

CAPE COD





THE CAPE'S SILVER SCALES

A S t r i p e d B a s s B o n a n z a

BY TOM KEER

It's been said that if the striped bass species ever became extinct, the last one would be caught on Cape Cod. With a gorgeous Northeast coastline filled with countless fishing opportunities running from Connecticut to Maine, that's a bold claim. Still, with the Cape's rocks and ledges, flats, rips, coves, salt ponds, beaches and rivers, I believe that statement holds true.

While we almost lived in a world void of striped bass, strict and progressive conservation practices in the region have restored the fishery, thereby making Cape Cod an epicenter for the species. From April through December, you can catch scores of striped bass. As the water warms in the summer, you can add bluefish and pelagic bonito, false albacore, skipjack and school tuna to the list.

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SPRING IN

Spring on Cape Cod is always worth the wait. The winds start to waffle, blowing sometimes from the north, but more and more steadily from the south. Southern winds bring warmth and push the Gulf Stream closer to shore.

The season technically begins on March 21, the time when the shadbush bloom, a local fishing season indicator. When the shadbush buds form, Cape Cod anglers get excited. And when the flowers pop, anglers hit the water in droves. Shad, striped bass, herring, silversides and squid all arrive in unison.

The first baitfish we see are herring, then alewives, which all migrate inshore to spawn. Both spawn in freshwater, so any freshwater river system that enters into the ocean is a great place to look for bait. A lot of the freshwater river systems enter salt ponds, too, so be creative as you scour nautical charts for exciting fishing spots. Once the bait is in, strippers are sure to follow.

Some of the early season hot spots are situated along the Upper Cape. The migrating striped bass are found cruising the beach-fronts until they locate the herring and alewives. You'll find them all along South Cape Beach before they move into the salt ponds and rivers such as Waquoit Bay, Popponesset, Teaticket River, and Green Pond. Fish that push through the Cape Cod Canal, locally known as "The Big Ditch," move along into Buzzard's Bay, Buttermilk Bay, then through the canal and along Sandwich Town Beach into the Scorton Creeks.

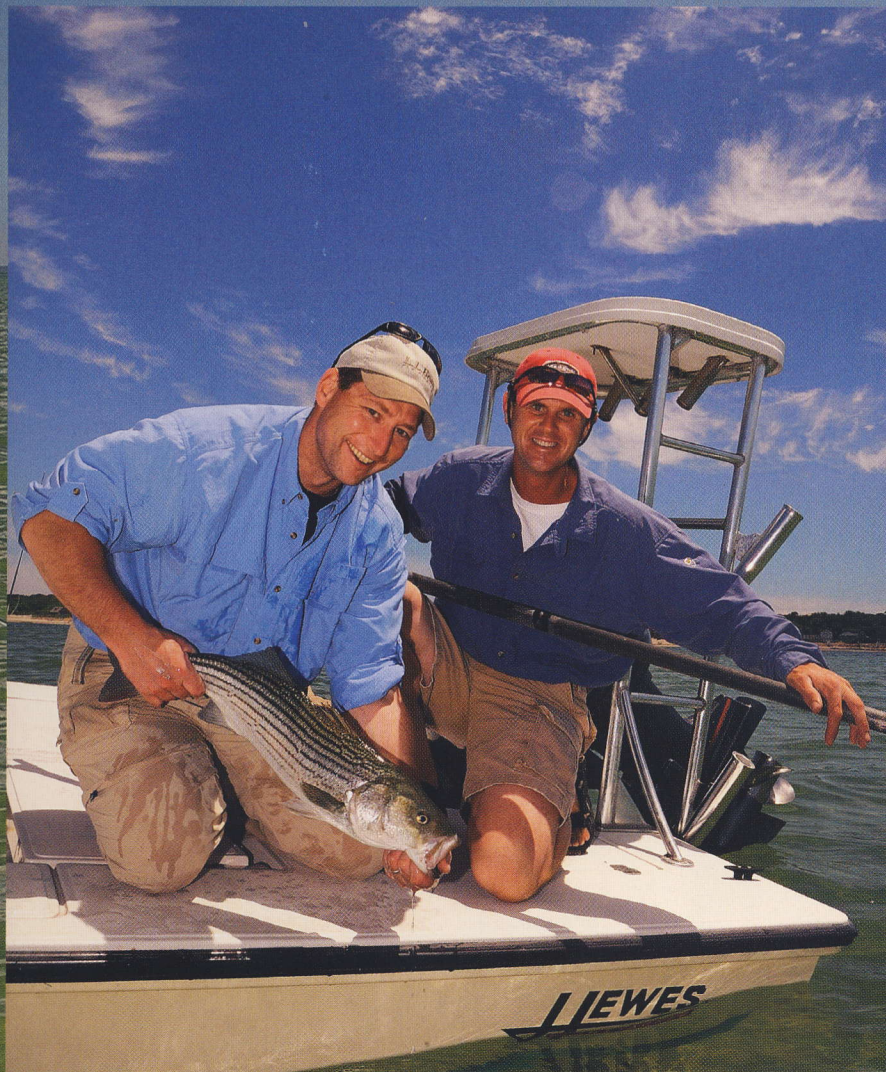
In May, racer bluefish show up. A racer bluefish is fresh off a long migration. They may be three feet long, but they are rail thin, having metabolized nearly all of their body weight during the long swim from offshore. They're finicky, too, and seem too tired to eat. A three-foot, in-season bluefish probably weighs around 14 pounds, but when you find them in the spring,



WHEN THE SHADBUSH BUDS FORM, CAPE COD ANGLERS GET EXCITED.

they're a scant eight or nine pounds. You'll have to get them pretty interested to strike, or you can take a different tactic: give them a few weeks to rest, and they'll explode on your popper or plug. Bluefish have razor-sharp teeth, and you'll need a BogaGrip and/or pliers to extract your lure. Their eyesight is just as good out of the water as it is in, one of only a few fish to have this distinct feature, so handle them with care.

Silversides and squid arrive in the spring as well. Long, thin and with a fine stripe of silver, silversides are known fish magnets. When you see small bait spray out of the water, you know it's a silverside and that a predator is just underneath. Strippers are known as squid hounds, so any reef, salt pond, harbor or rip that has squid will inevitably hold bass.



Where to Toss The Bags

There are a few ways to get to Cape Cod. Direct flights arrive at Logan International Airport in Boston where you can rent a car and drive south on Route 3. A second option is to take a connecting Cape Air flight from Logan to Hyannis Airport and rent a car from there.

Cape Air

800.352.0714

www.flycapeair.com

On your visit to the Cape, you can choose from a number of quality inns, motels or bed and breakfast establishments to meet your needs. The Sandpiper Beach Inn, located on the south side of the Cape is a landmark hotel in the area, which offers guests spacious rooms with numerous amenities. The hotel is also just steps away from its own private beach.

Sandpiper Beach Inn

800.433.2234

www.sandpiperbeachinn.com

The Stone Horse Motel, up from the shores of the Nantucket Sound and Red River Beach offers traveling anglers a pleasant stay. Their family style compounds consist of 21 units wrapped in beautiful oak. Guests can choose from either traditional units or suites with kitchenettes. Their friendly staff can also make reservations for dining, charter fishing, and sightseeing trips.

Stone Horse Motel

508.430.2220

www.stonehorsemotel.com

For a great offshore fishing experience, Maverick Charter Fishing Adventures helmed by Captain Jack Reilly, who has fished Cape Cod's waters for the past two decades will get you into the fish.

Maverick Charter Fishing Adventures

508.509.0113

www.maverickchartersltd.com

Sasquatucket Harbor on route 28 in Harwich Port is home to Haywire Sport Fishing, owned and operated by Captain Chris Pistel who brings 20 years of expert fishing experience to the region.

Haywire Sport Fishing

508.246.0980

www.haywiresportfishing.com

SUMMER CATCH

Summer is a wonderful time on the Cape. Sand eels arrive in June and the fish move up onto the flats to feast on them. The sand eels range in size from half-inch juveniles to three to four-inch adults. When the bass and blues key in on the sand eels, they can be selective. Scaling down your fly or plug is the way to go. It's a good idea to swing by a local shop and go to the freshwater section for plugs. Freshwater-sized Rapala's in an olive over silver or a yellow over silver coloration work like a charm. Try Chatham's Monomoy Island on the ocean side or Barnstable Harbor on the bay side for abundant catches. If you're a fly-fisherman, be sure to bring a bunch of Kenney Abrames L&L Specials.

During the summer, bluefish are around as well, so bring some wire leaders. A few years back, the average-sized summer fish was between two to four pounds, also known locally as cocktail bluefish. They were fun to catch, but de-

stroyed flies and plugs and didn't put up a whole lot of fight. Today, these fish have grown up, so now you can expect bluefish in the 12-pound class. A school of big bluefish on a flat is about as much fun as a light-tackle angler can have, as they run, jump and pull hard. Think of them as the Northeast version of tarpon.

In the early summer, school tuna arrive and stay through Thanksgiving, and you can find them in Cape Cod Bay. As with the bluefish, a few years back, the tuna ranged in the 20 to 30-pound class, but are now a beefier 50 to 70 pounds. Fly-fishermen in particular are chasing bluefins in record numbers and permits need to be obtained prior to targeting them. Licensed charter captains have all the gear and permits required, so you'll be good to go.

As the water temperatures warm, many bass head to the rips. A rip is created when there is one depth of water that quickly descends into much deeper water. The best time to fish a rip

Bring Your Camera

Each town on the Cape is unique, and occupies its own place in American history. The outer Cape is where the Pilgrims first landed before heading on to Plymouth. In Truro you'll find the Corn Hill - the beach where the first pilgrims found an Indian cache of corn that got them through the first winter. For a taste of the region, Truro Vineyard, the Cape's only vineyard, is a must see.

www.trurovineyardsofcapecod.com.

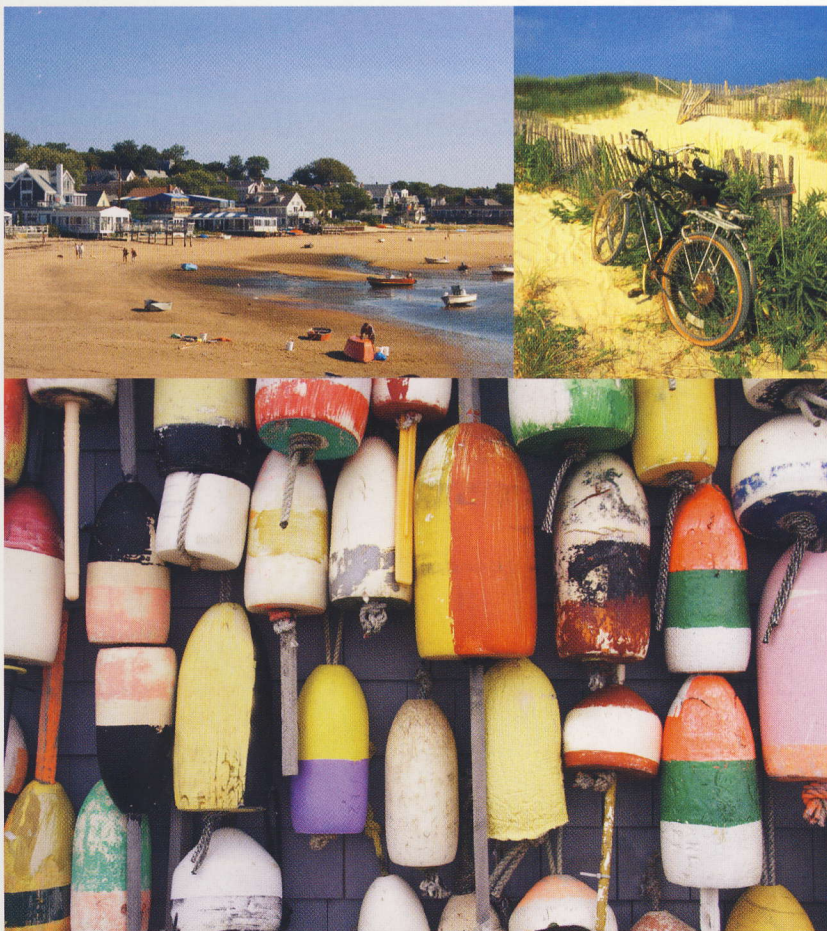
Quirky Provincetown has attracted artists and jazz musicians for decades, while the quaint town of Wellfleet is the home of the world famous Wellfleet Oyster and other bivalves. Orleans is a moderate-sized town with lots of shopping, while nearby Nauset Beach gave up the one-time world record striped bass weighing in at 73 pounds!

Chatham gets the nod for the most picturesque town on the Cape. It's got everything from spas, art galleries and high-end shopping. Brewster, on the bayside, is a bit more rural, but still offers some of the most outstanding flats fishing in the area.

The Upper and Mid Cape is more densely populated, perfect for those going on a day-trip excursion to nearby Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket. There, visitors can improve their handicap on one of several golf courses, enjoy local crafts at a Cape street festival or indulge in automotive nostalgia at a classic car show.

Serious history buffs should head off Cape to visit Plymouth Plantation, the recreated first settlement, where visitors can see a replica of the Mayflower and the actual Plymouth Rock.

www.plimoth.org

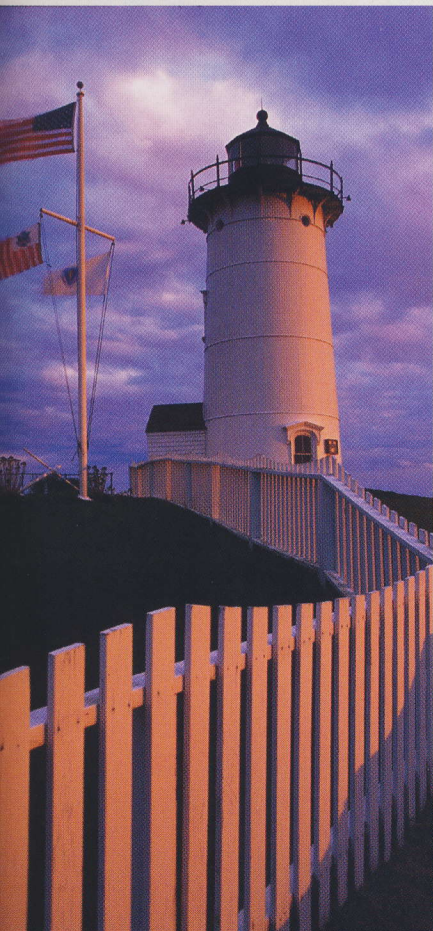
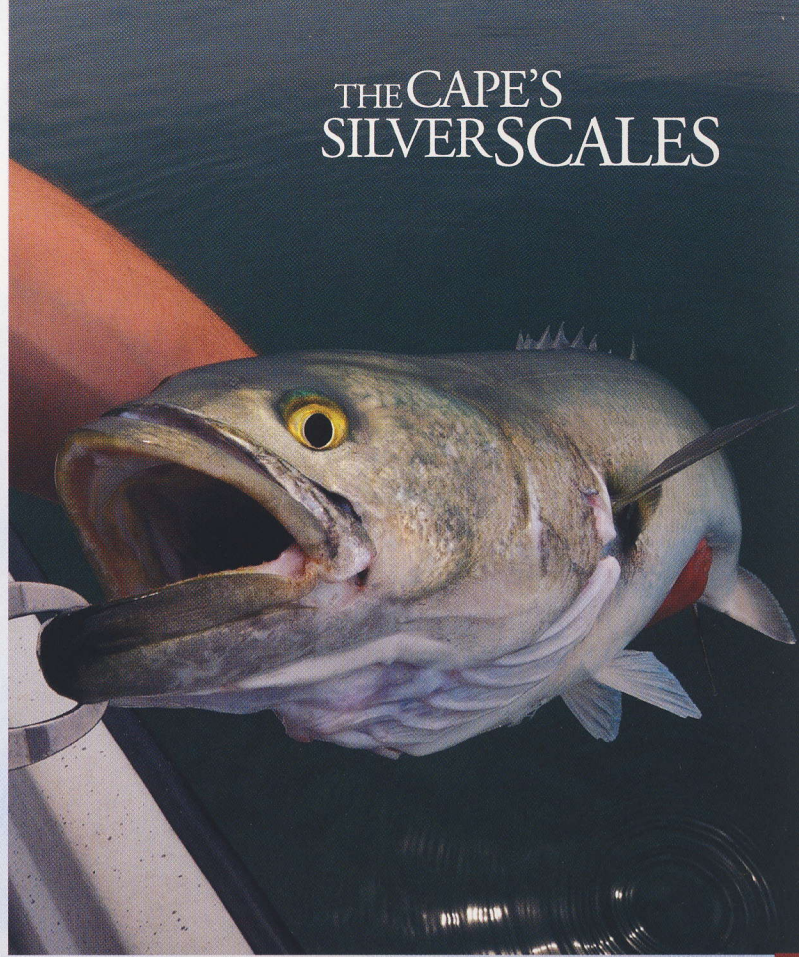


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TODAY, THESE
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is during a falling tide, as the fish line up throughout the water column and wait for the baitfish to drift by in the fast current.

Night fishing for many on the Cape is the best time to tackle striped bass. Cape Cod is loaded with onshore bars that connect and run parallel to the beach and bull-nosed bars that look like an upside down letter *U* located at various turns along the way. Some of the best night fishing beaches are from Orleans through Provincetown. Take a drive at dead low tide and you can see the terrain perfectly. If you're unfamiliar with night fishing, head out a couple of hours before sunset to ease your way into the night.



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FALL | WINDFALL

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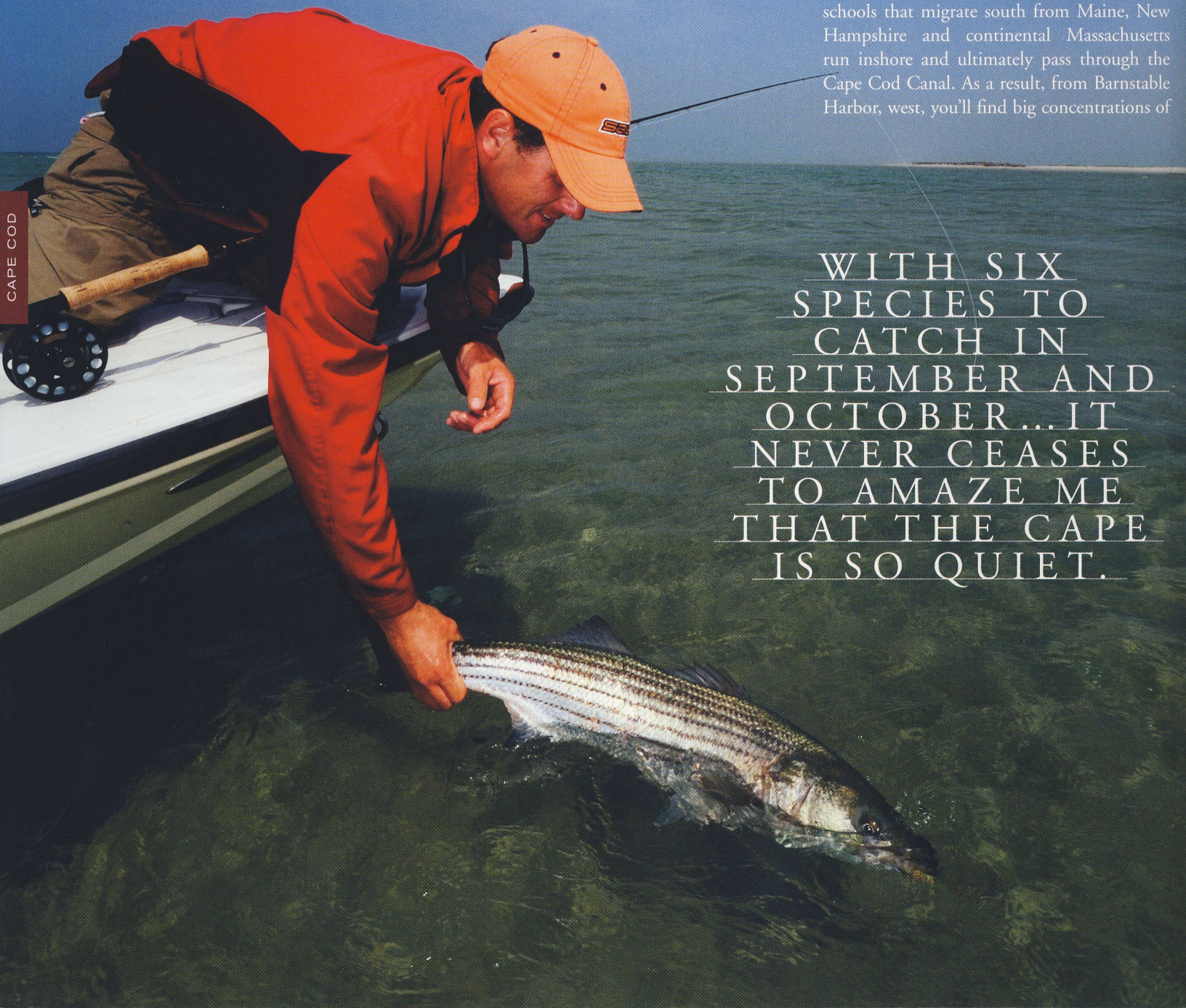
The very best time for fishing in Cape Cod is during the fall, which is surprisingly the time when very few anglers head out.

The warm water brings in many pelagic species, like bonito, albies and skippies. Tuna are around, the bluefish are now fat and aggressive (known as choppers), and the stripers are schooling for their migration. With six species to catch in September and October, and with surface blitzes commonplace, it never ceases to amaze me that the Cape is so quiet.

If you're looking for pelagics, Buzzard's Bay through Chatham on the south side of the Cape is the area to target. Look for sharp drop-offs and bait, and you'll see the fast-swimming fish nearby. Jetties, break-walls, and beach-fronts are good places to find the sharp drop-offs necessary for attracting bonito and albies. The reason these pelagics stay in the upper-mid Cape region is because of the coastline's proximity to the Gulf Stream. After Chatham, the Gulf Stream vectors east, and the colder water is better suited for striped bass.

Striped bass move in two directions. Big schools that migrate south from Maine, New Hampshire and continental Massachusetts run inshore and ultimately pass through the Cape Cod Canal. As a result, from Barnstable Harbor, west, you'll find big concentrations of

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Cape Cod's famous sand dunes rise up adjacent to the Atlantic's majestic deep blue.

Other Notes of Interest About Massachusetts

Capital: Boston

Area: 10,555 sq mi

Population: 6,349,097

Highest Point: Mount Greylock at 3,491 ft.

- The first American lighthouse was built in the Boston Harbor in 1716.
- The Cape Cod National Seashore was created after the federal government purchased portions of private and state owned land.
- The Massachusetts Bay Colony was named after the indigenous population, the Massachuset.
- The first European settlers in Massachusetts, the Pilgrims, established their settlement at Plymouth in 1620, and developed friendly relations with the native Wampanoag.

For more information visit:
www.mass.gov

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them. The canal also gets red hot with action, and Buzzard's Bay on the West End of the Cape loads up. Bass also run the tidal line from Newburyport and hit Provincetown at the tip of the Cape. For decades, the fall run on the Cape meant Race Point, Provincetown.

Stop by an old tackle shop and you'll see tattered photographs from the 1940s to the 1960s with beach buggies posing along daily catches of a dozen 40 to 60-pound bass. Nowadays, the large schools of stripers will split around Provincetown. Some run along the bayside of the Cape past the towns of Truro and Wellfleet, while others run along outer beaches and past those very same towns. Every year the biggest bass are caught in September on live eels off the outer beaches. Something tells me that it won't be any different this year.

During the fall, it's common to get a Slam or a Grand Slam. Toss in a few other species such as the delicious but not terribly good fighting Spanish mackerel or Squeateague (the Indian name for weakfish or grey sea trout) and you'll have more action than you can handle.

On Cape Cod there's a time, a place and a season to match any angler's tastes and preferences. The region offers a one-of-a-kind fishing experience filled with a deep angling history and an abundance of species that should not be missed.

Tom Keer is a full-time freelance writer who lives on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. He is currently at work on his first book, a collection of fly-fishing essays, to be published in Spring 2009 by Barclay Creek Press.



Featured Destination

