

## **Let's Get Calico Crazy!**

by Capt. David Bacon

The spawn, during late Spring and early Summer, is when calico go nuts and bite everything they can fit in their mouths, because they need plenty of energy for the rigors of spawning. This is when the hard-core calico hunters come out in force and practice their favorite sport, methodically and tirelessly making maybe five or six hundred casts in a day and hooking more calico bass than you would have thought could possibly live in a given area. For these specialized fisherfolk, it's calico or bust.

I always recognize these folks. They come organized and prepared. One cooler of eats/drinks, one tackle box containing plastic boxes - each one with an impressive array of neatly arranged swimbaits and leadheads, about three rods apiece - 7 to 9 foot casting rods such as the Penn Carnage, G Loomis or Calstar and smooth casting reels such as the Penn International 955 or 965 spooled with soft mono line in the 12 to 20 pound class or 30 pound braided line. Many will also carry one small bag of spare reels, so they don't have to take time to deal with bad backlashes during prime fishing time.

I call these folks my "calico crazies", and I absolutely love it when I see them show up in the morning because I know we're in for a day of hard fun fishing. Most belong to very active fishing clubs. Many of them know one another, so we can talk about other groups I've had out. They ask questions like, "How are the swells - can we fish the boilers"? In short, they know their stuff.

I know exactly what they want, and these trips are my number one specialty. I call it "Boiler Rock Bassin". I take my charterboat, the WaveWalker in surprisingly tight into the boiler rocks at the islands where powerful swells are crashing over the rocks, and spend the day at the helm maneuvering the boat along those productive looking spots most folks only look at and dream of fishing. These spots are loaded with calico bass that don't get fished much. These bass are surprisingly muscular fish. The surging turbulent environment they live and feed in keeps them in great shape. Honestly, a four pound boiler rock bass will fight like a six pound kelp bed bass. I call them, "Junkyard bass."

The technique is to become a casting machine, continually casting to pockets between rocks and along dropoffs in front of rocks and ledges. That swimbait/leadhead combo must hit the water within a couple feet of the structure to get the attention of the nearby bass. Then reel it slowly - I mean painfully slowly - away from the rocks. Those bass, holding tight to the structure, have to see it, make a killing decision, chase it down, and pounce on it, all within several feet of the rocks, or they will frequently settle back down and wait for another feeding opportunity. To maximize your chances for a hookup, just cast close to the structure and retrieve at a slow speed. Then do it repeatedly all day long.

Sometimes, however, the bass will follow a swimbait well out away from the rocks, and strike in open water between the rocks and the boat. When this happens, they frequently come out in groups of two or more, and it isn't usually the biggest bass who jumps the swimbait. This knowledge can earn you a great opportunity. When you see someone hook up in open water, immediately cast beside and just beyond where the hookup occurred. The result is often a bigger bass than the one your buddy hooked. Then you get the last laugh! This is just one of the many secrets I've learned while watching from the helm and maneuvering the boat. I hope you catch some great fish, and have some fun with your buddies, with that tip.

The best colors to use seem to change frequently. Colors which match natural forage fish produce most consistently. Two of my perennial favorites are 5-inch Big Hammer swimbaits and Fishbones swimbaits. Other great colors include brown, green, white or pearlescent, red, and combo colors such as sparkly green/red (called a "Christmas tree"). My favorite leadheads are ones with large sparkly eyes, called Hammer Heads. I recommend changing colors frequently in an effort to find the magic color of the moment. Then fish it like there was no tomorrow!

A couple of generalities about color and brightness selection warrant consideration. In early morning and lowlight conditions such as thick cloud cover, I recommend subtle colors that are almost clear. As the sun moves higher, clouds burn off, and sunlight penetrates deeper into the water, switch to brighter colors with metalflake and prisms.

Wanna get "calico crazy"? C'mon out on the WaveWalker and go for it!