



Saltwater Fishing: **WEAKFISH**

Native Americans called this fish squeateague, which means “squid eater.” Weakfish are somewhat overshadowed by other local gamefish like bluefish and striped bass, but are challenging and fun to catch. Their name may be derived from the fact that the membrane around the jaws tends to tear easily when hooked.



Identification. Weakfish are long and fairly slender fish. They are characterized by the presence of many dark spots, or “freckles,” on the back and sides, many of which blend together to form irregular lines. They are also one of the more colorful local species, with distinctive yellow pelvic and anal fins. They are dark olive to greenish brown above, shading to silvery white below, but displaying pearlescent lavender, rose, blue, gold or copper overtones on the back and sides. Most weakfish caught by anglers run 1-6 pounds, with fish over 14 pounds considered rare trophies.

Season. Weakfish surge into local waters for spawning in the spring and spend the summers and early fall here fattening up for the trip south. Look for them from late April through early October.

Habits. They are schooling fish, preferring inshore waters inside estuaries, bays and tidal creeks, or along the open sandy beach. They tend to feed near the bottom, but will venture into shallow water in the evenings and early mornings. Large fish are found in deeper waters in inlets or other areas where the tidal currents run strong.

Bait & Lures. Weakfish feed on many fish and invertebrate prey, including the squid for which they were named. Small weaks tend toward worms, shrimp and crabs, while the larger specimens are more piscivorous (fish-eating). Commonly used bait items are sandworms, squid strips or live killifish, with whole squid or live menhaden used to catch the larger fish. Artificial lures include silver spoons, diamond jigs, bucktail jigs, plastic-bodied jigs, plastic worms and swimming plugs. .

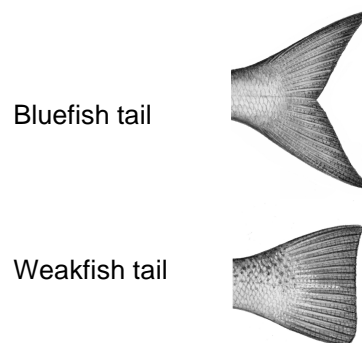
Tackle. Medium-power 6-7 foot spinning or conventional rods and reels spooled with 8-12 pound test line are all that are required. Gear up or down, based upon the size of the fish targeted and the bait used. For example, a medium-light spinning outfit with 6-8 pound line is all that’s necessary when using small jigs for fish in the 1-4 pound class. Hooks should be sized to the quarry, mainly in the #1 to 4/0 range. Wire leaders are not necessary and not recommended, as weakfish can be leader shy. Jigs are usually fished tied directly to either the main line or a flourocarbon shock leader of about 2 feet.

Methods. When fishing with bait, a high-low rig baited with a sandworm on one hook and a squid strip on the other is very effective. Fish with live killies under a bobber in shallow creeks for weakfish and the occasional fluke or blue. Fish jigs by retrieving them slowly close to the bottom without any jiggling action. Tipping jigs with a squid strip is recommended but not necessary. When fishing with plugs or spoons, cast them into shallow water or near marsh banks in evenings or early mornings.

Cleaning & Eating. As with any fish, preserve the best flavor

A Case of Mistaken Identity

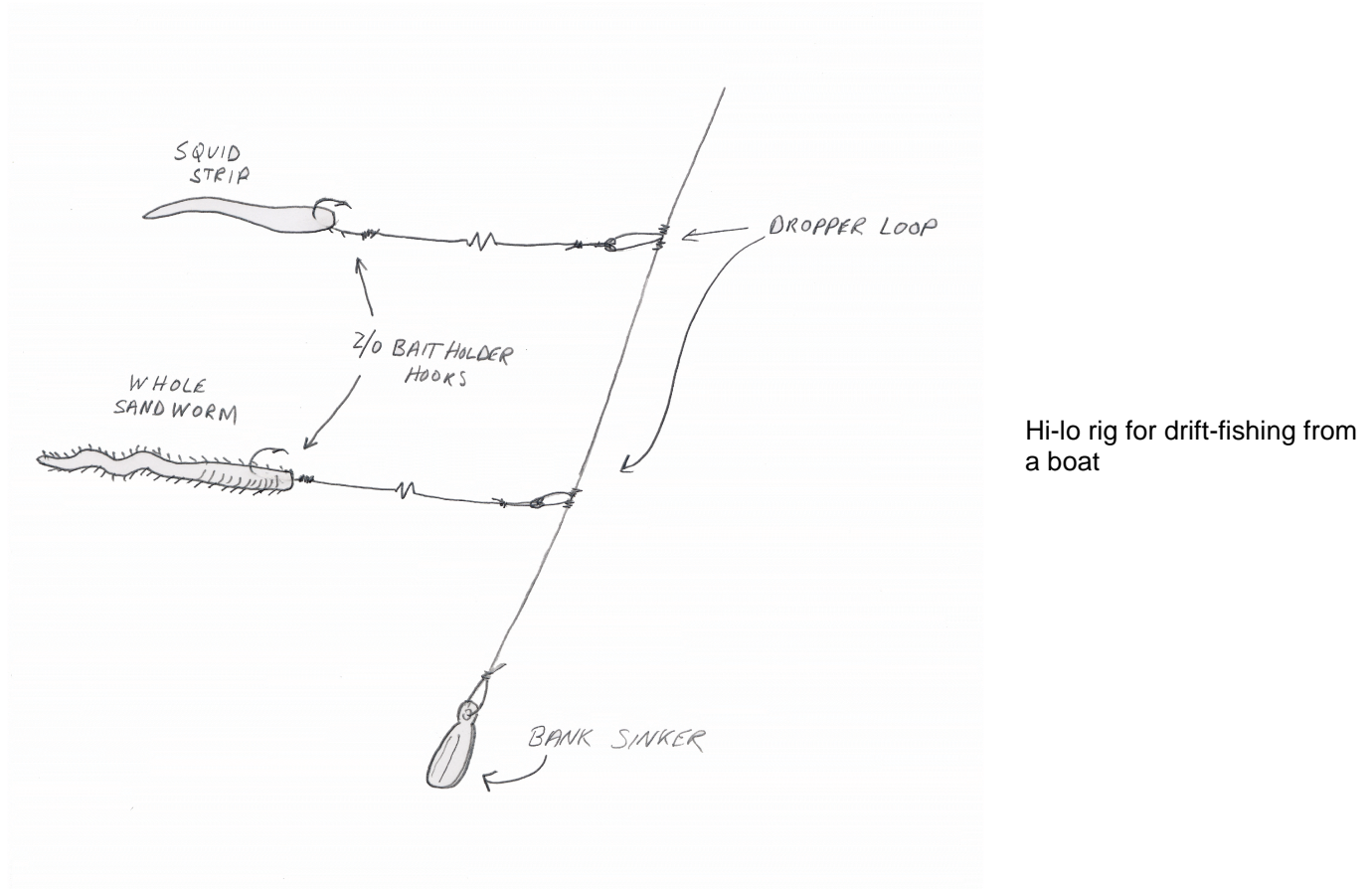
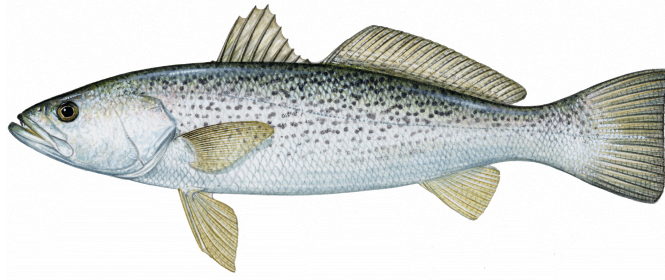
Often, anglers will catch young weakfish while snapper fishing. Though they are similar in appearance, weakfish are subject to a minimum size limit, while bluefish are not. Therefore, it is important that you learn to tell the difference and release all undersized weakfish. The main distinction between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





and condition in weakfish by getting it on ice as quickly as possible. Bleeding the catch is not critical, but recommended. Smaller weakfish can be simply gutted, scaled and left whole for baking or pan frying. Larger weakfish should be filleted, a process that is easy due to their small scales, thin skin and soft flesh. Weakfish flesh is light colored and tender, with a band of red muscle on the sides. It is very mild flavored and sweet. If the fillets will be held for more than 2 days, it is recommended that the red muscle be trimmed away. While the fish is good fried or broiled, it is excellent stuffed whole and baked in the oven, or in foil on the grill. It is delicious smoked, too.

Cautions. Weakfish have needle-like teeth which can cause puncture wounds for the unwary. This fish is not subject to any specific advisory for consumption. Eat and enjoy!



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