

# Hot Fun in the Summer Time



*Try some piscivorous plinking to fill the long days between fall hunting seasons.* By Bob Humphrey

When I leave this world I want to have very few regrets. I know I'll have some; that's unavoidable. But I do my best to eliminate or at least minimize as many as possible. I ticked one of my list a few years ago when I finally decided to take up bowfishing. It's something I'd wanted to try for a long, long time, but I lacked some of the essential components, like proper motivation and more importantly, a mentor. In other words, I was a bit intimidated by the prospect.

Part of that intimidation stemmed from something I once read in an outdoor magazine. It was one of those “This Happened to Me” stories about some fellow who was bowfishing. The last thing he remembered was lining up his shot and releasing the arrow. He woke up some time later, bloodied and lying in the bottom of his skiff. He surmised somehow his line had tangled and when he released the arrow it came back and struck him in the head. That was enough to dissuade me for a while.



*Jeff Miller poles along through the floodplains.*

Then there was all that fancy, specialized equipment. Knowing how fickle archery tackle can be, the idea of attaching a heavy cord to an arrow and then expecting to be able to hit anything seemed counterintuitive.

So, I put it off, but always kept my eyes and ears open for an opportunity. I have several friends who are fisheries biologists for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and I was forever pumping them for information on where I might find some bowfishing opportunities. As the sport is virtually unknown in my home state, the best they could do was steer me toward waters that held my intended quarry - carp.

The final piece fell into place when I found a mentor, Jeff Miller who is a product designer for L.L. Bean, and an experienced bowfisher. And, he has a boat. He was as eager to welcome me into the small fraternity as I was to join it.

**Sidebar: Bowfishing Basics** - a primer on gear you need to get started.

Bow - compound or recurve with a peak weight around 40 - 50 pounds.

Arrows - un-fletched fiberglass or carbon shafts of 30-plus inches.

Fishing Heads - screw-on heads with some type of barb or toggle.

Reel - oversized closed-face spinning reel with heavy (40-50-pound) mono, or bucket and crank with Dacron line.

Rest - Some type of simple, open shelf

Sight - (optional) simple, single pin

Polarized Sunglasses - to cut the glare and protect your eyes.

Push pole and a boat, or a friend with a boat.

Trepidations about equipment were put largely to rest when I did a little in-depth research at last year's Archery Trade Association trade show. The folks at Darton introduced me to their Aquaforce, a bow designed specifically for fishing (see sidebar).



*I had my bow set up and ready to fish in less than 30 minutes.*

You don't need a fishing-specific bow, but it made me a lot more comfortable with the whole prospect. Most any old bow will do. In fact, it's a great use for your once favorite, but now "out-dated" and neglected hunting bow. Preferably, you want something with lighter poundage - peak weight around 40 or 50, which you can probably achieve by dropping the poundage on that old dust collector.

More important than the bow are the accessories. For the novice, I highly recommend starting with a basic kit, consisting of a reel, rest, arrows and fishing heads. Top end reels are essentially oversized closed-face fishing reels. Simpler ones consist of little more than a plastic jar with a crank line retriever. The rest is little more than a shelf, and arrows are un-fletched fiberglass or carbon shafts. The heads typically have some type of moveable barbs.

## Practice

After setting up my bow I was still fairly anxious about the prospect of propelling a massive (relatively speaking) un-fletched missile encumbered with heavy fishing line with any hope of actually hitting the target. That anxiety was assuaged somewhat when I learned most shots are inside 15 feet.

The test firing occurred in my back yard, shooting at milk jugs off the deck. The first shots went off almost without a hitch, figuratively and literally. The rig worked fine. I just couldn't hit where I was aiming.

Fishing bows typically lack sights, which created a problem for me. I'm a compound shooter; always have been. That left me with two options, learn to shoot instinctively, or cheat. I chose the latter, and attached an old Carolina Foxfire single pin sight. After a couple shots for adjustment, I was nailing the jug consistently. I was ready for the real thing.

### Sidebar: Darton Aquaforce

The Darton Aquaforce reaches its peak weight (adjustable 40# - 55#) early without strain, and then lets down to a comfortable weight (20# - 27#) allowing the shooter to complete the draw cycle (23" - 29 1/2") with minimum effort, and release the string anytime during the draw cycle. Its molded cams and self bearing and stainless steel axles are designed to withstand wet conditions. The Aquaforce package comes with an AMS Retriever Pro Combo Kit, which includes the AMS Retriever Pro reel with Hi Vis Orange 200# braided dacron line and Fish Hook Arrow Rest, AMS Wave rest and two AMS fiberglass arrows with AMS Safety Slides and Long Barb Piranha Points.

## Let's Go Fishing

Fishing methods vary with conditions and quarry. We were after carp that feed in the grassy shallows along major rivers. This involved simply poling along the floodplain and watching for sign or fish. Sometimes it was subtle, like moving grass or clouds of mud stirred up by the feeding fish. Other times we'd spot the fish, suspended in the shallow water. Care was taken to avoid any sudden movement or loud noises as we neared the fish.

As I was the greenhorn, Jeff was gracious enough to take the pole and allow me the first shot. When we reached the first shallow Jeff cut the motor and began poling.

The next task was obtaining a search image. Jeff had it, and from the stern was picking up fish long before I spotted them, mostly after they'd spooked. Once I spotted my first fish I was locked in, and it was game on.

That's when I learned about refraction (see sidebar). I knew you have to aim low, but didn't know just how low until I shot over the back of my first carp, and my second, and third. Even that was fun as each miss was followed by shouts, laughs and some good-natured ribbing. This wasn't like deer hunting, where a miss might mean the end of your hunting day. We simply moved on through the target-rich environment in search of the next potential victim.

I won't say how many shots it took to finally get it right. I will say when it happened, it felt good from the moment of release. And when line started peeling off my reel the fish wasn't the only thing hooked.



### Sidebar: Refraction Index

Refraction is the bending of light when it enters a different medium, where its speed is different. The amount of refraction varies with the medium. The refraction index of water is  $\frac{4}{3}$ , meaning light travels  $\frac{3}{4}$  as fast in water as in a vacuum. As a result, submerged objects appear shallower than they are; so you have to aim below your target. How low to aim varies with depth and distance, and the best way to learn is to practice.



In many ways it was the antithesis of bowhunting I'm used to. Often there's no closed season so you can pick your days, the best being warm, sunny days with little or no wind. There's no need for meticulous concerns about camo and scent control. Instead of a Scent-Lok suit and rubber boots I was garbed in jeans, a t-shirt and sandals. And there's no sitting still and quiet for long hours waiting for something to happen.

Even better, it's a team effort. You need at least two people, one to pole and one to shoot. If your boat is properly equipped you can have multiple shooters, which adds a note of competition to the proceedings. And when the fish are found, it's a whole lot of good, clean redneck fun.



It's also a great way to fill the void between seasons and keep your shooting skills and muscles honed. I'm glad I finally crossed this one off my bucket list. However, I do regret not getting into the sport a lot sooner. Ah well; better late than never.

