

White bass save summer fishing trips

by Lee Keck

July 14 2017 5:43 AM



SHELBYVILLE – Though Steve Welch now does most of his guiding in the Kentucky Lake area, he previously guided hundreds, if not thousands, of hopeful fishermen on Lake Shelbyville. Though he is now gone, many of his tactics and techniques still produce plenty of fish at each of Illinois' three large Corps of Engineer lakes.

In fact, this year is likely to bring a major resurgence of his techniques. Fishing in these waters is now beginning to shape up much as it did when he was guiding.

For those who do not know him, Welch is likely best known as one of the premier crappie fishing guides in the Midwest. At one time he was one of the guide pack leaders on this area's scenic Lake Shelbyville. During that time, Welch and his clients recorded some phenomenal crappie catches.

During most spring and fall fishing trips, the anglers in his boat filled their legal limit of crappie. Better yet, most all of the catches averaged better than one pound per fish. And in most cases, some of these fish have pushed the two-pound mark.

Unfortunately, finding crappie in any significant numbers during the near 100-degree days of the past week or so is not an easy task. While it is possible to land a few of Lake Shelbyville's bragging size crappie, the action is simply too slow for most of his fishing clients.

"Most of these folks are here to catch fish," he explained during one scorching day on the water a few years ago. "Virtually all of my clients really like feeling that tug on the line and are here to catch plenty of fish."

This is why he chooses forgo the crappie fishing for a few months and switch to catching the lake's plentiful white bass population. And, now is that time!

On this particular day, Welch and Outdoor Guide Magazine editor Bob Whitehead were enjoying a few hours of summer white bass action. And, action was exactly what they were finding.

Both anglers were catching fish on almost every cast of the lure.

"These fish are relatively easy to catch, good to eat and put up quite a fight when hooked," he said. "This summer, in fact, we've had numerous days where we've filleted more than 200 white bass."

While boating his fifth fish in as many casts, Welch went on to say there would have been even many more days of similar fish cleaning activities. However, this is really up to his fishing partners on any given day.

"I have many clients who really do not want to take home that many fish," he said. "In fact, I've had several older clients that simply quit fishing after a few hours because their arms grew sore from catching so many white bass."

To say the white bass fishing outlook in this lake is good would be an understatement.

Several years of high water conditions have resulted in some phenomenal reproduction. The high water has brought about excellent fishing for almost every species. This is the same situation that exist this year.

During these conditions, Welch said the best white bass action is often found near some the shallow flooded weedbeds. The voracious whites often swarm to these areas to shop for their favorite grocery item - a meal from the large schools of shad found in this lake.

The biggest problem facing anglers at this time is the fact that most of these shad are still very small. This situation will definitely improve in the coming weeks.

To catch these fish, anglers regularly use two simple lures. The in-line spinners like those made by Blue Fox or Roostertail seem to work best in the very shallow water areas. In somewhat deeper water, Welch preferred to use his own invention - a Candy Striper lure that somewhat resembles a Little George or Sandblaster.

"I've found the Candy Stripers work best because of a special spinner on the lure," he said. "The blade spins better when retrieved at a slower rate."

However, anglers need to be aware of conditions that may affect the fishing pattern.

During the current conditions, the Corps of Engineers continues to drop the lake level and the baitfish begin to moving out into deeper water. The white bass are always quick to follow the food source and anglers begin finding them along the deeper dropoffs on the main lake.

Still, the white bass fishing will be every bit as good as before and maybe even improve. The only real difference will be that most of the action will be coming from deeper water.

Once this happens, he says the fish will concentrate along the deeper shorelines. Many of the best spots will be along the ledges of the old river channel.

It happens every summer and anglers can actually see the large schools of white bass on their electronic equipment. Though the water might be as deep as 30 feet, these fish will often suspend at depths of 15 feet.

However, most anglers will find their white bass trips coming to an end in mid-September. Once the fall crappie action begins, these very same anglers will again change their angling emphasis. Though the white bass fishing remains quite good until early winter, most fishermen begin targeting the big crappie.

In recent years, the fall crappie fishing has been even better than the terrific action found in the spring. There is every reason to expect this same thing to happen again this year.