

Spring Striped Bass Fishermen Just Caught a Real Break!

by John H. Vargo, Publisher



What could be better, the last vestiges of February's cold, brutal winds, and then the opposite, of a warm sunny day, and finally its March!

Striper season on the Hudson River has arrived. Some of us fisherman are getting smart as we age; we painted the bottom of the boat with a fresh coat of bottom paint, after we washed it down during haul out, and cleaned up the boat, already for spring. Now, if it is not buried in the back of the boat yard, or in your own back yard, you can get it out and down to the river for an early launch that will begin the wonderful ritual of spring striper season on the Hudson River.

The Season begins with five year old and older stripers gathering on the west side of New York Harbor all winter. In March savoring the small differences in rising temperatures, as the sun warms the shallows from Jersey City to Englewood, the "bass" begin to move upriver.

In my lifetime these stripers have grown in size much larger than when I was a child. The quantity of striped bass migrating each year is nowhere near as large as they were in the early 90's, but the stripers are most definitely larger as a year class than ever before.

Perception is everything and the older striped bass fisherman, remembering what it used to be like, can be discouraged by all the changes in the rules that allow a delicious striper to wind up on the dinner table. But, for those of you who are willing to adapt to the new rules and conditions the eye opening opportunity to catch stripers is still there.

The biggest break we have gotten is that "Bunker" are back in the Hudson River in large numbers. They range as far north as Peekskill, NY in huge schools, something we have not seen in my lifetime!

"Menhaden, Brevoortia tyrannus, is, without a doubt, the single most important fish in the western Atlantic. This oily filter-feeder swims in schools so large that they block the sun from penetrating the water's surface as it regulates ocean health. Earlier this week, we were greeted by news that menhaden stocks were rebounded, yet despite their near-universal importance in the western Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, most Americans have near heard of a menhaden. Andrew David Thaler"



Chris Pritchard's Lowrance electronic fish finder on his net boat, late April 2016, these are bunker by the thousands on the screen.



A fresh haul of bunker, (Menhaden) Chris Pritchard photo late April, 2016

These two photos by Chris Pritchard really tell a story of back-breaking, cold miserable work, not only hauling in the net to the boat, but of then "picking the net clean", putting the bunker on ice and then getting them to market all within an hour of hauling.

You truly have to love what you do to enjoy the benefit of having fresh bunker for bait, and Chris Pritchard does enjoy it!

In the lower "river" the most significant positive change is the huge schools of "bunker" that now arrive in April. This is a major change in live bait fishing as "bunker" is the number one ocean fish that striped bass feed on throughout their migration up and down the east coast of the United States. Herring, another part of the Herring family of fishes, is still very important to the upper river's live bait fishing for striped bass, but fishing from Newburgh south with bunker has created an entirely new "game" for live bait fisherman. Those fishermen that have caught on to this new development will be the first to say, "The bunker had better be fresh if you're going to consistently catch stripers!"

There is licensed commercial fisherman on the lower Hudson River that is allowed to sell this fresh bunker. This is the number one reason why some striper fisherman consistently are successful in catching and releasing stripers on their fishing trips. They always use fresh bunker as bait!

