

Local crappie bite soon as weather changes

by Lee Keck

March 19 2018 11:07 AM



One questionably wise person once said something about a young man's fancy turning to thoughts of love during spring. While the subject of love may rate high in some circles, I sincerely doubt if the issue ever comes up at most local baitshops.

And, I can honestly say that the arrival of spring has never triggered any discussion of an even somewhat related subject at any of my favorite coffee shops.

Among my associates, however, spring does bring a variety of different, yet more important, issues to the table. Where to find the liveliest minnows, spooling new line on reels and discussing those waters likely to yield the best crappie fishing are the topics of greatest interest among my cohorts.

As the years pass, it seems like the winter months never end. But, that only reminds me of another wise saying emphasizing the fact that all good things are worth the wait. This definitely holds some merit when it comes to Illinois' crappie fishing.

With winter now grudgingly and slowly releasing its grip on our area, local anglers are already enjoying their first taste of the spring crappie action.

Downstate crappie anglers are blessed with an assortment of fishing waters ranging from smaller private and state-managed lakes to several rivers and numerous city lakes. Most all of these offer good crappie fishing each spring.

All we need is several days of warm weather accompanied by powerful southerly winds. Then, most local fishing holes will quickly warm. And, these warming waters will trigger a rather early crappie bite.

During the past week or so, catches of crappie have been reported from almost every lake in our area. Like most years, this welcomed phenomenon is occurring right on time.

Crappie fishing in the lower reaches of our state often begins in early March. And, it really heats up once the month of April arrives. This year, the local crappie action started heating up the second week of March.

Following mild winters, unlike our most recent, crappie anglers tend to enjoy a few extra weeks of quality fishing. Still, it is during April when water temperatures finally climb to the point where they trigger something of a feeding frenzy.

By mid to late-April, most crappie anglers throughout the state have enjoyed several delicious meals of fried crappie fillets. By late April, upstate crappie begin to seek out shallow water spawning areas. This is when the real action heats up. As a general rule, this good fishing continues throughout the remainder of the month, until the end of May.

Locally, most veteran crappie anglers concentrate their fishing activities along weedbeds, in areas containing flooded timber or near deeper brushpiles. Once the spawn

begins, anglers find shallow-water coves, weedy shorelines and areas containing downed trees or flooded brush the top fish-producing areas.

When it comes to crappie fishing, anglers can carry virtually all their terminal tackle needs in a small plastic bag. All that is required is an assortment of jigs, a few hooks, a bobber or two and some split-shot sinkers. Their choice of bait is equally simple, with small minnows definitely the preference among most anglers.

Right now, anglers are finding small minnows or tiny jigs the top producers. Soon, these fish will be caught on almost any popular crappie bait.

For most Illinois anglers, the preferred fishing gear is equally simple, ranging from ultra-light and light spinning combos to long supersensitive flyrods rigged with small spinning or spincast reels. In those waters tending to be a bit clearer, a lighter line - four to six-pound-test monofilament - is the top choice.

There are many angling techniques that yield crappie. Some anglers find success fishing tiny inline spinners. Others prefer to catch crappie on tiny crankbaits. However, I suspect the overwhelming majority of fish are caught by anglers using small (1/32- to 1/8-ounce) jigs or jigs tipped with a small lively minnow.

With warmer weather ahead, the time is now to dust off your fishing gear, grab your minnow bucket and head to your favorite crappie spot. The best crappie fishing of the entire year is about to begin.