

Christmas Eve Bluegill



Billy Martin, 10 years old, from Chicago, caught this bluegill while fishing with the author.

BY JOHN ANDREW

It's December already and the bluegill are biting through the ice in numbers. As always, we can catch the mighty bluegill when we want action, right? Well, this month we are going to go over the type of lakes on which we do best and the location in those lakes where we do the best fishing. As all lakes freeze over, even in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois, the bluegill will go on a feeding frenzy that lasts most of the hard water season.

Our first lake of preference is a lake that has several acres of shallow water; let's say from eight to 30 feet deep. This lake also has some large, shallow, weedy bays that slowly drop off into or towards the main lake basin. This shallow bay may be 20 acres, or as big as 300 acres or larger and range from two to six feet, or

eight to 20 feet. But, make no mistake about it; this bay is producing bluegill now and in the weeds. Drilling several holes across the weed flat and then going back with your underwater camera and looking into each hole is your key to success—yes, your underwater camera. This tool has been around for 20 years and only until the last five or six years have people started using them on a daily basis when ice fishing. Some have been using them longer, but most have not, and you should be.

In my 12 wood-heated, insulated and carpeted ice houses located on seven different lakes, every ice house not only is equipped with rods, reels, hooks, tip-ups and a gas-powered ice auger, but also an underwater camera. I do all the hole drilling for all my clients. Watching the monitor of the camera will teach you more about the fish you are seeing and



Mr. and Mrs. Jacobson from Milwaukee, Wis., caught these bluegill while fishing with the author.



Jill Barnet from Appleton, Wis.



Anne Margaret from Palos Heights, Ill., while fishing with the author, caught these bluegill.

fish behavior than any flasher will ever teach you. However, be sure to remember that the flasher will always have a place in ice fishing, especially in the darker water conditions when a camera is not able to give you a clear view.

We use two-pound test monofilament with a 1/32-ounce jig head. There are times when a 1/2-inch-long, soft jig head works even better; tipped with live bait such as wax worms, spikes and wigglers are also very productive. We also like the very thin, 1/2-inch-long, narrow piece of plastic in a wide variety of colors. Scented plastics are even more effective. These plastic baits are extremely effective on a wide variety of panfish, especially bluegill.

Finding wood on these weed flats is also a very important key to your continued success. This may be a simple log (say 10 feet long log) that is partially on the bottom and partially sticking off the bottom. This can be a gold mine for several weeks long. So, wood and weeds could be the secret ingredient (in my opinion) for season long success.

DEEPER LAKES

Working deeper, clear lakes or deeper lakes with little weeds is a different story. We do need a log pile, brush or some type of underwater manmade structure to attract and hold our bluegill, as well as other fish—although the bluegill normally are the most abundant. We need to know where these deep structures are ahead of time since these lakes will produce all winter long.

There are a few Illinois lakes that come to mind, mostly the Chain of Lakes in northern Illinois and a couple more like Lake Bloomington with lots of deeper wood and long deep flats, and Lake Evergreen, also with good, deep wood, as

well as shallow weeds. Then there are a couple of private lakes like Lake Holliday and Lake Wild Wood in Marshall County that are very deep with a few trees and several brush piles planted by the Natural Resource Committee. They are loaded with white bass and hybrid stripers. Then there is Lake Thunder Bird, a long, narrow lake, also with several planted brush piles, located in Putnam County.

All these lakes, including the Chain of Lakes in northern Illinois, hold great populations of bluegill and are easily caught. You need to do your homework during the open water period, then come back during ice up. We still like to use two-pound test monofilament and now we may even use a tiny 1/32-ounce split-shot about one-foot above our small ice jig. Even with the light line, we need to get our offering down to the fish in a slow but even descent, as not to tangle our line and hook on the way down to the fish. Deep fishing is mostly a daytime event—not before 8 a.m., and not after 3 p.m.—when fishing from 30 to 50 feet down. Remember, this is how we work deep fish. Color does seem to matter for a continued success pattern. You will need to experiment on what works the best for you.

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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