

In the previous blog about common mistakes I see anglers making while fishing for speckled trout with artificial lures, I neglected to mention one. It's obvious and widespread, and is always, in my estimation, a mistake, but the "penalty" or "negative consequences" it generates vary greatly from angler to angler. The tendency to which I refer is the **fanatical reliance on one lure or one type of lure**.

Most often, when I encounter anglers who are too "married" to one lure or type of lure, they are wed to soft plastics. Someone who loves the worm(s), is probably not losing much in terms of general productivity due to their affinity for the soft, wiggly things. In fact, if I were forced to use only one type of lure for the rest of my time, I would choose soft plastics. If limited to one specific lure, I'd probably pick a MirrOlure Provoker 5-inch worm in plum/chartreuse.

Anglers who fish 90% of the time or more with soft plastics in various sizes and types, including both rat-tail versions and paddletails, and who vary jighead size according to the conditions of the moment, have the potential to catch lots of trout. They will catch some big ones too, assuming they fish in areas where numbers of them live. I know a versatile angler is a better angler than one stubbornly committed to a specific lure, but I also realize a great worm fisherman is capable of tremendous productivity.

However, many people who have "tunnel vision" on the worm aren't versatile in using various sizes and types of soft plastics and jigheads. Many of them use the same exact worm on the same exact head over and over again, regardless of the environmental variables in play. Those people are undoubtedly limiting their chances for consistent success.

Of a slightly different breed are those who throw nothing but Gulp! products. My perception of their habit as a flaw comes from a specific perspective, one biased toward the sport of lure fishing as opposed to fishing with bait, which I perceive as a leisure activity. An angler who truly wants to become proficient and highly skilled as a lure chucker is not aided in the endeavor by the use of the radically-scented, deadly-effective Gulp! family of lures. In fact, I'd go a step further and say I have a problem with defining these products as lures. If it's possible to catch fish on something simply by throwing it into the water and letting it sit on the bottom, I'd venture to say it's more "bait" than lure.

People who use Gulp! all or most of the time because they simply don't care about becoming better lure fishermen are making a reasonable choice; others, who think they are working on their skills as lure fishermen, are making a mistake if they rely on Gulp! for any significant percentage of their fishing time. Often, I've heard people say they know the stinky stuff is hampering their evolution, but they bring it along "just in case" the fish aren't biting more conventional plugs. What happens too often is the Gulp! gets brought out soon after a couple of other lures are tried without success, and then stays on for the duration of the day.

Basically, the effectiveness of these lures negates the need for creativity and precision in presentation, hampering the process of growth in the angler deploying them. They limit the angler because they are too effective, regardless of the conditions. On the other hand, topwater plugs limit anglers in an entirely different way.

Conventional floating plugs will catch plenty of trout when deployed skillfully and thoughtfully. The thought process comes in most prominently in the consideration of the

timing of the outing and the feeding mood of the fish. Topwaters produce fast action in warm water; they are much less effective in cold water, except in specific situations.

People who have tunnel vision on topwaters catch fewer trout than more versatile anglers. Some of these topwater fanatics argue they catch more big fish because of their choice of a large plug. While large, floating plugs are on some occasions the best lures to deploy in the attempt to catch big trout, I know they will often be ignored by those trout when they can be enticed to bite other offerings.

Topwater junkies become hooked on watching their plug all the time. Even when the bite is excruciatingly slow, they have something amusing to focus their eye on. Many of these visual types will go to great ends to defend their stubbornness with the plugs. They might make 200 casts without a blow up, then catch a 4 pounder and say, "See, I told you they wanted topwaters," all the while ignoring the fact that others have caught plenty of fish during the time they spent walking the dog, zoned out and staring at their dancing darling.

Perhaps the most famous of these anglers (who shall remain nameless here) carried three plugs into battle during tournaments: a white Top Dog, a white Top Dog and a white Top Dog. He'd say, "If they aren't biting a white Top Dog, I'm screwed. And I don't care. If I can't catch 'em my way, I don't want to catch 'em." I never respected the validity of his choice and didn't fear him as an angling competitor, but I did respect his honesty about his obsession.

Conversely, I've met a few too many topwater freaks who try and convince me their way is tougher, more of a challenge. "It's more challenging to try and make 'em bite topwaters," they say. I disagree. I believe using the same plug all the time takes much of the challenge of lure fishing away. In some cases, mindlessly throwing topwaters for hours without any bites provides a definition of the word insane.

The greatest challenge a lure chucker faces is figuring out how to catch fish consistently in all types of conditions. Consistent productivity comes from versatility, through the skilled use of various plugs, considering the context of time and place, not from the overzealous commitment to one wrongly perceived "magic bullet".