



NEW JERSEY FISHING REPORT

by Nick Honachefsky

Fluke season opened up with fireworks as summer flounder pounders had great success banging out fish up and down the Jersey Coast. With such a late start to the season, fluke were stacked like pancakes at a fireman's breakfast in the early season spots all through the back bays and estuaries. When the starting gun sounded, it was an all-out assault on the backwater flatfish from Raritan Bay through Barnegat Bay. Water temperatures were on the steady rise in the first days of June with temps hitting the 67 degree mark in some backwater spots, and that elevation sparked a bite on all levels of bluefish, stripers, weakfish and sea bass, effectively launching the 2007 fishing season into high gear. Anglers should note that the Jersey blackfish season has now dropped down to a one fish limit at 14 inches, which will last through November 14, which really stinks.

RARITAN BAY

Some major striper tournaments took place in the R-Bay during May, and big bass were stacked way back inside the bay, near the Driscoll Bridge and off of Morgan Creek, also going way up into the Hudson River. Tournament winners checked in with fish in the 30- to 40-pound class to take home loot, but a lot of shorts and 10- to 20-pound class bass were found throughout the baywaters in spots such as Great Kills, Old Orchard, Romer Shoal and Flynn's Knoll. Trolling the area between Romer and the Knoll, I fished the FLW Outdoors tourney and we found the bass biting on chartreuse Stretch 25 minnows, as well as Mojo Balls fished along the bottom. Bass also aggressively fed through the bunker chunk slicks on the switch of the tides, and as of this writing, the real deal bass bite for larger fish had just begun to gain some serious momentum. The larger linesiders are now exiting the bay, and preparing to move northward up the coastline and spilling out along the northern part of the Jersey Coast. Fluke-slayers found some true doormats fishing in the bay off the Coast Guard Station and the Ammo Pier, with fluke between 7 and 12 pounds coming up with some welcomed consistency day by day. Fluking looks like it's going to be one heck of a season here. Be sure to bring large strip baits and bucktails to target the biggest of the flatties. Still, sporadic tiderunner weakfish have been taken on bunker chunks intended for bass, including a ridiculously large 17-pound spiketooth that was just ounces shy of the state record!

NORTHERN JERSEY

This region went off on all fronts! With big bass now leaving the Raritan baywaters as well as the migration of cows coming from the south, striper anglers got hit by random schools of trophy bass from Deal, Avon, Asbury Park and off the Shrewsbury Rocks. Surfcasters in Avon had a hit of bass that stormed the shoreline for a few hours and they tossed large pencil poppers out to drill bass from 20 to 35 pounds on each cast. Trollers pulling wire with bunker spoons and shad bar rigs hooked up with the same caliber bass, and reports had some 40-pound bass reportedly caught off the Shrewsbury Rocks. The striped bass runs of the past few years have seen action well into late June and early July as bunker schools and colder water temps have kept the linesiders on the bite late.



Captain Dave DeGennaro of the "Hi-Flier" bucktailed up a mess of fluke in Barnegat Bay during opening day.

We can hope for that to happen again in July. Bluefish schools terrorized the inshore waters and were easily found crashing the surface along this whole stretch as daytime and nighttime party boats were well into 5- to 14-pound choppers on jigs in the Mud Hole region and off of Asbury Park and Deal. Some Kroc spoons dropped to the bottom under the bluefish schools found the mouths of the 30-pound family of stripers. Fluke fishing was an on and off proposition. When the waters were clear, it wasn't hard to put a few keepers in the box, but a brown tide at the end of the month shut down the bite for a few days. The structure of the Elberon Rocks and off of Spring Lake produced when the waters were clear, with fluke jumping on killie and squid combos, as well as anything that had spearing on the hook. Shark River had a good population of fluke in its reaches during opening day, but was picked over quickly by the barrage of Memorial Day weekend anglers. Anglers fishing from the Sandy Hook surf also reported finding some fluke and word had it that anglers who could reach the Rip could find some quality keepers in the rushing tide. Fluke anglers will be in their glory during the month of July as the ocean fluking on the Sandy Hook Reef, Elberon Rockpiles, off the Spring Lake Hotel and the Red Church should all be hot spots to pull in a limit of flatties.

CENTRAL JERSEY

Though there were a ton of keeper fluke in the Manasquan River days before opening day, the keeper-sized ones seemed to have left out into the ocean as it was mostly a tale of short fluke in the river. The best action to put some in the cooler seemed to be west of the 35 Bridge and deeper into the river system, as well as off the old hospital at the mouth of the canal. Both bunker and herring schools staged off Mantoloking and Brick Beaches and the big bass were on them like flies on garbage. The migratory schools of 20- to 35-pounders were found within surfcasting

distance and anglers who had luck and time on their side during nighttime hours or early morning predawn sessions claimed the big brutes. Those sporadic shots of cows should be concretely consistent by the time this report hits the presses. One of the largest bass reported came from a bunker spoon troller off of the bathing beach of IBSP where he tied into a 40-pound bass and lost an estimated 50-pounder at boatside. Bluefish ravaged through the surfline from Point Pleasant to IBSP and some seriously large alligators pushing the 16-pound mark were found tagging top-water poppers and working over the bunker schools, though some tailors of 1 to 3 pounds were also in the mix. Barnegat Bay flukers slammed the flatties all through Double Creek and Oyster Creek channels as they rested on the channel ledges through the witch of the tides. Bucktails and leadheaded grubtail jigs brought up some near limit catches, as bluefish tore through whenever they wanted to. The beaches of LBI also saw some of those 20- to 40-pound caliber striped bass, as surfslingers casting out bunker heads and clams and a 47-pounder was reportedly taken off of Loveladies. As of the first week of June, the large cows have come home off of LBI as a slew of 30- and 40 plus-pound fish were reported coming in off of Loveladies and down off the Beach Haven sands. Flukers will be concentrating on hitting up the Barnegat Light Reef tanks and tire units as well as setting up on the Harvey Cedars Lump to find their flatties in the upcoming month of July.

OFFSHORE

Offshore anglers are primed up to hit the sharking scene as reports have blue sharks being caught in the Lindenkohl Canyon as of May 30. The month of July is synonymous with sharking as makos will move into the 40- to 80-mile range and threshers will readily be wrestled in the nearshore to offshore waters. Hot spots to try out and set up on a chunk slick will be the Resor Wreck, Mako Hotel, Bacardi, Texas Tower, Glory Hole and really any other wreck or structure you can find that sits along a nice ledge. Do not overlook the budding inshore fishery that has really surfaced for thresher sharks in the past few years. You can easily tie into a 100 to 300-pound class whiptail only a mile to 5 miles off the beaches when they work through the bunker schools, slashing and ripping apart the menhaden with their long tails. But wait, there's more offshore! Tuna trollers eager to find the first shots of yellowfin have been plying the Lindy and Spencer canyons and though no real reports of tuna have come up, there's a solid selection of mahimahi out in the 100-mile range where the waters hit 69 degrees. One boat reported catching 13 dolphin from 10 to 28 pounds. Yellowfin tuna should already be starting their chew as the latter portion of July starts to come through. If all goes according to plan, we should really see a quality inshore bluefin tuna fishery pop its head out again, but that fishery has been fickle year to year. Cross your fingers on this one! Blue and white marlin will be taken in the canyons, depending on where the warmer waters are, and there are a variety of marlin tourneys going on in late July including the Beach Haven Invitational. All in all, July flat out means that the offshore season's bell has been rung. Look for my next report to be filled with pelagics.