

Last Ice Bluegill

BY JOHN ANDREW

As we are now into late winter and fast approaching early spring for some readers, our last ice bluegill are very easy to catch. This month we are going to focus on three very different types of lakes and very different locations for our bluegill. They are hungry and feeding heavily during the daytime hours. Some people may catch them in the dark but this is not always consistent or popular.

Our first lake is a deep, clear lake and we are fishing deep wood structure. This structure could be branches, whole trees, logs and or manmade woodpiles. These deep structures were located long ago during the open water period while we were in our boat and using our depth finder. Once found, we then threw out one of our marker buoys on the surface of the lake. Then we put down the underwater camera to verify that we have found wood and if there were fish relating to this structure. We then use the handheld GPS to mark the location so we can return to it during the ice period and recapture this potential hot spot.

When using an underwater camera down to 55 feet (during the day time) we can see about three to five feet from the camera if this is clear water. We also find wood structure shallower and follow the same steps to mark the spot.

When fishing last ice, we use two-pound test and a wide variety of artificial hooks, from teardrop ice jigs (weighted with a tiny split shot) to Swedish Pimples. There are several baits we use from wax worms, Wigglers, minnow heads and even one kernel of whole kernel corn—yes, whole kernel corn, right out of the can. These all work well.

Using just plastics is also very effective such as a Ratso, or a small piece of red plastic tail, purple tail, dark green tail and several other plastic baits. You will need to experiment. When fishing on these locations we use wood, insulated and heated ice houses, as some of these underwater wood structures are far out from shore and the wind can be severe at times. Although, we're on top of the ice, inside the wood house we are always comfortable.

Some of the deeper woodpiles are closer to shore or located in the deeper section of a springtime spawning area. This could be on a deep drop-off connected to a shallow island. It could also be at the end of a long bay where it drops or tapers off into deep water or in between a narrow section of the lake or water environment you are fishing.

When we fish a shallow, weedy lake we also—as previously mentioned—have already marked wooded locations. However, these locations are not in deep water. Instead, these spots are in the general area of the bluegill springtime spawning locations. This could be three



Ben of Chicago, Ill., with bluegill caught with the author.



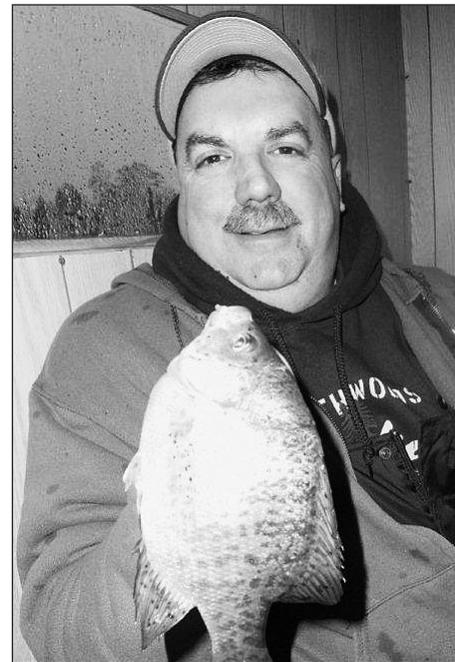
Betty and Doug Hermanson of Madison, Wis., with bluegill caught while fishing with the author.



Ken Williams of Rockford, Ill., with bluegill caught while fishing with the author.



Dennis of Milwaukee, Wis., with an 11-inch bluegill caught with the author.



Arron Griswald of Milwaukee, Wis., with an 11-inch bluegill while fishing with the author.

football fields away or 200 feet away. Locating a treetop, single log or logs, a manmade wood pile inside the weed cover six to 15 feet deep, or even a small pile of rocks inside the weeds is an absolute gold mine for the bigger 'gills. These bigger fish will stay around the wood week after week.

Be aware that these locations will also attract larger predators and they will spook the 'gills until the predator moves on. This is common when fishing any weedy area through the ice for panfish.

The pike move in while you are pulling a few panfish through the hole and everything shuts down until the pike moves on. Larger baits do well for us when fishing these shallow wood structures and we are still using two-pound test. We do get break offs from time to time but we simply produce more fish with the light line. By using the underwater camera we can micro-manage our bait location by presenting the bait exactly where the fish are located inside the wood structure.

If we are fishing in a darker water environment and the underwater camera is not very effective or we cannot see the wood structure we are looking for, we must then rely heavily on our flasher and GPS location. Our lure selection also must change. We are still fishing the same types of locations and the similar depths as mentioned in the above two lakes, but now we are using glow-in-the-dark colors such as glow red, glow green and glow yellow. This choice is very important to our success. You will catch fish without the glow colors, but you will catch many more fish with the glow colors.

Using small rattle baits is also very effective. Live bait now becomes very important, as well as scented baits since

the dark stained water has a very low visibility. Fishing even shallower in the weeds is very popular, from four to eight feet. Wood structure, deeper water and weeds are what attract some of the biggest 'gills. These locations will be close to their spawning areas, as mentioned above.

When working with my clients, I like them to use a small strike indicator on the line or a tiny slip bobber, and when the indicator barley moves I instruct them to set the hook. This catches fish because if you use an underwater camera you will see the fish inhale the bait, and the indicator (including a spring tip) will barley move or not even move at all. At this point we only watch the monitor screen when setting the hook. This is the true learning advantage of an underwater camera.

Tight lines and slush free ice.
The author, John Andrew, owner/operator of the AnglersChoiceGuideService.com is a two-time world record holder. He can be reached at 715-892-3020. John Andrew is a fulltime resident and fulltime, year 'round tour guide for fishing and hunting in the state of Wisconsin, specializing in Vilas, Iron, and Oneida counties.

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