



Feeling Froggy

All-terrain Surface Lures Offer Heavyweight Excitement

BY RANDY ZELLERS

A beast lurks below the surface. This predator closes the gap as a hapless, web-footed amphibian blunders across lily pads on its way to the nearest shore. Water erupts as the bass inhales its victim. This time, however, roles are reversed. The unfortunate bass fell for an angler's tool – a froggy forgery sporting hook and line.

The frog is nothing new in the angler's arsenal. Long before soft-plastic concoctions were invented, fishermen carved wooden replicas and rigged elaborate harnesses around real frogs because of their top-shelf status on the largemouth menu. Today's frogs are part of a comeback. Perhaps that's the result of a few popular anglers and a keen marketing strategy; or maybe it's because of the latest improvements in lure design. Most likely, the increased popularity is because fishing a frog is just plain fun.

Keep a frog at the strike zone along the edge of lily pads and other cover. Photo by Jason Sealock.

Toads and Frogs

Bass lures come in every size, shape and color to match anything your mind can conjure. But frog imitators fall into one of two main categories – hollow-bodied frogs and soft-plastic toads. The Snagproof frog (the original) is the poster child of the hollow-bodied frog category. The Zoom Horny Toad is the inspiration for the soft-plastic toad family.

Mike Siefert, owner of Millwood Guide Service in southwestern Arkansas, says he prefers the soft-plastic variety, especially the YUM Buzzing Frog.

"These frogs just seem to have more lifelike action, but most people kill that action with too large of a hook," Siefert said. "I only rig my frogs with a 2/0 hook to keep the bait light and lifelike."

Although many anglers cast and reel in the soft-plastic toads, Siefert said they're missing

out on potential strikes by not pausing the bait occasionally.

“Sometimes the fish will follow the bait, but not strike on the surface; if you give it a long pause, the toad will slowly drop in their faces and often draw a strike.”

River2Sea Lures pro staffer Dan O’Sullivan says he chooses the hollow-bodied Bully Wa, an advanced take on the traditional style hollow-bodied frog.

“You can work the hollow-body slower around likely vegetation and it will stay on top of the water, and the small keel on the frog will help you twitch it back and forth over open areas,” O’Sullivan said.

Color Conundrum

Although frog lures resemble hopped-up amphibians, O’Sullivan says bass busting the surface for the lure aren’t necessarily trying to eat Kermit.

“Frogs represent all sorts of food items a bass will find at the surface,” said O’Sullivan. “A bass will eat anything it can fit in its mouth. It may think the lure is a frog, an insect, a small duckling or a baitfish.”

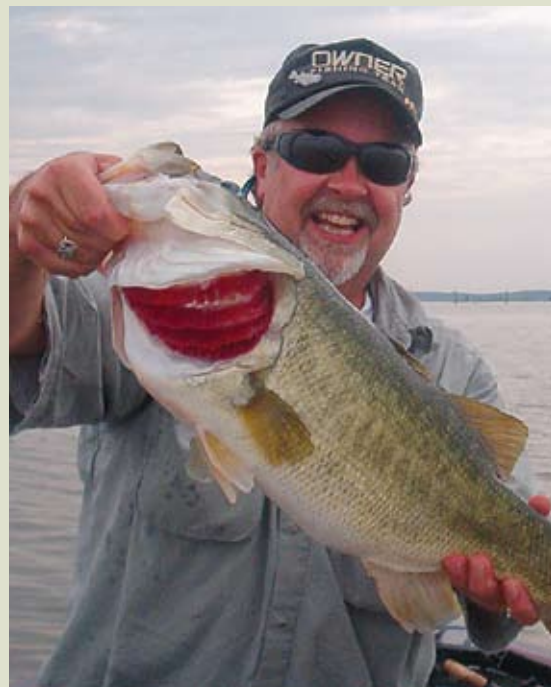
Siefert and O’Sullivan agree that the rainbow

of colors available to anglers is nice, but often unnecessary. A few key colors are all an angler needs.

“I’ll use black, June bug, white or pumpkinseed,” said Siefert. “That covers any condition on the water.”

Both anglers follow the simple rule of dark colors during dark hours and light colors on bright days. When the water is muddy, they stick to black or white and bring out the more natural colors for clear water.

O’Sullivan says the lure’s color has much more to do with visibility than convincing appearance. “In matted vegetation, they can’t see the frog so much as they see the movement on the other side of the cover.”



Mike Siefert of Millwood Guide Service holds up a bass caught on a frog. Photo courtesy of www.millwoodguideservice.com.

The \$100,000 Amphibian

Watching a giant bass leap from lily pads to annihilate a top-water frog is about as exciting as fishing gets. Add a \$100,000 paycheck on the end of that line and you get a sense of how Duke Gunnell felt on the last day of the 2008 Arkansas Big Bass Bonanza. Duke won the event with a frog fish that weighed 8.14 pounds. It came from one of the most weed-choked areas of the Arkansas River.

Gunnell and his partner fished Lake Dardanelle during the first two days of the tournament, but decided to pack up and head to the southernmost pool of the river and fish Post Lake the last day.

“A lot of people fish Post, but they tend to stay at the edge of the open water,” Gunnell said. “My partner and I pushed our way into some of the really thick stuff, fan casting to cover as much water as possible.”

In a big bass tournament, anglers are looking for one good bite – Gunnell got three. The thick cover allowed two of those fish to escape, but the third fish made it to the weigh-in for the \$100,000 payday.

“If you look back at the (Big Bass Bonanza), the frog has always

been a big bait to have tied on,” said Gunnell. “The tournament was won on a frog a few years back and I led the tournament for two days the year before last with a frog fish. A frog was the key bait I used to win a boat at the Mr. Bass of Arkansas Classic at Millwood in 2004, too.”

“Frogs are just great baits for big bites. Big bass eat frogs, small birds and anything else that hops around on thick vegetation at the water’s surface.”

Gunnell’s frog of choice is the River2Sea Bully Wa 75.

“It’s one of the biggest frogs on the market, and the plastic stays softer than other brands. I’ve had a lot of luck with it and I especially like using it when I’m looking for one big bite.”

Gunnell says there’s really no big mystery to fishing the frog.

“Get in the thickest slop you can find and fish it thoroughly. Hop the frog through every inch of cover you can; if you miss a fish by 2 feet, it may never see the bait.”

– Randy Zellers



A white-and-yellow Bully Wa 75 was the secret recipe that lured last year’s Big Bass Bonanza winner from the Post Lake lily pad fields. Photo by Jeff Williams.



A variety of soft-plastic toads and hollow-bodied frogs is available in every color of the rainbow. Photo by Randy Zellers.

Opposite page: Receding water reveals the amount of space under lily pads where bass may lurk. Photo by Kelley Cooper.

Finding Frog Water

Some lucky anglers could fish a frog in 20 feet of water in the middle of nowhere and get a strike, but most frog fishermen are as cover-oriented as the bass they chase. Cover provides an ambush area for bass, offers protection from larger predators and gives some relief from high temperatures.

“Lily pads and cypress trees cast shade on the surface that can make dramatic differences in water temperature,” Siefert said. “This is especially true on shallow lakes like Millwood.”

When water is consistently above 65 degrees, it’s frogging weather. As water nears the 90-degree mark, Siefert says anglers should focus on the mornings, evenings and overcast days.

“Cold water holds more oxygen than hot water,” Siefert said. “Early in the morning, from daylight to 9 or 10, the fish will be up in the shallows still feeding like they had been all night.”

When the sun is high, anglers should move to slightly deeper water and fish the edges of the lily pads and other overhead cover.

“I’ve had fish blast a lily pad from underneath and knock the bait out into the water, then put

up a V-wake on its way to get the lure as soon as it touches down,” said Siefert. “That’s the fun of frog fishing Millwood.”

Hopping Hints

When working his toad over lily pads and other cover, Siefert doesn’t watch his lure. Instead, he scans surrounding water for movement. A fish often reacts to the lure hitting the water or bouncing off a lily pad, which lets him know where to make the next cast.

“Not watching the frog also makes it easier to let the bass take the lure completely before I set the hook,” Siefert said. “One of the biggest mistakes people make is setting the hook too soon and pulling the lure away from the fish.”

O’Sullivan says another mistake is pigeonholing the lure into a “heavy-cover only” category.

“I throw a frog any time I think I can catch a fish on the surface,” O’Sullivan said. “I can get fish to come up and eat it in clear water just like any other type of top-water lure.

“The frog is a big-time bait during the spawn, as well. While many anglers work beds with jigs and soft plastics, few think to throw a frog, but it works.” **AW**



Road Signs on the Water

Millwood Lake is a boat repairman's dream. The stumps and snags that carpet this shallow impoundment have claimed more than a few boats. Fiberglass or aluminum makes no difference to the wood waiting just under the surface.

Mike Siefert, owner of Millwood Guide Service, has fished the lake since it was created. He says finding your way on the lake has improved a thousand-fold since its creation.

"When the Corps of Engineers filled the lake around 1967, the timber was so thick we were fishing underneath people's deer stands," Siefert said.

The only way to navigate Millwood was to idle in search of a path an enterprising angler had cleared with a chainsaw. Even then, anglers putted about in fear of a stump reaching up and grabbing the motor.

"The Corps did an excellent job of clearing other boat lanes, but marking the lanes was a nightmare," Siefert said. "PVC markers were placed on stumps, but they constantly floated off when the water fluctuated."

In 1998, a major project on Millwood offered a permanent solution to navigation issues. The lake was lowered three feet from normal pool elevation and stumps were sawn off at the water's surface to clear the lanes. Telephone poles were driven into the lakebed on each side of lanes, marked with reflective tape and given metal caps to prevent water from rotting the wood. To help boaters find their way, navigation signs were placed at junctions of boat lanes and at the main river channel running through the lake.

"The whole project cost almost \$800,000 and took three years, but it's much better than the old method of marking," Siefert said. "With both sides of the lane marked, you know exactly where the lane ends. Boat drivers can give each other enough clearance to pass and know they're safely inside the lane."

But Siefert still warns anglers to use caution and common sense when running their boats on Millwood.

"The stumps are still there in most places, but when the water is at normal pool (259.2 feet above sea level), they're three feet below you. Anyone wanting to fish here should look up the water level on the Corps Web site or call before they even put their boat in the water to make sure they can run safely and get to the places they want to fish."

Siefert also says he almost never runs his boat wide open on the lake. Even when the water is at or above normal pool, timber may fall into the lake and get lodged in a lane.

For the current lake level, call (870) 898-3343.

— Randy Zellers



Navigating Millwood is much easier lately, thanks to a network of clearly marked boat lanes. Photo by Randy Zellers.