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FISHING, NOT CATCHING

I often explain to unsuccessful fishermen who pass through Belle Harbour Marina that the name of the sport is Fishing, not Catching. If you were assured of catching fish on every trip, it would be named differently.

I just returned from my latest annual trout fishing extravaganza in Arkansas. It was a great trip with perfect weather and water conditions, but the fish just didn't want to bite. We caught some fish, but not in noteworthy numbers or sizes. Despite this, I had a great trip and will anxiously await next years excursion.

The reason that I am not dismayed by the lack of significant fish is simple. I met a group of 20 to 30 of my oldest friends (several started first grade with me back when dinosaurs still walked the earth) and we spent two days and three nights enjoying the outdoors on the beautiful White River. In the close to 50 Years that this group has been coming together annually, we have become considerably less driven to catch massive numbers of trout and much more focused on enjoying the company of some truly rare old friends. Even though we did not catch massive numbers of fish, we still enjoyed drinking like fish (do not attempt this at home kids, we are professionals), eating like pigs (incredible dinners of gigantic shrimp from Florida, excellent BBQ from Oklahoma and a fine fish fry of trout and catfish), and generally acting like kids again.

The only thing that kind of concerns me about this group as that so many of them are looking so old. I know that I have not aged that much, but seeing all of them makes me wonder what happened. I guess I am just fortunate to be so well preserved for my age, ha ha!

We still stay at the same resort that we started at 40 years ago at "The Y Cabins" in Salesville, Arkansas. It provides simple accommodations where we usually overlook shortcomings like a shower the size of a postage stamp with less water pressure than I can personally generate after consuming a couple beers, because it just would not be right to stay anywhere else. This is combined with the fact that we would have almost certainly have been thrown out of anywhere else for various infractions like having wet toilet paper fights and leaving the cabins smelling like a group of flatulent llamas had stayed there.

As I sit writing this column, I am still recovering from the effects of my overindulgence, both with food and various adult beverages, while on the trip, but in a couple more days, I will be ready to do it all again.

Ultimately, the moral of this story is to not be dismayed when the fish do not bite, for spending time on the water or in the great outdoors with good company is surely better than anything else you could have done with your time.

Come see Flip the Bird and I at Belle Harbour Marina and we can discuss trout fishing, good friends and good times.

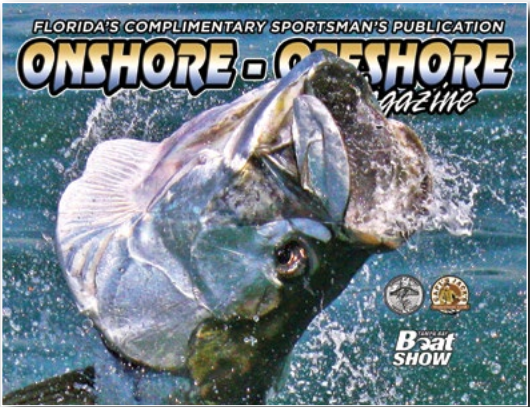
Merle & Flip



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ON THE COVER: The silver explosions will be a common sight along our West coast this June. Captain Tommy Mahinis captures this silverking taking a few jumps.

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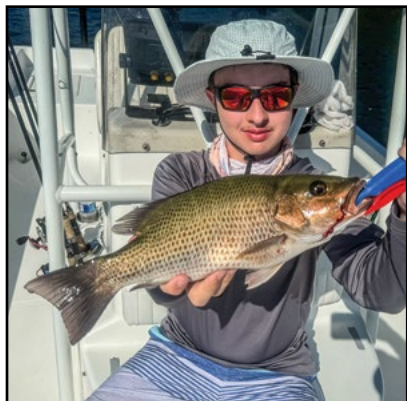


THE SKYWAY IS A FISH HIGHWAY

by Captain George Hastick

If you ever wanted to find a diverse fish magnet look no further than the Skyway Bridge.

The Skyway Bridge spans lower Tampa Bay connecting St. Petersburg to Terra Ceia, Florida. It goes over the main shipping channel coming into Tampa Bay which is a fish funnel in itself. The Skyway area and its approaches can hold a wide variety of fish since you have shallow grass flats on either side of the bridge with 20-30 foot depths near the bridge and the channel averages around 48 feet deep. The channel extends about 20 miles out into the gulf, which gives offshore fish a direct pathway and highway to the Skyway Bridge.



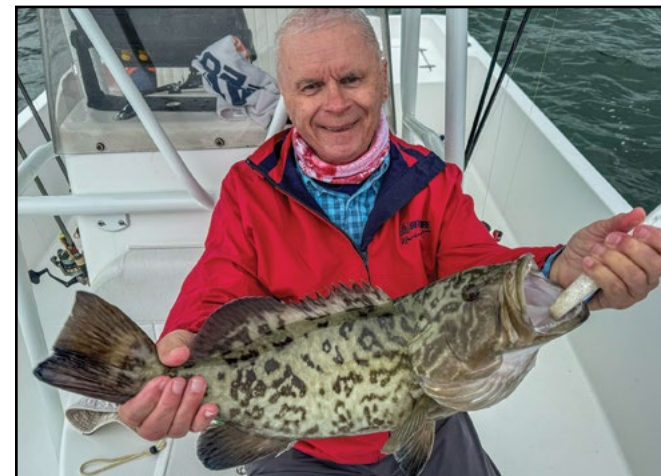
Besides being a fish magnet, the Skway and its fishing piers hold tons of live bait, just one of the reasons it is a fish magnet. You also have a variety of different types of structure that fish gravitate to like pilings with barnacles, eddies, grass flats leading to the bridge, exposed limestone rock edges and piles from dredging, rock ledges, hard bottom, coral and shell bottom, deep pockets and more.

The list of fish that can be caught on and around the Skyway is vast but here is a list to name a few: Tarpon, Red Grouper, Gag Grouper, an occasional Black Grouper, Goliath Grouper, a variety of Snapper, Pompano, an occasional Permit, Black Sea Bass, Spanish Mackerel, Kingfish, Cobia, Bonita, Sheepshead, Snook, Trout, Flounder and more!

The Skyway is definitely known especially for Tarpon and Grouper. Tarpon fishing techniques have



changed at the skyway over the years. Throwing live threadfin, whitebait or crabs along the pilings and letting it drift back to the eddies was always a good method. Tarpon are also scavengers willing to eat dead bait on the bottom or chunks drifting in the current. So, a technique that is popular now is chunking for Tarpon with Threadfin. Basically, you will set up at the bridge and start throwing pieces of Threadfin over the side to attract Tarpon into your chum slick and then you drift a larger chunk of Threadfin back in the slick. There is no mistaking the thump of a Tarpon and your battle begins. If Tarpon is not your thing there is Grouper around



the Skyway pilings, the edges of the channel, wrecks and rockpiles around the area, that hold great Grouper action. Check the regulations for the kind of Grouper you catch but the most popular is the Gag Grouper which is closed and has yet to be announced as to when it will be opened. Live bait like white bait, Pinfish and Threadfins fished on the bottom near hard bottom rocky areas will usually produce a nice Grouper around the Skyway.

Frozen Sardines or Threadfin will work also but I like the live bait. Sometimes it takes the cut bait to get them going but usually a frisky bait placed correctly will get the job done.

If bottom fishing is not working you can start throwing spoons around the bridge pilings, bait schools and over the artificial reefs. Usually if the bait schools are showering or if you see fish exploding on the baits a spool or white bucktail will get the hits. It can be anything from Mackerel, Ladyfish, Bonita, Sharks and more. If it gets windy you can always fish the mangroves and grass flats for Snook, Redfish and Trout to get away from the wind. so, don't be afraid to try out the Skyway Bridge and the area surrounding it, because there truly is something to catch for everyone! ☑

Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Petersburg has been fishing the waters of Tampa for over 35 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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MASTERING THE JUNE TRANSITION: TACTICS FOR TARGETING BIG SNOOK, REDS & TARPON

by Captain Justin Searcy

As the Gulf waters heat up and summer rolls into full swing, June delivers some of the most exciting and challenging inshore action Florida has to offer. Whether you're working the mangrove edges at dawn or cruising the beaches in search of silver, this time of year is all about adapting to conditions—and knowing when to pick up and move.

The big Snook have officially moved out. We've been seeing them stack up along the beach, especially during that crucial early morning bite. Sight-fishing them in clear water with light tackle is one of my favorite things to do. There's nothing like watching a trophy Snook turn on your bait and crush it just feet from the boat.

This time of year also marks the peak of the beach Tarpon run, with migrating schools cruising just outside the swash line in crystal-clear water. These fish aren't just big—they're smart, moody, and sensitive to pressure. Success comes down to stealth, timing, and a perfect presentation. Early morning light and calm conditions give you the best shot at spotting rolling fish before the boat traffic picks up. I prefer drifting quietly with the current and presenting live crabs or Threadfins well ahead of the fish's path. You'll know when you did it right—the take is unmistakable, and the acrobatics that follow never get old. It's a visual game of chess with 100-pound silverkings, and no two encounters or outcomes are the same.

The key right now is timing. Boat traffic and wind can shut things down fast, so I've

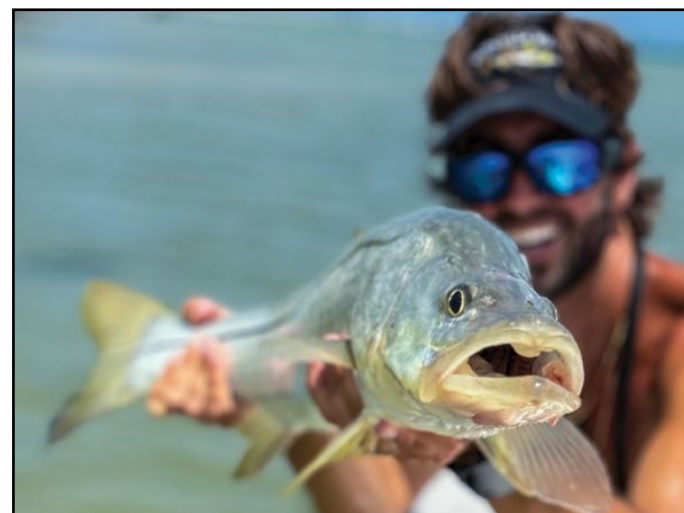


been watching the tides closely and getting out early. On calm mornings after a good outgoing tide, you'll often find pods of Snook holding tight to submerged structure or shadow lines along the beach.

Live Pilchards have been the top producer, but if you're looking to challenge yourself, a well-placed fly or paddle-tail soft plastic can trigger a strike if presented naturally. Just be patient. The fish are there, but they're smart—and they've seen a lot by now.

Back inside the bays, Redfish and Trout continue to hold steady, especially in areas where grass flats meet deeper drop-offs. Early summer storms have brought in a lot of floating grass, so staying mobile and finding clean water is critical.

I always encourage clients and readers to keep conservation top of mind. These fish are under pressure—both from anglers and environmental stress. Handle them with care, limit your take, and leave the water better than you found it. This month, I'm also highlighting a few of the incredible small businesses that help keep our coastal communities alive and well—from bait shops to beach-



front diners. Swing by my Instagram @capt_justin_searcy to see some behind-the-scenes content and local shout-outs. Tight lines & respect the tide. 🎣

Captain Justin Searcy
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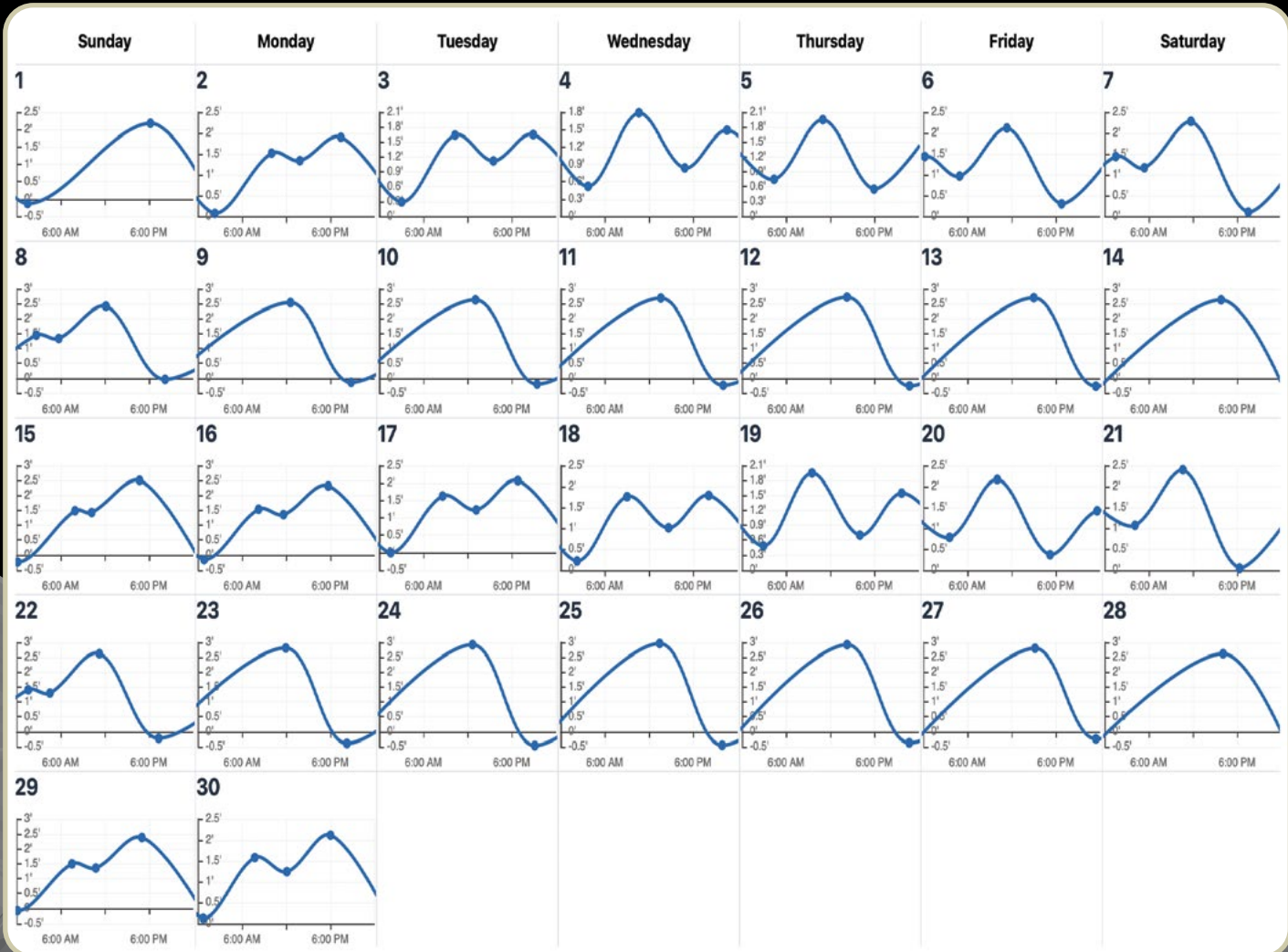
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

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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7:00 PM – 8:00 PM



TAKE A BOW, IT'S ALMOST TARPON SEASON!

by Misty Wells

Tarpon fishing is guaranteed excitement for any angler from seasoned to beginner. Tarpon are second to none for their size and large school numbers at certain times of the year. Most of the Tarpon in the Tampa Bay area run from 40 to 140 pounds plus. However, don't forget those trophy Tarpon that can range from 70 to over 180 pounds.

One of the most sought-after inshore gamefish in the world is the Tarpon known also as the Silverking or Sabalo. Since the early 1800s legendary anglers from Hemmingway to Flip Pallot and Lefty Kreh have been casting everything from flies, live bait and plastics to catch these gamefish. And, the Tarpon fishing here in Tampa Bay ranks as some of the best Tarpon fishing in Florida along with Boca Grande, Sanibel Island and Islamorada in the gorgeous Florida Keys.



This month, I thought I would share a bit of Tarpon knowledge I have picked up over the years with you, as I feel understanding your prey sometime leads to more catches. Tarpon inhabit warmer water, they are primarily found in the Gulf of Mexico, and the West Indies, but have been found north of Cape Hatteras and all the way down to Brazil. The female Tarpon can grow as large as 300 pounds and can reach lengths of over eight feet long. Like in real life, females seem to live longer than the males, reaching up to 50 years old, while the males typically live to 30 years old. A female Tarpon can lay as many as eleven million eggs in her lifetime, which is why it is important to practice catch-n-release especially on bigger fish.

Tarpon are toothless and they swallow their prey whole; their mouths are hard, boney and very rough.

Because a Tarpon's mouth is so boney, once they take the bait, you need to practice a hard hookset or you may not get the chance to fight this fish. Tarpon are one of the few species in the world that have a swim bladder. This bladder acts as a lung so they can breathe raw air, and they breathe like most other species through their gills. The faster a Tarpon is swimming means they

will usually "surface or roll" more for air and that is the time when angler can easily locate a school of Tarpon. The best tactic for casting to a school is positioning your vessel in front of them and allowing them to swim towards you. Once they are close enough, position your bait and begin casting in front of and into the school of Tarpon.

Now, there are lots of baits that you can use to catch Tarpon such as small pass crabs, live bait, cut bait, jigs and soft plastics. I personally like fishing with live pass crabs for Tarpon, but make sure you hook the crab correctly; that is the difference between a catch and a loss. Hooking a crab in the body will kill it, so make sure to put the hook through the very edge of the crab between the brown edge and the white underside and always keep it in the water. Buying crabs can be expensive and hard to find; netting them takes quite a while but if you have the time, it's fun. Regardless, if you buy them or catch them you need to keep them alive and if you do it right, you can keep your crabs healthy and alive for days. A few tips to do that is to change the water twice at least twice a day and feed the crabs some cut bait to keep them healthy overnight. Do not keep any dead shrimp in the cooler or livewell because when they die they release a toxin that can kill your crabs. If a crab dies, get it out right away.

Moving on to natural bait. As you may know, Tarpon are opportunistic feeders, so they will eat almost anything if the time is right. And as you may also know, if they have their mind on anything else they won't give you the time of day no



matter what you throw. Some of the go-to live baits I have been successful with are Threadfin, Shrimp, Sardines, Mullet and Menhaden. Believe it or not, I have also landed some nice Tarpon on cut bait that I have dropped into what I call a "Tarpon Ball". This is when they're schooled up all together and going down deep in the water; all you can see is their dark shadows. Tarpon are known to scavenge the bottom, as well, for dead fish, so I am guessing that is why this works from time to time.

Let's talk rods and gear. When selecting your Tarpon rod be sure that the rod has a strong backbone. It should have moderate give in the first one-third of the rod then get stiffer. Braided line is highly recommended by many guides but make sure to spool up your reels with a lot of line and most pro's use anywhere from 30# to 65# test. Remember, Tarpon have very abrasive mouths so a good leader is a must; use anywhere from 50# to 80# with lighter leader in the day and heavier during the night. Using circle hooks for Tarpon offers the best hook up ratios and it inflicts the least amount of damage to the fish. Get a good fighting belt for tarpon fishing because you don't want to break your back. Have it sized and ready before the hook up. You are also going to need some good shoes; nonskid, it can really make the difference between the catch or a self-release.



Of course, you must "bow to the Silverking". When I first started fishing for these awesome creatures, I did not understand this term. We are all beginners at some point, and I had to learn the hard way that if you do not "bow" and give slack in the line when they jump, there is a good

chance you will lose your fish. By allowing the line to go slack it makes it harder for them to cut it on their gill plate or spit the hook, so "please take a bow" when they jump and point your rod towards the fish.

Lastly, let's talk about how to fish for Tarpon and show some good fishing manners. There are a lot of newbies out there, so if you want to be successful to fish another day, please follow some basic fishing etiquette. If someone is following a school, get out of the way if they were on them first. Don't try and "jockey" into position and split the school and have them dive down. A lot of times if you are in a position where the school is coming your way, just stay put, let the school swim right into your bait and there will be a good chance for a hook-up. There are going to be times where you are fishing next to other boats and anglers where you get a hook up; try and control the Tarpon the best you can and move them away from the other boats. I learned this tip the hard way, if the fish swims under the boat put your rod tip in the water right away until you can control where the fish swims. If the Tarpon swims to the other side of the boat, keep your rod tip in the water and walk around the front of the boat to the other side keeping tension on the line and moving quickly.

I need to take a quick moment to brag about my Grandma, Bobby Wells. In 1984, she captured the **TIFT Record** with a Tarpon catch of 160 pounds; a fish that out-weighted her by about 60 pounds at 62 years old.

Hopefully these tips will help you "up your game" and you might skip a few mistakes that I personally had to learn the hard way. There are some top fishing guides in Tampa Bay and in Florida that can really teach you a lot and put you on some great schools of Tarpon. A quick list of my favorite Tarpon Fishing guides in my area are Captain Chris Wiggins of Salty Hook Charters, Captain Brett Norris of Rock Bottom Sport Fishing Charters and Captain Kyle Applefield of Loaded Down Sportfishing. I have fished with all of these captains and I can guarantee that you will have the trip of a lifetime and want to go fishing with them again and again. Fishing with a professional guide can really make a difference between landing the big one, or the one that got away. One thing I can tell you for sure, chasing the Silverking is worth it and it's a lot of fun! 🎣

Misty Wells Producer & Host of Award Winning "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to 220 million on Discovery & Discovery GO & Plus & 17 other networks. Bass Pro-Outdoor Pro & Outdoor & Outdoor, Travel Writer. Founder of "A Reel Future" non-profit devoted to teaching the passion of fishing & conservation to foster children, over 4,000 children & counting. Watch for free & on demand @ www.mistywells.com.

The Girls of Summer!

Editorial by Sheila Tramontana
Photography by Sheila T Photography



Captain Krista "Redfish" Tucker

From the looks of things, it is obvious that women are becoming more and more involved in all aspects of fishing. Tournament fishing, which previously belonged to the men, has now opened up opportunities for women to compete with each other as well as against the men in both freshwater and saltwater for both inshore and offshore events. Young women who were introduced to fishing by grandfathers, dads, brothers and uncles are becoming more active in the sport as anglers, captains, fishing guides and tournament competitors. We recently spoke with a few of our top lady anglers in the area about their reasons for being involved in Florida's number one outdoor sport.

CAPTAIN KRISTA "REDFISH" TUCKER

Krista Tucker was introduced to fishing before she can even remember. Her mom and her uncle were taking her fishing when she was still in diapers and it was just a way of life for her. Tucker learned to tie a clinch knot before she could even tie her shoes. She grew up catching Bass, Snook, and Tarpon in the Everglades in Chokoloskee and the Ten Thousand Islands, but really fell in love with the sport when she moved to Charlotte Harbor. She was on the boat every chance she got and just couldn't get enough. At 18 years old, she got her Captains license following the inspiration that fishing was her calling. Tucker loves the competitive side of fishing and credits her dad with instilling that drive to succeed in her by not allowing her to beat him easily at childhood board games. She was good at fishing and while others in high school were medaling in Track & Field and Softball, she was entering Xtreme Redfish tournaments and fishing the Flatmasters Redfish series.

Tucker's favorite fish to target is Redfish. At first it was the hardest fish for her to figure out and now she feels like she is one with them, hence the adopted middle name. While she pre-fished for upcoming tournaments, she would often just go out and watch, not casting a line, just watching what the tide was doing, paying attention to where the fish were, and when the water started moving, she would see where the fish would go. She noticed that the fish had a route they'd follow every day and at nearly the same time every year, the school would come back to the same spot at nearly the same time. She studied their interesting habits for countless hours and really has a true appreciation for them. Tucker says, "they are a gorgeous fish to catch and I love the fight of a nice bull." She also enjoys the reward of being able to do so.

CAPTAIN LORI DEATON

Capt Lori Deaton, a longtime lady angler, was always quite the tomboy growing up and enjoyed just about any outdoor activity, but the very first time she cast her line and hooked a Snook, she knew she was born to fish. Deaton says that fishing and being on the water brings her peace and provides relaxation, even when she is catching Tarpon! Tarpon are known as the Silver King to many who appreciate their beautiful silver color, their powerful fighting spirit

and their dominance as the King of all sport fish. "I love everything about them, says Deaton. I think they are the most amazing creatures on earth and I live to catch them."

When Deaton is not catching tarpon, she is raising money for her charity fishing tournament, Hooked on Hope, which she established to fight breast cancer. Because Deaton has seen more women enjoying the sport of fishing over the years, she thought it would be a great idea to combine their love of fishing with a cause close to her heart. Although the tournament has many male anglers who support her registered non-profit foundation, there are a lot of teams that consist of lady anglers who wear pink wigs, have pink fishing rods and dress all in pink for the occasion which takes place in early October every year. Her tournament also invites cancer survivors and those battling the disease to the event for a day of pampering. Deaton is not only a lady angler and a licensed fishing Captain, but she has a heart of gold that is obvious from the moment you meet her. Deaton welcomes young women and girls into the sport and says that the fishing industry has much more to offer now than it did when she got her start. "Your options are endless" she says.



Captain Lori Deaton

ALYSHA ARATARI

Alysha Aratari started fishing at just five years old, when her dad entered her in a tournament. She was so upset that she had not caught anything all day until the last minute when she hooked up and caught her first fish. She fell in love with fishing from that moment on and has fished ever since. Aratari says there is something about being in the outdoors with the sun beating down, the song of the



Alysha Aratari

whistling fishing line in the wind and the fight for the fish on the other end of a pole that she loves about fishing. Like others, Aratari says that fishing is therapeutic for her and that she is most at peace in the tranquil quietness on the water.

Aratari loves being an angler and encourages other lady anglers not to be intimidated by the once male dominated sport. "Women in fishing is on the rise," she says.

Aratari is passionate about Tarpon fishing. She loves to compete and also fishes recreationally for the explosive sport fish any chance she gets. "There is nothing like it to me, she says with a smile, for anyone who has experienced the thrill of tarpon fishing, you know exactly what I'm talking about!"

MELISSA TRAMONTANA

For Melissa Tramontana, fishing is an adrenaline rush. The excitement of not knowing what is lurking on the other end of your rod is what keeps her on the water every chance she gets. For Tramontana, fishing has always been a family affair. She grew up in a home on a lake fishing for Bass almost every day with her two older brothers. As they got older, they discovered the fish were a lot bigger in salt water and the trio never looked back. Learning everything she could from her brothers, who always let her tag along, she fishes with them often and even mates for her older brother who is a licensed Charter Guide. Her love of the sport is tied to the many good memories she has made through fishing and she wouldn't trade them for the world.



Melissa Tramontana

Growing up in a fishing and hunting family, Tramontana loves to cook her catch and enjoys a fresh fillet of fish on her plate after a good day on the water. Tramontana fishes competitively in both inshore and offshore tournaments where Grouper usually becomes the main course afterwards. She tells friends how spoiled she is knowing there's always fresh fish in her house. Despite her love of a fresh catch, her favorite fish to tangle with is definitely the Tarpon. "They fight hard and jump high which makes it an adrenaline rush as well as a workout", she says. "It always makes me feel like I have accomplished something when I can get one of the Silver Kings to the boat." Tramontana looks forward to targeting other sport fish on her "list" and hopes to continue pursuing different species she has yet to land. Tramontana, at 23, hunts, fishes and scuba dives passionately. She encourages other women not to be afraid to get into the sport. "Everyone I know thinks it's awesome when I tell them that I fish, and more often than not, I out-fish the guys," she jokes. Fishing is definitely a big part of her life spending much of her down time on the water and providing her family with an activity to enjoy together.

MELISSA BLAKEY

Lady Angler Melissa Blakey not only loves to fish, she is also a graduate with a degree in Environmental Science and cares about the future of fishing and the preservation of wildlife. When on the water, she learns something new and amazing on every trip. "I love the different species of fish, birds, aquatic vegetation, mammals and reptiles", she says. "I want future generations to be able to enjoy the pristine Florida outdoors as I have been able to do." Blakey is also a competitive tournament angler. Always hooking more fish than most of the guys on her boat, she believes that woman have more patience and better instincts so they are naturally better anglers. Blakey fishes almost every week and supports the DNA research being done for the tarpon fishery. Collecting several samples already this season from fish she has landed, she has provided them to the Florida Wildlife Commission for their Tarpon studies, a science of great interest to her.



Melissa Blakey

Growing up a tomboy but still a Daddy's girl, Blakey spent her childhood camping and Bream fishing on the Hillsborough River from her dad's jon boat. She always loved just being on the water. She had never been exposed to saltwater fishing until five years ago when she met a young Captain who took her flats fishing for the first time and she was hooked. She seemed to have a knack for it and her ease at casting and hooking fish seemed to come naturally. She learned as much as she could and fished every opportunity she had. After eluding her on several attempts, the Snook has become her favorite fish to catch. Casting in the perfect spot in the Mangroves where they lay is challenging and when she gets one to chase her bait, it's very rewarding. "I love to watch them jump" Blakey says. She adds that fishing has been a predominantly male sport, but women will find it to be relaxing, enjoyable and exciting and she hopes that more women will venture into the sport.

ALYSHA LANDRY

Hanging out at small freshwater lakes when she was still in a stroller, lady angler Alysha Landry was introduced to fishing by her uncle who would take her along as he passionately fished for hours. Landry says the complete tranquility she feels when she has rod and reel in hand is her favorite part of fishing. Being relaxed yet getting an intense work out from a giant Tarpon, which is her favorite fish to catch, is an adrenaline rush. "Tarpon are gorgeous,

prehistoric fish that put up a fight like you wouldn't believe!" says Landry. "Guys are always so shocked when girls reel in a 200 pound fish by themselves."

Landry hopes that other young women will give fishing a try because the second they hook their first fish, they are hooked for life! The outdoor sport of fishing is amazing and she encourages women to get out there and learn all they can. Landry lives near the water and fishes for many types of fish that reside in her area. She is also a competitive angler and has made many great friends in tournament competition.



Alysha Landry

CAPTAIN JILL SAPP

Growing up in Ormond Beach, Captain Jill Sapp's Grandpa and Uncle started her fishing and blue crabbing for fun when she was just seven years old. Since they didn't have a boat, they fished in the surf, from bridges, on piers or from the shoreline. She has been in love with fishing ever since. She credits her husband, Captain Troy Sapp with teaching her everything she knows about the kind of fishing they do together today. Sapp says she would never be able to do any of it without him. "I have been fortunate to fish from the Panhandle to the Florida Keys on all types of tackle to see firsthand what outstanding fishing opportunities Florida has to offer."



Capt. Jill Sapp

and sport fishing for Tarpon and Billfish because of their beauty and power. Sapp, who is an accomplished angler, is also well informed and knowledgeable about Florida fishing laws, regulations and pending issues. Her words of wisdom for young women who are interested in the sport is to "watch, listen and learn all you can. Ask experienced anglers for advice, attend outdoor expos, read some of the

many fishing books and magazines and tune in to various fishing shows for information. Most importantly, know the laws! Know the legal size, quantity, season and take limits for each species of fish or any game you plan to harvest." Sapp stays informed on all state fish and game regulations and issues through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Florida Wildlife Commission websites and often attends hearing meetings. Sapp is adamant about taking care of our precious resources for future generations and advises everyone to educate themselves about the sport.

SO MOVE OVER FELLAS, THE GIRLS OF SUMMER ARE HERE TO STAY!

Important caring male figures were key factors in introducing the sport of fishing to all our featured lady anglers at a young age. The benefits to exposing young girls to outdoor sports such as fishing and hunting are many. Accomplishing anything builds self-esteem. Fishing is a sport that allows multiple repeated success with each catch. A feeling of confidence in the ability to use tools such as rod and reel, firearm or bow to become successful at the sport starts with being comfortable using them. Women are not only becoming more prominent in the sport as successful competitors, anglers and business women today but are often more compassionate about the conservation of wildlife and the environments which create stability for future generations. Won't it be great when our daughters are being taught the techniques of fishing and hunting and an appreciation for the outdoors not only by their dads, brothers and uncles but by their moms, sisters and aunts as well! ♡

Sheila Tramontana is a photographer and outdoor enthusiast who is a native Floridian. Introduced to fishing by a long heritage of family who enjoyed the sport, it was one of her favorite outdoor activities as a child. Sheila now photographs professional fishing tournaments, as well as other outdoor sports and her portfolio contains Florida scenery and wildlife photography for home and office. For more information, you can visit her website at www.sheilatphotography.com or find her on Facebook and Pinterest.

TAMPA BAY'S SHARK TANK

by Captain Matt Santiago

While Tampa Bay's shark population is high year round, summertime is when they move into our bay in mass. In the summer, Tampa Bay is considered to have one of the highest populations of sharks in the world. Our waters are home to numerous species including Black tip, Bonnethead, Nurse, Bull, Reef and Hammerhead just to name a few. Sharks are an apex predator that rest comfortably at the top of the Tampa Bay food chain. They are also one of the top heavy-weight contenders for best fighting fish. Blazing speed, endurance and surprising aerial acrobatics make shark fishing one of the most exciting options in the summertime. Often times the hotter the water gets, the slower the fishing is for other inshore species such as snook and redfish, but that is not the case for our tropical and sub-tropical species of sharks.

Tackle: Sharks are one species where you really need to beef up your tackle to handle the big boys. The business end of your shark rig is most crucial to going the distance with the man in the gray suit. My standard shark rig consists of a 8/0-10/0 heavy wire circle hook crimped to about 4-6 ft. of 150-200 lb. seven strand coated wire. I connect wire via a crimped swivel to another

5-10 ft. of 80-100 lb. fluorocarbon leader. The fluorocarbon leader is more abrasion resistant on shark skin than braid, so it helps to keep longer sharks from chaffing through your braid. The fluorocarbon to braid connection is made with a Bimini Twist and Albright knot. When targeting big bull sharks and hammerheads over 8 foot, I beef up a bit and conversely I go down a size or two when targeting smaller sharks such as reef sharks and bonnetheads.

Bait: Sharks are opportunistic predators whose primary sensory organ is their nose and olfactory glands. Almost any stinky, bloody, oily fresh bait will work, but I do have a few favorites. The baits that top my list for sharkin' include Bonita, Spanish Mackerel, Menhaden, and Stingray. All of the above baits can be harvested locally in the

summer and can be used as bait so long as you follow FWC regulations for each of the species. Depending on the size of the shark you are targeting, you

can prepare any of the above baits in chunks, strips or even whole. The largest shark we caught last year was a great hammerhead that taped out at just over 13 ft. and ate a whole 5 pound Bonita. Skin

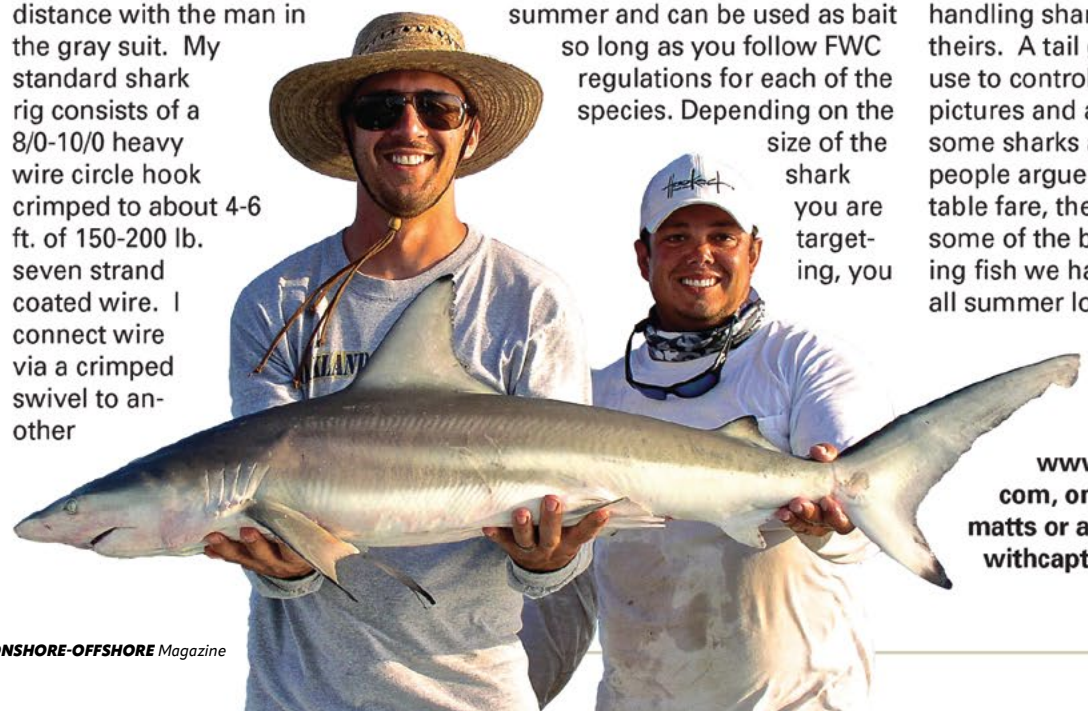
hooking your bait will help to ensure a solid hook when a shark takes your offering.

When: Shark fishing can be good throughout an entire summer day, but there are definitely times that

are more productive than others. Fishing the strongest parts of the tides is preferred, as the fast moving currents will move your chum slick and scent drawing in more hungry sharks. Nighttime is also a great time to shark fish. Sharks use the cover of darkness to sneak up on unsuspecting prey. The big evening/nighttime tides around the full moons result in some of the best shark fishing days of the year.

Remember to take care when handling sharks for your safety and theirs. A tail gaff is a great tool to use to control a shark boatside for pictures and a safe release. While some sharks are edible and many people argue over their value as table fare, they are undoubtedly some of the best fighting and exciting fish we have to do battle with all summer long. ■

Captain Matt can be reached at 813-205-2327, online at www.FishingGuideTampa.com, on twitter at @captainmatts or at Facebook.com/Fish-withcaptainmatt



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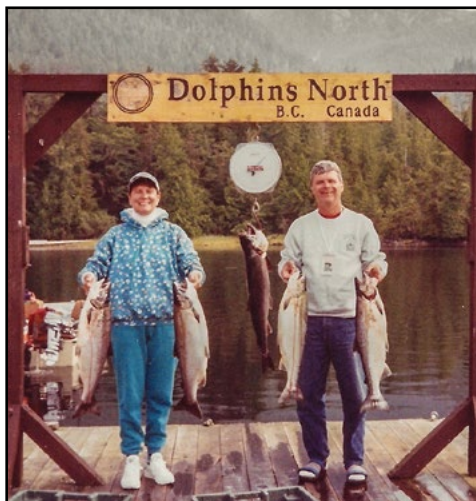
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TALES FROM THE OLD GUY

by David Mallory

In the 1990s, a group of eight decided to travel from the Atlantic side of the continent to British Columbia on the Pacific side to fish for salmon. The lodge we chose was Dolphins North. We had a choice of either three days or four days. We settled on the three days, thinking that would be enough time in an 18 foot Boston Whaler. Everybody agreed.



We flew from Burlington, Vermont to Prince Rupert, BC. We stayed in Prince Rupert for a few days to explore the area before we were flown into Dolphins North. Three of us decided to do a helicopter-raft trip down the Exchamsiks River, while the others went off to play golf. Pauline, another woman in our group and I started paddling down the river after the helicopter dropped us off. We stopped to lunch on a sandbar along the way.

We took our time, lost a paddle and had to go back to get it, which was a bit tricky. We didn't set any speed records - even a frog swam faster and passed us as we floated our way to the end of our trip. The next morning we were flown

in a small sea plane to the Dolphins North lodge, located on an old floating fish hatchery in Work Channel. This was to be our home for fishing, sleeping and eating for the next three days. We met Chef Brian, who turned out to be a great chef who used about a pound of butter for every meal! Our schedule was up at 6:00am, a big breakfast, then a send off with a snack and coffee laced with Baileys to fish.

Fishing was along the shore of Seal Cove, we started catching silver or coho salmon. That was the normal fish of the day, but we did catch a few black sea bass and one halibut. Some of the sea bass, we would throw back so they would float; the eagles would fly down and grab them. They loved to follow us. We would fish for the morning, go back for lunch, take a short nap and go back out to fish until supper. We were able to take fish home with us on the plane, which the lodge would pack on ice for us. At that time, they would just gut them and we would have to process and clean them once we got home.

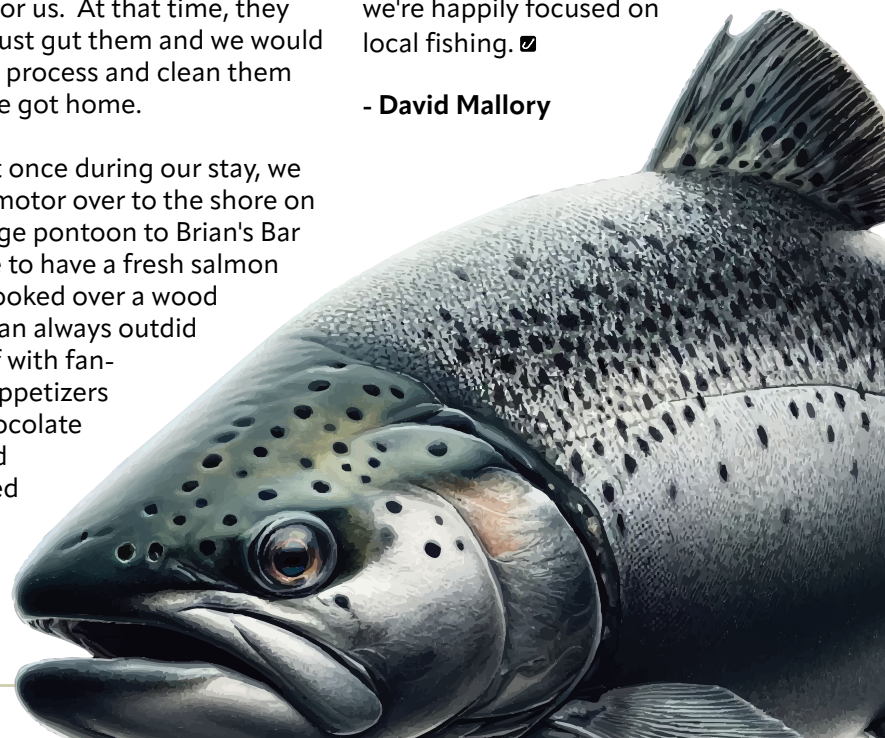
At least once during our stay, we would motor over to the shore on the lodge pontoon to Brian's Bar & Grille to have a fresh salmon meal cooked over a wood fire. Brian always outdid himself with fantastic appetizers and chocolate covered brandied cherries.

We had such a wonderful experience the first year, that we went back with our same group three more times. Each time we caught different kinds of salmon, and often all five types of salmon: pink salmon, sockeye, chum or dog salmon, coho and King. We also caught halibut and Pauline caught a 45 pound ling cod. It was always an adventure and made fun by daily competitions for biggest non salmon fish, widest variety of fish and the biggest salmon caught each day.

We often saw birds and wildlife while we fished and one year a pod of humpback whales entertained for about 45 minutes not far from where we were fishing. It was so spectacular, that we just put our rods up and sat watching them feed. We also saw black bears, and a grizzly one year. That's why our lodge was floating in the middle of the river!

We look back at these times and are so happy we had the opportunity to do these trips. Now, we're happily focused on local fishing. ☑

- David Mallory





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TARGETING PERMIT IN THE GULF

by Captain Jared Simonetti

Habitat & Distribution

- Range: Western Atlantic Ocean, from Massachusetts to Brazil.
- Common in the Florida Keys, southern Gulf of Mexico & Western Caribbean.
- Preferred Habitat: Inshore flats: Sandy or grassy bottoms (especially in the Keys). Nearshore wrecks and reefs: In the Gulf of Mexico (especially off Clearwater, Tampa, and Naples). Surf zones and passes during seasonal crab flushes.

Size & Identification

- Average Size: 10–20 lbs.
- Trophy Size: 30–40+ lbs (record is 60+ lbs).
- Shape: Deep-bodied, laterally compressed.
- Color: Silvery with possible golden or dark tinge on the belly.

Distinctive Features

- Deeply forked tail.
- Long dorsal and anal fins.
- Short snout, blunt head.

- Small mouth with crushing plates (for eating crabs and shellfish).

Diet

- Crustaceans like small Blue Crabs & Pass Crabs.

- Shrimp.

- Small mollusks and benthic invertebrates.

Permit use their blunt teeth and crushers to smash and eat hard-shelled prey.

Sport Fishing Information

Known for incredible power and endurance. One of the "Big Three" in saltwater fly fishing (along with tarpon and bonefish). Highly challenging to catch—very wary, picky eaters.

Fishing Methods:

1. Live Bait: Pass crabs or shrimp on circle hooks (2/0–4/0).
2. Artificial Lures: Soft crab imitations, small jigs.
3. Fly Fishing: Crab flies (Merkins & Ragheads), long leaders, 9–10 wt rods.
4. Sight Fishing: On clear, sunny, windless days over shallow flats.
5. Structure Fishing: Drift live crab near wrecks or reef edges.

Seasonality

Peak Season in Florida is March to September. Best Months in Gulf Wrecks are May–August (when crabs flush during full/new moons). Best during warm months and calm seas.

Fishing Regulations for Florida Gulf Coast

(Regulations as of 2024. Always verify with FWC for updates)

- Bag Limit: 2 per person. Vessel max of 6.
- Size Limit: 11–22 inches fork length (1 fish > 22 inches is allowed).

- Permit & Pompano Zone applies (separate from Special Permit Zone in the Keys)

Fun Fact:

Permit are often confused with pompano, but are generally much larger and deeper-bodied. Look for the elongated dorsal and anal fins for quick ID.

Where to Find Permit?

Permit are most commonly found in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, particularly:

Nearshore Wrecks & Reef

Clearwater artificial reefs in depths of 20 to 70 feet. Tampa Bay wrecks. Naples to the Florida Keys – best for big numbers. Structures attract crabs, making them feeding grounds for permit

Inshore Flats

More common around the Lower Keys, Ten Thousand Islands, and Florida Bay. In the Clearwater area, you'll rarely find permit on flats compared to farther south

Spring Tides / Passes

During Spring and Summer, permit follow crab flushes through passes (like Boca Grande Pass or Egmont Key).

Top Permit Techniques

Live Crab Drift

Use small pass crabs or juvenile blue crabs. Drift them near wrecks or structure with a freeline or small egg sinker (just enough to reach the zone).

Use 2/0 to 4/0 circle hook with a 30 to 40 lb fluorocarbon leader. Use a braided main line of 20 to 30 lb test.

Jig-and-Crab

Rig a small jighead (1/4–3/8 oz) with a crab or shrimp. Drop it straight down over wrecks and bounce it gently. This method is effective for vertical jigging over high-relief wrecks.

Sight Casting

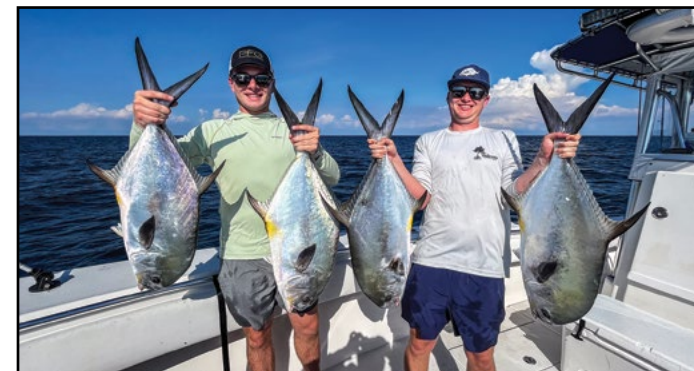
Only works in clear, calm, shallow water with good sun. Use a quiet approach using push pole or trolling motor. Cast a live crab or small artificial (like a crab fly or soft plastic bait) in front of fish.

Fly Fishing

Used mostly in southwest Florida and Keys flats. Recommended flies to use are a Merkin Crab, Raghead crab, or EP Crabs. Use a 9–10 wt fly rod, floating line, long fluorocarbon leaders.

Best Time to Fish for Permit


- March–September is peak season.
- Late Spring is best for crab flushes & active feeding.
- Calm, sunny days for ideal sight fishing.



BONUS TIPS

Permit are spooky and smart – use long leaders and quiet boats. They fight hard – be prepared for strong runs and long battles. Be patient and persistent – few but very rewarding hookups. 🎣

Captain Jared Simonetti
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Captain Sergio Atanes

Its Cobia time, so look for this creature roaming the flats around big rays and channel buoys.

Best bet is using live threadfin sardines or pinfish float under a cork suggested tackle would be medium action spinning rod with 4000 size reels spooled with 30-pound FINS braided line tied to 40-pound fluorocarbon leader at least 48 inches long since they tend to tail whip your line a 3/0 circle hook works great.



Captain George Hastick

June water temps are in the mid to upper 80s in the afternoons. That, being said, look for your snook and redfish to be up under the mangroves, keeping cool waiting for bait to come to them with the current. Trout will be on the

deeper grass flats in 5-8 feet of water. Mackerel will be roaming the beaches all the way up into the bay, especially around the bridges and artificial reefs which will also hold mangrove snapper. The other big player that will be around the bridges and artificial reefs is the tarpon. They will be eating crabs and munching on the large schools of threadfin.

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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LADIES & REDS

by Captain Sergio Atanes

This month, we'll provide insights on fishing for Redfish, particularly in the Tarpon Key area, emphasizing the importance of patience and strategy. It highlights the differences in fishing approaches between men and women, with women often being more successful by following instructions.

Successful Redfish fishing requires patience and positioning; anglers should avoid chasing fish and instead setup ambush points. It's crucial to chum with both live and cut bait while maintaining a distance to avoid spooking the fish.

Two things I can count on this time of the year is having the ladies catching fish and finding big Redfish in the flats, which makes for a great combination. When I have couples on the boat I can always count on the ladies getting the biggest and most fish and that is because they listen to the captain and follow instructions. Men on the other hand, within a few minutes, are back doing their own "macho" thing.

When fishing for reds, look for their usual hangouts. They are known to return to the same spot year after year. Tarpon Key is one hot spot that produces on a yearly basis, but again, the secret is to be patient. Look for other boats and learn to read the area and setup that ambush point. Let the fish come to you and don't try



chasing them down with your trolling motor. You will only accomplish pushing them away.

When you spot the school of Redfish, position your boat up wind from them to give yourself greater casting distance. The big reds can spook easily so the further away you are the better.

Chum with both cut and live bait. I give my clients the rods with live bait while "Rodney", (my rod holders) gets the one with cut threadfin with a #5 split shot which keeps the dead bait on the bottom, and remember that redfish are bottom feeders. By the way,

"Rodney" the rod holder has out fished many of my clients by being my silent angler and catcher of big fish. When fishing in heavy grass area try using a float and suspend the bait just above the grass line. This keeps the bait from hiding in the grass and lets the bait travel with the current, giving you a better chance on finding the fish.

Work as a team with other anglers in the area. You will often see us captains form a circle around the school of redfish, and we throw chum into the center to keep the fish concentrated and feeding. If you see this and decide to join in, most anglers will let you, but just don't try to move in on the fish, as this will only breakup the school. Work your boat alongside another boat and ask for permission first. You'll find that most anglers will let you join in on the fun. Every boat takes turn throwing chum into the school, which will give everyone a chance to catch some fish.

The average size of these redfish range from 30 to 38 inches (15



water until she decides to swim away, otherwise she may go to bottom and die from exhaustion.

My tackle is simple; 7 1/2 ft. rod, medium-action fast tapered with a 300 reel, a full spool of 15-pound test Fins Windtamer braided line, and 32 inches of 30-pound fluoro-carbon leader with a 2/0 circle hook. The only time I use J hooks is if I have clients who keep trying to set the hook, so I have no choice but to use a J-hook.

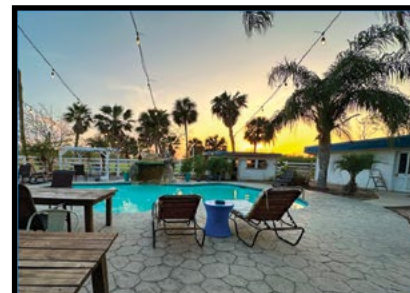
Big redfish are residents of Tarpon Key, Joel Island and outside mangrove areas of Bishop's Harbor. They are year round residents except in August when water temperature

to 25 pounds), and to me they are one of the best fighting fish on the flats bar none. Snook will give a quick hard run and maybe a jump but redfish will fight to the end. In fact, never release one after a hard fight. Hold the redfish in the



gets too high and they move into deeper waters. If your bait starts to die in the flats, then it's too hot for the fish to bite. Good fishing and tight lines. ☑

Captain Sergio Atanes is the host of Fishing Adventures Florida and Captain Sergio Fishing Chronicles on YouTube, Waypoint TV, Carbon TV, Outdoor Action TV and Angling TV. For info call 813-973-7132 or email: atanes@msn.com.



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