

# CONNECTICUT FISHING REPORT

by Bob Sampson Jr.

It has been a very good fishing season so far for almost all the major inshore species on the menu. There is a high percentage of old stripers with seven or eight parallel black stripes on their sides at this point in fishing history. For the past couple of seasons, reports of 20-to 40-pounders have been coming in from area tackle shops on a weekly basis. During the peak period of the early summer migration, a few high 50- and even 60-pounders were brought into tackle shops for bragging rights and entries into various contests and tournaments.

All of them will be putting on the feed bag as they migrate back down the coast this fall, so expect good things to happen between now and Thanksgiving.

Despite the lack of coordination among regulations in the tri-state area, with Connecticut, Rhode Island and New York having totally different regulations for fluke and minimum size limits (ranging from 18 to 19.5 inches), which, in my opinion, was probably killing more fluke due to hooking mortality than were being saved, no one complained about his or her fluke catches this summer. At this point, I'm not sure if this is a good or bad thing. Maybe it's like living with constant back pain - you get used to it after a while.

This year, despite the large minimum length limits, short-to-keeper ratios for fluke improved over last season's. Most of the shop owners I talk to on a regular basis reported that customers were able to keep one fluke out of every four or five they caught. Last year, with every state in this area regulating its fluke catch with minimum lengths that were on average a half-inch to an inch shorter than they were this year, anglers were reporting on average eight to ten throwbacks for every keeper. I logged days that ranged from four to one, to as much as twenty to one during 2006. Based on these numbers, it looks like an improvement in fluke fishing this year.

However, bear in mind that I haven't seen very many "small shorts", fluke of 14 to 16 inches long on my hooks so far this year. This observation could mean that this improved keeper-to-short ratio is being supported by two or maybe three decent year classes, with nothing to back it up. This is like having a great baseball team with a lousy bull pen - not a good scenario for the World Series, or the future of fluking. Connecticut-based anglers must remember that the fluke fishing season in this state ends on September 5, 2007.

Scup (porgies) have not been quite as much of a pain in the butt during my personal striper tube and worming and fluking this year as they have been in the recent past. This means either that I've been fortunate not to run into these bait demolishers when I didn't want them or that there are not quite as many around as there have been during the past few seasons. I seldom target this popular, hard-fighting and good-eating species. However, reports indicated that those who do and did, on a regular basis, were not com-



**Stripers like this and much larger than this 25-pounder my buddy Bruce Guyot caught in late July will begin cruising our shoreline starting this month.**

plaining, so maybe my personal assessment of the status of scup is off the mark.

This fall and probably over the next few falls, anglers who want to catch a giant bluefish will have a very good chance of accomplishing that goal.

Those strong year classes of small bluefish that were almost a nuisance a few years back are beginning to mature and put on some size. This year choppers of all sizes showed up early and in good numbers. The interesting thing is that last year during late spring and early summer, fishermen throughout the region were bringing in double-digit-sized bluefish. Most years we don't hear of very many 15-pound-or-better blues until September or later. This summer there were a bunch of spawned-out, big-headed, future 20-pounders logged into tackle shops. That's a good omen for bluefish fans. This fall and probably over the next few falls, anglers who want to catch a giant bluefish will have a very good chance of accomplish-



**Last year at this time this group of blue crabs produced a spawn that providing winters are not too severe, could provide plenty great crabbing for those of us who are fans of this super good eating crustacean.**

ing this goal as the fish bulk up for the winter.

Blackfishing was good last fall and strong

this spring, and those who tried, during the heat of summer, continued to take some fish throughout the region.

By next month, fishing for this species will be very good, but remember in Connecticut waters, anglers can target and keep four 14-inch or greater tautog until September 7 and then resume fishing for them again on the 21. All indications are that blackfishing will be excellent again this fall.

Last year a couple of friends who target and catch black sea bass on a regular basis said they did not do as well as they had during the previous few seasons. As of late July, tackle shops had not been disclosing much about anything other than incidental sea bass catches. I made one trip with Captain John Planetta off Block Island in which we landed a dozen or so of these excellent eating fish, but only a few stretched to a foot from nose to tail.

Our winter flounder population is in such poor shape that they are not even on Connecticut's fall fishing menu any more. However, despite this fact, spring catches have been improving slightly over the past three to four seasons.

September is the month when every light tackle, lure-slinging, fly-flicking angler in creation books charters or goes out on his or her own to be frustrated by the tunoids (bonito, false albacore and Spanish mackerel). All three species should be around by now and feeding heavily on sand eels, silversides, peanut bunker and any other abundant form of small bait they can find. The key is having warm water temperatures during August and September. When you hook up, these fish are a blast to catch, but they often are very annoying to fish for because so many times they show on the surface but fail to eat the stuff we all throw at them.

These fish move around so rapidly that any report you read, even hear on the radio, is old by the time you get it. Look for them to show on a regular basis along the Fishers Island / Watch Hill Reef complex, the Sluiceway, Race, off Bluff Point and Pine Island (Groton), in the Millstone Point outflow and obviously anywhere along their feeding pathways between these "A list" spots on your fishing "paper route".

Deadly Dicks are the one lure that many anglers who are successful tie on their lines, but they are not the only artificial that works. My good friend, now a charter captain, Eric Covino of Playing Hookie Charters (860-889-8686), and I take a scientific approach to all of our angling. Over the years we've tossed about everything that we thought might work at false albacore and bonito. Depending primarily on what they are feeding, we have had great to horrible success. We've caught them on small 3.5- to 5-inch Slug-Go's, Fin-S Fish, Salt Shakers, Rattle Trap fast-vibrating crank baits, chrome-colored five-inch Mambo Minnows, Rapalas, a variety of small, narrow metal lures including Needle Eels and Kastmasters, as well as large live, lip-hooked mummichogs on a

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