

## **May Means the Crappie Spawn is On**

By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville has had high water over the last two years and has received a high ranking from the Corp. on both crappie and bass. Believe me; I have seen it last fall and all this spring. The fish are big and fat and the spawn should be the best fishing period I have seen in many years. I have seen more fish over a pound and a half these past few months than I can ever remember.

I look forward to May every year. There's warm weather and no nasty cold fronts. Just get out the shallow rigs and go get them. I have been following the crappie ritual from their deep winter homes to the spawn since February.

I have become a specialist in deep water fishing with all the electronics I have on my big Ranger boat. This is how you do ninety percent of your crappie fishing. My electronics allow me to scan out to the side of the boat as well as under. I watch for submerged trees with plenty of branches that others miss. I have three GPS units on the boat to allow me to return to these fishing honey holes. They are all networked and share info making it easier for me to sneak back up on my waypoints.

Once May hits, the tasty crappie are right on the bank and all you need to be successful is a temperature gauge and the knowledge of spawning areas that are the same every year. I know where several coves are on Lake Shelbyville, and year after year they turn out thousands of crappie. Shelbyville is a flood control lake and each year you must make adjustments. If you can find five feet with good wood on it, you have the potential of a good spot.

The crappie on Lake Shelbyville have adapted and spawn deeper than other lakes in the area, like Lake Decatur or Clinton Lake. Both have fixed dams and don't vary much, unlike Lake Shelbyville, which can go up and down several feet. I have found crappie at Clinton and Decatur spawning in six inches of water.

You need a surface temperature gauge. Crappie spawn at the 62-68 degree range but the males will be on nests preparing for the female to move up, which she will several times. The males will start moving to shallow waters once the surface temperatures are in the mid-fifty degree range and once it gets to about sixty degrees, they will have on their full courting colors. Their overall appearance will be very dark and the black crappie will be almost all black.

The males stay and protect the young for about thirty days so the spawn lasts for some time. Not all crappie move to the bank at the same time, so this ritual lasts for thirty to forty-five days. Lake Shelbyville is unlike most crappie lakes. It is an Army Corp of Engineer Flood Control Lake and once we hit May, they allow the lake to rise to summer pool or some five and a half feet. This brings in fresh water to all the feeder creeks and the crappie hide in the willows and smartweeds. The crappie will stay shallow until the water clarity is too clear for them to hide from their food or the food just disappears and goes back to the lake. I have been able to stay on shallow crappie in less than three-feet of water as late as mid June. This allows me to get in half a guide trip up in the creeks where almost no boats are. As most of you know, once we get past Memorial Day, the ski boats come.

To attack this tasty crappie, we use a two-pronged approach. I have poles rigged with slip bobbers and a number four light wire hook and just enough split shot to hold up the cork. We use lively, medium sized minnows. I don't like small minnows on a plain rig. I want a minnow that causes commotion in the brush pile. On the slip bobber pole, I like an eleven-foot rod with the long length so you can just drop it into the brush. I also have a twelve-foot rod with a sixteenth ounce jig on it and a Midsouth tube. No more Deep Ledge Jigs now. The lighter jig falls slower. I use the jig pole to fish deeper to look for the females. Sometimes I will tip this jig with a minnow.

Lake Shelbyville is so large you can track the spawn from the north end to the south with the

rivers thrown in as well and this takes several weeks. The spawn will be done on the shallow dirtier north end and the south end is not even started with it's deep clear water. The rivers are a whole different story. Timely rainfalls are the key up in the creeks. This brings in fresh nitrogen that the babies will need to feed on in their first few days.

My construction job is slow to take off this year and my guide service has been in full swing now for the last three months. I am guiding every day in May and have many weekday openings left!