

Elusive Open-water Slabs: Midsummer Suspended Crappies



These two brothers caught these crappies while drifting a half mile off shore and casting a jig and minnow.



These two brothers enjoyed their day catching suspending crappies over 21 feet of water. They were casting a jig and plastic called a "Nail Tail."

by John Andrew

Discovering a high-density crappie lake should be number one on your priority list for catching midsummer suspended crappie. Checking your local DNR records on the internet is your best bet. Of course, there is personal knowledge from the area fishing guides and the long-time residents of the area as to which lakes are highly populated with crappies as well.



This father and son caught these crappies while drifting with a 1/16-ounce jig a quarter mile off shore over 33 feet of water.

This is an undiscovered resource (few have known for years) that needs to be carefully monitored, so please keep only what you wish to have for a meal and practice C.P.R. (catch, photo and release).

Catching crappies only in the spring and winter is no longer the only way to enjoy these tasty fillets. Once the first step has been accomplished, look for areas on the lake that have a year-after-year high spawning concentration area. Do this in the spring, not in midsummer. Once spawning is completed and the water temperature is rising rapidly, the crappies will move slightly deeper in the area of the lake or reservoir you are fishing. This will happen at a slightly different timetable as different parts of the lake warm sooner or slower than others.

As the crappies continue to move deeper and relate to some type of structure such as weeds, wood, manmade objects, drop-offs, and the subsequent summer, a large portion of the crappie population will be suspending over open water. This will happen during the warmest water temps of the year.

Finding these open water slabs takes fairly good electronics. Being able to accurately present your bait to the fish is very important, for you will need to maintain the correct depth of your bait so the crappies can feel your approaching

bait (through their lateral line). Then they will see the offering you are putting down to them and then smell the bait or lure. Always staying at the same depth, or slightly above the depth of the fish you are marking on your locator, is a critical concept to your success.

Crappies like to feed in the upward motion or parallel to their position, whether the fish are suspended or close to the bottom (at certain times of the year.) The reason for this is because of the location of their eyes. The fish's eyes are located high up on the front of its head; this gives it a very good view of what is filtering down through the water column. Or, when they are close to the bottom (at certain times of the year) they can easily find swimming larvae or aquatic crustaceans and free-swimming shad, depending where you may be fishing.

For catching, remember, first you must find these suspended fish with your electronics and perhaps mark the group of fish you find with a surface buoy. This is done for use as a visual reference—a critical part of this process when you are casting, drifting close to the buoy, or using slip bobbers (if calm enough). Using a

skies and water skiers go roaring by. The fish may move a few feet away, but they continue to bite all day long.

We like the smaller minnows on our jigs and medium-sized minnows on our bobbers. Why? Well, the water temps do get warm and some of the fish get a little lethargic during the hot water period, and we do not want the fish to work too hard to tackle a bigger minnow. There are certain areas where the crappies feed primarily on shad, but we still use the smaller shad for bait. For us, this is very important.

We are using 4-pound, test-braided line—sometimes with fluorocarbon leaders and sometimes without. Braided are used because when the light tap or light strike happens, the braided is an instant hook up, with no stretch at all. We never use snaps, clevises, or any quick-change device; we tie directly to the hook. Some may say this is not needed but at the end of our day, I believe, we are catching about six to eight percent more fish without any additional hardware on our line. And, as any businessman or businesswoman will tell you, a "six or eight percent increase" in his or her sales is very welcome.

Certain parts and locations of all reservoirs and lakes have suspended crappies during the warm water period of the year. Once you find them and present a bait to them, hang on because you will have discovered a true bonanza. **MWO**

1/32-ounce jig to a 1/8-ounce jig head tipped with a plastic trailer or a minnow is important to catch these fish. Now let's not forget that the slip bobber has to set to the correct depth. This is also a deadly approach.

From my 40 years experience, crappies like color, and there are multiple color patterns that work. The best color of your jig head, hook color, and even your line color will depend on what the water clarity is in the water environment you are fishing. Ask any pro crappie fisherman how important color is to the fish and you better pull up a chair because they are going to speak for a long time on how important color is throughout a 12-month period of tournaments.

After your first or second time finding and catching suspended crappies, you will begin to put together a solid pattern of re-finding and re-catching these fish week after week. They will bite even during the hottest time of year, including when the jet

Always be prepared!

We are all guilty of making mistakes on occasion, but boy, was I taken by surprise when stopped by the DNR just last month. The two officers asked for my license, as was routine. Being a seasoned guide, I didn't think twice before confidently handing the gentlemen both my guiding and fishing licenses, but I was shocked at what happened next.

One of the officers told me that, while my guiding license was up-to-date, my fishing license was not and consequently, I was issued a ticket. In all the years I've been fishing and guiding, I had never failed to renew either licenses and so you can imagine my dismay, but it just goes to show that we are all capable of making this mistake, even a veteran guide like myself, and I learned a lesson that you can benefit from.

The fees that we pay for fishing and hunting licenses help support the DNR who, in turn, conserve and protect our fisheries and wildlife for everyone so we can continue to enjoy them for generations to come.

So remember, before you hit the water this season or embark on your next hunting adventure, make sure you have a *current* license!

—John Andrew

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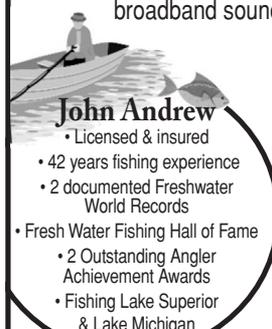
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