

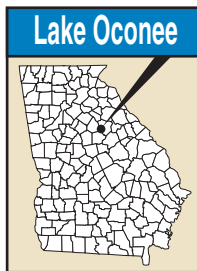
*Oconee Bass Are Shallow and Feeding. Time for...*

# Power-Fishing Fun

By Ronnie Garrison

Here in Georgia, there is no better month for bass fishermen than April, at least for anglers who like to fish fast and like their bass to be aggressive.

This month big bass are shallow and feeding, either getting ready to spawn or in a postspawn feeding mode. It is a great month for big bass, but it's also great for catching lots of bass.



In April there is no better lake for bass fishermen than Oconee. Bass are shallow for their spawn as well as taking advantage of the shad spawn. Numerous seawalls and lots of rip-rap on Oconee give the shad many places to lay their eggs, and lots of pockets and small creeks offer bass excellent bedding areas.

Lake Oconee has good access at several public ramps, and the lake is centrally located so it is not too far from most Georgia bass fishermen. It is popular with club fishermen. There were 95 recorded club tournaments on Oconee in 2004, third in the state behind Clarks Hill and Sinclair, according to the bass-club Creel Census Report compiled by Dr. Carl Quertermus.

That report shows an average catch rate of just .20 keepers per hour, but the weight per hour is .39 pounds, the fifth highest in the state. The lower catch rate but higher average weight is probably due to the 14-inch size limit most clubs follow at Oconee. It took an average of 10.1 pounds to win a tournament at Oconee, the fourth-highest average among state reservoirs.

Roger McKee has fished Oconee since 1985 and has lived on the lake since 1995. He is on the lake almost every day checking out the bass or guiding other fishermen. He fishes most tournaments on the lake and does well in them. He and his partner James Scott placed second in the HD Marine tournament on Oconee in March with four bass



**Roger McKee with a pair of quality Oconee largemouths caught last month. In April, the bass are still shallow for their spawn, and then the famed Oconee shad spawn kicks in.**

weighing 20.17 pounds.

The year before last, Roger and his partner Shawn Malcom were points champions in the Berry's trail, and they weighed-in five-fish limits of 20 or more pounds in three of those tournaments. Roger says he loves the competition in a bass tournament, and he does not go for a check, he goes for the win. He is willing to gamble and take chances for a heavy sack rather than just trying for a limit.

I met Roger at JR's Marina in mid March to get information for this article. The following Sunday he and a partner fished a pot tournament on the lake and won it with a

limit weighing 16 pounds. Roger says the lake will just get better and better during April.

Roger likes a variety of baits for April bass at Oconee and will have a spinnerbait, crankbait, jig 'n pig, Trick Worm and Carolina rig all tied and ready. He depends on the crankbait and spinnerbait for most of his better fish, and says he would choose a crankbait if he could only use one bait. In April Roger fishes the crankbait and spinnerbait fast, covering a lot of water looking for feeding fish. He wants his baits moving fast so the bass don't have time to get a real good look at it. A reaction bite is more likely when the bait runs by a fish too fast for a bass to hesitate.

There are two keys to April bass on Oconee, according to Roger. The spawning movement brings bass in to the shallows all month long, and there

will be prespawn, spawning and postspawn bass during the entire month. Many big bass will spawn in March, especially this year with the warm winter, and will already be on a postspawn feeding spree by early April.

The other key on Oconee is the shad spawn. Unless a bass is hard on the bed, they will take advantage of the shad spawn and feed up. Shad like hard bottoms to lay their eggs, so the rip-rap and seawalls all over the lake are perfect for them. You can see the shad spawning early in the morning, and when you find the shad, bass will be feeding on them.

For the shad spawn, Roger looks for rip-rap and seawalls near the main lake. Points and pockets near the channels will draw the shad if rocks or wood are available for them to lay their eggs. A wood or rock seawall

with rip-rap in front of it is a perfect place to find them.

For spawning bass, Roger looks for secondary points going into the coves and catches both prespawn and postspawn bass on them. He will also look in the very backs of coves, pockets and small creeks for bass on the bed. All can be caught and some of the biggest bass in the lake will be located this way.

The following 10 spots are all good in April and offer a variety of places to fish. Some are good holding areas for prespawn and postspawn fish, some are spawning areas for bass, others for shad. Some put all three types of places together in one spot.

**No. 1: N 33° 25.884 - W 83° 17.023** — Go all the way to the back of Lick Creek to the right side. Slow down, the water is very shallow. You

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*Save this article in a notebook for future fishing trips.*

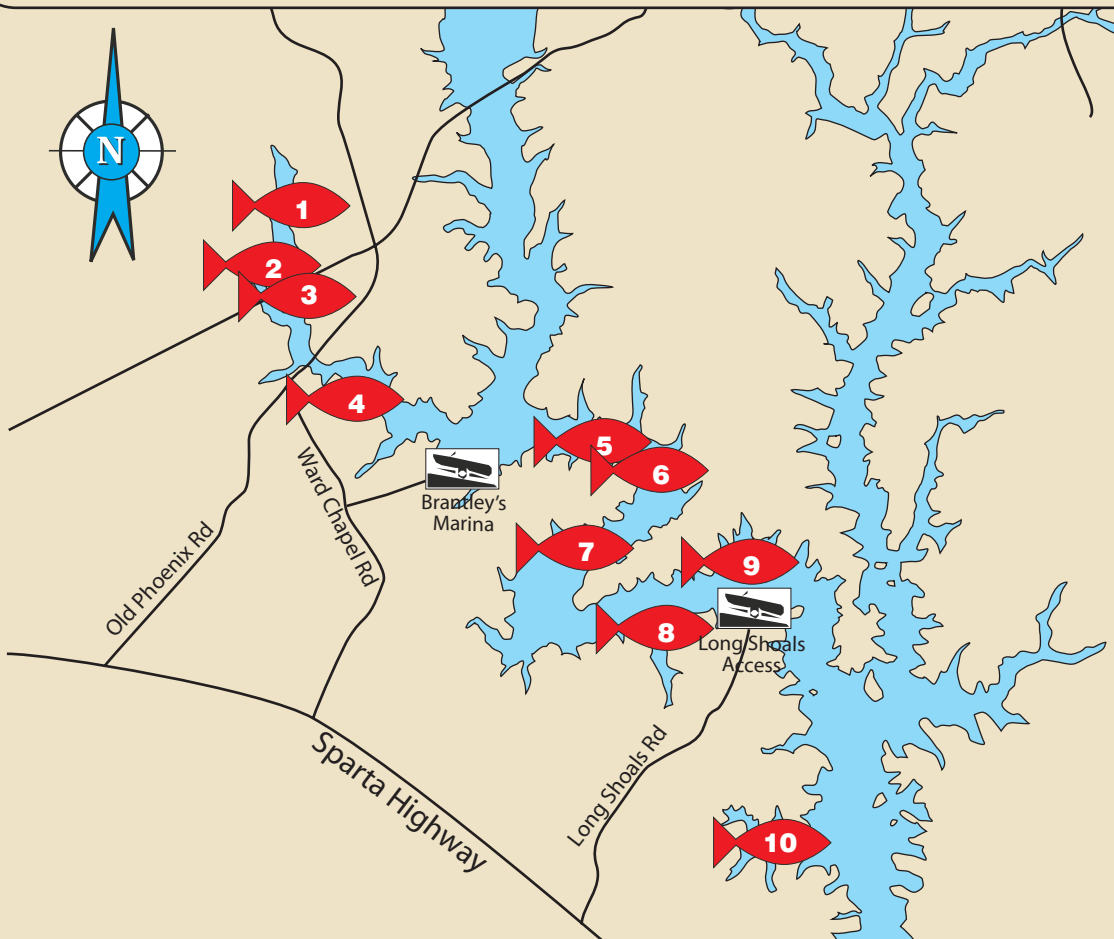
## **GON Fishin' Map-of-the-Month**

**Species: Bass**

**Month: April**

**Location: Lake Oconee**

**Pattern: Power Fishing**



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*Continued from page 33.*

will see a lot of white poles marking stumps, and in the very back are some condos. There are some docks on the bank, and you want to start at the brown dock with P-26-24-M on it, in front of a brown, A-frame cabin. Fish all the way to the back, past the blue dock at the end of the creek.

Fish the docks and stumps with a spinnerbait or small crankbait, running it by them for active prespaw and postspaw fish. Then drop a jig 'n pig beside dock posts and stumps for less active bass. Don't waste time — let your bait drop by the post or stump, jiggle it, then move to the next one. Roger likes a small jig 'n pig this time of year. He uses a 1/4-oz. green-pumpkin Booyah jig with a green-pumpkin Zoom Swimmin' Chunk. The smaller bait seems to work better in April.

Watch for shad on your depthfinder and for the fish spawning and dimpling the surface. You will catch a lot more bass if shad are in the area. Some fish will be in here to spawn, but the shad will draw in a lot of prespaw and postspaw fish to feed.

**No. 2: N 33° 25.007 - W 83° 16.949** — Coming back out of Lick Creek there is a high bank on your right with houses on top of the hill. Where this bank ends and flattens out on the water, a small cove starts and runs out to a point. A rock seawall starts in the cove and runs out around the point, and there is rip-rap on it, too.

Roger says this is an excellent place for shad to spawn, and bass hold here moving in and out of the back of the creek. Fish from the beginning of the rock seawall in the cove all the way around the point. The best area is the upstream side of the point to the end of it. Throw a spinnerbait or crankbait on it early, especially if shad are spawning.

When the sun gets up, the shad pull off the point and hold around a rockpile out in six to seven feet of water. Run your crankbait across it, making sure you hit the bottom. Roger says if your crankbait is not bouncing off something you are less likely to get a bite. Hit the rocks with your jig 'n pig and a Carolina rig before leaving. Roger likes a Zoom Trick Worm in green pumpkin on his Carolina rig and uses a 30-inch leader. You may get hung up in the rocks, but that is where the bass hold after the sun is up.

**No. 3: N 33° 24.738 - W 83° 16.558** — Go under the bridge at JR's

*Continued on page 36.*

GEORGIA OUTDOOR NEWS



Continued from page 34.

and look to your left. There is a deep cove at the bridge, and the first point on the downstream side of it has a dock with planters and a park bench on it. Start here, and fish all the docks downstream until you get to the dock with the green canopy on a point with two flags on a flag pole. There was a U.S. flag and a Confederate Stars and Bars flying when we fished it.

This is an excellent bank in early and mid April, according to Roger. There are some spawning pockets on this bank, and it is near deep water so the fish constantly replenish themselves. Run crankbaits and spinnerbaits beside the docks then work a jig 'n pig on the posts.

**No 4: N 33° 24.155 - W 83° 15.893** — Go under the second bridge, and watch to your right as you head downstream. The bank runs fairly straight to a small ditch then makes a sharp turn to the left. Back up from this ditch is a brown stucco house with a green, metal roof. The seawall makes a little point in front of the house.

That point is much more pronounced under water and has rocks on it. There are also a lot of logs and other wood cover that washes in on it

and hangs up there. Roger says it is an excellent postspawn holding area and bass stack up on it starting around the second week of April.

Run a crankbait across this point from all directions. Roger likes the old Down Deep Rapala that is no longer made. He searches them out on E-Bay and likes both the No. 5 and No. 7 sizes. The smaller bait works best in shallow water and the bigger bait digs deeper. Before you leave this point fish it with a jig 'n pig, and drag a Carolina rig across it. You will probably get hung up on the wood cover, but sometimes bass will hit a slow-moving bait even if they won't eat something moving faster. Try both.

**No. 5: N 33° 24.478 - W 83° 13.563** — Run down to the main lake past the island on your left. Watch for the small creek with the boat storage house for Reynolds Plantation, and start fishing on the upstream point of that creek. Start at the dock with the green canvas top in front of a beige house, staying way out from the seawall. Roger says this point and the two more upstream of it, as well as the pockets between them, are good from now until early May. Many tournament wins have come from this area.

The pockets have stumps along the bank and good deep water out from the bank. They are on the north side of the lake, so they warm fast.

Bass spawn in the pockets and then hold on the little points and off the seawalls because shad spawn here, too. This is a good place to spend some time in April, learning the hidden cover and points that others might miss.

**No. 6: N 33° 24.452 - W 83° 13.291** — Go to the downstream point of the cove with the boat-storage house, and start fishing at the dock on the inside of it. Work into the cove, fishing the shallow water with a spinnerbait. There is rip-rap on the bank and seawalls that shad spawn on, and bass will spawn in the pockets.

Fish past the pavilion and gas dock for Reynolds Plantation back to the beach. This is good in early April. If bass are spawning, work all the way back into the pockets as far as you can go. Drag a lizard in the spawning areas if you don't see bass on the bed, or sight fish for them if you do.

**No. 7: N 33° 23.886 - W 83° 13.150** — Head down the river, and go around the bend. Watch on your right and stop at the cove with the golf

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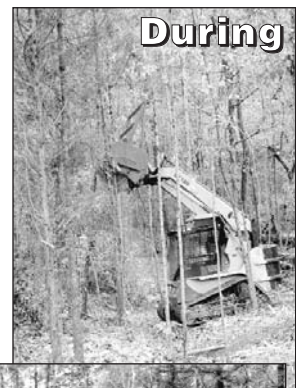
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course on the downstream point. Start on that rip-rap point, and work around the pocket upstream. Fish the next point and docks on it, then fish the next upstream pocket, too.

Stop at the point upstream of this pocket. There is not a dock here, but you will see a swing between two trees back in the brush on the bank. The house inside this pocket on the upstream side has a small red-and-white lighthouse in the yard. Roger says this is a major shad-spawn area, and many big fish feed here because of the deep water nearby. The old river channel makes a bend here, and these pockets are not far off the channel. Run the pockets with a spinnerbait and crankbait, looking for feeding bass.

**No. 8: N 33° 22.533 - W 83° 13.494** — Run down the river, and go straight when the river turns back to your left. Straight ahead of you are two creeks that enter together, and on the downstream side of the big pocket formed by them is a big new house under construction. There is a new dock in front of it. Start at the dock, and work upstream into the mouth of the creek. Stay way out, keeping your boat in about 12 feet of water and make long casts toward the bank. Shad spawn here and hold here, too. There is a lot of brush underwater. Part of it is an old state fish attractor, and fishermen have added much more brush.

If you look into the big pocket at the point between the two creeks, on the left bank across from it you will see a gap in the trees where an old roadbed enters. This roadbed swings around this point and offers the bass a highway from deep water to shallow.

If the bass are not in close to the bank, back out even farther and use a deeper-running crankbait. You can also drag a jig 'n pig or Carolina rig through all the brush, but you will get hung up a lot. If you see shad on the surface, or on your depthfinder, take some time fishing this point. The bass will be here if the shad are present.

**No. 9: N 33° 23.729 - W 83° 12.104** — Across from and a little downstream of the Long Shoals ramp you will see a small island sitting just off a point. Run in on the upstream side of this island, and start fishing just inside the point. Fish all the way to the back with a spinnerbait and crankbait. There are stumps along the bank that you can see and drop a jig 'n pig beside. In the back of the cove on the left bank are some docks but no houses. Fish the ditch running out beside

**Roger says this is a major shad-spawn area, and many big fish feed here because of the deep water nearby. Run the pockets with a spinnerbait and crankbait, looking for feeding bass.**

them, and look for bedding bass in the little cuts and pockets along the ditch.

**No. 10: N 33° 21.271 - W 83° 11.009** — Run down almost to the dam, and turn right into the creek just upstream of the Lawrence Shoals swimming area. This creek has four fingers, and you want to go to the point between the first and second on your right. It is a round, shallow point with rocks on it, and bass hold off this point both during the spawn and prespawn, as well as during the day after feeding on the shad spawn. Stay way back, and make long casts with a crankbait and a Carolina rig up on the

point. Fish to your left facing the point, probing for rocks and fish holding here. When you get to the grassbed between two docks, switch to a spinnerbait and fish the bank, especially if you are here before the sun gets on the water or if shad are spawning.

Fish past the next pocket and halfway way down the bank toward the back end of the second finger of the creek. There are rocks off the point and a couple of blowdowns on the steep bank to hit with spinnerbait and jig 'n pig. Turn around, and head back the way you came, keeping your boat out in 28 feet of water. Make long casts with a big crankbait. Once you pass the little pocket there is a house with a big clock on it. From that house to the point where you started there are lots of scattered big rocks. Run a crankbait through them that will hit bottom in 14 to 18 feet of water, and try a Carolina rig, too.

These spots Roger shared will all hold April bass. Give them a try then use the patterns to find other spots like them to fish. Watch for the shad, and bass will be nearby. Other bass will be spawning. For a guided trip on Oconee with Roger, call him at (706) 342-8555.





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