



the
CRAYFISH TALE
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FISH OIL AS CRAYFISH BAIT – AN EXPERIMENT

Ever since I found that canned cat food works as bait for crayfish, I have wondered what it really is in cat food that attracts them.

One evening as I sat in my boat preparing trot line traps for placing in my favorite crayfish lake, it struck me. After I had punctured the flat can with my “church key”, I tipped the can a bit too much, and out came a dribble of liquid that made a big, fat blob on my pant leg. Immediately a fishy aroma permeated the air around me, and I wondered, what is in that smelly liquid? Maybe that is the key to the attraction for crayfish? Rubbing my fingers together I found that they were kind of greasy and slippery. Oil? Fish oil?

Some time later I was browsing Walmart’s stock of cat food cans. There, one of them had a contents label, and among the information was one line that said :”fish oil”. Aha! That was it! Cat food, at least some, does include fish oil as part of the stuff that attracts cats. Maybe this was also what attracts crayfish?

Then one day while browsing the Internet, I ran into the website of a company called Pro-Cure. They promoted fish oil as an attractant for fish. With their scent attracting fish oils, they claim you can improve your catch of fish considerably. Seeing other fishing web sites linking to Pro-Cure for attracting fish, I decided to try it. I purchased two fish oils, one made from Menhaden fish and the other from ‘bloody tuna’. Menhaden is a name I recollected. That’s what crayfish catchers in Louisiana often use as bait in their traps. Apparently with success. And one of the cat food cans I had used with great success included white fish and TUNA. It made sense to me to use these two fish oils to try to attract the crayfish in one of my favorite crayfish lakes. In the words of Pro-Cure: *Whether you call it pogie, bunker, Moss bunker or Menhaden oil, savvy east coast anglers know this is one of the fishiest oils available anywhere.*

But how to attract crayfish with fish oil? After scratching my head for a while I came up with this solution. Taking five bait boxes of the sort I include when selling Trappy and XL traps, I inserted into them a piece of sponge of the kind my wife uses in her kitchen. This sponge readily absorbs water, so why not also oil? Fish oil?

Said and done, I soon had the five bait boxes filled with absorbent sponge, and I was ready to attract crayfish. First thing I did after my son Peter and I arrived at the crayfish lake was to do a pre-catch test with only three Trappy traps. Into these three traps I inserted two bait boxes with fish oil impregnated sponge and one with a can of cat food used as a comparison. I planned to have these three traps in the lake for about four hours before we were ready for the ten trap trot line for the night.

After about four hours, we pulled the three test traps. The first one, with fish oil, came up empty! The second one, with cat food, came up with five crays in it. The third trap with fish oil, came up with one crayfish!

Big surprise and big disappointment. Well, that's what tests are for. We tested and found that obviously, fish oil was not very attractive. But the real proof of the pudding lay in the coming nightly trap placement along the lake's boat launching area, where earlier the same summer we had pulled up one Jumbo with 70 crayfish after a nightly session.

The plan was to place traps with every other trap baited with cat food and every other one with fish oil soaked sponge in bait boxes. To avoid telling what we were doing at the boat dock, we chose the time after sunset. Unfortunately, with my weakened eye sight, I had trouble handling all the details when it came to attaching traps to the trot line and to equip each trap with either a cat food can or a bait box soaked with fish oil. A pesky wind did not help either. But finally the traps were all in the water and, in total darkness, we left the boat dock for camp where a dinner and liquid refreshments and a camp fire waited.

At sunup the following morning we rowed out to the boat dock and started pulling traps. Making a long story short, here is the result.

Traps with fish oil = 4 crayfish

Traps with cat food = 96 crayfish.

A pretty startling result in favor of fishy cat food. (I say 'fishy' as I always choose cat food advertised as made from fish products.)

Needless to say, I was both surprised and disappointed. I had really worked up anticipation for having found a new and better way to bait my traps for really big catches of crayfish. Obviously something in my calcula-

tions did not work as expected. Apparently, crayfish simply disregarded the fish oil in the bait boxes while they equally obviously went for the cat food cans with four punctured lid holes.

The next day, we placed the same string of trot lined traps along the opposite shore, all baited with canned fishy cat food, and during the five afternoon hours we pulled up better filled traps for a total of 158. Not a record by a long shot, but much better than the night before.

Out of the crayfish catch I prepared 15 for me and 15 for Peter in a salty water kettle with Zatarain's crawfish boil, and that evening we had one heck of a fine crayfish dinner in our camping trailer while outside elks were bugling and the reservation cows lowing. Later we spent time around a roaring camp fire followed by a pleasant night's rest while contemplating the result of this year's crayfish experiments with fish oil.

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Greetings.

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