

# Fishing

By Richard C. Seale

To many of us, the fish that migrate from the ocean into our sounds and estuaries are very anonymous. However, they really are anadromous, meaning that they can live in both salt and fresh waters. This is a pretty remarkable adaptation.

Here in North Carolina, five species fit the definition of being anadromous. The most valuable, both to commercial and recreational fishermen, is the striped bass, known to most locals as a rockfish. In late winter, large specimens migrate south from northern waters. Unfortunately, most years, these ocean wanderers seem to get no farther than Cape Lookout. The roe- and milt-laden females and males, respectively, deposit their eggs in our sounds and rivers.

Some nice sized rockfish are caught near structures during the cold winter months far up the Pamlico, Pungo and Roanoke Rivers. In April and May, a major run of spawning rock fish surge up the Albemarle Sound and Roanoke River. The launching sites along the Roanoke River are jammed with fishermen launching boats. Due to past over fishing, this is now both a success story and a carefully managed fishery with slot fish size limits and total poundage landing limits for commercial and recreational fisheries. Smaller rockfish can be caught up in the estuaries

almost all year long. They grow up in these rich feeding grounds until they are large enough to survive in the ocean. They then migrate into the ocean and head north where surfcasters from Cape Cod to Maryland love to fish for them.

The major food source for rockfish used to be river herring, also an anadromous fish. People here liked to catch the river herring as well. It was deep fried



Tom Tempel with fly rod caught American Shad on the Roanoke River.

very crisp, after which most of the fish could be eaten, bones and all. There is some dispute whether commercial overfishing or the return of huge numbers of

striped bass decimated the river herring stock. In any event, generally speaking, the river herring fishery is a no-harvest fishery at this point. I miss my spring celebration at the Cypress Grill in Jamesville and my homemade pickled herring in sour cream or herring roe along with fried eggs. By the way, herring can only be caught in drift, gill or dip nets. Dip netting them in the Lake Mattamuskeet outfall canal was great fun in years past.

Two other species that come in from the ocean to spawn in our estuaries are shad, the American and the Hickory. These are aggressive fish and can be caught on small jigs and flies. Shad are in both the Roanoke River and Pamlico/Tar River drainages. Other than their roe, most folks do not consider shad worth eating because they are boney. These fish are much larger than the herring, so they do not fry up as well as do the herring. Shad show up prior to the stripers in the Roanoke River, so fishing for them is great sport without the crowds that come when the stripers show up. Tom Tempel had a great fly fishing trip in late March on the Roanoke. (See photo showing Tom with a nice shad caught on a 4 weight fly rod.) He said his fishing crew each landed over 50 fish, all of which they released. Now that is a great day of sport fishing.

The last anadromous fish is the American eel. This fish is really unusual. It does not come into the estuaries to spawn. In fact, it only spawns in the Sargasso Sea in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. A roe or milt

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