

The big striped bass are in town

But can we eat them? I conducted a thoroughly unscientific survey last Sunday, one which included opinions of an unnamed Water Authority spokesperson. The results of the survey were this: 67% of those polled said: "wait one week". 33% felt that since we ate stripers years ago when the river was very polluted, why couldn't we eat them now? I plan to err on the side of caution, waiting until June 4th, or later. The Merrimack still has an odor and there is still plenty of debris floating around.

Parenthetically, I'm not a "catch-and-release" kind of guy; I want meat in the freezer. Grilled stripers are delicious – I'll just wait, that's all.

Paul Hogg of Crossroads Bait and Tackle in Salisbury said that the striper fishing was "unbelievable" - Paul's shop had recently logged in bass of 40 and 42 inches. According to Paul, one angler fished the outgoing tide last Saturday and caught more than 100 stripers, among which were 2 keepers. Paul said that the bass were hitting lures: "Mr. Bills" and Storm Lures. Paul said that the mackerel were schooling offshore and that haddock could be caught fairly close to shore.

Rene Vigneault of Bridge Bait and Tackle in Salisbury said "lotta stripers." While Rene had not logged in a keeper yet, he had heard of 2 keepers being caught off of Ring's Island. Rene said to try for bass with tried and true baits: herring, mackerel or clams; he cautioned boaters to watch for floating debris.

Kay Moulton of SurfLand weighed in a few keepers last week: stripers of 9, 14, and 16 lbs. Kay said that there was plenty of action at the south end of Plum Island, the Parker River, and Plum Island Sound. Kay suggested seaworms or clams off of the beach and said that "Chugga Bug" poppers and Sluggos were working too.

Kate Yeomans wrote of the Erica Lee's trip of May 23: "Chuck Russo and his crew from Grassfields Food & Spirits in Andover, Massachusetts, came out on the boat on this very windy day. Coming out of the WNW at about 30 knots, it looked to be a bad day. We pulled up short to an inside spot and fished there until 11 am. By then, we'd put 50 fish aboard, with an even mix of cod and haddock. The pool fish weighed in at 35 pounds while Chuck's was just six pounds less. Two others weighed in at 20 pounds each while the rest were nice size markets. The afternoon fishing was less productive, but we managed to put several more fish in the box along with two or three cusk. Great trip, nice people . . . and good fishing."

George Charos of Captain's Parties said that there were very large codfish "not too far out" but had not been fishing there because of the boat traffic. George said that there was "lots of bait" out on Jeffrey's Ledge and that he had been going out there for haddock and codfish – to 44 lbs, last week. George said that there was lots of action offshore but with a high "throwback" ratio. Captain's Parties is sailing now for mackerel and will start striper fishing next weekend. Please call 1-800-427-1333 for reservations.

Captain Rick LaPierre of the Yellow Bird wrote about his trip of the 27th: "Not great today, we started out on Jeffrey's where we fished yesterday, and found a bunch of stubborn fish. After a few moves, we ended up heading back in toward the beach to see if we could get a few big cod. We got about a dozen fish from the teens to 50lbs., along with 20 big haddock which made some of the anglers happy, but many unfortunately went home with nothing." You may call 1-888-234-3531 for Yellow Bird reservations.

As always, I thank Kay and Martha Moulton, Rene Vigneault, Paul DeFrancisco, Paul Hogg, and the local sport-fishing captains for their forecasts and news. If you have your own stories, please call me, John Altson, at 978-499-9972 with your news, recipes, and stories. Better yet; send them by e-mail to jaltson@comcast.net. I'd love to hear from you. This column is available, along with other good fishing reports, on www.surfcaster.com. Get your fishing tournament details here: <http://www.yankeehomecoming.com/fundraising.html>.

Have a great weekend!