



1999

# Fisherman

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October 7, 1999 - No. 41 New Jersey, Delaware Bay Edition \$1.50

## Great Fall Fishing

- *Stripers On The Drift*
- *Stealth 'Bows And Browns*
- *Sandy Hook Reef Blackfish*

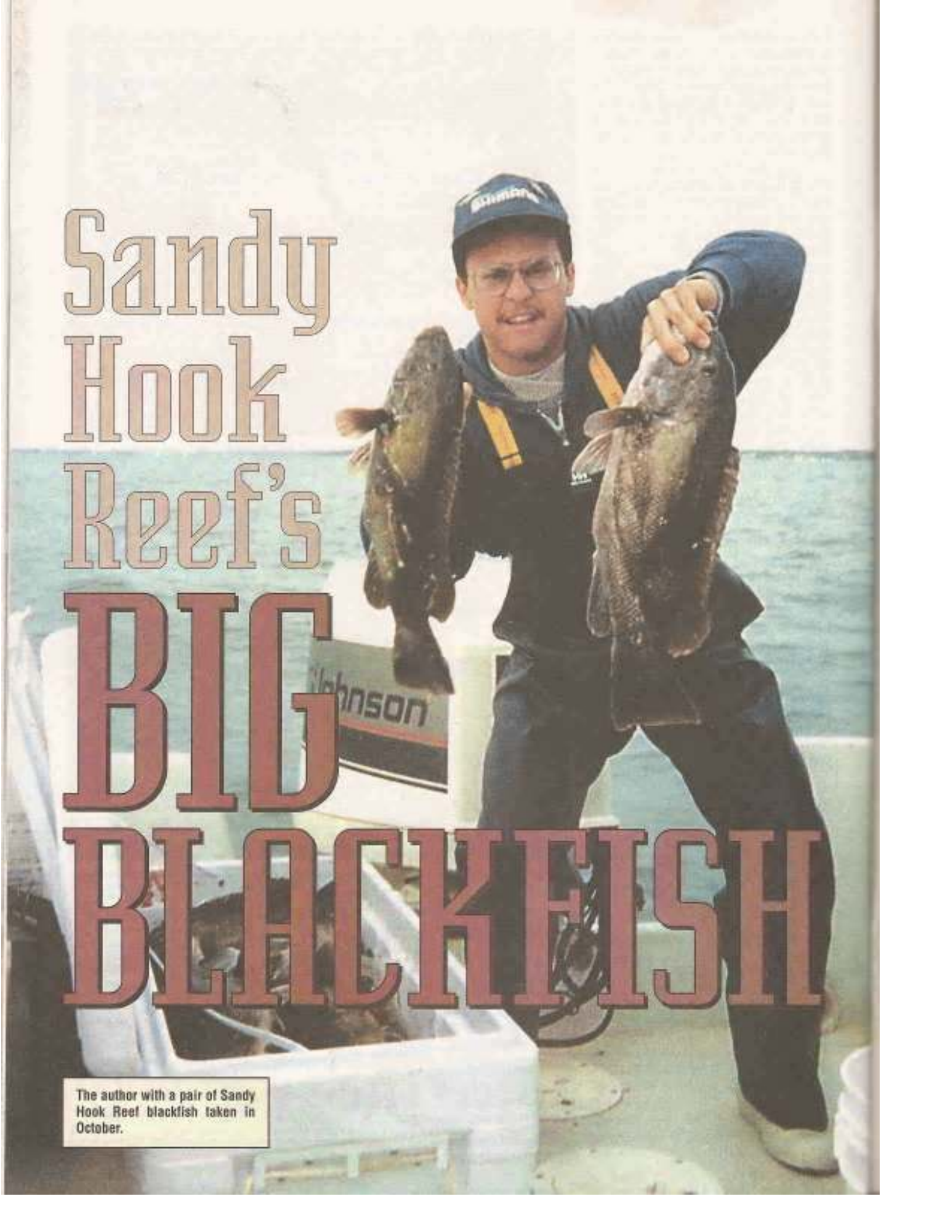
## How-TO: Small-Boat Rod Holders

**Weekly Fishing Reports:  
What's Hot, What's Not**



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41

A man wearing a blue baseball cap with the name 'Johnson' on it, glasses, and a dark blue jacket is standing on a boat. He is holding two large blackfish, one in each hand, up to his chest. The boat has a white railing and a sign with the name 'Johnson' on it. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky.

Sandy  
Hook  
Reef's

**BIG  
BLACKFISH**

The author with a pair of Sandy Hook Reef blackfish taken in October.

# BY CARLOS BASTOS, JR.

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The temperature was 45 degrees and here I was in my 17 foot ProLine with my hands getting numb from the northwest breeze but it really didn't bother me as much because my fishing partner, Frank Vetter and I were reeling in blackfish



All the needed gear - line, hooks, scissors for bait, a good supply of sinkers.

on every drop to the bottom. They were on the bite and we were taking full advantage of it. We weren't anchored on some secret wreck that nobody else fishes but were located right on the edge of a fleet of about 40 boats.

Continued On Next Page

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The "hot spot" was the man-made artificial reef named the Sandy Hook Reef.

### ABOUT THE REEF

The Sandy Hook Reef consists of a very large area of bridge rubble with a few wrecks scattered throughout mainly south of all the rubble. I did not fish the reef that much until my friend Capt. Pete Wagner told me about all this great fishing going on at the reef during the fall. That was two years ago and I've been fishing there ever since.

I think the reason why there has been a sudden interest in fishing the reef is the fact that the roller netters tend to stay away from that particular area because of the jagged bottom, which gets hung up on the nets. A lot of the usual blackfish haunts like Shrewsbury Rocks and Long Branch get rolled over quite a bit. You might have a good catch one day and find the spot completely barren the next.

If anyone is not familiar with the location of the reef, the loran coordinates are 26943-43649, which will put you in the center of a lot of the structure. You can look in any direction and find rubble. Some piles will come up on your fish finder as high as 10 feet or more.

One very important thing about the Sandy Hook Reef is that it is an anchor deposit. Bring along an extra anchor or try one of those wreck anchors made out of rebar so that it will straighten out when you pull it up with your boat. I always pull up my anchor by swinging the boat around so that the anchor pulls out the opposite way that it dug in.

### WHEN TO GO

The blackfish start biting at the reef right at the start of the season, which this year is October 10, and continue biting thru December. If the water temperature remains in the middle 40s, you could see the action continue well into January. On a nice day, the reef can get quite crowded so try to get out early if you want to anchor on a particular spot. There are days when you can literally jump from boat to boat.

I tend to fish away from the fleet because I've noticed that there is a lot of rubble spread out over a broad area. I end up fishing west of where everyone else is. Another good thing to remember is to stay put where you are. Blackfish usually do not bite all day so one minute you might not be catching

anything at all and then all of a sudden you're into a heavy bite. Move around too much and you could miss out on some of the big blackfish that the reef has to offer.

When I say big I mean fish up to 10 pounds are caught there on a regular basis.

## BAITS AND RIGS

The green crab is the bait of choice when fishing for blackfish at the reef. Fiddler crabs would also work but the bergalls make short order of them. I like to cut my crabs in half and I like to try crabs with their legs on and some with their legs off. It's strange, but some days it seems that they show a preference for one or the other.

My rig consists of 30-pound leader and a 2/0 Owner hook. I snell my hook onto an 18-inch piece of leader and put that through a small dropper loop that I tied onto my main line. I stay away from using two hooks because I find that one hook doesn't get hung up as much and I can free up my rig more often when it does get stuck on the bottom. I choose Owner hooks because they are very sharp and also very strong. I've had other hooks break in half while I was reeling in a big blackfish.

## ROD AND REEL

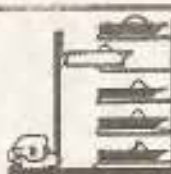
I want a rod that has a fast taper and a sensitive tip. My blackfish rod is custom made but St. Croix makes a nice rod for around 80 bucks. My reel is a Shimano TLD-5, which are no longer made. These are workhorse reels and you can find them at flea markets sometimes. I've caught 40-pound yellowfin tuna on that reel without a problem.

I load my reel up with 30-pound Silver Thread and I'm all set to go. I do not use the braided lines when I'm fishing for blackfish because the water is shallow and I can feel the fish biting with no problem.

On a sad note, there is a big demand for live blackfish and if you take a good look at most of the other boats fishing the reef you can see that almost every vessel has hoses pumping salt water into tanks in order to keep the fish alive and get top dollar for them. I've noticed that even on a lot of party boats there are guys doing the same thing. There are a lot of fishermen not thinking about tomorrow. It's bad enough that there are roller netters scooping up thousands of pounds of blackfish on one set. If we don't do something now the blackfish will become extinct just as fast as the whiting did. Protect and Conserve.



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