

## Observations on bait and tackle

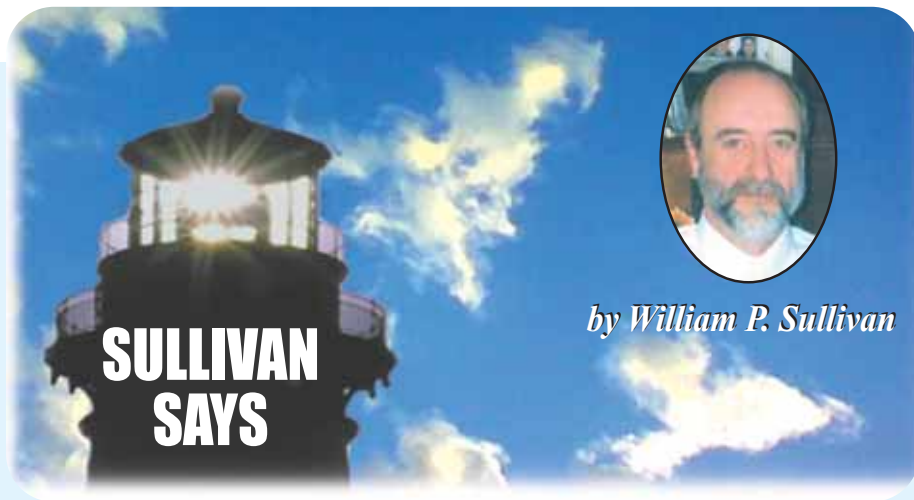
In the bait and tackle business there is a hard and fast rule as universally true as Newton's Laws of motion; just when you need something, it is unavailable.

The most common of these is spearing in August; and it will be worse in the future. First, let me explain the spearing business. Over the winter, Canadian bait seiners load up on spearing and pack them in 10-ounce, 2 1/2 pound and larger batches which get packed in cases for shipment. Local seiners start dragging the bay in February and March when the spearing spawn in the back. In spring, the refrigerator semi's come down from Canada to the wholesalers, that once. When that supply is gone, there's no spearing.

Later in the season, around the middle of August, the local spawn from spring are getting fluke-sized and you may get a small supply. Last spring, Canada was short in supply and stopped packing 2 1/2 pounders. The local spring spawn run fell short of expectations. The next remote supplier was Virginia and they looked good, but they wouldn't pack 2 1/2's and just when things were looking positive, Virginia got a better deal from Sea World to feed "Shamu" and the bottom fell out of the spearing supply. Moral of the story is, go to P.C, Richard, buy a 5-cubic foot freezer for the garage and buy your spearing by the case in May. Believe me, if you do any amount of fluke fishing, you will go through a case in no time. The rest of the freezer should be used for herring that you will catch over the winter, bunker and peanut bunker that you cast-net yourself and maybe a case of squid. Or, if you do some offshore fishing, then stock a flat of mackerel or butterfish.

Bunker snags hang on the rack looking forlorn and lonely, until the bunker show along the beach. Then its mayhem. Everyone wants three or four in different sizes, but the lead casters have switched over to sinkers to get ready for fall wreck fishing, so the re-supply is tough. Buy our bunker snags in the fall and put them in your home-base tackle box. You do have a home box don't you? I have a home box that all my might-as-wells and need-them-laters are kept in. Snags, swivels, plastic fishfinders, crimps, cable, spare hooks, winding materials, etc. I have a deck bag ready for when I work charters, two plug bags, one for the beach and the other for popping the bay and a regular working box. All of them ready to go. Its like an EMT, he isn't going to reach in his bag for gauze and tape then run to a supplier, he's always re-stocked.

Crab traps are another 'I'll wait until July' deal; and since everyone else said the same thing, there are none or not the one you want in the shops. Crab traps aren't built in some factory in China by the millions. The pots and traps you are use to using are made by hand in small shops by the same guys who make commercial gear. If they get an order from a crabber for a hundred pots, the recreational construc-



by William P. Sullivan



*Here is a beauty of a party boat, the "Celtic Quest". Look for the CQ to be on the North Shore blackfish in October. courtesy Capt Desi O'Sullivan.*

tion takes a back seat. If they get multiple orders from tackle shops, someone is on the bottom of the list and they only deliver once a week, at that. Buy them early and hang them from the ceiling in your garage.

When you do go shopping and you only shop locally in your bait and tackle shop to boost your local economy and make valuable connections, look at everything in the store and pick up one or two small items for home base. Teasers, swivels, sinkers, hooks, a coil of fluorocarbon, buckails; buy it when you don't need it, then when you get the call you are ready to rock and roll.

It's October, which means everything stops because blackfish season is on! Looking back to the above, you're ready right? You have a hundred #3 Virginia or 4/0 Gamos already tied and 25 pounds of sinkers from three to ten ounces all set to go. If you had been buying a half a dozen sinkers every time you walked in a store and a pack of hooks, you'd be ready now. Fire up the GPS and fish-finder and start with all those little hangs and snags you marked when you were drifting for ocean fluke.

Every Tom, Dick and Harry will be on the well-known pieces. Oh, if you didn't get numbers on those hangs, you're bad! Always think ahead.

Let's start with the rig. Like I said, #3 Virginia's are the standard, bear in mind the size of a legal blackfish is 14 inches. That size fish has no problem inhaling a #3. Smaller will get

more fish in the boat but, likely shorts and bergals. Size your hook to what you are after. Over the past couple of years, the 4/0 Gamo Octopus has been the trick of the sharpshooters. The laser point will nail a lot of lip-hooks that the Virginias miss. Snell your own Gamos on 50-pound fluorocarbon with 12-inch leaders. Learn to tie and use composite lines like PowerPro, it makes a huge difference in feeling and sticking blackfish and is a must in depths over 80-feet.

The rig varies. The norm is to tie a single hook a few inches above your sinker on a dropper loop. The variations are to tie a dropper loop with a long tag end in fluorocarbon and clinch knot your bare hook to the tag end. Use the dropper loop for your sinker. This works well in shallower water with low to medium current. Next, you can use a fishfinder rig. Last variable, snell the loop on the hook's leader onto your mainline above the sinker. This rig stops any chance of the leader twisting and

wrapping around your mainline and tangling the rig. Illustrations of this can be found by doing a search on the discussion boards of Noreast.com.

Everyone knows the bait. Start with green crabs. Use them whole when small with the claws taken off. Use them halved or quartered when larger. Bait variations include cracking the shell with your sinker, leaving legs on, leaving half the legs on or taking them off all together. Hard shelled green crabs with orange underneath or soft light colored will catch differently at times, as will white crabs, calico crabs and stone crabs.

The bite is hard Out East, where the current races and soft and picky to the west where you don't have the current. Fish may be stacked up, hard into the structure or working the edges of a wreck. It's best to anchor uptide and let your baits work the edge of a piece before you get into the sticky parts. Quite often you can get the fish to move off the structure a few feet and save on rigs this way. I would chum when trying to draw the fish out. Save the shells, claws, legs and crush some

crab. Just be sure you don't drop a pot in the wreck, you won't see it again.

Double anchor to the west, single anchor to the east where the current will hold you steady as a rock.

Party boats will swing over to blackfish as soon as the law allows. If you are a novice at



*North Shore "Celtic Quest" blackfish.*

*Courtesy Capt. Desi O'Sullivan.*

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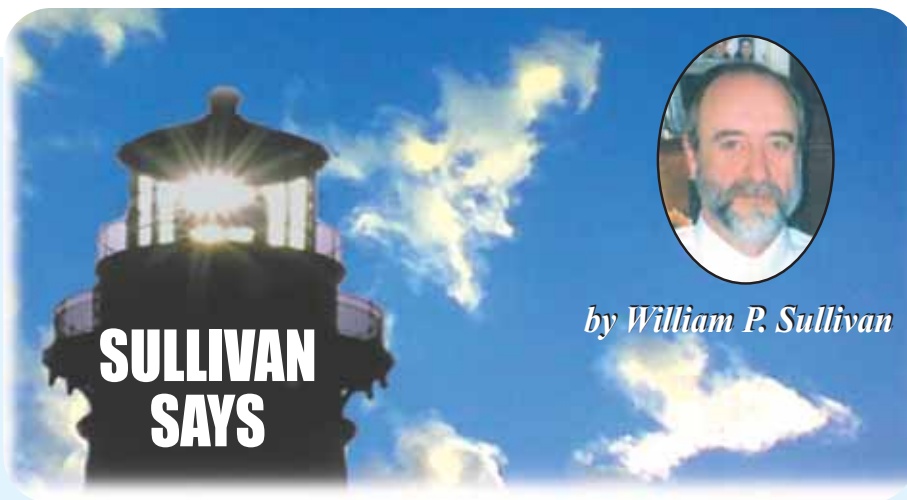
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anchoring or blackfishing, get on a head-boat and learn before you frustrate yourself. What else is left after blackfish?

**Stripers:** Trolling bunker spoons, tubes and shads starts as soon as the bait starts to migrate. When the mullet show, plugs, swimmers and darters, in blue patterns work well on the beaches. Diamond jigging in the inlets or along the beaches is a standard Out East, but tends to work better late into December at the west end. If the bass, bluefish and weakfish stack up on spearing or sand eels off Lido and Long Beach, in the shallows, jigs will work. Wild-Eye shads dropped to the bottom on light tackle and bounced a foot or so off will also get their share of fish. For the stronger of heart, live eels at night is the way to go. They will work during daylight Out East, but in the west it is almost totally a night, ebb tide bite. Use a sinker with a fishfinder rig and stick a hook in the eel's mouth and out one eye. If they get rambunctious and roll in the line, give them a whack against the gunnels to teach them who's boss. Live bergals, porgies, kingfish and peanut bunker will also take bass. If you don't like the idea of running the bay in the dark, get on a party boat. Every port will have night bass boats. Some sail by the clock and others according to the tide. Baits can run from worms in the west to eels in the mid-island and eels or porgies Out East. Anchoring and chunking bunker over structure is a way to target big fish, but you need to know the structure first.

**Fluke:** Capt. Paul on the *Tradewinds* from Captree reminds everyone that fluke is open all year, the regulations change in the spring to 19.4-inches extended the season. As in the photos, there are impressive fluke being taken since anglers learned to target doormats and avoid the shorts. Persistence paid off for Lillian Kelly, the proof is in the pictures. Fluke will be moving out or gone altogether from the bays and inlets. Search for them around the structure like wrecks and reefs. Ambrose Channel is usually hot this time of year. Drift the edges or between the structure on the artificial reefs. Big baits rule.

Sea bass and porgies have most likely started to move deeper. On the South Shore, check out the 90- to 120-foot wrecks. Porgies use to pile up on these in October and since they have made a huge comeback inshore over



by William P. Sullivan



*Whenever you fish, you need to be ready for the unforeseen. Jigs will slam bluefish in a bust like this. courtesy Capt Desi O'Sullivan, "Celtic Quest", Port Jefferson*

the summer, chances are they are back on the deeper haunts.

**Bluefish**, the bane of bass anglers, will be big and nasty. You can go through a dozen bass eels in no time if the bluefish show up. If you want to target blues, troll single tubes or umbrellas, jig under the birds or get some hook bait and chum for them. Anchor over a piece of structure and chum. Keep a deep rod weighted near the bottom with a live bergal for some true alligators. Bluefish jigging is also better on a party boat. Sheepshead Bay will have boats running to 17 Fathoms, the Mud Buoy and the Mud Hole targeting bluefish, bonita and false albacore. AVAs from 007 to 747 may be required and the fish definitely will have a preference in size and tubes..or no tubes so, be prepared.

Night bluefishing in the ocean should be left to the party boats. There are enough of them to keep everyone happy and they produce bluefish on bait and chum like crazy. Albacore and bonito can still be chummed until the water cools off. They may be farther off, but should still be around structure. If you are running off to sample wrecks, pre-codfish, or looking for bluefish, troll some small feathers at 9 to 11 knots and try to nail a

speeder. Toss tins like Deadly Dicks, small AVAs, Drones, etc. on breaking fish

**Bluefin Tuna** will be taken on the troll in the usual haunts around the island and can be chunked from 17 Fathoms on south through Monster Ledge and the Farms and the Mud Hole. Off Montauk, Block Island has had some good bluefin bites for the past couple of seasons. Don't forget the jigs, six- or eight-ounce diamonds can be deadly for tuna. The offshore canyon action will hold until November, but you will get weathered out more times than not. Head boats will be running overnight Canyon chunking trips from all the south shore and east end ports. Yellowfin, longfin, bigeye, mahi and swordfish will be in the canyons, so reserve early. Remember, no tuna fishing without a license and check the up-to-date restrictions the night before you go.

**Makos and Threshers** make another run past the island in October and some bruisers come from the Linda, Glory Hole, Coimbra and lots of other South Shore wrecks. So don't write sharks off because the air is cool, the water isn't yet. On the east end, the deep water wrecks will offer the same mako action.

Canyons, as I said, are still warm and going strong, but your weather windows are closing rapidly.

Odds are with the size of the average boat, you will be blown out more times than not. Better idea would be to make reservations on the tuna party boats and you will most definitely get your shots in.

So keep fishing and keep visiting your local heroes that get you the best bait and put you on the fish. Big box stores and the internet

have their place, but the next time you buy a reel at the "Authority" ask them to spool it with 50-pound PowerPro. I'll bet they'll be glad to sell you the line and send you back to your tackle shop to spool it. Shop local, keep your investment local and save the character of your locale. As always in this changing world, check your regulations before you go. Blackfish regs were in review at the time of this writing and they were leaning to five fish at 14-inches, no live tanks unless you had a commercial permit, commercials allowed 25 fish and only 25 fish total counting the fish in pens at the dock waiting for the wholesaler. Tuna regs change even more frequently.



*Lillian Kelly nailed this 11.5-pound doormat fluke this summer on the "Tradewinds", Captree. Courtesy Capt Paul.*



*Lillian came back and bagged a 9.5-pound mini-doormat. Courtesy Capt Paul.*

