

# Delta Stripers During The Sizzling Days Of Summer

by Jack Naves

**T**rolling the delta for stripers during the fall or springtime is a popular pastime for many local anglers. There is nothing that compares to the screaming clickers and rod-shaking action produced by hard fighting striped bass in the California Delta. But what about trolling in 103 degree heat at the end of August? Well my buddy and I headed out on August 29th, to find out.

Earlier in the week, Gil Perez had invited me to join him fishing the Rio Vista area on board his North River Seahawk. He got a tip from a co-worker that some summer stripers were starting to show up in the Delta. I jumped at the opportunity, since I rarely get the chance to fish in somebody else's boat, and it's a great way to see other people's ways of doing things on the water. I'm a big believer of both sharing and learning fishing techniques while I'm on the water. Gil's boat is always in perfect condition, so I knew that I would be treated to an enjoyable experience regardless of the

we attached a swivel and then tied a four foot long 20 lb test monofilament leader. At the end of each leader we attached a duo-lock snap which was snapped to our lures of choice. We started out trolling Yo-Zuri Floating Crystal Minnows model F8 in the 4-3/8" size. On the tail end treble hook we attached a white rubber worm as a trailer. This is the classic shallow trolling setup used in the delta.

We were both anxious to get going and let our lures out 135' behind the boat. This put our lures down to about 7 feet deep. Gil had the kicker motor set to move us so that our water speed was four miles-per-hour. Once the lines were out we set our drags loosely and turned on the clickers. The rod holders were set so the rods pointed out from the boat at 90 degree angles. We made our way down past Snug Harbor making slow 'S' shaped turns while working the lures along the riprap shoreline.

We didn't have any strikes by the time we had passed the Snug Harbor slow zone, so I suggested to Gil that we pull in

hard runs once Gil had it to the boat side. I used my gripper to lip grip the fish instead of using the net. I like to use grippers because using treble hooks and nets is always a big mess once you get the fish into the boat. It's also much easier to catch and release when using a gripper.

The fish went about 19 inches on the ruler on the back of Gil's boat - our first keeper of the day. Gil decided to release it, so I quickly returned the fish to the water and we were off. I circled the boat back to the same spot but this time the fish weren't cooperating. When trolling for stripers on the delta, it's always a good idea to pass back through the area where you just caught a fish. In many cases, you will be able to pick up several fish, especially if you run into a large school. We continued upstream against the outgoing tide for about a mile but didn't have any more luck.

By now the outgoing tide was starting to slow down and I mentioned to Gil, "This is primetime". The tidal pull from the sun and moon in the delta moves the

water both upstream and downstream. The best times to catch stripers or sturgeon seems to be when the fast moving tides start to slow down. Eventually, the current will slow down to a dead stop, which is usually referred to as the 'slack tide'. After the slack tide the current will change directions and move in the opposite direction as before. The key to fishing the delta is knowing when the tides will change and when the best times are to fish. As a general rule, I try to fish the hour before and after the slack tide. High or low tide doesn't really matter - you will increase your odds by keying in on the tide changes.

Gil and I didn't have any more luck in Cache Slough so I suggested that we run down to the shoals above the Rio Vista Bridge. We had only made it about 100 yards when my clicker started to make that familiar sound that I love. I picked up my rod and told Gil, "It's on there!" I turned off the clicker and proceeded to fight the fish to the boat. It was a nice 20" keeper that we snapped a few quick

photos of and gently released using the gripper. A few minutes later Gil picked up another small keeper, which was released as well. It was now 8 o'clock and it was already getting hot! The forecast was for temperatures in the low to mid-nineties and winds up to fifteen miles-per-hour. Up to that point, the water was like glass and I had already peeled off all of my layers of clothing layers down to my tee shirt and jeans.

We trolled downstream during the slack tide and picked up a few fish but they were all under the 18" minimum length to be legal keepers. Finally near Sherman Island, my rod went off.

"This feels like a bigger fish," I commented. The fish made several hard fighting runs, but I eventually got it to the boat. It was a bright 4 pound striper fresh from the bay, so I decided to keep it for fish tacos.

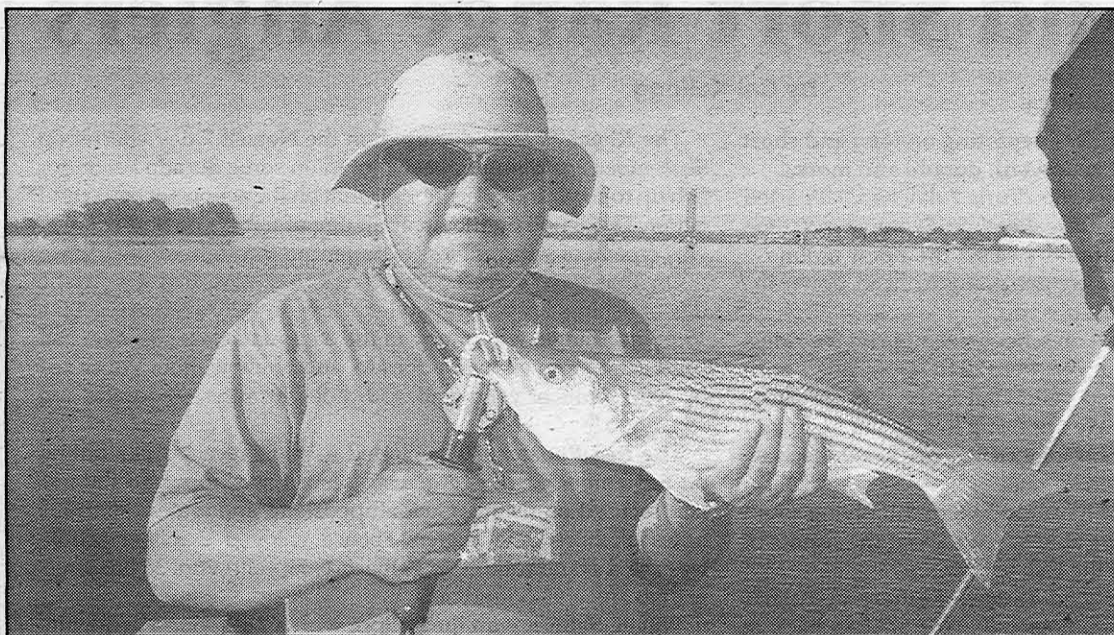
I started by knocking out the fish with a small club. Then, I quickly bled the fish by hanging it in the water on a stringer and cutting the gills. A couple of minutes later I carefully wrapped the fish in a garbage bag and covered the fish in ice.

One common mistake that I see lots of anglers make is the mishandling of fish once it's caught. It's important to bleed your fish and get them onto ice as soon as they're caught. Wrapping them in a plastic bag helps to keep the melt-water from making the meat soggy. I've talked to too many people that claim that their fish is 'mush', only to find out that they handle their catch by leaving it on the floor of the boat all day.

Gil and I made our way down Broad Slough, up the San Joaquin River, up Threemile Slough, and back into the Rio Vista area. We picked some more undersized fish and lost quite a few small fish on the way to the boat. It was steady action but not the quality of fish that we were looking for. By now it was getting really hot and we trolled our way back towards the boat ramp. The action had pretty much died the last couple of hours and we decided to call it a day at two-thirty.

We each had been able to pick up our limits of quality stripers, and all but one had been released. Although the fishing wasn't exactly red-hot, the red-hot air temperature was making us think that the forecast for 'low to mid-nineties' was way off. The fifteen mile-per-hour winds had never shown up and when I returned home that afternoon I was shocked to see that the temperature in Rio Vista had peaked at 103 degrees!

Next summer when the temperature is in the red zone and everybody else is fishing for kokanee or halibut, be sure to keep the delta in mind. Once the summer stripers show up, you'll have your crack at these fresh, hard fighting fish as they invade the delta in mass numbers. The winds can be menacing, but if you can time the right combination of tides and weather, you might be rewarded with some surprising summer action.



Gil Perez shows off a handsome summer striper that blitzed his Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow on August 29.

Photo courtesy of JACK NAVES, Roseville.

fishing action.

On the morning of the trip, I met at Gil's house in Elk Grove at 5:30. We made the 45 minute drive down to the Hogback Island boat launching facility near the town of Ryde. "Wow, look at that!" I related as we rambled down the winding levee road. Thousands of small threadfin shad were dancing across the surface of the Sacramento River. I hadn't seen shad in those kinds of numbers in several years. I took it as a good sign since threadfin shad are one of the main food sources for striped bass in the delta. The tiny threadfin shad tend to dance on the surface at daybreak and sunset, which can make for a spectacular sight.

Hogback Island is a well maintained Sacramento County run facility that connects to Steamboat Slough. We launched and made our way downstream towards Snug Harbor. There's a 5 miles-per-hour speed limit in that section of Steamboat Slough, so we decided to troll downstream through the slow zone.

Our setups were the standard delta shallow trolling rigs championed by delta trolling gurus like Mark Wilson and Clyde Wands. We used medium weight rods with flexible tips. Our bait casting reels were spooled with 30 lb test super braid Spectra line. To the end of each line

the rods and head up to a spot that I knew of in Cache Slough. Gil made the run to Cache Slough not far upstream from the ferry crossing and I took the helm. I was familiar with the area and could troll us through the strike zone. I try to keep the boat in between eight to ten feet of water when trolling the shallow running Yo-Zuri lures. This keeps the lures near the bottom where the stripers are waiting to ambush their prey.

The low outgoing tide was starting to show some nice weed lines along the west bank. I like to troll as close as I can to the weed lines because the stripers seem to hang out in those areas - especially at low tide. Gil helped to put out the rods and we slowly made our way upstream.

I started to tell Gil about a shoal that sticks out near the shipping channel marker when his clicker started screaming. "Fish On!" I shouted, and Gil rushed to the rod holder. I slowed the boat and slowly turned out towards the middle of the river to allow Gil to fight his fish. It was a nice, hard fighting striper fresh from the bay. In the late summer and early fall striped bass make their way from the ocean and bay back into the delta. When they return they are well fed, healthy, and brightly colored. This fish was no exception, and it made several

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