



the
CRAYFISH TALE
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ESCAPE STOPPERS – NEEDED OR NOT?

When I started catching crayfish in Arizona lakes many years ago, I asked my brother to send over a dozen of the best Swedish crayfish traps he could find. He shipped over the ones that were at the time the most popular crayfish traps around, the ones I now call the Jackpot. This is the collapsible crayfish trap with netting wound around a metal spiral. This trap served me well for many years, and thousands of crayfish found their way to my dinner table that way.

But because of its net construction with no solid entry funnels, this trap can not be equipped with separate so called escape stoppers. That did not bother me in the least, however, and I merrily hauled in all these crays from my favorite lakes.

But after a few years of using them, I noticed that sometimes, when I pulled up a trap with no remaining bait in it, the number of crayfish in it was lower than in those where there still was some bait left. At first I did not see the connection between these two facts. Finally, though, I realized that, if a crayfish trap runs out of crayfish bait, the crayfish inside start looking for bait somewhere else, such as outside of the trap. Consequently, traps that had run out of bait started showing up with less crays caught.

My first solution was simply to add more bait or to empty and rebait the traps every three or four hours. As most of cray fishing is done at night, that caused me to lose a lot of sleep. But I caught lots of crayfish.

Then came the Trapper with its sturdy construction which allowed it to be fitted with an escape stopper. Now, even if the trap ran out of bait, which it often did in well populated waters, the crays inside the trap had difficulty getting out. Result – more crayfish. I was thrilled at this discovery and for a while rested on my laurels.

But then I was introduced to the Trappy and the Trappy XL traps. These traps did not have escape stoppers like the old Trapper and my first version of the Jumbo. The manufacturer stated that they had a simplified escape stopper installed, but I could see that it was not one as efficient as in the old Trapper. Yet, these traps caught lots of crayfish.

As I had advanced in my knowledge of crayfish catching, I realized that I had lately increased the amount of bait I supplied in each trap. And when I designed the new Jumbo and used canned cat food as bait, I noticed that I hardly ever ran out of bait. The cat food cans with four punched holes in the lid kept the aroma coming but left the bait almost intact. I was catching more crayfish than ever.

I discussed this situation with my Swedish crayfish guru, and he at once had the answer. Crayfish simply do NOT leave a trap as long as it has bait in it. It is as simple as that. In other words, you don't need an escape stopper at all. All you need to do is to make sure the trap has an ample supply of crayfish bait.

So here was the reason why my old Jackpots, with no escape stoppers, always caught so much crayfish; they never ran out of bait because I steadily replenished it. Once I discovered this theory, I realized how true it was. Using fishy canned cat food with only four punctured holes in the lid always supplied an attracting fishy aroma to keep the caught crays inside while still attracting new ones to enter.

Most of my crayfish catching is done during over-night sessions, but I have no trouble supplying bait that will last until sunup. And using my new Jumbo design, I have been thrilled seeing that the normal amount of trapped crays at sunrise is usually around and above 50 in each trap. (The one Jumbo that came up with 80, was probably an aberration, yet a welcome one.) Should you want to leave your traps in longer than over night, maybe two cans of cat food will do the trick?

So after ten years of touting the escape stopper of my first traps, I have now come to the conclusion that, while escape stoppers of course work, they are not necessary as long as you supply enough bait. I may be getting old, but not too old to learn new tricks...

IMPORTANT NOTE! During the week after Mother's Day (May 8, 2011) Trapper Arne will be out of office for a week for a cornea replacement procedure which hopefully will improve my vision. During that time, all orders will still be processed and acknowledged by my assistant and Better Half. Shipments will continue starting the week of May 16. Please have faith and patience.

Trapper Arne