Over the past few years, squid fishing has become less of an oddity and more of a summertime staple on New Hampshire’s coast. Their documented range extends up to Newfoundland, but until recently, the major concentrations of squid stayed south of Cape Cod.

Anglers anticipate the arrival of squid in the Piscataqua River in early summer, and they are fished for as far north as mid-coast Maine. Squid jigs can be found in most seacoast New Hampshire tackle shops during the summer. These are as odd looking as the squid themselves, with upward-turned metal pins at the end of the jig in the place of hooks.

Squid are fascinating creatures; let’s explore their unique traits and life history a bit before we go fishing.

**Camouflage, Communication and Courtship**

The longfin inshore squid (Doryteuthis pealeii) is a fast growing, short lived molluscan invertebrate. It is a cephalopod (meaning “head foot”), closely related to the octopus and cuttlefish. These creatures all have their feeding and major sensory organs on the part of their bodies to which the tentacles attach.

While this peculiar body structure may be the first thing you notice about a squid, the second is likely to be its dazzling ability to camouflage. Squid have “chromatophores,” which are cells dense in pigment. Nerves and muscles control the contraction or dilation of these pigmented sacs, resulting in a change in color or pattern on the creature. This can be done at a very high speed, resulting in what looks like flashing. This behavior serves several purposes, including camouflage, communication and courtship.
New Hampshire anglers are catching and cooking their own calamari

by Rebecca Heuss
Squid are a seasonal migrant, moving inshore in the spring and offshore in the fall. Inshore movement starts at the southern end of their range and continues northward as waters warm, with larger, mature adults arriving in our waters ahead of smaller squid.

It was historically thought that squid lived for about two years, but more recent studies have suggested that their lives may be as short as nine months, with the entire population replacing itself at a rapid rate. Breeding can occur at any time of the year, but the largest spawning event coincides with the inshore migration. Squid are social spawners, coming together in large aggregations where the males vie for a female; courtship incorporates flashing of chromatophores. The female may spawn with many males, resulting in a number of gelatinous egg capsules, which are fingerlike structures, each containing 150 to 200 eggs. These are deposited on the bottom in groups called “egg mops,” with many females depositing their egg capsules together.

Many invertebrates, such as crabs, lobsters and shrimp, have early life stages that look distinct from their adult form. This is not true for squid and other cephalopods, which hatch from their eggs as “paralarvae” (small, 2-to-4-mm versions of a squid). Juvenile squid inhabit surface waters, are planktonic (a term for drifting or floating animals that live in certain zones of oceans or fresh waterbodies), and feed on other plankton.

The rate of growth for squid depends on temperature. They grow faster in warmer water. As they grow, the squid’s diet changes from small planktonic organisms to krill (small ocean crustaceans), polychaete worms and shrimp; eventually they feed on larger prey like small fish and even other squid. Once they reach 4.5 cm, squid live near the sea floor. They can reach a maximum size of about 19 inches, not including the tentacles, but are usually less than 12 inches long.

**Squid Strategy**

While it is possible to catch squid at any time of day, night fishing is the most productive. Day or night, high tide is the time to fish. Any structure that extends over water can be a suitable platform, provided there is lighting. At night, adult squid ascend the water column to feed. They are attracted to lit areas and will stalk their prey from the fringes, waiting for mackerel, herring or other baitfish. Many squid jigs incorporate a light or glow-in-the-dark component as an attractant.

Squid are one of the fastest marine invertebrates, and use their speed to ambush their prey. Cast your rig out toward the line of light/dark and retrieve it by jigging (pull up on the rod, let it down, and reel in the slack), to find the area where they are hiding. Then, when you feel a subtle change, pull upward and reel steadily to keep tension on the line; any slack could allow the hooks to dislodge.

Gear requirements are fairly minimal. A basic setup such as a light-tackle mackerel pole will work. To increase your harvest, you’ll need a rod that is sensitive enough to allow you to feel the subtle “bite,” paired with a line that is on the lighter side. Six- to ten-pound test is best.

There are a number of options for rigging your tackle, using weight and single or multiple jigs. The most flexible option is to
attach a squid jig with a snap swivel at the end of your line and another about two feet up, using a dropper loop. This will allow you to make quick adjustments until you figure out what is working.

Experiment with different weighted sinkers instead of your terminal jig, or try a different size, style or color. Changing the weight will alter the rig’s position in the water. You can try other jigging techniques, as well.

You should have one more important piece of equipment ready once you bring your catch to shore – a bucket. Squid expel ink as a defense mechanism, and they are sure to make a mess out of the fishing area, as well as the container they are initially placed in, so keep fresh catch out of your lunch pail! Believe it or not, gourmet cooks use the ink to make delicious black pasta; just be sure to use a non-porous sterile container to capture the ink.

For step-by-step instructions on how to clean a squid, plus a delicious recipe for stuffed squid, visit the Fish and Game website at www.fishnh.com/fishing/profiles/squid.html.

Now that you know a bit more about this unusual New Hampshire denizen of the deep, have fun angling for squid this summer!

Rebecca Heuss is a Marine Biologist at the N.H. Fish and Game Department, and contributes saltwater fishing advice in the New Hampshire Fishing Report.

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**SPICY ASIAN CALAMARI**

Try this simple recipe and bring some seacoast cuisine into your kitchen.

**Ingredients:**
- 1.5-lbs. squid, cut into rings and bite-sized pieces
- Oil for frying

**Batter:**
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1/2 tsp. each salt and pepper
- 1/2 tsp. Chinese 5-spice

Rinse the squid and pat dry. Heat the oil in a deep-sided pan or deep fryer to 350°F.

Mix the batter ingredients together in a bowl. Dip the squid pieces in the batter, coating each piece thoroughly. Place the pieces in the hot oil; avoid overcrowding by cooking a small amount at a time. Cook for two minutes, turning pieces to brown evenly.

Place the cooked squid on a paper towel to drain. Sprinkle with a dash of sea salt while hot. Serve with your favorite Asian dipping sauce, serrano chilies, cilantro and lime.