

The Fishing Experience:

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People go fishing to catch something fresh for dinner, to brag to their buddies or simply to enjoy a day outdoors experiencing nature first-hand. There is much value in the camaraderie of spending quality time fishing with friends. Find out how your fishing fun might even benefit the fishery resource.

More than Just Fish

The fishing vessels *Queen Mary*, a party boat from Point Pleasant and the charter boat *Hunter* from Barnegat Light both have a group of anglers who faithfully count on captains Dave Riback and Eddie Yates for their fishing experience. On each vessel, the group of “regulars” have become friends through their common love of fishing.

As a marine biologist with New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, it’s been a privilege working with these two party/charter boat crews as they assist the agency in our fish sampling efforts. It has also been a pleasure to learn how these fishing vessels became like a second “home” to several dozen anglers over the past 20-plus years.

Although the *Queen Mary*’s “Wednesday Gang” and the *Hunter*’s “Barry’s Barnegat Light Bruisers” look forward to catching dinner as well as doing some bragging, the main reason these groups go fishing is to spend time together and to share a few laughs.

Fishing Vessel *Queen Mary*

The *Queen Mary*’s most devoted regular, Bill Holden, has been fishing on this boat since the late 1960s when Harvey Brown was captain. In spring 1995, Holden made the 1.5 hour drive to Point Pleasant planning to fish for mackerel. The boat never left the dock that day because there weren’t enough customers. Holden was determined to not let this happen again. He approached then-owner, Captain John Brackett (JB), and received a list of his regular customers. Holden contacted each of them and organized a weekly Wednesday fishing trip to assure there would be enough anglers for the boat to sail. Since then the group of fishermen, known as the “Wednesday Gang,” has been fishing together every week of the season.

Currently, the Wednesday Gang has 18 members who get together for more than just fishing. They have helped one another after Hurricane Sandy, have shared vacations and enjoyed dinners together. Since the spring of 2009, they gather for an annual luncheon to kick off the fishing season. At last year’s annual luncheon, Rich Sloane (Stoney) had a special surprise for boat owner, Dave Riback.

Sloane, a member of the Wednesday Gang since 2012 who joined after repeated encouragement from Frank Strouse, said he had no idea he would have so much fun fishing. In addition to fishing, Sloane makes models as a hobby. His latest creation is a perfect replica of Captain Dave’s *Queen Mary*. Minute details from the anchor winch to the helm controls look exactly like the boat of which the Wednesday Gang is so fond. Sloane’s replica, which measures 31.5 inches long and 19 inches tall, took 345 hours to construct from November 2014 to March 2015. The long hours spent meticulously working on the model vessel shows Sloane’s true appreciation for the Wednesday Gang and the *Queen Mary* staff.

Fishing Vessel *Hunter*

Captain Eddie Yates’s customers are another dedicated group of camaraderie-seeking anglers no less dedicated than the Wednesday Gang. *Hunter* customers have come to expect entertaining banter between captain and crew as well as deckhand Marty Pley’s patience in teaching even the most novice angler how to catch fish and have fun.

About ten years ago, several groups struggled to assemble enough anglers to book a fishing trip. Captain Eddie approached longtime customer, Barry Emens—who has been fishing on the *Hunter* for over 25 years—for his assistance. Emens contacted all 32 fishermen, merging the groups into one. Each spring Emens sends the group a list of dates. Fishing trips are booked on a first come, first serve basis.



Rick Case and Rich Sloane with his bluefish on the *Queen Mary*.



Captain Eddie observes Walt Kaminski netting Barry Emens’ catch on the *Hunter*.



Bob Gieson and his bluefish with Erik Olsen on the *Queen Mary*.



Replica of the *Queen Mary* made by Rich Sloane.

It's Not Just About *The Fish*

and most dates are booked quickly with alternate anglers listed in case someone must cancel.

In January 2015 the group was officially named by Captain Eddie at their annual luncheon when he presented each member with a "Barry's Barnegat Light Bruisers" tee shirt. *Memorable Moments* awards are bestowed at the luncheon. One of these moments recalled was when two regulars lost their rods overboard but were miraculously saved by deckhand Chris Patro and Walt Kaminski.

The Bruisers typically start each season with an "exploratory trip" where the fishing grounds are tested. This trip is full of excitement, with everyone catching up on what's happened during the winter break and filled with anticipation of what the season ahead will bring.

There are a lot of laughs and always an elaborate food spread provided by Wayne Queroli. Queroli's food selections have ranged from pepperoni to shrimp—which was successfully used one day for bait by Dave Bryan! On hot summer days everyone is refreshed with ice cold watermelon on the ride back to the dock. Another special memory was when everyone stopped fishing to gather in the cabin to share cake and sing Happy 90th Birthday to Jack Stewart.

One Bruiser, Tony Ingram, fishes so relentlessly that his favorite fishing shoes literally disintegrated all over the deck! During the offseason, many of the Bruisers spend time together shopping for fishing gear or even fishing in Florida.

Importance of Science


Why is this story different? The uniqueness is the cooperation between everyone associated with these two fishing vessels and the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife. Since 1999, our agency has been collecting data, primarily on striped bass and bluefish. The Queen Mary's deckhand, Erik Olsen, has been helpful in developing protocols

for sampling to make the process simple and efficient, making it easy for Fish and Wildlife to collect length, weight and age data.

Information collected about striped bass provide data that's lacking from Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)-mandated field surveys and has been instrumental in enabling Fish and Wildlife to use New Jersey-specific data when developing regulation options. Considerable data on age structure are required for stock assessments both for bluefish and for striped bass.

Prior to 2010, all bluefish age data came from the state of Virginia. Since that time, New Jersey has collected nearly 1,000 bluefish age samples which have significantly contributed to the coast wide bluefish stock assessment. Both of these boats are always willing to help by submitting voluntary daily log books, collecting requested samples, spreading our agency's messages and providing information when requested.

Whether your reward for a day of fishing is the bragging rights about "the big one" or it's the camaraderie of friends, consider modeling after the crews of these two boats by remembering that it's not all about the fish. Consider submitting a fishing log to Fish and Wildlife after **every** trip. Be a part of the fisheries management process. Complete your Striped Bass Bonus Program Log or the volunteer Recreational Saltwater Angler Survey (see NJFishandWildlife.com/saltwater.htm) each time you wet a line. All data is valuable. Your log from a day without harvest is just as valuable to Fish and Wildlife as a day where 10 fish are caught!

Experience the adventure of party or charter boat fishing in New Jersey. See Fish and Wildlife's Party/Charter Boat Directory at NJFishandWildlife.com/prtyboat.htm or visit a local bait and tackle shop for fishing boat recommendations. Boats from Cape May to Atlantic Highlands all have something to offer for first-time or experienced anglers alike. 

More Than Just Fishing

"It is not always about the fishing that catches my interest. It is about the outdoors, bird watching, whale watching, ship and tall ship watching plus viewing other interesting marine-related wildlife that I observe while being out on the ocean. Then there are the personalities, backgrounds and stories told by the other persons that are part of the fishing trip. Finally, over the years, it is the camaraderie and friendships that are established with the fishermen, captain and mates onboard that is very hard to replace. It all makes life—and you—a better person. Life is good!"

Bruiser Barry Emens