

In the first two parts of our series on pond management, we learned how to evaluate the fish population and correct imbalances. Now it's time to...

Grow Big Bass!

By Greg Grimes

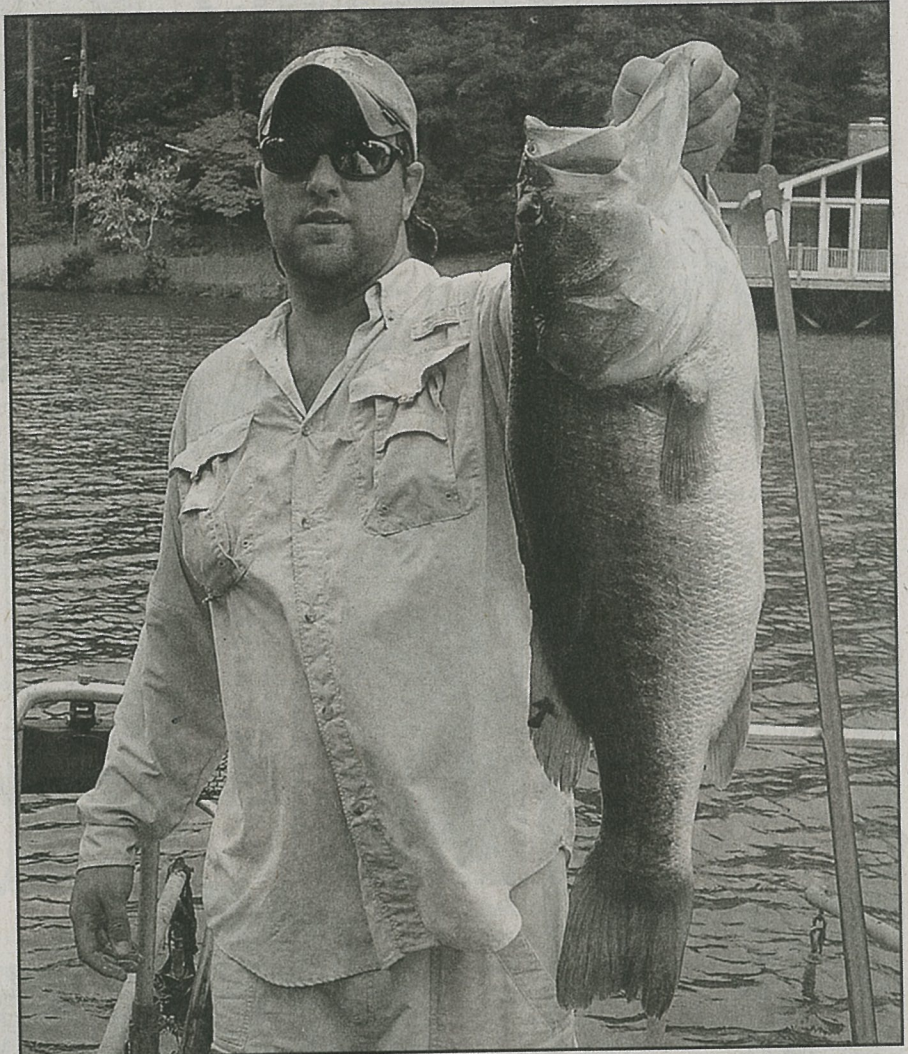
Hopefully you have been following the advice in the past two pond-management articles. The first two articles had a lot of information, and this article is no different. However, now is the time to ramp it up. The advice here might be controversial, maybe even cutting edge, but it is important if you want to push the envelope on your bass-growth potential.

First, let's start with supplemental feeding. Feeding is a valuable tool to boost your forage base and also jack up the weight gain of your bass. There has been a big push in the last few years for fish feeding because it is easier to see the results versus fertilization. Also, many clients may have excess water or poor water quality, meaning a fertilization program is not feasible. In lieu of fertilization, feeding is one of the best ways to increase the number of pounds of fish the pond will grow.

There are several directional fish feeders now on the market. We now sell products from three manufacturers, so the consumer can choose what is best for them. Distance in food delivery and feeder capacity are the two most important considerations. The saying you get what you pay for is true on fish feeders with the higher-priced units having good warranties.

What to feed the fish depends on the species you're feeding. In bass terms, you are mainly feeding bluegill, and I believe the most economical choice is a 1/2-inch pellet that is 36 percent protein and 4 percent fat. It costs more than cheap catfish food, but the growth rate is improved.

I will let you in on a new product that has just hit the market. There is now a pellet designed to feed your bass. It is huge — about half the size of a golf ball — and the nutrition is the same as if the bass ate a trout. The bass gets tons more energy from these larger pellets than trying to eat hundreds of tiny pellets. The catch is the bass in your pond probably will not take right to it. A bass needs to be trained to eat pellets



Want to grow trophy bass? It may take intensive management that includes supplemental feeding, specialized stocking programs and selective harvest.

because this is not something natural to this predator fish. You may need to buy bass already trained on pellets, more on this in just a bit. Currently, since the recent introduction of this large pellet by Purina, there is not a commercial feeder available to cast this pellet, so it requires hand feeding.

Last month I spoke about the importance of selective bass harvest. The overriding key is to remove enough pounds of bass to free up more bass food. However, would knowing the age of a bass help determine whether to put it in the frying pan?

Matt Morgan, supervisor of the

fishery division at our company, Aquatic Environmental, had this to say about aging bass.

"Knowing the age of a bass from your pond provides excellent data on the growth rates of the bass in your pond. By sacrificing a few bass from different size classes and aging the fish via the otolith (earbone), you will see how good or bad the bass growth rates are. I have aged too many bass to count that have been 5 to 7 years old and only 12 inches in length, even one 13 1/2-inch bass that was 11 years old. Is it worth throwing these fish back into the pond? Think again, those fish at that