

Stripers on the Fly

By *Joe Superior*

Fly-fishing just seems to be something I have always done. I learned how while in high school from my best friend Jack and his dad, Andy. In fact, I bought my first fly rod from Andy around 1954. It was an 8 ½ foot Action Rod in a D weight. That was a sweet casting rod. I used that rod all through high school fishing at the city reservoir during the summer for bluegills and bass. It was finally stolen from me while I was in the Army in Alabama. Up until then, I had never used anything else. I think I replaced it with an ultra light spinning rod and sort of gave up the fly rod for a few years.

I bought a Fenwick four piece rod and got back into fly-fishing in the seventies. I did some trout fishing and fly tying in the Asheville, NC area. Eventually, my job as a pilot landed me in the Tidewater Area of Virginia. No trout streams. My attempts to go fishing (I had no boat at first) on the local lakes were not very productive. The bream were small and the bass fishing was very slow.

In 1983 I bought a sailboat and started racing. The fly rod was almost forgotten about. What little fishing I did was bottom fishing or trolling for bluefish or whatever might hit a trolled lure. From a Sailboat? Sacrilege! Oh well, I still like to fish and this was all I had. I still wanted to fly fish, but from a sailboat? Forgetaboutit!

I was at a boat show in Virginia Beach in 2000 when I saw a bunch of fellows in a booth for a Fly fishing club. Hey! What's this! Big rods, big flies; lot's of pictures of big fish! This was interesting! The club met on Thursday nights and it was about a thirty-mile drive to the meeting place. My flying job kept me away a lot during the week, so I didn't join.

I finally retired in May of 2001, and one day while in VA Beach, my wife and I stopped in a fly fishing shop we stumbled upon. It was the same group! Now with time to spare, we joined the club. The Virginia Coastal Fly Anglers, or VCFA, had about 100 members, and it looked like a chance to meet some guys with a fishing boat (still have that sailboat) and finally do some salt water fly fishing.

At the first meeting, I learned that they have a fly tying class before every meeting, and tie a pattern that will be productive during that season. With striper (we call them rock here on the Bay) season coming up, the first two patterns we tied were the Clouser Deep Minnow and Art's Yak Attack! The Yak fly is a large pattern and is supposed to look like the large menhaden we have in the bay. I had acquired an 8/9 fly rod several years earlier and never had a chance to use it. Things were looking up! The club had organized an outing to fish some local flats for trout and redfish and I got an invitation to

go. The trip was fun, but we caught no fish on my boat.

Jeff, the fly tying instructor, had been going to take me with him, but had to work on that Sat, so he invited me to try for some rock at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel the following morning. I told him I was still a virgin with the fly rod in salt water. Jeff has caught thousands of nice fish on the long rod, and promised me that would soon change. I was hopeful.

Our run out to the CBBT early Sunday morning had a real tinge of excitement for me. The water was flat, no wind, and a light fog hung over us reducing visibility to less than five hundred feet at times. The long span of the bridge finally loomed out of the mist, and a left turn had us at the first island of the south channel tunnel. We went to the ocean side of the half-mile long island and right away saw fish feeding on top. Jeff set me up to cast first and in no time I had a fish on. Just as quickly, it was off and I was left with an empty tippet. Cut off! Bluefish! We both had several fish on that morning, but landed none. But it FELT GOOD! In all of my freshwater fishing, I had never felt a fish on the fly rod that fought like the ones that got away!

I had a friend in the club where I docked my sailboat that had a 22 foot center consol. We both liked to fish and had been going rock fishing, but with big diving lures or wire lines and 24 oz weights to get deep. We caught fish, but it was not as much fun as what I had just experienced fishing with Jeff, even though we didn't land anything. The next time Phil and I went fishing, I took the fly rod. He seemed tolerant of my interest in trying to fly fish for stripers. No one in the yacht club had done this before. Our first afternoon of what I'm going to call our *second season* was nearly perfect. We found a large flock of gulls working over feeding fish! Phil took us into casting range but we were still trolling deep. When fish started breaking right next to the boat, I put on a top water plug. As I made my first retrieve, you could see several fish trying to hit it! FISH ON! I landed that one, and caught another one before Phil caught his first fish! Now, he was interested. I gave him a big surface lure, and in no time, he had a nice striper also.

It was time to take out the fly rod. I tied on one of the big Yak hair flies, and within a few minutes, I had my first stripper on the fly rod! That made the whole day a success! Before it was over, I had caught as many fish as my friend and had twice as much fun! We had several more good trips with me catching four or five stripers in the 20 to 24 inch range on the fly rod. Phil was enjoying the top water action so much, we stopped taking our wire line rods. Previously, I said that trip started our second season. It was the beginning of our top water season, and my fly rod season!



“This is an example of the Yak Attack fly I was using.”

My brother Bruce lives in Roanoke, VA and does a lot of striper fishing on Smith Mountain Lake near there. When he heard about our success with top water and the abundance of stripers in the area, he had to come down and try it out. Phil agreed to take him along, and he came down in early December.

The weather was perfect! Blue sky, light winds, and the temperature about sixty degrees was almost too much to ask for. When we got out to our favorite area, I couldn't believe my eyes. There must have been a thousand gulls going crazy! My hands were trembling as I tried to thread the leader through what seemed like about twenty line guides! We stopped the boat after only a short run and you could see stripers breaking almost anywhere you looked! I had on my big Yak Attack, and my brother went to his favorite lake lure, a big lipped diver. Phil had on one of his, by now, many surface poppers. It is truly exciting to see several fish trying to get your fly as you strip in line after a nice cast. The fish we caught that afternoon were not large by Bay standards. Most were in the 23 to 25 inch range. Several times we each had a fish on at the same time! Bruce soon gave up on the diver and went to a surface lure also. With a two fish limit per person, we had our limit within ten minutes. After that, we began to cull fish. If we caught a fish larger than one in the box that was still active, the small fish went back in. Before we finished, we were throwing back much larger fish than we had saved.



“even a 24 inch schoolie puts up a nice fight!”

That afternoon was the highlight of my fishing life so far! I guessed we caught over forty fish between us, but my brother thought it was well over fifty! I don't know how many I caught, but it was my best day ever. In fact, I caught more stripers on my fly rod that afternoon than I did during the entire previous season using all techniques!



"This means 'Fish here!'".

Fishing the Yak fly couldn't be easier. It is slightly weighted and I used an intermediate sinking line. Cast and strip. The fly casts easily and sinks to about four feet during the retrieve.



I have also started using a stripping basket. There is nothing more frustrating than having your line wrap around something in the boat or getting under your foot just as you are trying to make a long cast. I made mine from a plastic basket with bungee cords to go around my waist. Some heavy tie wraps stuck up from the bottom and cut off about five inches long keeps the line loops from tangling as it plays out.



If you fish in salt water, and like to fly fish, but haven't tried it salty, give it a try. Our club members fish from the beach, in inlets and off of jetties, all with good success. Since that first season, I have caught several nice fish, my biggest two being one 32 inches and my largest to date, a 38 inch striper weighing around 25 pounds.



My biggest thrill to-date was a false albacore I caught last year, but that's another story!