



TECH BULLETIN

COLORADO

BONNEY RESERVOIR

Compiled from the Diaries and Logs of the Luhr Jensen Fishing Research Team.

By ED MARSH

Bonney Reservoir, located in eastern Colorado off Hwy. 385 some 25 miles north of the town of Burlington and 10 miles south of the community of Idalia on the South Fork of the Republican River, is an oasis in a land virtually devoid of lakes or streams. Built in 1951 as a flood control facility by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, this 1,900-surface-acre lake is a true paradise for the sportsminded. In 1982 the state of Colorado purchased water rights to maintain the lake at a constant level, ensuring a stable aquatic environment for game fish and their food sources. A thriving population of walleye, wipers, white bass, largemouth bass, crappie, bluegill, freshwater drum, bullheads, channel cats and northern pike has produced one of the finest warm water fisheries in the state. A very healthy shad population ensures a bountiful supply of forage fish for the many predators, and all game fish feed on the shad.

As with any lake, some months provide better fishing than others. April, May and June produce some of the best walleye, crappie and white bass fishing. Wipers, largemouths and northern pike are also feasting on baby shad, shiner minnows, crawfish and baby panfish from the previous year's hatch. Except in the winter, catfish are always hungry and will hit a variety of crankbaits. While fish can be caught in July and August, especially at night, the daytime heat and the mosquitoes can make life less than fun!

Starting in September, cooler weather again brings better fishing for most species. October and November can produce good fishing, especially for walleye and wipers. During extremely cold winters, the lake will freeze and a few locals do some ice fishing. This is a practice *I would not recommend* because low altitude ice can be very treacherous.

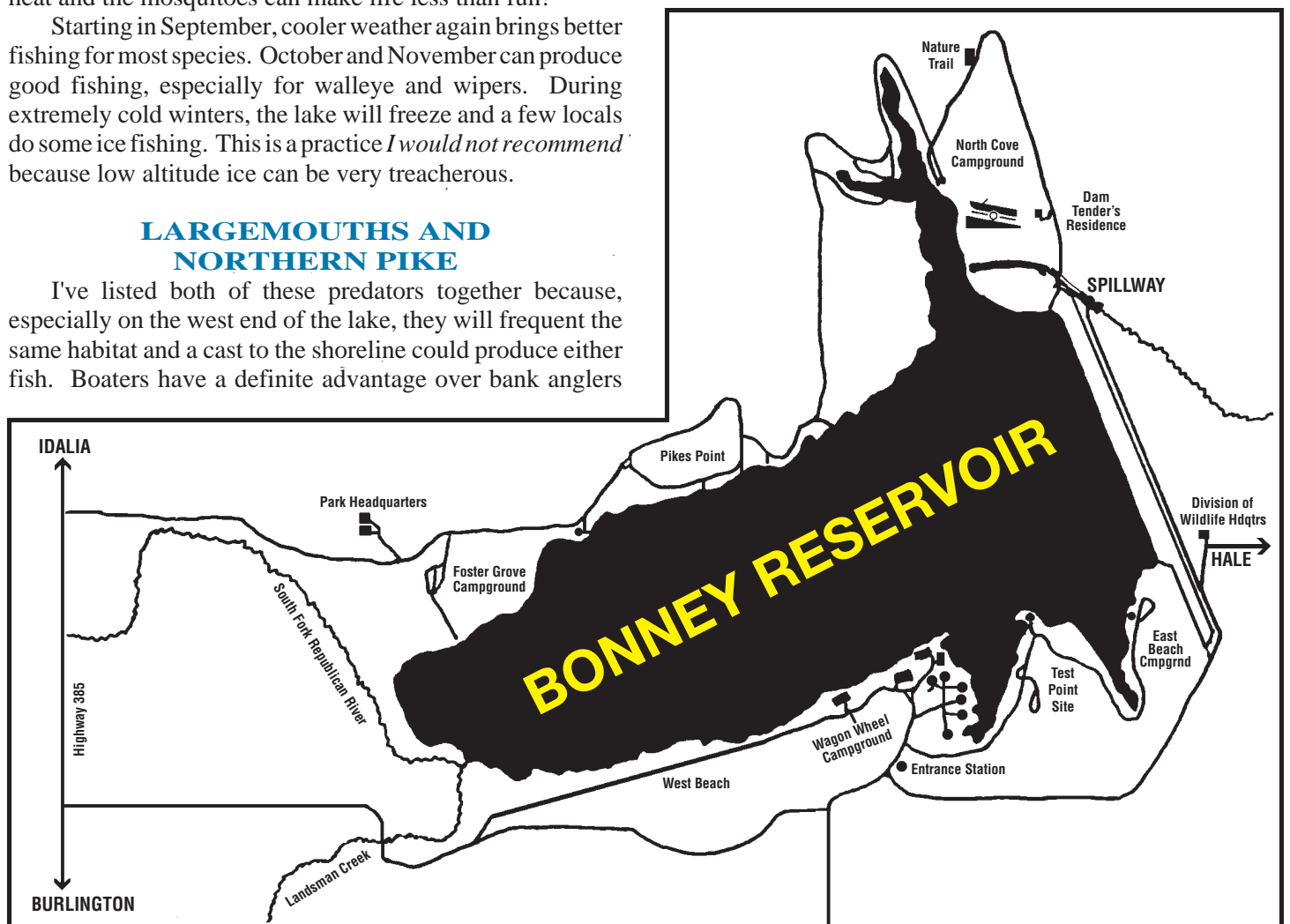
LARGEMOUTHS AND NORTHERN PIKE

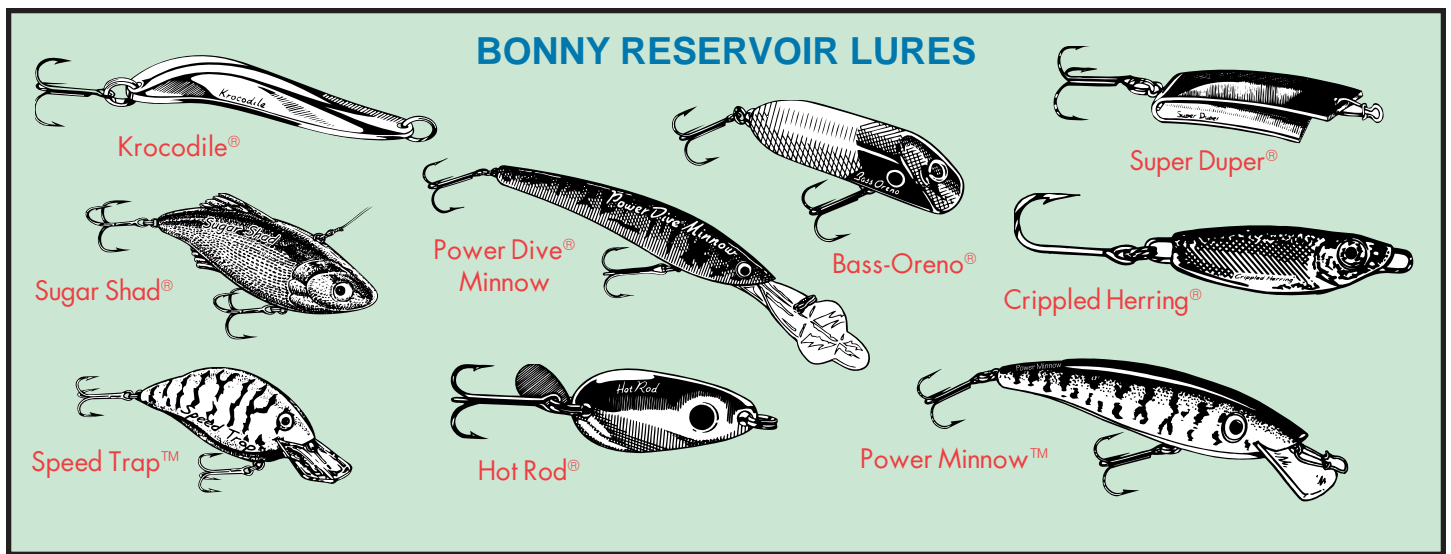
I've listed both of these predators together because, especially on the west end of the lake, they will frequent the same habitat and a cast to the shoreline could produce either fish. Boaters have a definite advantage over bank anglers

when fishing the west end because it's almost impossible for those on shore to work this water well whereas boaters can do so with ease and produce some really fine catches of largemouths and pike. Here is where Luhr Jensen's *Fingerling Hi-Catch™* and a *Nip-I-Diddee®* or *Bass-Oreno®* topwater wood will produce some incredible action. Bank anglers do have a chance for both largemouths and pike though by fishing around the South Marina Cove and also both arms of the North Cove. Again, spinnerbaits and top water plugs are deadly but shallow running crankbaits such as the *Speed Trap™*, especially in *Shad* or *Bluegill* finishes, will also catch these fish. There's also the possibility of finding schools of white bass, wipers or walleyes in these same waters and when that happens . . . H-A-N-G O-N!!

WHITE BASS

Dense schools of these fabulous game fish cruise much of the eastern half of the lake, especially in front of the dam. When they are in and feeding, the fishing (or catching) can be *totally awesome!* My favorite lures for these scrappers are *Krocodiles®* in sizes 1/6-oz, 3/16-oz. and 1/4-oz. and in *Chrome, Hammered Chrome, Chrome/Silver Prism-Lite®* or *Pearl/Fishscale®* which all have a finish similar to the baby shad that white bass feed heavily on. Other lures to try are the *Super Duper®* in size 502 and 503 in *Nickel/Red Head,*





Chrome/Silver Prism-Lite® or Pearl/Fishscale® finishes. I personally guarantee that the 1/6- and 1/8-oz. **Crippled Herring®** lures in Pearl White, Mother-of-Pearl or Nickel/Neon Blue Stripe will catch white bass because I've done it!

Crankbaits such as the 1/8-oz. **Sugar Shad®** or 1/8-oz. **Speed Trap™** in various finishes are equally deadly. Trolling any of these lures along the face of the dam can be quite productive too.

WIPERS

These white bass/striped bass hybrids are the heavy-weights of Bonny Reservoir. It has been rumored that some 20-lb-plus wipers have shown up in the Colorado Division of Wildlife nets, put out to take walleyes for their spawn. I believe it because the conditions are right for these giants to reach incredible sizes. More food than they can eat, a stable water level and a long growing season. For wipers, it just doesn't get any better... that is until some smart angler comes along and puts an irresistible *Luhr Jensen* lure in front of its nose!

Obviously the lake isn't overflowing with 20+ pounders, but most will run from 3 to 5 or 6 pounds. There are also plenty of 10 to 15 pounders but it takes time and patience to catch them. The smaller ones can be caught in the same areas, with the same lures (although I prefer the 1/2-oz. **Krocodile®** for these smaller wipers) and the same techniques as used for white bass BUT for the giants of 10 pounds and up, the rules have changed! Trolling deep-running crankbaits such as the **Power Dive® Minnow** or **Hot Lips Express®** that bounce along the bottom in 20 feet of water is a sure way of tangling with some of these giants plus the 12- to 14-lb. walleyes will hit these same lures.

A word of caution: Use new line of at least 15-lb. test and keep a loose drag. Another technique is to drift with the wind in about 15 to 20 feet of water, dragging a dead shad or bluegill along the bottom. Personally, I prefer trolling with crankbaits or jiggling large 1-, 2- or even 3-oz. **Crippled Herring®** or **Krocodiles®** in the deep water. Believe me, a 14- or 15-lb. wiper would probably consider a 3-oz. **Krocodile®** an easy snack!

WALLEYES

These hard-hitting fish can be caught almost anywhere around the lake. Casting wide spoons such as a 1/6- or 1/4-oz. **Hotrod®** in Nickel/Silver Scalelite®, Nickel/Green Scalelite®, Nickel/Blue Scalelite® or Hammered Nickel/Fire Dot finish will absolutely bring strikes from walleyes. My fishing buddies and I have caught many with these spoons, both off the dam and from both sides of West Beach, by casting as far as we can and jiggling the spoon back. Because these spoons have a wide blade and offer resistance in the water, it is possible to jig them slowly and the walleyes will hammer them! **Krocodiles®**, especially in the new Fire Tiger finish are deadly when fished in deep water and over the rocks, like off the dam. Here a fast retrieve can be used to keep the spoon out of those lure-eating rocks.

Crankbaits such as the **Sugar Shad®** and **Speed Trap™** are more of my favorites because they do catch fish! Casting

or trolling will bring results with these lures and make a special point to try jiggling a **Sugar Shad®** in the deep water in front of the dam. An exciting result of fishing any of these lures could mean hooking almost any of the different game fish found in Bonny including catfish and freshwater drum which are terrific fighters and fine eating.

CRAPPIE

While most crappie are caught with minnows, marabou jigs or plastic grubs, they will hit small-size lures such as **Krocodiles®**, **Super Dupers®**, **Kwikfish®** and spinners such as small **Shysters®** or **Bang Tails®**. I've even had big slab crappie (14 inches) hit **Power Minnows™** in the 3 3/8-in size.

ACCOMMODATIONS/FACILITIES

The Bonny Marina (970-354-7339) offers a full range of products and services, including boat rentals. The store has fishing tackle, bait, food, beverages, ice and boat supplies. The marina is fenced and offers slips for rent which means boats can be secured in a safe area.

Bonny State Park has four campgrounds with 200 campsites available. Wagon Wheel Campground has electrical hookups plus showers, flush toilets and a laundry. Foster Grove Campground has flush toilets and showers. North Cove and East Beach have primitive camping and all campgrounds have safe drinking water. Also, a fish-cleaning station with electricity is located near Wagon Wheel CG.

A daily or annual Colorado State Parks Pass is needed for each vehicle that enters the park and camping fees are charged for each campsite. For more information, write or call Bonny Lake State Park, 3010 County Rd. 3, Idalia, CO 80735-9637 or call 970-354-7306.

The only restriction on keeping fish is that any largemouth bass must be 15 inches or longer. Standard Colorado fishing regulations apply to all other species. For non-campers, motels are available in Idalia or Burlington and both towns have fine restaurants.

PROPER CATCH AND RELEASE

1. Play the fish in quickly so it is not too tired.
2. Handle the fish as little as possible and never let it flop on a hard or dirty surface.
3. Use hemostats or needle-nose pliers to back the hook out the way it went in. Barbless hooks make the process easier.
4. Never release a fish until it is fully revived and acts strong. A tired fish can tumble and get lodged in rocks or moss and suffocate. Carefully work the fish back and forth to pump water through its gills. You will know when it's ready to leave.
5. When taking a picture of your catch, leave it in the water until the camera is ready and then gently cradle the fish in both hands as you lift it out of the water. Never put your fingers in its gills or squeeze it too hard. Keep the fish out of the water only long enough to take the picture.
6. Be gentle and release the fish carefully. NEVER THROW A FISH BACK INTO THE WATER.