

SPRING HASN'T SPRUNG...BUT IT'S ABOUT TO FOR KENTUCKY LAKE ANGLERS

By Steve McCadams

Updated April 4, 2014

Kentucky Lake crappie have been on the move this week after an overdue warm spell increased surface temperatures. Added to the warmer weather has been a rise in lake levels that may have triggered fish to move toward shallow venues but their maneuvers have thrown a curve to some fishermen this week.

Both bass and crappie anglers have enjoyed spring weather that saw temps reach the low to mid 70's a few days and that really increased surface temperatures too. At the beginning of the week the water was still cool and lingering in the 50 to 53 degree range but after back to back sunny days readings climbed into the 58 to 61 degree range in some places.

Hefty stringers of bass were taken this week as some big females made a surge toward shallow gravel banks, roadbeds, sloping rock points, and rip-rap. Good numbers of fish were caught by anglers tossing Alabama rigs, crawfish and shad colored crankbaits, suspending jerk baits, and jig and pig combos.

A lot of fish in the 5-pound plus range are being caught as those bulging prespawn females are moving up and roaming the shallow areas that are warming fast. A lot of anglers are laying back off long sloping points and banks while long casting Carolina and Alabama rigs, targeting fish that are staging out away from the extreme shallows at times and perhaps suspending during the day.

Lake levels have been rising this week and are about a foot above normal for the first week of April, which hasn't put water on shoreline habitat just yet but it has brought bass up to shallow spots as they await spawning time.

Elevation at midweek was 356.7 at Kentucky Dam. Upstream at New Johnsonville readings were in the 356.3 range. The reservoir rose over a foot since last week at this time as last weekend's heavy rains really drenched the region and sent a lot of runoff into Kentucky Lake.

Water color is clear in the Paris Landing area. Up Big Sandy there is some stained water in West Sandy and also around Swamp Creek and up Big Sandy itself toward Country Junction and New Hope sectors.

That dingy water warms quicker and has appealed more to prespawn crappie this week than clear conditions found elsewhere. More crappie have been taken lately south of the power lines in Big Sandy than other regions.

Most of the decent stringers taken this week were from anglers slow trolling curly tail grubs and Road Runner style jigs. Long line techniques, along with multi-pole spider rigs and drift fishing have paid the most dividends as finicky crappie have been quite scattered and suspended.

Trolling and drifting allows boats and pontoons to cover a lot of water. The fish have been taken in a variety of depths as they respond to warmer surface temperatures but continue to shy away from structure. For that reason anglers covering a lot of water with a variety of baits dragging over wide areas have chalked up decent stringers.

Late last week and earlier this week a lot of crappie were taken by boaters staying out over the old Big Sandy river channel and dragging their buffets over 25 foot depths. However, a lot of the fish were suspended in the 15 foot range.

Now that surface temperatures are increasing crappie appear to be staging toward shallow areas in preparation for spawning which will likely start next week. At midweek a few fish were taken in the back of Swamp Creek and various flats in the Sulphur Well Island area.

Rising lake levels likely sent a few fish toward the New Hope and Country Junction area the last few days where they should start targeting structure in the 3 to 8 foot depth ranges in the days ahead if not already. West Sandy anglers have been catching fish too in midrange depths.

Active spawning will begin once surface temperatures reach the 62 to 66 degree range and stay there. Spawning phases are on the threshold but a cool snap this weekend may slow things for a day or two.

Crappie in the Paris Landing sector have been quite finicky as catch rates have been much lower than the upper Big Sandy region. Fishermen stalking stakebeds and brushpiles in both midrange and deep main lake areas have struggled to boat decent numbers around Paris Landing.

Meanwhile, fish are on the move and in transition as spawning time approaches. Several different presentations are likely to produce in the days ahead ranging from casting jigs beneath slip-bobbers around shallow structure to vertical jig and minnow rigs in manmade fish attractors. Trolling multi-pole presentations will continue to produce as well and has been the best thing going this spring.

The fish have displayed some unusual behavior the last week or two in terms of their whereabouts and movement, choosing to stay out over deep zones and suspend instead of relating to submerged structure.

It's time for crappie to make a blitz and begin the annual ritual. A few male crappie began to show signs of tinting toward a darker color the last few days as hormonal changes kick in.

A few anglers have enjoyed success, bagging limits with trolling and drifting techniques while other structure oriented fishermen have been less fortunate. Some are doubting the strength of the crappie population and wondering where the fish are.

An unusual spring has pushed the timetable back and altered things a bit. It will be interesting to see how the next week to ten days treats crappie and bass anglers. Dogwood days are almost here!

