

## Spider-Rigging for Shallow-Water Slabs

By Bernard Williams, Magnolia Crappie Club

Late Fall and early winter is the season that some crappie fishermen seem to forget, they've developed "Buck Fever", from the current deer season or it's just too cool to fish. For the avid crappie fisherman this is when the weather changes from unbearably hot days to cold nights and cool days, the perfect fishing weather. The lakes become almost empty, very few fisherman on the water. I love this time of the year.

This change in weather and water temperature cause something to happen in the crappie psych, the move from their deep water hide-outs to shallow water hold-ups, ready to load up with their favorite food, **shad**. Crappie start the winter gorge, they try to gobble up as many shad as possible in order to build up weight for the up-coming spring spawn.

### The Shad Migration

The late fall and early winter crappie transformation is caused by the shad migration. Shad begin to travel when the water temps start to drop from the mid-80's to the low 60's and the crappie will tag along. Its like the spring-time part II. Crappie will go behind the shad into areas almost to shallow to float a boat. I've experienced catching slab crappie in water less than 18 inches deep.

Fishing shallow necessitates us long-liners and crank-baiters to change methods in order to catch the large crappie. We now have to utilize a technique known as spider-rigging. What I mean is we move both seats up front and use very 6 to 8 long poles (14' to 16') placed in our front rod holders, with 6# to 8# test line and either a single or double minnow rigs. We often attach 2½" walleye tubes filled with crappie nibbles and minnows. These rigs are gradually (.4 to .5 mph) pushed along shallow flats or break-lines.

### Equipment

16" – B'n'M Bucks Graphite Jig Poles or B'n'M Capps & Coleman Poles

6# or 8# - Vicious High-Vis Panfish Line

B'n'M Spinning Reels or Baitcasting Reels

B'n'M Capps & Coleman Double Minnow Rigs (1/4 oz or 3/8 oz)

Southern Pro - Walleye Glow Tubes (2" or 2½")



Bobby Garland Stroll-R (Glow)



Medium to Large Shiners

Lindy Thill Crappie Cork



Bait Pump with Berkley Crappie Nibbles



Driftmaster Rod Rack and Holders



B'n'M Pro Staffer Brad Taylor with his spider-rigging Driftmaster Rod-Holder.

### **Fishing Location**

We try to find an area of the lake identical to where we fished in the spring. We look for creeks that run off the main channel. We then trail them back to where they begin to split and fragment off to small branches. This is *just what the doctor ordered*, if the area contains bait fish. Check you depth finder continually looking for the occurrence of shad at or near the surface.

When we are probing for our late-fall spots on a new lake we ride the main areas looking for diving sea gulls. Sea gulls are thousands times better fish finders than any electronic device on the market, believe it or not. When we see these birds flocked in a certain spot you can be sure that there's bait fish in close proximity. They don't waste their time; they go where the food is can be found.

### **Starting the Hunt**

When we coast up to our spot we want to fish we stop at least 50 yards for where we want to start fishing. We bait up and set up our rods in the holders and set the depths. We set 2 poles near the bottom in 5' to 6' of water and then stagger our depths about 1 foot apart up to 18 inches from the surface.

We use our GPS and Lake Map to track the break-lines into the shallow areas, frequently adjusting our line depths as we move shallower. If we get a bite we stop and fish the area for a few minutes. The fish in these areas are particularly spooky. We use the 16" poles for two reasons: (1) to carry a broad path, and (2) not spook the shallow fish.

### **Landing a Fish**

Fishing with really long poles necessitates some practice. When you have a 16" pole with a short string, you simply cannot lift a fish out of the water without breaking the pole tip. You have to maneuver the fish back to the back of the boat and then net the fish at the back, or if I'm fishing alone, set the hook and slide the pole to the back of

the boat before netting the fish on the front. We utilize a really long dip net, one with a 10' to 12' handle. This permits you to capture the fish further out from the boat than with a short handle net.

### **Seeing the Bite**

Fishing shallow water calls for complete attention to all the details. Sometime the bite is very ferocious, I mean they will bury the pole tip 2 or 3 guides up the pole, but other times the bite is so delicate that you only see the line moving left or right, this is when you have to decide to set the hook or let him take it more. There are periods when you only see a peck, or thump. I set the hook in either case.

Fishing shallow with sharp light wire hook necessitates a light set of the hook. A hard set will definitely cause you to either rip the mouth or pull the hook entirely out of the fish. The poles have to be the center of your concentration. If I must take my eyes off the pole I place my hand on the rod rack. This permits me to survey any strikes I may get with my back turned.

### **Triggering a Bite**

When the fish are finicky, I sometimes use diverse tricks to trigger a bite. Listed below are a few of my tricks and tips:

- A short quick turn to the left or right
- Speed up and stop or pull up and back-up, this causes the bait to rise and fall.
- Grab the line near the reel and pull 6" to 8" and let it fall, I do this on all the rods at random time intervals.
- Placing beads and a spinner blade above the minnow hook.
- Downsize hooks, minnows, jigs and weights
- Use Lindy Thill Slip-Corks – This gets your bait away from the boat and on windy days it will take the bounce out of the poles.

### **Covering Water**

The best tip I can give you is to cover as much water as possible. Large lakes are full of dead-water. You have to do away with as much dead-water as possible. I do this by trying to read the natural signs, diving sea gulls, talking to the local fishermen, watching other boats and covering as much water as I can in a day of fishing. Spread your poles as wide as possible, the side poles often produce better than the front poles.

I sometimes start out by long-lining an area just to see if I get a hit. If I can catch several fish in an area I mark this area and come back with my long poles. This helps eliminate a lot of dead-water. I must caution you to develop a pattern on the fish. Sometimes it takes several hours to several days. Fish all depths from the bottom to the top. I've seen times when the water was extremely stained that the fish were only 2 feet from the surface. Don't fish under the fish. It's better to fish too shallow than too deep.

## Spider-Rigging Advantages

- *Cover lots of water* – Spider-rigging at .4 to .5 MPH in 8 hours allow you to cover nearly 4 miles of water. With 14' poles out the front and sides, you can cover a 35' path down the lake.
- *Target suspended and scattered fish* – Good sonar allows you see the baitfish schools and the fish underneath. By setting your line length just above the fish allows you to stay in the strike zone all the time.
- *Fish Directly on Brush Piles, Stake Beds and Ledges* – Crappie love brush piles, stake beds and ledges, that's no secret. Spider-rigging puts and holds your bait directly over these areas, this is where the fish are, and sooner or later they're going to feed.
- *Stay with the Schools* – Crappie travel in schools, spider-rigging keeps you on top of the schools of crappie.
- *Catch lots of fish* – Spider-rigging with 6 to 8 poles increases your chances 6 to 8 fold. This allows you to catch your lake limit much faster.
- *Inexpensive way to fish* – Fishing live bait is one of the least expensive ways to catch fish.
- *Easy to Learn* – This technique is one quickest to master, it just takes practice.

## Spider-Rigging Disadvantages

- *Multiple poles become tangled* – Its easy to get poles tangled, one uncontrolled fish can wreck havoc on your setup.
- *Long poles* – Its takes time to learn to land a fish with long pole fishing. Don't try to lift a big fish with the pole, always use a dip-net, these pole tips are expensive to replace.
- *Lots of Bait* – With 2 baits per pole and 8 poles it takes 16 minnows to get setup. At \$2 per dozen that could become a costly.
- *Rigging the Boat* – Most boats come with a single seat up front, to be effective spider rigging requires both persons to fish out of the front. Installing 2 seats on the front requires the purchase of a Double-Down Seat-Setup.
- *Total Attention to Detail* – Fishing multiple poles requires your full attention, not paying attention and all your poles become hung can cause major frustration.
- *Aerating your live bait* – Live bait requires some type of aeration, we use pure oxygen. This makes the minnows lively, they will literally jump out your hand. A typical oxygen setup with tank, regulator and stone costs around \$100. Oxygen refills costs about \$12 per tank.
- *Broken Poles* – Long poles are easily broken if you are not careful. Be careful not to step on the pole tips. Driftmaster Tip-Savers can save your poles from damage during transport.

## Conclusion

While there are numerous ways to catch crappie in shallow water, I personally think spider-rigging minnows and jigs is one of the top fish catching techniques. Find the right lake, the right spot and hold on, get ready for some major action.

My fellow Magnolia Crappie Club friends, Brad Chappell and Bo Hudson set a 2009 nation-wide tournament record for the heaviest 7-fish weigh-in on Grenada Lake of 19.42 lbs. with a 3.03 lb. monster spider-rigging in shallow water. That's a 2.8 lb. average. Now that will make me fish shallow any day and all day.



Bobby Garland Pro Staffers Brad Chappell & Bo Hudson after a record tournament catch.