

# Whites at Night

## Amazing Night Fishing for Whitefish

By Russ Gabel

I glanced at my watch as I made my way along the deserted lakeside road. It was already 7:30pm, so it had been dark for over 90 minutes. As I passed empty beach parking lots, my anticipation grew. Rumor had it that a very strong run of whitefish had made its way from the cold waters of Lake Michigan into the spawning grounds of the Muskegon Channel. Fishing was supposed to be hot, and fishermen were catching their limits in just a few hours. Hopefully the combination of darkness and cold temperatures would keep the crowds down, and I would have a good stretch of boardwalk all to myself.

My delusion of privacy quickly faded as I rounded the corner and pulled into the crowded Silversides Submarine parking lot. My first observation was that there were no less than thirty snowsuit-clad fishermen crowded shoulder to shoulder along the boardwalk. My second observation was that nets were swinging fish onto the sidewalk and the bite was on. I hustled out of the car, grabbed my gear, found an open spot, and started jigging my #6 Swedish Pimple. My first fish was on in a matter of moments. I was stunned at how powerfully the whitefish fought once hooked. Its strong and determined runs rivaled fish twice its size.

Reluctantly, the fish came to net and eventually found its way into my cooler. Over the next two hours, over a dozen whitefish would take the trip from the water to my net. Some were body-hooked and had to be released, but at the end of the night 6 fish came home with me. This experience was a perfect introduction for me to the world of night time whitefish.

Around Thanksgiving, when most outdoorsmen have their minds on deer hunting, massive schools of whitefish make their move. They gather around Lake Michigan river mouths for a 4-6 week spawning run. During daylight hours, they can be found in the deeper waters surrounding the piers and in the middle of the river channels. When nighttime comes, however, they move up into the shallows of the channel to spawn. It's common to see whitefish cruising in just a foot of water as they search for spawning companions. These schools are dense and massive, making for a perfect fishing opportunity. Daylight fishing methods usually involve fishing with a single salmon egg on a 3-way rig. Boil the egg so it will stay on the hook, then use food dye (red or orange) to give it an attractive color. Nighttime, however, is when the fishing gets really interesting. Choose a 1/4-1/2 oz. jigging spoon with a glow finish. A Swedish Pimple in a size 4 or 6 seemed to be a common choice, and with a little glow-tape added, you have the perfect lure. Keep a small flashlight handy to charge up your glow lure, and you're ready to rock. You can cast this lure out, then retrieve it using a sharp jigging action, with pauses to allow the spoon to settle back to the bottom. You can also simply drop the lure straight down along the sea wall, then use sharp jigging motions to attract interested fish. Strikes are solid, so there's no guessing when a whitefish is on your line. Make sure to have a net with a handle at least 8 feet long to reach the water below, and consider taping a small flashlight halfway up the net handle to illuminate your hooked fish. You'll need to be particular about where your fish are hooked. Many of the whitefish are body-hooked, and must be released. Be diligent about this, as there are frequent visits from the DNR at this sight. Most tackle shops will tell you that if a fish is hooked anywhere from the gills to the mouth, it's a keeper fish. On good nights, you can fill your 12-fish limit in just a few hours.



#6 Swedish Pimple with glow tape

I don't know how I've lived in Grand Haven for over 13 years and had never heard of this awesome fishing experience. It was some of the most enjoyable fishing I've had all year. From salty old fishermen, to families with young children, this fishing crowd was one of the most friendly and helpful that I've every had the privilege of mixing with. Of course, having a chance to send some of the best eating freshwater fish to my freezer was definitely a plus as well. Though most fishermen are packing up their fishing rods, whitefish madness is waiting for those willing to brave the cold and the crowds. Grab your snowsuit and your gear, and get out there while this brief run is still going strong.



A table-full of awesome whitefish



A mudpuppy that hit our jigging spoon