

My friend Jason King gave me an interesting fishing report a while back, one which emphasized the negative impact unnatural scents can have on the catching of fish. Jason inadvertently executed an experiment related to the concept, with startling and obvious results.

He was sightcasting reds from his boat in water about a foot deep next to an old oil-field channel, using MirrOlure Provoker soft plastics rigged on sixteenth-ounce jigheads. The first five or six fish he saw, he caught easily. The pesky, aggressive carp would readily chase down his worm, even when his cast was not as precise as intended.

In the clear water, the fish willingly moved several feet to snatch the plastics, taking them in fully, obviously in a feeding mood. After keeping a couple to eat, Jason was mostly amusing himself and passing the time, having experienced a slow bite while trout fishing, and having difficulty finding any of the preferred species in the shallows while running around looking.

At one point, he lost track of his pod of fish on the edge of the little ditch, and while searching for them, realized the sun was starting to burn some color onto his skin. So he applied some sunscreen to prevent further damage, then began looking for the prowling reds again.

Soon, he spotted one coming out of the depths onto the sandy ridge next to the channel. As he'd done before, he cast his worm a few feet beyond the path of the fish, intending to reel it into the red's field of vision. However, something radically different happened on this occasion. Before Jason could begin moving the lure toward the fish's path, the red turned quickly and bolted away, leaving a large swirl and muddy boil!

Thinking little of it, assuming the fish was simply in a different mood than the others, Jason located another one and repeated the drill. Again, the fish darted away from the point where the lure splashed down! Still not convinced the event held significance, Jason tried another red, which did the exact same thing.

Realizing "the third time's the charm", he paused to consider what was happening. Why were the fish suddenly reacting so negatively, actively avoiding the lure, rather than chasing it down? Then it dawned on him--he'd applied the sunscreen, neglected to wash his hands, then touched his lure, undoubtedly transferring some of the lotion onto the soft plastic. Reaching over the gunwale, he plunged his hands into the muddy, grassy bottom and scrubbed the offending lotion off of them. He also replaced the soft plastic with a fresh one. After doing so, he caught several more reds, which began reacting to the lures as they had prior to the "sunscreen experiment".

The anecdote started me thinking about what I do every morning on the way to the boat ramp--handling gas pumps, oil cans, the rusty chain and other stuff on my trailer, etc...also, the fact I apply sunscreen religiously before the first wade every day.

All these activities likely cause my hands to become covered in unnatural, potentially fish-offensive scents. If I then touch my lure, those scents will be transferred onto it. Accordingly, it occurs to me I should make a habit of "cleaning" my hands once I park the boat at the first wading spot, after I apply sunscreen. I should also clean them again every time I apply sunscreen thereafter. I intend to make a point of doing so in the future, by reaching into the water and grabbing some mud or sand and rubbing it between my palms if possible. If not, I'll grab some strands of grass and use them the same way. If no mud, grass or sand is available, I'll at least vigorously wash my hands off in the water, in attempt to remove any offensive scent, so it can't be transferred to my lure. All of this I'll do BEFORE I touch my lure.

Catching fish on lures is difficult enough; tossing lures with offensive scents at the fish is foolish. Many people recognize and try to maximize the positive effects of attractive scents; fewer consider and try to eliminate the potential negative effects of unnatural scents. Taking every precaution possible to reduce the transference of unnatural scents onto lures is a wise and

necessary step in the quest for consistency.