

# Branson's Other Nightlife

**A**utumn is special for a lot of reasons. For many, it's the consistently cool nights after a long hot summer. For others, it's the oranges, reds and yellows of the forest. And of course, everyone likes jack-o-lanterns and fresh apple cider. But for trout fishermen, autumn means something entirely different — *IT'S GIANT BROWN TROUT TIME.*

The Ozarks of Missouri and Arkansas boasts a great many brown trout fisheries, but the tailwaters (rivers that spring from the bottom of deep-water dams) receive true acclaim as trophy trout factories. In fact, the White River system of tailwater trout fisheries is known throughout the world. Lake Taneycomo is the first link in the White River chain, making Branson, MO, an even more tempting destination for your autumn getaway. So, trout fishermen get ready!

Brown trout are autumn spawners, and with a little planning, you can hit the brown trout spawning run with fantastic results. But don't expect that you can simply show up, throw out some bait and hook into a whopper. Brownies are notorious for their twitchy behavior, and the first step to defeating the twitchiness is to understand it.

Smaller brown trout act very much like their more common cousin, the rainbow trout. They tend to inhabit the same types of water, and they spend most of their time feeding on drifting insects and crustaceans. They usually feed opportunistically, although they can occasionally be infuriatingly picky. But those aren't the fish you're targeting in the fall. You're looking for lunkers, and lunkers act a bit differently.

Sexually mature brown trout gradually transform into hunters and begin to eat fewer and fewer drifting bugs, although they'll never fully quit their insect-eating ways. Once the new feeding habits take hold, they'll also begin hanging out in new types of water. They'll spend most of their time in resting areas, which tend to be ugly slack-looking waters with silty bottoms. Then four or five times a day, their stomachs will start to rumble, and they'll begin moving upstream toward deeper water in search of some prey. As they move up, they'll feed on whatever happens to present itself, but a truly big

brown will prefer the biggest bite of food he can get — minnows, sculpins, sunfish, and even small suckers and trout are targets. Once that lunker's belly is full, he'll start drifting back into his favorite resting spot. So, puzzle-piece #1: fish big baits! To maintain their enormous weight, they need the maximum number of calories per bite, so you should choose flies and lures that simply seem "too big."

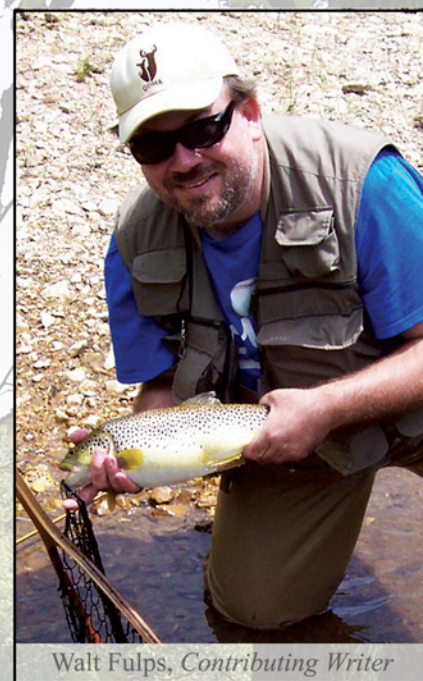
But if you really want a shot at the biggest fish in the river, you have to reverse-engineer their most successful behavior. How the heck did they survive long enough to grow into that 3-foot long leviathan? The simple answer is night feeding.

Every fish has a lateral line that runs the length of his body, terminating in the inner ear. It's a very nifty device. It allows the fish to feel his surroundings, including potential prey. In fact, a trout's sonar-like distant touch ability is so acute, they can sense something as small as a grain of sand drifting in the current toward them. So, tracking down a 6-inch sucker fish is child's play — even in the dark. So what's so special about a fish that learns to successfully feed at night? Well, he's simply not going to be caught by any fisherman that prefers fish-



*Holding this Giant is Leonard Keeney, the owner of Taneycomo Nights Guide Service, the only Lake Taneycomo guide that guides exclusively at night.*

ing during daylight hours, which is most of them. That's likely the top reason those fish



*Walt Fulps, Contributing Writer*

grow to such monstrous sizes. So, puzzle-piece #2: fish in the dark! You might want to plan a daylight-scouting trip, since reading the water is a bit difficult when you can't see. But the bulk of your time on the water should be nighttime.

*But why autumn, you ask? Hormones!* When spawning season comes around, those big aggressive male trout add a new quality to their personality — stupidity. You can catch big monster brown trout year 'round on Ozarks tailwater fisheries, but if you can concentrate your efforts during a time of year when trophy fish are behaving recklessly, why wouldn't you?

If all the other amenities that Branson offers haven't been enough for you to plan a trip, then perhaps a chance to catch some enormous nocturnal brown trout will convince you to add an autumn Branson trip to your list of future vacations. Spend your days golfing or playing at Silver Dollar City with the kids, but hit Taneycomo as soon as the sun goes down for some ridiculous fun. Stripping in great big, and I do mean BIG, flies or lures in those prime brown trout hunting grounds at night will give you an experience you'll never forget. But take a camera — your friends won't believe you without proof.

Walt Fulps is a fly-fishing guide as well as the owner of Trout Hunter Fly Fishing School. He can be reached through his website at [www.MissouriTroutHunter.com](http://www.MissouriTroutHunter.com).