

STARS & STRIPERS

A warm American welcome and fishing tips served up with his breakfast eggs. No wonder BASS member Matt Spence likes life across the pond...



Protection of striped bass in the US could be replicated in the UK

A midnight start, eight hours' hard fishing and now we're at another American diner for breakfast. Unshaven and wearing waders, three of us traipse in, trailing footprints across the linoleum floor.

No-one gives us a second glance, while the waitress cheerily greets us with: "Hey, how's the fishing, boys?" In upbeat tone we reply "pretty good", although it's hardly been spectacular for the past few days.

Still, given I am in Cape Cod for the first time, fishing for (and occasionally catching) striped bass with two of my best friends, I can hardly complain.

The waitress is not only friendly but perceptive too and senses our lack of success, so rather than offering the menu she gives fishing advice instead: "You guys tried The Bay? My cousin Ed fished it on the weekend and had plenty, I hear." At this point another

customer chips in with more information. In no time the three of us are conducting multiple conversations with various strangers about the fishing.

Here and there

This is my first time fishing the US coast, but already such scenarios no longer surprise me. Angling, it seems, is viewed by the public here as a normal healthy hobby, not an affliction. How different to the reaction I'd get walking into a British café in waders looking dog rough!

Given that so many folks fish for the striped bass here, and that these fish boost the local economy, this positive perception is understandable. I am told attitudes have become more ingrained as the size of the bass, the angling population and the economic benefits they bring have all spiralled after the introduction in the 1990s of effective regulations to protect this resource.

Yet there is hope that my bass

fishing at home could soon be similarly improved. A campaign run by the Angling Trust and backed by BASS and MPs from all parties has been launched, seeking an increase in the minimum landing size of bass in England to 48cm. This proposal would give the bass the chance to effectively breed at least once before they can be taken. Then, as with the striped bass, the size and numbers of our fish would increase, to our benefit.

I don't know if this change would result in UK waitresses giving fishing tips like their transatlantic cousins, but it's likely that businesses would gain from the upturn in bass angling, while tackle companies would find new opportunities in a

growing market.

A day on and we were back in that diner, but this time with a spring in our soggy step. The mountain of information gained over breakfast yesterday had helped us locate and catch (and release) some excellent striped bass in a dawn session. Now it was us giving tips to the waitress.

Catching these fish with lures and stepped-up UK tackle was indescribably exciting. Even simple questions, such as whether I'd prefer my eggs sunny side up or over easy, suddenly seemed hard to answer: my head was scrambled by the problem of how to raise the money and the goodwill of my family so I could return next year. Yet I can't help but ponder the question - would I travel across the Atlantic to fish for stripers using similar methods if our bass were protected enough to reach their full potential?

Maybe this choice will become a real one.

