

# Welcome to the dark side of crappie fishing

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
FOR THE JOURNAL

**W**hen real-time, forward-facing sonar first hit the market, many anglers were slow to embrace the new technology.

This is especially true for crappie anglers, because using RT/FF sonar — what many refer to as Livescoping, since Garmin's products were the first to hit the market — meant learning an entirely new way of fishing. Like most new technology, many swore it off as cheating, too hard to learn or simply being downright evil.

In time, even the old dogs are starting to pay attention, particularly with the number of crappie fishing tournaments being won using it.

In the beginning, Garmin Panoptix led other manufacturers in getting its product to the market. However, Lowrance's Live Sight and Humminbird's Mega 360 Imaging have now entered the market and are garnering their fair share of recognition.

Hands down, most veteran anglers will point to learning how to identify what is and what isn't a crappie when learning to use RT/FF sonar.

Despite the claims of high-density image resolution, many fish look like one another in the water. One of the best ways to differentiate a crappie from a bass on real-time sonar is to pay close attention to how a fish acts rather than precisely what it looks like. Crappie are known to be schooling fish, but sometimes those schools can be densely packed, and at other times not so much, particularly with larger specimens.

Crappie don't move around as much as many anglers believe and can

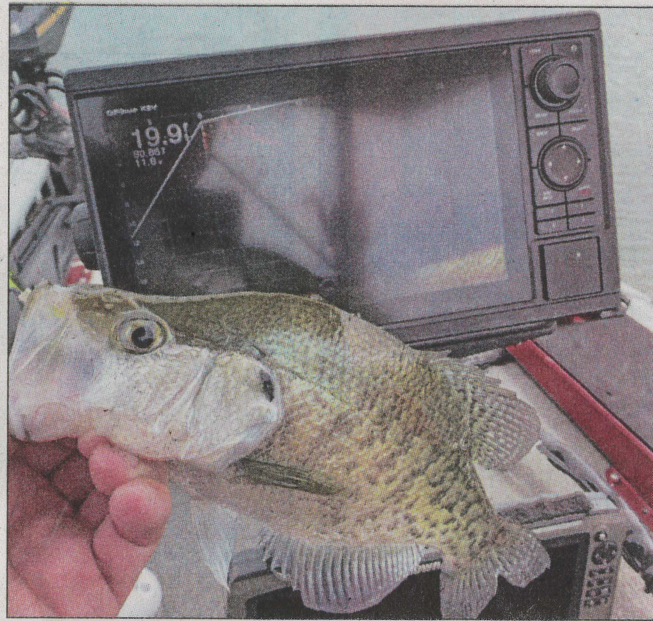
most often be found in that characteristic, slightly upward tilted pose, often relating to structure. Also remember that when species intermingle on a stake bed, brush pile or other structure, crappie tend to hover rather than swim around in tight circles.

While no sonar unit worth having is truly automatic, RT/FF sonar is not as complicated as you may think, though it does require some individual adjustment for each fishing situation encountered.

For Garmin units, this means making tweaks and adjustments to the range, gain, noise rejection, TVG and color gain.

No single configuration works in every situation. Some settings build on others, so spending some time with the unit on the water in real fishing situations is crucial.

The same can be said for the sensitivity, noise rejection and palate color with the Lowrance units, as well as the sensitivity, contrast



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**The use of real-time, forward-facing sonar is changing the way many anglers now fish for crappie.**

and dynamic contrast for the Humminbird units.

When mounting the various transducers for RT/FF, two popular options are on the trolling motor shaft or on a stand-alone mount. Aftermarket products are available to mount the RT/

FF transducer in a location other than the trolling motor. Some of these mounts

are hand controlled, while others are remote or foot controlled.

Transducer placement, in crappie fishing applications, in a location other than the trolling motor is to allow the angler to provide proper boat control without changing the direction the transducer cone is facing. In windy conditions, anglers who are trying to focus on fish on structure lose that picture when they need to move the trolling motor heading to combat the wind.

Since the majority of baits used to target crappie are artificial crappie jigs, crappie anglers are keen on having sonar settings, transducer placement and even bait and tackle choices that show up the best on the sonar screen.

Either casting the bait or placing the bait with a

jig pole are two popular bait presentations when crappie fishing, depending on which is more comfortable to the angler in allowing him to find and keep the bait in the transducer cone to see the fish's reaction to the bait.

Most times, crappie will exhibit a distinct preference between bait profiles, shapes, speed and actions. This will be readily viewable on the screen. Pay attention to the fish's reaction to the bait and make adjustments. Veteran anglers have learned to have multiple baits rigged on different rods — aka bass angler style — so they can offer fish multiple bait choices in short order.

**PHILLIP GENTRY** is a freelance outdoor writer who has been writing a wide variety of outdoor articles across the Southeast since 2004.