



Kayak anglers drift to still waters

CHATTING WITH ROBERTO BRIONES, WHO STARTED KAYAK ANGLERS ASSOCIATION OF THE OUTAOUAIS

It takes only a few minutes to discover why kayak angling is exploding in popularity.

You dip your paddle into the water and slide almost silently onto a quiet, shallow river flat to begin casting. The line tightens, slices through the water across the bow and moments later you hold the scrappy, chunky fish which inhaled your spinner and jig combo.

For me, that “quiet, shallow river flat” was along the Rideau River not far south of downtown Ottawa. It was early May. The fish was a black crappie (most of the more-sought-after species were out of season).

Hooked. Not the fish. Me. Along with many, many others.

Folks like Roberto Briones, who recently formed the Kayak Anglers Association of the Outaouais. In two months, its Facebook group swelled to about 100 members ... and is still growing.

“First of all it’s a very ecofriendly way of fishing,” says Briones, who joined the kayak fishing crowd three years ago. “It’s an affordable way of fishing, and I love doing it. I switched from a bass boat to a kayak and I don’t think I am ever going back.

“You don’t have to worry about boat launches, launching fees – gas for the boat or a towing vehicle.”

This sudden popularity has created a stampede of companies moving to fill the specialized needs in the

wake of all those kayaks. From the boats themselves (both sit-on-top and sit-in styles) to paddles, electronics and a myriad of accessories for fishing decks and gear racks, outdoors stores and paddle shops are paying lots of attention to kayak anglers.

Obviously, the biggest decision you’ll face is the kayak itself. Most anglers opt for “sit-on-top” ‘yaks which generally offer wider beams (more stability), easier access, more storage area and the ability to stand up while casting or scouting the water.

A “sit-in” kayak is generally faster, allowing you to cover more water with less effort. They offer more protection from the elements and splashing water – a big asset if you want to extend your fishing from early spring to late fall. They also double as a great touring boat if it won’t always be used for fishing.

Jackson, Wilderness Systems, Old Town and Pelican offer models at prices ranging from about \$600 to well over \$2,000. If you opt for a sit-in model, the respected Canadian firm Clearwater Designs (it’s just outside Belleville) offers a popular model with a fishing package.

Like any substantial purchase, this one rewards time spent researching, reading customer reviews and “try before you buy.”

“Definitely,” says Briones. “You don’t want to end up spending \$1,500 or \$2,000 on a kayak that you won’t feel comfortable fishing out of.” Many smaller stores



DON WILCOX



and paddle shops along waterways allow you to test ride a few of the kayaks (failing that, find a boat rental place and take one for a spin). If you can, test-paddle several before buying.

In particular, test the seat comfort – which can be an issue with cheaper boats – and how you feel in the cockpit. Then consider how much it weighs. Will you carry it into remote locations, or take it by trailer to launch ramps?

As for options, do you want rod holders, gear storage, a rudder, anchor assembly, paddle rest, racks for holding electronics, cameras, a net, etc.? Consider your “must-have” features, then determine if they’re built-in or if you must buy and add them yourself. “Dry bags” are a good idea for phone, camera and wallet.

Then come the critical purchases with your ‘yak, a paddle and a PFD (life jacket).

“Get the best paddle that you can afford,” Briones says, “because that means it’s going to be a light paddle, better made and it will allow you to enjoy longer days on the water.” Heavier paddles lead to neck or shoulder pain.

As to safety, bulky PFDs that work fine in a larger boat or canoe might be restrictive in a kayak. So, if you already have a life jacket, you might want a different model for kayaking.

Fishing kayaks are stable, but it’s important to know how to get out if it tips – particularly a sit-in model. Take a course, then practise once you’re comfortable with the technique. And learn how to re-enter the boat and practise that manoeuvre too. If you aren’t comfortable doing it, capsizing can lead to disaster if you are stressed, cold or unnerved.

Once you’ve tested the craft and paid your money, you’ll enter a world where previously inaccessible waters flow effortlessly under your bow in shallow bays, small rivers and creeks, out-of-the-way lakes and ponds. It’s more peaceful and relaxing, great for physical fitness. And a near-silent approach gets you closer to wildlife, a bonus for photography.

Briones discovered another benefit. “You become a better angler, because of the limited area you can cover. So, it forces you to work on your techniques to catch more fish.”

The Kayak Anglers Association of the Outaouais is on Facebook, at www.kaao.ca on the web or [kaao.ca](#) on Instagram. 🐟



AVOID TICKS AND LYME DISEASE



By Don Wilcox

An increase in cases of Lyme disease in Ontario this year means outdoors enthusiasts should beware.

A short, warmer winter resulted in a bumper crop of ticks. That means more people – and animals – will come into contact with the bugs which can transmit the potentially debilitating disease.

“Every year it fluctuates based primarily on the weather,” said Ottawa public health inspector Ann Stanton-Loucks. “This year we are seeing more.”

The black-legged tick (deer tick) is the culprit which spreads the disease. They love leaf litter on deciduous forest floor, brushy areas and tall grasses.

Loucks recommends simple protective measures:

- Use bug repellents containing DEET
- Stay in the centre of marked trails where possible
- Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts
- Tuck pants into socks, use duct tape around boot tops and cover shoe eyelets
- Thoroughly wipe yourself; check your entire body after outdoor activities

Pets can easily transport ticks into your home. Though cats can’t get Lyme disease, dogs can, so ask your vet about preventive treatments.

If a tick bites you, remove it gently using tweezers and keep it for analysis by medical staff. It usually takes 24 hours (or more) to transmit the disease, and not all deer ticks are infected. Contact your public health unit, or your doctor.

If you develop a bullseye-looking skin pattern or patchy rash, fever, headache, joint or muscle pain, see your doctor.

“People don’t need to panic if they are out in the bush” Stanton-Loucks said. “Just make this part of your routine.”

For more, visit health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/disease/lyme.aspx 🐞

