

Best Bets for Ohio Fishing

by Dan Armitage

Ohio anglers enjoy year-round fishing action, and some months the opportunities are so varied that you need to organize your efforts to take full advantage of them. Here is a state-wide, month-by-month guide to where to find some of the best angling possible for some of our more popular gamefish.

JANUARY

Bluegills

Indian Lake

Ice fishermen from across Ohio head to 5,000-acre Indian Lake in northwest Logan County to take advantage of its famous 'first-ice' bluegill action. The Lucy's Pond area is just one of the popular panfishing spots on the lake, which is located about 10 miles northwest of the city of Bellefontaine and is accessible from state routes 33, 708, 117, 366 and 235.

Yellow Perch

Lake Erie

Practically any protected area along the Lake Erie waterfront is a potential spot for ice anglers to catch perch. Sandusky Bay and the main-lake waters west of Catawba Island are popular, as are harbor areas from Toledo to Conneaut. The 30 fish-per-day bag limit in that's in effect year-round for Lake Erie perch may sound liberal — until a school moves in and hook-ups come as fast as shiners and jigs can be dropped through the ice.

FEBRUARY

Saugeyes

Buckeye Lake

The late-winter saugeye bite at 2,850-acre Buckeye Lake in Fairfield County is legendary among central Ohio ice fishermen. Ice often arrives early and usually stays late at this shallow, man-made impoundment located east of Columbus and accessed off state routes 204, 13 and 79.

Saugers

Ohio River/Greenup Dam

Tailwaters

Saugers prepare to spawn as winter water temperatures plummet, offering anglers some fast action in the open waters below several Ohio River lock-and-dam structures. Greenup Dam, along US route 52 east of Portsmouth in Scioto County, is one of the best and allows plenty of access for shore fishermen.

MARCH

Channel Catfish

Alum Creek Reservoir

The broad, shallow flats north of US route 36 abound with channel cats on the prowl for winter-killed shad. Boat and bank anglers alike access the flats areas area at the launch ramp off Howard Road on the reservoir's east side and walk or motor north or south to reach areas where cruising cats are pushovers for a dead shad tight-lined on the bottom.

Northern Pike

Sandusky Bay

After ice-out, pike are looking for spawning areas and the bay's marshes, flooded areas, and shallows. Sandusky Bay's north and east shorelines warm first, and offer the best action in water as shallow as one foot. Access the bay from the Shelby Street Boat Launch Ramp in Sandusky.

APRIL

Walleyes

Maumee River

Elbow-to-elbow fishing action normally peaks in the first two weeks of April, but the migrating walleye may remain in the Lake Erie tributary through the end of the month after the annual spawning runs begin in mid-March. Fishermen can find access at Maumee's Side Cut Metro Park. Be ready for plenty of company in the form of both fish and fishermen.

Steelhead

Conneaut Creek

Steelhead remain in the Ashtabula County stream all winter, but fishing action can pick up fast when the weather takes a turn toward spring. Access at the Woodworth Road Launch Ramp south of Conneaut or (way) upstream Lakeville Park. Reference the ODNR Conneaut Creek Steelhead Fishing Map.

MAY

Channel Catfish

Hoover Reservoir

Brushy shorelines where the crappies spawn draw channel cats from deep water to feed on the eggs — and natural baits such as shrimp, cut-bait or nightcrawlers suspended a couple feet below a bobber cast just off the willows. Access at Twin Bridges area on the central Ohio reservoir's northeast side or at any of the half-dozen ramps that serve the impoundment.

White Bass

Sandusky River

The peak of the annual white bass spawning run up the Sandusky River typically takes place in mid-month when water temperatures reach around 55 degrees and the action can continue well into June. The best fishing areas for finding white bass are from the Street

bridge in Fremont, upstream to the Ballville Dam. Boat ramps are available just north of the State Street Bridge in Fremont.

JUNE

Sunfish

La Su An Wildlife Area

Several lakes on the 2,430-acre wildlife area in the northwest corner of Williams County are managed to produce populations of big bluegills and redear sunfish, including namesake Lake La Su An. There are special fishing regulations on the lakes, which are closed to fishing on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and a permit is required to fish on the area, available by calling the fish check station at (419) 636-6189 or the Wildlife District Two Office at (419) 424-5000.

Walleyes

Berlin Lake

Walleyes are the key catch each June at Berlin Lake, where its 3,650 surface acres cover parts of Mahoning, Stark, and Portage counties. One of the state's few lakes with natural walleye reproduction, the fishing can be accessed at the Mill Creek Recreation Area, located on Bedell Road five miles east of Deerfield. Additional access can be found at launch ramps located at Bonner Road and Dutch Harbor Marina.

JULY

Walleyes

C. J. Brown Reservoir

The Clark County lake located 2 miles northeast of Springfield offers rare inland walleye fishing in southwestern Ohio, where mid-lake humps and the original creek bed in the north end of the reservoir produce the most fish to anglers trolling crankbaits or drifting with worm-tipped jigs. Access the 1,970-acre lake at the launch ramp at adjacent Buck Creek State Park.

East Fork Lake

Hybrid Striped Bass

With 1,971 surface acres 2 miles south of Batavia in Clermont County, East Fork Reservoir offers one of the state's most consistent hybrid striper fisheries, where "wipers" are stocked annually. The open waters in the upper end of the main tributary offer the best summer action, which can be accessed from six public boat ramps, including those at the dam, the north shore, off Reisinger Road, and at the state park campground.

AUGUST

Yellow Perch

Kelleys Island

Lake Erie yellow perch school up in 20 to 30 feet of water off the south shore of Kelleys Island each August, where the best action is apparent by where the densest concentrations of boats are anchored. The area southeast of the island is one of the most popular, but prime perch-jerking could take place anywhere around the Lake Erie island this month.

Channel Catfish

Grand Lake St. Marys

Channel cats get active late each summer at Ohio's largest inland lake, which covers parts of Auglaize and Mercer counties. Bottom fishing with nightcrawlers, chicken livers, shrimp, or cut baits off the Windy Point fishing pier or the stone piers along the east bank will net channel cats, while anglers using live chubs or sunfish may hook into a flathead.

SEPTEMBER

Muskellunge

Leesville Reservoir

One of Ohio's top "huskie" muskie producers, the 1,045-acre Carroll County impoundment usually produces some of its best catches late in the season. The lake is located off of State Route 212 near Carrollton. Anglers casting large spinners or crank baits catch bass and big muskellunge this time of the year.

Largemouth Bass

Hammertown Lake

The bay area of 157-acre Hammertown Lake in Jackson County can be a very productive place to target late-summer largemouth bass in Southeastern Ohio. Bonus catches of trout, stocked each spring and fall, can be taken as well. Call the Ohio Division of Wildlife District Four office at 740-594-2211 for a lake map and more fishing info on fall bass fishing at Hammertown.

OCTOBER

Smallmouth Bass

Little Beaver Creek

The stretch of Little Beaver Creek just above where it meets the Ohio River in Columbiana County often produces top-shelf smallmouth bass fishing for late-season waders. Try the area near Grimm's Bridge in the state forest or off Beaver Creek State Park at the Echo Dell Road bridge or near Gretchen's Lock.

Hybrid Striped Bass

Buckeye Lake

Cool water temperatures mean hot hybrid action at this east-central Ohio reservoir that straddles Perry, Licking and Fairfield counties. Fall "wiper" fishing is often fastest along the lake's north shore from Seller's Point to the SR 79 launch ramp — which is the prime access area for boaters targeting the hybrids.

NOVEMBER

Walleyes

Marblehead Peninsula

Anglers intercept walleyes migrating back from the eastern basin as the fish cruise along the lake's southern shore. Boat and shore anglers alike wait until dusk to troll or cast big crankbaits into the twilight off the Marblehead Lighthouse State Park and Mazurik fishing access areas. The action is often best when weather conditions are at their worst. When the bite is "on" it creates combat fishing at its finest.

Big Rainbow Trout
Antrim Reservoir

The flooded quarry in the city park on the Columbus' north side is stocked with trout each November prior to the Thanksgiving weekend, and in addition to catchable-size fish the rainbows placed in the lake include big breeder specimens that may weigh 10 pounds or more.

This is a shore-only angling opportunity and the best fishing can be literally at your feet as schools of trout cruise the shoreline.

DECEMBER

Steelhead
Grand River

Early winter steelhead fishing can be “grand” on the Lake Erie tributary anywhere along its flow across Lake and Ashtabula counties from the short pier near Lake Erie all the way upstream to the Harpersfield Dam. Anglers cast spoons, flies, jigs tipped with maggots and egg sacks to fool the river-run rainbows that can top 12 pounds in weight this time of the year. Get a detailed steelhead fishing map showing all the access points.

Brown Trout
Clear Creek

The stretch of Clear Creek that flows through Mohican State Park in and State Forest in southern Ashtabula County can be a worthy destination for fishermen seeking browns as well as rainbows, where wading anglers use flies or worms to fool the stocked trout. The run just downstream of the covered bridge can be as productive as it is scenic, and you can camp literally next to the stream.

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