

Triggering Ice Walleye by Jason Mitchell

Walleye are often underrated as a predator. Perhaps the unpredictability and changing moods of these popular fish mold our ideas and thoughts to the point where we sometimes forget that walleye are indeed very efficient and vicious hunters. On so many frozen lakes, the bite revolves around low light conditions. On Devils Lake, North Dakota where we make our living as guides, the bite usually happens in the morning and at dusk. On some lakes, the bite might be better at night and a few places with stained water like Lake of the Woods offer a good bite during the middle of the day. Timing is everything because when walleye are on they are hunting and eating and when they are off they are tough for anybody to catch.

There has been much written about how to catch walleye that are off. My advice is to not worry about the off fish and focus on your timing so that you can be over the top of fish that are turned on. Focus your efforts around prime periods of the day and seek out aggressive fish by aggressively fishing.

Aggressively fishing doesn't necessarily mean pounding several holes and making big moves. If you are in a good spot, patience often means more success. What I mean by aggressively fishing is working a lure aggressively so that you pull in aggressive fish from further away and trigger those fish.

Also, aggressively working a lure doesn't mean making the lure move through the water so radically that fish can't bear down on the lure and catch the offering. Bring walleye into the cone angle of your Vexilar by working your lure into an imaginary foot and a half window. If the fish are very bottom orientated, that might mean the bottom foot and a half of the lake, if the fish are riding higher, adjust accordingly. Rocks and other objects on the bottom often force an angler to work a little bit higher off the bottom so that fish can see the lure from further away.

Within that window of a foot and a half, hard snaps will usually give any lure the most flash in the water. This flash is what pulls fish to you from the furthest away. Remember that you are trying to get the attention of a passing walleye that might be ten feet or more away. When you can detect the presence of an inbound walleye on your Vexilar, we often change the hard snaps to a hard shake where we shake the lure in about a six-inch window. Again, we are putting optimum flash off the lure and enabling fish to key on the lure as they close the gap.



As the gap closes, we often have the best luck by either dropping the lure into the mud or forcing the fish to rise. If in doubt, raise and shake. In the end, every day is different and every fish is different. Sometimes, the fish want a soft bob that just flicks the treble hook; other fish want a hard shake or slight rise and fall of the lure. Different lakes have different characteristics as well.

Now, the problem with really snapping and shaking a lure to bring in fish from a distance to begin with is that aggressively working a lure often shakes the minnow or minnow head off the treble hook. Minnows will stay on

better if you run the hook down thru the skull and come out the bottom of the head. Putting a minnow head on each hook of the treble is one tactic that can enable you to stay in the water longer with bait. Another option is using pieces of Berkley Gulp. One particular spoon that brings in walleye from a distance and emits a very attractive flash and wobble in the water is Lindys Rattler Spoon. From watching different spoons on underwater cameras, most of the other rattling spoons fall vertically and the profile of the spoon stays straight up and down. The Lindy Rattler slides and wobbles more horizontally on the fall, which I like.

The final answer is using presentations that don't require bait. Lures like Cicadas, Heddon Sonar's and Salmo Chubby Darters are very effective without bait. I prefer the Chubby Darters myself because these particular lures vibrate and wobble on the fall and flash on the upstroke where as the blade baits like Sonar's and Cicadas vibrate on a hard up stroke and flop and flash on the way down. The Chubby Darters seem much more effective. Whatever lure you choose, work the lure aggressively to bring in turned on fish. Attract the fish that have a chip on their shoulder and want to eat. Fishing aggressively catches aggressive fish and we all know which fish are easiest to catch.