

May Is Here, Spawn Too

by Steve Welch

Each year we as anglers anxiously await the spring crappie spawn. I see bass fisherman even throw a spinning out fit and some jigs on board in hopes of getting some of the best table fare there is the tasty crappie.

Last month we talked about cold April rains and warm sunny days. These two distinctly different patterns have the fisherman perplexed and sometimes down right discouraged.

May, however, makes everyone a pro. The fish are shallow and they are hungry. Our employers should just give us the month off as I know how hard it is to look out the window and see the first real signs of spring and you know the fish are biting.

Last month I ended with water temps hovering in the fifty-five degree range and the males making that push from fifteen to twenty foot of water up into the ten-foot range and some days into the six-foot range. Now we can actually start talking about the next stage the spawn.

Once the water temps hit the sixty range the males will start to turn a darker shade around the belly and mouth area. The black crappie, especially in clear water will turn pitch black. This marks the start of the whole ritual. I love it when I catch my first one, as I know what is to come for the next month.

The males will get busy preparing a nest for the female to move up on and drop her eggs. My home lake of Lake Shelbyville is a little different than most. Since it is an Army Corp of Engineer Lake they have it pulled down for winter pool in April and will slowly bring it up in May. The fish on the main lake have just figured out through the years that four to six-foot is a good spawning depth.

Up in the creeks however this isn't the case. Once the lake fills up to summer pool you can run up the biggest feeder creeks on the lake and actually fish for them in just a few inches of water. This is more like most of you are used too.

May is also the month I do a lot of live bait fishing. Nothing is a better search tool than live bait. Jigs still work but I have seen fish pass them up for a lively minnow. This is especially true when the water temps are in the sixty-five to seventy-five ranges. The spawn is winding down and the fish want nutrients.

On my guide trips and in the tourneys that I fish I always get at least eight to ten dozen minnows to start the day. I snicker at those coming in and buying two dozen. I always say if you are using live bait then use live bait. Never drag a minnow around more than five minutes. I will get larger shiners for the typical slip bobber and plain hook rig and slightly smaller ones to tip on the back of a jig. The big ones won't ride on a jig well and just flip around all over the place, but on a plain hook I want action and they cause havoc in a brush pile that gets the crappie's attention.

Like I said earlier I guide on Lake Shelbyville and the best thing about guiding on this massive reservoir is that you can spread out the spawn so to speak until mid June. The lake keeps rising and the fish just move further up the creeks, as does the bait. The males will remain dark and stay up there and fatten up. The carp go up there to spawn as well and they keep the water dirty enough that the crappie will remain as long as they can find food. You can walk across the carp up they're spawning in the smartweeds. I have caught crappie in two-foot of water on July fourth weekend. That is pushing it but if the lake goes on up past summer pool we can get them in willows and smartweeds until the lakes comes back down and I have seen the lake high all summer before.

Sooner or later it has to come to an end though so I switch tactics and go walleye fishing on the

main lake flats. The best shot at getting walleye on this lake is June so that is the only time I fish for them. Then it is time for white bass on the drops another of my favorite times of the year. This year with the crappie limits changing I will be doing more crappie fishing in summer than ever before. I look forward to another season as I bet you are too. See you all out there.