

Downsizing to Dead Sticking Kevin Dahlke



As January has wrapped up and February is underway, this is the time of year that starts getting tough for a number of anglers. The anglers that are consistently catching fish are in the know about what to do in the toughest time of the year. This time of year brings cold weather, snow and along with that comes the relentless onslaught of cold fronts pummeling areas that many of us ice fish.

The anglers that are taking on these tough times that are being presented consistently are using tactics and techniques that are putting the favor to the anglers that are in the know. What these anglers are doing is very simple and one thing that they are doing is they are downsizing their baits and also dead sticking their baits.

The fish at this time of year are facing barometric pressures that are high and rising at all times and what this is doing is putting the fish into a very finicky, dormant and not willing mood to chase our baits like they were earlier in the season. Since these fish are looking for much smaller baits this is where downsizing is going to come into its own.

By downsizing we are not talking about the usual 1/32 oz or even the 1/64 oz jigs that many anglers using but there are baits out there that are much smaller and these are the baits that we use on a consistent basis. The sizes we are using are 1/60, 1/80 and even 1/100 oz and these are very tiny baits that many anglers are not even taking a look at. These tiny jigs are called hair jigs and imitate the small fry that are hatching and are a main staple of the fish's diets at this time of year.



By using these tiny jigs this is giving those fish a much smaller profile looking bait and one that isn't doing a lot of movement. By tying these on with a loop knot they are able to hang freely and act much more natural in the water. We aren't putting any livebait on these as the design and the content that these are made from is all that is needed.



Another aspect of downsizing baits that is sweeping the ice belt is the use of micro plastics. These are newer baits that anglers are using but are finding their ways onto many a hook across the ice belt. These plastic baits are put onto tiny lead head jigs in the same size that we talked about earlier.

What these tiny plastics baits are representing are the larva stages of many different insects that are hatching out of the lakes bottom. These come in many sizes, shapes and colors and

all of them can be adapted to the mood of the fish on a given day. With their tiny tentacles and appendages these quiver and move freely in the water with the tiniest movement applied to them. If they seem to big for what the fish are wanting or looking for then all that is needed to be done is pinch a piece off of one and put that onto the hook.

There are also going to be times that no matter how small you go with baits the fish may still ignore your offering. When this is the case what we will employ is the dead sticking technique. This is exactly what it sounds like and that is leaving the bait just sit at the depth where the fish are hanging and see if this will get them to bite.

There has been many times that when we leave our bait sit and go and drill another set of holes in the ice, what we come back to is a load of fish hanging around our bait. Then all we do is give the bait a little action and this will generally excite the fish into biting. If not leave it sit a little longer and eventually these fish will come around.

Between now and when late ice comes if the angler employs either or both of these tactics, this should put more fish onto your line. Now is the time that will test the best of anglers and if you and they try a couple of these techniques this will make a better angler out of you. By changing between these techniques and offering the fish something a little different at all times, this will dramatically increase your odds and you will notice other anglers not catching fish like you are.