

Lake Norman Wildlife Conservationists Newsletter

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Game Fish Eat Baitfish, What Do Baitfish Eat?

By **Capt. Craig Price**

CAN UNDERSTANDING what and how bait fish eat help us catch more game-fish? The website www.bassmaster.com uses a Japanese proverb to express this concept—"If you wish to learn the highest truths, begin with the alphabet."

My initial research into this query promptly reminded me that relationships in nature are rarely simple. I soon came to realize that to understand what and how baitfish eat, I need know what their primary food source is, and how it exists.

For the purpose of this discussion, I refer to all bait or forage as shad, which are part of a family known as Clupeids. Wikipedia says the Clupeidae family includes about 200 species, including sardines, anchovies, menhaden, shad and herrings. Our central NC impoundments contain forage populations in some combination of threadfin shad, gizzard shad, herring, and alewives. Close inspection is often needed to tell the difference. Our gamefish species also consume panfish like bream, crappie, and perch but my references to forage in this article relate to shad.

A multitude of sources confirm that juvenile and adult shad rely on small organisms for nourishment, primarily plankton. They consume algae in the absence of plank-

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Josh and Ayden show their nice LKN striped caught in Mountain Creek.

Brand New! LNWC Spring Fling

By **Don West**

Our first-ever spring community event features all things "Nature." Are you planning on beautifying your yard this spring? Our nurseries and landscapers can give you helpful suggestions. Would you like to make your yard wildlife-friendly? Exhibitors can supply food that attracts wildlife, shelter to raise young and guard against predators, and water sources ranging from decorative bird baths to a beautiful garden pond. You are sure to take away many inspirational ideas.

Our Spring Fling is both entertaining and informative. We will have music, food and beverages, hands-on activities, and hours of kids activities. Experts will speak on subjects



Blue Heron courtesy of Kristen Meng

such as "Bird-Brained Gardening" and "Aliens Among Us." Visitors can learn about hiking, cycling, paddle boarding, beekeeping, wildlife removal, or even design their own outdoor kitchen. Kids can cast for prizes, shoot a bow, or kiss a fish!

Join us **April 18 from 10am to 4pm at LangTree of Lake Norman.** It's fun for the entire family and it's free!

LNWC on the Lookout for Litter!

By **Eric Peterson**

One of the lesser-known, ongoing projects of the LNWC is the prevention of roadway litter from making its way into Lake Norman. While a great deal of lake litter emanates from recreational boaters, anglers and other lake-users, a considerable amount of the trash finds its way into the lake from roads and other sources not directly on the water.

Simply put, it is very easy to understand how litter deposited alongside interstate and local roads is driven

by wind and/or heavy water runoff down to the lakeshore. Once in the water, most of it is free to be blown by changing winds to almost any part of the lake. For example, discarded trash from garbage and recycling trucks, automobiles and construction sites, and other sources close to the lake will easily end up in the water.

This happens most frequently on I-77 near Exit 33, Williamson Road near the bridge, and the HWY 21 bridge over Reeds Creek. Trash from passing vehicles makes its way over and under guardrails and catch fences, and down into the lake, sometimes via concrete spillways.

LNWC is anxious to find other similar litter-fields that could be flush with trash so we can remove and properly dispose of the potential contaminants. If you are aware of any such sites in the lake region, please contact me at 704-660-3508 or send your information to info@LNWC.org.



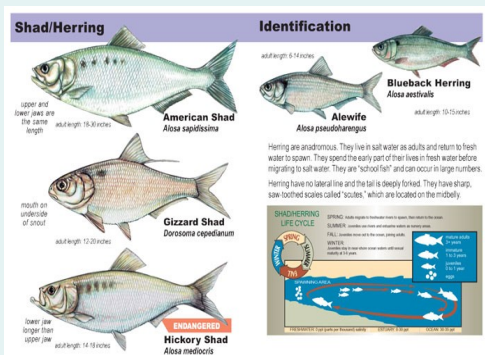
Capt. Craig Con't

ton, but plankton is the #1 source of their nutrition. Larger adult shad are also known to eat fish eggs, fish larvae, and even bottom detritus.

The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI) website says the name plankton comes from the Greek meaning "drifter" or "wanderer". It also states there are basically two types of plankton - tiny plants called phytoplankton, and weak-swimming animals called zooplankton. But again, nature is rarely so simple. There is a third designation called bacterioplankton. The relationship between phytoplankton and bacterioplankton is too complex to expand on here, so I focus my discussion on phytoplankton and zooplankton.

A paper by Carl Richardson on the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission website says phytoplankton are the first link in many aquatic food chains. They are very small plants, almost invisible without magnification. WHOI reports that phytoplankton produce their own food by lassoing the energy of the sun through photosynthesis. During photosynthesis, phytoplankton absorb carbon dioxide to create carbohydrates for energy, and release oxygen as a by-product of this process. WHOI says phytoplankton remove huge quantities of carbon from our atmosphere, and about half of the world's oxygen supply is produced by them. That's as much oxygen as all of the earth's plants produce. These are obviously very important little creatures, not only to fish but to humans as well!

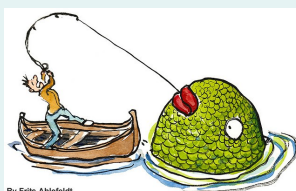
WHOI adds that for sunlight to reach phytoplankton, they need to be near



PA Fish & Boat Commission

the water's surface. But it turns out "near the surface" is a relative term. Enough sunlight for the phytoplankton's needs can penetrate water depths to 900 feet deep. This part of the water column is known as the photic zone. Mr. Richardson confirms that phytoplankton are critical to good fishing in most freshwater systems because zooplankton, very small animals, eat them. The health of baitfish populations is closely tied to plankton in general, but baitfish and gamefish fry need lots of zooplankton to grow into bigger minnows. Because phytoplankton are near the surface, most zooplankton occupy the same areas as their food source.

However, zooplankton are found at many depths throughout the world's oceans and freshwater systems. As an interesting aside, larger weak swimming organisms such as jellyfish are also part of the zooplankton family. Being able to identify these locales should help us catch more fish.



By Frits Ahlefeldt

Conservationist Updates!

Robbins Park

Our partnership with Cornelius Park & Rec continues and the park is looking great!

PONDS: Work on the ponds is continuing. The dams are finished and the new boardwalk is under construction in the big pond. The boardwalk will have a fishing pier incorporated in it. There are new benches installed near the pond in the woods. A time for the ponds to be filled is unknown at this time.

TRAILS: The handicap-accessible trail is nearly finished. It links ponds 1 and 2 and continues on to the Westmoreland Athletic Complex.

BUTTERFLY GARDEN: The first phase of the butterfly garden was successful in that all plants survived and are now reseeding the garden. There were a small number of butterflies in its first season, but at least 6 species were seen there. There were also a number of bumble and carpenter bees and a few honeybees. Dragonflies, crickets and grasshoppers were also seen. A pagoda is being considered for the next phase of the garden. Stay tuned for volunteer opportunities!

Membership Campaign

Since 2008, NCWF members have reaped the benefits of becoming affiliates of their local chapters. Likewise, a growing membership base enhances NCWF's ability to efficiently and effectively bring issues that matter to the forefront at the state and local levels. Members receive the benefits listed below, as well as many others that are offered through local chapter affiliation.

NCWF Membership Benefits:

NCWF's quarterly wildlife Journal

Membership in your local NCWF Chapter

NCWF Membership decal & bumper sticker

Wildlife Wire periodic e-newsletter & Action Alerts

Networking opportunities with other wildlife enthusiasts

Representation about issues you care about most at the state and local level

Join our chapter by visiting

LNWC.org

Thank You to Our Major Sponsors!



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Ken Teeter

LNWC's Board of Directors meets at 6 p.m. on the first Monday of the month at Keller Williams Realty, 118 Morlake Dr., Mooresville. Join us!

We welcome photos and article ideas for our newsletter.
Contact Julie Higgie, editor, at jchiggie@yahoo.com