

Back Off The Banks For Crappie On The Move

Don't hang up that pole and tackle box just yet. Just because spring spawning phases have come and gone, there's no reason to quit. Crappie are on the move, but they haven't disappeared — and neither should you.

For much of the country, the fish are in the post-spawn phases or well passed that. This means it's time for you to back off the banks and test the water in zones that also appealed to the fish during a portion of the prespawn stages.

The crappie use some of the same routes to and from spring venues, so just go back down the same road and check for fish in that transition zone of midrange depths.

Crappie anglers have to approach this transition period as though it were two seasons in one. At this time, suspended fish are still holding between spring spawning shorelines and deep main-lake venues. Typically, there are a few fish everywhere but not much concentration anywhere. This scenario continues to evolve each day as fish slowly stair-step their way back to warm-weather hideouts.

This period is a productive one for me, as I know the crappie are getting back to a structure-oriented mode, unlike the previous few weeks when fish were stressed, scattered and mixed up about when and where to spawn.

This phase of the year means spawning is on the back burner, so the fish are headed back to midrange brushpiles, stump rows, humps, ledges or man-made fish attractors located between the two depth extremes of deep and shallow.

Expect the fish to use the same route that brought them to the shallows. Prime examples will be secondary creeks or meandering sloughs or ditches that form a corridor from main-lake channels. Along the way will be irregular turns or bends where two depth

extremes come close together. Find a little structure in such a spot and you'll also find the crappie.

A typical scenario is to locate fish in 9- to 13-foot zones on flats where structure gives them a temporary refuge in the form of shade. Here, the fish can hide and ambush shad while finding a comfort zone away from sunlight or deep enough to filter out bright light.

Surface temperatures, which are likely to be in the 68- to 75-degree range, have yet to heat up enough to send fish to summer venues but are warm enough to push them off the banks.

Anglers can enjoy consistent action using a variety of presentations, ranging from drifting or trolling to casting and vertical presentations of both jigs and live minnows. Depth is crucial, but crappie will move some throughout the day if clear-water conditions are present.

The fish are more predictable this time of year, as they don't have spawning on their minds and they're getting over the stress of the annual ritual. That mood swing can work in your favor. I often find several fish in one spot, such as around a stakebed or brushpile.

A series of stops at structure in these midrange zones will fill the cooler in a day. Averaging six or eight keeper fish on a milk run of a dozen or so locations can quickly add up. You may not find a big concentration or be able to sit in one spot all day with the anchor out, but this "hit-and-run" style is worthy of pursuit.

Big reservoirs have a lot of movement from crappie, while small lakes, sloughs, backwater swamps or watershed lakes won't experience the same habits of fish movement. Backwaters and small lakes will see crappie scatter and suspend for several weeks after spawning, so you may have to cover a lot of water and even find fish staying shallow well into summer. Truth is, the fish have no other place to go in small



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bodies of water and can be victims of a lack of fresh water, low dissolved oxygen and stress as the waters warm.

However, the changing seasons bring stability for anglers who now have cold fronts and windy days behind them. Lake levels are relatively stable, too.

So back off the banks but stop short of going to the deep extremes on your favorite crappie lake. Somewhere in between the shoreline and the main channel bank is where you need to be during this transition period.

Although the lion's share of anglers think the peak season for crappie fishing has just passed, your midrange approach and tactics will keep you in the game while others are on the bench.

For me, this transition time is one of the most consistent for hefty catches on Kentucky Lake in Tennessee. It can be the same way for you, too, wherever you live. 🚗

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