

## **March is My Month for Big Fish**

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Every year I get the boat on Shelbyville right after ice-out and hook a big fish. The truly big crappie can feel the slight warming trend and the sudden temperature difference on the top layer of water. We start our day fishing on any river channel drop probing the deep looking for crappie wintering spots.

Really I am waiting on that mid day sun to get things a hopping. The deeper coves on Shelbyville have tons of standing trees. The crappie and bass will suspend along side these trees just a couple of feet deep. We fish as many of them as we can because you won't get numbers on any one tree, just a fish or two.

This pattern seems to work best when you see at least 48 degrees on surface and you have had more than one day of full sun. This doesn't take long after ice-out. Mother Nature can really cook that top layer. The fish are still very lethargic so a fast moving bait isn't your bait of choice. We slow it down by simply putting a pegged cork about two feet or so up the line above a sixteenth ounce jig.

I like to use a very small jig in March because the crappie's diet has been small bugs and what not they get under the ice. So I opt for the sixteenth and either a small Midsouth tube or a hair jig. Now, back in December, before we quit for the winter, I am using my biggest baits because the fish are fattening up for winter on the biggest shad they can find. Just a deal of match their diet.

Weather and warming trends mean everything in the early season. I have put together logs on surface temperatures and water clarity to help me in locating early season fish. I will take full sun on Shelbyville and no wind and three days of it are better.

The problem is getting that weather on a weekend when I can guide. This just never seems to happen so I usually just start guiding the first of April.

By putting off the start of my guiding season until April I get to sample some of the best crappie fishing in the world down at Paris Landing, the southern most part of Kentucky Lake. Kentucky Lake is fed from the south and it runs south to north so the waters down at Paris are warming up way before the rest of the lake. You can track the spawn from south to north on this huge lake. Down at Paris activity is very good the last part of February and all of March. They will be done spawning by mid April and still in the pre-stages of it on the north end, which will wrap up mid-May.

I like to see warming trends down there too, but not a lot of wind, as you can't hide from it. Down there full sun penetrates the water so deep that the bite will slow about mid morning and pick back up towards dark. The fish bury themselves deep into cover and the boat hovering over them will spook the bite. I prefer an overcast, fog-ridden day. Fish bite all day long as you can get right over them and pound em.

I have done my best once the surface warms past forty and better if it is mid forty. I don't want to see mid fifty as this scatters the fish and they will move out of deep winter holes and up onto flats and start moving back into coves.

Crappie and I mean big crappie will be quite active in that mid forty ranges and you have a bunch of big fish bunched up together. A good trolling motor operator and a ton of waypoints to run and gun all day long is all you need. You need to be able to hover over these deep fish and hold your jig very still.

People act like I am crazy once I tell them I fish with quarter-ounce jigs for crappie, but they really help me probe a brush pile and I can feel it bouncing over branches. I also use braided line now 8/3 Fire line Crystal. This too helps in that all-important feel. Not from the fish but more of the sliding over the branches.

The fish hit the bait so hard that at the end of the day you are icing your shoulder. A big two-pound plus crappie can really slam a jig and I think they just hit that quarter even harder. I think they can just see it better. The jigs I use you will have to get on line they are made by a company called Bighead jigs. They are

a huge aspirin head jig and a small number four hook. The small hook doesn't seem to lose any fish so I don't argue with success.

March is usually my best month and I will go just about every weekend with different buddies to help offset the cost. It really isn't that bad a trip. It's three hundred miles from my house in Monticello, three tanks of gas in truck at about \$120 to split, three nights in a motel at \$180 and your food and drink and license - so about \$220 per person for three days and it is the best crappie fishing period this early in the season. I save for it all year and I have caught tons of big fish in winter. I like going to Mississippi but it is so much farther that I need to set up a week vacation. I can go to Paris Landing two or three times for the same money and bring home ten times the fish.

Colors on my tube bait will change with the water color. I usually use a pearl white or an emerald blue, which is a very light almost pearl, colored blue with some sparkles in it on a white head. This last trip however they wouldn't touch it. They had a bunch of rain like we have been getting so I used orange and chartreuse with a dark red head. I also like to use big small mouth buck tail jigs in winter. I like the big profile and I soak it with fish formula to help me as well.

Numbers is the game for me down there as well as big fish. I can get my limit just about every trip and that is thirty per person per day ten inches and over. I never keep just ten-inch fish and usually stay around eleven or better and I have found brush piles with enough thirteen to fifteen inch fish to get your entire limit from your first stop of the day.

A normal trip with two buddies and me we bring home about a hundred on two and a half days fishing. Of that hundred we average anywhere from two to ten that are fifteen inches or better and about another ten to twenty that are fourteen inches or better and so many thirteen-inch fish you can't keep track of them. They are like our mid ten inch fish on Shelbyville, the lake is just full of them.

With today's electronics and GPS and Navionics mapping of lake contours you can really get comfortable fishing deep and I actually prefer it over shallow water. It gives you time to grab a net and prepare yourself for a big fish. Shallow water things happen so quickly nothing can go wrong.

Just grab a bunch of marker buoys and be prepared to wind up about forty a day and cover water.