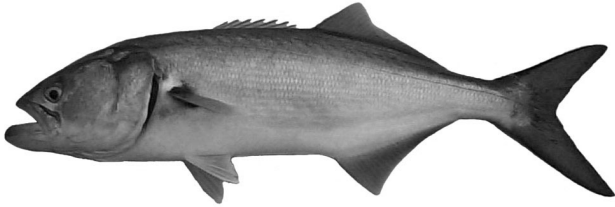




Saltwater Fishing: **BLUEFISH**

Bluefish, or blues as they are often called, are one of our area's most popular gamefish. Their aggressive behavior and strong fighting ability when hooked provide exciting angling adventure. When a school of bluefish attacks a baitfish school, the resulting frenzy is often visible on the water's surface as splashing and jumping fish flee for their lives. When this happens close to the shore, the action is often referred to as a "blitz." Casting a lure into this melee is a virtual guarantee of a hook-up.



Identification. Bluefish are long, moderately stout fish, with large heads and jaws filled with triangular serrated teeth. Greenish-blue above shading to silvery below, the bluefish is characterized by a dark spot at the base of the pectoral fin and a distinctly forked tail. Rarely exceeding 20 pounds, fish caught by anglers generally range in size from 9-inch "snappers" to 12-15 pound brutes.

Season. They are coastal migrants who find their way into local waters in the spring, following the schools of mackerel and menhaden. Look for them from late April through early November.

Habits. They can be caught in a variety of habitats close to shore. Bluefish travel in schools of similarly sized individuals. They feed at all levels of the water column from bottom to surface.

Bait & Lures. Blues will eat almost anything, preferring fish such as menhaden (bunker), anchovies and silversides (spearing). They are often caught on baits intended for other fish; they're not fussy. The most commonly used natural bait is whole or cut bunker, fresh or frozen. Artificial lures include anything shiny (diamond jigs, spoons), poppers, swimming plugs and jigs.

Tackle. When fishing for blues, it is possible to catch large fish, so gear up appropriately. From piers, docks and Sound beaches, a medium to medium-heavy power rating in a 7-9 foot spinning rod and reel spooled with 12-15 pound test line is good. Open ocean beaches call for gear that can get the bait out away from the surf zone, so a 9-foot or longer rod is required. Spinning tackle works fine for casting lures from a boat, though 12-30 pound class conventional gear is better for fishing with bait. Hooks sold for baitfishing for

SNAPPERS.

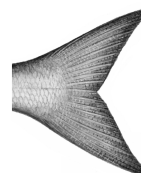


Fishing for juvenile bluefish, a.k.a. snappers, is a great way to introduce youngsters to saltwater fishing. Snappers show up in area waters beginning in June. These baby blues grow rapidly, reaching about six inches by August when anglers begin to target them. Feeding voraciously on young silversides, they may get to 10 inches or more before they leave local waters in late September.

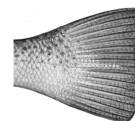
Catching snappers is usually just a matter of finding them and presenting a bait. They prowl the tidal creeks, marshes and canals, and can be found around docks and inside marinas. Tackle can be a cane pole with a bobber and hook, or light spinning or flyfishing gear. Small hooks baited with a young spearing or killifish under a bobber is the most popular rig, though small shiny spoons and small saltwater flies will fool snappers.

Often, anglers will catch young weakfish while snapper fishing. Though they are similar in appearance, weakfish are subject to a minimum size limit, while bluefish are not. Therefore, it is important that you learn to tell the difference and release all undersized weakfish. The main distinction between the two young fishes is their tails: blues have a forked tail, while weakfish do not. Also, bluefish have those nasty teeth!

Bluefish tail



Weakfish tail



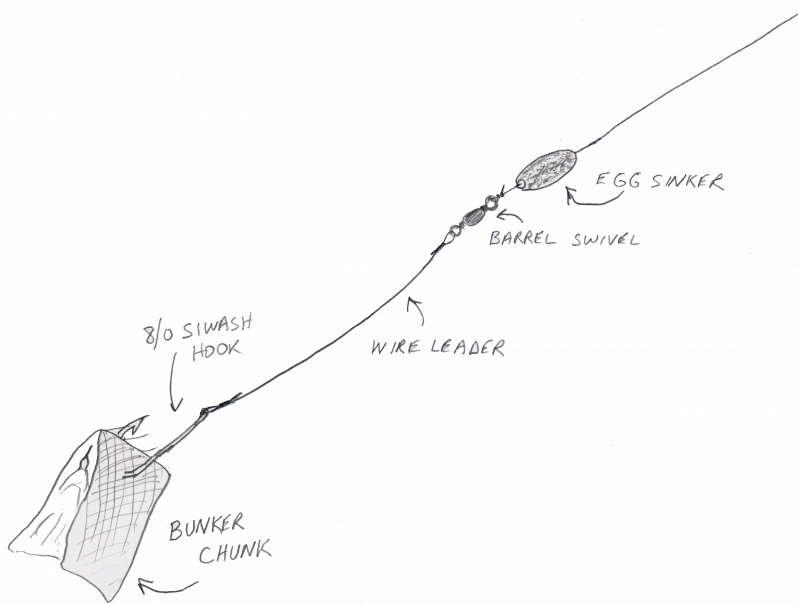


blues are generally large baitholder or Siwash (salmon) hooks with wire leaders, in sizes from 4/0 to 8/0. Try similarly sized and rigged circle hooks. Wire leaders are advisable for casting lures, as well.

Methods. Try a standard bottom rig or Fish-finder rig with bunker chunks, from the beach. Use pyramid-type sinkers to hold position on sandy bottoms. When fishing with artificials, a moderate to fast retrieve rate is desirable; vary the rate until you get a strike. Trolling with plugs, spoons, tubes or umbrella rigs can be very effective. Blues can also be caught by flyfishing, though wire leaders are advisable here, as well.

Cleaning & Eating. Bluefish flesh is dark and has a high oil content, making it quick to spoil. In order to maintain quality in fresh-caught fish, immediate chilling is essential and bleeding is desirable. Super-chill your catch by immersing it immediately in slush created by pouring seawater into crushed ice in your cooler. Blues have small scales and soft flesh, making them easy to fillet. Fillets should be skinned, then trimmed of all fat and red flesh. Do not wash the fillet in fresh water! Quickly rinse the fillets in seawater or a light brine, then pat dry with paper towels. Bluefish is good baked, broiled or fried, and is especially tasty when smoked.

Cautions. Bluefish **teeth** are much like many sharks', so exercise extreme care when removing the hook! Use a de-hooker or a pair of long-nose pliers on those hooks. Also, New York State Department of Health has issued an advisory about consumption of bluefish, recommending that you eat no more than ½ pound per week because of possible PCB contamination. For more information, contact the Department of Health.



Suggestion for bluefish bait rig

For more information, contact

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