

Anglers, you've already experienced a full season of fishing this summer — why leave the Bay when you're at your best?

A long-time angler, Joe Evans, DNR Fisheries public affairs officer, shares his knowledge of and tips for — both personal and professional — fishing in the fall.

"Autumn is my favorite time of year for this sport. Not only is the air crisp and fresh, the conditions are ideal for fishing all day long," says Joe.

Many anglers, novice and seasoned alike, are often surprised to find that with the right location, a little know-how and some practice, fall can be one of the most enjoyable times to cast a line. The weather is cool, the boaters are few, and, if you know where to go, the fish are still biting strong.

Location, Location, Location!

As water temperatures cool, the Bay comes alive with a variety of catch-worthy fish that venture to the mouths of small waterways to feed on baitfish moving downstream to the Chesapeake for the winter.

These sections of the Bay are swimming with Maryland's State Fish, the striped bass, which remain in the Chesapeake year-round. These are mostly males from

one to 10 years old. Older and larger migratory fish will also show up after spending the summer in New England waters. Other possible catches include bluefish and speckled trout, which can be found feeding on white perch, bay anchovies and minnow bait.

Certain locations could bring in continuous fishing throughout the day, so throw your lure where they will bite, follow the bait and you'll find success.

"My favorite spots are open water areas, such as the Choptank River, the Chester River, Hackett's Shoal, and the waters between Tolly and Thomas Points," says Joe. "But my *absolute* favorite is the Poplar Island complex."

Off the Eastern Shore, Poplar sits out in a mix of currents from Eastern Bay, the Choptank River, Poplar Narrows, and Chesapeake Bay, making it the home to an abundance of fish. For Joe, this spot is where most of his family outings take place.

"Spending a day on the water with my family is special," explains Joe. "Everyone gets the chance to catch a rockfish or a blue this time of year at Poplar."

Ideal Time of Day

According to Joe, the best time to fish on a fall day is at sunset and sometimes under

a big moon. Stripers feed at night, and with the sunset and moon as guiding lights, the search for food goes into full swing.

"Right at the end of the day, the temperature grows cooler, the night air begins to settle, the water is quiet and most boaters are headed in for the day. This prime opportunity could lead to a great catch," says Joe.

"Not only are bass feeding, but these fish will feed persistently until they have had their fill. So stay out for a couple hours, enjoy the sunset and the cool breeze," he adds.

Special Encounters

Fishing in the fall can be a huge success no matter the skill of angler, especially when encountering a *blitz*. A blitz occurs when dense groups of baitfish rise to the surface followed by aggressive predator fish, causing a feeding (and fishing!) frenzy. The sure signs of a blitz are diving seagulls and a crowd of anglers looking to get in on the action.

Silence is important for catching fish during a blitz. Turn off your engine before drifting in close. If the fish are spooked or disturbed, they will disperse, leaving you with nothing to catch. ■

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Jessica Hawkins was a summer intern with DNR's Office of Communications.

Tackle Tips

CHOOSE BAIT WISELY. Fish want one thing — food. Selection of tackle could be the difference between catching fish or going home empty-handed.

"In the fall, you don't need heavy tackle," says Joe. "The lighter the tackle the more realistic the bait will seem, which is key to successfully catching fish."

LIVE BAIT WORKS WONDERS as well. Stripers are predators; they will feed on anything that moves, and as temperatures cool, bass instinctively look for food to fatten up for the winter. Live minnows are the bait of choice — the freshest bait will make the difference in an angler's success.

Enjoy the season, grab your rod and relax. High water traffic from summer is slowly dying down. The fall fish are out and about. Go explore and take advantage of this glorious time of year!



Striped bass

Chris Stephens



Bluefish



Striped bass

George Shoemaker

Kevin Corbin



An unexpected onlooker

Bill Brown



Alan Klotz



Bluefish

Thomas Wazlavek