned very quickly only a couple small bass had been caught by other fishermen.

I'm not sure the fishermen present heard or understood what was said when I told them a white-sandy water color had been seen from the air in one of the feeder stream arms (a drainage area) of the lake. And the map at the dock indicated the feeder drainage area was about 8 or

9 miles down the lake from the resort.

The reason I feel the fishermen didn't hear what was said about water color is due to the fact we never did get an inquiry about lures or additional information from the area. As expected, the fishermen had cleaned us out of every "Spoonplug" (only a tool) we had after viewing our fish. But they paid no attention to the state-

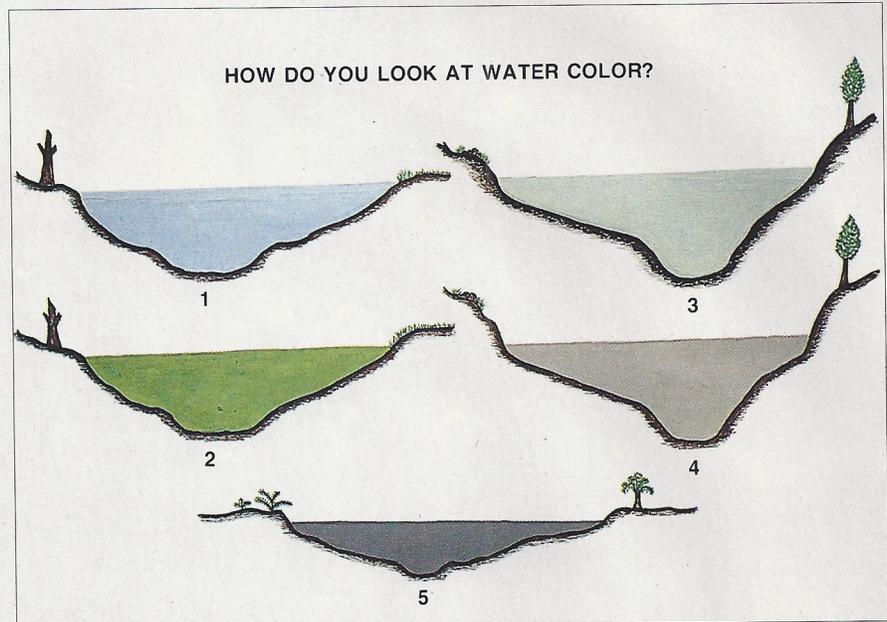


FIGURE 3 - Various water colors classified into five categories. The article lists them according to greatest quality and quantity of fish, and greater ease in the catching.

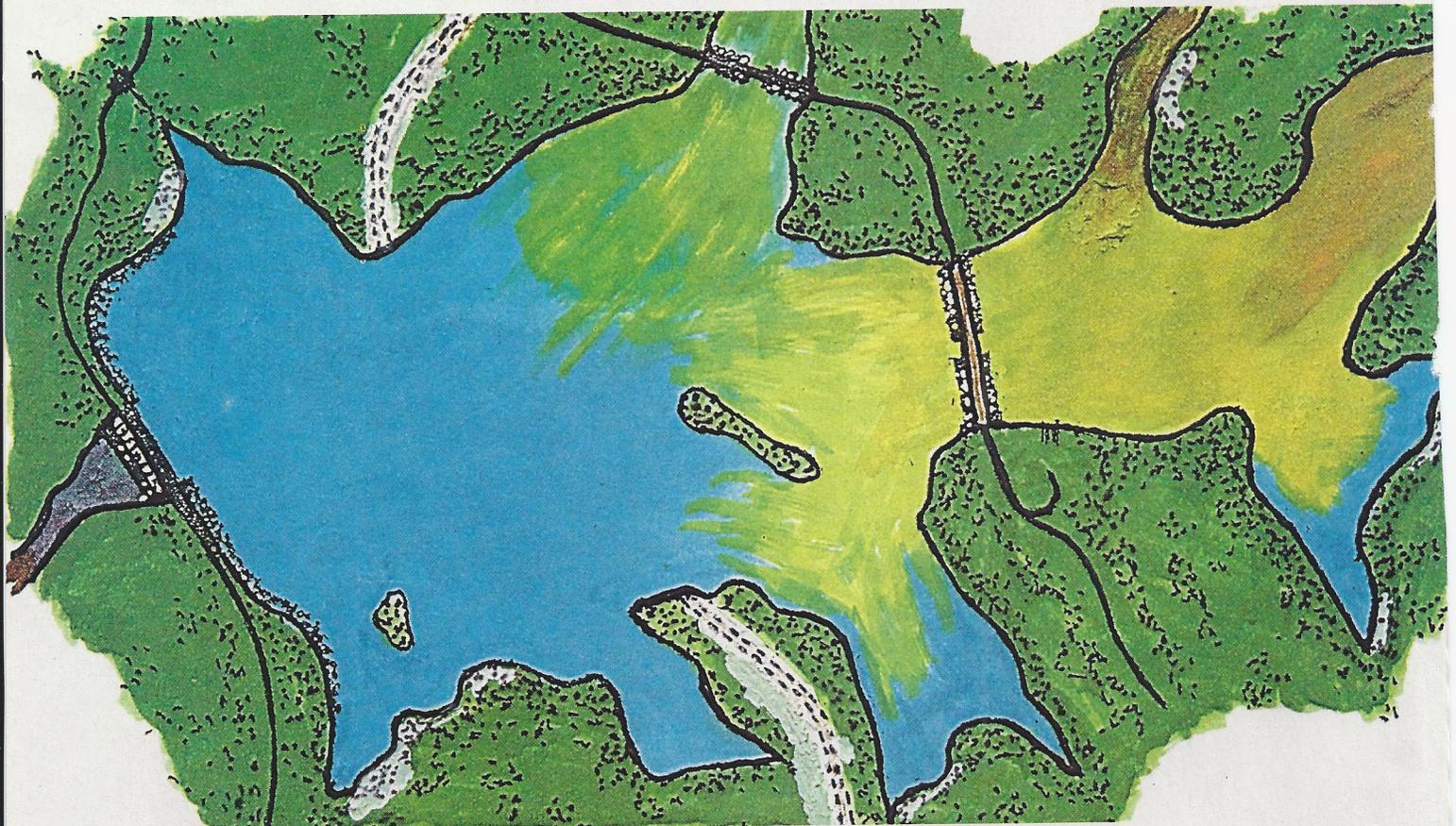


FIGURE 1 - Top view of a reservoir fed by streams containing different water colors. Over the long haul, where would you concentrate your efforts on this body of water?

ment that answers to various fishing situations can't be had with size, color or action of lures alone.

When you and I go fishing on a strange reservoir (man-made lake), or for that matter any reservoir that we are not familiar with, we should be able to look at the prevailing weather conditions, in light of the recent past, and come up in short order with a fair estimate (guess, if you will) as to the activity of the fish. We should look at the water color and determine if it's suitable for the season or for the present weather conditions. Just these quick observations should tell us if we are fishing the wrong reservoir or in the wrong part of it.

I can't recall the number of times I've been accused of wasting time by driving completely around a body of water just "looking." I found out years ago that the time my partner felt was wasted was about the most important period of the fishing trip. It mattered little if it took a full

"Wind plays a significant part in creating changes in water color. Few reservoirs exist where water color is the same all over."

day to select a spot to launch the boat. Regardless of the time it took to decide where to do the fishing, I knew I would be way ahead of the game. I had not only saved time, but I'd saved myself a quantity of hard work.

My observations entailed quite a few things. I could "see" the terrain. This observation told me a great deal about the features of the lake bottom. If an area did not indicate or show "structure situations" were present, it was quickly eliminated. (Why should I spend my time working an area with only a hope that something "might" be present?) This is such an important point, let me put it another way. My *above* water observations are a major factor in determining where I will spend the major part of my time in order to have the *best* chance to catch a fish. As a rule, this does not mean all the "fishy-looking" places along the shoreline. It means my observations must lead me to features of the lake (structure, breaks, breaklines, deep water) the fish use in their movements and migrations.

My observations may show areas where heavy brush or heavy weeds are indicated in deep water; or areas of wind and boat traffic. All of which may present problems in the presentation of lures. If a *good* structure situation can't be worked

continued

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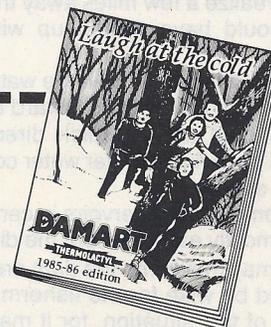
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effectively (control of depth and speed of lures), then my thoughts are to get out or stay out of such a situation.

Although the above observations are important, in my estimation they are secondary to the one thing that would probably have more to do with my fishing results than anything else. The main purpose in looking a reservoir over is to search for the best water color. (The other things will be noted along the way.)

Man-made lakes (reservoirs) change color primarily due to the suspension of soil or dirt particles in the water, rather than from an algae or "bloom" condition. This condition is created by the "run-off" from rains and by streams of different color entering the lake. Reservoirs, after a "pull-down," will change color as they fill. And wind plays a part in creating changes in water color. Very few reservoirs exist where the water color is the same all over the lake.

Figure 1 is a top view of a reservoir fed by streams containing different water colors. The major streams feeding the lake become discolored quite often by rains upstream. Many smaller feeder streams do not get muddy or dingy during this period. This is due to the type of terrain through which the streams flow. The mixing of these different waters can create a condition where the fisherman has a chance to find a desirable water color throughout the season.

The different water colors in **Figure 1** have been slightly exaggerated, but this is done to amplify the importance of seeking the best water color in which to fish.

Figure 2 is another top view of a reservoir. Two main streams feed the lake. One is a stream that gets discolored quite often. It likely flows through farming or urban areas. The other main feeder stream flows through forested areas and the water color is clear.

This is a situation many fishermen overlook when fishing large reservoirs. This is regrettable as most may wind up getting skunked in clear, deep water and never realize a few miles away they probably could have wound up with a full stringer.

Figure 2 indicates how the water clears (settles out) as it moves toward the dam. This should tell us which direction we should go to find a better water color most of the season.

In some large reservoirs in certain seasons (mostly early season) the discolored water may move into the dam area. Then it would be wise for the fisherman to be aware of this situation, for it may be the only time this part of the reservoir provides easy pickings.

The experienced structure fisherman has some sort of guideline for most any situation encountered when on the water.

His or her basic guideline as to water color says the clearer the water, the more difficult it is to secure good fishing results. Clear water spells *trouble* for the average fisherman. It means deeper fish, slower growth, less reproduction, more weeds (or moss), etc. The guideline goes further and says the fisherman should seek out those lakes or parts of reservoirs where the water is more dingy, cloudy or slightly muddy. This means the fish will be shallower, more active and have greater growth. There will be less weeds or moss, and catches of good-sized fish come easier and more consistently.

It soon becomes obvious to most fishermen that fishing water comes in a variety of colors (this is especially true for those who fish reservoirs). Quite a few fishermen, I suppose, wonder at times which water color would give better results over the long haul.

In order to have a basic understanding

of water color, let's classify them. Each of these colors could be lighter or darker, depending on where the water is located, the type of soil, the amount of run-off from the surrounding land, or the color of the streams feeding a lake. Some could vary due to the amount of algae growth or "bloom."

Figure 3 shows the water colors which have been put into five categories:

1. Clear
2. Yellow-Green
3. White-sandy
4. Red-sandy
5. Brown (cypress)

To better understand your situation, let us reclassify the above list in order of value when fishing. You should always keep in mind that your selection of water color for fishing will have a definite bearing on your catches. It could spell the difference between catching a fish or not catching a fish. It will determine whether



After a brief lesson from Education Editor Buck Perry, Spoonplugger Frank Hamill (pictured) and his wife Theresa had a ball catching and releasing big bass from dark water. At the end of a thrill-packed week, each kept two fish for the long ride home.

fishing is easy or fishing is tough.

The following would be the way to list colors that give the best movement, greatest quality and quantity of fish and greater ease in the catching:

1. White-sandy
2. Red-sandy
3. Yellow-green
4. Brown (cypress)
5. Clear

When developing this order of "goodness," the most difficult part was selecting the type color for numbers 4 and 5. The question was which should come first, the clear water or the brown (cypress)? After much testing (and fishing), the clear water was put in last position. It was found that the brown (tannic acid stained), or "cypress" as some call it, was mostly clear; but in some instances it would be slightly mixed with yellow-green or white-sandy water. In isolated cases, the clear brown would have a

During this test I had to look at quite a few lakes before finding those with a brown/white-sandy or brown/yellow-green water color. Most of the lakes were "brown/clear" and, I might add, the "brown/clears" contained most all the fishermen, although the lakes with the better brown/white-sandy and the brown/yellow-greens were in the same general area.

About the best way to state the difference between these lakes and the "brown/clears," etc., is to say the lakes containing white-sandy and yellow-green/browns produced bigger fish and lots of them, while the "brown/clears" produced fewer and smaller fish. This does not mean the clearer browns (and "clear" lakes) do not contain fish. It means that under normal or marginal weather conditions these water colors mean deeper fish. Where they start from on movement or active periods, how long the activity pe-

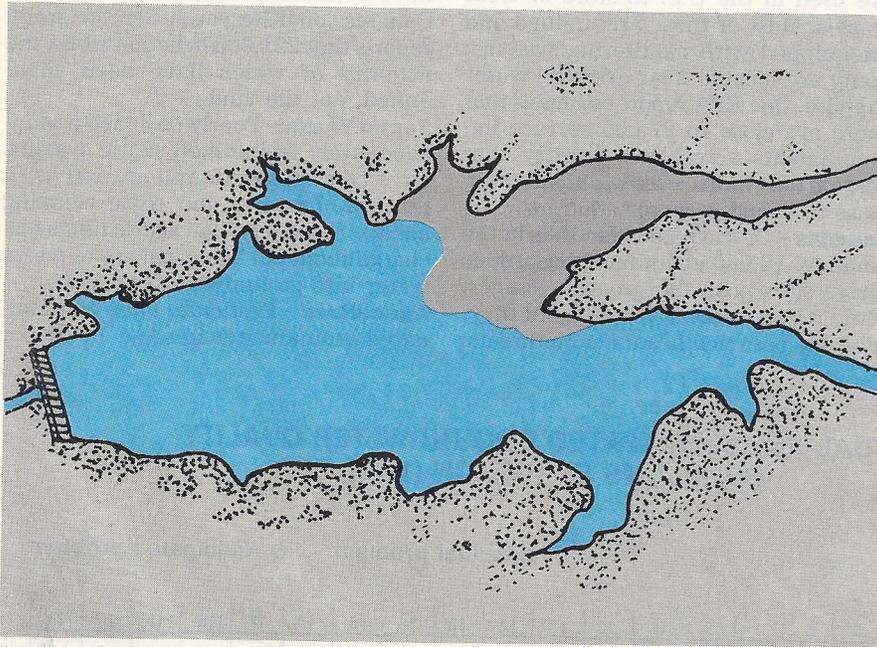


FIGURE 2 - Another top view of a reservoir. Two main streams feed the lake. One is a stream that often becomes discolored. It likely flows through farming or urban areas. The other main feeder stream flows through forested areas and the water is clear.

black color derived from a soft black soil bottom. All of the brown colorations are related in some manner to low-lying swamp areas.

Just recently I checked out (fished) a dozen or more natural lakes not too far apart. Most of them were a "clear" brown. Only a few were brown/white-sandy, brown/yellow-green, or brown/black. They were checked several times to be sure the prevailing weather condition didn't affect the results too much. The results stood out loud and clear. As per "goodness" they were:

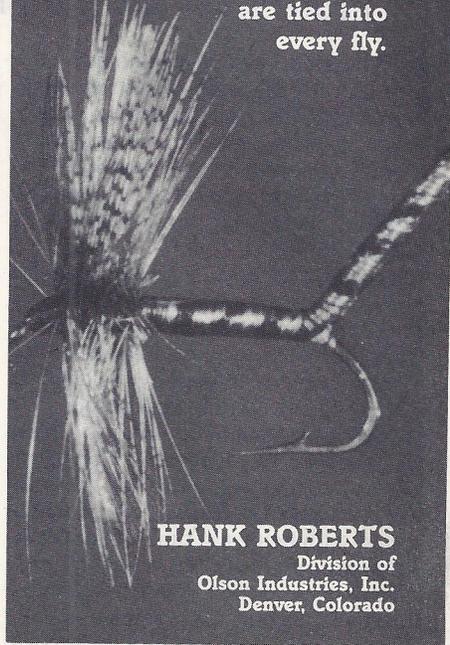
1. Brown/white-sandy
2. Brown/yellow-green
3. Brown/black
4. Brown/clear

riod lasts, how long they stay shallower (or active), and how difficult it is to catch them, will all be significantly influenced by water coloration.

To cover the subject of water color thoroughly requires more space than is allowed in an article such as this. In my books and Home Study Series the questions regarding water color are discussed much more thoroughly. At this point it would be wise to keep in mind that water color is important and should be considered **in any fishing situation we face.** My hope is that you get enough from this brief discussion to realize that in selecting fishing waters, a bit more knowledge is needed than just knowing it is wet and that fish swim in it. 

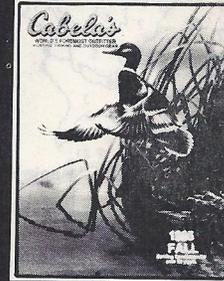
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