

This Month With A Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

October has got to be one of the best times to be outdoors. The crisp morning air with the mild afternoons. The colors of the leaves as they turn from the summer green to the brilliant fall display and what outdoorsman can resist the smell of the fall woods, it's heaven on earth. It's also one of the best and easiest times to catch fish on the river. Or was it? Most Octobers you could cast almost any lure and catch 60 to 120 fish per day for the whole month and we did have many of those early this month but about mid October we got a cold spell and the water temperature got down to an average of 46 degrees. The water cleared up as the cold water killed off that green algae stain that we were accustomed to and left us with gin clear water where you could see the bottom at 8ft deep. The fish became harder to catch because they now could see the boat and your movements on it, which reminds me, leave that brilliant orange hunting suit at home, yes the fish can see it under clear water conditions. Add to that the cold water which slowed down the aggressive bass bite we were accustomed to in the fall to an almost winter dead stick bite. And just for good measure lets put in a brilliant sunny fall day that makes the fish hold tight to those rocks and structure. What do you do? Give up and say that the fish aren't biting? I don't think so, I need to get my clients on a good number of quality fish each day. So you change your fish catching tactics of course, try the suspending jerk bait, it was made for these conditions. For those of you unfamiliar with the suspending jerk bait let me tell you about it. It's a hard plastic minnow shaped lure with a plastic bill to make it dive to a certain depth when jerked on your line and has hollow chambers in it loaded with enough BB's to give it a neutral buoyancy, or in other words, it stays down in the water column where you left it. Some popular brands of suspending jerk baits include the original Rapala Husky Jerk, the expensive Lucky Craft pointer, and my favorite the Rapala X-Rap Extreme. Just give it a nice long cast, remember the fish can see the boat, jerk it with sharp, short, downward movement and let it sit or pause for 3 to 10 seconds. The fish will most always hit on the pause so take up your slack line during the pause. The colder the water the longer the pause. The cold water has slowed down fish and sometimes they just lightly put the lure in their mouth. If you feel anything at all, even a slight weight difference, set the hook and reel. You can ask my clients, we have caught several hundred fish this month using this tactic. Once you learn it and get used to it you will also bring many more fish to your boat. The water did climb back up to the 50 degree mark this month and made the fish a bit more active. So what do I throw over shallow rocks in clear water from a distance, especially on an overcast day? It's going to be a surface lure for a good deal of fun. More specifically a Hubs Chubs lure from the HC Bait Co. Since I got this lure I have consistently caught more fish on the surface.

There's nothing like getting that startling, water splashing strike from a big smallie or northern pike.

In talking about these lures remember that they all have treble hooks on them or hooks by three, usually two sets and sometimes three. Now that's a lot of hooks! I pinch the barbs down for several reasons. You could say I do it because the hooks will penetrate the fishes mouth easier with the barbs down. You could say that there is less damage to the fish when you take the hooks out. You could say that it hardly causes any less fish caught if you just remember to keep the pressure on the fish while playing it. Yes, you could say all of that but the main reason I pinch the barbs down on treble hooks is because they come out of me and my clients easier! This happens with regular frequency when you fish everyday like I do. When I give a lure to a client to use I check that the barbs are pinched down. One instance in particular that I remember this month is I had a couple of guys that booked a three day charter. The first day we were using jerk baits and when I gave the lures to the guys to use I told them to check that the barbs were pinched down which they did and even used their needle nose pliers to make sure they were down. Later in the day the one guy says he has a problem. I look back and while he was taking a fish off the treble hooks it jumped and he got a hook in the finger past the pinched down barb. I told him that I'm no doctor and they don't even let me play one on TV so his buddy would have to pull it out. In hearing that he said "No, I got it" and yanked it right out. Sure it hurt a little but it came right out. With a little first aid and a bandage we were fishing again. The second day we were fishing and wouldn't you know it but the second guy got a hook caught in his finger the same way only this time it was in there clear up to the bend of the hook! With a harder yank and a louder grunt it also came out relatively easy. Each time we had a discussion on how glad we were to pinch the barbs down. I have personally been hooked 4 times this year by clients where the hook penetrated the skin. Now I will admit that I only pinch down the barbs on trebles but I'm strongly thinking about also bending them down on the single jig hooks. Twice this year I have been stuck in the nose with single hook jigs! That will teach me to stick my nose in where it doesn't belong alright. Both times a client was fighting a fish and the hook came out flying only to find my nose for a landing place,(I really didn't think it was that big). The first time it just hardly stuck in and I plucked it right out with just a drop of blood showing. The second time it went in past the barb and the only way to get it out was to push it through and cut off the barb then back it out. You should have seen me pushing the wire cutters up my nose to cut the hook, it must have been hilarious to look at. I don't know how those kids wear a nose ring, it sure bothered the heck out of me!

We caught our season record this month. Every year I give away a free charter to the anglers who catch the most fish in one day. This year the free trip goes out to a couple of my regular clients, Bill Dombrowski and Dave Flanery who along with me caught 185 fish in one day. The fish were mostly caught on 3" Trick Sticks from alluring Baits. The LD Smallie Slammer to be exact which is a green pumpkin color with a chartreuse tip.

We rigged it on a lead jig head with the full hook exposed and fished it slowly along the bottom. That lure is also great for walleyes which all the river anglers are eagerly fishing for now that the water temperature has dropped. I just had some custom hair jigs made by JJ's Jigs which is their woolybooger shortie hair jig and I asked him to put just a touch of chartreuse in the tail. It should be a dynamite cold water walleye jig. I'll put it to good use this November.

I've been seeing a good amount of Mink on the river, several every day. One little guy had just caught a bass about 8" long and was carrying it along the river bank and he would stuff it into the rocks which was amusing to watch and then go back in the river to hunt some more. He would then come back out of the water only to dig out his fish go up the river another 10ft or so and repeat the process. He must have been saving the fish for an evening meal. I have a photo of him on my website. Well that's all I have for this month. For further reports along with photos and charter information, visit me on my web site at www.ldguideservice.com . Fish safe and I'll see you on the river.