

Fish Norfolk Lake

Big Striped Bass Rise to Baits as the Sun Goes Down

by John N. Felsher

Somewhere between a mountainous shoreline thick with lure-eating brush during daylight hours and us, a large fish splashed. With no moon to illuminate the rugged Ozark Mountains, we couldn't judge distances very well. Was the shoreline 20 yards away or 100?

Making distance calculations even more tricky, a point projected out from that dark shoreline toward the boat. We unleashed our lures in the general vicinity of the stygian shoreline, intently listening for the reassuring splashes of them hitting the water rather than a disheartening clunk. Splash! Success —this time!

"Shad move up on the banks at night," explained Steve Olomon with Steve's Guide Service (870-491-5142, fishingwithsteve.com) on Norfolk Lake near Mountain Home, Arkansas. "Stripers move up shallow at night to feed. Sometimes, they get right on the banks. We want to put the bait close to the shoreline, but not on it. With a good breeze like we have tonight, a Smithwick Rogue can really sail on light line. At night, stripers don't like to hit a lure if it's going too fast. Reel it very slowly. The slower the better, just so it wobbles back and forth. Don't jerk it like when fishing for largemouth bass."

In the incredibly transparent water of this deep lake, fish can see even at night. They might rise 50 feet to smack a bait on the surface, but we couldn't see the lure wobbling almost painfully slowly at the end of the line. Large predators could

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Valory Zortman shows off a striped bass caught while fishing with Steve Olomon of Steve's Guide Service, on Norfolk Lake in Arkansas. Photo: John N. Felsher

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Norfork Lake

by Tom Reynolds

Tom Reynolds of STR Outfitters has fished Norfork Lake more than 36 years. He's guided striper anglers for 17 years. You may contact Reynolds at 877-246-4896 or at stroutfitters.com.



LOCATION: Baxter/Fulton Counties, Arkansas
SIZE/DEPTH: 22,000 surface acres. Maximum depth: 177 ft
DOMINANT SPECIES: striped bass, hybrid bass, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleyes, crappies, white bass, bluegills, catfish



- 1

Thumb Point: Thumb Point is a great night spot for early stripers/walleyes. Sloping banks provide easy access from deep water. Later in summer, stripers school on Thumb's big flat and right off the edge of the flat.
- 2

Dam Cove: Dam Cove is another spot for the night bite in March and April. The summer bite for stripers and hybrids is very good also. The cove is deep, leading back to a small flat where the fish will school.
- 3

Point One: Excellent beginning in April. It features a large flat that goes nearly across the lake and has the river channel bordering three sides. Stripers feed on the flat, and as summer progresses they school up, feeding on crawdads.
- 4

Hand Cove: This flat is an outstanding location for the night bite beginning in early March and on into May. Both stripers and walleyes can be caught along the whole bank. The bank slopes off into deep water.
- 5

Barren Point: Good for both the night bite and spring and summer stripers on the inside of the point. Smallmouth spawn on the point, because it has the right structure and depth.
- 6

Brushy Creek: Outstanding area for crappies and stripers. The beginning section of the creek is very good for the March to May striper bite. The back end of the creek is loaded with trees and structure for crappies. You can find crappies on the brush piles early and during the spawn all the way back into the willows.
- 7

Big Creek: The other outstanding creek for crappies and stripers. The creek is much larger than Brushy Creek and has many inlets that have brush piles and blow-downs. Stripers will be caught all around (and to the north of) Reynolds Island during March through May. The back end of the creek near the Boggy Access is loaded with trees and structure for crappies. You'll find crappies on the brush piles early and during the spawn all the way back along the blow-downs.
- 8

Koso Point: Koso Point has an outstanding flat that borders the river channel on three sides. During April and May, stripers will be shallow between the two points, and anchor each end of the flat. In late summer, stripers school on the flat, feeding on crawdads.
- 9

Brushy Point: Straight across from Woods Point, this entire area is good for schooling stripers during summer.
- 10

Holiday Hills: Holiday Hills is a cove that has a series of points leading to the actual cove. During spring and early summer, look for stripers feeding in the early morning off of these points.
- 11

Shoal Creek: This is a mid- to late-summer creek that can be outstanding striper/hybrid fishing. It is one of the deepest creeks on Norfork Lake and you will find lots of schooling fish.
- 12

Long Flat: This is a long flat heading into Big Creek. Stripers will feed and spawn along this flat starting in April and May.



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Coming next month...
Leech Lake, Minn.

Fish Norfolk Lake

Big Striped Bass Rise to Baits as the Sun goes Down

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detect the movement of a silhouetted morsel seductively wobbling just under the surface. The first lure didn’t move very far before a vicious beast smashed it and raced for open water, nearly pulling the rod with it. On the boat, 19-year-old Valory Zortman fought her first striper.

“Norfolk Lake is well-known for its striper fishery,” advised Tom Reynolds with STR Outfitters in Mountain Home (877-246-4896, stroutfitters.com). “The state originally stocked striped bass into the lake in the 1960s and continue to stock stripers and hybrid bass each year. The lake has a good population of stripers averaging about 10 to 12 pounds, but we catch some fish in the 20- to 40-pound range. Occasionally, someone lands one topping 50 pounds.”

Just outside Mountain Home, Norfolk Lake began with a dam on the North Fork of the White River in 1944. Slicing a path through the ancient Ozark Mountains of Missouri and northern Arkansas, the North Fork runs about 109 miles until it hits the White River at Norfolk, Ark., below Norfolk Lake. The White River snakes 720 miles through Arkansas and Missouri before turning southerly to hit the Mississippi River in southeastern Arkansas.

Norfolk Lake runs about 47 miles along the river channel. No other rivers flow into the lake, but the dazzling waters spread through myriad mountain coves totaling about 22,000 surface acres at pool stage. The lake drops to more than 200 feet deep near the dam. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers controls the 550 miles of shorelines, preventing most development. The COE strip of land may

extend back from the water a few hundred feet or nearly a mile.

During daylight hours, visitors see rocky bluffs and forested shorelines touching crystal waters reminiscent of a remote lake in boreal Canada. At first light, anglers fishing a wooded point might hear turkeys gobbling or see bald eagles hunting prey. Sometimes, deer walk along the boulder-strewn shorelines. Just a cast away from shore, the boat could sit in more than 100 feet of water.

“It’s somewhat isolated with no superhighways passing close to it so it doesn’t have any really big boats on it,”



Tom Reynolds with STR Outfitters shows off a striped bass he caught while fishing on Norfolk Lake near Mountain Home, Ark. Photo: John N. Felsher



Kenny Kieser shows off another nice Norfolk striper. Photo: John N. Felsher

Reynolds said. “On the weekends, it gets some boat traffic, but Norfolk doesn’t get nearly the pressure of other lakes. During the week, we hardly see another boat. Since the water is so clear, night fishing can be outstanding. The stripers can see baitfish at night as they move into the shallows.”

This adventure began just as the day ended and a chilly night started. Hall of Fame outdoor writer Kenny Kieser, Valory, the daughter of our hosts at Mockingbird Bay Resort, and I ventured into the darkness with Steve to tempt nocturnal stripers. Normally, Steve runs out of Quarry Marina near the dam, but picked us up in his Legend boat on this breezy, twilight at the Mockingbird Bay Resort where we stayed. That morning, Valory caught her first fish ever, a Kentucky spotted bass, while fishing with Steve. Besides those fish mentioned, the lake also holds smallmouth and largemouth bass, Ozark bass, walleyes, crappies, bream, catfish and other fish. In the tailrace below the dam, anglers catch several trout species.



Steve Olomon, a guide on Norfolk Lake near Mountain Home, Ark., shows off a striped bass he caught while fishing at night. Photo: John N. Felsher

“We’re fishing a gravel flat close to the bank,” Steve advised as he powered down the outboard at the honey hole. “Stripers

story continued...

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Answers to Outdoor Puzzler
Puzzle on page 39

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Fish Norfolk Lake

Norfolk Lake—Year ‘Round Open-water Fishery



Norfolk Lake is an outstanding fishery, drawing enthusiasts from all over the country. Nationally famous for the striped and hybrid bass it yields, Norfolk Lake also offers great fishing for both large and smallmouth bass. Don’t overlook the walleye population. This much sought after table fish has really come into its own. White bass, monster crappies, bluegills, and catfish are also plentiful. Mild winters, water that never freezes, and a 365-day open season, enable anglers to enjoy fishing throughout the year. Spring typically comes early to Norfolk

Lake, as does the traditional spring bite. The warm lazy summer days offer great bass and crappie fishing early in the mornings and late in the evenings, leaving your afternoons for other lake adventures. For a real thrill, try night fishing “under the lights.” The mosquitoes won’t bother you. There are none. And fishing in the fall couldn’t be better as you cruise the lake looking for that special hotspot while admiring some of the most beautiful fall foliage that you have ever seen. Spoons and other more natural-looking



lures are encouraged along with various live baits. For the best experience, schedule a charter with one of the lake’s experienced and professional fishing guides. They are there to help you learn technique, bait choices, and locating the big one you’re looking for. Don’t forget to stop in at one of the conveniently located bait shops on the lake. Those bait guys are full of the most up-to-date “what’s hot and what’s not” information. Some even offer bait delivery services to select areas of the lake. And don’t forget those knowledgeable resort and marina owners. They literally live on the lake and are always willing to steer you in the right direction. The key is to be patient and to know when to fish deep but also know when the top water bite is on. **MWO**

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like gravel flats, like where smallmouth would go. Sometimes, the fish are off the end of the points. Sometimes, they might be off to one side. I’ll keep the boat in about nine to 11 feet of water as you throw toward the shoreline.”

While Steve maintained the boat position and kept a Frabill net handy, the rest of us propelled our jerkbaits toward the general vicinity of the shadowy shoreline. We used light spinning rods loaded with 10-pound-test monofilament because we didn’t anticipate hitting any snags in the clear-cut lake—as long as we hit the water on the cast!

“It’s a little tougher to catch stripers on artificial baits, but I like the challenge of tempting big fish on light tackle with lures,” Olomon remarked. “I know of at least one 53-pound striper that came out of this lake. A lot of people fish at night with artificials because in that extremely clear water, fish can get spooky.”

When tempting stripers at night, keep noise to a minimum and avoid shining any lights onto the water, particularly toward the chosen shoreline. That could spook fish. When preparing tackle or taking care of a problem in the boat, use a small LED light and shine it into the bottom of the boat instead of over the water.

“Stripers don’t like a lot of light,” Olomon explained. “Even when an electrical storm comes up, that shuts down the striper bite for a day or two. A little talking doesn’t hurt anything, but avoid banging things around in the boat. Sound travels through the boat hull into the water.”

Every few casts, one of us hooked a fish. When someone hooked a powerful fish, the others pulled in their lines to avoid a tangled mess, but we did manage a couple doubles. After about 90 minutes, we head back to Mockingbird Bay Resort after catching and releasing 14 stripers and missing several others. Valory landed a double-digit hybrid striped bass, a hatchery-raised combination of a striped bass and a white bass.

“We catch hybrids the same way we catch stripers,” Olomon advised. “Hybrids often run with stripers. Sometimes, we catch a striper on one cast and a hybrid on the next cast with the same bait.” **MWO**

John N. Felsher grew up in Slidell, La., and now lives in Semmes, Ala. He’s a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 2,100 articles in more than 135 different magazines to his credit. He also co-hosts a weekly live outdoors radio show every Thursday from noon to 1 p.m. Central Time on WNXP 105.5 FM in Mobile, Ala. and a recorded syndicated show that goes out to multiple stations in Alabama each week. For more info on the syndicated show, see gdomag.com. Contact Felsher through his website at JohnNFelsher.com.

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