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November 2026
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NORTHEAST MARINE

IF I ONLY HAD A BOAT.

Lots of you readers out there already have boats. This column is not for you, although you might still learn a little or get a chuckle out of it. This column is intended for those of you out there who are absolutely certain that everything will fall right into place and your life will be complete, if you only had a boat. The idea of a boat is just so damn romantic. They give you access to the open seas where you can break the bonds of your work-a-day life and really find true freedom, right?? There are so many different types of boats that there is something for everybody, from the smallest dingy to the largest megayacht.
The reality of the boating experience can be pretty close to the heaven described above, or it can come very near to experiencing the fiery pits of hell. It is really pretty much up to you to determine which way your boating experience goes.

The whole experience starts with the choice of the boat. Pick something appropriate for what you want to do and where you want to go. If you have never ever operated or maintained a boat, start small. Small boats are fairly simple, they are easy to get unstuck (if you happen to forget about the tide) and generally, they are cheaper to fix when you do mess up. I have seen far too many people buy a big complicated boat (because they can) and wind up having a hellish time because they exceeded their skill level. New boats can be quite expensive these days, but you do get a dealer who should stand behind them and help with some of the troubles. If a new boat is your choice, look for an established dealer who has been in business for years. Dealers who survived the 2007/2008 economic crash probably offer good service and aren't going anywhere. If you are going for a used boat, make sure that the major systems are in good order.

Get a mechanic to check the compression of the motor and find out the hours, when possible. Most marine motors are capable of running way more hours than you might think, I have almost never seen a worn out boat motor, it is corrosion and improper maintenance and misuse that kills them. Don't worry so much about the little stuff like horn, lights, pumps, etc. They are important for safety, but they are generally easy and cheap to fix.

The most important thing to realize is that, while they may seem to have similarities, a boat is absolutely nothing like your car. Boats are produced by hundreds of relatively small manufacturers, not a handful of mega corporations with billion dollar-automated factories. Boats are much more hand crafted than cars and quality of wiring and other critical systems varies widely between builders. Unlike cars, boats also sit for weeks or months at a time during off-season periods. This is a phenomena that I don't really understand in Florida, but despite year round beautiful weather, many of our friends who came here from the North have retained old habits and they only use their boats during spring and summer. Batteries, fuel systems and electronics, like to be used regularly, when they sit, the gremlins creep in. I can't believe how many of our storage customers show up in April after not seeing their boats for 4 to 6 months and just don't understand why they won't start.

Last, but certainly not least, don't be afraid to admit what you don't know. In our rental fleet, we have very few problems with novice boaters who admit their lack of knowledge and ask for instruction. The boaters who have issues are the ones who think that they know everything and are unwilling to listen and ask questions. A USCG Auxiliary or Power Squadron class is a good place to start and these classes teach you the basics of navigation and safe boating, but they are not really able to offer hands on instruction on the water. There are many well qualified boat Captains who will be glad to go out on your boat and teach you the in's and outs of boating in our area. Don't be afraid to call on them.

Boats can be a lot of fun, but the best advise that I ever saw about having fun on a boat was to go on somebody else's. If you heed this advise, you are almost certain to have a good time, but don't forget, your buddy's boat runs on gas, not thanks; chip in if you want to ever be asked back.

Merle







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ON THE COVER:
Ever wanted to restore an older boat into your ultimate dream fishing machine? Well, this month, Captain Sergio Atanes breaks down whether its worth it or not. Flip to page 26 of this issue to check it out and learn more!

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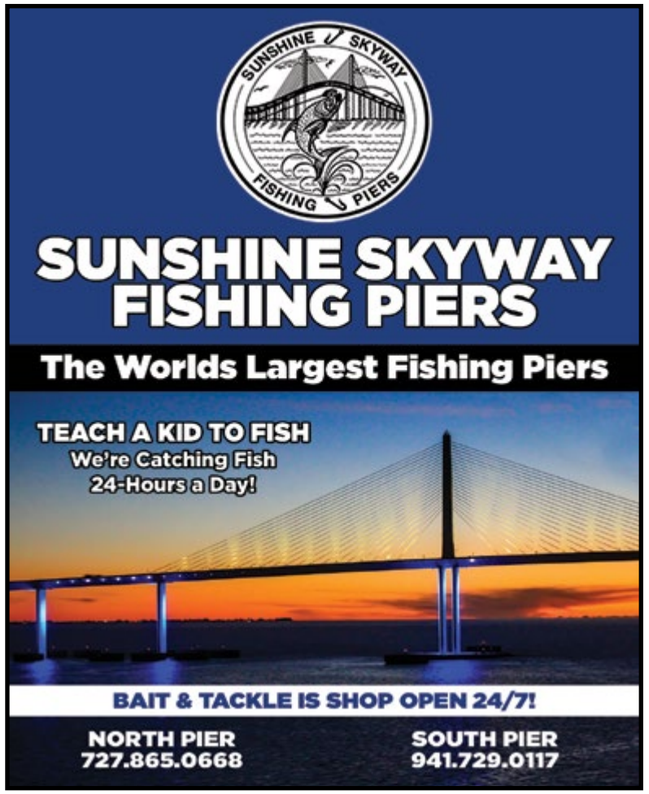
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THE LIFE OF THE REDFISH

by Captain George Hastick

The red drum is one of the most iconic sport fish in Tampa Bay. These resilient fish navigate a multi-stage life cycle that relies heavily on the health of Florida's estuaries. From microscopic larvae in the open ocean to massive "bull" reds in the deep gulf, the journey of a Tampa Bay Redfish is a tale of survival and adaptation.



SPAWNING

The life cycle begins during the late summer and fall, peaking from late August through October. Mature adult Redfish (typically around 6 years of age or older) migrate out of the shallow waters of Tampa Bay and gather in massive schools near offshore passes, inlets, and the open waters of the Gulf.

Spawning occurs at night. Male redfish produce a distinct drumming sound by vibrating special muscles against their swim bladders to attract females. A single female can release tens of millions of eggs into the water column, which are fertilized by the males. These buoyant eggs drift with the tides and ocean currents, hatching into microscopic larvae within 20 to 24 hours, which eat microscopic organisms.

ESTUARINE NURSERY STAGE

The incoming tides act as a conveyor belt, carrying the defenseless larvae back through vital channels like the Egmont Channel and into the protected interior of Tampa Bay. Once inside, the larvae seek refuge in shallow, low-salinity habitats. Mangrove shoreline tidal creeks, salt marshes, and lush seagrass beds serve as critical nurseries.





In these protected zones, juvenile redfish find an abundance of food, while sheltering from larger predators. By the end of their first year, a juvenile redfish typically measures between 10 and 17 inches in length. Their diet evolves as they grow, transitioning from microscopic plankton to small marine worms, copepods, and eventually small shrimp and crabs.

ESTUARY SUB-ADULTS

Redfish spend their first 3 to 5 years living continuously within the shallow flats of Tampa Bay and adjacent areas. At roughly three years old, a redfish reaches about 24 inches in length. At this time, they will feed on crabs, shrimp, baitfish, and more.



This growth period corresponds directly with the Florida slot limit of 18 inches to 27 inches. In the Tampa Bay region, the harvest limit is restricted to 1 fish per person with a maximum boat limit of 2 fish to ensure that enough juveniles survive to reach spawning age. Stay up to date on regulations with the "Fish Rules" App.

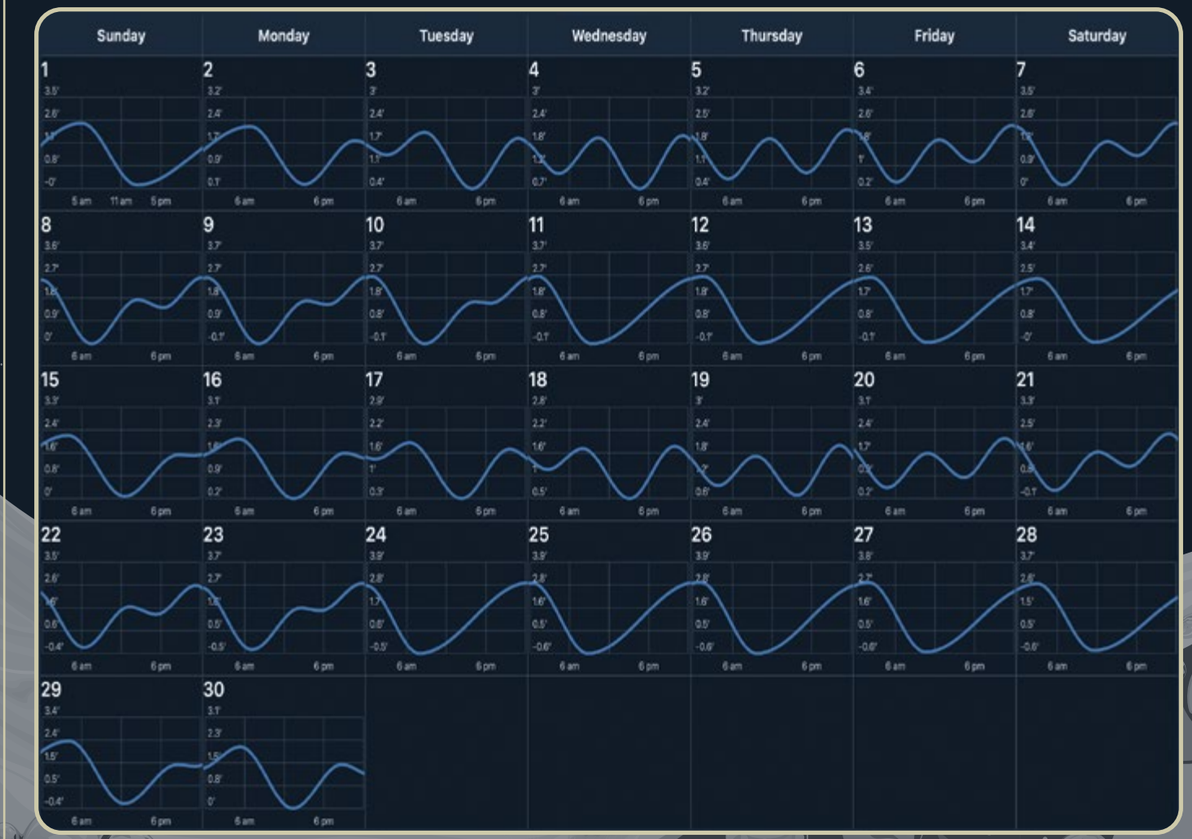


MATURITY & JOINING THE "BULL" FLEET

Reaching sexual maturity around age 4 to 6, redfish permanently shift their behavior, migrating into the deeper waters of the Gulf of America to join the adult breeding population, often referred to by anglers as "bull reds."

Their lifespan can exceed 40 years. Year after year, these massive adults, sometimes reaching 40 inches, return to the mouth of Tampa Bay every autumn to spawn and even migrate up into the bay. This completes a beautifully synchronized ecological circle that sustains one of Florida's most treasured marine fisheries.

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





SNOOK FISHING IN FLORIDA'S BIG BEND

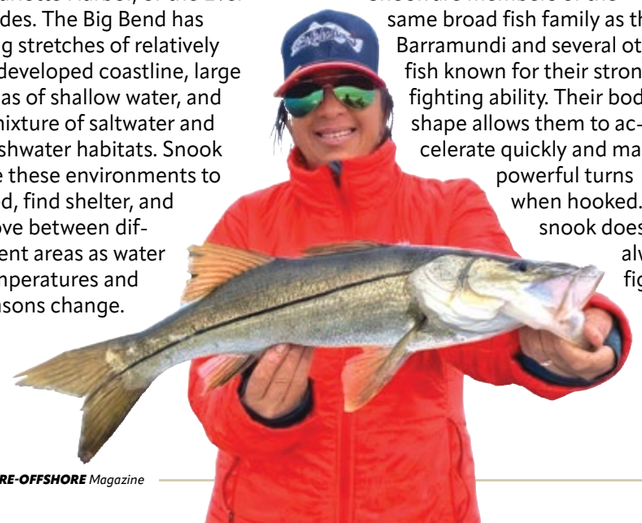
Hunting One of the Gulf Coast's Hardest-Fighting Fish

by Terri B. Huffmaster

Florida's Big Bend region is known for its beautiful coastline, shallow grass flats, winding creeks, oyster bars, salt marshes, and quiet rivers. Stretching along the northeastern Gulf of Mexico, this part of Florida offers anglers a chance to experience some of the state's finest inshore fishing. Redfish, spotted seatrout, flounder, and sheepshead are familiar catches in these waters, but another fish has earned a special place among anglers who enjoy a serious challenge: the snook.

Snook are famous for their powerful runs, sudden changes in direction, and ability to use nearby structure to their advantage. An angler may hook a snook near a mangrove shoreline or a riverbank and watch it head straight for a submerged tree, dock piling, or oyster bar. Landing one takes more than luck. It requires the right tackle, careful presentation, patience, and a good understanding of the fish's behavior.

Snook fishing in the Big Bend can be different from fishing in places farther south, such as Tampa Bay, Charlotte Harbor, or the Everglades. The Big Bend has long stretches of relatively undeveloped coastline, large areas of shallow water, and a mixture of saltwater and freshwater habitats. Snook use these environments to feed, find shelter, and move between different areas as water temperatures and seasons change.



Although snook are often associated with Florida's warmer southern waters, they are also found in parts of the Big Bend. Their presence adds another exciting opportunity for anglers exploring the region's creeks, rivers, bays, and coastal shorelines.



The common snook, scientifically known as Centropomus undecimalis, is a popular sport fish found in warm coastal waters of the western Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico. Snook have a long body, a sloping forehead, and a large mouth designed for catching smaller fish and other prey. Their coloring can change depending on their surroundings, but they often have a greenish or gray back, silvery sides, and a pale belly. One of their most noticeable features is the dark lateral line running along the side of the body from the gill area toward the tail. This line makes snook easy to recognize once an angler becomes familiar with the species.

Snook are members of the same broad fish family as the Barramundi and several other fish known for their strong fighting ability. Their body shape allows them to accelerate quickly and make powerful turns when hooked. A snook does not always fight by running straight away from a boat. It may surge toward the surface, shake its head, turn sharply, or try to reach nearby cover. Larger fish can put considerable pressure on fishing tackle, especially in shallow water where an angler has little room to let the fish run.

Their feeding habits also make them interesting targets. Snook are predators that often wait near structure before rushing toward passing prey. Instead of spending all their time chasing baitfish in open water, they frequently take advantage of places where smaller fish naturally gather.

For the angler, understanding this behavior is one of the first steps toward catching more snook.

Florida's Big Bend is known for its broad marshes, shallow flats, oyster reefs, tidal creeks, and natural shoreline. Unlike heavily developed coastal areas, many sections of this region still have large stretches of habitat that support a variety of fish and wildlife.

The coastline includes waters around places such as Steinhatchee, Keaton Beach, Horseshoe Beach, Cedar Key, and the lower reaches of several coastal rivers and creeks. These areas offer a mixture of fishing environments. Some have broad, shallow flats where anglers can search for fish moving along grass edges. Others have deeper channels, small creek mouths, oyster formations, and protected shorelines where predatory fish can wait for an easy meal.

Anglers who target snook here should be prepared to explore. One creek may hold fish while another nearby creek has very little activity. A productive location during one part of the year may become less productive after a cold front or a change in water temperature. That is part of what makes fishing the Big Bend interesting. Success often comes from learning a small area well rather than simply covering as much water as possible.

Tides influence where baitfish travel and how snook position themselves to feed. In the Big Bend, tidal movement can make a major difference because many fishing areas are shallow. A change of only a few inches can affect which grass edges, oyster bars, and creek banks are accessible to fish. During a rising tide, water spreads across shallow areas and allows small fish and other prey to move closer to shore. Snook may follow this food into places that were too shallow earlier.



A falling tide can create a different opportunity. As water leaves the flats, baitfish and shrimp may move toward creek mouths, deeper channels, and small drains. Snook can wait near these openings and feed on prey being carried out by the current. The best tide depends on the location, season, weather, and available habitat. There is no single tide that guarantees a catch everywhere. One useful approach is to arrive early enough to fish the final part of a falling tide and the beginning of the next rising tide. This allows an angler to observe how fish respond to changing water levels. Keep a tide chart nearby, but also watch the water itself. Current direction, floating grass, baitfish activity, and changes in shoreline depth can provide valuable clues.

Water temperature is especially important when fishing for snook. These fish prefer warm conditions, and sudden cold weather can cause them to become less active. Extended periods of very cold water can be dangerous to snook, particularly in the northern portions of their range.That makes the Big Bend's seasonal temperature changes an important consideration.

When targeting Snook, live bait is a dependable option for anglers. Depending on local availability and regulations, suitable bait may include small baitfish or shrimp. The best choice is often whatever healthy prey is naturally present in the area being fished. A live baitfish struggling near a creek edge or passing through a current seam may attract attention from a nearby predator. A bait that is poorly hooked, badly injured, or placed in the wrong part of the water may be less effective. Use a hook that matches the size of the bait. The goal is to allow the bait to move naturally while keeping it securely attached. When fishing around structure, anglers may need a stronger leader to reduce the chance of a fish breaking the line against oysters or other rough surfaces. Avoid using tackle so heavy that it prevents the bait from moving naturally, but do not use equipment so light that a hooked fish cannot be controlled safely. Live shrimp can also be useful when snook are feeding on crustaceans or when baitfish are difficult to find. Before collecting or purchasing bait, check any applicable rules and make sure the bait is legal for use in the area.

Artificial lures allow anglers to cover water efficiently and search for active fish. They are also useful when anglers want to practice accurate casting around structure without constantly replacing live bait. Several types of lures are worth considering including soft plastic paddletails or topwater lures in natural colors that resemble local baitfish are a useful starting point.

Florida manages snook under regional regulations because fishing pressure, habitat, water temperatures, and fish populations can differ across the state. The Big Bend region has specific rules that anglers must follow. These rules apply to covered inland and coastal waters as well as adjacent federal waters. According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's published rules for the Big Bend region, the regular recreational harvest season runs from March through April and September through November. The closed season runs from December 1 through the end of February and from May 1 through August 31. The published slot limit is at least 28 inches and no more than 33 inches in total length, and the bag limit is one snook per person per day.

In Florida's Big Bend, the combination of natural coastal habitat and the powerful fight of a snook makes every encounter memorable. With careful planning, suitable tackle, and responsible fishing practices, anglers can enjoy this remarkable fish while helping preserve the region's coastal resources for years to come. ◪

- Terri B.Huffmaster

CHANGING TIDES, LASTING TRADITIONS

by Captain Justin Searcy

November has always been one of my favorite times to be on the water along Florida's Gulf Coast. The mornings are a little cooler, the boat ramps start to quiet down, and the first real cold fronts remind us that another season is changing.

Growing up around Tarpon Springs, I've watched these waters change throughout the year, and it's something I still appreciate every time I get out. One week, you're looking for schools of bait along the flat in shorts and a T-shirt. The next, you're reaching for a jacket and trying to figure out where all that bait went.

That's part of what makes fishing this time of year so interesting. Just when you think you've figured out a pattern, Mother Nature reminds you there's always something new to learn.

As November settles in, falling water temperatures begin changing where fish spend their time and how they feed. Snook start transitioning away from their warmer-weather patterns, seeking rivers, canals, and protected areas where temperatures remain more stable. Redfish can offer great opportunities around oyster bars, mangrove shorelines, and grass flats, while spotted seatrout become increasingly worth targeting around deeper grass, sandy potholes, and areas with moving water.

One of the biggest adjustments anglers face this time of year is finding bait. Those schools of pilchards that seemed to be everywhere during the warmer months can become harder to locate as cold fronts move through. Fortunately, this is also when artificials or a live shrimp really start to shine.



Sometimes we make fishing more complicated than it needs to be. A live shrimp under a popping cork over a healthy grass flat can be extremely effective for trout. Along channel edges or deeper sandy holes, a lightly weighted shrimp or soft plastic worked slowly near the bottom can produce great results.



The key is paying attention to what's happening around you rather than relying on what worked during your last trip. Cold fronts are a perfect example. Ahead of an approaching front, fish may feed more actively as conditions begin changing. But after a strong front passes, north winds can push water off the flats, temperatures drop, and the bite can slow considerably. Those are the days that test your patience. Instead of automatically launching before sunrise, consider waiting until the sun has had a chance to warm the shallows. Look for wind protected shorelines, deeper pockets near flats, and areas where fish can move between shallow feeding grounds and more stable water. Slow your presentation down, pay attention to the tides, and don't be afraid to change your approach.



A spot that produced fish consistently a few weeks earlier might be completely different after a cold front. Sometimes moving a short distance or adjusting your timing by a couple of hours makes all the difference. That's one of the things I enjoy most about fishing. No matter how much experience you have, the water and the fish can always teach you something if you pay attention.

Of course, what makes fishing around Tarpon Springs special goes beyond knowing where to find redfish or how to catch trout after a cold front.

It's the people and the community that surround it.

Some of the best fishing conversations happen before the first cast. Whether you're at the boat ramp, stopping for bait, or talking with another angler at the dock, there's a lot of knowledge and friendship shared around these waters.

Over the years, I've gotten to know plenty of people through fishing, including Jake and Jackie with @GetBentLiveBait. I've bought bait from them and had the opportunity to fish with them, too. They recently shared a couple of great photos, one showing Jake with a beautiful nearshore hogfish and another of Jackie holding an impressive redfish caught after dark.

Those two fish are a great reminder of how fortunate we are to live where we do. Within a relatively short boat ride, we have access to grass flats, mangrove shorelines, oyster bars, passes, and nearshore hard bottom. Whether you're chasing redfish in the shallows or heading into the Gulf, there's something for just about every kind of angler.

But the part I appreciate most is how fishing brings people together, often across different generations and backgrounds. That connection to our community is also why I'm excited about something we're working on for next spring.The Rotary Club of Tarpon Springs is preparing to bring back a local fishing tradition that hasn't been held since 2019. I'm helping lead the return of the memorial fishing tournament as Tournament Director, and we're planning the RCTS Memorial Fishing Tournament for April 2027 at Rusty Bellies in Tarpon Springs.

Our vision is a catch-photo-release tournament featuring snook, redfish, and spotted seatrout, bringing anglers, families, and local businesses together while encouraging conservation and responsible fishing. It's an opportunity to celebrate the waters we love, support our community, and introduce another generation to the traditions that make this area special.

I'll be sharing more information as plans come together, and I hope many of you will be part of it.

As we head into November, I encourage you to enjoy everything this season has to offer. Try somewhere new. Take someone fishing who doesn't get out very often. Share a little knowledge with a younger angler, and don't let a slow day keep you from appreciating where you are.

Some of the best things we take home from a fishing trip aren't measured by the number or size of the fish we catch. They're the experiences, the people we share them with, and the memories that keep us coming back.

The weather will continue to change, and the fish will keep us guessing. But if we take care of our waters and continue passing along our love of fishing, the traditions that make Florida's Gulf Coast special will be around for generations to come. Tight lines, and I'll see you on the water.

@capt_justin_searcy

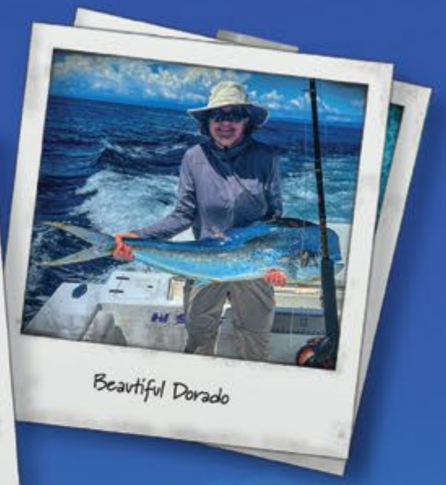
FEATURE STORY



Our Vessel & Crew



Hotel Monkeys



Beautiful Dorado

Marlin For Merlin?

by Merle Seamon

In January, I had the great pleasure of making my annual pilgrimage to Crocodile Bay in Puerto Jimenez, Costa Rica. This year, the trip was to celebrate my 67th lap around the sun and I was really hoping to get the opportunity to check Marlin off of my fishing bucket list.

My buddy, Lex Salisbury and his Wife, Elena Sheppa, accompanied me on the trip. When I went to book my flight, I was fortunate to discover that Jet Blue is now making direct flights to Costa Rica from Orlando. The flight was quick and easy; only three hours and I was on the ground in San Jose. From there I boarded the small plane with Sansa *(a local airline)* for a truly beautiful flight right up the coast to Puerto Jimenez where Crocodile Bay is located. Both flights were great, but it is a little disturbing to arrive in Puerto Jimenez to find that the town cemetery is immediately adjacent to the Airport Terminal. I sincerely hoped that this was not any indication of the safety of flying in there.

Upon our arrival, we were immediately picked up by the staff in a nice new air-conditioned van for the very short ride to the resort. When we arrived, we could immediately see that everything had changed since my trip last year. The brand new Botanika Resort has now opened and it is truly knocked out! See more about this in the following destination article titled ***"Beautiful Botanika."*** We planned two days of offshore fishing and a couple days for eco tours and relaxing.



Without further ado, I'll get to the fish tales.

On our first fishing day, we left the dock around 6:30 and headed out while visions of Marlin, Sailfish, Tuna and Mahi danced in our heads. Before we got very far out into the Pacific, the captain spotted fish and we slowed to put out the spread. Their preferred approach to offshore fishing is trolling with a combination of dead and artificial baits. The mate is a pro at quickly and carefully getting a bunch of lines rigged and out behind the boat and the captain knows where to find the fish.

Within 30 minutes of starting to troll, Elena had hooked, landed and released a nice Mahi and it was my turn to take the next fish. My timing was good and it was not long before I was hooked up with a nice Sailfish. It gave me a really good fight and we got it up beside the boat for a quick release. All of the crews are very good at safely releasing these beautiful fish to fight another day, but this makes getting good photos a bit difficult. Not long after my fish, Lex got his shot at another nice Sailfish *(although his was smaller than mine)* and we got it to the boat for another successful release.



The fishing got slow for a while and we began to wonder whether we should have kept that first Mahi for dinner. The resort offers a great deal on a fresh, "you catch it we cook it," fish dinner and we definitely wanted to take advantage of that. In the end, the Mahi bite warmed up, later in the day, and we got several more nice ones *(40 to 60 lbs. or so)*. We wound up bringing two back for dinner and to share with friends. We ended a great day by returning to the dock by around 3:00 pm and headed for the beautiful new pool to chill and tell fish stories until time for dinner. The Mahi was out of this world and they prepared it several ways including a ceviche that was to die for.

The second day of fishing dawned clear and we once again headed out in the ***Strike***. It wasn't long before we were trolling again because the fish were in quite close to shore. The day started a little slow, but by mid-morning, it was on. Lex started it out with a sail and Elena got another nice Mahi and then it was my turn. The next fish to enter the spread was a beautiful Blue Marlin that the mate said was 13 to 14' in length. I was thrilled to step-up and get a chance to fight this monster from the deep. I fought the great fish for a few minutes, but then it threw the bait and





my first ever shot at a Marlin was over. I was disappointed, but also excited to even get the chance to do battle with the fish.

Once the mate got the spread back out and we were trolling again, it wasn't long before we got our second Marlin bite. This time, a pair of really nice Black Marlin charged into the spread and wreaked havoc for a while. Both of the fish hooked up briefly and the reels were both really singing for a bit, but it did not take long before both fish spit out the baits and were gone. What a thrill it was to see a Marlin doubleheader, even if it was short lived. Shortly after that, a pair of nice Sailfish swam right by the boat while we were re-rigging and I got a chance to fight one of them on fairly light spinning tackle. It was a thrill that was, unfortunately, short lived as the big sail was quickly able to break free, but just getting a shot was thrilling. We wrapped up the day by catching and releasing a few more nice Mahi, then we headed to the pool to "recover" from our exciting Marlin encounters.



In addition to the great fishing, we also enjoyed a couple Eco Tours to experience the wealth of wildlife and plants that are native to the Osa Peninsula region of Costa Rica. The Osa Peninsula is one of the most biodiverse places in the world and it has really become my favorite place on the planet.



To make your reservations, contact David Kanski at Costa Rica Fishing & Adventures at 1.800.733.1115 ext. 1002 or by emailing him at david@costaricafa.com. Learn more online at www.costaricafa.com.

Merle



WINTER TROUT

Learning to Follow the Fish as the Water Cools

by Captain Mike Haynes

Every year, as the summer heat begins to fade and the first cold fronts make their way across Florida, I start thinking about one of my favorite fish to target: spotted seatrout. Here along the Nature Coast, trout fishing can be productive throughout the year, but fall and winter bring a different set of challenges. The fish begin changing their habits, and if you're not paying attention to those changes, you can spend an awful lot of time fishing water that held plenty of trout just a few weeks earlier.

One thing I've learned over the years is that trout don't necessarily disappear when the weather turns cold. They simply adjust to their surroundings. Understanding where they go, why they move, and what makes them feed can make a tremendous difference in your success.

Following the Falling Temperatures

As fall approaches, I generally begin looking for trout across the deeper grass flats, working my way toward the mangrove shorelines. These areas provide plenty of opportunities for trout to find bait, and the grass and broken bottom give them places to ambush an easy meal.

But as the water temperatures continue dropping, I begin changing where I look. Instead of spending all my time on the open flats, I start concentrating on river mouths, creeks, and estuaries with deeper channels. Here in Crystal River, those areas become increasingly important as winter settles in. A common misconception is that a few warm days will send the trout right back onto the flats. That hasn't been my experience. Once trout establish themselves in their winter areas, they tend to remain there until the water begins warming consistently.

A short stretch of warmer weather might get them moving, but they're usually just adjusting their depth within the same general area. They may slide out of a deeper channel and onto a nearby shallow edge, then move right back down when temperatures fall again. They're not necessarily making a long trip back to the open grass flats every time the sun comes out. That distinction is important. Sometimes finding fish isn't about running to another location. It's about figuring out where they're holding within the area you're already fishing.



The Cold Front Feeding Window

Anyone who spends much time fishing Florida's Gulf Coast knows that cold fronts can change things in a hurry. Over the years, I've noticed that trout often feed heavily a day or two before a front arrives.

Those can be some of the most productive fishing days of the season. Once the front passes and the temperatures drop, however, the bite can slow considerably. In my experience, it often takes another two or three days before the trout begin feeding aggressively again.

That doesn't mean they won't bite immediately after a front. It means you may have to work a little harder and adjust your approach. I pay attention to how many days have passed since the front, whether the weather is stabilizing, and what the water temperature is doing.

Those observations help me decide whether to expect an aggressive bite or a day when I'll need to slow everything down. And during the winter, slowing down can be the difference between catching trout and simply fishing around them.



When the Fish Slow Down, So Should Your Bait

One of the simplest things I tell my clients is that if the fish are moving slowly, our baits should be moving slowly too. When the water gets cold, trout generally become less willing to chase a fast-moving meal. That's when I'll often put a shrimp on a jighead and have someone work it very slowly along the bottom. Sometimes barely moving that shrimp is all it takes to get a bite.

Think about what you're asking the fish to do. If a trout is sitting near the bottom in cold water, waiting for an easy meal, a bait racing past its nose may not look particularly natural or worth chasing. A shrimp creeping along the bottom, on the other hand, might be exactly what that fish is willing to eat. That doesn't mean slow presentations are always the answer. It means you need to recognize the mood of the fish and adjust accordingly.

One way I figure that out is by having my clients fish two different presentations. I'll give one angler a fluke-style soft plastic and have them swim and twitch it through the water. The other angler might be throwing a jig and plastic, bouncing it along the bottom. Then I watch. Which bait is getting hit? Are the fish chasing the swimming bait, or are they picking up the slower presentation closer to the bottom?

Once I see which one is producing more strikes, I'll usually switch the other client over to that presentation. It's a simple approach, but it tells me a lot about how the trout are feeding that day. Rather than deciding what the fish should want, I let them show me.

A Degree or Two Can Make a Difference

Another winter pattern I've noticed involves the outgoing tide. During the colder months, shallow water can warm up under the sun. When the tide begins falling, that water moves off the shallows and into nearby channels and deeper areas. Depending on the conditions, that outgoing water may be a degree or two warmer than the water where the trout have been holding. That might not sound like much to us, but I've seen those small temperature differences coincide with a noticeable increase in feeding activity. The trout don't necessarily have to leave their winter habitat. They can move toward the shallower edges of the channel and take advantage of the conditions as the water flows past.

Of course, an outgoing tide doesn't automatically mean warmer water. A cold morning or a lack of sunshine can change that equation. What I'm watching for is the combination of shallow-water warming and moving water. It's another reason I pay attention to what's happening around me instead of relying entirely on a tide chart.

Finding the Bigger Trout

Once you locate a school of trout, the temptation is to keep moving until you find bigger fish. But I generally prefer to stop the boat and work that area first. Trout can school with fish of similar size, and sometimes the smaller ones are the most aggressive. You might be catching trout on nearly every cast, but they're all running about the same size. That tells me we've found fish, but it doesn't necessarily mean we've found the larger ones. When the trout are feeding aggressively, I'll sometimes increase the size of the bait we're throwing. Bigger baits can produce bigger trout, although I don't automatically make that adjustment when the fish are sluggish.

I'm also paying attention to where those smaller fish are holding. If we're catching mostly smaller trout farther back in a channel, I may begin working toward the creek mouth or looking for slightly deeper water nearby. Over the years, I've found that larger trout, particularly females, can sometimes be holding outside those concentrations of smaller fish. That doesn't mean every school



of small trout has a group of big females waiting around the corner. But it's a pattern worth investigating before leaving an area entirely.

And I don't necessarily start looking for the deepest hole I can find. Those bigger trout often relate to something along the bottom. It might be scattered grass, a patch of broken bottom, an oyster bar, rocks, or a ledge along a channel. A small change in depth or bottom composition can create the kind of ambush opportunity a larger trout is looking for. Sometimes moving the boat just far enough to work a different edge or piece of structure is all it takes.

Pay Attention to the Direction of the Water
Finding the right structure is only part of the equation. How you approach it matters too. Trout are ambush predators, and they often position themselves facing into the current, waiting for food to come toward them. Wind can also influence the movement of bait and where fish position themselves. Whenever possible, I try to set up so my clients can present their baits naturally with the conditions, working toward the fish rather than bringing a lure up behind them.

This becomes particularly important when fishing ledges, oyster bars or channel edges. A trout holding near the bottom may be waiting for something to drift into its feeding zone. If we can make our bait look like that easy meal, we've got a much better chance of getting its attention. It's easy to overlook casting direction when you're focused on finding fish, but I've seen enough days on the water to know that the angle of your presentation can matter just as much as the bait itself.



Let the Trout Tell You the Rest
Winter trout fishing around Crystal River isn't simply a matter of finding a deep creek and dropping a jig to the bottom. It's about recognizing a series of changes. Where were the trout holding before the water cooled? How far have they shifted toward their winter areas? Has a cold front just passed, or have conditions had time to stabilize? Is the outgoing tide carrying warmer water into the channels? Are the fish chasing a swimming bait, or do they want something barely moving along the bottom?

Those are the questions I'm constantly asking myself when I'm on the water. And even after I find trout, I'm still paying attention. The size of the fish, the type of bottom, the direction of the current, and the way they're striking our baits all tell me something about what I should do next. One of the biggest mistakes an angler can make is assuming that because something worked yesterday, it ought to work again today. Trout don't follow our fishing plans. They respond to the conditions around them. The more time you spend observing those conditions and understanding how trout react, the less time you'll spend guessing where to cast. And that's really what winter trout fishing is all about. Not just finding the fish, but learning to understand why they're there.



Captain Mike Haynes is the owner of Fishbonz Charters in Crystal River and co-host of Fishingdventures Florida and the Florida West Coast Fishing Report. www.fishbonzcharters.com.

FISHING FORECAST

THIS MONTH'S OUTLOOK WITH CAPTAIN SERGIO ATANES



November offers excellent opportunities to target a variety of species throughout the Tampa Bay area as water temperatures settle into the mid-70s. Baitfish may become more difficult to locate on the flats, but they should remain in the area until water temperatures drop into the 60s. Expect Flounder and Redfish activity to increase, with larger Trout moving into deeper flats and channels.

November is also an ideal time to begin fishing with artificial lures; among my favorites are the Saltwater Assassin Paddletail rigged on a 1/8-ounce jighead. Do not overlook oyster bars or the deeper cuts along the edges of grass flats, which consistently produce excellent results.

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 opportunitiesall over the Tampa Bay area.

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FLORIDA'S FALL TURKEY HUNT

by Misty Wells

While Spring turkey season gets the "lion's share" of attention, hunting fall turkey in Florida offers an entirely different challenge—demanding sharper woods wisdom, keen observation of changing food sources, and an understanding of autumn flock dynamics.



As the morning humidity begins to shift and the first cooler breezes sweep across the Florida palmetto flats, hunters are waking up to a different kind of hunt. Spring hunting is defined by booming gobbles and aggressive calling, but the Fall season in Florida is a game of stealth, food sign, and family flock dynamics. To pattern autumn birds across oak hammocks and cypress heads, you have to trade the loudmouth calls for sharp eyes and patient scouting.

It's time to forget everything you know about calling aggressive Toms into strut. Florida's fall turkey season requires a shift in strategy. With birds grouped into hen-poult flocks and bachelor groups roaming vast tracts of oak hammocks and pine ridges, success relies on locating primary autumn food sources and understanding topography. Florida terrain presents unique challenges-thick saw palmetto beds, cypress domes, oak hammocks, and damp pine flatwoods.

Throughout both the Spring and Fall season, turkey will follow the food. Focus on the edges of live oak hammocks for dropped acorns and saw palmetto flats when palmetto berries are ripe. It is a good idea to also find the "high ground" as turkey prefer to walk where they can see predators coming, focus on pasture edges and sandy ridges running between swampy cypress heads.

If you are able to get out and do some scouting, that can make the difference between bagging a bird or going home empty-handed. Look for roost trees, as turkey often roost in large cypress tress over water for protection from ground predators like coyotes and bobcats.

Now lets talk decoys and why they are important? Turkey see in color and as we know, they have eyesight 3x better than humans. A decoy can give you a chance to take the focus off the hunter and on the decoy for starters.

A decoy is also important for a turkey to associate the call with, if a turkey comes in from a call and does not see a decoy he may get confused. However, make sure you are matching the call you are doing with the decoy that you have out. You defiantly also want to have a Hen and a Tom decoy; this might help bring in the bird a lot faster. Tom's want all the Hen's to themselves, so if he sees a Tom with a Hen, he may move in fast to get rid of him, get careless and give you a shot.





Because Florida vegetation can be dense, your setup position can make or break the hunt. A great way to hunt is setting up tight cover, maybe your back up against a tree trunk (wider than your shoulders), or using natural concealment using palmetto's or bushes to break up your hand or facial movements. Of course, calling in turkey can be both fun, and challenging as there are several calls that mean different things.

Let's go over a few calls that I know can help you...

The yelp is the most heard sound from turkey from both male and female, it is commonly a locator saying, "I'm over here". This locating call is helping hens find other turkeys in the same area, call to them asking them to join her. It is possible if you get these hens fired up enough, they may come to investigate and bring that unsuspecting gobbler with her.

The purr is another sound you may hear a lot from Turkey; it usually means they are content. When they are feeding or generally communicating with one another they will often use a purr, this is why a "Purr Pot" is important to have in your calling collection. Cutting is another important sound they make, it is a series of load and fast clucks with a few yelps thrown in. When a Hen is fired up and wants attention she may start cutting, this will usually get a Tom's attention quick.

Let's not forget the gobble the sound all turkey hunters want to hear, this is a clear indication that a Tom is excited and looking to attract a hen. This is also used by a Tom to let the other males in the area know he is there and he is trying to deter them from coming in.

So, before you spend your entire fall sitting in a deer stand, grab your slate call, pull on your boots, and head out into the woods. Remember, Florida's fall turkey season presents a unique challenge that can you a sharper, more patient hunter. Respect the birds, pattern the food sources, and embrace the chase—you just might discover your new favorite Florida tradition. ◪



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.

REFURBISHING AN OLDER BOAT

Is It Worth the Time & Money?

by Captain Sergio Atanes

Over the years, I have met many anglers in Florida and elsewhere who chose to refurbish an older boat for one of two reasons: sentimental value or the inability to find a newer model that met their needs.

A boat may have belonged to a parent, come from the person who introduced its owner to fishing, or hold memories of countless catches. In those cases, cost may be secondary. Other owners know exactly what they want but cannot find it in a newer model or they already own their ideal boat, and it simply shows its age.

Either way, the practical question is the same: how much boat restoration is too much?

Answering that question begins with the boats structural condition. This article examines which upgrades make practical and financial sense, and how far an owner can go in making an older boat feel new without overspending. The hull and stringers must be sound; if the transom or stringers are damaged, repair costs may make refurbishment impractical.

To put those considerations into practice, we used a 2012 Ranger 2410 as our project boat. This 24-foot bay boat belongs to a good friend and co-host of our Fishing Adventures Florida YouTube show. Its structure was sound, and its 300-hp Yamaha outboard was in good condition, making it a suitable candidate for refurbishment. We assessed the necessary improvements and went a step further to illustrate the potential costs. A detailed breakdown of each upgrade appears at the end of this article.



Tee Top: We began with the tee top, replacing the worn canvas with new Sunbrella material that matched the hull. A local one-person marine upholstery shop completed the work at a reasonable price and delivered results comparable to those of larger companies in the area.



Center Console: Once the tee top was refreshed, we moved to the console, which required a comprehensive update. Wired UP Marine Custom Rigging rebuilt it, modernized the switching system, and created space for a new Fusion stereo and speakers as well as a VHF radio. The team also rewired the console, labeled every wire, and installed new breakers—work that would make even the Ranger factory proud. With the electrical system modernized, we turned to the final major upgrade: the deck.



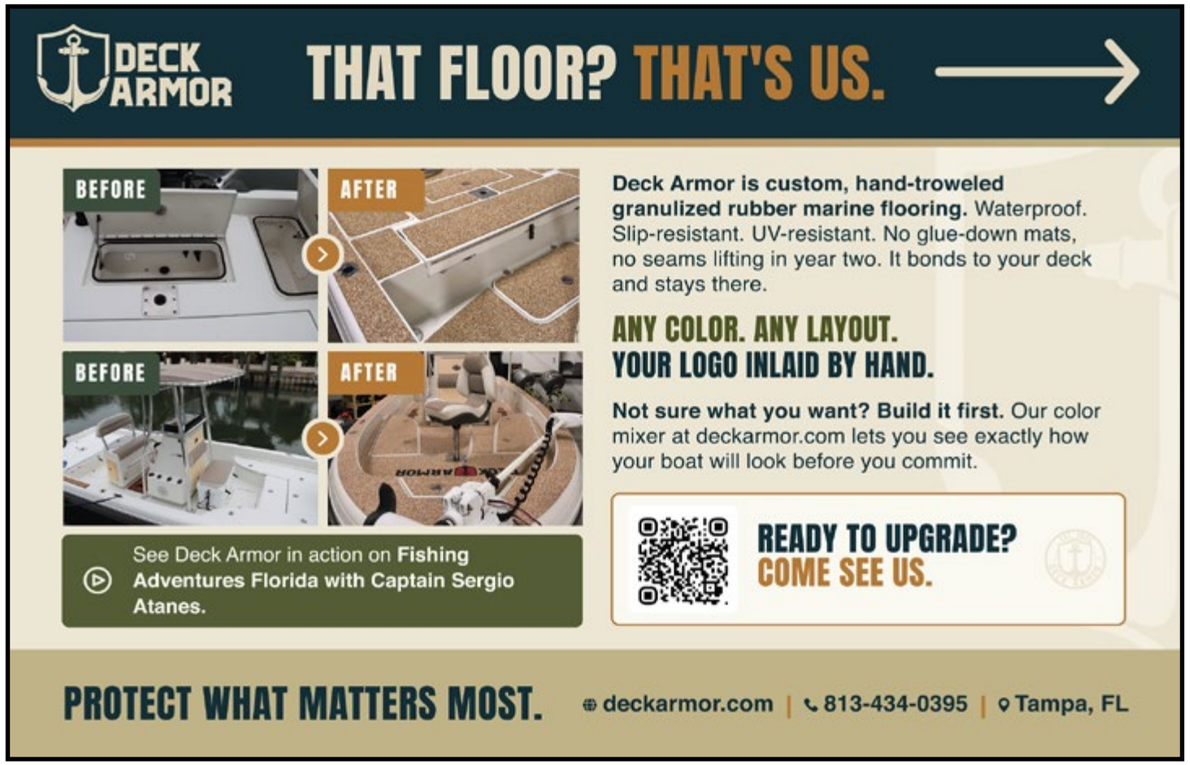
Boat Deck: The deck was the finishing touch. Dave and his crew at Deck Armor transformed it into a work of art. The product made the boat look new, but its practical benefits matter even more. At the end of a long fishing charter, I can rinse the deck with plain water instead of scrubbing it. If a stain remains, a little Comet cleanser with bleach and a soft brush removes it easily. The surface is also slip-resistant and cushioned, which reduces fatigue during long fishing trips.





We'd like to thank the following companies who helped us with this project; we picked them for their professionalism and recommendations from clients.





$3,900
Chris Morelli at Wired-Up Marine Services, LLC
12259 62nd St. in Largo, FL 33773

$3,500
Dave Odell at Deck Armor
217 S. 78th St. in Tampa, FL 33619

$750
Juan Calzada at JC Elite Upholstery, LLC
jceliteupholstery@gmail.com

$900
Charlie DeMeritt at Charlie's Detailing

Total: $9,050

Upgrades that were not needed but we decided to move forward with them to show the total cost for restoring it to "like new" condition.

- Loadmaster Trailer - **$7,000**
- Simrad NSS12 EVO3S Chart/Sonar Combo - **$2,999**
- Move Trolling Motor by JL Marine - **$5,499**
- (2) 10 foot Power Poles - **5,000**
- (4) OPTIMA AGM Batteries - **$1,200**
- Shadow Caster LED lighting (above & under) - **$600**

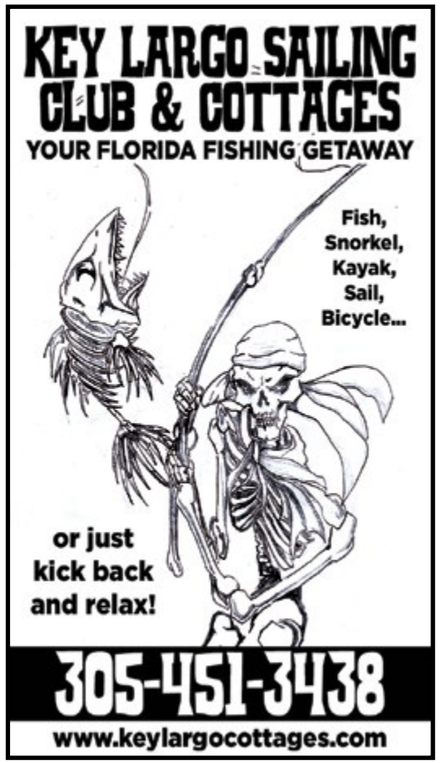
Total: $22,298



Cost of a new Ranger 2410 with all the options on our boat cost would be approximately $150,000. Taking into consideration our cost it was well worth it for us to invest in our boat. Again, as I said before our investment versus, the cost of a new one gave us savings of over $118,000. Please feel free to contact me with any questions I will be glad to explain or help in any way to help you reach your dream boat goal.

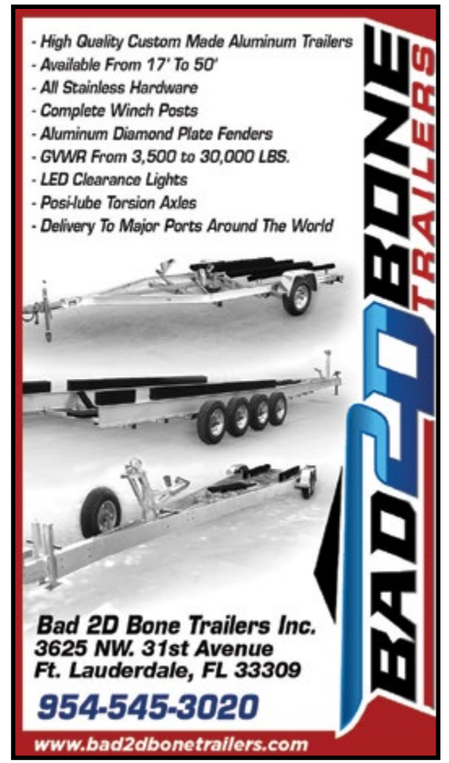
Captain Sergio host of Fishing Adventures Florida Show on YouTube, Carbon TV, Waypoint TV, Angling TV and GEN7 Outdoors TV. CEO of Reelfishy.com Fishing Charters. He can be reached at (813) 973-7132 or by email at atanes@msn.com.

















FLOUNDER, THE OVERLOOKED FISH.

by Captain Sergio Atanes



Tampa Bay offers anglers a wide variety of species, including Redfish, Snook, Trout and Cobia. As a charter captain, I find that Snook is the most requested inshore species, followed closely by Redfish. One fish that is often overlooked is ***Paralichthys lethostigma***, commonly known as the Southern Flounder.

Southern Flounder, often called "doormats," blend easily into sandy or muddy bottoms near grassbed edges and channels. They typically weigh 2 to 4 pounds, though some reach 8 pounds. Strong fighters on light tackle and prized for their flavor, they are often caught accidentally while anglers drift flats or cuts for Redfish and Trout.

Although Southern Flounder can be caught year-round, the cooling fall months are prime time for doormats. October through December are my favorite months because, when other fish are slow to strike, flounder remain ready for an easy meal. Because they feed on the bottom, the following techniques can improve your chances of catching larger fish.

LIVE BAIT TACTICS

Drift along the outer edges of grass beds or beside channels with structure or rubble. In 2 to 6 feet of water, use a 1/4-ounce jighead. Hook a Sardine ("greenback") through the nose or a shrimp through the tail. Bounce the jig along the bottom and let the boat's drift provide the action. In 6 to 10 feet of water, use a 3/8-ounce jighead.



Another method is a Texas Rig. Simply use a 1/0 hook with a small bead just ahead of the hook and a egg sinker. Start with 1/4 to 3/8-ounce size according to depth and current.

ARTIFICIAL BAITS

During cold fronts, use a 3/8-ounce jighead with a 3-inch paddletail. In recent years, scented artificial baits have helped me catch more fish than live bait. Anchor along the outer edges of grass beds or deep channels and cast upcurrent or uptide.

Bounce the jig along the bottom with a slow retrieve. Because Flounder travel only short distances for food, keep the presentation close and make plenty of casts to improve your odds.

HABITATS

Docks are another productive place to catch large Flounder. On cold, windy days, warmth around concrete pilings naturally attracts them. Seawalls that drop quickly to a sandy bottom are also excellent spots.

I catch most of my larger Flounder along the outer edges of ledges and rock piles in the middle of the bay.



I typically use a 3/8 to 1/2-ounce jighead with a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader 3 to 4 feet long. Please note sure your jigs are a 1/0 to 2/0 hook size I have seen some with 3/0 hooks great for Trout, but not for Flounder.

TACKLE SETUP

My preferred setup is a 7-foot OHERO Hyper (Lee Fisher Sports) medium-light rod rated for 10 to 17-pound test, paired with a medium-sized reel such as the Florida Fishing Products Salos 4000.

Because fall often brings windy conditions, I use FINS Windtamer braided line to minimize wind knots. I also prefer braid when targeting large Flounder around docks because it performs especially well in that setting.

LOCATIONS TO TARGET

Old Tampa Bay

- Double Branch Bay entrance has several oyster beds with sandy shoulders.
- Big Island cut west end of Howard Frankland Bridge.
- Culbreath Flats
- St. Pete Power Plant at the hot water outflow. Fish the drop along the mangroves during cold snaps, beware of security restrictions since 9/11.

Lower Tampa Bay

- Port Manatee spoil island drop
- Joe Island west end
- Apollo Beach canals
- Terra Ceia Bay
- Bird Key
- Flounder Pass



Southern Flounder will offer a change of pace and taste, so don't overlook the doormats of Tampa Bay. Please e-mail any questions concerning fishing or tackle & I will be glad to respond.

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.



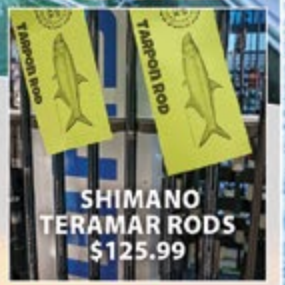
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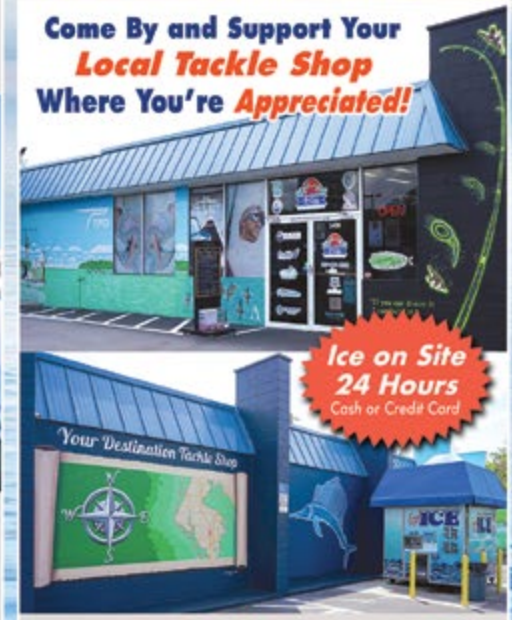
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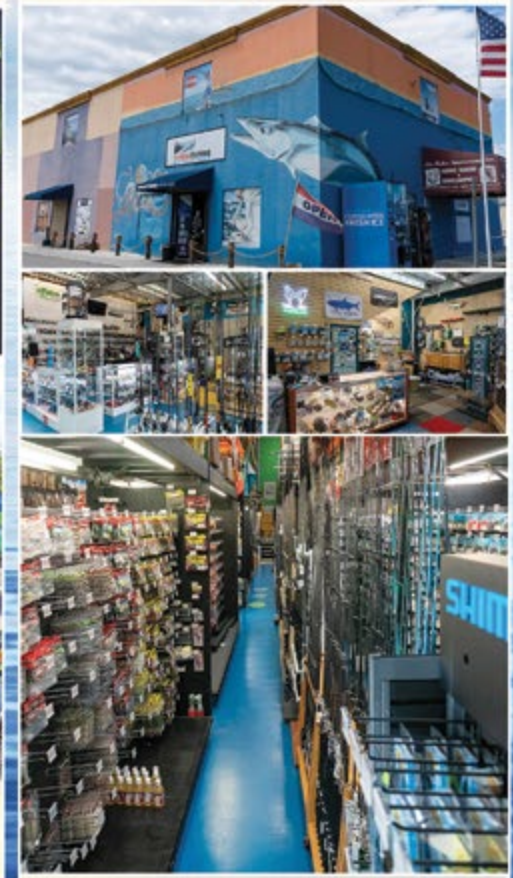




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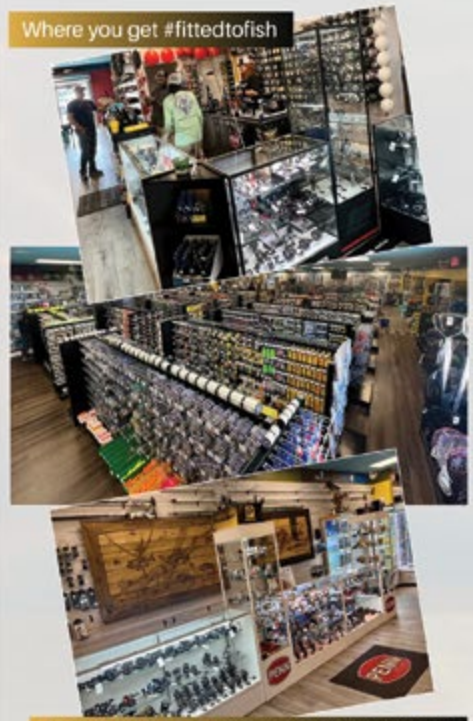
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