



NEW JERSEY FISHING REPORT

by Nick Honachefsky

Waters have really warmed up quickly through June as surf temps hit the 72 degree mark in mid-month, and offshore there were warm water eddies pushing the 80-degree point! It looks like it's going to be one of those years with subtropical and tropical species moving into our inshore as well as offshore waters through the summertime, and if you want proof, look no farther than the fact that a 26-pound cobia was caught in the LBI surf early in June, bluefin tuna were caught a mile off Brigantine Beach and a southern short-tail stingray with a wingspan of 9 feet was taken off Absecon! Summertime has started, and fishing all around has settled into its pattern of lazy and hazy days. Fluke anglers – remember that due to the stringent regs this year, fluke season will officially close on September 10, so you need to get your flatfish action in now.

Raritan Bay

The run of stripers seemed to be a hit or miss proposition for the last weeks of June, since one day bass were all over, the next, ghosts. Spots such as Romer Shoal, the Knoll and the Clam Beds were all the live areas outside of the bay waters leading into the Atlantic. Most bass taken were in the 10 to 25-pound class, but still a good number of 30-pound and even 40-pound class fish were found on the ends of lines that had bunker chunks or live bunker on them. Fluke fishing maintained a good solid pace inside the bay, and it seemed that spots way back inside near the bay shore area produced best. Areas such as the # 3 can in Keyport, Ammo Pier, bay shore flats area all dished out 3 to 10-pound fluke that seemed to be stacked in the back. There also has been a decent show of flatties on the Knoll and in Sandy Hook Bay. The Keansburg fishing pier gave up both fluke and stripers for its patrons with some bass to the 25-pound mark being hoisted up. Bluefish schools ravaged through the bay waters again at any given time, though they were a bit smaller, in the 3 to 6-pound class. Metals cast from the pier and trolled plugs and spoons took the choppers. August will be a prime time for fluke fishermen to really bag a doormat when the flatties move into the deeper channels of the Chapel Hill Channel, Raritan Reach and Ambrose Channel where depths can dive down to 65 feet, providing plenty of cooling temps and rushing currents to feed for mid-summer doormats. Long strip baits of sea robin, bluefish or Berkeley Gulp 10-inch strips hooked on a sliding two-hook snelled rig will put some in the cooler.

Northern Jersey

The best bass bite up north was in this area as the linesiders spilled out of the R-Bay and hung over and around structures off of the Highlands area. Rocky bottoms such as the Shrewsbury Rocks, off the Spy House, the Rattlesnake and snags and such off Asbury Park all put up quality numbers of bass in the 15 to 40-pound caliber. Interestingly, black drum also are being seen around the area with some anglers hooking into them while clam slicking for stripers. Drum are usually a more southerly species, but the warm water temps may have brought some schools of the boomers into town. Bluefish have been on a tear at 17 Fathoms and in the Mud Hole



Captain Bernie Walker and the crew of the "Wave-walker" battled this 454-pound thresher shark that fought for three hours.

area, though most blues are in the 6 to 8-pound average class with some reaching the 14-pound mark. Bluefish schools also could be found marauding the waters from Sea Girt to Highlands, mainly in the 30 to 45-foot depths alongshore. Word has it that some large and in-charge fluke had moved into the Shark River backwaters as was proved by a whopper 11-pound doormat taken there along with a mess of 4 to 8-pounders weighed in at a local tackle shop. That's an interesting scene, giving bank anglers, kayakers and small boaters a real shot at a trophy fluke to put outside their front door. The bottom structure and wrecks in the 60 to 80-foot depths have been holding some impressive numbers of black sea bass as most three-quarter day trips have been putting up between a dozen and 25 keepers for bottom bouncers sending down fresh or salted clam baits. As summertime starts settling in comfortably, look to the Sandy Hook Reef site as well as the 15-mile-out Shark River Reef site to produce some excellent bottom fishing consisting of porgies, blackfish, sea bass, ling and triggerfish. Look for the summer speedsters - false albacore, bonito and Spanish mackerel - to start showing up around the end of August when they will chase rainfish schools and readily attack a thin-profile metal such as a Deadly Dick or even a tail-less Ava 007 jig cast out and retrieved quickly.

Central Jersey

The Manasquan River had a few nice 6 to 10-pound weakfish come out from around the 35 Bridge and the canal outflow by the old hospital, with nighttime hours producing fish that chased three-quarter-ounce bucktails tipped with 5-inch bubble gum Fin-S fish. The Manasquan River became an intense fluke fishing ground as larger fish and limits were caught on a nearly daily basis. Some 3 to 8-pound fish were pulled from the channel edges west of the 35 Bridge, and limits could be had on simple squid and killie combos. Kayak fishermen could navigate the thinner channels of Wills Hole Thorofare and bounce bucktails to find some keeper flatties. In Barnegat Bay, Oyster Creek channel seemed to lay down on the fluke front, but Double Creek Channel picked up, especially around the 25 can and the offshoot channel on the east end.

Larger fluke could be found off the sedge banks by the inlet where depths reached down to 25 feet and in certain holes, though flatties to 5 pounds were hanging tight to the sodbanks and in the mussel beds. Bunker schools have yet to make a solid appearance on this section of coast, thus the big bass have yet to show up. There were reports of one school of bunker off Fun-town Pier and a thresher shark working the school over with its whiptail. Off LBI, more schools of bunker were found, mainly down south off Holgate, and threshers were reportedly in there as well. IBSP has been a steady show of stripers from 8 to 18 pounds from the sands, with occasional 20-pound plussers on clams and fresh bunker chunks. The Barnegat Ridge was paved with chopper blues in the 5 to 12-pound class, and both Ava jigs and chunks are getting attention on both day and night trips. Both the north and south portions of the Ridge should be holding some schoolie bluefin tuna, small mahimahi and a few false albies and skipjack tuna during August, with small 2 to 3-inch feathery in black and purple or green and yellow getting strikes.

Offshore

The offshore season has really gotten a jumpstart! Warm water eddies to 80 degrees have been found in the Wilmington and Baltimore Canyons and are moving northward. Overnight charter chunkers had trips that gave up 14 yellowfin tuna in the 50 to 70-pound range, along with the first swordfish of the year over 100 pounds. This could be the precursor to an incredible year offshore with this intense warm water already sitting on us. A bit closer inshore in the 40 to 70-mile range, bluefin tuna schools have shown up and it's been a mix of football schoolies mixed in with bluefin in the 30 to 50-pound class, all chasing cedar plugs and rainbow-colored squid spreader bars. The Elephant's Trunk, Lobster Claw and even as close as the 5 Fathom Bank all have been reported as bluefin hangouts. The first blue and white marlin were reported in the Baltimore Canyon, to boot. Shark fishing has been red hot! Spots such as the Cigar, Varanger, 750 Square, Northern Pacific, 19 Fathom Lump, and Massey's Canyon have been ripe with mako activity, and makos to 300 pounds have hit the scales with a good show of 100 to 150-pound class snaggletooths. Farther north, the Glory Hole, Resor Wreck and the Fingers all have started to see the first makos come in. Thresher sharks have been sporadically hopping onto lines, with some pushing the 450-pound mark already. Results from the Mako Mania tournament had a handful of makos that ran over the 300-pound mark and a mess of smaller 100 to 150-pound makos. It seemed that on any given day out sharking, you could be into a catch of at least a 100-pounder with a mix of blue sharks hanging around. August will bring in some intense yellowfin tuna activity in the canyons and chunkers will be overnighing out to fill their coolers. It already looks like we may have decent swordfishing once again this year, though only time will tell. Next offshore report will have the juices really flowing as the fishing peaks out!