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Subject: : Warm Water & Salt Water Fly-Fishing

Topic: : Delaware River stripers are in!

Re: Delaware River stripers are in!

Author: : afishinado

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URL:

Mike makes an annual report on PAFF about Delaware River stripers. To save Mike some time, here is a copy of the report from last year. (Thanks, Mike!)

Re: Delaware Estuary stripers (tidal portions of Delaware R and tribs)

First, thanks to Afish for digging up my comments from last year and posting them on the Delaware River Stripers thread. They were fairly detailed and I don't have much to add to them, as they are still applicable. They, however, pertain to the Delaware Estuary, the tidal portion of the Delaware. The fishery and its timing is much different on the non-tidal Delaware, except perhaps from Yardley to Trenton Falls. Additionally, I have started this new thread because the Delaware River one became a discussion of the Susquehanna Flats and tribs.

The impact of the warmer winter on the timing of the first appearance of the stripers in numbers worth fishing over is an interesting one (Read that as follows: it keeps me guessing too). Two years ago the water warmed earlier than normal and the stripers began spawning in greater numbers than usual in the Delaware (Commonwealth of), but the spawning activity did not start more than a week earlier in Pa than it normally would have. Using that for guidance, I suspect that if the warmer weather persists, anglers using bait may be catching stripers in Pa in the last week of March or possibly the week prior. Bait fishing should continue to build and be good through April. The peak of the run, however, always occurs in May and, with the exception of Trenton Falls and the Schuylkill R below Fairmount Dam, it is possibly the only time that numerous stripers are close enough to shore to make wading or shoreline fishing with lures or flies profitable. If you have a boat, you may be able to get on the fish earlier, but for the most part they will be 15-35 ft deep, giving the advantage to boaters and individuals with surf rods and a few oz of lead. (Boaters: Be careful. This is not your local lake; it is big water with big waves in windy conditions and most anytime a tug or ship is on the move, but especially when they are running against the tide).

That having been said, a few large females (the largest fish of the year) are often found cruising some NJ shallows (3-8 ft of water) before the males show up and before large numbers of stripers move onto the spawning grounds. I have seen this happen on shallow flats and more commonly where a tidal stream dumps warm water out of a near-by wetland or sewage treatment plant onto an adjacent river flat. Finding these fish, at least in my experience, would be a low percentage game unless you have learned exactly where to go. But, it is probably not a lower percentage game than is muskellunge fishing, and these female stripers are usually 36-42 inches long and very heavy. Otherwise, fishing at that time should for the most part be from a boat in deeper water until groups of fish start going into the shallows to spawn (generally 59-60 deg water temp as a guideline).

So what is a good day in the last three weeks of May? If you are landing 5-8 fish per hour between 18-32 inches

(mostly 22-27 inches) you're having a real good day. Larger fish are around at that time and can typically run up to 42 inches long. Even larger ones are present, but rare. March and April seem to be the time that the really large fish are caught, and almost always with bait. Again, the Schuylkill and Trenton Falls do not follow this rule of thumb, and seem to produce larger fish throughout the run.

ALERT: If you fish the NJ side of the Delaware this year, you will be required to possess a FREE marine fishing permit and you must abide by NJ regs. If you fish the Pa side you must have a FREE Pa marine fishing permit. Both permits are readily available on-line from the respective states' fisheries web sites and may be printed out on the spot. I carry both in addition to my Pa license, which is good on both shorelines (see Pa Summary Booklet of Regulations). If you do not carry the NJ permit and are fishing in NJ the fine starts at \$300 and goes up from there into the thousands. This also means that if you wish to keep a striper from the Pa slot limit, you can't have it in possession while over the NJ state line in a boat or on shore. The state line is roughly the center line of the river, but varies, particularly around islands. My recommendation: consult a USGS topographic map or perhaps the navigational charts that you can find on-line. All stripers caught on the NJ side of the line must be immediately released, as Pa's and NJ's regulations differ. Additionally, if you decide to use bait in NJ (perhaps out of frustration). you must use a non-offset circle hook when fishing the typical size striper hooks. Check the NJ regs for the hook size at which the circle hook reg takes effect.

This fishing in the tidal Delaware is pretty much over by Memorial Day weekend or certainly by June 1-3.

For additional info, see the Delaware River stripers thread and a number of Area 6 biologist reports on the topic (PFBC web site).

Nuther great post by Mike:

Best places to get at the stripers on the Pa side with a fly if you don't have a boat or a kayak: Trenton Falls, Morrisville, Bucks Co.; Fairmount Dam tail-race, west side, Schuylkill R., Phila. If you have a kayak, you can make a killing at a number of spots, particularly on the NJ side. Having experienced the fishing in the Delaware, I don't know why anyone would drive 1.5 hours farther to fish the Jersey shore at this time of the year unless they are intent on harvest of a 28" or longer fish.

Just released is a new report on the Delaware Estuary striped bass studies. Included is state-by-state tag return information from 3200 stripers tagged (600 tags returned) in the Delaware and Schuylkill between 1995-2009, inclusive. The fishing in the tidal river (Delaware Estuary) primarily occurs in late March, April, and May. Peak time is about the second week in April until the second to third week in May.

[http://www.fish.state.pa.us/images/reports/2010bio/6x06\\_23dela.htm](http://www.fish.state.pa.us/images/reports/2010bio/6x06_23dela.htm)

If you wish to fly fish for stripers on a C&R basis in spring along the tidal Delaware and Schuylkill in Pa, there are a few locations where the fish are frequently in areas that are accessible by foot from shore. The Schuylkill location has already been mentioned above. A Delaware Estuary location is off the public road that roughly parallels the shoreline behind the Phila Airport. Another one is the shoreline that runs along the mile long fall line at the head of tide, known as Trenton Falls. This is accessed via the Morrisville, Pa. side of the river. On the other hand, the NJ shoreline is much more accessible and some good places to start are the shorelines near National Park (near the public launch) and downstream from the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge. The shorelines that extend for a mile above and below the Cinnaminson walled waterfront are also good loctions to find the fish, but I do not know whether these locations are accessible to the public. I see people fishing those locations on occasion, however. You'll need to explore this on your own. There is a very tight window of opportunity along the Delaware shoreline other than at Trenton Falls. It is during the period from about May 8 to May 26. When

you are on the NJ side the wind is usually in your face.

When: Sometimes as early as the last week in March, but more typically in April and May, concentrating on periods of steady or rising water temps. An especially good water temp range is 60 F - 68F, but the fish will certainly hit in cooler water than that. The problem is that they are not real common in near shore areas (for shore fly or lure anglers) until the temp hits around 60 F. The exceptions to this are in the few hundred yards below Fairmount Dam on the Schuylkill in Phila and at Trenton Falls, which is the tidal set of rapids between Morrisville, Pa and Trenton, NJ. At those two locations you can pretty much just go by the time of year and not necessarily the 60 F rule. That may also be true at some NJ creek mouths, but generally 60F is a good rule of thumb for near-shore areas. Good numbers are often present in the Schuylkill in April and May.

Where/when: Aside from what I mentioned above, once 60 F is hit and temps are steady or rising, fish near shore areas during the three hours before and three hours after high tide. Fish will typically be in 4-10 feet of water, but may be as shallow as 2 ft. So, if you wade out, they may be in front of you and behind you. Good spots on the Delaware Estuary are along sandy beaches with good current, creek mouths, island shorelines that face the main river channel, concrete rip-rapped areas, again paralleled by good current speed, sand bars, discharges from large wetlands, and, if you can stand it, sewage treatment plant discharges. Stay out of coves, other than at the points where the coves meet the main river. The greatest amount of shore access to good habitat in the Pa. portion of the Delaware Estuary is on the NJ side, if you can gain access. One good spot is the nature center at the end of the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge where there is good habitat for about a mile below the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge. That good habitat continues upstream to about a mile below Dredge Harbor, by-passing the walled stretch at Cinnaminson, NJ, but I am not aware of the legal access situation other than at the nature center. I see people shore fishing the stretch between TP bridge and Dredge Harbor at places, but I don't know the status of the lands they crossed to get to those places. Another potentially good spot is the shoreline along and upstream from National Park, NJ, where there is a public boat ramp. The fish sometimes show up on that sandy beach in big numbers.

On the Pa side, shore spots with good concentrations of fish are limited. One popular one is on the stone wall across the street and behind the UPS terminal, which is on the back side of the Phila Airport.