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IF I 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 & out's 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 advice, you are almost certain to have a good time, but don't forget, your buddy's boat runs on gas, not a thanks. Chip in if you want to ever be asked back.

Merle and Flip the Bird can be reached at Belle Harbour Marina in Tarpon Springs, Florida by calling 727.943.8489 or by emailing: merle@shoredev.com.

Merle



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ON THE COVER: Almost like "Shooting Fish in a Barrel". Onshore-Offshore's Creative Director, Bryan Hudson, found this beautiful, multi-spotted Redfish in the most unlikely location; a small residential pond in Palm Coast, Florida.

Check out his website at: fishbonecreates.com

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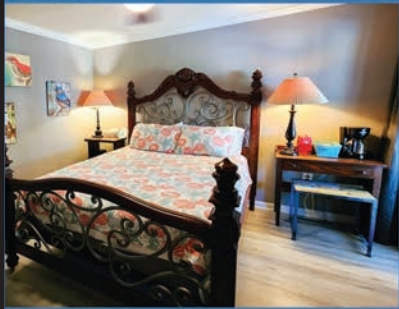
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SPRINGTIME GOBBLE WOBBLE

by Misty Wells

Spring is wild Turkey mating season in Florida and it time to dust off those decoys and brush up on your calls. I am hoping this year will be my year to finally bag and bird, it's been a long time coming. You are probably wondering where you can hunt this year, well the FWC offers 43 public hunting areas statewide and you can basically walk right into season. If you are new to this you are going to want to understand wild turkey behavior, figuring out "why they do what they do". I did some research and found that the FWC is offering some really good advice for successful turkey hunting this year, here is what they had to say.

MY TIPS FOR A SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL TURKEY HUNT:

- Gobblers have sharp eyes so staying concealed is critical. When turkey hunting, wear camouflage or drab green and brown clothing, including gloves and a face mask. Never wear red, white, blue or black, which are colors associated with a gobbler. So replace those white socks and T-shirts with camo or earth tone base layers.

- Hunters often like to cover some ground in search of a bird. When calling, always set up against a tree taller than your head and wider than your shoulders before you start calling. Doing this will provide you with protection and make you more prepared for a gobbler that shows up more quickly than you expected. Also avoid setting up in thick cover. Instead select more open areas and eliminate movement and rely on your camouflage for concealment.

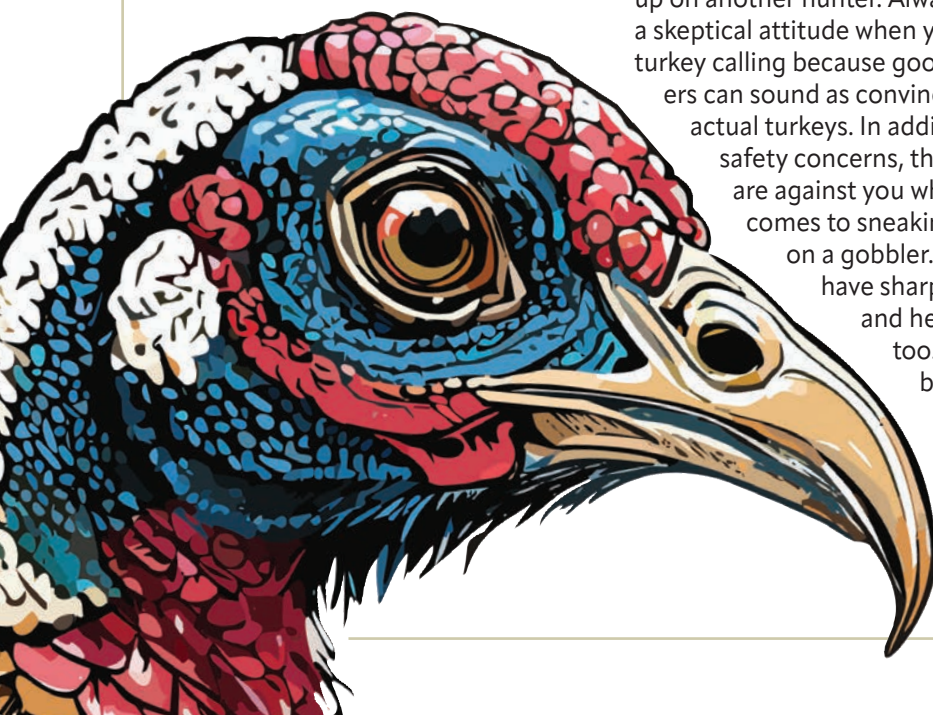
- When you hear birds, you want to position yourself for success, however, don't try to sneak up on a gobbler. You might think you're stalking a turkey, but you could actually be slipping up on another hunter. Always adopt a skeptical attitude when you hear turkey calling because good callers can sound as convincing as actual turkeys. In addition to safety concerns, the odds are against you when it comes to sneaking up on a gobbler. Turkeys have sharp eyesight and hear well, too. You'd be better off setting up and calling a bird to you.



- Even when hunting private land, don't assume you're the only hunter in the area. If another hunter approaches your set up, remain still and speak in a loud, clear voice to announce your presence. Never move, wave or make turkey sounds to alert another hunter of your presence.

- Before you pull the trigger, demand multiple points of identification to be absolutely certain it's a legal turkey. If you see movement, do you also see the turkey's beard? Feet and wings? Never shoot at sounds, color or movement.

- Always practice the basic rules of firearms safety. Review the rules





provided by the FWC at MyFWC.com/ThinkSafe.

Wild turkeys have a well-developed communication system that they use to avoid danger, call mates, and establish dominance. Turkey use two main forms of communication, vocal and visual and often use both methods at the same time. An example of both methods is a Tom may gobble while also strutting (the act of spreading its tail fan, dragging its wings, and making his body appear as larger as possible). It's important to know why a Tom is doing this and that will help you bag your trophy. One thing us hunters need to focus on more are turkey calls, what they mean and how they are communicating because that is what is setting the mood.



Let's go over a few turkey calls to get you started:

The *Yelp* is the most heard sound from turkeys 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's 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 loud 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 that he is there and he is trying to deter them from coming in. Remember, don't over call; this can be a real turnoff!

Decoys. Why are Decoys 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 both a Hen and a Tom decoy as this might help bring in the bird a lot faster. Toms want all the Hens to themselves, so if he sees a Tom with a Hen, he may move in fast to get rid of him then get careless and give you a shot. One last thing I want to remind you of is to get out and practice shooting. You want to shoot straight when the time comes. I plan to hit the range and practice my skeet shooting, so when the ultimate Tom shows up, I can finally bag one. See you out in the woods! ☑

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.



MARCH REDFISH MAGIC

by Captain George Hastick

March can be a thrilling month especially if the water temperatures warm up, like it typically does in spring. Usually this will spark the bait to show up in numbers on the flats and where there is bait, predator fish are not too far behind.

With that being said, you will still have your winter-time fish around like sheepshead and trout that can still be caught, but snook and redfish will come alive with redfish taking center stage.

If we have the normal weather patterns that we usually get in March, the schools of redfish will move onto the flats and work the mangrove tree lines and oyster bars. Shrimp, Scaled Sardines, Pinfish, Finger Mullet and cut bait like the previously mentioned along with Ladyfish, Threadfin Herring and any other baitfish that is oily that produces scent in the water.

If you are into the artificial style of fishing nothing beats seeing a redfish get its head half out of the water to inhale a topwater lure. One of my favorites is the MirrOlure's Pro Dog in the Finger Mullet Skin

Series CS85MR or for a smaller topwater presentation, the MirrO-mullet CS16MR is a great choice. You may miss some strikes from the Redfish with the topwater lure, since its mouth is geared for bottom feeding. One of the things you can do for any fish striking a topwater lure is to wait a second

when you see the strike before setting the hook. This gives the fish time to get a good grip on the lure before you set the hook. But, you can't wait too long or they will spit the lure out once they figure out it's not

real. Typically, when not using topwater lures the fish has had the bait for a second or two before you set the hook. When using topwater lures you see the exact time they strike the lure and a knee jerk reaction can sometimes lead to pulling the lure back out of the fishes mouth. Some

Pro-Cure scent gel added to the lure can get fish to hold that lure a little longer to give you a longer window of opportunity for a better hook set.

For these lures, I like Pro-Cure's Mullet or the Inshore Super Gel bait scents. If you like soft plastics, a 1/8-1/4 ounce jighead with a Saltwater Assassin Lil P&V or the 4" Sea Shad in New Penny, 10w40 with LT Tail or "Texas Roach" to name a few effective colors. And, again, don't forget to add a little Pro-Cure to your artificials.



On lower tides there are large holes or cuts on the edges of grass flats that the Redfish will hold up at and wait for the tide to come up. Once it does, they will move with the tide towards the mangrove treeline or oyster mounds to feed.

Now, if you can find an area holding good grass with sand holes with a mangrove tree line that also has an oyster mound...that is like placing three "Redfish magnets" in one place.





Try to use your trolling motor on medium to low since Redfish can spook easily. Try to get there, setup and let the reds come to you. If you see a Redfish school, do not chase them as it will usually shut down the bite. The key is getting into casting distance without spooking them, but if you do, it usually only takes about 15-20 minutes for them to settle down unless you spooked them out of the area. So be stealthy and reap the rewards. ☑



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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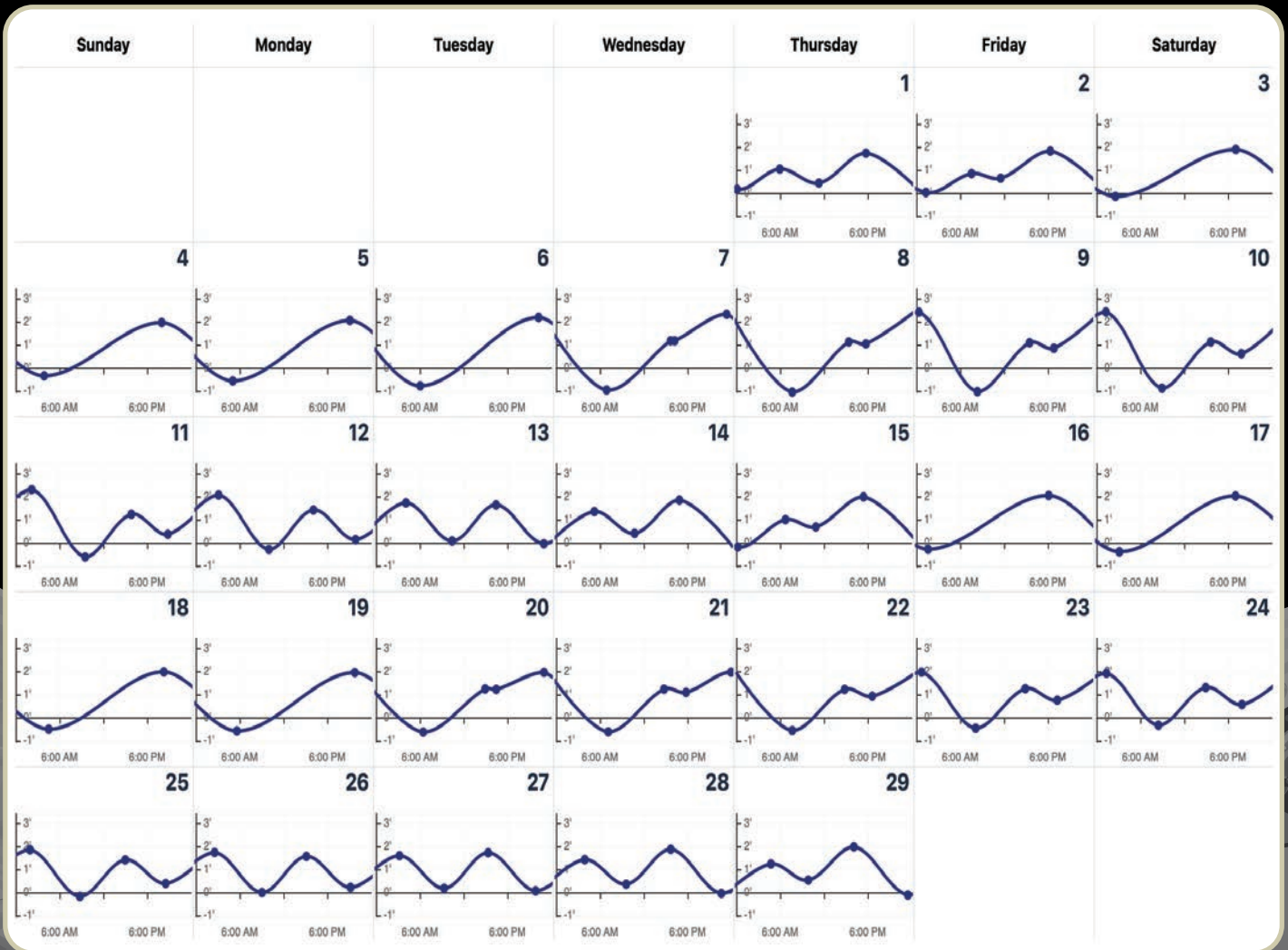
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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

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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Tampa Tarpon



Bay on History

by Captain Brent Gaskill



Who remembers what a "cracker cast" is? How about a 4/0 reel? A shad? If you're still with me, you are probably considered an old timer and you know a little something about the way tarpon fishing used to be in Tampa Bay. We used to fish with heavy 8-foot rods with a 4/0 Penn reel loaded with 50-pound mono and 125-pound leader or your favorite beach rod may have been built on a 9-foot Harrington blank with a 4/0 Newel reel filled with a floating squid line, a natural cork float and a long 100-pound leader with a hook that had the eye soldered closed and the point sharpened with a



file. Yes, we could all cast those heavy conventional style outfits...a long way. In those days, a crowd out at Egmont meant six or eight of us being there. When we fished the Skyway, we were talking about the old original span, the new bridge wasn't there yet.

That's all just in my personal experience. There are plenty of guys and gals around that go back further than me. You just don't hear much from them. They're not on social media bragging about their catches.

There's no photos being posted, no TV shows, radio, seminars or showing off. They are the ones who quietly slip off to their favorite honey hole to shad fish. It's not glamorous; it's an addiction. It's a fever and the only cure is to hook another big tarpon, then repeat as necessary.



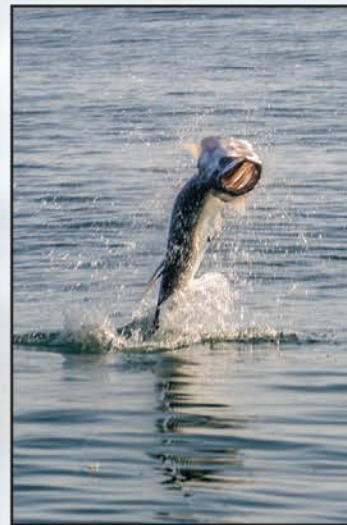
Modern day technology has changed tarpon fishing forever. The invention of braided line, combined with new powerful drags on spinning gear has turned everyone into a tarpon fisherman. Spinning reels never used to have the stopping power of their conventional counterpart. Spinning reels also did not have the capacity to hold enough monofilament line. Technology has brought lighter rods and smaller reels that can be effective for fighting



and landing large tarpon. The bonus that has really changed the tarpon fleet is that everyone can cast a spinning rod. If we all had to only use conventional

gear again, the pack of fishermen would be greatly reduced.

My grandparents used to fish Tampa Bay for tarpon out of a 15-foot wooden rowboat that my grandfather built back in the mid 40's. My grandfather fished the light tackle division with 9-thread line, which is the equivalent of 27-pound test that is still considered light to this day. My grandmother fished the knuckle-buster division, which is a reel that's always in gear and the drag was a leather strap to apply thumb pressure to the spool. As the fish would run, the reel handle would spin backwards thus giving the name knuckle-buster. ▣



Capt. Brent Gaskill is a 4th generation Tampa Bay native and full-time guide both inshore and offshore. He can be reached at 727-510-1009 or e-mail captbrent@summervacationcharters.com View his website at summervacationcharters.com for more information.

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TALES FROM "THE OLD GUY"

by Dave Mallory

Since I started doing an article every month, I have had fun remembering the details of each adventure as I write it and live it again. Last month, Pauline and I brought you to Mexico to try for Bonefish, the "shadows of the shallows". This month pertains to Bear and Brook Trout in Vermont.



My Dad was a police commissioner in Burlington in the 1960s, this was back in the days of practically no crime there. Everybody was friendly and we all knew each other. Dad would walk up Church Street, the main street, and could visit with all the shop owners because he knew them all. One of them, Bill, owned a jewelry store and also owned a very large piece of land in Jonesville. There was a brook running through his land which emptied into the Winooski River, a large productive fishery. Rainbow and brown trout would come up the brook from the Winooski to spawn. The trout would be stopped by falls, but the lower part of the brook was very productive.

The upper part of the brook was also very productive because it was full of brook trout and beaver dams.

Bill told Dad to come up anytime to fish. That invite included me! From that day on, Dad and I enjoyed many wonderful trips to the brook, catching Rainbow, Brown and Brook Trout, often seeing Deer, Beaver, Otter and many other wild creatures. It was always an adventure.

After Dad retired, he would still come to Vermont for a portion of the summer, but he didn't enjoy walking the streams in hip boots as much as fishing for bass in our boat. That meant that I would often go up to the brook alone.

Bill had told us that a tiny stream came down the mountain from a series of beaver dams near the top and they were full of big brook trout. I kept skipping the trip up the mountain because I always caught enough trout to keep me happy both in my creel and in the frying pan.

However, one summer day, when it wasn't very hot, I thought a trip up the mountain would be a good idea. The morning was cool, I had a full can of nightcrawlers on my belt and ate a sandwich with a drink, so I was ready to go. Walking uphill through the woods in hip boots is not something I was prepared to do quickly, even though I played racquetball three times a week and did running to pass the ARMY PT test every year. So off I went, carrying my spinning rod. The woods in the area were a mixture of hardwood, with balsam and pine mixed in. In the woods like that, I was always on the lookout for deer, although it is quite challenging to be quiet in hip boots.

As I was moving along, I saw something move about 10 yards ahead of me up the hill. I stopped and saw it was black!!! A bear! Not what I wanted to see. I knew you NEVER

turn and run from a bear. Picture this, the only thing between me and the bear was my fishing pole! As I was inching backwards down the hill, looking for a tree I could climb in my boots, I saw two other small black animals. OH GREAT—bear cubs!

Now I really needed a place to climb. More backward inching down the hill and mama bear started down slowly toward me. I stopped and so did she. We stared each other down for a bit and she turned to look at the cubs, who, lucky for me, had stayed where she left them. Mama turned, looked at me again, and turned up the hill to walk back to her babies. I started backing down again, but she didn't like that and came down toward me again. This time, she was just making sure I wasn't moving up to them. I stayed where I was, she sniffed the air, I tried to look very big, she turned around, walked back up the hill, never to be seen again. Thankfully!

At that moment, I decided I really didn't care about going up the mountain for some brook trout. I turned around and walked back to my truck, checking often in back of me. Over the years, I had the urge to go up the mountain, but never tried again. If I ever fell and got hurt, or did get attacked by a bear to the point I couldn't get myself out of the woods alone, I would never be found.

There were no cell phones in those days and probably no cell reception now, either! ☑

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

If we get cold weather, look for bigger fish around the hotwater runoffs in and around the power plants, rivers, and creeks. Live medium Shrimp is the game changer for me and artificial baits like the Saltwater Assassin "She Shad". The color of the water will dictate whether to use a dark or light color tail. I prefer those with glitter. Sheepshead should be in quantities around the rock piles and docks. Live Shrimp, Sandfleas or Fiddler Crabs are best bet. Trout will make their home in potholes on the flats or muddy bottom channels. The best times are early morning around power plants as the sun rises; dock and deep water flats will also turn on.



Captain George Hastick

Depending on the weather and how many cold fronts we get will dictate what happens with the fishing in March. Typically, you'll still have plenty of Sheepshead around the docks and bridge pilings that will eat. The Seatrout bite should be good in 4-7 feet of water using live shrimp & white bait. Small MirrOdines and a Saltwater Assassin "Lil' P&V" in electric chicken and brown glass minnow on a 1/8 to 1/4oz jighead depending on depth and current. The big news in March is the Redfish will move in and become the star of the flats. They will take the same lures as trout along with live Scaled Sardines, plus cut bait like Pinfish & Ladyfish.

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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A REEL FUTURE: WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

by Misty Wells

I challenge you to sit back & look around for the next generations out on the water. What do you see? Frankly, I do not see very many adults taking kids fishing or spending time in the outdoors. What I mostly see is the tops of kids' heads as they all look down at their tablets, phones, and portable games. Most of the kids nowadays are involved in posting 300 selfies daily on their Instagram, Snapchat and Tik Tok. What can we do in 2024 to make some changes in kids' lives and get them outside and engaged in "Reel Life?"



Brothers Cole and Carter, ages 5 & 8, used teamwork to reel in this Black Grouper

In 2014, I realized entire generations of children are growing up in foster care, and at the time it was something I did not know much about. Did you know at any given time in the United States there are over 450,000 children in foster care right now as you read this article? I meet entire families of siblings that are all growing up in foster care together and most likely will not get adopted. With hundreds of thousands of children not being exposed to nature, our waterways, parks, and beaches how are they going to develop a love for nature and the desire for conser-

vation? So, in 2014 I decided to do something about it and started "A Reel Future" a non-profit designed to take children in foster care fishing and teach them about nature and conservation. Our mission has now expanded to include young adults with nero-diversity, kids who are at-risk, and children in need.

So, you may ask why fishing? Why not something else? So far, I have taken over 3,800 kids fishing, I have never been with one child that did not laugh and have the best time of their lives catching their first fish. Fishing is such an even playing ground for anyone because they don't have to be the fastest, strongest, smartest, or even have any experience to land a catch. I would say 70% of the children I take fishing have never been on a boat, caught a fish or learned anything about conservation. It is amazing the self-confidence that these children get by learning to fish; they even start to begin to help the other children once they get the hang of it. Now don't get me wrong, at the beginning of a trip, some of the kids didn't even want to be there, but it was fishing or chores, so they opted to fish. However, once we leave the dock and they get the feeling of being on the water, seeing dolphins and then catching fish, they are "hooked". It's time for us adults to slow down and take the time to put a line in the water and take ourselves and a kid fishing. You don't have to have a non-profit like "A Reel Future" to do this, but if you need some pointers and help, reach out to me. Remember, it is not always easy to get a kid engaged in



fishing, so I wanted to share some tips with you so you can be sure to avoid some common mistakes that can turn kids off to fishing.

First, don't wait until they are a certain age; if they can hold a small rod and reel, take them out for a bit and get them started early. Kids have a short attention span, especially if the fishing is slow, so be sure not to stay too long unless the kids don't want to leave. Try and make their fishing experiences easy, don't target hard to catch species. Freshwater species that are easier to catch for kids are Bluegill, Catfish, Shell Cracker, and Sunfish. Saltwater fish that offer a lot of action are Grunts, Pinfish, Porgies, Trout and Redfish. Tip: Use a bait like Squid, cut bait or hotdogs, as they stay on the hook longer.



Size does not matter and remember their measure of success is different from ours, so let them have fun no matter what they catch. I have been with kids that reel up a piece of the bottom laughing so hard they want a picture of their rockfish. Make it fun, do not be impatient if they tangle the line or if they lose their bait a million times. Remember to teach them the right way as they are learning about safety and conservation; they are the future

of our fisheries and need to protect it. Give our next generation a sense of accomplishment and ownership because they are the ones that will inherit it. Explain why they are releasing that fish and why we leave our fishing spot better than we found it. Teach them to tie & bait a hook, net a fish, and release a fish. Don't do everything for them, they want to learn!



There are plenty of organizations and ways to take a kid fishing. If you have a kid or two, take them fishing and let them bring a friend. There are kids with special needs, kids in a single parent home, kids on the wrong path that need a positive diversion. It is not hard to find an organization that you can be a part of for a day, week or all year long. I promise you this, you will get way more out of it than you give it. Come join the "Reel Life" with me in 2024 as we are always looking for donations and fishing equipment to keep us going. To learn more about my organization goto: areelfuture.com or reach out to me directly at 970.708.7997. Thank you! 🍷

Misty Wells

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This Annual Outdoors Show will span over three days, with raffle giveaways, dozens of fun activities and local vendors all weekend! The family-friendly event will feature the beautiful downtown Tampa skyline, ability to tour boats in the water, the Armature Works Food Hall, dog friendly outdoor space, seminars, and activities throughout the whole show.

There will also be meet and greet opportunities with the News Channel 8 Anchors and local host, Misty Wells from the hit Outdoor TV Show, "Let's Take it Outside" airing on Discovery Channel. Stay tuned because more celebrity guests and hosts will be announced as we draw closer to the event date.



With nearly 400,000 square feet of exhibits and activity space, the Expo is the perfect place to explore boats of all shapes and sizes, boating accessories, fishing gear, apparel, outdoor supplies, and much more. Check out high end luxury vessels, ski and sportfishing boats, pontoon, family, and speed boats showcased by multiple manufacturers and dealers. Guests can take advantage of weekend seminars featuring talks on fresh and saltwater fishing, fly-fishing, boating, and more. Learn

the latest tips, tricks, strategies, and advice from the industry's most renowned professionals.

The 33rd Annual News Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show takes place on Friday, April 5th, from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, April 6th from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday, April 7th from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Armature Works located at 1910 N Ola Avenue in Tampa. Parking at Armature Works will be event pricing in the lots, street and parking garage. You could also use the Riverwalk or Pirate Taxi! **Remember...admission to the event is FREE, so we will see you and your crew there!**



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FISHING THE CHAZ

by Captain Sergio Atanes

It's been a blessing for me to be able to fish and share my passion for fishing with friends, clients, and my audience.

The "Chaz" or Chassahowitzka River with its winding cuts, springs and proximity to the Gulf of Mexico is a living wonder of nature with birds, raccoons, snakes, squirrels, Whitetail Deer and beautiful scenery with an array of wildlife including manatees, otters, alligators, stingrays and a bull shark might just pay you a visit.

The "Chaz" is located about an hours drive North from Tampa, half hour South from Crystal River and 100-miles from Orlando. The river transitions from clear spring freshwater water to tannin-colored to a brackish river and improves as you get closer to the mouth of the river. As you enter the mangrove islands with its oyster beds, it becomes more of a marine environment the closer you get to Gulf of Mexico. Its a great place to kayak, snorkel and swim over springs that sparkle like a swimming pool. And the fishing is fantastic if you challenge yourself to find the cuts and holes holding Trout, Redfish, Flounder, and Drum. The one major problem is not tearing up your boat getting there and this is why I recommend hiring a local guide who can take you around to



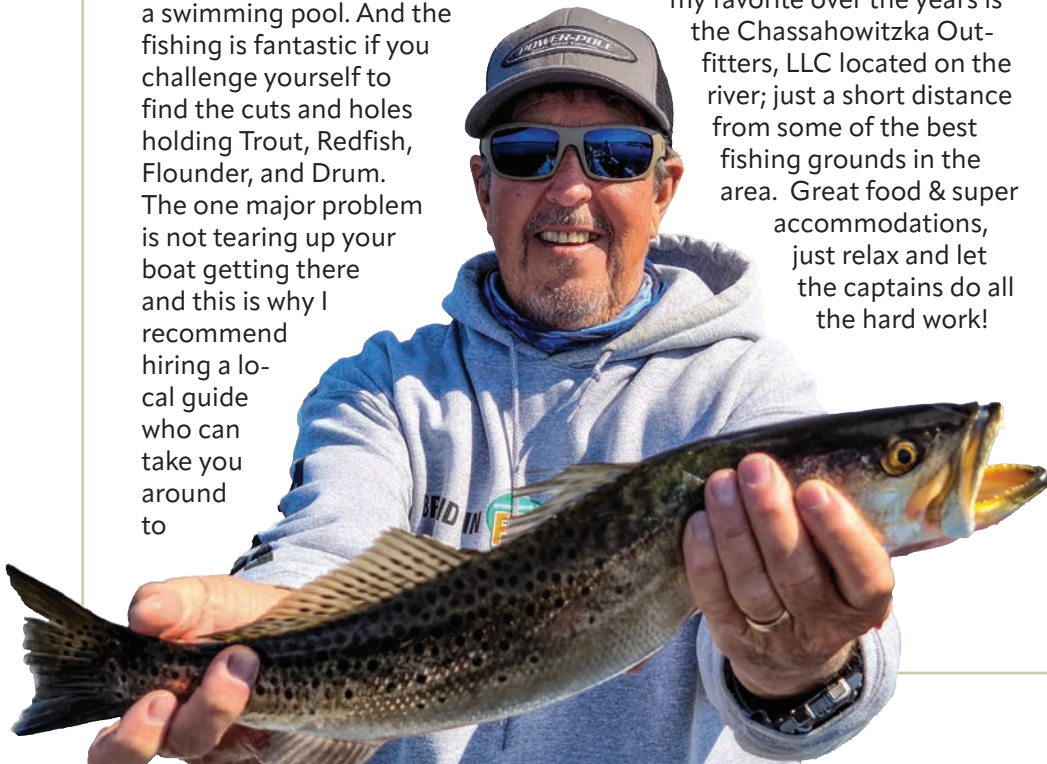
those honey holes. I'd say it would take more than several trips with a local before I would consider doing it on my own as this is not the place for a deep draft boat.

The best way to enjoy yourself is to book a two- or three-night stay at one of the local fish camps along the river where everything is included and my favorite over the years is the Chassahowitzka Outfitters, LLC located on the river; just a short distance from some of the best fishing grounds in the area. Great food & super accommodations, just relax and let the captains do all the hard work!



A typical morning starts with a big breakfast and some trash talk about who is going to catch the most and biggest fish, then 8am hits and we are in the boat with our local captains. Fishing starts within 15 to 20 minutes from the dock.

Here is where things change a bit. I am used to using live baits for my clients, but this trip, I am just one of the guys tagging along to learn a little bit on the techniques of fishing the "Chaz". First, a flat bottom boat is a must to get into the best places and nothing fancy here, remember the rocks always love to tear up your boat. Many of the local captains build their own



out of plywood; wide & long, and most only run smaller outboards to keep the weight down.

Baits differ with different captains because the river has a lot of fresh water. Live shrimp will die rather quickly, so many of the captains will nest baits on top of ice as this drops their metabolism. They can stay alive for hours in a cooler. Some captains prefer using fresh, medium eating shrimp, cut into two pieces. They both work great and each captain has his techniques. I suggest going out with several different captains to learn.

Artificial baits work great on Redfish, small Drum and Spotted Seatrout using a light jighead. Keep in mind, you are normally fishing in 2 to 5 feet of water with grass and rock and oyster beds. Color does make a difference



and on my last trip one of the top colors was "Electric Chicken" by Saltwater Assassin. The Trout and Redfish loved it!

Due to the rocky bottom, nobody uses a fluorocarbon leader; they tie the hooks straight to the braided line using a 2/0 J-Hook with a 1/4 ounce egg sinker, like a Texas Rig. Remember, you lose a lot of tackle to the rocks and oyster beds and if you aren't losing some tackle, you just aren't fishing the right way. In fact, it wouldn't hurt to bring some extra spools of line, hooks, and sinkers just in case. ☑

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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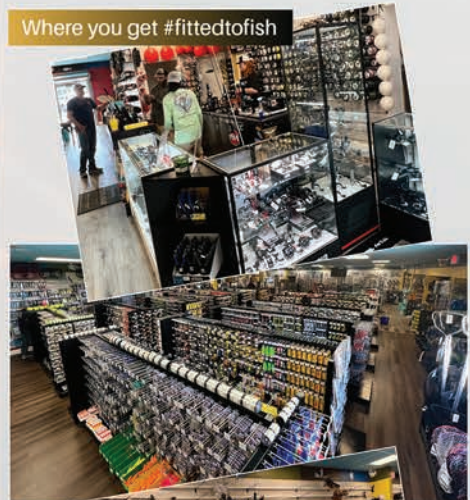
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