

Tennessee Striped Bass Association

Get Hooked !



March/April 2023



Keith Shannon with his best friend, Forced Perspective, making the most of a tiny catch!

In-Person Bi-Monthly Meetings on first Thursdays

- at Shoney's on Emory Road in Powell

TSBA web site <http://tnstripedbass.com/> for the latest news.

Submit news items to tsba.newsletter@gmail.com

Join us on Facebook [Tennessee Striped Bass Association](#)

April 2023 Club Meeting

The April meeting will be held on Thursday, April 6th at Shoney's, 315 E. Emory Rd, Powell, TN 37849. Come join your fellow club members for a fun and informative session featuring Allan Franklin and Keith Shannon giving presentations on how to catch and keep bait.

Striper Trivia

Despite being the most loved and one of the most heavily researched fish in the Northeast, several myths persist about the striped bass. Here are some of the most popular ones, and whether we think they're factual or old fishermen's tales. (*Sourced from onthewater.com*)

Stripers Eat Rocks to Ride Out Storms

Claim: Before storms, stripers eat rocks to provide ballast that prevents them from being tossed around in the rough waters.

Rating: FALSE

Among living aquatic vertebrates, gastroliths (stomach stones) are common among crocodiles, alligators, seals and sea lions, and [scientists believe that they play a role in buoyancy as ballast](#), although in some species (extinct and present) they may also play a role in aiding digestion. While striped bass (and other species) are regularly found with rocks in their digestive tracts, this is likely the result of accidental ingestion while feeding along the bottom. A striped bass uses [suction feeding](#), where it creates a vacuum in its mouth, so that when the striper opens its jaws, there's a rush of water into its mouth, in which the prey becomes trapped. When feeding this way along the bottom, items like rocks and shells can be caught up in the flow with the prey, ending up in the striper's stomach.

Stripers Tail-Slap Baitfish and Lures

Claim: Striped bass use their tails to stun baitfish before eating them.

Rating: LIKELY FALSE

When fishing topwater lures for striped bass, it sometimes seems as if a striper has batted a lure out of the water using its tail. A striper uses its broad tail for quick acceleration, conquering currents, and fast direction changes—not stunning prey. When a striped bass appears to have tail-slapped a topwater plug, what most likely happened is the fish turned so quickly in attempting to eat or refuse the lure that the tail hit the lure by chance. In normal feeding behavior, stripers do not slap baitfish with their tails.

Stripers Use Rocks to Remove Hooks

Claim: Striped bass rub their heads on rocks or sand to dislodge hooks.

Rating: **LIKELY TRUE**

A common claim among striper fishermen upon losing a big striper is that the fish used the rocks to break the line or open the hook. A [study that injected bee venom into the lips of rainbow trout](#) showed that the trout rubbed their faces on the bottom in an attempt to remove the irritant. It's likely that hooked striped bass employ a similar strategy around rocky habitats, resulting in broken lures, lines, and mangled hooks.

Large Stripers Stop Spawning

Claim: When striped bass reach a very large size, their eggs are no longer viable.

Rating: **FALSE**

Unlike humans, [a striped bass' reproductive potential does not decrease with old age](#). Its fecundity increases as the fish grows larger and it produces more eggs. Fishermen used this myth to justify the harvest of large bass by suggesting they had stopped contributing to the population.

If conditions are poor in the spawning rivers during the spring, stripers of all sizes may forego spawning in a given season. In these years, fishermen may find gravid stripers, those with green, mature eggs, rather than the orange, still-developing egg sacs, far from the spawning rivers.

Big Stripers are Lazy

Claim: Large striped bass are lazy in their approach to feeding and swimming.

Rating: **FALSE**

Laziness is an unwillingness to move or use energy. This is a trait found only in humans and domesticated animals, so to suggest that striped bass are lazy is anthropomorphizing the fish. This myth stems from the difference in feeding strategies between large and small striped bass. For a small striper, chasing small baitfish at the surface is an effective feeding strategy because it can realistically catch enough small baitfish to justify the energy expended. A large striped bass has energy requirements that are unlikely to be met this way and is more likely to pursue larger or slower-moving prey, often near the bottom, which may make them appear "lazy" in comparison to the surface-feeding schoolies. A 40-pound striped bass is in the prime of its life, having reached less than half of its growing potential, and is likely to migrate hundreds of miles every year from its spawning river to its summer feeding grounds and back again.

Tailwater Fishing for Striped Bass

Much of the finest striped bass fishing in Tennessee occurs in tailwater portions of rivers, immediately downstream of hydroelectric dams. Many anglers associate tailwater striper fishing only with the spring, when fish run out of the main bodies of the reservoirs to spawn near the dams. However, stripers can be caught at the dams all year. In the heat of the summer, cool, well oxygenated water discharged from the dams provides thermal refuges for stripers.

Striper fishing in all tailwaters have some things in common. Fish feed in, or just out of, the current. Live bait such as gizzard or threadfin shad is usually most productive. Swimbaits and bucktails that imitate shad are also effective. Fishing tends to be best when the water is running and more current tends to be better than less current. When fish are sparse in the tail race, they will usually hold close to the bottom in the choicest ambush points. Getting your bait into these spots is required when fish are not plentiful. It will take a bit of experimenting on your part to determine the correct amount of weight to get to the bottom. When fish are plentiful, it is often not necessary to get your bait into these locations.

However, each tailwater is unique. Striped bass seek out current breaks from which to ambush baitfish. The current breaks and therefore the fish will change locations based on the number of generators running and which generators are operating. Moreover, each tailrace's bottom contours and obstructions are unique. If possible, thoroughly graph the first few hundred yards below the dam when the water is off to identify fish-holding structure.

While I've fished all the tailwaters in East Tennessee, the remainder of this article will focus on the two I fish most often on Watts Bar, Fort Loudon and Melton Hill Dams.

Fort Loudon Dam

The first dam on the main stem of the Tennessee River, Fort Loudoun Dam creates a first rate tailwater for striper fishing. The tailwater is the head of Watts Bar Lake. The dam has four turbines and a maximum discharge of approximately 30,000 cubic feet per second. The area directly downstream of the turbines is free of propeller-wrecking rocks but to the right of the discharge several rocks lurk just below the water's surface. Exercise caution in this area when the lake is below full pool and/or when the generators are off.

When multiple generators are on, look for the "seam" created by the current of adjacent generators. Run your boat to about fifty feet of the dam, put the boat in neutral, make a short cast into the seam and let out about twenty feet of line. If your bait gets pulled down toward the bottom, you are in the magic spot. Be aware that the magic spot is magic because it is full of rocks and sharp construction debris left in place when the dam was built. If you are doing it right, you will break off many rigs on the bottom. To reduce break-offs and maximize hook-ups, try to fish as vertically as possible. As you drift downstream and feel the sinker tap the rocks, lift the rod

tip and reel in a turn or two to walk the bait up the rocks. This takes a bit of practice. Stout tackle is the name of the game here. Heavy baitcasting gear and 30 pound test is required to pull fish off the bottom quickly. If you attempt to "play" a fish here, you are only playing yourself. The fish will run to the bottom and break off.

While the best fishing is usually within one hundred yards of the dam directly downstream of the discharge, fish can be found for a half mile or so below the dam and off to the side of the discharge. When fish are off to the side of the discharge in shallow water, topwater baits can be very effective at dawn and dusk.

A word of etiquette; let the bank fishermen fish the current break closest to the bank. Don't drift over their lines. We all gotta share the water. However, some bank fishermen are equipped with surf fishing rods capable of 100+ yard casts and are not fond of sharing the lake. They intentionally cast at boat fishermen in an attempt to intimidate. I like to keep my trolling motor down and running at a low setting so I can snag their lines. I hit the "jackrabbit" button on the remote to spool them and end their day at the lake. So sorry..... I think MinnKota engineers had this in mind when they put the otherwise good for nothing jackrabbit button on the remote.

Another word of etiquette; don't run upstream in the discharge when there are other boats fishing it.

Please be aware that while the Fort Loudon Dam tailwater holds fish all summer long, water discharge temperatures can be too warm for ethical catch and release fishing from July through September.

Melton Hill Dam

Melton Hill Dam is on the Clinch River arm of Watts Bar Lake. The dam has three turbines and a maximum discharge of approximately 21,000 cfs. There are no prop-wrecking rocks below the discharge or off to the left side of it.

When multiple generators are on, fish it as described as above. However, Melton Hill Dam frequently has only one generator running. When this is the case, fish the current seams close to the bank and directly downstream of the wing wall. Don't forget to fish the eddy that forms along the lock wall. Stripers frequently ambush baitfish along the wall.

Fishing is often good for miles below Melton Hill Dam. For this reason, if you don't catch fish quickly in the tailrace, fish downstream with planer boards and downlines.

Water discharge temperatures at Melton Hill Dam rarely exceed seventy degrees and ethical catch and release is possible all summer.

- Keith Shannon

Creel and Size limits

CHEROKEE LAKE

Striped Bass or Hybrid Striped Bass:

2 per day in combination, 15 inch minimum length limit

NORRIS LAKE

Striped Bass

April 1–October 31: 2 per day, 15 inch minimum length limit

November 1–March 31: 1 per day, 36 inch minimum length limit

WATTS BAR

Striped Bass or Hybrid Striped Bass:

April 1–October 31: 2 per day in combination

November 1–March 31: 2 per day in combination, only one may be a striped bass.

Striped Bass:

April 1–October 31: 15 inch minimum length limit.

November 1–March 31: 36 inch minimum length limit

Hybrid Striped Bass:

15 inch minimum length limit

MELTON HILL

Striped Bass or Hybrid Striped Bass:

2 per day in combination, including Clinch River upstream to Highway 61 bridge in Clinton. 15 inch minimum length limit

Striped Bass:

32–42 inch PLR; only one fish may be over 42 inches

Outlook for current fishing spots

CHEROKEE LAKE The stripers and hybrids often feed on the surface in April and May. The gulls and other bait eating birds will help indicate where these fish are showing up to dine at the all-you-can-eat buffet. They can be scattered all over the lake from the John Sevier steam plant to complete the spawn downstream in all the major coves with baitfish. Night fishing with the alewife spawn in progress is at a premium this time of year.

NORRIS LAKE Excellent fishing can be found at the Loyston/Lost Creek area around point 19 upstream to the head waters. The same holds true for the Powell River above point 15 and in most of the major coves including Cove Creek, Big Creek, Cedar Creek, Davis Creek and Sycamore Creek. Look for the gulls and the warmest water that is attracting bait fish. Artificial lures are still very effective. Pull the live bait along the shallow sun-warmed banks and shallow humps with planner boards.

WATTS BAR & CHICKAMAUGA The fish have begun their spawning runs by moving upstream toward the dams and feeder creeks. Prior to the spawn look for fish in deep water several miles downstream from the dams. The spawn typically takes place throughout the month of May.

CAUTION & PLANNING State law requires that you wear a life jacket if you are within 400 yards of a dam. Top water action is common. Artificial baits, as well as larger live baits, are very effective this time of year. Catch & Release is very successful this time of year.

A great way to find the right places to look for fish is from past history. Look at the last few years of information available on fishing websites, articles, pictures, and magazines. Many times the best clue is to find the largest baitfish concentrations that will seek out the warmest most stable temperatures with nutrient rich water that is normally murky.

— *Ezell Cox*

When my favorite bait breaks off



**IF YOU COULD MARRY
A SUPERMODEL OR GO FISHING**

**WOULD YOU FISH IN
FRESHWATER OR SALTWATER**

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No Need to Renew!

If you paid dues in 2020 or later, your membership has been extended through 2023. New members can still join by completing the form in this newsletter and mailing it with their payment to the address below.

Enclose a check for \$20.00

Mail to: TSBA

P.O. Box 7303

Knoxville, TN 37921

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As a member:

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- * You'll help support striped bass fisheries & wildlife agencies.
- * You'll be informed of new regulations & information that affect striper fishing.
- * You'll develop a network of "striper friends."
- * You'll learn new methods to improve your striped bass fishing effectiveness.
- * You'll be able to call officers for fishing reports.
- * You'll be able to attend bi-monthly meetings with informative programs.
- * You'll have access to all areas of the TSBA, Inc. web page.

Is this a renewal ___ or a new membership ___

Your name _____ -- _____
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I have read and agree to abide by and be bound by the Tennessee Striped Bass Association, Inc. (TSBA, Inc.) Bylaws*

* A copy of the Bylaws can be found on the TSBA, Inc. website at <http://tnstripedbass.com/> or at the offices of the corporation.

(Signature)

(Date)

Enclose a check for \$20.00
Mail to: Tennessee Striped Bass Association, Inc
P.O. Box 7303
Knoxville, TN 37921

Memberships extended: Members who paid 2020 or later dues have no need to renew for this year. All current memberships have been extended through 2023. New members may still join by filling out the above form and submitting it with their payment.

Tennessee Striped Bass Association
P.O. Box 7303
Knoxville, TN 37921

Tennessee

Striped

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GET HOOKED!