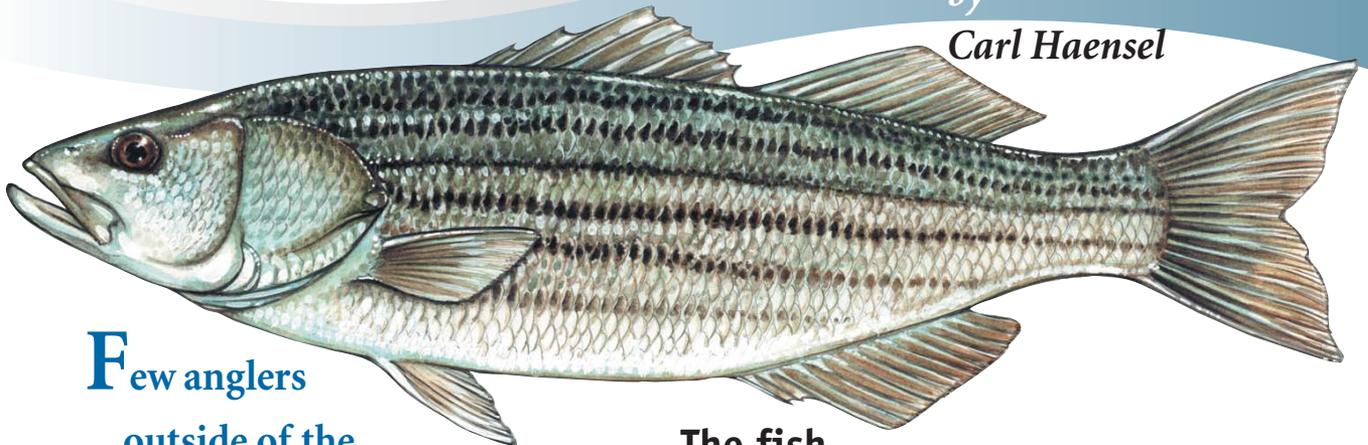


# BIG-CITY STRIPERS

by  
*Carl Haensel*



**F**ew anglers outside of the Philadelphia area know one of southeast PA's biggest secrets: **Monstrous striped bass arrive each spring to spawn in the lower Delaware River. Striped bass numbers have increased steadily since the 1980s, and renewed angling interest has appeared as the fishery has returned.**

## **The fish**

Striped bass are members of the temperate bass family. They are considered anadromous fish, and even though they spend most of their lives in salt water, in spring they ascend coastal rivers to spawn. Striped bass in the Delaware River spawn upstream to Trenton Falls.

From a plummeting population a few decades ago, stripers in the Delaware River have made an amazing comeback. Creel surveys estimate that in 2002, over 36,000 striped bass were landed in the Delaware River. Anglers catch them regularly as far upstream as Northampton County as well as in the Philadelphia area. Delaware River anglers catch stripers that range from 10 inches to over 30 pounds. Fish exceeding 30 inches are not uncommon.

## **Gear**

Anglers seeking striped bass on the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers use a huge array of rods, reels and tackle. Many times it can be challenging to determine the best equipment to use. While fly-fishers and anglers casting artificial lures do catch



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## When to fish

fish, the most consistent way to catch striped bass is with bait. Anglers fishing bait find that medium-heavy spinning rods combined with spinning reels loaded with 12-pound- to 20-pound-test line work well. Lighter line will spook fewer fish, but it makes landing a big striper much harder.

Bottom-fishing rigs and “spreader” rigs work well when using cut bait and other baits fished on the bottom. Many other setups use little or no weight with simply a hook on the end of the line. You might want to use circle hooks because they help facilitate easy release of striped bass. Sizes 1/0 and larger work well.

## Bait

One popular striped bass bait is the blueback herring. Commonly called “river herring,” these small fish are usually less than 10 inches long. Anglers commonly “live-line” these fish, along with alewife and American eels. Live-lining a baitfish consists of hooking it through the back or lips and allowing it to drift or swim with little or no weight. These baitfish can also be used in smaller sections as cut bait.

Blueback herring are not generally found in bait stores. Anglers commonly fish for them when they fish for striped bass, on a separate rod with small gold hooks on light line. Note that there are specific regulations for all of these fish, which are listed in your *Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws*.

Bloodworms are near the top of the list of other popular baits for striped bass. Local anglers recommend fishing them during the early part of the season when herring and other baitfish are not available to the stripers.

They can be purchased at local bait stores along with other baits including shrimp and clams. These baits are generally fished with heavy weights on the bottom.

Make sure to check your *Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws* before fishing for striped bass. Currently there are closed seasons for striped bass from January through February and in April and May. The specific dates appear in the current *Summary*. No possession of striped bass is allowed in the closed season, and they must be released immediately. Anglers should note that a Pennsylvania or New Jersey fishing license is valid on the Delaware River between the states when fishing from a boat or from either shore.

Dawn and dusk are good times to catch striped bass, although anglers also catch large stripers during the middle of the day. Night fishing can also be very productive, though angler safety is a much greater concern. The Delaware River below Trenton Falls is influenced by tides. The receding, or outgoing, high tide is a good time to try for stripers.

## Where to fish

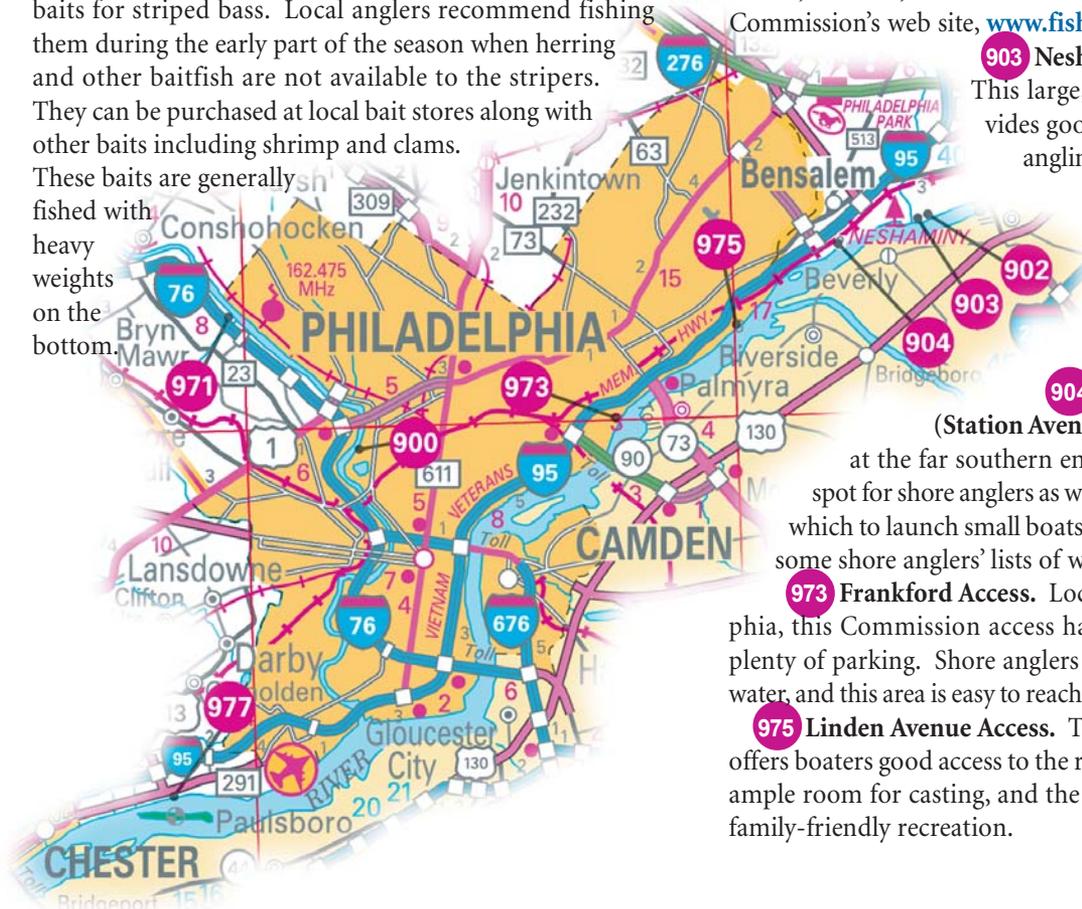
Both shore-bound and boat anglers have a good chance to catch striped bass in the Philadelphia area. The Commission’s “Fishing & Boating Map” and “Southeast Region Guide” show all public accesses, but the following areas have been known to produce striped bass when the fishing is good. Numbers correspond to those on the “Fishing & Boating Map” and the “Southeast Region Guide.” Order both publications by contacting the Commission at P.O. Box 67000, Harrisburg, PA 17106, or view, download and print them online at the Commission’s web site, [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us).

**903 Neshaminy State Park Marina.** This large, popular boat launch provides good access to the river. Shore angling is available here as well, although heavy boat traffic may influence angler success. Some beach areas exposed at low tide are not accessible at high tide.

**904 Delaware River Access (Station Avenue).** This small boat launch at the far southern end of Bucks County is a top spot for shore anglers as well as an adequate place from which to launch small boats. This area is near the top of some shore anglers’ lists of where to go.

**973 Frankford Access.** Located in northeast Philadelphia, this Commission access has a large boat launch with plenty of parking. Shore anglers will find good access to the water, and this area is easy to reach for persons with disabilities.

**975 Linden Avenue Access.** This city of Philadelphia site offers boaters good access to the river. Shore anglers will find ample room for casting, and the access offers park areas for family-friendly recreation.





**Delaware River below the Commodore Barry Bridge.** This area is popular with boat anglers and is known for producing large striped bass, as is the area around Little Tinicum Island not far upstream. Current seams that occur below islands or other obstructions are great spots to try for stripers.

**Pennypack on the Delaware.** The confluence of Pennypack Creek and the Delaware River is another spot to check for stripers. Shore anglers have access at this site, but those in boats will need to motor in from upstream.

**Mouth of Poquessing Creek.** This creek is the boundary between Philadelphia and Bucks County. It's a good place to try for stripers, as are all creek confluences with the river. Fish sometimes rest in the current outside of a creek confluence in the Delaware River.

Just after a strong rain that brings up the water level in smaller streams can be a good time to try fishing around creek mouths.

**Trenton Falls.** Much farther upstream into Bucks County, this area is the head of tidewater on the Delaware River. This rocky area is not for the inexperienced boater, and extreme caution should be exercised. You'll find many good angling areas between Trenton Falls and Poquessing Creek that are easier and safer to reach.

**Note: Fishing near some bridges may not be allowed because of U.S. Coast Guard regulations. Check with the U.S. Coast Guard captain of the port of Philadelphia via VHF marine radio. River anglers unfamiliar with navigating near large commercial and naval vessels need to take extra caution when boating on the lower Delaware River.**

**978 Ridley Park Access.** This boat ramp is a good location in Delaware County for getting on the water. It is the nearest access to many lower river hotspots. Little shore angling for striped bass is available here.

## More shore-fishing hotspots

**Hog Island Road.** This spot can be reached off the Island Avenue exit of I-95. The area offers a long stretch of the Delaware River to shore anglers. Pay close attention to parking regulations and don't expect a quiet experience: This area is directly behind Philadelphia International Airport.

**Schuylkill River.** The dam on the Schuylkill River at the Philadelphia Art Museum is a striper hotspot in the spring. Note that there is a fish passage facility at this dam, and no angling is allowed within 100 feet of the passageway. Boating anglers often catch fish at other locations on the Schuylkill, but access is difficult.

## More hotspots for boating anglers

The spots below are good places to check out with a boat, though many anglers find their own "hotspots." Striped bass often favor current breaks and seams, especially those near shoals or shallower areas. Mainstream deep channels are usually not good striped bass locations.

## Catch and Release

Catch-and-release angling is a vital part of continuing to improve the Delaware River striped bass fishery. Anglers releasing their fish should play them as quickly as possible. When taking photos, keep the fish out of water for as little time as is necessary. Using circle hooks helps facilitate easy release of fish and helps keep fish from getting deeply hooked. ☐



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