





No Fluke: Impact of Gulf oil spill on bluefin tuna fishing in Rhode Island by Captain Dave Monti

Aug 26, 2010 | 258 views | 0  | 1  |  | 



Rob Sperrazza of Suffield, CT caught this 26" fluke (summer flounder) on the vessel Angel Light of No Fluke Charters using a squid rig tipped with squid strip and a fresh water minnow mounted horizontally on the hook which made a big presentation to the fluke.

Scientists have objected to the Obama Administration's claim that 75% of the oil spilled by BP in the Gulf has been collected, burned, degraded or evaporated. In fact, scientists have refuted this claim and related that much of the oil is still in the water.

News about a 22 mile underwater oil plume 3,000 feet below the Gulf surface was reported by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in a study published in the August 19, 2010 issue of Science magazine. The study enhanced fears about possible damage to bluefin tuna larvae.

Bluefin tuna migrate to waters off Rhode Island, so damaged larvae in the Gulf could impact fishing here. The 22-mile plume is actually 1.2 miles wide and 650 feet high. The study's author, Christopher Reddy, is a Rhode Island native.

Ekos 2 (an environmental/economics blog) reported that Dr. Ronald Kendall of Texas Tech University emphasized how little was known about the impacts of dispersed oil on species such as bluefin tuna, a species that has experienced a decline over the past few decades. He noted that critical spawning areas for tuna are located in the vicinity of BP's oil releases and plumes of dispersed oil. The spring and summer spill period coincides with the tuna's egg and larval stages.

I wondered about the impact of the spill on bluefin tuna fishing in RI so I asked Captain John Rainone, L'il Toot Charters, Narragansett and past president of the RI Party & Charter Boat Association (RIPCBA). He said, "...The scientists say that they have no clue as to whether there will be any long term impacts from the oil spill on tuna eggs and larvae. In fact where is the proof (100%) that the only area that bluefin tuna spawn is in the Gulf of Mexico where the oil spill happened. Is that the only place in the entire ocean East and West that Bluefin spawn?" Rainone continued, "...I have one strong feeling ... tuna fish are smart, just like most animals and fish they have survival instincts. If they are swimming into the area that has oil... do you really think they are going to stay there and spawn, or move off to a different area in the ocean and spawn there? When the tsunami was coming and all the animals headed for higher ground, did they do this

due to instincts and survival feelings, or did they hear the special weather broadcast on the radio?"

Captain Rick Bellavance is a member of the Highly Migratory Species Advisory Panel of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), a charter boat captain in RI and president of the RIPCBA. Captain Bellavance said the NMFS committee has and will again address the effects of the spill on tuna at their September meeting when they have more information. He said,

"Prior to the spill, bluefin tuna stocks were not rebuilding sufficiently and as a result NMFS enacted a mid season adjustment to reduce fishing mortality within the Private Angler Sector.

Any effect the spill has on this year's spawn could show up in future stock assessments and result in further regulations... There are some global complications as well. As we try to convince Eastern countries to rebuild their stocks, we are dumping oil and chemicals all over ours. Not too convincing! "

Striped bass regulations

Recently the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) held a public hearing on increasing commercial striped bass quotas. The majority of those attending felt that all is not well with striped bass and we should look to cut back rather than increase the number of fish being taken. Steve Medeiros, president of the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association (RISAA) presented membership with the question on their blog. Should more or less fish be taken? Overwhelmingly members felt striped bass regulations should be adjusted downward if necessary to preserve the fishery. Many favored slotting, allowing anglers to take fish of a certain length (smaller fish) rather than larger egg bearing fish. Members related they would be willing to take less fish to preserve the fishery if necessary.

New tautog regulations

The RI DEM director has approved new regulations for tautog fishing. There are different regulations for private recreational anglers and party & charter boats.

Recreational angler: 3 fish per person/per day from now through October 15 (status quo); 6 fish per person/per day from October 16 to December 15; and a 10-fish BOAT LIMIT from now to December 15.

New changes include a reduction from 8 fish/day to 6 fish/day in the fall fishery, and the new boat limit. This means that no more than 10 tautog may be caught on any boat, no matter how many anglers are aboard.

Licensed Party & Charter Boats with mandatory logbook reporting for all tautog fishing (new): 1 fish per person through October 15 (new); 8 fish per person from October 16 to November 30 (will drop to six fish in 2011); and 1 fish per person from December 1 to December 15.

Where's the bite

Fresh water bite is good and improving. Angler Kim Bissonnette of South Kingstown said, "Largemouth bass are still relating to cover and structure, but can be found roaming a bit during early mornings and later in the evening as the water temperatures drop a bit. Flat water conditions during either time of day are beginning to produce some very nice strikes on top water baits using poppers and smaller profile propeller baits. Soft plastics are also still catching fish along weed edges close to drop offs. During the day, downsizing has helped to produce some good bites using 4" lizards and stick baits. Good colors have been chartreuse, green pumpkin with flakes and sweet potato pie.

Striped bass bite continues to be good at Block Island with fish being caught in the lower part of the Bay too. Robb Roach of Kettlebottom Outfitters, Jamestown, said, "Surprisingly the Stripers are in the Bay. My eight year old Ethan won the CYC tournament with a 31", 11 lb striper caught at Half Way Rock." Captain Rick Bellavance of Priority Too Charters said, "Persistent easterly winds have had a negative effect on the fishing around Block Island. We are still catching stripers during the day drifting eels and parachute jigs on wire, but you have to work for what you catch. The North Rip is full of bluefish." Fly fisherman Peter Nilsen

of Barrington said,

"Fishing from shore is still very slow. The only action from the beaches on the East Bay side, are "skipjacks". But they are getting a bit bigger than they were a few weeks ago. I've been casting on the shores of Little Compton and along Barrington Beach looking for the occasional striper and have caught many of these pesky little blues. No bass!"

Fluke (summer flounder) fishing is good at Block Island with some fish being taken along southern coastal beaches and in the Bay around the bridges and south. Fish to ten pounds being taken at Block Island with jigs outperforming squid rigs. Last week Rob Sperrazza of Suffield, CT caught a 26" fluke under the Newport Bridge when fishing on Angel Light of No Fluke Fishing Charters. The fish was taken on a squid rig tipped with squid and a minnow (you can purchase frozen fresh water minnows at Erickson's Bait & Tackle in Warwick, they save them for fluke fishermen).

Captain Dave Monti has been fishing and shell fishing on Narragansett Bay for over 40 years. He holds a captain's master license and a charter fishing license. Your fishing photos in JPEG from, stories, comments and questions are welcome... there's more than one way to catch a fish. Visit Captain Dave's No Fluke website at www.noflukefishing.com or e-mail him at dmontifish@verizon.net.

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