



The Crayfish Tale

MORE ABOUT CAT FOOD

In the September newsletter I wrote about how my friend George showed that cat food made better crayfish bait than my frozen tilapia from Wal-Mart. As it was just time for the annual trek to my favorite crayfish lake, I decided to make this trek settle the question.

So early one September day, I packed eleven traps into my camper and went up to the lake in company with my son Peter and his family; including two dogs. I was intent on either proving or disproving that some cat food may be the crayfish bait we all have been looking for. To come to some conclusion I had purchased two cases of Friskies cat food – ocean white fish and tuna – and also one precooked sausage, some baloney and two packages of bacon. Oh, yes, I also included a package of frozen wild salmon filets.

We had scheduled to stay for three nights, so I had three nightly sessions planned for the traps. During the first two sessions I would bait each other trap in my trot line with cat food and every other trap with some of the other baits I had brought. For the third session I would use only the bait that had scored best in the first two test sessions.

A hefty monsoon downpour, typical for this lake, almost cancelled my plans for the first all-night trot line session. But the weather cleared up just before sun-set and my son and I braved the wet boat seats and placed the eleven traps, half with cat food and half with assorted baits.

To find the submerged trot line the following day, the last trap was attached to a plastic float left bobbing inconspicuously. As we were almost alone on the lake at this time, we had few fears of unauthorized interference with our traps. So we rowed back, ate dinner, drank some wine and slept well until next morning.

With the sun barely up over the mountain range to the east, Tracey, my daughter-in-law, and I rowed out to pull the traps. First, find the plastic float.

There was no plastic float to be seen! We looked all over the area where the float had been placed, but no sign of it. Then, suddenly, Tracey, with younger eyes than mine, found the float, up on the shore by about 15 feet. And the end of the string was no longer attached to the last trap in the trot line. Great mystery. Who, or what, would have pulled the float out of the water and brought it up by 15 feet onto the shore? Analyzing the end of the string, I found it was definitely not cut, it was frayed, as if chewed apart with teeth. But whose teeth?

Pondering this mystery, I located the grappling hook in the boat. With this homemade device, made from pieces of coat hangers and a long string, I quickly made contact with the main trot line, retrieved the end and we could start hauling up traps.

Now for an analysis of the first nightly catch.

Total – 289 crayfish, avg 26.3/trap
Traps with cat food – 185 (64%)
Traps with bacon/salmon - 104 (35%)

The second night's catch was as follows:

Total - 294 crays, avg 26.6

Traps with cat food – 177 (60%)

Traps with baloney/sausage –
116 (39%)

Based on this analysis, it was obvious that cat food was superior to other traditional baits even including the salmon filets.

Finally the last nightly session. As the cat food was clearly more successful, I decided to bait all traps with cat food during the last session. For the first two sessions I had opened the lid of the cans about half. As a result, those cans still had about half the contents left as the crays simply could not reach all of the bait. For the last session I opened the lid more than half, so the crays were able to reach more, if not all of the bait in the cans.

Needless to say, each time we placed traps, it was in a different area, but each in areas where I had had good luck with crayfish catches in previous years. Instead of my home made crank operated trot line, which had worked very well for me, this time I tried out a new and simpler method. Now the trot line was simply coiled by hand into a plastic gallon bucket with clips spaced along the line every 20 feet or so. This method worked so well and with no string troubles, that I will use it from now

on. I recommend it for all who use many traps.

Here's the last night's catch:

All cat food 406 crays

Trap average 37

All the bait cans were totally empty in the morning. I now realized that some crays escaped after their food was gone. Empty bait cans don't attract any crayfish. I recommend either opening the lid only half way or maybe puncturing the can to make the bait last longer. Later I found some traps with small net holes along the funnel periphery that offered an escape. But traps with no net holes were full, and some of my discontinued Jumbos came up with over 50 crays in each.

Checking my records of successful catches of the past I found that when catching crays from Black Canyon lake using chicken parts as bait, the catches averaged 25 crays per trap. Although I considered that a fine catch then, it was still less than the 37 per trap when using cat food as bait now.

I no longer doubt the effectiveness of fish based cat food as bait. If cat food based on meat products is as good, I don't yet know. But this fish variant surely worked.

Summarizing my experience, I see no reason to use anything else but cat food in the future and at 50c per can it was worth it.

Trapper Arne