



Fishing from the Shore

By Bill Hall



Cobia fishing has been red hot, at least as far as numbers are concerned. Some vessels have reported catches of over 20 fish and even a few catches exceeding 30 fish on a single trip! Of course, most of these fish are under the 40-inch minimum size limit, but there are enough keeper sized fish out there, if you are willing to put in your time. Still, there seems to be a lot of (justifiable) confusion among the recreational fishing community regarding the cobia regulations, the need for a permit just to target cobia, and the requirement to report every cobia fishing trip, even if you do not catch or keep a fish.

To keep a cobia in Virginia, the fish must measure at least 40 inches in total length. There is a bag limit of one fish per person, but no more than three fish can be kept on a single boat, no matter how many people are aboard. And to make things just a little more confusing for the weekend angler, only one fish per boat can measure in excess of 50 inches in length. In addition, all recreational anglers, captains, and guides must have a permit to fish for cobia. The permits are free and can be obtained from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) website. In addition, cobia permit holders are required to report all catches and cobia fishing activity to the VMRC, which can be done through the website.

Lower Shore – Chris Snook, at Chris' Bait & Tackle, said that the cobia action has been "great" with anglers catching lots of fish, though there are lots of undersized fish for every keeper. Spadefish are providing action around the fourth island of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, though a lot of the fish are on the small side. Sea mullet (whiting) catches continue to come from the

waters just below Kiptopeke, while catches of croaker have been reported off the Concrete Ships. Flounder catches have come from out of Oyster and down by the Ditch when conditions have been favorable.

Jeb Brady, of Bailey's Bait & Tackle, reported that cobia fishing was excellent over the weekend for anglers who were able to get out, with action recorded from buoy 36A all the way down to Latimer Shoals. Some boats were reporting double-digit catches with most boats finding keepers. Spadefish action is picking up around Plantation Light and at the bridge-tunnel. Spanish Mackerel action is on the upswing, with a nice size class of fish in the mix. Action should only improve for these warm water fish as the temperatures rise. On June 22, the shop will celebrate its 50th anniversary from 2-6 p.m. Festivities include a fishing seminar from Nathan Richardson at 2 p.m., and Dalton Elliott will be performing until 6 p.m. There are lots of in-store specials and giveaways planned.

Wachapreague – A spokesperson from Trident Tackle reported that she had heard of action occurring in the offshore waters, but the inshore flounder fishing was off due to the wind and dirty water conditions.

Yellowfin tuna made their appearance in the Norfolk Canyon last weekend, with fish ranging from undersized "footballs" to 80-pound bruisers. Trollers also found good numbers of dolphin (mahi), as well as a few blue marlin, white marlin, and bigeye tuna. For those captains with good GPS numbers, deep water dropping

has been productive for both blueline and golden tilefish.

Chincoteague – Donna Rae Roeske, at Captain Bob's Marina, commented that the weather over the last weekend was a "tad" too windy to provide ideal flounder catching conditions. A few keeper flounder in the 19-22-inch class were pulled from the waters of the Chincoteague Channel. Assateague Channel provided more shelter from the winds and that provided easier fishing conditions, though the catching was not as good as the western side of the island. A few kingfish (whiting), croaker, and inshore sharks rounded out most of the recent catches. Roeske said that she expects action to take off out on Blackfish Banks around the submerged subway cars and boxcars with the warmer weather.

Upper Shore – Allan Ring, at the Sea Hawk Sports Center, said that anglers were still finding some flounder inside the inlets but it was rough fishing all of last weekend. Ring recommended Berkley Gulps, minnows, silversides, and Fish Bite's "Bob's Your Uncle" selections for baits. The cobia bite was described as "really, really good" for anglers employing menhaden cut baits behind buck-

ets of bunker chum. Rockfish have settled into their summertime pattern, with best action occurring in the creek mouths on the first of the ebb tide, early in the morning and around sunset. Casting lead jigheads with paddletail grubs has been an effective. Ring also added that spot and kingfish (whiting) have made their appearance in the sound with catches coming on small hooks baited with pieces of peeler crab, bloodworms, and Fish Bites.

Bill Hall was the first Eastern Shore resident to achieve Virginia Salt Water Master Angler Status. He has been named Virginia Saltwater Angler of the Year and Virginia Saltwater Release Angler of the Year. Bill is an I.G.F.A. International Committee Representative and a longtime member of the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament Committee. He is the Virginia Recreation Fishing representative on the ASMFC Striped Bass Management Panel and is a past recipient of the CCA-VA Virginia Outdoor Writer Conservation Leadership Award.



Photo courtesy of Chris' Bait & Tackle
Matt Fetters landed this keeper cobia near the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel.



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The cobia fishery has occupied most local anglers' recent conversations and efforts. Although cobia have been available to Virginia anglers for the last two weeks or so, the official cobia season does not start until Saturday, June 1. Up until then, it has been release only. In Virginia, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) requires all anglers targeting cobia to obtain a permit. The permit is free and available at <https://webapps.mrc.virginia.gov/public/mpermits/index.phppermitting>.

In addition, there are catch and effort reporting specifications that are part of the permitting requirements. The 2019 cobia regulations remain the same as the previous year: one fish per person, three fish per boat maximum, 40-inch minimum size limit with only one over 50 inches allowed per boat. It will be legal to gaff a cobia this year, although a large dip net remains the preferred method for boating one of the muscular fish. All early reports point to a banner cobia season, with good numbers of fish reported from the ocean front of Virginia Beach to the Pungoteague Flats off Onancock.

Black drum are being caught from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel to the Maryland-Virginia state line on both sides of the peninsula in what is shaping up to be the best drum fishery in several years.

Lower Shore – Jeb Brady, of Bailey's Tackle Shop, reported that fishing over the recent Memorial Holiday weekend was "both up and down." Anglers reported catches of drum on the seaside and behind Fisherman's Island. Cobia have been caught by both bottom fishing and by sight casting and anglers were biting at the bit while waiting for the opening of the cobia season on June 1. Brady also reported that small croaker have begun to show up, as well as small gray trout and larger sea mullet.

Chris Snook, of Chris' Bait & Tackle,

reports that there is been a "bunch" of sea mullet being caught just off the beach from Kiptopeke State Park down to Sunset Beach. The black drum fishery is still going on but the red drum and cobia fishery has gotten "real strong" according to Snook. Sheepshead are still a welcome bycatch in the black drum fishery. Flounder fishing has picked up inside the Ditch off Wise Point.

Wachapreague – Captain Lindsay Paul, from Trident Tackle, reported that flounder fishing was still on the slow side, particularly for this time of the year. Paul claimed that there have been more black drum caught than flounder recently. Small black drum, undersized rockfish, and sea mullet are being caught by anglers surf fishing. Nice catches of larger black drum are still being made out of Willis Wharf.

Chincoteague – Donna Rae Roeske, at the Captain Bob's Marina, reported that fishing had improved over the last week, especially the flounder action. Flounder catches were coming from inside the Chincoteague Channel from Buoy 17 north to beyond Daisey's Dockside. Action inside of Assateague Channel has also taken off, with the area from in front of Memorial Park to Tom's Cove Campground producing flatfish from 17.5 to 22 inches. Live minnows topped with Gulp swimming mullet and Gulp baby crabs having been effective. Other bait options include smelt, silversides, shrimp and minnow/squid combinations. Kingfish (whiting) action has occurred from Buoy 14 to Buoy 11. Live bloodworms, as well as bloodworm scented FishBites and bloodworm scented squid, have been productive kingfish baits. A few croaker have begun to show up in local waters this week. Catches of bluefish have come from the area around the Inlet, while limit catches of black sea bass have come from the offshore wrecks.

Pete Vasiliou, of Captain Steve's Bait & Tackle, reports that surf fishermen were still "picking off black drum" from the

beach on Assateague, but fishing has not been quite as good as it has been the last couple of weeks. Larger sharks are starting to move in, such as sand tigers and black tips. Vasiliou said that there has been a really good sea mullet (whiting) bite. Flounder fishing in the back bay has improved with the water clearing. Vasiliou had no reports from the canyons, but most wreck fishermen were returning to port with their limits of black sea bass.

Upper Shore – Captain Matt Abell, of the Sea Hawk Sports Center, reports that the drum fishing on the bayside has really picked up with both red and black drum. Kyle Abell returned from a recent trip to Bird's Rock with a black drum catch as well as a red drum release. Similar reports were coming from other hard bottom fishing locations in Pocomoke Sound. Red drum and a larger class of speckled trout have been caught in the shallows. Captain Abell had a flounder charter on Tuesday and, despite winds in excess of 20 miles per hour, guided his clients to a catch of 25 fish, of which only three were big enough for the cooler. A casting trip in the shallows of Smith Island on Wednesday produced a three-man limit of rockfish to 25 inches. Bass Assassin paddle-tail grubs proved effective on the stripers.



Photo by Kate Bonniwell
Lucas Woermer landed this black drum that was almost as big as himself while fishing in Pocomoke Sound.

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Photo by Kathleen Bono
Jack Bono caught a citation 24-inch sheepshead weighing in at 11 pounds, 6 ounces last weekend around Fisherman's Island.



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The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Striped Bass Management Board voted 11-4 at its October 30 meeting to implement a striped bass management option that requires an 18% reduction in both the recreational and commercial striped bass catch. Each member state (North Carolina to Maine) must comply with the reductions. The state of Virginia had already implemented its own emergency actions, which mandates a one fish bag limit and a 20- to 36-inch slot limit for the Chesapeake Bay recreational fishery and a one-fish, 28- to 36-inch slot limit for the coastal (Atlantic Ocean) recreational fishery.

Striped bass are now the most abundant species in the Chesapeake Bay and are being caught from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel all the way up to the Susquehanna River. Most of the fish are schoolies measuring less than 20 inches. The size of the fish should improve as the water temperatures continue to fall, with the larger fish typically showing up around Thanksgiving with fishing improving into the month of January.

Lower Shore – Jeb Brady, at Bailey's Bait & Tackle, reported that speckled trout fishing remained good through the week as long as the winds were not too strong. Both bayside and seaside anglers reported trout up to 23 inches. A few catches of puppy drum were made by an-

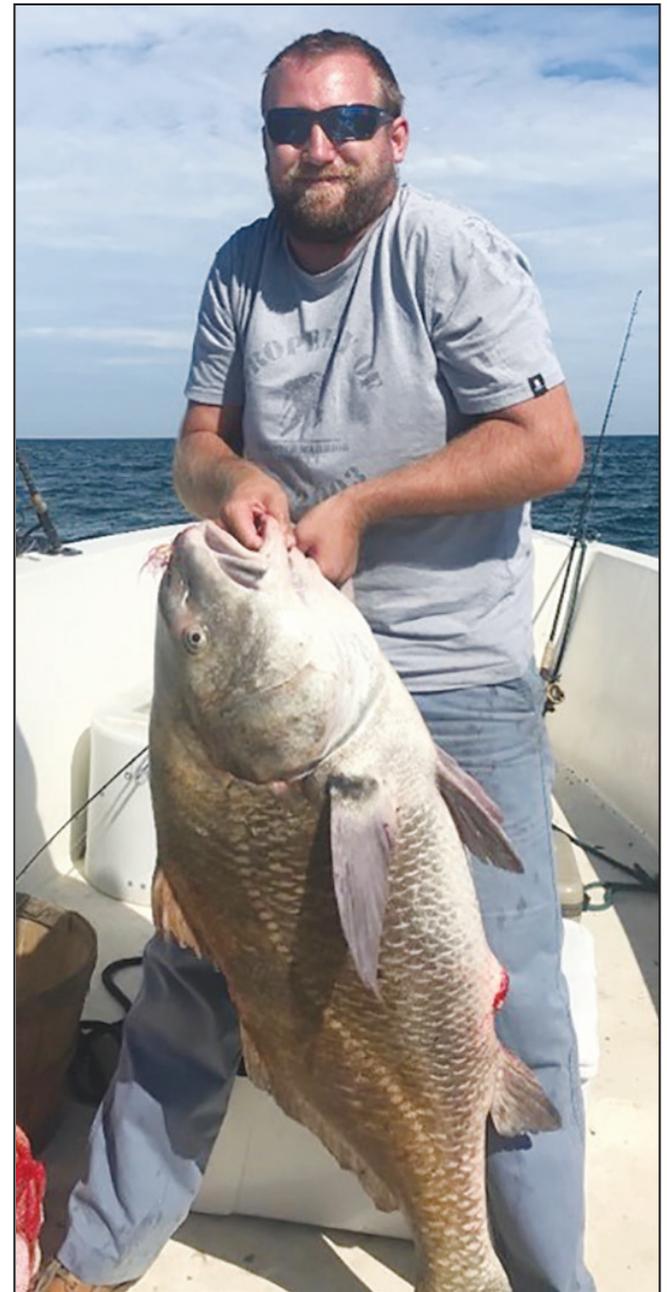
glers targeting the trout. The structure at the bridge-tunnel has produced a few catches of large sheepshead. Brady said that a few small striped bass have been caught along the lower bayside creeks and off the Cape Charles Fishing Pier but most have been under the 20-inch slot size.

Chris Snook, at Chris' Bait & Tackle, reported that there have been a few sheepshead at the concrete ships off Kiptopeke. She said that the speckled trout fishery has "slacked off" some on the bayside but remains "pretty good" on the seaside. Anglers are seeing some small stripers on the bayside. She had not heard of any reports on flounder action.

Chincoteague – Pete Vasiliou, at Captain Steve's Bait & Tackle, reported that striped bass have been caught in the back bay. Speckled trout continue to be caught inside and around the mouths of the creeks, particularly on the north side of the island. The few anglers who are still targeting flounder are enjoying some success in Chincoteague Channel and along the south side of the harbor. The surf is producing catches of bluefish and a few slot-size puppy drum. Vasiliou had not heard of anybody attempting to fish offshore over the weekend.

Upper Shore – Allan Ring, of the Seahawk Sports Center, reported that action in the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay consisted primarily of rockfish, particularly in the shallows. Anglers were enjoying success by casting Bass Assassins on light jig heads. Anglers are starting to see schooling rockfish in a little deeper water, according to Ring. The larger schooling fish were hitting 1-ounce Faux Jigs with 5-inch paddletails. The schooling fish were found in the vicinity of submerged structures and along channel edges. Speckled trout action on the

Maryland side of the state line had slowed down, with only a few trout taken over the last week. Ring did say that trout action on the Virginia side was still good, particularly down around Kiptopeke, with anglers enjoying success using jig heads with paddletails. White perch are being caught in the Maryland rivers as well as in Tangier Sound by anglers soaking bloodworm baits and casting small spinnerbaits.



Greg Harmon landed this large black drum on a flounder rig while wreck fishing. Photo courtesy of Bailey's Bait & Tackle.



Sly Young just missed a citation with this large whiting caught in the Assateague Island surf. Photo courtesy of Captain Steve's Bait & Tackle.

A surf fishing team representing the Eastern Shore Anglers Club is in Hatteras, N.C., this week, participating in the Cape Hatteras Anglers Club's Annual Surf Fishing Tournament, considered the World Series of Surf Fishing. This will be the 57th year the club has fielded a team for this tournament, winning the event three times. Look for the team's final standing in next week's column.

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