San Francisco Bay, California. Within ten years, a new population was thriving in the Pacific. Striped bass are anadromous, migrating inland each spring to spawn in freshwater rivers, such as the Hudson and the Delaware, before swimming back out to the sea and north to feed in coastal waters. In the Atlantic, the first fish arrive on the South Shore of Long Island at the end of April. Some continue north, but others take up residence in local waters. By early December, the bass have returned south to winter in more temperate zones, such as Chesapeake Bay.

Menhaden are their primary source of food, but striped bass are generalists, also feeding on crustaceans, mollusks, eel, fluke, herring, mullet, squid, and sand eel. They favor rough water and rocky structure, where they can outmaneuver a rich variety of prey. Those features define Montauk Point, Long Island, as one of the premier striper surfcasting locations in the country. The tremendous volume of water flowing out of Long Island Sound creates a whip-like current along that jagged terminus, making it among the most challenging waters to fish in the world.

May The ocean Temperature is just flirting with 60 degrees Fahrenheit this early in the season, but as the evening’s last light fades, my friends and I can’t wait to find the fish. Even augmented with a hooded, waterproof top, the chest waders worn by most anglers can be inadequate in the surf, so we don our full body, seven-millimeter-thick wetsuits along with spiked sandals over neoprene boots. We tuck a ten- or eleven-foot rod into a sturdy utility belt and clip on a small bag stuffed with the rest of our gear. Entering the water we scramble over slippery rocks, battle our way past the breakers, and swim out hundreds of feet to fish on gnarly subsurface rocks. It is here, under the cloak of darkness, tenuously suspended between sea
and shore, that we have the best chance of connecting with quality fish.

Wetsuiting is growing in popularity among adventurous anglers, but it takes a strong swimmer to leave the refuge of the beach. When you are surrounded by rocks, the crashing surf can be treacherous. You must stay alert and use all your senses to remain upright. Only a few engage in the ultimate fringe of surfcasting: they slip on small fins, release their last foothold on the rocks, and swim out even farther, where they careen freestyle, to cast and fight fish midcurrent. The technique is called “skishing,” a term derived from swimming, fishing, and skating. It is a long way, as long as it gets, from the safety of the piers and party boats most anglers rely on.

About eight years ago, a wetsuit who was skishing landed at an infamous perch at Montauk Point but then was swept off into the current. Thinking fast, he grabbed the heaviest bucktail jig from among his lures, tied it on, and dropped it down to the bottom, where it eventually snagged and held. He gripped his line tightly, signaled with his flashlight, and was finally picked up by a trawler, nearly half a mile offshore.

Like a waterfowl decoy, to be effective, a lure must be concealable until the weight of it becomes prohibitive. You must catch fish. This composite image was made from a single print of a thirteen-inch-long fish. Menhaden are an important prey of striped bass. This composite image was made from a single print of a thirteen-inch-long fish. Menhaden are an important prey of striped bass.

The creature is a rough-tailed stingray, well over five feet across, and its long tail bows up gently in the water column just past my shoulder. We quickly realize that another, even larger stingray faces the first, nose to nose. The current pushes us past as they begin to hover like large spacecraft. We watch in awe as they wing off silently.

We swim toward shore through water teeming with schools of bay anchovy known as rain bait. In the shallows, we feel the water temperature rise. I lift my head above the surface and pull up my mask. Montauk Point Lighthouse stands high above, on a cliff’s edge. The Sun is setting; it’s time to go fishing.

**October**

Migrating is a stressful feat that requires tremendous stores of energy. Yet inclement weather that defeats the heartiest of mammals and birds seems to incite the striped bass. When most people take shelter, the leading edge of a storm draws anglers to the surf like a powerful magnet. Setting out in the dark, my surfcasting friends and I rush to Montauk to meet the onslaught of a powerful nor’easter.

The ground reverberates with pounding surf, and gale force winds bend over. Still, through the din, we hear the high-pitched chirps of migrating songbirds. As the Sun begins to rise, we can see them streaming westward across Block Island Sound by the hundreds. They land, exhausted, at our feet. I see one warbler quickly leap inside a small bush and tuck his head behind his wing to sleep. An eerie golden light emanates from a thin break in the steely clouds that line the horizon, and for the first time we see the battalion of waves rounding Montauk Point. Walls of water, ten feet high, culminate in white fiery crests. The beach is engulfed by a moon-tide flood, the high bluffs are lashed by chop and swells.

The barometric pressure drops like a stone as the storm makes landfall. Fishermen, like song- and seabird alike, are staging in flocks. When the waters draw back, surfcasters inch forward. In this wild surge and vaulting sea, the fish are biting. A friend, up to his shoulders in white water, heaves in a bass on the end of his line.

Steve Thurston, whose prints you see here, is also fishing on this day, outside of town. He packs a handful of favorite lures into a small bag that clips around his waist, which makes his surfside journey efficient and easy going. In contrast with his streamlined approach, many of us pack our surf bags with every size, shape, and color of lure. We also carry riggers, a waterproof flashlight, and a length of thin rope called a stringer that we can slip through the mouth of a fish midcurrent. You must catch fish. This composite image was made from a single print of a thirteen-inch-long fish. Menhaden are an important prey of striped bass.

The Sun is setting; it’s time to go fishing.

Steve Thurston, whose prints you see here, is also fishing on this day, outside of town. He packs a handful of favorite lures into a small bag that clips around his waist, which makes his surfside journey efficient and easy going. In contrast with his streamlined approach, many of us pack our surf bags with every size, shape, and color of lure. We also carry riggers, a waterproof flashlight, and a length of thin rope called a stringer that we can slip through the mouth of a fish.

**August**

**Striped Bass Are Less Active close to shore during the summer,** so they are more challenging to find. One afternoon, when a friend and I are wading in search of bass, he spots something and motions wildly for me to swim over. A long object, serrated near its base, rises up from the bottom. There, less than eight feet beneath us, is an eye the size of a grapefruit, looking out across the speckled sea floor. I have never seen another angler, but it must survive the merciless battering of rocks. Above all, it must catch fish.

If you have a good set of hands you can lure in, hook, and land many fish on a simple bucktail jig. You make one by attaching a hook to a molded piece of lead for weight, and tying hairs from the tail of a deer (or a synthetic substitute) along the shank. For the final flourish, you attach a strip of pork rind, which waves enticingly behind the lure as you reel it in. According to Henry Cowen, writing in the online fly-fishing magazine Midcurrent, the bucktail is so effective that during World War II, each U.S. military pilot carried one, along with some fishing line, in his survival kit in case he was shot down over water.

For bait we carry rigged eels—dead eels sewn with steel hooks cinched in with dental floss—and as an alternative, live eels, carried in a mesh bag tied to our belt. We also carry pliers, a waterproof flashlight, and a length of thin rope called a stringer that we can slip through the mouth of a fish.
and a gill in the event we want to carry a fish back from the beach. (Most often, we release them.)

Steve started fishing as a small child, on the freshwater ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.

Bluefish caught in Charlestown, Rhode Island's west end. The ocean is a place of worship and solace. For my hardworking grandfather, the time to consider his belongings to God was the bays and ponds and rocky beaches of coastal Rhode Island. In recent years, sugar bass—fish along eastern Long Island, with a stretch of brackish shoreline that was twenty-four inches long in life. Below: a metal-lipped swimmer; opposite page: a pencil-popper.