

PLAN YOUR STRATEGY
FOR THE FULL SLAM



↓
STRIPED
BASS



↓
WEAKFISH



↓
FLUKE



↓
BLUEFISH

BARNEGAT SLAMMING///

LAND A GRAND SLAM IN
NEW JERSEY'S FAMOUS
SHALLOW BAY.

/// BY NICK HONACHEFSKY

We were borderline late for a lunch meeting, so I made my last cast of the day to the edge of the shoal. Captain Dave DeGennaro aboard *Hi-Flier* had already helped me put a weakfish, a striper and a fluke on the charts. Now only one target remained to complete my Barnegat Slam, a bluefish; the easiest of all, had managed to elude me all morning. The popper hit the water and I chugged it back over the dropoff. A crash, a dash and few cranks later and ... Let's just say we weren't late for lunch after all. I got my grand slam, and in Barnegat Bay's productive waters, that is a worthy and attainable goal. Here's a proven plan to catch all four species in a single day.

PLANNER

WHAT: Striped bass, weakfish, fluke, bluefish

WHEN: Spring through summer, best May through September.

WHERE: Barnegat Bay, New Jersey

WHO: The following guides can help you in your quest for a Barnegat slam:

Capt. Dave DeGennaro
732-330-5674
hiflier.com

Captain Brett Taylor
609-290-7709
reelreactioncharters.com

Captain Steve Purul
609-290-1217
reelfantaseafishing.com

BARNEGAT BAY GRAND SLAM

TACKLE BOX

RODS: Medium to fast action 6½ - to 7-foot 12- to 20-pound class for casting; stout 7-foot, 20- to 40-pound-class for live-lining and chunking.

REELS: 4000-class spinning for casting; Shimano Torium 16 or equivalent for live-lining and chunking.

LINES: 12-pound mono or 20-pound braid for casting, 40-pound braid for live-lining and chunking; 20- to 30-pound fluorocarbon leaders.

LURES: Variety of poppers, swimming plugs and soft-plastic baits.

OTHER: Consult "Captain SeGulls Chart #MBB358 for Barnegat Bay" (captainsegullcharts.com) for precise locations.

SLAM COUNTRY: Barnegat Bay, just inside the inlet, offers enough variety to keep you reeling all day.



A SOUTH HARBOR MARINE
116 Oregon Ave.,
Waretown
609-693-3658

B BARNEGAT MUNICIPAL BOAT RAMP
Bayshore Ave.,
Barnegat
609-698-0080
Ext. 122

C BOROUGH OF BARNEGAT LIGHT PUBLIC DOCK
10 West 10th St.,
Barnegat Light
609-494-9196

EARLY RISERS:
Seek the biggest weakfish in the pre-dawn hour, when they feed aggressively.

banks off the dike and Oyster Creek Channel, where it's common to witness the dorsal fins of the bass breaking the surface. Poppers or soft plastics tossed against the sod banks at sunup become the modus operandi here. The pilings of the Route 37 bridge also offer sight-casting opportunities for bass. But for larger stripers, work closer to Barnegat Inlet. That's where big breeders of 15 to 35 pounds enter bay waters, especially during the spring run.

A well-defined clam slick brings in the linesiders like the Pied Piper. Anchor up in depths of 12 to 20 feet inside the

inlet, in the Oyster Creek Channel on the north side of the dike. Hang a clam chum pot out, crack fresh clams and toss two or three out every 10 minutes to get the slick greased. Rig with a fish-finder slide with a 3- to 4-ounce bank sinker, a 50-pound barrel swivel, a 36-inch length of 30-pound fluorocarbon and an 8/0 Gamakatsu Octopus circle hook embedded in a big gob of clam. The let your reel clicker signal when a bass has taken the hunk of surf turkey.

For a more aggressive approach, live-line spot or bunkers in the shifting shoals of Barnegat Inlet, most notably on the bay side off the Coast Guard station, or the inside tip of the north jetty, especially the stretch with submerged rocks. Use the same setup employed for chunking, but hook a live baitfish through the eyes or



Early Weakfish

Weakfish silently maul baitfish on the night shift, and during the last hour of darkness, just before dawn, they become vulnerable to artificials. As the warm outflow of the Oyster Creek power plant

reaches the range of 62 to 70 degrees, tide-running weakfish of 8 to 12 pounds patrol Oyster Creek's outflow flats from the BB marker south to the 42 marker, picking off spearing and peanut bunker. Come early summer, those tide runners move toward the deep cut off the Sedge Islands, on the backside of Island Beach State Park.

Notoriously skittish, trophy weakfish demand dedication and precise presentations. Drift over a flat or ledge, and cast a 5¾-inch Bubblegum Fin-S Fish or a pink Zoom grub

uptide. Then, work it back slowly in the mid to lower part of the water column, gingerly moving the rod up and down with an occasional twitch. As soon as you feel a light tap, set the hook forcefully. But be sure to set a light drag so the hooks won't rip right out of a weakfish's paper-thin mouth.

Switch tactics once the sun rises high in the sky to target smaller weakies. Obtain a few quarts of fresh grass shrimp from a local tackle shop, like Bobbie's Boat Rental in Barnegat Inlet, and start a shrimp slick at Myers Hole, where droves of smaller

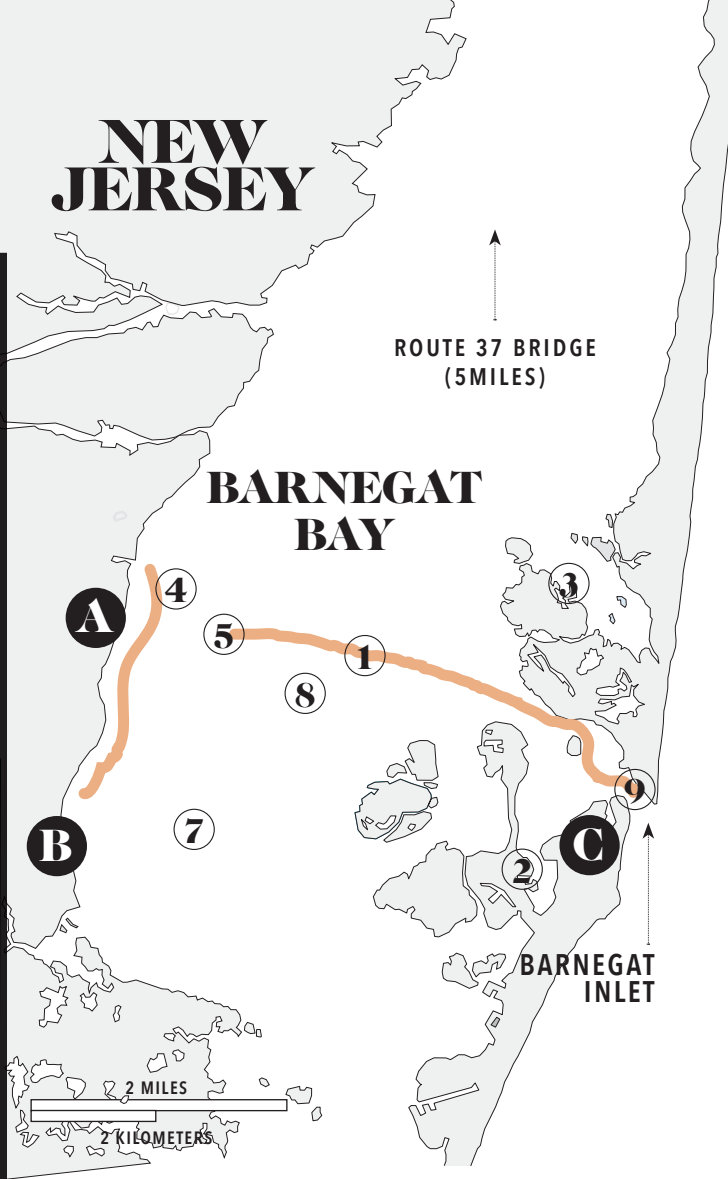
"spike" weakfish of 12 to 15 inches will be eager to feed. Anchor on the 6- to 15-foot ledge and dole out handfuls of shrimp to let the running tide form the buffet line. Set up with a float rig, a 24-inch piece of 15-pound fluorocarbon leader and a 1/0 bait-holder hook lancing three grass shrimp, the first hooked through the carapace, the others through the rostrum (the beak or horn). Send the float out 20 yards into the slick and leave the bail open, waiting until the line has peeled off for a good three count after the strike to set the hook.

ERICH MEDENBACH (2); NICK HONACHEFSKY (OPPOSITE); ALAN KIKUCHI (MAP)



Striper Sunrise

Anglers stand a great chance to hang a schoolie striper of 22 to 28 inches while targeting weakfish with rubber baits in the false-dawn hours. A sight-casting fishery has developed for stripers along the inside sod



1 OYSTER CREEK CHANNEL
This thoroughfare into the bay from the inlet holds blues and stripers.

2 MYERS HOLE
A reliable location to chum for smaller weakfish after the sun comes up.

3 SEDGE ISLANDS
Larger weakfish migrate to the deep cut off Sedge Islands once the weather warms.

4 OYSTER CREEK OUTFLOW
Warm water discharge draws bait, weakfish and fluke.

5 40 CAN
It marks the entrance to Oyster Creek Channel on the ICW in the bay.

6 BB MARKER
Northern limit of Oyster Creek Outflow flats, a prime spot for cool-weather weakfish.

7 42 MARKER
Southern end of the flats is warmed by Oyster Creek Outflow discharge.

8 WHALEBONE
Promising spot for bluefish, which roam the bay widely, feeding sporadically.

9 BARNEGAT INLET
Fish inside the tip of the north jetty or try drifting live baits in the shoals for big stripers.



lips and drift it from the end of the incoming to the beginning of the outgoing tide, when the water flows slowly enough for a lazy bass to chase a livie. Cast as close to the rocks as you can without getting snagged, keep tension on the line and wait for a pickup.



Lunchtime Fluke

Sunshine sparks the fluke bite, and when water temps

average 64 to 69 degrees in late May and early June, bucktails and strip baits are the keys to tricking flatfish. You find fluke sunning up on 4- to 7-foot-deep flats outside the Intracoastal Waterway edges during breakfast hours. Then, when lunchtime comes around, the fish begin to hunker down in the deeper slope of the ICW channel. Oyster Creek's green 33 and 35 cans are red-hot spots to drift, but the entire ICW stretch from the 40 can to the inlet is tops. Try vertical jigging with 3/8- to 1/2-ounce white, white-and-yellow, or white-and-chartreuse round-head bucktails with a white 2/0 bucktail teaser some 18 inches above — particularly during slack tide.

Once the tide is running fast, switch from bucktails to strip baits on a fish-finder rig with a 30-inch piece of 25-pound fluoro leader snelled to a 3/0 Octopus hook. Use fresh 4- to 5-inch strips of mackerel, bluefish, sea robin, spearing or squid, and drag them through the channels.

BEST BETS

1. When bluefish blitz, they will strike lures meant for other species.

2. Drift live baits during the slower stages of the tide.

3. Strip baits cut from mackerel, bluefish or other baitfish do the job on fluke.



Bluefish Finale

The wild card that can make it more challenging for grand-slam hopefuls to seal the deal is the bluefish. Blues are notoriously ubiquitous feeders in Barnegat Bay, but their presence — or lack thereof — can be difficult to predict. Schools randomly ravage the bay throughout the day. There is no real pattern, no specific tide or time of day. The best bet is to pay attention to the cuts and shifting sandbars inside the

LURES DU JOUR

TOUCH ALL FOUR BASES FOR A GRAND SLAM WITH THESE PROVEN ARTIFICIALS:



WEAKFISH

5-inch Bubble-gum Fin-S or pink Zoom grub with 1/4- to 1/2-ounce leadhead



STRIPED BASS

Daiwa SP Minnow, 5 3/4-inch Rainbow Trout Fin-S, 4-inch Storm Wildeye Swim Shad



FLUKE

3/8- to 1/2-ounce white bucktail jig tipped with Berkley Gulp! Swimming Mullet grub



BLUEFISH

4-inch Smack It Popper, Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow



**THE WILD
CARD THAT
CAN MAKE
IT MORE
CHALLENGING
FOR GRAND-
SLAM
HOPEFULS
TO SEAL THE
DEAL IS THE
BLUEFISH.”**

Big stripers
inside the bay
take up feed-
ing stations
early in the
morning.

north side of Oyster Creek Channel during the ebbing tides and check spots like the Whalebone in the Barnegat Bay proper. “Cocktail” blues (1- to 3-pounders) are the most likely to be terrorizing the area, but some “choppers” (3- to 5-pound blues) are often around and glad to pounce on a popper. In late spring, “racer” blues of 7 to 10 pounds occasionally infiltrate the bay as well.

Bird activity is the telltale sign that betrays roving packs of bluefish pushing bait up on the flats. If you spot some, grab a rod rigged with a 3- to 4-inch popper and cast smack-dab in the middle of the melee. Commotion is key here, so create intense splashing and gurgling on the surface while retrieving the lure at a quick pace. If a blue misses the strike, keep the popper in one place and pop it. It’s sure to be smacked immediately.

Scoring a grand slam is no easy feat, but with the right plan and the proper timing, Barnegat Bay’s bountiful waters are just the place to get it done. ☺

