

# It's almost here

## April 6 looks like the date for walleye spawning on the Rock

**L**ord knows I've been wrong before. But here's a prediction for you: The walleye spawn on Rock River will be in full swing April 6th.

The zenith of this annual event should be a full week later than any time since I started writing this column for the Gazette almost 20 years ago.

During this time frame there have been years when it looked like water tempera-

tures in the Rock would reach that magic 45-degree mark by mid-March. There were a couple of other years when the water was way too cold to initiate this blessed event just 10 days prior to April Fool's Day.

Massive cold fronts cooled walleye ardor in years when it appeared spawn would come early. In those years when it looked like spawning would come late, we experienced temperatures far above average for the last 10 days in March.

We're eight days out from April 1st right now and water temperatures are still shy of 40 degrees. Given our brutal winter, it doesn't seem possible that walleyes will be carrying on the family name by next weekend.

According to the fishing diary I've kept since 1976, there have been only three years in this time frame when 'eyes have spawned in the Rock later than April 1st.

Back in 1979, '80 and '81 we had three tough winters. The spawn was delayed by a week.

The winter we are just shaking off surpassed these tough winters with more snow than has ever been

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recorded in Madison. It takes a tremendous amount of energy to change snowmelt into 45-degree water. This is why water temperatures are still in the upper 30s.

Moon phase can also have an effect on spawning. The new moon occurs April 6th. The impact of a new moon isn't as substantial as influence of a full moon around April 1st. But it is certainly a factor to consider.

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Word is coming in that walleyes are very active up on Fox River at De Pere. Ditto over on the Mississippi at Red Wing. These two fisheries are probably your best bets for catching quality walleyes over the next several weeks.

The transition from sitting on a bucket to sitting on a boat seat typically takes several weeks. Eighty hours ago, I was still walking on water in its frozen state, wailing on jumbo perch and big crappies. Now it's time to get serious about chasing walleyes.

### Hunting shed antlers

A passion for searching for shed antlers also exerts a very strong influence. Because winter was so long and hard, this will be the best spring in years to find success hunting sheds.

Bigger bucks tend to lose their headgear first. They started dropping horns just before winter arrived in earnest, making the search for sheds fairly straightforward.

Whitetail travel at antler

dropping time occurred between bedding areas and feeding areas. The distance between these two habitats may be only a couple of hundred yards because of this past winter's severity.

I've been out three times in the last week and found 11 sheds. Granted, most look like they've come from "jackalopes" rather than white-tails—but a shed—no matter how small—is a thrill.

I've also stumbled across the carcasses of five deer that didn't make it through the winter. DNR deer experts say the winter we just went through in southern Wisconsin is "mild on the severity index used to judge impact on the deer herd in the northern part of the state."

It seems to me this is like telling folks from south Florida to stop whining because Alaskans who have been studied for years barely felt a chill all winter. We're all Americans, but that red blood runs a little thicker in Barrow than it does in Boca.

By far the most productive shed hunting areas for me this spring have been in alfalfa fields. Robins have been out there in the hayfields, too—another sure sign of spring.

The song of Canada geese, cardinals and sandhill cranes fill the air.

Walleyes are on the move. We made it through another winter. Life is good.

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