

# Crank-baiting for crappie

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
FOR THE JOURNAL

Late spring and early summer are great times to target crappie using crankbaits.

If you are not familiar with the tactic, crank-baiting can be performed in one of two methods that crappie anglers may be more familiar with — long-line trolling, or tight-line trolling. However, the most popular is long lining.

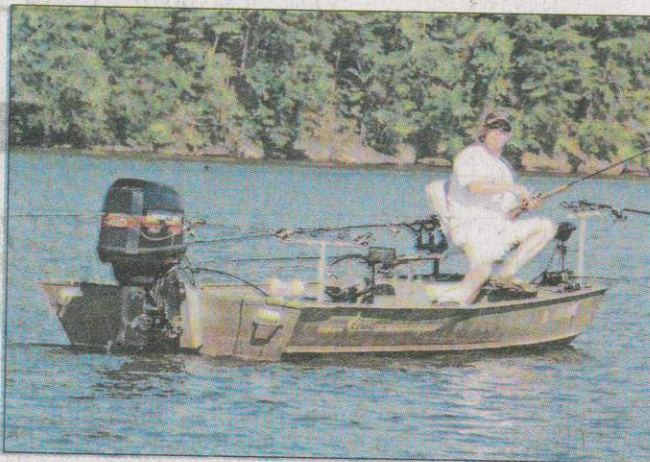
Long lining crankbaits requires a bit more coordination of effort than longlining jigs. Most crankbaits are rated for diving to a prescribed depth, so it's important to present crankbaits at the proper speed, distance out and spacing to achieve that depth.

It starts in the boat. A strong 24- to 36-volt variable speed trolling motor is the preferred method of propulsion to sustain a 1.8 to 2.5 mph trolling speed for an entire fishing trip.

Rod holder placement is another important aspect of crankbait trolling and should allow the angler to deploy the desired number of rods — six to eight rods is common — without crossing and hanging lines. Rods should be angled to be parallel with the water, both to achieve spread of the baits and to keep wind or wave action from introducing slack in the line.

Choose rods of varying lengths, starting with the shorter rods closer to the stern, and increase length as you move toward the bow. Mirror one side of the boat with the other in rod placement. An example could be a 6-foot rod straight off the bow, an 8-foot rod on the corner, a 10-footer perpendicular to the gunnel and then another 12-foot rod just forward of that.

Because the diameter of



PHILLIP GENTRY | FOR THE JOURNAL

**Trolling crankbaits is becoming an increasingly popular tactic for catching post-spawn crappie in many Upstate lakes.**

fishing line used is a factor in depth of presentation, most anglers choose a balance of low-diameter line with test strength in the event the crankbait hangs on structure and can possibly be retrieved. Since trolling crankbaits en masse is more of a reaction strategy and fish generally attack from below and behind the bait, line visibility is not as big an issue with crank baiting as for long-lining jigs. As such, 15-pound mono and 20-pound braid are both popular line choices when crank baiting.

Line distance out is another determining factor in depth, so using line counter, baitcasting reels can be a big assistance in pulling crankbaits. With line distance, reverse the order of rod length so that the shorter rod to the stern has more line out than the longer rods, with the longest rod being the shortest distance out.

Turning the boat with such an arrangement should be done with gradual sweeps to keep the lines from crossing. Unlike longlining crappie jigs, a crankbait will generally hang another line if it crosses it. One reason to vary the distances out

is so that baits run at different depths and will not hang another line during a gradual arcing turn.

At the terminal end of the line is the crankbait. A variety of crankbaits are made specifically for trolling for crappie. The typical crankbait suitable for crappie fishing may be 2.5 inches up to 3.5 inches, although larger baits are often used successfully. Crankbaits designed for crappie fishing tend to run in more brilliant colors than would be used for bass or striper fishing, again to trigger the reaction bite and when used in dingy or even muddy water.

Many anglers choose a subtle break line on a mid or deep water flat where bait is present and dissect the area trolling crankbaits. A bite is easily detected as the hooks grab into the fish and will generally double the bow in the rod.

Land every fish in a long-handled net, as most lost fish occur right at the boat when the fish shakes its head after hooks have become partially dislodged on the way to the boat.

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