



The Fish Sniffer

Since 1982

American River Map Feature



See Page 16

1982-2012
30TH
ANNIVERSARY

VOL. 31 - ISS. 4

Feb. 3 - 17, 2012

SEE OUR NEW BAJA
ROUNDUP SECTION ON
PAGES 28-29

Our
31ST
Year

"The Magazine For West Coast Sportsmen!"

INSIDE Area Reports

TAHOE SIERRAS	4
NORTHERN SIERRAS	4
NEVADA	5
AMERICAN BASIN	5
NORTHERN MOUNTAINS	5
EVENTS	6
NORTH BAY FOOTHILLS	6
SACRAMENTO VALLEY	8
SACRAMENTO METRO	8
FOOTHILL LAKES	9
EASTERN SIERRAS	10
MOTHERLODE	10
OREGON	11
HUNTING JOURNAL	12-13
NW MOUNTAINS	19
DELTA	22
BAY AREA LAKES	23
SNAG PROOF'S BASS TACTICS	24
SPORTFISHING	26-29
NORTH BAY	27
BAJA ROUNDUP	28
SAN DIEGO	29
CLASSIFIEDS	30
TIDE TABLES	30

FEATURES Where..When..How..

GO FOR IT - Staff	2
BILL'S TIP SHEET - Adelman	9
OREGON RIVERTALK - Kremers	11
WHAT'S HOT?... SALT - Bacher	15
AMERICAN RIVER MAP - Bacher	16
FISH SNIFFER HOW-TO - Kellogg	18
COOKIN' YOUR CATCH - Paulette	20
SALTY TIPS - Lau	27
SPOTLIGHT ON CONSERVATION - Bacher	31

Winter Delta Combo Trips

My favorite time of year to fish the California Delta is the wintertime. Unless there's a storm, menacing Delta winds tend to be absent during the winter months. This makes for still, relaxing

days on the water that are usually capped by postcard-worthy sunsets at dusk.

Another cool thing about fishing the Delta in the wintertime is that stripers and sturgeon tend to feed in similar areas. This means that you can expect to catch either species at a single location.

Fishing during the winter months on the Delta isn't always as action packed as the fall or spring. The cold water slows the fish down, and the bites tend to be very light and subtle. This doesn't mean that you can't catch fish - you just have to adjust your tactics to account for the colder water. So far this winter I've had a couple of opportunities to fish the Delta to see if I could tap into some sturgeon/striper combo action.

During the second week of December, my dad Bob Naves said he had been fishing near Sandy Beach Park located in Rio Vista. He had been doing well using sardines while fishing the incoming tide. We decided to head out a few days later in my boat, hoping that the bite would still be good. We got on the water just in time to catch the end of the outgoing tide. Despite marking fish in several different spots, we only had a few nibble bites during our first few hours of the trip.

The incoming tide also proved to

• Cont. on Page 7



Fish Sniffer Field Writer Jack Naves shows off the 52 inch sturgeon he nailed while fishing at Chain Island on the Sacramento River this December.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.

What's Hot?...FRESH

• Cont. from Page 1

challenging, and our trip wasn't looking very promising. We moved to 28 feet of water near Chain Island where the current was racing under the boat. We were getting nibbles on sardines, but our other offerings of salmon roe and lamprey weren't getting touched. We decided to forget about the sturgeon baits and rigged up sardines on all four rods.

Dad got a nice takedown, which turned out to be a 16-inch striper that he quickly released at the side of the boat. The current started to slow down with the tide change, and I figured we didn't have much time to waste. I started the motor to warm it up and told my dad, "Let's try one more spot before heading home."

With the motor running, I reeled in my heavy-duty sturgeon rod and noticed some movement out of the corner of my eye. My lightweight striper rod slowly tilted down in the balancer until the rod was parallel to the water. My reel was set in free-spool mode with the clicker on, and the line was rhythmically playing out of the reel in a click...click...click...manner.

It looked like a classic ball of weeds on my line, so I slowly picked up the rod. There was no indication of a fish - the line was steadily rolling off the reel at about the same pace as the slow moving current.

Just to be safe, I put my thumb on the spool and set the hook, figuring most of the weeds would come off and we'd be on our way to the next spot. I felt a sharp jolt at the end of the line, followed by a heavy pull and some violent tugs. "It's a sturgeon!" I shouted to my dad.

It seems like Murphy's Law because whenever I fish the Delta with lightweight striper-oriented gear, I hook sturgeon. And it goes both ways. I've hooked stripers using salmon roe on my big sturgeon rods, and sturgeon on my striper rods. I've heard of people catching sturgeon on live bullheads - so go figure.

This sturgeon hit a sardine at the end of my 20-pound test striper leader. The problem with sturgeon is that they have sharp armor plates called scutes lining their bodies. They use their scutes and rough skin to saw off fishing line when

hooked up. It's happened to me more than once, and this time I was hoping that I wouldn't feel the dreaded vibrating and shaking action you feel when a sturgeon rolls in your line.

The prehistoric beast moved slowly upstream, never making any crazy runs, jumps, or rolls. At one point I was afraid it might swim into the anchor rope, but I patiently worked it back towards the boat. After about ten minutes, I could see my leader coming out of the muddy water and I told my dad, "Here it comes". Dad slipped my big landing net all around the fish, and we finally had it secured.

It turned out to be a nice 52-inch sturgeon, my first keeper-sized fish in several years. Although it was our only decent fish of the day, I was pumped. There's nothing like a last-minute sturgeon to save the day! About a week later, I had the chance to fish the Delta again with Dan Johnson of Sacramento so I jumped at the opportunity.

Dan and I headed out a little earlier this time, launching my boat from Brannon Island on a dark foggy morning. Dan is kind of new to fishing the west Delta, so I tried to give him a few pointers. The first thing I told him is that the fish slow down when the water gets below 50 degrees. The fish don't move around as much, and they typically don't aggressively take the bait.

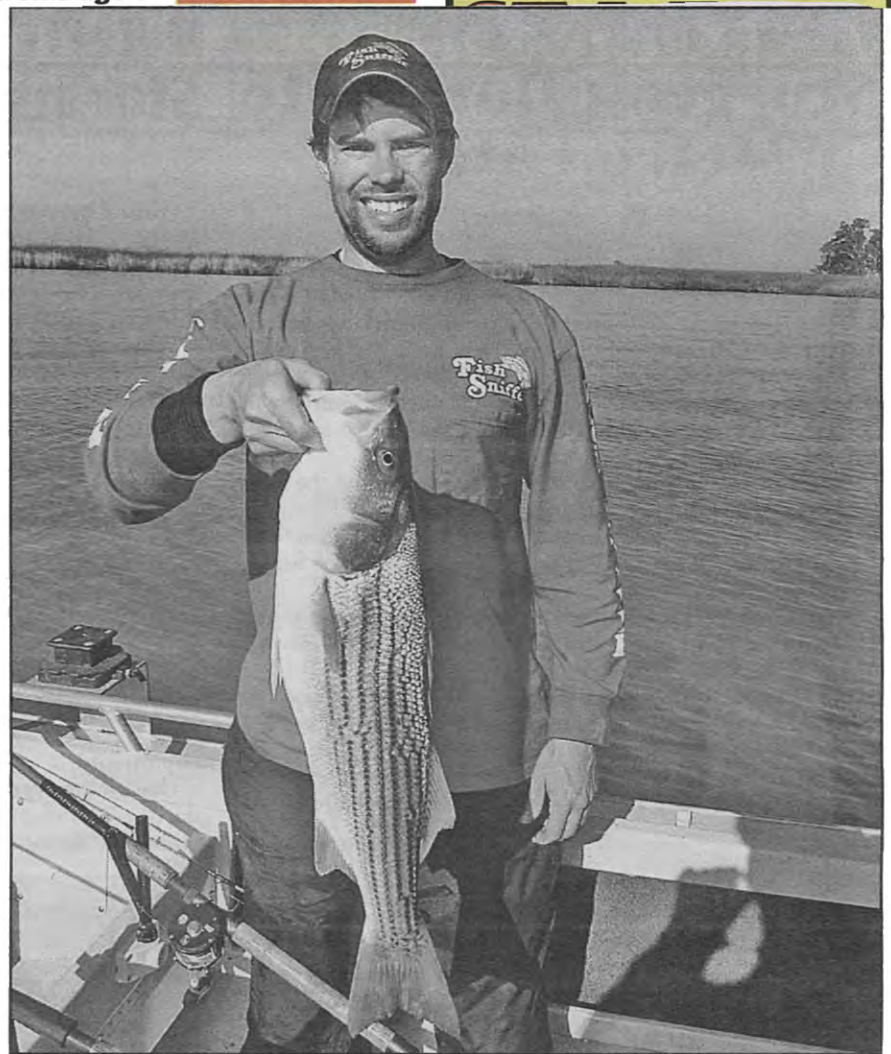
In cold water, if your rod tip vibrates for more than a few seconds, or moves down a few inches and stops - set the hook! Don't expect them to run with the bait, because it won't always happen in the cold winter water. If a fish nibbles once and stops, try feeding out some line. Sometimes they will eat the bait if you make it drift right into their face.

Another thing to keep in mind is location. The majority of winter stripers seem to hang out in water that is 15 to 35 feet deep. Really big fish can be caught in water as shallow as two feet deep, but the average sized fish will be deep. This is fun, because sturgeon will also be found in the same water.

Dan and I tried several locations before settling down near Pittsburg in 28 feet of water. The slack tide was approaching, and the outgoing tide was starting to slow down. As is often the case before or



WHAT'S HOT?
FRESHWATER
by Jack Naves



As Jack Naves will certainly attest, sturgeon are only one part of the wintertime Delta angling menu. Quality stripers like this fat 6 pounder are available too.

Photo by JACK NAVES, Fish Sniffer Staff.

after a slack tide, the bite really picked up. Instead of nibble bites, we were getting steady pulls and prolonged bites on sardines. I got the first striper, a feisty lineside that weighed almost six pounds.

The slowing current from the impending tide change really turned on the bite, and we enjoyed non-stop action for about 45 minutes straight. We ended up landing five keeper stripers and several shakers during the short bite window. As usual, we had the rods secured in balancers instead of standard rod holders.

When using cut bait on the Delta, rod balancers are the best way to detect bites - especially subtle cold-water bites. They also prevent fish from feeling resistance when picking up the bait. When you're

getting bit, try to resist the urge to pick up and hold the rod. Let the rod balancer do the work, and set the hook right out of the rod balancer. Dan and I were using custom 'V' shaped balancers made by my dad, and they worked like a charm. We didn't catch any sturgeon on that day, but the striper action was fast and furious.

That's the fun thing about the Delta in the wintertime - you never know what's lurking at the end of your line on any given day. One day it will be a powerful sturgeon, and the next day feisty stripers. Or better yet, both on the same trip! If the weather is calm, try making a combo trip to the Delta for sturgeon and stripers this year. Keep a close eye on your rod tip, and be ready for anything when you set the hook!

