



THIS HEFTY largemouth fell for the tiny Bug-A-Boo Jig (pictured actual size on opposite page). Photos: Mike Pehanich, Laurie Tisdale

Want tight lines under
the toughest conditions?
Go micro!



Micro Magic

By MIKE PEHANICH
Senior Writer

FINESSE TECHNIQUES FLEW a bit under the radar during the 2010 Bassmaster Elite Series season. And, for finesse aficionados, that was just fine!

Secrets are hard to keep in this Internet age. A rush of publicity following a big win opens the floodgates to everyone to cash in on a new bait, rig or technique. Many regard "finesse" as one of the last frontiers in bass fishing.

And so it has been with fishing microjigs, the slow-mo, get-out-the-microscope-to-tie-it-on family of lures that developed along regional lines in Japan, Tennessee, the upper Midwest, north central U.S. and elsewhere.

Here's a look at "old school" and "new age" microjigs that are gaining a following among pockets of serious bass anglers in North America and Japan.

SAY "BOU!" ... AS IN MARABOU

"It has been a closely guarded secret among tournament anglers in the North, many of whom are guides here (in northern Minnesota and Canada)," says John Crane, brand manager for Northland Tackle and a regional tournament

(Continued)



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angler. He has won more money than any bass angler alive in tournaments at Leech Lake near Walker, Minn. "But it's now become so prolific in (our) tournaments that it is spreading to everyday anglers, too, because these jigs are so easy to use."

He's talking about tiny marabou jigs (1/32 ounce up to 1/8 ounce), such as the Northland Bug-A-Boo Finesse Jig, used in short- and long-line techniques on clear North Country lakes and streams where they unlock bass lips under the toughest of weather and competitive conditions.

For decades, tiny marabou jigs — like the Lindy Fuzz-e-Grub with its plastic body and marabou tail — have performed multispecies duty in the upper Midwest, catching cold-weather panfish, walleye and bonus bass, particularly in the early season. Minnesota tournament anglers began using these "panfish jigs" for bass about eight years ago after "incidental" bass catches became too numerous to ignore, according to Crane.

But he hastens to add that, as a bass tool, the jig is really a throwback — "a kind of a retro deal" — with decades-old roots that trace back to the bear-hair Hoss Fly of the late Billy Westmorland in Tennessee and to Canadian smallmouth anglers. Minnesota anglers simply took the threads of each and wove them into their own deadly systems.

The pulsing Bug-A-Boo, with its half-moon mushroom jighead and full marabou tail, does a convincing imitation of several popular foods on the bass' menu. Crane speculates that a black and black/brown marabou jig resembles a leech, mayfly or other larva; white and pink resemble minnows and other baitfish; orange and brown, perhaps a crawfish.

"The secret within the secret" of the marabou jig lies within the component material rather than the jig design or even the refinement of technique. Marabou's buoyancy effects a slow drop; very light jigs tied with marabou nearly

Small Wonders

Bug-A-Boo Finesse Jig
www.northlandtackle.com

Johnson Beetle Bou
www.berkley-fishing.com

Korekara Jig
www.reinsfishing.com

Lindy Fuzz-e-Grub
www.lindyfishingtackle.com

Wild Kem Kem
www.noikeweb.com

The following products are not yet widely available in the U.S. Check online for U.S. dealers:
Egu Jig by Qu-on

Flick Shake (2.8- and 3.8-inch sizes) by Jackall Bros./Lake Police

Han Han Mini Jig by Tsunekichi Inc.

Micro Flick by Jackall Bros./Lake Police

Rock Vader by Imakatsu

Zappu Inch Wacky Jr. wacky jig-heads by Gain Corp.

hover. The material breathes even when the jig is at rest.

"Marabou can't help but move even when the jig is not moving," Crane says. "I haven't seen anything that duplicates this movement-within-movement. Your hand's coffee or adrenaline shake is about the most action you'll want to add. But you can use current, wind or slow movement of an electric motor, too. An added benefit is that you are keeping the bait in the water for two or three or five minutes between casts rather than 30 seconds."

Fishing them is dirt simple. Techniques range from simply dangling the bait vertically to dragging, hopping and even wind-drift trolling.

Marabou microjigs are ideal for fishing suspended bass. But they are equally effective on bottom huggers. One favorite trick in the North Country is waving

one in the nose of a smallie that has followed a crankbait or a hooked bass back to the boat.

"They are also deadly over smallmouth beds," Crane adds. "All of a sudden, that leech or minnow or crawfish that the jig seems to resemble is seen invading that smallie nest ... game over!"

Crane says many anglers on the upper Mississippi River, Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, Sturgeon Bay, Chequamegon Bay and Mille Lacs Lake have become deadly with micro marabou.

"We are developing all these new high-tech materials and technologies, yet here's an 'old school' move

MICRO FLICKIN'

Kota Kiriyama helped to popularize the Japanese-born flick shake technique in the U.S. The wacky-worming technique employing a small jighead and hand-poured worm has joined drop shotting as one of the more popular Japanese finesse techniques to take root in North America. But even this already delicate presentation has gone micro.

Jackall has released an ultrathin 2 1/2-inch hand-poured Micro Flick worm in Japan, in addition to 2.8- and 3.8-inch worms under the Flick Shake name. (The worms currently have limited distribution in the U.S. market, though that could change this spring.)

Kiriyama fishes the Micro Flicks and Flick Juniors on jigheads designed for flick shaking, including a Jackall head currently distributed only in Japan. Slightly more easily accessible for American anglers is the Zappu Inch Wacky Jr. jighead, available down to 1/64 ounce (0.45 gram). He often adds a second worm to the jig in a cross pattern — a rig known as the Octopus Flick Shake in Japan.

Kiriyama cautions anglers not to overwork the bait when flick shaking, especially with these very tiny jigheads and worms that seem to come to life with the subtlest of current or movement.

"The higher the pressure on the waters, the less I move it," says Kiriyama, who likes to use the baits in clear to stained shallow water. "You need to do almost nothing to create natural movement."

that is just solid and actually out-fishing modern techniques in bass fishing," Crane says.

SKIRTED MICROJIGS

If you think your waters at home are pressured, try fishing in Japan, where popular bass fisheries find shore anglers nearly rubbing shoulders and locking arms as they cast. Japanese anglers are taking microjig finesse to a quantum physics level!

"In Japan, we are now working with real small jigs, as small as 1/32 or 1/64 ounce," says Kota Kiriyama, who brought Japanese finesse techniques to the Bassmaster Elite Series tournament trail. "The big advantage is the slow presentation. The slower falling speed creates a more natural action while maintaining a good (realistic) profile."

These skirted microjigs from Japan feature fine synthetic or rubber skirts of varying strand length and density and fine-wire hooks. Jig weights range from roughly 1/8 to 1/64 ounce. Some feature delicate single- or dual-bristle weedguards. Kiriyama favors several models from Jackall Bros. currently available only in Japan, along with some hand-tied designs and an unnamed Jackall prototype likely to be released this spring.

Other Japanese-made microjigs include the Korekara Jig from Reins & Co. Ltd. — a short, full-skirted model without a weedguard — and the Noike Wild Kem Kem Jig. The latter ranges from 0.9 to 2.5 grams (roughly 1/32 to 5/64 ounce) and has a longer trailing skirt with a trimmed "neck hackle" collar and a single-bristle weedguard.

The fine buoyant skirt material of these microjigs provides pulsating motion even with a painfully slow, almost motionless presentation, which Kiriyama claims is, more often than not, the best way to go.

Downsized soft plastic trailers like the Qu-on Money Bait Egu Jig Trailer (from Final Weapon Products) or Noike Biteguts Yabby or Wild Goby can make deadly accompaniments at times by adding to or altering the profile and further slowing the bait's descent.

"I don't usually add plastic with these if I don't need to," Kiriyama says. "But when I feel I need something bulkier, I add a small trailer."

Buoyant hand-poured trailers offer a particularly subtle, extremely

Noike Wild Kem Kem Jig with Qu-on Money Bait Egu Jig Trailer



slow-falling bait that gives off a faint quiver even on a do-nothing retrieve. Micro worms are often the first choice, but some West Coast anglers are coupling microjigs with a slightly larger morsel such as a Reaper or other soft plastic. Kiriyama occasionally adds a Jackall Superpin-Tail.

Such tender baits require fine tackle and gossamer-thin lines that remain manageable even with these near weightless baits. Kiriyama's gear consists of a Shimano Super Finesse rod, currently available in Japan, mounted with a Shimano Stella spinning reel. On American waters, he seldom drops lower than 6- or 7-pound fluorocarbon. But on ultraclear, highly pressured Japanese waters, 2 1/2- and 3-pound fluorocarbon lines are the norm.

"Say I am fishing Logan Martin (in Alabama), and I am fishing heavily pressured areas where other anglers have been fishing," Kiriyama says. "I will come in right behind anglers and fish the boat docks and catch bass even if no one else is catching fish. That's the kind of situation where the microjigs shine."



JACKALL, LLC. (U.S.A.) 10565 Bloomfield St. Los Alamitos, CA 90720
Phone (562)493-0300, FAX (562)493-0332 E-MAIL: jackall@la.twcbc.com
www.jackall-lures.com