

WHY WARMWATER FLY FISHING?

With all the great fly fishing throughout the world for trout and the growing passion of saltwater fly fishing, why would anyone want to land a one-pound bluegill or strip flies down deep for walleyes on a cold, windy lake?

There are a number of good reasons. One is to escape the crowds that are often found at today's finer fly-fishing destinations. Most of the bodies of fresh water contained by six of the earth's seven continents are inhabited by warmwater fish species. Therefore, the opportunities to fish are plentiful. Easy-to-reach locations throughout the world may be only a block away from wherever you are. For instance, carp thrive in city park ponds, and in the United States, these locations often produce bluegills, crappies, bass, and channel catfish, as well.

Warmwater fly fishing also provides a very diverse selection of species from which to choose. North America itself may be the finest location of all. Canada offers fishing of legendary quality for northern pike, walleyes, and smallmouth bass. The United States hosts those same species, plus more than a dozen others, and is home to the celebrated largemouth bass. Central America, a mere sliver of land, is home to many cichlids that will absolutely smash a top-water fly, including the widely distributed guapote, a fish known to Americans as the rainbow bass, and the hard-fighting machaca and mojarra. The Amazon Basin of South America holds the peacock bass, which is constantly growing in popularity among fly fishers, plus the freshwater dorado,

piranha, payara, and possibly over one hundred more. Australia has its own family of native warmwater fishes known as cod (much different from saltwater cod), as well as its own type of bass and perch. Remote parts of Africa are home to the tigerfish, one of the toothiest of all fishes, and in the Himalayas of Asia lives the mahseer, a member of the carp family that grows to over one hundred pounds.

As one can imagine, the tremendous varieties of warmwater species worldwide offer many unique challenges. For instance, largemouth bass, one of North America's favorite game fish, frequently surpass 10 pounds. Trophy fish such as these reside amid structures such as sunken or fallen trees surrounded by lily pads and other vegetation. It's possible for an angler to hook several of these monsters over the course of a lifetime, but pulling one out from such a fortress is nearly impossible. Other species such as the muskellunge not only exceed 50 pounds and lurk in a protected habitat of their own, but also are considered to be among the wildest fish on earth. Some of northern Wisconsin's oldest and finest bait fishers can count hookups with muskies on one hand.

Although most North American warmwater species are within easy traveling distance, it can take days to reach where monster northern pike lurk in Canada's Northwest Territory. And heading south to the headwaters of the Amazon in Peru entails at least two days of travel. Civil unrest, language barriers, transportation headaches, dysentery, and skimpy information can tack on more time. Once you make it to



Warmwater species thrive in and around most urban regions. Here an angler pursues carp alongside a busy highway.



Warmwater species exist throughout the world. South Americas red bellied piranha can provide hours of fun on a 5-weight fly rod, but as you can see, flies don't last very long.

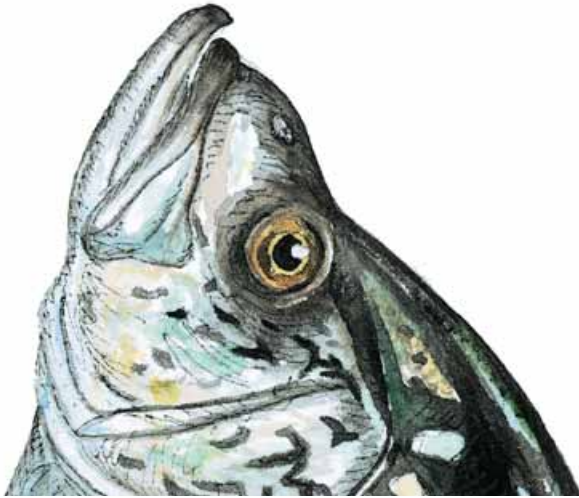
your South American destination, only local guides with a lifetime of experience know the seasonal nuances and fish habits, as well as how to navigate these jungle rivers.

Finally, warmwater fly fishing will challenge your skills. Many situations require casting large, wind-resistant flies with stiff shock tippets. Long and accurate placement of these flies far back under overhanging tree branches or tight against a protruding log can be a must. Ever-present winds contribute to the casting challenge.

Warmwater fly fishing offers something for everyone and fishing opportunities as convenient or as unusual as you could desire, from the bluegill pond in the local park, where anglers can fish after a hard day at work and teach their kids the art, to the exotic species and travel adventures to be found by fishing the Amazon, the world's largest river. Warmwater fly-fishing opportunities are as diverse and intriguing as the world itself.



Popping for largemouth bass on a private lake in Alabama.



FOUR TYPES OF WATER

An entire book could be written on water types alone if it were really to go into detail and explain differences in places that otherwise might seem similar, such as beaches and sandy points. To keep things simple, however, I will cover the four basic types of water that a newcomer to warmwater fly fishing is likely to encounter. These are ponds, lakes, rivers, and canals. Of course, where and how you fish these waters will vary with a multitude of factors, including the kind of structure that is present, the depth of the water and the depths at which fish hold, currents, if present, and the species of fish you are pursuing. Here, I'll present a quick overview of the tackle and flies appropriate to each kind of water type, topics that I'll go into more detail in later chapters. I'll also sketch some of the safety concerns that each type of water raises. When you're fishing a quiet pond, it's just as important to be safe while having fun as it is when you're taking on the mighty forces of the ocean.

PONDS

Ponds exist in two forms, natural and artificial. Natural ponds are small, shallow bodies of water with aquatic plant life from one shoreline to the other, often bordering or connecting to a marsh or swamp. Lily pads, reeds, cattails, and other emerging vegetation, as well as stumps, trees, beaver dams, and muskrat lodges, often protrude through the surface. Overflowing rivers and heavy rains usually form most natural ponds.

Artificial ponds, often referred to as “tanks” or “pits,” are strategically built on farms and ranches for irrigation purposes and to provide drinking water for livestock. They are also commonly constructed for landscaping purposes. Golf courses and housing developments use them worldwide to create a more scenic environment. To enhance the setting, fish are often introduced or arrive naturally through connected rivers and canals. Because many of the warmwater species reside in ponds, I will discuss them first.

Ponds are nearly always rich with life. The shallow water and the scattered debris create hiding places that support populations of many small animals. Insects, snails, freshwater shrimp, leeches, salamanders, frogs, and turtles, to name a few inhabitants, thrive in this environment. These, in turn, attract fish, both big and small. The small fish, mostly minnows and sunfish, dwell in the sunken structure and feed on insects and other tiny animals while hiding from larger fish that come to eat them. That makes ponds great places to pursue warmwater species.



This toad wouldn't stand a chance at swimming across a pond full of largemouth bass and chain pickerel.

Many warmwater species flourish in ponds. Members of the sunfish family, such as largemouth bass, warmouths, bluegills, longear sunfish, and black and white crappies are the best known, but you will also find chain pickerel, northern pike, bowfin, gar, and carp, depending on region and time of year.

The shallow waters of ponds heat up fast in the hot summer sun. Resident fish can save their energy by feeding at cooler times of day. Early mornings and evenings, as well as overcast days, provide the best



action. When fishing during the heat of the day, search for shady areas. Shorelines with overhanging trees are usually inhabited by larger predatory fish. Chain pickerel are commonly found lying perfectly still in water as shallow as 6 inches, waiting to ambush passing prey. Crappies and bluegills can be found scanning overhanging branches and protruding weeds, anxiously awaiting for insects to get carelessly close to the waterline.



A damselfly dangles over the waters edge teasing many lurking sunfish family members.

Fly Tackle

Unless you are specifically after small panfish or fishing waters known for trophy-sized largemouth bass or northern pike, the most practical fly rod is a 9-footer for either a 5-weight or 6-weight fly line. Such rods are light enough to provide fun with small, cooperative sunfish, yet have enough backbone to handle startling surprise attacks from brutes lurking out of sight. These rods can easily cast a variety of fly sizes, from tiny nymph patterns to midsize poppers.

Reels, like the fly rods, need not be anything too fancy. If it's panfish you're after, you don't need a football field's length of backing or a high-tech drag, but if you are looking for an all-rounder to aid in fighting that occasional bruiser, a reel with a strong, smooth drag is the best choice. Few pond fish will take extreme amounts of line, let alone show you your backing. Because ponds are shallow and often full of vegetation, a weight-forward floating fly line is best to avoid constantly snagging weeds.