



Carlyle's Catfish on the Rocks

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Catfish on the rocks might sound a bit like some sort of Cajun cocktail, but for anglers at Carlyle Lake it takes on a whole different meaning.

It's nearly catfish spawning time at Carlyle and other lakes throughout the state. Anglers here know these fish move to the waters along the rip-rap shorelines to spawn.

Most years, this creates something of a catfish feeding frenzy. And, this year is likely to be no different.

Arriving a bit later than normal, like most of the fishing and hunting action thus far this year, angling action for catfish throughout the River Bend is quickly reaching a fever pitch.

The really good catfish action typically occurs during the spring, summer and fall. This year, however, anglers only recently began enjoying exciting action for this species.

There is no better time than now to pursue the many species of catfish found in downstate Illinois waters. Warm weather always seems to put these whiskered creatures in a hungry mood. And, a three-pound channel catfish can be a worthy adversary when fishing with light tackle.

Catfish aren't picky eaters. Just about any type of live bait will take these fish. In addition, bait shop shelves are loaded with various concoctions that all but guarantee to stop up your sinuses and put catfish on your stringer.

There is a certain solitude one enjoys while waiting for a catfish to grab the bait. Perhaps, it is just a chance to relax and enjoy the great outdoors that makes this type of fishing so appealing.

Best of all, there are relatively few Illinois waters that do not contain one or more species of catfish. Channel catfish, bullheads and the huge flathead catfish are the most abundant. Blue catfish can also be found in many waters across the state.

Though currently flooded, the many downstate rivers are among the better catfishing locations. The entire length of the Mississippi as it runs along Illinois western border contains excellent populations of flathead and channel catfish. Blue catfish seem to be found in fairly good numbers in that segment of the river below the Alton lock and dam.

The Illinois River also contains excellent numbers of channel and flathead catfish. Action is especially good in the lower portion of the Illinois.

Not to be overlooked are the Kaskaskia River, the Ohio River and the Wabash River. These locations are almost legendary for the excellent catfish angling they provide.

Illinois' three big Corps of Engineer impoundments also offer some top-notch catfishing opportunities. Rend Lake may be the best, providing good angling for channel and flathead catfish.

Carlyle Lake is also a good bet for the fisherman in pursuit of three to five-pound channel catfish. The tailwaters of this huge reservoir is also a summer hotspot for catfish anglers. In fact, a state record flathead catfish was caught from these waters in 1991.

Other state-managed lakes like Washington County Lake, Lake Murphysboro in Jackson County and Beaver Dam Lake in Macoupin County hold good populations of channel catfish. Other prime locations include Cedar Lake in Jackson County, Red Hills Lake in Lawrence County and Sam Parr Lake in Jasper County.

Another good bet would be the many city-owned reservoirs found in downstate Illinois. In many cases, cooperative agreements with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources permit the state to provide regular stockings of channel catfish for these waters.

The Gillespie Old Lake in Macoupin County, Lake Jacksonville in Morgan County, Pittsfield Lake in Pike County and the Vandalia City Lake in Fayette County are only a few of the top city-owned locations.

Perhaps the largest concentrations of channel catfish are found in the numerous downstate power plant reservoirs. Lakes like Coffeen Lake in Montgomery County, Newton Lake in Jasper County and Baldwin Lake in Randolph County all hold huge populations of channel catfish.

In fact, most of these warm water sites are swarming with small channel catfish. An angler might have to release several small catfish before finally putting together a respectable stringer of fish.

Oftentimes, the very best catfish waters are privately owned farm ponds. Anglers are often surprised by the quality catfish these smaller ponds and lakes produce.

The opportunities are endless when it comes to catfishing in downstate Illinois. And, the time is now to head to grab your tackle and head to your favorite catfish hole.