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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 reminicing of how great our backyard really is by the out of town customers who used to rent boats and kayaks at a previous business of mine. Their perspective 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 head over to Belle Harbour Marina and rent one of their 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 historic 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 shop 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



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ON THE COVER:

Dean Gaita speared this beautiful Gag Grouper while diving about 5 miles due West of the Sea Pines Birdcage off of Hudson, Florida. Way to go Dean!

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OCTOBER IS THE MONTH OF OPPORTUNITY

by Captain George Hastick

October is one of the best months of the year for fishing in St. Petersburg, Florida. As summer's intense heat gives way to cooler temperatures, fish become more active and feed aggressively in preparation for winter. Surrounded by the productive waters of Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, St. Petersburg offers anglers the chance to catch an impressive variety of inshore, nearshore, and offshore species, making October a favorite month for both locals and visitors.

The most popular inshore targets are the "Big Three": Snook, Redfish and Spotted Seatrout, our inshore slam. Snook remain aggressive around mangrove shorelines, docks, bridges, and creek mouths, where they wait to ambush schools of baitfish during moving tides. Their explosive strikes and powerful runs make them one of the areas premier sport fish. And, Redfish fishing is exceptional during October as



large schools gather across shallow grass flats, oyster bars, and mangrove shorelines. Sightfishing for tailing Redfish in "gin clear" water is a thrilling experience, especially when using artificial lures, live Scaled Sardines, Pinfish, cut bait, or live shrimp. Many anglers

consider the month of October one of the best opportunities of the year to catch Redfish.

Spotted Seatrout are plentiful across the area's grass flats. They eagerly strike live shrimp, Pilchards, soft plastics, and top-

water lures, providing steady action throughout the day. Catching Trout, Redfish, and Snook during the same trip is common in St. Petersburg during the fall to accomplish the inshore slam. Many inshore slam tournaments are held in our area.



As baitfish migrate through Tampa Bay and along the beaches, Spanish Mackerel become extremely active. Their blistering speed and aggressive feeding behavior provide nonstop excitement from boats, piers, and shorelines. King Mackerel also begin their seasonal migration, creating outstanding opportunities for anglers fishing nearshore reefs, the piers and deeper waters.

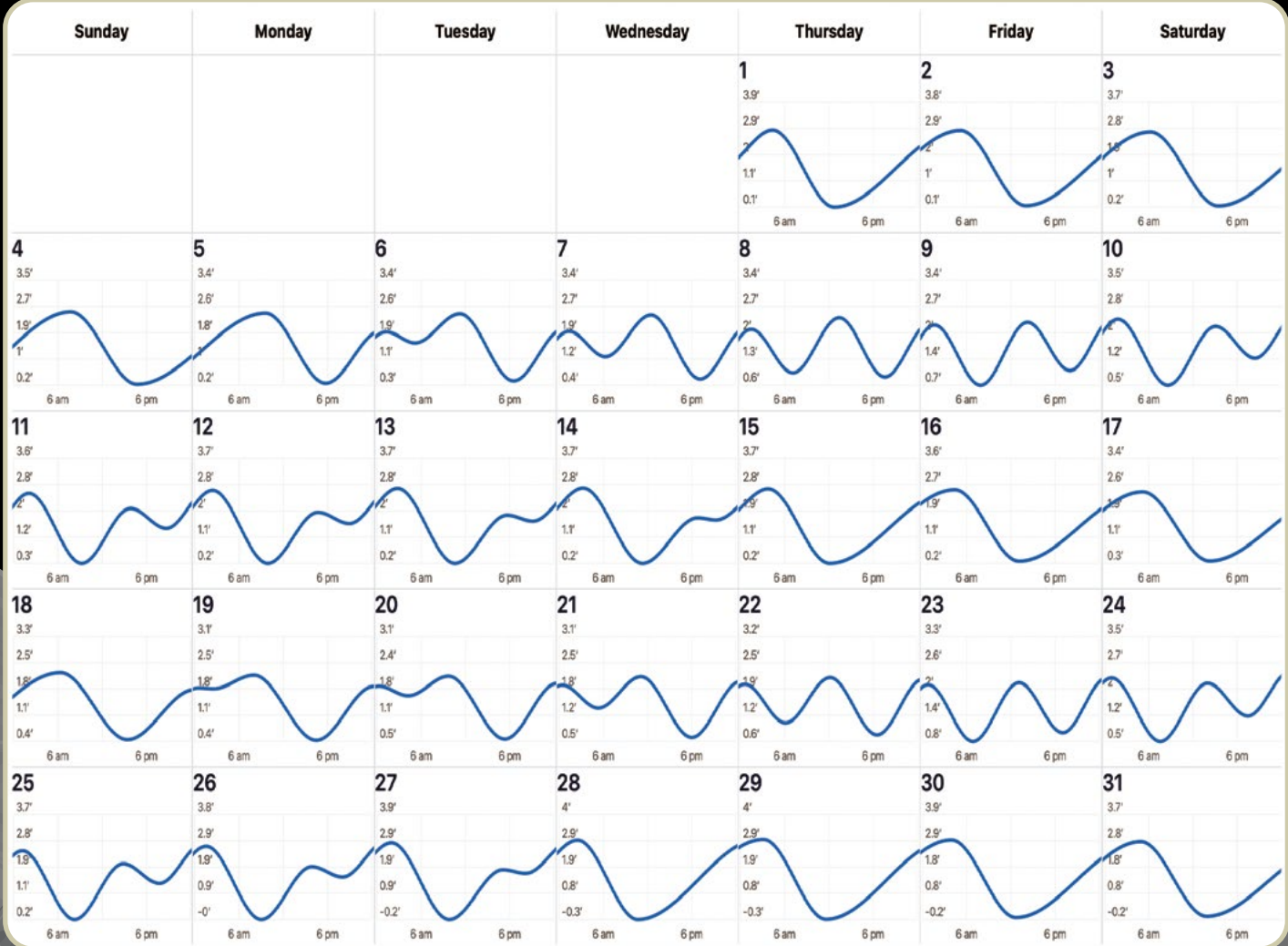
October also offers excellent fishing for Flounder in certain areas, Black Drum, Sheepshead and Pompano in a variety of spots. Flounder are prized for their delicious fillets, but if you are just looking for fun action, Jack Crevalles are known for hard-fighting action on light tackle and will attack schools of baitfish. Pompano can often be found along sandy beaches and passes as water temperatures begin to cool for another great eating fish.



Nearshore and inside Tampa Bay, reefs, ledges, and artificial structures become increasingly productive during October. Mangrove Snapper, Gag Grouper, Lane Snapper, Grunts, Porgies, and Black Sea Bass are common catches using live bait, soft plastics and jigs. As it cools off more sheepshead will invade these same areas. Offshore anglers may also encounter Cobia, Permit, Amberjack and the occasional Mahi-Mahi when conditions are favorable. Whether you're fishing the grass flats, exploring mangrove shorelines by kayak, casting from the Skyway Fishing Pier, or venturing offshore into the Gulf of Mexico, October provides outstanding fishing opportunities. Comfortable weather, abundant bait, and an incredible diversity of species combine to make St. Petersburg one of Florida's premier fall fishing destinations. 🎣

Captain George Hastick of "Fish Hunter Fishing Charters" in St. Petersburg, Florida has been fishing the waters of Tampa Bay for over 35 years. From novice to professional; you'll feel like you have been fishing buddies for years. For more info, contact him at 727-525-1005, www.FishTampa.com.





Conversions are based off of the St. Petersburg Pier. They are published strictly for reference and are not designed for navigational aid. Onshore-Offshore assumes no responsibility for their accuracy.

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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THE REST OF THE STORY

Planning Your Day Around the Tides

by Captain Mike Haynes

Over the last couple of articles, I've talked about learning to think like the fish and taking the time to watch the bait before making that first cast. We've looked at habitat, bait activity and some of the little observations that can help explain why fish are using a particular area.

But that's only part of the story. You can find the right habitat. You can find the bait. You may even know fish are in the area. But that doesn't mean they're going to be in the exact same place—or feeding the same way—all day. The next piece is understanding what the water is doing.

Growing up, I always enjoyed listening to Paul Harvey. He'd give you part of a story, but you knew there was more coming. Fishing is a lot like that. We've learned to look for the right water. We've learned to watch the bait. Now let's add tide, current, wind and timing and start putting all those observations together.

PLAN BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE DOCK

Think about going on vacation. Most of us don't just show up at the airport and figure everything out when we get there. We've already looked at flights, hotels, rental cars, places to eat and things we want to do.

I approach a fishing trip much the same way. If I've been off the water for a day or two and have a charter coming up, I'll start planning before my clients ever step on the boat. I'm thinking about where the bite has been, the time of year, temperature, recent weather and any fronts or storms that have moved through.

Then I start looking at the tide. Summertime is a good example. Generally, I want to take advantage of that early-morning bite before the sun gets too high and the day gets hot. But deciding to leave the dock at 6:30 or 7:00 doesn't tell me where I should start fishing. I need to know what the water should be doing when I get there.

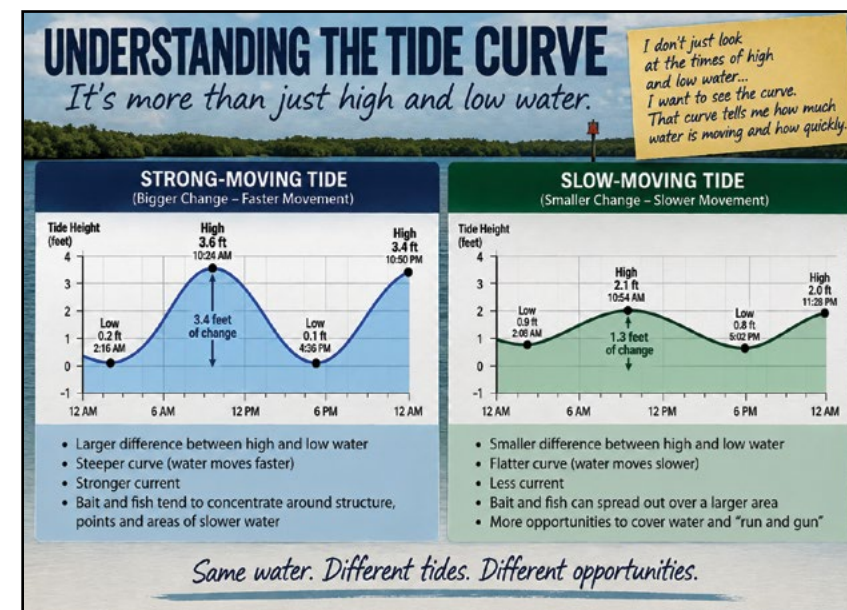
Is the tide coming in or going out? Are we close to the bottom of the tide? How much water is expected to move? How long before it really gets moving? How

long will it take me to reach the area? Then I start thinking about what bait I'm going to use and which areas give me the best opportunity under those conditions. I may not know the exact spot where I'll make the first cast. But I have a pretty good idea of the type of water I'm looking for.

I WANT TO SEE THE CURVE

When I'm planning a trip, I don't particularly like looking at a tide chart that only gives me the times of high and low water. I want to see the curve. That curve tells me more than simply when the tide is supposed to turn. It gives me an idea of how much water is expected to move and how quickly it's going to move.

A tide moving two to four feet is going to fish differently than one that only changes a foot or two. When I see a steeper curve and a bigger difference between high and low water, I'm expecting stronger current. When that curve is flatter and there's less difference between high and



low, I'm expecting a slower tide. That starts changing my fishing plan before I ever leave the dock.

On a stronger tide, bait tends to become more concentrated around places where it doesn't have to fight the hardest current. That might be behind an oyster bar, on the protected side of an island, around a point or tucked against a mangrove shoreline. The fish are looking for many of the same advantages. They don't need to sit in the strongest part of the current burning energy if they can move a short distance, get into slower water and let their food come to them.

A slower tide changes that picture. Without strong current pushing everything around, bait doesn't necessarily have to stack up behind an oyster bar or other current break. It can spread out and move through a much larger area. The fish have that same freedom. Instead of being pushed toward those smaller areas of slower water, they can move through more open areas looking for food.

On those slower tides, I may expand the type of water I'm fishing. I might move away from those obvious current breaks and spend more time fishing open flats where bait and fish have room to roam. Those are also the days when I may do more of what we call run-and-gun fishing. I might catch a couple of fish in one area, move somewhere else and find a few more, then move again. I'm covering more water because the conditions are allowing the fish to do the same thing. On a stronger tide, it's almost the opposite. The current can actually help narrow my search. So that curve isn't just telling me when high and low tide occur. It's already giving me an idea of how I may need to fish that day.

THE TIDE CHART IS ONLY A STARTING POINT

There's an important word in that last sentence: **May**. A tide chart is a prediction. It doesn't guarantee that the water is going to be doing exactly what I expect when I get there. The moon is another thing I'm looking at. Around the new and full moon, I'm generally expecting bigger tide swings and stronger water movement. Other times of the month, I may be dealing with less water movement. That doesn't tell me exactly what I'm going to find, but it's another piece of the plan.

Then there's the wind. Here on Florida's Gulf Coast, I've watched a strong north wind pull water out of these shallow areas faster than the tide chart would make you expect. Put that together with an outgoing tide and you can end up with a lot less water than you planned on. Wind from another direction can do just the opposite and hold water in. That's why I'm not going to see low tide predicted for 8:30 and assume I know exactly what the water will look like at 8:30.

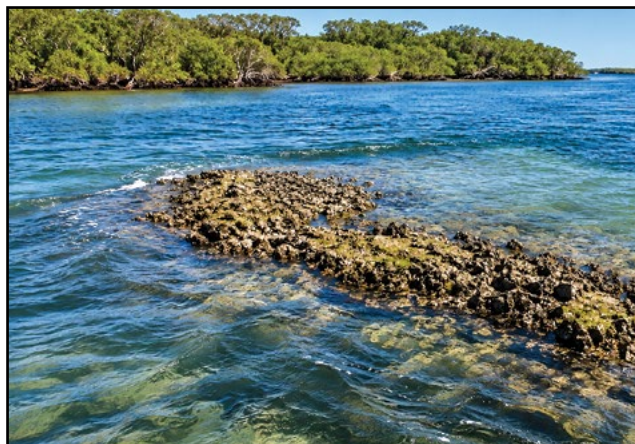
I look at the tide. I look at the curve. I consider the moon and wind. Then I get on the water and look at what is actually happening. Do I have more water or less water than I expected? Is the current moving as fast as I thought it would? Where is the bait? Is it concentrated or spread out? That's where planning turns back into observation. The tide chart helps me plan the day. The water tells me whether the plan is right.

LET THE TIDE COME TO YOU

Let's say I start the morning near the bottom of an incoming tide. At low water, I'm thinking about where fish can comfortably position themselves until more water arrives. That doesn't necessarily mean deep water. In the shallow areas I fish, another six inches or a foot can make a big difference. A pothole, small channel, harder-bottom depression, edge of a sandbar or even an old prop scar may provide enough additional depth for fish to hold. Then I go back to the observations we've already talked about. Where are the mullet? Where am I seeing bait flip? Is the activity tight to the shoreline, or is it twenty, fifty or a hundred feet away?

Sometimes the bait activity can show me a little deeper water or a bottom change I couldn't see otherwise. Now suppose I've got the structure. I've got the bait. Everything looks right. But I'm not getting bit. Before I decide the fish aren't there, I want to know what the tide is do-





ing. If I'm sitting near slack water without much current, those fish may be right there. They may simply be waiting for the water to move. Then a little current starts. One fish eats. Then another. For twenty or thirty minutes, everything seems to come alive. Then suddenly it stops. It's easy to think: The bite shut off. Maybe. But if fish were feeding well in an area and the bite suddenly stops, I don't automatically assume they packed up and left. More than likely, something changed.

SOMETIMES IT'S ONLY A FEW FEET

As the tide progresses, the current changes and those fish may simply reposition themselves to take advantage of a better feeding opportunity. And that move may not be very far.

Sometimes it's only a few feet. They may have slid closer to an oyster bar, moved underneath the mangroves, shifted toward a point or settled into an area where the water is moving a little better. That's why I don't immediately pull up and run somewhere else when a good bite suddenly stops. First, I look around. Has the water come up? Has the current gotten stronger? Has the bait moved? Where is the water flowing now compared with twenty minutes ago? If those fish were feeding well a few minutes ago, there's a good chance they're still somewhere close. Something may have simply given them a better place to feed. Sometimes you don't need to find another spot. You just need to find where the fish moved within the spot.

WATCH AN OYSTER BAR THROUGH THE TIDE

An oyster bar is one of the easiest places to see how this works. At lower water, part of the bar may be exposed. Current has to move around the ends. That creates a feeding opportunity. Bait gets pushed around those points, and fish can position nearby without sitting directly in the strongest flow.

That's where I may start fishing. But now let that incoming tide continue to rise. More of the oyster bar gets covered. Eventually, water starts flowing across areas that were exposed earlier. Now shrimp, crabs, pinfish, mullet and other food can move across the top of the bar. The feeding opportunity has changed. Those fish that were positioned near the end of the oyster bar may only need to move a short distance to take advantage of it. If I keep throwing to the same end of the bar simply because that's where I caught three fish thirty minutes ago, I'm fishing old information. The fish didn't necessarily stop eating. They found a better seat at the table. So I need to adjust with them.

KEEP FOLLOWING THE WATER

As that incoming tide continues to rise, the best position can change again. Fish generally aren't going to sit in the strongest current burning energy if there's an easier feeding opportunity nearby. If the flow across that oyster bar becomes too strong, they may slide into slightly deeper water where the current isn't as powerful. If there's an island or mangrove shoreline nearby, they may continue moving toward it as the water rises.

Now my whole approach can change. Instead of fishing the ends of the oyster bar, I may be casting toward flooded grass or underneath mangroves. Especially during summer, those mangroves can give fish several things at once—shade, bait, cover and some relief from the current. Nothing necessarily happened to the fish. The tide simply gave them a better place to be. That's the part I think a lot of anglers miss. They find fish and mentally mark the spot.

I'm trying to figure out why those fish were there at that particular stage of the tide. Because if I understand why they're there, I have a much better chance of figuring out where they're going next.

YOUR POSITION HAS TO CHANGE TOO

Following the tide also means changing how I position the boat and present the bait. I want my bait to work naturally with the current. If I understand where those fish are likely positioned and how the water is bringing food to them, I can put my client in a better position to make that presentation.

That position may change several times during the same tide. Sometimes I only need to change the angle of the cast. Sometimes I move the boat twenty or thirty feet. Sometimes I leave the oyster bar and start working the mangroves. I'm not moving randomly.



I'm responding to what the water, bait and fish are showing me. That's why I don't really think of a productive area as one exact fishing spot. I think of it as a series of feeding opportunities that develop as the water changes.

THE REST OF THE STORY

The first article in this series was about learning to think beyond the spot and understand why fish might be there. Then we looked at the bait—where it's positioned, what it's doing and what its behavior can tell us. But finding the right water and finding the bait is still only part of the story. Now we've added another piece. The tide helps tell us when an area may become productive. The strength of the current helps tell us where bait and fish may position themselves. The moon gives us an idea of the type of tide we may be dealing with. The wind can change what we expected to find. But none of those things work by themselves.

That's why once I get on the water, I go right back to watching. I'm comparing what I thought was going to happen with what is actually happening in front



of me. That's when all three parts start working together. Find the right water. Watch the bait. Follow the tide. Don't get locked into one spot just because that's where you caught fish an hour—or even twenty minutes—ago. The water changes. The bait adjusts. The fish reposition.

And we have to adjust with them. Fishing isn't just pulling up to a point, throwing out a bait and hoping for the best. It's learning to recognize the little pieces of information happening around you and understanding how they fit together.

The tide chart may tell you how the story is supposed to begin, but getting on the water, making the observations and adjusting to what you see—that's how you learn, in the words of Paul Harvey, *"The Rest of the Story..."* 📖

Capain Mike Haynes is the owner of Fishbonz Charters in Crystal River, Florida and co-host of Fishing Adventures Florida and the Florida West Coast Fishing Report. He enjoys helping anglers better understand fish behavior by learning to read the water and the ecosystems that support it. Learn more by visiting www.fishbonzcharters.com.



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HOW TO GET YOUR KIDS HOOKED!

BY CAPTAIN CLAY EAVENSON



I often get clients on the boat who tell me that they just can't get their kids "into fishing". They say that they've tried to get them interested, but they just can't figure out how to make their kids love it. I'm a big believer in not forcing sports on kids, if they don't enjoy it, they don't enjoy it. Even though I played professional baseball for a few years, my son doesn't love baseball. He plays it because it's better than sitting at the house, but he doesn't have a passion for it and I don't force him to play it. He loves fishing and football. Now, maybe I passed on the fishing bug, but I sure didn't pass on his love of football.



Even though I don't think you should force a hobby or a sport on your kids, I do think there's a few ways to encourage them to like fishing and even help them become better at it once they show an interest.

Make it easy for them to succeed early on.

Some of my clients who have tried to get their kids into fishing tell me about how they took their kids Snook fishing, or Redfish fishing, or even trolling offshore. Even though you can have great days doing those types of fishing, you're very likely to have a slow day fishing for such sport fish. There's no better way to turn your kids off from fishing than

to take them to fish for a hard to target species. If you also throw in inclement weather you may have just insured that they pick up bowling instead.

The lowly Bluegill.

The Bluegill doesn't get much recognition as a sportfish, but I can just about guarantee that it is responsible for starting the addiction to fishing that most avid fisherman have. The lowly Bluegill has this ability because it is easily accessible, fairly easy to catch and puts up a good fight on a Superman rod and reel from Wal-Mart. If you want to give your kids that nudge they need to really get into

fishing, take them to a local pond with a tube of crickets and a little rod and reel setup and you could very well hook a kid for life.

You can find Bluegill almost everywhere from the north to the south. Almost anywhere you go, you can find a pond that has them in it and they will eat anything from bread to red wigglers. Take a small push button rod and reel with some easy-to-come-by bait and just sit on the bank and bait your child's hook. If they have a single fishing bone in their body, they are bound to get hooked. If they don't enjoy that, start looking into piano lessons.

Pick easy to use tackle.





There's no need to start your kid out with an expensive spinning or bait casting rod and reel, unless you enjoy frustrating your kid. If that's the case, seek mental help. Just head over to a local tackle shop and pick up one of those push button combos that come in the heat-shrunk packages and cost about \$15. All you'll have to teach them is to hold the button down until they make their cast. The key to all of this is to let them succeed. If you make things easy early on, they will want to learn more advanced things.

Graduating from Bluegill and Superman poles.

My son and daughter still love catching Bluegill, don't get me wrong, but they've both moved up the food chain. Because they fell in love with fishing early on, they have a hunger for more challenging game. My oldest daughter, Claire, is now 7 years old and she has caught Redfish, Snook, Trout, Cobia, Sharks and much more. My son has caught all of those and Tarpon to boot. He's 8 years old and this year he caught his 14th Tarpon, which is his biggest to date, a 150lb beast. All of these fish take some serious skill to cast to, hook and land, but none of it would have been possible if I hadn't made fishing easy for them early on.

Teaching the skills.

It's not possible for most people to take a boat out every day so that their child can practice casting. The good news is that you don't have to. My kids wanted to be better at casting and they often would express this frustration while Bluegill fishing so, I made casting a game for them. I would set a bucket out in our dead end street and tie a hookless soft plastic bait to their poles and let them practice casting into the bucket from different angles and distances. I would give them points for getting close and more points for getting the bait to land in the bucket. They would compete like this several times a week and they loved it. Early on, the trees in the front yard would begin looking like Christmas trees as lures dangled from them like ornaments, but after a while they became quite proficient at casting. These days, my 8 year old son Cade acts as my first mate on many of my charters, often casting for my clients who are inexperienced.



If you want your kids to catch the fishing bug, make it easy and enjoyable. Pick targets they can readily catch and when they learn to love our sport, help them improve with simple games they can enjoy. 🎣

SUMMERTIME SMOKE

by Captain Johnny Touchton

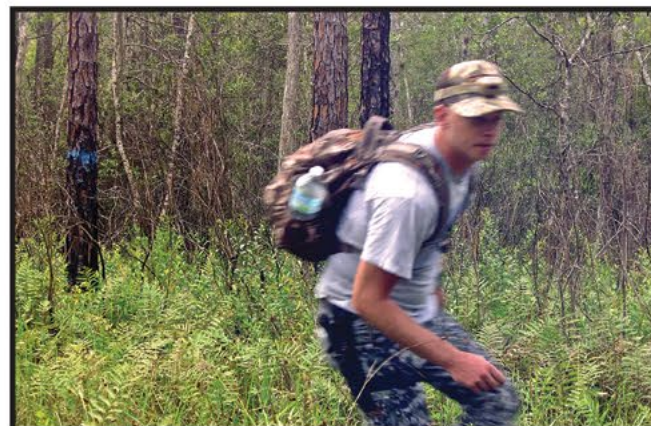
The road was muddy, wet and narrow as we entered the lease and the truck's engine revved hardily as it clamored over the ruts from previous trips onto the land. Hog sign was off to the left from the previous nights escapades.

The pigs had torn up the edges of the road leading up to their favorite swamp and it made the going even more difficult for the truck as the all-terrain tires slung the black Florida mud all over the trail.



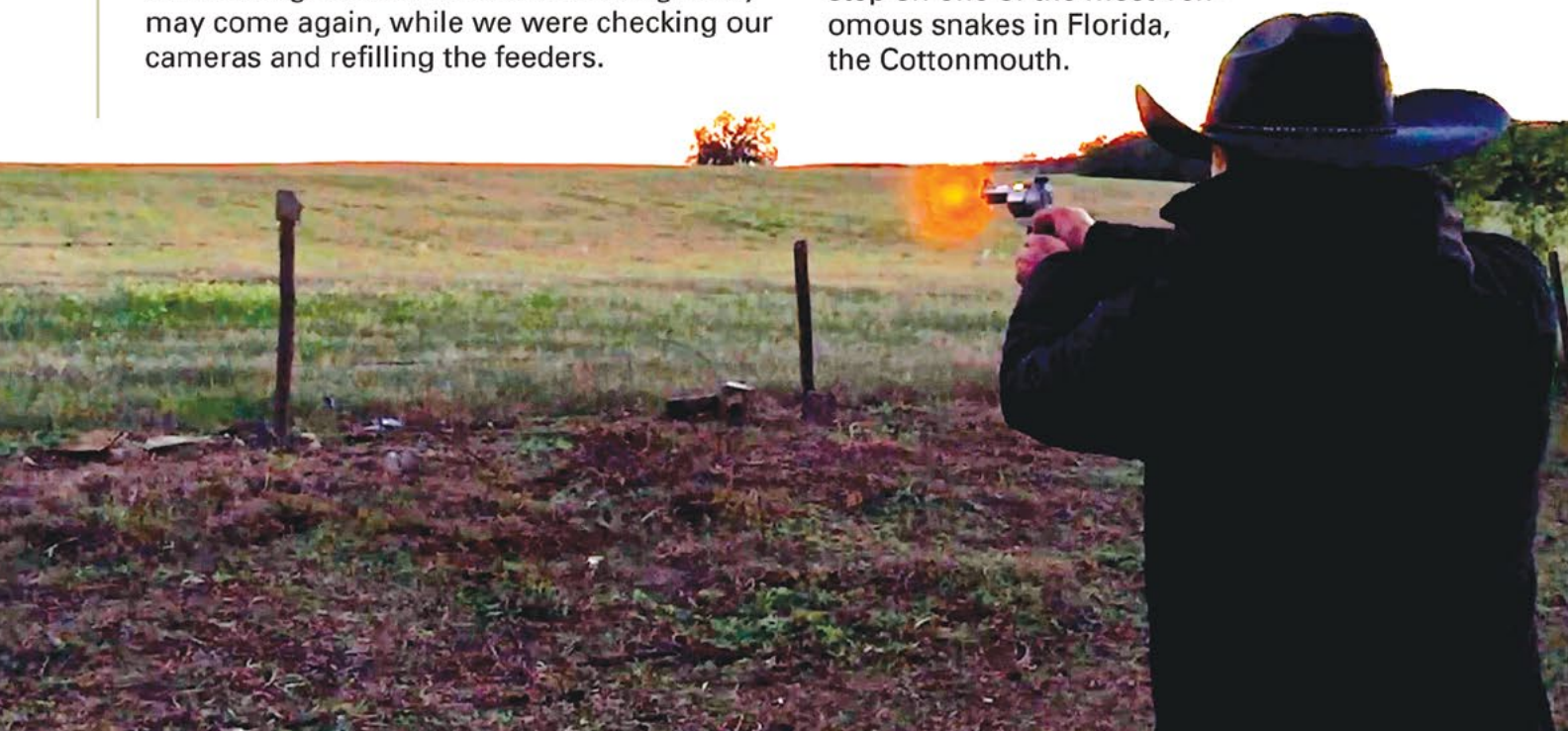
My partner and I decided that we had gone far enough, as we did not want to disturb any animals not already apprised of our location. We shut the doors quietly and got out of the air conditioning

and into the humid Florida air. The rains had come and gone and it looked as though they may come again, while we were checking our cameras and refilling the feeders.

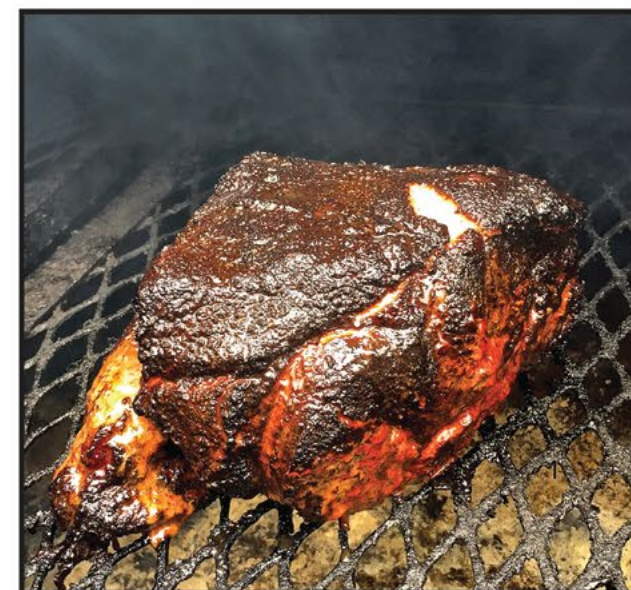


Cabbage palms and cypress trees filled our view for the next twenty minutes, as we moved slowly and purposefully dodging horse flies that appeared to be the size of small mockingbirds. The mosquitos were not thick as it had just rained and we opted to not use bug spray to limit our scent in the area.

On approach to the first camera, I was in the lead and I had decided to not run up on it, which was a good thing, as I would soon find out. My partner grabbed my pack as I was in mid-stride and, only using facial expressions, let me know that I was about to step on one of the most venomous snakes in Florida, the Cottonmouth.



The snake was quickly shoed away and we could hear hog beneath the feeder. It was decided that our handguns would do the trick for a shoat that would be perfect for the smoker later that weekend.



We drew our .45's and much to our surprise, we found a very large boar hog gorging himself on corn and salt. The shoats

and momma hogs had scurried off, apparently smarter than the big boar. We waited with baited breath, watching as the big tusker ate his fill of the little yellow acorns. It wasn't long before a game of paper, scissor, and rock was played and I was able to sneak up on the brute and put two slugs into his heart. He ran a measly ten yards and after we had checked the cameras and filled the feeders, we carried the hog out on a freshly cut sapling and rendered him for the smoker.

The next day, with smoke billowing out of the top pipe of the pull behind and the sweet smell of apples and dry rub roasting to perfection, we recollected and took great joy in the fact that we are able to live in a state where such occurrences are common practice. Cheers to summertime in the sunshine. ▣

Captain Johnny Touchton can be reached via his website at www.LPineOutdoors.com.

FALL FISHING RODEO

by Misty Wells

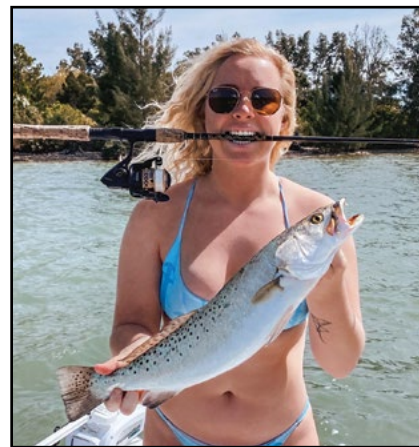
The month of October offers some the best fishing on the Gulf Coast of Florida and this "Rodeo Season" is here. Finally summer's scorching heat has begun to fade along the west coast of Florida, and anglers can start to target a large number of local species. October is widely considered the "sweet spot" month on the Gulf of Mexico. With cooling water temperatures, thinning crowds, and massive schools of migrating baitfish, the action inshore and offshore hits a fever pitch. Whether you are casting live bait along shallow mangrove shorelines or trolling open waters, October delivers some of the best fishing conditions of the entire year.



Let's kick it off with some inshore action, fishing the shallow flats, passes and backcountry estuaries provide world-class action in our area. This is the time of year to start targeting Redfish, Snook and Speckled Trout in your favorite inshore spots. As summer beaches empty out, Snook start transitioning back into rivers, bays, flats and mangrove creek mouths. Snook are among the most prized, powerful, and thrilling inshore game fish in Florida and in our area. Known for their distinct black lateral line, razor-sharp gill plates, and explosive surface strikes, Snook behave much

like a combination of a freshwater largemouth bass and a tarpon. Anglers travel from near and far to be able to target this species and hope to enter the "Over 40 Club", and elite club of which you can not pay to enter. Snook are ambush predators and rely heavily on current and cover to hunt. They hide behind structure-facing the current and wait for the moving water to push baitfish, shrimp, or crabs directly toward them. In the Fall snook tend to move into bays, grass flats and mangrove edges, feeding aggressively to prepare for Winter.

While you are inshore you may want to also target our famous Redfish, they are shallow-water bottom feeders that rely on structural edges, grass and current to hunt just like Snook. Some key places to target Redfish in our area are Weedon Island, Fort DeSoto and St. Joseph Sound. However Redfish can be found almost anywhere if you target shallow seagrass flats (1-3 feet deep), or look for mangrove points where tidal currents push past. Another key location to target Redfish are Oyster Bars and Sandbars, at high tide they often swim over submerged oyster bars and shallow sand flats targeting crabs and shrimp. Often they will also follow a school of Mullet so look for "nervous water" and tailing fish in shallow water. You are also in the right location to target



Speckled Trout and Flounder; this type of fishing picks up substantially across the seagrass beds and sandy transition areas.

October also marks the opening of Stone Crab season, one of the most anticipated events on the West Coasts culinary and coastal calendar. Stone Crab are Florida's only sustainable fishery, meaning it is built on a catch-and-release model. When you harvest Stone Crab, only the claw is kept, meaning you return the crab back to the sea where it can regenerate its lost claw(s). Registered recreational harvesters are permitted to have five stone crab traps, you can bait and drop the traps on October 5th, 10 days prior to opening season. Wanna know the best place to buy your stone crab trap



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Make sure to check out all the up-to-date information on Stone Crab season on myfwc.com and be sure you are following all the regulations on size and harvesting. The good news about Stone Crab season beside the tasty claws, is the distribution of Stone Crab traps in the Gulf brings in the Tripletail.



Tripletail are one of the most unique, unusual, and delicious species of fish on the Gulf Coast. Tripletail are known for their strange habit of floating sideways near the surface debris-resembling a dead floating leaf or weed patch. Crab Trap buoys and crab trap lines are one of the best places to find Tripletail, offering a sight fishing opportunity for observant anglers. To catch these skittish fish, you need to cast past the target, never cast directly onto or over the tripletail they will swim down immediately. Cast 5-to-10 feet past or up current of the buoy/debris, reel slowly in the direct line of sight and let the natural current carry the bait directly to the tripletail. Tripletail are lazy eaters, wait 2 to 3 seconds then reel steadily to set the circle hook and quickly reel down to pull the fish away from the trap ball and rope.



easier to catch them on hook-and-line, but it does require a specialized approach because hogfish are bottom-dwelling crustacean eaters with small, rubbery mouths that rarely hit standard fish baits or artificial lures. You're going to find Hogfish on bottom structures in about 30 to 60 feet of water along the West Coast. Look for low-profile hard bottom,

Next up we are going to talk about Hogfish, and last but not least our highly sought-after Kingfish. Hogfish are also a prized catch having some of the sweetest, most delicate white meat in the ocean. These days it is much

rock ledges and limestone outcroppings. The #1 undisputed bait for hogfish is live shrimp; dead shrimp will work but not as effective as live. Don't go too heavy on the bottom rig's hogfish have small mouths and gently pick at the bait if you go too heavy it will cause you to miss the strikes.

Lastly, the fall kingfish migration along Florida's west coast is one of the most anticipated events for anglers and tournaments in our area. As water temperatures drop in the northern Gulf, massive schools of kingfish push south along the Suncoast, following migrating baitfish. Kingfish are highly temperature-sensitive coastal pelagics, they thrive in water temperatures between 68°F and 74°F. As early fall cold fronts push down from the north, water temperatures along the Florida Panhandle drop into the low 70s, initiating the southward run. Starting late October through November large schools hit local waters off Clearwater, Tampa Bay, and Sarasota. Structures 3 to 15 miles off the coast in 30 to 60 feet of water (such as the Clearwater Wrecks, Rube Allyn Reef, and Egmont Key shipping channel edges) hold massive schools. If you don't have a boat don't worry during calm fall mornings, kingfish often chase schools of threadfin herring and Spanish mackerel in 15 to 25 feet of water just a few hundred yards off the sand. Look for diving seabirds, frantic surface activity, or large kingfish launching completely out of the water (skyway leaps) as they strike bait from underneath.

Go-to Fall tactics are slow trolling with live bait using blue runners, large pinfish or threadfin, with an idle speed of 1 to 2 knots, letting the bait swim naturally. If you are pulling hardware such as a plug or lure push it up to 3 to 5 knots to cover ground more quickly. Make sure to use a stinger rig made of #4 or #5 wire leader with a nose hook (1/0 to 2/0) and trail buy using a #4 or #6 treble hook near the tail to catch tail-biters. Chumming for this species always increases your chances of landing the winning fish, so grab your frozen blocks of chum and get to work.

Fall on the Gulf Coast doesn't last forever, but the memories made during this golden window surely do. As the water temperatures hover in that perfect sweet spot, the fish are active, the weather is unbeatable, and the crowds are gone. I look forward to seeing you out there, the fall bite is officially on, and there's no better time to bend a rod. Ready to book at charter with us, check out: www.ucatchfish.com.

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 at mistywells.com.

THAT OCTOBER FEELING

by Captain Justin Searcy

Every October, I get the same feeling when I leave the dock in Tarpon Springs. The air is a little easier to breathe, the sun takes its time coming up, and you can finally fish through the middle of the day without thinking about where the nearest patch of shade is. Fall on Florida's Gulf Coast does not arrive all at once. A few cooler mornings and a change in the wind are usually enough to get my attention. The fish notice it, too.

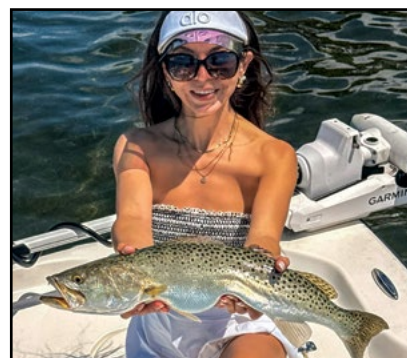


For me, October is a month to stay flexible. One morning might be all about redfish on a shallow flat. The next, bait is getting pushed around the mouth of the Anclote River and the action is along a shoreline. I like to have a plan when I leave the dock, but I pay more attention to what the water is telling me once I get there.

Redfish are a great place to start. Look for moving water around mangrove points, oyster edges, and the deeper cuts that connect a flat to a channel. On higher water, they may push right up against the cover. As the tide falls, I work the outside edges and nearby potholes. A live shrimp or a well placed baitfish can do the job, but the most important part is making a quiet approach. If you can see a

school before it sees you, slow down and give yourself one good cast instead of rushing three bad ones.

Snook are still very much part of the October conversation. I check creek mouths, docks, and shorelines where bait has a reason to gather. An early start and a moving tide can put you in the right place, but do not stay glued to one spot just because it produced last week. Watch for nervous bait, birds working the edge, or a fish pushing water. Those little signs are often worth more than a favorite waypoint. Snook deserve careful handling, especially after a long fight. Keep them in the water when you can, support them properly, and take the time to make sure they are ready before release.



As the water begins to cool, I also start looking more closely at the grass flats for trout. Focus on healthy grass, sandy potholes, and nearby depth changes. A slow moving soft plastic or shrimp worked just above the grass is a good way to cover water. If you



catch one, take a moment before moving on. There may be more fish holding along the same edge. October is also one of my favorite times to bring somebody new aboard. The weather is more comfortable, there is plenty to look at between casts, and a short trip can turn into a full day of memories. Give a younger angler the rod when a fish shows up. Let a friend make the first cast. Stop at a local tackle shop on the way out and grab lunch at a waterfront spot when you come back. Those are the parts of a fishing day that stick with people.

We are fortunate to have this water right in our backyard, and taking care of it is part of enjoying it. Pick up the loose line you see at the ramp, give other boats room, and keep only what you will use when harvest is allowed. Regulations can vary by species and location, so check the current rules before your trip. A good October day does not need a full cooler to count. Sometimes it is a clean release, a few hours with good company and a reason to come back tomorrow. 🍷

@capt_justin_searcy

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Dale Tuttle with a nice Florida Keys Kingfish!



Marty Cohen with some chunky American Reds!



Richard Sullivan with another impressive Middlegrounds Grouper!



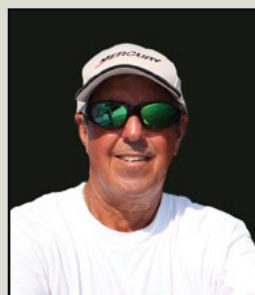
Merle Seamon with a Knuckle Busting Amberjack!



Marty Cohen with a beautiful Middlegrounds Grouper!

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As daily temperatures begin to drop, water quality improves and the fish become more eager to bite. During clear water winter conditions, I switch to lighter lines; sometimes down to 15-pound leaders to help trigger more strikes. Live shrimp becomes one of our top baits this time of year because fish adapt to it as a primary food source, so it makes sense to give them what they want.

Keeping shrimp lively is important, so a good aeration system is a must. Don't forget to downsize your hooks as well; in some situations, I prefer using only a split shot when a little weight is needed. Cooler water starts the big trout bite as they move along edges of the grass flats.

ABOUT THE CAPTAIN

Captain Sergio Atanes has been fishing the waters of Tampa Bay since the age of five years old. He has seen all the changes over the last 50-years and loves to share his knowledge and experience with anyone interested in fishing especially kids which are the future anglers and captains. His goal is to educate and share the experience of fishing opportunities all over the Tampa Bay area.

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FALL TACTICS FOR TAMPA BAY BRUISERS

by Captain Sergio Atanes

October is one of the best months of the year for catching large redfish in Tampa Bay. Although redfish are year-round residents, the bigger breeder fish become more predictable as the water cools and bait gathers along the mangrove shorelines. After the long heat of summer, the lower water temperatures bring new life to the flats, and the big bruisers begin feeding with more confidence around points, cuts, potholes and current swept edges.



After a short run to catch bait at my secret spot, we headed for Weedon Island, one of my favorite places to target oversize redfish this time of year. Once we reached the no-motor zone, I lowered the trolling motor and, with the push of a button, 103 pounds of thrust came to life, quietly pushing my 24-foot Sheaffer bay boat toward the mangrove shoreline. Many islands and keys in Tampa Bay are protected areas, and anglers must rely on a trolling motor or push pole. It pays to know the rules, respect the habitat, and move slowly because FWC keeps a close eye on these areas.

We worked slowly toward the southeast point of the key, watching nervous bait, push-

ing wakes, and mullet activity. Once we found the right mix of current, grass, and mangrove cover, we anchored and waited for the school to appear. Patience is one of the most important parts of red fishing. A shoreline can look empty one minute and then suddenly come alive when a school slides in with the tide.

We were prepared for action with several bait presentations ready to go. One rod carried a live pinfish suspended just below the surface under a float, another had greenbacks free lined beyond the float, and a third was rigged with cut pinfish and a small split shot to keep the bait on the bottom. Having different options in the water helps determine what the fish want, especially when reds are moving through shallow grass or staging along mangrove edges.

The sun's rays were beginning to cut through the crystal-clear water, and we could see small pinfish darting in and out of the grass while



mullet jumped nearby. By looking at my clients' faces, I could tell they were ready for action, and so was I. Just beyond casting range, a small wake appeared as if a boat had slipped across the flat. We looked at each other and, without saying a word, prepared for the attack. The reds were coming. Rolando drew first blood, and within a split second another rod bowed over. Soon we had three hookups and no one around to see it. For more than three hours, we had the school to ourselves, battling reds, winning some fights and losing others, and enjoying the kind of morning every redfish angler dreams about.

Large schools of redfish often congregate around mangrove islands in the fall. Some schools are so large they

form a reddish wave as they push through the shallow flats. My favorite baits for these fish are 3-to 5-inch pinfish, fresh cut pinfish, greenbacks, and dollar-sized pass crabs. Casting distance is a must because these fish are wary in skinny water. Medium tackle works best: I prefer 15-pound braided line, a 7-foot, 6-inch medium-action fast-taper rod paired with a 3000-to 4000-size spinning reels for long, accurate casts and enough backbone to control a big fish around grass and mangrove roots.

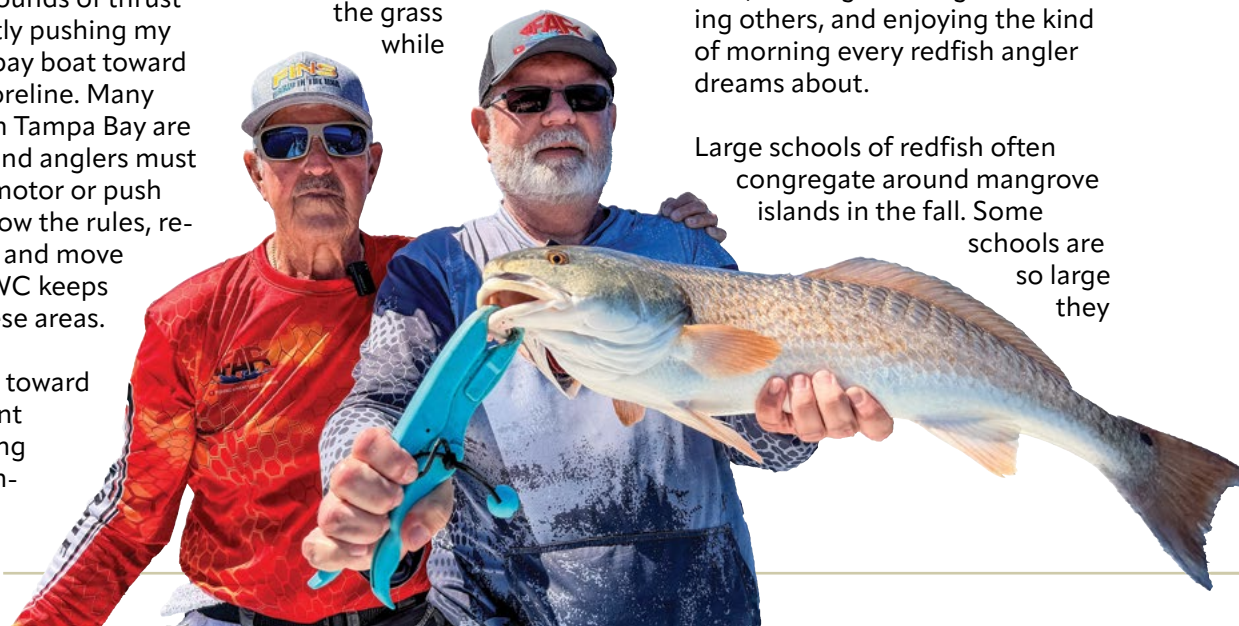
Redfish in shallow water spook easily, so stealth is the key. Keep a safe distance from the school, avoid slamming hatches, speak quietly, and use the trolling motor sparingly. Sound travels much faster through water than through air, and even a small noise can scatter fish that were feeding comfortably moments before. The best approach is to position the boat ahead of the fish, stay still, and let the school come to you.

I prefer to fish the start of the outgoing tide for reds because, as the water drops, bait and fish are pushed into cuts, potholes, and troughs around the mangrove islands. Those areas can turn into private casting ponds when the timing is right. Get there early, stay ahead of the tide change, and be willing to wait. I sat quietly for an hour before the fish moved in, and it was often well worth it. While other boats chase the school, let the fish come to you. Never cast directly into a school of redfish; instead, cast ahead of them and allow your bait to settle naturally in their path. On days with stronger current, I will use a float and let the flow drift the bait toward the



fish. That simple adjustment made the presentation look natural and kept the bait in the strike zone longer. With that said, my clients had a great day, and it was one they will never forget. ☐

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



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