

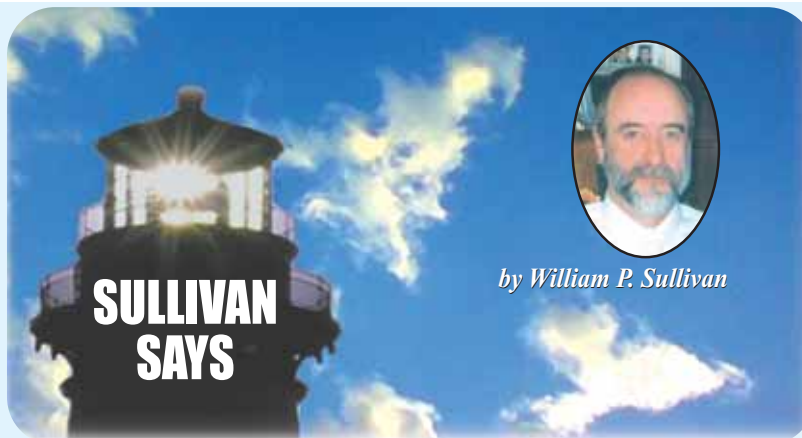
Once again, the cycle of owning a boat is starting. It's time to pull the shrink wrap and take a walk around the boat to decide where to start. Year after year of cleaning, waxing and overhauling the electric system has taught you what works and what doesn't. Start from the inside and work to the outside, then top to bottom with the last being the coat of bottom paint. If you did the right thing with prep last fall and used the winter for as many off-the-boat projects as you could, spring should only be some cleaning, waxing and touch ups. Leave the engine work to the pros. Two weekends should do it. If you are lucky, the yard can fit you into their schedule and get you in the water. If not, not to worry, you won't be missing much until May anyway, and there are always party boats sailing from some port within an hour's drive of your home.

Fishing for the next month will be confined to party boat bottom fishing and some flounder at Raritan Bay, Quogue and Shinnecock Canals, Heckscher Flats, Silver Hole in J-Bay and Parsonage or Milburn Creeks. Once you are set to go, use your local flounder fishing, seal watching and general cruising to shake out the problems and get them fixed before things get into full swing.

Flounder fishing of late has changed from catching to a challenge. Repeatedly producing a catch of a dozen or so keepers per boat has become the mark of success. While anglers on the Island hang their hats on their ability to produce bass, weakfish, blackfish and big fluke, anyone who can return to the dock with flounder deserves some respect, especially if he does it locally. Think of flounder as a game fish and challenge yourself to find them. What does it take to leave the dock and actually return with some winter flatfish from your local waters? I'm saying, to plan a trip, gather some die-hard friends, study the bay charts, currents, tides, moon phases and actually go out and test yourself against a fish that is in limited quantities right in your own backyard. See if you have what it takes to pattern what few fish are there and score. This is going to take some homework and preparation. The spots that produced 30 years ago are not yielding the catches of old. Sure, the Sore Thumb and a few other spots are consistent best bets, but see if you can find your own pods of flatties. The rewards in fillets will still be light, but the personal satisfaction is priceless.

So here are some other options for April fishing. As I said, stay local for flounder. Watch the water temps, tides and moon, and you should be able to outsmart a few. Best bets for bait...sandworms and mussels early. Clams will work better later as the water warms some. On the ebb tide, the warm water is running off the

edges into the channels, so expect to fish the deeper sides of those edges. On the flood, on a sunny day, the fish will move up onto the flats and take advantage of the few degree increase that the sun gives. You are going to have to find them and move



with them, no easy task. Hooks can be Mustad Sproats, Carlisles, Aberdeens and the like in freshwater sizes like #4 or #6. Short-shank #9 Chestertowns with a corn bead are the mainstay. In any event, some kind of bead or grub in yellow, pink or glow will improve your chances. So will yellow sinkers; you can dip your own. Rigs should be experimented with. The normal Sea Bright tandem tied an inch above the sinker works 99 percent of the time. I have seen days where fishfinder rigs were the better choice. Rapid bouncing to stir the mud is normal, but dead-sticking has its days too. The answer is having your crew rig different and fish differently until you figure the fish out. Chumming is a must with crushed mussel and/or ground clam. Stirring the bottom is also not to be overlooked. Clam rakes, sash weights, plungers, you name it...flounder fishermen have used it. Pound the bottom around the boat, repeat it often and set the chumpot up-tide. I have seen days where the fish were active only when the pounding was going on. If you anchor bow and stern, cross-tide, you may have to fish up-tide, under the boat. Don't ask me why, but I've seen days where up-tide fished better than down-tide. In essence, don't get stuck in a rut, experiment.

Flounder in Shinnecock Canal, Quogue Canal and the channel running through Moriches Bay are targets. Possibly Heckscher and the flats off Sayville, Middle Bay, Hole in the Bay, Parsonage and Milburn Creeks, Squaw Island or Massapequa Cove will produce. If you are near Massapequa, also try Florence Beach. The 3rd Wantagh Bridge, Coast Guard Station, Jones Beach Piers, the Cedars off Raritan, Coney Island Flats, Lake Montauk and Sore Thumb will light up later on as the small body of migrating flounder move to the ocean.



The first flounder of 2006 on the "Shinnecock Star" and a real fine one at that.
courtesy Capt John Capuano

Flats and Jamaica Bay, while the fish that move along the South Shore at the same distance off the beach simply never see an inlet to enter. I've caught them while wreck fishing and tried targeting them

with no success. Maybe you will fare better if you scout a piece of inshore gravel bottom or the inshore fingers and set up with some chum. Chances are that you will be overrun with greyhounds as soon as the chum starts.

To the west, spring blackfish, ling and a few cod are available from Ambrose south to 17 Fathoms. Anchor for blackfish and drift for ling. By now, everyone knows how to blackfish; I've spoken about that enough. But, ling - they're another story. Most people catch them as by-catch. I know very few

who target ling and/or know how to. First thing is the hi-lo rig, with my favorite (and you see this often) Mustad Sproats 3/0 should be fine; you can even go to 2/0. One hook is near the bottom and one is up about two feet. Bait to start with is clam, but switch to bergall strips or strip/clam combos ASAP. If you are on the anchor, don't let the bait lie still like codfishing, and don't lift like sea bass. With the sinker on the bottom jig, the slack out of the line without moving the sinker. This twitching of the bait gets ling going. If you are going to drift, fish the peak of the bow. Cast up-drift as far as possible, underhand. Then fish as on the anchor until you have drifted past your rig and start over.

In mid-island you have some ling, spring puppy cod and blackfish on the 70-foot-deep and



Here are some typical spring cod on the "Captain Mark," Montauk.
courtesy Capt Mark Marose

deeper wrecks. Years back, we had a spring cod fishery on the standard fall wrecks off Fire Island. Maybe there are no cod there now or maybe no one is trying. Give that some thought. I doubt that there will be a lot of life on the inshore reefs yet. That doesn't mean you run past them without scanning for life. Rig for mixed-bag bottom fishing and catch what you can.

Montauk will be the best bet for codfish and some major ling bites. This is the realm of the charter and party boat fleet. Save yourself the headaches and cost and go with a pro. If you have the right boat and it's docked out east, then by all means put a crew together and have at it. Over the past few years, the spring action at Block Island and even Coxes Ledge has been very good to great, not the mondo-sized cod of yore, but enough 3's to 5's with a couple up to the 30's. And the ling sometimes go to 5 pounds. Be prepared for either jig or baitfishing on the codfish Out East. They swing back and forth depending on the natural feed. If the finger-whiting, sand eels or herring show, the cod will be chasing them and want jigs. If natural feed is in short supply, they

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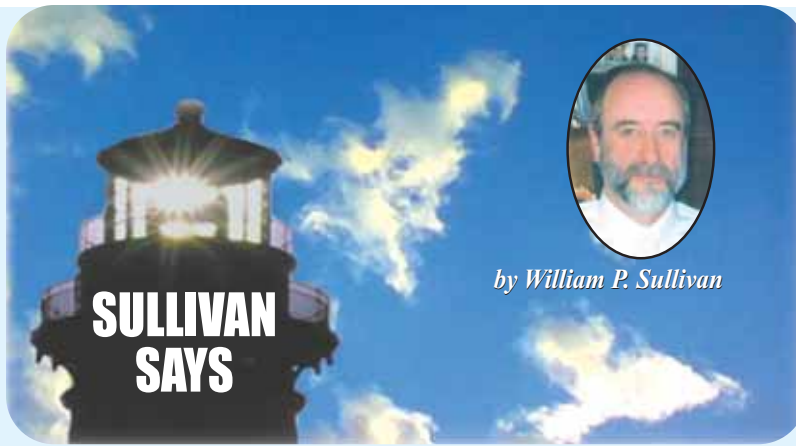
will be grubbing around the bottom for crabs and whatever, so clam bait will rule. Since cod is the primary target, I would leave the ling to by-catch and not use the technique I offered before.

Mackerel will buzz through in the last week of the month or later and the chance to get on them short. If you intend to mackerel fish, I would save the fuel and hop on a party boat. They have the range and speed and their people have the knowledge and will out-catch any private boat.



Here's a nice spring west end flounder.
Courtesy Capt Tony Santella
Marilyn Jean Charters, Brooklyn NY

Stripers are not ready yet. You will catch shorts while flounder fishing, but the teen-



by William P. Sullivan

sized and bigger fish aren't ready. Either have some fun tossing shads and bucktails in the back bays with ultra-light tackle or give them a break until late May.

Fluke may open early, but they will be so skinny you can see through them. Give them another month. Regs are still up in the air on season and possession.

Fresh water fishing in the lakes and ponds for trout would surprise you. Throwing anything gold should yield a few. The nice thing about trout fishing is that you can just keep a rod rigged in your car and stop off at many ponds, toss some tin for an hour and head home. I know many guys who do just that on their way home from work.

In any event, shake the boat down and get ready for fluke, sea bass and striper in May. You have only until mid-to late June to get ready for sharks, so don't let time slip by on you. You already should have bought the hooks, cable, swivels, wire, crimps, skirts, rigging needles and floats. Now is when you

should be wiring and crimping an assortment of rigs. You can go with straight cable or wire or make up some wind-on rigs which are simply a length of wire and cable combined. Experiment with cable or wire backed-up with 400-lb test mono leader.

As always, work your friends at the local tackle shops for information, tips, proper tackle and the best bait you can find. In case you forgot from last month, the USCGA will be offering classroom training in America's Boating Course. Just go on-line to www.cgau.org for details. Be smart, be safe and invest a very little amount of time for a very large amount of knowledge.



Rob with flounder that came up as a double-header on the "Big M Express," Brooklyn.
Courtesy Capts Mario & Steve

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