



Maryellen Gordon, NJ Div. Fish and Wildlife

# How to Catch a Whopper

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## Kids and Fishing Clubs

Numerous fishing clubs have programs to help kids get started fishing. This is great for the sport, the future of fishing and the parents, but it's most important for the kids. Large and small fishing organizations share the gift of sportfishing with the next generation. Good information about fishing programs offered in your local area plus family-oriented outdoor events sponsored by New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife is available on the Internet. Some of the following Web sites will help you research family fishing events:

"Hooked On Fishing Not On Drugs"  
[www.futurefisherman.org](http://www.futurefisherman.org)

"Take Me Fishing"  
[www.takemefishing.org](http://www.takemefishing.org)

Absecon Saltwater Sportsmen  
[www.abseconsaltwatersportsmen.com](http://www.abseconsaltwatersportsmen.com)

Berkley Striper Club  
[www.berkeleystriperclub.org](http://www.berkeleystriperclub.org)

Hi-Mar Striper Club  
[www.hi-mar.com](http://www.hi-mar.com)

Hudson River Fishermen's Association  
[www.hrfanj.org/](http://www.hrfanj.org/)

Jersey Coast Anglers Association  
[www.jcaa.org](http://www.jcaa.org)

Kids All-American Fishing Program  
[www.kids-fishing.com](http://www.kids-fishing.com)

National Fishing and Boating Week  
[www.asafishing.org](http://www.asafishing.org)

New Jersey Beach Buggy Association [www.njbba.org](http://www.njbba.org)

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife  
[www.NJFishandWildlife.com](http://www.NJFishandWildlife.com)

New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs  
[www.njsfsc.org](http://www.njsfsc.org)

Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation  
[www.rbff.org](http://www.rbff.org)

Shark River Surf Anglers  
[www.sharkriversurfanglers.com](http://www.sharkriversurfanglers.com)

**M**any young anglers begin their fishing experience at a freshwater pond or lake close to home. Often a family member or friend gets them started sharing their collection of tips and tricks from outdoor excursions experienced over the years. When I was a child, my brother, sister and I would get up early on Saturday mornings and my dad would bring us to a local lake to fish for bluegills. My dad was the one that taught us how to fish and I can't thank him enough for giving me a lifelong hobby that I share with my family and others.

If you haven't yet tried saltwater fishing, read on for some great suggestions to help you catch a "whopper." No, not the big hamburger, but that fish of a lifetime. The fish you will never forget, and the story you'll share with others about the day you reeled in a whopper.

My definition of a whopper is a fish that tops the current state record or even one which meets the New Jersey Skillful Angler minimum size requirements. (See page 24 for details.) Saltwater fish can grow quite large. A 40-pound striped bass certainly could be considered a whopper.

Once you decide what type of saltwater fishing to pursue, you'll need to match the equipment to the fishing style. Will you be fishing from a jetty or miles off shore in a boat? One way to choose the type of fishing gear needed for hooking a huge fish is to see how already successful anglers got the job done. Scan through fishing magazines looking for clues in the photos or tips in the text. Find out the "who, what, when, where and how" information about others' success. Photos of anglers with their trophy fish may offer clues on the rod, reel type and lure, bait and/or sinker used to land that whopper. Remember to look at the size of the rod and reel. These will indicate if the fish was caught from a boat, surf, dock, pier or jetty. Most surf, jetty and pier rods are 8 to 12 feet long and have spinning reels. Boat rods are 5 to 7 feet in length and are used with bait-casting reels that have a revolving spool.

Local tackle dealers are experienced with recommending the proper equipment needed to get started. When purchasing a rod and reel, choose an outfit that is comfortable to hold. Saltwater tackle becomes weathered quickly; local tackle dealers can help keep your equipment in good working order. Be careful not to rest your reel in the sand; sand is an enemy that can destroy your fishing gear. Remember to rinse off your equipment with freshwater after every saltwater fishing trip. **S**


Most tackle dealers are willing to help children and novice anglers learn the basics of fishing and where to catch fish. Don't be shy; ask for help. Let them guide you on the proper line weight and hook size for the fish you plan to catch. It's important to match the hook size to your target species.

Since 1991, New Jersey has one protected game fish, the striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*). The Jersey Coast Anglers Association (JCAA) was instrumental in having legislation signed into law which effects striped bass conservation measures for future generations of saltwater anglers. In 2007, New Jersey anglers may keep two striped bass over twenty-eight inches. Those who apply to receive a special Striped Bass Bonus Program Permit may keep a third striped bass over 28 inches; be sure to attach and sign the bonus permit. (See Bonus Program information, page 13.)

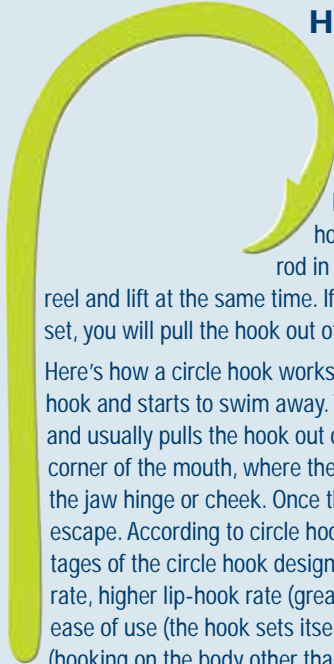
Striped bass is one of the most prized game fish in New Jersey. Currently, the New Jersey state record striped bass is 78 pounds, 8 ounces. Let's review some tips for how to catch a whopper striped bass. The months of May through June and September through November are the best times to target trophy striped bass. During the spring and fall migration, big bass feed most voraciously. The key is to use large baits. Large artificial plugs, 6 to 10 inches long, or fresh cut bait such as cut bunker and whole surf clams, are effective for catching whoppers. For early spring bait it's best to use fresh – not frozen – clams. Starting in September, it is best to match the bait in the surf, but fresh bunker heads are my favorite. Here, a fish-finder rig works the best with an 8/0 circle hook. (See sidebar.)

When using artificial lures, try using large wooden swimming plugs and a very slow retrieve. The longer your bait remains in the water, the better your chances for catching fish. Swimming plugs float on the surface of the water; it doesn't matter what color you use as long as the belly of the lure is white. Keeping your hooks sharp will increase your chances of hooking a fish on the slightest strike.

Striped bass may swirl on live or artificial bait by swimming fast in a circle to disorient their prey. Because of this trait, with very sharp hooks you might snag a striped bass by its tail. You're in luck if this happens; just hold on for the fight of your life. My arms ached for days after fighting a thirty-six inch tail-snagged striped bass. I release snagged fish; they deserved to fight another day.

It's good to practice catch and release fishing, keeping only what you can use. For those times, bring with you a disposable camera to document the fish you release. Some fishing publications will accept photographs of youngsters with their catch. If you plan to submit a photograph to a publication, follow these tips: submit your photograph as soon as possible, use a higher resolution camera setting which can produce a 300 dpi (dots per inch) photograph, and try look excited and happy while posing with your fish and gear. Big smiles increase the chance of having your photograph published. 

## How Does A Circle Hook Work?



The most effective way to hook a fish with a circle hook is to avoid raising the rod in a quick motion. Instead, reel and lift at the same time. If you do the typical hook set, you will pull the hook out of the fish's mouth.

Here's how a circle hook works. The fish grabs the baited hook and starts to swim away. The line tightens slowly and usually pulls the hook out of the throat and to the corner of the mouth, where the point rotates and pierces the jaw hinge or cheek. Once the fish is hooked, it cannot escape. According to circle hook manufacturers, advantages of the circle hook design include increased catch rate, higher lip-hook rate (greatly reducing mortality), ease of use (the hook sets itself) and less snagging (hooking on the body other than in the mouth) in certain bottom fishing applications.

*Remember to avoid the usual hook-setting practice when fishing with a circle hook.*