

July 19, 2017

Greetings from the white Excel Bay Pro 203.

Hot weather, boat traffic, unreliable current, you name it - they've all been factors affecting fishing the last week. As a guide who is on the lake a majority of the days in a week (six days last week), it has been frustrating keeping track of the fish and their whereabouts. One day they will be on the ledges, the next they will be in the back half of bays. One day the catch is a mixed bag. The next day it may be mostly one species, like bass.

I had the pleasure of taking out Kevin and his step-sons Caleb(12) and Kaden (10) on Barkley last Saturday. I knew boat traffic would be a factor so we got an early start. A lot of kids are zombies at 6AM but these boys were ready, willing and gung-ho to make the best of our day on the water.

I went through my usual equipment review and how the reels work, why we are doing things a certain way, and why I chose this certain spot to start. With many adults I get a deer-in-the-headlights look when they first see my trolling gear. These guys were all ears and took to the gear like old pros.

I won't go into boring details but we had a ball. I have worked with lots of kids in the past but these two were soaking up all the details of how, why, when, and where. Their questions were those of an adult who genuinely wanted to learn my techniques so they could use them as they further their fishing careers. I let them pick the baits they wanted to use with a little guidance as to what I thought might work best.

We ended up with a mixed bag of crappie, bass, catfish, and yellows. I had to clean the catch on my truck tailgate due to the crowded marina. Mom and little sister Kinsley (7) had joined us. Kinsley was as excited as Caleb and Kaden were worn out.

She and Kaden wanted to help me fillet the catch. Kaden got his turn with the fillet knife and did pretty good for a beginner. I told little sister she might get her turn next time. She had already informed us all she WOULD be along for the next trip.

Mom sent me pics of the three kids just after they started their way back home. The enjoyment I get from being with a family such as this makes me know I'm doing what I was meant to do. Kids are the future of our outdoor sports and so many want to spend their waking hours tapping on a cell phone or playing video games

inside. These kids (Caleb and Kaden) are outdoor kids and a genuine pleasure to fish with.

Crappie

Scattered would best describe the crappie lately. Our best catches are coming on or near deep wood cover with baitballs (schools of minnows) nearby. The bite has been best early and very late in the day. KY Lake has been very clear all year and the extreme sunshine is causing the fish to seek shelter during the hot parts of the day. Cloudy days have made for better fishing but the clouds have mostly given way to clear skies most days.

I'm getting some good reports of vertical jiggers having good catches early on wood cover but they are catching one here, two there. Concentrations of crappie have been hard to find. Tube jigs, baby shad bodies and curly tails have all been working for the jig fishermen using light to medium weight jig heads.

I've found that with the hot weather, many fishermen will limit their search for crappie to the deepest areas of a given location. Most boats now are equipped with good electronics that many folks don't pay attention to other than a depth reading. Learn how to look for schools of bait and fish in all areas.

Many times we will catch good crappie no more than a few feet deep that are suspended above deep water. When I tell folks we caught crappie 10 feet deep in 25 feet of water, they act like it is some foreign concept. The deepest running bait is not always the best choice. Be willing to experiment but keep an eye on the electronics all the time.

Catfish

Reports of some nice channel cats and blues have been coming in from fishermen trolling crankbaits on the deeper ledges on the main lake and mouths of bays.

Bait fishermen have been doing so-so when there is current on main lake rocky areas and river-channel drops. Try leeches, cut bait, and prepared stink baits fished on or very near the bottom. The best areas are also areas you can expect to lose several hooks and sinkers.

White and Yellow Bass

I'm still seeing several jumps but they are not staying on the surface very long. Long casts with blade baits, spoons, in-line spinners and curly tail jigs will draw strikes.

Lots of days we can't seem to be able to get a crankbait in the water without having yellow bass hammer it immediately. Lots of these yellows are very small, almost the size of the bait they hit, and barely give any indication they are on the lure. If you are trolling, be sure to check the baits very often for yellows. A 6 inch yellow may keep you from catching a large crappie if it is allowed to stay on the bait.

Bass

It seems the ledge bite for bass has been as fickle as the crappie bite. Current is the key to success and it has been unreliable at best. Some days there is good current, others none at all. TVA has a phone app called "TVA Lake Info" that I use daily to keep up with current rates.

Nice sized bass are still being caught on large crankbaits, creature baits and flutter spoons. We caught our largest bass of the year Thursday while trolling a main lake flat. The lucky angler let me take a couple of pictures before it was released to swim again.

Bluegills

There are still some willow fly hatches that are drawing bluegills along with lots of other species to the bank areas where the trees and cover are seeing hatches.

We are picking up some really nice bluegills while trolling deep rocky bank areas in some major coves. A bluegill that is willing to take on a medium bass-sized crankbait is probably going in the livewell. That area is also marked for future attention by waypoints or memory.

Boat traffic is as high this year as I've ever seen. Lake Barkley traffic gets intense and is best avoided during the mid-day times of the weekends. KY Lake gets lots of traffic but the size and fact that there are not the large shallow areas like in Barkley let the traffic spread out where it doesn't seem as bad.

The weather and forecast lake levels and current make it look like we will stay in our current situation for a few weeks. Make the best of your time on the water. Consider planning your trips for very early and very late in the day. Carry plenty of

non-alcoholic drinks and water. Dehydration is a real danger to boaters and fishermen.

Be careful and considerate of those who you share the lake with. Wear your PFDs when the big engine is running. Enjoy our beautiful lakes but also keep in mind where your wake is going and be aware you are responsible for any damage it causes. Remember the lake is now slowly being drawn down toward the winter pool. Be mindful of shallow areas and objects on or near the surface.

Welcome to our little piece of Heaven.

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