Angler Blog

February 2013

FIZZ, FIZZ, OH WHAT A RELIEF IT IS…

By Martha Goodfellow, South Carolina Pro Angler
February 14, 2013

Ever place a healthy bass in your livewell and shortly after see them lying on their side or upside down, struggling to submerge, their belly appearing to be swollen? These are symptoms that a bass can suffer when they experience an "over-inflated swim bladder" (a.k.a. "barotrauma" or hyperbuoyancy). It's typically caused when a fish is caught from deep water, or sometimes even as shallow as 8 feet if they've recently come from deeper water.

A bass' swim bladder allows it to control its buoyancy. Under normal conditions, their swim bladder will naturally adjust to various depths. The outcome is called "neutral buoyancy." In deeper water, the air in the bladder is compressed by water pressure. This is the same affect that many of us feel in our ears when we swim to the bottom in the deep end of a pool.

When a hooked fish is quickly reeled to the surface, their air bladder hasn't had the time it needs to reach neutral buoyancy and might develop barotrauma. Placed and left untreated in a livewell, a fish with barotrauma will struggle to submerge itself and become exhausted. On their own, a bass will have difficulty trying to recover from an over-inflated swim bladder. When later released, the bass might not be able to get back below the water surface. It might struggle on the surface, tire and stress itself, and could become a predator's meal.

You can help …. making sure that your fish will be around to grow and be caught another day!

In writing this article, my goal is to give you useable information that you can pair with having someone show you how to treat a fish with barotrauma. Or, if you're the one that is showing someone how, you can share this information to use as a reference.

THERE ARE FOUR WAYS TO DEAL OR TREAT BAROTRAUMA:

1. **Do nothing** ~ This is an option. If "fizzing" is done improperly, there is a risk of causing damage to internal organs. If you are a "catch and release" angler, by promptly releasing the bass, the fish will usually go to the correct depth to manage the air bladder and no treatment is necessary.
2. **Mouth fizzing** ~ A good way but, considered riskier for untrained individuals to do. There are a lot of vital organs, like the rete mirabile organ. If punctured you can cause excessive bleeding.
3. **Deep water release**, using release cages ~ For the average tournament or angler, this is not practical.
4. **Side Fizzing** ~ After my research, the recommended choice was the "side fizzing" method. The studies showed that "side fizzing" had a higher survival rate, by 14%.

Recommended Videos:

- **"Splash, Splash! Fizz, Fizz!"** Scientists test cures for over inflated bass. By Dyanne Fry Cortez, available on the Texas Parks and Wildlife site (based on a two year study by the Inland Fisheries Division of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).
  http://www.tpwmagazine.com/archive/2011/aug/scout1_bassfizzing/
- **"Fizzing A Bass"** An exclusive HD video where Doug Hannon teaches you how to fizz a bass.
  http://www.bassresource.com/bass-fishing-videos/how-to-fizz-a-bass.html
- This video is an example of "mouth fizzing" and shows someone using a "Bends Mender" needle.
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyoe0jrZWvQ

Martha Goodfellow
South Carolina Pro Angler

If you would like to learn more about Martha Goodfellow, visit her web site:
GoodFishin.weebly.com

Her "Angler Highlight" is available on the Lady Bass Anglers web site:
click here to visit link

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The following are Guides that you can print to use as a reference:

"Mouth Fizzing" Guide

Grip the bass' lower jaw.

Locate area between the "crusher teeth" (a.k.a. "tongs" inside fish's mouth)

Insert 18 gauge needle between the crusher teeth.

Important that you insert in the proper area or the fish will bleed excessively.

With bass underwater, you will see the air coming out.

Be careful to not let too much air out.

Let the bass equalize itself.

Do not squeeze the bass.

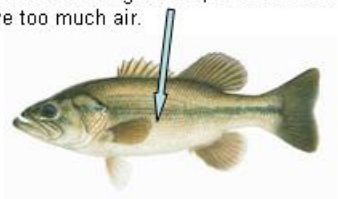
"Side Fizzing" Guide

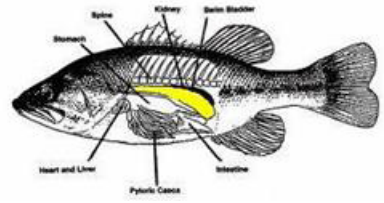
Need an 18 gauge needle

With the needle's flat side down,  against the bass – about 2 or 3 scales from the side fin (with your hand laying it flat), insert the needle horizontally, just under the skin, insert needle

Move needle vertically (about 90 degrees) and insert straight down into the fish – about ½" to 1". Let the fish be the guide to how much air to release – with fish floating next to your hand, when you feel fish start to go down, remove needle.

Do not remove too much air.





You can use an 18 gauge hypodermic needle, with the "plunger end" removed, so the air can escape. Or, there are companies that make a needle specifically for this purpose. The Bends Mender available at Tackle Warehouse ($4) or Team Marine Pro Fizz FZ-1 Fizzing Tool available at Bass Pro Shops ($30), are a couple that I could find. Be sure to safely store whatever needle you choose.

A general guide of how much air to release is ~ For a bass under three pounds, release air for three to five seconds. For a bass three pounds and over, release air for five to eight seconds.

To avoid letting out too much air, it is best to "let the fish let you know." You can do this by removing the air while the fish is under water. When side fizzing, rest your hand on top of the bass while you release the excess air. When you feel the bass lose some buoyancy and the bass stops pressing on your hand, you should stop fizzing. Releasing too much air could cause the fish to lose buoyancy and the bass will sink uncontrollably to the bottom.

Before you "stick the fish," I recommend you check to make sure that the needle is not clogged, by blowing air through it. If when trying to fizz a bass you notice there is no air coming out of the needle, be sure to check that the needle is not clogged. You can blow into the needle to try to remove the blockage or use a piece of 20-pound mono line inserted into the needle. Two recommendations: 1) have a spare needle and 2) when inserting the needle, be sure to insert under the scale.

I sincerely submit this information in hopes that more anglers will be able to treat fish with barotrauma safely and successfully so that our bass population can grow in numbers and size. Good fishing!