



ALL PHOTOS BY GLENN ZINKUS

## Boston, MA

### South Shore Bass and Blues

By Glenn Zinkus

**W**e started the day with coffee in hand, casually walking to the boat ramp on Marshfield's South River on a foggy, overcast morning—the kind of morning that inevitably seems to unfold into a drab day. And also the kind of June morning that just screams striped bass. My fishing partner, Mike Rice, and I, arrived in time to catch local angler Henry Gobin chatting with some of the locals who were just coming off the water.

We loaded our gear for the day, gulped down the rest of the coffee, and I stepped back to admire the lines of Gobin's original RothBilt fly-fishing-edition, center-console skiff. Wow! Was this the ultimate saltwater fly-fishing boat for these waters or what? I thought.

We set off to sample some of my favorite waters, first to fish the "outside" and cast to the outcrops around

Minots Ledge and the Minots Ledge lighthouse. The Roth-Bilt skipped over a light chop on the water as if we were walking barefoot across a silk carpet, and the short run from the mouth of the North River to the ledges of Cohasset was filled with talk of places we've fished, places to go, and, most of all, anticipation of the day's striped bass action.

We arrived at the ledges and Gobin skillfully motored into position just off the windward side of a jagged ledge with a pocket that churned up white water. He advised, "Just cast into that white froth and I'll bet there will be a striper there."

*Bam!* Fish on! Just like that. Fortunately, Rice had a firm grip on his rod as it doubled over into a full bend. Under the Minots Ledge Light, flashing its one-four-three sequence of light, we were into striped bass that morning, and there was nothing but smiles from that point on.



*Schoolie stripers make fun targets for sight-fishing on the flats (above). A fly angler probes an out-of-the-way saltwater creek on Boston's South Shore. Such places often hold fish for fly casters willing to explore (top).*







use herring imitations during the early season. The Weir River is known to hold some large stripers.

**Cohasset–Scituate:** The ledges and rocky beaches that characterize much of the coastline of Cohasset and Scituate are primarily a boater's game. Many of these rock formations are far enough off the shoreline to eliminate wading. In addition, private property limits parking options in these locations. If you are a resident or have friends in these towns, you probably already know that these picturesque locations are more than just pretty—they are striped hot spots. The ledges off Cohasset and Scituate provide reliable summer fishing as the water warms in other beachside or estuarine locations.

One Scituate location that does offer easier parking and piscatorial possibilities during the fall run is the Scituate Harbor jetty at the lighthouse. I've spent many memorable October days fishing during the striped bass heydays. Most angling success comes in the bowl on the east side of the jetty. A stripping basket is a must here, as success hinges on line management.

**Scituate–Marshfield–North River:** Farther south, the North River is formed by the Indian Head River and Herring Brook, and meanders 8 miles to its confluence with the South River before emptying into Massachusetts Bay. Big bass—and big may be an understatement—make it all the way up the river and linger in places up near the Union Street Bridge. Good access points include Damon Point in Marshfield; parking is limited but available, and fly fishing can be especially productive on falling tides and the beginning of the incoming tide because low water allows access downriver along a mud flat and mussel beds to several productive holes.

Parts of the North River are ideally suited to fly fishing in canoes or kayaks, which are mobile and stealthy. Access points for small craft abound and include the Union Street Bridge, First Herring Brook along the Driftway in Scituate, and from the town boat ramp on the South River in Marshfield. The upper stretches of the North River (including First Herring Brook), the Union Street Bridge area, and the main stem of the North River are all places for canoes and kayaks. Beware of the hours approaching the low tide, as certain runs can turn fast and treacherous

on the dropping tide below the Union Street Bridge.

The actual mouth of the North River—between Third Cliff in Scituate and Fourth Cliff in Marshfield—is a complex series of flats, channels, and rips, all of which hold fish at various times and tides. Direct shoreline access from the Marshfield side is available at the Fourth Cliff Recreation Area on Hanscom Air Force Base, which is open only to active and retired military. If you fall into

that category, you have access to the rock gardens on the south side of the river delta—striped bass heaven. Direct shoreline access at the mouth on the north (Third Cliff) side is also difficult because a settled residential area gives way to marshy expanses before reaching the water. An arduous hike from the Driftway boat launch area is possible, as is paddling down First Herring Brook from the Driftway launch.

Numerous rivulets along the North River and its tributaries hold fish. These small creeks fill with water and bait during the high tide, and become a banquet to predat-

tory fish on a dropping tide as the bait rushes out with the water into the main stem of the North River or First Herring Brook. The effect is kind of like those sushi joints with conveyor belts delivering sushi and sashimi dishes to ravenous diners: all the raw fish anyone could want.

**Duxbury Bay:** Closer to Cape Cod, the hamlet of Duxbury includes Duxbury Bay, which features a barrier beach on the east side, and various land points sweeping from the barrier beach on the north side of the bay around to the west, with an opening in greater Massachusetts Bay. Duxbury Bay offers flats that are friendly to wading anglers on a dropping tide and at the start of the incoming tide. Stripers cruise the flats searching for forage, and anglers can intercept these fish. I've watched schools of silversides being worked at all times, including the high tide, but accessibility for wading anglers is best nearer the low tide.

## Steeped in History

Striped bass have been significant to eastern seaboard residents for centuries. Native Americans caught them in vast numbers, and the first documented conservation efforts occurred in colonial times when the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law prohibiting striped bass from being

## Dazzlebait

By Mike Rice



PHOTO BY EASTERN FLY FISHING

**Hook:** Mustad 370SD, sizes 2/0 and 3/0

**Thread:** White

**Head:** Chartreuse Mirror Image and silver holographic Flashabou

**Underwing:** Olive Just Add H2O Deadly Dazzle

**Wing:** Olive Just Add H2O Deadly Dazzle

**Belly:** White Just Add H2O Deadly Dazzle

**Eyes:** 5/16-inch silver 3-D molded eyes with black pupil

**Head:** 5-minute epoxy

**Body coating:** Softex or similar



sold as fertilizer in 1639. Much more recently, striped bass populations waned from the 1970s through the 1980s before staging a dramatic comeback in the early 1990s. Measures such as the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act of 1984 established a state-based, federally backed striped bass management approach.

Although striped bass populations have historically wavered, the resurgence of the striped bass numbers during the past 20 years represents a remarkable conservation success. In my early years fishing South Shore beaches, I caught only an occasional striper; but thereafter they started to make up a larger share of my catch as the fish became increasingly numerous. Each state along the East Coast began enacting increasingly stringent minimum-size requirements for harvest of stripers, and then, as numbers rebounded, those minimum sizes were decreased. Striper anglers are now living the high life.

One of my more memorable days of South Shore angling came with Rice. Overcast weather lifted, revealing a picturesque afternoon while we explored old haunts and tried new waters. We focused on the fish and the tides, experimented with new flies, and exchanged notes on our fly-fishing obsession. We ended the day in familiar Duxbury Bay, chasing stripers on the flats with the receding tide. They say the sun always shines in Duxbury, and such was the case that day. We were hooking stripers while wading knee-deep flats, and even while battling and landing fish we kept our eyes peeled for the next target. The fish kept us plenty busy that day.

I remember a comment Rice made as we were walking the beach back to the truck. He reflected, "My ancestors arrived just a few miles south of here in Plymouth in 1638. I think of them every time I walk my dogs through the dunes on Humarock/Rexhame Beach, but there is something particularly haunting about Duxbury Bay. I'm certain, at one point, they fished those very same waters in the 17th century."

And to me, that's the other cool thing about South Shore angling: you're surrounded by history in the Bay State—the Pilgrims, the American Revolution, the Civil War, and so much more. 🐟

*Glenn Zinkus is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Corvallis, Oregon.*

## SOUTH SHORE NOTEBOOK



**When:** May–October.

**Where:** South of Boston, MA, from Quincy to the Cape Cod Canal, including Quincy, Weymouth, Hingham, Hull, Cohasset, Scituate, Marshfield, Kingston, Plymouth, Sagamore.

**Headquarters:** Various South Shore chamber of commerce Web sites have links at [www.seeplymouth.com](http://www.seeplymouth.com). Closest major airport is Boston's Logan Airport. Another alternative is to fly into the T. F. Green Airport in Providence, RI. Public boat ramps are available in the towns. Access/boat ramp information is at <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/pab/>.

**Appropriate gear:** 7- to 10-wt. rods; intermediate and floating lines for inshore, sinking lines for offshore; saltwater big-game reels; 7.5- to 9-ft. leaders; shorter leaders for sinking lines fished near rocks; wire tippets for bluefish.

**Useful fly patterns:** Cichetti's Sand Eel, Dazzlebait, Skok's Whitebait Mushy, Boyle's Albie Fly, Boyle's Bonito Bunny, Popovic's Surf Candy, Brooks Blonde, Deceivers, EP-style flies, Piasecki's Silver Bullet, Piasecki's Nauset Sand Eel, Calcavecchio's Striper Dragon, Tabory's Snake Fly, Yak Hair Deceivers, Sedotti Slammers, Piasecki's Wasabi Special, Skok's Mega Mushy, Fur Strip Deceivers, Grocery Flies, Clousers of all sorts, Half and Halfs, Merkin, EP Crab, Hamilton's Copperhead (pearl or chartreuse), Slim Jims, Crease Flies, Gurglers, poppers.

**Necessary accessories:** Polarized sunglasses, brimmed hat, waders, waterproof jacket, warm clothes for layering, sunblock, stripping basket.

**Nonresident license:** None required for saltwater.

**Fly shops/guides:** *Marshfield:* Mud Dog Saltwater Flies, (781) 254-4533, [www.muddogflies.com](http://www.muddogflies.com). *Taunton:* Bear's Den Fly Fishing, (508) 977-0700, [www.bearsden.com](http://www.bearsden.com). Boston Fishstix Guides, (617) 233-6090, (978) 314-2424, [www.bostonfishstix.com](http://www.bostonfishstix.com). Firefly Outfitters, (617) 423-3474, [www.fireflyoutfitters.com](http://www.fireflyoutfitters.com).

**Books/maps:** *Inshore Fly Fishing* by Lou Tabory; *Fly Rodding Estuaries* by Ed Mitchell; *Fly Fishing for Striped Bass* by Rich Murphy; *The Fly Fisherman's Guide to Boston Harbor* by Jack Gartside. *Massachusetts Atlas & Gazetteer* by DeLorme Mapping.