

Grab your pole — ocean fishing is hot

by Mike Baxter/Let's Go Fishin'

Within a short drive for most of us, there are some hot bites in the water right now. Most of the action is coming from the ocean, and Santa Cruz is at the top of the charts, with albacore, halibut, striped bass, rock fish, ling cod and even thresher sharks.

It's hard to keep my concentration, as there are so many fish stories rolling in.

Albacore fishing remains great, as boats are catching up to 20 fish per boat. Some are taking the responsibility of only catching as many as they need and are coming in early with only the albacore they can use.

The warm water has been 50 to 60 miles out, and the weather has been off and on. If the weather is calm and boats hit the warm water, they are catching 15- to 30-pound albacore while trolling jigs and drifting live bait. It looks like it is going to be a good albacore year.

Near shore, fishing has been epic, as huge schools of sardines make their way to the shallow waters off Santa Cruz. The sight has been amazing as huge schools of sardines seek safety in numbers as birds dive-bomb, sea lions corral them and large net boats pursue them. It makes one wonder if there are enough sardines out there to withstand the pressure. We have to hope that California Fish and Game has proper regulations in place for this new era of sardines.

Small boats have focused their efforts inshore, catching rockfish and halibut. The rockfish have been on a steady bite along the reefs up and down the coastline. The swell has been down, and anglers are enjoying some shallow-water action while catching rockfish in 30 to 90 feet of water.

Halibut have been scattered along the sandy spots that border the reef in 30 to 60 feet of water. The boat pressure on halibut has put a damper on the bite, and some boats are venturing up the coast to find solitude and hungry fish.

Thresher sharks have been a big surprise for halibut anglers. When a 60-pound thresher shark decides to take your bait, it may be a bit startling. They tend to make screaming runs, huge jumps and bite through the line before you know what's happened. Most anglers release thresher sharks if they make it to the boat.

I hope you have a chance to get out on a boat and go fishing with a friend.

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