



# NEW JERSEY FISHING REPORT

by Nick Honachefsky

Now that fluke season is officially in the books, anglers are looking for other options to fill the void left by an early closure of the season. Most boaters have switched over to bottom bouncing for ling or bluefishing on the party boats as they await the return of striped bass to the waters. October hits the switch for the official start of the Fall Run, when stripers, blues and weakfish make a monstrous push back down the coastline in a feeding frenzy to fatten up for the winter months. The canyon season should be in full swing with yellowfin and, hopefully, swordfish all on tap as warm water eddies spin off the Gulf Stream and spiral onto the continental shelf. The pleasant, cool fall breeze of October is upon us - how refreshing!

## Raritan Bay

Raritan Bay gave up a mess of quality summer flounder in the last few days of the fluke season when the deeper waters of Ambrose Channel and the Raritan Reach had a good show of 5- to 8-pound class flatties. The Keansburg Pier was a solid bet to bag a few keepers over 18 inches and pier-pullers hoisted in fluke on spearing and squid combos. Big blues to 10 pounds also hung around the pier pilings giving anglers a good tussle. Cow-nosed rays made a push into the bay during late summer, spooling rods and snapping lines on unwary anglers. Rays that were landed and released were in the 40- to 60-pound class. Resident striped bass have been hitting sandworms and eels during the night hours off the tip of the hook in the Sandy Hook Rip. Bass up to 18 pounds hung tough through August and September, feeding on worms, baitfish and clams in the rippy area and persistent anglers found their bass even through the heat of the summer. Look for October to get a good push of striped bass activity once again as the waters cool down. Hopefully, peanut bunker schools will still be thick and bring in the bass. There was a mess of peanut bunker and spearing stacked back inside Great Kill Harbor for most of August and early September, which could be a harbinger of good things to come for the fall run.

## North Jersey

Bluefishing remained constant through August and early September with schools of 6- to 12-pounders roving through the waters of the Mud Hole, 17 Fathoms and spread out from 3 to 12 miles off the coast. Bunker chunks worked, but jigs also took a fair share of the choppers. Probably the most glorious happening off this stretch was the presence of 20- to 50-pound class bluefin tuna that appeared at spots such as Little Italy, Monster Ledge, Lillian and surrounding waters of the Mud Hole. Schools of bluefin would break the surface amidst a bounty of aquatic life such as whales, porpoises and turtles in the area, and they would eagerly pounce on squid skirt daisy chains, cedar plugs and small feathers. Most were in the 20- to 30-pound class, but a few larger models were also found, and this fishery just may last through October, if we get lucky. An inordinate amount of grasshopper-class (1- to 2-pound) mahimahi was also in the mix at those grounds. Scores of mahi, sometimes upwards of 30 to 40 fish, hit on a troll out, and all were of cookie cutter size. Reports also had a few random schools of cobia in the

Mud Hole waters, though none were reportedly taken. On the bottom fishing front, the red hake, or ling, bite has yet to cease or even slow down and days out linging put anglers into 15 to 40 fish per man, along with a good selection of porgies, sea bass, and a few blackfish here and there. The Sandy Hook Reef was a good spot for a mixed bag of beasties, as were the local wrecks. Fluke were hanging inside the structure of the Elberon rockpiles and the Rattlesnake area, and an unusual amount of black sea bass of keeper size also could be taken there, some even up to 4 pounds.



*The author scored this 70-pound brown shark right from the surf off Island Beach State Park using a fresh bunker head.*

## Central Jersey

Barnegat Bay had an explosion of weakfish come rumbling through the bay. Though most were of sub-legal spike size, there were shots of fish that taped out at 17 to 23 inches. Myers Hole, the BI Buoy and the mouth of Oyster Creek were all top spots to set up on a shrimp slick or to bounce sandworm bits to hang a spiketooth. Probably the coolest thing to happen was the mad influx of kingfish into the bay. Anglers tossing out small ¼- to ½-ounce bucktails tipped with shedder crab or sandworm bits were doing heavy battle against kingies up to 16 inches long, and they put up one heck of a fight for a small fish! Bucketsful could be caught during the afternoon tides. A mix of small sea bass, porgies, croakers, porcupine puffers, small stripers and bluefish rounded out the eclectic Barney Bay mix. Out at the Barnegat Ridge, the bonito bite stayed strong and some days were banner trolling experiences with dozens of bonito lighting up the spread. Very sporadic schools of false albies were also around, though they should really move in late September and early October. The Manasquan River held some decent fluking through the end of the season, but even better was the presence of weakfish that stayed put in the river system from the Mantoloking Bridge through the canal to the inlet. Anglers fishing the Mantoloking Bridge in the predawn hours were casting out small 4-inch Fin-S fish to load up on weakies to 22 inches.

Probably the best place to be in October will be Island Beach State Park, surfcasting the 14-mile-long protected stretch of Garden State coast that will hold the biggest stripers and bluefish blitzes. Check out the NJ Beach Buggy Association at [www.njbba.org](http://www.njbba.org) for fees, descriptions and the lowdown on how to access

the area properly. Speaking of Island Beach State Park, probably the most menacing and interesting news to hit the headlines was the presence of big brown shark of 4 to 6 feet long that could be caught on fresh bunker heads right from the sands of the surf! These big brownies put up one heck of a fight from the surf, and more than a dozen rods were pulled right out of the sandspikes and into the ocean! Sharks were also prevalent at the Sea Girt Reef, only three miles offshore. Dedicated sharkers were setting up chunk slicks in the early morning hours to battle sometimes up to a dozen brown, dusky and hammerhead sharks, all in the sunup hours and get this - two 6-foot Great Whites were documented, caught and released at the reef!

## Offshore

Strangely enough, there's been a justifiable showing of big blue marlin in the canyon areas this year with blue marlin in the 500- to 950-pound class being caught every now and then. The Lindenkohl canyon has been one of the spots you can find the "Man in the Blue Suit". All of the major white marlin tournaments were held with some nice results of whites in the 50- to 87-pound range coming up to hit the spread. At the Mid-Atlantic \$500,000 tourney, some 384 white marlin were caught, with 355 being released. Comparable release counts were at the Ocean City White Marlin Open, where a total of 365 whites were caught and 349 released. At both these tournaments, the whites that were caught and kept went directly to scientific study.

A phenomenal bluefin tuna fishery has sustained off Cape May at the Lobster Claw and the Elephant's Trunk. It's been a nonstop affair day to day with 80- to 200-pound bluefin hitting the decks of anglers trolling, jigging or chunking. Some days anglers are tying into a dozen on a day out. The bite seems to be at the crack of dawn with the chew over by 10 a.m. The good news is that those bluefin are possibly making a run northward into the areas of the Glory Hole and the Mud Hole, which we should know for sure by late September and early October. The 10th month of the year is the best time to head out to the Hudson, Toms, Spencer and Lindenkohl canyons to catch yellowfin tuna, and the bite should really be rolling by the first week of October. Sardines, butterfish and 10-ounce hammered metal jigs will take yellowfins, and there are already reports of 30- to 50-pounders here in early September. If we have a year like last year, expect to see some great swordfishing, as well, on the tuna trips and prepare to drop down to the 200-foot-plus depths with live squid or fresh sardines to do battle with a true gladiator! When in the canyons, also be sure to bring a lighter rod to jig fresh squid and to cast out 1-ounce bucktails to mahi schools that will surround the boat and stay in the lights during nighttime hours. Tip the bucktail with a bait strip and cast away.

With amber leaves, cool, wispy breezes and a slight chill in the salt spray, October is my favorite time of year to pursue all things outdoors. Be sure to get out and enjoy it on the water!