

# Gaspereau gauntlet full of opportunity



## JOE FITZGERALD CHASING PISCES

The more I learn about the fish of Nova Scotia, the more memories come flooding into my mind. And as I explore our waterways and read books on fishing in Nova Scotia, many of those memories are providing insight to my experiences. Don MacLean's wonderful little book, *Sport-fishing: A Season-By-Season Fishing Guide To Nova Scotia*, gave me one of those light-bulb moments last week.

Two days after reading the book, I was fishing a waterway that connected two lakes, and right in front of me, hugging the shoreline, was a school of fish passing back and forth continually. They acted a lot like the shad I'd seen in Nine Mile River, so I tried using shad darts and dragging the lure through the oblivious throng. No bites. I started to recognize individuals in the school, by their many scars. One was missing an eye, though the bare socket didn't seem hinder it in any way. Maybe its impaired vision kept it from seeing my presentation, but the rest of the fidgety group had no interest, either.

These fish were not shad but gaspereau, I realized — another

species of the herring family, but much smaller. The thought took me back to an experience my brother and I still talk about today.

We were fishing near the same area many years ago. After we'd used spinners and worms with no luck, the waters in front of us suddenly began swirling and splashing with countless small, silver fish. The two of us literally got on our knees and scooped them out of the water with our hands. I took one of the "minnows" and put it on my hook. Immediately, I caught a large small-mouth bass. We both continued to bait our hooks with this unexpected bounty and catch the predators gorging on the hapless fish.

We never did figure out what those fish were, until I read MacLean's account of gaspereau and their importance as bait-fish. The revelation struck me like the bass were striking our lines that day years ago. I was focusing on the wrong fish.

With calm resolve, I removed the shad dart and put on the biggest, shiniest, silver rapala lure in my possession. I flung it way past the schooling gaspereau, and reeled it back with resolute expectation.

*Wham!* The wobbling plug was attacked violently, and seconds later, a fierce bass leaped out of the water in front of me.

I suddenly knew how that poor gaspereau had lost its eye, and that by imitating the savaged school, I could take advantage of the dangerous gauntlet they run. **Joe Fitzgerald is a freelance writer living in Halifax.**

### GASPEREAU FACTS



● Gaspereau, or alewives, are part of the herring family and can be identified by a single black spot behind the head.

● Gaspereau spend their adult lives in coastal marine waters, and enter fresh water from April to July to spawn.

● Although not a sought after sportfish, gaspereau are fished commercially with weirs and nets in the Margaree, Gaspereau, and Shubenacadie rivers. Most of the catch is smoked or pickled and sold internationally, or used as pet food, fish meal, or commercial bait.

● Gaspereau are also known as the Sunday Fish, because although tasty, it would take you all Sunday to remove the bones.

● Using gaspereau for bait — or plugs, spoons, and streamers that imitate them — can be extremely effective for landlocked salmon, small-mouth bass, chain pickerel, and sea run trout following them upstream.

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