

CONNECTICUT FISHING REPORT

by Bob Sampson Jr.

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One of the things I have been most excited about this summer is the fact that, apparently, many of those blue crabs that showed up about this time last year did, in fact, survive the winter and cold, wet spring.

Over the years, the most successful people I've seen weren't in my boat. A couple of years ago, while fishing on a huge concentration of these fish in the Millstone Point warm water discharge outflow in Waterford, some young anglers whom I don't know, but wish I did, had obviously filled a couple of five-gallon pails with fresh, baby bunker. They used them as chum, just like chunking for big tuna. They were "yo-yoing" hook baits back into their fresh chum slick and they caught more false albies and bonito in a few hours than I've ever seen hooked up in one sitting. That day their hookups were continuous, while ours, with artificial lures fished in the middle of a huge, swirling concentration of these fish, was sporadic.

One of the things I have been most excited about this summer is the fact that, apparently, many of those blue crabs that showed up about

this time last year did, in fact, survive the winter and cold, wet spring. In my June report for this magazine, I noted that during a May striper trip on the Thames River, we saw a number of three-inch crabs floating dead on the surface. Assuming that this was an indicator of poor winter survival, I made that comment. I am very happy to say I was totally wrong! A tad later than would be expected, but during late June and into July, shop owners in the eastern third of the state all began reporting blue crabs in their local estuaries and tidal creeks. Pat Abate, owner of River's End Tackle, Saybrook, and Joe Balint of the Fish Connection in Preston, on the Thames, both said their customers were catching more blue crabs than they had seen or heard about in a number of years.

Last year, I didn't see or catch a legal blue crab until late August or early September. In mid-July this summer, I caught three keepers with a landing net while waiting for some friends to load their gear on the boat for a fluking trip.

In the first week of August, 2007, I went out on a minor scouting trip to the Thames River and caught over 20 just-legal (five-inch point to point

Connecticut legal) blue shells. Crabbing looks to be very good this month and will improve throughout the early fall. None of those crabs were "big", which I consider to be six inches or larger, and most were paper shells. This means they recently had shed when they were caught.

Being that these crabs will shed at least one or maybe two more times between now and the end of the season in November, and increase their size by 15 to 20 percent with each molt, there will be some real finger-crushing behemoths around to catch over the next couple of months.

I am an all-around fisherman and hunter who pretty much does it all. Over the years, I have passed up shots and released just about everything I chase. I have released stripers to 40 pounds, muskellunge of 30 pounds, pike of 20 pounds, even fluke of five and six pounds, passed up kill shots at six-point bucks, pheasant and geese, but never, never in my life have I or will I ever release a single legal-sized blue crab! The reason is that these nasty, ill-tempered decapods are simply the sweetest, most delectable, good-eating critter that walks on land or lives in the water!

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