



PANFISH POPPERS

Poppers are great lures when fly fishing for the frying pan.

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The west fork of Little River is a peaceful setting for many activities, including fly fishing.

Go!



Few things compare to the thrill of a fish striking a topwater lure, whether it's attached to a fly rod or a baitcaster. From late spring through fall, panfish popper action can truly be the most fun someone can have fishing.

From some of my earliest childhood memories of my grandfather fly fishing from the bank of the creek, hidden behind a catalpa tree, to my new memories of introducing fly fishing to my own son, it, like most outdoor activities, can be addictive. As spring rounds the corner in to summer, my thoughts lean toward the water warming and the time I will be able to spend fly fishing for panfish and bass on Alabama waters.

Whether I am enjoying wade fishing (my favorite), or fishing from the bank or boat, being outdoors is relaxing and cheaper than other therapy.

ALABAMA FLY FISHING

No matter where you live in Alabama, I am willing to bet there are panfish within 5 miles of your home. The term "panfish" has become quite a broad definition, but generally refers to fish that never outgrow the size of a frying pan and include, but are not limited to, bluegill and crappie.

My home waters are in north Alabama along Little River, but I try to discover

new fly fishing opportunities in other parts of the state as well. For this article, I hope to entice you to my area of the state and give you information on some of the most picturesque and beautiful fishing opportunities in Alabama.

DeSoto Falls, near Montone, Ala., is one of the most picturesque areas in the state. The old hydroelectric dam creates about two miles of still water. You can fish from the bank or put in a kayak or canoe and paddle upstream, fishing along the way. I recommend practicing your fly rod casting from a kayak before paddling as it is a learned skill that takes some practice.

The Yellow Trail in DeSoto State Park is a great place to start fly fishing. This trail follows alongside some great water that can be waded. Don't let the small runs and pools fool you – there are fish there.

The Yellow Trail leads you along the west fork of Little River. After leaving the state park boundaries, you enter Little

River Canyon National Preserve. The trail, also known as the DeSoto Scout Trail, winds through some extraordinary backcountry areas.

Within the boundaries of the Preserve, Little River Management Area offers backcountry roads where Little River can be accessed with plenty of long, wadable runs, perfect for the fly rod.

Hiking into Little River Canyon can tax the most athletic, but the view from the bottom is always worth the hike in ... and out. Little River Canyon National Preserve has made improvements to Canyon Mouth Park, near Blanche, Ala., making access to the canyon easier for fly fishermen.

Combined, DeSoto State Park, Little River Management Area and Little River Canyon National Preserve provide more than 15 miles of wild and scenic public lands.

GETTING STARTED

It really doesn't take much of an investment to start fly fishing. A basic fly fishing rig will cost you about as much



as any other nice fishing rod setup. Even though fly fishing for trout, tarpon and bone fish is a great experience, fly fishing for bass and panfish can be more rewarding and, many times, more fast and furious fun.

While fly fishing my home waters in north Alabama during the spring and summer, I use a lot of the fly fishing standards such as the Adams, Elk-hair Caddis, or a bushy attractor fly. All work fine but, I have found that a small panfish popper works the best when seeking to catch bluegill and redeye bass. In today's economy, panfish poppers are relatively cheap and can be purchased for \$2 to \$3 each. Bulk packs of 10 bring the price down even further.

The panfish popper weighs more than a topwater fly and is almost like casting a heavier, weighted wet fly. This alien-looking lure is almost always brightly colored with rubber legs and a hackle tail.

The name "popper" comes from the popping sound the lure makes when quickly stripped in from on top of the

water. The sounds are designed to get the attention of waiting bass and panfish. Sometimes the best action is no action, allowing the surrounding fish to observe and study the popper a few seconds before they strike.

Over the years I have been able to make a good guess of my catch by the way the fish attack the popper. Green sunfish strike the popper almost before it hits the water. Redeye bass come from yards away creating a slight wake in their path before taking a popper, and many species of bluegill wait, study, then violently attack the fly, almost coming out of the water.

Making a strategic cast is paramount. I look for the broken seams in the sandstone bedrock floor of Little River and I fish the bank heavily, especially where there are shadows and overhanging limbs.



Try using a popper when fly fishing for bluegill or redeye bass. It weighs more than a topwater fly and is almost like casting a heavier, weighted wet fly.

Anywhere you think fish maybe hiding and waiting to ambush a floating piece of food is a good place to cast.

I believe that someone fishing with a fly rod can get their fly in more places and present it to more fish than someone using a baitcaster or spinning rod. More presentations equal more fish in the frying pan. I encourage you to give it a try! 

Redeye bass is one of the smaller members of the black bass family. The redeye inhabits small- to medium-sized upland streams and only rarely large rivers and impoundments. The upper and lower margins of the caudal fin are edged in white, a useful feature for separating redeye bass from both small-mouth bass and shoal bass.

