

Western Stripers on Peanut Bunker

By Captain Andy LoCascio
from Northeast Angling



I cut the engine and let the boat glide quietly into the shallows. The wind slowed the boat to a stop and started to push it backward. Rich gently slipped the anchor over the side into 6 ft of water and tied it off. I opened the baitwell and grabbed a couple of handfuls of 3 inch peanut bunker and tossed them off the back of the boat. Before we could even grab our rods, there were bass swirling on the peanuts and knocking them out of the water. Rich hooked a bait and tossed it back into the swirls. The bait disappeared beneath the surface and the line quickly got tight. He set the hook and was in to a 3-5lb class striped bass. Moments later my bait was hit and we were off to a great start. The red-hot action continued for nearly an hour before we decided to try another spot. We caught dozens of fish during the day on very light tackle. The largest topping the scales in the high teens.

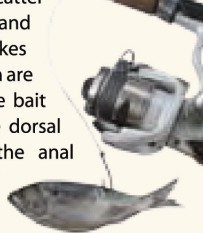
SUMMER AND FALL

The peanut bunker typically makes an appearance in early July and are available in good numbers throughout the summer

and early fall. Numerous schools of these juvenile moss bunker (menhaden, pogey, etc.) can be found in many of the back bays along the northeast coast. They are too small and fragile until they reach about two inches in length. Sizes larger than two inches make the perfect baits. A 6 to 10 foot cast net with 1/4 inch to 3/8 inch mesh (un-stretched) is the most effective way of getting them. A good live well with high volume and low velocity circulation is needed. Improvised live wells made from large laundry tubs, bait totes, and cutoff plastic barrels will also work provided there is enough circulation. The smaller baits are fragile, the scales and slime are easily removed. This will tend to clog their gills and lead to an early demise unless the water is replaced frequently.

SCOUTING FOR SUCCESS

The method is very simple. Anchor or drift very slowly in shallow waters either near or on top of rocks and structure. Rocky points, jetties, docks, and pilings will all hold some fish. Pull up to a spot and toss out a few handfuls containing 6 to 12 live bunker in all directions every few minutes. The bunker will scatter across the surface and quickly draw strikes from whatever fish are around. Hook the bait either behind the dorsal or just behind the anal vent and toss it into action. Keep the line tight and



strike as soon as the bait is hit. This will almost nearly eliminate the chance of gut hooking any fish.

Spend 10-15 minutes in a spot and if nothing shows, then move on. Give each spot enough time so that fish in the general area have a chance to hear the commotion and find the bunker. Using this technique you can cover an entire shoreline in a couple of hours. This is a great way to find which areas hold the best concentrations and the largest fish. It is the best way to find where the fish tend to stage when they are not actively feeding. The same shoreline will produce different results based on the tide level. Keep a log of which spots worked at what time, tide stage and light conditions. As with most predatory species during the warm summer months, this method is most effective just after dawn, at dusk, or in any low light conditions (overcast, rain, etc.). However, some shallow rocky ledges with deepwater nearby will hold fish no matter what the light conditions. As summer turns to fall and water temperatures begin to cool, the condition of the light matters less and less as the fish begin to feed around the clock.

KEEP THEM GOING

Once the fish are up and crashing the baits in the surface, don't forget to keep the chum going. The commotion of the feeding fish will attract even more fish and they will stay around the boat as long as there is a steady supply of bait. This is one of the few times where it pays to increase the amount of chum in the water when the fish start

biting. As more fish arrive they will keep working closer and closer to the source of the bait and become increasingly concentrated around the boat. It is not unusual to have fish right at the side of the boat as the bait congregates in an attempt to seek shelter.

GO LIGHT

This is a great chance to break out the lightest of saltwater tackle. Small spinning and bait casting reels loaded with 8-12lb line on 6-7foot medium action rods are all that is needed. Baby bunker are fairly light and are difficult to cast accurately on heavier tackle. Braided lines provide an added advantage and allow the angler to use even heavier lines without sacrificing casting distance. Well maintained drags are a must since nearly all of the fish will take some line. There is always a chance of catching trophy size fish. The terminal tackle consists of a 2-3ft length of 20-30lb test flourocarbon leader (attached to the main line via a small swivel) tied to a 2/0-4/0 Gamakatsu live shiner hook. The leader provides abrasion resistance and also allows the angler to control the fish when landing using a gripping tool or by placing a thumb in the fish's mouth (be careful of the hook!).

MIXED BAG

Any predators in the area will respond to this method. The splashes of the bunker hitting the surface of the water will get them interested. Striped bass, bluefish, bonito, false albacore and weakfish can all be targeted. Even an occasional fluke can get into the act. When bluefish are around a 30-50lb flourocarbon leader will increase the angler's chance of getting the fish to the boat. Even the biggest fish cannot resist



these baits especially when other fish are actively feeding on them. Be prepared to weight anchor and chase some of the larger fish especially in areas near docks and pilings. Attempt to slow and turn the larger fish by applying gentle gradual pressure on the spool of a spinning reel.

GREAT FOR ALL ANGLERS

To review, this method is an effective way to target fish of all sizes and species in

shallow water. It is a great way to introduce new anglers to the sport. The action is usually fast and furious and very visible. The rig and hook up are very simple and little casting ability is required. This method can also be used to salvage those days when nothing else seems to be biting. It can also be used to learn more about all the shoreline staging areas in a body of water.

About the author:

Captain Andy LoCascio - Host of Northeast Angling - www.neangling.com
Specialized fishing charters for 1-4 people from Port Washington, NY. Available April through December - www.lifishcharters.com.
AndyL@lifishcharters.com.



Photos:
Far left: Captain Rick Tenreiro in Little Neck Bay.
Below: Captain Rich Tenreiro and Captain Andy LoCascio
Above: Captain Andy LoCascio demonstrating any size fish is possible
Right: Nancy LoCascio

