

CONNECTICUT FISHING REPORT

by Bob Sampson Jr.

Fall is the best time of year for saltwater anglers. Migratory predators and their prey are on the move and feeding heavily in preparation for the now rapidly approaching cold of winter. That racy, svelte, 12-pound bluefish that was released back in the spring is now a broad-shouldered brute of 14 pounds or more. If the summer run of "gigundo stripers" is any indication of what is in store for this fall, there might well be some records falling before the snow flies.

As of this writing, there hadn't been much encouragement from the "tunoids" this summer. An abrupt change from torrid heat early on to a constant barrage of rains and chilly evenings apparently dropped inshore temperatures enough to keep these warmth-loving, fast-moving fish from a major invasion of the Connecticut coast again this year. There were a few reports of scattered bonito in the area during August; at best they were sparse and hard to locate. However, a September heat wave could have changed this scenario.

Bluefishing has been excellent again this season, but blue crabbing has been a disappointment. Last fall at this time we were talking about large numbers of adult crabs and incredible numbers of their young going into the winter of 2007/2008. It doesn't look like they came out on the other side intact. Blue crabs are very weather sensitive, and apparently the early cold snap last fall followed by a mild, but extended wet cool period last spring, did most of our local crabs in. There have been a few discreet locations, including Niantic River, the upper Mystic River and lower Connecticut River that have been producing some crabs after dark, but other spots have been very quiet. The season is open until November, but there haven't been enough around to get excited about doing any late season blue crabbing this fall. I hope I'm totally wrong on this one, but all the signs were not favorable as of early September.

Fluke fishing has been closed in Connecticut and New York waters since Labor Day, but other bottom fishing options are good ones. Scup will remain open until October 15 and blackfish season is opening on October 1. During the summer and early fall, fishing for porgies was excellent and there are plenty of keepers around all the area's reefs for anyone who wants to target these aggressive, good-eating, hard-pulling scrappers. Scup have shredded our fluke baits and nipped off sandworms while we were tubing for stripers all summer long. They can be a pain in the butt when you don't want them, but have saved the day for many anglers when other species haven't been cooperating. Many anglers were using them and blackfish as "fillers" when the fluke fishing was slow this summer.

During a mid-summer, daytime striped bass tubing trip, just after the scup invaded the coast, we couldn't put the hooks into a keeper



Big fat bass and blues will be chowing down along the coast from now until they move out later in November or December - it's a great time of year to catch quality fish of both species. Many are speculating that some striped bass records might be broken this fall. It's a great time to toss big plugs for big bass.



striper. We wanted a single 28-incher for supper. As the Rolling Stones sang, "You can't always get what you want" and that void on our supper menu was filled by a few scup, three of which ranged from 14 to 16 inches. None of them had any trouble getting their small mouths around the 2/0 hook on the end of our Fish Connection "Red Licorice Stick Tubes". There were a few giant humpbacks caught this summer. Hillyer's Tackle of Waterford weighed in a behemoth porgy that was 19 inches and 3.5 pounds back in late August. Most interesting is the fact that this bigger-than-a-pizza-sized scup was caught by a customer who was fishing from the rocks, either off the Pleasure Beach jetty or most likely "between the bridges" in Waterford.

The bottom fishing option that most anglers wait for in the fall is blackfish (tautog). They are a species that has been gaining favor steadily among marine anglers for a couple of decades now because they are great eating, hard-fighting and really a challenge to consistently hook.

Their buck teeth and rat-a-tat-tat biting style makes fishing with crabs (the best blackfish bait) like fishing with a cocoa puff on a hook. A couple of taps and it's gone.

Until you get the "feel" and let them take it just enough, it's tap tap, empty hook. It always takes me a couple of tautog every year to get tuned in so that it's not a "free crab

luncheon" for all the blackfish around the boat. The summer blackfish season, which allowed anglers to take two fish per day, was utilized by many unsuccessful fishermen as a backup when fluke fishing was slow. Those that targeted blackfish for the most part did very well. There weren't many reports of huge ones reported this summer in the eastern end of the sound. Most were just keepers to maybe seven or eight pounds, but there appeared to be a good number of them around. Bigger blackfish tend to hang in deeper, cooler waters during the heat of summer.

A productive summer season, along with the fact that blackfishing was good last year and during the short spring season of 2008, bodes well for this fall. Weather permitting, "togging" should be good to excellent from now until the season ends on December 6.

The mainstay of fall fishing for most anglers, especially surf fishermen, is striped bass and bluefish. Bluefishing was excellent this summer and there are marauding schools along the coast right now that are building up as they chow down on bunker (peanuts and adults) and anything else they can find to eat. This is the time of year when bluefish will chase bait for miles up large coastal rivers, giving inland anglers a shot at them.

Classic places such as the Race and Plum Gut always provide great fall bluefishing, with daily surface feeding blitzes that become more frequent and long-lived as daylight hours shorten and the migration builds. I had a chance to fish with a very skilled deep water bluefish specialist named Bill Sirois this summer. Bill is legally blind, but far from handicapped. He lost his sight later in life, and he had owned and run his own boat back in the 1970s and loved fishing for blues in the Race at that time. But he gave it and many things up when his vision faded.

He happened to call a good friend, long time fishing partner and charter captain Eric Covino of *Playing Hookie* Charters earlier this summer to book a bluefishing trip when he first heard that the choppers reached this area back in late June. He and Eric worked well together that day. Bill caught lots of fish and has been booking Eric on a regular basis ever since. He was rediscovering a pleasurable activity in his life that he'd given up for years. Eric told me about "this blind guy" who would catch fish when no one else was bringing anything over the gunnel.

Bill's a skilled angler and has been playing around with various "super lines", appropriate light, powerful, fast level-wind reels and modern, fast-sinking "knife blade" style jigs. When he first started fishing with Eric, Bill was doing what I call "side by side taste tests" to compare the old classic "diamond jigs" he had in his tackle box from the 70s with the new

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stuff he bought for his first outing in many years. One day this summer, while aboard *Playing Hookie* with Bill, he told me that when he first got back on the water, the old-style diamond jigs, even though they were heavier, eight to twelve ounces, would “hang up”, as he stated it, in the fast-moving tides in the Race and not sink anywhere nearly as fast as the lighter, back-weighted, holographic, modern jigs that need only weigh half as much.

The day we fished together, Bill was effectively getting to the bottom with six-ounce blade-style jigs during an incoming moon tide, when in the old days he’d have been cranking up 10- to 12-ounce Diamond Jigs. By combining good tackle and his heightened sense of feel, Bill has become very adept at “squidding” bluefish from the depths of the Race. Squidding is a vertical fishing technique that is basically dropping a lure to the bottom and cranking it up through the fish, either from top to bottom or stopping and dropping it back through the depth range where fish are marking on the recorder screen. It takes skill and energy.

I saw Mr. Sirois picking a few blues when

the 10 or 15 boats within sight were doing absolutely nothing. This guy has mastered deep water vertical jigging and was a pleasure to observe and talk with on a cool “bluebird” day in the Race late last August.

Mr. Sirois told me he loved being in the riled waters of the Race in the hands of an “ex-teacher/school principal” who gave him concise instructions and warnings when needed, such as when wakes from other boats were on the way. He said the essence of reclaiming his passion for fishing is achieved when he’s cranking that jig up from the bottom and it’s stopped dead by a hungry, hard-pulling bluefish. I give this man all the credit in the world for what he’s does on a weekly basis. He is a good example for others who may have similar desires to overcome whatever handicaps they may be dealing with.

Stripers always hang around a little later in the season than the more warmth-loving bluefish. As the season runs from the often warm weather of early October to the cold temps of late November, the space between pulses of bait and predators that are migrating south becomes larger, to a point where there

may be larger holes than fishable schools, so angling in general becomes more hit and miss.

When it’s good, it can be incredible; when it’s bad, it can be awful. Late November/early December is the time when “the Fat Lady sings” an end to marine angling.

Look for some of the last great striped bass catches of the year to take place in the region’s striper Meccas located in the waters from Newport to Block Island, Montauk Point and back to Plum Gut, the Race, Fishers Island and the Watch Hill Reef Complex. If any records fall, it will most likely occur during the month of November when the last of the giants make their way back to their wintering grounds. It’s never completely over for those who want to continue to catch striped bass. During November and December there will be striper fishing opportunities associated with the run of Atlantic herring in western Long Island Sound and tens of thousands of bass will move into the wintering grounds of the Thames River, where they will create a fishery that lasts all winter as long as the ice cover doesn’t freeze boats off the water.

High Tides For October 2008 Bridgeport, CT

Oct 1	12:56 AM	1:10 PM	Oct 16	12:20 AM	12:36 PM
Oct 2	1:36 AM	1:49 PM	Oct 17	1:08 AM	1:25 PM
Oct 3	2:16 AM	2:29 PM	Oct 18	2:00 AM	2:17 PM
Oct 4	2:58 AM	3:12 PM	Oct 19	2:56 AM	3:15 PM
Oct 5	3:44 AM	3:59 PM	Oct 20	3:58 AM	4:20 PM
Oct 6	4:34 AM	4:51 PM	Oct 21	5:06 AM	5:31 PM
Oct 7	5:29 AM	5:48 PM	Oct 22	6:16 AM	6:42 PM
Oct 8	6:26 AM	6:45 PM	Oct 23	7:22 AM	7:50 PM
Oct 9	7:20 AM	7:39 PM	Oct 24	8:23 AM	8:51 PM
Oct 10	8:11 AM	8:31 PM	Oct 25	9:16 AM	9:44 PM
Oct 11	8:57 AM	9:19 PM	Oct 26	9:03 AM	9:31 PM
Oct 12	9:41 AM	10:05 PM	Oct 27	9:46 AM	10:14 PM
Oct 13	10:24 AM	10:50 PM	Oct 28	10:27 AM	10:54 PM
Oct 14	11:07 AM	11:34 PM	Oct 29	11:05 AM	11:32 PM
Oct 15	11:51 AM	-----	Oct 30	11:42 AM	-----
			Oct 31	12:10 AM	12:20 PM

High Tides For Other Locations:

City Island	+0:17	Stamford	+0:03	Madison	-0:21
New Rochelle	-0:04	S. Norwalk	+0:09	Essex	-0:05
Mamaroneck	+0:12	Housatonic Rvr	+0:26	Saybrook Pt	-0:31
Cos Cob	+0:05	Milford	-0:08	New London	-1:45

Times are approximate • Not responsible for errors

Moon Phases



High Tides For October 2008 Sandy Hook, NJ

Oct 1	9:45 AM	10:01 PM	Oct 16	9:13 AM	9:44 PM
Oct 2	10:24 AM	10:43 PM	Oct 17	10:00 AM	10:37 PM
Oct 3	11:05 AM	11:28 PM	Oct 18	10:53 AM	11:37 PM
Oct 4	11:49 AM	-----	Oct 19	11:54 AM	-----
Oct 5	12:17 AM	12:37 PM	Oct 20	12:42 AM	12:59 PM
Oct 6	1:09 AM	1:27 PM	Oct 21	1:46 AM	2:03 PM
Oct 7	2:02 AM	2:20 PM	Oct 22	2:50 AM	3:07 PM
Oct 8	2:57 AM	3:15 PM	Oct 23	3:53 AM	4:09 PM
Oct 9	3:54 AM	4:12 PM	Oct 24	4:53 AM	5:10 PM
Oct 10	4:49 AM	5:06 PM	Oct 25	5:49 AM	6:04 PM
Oct 11	5:40 AM	5:57 PM	Oct 26	5:37 AM	5:52 PM
Oct 12	6:26 AM	6:44 PM	Oct 27	6:20 AM	6:36 PM
Oct 13	7:08 AM	7:28 PM	Oct 28	7:00 AM	7:16 PM
Oct 14	7:49 AM	8:12 PM	Oct 29	7:37 AM	7:55 PM
Oct 15	8:30 AM	8:56 PM	Oct 30	8:14 AM	8:35 PM
			Oct 31	8:51 AM	9:15 PM

High Tides For Other Locations:

Atlantic Highlands	-0:10	Red Bank	+1:16	Seaside Heights	-0:03
South Amboy	-0:04	Manasquan Inlet	-0:13	Sea Bright	+1:15
Belmar	-0:35	New Brunswick	+0:31	Beaverdam Creek	+2:29

Times are approximate • Not responsible for errors

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