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Chris Megan and the author celebrate a successful capture of a white marlin while filming an episode of *On The Water's Angling Adventures*.

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PUBLISHER

Chris Megan
cjm@onthewater.com

EDITORIAL

Kevin Blinkoff, Editor-In-Chief
kevin@onthewater.com
Jimmy Fee, Editor
jimmy@onthewater.com
Matt Haeffner, Assistant Editor
mhaeffner@onthewater.com

DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Andy Nabreski, Design Manager
andy@onthewater.com
Ed Giordano, Digital Content Editor
egiordano@onthewater.com
Patrick Washburn, Senior Designer
pwashburn@onthewater.com

VIDEO

Alex Blackwell, Creative Director
ablackwell@onthewater.com
Adam Eldridge, Video Production Manager
adam@onthewater.com
Liam O'Neill, Video Specialist
liam@onthewater.com
Robbie Tartaglia, Digital Content Coordinator
robbie@onthewater.com

CIRCULATION (SUBSCRIPTIONS)

Bill Dean, Circulation Manager
bdean@onthewater.com ext. 233
Nick Cancelliere, Audience Development Coordinator
ncancelliere@onthewater.com

BUSINESS

Valerie Watts, Business Manager, In-House Editor
val@onthewater.com
Matt Ryan, Director E-Commerce & Retail Division
mryan@onthewater.com

SALES & MARKETING CONSULTANTS

Anthony DeiCicchi, Director of Sales
anthony@onthewater.com • 508-944-5733
Bob Potter, New England North Region
bob@onthewater.com • 508-776-5502
Robin Davis-Minichino - Mid-Atlantic Region
robin@onthewater.com • 609-204-4060
Joe D'Onofrio - Business Development, Chesapeake Region
joed@onthewater.com • 201-906-2586

Tuna Relays and Angling Teamwork

Many aspects of fishing are solitary—one angler's journey type of stuff. Surfcasting is the most extreme example. Victories are your own, and seldom is the glory of a great catch spread around. Offshore fishing is different. In search of tuna or marlin, a group of individual anglers must coalesce into a "crew" to achieve the day's goal. In some cases, everyone has a particular role to play: the captain running the boat, the angler fighting the fish, and the gaff or leader man handling the end game. In others, that teamwork comes together when a tuna is simply too big to be tamed by one angler, and the rod is relayed to everyone on board to keep the maximum pressure on the fish.

I've been a part of some marathon relays and the feeling, when that tuna finally hit the deck, was euphoric. Even though only one of the anglers on board had hooked the fish,

everyone shared equally in the victory. That's a rare feeling outside of the organized sports most of us left behind after high school.

Put that same crew, in that same boat, over a wreck with a tote full of green crabs and those former teammates quickly become competitors looking to outwit each other and the largest tautog on the structure. I've seen such trips take weird turns with the high hook loudly celebrating each catch and the other anglers grumpily muttering under their breath. Sometimes the anglers on the same boat come home with wildly different recollections of the fishing.

I love both sides of the fishing dynamic, the solitary and the group, but I remember most fondly the shared victories—if only because it means someone else has a vested interest in backing your fish stories.

- Jimmy Fee, Editor

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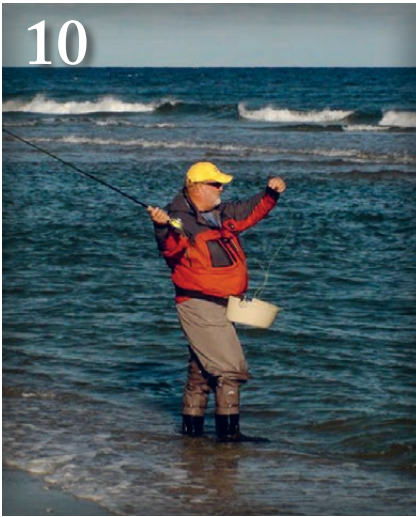
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Submissions:

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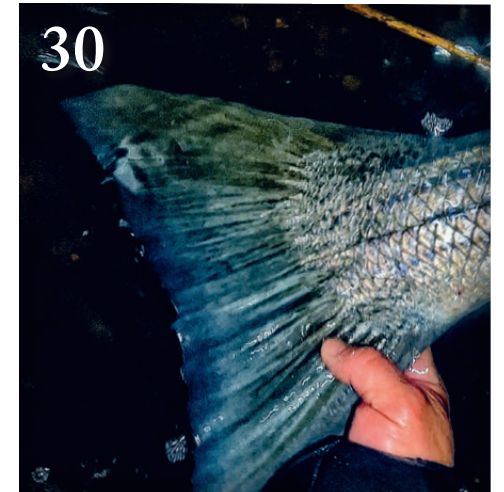
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THE FISHING SCENE



The Marsh Cycle

Our striper seasons begin and end in the same places. Come November, with cooler weather and water, small striper snacks like killifish, crabs, and silversides take refuge in the salt marshes, where the shallow but dark, muddy bottom traps heat from the sun's rays. For bass, the marshes are warm and inviting—so much so that a few may even spend the winter. Anglers, reluctant to let the season end, wade the sod banks in search of those fish before hanging up the waders. And when the time comes to strap them up again in spring, those 5-month-old dried salt stains will be washed away by the same pocket of skinny water that left them.

Photo and caption by Matt Haeffner





Bob Popovics works the trough between the beach and a sand bar at Island Beach State Park in search of a November striped bass.

Chasing The Thump!

BY PETE BARRETT

November is a month of changing fly-fishing choices. Triggered by shorter days, dropping air temperatures, and the sun's lower arc in the sky, pods of bait scoot along the beach, with striped bass in hot pursuit, eagerly feeding to fatten up for a dormant winter off Virginia and the Carolinas. Summer's beach crowds are long gone, so you don't worry as much about snagging your backcast on bathers, shell hunters, or dog walkers; parking is generally easier, too. The blustery days are nicely balanced with good-weather days when the breeze is at your back with calm surf and ideal conditions for chucking flies.

In fresh water, largemouth bass lakes and

ponds are also more accessible. Weed-choked shorelines begin to die off, so there's far less "salad" to deal with, and fly-fishing opportunities improve. Just as in the salt, there's less boat, canoe, and kayak traffic as air temperatures slide toward 40 degrees, leaving many ponds devoid of significant fly-fishing competition. Best of all, the shallow waters along shoreline edges cool off considerably and are quite comfortable areas for largemouth bass to hang out. In November, a well-placed popping bug can trigger a wallop strike, and by December into January, streamers and Woolly Buggers also appeal to crappie, perch, and pickerel. Largemouth bass regulations vary from state to state, so be sure of your

state's open seasons if you plan to keep a fish for dinner.

Every year has surprises, so be prepared for anything. If the weather god smiles, it's possible to see epic striped bass fly fishing along the coast from before Thanksgiving all the way past Christmas. I recall one fall along the Jersey coast when striped bass paused their migratory trip south, taking time to appreciate the unusually moderate surf temperatures and abundant bait. From Bay Head to Island Beach State Park, nearly every day gave up some decent fishing with 2-pound rats and a few 10 pounders mixed in.

In the fall, the beaches may form a shallow bar well within fly-casting range, causing bass

When striped bass action fizzles out along the beach, many flyrodders look for end-of-season action with freshwater largemouth bass.



to move along its edge in decent numbers. On high tide, they travel in the trough between the bar and the beach; at the low, they favor the drop-off at the outside edge. A floater with an intermediate sink-tip line is good medicine for the trough while a 3-weight sink-tip is more effective for the outside edge. Sand eel patterns often rule the surf during those last few weeks.

Even bird hunters can take advantage of fall fishing. Once, during a Mid-Atlantic goose hunt when extreme downpours made sitting in a goose blind utterly uncomfortable, the day was saved with a side trip for largemouth bass on the nearby Nanticoke River. The rain had slacked off to a soggy, foggy mist, so standing in a bass boat and catching tidewater largemouth bass was still much more comfortable than a wet-butt goose pit.

The days play out differently in November and into December. Unlike summer and early fall, there's not as much advantage to fishing

the dark side. Striped bass sometimes feed all day long, even when the sky is bright. It's a heck of a lot colder at night and much more comfortable to throw flies at sunup. Cold nights make handling fly lines difficult, which translates into casting problems; numb fingers make it tough to grasp the rod and strip the line. Knot tying to switch a fly is often impossible.

Boaters may still catch bass on the troll, but there's less opportunity for boating fly fishers and it's nearly impossible to find decent fishing in the back country. For boaters, it becomes a trolling game while beach-bound flyrodders slip into neoprene waders and walk the sand to find the most action near inlets and along the beach.

An advantage of November is that the action may start at sunrise and continue well into the middle of the day. It's not just the "magic hour" at dawn that holds all the promise. Sometimes, it may not start until midmorning and those

flyrodders who gave up early for bellies full of ham, eggs, and a cup of coffee at the diner will miss out. Cloudy, overcast days are often the best for sporadic all-day action, but in late fall, bass aren't shy of bright, sunny days.

A popular strategy with many feather merchants is to hit the beach right before sunrise to work the suds until at least midmorning. If work, school, or family obligations prevent this, you might plan on a mid- or late-afternoon session. A blitz can fire off at any time right up until the curtain falls and it's time to head home for dinner. A patient, flexible spouse is also a big help.

Sometimes, the bass put on a show as they crash bait, cartwheeling and splashing—not caring if anyone sees them. Other times, they feed a few feet below the on-top bait schools and you may see only boils. Fortunately, the weather in late fall often brings many days with a west wind and a calm surf, so it's relatively



Sand eel patterns are good choices for November and December striped bass. These were tied by longtime saltwater fly angler Don Avondolio.

easy to see the surface activity. Then, too, birds often give up the location of a blitz. Many surf guys seem to have binoculars glued to their faces while scanning for bird play. I'm also guilty of this, but the bass will occasionally be right at your feet, so bird play or not, it can pay off to throw a few blind casts while awaiting the next bite.

Inevitably, at some point during the late fall, the beach action for striped bass fizzles out, and diehard flyrodders who refuse to surrender happily switch to fresh water in search of a few more thumps before quitting time. A friend from Long Island, Rick Ferrin, told me,

"Just before Thanksgiving, I carry an extra fly rod, a 7-weight, so I can stop off at one of my favorite freshwater ponds. I spend an hour or so at daybreak in the surf, but if there are no bites, I pack it in and try for a shot at largemouth bass. The weed beds are dying off, exposing prey like baby perch and crappie—maybe some bluegills—and I can cast to largemouth bass spots that were hidden in the weeds since midsummer. It's an easy switch because I already have my waders in the truck, so all I do is pack a sling bag with my bass flies.

"The best strategy is to wade parallel to the shore, casting directly ahead and at about a

30-degree angle, or whatever it takes to fish the drop-off. Working nearly parallel keeps the fly in the zone where the fish are holding.


"My SUV is big enough that I can also slide my 11-foot kayak completely inside in case I want to cover a lot of water. I prefer using the kayak in ponds where the wading is difficult because there is still a lot of marsh grass or downed tree limbs to push through. With the kayak, I can work a short distance off the shore and cast into the grass with weedless poppers or streamers, getting into the tight spots where the bass are hiding. At this time of year, the fish leave their deep-water haunts for the shallows and this seasonal migration will continue until the shallow water gets really cold in January. At that point, they again seek ideal water temperatures along the drop-off and into deep water. The kayak also lets me adapt to the wind to find locations in the lee where I can still cast even if it's breezy."

Capt. Ray Szulczewski's *Tiderunner* is usually the last boat to be shrink-wrapped at Joe and Eileen Baker's Off the Hook Marina in Cape May; by late November, he switches to freshwater bass as the striper fishing dwindles. "If it is too windy to go out in the boat or my window of time is small, I will go freshwater fishing because my closest spot is just 10 minutes from the house," he says. "The spot I fish is an old sand quarry that was turned into a lake. It is very overgrown with trees around the edges, so to fish it with a fly rod, I have to wear waders and cast semi-parallel to shore, being super careful not to step over the steep drop-offs.

"When the weather turns cooler, largemouth and crappies put on the feed bags to fatten up for the long winter ahead. In November, I primarily fish late in the day as the sun is setting until after dark. The small bait congregate in the shallows and the larger fish come up to feed. Black Woolly Buggers, both weighted with lead wire or with bead heads, and all-black gurglers or poppers are deadly. I use a light sinking line for the Buggers and a floating line for the poppers. It is not as much fun fishing in the dark, but the action is worth it.

"By December, the water gets even colder, so the fish tend to migrate and hold in deeper sections of the lake. I can then fish any time of the day and catch, but near dusk and after dark still produce the best. In cold water, I switch to small baitfish patterns like Woolly Buggers on a heavier sinking line. The key in the colder water is working the fly very slowly, sometimes stripping in only a couple inches



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of line. You want to ghost your presentation through the water.”

Ray keeps fishing after the striper season has closed and says, “You can still catch largemouth and crappies during the winter in January, February, and March.” During those months, he prefers a sinking line. “I let it sink for 10 seconds and increase the sink time until I get hits or bounce the fly on the bottom. This is mainly a daytime thing, but even then, it is extremely cold standing in waders with wet or semi-wet hands. You can catch as long as the lake is not iced over, so I fish the deepest part I can access. The key is to get the fly down deep near the bottom and work it painfully slow. When a fish takes the fly, it’s a very light tap, but once you set the hook, it fights hard and will even jump.”


We’re lucky today to have companies specially formulating excellent cold-water fly lines that deliver flies in extreme conditions. Cortland relies on a braided core with a specially-formulated coating to reduce coiling and to stay supple even as temperatures plummet. Still, it’s essential to stretch your line and leader before making the first cast. Rick Ferrin suggests, “On really cold days, I stretch my line several times to keep both the leader and the fly line straight



Woolly Buggers, EP Micro Minnows, bluegill imitations, worm patterns, and Seducer poppers and sliders all work well for cold-water bass in lakes and ponds.

so I don’t miss strikes. The fish may not strike aggressively, and a slack line is the enemy.”

Despite the cold, looking for late-season thumps of a bass, striper or largemouth, is addictive. “This type of fishing is not for

everyone,” cautions Szulczewski. “It’s very hand-numbing and cold even with insulated waders, but if you are desperate and there is nothing else to fish for—and you are half crazy, you can find some fish.” Catch ‘em up! 



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Padua Jig Tail

BY TONY LOLLI

“Jig” is a term for a dynamic dance characterized by leaps and twirls. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation, in the Elizabethan era, a jig was slang for a practical joke or a trick. Why? I have no clue. So, combining the best of both definitions, could a jig be a trick perpetrated while vigorously dancing? I’m too old to try this, so why don’t you give it a whirl (pun intended) and let me know how it works out. But, I digress.

Evan Padua owns Sweetwater Guide Service LLC on the Upper Delaware River. Whether he’s a tricky dancer remains to be seen. But what if, like me, he’s a closet dancer? I doubt it because there’s not much room in a closet. But I digress, again.

This fly is best in medium to large rivers and is great for plunge pools, deep holes, and drop-offs unreachable with traditional streamers or fly setups. Evan targets trout, crappie, walleye, perch, and bass in cold-water months, fall through spring.

Evan said, “This fly works well when it


swims in a lifelike manner. The inspiration came from the undeniable effectiveness of soft-plastic paddletail baits used with spinning rods. I knew if I could create the paddletail effect on my jig flies, fish would be interested in them and be willing to chase and bite them.

“The synthetic paddletail is for flair and succeeds if and when it moves correctly, but I’ve had medium success with the tail swimming correctly while using these jigs. I sometimes cut the tail off and fish it as if it were never there, and the jig remains effective. Or, sometimes the marabou needs to be trimmed so the tail can move away from the other material. The paddletail is temperamental and works only some of the time. The less material you add to the jig head, the faster the sink rate. You can add a lot of material or very little material, and the sink rate will vary accordingly.”

Evan says this fly is best fished on a 6- or 7-weight fly rod, with an intermediate- or slow-sinking line and at least a 3X or 6-pound leader. It also fishes well in large runs and

pools where you can bounce the bottom and search the river’s entire base. Brown trout will chase jigs like these when the conditions are right. They also work on lakes and ponds around docks while slowly stripped for pan-fish. This fly works if you understand how to fish it. Creating the most lifelike presentation is what it needs.

Evan said, “In my first few years as a guide, I took out a few of my father’s longtime clients. One of them had earned himself the nickname ‘Jigmeister.’ After watching him repeatedly catch large trout by swimming marabou jigs through the water, it opened my eyes to the possibilities. So, I began to tie up some jig patterns. It started with many single colors—black, brown, and white, on various colors of jig heads, and has developed into more varied color schemes over the years. I like to tie with dark colors on top and lighter on the belly, as most baitfish are colored that way, but I sometimes tie just the opposite. If I know I can sight-fish the fly, it makes it easier to spot the fly’s white top while bouncing or stripping it in.

So, there you have it, jigging but without the fancy dance steps ... unless you think they’d help catch fish. Come out of the closet and report back when you get a chance. 



*Small Lure Company
Mikros Pop*

The Popper

BY JIMMY FEE

Few lures bring anglers such unabashed joy as the popper. You can't help but hold your breath as the rings from your last "pop" dissipate and you wait a few tense seconds for the fish to react. When they do, the water erupts below the lure, and you grit your teeth while waiting the couple of heartbeats between seeing the strike and feeling it—and then you set the hook.

The distinguishing characteristic of a popper is its wide, cupped mouth designed to catch water and send up a large splash. Depending on its size, a popper's action can fool just about any fish from smallmouth bass to bluefin tuna.

In recent years, however, the popper seems to have taken a backseat in the topwater arsenals of inshore anglers as fishermen go all-in on walk-the-dog lures like the Doc. This is a mistake.

Topwater spooks are tremendous lures, but they aren't a one-size-fits-all option for raising gamefish. In rough water, for example, a popper holds its position better without skipping across the surface. In a crosswind, it's easier

to work a popper effectively. When the fish are deep, a popper is better at drawing them to the surface.


The popper retrieve is straightforward: the angler simply snaps the rod firmly enough to make the lure's cupped mouth throw water, but not so aggressively that the popper skips across the surface. Each pop is followed by a pause. Depending on the species and conditions, the pause length can vary from less than a second to between 10 and 15 seconds. In rough water, when targeting stripers, shorter pauses draw more strikes, while tuna fishing in calm conditions yields better results with longer pauses. Most hits come on the pause, but it's important to wait to set the hook until the line comes tight and the rod begins to bend. Setting the hook when you see the strike will result in missed fish.

One of the newer poppers on the market is the Small Lure Company Mikros Pop designed by artist and lure builder Merv Rubiano. Merv took the craftsmanship behind his Strategic Angler stickbaits and brought it to a popper that's well sized for blues and stripers

inshore as well as mahi, yellowfin, and school bluefin offshore.

The Mikros Pop's features include a specially curved head and body to increase cavitation and surface disturbance. An internal chrome insert provides added depth, while the stainless-steel rattles shift on the cast to improve distance and call in fish. The lure is through-wired and built to survive long battles with hard-fighting pelagics, and lifelike 3D eyes provide the finishing touches.

The lure can be fished with the pop-pause cadence of a traditional popper, or with a smooth, slow diagonal sweep of the rod, it will slide under the surface, kicking and leaving a bubble trail. It can also be walked, almost like a spook, by twitching the rod with the tip held straight up.

Colors include bunker, mahi, sand eel, hot pink, flying fish, and pearl white. The Mikros Pop weighs 1.4 ounces and is 5 inches in length. A final thoughtful touch is its 100-percent recyclable and compostable packaging to help reduce the plastic waste found around our oceans. 



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FROM THE SURF



A Surfcaster Looks at 40

BY JIMMY FEE

By the time this issue of *On The Water* reaches you, the cultured, well-read anglers of the Northeast, I'll have crested the "hill" and turned 40 years old. Approaching this manufactured milestone, *I passed out and I rallied and I sprung a few leaks*, and I have become acutely aware that the tide is ebbing, and there is still quite a bit I'd like to do before it bottoms out, six feet down.

First, it felt like the time to freshen up that surf-fishing bucket list, to put less emphasis on how many and how big, and more on the where, the why, and the with who.

Catch a Cod in the Surf

Yes, I want a surf cod, 200 years too late. The old guard paints images of anglers huddled around blue-flamed driftwood fires, taking pulls of blackberry brandy, waiting for a cod to knock

the ice out of their rod guides.

Sliding a writhing cod out of the winter surf has been a dream of mine *since I was 3 feet tall*—partially because it justifies the impulse to fish the surf all year long and partially because of the connection to surfmen of the past. Even if I never cross paths with a codfish within casting range of the beach, the excuse to surfcast under the light of the Wolf Moon is its own reward, especially if I can sucker a good friend into joining me out there and bringing the brandy.

Really Learn to Cast a Conventional

I love fishing conventional reels. The extra stopping power and the ability to deliver heavy loads a long way out make them valuable tools in the right hands. Plus, they have that old-school look that just feels cool to fish with.

In skilled hands, a conventional outcasts a spinning reel because once the spool starts turning, it actively feeds line to the lure or rig without any added resistance. However, knowing the proper mechanics of the cast, and how to tune your reel, are essential to achieving maximum distance. This requires practice. Practice? I share Allen Iverson's view on practice, but perhaps the wisdom of advancing age will inspire me to spend a few winter afternoons dialing in my conventional cast.

Catch a Striper from the Maine Surf

I always thought it would be neat to catch a striper from every state that's on their migratory route. David DiBenedetto did it in one glorious fall, documented in his book *On The Run*, but doing it over a lifetime would be

nearly as satisfying. I've checked off every state from North Carolina to Massachusetts, but my personal migration ends somewhere around the Merrimack River. It's time to change that.

I'd like to see all the places where our stripers swim—to catch this familiar fish in unfamiliar waters and compare the experience to back home.

Catch a 60-Pounder

Striped bass larger than 60 pounds are exceedingly rare. Precious few are caught every season, almost always from a boat. Yet Al McReynolds, Tony Stetzko, Tim Coleman, Al Pellini, and Ralph Vigmostad, to name just a few, found hungry super-cows within casting distance of shore, so why not aim high?

I know that I'll almost certainly make my last cast without ever grabbing the lower jaw of a 60-pounder, but if the pursuit of that dream keeps me out for a few extra casts each outing, extra casts that add up to hundreds or thousands over the years, what more can I ask for?

Get Back to Montauk with Dad

For years, my dad and I made an annual trip to Montauk in mid-October. Some years, the blitzes went off as if on a schedule, every morning and afternoon. On the worst year, a storm left the water muddy for our entire week, and we watched from the bluff as boats caught and surfcasters skunked. On the best year, a nor'easter battered the north side with head-high waves while jumbo bluefish and heavy bass feasted among the chaos. One year, we drove right from the beach to a film festival, caked in bluefish slime and still wearing casting tape as we dug into the popcorn and Snowcaps.

That tradition survived only two years after my move to Cape Cod, where I found it difficult to leave the fishing in October, explaining to Dad that we had a better shot at big fish at my new, adopted home. I'd been missing the point, of course, that for Dad those trips weren't just about the quality of the fishing, but the time spent together.

Catch a Striper from the New Hampshire Surf

See "Catch a Striper from the Maine Surf."

Fish Block Island in November

I've been to many of surfcasting's high holy grounds—Montauk, Cuttyhunk, the Outer Cape—but Block Island is, to date, a gap in my resume. While I'd happily fish this island at any time of year, the tales of glory of Novembers past makes it the perfect month for a pilgrimage that's more about basking in surfcasting history than catching.

Show My Kids What Surfcasting is All About


My kids will ultimately make their own decisions about whether or not surfcasting is their passion, but I'd really like to get each of them, individually, on a trip that shows them what drives me out there, night after night. It could be a fall blitz when the waves thicken with panicked baitfish as the bass herd them against the sand; it could be a slow night punctuated by one good fish at the end of the tide; it might be a sunrise spent driving the beach with a coffee steaming in the cupholder and binoculars on the dash, ready to spot distant birds.

Whatever it is, I'd like them to end the trip with an answer to their question: "Why do you like fishing so much?"

Accept a Changing Relationship to Surfcasting

Surfcasting, I'm reluctantly learning, is a young man's game—at least the way I've done it the last 20-some years. That is, all night, every night, and if you aren't calling about the next set of tides, you'll hear from me in December.

Fishing the surf at this level pushes one to the fringes of society, where many surfcasters feel most comfortable. You get to know the graveyard-shift workers at all the gas stations and convenience stores on your routes to the beach. Your waders never dry and your striper thumb rarely heals. It's glorious, but *never meant to last*. For how much longer can I be the unshaven, glassy-eyed dad at the bus stop, nursing a high-test coffee, and reeking of eels. While the other parents, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, talk excitedly about ... well, whatever it is the non-fishing people talk about on October mornings, I'm there grumpily wondering why the bass didn't show up the night before. I simply can't maintain the surfcasting intensity of an unattached 25-year-old while managing the familial and professional responsibilities of an *over-40 victim of fate*. If I want family and fishing to continue to be sources of joy through middle-age and into old age, then I need to find the balance now.

That's enough for now. There are a lot of casts to take and plans to make, so *I've got to stop wishin', I've got to go fishin'*. See you on the other side of the hill. 





Making stuffed quahogs from scratch is a time-consuming, messy ordeal. Because of this, I like to make a large batch and load up my freezer.

Stuffies

BY ANDY NABRESKI

Stuffed quahogs, endearingly called “stuffies” by many, have become a quintessential part of New England cuisine. A true comfort food, stuffies were the gateway recipe that led to my obsession with quahogs, and to this day, I can think of no other preparation that can better highlight the unique gastronomical qualities of these humble clams.

I fondly recall feasting on them at a young age; they were a go-to appetizer recipe for my mother during the 80s. She made them with

canned clams and packed them into shells we collected on our summertime trips to the beach. She treated the perfect stuffie-sized clam shells like treasures, and I recall her loading them into the dishwasher for reuse after their contents had been devoured.

The thought of using canned clams makes me cringe, although I do recall Mom’s stuffies always tasted great. And, after making my last batch of stuffed quahogs a few weeks ago, canned clams are beginning to seem like a logical alternative. Digging the clams, scrub-

bing them, steaming them open, shucking the meat, and chopping it up into tiny bits makes preparing a batch of stuffies from scratch an all-day affair.

No one knows for sure who was the first person to mix clam meat with breadcrumbs, sausage, and onions, and pack it into a clam shell, but we do know that the practice originated in Rhode Island around the turn of the last century.

Back then, quahogs were looked down upon and considered a poor man’s food. At



When I find myself with a pile of large quahogs, stuffies are what usually end up on the menu.

the time, Rhode Island was seeing an influx of Portuguese and Italian immigrants, both clam-loving cultures. They recognized the potential of Rhode Island's abundant bivalves, and both cultures had an influence on the modern-day stuffed quahog.

The first stuffie to appear on a menu is believed to have been at the Narragansett Pier Casino in the early 1900s. Despite the name, this was a ritzy upscale waterfront resort, not an actual casino. (Julius Keller, a chef at the resort, is credited with creating and naming clams casino.) Both stuffed quahogs and clams casino became all the rage among Newport's

elite upper class.

I am embarrassed to say it has probably been 10 years since I've read a book that wasn't a cookbook. But while researching the history of the stuffie, I stumbled upon an entire book dedicated to the stuffed quahog. I am so obsessed that I decided to write an article on them, but if this author was so obsessed with the stuffie that he actually wrote an entire book on the topic, I figured I owed it myself to hear what he had to say.

In *Stuffie Summer: One Man Eats Every Stuffed Quahog In Rhode Island*, the author, David Norton Stone, partakes in a delicious

journey throughout Rhode Island in search of the perfect stuffed quahog. He visits all of the well-established coastal restaurants and delves into the nuances of each place's recipe.

Surprisingly, he didn't encounter a single bad contestant, and his favorite came from Matunuck Oyster Bar in South Kingstown.

At the end of the book, the author includes his own recipe, which has similarities to my own, but we disagree on one main ingredient: green bell peppers. My mother never used them in her recipe, but it seems like the majority of restaurants do. I've tried including them, but for some reason, I just don't think they work

"Quahogs have been central to the diet of those who live along Narragansett Bay as long as there have been people and gulls there."

David Norton Stone, author of *Stuffie Summer*



When the paper an ingredient list is written upon looks this weathered, you know it's a good recipe. This is my mother's recipe for stuffies (using canned clams) she provided me with when I first moved to Cape Cod and began clamming in 1996. It lives safely nestled inside my prized Betty Crocker cookbook.

because I find them overpowering. Where I live on Cape Cod, the stuffie is cherished almost as much as it is in Rhode Island, and the majority of those I have sampled at restaurants here include bell pepper as well, so it seems like I am in the minority on this, yet I still believe I'm right.

Like me, the author feels that chourico or linguica is the superior choice over Italian sausage, which some restaurants use, and that a dash of hot sauce and a drizzle of lemon juice should be mandatory when eating a stuffie. We also both agree on the fact that Ritz cracker crumbs play a crucial role in a proper stuffed quahog, and that garlic and a lot of butter are also critical ingredients.

Following is my own prized stuffie recipe, which is roughly based on my mother's, but

I've added quite a bit to it over the years.

ANDY'S STUFFIES

3 cups of diced quahog meat (about 36 top neck quahogs, the size I prefer)
 3 cups onion, diced
 1/2 cup celery, diced
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 3 tablespoons garlic, minced
 2 cups ground linguica
 2 teaspoons dried oregano
 1 packet Goya Sazon Con Azafron
 3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
 2 teaspoons Frank's hot sauce
 1/2 cup clam broth
 4 cups fresh breadcrumbs made from English muffins (4 muffins)
 2 cups Ritz cracker crumbs

3/4 cup fresh parsley, minced
 10 tablespoons butter
 Paprika
 Garnish: Hot sauce and lemon wedge

Thoroughly rinse the quahogs under cold water to remove any sand and grit lodged in the shells. Steam them in a large stockpot until they pop open, about 10 minutes. Move them to the sink and spray with cold water (reserving the broth). Remove all the meat from the shells and rinse under cold water to remove any remaining sand, then dice them up. Set aside the shells. Sauté the onions and celery in the olive oil and a bit of the clam stock until almost transparent, then add the garlic and 1 tablespoon of Worcestershire sauce. Stir well, cover, and cook on low heat for 5 minutes,



stirring occasionally. Add the ground linguica and cook for another 5 minutes. Next, add the butter, clam broth, minced clams, oregano, Sazon, remaining Worcestershire, and hot sauce. Cook on low heat, stirring often, for about 10 minutes. Stir in the cracker crumbs, muffin crumbs, and parsley. If the mixture looks too dry, add some more broth. If it's too wet, add more breadcrumbs. Mix together thoroughly, taste, and season with additional Worcestershire and/or hot sauce, if needed. (Do not add salt—the clams and broth will provide plenty.) Loosely pack this delicious stuffing into the empty quahog shells, sprinkle with paprika, and cook on a baking

sheet for about 12 minutes at 425 degrees. Finish off under the broiler if desired. Serve them with a small pat of butter on top, and a sprinkle of hot sauce and lemon juice.

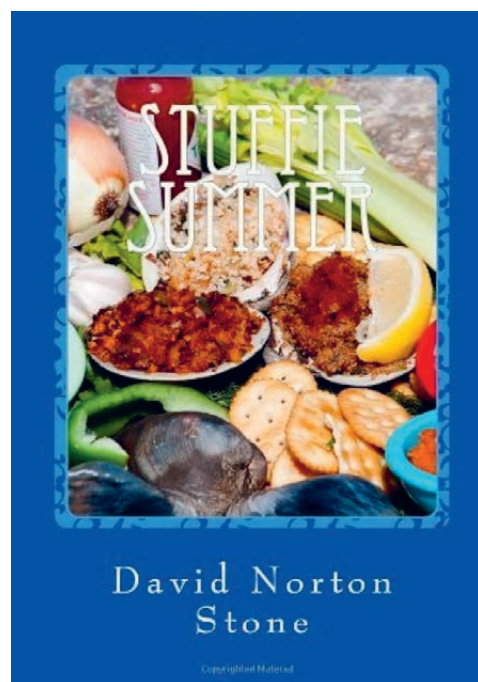
Making stuffies from scratch is a long, messy ordeal, but I guarantee you they are worth the effort. These freeze well, so I often make a double batch.

Our next version of the stuffie comes from David Norton Stone's book. Al is the author's stepfather and hails from Fall River, Massachusetts where, as David puts it, "Chourico is like mother's milk." Al, a true lover of clams, was once seen eating, in a single meal, "a heaping bowl of steamers, a bowl of clam chowder, a stuffie, and fried clams."

AL'S HOT CHOURICO STUFFIE

2 quahogs
1 cup celery, chopped
1 cup bell pepper, chopped
1 small onion, chopped
4 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon garlic, minced
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 pound hot chourico
1 cup Ritz cracker crumbs
1 tablespoon fresh dill, chopped

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cover the quahogs with an inch of water and cook in a large, loosely covered pot until the shells open and the clams are cooked through. (This will take about 10 ten minutes.) Discard any clams that don't open. Remove the clams from the pot with tongs and let cool. When cool enough to handle, remove the clams from the shells and mince. Separate the halves of each shell.



Stuffie Summer, 52 pages, \$5.99; Amazon.com



One Clam, Five Names...

Quahogs have unique names based on their size.

LITTLE NECK	10-13 per lb.	1" hinge
MIDDLE NECK	7-9 per lb.	1 1/4" hinge
TOP NECK	5-7 per lb.	1 1/2" hinge
CHERRYSTONE	3-4 per lb.	2" hinge
CHOWDER	1-2 per lb.	2 1/2" hinge

LITTLE NECKS (or littlenecks) are the baby quahogs. Named after Little Neck Bay on Long Island, they are the sweetest and most tender. They are best eaten raw, steamed and served with melted butter, or served whole over pasta.

MIDDLE NECKS are the next size up, and can be used in the same manner as littlenecks.

TOP NECKS are preferred for recipes where the clams are served as an appetizer in the shell. When they get to this size, I like to split the meat in half when shucking.

CHERRYSTONES are named after Cherrystone Creek in Virginia. When quahogs grow to this size, the meat gets tougher. Cherrystones are best when chopped and used for stuffies or chowder.

CHOWDER clams are the big, old tough ones, but they pack the clammiest flavor. Dice them up after cooking, and use them for dishes like clam cakes, fritters, dips, and pasta sauces. Freezing helps tenderize the meat.

Brown the chourico in a frying pan for a minute or two over medium heat. Add the butter, chopped vegetables, garlic, and cayenne, and cook until the celery, onion and bell pepper are almost, but not quite, soft. Remove pan from heat and stir in the crumbs, minced clams, and dill. Mix thoroughly.

Use a tablespoon to stuff shells with the stuffing. Place on a cookie sheet and bake in the preheated oven for 25 to 30 minutes. 🐟

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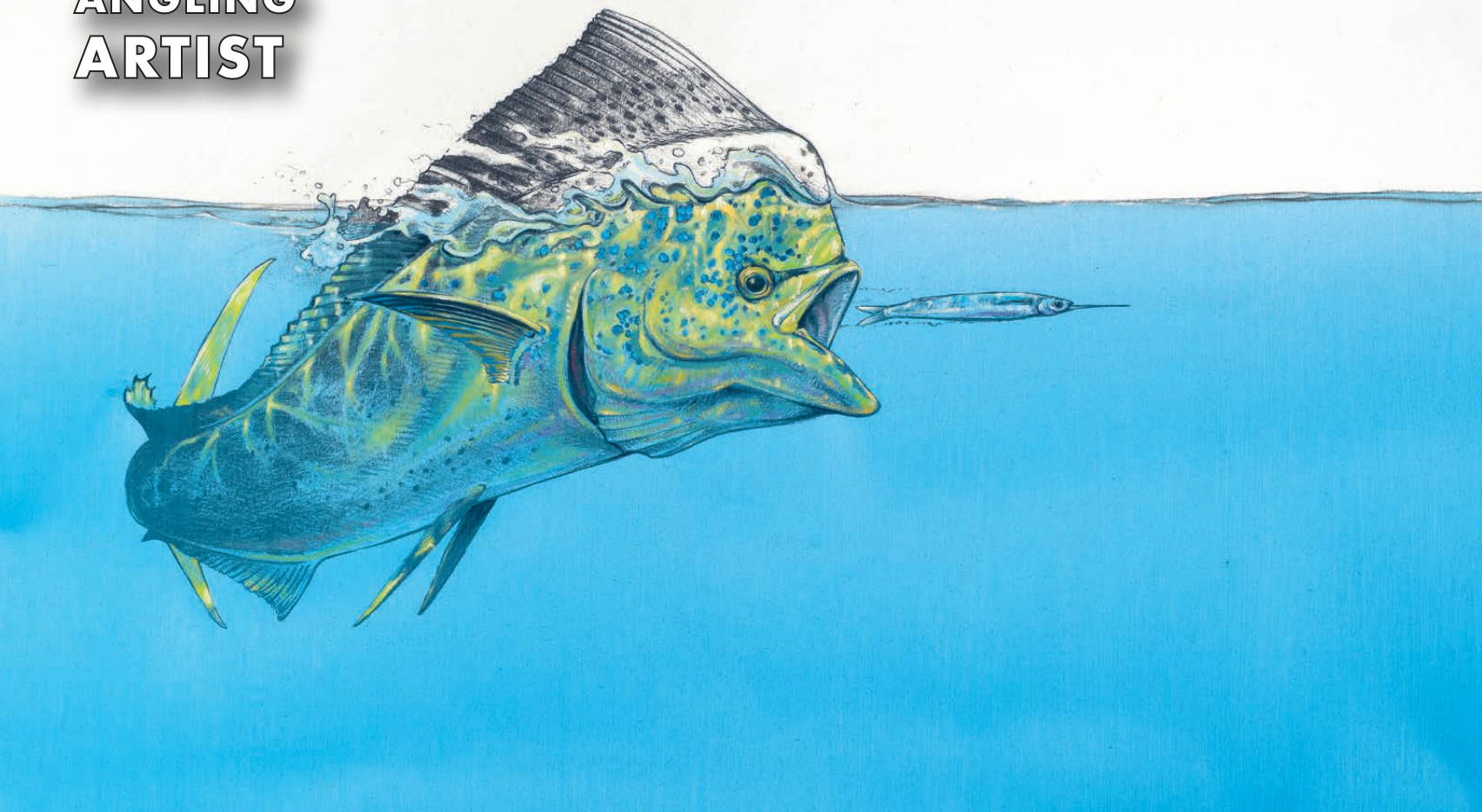
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ANGLING ARTIST



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BY MATT HAEFFNER

Though fishing on the opposite coast, Amadeo Bachar's favorite pursuit is a familiar one to us here in the Northeast. With a surf rod in hand and the family dog, Jasper, by his side, he scans the suds in front of him for signs of boiling or breaking fish in the whitewash. Twenty years ago, he was often greeted by "foamers" (West Coast jargon for "blitzes") of 25-pound striped bass during his morning strolls on the beach. "Since then," said the lifelong Californian, "our striper fishery has changed a lot. I have friends down south who are now seeing big schools of 20-pound stripers from Santa Barbara to LA." Striped bass aren't native to the Pacific Ocean or its tributaries, but no matter where they swim, these seven-striped fish inspire awe and reverence in artists and anglers alike.

Bachar's career as an artist began in 2004. Being part Filipino, a culture in which fishing is a staple, Bachar says "fishing was just part of our existence growing up." His father—a devout steelhead fisherman—raised him on the rivers that meander the mountains of Humboldt County. They frequented the shores of the San Joaquin River Delta to fish for striped bass, and he recalls catching small bluefin tuna while albacore fishing in their 19-foot Bay Runner, *The Coconut*, which his father and uncle shared.

Bachar drew early inspiration from *The Lore of Sportfishing* by Frank Moss, a book that dives into the origins of angling for sport and features detailed illustrations of popular gamefish from sea to stream. The book helped Bachar realize his knack for creating scientifically and anatomically accurate depictions of

saltwater and freshwater fish. "In high school, I really explored my artistic ability, but I wasn't focused on fish," said Bachar. "I was always drawing or painting because I was good at it and it made me feel more positive about myself," he continued. "In college, I got sidetracked with surfing and fishing, so I didn't make the immediate connection between my hobbies and artistic abilities until later on."

Once he realized the intersection of his personal interests and natural artistic skill, Bachar decided he didn't need an art degree to pursue it professionally. He switched his major to marine biology, which was more aligned with his lifestyle and leisure pursuits, and upon graduating with his B.S., he joined the University of California's Santa Cruz Science Illustration Program in 2004. "Stylistically, I was always



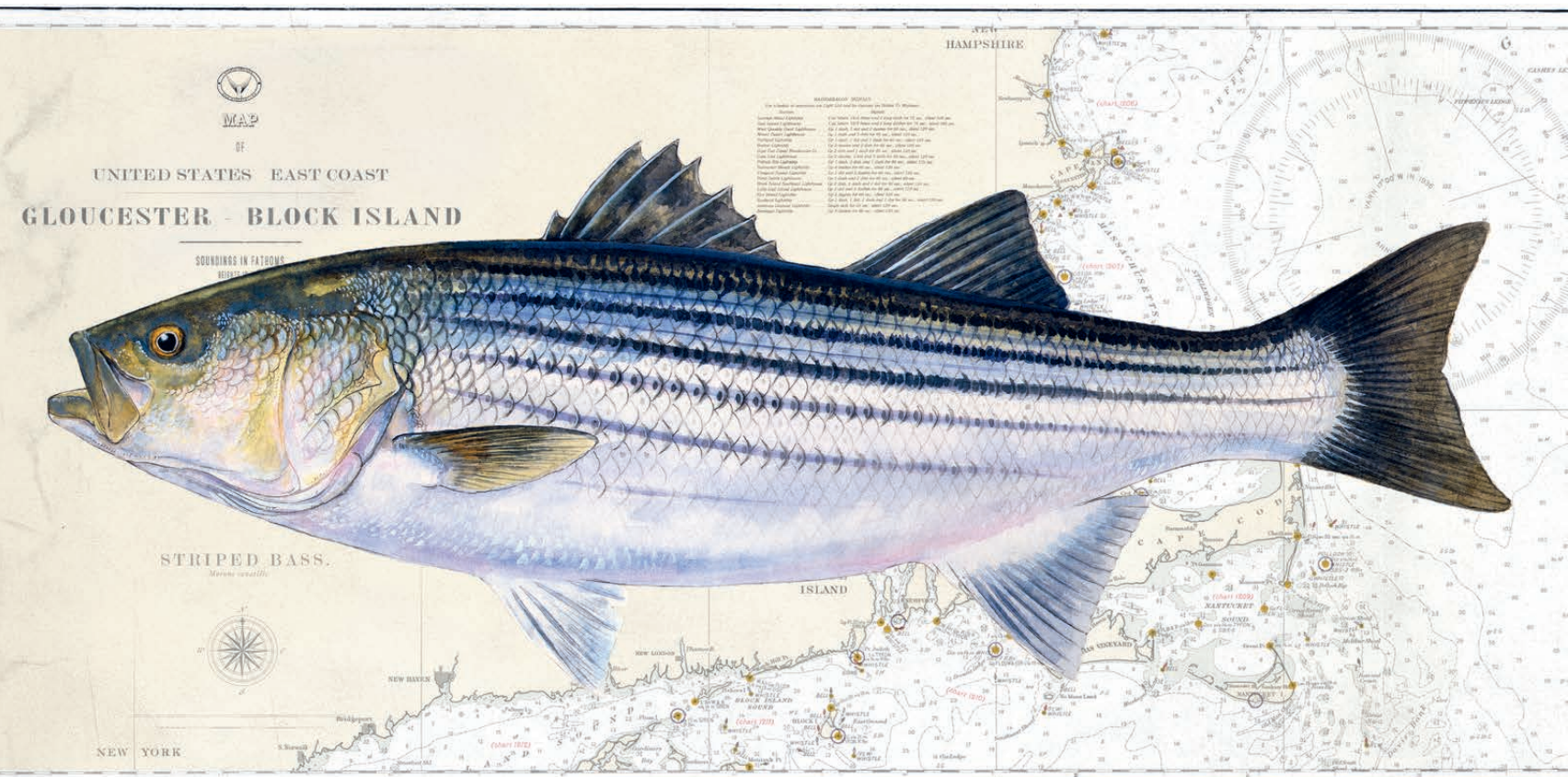
very good at realism, and this program reinforced that ability and honed my skill set,” Bachar said. The program consisted of just 10 students who took the same classes for one year and, because it was so portfolio driven, he quickly started building a body of work.

With school in the rear-view mirror, Bachar began doing very general, scientific fish illustrations for a variety of publications and organizations, including the California Department of Fish & Wildlife. “They were redoing all the fish IDs for their guidebook, which consisted of at least 100 different species, and I was up to the task,” said Bachar. He was able to maintain licensing rights to all those fish, and by 2008, he had established himself as a competent and talented freelance illustrator, with his artwork published by *National Geographic* and the United Nations, among others.

When Bachar attended his first fishing trade show with prints of his artwork, he made only \$300. It covered his gas money to and from the show and bought him a few beers, an exciting and prosperous outcome for a young artist selling his work for the first time.

Eventually, Bachar garnered enough of a following that he wound up on the radar of some






big-name brands. He began merchandising his designs with national fishing media and apparel companies like Bloody Decks Outdoors, Salty Crew, and Igloo, which put his art in front of millions of eyes. To this day, Bachar's most popular body of work is his Nautical Chart series—a collection of watercolor paintings that showcase the United States' most coveted gamefish over region-specific charts of their native waters.

Nowadays, Bachar spends more time managing his website and online store, but he's also developing local scientific illustration

workshops and an online curriculum to teach aspiring artists of all skill levels. "I've been given a gift," he said, "and have a responsibility to share it with others in more ways than one."

Bachar, who turns 50 this year, said his goal for the past decade was to establish himself as a fish artist. With his art now shipping around the world, he's more than content with where his career has taken him. However, he admits he'd like to focus less on the management side, get back to his creative roots, and spend more time fishing. "I'm always telling other

people's stories through commissioned work, but in this next decade, my goal is to share some of the stories that I want to tell," he said. One of those stories is "An Ode to the East Coast Striper", which would aim to capture the locations, tackle, people, and culture of fishing for Atlantic striped bass.

And while Bachar typically starts each painting by sketching the fish and referencing photos from friends, the client, or the internet, "Sometimes," he says, "I like to catch it right before I paint it." If that's the case, Bachar is due for a trip to the Northeast. 



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The Cold Snap Pattern

The first cold nights of winter ignite a surprising bite for big striped bass.

BY RYAN NORTON

The gray-white frost of Eddie's breath remained suspended in a kind of slow animation, projected against the inky backdrop of the November night, so much so that for a moment I thought he was vaping.

Even from 10 feet away, I heard the audible thump of his rod. Braid tore from the line roller as if he'd clipped the Bomber Long A to the back of a passing SUV. I had just slipped into the water

and the tips of my fingers were quickly going numb. Suddenly, the screaming drag stopped, as if someone hit mute right as this scene approached a climactic point in the plot. The fish spit the hook and as Eddie's neck swiveled in my direction, I noticed his eyes were as wide as boiled eggs, not because he had lost the first fish of the night, but because he realized that I wasn't a liar.

"There are giants here."

The first substantial cold snap in November often sends large resident fish into a feeding frenzy.



It was mid- November and for the first time in three winters, I asked a friend to join one of my secret missions. Eddie was my partner in the surf and had shared some of his most precious spots with me, so I thought it was only right to invite him. Plus, it can be lonely and boring out there in the cold when the fishing is slow, which is often. He showed moderate interest at first and admitted that he didn't typically do much "holdover fishing." I assured him that this would be different, and he agreed to meet me.

At the time, Eddie didn't realize that I'd brought him to an area on that night for very specific reasons. Earlier that day, he asked "isn't it going to be freezing tonight?" The answer was yes, and that was exactly why we

needed to go, to catch what I have come to call "the cold-snap bite."

The first real cold snap in November often sends our resident fish into hyper drive. After three years of experiencing this phenomenon, I believe the fish sense that winter is coming and aggressively feed in anticipation of the brutal months ahead. Shortly after this feeding event, which can last up to a week, the fish change behavior and act more like sluggish holdovers, sticking to bottom, slowing their metabolisms, and feeding infrequently. By early December, patterns I swear I had uncovered evaporate into the ether and it's back to grinding for weeks at a time with very few—or sometimes no—bites.

This first cold snap, coupled with the thinning of natural bait, represents a unique oppor-

tunity for those of us who scour the backwaters for striped bass that pass on the migration and call our local estuaries home. When I am lucky enough to find the fish at the right stage of the tide and decipher what they want to eat, I often enjoy some of the best fishing of the season. Last year, I was happy to finally share this event with a friend who got to witness and partake alongside me. A part of me had almost forgotten how special it was, but seeing his disbelief after almost getting his shoulder dislocated on a giant fish in sub-32-degree temps was all it took to remind me how lucky I am to do what I love 12 months a year.

Shortly after Eddie lost his fish, I went tight. After a respectable fight, I eventually got the fish to roll on her side and we got the first

glimpse. It was a stout 25-pound-class fish and Eddie couldn't believe it. If I recall correctly, he simply yelled "Dude!" or "Bro!" Whatever he said was drenched in monotone bewilderment. What he meant was, "This makes no sense!" We had just spent the previous month chasing the last of the schoolies as the Fall migration waned in our local waters. On countless nights, we drove from Massachusetts to Rhode Island just to catch a few small fish, or often no fish. Suddenly, this secret winter wonderland revealed itself, as if I had just lifted a magic curtain that revealed a kind of Striped Bass Narnia.

I explained that even larger fish were in the area so we needed to keep casting as it was clear that they were fired up. I knew that we had the cold snap working to our advantage, and it was just a matter of time before we connected with something bigger. The last few winters had taught me that 35-pound fish were present in Massachusetts waters, some of which I have caught into the first week in January after going weeks without a bite. Other fish that I suspect were even larger had gotten away—bent hooks and demolished plugs were common occurrences at several of my favorite winter spots.

I took off the Bomber minnow plug I was using and clipped on a Super Snax weightless soft plastic. As I retrieved at a slow/medium speed, I got absolutely smoked by a bigger fish that immediately began to run. I fish with my drag set extremely tight, so Eddie knew it was a good fish on account of the lengthy runs it was taking. Even when I got the fish in front of me and grabbed my 60-pound leader, she didn't stop fighting. Cold water exploded into the November night as her tail slapped the surface, propelling her in a circular pattern. When she finally settled, I got my grip on her bottom lip and held her up for Eddie to see. She was somewhere in the 28- to 30-pound range, chunky, and had a beautiful blue-white hue. These fish were not merely *surviving* in the frigid estuaries all year—they were healthy and *thriving*.

I landed a few more fish in the mid- to upper-20-pound range and Eddie was kind enough to snap a few photos for me, but I could tell he was determined to land one before the night ended. He had hooked up at least three more times since losing the first fish but hadn't successfully landed one. Each of his hookups began with heart-pounding drag screams and ended in silence. Eddie is an experienced surfcaster, having landed fish up to 51 pounds, so this

The author believes that the resident population of large striped bass in every state from New Jersey to Maine is larger than most people realize.



wasn't a matter of skill. Looking back, I don't think he was mentally prepared for striped bass mayhem to unfold in 30-degree weather. The first time you connect with a large fish in the context of a frigid landscape, it doesn't make sense and can catch you off guard because it goes against so many of the widely accepted "rules" of fish behavior related to water temp, depth and "water quality." That, coupled with frozen fingers and impaired dexterity, certainly makes for challenging fishing.

My last fish of the night was about 30 pounds, and after releasing her, I took a break. Eddie continued, and just as we were about to leave, he hooked into another fish. We both sighed in relief as he brought the fish to his feet. It ended up being the smallest fish of the night, yet still over 20 pounds.

A few nights later, he returned on his own and sent me a picture at 1 a.m. of him holding an absolute monster, bigger than any we had caught a few nights earlier. I laughed out loud when I got the text because he was wearing one of those Russian-style, furry winter hats in the photo, something I assume he procured specifically for his return to our winter wonderland. He went back for redemption, made the appropriate adjustments based on his previous struggles, and landed his first, but certainly not his last, winter giant. I wished I could have been there, but I felt a sense of relief that I had someone I could share these stories with. Secrecy is vital to preserving the areas that hold larger fish, but I had fished these spots alone for so long that I'd experienced the magic in a vacuum, so to speak. It was like winning the

Eddie with a monster cold-snap striper.



lottery and having to keep it a secret. Once I shared this phenomenon with Eddie, I felt renewed.

It is always a gamble in storytelling when you start with the ending and work your way back to the beginning, but it's worth explaining what led to my cold snap discovery.

As I waded into the trenches of my early 40s, I started getting small glimpses of ways in which my age and perspective has the potential to bring new gifts to the table in exchange for more youthful gifts (like good eyesight) that have fallen to the wayside. For one, I am a little less encumbered by the warm cloak of thinking that I know everything. In fact, the deeper I descend into this surfcasting rabbit hole, the more I realize I still don't know much at all. Or more accurately, I've come to terms with what is more likely true. What I know about

striped bass only serves me on occasion, or for fleeting periods, until new truths, or better truths, unravel, bringing me on a non-linear fishing journey that may be perceived by others as progress.


This fluid, ever-evolving way of thinking about surfcasting and fish behavior has several advantages. First, it's allowed me to contemplate what crazy, unlikely, and seemingly impossible things are achievable in this sport. Freeing myself of any rigid, absolute truths has afforded me the luxury of daydreaming about being able to catch large fish in local waters 12 months a year, something that the younger me thought was impossible. Refusing to tie myself to the anchor of past lessons allowed me to press through some daunting thresholds of "failure." It wasn't always easy, but I did my best to view my winter outings

as exploratory instead of through the binary lens of "successful" or "unsuccessful." On the other side of those thresholds, I experienced some of the most memorable nights of my life.

A few years back, feeling depressed that winter had arrived, I asked myself a simple question. What if I keep fishing? What if I don't put the gear away and continue fishing all winter?

It is no secret that many estuaries attract "holdover" stripers that stay in local waters all season. I wrote an article on how to target "holdovers" in the 2022 *On The Water Angler's Almanac*. The article was mostly a how-to guide on targeting small fish throughout the winter by scaling down tackle and using the right tactics. Shortly after that publication, I set my sights on a new goal. I wondered if larger fish, in the 20- to 30-pound range, live in Massachusetts all year long. After a few years of scouring the backwaters from Cape Cod to north of Boston, it turns out they do, and lots of them.

I now believe, through direct experience and from credible contacts in other states, that the resident population of large striped bass in every state from New Jersey to Maine is astronomically larger than anyone previously understood.

For readers looking for an easy path to catching them, I regret to say that there is nothing easy about winter fishing. I have, however, stumbled on a pattern that has offered me a handful of tides that I will never forget. As winter approaches, many surfcasters are willing to venture out on warmer nights, partly for their own comfort, but also because they believe warmer weather leads to more active fish. I also believed this for years until many frozen nights revealed the magical effects of the Cold Snap on fish behavior. I was hesitant to refer to it as a pattern after the second year, but now, as I approach the fourth consecutive year of testing this pattern, I am comfortable that it holds true. Of course, I am well aware that what I know about striped bass will continue to evolve, transform, dissolve, or otherwise surprise me, over and over, until the very end. 

A few years back, feeling depressed that winter had arrived, I asked myself a simple question. What if I keep fishing? What if I don't put the gear away and continue fishing all winter?



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The Giant Brown Trout of Lake Ontario

*Use egg-imitating beads to catch the
biggest trout of your life in New York.*

BY JOSH LONG

Want to catch the brown trout of a lifetime? There are a few places that constantly come to mind: Iceland. New Zealand. Argentina. Chile. New York. Yes, you read that right. Many of the big brown trout you see on your social media feed and in books and magazines are caught in far-flung locations with astronomical price tags for guides and lodging. However, right here in New York we have brown trout in the Lake Ontario watershed that rival, if not exceed, the size of the browns in those distant waters. Lodging is inexpensive and the fishing techniques can be learned quickly on your own, if you choose. So, what's stopping you from catching the brown trout of your dreams this fall?



After growing large and strong on the bounty of Lake Ontario's open waters, brown trout return to tributaries in the fall to spawn.

The Fresh Water Fall Run

Just like saltwater gamefish, as the leaves fall and the days get shorter and colder, brown trout, salmon, and steelhead in Lake Ontario change their feeding patterns and begin to migrate. Unlike saltwater fish, which largely migrate south, these fish spawn in the countless rivers and creeks that line New York's border with Lake Ontario. While much of the press and attention in this fishery goes toward steelhead and salmon, brown trout also enter these areas in September and often stay well into the winter. Timing their run is crucial, as being off by a day or two can be the difference between casting into water that seems devoid of life and running into unbelievable numbers of migratory browns.

In terms of areas to fish, look for major Lake Ontario tributaries between the Salmon River in Pulaski to the westernmost border of New York. Every year, trophy browns are netted in the easternmost section of this range, often as bycatch for anglers targeting salmon or steelhead. However, for unknown reasons, the concentration of brown trout seems to increase the further west in New York you go. If your goal is to specifically fish for brown trout, I highly recommend focusing on the western part of the Lake Ontario watershed. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation website lists a number of locations where lake-run browns are present, as well

as providing information on public fishing access and parking. One of the best parts of this fishery is its accessibility. New York State excels in ensuring anglers have access to this world-class fishery through Public Fishing Rights easements.

A few factors reliably signal when browns decide to run into tributaries from Lake Ontario. Large temperature drops seem to trigger these runs, but that alone is often insufficient to trigger large runs of fish. Many of these tributaries are all but tiny trickles in the summer, so even with a large temperature drop, the absence of rain in the early fall may lead to water too shallow for a large brown trout to comfortably traverse. As a result, browns tend to stage off the mouths of tributaries as the temperature drops, waiting for sufficient rainfall to make their runs into the tributaries. A big rainfall might get anglers excited to immediately hook into some of these fish, but large amounts of runoff can reduce water clarity in these shallow, often muddy tributaries, making it difficult for fish to see your presentations. Therefore, ideal timing for fishing these waters is usually a day or so after a large rain and a temperature drop. This delay gives fish time to push into the tributaries and water clarity to improve. Once you've found some fish, they are opportunistic predators, feeding on steelhead and salmon eggs as well as baitfish, making them a great target for anglers.

The Rig

Air Lock foam indicator

(set the indicator around one-and-a-half times the depth of the water you are fishing)



Size 8 Spro Power Swivel



Tag end

Split shot

Overhand knots

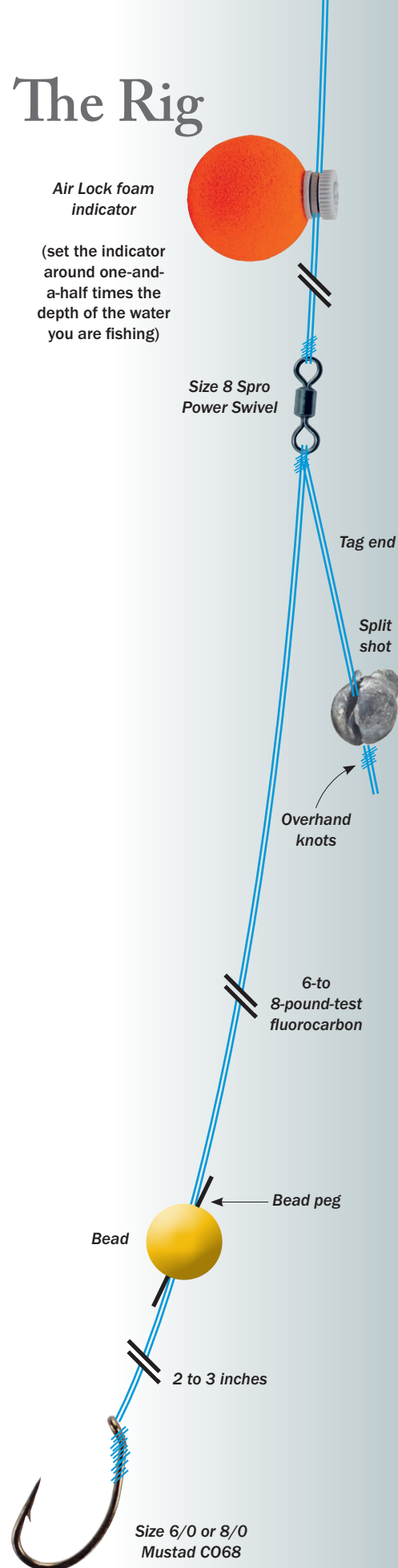
6-to 8-pound-test fluorocarbon

Bead peg

Bead

2 to 3 inches

Size 6/0 or 8/0 Mustad C068





Tributary-running browns primarily have spawning on their minds, but they happily gobble up salmon eggs (and salmon-egg imitations) while in rivers and creeks.


Rigging


Fishing for browns can be as simple or complicated as you want. Some fly fishermen deploy elaborate spey presentations while other anglers come armed with spinning rods and get to work casting lures. Others fish with a centerpin to get the best drag-free drifts possible. Whatever method you choose, there are a few popular techniques to employ. Brown trout feed heavily on eggs during their spawning run; as a result, egg imitations are the most common presentation.

Flies

On the fly rod, this can be accomplished with egg fly patterns. Many anglers opt to carry an assortment of egg patterns in various sizes and colors, but any pattern that's close to the natural peach color of the eggs is usually a good bet. Blue can also be effective, particularly after snowfall. Choosing flies with flash or in brighter colors like chartreuse can help them stand out in murky conditions, while muted, natural colors are often a better choice in clear water.


Wet flies also account for a good number of fish. Classic patterns like Zonkers and beadhead or conehead Woolly Buggers in olive, brown, and black can produce well, as can nymphs that replicate the stoneflies





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The author prefers a fly rod because it allows for quick changes between flies and beads.

found in many of the area watersheds in the fall and winter.

Bead Rigs

While egg patterns have been around for a long time, many anglers are now switching to plastic beads for their durability, low cost, and wide range of colors and sizes. Bead rigs can be deployed on a spinning rod, fly rod, or centerpin. Centerpin and spinning-rod anglers typically choose torpedo-shaped floats made of plastic or balsa wood. Fly fishermen usually go for smaller foam indicators that are more amenable to casting. I have found that an Air Lock foam indicator works very well on the fly rod. Its unique design helps it stay in place on the line without damaging it. Some spinning rod and fly-rod anglers also elect to fish bead rigs without indicators. I usually use an indicator of

some sort because it helps me easily follow my drift and ensures my line isn't dragging. However, if you are fishing in extremely fast water or heavily pressured fish in shallow water, you might choose to skip the float.

I prefer using a fly rod when I'm after lake-run browns because I can switch between throwing flies and beads. I'll outline the rigging here in terms of how I use it with the fly rod, but this rig can be adapted to work on spinning rods and centerpins as well. I use a 9-foot, 8-weight fly rod, the same one I use for everything from stripers to albies in the salt. A 6- or 7-weight will also work, but make sure it has sufficient backbone to turn a large brown away from the downed trees and sharp rocks that are common in these waters.

If you have floating fly line that you use in salt water, it should work fine. I spool up with

a floating fly line that I can mend to get better drifts and attach a 9-foot 2X or 3X fly leader to it. Having a long leader helps with spooky fish, but can be harder to cast, so you might want to cut it down a few feet if the fish are aggressive.

I tie the leader to a micro-swivel — Spro Power Swivels in size 8 (50-pound) have worked well for me. When tying to the swivel, leave the tag end of your knot around 2 inches long. Tie two or three overhand knots on top of each other at the end of it. Your split shot (if needed) will be crimped here between the swivel and the overhand knots. (The knots prevent the shot from sliding off the tag end.) If you snag the split shot, ideally the line will break at the tag end, preserving the rest of your rig.

At the other end of the swivel, tie a piece of 6- to 12-pound-test monofilament or fluorocarbon leader. The length past the swivel varies

A beautiful hen brown trout, heavy with eggs, caught under changing foliage on a New York tributary.



depending on water depth and flow, but around three feet usually works well. Note that New York Great Lakes tributary regulations state that there can be no more than 4 feet between any weight on your line and the hook, so go as light as you can on the leader. I have had days where even the slight difference of going down from 8-pound to 6 made a difference. The challenge is finding a leader that will stand up to rocks, snags, and headshakes from big browns while being thin enough to avoid detection.

Next, slide your bead onto the end of the leader. Tie on the hook below the bead and peg the bead about two to three inches above the hook, trimming the ends of the peg to be as close to the bead as possible. You might be wondering why the bead isn't attached directly to the hook. Some fishermen fuse a bead directly to the hook by melting it, but this can make hookups challenging if there isn't enough of a gap between the bead and the hook point. Additionally, there is the risk of hooking a fish deeply as it inhales the small presentation, hook and all. Pegging the bead is the most common way to deploy beads since it allows the fish to strike the bead itself. As the fish turns, pressure causes the bead to slide down toward the hook, which latches

into the corner of the fish's mouth, ensuring a good hookset.

For the bead, there are endless options. Two productive sizes to carry are 6- or 7-mm and

10- or 12-mm. The larger beads can help you get noticed in high or stained water, while the smaller beads are more realistic and better for low or clear water conditions. A Lazy Larry

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The size of New York brown trout rivals those of far-flung trout-fishing destinations like New Zealand and Patagonia.



ANDREW BURKE

bead is unique in that it has a slot in the side so that you can switch beads without retying. This can be very helpful for finding out what the fish want on a given day. Great Lakes Bead Co. and Trout Beads also make great traditional beads without a slot. As with egg flies, any bead that is close to the peach color of natural eggs usually produces well, but go for chartreuse or brighter colors in stained or high water. For pegs, I like the Trout Beads Peggz.

Split shot weight will vary depending on conditions. I use a pea-sized split shot and add or subtract depending on conditions. For the hook, opt for a strong size 6/0 or 8/0 caddis-style octopus hook. The Mustad CO68 works well and can be purchased in bulk at a reasonable cost.

I recommend getting a small box with lots of compartments to store your beads, pegs, split shot, and hooks. This will keep you organized so that you can find the rigging you need easily and quickly. Some anglers also opt to add an egg sac to the hook on a bead rig if fish are being especially finicky.

Presentation


Presenting a bead rig is straightforward and follows the most important rule of all moving-water fishing: to minimize the drag on your

drift. If you are fishing without an indicator, make a short cast upstream at 2 o'clock and stay tight to your rig as it tumbles in the current. When it reaches 10 o'clock, pick it up, and with a roll cast, throw again. Your goal is to get the bead bouncing along the bottom for as much of your drift as possible. On an ideal drift, you will feel your split shot ticking the bottom as your rig drifts downstream. If you are constantly getting hung up, reduce the amount of weight you have on. Conversely, if you can't feel the rig ticking bottom, consider adding more shot.

With an indicator rig, first set the indicator around one-and-a-half times the depth of the water you are fishing. If you keep getting hung up, add some distance between the hook and the indicator, or reduce the amount of split shot. Like the non-indicator rig, you will know you're in the zone when your rig is ticking along the bottom. Here, however, the best sign that you're in the zone is when you see your indicator occasionally jumping as the split shot hits bottom. Cast the indicator rig using the same approach mentioned previously by drifting from 2 o'clock to 10 o'clock, or as far as you can without having your line drag. Another plus to the indicator rig is if it starts to

drag, you can mend your fly line and continue the drift. With a longer leader, you can keep your line off the water altogether and reduce drag as your rig travels downstream. However, even though it's tempting to make hero casts and long drifts, short, effective drifts and casts usually catch more fish.

When fishing streamers, casting upstream and dead-drifting with an occasional twitch can be deadly. If browns are lethargic, casting upstream and imparting aggressive, frequent twitches may trigger explosive strikes. These fish have no problem with chasing down a streamer if they are agitated enough by it. Experiment with the weight of the head of your fly. Heavily weighted streamers may send fish fleeing for cover in shallow water and bright conditions. Conversely, coaxing a strike from a big brown sitting in a deep hole or murky water sometimes requires throwing a large, heavily weighted pattern.

This fall, set aside some time to visit Lake Ontario in search of a lake-run brown trout. With proper planning, you can be in the midst of a world-class fishery at a reasonable cost. You might just catch the biggest brown of your life, one that would make any angler proud, from New York to New Zealand. 

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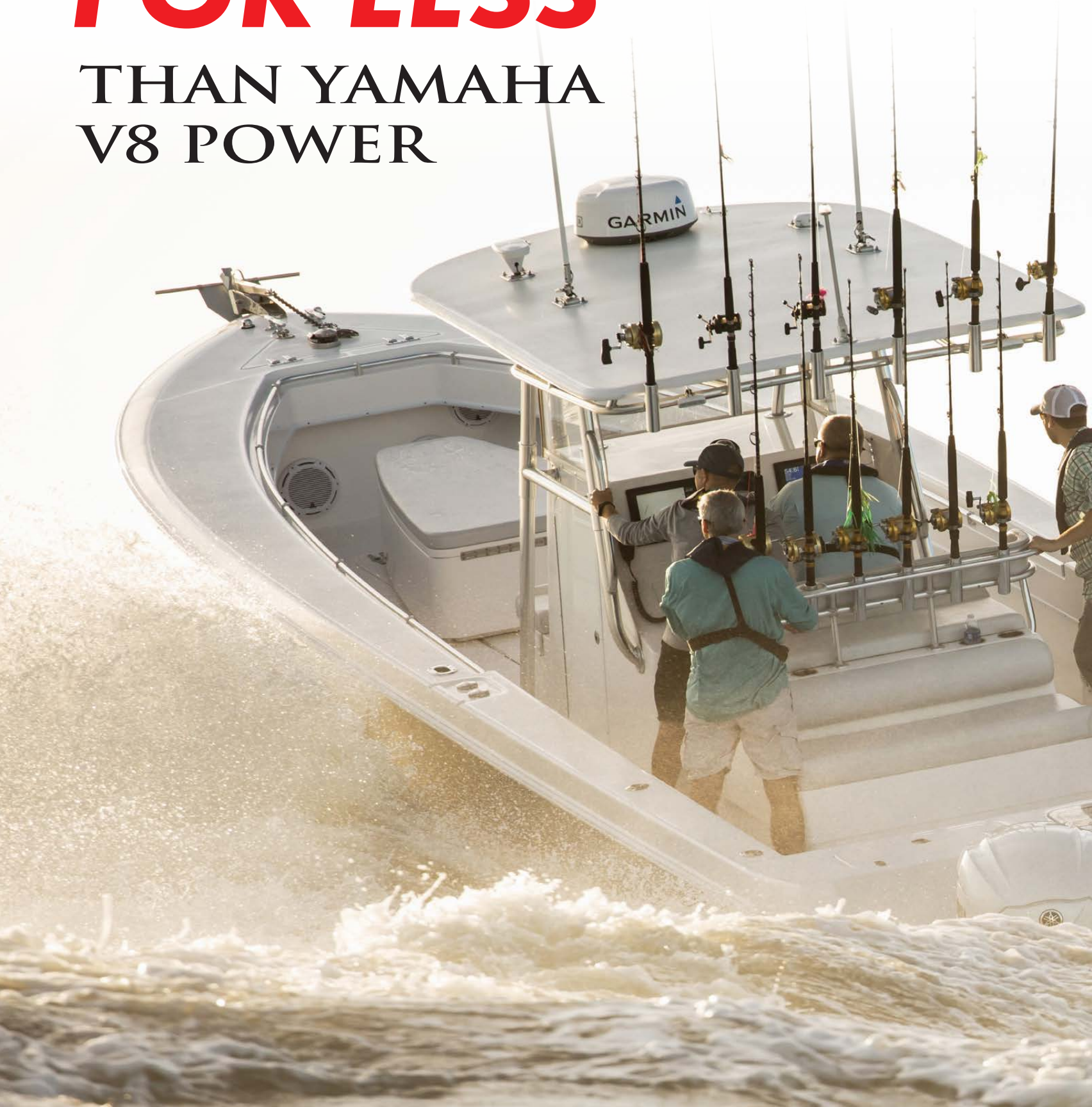


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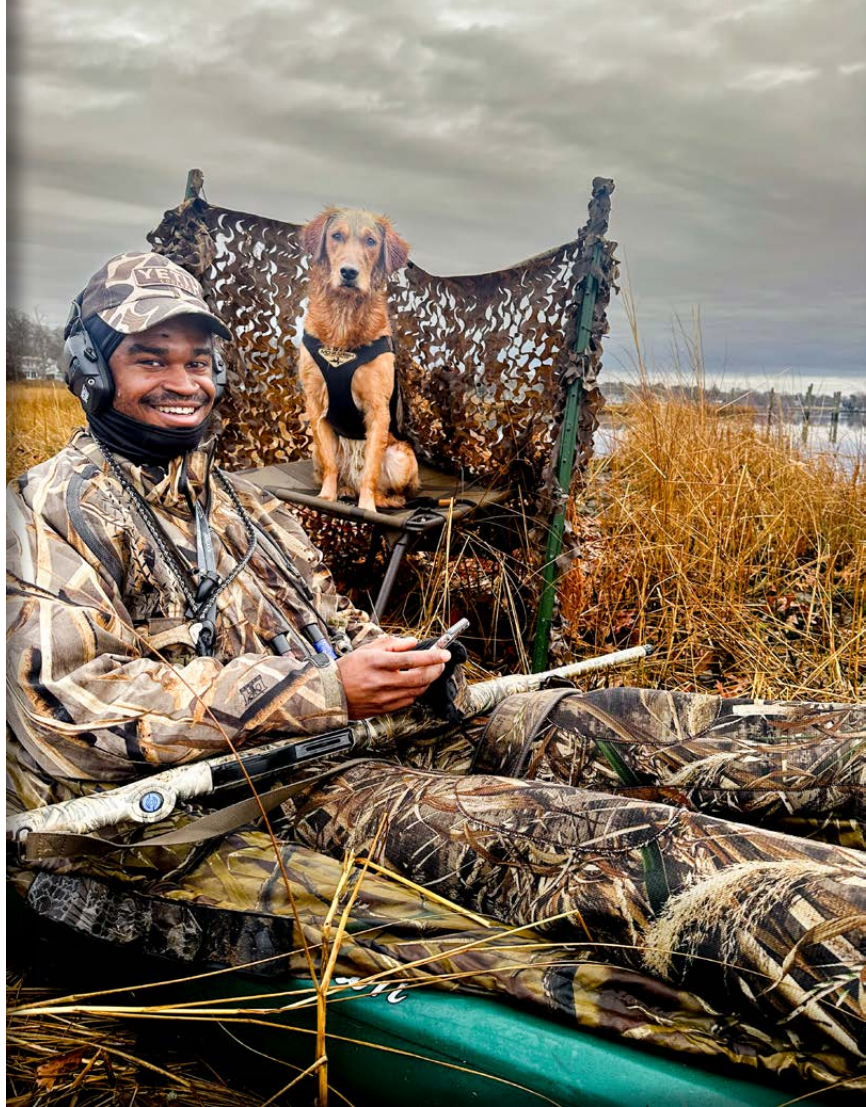


*Duck hunting in the cold months keeps
an angler's cabin fever at bay.*

BY QUINCY MILTON, III

It's 20 degrees. I step outside of my apartment to a blast of cold air that serves as an uncomfortable reminder that summer fishing is a long way off. Still, I continue on my mission to hear the sound of whistling wings under the cover of first light.

As a fly fisherman who doubles as a waterfowl hunter, I relish the cold-weather months. While I am a fisherman at heart and prefer warm spring and summer fishing, living in New England means opportunities for fishing, especially fly-fishing, become far less lucrative during the winter. However, my love of fishing is coupled with my love of the water, so it remains my goal to stay on the water in the wintertime.



Knox joins the author on fishing adventures throughout the spring and summer, but he especially loves hunting season.

The sound of slapping tails on the surface during an epic striper blitz is unmatched, but the whistling wings and subtle groan of a drake mallard at first light is a very close second. Although waterfowl hunting is fundamentally a different activity than fishing, they are conceptually similar. Both activities require researching your target species, learning their patterns, and presenting them with an attractant (flies or lures vs. decoys and calls).

Waterfowl hunting has been a part of my identity since I was a kid. I grew up hunting with my dad in Washington State primarily on land or in shallow, marshy areas. Since moving to New England a few years ago, I have transitioned to hunting almost exclusively over water and it has taken my enjoyment of the sport to the next level.

Benefits of Waterfowling

My golden retriever, Knox, is a bona fide boat dog—he cannot get enough boat rides. As soon

as the kayak comes off the top of the car, he jumps into the cockpit before I even get the chance to launch it. He is equally excited to jump in my jon boat, which only gets me more fired up to get on the water.

Knox is my most consistent fishing buddy. He is especially welcome because he never takes a turn on the bow. Although he likes his leisure time, Knox is a hunter at heart. He is willing to brave 33-degree water in pursuit of some feathers.

When the fishing gear goes into storage for the winter and the hunting gear comes out, Knox knows what is in store for him. As a soon-to-be 3-year-old dog, he is still difficult to control on opening morning. He knows the hunting spots by their scent and loses his mind as soon as I reach the parking lot and put the car into park.

Knox shakes during the entire kayak ride into the marsh. As ducks begin landing in the decoy spread before first light, he will express

his frustration with the lack of shooting through a series of subtle whines. Once the clock strikes shooting hours, all bets are off for this dog.

When birds hit the water, Knox's primal genes kick in. He has turned into a classic retriever who leaps into the water to begin pursuit of the fallen game. His enthusiasm and excitement give him the look of a dog who should be on the front page of *Gun Dog Magazine*.

There's never a bad day on the water with Knox, and waterfowl hunting helps me create those memories throughout the entire year. If you are interested in bird hunting, training your dog to accompany you will enhance the experience and your relationship with your dog.

The Gear

Most of my fishing gear has a dual purpose for waterfowl hunting. In addition to the many similar clothing items I wear, I use the same jon boat and kayak for waterfowl hunting in the winter that I use to chase fresh and saltwater

bass in the spring through fall.

If I go several months without launching my kayak or boat, I lose my routine and become rusty, but if I do so throughout the year, I never have any issue staying on top of the protocol. Waterfowl season provides me with excellent opportunities to use my gear in a slightly different manner and stave off the rust that can come with prolonged disuse.

Location Overlap

Since many of my fishing and hunting spots overlap, I can observe them at various times of the year in very different conditions. That allows me to evaluate prospects for both fishing and hunting more accurately. The more that I travel these waters, the more adept and familiar I become in navigating them in various conditions. More importantly, there is no such thing as too much boat time for the mind, body, and general ability to practice boating skills.

When I hunt estuaries in the mid- to late fall, I can still hear the tail slaps of striped bass moving through my hunting spot before the sun comes up. These noises almost make me want to pack my fly rod right alongside my shotgun. Over the past couple of years, I have even discovered a couple of hunting spots that turned into hunting and fishing spots because of what I observed during waterfowl season.


Field/Sea to Table

Many of my fellow anglers and hunters harvest food because it provides us with the knowledge of where our food came from. We connect with it beyond seeing it in plastic wrap at the grocery store. My freezer is full of birds that have stories attached to them, just as many fishermen can attach a story to their fluke or sea bass. The ability to tie stories to the food I eat provides a better appreciation for it and a greater respect for the animal's life.

On Christmas of 2023, I made duck three ways using mallard and bufflehead meat. I had harvested both on Thanksgiving Day in one of my best hunts of the year. On that particular hunt, I observed Knox take the next step as a retriever. Telling those stories around the Christmas dinner table is what being an outdoorsman is all about.

Keep Your Sanity

Staying on the water at all times of the year helps me stay sane. There is serious serenity at play during the lone fishing days of the spring and some of the solo outings in the pitch black during waterfowl season. It's an equally fulfilling experience with friends and family and, of course, I can never be truly alone with Knox at my side.

I know plenty of anglers who feel trapped for months on end because of the inability to get on the water during colder months. For those who feel trapped when the temperatures plummet, there is a fantastic activity begging for your participation. Grab a shotgun, don some camouflage, and try your hand at waterfowl hunting. 



The first step if you are interested in getting into hunting is to complete your state's hunter safety course. Classes can be difficult to find, and they often fill up fast, so start looking now if you want to hunt next year. www.ihea-usa.org



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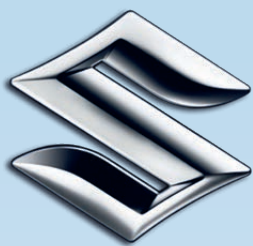
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On spring floats down the Delaware,
Joe Cermele takes freshly caught shad and
chunks them to catch large channel cats.





The PROGRAM

*Floating down the Delaware
with Joe Cermele.*

BY MICHAEL CARR

In 2007, Joe Cermele's career in fishing media began in earnest. He became the youngest fishing editor in *Field and Stream's* storied history. From there, he was sought out by *Meateater* to bring original fishing content to their outdoor library, and after establishing both video and podcast shows for the Bozeman enterprise, Joe moved on to start his own media company called *Cut and Retie*. Now in its second year, Joe has plans to grow and expand the brand, though he has already achieved podcasting success, averaging 40,000 downloads per month.

"I don't know what the next *thing* is," he tells me inside his celebrated podcasting studio, affectionately named "The Bunka." It's got a beer fridge, original Nintendo gaming system, *Tremors* poster, enough ancient skin mounts for a museum, and a near life-size Patrick Swayze likeness keeping watch in the corner. There are images of The Misfits and walls filled with the tackle-shop Polaroids that have become a signature set piece on his show. Guarding the door is Marshellus Wallace, the snapping-turtle mount that everyone should have. The Bunka is the best clubhouse a 40-year-old dude could want.



Cermele fishes the Delaware on a Clackacraft driftboat, a unique vessel among the jetboats typically used in his stretch of the river.



ABOVE: Cermele's podcast studio, The Bunka, is plastered with posters that reflect his love for music, fishing, and 1980s pop culture.

LEFT: The Program begins at Cermele's "new jaw"—a new-to-him launch spot on the lower Delaware River.



As we talk in earnest, it's clear that Joe could have a million and one "next things" because he has built a loyal and dedicated following over nearly two decades in outdoor media. All of his fans would be pretty psyched for a Bunka beer hang, and if Joe could make it happen, we'd all cram in.

Earlier in the day, under a bridge somewhere on the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River, I ponder "*Trenton Makes the World Takes*." I have never seen the giant sign on the Lower Trenton Bridge from this vantage point, yet I know the sad truth that Trenton hasn't made much in a long while. The only holdout is my beloved Taylor Ham, which is still made downtown from the same witch's brew of salt, spices, and offal that John Taylor concocted in 1856. As a loyal son of New Jersey, though, I love the sentiment. Trenton's still in business ... the sign says so.

I'm early. I didn't think I'd get out of the house on time as there are a few family issues that have clogged up my morning exit. Nothing drastic, but parenting doesn't come with a manual, and learning about my children forces me to learn about myself more times than not.

I see Joe's truck come around the corner with a drift boat in tow. Every angler knows the feeling that creeps up the minute or two before trip starts. You get a sixth sense that it's either going to be a memorable day, something that you can call to mind

during the dreariest February workday, or it's going to be one of those stories that starts, *You remember that one time that sucked?* When Joe stepped out of the car, I knew it was going to be the former.

"They blocked off my old takeout," he said with a smile and a handshake, then proceeded to tell me about how the company that owns the perfect boat ramp on the Morrisville side had been forced to put concrete barricades up in front of it due to the insane number of people who found the river during COVID lockdown.

"One bad accident, and that was the end of years using that spot," he says, pointing it out to me as we drive up the road toward the top of the launch.

My wife calls. I take it quickly and then apologize to Joe.

"Kids are having some issues at the moment," I say.

"Dude, say no more," he replies.

We're both in nearly the same stage of life, though my kids are slightly older. He mentions an art show coming up this evening, and I tell him about the Boy Scout Court of Honor I attended the night before. We both agree that it gets harder every day.

"But, I like this age they're in right now, and I know I'm going to miss it," he says.

"It goes by too fast. I just wish it were a little easier sometimes," I say.

"Oh yeah, don't get me wrong. It's nuts," he says, and we share a Dad laugh as he approaches the put-in, where we're about to begin "The Program." This is Joe's home water. He's studied it, learned it, and if he were running a guide service, he'd be sought after. I have to take a moment to look around at the launch and see trees instead of buildings. In the 10-minute drive, we've left Trenton behind and are now tucked away in a section of the Delaware River that seems to be untouched by the concrete just a few miles away. I then realize that we are just up the road from Washington's crossing. It makes sense now why the general chose this particular stretch to launch his boats. "This is my new jaw'n," he says, using one of my favorite Eastern Pennsylvania expressions. For those unfamiliar with Delaware Valley English, a "jaw'n" is anything. In this case, it's the boat launch into the pristine Delaware River morning. The river is wide and calm, almost placid, a fine-looking jaw'n. We shove off, and the adventure is underway.

If Joe Cermele weren't a versatile angler and highly influential fishing personality, he would probably be a guitar player and front man for a band that only your coolest friends know about.

"I loved everything about music, but it wasn't just playing music. I loved the stickers and the tee-shirts and booking the gigs," he tells me, and I realize that Joe would never be one to do anything halfway, which is why the career in music didn't pan out. It was going

Smallmouth bass and striped bass cohabit the Delaware, and smallies frequently intercept flies intended for stripers.



The author proudly displays his first-ever American shad.



Every spring, stripers chase schools of herring up the Delaware past Philadelphia and Trenton, where they can be caught alongside shad and catfish.





A staple piece of decor in The Bunka, Cermele's snapping turtle mount is affectionately named after the antagonist in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*.

to be all or nothing.

"I had a band in college that could've done something, but I had just gotten an internship at *Saltwater Sportsman* and our lead singer was moving down south for graduate school. So, we had choices to make. Do we give those up just to run around and play screamo?"

It probably would've been good screamo considering Joe's taste in music. Anyone who's been on his *Cut and Retie* Spotify page is treated to the assortment of punk, metal, and everything in between that Joe values. In the span of five minutes, he shredded my opinion on Volbeat, calling them a corporate cross between Nickelback and The Misfits, yet we both believe they're still pretty good. I admit to him that I, like everyone else on the planet, bought Creed's first album, but he didn't because he knew they were something created in a boardroom. He knows music like he knows fishing, which is why we all love to listen to him talk. He's one of those rare people who is a natural host, a presence, a per-

son with whom you feel you've been talking to for years even when you don't know him. Somehow, you know *of* him, or you've got a buddy *like* him. He's one of us, yet make no mistake, despite the fact that *he* would never say this to anyone, he can outfish you any day of the week and twice on Sunday. Joe is an expert angler.

"This is my Program," he announces, and I'm expecting something like TB12, where I'll have to do X, Y, and Z to make it work, which I'm willing to do. If he says I have to jump in the water to catch a fish at this particular spot, well then, I guess I'm driving home wet.

"We'll start with stripers, then move down for shad, followed by cats and then stripers on the way out. That cool with you?"

A Delaware River slamfest? Yeah, Joe, that's cool with me.

"Put on a big hollow fleye and start throwing a few toward the bank," he says, still in sight of the put-in. He drops anchor and

maneuvers the boat so I can cast.

I do as I'm told. I'm in The Program and want to *stick with* The Program. On my second cast, the rod bends. I can still see the boat ramp.

"Striper?" I ask excitedly.

"Smalljaw," Joe says, readying the net. He knows by the take. We haven't seen the fish but, sure enough, it's a fat, red-eyed Delaware River smallmouth. A bonus, as we both love smallies. We send him back, glad that he was there, even though it technically should've been striper water. Still, we've caught a fish, and haven't been on the boat for more than 20 minutes; a good start to the day.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to fishing media that Joe made before his current *Cut and Retie* podcast, which runs in traditional interview format with interludes throughout, is *Hook Shots*.

"*Hook Shots* started when I got a Sony Handycam for Christmas one year. I did all of the shooting and cutting. It really was my baby," Joe said in an earlier interview.

The show followed Joe on a series of fishing trips with a wild cast of compatriots. Some are constants like his co-host, Raritan Bay Captain Eric Kerber, who's "Hardcore Tackle" segment was always one of the funniest parts (see the Florida sharking episode where Kerber ends up in a bunny suit holding mayonnaise and a hockey stick), and some are just wild people that Joe found along the way. There's cultural and sporting significance to the show, and someday, a better writer than me will dive into the anthropological importance of what Joe did over the course of 10 years, but until then, go watch them. They need no further explanation.

Along the *Hook Shots* journey, Joe managed to put some really impressive fish on camera, including giant flathead catfish, mammoth gator gar, Amazon peacock bass, the biggest pike any of us has ever seen, and a near thousand-pound hammerhead shark. In addition, we met Jimmy, Kerbs, Hammer, Ross, Hawkins, Joe D., Wolf Hat Guy, Arkansas Brian, Best Friend Mark, Artist Mike, Raftas, Tim-maaaay, and That Guy from Iowa. You probably remember Joe's cast of characters, but they're all too real. If you fish enough, you've met them all, and that was the brilliance of *Hook Shots*. Unlike any other fishing show in the past, the Dances, the Martins, the Houstons, we all felt like we could stand next to Joe on whatever adventure he was on



This weathered piece of dried timber is Cermele's unofficial cutting board when it comes time to chunk some shad.

without him turning and asking smugly, "What the hell are you doing here?"

We're on our way to a shad spot, and we're both hungry. I've brought Taylor Ham, egg, and cheese sandwiches from up north. We're gentlemen, so we don't get in to the age-old debate about whether it's Taylor Ham or Pork Roll. But, it's Taylor Ham, and that's that. If you're from this part of the world, you've most likely had a good breakfast sandwich, and if you're not, we invite you to come down and try one, but don't make it *your* way. Have it how it reads.

I've never caught a shad, and I tell Joe so. He's glad for that because he genuinely loves putting people on fish, particularly shad. We're anchored in one of his shad spots and are working four rods. He's had me cast a fly for a bit, but we now just want to stick one, so I set down my dad's ancient Martin fiberglass six-weight.

"I like to keep the freezer full of shad," Joe says, pointing to an island off our left. "In the summer, I take the kids out there to swim, then I'll drop a surf stake. I catch stripers and cats all day."

A rod bends. Joe expertly grabs it and proceeds to haul in a beautiful roe shad that gives us a few acrobatic jumps like the good Jersey tarpon it is. Scales fly off the fish, and before I know it, a second rod bends, and now I'm fighting a shad. It's a delicate fight.

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While shad can make fine tablefare, when carefully cleaned and prepared, to Cermele, they are more valuable as a chunk bait for large catfish.



Shad have thin lips, and if you horse them too much, the hooks rip right out. Joe coaches me through the fight, and as we net it, I feel a wild sense of excitement. We've got smallmouth and shad. Add a couple more and we've got the slamfest. I'm also starting to sense the inherent scholarship in Joe's Program. I look around at the river and wonder how on earth he happened to find this little stretch of shad highway.

"I've been out here since I was sixteen. This is my jam," he says with a smile while tossing darts back into the water. I appreciate the time it took to set up this outing and feel incredibly fortunate to be involved.

"It's only Tuesday, Joe. How the heck am I going to finish the week after a day this good?" I ask.

He laughs, and I know that he might feel the same.

Joe's time as a professional podcaster began while he was still at *Field and Stream*, but really blossomed during his stint under the *Meateater* banner. With Myles Nolte, former editor of *Gray's Sporting Journal*, Joe created *Bent*, which combined interviews, prepared segments, and tackle tips in a "variety show" format. Myles played straight man to Joe's irreverence, and together they managed to bring some punk to the *Meateater* brand.

"I learned a lot during my time at *Meateater*. Before that, most of what I was doing was self-driven. There, I dealt with people with a lot of opinions," Joe tells me. I can't help thinking

of the scene from *Office Space* where Peter laments about having "eight different bosses."

In addition to *Bent*, Joe worked on two video web series for *Meateater*. He wrote and produced *B-Side Fishing* and season three of *Das Boat*, which combined high-quality production with really interesting guests from all walks of fishing.

"I don't think they fully got what we were trying to do," Joe remembers, which is clear because *Meateater* didn't renew *B-Side*. "I think *B-Side* was the grown-up version of *Hook Shots*, and I'm really proud of what we did. I just wish it had been better received internally."

Those episodes are all still available on YouTube. Joe describes these as his "early albums" and those of us who've stuck with the

band over the years were eventually rewarded with his first solo project in *Cut and Retie*.

Joe pulls the Clackacraft onto an island. “My cutting board is still there,” he says, and I see a chunk of log protruding from the bank. There are blood stains and fish scales on it. “All those scales are mine,” he tells me as I curiously look on.

We’re going to the next stop in The Program to hunt for catfish. One of the shad that we caught has been sacrificed for cat bait, and Joe chunks it up thoughtfully on his log.

Minutes later, we’re anchored in fast water with two heavy rods in the holders. Chunks are soaking and it’s in this quiet, relaxed bit of fishing that I further understand the appeal of The Program. I’m not a chunk bait guy. I’m usually standing, casting, waving a stick over my head, thinking I’m making rod poetry instead of eventual bursitis. I haven’t sat and waited on a bait in a long while.

“I’m not normally one for a long soak either, but there’s something really satisfying about strategically chunking. I’ve got just the right rod, just the right setup, and it’s taken me awhile to dial that in,” he says.

There is a technicality to the way he’s rigged the cat rods. He chose exactly the right sinkers and rigged them clean. The circle hooks are neatly fitted, and everything is just how he wants it to be, almost fastidious yet simple.

The rod knocks over, and Joe fights the fish hard. It’s got some heft to it.

“Not sure what we got here,” he says, and I’m hoping for a cat, but a striper would be just as fun.

Sure enough, it’s a meaty striper that has taken the shad chunk, and as I net him, I realize how hard he must’ve been pulling against the current. The water is moving really fast, and the fish has some shoulders.

“Lazy fish hovering my catfish hole,” Joe chuckles.

We take a quick photo of the striper, Joe kisses the top of its head in reverence, and sends the fish back on its way. Smallie, shad, striper. One more and the slam is complete.

Cut and Retie combines the best of all of Joe’s previous projects under one media banner. He controls the content, the vibe, and the release of the podcast and merchandise. He’s talked to everyone from fishing royalty to his neighbor, Steve. There’s no topic that hasn’t been broached, but he’s been able to do so with an ease that reflects careful planning

Cermele loves putting people on fish, and it comes relatively easy on this stretch of the river, which he’s been fishing since he was sixteen.



and thinking.

“I have to think strategically now. If it’s not helping the brand, I have trouble committing to it. The machine needs to be fed constantly,” he says.

He sets up his schedule so that he always has at least two complete shows done. “I never want to be working on Monday for a show that drops on Friday. It’s just impossible for me, and I won’t be able to deliver what people want.”

Joe is in tune with his audience. From sponsored beer hangs to dedicated responses to messages, Joe always remains loyal to his fanbase. “At the end of the day, we’re not curing a disease. It’s fishing. It’s supposed to be fun,” he tells me, referring to those who take it far too seriously. His listeners, though, always know that Joe has what they want and he’s never going to take it to the point where it stops being fun.

On the show, he is able to break up his interviews with innovative segments including perhaps the most important, “Polaroid of the Week.” Joe inherited boxes and boxes of tackle-shop trophy photos over the years from various sources. He pulls a photo from the box each week, blacks out the name, and writes an original story surrounding the catching of the fish. These segments highlight Joe’s natural ability to be incisive, and hilarious, yet he’s never mean-spirited. The mullets, Starter jackets, and sweatpants are all part of the experience, and it’s just good fun. After

all, everyone in the Polaroids had been proud enough of their catch to have it displayed on the wall of the shop. Joe is giving that time-honored tradition a second life with the original spin of a supremely talented writer.

Joe has future plans for more merchandise drops, and he may even expand further into video.

“For my next video project, I’m hoping to just write, produce, and host it. I’d let somebody else handle the production side,” he says. There have been select offers and he’s constantly being approached by new sponsors. It feels like the *Cut and Retie* brand is right on the verge of some grand launch. I, like many, are staying closely tuned.

We complete the Delaware slamfest with two meaty catfish, and after a long float furiously casting through more good striper water and seeing a nasty-looking copperhead, the day begins to wane. The art show is calling. My kid has a science test, and as much as we would love to sit and keep talking, we’ll likely share more conversations in the future. When you fish with someone, you know pretty quickly if you want to fish with them again. I’m glad that I still keep getting calls from Joe as he builds his brand and keeps making amazing content.

Joe’s Program is like his career. It’s dialed and refined, but it’s so damn fun. Joe Cermele is as real as it gets. If you don’t know him, seek him out. You will feel as if you’ve known him for years, and you’ll be better for it. 🐟



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Costa Photo Contest.....COLIN MALONE, East Patchogue, NY
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Youth.....CHRIS GRELE, Fairhaven, MA
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Bubba Saltwater Multi-Flex Knife Set
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WEEK 3

Youth.....ADAM DEHAVEN, Woonsocket, RI
Bubba Smart Fish Scale + YETI YONDER
Shore.....ROMEO DEANGELIS, Wareham, MA
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WEEK 4

Youth.....MICAH GONYER, Plymouth, MA
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker
Shore.....PATRICK THOMPSON, BERWICK, ME
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker

Boat.....COLIN MALONE, East Patchogue, NY
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker
Kayak.....DANIEL CAMPOS, Nashua, NH
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker
Costa Photo Contest.....DONNA PIRAINO, Gloucester, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 5

Youth.....KILLIAN KELLY, Hull, MA
Penn Spinfisher VI 4500 & Battalion II Combo
Shore.....ROBERT BURCH, East Meadow, NY
YETI Panga® Backpack
Boat.....SILVESTRO ACCETTULLO, Fairfield, CT
YETI Camino carryall + YETI YONDER™
Kayak.....MICHAEL WARDROP, Scarborough, ME
YETI Flip 12 soft cooler
Costa Photo Contest.....JUSTIN GRILLS, Mystic, CT
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 6

Youth.....COLIN FULLER, New York City, NY
Bubba Seaker 10L Sling Pack
Shore.....ROSS SILVA, Eastham, MA
PENN Slammer 5500/Carnage III Surf Combo
Boat.....THOMAS ABBOTT, Portland, ME
Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
Kayak.....DONALD GILBOY, Fairhaven, MA
Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
Costa Photo Contest.....JARED SWEENEY, Glastonbury, CT
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 7

Youth.....CHARLIE MCGRAW, Greenwich, CT
Bubba Smart Fish Scale
Shore.....LAUREN SCOWCROFT, Bridgewater, MA
Bubba Seaker 10L Sling Pack, Pliers Bundle
Boat.....PHILIP HONKALA, Merrimack, NH
Bubba 110V Electric Fillet Knife Bundle
Kayak.....WILLIAM FELDER, Staten Island, NY
Bubba Saltwater Multi-Flex Knife Set
Costa Photo Contest.....LINDSEY ZABOROWSKI, Scituate, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 8

Youth.....AIDEN HESS, Hanover, MA
Penn Spinfisher VI 4500 & 9' Battalion II Combo
Shore.....TODD ZAGURSKI, Plainfield, CT
YETI Panga® Backpack
Boat.....MIKE DONLON, Bronxville, NY
YETI Camino 20 Carryall Tote Bag
Kayak.....DONALD REMINES, Pasadena, MD
YETI Flip 12 soft cooler
Costa Photo Contest.....MARK BUMANN, Salem, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 9

Youth.....CALEB BRASSARD, Dunbarton, NH
Penn Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
PENN Authority.....JOSH DION, Garrison, NY
PENN Authority 5500
Costa Photo Contest.....AARON DIENER, Rockaway Park, NY
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 10

Youth.....MARCO PINTAURO, Sag Harbor, NY
Bubba Smart Fish Scale
Shore.....SEAN UITERWYK, Lyme, NH
Bubba Seaker 10L Sling Pack and Bungle
Boat.....SHANE MESSIER, Riverside, RI
Bubba 110V Electric Fillet Knife Bundle
Kayak.....ZACK FLANAGAN, Quincy, MA
Bubba Saltwater Multi-Flex Knife Set
Costa Photo Contest.....EMMA BARBERA, Marblehead, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 11

Youth.....STELLA ROSE, Chatham, MA
Penn Spinfisher VI 4500 & 9' Battalion II Combo
Shore.....JOSHUA CLEMENT, Derry, NH
PENN Slammer 5500/Carnage III Surf Combo
Boat.....TIM WHITMAN, Hamilton, MA
Penn Slammer IV 5500 Reel
Kayak.....MARK KINSEY, Warwick, RI
Penn Slammer IV 4500 Reel

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Costa Photo Contest..... AARON LAMB, Wakefield, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 12

Youth..... AIDEN BEAUREGARD, Eliot, ME
Penn Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
Shore..... ALEX BACZEWSKI, New Britain, CT
YETI Panga® Backpack
Boat..... DAVID HOFFMAN, Weymouth, MA
YETI Camino Carryall
Kayak..... ROTH NONG, Enfield, CT
YETI Flip 12 soft cooler
Costa Photo Contest..... STEVE LACHANCE, Yarmouth, ME
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses
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WEEK 13

Youth..... PARKER PIOTROWSKI, Hampton, NH
Penn Spinfisher VI 4500 & Battalion II Combo
Shore..... THOMAS DELANEY, Brockton, MA
PENN Slammer 5500/Carnage III Combo
Boat..... ADAM MCCARTHY, Glastonbury, CT
Penn Slammer IV 5500 Reel
Kayak..... MATTHEW SCANNELL, Cranston, RI
Penn Slammer IV 4500 Reel
Costa Photo Contest..... MARK BELLAMY, Hingham, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 14

Youth..... KEVIN DUNN, Hull, MA
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker
Shore..... ROBERT SACRAMONA, Walpole, MA
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker
Boat..... JASON HESTER, Hull, MA
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker
Kayak..... BRIAN STRAYER, North Kingstown, RI
Turtlebox Audio Outdoor Speaker
Costa Photo Contest..... CHASE TRUDEAU, Wells, ME
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 15

Youth..... ZACHARIAH HALMAIER, Lebanon, ME
YETI Panga® Backpack + YETI YONDER™
Shore..... FORREST WRIGHT, Portland, ME
YETI Panga® Backpack + YETI YONDER™
Boat..... SHAWN LALOND, Milford, CT
YETI Camino 20 Carryall Tote Bag + YONDER™
Kayak..... DAN GREENFIELD, Cambridge, MA
YETI Flip 12 Soft Cooler + YETI YONDER™
Costa Photo Contest..... VINCENT GIUFFRE, Plymouth, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 16

Youth..... MICHAEL MILLS, Grafton, MA
Penn Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
Shore..... TED HEINTZ, Port Chester, NY
Penn Spinfisher VI 4500 & Battalion II Combo
Boat..... RICHARD BOUCHER, Lincoln, RI
Penn Spinfisher VI 5500 Spinning Combo (8')
Kayak..... MATT DEWEY, Taunton, MA
Penn Spinfisher VI 5500 Spinning Combo (8')
Costa Photo Contest..... DANA SILVIA, Scituate, MA
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 17

Youth..... COLTON JOHNSON, Shelton, CT
Penn Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
Shore..... MATT LARUSSA, Bailey Island, ME
YETI Panga® Backpack + YETI YONDER™
Boat..... STEVEN MAIO, Beverly, MA
YETI Camino 20 Carryall Tote Bag + YONDER™
Kayak..... ERICK HOLMES, Norwich, CT
YETI Flip 12 Soft Cooler + YONDER™
Costa Photo Contest..... KYLE KENNEDY, Windham, ME
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 18

Youth..... CHASE WHEATON, Duxbury, MA
Penn Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
Shore..... TYLER CENSORIO, Block Island, RI
PENN Slammer 5500/Carnage III Combo
Boat..... TIM WOOSTER, Rindge, NH
SIMRAD NSX 3007
Kayak..... NICHOLAS LOUKELLIS, Niantic, CT
PENN Authority 5500
Costa Photo Contest..... COLLIN KILROY, Darien, CT
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 19

Youth..... REX CLIFTON, Westerly, RI
Penn Spinfisher VI 4500 & 9' Battalion II Combo
Shore..... SEAN MACCARONE, Orland, ME
Penn Spinfisher VI 4500 & 9' Battalion II Combo
Boat..... PAUL FAHEY, Dorchester, MA
Penn Spinfisher VI 5500 & 8' Spin Combo
Kayak..... CARL BUSCHMANN, East Haddam, CT
Penn Battle III 4000 Spinning Combo
Costa Photo Contest..... JAMES LABOUNTY, Wells, ME
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

WEEK 20

Youth..... VINCENT GIUFFRE, Plymouth, MA
Penn Slammer IV 4500 Reel
Shore..... TRAVIS MUNROE, Great Diamond Island, MA
YETI Panga® Backpack + 2 YETI YONDER™
Boat..... REUBEN FEINMAN, Boston, MA
SIMRAD NSX 3007
Kayak..... BRIAN HALL, Portsmouth, RI
Penn Authority 4500 Spinning Reel
Costa Photo Contest..... KALI SCANLON, Amston, CT
Costa Del Mar Sunglasses

2024 STRIPER CUP
IN NUMBERS

4,580 anglers entered
9,255 stripers released
\$100,000+ in prizes won!





ORIGINAL ARTWORK BY JOHN RICE

ENDING *the* STRIPER SEASON

*How do you know
when to hang up the
striper season?*

BY JOHN SARGENT

The treble hook embedded in my hand sits snugly between the bone of my right thumb and the knuckle, the gentle curve of its point now flush with the surrounding skin, which has become pale and taut as I grip my wrist. The striper that delivered this reminder of fall-run unpredictability lies at my feet, mouth gaping in the pouring rain, in an almost crude, silent laughter.

Where are they? I think, patting my wader belt in a panic. The surf thrashes the line of boulders I am crouching behind and sends a blanket of green water across my back. I fumble to turn on my headlamp, then jam my good hand blindly into the crevices of the rock, praying to feel the smooth stainless-steel pliers against my fingertips. *Where are they?!* Another wave vaults over the boulders and cracks me on the head, knocking me on my backside and extinguishing the headlamp, leaving me gasping for breath in the dark....

Pulling up to the beach that morning, I note the temperature outside the truck. A balmy 50 degrees, the warmest it has been in days. It's a week before Thanksgiving, and the entirety of the coast has been turned over like a garden bed, transforming what was once a smattering of green, red, and orange to a stark gray. The iridescent blue of the surf shimmers under a pale sun, and for a moment, I am almost tricked into thinking the scene before me belongs to March. If only that were the case.

These aimless trips to the water have grown more frequent as the days shorten, and I convince myself it's because I enjoy the fresh air, but I know it's because I am praying to witness a sign that the season isn't over. A passing blitz, diving birds—I'd even take an odd-looking splash. The last fish I caught was more than two weeks ago on the night before Halloween—a healthy 30-incher that fell to a white needlefish under a waxing quarter moon. Since then, the surf has been quiet, as have the reports, so I drive the long way home, hoping to see anything that betrays the location of one last migrating school.

While bleak on the surface, November is defined by a stark beauty in oceanside communities. Early evening skies fall behind the silhouettes of shuttered houses, the crackle of oak leaves blow across an empty street, whitecaps dapple with bright, slanted light. Emptiness abounds, especially on the beaches, and I have many nights in a row without seeing another person. If spring fishing announces itself with a sigh of relief, then November is a whimper. In April, those first peeper-drenched nights may be just as cold and quiet, but at least they are spangled by the twinkling of other headlamps as anglers emerge like new shoots from the ground to welcome back life to the water. In short, there's more to come.

November is different. Fishing in November is the lonely walk home after being last to leave the party. It's the final glass of whiskey before crawling into an empty bed. It's the end. I often wish that I were a different kind of angler, one capable of finessing keeper-size bass every month of the year alongside Instagram posts espousing hard work and determination. Unfortunately, come November, I always find myself begrudgingly watching the Patriots, 10 pounds heavier in the midsection, and 50 in the soul.

The crackle of the radio pulls me back into the truck, and I slam the door before driving

off toward town. "You're listening to WLNG, Long Island's oldies station... a storm warning is in effect until 8 am. tomorrow morning. North winds 20 to 30 knots with gusts up to 50 knots and seas 4 to 7 feet will affect areas of Long Island Sound east of Orient Point and the Connecticut River. Very strong winds will cause hazardous seas which could capsize or damage vessels and reduce visibility..."

Perfect timing, I think.

I've decided that tonight will be the last striper trip I'll take for the year, and I choose to end it by attempting something I've never done before. Usually, I spend my last days on the water chasing schoolies in estuary rivers and in the back bays; tonight, I want to aim higher. Where I am on Long Island Sound, the bulk of the fall run wraps up just after the last new moon in October but, sometimes,

Fishing in November is the lonely walk home after being last to leave the party. It's the final glass of whiskey before crawling into an empty bed. It's the end.

one or two cow bass slip silently by much later, long after their brothers and sisters have nestled into their home coves in the Hudson or the Chesapeake. These last-rite bass follow the final meandering schools of bait south, gorging themselves with abandon to fatten their bellies before winter drapes itself across the sea. I've heard stories of guys pulling in 30- and 40-pound bass on Thanksgiving, victories that no doubt keeps them warm and happy long after the rest of us have hung up our waders.

As evening comes, I hunker down in my plug room to prepare. Outside, things have already started to sour, and the wind occasionally creeps through the uninsulated cedar shake, causing the walls to shudder and hum as a gust rushes through the cottage. Scattered across my workstation is a debris field of hooks, swivels, split rings, and shamefully enough, a few cigarette butts, each casting a fractured shadow from the single bulb dan-

gling above. It feels pointless to be putting on new hooks this late in the year, but I tell myself it's because I don't want to taint the mouth of my final fish with rust—nothing to do with what's waiting for me on the other side of the rattling door. A lukewarm beer pulled from an iceless cooler turns into a second, and I can feel my body relaxing as I get a little too consumed in my busywork. In an act of defiance, I pour the rest of my beer down the sink and twist on the faucet, only to remember we turned off the water over Columbus Day.

My destination for the evening is a south-facing point that caps a popular summertime beach. To the untrained eye, this nondescript clump of boulders looks like any other, a rocky stretch punctuated with broken slabs of concrete from the defunct military base and large columns of driftwood, but just off its tip lies a drop-off that conceals a few car-sized boulders. In the fairer months, this location is a hot spot for evening cookouts and flounder fishing because it never produces a tide higher than one's waist. Yet, as the seasons change, it transforms, and the once-flat sand becomes swallowed by waves and white water that pins bait to the shore. It's the perfect place to intercept a few bass on their journey home. Given how rough the surf was forecast to be that evening, the only lures I place into my surf bag are a pair of weighted needlefish and some Super Strike darters. The heavy left-to-right current of the point requires something capable of movement, and the needlefish will help if I can find any bass further out. Another gust rattles the plug room, followed by the heavy patter of something against the windows. Rain.

Perfect timing, I think again.

The only thing worse than leaving the couch this time of year is leaving the truck. Waders have a fantastic ability to keep me the perfect level of dry and warm, and the cab is always just quiet and comfortable enough to make me question why I choose to go fishing in the first place. Sitting in the pull-off above the beach, I find myself unable to open the door. Mentally, I try to plan a path along the stones that will yield the best chance of keeping me dry as long as possible. That's wishful thinking in this weather. The wind has nearly reached gale force, and the incoming tide is climbing fast. If I am going to make a move, it had to be now. I listen to the last rhythmic sounds of the windshield wipers before turn-

ing off the key. One more fish....

The beach is less of a warzone than I anticipated, and I am pleasantly surprised at how warm the water feels against my shins. For a moment, with the humid scent of mung and eel grass cutting through the salt, I think of September nights, and I can feel my confidence rising. By the time I reach the far point, the waves have just started to produce their magic roll over the large boulders, in their low periods revealing the crests of each rock like small mountains in the surf. Given the white water, I opt to start with something heavy and hurl a sinking 3-ounce blurple needle into the darkness. After every fourth turn of the reel handle, I give the needle a jostle, pausing momentarily to wipe the rain from my face.

After a dozen or so casts, nothing bites, and I decide to switch to the darter. This time, I aim far left, allowing the sweeping current to carry the plug to the center of my cast before beginning the retrieve. The action feels strong, and the tip of my surf rod thumps as the darter digs in. Occasionally, the hooks swipe the edge of a rock and my heart stops, hands tingling in anticipation as I pray to feel a solid strike. I pause again, this time to clear weeds from the line. An hour passes, and no strikes come. Deflated, I change positions, clambering along the shore and down into a pool of boulders that sit closer to the water's edge. From here, I need to battle more waves, but the payoff is that I have better access to the drop-off. Once again, I aim left with the darter, waiting in silence as the plug vibrates.

It's these moments that self-doubt is the loudest. Getting skunked in May is frustrating, but I always have the next night. Maybe the fish haven't arrived yet or maybe the tide is wrong. I don't have the same luxury this late in the season, and a skunk tonight means the end has truly come. As I am licking my wounds, I feel the darter shimmy. Nothing substantial, but a gentle movement in an area that is far beyond the edge of the boulder field. I cast again and feel another bump, then another, and soon enough, I am on. It isn't much, a feisty, lukewarm 16-inch schoolie, but it's a bass. Elated, I cast again, this time connecting with a fish that feels a bit better, and I pull a 25-incher to my feet. It's full of vinegar and spitting up sand eels. For the next fifteen minutes, I catch a slew of feisty schoolies; all the while, the tide around me rises.

It's not long until I feel properly satiated, so I lean back on a stump and enjoy my suc-

cess. I have had some decent nights in the fall, but nothing like this in November. Must be the warm weather, I muse. At this point, my pinholed waders are starting to soak through, and I can feel the heavy canvas work pants I am wearing grow stiff and cold with seawater. To add insult to injury, my headlamp has a corroded coil, meaning that I need to fidget with it to produce any light. Let's get one more to end on, I decide. Pulling myself off the stump and back into position, I cast again into the vein of water that has been producing fish and am thrilled to feel another solid strike on the darter. This fish has more weight, and I thank myself for having the determination to stick around a bit longer. The fish takes a fair amount of line, I gain it back, and we repeat this dance until I wrestle it over the lip of the rocks and into my submerged pool. A healthy-looking specimen, just north of 38 inches with a plump belly. I reach down to hoist the fish aloft, bringing it up to my line of vision while holding it with arms outstretched. In that moment, two things happen very quickly.


First, I lose my footing. The rock I am standing on is just a bit bigger than a manhole cover, and with the rising water, it shifts a mere two inches, nothing major, but enough to upset my balance. The second thing is the fish shakes its head. A spasm, mindless and unintentional, but unfortunate. As I fall, I feel my weight descend on my rod and a sickening snap breaks through the hiss of the waves. I then feel a dull pain in my hand, as if someone jammed a blunt stick into the knuckle of my thumb with all their weight. I inhale sharply, sputtering rainwater from my lips as I look at the 4/0 treble hook now dangling from my hand.

As I regain my wind from the last wave, I attempt to sit up, only to be beaten down again by more water washing over the boulders. The darkness in front of me is unyielding, and I

grasp aimlessly at the space below me to try and find my headlamp. The striper, now in my lap, spasms again, slapping my thigh with its broomtail and tangling itself in a mess of braid. In the tumble, I realize I have ripped my waders, and my left leg feels heavy as I try to stand. The pain in my hand starts to set in, and I accept that finding my pliers at this point is a lost cause. Taking a deep breath, I shimmy my forefinger under the curve of the treble and pull. In an instant, I feel the pressure in my knuckle subside, followed by a warm cascade of something dripping down my fingers. Blood, no doubt. As I turn to address my broken rod, I see the faint glow of something green at my feet. The headlamp, thankfully, caught around the cracked guide. Restoring it to my head, I am shocked that it turns on the first try.

The culprit of this misfortune is nowhere to be found, already wriggling free of the line and pulling a Houdini through a gap in the pool back into the white water. Gathering up what remains of my busted tackle, I trudge off the rocks toward my truck, cursing myself all the while.

In the bathroom back at the cottage, I look down at my skewered hand, which now holds a forlorn looking mug filled with some Goslings I found under the kitchen sink. The bleeding has stopped, and the wound resembles the cut end of a flower; a hollow wick reaching down to the bone. I drink deeply from the mug. After such a poignant defeat, I am surprised that I am not feeling sorry for myself. The universe has given me a clear answer that it's time to call it quits, but for some reason I am not ready to listen. Ripped waders can be repaired, fishing rods and pliers replaced, headlamps get new batteries.

Football can wait, I decide, the season isn't over just yet. 



The SWEDISH PIMPLE®
THE LURE FOR ANY SEASON!

Bay de Noc
LURE
Company
Established 1955

BayDeNocLure.com

Gladstone, MI

MADE IN USA



On The Water's
HOLIDAY
Gift Guide



For The Fly Fisherman



YETI Flask

Carry up to 7 ounces of your favorite fly-fishing juice in this stainless-steel, leak-proof flask that comes with a funnel for easy filling.

\$50; yeti.com

Simms Headwaters Sling Pack

Made with water-resistant fabric and YKK Aquaguard zippers, this 12-liter sling bag comes with a fold-out compression-molded workstation.

\$200; simmsfishing.com



Columbia PFG Back Tack Snap Back

Columbia PFG Back Tack Snap Back
This vintage-inspired adjustable hat is lightweight and has a relaxed fit to provide shady comfort on streams, sod banks or around town.

\$30; columbia.com



Simms Tailwinds Rod Cannon

Whether road-tripping it to the Lake Ontario tributaries or flying somewhere more exotic, the Tailwind Rod Cannon provides safe transport and easy deployment for two (4-piece) fly rods up to 9 feet in length.

\$130; simmsfishing.com



G. Loomis IMX-Pro V2S

Built to subdue powerful saltwater species and improve line control, this fly rod features Fuji tangle-free K-frame stripper guides and a custom aluminum reel seat with a fighting butt for those long, grueling, big fish battles.

starting at \$595; gloomis.com



Decathlon Flies Albie Escort

A variation of a classic false albacore fly, the Albie Escort uses thick UV resin instead of messy, hot glue, which makes it easier to tie and gives it a thinner, fishier profile when albies are keyed-in on micro-sized baitfish.

\$9; anglers-marketplace.com

Hardy Averon Fly Reel

With a large arbour and an enclosed multi-pad disc drag system, the Averon combines performance, power and durability into a lightweight package, which earned Hardy the award for Best Fly Reel at ICAST 2024.

starting at \$395; hardyfishing.com



For The Angler At Home



Uncharted Supply Zeus Air Jump Starter/Inflator

This rechargeable multi-use tool can jumpstart a car battery, inflate tires, or charge a cell phone. The kit comes in a rigid storage case and includes a collection of adapters, jumper cables, and an air hose.

\$219; unchartedsupplyco.com



YETI Cast Iron Skillet

These non-stick cast-iron skillets are polished, pre-seasoned, and lighter than the average cast-iron pan. They're designed to hold heat for even cooking, whether on the stovetop or over an open flame. Available in 8-, 10- and 12-inch sizes.

starting at \$150; yeti.com



Carved Lake Art

Showcase your favorite East Coast waters with this framed, wooden 3D nautical chart that has been laser-etched to accurately reflect the detailed underwater topography.

Prices Vary; carvedlakeart.com



Bubba Kitchen Knife Set

Each knife in this six-piece set features a durable G10 handle for a firm grip with a clean look.

\$450; bubba.com



MacKenzie's Fisherman Hand Scrub

Easily clean fish slime, blood, dried salt, and scales from your hands with this moisturizing, lemon-scented, exfoliating hand scrub. starting at \$15; store.onthewater.com



Nick Mayer Art New England Seafood Kitchen Towel

Add fishing accents to your kitchen with a towel featuring the original artwork of marine artist Nick Mayer.

\$20; nickmayerart.com

Industrious Spirit Company Seaflow Ocean Gin

This sustainably-sourced gin made in Rhode Island contains flavors of light juniper and citrus, accented by mild salinity and umami flavors from local oysters and regeneratively-farmed New England seaweed.

\$40; iscospirits.com



West Marine Floating C-Dock

Featuring adjustable backrests, cup-holders, and a faux-teak traction pad for safety, this inflatable 10'6" x 6'8" floating platform is the perfect place for a leisurely hang, whether it's tied off to the boat or the backyard dock.

\$950; westmarine.com



For The Striper Specialist



Grundens Transmit X Jacket & Bibs

This midweight jacket and bib combo is breathable, waterproof, and has snug neoprene wrist cuffs to seal out moisture. Jacket, \$200 / Bibs, \$200; grundens.com



Penn Battle IV Spinning Reel

Building on the solid foundation of the Battle series, the Battle IV incorporates Penn's Hydro Armor technology. Combined with its full metal body and sideplate, it adds protection against saltwater intrusion and corrosion. starting at \$130; pennfishing.com



OTW Striped Bass Cloud Polo

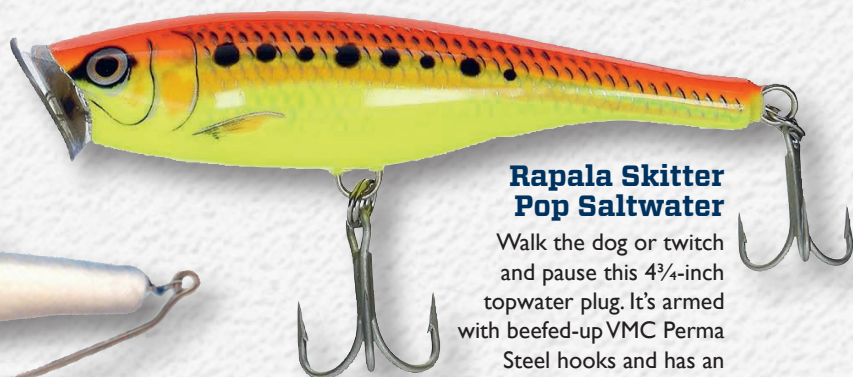
This relaxed-fit polo is made from breathable, sustainably-sourced beechwood, and is cooling, moisture-wicking and provides UPF 50 sun protection. \$81; store.onthewater.com



Fish Snax Lures FishSnax XL

Weighing 1 ounce and measuring 7½ inches long, this versatile soft plastic was designed to cast long distances toward surface-feeding fish while rigged weightless.

\$14; fishsnaxlures.com



Rapala Skitter Pop Saltwater

Walk the dog or twitch and pause this 4¾-inch topwater plug. It's armed with beefed-up VMC Perma Steel hooks and has an internal rattle. The cupped lip generates a loud popping sound as it's retrieved.

\$19; rapala.com



VMC 7385 Tournament Circle Hook

With the widest gap of any tournament-approved circle hook, this non-offset hook is a good match for anglers soaking big baits like bunker or mackerel chunks.

starting at \$7; rapala.com



OTW Striper Ribbon Belt

This sharp-looking belt features a brass buckle and genuine leather tab engraved with our classic striper logo for a clean, formal look wherever you go.

\$50; store.onthewater.com

For The Year-Round Angler



Garmin Panoptix PS22-IF Ice-Fishing Bundle

Packed in a glove-friendly water-resistant carrying case, this ice-fishing kit features two live sonar modes. It allows you to customize your 7-inch display to include sonar and mapping, so you can easily bounce between holes to maximize fishing time.

\$2,000; garmin.com



HUK Women's Cold Front+ Pullover Hoodie

This breathable and antimicrobial hoodie provides UPF 50+ sun protection enhanced by a full-coverage hood and kangaroo pocket for hand warmth in brisk but sunny conditions.

\$70; hukgear.com



HUK Scale Primaloft Jacket

This Primaloft-insulated jacket features a unique fish-scale pattern on its water-repellent nylon shell. It packs down into its own pocket, making it the perfect layer for the all-season angler on the go.

\$130; hukgear.com



Humminbird ICE Helix 7 CHIRP GPS G4 All Season

For use on the boat or the ice, this dual-purpose fishfinder features

Humminbird's CHIRP Interference Rejection to keep competing sonar signals from interfering with your view, an adjustable sonar zoom to focus on schooled fish, and Basemap technology for a clear view of underwater terrain, among other useful features.

\$950; humminbird.johnsonoutdoors.com



Simms Challenger Insulated Boot

These 14-inch boots are neoprene insulated, lined with fleece to trap heat and shed moisture, while rubber outsoles provide traction on slick or icy surfaces.

\$200; simmsfishing.com

For The Fishing Family



AFTCO Youth Samurai Hooded Performance Shirt

This lightweight, moisture-wicking hoodie features UPF 50 sun protection and is quick-drying and stain resistant, whether the culprit is spilled lunch or fish slime.

\$39; aftco.com



OTW Store Youth Shark Long-Sleeve Shirt

Give the gift of comfort to the aspiring young angler in your family with this 100% cotton shark-print, long-sleeve shirt.

\$32; store.onthewater.com



Ugly Stik GX2 Spinning Youth Combo

When they're new to fishing but they want their own "big kid" setup, look no further than the Ugly Stik GX2 combo, a durable rod and reel that will stand up to accidental abuse.

\$50; uglystik.com



West Marine 3-Layer Water Carpet

This 6-foot by 18-foot buoyant foam platform will keep the kids busy in the pool, on the lake, or at the beach. It features plastic grommets to tether to a dock, boat, or piling, and a webbing cinch strap for easy transportation.

\$550; westmarine.com



IKO Print Gytaku Fish Printing Kit

Help the kids commemorate their catch with this DIY fish-printing kit. It comes complete with 2 brushes, a paint bowl, 5 sheets of Xuan paper, 6 ounces of sumi ink, and a full set of step-by-step instructions.

\$45; ikoprints.com

Abu Garcia Max X Spincast Combo

This user-friendly combo features a new and improved, ergonomically comfortable spin-cast reel that performs like a low-profile baitcaster and is paired with a lightweight and sensitive rod.

\$40; abugarcia.com



For The Surfcaster



Daiwa Blackline Surf Rods

The V-Joint technology of this two-piece surf rod allows the connecting blank segments to flex with the rod under a heavy load without sacrificing power, providing the strength and sensitivity of a one-piece rod with the easy storage and transport of a two-piecer. *starting at \$400; daiwa.us*



Grundéns Vector Stockingfoot Waders

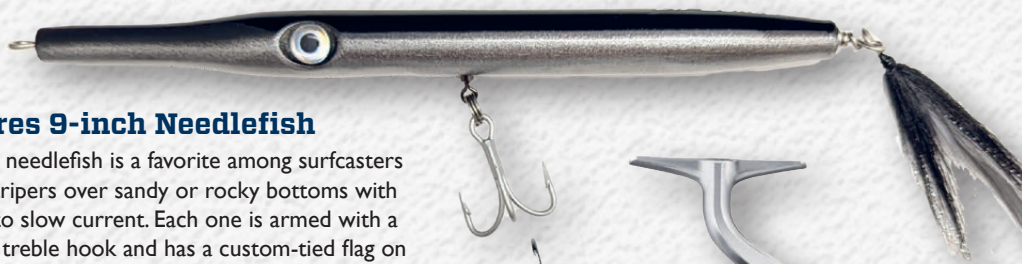
In these waders, molded knee pads provide additional comfort on rocky shores and dual-density neoprene stockingfeet provide warmth in cold water.

\$500; grundens.com

247 Lures 9-inch Needlefish

This classic needlefish is a favorite among surfcasters targeting stripers over sandy or rocky bottoms with moderate to slow current. Each one is armed with a single belly treble hook and has a custom-tied flag on the tail loop.

\$30; 247lures.com



YETI Rambler Bottle Sling Large

Whether you carry it over the shoulder or slide it onto your surf-fishing belt, this portable pouch carries a 26- or 36-ounce YETI Rambler bottle for hands-free hydration while on the rocks or the beach.

\$40; yeti.com



Shimano Ultegra XR 14000 XSD

The flagship of Shimano's surfcasting line, this reel features X-Protect water resistance, increased winding power, and a RigidCast spool that reduces line friction for longer casts.

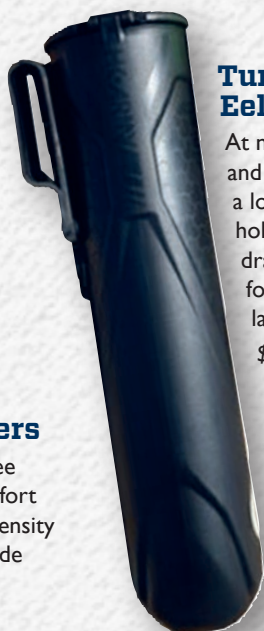
\$370; fish.shimano.com



Turtle Cove Tackle Eel Tube

At nearly 2.75 inches wide and 10.75 inches long with a locking lid and five large holes in the base for quick drainage, this tube is ideal for carting rigged eels or large soft plastics.

\$34; turtlecove tackle.com



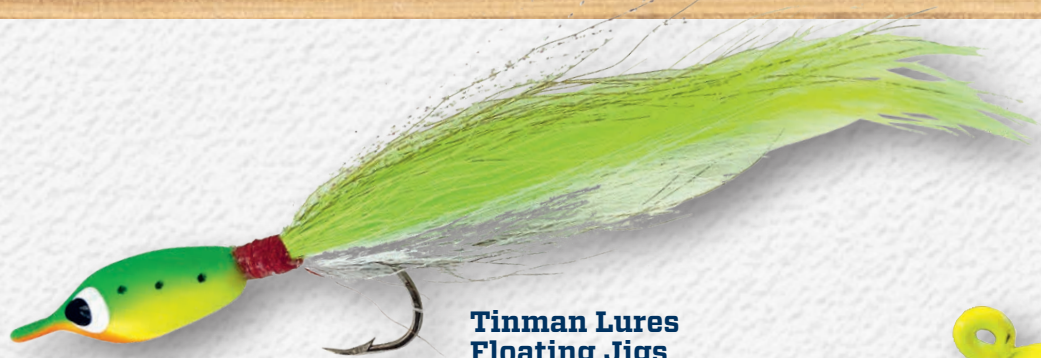
Tsunami SaltX II Spinning Reel

The next generation SaltX is fully sealed and boasts 50 pounds drag in a lightweight, CNC-machined aluminum body.

starting at \$429; tsunamifishing.com



For the Bottom Bouncer



Tinman Lures Floating Jigs

These buoyant jigs are perfect for shallow-water fluke rigs and can double as a teaser in the surf.

\$15 for 12; ebay.com/str/tinmanlures



Game On Rock Bottom Jig

The wide-body design of this blackfish-style jig keeps it lying upright for a natural presentation, while reducing the likelihood of it slipping between rocks and hanging up.

gameonlures.com



Dryshod Slipnot Deck Boot

At 9 inches, these deck boots provide ample ankle support and protection from the elements, while in warm temperatures, the roll-down calf and air-mesh lining keep feet cool and comfortable.

\$120; dryshodusa.com

Waquoit Bay Fish Co. Cods of Northeast Poster

Designed by marine scientist and Cape Cod artist, Mike Palmer, this poster features original renditions of white and silver hake, haddock, cusk, and Atlantic cod over a nautical chart of the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank.

starting at \$30;
waquoitbayfishcompany.com



Jigging World Night Ranger

This fast-action rod was built using Nano Carbon technology that lessens its overall weight and enhances durability and stopping power, while titanium guides and a Fuji reel seat further reduce the weight.

starting at \$260; jiggingworld.com



Shimano Ocea Jigger Infinity Motive Rods

These 2-piece, slow-pitch jigging rods are built on a soft blank with enough backbone to impart action on heavy jigs in deep water and out-muscle powerful, bottom-dwelling fish. Shimano's Spiral X Core technology improves blank flexibility and breaking strength under pressure. Available in casting and jigging models.

\$550; fish.shimano.com

For The Bass Master



Rapala 20-Pound High-Vis Digital Scale

This waterproof scale has a large bright display, multiple weight-display options, and stores minimum and maximum weights for tournament applications or for friendly competition.

\$180; rapala.com



SPRO Sashimmy Swimmer 125

This triple-jointed 5-inch swimbait casts long distances and has an ultra-realistic S-pattern swimming action.

\$19; spro.com



Seaguar JDM Collection

This collection of lines is imported directly from Japan, where tackle designers are innovating ways to catch finicky, high-pressured fish. Seaguar's JDM lines are designed to give avid and professional anglers a competitive edge.

starting at \$28; seaguar.com



Berkley Fusion19 Hybrid Jighead

The unique shape of this jighead is designed to cut through current and vegetation while maintaining balance and a natural presentation.

\$7; berkley-fishing.com



Trika 6X Casting Rod

Trika's 6x lineup boasts heightened sensitivity and superior casting distance due to the fully carbon-weaved blank construction complemented by titanium frame guides with zirconia inserts.

\$300; trika.com



G. Loomis GLX Bass Jerkbait Casting Rod

Built on a blank made from high modulus graphite and advanced resins, this jerkbait rod features lightweight, tangle-free Fuji K SiC guides and a CI4+ reel seat that further enhance its sensitivity, strength, and balance—key components for throwing jerkbaits in cold water.

\$525; gloomis.com



Shimano Poison Adrena B Spinning Rod

These technical bass rods are built with Shimano's Spiral X Core technology that allows the blank to twist and compress under pressure, improving its durability and flexibility. The full monocoque carbon grip decreases overall weight and boosts sensitivity.

\$380; fish.shimano.com

For The Inshore Angler



Bubba Fish Lip Grabber with Scale

This fish gripper features Bubba's nonslip grip on an ergonomic pistol-style handle with corrosion-resistant stainless-steel components to give an accurate weight reading.

\$80; bubba.com



Costa Voyager Polo

Look the part for date night or fly fishing on the flats with this moisture-wicking shirt that provides UPF 50+ sun protection.

\$75; costadelmar.com



Quantum Benchmark Spinning Reel

This aluminum spinning reel boasts an IPX6 rating to resist intrusion from salt water and sand, along with a fish-stopping, carbon-fiber drag system.

starting at \$150; quantumfishing.com

Eagle Claw Trokar Bait Saver Circle Hook

A strategically placed monofilament loop prevents baitfish from fouling and impaling itself, keeping baits livelier and more likely to tempt gamefish.

\$12; eagleclaw.com



Columbia PFG Women's Uncharted Insulated Anorak

This active-fit pullover features Columbia's Omni-Shield technology for stain-resistant, moisture-repellent warmth, and the drawcord-adjustable hood and elastic cuffs seal out the elements.

\$120; columbia.com





Z-Man Mulletron LT

Z-Man developed this wedge-tail, line-through swimbait to look and swim like the real thing. The lure's reinforced line-through harness allows it to slide up the line upon setting the hook, so you lose fewer fish to thrashing headshakes.

\$10; zmanfishing.com



Marine Tool Kit from West Marine

These double-chrome-plated steel tools are corrosion resistant and come packed in a convenient waterproof storage case with a sealing gasket for safekeeping.

\$83; westmarine.com



Costa 580g Gold Mirror Lenses (in Grand Catalina)

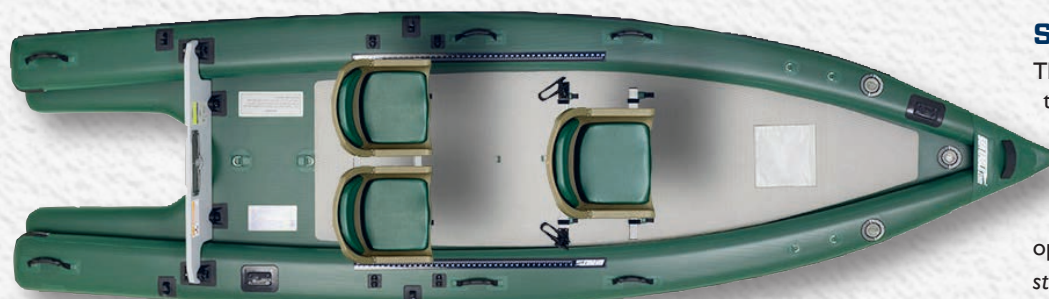
A rose-base glass lens with encapsulated gold mirror creates a crisp and vibrant view no matter the conditions in a variety of conditions from freshwater to inshore to offshore.

\$292; costadelmar.com

Korkers Neo Flex Ankle Boot

A Cush-Tech EVA midsole provides shock absorption for maximum comfort in this all-weather, waterproof deck boot.

\$120; korkers.com



Sea Eagle FishSkiff16

Three independent air chambers make this inflatable skiff easy to pump up and pack down into the car trunk. Fishing friendly features include nonslip EVA foam deck padding, built-in 40-inch fish rulers, and canopy brackets for optional sun/rain coverage.

starting at \$2200; seaeagle.com

For The Offshore Angler



RonZ Sand Eel Tuna Kit

This tuna-jigging kit comes with two pre-rigged, 4- and 5-ounce jigs with 10-inch tails and two pre-rigged 2- and 3-ounce jigs with 8-inch tails, along with eight 10-inch replacement tails and twelve 8-inch replacement tails.

starting at \$105; ronzlures.com



Shimano Ocea Plugger Full Throttle A

The upgraded Ocea Plugger rods are built with Shimano's new X Guides that minimize line tangle on the spool and enhance casting distance and accuracy. Shimano's Spiral X Core and Hi-Power X construction give the rod maximum control and power, even against the biggest tuna.

\$600; fish.shimano.com



Pelagic Gear Topshot Tropicali Button Down

Made from recycled fabric, this ultra-soft, stain-resistant, 4-way-stretch woven shirt is formal enough to wear from the dock to the dinner table. Features UPF 50+ sun protection for long days of offshore fishing under sunny skies.

\$65; pelagicgear.com



YETI Silo 6-Gallon H2O Cooler

Three inches of insulation in these 6-gallon dispensers keeps water ice-cold and easy to pour with Yeti's Surepour Spigot.

\$300; yeti.com



Smith Optics Hookset Sunglasses

These medium-frame shades feature ChromaPop polarized lenses that enhance color and contrast for boosting subsurface visibility. Spring hinges adjust for a comfortable but snug fit, and rubberized temples and nose pads keep them stationary.

starting at \$215; smithoptics.com

Daiwa Seaborg Power Assist Reel

Daiwa's new electric reel is features a high-vis LCD screen, a smoother, stronger drag and motor, and a sealed ball bearing to prevent water and dust intrusion.

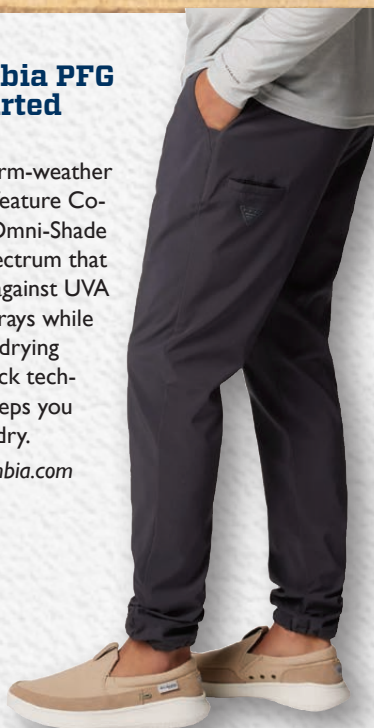
starting at \$1000; daiwa.us



Columbia PFG Uncharted Pants

These warm-weather bottoms feature Columbia's Omni-Shade Broad Spectrum that protects against UVA and UVB rays while their fast-drying Omni-Wick technology keeps you cool and dry.

\$80; columbia.com



Canyon Runner Virtual Captain Subscription

The Canyon Runner Virtual Captain System gives you the ability to track over 475 member boats & 20 pro-staff boats in real time for the best info on what's happening offshore.

starting at \$1,500; canyonrunner.com



AFTCO Aluminum Deck Brush

This 5-foot-long deck brush has a lightweight, corrosion-resistant, anodized aluminum shaft. The removable Shurhold adapter makes it easy to swap out the ultra-soft brush head for a mop top or squeegee.

\$130; aftco.com



Rapala Sarda

This trolling lure is built for large tuna and wahoo with its vertical, forward-oriented line tie that generates a tight wobble at trolling speeds up to 14 knots.

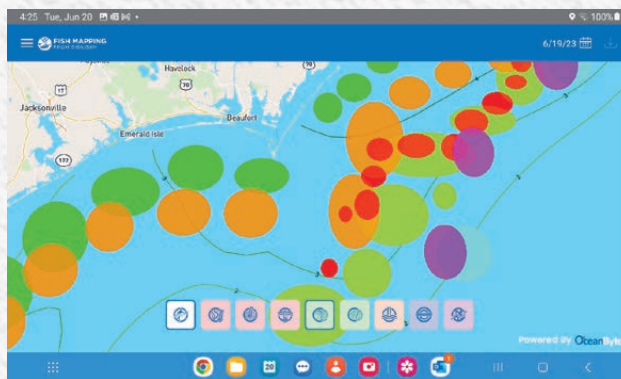
\$50; rapala.com



Pelagic Gear Longshore 12-inch Fishing Boots

These waterproof, slip-resistant deck boots feature a reinforced toe for protection and a Neotech cooling liner.

\$120; pelagicgear.com



Sirius XM Fish Mapping Subscription

Fish Mapping is SiriusXM Marine's most comprehensive plan and is available on your boat's display. It includes access on your phone or tablet via the Fish Mapping App. Serious anglers use every advantage available and SiriusXM marks the spots where baitfish gather and game fish hunt.

\$110/month; siriusxm.com

For The Kayak Angler



Old Town Sportsman Autopilot 120 in Fire Tiger

This limited-edition color of the new Sportsman Autopilot is based on the popular and vibrant lure pattern that's been a tackle box staple for generations.

\$4,500; oldtownwatercraft.com



Frabill Collapsible Bait Bucket

This 6-quart bait bucket easily folds down to the size of a 3700-size tackle tray for convenient storage on the boat, in a kayak, or in a backpack. Available with or without aerator.

starting at \$30; frabill.com



YakAttack BlackPak Pro Kayak Crate

This durable kayak crate features a hinged latch lid for safe-keeping of belongings or stowing up to five 3700-size tackle trays. Rubberized feet make sure it stays stationary in your kayak's tankwell, and four rod holders with built-in tethers keep additional combos secure.

\$150; yakattack.us

West Marine Coastal 400 7 x 50 Waterproof Binoculars

Ideal for spotting blitzes from the beach or searching for tuna feeds offshore, these durable waterproof binoculars boast an IPX7 waterproof rating and 7x magnification in a grippy and shock-resistant rubber-armored body.

\$320; westmarine.com



Turtlebox Audio Gen 2 Portable Speaker

This 100% waterproof Bluetooth speaker boasts 20+ hours of playtime on one charge with an output of up to 120 decibels, allowing you to bring your tunes wherever the fishing takes you.

\$400; turtleboxaudio.com



Wilderness Systems iATAK 110

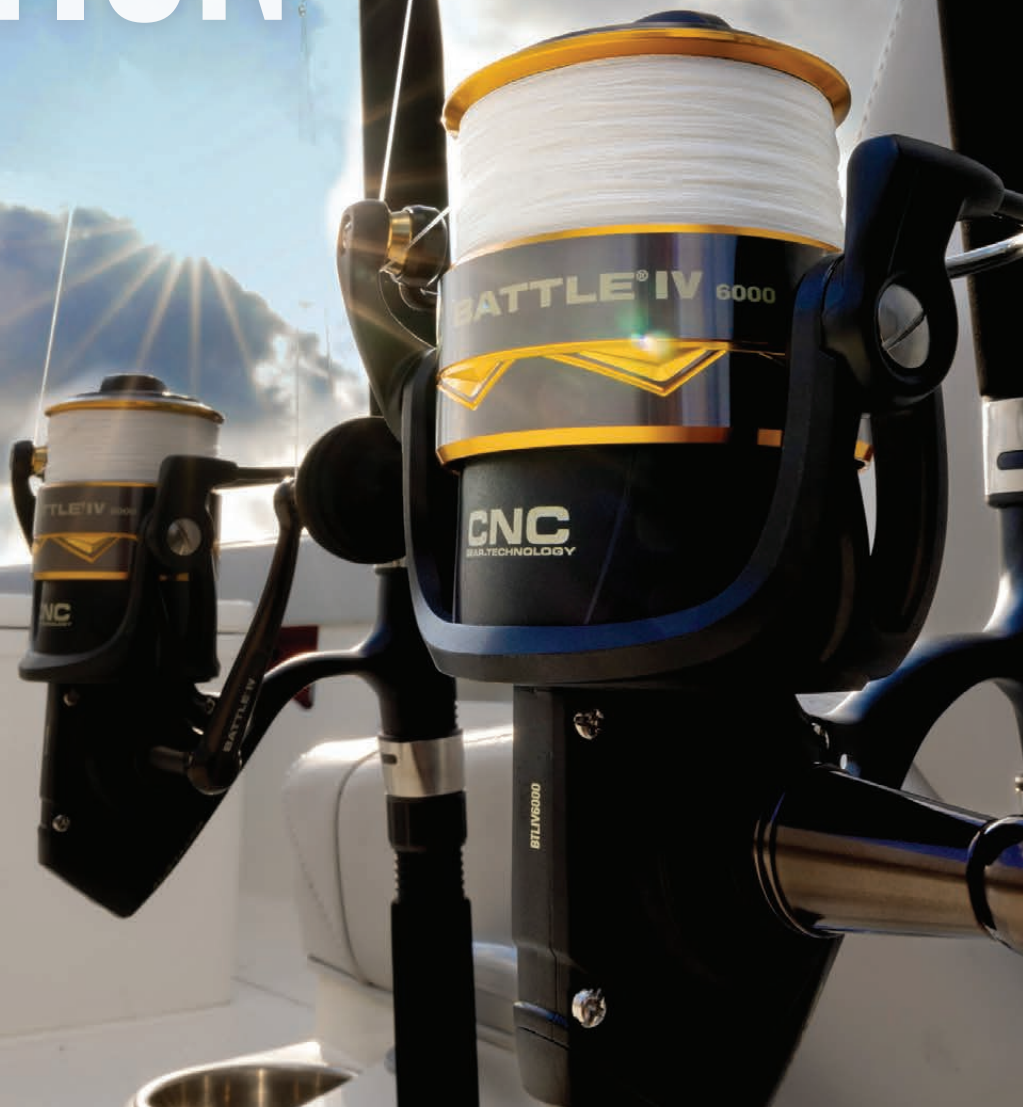
Weighing only 44 pounds with a weight capacity of 650 pounds, this inflatable fishing kayak feels and performs like a rigid, hardshell kayak, but it compresses into a backpack for easy transport.

\$1,400; wildernesssystems.confluenceoutdoor.com

ON THESE SEAS, DOMINATION BEGINS WITH THE BATTLE.



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A fluke's teeth angle inward and have adapted for grabbing and holding prey. Fluke swallow the majority of their prey whole.



Adapting to Fish ADAPTATIONS

Understanding your quarry will lead to more and larger catches.

BY CAPTAIN BRETT TAYLOR

It started with a simple question asked by my four-year-old son, “Daddy, do they have spines like sunfish?” We were admiring the first fluke he landed on his own as its perfectly camouflaged body flopped on the deck. It was only 15 inches, so it had to go back into the bay, but the fish provided the opportunity for a quick science lesson. Every fish species has highly adapted to their particular habitat, enabling them to live and successfully reproduce. As a fisherman, recognizing these adaptations can unlock better angling techniques.

That flounder on the deck of our skiff was a


prime example of “countershading,” the term to describe fish that have darker-colored tops and white undersides. This adaptation allows a fish to evade predators and hide from prey. Along with a flat body, the flounder is perfectly adapted for a life on the bottom as an ambush predator.

But back to the original question posed by my inquisitive son: Why did the fluke have no spine? A summer flounder’s primary defense mechanism is camouflage along with its sharp eyesight, both of which help it hide from and detect potential threats. In fact, its camouflage is so good that it can change color to match the

bottom where it resides.

Tale of the Teeth

As a professional fishing guide, I always like showing new fishermen the parts of the fish and explaining why certain anatomical features are present. I point out how a flounder’s teeth are angled inward and do not mesh together like the teeth of a bluefish. A fluke’s teeth are ideal for grabbing and holding prey, especially larger fish, until it can fully engulf the meal. Next time you fillet a fluke, check its stomach contents and you will notice that the prey has not been bitten



Combined with powerful jaws, bluefish teeth are designed to disable their prey by biting off their tails.

Tautog rely heavily on sound and smell to locate their prey.



in half, but rather swallowed whole.

Bluefish have sharp teeth that mesh together, coupled with extremely strong jaws and a forked tail for fast, extended swimming. These adaptations enable bluefish to disable their prey by biting off their tails. Bluefish stomach contents usually yield chopped pieces of spearing, bunker, squid, or whatever else the blues have been eating.

Striped bass lack the large, sharp teeth of bluefish and fluke, but they have small sandpaper-like teeth that help them hold prey as they manipulate them in their mouths to swallow headfirst. For this reason, anglers live-lining bunker or eels will notice a “bump” or two, followed by a run. The initial bump tends to be the strike, followed by orienting the prey to swallow. Anglers setting the hook at the first bump will nearly always miss since the fish has not yet put it in position to ingest. You can easily tell when someone sets the hook too early as the bait comes back with the telltale scrape, showing where the fish was holding the bait before it had a chance to swallow it.

Tautog Survival Tactics

Anglers who fish for tog know all too well that a large ocean swell or storm will disrupt the

bottom and put tog off the feed. If you take a fish tank, move it back and forth so a swell occurs, the bottom becomes stirred up—this is essentially what happens when we get a decent ocean swell or groundswell.

In addition to sound, tautog rely on sight and smell to find prey on wrecks, rock piles, or structure. A tog’s eyes and nostrils have adapted to see the slow movement of crabs and smelling the scent of crustaceans or mollusks. Serious tog fisherman sometimes crush crab baits to put scent in the water, helping to bring blackfish into the area. Another validation of a tautog’s sense of smell is how a bite will build as more crab baits are dropped down on a particular piece of structure. Lowering a chum pot filled with crushed crab shells can trigger the bite and turn the feedbag on sooner.

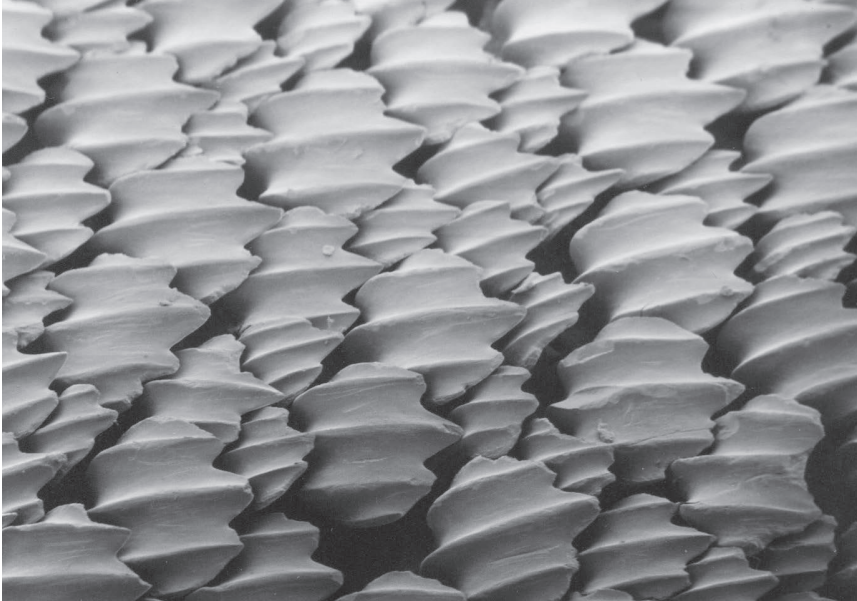
Tautog are also able to “lock” themselves into a wreck or structure by erecting their short, stout dorsal spines. Night divers have seen tautog resting inside various holes or compartments in wrecks and their bodies are basically locked into place to prevent them from giving up the “hole” or becoming potential prey to a shark. Avid tautog fisherman encounter this behavior when they lose a tog in a wreck. The fisherman can feel the tog on the hook, but is unable to

move it. When this occurs, the best way to get it out is to free-spool the reel and let it go for a period of time. By doing this, there is a chance that the tog will relax, giving the angler an opportunity to quickly apply pressure and reel it to the surface. I have seen anglers wait as long as 20 minutes to get a large tautog out of a wreck.

Low-Light Feeders

Bigeye tuna have extremely large eyes due to the adaptation of hunting prey (squid, mackerel) in deep-water environments where light penetration is minimal. Their eyes have very large photoreceptors that dramatically increase the sensitivity and ability to detect squid and other prey in dim light. Inshore species such as striped bass and weakfish also have relatively large eyes, which may explain why angling for both species is often better at night, dawn, or dusk, and on overcast days. These fish tend to be much more light sensitive, and on brighter days, they both can be found in deeper water in the lower third of the water column. Some of our best weakfishing was on sunny days, working soft-plastic jigs in deeper channels and holes of 20 to 40 feet.

Have you ever fished for striped bass and had a very good bite just before sundown, only to have it dry up after the sun fell below the hori-



Shark scales end in a point that faces toward the tail. This adaptation increases the laminar flow and reduces turbulence and drag when the fish is swimming.



Bigeye tuna have extremely large eyes that adapted for hunting prey in deep-water environments where light penetration is minimal.

zon? Light-sensitive species tend to stop feeding as a period of light actively changes. This brief intermission allows rods cells in a fish's retina to adjust to the darker environment. Many times, feeding will resume within 30 to 40 minutes of the adjustment phase.


Speed, Stealth, and Success

Some species rely more on speed and stealth to essentially make a living. Sharks and tunas have ultra-smooth skin made of extremely tiny scales. These still offer protection from the outside environment (other sharks, bacteria, viruses, etc.), but they are positioned in such a pattern that makes them incredibly smooth in one direction. In a shark, the crown of the scale ends in a point that faces its tail section. This scale adaptation increases the laminar flow,

and reduces turbulence and drag when the fish is cutting through the water chasing prey. The reduced drag also allows for easier swimming, further reducing energy consumption, helping a shark travel greater distances. There is a reason why some companies developed swimwear using the "shark skin" concept—it reduced drag and made competitive swimmers faster, though some were banned due to the unfair advantage.

Tuna also have very smooth skin due to the extremely small nature of their scales, known as ctenoid scales. These are incredibly thin, overlap, and are quite smooth to the touch. The scale features provide some of the same benefits as sharks—reducing turbulence and increasing laminar flow. Aside from the body shape, muscle and tail adaptations, both species are considered highly migratory, traveling very long distances

with maximum efficiency. In the open ocean, stealth becomes very important for both predator and prey, with one trying to escape the other. Counter-shading is a universal adaptation across many species of shark, fish, and even crustaceans. Most species that survive in our coastal waters exhibit some form of countershading, which helps them blend into their environment. Darker dorsal top sections prevent good visuals from predator or prey above them, while white or lighter-colored ventral sides provide ample camouflage against the light and sky from anything below.

Angling affords us the ability to interact and marvel over the natural world that exists in our home waters. The more you understand and appreciate the adaptations of our local marine life, the more effective you'll be as an angler. 



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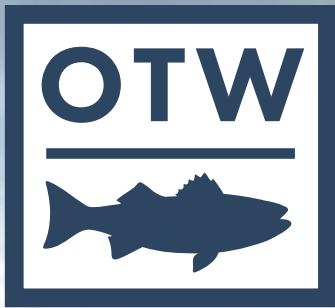


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2025 FISHING BOAT BUYER'S GUIDE



ERIC KULIN

DISCOVER WHAT'S
AVAILABLE FOR A NEW
YEAR AND A NEW SEASON
OF BOATING AND FISHING.

LOA: 28' 5"
Beam: 9' 11"
Weight (w/engines): 7,250 lbs.
Power (max): 700 hp
Fuel: 231 gal.

FEATURED NEW BOATS



cobiaboats.com

COBIA 285 CC

Cobia Boats mesh tournament capability, family comfort, and style into a single package for boaters who want to have it all. The all-new 285 CC features a helm that can accommodate dual 16-inch Garmin screens, an inward opening tuna door, and multiple helm seating/storage configurations. Dual fuel fills with 231-gallon capacity with up to 700 maximum horsepower put the tuna grounds in range, and the hideaway aft bench seat will give your crew plenty of room to fight fish. Cobia offers a full range of center console and dual console boats from 22 to 35 feet.

LOA: 43' 10"
Beam: 12'
Weight: 22,300 lbs.
Power (max): 1,800 hp
Fuel Capacity: 600 gal.



contenderboats.com

CONTENDER 44CB

Contender's clean lines and aggressive entry make it a good-looking, comfortable-riding, fast boat. Built on the renowned platform of the 44ST, the 44CB (Canyon Berth) offers additional creature comforts that you'll appreciate on long days offshore or overnight canyon runs. With triple and quad engine configurations available and a maximum power rating of 1,800 HP, the 44CB will get you to the grounds quickly so you can spend more time fishing. With over 35 years of experience, they have built a reputation for building high-quality, durable boats. Contender offers fishing-focused boats in their Bay, Tourney, and Sport series.



FEATURED NEW BOATS

LOA: 22'
Beam: 8' 6"
Weight: 2,295 lbs.
Power (recommended): 115 hp
Fuel: 64 gal.



easternboats.com

EASTERN 22 CC

Eastern uses modern building techniques to make fuel-efficient 18- to 27-foot semi-custom boats with classic downeast hulls. In response to customer suggestions, Eastern developed the roomy 22 CC design from their successful 248 downeast-style hull. The 22 hull combines a sharp bow entry with a soft chine, a relatively flat bottom aft, and a keel for good tracking on course. The hull shape provides a soft, smooth, efficient ride at speeds in the twenties with only a 115-hp outboard. Seating includes cushioned forward benches with storage, a double-wide cushion in front of the console, and rear cushioned seating.

Length: 36'6"
Beam: 10'10"
Weight: 14,900 lbs. (w/
engines)
Power (Max): 1200 hp
Fuel Capacity: 403 gal.



evergladesboats.com

EVERGLADES 375 CC

Everglades builds premium boats of the highest quality on legendary Bob Dougherty-designed hulls. Their model lineup includes 3-series hybrids, 5-series center consoles, and, coming in 2025, 7-series crossovers. Their new 375 CC, announced in late 2024, is ready for offshore fishing adventure with its single-level cockpit with unobstructed 360-degree gunnel access. Hardcore fishing options include a rigging station with sink and tackle storage that replaces mezzanine seating. Its proven hull design combined with an optional Seakeeper 3 boat stabilization system provides incredible offshore performance.

NEED PHOTO

LOA: 30' 6"
Beam: 10' 7"
Weight (w/o engines): 6,950 lbs.
Power (max): 700 hp
Fuel: 290 gal.

FEATURED NEW BOATS



gradywhite.com

GRADY-WHITE CANYON 306

Grady-White designs and manufactures an extensive lineup of center console, dual console, and cabin boats with innovative designs, exceptional attention to detail, and award-winning performance. The result is a boating experience that inspires unmatched customer satisfaction and camaraderie among those living "The Grady Life." Grady-White's Canyon 306 has been an impressive standout for years with its fishing-focused layout, sleek lines, and offshore performance. Now, this customer favorite is even better with the addition of a new glass windshield that is completely integrated into the T-top structure, resulting in a stronger surface and more stylish appearance. An updated helm with an enhanced ergonomic design allows the electronics to be installed closer to the captain's line of sight.



LOA: 25' 8"
Beam: 8' 6"
Weight (w/o engines): 3,650 lbs.
Power (max): 350 hp
Fuel Capacity: 120 gal.

maritimeboats.com

MARITIME 250 VOYAGER

Built in New Hampshire, Maritime Boats combines traditional New England looks with modern construction techniques and state-of-the-art design. Maritime's original concepts of simplicity, fuel efficiency and continued emphasis on function over form still guide the company today. The 250 Voyager can be powered with single or twin outboards and comes standard with a fold-away bench seat and fishbox/storage locker. It's a strong and stable seaworthy hull design combined with the safe, comfortable center cabin delivers uncompromised performance and weather protection. Custom stainless-steel handrails throughout add additional safety and security.



FEATURED NEW BOATS

LOA: 37' 8"
Beam: 10' 6"
Weight: 11,000 lbs.
Power (max): 1,500 hp
Fuel: 540 gal.



onslowbayboats.com

ONSHOW BAY BOATWORKS 37

The Onslow Bay fleet offers expertly designed and crafted offshore and tournament edition center console boats built to get you to your favorite fishing spots with comfort and performance. The Onslow Bay 37 is a versatile and capable fishing boat that excels in both offshore and inshore conditions, making it an ideal choice for anglers in the Northeast. Its spacious layout and comfortable accommodations make it perfect for family outings, while its robust construction and advanced features ensure a safe and enjoyable fishing experience. Whether you're targeting offshore canyons or inshore fishing, the Onslow Bay 37 delivers exceptional performance and reliability.



LOA: 34' 6"
Beam: 10' 10"
Weight (w/engines): 12,430 lbs.
Power (max): 600 hp
Fuel Capacity: 300 gal.



pursuitboats.com

PURSUIT OS 325

Pursuit boats are built on proven hulls matched to dependable Yamaha outboards. Pursuit's refined engineering leads their timeless design, innovative features and manufacturing processes to consistently create quality boats. The all-new OS 325 has been redesigned from the hull up, making it the definition of yacht-caliber luxury. It's heavy on features that matter, like a single-piece, optically clear front windshield, forward-facing bridge deck seating, more rod holders, a dive door, and large transom walkway. Plus, the well-appointed, modern interior finishes and sleek exterior curves are completely new yet completely aligned with the Pursuit name.



LOA: 36' 6"
Beam: 11' 4"
Weight (w/engines): 14,500 lbs.
Power (max): 1,200 hp
Fuel: 350 gal.

FEATURED NEW BOATS



ROBALO R360

robalo.com

A leader in the marine industry since 1968, Robalo is renowned for its heavy-duty construction, legendary ride and unwavering desire to stay on the cutting edge of innovation. The R360 is the biggest Robalo to ever hit the water, redefining what it means for an offshore center console to be both capable and comfortable. With plenty of seating and space, including helm seating for three, it's ready to run a full crew out to the tuna grounds or take friends and family out for a cruise. With twin 80-gallon in-floor fish boxes, side-entry doors port and starboard and a stern access door, bringing home sushi has never been easier.

LOA: 28' 4"
Beam: 9' 10"
Weight (w/o engines): 5,800 lbs.
Power (max): 600 hp
Fuel Capacity: 205 gal.



[tidewaterboats.](http://tidewaterboats.com)

TIDEWATER 282 CC ADVENTURE

Tidewater boats have an impressive look, with clean lines and a Carolina flare in the bow, and an even more impressive price range. Their solid feel, dry ride and spacious cockpit will give any captain the confidence needed to take this offshore machine into the battle-tested Northeast waters. Tidewater's all-new 282 CC Adventure includes a number of highlights that will please offshore anglers looking to chase tuna and boaters looking to increase the comfort level on open-water cruises. Standard Seakeeper Ride trim tabs adjust automatically to eliminate excess pitch and roll when underway, making offshore runs feel far more comfortable and controlled. Tidewater has also redesigned the open bow seating with an electric table. Back at the stern, dual dive doors and dual aquarium-style livewells add to the offshore angling appeal.



2025 FISHING BOAT BUYER'S GUIDE



23LS

CAROLINA SKIFF

carolinaskiff.com

Carolina Skiff boats are durable, versatile, and economical, giving you great value in both performance and comfort. With 27 models from 16 to 25 feet to choose from, you can find a boat that meets your personal needs, whether you want to wake before dawn to hit the best fishing spots or take the family for an all-day offshore adventure.



Admiral 260 EX

DEFIANCE BOATS

defianceboats.com

Defiance Boats was created in 2002 with the sole purpose of building a commercial-grade, outboard-powered pilothouse fishing boat at a reasonable price. Defiance Boats uses only composite materials and no wood materials for a boat built to last that is backed by a lifetime limited structural hull warranty. Their Admiral series includes pilothouse boats from 22 to 29 feet.



230CC

EDGEWATER

ewboats.com

EdgeWater fishing boats are used by serious sportsmen who demand practical features, reliability, and durability. With their "Single-Piece Infusion" construction, they achieve a strength-to-weight ratio that, when combined with their variable deadrise deep-V hulls and dependable Yamaha outboards, produces remarkable handling and performance.



457 CCF

FORMULA

formulaboats.com

Since 1976, Formula has been owned and managed by the Porter family, focused on continual product improvement throughout the line. They are known for their high-performance hulls that provide confident control and a solid, exhilarating ride. The 387 and 457 Center Console Fish models can be built to your preference with hard-core fishing options.

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291 FS

KEY WEST

keywestboats.com

Key West boats are built for fishermen who place equal importance on quality and value. With bay boats, center consoles, and dual consoles from 17 feet to 29 feet, anyone can picture themselves fishing from the deck of a Key West, whether it's in the back bays or offshore chasing stripers and tuna.



415 HT

NORTHCOAST

northcoastboats.com

NorthCoast Boats is a premier boat builder producing high quality fishing and recreational boats. Overbuilt for solid durability, NorthCoast Boats are designed to be strong and tough with plenty of style but no unnecessary "fluff." The NorthCoast lineup includes five pilothouse models and two classic center consoles.



21 SE

PARKER

parkerboats.net

Parker builds boats for "strength, simplicity, and seaworthiness" with an efficient hull design that allows them to plane easily and run economically. Parker offers center console, dual console, walkaround, and sport cabin designs all powered by Yamaha and built on the traditions of North Carolina boatbuilding.



196RX

RELEASE

releaseboats.com

Release Boats incorporates fish-ability and function into an attractive package designed to be fished hard and to endure over time. Their fleet includes center console models from 19 to 30 feet and a 23-foot dual console.

2025 FISHING BOAT BUYER'S GUIDE



232 CC

SAILFISH

sailfishboats.com

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A subsidiary of HCB Boats rooted in Hydrasports' half-century heritage, iKon debuted the LX21 in 2023 as a transformational modern bass boat.

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AVX2080

SKEETER

skeeterboats.com

The ZXR20 is the latest evolution of Skeeter's FXR technology, offering a lighter yet stronger boat with an updated deck layout and ergonomic placement of rod tubes and lockers. Skeeter makes tournament-caliber Yamaha-powered bass boats and deep-V fishing boats.

VEXUS

vexusboats.com

The digitally engineered AVX2080 benefits from precision-fit designs and is built to exacting specs that raise the bar on aluminum standards. The 2080 runs on a fired-up pad hull with a deeper V entry. Inside, the design carries a massive front deck. Vexus offers aluminum and fiberglass bass and multi-species boats.

Cold Waters, Heated Rails

*Fill the coolers—and the heart—
with a soul-satisfying winter headboat trip.*

—BY JIMMY FEE—

The string of expletives and insults directed at Cheech and me would have to serve as our “Welcome aboard” as the fishermen inside the *American Classic*’s cabin implored us to shut the (*expletive removed*) door, lest the heater’s warmth escape into the cold, December gloaming. A different breed of angler lines the rails of party boats between November and April. Gone are the smiling, sunscreen-slathered, Dramamine-popping tourists hoping to catch “whatever’s biting” on a half-day trip, replaced by Carhartt-clad, steely-eyed regulars with 100-quart coolers that they damn-well better fill or the captain’s gonna hear about it.

If you’re the type of fisherman who racks the rods when the strippers leave or turns your atten-

tions to fresh and hard water to get you through the winter, you might not even know that headboats throughout the Northeast sail all year long. The captains and crews provide what I consider a public service, ferrying cabin-fever-afflicted anglers over the icy Atlantic swells to where schools of delicious bottom-dwelling species ride out the cold months. And while the winter headboat regulars might be a little saltier than your average angler, it’s important not to take things personally. The same guys who greeted you with four letter words will toss you a beer on the ride in and share their best tips for taking home the pool money.

Here are some of the trips that the *On The Water* crew through the (*expletive removed*) winter.



Acadian redfish make a tasty day-saver when the pollock get scarce on mid-winter trips.





Pollock fishing can be fast and furious in the winter with anglers catching two at a time on jigs and teasers.

ATLANTIC POLLOCK

TIMING: *December, January*

BOATS:

Yankee Fleet - Gloucester, MA

Eastman's Fleet - Seabrook, NH

American Classic - Lynn, Massachusetts

The pollock is unique among its groundfish brethren in that it's perfectly comfortable feeding anywhere from the surface to the bottom. Its forked tale and aggressive attitude earned it the nickname Boston Bluefish. In the winter, massive schools of pollock swim close off northern New England, in range of boats from Maine to the North Shore of Massachusetts.

The winter of 2023/2024 was a banner year for pollock, with anglers enjoying drop-and-reel action with fish that ranged up to 20 pounds.

Best of all, pollock fishing is better done with jigs, not the bone-chilling bait-and-wait. Send a heavy Norwegian- or herring-style jig to the bottom, crank it up 50 to 75 feet, and drop it

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back down. This tactic, known as squidding, is a time-honored way to catch these groundfish as they spread throughout the water column on their hunt for herring.

While pollock do strike a jig, most fish will fall to the teaser(s) fished above it. Any type of fly or soft-plastic teaser can work, but you'll see most regulars using "cod flies," simple teasers tied from synthetic hair. Favorite colors include blue, purple, and pink.

Acadian redfish usually add some color to the cooler on pollock trips, and it's wise to have a three-hook bait rig ready in case the captain pivots to redfish on a slow pollock day.

POOL-WINNING TIP:

Get to the boat early and secure the pulpit, where you'll have more room to cast your jig underhand (always underhand on a headboat!) and probe for pollock out of reach for the other anglers.

DEEP-WATER WRECKS FOR BLACK SEA BASS AND PORGIES

TIMING: *December*

BOATS:

Voyager - Point Pleasant, NJ

The winter wrecking-crew trips, departing from New Jersey and Long Island ports, involve long runs with big payoffs as the largest models of each species are caught on these trips. The state record black sea

The deep-water wrecks off Long Island and New Jersey load up with porgies in the early winter.



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It takes a skilled hand to limit out on tog on winter headboat trips, but that's part of the fun.



bass, Steve Singler's 9-pounder, was caught on one of these trips aboard the Voyager in December 2015.

Captains will anchor over wrecks in 150

to 250 feet of water, where sea bass and porgies dominate the catch, while bluefish, cod, weakfish, and pollock add some extra spice to the winter variety.

POOL-WINNING TIP:

Skip the clams and send down a diamond jig (with a bulky teaser). The largest sea bass can be the most aggressive, and while the clam-soakers are culling through scup and shorts, you'll be bailing knothead sea bass.

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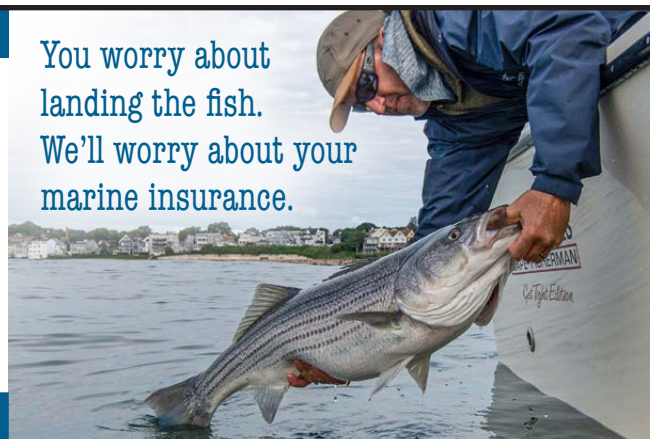
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TAUTOG

TIMING: November to February

BOATS:

Norma-K III - Point Pleasant, NJ

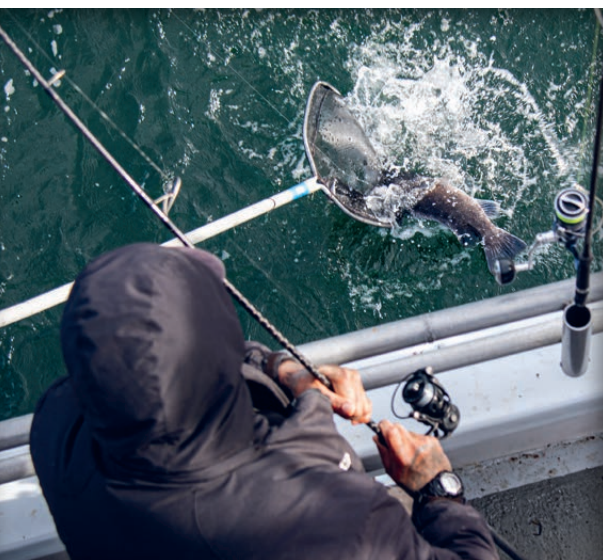
Depending on the port of call, tog season ends as early as January or as late as March. Headboat togging can be tricky business, with the large vessels forced to focus on heavily pressured, well-known reefs and wrecks in 40 to 60 feet of water—not to mention the 30 or so other crab-baited rigs on board vying for a tautog's attention. However, saltwater-starved anglers in the depths of winter cannot afford to be choosy beggars.

Board the boat with plenty of pre-snelled hooks on short leaders and an ample supply of lead. The easy-to-tie "Belmar Rig" was made for this type of fishing and is the fastest way to get back in the game after an inevitable hangup.

If the boat offers white-legger crabs at an upcharge, get them. These baits can provide an advantage over green crabs. Experiment with the presentation and see what's getting the right bites—half-crab, whole crab, shell on, shell off, legs on (burger and fries), or legs off (just the burger). If short tog and bergalls are stripping your crab of the tasty vittles before a keeper can find it, try going with a whole crab. If that doesn't get bites on a couple of drops, try cracking the shell with the sinker and sending it back down.

For your sake, and the sake of the other anglers on board, do your best to avoid bouncing your sinker. On heavily-fished structures, tog can be wary of the sound of sinkings clicking over the structure.

You may get only one shot to convert the right bite into a scales-of-justice-tipping white-chinner, so anytime your crab is on the bottom, it's important to remain focused on feeling what's happening with your bait and choosing the opportune time to swing the rod.





*As Seen In On The Water's
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POOL-WINNING TIP:

Find the edge. Most of the anglers on board will drop their rigs straight to the bottom, though there's nothing wrong with this tactic. The captains and mates on headboats go to great lengths to double-anchor over the structure so everyone on board is over some hard, tog-holding bottom. Still, you can give yourself an edge by casting your rig (underhand, of course) away from the boat and feeling for the edge of the structure or some high points. This can help your crab stand alone among the 30 or 40 other rigs on board and put you in front of some fresh fish; however, casting away from the boat increases the likelihood of snagging

COD

TIMING: November to April

BOATS:

Miss Montauk II - Montauk, NY

Frances Fleet - Galilee, RI

The waters around Block Island hold schools of cod during the winter, and headboats sail for them as the weather allows. The fishing runs hot and cold, with fish simply not feeding on some days, but most trips provide a good shot at a keeper codfish or three. Clam-baited high-low rigs and jigs work equally well, though jigs outperform clams early in the winter, when there are large schools of baitfish on the ground.

Many of the cod will be right around the 23-inch minimum size, and any fish pushing 30 inches will be in heavy contention for the pool money.

Sea bass (when in season) and some super-sized bergalls are the primary bycatch on winter cod trips. Bergalls, when large enough to yield a hearty fillet, are excellent eating, and well worth keeping.

POOL-WINNING TIP:

Bundle up and stay at the rail. Winter codfishing can be a grind, but the more time your bait is soaking or your jig is jigging, the better the odds of a pool-winning cod finding your bait. Good gloves, proper layering, and a comfortable pair of waterproof bibs will keep the chill out so you can keep your line in. 🐟



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Bob Dettling begins working toward his limit of blackfish with this early-morning keeper.



Eastern Sound TOGGIN'

Captain Rich Jensen's blackfish tactics have been putting fishermen on big, North Fork tog for nearly 50 years.

BY MATT HAEFFNER

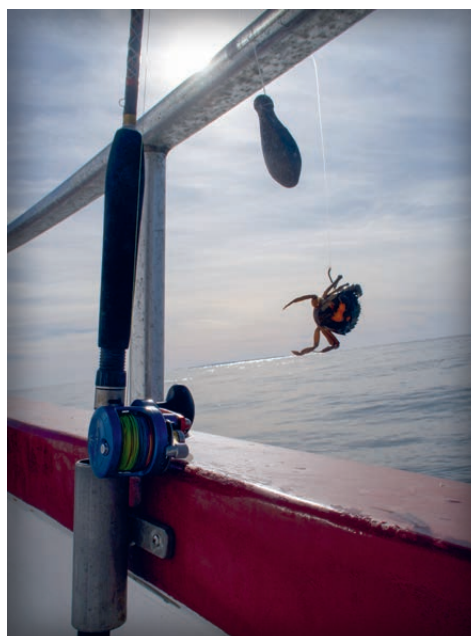
The forecast showed a high of 28 degrees with a steady 10-knot northeast wind persisting throughout the day. "Frozen guides, here we come," I thought, with one hand cupped

over the air vent while the other clutched an icy steering wheel. From May to October, the 10-mile stretch of road between Greenport and Orient Point is jumping with anglers, clammers, beachgoers, and farm stands. But,

as 6 a.m. approached on November 25, the area felt deserted and eerily quiet. While I cruised toward the rising sun, most sensible fishermen were heading west, hot on the tails of what could be the final wave of striped bass



Sights seen aboard a trip
on Nancy Ann Charters.



migrating south for the winter. I was joining a devout bunch of blackfish anglers, some who drove all the way from Bayville and Queens to fish with one of the North Fork's most revered captains, Rich Jensen of Nancy Ann Charters.

Tautog, like the Insane Clown Posse, have a cult following. However, tautog fanatics don't paint their faces or adopt strange monikers like *the juggalos*; they live among us, dreaming of ugly but tasty fish that lurk in the shadows of enormous rocks. And, when they find a good rock, they keep its location close to the heart. Between Rhode Island and Maryland, the community of dedicated blackfish anglers and captains is tightknit.

Like surfcasters in pursuit of striped bass, blackfish fanatics share information, techniques, and drive long distances in pursuit of their quarry—they're the rockhoppers of bottom fishing. What better place to be a rock-hopping crab-dropper than in the craggy, cool waters of Long Island Sound?

The Sound

At Exit 73 on the dreadful Long Island Expressway, drivers continuing east can head inland toward the Main Road, which runs through the quaint villages of Mattituck, Cutchogue, and Southold, but I always opt for the scenic route. Sound Avenue and the North Road give passersby a view of these pebble-

laden and boulder-strewn shores. Unlike the fine-grain sand of Long Island's Atlantic-facing side, the Sound is comprised of larger, more permanent hard structure resulting from glacial passage over tens of thousands of years. Today, rocks the size of cars peek above the surface at low tide like stationary icebergs, providing a mere glimpse as to what the Sound's stony sea floor looks like.

With an average depth of 63 feet and some boulders that stand nearly as tall, navigating shallower coves can be treacherous, but these are the rocks that make the Sound a haven for such structure-dependent bottom-dwellers as blackfish.

This late in the Sound's fall tautog season,



According to Jensen, 7- to 8-pound tautog are more plentiful in Eastern Long Island Sound than the double-digit tog of yesteryear.

which differs from that of the New York Bight season, keeper-class fish are generally hanging in deeper water. So, while running aground on a sneaky boulder is of little concern, snagging rigs and jigs still spikes a togger's anxiety. Luckily for our group, the man at the helm has almost a half century of fishing in Long Island Sound under his belt, and tautog are his bread and butter. I didn't know it at the time, but I had enrolled in a master class in tautog fishing and terminal-tackle loss prevention at the hands of a generational Long Island fishing legend.

A Blackfish Pioneer

Rich Jensen's blood runs deep on the North Fork. Beginning at age 18, he cut his teeth captaining the *Wilhelric* in Greenport—the family-owned charter boat named after his grandparents, William and Helen, and his father, Richard. At that time, winter flounder were the biggest draw for party boats on the North Fork and carried them through the spring months. However, Rich's grandfather was especially fond of targeting blackfish in shallow water. According to Jensen, spring

tautog fishing was tremendous in those days because they were not yet valued as table fare or as a sportfish.

After learning the ropes as captain of the *Wilhelric*, Jensen began work for brothers George and Jay Porter, who operated the *Brand X*, another famous party boat out of Greenport during the 1970s. "The Porters were responsible for locating many of the big wrecks off Long Island, like the *Coimbra*, and I grew up fishing with them," Jensen recalled. They taught him the basics of locating wrecks, a skill that would become instrumental in his pursuit of big tautog.

With nearly a decade of experience, a 27-year-old Jensen decided to get into the family business. He bought his first boat in 1979 and named it *Nancy Ann* after his childhood sweetheart (now wife). "It's exactly the same style boat I have today," said Jensen, referring to the *Nancy Ann IV*, currently docked in Duryea's Orient Point Marina.

"Back then, I docked in Greenport to fish in the Bay during the spring and moved to Orient for the summer and fall." At that time, Orient did not house the charter-boat fleet it does

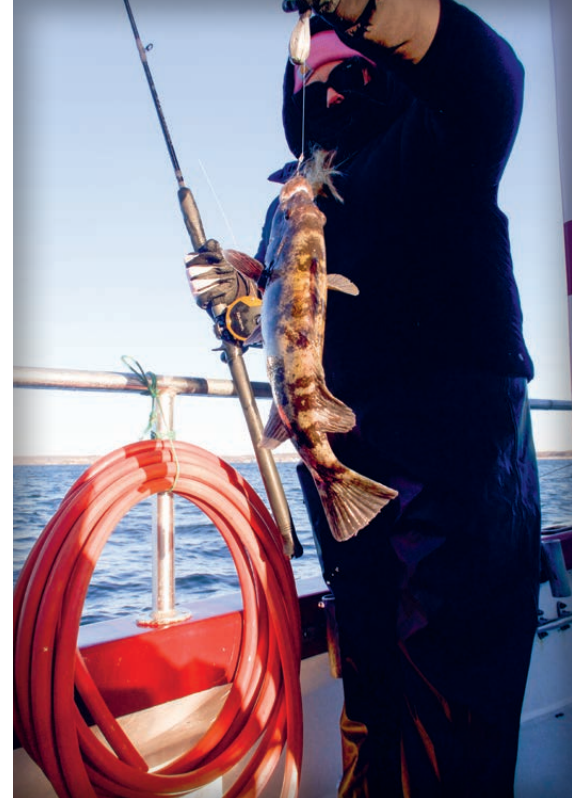
today. But Jensen, being the humble trendsetter he is, made the move in order to save time and fuel running to and from The Race and points in the Sound. Eventually, the rest of the boats followed, and Orient became a small yet undeniably fishy hub on the quieter of Long Island's two forks.

In 2001, after 20 years of *Nancy Ann* Charters and a few different boats, Jensen acquired the *Nancy Ann IV* that he still runs today. She's a 45-foot Burpee—a custom-finished vessel that was built in Florida as a dive boat. "They built only 12 or 15 of them," said Jensen "and mine was set up the same way, only I got rid of the platform and the stern door and turned it into a fishing boat." The walkaround Chesapeake-style hull has a deep bow with a flat bottom and a single diesel engine, so it rides smoothly and allows him to pursue a variety of species. "We're set up for bottom fishing, but we also do a lot of drift fishing. It's versatile enough that we can do it all, and that's what we need out here."

On this brisk, late-November day, there'd be no drifting. We were fishing over rock piles and wrecks in 40 to 120 feet of water, and with a full



Jensen requests that the mates cut green crabs into halves, because a bigger bait leads to more bites, and more bites means more chum.



A bundled-up Becca Stapleton swings a nice female blackfish over the rail.

moon only two days away, Jensen's prowess in maneuvering and anchoring us over the fishiest pieces of structure would be on full display.

Good Company

It was around 8 a.m. when I heard the unmistakable *crack, hiss, pop* of an opening beer

can. Tautog fishing, as much as it demands an angler's focus and attention to detail, is meant to be fun and laid-back—even when



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David Velasquez pinned this pool-winning tautog just before we pulled our lines for the day.

the possibility of a double-digit blackfish is on the line. Plus, everyone knows breakfast beers are only socially acceptable on a fishing boat. An ice-cold Miller Latte? Don't mind if I do.

As it turned out, the crowd on board were regulars who block out dates to fish with Jensen each autumn. "During the fall, I never have a day available because we get the same people every year, and they will never give up their dates," Jensen said. The *Nancy Ann*'s packed schedule is a testament not only to the quality of Long Island Sound's tautog, but Jensen's ability and dedication as a captain.

Mike Dunne, the organizer of these trips, hopped on the boat that morning with a sack of breakfast sandwiches for everyone. In these sub-freezing temperatures, the warm welcome (and the hot egg sandwich) from Mike was especially appreciated. He might as well have been wearing a cape.

One by one, members of the group introduced themselves after greeting the captain

with a hug or a handshake, along with a couple of wiseass aging remarks in good fun.

Now, fully confident that I was in good company, I settled in at the rail and joined the toast as we approached the first drop. Our mate Cristina, the fiancée of Rich's son and first mate, Rick Jr., had been cutting green crabs all morning and handed me a bucket. I found it admirable that Jensen maintained the values instilled in him during the 70s, employing his own family members just as his grandparents did.

While Cristina packed bait buckets with a hodgepodge of green crabs and the occasional white-legger or mud crab, our other mate, Derek Grattan, rigged up the boat rods. During the peak season, Grattan is the captain of his own operation, Gratitude Charters, just down the road in Southold.

Insider Knowledge

"Get ready to drop 'em, guys," Jensen hol-

lered from the cabin. Beers were cracked, bait buckets distributed, and halved green crabs dangled from the hooks of eager anglers waiting for the go-ahead sign. Seventy feet of frigid saltwater separated us from the boulders that bordered a small wreck below. In a few hours, the tide would be falling and we'd have no option but to fish shallower.

In Eastern Long Island Sound, the captain explained, the flood tide is the slower of the two tides, and with less current to battle, it's more favorable for tautog fishing.

"We fish a lot of deep-water spots, and when the outgoing tide is running hard, you just can't fish certain wrecks, or everybody is getting hung up. The incoming tide, on average, runs about 2 knots slower than the outgoing tide because we have so many islands out here," Jensen continued. "So, when the flood tide is running (west), the flow is inhibited by Fisher's Island and Plum Island, and we can fish all the backside eddies with relative ease.



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Our mate, Derek Grattan, keeps things running smoothly in the stern, helping to land our fish and fixing tangled lines.



When the water is rushing out (east) on the ebb tide, it all exits the Sound through either The Race, Plum Gut, or Sluiceway. That funnel effect makes the tides stronger here than anywhere else in the Sound.”

We started our morning fishing the early incoming tide. Having scarfed down breakfast sandwiches, our stomachs were full and morale was high. Soon after the first drop, we started picking away at mostly short tautog, with a few keepers in the mix.

Spot number two was a short steam away, and with the incoming tide still on our side, the bite really fired up. This time, Jensen anchored us over a barge wreck, and we dropped baits

115 feet to the bottom. This required between 10 and 12 ounces of lead, and bank sinkers were favored because of their ability to slip in and out of tight pockets between rocks.

It became apparent after two drops that the deeper water was holding bigger blackfish. Keepers, and some nice ones at that, came over the rail where they were met with a mix of cheers and friendly jeers by anglers competing for the pool money. The largest fish was around 6 pounds—a nice tautog, but not the double-digit caliber that the Sound has been known to produce.

Throughout his 45 years as a charter captain, Jensen says many 14- to 15-pound tog

have hit the deck of the *Nancy Ann*. The biggest, over 16½ pounds, was caught by veteran outdoor writer, Tom Schlichter, on a charter trip eight years ago. “A friend of mine has a boat in Connecticut and has had a couple fish over 20 pounds. Some of those extra-large blackfish live along the edges of their rivers, and they don’t go very far,” Jensen noted. “But for whatever reason, they rarely get above 16 pounds over here.”

Jensen admits that *very* big blackfish were once plentiful in the Sound. “There are still a lot of fish, but not as many jumbos as we used to see,” he said. Not long ago, they would catch a double-digit fish once or twice a day; now, they may see only a handful all season. “Tautog are very slow-growing fish,” Jensen said, “and so many people are targeting them now and are good at it,” he added, citing major improvements in electronics, like the trolling motors that allow anglers at any experience level to “anchor” the boat over structure. “But fishing is still good, and we get 7 to 8 pounders pretty reliably.”

As more people discover and pursue tautog in the Sound, the *Nancy Ann* crew does their part to minimize mortality and preserve the fishery. They make small tweaks to their approach that come from years of observation. For example, Jensen requests that all the boat rods are rigged with 4/0 hooks and instructs the mates to cut crabs into halves. They used to opt for 3/0 hooks, but a 4/0 can handle a larger bait, and a larger bait helps minimize how many undersized fish are hooked and released.

“Release mortality is probably lower than we think for most of our season,” Jensen said. “These are strong, hardy fish. It’s only the late season that’s a little tougher on the released fish because, at that point, we’re fishing much deeper water than we do in October.”

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Rich Meyerholz hoists a quality tautog that's destined for the fish box.

Jensen is a firm believer in keeping a fresh crab on the hook. "We tell our anglers to change out baits every few minutes. A fresh bait will produce more bites, even if those bites are from smaller fish. More bites generate more chum, so the fishing will typically improve," said the skipper. With that, now I understood why we had a vat of green crabs on board, more than I'd ever seen in one place.

As with any recreational fish species, there are obstacles to overcome. Jensen claims one

of their greatest challenges to this day is the division of Long Island's tautog fishery into two zones. "The regulations have less of an impact on the charters to our west, in areas like Port Jefferson, because it's unlikely those blackfish ever leave the Sound. But our fish out in Orient could be in 2 different zones in one day," Jensen said, pointing out the 1-fish difference in bag limits. "It just complicates things for us."

As one of the most experienced captains

in the Eastern Sound, Jensen makes sure his voice (and the voices of other North Fork captains) are heard. "I'm probably the oldest member of the North Fork Captains Association, which started back in the 80s," he said. Their common goal is to self-promote fishing charters in the area and to be recognized for having a say in regulations as a group. The local boats may compete for business, at times, but in this close community of like-minded captains, their voices are stronger together.

For All the Marbles

By the time we reached our third and final spot, I had lost all feeling in my toes, which I realized when a 12-ounce sinker rolled right off the fillet table onto my foot. Even with the sun overhead, it was cold enough that a few anglers who had already caught their limit retreated to the cabin. "If we're gonna catch a big one, it's gonna be here," said Jensen.

This spot was different. We had steamed across the Sound and were hugging the Connecticut shoreline. The Cross Sound Ferry, which I'd be catching to New London later that day, cruised right past us. I poked my head into the cabin to ask Rich what the bottom structure looked like. Rather than big boulders or the rigid remnants of a barge, we were fishing over a gravel and rubble bot-

Know When to Fold 'Em

Tautog (Blackfish) Regulations Long Island Sound Region:

3 fish per angler, 16-inch minimum size limit

Season: 10/11 - 12/9

Per New York state regulations, the tautog season in Long Island Sound opens in October and lasts into early December, but Jensen concludes his season by November 30 each year.

"The Connecticut River is really what shuts us down," said Jensen. "When the rivers get cold up north and all that freezing water flows downstream into the Sound, it changes our water temperatures drastically."

In Eastern Connecticut, the Niantic and Thames rivers also contribute to the rapid cooling of the Sound's waters. "We can see as much as a 5- to 7-degree temperature difference just on the tide change," Jensen added.

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The bottleneck created between Orient Point and Napatree Point has a big effect on the tides in this area. The incoming tide, on average, runs about 2 knots slower than the outgoing tide, making it the ideal time to target deepwater tautog.

tom in 45 feet of water. Jensen anchored up and we shared the small piece of real estate with a center console using a trolling motor to hold its position. The northeast wind was hardly a factor on this side of the Sound, but in the time it took us to run across, the tide had flipped. Jensen's plan was to put us in shallow water during the slowest portion of the ebb tide, which would soon be cranking. The jig window was closing.

I pulled out my lucky tog jig: a white-legger-patterned S&S White Chin Wrecker, tipped it with a halved crab, and pitched it up-current. After several minutes, there was a delicate *peck-peck* on the bait. Using all my restraint, I waited out a few more pecks, willing the line to move, indicating that the jig had been picked up. The split second between that line movement and the hookset is full of anticipation. I reared back and upward with


the rod. Big headshakes surged through my line, and 20 seconds later, a chunky sea bass showed itself on the surface, pinned right in the roof of its mouth. It was indeed a black fish, but the wrong kind. "That'll eat," I heard over my shoulder.

There was one more chance to drop a jig before we headed for Duryea's in Orient. This time, I opted for a heavier one, painted bright green and blazing orange to match the innards of a green crab. The tide pulled my jig beneath the boat, where it got bit twice before a decisive thump. Ready for my pool winner, I swung away, but the hook didn't connect. "Last drop, guys, so make it count," Jensen said. "Someone always catches a pool winner on the last drop," Cristina chuckled. "Who's it gonna be?"

Sure enough, on the last drop of the day, David Velasquez pulled in the biggest fish of

the trip with an estimated weight of 8 pounds. "See?! I told ya!" Cristina crowed. I missed my shot at a big one, but I had learned more in six hours of fishing than I had anticipated.

What I learned is that tautog fishing is not about catching the biggest fish. It's about the likeminded people we meet, the relationships we develop with them, and what we can gain from those relationships. I've been out on the *Nancy Ann IV* a handful of times now, and fishing with them feels like fishing with friends and family.

If you can manage a few fillets on top of all that, you're walking away from the table as a winner. A good captain leads to good fishing, and that's what keeps folks like Mike Dunne and his crew coming back to the North Fork to fish with the same captain, for the same fish, on the same day, year after year. 

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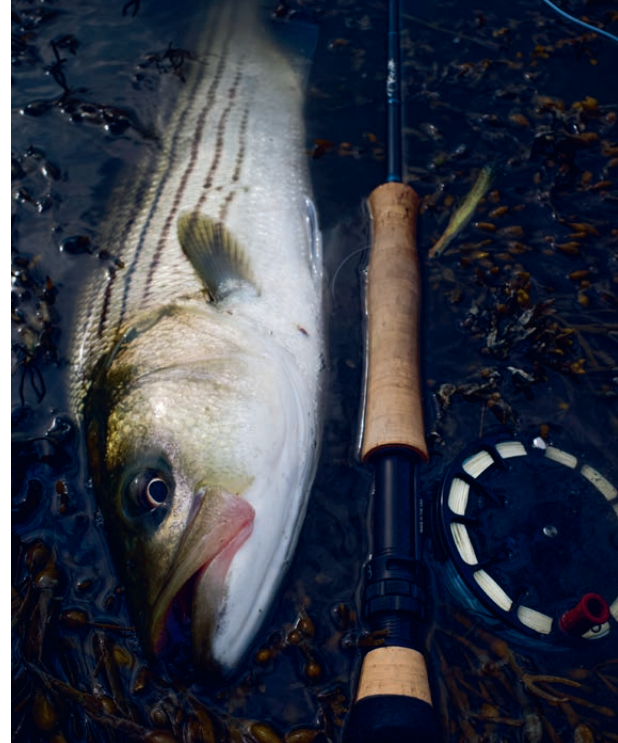
An Outsider's MISUNDERSTANDING

STORY BY JOE DAHUT • PHOTOS BY JEFF TYSER

I thought I had officially renounced night fishing a few seasons ago when I lived in Florida. I knew a few people who dabbled in the art of fishing in darkness, and I had dipped my toes in the cool, moon-soaked waters a time or two. The rumors I'd heard about fishing at night were true, most of them causing palpable, visceral consequences to the health of the fishery. Losing one or two fly lines a night from tarpon wrapping around bridge pilings was common, so I'd heard. Stories, videos, and secondhand anecdotes about hammerheads the size of skiffs gliding through the water with ease and making light of triple-digit-size tarpon made me grimace. Evidently, it spooked me off the prospect of fishing for big tarpon at night.







That was before I moved back to New England, where night fishing is king. I've told myself that I need to be available to the fish when they are in the mood. Despite the obvious statistical disadvantage I put myself in when swinging a fly to striped bass, my goal is simple: make a fish interested enough to pounce. For the most part, I can accomplish that goal when the right fly is placed in front of the right fish. Besides the alignment of the stars and moon, there was some mental conditioning I had to undergo for this to make sense to me. After spending four years sight-fishing in the Florida Keys, I con-

vinced myself that sight was a fishing luxury I could afford. As a Northeastern night angler, one must make an honest attempt to eulogize expectations and leave any sensory comforts at home on the couch.

Under the lamplight of a full moon, I watched undefined wading birds poke their beaks into the water's edge, their figurine bodies skeletal and untamed. Most of my nights have been fruitless, crowded, and cold; three things that differ from my time in Florida. The golden rule in the world of backcountry tarpon is that if you can accurately distinguish the color of another

guide's skiff, you're too darn close. I questioned some of the etiquette practices (or lack thereof) on New England's sandy shores, such as hooking an albacore on a jetty, and being interrupted by four more anglers plunking their lures into the same school of fish I had seen blitzing. Or, when fishing an estuary and having an older angler pull in and stand a few rod lengths away from me. These were instances that made me scratch my head. It wasn't combat fishing necessarily, but it was a little more claustrophobic than I was used to.

It is easy for any angler to wax poetic about



the good 'old days. However, the ever-enticing possibility of living the good 'old days while I still have them to live beckoned me to the water on a fall evening when no one else wanted to be out.

I slop the laces of my wading boots together and peek over the bridge at the line where the streetlight meets the water. The plasticity of the light molds itself around the rocks, the concrete, and the current moving over other undeterminable shapes beneath the surface. My rod is strung up, but I do not cast. I'm waiting for objects that go unnoticed. I'm waiting for clues. I have gravel in my boot from the lack of tension in the failing, stringy laces and, with each step, I lean closer to needing a replacement pair of waders. Even though I know I should stop and fix it, I am too engulfed in the sensory mind warp that is night fishing.

The silhouette of a headlamped figure floats toward me down the same hill I crawled from moments before. His headlamp light stretches only a few feet in front of him, so I shuffle my feet on the gravel to prevent a jump scare. Despite my efforts, my stillness shocks him. It has been great the past two nights, he admits. Everywhere else, he grumbles, has been dead. For many of the evenings I've spent out on the water



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since moving back, I drown in the depth of my own misunderstanding. The growing pains of knowing a new fishery have a particular biting annoyance, similar to the gravel in my boot. Despite its peculiarities, I am fond of any fishing challenge since it poses moments of stillness and clarity that are hard to achieve when in a routine. As an outsider, it feels good to tap on the glass of the ocean's consciousness. I am fascinated at the differences between both areas surrounded by, strangely enough, the same ocean. I have not gotten over how strange it feels to discover something new to me in a world full of trodden paths. Even more than last year, it feels particularly strange to fish under the stars. I am partially waiting for the tide to change and, more importantly, I am waiting for something to give away a clue. 🐟

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Yellowfin Tuna
Thunnus albacares
Photo by Jessica Haydel Richardson

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27 JULY 2025	28	29	30	31	1 FIRST QUARTER	2
3 RISE 5:49 AM SET 8:08 PM	4	5	6	7	8	9 FULL MOON
10 RISE 5:56 AM SET 7:51 PM	11	12	13	14	15	16 LAST QUARTER
17 RISE 6:05 AM SET 7:47 PM	18	19 PEAK TIDES	20 PEAK TIDES	21	22	23 NEW MOON
24 RISE 6:10 AM SET 7:36 PM	25	26	27	28	29	30
31 RISE 6:17 AM SET 7:25 PM FIRST QUARTER	1	2	3	4	5	6 SEPTEMBER 2025

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Finish the Season on Saltwater

It's often said that striped fishermen call it quits before the stripers do. I tried to buck the trend last year, when reports circulated of some late-season action around the Cape Cod Canal. That's not entirely unusual, but what piqued my interest was the presence of some big bluefish—blues that were so fat, they were almost shaped like bluefin tuna.

That's what drove me to the Canal on Thanksgiving Day, where several other anglers awaited the beginning of the east-moving tide. A few gulls hovered over the surface, but the crystal-clear water showed no signs of life. And then, on my fourth cast, as my 3-ounce jighead fitted with a Z-Man DieZel Minnow tumbled along the bottom with the current, a striper found it. It was one of six fish, ranging from 24 to 32 inches, brought to hand until the phone call came, asking if I could pick up a forgotten ingredient for Thanksgiving dinner at the in-laws' house.

A couple weeks later, I fished through a December rainstorm in Rhode Island, where stripers were pushing peanut bunker to the surface under flocks of gulls, and if it weren't for the Christmas wreaths on the doors on my drive to

the water, it might as well have been October. I put away the surf rod after that, proving that I was indeed quitting before the stripers had fully left. A week or so later, I picked it back up for an ill-fated holdover trip, but that's a story for another time.

Finding some late-migrating stripers is largely a matter of the time put in. There are fewer fish around and they tend to move quickly, so it's very easy to miss them. Keeping a regular check on one of your favorite striper spots is the best way to make sure you're there as the fish are passing through. For baits, keep to the basics of minnow plugs, soft-plastic paddle-tails, and eels, if you can find them.

Depending on your latitude, at some point over the next two months, striper fishing in your area will transition from chasing south-

bound migratory fish to targeting the holdovers settling in to the rivers and salt ponds. Some anglers take their holdover fishing seriously, bundling up throughout the winter to keep in touch with striped bass. Others go just often enough to remind them what a striped bass looks like.

Stripers hold over in rivers from Connecticut to Maine. While some rivers are well known and the fish there face lots of pressure, most salt ponds and bays have a small population of wintering-over stripers for anglers willing to freeze long enough to find them.

Small straight-tail jigs drifted through channels and holes are the way to connect with holdover stripers. Outgoing tides are generally favored, as falling water concentrates the bass in deeper parts of the bays and rivers. Nighttime tends to be more productive, just as it is with migratory stripers. You could close out the year without having to switch from salt water to fresh water, if you wanted.

Last year, a lights-out pollock bite at Jeffries drew big crowds to the headboats sailing from northern New England. Fishermen filled coolers with fish to 20-plus pounds. Cod season is closed, but when the pollock fishing was slow,



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a pivot to targeting Acadian redfish made sure everyone came home with something to eat.

South of Cape Cod, tog fishing stays strong through November and into December. During December, anglers will find the best action by heading for deeper structure out around Block Island. Green crabs get bites, but white-leggers can provide an edge, especially in deeper, colder water. These larger, white-and-orange crabs stand out in deeper water and are the crabs tog are likely to encounter on offshore structure.


Cod fishing south of the Cape can also be good through the end of the year as boats seek out codfish schools from Coxes Ledge to Block Island. Mixed in will be some super-sized bergalls, some fine eating as well.

And the tuna season ain't over yet! Bluefin will linger around Stellwagen and the Cape into December. Last year, fishermen enjoyed lights-out catch-and-release fishing for giant tuna through November and made short work of the quota when the commercial fishery reopened in December. The canyons will continue to hold fish if the weather allows a run that far. Recreational-sized bluefin may still be available south of Block Island, but we'll need to see how things move around following the

fall storms. The small tuna usually leave weeks, or even months ahead of the giants, some of which have been known to stick around even past the new year.

Some anglers struggle to make the switch to fresh water, but late-fall/early-winter fishing on rivers and lakes is excellent. Smallmouth bass school up and head for deep structure. Largemouth bass, some very big ones, are looking for big meals. Trout will feed with abandon, and fish from the fall stockings will

be joined by larger holdovers that survived from previous stockings. Pike will perk up, crappies and perch will form big schools to feed, and carp should begin grouping up in slower parts of the rivers, where fishermen can catch big numbers.

Even with all these options, it's tough to quit the striper season. If you're looking to end on a fish-catching note, a south-facing beach on Cape Cod or Rhode Island, or a river in Connecticut, is your best bet. 



Matt Haeffner with one of a number of jumbo pollock caught with Cam Faria last winter.

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until the children were grown and out of the house. I finally realized that no matter what I did, she would never be satisfied. We finally divorced, and ever since, I've been happy as a clam. I have a widow friend who accepts me for what I am and is very happy to go to a movie, out to dinner, or just spend time watching television or enjoying each other's company. This woman says I always appear much more relaxed after a few hours of fishing, and she takes great pride in the fresh fish she cooks and prepares for us."

My old friend shared those words of wisdom at a critical time in my early life and may have saved me from a lifetime of anguish and sorrow. The young lady and I parted amicably and, a few years later while working three part-time jobs in my junior year of high school and saving money for my first year of college, I met my wife, Lola.

I knew then, and it has been since proven that it was one of the most fortunate days of my life. Lola lost her mother at age 13 and became the woman of her household, bringing up her infant brother. That devastating early life loss of a parent was something we had in common. After my mother met Lola, along with the little brother she was responsible for bringing up, she took me aside and whispered, "This might be the one."

My first year of college, Lola went to work for a bank and paid for my textbooks and more than a few lunches. She encouraged me to begin outlining and documenting an article about my experience with and tutelage from the men of the greatest generation. She had never been in a boat, caught a fish, or eaten a steamer clam. By the time we were married, she had accompanied me on fishing trips and helped me harvest clams, quahogs, and blue-shell crabs, pull eel pots, and pin-hook fin fish, all of which I sold to neighbors or the fish market. She was my right hand when I began commercial fishing and guiding.

Many nights found us on our dead-end lane under the headlights, refilling reels with wire or lead line and repairing tackle for the following day. Ours was a partnership made in heaven. Our most important concerns were the upbringing and well-being of our two sons. Once they were in school, she was able to accompany me on trips where we harvested stripers, bluefish, scup, sea bass, and summer flounder. One of my fondest memories was of a rainy late-

October day in Vineyard Sound when my bride had my spare rain jacket wrapped around her waist under her own jacket as we were filling up an Igloo cooler with hubcap-sized scup that, due to scarcity, were bringing in the best price of the year. We celebrated with chowder and clam cakes at a Fairhaven restaurant, then took in the Wednesday afternoon matinee at a charge of \$1.50 per person. We then picked up the boys at my mother's house and took them out to McDonalds for dinner. Simple pleasures produced smiles all around.

With no background of any kind in angling, my wife naturally adapted to fishing and developed an uncanny sense of touch for all types of bottom fishing. As I was working on the book "Fishable Wrecks and Rockpiles," she caught the largest black sea bass of the year, which we entered in the state saltwater fishing contest. It was a feat she accomplished on two occasions, but she would not allow me to enter the huge scup she swung over the side from one of my rock piles northeast of Nomans Island—in the spirit of giving someone else a chance. The boys worked on the boat, catching fish and hauling our lobster pots, and when they moved out to live on their own, Lola and I continued our partnership. Some stormy falls and hard winters were more difficult, but because of her insight, we not only survived, we thrived. She worked every fishing, boating, and sporting show with me during the winter months, and accompanied me when I gave slide shows at local clubs.

One very cold and windy late October day while the boat was still berthed at Concordia in Padanaram Village, I returned home after deciding it was much too rough to fish. I walked into my office to find a miniature cloth-covered book propped up against my Smith Corona typewriter. It was a Christmas-club book from St Michael's Credit Union, and my wife had put it there as a reminder.

For those unfamiliar with Christmas clubs, they were a way of saving money for the holidays in sums as low as a dollar a week, although my wife usually found a way to make it a \$2 club. When the club began each year in November, I started my own book with at least five dollars because we were usually into the inshore cod fishing season, and the captain had a large retail customer who needed fresh fillets. Whatever fish were still uncut when we reached the dock were allotted to me. There is nothing quite like a golden fresh cod fillet ready for baking or broiling, particularly when

that fish was for sale on Thursday for Friday dinners. I had my own patrons who followed the "fish on Friday" routine passed on by their parents, so I had no trouble at all peddling fresh cod at two local taverns and the three nearby tenement houses in my neighborhood. I cut those fish very carefully because a complaint about a bone would have been a blemish on my reputation. One rugged Newport Navy Yard wharf builder, who had a penchant for beer and cheap bar whisky, told me the fresh cod fillets provided him with a much more hospitable greeting when his wife opened the door and inhaled the heavy scent of liquor on his breath.

As the cold winds of fall marched on, many

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Chris Megan, Publisher

Average No. copies each issue during preceding 12 months	Actual No. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date
45,382	41,076
20,793	117,679
1,230	1,228
17,187	14,769
0	0
39,210	33,676
1,590	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
2,522	3,700
4,112	3,700
43,3223	37,376
2,060	3,700
45,382	41,076
90.51%	90.10%
0	0
0	0
0	0
0%	0%

outdoor laborers began to work shorter hours due to the weather, yet the men who worked at the Navy Yard in Newport seldom lost any time or money; consequently, they were a bit more generous toward a young man skating on thin ice. That subtle message from my wife about the Christmas club was not ignored. Despite my menial contributions to the fund, we always managed to squeak by with my part-time work for Uncle Ernie, a Jack-of-all-trades fireman. My duties usually consisted of carpenter's helper, plumbing assistant, post-hole digger, and the most dangerous of all, walking bricks up a rickety wooden ladder to Ernie as he repaired a third-story chimney. Through it all, our triumph over poverty had everything to do with my wife's management of our budget.

Our financial situation was not dissimilar to other couples our age, and so we cut corners and somehow made it work. Employment of any kind was tenuous, and I always worked according to the mantra my father left me with. "If you are working for a man who pays you a dollar an hour, you give him a dollar-fifty worth. And no matter how bad the manager or the task assigned, you never quit in the middle of the job. You always finish the day, or week, or whatever you agreed to."

I was fortunate to have earned the trust and support of the boat club elders, who provided me with some great references for numerous jobs. During the winter months, shows like Paul Fuller's Eastern Fishing and Outdoor Expo, George Hawkins' boat show, and fishing clubs' speaking venues kept us busy and in the black. After Red Chaplin appointed




When was the last time you heard of anyone's wife picking up a pad sander and paintbrush to begin preparing the surface of a skiff project? Lola sanded and painted the topside of their fiberglass project while the author made repairs on this old former rental skiff they named *Resurrection*. In this season of thanksgiving, why not give an old fishing buddy, a friend, or relative a call, a card, or a prayer. Better yet, visit them. What a great way to begin the new year.

me Saltwater Editor of *New England Out of Doors*, the requests for articles began to come in. They kept me busy and in groceries and mortgage payments throughout the winter months.

I was always aware that a building requires a strong foundation. Beginning at the bottom rung of the ladder, I appreciated the opportunity to work my way toward the top. During my early years, I came to many crossroads. Thanks to my parents, the devout nuns who educated me, and the fishing and boating mentors who gave me guidance and provided courage and understanding, I avoided shortcuts and illicit paths. My childhood apartment was situated between two pubs, providing me a ringside seat

to the ravages of overindulging in alcohol. On Friday night pay-days, usually rational men burned through a week's salary, and when their wives dared to walk into the bar and plead with them to save some money for food, rent, and clothing, the results were not pleasant. The old-timers were fond of their whiskey and beer; they often passed a 10-cent draft toward me when we were eating blue claws or enjoying a clam boil. I thanked them and pushed the glass to someone else. Except for a rare bottle of beer, I never developed a desire for it, and I quit smoking the day my youngest son was born. I watched alcohol and tobacco sicken and kill my mentors long before their natural demise.

Fishing has been a source of many ruined friendships as well as marriages. I have witnessed firsthand the problems my friend Albert warned me of on the bridge that fateful evening. I have former mates and friends who married

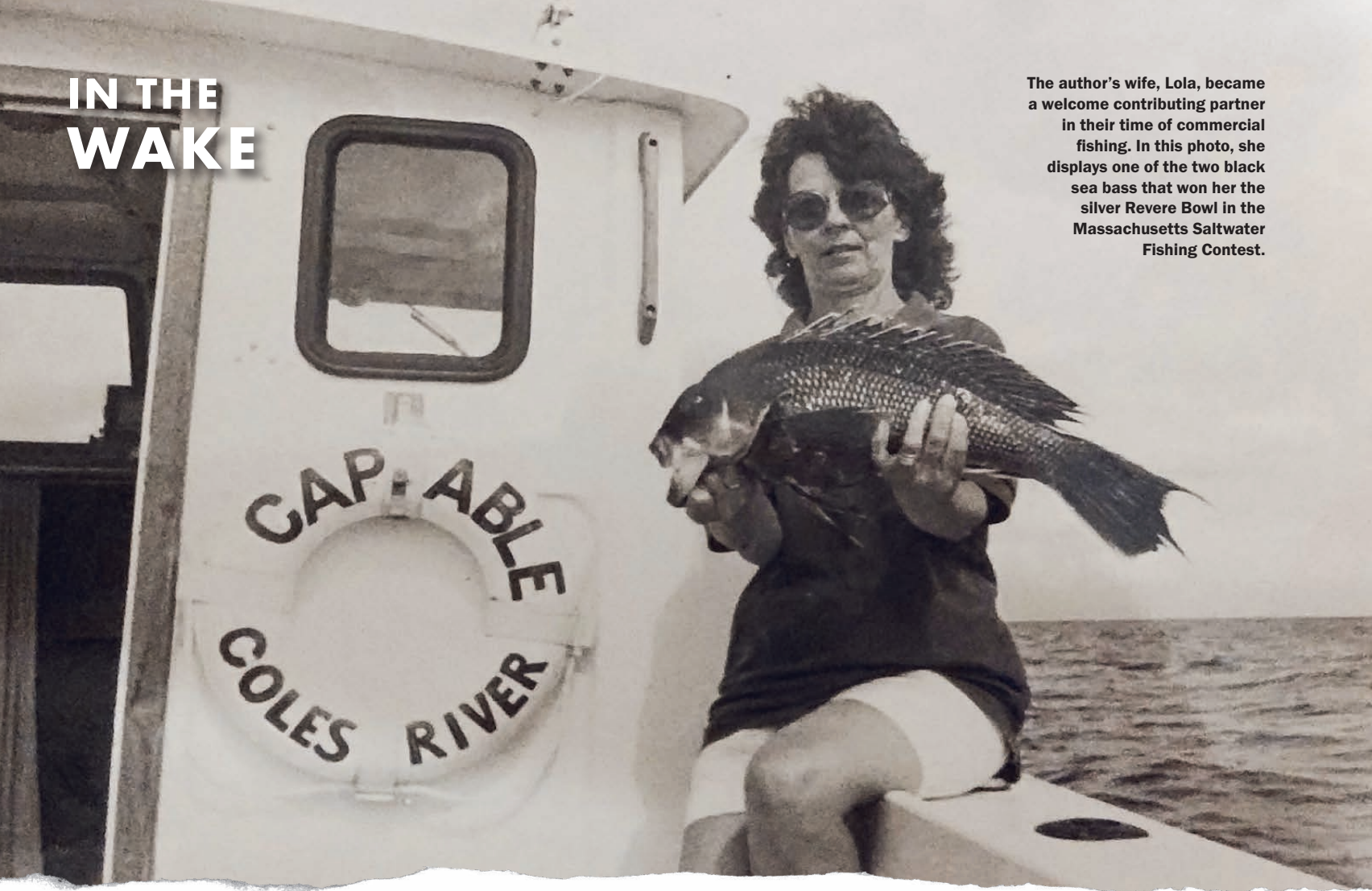
someone who promised to support or at least accept their passion for fishing and boating, then attempted to wean them off it. I have been guilty of fishing to extremes, and only because of my wife's understanding and patience was I able to remain a contributing partner in a loving relationship that raised two sons, both successful men and enthusiastic fishermen with families of their own. Every visit from the boys and their children is a reward, and each fishing trip is greatly appreciated. When compared to our allotted time on this earth, fishing season seems remarkably brief. Treasure your family and partners, for life is short. By the grace of God, this once-young errand boy has become an old man. 

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IN THE WAKE

The author's wife, Lola, became a welcome contributing partner in their time of commercial fishing. In this photo, she displays one of the two black sea bass that won her the silver Revere Bowl in the Massachusetts Saltwater Fishing Contest.



Poor No More

An Enduring Partnership Achieves Sustainability

BY CHARLEY SOARES

She had every right to be upset. I had promised to meet her at the Bridge Diner, as she was taking me to a movie at the nearby theatre. She was a kind and generous girl I'd met while working at the local drugstore. She came in to pick up her dad's prescriptions and purchase an ice cream soda, which she sipped slowly while conversing with me as I dispensed ice cream, cigarettes, and newspapers.

We hit it off, and I soon determined that she was a generous and thoughtful person, the daughter of parents who held good positions and were extremely generous with her allowance. I was embarrassed when my employer teased me about her inviting me to the movies and insisting on paying for the popcorn and

soda.

She was easy to like, but fishing was my first love. One night, while fishing from the bridge alongside my friend Albert, she walked up, wiping tears from her eyes and asked how I could forget our date. What had happened was that when Albert invited me fishing and told me he'd caught two big tautog and some white perch the previous night, I was so excited about the prospect of fishing that I'd forgotten all about my meeting with that pretty little lady.

She complained about all the time I spent fishing and asked where she fit into my schedule. I was too much of my mother's son to tell her that she was somewhere around third or fourth behind fishing, boating, and my dear friends and mentors at the nearby boat club.

However, I agreed to pack up and meet her at the diner a little later.

After she left, Albert shared some of his experiences. "That little lady is what we call high maintenance. From what I've just witnessed, she is a very needy person and considers that all your free time should be devoted to her. She actually reminds me of my former wife. I worked ten-hour days, came straight home for supper with the family every night, and on one or two nights out of seven, after the children were in bed, I enjoyed fishing on this bridge with my friends. My wife told me I was selfish and should spend that precious free time with her and not my friends. That went on for years

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*Continued on page 134*



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