

March on Shelbyville

By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville is and always will be an Army Corp Flood Control lake. It was meant for flood control and that's its first priority. That means that they drop the lake from 599.9 to 594 and hold it there until April and then they allow it to come up two-feet then in May the remaining four-feet.

If you can get out in March you can use it to your advantage. Brush piles and stumps you will never see the rest of the year are protruding through the surface for all to see. I mark all my walleye spots or stumps for the June run and keep an eye out for any new brush piles for the crappie.

This is also a month that a Navionics map chip is very helpful. It colors very shallow water in dark blue, moderate depths in light blue and deep water in white. This will help you from running a ground. This is very easy in March. Point six and point five have claimed many a lower unit. There are a half dozen islands that will also find you stuck. Some are marked some are just under the surface.

This doesn't mean you can't get on crappie. With the lake drawn down it pulls all the crappie out to the old river channels and the very front of the deep wooded coves. I prefer the old river channels simply because I will fish a big down tree over a standing one every time. They simply hold more fish. They will be bunched up in March and you can get several from just one spot.

To be successful in March you want no wind and full sun to penetrate the surface to aid in warming the water. This will cause fish to suspend above the deep brush and get them active. We hover right over the brush and fish down vertically with small jigs. This is the time of year I tend to downsize. So I drop to my 3/16oz. Deep Ledge Jig or my 1/8oz. Holding it still is the game so we let out the right amount of line to hover the jig right on top of the brush and I will slightly move the boat back and forth, easier said than done but I am trying to swim the jig very slowly across branches without getting hung up.

Crappie are still active enough that they will still just hammer the jig so no problems feeling bites. Besides we use Fireline Crystal 8/3 braid so we can feel any tug very easily. If they get real finicky I will tie on a three-foot leader of 4lb. P-line fluorocarbon. I still want very little stretch. P-Line is the smallest diameter fluorocarbon yet is very strong. I use it all summer on my live bait rigs.

Colors of my jig varies with water color but in March you tend to have gin clear water since the spring rains haven't really started yet. I stay with clear or shad colored baits. My new Brush Bugs are my bait of choice. The rubber legs and tensile are just the key to catch finicky crappie.

It is March that does give up some of Shelbyville's nicest fish since they are bunched up and Shelbyville still has a bunch of standing trees out on the old river channels that have every branch they ever had since the lake flooded. These trees have always been under water so they aren't stripped of their branches. The trees at the mouths of many coves are only trunks and very little horizontal branches.

It is these horizontal branches that the crappie like to hide right under. They like a heavy branch in March since they can draw some heat from it. You can catch crappie just two-feet under the surface hiding under such a branch on any sunny day. Even in water temps of forty or so. The surface warms very quickly and will spike ten degrees or more on a sunny day.

A March spot just like that gave me my biggest Shelbyville seven fish tourney stringer I have ever had. I kept flipping out twenty feet of line and allowing it to swim back under my rod tip in these heavy branches of a tree standing in forty-feet of water. Every fish I took from there was over thirteen and a couple over fifteen. Those two-pound fish do exist on Shelbyville you just have to hit it right and find a spot that has never seen a bait swim through it. I pride myself in knowing the deep southern end of the lake just for drawdown situations like this. Ten years ago like many of you I was stuck fishing the shallow north end and in March that can be a big mistake. May is a different story.

So get on out there and try some early season crappie because many times March can be better than April since April tends to bring a lot of cold rain. Full sun and three days of it is the key for early season success. I have still got plenty of good spring trips left to get booked so you better hurry or otherwise I will be booked about four months out very soon. You can go to my website at LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com or simply give me a call at 217-762-7257.