

Fishing Tip – “Scents Make Sense” *by Frank Przybylski*

By the title of this article you are probably wondering if I have any sense. But bear with me and maybe scents will make sense to you too. Like all vertebrates, fish have sense organs that tell them what is happening in their environment. These organs enable them to see, hear, smell, and taste. In addition, almost all fish have a special sense organ called the lateral line system, which enables them to “**touch**” objects at a distance. For the purposes of this article I will focus on hearing, sight, smell, and taste.

How Fish Feed:

The sound of your lure hitting and then moving through the water is actually the first thing to alert a fish of something going on in its environment. Keep in mind that water is a tremendous conductor of sound, and the movement of sound waves through the water is integral to a fish’s sense of hearing and overall survival. When a bait fish or lure moves through the water, it gives off vibrations which fish can detect from yards away. These vibrations are both heard and felt by the fish. When a lure is yards away the fish feels the vibrations with its lateral line and begins the process of pinpointing the location. As the fish gets closer in on your lure, the sound of its rattling and/or vibration is picked up through the inner ear. The fish then begins to home in on your presentation, they rely on their senses of sight, smell, and taste to determine the actual location of your lure, and if it is actually something they want to eat.

Once the gap between fish and lure narrows even more, the sense of sight plays a bigger role. Because most fish have eyes on the sides of their heads, they are able to see nearly all around themselves. Like our own eyes the two eyes must work together so that the fish can focus and determine distance from an object. But, because the eyes are on opposite sides of their head, fish have a very narrow area of binocular vision – **directly in front of their snouts**. In actuality, fish are near sighted. While they can make out movement and images at a distance, they cannot see them clearly or judge the distance or depth to an object. Maybe that is why we occasionally see fish swimming right next to our lure, close enough to eat it, but just turn away.

As well as hearing and seeing a food source, fish can smell it from a distance. Fish have a very sensitive sense of smell. Generally speaking, a fish can detect concentrations of chemicals as low as one part per million. To put that into perspective, that’s equivalent to one ounce of chocolate syrup in a million railroad cars of milk. **Now, this is where scents start to make sense.** When fish are aggressively feeding, anything that resembles food may draw a strike. On days when fish are not actively on the bite is when application of artificial scents can make the difference between no bites and a decent day of “catching”.

Products like Berkley Gulp and even some soft rubber baits have built in attractants that fish can smell and taste. Hard plastic baits have no smell ***“nor do they taste like anything”*** fish normally eat. Most strikes on these types of lures are purely reactionary as fish are either actively feeding, just curious, or protecting their territory.

Most of us tend to just pop open the tackle box and think “hmm...what looks good”? We make our selection, tie it on, and give it the old ***“heave ho”*** out into the water. That’s about as much in-depth consideration we give our lure selection. After all, the fish will surely hear the lure hit the water, more than likely locate it, and maybe, just maybe even bite it. But, why not stack the odds in your favor by taking advantage of all of the fish’s feeding senses by including smell and taste to your offering? Think about anglers who deploy chum bags to attract fish to the boat and thereby making them easier targets. Applying scents on your lure is basically the same as placing a mini chum bag in the water.

There are several good attractants on the market. Some are in a liquid/spray form and others come as gels. They come in different “flavors” like shrimp, mullet, crab, etc. Match the scent to the “bait” you are trying to imitate. Personally I prefer scents in a gel form. Gel scents last much longer, up to twenty minutes, and as I said, act like a ***“chum bag”*** for us inshore anglers. I know one angler who smears a gel attractant on the stern of his boat as well as applying it to his lures. The scent slowly seeps into the water from the back of the boat as he casts his lure. Pretty ingenious!

Here’s a little trick to try when you are fishing rubber baits that have a cavity or depression built into them. Fill that area with the gel. Get the scent into the water, add that little bit of smell and taste to your lure. Have you ever had a fish take your lure and spit it out before you could react? I have! Whether it’s hard baits, soft plastics, spoons, jigs, and may I dare risk to be blasphemous enough to suggest even on flies, the taste of the attractant will make the fish hold onto your presentation that split second longer. This blink of an eye during the bite can be the difference between a solid hook up and a miss.

You may be asking...“Can I catch fish without adding a scent”? The answer is yes. But why not slant the odds in your favor? If you are not using an attractant on your lures, you are not taking full advantage of all the feeding senses fish use to eat and survive.

After reading my little dissertation, I hope this article helps you in understanding what I mean when I say ***“Scents Make Sense”***. You do not have to apply gobs of attractants, just smear a little dab on, spread it over the lure, and give it a try. ***What do you have to lose?***