

Watchin' bobbers

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

Even at the tender age of 63, Alan Tindle from Clarksville, Ga., still looks forward to getting out on the water when the flowers and trees are blooming to enjoy what has become a lifetime tradition for him. "Nothing beats getting out here on the water on a sunny spring day and jiggling the shallows, throwing a jig under a bobber and catching slab crappie," Tindle said.

Tindle reflects that back in his younger days, he would sit for hours watching a bobber with a minnow hooked on his line waiting for a crappie to come along and drag the bobber under the water. While he has learned much since those days, he still gets just as excited seeing his cork suddenly disappear after placing it in the fishiest-looking spot he can find.

"This time of year, I'm looking for crappie to be anywhere from 8 inches of water up to 3 feet," Tindle said. "Usually, they'll be stacked up around standing trees, stumps or any piece of shallow-water cover they can find — any place where the males can find a spot to hold and protect the eggs and fry."

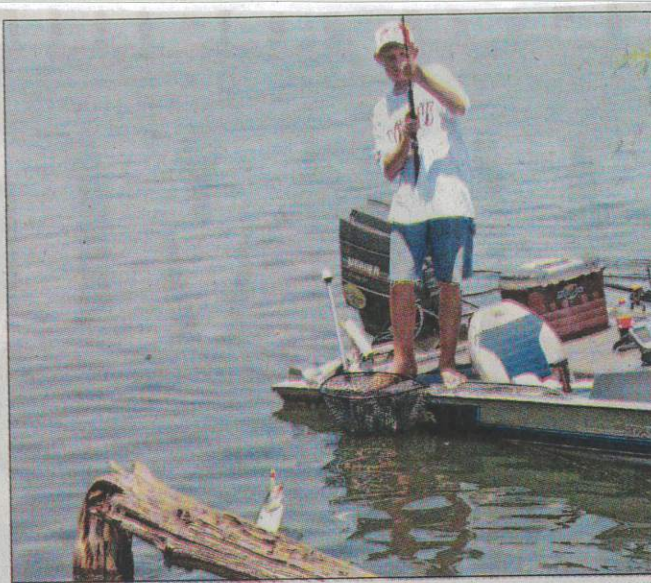
Tindle said he usually looks for spawning fish between mid- to late-March until mid- to late-April. Much of the timing depends on water temperature and the species of crappie that's there to be caught.

Lakes Keowee and Russell have crappie populations comprised primarily of black crappie, which are known to spawn earlier and in cooler water than white crappie. This means Tindle expects to see those lakes' fish move to their shallow-water haunts when daytime water temperatures peek into the 57-to-60-degree range.

Tindle's favorite tactic when crappie move shallow to spawn is to pitch a jig and cork into and around likely looking spawning sites. He claims that by using a long rod with a small jig under the bobber, he can place his bait right in the face of a spawning crappie. He further claims that by having a slip cork adjusted to the level he's fishing, he can let the jig bob right in the fish's living room.

"Sometimes they'll snatch it the instant it hits the water, but most of the time the bite comes when the jig has been floating motionless for a few seconds," Tindle said. "These fish aren't necessarily hungry — they're protecting a territory. When that jig drops in there and just hangs out too close to the nest, it sets the fish off and he just tries to annihilate it."

Tindle refers to a spawning crappie as a "he" because the majority of the fish he catches during the



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Kids of all ages look forward to springtime, when watching bobbers for spawning crappie becomes a favorite pastime.

spawn are male crappie, which build and protect the nest before and after the females move in to lay eggs.

He said that later in the spawn, he may have an afternoon when he catches a lot of egg-laden females, but for the most part, it's the smaller males he's after.

"It seems like the males will pick one area and really gang up in that location," Tindle said. "You

definitely can't say that they're evenly spread out around the shallows."

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"White crappie spawn after the blacks," he said. "That means that crappie anglers who time it right can visit some of the other lakes that hold some white crappie, like lakes Hartwell and Clark's Hill starting in about mid-April and get in on the white crappie spawn."