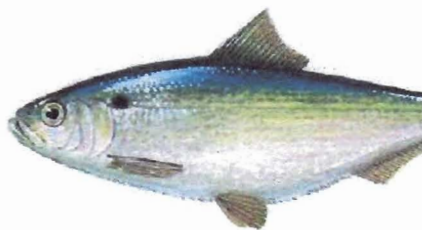
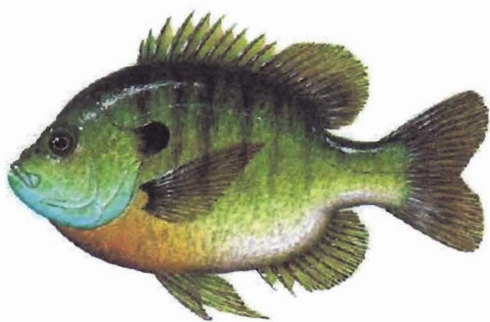


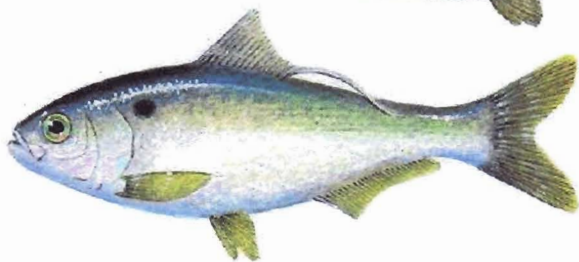
Can You Do What He Did?

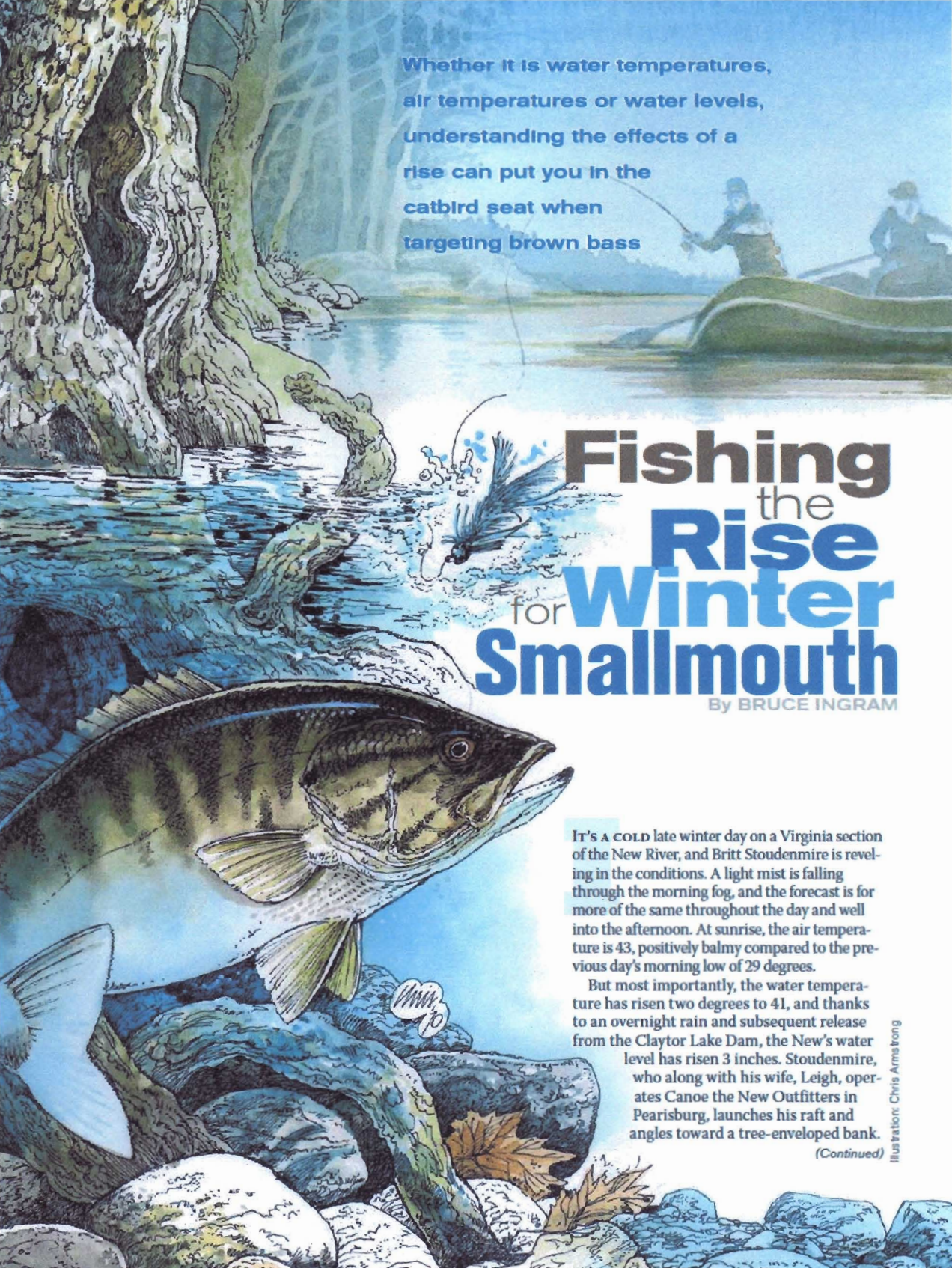
# BASS MASTER



## 7 Deadly Spins on Baitfish

p. 44





Whether it is water temperatures, air temperatures or water levels, understanding the effects of a rise can put you in the catbird seat when targeting brown bass

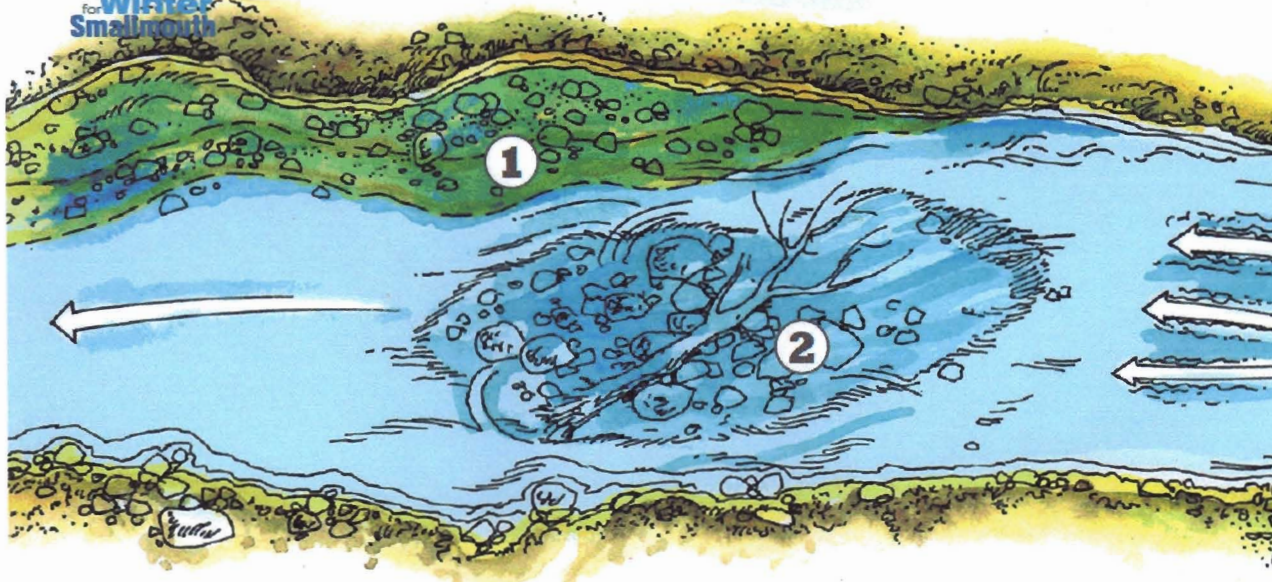
# Fishing the Rise for Winter Smallmouth

By BRUCE INGRAM

IT'S A COLD late winter day on a Virginia section of the New River, and Britt Stoudenmire is reveling in the conditions. A light mist is falling through the morning fog, and the forecast is for more of the same throughout the day and well into the afternoon. At sunrise, the air temperature is 43, positively balmy compared to the previous day's morning low of 29 degrees.

But most importantly, the water temperature has risen two degrees to 41, and thanks to an overnight rain and subsequent release from the Claytor Lake Dam, the New's water level has risen 3 inches. Stoudenmire, who along with his wife, Leigh, operates Canoe the New Outfitters in Pearisburg, launches his raft and angles toward a tree-enveloped bank.

(Continued)



In the morning murk, ghostly sycamores stand sentinel along the shoreline, their root wads extending slightly out from the bank and abutting a jumble of basketball-size rocks and odd limbs that have fallen from the sycamores. Stoudenmire picks up a G.Loomis spinning rod, attaches his own hand-tied 1/4-ounce Undulator rabbit hair jig and a 2-inch Case Salty Trailer and makes his first cast of the day.

The jig lands at the base of one of the root wads, and the guide feels the bait slowly descend to the substrate. And then Stoudenmire does ... nothing. After some 20 seconds, Stoudenmire begins to inch the jig along the bottom, often pausing the bait for long seconds at a time. Approximately two minutes after the cast, the jig finally makes its way back to the raft.

For some 30 minutes, Stoudenmire continues to cast toward the bank, only re-anchoring the raft one time followed by allowing the craft to slip just a few yards downstream. And then the Virginian feels a slight quiver in his line, quickly reels up the slack and

sets the hook. The smallmouth is a good-size one, but it does not jump from the icy water, merely wallowing a few times on the surface before boring deep once again into the 6 feet of liquid that lines the shoreline.

Finally, Stoudenmire lands the 21-inch bass and gently and immediately releases it. Over the next two hours, four more bronzebacks come from the same 20 yards of shoreline — the best fish measures 22 3/4 inches and weighs 5 pounds, 12 ounces. The guide looks up and down the New, and not surprisingly, his boat is the only one on the river.

For Stoudenmire, it is just another outstanding winter day of fishing on the New, a river that is perhaps the premier smallmouth waterway in the mid-Atlantic region. The key to his success on this outing — and numerous others, as Stoudenmire pursues smallmouth on this flow no matter how harsh the wintertime conditions — is the fact that the air and water temperatures were rising along with a slight rise in river levels.

## ROD AND REEL CHOICES

**Essentials:** A 6-6 medium action G.Loomis rod (SJR782) with a Shimano Saros 2500 reel for jigs and tubes. Power Pro 20/6 yellow braided line with a 12-pound Gamma Edge fluorocarbon leader.

"I like the longer rod and fast tip to give the jig or tube a more subtle, floating action as I work it off each piece of cover," Britt Stoudenmire says. "If I want more of a 'bang into the rocks' type presentation with a crankbait or jerkbait, then I will switch to a shorter, heavier rod. I use the Shimano Saros reel because I like the higher gear ratio of 6:1 to pick up line quickly after getting a subtle strike. I prefer Power Pro line and a Gamma fluorocarbon leader for their visibility, sensitivity and abrasion resistance."

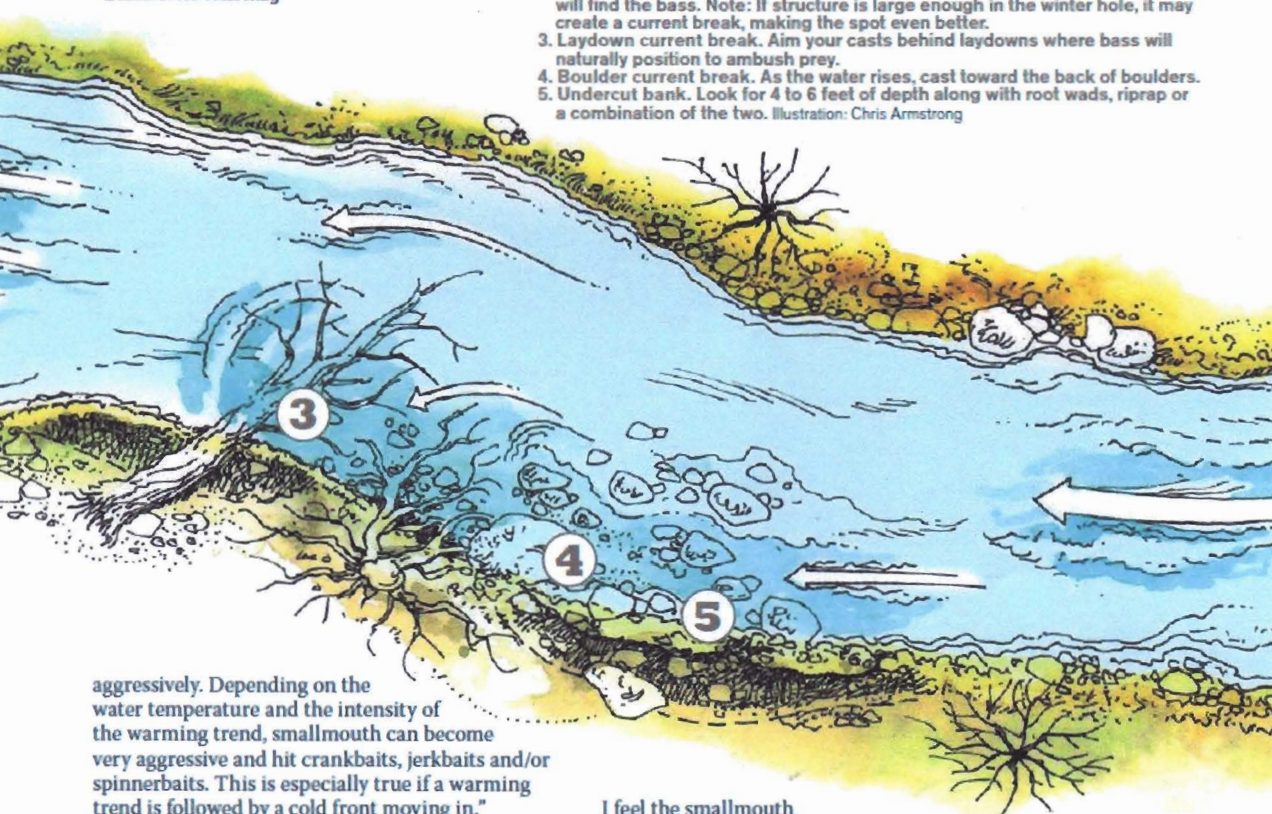
## RISING AIR AND WATER TEMPERATURES

During the coldwater period, Stoudenmire says he believes a slight increase in the air and water temperatures, even if it is just a few degrees, is crucial to success. Indeed, the guide says better fishing results if, for example, the water temperature increases from 41 to 43 degrees than remains stable at, say, 44 degrees.

"A two- to three-day warming trend will almost always make the fish more active," he explains. "During this trend, smallmouth can move to shallow feeding areas adjacent to their wintering holes and feed

#### FOCUS POINTS FOR A RISING RIVER

1. Shallow feeding flat (1 to 3 feet deep) adjacent to winter hole featuring current and broken rock. Fish this area later in the day after the sun has had a chance to warm the water.
2. Winter hole. Structure may include chunk rock, boulders and logjams. Look for at least 6 feet of depth in these midriver areas. If you find food here, you will find the bass. Note: If structure is large enough in the winter hole, it may create a current break, making the spot even better.
3. Laydown current break. Aim your casts behind laydowns where bass will naturally position to ambush prey.
4. Boulder current break. As the water rises, cast toward the back of boulders.
5. Undercut bank. Look for 4 to 6 feet of depth along with root wads, riprap or a combination of the two. Illustration: Chris Armstrong



aggressively. Depending on the water temperature and the intensity of the warming trend, smallmouth can become very aggressive and hit crankbaits, jerkbaits and/or spinnerbaits. This is especially true if a warming trend is followed by a cold front moving in."

#### RISING WATER LEVELS

Another factor that can trigger increased fish activity is a rise in water levels caused by either a recent rain or dam release.

"A rise in the water level can cause smallmouth to do several things, most often related to the intensity of the rise," explains Stoudenmire. "An average and predictable rise, such as from a dam release, can often send the fish into a feeding pattern for a small window of time.

"I like to fish the rise at its very onset, before it is even noticeable. The initial onset of the rise stirs up the river bottom, and the fish feed opportunistically. Smallmouth do not eat as much in the winter as they do during the rest of the year because their metabolism is reduced due to lower water temperatures. Because of this, the peak bite is often short and quick, although aggressive. Once the rise reaches a certain level,

I feel the smallmouth change their focus and become more reactive to the conditions, focusing on holding in the high, cold flows rather than feeding. Sometimes, they will bite again as the release stabilizes and begins to fall."

A more significant rise, such as high water levels caused by rain and/or snow runoff, will often push smallmouth toward the banks where they take cover from the high flows. In the middle of the winter, Stoudenmire never does well in cold, muddy water; however, after a big rise from snow runoff or rain, he will wait until the river clears slightly and then fish. The bass will often be in micro-eddies against banks, taking cover behind laydowns and boulders.

#### WINTER HOLDING AREAS

Stoudenmire concentrates on areas that possess specific depth and cover requirements.

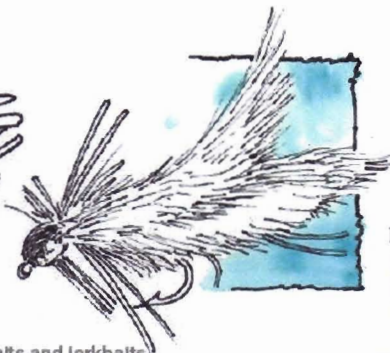
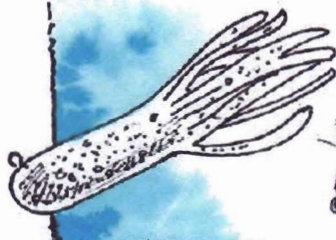
"There are several key ingredients that I look for when targeting winter

(Continued)

#### Rising Choices

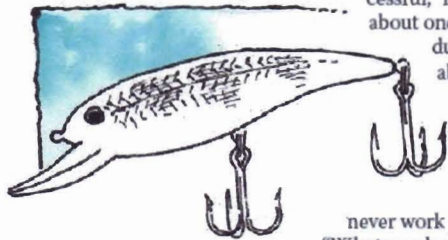
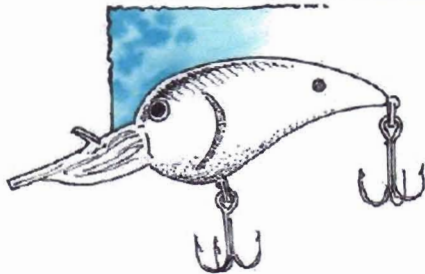
- Bandit Lures**  
www.banditlures.com
- G.Loomis**  
www.gloomis.com
- Gamma Technologies**  
www.gammafishing.com
- Lucky Craft Lures**  
www.luckycraft.com
- Susquehanna Fishing Tackle (Mizmo)**  
www.sftackle.com
- Power Pro Fishing Line**  
www.powerpro.com
- Shimano**  
fish.shimano.com

## Fishing the Rise for Winter Smallmouth



### BAITS FOR THE RISE

Tubes, rabbit hair jigs, crankbaits and jerkbaits should all be tested in cold, rising water.



smallmouth," he says. "The first ingredient is to locate an area that will hold fish in extreme low and high water during the middle of winter. In other words, there needs to be at least 6 feet of depth with good cover. Mid-river dropoffs at 6 to 8 feet of depth in a longer, straighter section of river, with a slight over-current, are some of my favorite places.

"Other areas I like to target are undercut banks in at least 4 feet of water that contain major rock and/or wood cover, such as boulders and submerged logs. Again, I like to target these types of banks in a straighter section of the river.

"Another ingredient I look for is food. There has to be food in or close by the wintering area before it will consistently hold winter smallmouth. Finally, I like a wintering area that is close to a shallow feeding flat or shallow current area. Smallmouth can become aggressive during the winter and move shallow to feed, and having an area to target like those nearby is definitely an advantage."

### BAITS FOR FISHING THE RISE

Stoudenmire relates that he has tried jigs made from silicon, rubber and different varieties of natural hair.

## WINTER SAFETY TIPS FROM BRITT STOUDENMIRE

- Wear a lifejacket at all times.
- Dress appropriately (synthetic fibers, no cotton).
- Have the right boat, such as a raft or dory.
- Avoid sections with major rapids.
- Never fish alone.
- Tell someone when you plan to return.

## CONTACT

For guided trips with Britt Stoudenmire, contact Canoe the New Outfitters & Guide Service at [www.icanoethenew.com](http://www.icanoethenew.com) or 540-921-7438.

But his favorite jig (and his overall go-to bait) is his Undulator rabbit hair jig that he ties himself because of the jig's natural buoyancy and lifelike undulations even when still.

"Presentation is the key, and visualizing what the jig is doing on the bottom greatly increases the odds that this bait will be successful," he explains. "Expect to have about one bite an hour on average during the winter and to lose about half your jigs during any one outing. I start with about a two- to three-minute retrieve and let the fish tell me how fast they want the retrieve. You can never work a jig-and-pig too slowly.

"Whatever lure you choose, it is important to pick one and slowly and repeatedly work an area with it. The term I like to use to describe how I approach a wintering hole is 'dissecting it' — given to me by good friend and coldwater expert Barry Loupe from Saltville, Va. In other words, you want to cover every square inch of a hole before moving on to the next area. Many times, I will spend several hours in one wintering area."

In addition to the jig, Stoudenmire employs several other baits. Perhaps his second favorite is a 4-inch Mizmo Big Boy Tube with a 1/4-ounce to 3/8-ounce inserted jighead fished very similarly to the way he does a jig.

If the fish become reactive, the guide opts for Model 300 or Deep Flat Maxx Bandit crankbaits because both excel at "diving deep and banging the rocks on a slow, crawling retrieve." Finally, if the fish are suspended but looking up and reactive, he will tie on a Lucky Craft jerkbait in the Pointer 78 or 100 model and fish it with short, subtle jerks and long pauses of 10 seconds or more.

## SUMMING UP

How good can wintertime river smallmouth fishing be? The day on the New ends with us catching 13- and 17-inch smallmouth — nice fish to be sure, but not when compared to the nine bronzebacks between 18 and 22 inches that Stoudenmire caught and released earlier in the day.

Bruce Ingram is the author of the following books (cost in parentheses): *The James River Guide* (\$17.25), *The New River Guide* (\$18.25), *Shenandoah/Rappahannock Rivers Guide* (\$18.25), and his new book, *Fly and Spin Fishing for River Smallmouths* (\$19.25). To purchase one, contact Ingram at [be\\_ingram@juno.com](mailto:be_ingram@juno.com).