

The Crappies

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THE NAMES bachelor, campbellite, white bass, camp lighter, sac-a-lait, silver crappie, speckled bass, tinmouth, bar fish, Oswego bass, razorback, grassback, shiner, john demon, calico bass, strawberry bass and "crap'pee," along with 10-20 others, all refer to two rather than one species of fish. Most Maryland fishermen when applying these time honored names do not realize they are referring to two distinct species of fish. These species are the black crappie, *Pomoxis nigromaculatus*, and the white crappie, *Pomoxis annularis*. Contrary to common belief, the white crappie does not change into a black crappie during parts of the year nor are these two fish just color phases of one species.

Crappies are members of the freshwater sunfish family of fishes, Centrarchidae. This family encompasses an assemblage of deep-bodied fishes ranging from the familiar large and smallmouth bass to the lesser known and recognized blue gill, pumpkinseed, rock bass, yellow belly sunfish and crappie. In general, fishes which possess one dorsal fin within which both spines and soft pliable rays exist. Other families of fishes have either separated spines and rays or a separate fin for each, rays or spines.

The white and black crappies are easily distinguished by a simple ex-

amination of the dorsal fin. The black crappie has seven or eight dorsal spines while the white crappie has only five or six. Likewise, note the highly arched back, deeper body and intense black coloring on the fins and body of the black crappie. The white crappie has a shallower slope to the back, lighter coloration and often a barred color pattern rather than blotches. A good secondary method of distinguishing between these two fish is to take a stick or pair of dividers and measure the length of the dorsal fin base forward. In the black crappie this distance will pass forward to the eye whereas in the white crappie the dorsal fin base length will end far behind the eye.

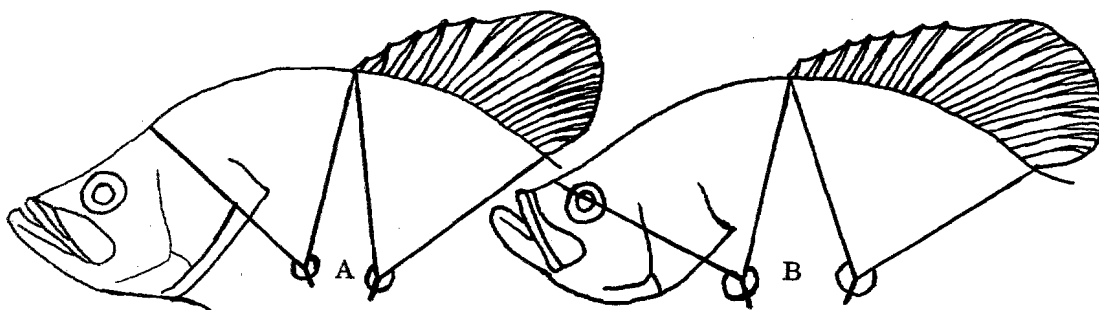
The crappies originally occurred east of the Rocky Mountains, south of Canada to the Gulf States and north along the Atlantic Coast to North Carolina. Introductions have greatly expanded their range into almost every state and province. In Maryland, the black crappie may be found throughout the state; however, great concentrations occur as one passes from west to east so that in the Coastal Plain the black crappie usually predominates. The white crappie is generally (only a few records exist for the mountainous region of the state) found in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain areas of the

state west of Chesapeake Bay. Kent and Talbot Counties possess the only known records on the eastern shore.

The black crappie prefers clear, cool waters having hard bottoms and an abundance of aquatic vegetation. The white crappie is more tolerant to turbid conditions and seems to do best in warm, sluggish waters having a mud bottom and vegetation. The distributions of these two species within the state follows rather closely stream conditions of the major provinces—clear mountainous streams in the west, slower, more turbid Piedmont streams west of a line from Baltimore and Washington, D. C., and slow, brown intertidal streams east of this line. Only the preponderance of the black crappie in the Coastal Plain area upsets the ideal. When these two species occur together, in many instances the white crappie will rapidly overpopulate and/or replace the black crappie. This has been

vividly demonstrated in drained lakes such as: St. Paul's Lake, Kent County, where in six years white crappies completely replaced the black crappie and New Germany Lake, Garrett County, where white crappies replaced the black crappies in five years.

The deep body shape of crappies, after their first summer, permits only large walleyes, pickerel, pike and bass to prey on these fish. The record Maryland black crappie was a 17", 2 lb. 11 oz., specimen taken in Avalon Pond, Baltimore County, in 1950. A 19" white crappie captured in 1952 in Loch Raven Reservoir is the longest while a 13.4" fish that weighed 1 lb. 3 oz., captured in Back Creek Pond, Cecil County, in 1956 is the heaviest white crappie known in Maryland. The black crappie records cited for Maryland exceed the record length and weight of other states. The white crappie length records are comparable to those of other states



A: Partial outline of White Crappie illustrating dorsal fin base when measured with dividers and projected forward seldom reaches eye.

B: Partial outline of Black Crappie illustrating dorsal fin base when projected forward reaches eye or beyond.

KNOWN LOCALITIES OF BLACK AND WHITE CRAPPIES IN MARYLAND WATERS

		Black	White
Allegheny Co.	Potomac R.	X	—
Anne Arundel Co.	Kelly Pool	X	—
	**Lake Waterford	—	—
	Little Patuxent R.	X	X
	**Magothy R.	—	—
Baltimore Co.	Patuxent R. (N. of Bristol Landing)	X	—
	Loch Raven Reservoir	X	X
	Patapsco R.	X	X
Calvert Co.	Lore's Pond	—	X
	Patuxent R.	X	X
Caroline Co.	Chambers Lake	X	—
	**Garland Lake	—	—
	*Harmony Pond	—	—
	Linchester Pond	X	—
	Smithville Pond	X	—
	Williston Mill Pond	X	—
Cecil Co.	Back Creek Pond	X	X
	Susquehanna R./Conowingo Dam	X	X
	Northeast R.	X	X
Charles Co.	*Hughesville Community Pond	—	—
Dorchester Co.	Higgins Mill Pond	X	—
Frederick Co.	Catoctin Creek	X	—
	Chesapeake & Ohio Canal	X	—
	Monocacy R.	X	X
	Potomac R.	X	X
Garrett Co.	Cunningham Lake	X	—
	Deep Creek Lake	X	X
	Herrington Manor Lake	X	—
	*Lake Koshare	—	—
	New Germany Lake	X	X
	Piney Dam	X	—
	Potomac R.	X	X
Harford Co.	*Broad Creek Pond	—	—
	Conowingo Reservoir	X	X
	Susquehanna R.	X	X
Kent Co.	Frazier's Pond	X	—
	Sassafras R. (near Georgetown)	X	—
	St. Paul's Lake	X	X
	Swan Creek	X	X
	Urieville Pond	X	—
Montgomery Co.	Chesapeake & Ohio Canal	X	X
	Potomac R.	X	X
	Seneca Creek	X	—
Prince Georges Co.	*Cash Lake	—	—
	Greenbelt Lake	X	—
	Patuxent R.	—	X
Queen Anne Co.	**Kimball's Pond	—	—
	Wye Mills Pond	X	—
Talbot Co.	Patchetts Pond	—	X
Washington Co.	Big Pool	X	—
	Cascade Lake	X	—
	*Indian Springs Community Pond	—	—
	Little Pool	X	—
	Potomac R.	X	—
	*Sharpsburg Community Pond	—	—
Wicomico Co.	Johnson's Lake	X	—
	Leonard's Pond	X	—
	Salisbury Lake	X	—
	Shad Point Pond	X	—
	Tonytank Pond	X	—
	Wicomico R. (below Shad Pt. Pond)	X	—
Worcester Co.	Boxiron Pond	X	—
	Pocomoke R.	X	—
District of Columbia.....	Anacostia R.	X	—

X Present

— Absent

* Lake drained, both species absent.

** Not observed by creel census field man.

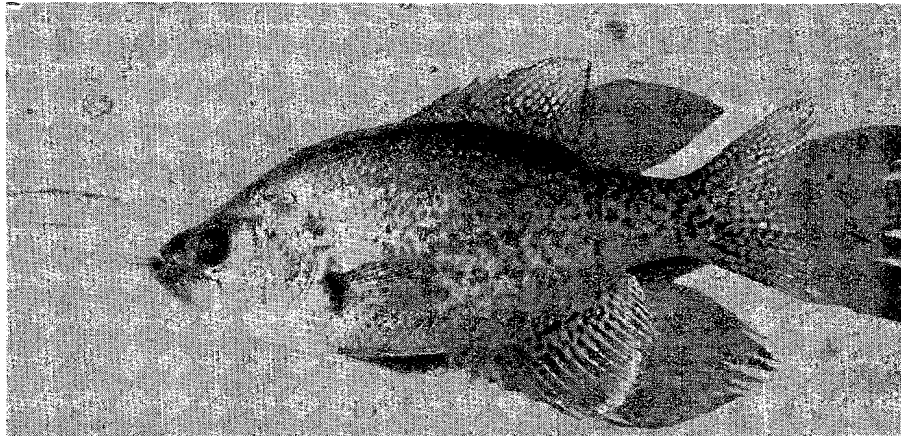
*** Not found in seining sample.

but southern state weights far exceed Maryland specimens. Growth studies on these two species from other areas indicate that the black crappie usual-

ly lives nine years while the white crappie lives only eight. In Maryland, a ten year old black crappie which was 14.1" long and weighed

17.2 oz. has been captured on hook and line in Loch Raven Reservoir in June of 1950. Several seven year old black crappies have been taken in Wye Mills Pond and Deep Creek Lake, however, the usual age is four to five years old. The record 19" Loch Raven white crappie was eleven years old. Several seven year old white crappies have also been cap-

Crappies are currently being stocked in shallow farm ponds. Their deep bodies and healthy reproductive capacities limit their usefulness under these circumstances and are not recommended if balanced fish populations are desired. The crappies, whether you realize they are different, do make a hardy contribution to the fish fauna of the state. They supply



White or black? Use the methods described here to identify this crappie. Answer below, right.

tured. However, populations are generally three to four years old. Overpopulation of both species usually results in stunted fish, thus Maryland crappies rarely exceed ten inches in length and a few ounces in weight.

The life history of these two species follows fairly closely that of the sunfishes. Guarded depression nests are built in late spring in sand, gravel, aquatic roots or near brush bottoms. Parental care of the young is common. These fish are carnivorous and feed on crustaceans, insects and fishes. Overpopulation is common and rapid (a ripe female may lay 200,000 eggs during one spawning season).

joy and pleasure to the fisherman by biting voraciously when other species don't.

Probably every pond and stream in the state contains its share of crappies. Additions to the known list of localities will be welcome. If you can authentically top existing Maryland length and weight records for these two fish, this will also be welcome. In any event, employ the two methods cited and you should have little trouble identifying the two species of crappies. ● ● ●

The fish above is a black crappie. (More articles aimed at helping the fisherman identify his catch are planned for future issues.)