

Fishing for Spring Striper

In The Net with Fish'n Dog Drew

By Drew Gidlof Photo by Jan Vick

Drew Gidlof, owner of Fish'n Dog Drew Guide Service, offers his expertise on fishing the vast waterways of the Delta.

What a crazy winter we had this year! Record amounts of rain in the California Reservoir systems and local rivers, made winter striper fishing almost impossible. Thankfully, we will get a great opportunity to fish for stripers this spring as they migrate north to their spawning locations from the San Francisco Bay, Pacific Ocean, or the winter beds in the Delta.

The previous article discussed some techniques for targeting stripers using a variety of different lures. Lures, jigs, and plastic worms, are still excellent methods for catching stripers in the spring.

Spring is the time to dust off your action tipped fishing rods so you can drift jumbo minnows. This allows us to take advantage of the striper's aggressive attitude and predatory instincts. Fishing with minnows is a great way to target stripers.

Using minnows is a thrill but requires some extra planning and logistics. You need a container to store your live minnows in that has a good aeration system to keep the water oxygenated. Use a simple 5-gallon bucket, with a lid and an air unit attached to the side for under \$20, or go with an elaborate system that runs closer to a \$100 or more. Systems at both ends of the cost scale generally provide the same results. The key is to keep the water clean and to not use untreated chlorinated water. Otherwise, you will lose your bait before having a chance to fish.

Use a medium to light weight fishing pole with a 2500 series bait caster reel and mono filament or braided line. You use fishing rigs for a variety of fishing techniques, species, and methods. With braided line you do not have to worry about changing reels or line when conditions change.

Once the live minnow is hooked through the lower jaw and nose with a number 4 hook, drop the bait rig into the water to drift. Do not run the hook through the eye of your bait or it will become wasted and you will need to change it out. Once the bait rig hits the river bed, reel up a couple of times and let the minnow drift. Use a 3/4 ounce in line weight to start with. An in line weight allows you to move it up or down on the line easily. The weight is used to take the minnow down and to hold it in a suspended state while you're drifting. Every

couple of minutes, or when you notice a change in the water depth on your depth finder, drop the minnow down again and crank it up a couple of times to keep the minnow close to the bottom. Using a bait caster with a button line release works best. Open face spinner reels can be used as well but require

some extra action on your part to let the line out.

Hold your rod steady without a lot of extra movement so the minnow drifts in a natural state.

When you notice a lot of movement, or swimming by the minnow, a predator fish such as a striper is close by. When this happens, hold on, you are about to get a bite! Let the striper take the minnow in, or "feed the striper." Once you feel the striper has taken your bait set the hook if the striper has not hooked itself.

At this time of year target sand bars for stripers.

Find a nice sand bar and motor up above it, get

your boat lined up, drop your bait into the water and drift past the sandbar letting the current move you along. To make adjustments to the drift, use the electrical motor for changes in direction or movement. This approach keeps the noise level down while enjoying a quiet drift and the beauty of the nature around you.

Never give up on a sand bar after a single drift. Do not be afraid of drifting a section of the river multiple times. When you get a bite, or mark a school, definitely drift through the section a few more times, concentrating on the areas near the river bank as you drift a minnow.

To mix things up to generate a bite, try using a bobber to suspend the minnow as you drift an area. This technique is best when the river depth is consistent so you can set the minnow at a set depth and drift with confidence that you will not get hung up, or worse, are fishing too shallow.

Always have a small container, such as a coffee can, on board to use in between drifts or while motoring to a new location. Put some of the river water in the container and let your minnow rest when you are not fishing.

It is important to check the condition of your minnow in between drifts or after a good strike. If the bait appears marked up or weak you need to change it out. You are using live bait and the minnow needs to swim normally for it to be effective.

In closing, "remember to keep those fishing lines tight", and "take time to take a child fishing..."

