

Outdoors

Our lives in the
Northwoods

INSECT LIFE

The season of wooly alder aphids

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

REGIONAL—It's the time of year for wooly alder aphids. If you've spent any time in the woods recently, you've probably seen them and didn't know what they were. These tiny, odd insects can be seen floating through the air each fall, looking like bits of whitish or even bluish fuzz. Or, you may have seen them on the branches or trunk of an alder bush, where the

clumps look almost like a stringy white fungus.

For many insects, aphids are easy prey, which means they've had to develop elaborate defenses against being eaten. For wooly alder aphids, the waxy wool that each individual produces make them tougher to eat. At times, especially if they've been sedentary for several days, they produce so much of it that finding the aphid at the center of it all can be tricky.

While these aphids don't fly that

Right: A small clump of wooly alder aphids on an alder branch.

photo by M. Helmberger

much during the summer, come fall some of them begin to move about in search of silver maple trees. There, they'll mate and the females will lay eggs on the tree's bark. The young wooly alder aphids will feed, upon hatching, on newly-grown maple

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Fishing reports

Ely area

Mother Nature is giving anglers a helping hand by dropping water temperatures. The walleye bite has picked up in recent days due to the falling water temps, and fishermen and women are taking full advantage of it. The "eyes" are beginning their fall feeding patterns and have become increasingly active in water depths from 11-20'. Jig and minnow or spinner combinations are racking up good numbers in the 15-20" range. Some folks too are using deep running crank baits with the same amount of success.

Crappies too are feeling the chill and are bunching up in deeper drop-offs and can't resist a lively chub fished near the bottom or suspended just above it. Watch your fish finder to see just where the fish are holding and get ready for some good action.

Pike are putting on the feed bag as well and can be caught using larger crank baits and spoons in a bit deeper water than normal, probably preying on other species holding there.

It's time to get in on the action and get out on the lakes one last time or so before winter freeze up. Caution is required though as water temps drop and winds pick up. Remember to always wear a life jacket during this cold weather period as hypothermia is a real possibility if you should find yourself in the water.

Outdoors briefly

Some area lakes open for whitefish netting Oct. 10

Recreational netting for whitefish and tullibee opens Friday, Oct. 10, on designated lakes in northern Minnesota, according to the Department of Natural Resources.

Only lakes designated as Schedule II will open Saturday. Schedule II lakes in northern St. Louis or Lake counties include: Sand Point*, Rainy*, Namakan*, Kabetogama*, Elbow, and Crane*. Netting will close on Dec. 7.

Opening dates for other area lakes, including Vermilion, Basswood, Bear Island, Fall*, Newton*, Ojibway, Shagawa*, Side, and South Sturgeon, will be announced with at least 48 hours notice in the coming weeks.

Lakes listed above with asterisks are infested with spiny water fleas and/or zebra mussels. Nets used in these waters must be dried for a minimum of 10 days or frozen for two days before using in any other water body.

About 700 people obtain special permits to net for whitefish and tullibee each year. As the water temperature cools, game fish head to deeper water and whitefish and tullibee come to shallow water for fall spawning. Netting is allowed when there is little chance that game fish populations would be harmed by recreational netting in shallow water.



LAKE VERMILION

Cool days, hot fishing

LAKE VERMILION—The word is out— fall fishing is hot on Lake Vermilion.

In years past, Labor Day pretty much marked the end of the fishing season in the North Country and the handful of diehards had even popular lakes like Vermilion more or less to themselves.

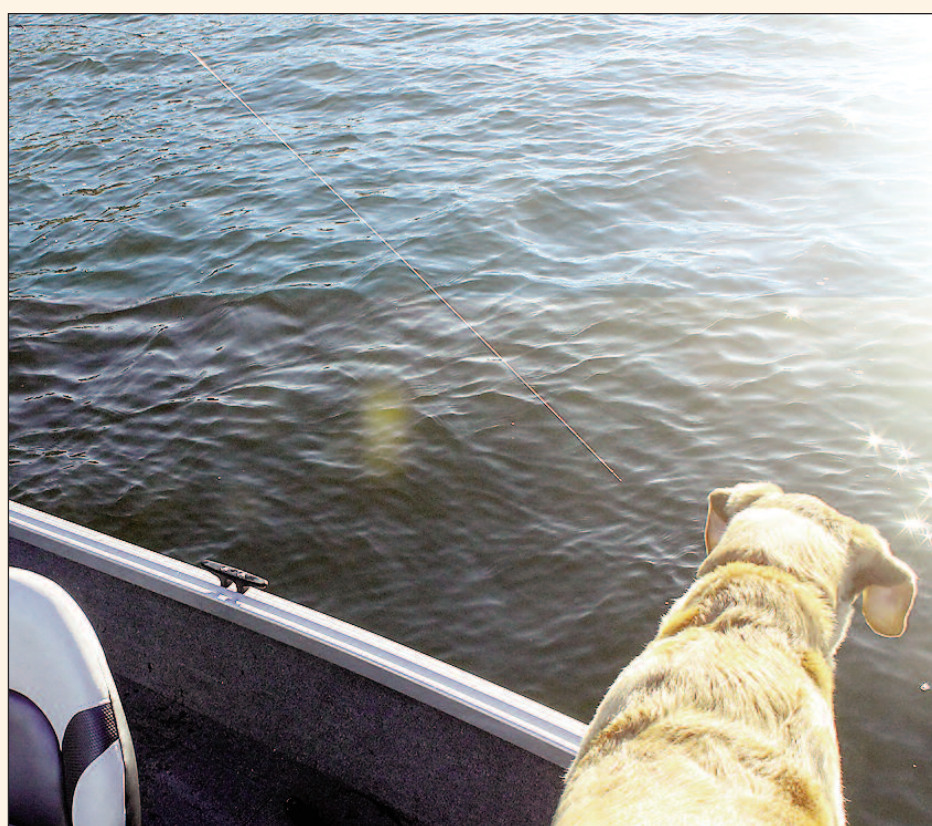
Not anymore. A couple weeks ago, early on a sunny Monday, as the maples were ablaze along the shore and the aspen were just starting their turn to gold, the lake was abuzz with anglers working shorelines for hungry walleye or lobbing giant crank baits across reefs in hopes of provoking a muskie.



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HELMBERGER**

But I was with fishing guide Rob Bryers, who leaves the muskie alone and prefers to avoid the beaten path when he's in search of his favored walleye. So we zipped past the busier honey holes near his Birch Point summer residence and found a lonely spot along the lake's north shore where the walleye had been feeding heavily in recent days. A bald eagle floated above us as we grabbed poles and hooked a couple minnows. We were the only boat in sight and the big bird landed in a nearby white pine where he proceeded to watch over us for the better part of an hour. I suspect the local eagles have figured out that fishermen are a reliable bet for an easy meal.

We dropped minnows into 20 feet of water and quickly discovered the walleye were waiting. One after another, we (actually, mostly Rob, as he pointed out more or less continuously), pulled in walleye,



Top: Fishing guide Rob Bryers holds a nice eater-sized walleye, caught recently on Lake Vermilion. The weather may be cool, but this time of year offers some of the hottest fishing of the season.

Above: Bryers' yellow lab, Skookum, watches the water with interest as his master reels in another walleye.

photos by M. Helmberger

including a half dozen nice eaters that went into the live well. We tossed at least as many more back to grow a little more and we lost another dozen, including some nice ones, that bit but never made it to the boat. And all that action came in just over two hours of fishing.

Duane Williams, Tower area large lake specialist for the Department of Natural Resources, said the reigning theory on why fall fishing tends to be so hot is that the fish are trying to pack on fat reserves for the winter. But Williams said there likely are other factors that are also at play. "Another thing that probably plays a role is that the forage abundance is lower," he said. "The young perch of the year have been mostly consumed by now, he added, which makes an angler's offering that much more attractive. And Williams said anglers have definitely noticed. "It's amazing how much more fall fishing there is. We've seen the increase through creel surveys. Even in October now, there are quite a few boats."

While the fall fishing is great, it was a strong summer on Vermilion as well, said

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Rob. “We’ve hardly had any slow days,” he said. Even on the west end, where an overabundance of big fish was making it tough to catch a few outside the protected slot last year, anglers were catching more keepers, according to guide Doug Knoer.

The good fishing made for a busy year for a lot of the guides who work Lake Vermilion, although Rob was wrapping up his guiding for the season later that week. While growing interest in fall fishing could keep area guides busier later into the season, the unpredictability of the weather this time of year can make advanced planning more difficult. Besides, Rob said, he was looking forward to a bit of a break from a long season out on the water, to spend more time hunting in the spectacular autumn woods. “I’m getting tired of clean-

ing fish,” he said (you can cue the violins here). Bryers, who is active in the Lake Vermilion Guides League, was also more than satisfied with the two big fishing events this remarkably active guides group put on this summer, the annual Take a Kid Fishing day in July, and the Take a Veteran Fishing event in late August. Both events received rave reviews from participants and provided excellent media promotion of the Lake Vermilion fishery. Not that it needs all that much promotion when the fishing is so good. The best news is that there’s still time to wet a line. Some of the best fishing of the year is happening right now. So bundle up, and give the fish one last going over before winter sets in. And put a few filets in the freezer. I know I did...

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leaves, but by midsummer, they’ll move on in search of alders. Not all of the aphids, however, make the fall trek to a silver maple tree. Some will overwinter as nymphs on alder bushes and begin to grow again come spring. In most cases, these aphids never get around to mating at a nearby silver maple. Instead, the non-mating females can produce offspring parthenogenically

(without mating), essentially producing clones of themselves. This allows aphids to reproduce at astonishing speed. Indeed, one researcher has calculated that under good conditions and without predators, a single female aphid could produce 600 billion offspring in a single season. Perhaps that’s why these insects can put so much “fluff” in the air each fall.

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| 09/29 | 81 | 38 | 0.19 | | 09/29 | 78 | 51 | 0.22 | | 09/29 | 77 | 43 | 0.44 | | 09/29 | 48 | 37 | 0.15 | | 09/29 | 79 | 40 | 0.44 | |
| 09/30 | 47 | 37 | 0.00 | | 09/30 | 45 | 39 | 0.00 | | 09/30 | 48 | 41 | 0.00 | | 09/30 | 61 | 39 | 0.00 | | 09/30 | 49 | 39 | 0.00 | |
| 10/01 | 58 | 37 | 0.19 | | 10/01 | 55 | 38 | 0.12 | | 10/01 | 59 | 40 | 0.00 | | 10/01 | 52 | 41 | 0.00 | | 10/01 | 58 | 39 | 0.00 | |
| 10/02 | 52 | 46 | 0.20 | | 10/02 | 49 | 38 | 0.25 | | 10/02 | 54 | 44 | 0.12 | | 10/02 | 55 | 48 | 0.03 | | 10/02 | 53 | 48 | 0.00 | |
| 10/03 | 59 | 43 | 0.00 | | 10/03 | 54 | 48 | 0.40 | | 10/03 | 58 | 44 | 0.21 | | 10/03 | 46 | 34 | 0.00 | | 10/03 | 60 | 34 | 0.33 | |
| 10/04 | 45 | 34 | 0.09 | | 10/04 | 41 | 34 | 0.20 | | 10/04 | 45 | 37 | 0.20 | | 10/04 | 43 | 36 | 0.40 | | 10/04 | 42 | 33 | 0.00 | |
| 10/05 | 42 | 32 | 0.03 | | 10/05 | 41 | 35 | 0.03 | | 10/05 | 43 | 33 | 0.06 | | 10/05 | 48 | 32 | 0.00 | | 10/05 | 44 | 31 | 0.00 | |
| Totals | | | 24.13" | | Totals | | | 22.51" | | Totals | | | 27.59" | | Totals | | | NA | | Totals | | | 23.74" | |

What's in your boathouse?

This week's featured boat is the famous street car boat, Minnehaha, built by the Royal C. Moore Boat Company in 1906. Recognized as a leader, designer, and builder of fine boats, Royal C. Moore put Wayzata, Minnesota, and Lake Minnetonka on the map. Operating around the turn of the century, Moore Boat Works, situated on the shore of Wayzata Bay, was the factory location for the building of numerous boats of all kinds, large and small. In the fall of 1905, Moore Boat Works was awarded the contract by the Twin City Rapid Transit Company to build six identical, yet unique, seventy-foot “express boats.” With their yellow color and design resemblance to their landlocked streetcar “cousins”, they provided frequent, fast, reliable transportation for passengers across the lake for the next twenty years. When ridership declined, they were all scuttled. Minnehaha was sunk in 1926, raised in 1980, and restored in 1996. My younger brother, Barry, actually dived on this boat in 1979, and remembers grab-

bing the top railings. It was all he could see of her as she was deeply mired in mud. Today, she plies Lake Minnetonka again, giving pleasure excursions on the lake.

Bob is the author of What's In Your Boat House? Amazing Stories of Nautical Archeology! If you would like to see your boat featured here, contact him at 218-365-2555, or email him at rcmely@frontiernet.net.

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