

Get ready to catch fluke... warm water bringing them early?

by **Captain Dave Monti**



How is warming water impacting summer flounder (fluke) fishing? And, how might you alter your fluke fishing strategies to catch them?

According to the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program the Bay's surface temperature has increased 2.5 to 2.9 degrees F from 1960 to 2010. At the time of this writing, March 8, the water temperature at Narragansett Pier was 42 degrees F, at the high mark of a 38 to 43 degree F twenty-five year range.

And, climate change experts tell us 2019 was the second warmest year on earth (on record), which makes the past five years the warmest five years on record.

With all this heat, what impact does it have on summer flounder (fluke), the forage they like to eat (squid, silver sides, sand eels and more), and how can you alter your fluke fishing strategies to catch them?

My experience is that the fluke are coming earlier than ever before, following the bait. Last year the best fluke fishing was early in June, even close in shore. This year, due to a continued warming trend, I am expecting fluke to arrive early. Here in May and June more so than ever before.

So get ready, it could be an early fluke season. Here are some fluke facts, tips and what happened in 2019.

Last year the fluke bite was off Block Island, in the Bay and along the coast was early. Once water warmed in July and August fishing was spotty. In June last year the bite was as good as it gets in the mid- and lower Bay region before the fish move out to deeper, cooler water.

The fluke season runs from May 1 to December 31 in Rhode Island with a six fish/angler/day limit and a 19" minimum size. In Massachusetts the minimum size is 17", five fish/person/day.

Rhode Island also has a special shore area provision. Two fish with a 17" minimum size are allowed in special shore areas only. (See page 54 in this newsletter or visit www.dem.ri.gov for special shore areas)

Last June Ken Ferrara



Lucy Churchill of Providence caught her first fluke last year on the edges of an underwater trench at the southern tip of Dutch Island

of Ray's Bait & Tackle, Warwick, said, "Anglers are catching keeper fish off Warwick Country Club and in the channel between Warwick Light near the red can. The bite south of the Jamestown Bridge has been OK too." And, the southern coastal shore was producing some nice keeper fish too with a lot of shorts and good size black sea bass mixed in. The black sea bass season opens June 24 in Rhode Island.

By August 1st last year fluke fishing had dropped off at Block Island, in the Bay and along the southern coastal shore. Mike



Cardinal of Misquamicut Bait & Tackle said, "Fluke fishing along the southern coastal shore is tough, anglers are catching plenty of small fish but not a lot of keepers. It's about 30 shorts to one keeper." Michael Callahan of Red Top Sporting Goods, Buzzards Bay said, "Fluke fishing has been difficult in Buzzards Bay but things are improving a bit for anglers with larger fish."

Most all of the large fluke we have caught on my charter boat in July and August were caught on edges and in deeper water. Summer flounder look into the current to ambush bait fish, and the larger ones like to use edges for cover. What I mean by edges is bottom structure such as reefs, channel edges, flat areas at the foot of jetties, open sandy spaces between bottom structure, underwater valley edges, etc.

Another important factor is water movement. When water is warm in August fish often can be found in deeper water and/or water that is moving and tossing around bait such as bridge abutments, jetty and channel edges, etc.

I also like to use a large bait to catch larger fluke and often tip my squid rig with squid, silversides or spearing and often add a piece of fluke belly. I do not catch as many fish with this rig but the fish we do catch are larger.

Search 'larger fluke' and 'fluke tips' when visiting www.noflukefishing.blogspot.com for tips from the experts on how to catch larger fluke as well as a list of my favorite places to catch fluke. **I am also presenting on "How to Catch Lager Fluke" at the Monday, April 27, 7:00 p.m. RISAA monthly seminar.**

Fluke facts

- In May, fluke move in shore from deep Continental Shelf waters where they spend the winter. They stay inland until October and then move back to the deep water. **(to page 39)**