



Fisherman's Almanac

What Is A Rockfish?

by Bob King

A Rockfish is called a Rock, Striper, or Striped Bass depending on where you live or fish. On the Atlantic coast it is called a Rock or Rockfish. In the inland waters, such as Smith Mountain Lake and others, it is identified as a Striped Bass, or a Stripper.

The Striped Bass (*Morone saxatilis*), also called Atlantic Striped Bass, Stripper, Linesider, Pimpfish, Rock, or Rockfish, is an anadromous Perciforme fish. This type is defined as a perch-like fish that is born in fresh water and then spends most of its life in the sea. It returns to fresh water to spawn. Salmon, Smelt, Striped Bass, and Sturgeon are common examples. A catadromous fish does just the opposite: it lives in fresh water, and enters the sea to spawn. Striped Bass are members of the Moronidae (temperate basses) family, which is found primarily along the Atlantic coast of North America, from Florida and the Gulf to Canada, especially in some main inlets such as the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia and Maryland.

On average, adult Striped Bass typically grow to be 2 or 3 feet in length, weighing between 10 and 30 pounds, although they can get much larger. Their elongated bodies vary in color from light or olive green to blue, brown, or black, and their metallic sides are striped with seven or eight dark, continuous lines. Their bellies are white. They have a dark, forked tail fin, with three spines on their anal fins. Their dorsal fins feature a deep notch, and the forward portion has several spines.

Striped Bass is a mellow, sweet, white meat fish, and it was very much in demand at markets and restaurants until overharvesting became a problem. This caused several states to enact a moratorium on commercial fishing of this species. Sportsmen can still fish for them in each area, but with limitations. This fish has also been introduced in the Pacific Coast area with success.

When Santee-Cooper was built in Tennessee, the Striped Bass had gone up the river to spawn in this area. When it came time to close the dam and fill the lake, some of the Striped Bass were still up the river. Engineers waited as long as was possible to fill the lake, hoping that all the Striped Bass would have gone back to the sea, but this was not the case. It was generally assumed that these fish would die, but the Striped Bass is a euryhaline fish. That is, a fish that can adapt to fresh water, even though it is normally a saltwater dweller. After the Striped Bass demonstrated that they could thrive in fresh water, plans to stock in other lakes began.

The spawn occurs from April through early June, depending on the water temperature and the full moon, most likely in May on Smith Mountain Lake. The spawn on Smith Mountain Lake is called a "false spawn". If a lake is fed by a river, in which Striped Bass could go up stream far enough to spawn, and the eggs could float and tumble for at least 72 hours before reaching the lake, the fish could have a successful spawn.

However, if the Striped Bass can not reach the distance needed for the eggs to float and tumble for at least 72 hours, the spawn will not be effective, resulting in no offspring, and thus a "false spawn". Such a lake is termed a "Put & Take" lake. In other words, it must be stocked in order to maintain the Striped Bass population.

After a number of dead Striped Bass began showing up in the Chesapeake Bay, the state of Maryland made a long intensive study to determine the cause. It was determined that because of the fight that an adult Striped Bass will give an angler in the summer months, the fish produces a large amount of lactic acid in its system, and this becomes a big problem. The lactic acid can cause the fish to die after it is returned to the water.

I'm sure you are aware of athletes getting muscle cramps that are severe enough to cause knots in the muscles, and cause a lot of pain. As with most creatures, fish require a consistent intake of oxygen in order to survive. Their gills absorb oxygen from water molecules as the water passes through the gill membranes. Excessive lactic acid can cause a problem for Striped Bass, resulting in their not being able to pull water thru their gills, effectively "drowning" the fish. The mortality rate for these fish in the summer is very high. In the cold water months, this is not so much of a problem.

MOON PHASES FOR 2016

December 11th - New Moon

December 25th - Full Moon

January 9th - New Moon

January 23rd - Full Moon

February 8th - New Moon

February 22nd - Full Moon

March 8th - New Moon

March 23rd - Full Moon

April 7th - New Moon

April 22nd - Full Moon

May 6th - New Moon

May 21st - Full Moon

June 4th - New Moon

June 20th - Full Moon

July 4th - New Moon

July 19th - Full Moon

August 2nd - New Moon

August 18th - Full Moon

September 1st - New Moon

September 16th - Full Moon

September 30th - New Moon

October 16th - Full Moon

October 30th - New Moon

November 14th - Full Moon

November 29th - New Moon

December 13th - Full Moon

December 29th - New Moon