

Focus on Fishing

Guidelines for success

Channel catfish

General facts

The channel catfish is the largest member of the catfish family found in New Jersey. Stocked in 90 waterbodies throughout the state, they can be found in the Delaware River plus large lakes and small urban ponds. Channel catfish are generally bottom feeders, consuming nearly all aquatic life-forms including fish, insects and crustaceans. They feed mostly at night, using their barbels and sense of taste to locate food.



Seasonality

During the winter, channel catfish are highly concentrated in deep water, lying almost dormant. Their activity increases as water temperatures reach 50° F. At 60° F, channels leave their wintering locations in search of food and will bite readily. Spawning begins when days become longer and water temperatures reaches 75° F. Prime fishing occurs during the summer months where channel catfish can be caught 24 hours-a-day with nighttime being the most productive fishing period.

Prime Fishing Time

Season	Time of Day
Spring	Day and night
Summer	Early morning, evening and night
Fall	Day and night
Winter	Minimal activity

Bait

Bottom fishing is the most common technique for channel catfish. Use a #6 to #1 hook, with several large (size #1) split shots attached one to two feet above the hook. A slip sinker rig can be made by threading a 3/4 to 2 oz. egg sinker on the line with a size BB split shot between the hook and sinker, 2 feet above the hook. Also, try a three-way swivel with a hook tied on a 2-foot leader on one eye and on the other eye a 3/4- to 2-ounce bell sinker tied to one foot of 4 pound test monofilament leader. If the sinker gets stuck, the lightweight leader will break and the rest of the rig will be salvaged.

Cut Baits – Use oily fish (1-inch chunks), dead shiners, shrimp, chicken liver, hot dogs, crayfish tails and commercial stink baits. Hook cut bait through the center, and replace them often.

Live Baits – Hook worms multiple times and leave an inch dangling. Hook large shiners near the dorsal fin, above the lateral line. For crayfish, insert hook on top-side where tail joins the body (parallel to length) so point of hook faces tip of tail.

Gear:

Fishing Rod – 7 ft. medium action
Line — 10 to 15 lb. test monofilament

Key fishing areas:

Assunpink Lake, Cooper River Lake, Furnace Lake, Lake Hopatcong, Manasquan Reservoir, Mary Elmer Lake, Rising Sun Lake, Spruce Run Reservoir, Stone Tavern Lake and the Delaware River.

Size:

Adults typically range from 2 to 3 lbs.; however, fish over 5 lbs. are common.

Skillful Angler Award (min. size):

Adult: 10 lbs., 8 oz.

Junior: 8 lbs.

Catch & Release: 35 in.

Artificial Lures

Although artificial lures are not commonly used to catch channel catfish, occasionally they do strike lures. A shallow-diving, chartreuse-colored crankbait may produce results.



Take advantage of a great **night bite** all summer long. Invite friends and line the shoreline of a lake or large river using forked sticks for rod holders. Expect nonstop action from channel cats plus anticipate strikes from additional species such as white catfish, bullheads, American eels and even striped bass.

State Record:

33 lbs., 3 oz., Lake Hopatcong (1978)