



Saltwater Fishing: **STRIPED BASS**



Striped bass are the most prized of the inshore gamefish species of New York. Their striking appearance, large size potential, hard fighting ability and delicious flesh have created a virtual cult among local anglers, causing many to lose countless hours of sleep while pursuing their quarry in the dark hours. Many anglers remember their first striped bass with the same fondness as a first love. For a few, this fish is their first love.

Identification. Striped bass are long, thick-bodied fish with large broad heads. They are characterized by the presence of 7-8 smoky black stripes running the length of the fish. The scales are large and rough, as are the sharp-edged gill plates. The fin spines are stout. The fish is generally dark olive above shading to silvery white on the belly. Fish caught by anglers generally range from a few pounds to over 30 pounds, with fish over 40 pounds not uncommon. The New York State record for striped bass is 76 pounds.

Season. The Hudson River produces a local strain of stripers, but most of the fish caught on the coast originate in the Chesapeake. Stripers are seasonal migrants, though some fish are found in New York waters year-round. Fishing for them generally starts in April with warming of local waters, and drops off in late November, though they are around in good numbers well into December many years.

Habits. They can be caught in a variety of habitats close to shore. They prefer inshore habitats with some structure, such as rocks, pilings and troughs, but are found in open water as well. They feed at all levels of the water column from bottom to surface.

Bait & Lures. Stripers eat a wide variety, preferring fish such as menhaden (bunker), anchovies and silversides (spearing). They will eat tiny amphipods, lobsters, squid, worms and clams. The most commonly used natural bait is surf clam, with whole or cut bunker a close second. Live baits include bunker and eel, but any live fish can be good. Artificial lures include diamond jigs, spoons, tubes, poppers, swimming plugs and bucktail jigs.

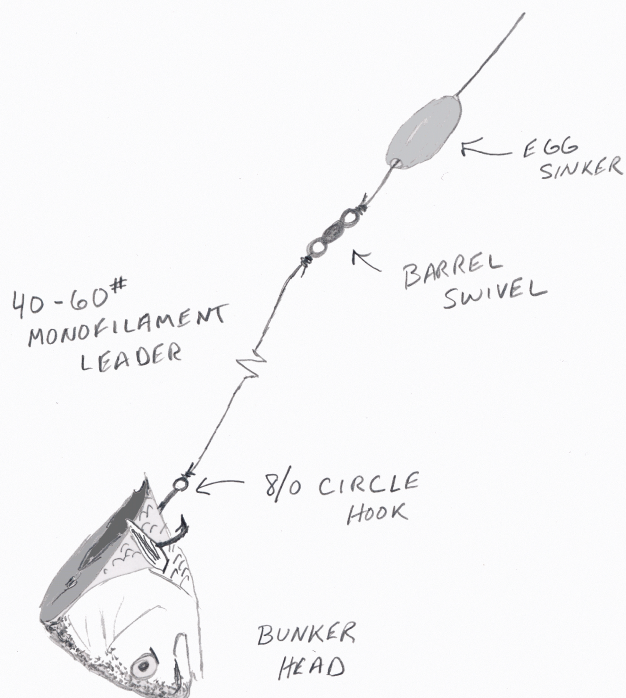
Tackle. When fishing for stripers, it is possible to catch large fish, so gear up appropriately. From piers, docks and Sound beaches, a medium to medium-heavy power rating in a 7-9 foot spinning rod and reel spooled with 12-15 pound test line is good. Open ocean beaches call for gear that can get the 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 stripers are generally large baitholders, in sizes from 4/0 to 8/0. Try similarly sized circle hooks. Wire leaders are not necessary when fishing for striped bass.

Methods. When fishing with bait from the beach, try a standard bottom rig or Fish-finder rig with bunker chunks or clams. Use pyramid-type sinkers to hold position on sandy bottoms. When fishing with artificials, a slow to moderate retrieve rate is desirable. Vary the rate until you get a strike. Trolling with plugs, spoons, tubes or umbrella rigs can be very effective. Tipping jigs and tubes with live sandworms is very effective. Stripers can also be caught by flyfishing, using baitfish or squid imitations.

Cleaning & Eating. 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. 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. Stripers have firm, white flesh that is delicious cooked in nearly any manner, including as a substitute for crab meat in "crab" cakes. Large fish can be cut into steaks for the grill.



Cautions. Striped bass have very small teeth, such that their jaws feel as though lined with rough sandpaper. They have stout, sharp spines, however, and the rear margin of the gill plate is like the edge of a serrated knife. Be careful! Also, New York State Department of Health has issued an advisory about consumption of striped bass. For more information, contact the Department of Health.



Suggestion for a striped bass rig. Note that striped bass will eat the heads of bunker.



For more information, contact

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