

SALTWATER NEWS »

BONITO, BARRACUDA POP UP LOCALLY

Catalina yellowtail, bonito give L.A. boats hard targets

BY BRANDON HAYWARD
WON Staff Writer

SAN PEDRO — Runs across the channel have been more than worth it for L.A. County-based ½-day boats, thanks to willing bonito and the occasional snap on the yellows for boats tanked up with mackerel or sardines. Locally, one of the half-days was able to find some bonito and barracuda, giving some spring-like targets for the local runs to look around for this month.

The best yellowtail score to come from Catalina as of late was on the *Sport King* out of L.A. Harbor Sportfishing on Friday. The trip put 9 yellows on the deck to go with 80 bonito and 7 calico bass. The same day had the *Gail Force* deck 4 yellows to go with 80 bonito. On Sunday the boat had a pair of yellows to go with 75 bonito and 2 calico bass.

The bass fishing has been pretty good at times for boats focusing on bass after getting their fill of bonito.

"We had really good bass fishing on here yesterday. I've just been burying the boat in the kelp and the guys have been flylining these big anchovies we've got back into the kelp on 12- and 15-pound test," said John Woodrum, owner/operator of the *Pursuit* out of 22nd Street Sportfishing. "The bonito fishing has just been epic on 5 to 7 pounders. We've been driving away from them."

As far as local fishing goes, rockfish and sculpin had been

the name of the game, but on Sunday the *Southern Cal* found the first local barracuda to be caught in quite some time when 31 barracuda and 40 bonito were sacked on the morning half day.

On the further end of things, rough weather made things tough out on the Cortez for the *Freedom* on its last 2½-day trip

that had 8 yellowtail, 150 bonito and a bunch of bottom grabbers for its 2 days spent at the Cortez and San Clemente Island. The prospects are still good: a 2-day WON Charter earlier in the week had 25 bluefin on the Tanner and 75 big yellowtail out at the Cortez before the weather got up. Look for a story in next week's paper.

Orange County boats look to Catalina for action

NEWPORT BEACH — Fishing along the coast has been all about colder-water targets like rockfish and sculpin, while out at Catalina bonito have been the big draw.

The offshore scene looks to be about done for the year, save for runs to the Cortez or Tanner Banks. The last trip to pound around offshore was on the *Bongos III* out of Davey's Locker that caught 26 skipjack and a yellowtail for its 4 anglers on Saturday. The *Freelance* is in full-on Catalina mode, running to the island on ¾-day trips whenever it can get enough folks to get off the dock. Great bonito fishing has been the reward, as seen by 32 anglers bagging 162 bonito, 38 rockfish, 2 sculpin, 6 salmon grouper and 9 calico bass on Saturday. The *Tide Change* fished Cat the same day for 125 bones for its 25 anglers.

Newport Landing's *Nautilus* showed that the local sculpin are biting on Saturday when 39 anglers on the afternoon trip put 107 sculpin, 13 rockfish, 2 sheephead and a sand bass in the sacks. The *Amigo* elected to fish Catalina on its ¾-day charter the same day that came back with 100 bonito and 4 calico bass for 20 anglers. The *Patriot* was also out at Catalina on Saturday, and it also got on the bonito: 26 anglers scored 130 bones, 2 calico bass and 2 sheephead.

To the southern end of the county, the bottom fishing has been the name of the game out of Dana Wharf Sportfishing. On Saturday the *Clemente* was out on a ¾-day trip that put 28 rockfish, 12 sculpin, 7 reds, 5 salmon grouper, 2 calico bass and 1 sand bass in the sacks.



KAYAK CHRONICLES By Paul Lebowitz

Bugs on the brain

Paddle away from the crowd for your own piece of the lobster pie

It's California spiny lobster season again. Frenzied bug hunters are back at it, busily stalking the delicious crustaceans.

It's an incredibly busy time at the harbor breakwalls. These obvious and easy to reach spots are the focus of intense pressure. Seemingly anyone with a boat that floats is out there staking out prime hoop net turf. And don't forget the divers, who thread their way through the lines of bobbing floats.

Once you break a wall up between 50 people, there's not much real estate to go around points out Jason Morton, marketing director for hoop net manufacturer Promar. Like an accident-marred rush hour on I-5 through downtown L.A., the overcrowded scene is a prescription for high blood pressure.

So what can a kayak angler with bugs on the brain and an aversion to combat fishing do?

Morton points out plenty of options. Lobsters enjoy other rocky haunts, such as the edges of kelp beds, rock piles, and artificial reefs.

If some of these spots seem obvious, well, that's because they are! Rocks poke out of the water at low tide, reefs are shown on maps and charts, and nothing can hide from a modern fishfinder.

Any place you dredge up a shallow water rockfish potentially holds lobsters. Depths up to 120 feet don't discourage the bugs, especially come winter when they migrate to deep water. Of course, that's a long,

muscle-burning pull.

Okay, it's true, many if not most of these potential lobster mother lodes are miles from a harbor. That's why they get so little love from the masses. Our launch-almost-anywhere craft don't care. The better question is, do you? After all, it's dark out there! Launching and landing through the surf is tough enough when you can see it.

For Andrew Allen, the long-time kayak angler who runs OEX Sunset Beach, the answer is yes.

"I stopped hooping Mission Bay because it got too crowded. At La Jolla on the opener, it would be one scuba diver after another," Allen says.

Orange County kayaker John Near, a Hook 1 pro staffer, is another over the beach hooper.

"I don't like the crowds. You'll catch more lobsters if you can get away by yourself. Besides, it's safer. I don't have to worry about getting run over or losing nets to a boat propeller," Near says.

A heavy load of hoop nets plus surf? That's a challenging combination. How do these pros deal with it?

"I usually go in a Malibu Mini-X. It's a very surf-friendly kayak. At times, I just glide in," Allen says.

For Near, the answer is securely stowing his nets. After all, a tumble with loose lines — there's a lot of rope to hang yourself with on a stack of lobster nets — is a good way to get hurt. Near ties his nets down on a simple PVC rack of his own design.

LEBOWITZ/next page



EPIC SKIFF TRIP ON THE 105 — Ken Mattson just got back from a 6-day skiff trip on the *Qualifier 105* which fished Sacramento Reef, Benitos and Cedros. They had great weather and good fishin' with lots of big fish on the Slug at Sacramento reef. "We had one epic run with 5 fish over 7 pounds and one story of the 'big one that got away'. It looked to be in the 11- to 12-pound-plus range. Glad I've got witnesses, it was a real heartbreak." The calico in the photo had a nick on the tail as a direct result of a seal swipe while the fish was hung up in the kelp. He added, "It took a lot of effort but we kept the seal off it. This nice yellow on the 7x straight-tied to 80-pound Blackwater Spectra eased the pain. It weighed 36 on the digital when we landed it and was one of the thickest yellows I've seen in a while. It had some serious shoulders. Thanks to Cory Sanden of M.C. Swimbait for the great giveaways and the crew of the *Qualifier* for making it such an unbelievable trip."



KAYAK YOUR WAY TO A BUGGY BOUNTY — Jim Salazar shows how it's done. The lobster guru doesn't limit himself to the obvious places, the harbor breakwalls. He knows paddling away from the crowd can pay big dividends for those up to the challenge.

CLAY 'THE FISHCATCHER' HARDING SHOWS OFF DAD'S SURF COLLECTION — Watermen with exceptional surf knowledge are kings of the close-in reefs. Situated just outside and sometimes even within the break zone, few people are crazy enough to go after these shallow-water bugs.



PROMAR LED GLOW LIGHT STICK

Lobstery Lights: a pair of illuminating products

Light sticks are indispensable lobster hooping accessories, used to illuminate floats, boats, and everything in between. The disposable chemical variety, ready to go with a crack and a shake, are just fine for the occasional trip. Unfortunately, the fizzled sticks pile up fast over the course of a long season.

Promar's got another option. The company's LED Glow Light Stick is a waterproof, battery powered, environmentally friendly replacement. With a glow-in-the-dark casing that delivers additional performance and an extra set of batteries, each will light up four to six outings. Additional watch-style replacement batteries are widely available. Glow on. www.promarnets.com

Take your lighting hands-free with Energizer's e2 Lithium Headlight. This energized weatherproof beauty boasts five lighting modes (red, high, medium, low, and strobe) and an intense burst option that really blazes. The head pivots and beam width is adjustable. There's even a taillight of sorts, a green LED mounted on the interchangeable battery pack. That's one of the signal features of this sweet little number — it takes full advantage of Energizer's exceptional AA and AAA e2 Lithium batteries. Long-lasting and weighing 40 percent less than standard alkaline cells, they don't fade when it's cold out. Energizer.com

ENERGIZER E2 LITHIUM HEADLIGHT



Lebowitz...

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"It works for me. If I had to, I'd ditch the kayak and save myself," Near says.

Launching through surf is simple enough — just wait for a break between sets and go for all you're worth. Landing is a tougher proposition, especially when you can't see the swells that are coming. Allen turns to another sense.

"You can tell when the set wave hits. It booms. I don't wait around much after that," Allen says.

Near finds comfort in company.

"I go with a buddy. I've been hooping where it's downright scary. It's good to have a friend to save your bacon if you get in trouble. That's huge," Near says.

When you commit to a landing, give it 100 percent. "Hesitation leads to devastation," in Near's memorable and oh-so-true terminology.

Kayakers who fear no surf are the kings of the in-close reefs. Few sane boaters trespass here, perilously near and sometimes within the break zone. The commercial guys can't touch it.

This is not a place for the faint-hearted or the under-prepared. For watermen like Martin Harding of the Loco Pescadores crew, it's just another night at the office. Taking a few over the bow comes with the territory.

"You'll get wet. Deal with it; it's a water sport," Harding says, and he's right. Pulling hoops from a kayak is soggy business.

The key here is a thorough



WINNING FLATTY — Big kayak-caught flatfish accounted for plenty of tournament wins this year. The latest to sip the victory champagne was Aaron Smith, who nabbed this 35-pound Cabrillo Beach halibut during September's So. Bay Kayak Fishing tournament. The group holds a kayak/float tube contest every month. Want your picture here? Send a copy to Paul@KayakFishingZone.com along with your name, hometown, and catch details. We'll print one big fish photo each month, space permitting.

PHOTO COURTESY KENNY SATO SO. BAY KAYAK FISHIN

understanding of the local beach. This means an intimate, surfer's eye view of where and how the waves break. Where's the inside reef? Where are the productive zones no one else touches?

In this tight, surge is a major issue. Harding weights his nets down to keep them in place, but even that has its limits.

"If it's choppy and splashed out, if it looks like its ripping, it's not a good night to go out," Harding explains.

Lobsters won't linger in a sliding hoop. In fact, Harding, also an experienced free diver, says the bugs hunker down in their holes when the surge might carry them away. In these conditions, hooping is

just hoping.

We've talked a lot about surf — it's the barrier that must be broken for kayakers to claim their very own pieces of the lobster pie. For those who don't know their business, it's a dangerous, even deadly place, given heavy loads of hoop nets and multiple coils of line. So let's hit this point one more time.

"The last thing you want to do is get tangled. Wrap your ropes carefully," Harding emphasizes.

A couple more points. When launching through larger surf, Harding recommends tying the hoops down the bow of the

kayak, where their extra weight will help punch through the waves. Coming in, the opposite applies. Placing them on the stern will help prevent the kayak's nose from digging in and pitch-poling (never pretty) and should improve the surf performance of most fishing kayakers.

But then again, when it comes to braving the waves in the dark, you've got to be a little "loco" like Harding. The last thing most kayak anglers want to do is catch a wave. For Harding, it's a free ride.

Just lean back and enjoy it, minus the crowds.

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