

ARROWS *from* ABOVE

Summer Bowfishing Action
story & photos by **Dustin Vaughn Warncke**

ONE OF MY MOST

memorable experiences in the bowfishing world was when bowfishing guide Marty McIntyre

from GARQUEST Bowfishing Adventures (www.garquest.com) and I went on a 24-hour, four lake bowfishing marathon in the spring of 2012.

We started very early one morning and ended up fishing on Lake Dunlap under a bridge later that same day and into the wee hours of the next morning. We stumbled upon a bowfisher's paradise. It was a target-rich environment to say the least. There were more fish to shoot at than we had time to shoot at them.

In just under two hours we shot 12-long-nose gar in Marty's custom bowfishing boat. We missed far more fish than we took in that night because we caught the lake during the gars' spawning season.

The armored skin of the biggest gar we took now hangs on my office wall. He was four inches short of the lake record at the time.

What a treasured memory!

I will never forget that night. We were dead tired but you couldn't wipe the grin from our faces from the amazing action.

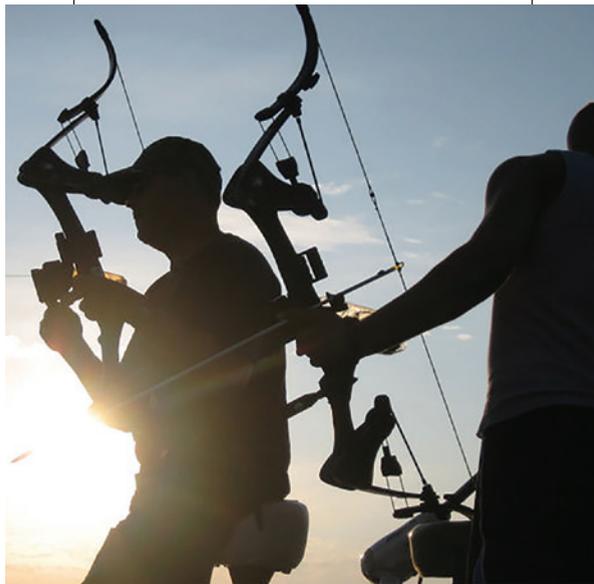
In its basic form bowfishing is shooting an arrow into water at a fish. The arrow has a string attached that is connected to a bow-mounted reel. After the shot, you reel the arrow back in, with or without a fish on the arrow.

As the old saying goes, "Some days, chicken, other days, feathers." Sometimes you hit what you're aiming at, and sometimes you just have a learning experience.

One of the main misconceptions in bowfishing is that you have to have a boat to do it—not true! Many bowfishers get their start bowfishing from the banks of lakes and rivers. Bowfishing this way is a blast!

The main fish that can be pursued in bowfishing are carp, buffalo, gar and other "rough fish"—typically not considered game fish. A lot of bowfishing takes place at night, but daytime bowfishing is fun as well.

Whether from a boat or on the bank, the main goal is to sneak up on fish in shallow water areas. One of the main tactics for bowfishing during the day or night is to follow



the edges of the lake, river, or creek in the shallower water area and troll slowly.

Always be on the lookout for shot opportunities. Sometimes, as in the case of alligator gars in the spawning season, you can find fish rolling or sunning themselves in deep water in the middle of the main lake or river areas.

On a boat you are constantly on the move, slowly trolling for fish. At night, most bowfishers use high pressure sodium (HPS) lights or LED lights to penetrate the water and see the fish better. You can also use bow-mounted flashlights to scan the water where the boat lights don't reach. If you're bank fishing, you slowly walk the edge of the water to find a fish to shoot.

The main rule to follow when bowfishing is always have more than one arrow. Many bowfishing kits already come with two arrows. You always want a back up arrow with you because anything can happen, and believe me it does—to the one you are fishing with. Bowfishing arrows are incredibly strong, but even the strongest things can break or malfunction sometimes.

Most of the shots you take in bowfishing are "snap shots." When snap shooting you are basically aiming down the arrow at the fish as you draw and releasing the arrow soon after you come to full draw. Your shots will be quick, and your retrieve of the arrow should be fast, too, so you can get ready for your next shot.

As with all styles of archery, be sure you have a good anchor point you can reach when you come to full draw. My anchor point for bowfishing is my thumb on the

bottom part of my jaw. When you reach this point, you know you are anchored, and anchored shots are more consistent shots.

Another thing to note is that your bow set up doesn't need to shoot super fast for bowfishing. What you are going for is a balance between penetrating power and easy arrow retrieval. If your draw weight is too heavy, it will be harder to retrieve your arrow from the lake or river bottom. Also, you may increase the potential damage to your arrow if you strike rocks or other hard objects shooting super fast.

I would recommend most bowfishing rigs to be around the 45 to 50 pounds in draw weight at the maximum. After all, most of your shots in bowfishing will be at short range, unlike many targets on land.

Remember, AIM LOW. A common statement for new bowfishers the first time they hit a fish is, "I thought I was shooting super low, like way under the fish!" Exactly how low you should aim takes some getting used to, but the more you do it, the better you will get. If the fish is deep, you want to aim even lower. If the fish is higher or shallower in the water, don't aim as low.

A common rule of thumb is "10-4."

If the fish is 10 feet away and one foot deep in the water, aim four inches below the fish. Change your multiples with distance, depth, and shot placement. I shot a tilapia one time in eight feet of water near the bottom of the lake by aiming far under where the fish appeared to be. Again, it takes practice, but the more you do it, the better you will get.

Bowfishing is legal on most rivers and lakes, but it's important to check your local wildlife regulations or call your local game warden to ensure you are following the rules on the rivers and lakes you are fishing.

There are many great reasons to get into bowfishing and it is fun for young and old alike. Many of my bowfishing friends take their whole family out for a bowfishing adventure on a regular basis. However you decide to go bowfishing, be safe and have fun out on the water.

(View Dustin's videos at FishGame.com and DustinsProjects.com)

