

Lake Norfolk Striper Fishing 101

By: Ron Teter



Lake Norfolk is a unique, pristine lake that was pre-cut of all timber before it filled. That is why I moved here more than nine years ago. I used to fish Beaver Lake for stripers with heavy tackle because of the sunken timber. A 25 lb. striper on heavy tackle is a blast but a 10 lb. striper isn't. 25 lb. stripers aren't caught everyday but 10 lb. stripers are more the norm and they are a blast on a medium rod with 10 lb. test line. Also, much of the year, Lake Norfolk is very clear and heavy line is a turn off for the stripers.

A few words about equipment. Seven foot medium action spin cast and bait cast outfits with 10 lb. test braided line and a fluorocarbon leader is all you really need. If you don't like braided lines, then I would recommend total fluorocarbon lines. I personally don't like monofilaments because they stretch too much and weaken and you don't feel the fish near as much. Also, with braids, you can put so much more line on your reel which can be a real plus when a striper takes off on a long run. Stripers are very strong and violent and will tear up lures so another good idea is to change the hooks on some of the effective striper lures with better hooks and split rings, I like Mustad size 4 triple grip wide gap treble hooks. These hooks are especially effective on spoons. Stripers shake their head and throw the spoon too many times, with these hooks that rarely happens. Speaking of lures some basic ones are four inch swim baits, Hyper Striper Stump Jumpers jigs, Reef Runners, Walleye Bandits, Razor Minnows, Zara Spooks, Rouges and Bink spoons. White is a good color for spoons, I like pearl or natural for swim baits and chartreuse, pink, blue, black, orange and combinations thereof are other good choices. If fishing for stripers with live bait I think longer rods are more fun but I think it should have some backbone like a good steelhead rod. Long rods also have the advantage of getting a better spread of baits. The most common mistake I think many new striper fishermen make is setting the drag too heavy and then trying to horse them in like a bass. That will result in a break off every time, you have to let the striper run and take line when it will let you.

It goes without saying that a fish finder is essential and if you can afford it, I would recommend Side Imaging also because when the stripers are shallow they will shy away from the boat and you might not ever see them below the boat and miss out on many opportunities. I am not impressed though with 360 imaging and it is so much more expensive.

Now too fishing. I will go through my routine throughout the year. Stripers do not necessarily relate to structure but they do relate to bait. They also swim a lot and one day you won't see them and the next day you will. Live shad works year round, the trick is knowing where and when to fish for them. I rarely use live shad because of the effort and trouble involved, but many do just because of the challenge of finding and keeping bait and the resulting chances of catching good fish. That is all I will say about live shad but a lot I do say also pertains to live shad fishing.

From late November until mid Spring I do fish with live large shiners. I don't fish shiners in the warmer months because the stripers much prefer live shad. Shiners seem to work well during this time frame and they are so easy to use. Several local bait shops sell them, they are inexpensive and even some of the live shad guides use them. Last winter, there was a time when smaller shiners worked better for some reason, guess you need to "match the hatch" so to speak. In the winter I fish the mid lake area, Marker 4, including Panther and Float creeks, to Fouts and Calamity Beach. Similar areas are also up Big Creek. I let my fish finder determine how deep I set my baits and remember that stripers will come up to take a bait but rarely go down. I normally put out about four lines and if the fish are 30-40' deep or more, I will fish straight under the boat. Later, into the spring, as the water warms the stripers will rise and then I will tow balloons and planer boards to get the baits away from the boat, remember what I said about fish shying away from the boat. When using shiners I move through the water very slowly, .6 to 1.1 mph., this helps keep the lines untangled. A GPS controlled trolling motor really helps, especially if you fish by yourself in windy conditions, don't know what I would do without mine. I prefer using a small Kale hook with a short fluorocarbon leader, 2-4' from my weigh in cold water to restrict the bait movement because the stripers, being cold blooded, are also slower moving and prefer a slower bait. But as the water warms I use longer leaders because the stripers are more likely to take an active bait. Also, during this time frame, I troll swim baits and Alabama rigs rigged with swim baits can be very effective. Another note, even though I mention this part of the lake, weather, and the resulting lake conditions, can make a big difference. Part of the challenge of striper fishing is finding the fish. If the lake is high and a lot of water is coming into the lake, many stripers will go way up into Missouri.

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Depending on water temps or about late March as the water warms, the stripers will start hitting the banks at night. I find that for about 1-2 hours immediately after complete darkness, the action can be dramatic and if fish are in the area you will hear tremendous splashes as the fish feed. This is when I cast the bank with Rouges or Razor Minnows. It is a challenge fishing at night, depth perception is difficult and you need to cast the lure right up to the bank. Assuming you are in fish, splashes are a good indication, the most important thing is to retrieve the lure steadily and very slow. If you think you are retrieving very slow, slow down some more, you want the lure to just barely wobble. I also troll rouges way behind my boat, 200+', at about 1.1 - 1.4 mph as close to the bank as I can, also very tricky, easy to hang up on the bank because of the darkness and not realizing where the lure is. You can still catch fish in the early morning and late afternoon times, especially if there has been a southwest wind for a few days, then you want to fish the resulting mud lines along the wind swept shores. Soft plastics work well, I like a pink or bubble gum colored fluke. Swim bait rigged Alabama rigs again work well. Also, this time of year, I keep a Zara Spook ready to cast at anytime and I also have a spoon on a braided line rigged spin cast outfit ready to go also because sometimes the stripers will erupt a long ways off and I can cast this spoon a country mile and then I reel as fast as I can through the stripers, what a blast!

About late June as the surface water warms the stripers move deeper. This is when I begin to look for stripers in the deep creeks and I start vertical jigging for them with a Bink's one ounce many shad spoon. If I can't see them on my fish finder I don't even try, but if I do, this can be very effective. May have to experiment on technique, sometimes they will simply inhale the bait on the drop and you may not even know thinking you have hit the bottom, so I always jerk up when the bait stops. Of course sometimes there is no doubt especially if they hit when you are bringing the lure up rapidly. Also, night fishing is almost always a good time to catch bigger fish. I don't jig at night, unless jigging for walleyes, but trolling swim baits can be very effective. Speaking of walleyes, it is not unusual to catch walleyes fishing for stripers. During this time I will go out a couple of hours before sunrise and jig for walleye and at the first sign of light move out a few feet to deeper water and continue to jig for stripers.

In mid to late summer the oxygen levels in most of the lake has disappeared at the depth the stripers have to be because they can not stand the higher temperatures in the upper water column. Most of the stripers will be within a few miles of the dam in open water or into the deeper water of some deep coves. Spooning still works well but it can be hard keeping with them as they swim or they may be so deep that it takes a spoon a long time getting down to them. This is when you will see the trollers with there downriggers, leadcore or snap-on weights using their favorite lures. If you fish at this time, please take you three stripers and quit, released fish won't survive.

Late September or early October as the water cools the lake will turn over. For two or three weeks stripers just won't bite and once they can escape their deep water jail they will scatter throughout the lake. October and November are the most challenging time of the year for me to catch stripers because they are so scattered and constantly moving, really hard to settle on a pattern but they are catchable if you can find them. I mainly troll swim baits and consider it a real plus to hook up. However, you can fish Lake Norfolk year round and there are other fish in the pond like really nice bass, walleye, crappie and some really big blue cats and flatheads. Blue cats aren't the best fighters but I caught a 20 lb. flathead last year and I thought I had on a steeper.

It is not easy catching stripers but once you hook into a big one you will be hooked. This is a beautiful lake with eagles, deer, turkeys, otters, mink, beaver, ducks and geese and very little shore development. How can there ever be a bad day on Lake Norfolk? See you on the water, Ron.