

Freshwater Clydesdales: Carp!



Huge carp await your bait in quiet New Jersey waters.

They lurk in the turbid waters of most ponds, lakes, and streams. Their gargantuan proportions are intimidating. Their strength is immense. What can they be? Carp, of course! These freshwater Clydesdales will give the most robust

angler a bone-jarring run-off and “smoke” even the best fishing reels. With all this excitement, why don’t more anglers fish for these giants? Well, many consider carp to be “trash” fish and very unattractive. To borrow from comedian Rodney Dangerfield: Carp get no respect.

Captain Henry Robinson of New York first introduced the carp to North America in 1831. This parent stock was shipped across the Atlantic Ocean from France. Introductions into the United States continued and by 1877, the common carp was well established throughout the nation.

The common carp, *Cyprinus carpio*, is a copper-colored cousin of the minnow. Carp are late-spring spawners, waiting until the water temperature ranges between 63° to 79° F. Depending on water depth, spawning occurs during the first two weeks of June. During spawning rituals, carp move into grassy shallows.

Carp have a soft, fleshy mouth with two sets of barbels or “whiskers”. Carp, like catfish, have thousands of taste receptors located along the length these barbels. During their normal foraging routine, carp root around in the bottom sediments

sucking in insects and other invertebrates. But carp are not choosy; in addition to insects, they will devour almost any kind of vegetable matter. And they certainly have a sweet tooth. Any carp angler who has used dough balls sweetened with molasses, mulberries or even blueberries, will swear carp love to binge on sugar.

Veteran carp fisherman Don Harris offers advice for carp-fishing amateurs. His first rule: avoid using floats or sinkers, which create a taut line that carp seem to detect. If a weight is needed for casting purposes, use a fish-finder rig that allows the fish to take the

bait without feeling the weight of the sinker.

Ideally, the spot chosen for fishing should have calm water. Harris contends that quiet water will also make chumming more effective. That’s right, *chumming* for carp; and niblet corn is recommended. Once the corn is thrown into the water, use dough balls or more corn to bait the hook. Use a bronzed #8-14 bait holder hook.

It is not uncommon to see their serrated dorsal spine protruding from the water, as many carp bow and arrow anglers can verify.

Carp have an extremely long life span of 12 to 20 years, probably because they are not a favorite among anglers. The current state-record carp, caught on the South Branch of the Raritan River, weighed 47 pounds, measured 38 inches long, and had a 32-inch girth—a colossal specimen by anyone’s standards.

Harris also recommends chumming be done a day or two before the fishing excursion to condition the carp in the area.

Now comes the waiting game. A beach chair and rod holder will make a long stay at the fishing grounds more comfortable. Remember, carp stay away from taut lines, so the reel should be in free spool or the bail on a spinning reel should be flipped over. Sit back and get ready to grab the reins, because you may be in for the ride of your life!

If you’re lucky, you might land a good meal. Carp as table fare? Yes, believe it or not, carp have been eaten for thousands of years. The Jewish delicacy gefilte fish is often made with carp. Small- to medium-size carp (four to five pounds) are the perfect food specimens. Fish markets sell carp live as well as cleaned, iced and smoked. Smoked carp is usually sold skinless; the meat is reddish or orange in color, cut into strips and sometimes highly spiced.

Try the following carp recipe, created by Izaak Walton, the 17th-century English angler-conservationist who wrote the literary classic “The Compleat Angler.”

Split open a carp, scour well and place in a large pot. Take a handful of fresh sweet marjoram, thyme and parsley and a sprig of rosemary. Then, place these in the carp along with four onions, 20 pickled oysters and three anchovies. Next, pour claret wine over all, and season the claret well with salt, cloves, and mace, plus rinds of oranges and lemons. Cover the pot and place on a quick fire until sufficiently broiled. Remove the carp, and lay it on a large dish with broth. Garnish with lemons and serve.

The carp is a fish to be taken seriously. Carp is the most popular gamefish species in Europe. Maybe the Europeans know something we don’t. Only a limited number of New Jersey anglers target their efforts toward these big fish. And those folks are having the time of their life. So, don’t miss out. Go carp fishin’.

— Hugh Carberry, Supervising Fisheries Biologist

Don Harris, a carp fisherman for more than 45 years, shares this dough ball recipe:

Carp Dough Balls

- 1/2 cup corn meal
- 1/2 cup wheat flour
- 1/2 cup oatmeal
- 3/4 cup water
- four cotton balls
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar

In a large mixing bowl, combine all ingredients and knead thoroughly with hands into a dough-like consistency. Place the dough onto a sheet of foil large enough to bring the edges up to enclose the dough. Bake at 350°F in a conventional oven for 30 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Go carp fishing!

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New Jersey is a great place to start tournament bass fishing

Are you a weekend angler who would enjoy a little friendly competition? If so, then you might want to consider participating in one of the fishing tournaments held almost every weekend in New Jersey waters. Anglers who typically fish with a partner can enter one of many team or "buddy" tournaments held for a variety of species including trout, chain pickerel, catfish, crappies and bass.

Tournament fishing for bass is the favorite by far, and has been popular in the United States for more than 30 years. But this year, New Jersey became the focus of tournament bass fishing when resident and professional bass angler Michael Iaconelli won the 2003 Bassmaster Classic held on the Louisiana Delta in New Orleans. His victory cast a spotlight on the level of experience New Jersey's anglers can acquire and on our quality fisheries, raising awareness about the Garden State's wealth of diverse habitat ideal for learning a variety of bass fishing techniques.

Indeed, once an angler masters the tidal waters of the Delaware River, the deep rocky lakes of North Jersey, and the shallow vegetated ponds of South Jersey, he or she has the breadth of experience necessary to compete on the national level. One never knows: once a weekend angler, next a national bass tournament competitor. What's more, the bass fishing in New Jersey is outstanding.

So, now you might be wondering how to get involved in tournament bass fishing.

It's important first to consider the level of commitment you are willing to make. If you plan to fish the national tournament trail, the state and regional level is the place to start. Boat ownership is not required for tournament fishing. Most tournaments, no matter the skill level, will pair non-boaters, those without a boat, with someone who does. Anglers who want to participate in state and national tournaments can decide whether they will fish as a boater or a non-boater. In the Pro-Am (Professional/Amateur) level tournament, both boaters and non-boaters compete from the same boat. Generally, owners of tournament-type bass boats enter as boaters.

Tournaments sanctioned by the New Jersey Bass Federation are professionally run tournaments for the amateur angler, providing excellent competition and sportsmanship. Tournaments are held in New Jersey and surrounding states. Anglers compete for the opportunity to fish on the New Jersey State Team. Through a series of qualification tournaments, anglers could be eligible to compete in the Bassmaster Classic.

Keeping the fish alive is extremely important in tournament competition; anglers are penalized for weighing in dead fish. So a live well and aerator that will accommodate up to 10 bass are among the essentials to bring on board. Wearable floatation devices for every person are also necessary, along with various other safety items including a fire extinguisher, running lights, a whistle and a paddle.

Check regulations carefully. And don't forget your New Jersey freshwater fishing license.

There are no specific gear requirements for tournaments. But anglers should keep in mind that too much tackle can create safety concerns in small boats. And, as is the case with any sport, ethics apply to tournaments. Rule number one: respect other anglers.

The Internet is a great source for information about tournament bass fishing. Many local and national tournament sponsors and organizations have excellent Web sites that detail how to enter these events. To learn more, check out: www.bassmaster.com, www.flwoutdoors.com, www.njbassfed.org, www.americanbassangler.com, and www.geocities.com/sjbca99/. Find the circuit that fits your level of experience, and enjoy the competition.

— Christopher Smith, Assistant Fisheries Biologist



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Species Spotlight: River Herring

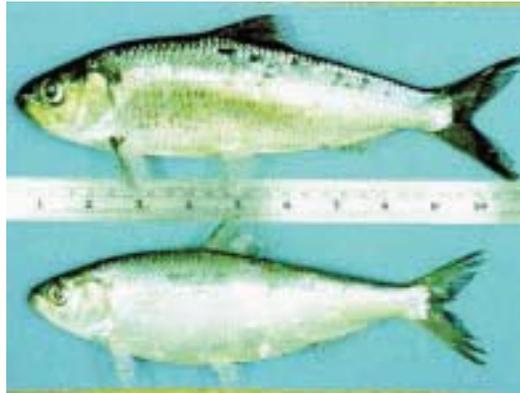
The term river herring refers to both the alewife and the blueback, two different, soft-finned fishes, belonging to the family *Clupeidae*, that migrate from saltwater to breed in freshwater.

Both the alewife and blueback have a similar size, shape and life history. These fish have distinct differences in appearance and behavior, but distinguishing between the two often requires a trained eye.

The alewife and the blueback are both laterally flat, silver on the sides, and have a series of scutes, modified scales that are spiny and keeled, along their bellies. Generally, the alewife has a larger, more pronounced eye and are deeper bodied than the blueback.

Blueback, as the name implies, often have a dark blue back. In contrast, the alewife usually have a bronze back. The most distinguishing characteristic of these fish is the colors of the linings in their abdominal cavities. The distinction cannot be made without sacrificing the fish, however. In the alewife, the lining is pale white with dusky spots, while the blueback's lining is black or dusky in appearance.

Biologically, there are differences in the alewife's and the blueback's spawning temperatures. Spawning temperatures vary by approximately eight degrees Fahrenheit. The alewife arrive earlier and spawn when water



Alewife herring (top) and blueback herring (bottom).

temperatures range from (50.0° to 71.6° F). Blueback, also called "summer herring" arrive later and spawn in temperatures ranging from (69.8° to 77.9° F). Typically, April is the month for alewife spawning, and May is the month bluebacks spawn.

Another unique difference is their tendency to remain in freshwater. If both enter a freshwater lake and spawn, the new young use the impoundment as a nursery throughout the summer and feed on microscopic animals called zooplankton. During the fall, cooler water temperatures and decreasing daylight trigger a migration of juvenile fish—primarily blueback. These migrating young leave the impoundment, enter the estuary, and move out into the ocean. Remaining in the

impoundment are mostly alewife, referred to as a "landlocked" population. The alewife serve as an important forage fish for many freshwater predatory species such as largemouth bass and chain pickerel.

The next time you catch a river herring, take a closer look. The subtle differences in appearance may now be more obvious to you, and also keep in mind the behavioral differences. Perhaps most important to anglers, both species work equally well as bait, and they taste the same, too.

— Hugh Carberry, Supervising Fisheries Biologist

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For fast-action angling and tasty table fare, aim for an “eye”



A fabulous New Jersey walleye.

I remember my first encounter with a walleye more than 20 years ago, when I was 16. It was January, and my buddy and I were fishing on six inches of black ice, in three feet of water in a cove on the Delaware River under the Interstate 84 bridge. My fishing buddy brought in a giant fish, 31 inches long and weighing 11 pounds. We had never before seen anything that big in the area except carp. By the process of elimination, we concluded that it must have been a walleye.

Talking with many anglers over the years, I have discovered that only a handful of anglers have ever caught a walleye or even know what these fish really look like.

Before the Monksville Reservoir opened in 1988, the Delaware River was the only place for New Jerseyans to target walleye. Today, after a decade of stocking by Fish and Wildlife and fishing clubs, walleye populations have taken hold in Canistear Reservoir, Greenwood Lake, Lake Hopatcong, Monksville Reservoir and Swartswood Lake.

Dual dorsal fins, an olive-green back, golden sides and a white belly identify the walleye. Its most distinguishing features, however, are a milky-white tip on the lower lobe of the tail and mysterious, glassy eyes. A reflective layer of pigment in the retina gives the walleye its glassy gaze. This layer, called the tapetum, gathers light very effectively and accounts for the walleye's excellent night vision and aversion to bright light. Walleye are also armed with a finely tuned lateral line and sharp hearing. The combination of these senses places the walleye near the top of the food chain in most lake or river systems. While these strong senses make them efficient predators, they also make walleye vulnerable to anglers. When conditions are right, walleye provide some fast-action angling. Walleye are considered excellent table fare, so many anglers take a few home for the frying pan.

Walleye can be caught any time during the fishing season. Key periods for catching walleye seem to be during late spring (May and June) after fish have left the spawning area, and during fall (October and November) when bait fish numbers have dwindled and fish are trying to bulk up for the long winter months.

Walleye are famous for biting like crazy one

day and then shutting down for an entire week. Changes in light, brought on by dawn, dusk, choppy water conditions or an approaching storm, can trigger a feeding frenzy. That is why many experienced anglers fish during low-light conditions or at night. (Barometric pressure and moon phases do not appear to affect the walleye bite.)

During cooler months and at night, walleye can be found moving into the shallows. In the summer, anglers find these fish in deeper water just above and within the upper portion of the thermocline which is a layer of water between the warm and cold water layers. In the Delaware River, walleye can be found in the deeper pools during late fall through the winter.

In lakes, anglers should fish the points, drop offs, sunken islands and the outside edge of the weed line. Shoreline fishing, including docks, is also effective, especially during spring and fall when walleyes are in shallower water. In areas where deep water is near shore, using slip bobbers during the summer will get you down to the fish.

Just some “eye-deas” for helpful equipment

- **Boat, motor**—14-foot semi-V with a 9.9 hp and a good electric motor. Allows for access to remote areas and changing conditions. Check regulations for motor restrictions on some reservoirs.
- **Depth finder**—Noted as the most important piece of gear by many avid walleye anglers. Used to locate structure and depth of bait.
- **Rod, reel and line combo**—Six-foot, medium-power, fast-action spinning rod with a matched reel. Make sure reel has a smooth drag. Walleye can be line shy, so clear monofilament or line tinted to your target lake shade will help. Six- to eight-pound test is preferred for easier casting, better lure action and feeling those soft bites that walleyes are famous for when jigging bottom fish.
- **Lures and baits**—Live bait: Drifted or jigged over structure (logs, rocks, vegetation), or trolled in combination with a jig or spinner rig. Use herring and fathead minnows for spring and fall, and nightwalkers and leeches for summertime.
Artificial Lures: Use lead-headed jigs either casted, vertical jigged or backtrolled in current, or plugs (three to six inches long). Four major categories of plugs are minnow, crankbait, vibrating and trolling.

Walleye Regulations and Facts

See pages 12 and 13 of this *Digest* for new season dates, size limits and daily bag limits. The size limit remains at 18 inches, and the bag limit is three fish per day in all New Jersey walleye waters. Boundary waters, such as the Delaware River and Greenwood Lake, have special regulations. The Delaware River has no special season. Greenwood Lake is closed from March 1 to April 30 to protect walleye during their spawning season.



Popular walleye lures

Since New Jersey's walleye program began in 1988, the Charles O. Hayford State Fish Hatchery in Hackettstown has stocked a total of 5.6 million fry, 2.7 million two-inch pond fingerlings and 350,000 four-inch fingerlings.

Local fishing clubs in New Jersey report catching six- to eight-pound walleye regularly. Hatchery technicians captured two walleye, each weighing more than 11 pounds, from Swartswood Lake during the 2002 spring trap-netting season. A year and a half later, however, the New Jersey state record for walleye stands at 13 pounds, 9 ounces, caught from the Delaware River in 1993.

So, get out there and aim for some “eyes.” Maybe you'll catch the new state record!

— Craig Lemon,
Hackettstown Hatchery Superintendent

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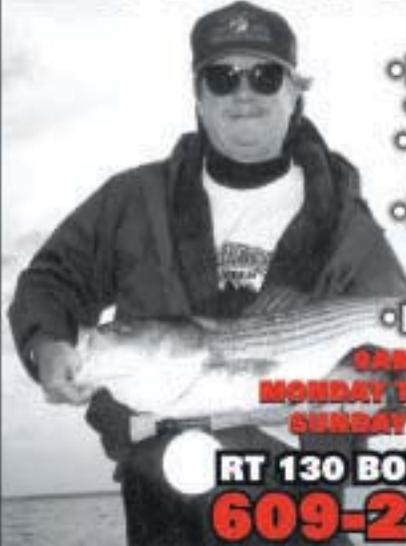
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