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ONSHORE & OFFSHORE Magazine

January 2023

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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 Bay.

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.

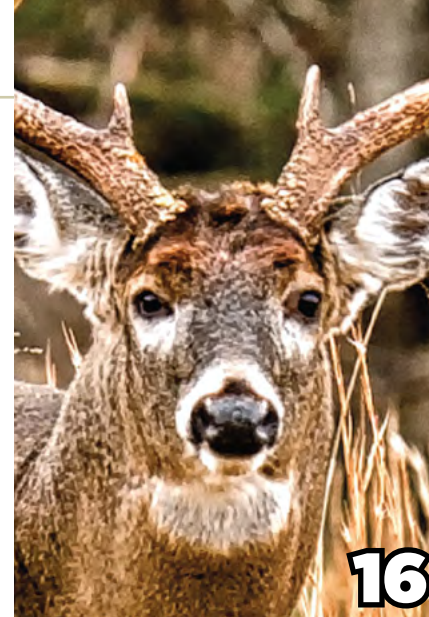
There is so much to do right here. If you want a really wild experience with animals try Giraffe Ranch or Safari Wilderness where you can take a real safari and see lots of exotic wildlife in a naturalistic setting. You can even feed lemurs grapes! If you want to get out on the water, you can come to 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.

Merle can be reached at Belle Harbour Marina, located at 307 Anclote Road in beautiful, historic Tarpon Springs or by phone at 727-943-8489.



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ON THE COVER: Captain Jimmy Nelson and Luiza with two beautiful American Red Snapper to kick off the New Year! To follow along on their adventures, head on over to www.livinthedreamtv.com for more information and channel listings!



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**NORTHEAST
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WHERE DID 2022 GO?

by Tom Mohrbach

I thought about calling our local sheriff concerning a recent theft, as someone stole most of 2022! I swear it's true. It seems like just a few months ago; I was celebrating Easter. How can 2022 be over? Where did it go? Who stole it? I know on occasion that the Grinch attempts to steal Christmas but not a whole year.

One thing for sure was that I didn't go fishing nearly as much as I wanted to. I hope to remedy that this year. You could call that a resolution if you want to, but I'm just calling it a goal. I'm not calling it a resolution, as experience

shows I'm not great at keeping those. In addition to fishing more, I hope to catch more fish.

I believe each year I reside here; I incrementally become a better fisherman. If I continue to improve my tactics at the same rate as the past few years, soon, I should be able to have fish fries three times a year instead of only twice. Until then, a McDonald's fish sandwich is always an option. Who doesn't like square fish?

December seemed to go by in a week. Fishing was almost non-existent. When I received

an email from this magazine's editor advising me to submit my column, I ran to my calendar and was shocked it was already that time. I scratched my mostly bald head and searched my mostly empty mind wondering what I could possibly write. I didn't entirely figure that out.

I suppose I could lament about missing ice-fishing opportunities in my home state of Michigan, but I despised ice-fishing. I don't miss a single thing about it. Plenty of Midwesterners love it. I'm sorry but sitting on a tiny stool while staring into a small hole that I augered through the ice isn't my idea of fun, especially while my toes and fingers are going numb. I prefer sun fishing in a warm climate with a cold beer or two.

Sorry folks, but this column is going to be short. I can hear cheering from some of you. Be nice! After all, it is a new year filled with endless possibilities. I suggest making some extra time for fishing this year.

I certainly plan on it just after I finish investigating who stole most of last year. ☒

Tom Mohrbach is a retired police officer. He has published four novels since his retirement. All of his books are available to order on Amazon. Tom recommends that outdoor enthusiasts who like action/adventure stories check out his novel, Northern Nightmare. See his website: tommohrbach.com for additional information on all of his books.



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THE RIVERS REPORT

by Captain John Rivers

What a weird weather pattern we experienced in November; being 5 to 8 degrees warmer than normal.

December was no different and many have asked what this has done to the fishing? Well, the Trout bite has been outstanding

the past month and and January should be very good, as the water temps are in the 60s, right where the Trout like it.

My "go-to" baits for Trout are soft plastics such as a Matrix Shad on a 1/8 ounce to 1/4 ounce jighead depending upon how deep of wa-



ter I'm fishing. I also have a 17MR MirrOlure tied on, as well as, a Heddon Spook topwater plug. These three lures are my staples when it comes to Speckled Trout fishing. I've been using them for years and they have never failed me yet.

Now let's talk Redfish! Big schools of reds have moved into Tampa Bay, as they have come

in the past two years in January. All I can say is that they are chewing and as happy as my Bull Bay Banshee, 7'2" fishing rod matched with my Shimano Stradic. They are chewing on a variety of baits, from cut Whitebait, to cut Mullet and if you want to toss artificials, tie on a Heddon Spook or a Gold Spoon and hang on! Look for pushes in the water plus lots of Mullet and you'll find the reds; in depths of 2-5 ft of water is where they'll be hanging out.

Moving on to Sheepshead. The bite has been outstanding on many of the bridge pilings, rock piles and docks in Tampa Bay. Live Shrimp and Fiddler Crabs are the baits of choice. Remember to have a light leader and a small #1 or #2 J-Hook tied on. I like Gamakatsu, but you can use what you like or you can use a 1/4 or 1/4 ounce jighead depending upon what the current & tide is doing.



Snook fishing has been slower, and it will be till Spring, especially with the major cold fronts we have in January. It puts the Snook into Winter mode; acting very lethargic and not feeding much. Once the water warms back up, the Snook should be back to their usual feeding patterns, but until then, I suggest letting them adjust to the weather change and go after some other species.

As you can see the fishing is usually very good in January and it should last till the last week of February as we get closer to Spring, then everything changes and the Snook bite fires off! 🎣

Captain John Rivers has a lifetime of fishing knowledge and over 20 years of experience fishing the gulf coast. For more information or to book an unforgettable fishing trip, please call 727-313-1781.



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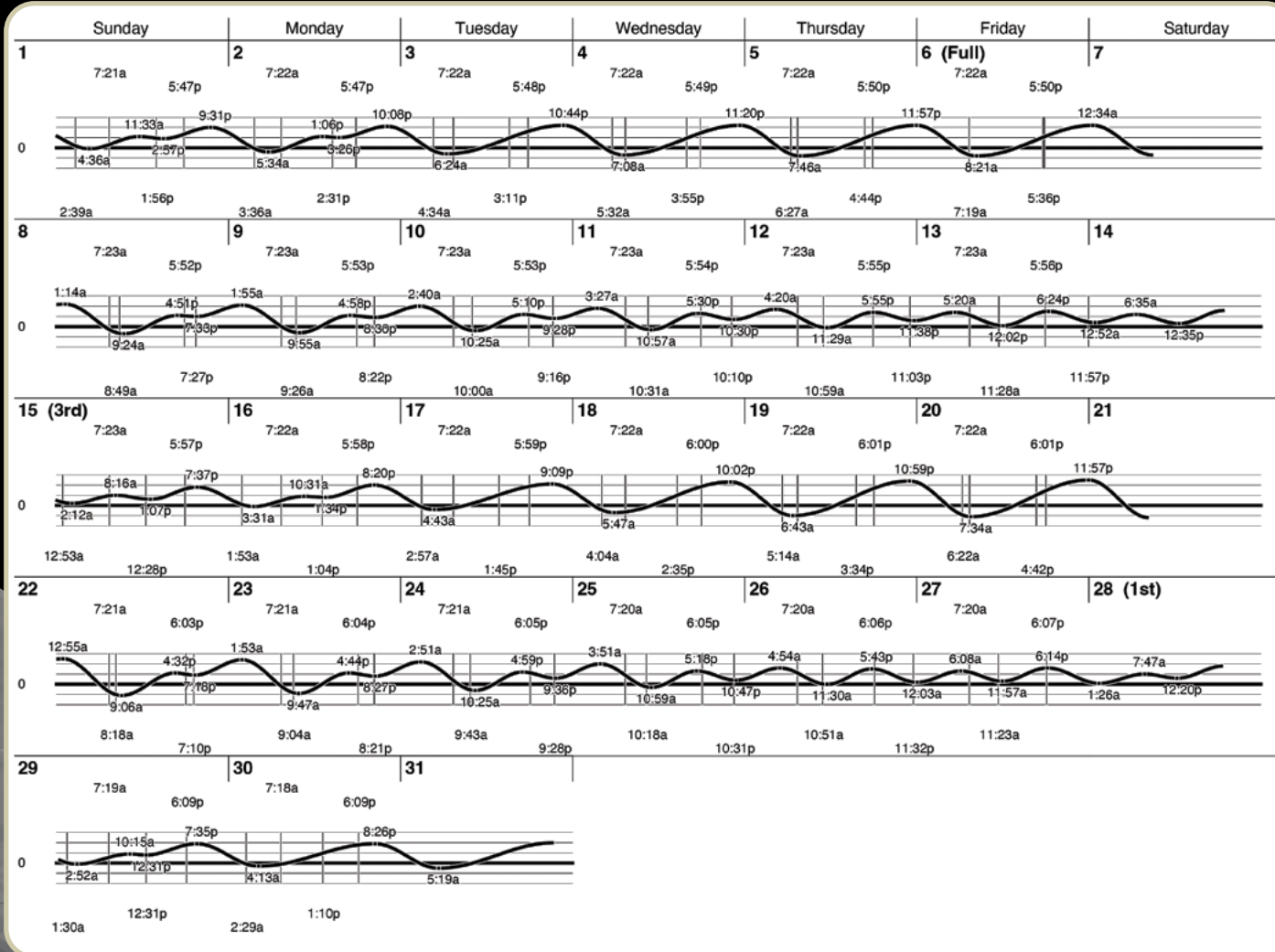
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area			Conversions for St. Marks River Area		
High	Low		High	Low	
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound	+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End	-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River	-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key	-1:59	-2:04	Naples
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa	-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors	-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River	-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River			
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek			

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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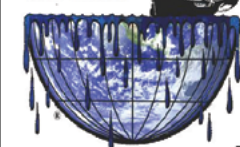
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INCREASE YOUR SUCCESS RATES IN THE FIELD

BY JAMES STOVALL

Photo By Kathy Porupski | www.kathypix.com

Welcome to another hunting season, I can't believe it's upon us once again. I've spent a considerable amount of time pondering what to write about this month. My goal is to help readers and provide my personal tips. This month I'd like to discuss scouting methods and product selection; hopefully, this article will assist someone in filling their freezer or putting a trophy on the wall.

This time of year, I spend a lot of time preparing for upcoming hunts. It is my belief that the more I put in, the more I will get out. Every year, I spend way more time scouting than I do actually hunting. I compile information from past years and the present to select the best

stand locations. Entry and Exit routes to my stand are crucial for success; always avoid walking on known deer trails.

Acorns seem to be the key right now. Nothing beats boots on the ground and locating prime feeding areas. Take advantage of Google Earth to look for natural pinch points caused by flag ponds, cypress heads, roads, etc. While scouting, mark on a GPS or smart phone app any pertinent deer sign and later transfer this information using pins to mark and label on Google Earth.

I love using scrape drippers and Black Widow Lures over scrapes. I'll start with a known active scrape from last season. I simply use my machete or a long stick and



scrape the dirt, leaves, and twigs away. I leave a highly visible bare spot under a licking branch. I always spray my machete or stick with Black Widow Lure before pawing the mock scrape and finally, I hang a dripper over the scrape as high as I can reach and fill with my Black Widow Scrape Master or XXX. Black Widow is the best scent I've ever used.

Game cameras have been a valuable tool for me over the years. Moultrie cameras are my personal favorite. I now have multiple cameras running in several different management areas. It has become an addiction for me, running all my cameras. I usually have my cameras on video mode. This reveals un-



limited angles of the rack, direction of travel, deer behavior and responses at a scrape. Moultrie cameras are affordable, have fast trigger speeds and options to cover any hunter's needs.

I refuse to sacrifice what might be the shot of a lifetime to an inferior broadhead. I switched to Swackers this season and I've already put them to the test on deer and hogs and they have performed flawlessly. Swackers fly like a field point, have superior design and are scalpel sharp, resulting in incredible blood trails. I encourage you to go on Swackers website and watch the "broad head Integrity" barrel test. You might be surprised how some literally come apart as seen with a high-speed camera.

Remember, shot placement is the key to a short blood trail. Be mindful of the deer's vitals and anatomy. Be patient, wait for a good angle and follow thru on every shot. The exit hole can be more important than the point of entry. Examine the vitals on every deer harvested. Notice what vital organs were impacted and use that information for future shots.

Gold Tip offers three arrows in the hunting line, which includes the Velocity, Hunter and Kinetic. My personal choice is the Velocity Pro; these are lightweight, accurate and sizzling fast. The Hunter line offers versatility to meet any hunter's demands. The Hunter is the all-purpose "go to" arrow. The Kinetic's small diameter and heavier weight offers deep penetration and hard-hitting performance for the toughest animals on the planet.

Shooting form is often an overlooked part of the overall equation. While practicing, try these tips; just like building a house, it all starts with a good foundation. Start with feet about shoulder width and keep a nice relaxed grip on the bow with your elbow slightly bent. If using a release, make sure your finger is over or wrapped around the trigger, this insures a straight back pull without transferring unwanted torque on the string. A good follow thru is essential to accuracy.



These products and techniques have all helped me shrink my groups.

These are just a view products and tips I rely on for personal hunts. There are many factors that can influence the outcome of a hunt so I rely on the best gear to improve my chances. Don't sacrifice the shot of a lifetime because of inferior gear. I encourage you to visit these product sites and decide for yourself. I hope your hunting season is safe and productive! 🎯

**On Shore,
James Stovall**



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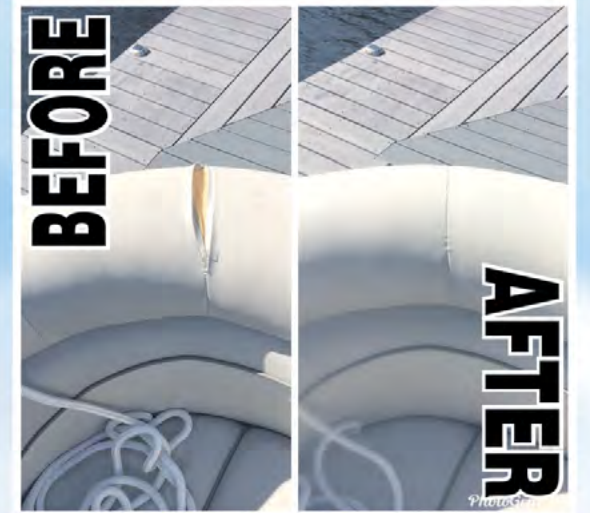
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Cast your line in Citrus County, Florida for world-class fishing, year-round!

by Christine Steele

Set on Florida's Nature Coast, just a short drive from Orlando, Tampa, Gainesville and Ocala, Discover Crystal River is a true sportsman's paradise. Three spring-fed rivers — the Homosassa, the Chassahowitzka and the Crystal — feed into the Gulf of Mexico and create a rich fishing habitat.

This combination of fresh and salt water fishing, along with the pristine untouched character of the landscape and easy, relaxed pace of life, make Citrus County a world-class fishing destination year-round.

GO COASTAL OR GO FRESH

Homosassa Bay, with its mangrove shorelines, dense seagrass beds and network of islands, is known for its giant Redfish, but that isn't the only species that will give you reel-burning thrills in this authentic Old Florida destination. You'll also find an abundance of Spotted Seatrout, Cobia and Spanish Mackerel ready to challenge the best of light tackle anglers. The clear, pristine flats are perfect for drifting or trolling along and taking in the scenic beauty all around.

At the mouth of the Crystal River, reel in Tarpon, Cobia, Redfish, Seatrout or venture offshore to deeper waters for Snapper, Grouper and Amberjack. At the river's headwaters, you'll find Bass, Sheepshead, Mullet and Bluegill.

Off the coast, the 19,000-acre Tsala Apopka chain of lakes connect with the Inverness and Floral City pools in Citrus County that are prime for landing largemouth bass. Shellcracker and Bluegills also flourish throughout the chain, making this a quality, year-round freshwater fishing destination.

FISHING IS A WAY OF LIFE

Fishing goes back generations in Citrus County. Guides with a lifetime of experience on the water can help you find the best honeyholes to access boatloads of fish, both inshore and offshore.

While visiting, be sure to spend some time swapping fish stories with the locals at unique spots like MacRae's or the Monkey Bar in Homosassa, or Peck's Old Port Cove in Ozello. Or, just sit back and watch the boats go by as you relax with a cold one after a successful day on the water.

During the summer months, Citrus County's famous scallop season is in full swing. The waters off Crystal River and Homosassa are two of only a handful of places in Florida where you can gather buckets of fresh, juicy scallops. Dive into this local tradition likened to an underwater easter egg hunt.

FROM FISH TO FORK

After a fantastic day on the water, pull your boat up to shore and bring your buckets of crabs, cleaned scallops or fish to one of more than a dozen restaurants or seafood shacks where a local chef will cook your catch in this time-honored Florida tradition.

Call ahead and let them know you're coming, then have a seat and let them serve it up to you with all the fixin's, fresh from the water and onto your plate.

With so much to see and do, plan your next fishing trip to Citrus County and discover authentically awesome fishing and more in the soul of Florida. ☑

Visit DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com to plan your trip.

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COMPANY LISTENS? The Pathfinder 2400TRS is Born

by Captain Sergio Atanes

Sometimes it's hard to make changes in our lives from everyday things in this case fishing. When I first started in the business, paper graph depth finders where a thing and if you could afford a Ray Jefferson, Furuno or a Si-Tex machine, you were in the game. Then along came the digital world and I and many other captains said no way, I am changing, but we did change, and for the better!

Soon we found the improvements made fishing easier in a way, but also tougher. The average Joe could learn to catch fish if he just spent a little time learning how to read bottom with the new system. The "honey" holes, ledges, and rock piles we the experts already knew about have now become public knowledge.

Boat and motor technology has also changed so much in recent years making life easier and more enjoyable. For instance, outboards now are at a peak in dependably. At least I can say for



my Yamaha Outboards there is no more carrying a 9.9HP extra motor in case your main one gave out; which happened on a regular basis for me. This has all come about because companies are listening to the end user and making the changes needed to succeed in a competitive market.



I want to give credit to the Maverick Boat Group for being one of those companies. Its tough to make changes when you already have a great product, but they listened to many of us who spend hundreds of hours on the water and get to hear not just from the angler but from their "better half" on what they would like to see in a fishing boat.

So, here is my take on it. Some of the best fishing boats in the market fall short on some things and yes, I know you can't have the perfect boat. But, that is where the new 2400TRS comes into play. We wanted a nice casting deck, an enough storage for the vitals, enough baitwells to able to fish all day, decent draft to fish the shallows. Pathfinder had that but was missing and here is where they listen.

The boat can handle up to a 350HP Outboard, one 38-gallon live well standard with the option to add another 38-gallon release well. A console big enough to put up to a 16-inch screen sonar/GPS combo, stereo plus a VHF radio. Cupholders, a place for your cell phones, wallet and key. Add the t-top with more storage and more rod holders and you've got a real fishing machine!

For the lady anglers, they integrated a forward facing backrest at the bow, and added a larger console with an optional pump out toilet to accommodate all your needs. They added center rear seating with under seat storage and raised the gunnels by 4 inches, which is great if you have kids. Plus, a Teak bow table that fits inside the console when not in use. Want more shade? They have it with a shade package that will satisfy all her needs.

Some of the items listed are optional and there are a ton of other optional items you can add to make your 2400TRS your dream fishing adventure machine. Maverick Boats has been a winner for a long time and I can't wait as mine should be in by the time this article is published.

For more information about this great boat please head on over to their website at: www.pathfinder-boats.com

Captain Sergio Atanes is host of Florida West Coast Fishing Report on Facebook and YouTube every Monday night 7-8 p.m. live. He is also host to Aventuras De Pesca USA on national TV and Radio Show. Email the captain at: atanes@msn.com, call 813-973-7132 or visit: reelfishing.com.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE POWER PLANTS!

by Captain George Hastick

One of the great things about power plants and fishing in the wintertime, is they use water to cool the plant, which means warm water outflows. The colder it gets the more people run their heat and the more the power plant runs. This produces a plume of warm water around the outflow of the powerplant for a half mile or longer. So how does this benefit you and your fishing?



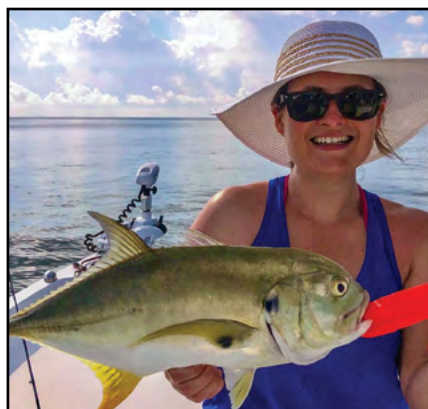
There are a few fish that can warm-up areas of their body but the only known fish to be fully warm blooded is the Opah, also known as the Moonfish, which you will not find in our area. Almost all fish are cold blooded, meaning they are only as warm as the water they are in. Knowing this, a fish's survival instincts kick in during the winter months to look for warmer water. This includes deep residential canals, rivers, dark and mud bottom areas and power plants.

For example, one of my favorite gamefish, the Snook, prefer

water temperatures between 70-82 degrees and become dormant below 50 degrees. They run the risk of dying when the water temperature goes below that. Other fish like Redfish can tolerate the cold better, but they can be slow to bite in the colder Wintertime waters.

Fortunately for us we have multiple power plants in the Tampa Bay Area, that are very productive. We did loose the A.W. Higgins power plant in Oldsmar, which was demolished, but the two good plants that still remain are the Apollo Beach Teco plant and the Duke Bartow plant in St. Petersburg. They both can be very productive, but the Apollo Beach plant can be better since it's plume of water goes right out into Tampa Bay's open waters. This attracts more fish to the plant. They both are fish magnets in the wintertime and attract a wide variety of species, From smaller fish like silver trout all the way up to larger predators like shark, cobia and even wintertime tarpon.

The Apollo Plant is known for its cobia run and if it is a good year, you can run the deep flats out in front of the plant and sight cast to cobia, large jacks, pompano and sharks. The other thing that is great about this plant is if you do not have a boat there is the Apollo

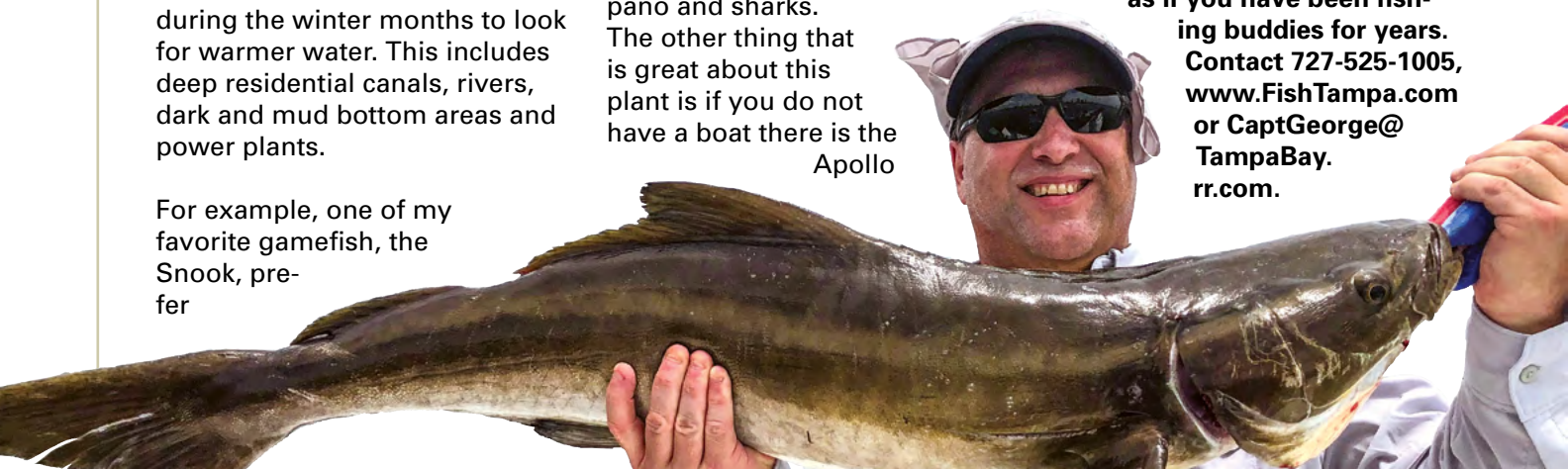


Beach Nature preserve beach across from the plant that you can fish from and catch quality fish like cobia and more.

Both plants can give you a wide variety of fish, besides the previously mentioned fish there is also mangrove snapper, Snook, Redfish and more. So don't let the cold waters of wintertime stop you from fishing, there is still action to be had!

Good luck, tight lines and remember to reel, reel, reel! 🎣

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



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A SOLID DAY OFFSHORE

by Anthony Gomez

The day had finally come. A weather window had shown up to take the boat out offshore. I was going with my uncle and cousin on the 28 foot Cobia. We were all up at 4:30am, getting all the gear in the boat so we could get out of the inlet at around sunrise. After we were fully packed up, we went to the gas station to fill up the boat and then made our way to the ramp. We ended up getting to the ramp at sunrise but it wasn't that big of a deal. We dropped the boat in the water and we set out for the first spot.

Once we arrived, we noticed that the water was somewhat stirred up. A big storm had just passed a few days before, so it made the water a little dirty. It also

seemed to spread the fish out from our spot. Usually, we will mark multiple big schools of snappers on the bottom with the sonar. This day, we weren't marking those big schools of Yellowtail and Mangrove Snappers. We continuously moved around the spot until we finally saw a decent school of fish on the sonar. We got setup, dropped the anchor, and ended up perfectly up current of the Snapper school we had marked.

Before fishing, my cousin and I get a chum block in the water to start to get the snappers in a feeding mode. We also throw in scoops of chum that we mix with sand and oats to help create an even thicker chum slick.

While starting to chum, my uncle noticed that there was not much current at all. For 75



feet of water, the current usually runs at around 2 knots. It was only about 1 knot of current on this day. This was good for free lining yellowtails and other snappers but not good for bottom fishing with long leaders for mutttons. When fishing for mutttons, decent current is important to move the bait far away from the weight. With no live baits as well, it was going to be pretty hard to fish bottom for big mutton snappers. We all ended up free lining with jig heads to catch the

snappers that were moving up in the chum slick. We were using 1/8 oz jig heads with small chunks of bonita belly. A 4000-6000 size reel is the usual with a light fluorocarbon leader.

My uncle was the first one to hook up. He got a nice keeper Yellowtail to start off. We proceeded to catch an assortment of Mangrove, Yellowtail, and Lane Snapper. Mixed in with them were also some blue runners, grunts, and a lonely red snapper that my cousin was very lucky to catch. After about 15 keeper Snapper, my uncle decided that we should switch spots and go try to find more current so we could fish for some Mutttons. We worked our way North for a few miles to about 90 feet of water. We did end up finding some better current but did not find the mutttons we were looking for. We had anchored and tried for about an hour with no success. As we were getting ready to leave and go back to our original spot, we had some surprise guests visit the boat. 3 nice sized Mahi-Mahi swam behind the boat and started to eat pieces of chum from the chum slick. I noticed them first so I grabbed my light rod and pitched out a small swimbait that I had tied on. I always have a rod ready for when some Mahi decide to swim by the boat. As soon as the bait hit the water, the bigger cow Mahi swallowed the swimbait and I was hooked up.



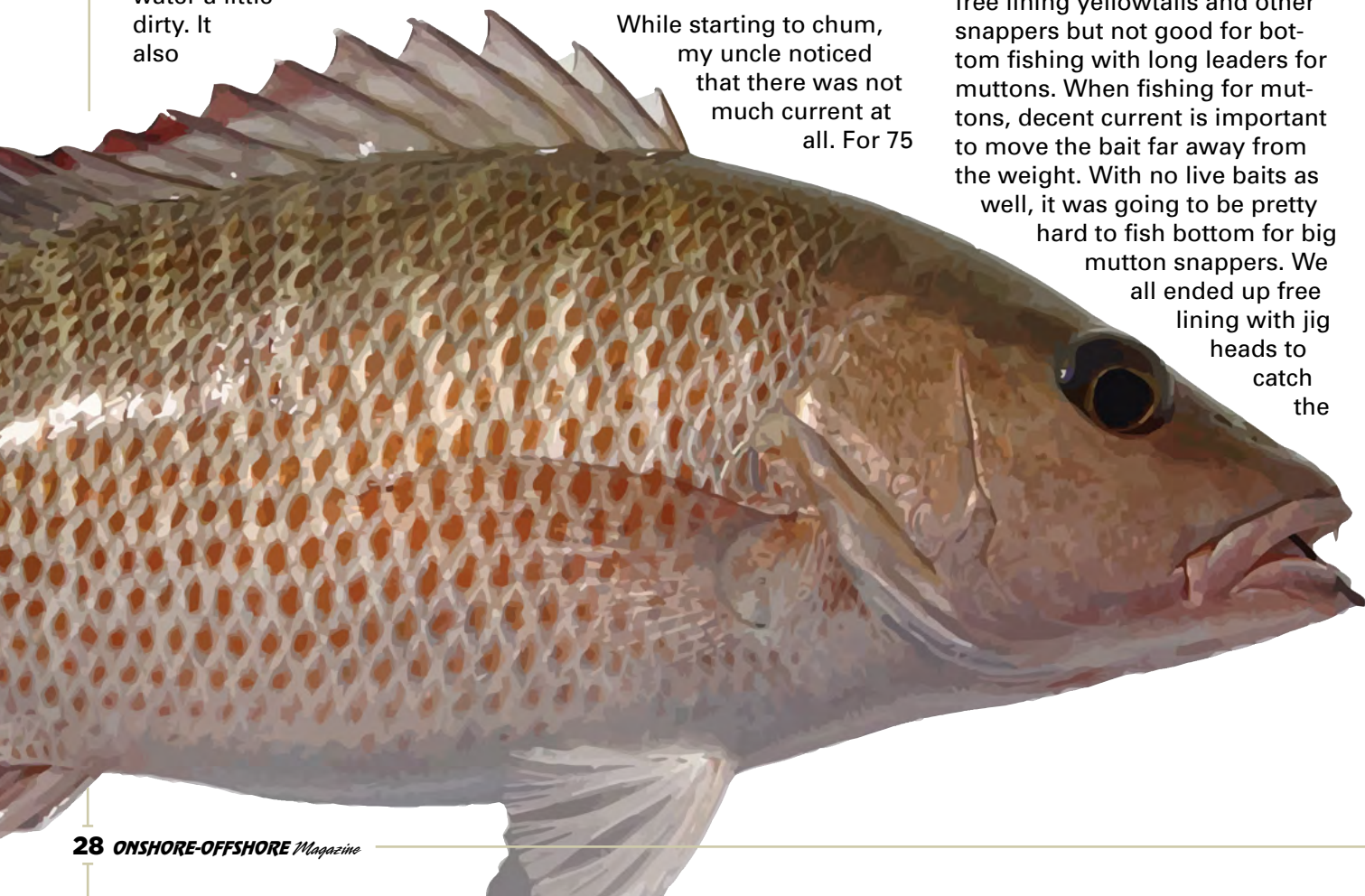
Seconds after, my cousin pitched in his shrimp lure he had rigged for mahi and hooked the big bull mahi. We both were excited to finally hook up again after a disappointing attempt at some mutton snappers. The third Mahi had disappeared for a minute but then came back and ate a chunk bait that my uncle tossed at him. Once we landed those three Mahi, we headed back South to get back on the solid Snapper bite that we had left behind.

We positioned back on the same area we caught all the snappers before. During the afternoon, we still continued to catch plenty of Snapper. The only dif-



ference was we were catching more blue runners than before and a lot of short sized snapper. We still were having fun getting bit every cast but I soon got the bite that we were looking for all day. I felt a nice hit and set the hook into a heavy fish. I could feel the weight and was telling everyone that this was a nice one. The only problem was that my uncle and cousin both got tangled in my line. I ended up sitting there, holding my line tight while they both tried to untangle this mess they had made. After about a solid minute, they got the tangle out and I was back in the fight. I was trying to get this fish up quick because of the amount of goliath groupers and sharks that eat our fish, but this beast would not let me gain any line. I eventually got his head turned and up came my biggest Mutton Snapper ever. He was 27 inches long and one of the biggest ones we have caught while free lining for Yellowtails and Mangroves. If it wasn't for the stirred up water, the goliaths and sharks would have devoured him before I even had a chance to see him.

Eventually, we decided it was time to go and made our way back to the boat ramp. We drove home happy and with a cooler full of some nice fish. We ended up giving away some of the snappers and mahi to some of our neighbors and filleted the rest of the fish for all of our family. All in all, it was great to finally make it back out offshore and slay the fish with my uncle and cousin. ▣



PUTTING THE HEAT ON THE FISH

by Captain Sergio Atanes

January weather determines what kind of fishing we do, and under normal conditions we should be in the low 40s at night and high 60s during the day. Using this as a guideline I am going to fish the warm water runoff at the Apollo Beach power plant at first light. My experience tells me the Snook, Redfish and Trout are most active early in the morning as the sun rises, and as the surface water warms up the Jacks, Sharks and Catfish seem to take over.

Little Manatee river is brimming with action this month. Snook are in the creeks and cuts along the river; Redfish and Trout are looking for food, and Jacks are on the prowl for anything they can sink their teeth into.

I prefer using artificial baits in the Winter months keeping me moving in

search of the prey and at the same time teaching myself new spots that I would not try during the Summer. Soft baits I prefer are **Salt-water Assassin Paddletails in Pumpkin Seed with a Chartreuse Tail, Plum with Chartreuse Tail, Chicken on A Chain and Avocado with a Red Tail.** This time of year work them slowly along the banks and edges of drop-offs. I can cover more area and increase my chances of finding fish pitching plastics. Look for holes along the mangrove line 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.

For hard baits, my go to has always been the **MirrOlure 52M11 Red head with Silver sides and White on top and bottom.** Although this past



year they introduced the **SKIN Series (CS17MR PIN, CS17MR PRD and CS85MR Mullet)** and it's been a killer for me. Early morning casting while working them from the shallows and over the holes seems to produce the most action.

For live baits, Shrimp works great this month, paired with a 1/0 circle hook and a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader about 36 inches long. Remember, this time of year the water is extremely clear, so the light leader helps in getting more strikes. I use a small split shot placed about 4 inches from the hook, as this allows me to keep the bait close to the bottom where the fish are feeding. You can use the same method as fishing with artificial baits by working the Shrimp along the bottom with a slow retrieve, which helps in locating where the fish are staging.

Sheepshead are one of my favorites during the Winter months, as they prove to be great fighters on light tackle. Feeding on mostly Shrimp, Fiddlers, Small Crabs and Barnacles, 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 Tampa Bay, hanging around the ledges, wrecks and rock piles in anywhere from 12 to 30 feet of water and average in size from 4 to 12 pounds. Here, I prefer to use medium tackle, specifically a 7'6" rod medium action with a larger spinning reel paired with 20-pound test braided line and 25-pound test fluorocarbon leader tied with a loop knot to a number 1/0 j-hook. I use a "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. Live shrimp, fiddler crabs, bloodworms and sand fleas are some of their favorite baits.



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

Captain Sergio Atanes is host of Florida West Coast Fishing Report on Facebook and YouTube every Monday night 7-8 p.m. live. He is also host to Aventuras De Pesca USA on national TV and Radio Show. Email the captain at: atanes@msn.com, call 813-973-7132 or visit: reelfishing.com.

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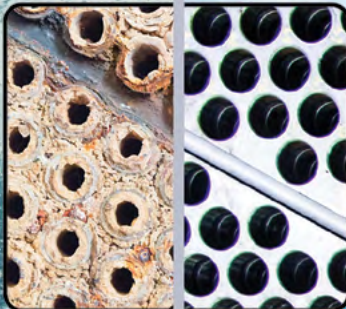
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