

# Largemouth Bass fishing in the Philippines

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This is a follow-up article to Rod&Line December 2006 issue, about the emergence of a new Largemouth Bass hot spot in Southeast Asia, in the least expected locale of Pantabangan lake about 120 kilometers north of Manila. The preview has caught the attention of many enthusiasts in Malaysia and Singapore. Organized by Mr. Quek Jin King of Pure Fishing Malaysia, Ah Pan (a local fishing guide in Malaysia) and I had the privilege to be among the first Malaysian to sample the reputable largemouth bass in the Philippines. This trip was truly memorable, and not unlike a cultural shock to me, as far as fishing is concerned. The fishing environments and conditions were different, the quarry was exotic, and the techniques are also alien to me. The only things that remain unchanged were tall tales and camaraderie that anglers never fail to cherish, regardless of their origins. Built in 1972, Pantabangan is a picturesque lake created by damming the Pampangan River in the province of Nueva Ecija. Covering an area of 80,000 hectares, it has a very hilly rocky bottom profile and habitats that are conducive for the proliferation of the American largemouth bass. The lake temperature of 19 to 33 degree centigrade is also to their favor. The biggest bass captured by the local fisherman so far was a stunning 7kg specimen, and it's common to land specimens of 1-2 kilos, which is considered good by American and Japanese standard. When we were there in December, the Walo-Walo (figure 8) winds were awesome and powerful enough to create waves of more than 3 feet high, which made fishing very uncomfortable and unproductive. Even then, our tally was not bad at all in the first day of fishing, with more than 40 largemouth bass in the range of 0.5 to 2 kilos, landed by six anglers in two boats.

**The Power Bait** The exclusive use of plastic worm was an interesting experience. In Malaysia, the use of 7-inch worms is rare and often a laughing stock. For the bass in Pantabangan, these worms turned out to be a killer. As a matter of fact, the longer the better. In no time the 10-inch Powerbait worms of various colors brought over by Quek were quickly 'borrowed' away not only by fellow anglers, but the local villagers as well. The sight of villagers happily fishing the outriggered dugout boat using handline attached with weighted Power Worm to good effect was the best testimony Quek had been eyeing for to promote the latest from Berkley.

**Introduction to Largemouth Bass** The large mouth bass (Florida strain) was introduced to the Philippines by Alvin Seale from California, USA in 1907 as a food fish and sport. They were reintroduced in 1915 and 1958, stocked in Trinidad Lake in the northern Province of Benguet and in Caliraya Lake (not far from Manila) in the Laguna Province. The dam in Trinidad unfortunately produced sulfuric acids some time in eighties thereby eradicating the bass there. The Caliraya has now a steady population, and the bass also managed to find their way to the adjacent lake of Lumot (this lake is where the existing bass record came from). From these two lakes avid bass anglers tried to propagate them by bringing them to other lakes and their efforts bear fruit in the Pantabangan lake too. As for the Pantabangan, according to a local hotel operator, Miss Joar Weigel of Best View Resort, stocks of bass were also released by the Governor in 2000, and similar actions were subsequently taken by other related agencies to promote fishing activities in the lake. The existence of abundant largemouth bass in Pantabangan only went into limelight about three years ago. According to her, the locals do not like to eat the largemouth bass (known as Tawis in the local language) and this contributes immensely to the proliferation of the fish stock in the lake. The emergence of Pantabangan as the latest bass fishing hot spot is most remarkable. The remoteness of the lake, as well as the bottom profile of the lake could be the key factors contributing to the healthy fish population. According to a regular angler, there are only few areas which are shallow, thereby giving them chance to hide from net, fisherman using electrocution for fishing and long lines. The quality of the substrate which is full of rocks and stone instead of soil also play a part, as bass loves to spawn at these habitats during season.

**Fishing tips for Pantabangan lake** The unique feature of largemouth bass fishing is that there seem to be many variables for consideration when tackling fish. Their behaviors change from lake to lake, season to season, and even in the same lake, from day to day. That is what makes bassing so interesting and challenging. According to Peter Tan, a regular bass hunter who is most willing to divulge his knowledge, the bass in Pantabangan has a different character from the bass in the other lakes. They have already adapted so well to the area that they tend to seek places which are uncommon. Usually bass in Pantabangan will be seen or caught abundantly (size and numbers) in submerge islands, points and being structured oriented fishes, in the submerged trees. Local diver and fisherman in the area say that they usually see huge population in submerge trees. They also theorize that one of the tree species 'camachile' attracts and holds bass.

**Common Fishing Techniques**