

Fish Bunched Up In March

By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville is an Army Corp of Engineers flood-control lake, so it is dropped six-feet in December in preparation for spring rains. This bunches up the fish and presents a smaller playing field.

The crappie will move out of the coves to the points leading in or further out to the old river channels on the main lake. This is why your best coves have the channel sweeping across the front of it.

Since the north end of Shelbyville is very shallow I tend to fish the south end until later in April. The south end still has plenty of water deeper than thirty-feet.

I concentrate on both down trees and standing trees that have ample heavy branches. The crappie or any fish for that matter will tuck up tight trying to get any heat generated from the sun. So spindly little branches won't provide that. Big stumps on deep points also a great spot in March.

March is one of your best big fish options all year long simply because a big crappie reacts to the sun giving you that one or two degree difference in surface temp. and if you key in on this it might be the one time of the year that big fish is vulnerable.

Big crappie usually spawn late and will spawn deep and some really big crappie will just absorb their eggs if they think conditions aren't perfect. So this is why in March you can get them they love to bask in the sun.

With today's hi-tech electronics equipped with side imaging and down scan you can really see what it is like under the water. A standing tree left in when they made the lake still has every branch it ever did and you can see these big crappie suspended in the tops. This is where they have lived all winter. They will rise to the top of the tree when they feel some warmth and then drop back in and tuck up tight to the trunk on overcast days once again to get any warmth they can get.

The same with a stump out on a main lake point. They will hover right over it on sunny days then pull out and suspend in deep water on overcast days. All bunched up though and this is one of my best big fish patterns in March.

A big crappie can't turn quick in a tight brush pile so it will seek out structure more like what a bass likes. This is why heavy wood is your main focus. That and your surface temp. gauge. This gauge is your most important tool in the spring. A full sunny day will spike the surface temp. ten degrees or more so it is not long after the ice comes off that you are seeing fifty degree water temps.

Keying in on this and forgetting about spawning areas for now will yield you much bigger sacks of fish. So just remember try and fish on sunny days if you can and keep your eyes peeled on that surface temp. gauge. Not to say you can't catch crappie in overcast conditions they just pull in tighter to structure.

Since like I said we are not worried about spawning areas and fishing deep is the pattern this is when my 1/4oz. Deep Ledge Jig and it's brother the DLJ spinner come into play. You can watch it on the depthfinder up on your trolling motor and present it right on the nose of a big crappie and have the feel necessary to fish twenty-feet or more deep. We swim this jig back and forth bumping it into structure trying to get a reaction strike and the DLJ spinner has a very small willowleaf blade that just picks up light and big crappie just hammer it. I actually caught two back

to back my first time using it that were over two-pounds. We also make a Deep Ledge Jig that imitates a bug which crappie really love in the winter. We call it the Brush Bug and it too has already caught on as a big fish bait.

So if you have a bad case of cabin fever and want some fresh crappie for your dinner table give me a call. I still have openings left for March and April. You can go to my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com and look on the front page for available dates or simply give me a call at 217-762-7257. I will show you how to catch these deep crappie giving you confidence that you don't need to wait until they are on the bank.