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SHRIMP ON A TREADMILL

Sometimes reality really is stranger than anything that I could make up. In my never ending efforts to keep my readers well informed on matters important to our beloved aquatic resources, I took special interest in a news item that I saw about making shrimp run on a treadmill.

Just search for "Shrimp on a Treadmill" and you will find a mesmerizing video of athletic shrimp running to the music that I could best describe as the theme to the Benny Hill show. Be careful, as you can easily spend hours watching it.

Upon my first look at the video, my mind was simply churning with many burning questions about how and why it was made. Just like the National Enquirer, my inquiring mind wanted to know things like:

- **Where do you go to purchase a tiny underwater shrimp treadmill?**
- **Are shrimp naturally athletic or do they have to be taught to run on a treadmill?**
- **Who paid for the treadmill and the hours it took to get the shrimp to jog?**
- **Was the shrimp overweight when it started training or did it just want to bulk up?**
- **Was Benny Hill somehow involved in this effort?**



While most answers have proved hard to come by, it did not take much research to determine that a grant from the National Science Foundation provided the money. A total of \$682,570 was spent on a study titled "Taking the Pulse of Marine Life in Stressed Seas". In the study crustaceans were apparently infected by being given injections of disease carrying bacteria like they would encounter in the wild and then they were forced to run on tiny underwater treadmills while their vital functions like blood pressure and heart rate were monitored. I just gotta see the tiny blood pressure cuffs and little heart rate monitors!! This kinda sounds like cruel and unusual punishment and it is probably against the Geneva Convention or at least its seafood equivalent. I also have to wonder what they did with their specimens when the tests were over? A big seafood boil seems kind of barbaric after all of the things that the shrimp were put through.

I am unsure what valuable findings may come out of this effort, but I was also a bit doubtful about the benefit of studying bovine belches on the ozone layer and USDA spent \$700,000 doing that in 2010. Perhaps we will get a new strain of pumped up super shrimp that will be even tastier on the table.

While I was unable to answer most of my other questions, I did verify that Benny Hill continues to be dead (sadly since 1992 so apparently it is a permanent thing) and thus he had nothing to do with the research. I have a feeling that those who posted the video on line may have simply added his theme song because they thought that it had a good beat and you could dance to it.

So do Flip and I think this study was a huge waste of our taxpayer dollars? Does a shrimp poop in the Ocean???

Stop by Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs to speak with us about shrimp treadmills or other important topics. While you are at Belle Harbour check out our dry storage, boat lifts and great rental boats.

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ON THE COVER: A happy angler with a beautiful Costa Rican Mahi caught on a recent fishing excursion to Central America with our very own, Misty Wells. Read more about this tropical adventure on page 16 of this issue!

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ONSHORE - OFFSHORE Magazine

Publisher & Chief Bottle Washer

Sal Liggieri

727.359.3471

sal@onshoreoffshore.com

Design & Layout



FISHBONE
CREATIVE

Bryan R. Hudson

616.250.0522

fishbonecreate@icloud.com

www.fishbonecreates.com

Contributing Photographer

Captain Jimmy Nelson

www.livinthedreamtv.com

Contributing Writers

Captain George Hastick

Captain Sergio Atanes

Dave Mallory

Merle Seamon

Josh Johnson

Misty Wells

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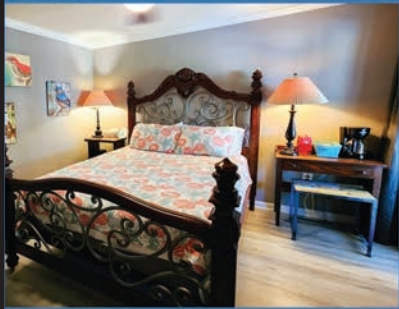
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TAKE A BOW; ITS ALMOST TARPON SEASON!

by Misty Wells

Tarpon fishing is guaranteed excitement for any angler from seasoned to beginner. Tarpon are second to none for their size and large school numbers at certain times of the year. Most of the Tarpon in the Tampa Bay area run from 40 to 140 pounds. However, don't forget those trophy Tarpon that can range from 70 to over 180 pounds. "I need to take a moment to brag about my Grandma, Bobby Wells. In 1984, she captured the TIFT Record with a Tarpon catch of 160 pounds, a fish that outweighed her by about 60 lbs at 62 years old.

One of the most sought-after inshore gamefish in the world is the Tarpon, known also as the Silverking or Sabalo. Since the early 1800s legendary anglers like Hemmingway, Flip Pallot and Lefty Kreh have been casting everything from flies, live bait and plastics to catch these gamefish. The Tarpon fishing here in Tampa Bay ranks as some of the best Tarpon fishing in Florida along with Boca Grande, Sanibel Island and the key of Islamorada. I thought I would share a bit of Tarpon knowledge I have picked up over the years with you; I feel that understanding your prey sometime leads to more catches.

Tarpon inhabit warmer water, they are primarily found in the Gulf of Mexico, and the West Indies but have been found north of Cape Hat-

teras and all the way down to Brazil. The female Tarpon can grow as large as 300 pounds and can reach lengths of over eight feet long. Like in real life, the females seem to live longer than the males, reaching up to 50 years old, while the males typically live to 30 years old. A female Tarpon can lay as many as eleven million eggs in her lifetime, which is why it is important to practice catch-n-release, especially on these bigger fish.

Tarpon are toothless and they swallow their prey whole; their mouths are hard, boney and very rough. Because a Tarpon's mouth is so boney, once they take the bait you need to practice a hard hookset or you may not get the chance to fight the fish. And, Tarpon are one of the few species in the world that have a swim bladder. This bladder acts as a lung so they can breathe raw air and they breathe like most other species through their gills. When a Tarpon is swimming quickly it usually means they will "surface or roll" more for air and that is the time when angler can easily locate a school of Tarpon.

The best position for casting to

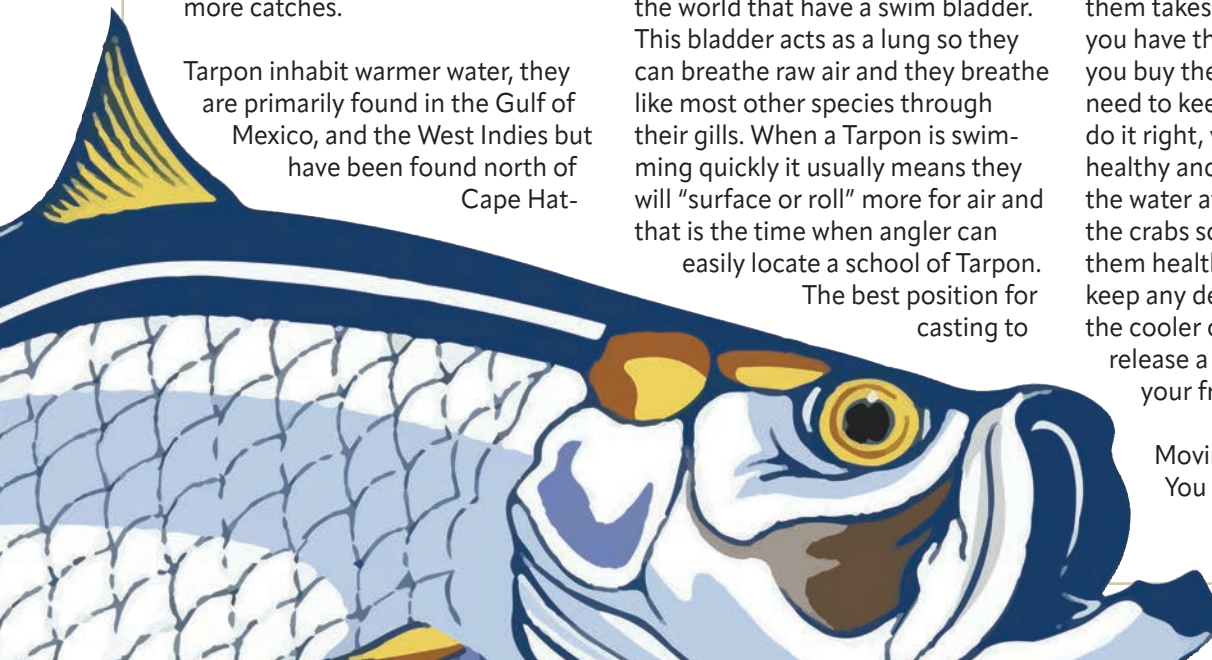
a school is positioning your vessel in front of them and allowing them to swim towards you. Once they are close enough to position your bait, begin casting in front of and into the school of Tarpon.

Now, there are lots of baits that you can use to catch Tarpon such as small pass crabs, live bait, cut

bait, jigs and soft plastics. I personally like fishing with live pass crabs for Tarpon, but make sure you hook the crab correctly. That is the difference between a catch and a loss. Hooking a crab in the body will kill it, so make sure to put the hook through the very edge of the crab between the brown edge and the white underside and always keep it in the water. Buying crabs can be expensive and during season

hard to find, so even though netting them takes quite a while, it's fun if you have the time. Regardless, if you buy them or catch them, you need to keep them alive and if you do it right, you can keep your crabs healthy and alive for days. Change the water at least twice a day, feed the crabs some cut bait to keep them healthy overnight and do not keep any dead shrimp or crabs in the cooler or livewell because they release a toxin that will kill your your fresh, live baits.

Moving on to natural bait. You may know Tarpon are



opportunistic feeders, so they will eat almost anything if the time is right. As you may also know if they have their mind on anything else, they won't give you the time of day, no matter what you throw. Some of the "goto" live baits I have been successful with are Threadfin, Shrimp, Sardines, Mullet and Menhaden. Believe it or not, I have also landed some nice Tarpon on cut bait that I have dropped into what I call a "Tarpon Ball". This is when they are schooled up all together and going down deep in the water and all you can see is their dark shadows. Tarpon are known to scavenge the bottom as well for dead fish, so I am guessing that is why this works from time to time.

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

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

slack it makes it harder for them to cut it on their gill plate or spit the hook, so please take a "bow" when they jump and point the rod towards the fish.



Let's talk about how to fish for Tarpon and show some good fishing manners. There a lot of beginners out there, so if you want to live to fish another day, please follow some basic fishing etiquette. If someone is following a school, get out of the way, if they were on them first. Don't try and jockey into posi-



tion, split the school and have them dive down. A lot of times if you are in a position where the school is coming your way, stay put, and let the school swim right into your bait for a good chance for a hook-up. There are going to be times where you are fishing close to other boats and anglers, so when you get a hooked up, try and control the Tarpon the best you can and move them away from the other boats. I learned this tip the hard way. If the fish swims under the boat put your rod tip in the water right away until you can control where the fish swims. If the Tarpon swims to the other side of the boat, keep your rod tip in the water and walk around the front of the boat to the other side keeping tension on the line, move quickly.

Hopefully these tips will help you up your game and help you skip a few mistakes that I had to learn the hard way. There are some top fishing guides in Tampa Bay and in all over the state of Florida that can really teach you a lot and put you on some great schools of Tarpon. Fishing with a professional guide can really make a difference between landing the big one or talking about the one that got away. One thing I can tell you for sure, chasing the Silverking is worth it and a lot of fun. 📌

Misty Wells, Producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to 374 million on Discovery Channel, Bally Sun Sports, Waypoint TV, World Fishing Network, Hunt Channel, MOTV, TCT, Discover Florida Network & Carbon TV.

A SNOOK IS A BASS ON STEROIDS!

by Captain George Hastick

Snook is one of my top three favorite fish to target and April is a great month to target these popular linesiders. The bait has shown up in numbers and the Snook have their feedbags on and with a good presentation you will get hooked up to one of these great fighting fish. They give such a spectacular fight with their top-water explosiveness, their rocket like runs, jumps and gill raking headshakes! It is everything you could ask for, out of an inshore predator fish. They are definitely an ambush fish with explosive strikes that can be memorable.



My typical setup is a 7'6" medium heavy spinning rod in the 8-17# class paired with Fins 10 to 15lb braid and 4 to 5 feet of 25lb Seaguar Fluorocarbon leader and a 1/0-2/0 light wire Owner Circle hook. Adjust the hook size to the size of the bait you are using. This is the typical set up for fishing in the flats and along the mangroves during the day.

be fishing around the pilings you will have to up your mainline and leader, along with your hook size depending on what bait you are throwing.



Night time is a different story. You can run heavier tackle to fish the bridges like the Gandy, Johns Pass, Howard Franklin and the Courtney Campbell along with many other local smaller bridges that will hold some large snook. Since you will

At night, you can get away with 40-50lb leader to help get those large snook out from the pilings. Because they can see the leader during the day, you usually would not get a bite unless the water you are fishing is deep enough to hide it due to less light at the deeper depths. When fishing the larger bridges you will have to add weight like an egg sinker to keep your bait down near the pilings. A slip egg sinker rig is a nice set up for this since you can get the lead to the bottom and then let line out to get the bait just in



front of or next to the piling. Pinfish are a great bait when fishing deep structure like this since they will swim down most of the time without any weight. During



the day, a freeline Scaled Sardine is a great choice along and under the mangrove shorelines.

Myself, I like fishing light tackle during the day and being able to see that large 30-40 inch snook chase my bait down and demolish it! My best day with a client we caught 3 snook in a row over 40 inches in 3 feet of water. After my client had caught two, he generously asked me if I wanted to take a shot and I couldn't pass up the opportunity. So, I saw two beasts, made the cast and watched as my bait got chased up into 1.5 feet of water and get hammered and the third one in a row was boated and released. ☑

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

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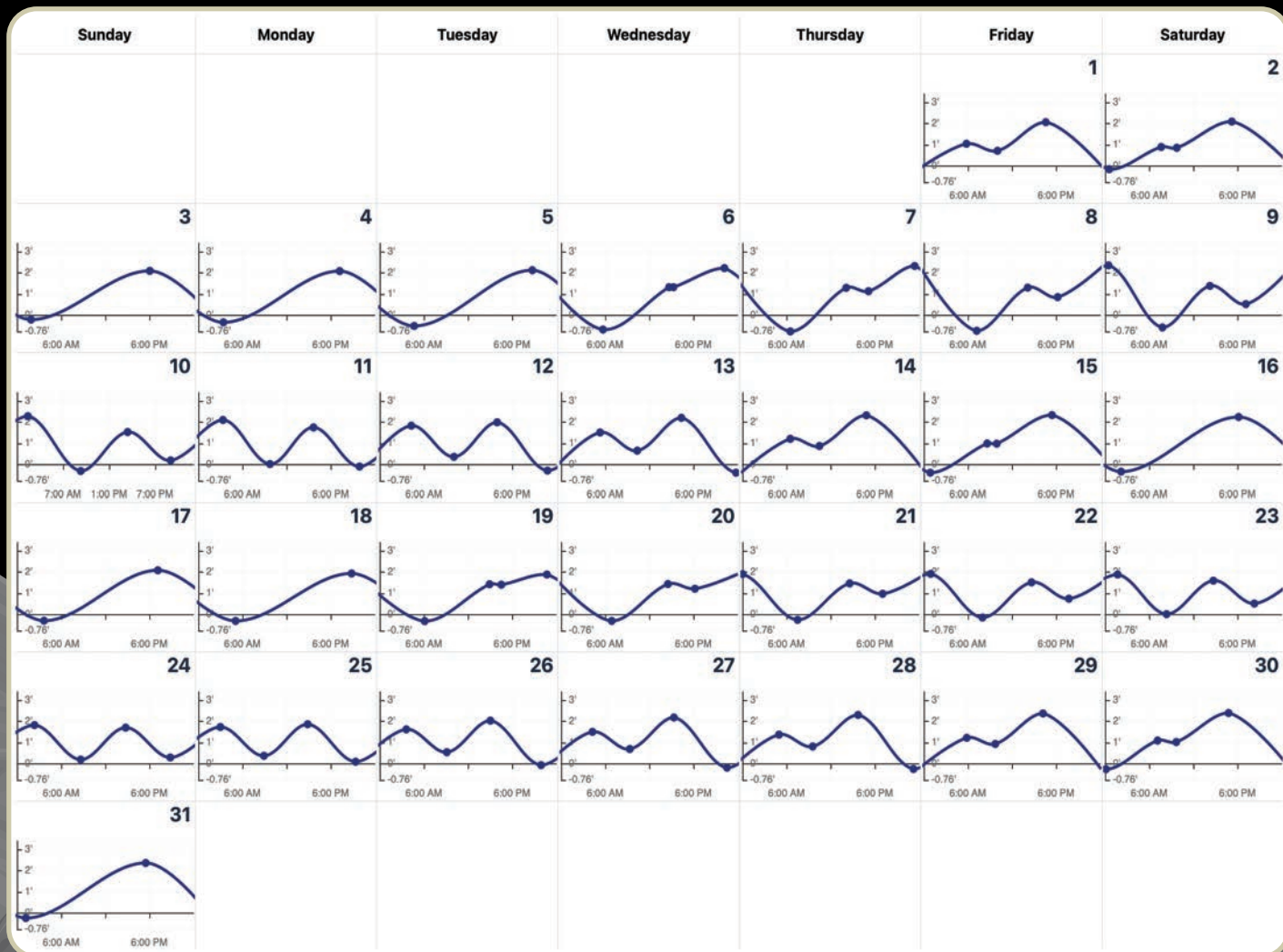
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	
-0:02	-0:10	Dunedin, St. Joseph Sound
-0:05	-0:15	Anclote Key, South End
+0:42	+0:42	Tarpon Springs, Anclote River
-0:07	-0:03	North Anclote Key
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
+0:33	+0:53	Gulf Harbors
+0:42	+1:05	Hwy 19 Bridge, Pithlachascotee River
+0:50	+1:35	New Port Richey, Pithlachascotee River
+0:36	+0:43	Hudson, Hudson Creek

Conversions for St. Marks River Area

High	Low	
+0:23	+1:18	Everglades City
-1:17	-1:03	Cape Romano
-1:04	-1:08	Marco Island
-1:59	-2:04	Naples
-0:46	-0:09	Indian Bay
-0:59	-0:42	Bayport
-0:25	+0:23	Withlacoochee River

Conversions for Tampa Bay Area

High	Low	
+0:49	+0:58	Gandy Bridge
+1:38	+1:55	Courtney Campbell Cswy.
+1:38	+1:55	Safety Harbor
+0:20	+0:22	Ballast Point
+0:07	+0:26	Hillsborough Bay
+0:21	+0:29	McKay Bay Entrance
+0:41	+0:39	Old Port Tampa
-2:27	-2:24	Egmont Key
-2:53	-2:46	Anna Maria, Bradenton Bch
-2:10	-2:19	Anna Maria, City Pier
-1:24	-0:55	Bradenton, Manatee River
-0:30	+0:14	Redfish Pt., Manatee River
-2:22	-1:58	Mullet Key Channel, Skyway
+0:08	+0:17	Shell Point
-0:22	-0:29	Point Pinellas
-1:34	-1:30	Pass-a-Grille Beach
-1:32	-1:05	Gulfport
-1:18	-0:44	St. Pete Beach Causeway
-2:14	-2:04	John's Pass
-1:40	-1:18	Madeira Beach Causeway
-2:00	-1:25	Cortez, Sarasota Bay
-1:38	-0:58	Sarasota Bay
-2:02	-1:38	Venice Inlet
-0:57	-0:40	Englewood, Lemon Bay
-1:27	-0:59	Placida, Gasparilla Sound
+1:38	+1:56	El Jobean, Myakka River
+1:52	+2:30	Shell Point, Peace River
+1:06	+1:27	Punta Gorda, Charlotte Hbr.
-1:12	-1:56	Boca Grande, Charlotte Hbr.
-0:19	+0:26	Pineland, Pine Island
+0:43	+1:28	Matlacha Pass
-0:55	-1:14	Redfish Pass, Captiva Is.
-0:46	-0:20	Captiva, Pine Island Sound
-2:20	-2:28	Captiva, Gulf Side
-0:25	+0:16	Galt Isle, Pine Island Sound
-0:30	-0:44	St. James City, Pine Island
+2:08	+2:44	Fort Myers
+1:15	+2:02	Cape Coral Bridge
+1:08	+1:40	Iona Shores
+0:51	+0:42	Indian Rocks Beach, ICW

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I am excited to share my first trip to Costa Rica with you and since there are so many reasons to visit, it is hard to know where to begin. Let's start with getting to know a bit about Costa Rica. We have all heard of it; maybe visited, but how much do we really know? Well, Costa Rica is the most biodiverse country in the world with a whopping 500,000 species of wildlife and many of these species are classified as rare or endangered. Costa Rican culture embraces the environment and has saved 25% of its land and classified it as conservation. Costa Rica has 12 ecological zones and over 100 national parks, reserves, refuges of protected lands.

Costa Rica is also part of the "Pacific Ring Fire Circle" and has over 200 volcanic formations traced back over 65 million years. Of these formations, there are around 100 of them that actually show signs of activity and only five are classified as active. Costa Rica has been named one of the top "Happiest Places to Live" and boasts an average life expectancy of over 80 years. I do think the laidback and relaxing lifestyle that Costa Rica has is a great recipe for a long happy life. As far as weather, there is no real bad time to visit Costa Rica, but the most popular times are December through April as tourists are ready to escape the cold winters. I went to Costa Rica in August, during that time of year you get the afternoon rains and everything is lush and in full bloom.



On my first journey to Costa Rica, I decided to visit the Southern portion of the region and I set my sights on the coastal town of Puerto Jimenez. Puerto Jimenez is a small town

of about 3,200 residents and it is located on the eastern side of the Osa Peninsula. Puerto Jimenez is bordered on one side by the world-famous Corcovade National Park and the other side by the Golfo Dulce (Sweet Gulf). The Golfo Dulce is a very unique place and during certain times of the year, it is home to Humpback Whales that come to breed, give birth and nurse their young. The Osa Peninsula is teeming with all types of wildlife from tropical birds, Sloths, Monkeys, Jaguars and Crocodiles; just to name a few. Keeping in step with the local wildlife I decided to stay at the famous Crocodile Bay Resort. I believe they are the oldest resort in the area they broke ground in June of 1999. Back in the day this was "the place to stay and fish" and that reputation still holds true! It truly is "heaven on earth"! Recently, they have undergone a major upgrade and built Botanika Osa Peninsula by Hilton, a tranquil, upscale retreat in the



middle of the coastal rainforest. Over the years Crocodile Bay has entertained Oscar-winning actors, Rock & Roll Stars, Country Singers, World Series & Superbowl champs and now myself.

We arrived in a small commuter plane from San Jose, landing just 2 minutes from the Resort and were greeted by a large Crocodile Bay welcome committee. I was blown away by the resort, as I could not believe that this style masterpiece was in the middle of the rainforest. I have slept in my truck in the Everglades, but I



have to be honest, I could get used to this place. The Resort was just jawdropping; the lagoon-style swimming pool area, the exterior lounge areas throughout the resort and the 5-star accommodations were a far cry from 'the old days'. Now, of course, another reason people travel from all over the world to Crocodile Bay is the world-class fishing and I was no exception, as I was there to catch my first Roosterfish. The rest of my crew flew in a bit later in day and I told them it's time to rest up, cause we were heading out early for some Inshore fishing and filming.

On day one, we met down at the dock at 7 am, boarded the vessel "Crocodile Rock" and headed out. We were all excited as we headed out the Peninsula, the Captain told us there had been Humpback Whale sightings the day before and I was hoping we would see them, as well. Of course, off to the right as we headed out, we spotted three huge Humpback Whales all hanging out together and communicating with fin slaps on the water. Michael launched the drone and was able to get what I call "Nat-Geo" footage; it is just epic and I can't wait for you to see it in the episodes. Well, it was time to get fishing, so

we headed up the coast for about 25 minutes until the captain said it's time to wet a line. Our fishing crew was made up of myself, my good friend Stephen, Stephen's dad John (Pappy), and Robert. First on the rod was Pappy and he came out of the gate swinging with a huge Cubera Snapper. Pappy was so happy; he had never caught a Snapper that big and it brought tears to his eyes. That Snapper was a great start to such a perfect fishing day! I caught my first Roosterfish, and it was the biggest Roosterfish of the day. Stephen and Robert both caught nice size Roosterfish and we all caught various Jacks and landed a huge Red Snapper. The action was non-stop on that inshore trip; we could have filled two fish boxes, but we did take that nice Red Snapper back to the resort for a delicious "hook-n-cook" meal.



On day two, we changed up the game and went offshore looking to target Sailfish, Marlin and Yellowfin Tuna. We headed down to the dock, a little sore from the day before, but really excited. Pappy and Stephen had never landed a Sailfish, so we all decided if we get hooked up, they are first on the rods. As luck would have it, the first rod went off about 30 minutes into trolling and it was a nice size Sailfish. Pappy jumped into action and got to work on that fish; she really put on a nice show and made quite a few jumps. Pappy was able to get her to the boat, we got the leader touch and released the fish. Almost right away Stephen's rod went off and he started working on Sailfish number two; the captain and mate did an excellent job of coaching him through the process and here comes another leader touch and release. We got rigged back up and started to troll again when a call came over the radio about a pod of Dolphins was spotted about a ½ mile away from where we were trolling. While fishing in Costa Rica, Dolphin pods are good news. The captain told us the Yellowfin Tuna travel with Dolphin to school up bait fish and we needed to head

over there right away. We reeled everything in quick and headed North looking for the school of Dolphin. We didn't have to look too hard because captain pulled up right next to the pod and kept pace as we started casting into the huge school of Dolphin and Yellowfin Tuna. It was a sight to see, with Dolphin and Tuna jumping out of the water, working together to school up their catch. You have to think about it for a moment; mammals and fish working together in nature to accomplish a common goal.

Almost immediately two rods went off and Robert and I got to work trying to land these big Tuna. These Tuna we had hooked were about 40 to 50 lbs. each and if you have ever hooked a Tuna, they know how to fight. Our two Tuna were a nice size, so we decided those looked like dinner to us and threw them in the box. Next up was Pappy and true to form, he landed a nice Yellowfin weighing about 45 lbs. We already had two in the box, so we decided to release that "big boy". Stephen was the last up on the rod and as it turned out he landed the biggest Tuna of the day; I would say about 75 lbs. One of the many things I love about Costa Rica and its people, is they are huge conservationist. Other than the two Tuna in the box, they suggested we release the rest. We could have caught Tuna for days, but if you have ever fished them you know how hard they fight and we were ready to head back to rest and have some cold drinks at the pool.

I can honestly say the two days of fishing in Costa Rica was some of the best fishing I have ever done. I love that you have a choice of inshore or offshore daily and you can be in fishing position within a half an hour. The boat fleet that Crocodile Bay has is pristine, they use new tackle and the crew is some of the best in the World. They make sure your trip is perfect. I know it does not always work like this, but if I could have scripted how I wanted the episodes we were filming to go, it would have been just like it happened. My show "Let's Take it Outside" will be airing these two episodes in August along with 8 other new episodes on Discovery Channel, Discovery GO and on my new network Wild TV Canada's largest outdoor network in the Country. You have to tune in and watch the new season, it is going to be one of the best I have filmed so far. I know you're going to tell me how busy you are and don't have time to DVR. No worries, you can download the Free Waypoint TV, Hunt Channel or Carbon TV app and watch my show free along with many others 'On Demand'. Stay tuned so you can see firsthand how beautiful Crocodile Bay Resort is and how epic the fishing is in Costa Rica.

When you are ready to stay, play and fish at Crocodile Bay, please tell them, "Misty sent you". 📌

Misty Wells: Producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside"

TALES FROM "THE OLD GUY"

by Dave Mallory

Having fished with Captain George for a number of years, catching literally hundreds of fish, we got to know each other quite well. He called me in January and said, "Dave, I have a cancellation on February 25th. Isn't that your birthday? Do you want to go fishing?" I said I had to check with my fishing partner (AKA my wife) to see if anything was planned for that day. I asked and she said nothing planned. I told George I could go along with my commander, Pauline. Yes, she was an MP Commander in the Army Reserves, and also in my life!

I wondered if she had anything planned before we committed to fishing or if that was going to be it.

As January turned into February, I wondered if I was having a party for my 80th. The weekend before my birthday, Pauline surprised me with a party with friends and neighbors, some of whom were fishing buds. I thought that was the big surprise. However, the day before the birthday fishing, Pauline said she had an errand to run and came back with our dear friend from Vermont, Helen-Anne. That was a complete surprise!!!! Pauline had told her we were going fishing and after some discussion, she consented to go along with us! She was all excited. She had done a small amount of fresh water fishing in Vermont, but never any saltwater. I told her not to expect much because the water was still in the low 60s. She didn't care.

Rub-a-dub-dub, three friends in a boat for our Captain to deal with,

one being a rookie. I let him know before hand so he could plan his "strategies." He said he could make it work.

The big day arrived. George, bless his heart, got up at 4:00 AM to net our bait. He picked us up at 9 AM and had hundreds of our favorite white bait, along with some shrimp

for sheepshead and snapper. He had also done some scouting and found a rock pile with about twenty sheepshead, so that's where we headed first to see if we could snag a few. The ladies said the birthday boy should get the first cast. I didn't argue

with them. After all, 80 has a few privileges. We hooked on a shrimp and cast it toward the rock pile where George had seen all the sheepshead earlier. The shrimp barely hit the water when there was a huge splash as a fish inhaled it. Captain George said "That is either a record sheepshead or it isn't." I saw the flash and knew it wasn't what we expected. George yelled "It's a big redfish. Keep your pole high and take your time!" Always giving me instructions. Sometimes I need them. I fought the fish to the boat and George netted him, a nice 31 inch redfish. After a few pictures, it went back in the water (too big to keep) then it was time for the ladies to fish.

A generous Pauline said Helen-Anne should get the next cast. George rigged another pole with

a shrimp and tossed it toward the same rock pile. We thought we would start catching sheepshead now that the big red was probably not going to bite again. However, like the last cast, the water exploded as the shrimp hit the top. Another large red. As she fought the fish, she said she was being pulled out of the boat. She yelled at me to help her. I reached out and grabbed the back of her shorts and kept her in the boat. All this time, George was giving her instructions. With his advice, she did a great job and got the fish to the net. It was another 31 inch red. We checked the tail markings and it was a different redfish. A beautiful start to salt water fishing. Her response was "Holy Mackerel!!!"

Now, it was up to Pauline. Just as George was rigging another pole, a big dolphin came in and either ate what was left or chased it away. We threw the shrimp over there a few times with nothing happening. Poor Pauline. By being polite, she lost out on a big red. Normally, George would have the three of us casting to the same area, but it was a small rock pile so only one line at a time would work.

George isn't called captain for nothing. He took us to a number of other spots where we caught jacks, ladyfish, more reds, spots and all three of us caught snook. It was a typical George day: many fish, happy people, and a rookie who would sleep well with happy dreams. ☑

Dave Mallory can be reached by email at: David_Mallory@msn.com



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CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN THE MANATEE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Discover How Conservation Efforts in the Crystal River Area Impact Fish, Wildlife and More!
by Josh Johnson

As the Manatee Capital of the World, Crystal River takes great pride in being at the forefront of manatee and local ecosystem conservation. These continued efforts help ensure these gentle giants have adequate food sources and a safe refuge yearly from November to early April.

Healthy ecosystems in the Crystal River area greatly benefit us all. Here are two ways you can help take part.



Practice Responsible Boating

A recent study by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission shows that only 4% of observed adult manatees show no sign of watercraft-related scars. As



you can tell by this staggering statistic, boats pose one of the single largest dangers to manatees' health and safety.

When posted regulations and signage are not followed, this can physically harm both manatees and their feeding

grounds. For these reasons, it's essential to follow all posted signs and listed regulations and ensure responsible boating is practiced at all times.

Other responsible boating practices include wearing polarized sunglasses during boat operations and observing all manatee speed zones and caution areas.

So whether you're enjoying a sunny day on the water or hunting for your next catch before the sun rises, please remember to practice your manatee manners!

Catch and Release

Unsustainable fishing practices threaten local ecosystems and their resiliency in a few ways. Primarily this happens through overfishing and, in turn, habitat de-

struction. Habitat destruction not only impacts the quality of fishing but also directly impacts manatees and their ability to thrive here.

Groups in the Crystal River area, like Save Crystal River, have spent time and resources breathing new life into the local ecosystem by planting fresh eelgrass and combating harmful invasive species. And because of this, habitats in the area continue to grow and thrive! Now it's up to all of us to keep them that way.

Besides curbing potential habitat destruction, catch-and-release fishing also improves native fish populations. How? Because it ensures that more fish remain and reproduce in the ecosystem. This practice allows anglers to enjoy the bounty of fish in the Crystal River area while increasing their chances of successfully catching fish.

Practicing catch and release of native fish also ensures that the opportunity to enjoy this national pastime and recreational opportunity will be around for many years!

Conservation in the Crystal River Area

As you can see, there are many ways for you to engage in conservation efforts. If you're interested in discovering more about the continued progress being made by conservationists and eco-tourists alike, we have created a Conservation Hub filled with more information. Topics include how to be involved, from the comfort of your home to a deep dive into the invasive aquatic species that threaten the local ecosystem. There's a wealth of knowledge ready for you! ☑

Learn more at DiscoverCrystalRiverFL.com/Manatee-Conservation.





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Captain Sergio Atanes

April starts the ball rolling for some exciting fishing and one of my favorite species is the Spanish mackerel. Just the sheer excitement of watching them break the water and tear up the

bait with their long runs. Plus, one of the best fish to prepare in a smoker. The top places to find them are around the edges of drop-offs, range markers and bridges. Second on my list would be the Mangrove Snapper; another great fighter for their size and excellent table fare. I really got hooked (no pun intended) on using a Yellowtail Jig with either a live medium Shrimp or small Greenback Sardine.



Captain George Hastick

April has always been a favorite Snook month for me in terms of catching quantities. Snook will be on fire this month with all the bait that shows up. The Snook will come alive

but that's not to say there won't be plenty of Redfish and Trout around. This makes for a perfect opportunity to catch your "inshore slam". Snook will be under the mangroves waiting for baitfish to come past with the tide, so good casts next to and under the mangroves will pay off. Redfish will follow the tide as it comes in to get to the mangroves and oyster bars. Trout will be on the grass flats in sand holes.

ABOUT THE CAPTAINS

Captain Sergio and Captain George Hastick fish the Florida waters, specializing in and around the West Coast of Florida and Tampa Bay. Their show, *Fishing Adventures Florida*, is about two captains sharing their knowledge and experience of the local waters. Encouraging others to share in their love of what the outdoors has to offer. Their goal is to educate, entertain and share the experience of fishing opportunities the state has to offer.

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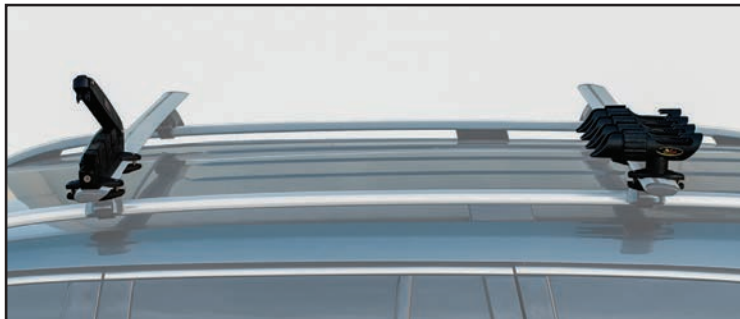
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But GearRAK offers more than just reliability – it's a catalyst for angling success. With its versatile design, GearRAK accommodates a wide range of fishing setups, including spinning reels, bait casters, and fly rods. This adaptability means that no matter your preferred fishing style, GearRAK has the flexibility to meet your needs.



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Of course, the ultimate goal of any fishing trip is to reel in the big catch. GearRAK's commitment to excellence extends beyond its construction;

it's a tool designed to enhance your angling experience from start to finish. By simplifying the transportation process, GearRAK allows you to focus your energy on what matters most – catching fish.

In the world of fishing, success is measured not just by the quantity but by the quality of your catch. GearRAK's unwavering reliability and commitment to excellence set the stage for anglers to achieve unparalleled triumphs on the water. With GearRAK by your side, every fishing expedition becomes an opportunity for greatness.

But GearRAK isn't just about functionality – it's about empowering anglers to pursue their passion with confidence. Whether you're a seasoned pro or a novice angler, GearRAK provides the support you need to elevate your fishing adventures to new heights.

So why settle for anything less? Equip yourself with GearRAK and experience the difference for yourself. From the moment you set out on your fishing journey to the exhilarating moment you reel in that trophy fish, GearRAK will be there every step of the way, ensuring that your angling experience is nothing short of extraordinary.

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THE START OF FISHING FEVER

by Captain Sergio Atanes

At last, April is upon us and with it comes some of the best fishing Tampa Bay has to offer. Anglers from Double Branch in the North to Bishop Harbor in the South are treated to some of the best inshore fishing anywhere in the state. Snook start their migration from the creeks and rivers to the flats and eventually to the passes to spawn by the first full moon of May.



Redfish and Trout that call the flats home all summer long start bulking up on the Greenback Sardines. This live bait treat starts the ball rolling in the spring and lasts until the first cold snap in the fall. So, look for the bait along the mangroves and not far from there, you'll find the fish.

Look for Mangrove Snapper around rock piles and under the bridges using medium live Shrimp or small Greenback Sardines. I started using a Yellowtail jig. They are new in this area but very popular down south and in the keys. Its nothing more than a

1/0 hook with 1/8 or

1/16 oz weight on the shank of the hook and comes in four different colors. They're super for catching Mangroves and Flounder.

Tripletail are number 10 on my food scale for taste and the same goes for a tough fighting fish. Live Shrimp works wonders on these guys; freeline them around crab trap boys or range markers. They do spook easily, so keep your distance and let the bait drift around the buoys. Sometimes it takes more than one presentation for them to take the bait.

Spanish Mackerel and Cobia also follow the bait inside the Skyway Bridge. The bigger baits will hang around tripods, artificial reefs and rocky bottoms that abound from "Channel A" just inside the Skyway Bridge to the Howard Franklin bridge to the north.

I find Spanish Mackerel fishing exciting and most productive for my clients, so I make it a point to start my morning by searching for a school of big mackerel to get the adrenalin going. Then, after boating 20 or 30 mackerel, it's time to move on and start another hunt.

My method for fishing Spanish Mackerel is very simple. Find the bait and anchor, and start a chum line to

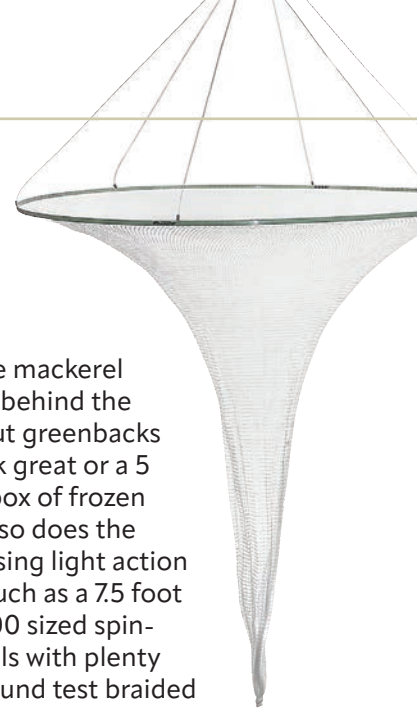
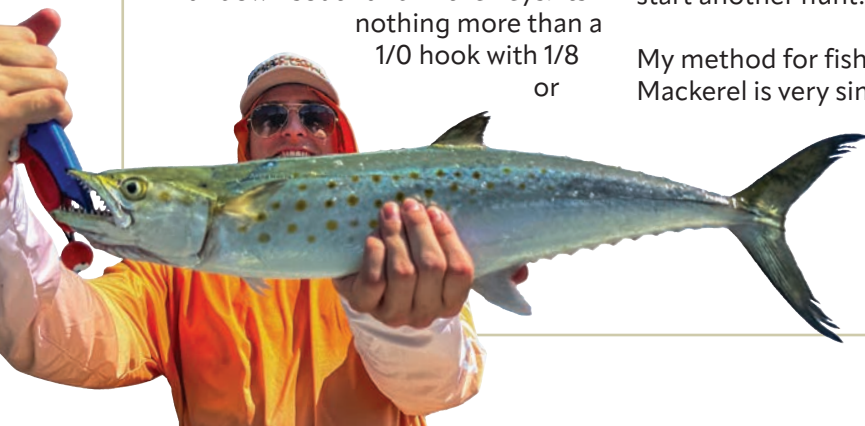
keep the mackerel feeding behind the boat. Cut greenbacks will work great or a 5 pound box of frozen chum also does the trick. Using light action tackle such as a 7.5 foot rod, 3000 sized spinning reels with plenty of 15-pound test braided line, and a #1/0 XX long shank hook with 30-pound test fluorocarbon leader about 32-inches long works well. The XX long hook eliminates the need for wire leader and increases bites.

Hillsborough County has six artificial reefs that produce great



quantities of Spanish Mackerel every year. The information with GPS location can be obtained from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and they can even mail you their information in a brochure upon request.

If you have kids, mackerel can entertain them all morning long. Also, remember that Redfish and Snook are great to catch but





sometimes hard to find and slow to bite. Make this April a family affair with the kids by putting them on some fast moving Mackerel action!

As mentioned, Greenback Sardines are the best bait for mackerel so either buy your bait or catch it. Which

method is best depends on you. I prefer catching the bait as its part of the fishing trip or as I like to say, making it an adventure for my clients, as they are watching how it's done. There are three basic ways to catch bait; the traditional 10-foot bait cast net, a Ballyhoo Ring net or the WhyTangle Hook Tunnel shown on the left with a Sabiki rig.



If you can't throw a net or have a bad back the last two mentions are a great substitute and well worth the investment in the long run. ☑

Captain Sergio Atanes is Host of the Fishing Adventures Florida Show on Waypoint TV, Carbon TV and YouTube. He is owner of Reelfishy.com fishing charters and can be reached at: 813-973-7132 or by email at: atanes@msn.com

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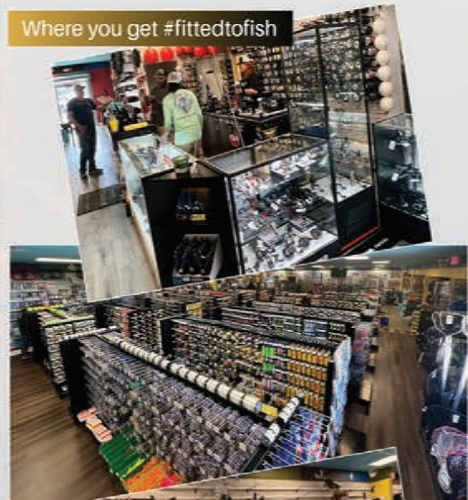
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