

Make Plastics Work For You

By DJ Muller

Between the spring and fall run of stripers and blues on the beach, I like to fill the summer months with some relaxing weakfish and small striper action. As the summer sun warms the rivers and bays, volumes of small spearing, anchovies, shrimp, killies, worms, and many other young, feed and grow in the rivers waters. This provides excellent opportunities for stripers, weakfish and small blues to forage in the river after dark and as the waters quiet down from the days boat traffic. It is at this time when I go to the plastics in my arsenal. Plastics can be used to catch just about any of these gamefish. Fin-S, Storm Wild Eyes, Bassin Assassins, small 1-2" Sassy Shad, all work nicely for hitting weakfish, blues, and small bass. The plastics come in many different sizes and colors so you can match up to what the fish are feeding on. You can hook up with just about any of these fish at any time while fishing the river, canal, or back bays, but here I would like to focus on weakfish in the months, June through September.

Locations. There are many locations available for fishing in the inland estuaries. When looking for a spot you might first want to try a place with some historical significance. Nose around a little bit, ask some questions at the neighborhood tackle shop, befriend a couple locals and see what kind of information you can produce. Secondly use your intuition and creativity. Look for spots that look good, spots that hold bait, look for areas on the river where flood lights or street lights hit the water. Lights cause the bait to cluster thus bringing in the predators. It is also very important that the area you fish is an area that is quiet. No boat traffic. Another tell-tale sign in the quiet of the night is by what you can hear. You can here the splapping of the tails and the slurping of the fish on the surface as they feed. You may also be able to see breaking fish in the ambient light. Fish these spots.

Equipment. When fishing for these fun little gamers I usually use one of my freshwater set ups. I use a rod between 5 and 6 foot, with a small reel, like a Shimano Sedona (SE2000FA) loaded with 8-10 pound test line. Remember that the weigh of your line influences your cast. The smaller the diameter the longer the cast. The more water you cover the better. Power Pro or some other braided equal would work good here because of the small diameter and the strength, often times the line strength will help you lift a fish up to a dock or over a fence.

Some other equipment that you will need to take with you would be a landing net with a handle long enough to service your needs. Every once in a while you do hook into a lunker that gives you a tough time on the lift. One night as I was catching a bunch of spikes and having no problem getting them up and over, a 27" (six or seven pound) weakfish liked what he saw and gave me a tough time when it came to lifting it over the fence. Of course it was the night I forgot my net. You also have to remember that stripers and blues are also present and if a larger one visits, you want to give yourself a good shot at landing it. The one other item that you may be lost without is your head lamp. I don't usually use it for peering into the water, but most often for knot tying or unhooking fish.

Lures. The lures vary greatly. There is a huge selection available now a days. The one common denominator with weakfish is that they prefer pink or bubblegum over the others by quite a margin. Stripers on the other hand like chartreuse green and white or

pearl. I will emphasize one that I am very familiar with. I personally use Lunker City's, Fin-S in 4" with a 1/4 ounce Lunker Grip Jig Heads, which I find superior. Once the plastics is slid up over "gripping cone," I will not have any trouble with the plastic sliding down my jig while casting, this is a great asset especially when fishing in the dark. Zap-a-Gap is an adhesive that is available at some shops, that you put on the shaft of your hook before you put your plastic on. This will keep your bait from sliding down the hook. When rigging a Fin-S onto the hook, I begin by taking my bait and holding it up besides the jig, to see how the bait will sit on the hook. I look closely to see where the hook will come out on top of the plastic. There is usually letters on top of the bait. I pick the appropriate letter and target my point to break out of the plastic at that spot. This technique works well with any soft bait. The other thing that I do is I make sure that I put the bait on as straight as possible. Centered right down the middle. I want the barb of the hook to be sitting just above the plastic by maybe 1/8" maximum, not a 1/4" like I see some do. Once you have the plastic bait on to where you feel comfortable with it, you may want to give it a practice run in the water, make sure it looks and swims naturally.

Technique. As I previously stated, the technique that I am about to share is one that I use most often when fishing for weakfish. However when fishing for weaks bicatch of small stripers or blues, is not uncommon and only spices up the fun.

When casting out, I always cast straight out into the current. If I was standing looking straight out at the river, straight ahead would be 12 o'clock. If the tide were moving right to left, I would cast to somewhere between 10 and 12 and as far out as I can. If the river is fast and deep, I will wait a few seconds for my jig to sink, without letting it hit the bottom. If the river is on the shallower side, I will start reeling sooner and quicker after it hits the water. I am reeling just fast enough to keep the jig off the bottom and allowing the lure to have a life of it's own. Reeling in at break neck speed is useless. That is to be saved for the albacore. I will reel at a different speeds until I get a bump or a hit, or a hookset. Then I will repeat that speed. A good goal for a novice would be to try to keep the lure at the middle of the water column. That way if the fish are down they can easily look up to see the offering, or if they are up they can look down and easily see the offering. I want keep my lure looking and acting like a wounded or scared baitfish, while at the same time keeping it looking as natural as possible. I may twitch, jerk, or jig my bait a little, to try different things to draw a hit.

The other thing that I want to pay close attention to once I start to cast, is where all the hits are taking place. Is it as soon as the bait hits the water? Is it on the fall? Or is it on the retrieve? Is it high in the water column (near surface) or low in the water column(bottom), once I have figured it out, I can start getting into a routine where I can anticipate the hits, thus getting better, quicker hook sets.

When the push and shove of summer begin to get to you, set up a stress relieving routine of spending some evenings riverside, catching weakfish or whatever the river gods have in store for you, and take advantage of the peace and quiet that is there.