



# Fall crappie bite already underway

by Lee Keck

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While most area sportsmen are busy preparing to pursue deer, waterfowl or upland game, a handful of dedicated anglers are enjoying some of the finest crappie fishing action of the entire year. The months of September, October and November (and sometimes December) typically bring excellent fishing opportunities for good-sized crappies.

Oddly enough, with all this good fishing to be found, there are relatively few anglers that take advantage of the opportunities. In fact, there are times on some smaller waters where an angler might be the only one fishing on the entire lake.

But, this lack of fishing pressure should not be considered a measurement of angling success. It's possible that an autumn outing could bring one of the finest crappie fishing trips of the entire year.

In fact, many regular autumn anglers realize that now is the time to grab a minnow bucket and try one more fishing trip before putting the tackle away for the winter.

Fishing guide Steve Welch says the fall crappie bite is now underway at Kentucky Lake and Lake Shelbyville. Plenty of big crappie currently reside in these waters and the action is turning on.

"Color on the main lake is a factor," says Welch. "This time of year, the water is often so clear that the bigger fish have backed off the shore and most catches are coming from depths of 14 to 20 feet."

He says the trick is to concentrate on the deeper shorelines and keep a close watch for schools of baitfish. Here, small jigs or minnows fished near these baitfish are producing good numbers of quality fish.

There are also many other nearby waters holding promise of good fall fishing action. One site topping the list is Rend Lake in Franklin and Jefferson counties.

Rend Lake, holds a large population of crappie and, this past spring brought excellent fishing from these waters. And, recent reports indicate more of the same type of action already coming from Rend Lake this fall.

Reports from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers indicate that the good action has already began at this location. Anglers are taking catches of quality crappies from some of the deeper brushpiles.

Another good bet would be Crab Orchard Lake in Williamson County. This 7,000-acre lake regularly produces top-notch angling action for fall crappies.

Anglers shouldn't overlook Cedar Lake in Jackson County, as well. While this lake has always been known to hold large numbers of smaller crappies, recent reports show more larger fish being caught.

Downstate anglers may also want to consider Kinkaid Lake in Jackson County. Here, reproduction has improved over the past few years and anglers should find good fishing for one-half to three-fourths pound crappies.

Not to be overlooked is Coffeen Lake in Montgomery County. Anglers will find good crappie fishing all winter at this state-managed cooling lake.

Over the past several years, reports have shown an improvement in the Coffeen Lake crappie population. Coffeen Lake is again expected to offer plenty of good crappie fishing this fall and winter.

Sangchris Lake is another top crappie water for downstate anglers to try. According to biologists, the crappie fishery is looking good as autumn continues.

Anglers can expect to find good fishing for crappie in the ten to eleven-inch category. In addition, there is another group of crappie coming on that should begin to reach the nine-inch minimum length limit by this fall.

And, the list of good crappie waters goes on. Lakes like Beaver Dam State Lake in Macoupin County, Litchfield's Lake Lou Yaeger in Montgomery County, Raccoon Lake in Marion County and Lake of Egypt in Johnson County are all top choices for the downstate crappie angler.

Other locations like the lower Kaskaskia River, the Smithland Pool on the Ohio River and the many backwaters of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers are also good choices for fall crappie fishing.