

Just because it is hot The Fish Still Bite
by Steve Welch

I have had a very productive spring and lots of limits of crappie have come over the side of my big Ranger. My annual early spring trip to Kentucky was also very fruitful and I topped it off by winning the Crappie U.S.A. qualifier on my home lake.

The crappie will still bite during the summer but on this lake they leave the structure and roam in huge schools. They suspend and this makes it hard for me to find many fish over the ten inch minimum.

They do have to eat and they become quite predictable on their haunts and feeding times. We start my summer guide trips very early before the boat traffic has the lake all churned up.

We concentrate on the sheer drop offs next to a flat. Or on a high clay bank that also drops off very quickly. I fish a Charlie Brewer Slider Grub (white with a chartreuse tail) on an eighth ounce jig (weed less). Sometimes I put a small split shot about ten inches above it. This gives me some extra weight but more importantly it gives me a brush indicator. I can feel the shot hit something then just a gentle lift of the rod tip and the jig will bounce over the branch.

I never fish a spinning reel with less than nine bearings and never the ultra-light reel. The spool is too small. I tend to use a six and a half-foot medium action rod. You have to have a smooth good feeling rod to feel the structure and the light bites. Just learn how to position the boat about a cast from your target and count down to stay just over the brush.

We start every guide trip fishing this pattern until the boat traffic picks up. Then we switch over to two different rigs for deeper water. The first rig is very similar to the crappie rig we started with. I just put on a heavier jig and fish it a little different. I use a quarter ounce jig and fish it right on bottom. I put the boat out in twenty foot of water near a shear drop on a flat. I cast up on top of the drop and let the jig go to the bottom then just lift the rod tip and let it bounce right down the drop. You don't need to reel much. The other rig is a drop-shot variation. I put a half ounce bell sinker on bottom then go up about a foot and tie a small one inch loop knot and on this I put a small live bait hook and tip it with a minnow. On both of these rigs I am fishing for white bass.

The white bass roam the flats early in the morning and if it is windy they will be very shallow. But once the boat traffic hits they drop back to the edge of flats and school up. I have harvested thousands from the same school over a several week period. So it is the white bass that I switch too for my bread and butter go to fish on my guide trips. We can get a few crappies early in the morning but that can be hit or miss. I just tell the clients to wait till mid morning on through the heat of the day.

Fishing for any summer fish is all about electronics. That and the heat are why most don't even try. I can't help you with the heat but I can help you with your electronics. I have three depth finders on my boat. Up front I have a Lowrance 102c. You can actually see my jig without having to take it off automatic. I try and hover over a school of whites and vertical jig for them very radically. I jig my rod tip up swiftly and the jig hops off the bottom about ten foot. If you are over a school of whites it won't get back to the bottom. That is how I tell the difference between whites and a school of shad. They both look very similar on your screen. If you in a school of shad the whites aren't far away.

I have found that whites will be on the drop at a specific depth usually around eighteen feet. You can back off the flat and keep an eye on your electronics. There will be whites suspended in the same depth.

On my dash I have a Lowrance 332c GPS system. I never take it off GPS though I don't like the split screen so right beside it is another Lowrance 102c mounted in dash. I use this as my depth finder to find my hidden brush piles that I have as my waypoints. Even though whites don't bury in brush like bass and crappie baitfish do and the whites will be near brush. So I mark several brush piles on a drop then just use them as my line to cast too.

This pattern holds up from mid July through mid September. So if hundred fish days are your taste or better yet give that kid a great present he or she soon won't forget and call me and book a trip. I have several openings now since I am through my crappie spawn period, which is the busiest part of my season.