

Mullet Madness: Love Those Blue-Backs

By DJ Muller

Man do I love it when the mullet show up! It is more fun than a pocket full of peanut bunker. For several years there we had less than desirable mullet runs in September. For me, I almost forgot about bringing those silly silver and black tightly schooling fish into the equation when it came to my approach. I remembered a time when my fishing partner at the time Steve Daniels and I would go down to the docks and throw net them by the bucketful, and then either fish them as bait for big blues or live line them for stripers. Predators like bluefish and striped bass, not to mention weakfish and fluke, love this hearty like baitfish and usually when the mullet show up and start schooling in September, so does the complement of surf fish.

There are two things that I like about the mullet, one is that they are very easy to spot. They travel in sometimes very large, tightly packed schools, right on the surface making them very easy to spot. They also leave a tremendous wake which also makes them easy to see in calm water. The second thing I like about the mullet is that they always seem to be within casting distance when they swim the shoreline. This brings them into the Muller strike zone. Good for bait, bad for bass. Just kidding.

It was last September when the mullet made a return in big numbers, I was interested. Island Beach had been holding a lot of bait, so it was there that I targeted my efforts. I thought back to when we had strong runs of mullet a few years back and knew that I just had to have a blue-back, steel-lipped swimmer. After scrounging through all my lures I, for the life of me, could not find one to suit my need so I made a B-Line for the shop that I knew carried my go-to lure the Big Don...but did they have it with blue-back??!! It is a very hard to get color because it is not a common color. I screeched the brakes in the parking lot and ran in the store at full speed, slamming my boot-brakes on when I got to the spot where the Big Don's hung. "Now what are you up to??" A voice asked. I raced through the lures in a panic (I was on my way to Island Beach mind you). "I got one!!!!" I yelled. By this time the guy at the shop was wondering what I had up my sleeve this time. "Come on." I said. "I want to check out now!"

I got to the north jetty in short order, strapped on my Korkers, loaded my new BLUE swimmer into my plugbag and stumbled out onto the jetty. The mullet were packed into the pocket and there were occasional crashes as predators took turns crashing the large pods. It did not take long for a couple low teen bass to come onto the rocks before dark as my blue-back Big Don seemed to be the only one that worked amongst the casters present.

It was a couple days later when another buddy and I rolled on to the beach at Island Beach State Park in the late afternoon. It was immediately apparent that the mullet were in, and were they ever! The cast netters were lined up down the beach. It was low tide but from the trough to out about 25 yards the wash was thick with mullet. You could have walked on them. It is a sight that drives any surfcaster into immediate drool mode. We drove a short distance to where we found what looked like an active area with some predator action slashing through the bait schools. We looked at each other and gave it the old, "Let's do it!" I once again snapped on the blue-backed Big Don and went to work. It

was about the third cast into the fracas that once again my swimmer took a massive hit and the fight was on. I took the whole ordeal very non-chalantly, looking at my buddy saying, "Ughh I got a big blue...I think." The fish was of good size and needless to say that once I got the fish into the wave where I could see it, the fish had my immediate attention. I saw the large dorsal fin of a good sized striper. It ran parallel to the beach. I was focused and proceeded to beach a 22 pound striper, which most know is a decent fall Jersey bass. I was pleasantly surprised to say the least.

Did I mention that I love it when the mullet show up? Anyway one year is never like the previous, but if the mullet have made a recovery then may I suggest that you make an effort to go buy a blue-back swimmer or two while you still have time. OK, OK, do not panic. I don't think that the blue-back thing is strictly a Big Don thing, but any blue-back will do. I am not sure what the blue has to do with the fish or the choice of lure color. When I look at a mullet closely on the beach, I see silver...and black. What **does not** matter is what we see or how we see, what **does** matters is how the fish sees. I have some 7" Red Fins in my garage that I have spray painted blue on the back and have taken bass in mullet season (of course I could not find them).

In all actuality, if you look very closely at a picture of a striped mullet you will see that it does actually have a bluish hue to it. On the beach with sunglasses on and fish breaking all over the place is no time or place for a scientific color analogy. Perhaps the blue hue stands out more to the predator than it does to us humans. Apparently the bass like it and it will remain a mystery to me, but one thing will not, that blue works!

Get a couple blue-backs, get down to the water and search out a couple mullet schools and then have some fun. It is why we do what we do in the surf.

Hopefully, I will see you on the beach.