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MAY 2024
ISSUE 8, VOLUME 52



THE Fisherman

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New Jersey, Delaware Bay Edition

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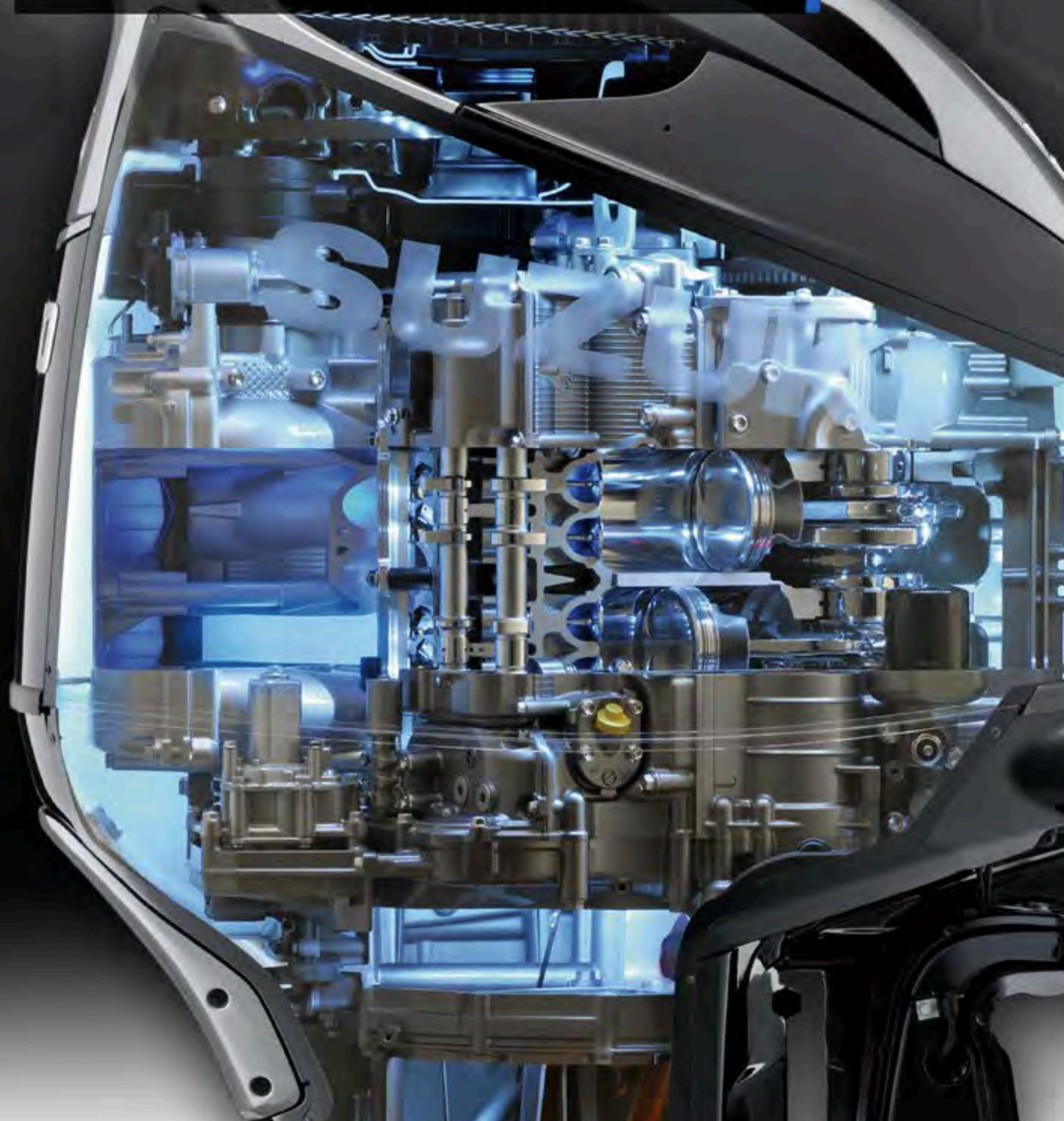
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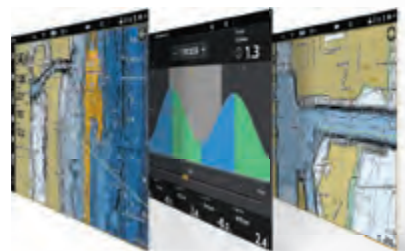


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Expert advice on casting jumbo
flies for the biggest stripers.

GODZILLA FLIES FOR KING KONG STRIPERS

BY ANGELO PELUSO

*Captain Joe Mustari
holding a fabulous
fly-caught striped
bass.*





One of the most overused phrases in the world of saltwater fishing these days is “match the hatch.” That axiom was first coined in 1955 by legendary fly angler

Ernest Schwiebert in his book, *Matching the Hatch*, and then reinforced in Art Flick’s, *Streamside Guide* published in 1969. The original meaning of the catchphrase was linked to matching trout flies to the relevant aquatic insects that trout feed upon, specifically, those hatches that create dry flyfishing opportunities.

Over time, the phrase *match the hatch* became somewhat of a universally accepted slogan for many forms of fishing, even those beyond flyfishing. Freshwater bass anglers and saltwater anglers alike embraced the concept to include matching artificial hard and soft baits to the prevalent food sources of their quarry. While the popularity of this practice grew, another time-honored mantra, “big baits, big fish,” also took center stage in the jargon of contemporary anglers.

When we marry super-size baits with matching hatch practices, we create a formula for success. Largemouth bass anglers exemplify practitioners of this theory with the use of oversized swimbaits and glidebaits. The results of their efforts are very impressive

with lunker freshwater bass. Furthermore, fly anglers who target muskellunge got into the big bait game with massive flies for this top-tier member of the pike family. Those results have also been remarkable.

Without a doubt, most large specimens of any species will get aggressive with a big “bait” that appears to be in distress. Not to miss out on this opportunity, an expanding number of saltwater fly anglers fishing for Northeast striped bass have taken to casting extra-large flies to very big stripers with excellent results. But this is not an easy game. While catching school-size bass on the fly is a relatively easier task, enticing large bass between 30 and 50 pounds takes additional casting and retrieving skill, as well as a significant amount of patience, perseverance, and sometimes, a belief in miracles. But it can be done, and there is a core of anglers who regularly

The Fisherman Magazine

take up the challenge. Tristate fly anglers have the unique opportunity of accessing waters that lunker striped bass seasonally frequent.

BIG FLY BLITZ

Capt. Jason Dapra of *Blitzbound Guide Service* (blitzboundcharters.com) is one of those passionate and deliberate pursuers of big bass with big flies. Jason fishes the waters of Montauk and Raritan Bay and has guided many fly anglers to their “fish of a lifetime.” Capt. Jason regularly fishes the waters of New York and New Jersey but has a strong affinity for the big bass that seasonally frequent Raritan Bay. He offers some well-earned words of wisdom for would-be fly anglers. “There truly is no better place to get a personal best striped bass on the fly than the Raritan Bay, and the New Jersey shore in spring and early summer,” said Capt. Dapra, adding “That area is loaded with adult bunker schools, and just about

every day, you can find big bass feeding on those schools.”

As fly fisherman, the odds are often against us. The bait we are trying to imitate is very large, so we have to do our best to “match the hatch” by throwing big flies that are 8 to 12-inch Hollow Beast-type flies, and even at that size, they often appear

on the small side. Casting flies this size can be difficult. Therefore, we do several things to improve our odds of hooking a monster. “First of all, and in my opinion, if it ain’t chartreuse, it ain’t no use,” said Capt. Dapra, adding “Especially in the spring, the color of the water is not exactly clear, so I find it very bright pattern out-fishes all other colors.”

Since there is not much structure to work, Dapra said the fish will be on the roaming bunker schools, which sometimes could be anywhere from the back of the bay to 20 miles down the beach. “When you pull up to bunker school, you need to identify if they are happy, stress-free bunker, or nervous bunker, about to get blown up by feeding bass,” he said, adding “Much of the time, we will be able to mark larger fish under the bait schools, so heavy, sinking lines will be the play. This line



Joey Walter with a King Kong striped bass taken on fly with Capt. Jason Dapra.

game is all about being relentless and believing that your fly is going to get eaten in the deep.”

Dapra said it can get tiring - maybe even a little boring - throwing a heavy sinking line, letting it sink, and stripping it over and over again, but he said you need confidence that a big bass will eventually find your fly and eat. “I also like to put the throttles down and run, looking for any school that is showing surface activity. Once we find a school that is active, I will throw a hookless teaser plug to try to get the fish riled up.” At that point, Dapra said his anglers will continuously make their casts in hopes a big bass finds their fly.

“In the spring, we use 10 weights with intermediate lines and 10- and 11-weights with 350-grain and 450-grain sinking lines. Being a proficient caster makes a huge difference,” said Capt. Dapra. “If you can get a fly out 80 feet as opposed to a lazy 40-foot cast, your fly will be in the water twice as long. The more time that fly is swimming, the more time a bass has to find it, and with persistence, they will,” he added.

Two of Capt. Dapra’s regular clients are fully dedicated to the pursuit of monster bass. The brothers, Joey and Jesse Walter have many such fish under their belts, including three bass between 49 and 50 pounds. One of Capt. Jason’s line tips that should be reinforced is that of utilizing high-grain sinking lines. Back when I first started to fish for Alaskan Chinook salmon

in big water with heavy currents and significant depth, the advice that I received from one of the lodge guides was, “If you want to catch big King Salmon consistently on the fly, you need to learn how to cast and fish 300- to 450-grain sinking lines. That was sage advice that holds true for big striped bass. Those lines are an important part of the fly angler’s toolbox.

TIPS & STRIPS

Capt. Joe Mustari of *Mazman Charters* (mazmancharters.com) has been guiding fly anglers for striped bass for more than 40 years, and he has gained a reputation as one of the very best at the big bass game. He offers some well-learned lessons from that extensive period of chasing large fish: “The key to catching large trophy striped bass on the fly is to never get discouraged,” Capt. Mustari, explaining how that’s not an easy task by any means. “I have anglers sometimes throwing 8- to 12-inch flies for hours without a bite while watching others catch one after another on live bait or huge plugs. It’s frustrating to watch, and most people just give up and grab the spin tackle,” he said.

“When I take people to fly fish for big bass, I explain the difficulty level and let them know we are fishing for probably one bite, and it’s a long shot unless you find them blitzing baits on top. Then it’s actually pretty easy,” Capt. Mustari said, noting how the pay-off is the chance to catch that trophy striper of a lifetime on the fly.

Capt. Ian Devlin, originator of Devlin Blend Flies with a trophy striped bass.



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Capt. Mustari added, "To be successful at this, you must be relentless. I mean, you need to be totally focused on the task. You must keep casting and retrieving non-stop, sometimes for hours without a break. You have to visualize that monster striper following your fly on every retrieve and figure out how to get that fish to bite. Constantly change up the retrieve technique to find something that might work. I generally like a faster, more erratic retrieve with multiple pauses, and I will switch it up from a one-hand to a two-hand retrieve. I have had some really great casters onboard the *Mazman*. What I always tell them is, it's not how you get it out there, but how you bring it back that counts."

Capt. Joe Mattioli of *On the Bite Charters* (fishingnyc.com) is another prominent guide who fishes for big bass in the waters of New York and New Jersey. "It's no secret that big bass love to eat bunker. So, match the hatch with a bunker fly," Capt. Mattioli told me.

"I tie and use weighted synthetic bunker flies. They shed water quickly as you cast them and are less fatiguing," Capt. Mattioli said, explaining how the other benefit of synthetic is that these flies also begin to sink immediately and maintain a consistent descent with your sinking line. "Search for the tightest balled-up bunker school or, better yet, one that has obvious signs of fish crashing through (white water is the clue)," Capt. Mattioli, advising fly anglers to use a 300- to 500-grain full sinking line, casting the fly into the middle of the school and letting it sink below the bunker.

"The strip method varies; sometimes, they like it fast with long,

quick strips, and other times, they like it really slow with 5-inch slow strips," Capt. Mattioli said, adding "Mix it up until you home in on what they want."

There are a number of common themes that run through the advice given by the above-referenced guides. Those tidbits of wisdom are worth repeating. The success of the fly angler in hooking and landing big striped bass is in many ways contingent upon the following elements: Persistence in pursuit of the goal; relentless casting and fishing through challenging conditions; the use of high-density sinking lines; varying the rate and tempo of retrieves; confidence that a fish will strike the fly; and just a little bit of luck.

THE BUSINESS END

Although there is renewed interest among a core of avid fly anglers in pursuing stripers with big flies, there are a number of early pioneers of the big bass game who had, at the time, broken new ground with their patterns.



Bill Peabody Bunker



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Two of the most prominent of those regional innovators were New Englanders Bill Catherwood and Bill Peabody. Catherwood was most known for his 1950s series of "Giant Killer" flies, while Peabody originated one of the first full-bodied bunker patterns named Bill's Bunker fly. These flies maintained a long and storied history as consistent producers of big bass.

Mark Sedotti, a regular contributor to *The Fisherman Magazine*, is a renowned fly caster and angler who has a demonstrated affinity for catching big fish on big flies. He is also the originator of the Slammer Series of large flies that have a proven track record for enticing big striped bass. Two of Sedotti's most effective big fish flies that mimic adult menhaden are the Feather Slammer and Synthetic Slammer, both of which can be tied to a length of about twelve inches or longer.



Sedotti Slammer

New Jersey's Bob Popovics is an internationally recognized fly tyer and angler who has been at the forefront of northeast saltwater fly fishing. He is one of the most preeminent fly innovators of our time and has designed many effective saltwater flies. Two of his high-performing patterns for big striped bass are the Buck Tail Deceiver and the Hollow Beast Fleye. Both fly styles maintain their large bait profile while being relatively light and very castable. Popovics' designs also display very tantalizing motion when retrieved, an action that big bass often find irresistible.



Popovics Buck Tail Deceiver

Capt. Ian Devlin operates *Devlin Fishing Charters* and commercially ties flies created from his proprietary Devlin

Blends, a material that is very suitable for thing large flies. Devlin spends most of his time fishing the waters of the Long Island Sound and is one of the region's best fly fishing and light tackle guides.



Devlin Blend Adult Bunker

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Striper Dragon

In addition to large hair, feather and synthetic flies, over-size offshore-type poppers are also very effective when large bass surface fee on adult menhaden. These poppers require the use of at least 10/11-weight rods and heavy weight-forward lines. But they make topwater commotion and can replicate panicked splashing of harried bunker. 🐟



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"Get to the choppa!"

Is '24 the year that these toothy predators return to feast on bait and tackle?

BY NICK HONACHEFSKY

SPRING BLUES

get to the choppers!

*"Choppers, slammers, gators, gorillas – whatever you call 'em, bluefish certainly earn their nicknames."
Photo by Jim Hutchinson, Jr.*

No better way to talk about

bluefishing then starting out with the timeless Predator quote from Schwarzenegger because spring bluefishing is an all-out battle.

Choppers, slammers, gators, gorillas – whatever you call 'em, bluefish certainly earn their nicknames. When roving packs of blues invade the backwaters, bays and surf, nothing is safe. Blues maniacally rip through the waters

with knife-wielding maws equipped to shred, tear and destroy baitfish and lures alike, and it makes for some hands-down adrenaline pumping action. From back bays to inlets to out front, it's time to prepare your battle gear for action.

The commonly held belief is that after wintering offshore and in the Carolinas, bluefish start their migratory push northward along the Northeast coast usually during the mid-month portion of April, inundating New Jersey waters through May where they push up toward New England waters off Long Island and the Cape to continue their onslaught through June and the summer months.

Where I am in New Jersey, a nor'easter during the second to third week of April usually kicks off the bluefish push into the waters as they are brought in and attracted into the bays by bunker schools, but

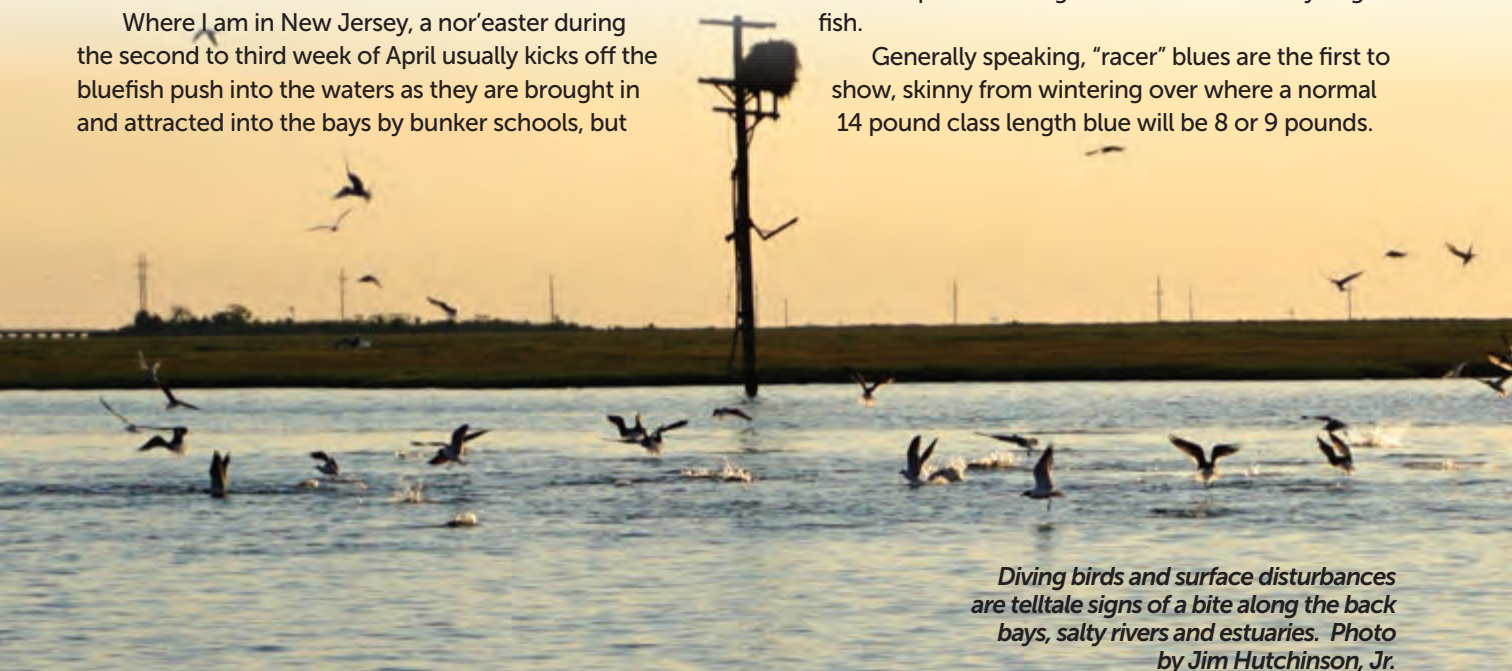


The author with a long, lean, big-headed spring bay invader; the question is, is this the year when blues cycle back into our region in force?

May is the prime time month for all-day action. In fact, we witnessed an onslaught of major caliber fish that pushed 15 to 24 pounds in the recent years of 2016 to 2019 that absolutely destroyed dreams and kept tackle shops in business. Since then, it's been mostly smaller-size fish of 2 to 6 pounds, generally racing through for a couple of weeks before moving into the waters off Long Island and Cape Cod, where action on gator-class blues has been omnipresent.

Bluefish seem to come in school classes where 4- to 6-pounders, 8- to 12-pounders, then 14- to 20-pound plus fish hang together. The reason is that smaller blues are not exempt from being attacked and eaten by larger fish.

Generally speaking, "racer" blues are the first to show, skinny from wintering over where a normal 14 pound class length blue will be 8 or 9 pounds.



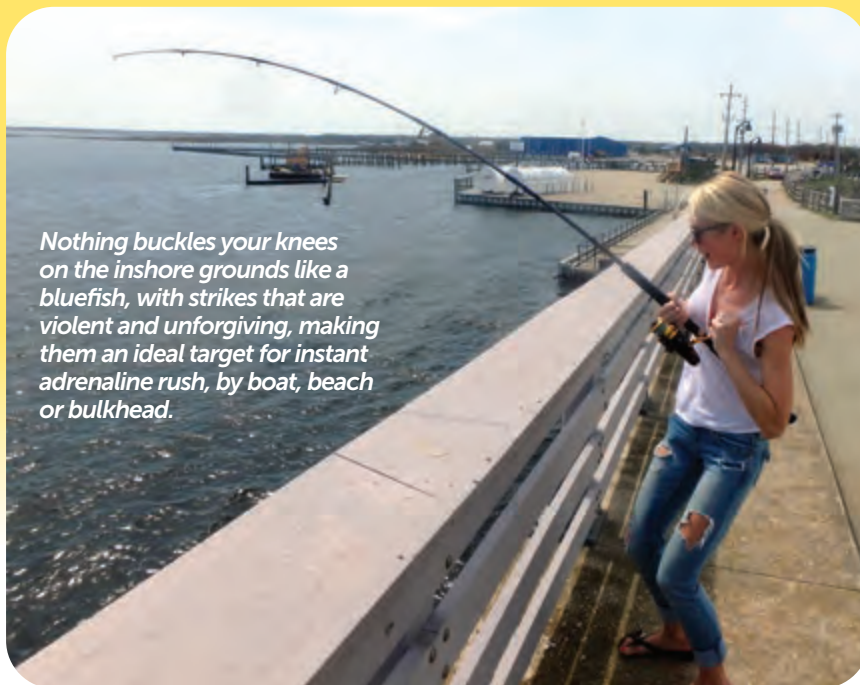
Diving birds and surface disturbances are telltale signs of a bite along the back bays, salty rivers and estuaries. Photo by Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

However, in recent years, first wave blues have already been fat and happy with full guts from feeding on the usually present bunker schools that have made a rebound.

SURFACE STRIKES

Nothing buckles your knees like bluefish crushing a topwater popper. Strikes are violent and unforgiving. The first rule of tossing topwater lures for bluefish is to get rid of the treble hooks on any plug or popper and replace them with single hooks. If you choose not to heed that advice, well, as the southern folks say, bless your heart. The crazed thrashing of bluefish on deck or at boatside will invariably fling the lure into your hands, clothing or worse. I cannot tell you how many treble hooks I've had to pull out of people, so please, replace the trebles. That said, the aggressive nature of blues calls for topwater action.

Utilize heavy 50- to 60-pound leader tied to a 100-pound TA Clip and bring out those old plugs and lures; rest assured, when the action is good, any popper



Nothing buckles your knees on the inshore grounds like a bluefish, with strikes that are violent and unforgiving, making them an ideal target for instant adrenaline rush, by boat, beach or bulkhead.

or hard slidebait will usually work. Of course, if you have an old-school Atom Popper, by all means, throw it on, as the hard plastic construction is built for the damage done by bluefish. Work poppers frantically creating as much commotion as possible to make them aware of the "fleeing baitfish" and set the hook hard, fighting the fish

A large bluefish is shown leaping out of the water, its body curved and its long snout pointed upwards. The background is a dark, choppy sea. In the bottom right corner, there is a collection of Seaguar fishing line products, including several spools of line in various colors (yellow, blue, green, pink, teal) and a larger spool of white line. The Seaguar logo is prominently displayed in the top right corner of the advertisement.

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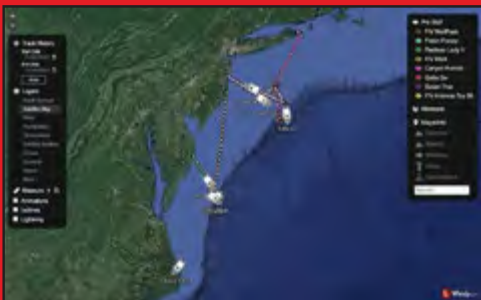
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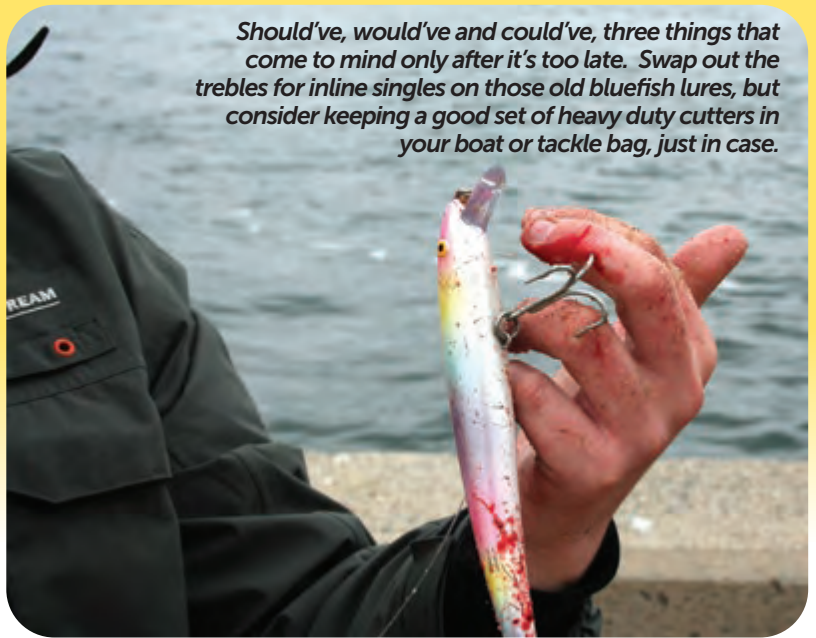
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with a heavier drag setting to muscle in the fish. If netting a fish, be sure to use rubber nets over the mesh nets, as you will have fewer tangles from a flopping blue and be able to release the fish faster.

HEAVY METAL

Sometimes, during the spring, blues will stay deeper, and that's when to bring out the metals. Most metal lures come equipped with single hooks so that box is checked off, plus they can take a real beating. Ava jigs are the go-to lure from size 007 to A27 in the backwaters, where they can be cast and retrieved at a moderate pace before you get a sudden stop hit from the chopper. Other lures that work well are Crippled Herring 1-ounce jigs, Deadly Dicks and RonZ glass minnows. Metals are great for unhooking fish as you can usually grab the metal itself instead of the leader to control and handle the fish more safely. I find that metals will work better than poppers if the water temps are in the low to mid-50s. It should also be said here that you should leave any and all rubber baits at home for obvious reasons unless you have an unlimited budget to lose lures on every cast.

Should've, would've and could've, three things that come to mind only after it's too late. Swap out the trebles for inline singles on those old bluefish lures, but consider keeping a good set of heavy duty cutters in your boat or tackle bag, just in case.



PRETTY FLY

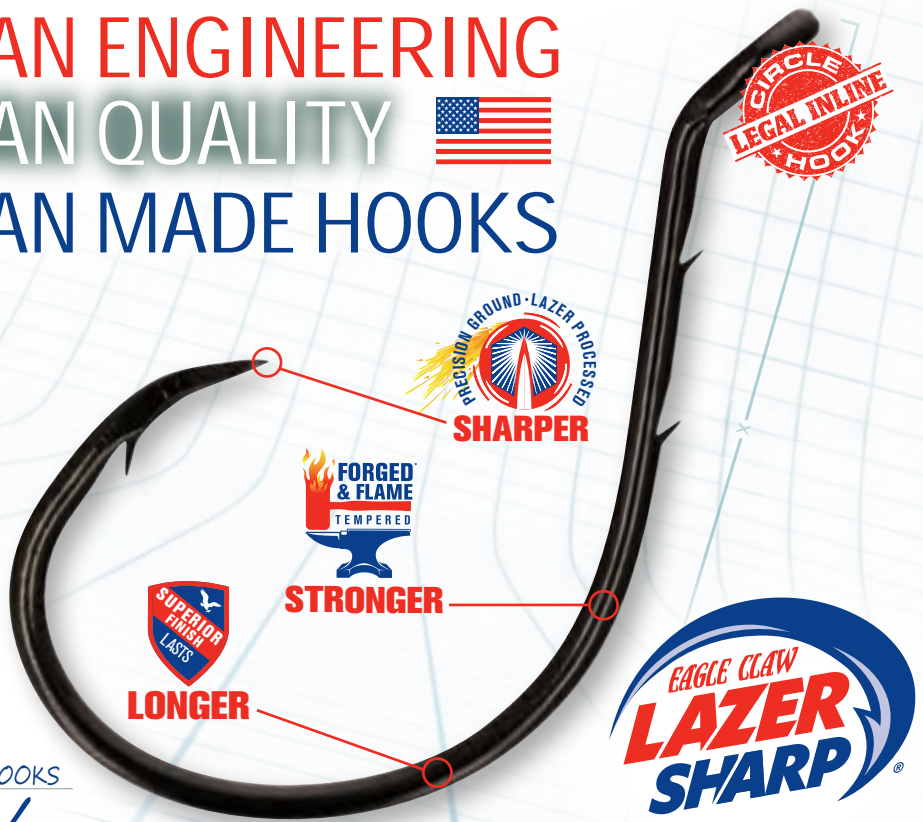
If you've had your fill of bluefish on standard lures, why not elevate your game and bring out the longrod. A 9- to 10-weight rod is sufficient, so long as your tippet is upped to 30- or 40 pound line. Clouser and Deceiver Flies will get beaten up pretty good, so you only have

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BREAKING THE CYCLE

In his 1987 bestseller 'Blues', author John Hersey noted "bluefish come and go in a way no one understands," going on to describe how blues were plentiful off the New England coast in colonial times, "But then from about 1764 they totally disappeared and didn't show up again until about 1810. There were tremendous catches from 1880 to about 1905, when they dropped off again for several years. There was a sharp decline again in the 40s; in 1941 almost none were caught except for a few off Maryland and Virginia."

Back on January 26, an Alabama angler broke a 20-year state record by weighing in a 17-pound, 8-ounce bluefish caught on a Carolina-rigged frozen finger mullet down along the Gulf of Mexico. As several southeast writers noted at the time, a bluefish of that size in the Gulf is somewhat of a rarity. About the same time, anglers along the South Atlantic Coast in Florida were reporting on an invasion of teen-sized bluefish.

So is this a cycle? And will we see a similar invasion again along the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic coasts? On March 24, 2024, I received a text from a good friend who wrote "Local dragger captain told me the bluefish are in the Hudson Canyon are so thick they can't drop their nets and the tilefish guys are getting killed."

J. Hutchinson, Jr.

about a dozen blues to catch before the fly becomes dehaired and needs to be replaced, unless you opt to fling out epoxies like Surf Candies.

The battle on the longrod is unparalleled, with ripping runs and aerial antics from the gators, and is surely a way to get your blood pumping. Strip quickly when you come upon a pack of blues, or have an angler sample the area with a popper to see if any blues are around before you whip out a fly cast.

Will we see the big blues again this spring? With warmer-than-average winter waters, the spring run could be bone-jarring. Bunker schools are already thick in the New Jersey, Delaware Bay region in March, and if the schools are pushed inside the bays from easterly blows, blues could very well pack inside the bays and stick there for weeks on end.

Only time will tell, but one thing is for sure: You had better prepare correctly to tackle the blitzkrieg of blues, for they wait for no man or angler and have no qualms about crushing your dreams when they are on their feeding frenzy. 🐟



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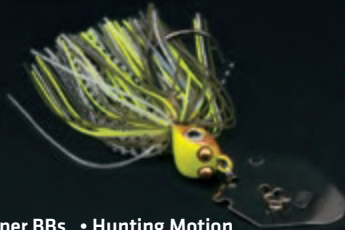


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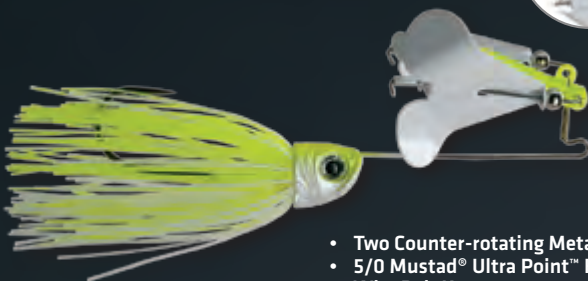
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MAY 2024

NEW JERSEY, DELAWARE BAY EDITION



Lee Wakefield shows off a keeper summer flounder, fluke, taken from the backwaters of South Jersey. Whether you call them fluke to the north or flounder in the south, the season kicks off again in the Garden State on May 4th, which coincides with the official return of The Fisherman's "Coastal Kayak Clash" in 2024.

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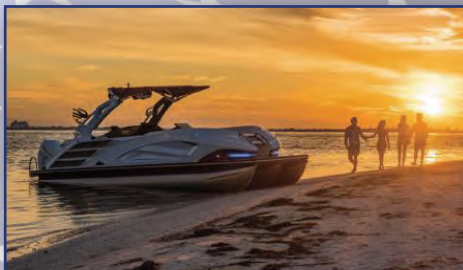
As any angler knows, one knife, and one knife only, simply won't cut it!



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By Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

"And So Forth"

"And the equestrian flogging continues..."

That was the opening line of my first draft of this May edition editor's log for *The Fisherman*. Most readers know I've spent the past 5 years railing against New Jersey's lame duck governor, Phil Murphy, and his New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) commissioner Shawn LaTourette, over a pair of vacant seats at the New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council (Council). Apparently, I've beaten this dead horse to the point where one top NJDEP bureaucrat refers to me internally as "the heckler." Well, if standing up for citizen participation and our legally protected voice in the fisheries management process makes me a "heckler" then so be it.

By now, you know the details. I've written extensively of how the Council was established by the *Marine Fisheries Management and Commercial Fisheries Act of 1979* (N.J.S.A.23:2B) signed into law 45 years ago by Governor Brendan Byrne "to encourage citizen participation through advisory councils," noting specifically how "decisions concerning the distribution and allocation of fisheries resources have important consequences for all citizens of this state." By legal statute, the Council should consist of 11 members, nine of whom are appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the New Jersey Senate.

Those nine governor-appointed members are supposed to include four members of the recreational fishing community, two active commercial fin-fishermen, one active fish processor, and two members representing the general public (with the final two seats representing the state's two shellfish councils). Since Governor Phil Murphy's second year in office, the Council has been two members short, one angling rep, and one member of the general public.

A year ago this month I attended a Memorial Day weekend press event in Asbury Park and questioned the NJDEP Commissioner, on camera, about these vacancies. "I've had some conversations with some of our friends in the legislature about this and I do think that we're going to see some movement there," LaTourette replied, fidgeting rather uncomfortably in his seat. "Unfortunately we don't, we don't get to control that because while we staff Council from the perspective, from the department, we don't get to control what the senate schedule is, and so forth," he added.

And so forth, the words it would seem of a man with nothing truthful to say on the matter. The senate can only "advise and consent" on names actually delivered by the governor's appointment office, which they never were; in other words, Commissioner LaTourette was simply trying to "control" the narrative, which this heckler views as a dead horse of a different color. Factually speaking, state senators can't approve names not sent by the governor's office for a vote; that's a little like putting the cart in front of a dead horse.

This month's original editor's log changed on April 9th when I received a tip, "names have left the governor's office and are in the hands of the senate." The next morning I checked the list of senate nominations received by the state legislature and found the two missing Council appointments had finally left the governor's office! Sea Girt's Greg Hueth of the party boat *Big Mohawk* was officially nominated to take over the sportfishing seat left vacant when Sergio Radossi stepped away from the Council in 2020, while Lakewood's John Tiedemann, a professor at Monmouth University, has been tabbed for the "at large" seat to replace James Alexis who left the Council in 2019.

The next New Jersey Marine Fisheries Council meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m. on Thursday, May 16 at the Stafford Township Municipal Building at 260 East Bay Avenue in Manahawkin. After nearly 6 long years, it will be nice seeing a full stable again in Galloway, especially one that doesn't leave New Jersey's saltwater anglers seriously handicapped at the vetting window. 🐟

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TAG STRIPERS WITH THE FISHERMAN AT STRIPERQUEST ON MAY 16

The Northeast Striped Bass Study with Gray Fishtag Research is expanding this month with the second annual StriperQuest tagging tournament on Thursday, May 16, 2024 along the Raritan Bay.

The festivities get underway on Wednesday, May 15, 2024 at the captains meeting to be held at Ross Brewery, 909 Main Street in Belford, NJ (732-835-7677). The tournament headquarters for the event, the captains meeting is where tournament tagging kits will be distributed and all StriperQuest rules sheets must be signed and dropped off for the tournament officials.

Open to a limited field of just 50 boats, StriperQuest is a catch and release only tournament aimed at successfully tagging as many striped bass as possible on a single day of fishing. Each tournament crew will be given a package including tags, catch cards and one tagging stick; the goal for the day is to catch as many striped bass as possible, each to be tagged with the information filled out on each corresponding catch card to be handed in at the end of the tournament day.

The official kickoff will begin with mandatory boat check-in off Bahr's Landing in Highlands at 6:30 a.m. with lines in at 7 a.m. and out by 2:30 p.m. The completed Gray Fishtag Research catch cards must then be brought to Ross Brewery no later than 4:30 p.m. to qualify for prizes for the most measured, tagged and released striped bass.

Tournament entry starts at \$350 per team, with first place team receive 50% of the pot along with a Striped Bass Mount from Gray Trophy Fish Mounts, second place earning 30%, and third getting 20%, with 15% of the entry fee contributions going to support the non-profit 501(C)3 Gray FishTag Research and their continuing work on Atlantic striped bass.

In addition to our tournament participants deploying green Gray Fishtag Research tags into as many stripers as possible, a separate group of captains and crews will be out in search of larger post-spawn stripers in which to deploy this season's MiniPAT devices. In all, we are expecting to release three sat-tagged striped bass this spring.

For those coming from outside of the Raritan Bay region, there are multiple ramp options all along the Raritan Bayshore, but probably the most accommodating for a tournament crowd with best access to both bay/river and ocean fishery is the Borough of Atlantic Highlands Municipal Harbor at 2 Simon Lake Drive in Atlantic Highlands, NJ. The marina offers transient slips with fuel and pump out services, and it's the location of a number of charter and head boats. Call them at 732-291-1670 (www.ahnj.com).



And if you happen to already have a charter scheduled for May 16, let your captain know you'd like to participate in StriperQuest '24, and get your team registered by visiting grayfishtagresearch.org/striper-quest.

REGULATORY REMINDER ON SEA BASS, PORGY & FLUKE

If you find the pegboard at your favorite tackle shop is running a little lower than normal on Gulp and Fishbites, you might want to grab the last few handfuls of your favorite color now! This month, New Jersey anglers are back in black sea bass and summer flounder for the 2024 season.

New Jersey's recreational fluke season will run from May 4 through September 25 with a three fish bag and 18-inch minimum size limit. The state sill once again have separate summer flounder regulations in two special management zones, one being a 17-inch minimum and three fish bag west of COLREGS on Delaware Bay, as well as a 16-inch minimum size and two per angler limit at Island Beach State Park for surfcasters.

Also included in the regulatory change for 2024 is a new recreational porgy season, with a 10-inch minimum size and 30 fish bag limit open from January 1 to June 30, closed July and August, and reopened from September 1 to December 31.

This season's black sea bass regulations in New Jersey are the same as in 2023, with a spring opening of May 17 with 10 fish bag limit through June 19 on a 12-1/2-inch minimum size. The same size limit will be in place with a one fish bag limit from July 1 through August 31, followed by a 10-fish bag limit during the month of October and a 15-fish bag limit starting November 1 and running through December 31.

For Delaware anglers, summer flounder is open year-round; however, there's a new "split season" for sorts in 2024, with a four fish bag limit and 16-inch size limit through May 31, and then changing to a four-fish bag at 17-1/2-inch size limit starting on June 1. Delaware also updated the 2024 porgy regulations, with a 9-inch minimum size and 30 fish bag limit.

Delaware's black sea bass regulations for '24 also remain the same as in '23, with a 13-inch minimum size and 15 fish bag from May 15 through September 30, and from October 10 through December 31.

When fishing in NY marine waters, keep in mind that the minimum size for black sea bass is 16-1/2 inches, with a three fish bag from June 23 until August 31, and a six fish bag limit starting September 1 and running through December 31.

The state of New York finalized their fluke regulations in early April, with a three fish bag limit and 19-inch minimum size from May 4 through August 1, at which point the size limit increases to 19-1/2 inches as of August 2 and running until October 15 (same three fish bag limit).

New York porgy anglers will enjoy a 9-1/2-size limit when fishing from shore along with a 30 fish bag limit from May 1 through December 31. For those targeting porgy/scup by boat in New York, it's the same 30 fish possession

limit but with an 11-inch size limit. From September 1 through October 31, patrons fishing aboard for-hire boats in New York will be able to retain 40 fish at the 11-inch minimum size limit.

To see regulations from Maine to Maryland find us online at www.thefisherman.com/marine-regulations.

ASAC TOURNAMENT SURF SEASONS KICKS OFF IN MAY

The Association of Surf Angling Clubs (ASAC) welcomes New Jersey, Delaware Bay region surfcasters and local fishing clubs to another tournament season in the surf. Founded in 1915 by a dedicated group of surf anglers primarily interested in perfecting and improving the art of surfcasting, ASAC has dedicated more than a century towards sanctioning surf fishing tournaments and acting as an arbiter when needed.

ASAC also reviews and calculates points at each tournament to determine the championship teams and individual champions, with team and individual winners awarded championship jackets, prizes and awards at the end of each tournament season.

On May 4, another ASAC tournament season gets underway in Brigantine at the 39th Annual Women's Surf

Fishing Club of NJ Tournament. Registration gets underway at 6 a.m. and runs until 7 a.m. at the Community Presbyterian Church at 1501 West Brigantine Avenue. Entry is \$15 for individuals and \$70 for six-member teams. First position fishing will run from 7:30 a.m. until 10 a.m., and second position from 10:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. One-day 4X4 passes will be available at registration for \$10.

There will be lunch and awards at the tournament headquarters after the event, with the Suzie Boehret Memorial Mermaid Cup awarded for the largest fish of the contest. For details contact Reggi Vasta at 215-901-2474 or cozmofaerie@aol.com.

On May 11, the 42nd Annual Karl J. Boehret Surf Fishing Tournament will be held along the beaches of Sea Isle City. Presented by the Delaware Valley Surf Anglers, this is also an ASAC sanctioned event that is open to teams and individuals. For details Joe Kelly 267-918-4517 or jckastr@yahoo.com.

The final ASAC event for the month will be held on May 18 as the 34th Annual Surf'n Land Tournament returns to the beaches of Brigantine. With tournament rules under the ASAC format, the contest is open to both teams and individuals. Registration gets underway at 5:30 a.m. at the American Legion Hall at 3218 W Brigantine Avenue. Entry is \$70 for a team of six, \$15 for individuals.

The first fishing position is from 7 a.m. until 9:30 a.m., with the second position from 10 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. Awards will be given out at 1 p.m. for teams, individuals,



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youth, women and men starting at 1 p.m. For details contact Dan Wiest at 215-410-6192 or danstcroix@verizon.net.

To learn more about ASAC and the 2024 tournament season go to asaconline.org.

'24 FLUKE TOURNAMENT SEASON KICKS OFF IN LEWES & BASS RIVER

With the reopening of the summer flounder (fluke) fishery comes the very first tournaments of the 2024 season in the New Jersey, Delaware Bay region.

First up on the seasonal circuit is the Valhalla Flounder Open out of Bass River on May 11. The longtime Bass River Classic returns to Valhalla Yachting Center in New Gretna with awards ceremony at Breeze's on the Bass River. Entry fee is \$120 per boat, with \$2,000 payout for first place, \$1,250 for second and \$750 for third, along with various calcuttas.

It's "lines in" at 6 a.m. with the awards festivities running from 3:30 until 4:30 back at the dock at Breeze's on the Bass River. Register online at fisheriesconservationtrust.org.

The mission of the Fisheries Conservation Trust is to improve the science used to assess, manage and conserve our nation's marine resources. The Trust works to help close scientific deficiencies that have a direct impact on our ability to manage fish stocks in a productive and sustainable manner.

Next up on the Fisheries Conservation Trust tournament trail is the annual Manhattan Cup Striper Tournament out of Jersey City on June 7. Get details on that legendary catch and release striped bass event at manhattancup.com.

The second summer flounder tournament of the 2024 season is the Lewes Harbour Marina Canal Flounder Tournament on May 17. Formerly the "Joe Morris Tournament" the Lewes Harbour event helps raise money to support the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network. Cost for entry is \$50, with over \$10,000 in prize money. For details stop by Lewes Harbour Marina or call 302-645-6227.

First up in June is the 5th Annual Raging Raymond Fluke Tournament in the Tuckerton area on June 1-2. The captains meeting will be held on May 31 at 7 p.m. at American Legion Post 493, 420 Radio Road in Little Egg Harbor. Entry fee is \$100 per boat (four anglers), fish sunrise Saturday through Sunday at 1 p.m. Call 609-845-7653.

NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR'S CUP SURF FISHING TOURNAMENT ON MAY 19

The 33rd annual Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament will be held on Sunday, May 19 at Island Beach State Park. The individual who catches the overall largest fish wins the "Governor's Award" and will have their name engraved on

the Governor's Cup, which is permanently displayed at Island Beach State Park. Prizes are awarded to winners in a variety of age group and fish species categories.

Same day registration (cash or check only) is at 5 a.m. at Island Beach State Park Pavilion #1, with \$20 entry fee for anglers 18 and older, \$5 for youth anglers from 13-17, and free for ages 12 and under when accompanied by an adult. All funds raised by the tournament go toward improving beach access, surf fishing instruction programs and equipment plus marine education and restoration projects.

There's also high school team category for students who part of a formal fishing club or Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs group (HOFNOD) supported by The Reel Seat, Fish Hawks Saltwater Anglers Club, Shark River Surf Anglers, HOFNOD and *The Fisherman Magazine*. The tournament entry fee is waived for student teams, and admission to the park is free for registrants.

The Governor's Cup tournament officially begins at 6:30 a.m. and runs until 1 p.m. A raffle will be held between 1:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. with the awards ceremony getting under just after 2 p.m. The tournament is sponsored by NJDEP's Division of Fish & Wildlife, and Division of Parks, Forestry and Historic Places, New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, Jersey Coast Anglers Association and New Jersey Beach Buggy Association. Get details at njfishandwildlife.org or call 609-748-4347.

NJDEP & NJBPU ANNOUNCE \$3.7 MILLION IN OFFSHORE WIND STUDIES

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette and New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU) President Christine Guhl-Sadovy announced last month that nearly \$3.7 million would go to fund scientific research projects related to industrial offshore wind development.

According to the NJDEP press release, projects newly funded through the state's ongoing Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI) include an aerial survey of whales, a whale satellite-tagging study, a study of seasonal water-mixing dynamics, the expansion of an existing tracking system for birds and bats, and a study focused on sea turtle behavior and health.

"Development of offshore wind energy is critical to mitigating and responding to the worsening impacts of climate change," said Commissioner LaTourette, adding "These projects continue to advance our collection of important baseline scientific information that is necessary to ensure the responsible development and operation of offshore wind facilities."

According to LaTourette, the RMI which is jointly administered by the NJDEP and NJBPU employs a rigorous scientific approach to coordinate research on

potential impacts of the development, operation, and eventual decommissioning of offshore wind energy to ensure the state’s offshore wind energy goals are achieved responsibly and with as little impact on natural resources as possible.

“As we continue to pursue a 100% clean energy economy by 2035, it’s imperative that we not only protect the interests of our ratepayers but safeguard the vitality of our marine ecosystems as well,” said NJBPU President Guhl-Sadovy, adding “The Research Monitoring Initiative is a crucial piece of our comprehensive efforts to responsibly develop New Jersey’s nation-leading offshore wind industry.”

Prior to being appointed NJBPU President back in 2023 by Governor Phil Murphy, Guhl-Sadovy served as Cabinet Secretary in the Governor’s senior staff. According to the NJBPU website, Guhl-Sadovy previously worked at NJBPU, where she rose to the position Chief of Staff under President Joe Fiordaliso helping spearhead Governor Murphy’s clean energy agenda.

Rutgers University has been awarded \$97,462 to study the effects of offshore wind turbines and foundations on the Mid-Atlantic cold pool, a unique oceanographic feature important to marine ecosystems. The cold pool is characterized by a cold bottom layer of water that develops in the spring and breaks down in the fall as seasonal storms and high winds mix the thermal layers of the water column.

A report issued in 2020 by the Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCMFIS) found that any weakening the cold pool could help generate “the most catastrophic ecological event on the continental shelf the world has ever seen,” with the SCMFIS researchers noting how great care must be taken to show the chance of an impact from offshore wind is “vanishingly small.”

Rutgers University was also awarded \$929,593 to evaluate the movements and habitat use of humpback whales and fin whales in and around the New Jersey offshore wind lease areas. NOAA Fisheries has also been awarded \$47,383 to extend seasonal aerial whale surveys by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center into the coastal region off northern New Jersey. Other funding from the NJDEP Research Monitoring Initiative include \$1.3 million for the American Bird Conservancy for helping track the movements of radio-tagged birds and bats, along with \$1.03 million for the Coonamessett Farm Foundation for tagging efforts to evaluate baseline preconstruction migration routes of sea turtles, including loggerheads, greens, kemps ridleys, and leatherbacks.

“RMI projects are selected to address the short-term highest priority research needs identified with input from subject matter experts; stakeholders, including a variety of state, federal, fishing industry, and environmental organizations; and the New Jersey Environmental Resources Offshore Wind Working Group,” the NJDEP release stated. 🐟

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Through November 30. The Fisherman Dream Boat Fishing Challenge. Subscribe to *The Fisherman*, catch and weigh-in qualifying fish from eight eligible species and you could win the Grand Prize of a '24 Steiger Craft. Go to TheFisherman.com.

May 4. 39th Annual Women's Surf Fishing Club of NJ Tournament. This ASAC sanctioned event is open to teams and individuals on the beach at Brigantine. For details contact Reggi Vasta at 215-901-2474 or cozmofaerie@aol.com.

May 4. 29th Annual BSC Fisherman's Flea Market. Berkeley Striper Club's annual outdoor tackle flea market from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Marina Park (J Street) in Seaside Park, across from Grumpys Tackle. For details email bscfishingfleamarket@gmail.com.

May 11. Valhalla Flounder Open. The Bass River Classic returns to Valhalla Yachting Center in New Gretna with awards ceremony at Breeze's on the Bass River. Register online at fisheriesconservationtrust.org.

May 11. The 42nd Annual Karl J. Boehret Surf Fishing Tournament. Presented by Delaware Valley Surf Anglers this ASAC sanctioned event is open to teams and individuals in Sea Isle City. For details Joe Kelly 267-918-4517 or jckastr@yahoo.com.

May 16. '24 StriperQuest. Second annual Gray Fishtag Research event, a 100% catch and release tournament with prizes for most striped bass tagged. Benefits Gray Fishtag Research and the Northeast Striped Bass Study. Go to grayfishtagresearch.org/striper-quest.

May 16. NJ Marine Fisheries Council Meeting. Scheduled for 5 p.m. at the Stafford Township Municipal Building at 260 East Bay Avenue in Manahawkin; for details call 609-292-7794.

May 17. Twin Lights Cup Striper Tournament. Out of Bahr's Landing supporting the Monmouth County Mental Health Association. Captains meeting 7 p.m. at 731 River Road, in Fair Haven. For details email brian@jerseydevilsportfishing.com or visit thetwinlightscup.com.

May 17. LHM Canal Flounder Tournament. Register at Lewes Harbour Marina. Over \$10,000 in prize money; cost is

\$50, with proceeds helping benefit Pancreatic Cancer Action Network. For details call 302-645-6227.

May 17-19. 20th Annual Middle Township Drum Fish Tournament. Begins noon on May 17 and runs until noon on May 19. Weigh-ins will be held at Jim's Bait and Tackle at 1208 NJ-109 in Cape May. Visit Jim's for registration details or go to middletownship.com.

May 18. The 34th Annual Surf'n Land Tournament. An ASAC sanctioned event is open to teams and individuals in Brigantine. For details contact Dan Wiest at 215-410-6192 or danstcroix@verizon.net.

May 19. Governor's Cup Surf Fishing Tournament. Annual surfcasting event at Island Beach State Park. Onsite registration gets underway at 5 a.m. Get details at njfishandwildlife.org or call 609-748-4347.

May 25-June 2. Berkeley Striper Club 19th Annual Catch & Release Tournament. Annual catch and release striper tournament helps raise money for BSC Fisheries Defense Fund. For details visit berkeleystriperclub.org.

June 1. Hi-Mar Spring Striper Tournament. Captains meeting to be held on May 31 at Ross Brewing Company, 909 Main Street in Belford. Registration is \$150 per boat (6 anglers). For details email springtournament@hi-mar.com.

June 1. New Jersey Free Fishing Day. Since 2015, the NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife has offered two free fishing days each year when no freshwater license is required. In 2024 the first is June 1, the second is October 19. For details visit njfishandwildlife.com.

June 1-2. 5th Annual Raging Raymond Fluke Tournament. Captains meeting on May 31 at 7 p.m. at American Legion Post 493, 420 Radio Road in Little Egg Harbor. Entry fee is \$100 per boat (four anglers), fish sunrise Saturday through Sunday at 1 p.m. For more info call 609-845-7653.

June 2. Nuncio Bruno Kids Bluefish Tournament. Presented by Absecon Saltwater Sportsmen club from 7 a.m. to noon with weigh-in until 1 p.m. at Chestnut Neck Boat Yard in Port Republic, NJ. Sign up at Chestnut Neck. 🐟

OFFICIAL WEIGH STATIONS

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Atlantic City	One Stop B&T	609-348-9450
Atlantic Highlands	Julian's B&T	732-291-0050
Barneгат Light	Bobbies Boats Bait & Tackle	609-494-1345
Bayonne	True World Tackle	201-339-2628
Beach Haven	Jingle's Bait & Tackle	609-492-2795
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Brick	Gabriel's Tackle Co.	732-714-6609
Brick	Jersey Hooker Outfitters	732-903-6904
Brielle	The Reel Seat	732-223-5353
Brigantine	Riptide B&T	609-264-0440
Cape May	South Jersey Marina	609-884-2400
Cape May	Hands Too Bait & Tackle	609-884-2248
West Cape	Cape May Bait & Tackle	609 898-6001
Chadwick Beach	Gabriel's Tackle Co.	732-250-1026
Forked River	Lacey Marine	609-693-0151
Fortescue	Higbee's Marina	856-447-4157
Hazlet	Tackle Box	732-264-7711
Highlands	Bahrs Landing	732-872-1245 x 3
Highlands	Twin Lights Marina	732-872-7200
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Keyport	Up Front B&T	732-497-0919

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Margate City	Ray Scott's Dock	609-822-6819
New Gretna	Allen's Dock	609-296-5660
Normandy Beach	Charlie's B&T	732-793-1144
Ocean City	Fin-Atics Marine Supply	609-398-2248
Point Pleasant	Clarks Landing Marina	732-903-6904
Port Republic	Chestnut Neck Boat Yard	609-652-1119
Rochelle Park	Tackle World	201-587-0011
Sea Isle City	Sea Isle Bait & Tackle	609-263-6540
Seaside	Grumpys Tackle	732-830-1900
Seaside Park	Betty and Nick's B&T	732-793-2708
Sewaren	Dockside Bait & Tackle	732-261-3996
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Sicklerville	Bait N Hook	856-513-2232
Toms River	Hook House	732-270-3856
Tuckerton	Tuckerton Bait & Tackle	267-229-1485
Waretown	Creekside Outfitters, LLC	609-242-1812
West Cape May	Cape May Bait & Tackle	609-898-6001
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Furuno TZtouchXL MFDs

www.furunousa.com

BY CAPT. JOHN N. RAGUSO

Just introduced at the recent Miami Boat Show for the 2024 season, Furuno's next-gen, feature-rich TZtouchXL multi-function color displays have a lot to offer, setting a new standard for others to follow.

GO BIG, OR GO HOME

This new generation of TZtouchXL screens includes five models ranging in size from 10, 13, 16, 22, and 24 inches. The TZT10X, TZT13X, and TZT16X feature a built-in 1kW TruEcho CHIRP or CW (constant wave) fish finder, as well as built-in 235kHz or 455kHz CHIRP side-scan capability that can show fish and structure in high detail port and starboard, providing crucial insights for successful fishing trips. The supersized TZT22X and TZT24X MFDs across the NavNet network can access the fish finder and side-scan functions. NavNet TZtouchXL can tailor the system with a wide array of high-powered Fish Finders to cater to their fishing needs. For anglers who like to deep drop, the DFF3-UHD Network Fish Finder offers high-power 2kW/3kW output to go deep. The DFF3D multi-beam sonar shows fish and structures around the vessel in 3D while generating amazingly detailed custom-shaded relief maps.

All essential fishing tools like Magnetron, Solid-State Doppler Radars, AIS, and NAVpilot Autopilots are compatible. Plus, if you have a Furuno Sonar, you can display it on your TZtouchXL screen with an optional video kit. The NavNet TZtouchXL series MFDs include exclusive, singular features like the new TZ MAPS with Bathymetry and AI Routing. Plus, they pack all this power and performance in a fresh and easy-to-use interface. The 10-inch TZT10X and 13-inch TZT13X feature a hybrid control, incorporating all of the multi-touch capabilities of the larger TZtouchXL series, as well as Furuno's RotoKey control knob and dedicated soft-touch keys, making operations easy in any sea conditions. The all-glass 16-inch TZT16X, 22-inch TZT22X, and 24-inch TZT24X boast super-wide displays with exceptional clarity and brightness.

The all-glass design allows these big-screen MFDs to be mounted side-by-side for a seamless all-glass appearance to enhance both the functionality and attitude of the helm.

Every TZtouchXL model features a powerful hexacore processor for lightning-fast response.

CHART YOUR DESTINY

What sets these new TZtouchXL MFDs apart from the competitive pack is an all-new chart offering called TZ MAPS. Bathymetry, a new feature in TZ MAPS, offers anglers truly 'off the charts' bathymetric data with contour lines that can be configured with a single tap, with a resolution of 3 inches between contours! Fishermen will appreciate the custom depth color shading that enhances the bathymetric data, creating fishing charts of unmatched detail and clarity. All of this can be rendered with custom color palettes and terrain shading, giving anglers an electronic charting experience that goes far beyond any capabilities to date.

For anglers looking for an added element of control, two new remote control options are available, identical in function to the keypad on the TZT10X and TZT13X. The vertically-oriented MCU006 and horizontal MCU006H can control any TZtouchXL MFD in the network. Both feature a comfortable RotoKey and beveled buttons for enhanced ease of use. The ten dedicated dual-purpose buttons operate different functions, including the ability to access the Edge Swiping functionality that makes the NavNet TZtouch series so easy to use.

When connected to a DRS Radar, two new, powerful safety features are unlocked in the TZtouchXL MFD: Risk Visualizer and AI Avoidance Route. Risk Visualizer is a unique function of Furuno Radars that provides a 360-degree visual representation of potential collision risks of approaching objects around the vessel. Unlike CPA/TCPA alarms, which indicate only the risks visible on the ship's current course, the Risk Visualizer assesses all of the objects around the vessel. Dynamic icons are automatically created for targets with the highest probability of collision, ensuring the captain has the information they need to maintain safe distances when passing. The new AI Avoidance Route feature takes all the information the Radar provides. It instantly provides a safe route around those hazards, which can be sent to a Furuno NAVpilot series autopilot with a single tap.

As a current Furuno user (I have Furuno electronics on both my EdgeWater center consoles), I was totally blown away by the intuitive operating program, screen refresh speed, new features, quality of the presentation and screen readability, even wearing polarized sunglasses. These new multi-function displays are an excellent choice if you are outfitting a new ride, or even if you are upgrading an old favorite. 🦞





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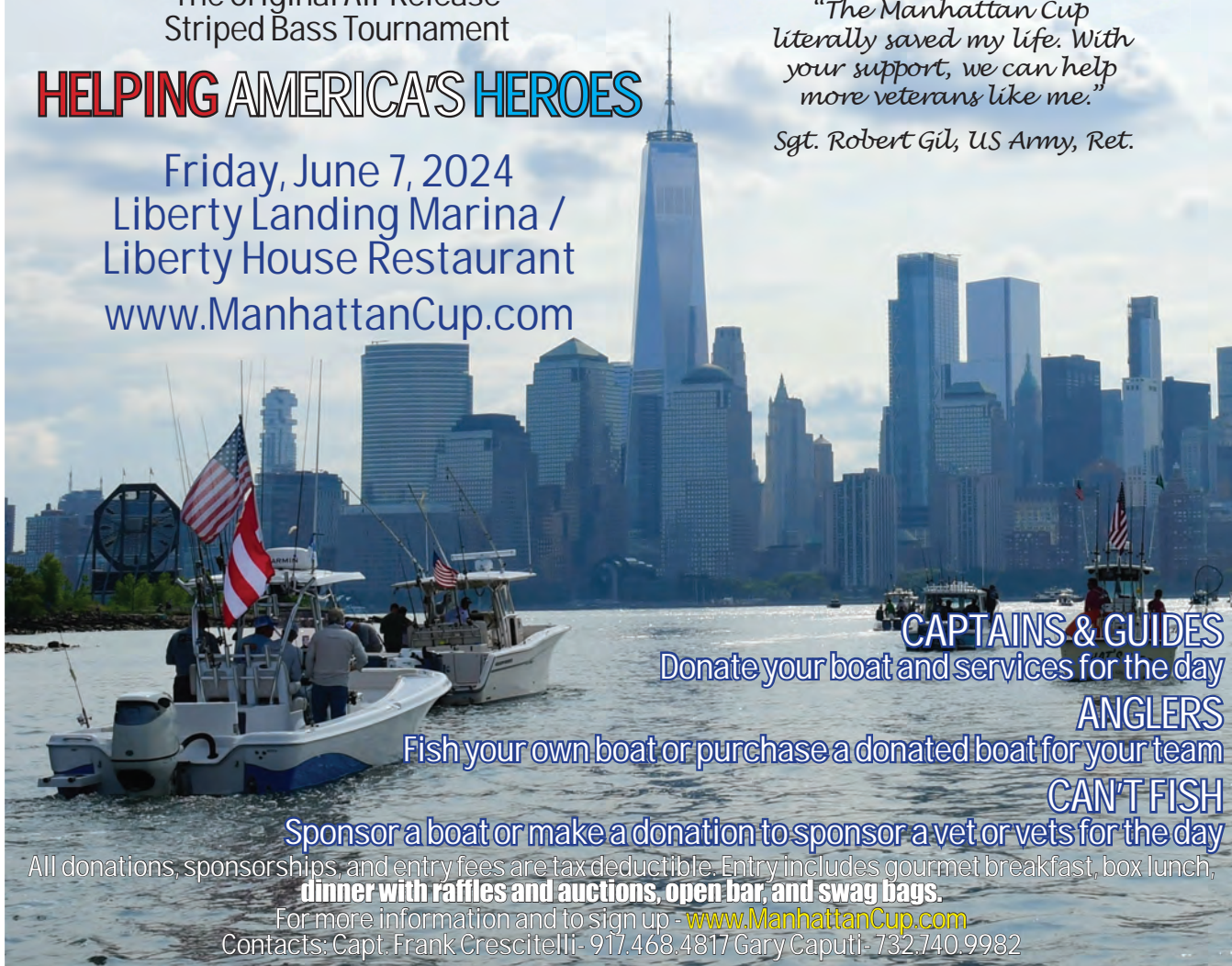
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SNAP JIGGING

for stripers

BY BOB STAVOLA



Salty "snap jigging" techniques born on Long Island are equally effective in the back bays of South Jersey.

As the spring striper run swings into full gear in the backwaters, estuaries and tidal rivers, one of my favorite ways to pursue them is by "Snap Jigging." Unlike dunking baits like bloodworms or bunker chunks in hopes that a hungry striper will hone in on your scent trail, snap jigging consists of hunting stripers down using your favorite ball jigs, leadheads or even buck-tails tipped with various soft plastics like Zooms, Keitechs, Gulps or even strips such as Otter Tails.

Snap jigging isn't something new. In fact, it's a fishing tactic that was developed and put into action by Capt. John Paduano over a quarter of a century ago in the ever-fertile waters around Montauk, NY, and introduced to readers of *The Fisherman Magazine*. It's through the grace of god - and a little prodding by the late, great Fred Golofaro - that sharpies the likes of Capt. Paduano have continued to perfect and, more importantly, share this strike producing method with the rest of us so we too can cash in on its benefits!

Simply put, snap jigging is the technique of dropping your jig down until you touch-up on the bottom and then snapping (lifting) your jig up 1 to 3 feet off of the bottom and then following your line back down as your jig falls. I know I said "Simply put," but this technique isn't that simple. Well, at least half of the technique isn't that simple. Staying in contact with the bottom and "snapping" or lifting is the simple part. Following your line back down as not to impede your jig's descent, or to the contrary, lose feel of your jig as it falls is the part that will take some time to perfect. It's also the part of the technique that usually sees the most action as striped bass tend to strike the lure as it falls. Be ready; when your line stops falling, but you know there's no way you're on the bottom, your jig is most likely in a hungry striper's mouth.

Set the hook like your life counted on it; or as another "snap jig" disciple, John Skinner, likes to say, "hook-sets are free!"

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

In adopting the snap jig method, I've found that there are several factors that affect your jig's descent, such as jig weight, water current, drift speed and line diameter. The lighter the jig weight, the slower the fall, but the more water current and even drift speed will come into play. This is where using the thinnest line possible

becomes so very important. The thinner the line diameter, the less the current will play a part in creating a bow in your line and the more vertical your jig's descent will be. If you're not already using braided line, I highly suggest you make the switch as braided line offers greater strength and less stretch at a much-desired thinner diameter.

As with all fishing techniques, you need the right tackle, and snap jigging is no different. Let's start from your rod and reel choice and work our way on down the line. You don't need heavy gear to snap jig; in fact, I prefer the lightest rod and reel that I can confidently put in my hand. Nine times out of 10, I'm using the same gear that I use in the backwaters rapid-jigging for summer flounder. Now, before anyone blows a gasket, I primarily fish for stripers in Atlantic and Cape May counties; we don't get the striped submarines that they get up in the Raritan. This is where your local knowledge of the biomass plays a major part in your tackle selection.

Once you've picked out your rod and reel, it's time to think about your line. I religiously use 15-pound PowerPro braid. It's super thin, super strong and doesn't stretch. With a uni-to-uni knot, I add approximately 3 feet of 20-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon leader, using a loop knot to secure my jig at the end of the leader. The loop knot allows the jig to move as freely as possible.

As far as jigs, we all have our favorites. For snap jigging, I lean towards ball jigs no greater than an ounce. Lately, I've made it a point to focus on reducing my jig weight not only for stripers but also for flounder fishing. Less is certainly more when it comes to jig weight. A 3/0 or 4/0 hook with a baitholder collar is always a plus. Some anglers prefer a "Boxer" jig, while others choose a more utilitarian bullet-



In addition to bucktails popularize "out east" by Capt. John Paduano, the author says various jigheads and soft plastics will get the job done when snap jigging for backwater stripers.



Lighters rods and reels (with braid) are best for snap jigging smaller stripers in the backwaters, often the same gear as you'd use this month for the summer flounder reopener in New Jersey on May 4.

4-inch lengths however this year I've digressed a little and introduced Keitechs and other similar soft plastics into my striped bass arsenal. In the past years I was a tried-and-true green shad body devotee, but this year I've been using white and/or green paddletails with equal success. My theory is that the water has been exceptionally dirty this season and not only is the white easier for the stripers to see, the paddletails create more vibrations for the fish to "feel." Am I setting the world on fire and holding any seminars about striper fishing? Absolutely not, but I am modestly holding my own and enjoying the fish that have accommodated my pursuits thus far this season.

ON THE MOVE

Snap jigging is not a stationary game; it involves going on the hunt, just like the quarry you're pursuing goes on the hunt for its next meal. Both boaters and

stylized plain leadhead. My suggestion is to have a variety onboard and see what's working on that particular day.

Now for the fun part. Which soft plastics to choose and use? Primarily, I use Zoom Salty Super Flukes in either 3- or

kayakers alike can cash in on the snap jigging game with the use of patience, perseverance, tenacity, local knowledge, good electronics and a little luck. Remember, this is a game of cat and mouse; you have to put in the time covering



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We've all seen social media pictures and posts of sonar screens where the stripers are so "stacked up" that you could walk across them. Those are the days we all dream about and sometimes those dreams do come true. Now we just have to hope that they don't have lock-jaw and are actively eating.

When everything comes together and all of the stars are in alignment, snap jigging can lead to some of the most fast and furious fishing you've ever encountered.

I had a day 2 years ago that I literally hit the spot-lock on my Minn Kota trolling motor and "parked" my skiff right over a school of fish that were stacked one on top of the other and were feeding like it was their last meal before a trip to the electric chair. We were doubled and even tripled up and couldn't release caught fish fast enough as to drop back down and jig up more!

Just remember one thing, and this is important, as fast as you found the school is as fast as they will disperse and you will have to hunt them down again.

Over the years, I've found that stripers, like summer flounder, will feed best during what I've coined the "Hour of Power," that being the last hour of either the outgoing or the incoming as well as the first hours of same, which tend to be the best times to catch. Like belly-buttons, everyone has a theory about the best time to fish and I'm no exception. "The Hour of Power" theory has been fairly consistent for me and that consistency has built confidence. We all know that confidence tends to build success and success tends to bolster confidence. But in the end, it's just a game of chance and luck...or is it?

I'd like to reiterate; I am in no way a fisherman the likes of Capt. John Paduano, Skinner, EliasV or even my local buddy Capt. Jerry Lynch of *Diamond Jig Charters*. These "sharpies" are at the top of the fishing food chain and have probably had their hands dipped in holy water at one time or another.

I am just a retired cop who has turned his love of saltwater fishing into a YouTube Fishing Channel (@*BStavFishing*) where I try to share both my successes and failures with fellow anglers so we can all learn and grow in the sport that we love, fishing.

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SMALLMOUTH

spring strategies



Tournament angler Nick Canestra offers a few professional tips and tactics to seeking out spring smallmouth.

Smallmouth bass have always been near and dear to my heart.

In fact, I prefer them over their largemouth cousins for the challenge and their tenacity; they just seem to fight all the way to the boat!

While I have fished smallies most of my life, I wanted to get some tips from a local pro, so I reached out to a good friend of mine, tournament angler Nick Canestra. Nick is a founding member of "Bass Legends BTT" and member of Maryland TBF (The Bass Federation).

A 32-year tournament veteran, Nick recently fished the Bassmasters Team Championship at the Harris chain of lakes in Florida for a chance to make it to the Bassmaster Classic. Nick managed to finish in 27th place out of 250 teams from around the world.

I had the chance to sit with Nick as he shared some of his pro strategies for getting on some early trophy smallmouth. While spring can present itself with a variety of fishing conditions, Nick described what he likes to see for a good day out hunting smallmouth.

SUN IS KEY

Early in the season when water temps are still on the chillier side, fish will look for the warmest water they can find. This can normally be found on the northern side of a body of water as sun will warm this area first. Look for rocky banks or points, someplace close to deep water. Nick says he prefers to fish in 8 to 12 feet of water exclusively. While many anglers look to find smallmouth in 20- to 30-foot depths, he feels fish in this shallow range are hungry and far more active than fish resting in deeper water.

Water clarity can also be a factor in the spring. Water that's too clear can make fish wary and line shy, while muddy conditions after a spring rain and make it impossible to get a bite. Slightly stained water seems to be ideal. A minimal breeze to keep the water surface rippled is preferred over a flat calm day. Also a breeze from the south can help to warm those northern banks by pushing warmer surface water north.

Baits and tactics change as water temps increase throughout the spring. Nick shared



Jerk baits can be very effective when casting for smallmouth bass.

his strategy for getting on a trophy, explaining that as conditions vary from one body of water to another, it's important to have an open mind and be willing to change it up if the current presentation is not producing. Successful anglers must be flexible.

Keep an eye out and look for surface water temps over 40 degrees. In fact, Nick says he will not even fish smallmouth below this critical point. Fish will be just too lethargic to put

any serious time on the water. But once waters are at 40 degrees, it's game on for the season. Just remember, earlier in the season you need to take a slow deliberate approach when fishing this colder water. While more active than fish in deeper waters, they might not event chase fast moving baits. Nick suggests using something like a "blade bait" in silver, jiggling it slowly across a rocky bank or point. Black hair jigs in 1/16- to 1/8-ounce are also great options.

Keep your presentation slow, and use short hops as you bring the bait through the rocks.

TEMPERATURE GAUGE

As water temps steadily move up to the mid-40s, tactics can also change to a slightly quicker presentation. Nick will often switch up to a small jerkbait, something along the lines of a 3-inch LuckyCraft or 4-1/2-inch MegaBass jerkbait. Keep in mind, these still need to be worked with finesse when things are on the cool side. Use a very slow "jerk, jerk, pause – jerk, jerk, pause" retrieve; it is critical not to overwork the bait and find the cadence that draws the strike.

Anglers can get a bit more aggressive as water temps move up in the 50-degree range. Fish will become more active as they begin to feed heavy for the upcoming spawn. Longer daylight hours will also help to turn on a bite. Jerk baits up around 5 inches can be very effective. Solid colors like the "clown" pattern or translucent patterns in shad, perch, or bluegill can also excel this time of year.

Don't be afraid to give the bait a good initial "rip" before getting into the "jerk, jerk, pause" cadence. The erratic action will get the attention of the fish, while the retrieve will draw the strike.

Other effective presentations during the spring smallmouth season include the tube jig in



Blade baits, like these made by Nick Canestra, are an old school lure making a comeback, and are ideal for taunting a stubborn smallmouth to bite.

green pumpkin (of course); Nick recommends a small, 1/4-ounce jighead. The lure can be slowly dragged or hopped along the points. A football jig and tail is also a good option. Again, allow to slowly drag along the bottom, with slow lifts to draw a strike.

A-Rigs are usually thought of as a warmer water bait, but can be extremely effective this time of year if presented properly. Nick generally uses an A-Rig with a 1/8-ounce head and 2.8 or 3.3 Keitech swimbait. Many A-Rigs come with additional willow leaf spinners attached for more flash. Nick will often clip these for the early season, leaving fish to focus on the swimbaits in the clear spring waters. Use this bait in the same areas as discussed previously, targeting those more active fish in shallower water. If an A-Rig feels to be too much, a single swimbait can be used. Slightly larger Keitechs in the 4-inch range are ideal for this presentation.

Action heats up when water warms above 50 degrees, which is when Nick recommends more traditional bass baits; Chatterbaits in green

BY BOAT

When working from boat, Nick Canestra recommends keeping parallel to bluffs and banks to keep your bait in the strike zone longer. Keep mental note of the conditions you had on the last strike. Define the pattern, lure color, location, depth that fish are hitting. Search for similar areas and explore using similar tactics. Look for bait, as the saying goes, "Find the bait, find the fish".

pumpkin color, the versatile white spinnerbait with a willow leaf blade are good first choices. Crankbaits are also effective and fish tend to get even more aggressive. Flat sided baits and lipless crankbaits will be effective as well when fishing in less than 10 feet of water.

While these are some great strategies to get started on spring smallmouth,

conditions change daily; color, presentation, depth will also change as days become cloudy, breezy, or cooler. Build on these tactics, learn and adapt to the changing environment. And don't be afraid to switch up to live bait if conditions

are difficult. Cold fronts and nasty weather can make artificials non-productive. Fish will often go deep in these situations.

A good friend of mine once said "It's easier to feed them than to fool them" meaning sometimes bait is the best option over artificial lures in tough conditions. Build confidence in your presentation and success will follow in short order. Early season success can set the tone for the coming year. Go get on 'em! 🐟



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May The Fourth...

SKINNY WATER FLUKE

BY NICK HONACHEFSKY

Be With You!

New Jersey's
summer flounder
season kicks off on
May 4, 2024.



Austin Perilli shows off a nice back bay fluke while out on the road fishing with the author.

Perhaps there is no more satisfying way to catch large fluke than in the shallow, skinny waters of the back bays. Many anglers don't realize that true fat daddies pushing the 6- to even 8-pound mark are hanging tight in the back as they are post-spawn fish waiting to exit the bay systems.

With a gratuitous opening day of May 4, it's prime time to target the flatties in the backwaters, but the key is knowing how to fish the super shallow flats.

SKINNY WATER ARENAS

All up and down the 128 miles of coastline of Jersey, backwaters abound. A wide array of locales attract fish. In the northern sections, the Navesink and Shrewsbury Rivers are prime; moving into the central coast, Manasquan River, Barnegat Bay, and the Great Bay, Little Bay area; then down south to the Wildwood, Sea Isle, Ocean City, and Cape May backwaters, all of which hold miles of winding channels and large, expansive shallow bays.

The Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) offers protection for flatties to wander in and out of the 8- to 20-foot depths then come up on the shallow flats on either side of the ICW to sun up and warm in the early spring months. Some overlooked areas to find fluke are around gas docks and boat mooring areas or docks and piers where propellers kick up and create small holes for fluke to hunker down in and ambush prey as they wash on by with the tide.

It's not necessary to be successful only if you have a boat as shore bound anglers can also get in on the action as piers, docks and fishing walls allow you to fancast and work the bucktail on its 10 to 2 swing with the tidal current.

LIGHTEN UP

First things first, you don't need the bulky ocean water outfits to score in tidal waters. Generally, a 6-1/2- to 7-foot rod rated for 15- to 25-pound and moderate to fast action is primo, matched with a 4000 to 5000 class spinning reel. I use a Shimano Terramar rod 7-foot with a Shimano Stradic or Miravel 5000 spinning reel spooled up with 30-pound Power Pro braided line and a 4-foot section of 25-pound Seaguar Fluorocarbon leader attached via uni to uni or Albright knot. From there, all my lures are tied directly onto the line to minimize terminal tackle. The light setup is necessary to impart the proper presentation of light bucktails of 3/8- to a half-ounce and to maintain contact with the lure to feel out the bottom and jig it effectively.

During mid to late spring, fluke are looking to find that magic mid-50-degree water to spark them to feed. Incoming waters are generally colder as ocean water floods the back, and you will read temperatures in the 46 to 52-degree range. However, once the tide starts spilling out, the temps will skyrocket, sometimes 8 to 10

degrees into the 53 to 62-degree range, and that gets the fluke snapping. When the outgoing tides begin to swallow up the backwaters, fluke will move up from the channels and creep along the edges and up into the flats of 4 to 8 feet of water, where they can warm up and get the juices flowing to feed.

When I begin to target the skinny water, I usually start off by drifting the ICW channel edges to catch them on their move up onto the flats. A prime drift would be one that allows me to drift from one side of a channel through the deeper water then up onto the edge and eventually working over the flats ranging from 4 to 8 feet. Many times, you can actually get visuals of fluke lying on the sandy bay floor and watch them pursue your lure as you drift on by.

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

Hands down, small bucktails are clutch when targeting backwater fluke. The fluttering action of a light bucktail sways and drops enticingly down to a fluke in pursuit. A 3/8- to half-ounce roundhead bucktail in white, white/yellow, or white/pink is preferred in clear water conditions, but I will switch to a chartreuse coloring when the water is off-color or dirty. The bucktail is tied directly via a loop knot, then 18 inches up, a dropper loop is tied for the use of a 2/0 to 3/0 plain white bucktail teaser fly. The teaser not only attracts fluke to pursue two baits, but the light floating action of the teaser most times gets hit before the bucktail.

Doubleheader catches are commonplace with a teaser. Both the bucktail and the teaser are seasoned with a small 3- to 4-inch strip bait cut into a half-inch wide tapered, and single hooked through one end. Bluefish, mackerel, sea robin all make great bait strips, but a tried and true Berkley Gulp 3- to 4-inch Swimming Minnow is absolutely lights out for fluke as it dishes out plenty of scent and can stay on the hook for multiple fish catches.

The key to working a bucktail properly is to be sure you are always holding bottom to bounce the lure effectively. If

"A 3/8- to half-ounce roundhead bucktail in white, white/yellow or white/pink is preferred in clear water conditions, but I will switch to a chartreuse coloring when waters are off color or dirty," the author noted.



a drift is moving too quick, instead of amping up the bucktail weight, simply let more scope of line out so you ensure the proper action and it's not hampered by a heavier weight. Pop-twitch the bucktail on and off the seafloor, raising the rod in quick twitches once every 3 seconds, allowing the lure and teaser to pop up and flutter back down.

Fluke are aggressive and will actively pursue the lure sometimes all the way to boatside. Early season flatfish sometimes tend to "lay on the bait". An obvious hit from a fluke should elicit a quick, sharp hookset, but if you feel heavy weight on the line, open the spool and let some slack in the line so the fluke can inhale the lure.

Without a doubt you will catch loads of short fluke, but

plenty of 18-inch plus sizers during the spring months in the backwater shallows. But be prepared for high caliber fluke pushing into the 4, 5, 6 plus pound bracket too. Remember you have lighter outfits and cannot horse a fish in and realize that fluke will have a ton of fight in them as there is no water for them to prolong the battle, so drags should be set a little lighter than normal to allow for the fluke to pull the drag out and not pull the hook out once it resists. Take your time with the fight, and always have the net prepared to scoop up the fish at boatside.

Once you target fluke in the shallows on light tackle, you'll be hard-pressed to find a more exciting way to catch them. 🦞

While many boaters are racing through the inlets towards the eastern grounds, many bay waters are teeming with fluke of various sizes. Darren Novi shows off a "23" slot" from upper Barnegat Bay from late July (no "slot" in '24 folks, three at 18 inches for all New Jersey bays except the Delaware).

NJ RULES & REGS

New Jersey's summer flounder (fluke) season is open from May 4 to September 25 with an 18-inch minimum size and three fish bag. Special New Jersey management zone regulations include 17-inch minimum and three fish bag west of COLREGS on Delaware Bay, and a 16-inch minimum and two per angler limit at Island Beach State Park.

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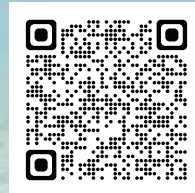
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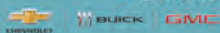
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A DELAWARE DRIFT:

FINDING FLOUNDER

on Indian River Bay

BY ERIC BURNLEY

Flounder pounders in Delaware are already drifting and dreaming of doormats.

There are some big flounder to be found drifting along Indian River Bay.

"The rod and reel I use with the green bucktail and Gulp crawfish that flounder seem to love," said Eric Burnley.



Indian River Bay is a shallow body of water that warms up quickly once we get some warm weather. It is best fished on the last of the flood and the first few hours of the ebb as the warm water on the shallow flats will attract summer flounder until the tide begins to fall and then the fish will move to the deeper channels and station themselves in locations where the falling water will wash bait right to them.

Your job, if you decide to take it, is to figure out exactly where the flounder will be at each stage of the tide, what they want to eat, how to present that bait to them, and do all of this between pre-dawn and 10 a.m. or late evening until dark.

You see, Indian River Bay is not only used by fishermen; it is also a playground for all sorts of boating activities. Jet skies are very popular. Water skiing is another fun sport. And we shouldn't forget our fellow fishermen who get up around 10 a.m., have a nice breakfast, go down to the nearest tackle shop for bait and conversation, and then launch the boat and maybe get out on the water just before noon. By the time they finally get a bait in the water, it's time for lunch, so they put their rods in holders. If they are really lucky a flounder may hook himself before they head in early because the sun is getting too hot to stay out any longer.

You may laugh, but I had a neighbor at Bayshore Campground in Ocean View who did exactly that. I would go out around dawn in my 14-foot tin boat and be back with some flounder about the time he was having breakfast. I would be sitting under my canopy having a cup of coffee and he would see me and say, "You going fishing today?" I would reply, "I may go up on the beach later on." This

was true, as I would take the wife and kids up on the beach, where I would surf fish while the kids played in the ocean. My wife and several of our friend's wives would all get together while the men fished.

WHEN & WHERE

Today, when I fish Indian River Bay, I launch my 16-foot tin boat at Indian River Marina (302-227-3071). They have a nice ramp and a decent amount of parking, especially if you get there early. Where I begin to fish depends on the stage of the tide and the direction of the wind. Since I usually start early in the morning, the direction of the wind is not as critical as the direction of the current.

If I have an incoming current, I may begin my first drift as soon as I clear the entrance to Indian River Marina. There is a channel that runs tight to Burton's Island on your starboard side that will hold flounder. This is not a one drift and done channel. Flounder will hold on the banks alongside the island, the deep part of the channel and along the side of the shoal on the south side of the channel.



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A small, light boat with a shallow draft is perfect for fishing Indian River Bay.



Once you are satisfied you have caught all the keepers in that channel, you should move to the other side of the shoal and make a drift or two there. The biggest problem here is the boat traffic running towards the Indian River Inlet and the ocean beyond. If it is a weekday, the traffic won't be too bad, but on a weekend, especially a Saturday, it may be impossible to fish here.

Fear not, for just across the way, opposite the end of the campground on the south side of the inlet, is a reasonably calm section of water that can hold flounder. I will begin my drift at the end of the campground, where the shoreline curves outward and creates a small rip. Be careful not to drift too close to shore as this is a popular location for land-based fishing, and you don't want to be dodging 3- or 4-ounce sinkers. Some anglers will drift the area from just west of the

bridge to the end of the campground. I find the current here too fast for a flounder drift. I am sure there are fish here and I have caught blues and stripers on bucktails and metal, but no flounder for me.

Once I have made a few drifts from the campground to the entrance to Southshore Marina, I have to decide where to fish next. If the tide moves to flood, I will work the flats between Southshore and White's Creek up to the junction buoy and Massey's landing. This is a lot of real estate, and it takes a certain amount of stealth fishing. This is also shallow water, and running across it at high speed is not going to help your cause. I will run down the deep channel along the east side of the flat until I am opposite the VFW before I begin my drift. Then, I will shut off the motor, lower my trolling motor, and use that to control the boat until the end of the drift.

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If or when I catch a flounder, I will hit the MOB button on my SONAR to mark the spot, and after landing the fish, I will follow the same drift that produced my catch, no matter how large or small that fish may be. Flounder tend to gather in small groups in good feeding locations, so it pays to fish in one location until you fish it out. There may only be one fish there, so you wasted one or two drifts, but if a half dozen keepers are gathered in one little spot, wouldn't you feel bad to have limited out in four drifts?

This flat area can be fished until a couple of hours into the ebb tide. At that point, it is time to move to the deep channels because that's what the flounder will do. Unfortunately, that is also what the boat traffic will do.

There is a channel that runs from the entrance to the little marina at Bayshore Camp Grounds north to Southshore Marina. The last time I was there, this channel was marked only by a few sticks placed here and there. It doesn't get a lot of boat traffic. There once was a duck blind off to the west of the channel, and I caught my largest flounder, an 8-pounder, there. Here, too, your trolling motor is your friend. Look for drains out of the marsh and fish them hard.

BAIT & TACKLE

Live minnows are the top bait for fishing Indian River Bay. This body of water is the nursery ground for a variety of species, including striped bass, tog, flounder, and numerous types of minnows. There are also shrimp and crabs that flounder like to eat, but they are difficult to find, and if you use a small blue crab, you are likely to get arrested.

When fishing the flats, I always use a single live minnow on a circle hook without any weight. This bait swims behind the boat from a rod holder set in the stern. In deeper water, I use a knocker rig. A round sinker is set about 12 inches above the circle hook. I use a sinker that is just heavy enough to keep the minnow swimming just above the bottom.

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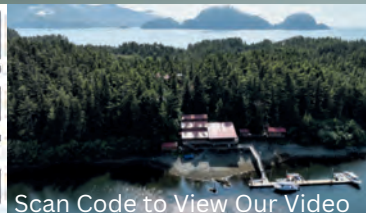
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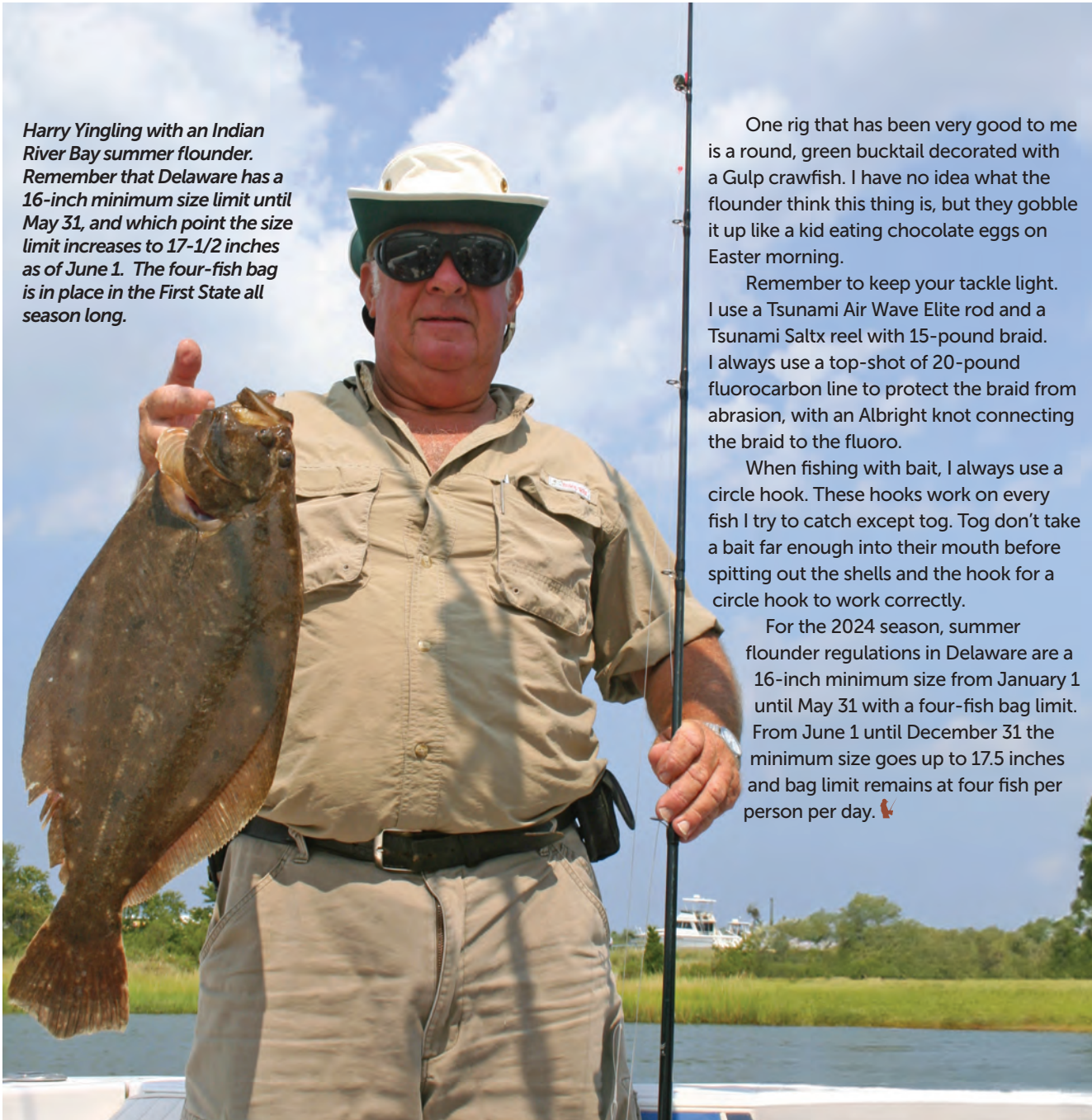


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Harry Yingling with an Indian River Bay summer flounder. Remember that Delaware has a 16-inch minimum size limit until May 31, and which point the size limit increases to 17-1/2 inches as of June 1. The four-fish bag is in place in the First State all season long.



One rig that has been very good to me is a round, green bucktail decorated with a Gulp crawfish. I have no idea what the flounder think this thing is, but they gobble it up like a kid eating chocolate eggs on Easter morning.

Remember to keep your tackle light. I use a Tsunami Air Wave Elite rod and a Tsunami Saltx reel with 15-pound braid. I always use a top-shot of 20-pound fluorocarbon line to protect the braid from abrasion, with an Albright knot connecting the braid to the fluoro.

When fishing with bait, I always use a circle hook. These hooks work on every fish I try to catch except tog. Tog don't take a bait far enough into their mouth before spitting out the shells and the hook for a circle hook to work correctly.

For the 2024 season, summer flounder regulations in Delaware are a 16-inch minimum size from January 1 until May 31 with a four-fish bag limit. From June 1 until December 31 the minimum size goes up to 17.5 inches and bag limit remains at four fish per person per day. 🐟

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The Fisherman's John DeBona puts blade to fluke, under the watchful eye of Capt. Al Ristori. Photo by Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

THE CUTTING EDGE:

FISHING

BY CAPT. JOHN N. RAGUSO

KNIFE

primer

As all anglers know, one knife, and one knife only, simply won't cut it!

I've talked to a lot of captains and mates over the years, have taken folks out on hundreds of successful charters, and cut up thousands of fish, learning a few things along the way. As I look over my current inventory of fishing knives, I have at least 35 kept on both of my Edgewater center consoles, in my home and away travel bags, and in a stash box at my house. Of this group 80% of them are either Dexter or Penn knives, with the remaining cutlery consisting of a variety of models from Rapala, Danco, Berkley and others.

So what types of knives do freshwater and coastal anglers need to have in their bag of tricks? I reached out to few industry friends to get their spin on it, while taking a closer look at blades in the world of fishing, and shellfishing.

For starters, a *fillet knife* is an oft-misunderstood term that erroneously includes some of the other knives on our full list of knives for fishermen, which also includes knives for boning, breaking, utility, bait and emergencies.

FLESH & BONE

A *fillet knife*, while similar to a boning knife, is typically equipped with a thinner and more flexible blade than the other types, ranging in size from 6 to 9 inches in length. Due to the flexibility of the blade, you can easily contour the knife to cut close to the skeleton or backbone of your catch to get maximum yield from the meat. The extra-narrow shape and reduced profile allows the user to control the knife with more ease. On the downside, the lighter weight and reduced profile of many fillet knives have a tendency to "wobble" in your hands, especially if you don't have a good grip or if the handle is wet or slimy. Some fillet knives offer a stiffer flex with a deeper blade, while others offer a longer blade with a reduced profile. There are many choices for this type of tool, so find one that works best for you.

I spoke with Carl Abissi from Dexter Outdoors who said "7-inch and 8-inch fillet knives are the most common sizes

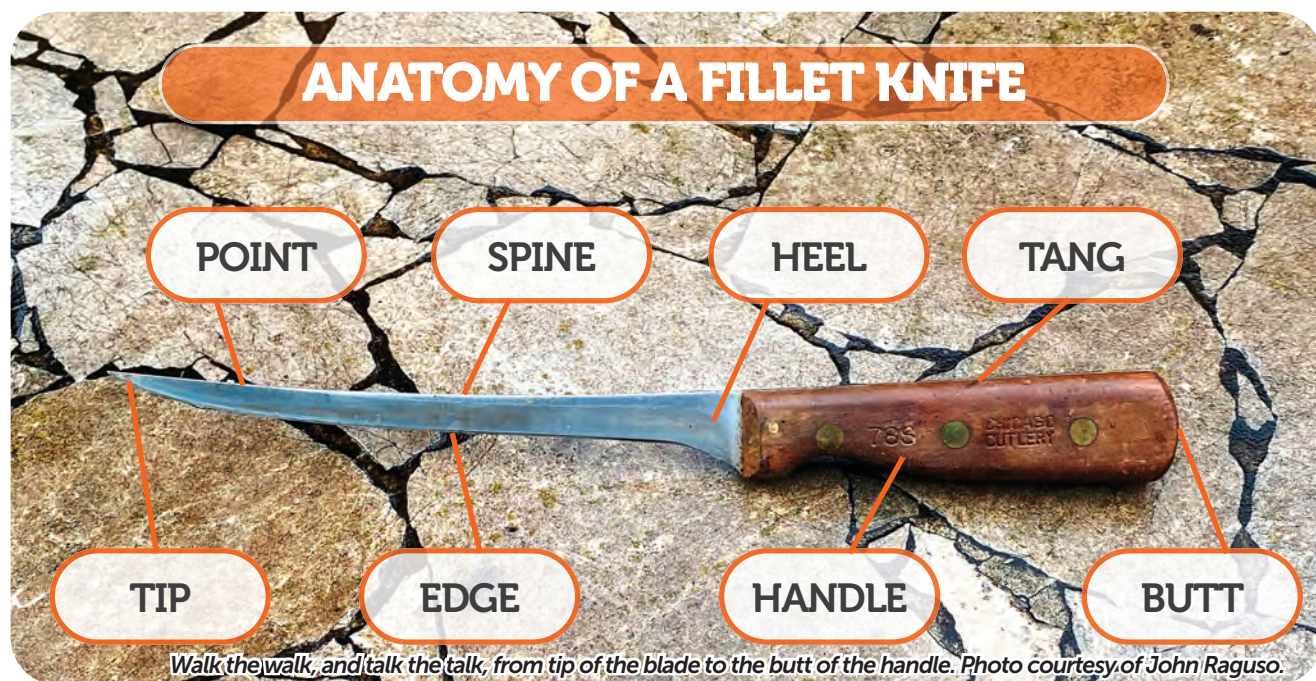
and are perfect for most fish that east coast anglers bring to boatside and want to harvest," while also adding "If you spend most of your time and effort going after bottom fish like sea bass and porgies, a smaller 6-inch flexible fillet knife will be easier to navigate in the downsized profiles of these fish."

"If you are a big fluke fisherman and prefer to cut the entire front or back side of these flatfish in one piece, longer 8- to 9-inch flexible fillet knives will probably operate with the most efficiency and ease," Abissi noted, going on to explain that if larger, thick-skinned fish like big tuna or sharks are on the menu, the 9- to 10-inch fillet and scalloped edge knives will give you the length and power you will need to get the job done. "If you had to choose just one knife for most of your applications, it's hard to go wrong with a 7-inch fillet knife that will work great with a variety of inshore fish ranging from stripers to black sea bass," Abissi added.

A *boning knife* is usually in the 6- to 7-inch range with a slight upward curve that affords the operator a better view of what is being cut when taking meat off the bone. The curved blade has more cutting surface than a straight-edged fillet knife, so more meat can be taken off the skeleton with less effort, which really adds up when you are slicing up dozens of fish. Because of its slightly stiffer and deeper blade, a boning knife has less of a tendency to wobble in your hand when making your cuts. Many times boning knives with the right size and flex are used as fillet knives.

CUT BAIT IN EMERGENCY

The blades on a *breaking knife* typically range from 8 to 10 inches in length. Breaking knives are usually thinner and more flexible than stiff serrated utility knives of the same size, with tips that curve upwards towards the spine of the blade. Compared to a fillet or boning knife, breaking knives have thicker, deeper bodies with more backbone, and are best when dealing with large, whole, big-bodied fish like





The Dexter Outdoors "Dextreme" two-in-one dual blade provides an upper Tiger Edge to cut through scales and tougher surfaces on species like black drum, sheepshead or triggerfish, while preserving the fillet blade's sharpness.

tuna, shark, halibut or swordfish.

Like the name implies, a *utility knife* can take on many shapes and sizes. For the fishing boat application, I will define a utility knife as one that has a stiff, deep, serrated edge with substantial backbone that fulfills a variety of tasks, from cutting an anchor line, chopping up frozen baits, to taking the bony tail off a big tuna or shark. I have a 9-inch Dexter Sani-Safe knife that I have used for the better part of two decades and it is still going strong with no signs of slowing down.

It makes sense that you are not going to sacrifice the edge that you painstakingly put on that favorite fillet knife for cutting up squid strips or dicing a clam into bite sized pieces. Hence many anglers adopt the dedicated *bait knife* option that you can typically acquire for less than \$10 at your local tackle store or online. After rusting out a bunch of old stainless steel serrated steak knives cutting up squid, mackerel and clam baits, I finally broke down and purchased a 3-1/2-inch Dexter Sani-Safe net-twine-line knife and repurposed it as my everyday bait knife. It has lasted a few seasons cutting up a variety of oily, salty baits with its sharp serrated edge, and it's stiff enough to slice through bone when chopping up

bunker or mackerel.

See the description of my bait knife, which also serves as my *emergency knife*. Of course, you might consider the alternative of purchasing a special purpose knife like the Dexter Sani-Safe 3.5-inch Utility Knife. The standard plastic sheath allows the owner to wear it safely on a belt so it's always ready for immediate deployment in case of an emergency. Trouble is, most recreational anglers don't wear a knife on their belts. This observation is supported by some market research that the folks from Dexter did a few years back where they surveyed approximately 2,000 coastal anglers and discovered that less than 2% of the respondents actually wore a knife on their belts; pliers and clippers yes, knives no.

IT'S ALL IN THE STEEL

The ability of a fillet knife or any of its siblings like breaking or boning knives to hold a durable edge for an extended slicing and dicing session with your catch of the day rests in the quality of the steel. That same steel will determine how easily you can restore that sharp edge when the initial hone has been lost due to the knife's interaction



A relatively new addition to the world of fish blades, Mercer Sport released their product line to the angling public last summer, with apologies to our local bluefish.

with scales, skin, flesh and bone. Dexter has long been one of the biggest names in both commercial and sportfishing circles, as well as in the culinary world, and the fact that the majority of professional captains, mates and seafood processors that I've come across prefer Dexter knives speaks volumes to their quality, variety of products and well-deserved reputation. "Dexter has been around since 1818 and in those 206 years we have learned how to produce the best steel alloys that can both hold an edge and also stand up to continued use over the long haul, especially in the saltwater environment," Abissi said, adding "Since all of the knives in the Dexter Outdoors lineup are made in the USA, it makes sense that we use USA-manufactured steel in our cutlery."

"The proprietary Dexsteel used in our Dextreme line and the other steel alloys used in our Dexter Outdoors products is made in Ohio and is a special alloy blend of high-carbon and stain-free steel," said Abissi, adding "For our classic 'old school' wood-handled fillet knives, the steel formula is slightly different and has a higher percentage of carbon steel that requires the owner to clean and oil it on occasion to keep it looking good." Abissi said these types of knives are preferred by many of the old-timers because of the feel of the handle, the flex and length of the blade, and the ability of the knife to be honed to an extremely sharp edge.

Since I've also been using Penn fillet and utility knives on my boat for the last few seasons, I reached out to their spokesperson Michelle Gandola about the type of steel used in their construction. "Penn prioritizes three crucial characteristics in their fillet knives, sharpness, edge retention and saltwater durability," Gandola said, adding "Balancing these attributes is often challenging, as achieving an ultra-sharp edge can compromise durability and flexibility." Gandola said Penn knives are made from German stainless steel, known for durability and corrosion resistance, with a black Nickel Titanium exterior finish. This unique alloy not only

ON THE HALF-SHELL

If you're looking to break into crustaceans that you like to eat, cooked or raw, you will want a dedicated *shellfish knife* or two for prepping. Local favorites like clams, oysters, mussels or scallops really require knives engineered for each one of these to pop open the shell with a minimum of fuss. "I typically keep a Dexter 3-inch blade, poly handle clam knife on the boat and/or in my travel bag for away charters, which allows me to make short work of various sized clams and mussels if we are using fresh ones for bait," the author said, adding "These are relatively inexpensive; I bought one a few years back for less than \$10 and it's still working great with its specialized stiff carbon steel blade, tapered rounded tip and sharp edge."

Take a look at Toadfish products as well, offering well-designed, species-specific tools like the Toadfish 2.75" Clam Knife, or Put 'Em Back Oyster Knife which also "puts back" some of the proceeds to oyster replanting programs along the coast. There's also the Toadfish Coastal Kitchen Collection which includes their patent/patent pending Oyster Knife, Crab Cutter and Rockmore Shrimp Cleaner which peels and devein in one single smooth motion.

enhances flexibility and metal memory, but also boosts corrosion resistance, ensuring that the blade maintains its sharpness and shape even in harsh saltwater conditions.

"The sharpening angle is one of the critical factors influencing the balance between sharpness and durability," Gandola said, explaining how Penn's fillet knives are sharpened at a precise angle of 26 degrees, striking the perfect balance between sharpness and resilience. "This angle ensures a keenly-sharp edge while maintaining durability, making Penn's fillet knives ideal for the task of filleting a cooler full of fish," Gandola said, noting how ongoing maintenance should include regular sharpening on a wet stone, ensuring optimal performance throughout their lifespan. "Periodic cleaning to

rid the knives of saltwater residue is advised to prolong their durability and performance" she added.

One of the new entries into the world of fishing knives is Mercer Sport. Although they have been a regular supplier of quality cutlery in culinary circles for the past 40 years, they recently got into sportfishing knives at last year's 2023 ICAST tackle show. "All Mercer Sport fishing knives are crafted from high-quality, high carbon, no-stain X50 steel that is made for us at a factory in Solingen, Germany," said Mercer's Shane Conrad, adding "German steel is a very high quality known for increased blade strength. The mirror finish gives it added durability plus makes for easy cut and release when filleting a fish."

"From there we ship the steel to a factory in Taiwan that crafts and shapes our fillet and slicer knives, adding a neon orange Santoprene textured handle that offers a secure, non-slip grip that really stands out and is easy to find on your boat," Conrad added. As far as best practices to keep an edge on your fishing knives, we could probably dedicate an entire article to cover this topic; perhaps we will! Stay tuned. 🦞



To speed up time at the cleaning station, Bubba's Lithium Ion Cordless Electric Fillet Knife boasts an ergonomically handle design with engineered ventilation to maximize motor transmission output for increased torque while cutting.

GRAY FISHTAG

RESEARCH 

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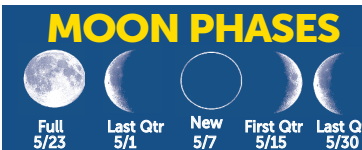
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TIDE TABLES

MAY 2024



SUNRISE / SUNSET			
DAY	DATE	RISE	SET
MONDAY	5/06	5:48	7:57
	5/13	5:41	8:04
	5/20	5:34	8:11
	5/27	5:30	8:17

DATE	DAY	NEW YORK		SANDY HOOK		BREAKWATER HBR.		REEDY POINT		PHILADELPHIA		BALTIMORE	
		AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
5/01	WEDNESDAY	2:07	2:57	1:48	2:32	2:40	3:21	5:02	5:58	7:47	8:39	12:47	1:16
5/02	THURSDAY	3:12	4:00	2:50	3:33	3:47	4:31	6:13	7:03	8:54	9:39	1:49	2:16
5/03	FRIDAY	4:20	5:05	3:55	4:37	4:55	5:34	7:23	8:05	9:58	10:37	2:51	3:17
5/04	SATURDAY	5:28	6:05	5:00	5:37	5:58	6:31	8:27	9:02	10:58	11:31	3:53	4:16
5/05	SUNDAY	6:28	6:57	6:01	6:32	6:55	7:23	9:26	9:55	11:54	---	4:50	5:10
5/06	MONDAY	7:22	7:45	6:56	7:22	7:49	8:14	10:20	10:44	12:23	12:47	5:42	6:00
5/07	TUESDAY	8:12	8:31	7:47	8:09	8:42	9:03	11:11	11:32	1:13	1:39	6:33	6:51
5/08	WEDNESDAY	9:02	9:18	8:37	8:56	9:32	9:51	---	12:01	2:01	2:30	7:24	7:42
5/09	THURSDAY	9:53	10:05	9:27	9:43	10:22	10:39	12:19	12:51	2:48	3:20	8:15	8:32
5/10	FRIDAY	10:48	10:56	10:19	10:31	11:11	11:27	1:06	1:41	3:35	4:11	9:04	9:20
5/11	SATURDAY	11:45	11:51	11:13	11:23	---	12:02	1:53	2:32	4:24	5:03	9:52	10:09
5/12	SUNDAY	---	12:43	---	12:10	12:17	12:54	2:41	3:25	5:14	5:56	10:43	11:06
5/13	MONDAY	12:48	1:39	12:18	1:06	1:08	1:48	3:33	4:20	6:06	6:50	11:40	---
5/14	TUESDAY	1:43	2:32	1:12	1:59	2:00	2:44	4:27	5:16	7:01	7:44	12:10	12:38
5/15	WEDNESDAY	2:36	3:22	2:04	2:49	2:55	3:44	5:25	6:12	7:58	8:40	1:11	1:31
5/16	THURSDAY	3:27	4:13	2:54	3:39	3:54	4:42	6:24	7:08	8:55	9:34	2:08	2:20
5/17	FRIDAY	4:21	5:05	3:45	4:31	4:52	5:33	7:21	8:01	9:50	10:27	3:04	3:10
5/18	SATURDAY	5:16	5:54	4:40	5:20	5:44	6:17	8:16	8:50	10:44	11:16	3:58	4:00
5/19	SUNDAY	6:08	6:37	5:33	6:06	6:30	6:58	9:06	9:35	11:35	---	4:44	4:46
5/20	MONDAY	6:53	7:15	6:21	6:47	7:14	7:38	9:54	10:17	12:02	12:23	5:24	5:28
5/21	TUESDAY	7:34	7:49	7:04	7:24	7:56	8:17	10:38	10:55	12:45	1:09	6:01	6:09
5/22	WEDNESDAY	8:11	8:21	7:44	7:59	8:38	8:56	11:20	11:31	1:26	1:53	6:39	6:51
5/23	THURSDAY	8:48	8:53	8:23	8:34	9:19	9:35	---	12:00	2:04	2:35	7:18	7:34
5/24	FRIDAY	9:25	9:27	9:03	9:12	10:00	10:16	12:05	12:39	2:41	3:17	7:59	8:16
5/25	SATURDAY	10:07	10:08	9:45	9:53	10:42	10:58	12:40	1:19	3:18	3:59	8:40	8:58
5/26	SUNDAY	10:55	10:57	10:31	10:40	11:27	11:45	1:18	2:01	3:58	4:44	9:21	9:42
5/27	MONDAY	11:51	11:54	11:25	11:36	---	12:16	2:02	2:49	4:42	5:32	10:06	10:33
5/28	TUESDAY	---	12:52	---	12:24	12:34	1:09	2:52	3:41	5:34	6:24	10:57	11:35
5/29	WEDNESDAY	12:57	1:50	12:36	1:22	1:27	2:06	3:49	4:39	6:31	7:20	11:55	---
5/30	THURSDAY	1:58	2:45	1:35	2:18	2:24	3:07	4:52	5:40	7:32	8:19	12:40	12:53
5/31	FRIDAY	2:57	3:41	2:33	3:15	3:26	4:11	5:57	6:42	8:35	9:17	1:40	1:47

ON NEW YORK		ON SANDY HOOK		ON BALTIMORE		ON REEDY POINT		ON PHILADELPHIA	
Governors Island	-0 07	Waretown	+2 32	Ocean City Outer Coast	-0 28	Dividing Creek (Town)	+3 07		
Jersey City RR Ferry	+0 11	Oyster Creek	+2 15	O.C. Isl. of Wight Bay	-0 14	Egg Island Point	+0 28		
Hoboken, Castle Point	+0 21	Barnegat Inlet	-0 21	Chincoteague Point	+0 05	Brandywine Shoal Light	0 00		
Weehawkin, Days Point	+0 28	Harvey Cedars	+3 14	Chincoteague Inlet	+0 38	Fourteen Foot Bank Light	+0 13		
George Washington Bridge	+0 50	Manahawkin Bridge	+2 32			Miah Maull	+0 23		
Spuyten Duyvil	+1 02	Tuckerton Creek Ent	+1 39	ON BALTIMORE		Elbow of Cross Edge Light	+0 35		
Ossining	+1 57	Beach Haven	+1 46	LITTLE CHOPTANK RIVER		Cape Henlopen	-0 10		
Peekskill	+2 28	Holgate	+1 10	Taylor's Island	-3 09	Roosevelt Inlet	+0 04		
West Point	+3 16	Little Egg Inlet	-0 02	CHOPTANK RIVER		Mispillion River Ent.	+0 23		
		Graveling Point	+0 38	Choptank River Island	-3 17	St. Jones River entrance	+0 57		
		Mullica Riv Chestnut Neck	+1 23	Kent Island Narrows	-1 44	Leipsic River entrance	+1 18		
		Brigantine Channel	0 00	Bloody Point Bar Light	-2 46	Leipsic, Leipsic River	+3 42		
		Absecon Creek	+1 03	Charlestown NE River	+3 38				
		Absecon Channel	+0 11	SUSQUEHANNA RIVER		ON REEDY POINT			
		Shelter Island	+0 38	Harve de Grace	+3 10	Fortescue	-2 05		
		Longport	+0 04	Port Deposit	+4 00	Cohansey River Ent.	-1 30		
		Great Egg Harbor Inlet	+0 11	Pooles Island	+0 51	Bridgeton	+0 27		
		Ocean City 9th St. Bridge	+0 23	Battery Point Gunpowder R	+1 00	Ship John Shoal Light	-1 32		
		Great Egg Harbor Bay	+0 43	Rocky Point, Back River	+0 42	Reedy Island	-0 16		
		Scull Landing	+1 42	Edgewater, South River	-2 05	Salem River/Sinnickson	+0 04		
		Mays Landing	+2 25	Galesville, West River	-1 52	Deepwater Point	+0 46		
		Corson Inlet	+0 08	Chesapeake Beach	-2 56	C&D CANAL			
		Townsend's Sound	+0 40	Solomons Island	-4 46	Biddle Point DE	-0 05		
		Townsend Inlet	+0 05	Hills Bridge	-1 11	Summit Bridge DE	-0 34		
		Great Sound	+1 02	Cedar Point	-4 58	Chesapeake City MD	-0 30		
		Stone Harbor	+0 41	Point Lookout	-5 30	New Castle DE	+0 30		
		Hereford Inlet	+0 01			Christina River ent. DE	+0 51		
		Wildwood	-0 16	ON BREAKWATER HARBOR					
		Grassy Sound Bridge	+0 44	Cape May Point	-0 15	ON PHILADELPHIA			
		Cape May Harbor	-0 03	Five Fathom Bank	-0 48	Delaware Riv Phil. Muni Pier	0 00		
		Rehoboth Beach	-0 07	McCrie Shoal	-0 27	Schuylkill Riv (Girard Point)	-0 20		
		INDIAN RIVER		Bidwell Creek Ent.	+0 15	Schuylkill Riv Fairmont Br.	-0 01		
		Inlet Bridge	+0 34	E. Point, Maurice Riv Cove	+0 48	Rancocas Cr., Bridgeboro	+1 19		
		Oak Orchard	+2 44	Port Norris	+1 09	Rancocas Cr., Hainesport	+2 53		
		Fenwick Island Light	-0 13	Dividing Creek (Entrance)	+0 29	Trenton	+1 52		

HOW TO USE THESE TABLES: To compute the high tide for the area you wish to fish, find the closest area on the conversion table. Add or subtract the hours and minutes as indicated from the station below. Example: Asbury Park...-0.35 is listed under "On Sandy Hook" -0.35 means you subtract 35 minutes from the time given for the SANDY HOOK for the day you are going fishing. For the low tide add 6-1/2 hours to this figure. NOTE: Do not rely solely on these tide reports. Always consult a secondary tide source heading out on the water.

TIP

E-mail your best fishing photos to *The Fisherman Magazine* - jhutchinson@thefisherman.com

NJ BLACKFISH ON SPRING BREAK



"Hey cap, can you send a photo of yesterday's 20," was the text sent from The Fisherman to Capt. Tom Daffin of the Fishin' Fever out of Cape May on April 10. "How about the 20.5 from today," Capt. Daffin replied, along with this pic of Len Fennimore with his 20-1/2-pound tautog, caught one day after Brian Mingione's 20-pound catch and release tautog aboard Fishin' Fever.

» BUT, BLUES, WEAKIES & BLUEFIN ARRIVE

» STRIPER ACTION SET FOR MAY MADNESS

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CKC RETURNS!

The Fisherman Magazine's Coastal Kayak Clash is back for 2024! Look for the full article in this month's glossy section, make sure your Fisherman "membership" is active for the year, and get all the details including your tag and entry forms over at our website.



FISHING REGULATIONS

Are you up on all the '24 changes to fluke and porgy limits along the Atlantic Coast? Need a reminder of your state's season, size and bag? And how about in neighboring coastal waters? *The Fisherman* tracks coastal fish regs from Mass to Maryland, and everywhere in between.



SAT-TAGGED STRIPERS

Have you been following our Northeast Striped Bass Study? Check out this month's Tale End feature by Jenni Ackerman, and take a deep dive online into our satellite-tagging project along the Striper Coast with our friends from Gray Fishtag Research and an incredible group of sponsors.



NORTH JERSEY COAST REPORT

HUDSON RIVER TO BELMAR

by J.B. Kasper
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A drop in water temps rearranged the striper fishing heading into the third weekend of April, and the stripers seem to have lockjaw when it came to artificials, most likely due to the cooler water. If you had bunker during the April 20-21 weekend (which was hard to get), eels or took out a loan to buy bloodworms you had a good shot at the bass. Likewise some boats as you will see in this report did well trolling. Some folks did report seeing some schools of baitfish starting to move into Raritan Bay and this should be a precursor to some better bass fishing heading into the month of May. On the blackfish front, with just a handful of days left until the May shutdown catches were sporadic at best with bottom fishermen seeing some ling, and cod, along with a 718-pound bluefin about 5 miles off the beach.

BAYONNE

Weather and bait problems continue to hold back striped bass fishing in the latter days of April according to Akira over at **True World Tackle**. Anglers fishing off piers in New York Harbor and the lower Hudson River continue to catch stripers mostly smaller fish with some keepers and overs mixed in mainly on bloodworms. This past week saw a shortage of fresh bunker as boats that went out could not find any local bunker. Akira said while his regulars have their boats in the water and are fishing, a good many other people have yet to get their boats in the water.

BELLEVILLE

Reports coming back to the store this past week told of a lot of fish being read on sonar by boats that were fishing, but very pick action with some days good and some days slow,

according to Nick over at **Bullet Hole Annex**. Nick said that while the waters have cleaned up and settled down from the recent weather problems, water temps have been up and down. "The only way that is going to change is for the northern coast to get a good week or more of sunny weather," he said.

PINE BROOK

"We have been hearing of erratic striped bass fishing in Raritan Bay and surrounding waters," said Joe over at **Fairfield Fishing Tackle**. Recent drops in water temperature shut down the lure bite and made the fishing a bait bite, he added. "Most of the bass are being caught on bunker, if you can get it, worms and eels," Joe said.

ROCHELLE PARK

The third week of April saw some hit or miss striped bass fishing in northern waters according to Mark over at **Tackle World**. He told us most of the fishermen he spoke with told him they read a lot of fish but the mid-week drop in water temps seems to have given them lock jaw. What fish are being caught are a mix of sizes on eels, worms and bunker, if you can get it. "Hopefully we will have some sunny weather this week to put some life in the fishing," Mark added.

SUCCASUNNA

Most fishermen stopping in at **Ramsey Outdoors** in Succasunna after fishing Raritan Bay and surrounding waters for stripers have been reporting hit or miss fishing. Don told me some have seen good catches, while others not so good. Up and down water temps are making the fishery unpredictable and you simply have to be in the right spot at the right time. "Quite a difference from last season," he said. Over at the Ramsey store Andrew said reports he has been getting told of plenty of bass still in the backwater areas, around Perth Amboy and the Triangle. He also got reports of mixed size bass being caught from the shoreline along Cliffwood and Union Beach mainly on bloodworms.

SOUTH AMBOY

"We got in our first trip of the

season on Sunday," reported Capt. Phil Bouchard of the **Misty Morn** on Sunday the 21st, adding "After finding the bass had lockjaw we switched to bottom fishing and caught a few tog." Phil noted, "Need some warmer water and better weather."

SEWAREN

We got an upbeat report from our sources at **Dockside Bait and Tackle**. They told us anglers fishing the back bay waters around the Triangle enjoyed some decent catches this past week. Anglers fishing off lower bay beaches also picked up bass mainly on worms fished on the top of the tides. Here too the word on the blackfishing was hit or miss heading into the final days. The store has worms and greens and hopefully some fresh bunker this week for the early season fishing, they added.

KEYPORT

"To say it has been a very strange year so far, would be an understatement," said Steve over at **Up Front Bait and Tackle**. Anglers stopping by the store have been saying they have been reading tons of fish, but the water temps is back into the 40s and the fish have just stopped hitting artificials. You simply have to have bait, worms, cut bunker or eels or you're not going to get bass. Steve told me conditions in the bay are very much improved with the exception of water temps. In addition he said the number of boats in the water is a lot less than the last few years, also because of the weather.

It was a slow week for fishing and boat traffic this past week cited Mike over at **Wagner's Marina**. Mike said very few boats that went out returned with fish and only Dan Mazza, who fished on Saturday, enjoyed a good catch of stripers which were returned. Mike stated he pulled an anchor rope up and said boy did the waters got cold this past week. "Simply put all we need is some warmer weather so the tide can bring in some warmer water to get the fishing going," he said.

This past week saw some spotty bass action on most days according to sources over at the **Keypoint Marine Basin**. Saturday's lousy morning

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weather cut down on the number of anglers fishing on Saturday. Like most other marinas they got reports of boaters reading a lot of fish but picky action with the bass turning on for a shot time then shutting down just as fast.

"Wednesday proved to be our best day this past week when we were fishing just below the Verrazano Bridge," said Capt. Victor Hartley of the **Keypoint Princess**. Victor said the weather looks better for the final week of April, except for the cool evenings. Hopefully we will see a better bite heading into the first days of May.

HAZLET

"The weekend saw some fish trolled in the Reach," said Phil over at the **Tackle Box**. Phil said that was a good sign since the drop in water temps seems to have turned off the artificial bite and made everything a bait bite. While worms and eels have been the top baits because due to erratic bunker supplies, it was also good to see a few bass were taken on swimmers along the lower bay beaches which have shallow water which is warmer. A few bass have also been caught on clams. Phil said it will be interesting to see if boat traffic, which has been light this spring, will pick up once the bass really

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LEONARDO

"We got out on one trip this past week," reported Capt Joe Baumle of *Sour Kraut Sportfishing* on April 20. Joe said fishing was picky at best and some tough conditions on Saturday while trolling. Joe said the boat has dates open for the spring stripers so give him a call for info and available dates if you want to get in on the spring fishing.

ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS

It was another up and down week of fishing for anglers stopping in at **Julian's Bait & Tackle**. Steve said the shop has been having problems getting the bait they order. With water temps back into the upper 40s most of the bass action has been on worms, bunker and eels and bunker has been hard to come by. Like with most other shops the store's regulars have been telling of reading a lot of fish, but nothing close to a steady bite is being seen. Most times the bass will hit for a short period then go off the bite we were told.

"We saw a better number of boats go into the water this past week and

weekend, but it is no where near the numbers we saw last season at this stage of the season," stated Lou Fligor at **Atlantic Highlands Municipal Harbor**. Lou said the harbor is slowly filling up with seasonal boats but here too there are still plenty of openings. Catches coming back to the ramp have also been slower than last season, even with all the fish that boaters have been reading.

The charter boat **Little Hawk** got in a good week of striped bass fishing. Capt. Joe Occhipinti said he had to troll the bass on most of the trips in order to put together a catch. A pair of trips started the week off on Sunday the 14th with John and his party in the morning and the Nelson family on the afternoon trip with both enjoying a good pull of keepers. Doug and his charter on Monday and Stan and his group Tuesday morning also enjoyed a good troll of keepers and released plenty more fish. A Tuesday afternoon trip with Keith and his party kept the string of good fishing going, while a pair of trips on Friday also found good fishing. The crew finished up the week on Saturday the 20th with two more good pulls of mixed size stripers.

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HIGHLANDS

Wayne over at **Twin Lights Marina** brought up a good point when I was talking with him over the weekend. He said this is the first spring we have the 3-inch slot limit on the striped bass. "Last season that limit was not in effect in the spring and we had trouble handling all the boats going in the water," said Lou, adding "this spring we have had a plethora of weather problems and combine this with the 3-inch slot limit of one fish we are seeing the results of the crazy regulations." He said the weekend of April 20-21 saw a handful of boats go out of the marina to fish for stripers despite all the fish in the bay and surrounding waters. Sure makes sense to me!

"We got out on several trips this past week and found decent action in the lower bay and lower sections of the Shrewsbury and Navesink rivers," said

Capt. Fletcher Chayes of **Two Rivers Charters**. Fletcher told is all his fish were caught on shads and swimming plugs. He said he did not see any schools of bunker like there was in the area a few weeks ago and only saw scattered baitfish pods.

"We have been reading a lot of fish, however fishing has been very picky with some days giving up good catches and others finding spotty fishing," reported Capt. Pete Wagner of the charter boat **Hyper Stripper**. "We need some steady good weather to push the water temps up and get the bass on the heavy feed," Pete said.

"Striped bass fishing has been day to day with some days finding good action on jigs while other days we had to troll the fish," stated Capt. Chad Hacker of **Tagged Fish Charters**. Chad told us the baitfish have started to move into northern waters and the

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boat will start chunking this week.

BELMAR

I spoke with Marty over at the **Fisherman's Den** and he told me the store has been getting reports of some stripers being caught in the local surf. One good sign is that anglers have started buying Sabiki rigs and catching sea herring in the inlet. This is usually a sign that baitfish populations have started to move into the inlet and forage fish attract other fish.

"The boat got out early in the week and on Saturday and found some better fishing on Saturday," reported Greg Hueth of the **Big Mohawk III**. Greg told me he will be fishing the boat for blackfish right up until the final bell, and then make a decision on what he will do for the 17 days we can't fish for sea bass. Hopefully some migratory stripers will make an appearance in our waters.

"We spent the week in the boat yard for our annual sprucing up," said Capt. Steve Spinelli of the charter boat **Skylarker**. Steve said with the crazy weather and picky fishing we have been seeing we just figured it was a good time to get things done.

It was an off and on week for the **Golden Eagle** and **Victoria Marie**. Capt Rich Falcone said both boats had days when the caught some fish and days when fishing was tough. The big

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boat got in a few days in between the weather. The smaller boat found overs in the back bay on a couple of trips early in the week and some keepers and smaller fish later in the week. "We need a week of good hard sunshine to jumpstart the fishing," Rich said.

The **Ol' Salty II** got in on her first trip of the season with Pat and his party. Capt. Nick Caruso said the group caught plenty of short blackfish and a few keepers, along with a couple cod and ling with Alex taking the pool. Nick told me the highlight of the trip was when another boat hooked up with a 718-pound bluefin which every one on the boat enjoyed watching from a distance. "The boat will continue to fish for tog until the season closes," Nick added.

Another person that told me he found off and on fishing with the stripers this past week was Capt. Joe Paton of **Nearfall Fishing Charters**. Joe said when he was able to get fresh bunker the fishing was very good. We did an evening chunking trip that was very successful and plans on doing two or three evening chunking trips a week for a while. The boat has some days open this week so if you want to get in on the action give Joe a call for details and dates.

"We had a decent week of fishing for ling and tog," reported Capt. Al Shinn of the **Miss Belmar Princess**. Al said most tarps see the ling dominate the catches however some nice tog have also come over the rails. Al told me he will be staying with the bottom fishing for another week or two or when the migratory stripers start showing up.

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refit and expect to resume fishing for the season on May 1," said Capt. Matt Quinones of **BeastMode Fishing**. Matt said he had many delays with the weather this spring and hopes the weather will settle down once he starts fishing again.

NEPTUNE

"Blackfishing has been getting better as we get deeper in April on the days we have been able to get out," reported Capt. Ralph Leyrer of **Last Lady Fishing Charters**. Ralph said it's too bad the season ends on April 30. The migratory stripers should be

getting closer to our area and the boat will be targeting them in May and June. Open boat dates for April are April 24, 27, 28 and 30. "Our first open boat striper trip is May 4 and sea bass May 17," Ralph said.

"We got in a trio of trips this past week," cited Capt. Robbie Siciliano of **Smokin' Reel Charters**. Robbie said the fishing has been very picky because of the cooler water temps and most of his fish are being caught on cut bunker. Rob told me he intends to stick with the stripers and blackfish and hopes the weather will turn around and jumpstart the striper fishing.

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**CENTRAL
JERSEY
REPORT**

by Ashley Viola
848-299-9581
violaashley369@gmail.com

As of this report heading into the final week of April there has been a lot of opportunity for anglers to reel in some fish, that is when the weather cooperates. There's been plenty of

action reported at the wrecks and reefs, with ling finally adding to the mix. Stripers are making their presence known in the surf as of late. They don't seem to have a bait preference, as folks report action on artificials, worms, and clams. Bluefish finally joined in this past week with reports out of the Manasquan and Barnegat Bay. On another note, the black drum action that turned frenetic over the second weekend of April slowed. Bluefin tuna are here and not far off either, with reports on April 20th of fish from just 10 to 20 miles out.

BRIELLE

Nick at **The Reel Seat** said bluefish are beginning to show up with their first run in the river, as well as some bass. Striper action in the bay is starting to heat up with folks getting them primarily on worms, but the lure bite is getting better. Blackfish action was red hot heading into the final days of the April opening. The big news on April 20th was the first bluefin of the season weighed in at 718 pounds out of Brielle.

Capt. Joe said the **Jamaica II** got back out on the water Saturday for some ling and tog. The morning trip was better than the afternoon, but overall, not too shabby. They get back out there on April 27th and 28th, as long as the weather cooperates of course.

"Bottom fishing has improved and striped bass fishing has been slow so the **Jamaica** will be fishing for ling, blackfish, and cod through the end of April," said Capt. Howard towards the latter part of April from aboard the **Big Jamaica**. Of course, with blackfish shutting down for a spell as of April 30, hopefully those striped bass numbers will see an uptick off Manasquan. The crew is looking forward to the black sea bass opening on May 17. Meanwhile there's a tilefish trip scheduled to set sail at 10 p.m. on April 30.

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Fishing said they got out last Sunday and had a few dozen ling on the boat, which is a great sign for the season! They also had big keeper cod and some nice keeper blackfish with plenty of throwback action, especially on the last drop. There was plenty of life and action around the boat all day long. They got back out Wednesday and picked at some fish having better bites in the morning. Nice blackfish and ling made it over the rails. Saturday, they saw a similar pattern with a busy morning but slower afternoon.

POINT PLEASANT

Jason at Fishermen's Supply said blackfish action in the canal picked up

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CURRENT FISHING REGULATIONS


NEW JERSEY

- BLACK DRUM** 16-inch minimum, 3 fish, open all year.
- BLACK SEA BASS** 12.5-inch minimum size, open 5/17-6/19 (10 fish bag), 7/1-8/31 (1 fish bag), 10/1-10/31 (10 fish bag), and 11/1-12/31 (15 fish bag).
- BLACKFISH/AUTOG** 15-inch minimum size, open 1/1-2/28 (4 fish), 4/1-4/30 (4 fish), 8/1-11/15 (1 fish), and from 11/16-12/31 (5 fish).
- BLUEFISH** No closed season or size limit, 3 fish bag for private anglers, 5 fish bag for anglers aboard for-hire boats.
- BLUE CRAB** From point to point, 3 inches for peeler or shedder, 3-1/2 inches for soft shell, 4-1/2 inches for hard, with one bushel recreational limit.
- COBIA** 37-inch minimum, 1 fish per angler, 1 per vessel (no closed season).
- COD** 5 fish per bag, 23-inch minimum, open 1/1 to 5/31 and 9/1 to 12/31.
- HADDOCK** 18-inch minimum, no limit, open all year.
- POLLOCK** 19-inch minimum, no limit, open all year.
- PORGY/SCUP** 10-inch minimum, 30 fish, open season from 1/1 to 6/30, and 9/1 to 12/31.
- RED DRUM** Slot fish between 18 and 27 inches, 1 fish, open all year.
- STRIPED BASS** One fish from 28 inches to 31 inches. No closed season 0-3 miles from shore; Delaware River from Trenton to Salem River open 3/1-3/31 and from 6/1-12/31; all other marine waters open 3/1-12/31. Circle hook required when fishing with natural bait (all waters).
- SUMMER FLOUNDER/FLUKE** Open 5/4 to 9/25 with an 18-inch minimum size and three fish bag. Special NJ management zone regs include 17-inch minimum and three fish bag west of COLREGS on Delaware Bay; 16-inch minimum and two per angler at IBSP.
- WEAKFISH** 13-inch minimum, 1 fish, no closed season.
- WINTER FLOUNDER** 12-inch minimum, 2 fish, 3/1-12/31.
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DELAWARE

- BLACK DRUM** 16-inch minimum, 3 fish, open all year.
- BLACK SEA BASS** 13-inch minimum size and 15 fish bag, open from 5/15-9/30 and 10/10-12/31.
- BLUEFISH** No closed season or size limit, 3 fish bag for private anglers, 5 fish bag for anglers aboard for-hire boats.
- COBIA** 37-inch minimum, 1 fish per angler, 1 per vessel (no closed season).
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- PORGY/SCUP** 9-inch minimum, 30 fish, open all year.
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- SPOTTED SEATRUT** 12 inches, no bag, open all year.
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- SUMMER FLOUNDER** 16 inches, 4 fish bag limit from 1/1-5/31, with the size limit increasing to 17.5 inches from 6/1-12/31.
- AUTOG** 16-inch minimum, 4 fish from 1/1-5/15 & 7/1-12/31.
- WEAKFISH** 13-inch minimum, 1 fish, no closed season.
- WHITE PERCH** 8-inch minimum, no bag, no closed season.

BELMAR



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from the inlet to the north end of the canal. Anglers fishing Shark River reef are doing okay with blackfish, ling, and cod, but not spectacular.

Capt. Danny said the **Norma K III** got out a few times this past week and managed to reel in plenty of fish. Blackfish up to 10 pounds bent some rods and short-life action kept anglers busy at the rails. "The fishing just keeps getting better and better each day," Capt. Danny told us, saying the important thing is to stay in a spot,

substantially. Striper fishing in the river and bay picked up and it seems like anglers are doing better throughout the day fishing the outgoing tide. Soft plastics fished slow on the bottom are key. A few blues have been caught

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be patient, and they will chew. They started posting dates for tuna trips online so make sure to reserve a spot.

Capt. Bob on the **Gambler** said his April 16th 12-hour Taugathon started out a bit slow, but gradually the bites got better as the day went on. The fish were taking green crabs, white crabs, and clams. Baits didn't seem to matter as much as being at the right place at the right time. The fish seemed to hold in a few areas of the wrecks. They also saw a couple cod, a small pollock, a big ling, and a huge porgy.

Capt. Alan of **Mushin Sportfishing** congratulated mate Jon Cavaliere who landed a nice black drum he boated from his tin boat on April 15. Scott W

and friends got out the day after and had a great time, however, the fishing was not so great. By Friday, the Raritan Bay bite picked up a bit for Dave T and friends who landed some stripers. A new body of bass definitely moved in for great action on Raritan Bay, all were overs except one. Friday afternoon, Mike B and friends crushed some more bass, all overs up to 40-inches. Saturday morning, Ismael, Julio, Bill, and Justin picked away at fish with everyone getting their limits and doing some catch and release with fish up to 39 inches.

Adam at **Canyon Runner Sportfishing** said several Canyon Runner Coaching Members got in

on the first giant bluefin bite of the year off of New Jersey on April 20-21 with multiple bluefin up to 110 inches hooked, only within 10 to 15 miles from most central New Jersey inlets. Trolling big bally and wolfpack tails way back was the ticket. Adam said it looks like it's going to be an early season for tuna in the NY Bight!

BRICK

Frank at **Gabriel Tackle** said the surf is showing life with reports of stripers being landed on clams and bucktails. It seems the black drum bite slowed down in the south end of the bay, it might be because they are spawning, or they moved further north, or did they head out already? It will be interesting to see what's next with them. The striper bite in Barnegat Bay remains good on bloodworms, but they are finally hitting lures more consistently. The Raritan Bay bite has been a little tough, but some nice size stripers have been landed. Good reports came from the Delaware. Frank thinks the water temperatures need to rise a little higher to really kick off the run. The first reports of blues from the Manasquan had just came in from Chris Kahler when we spoke.

NORMANDY BEACH

Pete at **Charlie's Bait & Tackle** said bass are biting in the back. North of Seaside bridge there seems to be more bass than drum. Bass and blackfish are producing in the canal with a few winter flounder near the entrance on the southside. Bloodworms are working for bass and flounder while clams were doing the trick for blackfish. South of the bridge there is a slower bite. Off the beach, stripers are finally hitting artificials during the day and on clam at night. One angler throwing artificials reeled his line in to notice the tail was bit off which is a good sign for blues.

It was quiet for a bit but they finally heard their first blue report caught in the Manasquan River.

SEASIDE PARK

Connor at **Grumpys Bait & Tackle** said the bass bite out front on clams has been excellent right around the tides. The drum bite slowed a bit in the back, while the blackfish action on boats was hit or miss heading into the final week of the spring season.

John at **Betty & Nick's** said anglers were killing the black drum game off the docks but it slowed the last few days. Good news is the striper action out front picked up and is getting better each day. Clams and rubber shads are the ticket.

TOMS RIVER

The improving beach bite out front along the local beaches has been keeping the crew at **Hook House Bait & Tackle** pretty busy during the second half of April, so much so that Dennis and crew are looking for part-time help (15 to 18 hours a week) over at the second shop. If interested, stop by Go Fish and see Maryann, Monday through Thursday 9-3.

FORKED RIVER

Capt. Ray Lopez of **Miss Liane Charters** said the boat is going in the first week of May to target tilefish, sea bass, and bluefin. The bluefin tuna are already here and close to shore, and he's taking reservations for those charters now.

WARETOWN

Jorden at **Creekside Outfitters** said anglers are using clams to reel in some drum from the bay. Stripers continue to chew on bloodworms. A few reports came in of anglers soaking clams and landed stripers off the surf. Tog are biting good at the reefs and wrecks with some reports off the jetty.

Capt. Joe Rizzo of **Barnegat Bay Fishing Charters** said he's been working up along the Navesink and still has not seen any signs of bunker. A few short stripers were landed over the weekend but no true action. Some bird play started

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so maybe bluefish are coming in. He heard of shorts along the sod banks in Barnegat.

BARNEGAT LIGHT

Sounds like things are breaking open along the north end of LBI, as the folks from **Bobbie's Boats** said they were too busy to give a report. With the summer flounder season getting underway on May 4, look for the first catches coming from the backwaters not far from the shop, typically along the channel edges and flats.

SURF CITY

Tom at **Surf City Bait and Tackle** said the windy weather slowed the fishing down early in the week, but despite that, blackfish action in the inlet didn't slow up. Once the weather calmed it got even better with numerous limits reported. Some kingfish were caught in the bay and surf. Drum are being landed all over the bay, right on the island. Someone landed six drum right near the shop. The action has been hit or miss. Striped bass action exploded on Saturday the 20th on the island with fish caught from Barnegat Light to Holgate with anglers absolutely

killing them up and down, both big and small.

SHIP BOTTOM

Greg at **Fisherman's Headquarters** said he got his first report of a kingfish catch this season. Both Barnegat Bay and Great Bay have a ton of drum. Tog fishing out in the ocean has been really good during the second half of April. Meanwhile Raritan Bay and Delaware River are both producing great bass action.

LONG BEACH ISLAND

Steve at **Jingle's Bait and Tackle** in Beach Haven said the spring blitz for striped bass in the surf has started. Anglers have been getting them on the south end of the island. Numerous fish are of keeper size biting on both bloodworms, artificials, fresh surf clam, and salted clam. Steve is still getting reports of black drum as well. Smaller schoolie stripers continue to bend rods in the bay around the sod banks. Kingfish have been reported on bloodworms.

BEACH HAVEN

It is starting to look like "spring has sprung" in the Long Beach Island

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SOUTH JERSEY/ DELAWARE BAY REPORT



by Anthony J Califano
(215) 802-7182
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Stripers are still the number one fish being caught locally according to our reports as of April 21, with fish being found in the rivers, creeks, bays and even along the oceanfront. While stripers have gotten most of the attention so far this year for their fantastic spring run, another spring visitor is making their appearance as black drum are starting to launch rods out of sand spikes from Great Bay down to Delaware Bay. With more anglers switching from bloodworms to clam, the chances of getting the attention of a boomer increases dramatically heading into May. Year after year, the Great Bay and Delaware Bay serve as the spawning grounds for drum that push the 70-pound mark. It's an amazing opportunity to catch a monster size fish, with simple tackle (7/0 hook, 4-ounce weight, clam bait) and without leaving the confines of the bay. Prime dates in May and early June for charters fill up quickly each year, so now is the time to book those so you don't miss out. Another annual drum tradition is the Middle Township Drum Fish Tournament, now in its 20th year from May 17-19 with weigh-in at Jim's Bait and Tackle in Cape May. See our *Calendar of Events* on page 10 for more info.

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area, and the captains of the **Beach Haven Charter Fishing Association** are excited as the 2024 fishing season arrives. There have been some serious catches of striped bass in the local inshore waters during the second half of April, while black drum have also begun to make their presence known. The BHCFA captains are in various stages of preparation. Capt. Gary Dugan has the *Irish Jig* ready to go and reports

he will be targeting striped bass and drum right away. Capt. John Lewis of *Insatiable Sportfishing* has spent the past two months delivering boats up and down the Atlantic Coast, but says he is looking forward to staying in Beach Haven and putting anglers on fish. Meanwhile Capt. Dave Wittenborn has been working feverishly readying the *Benita J* for action and plans a launch in early May for the heart of the striper season.

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TUCKERTON

Mike with **Tuckerton Bait and Tackle** tells us that there are a lot of bass around the area. Anglers are picking up fish in the back bays from local docks, in the rivers and creeks

and also in the bay. Bloodworms were the top bait, but now that fresh clam is available, many anglers are making the switch and in the process upping their odds at hooking a drum while striper fishing. Several nice drum were caught at Graveling Point in recent weeks, and anglers also report that their baits are getting all chewed up by crabs, so they are starting to move around as well. Mike also tells us the tog action has been really good this spring, with more green crab demand than he's ever seen, and not just the nearshore wrecks and reefs, but many folks have done well in April fishing the end of Seven Bridges

Road.

The folks at **Dockside Cafe and Marina** told us that anglers are finding stripers, perch and drum in the area and that the crabbing is just starting to take off. Stripers and drum are being caught in Great Bay on bloodworms or clam baits. Many of the bass have been in the slot keeper range and above. The drum are taking clam baits and occasionally the bloodworms intended for bass, and they have been reported to be in the 15- to 25-pound range. The river and creeks are also producing some nice size perch as they are moving into their spawning areas. Live grass shrimp and

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The good striped bite continues according to reports out of **Empire Fishing and Tackle**. Fish are being taken in the Mullica River as well as in Great Bay on bloodworms and clam baits. Keeper size fish and above are being taken every day, the action is pretty hot right now. Those fishing with clams are also coming across some nice size drum in the bay. On the tog grounds, both inshore and offshore, the action was very good with limits of fish being reported to 6 pounds on green crabs.

BASS RIVER TOWNSHIP

The striped bite in the bay is still pretty hot according to Justin with **Allen's Dock**. The fish are taking both bloodworms and clam baits and there are plenty of fish in the keeper slot range being caught. In the river, the fishing has been a bit tougher with anglers marking lots of fish but having a hard time getting them to bite. They are probably only in the mood to spawn, but when the spawn is over,

Justin expects the fishery to bust wide open. There were reports of drum being caught in the bay, but none have been brought to the scales just yet. Justin is stocked up with bloodworms, clams, eels and live minnows will be arriving in plenty of time ahead of flounder season on May 4.

PORT REPUBLIC

Anglers are seeing a decent striped bite in the Mullica if they are drifting live eels according to Violet with **Chestnut Neck Boat Yard**. The fish have been turning their noses up at artificials, including trolled baits. Live eels have been the key to putting some fish on deck, and those fish have ranged in size from 24 to 36 inches. For the land based angler, Graveling Point was the hot spot again as anglers have been finding lots of fish in the keeper size range and over, all on bloodworm baits.

ABSECON

The stripers are all around the Absecon Area according to Capt. Dave with **Absecon Bay Sportsman's Center**.



James Hickey was going through his '24 catch photos, and sent us this shot of his wife Rosemarie after a solid day of catching, tagging and releasing striped bass with Capt. Joe on the Little Hawk out of the Atlantic Highlands.

The back bays have been very good for fish to 30 inches on bloodworms, clams and even on artificials like Gulp Paddleshads. Along the inlet, there are even more fish and these are hitting both soft and hard plastic lures, and these fish are pushing the 36-inch mark.

BRIGANTINE

Brigantine is on the board with its first weakfish in the shop, a 19-incher according to Capt. Andy with **Riptide**

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Bait and Tackle. The oceanfront has also come alive with reports of stripers from the beach and jetty on RipTide Rotters (clam). There have also been the first reports of black drum in the area, from the beaches, also taking the Riptide Rotters. All of this action is ahead of schedule as compared to last year's report, so May should be a fantastic month along the beaches and behind Brigantine.

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ATLANTIC CITY

Tog and stripers were taking center stage in Atlantic City during the week of April 15th according to

reports from Noel with **One Stop Bait and Tackle**. The tog bite was on fire with anglers catching keeper fish to 3 pounds, and many coming close to their limit of four keepers per jetty trip. Also from the jetties, the biomass of striped bass this spring has been nothing short of amazing. Anglers are throwing artificials as well as clams and bloodworms and finding stripers in the slot range and over. But it's been pretty amazing that even with a narrow slot, so many fish being caught are within this size range and are able to be harvested. In the back bays, the stripers are also feeding right alongside large drum. Here, bloodworms and fresh clams are the top baits.

After waiting out the spring weather, the crew of **Jersey Nutz Sportfishing Charters** finally got out to the tilefishing grounds. Unfortunately they found very cold water temperatures and way too many dogfish in 600+ feet of water. The crew will definitely give it another try as there is a high demand from anglers for this type of fishing.

MARGATE

There were some tog being caught in the back bays right now according to Justin with **Scott's Dock** (formerly Ray Scott's Dock). Many of these fish are small, but anglers were finding some fish in the 2- to 3-pound range from the bridges. As tautog ends with the month of April, back bay striper action is starting to catch fire and we heard reports of fish being caught on bloodworms and clam baits. There have also been plenty of fish caught along Longport and Absecon Inlet with soft plastics being popular here with fish to 34 inches.

SOMERS POINT

While the crew at **Waterfront Marina** provided current reports on the tog and striper action, all thoughts are on the May 4th opening of the summer flounder season. The Longport area has been especially productive for both tog and stripers for the last few weeks. Tog were taking green crabs and stripers are taking a variety of baits including bloodworms, clams and soft plastic baits. Offshore, the wrecks and

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reefs were loaded with life and many anglers reported easy limits of tog to 5 pounds.

OCEAN CITY

"Incredible" is how the crew at **Fin-Atics** described the tog and striper action of late. The tog were not only being caught from the wrecks and reefs, but also from the local jetties, sea walls and bridges. Fish to 4 pounds were reported from land based anglers, while the wreck anglers managed fish to 8 pounds. Stripers were found from the river all the way out to the inlet. The river and bay fish were taking bloodworms or clam baits. The fish closer to the inlets were also falling



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for these baits, but were even more likely to be caught on 6- to 8-inch soft plastics and 6-inch minnow type hard plastics. Larger fish were in the rivers, but the "Goldilocks" fish (those in the

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keeper slot range) were much more plentiful as you got closer to the Great Egg Harbor Inlet.

After a couple of disappointing blowout weeks, Capt. Mike with **Mighty Heron Charters** finally got out to the wreck sites for some tog action. While trophy tog were the target, the mega whitechins did not cooperate. Instead, the crew wound up with a very respectable total of over 80 fish, 17 of them keepers. Capt. Mike is already planning for the start of the spring black sea bass Season, which will include some deep water trips for jumbo sea bass.

SICKLERVILLE

Many of the customers we spoke with this week from **Bait N' Hook** tell us that the hottest spot in South Jersey just might be Atlantic City. Here, anglers are both tog fishing and striper fishing along the jetty front and boardwalk. Tog were taking green crabs, there are tons of fish and many anglers are finding keepers in the 2- to 3-pound range. Much of the striper action has been on darker colored soft plastics, including 9-inch Slug-Gos, 10-inch Hogy Eels, and 8-inch NLBN Straight Tails. An amazing number of these fish have been in the slot range for the last few weeks with more fish coming through each week in the "over" size range.

SEA ISLE CITY

The first reports of weakfish so far this season have come from the crew at Sea Isle Bait and Tackle. The reports started off with just one fish early in the

week, but by the end of the week, Capt. Joe with *Jersey Cape Guide Service* reported a decent weakie bite on soft plastics. The reports were confirmed and emphasized when one customer brought in a real beauty, a 22-inch, 3-pound, 12-ounce weakie caught behind Sea Isle.

WILDWOOD

The back bay striper bite continues to be very good according to reports from **Pier 47**. As the spring progresses, it seems as though new schools of stripers move through the area. One week all the fish are 22 to 26 inches, and the next week sees fish from 28 to 33 inches. This past week was again a mix, but with more larger fish pushing in from the ocean in the 32-inch plus size range. Anchoring up in the deeper holes along the ICW and fishing fresh clam is one way anglers are scoring these fish. Other ways include the use of soft and hard plastic artificials, including Zooms and Bombers, fished along the sod banks and bridge pilings.

CAPE MAY

As the Delaware Bay and the ocean cleans up after weeks of storms, the striper action is starting to heat up along the banks according to reports from customers of **Hands Too Bait and Tackle**. Anglers fishing from Poverty Beach, around Cape May Point and up into the Villas are starting to see stripers on both bait and on hard plastic lures. The fish are not monsters and have been ranging in size from 22 to 30 inches. Tog action also started to improve on the jetties as the water

cleaned up. No reports of drumfish just yet on the Jersey side of the Bay, but with April 23 full moon, things should kick into high gear.

FORTESCUE

Higbee's Bait and Tackle continues to report that day in and day out, the Fortescue Beach is giving up lots of striped bass on bloodworms. The size of the fish are all over the place with many just over 28 inches, and some as large as 47 inches. Under the cover of darkness is when the bigger fish seem to put on the feed bag, including a 47-incher for Tyler Smith of Millville.

DELAWARE COAST REPORT



by Eric Burnley
eburnle@aol.com

The bad news comes from Indian River Inlet as the Army Corps of Engineers has fenced off the Northside from 75 yards west of the bridge to 50 yards east of the span. That is where I do 90% of my fishing. The parking lot will soon close as well. At this time the Southside is open, but it too will soon close. All of this is to repair the jetty system that is in very bad condition. Fishing did improve heading into the third weekend of April in Delaware with blues to 6 pounds caught from Indian River Inlet, tog caught over ocean structure and black drum and big blues taken from the beach.

ODESSA

Patty at Captain Bone's told us anglers are still catching big striped bass on bunker and bloodworms at Green's and Augustine beaches. Woodland Beach has also seen big stripers on the same baits. White perch and catfish are in the tidal creeks and rivers. Use bloodworms for the perch and cut bunker for the catfish. Stephen Miller had an 8.12-pound Delaware Citation snakehead out of Nonesuch Creek on a frog chatterbait.

LEIPSIC

At **Smith Bait** Steve said big stripers continue to be caught and released from Port Penn, Collins Beach and the Power Plant. Cut bunker and bloodworms remain the prime baits. White perch are available in the tidal creeks and rivers with live minnows a good choice when bloodworms are not available. Black drum have been caught out of Slaughter Beach on crabs.

BROADKILL BEACH

Dan at Dan's Tackle reported that black drum to over 40 pounds have been caught at Broadkill Beach on clams, green crabs and frozen peelers. The rising tide is the best time to fish there.

LEWES

Bill at **Lewes Harbour Marina**, said the *Katydid* ran to ocean structure on Saturday, April 20 and returned with 24 tog. Julie reported that black drum were caught at Broadkill Beach on green crabs. These fish weighed as much as 44 pounds. Ron Capone fished Broadkill Beach with green crabs and caught a black drum. Craig Blocker from Laurel, Delaware caught a 4.46-pound flounder out of the Lewes and Rehoboth Canal on squid.

Bill at Henlopen Bait and Tackle said Maddison fished the surf at Herring Point with cut bunker to catch a big bluefish. He too reported black drum at Broadkill Beach on clams and crabs.

INDIAN RIVER INLET

I spoke with Burt at Hook 'em and Cook 'em and he said the *Judy V* had a slow pick of tog on Saturday the 20th. He also said he has seen the first flounder come out of the Back Bays.

Old Inlet Bait and Tackle had some great new for us. Blues to 6 pounds were caught on SP Minnows on Saturday. One customer reported the fish would not touch metal, but jumped all over the plugs. The surf at 3Rs Road also produced big blues on cut bunker. A few small tog and stripers were caught from the inlet as well. The tog took crabs or sand fleas and the stripers like white bucktails.

LONG NECK

At Rick's Bait and Tackle they said fishing remains slow with just a few small stripers caught at Massey's Ditch on minnows.

CHESAPEAKE BAY REPORT

by Eric Burnley
eburnle@aol.com



Blue catfish remain the prime target of anglers since striped bass was closed to even catch and release fishing in April. The spring run of shad is also attracting some attention.

ANNAPOLIS

Angler's Sport Shop recommended fishing the channel edges from the Bay Bridge to the mouth of the Patapsco River. Anchor up in 10 to 15 feet of water and chum with chunks of menhaden or alewife. Always use non-offset circle hooks when fishing with bait. The Mattawoman Creek has been the most productive for shad of late.

BALTIMORE

Tochterman's told us the shad run at Deer Creek is under way with good numbers of hickory shad available. Shad darts and small spoons will find the action. Blue catfish in the 15- to 20-pound class are available from the lower Susquehanna to the Bay Bridge. Use cut menhaden or gizzard shad for bait. Fishing from shore at Sandy Point can be rewarding as well.

FRESHWATER REPORT

by J.B. Kasper
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Finalizing our freshwater report on April 21, Mother Nature was finally being kind with just a trickle of rain, which is quite a change from the deluge we've seen through much of the spring. This has allowed streams, rivers and

lakes to slowly recede to more normal levels for this time of the year. In fact, the Delaware is very slowly coming into more normal levels. On the upside Steve Meserve at the Lewis shad fishing in Lambertville did not get his nets in for the Shad Festival but hopes to get them for the final week of April.

Striped bass fishing in the lower Delaware is on the upswing. As of this report some of the better striped bass fishing in between Tacony and Burlington. Anglers trolling the flats are picking up fish on rattletraps and Bombers, as well as jig plasticbait combinations. The last few hours of the incoming and the first few hours of the outgoing tides are producing best. Fishing in the backwater areas is a mix of spotty bass, crappie and white perch catches also on the top of the tides.

Fishing in the Trenton area has also improved with the better water conditions, but it was still high for this time of the year. Hit or miss stripers fishing along with occasional walleyes and shad are hitting on the top of the incoming and the first part of the outgoing water. Swimming plugs and occasional topwater plugs are taking the stripers. Fishing in the backwater areas has been slow however some bowfishermen are hitting some big carp, catfish and snakeheads.

I spoke with John Bullock at **Old School Outdoors** in Ewing and he told me reports coming into his shop are telling of boat fishermen doing better with the shad than shoreline fishermen. A good part of the buck shad got past the Lambertville area with the recent high water. Anglers have also been doing well with the walleyes in the river from Trenton north to the Gap. John also mentioned that the canal and other waters in Mercer County were restocked with trout this past week.

Shad fishing from Easton north through the Gap has also been decent, I spoke with Sue over at the Stokes Sports Shop in Branchville and she said this past week saw some good shad catches, mostly bucks, from the Gap north and some fair walleye fishing.

As of this report on April 21, water levels are slowly improving with water temps in the tidal river in the low 50s on the incoming tide and the low to

mid 50s on the outgoing water. In the non-tidal river water temps are in the low to mid 50s, dropping into the high 40s north of Easton. All launch ramps are serviceable.

LAKE HOPATCONG

"It was a good week of fishing on the big lake this past week," cited Laurie Murphy at Dow's Boat Rentals. Crappie and perch are still being caught around the bridges and in the shallow areas. Anglers are trolling trout on spinners and spoons, along with a few pickerel. In addition walleye are being caught and released along with some hybrids around Brady's Bridge. Pete Pelligrino checked in with a 9-1/4-pound channel cat; Jim Welsh a 2.2-pound crappie and Ed Mahon a 4-1/4-pound pickerel for the top weigh-ins on the lake. Laurie said the lake is at full pool and water conditions are excellent.

ROUND VALLEY

Mike Roman of the Round Valley Trout Association said fishermen enjoyed a nice mix of recently stocked trout and holdovers, mostly rainbows being caught on Powerbait and shiners. Boat fishermen also got into the rainbows along with occasional browns while trolling swimming plugs, spoons and drifting shiners in water from zero to 30-feet down. Lakers have been holding in 50 to 70 feet of water and taking bait rigs dressed with herring and shiners. Mike said the reservoir is at 95% capacity and the boat ramp can now handle two trailers at a time. Water conditions are excellent and water temps are in the 50s on the surface.

NORTH JERSEY

The report on the trout fishing from Joe over at **Fairfield Fishing Tackle** set the tone for most of our other reports when he said the streams are still high but very fishable. Reports coming into the store have been of decent catches away from the stocking spots. Even the fish that are now being stocked are moving into quiet water places because of the high water. He also mentioned some decent reports coming from the local small lakes and ponds where bass and crappie are starting to take on a pre spawn mode.

Trout fishing was also the main topic when we spoke with Don over at **Ramsey Outdoors** in Succasunna, saying that while the streams are still running high and will be for a while longer, water conditions have cleaned up and as long as you can get down to the fish you will catch them in the bigger streams. He suggested fishing the smaller streams away from the stocking spots in the holes where they lay up during high water. Likewise spinners and spoons make better lure choices in the larger streams while salmon egg and Powerbait nuggets are a better choice in the smaller streams. Andrew over at the Ramsey store also told us of very much improved stream conditions especially on the Ramapo, Rockaway and upper Musconetcong. He said spinners, small spoons and salmon eggs are taking the bulk of the trout in those streams. He also got word of some good bass fishing in the northern reservoirs.

Northern trout streams are running clear but high, and fishing has been decent according to Mark over at **Tackle World**. Mark told me pick Gulp worms and pink salmon eggs have been the top producers. The shop also got a report of some landlocked salmon being caught at Waywayanda and some smallmouth being caught from Greenwood Lake on swimbaits. Mark asked me to remind everyone of their free Shimano Fishing Workshops on April 28.

The top trout streams over at **Bullet Hole Annex** were the Ramapo, Pequest, Rockaway and flat Brook. Nick said he got the best reports from those streams this past week and most were restocked with trout this past week. On the bass fishing front the store got reports of decent bass action in Lake Hopatcong and Pompton Lake where swimbaits and spinnerbaits were the main tools for anglers. Nick also mentioned that the Passaic River was once again fishable, be it still on the high side.

CENTRAL JERSEY

Bass and crappie fishing got top billing over at **Jersey Hooker Outfitters**. Amanda said she got good reports on the fishing at Manasquan Reservoir,

Lake Carasaljo, Lake Manetta and Lake Shenandoah. Here too the word on the pickerel fishing in the cedar waters west of the store was very good on live killies and swimbaits. She also mentioned Spring Lake and the upper Toms River as being the top spots for trout fishermen this past week.

Pickerel fishing continues to be the number one producer now that water levels in the Pine Barrens have returned to normal in most areas, stated Dennis over at the **Hook House Bait and Tackle**. Killies, spinners and swimming plugs continue to be the top producers. Dennis said he also got decent reports on the trout fishing in the Riverwood Park section of the Toms River on spinners and also mentioned that trout fishing has remained good in Spring Lake.

Over at **Creekside Outfitters** Tom P had several reports for us. Waretown Lake is giving up some largemouth and crappies with the bass hitting Chatterbaits and the slabs hitting small killies and jigs. Some nice rainbows are also being caught from the upper Toms River and the TCA. Lake Riviera is producing some bass on golden shiners. Lou Brock pulled an 18-inch rainbow from the upper Shark River and some catfish are also being caught there.

SOUTH JERSEY

"It was an up and down week of fishing in the lower part of the state," stated Justin over at **Allens Dock** on Bass River. Pickerel fishing in the nearby cedar waters has been decent, with some better access, on live killies and swimbaits. Perch fishing has been decent in the Mullica and Bass rivers he added.

We got a pair of reports on the trout fishing in the lower part of the state when we spoke with the folks over at **Hands Too Bait and Tackle** in Cape May. They told us the trout fishing in Tuckahoe Lake was spotty at best while the fishing in Ponderlodge Lake which was restocked this past week, was good. Most of the trout are being caught on Trout Magnets and Powerbaits. They also mentioned some

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continued from page 60

decent pickerel fishing in some of the cedar water lakes on live bait.

A call to the Blackwater Sport Center got us a trio of reports. First off bass fishing has started to take on a pre spawn look in Rainbow, Union, Parvin and other area lakes and ponds. Anglers fishing swimbaits and spinnerbaits in the deeper water of the spawning areas

are scoring some bass and crappie. Trout fishing continues to be good in Iona, Shaw's Mill, Vineland Park and other stocked lakes. Lastly pickerel fishing is much improved with some better water levels in the local cedar waters on live killies and swimbaits.

PENNSYLVANIA

Water conditions in the Lehigh Valley and Poconos have also improved. This week's rain did little to change conditions and we got reports of decent trout fishing in the Jordan, Little Lehigh, Coplay and Indian. In the Poconos the Bushkill and Brodhead are the top streams. In Bucks County Levittown Lake and Tohickon Creek have been the top spots. Some bass and crappies are being caught at the Falls Township Park Pond and in Silver Lake.

I spoke to Diane over at Dave's Sporting Goods in Doylestown and she told us the reports on the trout fishing in the Tohickon Creek remain good and water levels in the creek are in very good shape as of this report. Diane said the reports on shad fishing show the bulk of the bucks being from Easton north.

DELAWARE

"Perch fishing was the name of the game in the sweet waters of the Diamond State this past week," stated Steve over at **Smith Bait and Tackle** in Leipsic. Steve said spillways at Garrisons Lake and Silver Lake remained the top spots and some bass and crappies are also being caught in those lakes as well. The top trout spot in the state was White Clay Creek where some decent size rainbows are supplying the fishing.

Trout fishing was at the top of the list when we spoke with Patty over at Captain Bones in Odessa. White Clay Creek accounted for most of the fish with Rich Fairweather weighing in a 2.6-pound rainbow; Anson Mars a 3.10-pound rainbow and Jeff Stillwell a 3.30-pound rainbow from the Creek. Josh Kushner had a 3.09-pound rainbow from Wilsons River. Stephen Miller caught an 8-3/4-pound snakehead from Nonesuch Creek.

BEACH TALK

by Nick Honachefsky
nickymagnum@hotmail.com



The sun came out over the weekend of April 20th and the bass bomb ignited. Finally, stripers from tip to tip of the state's frontside beaches got on the chew, both off the surf and off the bayside docks and piers. Black drum fishing kept up a pretty solid pace with a virtual explosion of Barnegat Bay boomers, while blackfishing turned up a notch as well around the inlet rocks. While putting this report together following the third weekend in April we had the first legit reports of bluefish finally came through in the days leading up the April full moon with 3- to 5-pounders inside the bays and river systems along the central coast.

Phil at the **Tackle Box** in Hazlet reported that Sandy Hook got a good shot of stripers this weekend as the Rip held keeper class fish that hit NLBN plastics, metal lipped swimmers and clams. The Keansburg Pier was loaded with bass as well with clam baits scoring slot fish there. Way back at South Amboy bloodworms are working best to score stripers. A big 50-pound black drum was also caught along the Bayshore back there this week on clams.

Kyle of **Fishermen's Supply** in Point Pleasant said a local customer has been throwing the Yo-Zuri Monster Shot around the Point area to connect with some larger stripers. Clammers are picking away at bass out front. The Manasquan Inlet jacks have magnetized blackfish to the area as limits were found on green crab baits. Just keep in mind that blackfish is closed for a bit at the end of April. Kyle said there may be bluefish around as the boats are marking fish though they may still be in lockjaw mode.

Frank from **Gabriel Tackle** in Brick had the first legit photos of bluefish come in near the Mantoloking area as 3- to 4-pounders were around town. Blackfishing was up and down in the Squan inlet and canal in the waning days of April with bloodworms getting more hits than clams right now, but

you can also use the usual green crab offerings to score. More reports of stripers from the surf came in towards the end of April, but the bayside still seemed to be the place to go for a linesider.

At **Charlie's Bait and Tackle** in Normandy Beach, surfslingers began to find a few more bass out front as Tim Brackman clammed up a couple of fish during the night shift. I also made it out to huck some snot in the dark hours to come up with a shorty bass. The Mantoloking Pier area saw its first bluefish of the year as well. Stop in the shop as Pete is selling special \$15 for Gulp tubs to prep for fluke season.

The black drum bite that was red hot early in the week of April 15th trickled down to a few boomers along the Seaside area docks according to Scott of **Grumpy's Tackle** in Seaside Park, but the chew could pick up again around the April 23 full moon. Sporadic stripers have been taken in the surf and along the bayside mainly on bloods and clams. The first bluefish were reported as well in the back.

The IBSP sands got lit up over the weekend as John from **Betty and Nicks** in Seaside Park said his customers couldn't keep a clam in the water without a striper hitting. Both clams and bloods are the way to go to find bass along the Seaside Piers, both day and night time, while drum fishing slowed up a bit. Looks like the barrier island is heating up.

At **Fisherman's Headquarters** in Ship Bottom Greg had some strange reports of kingfish already in the area, and some big ones too, up to nearly 2 pounds hitting bloodworms. Bass are hit or miss along the surfline, but the chew is still best along the bay beaches. Blackfishing had been red hot at the Barney Inlet south jetty for those exploring rocky sections in search of fish.

Clams have been connecting with stripers in the LBI surf according to the folks at **Jingles Bait and Tackle** in Beach Haven. A good show of slot fish are around along with sub legal caliber fish to eat up the clam baits. Folks there were expecting the first bluefish to get reported before the first of May, especially around the Holgate area at

the inlet. If clams aren't working for bass, try and switch up to bloodworms to mix it up a bit.

Stripers and drum came rumbling into the Brigantine surf according to Andy of **Riptide Bait and Tackle** in Brigantine. Saturday's sunshine on April 20 saw a mess of stripers being caught on the beaches on clams with a few black drum mixed in. The South Jetty was also a hot spot to land not only stripers but blackfish. Andy said the wave of fish that just moved in is large and should be the start of the fun.

"Big bass are here," declared Noel of **One Stop Bait and Tackle** in Atlantic City as he saw a mess of large linesiders get released off the jetty rocks with fish pushing the 20-pound mark and even more. A mass quantity of keep slot fish are around too to keep the lines busy with bloods and clam baits scoring. Blackfish were continuing to bend rods off the rocks where bloods and green crabs are the key.

At **Fin-Atics** in Ocean City Nick reported more bass moved into the area, especially down at Corson's Inlet where fish span the whole gamut from 18 to 40 inches. The 9th Street bridge also had bass hitting soft baits. Blackfishing picked up in a big way as the Longport Pier, Beer Pier and the bridge had plenty of almost legal size tog, with some big ones of 16 inches or so, topped out with a monster 22-inch tog heading into the third weekend of

April.

Down in Cape May at **Hands Too Bait and Tackle**, Jeff said bass anglers can take their pick in the Delaware Bay how you want to catch them on bloods, clams, bunker, plugs, shads. The chew is solid from Fortescue to Cape May Point. Higbee's Beach is seeing a lot of slot size fish, while the further up you go into the bay, the fish get larger up to 45 inches. Weakfish have been reported around The Point as bucktails tipped with soft baits as well as bloodworms are starting to nab the spiketooths.

A lot of good-sized spawning stripers were caught and released along the Delaware River heading into the final days of April, with spots along the Philly side proving especially good. Down around the bend a bit, Steve from **Smith Bait** said Port Penn, Collins Beach and the Power Plant were the places to find some big bass on cut bunker and bloodworms. He also said Slaughter Beach was giving up some black drum.

Finally for this week's report, Bill from **Lewes Harbour Marina** said bluefish and striped bass reported from Delaware beaches as well as the Cape Henlopen Fishing Pier and around the Indian River area. He also said black drum were reported out at Broadkill Beach heading into the April 23 full moon. 🐟



Jameson Stokes from Hamilton, NJ is out and about this season in search of his second striped bass, having caught and released his first back in late fall, an impressive 42-incher.

Tilcon Lake

BY TOM PAGLIAROLI

The lake that was a mistake. Or, more appropriately, a stunning and brutal force of Mother Nature. Welcome to Tilcon Lake, located in Allamuchy Mountain State Park, straddling the Sussex/Warren County border just off Waterloo Road (County Route 604).

It was a monumental rain event on a dead still, hot, and hard-to-breathe August day in 2000 that delivered 14 to 15 inches of blinding wind-whipped cloud eruptions over a small spot in the Morris/Sussex county region; dead zero were several local lakes, including the 2,658-acre Lake Hopatcong. The storm hung over the area for the afternoon, delivering one of those Hundred Year downpours.

Ultimately, the dam at Lake Seneca blew out, and Hopatcong's monstrous overflow (estimated at a 2-foot gain in water level), coupled with the flooding smaller brooks and streams, transformed the Musconetcong River, starting at the Hopatcong Dam, into a boiling brown and ash colored torrent. The wall of water took with it pieces of road, trees, brush, logs, rocks, and boulders...and whatever else was in the way. In a stroke of incredible luck, the floodwaters dumped into the abandoned Tilcon Quarry just above Hackettstown, avoiding what would have been a catastrophe to a portion of the town below.

The 60-foot deep, 88-acre jagged rock-studded hole eventually filled, and in the deluge delivery, including the aforementioned structures, was a cross-section of forage and gamefish that had washed down from the Musconetcong. The displaced residents included smallmouth bass, rock bass, bluegill, pumpkinseed and redbreast sunfish, white suckers, largemouth bass, yellow bullheads, pickerel, and carp. Forage species included banded

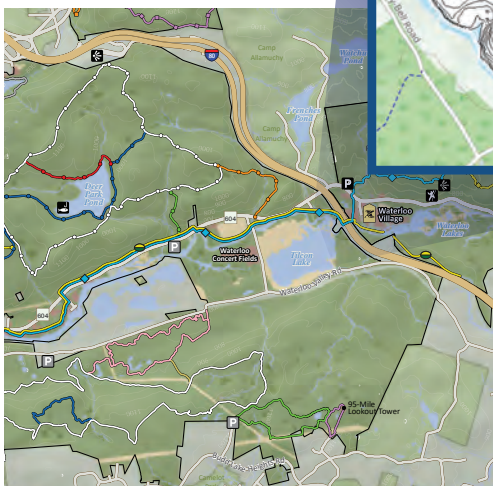
killifish, golden shiners, crayfish, dace, chubs, and minnows. It wasn't long before populations of all were established, with one critical forage species, alewife herring, also established via bait bucket stocking. (Bucket stocking is also suspected of the scatterings of black crappie and yellow perch being caught.) The herring population, as with the other forage species, has taken off, and natural reproduction of the bass (there was a token stocking of fingerling smallmouth in 2011 and 2018 by the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries) and pickerel is documented. While the lake is deep throughout most of its entirety, there are some shallow water coves on the western side that provide spawning areas for largemouth and pickerel, with the bronzebacks reproducing in slightly deeper areas.

Although the largemouth, smallies, and chainsides receive a lot of attention, it's the landlocked salmon that is the rising star of Tilcon. The cold, well-oxygenated hypolimnion (dense, bottom layer of water in a thermally-stratified lake) in the 20- to 30-foot reach and abundant herring forage make it a natural for this species. Since 2014 and through last year, approximately 5,600, averaging 13.83 inches, have been stocked. It's managed as a Holdover Trout Lake, with a daily possession limit of two at a 12-inch minimum. "Tilcon is providing outstanding opportunities for landlocked salmon, and we're working to improve the program even further," said assistant fisheries biologist Justin

Rozema, who oversees the Garden State's cold water lake/reservoir salmonid fisheries, adding, "It's a work in progress."

The bank sides all feature steep drop-offs, leading to over-the-wader depths within a few steps, the exception being the aforementioned shallow portions. There are cutouts along the shoreline that offer a modicum of access to landlubber anglers. The most effective way to work Tilcon is via cartopper, kayak or canoe; power is electric only. Said floats must be walked in from the parking area along Kinney Road, situated off Waterloo Road (a left turn if arriving from Route 46, a left if coming in from Route 206). For those who will be probing from the brushy banks, there is another access point at the end of Kinney Road. Make a left at the T (this is Bell Road) and follow to a gate on the left. There is parking in close to the woods. It's a few hundred yards trek down to where there is a split. Take the left and follow to the back of the lake. There is access along this area. The Musconetcong is tucked along a portion of the trail.

Tilcon represents a variety of quality sweetwater angling in the stunning highlands real estate. Salmon, bass, pickerel and panfish in a nice tight package. 🐟



Tilcon Lake is located within Allamuchy Mountain State Park, with structure detail available through the Navionics app. Main image courtesy of the New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife, with inset courtesy of Navionics.

PHOTO GALLERY



"The bite is starting to pick up on the Tom," said Manny Butera back on March 12, showing off one 31-inch striper out five caught while using bloodworms with a bit of Fishbite bloodworm.



A milder winter put the striped bass on the chew earlier this season along the Raritan Bay than most, with Eric Emanuele scoring from shore late during the tides of March.



Young Pedro IDefonso put in his time and got his first keeper striper of the 2024 season (15 pounds, 30 inches) around the March 25th full moon along the North Jersey piers.



By early April of this year, bigger bass had moved up the Delaware River, with Anthony Rios scoring his first 37-1/2-inch catch and release striper while fishing the Corona Fishing Tournament.



"The South Jersey striper action is getting hot plenty of mixed sized fish the past couple days," said Nick Rambo on April 9, showing off this 30-inch striper caught while plugging along a sandy stretch of the Delaware Bay.

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BY JIM HUTCHINSON, JR.

COASTAL KAYAK CLASH

returns for '24

Two-time "CKC" champ Justin Oser put the pedal to the polyethylene to chase down this hardtail (false albacore).



After a 1-year hiatus, *The Fisherman Magazine's* Coastal Kayak Clash is back again in 2024, officially kicking off at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, May 1 and running through 11:59 p.m. on November 30. This "kayak only" tournament is open only to subscribers of *The Fisherman*, and is based on a points system that's quite similar to the other "members only" contest we've run for decades called the Dream Boat Fishing Challenge.

However, the big difference between the two season-long subscriber tournaments is that the Coastal Kayak Clash (what we often refer to as the 'CKC' for short) doesn't require a weigh-in, but instead is based on the length of your fish. Therefore catch and release is not only possible but encouraged and it allows us to add jumbo stripers to the game.

HOW & WHAT TO WIN

All totaled, there are eight species of fish for kayakers looking to collect enough points to win big this season, including blackfish, bluefish, fluke, porgy, black sea bass, weakfish, hardtail species like false albacore and bonito, and of course the mighty striper. Points are awarded for each of the top three positions in each species category, with the longest of any species getting 3 points, second place getting 2 points and the third place finisher getting 1 point.

At the conclusion of the CKC, winners will be determined by tallying entries submitted for these eight species, with the kayak angler earning the most points across all categories winning first place and our grand prize, an Old Town Sportsman PDL 120 fully outfitted by YakAttack and worth over \$3,500.

The second-leading points scorer in 2024 will win a Helix 7 CHIRP MEGA SI GPS G4N from Humminbird valued at \$949.99, while our third place finisher will get \$500 in cash. Plus, we are also awarding prizes for the eight largest of species winners, which includes \$200 in cash along with an assortment of Yo-Zuri lures, Yo-Zuri fluoro and Yo-Zuri Striped Bass performance shirt, a prize valued at over \$270.

All totaled, the cumulative value of all prizes in the '24 CKC is \$7,179.43.

The Fisherman Magazine

HOW TO ENTER

First things first, you have to be a subscriber to one of our three regional editions of *The Fisherman* to qualify, those are New England, Long Island and Metro New York, or New Jersey, Delaware Bay. This is important to remember because subscribers aged 18 years and older who reside in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island are all competing against one another for this awesome spread of CKC prizes. You can take your kayak on road games and fish in other state waters, but you have to be a subscriber in good standing from one of the aforementioned states to qualify.

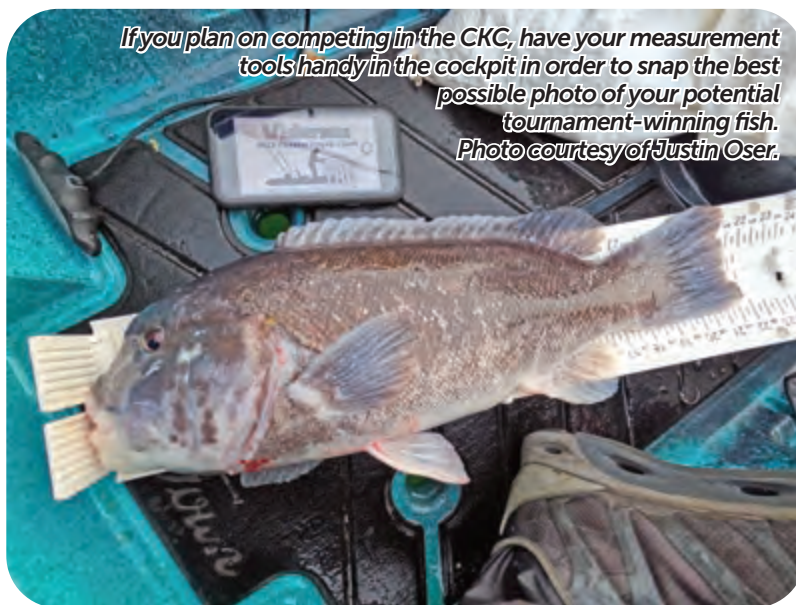
If you're not currently an active, paid subscriber to *The Fisherman*, visit our website at thefisherman.com and get it done; to qualify in the CKC the contestant must be a subscriber of *The Fisherman* a minimum of one calendar day prior to the date the fish was caught. Any fish caught and entered in the CKC must be caught

by the subscriber, in a sporting manner, on a kayak (electric motors are permissible, however gas-powered motors are not), or on a stand up paddleboard, with a rod and reel only, and only within one of the eligible U.S. states as mentioned above.

Eligible species must be photographed next to a ruler clearly showing the complete and unobstructed length of the fish alongside a standard ruler with

a free-standing rigid, taped to your paddle or a bump board measuring device being acceptable. A bent or curved fish length by way of a flexible sewing-type ruler/measuring tape is not a valid entry. The entire ruler must be visible. Included in the photo must be an official Coastal Kayak Clash tournament tag which can be downloaded at thefisherman.com as of May 1.

Keep in mind that the tag must be visible and legible in the photograph. Additionally, it must be clear that the fish was landed from a kayak, in other words, some part of your kayak or SUP must be visible in a qualifying photo. When measuring the length of the fish, the nose of the fish should begin at the 0" mark and the tip of the non-pinched tail of the fish denotes the length. Measurements are to be made to the nearest quarter-inch. This means that if the measurement falls short of the nearest 1/8-inch



GRAND PRIZE

The top prize winner in the 2024 Coastal Kayak Clash presented by The Fisherman and sponsored by our good friends at YakAttack will win the following (MSRP in parenthesis).

- Old Town Sportsman PDI 120 Ember (\$2,899)
- YakAttack TowNStow Bar Cart Kayak Cart (\$250)
- YakAttack BlackPak Pro Kayak Fishing Crate - 13" x 16" (\$150)
- YakAttack 13x16 ShortStak Upgrade Kit for BlackPak Pro, Black (\$60)
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- YakAttack DoubleHeader with Dual RotoGrip Paddle Holders (\$35)
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- YakAttack AR Tube, LockNLoad base with No Extension (\$42).

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mark then the length is rounded down, and if the length exceeds the nearest 1/8-inch mark then the total length is rounded up (tournament judges will have the final say on a given fish's length.)

Photos may be taken with a camera phone or standard digital camera, and should include the metadata within the image file that includes the date the image was taken. The photo file name should be the same as the contestant's full name. Email the digital photo, your full name, address, phone number, type of fish, length of fish, state fish was caught in, and date/time that eligible species of fish was caught, within 10 days of the catch to be eligible for scoring to CoastalKayakClash@thefisherman.com.

2nd, 3rd & LARGEST OF SPECIES

If you come up just a little short of the grand prize, don't sweat it; our second prize winner in 2024 will receive a Humminbird HELIX 7 CHIRP MEGA SI GPS G4N unit with an MSRP of \$949.99, while the third prize winner will receive \$500 in cash.

The Coastal Kayak Clash contestant that finishes with the largest of eight different species will win a Daiwa reel (BGMQ4000 valued at \$209.99 for weakfish, hardtail, striper and bluefish; or Coastal TW200 casting reel valued at \$249.99 for porgy, blackfish, sea bass and fluke), along with a 6-1/2-inch Yo-Zuri Mag Darter (\$17.99), a Yo-Zuri Mag Popper (\$17.99), a 5-inch Yo-Zuri 3D Inshore TopKnock Pencil (\$11.99), a 3-1/2-inch Yo-Zuri 3D Inshore Popper (\$9.99), a 4-3/4-inch Yo-Zuri 3D Inshore Popper (\$11.99), and a 5-1/4-inch Yo-Zuri Hydro Monster Shot (\$16.99), along with a 100-yard spool of 40-pound Yo-Zuri SuperFluoro and an XL Yo-Zuri Striped Bass performance shirt (total MSRP, \$272.93). 🐟


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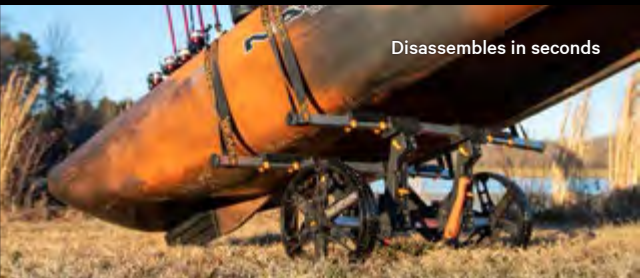
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FISH THE BEST

BY DAVE ANDERSON

Ask yourself the right questions and you will make the right choice.

picking THE 'YAK that's best for you

*Kayak fishing is one of the fastest-growing and most innovative niches in all of fishing.
Photo courtesy of RI Kayak Fishing Adventures.*





ver this past winter, I became much more interested in kayak fishing and how technology – along with a

few decades of ingenuity - have shaped not just the sport but the kayak itself.

I think all of us have fished from an old sit-inside kayak that felt like floating around in a Rubbermaid trash barrel at some point in our lives, and it's cool and interesting to see how much the kayak has changed from those early days. What used to feel like something you "settled for" because you couldn't afford a boat, or found yourself taking the 'any port in a storm' approach while trying to sneak some fishing in on vacation, has morphed into a sophisticated lifestyle choice that has grown from a tiny niche to a powerhouse that fuels its own industry.

What I learned, after talking to many great anglers and the marketing folks who specialize in 'all things kayak' is that there are a handful of preferences that should govern how you choose the perfect boat for your fishing style. If you're new to the sport, this may sound like an insurmountable task, but you can cut through the briars here by answering a series of simple questions.

WEIGHTING IS THE HARDEST PART

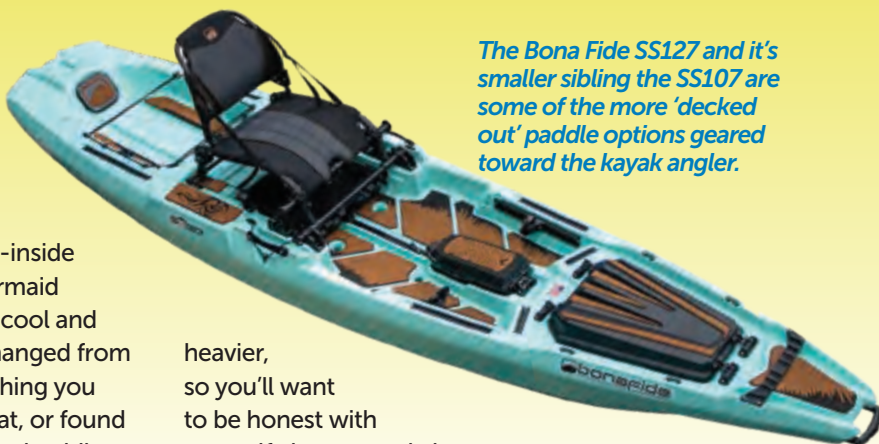
It's easy to fall in love at first sight with today's modern 'yaks; the eyes and minds that design these things have really made them look slick. And when you see one all decked out with rod holders and a fishfinder and all of the accessories that go along with the burgeoning sport of kayak fishing, it's hard not 'want it all'. But the first thing you really need to consider is what you (and your mode of transport) can handle. That means paying careful attention to weight of the boat and how it will fit into, or onto, your vehicle.

Luckily, there are options out there for – just about – every possibility. And for those with space issues or those that prioritize the lightest-possible options, you can go inflatable or you can go with a hybrid kayak/stand-up paddle board (SUP). An inflatable kayak can be rolled down to the size of a large hiking-style backpack and most hybrids, like the Hobie Lynx, can be carried under the arm, like a surfboard.

Obviously, as the boat gets bigger and the accessories pile on, the thing is going to get



The 3 Waters Big Fish 105 is a great paddle option that won't break the bank.



The Bona Fide SS127 and its smaller sibling the SS107 are some of the more 'decked out' paddle options geared toward the kayak angler.

heavier, so you'll want to be honest with yourself about exactly how much you can deadlift onto the roof of your Corolla before slapping the old debit card on the counter. Even if you own a pickup truck, there are still things to think about, for example, do you really want to just bundle your \$5,000 kayak into the back of your truck and tie it down with a ratchet strap? Probably not. So additional purchases may be required, like one of those T-bar contraptions that fits into your hitch receiver to effectively extend the bed of your truck. Or, if you don't relish the idea of having to wrastle your 'yak over the bar and into your truck bed, maybe a kayak trailer would be a better option for you.

Hopefully, it's becoming easier to understand why it is so important to consider size and weight before falling in love with that kayak of your dreams.

STABILITY & SPEED

I'm certain that everyone reading this article is going to list stability as a priority, and luckily, at this point in the evolution of the fishing kayak, you're unlikely to find one out there that feels like you're fishing aboard a floating cypress log. But, there's a tradeoff. And this is something I – personally – didn't put a whole lot of stock in before I spoke with the experts.

For example, while at the Hartford Boat Show back in January, I asked Matt Stone from Black Hall Outfitters in Westbrook, CT to give me a run-through with their kayaks and he repeatedly talked about one style being really fast, while others were really stable. I guess I assumed that the top speed would have more to do with the limitations of the propulsion system and, therefore, would be – more or less – similar from one boat to the other. "When you think about it though," added Matt, "it makes logical sense.

A wider boat will be more stable, but will also create more water resistance and it's going to fight the current harder and catch more wind. A narrower boat will be faster and easier to maneuver, but you'll sacrifice some stability."

So herein lies the next question for you to answer, do you prioritize speed or stability? But before you blurt out the first response that

The Hobie Lynx combines the stability of a stand-up paddle board with the amenities of a fishing kayak, sure to be the king of the flats, backwaters and freshwater ponds.



comes to mind, consider your fishing style. How often will you want to stand up to fish? How often do you expect to be fishing in a swell? What species will you be targeting most? If you think you'll be mostly fly fishing in calm waters, dropping jigs for tog or flipping jigs for

largemouth bass, stability is probably more important. But if you envision yourself chasing bunker pods in the spring and running-and-gunning for albies in the fall, look for a faster boat and just know that you'll sacrifice some stability.

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PEDAL, PADDLE OR POWER?

At this point just about every kayak angler is fishing from a boat powered by something other than a paddle. But this does not mean that you have to go this route or that it's just *wrong* to use anything other than foot for thrust. There are plenty of options out there for paddle-preferred fishermen that will be easier on the wallet and still provide a great fishing platform that can take on just about any customization.

The casual kayak caster will do well to check out 3 Waters Kayaks, these seem to derive their design inspiration from stand up paddle boards check out the Big Fish 105 that comes in several great colors, rides super stable and has tons of storage space, for just under \$800. For the paddler that wants it all, check out the Bona Fide SS107 or SS127. These paddle-powered 'yaks have all the amenities (and good looks) of the most expensive pedal boats but for about half the price. Anglers love the elevated seat and the 'junk drawer' that hides beneath it, their Boss Strap rod management system and the Drypod with transducer through-hull scupper. These boats also come Power Pole Micro Anchor ready and retail for

Old Town's AutoPilot series comes stock with a 45-pound thrust Minn Kota trolling motor which will synch with your Humminbird electronics allowing yak fishers to utilize SpotLock.



\$1,399 and \$1,649 respectively.

Another great paddle option is the Old Town Sportsman 106 which features premium adjustable hi/lo seating, a universal transducer mount and a lifetime hull warranty. The DoubleU hull glides effortlessly through the water and provides enough stability to make it perfect for standup fishing, made even better by the non-slip EVA deck pads, under-seat storage and it even comes with a custom tackle box. If you want all these features in a slightly larger boat, check out the Sportsman 120.

Hobie too, has a paddle option that provides a versatile fishing platform, the Quest 12.5 retails for \$1,199 and features a locking 8-inch hatch, forward accessory

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New for 2024, Old Town is offering both of their AutoPilot boats in a limited edition firetiger pattern.



mounts and 12 inches of track space for whatever add-ons you would like.

Just about everyone starts in a paddle 'yak and then transitions to one with pedal power. "The hands-free aspect of being able to maneuver with your feet while fishing makes it a whole new experience," said Lawrence

Thompson, a recent convert to pedal kayaking, "I wish I had gone right to using pedal power!" Lawrence fishes out of an Old Town PDL 120 and says it's changed his whole approach to fishing.

There are two main modes of pedal power, the Hobie Mirage Drive which uses a pair of 'flippers' to propel boat

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Sleek and stable, the Compass is the fastest pedal kayak offered by Hobie.

and the Old Town PDL style which uses a propeller. "For some guys it boils down to how the pedals function," said Mike Murray a kayak salesman at Black Hall Outfitters when asked for tips on choosing the right kayak, "the Hobie functions more like a stair-step machine, the Old Town is more like riding a bike."

Because pedal kayaks make up the bulk of the fishing kayaks on the market today, we'll devote an entire section to the specifics between the most popular

brands. But there's a new horizon in kayak fishing and this one takes the physical aspect out of the equation by utilizing a Minn Kota trolling motor, complete with Humminbird-integrated Spot-Lock technology. Just imagine the power a 45-pound thrust trolling motor lends to a kayak that barely drafts a few inches! These things fly, and when you want to stop and fish a hot spot, the Spot-Lock keeps you right on those numbers.



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The Sportsman 120 PDL is the most popular all-around fishing kayak offered by Old Town for the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic angler.



Currently, only Old Town sells a fully-integrated motorized kayak. Their Sportsman iPilot series comes from the factory with the integrated Minn Kota trolling motor, and is available in three models the 10.5-foot Sportsman 106 (\$3,499), the 12-foot, Autopilot 120 (\$4,499) and the 13.5-foot, Autopilot 136 (\$4,999). These boats come in four stock colors and – for a limited time – the Autopilots also come in a Firetiger pattern to pay homage to the popular lure color.

PEDAL PREROGATIVES

Look around anywhere fishers are casting from kayaks and you'll see that pedal-driven boats dominate in both fresh and salt water. Hobie was the first to introduce this technology with their genius innovation in the form of, Mirage Drive. Borrowing some technology from penguins, the boats are propelled by flippers that scissor in and out. Then Old Town came along with their PDL Drive system that utilizes a small propeller, this innovation offered instant reverse, simply by pedaling backwards. Hobie responded by adding a reverse lever, that functions sort of like shifting your car into reverse. "Both systems have their perks," said Matt Murray, "the instant reverse of the Old Town is great when you're

fighting a fish, but the kick-up fins of the Hobie allow access to shallower water and will fold up and out of the way when they encounter an obstruction, with the Old Town PDL system, you can't go as shallow."

With all that said, let's compare and contrast the two pioneers of pedal yakking. If you're looking for speed, the best Hobie option is the Compass (\$2,799). Sleek, yet stable, the Compass comes ready for battle with H-mount tracks for attaching accessories, a breathable seat that's set at an optimal height for fishing, a universal transducer mount with through-hull cable plugs and molded in carrying handles.

Old Town's answer for speed (other than those powered by Minn Kota) is the Salty PDL 120, described as "zippy and stable" the Salty is a great choice for fishing in moving water or chasing roving schools of fish.

The seat is adjustable to accommodate paddlers of all sizes and offers superior lumbar support.

For those looking for a stable boat that will provide a better platform for standup fishing, while also taking on rougher seas, Hobie brings a pair of heavyweights to the table in the Pro Angler 12 (\$4,599) and the Outback (\$3,699). The Outback has quickly become a favorite among saltwater anglers. At 12 feet, 9 inches long and 34 inches wide, it's a sizeable boat that strikes a balance between speed and stability. The Pro

ULTIMATE MANEUVERABILITY

Upping the ante yet again, Hobie has introduced their Mirage Pro Angler 360XR series which integrates a new steering mechanism that gives the power of propulsion and steering to your feet. Now you can rotate the Mirage drive as you pedal, directing your kayak wherever you want without using your hands at all! Videos show kayakers performing maneuvers you couldn't dream of before this innovation was made available; basically, you can parallel park this thing! The Pro Angler 360XR comes in a 12- and 14-foot version that retail for \$5699 and \$5899 respectively.





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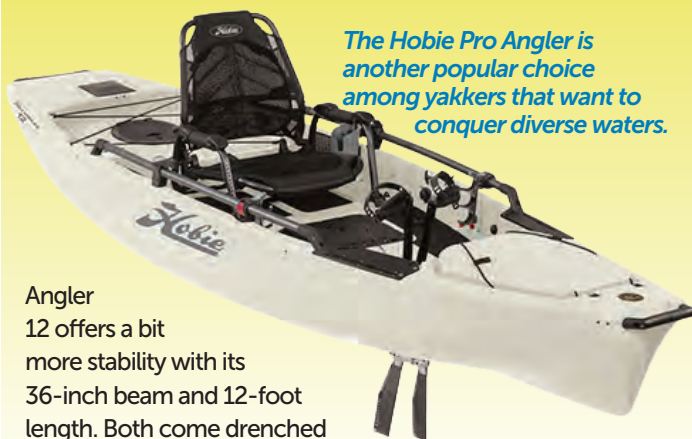
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The Hobie Pro Angler is another popular choice among yakkers that want to conquer diverse waters.

Angler 12 offers a bit more stability with its 36-inch beam and 12-foot length. Both come drenched in accessories and are powered by the Mirage 180 Drive with Turbo Fins, Hobie puts a lot of emphasis on storage and both of these boats have a ton of it.

Old Town's best option for stability is the PDL 120 (\$2,899), taping out at 12 feet in length with a 36-inch beam, it's also their most popular choice for saltwater anglers. Another great option is the Bigwater PDL 132 (\$2,999); this 13-footer also boasts a 36-inch beam and is made to handle the rough stuff. These boats both come standard with Old Town's superior seat design that is adjustable and offers excellent lumbar support, three rod holders, tons of storage and even a cup holder.

As you can see, there is a lot to consider when choosing a kayak. Hopefully this short list of questions for anglers to consider along with the specs of some of the best, will make it easier for you to sift through the possibilities and land on the perfect option for you and your style of fishing. Kayak fishing is here to stay and continues to prove itself as one of the most innovative angling niches. If you've been waiting for the right moment to pull the trigger... or perhaps push the pedal... now is a good time to dip your toe into the game. 🐟

ULTRA-LIGHT

Those looking for the lightest possible option should look into the Hobie Lynx. This is basically a kayak built on a stand up paddle board (SUP), and what's even better is that you can strip it down and use it as an SUP. At 11 feet with a 36-inch beam, the flat-bottom gives it ultimate stability and it's super light (63 pounds fully-rigged, 47 stripped), offering maximum versatility. It comes transducer-ready and is powered by Hobie's Mirage 180 drive system. A great multipurpose option for calmer backwaters or freshwater angling.



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BY MATT BRODERICK

SPRING FINESSE

TOP Weakfish Plastics

Eight plastics any serious weakfish hunter should have in their springtime arsenal.

Elusive, yet beautiful, weakfish will be a top target for many light tackle artificial enthusiasts this season.

The allure of soft plastics lies in their versatility and ability to mimic the natural prey of weakfish, such as shrimp, squid, and small baitfish.

These lures come in a myriad of shapes, sizes, and colors, allowing anglers to tailor their approach to the conditions at hand, whether it be clear or murky waters, deep or shallow areas, and varying degrees of light and temperature. The key to success with soft plastics is understanding how to navigate these lures through the water to provoke strikes from these predatory fish.

To start, selecting the right soft plastic lure is paramount. Options include swimbaits, jerkbaits, and shrimp imitations, among others, often rigged on jigheads or weedless hooks depending on the fishing scenario. The goal is to match the hatch, meaning the lure should resemble the weakfish's natural prey in size, shape, and color as closely as possible. Let's take a look at some of the top options for the 2024 season.

NO LIVE BAIT NEEDED (NLBN)



When I got my hands on these lures last year, I knew immediately that the 3-inch paddletail model would be a weakfish slayer, and my prediction was proven immediately. This full-bodied plastic features a lively swimming action and it's easy to keep it down near the bottom, slow-rolling with a slight twitch every once in a while. I was able to score several weakfish up to about 5 pounds using this method. The bodies complement well with matching screw lock jigheads that will keep your plastic secure for fish after fish.

BERKLEY GULP SALTWATER SHRIMP



The Gulp Saltwater Shrimp is a revolutionary addition to the arsenal of any angler targeting weakfish. Its lifelike appearance and action in the water are unmatched, closely mimicking a live shrimp to deceive any weakfish lurking nearby. The bait's construction incorporates Gulp's unique scent technology, which disperses a powerful attractant upon contact with water, drawing fish from a wider radius than traditional baits. Durability is another key feature, these baits stand up to multiple hookups, reducing the need for frequent replacement. Its ease of use, combined with the proven results, makes it a must-have for any serious weakfish hunter this spring. I would lean towards the 3- or 4-inch model in any natural color for the best results.

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HOGY PROTAIL



The Hogy Protail is a versatile and highly effective lure that can be jugged for weakfish. Created with a robust tail that produces lifelike action. The Protail mimics a wide range of baitfish species, making it irresistible to any tiderunner on the prowl. The durable, one-piece construction ensures it can withstand aggressive strikes and prolonged use. The weighted design allows for impressive casting distances and precise control in the water, enabling anglers to reach and entice fish in running tides. Furthermore, the Hogy Protail's selection of sizes and colors matches various fishing environments and prey, making it a versatile tool in any angler's weakfish box. I'd personally stick with a 3-1/2 inch to 4-1/4-inch sizes. Its effectiveness and durability certainly make it a top recommendation for serious fishermen looking to elevate their weakie game.

FISHLAB MAD EEL



The Mad Eel family of swimbaits was designed for most coastal and intercoastal markets with an impressive

swimming action to cover a ton of water. These baits have a heavy side-to-side rolling action for increased water displacement in low light, hard currents, and stained water conditions. The ribbed belly design also adds vibration that predatory fish can feel. The specially-designed jig hook keeps fish pinned, even through violent head shakes that might dislodge baits sporting smaller hooks. These baits are available in a selection of sizes, but I'd suggest sticking with the smallest, 5-inch size, for the best weakfish success. Sand eel, pink/white, and pearl white are some of the top weakfish color choices.

SAVAGE GEAR MANIC SHRIMP RTF V2



It's a fact that weakfish love shrimp!

Following along the lines of that known fact, I'm putting the Savage Gear Manic Shrimp RTF V2 on this list of top weakfish plastics for '24. The Manic Shrimp is another soft bait with the weight molded into the plastic and the erratic action these shrimp put out, makes them a real attention grabber. Its realistic design, complete with lifelike antennae and legs that pulse with every twitch, offers an unmatched level of detail that proves irresistible to discerning fish. The lure's durable construction

ensures longevity through countless casts. Short jigging motions near the bottom have proven to be the best presentation for weakies. Three ideal sizes are available, along with six excellent color patterns.

LIVE TARGET RIGGED SHRIMP



Just like the name suggests, the Live Target Rigged Shrimp looks alive in the water. Its lifelike design and realistic movements, mimic a live shrimp so convincingly that it's hard for a weakfish to resist. The lure comes pre-rigged with a durable, weighted hook that ensures it swims correctly through the water, achieving the perfect depth and motion when trying to jig up a 'runner. It's available in a 3- or 4-inch size in either 1/4 ounce or 1/2 ounce so using light braid with this lure is a must.



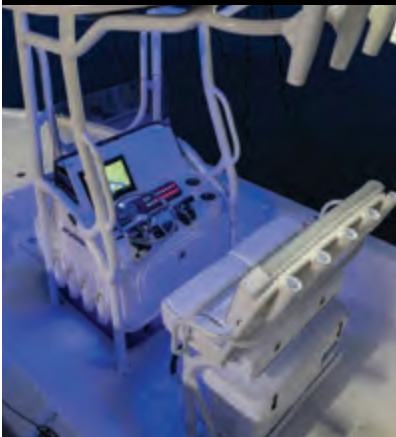
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TSUNAMI SPLIT TAIL MINNOW



Weakfish often require a finesse presentation and one lure that really lends itself well to this style of fishing is the Tsunami Split Tail Minnow. These lures are a top contender in the realm of weakfishing, offering a blend of realism and effectiveness that few lures can match. Its lifelike swimming action is irresistible to predatory fish, closely mimicking the erratic movements of real baitfish. This lure's split tail design, a critical feature, enhances its vibration and motion in the water, making it a must-have bait for tough bites. Durability is another strong suit, the Split Tails able to withstand aggressive strikes and the wear of repeated use. Anglers targeting weakfish will find the Tsunami Split Tail Minnow not just a useful tool but a game-changing ally, making it a worthy addition to any weakfish arsenal.

FISHBITES BRAWLER JERKBAIT

The Fishbites Brawler Jerkbait is highly effective for targeting weakfish due to its unique design and action. This lure mimics the erratic swimming patterns of baitfish that weakfish commonly chase in the back bays. The

LIGHT TACKLE IS A MUST

When using most of the soft plastics mentioned in this article we advise that you incorporate light tackle into your plan of attack. Weakfish, as their name suggests, have weak mouths and using stout tackle will rip hooks right out of their jaws. A moderate 7-footer rated from 1/4- to 3/4-ounce is 'just right' for this type of fishing. Pair the rod up with a 2500-sized spinning reel filled with 10- to 15-pound braid and tipped with a fluorocarbon leader from 15 to 25 pounds.

jerkbait's durable construction withstands aggressive strikes from those gnarly weakfish fangs. These baits get the nod for durability, and with addition of heavy scent release, they get another edge over other baits. The 5-inch model is an ideal profile and size for targeting these Northeast fan favorites.

Using soft plastic lures for weakfish requires a combination of the right gear, proper lure selection, effective presentation techniques, and an understanding of the fish's behavior, hence the nickname tiderunners. With practice, you can refine your approach, increasing your chances of landing these elusive and beautiful fish this spring. Whether you're a seasoned angler or new to the sport, the pursuit of weakfish with soft plastics promises an exciting and engaging fishing experience. Pack some of these plastics on your first weakfish mission of the season, and you'll be sure to increase your odds of success. 🐟

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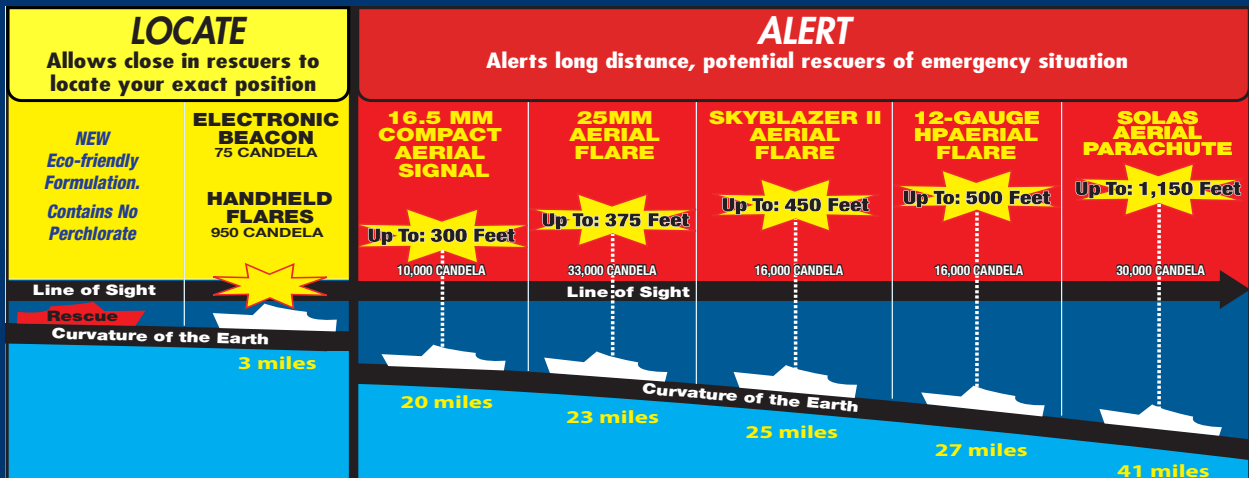
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The Lost Ark

BY JENNI ACKERMAN

Late afternoon on Good Friday, *The Fisherman* team received the group text from Roxanne Willmer of Gray Fishtag Research stating that a MiniPAT satellite tag that they initially lost contact with had made contact with the Argos satellite. However, there were complications, specifically an obstruction that might be impacting the uplink. By studying the LAT/LON numbers to that point, Roxanne felt the MiniPAT was either offshore, or onshore someone along the beach in cozy Lavallette, NJ with something impeding the signal.

The onshore argument made sense; perhaps it was along the beach covered by debris from the ocean heave in the days preceding Easter weekend. So I decided to grab my work phone and laptop and go mobile.

Lavallette was only 20 minutes south of me, so I sent a few text messages to a few fellow surfcasters. My plan was to go into this recovery alone but I thought it would be helpful to get as many boots on the ground as possible in an effort to recover that tag.

This MiniPAT device holds crucial data on light, depth and water temps; since the data uplink was being obstructed, finding that tag would be critical in gathering that information about this particular striper's winter migration having originally been caught, tagged and released in the NY Tight back on November 26, 2023 aboard Chuck Many's *Tyman*. As I parked on the road, I got a phone call from local surfcaster JM Basile who told me he was about to drive onto the beach checking but also posted about the tag to a couple of Facebook groups. As I stepped out of my car and started to walk up the dunes, I took one last check on my phone for the picture Roxanne sent of the map and pin for the potential location of the tag. I felt a bit like *Indiana Jones*, using the sun's rays to find the location of the Lost Ark, staring at my phone in an effort to help pinpoint that lost tag.

Scanning the beach from the top of the dune brought me to a circle of people standing around something on the beach. I thought to myself "oh this is easy it probably washed up right there" since it was the exact pin location on my phone. Walking out along the beach however I discovered that the crowd was assembled around a seal

pup that had come to rest onshore. My first thought was that I hoped that seal didn't eat the striper and our pricey satellite tracking device. After taking a picture of the sleepy seal, I continue my search for the MiniPAT. Surprisingly, give the ocean heave days before, there really wasn't much debris to check, and everything I dug up returned fruitless. JM pulled up in his beach buggy to report that he saw nothing, and continued along to the south. Grumpys Tackle staffer Scott Thomas then drove up on the beach in his waders with rods on his truck, as the gannets were actively diving out front; I was convinced that he was here to fish, but it turned out that he was in fact there to help. But at this point things were looking grim, and we really began thinking that the seal may have eaten the tag.

It wasn't long before I received a call from JM, his truck still visible on the beach a few miles south by the pier up by the dunes. JM told me that someone had posted in one of the Facebook groups saying that there had been a garbage cleanup along the beach, and that someone "may have" found our device and left it in a garbage pile by the benches up on the dunes. All I heard from that conversation was "garbage" and "dune bench" as my brain went into panic mode thinking someone threw away the satellite tag!

I sprinted up the beach, photobombing some woman's photo of the sleeping seal, and found my way to the dunes where I'd had my Indiana Jones moment a couple of hours prior. I began inspecting the area like a forensic analyst; there were no garbage piles under the benches, only a pair of surf clam shells placed underneath. When I say placed, these were placed purposely by a human, and upon lifting them, there it was, the Gray Fishtag Research MiniPAT tag.

I thought to myself, this has to be the wildest Easter egg hunt I've ever been on! After taking a selfie and sending it to the group chat I relished in the moment for helping recover this important tag, originally deployed on a 38-inch striped bass aboard *Tyman* back in November. The MiniPAT has since been sent to Gray Fishtag Research for analysis, and hopefully we'll have more to share in the next months about those missing 120 days. 🐟



Indiana Ackerman and her Good Friday discovery.



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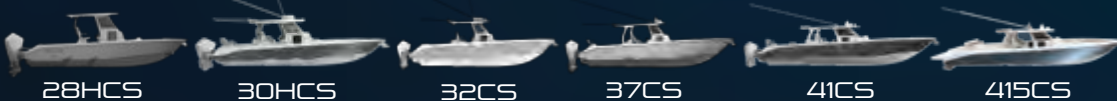
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