

I Spend My Summer Chasing Baitfish

By Steve Welch

I get this question asked of me all the time either in my seminars or in the boat. Can you see fish on the screen of your depth finder? I answer only in summer because that is when I am chasing the white bass around.

When I am crappie fishing I am looking for cover in the right depth for the particular season. Since it is a flood control lake, early season is mid-February to mid-April at Lake Shelbyville. The cover I am looking for is on the old river channels. Spawn is mid-April to mid-June in the first cover closest to shore. You cannot see baitfish on your depth finder, all you are concerned with is finding the cover.

For white bass, it is all about finding the food. In this instance I can see bait fish on my screen, partly because I only chase them in the summer. The baitfish will be suspended near the river channels in deep water and up on the flats early in the morning. If they are up on the flats, I am looking for visible signs of baitfish activity.

White bass will feed early on the flats, will back off to the ledges and will be under the schools of baitfish. I try to find the biggest ball of baitfish I can. This is why July and August are my best lake white bass fishing. The schools of bait are huge and so are the schools of whites. I have taken thousands of whites from them and not even put a dent in the school.

My clients ask if that huge blob on the screen is fish. I tell them it is either baitfish or white bass, hard to tell the difference. Either way we are going to catch the whites, as they will not be far away.

To catch these fish the best bait by far is a drop-shot rig. The whites cannot resist a minnow being jigged up and down right through the school. For those of you who want more of a challenge. A Bomber slab spoon will get them as well. If up on the flats I also throw a gayblade or a two-jig rig.

If my clients are doing fine without my help on the drop shot, I will fish with the slab spoon. I catch all kinds of non-specie fish like big channels or even bigger buffalo. I have caught buffalo over thirty pounds and channel up to twenty fishing the spoon.

The big boats can sure be a nuisance but in July and August they help to drive the fish off the flats. Up on these huge flats they tend to spread out more making it harder for me to find them. Once they drop back to the drops, they will school just like the bait and use

their numbers to attack their prey.

White bass will go through a school of baitfish thrashing and wounding thousands of bait and then the bait will sink, at the bottom are the biggest whites, walleye, and channel catfish. These fish are opportunists and lazy. They eat up the bait that sinks down to them, making the drop shot and the jigging spoon a deadly weapon.

There cannot be a better fish to start out a youngster on. I have had trips on which we have caught over a hundred before lunch. The drop-shot rig is easy for an angler of any age to fish. We start out early in the morning throwing buoys marking the ledge then we put the boat right on the buoy line and cast up on the shallow flat and let it go to the bottom. Then just slightly lift your rod tip and reel once and that will bring the drop-shot rig back towards you but also bring it towards deeper water. Once the fish leave the shallow flat, we put the boat about thirty foot from the buoy line so I can toss the drop shot up on the buoy line, then repeat what you did. The whites and now a few crappies will be in this zone. I am also looking for huge balls of bait to be under the boat, then just fish both rigs vertically. This style of fishing anyone can do.

Good electronics is necessary. I have three Lowrance color systems on my boat. Two of them have GPS capability. I can motor to my next waypoint from the trolling motor and not have to start big engine. Among other luxuries that two GPS systems give you like trolling speed if you are spider rigging and the ability to stay on the drop better by watching you old path.

I use icons to mark bait so I can return to them the next day, as they might suspended out in nowhere. Wind will move them but for the most part, if you find a huge school of bait they will be there from mid July all the way through August.

Once Labor Day hits, the whites will make another run up the rivers, following the bait. These trips are also some of my best. Hardly ever see another boat and the whites are huge as are the crappie. That lasts about a month then I put all the white bass stuff away and it is time to crappie fish until ice up.

I have had tremendous response to my web site and have had one of my busiest seasons ever. I do however still have good white bass trips available in August and river trips in September.

So give my web site a look at www.lakeshelbyvilleguide.com or give me a call at 217-762-7257 or 217-840-1221.