



the
CRAYFISH TALE
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More Talk About Bait

When crayfish catchers get together, the topic eventually turns to bait. Anyone trying to catch crayfish sooner or later realizes that practically any contraption catches crayfish as long as it's furnished with some attractive bait. But what bait?

Even my first, boxy and clumsy crayfish trap would catch crayfish. In those days I often used pieces of chicken as bait, ignoring the advice from a Finnish crayfish catcher to consider "a stealthily shot neighbor's cat".

Then I learned that the best baits are those including fish, especially fish that is oily and fat such as salmon, mackerel and shad.

One day my friend George and I decided to go crayfish catching at Arizona's Black Canyon Lake. I had picked up frozen Tilapia fish from Walmart, while George was going to use his latest finding – fishy cat food in cans.

Down at the lake, I strung out my eleven traps, 10 Trappers and one Jumbo, on my trot line while George modestly placed his two traps in the same area as I did. I had confidently baited all my traps with the frozen Tilapias that I was sure would be the perfect crayfish bait.

George calmly stuck in one can of cat food in each of his traps after he meticulously punched a few holes in the lid of each can. But George had one can of cat food left over and he graciously offered it to me. I accepted it, probably with a smirk, and stuck it into my last trap, the Jumbo, and we left the lake and went over to our camp site for the evening meal.

The next morning saw us rowing out to the placed traps in my ten footer aluminum boat. We pulled our traps and I found to my chagrin that George had caught more crayfish in his two traps than I had in my first ten. Then to really rub it in, I pulled my last trap, the Jumbo with the donated cat food can. It was full of crayfish! I could barely believe my eyes. What had gone wrong?

A few weeks later I drove up to my favorite crayfish lake with son Peter and his family. We had plans to stay for three nights, and I was prepared to really find out about cat food as bait for catching crayfish. After all, my mentor on the West Coast had told me that only fish makes good bait and he referred to chicken pieces and cat food as 'crap'. As I was entirely indoctrinated to his way of thinking, I had difficulty accepting that George had out fished me by using cat

food. Cat food that was supposed to be 'crap'.

I had planned three sessions with my eleven trap trot line. The first and the second soaking overnight with every other trap baited with cat food and the rest with wild salmon and/or salami or baloney sausage. The third session I would bait according to the findings in the first two.

Here is the result of the overnight sessions in this very well populated crayfish lake using either cat food or salmon with an assortment of salami and baloney. The first session, I left the can lid 25% open; the second session each lid was punched with four holes.

First night's catch:

Total – 289 crayfish, avg 26.3/trap

Traps with cat food – 185 (64%)

Traps with salami/salmon - 104 (35%)

The second night's catch:

Total - 294 crays, avg 26.6

Traps with cat food – 177 (60%)

Traps with baloney/salmon – 116 (39%)

Based on this data, it was obvious that cat food was superior to other traditional baits even including the salmon filets. During the third session I baited all traps with fishy cat food and each can lid open wide.

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Here's the last night's catch:

Total traps with cat food 406
crays

Trap average 37/trap

After the third session, all cans were totally empty of bait. Probably some crayfish might even have escaped since all the bait was gone. Yet, the total catch was the biggest of the three tries.

There is no longer any doubt in my mind about the success of using fishy cat food. And when I say 'fishy' cat food, I refer to those cat foods that are advertised as containing 'white fish and tuna' such as Friskies. What really attracts crayfish to this combination is apparently not just fish as such, but the oil and fat included in the mix. Since oily fish is considered good bait, I scoured the Internet for fat information about fish samples. Among the highest ones are salmon, mackerel and shad. As tilapia was not even mentioned, I suspect that tilapia is not among the oily ones.

I also recall, while baiting the traps with my 'church key' punctured cat food cans, that as I tilted one of the cans too much, a string of oily goo dripped out and lodged on my pant leg. Smelling like cat food bait the rest of the session, I came to the definite conclusion that 'fishy' cat food is the way to go. Crap or not, it sure catches crayfish.