

Lake Shelbyville White Bass

By Steve Welch

I am lucky to guide on Illinois's best white bass lake. Others can try and take the crown but for pure numbers and great size Shelbyville is full of fish. I have only been guiding for them now for just over a month and already we have caught close to ten thousand fish. I have cleaned about half that many and have gone through six electric knives this season already.

Lake Shelbyville is an Army Corp of Engineer flood Control Lake and every year we fight periods of high water. As of this writing we are up eight feet. What this does is bring in nutrients and flood all the shoreline willows and smartweeds. The fry get into these weeds and have very high survival rates. Bigger and more plentiful shad to eat make bigger white bass, and all species benefit from this. This year has been my best walleye fishing and crappie fishing that I have seen in more than a decade.

The first three weeks of June we just watched acres and acres of busting white bass that would stay up for hours. Fishing was easy and whites were everywhere. The reason was the small fry they were eating were only the size of a one-inch piece of thread with a head on it. You could see the fish's vertebrae. The whites couldn't get their fill and fed for hours by pushing the bait to the surface and just going nuts. Any of you that have seen a white bass bust knows what I am talking about. Imagine that lasting for an entire afternoon. We caught them by the thousands and so did everyone.

Now the shad are much larger and the whites have even taken a liking to the bigger shad I see roaming around that are nearly five inches long and look like small bass. This fills them much quicker and we haven't seen the surface busts as of late.

Most have gotten discouraged and you only see the die-hards now. The fishing requires some knowledge of white bass tendencies and summer patterns. Whites love drop-offs that go to deep water very quickly off a huge flat. You mix this with a hard bottom with large stumps or down trees on it and you have an area that will hold whites every year and in August they get in large schools making my job easier.

In August, I can locate a school of fish and stay with them for over a month. That means go to one spot and fish all day or until you are just tired of reeling them in. I have had clients in the boat already this year that have just bent over holding their back in pain and say Uncle I can't bring another one in. This is my life in summer. Tons of fish, sore backs, sore arms, fingers raw from handling thousands of fish. The price you must pay for repeat business. Give them the trip of their entire lives. White bass can make you god in their eyes. The pure fish catching action blows kids away and it is summer that I get a bunch of them in the boat. You get a kid on a good white bass trip and they are hooked for life on fishing.

Another big bonus in August that I have never seen on any lake that I fish are the lakes huge and I mean huge buffalo. They roam under the whites all summer, as do the huge channel catfish. I routinely get my hands on a buffalo over twenty pounds and some pushing forty. The catfish are anywhere from ten to twenty pounds as well. The jigging spoon is just great, big fish bait. I have had days and especially in August where we caught twenty or more of the big buffalo. Kids are really blown away by this and that is all they talk about when I see them at the winter shows. I let them fight the big bruiser all the way in and we take a scale for a memory to show their teacher.

The tackle we use is quite simple. I have a rod spooled with ten-pound mono and then I tie on a Strike King Sandblaster. It is a tail spinner bait that you simply jig it off bottom and let it fall causing the blade to spin and attract the whites or whatever is down on bottom roaming with them. I also have a bait caster spooled with twenty-pound mono to handle my spoons and dressed treble that gets the larger fish. The spoons tend to get bigger bites since it is a much larger offering. I use a 7/8-ounce Bomber Slab spoon in either white or chrome. I then tie on a

dressed treble. This is simply a treble hook with white buck tail on it. I tie this on a small loop knot about a foot or so above the spoon. This gets me doubles on the whites and usually much larger fish. The huge buffies as we call them are really attracted to this bait. If the spoon doesn't get them then the dressed treble will, by either them biting at it or us snagging them, by popping it off bottom.

Another essential tool is good electronics. I see it all the time, my boat bringing in so many fish that we just draw a crowd and onlookers getting just a fish or two. You see I use everything on my boat to help me find whites. First I use my Navionics mapping chips to mark off huge flats or points. All the water ten meters or less will be colored in blue and the deeper water in white. Shelbyville is a hi-def lake so I have an exact location of all the river channels.

Then I use my Humminbird side imaging to locate huge schools of bait out to the side of the boat and to locate deep wood in the area I am targeting. Then I use both my Lowrance units to find schools of shad with whites under them. We start by marking off a hundred feet of ledge and going along and casting fifteen-feet either side of drop-off until I get a hook up or two. Then I throw on the brakes and attempt to fire up the school. This is made possible because I have two other clients with me throwing either the sandblaster or the spoon treble combo. You want company doing this to help hold that school and turn them into a feeding frenzy. Whites are schooling fish and it not uncommon to see fish trailing yours when you get them to the surface. They just want what the other fish has and feed like pigs with shad hanging out of their mouths and yet still wanting more.

So give my guide service a buzz and let me show you Illinois best fishing lake. My plumbing job has been so on again off again that I have really just been guiding since March full time. You can reach me at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com or 217-762-7257 home or 217-840-1221 cell.