

Spring is Here, Time for Those Tasty Crappie

by Steve Welch

I know most of you have at least been out once to cure that dreaded cabin fever. I have had tons of calls with new and repeat clients and I have been out on the water now for nearly a month.

In some ways, fishing in March can be easier than in April. The fish are still deep and all you need to do is get over them and get them to bite. In April, the fishing starts out like the patterns in March and then ends up with the patterns in May.

It is the challenge that I love and the knowledge to know that warm weather is very close. I have had some very cold and nasty guide trips in early April. High winds and cold rain can drop the fish back into deep water. Surface temps will bounce all over the place but pure determination is how I attack the lake in April.

I have a big Ranger Bass boat and can cover twenty miles or more of lake in a day and often do. In my experience it is better to pick a few fish off each spot, the active feeding fish that are easy to get then move on to the next spot. I routinely make my clients put their pole down and we move to another spot some twenty thirty times a day.

To fish this many spots GPS and high-grade electronics is a big help. Fish can't hide from me. I have four depth finders, three GPS systems, and a side-imaging system and now I have down-scan. I can cover 480 feet of water at a time and see any brush out to the side as well as under the boat. This is a huge help when I go to a strange lake or a lake such as Kentucky Lake where all the best brush piles are buried out on river channels and you find yourself a mile or better from shore.

Shelbyville my home lake will spoil you. I can fish in most any weather due to the high banks that drop straight off into deep water. I can hide up under the high banks and never feel the effects of Mother Natures little temper tantrums. Then you get used to fishing a flood control reservoir and realize the lake is now five feet shallower than normal pool and therefore it is smaller and the fish are more bunched up. Then you have two back to back seasons with high water and you see the best shad hatches you have ever seen and all the fish are fat and healthy and you put all that together and Shelbyville like last year will be about the hottest crappie lake in the state. I saw more fifteen-inch fish last year than I have in many years. The lake is definitely in good shape.

I will give you a little insight on how to attack this big lake in April. I run what I call my down tree on channels pattern. I use my GPS mapping to target channels that swing next to the high banks. Then I go along the bank with my side-imaging looking for any tree that has fallen in and may not be visible up on the bank. Then I only fish from 14-22 feet. This is the depths that the fish will live in during the winter months and even though some fish have moved shallower the majority of the fish will set tight waiting on the surface temps to climb into the low fifties. By fishing that deep other fisherman haven't pressured them. I routinely follow other fishermen picking off these deep fish they have left for me. Usually the bigger white crappie is deeper. Black crappie will move up earlier but on our lake the white crappie are much bigger.

I use my new Deep Ledge jigs to probe these deep trees. They are specifically designed to get into tight brush and with the light wire hook I can bend it easily and get it back. I use Fireline Crystal braided line and a much stiffer rod than most would use to snap the jigs from the snags.

I learned all these deep patterns on Kentucky Lake over the past few years and now use it at Shelbyville. With the high water these past two years I have fished the deeper south end more and have put together a good pattern that produces time after time. It consists, like I said of running down trees and also keeping track of baitfish movement. Wind will move the bait and then the crappie will also move.

April has many changing weather patterns, which will also have wind blowing from one direction then have it switch on you unexpectantly. This is the challenge to stay successful in April. Anybody can get them when they are on the bank it is when they are deep that I shine. Experience and a little help from Lowrance will fill the live well.

Remember end of the month they will be on the bank or very near. It is all about surface temps. Fifty-five gets the whole ball rolling. Then an entirely different pattern will emerge.