



# SCUDDLEBUTT

Icons



## Paul Dixon—striper pioneer

By Capt. John McMurray

WHILE THE NAME DOESN'T DRAW THE SAME RECOGNITION AS A LEFTY Kreh or Bob Clouser, Capt. Paul Dixon has been just as important, if not more, to Northeastern flyfishing. Dixon was one of the first to successfully target cruising stripers over white-sand flats, and certainly the first to make a business out of it, effectively showing the world that an amazing flats fishery existed for a northeastern fish that was comparable to those that had long before put Florida on the map. Dixon also showed us the epic striped bass and false albacore blitzes that occurred at "The Point," solidifying Montauk as a flyfishing destination.

"Paul was the first guy I fished with for stripers on the flats," says Jersey fly tyer Bob Popovicks. "He really had it wired up there before anyone else."

Dixon, a West Coast transplant and flyfishing junkie, migrated to New York City and began working for Orvis in the mid '80s. He married into a family that owned property in the Hamptons, and thus spent a good amount of time out East. Hearing stories about East Coast stripers, he was intrigued and became intent on catching them on the fly. So he started asking around and got the typical answers: "Sixty feet of water," "You can only catch them at night," etc. These responses may have actually been accurate at the time, as striped bass had been severely depleted. But by the early '90s, because of some stiff management measures, including moratoria, stripers made a comeback.

Dixon disregarded the locals' advice and went out looking on his own. Having bonefished quite a bit, he knew what to look for. On foot he began to see a few stripers in the flats, even catching one or two. Soon thereafter, he bought his first flats skiff and began gradually unlocking the mystery by figuring out productive flats, baits, times for the best visibility, tides where stripers were most likely to come up on the flats, and when they were most inclined to eat a fly. He eventually found and dialed in an extraordinary fishery for stripers in the clear waters of eastern Long Island. These fish could be stalked via flats skiff

and would eat a well presented fly at the right tide, with shots at fish in the 30- to 40-inch range.

"I've sight-fished for stripers in many places on the flats," says Kreh, "but Paul was the one who introduced me to it in the early '90s. And he did so very successfully."

Dixon opened Dixon's Sporting Life in East Hampton in 1993, got his guide license, and started running flats charters in 1994. Once he started to show clients and a few outdoor writers the exceptional fishery, word spread quickly and business grew.

"Once they saw it, they were blown away," says Dixon. He hired a manager for the store but then the managers wanted to start guiding, so he trained them and bought another flats skiff. Guides eventually started their own businesses, and a local industry was born.

As the striper sight-fishing phenomena became better known, it spread to other areas. People began to discover that you could find and fish stripers in shallow, clear flats all across Long Island, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. The vast network of white-sand flats that surrounded Cape Cod soon became the place for sight-fishing stripers, and guides in Maine also discovered that their state had an excellent striper sight-fishery in the dead of the summer.

The whole idea of sight fishing for stripers in the sand flats was a foreign one before Dixon came along. He not only put a few areas on the map almost immediately, he added a whole new aspect to a fishery that was traditionally pursued in deep water at odd hours of the day and night, and in most regions during only the spring and fall. Dixon made the investment in time and money to figure it all out. He remains one of the best striper flats guides around, with a knowledge of tides, baits, and fish behavior in the flats that is unparalleled, and he is probably more responsible than anyone for creating the niche of saltwater flats fishing for stripers that thrives to this day.

PAT FORD