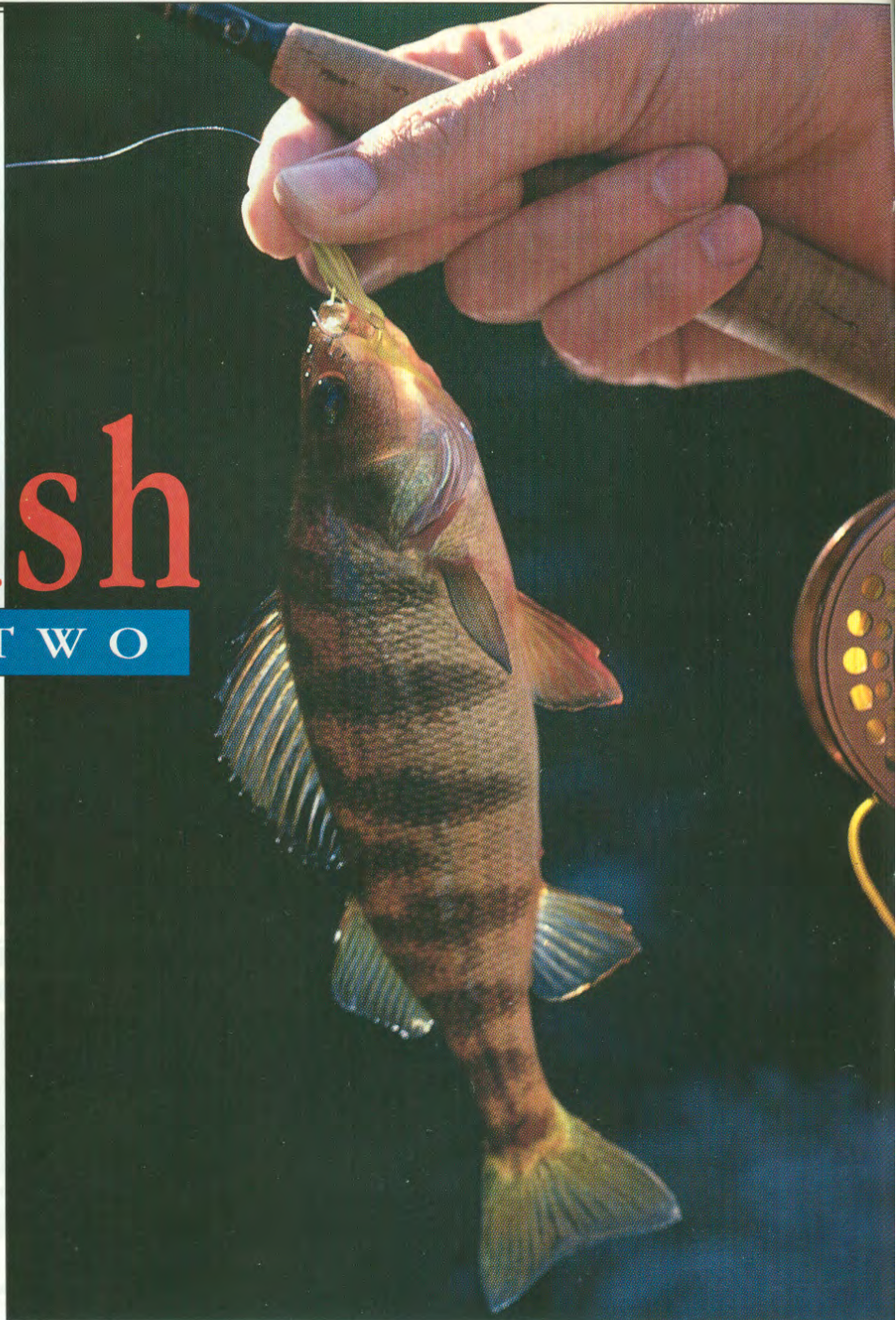


Panfish

PART TWO

*Yellow Perch,
White Perch,
Yellow Bass,
White Bass*

DAVE WHITLOCK

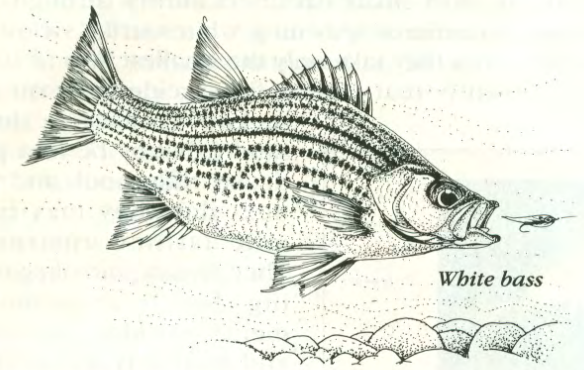


Yellow perch



White perch

This concludes Dave's article on panfish, which began in the May 1991 issue of FLY FISHERMAN.

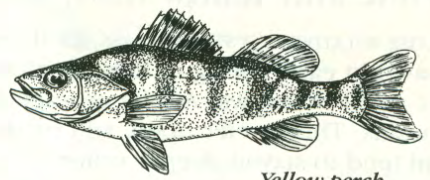


White bass

MOST PANFISH CATCHES are closely associated to their late prespawn or spawning activities. When the fish are concentrated in shallow spawning water, they are aggressive and will strike most natural or artificial objects. Their spawning behavior convinces us that they are typically gluttonous, stupid, hard-striking fish. Yet for the rest of the year they can be downright difficult to entice to strike flies unless the flies are precisely offered. It is difficult to detect the slow, soft strikes of nonspawning panfish, especially on flies necessarily fished deep and slow.

Fly size, texture, shape, action, sound, attitude, and odor can each be critically important, especially when you are trying to catch adult jumbo sizes of the various species.

The key to catching nonspawning panfish is to find the correct water temperatures, structures, depth, and imitation of preferred panfish foods. Like trout and bass, large nonspawning panfish prefer to live in deeper water or in expansive shallow-water areas. And like trout and bass, panfish follow abundant foods into shallow or surface areas when the rewards are great, such as when significant large hatches of aquatic insects occur or when terrestrial insects are abundant. Panfish also feed on large schools of fish fry, and on scuds, shrimp, and earthworms.



Yellow perch

The yellow perch is a member of the true perch family, which also includes

darters and walleyed pike. It's almost as popular with panfish anglers as the bluegill and crappie, especially for those fishermen who fish for food. Yellow perch aren't tackle busters, but they are fascinating panfish to take on flies. Yellow perch are more slender than most panfish, shaped similar to walleyed pike but without the sharp teeth and the size of walleyes. Most run from six to ten inches long and weigh well under a pound; a yellow perch over ten inches long and weighing over a pound is a jumbo. The record is four pounds.

Perch are school fish that prefer clear, cool water with hard sand or rock bottoms and vegetation. Distributed across the North and East and as far south as Texas, they spawn in chilly spring along the edges of small coves with from three to ten feet of 45- to 50-degree Fahrenheit water over clean sand or gravel bottoms.

Yellow perch are daytime feeders, but I've always had my best luck with larger ones just at sunrise and sunset. They prefer earthworms, small minnows, aquatic insect nymphs, shrimp, leeches, and crayfish, in about that order of presence. Streamers, nymphs, leeches, or Woolly Worms fished erratically slow from two to ten feet deep will catch them best, especially in thin weeded gravel-and-rubble lake and stream bottoms.

Perch in mild spring/summer/fall periods can be nearly anywhere, but lake points, jetties, docks, or rock reef areas offshore are the best spots to find them. Don't bother to look for round sunfishlike spawning nests; perch lay their eggs in strands over submerged brush, stump roots, and aquatic plant stems.

Perch get excited about brightly colored flies with red, orange, yellow, or white. Once you take a good perch or two on the fly, more perch often materialize into an aggressive school. If they begin to drop in size, or you get light strikes, it's time to move to another similar structure.



White bass



Panfish flies

DAVE WHITLOCK PHOTOS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

White and Yellow Bass; White Perch

CLOSE RELATIVES TO STRIPED BASS, all three are school fish, spawn in early spring in flowing waters, and prefer to eat small minnows. Adults average from one to two pounds. They prefer open, still or slow-flowing water and tend to stay in deeper water.

Silvery white with seven or eight lateral pinstripes down their sides, white bass resemble chubby striped bass in looks and markings. Yellow bass look almost identical, except they have a distinctive gold or yellow cast to their sides and just a bit stronger dark lateral lines. White perch are carbon copies of white bass, except they lack the family's characteristic block lateral pinstripes.

White bass, also called sandbass in the South, are the most widespread of the three panfish bass, ranging through the northern, eastern, and southern states and as far west as California. Stopping their first run is like trying to control a rolling bowling ball with a fly rod.

White bass love most threadfin and gizzard shad from a half-inch to three inches long. If shad or alewife are abundant, they eat little else; if not, they devour shiners, dace, smelt, and chubs. At times large night-emerging aquatic insects attract schools of whites, especially around lighted piers, boat docks, and bridge lights. The lights also attract minnows and shrimp, and schools of white bass cruise there looking for tasty morsels.

White bass move up reservoir tributary streams and rivers each spring as the water temperatures approach 50 degrees. The smaller males linger in deeper channel holes first, and when the water temperature rises into the mid-50s to 60s, the large females join them. They spawn, scattering their eggs on the bottoms or gravel and rock riffles in water two to six feet deep. Watch the water

temperature closely; if it rises one or two degrees on a cold, sunny afternoon, they often go on striking binges. It can mean the difference between two or three fish or from 30 to 50 fish caught.

I like to drift small streamers slowly through the schools. Sometimes spawning whites strike viciously; at other times they take only the smallest flies (#10 or #12) so softly that I hook fish accidentally on the pickup. One day a thousand fish may be in a particular riffle pool, and the next day they may be a mile farther upstream. They remind me of spawning shad in their movements, striking patterns, and in the types of flies they hit best.

On these runs I look for them below dams, where on any given cast you may hook a big white or walleye, crappie, bass, striped bass, catfish, shad, herring, or sunfish, all attracted by the activity and the concentration of fish and foods. Even after their spawning run big whites hang out below spillways, relishing the fresh, cool, aerated water that delivers stunned shad or other edibles.

Use small weighted streamers, minijigs, or Woolly Buggers in yellow, white, or chartreuse with mylar flash for spawning-run whites and their cousins, the white perch and yellow bass. I use an extra-fast-sinking-tip line with a three- to six-foot leader with snag-resistant weighted flies to catch the bottom-hugging spawners.

When whites are not spawning and after they have returned to the lakes, on cool cloudy windless days and early and late on sunny days they often herd shad to the surface and up against shorelines. Look for seagulls circling and diving or surface

splashes or boils. Watch for the shad "shower" skipping across the surface, fleeing desperately to escape the little white wolves.

Get on the action quickly, quietly, and stay as far as you can from the school. Such "jump fishing" requires

fast, long casts, so have your line stripped off the reel and your fly ready, like Lefty would have you do for flats tarpon jumping.

Topwater flies like pencil poppers, shad divers, or floating white or yellow marabou muddlers work well. I use a white or yellow pencil popper with a shad streamer dropped off its tail for the surface shad massacres.

Jump fishing occasionally calls for a fast, erratic retrieve, but if your nerves will allow it, place the fly in the front or middle of the rises and do a slow retrieve or no retrieve at all. Most of these whites, hybrids, stripers, and their entourage of bass, walleye, channel cats, and other panfish are not chasing and eating but eating shad disabled by the chasers of the school. If your shad streamer sinks with a wobbling, twisting, fluttering action, from three to ten feet deep, you'll hook the big lotus pickers of the congregation.

White perch are plentiful in the Northeast and the Eastern Seaboard states down to Florida. Look for them in brackish waters, in streams and rivers flowing into the Atlantic, and in landlocked freshwater streams and lakes.

White perch I've caught are less energetic in their feeding and fighting efforts than white bass, eating a wider variety of easier-to-catch swimming and crawling foods than white bass—seaworms, earthworms, minnows, aquatic insects, shrimp, and crabs.

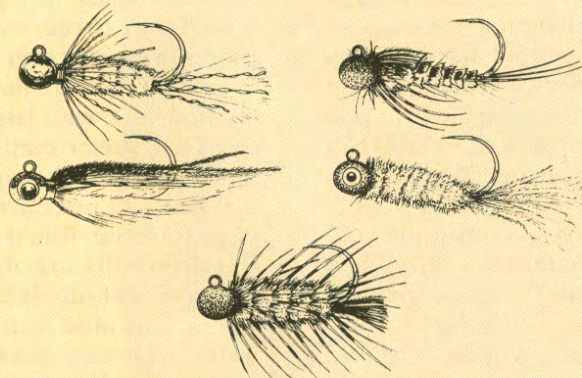
White perch do not move about lakes as rapidly as white bass and usually hold in schools in channels or along the edges of reefs. If you do not have a sonar fish locator, slowly troll or mooch your boat in water from 6 to 15 feet deep until you hook a white perch, then anchor and cast in that area. Some white perch specialists attach a thin monofilament line and balloon to the first perch they catch and release it. The Judas perch swims back to the school, pinpointing it for the fisherman.

White perch are not the surface feeders white bass are, but it still pays to keep an eye out in the summer and fall for their school surface-feeding on smelt and alewife. Use the same jump-fishing methods I recommend for white bass.

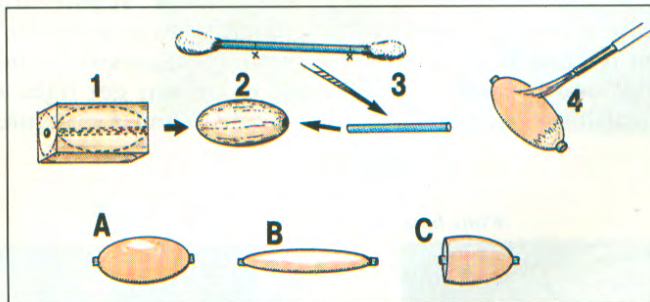
When the huge *Hexagenia* and drake mayflies emerge in midsummer, swimming nymphs and big



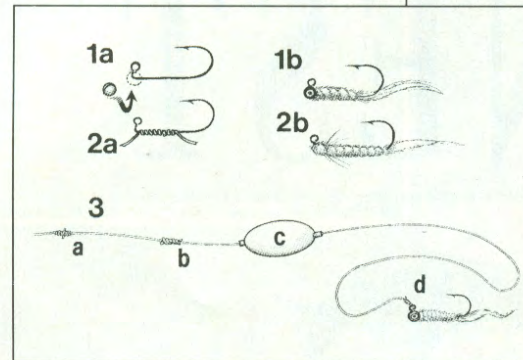
Panfish Flies



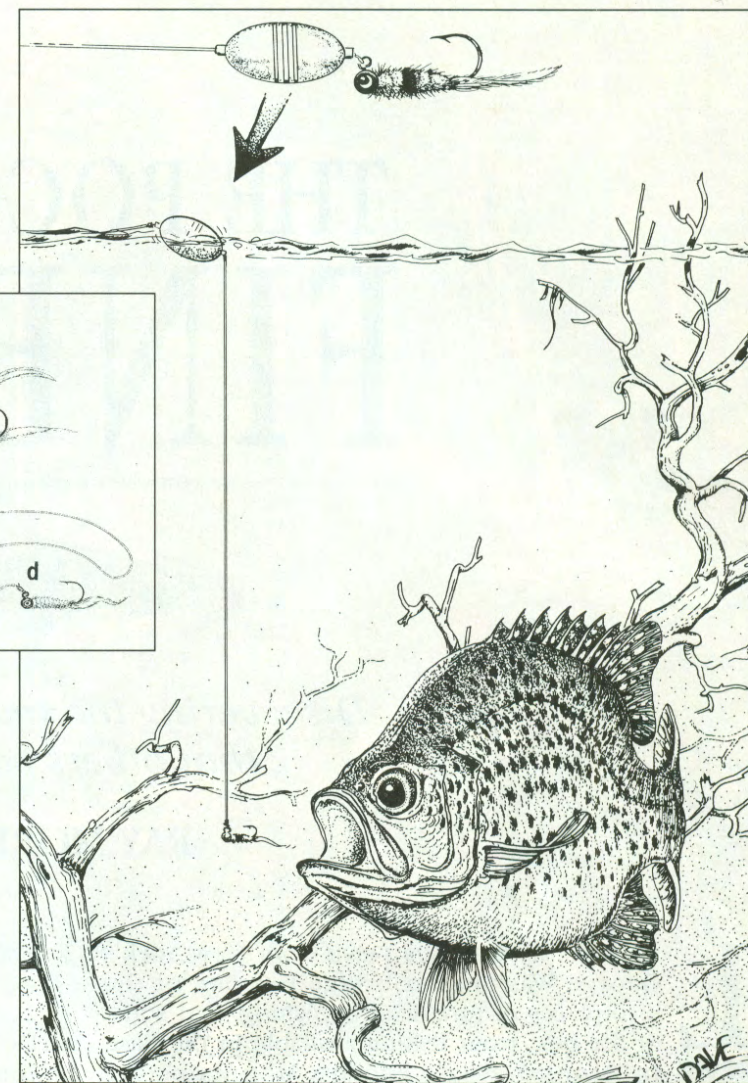
A variety of streamers and jigs work well for perch and panfish including (clockwise from top) Zonker streamer, jignymph, Fleafly, Woolly Worm, Marabou jig, Dave's Special



1. Mark a pattern for the bobber on a piece of balsa wood. 2. Cut and sand the wood to shape. 3. Insert and glue a section of hollow plastic or metal tube. 4. Paint the bobber a highly visible color. You can make the bobber with a regular shape (A), a quill shape (B) to reduce surface disturbance, or a popper shape (C).



To make the slip-bobber and minijig combo, weight a minijig as shown in 1a or 2a; tie it as you prefer (1b, 2b); and attach the bobber (3c) to the tippet as shown. Use a blood knot at 3a, a nail knot at 3b, and a clinch knot or improved clinch knot at 3d.



The slip-bobber and minijig combination allows the jig to sink to the proper depth and hold in a horizontal position. The bobber stays against the jig when it is cast.

fuzzy white, cream, or yellow dry flies, like the Wulff patterns, can take white perch and walleyes, smallmouth, whitefish, and jumbo yellow perch. That's happily what happened a few summers ago on Maine's Big Lake. I was enjoying an evening catching one-pound white perch on hex-paraduns when I hooked two large lake whitefish, something like hooking a tarpon in a bluegill pond. I did not, however, land either of the six- to eight-pound fish.

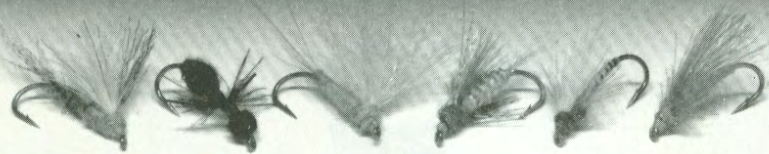
If you draw a 200-mile-wide line from Minnesota to east Texas, you have about covered home waters of the yellow bass. I've had little experience with them, but they are similar to white bass and white perch, and the same fly-fishing techniques I've explained should work well for them. They compare with white bass or white perch in fighting ability.

I'M SURE THERE ARE EXCELLENT PANFISH opportunities within a few minutes' walk, bike, or drive from where you

Continued on page 58

DAVE WHITLOCK PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATIONS

ATTACK



CDC™ (Cul de Canard) flies designed by Rene Harrop and tied by Umpqua Feather Merchants are simply the most aggressive flies since Lefty brought us the dreaded Deceiver for saltwater. CDC feathers come from around the preening gland on a duck. They possess a sheen and natural air-trapping quality that imparts uncanny realism to floating and underwater flies alike. Put them on the attack in your favorite run. We're pretty certain a more effective fly hasn't been invented (yet).

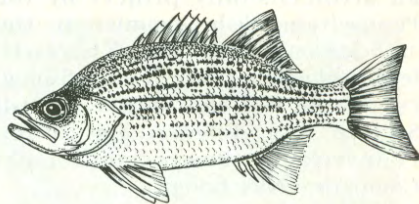


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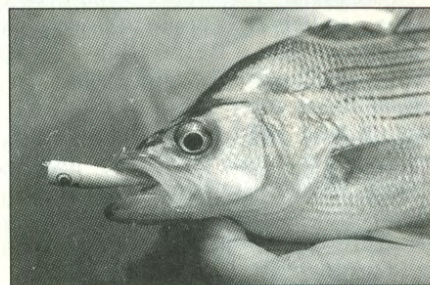
Continued from page 31
live or work. Even better, such special spots may be *unfished*. And, unlike the quality trout or salmon waters, panfish waters—creeks, ponds, lakes, canals, water hazards



White bass

on golf courses, irrigation ways, or reservoirs—are seldom difficult to gain permission to fish. The surprising fact about most of these city-limit “secret” panfisheries is that they are fish-filled, fertile waters. Most receive large amounts of lawn or farm fertilizers that enrich the food chains and generate big fish populations. For instance, just consider the runoff of a golf course into those water hazards.

If you want to get back to the fun



DAVE WHITLOCK PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATION

White bass love to eat threadfin and gizzard shad from a half-inch to three inches long. They also eat shiners, dace, smelt, and chubs. Topwater flies like pencil poppers, shad divers, or floating white or yellow marabou Muddlers work well, especially when the white bass herd shad to the surface or up against shorelines.

and relaxed challenges of fly fishing, give panfish a try. You may just rediscover what attracted you to the sport in the first place. And if you're just getting started, panfishing is the place to learn quickly and enjoyably the techniques that you will use for other fly-rod species. Panfish have provided me some of my most enjoyable moments in fly fishing.

DAVE WHITLOCK is a FLY FISHERMAN Editor-at-large and lives in Norfolk, Arkansas. His books include *Dave Whitlock's Guide to Aquatic Trout Foods* and *The L. L. Bean Bass Flyfishing Handbook*.

Cul de Canard Feathers: A Fly-tying Revolution

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DISPLAY UNTIL JULY 1

FLY FISHERMAN

How to Spot Trophy Trout

McCloud Rainbows

ALASKA'S Bright Salmon

Pocono Trout

Best Spots for Big Bonefish

