

Striped Bass Double Play

Here are two surefire methods for nailing a trophy northeast striper in the spring. - By Jeff Merrill

Though many may find it hard to believe some of the best striped bass fishing on the planet can be found in the northeast, particularly in the shadow of New York's skyscrapers where stripers weighing 25 to 30 pounds are caught regularly and 40 pounders are not uncommon.

In the spring as striped bass move out of their wintering grounds and migrate up and down the coast they expand a lot of energy and get in a feeding mood. The bays and coastal waters of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut provide a perfect atmosphere for bass to congregate this time of the year as massive schools of menhaden, locally known as mossbunker or bunker swarm into the area. This baitfish which ranges in size from peanuts of three to four inches up to adults that approach two pounds are the primary forage of striped bass. Liveling and trolling artificial lures which resemble this species are both popular techniques for catching bass in the spring. Stripers can be found just about anywhere from flat, open bottom where they're often crushing schools of bait near the surface to channel edges and rocky bottoms where they feed on a variety of other baitfish.

Some of the first stripers of the year are caught on bunker spoons trolled with wireline. Wireline is a must to get lures down into the feeding zone of the striped bass and requires special rods with

hardened guides that resist grooving from the wire as it passes through. Reels should be high-speed star drag models such as the Penn Senator 113HSP matched to rods such as the Tsunami Trophy Series TSPBC761HW or Star Rods DLX 8/0



Spring stripers in the northeast are big, fat and strong fighters and a blast to catch.

WL. Reels are spooled with 300 feet of stainless steel wireline that's marked at 50-foot intervals. A 20-foot leader of 80-pound test monofilament is attached to the wire and a ball bearing snap swivel is added for attaching the bunker spoons. There are as many ways to setup wireline on a reel as there are anglers who use

them. Spools of wire that's pre-marked are available from several manufacturers which can be spooled onto the reel after adding a couple hundred yards of Dacron or monofilament backing. Knots for attaching wire to the backing and monofilament can be tricky for those new to the sport. For those new to this game it's a good idea to have your local tackle shop setup wireline outfits for use in your particular area. These same pros can also provide additional tackle and information to help increase your score.

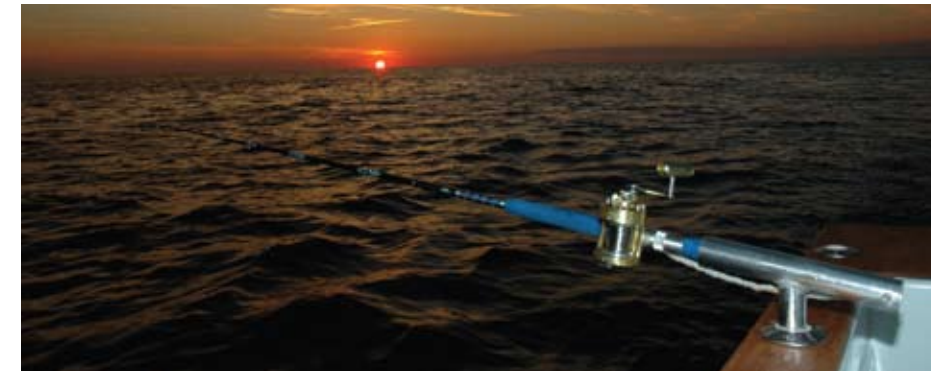
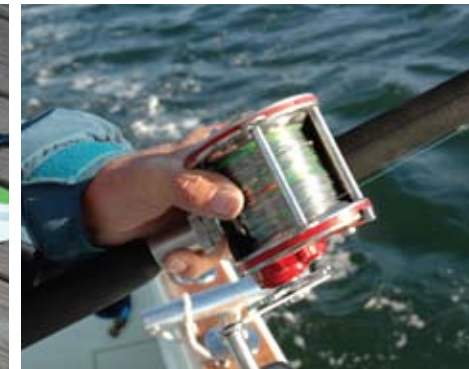
When trolled properly bunker spoons accurately resemble mossbunker but presentation in the feeding zone is critical as striped bass typically feed close to the bottom under the schools of bait, even in the spring. Several colors of bunker spoons produce but the most effective are white, green and white, chrome and chartreuse. Small versions of the larger spoons are effective when schools of small menhaden are present. Rods are placed in 90-degree rod holders often called outrodders to help get the wireline down in the water. Also, note that every 100 feet of wireline in the water will lower lures 10 feet in the water column. The marks on the wire at 50-foot intervals indicate how much wire is in the water for determining how deep trolled lures are positioned. Trolling speed varies by boat and sea conditions but should not exceed four knots. Two rods are normally set in the pattern, one on each side of the

boat. Always put the reel clicker on and apply light thumb pressure when letting out wireline to avoid a bird's nest in the reel which resembles a tangled Slinky and requires wire cutters to remove. Monitor the colorscope and when bait or fish are marked be prepared to retrieve or let out additional wire to place spoons to the proper depth. When trolled properly the rods will bow and return in a rhythmic pulsating motion as the spoon swims from side to side simulating a menhaden. Don't pump the rod when fighting a fish as wire has no stretch and by doing this slack will occur in the wire resulting in a lost fish.



Menhaden are hearty fish and will survive with small hook wounds from the snag. Some pros feel the scent from a snagged bunker's wound also helps attract bass as well. A good livewell that turns over the water in the tank quickly is critical to keep the baits frisky.

With the livewell is full, look for stripers in the same areas where you find the menhaden since they often can be found feeding under the baitfish. A medium to medium heavy conventional rod with light lever drag reel that's spooled with either 50-pound test monofilament or braided line gets the nod. A 9/0 or 10/0



(Clockwise from top-left) 1. Bunker spoons come in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes and all are proven striped bass producers. 2. Always apply light thumb pressure when using wireline to avoid a massive birds nest which is often impossible to untangle. 3. A quick toss of the cast net can fill the livewell in a hurry with menhaden. 4. When trolling with wireline outrodders are required to help get the wireline and bunker spoon down in the water column.

Like most fish, striped bass are suckers for live bait, especially menhaden. As schools of these baitfish swarm into the bays and along the coast striped bass gorge themselves as if it were their last meal. It's often very easy to spot schools of this baitfish "flipping" on the surface at first light in calm water. A cast net can fill a livewell in a hurry though it takes practice to throw one properly. Bunker snags, treble hooks cast in a lead weight, can be cast into the school to snag bait.

Gamakatsu Octopus-style hook is tied with a Snell to a 36-inch, 50-pound test fluorocarbon leader and then attached to a three-way swivel of adequate size with a Clinch Knot. A large sinker snap is used for attaching weights which range from four to 10 ounces depending on current and water depth. Hook the menhaden through the lower jaw and out through the upper jaw to keep the mouth nearly closed which allows the bait to breathe but prevents it from spinning. This

rigging method also keeps the hook from fouling in the bait as well. When fish are marked on the colorscope drop the bait to the bottom as the boat drifts across the structure or fish. Once on the bottom the bait will swim around so apply light thumb pressure to the spool while keeping the reel in free spool. When a bass picks up the bait continue to apply light thumb pressure for about ten seconds then engage the reel and set the hook.

Keep in mind that striped bass are tightly regulated and laws vary from state to state. Check with the local Fish and Game enforcement agency in the state where

