

# A Look at PLANET BASS

Looking back seven years, I recall the buzz in my bones during my first experiments with underwater cameras.

What would the bottom of the lake really look like? How would fish respond to different baits? The answers to these and more questions were revealed as I began tinkering with a prototype Nature Vision Aqua-Vu, a clumsy unit compared to today's models, yet functional enough to clearly display countless underwater features.

Early on, I was surprised how few fish appeared, even in what seemed like ideal habitat. How wrong I'd been about many spots. What had appeared on sonar like large rock fields sometimes were actually deep pits carved into the lake floor. What we thought were schools of big bass that wouldn't bite often were carp or suckers.

Cameras didn't spook bass as had been initially reported. Rather, smallmouths and largemouths often seemed curious, as they'd swim up to investigate the apparatus. Closely examining specific cover objects on favorite spots demonstrated that certain subtle characteristics attracted big bass, while other nearly identical areas remained lifeless. We discovered that it wasn't so strange to spot bass roaming well above bottom, sometimes far from cover objects.

We also learned that bass do indeed swim down to chase prey. The observation of professional angler Rick Clunn that, "The more we learn about bass, the more we realize we have yet to learn," was proven even truer than I'd thought. Active viewers often come away humbled by the

things they observed below, or are left further pondering reasons for what they've seen.

Beyond mysteries solved, underwater viewing during fishing trips brings an immediate boost of confidence, whether we're exploring a new lake or preparing for tournament competition. As you gaze into the aquatic world, your thoughts awaken, instinctively painting vivid images of fish and terrain in your mind's eye. You're astounded by your newfound ability to visualize how fish react to different presentation maneuvers. Accurate visualization spawns confidence, a mind set that inevitably yields more fish.

When I scout now, I'm looking for the "right" bass—big fish set up on small out-of-the-way spots. I have become so intimate with some lakes that things begin to look familiar. Distinctive logs, boulders, or a waterlogged skiff greet me like old friends with each visit. Some fish themselves actually become recognizable.

Then, as pieces of each lake's puzzle form pictures, I also have become profoundly aware that adult bass don't exist in the vast numbers that many anglers believe. You realize that certain pockets of bass, once found, such as winter concentrations of smallmouths or deep spawning largemouths, display a certain vulnerability. Despite the sometimes irresistible temptation to extract some fish, we must learn to exercise restraint.

In the end, underwater cameras make fishing more fun by improving our understanding of fish and their world, a magical realm where—in the minds of curious anglers—amazing things happen. Cameras confirm these amazing things, while also revealing other options one might never have thought to consider. ■

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