

April Is One of Crappie Season's Trickiest Months

By Steve Welch

You got to love April; it seems that you can't get a break during the first half of the month then wow it is nice out. I actually prefer March to April; you get those first few warm sunny days and the crappie wake up and suspend right under the surface in deep water along side standing timber or in high branches on down trees.

Well this is how I chase crappie in April as well but you have a lot more rainy days to get through than sunny ones. With today's hi-tech electronics you can easily find deep-water crappie these days by using four simple steps and I use these three steps until the fish hit the bank and start to spawn. Others will get in a hurry and go to the bank and wait not me. Even after it first starts (the spawning migration) there are plenty of deep fish to be caught.

Here are my simple four steps. Step one obtain a good map or use your Navionics or Lakemaster map on your GPS and locate all the deep banks that the river channel sweeps right in front. These are the banks they will live on during the winter and summer months. Good deep water that has bait migrating through.

Step two; navigate along these banks using your side imaging set at about sixty-feet. I then drive by every down tree on that bank looking for any tree that still has the smaller branches out on the end. Then on these trees you can see little white dots within the branches and clouds of bait. I drop a waypoint on every tree I see so I can return.

Step three, I switch my system over to down scan and I motor back over my new waypoints. Once over them I can now see a tree and every branch on it almost like an oil painting. Within those branches you can clearly see fish. I freeze the screen and bring my cursor right to the depth the fish are hiding and now I have an exact depth and then I drop a marker buoy right on the crappie's head. I then add a foot of depth to offset the transducer being in the water and I set my rods accordingly.

Step four, down scan although it is great to find structure has a very thin slice in the water column making it difficult to locate your jig on the screen so I switch back to normal 2-d sonar. I know what the tree branches look like and I am trying to suspend a bait right next to them. Water depth means nothing since I know of trees in fifty-feet of water that has branches just a few feet under the surface.

This method is when my Deep Ledge Jig really shines. The heavy 1/4oz. weight and the small light wire hook allow you to feel branches in deep water. You team this jig up with braided line and you have a great system for catching crappie on Lake Shelbyville or any other lake with a lot of wood. Even though a lighter jig will work in less depths I still use my Deep Ledge Jig all the way up to about four-feet. I think the big profile of this jig gets their attention. Besides it is easy to bump branches with it and not get snagged. This triggers strikes. Less than four-feet I like to throw a cork so I use my lighter Deep Ledge Jigs since we make them in four different weights with the big aspirin style head.

Most anglers in April try and fish like you will in May with the fish being right on the bank. Not me I stay out in deep water the entire month. Crappies don't spawn at the same time and there are always deep fish to be caught. Those fish are not as prone to all the fronts you have in April and are more predictable, therefore easier to catch. Besides it is the only time frame I get to give electronic demonstrations. You don't need good electronics to pluck them from the bank.

Even though April can start out being a real bear to fish in, the mid to tail end of the month you will see water temps spike some fifteen degrees warmer than the first half of the month and the spawn will begin and then watch out because May is coming and shallow cork fishing has got to be one of my favorite ways to get them.

Several months ago we started up an on-line store for those of you that aren't close to the retail stores I have my baits in and it has become a great success. You can simply go to my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com and click on the store. While you are on there feel free to join our new fishing forum called Illinois Fish Talk. It is Illinois fishing growing forum and packed full of helpful information. Not just about Lake Shelbyville but Rend, Illinois River and several other lakes and tons of helpful electronic info.

If you happen to be near Lake Shelbyville you can get my lures at these following locations. D&M located in Sullivan, Chip's Marine located at the Bo-Woods boat ramp and Atwood Armory located just north of Atwood. We will be adding to this list in the near future.