

BLUEGILL BEDDING BEGINS...CATFISH ON THE PROWL

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Updated May 01, 2014

Warm weather is fast approaching after a turbulent start to another weird week of spring weather. Anglers got their hats wet earlier in the week and then had to dig the coats back out as a cold front descended in the aftermath of thunderstorms.

At midweek it felt like fall. It appears the weather will skip spring and jump to summer by this weekend as temperatures are expected to climb into the low 80's. From overcoats to no coats; the spring weather saga added another chapter the last few days but there's reason for optimism.

Bluegill started biting late last week, showing early phases of spawning before the cool snap backed them off a bit but watch for action to really heat up this weekend. The powerful panfish are on the threshold of bedding and the bite should really turn on by this weekend and throughout next week.

Surface temperatures fell back to the 65 degree range at midweek, influenced by below normal conditions that curtailed activity somewhat for bluegill, shellcracker, crappie, bass, and catfishermen. However, with warmer weather approaching watch for action to improve dramatically in the days ahead as surface temperatures rise to the 70 degree range.

Some decent catches of bluegill have already been taken yet numbers of shellcracker have been sparse. Rising lake levels inundated shoreline habitat earlier this week and bluegill, shellcracker, bass and catfish have already begun to move into the shallow structure.

Lake levels are projected to fall slowly the next few days after cresting a foot above normal summer pool at midweek due to heavy rains Monday and Tuesday across the region. Elevation rose to 360.2 range at Kentucky Dam but is expected to be in the 359.8 range as the weekend approaches. Upstream at New Johnsonville elevation is projected to be 359.9, which is down a few inches from a midweek crest as well.

Water color is dingy in the upper ends of a lot of bays and creeks, along with the main Tennessee River channel. Elsewhere water color is pretty good except for the upper Big Sandy where dingy water was flowing in from runoff.

Sluggish bluegill and shellcracker should begin fanning their crater style bedding areas as surface temps cross the 70-degree threshold. Better break out the light spinning tackle and dust off the cricket boxes as battles are about to begin with these bronze bombers.

Catfish were on the prowl this week and moving up toward shallow shorelines and the upper ends of bays where feeder creeks were delivering muddy water and washing new food sources their way. Some nice stringers were taken by bluegill anglers typing into them in 3 to 4 foot depths. It's quite a surprise to tangle with a hefty catfish when you're expecting a bluegill but

that's not unusual this time of year.

Also starting to produce have been rocky banks as the rip-rap levee on the east side of the New McWherter Bridge was giving up some dandies as the fish moved up to crevices in preparation for spawning. Nightcrawlers were the bait of choice for most anglers.

Crappie action slowed some this week as high winds and another stubborn cool snap didn't help things. Some fish are in a finicky post-spawn phase and not as aggressive as they were a week or two ago even for long-line and spider rigging techniques.

Fish have been taken shallow lately by a few anglers casting jigs or vertical fishing jigs around shallow structure up Big Sandy. Depths of 3 to 5 feet gave up a few fish but it was a scattered scenario. A few fish likely moved up to some shallow buck bushes too as the fast rise in lake levels usually pulls them to shoreline cover.

Meanwhile, those trolling jigs and crankbaits or drift fishing multipole rigs were still catching most of the crappie. Fish were suspended in 10 foot depths out over deeper flats and areas south of the power lines in Big Sandy continued to be the most productive zones.

Some late spawning crappie were still holding eggs earlier this week but it appears the lion's share of fish being caught had already spawned.

Bass anglers have suddenly had shallow buck bushes, weedbeds, and willow trees enter the picture as shoreline cover is now quite appealing to spawning fish. Those abundant yellow flowers are submerged along many banks and really holding bass.

Tossing spinnerbaits and Texas rigged worms, crawfish, and lizards have worked well. Topwater will be popular the next few days too as floating flukes and various jerk baits will be appealing as will buzzbaits cast over shallow grassbeds.

There's a few fish hanging out deeper on sloping points as they stage there before moving shallow but a lot of fish are already thriving in the visible cover. A lot has changed since last week at this time as to lake levels. Sunny days ahead are about to heat up the Kentucky Lake fishing scene.