

Seesaw Approach For Early Fall Bass

By WADE L. BOURNE SENIOR WRITER

A SEESAW ISN'T exactly a thrill ride, but it does have its ups and downs. First you're high, then you're low, then you're high, etc.

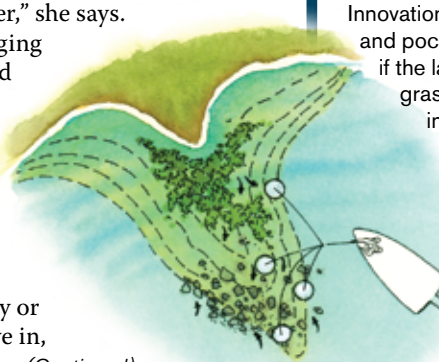
Pam Martin-Wells' seesaw pattern for early fall bass is similar, except she replaces "up and down" with "back and forth." Martin-Wells alternates between fishing shallow flats in the backs of creeks and staging areas out in deeper water. When bites in the shallows slow down, she heads out deep. After an hour or so of fishing channel swings, docks and other likely areas, she returns to the shallows (unless, of course, the deeper spots are producing). "After working the shallows for a while," she explains, "sometimes you have to leave them and give the fish a little time to settle down."

Martin-Wells knows whereof she speaks. She was raised on the banks of Lake Seminole in southwest Georgia, and she has pursued bass most of her life. She guides on this storied lake, plus she is a leading competitor on the Academy Sports + Outdoors Women's Bassmaster Tour and the Bassmaster Southern Open circuit.

"In many lakes bass are scattered in September and October," she says. "Some are following shad to the flats while others are still hanging out deeper. So you've usually got multiple options on where and how to fish. The flats may offer the best action, especially later in fall, but the deeper staging areas can also produce some good bass if the shad are still concentrated there. It's all about the food."

Martin-Wells usually starts checking this seesaw pattern when the water temperature in back-bay areas slides below 70 degrees. "The shad respond quickly to this temperature drop," she says. "One day they'll be in deep main lake areas, then a day or two later they'll have migrated to the flats, and when they move in, the bass come with them."

(Continued)



Gear To Grab

Here are specifics on the primary rods, reels and lines that Pam Martin-Wells uses when bass fishing in September and October.

For shallow crankbaits:

- 7-foot medium action Powell rod (model #703)
- H2O Xpress Mettle bait-casting reel (6.3:1 retrieve ratio)
- 14-pound-test Gamma fluorocarbon

For soft jerkbaits:

- 6-8 medium action (extra fast tip) Powell rod (model #684)
- H2O Xpress Mettle bait-casting reel (6.3:1 retrieve ratio)
- 16-pound-test Gamma fluorocarbon

For spinnerbaits:

- 7-3 medium-heavy action Powell rod (model #733)
- Shimano Core baitcasting reel (7:1 retrieve ratio)
- 17-pound-test Gamma fluorocarbon

For tube lures and jigs:

- 7-6 heavy action Powell rod (model #765)
- H2O Xpress Mettle bait-casting reel (6.3:1 retrieve ratio)
- 16-pound Gamma fluorocarbon (for light cover); 50-pound braid (for vegetation, heavy cover)



Tackle Tricks

If Pam Martin-Wells' "seesaw" pattern fails to produce in early fall, she reverts to fishing "old standbys" that will usually yield some bites. "If the lake has grass out on the main lake (next to the channel), I'll try pitching and flipping it with a tube bait or a Sweet Beaver (a creature lure by Reaction Innovations). I'll hit the points and pockets in the grass. But if the lake doesn't have grass, then I'll start working main lake points with diving crankbaits or football jigs, especially if there are a lot of rocks. Football jigs look like crawfish, and they're great for getting some bites on those points."

Illustrations: Chris Armstrong

She verifies this migration both electronically and visually. “I look for balls of shad on my graph as they migrate into the creeks, usually following the channels. A typical depth here would be 8 to 15 feet. Once they scatter across the shallows (3 feet or less), I can see them schooling just under the surface or flipping out of the water. Then I know it’s time to start running this pattern.”

Martin-Wells calls her approach to working the flats “junk fishing.” She explains, “I just stay on the move and cast to any little piece of cover where a bass might be waiting to ambush a shad. Nothing is too small or insignificant. One stickup the size of your finger might hold a good fish. A log, a rock, a stump, an old tire or bucket: I cast to any object that breaks the surface or that I can see underwater.”

To do so, Martin-Wells uses three main lures. “My first choice is a shallow running square-billed crankbait (H2O Xpress by Academy Sports + Outdoors) in shad color. I’ll cast beyond a target, then run the bait close by, even bumping the cover to trigger strikes.”

Martin-Wells’ second lure choice for working these cover objects is a soft plastic jerkbait (shad color). She says, “I’ll work the soft jerkbait erratically up to the object, then ‘kill it’ and let it sink. I try to make it look as much like an injured shad as I can.”

And bait choice No. 3: a 1/4-ounce spinnerbait (small tandem Colorado blades, white or white/chartreuse skirt). She says, “I like a compact lure that matches the size of the shad. I want the bait to look as natural as possible.” She reels the spinnerbait steadily past the cover, sometimes bumping it, to trigger reactive strikes from bass.

Martin-Wells also keeps a topwater lure rigged and ready in case she spies surface-feeding activity within casting range.

Thus, Martin-Wells covers the flats. She targets visible cover, plus she random-casts as she trolls from one cover object to another. She says bass can hold in a foot of water or less, so extremely shallow areas shouldn’t be overlooked.

Eventually, though, the commotion of running the electric motor and casting in the shallows will spook both baitfish and bass, which is when Martin-Wells’ “seesaw” comes in. “When the

shad disappear or when feeding activity stops, I know it’s time to get out of there and let things settle down.”

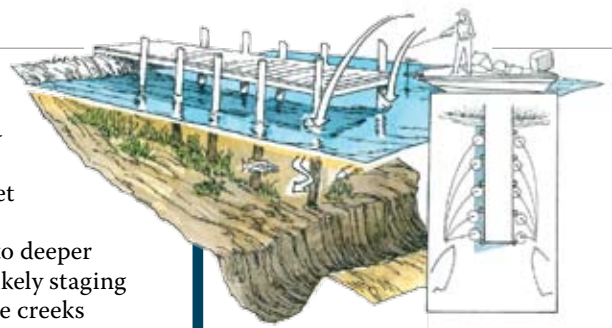
Martin-Wells runs back to deeper water and begins exploring likely staging areas for bass moving into the creeks from the main lake. “These might be sharp turns or humps along the creek channel. The best spots have some stumps or brush on them,” she explains.

In these staging areas, Martin-Wells casts medium or deep diving crankbaits or soft plastic jerkbaits, or she flips and pitches tube lures around likely bottom structure or cover.

Working these deeper staging areas does two things. One, it provides Martin-Wells an opportunity to locate a fresh school of bass. And two, it allows the shad in the shallows to regroup and the bass to start feeding on them again. “Usually the flats will come back to life in an hour or so, and if I’m not catching fish in the staging areas, I’ll head back to the flats and work them all over again.”

Martin-Wells says sometimes fishing gets better on the flats as the day wears on. She explains, “This is especially true if the night before was cold and the water temperature has dropped several degrees. When this happens, the shad may slide back off the flats to deeper water where the temperature drop hasn’t been so drastic. Then, the next day as the sun climbs and the water temperature warms back up, the shad will move back into the shallows, and the bass will resume feeding on them. So fishing the flats is oftentimes better in the midday and afternoon than in the morning.”

And how productive can this pattern be? “It can be phenomenal,” Martin-Wells answers enthusiastically. “It’s not unusual to catch 50 to 60 fish a day doing this, and you’ll catch a mix of big ones and small ones. The bass are feeding up for winter, and they’re hitting anything in sight. I’m telling you, they go into a feeding frenzy, and if you’re in the right place casting the right baits, you can enjoy bass fishing that’s about as good as this sport gets.” ■



Working Docks Adjacent To Staging Areas

When Pam Martin-Wells fishes deep water staging areas, she keeps a sharp eye for boat docks where the creek channel swings in close to the shore. “If I’m seeing baitfish on my electronics, then docks along deep banks are a prime place for bass to hide and ambush shad,” she explains.

“I’ll flip and pitch to these docks with a 3-inch tube bait (green pumpkin or watermelon) rigged with a 3/16-ounce Tru-Tungsten bullet weight. I’ll start on the front corners of a dock, then I’ll pitch along both sides. I’ll move my boat around so I can fish the walkways and backs of the dock. I pay special attention to where there’s the most shade. Also, if the dock is on pilings, I’ll let my tube sink to the bottom before picking it up. But if a dock is floating, I’ll let it sink to a few feet below the dock and then swim it back in.”

Before You Go

Here is a list of chores Pam Martin-Wells does before hitting the shallows for a day of fishing in September and October.

- Check the weather forecast to plan fishing strategy, and be prepared with the proper clothing.
- Make sure to take high-quality polarized sunglasses (such as Costa del Mar) on the water.
- Pre-rig all rods with baits for different techniques. Secure main rods/baits (crankbait, soft jerkbait, spinnerbait, topwater) on the casting deck and store other rods/baits in the rod locker.
- Make sure to have the proper lake map computer chip in the electronics unit, and have a topographic map as a backup.

Illustration: Chris Armstrong



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