

Swimming Jigs with Dave Wolak

John Neporadny Jr.

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A buzzbait becomes a great option for fishing aquatic vegetation, especially in the fall. Its ability to ride high on the water with an upturned single hook prevents the lure from bogging down in the weeds and the ruckus it makes as it buzzes along the surface triggers bass into biting. Conditions in the fall are also ideal for buzzbaits since bass have moved into the cooler shallows and are gorging on shad.

"The shad migration is a big thing in the fall," Bassmaster Elite Series pro Dave Wolak says. "The baitfish move into the creeks and are followed by bass, which set up in the weeds to establish ambush points."

While buzzbaits generate a lot of strikes during this time of year, there are plenty of times when bass prefer something more subtle that runs just below the surface.

"Swimming a jig is a shallow-water pattern, and in the fall when bass start moving shallower again they react to a faster moving bait like that because they think it is shad coming by quickly. Swimming a jig is like a silent type of buzzbait (or chatterbait) and it has about the same effect as a swimming frog."

Jig swimming tactics produce best when keying on any cover that serves as an ambush point rather than fishing along an open bank.

"I think it is an appropriate tactic when you have some hard edge or canopy (dock platform or weed edge) to swim it by."

Lily pads are Wolak's favorite type of aquatic vegetation for swimming a jig.

"A swim jig is really weedless and it swims down at the eye level of the fish right under the pads."

Other weeds Wolak swims a jig around include water willows, milfoil, matted maiden cane and hydrilla with a tapered edge that forms a cavern underneath the weeds. Some of Wolak's favorite places for swimming a jig include the water willows of Lake Dardanelle in Arkansas and Old Hickory in Tennessee, the various vegetation of the Red River in Louisiana, the water chestnuts of the Hudson River and the grasses of Lake Kissimmee.

Any edges and holes in the weeds are key locations for swimming a jig in the fall. When some weeds start to die off in the cooler weather, it creates an inside weed edge that attracts bass.

"There is usually a hole there, and it is usually shallow. A lot of fish move then from that grass to the bank, which can have one piece of wood (or a rock) along a three-foot section between the grass and the

bank."

The inside weed edge and the hard cover along the bank become prime locations for swimming a jig.

Wolak also looks for subtle differences in lily pad fields such as small indentations or an isolated pad.

"Once you find a fish is using something like that, you can just expand on it."

Weedless jigs designed for swimming work better than the standard bass jig for this technique. Wolak relies on a Title Shot jig which has a weedless system for securing a plastic trailer and has a head designed especially for skipping that also makes the jig ride higher in the water. He occasionally uses a 1/8-ounce model, but for most situations he opts for a 1/4-ounce jig because he notices the heavier jig slides by the cover faster, which triggers more reaction strikes.

Wolak's favorite trailer for his jig is a 3.75-inch Yum Craw Papi plastic crawfish that features oversized flappers. He favors this soft plastic craw because the large flappers produce plenty of action when he swims the jig-and-craw combo.

Swim jigs in natural colors such as green pumpkin and pumpkinseed have worked at times for Wolak, but he prefers a pure white jig and trailer for most of his swimming tactics, even in clear water. "I just make up for the clarity by moving the jig a little faster."

Wolak has also done well swimming a pure black jig-and-craw combo in tannic waters.

"Guys are all worried about matching the color of a bluegill or whatever forage, but a swim jig is more of a search bait and reaction strike bait than it is trying to nail down the exact two strands of orange rubber that they need to imitate the belly of a bluegill."

Wolak suggests they should stick with a white jig and just look for active fish under the grass.

Swimming a white jig also makes it easier for Wolak to detect strikes. "That is part of the reason I like a white jig. The white allows me to see it and if it disappears I crack them."

The North Carolina pro swims a jig at different angles to the cover in the same fashion as he does with a buzzbait or chatterbait. He keeps his 7 1/2-foot flipping stick at the 11 o'clock position and pops the rod a bit during the retrieve to make his jig slightly wake the water.

"I have my best success when I make a little bulge on the surface."

Employing a 6.2:1 gear ratio reel filled with 56-pound braided line helps Wolak retrieve the jig at a fast clip and keep it close to the surface. The high-speed retrieve prevents fish from noticing the heavy line.

"I am always throwing around cover, and it is coming by fast enough that that thick line is irrelevant."

Topwater fishing offers plenty of thrills in the fall, but when bass in the weeds are reluctant to bust the surface for a meal, try tempting them down under with a swim jig.

Dave Wolak swims a jig around weeds when bass move into the shallows to feed on baitfish during the fall.