

SPORTS

Pulse of trophy season holds more drama

As for the trophy striper season we can't say the best is yet to come, but things are far from over.

Joining me in that observation is Department of Natural Resource's



OUTDOORS

By Bill Burton

Keith Lockwood, who not only handles sports fisheries reports for the department. Lockwood is a fisheries biologist as well and the other day he rode a canoe to check out the upper Choptank and Nanticoke where fish were still spawning.

The activity was so torrid the males were rubbing up against the canoe apparently thinking it was a big cow striper in all the excitement. "put your hand over the side and they'd rub that, too," said Keith, who figures there could be more spawning to come — especially in tributaries where waters are a bit cooler.

Understand how this spawning procedure works. The fish arrive in the tributaries and wait for temperatures to reach about 50 degrees, then they drop their eggs and quickly depart. But it doesn't all happen at once.

Years ago, then fisheries biologist Ben Florence, retired and now living in Michigan, told me it's Mother Nature's way of insuring some spawning success. If all the fish spawned at once and the weather turned exceptionally sour, the total spawn for the year could be virtually wiped out.

So, spawning occurs in pulses. That way, unless waters are bad for an extended period, the spawning effort has built-in protection. It's obvious that best is over; it came just before the

season opened as warm days heated waters dramatically. The whole week before the opener turned up exceptional catch-and-release fishing. Unless one was fishing early on the opener, the kickoff day's catching was spotty.

But don't give up, wait for the next pulse, which will probably come over the weekend. The Potomac upper bay in the Susquehanna Flats area and the Elk River are a bit cooler and will send more fish down the bay. Former Washington Bullets coach Dick Motta would describe things as "the fat lady hasn't stopped singing yet."

I asked Lockwood about the biggest fish he has heard of so far this year; he said he tried to confirm rumors of a 68-inch caught and released in pre-season, but failed. He does know of a 47-inch taken on the Susquehanna Flats. Bud Hein of Fishbones Pasadena, reports one of his customers, Chris McNab of Pasadena reeled in a 50½ inch of 41 pounds. She was trolling a single rig with big white bucktail with 9-inch Sassy Shad added out of Solomons.

As usual in trophy season it's virtually impossible to offer any suggestions for a day or two ahead: hot spots change from day to day, but more prominent in recent reports are waters in the Thomas Point area, also those in the area of Buoy 83 off Deale, also the Thomas Point area. But, let's face it; currently the catching in many areas isn't up to what was expected. Word is that in the last couple of days the Bay Bridge has turned up some nice catches for those trolling pilings along the channel edge.

Channel edges are the key to success in the trophy season and this year it appears the fish are close to the top, which pleases those using planer boards. On a warm sunny day, I wouldn't hesitate to work a bait



Courtesy photo

Anne Arundel Sheriff Ron Bateman was one of the lucky ones to take advantage of catch-and-release action before trophy season for a 51-inch.

three to 5 feet below the surface, and I wouldn't give on Bloody Point.

On other fishing; at Ocean City flounder fishing is picking up, usually the first weeks are among the best, tautogs are still biting at the inlet, but it's better for them for headboaters who are taking biggies and often limits. Not much with striper fishing, but wait until those Chesapeake post spawn fish clear the bay and head north.

In the bay, white perch are leaving the tributaries which will please bottom fishermen. Shad and white perch fishing on the Susquehanna continues good and word is that hardheads a plenty are moving into the Potomac. Sandy Point and Matapeake are well worth a try for strippers. In freshwaters, the bass'n is picking up nicely.

PICTURE PERFECT: A year ago when I visited Gibson Island Country School, Pasadena, I came upon then 9-year-old Brewer Butler who was

displaying a model of the Bay Bridge that he and another student made as part of an Earth Week observance. We got to talking and he said he knew the bridge well because he often fished it with his dad and that he loved fishing and was intent on catching the biggest one.

Well, a year later at Saturday's seventh annual Boatyard Bar and Grill Catch-and-Release Tournament who was among the first I spotted when I arrived but Brewer who did catch the biggest one in the Junior Division. He had just checked in a 37½-inch striper aboard the Proud Mary. The fish hit a swimming Storm Shad in mid-day north of Poplar Island.

So many fish were checked in I couldn't count them, but after checking fishermen and report cards, I couldn't note any particular hot spot, but Bloody Point, the Gas Docks, Thomas Point and Buoy 83 appeared to have produced among the best.

Gregg Behling of Severna Park traveled to Calvert Cliffs to catch the biggest of all fish entered, a 46-inch that won him \$1,500 as tops for a CCA Md. Member, but better still enough tackle to last him a lifetime for best catch of all. He said he caught that fish south of Buoy 78.

Second was Doug Smith of Eastpoint fishing the Gin and Sin who took a 43.5 inch at the Gas Docks out of Solomons. He also won the prize for checking in the first fish. He checked his fish in at 11:30 a.m. Third was Jason Garsid fishing the Enough Said who took a striper of 42.75 inches at Bloody Point. Mike Killelea was fourth with a fish of 42.3 inches, and rounding out the top five was Stan Haile whose 41.25 fish was taken on a green spoon.

Look for this tournament to be around a long time. It drew the limit of 150 boats, which carried more than 700 anglers. It drew a crowd of about a thousand for the accompanying Opening Day Festival and raised \$25,000 for CCA, Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Annapolis Police Department's Kid's Fishing Program.

Sponsors in addition to Dick Franco's Boatyard facility were Anglers Sporting Goods, Boater's World/Ritz Camera, Prop Talk magazine and Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

OUTDOORS CALENDAR

May 9: Friends of Anne Arundel Trails will hold the first session of a tree-planting Maryland State Boating Course at Earleigh Heights Fire Department, Severna Park. Call: 410-222-6244.

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