

Observations on bait and tackle

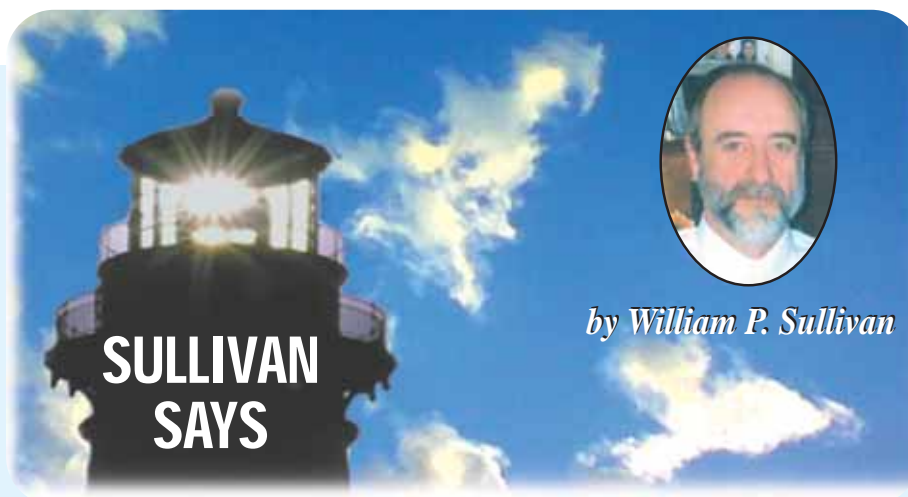
In the bait and tackle business there is a hard and fast rule as universally true as Newton's Laws of motion; just when you need something, it is unavailable.

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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