

Where Did They Go?

Contributed by Bruce Spangler and Chuck Good

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Team Crappie.com

Tournament Anglers
Bruce Spangler and Chuck Good

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It's a Saturday morning, the boat is in the water and you are heading to an area that has been producing crappie for weeks. You get there and can't find the fish. You go to other places where you've caught fish before and still...no fish. It seems like they have disappeared into the Twilight Zone. But don't give up looking for them. They're there; they can't get out of the lake. The bank stops them. All you've got to do is find them. Well of course, its easier said than done but there are going to be days when you win and days when they win. Sometimes it baffles even the most experienced fishermen. But its not impossible to find and catch them. It only requires a little extra effort.

DEVELOPING A PATTERN

The most important factors to remember when searching for crappie on any body of water is to find the approximate depth at which they are holding. The depth they prefer is determined by water temperatures, oxygen, pH, light penetration, food and cover availability. The best way in finding the correct depth is with a fish finder. They can show concentrations of crappie that may be suspended at that depth, and they may be around some kind of cover, channel edge, hump or drop-off. Crappie are usually relating to structure, and if they are nowhere near the objects, chances are they are inactive or a different kind of fish. If you're not sure if its crappie on your sonar unit, drop minnows or jigs down to a shade above the fish, and to see if they are aggressively feeding. Once you locate the crappie on one type of structure, crappie can often be found on other structures at the same depth.

If an angler isn't familiar with a lake, it may take more time to search the lake from the surface down to about 40 feet. They probably won't be much deeper because few reservoirs have adequate oxygen levels below those depths.

One mistake many anglers make in using the fish finders is looking for large numbers of fish. Sometimes the unit will display that information, especially around brush piles. Also, anglers overlook certain structures because the unit displayed no fish or may only see one or two, even though dozens are holding in and/or below the structures. With that being said, alot of times we've pulled impressive stringers from the brush piles by dangling a jig through the branches to find them.

BREAK LINES

A break line is any area beneath the surface where you have a sudden, rapid change in depth. It could be the edge of a channel, a point, a secondary bank, and nearly all bodies of water have numerous break line possibilities whether its a foot and half drop or a 20 feet drop.

But a break line itself won't always hold crappie, unless there is some kind of "break". A break is that area on a break line that has cover of some kind, like submerged brush, rocks, weeds, stump(s), or any other type of cover. These objects will hold crappie most of the time, only if the depth is in their "Comfort Zone".

When they move, they travel in close proximity to bottom contours. They are more likely to follow a descending point, side of a creek channel or a bluff. Again, these are places that has a sudden drop with breaks at a certain depth that crappie may relate to. These are also called "migration routes", which they use to follow from deep water in winter to their spawning beds in spring, and back to deep cooler water in the summer.

Another great asset to finding the correct depth on a lake is by asking a local angler who knows and fishes the lake, and is familiar with the behavior of its crappie through the seasons and in specific weather and water conditions. Ask someone who is fishing if they are catching any, and if he is, ask them "HOW DEEP" they are catching them at. That's all you need to ask.

So when you go to your favorite spot and the fish is gone, don't panic. Search for a break line when crappie is on the move. Its finding the right one, as well as the correct depth, is the key to unlocking the day's pattern.