

They're back! A fresh school of keeper striped bass has moved into our waters, probably following the schools of pogies.

Paul Hogg of Crossroads Bait and Tackle in Salisbury had the proverbial "grand slam" charter on his boat "Hogg Tide" last Saturday. He started offshore with cod and haddock, and then moved inshore for large bluefish and 2 keeper bass - the biggest 42 inches. Paul has had success trolling umbrella rigs just outside of the mouth of the Merrimack, picking up both striped bass and bluefish. While he has not gone after the giant tuna, Paul said that there were "tons of" football-sized tuna just offshore. Paul felt that the river was loaded with bait, mostly pogies, and Paul added that there were schools of large herring offshore - providing plenty of bait for the larger game fish.

Peter from Bridge Bait and Tackle in Salisbury spoke of a large school of 6-10 lb. bluefish, extending from the mouth of the Merrimack to the southern point of Plum Island; he added that blues were on Joppa Flats on the incoming tide. On the stripers, Peter said that a new school of bass was in the river from the mouth upriver to the Route 1 Bridge, with many of them in the 30-inch to 40-inch range. Peter thought that trying the outgoing tide, with herring or mackerel, might be better for the striped bass.

Kay Moulton of SurfLand on Plum Island was happy about the new school of fish. Kay said that stripers were hitting worms along the beach - she weighed in a 21-pounder last Friday. To further spice things up, Kay said that bluefish were hitting lures along the beachfront. According to Kay, the fish are there for the boaters too - a kayak fisherman, fishing Joppa, had his hands full with both bluefish and schoolie stripers.

Two doctor friends sent me e-mails: Dr. Steven Locke, in Alaska, "caught so many salmon (both trolling and flyfishing) that I could not keep count." Dr. Lloyd Fielder, while talking up his friends' fishing exploits on Cape Ann, sent me pictures of their striped bass - to 50 pounds.

A report from the Erica Lee: "Today our charter once again went out to the curl area of Jeffrey's Ledge and got knee-deep into the pollock. Sixty in all for 14 people from upstate NY and CT. Then we moved four miles to the south and picked up a few more haddock." For Erica Lee charters call 978-462-8859.

Chris Charos of Captains Parties spoke of continued good fishing. He is still going out for bluefish and striped bass, with 1-2 keeper bass coming over the railings each trip. Offshore, they have been enjoying the run of large pollock and getting a fair number of codfish, topping out in the 25-30 pound range. Please call 978-462-3141 for reservations.

Captain Rick LaPierre's Yellow Bird report for the 20th follows: "Hey gang, up until today, for the last few we have been enjoying some very good fishing. Large pollock and haddock have been the mainstay, with an occasional lunker cod in the mix. Today was a struggle from the start, with the fish getting the best of us. Full moon, tide, or whatever, we just couldn't get them started today." You may call 1-888-234-3531 for Yellow Bird reservations.

So you caught that large codfish and you'd like to celebrate the event with your wife... When I was out on my last Yellow Bird Marathon, Leo (the mate) cut the inner ear bones out of the cod for me and suggested that I make them into earrings for my wife. I did so, having a jeweler put them onto 14K gold posts. They are beautiful and my wife, Barbara, was both surprised and happy.

As always, I thank Kay and Martha Moulton, Rene Vigneault, Paul DeFrancisco, Paul Hogg, Kate Yeomans, and the local sport-fishing captains for their forecasts and news. If you have your own stories, please call me, John Altson, at 978-499-9972 with your news, recipes, and stories. Better yet; send them by e-mail to jaltson@comcast.net. I'd love to hear from you. This column is available, along with other good fishing reports, on www.surfcaster.com. See the striper ornaments at www.sportsornaments.com.

Have a great weekend!