

The Real Scoop on Moon Phases

by Joe Bucher

Full Moon or Dark Moon? Major and minor solunar periods? Which is best? Does any of this moon mumbo jumbo make any real sense nor does it actually work? These are legitimate questions asked by thousands of anglers each year, and they deserve concrete answers backed up by some bona fide data. Yet as much as pro anglers endorse the effectiveness of moon charts and outdoor publications of every niche' continue to print them, rarely does either source validate these solunar claims with data.

It's not hard to find a solunar table of some kind. Nearly every fishing publication today publishes some kind of monthly solunar table, moon chart, activity calendar, action graph, or other similar version. All of these tables, charts, and calendars claim to predict daily feeding activity of fish with accordance to moon and solar influences. Like so many other anglers, rarely can we find any consistent correlation with most of these references.

Finally, back in 1976, when I got into the fishing guide business full time, I really made it a point to compare my fishing catches to a number of popular solunar charts. Once I started logging my catches on a daily basis I developed a good data base. This finally put me in a position to compare hundreds of muskies, and thousands of bass and walleyes on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis to any printed solar/lunar reference. One of my key entries was TIME of day. I figured a daily entry of fish activity would finally give me a mound of fishing data to compare with the various solar/lunar references on a given day to day basis. What followed convinced me that certain solar/lunar criteria simply had very little or no daily influence.

Basically, I became so frustrated and disappointed with the lack of any real consistent correlation to most of the popular magazine charts today that I gave up on them completely. They simply did NOT work. I actually caught far more fish when they weren't so suppose to bite. And when good fish and game activity did coincide, which was usually less than 10% of the time, it was plainly obvious that it actually had much more to do with local weather changes than any predicted major or minor solar/lunar period.

You would have thought that my accumulated research would have cured me from ever looking at a solunar chart again, but it did just the opposite. Why? Because I ended up discovering a certain solar/lunar influence that really did work. In fact, it worked so well that it was hard to believe at first. My daily fishing logs had surely disputed the commonly accepted correlations, but they just as surely pointed to indisputable evidence that a "certain" solar/lunar factor was really important.

Yes, I had flipped 180 degrees on the entire solar/lunar deal. I went from totally disbelieving to being totally convinced. In fact, I eventually got to the point where I myself began to predict the most probable daily, monthly, and even yearly times when the biggest fish were most apt to bite. And what's even more incredible was that I was right almost every single time. But perhaps what was even more unbelievable to me was that everyone else had missed this simple but really absolutely TRUE key.

The real secret to solar/lunar influences on a daily basis was nothing more than knowing when the sun and moon rose and set on a 24 hour basis. That's right, it was simply a matter of knowing, to the minute, when the sun came up and went down, and when the moon came up and went down each and every day. My 21 year old fishing log revealed without question that more fish were active during a 90 minute window surrounding each one of these four daily influences.

Now, I realize this sounds overly obvious, but I told you it would. Most of the solar/lunar charts, tables, and graphs you see depicted in today's publications do NOT reveal nor coincide with these four vital factors: 1) sun rise, 2) sun set, 3) moon rise, and 4) moon set. Yet it doesn't take an astrologist to figure out how important the rise and set of both the sun and moon has to be.

It's certainly no secret that feeding movements of both fish and game have been traditionally accepted as key during dawn and dusk -- this correlates with sun rise and sun set. Moon rise and set is a bit more tricky to key in on though since they can often occur at mid day or mid night. Overcast weather can also make it impossible to see a moon rise or set, and of course a dark/new moon is not visible to begin with. This information is readily available in several national weather publications, but your best bet is to take a look around this website for Joe Bucher's Moon Secrets.

The other "super secret" my logs revealed was the predictable frequency of big fish catches during the peak moon phases of full moon and new moon. Specifically, a lot more big muskies, walleyes, and bass were taken right on the actual scheduled calendar day of both the full or new (dark) moon peak, and continued for a three to five day stretch afterwards. In other words, if the full moon peak is on June 10th, June 10 thru 15 have great potential for trophies. Backing up a bit, the four daily factors previously discussed (the rise and set of both the sun and moon) inside each one of these predictable monthly moon peaks (four days on the back side of the full or new moon) further nails it down. In other words, you want to plan your fishing trips to hit the peak of the full or new moon. Then you want to be fishing on your favorite big fish spots during the daily rise and set of both the sun and moon.

Finally, my logs revealed a third factor that really adds impact to this entire solunar secret. That unpredictable third influence is local weather. Whenever a local weather change coincides with the daily rise or set of either the sun or moon, during a peak monthly moon period, BIG things happen in bunches. BIG things meaning BIG FISH. For example, give me a severe summer T-storm right at sunset, and just before moon set during the new moon period and it's almost a sure bet that I'm going to bag a big musky or the year's biggest catch of lunker walleyes. Or just as good -- put me on a steep rocky shoreline with some spawning ciscoes right at the start of a snow storm in the late fall just after sunrise and right before moon set during a full moon period. Big muskies, big pike, big walleyes, and big lakers will be snappin'.

Could there be a fourth factor? Absolutely. In fact, there might even be a 5th or 6th. However, an easy-to-detect 4th factor of influence that adds even more impact to an already good situation is a change in the photoperiod, or laymen's terms -- a change in season. Photoperiodism is actually the measured ratio of daylight to darkness. The most drastic changes in the photoperiod occur in the spring and fall, but mini-differences are detected inside all seasons which are quickly detected thru their eyes and transmitted to their pituitary gland. The responses to these changes in

the photoperiod trigger sexual responses such as reproduction and the development of eggs. This, in turn, also triggers increased movement and feeding binges by normally less active trophy fish.

I do realize how controversial my comments on solunar table validity may seem to some, but the facts speak for themselves. My data clearly points to sun rise, sun set, moon rise and moon set as The most important factors. The simple rise and set of both the sun and moon has far more impact than any other daily sun or moon position. That is, bar none, the single most important daily triggering factor of both fish and game.

Monthly peaks in both the full and new moon are a second factor definitely worth considering. When fish of all sizes are feeding infrequently due to a prolonged streak of bad local weather conditions, that small "window" of three to four days right after the actual moon peaks, full or new, may be the only time that the largest fish of any species is truly catchable. Fishing during the daily rise or set of the sun and moon during these key monthly moon phases is paramount.

Weather is also a legitimate third factor, and helps to elevate the impact of the daily rise and set of the sun or moon. It further elevates the entire realm of big fish possibilities when all three factors happen at relatively the same time. A changing weather pattern combined with a good monthly moon phase and rise or set of either sun or moon can activate some major movement from big fish. If all of these things happen during a good photoperiod, LOOK OUT! This is when the biggest fish of the year are generally caught. If you are serious about taking such a fish, I'd suggest you start really paying attention to the real scoop on moon phases! Trust me -- thousands of entries in my fishing logs can't be wrong. This stuff really works. Sun set, moon rise and moon set as The most important factors. The simple rise and set of both the sun and moon has far more impact than any other daily sun or moon position. That is, bar none, the single most important daily triggering factor of both fish and game.