



NEW JERSEY FISHING REPORT

by Nick Honachefsky

Pending New World Record Summer Flounder

You heard it right. The doormat of all doormats finally was found! Monica Oswald of Neptune, NJ was fishing the area off the Shrewsbury Rocks in northern New Jersey with a 4-ounce Spro bucktail, Eagle Claw stinger hook and a strip of squid when the 24.3-pound, 38 1/4-inch beast hit her line. The previous world record, which has stood for 32 years, was 22 pounds, 7 ounces, set by Charles Nappi with a fish caught from Montauk, NY. Oswald's fish has yet to be certified by the IGFA, but looks like it should stand.

Unfortunately, Jersey's, as well as New York's, summer flounder season officially is closed for the year, and it looks like it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better since next year's size and bag limits most likely will be reduced drastically yet again, and preliminary reports have both states going over their allotted quotas. Fluke management is such an unfair proposition with flawed science and draconian unadjusted data penalizing the recreational angler while commercial anglers continue to lap up the fluke with smaller size restrictions. No way has there been any shortage of fluke this year, with not only big breeders showing up, but plenty of 16-inch and smaller fish coming up on lines in massive amounts.

Raritan Bay

Doormats running amok! Big fluke have taken over the outer bay waters around Romer Shoal, the TC Buoy and by the Sticks. Other spots inside the channels have been by the #9 and #10 Buoys. During August and early September, you couldn't get through a day without hearing of a 10-pounder coming up from the depths and scores of 5- to 8-pounders hitting tackle shop scales. Live snapper blues have been key baits, though long strip baits and bucktails also were attracting attention. The bays' shore beaches have had plenty of bluefish activity going on as the 1- to 2-pound tailors got replaced by 8- to 12-pound slammers during early September. Anglers surfcasting off Plum Island have been tossing out sandworms to land some nice-sized weakfish up to 24 inches, mainly during the evening hours. Look for the R-Bay to start showing its true colors in October as the scores of stripers at points northward of us will be migrating back down the eastern seaboard for the fall run. Stripers, no doubt, will be keyed in on the plentitude of adult bunker, peanut bunker, rainfish, spearing and sand eels that absolutely have been choking the bay waters.

Northern Jersey

This region is where the 24.3-pound record-pending fluke was taken. Word has it that it was somewhere just south of the Shrewsbury Rocks, possibly around the Elberon Rocks or Rattlesnake area. Monster summer flounder have been taken there for the last two weeks, and to put it in perspective, one charter captain I spoke with had 56 keeper fluke between 4 and 10 pounds with over

35 of those fish in the 5- to 9-pound class. Astounding! All the big fluke were hanging around structure and the Sandy Hook Reef site also has given up plenty of quality keeper flatfish. But don't count out the black sea bass bite! Knuckleheads to 3 pounds have been found on the same reef and rock pile structure as the fluke, though white bucktail teasers or curlytail grubs put on the hook about a foot or two up are attracting attention from the sea bass. Interestingly enough, there's been a wild porgy bite happening in the Mud Hole area and on the inshore wrecks with slabs over 12 inches long being caught on clam and squid bits. Party boats also reported hundreds of 2- to 4-pound blackback winter flounder out on



Big bull dolphin can be found in the canyons now as the author proved trolling up a whopping 40 pounder on a blue and white Ilander with ballyhoo bait.

the midshore fishing grounds, though they all have to be thrown back due to a closed season. Ling fishing has been outstanding with catches of 15 to 50 per man on most trips, with pool winners topping out with 6-pound class baseball bats. Bluefishing remains topnotch at the Mud Hole grounds and at the Mud Buoy with the choppers spanning anywhere from 3 to 13 pounds on any given day or night bite. Look for the Shrewsbury Rocks to start holding large and in-charge linesiders as they make their migration southward once again. Drag shad spreader bars, bunker spoons and Stretch 25 plugs around until you find the schools.

Central Jersey

Fluke again! You could hit any of the reef sites - Sea Girt, Axel Carlson, Garden State North and South or Barnegat Light and find tons of keeper flatties pushing up to 10 pounds. Most fish were in the 2- to 3-pound class as keepers, with a lot of throwbacks, but every trip had potential for a doormat-status fluke. Big bucktails and live snappers were best baits when the drift was slow, and large Peruvian spearing and squid strips worked better when the drift picked up. Flatfish still were being found in Double Creek Channel inside Barnegat Bay, as well, but the main story inside Barney was of the weakfish that invaded the bay waters. Most spiketooths were in the 14- to 17-inch class, keepers for sure, with a few 3- to 5-pounders mixed in. Light tackle anglers had a blast sending live grass shrimp back into a shrimp slick

to rile up the weakfish. The North Jetty pocket of Barnegat Inlet was a super spot for surfcasting fluke, and one 11- pounder was taken from the sands on a live snapper blue. The Barnegat Ridge was like a light switch, depending on the day - on and off for roving packs of bonito, false albies, Spanish mackerel, and even a few quality mahimahi. Word had it that the Manasquan Ridge, only five miles off, gave up a 20-pound mahi. Schools of baitfish have been choking the waters in this region with a mix of spearing, rainfish, peanut bunker, adult bunker and sand eels loading up the wash. I witnessed a school of big 8- to 12-pound bluefish come cruising through during a nor'easter in mid-August as they chased dozens of adult menhaden onto the beach, where they were ripped apart. False albies will be coursing through the inshore waters, and any of the reef sites should see them rainbowing out of the waters. Try dragging small Clark spoons, feathers and squids for a hookup.

Offshore

The offshore canyons got a full injection of good stuff as the Lindenkohl Canyon erupted with yellowfin tuna in the 40- to 80-pound bracket and reports of roving wolf packs of bigeye tuna not only were reported, but were abundant. Four different charters I know had between 5 and 9 knockdowns on their respective trips, resulting in bigeyes from 180 to 320 pounds, each charter only managing to nab between one and three fish from the nine knockdowns. The bigeyes took ballyhoo baits on blue and white Ilanders for the most part. White marlin and blue marlin were found in Spencer Canyon, and a recent tournament had blues up to 600 pounds from the area. An unusual amount of large wahoo have been streaking trolled lines as well as some chunk slicks in the canyon areas, with hoo's from 50 up to 100 pounds officially weighed-in on tackle shop scales. Anglers are adapting by using wire leaders to be sure to land the sharp-toothed hoo's. The Hudson and Toms Canyons finally opened up in early September with 50- to 90-pound class yellowfins inhaling butterfish chunks. The first reports of swordfish also came in. Though nothing over 100 pounds has been taken as of yet, the broadbill fishery should open full throttle by October. Now's the time to hit up a party boat for a tuna trip as they run a mild \$300 for a 24-hour jaunt out to the canyons, providing all baits and rental rods if you need one. Give a shout to the Gambler out of Point Pleasant at 732-295-7569 to book an October tuna trip.

October is here in full swing, and that means one thing - the best fishing of the year! The fall run will get its start officially with stripers, blues, and weakfish on the prowl big time in the near-shore waters. Offshore fishing will be smack dab in the middle of the hot season onward through October and most likely will trickle into November as it has been doing the past few years. This is the time to use up every last available sick day. Get out there!