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ALMOST PARADISE

Most of us who are lucky enough to live and work on the water in the Tampa Bay area start to take it for granted after a while. We get caught up in our busy day-to-day routine and don't take the time to appreciate what a paradise we live in. We complain about the snowbird and spring break traffic and we curse the hurricanes. We hate the heat and we bitch about the winter cold.

I have recently been reminded of how great our backyard really is by the out of town customers who have been using my rental boats and kayaks. Their perspective has really reopened my eyes to the beauty that we have in our own backyards. Without exception, these nice folks return from their outing on the water with great big beaming smiles and stories of all of the great stuff they discovered. Many of them are surprised to find that we have everything here that is available in places typically considered to be more exotic vacation destinations.

This was previously driven home to my wife and I while visiting in Key West. We were staying in a small rental unit near Duval Street with no pool or yard and we had not brought a boat with us on this excursion. We spent a couple of days partying on Duval and ate some good food but then we realized that back home in Tarpon Springs we had a great house and pool on the water, a couple boats to use plus our other toys. We had to ask ourselves, why were we staying in a musty little apartment with no amenities? Needless to say, we packed up and came home where we enjoyed the rest of our vacation right here. This is not to say that the Keys aren't a great place to visit but so is Tampa.

With gas prices somewhere north of insane and all of the other costs of travel going through the roof, why not plan a staycation this year. It just makes sense to stay close to home and save gas while taking advantage of all that is available nearby and helping local businesses. Maybe if we all did this and bought less gas, the prices would even go down to a level that is only ridiculous.

There is so much to do right here. If you want a really wild experience with animals try Giraffe Ranch or Safari Wilderness where you can take a real safari and see lots of exotic wildlife in a naturalistic setting. You can even feed lemurs grapes! If you want to get out on the water, you can come to Belle Harbour Marina and rent one of our great rental boats, try a charter with one of the many great captains who advertise or write in Onshore-Offshore or just take a ride on one of the great tour boats running from the Sponge Docks in Tarpon Springs. If you need a change of scenery, try a few days at a hotel on one of our great beaches, I especially like the Opal Sands on Clearwater Beach.

If you like more unusual pastimes, here are some fun ways to use some leisure time on your staycation:

- Take a photo safari in your local discount store. You may capture some images of unique wildlife that can even be immortalized on the Internet.
- Dress in stockings and a camisole (particularly if you're a 300 pound man) and go shopping at your local discount store so that others can photograph you, perhaps you'll get immortalized on the Internet.
- Wear an aluminum foil hat to shield your brain from the mind control rays.
- Buy birdseed at your local pet store. Ask the clerk how long it will take the birds to sprout after you plant the seed.
- Take a carton of Depends adult diapers into the changing room at your local department store and put one on over your pants. When you come out ask the attendant where the toilet paper is?

Now that I've gotten you started, I'm sure you can think of lots of other fun ways to pass your vacation time. Have fun and try to appreciate how lucky we are to be so close to so many great places.

If your significant other knows how to run a boat, but they just don't have one, you could buy a Boat Rental Gift Certificate from me and Flip the Bird here at Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs. Call me at 727.243.1493 to get one sent out to you.

Merle



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ON THE COVER: Captain Jimmy Nelson and fishing partner, Luiza, with a gorgeous Pacific Sailfish caught on one of many of their exotic fishing excursions. Learn more and follow along by visiting their website at: www.livinthedreamtv.com.

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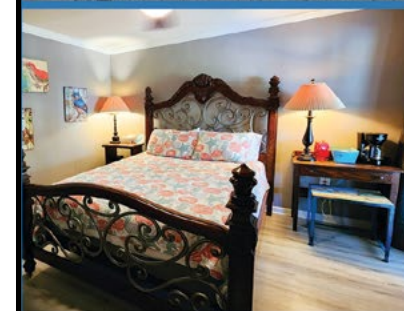


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FISH MORE, WORK LESS...

by Misty Wells

Since the beginning of modern time, there has always been a great deal of controversy between those who "hunt and gather" and those who think it is wrong for one reason or another. I may be opening a can of worms here, but most of those folks that think hunting and fishing is wrong still enjoy a daily dose of protein provided "guilt free" by their local grocer. Now, anyone with common sense knows where their food is coming from and how it finds its way into their homes. This month's article outlines the benefits of hunting and fishing and how "taking it outside" more in 2024, can help us all be better at preserving our sport and enhancing our conservation education and efforts.



Let's follow the money for a minute and talk about how the contributions made by anglers and hunters contribute annually to the outdoor resources we all enjoy. Our annual taxes and contributions goes directly to aquatic resource conservation in various ways. Hunting licenses purchases, excise taxes, membership dues and contributions paid by hunters and shooters generate over \$1.8 billion each year for wildlife conservation in the United States. To date, more than \$12 billion dollars generated by outdoors enthusiasts has been distributed through the Federal

Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act. The American Sportfishing Association reports that over 4 million anglers spent over \$4.3 billion dollars last year while fishing in Florida. The fishing industry alone in Florida generates over 56,000 jobs and income for many families; including my own.

Now that we have some numbers to go on, what are some great ways to keep the fishing industry going strong, all the while practicing conservation and engaging the next generation? In one form or another there is fishing year-round in Florida and there is always something to catch. Fishing is not always about filling the cooler; sometimes it is the thrill of the hunt. Catch & release fishing has become an effective conservation tool and can be a lot of fun; however, if the fish do not survive after being released, then what is the point?

I have researched some tips for a successful inshore release to help keep the fish that are not going in the box alive and give them a better chance for survival. First, remember that time is a precious resource to ensure a fish's survival. Leiza Fitzgerald, STAR Director of the CCA Florida put it to me this way...**Rule #1:** "hold your breath for as long as you intend to have that fish out of water". She said, "when you are out of breath, so are they". That being said, when working to release your catch, try to keep the fish in the water, if possible, as this allows the fish to continue to get oxygen and reduces their level of exhaustion. **Rule #2:** try and land your catch quickly so your catch won't be as tired and will recover quicker. **Rule #3:** if you must net your catch use a rubber or mesh net, don't use anything with



abrasive materials that could injure the skin or gills. **Rule #4:** have your pliers or tools nearby to reduce the time spent on the fish release, and when handling a fish make sure to wet your hands or gloves. **Rule #5:** avoid handling the belly, its internal organs can be compromised, hold the fish by cradling the head and tail if possible. **Rule #6:** remove the hook, gently acclimate the fish back into the water until it can regain its composure and swims away.

Anglers and hunters alike all have those prize trophies or catches that we want to memorialize and either have nice pictures of or somehow hang on our walls. Fishing year-round, a lot of times we are catching species that are out of season, not slot size, or are only catch-n-release species. Like most anglers and hunters, we want to find a way to somehow capture the moment forever and bring our story to life. I have recently teamed up with **King Sailfish Mounts**, based in Ft. Lauderdale, to bring my fishing dreams to life, they can do the same for you. However, I don't want you to just think of them as just a trophy-mount company, they truly are a conservation company. They are working with anglers

all over the world to encourage "catch & release" on all species that swim and create art. Back in the old days of Taxidermy, anglers would have to kill their catch, drop it off, then the Taxidermist would make an authentic skin mount. I am sure you have noticed most of the old skin mounts don't last and begin to deteriorate after a few years. Since sportsmen no longer have to have the actual fish, they can make a spot-on replica based on your measurements and your pictures. "The painting is what makes it your fish", their artists will refer to your photos and will incorporate similar color patterns and marking into each mount.

One of my fishing dreams was to go fish in Guatemala with Capt. Brad Phillips of Guatemala Billfishing Adventures, and few years ago it finally happened. I learned many valuable things from Capt. Brad and his crew but one of the most important things is "keep the fish wet". Capt. Brad has caught and release more billfish than anyone else in the World, and he believes 100% in the conservation and safe handling of the Sailfish species. Of course, the pictures we took during the three days of fishing were fantastic, but I wanted something more. I reached out to King Sailfish Mounts to talk to them about a mount for my biggest Sailfish of the trip. I sent them several pictures, we

talked about where I would put the fish, how I would like it positioned and a few weeks later it was ready for pick up. My Sailfish looks amazing on my living room wall and now I have an order in for my first Roosterfish I caught and release in Costa Rica.

The trophy is in the eye-of-the beholder, so please don't think you have to have something as grand as a Sailfish, Marlin or large species to want to have a mount. King Sailfish mounts does a lot of freshwater mounts, 1st fish, mini-mounts and a variety of other species in house. I am looking forward to fishing my way through 2024 and turning my walls into a mini Bass Pro Shop. I am blessed to be able to catch quite a few fish throughout the year, and the ones I don't eat, I practice catch-n-release. If you want to bring your Trophy to "3D life", reach out to my friends King Sailfish Mounts at www.kingsailfishmounts.com and tell them Misty sent you. 🎣

Misty Wells, Producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to 374 million on Discovery Channel, Bally Sun Sports, Waypoint TV, World Fishing Network, Hunt Channel, MOTV, TCT, Discover Florida Network & Carbon TV.

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WATER TEMPS HOLD THE KEY

by Captain George Hastick

In January the water temps can vary greatly from year to year and from week to week with cold fronts pushing through our area multiple times through the winter. The water temperatures can vary from 55-70 degrees with 61- 67 degrees being the average. Many times, this will cause fish to drop into deeper holes, dark canals and outflows of the power plants to stay warm, since they are cold blooded. If it really cools off, then your power plant outflows become a gold mine of a variety of species.



Stalking Redfish this time of year can be fun and challenging since the water will be shallow and clear, which can make them very spooky, so a stealthy approach is a must. Try not to hit them on the head with your cast so as not to scare them off. Instead cast ahead of the direction they are going to let them find your bait. Scent can come in really handy, so pinching off the tail of your shrimp or adding scent to your Lil' P&V Brown Glass Minnow will help attract them. If they are tailing, use no weight or as little as possible not to scare them and then slowly reel your bait closer to them and let the scent work it's magic.

Lil P&V soft plastics with glitter in them to catch the sunlight will work. Also, a MirrOdine in the Pilchard or Pinfish 'Skin Series' will work great and don't be afraid to add some Pro Cure Super Gel in the Inshore Saltwater scent o the



Speckled Trout can be found in the same area but also in deeper pockets on the flats when it's cooler out. A 1/8-1/4oz jig head with any of the

outside. Again, just like the glitter in the soft plastics, the MirrOdine can really catch the sunlight and make a flash that can be seen from a great distance away, which adds to how many fish can see your offering. The great thing about artificial lures in wintertime is that you can fan cast and cover a lot of territory quickly.

As the water temperatures continue to cool, the sheepshead should start to move in more, including some of the larger ones. Shrimp pieces are good bait for sheepshead, but fiddler crabs can really do the job when the sheepshead get finicky. Look for the Sheepshead in a variety of places including docks, bride pilings, rock piles and all over the flats.



One of my secret baits is the Tube Worm, but good luck finding them; they can be hard to locate due to no regulations. But, its okay because Mussels and Oysters also work well. I still lean towards the Fiddler Crab, but an alternative is a Tree Crab. You can find Tree Crabs in the mangroves and on the sea walls. Simply use your bait net to catch them and throw them in a bucket.

I hope everyone had a great Christmas holiday and a very Happy New Year!

Now, go use those new rods Santa brought ya! 🎁

Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Pete has been fishing the waters of Tampa for over 35 years & guiding over 20 years. From novice to professional; Captain George will make you feel as if you have been fishing buddies for years. Contact him at 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com or email CaptGeorge@TampaBay.rr.com.

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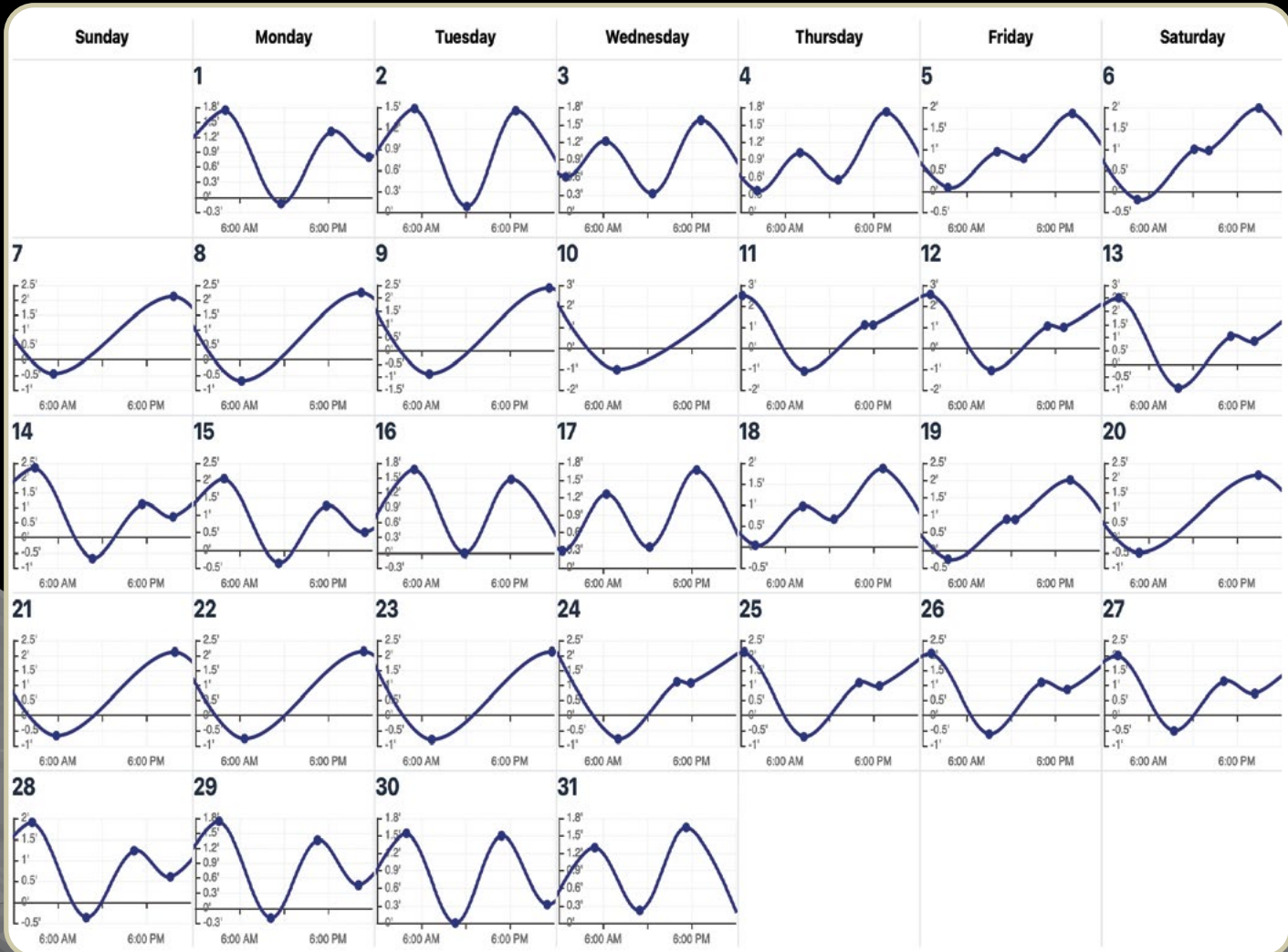
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek

Conversions for St. Marks River Area

High	Low	
+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-1:59	-2:04	Naples
-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River

Conversions for Tampa Bay Area

High	Low	
+0:49	+0:58	Gandy Bridge
+1:38	+1:55	Courtney Campbell Cswy.
+1:38	+1:55	Safety Harbor
+0:20	+0:22	Ballast Point
+0:07	+0:26	Hillsborough Bay
+0:21	+0:29	McKay Bay Entrance
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
-2:27	-2:24	Egmont Key
-2:53	-2:46	Anna Maria, Bradenton Bch
-2:10	-2:19	Anna Maria, City Pier
-1:24	-0:55	Bradenton, Manatee River
-0:30	+0:14	Redfish Pt., Manatee River
-2:22	-1:58	Mullet Key Channel, Skyway
+0:08	+0:17	Shell Point
-0:22	-0:29	Point Pinellas
-1:34	-1:30	Pass-a-Grille Beach
-1:32	-1:05	Gulfport
-1:18	-0:44	St. Pete Beach Causeway
-2:14	-2:04	John's Pass
-1:40	-1:18	Madeira Beach Causeway
-2:00	-1:25	Cortez, Sarasota Bay
-1:38	-0:58	Sarasota Bay
-2:02	-1:38	Venice Inlet
-0:57	-0:40	Englewood, Lemon Bay
-1:27	-0:59	Placida, Gasparilla Sound
+1:38	+1:56	El Jobean, Myakka River
+1:52	+2:30	Shell Point, Peace River
+1:06	+1:27	Punta Gorda, Charlotte Hbr.
-1:12	-1:56	Boca Grande, Charlotte Hbr.
-0:19	+0:26	Pineland, Pine Island
+0:43	+1:28	Matlacha Pass
-0:55	-1:14	Redfish Pass, Captiva Is.
-0:46	-0:20	Captiva, Pine Island Sound
-2:20	-2:28	Captiva, Gulf Side
-0:25	+0:16	Galt Isle, Pine Island Sound
-0:30	-0:44	St. James City, Pine Island
+2:08	+2:44	Fort Myers
+1:15	+2:02	Cape Coral Bridge
+1:08	+1:40	Iona Shores
+0:51	+0:42	Indian Rocks Beach, ICW

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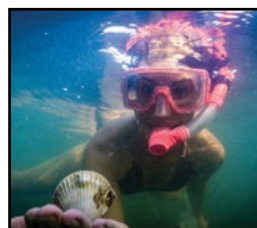
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mesh bag, snorkel set and head out to the grassy, shallow areas of the Gulf during scallop season from July 1 through August 6 for an underwater Easter egg hunt Florida-style!

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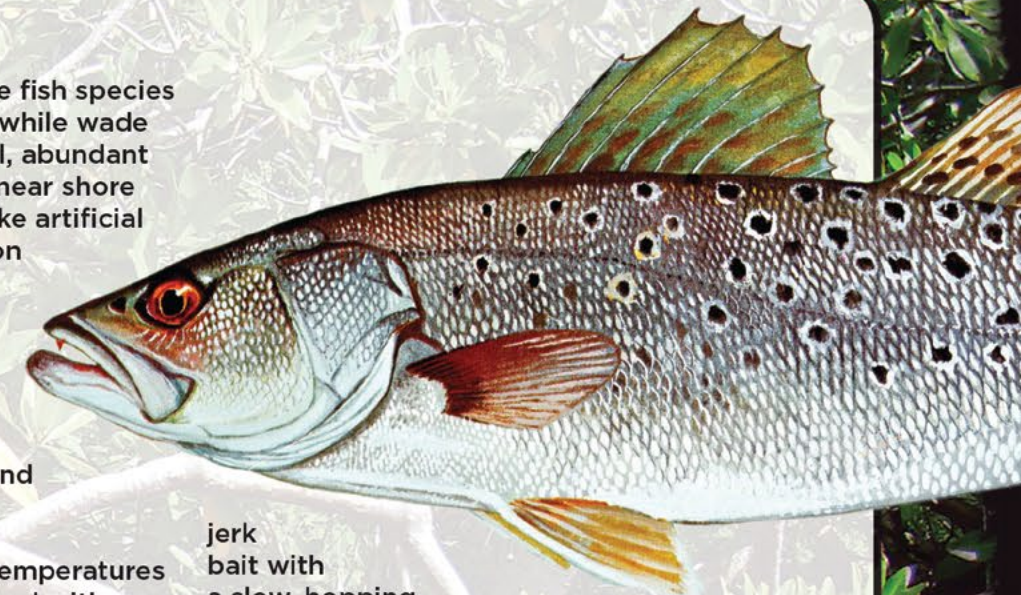


THIS WADE FISHERMAN'S Favorite Game

By David Ulgenalp

The spotted seatrout is the fish species I most commonly target while wade fishing. They're beautiful, abundant and taste great. Trout inhabit near shore waters year round, eagerly strike artificial lures and put up a good fight on light tackle. I also enjoy the challenge of finding trout and figuring out what it's going to take to catch them. Their habitat and behavior changes from season to season and so does the strategy and tactics I use to catch them.

As summer arrives and water temperatures soar, I target grass flats peppered with sandy potholes and high tides that occur during the first or last two hours of daylight. Under these circumstances and if there isn't too much grass, I use a loop knot to tie on a red and white or chartreuse, Storm® Ratlin' Saltwater Chug Bug®. I start my retrieve with a quick, hard popping action and continue to work it back with a series of starts, stops and pops. Often a trout will bump my lure but not strike aggressively. When that happens, I let the Chug Bug® rest a bit and then give it a tiny twitch, which more often than not, results in an aggressive strike and hookup. If my top water bait is picking up too much grass or I'm not getting any action, I switch to a jig and plastic bait combination. I tie on a 1/16th or 1/8th oz red or chartreuse C.A.L.™ Short Shank Jig Head by D.O.A.™ and attach a 3" C.A.L.™ Shad Tail or 4" C.A.L.™ Jerk Bait in Nite Glow or Arkansas Glow. With shad tails I use a steady retrieve keeping the bait just above the grass. I prefer to work the



jerk bait with a slow, hopping action that has the bait dancing in and out of the grass.

As fall arrives and water temperatures drop below 80 degrees, activity picks up. I wade the same areas I fish during the summer, but the cooler water brings baitfish near shore followed by schools of larger trout that feed on them. I prefer to fish the last two hours of an incoming tide and first two hours of an outgoing tide. Early and late in the day I like to throw a Chug Bug® but

when the sun is high, I will switch to a Capt. Mike's ADL Weedless Spoon in white, chartreuse or gold. I add a small swivel to the split ring and tie my leader to the swivel using a uni-knot. I like a steady retrieve with just enough speed to keep it nicking the top of the grass, rocks or oyster beds I'm targeting. If the spoon isn't producing, I use the same jig and plastic tactics that I use during the summer.

Winter can present difficult fishing conditions but it is my favorite season to target large numbers of big trout. My best winter wading spots are adjacent to the many



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During the spring, I continue to find schools of large trout but the warmer water expands the areas I may have to search to find them. I fish my favorite fall spots in addition to my winter spots and add spoons and top water plugs to my fanny pack. As the water temperature hits 70 degrees, I also start looking for schools of large trout along the beaches. They like areas of beach with sandy, hard bottom mixed with rocks and/or limestone out-

causeways connecting the mainland and beaches or one side of a bay to another. They typically have deep water within casting distance, provide good tidal flow and offer a bottom of sand, rocks and grass. On high water I target the areas where sand and/or rocks meet the grass. These areas include potholes and the areas where a sandy or rocky shoreline transitions to grass. On low water I seek deep holes that are often found in the middle of an otherwise shallow flat and the edges of flats adjacent to a channel or deep water.

During the winter I fish almost exclusively with a jig and plastic bait combination. I prefer a 1/4th oz, red C.A.L.™ Short Shank Jig Head and a Rootbeer/



Gold Glitter colored C.A.L.™ Paddle Tail or Shad Tail. I cast and let the jig hit bottom before starting my retrieve. I want to feel the lure making contact with the bottom as I very slowly reel in my line and gently raise and lower my rod tip. I always pay close attention to my line as the bite of a winter trout is often very subtle and easy to miss.

croppings. These areas aren't always obvious and often aren't visible from the surf. I search new beaches with a jig and plastic bait combination; walking and blind casting until I find the fish or run out of beach. These strategies and tactics work for me and they can work for you, so throw on your waders, get in the water and start catching some trout. 🐟

Dave Ulgenalp is the creator of Waders Guide™ fishing charts and offers guided wade fishing trips. His website is www.wadersguide.com and he can be contacted at dave@wadersguide.com. Read his fishing reports @waderdave on Twitter.



TALES FROM "THE OLD GUY"

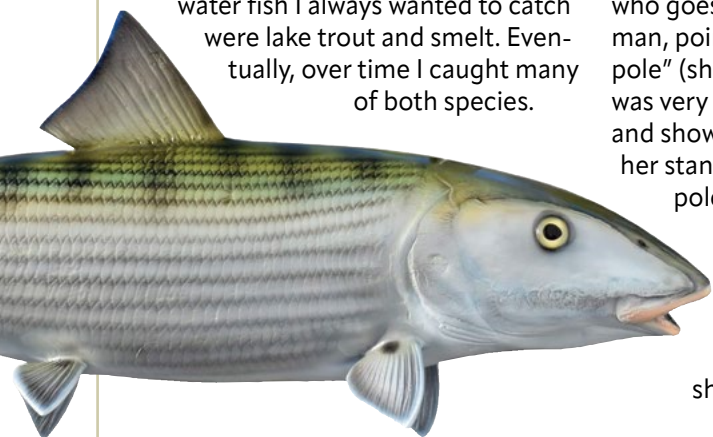
by Dave Mallory

Last month we caught a nice Atlantic Sailfish, along with some other "monsters of the deep." This month we will journey to Mexico to try for a bonefish.

I grew up with my Dad being a Red Sox fan who loved Ted Williams. We saw him play in the 1950's at Fenway Park, which was exciting. Ted had eyes like an eagle, and was the last ballplayer to hit over 400 for the season. He also flew a fighter in WWII and Korea, which took him away for a few years from his baseball career. However, how could you not be a Yankee fan, growing up with Joe, Yogi, the Mick and Whitey? So, Dad and I disagreed on our baseball teams, but not much else.

Over the years, I read about Ted Williams and his love of fishing. A good friend of mine took him fishing for brook trout in Vermont, which turned out to be quite successful. However, saltwater fishing was more to his liking. Narrowing it down even more, bonefish, AKA "the ghosts of the flats," was his favorite. He would take his fly rod to many great places to hunt for the elusive fish, including Mexico, the Bahamas, Belize & the Keys, many times successfully.

I have to confess, I envied him because when I was young, two freshwater fish I always wanted to catch were lake trout and smelt. Eventually, over time I caught many of both species.



Saltwater was more difficult for me. Tarpon and bonefish were just not successful, even though I fished for both many times. Fishing for tarpon in Tampa Bay just didn't produce. Bonefish didn't cooperate at the few islands I had a chance to fish while in the Caribbean. However, I finally caught a 200 pound Tarpon near the Skyway Bridge in Tampa Bay. A year later, I caught an 80-pounder and a 4-pounder.

Pauline and I booked a Holland America cruise which took us to three Caribbean islands and Cozumel, Mexico. We had been to Cozumel before, but this time a fly fishing experience for bonefish was offered! Neither of us were good fishing with a fly rod. I had caught a few fish with a fly rod on previous excursions; Pauline owned a fly rod, but caught mostly bushes. We practiced a little, but we really weren't what you might call, ready.

On the day of the trip, we had beautiful sunny weather with no wind. An hour taxi ride brought us to the fish "resort." Our barefoot fishing guide spoke English and led us to an old wooden boat that had seen better days, and so had the dock. I must say, we were a little nervous. We got in, rode for about 35 minutes to a big enclosed bay and stopped. He asked who goes first and, being a gentleman, pointed to my favorite "fishing pole" (she is Polish). Our guide, who was very polite and patient, laughed and showed her what to do. He had her stand up on the fore deck as he poled around the shallow water and stopped. He pointed to where she should throw her fly and after some practice casts she did. BANG!!! First cast and she hooked a fish! Since she

was higher than me and since I was in the well, I could not see what it was. It gave her a great fight and she finally brought in an 18" bonefish!!! All the years and trips I had put in trying to catch a bonefish and she did it with one cast! I have to admit, I had mixed feelings. I was extremely proud and happy for her. I was also envious.



Now it was my turn. Could I be so lucky? Our guide had me throw a few practice casts as he poled around the bay. He stopped and pointed. I cast my fly and nothing. He said to throw it a little farther. I did and hooked a fish. I prayed it was a bonefish. He said it was and I brought in a 16 inch. She beat me, not unusual, but I didn't care. I had finally caught a bonefish! We fished a little longer and we each caught another bonefish, although a little smaller and Pauline caught a Jack. I can't tell you how happy I was. The monkey was finally off my back!

We rode back to the fish resort, had a beer, tipped our fun guide and were taxied back to the ship to finish our cruise. It was a very special day for both of us. The next Christmas I had the two largest bonefish mounted and they are proudly displayed on a wall in our family room.

Dave Mallory can be reached by email at: David_Mallory@msn.com

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CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN THE MANATEE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Discover How Conservation Efforts in the Crystal River Area Impact Fish, Wildlife and More!
by Josh Johnson

As the Manatee Capital of the World, Crystal River takes great pride in being at the forefront of manatee and local ecosystem conservation. These continued efforts help ensure these gentle giants have adequate food sources and a safe refuge yearly from November to early April.

Healthy ecosystems in the Crystal River area greatly benefit us all. Here are two ways you can help take part.



Practice Responsible Boating

A recent study by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission shows that only 4% of observed adult manatees show no sign of watercraft-related scars. As you can tell by this staggering statistic, boats pose one of the single largest dangers to manatees' health and safety.



When posted regulations and signage are not followed, this can physically harm both manatees and their feeding

grounds. For these reasons, it's essential to follow all posted signs and listed regulations and ensure responsible boating is practiced at all times.

Other responsible boating practices include wearing polarized sunglasses during boat operations and observing all manatee speed zones and caution areas.

So whether you're enjoying a sunny day on the water or hunting for your next catch before the sun rises, please remember to practice your manatee manners!

Catch and Release

Unsustainable fishing practices threaten local ecosystems and their resiliency in a few ways. Primarily this happens through overfishing and, in turn, habitat de-

struction. Habitat destruction not only impacts the quality of fishing but also directly impacts manatees and their ability to thrive here.

Groups in the Crystal River area, like Save Crystal River, have spent time and resources breathing new life into the local ecosystem by planting fresh eelgrass and combating harmful invasive species. And because of this, habitats in the area continue to grow and thrive! Now it's up to all of us to keep them that way.

Besides curbing potential habitat destruction, catch-and-release fishing also improves native fish populations. How? Because it ensures that more fish remain and reproduce in the ecosystem. This practice allows anglers to enjoy the bounty of fish in the Crystal River area while increasing their chances of successfully catching fish.

Practicing catch and release of native fish also ensures that the opportunity to enjoy this national pastime and recreational opportunity will be around for many years!

Conservation in the Crystal River Area

As you can see, there are many ways for you to engage in conservation efforts. If you're interested in discovering more about the continued progress being made by conservationists and eco-tourists alike, we have created a Conservation Hub filled with more information. Topics include how to be involved, from the comfort of your home to a deep dive into the invasive aquatic species that threaten the local ecosystem. There's a wealth of knowledge ready for you! ■

Learn more at DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com/Manatee-Conservation.



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Captain Sergio Atanes

If we get cold weather look for the bigger fish around the hot water runoffs in and around the power plants, rivers, and creeks. Live medium shrimp is the game changer

for me and artificial baits like the Saltwater Assassin "She Shad" colors will vary with the watercolor in the area the color of the water will dictate weather to use a dark or light color tail I prefer glitter in them. Sheepshead should be in larger quantities around the rock piles and docks live shrimp or fiddler crabs are best bet. Trout will make their home in potholes on the flats or muddy bottom channels.



Captain George Hastick

January can vary heavily from day to day with temperature changes from cold fronts but the one thing you can bet on is Sheepshead and Trout will be around to put a bend in the rod.

On certain occasions when we have a few days in a row the Snook bite can be phenomenal, but if the water temperatures are in the low 60s, leave them alone, as they will be stressed. On the other hand, Redfish can also be a great target this time of year since they are not as sensitive as the Snook to water temperatures. Target canals, deep holes on the flats and docks.

ABOUT THE CAPTAINS

Captain Sergio and Captain George Hastick fish the Florida waters, specializing in and around the West Coast of Florida and Tampa Bay. Their show, Fishing Adventures Florida, is about two captains sharing their knowledge and experience of the local waters. Encouraging others to share in their love of what the outdoors has to offer. Their goal is to educate, entertain and share the experience of fishing opportunities the state has to offer.

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We have been given the opportunity to try out and review a new one-of-a-kind, patented net caster designed by an Australian fisherman for fisherman or anyone wanting to give cast net fishing a go.



Casting a net the traditional way is far from light work! You are often left saturated, messy and sore from heaving the net over your shoulder. The Amaross net caster is the perfect addition to your fishing toolbox.

The Amaross Caster has been designed to put less strain on your body when casting, so you can spend less time mucking around & more time doing the important stuff

(casting of course). With the Amaross Caster you will never need to haul your wet net over your shoulder again!



The caster is made from High-Tech Nylon material and weighs in at around 1.5lbs. The caster is robust, durable and octagonal in shape with a high pistol grip handle for stability. The octagonal pyramid at the centre disperses the weight into 8 individual pockets around the perimeter for even weight distribution, while the sides of the octagonal caster slope outwards for easy dispersal of the net when thrown.



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We have tested the Amaross Caster with their 6, 8 & 10 foot nets and so far, they work like a champ! Launch your net using the caster with a spiral type motion, flicking outwards and upwards; the faster you do this, the better the weights will be dispersed and as the centrifugal force gets hold of the weights, it will make a perfect circle everytime.

This product could be used by beginners, those casting in muddy messy waters and those with injuries or throwing difficulties. The Amaross Caster is the world's easiest way to cast a net. After only a few tries, you'll be casting confidently!

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"The growing brand is bringing some GIRL POWER to the predominately male focused outdoor apparel market with their women's Boating Lifestyle-inspired clothing."

St. Petersburg, Florida - Boat Bitch Apparel, a leading provider of high-quality, female-focused styles for boating enthusiasts and outdoor adventurers, is excited to introduce its Women's Outdoor Apparel. Tara and Jaclyn, the brand's founders, started the clothing line with the goal of providing comfortable and stylish clothing and accessories that enhance the boat day experience. The chic, stylish clothing, hats, and accessories that pair well with sunshine are available online and at a growing number of retailers.

"We are thrilled to introduce Boat Bitch Apparel to women who are passionate about boating and the outdoors," stated Tara, co-founder of Boat Bitch Apparel. "Our aim is to create a brand that caters to women in the boating community, offering comfortable and confidence-boosting attire for a seamless and enjoyable boat life, both on and off the water. We believe in embracing simplicity, having fun, and living your best boat life."



Boat Bitch Apparel offers a range of high-quality, stylish pieces perfect for a day on the water. Each item combines functionality and aesthetics, from tops, bottoms, and jackets to accessories. Crafted with lightweight, breathable fabrics, their exclusive collection ensures all-day comfort, and most items feature UPF 50+ sun protection.

Boat Bitch Apparel is proud of its cheeky and playful name, which perfectly reflects the founders' attitude toward life. With a deep passion for boating and a keen eye for fashion, Tara and Jaclyn recognized a gap in the market for female-focused outdoor and boating apparel. Determined to fill this void, they set out to create a brand that caters to the needs and desires of women who embrace the outdoor lifestyle.

The team at Boat Bitch Apparel welcomes women to explore their online store and discover fashionable, female-focused boating attire.

About Boat Bitch Apparel: Boat Bitch Apparel is a rising brand known for its high-quality, sun-protective fabrics and feminine silhouettes in women's outdoor apparel. Designed by women for women, the brand embraces the boating lifestyle with stylish and functional clothing. Committed to enhancing the outdoor experience, Boat Bitch Apparel makes every boat day better.

To learn more about Boat Bitch Apparel, please contact us.

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POT LUCK MONTH

by Captain Sergio Atanes

January brings cold & windy conditions but we sometimes get lucky with a beautiful day. Our temperatures will tell us what to do; if water temps are in the mid-60s or lower, the Snook action is out unless we fish the rivers or around power plants. So, let's be different and explore new adventures by trying new techniques and areas.



docks take in sunlight and radiate the heat through the piling into the water increasing the temperature up to 3-degrees warmer. This brings in some nice species, not only to keep warm, but also to feed on the baitfish that have the same idea for keeping warm.

Live shrimp work great this month paired with a 1/0 circle hook and a 15-pound Fluorocarbon leader about 32-inches long for freelining under the docks. Remember, at this time of year, the water is extremely clear, so the light leader helps a lot in getting more strikes. I also use a Yellowtail Jig; its a 1/0 hook with lead on the shank available in 1/16 or 1/8 ounce.

This allows me to keep the bait close to the bottom where Redfish, Flounder, and Sheepshead tend to hang out.

You can use this same method when fishing with artificial baits by working the lure along the bottom with a slow retrieving action, which helps in locating where the fish are staging.

DROP-OFFS

I prefer to use artificial baits this time of year working them slowly along the banks and edges of drop-offs. I can cover more area

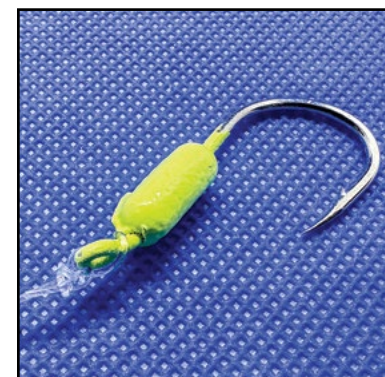


and increase my chances of finding fish. Look for holes along the mangrove treeline or points where the currents have dredged cuts or pockets. Producing any change in the depth of water will make a big difference to fish during the winter.



ROCKY SHORELINES

Look for areas that have rocks close or exposed during low tides as they draw heat and again increase the water temperature around them. A perfect spot for Speckled Trout and Flounder are a good 'by catch' in many cases, as they tend to look for a food source and the rocks are a magnetic for all small creatures.



crabs, they are considered a great table fair and some anglers even call them the 'chicken of the sea'.

The big females prefer the deeper waters of the Tampa Bay, hanging around the ledges, wrecks, and rock piles in anywhere from 12 to 30-feet of water. They average in size from 4 to 8-pounds. Here, I prefer to use medium tackle; a 7-foot medium action rod with a 4000 spinning reel with 15-pound test braided line. Add a 25-pound test Fluorocarbon leader tied with a loop knot to a number 1/0-circle hook. I use a

Sheepshead are one of my favorite species to target during the winter months, as they prove to be great fighters on light tackle. Feeding on mostly Shrimp, barnacles, Blood-worms, Sand Fleas, Fiddlers and other small

Texas Rig where the sinker slides on the leader just ahead of the hook. I also use a small glow soft bead because this keeps the sinker from hitting the knot and the glow beads seem to draw the attention of the larger fish.

Smaller sheepsheads prefer docks and oyster bars in shallow water, so just downsize your tackle and enjoy catching a great fighting fish.

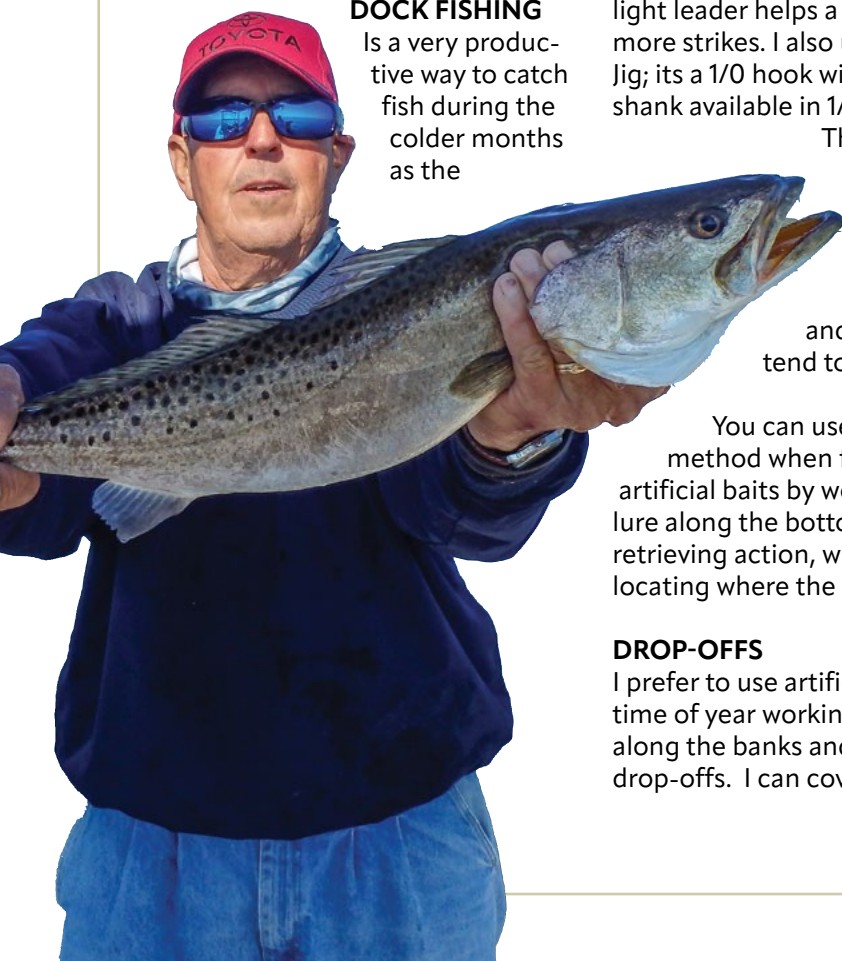
POWER PLANTS

Can't leave the power plants out as they provide great fishing and you never know what you'll catch! Best bet for me is using a Banana Jig with a medium size live Shrimp worked slowly on the bottom for Pompano and big Trout. Look out for Jacks, as they offer a super fight for their size and in many cases they are pure entertainment for the young ones. ▣

Captain Sergio Atanes is Host of the Fishing Adventures Florida Show on Waypoint TV, Carbon TV and YouTube. He is owner of Reelfishy.com fishing charters and can be reached at: 813-973-7132 or by email at: atanes@msn.com

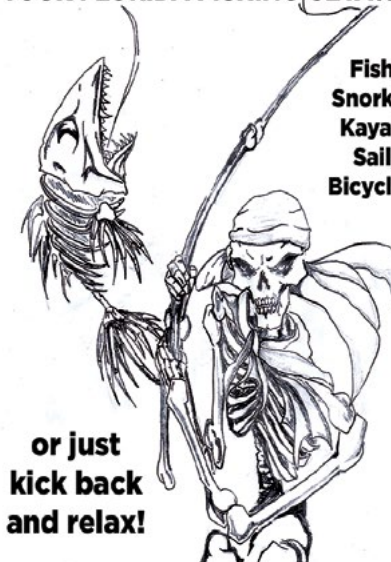
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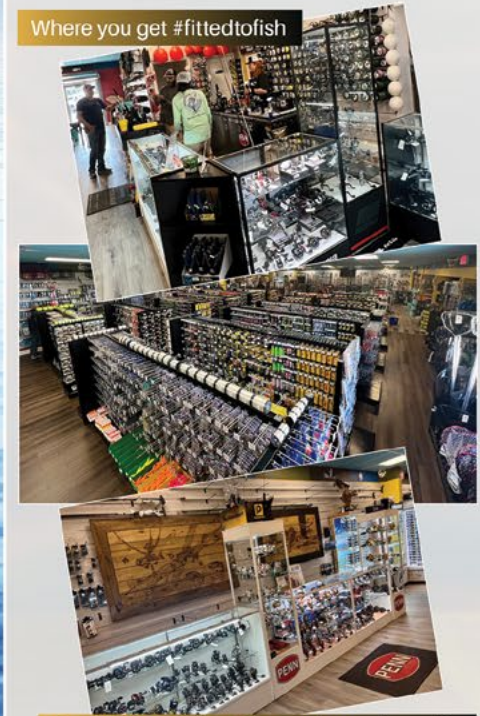
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