

Seven Sharper SHAD STRATEGIES

by Art Michaels

I no longer try to figure out if the shad season's water and weather conditions will be "normal." I don't think there is such a thing anymore as a "normal" shad season—at least not during the last few years. I've let go of the "normal" season notion because fishing smarter is more important no matter what the conditions are or how they change. Here are seven sharper shad strategies you can apply in your fishing from a boat in all shad-fishing conditions.

1. Prepare for debris in the water.

After hazardous conditions subside, the Delaware River is more fishable from a boat than you might think. As the water clears and its level subsides, the key to success is to keep debris off your line. A shad won't look at a dart or flutter spoon, or any other lure, if it's laden with debris.

The simplest solution is to cut a rubber band and tie it tightly to the line about 3 or 4 feet above the lure. To prevent the rubber band from moving on the line, tie in a barrel swivel at the end of your line. Then attach a 3- or 4-foot leader to the line (same pound-test as your running line) and tie the lure onto the end. Tie the rubber band onto one of the swivel rings. Thin rubber band pieces of about 3 unstretched inches work well. Tie on the rubber band so that the ends hang evenly. The rubber band catches most debris before it grabs your lure.



To maximize success, place your offerings on the current edge.

2. Think "edge" for lure placement. Many shad anglers don't score from their boats because they anchor in the wrong places and thus cannot place their lures where shad will intercept them. The trick is to find the edge of the current. Study the water and note the fastest and slowest current. You'll want to anchor so that you can position your offerings between these two places. Only in the most extreme conditions do shad migrate in the swiftest current (low water) or practically out of the current near the shoreline (high water).

3. Work islands, boulders and bridge abutments. Migrating shad pause to rest in the current break behind these structures. Eventually they emerge on either side of the structure to continue up river. Position your boat so that you can place your offerings a few feet in front of and on either side of the structure.

4. Set the reel drag. The reel drag is the most important component of your tackle when you hook a shad and the fight ensues. Set the drag initially light. Grab the line with no slack as it comes off the reel and pull firmly. The drag is set correctly for the beginning of the battle when you can pull line grudgingly from the reel with a firm tug.

5. Fight fish right.

With the reel drag set,

let the shad run so that the reel drag taxes the fish's run. Keep the reel drag set loosely so that a fish's sudden jolt doesn't stress unforgiving line. As the shad tires, tighten the drag and winch the fish in



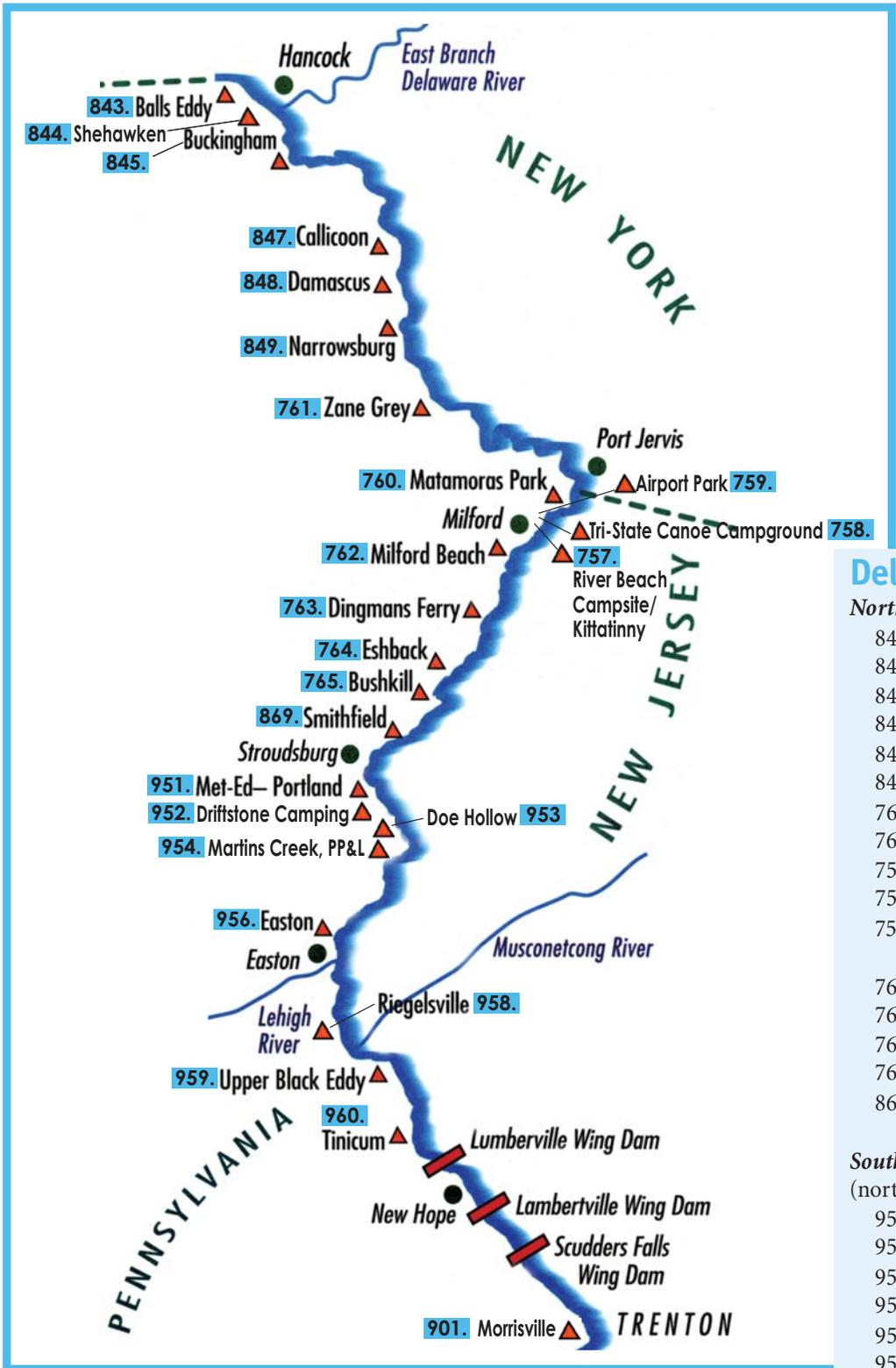
Photo: Art Michaels

You'll want a long-handled, wide-mouthed, deep-meshed net.

by raising the rod tip slowly to bring the fish closer. Then reel in slack line as you lower the rod. Keep winching this way until the shad is alongside the boat. Then loosen the drag. If the fish bolts for the bottom at boatside, let it run. A loose drag at boatside prevents the fish from suddenly yanking—and possibly breaking—the line if the fish charges for the bottom.

6. Use a net properly. You'll want a very long-handled, wide-mouthed, deep-meshed net—trout nets and "teardrop" nets are inadequate for landing shad from a boat. When the fish is alongside the boat, place the net downstream and a little beneath the fish. In a quick, smooth motion, scoop up the fish into the net.

7. Check the line after you catch a fish. After creeling or releasing a shad, beginning at the lure inspect about 8 feet of the line for cuts and frays. Cut off damaged line and re-rig. You will probably lose the next shad if you begin a new battle with damaged line. ☐



Delaware River Accesses

Northeast Region

- 843. Balls Eddy.
- 844. Shehawken.
- 845. Buckingham.
- 847. Callicoon.
- 848. Damascus.
- 849. Narrowburg.
- 761. Zane Grey.
- 760. Matamoras.
- 759. Airport Park.
- 758. Tri-State Canoe Campground.
- 757. River Beach Campsite/Kittatinny.
- 762. Milford Beach.
- 763. Dingmans Ferry.
- 764. Eshback.
- 765. Bushkill.
- 869. Smithfield.

Southeast Region

- (north of the U.S. Route 1 bridge)
- 951. Met Ed.
 - 952. Driftstone Camping.
 - 953. Doe Hollow.
 - 954. Martin's Creek, PP&L.
 - 956. Easton.
 - 958. Riegelsville.
 - 959. Upper Black Eddy.
 - 960. Tincum.
 - 901. Morrisville.

For more information on access amenities, visit the Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us. On the web site main page's left side, click on "County Guide."