

*Catching Tuna
From A Small Boat*



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Catching Giant Tuna from a Small Boat

Cape Cod sport fishing's most sought after thrill is to battle with a giant tuna. For many, the drive to catch a giant tuna borders on obsession. The tuna's beauty, the potential for big money, and the fish's sheer size have driven many fishermen to spend thousands of dollars, and devote years of their lives to the pursuit of world's most valuable fish.

Giant tuna in Massachusetts Bay can reach a length of nearly ten feet, and weigh more than 1,000 pounds. These massive tunas are capable of reaching speeds of 40 mph. The fish's incredible power and unmatched level of endurance, make giant tuna the world's most difficult fish to tame-even when using the heaviest of tackle.

For the weekend warrior, catching a giant bluefin tuna may seem more like a pipedream than reality. A small boat, restricted budget and limited amount of time on the water do certainly influence one's odds at bagging a giant. However with the correct gear and game plan, catching a giant tuna from a small boat is possible.

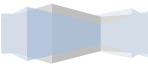


The Right Gear

Targeting giants from a small boat means it is time to put away the spinning rods and conventional stand-up gear. Utilizing swivel rod holders along with 80 or 130 class conventional reels make wrangling giants much easier.

Swivel rod holders, unlike typical rod holders found on small boats, allow a rod and reel setup to move 360 degrees. This means there is no need to ever remove the rod and reel setup from the swivel rod holder. The angler fights the fish by using the boat, instead of his or her body.

Ideally the swivel rod holder would be mounted on the bow of the boat. Unfortunately, installing the swivel rod holder on the bow is not practical for many smaller vessels. Second best would be at the corner of the stern.



Good communication between the angler and the captain is critical when fighting a giant tuna from a swivel rod holder. It is often necessary to maneuver the boat in accordance with the tuna's death circles. An experienced captain should be able to foresee boat maneuvers based on the angle of the rod and line.

Nevertheless having the angler and captain on the same page is absolutely critical to landing a giant.

An 800 pound giant tuna exerts incredible strain on the swivel rod holder, especially when the fish is straight up and down beneath the boat. Having a brute of a tuna beneath the boat is the ultimate test for the rod holder. A poor job installing the swivel rod holder will result in heartbreaking equipment failure. Backing plates are very important and if you are unsure as to what you are doing, it is best to ask a seasoned veteran before ever dropping a bait in the water.

We typically employ Penn International 80 or 130 setups when targeting giants. Many other anglers are switching to comparable setups from companies like Shimano.

Bent butt rods are an absolute necessity for fighting tuna from a swivel rod holder. The bent butt positions the rod nicely at around a 45 degree angle from the swivel holder.

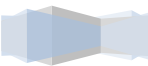


The Right Spots

It is no secret that the best “close to home” giant tuna fishing in our region occurs in the waters around Stellwagen Bank. Stellwagen’s southwest corner is 8 miles from Provincetown, 19 miles from Plymouth and about 26 miles from Barnstable. In tuna terms this is not a far run. Yet when fishing from a small boat, even venturing just a few miles from the beach can get dicey if the weather makes a quick turn for the worse.

So for the weekend warrior, finding spots that are closer to home is critical for those days that are a bit too breezy to make the dash to Stellwagen. Fortunately giant bluefins routinely venture deep inside Cape Cod Bay-sometimes within just a mile or two from the beach.

Giant tuna are seen each season at the “Fingers” outside Barnstable Harbor. There are not usually many tuna hooked and landed in this area, however this could have more to do with a general lack of effort from the fishing fleet than a lack of tuna.



The entire stretch of beach west to Ellisville Harbor can also hold tuna. A few October's ago tuna were spotted within 500 yards of Sagamore Beach for three or four days in a row. The tuna were so close to shore that they could have been reached in a row boat.

The area around the Fishing Ledge in the center of Cape Cod Bay is another spot worth checking out. Roughly half the distance to Stellwagen Bank, this small "hump" often attracts stick boats hoping to pursue giant tuna cruising just below the surface.



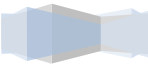
Just to the west of Billingsgate Shoals is an area known by old timers as "The Square." While working at a bait shop as a youngster I heard quite a few stories about the big tuna that feed on Billingsgate's bluefish and striper population. I did not 100% believe these stories until last June, when I witnessed tuna in the 250

pound range tearing up the surface in 90 feet of water west of the shoals.

The probability of an angler hooking into a giant tuna while fishing the above mentioned areas is no doubt lower than the odds enjoyed by anglers fishing Stellwagen Bank. However there are tuna in close to shore around Cape Cod, and if you put your time in, you may get lucky. All it takes is one bite.

Last season, my crew and I hooked into a giant tuna while fishing on the *Miss Loretta* just a few miles from the beach. The tuna inhaled a snapper bluefish and quickly tore through 100 yards of 200 pound dacron before the line rubbed up against the prop, snapping the dacron almost instantly.

If the weather is less than ideal, or if you are short on time, dropping a line inside Cape Cod Bay can yield some impressive surprises.



Cape Cod Bay Giants

This giant tuna article was published in June of 2011.

With reports of seriously big tuna being spotted by planes flying over Cape Cod Bay, it may be time to start thinking about drifting a bluefish off Sandy Neck.

A plethora of mackerel invaded Cape Cod Bay over the past few days. Some nice bass and blues have been caught by anglers trolling tube and worm rigs around the mackerel schools. However you can be sure that stripers and bluefish are not the only predators that have taken notice of the large amount of bait currently present in Cape Cod Bay.

The stickboats have been having good success off the backside of the Cape and around Provincetown. I would not be surprised if we soon hear of giant tuna being harpooned inside the Bay sometime over the next few days.



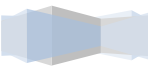
The nice weather predicted for this weekend presents a great window of opportunity for small boat tuna fishermen hoping to hook up close to home.

Recently fishermen departing from the East End of the canal have reported bait balls of tinker mackerel extending from the Sandwich shores, well eastward off Barnstable. Odds are this is not the only area in the Bay holding mackerel.

Areas to Check Out

The Fishing Ledge, which sits almost smack dab in the middle of Cape Cod Bay, could be a prime spot to take a look for Charlie (tuna) this weekend. If the seas are glass calm, keep your eyes peeled for giant tuna cruising just underneath the surface.

Giant tuna will often create a V-shaped wake as they cruise just inches under the Bay's surface. If you plan on targeting smaller



tuna on spinning gear, it may be smart to gauge the size of the tuna before casting.

Last year, around this time, tuna in the 150 pound range could be found a few miles north of the Fingers outside Barnstable Harbor. This class of fish would be much better suited for spin fishermen, compared to some of the larger specimens being caught by the stickboats and anglers utilizing heavy conventional tackle.

The area referred to by old timers as the Square off Billingsgate may also be an area worth taking a ride too. A smart tactic would be to spend the early hours of the morning catching bluefish over the shoal, and then drifting the blues in the deeper water west of Billingsgate in the afternoon.

The bluefish I have seen so far this week in the Bay have all been monstrous. We had good success on fat, 34+ inch blues on Thursday. These larger specimens of the bluefish population make prime bait for giant bluefins.

Techniques to Try

Kite fishing is one of the most exciting ways to catch a giant tuna. It's essentially the same thing as topwater bass fishing, except the fish is about 100 times bigger.

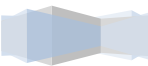
Details matter when kite fishing. Using braided line on Penn 80 or 130 conventional reels can really help a kite to fly high and strong even in a light breeze. Dropper lines set at intervals from the line running off the kite rod will help to decrease the severity of the angle of the main line running from the reel to the bait. "Bridling"

baits can help to increase the longevity of precious live bluefish, pogies and mackerel.



Balloon fishing allows a tuna fisherman to strategically place live baits at specific depths. An appropriate size egg sinker, say 8 ounces, is attached a distance up from the live bait on the main line using an elastic band. If the depth you desire to place your bait at is 80 feet, then 80 feet of main line is paid out. A balloon is then attached 80 feet up from the live bait. Float the balloon away from the boat and start the drift.

We'll discuss the finer details of balloon fishing in subsequent articles. Until then, tight lines and good luck in your pursuit of giant tuna!



Springtime Tuna on Cape Cod

The following excerpt originally appeared in the May 2011 edition of "On The Water" magazine.

"There was a slight chop developing on the ocean's surface as I eased the *Miss Loretta* into a slow drift on Stellwagen Bank's legendary southwest corner.

The previous day we had caught eight juvenile bluefish while fishing in Buzzards Bay, and we were eager to send one of the hapless critters flying under the kite. I could not help but feel bad for the little blues, who 12 hours ago were top predators, feeding on silversides in 70 degree bath water. Now, 40 miles removed from his warm and safe abode, we set our first bluefish under the kite off the port side.

The breath of easterly wind was becoming more of a consistent breeze, so I decided to get my mind off the deteriorating conditions by setting another bluefish off the starboard side of the boat. I wondered how much of a weather window we would have before the breeze would send us home.

Bluefin tuna return to Cape Cod during late May and early June.

15 minutes later something strange happened. A gaping hole opened underneath the kite bait and the small bluefish disappeared.

"What just happened!" yelled Todd, our newest crew member.

A second later the ocean erupted in a white water explosion and the unfortunate bluefish was sucked into the gullet of a large bluefin. I looked to the sky and watched the 220 pound mono top shot release from the kite clip. A second later the line came tight and shot off to the west. The drag on the Penn 80 was screaming!

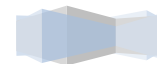
We scrambled around the boat, clearing lines and kicking over buckets, until we finally were able to secure the rod in the port side swivel rod holder. It was pure pandemonium on deck.

My long time fishing buddy, Jason Mazzola, was concerned that the initial drag blistering run would spool us, so I started the engine. I laughed a bit observing the scene, turned the bow to the west, and began following the fish.

Two and one half hours later we had the behemoth just yards beneath the boat's hull. It was now or never as sea conditions were steadily deteriorating. The tuna swam in a powerful death circle, which made gaining each foot of line agonizingly difficult. Finally she surfaced 15 feet off the port side.

"Throw the poon!" we yelled to Todd. Rearing back he launched a Hail Mary shot at the fish and missed by about five feet. Strike one!

"Stick him!" we yelled. On his second swing Todd sank the dart just behind the 700 pound tuna's massive head. He eased the fish in towards the port side while Mazzola manned the rod and I readied the gaff and tail rope. My hands were shaking as I sunk the gaff into the fish and secured the rope.



“We got him!” I said turning to the crew. “And guess what? The hook just popped out!””

Cape Cod’s Late Spring Tuna Fishery

Nothing beats Cape Cod tuna fishing. Without a doubt, our sandy spit of land is a top destination for world class big game fishing.

The sheer amount of tuna in Massachusetts Bay over the past few seasons has been staggering. Large schools of smaller school size tuna, along with some true giants, have been frequent visitors to the waters off Cape Cod, presenting an incredible opportunity for anyone willing to put in the time and effort.

There has been *a lot* of hype in the media about bluefin tuna being depleted and on the verge of extinction. This may be true in places like the Mediterranean Sea and off Asia, however our Cape Cod fishery is strong and the tuna are plentiful.



Significant schools of 100-200 pound tuna fed heavily just north of the Fingers outside Barnstable Harbor last June. These fish proved difficult to catch, however the top water feeding frenzies were downright impressive.

On certain mornings, hundreds of bluefins could be spotted across the horizon, whipping up whitewater and crushing baitfish on the surface.

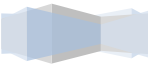
The stage has been set for some epic late spring tuna fishing. The bait is here in abundance, and more than likely the tuna fishing in our neck of the woods will break wide open over the next few days.

Live Bait or Artificial?

My crew on the *Miss Loretta* will be focusing our efforts on giant tuna this June. We will be live-lining bluefish and pogies with hopes of tying into a bluefin over 72 inches in length.

For those interested in live baiting a big bluefin, using “snack” size bluefish as bait may be the ticket. Juvenile bluefish should be plentiful in Nantucket Sound, Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay this June. The tricky part is figuring out a way to transport the feisty chompers to Cape Cod Bay and Stellwagen Bank.

Pogies may be a more realistic bait source for many. These filter feeders can be gillnetted or cast netted in many of the Cape’s back bays and estuaries. Expect to put in many hours of searching and trial and error before locating and perfecting the art of catching live menhaden.



Artificial baits will still produce plenty of tuna for anglers who would rather not deal with the complexities of obtaining live bait. Squid bars are always popular with captains who like to troll. The jigging and popping crowd always amazes the general population by wrangling tuna on relatively light spinning gear.

There is no wrong way to tackle a tuna-the key is discovering what works best for your crew.

June is Prime Time for Cape Cod Anglers

June is an exciting month to be on Cape Cod Bay and Stellwagen Bank. The whale activity off Provincetown is remarkable, not to mention the enormous schools of striped bass that invade the area.

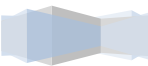


June is also a great month to target Cape Cod Bay's striped bass.

Switching tactics and pursuing stripers is always a viable alternative if the tuna bite slows. Often time's 20-40 pound bass are caught on the same pogies and squid bars meant for tuna.

If the weather cooperates, June has the potential to be one of the most productive months for anyone wetting a line in the Sound, on the Bay, or at Stellwagen.

The opportunities are truly endless.



Springtime Giants



Tuna Time

This article was originally published in June of 2011.

This past winter proved to be a difficult test of patience for many Cape Cod anglers. Yet the wait is now over as more and more bluefin tuna invade the waters around Stellwagen Bank and Cape Cod Bay.

A few of the region's top captains tied into school tuna this past week. Reports from the south tell a tale of larger bluefins heading north. Stick boats fishing Massachusetts Bay are consistently taking 80-plus inch fish. The stage is set, and the giant tuna fishing could very well break wide open sometime over the next few days.

June is a prime month for tuna anglers departing from Cape Cod harbors. The weather is becoming more stable and reliable. Mackerel, pogies and bluefish have now settled into the area, providing anglers with a reliable source of live bait.

Now is the time to use those sick days you have been saving up all winter.

The School Tuna Bite

The school tuna bite off Cape Cod has been remarkable over the past few seasons. Locations around the globe have sighted decreased landings of bluefin tuna, however the numbers of bluefins off the coast of Cape Cod has increased annually.

Most of the action on school sized fish will be centered on Stellwagen Bank. Yet the trek to the Bank is not always necessary for a chance to tie into a decent fish.

The area 3-10 miles off the Plymouth coastline has supported impressive tuna action the past couple seasons and there is reason to believe that it will happen again this year. Keeping your eyes peeled for signs of tuna during the ride to and from the Bank can pay big dividends-especially during October.

Some of the more popular methods for catching school tuna in our neck of the woods include jigging and popping using "beefed" up spinning gear. When the fish show on the surface, nothing beats the excitement generated from a slob tuna destroying a top water plug.

Yet often times the fish are not showing on the surface. During these times jigging for tuna, as well as trolling squid bars can be the ticket. The key is developing a game plan around your boat, crew and budget.





The Giant Tuna Bite

Numerous reports of giant bluefin tuna being taken by harpoon have trickled in over the past few days. For most anglers, one of the best ways to target a giant tuna is by using live bait.

Mackerel should be available throughout June, although it may take a bit more searching to find them as the month wanes into July. Live lining mackerel under balloons as well as fishing the colorful speedsters under a kite is always popular amongst the fleet.

Live pogies can be cast netted or gill netted in the back waters of many of the area's bays and estuaries. Expect to put some serious time in if you hope to procure a live well full of menhaden on your own. Another option is to befriend one of the region's talented live pogie suppliers. For a reasonable cost these guys will fill your livewell with menhaden—granted they are able to find the pogies in the first place.

Another option is to fish with live bluefish. Bluefish are probably the most desirable of giant tuna baits, but they are also probably the most difficult to catch and transport to the tuna grounds.

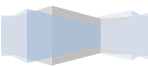
My crew and I have had success catching bluefish before a trip at Race Point in Provincetown and in Buzzards Bay. However the extra mileage and time spent making the run to Provincetown for bait really puts a dent in the gas tank, as well as eating up valuable tuna fishing time. Transporting snapper and juvenile bluefish from Buzzards Bay to Stellwagen is an entirely different matter; however it can be done and has paid off big for us in the past.

This is Just the Beginning

Things are just starting to heat up this month (June) in the waters off Cape Cod. In the past few seasons the tuna have stuck around in our region right through the month of December. The next six months promises to be an exciting time for Cape Cod tuna anglers.

Along with tuna, striped bass and bluefish remain top targets for anglers heading out on the water over the next few weeks.

It is a great time to be a Cape Cod fishermen.



Cape Cod Bay Giants and Lessons Learned

It seems like the tuna bite is starting to turn on in the waters around Cape Cod.

From what I'm hearing the bite off Chatham is nothing short of stellar, and quite possibly the best it has been in years. This news is not all that surprising to folks who have been following the "fish news" of 2011. Back in July and August an enormous biomass of striped bass set up shop off Chatham-gorging themselves on the plentiful foot long sand eels that inhabit the area. It looks like the tuna have caught on and picked up right where the bass left off.



A Penn 130 set to strike in anticipation of a giant bite.

And then we have Cape Cod Bay. Captain Damon Sacco phrased it best in his latest On the Water Magazine article titled "Bay of Pigs." If you haven't yet read his article, I suggest swinging into your local bait and tackle shop and picking up the October edition of OTW. It's a good read for sure.

There are some absolute *behemoth* tuna swimming around in the deep water off Provincetown-just a few miles from the beach.

You probably won't see these fish busting on the surface, but I assure you they are there. This past weekend I had the most enormous sonar marks I have ever registered on my fish finder. These were big, dense orange arches that filled the top half of my screen. Even though we did not hook up, it's good to know that we were in the right spot. For a few minutes yesterday afternoon we had multiple giant tuna 40-60 feet directly below our boots.

And just how giant are these giant tuna? Word on the radio yesterday had one fish pushing 1,100 pounds.

Aside from that big boy, quite a few other boats hooked up with an array of fish ranging from footballs to true giants. Not hooking up when you know giants are in the area is always a tough pill to swallow. This is especially true when you are marking tuna on the sonar, and when boats around you are hooking up. However I am sure there are another 100 or more "tuna hopefuls" lamenting in the same fashion as I at this very moment. As usual, most boats did not see any action yesterday.

However the "sharpies," the guys with years and years of tuna fishing experience, all too often seem to be the ones getting a bend

in their rods. You may be fishing in the same area with the same bait, however they generate bites and you don't.

Of course this makes perfect sense. It's how it should be. Consistently catching giants is not something that is picked up easily, unless one of the high liners takes you under his wing. For the rest of us, trial and error, a lot of research and hopefully some friendly help along the way is the only method to figuring this out.

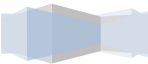


It took a while for us to find success catching school tuna on spinning gear. Then we were lucky enough to bag a giant on a kite. Now we need to figure out this chum bite. It may take a few years, but I know we will do it!

For now I will remain happy knowing that we have so far learned **how to jig up whiting** and hake to use as live bait. We now have 600 feet of anchor line, so we can successfully anchor up in close to 200 feet of water. I found a place in New Bedford where we can buy herring to use as chum. We're hitting the right spots and

marking giant tuna on the sonar. Most importantly, we are (knock on wood) getting nice weather windows that allow us to get out on the water.

Baby steps!



Procuring Reliable Tuna Bait

One of the most difficult road blocks we have thus far encountered in our pursuit of giant tuna is procuring a reliable source of high quality live bait. In the tuna world, this means having a bait pen chock full of live bluefish.

In a perfect world, we would have a giant bait cage filled to the brim with lively, 15-20 inch juvenile blues. However in reality, this is a very difficult proposition.

First off you need to have a bait pen. Then you need to have an accessible spot to keep it. After that you need to catch the bluefish. Of course you need to transport the bluefish to the bait cage. On top of that you need to find the time to do all of this.

Last year we tried our best to make this happen, however we realized just how difficult it was going to be. We found ourselves driving and boating all over creation, looking for bluefish, and then figuring out a way to keep them alive for a few days after we caught them.

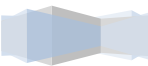
We resorted to some very makeshift and inefficient means of doing this. On numerous occasions we hung laundry baskets full of blues at marinas and boat ramps, sneaking around under the cover of darkness so nobody would give us a hard time or find our bait supply. I also remember keeping a half dozen bluefish alive in a 55 gallon drum in the bed of the truck for three days. I ran extension

cords from the house out to aerators pumping oxygen into the water. Of course every day I found myself at the boat ramp, dumping old “poopy” water and filling up with fresh stuff.

Of course on most days we found ourselves completely bait-less, heading out onto the Bay with nothing in the bait tank. On these trips we’d travel miles in search of bluefish. I find it comical that bluefish always seem to be everywhere when you are striped bass fishing, and then nowhere at all when you need them for bait. Real convenient!

We needed to do something different for this season. I’m happy to say that so far, so good on the bait front.

After some good networking, we secured an awesome spot at a local marina where we can keep our bait cage. I expect this to axe hours of running around time, and give us the potential to procure a consistent, reliable source of live bluefish. This way we sleep soundly the night before the trip, knowing we will have live bait in the morning. Nothing’s better than heading out onto the Bay with a livewell full of fresh baits.



We got the pen in the water two days ago, and after making some adjustments last night, the pen rises and drops quite nicely with the tide. My tuna fishing buddy Jason Mazzola constructed the pen last spring, out of steel mesh and a few “noodles” that help keep it buoyant. I may do a piece on how to construct a bait pen for short money in a future post.

The next hurdle we had to jump was figuring out a way to access the bait pen at low tide. For this we came up with the idea of constructing a rope ladder. I’m happy to say that our homemade rope ladder was easy to make, cost next to nothing, and so far has worked pretty well.

I used the ladder yesterday, it stretched a fair amount, but I didn’t end up swimming in the marina which was quite the relief!

Of course the next step is filling the bait pen with bluefish. So far so good on this front as well. Yesterday afternoon we shot down to one of our bluefish hot spots down Cape. The snappers were in thick and we quickly boated around a dozen of them. Unfortunately most of the snappers were on the small side (less than 8 inches) so I’m not sure how well they will perform as giant tuna bait.

However we did hook up with a giant tuna last fall fishing an 8 inch snapper beneath a balloon off the east end of the Cape Cod Canal, so we’ll just have to wait and see what happens.

Another benefit of good networking is getting tips as to where bluefish are, and access to otherwise un-accessible areas around the Cape. I met Bob P. last year when he came out on a striped bass charter on the Miss Loretta. We boated bass up to 46 pounds, which is always a good way to break the ice. Well after some chit

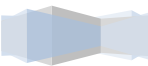
chat Bob mentioned that he had a great bluefish spot, a private dock, and a skiff. The stars have aligned!



So yesterday, after catching a bunch of snappers, we took Bob’s skiff out before sunset in hopes of catching some 15-20 inch bluefish. After some searching we managed to nab one beautiful 16 inch bluefish on a popper. Nice!

So after all that, we have around a dozen snappers and one perfect, juvenile bluefish swimming in our pen under a dock at a marina. It’s great knowing that we have at least some bait ready for that next weather window.

It’s also great knowing that we are starting to develop a reliable system for catching and storing bait, which was a huge challenge



last year. I'm headed up to Boston tonight to spend my birthday (yep 26 years old!) with the girlfriend. Mazzola is headed down Cape after work in hopes of cast netting pogies after receiving a pogie tip this afternoon. Again, good networking has gotten him inside pogie info, and access to a different skiff at a different dock somewhere near Hyannis!

Things are off to a great start!

Loading Up On Tuna Candy

Aside from inclement weather, catching, transporting and storing fresh live bait was the most challenging giant tuna hurdle for us last season. I'm happy to say that so far this fall, the news on the live bait front is much more encouraging.



This past weekend Mazzola and I brought the Miss Loretta down Cape to Lewis Bay, outside the Hyannis Marina. Mazzola had made

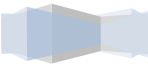
a bait run in Lewis earlier in the week, and found some perfect size bluefish chomping down on 4 inch baby pogies. Our hopes were set high for a productive bait trip.

I have to say, the public boat ramp at Lewis Bay is gorgeous. It's a paved ramp, with a brand spanking new dock and plenty of room to maneuver a truck and trailer. On top of that, there was no fee. I'm guessing free access was a post-Labor Day miracle, and isn't the norm at Lewis Bay. Either way, I'll take it!

After some searching around we found the bluefish stacked up in 7-18 feet of water. The packs of snapper and rat blues moved around quite a bit, but there were so many of them, that when we lost them, it didn't take long for us to zone back in. Best action occurred once the tide started rolling in. The action died pretty quickly as soon as the tide began to slow, around 11am.



We dealt with a lot of snapper bluefish that were just too small to use as giant tuna bait. However, for every 10 snappers we caught, we landed one 12 inch plus bluefish-perfect for fishing under the



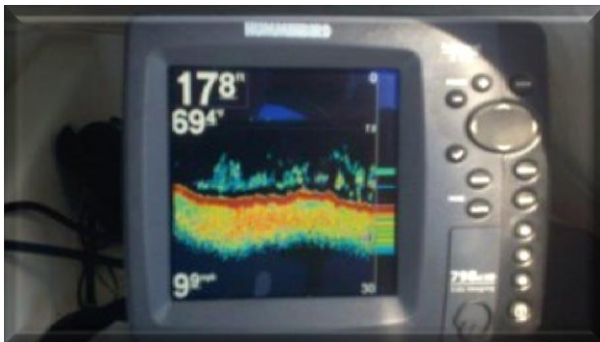
kite. It seemed that whenever we found a school of baby pogies, there were bigger blues in the 12-18 inch range underneath them.

The small snappers were, for the most part, found closer to shore. Kite size bluefish were found just a tad deeper, in 12-18 feet of water.

Hot lure for the snapper bluefish was a gold 1 inch Kastmaster. The thing casts like a missile on 6 pound line, and works extremely well. Hot lure for the 12-20 inch bluefish was a 3 inch floating, blue colored Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow.

I'm really hoping that this area will become infiltrated with juvenile bluefish over the next few weeks. It'd be great to have a reliable source of live bait. Even if we have to travel a bit to get there.

As far as traveling goes, we've upgraded and purchased a battery powered aerator. We kept the blues (about 20 of them) in the 55 gallon makeshift live-well with the aerator running without any problems. It's good to know that we can now transport live bait across land quite easily, without having to worry about fish dying due to lack of oxygen.



The bait cage is working out quite well too. The only problem is that the severe temperature change from where we caught the bluefish (maybe around 70 degree water) to the bait cage (located in 60 degree water) is killing the younger, smaller snapper bluefish. Fortunately the bigger, 12 inch plus blues seem to be able to handle the temperature change better, and are still swimming around happily in the cage.

So in conclusion, so far so good on the bait front. We have a fair amount of bluefish swimming around in the bait pen just waiting to be fed to a giant tuna. Now all we need is good weather (0-10mph winds) and some time in our schedules to get out there in search of a giant.

Shark!

The past day and a half has been nuts!

It all began with a bluefish surfcasting tuna bait run Wednesday evening. We're pretty sure we've found a spot down Cape that will consistently produce small bluefish from shore-which is a rarity. The spot offers easy access to a deep, dredged out channel that is currently holding a ton of baby pogies.

Only problem was the tide was slacking when Mazzola and I arrived at the spot. Like usual, there were a ton of juvenile menhaden, but really not much life at all in the form of bluefish. We saw a few blues break the surface here and there, but ended up getting skunked. I think things will be different if we hit up this shorebound spot half way into the incoming tide.

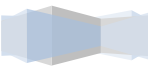
The weatherman was calling for southwest winds of 5-10 mph for Thursday, so we decided to make our first giant tuna trip of the fall yesterday morning. Hopefully the blues we had stowed away in our bait pen were still alive and kicking, and ready to be fed to some tuna.

Unfortunately, we had a major die off in the bait cage. Just about all of the snapper blues were dead at the bottom of the pen. Luckily 5 of the older, bigger bluefish were still swimming happily in the cage. My guess is that the younger, small snappers are too sensitive to the temperature change, and thus perished. It was a bit of a bummer, but we now know that blues under 12 inches won't survive very long in our bait pen.

The tide was dead low which meant I was climbing down 15 feet via a homemade rope ladder in order to access the bait pen. I'd imagine this was quite the site at 1:30am, and it wasn't long until we started to be questioned by some of the late night fishermen in the area. Due to the language barrier, I'm not sure if we were able to effectively explain the situation. I think the guys thought we had set up a "bluefish trap", much like a lobster trap-just for bluefish. Maybe this guys is on to something...

Nevertheless after meeting some very "interesting" fishermen at the marina, and grabbing iced coffees from one of the most enthusiastic Dunkin' employees I've ever ordered from (especially considering it was 2am) we were off to Plymouth in search of pogies.

Prior to yesterday, I had only seen live pogies on two occasions. The first is when we purchased live pogies last spring for bait. The second was earlier this year when I saw a couple pogies swim by my boots while fishing the Cape Cod Canal. I've wondered for years how certain, talented guys in our area consistently catch live pogies to use a tuna bait. This simple little foot long bait fish has driven us bonkers for years!





I'm happy to say that we may have finally "cracked the pogie code" yesterday morning. Our plan was to set a 100 foot long gill net along a channel edge that we had heard produced pogies from time to time. It could not have been longer than 10 minutes when we noticed the buoys on the gill net were bouncing around.

As we brought the gill net in to the boat, we were shocked to see not 1 but 3 three adult pogies caught up in the net! Finally, after years of trying, we had caught a live pogie! Funny to think that we managed to catch a 600 plus pound tuna, before being able to catch a 12 inch pogie-funny how things work!

After a few more sets with the gill net our live well was chock full with adult menhaden and one shad. We had netted close to two dozen big pogies when all was said and done. Hopefully this spot will continue to produce bait through October.

With plenty of bait we headed out to the western edge of Stellwagen Bank. It was a beautiful morning with light winds out of

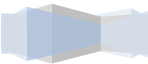
the south. It was an easy ride and we had baits in the water 45 minutes after departing Plymouth.

Of course, it was not long until we hooked up with our first dogfish (sand shark). These "rats of the sea" are virtually everywhere! Doesn't matter if you are in 50 feet of water in Cape Cod Bay, or 150 feet of water at Stellwagen Bank-you will catch a dogfish.



I baited up with a fresh live pogie and set him off the port side. As I was feeding line out an enormous fish came up and inhaled the pogie right off the stern of the boat. Fish on!

Right off the bat we knew this was not a tuna, but this fish still had some serious size and quickly began peeling line from the Penn International 80 setup. We cleared the other lines and began fighting what we figured was a shark. About 10 minutes later I had the fish somewhat close to the boat, when she decided to make a run for the bottom.



The shark began stripping line from the 80 and made a dash for the bottom as Mazzola circled the boat to avoid cutting the line on the engine prop. The fight did not compare to that of a giant tuna, however this fish was still very powerful and put some serious bend in the rod. I set the drag to full pressure in an attempt to lift the shark towards the surface.



A moment later we got a glimpse of the beast. This thing was massive! It was a blue shark, and was easily the longest fish I have ever seen in my life. Blue sharks are pretty common off New England, but I had absolutely no idea they grew to such a size. We estimated the fish to be around 10 feet in length and at least 400 pounds.

We finally were able to get the shark close enough to cut the line a foot or so up from its jaws. Unreal!

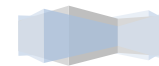
The wind began to kick up so we made our way in tighter to the Plymouth coastline and reset the baits. At around 1pm we had

something suck down the live blue we had set under the kite. A minute later we were tight again!

Right off the bat I knew we weren't hooked up with a giant, but I figured there was a chance that it was a small tuna that didn't yet realize he was hooked. The fish made a few nice runs, but we soon had her under the boat. Unfortunately not a tuna, but another blue shark-this one was around 7 feet in length. We both were surprised to have hooked up with another shark, just several miles from the Plymouth coast.



After checking the radar it was obvious that we were going to get slammed by strong thunderstorms, gusty winds, and even some hail. We decided to make a run for the dock to avoid the worst of the weather. It was a good decision. The wind picked as soon as we rounded the Gurnet outside Plymouth. Always best to play it safe and err on the side of caution.



All in all a great trip. We even managed to catch a striped bass on our way in before pulling the boat. No tuna on this outing, but we finally found a great spot to catch pogies-which is awesome. The massive blue shark was a sight that I will certainly never forget.

Tight lines this weekend. The north wind predicted for today and tomorrow may just light things up on the striped bass and tuna front!

Inches from Giant Tuna

If you are planning on going tuna fishing this week, but don't want to spend the gas or time getting to P-town or Stellwagen Bank, considering heading out on Cape Cod Bay.

Over the past few days a friend of mine, my father and now myself have found tuna of all sizes just a few miles off the Bay's north facing beaches. My father actually waved down a stick boat to bring the captain's attention to the giants that were pushing water all around him. My friend, Todd (who's becoming more addicted to tuna fishing as the days go by) watched in awe as dozens of bluefins-footballs to 400 pounders-surfaced all around him Sunday morning.

With all these reports of tuna so close to home Mazzola and I decided we *had to* give the Bay a shot. We told ourselves it would be stupid for us not to go-further rationalizing our obsession with catching one of these huge fish.

I broke the news to a disappointed girlfriend, as Mazzola called out of work. A couple hours later at 11pm we were on the water in search of tuna bait. I'm pleased to report that there are still plenty of pogies around the South Shore. After a few hours we had 20 live baits and plenty of dead pogies to use as chum.

The weather was perfect Tuesday morning with a beautiful sunrise and flat calm seas. For the moment visibility was at least 20 miles. After a short run from the east end of the Cape Cod Canal we arrived at the spot where we hooked up with a giant last year in the Bay.

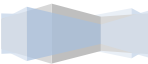
Wasting no time we set a pogie off the stern under a balloon. I figured we'd drift around a bit and if we didn't see any signs of life, move on to greener pastures before anchoring up and starting to chum. Fortunately it wasn't long until Mazzola spotted the best sign of life their is-big tuna crashing on the surface!

Off the stern a large bluefin propelled himself out of the water, crashing down into the flat calm bay with tremendous force.

"Time to start chumming!" I yelled, "the fish are here!"

We anchored up and began chumming heavy in hopes of gaining the attention of whatever fish were in the area. A few minutes into chumming I noticed a pod of tuna pushing water off the starboard side of the Miss Loretta. The fish were swimming directly at our balloon baits.

Then, just a matter of yards behind our farthest bait, another big tuna surfaced. The footprint this fish left on the surface was huge!



Off the bow another small school of tuna began pushing water, heading directly at us. We were surrounded and figured that one of the reels would start screaming at any instant. The anticipation was at an all time high as we waited in absolute silence for a take.

Then a balloon popped as our port side rod began to bend under the strain of a heavy fish! In record time I started the engine, cleared the lines, and disconnected us from the ball (aka the large orange float we had attached to our anchor line).

Unfortunately it was not long until we realized, again, that we had not hooked one of the many tuna around our boat, but had instead tied into *another* blue shark.

By the time we cut free of the shark, returned to the ball and resumed chumming, the bluefins had vanished. It was a steady diet of large blue sharks for the remainder of the morning, until the fog rolled in-reducing our visibility to around 200 feet for the rest of the trip.



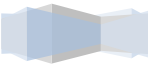
Final tally was 5 sharks hooked, all within a handful of miles from the coastline. Prior to this season I had never hooked into a blue

shark inside Cape Cod Bay, and had no idea they came in this close to shore. No need to worry of course, we are still miles from the beach, however I'm amazed at how many of these things are out there.

I like to think that if that first blue shark did not show up, we would have been able to entice a bite from one of the tuna we had swimming in our chum slick. Of course, who knows what would have happened.

The good news is that we are getting closer to hooking a giant. At one point yesterday morning we had big tuna within inches of our baits. Okay, maybe not inches, but a few feet at the absolute most!

The best part of yesterday is that this all happened close to home, and we were the only boat for miles.

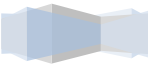




Unfortunately the dense fog forced yet another striped bass trip postponement last night. The fog has really thrown a cog in the wheel as far as striped bass trips are concerned. Hopefully the weather will work out in our favor for this weekend's trips.

I have high hopes for some big bass and even BIGGER tuna this October. As with anything, you never know unless you go. You just have to get out there and give it a shot.

How to Catch Whiting



The commercial whiting season opens in October on Cape Cod Bay. This means that the whiting draggers will be working day in and day out in the deep waters off Provincetown, Plymouth and Stellwagen Bank.



The return of the whiting also creates an awesome giant tuna fishing opportunity. Giant bluefin tuna most likely suck down hundreds of whiting each week. Whiting are certainly an easy meal for these massive fish.

One of the most popular and effective ways to catch these tuna is by live lining whiting. Conveniently, you can catch whiting and fish for tuna in the same area.

An effective way to catch whiting is to use a spinning or conventional reel loaded with at least 150 yards of braided line. Braided line will make keeping bottom in up to 200 feet of water much easier. Since braid has zero stretch, it will also help you to detect bites.

The next step is to tie on your favorite sabiki rig. Since you will eventually run into dogfish, it's often smart to avoid light poundage

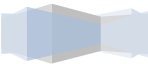
test sabiki rigs-since the hooks will easily snap off when reeling up a big sand shark.



The most important thing to remember is to tip each sabiki hook with a piece of bait. This could be a piece of herring, mackerel, pogie-basically whatever bait you have on board. A one inch strip will work just fine.

We've had success using "tough" pieces of pogie or herring. What I mean by "tough" is a section of the herring or pogie that will remain on the hook during the long drop to the bottom. 200 feet of water is a long way down, so you want to make sure that the piece of bait you hook onto the sabiki rig is actually going to remain on the hook during the descent. One inch strips of pogie belly seem to stay on the hook pretty well.

It's also important to use enough weight to keep the line nearly vertical and in constant contact with the bottom. We've caught most of our whiting on the bottom, or a foot or two above the bottom. Holding bottom can be a challenge when the tide is ripping. Often times we have used over 10 ounces of weight.





If the wind and tide are not too strong, then drifting can work. Motoring slowly into the current and wind as your crew members jig can help your crew keep constant contact with the bottom. However the easiest method is to just anchor up and jig.

Speaking of jiggging, so far I have not noticed any benefit from actually “jiggging” the rod. Having a fully baited sabiki rig right above Cape Cod Bay’s muddy bottom is usually enough to generate a bite.

Whiting are not the only fish you will catch using this method. Mud hake, cod, herring and mackerel will also latch onto a properly presented sabiki rig. Each of these fish will make good tuna bait.

Of course, expect to deal with plenty of dogfish as well!

How to Gillnet Pogies

Up until 2011, pogies had eluded me for years. How to catch pogies had remained a mystery the greater part of my time on Earth.

Well I am happy to report that I am no longer puzzled by this mysterious bait fish! At least for the moment...

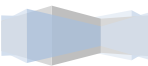
Live pogies make great bait for striped bass and bluefin tuna. Early in the tuna season, you may pay up to \$60 for a dozen live pogies- granted of course the pogie guy is able to catch enough the night prior to your tuna trip.

If you plan on going tuna fishing often, that \$60 can add up quickly. If you have the time, then why not devote a night to catching your own live menhaden?



So far we have had our best success gill netting pogies well after the sun goes down, in harbor and creek channels where we have heard of pogies being consistently sighted and caught.

We use a pretty sturdy, well made 100 foot long, 10 foot deep gillnet. The mesh is around two inches, which is a good all around



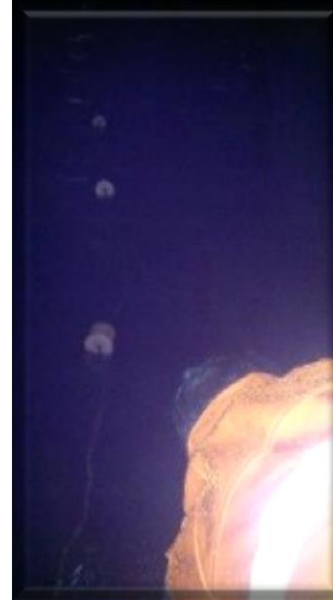
size for catching the adult menhaden and occasional shad we routinely encounter.

Don't forget that a special gill net permit is required in Massachusetts for gill nets longer than 50 feet.

Setting and retrieving the net is a two man operation. With the boat in gear, moving forward at a tube and worm trolling pace, the net is gradually fed over the gunnel. It's important to play the wind and current in a manner that results in the net extending to its full length. In other words, sometimes the wind and current cause the net to bundle up on itself-seriously impacting the net's fish catching ability.

Once the gill net is set we tie it off to a cleat on the stern of the Miss Loretta. We drift with the net through the area where we suspect pogies to be residing, carefully watching the gill net buoys for movement. Once the buoys begin bouncing around, or even better, completely disappear from sight, we retrieve the gill net, which is now hopefully loaded up with healthy adult menhaden.

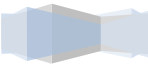
I've found that removing the pogie from the net while the fish is still in the water is easier and less damaging to the pogie. Just be sure to not drop the precious bait back into the water.



As mentioned before, we have had our best pogie success when fishing creek and harbor channels, and more specifically, the edges of such channels. A perfect gill net set is one that takes the net across the channel, or down the edge of the channel.

It is also possible to use your sonar to locate a pogie filled section of a channel. On my color Humminbird unit, pogies mark as blue and green blotches. A quick gill net set through an area with lots of blue and green marks usually results in bouncing buoys.

One problem we have run into has been marking pogies on the sonar that are holding deeper than 10 feet. Because our gill net only covers the top 10 feet of the water column, it is impossible for us to catch pogies swimming deeper than 10 feet. Fortunately, at some point during the course of the night (usually between 2am –

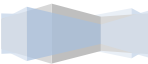


4am) the pogies venture closer to the surface, and subsequently get caught up in the net.

Another interesting observation we have made is that pogies tend to travel independently, or in small groups of twos and threes at night. Striped bass often exhibit this same sort of behavior. These fish are “shoaling” or spread out amongst a large general area. I’d imagine that these pogies are on the feed during the night, filtering out whatever they can from the harbor or bay. Then, when the sun rises, they ball back up into tight schools for protection.

Gill netting pogies is a bit wet and messy but can be a lot of fun. If you are like me, you will find yourself eying those little buoys with the same intensity you watch a kite bait. And then, out of nowhere a buoy goes down-fish on!

Good luck pogie fishing!



Anchoring and Chumming

Like I've said before, we are still new to the tuna game so take everything I say here with a grain of salt. With that in mind, if you are just starting out and trying to catch your first giant tuna, then hopefully these posts help you out!



One of the most popular and effective means for catching giant bluefin tuna in Cape Cod Bay is to anchor up and chum. So far this fall, multiple 1,000 plus pound giant tuna have been caught by anglers utilizing this technique.

I was out on the tuna grounds yesterday with my good friend and fishing buddy Jason Mazzola, and although we did not hook up, we did mark 7 giants on our sonar-which goes to show that chumming does at least draw some fish into the area of your baits. Whether or not the fish bite is a completely different story!

Anchoring

Chumming works best when at anchor. It's difficult to create an effective chum slick from a drifting boat. The rule of thumb for anchoring is to use 5-7 times more anchor line than the depth at which you intend to anchor. Fortunately this is just the "recommended" amount. We have anchored up just fine using 2 times more anchor line than depth. In other words, we have been using 400 feet of anchor line when fishing in 190 feet of water.

The next step is to purchase or find an orange "ball" or float. Once anchored we run the anchor line to the ball, tie it off, and then run 200 more feet of line to the bow of the boat. This gives us ample space between our baits and the anchor line, while also allowing us to leave anchor if we hook up with a fish. After fighting the fish we can return to the ball and resume fishing.



Retrieving 400 feet of anchor line by hand is a grueling task. That's why most tuna fishermen run the anchor line through a brass ring which is connected to the ball. With the boat in gear, the captain maneuvers the vessel upwind/up-tide of the anchor until the anchor

is dislodged from the bottom. The vessel continues forward, pulling the entire anchor line through the brass ring. Done correctly the anchor will become lodged in the ring and kept at the surface by the ball.

Chumming

One of the most popular fishes used for chumming is the herring. We have been chumming 50 plus pounds of herring on each of our trips this fall. I have heard of some captains chumming 100 plus pounds. When available we have thrown mackerel, menhaden and bluefish into the chumming mix.

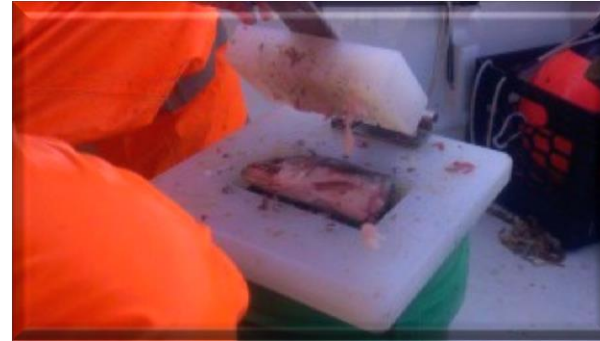


We have purchased 55 pound blocks of herring from Norpel (in New Bedford) for \$20 a block.

Cutting the chum into chunks is quite the process. If you get stuck with this smelly job, then best of luck to you!

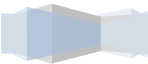
To make chumming life easier, Mazzola found an awesome “chunking device” which has proven to be a real labor and time saver. A herring is placed on top of the device and then pushed

through a set of blades-automatically cutting the herring into chunks-no knife required. It now takes us about 10 minutes to fill a 5 gallon bucket with chunks.



As mentioned above, we were able to draw quite a few big tuna to the boat yesterday, despite being on the outside of the fleet. We may have just gotten lucky, however I’ll think positive and credit the success to our chumming technique.

I spent the entire day throwing small handfuls of herring chunks into the water. As soon as the last handful drifted from sight, another handful went in the drink. Needless to say the birds loved me-we had a flock at our stern the entire day.



Kite Fishing

Kite fishing for giant tuna is the all jacked up, steroided out version of fishing a topwater plug for striped bass. The two concepts are at their foundations very similar. The only difference is that kite fishing can generate surface strikes from tuna the size of small automobiles.

If witnessing a massive topwater hit from a car sized animal interests you, then I suggest reading on. Kite fishing has become one of the most popular methods for taking giant bluefin tuna, and for good reason-it can be extremely exciting and effective.

For the crew of the Miss Loretta, kite fishing during the season of 2010 proved to be quite the learning experience. Our first few attempts at getting the kite in the air failed miserably. We watched our kites plunge into the ocean and fly off into the heavens, all while tuna crashed around our boat.

However we stuck it out, and after some changes to our gear and techniques, we were able to get our kites flying high and strong and our baits swimming nicely on the surface.

Later in the 2010 season, as we watched a 700 pound giant tuna crush a hapless bluefish, we realized why it pays to learn how to fish a kite.

The Kite Fishing Concept

Kite fishing allows an angler to keep a live bait swimming on the surface. The kite physically lifts the bait, and prevents the bait from

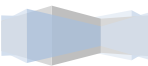
swimming downward. The result is a live bait, virtually half out of the water, swimming and thrashing frantically on the surface- basically ringing the dinner bell for any tuna in the vicinity.

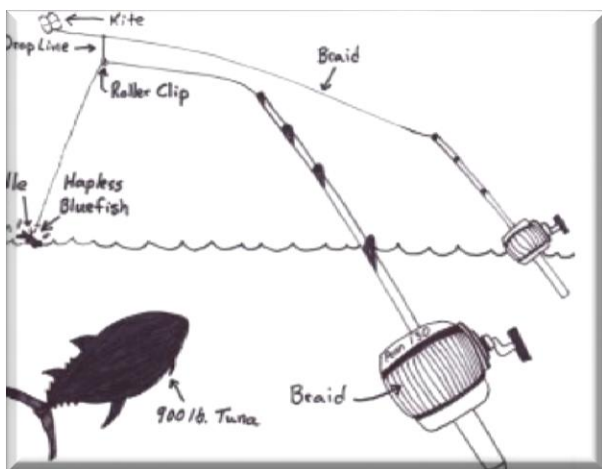
Placing a live bait on the ocean's surface creates a silhouette when viewed from beneath. This increases the likelihood that your bait will be noticed by that giant tuna passing below. Bait fish rarely spend extended periods of time on the surface of the ocean, unless they are injured or being pursued by predators. Kite fishing places live baits in an out of the ordinary situation that beckons predators to investigate.

The Gear

There are many variations of kites on the market. Some of which fly with relative ease while others prove more difficult to get a handle on. We have had success using Boston Big Game kites as well as Power Chute and Mega Mouth fishing kites. Obviously kites need wind to work and the more breeze there is, the easier it will be to get your kite flying high. However, making a few minor adjustments in gear can make a big difference in how your kite will perform in breezy, as well as calm conditions.

Utilizing a kite rod and reel loaded with 100 pound braided line has a few distinct advantages over a reel loaded with dacron. Braided line does not allow any stretch, while also providing more line strength with less line diameter. Essentially this means that the kite attached to braid will have to lift less weight than the kite attached to dacron. The extra strength provided by braid will also help ward against snapping off a kite in windy conditions.





Loading your 50, 80 or 130 class reel with braided line will also help to make kite fishing more effective and efficient. A reel loaded with 200 pound dacron can still be fished with a kite, however the bulky dacron (when compared to the thin diameter of braid) will make it more difficult to fish with a kite during light and variable wind conditions.

When we first began fishing kites we employed simple, run of the mill kite clips. Now, with a year of experience under our belts, we discovered that using kite clips with rollers makes life a bit easier. The rollers allow the main line coming from our 80 and 130 class reels, to slide easily through the clips with less resistance. This helps keep our baits positioned happily on the surface, instead of dangling in mid air-due to the friction created by non-roller kite clips.

Using an elastic bridle to rig live baits will help to minimize injury to the bait. This is important because live pogies, mackerel and

bluefish often times require a lot of time and energy to acquire. It is vital to keep the baits alive and frisky. Instead of traditionally hooking a bait through the top of the back or through the snout, a bridle allows an elastic to be threaded through the bait-much like stitches through skin. This way the hole pierced through the bait is much smaller than that created by traditionally hooking the bait. The bait will swim long and with more vigor due to this small alteration in technique.

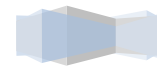
Braided drop lines should also be part of an angler's kite fishing arsenal. Drop lines run from the ball bearing swivels, which are spaced throughout the kite reel's braided line, down towards the ocean's surface. The length of these lines will vary depending on wind conditions. Attach a roller kite clip to the tag end of the drop line. Your main running line will run through the roller kite clip. Drop lines allow your main line to remain closer to the water's surface, instead of towering high in the sky.

Check out the diagram above to get a better understanding of how this all ties together.

The Bait

Of course it is impossible to do any sort of kite fishing without quality live bait. Fortunately Massachusetts Bay, Cape Cod Bay and Stellwagen Bank have no shortage of bait options. Unfortunately extra time, effort and sometimes dollar bills are required to obtain live bait.

Pogies call many of our local bays and harbors home during the season. Some years see more dense populations of pogies than



others. These fish can be caught using cast nets and gill nets, or can be bought from local live pogie suppliers.



Bluefish make fantastic kite baits. Unfortunately blues seem to possess an uncanny ability to be everywhere when you don't want to catch them, and nowhere to be found when you need them. To make our live bluefish supply a little more reliable, we have set up a network of live bait pens at friends' docks and moorings. In an ideal world we will load up the bait pens with bluefish, providing a reliable bait supply for multiple giant tuna trips.

During the spring and fall, anglers fishing in our neck of the woods are blessed by a nice run of atlantic mackerel. These fish are *usually* easily jigged up in water depths of 50-80 feet using sabiki rigs. A high quality sonar system is critical to finding the mackerel schools.

How to Make Tuna Bombs

Giant bluefin tuna can be extremely fickle creatures when they want to be.



I find it hard to believe that a fish that can grow to be 1,400 pounds would shy away from a big, fat lively bait just because of a heavy leader or big hook. However my own personal experience and just about every tuna pro, tuna article and tuna book all point towards the same conclusion-big tuna can be extremely leader shy when they want to be.

My understanding is that leader shyness is an even bigger problem during flat calm, sunny conditions when a lot of light is penetrating into the water column. I'd imagine that this makes it even easier for a wise old behemoth of a tuna to see your 180 pound fluorocarbon or monofilament leader.

I suppose that's why many folks choose to slim down to 100lb, 90lb and even 80lb leader material. Needless to say, getting a giant

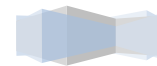
boatside on 80lb leader is quite a challenge. Snapping fish off is a real concern. So what can you do to maximize your chances at successfully getting a tuna to the boat when you hook up using such light leader?

Consider using a "tuna bomb."



The tuna bomb is a slick name for a piece of brake cable or tubing that slides down the line after the bite, lodging itself in the tuna's jaw. If all goes as planned the tuna bomb will protect the light leader from making contact with the tuna's teeth and bony mouth- thus decreasing leader chaff and the chance of a snap off. It's a pretty good idea that's been around for years.

So how do you go about making a tuna bomb?



Tuna bomb tubing prior to being heated up and straightened out. Well, I am sure that there are many different takes on the most effective tuna bomb. However one thing is for sure-having at least some sort of tuna bomb is better than no tuna bomb. This is the approach we have taken this fall when making our own t-bombs.

Mazzola is an engineer by trade so it made sense to let him take a hold of this project and run with it. I'm happy to say that even though the tuna bombs he made may be a little unconventional, they seem to work just fine. Of course we are yet to put them to the test on a big tuna, however in practice runs they have slid down the line all the way to the hook-which is a good sign for sure.

The first thing Mazz did was purchase a section of half inch tubing. The tubing comes all coiled up, which is not at all conducive to sliding smoothly down the line. Thus Mazzola threaded a metal rod through a 24 inch section of tubing and applied heat via a heat gun and blow torch to the tubing in order to straighten it out a bit.

Once straightened out he took the tubing (metal rod still inside the tube) and placed it in the freezer for a few minutes. After cooling the tubing took on a straighter shape-much more conducive to sliding down the line.

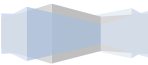


Next he attached weight in the form of lead blocks that he had sitting around the basement. I'll have to ask him again how much weight, but I'd estimate that it is around 1.5 pounds or so.

Electrical tape was used to secure the weights in place around the tubing. It's important to not pinch the tubing closed when securing the weights. A pinched portion of the tubing will hinder the tube from sliding smoothly over knots, swivels and crimps. Once attached to the tubing, the weights were covered in black electrical tape to further secure the tuna bomb. Again, be sure to not pinch off any of the tubing.

At this point the tuna bomb is ready to be used. When attaching the tuna bomb to your line, be sure to run the leader through the tuna bomb before tying or crimping on the hook. This seems like common sense but I've already made this mistake plenty of times.

Setting baits with a tuna bomb on the line is a bit of a challenge. Maybe a more experienced reader can chime in on how to more efficiently do this by leaving a comment below.



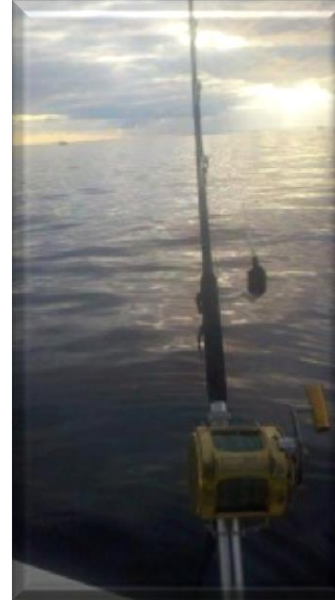


Until we figure out a better system, setting lines is a two man job. One crew member holds the tuna bomb as the other crew member pulls line through the bottom section of the tube until the balloon bait is the desired distance away from the boat.

Once the balloon bait is set where we want it, we use an elastic to keep the tuna bomb in place. Next time I head out on the water I'll get some detailed pictures of exactly how we have been securing the tuna bomb using elastic bands.

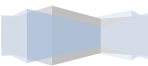
When a fish hits, the tension from the line snaps the elastic and the tuna bomb plummets down the line-hopefully lodging itself in the corner of the tuna's jaw.

In order for this to happen, the tuna bomb will have to slide past the balloon and sever whatever weights you are using. Thus we have been attaching the balloon on a loop of line that will automatically pop the balloon off when the line is under pressure. We've also been using very light, easily breakable elastics to attach weight to the line. In practice runs the tuna bomb has had no trouble snapping off the elastic holding the weight.



So we'll see how it goes. I'll be sure to update this blog post over time as we become more proficient with the tuna bomb.

Until then please leave a comment below if you have any words of wisdom when it comes to tuna bombs. I'd love to hear it!



Cape Cod Bay School and Giant Bluefin Tuna

My fascination with bluefin tuna began 13 years ago in a 12 foot boat about 300 yards off Sandy Neck beach. It was a flat calm, sweltering mid-August morning. The fact I had two more weeks of summer vacation, *and* a hefty bluefish on my line had me feeling ecstatic. But as I eased the toothy critter towards my beat up aluminum dinghy, I got a glimpse of a fish that would change my future forever.

In the crystal clear water behind and slightly below the feisty bluefish was a behemoth of a tuna, a true brute that looked to be half the size of the dinghy. With my heart in my throat I released the bail on my reel and let the nearly boat-side bluefish swim freely, praying that the tuna would engulf the hapless creature. However I was too late-hundreds of pounds of powerful sashimi had already disappeared somewhere into the abyss Cape Cod Bay.

I spent the next decade earnestly trying to catch a tuna. I was quick to learn that landing a bluefin from a boat more suitable for chasing striped bass is quite the challenge. Unless you have a substantial vessel, tuna fishing can be a hairy adventure in our neck of the woods. The trip to Stellwagen Bank can be a long, wet and even dangerous voyage for any size boat.

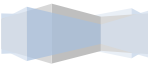
But the good news is that it is possible to catch tuna from a small boat more apt for inshore fishing-as I finally found out a few years ago. The *great* news for small boat anglers is that you may not

have to travel all the way to Stellwagen Bank for a chance to tango with a tuna.



It is possible to find, and catch tuna while staying in sight of the shoreline, which we have slowly come to realize over the past few seasons.

During the spring of 2010, school sized bluefin tuna infiltrated the waters just miles north of Barnstable Harbor. A select group of anglers who bypassed the long steam to Stellwagen Bank played witness to pods of surface feeding tuna, slashing and molesting the vast numbers of tinker mackerel, and other baitfish that had taken up residence in Cape Cod Bay.



Having bluefin this close to shore opened up a whole new world for anglers fishing from smaller vessels. For us, the ride to Stellwagen can only be done safely on the calmest of days, and can be expensive, considering the current cost of fuel. Stellwagen can also turn into a “parking lot” on nice weekends with boats competing for fishing space. The tuna feeding off Barnstable during 2010 were ours for the taking, with very little competition from other boats.

Local recreational fisherman Todd Baranowski recalls the tuna blitz he experienced last June, just five miles from the Sandy Neck shoreline.

“We had fish busting all around us. It was nutty. It was my first experience seeing tuna like that inside Cape Cod Bay,” said Baranowski.

According to Baranowski, most of the fish looked to be in the 100-200 pound range. The tuna were very finicky and moved quickly, but fed aggressively on the surface, making for an impressive show.

However juvenile tuna were not the only visitors to our neck of the woods last season. Giant bluefins also made their presence known to a few lucky anglers.

Bourne native Jason Mazzola was one of the lucky ones. During a late afternoon trip just north of the Sandy Neck parking lot, Mazzola had a run in with a giant. According to Mazzola, who typically fishes more offshore locations, it was a spur of the moment trip on a picturesque day.

“It was late in the afternoon so we decided it would be best to just get out there, put our baits in the water and see what happens,”

recalled Mazzola. “We let a bluefish swim out behind the boat a few miles off Sandy Neck, and 30 minutes later we were hooked up.”

Mazzola’s tuna broke off after a blistering run that peeled a hundred yards of 200 pound dacron from his Penn International 130 setup. Mazzola believes the tuna to have been substantially larger than the school sized bluefins that he too had seen within a few miles of the Barnstable shoreline.



Photo courtesy of TR Schilb.

“I think we were extremely lucky to have hooked up, but it just goes to show that the fish are around if you go looking for them,” explained Mazzola.

These sorts of fish tales give hope to small boat tuna anglers. It is feasible to bag a big bluefin from a 19’ skiff or a 20’ center console. Having a population of tuna closer to shore will certainly improve any small boat fisherman’s odds.

Catching Your First Bluefin Tuna

There is nothing quite like the expression on the face of a virgin tuna angler when they finally hook up with a Bluefin. It is usually a mix of shock, awe and fear.

Ask any fisherman who has successfully landed a tuna and they will vouch for its fighting power and unyielding endurance. The fight is commonly compared to reeling in a Volkswagen beetle or a small truck.

But catching a tuna can be done, and a large boat and fancy equipment is not always necessary—as discussed in *Cape Cod Giant Bluefin Tuna Fishing from a Small Boat*.



Catching your first bluefin tuna on spinning tackle will test your stamina, and your nerves.

The key ingredients for breaking the ice in the tuna world are a boat, a safety conscious captain, and a burning desire to catch a tuna.

Hooking up with that first tuna is an experience that will never be forgotten. However it can take a toll on a fisherman’s body.

Prior to 2009, outdoor enthusiast Chris Bird and local recreational fisherman David D’Amore had dreams of tuna, but had little luck when it came to actually catching the fish. However things took a turn for the better on June 25, 2009 when a school sized tuna engulfed a soft plastic trolled on the surface.

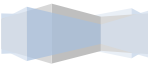
“My first experience fighting a tuna was similar to that of upgrading from a Honda Civic to a Ferrarri,” said D’Amore, comparing striped bass fishing to tuna fishing. “I would struggle for an hour to recover several yards of line, only to have fifty yards taken back in an instant.”

Chris Bird had a similar experience.

“I came into it feeling 10 feet tall and as strong as an ox, and left completely beat up,” explained Bird. “The fish dominated me.”

Even small tuna have a reputation as being one of the hardest fighting fish in the ocean.

So if an angler already possesses the key ingredients of a boat, a safety conscious captain and a burning desire to catch a tuna, where is the best place to start?



Unfortunately things can get confusing. There are as many ways to catch a tuna as there are tuna swimming in the ocean. The most important thing is to find a technique suitable to your means. For the sake of this article, we will focus on bagging a tuna from a small boat (around 20 feet in length).

The first decision to make is what size of tuna to pursue. Unfortunately, targeting giant tuna will require a general category permit, a life raft, an EPIRB and survival suits-which is extremely costly.

For most folks it makes more economic sense to target smaller bluefins. An angling/recreational permit purchased from NOAA for \$20 will allow an angler to retain one tuna 27-59 inches per day/trip (check with NOAA for current regulations). No life rafts, survival suits or EPIRBs required.



Spinning gear is one of the more appropriate means for taking tuna of this size category. There exists a multitude of spinning setups that

will get the job done. The key is finding a setup that is in your price range.

A Fin-Nor OFS-95 Offshore spinning reel with a full spool of 60# braid paired with a 50# class Fin-Nor Offshore rod goes for around \$300. \$300 is on the lower end of the tuna fishing price spectrum, however even better deals may be found by the angler who visits yard sales and keeps a keen eye on craigslist.

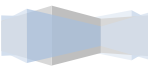
Having a few buddies who are obsessed with catching tuna can really help an angler who is just starting out. A single spinning setup will work great when casting to a pod of surface slashing bluefin tuna; however one setup will not create much of a trolling spread, which can really hinder the chances of a hookup when the fish are not showing on the surface.

On the other hand, it will be easy to create a productive trolling spread if each crew member has a spinning setup of their own.

Most serious tuna boats choose to troll with expensive conventional reels and pricey squid bars. However for the angler just starting out, spinning setups are the most economical choice.

A boat full of spinning rods will allow each crew member to get in on surface action and will also allow the boat to implement a productive trolling spread. It is like getting the best of both worlds, at a reasonable cost, for anglers just getting into the tuna game.

Creating a productive trolling spread from a small boat can be done by thinking creatively. Instead of focusing on everything your boat does not have (outriggers, a dozen rod holders, squid bars etc.) focus on what you *do* have (two to four rod holders, a tackle box



with maybe a few large soft plastics and a couple deep diving swimmers).

By utilizing a couple nine inch Slug-Go's or 14 inch Hogy soft plastics, and two deep diving swimmers, a small boat can troll four different lures at two different depths.

Set the two deep diving swimmers 30-40 yards off the stern of the boat and place these two spinning rods in the starboard rear and port rear rod holders. Then set the soft plastics 50 yards behind the stern of the boat and place each of these spinning rods in the starboard and port gunnel rod holders.



Successfully done the soft plastics will fish the top of the water column, while the deep divers fish below. The trolling spread will

efficiently cover two different spectrums of the water column-not bad for a boat more apt to fishing for stripers and blues.

Catching a tuna from any size boat is an incredible experience. However there is something special about plucking a big fish from the sea while fishing in a not so big boat.

Next week we will take a more in-depth look at some of the techniques and strategies that have helped many local anglers succeed in bagging their first bluefin tuna.

