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The Lovely Martha Family Legacy Continues With A Great Day On The Bay

I have been reading the halibut reports coming out of the San Francisco Bay and the bite had been very consistent with some of the party boats reporting two fish per rod and no less than a fish a rod in recent weeks. Not only were they catching a lot of fish but there have been reports of some fish in the 20 pound class as well.

It was time for me to book a trip so I decided to book it with the Lovely Martha out of San Francisco. I was excited for this trip because I have not been on a boat that was based out of San Francisco since I was a pre-teen. I also invited Amy Wellenkamp since she is an amazing photographer and I wanted to capture some great pictures.

Over the years I have learned to enjoy the adventure of fishing just as much as the fishing. This time I ended up staying in my hometown of Alameda the night before. I was able to get there in the early afternoon the day prior to the trip which allowed me time to drive around the island and



WHAT'S HOT
by
Ernie Marlan

reminisce about my youth and how I became so passionate about fishing.

It was also pretty amazing to drive over the Bay Bridge really early in the morning with no traffic. In fact, as I was driving over the bridge I thought about the amazing opportunities that we have here in Northern California. The reality is that some travel from across the world to visit San Francisco and I am lucky enough to

have the opportunity to fish out of this amazing destination.

This trip was special for Amy for a couple of different reasons. First, Amy had never fished on the SF Bay. Secondly, she had never caught a halibut.

We boarded the Lovely Martha at about 5:30 am with hopes that she would have an opportunity to add halibut to her long list of species that she has caught.

Andrew, one of the deckhands on the Lovely Martha started the morning off with some detailed



Chuck has been fishing with the Lovely Martha since 1959 and currently fishes about once a week with them. Chuck definitely had the hot hand for the day and gave us a lesson or two on how to catch fish!

Photo Courtesy of Amy Wellenkamp

instruction. This included what to expect, how we were going to fish,

CONTINUED ON PG 19

Kokanee Season Ramping into Prime Time



Kirby Desha of Lincoln lifts two 16 inch kokanee that slammed a pink and blue spinner at Lake Berryessa on May 15. The fish were caught at 45 feet deep trolling the main lake.

Kokanee season has a certain smell to it. I'm not talking about the weird scents we put on our corn and lures (garlic tuna?) It's something that you can smell when you take your first step outside when you get up early - in the darkness before dawn.

I think it's dry Northern California grass wetted by a light dew. It's hard to say exactly what it is, but I know it when I smell it. The scent instantly triggers one thought in my mind: "I should be on my way to kokanee fishing!" I caught my first whiff of the kokanee season several weeks ago when the temperatures spiked into the 90's. Unfortunately, I was waiting for some parts on my outboard motor, so the call of the kokanee would have to wait.

June tends to be the best month for kokanee fishing, but I usually get out to Lake Berryessa in April once the striper fishing has tapered off. This year I didn't make my first trip to Lake Berryessa until May 15, but the results were well worth the wait.

For my first trip of the season to Lake Berryessa, I was up around three o'clock in the morning as usual. Kirby Desha of Lincoln joined me, and we cut a path due west to the hills of Napa County. The early morning darkness cloaked the damages done by the wildfires of 2020, but you could sense a change. No deer or coyote crossed our path on our way down the grade to the lake.

I cranked my neck around to back the boat down the ramp, and I imme-



GONE FISHING
by
Jack Naves

CONTINUED ON PG 15

INSIDE Area Reports

FRESHWATER REPORTS

Lake Almanor - Eastern Sierra.....	8-9
Ebbetts Pass - New Melones Lake.....	12
Lake Oroville - Shast Lake.....	14
Lake Sonoma.....	17
Trinity River.....	18

SALTWATER REPORTS

Bodega Bay - Monterey Bay.....	20-21
--------------------------------	-------

FEATURES

Where...When...How...

GO FOR IT: Staff.....	4
HOW-TO: Roland Aspiras.....	5
MAP FEATURE: Dan Bacher.....	10-11
SPOTLIGHT ON CONSERVATION: Dan Bacher.....	19

STAFF TACKLE

What We're Using



Ernie Marlan - fished for halibut on the SF Bay with the Lovely Martha. He caught one halibut that weighed in at 15lbs. His rod of choice was a 8' 6" Phenix Trifecta teamed up with a Quantum Smoke HD spooled with 50lb FINS Braid tied to a California Dawn live bait leader.



Paul Kneeland - fished Davis Lake with Bridget Looney in the Fish Sniffer 21' Rogue Jet Coastal. They caught rainbow trout to 21 inches, using a Lamiglas Fish Sniffer special 7 1/2 foot ultralight graphite rod with a Daiwa Lexa 100 low profile line counter reel loaded with 6lb test Yozuri Hybrid line.. They trolled Hot Ticket spoons in chartreuse/red dot and Silver Horde Kingfisher Lite spoons in orange, both on the surface with Big Jon sideplanners and off the Canon Downriggers at 15 to 25 feet deep and 2.3 mph.



Sheldon Bright - Sheldon & Gavin Bright caught Largemouth Bass up to 3-pounds on Lake Berryessa while drop shooting 6" Robo Worms with 7' Daiwa Arid spinning rods with US Spincaster 230 XL reels and 6lb Yo-Zuri Hybrid Fishing line.

HOW TO Continued from Pg 5

line. No need to reel or let out line. Rinse and repeat.

As discussed before, either the shad will load up on your rod, or you'll feel subtle hits. Set the hook on any kind of "difference" in your drift. This includes bumps or ticks of the line -- hooksets are free!

At times I may add a split shot or two to increase casting distance and/or get deeper. Other times, I may attach a bobber constantly adjust the depth to find where the fish are hanging out in a particular section of river. But, most of the time I fish a

plain jig and grub as its nice, simple, and effective.

For locations on the the river, again -- ask your local baitshop where other anglers are having success. But if you're feeling adventurous, lace up your wading shoes and look for areas where there is smooth, flowing water. You don't want fast, ripply water.

Going back to my earlier note regarding quality gear, it truly is imperative that you run quality equipment while fishing on the American River. With light line and strong fish, your reel should have

a quality drag, and your rod should have excellent sensitivity while still possessing the fish stopping power and give to handle hard fighting shad.

While fighting shad, especially on the American River, its a game of give and take. When a fish wants to peel line off your reel, its best to let it. Once the fish backs off, you can begin to gain line. Take your time and you'll be rewarded by meeting one of our region's most beautiful migratory fish.

Mornings and evenings are usually great times to chase shad as they

tend to be closer to the surface and are more aggressive. Shad fishing is a great before or after work trip for those of you that work in the Sacramento Area.

The peak of the run usually occurs through the last two weeks of May and through the first two weeks of June on both the Sacramento and American Rivers. The Sacramento usually clears out of all shad around the end of July. While on the American River, its not uncommon to see small schools of fish hanging out in deep pools through September.

GONE FISHING continued from page 2

diately noticed that the lake was strikingly lower than last year. This is something that we are all going to have to deal with in 2021, as drought once again will be leaving ramps and docks high and dry this summer.

If we can battle through the limited ramp access, the kokanee fishing will be a worthy reward this summer. As lakes begin to stratify in May and June, the kokanee will start to stack up within sonar range. No more are the springtime days of top lining and making wild guesses as to how deep the fish are located. The kokanee will show up as clear as day on our sonar units, showing us exactly where to drop our downrigger balls.

As Kirby and I cruised away from the ramp, we made a beeline to the central portion of the lake where I've had success in past years. I keep a detailed log of depths, areas, and catch results from previous trips. These logs, in addition to reports from buddies or Facebook posts will usually steer me towards a game plan for every trip.

SPLASH! I deployed the trolling motor off my bow and jumped back down to the stern to descend the downriggers. Based off of recent reports, we staggered our rods between 35 and 55 feet deep. About fifteen minutes went by and I caught something out of the corner of my eye while scanning the horizon. "There's one!" I shouted, as Kirby's outside rod surged up and down in the rod holder. Kirby jumped up and popped the line out of the downrigger clip as I grabbed the net. I scooped under the fish as he lifted it behind the boat, and we had our first Berryessa kokanee of the 2021 season in the boat.

"Nice looking fish", Kirby commented, as I removed the hooks. "Yeah, this should be about average for this lake", I noted while putting the fifteen incher into the ice chest. About another fifteen minutes passed when I noticed a mark at 45 feet on the sonar screen. As I looked away from the screen, I noticed that Kirby's same outside rod had popped out of the clip. It turned out to be another nice kokanee about the same size as the first one.

I quickly adjusted my outside rod to 45 feet as well, and not long after I saw another mark on the sonar screen right at 45 feet! Nothing happened,



Kokanee salmon resembling footballs will start to emerge from Northern California waters in the next few months. This chunky fish came out of Lake Berryessa on May 15.

so I jumped up and dropped the downrigger ball two feet to 48 feet. My rod started shaking right away! It was a football-shaped kokanee, with girth more like a largemouth

bass than a kokanee. The depth drop of only a few feet was just enough to get the following kokanee to immediately strike.

I like to employ lots of different tactics to get kokanee to strike. Kokanee fishing can be frustrating, and on some days it seems almost impossible to get fish you see on your sonar unit to commit. A short three foot drop in depth is one of the tricks I use to get them to bite. Another trick I used during our trip was taking my downrigger swivel base out of gear and swinging the arm back and forth. This produced several strikes, as did the old 'take the motor out of gear for a few seconds' trick.

Anything that alters the action of the lure while you are trolling is bound to draw strikes at some point. Another fish hit on the outside rod when I was making a sudden fast turn -- the lure must have been going over two miles-per-hour! As we made our way, the sonar marks were scattered across the lake, but the depth range was really tight.

All of the fish were marking were between 42 and 47 feet deep. When the fish are concentrated like that, it makes it easy to set both of your outside downriggers at the exact depth of the fish. I adjusted my high rod down to 38 feet deep, but it never got touched. Kirby's deep rod was set at 52 feet and it only hooked one fish. It proved once again that the most important aspect of kokanee fishing is getting your lures to the correct depth.

We had early success using pink and blue spinners, and quickly switched most of the rods to that setup. We ended the morning at 8:45 am with our tenth kokanee in the box. The fish averaged fifteen inches, with several chunky sixteen inchers in the mix. A morning marine layer cleared to reveal scorched hills capped with leafless trees resembling charred match sticks. It was just another reminder of the devastating wildfires we've experienced over the past several years.

As the summer progresses, the fish will start to form small schools until the pre-spawn period when huge schools will form in deep water or along the bottom. This will signal the end of the 'easy' kokanee season, and slow trolling plugs will take over as the top method. While I truly enjoy the challenge of late season kokanee fishing, early summer limits of red-orange fillets is really the sweet spot of the kokanee season.

Now is the time to gear up for summer kokanee, as the prime month of June will be the easiest time of year to put limits into your boat. In addition to Lake Berryessa, New Melones, Don Pedro, Shasta, Pardee, and Bullards Bar will be kicking out limits for anglers willing to battle the crazy heat and equally outrageous launching ramps. Let's strike while the iron is hot, and put some easy limits of kokanee into our coolers this June. Kokanee season is here, I can already smell it...



Jack Naves of Roseville hoists two 16 inch kokanee that slammed a pink and blue spinner at Lake Berryessa on May 15. The fish were caught at 45 feet deep trolling the main lake.