

# CONNECTICUT FISHING REPORT

by Bob Sampson Jr.

I always hate to predict what the weather might be based on what's happening as I write this kind of report, because it always seems like Mother Nature is listening and does the opposite. For this reason, we will keep her guessing this year. Hopefully things won't be as cold as they have been for the past three springs so fishing action will start a week or two earlier.

The Connecticut winter flounder season opens on April 1 and is as highly anticipated by many coastal anglers as opening of the trout season is to freshwater fishermen. The difference is that the trout are stocked and in place, but with winter flounder you don't quite know. The problem is one or two of the best early season spots, at least in the eastern end of the Sound, are likely to be past their peak of fishing before the season opens. Bluff Point, which turns on most years some time in March, usually fades quickly after a week or two of what can at times be some pretty good flatfishing action. Most years the very best of the bite in this place is pretty well shot by April 1. However, a few spots from Niantic Bay, Clinton Harbor and points west to the Norwalk Islands that don't turn on until later this month and into May will have a few flatfish to offer. For the past decade and a half, winter flounder fishing has been poor to horrible along most of the Connecticut coast, with an occasional place lighting up for a few days before fading until the following spring. No place has had any sort of fall run in so long I can't remember the last time it was a factor in the reports I write every week.

Connecticut anglers are limited to eight fish per day, minimum length 12 inches. Forty years ago a limit of these proportions wouldn't impress any one who fished for these things; now it's bragging rights big time to even limit out. I haven't done it in many years, but I don't expend a great deal of energy into this species either.

If last year is any indication of what this spring will be like, and it was far from a stellar flatfish year in 2005, there will be some action for two to three weeks in the Niantic Bay area from a handful of hard-core winter flounder experts, a few catches, but not many limits from Clinton Harbor, Duck Island, and the mouth of the Housatonic River in the middle reaches of the state. Later in the month and into May, the waters last year in western Long Island Sound around Norwalk and across from there into New York waters produced reports of limits and near

limits for nearly a month. I don't foresee anything changing much from 2005.

Last spring was the first time in many years that Fisherman's World and shops in that western sound area were bringing up the subject of winter flounder without being asked. Nick at Fisherman's World, Norwalk, saw more than one three-pound flatfish, and I remember one fish nearly reaching four pounds.



**Bass like this thirty inch class fish will be found in most of the state's larger river mouths by late April or May.**

The Connecticut state record is a whopping six-pound, one-ounce "snow shoe" that was caught off the Millstone Point Outflow back in 1999. Fish half that size are considered to be monsters and only a scarce few true three-pound flatfish are caught each year by rod and reel anglers. Unfortunately, this species is in very poor shape in the waters of southern New England from a combination of overfishing from commercial draggers and a decade of unfavorable spawning temperatures back in the 1980s.

April is a time when the striped bass that had been wintering in various spots along the coast begin to move, creating small local fisheries. Look for the action to shape up primarily in rivers and shallow bays starting some time this month, depending on water temperature and weather trends. Plus, some of the smaller immature migrant stripers from the Hudson River begin to move by the end of April, creating some excellent top-notch schoolie action in places such as the Housatonic River and Connecticut River, along with the Thames River and Pawcatuck Rivers in the east.

Of the lot, the Thames is always red-hot by mid-April because it does not have to wait for any fish to arrive from elsewhere. This river has a huge wintering population of stripers that come to life beginning in late March and have usually begun feeding heavily in the river's

shallows and flats by the second or third week of April. Mid-April is always great fishing on an out-going tide in the Thames, pretty much any where an angler cares to toss a shallow-running soft plastic bait.

Early-run river herring, primarily alewives, show up at the Greenville Dam about the middle of April, pulling some big stripers in tow. The Enfield Dam on the Connecticut River and Derby Dam on the Housatonic River also produce some pretty big stripers that run up river to these spots following herring and shad this time of year.

Being that it is illegal to use any of the river herrings, which means alewives and blueback herring, as live hook baits in Connecticut waters, anglers have been looking for "clones" to throw at these big fish in the form of soft plastic and hard lures for the past few seasons. I have played with a few lures at Greenville Dam over the past few years that definitely have promise. The old standby is a 10-inch Fin-S Fish rigged with a stinger treble hook, or a 9-inch Slug-Go being a close second in the soft plastic department. Many anglers

like the largest-sized storm Wild Eye swim baits. I haven't used them much because I don't like the hook set-up in this particular lure; there's not enough gap between the lure and hook. However, other anglers catch big bass every year on these things.

I do a good deal of pike and musky fishing during the heat of summer and have musky lures that look a great deal like herring. My favorites are lures called the Salmo "Skinner," "Fatso" and "Fatso Swimmer," which has a plastic lip. All three are excellent look-a-likes for herring. The Fatso is so good, in fact, that a couple years ago when I took a one out for a test run below Greenville Dam, a horny alewife swam up and tried to mate with my lure, snagging itself in the process. Now that's a good looking lure when a live fish is so attracted to it. On that trip I didn't catch the 30-pound striper I was looking for, because it was one of those nights when there wasn't much in the way of bass below the dam; in fact, that trip was about a week too late to give any new lure a fair trial.

Another musky lure that looks to have some possibility as a hot striper lure is Delong's Killer Eel. Made originally for stripers, it has not been promoted very much along the coast, but it is one great-looking lure. I have some on order for this spring to try in places like the

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