

Autumn Cows

by J. R. Warnet

A light, damp breeze gave me a chill and a bit of a scare. My skin began to get goose bumps and I did a little dance in my waders to shake off the cold. As I looked to the right, then to the left, I noticed the other anglers gathering up their belongings and driving towards to beach access gate. The black Jeep closest to me was kicking up sand from beneath its bulging tires. A few seconds passed and a blue Dodge with chrome trim sped past my sand spikes. I looked up towards the skyline and saw gray upon darker gray.

The weather was supposed to be nice for this time of year, but an early cold wind combined with an overcast day worried me a little. Stripers don't seem to mind the lack of sun or the occasional raindrops on the water, but the clouds didn't look too promising. They were moving at a hurried pace; the darker clouds taking priority in their advancement to the Atlantic Ocean as the lighter clouds lingered behind. They seemed to stagger in their journey, while the dark, rain-filled clouds made a mad dash across Island Beach State Park. An old tan Chevy truck with a camper came driving past my truck as I zipped up my rain coat.

For as long as I've been fishing, I have always tried to stick it out when it comes to rain. It took me about an hour and a half to pack all my gear into my truck and I wasn't going to miss another day of fishing. The sand spikes with reflective tape, my five- and 6-ounce Outer Banks sinkers with heavy-duty leaders and Laser Sharp Hooks, all these things plus the regular gear that I always keep in my truck weren't going home dry. Either I used them to hook a striper or they would sit in my cab for another few weeks until I had another Sunday off. Since my busy season at work was coming up, I opted to wait it out.

After I set my third pole in a sand spike, I went over to my tailgate to sit and survey the scene. The rain-saturated clouds seemed to be thinning out as they traveled across the sky, but the number of trucks leaving the beach was up. My friend, Rusty, with his old Ford Conversion Van was slowing down as he pulled up to my spot. Rusty never left the beach unless he caught his limit or a Hurricane Warming was in effect. As he drove by with his Yellow Lab, "Buster" in the passenger seat, I saw his face and it was riddled with defeat. The look of dismay that many anglers have when it

rains was smeared across his gray-stubbed face. Even "Buster" looked sad, as if someone had taken his favorite bone and thrown it off a cliff. I waved 'buhbye' and checked on my poles just to convince myself the day wasn't a complete loss.

As the minutes passed, the drops of rain began to collect on my windshield. I leave a small folding chair out just in case I feel like taking a seat in between the action. The drops hit the blue canvas material and absorbed into the chair slowly at first, but faster as the rain fell. My second pole had small beads of rain on it that dripped down to the sand. It wasn't a hard rain by any account but just enough to make you want to sit in the truck instead of standing near the poles where you should be. I rolled up my soggy sleeve to look at my watch as another truck drove by with a quick honk as it barreled down the beach.

About 15 minutes passed when I decided to put some of my stuff in the cab, just as a precaution. I grabbed my tackle box in one hand and my cutting board in the other when my second pole began to scream. The drag was set low enough for the fish not to get spooked and spit out the tasty clam. The tackle box and the board fell to the ground as I galloped towards the pole. Running on the sand looks and feels weird at first, but you get into a rhythm soon enough. I snatched the pole from the spike and cranked down on the spinning reel without trying to set the hook. Hopefully, I wasn't too late and my circle hook was lodged safely in the corner of its mouth. As I reeled back, the bail stopped in mid-motion and I knew the fish still there. I felt that familiar resistance and tension that I had been waiting for.

The guy at the bait shop said that big bluefish were patrolling the beach for the past few days, so I was a little worried at first. When I tied on the hooks and line, I didn't use a thick leader and if I had hooked a blue, it would have sliced clean through in no time. As the line tightened, the fish began to pull like a bass, which was a good thing for now. The line started to veer off to the left as I kept pace and walked it into the surf. The more it pulled the bigger it seemed. You can tell whether or not the fish was a keeper by how many



Angler holding large "cow" striped bass.

times it pulled your line back into the wash. After it took out line again for the fifth time, I was hoping I brought a big-enough cooler. As I entered the waterline in my new green waders, I realized that my fish was definitely not a bluefish. The telltale black lines of a cow striper were coming into focus through the dark green water. It flopped around on the beach until I picked it up by its tail and grabbed its mouth with my other hand. It still had a little bit of clam on the hook in the corner of its gaping mouth.

While walking over to the cooler, one of the passing trucks stopped near the front on my cooler rack. He was heading off the beach when he saw me walking back to my truck with an easy 30-pounder. His brakes squeaked as he stopped the old rig and rolled down his passenger window.

"Well...looks like you got a rainy day bass there, huh?" His voice and tone had a hint of jealousy and sarcasm in it. Just enough politeness to carry on a quick conversation.

"Yeah," I said. "I figured a few raindrops can't hurt me."

The stranger eyeballed my catch as if to steal it from my cooler when I turned around.

"You gonna head on home now...the rain probably won't stop until later." said the stranger, trying to deter me from my glory.

"Nah." I shook my head and closed the cooler lid. "I haven't got my limit yet." I waved goodbye and turned towards the waves. My wet wader boots were covered in sand as I walked back towards the tailgate where the bait was. The strangers' exhaust fired up once more as he drove off towards the exit while the sand kicked up behind his tires.



Nautical Trivia by Ginny Hauff



1. Did you know that a very light puff of wind that just disturbs the surface of the water is called a catspaw?
2. Did you know that a halo around the moon usually follows a rain?
3. Did you know that "whipping" keeps the end of a line from unraveling and is especially good for the frequently hard-used dock or fender lines?
4. Did you know that the only lighthouse in North America that also serves as a post office is Peggy's Cove Light (Nova Scotia)?
5. Did you know that the phrase "three sheets to the wind" implies that a sailor is intoxicated?
6. Did you know that a hawser is a heavy line used for towing, docking or mooring a boat?
7. Did you know that "mean low water" is the average depth at low tide? The receding tide is called an ebb tide..
8. Did you know that the largest breeding ground for the humpback whale is the Hawaiian Islands?
9. Did you know that in 1820 Augustin Fresnel invented an improvement for lighthouses, still in use today, known as the Fresnel lens?
10. Did you know that the name of the point at which the total weight of the hull is concentrated is the center of gravity?
11. Did you know that El Nino affects the waters in the Pacific Ocean by causing their warming?
12. Did you know that the type of line best suited for towing a disabled vessel is double-braided nylon?