

# PLASTIC BOAT PAPER CHASING



By Kayak Kevin Whitley

## KAYAK TROPHY HUNTING

Two years ago Ric Burnley and I were talking about the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament and contemplating if it were possible for a kayaker to achieve the tournaments expert angler award.

That means six different species citations in a year, which is a tough order to fill even in a boat. At that time the only citation I had ever caught was a spot. How could I land six trophy size fish in a year from my kayak? The plan began to form with the timing of the different species predominately available throughout year. I saw the trophy schedule unfold.

### THE LINE UP

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament has designated 25 species that could be weighed or released for citation. These fish have a minimum weight for a kill as well as a minimum length for a release citation. In a kayak the release is the way to go. If I catch a tog at the 1st Island (23 inches, the minimum for a release) and it looks borderline for the minimum 9 pound weight, I'll let it go for the release citation and keep fishing rather than ending my day to paddle the three miles back with a dead and weight waning fish to rush it to the scales.

The targeted trophy fish that come into the four-mile paddling range are red drum, striped, black drum, cobia, flounder, speckled trout, sheepshead, tautog, croaker, and spot. Luckily these fish are within the striking range at different times of the year.



When trophy hunting alone, you can register a release citation by taking a picture of the fish on a measuring tape and sending it in with your paper work.

My year begins January 1st looking for my first citation of the year, a striped at least 44 inches long around the buoy 18 and concrete ships area. The next target in May are the big bull red drum, (minimum 46 inches) on the shoals of the Eastern Shore. June is dedicated to

cobia, (50 inches) off Grandview and the Latimer shoals. July and August are the hot months spent hunting the 1st Island for sheepshead, (24 inches) flounder, (26 inches) and black drum, (46 inches). September and October are the fall crunch time months when the fish are fattening up and preparing to exit the bay. The inlets are the paper chasing fishing grounds. At this time jumbo spot, (13 inches) croaker, (20 inches) and specks, (24 inches) are all stuffing in the calories. Fall is the time to hammer the inlets. November and December I head back out to the

1st Island for the tog, (23 inches). If I didn't get it in January, I end the year with stripers back on the Eastern Shore.

### GOING FOR IT

By the end of November of 2006, I was a nervous wreck. With five citations behind me I was chasing tautog for my last paper.

The pressure was on. I was using vacation days to get at least three days a week on the water after an exhausting 800 hours that year. I saw a giant tog brought up next to me. I knew they were there. I hooked up and broke a big one off. I was crushed, my nerves felt shot. My hands were shaking as I tied another rig. Luckily, I had another chance and landed a 24 inch. I didn't hoop and holler because I was relieved. I took a deep breath and simply said "Its over."

Its takes total dedication targeting one species at a time. I spent a lot of time on the water, a lot of time learning and a lot of time logging. For me it was a personal challenge. Of course I wanted to be the first kayaker to reach the expert level. The real challenge was if I could gain the knowledge to land six different species in a year. In my quest for the knowledge, I joined local angler clubs, went to seminars and constantly went to the tackle shops; anything to learn as much as I possibly could about individual species I wanted to target. The research is half the battle in succeeding in the expert challenge.

I gained a wealth of knowledge during the year long crash course in trophy fishing. I keep a detailed fishing log. I record location, current, tide, time, wind, air temperature, barometric pressure, water temperature, surface condition, clarity, sky conditions, moon phase, fish action scale from 0 to 5, type of fish, size and number of fish, who I fished with and what they caught. I research the previous years for the prime conditions. I read the fishing reports in the magazines and I never stop learning.

The fruit of all this knowledge is executing a successful plan of attack through the trophy schedule; knowing when the fish will be there and how to catch them. In the kayak, I'm committed to one fishing area. My information has to be correct and the conditions have to be in line, otherwise it's a wasted day.

Tenacity and stubbornness are a necessity when kayak trophy fishing. Not just patience, but full on obsessive compulsion will put a trophy fish on the plastic deck. The expert challenge takes long term planning and taking every chance you have to get out. I watch the buoy reports. If the conditions change for the better, I jump through the window of opportunity to get as much time on the water as possible. Like Claude Bain said, "If you catch enough fish, you will catch a trophy."

Fish hard, fish smart and fish a lot and you will GETON'EM. For more pictures, videos, and weekly reports go to kayakkevin.com



Zach Lannon of Virginia Beach is shown releasing a 48 inch striped.



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