

Downsizing Live Baits for Wintertime Stripers on Lake Lanier



As water temperatures drop below 45 degrees the striper bite tends to turn to very small baits. The most effective bait is typically the Threadfin Shad. Threadfins are very delicate bait and are not typically commercially available. The required method to catch the bait is using a cast net. An 8-12' net size with ¼" mesh is the ideal size for most people. These nets tend to sink very slow, and are only effective if you find bait shallow in the water column.



Threads are usually found in the back 1/3 of the creeks, but may be found over shallow water or deep water early depending upon the water temperature. The bait shallow in the water column will typically show itself by either the bait visibly disturbing the surface of the water or gulls diving on the bait. As the sun comes up the bait tends to go deeper than can be effectively caught with a cast net (don't ask me why, you would think it would come up).

In order to fish these smaller baits, you have to downsize your tackle. 8-12# leaders and #4-#6 hooks are required for these little baits. Make certain you have your drags set to these light leaders, and that you do not horse the fish when they hit. The Stipers metabolism is slowed down in these cold water temperatures; and a slow and steady fight is generally more successful than trying to fight it like a Marlin.



The general rule of thumb is that Stripers do not actively feed when the water temperature drops below 45 degrees. In general, I have found this to be true; but not always. See below:





A Triple, notice the stained water! (You can't catch fish in 45 degree stained water!)



We caught fish until we ran out of bait that day (1/21/?). And if I told you the whole story, you would call me a liar. But I have Mike Ferrell and Mike Maddalena as my witnesses.



The next day I fished with Jerry Skelly, we launched out of Clarkes Bridge and drove thru solid ice for nearly a mile before we found open water. Was it worth fishing in cold water? You decide (this fish was caught with the hook and size bait pictured in my hand above):





Disclaimer: I have not come close to repeating that days fishing since then, but I am hopeful every time I hit the water. You cannot catch fish from the couch. Get out there and try. The worse that can happen is that you got to go fishing! These fish were in Little River and Gainesville Creek.