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February 2023



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DON'T FEAR SHARKS OR GOATS BUT COWS ARE OUT TO GET YOU.

I think that sharks have been getting a bad reputation that is mostly undeserved. Many people seem to be irrationally afraid of sharks. One of the most frequent questions that I am asked by rental boat customers is, "are there sharks out there?" I try to calm their fears by telling them that the state of Florida Tourism Department has a treaty with the sharks and the sharks have agreed not to come past the 9 mile limit into state waters, as long as we agree not to include them in any more Lawyer jokes. Occasionally, despite this assurance, one of our customers is skeptical because of the inherent flaw in the treaty. All of us, who go out on the gulf regularly, know that the 9-mile line is only marked on the surface, so the sharks (usually being under the water) can't see it. In addition to this, I'm pretty sure that we have violated the terms of the treaty by continuing to tell the Lawyer/shark jokes; at least I know that I have.

For the brighter customers who still do not feel safe after hearing of the treaty, I offer further assurance of safety based on some interesting statistics that I saw on TV and further researched using the Internet. We all know that things on TV and the Internet are always completely true, they have to be don't they??? Sharks do actually kill a few people, but the average annual number of human deaths by shark bite is only 4.2 worldwide. Statistically when you consider the over 7 billion people in the world, this means that you have less than a 1.2 in 1,000,000,000 chance of being killed by a shark in any given year. This is about the same probability as you have of being named the next Queen of England, unless your name is Kate Middleton or Elton John.

There are many other mammals, insects and reptiles that kill far more people than sharks. Some of these are the usual suspects like lions, deadly snakes, crocodiles, elephants and hippos, but there are several others that you might never expect. The show that I saw on Shark Week noted that even goats kill more people worldwide than sharks. I was skeptical about this and I did considerable research on the subject. After investigating thoroughly, it appears to me that this may have been baaaaaaad information. It does appear that a demented mountain goat killed a hiker in Washington's Olympic Park in 2010 and a domestic goat killed its owner in Georgia in 1991, but I don't find a pattern of homicidal behavior in the goat population at large. Apparently the Georgia goat had been abused by it's owner in an ill fated attempt to make it an attack goat and it was simply responding to the abuse. It chased the abuser onto the porch and butted him repeatedly until he fell to his demise. Surely no jury would hold this goat responsible for it's actions, it probably is covered under "Stand your Ground" Laws. I think the whole goat thing was probably misinformation disseminated by the shark lobby to take the heat off of their namesake.

Anyway, this whole goat thing kind of distracted me from my point, but there are many other surprisingly deadly species out there that kill lots more people each year than sharks:

- Cows kill 20 people per year in the US alone. Statistics for worldwide cow related deaths are not readily available. Perhaps there is a bovine conspiracy to keep this information under wraps. Cows can be very Moooooody so don't mess with a cow!!!
- Bees cause over 400 human deaths per year so BEE very afraid!!!
- Mosquitoes far outrank all of the other most dangerous animals by killing 2 million humans per year. There's nothing funny about that.

Sadly, in addition to all of the above, traffic accidents kill around one person for every 5000 worldwide annually, thus you are around 200,000 times more likely to die in a car wreck than in a disagreement with a shark. Now I'm afraid to go out on the street.

Anyway, I think I've made my point; sharks aren't really all that bad. Gotta go, there's a mosquito in my office, It's kill or be killed.If the mosquito doesn't take me out, you can find me at Belle Harbour Marina at 307 Anclote Road in Tarpon Springs or at merle@onshoreoffshore.com. Stop in and ask about a great boat rental or just discuss the relative merits of sharks and goats. Keep an eye out next month for some great new articles about my recent trip to Crocodile Bay and Botanica in Costa Rica, it was great and nothing killed me!



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ON THE COVER: A very happy angler with a beautiful Sheepshead caught on a recent outing with Captain Sergio Atanes. Read more about the "Bandits of Tampa Bay" by flipping to page 30 of this issue. Enjoy & tight lines!

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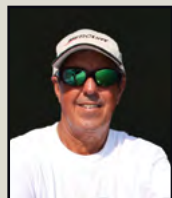


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## Captain Sergio Atanes

Cold water is driving the fish into deep holes, edges of channels, rivers and the old standby; the warm water discharge of power plants. On charters with newbies,

I use live shrimp on a jighead bounced slowly just off the bottom. With more knowledgeable anglers, I tie on a Saltwater Assassin Paddle-tail and have them work the edges of drop-offs or around docks.

Best time for me to fish is later in the day, starting around 9:00 am or later, giving the water temp time to increase a little.



## Captain George Hastick

Cold fronts with warmer days in a row between fronts can create a good bite on the flats. But, on those colder days, turn to obvious warmer areas like power

plant outflows but also metal seawalls that warm the water just a few degrees more from the sun. The residential canals that are deeper can be a "gold mine" of a variety of fish under the docks like Silver Trout, Whiting, Sheeps-head, Redfish, Snook and Trout to name a few. Try throwing artificials a like Saltwater Assassins Sea Shad and or frisky live Shrimp on a 1/4 oz jighead.

## 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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## THE RIVERS REPORT

by Captain John Rivers

**T**he Sheepshead migration and spawn is in full swing in Tampa Bay. Better known as convicts or I call them "bait stealers", these tasty bucktooth critters can be a lot of fun to catch in February and the first couple weeks of March. The sheepshead run started early this year in mid-

January due to a couple of really strong cold fronts that came through our area.

Sheepshead is very tasty both on the grill and fried. Mix it up with rice and beans and you can't go wrong! So, if you have a chance go to the local tackle store that



has bait, grab four dozen shrimp and go bend some rods!

Next on the menu is Mangrove Snapper. They also have been pretty plentiful on some of my honey holes. I've not got into the big ones, but I have been getting keepers from 14-16 inches in length. Get a few of those in the ice chest and you'll have a nice Snapper sandwich for sure.

Now let's talk Redfish and Snook. With the warmer than normal Winter we've had, the Redfish bite in Tampa Bay has been pretty

good. Snook has also been good; you just have to know where to look for both species. Live bait has been the ticket for reds and Snook, but don't fret, if you like tossing artificials, you'll still get a few. But the better bite has definitely been on white bait. Depths of the fish have ranged from 2 to 4 feet of water. Watch the tides and let the drags sing!

Lastly, let's talk "specks" or the Speckled Trout. The trout bite has been excellent in the rivers in upper and lower Tampa Bay. I've done well on 1/4 oz jigheads matched up with a Matrix Shad in either Lemon Head or Kamikaze. This bait is from Louisiana, and I don't think they've seen it before because they fall for it every time.



I fish both Tampa Bay and the St. Joseph Sound next to Clearwater Beach. If you're on Clearwater Beach, you're only 10 minutes from where I launch, and if you want to fish Tampa Bay it's only 30 minutes from your hotel. You're fishing after a short boat ride to the flats. Let's go! 🎣

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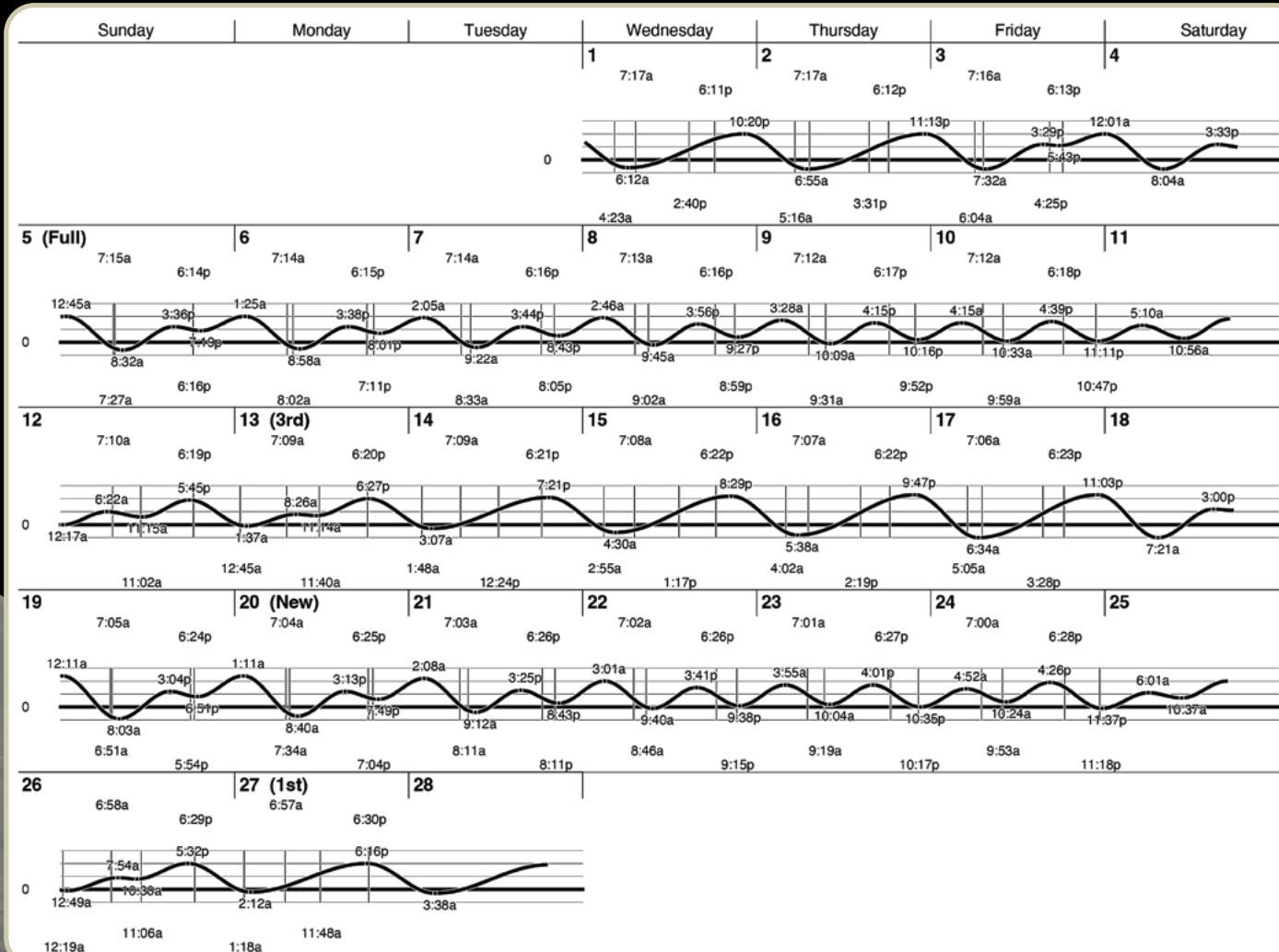
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### Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

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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## LET'S TALK ABOUT RED TIDE

by Killian James

**R**ed Tide is a Marine phenomenon often referred to as HABs (Harmful Algal Blooms) within the scientific community. Red tide often gives the water a red/brown color. Red tide is a single cell organism that is called *Karenia brevis* (KB). KB is part of the subclass dinoflagellate, which has "two whip-like appendages called flagella that propel and direct it through the water at a speed of one meter per hour." (FWC). Harmful and non-harmful algae are common and detrimental to the ecosystem within ranges.

### WHAT IS CAUSING THESE RED TIDE OUTBREAKS IN THE TAMPA REGION?

The conditions presented are perfect for HABs. KB prefers the warm, shallow, clear waters that occur in the Gulf of Mexico. KB occurs naturally in small quantities along the coast. Runoff of phosphates and nitrates, from big sugar and the tourism industry. This leads to a higher population density of KB near ports and harbors. The extra nutrients along with the preferred conditions leads

to the rapid growth of KB in terms it becomes an HAB. Now these algal blooms are not only caused by human impact they have been occurring well before humans. Another way to have an algal bloom is from an oceanic phenomenon called upwelling.

Upwelling is caused by winds and earth's rotation causing water to become displaced allowing a typically cold but nutrient dense water to rise near the surface. This increase in nutrients allows the KB and other organisms to reproduce at higher rates and create blooms. However, upwelling is not as impactful on algae blooms as human impact.

### HOW DOES KARENIA BREVIS PHYLOSILICATE ATTACK?

KB has a methodical form of attack. KB releases a neurotoxin called Brevetoxins (BTXs). The BTX attempts to "bind to and open voltage gated sodium channels (VGSC)." (Cocilova, Milton) These neurotoxins act as receptor blockers causing a depolarization of muscle tissue and nerves. This process can cause paralysis, and other musculature effects within aquatic species. HABs become so large that the paralyzes often cause death within the marine ecosystem. BTX can affect directly affect shellfish, the consumption of them can result in nausea, paralysis and rare cases can even cause death within humans.

Humans near the affected bodies of water can also experience extreme respiratory issues. Red tide (KB) may release neurotoxins however the largest amount of kill-off is a result of algal decay. The decaying algae reduces the amount of dissolved oxygen (DO) within the water causing fish and other marine life to suffocate. This is where you see the substantial amounts of sea life washing onto the coastline.

### HOW DOES RED TIDE AFFECT OUR ECONOMY?

Red tide affects Florida economy through multiple outlets. The tourism industry is the most reported impacted economic industry. According to NCCOS, "2018 red tide event resulting from the shock to the Airbnb market corresponded to \$318 million. Additionally, 2,876 jobs were lost state-wide." Tourism fell because of the coastlines being hazardous. The fishing industry is severely impacted and underreported. Fishers often must travel greater distances and burn more fuel/resources to achieve their catch aspirations. The state declared a state of emergency a few times because of red tide. When this occurs, the state uses tax dollars to compensate the affected industries accordingly. After the red tide has passed, the fishing industry is still affected.

Florida Fish and Wildlife must determine the next seasons fishing regulations which will be affected by the large kill-off from the red tide. To maintain a healthy fishery the populations must be kept in balance. If that means reducing the number of catches allowed per boat/person, then it must attempt to keep the fisheries sustainable. ☑



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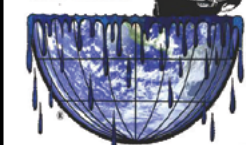
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# BIMINI BLUE

by Misty Wells



**T**he Island of Bimini is known as the “Gateway to the Bahamas”, located only 50 miles off the coast of Florida. Bimini is one of the smallest islands in the Bahamas, and is one of the few island to have maintained its Lucayan name, which translates to “small islands”. The Bahamas hosts over 700 islets, islands, and cays with less than thirty of them having permanent inhabitants. The population of the Bahamas is slightly over 400,000 and similar to Florida their direct success relies greatly on tourism.

The Island of Bimini is very special place with a rich history. It is known as Ernest Hemingway’s favorite escape and host to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on many occasions. Of course, Hemingway and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were vastly different people, but one thing they had in common, was they both created masterful writings during their time on Bimini. On the Island of Bimini Hemmingway penned “Islands in the Stream” and sections of “To Have and Have Not”. During some of his time in Bimini, Dr. King wrote his notes for his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech and other important works. Ernest Hemingway put Bimini on the modern tourism map as he began his travels to the Island in 1935, spending his days hooking some of the largest Marlin in Bimini’s waters and drinking rum. Local historian Ashley Saunders, recounted many a days where his relatives would box with Hemingway in a makeshift ring on the beach during his Summer visits. Ansel Saunders, a Bimini local and world-renowned bonefishing guide, recalls taking Dr. King Jr. out on his boat to the mangrove forest of the “Healing Hole”, a special location that served for inspiration for Dr. King Jr. in writing his own eulogy.



“Taking in Outside” in Bimini is easy. Trying to decide where to begin might be the hard part. The rich history of Bimini does not stop with Hemingway and Dr. King Jr. In 1969 the Bimini Road was discovered lying about a mile from shore, and about 15 feet below the surface. Bimini Road, also sometime called the Bimini Wall, is a collection of granite stones stretching out over a half of mile and stones not native to Bimini, assembled in what legend says “are the steps the led to the Lost Continent of Atlantis”. The city of Atlantis sunk into the ocean in one single day, wiping its existence off the earth over 11,000 years ago. Since that time there has been endless searching by philosophers, scientists, and treasure hunters trying to find a trace of the lost world somewhere below the oceans surface. Regardless of whether you are a believer or a skeptic, Bimini Road makes for a great snorkel or dive site and, of course, some great stories told of your journey.



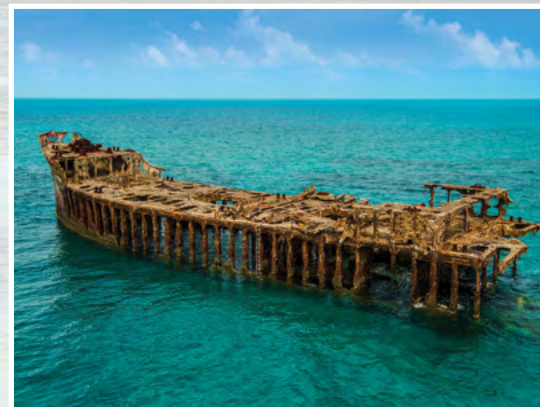
The Healing Hole is another discovery that happened about 20 years ago in Bimini. The Healing Hole is a natural, sulfur-rich pool hidden within a network of winding tunnels in a saltwater mangrove forest that covers four

miles of North Bimini. During outgoing tides, the channels pump mineral-laden freshwater into the pools and many visitors, myself included, believe the waters have healing qualities. Again, whether you are a believer or not, kayaking through the serene waters watching turtles, small sharks and many different species of fish is a day well spent.

After a good day of kayaking, you might be ready for your next underwater adventure. I suggest the “SS Sapona”, built during the First World War and constructed as a cargo ship. During the War steel was so scarce shipbuilders were pressed to find alternative hull materials which is why the “SS Sapona” is uniquely constructed with concrete. In 1926, while trying to outrun a hurricane the “SS Sapona” ran aground and has never moved from her location since. Over the years the “SS Sapona” has been used for many things from oil storage to being used as target practice by the military for World War II. She once was in the rum running business and is

currently a peaceful, man-made reef for an abundance of colorful marine life.

While the rich history and pristine beaches is why Bimini is so “ever popular”, some of the Islands new 4-Star attractions are also worth making the trip for. Resorts World is located on the North end of Bimini and it is a place where you can experience all the accommodations of the modern world while still exploring the rich history of Bimini. Of course, with Bimini being only 50 miles off the coast of Florida, it is a fairly easy Island to



access either by boat, ferry or plane. I have traveled to Bimini several times on the ferry called Balearia Caribbean and I love it, it’s so quick, fun and economical. The Balearia is basically like a mini cruise ship, boasting shops, dining, indoor & outdoor decks and of course, fabulous bars. Resorts World is the gem of Bimini with 750 acres of beachfront resort with 305 luxurious rooms, 2 exclusive pools, private beach, 5 restaurants and



a casino. If you are traveling on your own boat, no worries, Resorts World has the largest marina complex in the Bahamas located in the center of the Sport Fishing Capital of the World.



And don’t worry about over-packing for your adventure! Bimini Blue Adventures has everything you need from kayaks, scuba and snorkel gear, to expert captains for an epic fishing trip. New additions to Bimini is also the Resorts World Cruise Port, so next time you are booking a cruise on



Carnival, Virgin, Royal Caribbean or Celebrity Cruises, you may just have a stop on the beautiful island of Bimini.

I have been visiting Bimini for years and have some long time friends on the Island, some who have never left. There has been a lot of additions and changes to

the island of Bimini, but the Island’s heart is still the same year after year. If you are looking to experience outdoor adventures, relax on island time or experience every shade of blue the world has to offer, Bimini needs to be on your short list of “places to immerse yourself in harmony”.

See you on the blue side of the world! ☑

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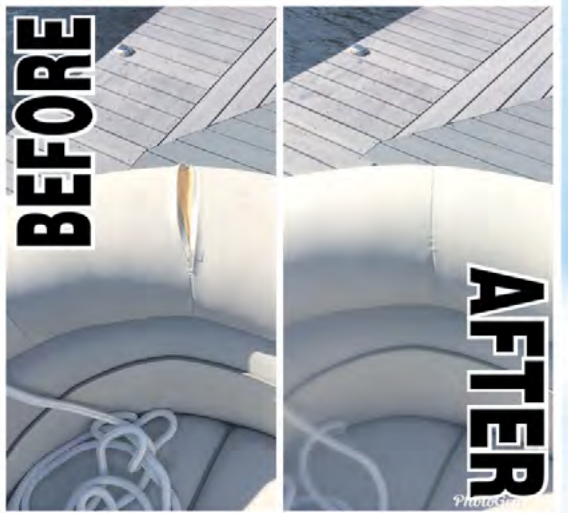


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The Outdoors Expo and Boat Show is back; it's outdoors, family and dog friendly at Armature Works! Who says the best things in life aren't free? Well, they were wrong because this amazing outdoors show is free and tons of fun for the whole family. News Channel 8 is teaming up with the beautiful waterfront view of Armature Works in historic downtown Tampa to bring the 32nd Annual News Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show.

This Annual Outdoors Show will span over three days with admission free to all and will include tons of activities and local vendors all weekend! This family-friendly event will feature hands-on activities for kids and

families, swag from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Tampa Bay Lightning, Boat Dealers, Kayak displays and the culinary dining of Armature works Food Hall. Misty Wells, from the hit TV Show, "Let's Take it Outside", airing to over 160 million viewers Worldwide will be there with her "Kids, Let's Take it Outside" booth all weekend. "Kids, Let's Take it Outside" is geared to hands on fun, learning and education for a kid friendly zone. Kids will learn to measure fish, learn species identification and she will be hosting rod casting lessons complete with prizes.

Have you always wanted to meet your favorite News Channel 8's anchors? Great because through out the weekend they will be on hand to



"meet & greet" and enjoy the festivities. With over 100,000 square feet of exhibits and activity space, the Expo is the perfect place to explore boats of all shapes and sizes, boating acces-

sories, fishing gear, apparel, outdoor supplies, and much more. Boating season is here and it's time to check out high-end luxury vessels, sportfishing boats, pontoon boats for the family and speed boats for that high energy style. There will be over 20 manufacturers and dealers showcased at this annual outdoors show and it is a great time have a first hand experience in what the boating world has to offer right now.

### SHOW DATES & TIMES

Friday, March 31st: Noon to 6:00pm  
Saturday, April 1st: 10:00am to 6:00pm  
Sunday, April 2nd: 10:00am to 5:00pm

And, don't forget to bring your furry family member, they are a huge part of this outdoor show and welcome to come and browse some items specifically for them.



The 32nd Annual News Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show takes place on Friday, March 31 from 12pm – 6pm, Saturday, April 1 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday, April 2 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Armature Works.

Parking at Armature Works will be event pricing in the lots, street and parking garage. You could also use the Riverwalk or Pirate Taxi! Remember, admission to the event is FREE, so we will see you and your crew there! ☑



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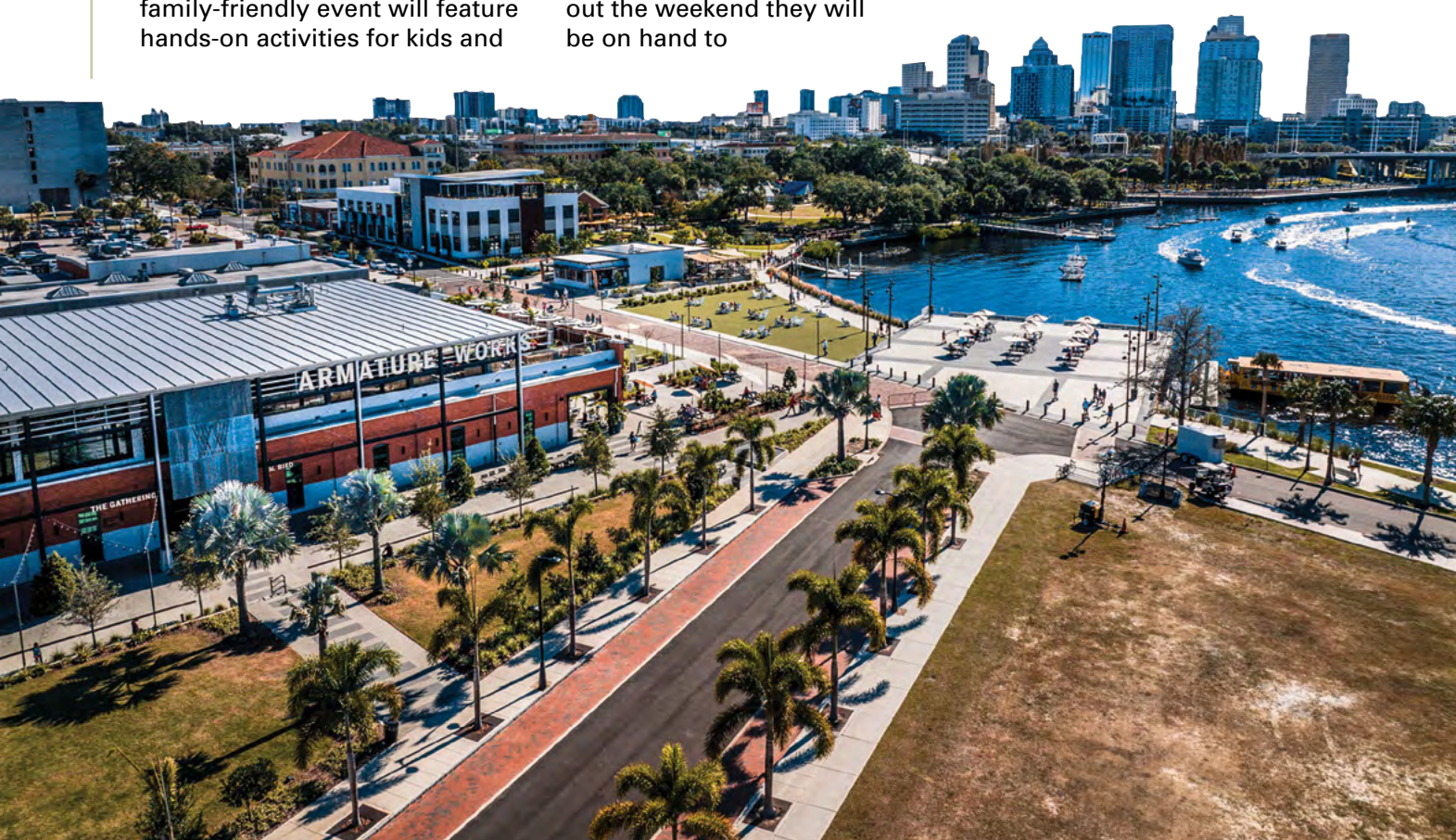
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## THE CONVICTS ARE OUT!

by Captain George Hastick

This time of year, is a great time to target Sheepshead. When other fish tend to disappear because of the cold that is when these striped fish really make their presence known.

Now, depending on who you talk to, they have their nickname the "convict fish" because of their black stripes that look like prison cell bars or their ability to really steal your bait. They are very good at getting a bait off the hook without getting hooked. One of the old time Sheepshead fisherman I talked to years ago (who caught a lot of them) asked me if I wanted to know the secret to catching a lot of Sheepshead. So of course, with the results he had from his experience over the years I said yes. Well with a little smirk on his face he said " you

have to set the hook right before they bite" and we both laughed. Now many years later and the introduction the circle hook many novice fisherman can have great results fishing for Sheepshead.

What is great about the circle hook is that you can let the Sheepshead take the bait and build up pressure which in turn will set the hook for you.

Depending on the size of the Sheepshead I like to use

an Owner Mutu Light Circle Hook in a size #1 or 1/0 with about 3 feet of 20lb fluorocarbon leader. If I am fishing shallow water rock jetties, rock piles, bridges. Seawalls or docks with slow moving water, I will freeline with no weight, a fiddler crab or a piece of Shrimp as my offering. If the current is to fast or the water is deep I will either add a split shot if not a lot of weight is needed or I will use an egg sinker large enough to keep me where I need to be.

When using an egg sinker, I will set it up as a knocker rig. When you do get a hit with the circle hook, just let a little bit of pressure build up and start to lift your rod tip slowly till you get a lot of weight and then do a short, quick hook set to make sure it penetrates their tuff mouth. Oysters, mussels and tube worms are also good Sheepshead baits but may be tougher for you to get.

When fishing structures like bridge and pier pilings or sea walls you can scrape the barnacles off them and let them sink into the water which will create chum for the sheepshead and a lot of times turn the bite on. You can use a shovel, hoe or some kind of scraper to do this but make sure you are not doing it

to someone's private property. You can also go to a bridge and scrape the barnacles off into a bucket to bring the chum to a

private area to be able to chum without damaging any private property. Sometimes you can even put barnacles on your hook and catch them that way, but fiddler crabs are easy to buy and are a great bait for them. You can also look on

the sea walls and mangroves for tree crabs and net them which are also great. Try to hook just the corner of the shell of the crabs as not kill them.

Another trick is to put them under a float when fishing structure at the level you see them suspending at, which will keep the bait in their face. Many times, you will not see them but if it is a known area for them, they can be on the bottom feeding on the rocks or pilings, so don't be afraid to try different techniques. ☑

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## SIGHTFISHING DRUM

by Anthony Gomez

**M**y friend Noah and I were talking after a Thursday morning of work. We both had off the next day and were wondering if we should go fish. We knew that there wouldn't be much wind tomorrow so Noah had the idea to go do some sight fishing. He had just gone up north to a new flat and caught one solid redfish and seen many more. I thought it was a great idea but there was one problem. I didn't have waders. So, I went out to Bass Pro Shops that night and looked for some waders to purchase. About \$100 later, I was ready to go sight cast for some Redfish.

The next day, we left at about 5 o'clock in the morning. We had about an hour drive ahead of us and Noah had to get some gas for his truck. We made it to the spot at the perfect time. The sun was just starting to come up and the water was flat calm. I quickly got my waders on, packed a few lures in the front pouch of the waders, and hopped in the water. I decided to start off with a small topwater while Noah chose a "D.O.A. Cal" that he had caught his Redfish on last time. I fished the topwater for about 45 minutes with no action. Noah didn't have any action either but spooked a couple nice reds.

The sun had come up

some more and it was time to start sight fishing. I was thinking about throwing a Shrimp style bait, but I ended up throwing a Savage Gear Crab. It's a smaller sized bait that won't make a ton of noise when it hits the water, and it mimics any small blue crabs roaming the flats. Noah also told me that he had seen a few black drum last time he was here. Getting one of those on artificial would be tricky, but I knew this crab had a shot at enticing one to bite. I even added on some Blue Crab scented ProCure to give the bait some extra smell. We continued up the flat, blind casting around while still looking for a fish to sight cast at. Noah had a couple chances at redfish, but they didn't seem interested in his "D.O.A. Cal".

Then we approached an area of mangrove trees with a huge amount of shade. We decided to post up for a minute and make a few blind



casts up in the shadow line. On my second cast up in the trees, I hooked a fat Redfish on the crab. He screamed drag on my 1000 sized Shimano Stradic and put up an amazing fight. He ended up being about 26 inches long. This would have been a perfect keeper sized fish, but redfish has been closed in our area and we didn't plan on keeping fish any-

ways. So, I got a nice picture with him and sent him back in the water.

We ended up making a few more cast up in the trees, but couldn't find any other fish.

We continued down

the bank, not really seeing many fish up in the shallows. I decided to make a couple cast out in some deeper water and found a rocky area out in the open. I kept slowly dragging my crab across the bottom and another solid redfish slammed it. He was a little skinner than the first one, but still put up a great fight. He also measured to be about 26 inches long. After I released that fish, Noah ended up changing to the crab as well since it was working great so far.

We waded over a mile before hooking another fish. We had seen many Redfish and a couple black drum but couldn't get any of them to commit to eating the crab. Some would chase it to our feet while others just didn't seem interested at all. Noah did get one to commit, but it ended up being a smaller red that was only about 18 inches long. Once we were about 2 miles from where we started, we decided to head back and just call it a day. We knew that the wind was going to pick up very soon and there was a chance some rain as well. We continued to cast our way back and saw plenty of fish. They were not hitting as well as we had hoped.



While wading back, we stopped at an area that we had seen a good amount of fish pass by us earlier in the day. We waited for a few minutes and had a couple reds pass by. They were not interested but Noah ended up sight casting a decent black drum on the crab. A Black Drum on artificial was the perfect way to end our day. We released the drum, waded our way back to the car, and headed back home. 📸

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## THE BANDITS OF TAMPA BAY

by Captain Sergio Atanes

February is the perfect month for catching one of the hardest fish to land. I am talking about the Sheepshead that invade the rocky bottoms, dock, bridges and wrecks inside Tampa Bay. Sheepshead are nicknamed *bait stealers* or *bandits* for their cunning ability to steal your bait before it even hits the bottom.

The big females migrate in from the Gulf of Mexico to spawn somewhere around mid to late January depending on water temperature and hang around till late March. Sheepshead are great fighters on light tackle, especially the big females that range from 5 to 12 pounds. Feeding on mostly shrimp, fiddlers, small crabs and barnacles they are considered a great table fair, and some anglers even call them chicken of the sea.

### TACKLE SUGGESTIONS

Tackle changes depending where you are fishing for them. Around bridges and docks, light spinning tackle, 10-pound test braided line and 20-pound test fluorocarbon leader with a #1 or #2/0 Circle hook will work just fine.

Fish hanging around these areas tend to be smaller, and most are males in the 1 to 3-pound class. The big females on the other hand prefer the deeper waters of the 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, a 7-foot rod medium action with a larger spinning reel with 15-pound test braided line and 25-pound test fluorocarbon leader tie with a loop knot to a #2/0 circle 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. If you find small jigheads with #1/0 or 2/0 hooks, they also work great around bridges & rock piles.



### BAITS SUGGESTIONS

Live shrimp, fiddler crabs, blood-worms and sand fleas. Fiddler crabs work best, but tides and time schedules for me to catch the little critters make them second best to live shrimp. Since sheepshead are bait stealers, regular shrimp works best, but don't waste money on medium or large shrimp. There's just more bait for them to steal.

### HOW TO FIND THE FISH?

Coast Guard charts are still the best is showing rocky bottom and ledges or wrecks. New software chips are showing the contour of the bottom with rocks and ledges which were not available a few years back. C-Map Reveal and Navionics Platinum to me are the best with C-Map Reveal being a little better.



### LOCATIONS TO FIND THEM?

From shore, bridges, docks, and rocky areas. On the water, their favorite spots are artificial reefs, wrecks, ledges and rocky bottom. Remember, the deeper water holds the bigger fish.

#### Inshore Locations:

- North side of St. Pete Gandy Bridge plenty of rocks along the shoreline.
- Weedon Island Fishing Pier sits on an oyster bed, great fishing all year round.
- Skyway Fishing Piers; both north and south piers. South pier you can drift a live shrimp on a cork with outgoing tide over the rock piles from the old bridge. Big sheepshead in winter months.

#### Offshore Locations:

- Howard Franklin Bridge rock jetties Tampa side, Gandy Bridge rock piles on edge of channel south-side of Gandy Blvd. on the St. Pete side.
- Skyway Bridge & Port Tampa rocks.
- Rocky seawall on the northside of St. Pete airport.
- Range markers, artificial reefs & wrecks.

Fishing for the sheepshead can be a fun and rewarding experience. Hooking and fighting an 8 or 10 lb. sheepshead will put a big smile on your face, and if you have kids they will love the experience. ☑

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](mailto:atanes@msn.com), call 813-973-7132 or visit: [reelfishing.com](http://reelfishing.com).



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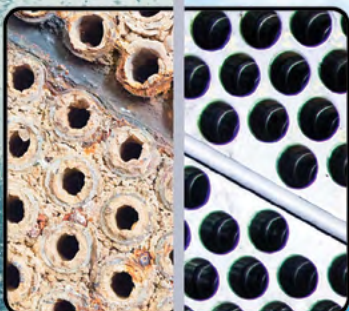




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