

## **Fish with the Herons**

- Bill Walker

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Spring is coming, and the bass will be moving toward the shallows by the time you read this. Shallow main lake points should be good fishing at dawn until the sun hits the water. The deep sides of these shallow points should be good later in the day. One question is: which points are best?

I like to fish the points where the herons fish: the Great Blue Herons and the Louisiana Herons. If you're lucky, you'll see them come swooping in to their favorite points at the crack of dawn before it's possible to see very much. More likely they'll get there before you, and you'll see them sitting at the water's edge silhouetted against the morning sky. The points that they pick are ones that I pick.

Think about it. They fly to a point when it's really too dark to see much, so they must already know the way. They are going to a point where they have caught fish before. They have learned that the minnows are on the points they go to. Well, you can count on it: the bass have also learned that the minnows are on those points! And now you and I know the bass are there!

So at dawn, I sneak up on the points where the herons fish. It's not only reassuring to see the herons fishing along side me, they're also fun to watch, especially when they catch a minnow. Every time I fish with a heron, I remember two particularly neat things that I have seen.

One morning I was watching a heron wade slowly near me on the shore, when it stopped suddenly. It slowly leaned over. Then it drew back its head and neck getting ready to strike. But suddenly the water exploded right in front of the heron as a bass got the minnow first.

On a second morning I was also watching a heron stalking along the shore. I saw it stop, slowly get set, draw back its head and neck, and strike. When it stepped back from the water, it did not have the usual small minnow in its bill. Instead, I was surprised to see it step back from the water's edge with a bass it had speared in the middle with its long thin bill. From where I sat in my boat it appeared to be a Spotted Bass about 9 inches long, much larger than I thought the heron could handle. The heron put one foot on it, and kept its bill lanced in the fish's side, holding it down until it stopped moving.

Then the heron removed its bill from the bass and tried to pick up the bass. With its weight, the bass proved very slippery for the heron to grip. But, on about the 8<sup>th</sup> try, the heron was able to stand up straight with the bass sideways in its bill. It stood there for a minute getting set for the next actions. Then it started tossing its head and bill up and bringing them down. With each toss the bass shifted a little in its bill, and then suddenly the bass was aligned and started to "slide" down the heron's throat head first. The "slide" took about a minute going down the long neck. I watched in amazement as the heron moved and stretched and the bulge in the neck worked its way down to the heron's body and disappeared. The heron stood there for a few more minutes, not moving, then flew away. What a treat!

Whenever I fish near a heron, I smile as I remember these two events, and wonder whether I will see something special this time. But usually I get distracted with my own catching.

On a different note, if you like learning about fishing on Lake Keowee and sharing what you know, if you like fishing with new people, and if you do not get any income from fishing, you might consider joining the Keowee Anglers. To find out more about the Keowee Anglers, you can check out their website at [www.keoweefishersclub.com](http://www.keoweefishersclub.com) .