

Our 40th Year

"The Magazine for West Coast Sportsmen!"

Lining Up Life: Crossing Paths with a Monster



Catching big striped bass on artificial lures is the ultimate test of an angler's skill.
Photo Courtesy of Roland Aspiras

GONE FISHING
by
Roland Aspiras

I've never been one to enjoy writing how-to articles. I feel like that's been done many times over by guys way more accomplished and experienced than myself. So if that's your thing, I'm not your guy.

But what you will get from me are connections - how fishing, family, and life are all intertwined. And I hope my articles provide inspiration for those that have felt the weight of the world the last few years.

These days, my fishing trips are a mixture of things: un-planned, short, few and far between, filled with sunset pictures. More skunks than catching. I even smashed my brand new boat into a rock wall trying to navigate fog in the Delta. Yes - I'm that guy. But I'm not afraid to fail. I'm not perfect.

Though, sometimes life and some luck align perfectly, as was the case on my latest fishing trip on the California Delta on April 23rd.

On this expansive body of water, tides play a major role in everything. It influences feeding patterns. It forces you

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Spring-Run Delta Stripers Now on Tap

The near-record rainfall we've experienced this year has delayed, but not canceled, our spring striper run in the delta. While we normally start looking for fish the week after Valentine's Day, this year we have been in a holding pattern because of high and muddy waters. With visibility improving and temperatures rising, now is the time to break out your rods and head down to the 'Big D' for some springtime striper action!

When targeting springtime stripers on the California Delta, trolling is a consistent bet. The fish are constantly moving, and trolling is an effective way to track down large schools of traveling fish. On April 24, I made my first trip of the season to the delta employing both trolling and bait fishing techniques for striped bass.

After a prolonged closure of the Brannan Island State Recreation Area, it was finally time to return to the familiar site since the State secured a new park operator. My neighbor Mike Stratton joined me for the early-morning trip. Mike catches and releases trophy

stripers on the American River using plugging techniques, but he had never fished the delta before our trip. I notified him that we probably wouldn't be catching any monsters in the delta, but we could expect to have consistent action on schoolie-sized stripers.

We started out near Threemile Slough on the San Joaquin River. I instructed him to play out one hundred feet of line and place the rod into the rod holder with the clicker on. The reel was engaged, not in free spool, so I checked the drag to make sure it wasn't too tight. I said we wanted the drags loose enough so fish could pull line and the clickers would indicate



WHAT'S HOT
by
Jack Naves

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Mike Stratton of Roseville holds up a feisty striped bass that hit a Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow Deep Diver trolled on the San Joaquin River on April 24. Be sure to use a grip tool like the one pictured here along with needle-nose pliers to avoid the treble hook danger zone when removing hooks.
Photo courtesy of Jack Naves

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What We're Using

- Ernie Marlan** fished for striped bass on the Feather River with Barebones Guide Service. He used a 7' Kevin Van Dam Team Lew's Signature Series rod with a line rating of 10-17lb. He caught and released several stripers while using a Strike King 3.75 inch Rage Swimmer in Pearl color.
- Paul Kneeland** fished Lake Camanche with Brian Garcia of Alta in the Fish Sniffer 21' Rogue Jet Coastal. They caught rainbow trout to 20 inches and 3 pounds using Daiwa DXS 8' light action IM-7 graphite trigger stick rigged with the new Daiwa Lexa 100 Line counter reel loaded with 8 lb test Yozuri Topknot line. They trolled firetiger and Red Racer Speedy Shiner spoons off the Canon Downriggers 10 to 30 feet deep at 2.5 mph.
- Dan Bacher** fished for trout at Pardee Lake. He used a Berkley Ugly Stick GX2 6' 6" medium action spinning rod, teamed up with a Shakespeare GX235 spinning reel filled with 6 lb. test P-Line CX Premium Flourocarbon Coated Line. He fished with garlic chartreuse Berkley PowerBait, 1/8 oz. gold and black Panther Martins and 2/5 oz. gold/red stripe Little Cleos.

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bites. I revealed that the amount of line out would be dependent on the lures and boat direction in relation to the current.

We started out shallow trolling 3/4-ounce Rat-L-Traps along shoals and weed lines. With these lures, we kept our water speed at about four miles-per-hour. When this produced no hits, we switched over to my favorite lure, the Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow Deep Diver 5-1/4" in red/white and chartreuse. Moving at about three miles-per-hour with these lures, we set out between 45 and 55 feet of line. This put our lures at about fourteen feet deep, right near the feeding fish at the bottom. After our rods were out, I noticed something on the sonar.

"There's a fish mark!" I called out and reached for my phone to take a picture. "ZZZZ-ZZ-ZZZ" my starboard rod started screaming! I ran to the back, grabbed the rod out of the holder, and turned off the clicker. "Feels like a shaker," I relayed and slowly worked the fish to the boat. After landing the fish and putting it up to the tape, I turned out to be wrong. The fish measured nineteen inches long, one-inch above the 18-inch minimum.

"I'll keep this one for eating," I said, as I demonstrated to Mike how I bleed them out. I had the fish on ice after knocking it out, ripping out the gills, and bleeding it in a bucket of water for about five minutes. The next fish hit my rod again, and this time it turned out to be a true shaker that was well below the minimum size. Next, Mike got in on the action, but all the fish were under keeper-size. Because of the lack of size, I decided to make a run west to see if we could find a decent school of better-sized fish.

One thing you need to remember about the delta is that you usually must deal with wind in some form or another. On this day, the northwest winds kicked up a rolling swell and whitecaps in the area I wanted to fish. After a wet ride, we trolled downwind with the swells, but nothing was happening as far as fishing action. With the outgoing tide starting up, I told Mike that it was time to get out of there before the opposite directions of the current and winds stirred up more menacing water conditions.

We ran to a section of the river that was perpendicular to the winds. Although the winds were still pushing the boat around, at least we were out of the whitecaps! The outgoing tide was just



The author shows off a striped bass that was quickly released on Monday, April 24. Fish like this are waiting if you are willing to troll, bait fish, spoon, or plug your way across the delta this spring.

Photo courtesy of Jack Naves

starting to trickle out, and I told Mike that the period just after the high tide is usually the best bite window for trolling.

Sure enough, we started slamming stripers one after another. I kept the boat in fifteen feet of water so our lures were close to the bottom. This time, we caught a mix of both shaker and keeper-sized fish. Mike landed the biggest fish of the day at right around four pounds. Although we didn't get any lunker-sized fish like he is used to on the American River, the constant action made for a great morning of fishing. With the trolling action tapering off and the winds picking up, it was time to change gears and switch over to bait fishing.

After anchoring the boat on a nice flat in about fourteen-feet of water, we pitched out chicken



Spool up a line-counter level-wind baitcasting reel with thirty pound-test braid. Mount it to a medium rod that has good action at the tip for reading lures. Next, tie up a duo-lock snap using a double Palomar knot. Finally, attach a deep or shallow diving plug. The author's favorite is the Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow Deep Diver 5-1/4" in chartreuse (top) or red/white (center). Don't forget to tip the rear hook with a white plastic worm. Zoom brand 'Trick Worms' or 'ElaZtech Finesse WormZ' by Z-Man will fit the bill. For shallow trolling in 6'-8' of water, the 3/4-ounce Rat-L-Trap (bottom) is a great choice.

livers using four to eight-ounce sinkers. I prefer to use Gamakatsu circle hooks, specifically 8/0 inline octopus circle hooks with a straight eye (265418 INLINE OCTOPUS CIRCLE SE). I use a three-foot long 25-pound test P-Line CXX monofilament leader. With bait in the water, it didn't take long before the fish showed up.

I instructed Mike to NOT set the hook, as the circle hooks would do all the work when the stripers swam off with the bait. In a couple of hours, we were able to put two more keepers into the boat along with several shakers. We pulled anchor at one o'clock and headed back to Brannan Island. It was a solid day on the water, landing a total of seven keepers and ten shakers.

Spring is an exciting time to get out onto the delta to see if you can find schools of pre-spawn striped bass. Whether trolling, bait fishing, plugging, or spooning, once you find a concentration of fish, you'll be sure to land a keeper or two.

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