

Fishing Chunk Bait to Catch Stripers

ACE CHARTERS

by **Capt. Jimmy Samia**

One of our most effective methods for catching stripers in the Hudson River during the beginning of our charter season just after the stripers arrive is to fish fresh chunk bait while anchored. Year after year when the water temperatures are cold, fishing chunk is just plain hard to beat. It just flat out produces fish. This article will explain some of the methods we employ when fishing off anchor during one of our Hudson River fishing charters.

The main ingredient to fishing fresh chunk is to have fresh herring to cut up. I know that's a blatant statement, but it is so true! Don't get me wrong. You can catch stripers on cut up frozen chunk bait, but it has been my experience that fresh will out fish frozen by at least 4/1. At this point I would like to define fresh as bait that has not been frozen, is less than 24hrs old, and has been refrigerated or kept on ice. Fresh bait bleeds!

Stripers have a keen sense of smell and it's the bloody meat smell that draws them to the bait which is typically fished off the bottom in very murky water. Why are stripers so attracted to fresh chunk in the beginning of the season year after year? I think the reason is twofold. First, feeding on chunk bait is a natural occurrence that happens in the day to day lives of stripers inhabiting the ocean. Stripers typically feed below big schools of blue fish as they attack through a school of bait. Bluefish will rip a school of baitfish into shreds as they chop through the schools. The stripers who are a bit more light sensitive than the blues, swim below the blues and feed on the chunks. They see it as an easy meal. The second reason and perhaps the more contributing one is that stripers are very lethargic in colder water.

Stripers do not like to expend energy in cold water. Their metabolic rate is controlled by the ambient water temperatures that they are swimming in. When the water is below 54 degrees in the Hudson, typical of early season steeper fishing, chunking can be a very effective method because the lethargic stripers can just easily swim up on a piece of fresh chunk that their sense of smell helped them hone in on and eat it. This is the reason why chunk out fishes live earlier in the season on most days. Lethargic stripers don't like to expend the energy to chase live baitfish any more than they have too. Larger stripers are also more lethargic than smaller ones so this is a good method to catch the larger spawning females early in the season as well. It

is my go to method in colder water.

One of the reasons why anglers seem to have a tough time fishing off of anchor chunking is because they are over tackled in their set-ups. We typically start the season off fishing light fluorocarbon leaders, going as light as 17lb test Gamma and may go as high as 25lb test. Believe me! It does make a difference to leader down, but it comes with a price. Drags have to be set perfect and the fish do need to be allowed to run. Once the fish is landed, the leaders need to be inspected for any nicks, abrasions, or cuts and should be replaced if necessary. We run 17lb gamma on our main lines which are Shimano Baitrunner spinning outfits.

The thinner diameter line disturbs less water as it descends to the bottom of the river and gives off less vibration. Some guys also like to run Power Pro or other synthetic super thin diameter lines with great success as well.

One other often overlooked item when fishing off anchor for stripers is to be stealthy. You have to be quiet when fishing in skinny water when fishing for striped bass. Striped bass have very large lateral lines which allow them to pick up minute vibrations in the water column. Things like livewell pumps and sonar noise can actually spook the fish and keep them from going under your boat. Even how your boat is anchored can affect whether stripers will come around or not. I have had days when I would reposition the boat to stop waves from slapping up against the sides of my boat making thumping noises. If these kinds of noises can shut down the bite, imagine what boat traffic noise can do?

There are many other little things that can up the odds to catching stripers on a day to day basis, especially earlier in the season when the fish are running in shallower water like they do in the Hudson. Using some of the techniques outlined above can help you get closer to catching these anadromous fish. I'm sure that if you put your stealth thinking cap on, you can come up with a few more ideas to not spook the stripers as well. C'mon Spring!

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This wonderful photo shows a group of successful charter boat members showing stripers they were allowed to keep at the time the photo was taken. Today, as this story is written the rules have changed!
In the Hudson River and its tributaries:

Slot size limit: 18"- 28" total length
(No fish smaller than 18" or greater than 28" may be kept)
Season date: April 1 - November 30
Daily possession limit of 1 fish/angler
Also a salt water license, which is free, must be kept on your person at all times while fishing in the Hudson River.
This license is free and can be gotten from an official NYS licensing agent. An example of this is a Walmart, or town clerk.