



NEW JERSEY FISHING REPORT

by Nick Honachefsky

Well, one thing's for sure, as this is being written in early October, we've got enough bait stacked in Jersey waters to make another land mass. Mullet, peanut, medium and adult bunker, and spearing are choking the backwaters and surfwaters in the thickest fashion I've seen in at least six years, and it all bodes well for anglers in the perfect months of November and December. Once the air and water temps drop into the high 50 to low 60 degree range, the stage is set for sure for some serious onslaught by stripers and bluefish. It's going to be an incredible inshore and surf fishery, and by the time this paper hits the newsstands, everything should be in full bloom and firing on all cylinders. Bottomfishing anglers eagerly await November 15, when the blackfish season "reopens" and the bag limit increases from one fish to an eight fish limit. It looks to be a promising fishery as tautog are already on the inshore snags en masse.

Raritan Bay

The big story in the R-Bay was that the weakfish finally came home. Though big tiderunners were few and far between, there was a solid quantity of spiketooths in the sub legal to 22-inch class milling around at the Raritan Reach, especially by the 12, 14, 16, and 19 buoys. Smaller jig-heads of 1/2 to 3/4 ounce tipped with sandworms were working well, and if you could get live peanut bunker, you had hot bait, dropped down on a fishfinder rig with a size 1/0 to 2/0 hook through the lips. Pool winning weakfish topped out around 7 pounds on most charter boat trips. If all goes well, the weakies have the possibility of staying in our waters through early November. Striped bass began to show up in the bay in October, as well, with the inside of the bay at Cliffwood Beach and the seawall dishing out bass up to 32 inches on clams and worms. Now for the good news to look forward to. The big bay will be holding some serious linesider activity come November, especially in the Sandy Hook Channel, Raritan Reach and Flynn's Knoll, which already have held a few packs of bass up to 34 inches, but averaging in the 22 to 26-inch class. Bluefish schools ran in and out of the mouth of the bay, and 5 to 10-pounders could be caught on jigs, chunks and just about anything else you threw out.

Northern Jersey

From the tip of the Hook down into the Shrewsbury Rocks, stripers began to move in. Bass up to 38 inches could be found trolling spoons and jigging worms alongshore, and as the temps drop this will be the prime place of steeper real estate along the coastline. Look for stripers of all shapes and sizes to set up off the coasts from the Rocks down through Long Branch and Asbury Park. On the bluefish front, the choppers have been relentless at spots such as the Mud Buoy, 17 Fathoms and the Farms, with AVA 47 jigs with fluorescent green tails dropped to the bottom and reeled up lightning quick, working best to attract the gators' attention. Most blues are averaging in the 5 to 10-pound class, though larger bluefish have been found offshore in the Mud Hole with 10

to 15-pounders prowling about. Big blues will be storming the surf all fall long, moving in and out with the tides. Look to throw Polaris poppers and 2-ounce metals out into the schools in November. False albacore schools have been flirting in and out along the shore, but they haven't been consistent enough to target effectively. A run out to Monster Ledge found a few big 8 to 12-pound albies and a few skipjacks for the *Cock Robin* on its initial special albie trip, fooled by 5-inch Tsunami swimming minnows worked just below the surface. The albies will stick around only to early November before they head to southern climes. The Shark River Inlet proudly gave up the last of the quality fluke when a few flatties of 7 to 9 pounds were found, and a 14-pound-plus fluke was reported taken off Spring Lake. On the structure spots such as the Farms and Sandy Hook reef, a mix of sea bass, porgies and fluke were on tap for bottom anglers and the action for black sea bass is at a high peak, with limit catches of 25 fish not uncommon.



Author with hefty striped bass

Central Jersey

The Manasquan River continued to dish out small to medium-size weakfish on plastics tossed around the Route 35 bridge pilings and off the old hospital by the canal mouth. Inside the canal, blackfish have been on a tear, eagerly chomping down on fiddler and green crabs as well as clam bits. Though most are shorts, you can find your one allotted keeper in the mix. Once November 15 hits, the eight fish limit should be attained easily on the inshore snags and wrecks, as well as the reef sites such as the Axel Carlson and Barnegat Light. Bottom fishing in general has been a bonanza at the Barnegat Light Reef and assorted inshore wrecks as party boats are reporting catches of 600 to 1,200 sea bass per trip with about 100 to 300 keepers on a half day out! The humpies are aggressively whacking jigs now and will through December, with Ava 27 with green or red tails working as well as 3-ounce Spro white bucktails tipped with a fresh bergall fillet. Some captains note that the sea bass are laying one to two feet off the bottom, so reel up a crank or two when you drop down your baits. The Barnegat Ridge has been holding steady with big bluefish of 10 to 15 pounds, and a few reports have surfaced of big bluefin horsing through the area, though none have been reportedly taken. The shining gem along the central portion of the state

will undoubtedly be the surf action from the Manasquan Inlet down through Island Beach State Park, where legions of stripers, blues and weakfish will be prowling about in the suds on a 24 hour basis. This is the time of the year to "run and gun" with your beach buggy on the sands, or go street to street looking to chase down the schools and birds as they move in and out all day long in the surf. What a time of year to be a surfcaster! The Bay Head, Lavallette, Seaside and IBSP beaches will be the best bets to cast out 3 to 5-inch Storm or Tsunami shads, 5-inch Bomber plugs in black, green and silver, and yellow color patterns, and Ava 27 jigs.

Offshore

What a phenomenal year in the canyons! The canyons have been lit up like some boardwalk carnival ride in terms of action and intensity. All through September and early October, yellowfin tuna have been highlighting the catches, averaging in the 40 to 70-pound class, with a few in the 80 to 100-pound range being decked. Live squid has been absolutely the best bet, and squid schools have been ultra-thick out in the canyon waters, though they have been holding deep in the 80 to 100-foot range even on the bottom, where a 10-ounce bank sinker on a shrimp chakka sabiki jig is needed to pull some in. Longfin albacore have been mixed in, as well as more consistent swordfishing, as broadbills of 100 to 300 pounds have continued to battle with anglers. Mahi schools have been hanging around the boat lights on through the nighttime hours, and bucktails and chunkers are helping to take home plenty of fillets for the dinner table while waiting for a tuna runoff. For the most part the Hudson canyon was hot, but in early October the warm water seemed to move down into the Toms and Lindenkohl Canyons where most of the party boat fleets were heading. Some more wahoo schools moved through slicks the past two weeks, and one party boat trip on the *Jamaica* saw three wahoo being decked at 40 to 65 pounds. Anglers awaiting tuna bites are dropping down to the bottom and picking away at 6 to 20-pound tilefish using chunk baits on hi-lo rigs. All said and done, the canyon season is in full effect, and the yellowfin tuna bite is at an all year high. Limit catches for you and your charter are expected, and there's no time like the present to get in on the action! Last year the longfin and yellowfin action lasted through the end of November, and a few years past, the season went all the way through January! If warm water temps stay put, the tuna will stay rooted in the canyons. It all depends on currents and the Gulf Stream to determine how long they will be around. Hope for some warm and friendly currents to keep them here until the end of December.

Heading into the final two months of the year, we've got everything going our way to finish up the year on a strong and memorable level. Tuna should be running strong still, blackfish and sea bass seasons will be peaking, and the invasion of the fall run of stripers, blues and weakies is imminent. Get out and have a ball - it's fall!